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FLIGHT UNKNOWN



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MANSON BRACKNEY

WRITTEN BY MANSON BRACKNEY at the TENDER AGE OF TEN

CHAPTER 1: Preparation

It was in the year 1988 in a secluded spot near Nome. Three men, the acme of earthly science, stood huddled together watching the workmen frantically put the finishing touches to what would seem to the common layman merely a large ball, the size of which had never been seen before. These men were racing against time, as in 24 hours the Earth would be in perigee with Mars.

The ball was made of gleaming beryllium, and was nearly 300 feet in diameter. The surface of the sphere was made without rivets and it was as smooth as polished glass. The shape of the sphere was not streamlined in the common sense of the word, as in space it didn't make any difference as the vacuum resistance in space cannot be felt or anything. Space contains only 18 atoms to a cubic foot. Roy Beldon, head scientist of the group, stood back to admire his work. "Neatly done; almost three years of my life have been spent on my work here," he mused to himself. It would not fail - all his calculations had been perfect. No, it could not fail. The ship was his very soul.

Jim Darlan, the astronomer of the group, hurried up to Beldon, saying: "Bring along the control box - we are almost ready for it." Beldon walked quickly over to the supply shed where the control box was housed. With the same degree of speed he walked back to the ship, handed the box to Happy O'Connor, all around mechanist and physicist, who busied himself with the installation of it.

Beldon walked over to the door of the ship and went inside to give everything a look-see. Satisfied that everything was all right, he turned and left for the house to get some of the much needed sleep, so as to be alert and prepared for the take-off tomorrow. Ready to leave in the first rocket ship to leave Earth for Mars.

CHAPTER 2: Off to Mars - and Surprise

Came the next morning, the three scientists hopped out of bed like eager little boys on the dawn of their first solar flight. The Dawn Star, for so it had been named, glinted weirdly in the shallow glow of the northern light. Once inside, co-pilot O'Connor switched on the dynamos. A soft hum growing louder every moment filled the ship. The gleaming ball quivered, the rocket motors started with a rush, and the ship left the Earth.

They were almost crushed by the terrific acceleration of the take-off. After the strain had passed, Happy ventured a look out of one the quartzite windows. The Earth was far behind and was swindling rapidly in size. The stars shown brightly in the vacuum of space through which they were traveling, and the sun took on a white hot appearance in the eternal darkness of space.

The next three hours were spent in observations of space. Darlan, the astronomer was busy making observations and notes of the space through which they were rocketing at a tremendous speed. Suddenly he sat up straight and cried that they were heading for a space vortex, which are seen only infrequently by Earth scientists. The vortex was completely black, showing no signs of reflection from the light of the sun. They were headed straight for it, and no possible way to swerve because of their tremendous momentum. In another moment they were engulfed in its depths.

It seemingly had no effect on them. Soon, however, there seemed to

be a certain transparency about their bodies and the ship. They could even see stars, very small, through the ship's walls as well as through the windows. They could see objects through their own bodies!

Then Beldon spoke up: "It seems we have struck a space warp which has disembodied the molecules of our bodies and the ship, and we are growing larger at a rate that is almost too great for human conception to believe." Now they could see the stars growing smaller in proportion to their bodies. Very soon, however, their growing seemed to stop, their bodies no longer transparent. They hit something solid with a thump and came to rest. Beldon and the others looked out of the window and what they saw no human eye had ever seen or no human had ever dreamed of in his wildest imaginings.

CHAPTER 3: Strange Sights and Facts

The planet, for such they imagined it was, was shaped like a many faceted diamond without any curved lines as far as they could see. A soft, humming noise penetrated through the air or whatever the atmosphere consisted of. They slipped on their space suits and stepped through the airlock onto this strange and remarkable world.

The substance upon which they were standing seemed to be made of tiny crystals which were arranged in a mosaic pattern. A sun was appearing over the horizon, and the size and shape of it made the scientists gasp. It was shaped the same as the planet upon which they were now standing, and the size of it was astounding. It filled half of the maroon colored sky.

As the sun came into view, the humming noise became so loud that it hurt their ears. The crystals underneath their feet started a queer, throbbing, pulsating movement. Beldon jumped and cried: "Run for the ship - the whole planet is alive. We are in a different dimension than the ones to which we are used to - these crystals, inorganic substances, are alive." Once inside the ship Beldon began explaining this strange predicament they were in. It seems we have burst through our own universe into a hyper universe. About forty years ago, before Einstein died, he proposed a theory that since every object possessed protons and electrons, the protons, as you know, are smaller than electrons, but have infinitely greater weight, as the sun does in our own solar system, and the electrons act as planets revolving about the proton in an orbit much as the planets do. We have affected the converse of this - we have grown so we burst thru the atom of this universe and landed on one of the plantes of the hyper universe. Jim Darlan spoke then: "Won't it be practically impossible to get back to our own universe and to Earth again?" Happy exclaimed: "You're right; we would have to find our own universe out of the countless millions and trillions of atoms on this spot." Resigning themselves to their fate, the three, tired men lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER 4: The Mental Ultimate

When they woke up, the sky was already shining, sending its blistering heat upon the crystalline planet, and then, in turn, the crystals reflected the light and intensified heat. After they had eaten breakfast, they got out their spacesuits, put them on, and went outside to further explore the strange world upon which fate had placed them so suddenly. Once outside, the landscape appeared to be a many-faceted mirror as far as the eye could see. Walking a dist-

ance they judged to be about two or three miles. Finally, they decided to turn back and eat lunch. After they had reached the ship, they sat down to eat lunch, consisting mainly of condensed food. This food, small capsules containing necessary vitamins and calories, served as a meal. They were easily packed and didn't weigh much, and were much better than ordinary food for the human body, although they didn't have much taste appeal.

Three days later, Beldon was walking outside when he seemed to hear a whisper in his brain. The whisper seemed to be getting louder and more persistent. Thinking that it might be some intelligence on this world trying to contact him by means of telepathy, he thought back the question: "What do you want?" To his surprise, a voice answered clearly in his brain. "I'm Arlos - it is good that you answered my thought transmissions - I was skeptical about your answering me for a moment. I shall tell you something of myself. You think I am merely the crystals upon which you are trodding, but each one of those crystals is a brain in itself, working together to form one large mind of Arlos. You wonder how I can read your mind? I have the power to read your mind or almost anything else I wish because I am the Mental Ultimate in my own universe. You also wonder how inorganic substances have life? In this galaxy, there are not very many organic substances, and in your universe you have only three dimensions - we have seven, including the ones your universe possesses. This makes possible many things that are not conceived of on your planet. The reason I know so much is from reading your mind for facts on your universe, but I don't know where it is located, because you don't know either. Your mind has only accumulated these facts, and I have no available information. My universe does not have any circular figure such as your ship. Your ship is as strange to me as these tetrahedrons are to you. Would you like to know more of my universe, and the many others around it?"

"Then, tomorrow, when the sun, Osmo, the Light Giver, comes up, you be here on this spot and I will endeavor to explain many things as you can understand to your friends and you."

CHAPTER 5: Information

The next day, they woke up all at once at the sound of an alarm and jumped out of bed before the sun arose. Even Happy, with a speed that was unnatural for him, hurried through breakfast. About five minutes before Osmo was scheduled to rise, the three men had on their space suits, and were walking hurriedly so they would be on time at the place they were supposed to be.

As the sun came over the horizon, they heard a voice in their minds just as Beldon had described it, a strong vibrant voice, saying: "I see you are on time. First I'll tell you about the various universes in this galaxy."

Arlos continued: "I shall explain that later, as I see you are puzzled. The universes in this galaxy have only one planet revolving about the sun. All of them have the same period for night and day. The days are five hours long in your time. The sun has one illuminated side, and it stands still while the bodies like myself revolve around it.

"Now," he continued, "I shall tell you about myself. I am but one of the many who subsist on the light from our suns. We would die if the light were cut off for more than fifteen hours. Many ergs ago - that is, an erg is equal to about thirty million years in your solar system. This is because when space increases, time also increases -

many ergs ago, these crystalline bodies like mine used to war on each other. Not by weapons, or in the physical sense of the word, but by transmitted thought. The two bodies would direct thoughts at each other until one would submit to the other's will. When this happened, the loser would disappear into the void, never to be seen again. We have long outgrown wars, now, however, as we spend so much time in problems that we haven't time to fight.

"Are there any questions on anything you would like to ask - anything you don't understand, or anything you want to know?"

Then Beldon spoke up for the first time in an hour: "Yes, we would like to know if you would help us to get back to our own solar system." The being mused for a moment, and then said: "I thought you would ask that eventually. If you will be back on this spot tomorrow, I will do what I can for you."

That, dear reader, is all that consists of the carefully handwritten tale. I believe Brackney once related another part of the plot to me, but it is not in the manuscript, and so is not here.

Have you any idea how to get Beldon, Darlan, O'Connor, et al, out of their predicament? There's a simple solution....

And with this, go our apologies to Brackney. I don't think he knows I've got his initial stf effort!

--John L Gergen

Published for the Fantasy Amateur Press Association for the March, 1942 mailing, by John L Gergen, 221 Melbourne, Mpls, Minn. Favorable comments welcome, of course. Brackney's address: 152 Arthur ave SE, Mpls, Minn.....