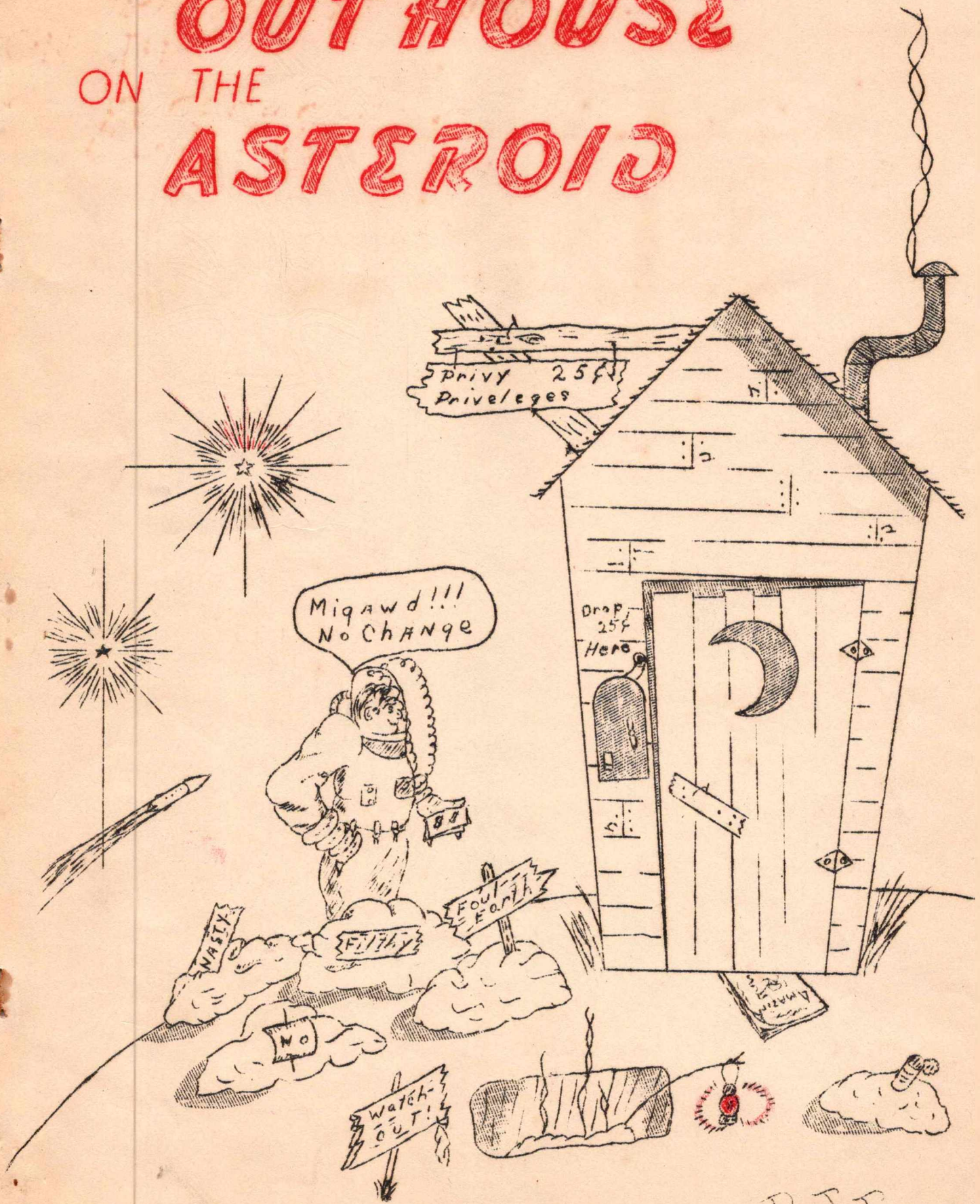


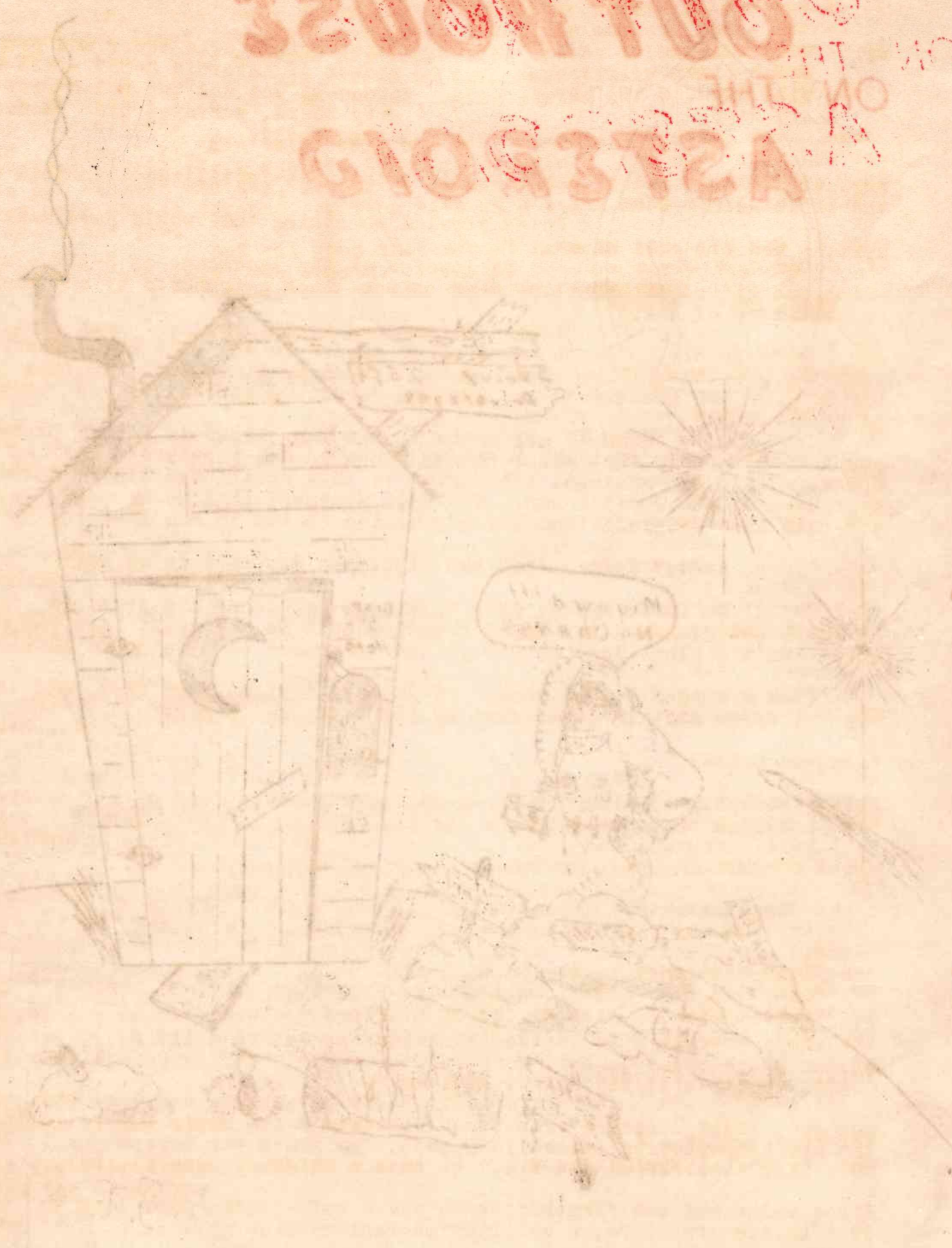
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# THE OUTHOUSE ON THE ASTEROID

## An Epic of Space

by: Martin Alger  
Ralph Fluette  
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pacerat Spike, sole owner and proprietor of Asteroid 3-237W-TX25 by grace of God and the Solar Property Board, surveyed his domain disgustedly.

"Well," said his partner Hank hopefully, "At least it's the best-fertilized planetoid in the whole damn System."

Spike growled something that would have made a Martian dancing-girl blush.

He lowered at the landscape of 3-237W-Tx25 which was pitted with shallow depressions, each neighbored by a small rounded heap of earth.

"It's all your own fault, really," Hank continued remorselessly. "Two hundred other miners in the Belt are satisfied with the primitive life. But you, you hadda be different. Hauling lumber 115,000,000 miles from the Martian Forest, just because you happen to be bashful!"

"Damn it all to hell, how many times do I have to tell you I didn't build that thing for my own personal pleasure?" howled Spike. "It's a commercial enterprise -- look at all the liners that go east here on the Jupiter run. You know yourself that we've made more off this damn asteroid than off our mining claims in the last ten years.

"Sure, sure," agreed Hank hastily. "But now what do we do?"

"Damned if I know," muttered Spike, and would have scratched his grizzled chin if the plastiglass of his space helmet wasn't in the way. "Are you sure there isn't a place left on the planet somewhere that we could move it?"

"Not a chance," said Hank. "It's four feet by four feet, and the biggest space left is three feet by two feet six inches."

observed Spike.

There was a good reason for the floom of the two space rats. Monopoly is always a money-making situation, and of all monopolies, none was so uncontested as theirs. For while the Asteroid Belt held gold, uranium, and even diamonds, nowhere in all those uncounted miles of hurtling rock was there a sign of modern plumbing.

It had been a rare inspiration of genius which had led Spike to build -- at incredible trouble and expense -- the only Chic Sale in a hundred million miles. Aloof and with a certain serene dignity of its own it dominated the close-horized landscape of 3-237W-TX25. vHardly a day -- even the brief 12-hour day of the small chunk of rock on which it perched -- passed without a sleek slim spacer or a battered mining tub tying up to the rusty mooring ring beside the wooden structure while the occupants of the ships enjoyed what, compared to the unlovely shipboard arrangements, constituted the height of luxury.

Scientists on Terra had announced, after long and arduous calculation a few years before, that the average asteroid gained in mass 2.3758 grams per Terran year. 3-237W-TX25 outstripped the field by such a margin it was pitiful.

And Since Spike had the forethought to add a coin-in-the-slot lock to the door of his structure, a devilish mechanism which yielded only to the

jingle of a two-bit piece, his account in the First National Bank back in Terra City mounted in direct correlation with the increasing mass of 3-237W-TX25. True, many a hard-bitten miner or supercilious ensign from a passenger liner fumbled frantically in bulger pockets for a Terran quarter, found only Martian six-ringa bits or the triangular prokees of Venusian commerce, and was forced to turn regretfully away -- but on each bi-weekly trip to 3-237W-TX25, Spike carted off a jingling pocketful of quarters.

The trips were not all pleasure, however, for each involved moving the structure to a new location. For no matter how deep the pit beneath was dug, sooner or later a move became imperative. And even with atomic torches, cutting pits in a solid mass of nickel-iron is a man-sized job.

But all good things must have an end, and now it seemed Spike's monopoly was doomed. For with no more surface on which to dig pits, what was to become of his lucrative outhouse?

"You could move it to another asteroid," suggested Hank hopefully.

"I thought of that long ago," snarled Spike. "Alpha, the nearest piece of property which I could buy, is 150,000 miles from here, way off in the Trojan group. Beta, no other location would be near the Mars-Jupiter route-- they purposely steer clear of the Asteroids. 3-237W-TX25 is one of the rogues that has an orbit entirely different than the main Belt."

"Ummm" murmured Hank, properly squelched.

"Damned if I know what to do," Spike concluded, and clomped off to his spaceship to sit beside the interwave communicator, a sign that he didn't want to be disturbed.

Hank muttered something about "easy come, easy go," went to his bunk, and presently drifted off to sleep with the aid of a bottle of foul Martian rotgut.

For a long while Spike conducted his vigil beside the interwave communicator undisturbed. Various routine messages crackled through the ether, but nothing to distract his brooding upon the problem which confronted him.

But then, came The Thought...

It seemed to come from the communicator, but it was not a verbal signal. Rather, it pulsed through his brain, subtle as thought itself, but unmistakable.

Despair was its dominant note, and frustration, and mounting claustrophobia. As the message strengthened, Spike felt his own thoughts crowding back to the dim corners of his brain, until he seemed to be, himself, the entity whose thoughts he shared.

"Ages, eons...how much longer can it go on...always the piles get higher... higher...HIGHER! It will soon be too late...they will overshadow my radiant-energy-converter, and then I will starve because no longer can the light of the stars be converted to matter, to food, the food that I need to live..."

"What the hell...?" Spike's dazzled thoughts interrupted. By some strange quirk of ether mechanics, they reached the source of the strange message.

"Ah, an intelligent entity...a denizen of the star-system which my planet is now approaching, I take it?" queried the intercom.

"Who is this?" thought Spike.

"I am -----" The thought was incomprehensible, but in its overtones Spike gathered that his telepathic contact was a totally unhumanoid inhabitant of a distant part of the Galaxy.

"But how, what...?"

The alien creature, apparently highly elated at contacting another entity, began pouring forth the story of its life in a torrential flood. From the mass of thoughtforms slung his way, Spike gathered the outlines of a life which had been spent in exile on an asteroid much like 3-2371-TX25, a planetoid which had drifted lonely between the stars while its con-lived inhabitant watched the slow passing of time. But slowly a problem grew, until its solution dominated his thoughts, a menace that would eventually kill him...

"What sort of menace is this?" asked Spike curiously, forgetting his own troubles in the interest which this strange conversation had aroused.

There was a lot of mental hemming and hawing on the part of the alien, but eventually Spike gathered that, having a metabolism like Solarian life, the creature was in much the same plight as Asteroid 3-2371-TX25 -- the accumulation of offal was awful.

"You have no idea how terrible is such a plight," commented the Alien.

"Oh, brother, you don't know the half of it!" retorted Spike.

A long and involved consultation ensued, the high point of which was reached when it became apparent that the Alien, his interstellar-wandering asteroid, and the ordure which was perplexing him, all were contraterrene matter.

"Yow!" howled Spike after this information had soaked in. "Brother, you and me is gonna transact some business!"

Presently Hank awakened, to find the spacer deserted, and a while afterward Spike returned, whist-



ling cheerfully to himself a song whose words are definitely unprintable in this, a family magazine.

Hank's surprise at this sudden change in Spike's spirits was nothing to his astonishment when, upon inquiring their cause, he was conducted to the port which overlooked the surface of 3-237W-TX25.

Hank looked, and blinked, and fubbed his bleary eyes and looked again. There could be no mistake. Somehow, miraculously, the surface of 3-237W-TX25 had been transformed. Where only hours ago had been the ugly mounds of earth beside the brimming pits, now the nikol-iron surface of the asteroid gleamed in the starshine, polished to bedrock. Undoubtedly someone had performed a labor of Hercules, the cleaning of a second Augean Stable, as it were, and if one might be permitted a vulgar metaphor.

"But what...? How...?" Hank gasped, stunned by the transformation.

Tersely Spike narrated the events of the preceding hours.

"Okay, okay," said Hank wearily at last. "So you hold a gabfest with a See-Tee critter on a chunk of rock, and he's even worse off than you -- but how does that get those privy-pits cleaned out?"

"Gawd," ejaculated Spike, spitting in the direction of the cuspidor and almost hitting it. "Ain't you remembered none of the physics courses you took in school? When See-Tee meets normal matter, the two different kinds of atoms cancels out, and all you got left is gamma. These here alien just come over and hovered about five miles off the surface of 3-237W-TX25 and -- uh, as they say in perlite sassiety -- indulged in a elementary function on each of the pits, and presto, we got plenty of gamma radiation, but no more overflowing pits to worry about."

"Chee," sez Hank after he'd digested this speech. "That's a right clever idea, Spike. But how did you talk this alien critter into doing that leetle service for juh?"

"Turn about's fair play," said Spike. "We uns gotta go visit that See-Tee asteroid about four hours from now. So don't just stand there -- here, have a plateful of these beans."

- END -

For the benefit of posterity, it should be recorded that this deathless epic resulted when Martin Alger visited the Wolverine Insurgents on 8 March 1950, and happened to remark that he had thought of the title several days before, and mentioned it to members of the DSFL in the hope that someone would turn out a story to fit it. Of course, no DSFL member did.

But it is a tradition that when someone visits the Wolverine Insurgents, SAPS gets a zine in memory of the event.

And that, gentle reader, is how this tale came to be. Are you glad?