

NUMBER
FOUR

APRIL
1951



IMPOSSIBLE

ISSUE NUMBER FOUR

A PRODUCTION OF the nameless ones

Seattle, Washington

April 1951

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edited by Burnett R. Toskey
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mimeograph machine owned by Wally Weber.
lithography by Andrew's Letter Shop, Tacoma, Wash.

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THE EDITOR CROAKS

This column would probably be more fittingly titled "Progress Report" this time, for I intend to present to you, dear reader, a report of real accomplishment in my chosen task of driving all magazines out of business. To begin:

Worlds Beyond has apparently folded; from all reports. Though this gladdens my heart no end, it also saddens it somewhat, for this was one magazine with which I found little fault. However, all joking aside, why condemn a fact which serves my great purpose?

Galaxy Science Fiction is one magazine that I truly believe is in its death throes. That this is a truly corrupt magazine is evidenced by several salient facts: Consistently has Galaxy appeared on the stands two weeks behind the date announced for publication. This might have been excusable for the first couple of issues, but after six issues, it would seem that they would realize that Impossible was being published. Next is the editorial policy of the magazine itself. They wheedle the authors out of their best stories by promises of higher rates and the waving of reprint rights. The editorials of the magazine are just one boast after another. Galaxy is without a doubt the most egotistical of magazines in existence. Then there were a couple really bad instances, such as the editorial of the February 1951 issue which told the sad story of why they couldn't print "Needle". This was a direct unadulterated attack upon Astounding Science Fiction. Then they used the sacred name of Christmas itself to wheedle money out of unwilling subscribers by offering special low rates. Just how low can a magazine stoop, fans? The fact that everything they say is true, of course, has nothing at all to do with this discussion.

Astounding Science Fiction is another magazine that my publication is beginning to make progress upon. In Earlier issues of Impossible I mentioned that according to a footnote in ASF there was to be a change, supposedly to take place in the Fall of 1950. The surmise was that the change would be one

of format, possibly to the large size slick. However, Impossible took care of that, and the change did not occur until the February 1951 issue, and the change was not one of format, but of subscription rates for foreign countries. Now the foreign rates are ten dollars for a single year, more than three times the amount that it had been! This is unheard of in the annals of sf! But, of course, it is obvious that ASF has finally felt the impact of Impossible. No doubt their incoming subscriptions have been falling off rapidly, and they were forced to raise their price to foreign subscribers in order to make enough money to survive. They will no doubt learn that this sort of policy will get them nowhere. The March 1951 issue of ASF was two full weeks behind schedule. We know why, don't we?

Fantasy Stories has not published an issue since the November 1950 issue. Could this one have folded too?

Out of This World Adventures has had two issues, dated July and December of 1950, and there have been no more since. Is the thing published every five months?

Marvel Science Stories is supposedly published bi-monthly. The March issue has not yet appeared. Let's hope that it doesn't.

Imagination falls into an odd category this month. Ray Palmer, due to financial losses because of Impossible, was forced to sell out this magazine to William L. Hamling, former editor of Fantastic Adventures. Imagination also is late on the stands, but it is so late that the publication date for the next issue was really the date of the appearance of the current issue.

Other Worlds falls in much the same category as Imagination, but there was no change of editors in this case, and the magazine was supposed to appear even before Imagination was, whereas they both actually appeared at the same time.

Famous Fantastic Mysteries made a change to slick paper, at the expense of the quality of their cover illustrations, at the expense of eighteen pages of text, and at the expense of their interior

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Even the cover girl is misproportioned. Also the issue appeared on the stands two weeks late.

Amazing Stories seems to be plugging along the same as ever. It seems that never again will it reach the height it achieved between 1946 and 1948. The April issue, however, did have a good cover.

Future and Impossible remain at a deadlock. I caused the raise in price from 15 to 20 cents, but I seem unable to go farther.

Ten Story Fantasy is Avon's latest effort at producing bottom quality sf.

Science Fiction Quarterly is out again. I like the sadistic grin on the cover-hero's face.

Planet Stories still remains the dean of the low quality pulps, and I somehow find myself unable to battle the teeming hordes of teen-agers who buy this publication.

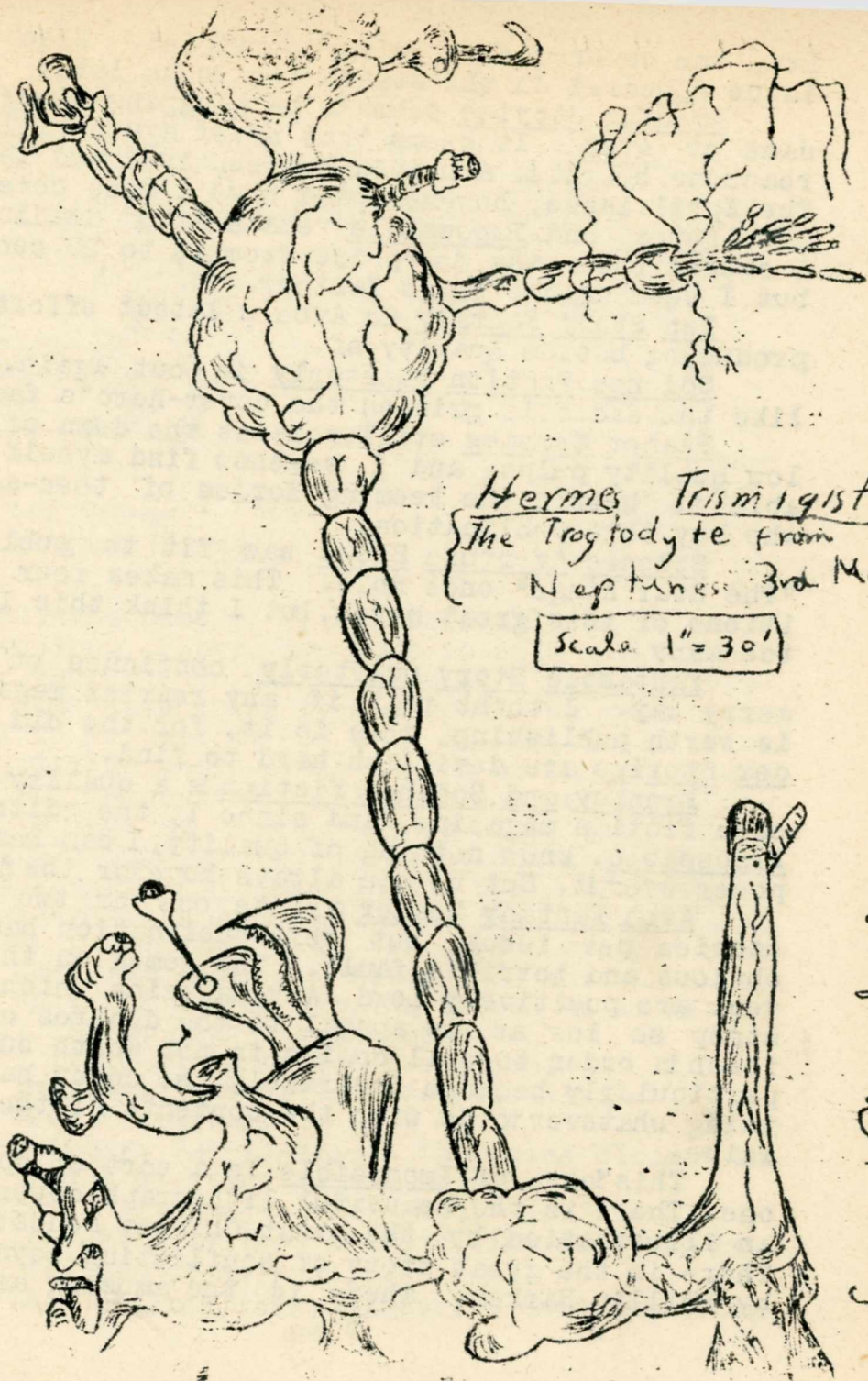
Science-Aventure Books saw fit to publish "The Star Kings" once more. This makes four editions of this great novel, but I think this is one too many.

Fantastic Story Quarterly continues on its merry way. I think that if any reprint magazine is worth publishing, this is it, for the old Wonder Stories are devilish hard to find.

Fantasy and Science Fiction is a quality science fiction magazine, and since I, the editor of Impossible, know nothing of quality, I can have no power over it. But we can always hope for the future.

Avon Fantasy Reader prints one or two good stories per issue, but this publication has one obvious and terrible fault. The women on the covers are positively lewd. Any magazine which must stoop so low as to appeal to the desires of the flesh in order to sell copies is not worth buying, particularly because invariably the cover has nothing whatever to do with the contents of the magazine.

This issue of Impossible is a sort of special one. There is the beautiful lithograph cover with an illustration by the great Chisler Bonestall. There is the great story of conflicting loyalties by Phillip Barker. There is the amusing article



Hermes Trismegistus
The Troglodyte from
Neptunes 3rd Moon.

Scale 1" = 30'

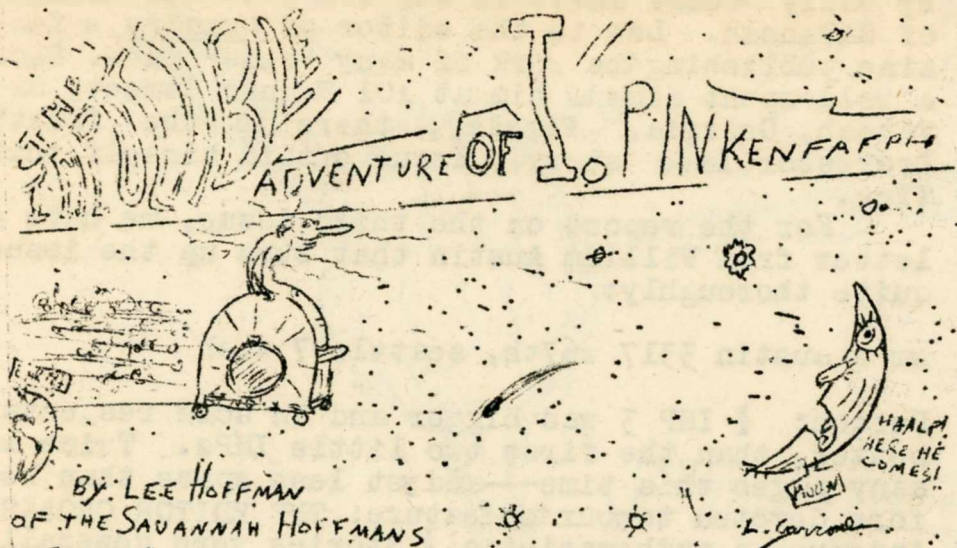
Lester & Blanchard

by Wally Weber. There is the story by Lee Hoffman of Savannah. Lee is the editor of Quandry, a fanzine publishing the work of many "name" fans. Send a well-spent dime to him at 101 Wagner Street, Savannah, Georgia. Finally, there is the fourth Professor Ames story. Kraus outdid himself this time.

For the report on the third issue, we have a letter from William Austin that sums up the issue quite thoroughly:

wm n austin 3317 w67th, seattle 7 wash

Burtos: | IMP 3 was bigger and in some respects, better, than the first two little IMPs. Twice as many pages this time---and yet less space than before devoted to your top feature: THE EDITOR CROAKS! And you---a mathematician! | Stories were generally readable(sic) tho, with the best being Barker's parallel worlds fantasy despite the device popularized by Hubbard in his Sleep-Slave series. Still, a rather more effective way of introducing a series than any other of which I can call to mind. More: ---and I suggest a paragraph or two of synopsis from this precede the narration of the follow-up yarn. Barker(sic) writes well enough for the pros if he'd hack away the corn first. | SANDMAN was rather too much like MIT(sic) for me, but almost entirely lacking the punch of the Sturgeon story. The human contact was devoid of personality, or reader sympathy-interest; the conflict, almost without suspense, and the climax, while logical, almost without interest. You apparently set out to create a new monster and, as such you were successful. Trouble is, you forgot about the other elements of a story. | Weber's effort followed a stock formula, and was pretty obvious from the outset. It was of interest to me in that it was the longest thing of his writing endeavors I've read to date, though not his best by quite a bit. The elements of MR. TINKERTOY seem to add up to another short-short---with this one being drawn
(continued on page 12)



Ah, the name of I. Pinkenfafph! There was a man for you. Pinky, we used to call him...those of us who were in his classes at Pimento University. Pinky was going to the moon. He told us so himself. He used to be seen in the halls after class, sitting there cross-legged on the floor and chortling as he read the latest copy of True Cosmic Love Gush of the Future combined with Modern Futuristic Science Stories about Sex in the Future and Confessions of sins in the World of Tomorrow as they Actually happened. That was where I first met him. I was rushing to trig, and I tripped over him. That was when he first told me. As I lay there sprawled across him, he looked up at me and smiled. "I am going to the moon."

"I am going to trig," I replied.

"The moon," he sighed ecstatically.

"When?" I asked.

"Someday. Tra-la-tra-la the roses bloom," he sang, "and I am going to the moon."

"Doesn't rhyme," I objected.

"Tra-la tra-la the sparrows sing and I am going to the moon," he continued.

"That doesn't rhyme either," I said, gathering

up the pages that had fallen out of my trig book.

"Here we go gathering nuts in May," he changed his tune. "Here we go gathering nuts in May, I'm going to the moon."

"Shucks," I swore, finding that my five place log table was missing.

"Jenny crack corn and I don't care," he sang, "Jenny shuck corn and I don't care, I'm going to the moon." He peered back at his magazine, thru inchthick glasses and read aloud, "Minerva Zwilch raised her arms and cried out, 'Kiss me, my handsome Trigonometric Functions of 50.'"

I grabbed the page away from him and absquatulated.

That was the year before he mixed Lux Beauty soap and Evening in Paris into a rocket fuel, built a ship out of an old Bendix washer and flew non-stop to the moon. You remember that, and the accounts of his return to Earth with the washer laden with precious jewels. And you remember his stories of the Queen Gulleauxellstein whom he rescued from Lunar Aphostophexors and who gave him all the jewels and offered to make him her king. And no doubt you read his description of her beauty which was greater than that of any Earth woman.

Good old Pinky...no common member of the masses he...no sir... He jumped right in with all that cash to advance the status of mankind by going to Mars. Spending the dough he got from the jewels to build himself a really good spaceship. You remember that. Remember the launching day...when it blew up with him in it.

Good old Pinky, he didn't stay on the moon and enjoy ruling it when he could come back to Earth and help humanity. Not him. No real man worthy of the title would.

Here, hold this test tube while I pour in the Evening in Paris and watch out that you don't spill the soap suds.

No sir, Pinky did the right thing coming back to Earth, bringing his wealth and knowledge to the rest of us.

GETTING MATERIAL FOR YOUR FANZINE

By Wally Weber

Obtaining material to put in one's fanzine has long been one of the stumbling blocks of fan publishing. Feeble attempts have been made to alleviate this problem by setting up such haphazard and inefficient organizations as manuscript distribution bureaus and fanzine pools, but few publishers realize that there are several easy ways of gathering material which are very uncomplicated and effective.

One very effective method of getting action from local authors, artists, poets, and letter-writers is to visit them personally. Tell them that you need material badly. Describe the suffering, the intense mental agony to which you are subjected because of lack of material. They, of course, will laugh in your face. It is at this point that you withdraw a gun from your pocket and demand them to write something for your fanzine or else be blown to bits. No one has ever been known to refuse a fan editor when approached in this manner.

If the fan editor hasn't the use of a suitable gun, or if he wants material from persons too far away to approach personally, there are a number of other devices he can use. For instance, he can offer to pay contributors a dollar per word. This simple method will insure a great inflow of material, enough to supply a fanzine for years. Some editors might find this rather expensive, especially if they actually pay up, but a sufficiently alert fan might go on for several days without being caught and put to death.

A simple solution to the whole thing is to do everything by yourself. Unfortunately this requires ability which few fan publishers possess; namely, the ability to write. Artwork is a simple matter, consisting mainly of making odd-shaped scratches of various shape and size and making everything vague enough that it could appear to be anything. Poems, too, are a simple matter, but only if the editor knows something about the alphabet and words and

such love as that.

For the illiterate editor, there is a simple solution. Simply copy from other fanzines, word for word, and publish them in your own. Nobody remembers fanzine material anyway --- few of them even bother to read the stuff --- so the danger of being censored for this sort of thing is practically nonexistent.

It is laughable when one realizes how some fan editors worry about the quality of their work. They demand stories, artwork, and articles that are of better quality than the professional work appearing in the pulps themselves. Actually the quality of fan material is no longer judged by the literary or artistic quality of their work. Nowadays everything is judged by the name of the fan who produced it. If it is by a name fan, it is good. If it is by a fan you have never heard of, it is rotten. Work from well-known professionals is, of course, ultra-perfect, and so the story goes. Advice as far as quality goes is simple; just print material submitted by professionals and big name fans.

A lot of fan publishers will complain at this advice, insisting that it is difficult to obtain material from famous fan and well-liked professionals. Some fan publishers are just that naive. Actually this isn't even a problem. Why bother about squeezing material out of famous fan when you can simply add their names to worthless crud somebody else sent in? Nobody will notice the difference. The people whose names you borrowed probably won't even see the thing, and if they do they probably will suppose that they actually did at one time or another send some material out and forgot about it. In case somebody objects to having his material published under somebody else's name, the correction can always be made in an obscure corner of some succeeding issue where practically all of the subscribers will fail to notice it except for the one person who is looking for the apology.

Now you can plainly see there is nothing to obtaining suitable material for your fanzine with

a minimum of hard work and trouble. Any fanzine can easily be filled if you don't try to make things more difficult than necessary. No editor should ever have need of suffering for want of material after reading this article.

THE EDITOR CROAKS--

----- continued from page 7

out by a couple thousand additional words. Neat way of disposing of sorcerer's apprentice's stooge tho not entirely (sic) convincing. Give us more of Weber tho. He's still one of my favorite fan fiction fabricators. But Kraus---that ham!!! That fugative (sic) from vaudeville! You ought to fire him, or at least exile him to a video writer's job. How you can stand eating breakfast in his presence is beyond me. I'd rather dine with my Clinch County pals. But if video refuses him entry, continue his work in IMP---where everything becomes possible. My objection to Garcone remains the same as before: his work lacks depth. God knows his inspirations are straight from a poppy jag, but there's no reason why his weirdies shouldn't be fullsome and buxom. Pages 5 and 35 were his best efforts this time, with the idea for the cover running far ahead of final result. Good free-hand stencil-cutting tho. Editorials: still the best feature in IMP. Would suggest special attention be spent on extending this by a couple of pages, and on a complete rewrite before dummyping. And watch that business of making statements that require a re-reading of No. 1 or No. 2 before the reader understands the significance, as in the case of ASF and the full (sic)

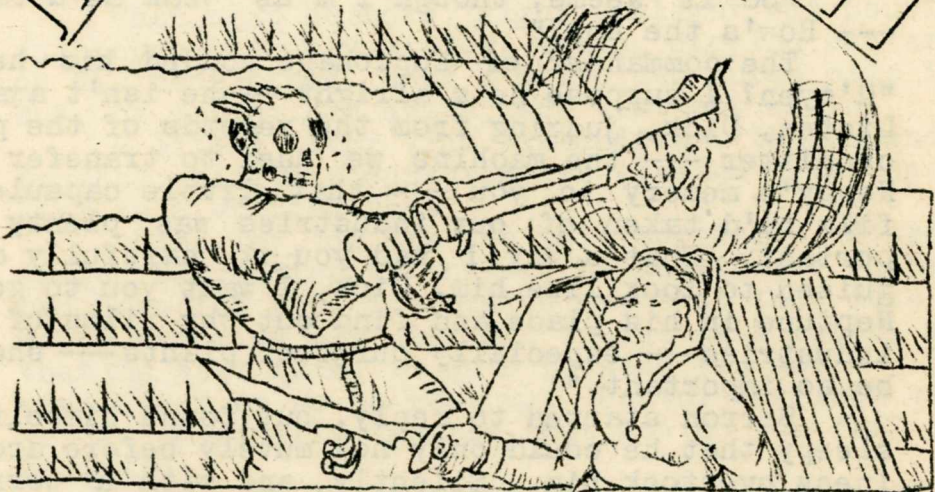
Avon Fantasy Reader comments. Everything considered, still one of the best buys for the dough in the entire field of fan magazines. Here's hoping those IMPs continue prolific.

Sez you, Mr. Austin.

Yrs.
Will Aus

THE DARKENED LIGHT

BY
PHILLIP BARKER



Barron's mind swam up out of the mists of unconsciousness to find Vram's kindly, tanned face looking down at him. His thoughts were still badly mixed with those of the Neptunian, whose memory he had just absorbed. Confusedly, he could recall both his own past and that of the enemy spy on the plastic slab next to him. Recollections of the sybaritic degeneration of the Tri-Planet Empire --- to which Earth belonged --- were jumbled hopelessly with views of great bustling, dark cities, the Sun shining, dim and tiny, far out beyond Uranus, the everlasting twilight of Outer Worlds. No wonder the Neptunian Confederation wanted to master the inner Empire! The poor devils only wanted sunlight, green things, and the warm, brown earth. After all, he mused, why shouldn't they have a share of the comforts too? They who had only the cold, basaltic rocks and matted, black lichens that abounded on the farthest worlds from the Sun.

Those were traitorous thoughts: With an effort Barron raised himself upon his elbow, shooed away the anxious doctors, and feebly beckoned Commander Vram to come closer.

"How do you feel, boy? Did the switch come off all right?"

"So it seems, though I'm as weak as a baby. --- How's the spy?"

The commander of Espionage nodded his head. "M'tyen? I suppose he's alright---he isn't awake. Listen, Dick, judging from the records of the psychomitter --- the machine we used to transfer the Neppy's memory to you --- that little capsule of film he'd taken of our industries was plenty important. That's why I had you so carefully disguised to look like him. Dick, I want you to go to Neptune in his place and find out why films of our industries--- especially our power plants--- should be so important."

Barron started to reply, but found himself so sleepy that he could only nod mutely before drowsiness overtook him. Silently, and with a worried frown on his face, Commander Vram left the room. Dick Barron had always been a son to him, and if he should happen to be killed on Neptune, Vram knew he would never smile again.

That night was the most hellish of Dick Barron's life. Uneasy memories of his part in the last battle between the Tri-Planet Empire and the Confederation and the subsequent defeat of the Martian general, Ho-Dyim at Jovopolis were the ugliest and most colorful of the enemy agent's reminiscences. With those as a central theme, thousands of other pictures revolved in his mind: images of Barron's first and only love, who had died in one of Earth's too-frequent atomic power explosions, Neptunian memories of many colors --- rosy hued thoughts of his parents who lived in Tvamal, vistas of great cities, and whole galaxies of little irrelevant ideas, impressions, and thoughts which crowded in on him like darkness goes to a dying man. An enormous host of people, places, objects, and events

swirled constantly before him. He seemed to experience moments of pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, courage and fear, some of light and some of darkness, - a whole phantasmagoria waiting to be called out from behind the doors of his mind. His entire intellect finally whirled down into dusky gloom; he slept.

When next he awoke, bright sunlight was pouring in through the only window, making dappled patterns on his bedclothes. Soon a uniformed nurse came in, but, on seeing him awake, she went out again.

A little later Vram was admitted. The commander brushed white hair back from his eyes and began speaking in a worried tone.

"Dick, boy, how are you this morning?" Without giving Barron time to answer, he continued. "I have bad news for you. The medics say that that dose of Neppy memories may wear off inside of a month, and that the best thing to do is to send you now --- not even a day or so to rest up. Doctor Morrison says you're physically capable, but how do you feel upstairs?"

Barron swung his long legs over the edge of the cot and was not even startled that they were grayish green. He grinned. "I sure look like a Neppy, don't I? Is this stuff indelible or do I go dirty while on Neptune?"

Vram looked even more anxious. "Don't jest, Dick. How do you feel --- able to take such a long trip and spy around on top of that?"

"I feel fine," Barron lied. "When can I start?"

"That's a relief! Come on, we've got to get some breakfast."

After a short meal (during which Barron just picked at his food, much to the commander's concern) they left for the spaceport.

Earth, in the year 3581, had already developed one nine-planet empire, which had failed, and was now on the downward road. Her citizens still prated of "rights, liberty, and the freedoms" --- words which had once meant something, but were only meaningless catchwords in Barron's time. On every side

of the little air-cabin which the two men traveled, were the signposts of decadence; unrepaired machinery, cracked plastic pavements, poor makeshifts for things that had rotted or wasted away, and above all, marks of the deterioration of the social system. The middle-class, average citizen sat back and babbled of his "rights" while equally free, but somewhat poorer, men were driven like beasts into slavery. It was a combination of the small class of degenerates and the large class of easy going clods over the progressives. Barron saw the situation and regretted it, but was powerless to remedy it.

The air-cab landed on the scorched plastic of the spaceport and discharged its passengers. In the days of the nine-planet empire the great spaceport must have been a thing of luxury and faery beauty, but the rats of time and the termites of disrepair had eaten away the pastel, translucent, plastic towers, had worn away the delicate carvings on the walls of the pillared courtyard, had cracked and marred the smooth landing field, and had destroyed the willpower of the men who could have rebuilt it.

On the far side of the field sat a squat, green colored cruiser. This ship, however, was not green with the patina of age but with camouflage, carefully designed by the Neptunians to give it the look of a hillock from the air. It had been so well hidden that it lay, undiscovered, within two miles of the Imperial City until the psychomitter forced its owner to give up the secret. Now Barron, masked by skillful surgery, walked briskly across the field, climbed up the short entrance ladder, and turned to speak to Vramin exact imitations of the Neptunians mannerisms.

"Well, sir, I guess I'll be seeing you," Barron tried to grin in his usual carefree way, but failed to give a happy impression.

"Dick, I have two more things to give you. One is this self-powered etherphone. I want you to report as often as possible. And the other is the Neppy's capsule of films --- but changed so that they will get no valuable information." He paused

unhappily. "Goodbye, lad. Good luck!"

The Martian commander turned hastily away so that Barron could not see the swift emotion that leaped into his face.

Slowly the airlocks hissed shut behind him, and Barron stood in the tiny cabin. He glanced about, letting the Neptunian memories and reflexes take over, and moved on into the pilot's cabin. There was no visible power supply! For a minute Barron was bewildered, but then he remembered the great, busy central power plants in Tramal and the gigantic antenna which broadcast pure power into space. This reminded him of the beamed power used to propel the little cruiser, and, looking upward, he saw the bare metal rods that literally picked his propulsion out of space.

The journey was uneventful to Barron, for he spent nearly all his time delving into the dim recesses of the Neptunian's mind. The recollections of the man's home especially drew his interest. Ever since the death of his parents in one of the atomic explosions which harassed the scientists of Earth and the sudden snuffing-out of his sweetheart's life in another, later explosion, Barron had been friendless except for Vram. The Neptunian's reminiscences only opened an old, aching wound.

He studied and re-studied the knowledge contained in his new memories until he knew it as well as the man from whom it came. Barron's only regret was that the Neptunian had not been a scientist or technician, for the spy had been woefully ignorant of everything but the science of espionage. Perhaps, if the enemy agent had been better informed, the whole trip might have been unnecessary.

Neptune loomed larger and larger in the vision plate, and Barron began to take an interest in its topography, customs, and religion. He found the language and the customs almost a reflex action in the Neptunian and strove to make them so in him. It was not easy, for the colloquial speech, though descended from the Earth colonists who were now the Neptunians, was hopelessly involved, and Barron

found it difficult even with his acquired memories.

He began decelerating slowly, making a narrowing spiral descent which brought him ever nearer to the time when he would test his disguise. At 3000 miles out, a Neptunian Patrol ship sighted him and requested him to follow a straight course at a set speed. This enabled the patrol ship to match his velocity and thus effect the landing of an inspection party aboard. Barron consented, did as he was told, and finally heard the grating clang of magnetic anchors against his hull.

A muffled voice at his outer airlock ordered him to open and admit the officer of inspection. This would be only the preliminary to the real test of his disguise, but nevertheless, he felt a slight sinking feeling in his chest as he watched the air pressure creep up to "bearable" and heard the inner door hiss open.

The officer in command was a tall, gangling Javian who affected Neptunian accent and manner. The first thing he did was to look at Barron's identification tags, and the second thing was to offer any possible assistance to the "so-gallant Captain M'tyen". Barron dug deep into his new recollections but found nothing to cause such evident respect in an officer of his own rank. Something must have come up in his absence. Oh well, he thought wryly, I'll soon find out.

After the guard's departure, the agent continued his slow circling over the high mountain ranges that hid Tvamal. Within a short time, he was setting his ship down on the tarmac of the general spaceport. As soon as his ship touched the ground, Barron climbed out and advanced directly to the records offices where he made a report of his identity, purpose, and landing time. Ignoring the crowd of space sailors, repair men, fuelers, and technicians, he went to the well-remembered station and caught an air-cab directly to the palace of the ruler of the Neptunian Confederation.

The royal palace could be seen from any point in the city, for it rose nearly a mile into the air.

In contrast to the lusty, brawling streets below, the palace was strangely quiet and subdued. The vast pile seemed from the ground like a mighty tree trunk, the top of which was hidden in the mists. Ethereal in structure, the network of delicate towers, lacy bridges, and peaked roofs gave it the appearance of an illustration in a child's book of fairy tales. But the fairies who lived within must have been evil indeed, for the plastic walls and terraces were black in hue, as black as outer space. The only available building material on Neptune, besides plain stone, was a plastic composed of the fibrous, matted lichens which alone abounded in the surrounding forests. Even this dusky material was lacking on some planets of the Confederation.

Barron entered the main gates and passed under the watchful scrutiny of the guards behind the draperies. Through several corridors, empty of life, then up a flight of stairs, through a long, spacious, pillared hall, and into the ante-room of the ruler's chamber, which was thronged with supplicants, officials and courtiers.

He was met by a tall, saturnine man in the flowing red robes of a technician. "You wished to see the Lord of All?"

Barron nodded.

"If you will give your name, sir, I'll place you in line according to your rank." The man smiled, giving Barron a feeling of friendship toward him.

"Using the information here in this capsule may get me in faster than just my name. I am Captain M'tyen of the Espionage ---"

"Captain M'tyen! But I was told --- His Majesty said --- you're not expected back yet for several weeks. I'll take you straight in!"

The secret agent was astonished. The steward-technician's manner had changed as abruptly as had that of the patrol captain. Barron hastened to catch up, for the brisk, young officer was already leading the way past rows of petitioners to an over-elaborate bronze door at the end of the hall. This he opened and ushered Barron into the presence of the arch-

enemy of the Tri-Planet Empire.

The apartment beyond the ornate portal was dark, nearly too dark to make out the decorations on the walls. Pillars of listening rock lined the length of the cavernous room. The floor was done in mosaic designs of polished stone, and the smell of musty incense hung in the air. Far, far down, at the other end of the chamber, a tiny spark of light wavered and flickered, casting erratic shadows on the polished golden dragons of the throne.

Barron advanced over the fantastic patterns of gleaming glinting twinkling gems toward that distant speck of illumination. The hall seemed endless, and the mosaic appeared to ebb and flow under his feet. The light was even farther away and was dimming. The whole hall was eternity, and he was man, marching toward Perfection with endless steps--- no, he was time, and he was moving slowly down the perpetual path of the years to a goal he could not understand.

"Kind of gets you, doesn't it, son?" The voice was aged--- whispery. "It's only an illusion I had made to awe fools and commoners."

Barron, startled out of his reverie, looked up to find the dulled gold of the throne looming above him, and the monarch of the Neptunian Confederation grinning at him. But what a man! The creature who sat on the wide, plush seat could once have been a man, but now was little more than a shriveled mummy. A face, wrinkled with unguessable senility, grinned down at him from atop a loose, flowing robe of velvet. The eyes were the only living parts, and they shone with more than the reflected light of the lone brazier. In the enfolding darkness, those two orbs blazed like beacons.

"You are M'tyen. Oh, don't start; I know all about you and your mission. Do you have the information? Quickly!"

A tiny, shrunken claw emerged from the folds of the velvet robe and snatched away the capsule that Barron tendered.

The sibilant, papery voice weakened perceptibly. "You will forgive me if I seem abrupt, but it takes

great strength to speak. We must conclude our business without delay, M'tyen."

Barron heard a soft step behind him and turned to see the young man in the red robe.

The dessicated lips writhed into a parody of a smile. "This is Mors-tyr, my favorite lordling. He will show you your properties on Callisto and instruct you in the niceties of the nobility."

The agent's mouth dropped open in surprise. He was no lord; he had no possessions on Callisto! What could the aged ruler mean?

"I thought that would amaze you. There is nothing I enjoy more than rewarding those who serve me well, of which you are one."

Here was the mystery of his sudden importance again! He let the king continue.

"Yes, in reward for the invaluable plans you brought me, I am raising you to the nobility. You really have no idea of their importance to the Confederation."

Mors-tyr suavely interposed. "Your Majesty forgets that M'tyen is not acquainted with the reason behind his mission."

Barron passed him a grateful look, but the old man snapped irritably, "I have not forgotten, Mors! I was but leading up to that. You must be told a state secret, M'tyen, so please do not permit it to pass on down the line to my enemies. Have you ever wondered as to the source of that power that we beam to our allied planets? Have you ever puzzled over those tiny receivers that utilize this power?"

Barron thought wryly that the king would be quite surprised to learn just how much he had wondered.

"I know you have. All the uniformed would like to know where that current stems from, but none could guess the truth in a thousand years!" The emaciated form leaned closer, and the rustle of his robes was louder than his voice. "That power is entirely the output of one crystal! Ever since the Nine Planet Empire fell to pieces, we have used this radioactive crystal as our sole source of power. It was first

discovered in space about forty years before the first break with Earth, but its potentialities weren't perceived and perfected until the scientists had found an effective shield against the murderous radiations which it emanates. But now I come to the disturbing part of the story. Now, after a century of use, that crystal's potential is waning! And we have no other power source ready when it dies. Now do you see its importance?"

To say that Barron was astounded would be underrating the actual depth of his emotions. Vram would find this extremely interesting! When he returned his gaze to the king's face, he saw that the blazing eyes were dark and empty.

Mors-tyr pulled gently at his sleeve. "Come away, M'tyen, for His Majesty sleeps. He is often like that now that he is in his dotage, but my father tells me tales of his youth in which this man played a great part as a revolutionary leader. Alas, now that he is old and feeble, he is not strong enough to solve the differences between our Confederation and the Tri-Planet Empire. --- But won't you come with me to some restaurant where we can find something to eat? I'm sure you're hungry after such a long trip and long conversation."

To tell the truth, Barron was hungry. He quickly agreed to Mors' suggestion, and the two men left the palace.

The long avenues thundered with the strong beat of a virile people at work. They passed through hurrying crowds of laborers, shoppers, business men, and soldiers, but nowhere did they see a pleasure seeker or a dissolute face. Mors-tyr explained that the cafe with the best food lay only a few streets from M'tyen's home, so they could go straight there after the meal. It would have suited Barron if he never had to go near M'tyen's parents or relatives, for that would be the supreme test for his disguise, and, to be honest, he feared it.

In the crowded little restaurant he felt safer, for among the rest of the greenskinned populace, any discrepancies in his makeup would be unnotice-

able. He and Mors-tyr became good friends with alacrity. Mors insisting on treating "M'tyen" to the dinner and asked only his friendship in return. Barron consented heartily, for a friend among those close to the monarch would be of invaluable aid. But he couldn't quite make himself believe this to be the main reason, for he found himself drawn to the young technician more and more with each passing moment.

"Well, M'tyen, you've finished your grafdt; shall we go and tell your relations that you're home?"

"I can hardly wait to see their faces," said Barron, showing false enthusiasm. "They don't expect me back for several weeks yet. In order to obey His Majesty's commands, I had to tell them that I was going on a trip for a few months or so. We'll say that I met you on the ship and formed a friendship immediately. Is that alright?"

Mors-tyr agreed, and brought himself up out of the chair. "We'd better be on our way. Coming?"

Together, the two friends directed their steps toward the home of M'tyen's middle class parents. His father, a fairly wealthy cloth manufacturer, owned a small, but pleasant house on the south side of the imperial palace. From M'tyen's recollections, Barron drew an image of the place with its shop in front, the tiny, inclosed courtyard where they sat and enjoyed the fresh air on bright days, and the face-like arrangement of windows on its west wall. Somehow, he couldn't quite describe how, those memories gave him pleasure, and, if it had not been for his apprehension over his disguise, he would have been quite happy to return to this place which he had never seen.

Barron felt a tight knot form in his stomach as he saw that comical west side with its windows arranged so as to make a slightly irregular face. It seemed as though his family had been expecting him, for, at his first knock, the door flew open and his mother came out to greet him. At her joyous call the rest of his little household crowded around the two men. He introduced Mors-tyr, and, to his con-

sternation, his father recognized him as "that great lord of the palace".

Then the whole story had to come out, with the exception, of course, of the details of his spying mission. He simply said that he had started on his trip, but Mors had approached him with a request to perform a service for the Confederation. After finishing it, he had come home again, so there he was.

"It must have been a great service, my son," guessed his father shrewdly, "for a friend of mine who is near His Majesty told me that you had been secretly made a lord and given property."

Barron flushed and looked modest outwardly, but his thoughts whirled about in his head like hornets. The real M'tyen would have immediately informed his parents of his good fortune. His excuse had better be good! Mors-tyr was looking at him with puzzlement mirrored on his patrician features. Barron thought fast and said, "I guess that I was so excited about coming home and being given a lordship, that I forgot to mention the cause of my happiness."

His mother saved him from making further lame excuses by taking his arm and leading him into the house. His father followed, discussing palace small talk with Mors-tyr.

"Your sister will return soon, M'tyen; she's gone out to invite your cousin Borim over to dinner tonight," his mother said.

Barron remembered with distaste that he had a sister and a cousin. In M'tyen's estimation, his cousin was a worthless hanger-on, and his sister was a quarrelsome, skinny brat, although she was only two years younger than himself. He --- or rather the real Neptunian --- could recall many vicious arguments, mostly over his cousin, whom she protected against his scorn. Borim was a pimply, nervous, dreamy youth, who could have stood in the middle of a spacefield and escaped notice, for he was inordinately quiet and retiring. M'tyen called it cowardice. M'tyen wouldn't have minded that, however, if the boy hadn't been impractical, fanciful, --- utterly unable to earn a living.

Footsteps sounded on the flagging of the corridor, and a girl's happy chattering was heard. Borim appeared, followed by Nalyra, Barron's "sister". But these couldn't possibly be the same people as those in the memories! The young cousin wasn't as pimply nor as dreamy as M'tyen remembered him. And the girl was beautiful! She had that lustrous, dark hair that flows smoothly, curls under at the ends, and gives a girl the look of a goddess. She was like that all over --- smooth, sleek, utterly desirable. She was worth fighting for.

Barron knew that he could never understand M'tyen's repugnant concept of his sister, unless their bickerings had colored his viewpoint. M'tyen's memories were purely subjective, and, therefore, his impressions didn't always jibe with Barron's.

Nalyra greeted him with a surprised but not overly enthusiastic smile. "You got back early from your vacation. What was the matter, homesick, or didn't Ganymede suit you?"

"I didn't go on a vacation. Mors-tyr asked me to perform a service for the government. I just happened to get back early."

For the first time Nalyra noticed Mors-tyr sitting quietly in an armchair in a corner.

Her hand flew to her mouth in pretty embarrassment. "Oh, excuse me, sir. I didn't know there was a lord present!"

"There are two lords in this room," said Mors, smiling.

"But --- but there's no one here but you --- and our family. Then who ---?"

Barron looked at his father questioningly, but the old man shook his head and whispered, "I didn't tell anyone but your mother, for my friends in the palace said that you were to decide when to divulge the secret yourself."

The agent stepped forward and bowed playfully, much as the true M'tyen would have done. "For my service to the Confederation and to His Majesty, I was given a lordship ---"

"You!"

"--- and some property on Callisto."

"Speaking of your property on Callisto," interrupted Mors-tyr dryly, "you'd better go and find out just what there is before you go lording it over the rest of us."

"A good idea! Would anybody care to come along and inspect my little domain?"

His "little domain", he found, consisted of nearly six hundred acres of fine, fertile land. Scattered about in this giant park were several palaces, summerhouses, a private spaceport, and three small villages of serfs. Together they roamed over it all, finding something new at every turning. Mors, who had shirked his duties at the palace for a few days, led them around explaining this feature or that, until Barron turned to him in bewilderment and asked, "How do you know so much about this estate? You act as if you've been here before."

"I have --- once, long ago. Only then it was the property of Lord Vndalo and his sons."

"What made them leave it? It's like heaven here."

The technician looked at the ground and at first refused to answer, but, after some persuasion, he said, "I'm sorry you insist on knowing that --- I didn't want to worry you--- but I suppose it's unavoidable. The last owners of this magnificence disagreed with His Majesty over the question of a separate power receiver for Callisto --- you knew, didn't you, that your power comes from Ganymede. Well, they didn't really object to the idea; only that the station would have to sit right where the palace now is to achieve greatest efficiency. So, the king exiled them in favor of some one who could bow to his slightest wish --- that's you. Now all you have to worry about is differing with him --- and that is worry enough."

Barron caught a slight nod in the direction of one of the summerhouses and knew that Mors-tyr wanted to speak to him alone.

The two men accompanied the rest of the family over to the tiny, lattice-work structure. There they

left the others resting while they strolled over to a grove of silvery leafed trees.

Once within the shelter of the thicket, Mors-tyr came straight to the point. "Listen, my friend, we haven't much chance to talk --- they'll be expecting us. I'd better tell you what I mean in a few words. You're in much more danger than you realize. His Majesty is temperamental enough to oust you in favor of some still more emphatic yes-man. For if he thought that another man could install the new power receiver in less time, he'd do away with you right now."

"What's the real reason for the new installation? Is it because the crystal's losing power?" inquired Barron.

"Shrewd guess! Lately its potential has fallen off at a tremendous rate. After the power has passed through even one relay station, it's practically too weak to raise an indicator on a meter. Try the lights in your palace and see. That's the situation briefly, and our best scientists are working on the problem. So far, no results, even with those plans you brought us. You see, we're lacking certain minerals found only on the inner planets."

"So it's as bad as that! How long will it be 'till the crystal is completely impotent?"

"Not very long --- only a year at most. The damn thing's erratic and loses power at varying rates that would ball up a mechanical brain."

Barron saw the others approaching through the glade and warned Mors with a nudge.

"---And so, M'tyen, I must really be on my way back to the palace or His Majesty will have my head."

"I really wish you could stay longer and enjoy my estate."

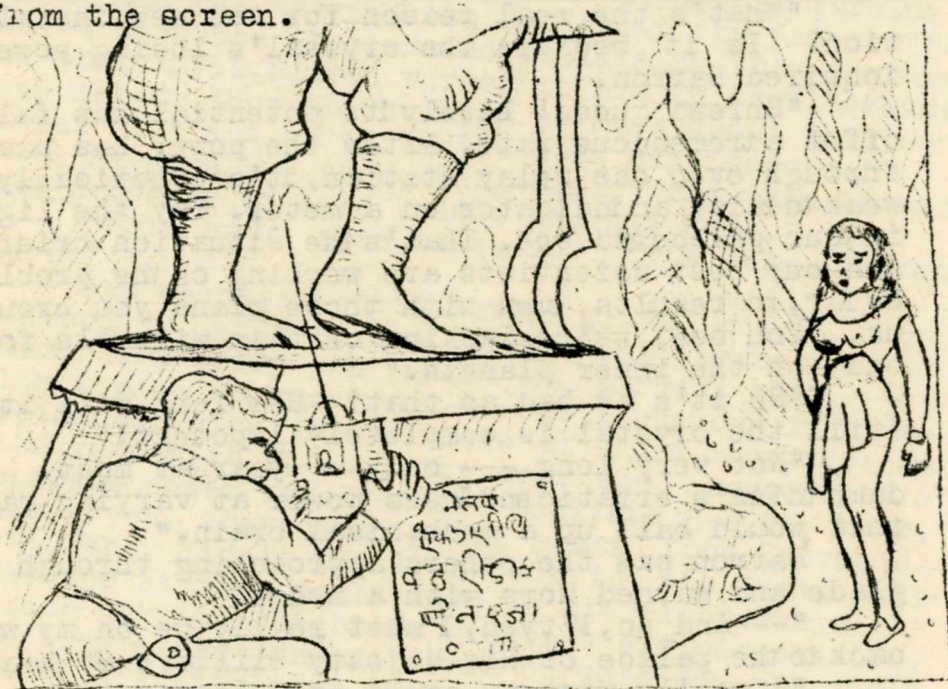
"Must you go, Mors-tyr?" interrupted Barron's father. "I'd hoped that you'd stay longer. Come back soon and often, won't you?"

The rest all chimed in with pleas of their own, for Mors had quite thoroughly charmed his new friends.

On the way back from the spaceport to the palace --- the very one that would be torn down to make room

On the power receiver --- Barrow pondered the things he had learned since he first set foot on Neptune. He had not been able to call Vram as yet, for he hadn't been alone for a moment. On Neptune, during the two days on the ship to Callisto, on his estate, --- he was surrounded by his family, or else in the company of Mors-tyr. However, with all the space on his property, he could most certainly find at least ten minutes or so alone.

It was nearly nightfall before he managed to rid himself of his admiring parents, and, taking the etherphone, he found a little garden, serene in the Jupiter-glow. He hastily put up the instrument on the pediment of a statue and pressed the call switch. Within a short time Vram's impatient face looked out from the screen.



"Where have you been? It's nearly three days since you should've reached Neptune!" His eyes widened in astonishment. "What planet are you on, anyhow? Isn't that Jupiter behind you? What are you doing on one of Jupiter's moons? Did you have

an accident?"

Barron gently placed a hand over the screen until the commander stopped spluttering. "You forget that I can turn you off now, chief," he grinned. "That is Jupiter, and I'm on Callisto. No, don't interrupt me --- I haven't much time. I ferreted out the Neppy source of power supply and discovered they're in dire need of replenishing it. I'm also a lord of the Confederation, and this land was given to me as my estate. Here are the details."

He told him exactly what he had learned, and when he had finished, Vram's eyes nearly popped out of his head. "What a set-up!" he breathed. "Why, we could step in right now and take 'em with very little loss!"

"Wait a minute, sir, they're plenty strong yet. Remember that the crystal has nearly a year to go. And don't forget that their scientists may be able to devise a way around it too."

Vram's forehead wrinkled in a puzzled frown. "That's right --- say, you couldn't work on Mors-tyr to let you visit this crystal?"

"Not a chance in a light year! Only a few of the King's yes-men --- of which he thinks I'm one --- even know the secret. Then you have practically got to be the chief techno to get inside the outer walls. I'd never make it."

Vram started to reply, but footsteps crunched on the gravel path. Hastily Barron laid the ether-phone behind the statue. He could get it again later.

"M'tyen! My, you startled me! What are you doing out here at this time of night?"

"I didn't mean to frighten you, Nalyra, --- just getting a little of that Jovian air."

"Mother said to go and find you. She wants you to look at the lights; they keep flickering."

Barron's eyes widened in surprise. Could the crystal be failing so soon? His mind ran riot with surmises, but he said nothing of them. Instead, he replied, "Of course, sis, I'll come and take a look at 'em. Maybe the tubes need replacing." Inwardly,

however, he knew nothing could be done.

The stroll back to the main building was pleasant in spite of his cares. Perhaps it was the glowing night, or the rejuvenating atmosphere, or --- he forced down the thought --- it was Nalyra leaning on his arm. He finished the walk in silence, trying not to think of the girl at his side.

For Barron, the next few days were forever memorable. He enjoyed the friendly aura of family life. He, the man who had seen only the dingy, dilapidated cities of Earth, savoured the glorious beauty of the estate; he inhaled beauty; walked upon beauty; and literally bathed in beauty. Callisto, one of Jove's largest moons, was the loveliest attraction in the Confederation. Illumined by Jupiter's reddish glow and warmed by his heat, the tiny sphere was the pleasure resort of the dark worlds. On it, one could find the splendid palaces of the aristocrats, gardens of enduring flowers, and ephemeral vistas of glowing color. White marble mansions intermingled with the green and silver of the foliage --- a veritable Grecian paradise.

Callisto, in fact, was one of the few spots in the Confederation where white marble and metals could be found, for, when the planets were thrown off from the Sun, those beyond Jupiter were made up of the exterior covering of that orb --- the dark basaltic rock. The inner worlds contained most of the valuable minerals and were, therefore, a constant object of envy to those less fortunate. The Earthmen, when they came, brought colonists, tons of soil, metals, and manufactured goods and made the barren planet habitable.

The people of Callisto, due to Jupiter's beneficial heat and radiations, were fair-skinned and healthy. The greenish, Neptunian pallor soon disappeared there, for it was but a condition induced by the unwholesome atmosphere of that world. In the days that followed, Nalyra's complexion cleared and even took on a tan, much to Barron's admiration. He, however, had considerable difficulty making his skin slowly change color as it should, for the dye

was indelible and impossible to remove without the proper solvents. The effect achieved by his "home brews" was streaky and splotchy to say the least.

He sat one evening alone in the vast study, pondering his mission. About him in the semi-obscurity loomed massive bookshelves, and the last, undulating flames in the grate cast reluctant illumination over the statuary and faded paintings. He had placed an old book and a decanter of wine on the table, but, judging from the dust on one and the contents of the other, neither had seen much use. The quiet and solitude had brought on a deep introspective mood. Head in hands, he wondered whether he would ever see the end of the undeclared hostilities between his old life and the new --- that is, between Earth and Neptune. Earth was his home, always had been, and yet --- he confessed that he no longer felt any special loyalty to the decadent Empire, itself, only for Vram. Neither did he feel any allegiance to Neptune, for, after all, he was only there under false pretenses. All the honors, affection, pleasures, and beauty were really M'tyen's --- the man who lay in some prison on the moon, or worked in the mines of Venus. Barron suddenly felt a cold chill of loneliness wash over him, leaving him friendless, unloved, and disowned. What was he to do?

It was while he was in deep thought that the Neptunian equivalent of an etherphone buzzed. At first he paid no attention, but, when it took on an imperative tone, he arose and flipped the switch. He awoke fully as he saw Mors-tyr's features form on the silvery screen. The man was disheveled, dirty, and obviously greatly worried.

Without giving Barron time to do more than open his mouth, Mors began: "M'tyen, listen! His Majesty's orders! You must come at once to Tvamal. The crystal's in its death throes! You may be able to help with your knowledge of Earth's science. The king thought of you --- you seem to have impressed him tremendously. God knows we need help! If the crystal dies, the populace will revolt.

Power technos are unpopular because we keep the power source a secret. A few radical leaders could bring about a revolt that would cost the Confederation its independence."

"How dit it happen? You said the crystal would run for a year yet."

"Just about two hours ago, some of the wilder young technos turned up the neutronic bombardment of the crystal in order to get more power --- and the thing flared up once and then died. --- Hurry! There may not be enough juice left in the reserve batteries to get your ship to Neptune. If the worst hap --- say: Bring your family directly to the plant with you. It won't be safe on Callisto with everything dead. There'll be strife there as well as everyplace else, which we'll just have to put down later --- if we ever get the crystal working again. I have to sign off now; the master techno needs me in the chamber of the crystal."

A day later, the little ship sank into the pneumatic shock absorbers with a grateful hiss. The Tvamal spaceport was as deserted as it had been populous a day or so ago. It had taken the last reserves of the plant's spare batteries to get that ship to Neptune. All that was left now was the almost negligible output of the crystal itself. And now that they were in Tvamal, Barron hadn't the haziest idea what his next move would be. "Come directly to the plant," Mors-tyr had instructed him, and that was what he would do, even though he felt sure that he would be of no use to the Neptunian scientists. --- He wasn't so certain that he didn't want to help them! He tried to choke that thought into silence, but his conscience stubbornly refused to call it traitorous.

When they flew over the central plaza, they had seen signs of revolt everywhere: great mobs rioted in front of the palace and the adjoining power plant: bonfires leaped and flamed in the frigid night air, and troops of bewildered soldiers found themselves attacked by their former friends and neighbors. Could Barron lead his aged parents

through that chaos? "

"It won't be safe to take you into that mess," he said. "Yet we can't land on the planet's roof --- damn slanting roofs anyhow!" He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I'll go alone and try to bring back some of Mors-tyr's soldiery."

Nalyra's eyes flashed dangerously. "I'm coming too! You'll need a rear guard --- Borim can stay to protect Mother and Dad."

"It'd be too risky. That plaza's no place for a woman."

"I can fight just as well as any man! I'll get the weapons."

"Okay, sis ---- Borim, you'd better have a weapon too in case some fool gets the idea that spaceships still operate."

"N --- No, I'm coming too! I won't be any trouble; I promise. Get me a sword and let me help!"

Barron was about to refuse, thinking that his impractical cousin would only be an extra difficulty, when he felt his father's hand on his arm.

"Go ahead, M'tyen, take him with you. You'll need as many friends as you can get. Your mother and I will close the airlocks tight and hold out till you can reach us."

Nalyra returned from the gun cabinet and handed Barron three distron pistols. "Here are the distrons, M'tyen."

"Those are worthless now," he groaned in dismay. "They're powered by the crystal, and it's dead!"

He passed a cursive glance over the cabin and then reached up to the ceiling and tore three power receiving rods from their moorings. "Here, these'll make fair swords. They're sharp enough."

Barron stepped over to the airlock and pressed the stud. No response. He raised his hand to push again --- and then remembered that all power devices aboard were run by the crystal. There were no manual controls, for the Neptunians had counted heavily on a permanent supply of energy. Neither were there any ports, for the ships of the Confed-

eration were equipped with an instrument similar to the radaplate of Earth. Escape by means of the reartubes was also closed off to them. It was just that morning, Barron remembered ruefully, that he had closed the emergency engine room airlock so that the booming of the rockets wouldn't awaken his parents.

He turned away dejectedly and was re-entering his room, when, with a sudden flash of memory, he recalled that he had packed his self-powered etherphone among his belongings. It was a thousand to one chance that Mors would have any power left in the reserve batteries, and it was even more improbable that he would be using it at that exact moment to contact someone else. Nevertheless, Barron flicked the switch and set the dial to the Neptunian wavelength. Minutes tiptoed by in a silence marred only by a mosquito humming of the phone. Finally he detected a weak, tinny voice and the ghost of an image on the screen.

"--- and the guns are all off now," whispered the voice, "if the radicals decided to attack now, we'd be powerless. Tell His Maj -- hello, I'm getting two images on my set. Who's cutting in?"

"This is M'tyen -- Captain M'tyen of Espionage. Get me Mors-tyr at once. This is important."

The face disappeared and another, dimly recognizable as Mors-tyr, took its place.

"Listen, Mors, --- never mind how I got this call through --- we're locked in our ship at the port. Can you give us enough power to open the locks?"

The technician's face darkened. "We can try. Hang on."

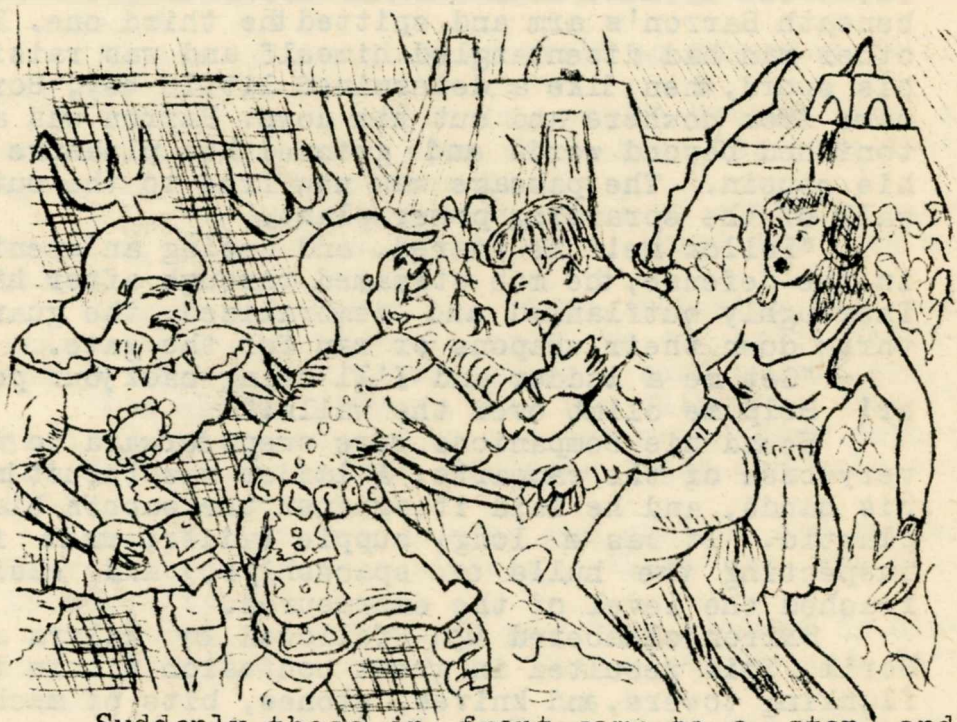
After a few moments waiting, Barron returned to the main cabin and pressed the lock stud. Slowly, very slowly, they slid open.

Together, they went out into the anarchy that was Neptune.

The hearer to the central plaza they came, the more people there seemed to be. Some were camped by bonfires of inflammable plastics or broken furniture. Others wandered aimlessly about like cattle

in an abbatoir. But the largest group by far hastened past them brandishing knives, bludgeons, or useless pistols. These followed in the wake of various radical leaders of all types and classes.

The crowds soon thickened to the point of impassibility. Nalyra clung to him as they were swept about by the press, and Borim cowered somewhere in the rear. Barron thought disgustedly that he had known how the youth would act from the start, but it was too late now.



Suddenly those in front came to a stop, and those behind crushed the middle. A line of soldiers, wearing golden tridents on their helmets, blocked the way.

Their captain, an overdressed martinet, shrieked reassurances into the face of the mob. He might just as well have poured soothing words into the ear of a tornado, for the horde pushed grimly forward.

Confused, the frenzied captain roared, "Charge!" Drawing their swords, the troops advanced on the crowd. The battle was short and furious. For a moment, brown hair and black caps mingled freely with silver helmets; swords wagged bloody tips at the sky; and then the helmets began to disappear.

Barron found himself facing three determined warriors. He dodged under the first man's blow and struck him on the temple. He fell like a tired man, backwards upon his companion's blade. Nalyra darted beneath Barron's arm and spitted the third one. The other man had disentangled himself and was raising his sword, when, like a determined little boy, Borim came from nowhere and cut him down. Barron was astonished beyond words and grinned his pleasure to his cousin. The passage was now free to the outer wall of the sprawling power plant.

"Follow me!" he roared, and seeing an opening in the defense, the mob streamed through after him. Thoroughly outflanked and demoralized, the guards threw down their weapons or ran for the gate.

"Get me a ladder and I'll bring back your power! Help me climb over the walls!"

He and his companions were swept forward to the very base of the ramparts. A ladder was thrust into his hands, and he laid it against the smooth black plastic. It was a long, supple ladder, made for inspecting the hulls of spaceships, and easily reached the level of the embrasures.

Barron clambered up, followed by Nalyra and Borim. This resulted in great confusion within the flanking towers, and knives, stones, bits of machinery were thrown through the gun ports in hopes of killing or wounding them. But he had chosen his place well, for only a few of the smaller missiles even reached the ladder. Barron was atop the wall by the time the guards arrived on the summit, and they were still too far away to do any damage.

"Mityen, we can't let that mob inside! They'd massacre the scientists and technicians. What are you going to do?"

"Human nature should take care of it for me!"

he shouted over the sullen roar below. "Watch!"

Sure enough, the leaders of the various factions swarmed about the foot of the ladder, vying for the right of first ascent. Under their quarrelsome hands the ladder jerked back and forth, then slowly swayed outwards and crashed down in ruin upon the heads of those beneath.

"It'll take 'em some time to get another ladder that'll reach."

"M'tyen! Look out --- behind you!" Nalyra threw up her sword and warded off the terrible blow. The red-robed techno swung up his ponderous battle-axe for another swing, but Barron, still with his back to him, struck the man a stunning blow in the solar plexus with his elbow.

It was Mors-tyr who doubled up on the walkway, groaning in pain!

"Mors! Good God! I didn't know it was you! Nalyra, help me raise him. --- Are you hurt badly?"

Some time elapsed before Mors-tyr could catch his breath to speak, for Barron had completely knocked the wind out of him.

"What a blow," he gasped. "But --- anyway, I'm glad you got here. --- Do you realize that I nearly decapitated you?" He staggered to his feet and leaned on the crenels. "Wait 'till I get my breath a moment, and then we'll go in."

The interior of the sanctum sanctorum was icy cold and lighted only by torches, crudely manufactured from the black fungi. Barron gave only a desultory glance to the high, vaulted ceiling, the jumbled mass of power broadcasting machinery, or to the nervous group of technos in one corner. He asked to see the chamber of the crystal immediately.

"Help yourself," said Mors-tyr carelessly. "There's nouse guarding a worthless secret. Still, you'd better wear one of the protective robes in case the crystal's giving off radiations."

Barron took the opaque, closely woven cloak and entered the passage pointed out to him. The rest followed, his friends because they were curious, the technicians because they hoped he could help them.

The chamber of the crystal, the heart of six planets, was not much to look at. No columned hall or fantastic floor designs; only pure, black plastic. In the center stood a homely, square pedestal on which rested a draped object about the size of a navigator's star globe. The thick covering of the crystal was of the same stuff used to make the robe that Barron wore. The ceiling was open to the sky.

The din of the mob was muted and distant.

"The chamber of the crystal! The heart of the Confederation," Nalyra breathed, breaking the silence. Slowly they advanced.

Barron's mind leaped within his skull. Here was the chance he'd waited for. He could see the crystal was dead; all that was necessary now was to get out of there and call in Earth's waiting invaders.

Under his heavy robe his shoulders slumped in defeat. He could never bear to do anything that would jeopardize Nalyra. What would become of her, if he opened the door to Earth's paid killers? Enslavement? A concubine for some fat lord? Even --- death? What would they do to Mors-tyr? Worst of all, what would his friends think of him --- the man who had caused them all that pain and humiliation?

In the silent gloom of the chamber his mind raced madly from one thing to another. There was no way out. It was Neptune or Earth with no middle way. Yet, what would become of him, if he chose to aid Neptune? Vram had said that the dose of memories would wear off within a month, and two weeks had passed already. Even if he could fake a knowledge of M'tyen's past, wouldn't Earth send more spies? Someone would succeed at last, and then his own life would be forfeit to an outraged Earth government. It wouldn't work. It wouldn't work!

Yet --- perhaps --- he could persuade Vram to use his influence in the all-powerful council to avert actual conquest. If he had his way, there might even be a renaissance --- a new nine planet empire! But then he remembered the avarice of Doval and Knox, the chief delegates of the council. They

would never consent to a profitless plan.

Mors-tyr was watching him hopefully. "Think, M'tyen, surely there must be a solution in your knowledge of Terran science. You must know of a way out!"

Barron turned to his friend, and at the sight of his face, all the hopefulness died out of Mors' eyes.

"The only possible thing is atomic power --- from Earth."

The assembled technos gasped simultaneously. "Power from Earth! Why --- why, that would be placing the Confederation squarely in the hands of the enemy! The Empire must never know the crystal's dead!"

Barron thought grimly that there would be no Confederation, if power wasn't restored soon. The crowds were getting louder.

Aloud he said, "There is no other solution. The crystal is powerless, but the Empire doesn't know that--- yet. Perhaps you could make terms --- bargain with them--- unite the nine worlds again."

He saw plainly that he wasn't succeeding. A few of the technos looked doubtfully at the crystal and then at him. Others had a crushed look --- easy to convince them that anything was better than revolt and conquest. But the main group bunched together and murmured angrily beneath their breaths. Only Mors-tyr, Nalyra, Borim, and one or two others stood squarely behind him.

With a suggestive grin at his companions, the leader of the hostile group, a huge, beetle-browed technician, stepped out in front of his followers. "Perhaps our friend, M'tyen, has absorbed Earthly propaganda --- or even become an agent of the Tri-planet Empire. It would hardly be to our benefit to follow his leadership!"

"You poor fool," Mors grated. "What else can we do? Our Confederation could never survive without power!"

The middle group wavered. The two opposing factions had drawn apart, each to one end of the

chamber. Barron now saw his chance to bring the vacillating bloc over to his side. With complete disregard for the actual facts, he cried, "Listen! Before you decide, you should know the truth! I beg you to let me finish --- no matter what I say. After that, settle it as you will."

Here was the crucial moment! Barron could only hope that they'd listen to him, for he had no idea what the reaction of friend or foe would be. He drew a deep breath and then plunged on.

"I have something to admit to you. I am what that man says I am --- a spy of the Empire!"

The effect was slow in coming. He heard Nalyra's quick gasp and a muffled exclamation from Mors. But on the faces of the technicians there was stupid astonishment, then wide-eyed surprise, and finally came terrible anger. The whole crowd surged forward.

"I asked you to hear me!" he shouted over the uproar. "Hear me out! I am a Terran espionage agent --- yes, but I didn't come to harm you or the Confederation! Haven't I placed myself in your power by this confession? --- Here, I give my sword to Mors-tyr. I came to re-unite your Confederation with the Tri-Planet Empire! For the mutual good of all!"

The anger slowly faded from a few faces and was replaced by apprehensive joy. But those faces were far too few in number to do any good. Barron glanced behind him and saw belief and a promise of aid on Mors-tyr's face. On Nalyra's piquant features he found belief, but there was another emotion there too. He let himself hope that it was affection.

"Those of Earth who are progressive don't want conquest, but the peaceful re-establishment of the old Nine Planet Empire--- a democratic Empire this time. Let me prove it to you. If you'll help me reach my cabin aboard the spaceship that brought me here, I could contact my chief on Earth with a secret televisor. That's how I called you, Mors."

Mors-tyr suddenly grinned with the light of recollection. "M'tyen --- or whoever you are --- there is a way to reach the palace from here, and

it opens out into the street somewhere in the square. If one of us could escape that way, we'd get your televisior for you in a few minutes." He turned, hesitated, and finally strode over to a section of the wall between the crystal and the main entrance. Drawing his short, ceremonial dagger, he raised his hand high above his head and inserted its point into an intersection of the blocks. With ponderous slowness, the section swung open, revealing a winding, inlighted tunnel.

"Who will go?" Barron eyed the hostile faction with unease, for they were muttering and gesturing among themselves in a tone that could be nothing else but dangerous. In a whisper he spoke to Mors.

"I think those finatics will attack as soon as one of us goes for the televisior. And that bunch certainly aren't going to let me get out of here alone--- we'd have to fight to get out of here together. Who can go that's not needed?"

"We couldn't send Nalyra into that maelstrom alone, and those two technos on our side aren't trustworthy. Then who ---?"

"Say --- where did Borim go?"

It was Nalyra who answered, her brown eyes brimming over with tears. "He's gone to get your televisior. He slipped out while you two were whispering."

"But he shouldn't have gone! He'll never survive in that mob!"

"He went because he was driven by his own cowardice." She was openly weeping now. "He wanted you to think that he was strong and brave after all. You drove him out --- perhaps to his death!"

Barron turned, hiding his suddenly churning emotions--- only to face the leader of the hostile bloc.

"We've decided, spy, and we don't believe your lies. You committed treason by joining Terra, and we aren't going to let you sell us out! Nine Planet Empire --- Hell! It'll be a Nine Planet Empire, all right --- with us as slaves! We're just going to lock you and your friends up until we find an an-

swer for our troubles. And if you resist, we're going to kill you."

Suddenly the man's eyes narrowed in surprise and suspicion. "Where's the kid --- the one with the scared look and the pimples?"

His suspicion deepened into certainty. "So he's sneaked out after your televisior, eh? Maybe he's planning to bring back a few more traitors to help you wipe us out!" The words came more slowly, and his eyes narrowed to tiny slits, spitting concentrated hatred.

Barron struck, heavily, straight into the solar plexus. The enemy leader went down roaring, and his followers poured over him.

The Terran agent found a sword thrust into his hand and Mors' reassuring grip for just an instant, and then he was facing several maddened technos at once.

He found himself in an insane melee of flashing swords and axes. The technos were armed with every kind of primitive weapon, but they ~~used them~~ poorly. Man after man fell under Barron's smooth swordplay, downed by his own carelessness. A monster techno swung a metal bar at Barron's head. Nimbly the agent ducked the clumsy blow, and the man clouted three of his own men before he could stop. Overbalanced, he was easy prey for Mors-tyr's sword. And Mors, being a noble, had been trained to the art of fencing since youth, and his blade was everywhere. The battle raged from one side of the chamber to the other, leaving wounded and dead in its angry trail. Nalyra had joined in like a goddess of fury, her long tresses flung out behind her. Barron himself was everywhere at once like an enraged wasp; now protecting Nalyra, now fending off a foul blow meant for Mors. Their clothes had been torn to ribbons, and several times they had been wounded, but it was the technos that lost the men. Finally Barron found himself with his back to the crystal. He could feel the pulsing radiations through his insulated robe. His opponent, wielding a massive broadsword, had beaten down the blows of Barron's slender weapon and

backed him up against the crystal for the kill. With one final lunge the techno smashed down, expecting to cleave Barron's skull neatly, but, as he struck, Barron rolled to the floor and let the crystal take the full force of the blow. It sliced the insulation with a clanging scrape and shivered the broadsword to bits. Then a ghastly thing happened; from the naked globe radiation leaped squarely into the man's unprotected face. The crystal, dead and dull though it was, still contained enough power to blacken and char that face until it was unrecognizable. Barron, from his place on the floor, watched his adversary twist and writhe and finally fall disjointedly in a heap. The ray of radiation leaped from the crystal to the wall, taking all those in its path to death. Barron hastily scrambled around to the insulated side and saw with relief that his friends were safely out of range.

"We'll have to get out of here!" he shouted, "The crystal's on the loose!" Already he could feel the prickles that presaged radiation burns on his unprotected skin. He pulled up the cowl of his robe so as to cover his face.

Nalyra parried a blow and twisted so she could see. "Mors --- M'tyen --- there's a bluish beam coming out of the far side of the crystal! It's making more light than the torches!"

Barron was startled, for, a moment ago there had been no light except the oily plastic torches. Did the crystal have that much power? He hurriedly seized the arms of his friends and pulled them toward the entrance of the secret tunnel. The technos' leader had been lost in the radiation, and his followers had lost the desire to fight at the same time.

In the passage they met Borim, who clutched the tiny television beneath one arm. He was tattered and bloody, but a grin of battle lust covered his face from ear to ear.

"You hit it well, M'tyen, but I found it!" The lad's eyes gleamed with pride. He was no longer nervous or frightened.

Barron gripped Borin's arm in thanks, and that grip spoke volumes of praise. He set the televisior down in the passage and knelt down beside it. He switched it on and set up the combination.

The sight that met his eyes was utterly alien. In place of Vram's orderly office there was only wreckage. Half of the televisior screen was blanked out, showing that Vram's had been smashed. The chairs were ashes, and the opposite wall lay across the desk. On the floor there was a broken plastic frame and a picture of Vram's wife and son.

Through the vacant wall could be seen splint-ered buildings, burning debris, and, in the far distance, a stationary column of smoke that rose to heights unimaginable.

"Vram," he murmured in choked tones, then louder, "Vram! Vram!" He stared wildly. "Hello --- somebody for God's sake!"

At the anguish in his voice, tears came to Nalyra's eyes. She slipped an arm around his shoulders, and he fell against her like a tired child; all the fight gone out of him. "Vram," he moaned brokenly.

For a long, long time the tableau in the passageway remained silent. After a while Mors-tyr reached out and took the televisior from Barron's nerveless grasp. He switched the dials this way and that, but there was no response. Apparently there were no other televisors in all of the Imperial City. Finally, in desperation, he returned to the scene in what had been Vram's office. It was the same as before --- no! Now there was someone wandering through the outer offices. A huge, space-suited figure, carrying several boxes and instruments.

"M'tyen! M'tyen! There's someone in that office!"

At the sound of Mors' excited voice, the figure turned awkwardly and lumbered toward the screen.

A voice came through the helmet. "Hello --- I didn't think there was anybody left alive here. --- Neppies! What do you want? Where are you calling

from?"

"Never mind that now. Where's Vram? What's happened here?"

"I don't answer nothing 'till I know what you want."

Barron felt around in the hem of his shirt and finally extracted a plastic capsule. "Here --- my identification. I am Captain Richard Barron of Terran Espionage."

As he said it, he felt Nalyra's arm tighten around his shoulders and then withdraw. In that withdrawal he sensed a sudden fear and repugnance. He would have to reassure her about her brother later, but he had no time --- no time.

"O.K. Captain. I'm Sergeant Martin of the Atomics department, Rescue Squad, Lunar Division. I guess I'd better explain about the explosion here. A coupla days ago somebody got careless with the atomic power pile and let it rise to critical mass. Nobody knows just what did happen --- they're all dead --- but they couldn't get the damper bars to working or somebody didn't check it --- anyhow, it went off. It took an arsenal of atomic weapons with it, and damn near blew half the hemisphere off the map. Luckily we got most of the Council and some of the scientists to Africa and Europe and the moon." The man's face whitened as he gazed at the wreckage. "God, Captain, all this was full o' people a week ago, and now nobody can enter it without a suit. All the kids and nice dames --- hell, you'd better call Lunar City pronto. That's where the council is now. I gotta sign off ---"

Without waiting for the rest of the man's sentence, Barron cut him off and set his frequencies for Lunar City. After he had identified himself to a central operator, he was connected with the headquarters of the Terran Council. He was answered there by a tall blonde, who screamed at the sight of several greenish faces staring at her from the screen. She reached for the cut-off switch automatically.

"Don't --- wait a minute! I'm Captain Barron

of Espionage. Get me Commander Vram or the person taking his place. This is important."

In a second or two Vram himself faced him across the distance. Barron felt weak for a moment and mentally wiped his brow with relief. Vram literally wiped his.

"Dick --- Dick, lad! Where are you? What's happened there? Who are all those people with you?"

"Whoa --- wait --- wait a sec, chief, 'till I get my breath. I thought you were dead. I found your office in ruins; I --- I ---"

"Okay, fellow, I'm fine. I'll have to have your story quickly. You see, Doval and Knox together with seven others were lost in the holocaust --- I'm second in command of the Council now. A friend of mine, Dastreen the Martian, is Chief Delegate."

Barron's eyes widened in astonishment. "I've got something important to tell you, chief, terribly important. Listen, the Neptunian power supply --- that crystal that I told you about --- has gone completely on the blink. It's dead. I'm within ten feet of the chamber of the crystal right now. Crowds are rioting in the streets, and I don't know what the outcome will be."

A hand fell on his shoulder. Turning, he found Borim leaning over him. "Listen, M'tye --- Dick. When I ran across the main square, the palace was afire, and the people were shouting that His Majesty was dead. He named Mors-tyr as his successor. Mors is King of the Confederation!"

Minds reeled in amazement on both ends of the connection. Mors was suddenly white under his greenish skin. His voice was old and tired, yet strong with authority. "So I am a --- king. An empty honor when my kingdom is in revolt, and there is possibility of war with the Empire. Dick, tell your commander that I will not resist conquest, for my people cannot fight without power. Earth could rebuild herself with the plunder from my worlds. My Confederation is like a darkened light now. Tell him also that my wish is for a peaceful union of our empires, a new Nine Planet Empire." The lines

on Mors' face slowly went deeper still. "Ask him ---ask him to save the Solar System by agreeing to a treaty. If he will not consent, then I will die with my people."

Vram looked completely dumbfounded, when Barron had translated for him. "Another Nine Planet Empire! It --- who ---?"

Barron stepped in, seeing that Vram would at least listen to him. "Look, chief, that's what you progressives have always wanted, isn't it? Haven't I seen it in your face a dozen times? Our Empire is corrupt --- dissolute. I think the Neptunians could help us. Their civilization is young, virile, undimmed by ages of ease and pleasure. The whole system will go to pieces with another atomic war. If we joined them, there'd be something to work toward --- live for! Our Empire'd be a going concern again. They are young and strong; we are old and wise! Wouldn't the Council listen to that, sir?"

Vram still looked thunderstruck, but the traces of a smile were beginning to play around his mouth. "But boy, the Council would have to have some concrete advantages. They won't listen to an idealistic theory. I --- I'm for it, but I'm not an absolute ruler like your friend there."

Barron thought desperately. His eyes wandered here and there about the passage in search of something tangible to offer the Council. He looked at Mors-tyr and saw searching hope. Their eyes met, and Barron smiled. His eyes strayed down over Mors' insulating robe ---! He'd been staring at it all the time!

"Listen, chief!" His voice was weak with excitement. "Look, how would you like to have insulation so perfect that you could carry a pound of Uranium 235 around as if it were butter. --- with insulation only one eighth of an inch thick? You could insulate every separate part of an atomic pile from the others, and, if the pile got out of control, you could carry away the 'hot' pieces with ease. No three foot wall of lead to protect the workers! There'd never be cause for another explosion!"

When Barron carried the televisor back out of the chamber of the crystal --- unharmed, Vram's face was actually shining. "I'm sure the Council will listen to proof like that," he enthused. "Most of the members lost somebody or something of value in the inferno --- they'll listen to anything I have to say on radiation insulation!"

"And what will you give my people?" Mors broke in. "They'd never consent to let me give away the secret of our insulation in exchange for promises. They must have something tangible to convince them too."

"We'll send them power --- beam it to them temporarily, until a ship can carry the material for atomic power plants. In the meantime, we'll set our best scientists to work on the crystal."

At that moment one of the technos returned from the chamber, shielding himself with his heavy robe. "Sire," he said, speaking to Mors, "the crystal is shining brilliantly now!"

"I've got a theory on that --- maybe the crystal acts as a storage battery --- storing an unknown radiation and releasing it in the form of power. Now that the Sun's up, the radiation's stronger. You were suffocating it under that heavy shielding. A storage battery can't run without recharging, and I think that it needs a trip Sunwards to fully replenish its energy. Perhaps it stores light and converts it to power --- I don't know --- that's something for the scientists to work on. Try your lights again, Mors, and see how strong the power is."

Within the hour plans were made and put under way. A delegation would soon be on its way to Neptune with a design for the re-integration of the Nine Planet Empire, or at least a treaty of peace and mutual aid. The same ship would also carry atomic pile materials and scientists. On its Sunward trip it would carry the crystal along with a load of insulation for the atomic piles of Venus and Mars.

Barron leaned wearily against the cool plastic of the power plant's main broadcasting hall. Some-

where there was a hum of slowly returning power. All was over. The mission was accomplished -- hell! He still had to tell Nalyra that Vram had ordered the release of her brother. For that matter, he knew he loved her --- loved her more than anything. Yet he'd have to win her love as Dick Barron, and that might be hard. After all, he'd lied to her, deceived her, never showed his affection.

A soft voice beside him said, "Dick --- I --- I wanted to see you. Mors said you were here. He's outside quieting the crowds now."

Barron didn't want to meet her eyes, but with an effort he looked into her face. There were tears on the lashes. "Nalyra --- I have something to say --- it ---"

"You don't need to apologize. You didn't deceive me at all."

"You --- knew? --- knew that I wasn't M'tyen all along?"

"Yes." Her eyes were cast down, would not meet his. "At first there was only my womanly intuition. Then there was the funny way you tried to change your skin color on Callisto."

He thought back to the many times he'd nearly exposed himself, and she seemed to read his thought.

"There were other times too --- lots of them." She rubbed a finger over a long cut on his cheek. "See, it doesn't bleed at all. Wax isn't it?"

"But why didn't you report me --- what could have ---?"

"Because, by the time I was certain you weren't M'tyen, I found I --- I ---" She stopped helplessly and blushed, looking down at her ripped and tattered and totally insufficient clothing.

Barron's heart rose straight up through him to a glorious elysium.

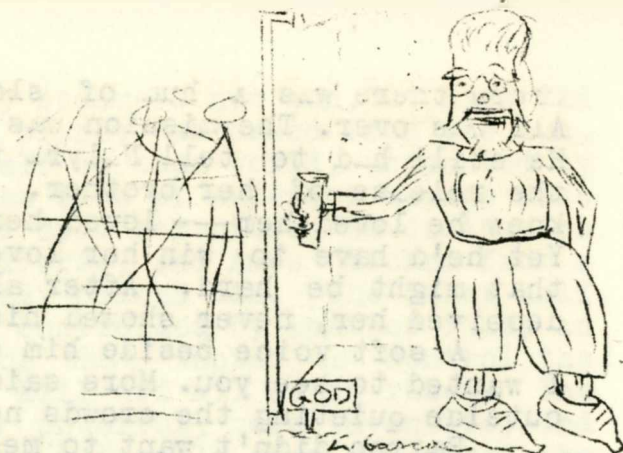
"I love you too," he breathed, gently caressing her hair.

The two drew together in a long embrace.

After awhile, Mors-tyr came in to announce that all was well, but when he saw them there, he smiled to himself and went out again.

WHO GOES WHERE?

By W. KRAUS



Professors Ames and Toup were sitting in the sumptuous living room of Toup's bachelor's establishment. Silence reigned for the moment while the great minds mulled over the problem that faced them.

"There are a number of ways," Ames finally said, "Which we could try to make ourselves invisible—we could somehow increase the space between our atoms so that light will pass through without interruption, or we could speed up our vibration until we are an invisible blur."

Toup looked sceptical. "The first one would demand that we disrupt our bodily cell structure, and the second might propel us into the fourth dimension."

"Well, why not try to make a cloak of mirrored reflecting surfaces and wear that. --- that would work, wouldn't it?"

"You forget, my dear Professor Ames, that such a cloak would of necessity have to cover the eyes, and as such you would be totally unable to see where you were going."

Ames pondered for a minute, a rapid glow of disgust spreading over his face. "Who started us talking on this anyway? Ha! I've got it!"

Ames reached for the telephone, thought for a second, then dialed a number. After a few clicks, a voice answered.

"Hello, Kraus? How do we make ourselves invisible? --- That? --- Figure it out for myself? --- You mean we--- But you can't mean it! --- You do?

God, what a relief! --- Thanks, pal."

Ames hung up, a beautiful smile playing over his face. "Toup," he trilled, "we are under our own power! Think of it, man, no longer are we puppets to that ham, Kraus! We are to figure out our own way to become invisible! Isn't that wonderful?"

"Well," Toup ejaculated, "in that case I can try my theory of nuclear repulsivity and apply it to cellular bombardment. This will, of course, produce invisibility. It's something that ham, Kraus, could never have thought of if he was given a million years, but now that he's not writing our story any more, we can act our natural selves."

Inflamed by their newly found freedom, the two set to work on Toup's theory, and after working in unison for several hours, they finally produced a vial of amber liquid. Before anyone could think, Ames had lifted the vial to his lips and taken a swallow of the liquid.

Immediately afterward, Ames froze into immobility, the vial grasped tightly in his hand. Toup stood aside, watching with scientific curiosity the changes that were supposed to take place in Ames. But Ames did not turn to an invisible man --- he just continued to stand there like a frozen statue.

"Well, say something! What are your sensations?" Toup wanted to know.

Toup tried to take the vial from Ames' hand, but the hand was frozen so stiffly about it that such an act was impossible. Further exploration of the statuesque Ames revealed that he was as cold as ice and as hard as a brick! Ames had turned to stone!

Toup died on the spot.

Time passed. Toup rotted to a pile of dust; Ames stood on, imperturbable, immovable. Civilizations came and went; Ames stood on, like a rock. Man conquered the stars and was conquered by alien races, but Ames, dauntless, stood on. The Sun died out; Earth became a gigantic frozen rock floating aimlessly in space, but not Ameslessly, for Ames still lived on. The rock of Earth fell into a gigantic whirlpool and dissolved in the cosmic mael-

strom that eventually became a new sun, but Ames did not dissolve. A new planet was formed from the sun, and Ames found himself on this world, undaunted by his adventures. A new race of superior beings rose up from the tiniest of cell structures to domination of half of the universe, and Ames watched from a cubical in which they placed him. The other half of the universe was controlled by another race, an evil, power-mad race that wanted to control the whole universe and kill off all other races. The evil race was more powerful, more inventive, and more intelligent, so naturally they conquered the whole universe and killed off all other races. All except Ames.

The evil race recognized Ames as the god of the race they had conquered, and tried to destroy him, but Ames was indestructible, so the whole alien race was killed off in the attempt.

More eons passed, new suns, new planets, new universes were formed.

New civilizations came to life.

And then Ames came to life.

He immediately set himself up as the emperor of the universe, seeing that all the peoples of the universe regarded him as a god, since his history had been written by succeeding generations and re-translated by succeeding races.

Ames was supremely happy. Everyone in the universe was happy, for was not their emperor a god? And who would rule better than a god? Ames had not a single enemy in his entire empire.

And then one day, Ames had a visitor. The visitor had a water pistol in his hand. He pointed the water pistol at the head of Ames, and pulled the trigger. Water splashed over Ames. Ames fell dead.

The assassin pocketed his water pistol and stepped out of the room. He stepped into a metal cubicle, shut the door after him, twisted a few dials.

A few minutes later, W. Kraus stepped out of his time machine and laughed his head off.

PEST PEACE
By Ferric Dank Mussel

A certain nefarious magazine has instituted a contest lately in order (they say) to give you readers a chance to win some wonderful prizes. Well, let the editor of Impossible, your ever-faithful reporter, give you the real dope (If you don't want him you can send him back). Actually, it is rumored in certain circles that Impossible has hit them so hard that they must perforce bring up some new and strange way of getting subscribers and readers to boost their failing circulation. Thus can the effects of mighty Impossible be felt upon all the ~~pr~~zines in the hemisphere. Soon we will extend our influence to other countries as well --- as good a way to break down the Iron Curtain as any --- they say that sewage does rust iron ---

Anyhow, we herewith plan to force the editors of Other Worlds to their knobby and bowlegged knees (we exclude Miss Mahaffey from this, since I, the editor of Impossible, intend to offer her a post on our staff after Other Worlds falls). We offer in this issue Impossible's new Super Contest, complete and unexpurgated! This contest offers some of the most worthy prizes ever offered to anybody anywhere, provided you're the type of person who reads Impossible.

We might as well let the reader enter the contest story knowing what it's all about --- with his eyes open and his nose held tightly. The editors of Other Worlds, not realizing the mentality of the readers of science fiction, deliberately put the rules after the story, thus leaving the reader with a confused and vague impression of the contest as a whole. I, being as fair and impartial as any editor of Impossible ever could be, put the rules first.

(y6) The contest date closes shortly after all other magazines have gone extinct --- there isn't much time left so get your entries in early. If the

postoffice has also gone extinct by this time, you may file your entries in the wastebasket, since we intend to give all our prizes to relatives, friends, or to other people whom we hate anyway.

(23) (The numbering of the rules may seem odd, but really we are not attempting to give you all the rules anyhow --- only those you will need to know in order to avoid this dreadful pitfall.) Oh well, rule twenty three wasn't important either. On to the next one ---

(14) All entries shall be accompanied by (i) a subscription to Impossible for sixty three years or more. Or (p) one young, alive female human of proper size and beauty for eating. (I never said I was human did I?) Or (c) one human head with or without attached ears and body --- to add to my collection.

(53) In case of a tie --- and we are sure you needn't worry --- the postmark on the envelope will have exactly nothing to do with the person the prize is awarded to. We intend to award the prize to the first one of proper age, sex, and wealth who offers us the chance.

(691) Instead of loosely and lasciviously permitting you to write on just anything that comes to hand, I am afraid that only entries written on gold blocks will be considered. The characters must not be less than three feet high to avoid possible misunderstandings (We promise special consideration to anyone sending us the deed to the gold mine along with his entry.

And now we come to the PRIZES. We hesitate to mention these here for fear somebody will notice them. You note that the contest is not mentioned on the cover --- nor even on the contents page. We were going to do better yet and put the contest in small type just under the cough medicine ads --- right under one of the beards on a Smith Brother, but the Smith Brother wouldn't cooperate, --- and besides we don't have any cough medicine ads anyway.

(1) The first prize goes to the lucky dog (I

may or may not mean that literally --- you figure it out) who sends us the contents of the Bank of England. It consists in a subscription, free of all charge except ten cents per issue for mailing --- which the winner pays in advance --- to Impossible for seven thousand years. That's forty two thousand wonderful issues! (This is hereditary, so committing suicide won't let your descendants out.)

(2) This wins the lucky contestant a short excursion to Indo China on a log raft. Tours leave regularly. All expenses paid.

(3) You win a lifetime vacation to the Devils Island Rest Resort, with all expenses paid by the French authorities. This is your chance to spend the rest of your life in a situation all of the prozine heroes manage to escape from.

(4) The fourth prize is a genuine cover illustration to the six thousand four hundred and forty fourth issue of Impossible by the redoubtable L. Garcone. This is folloed by either (a) a quick trip to the nearest padded hotel with all expenses paid by your state. Or (b) L. Garcone himself. Feeding instructions enclosed in box. (We're sorry, but it's the only way we can get rid of him.)

(5) You win a five year visit to the Russian Five Year Plan, with side trips to the Siberian Salt Mines, to the Ural Copper Mines, to the Siberian Salt Mines, to Lubianka Prison, to the Siberian Salt Mines etc. etc.

(6 to 10) The lucky winners of these prizes get three genuine ink drops from the pen of that famous author, that world-renowned raconteur, that stupid fugghead, that ham Kraus. These may be had by visiting him at his home in the cave just below Shaver's.

(11 to 50) One illustration by L. Garcone printed in brown ink on thin, absorbent tissue. These were personally rejected by the editor of Impossible himself.

We do not intend to be quite so cheap, so per-

fectly chintzy as the editors of Other Worlds. We will not stop at fifty one prizes. We are offering many more than this just because of our kindly, generally objectionable nature. Also because we have a mass of junk around here that we can't get rid of any other way. So ---

(51 to 100) One genuine indisputable (you can tell it by its smell) proof page from the one hundredth anniversary issue of Impossible. We intend to be celebrating the end of all prozines by this issue, so it will be quite a historic document --- if not hysteric.

(101 to 250) This series of prizes, contrary to the expectations of everybody, are really worth something. They consist in one ticket (just one way unfortunately --- the return trip has never yet been made) to the fourth dimension via Professor Ames' new interdimensionalreduplicatogurgitatoron. (This is no relation to his tridiffusional distributrixal matriventriculatropis. All claims to the contrary are completely Impossible.) At any rate, this is the chance to see the fourth dimension for those with the will to travel --- and the stupidity to entrust any part of his person to Professor Ames and his machinery!)

(251) This, the last prize, is the best of all, at least for the type of fellow who reads Impossible and who still has the power to send entries to our contest. This prize is a free, absolutely final, expense paid trip by parachute into the crater of Mount Vesuvius. You get to see it all this way. And at least Shaver does not live three quarters of a mile away. We guarantee that.

Oh yes, the contest story. We have decided to be so unassuming (even moreso than the wicked editors of Other Worlds) and let you figure out the answer to it without the contest. This is the height of modesty and unassumingness --- or something or other. Farewell Other Worlds! It was nice knowing you.