

SLUDGE



SLUDGE

Summer, 1951

No. 2

CONTENTS

PREVENTION IS BETTER --...Thenek Thims	1
A stitch in time save's lives	
THE DOOR. . . .	Alan Hunter
To be or not to be ?	
THE DEAD AREN'T DISAPPOINTED Peter Ridley	10
A hero in any world	
A COLUMN ?	From Dan Morgan
FROM OFF THE SCAFFOLD	Editorial and letters
	9

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THE FANTASY ART SOCIETY

a subsidiary of 'Operation Fantast'

Address all correspondence to the organiser:- A. Hunter
124, Bell Vue Road,
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This is more than just a club of fantasy artists, collectors and enthusiasts, but also a co-operative, non-profit making enterprise for the production of Fantasy Calendars, Postcards, Bookplates, Envelope Stickers etc.

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Come on you Fans! let's drop him a line, with a s.a.e.



PREVENTION IS BETTER

By

THENNEK THIMS

The heavy Airlock closed with a muffled thud. Lanyard hesitated for a moment, feeling lightheaded, a hopeless feeling of claustrophobia and nausea taking control of his whole being. 'Why should I feel like this ... damn it' he thought angrily. This is what I've always wanted, this is what I've planned for, lived for.'

Heart pounding, temple throbbing, head aching, he realised, suddenly with a feeling of despair, how highly strung and scared he was. He brushed the back of his hand across his forehead, a hand which shook visibly. He realised he was sweating, he wanted desperately to control himself, terribly afraid he was, so terribly afraid. He fumbled in his overall pockets, searching shakily for a cigarette, found one and after three attempts to light it he steadied his hands somewhat and

gratefully drew the soothing smoke into his lungs. He thought 'To-day's ration gone and I haven't left the ground yet!'

He watched the smoke spiral sluggishly about his body. He felt much calmer now. Thoughts flickered through his mind, thoughts of his mother, his brothers and his one sister, a feeling of depression and home-sickness crept upon him. He pulled himself together with an angry oath. He pulled himself together only to be assailed once more by the same remorseless fear as he once more remembered the fate of the previous three attempts. This was to be the fourth, the fourth space ship to blast off from mother earth, the fourth attempt to break the chains of remorseless gravity which had held Mankind to this planet for a million years. He wondered if it would be just that, an attempt. Would he end up as the previous three pilots had? He recalled grimly, that there hadn't even been enough left of them to permit burial, nothing but a few charred bones had been found.

The communicator crackled to life: 'Everything O. K. Lanyard .. Over.' Lanyard came to his senses abruptly with a feeling of panic. He should be in his Celeration bunk by now! He glanced at his watch and with a surprised shock realised he had been standing by the Airlock for over five minutes. He pulled himself together with much effort and hurried up the steel ladder in the middle of the ship, to the control cabin which was situated in the nose of the ship. As he climbed steadily a voice seemed to seemed to whisper in his mind, gently at first, then more insistent: 'It's not too late to turn back. It's NOT TOO LATE... NOT TOO LATE!' He groaned and thought numbly: 'I couldn't back down now, not after all the preparations, all the **months and months and months** of specialised training. Of course, every one would be most understanding but **underneath** it all **they** would be **thinking**: 'Yellow, HE couldn't take it' .. 'Damn! He couldn't back out now .. or could HE ..? NO!' He told **himself** **sharply** .. 'NO NO NO!'

He scrambled up into the control cabin gasping with effort and dropped the Trip Lock into position. Feeling weak he flopped on to the Celeration bunk and began

desperately to fasten the strap across his body.

'Lanyard!' cracked the communicator. 'You alright?'

He flicked a toggle over: 'Yes.. y ab.. sure Over.'

'Fifty seconds to go Lanyard .. 45 .. 40 ..' The voice was whispering again: 'NOT TOO LATE .. NOT TOO LATE .. NOT TOO L ..' 'Damn' groaned Lanyard. Panic was creeping upon him again. Growing, until it seemed to be a tangible entity. 'Got to get out! Got to get out of here,' he sobbed. All reason gone, in its place was fear and horror. His Heart was Pounding ... Pounding .. Pounding. Suddenly he was screaming: 'Stop! Stop! I can't go through with it .. can't .. got to get out.' He was fumbling desperately with the straps, seeking to untie them. Far away it seemed, he could hear a voice: 'X minus 4 seconds .. 3 .. 2 ..' Realisation dawned upon him. He hadn't switched over when he had screamed for them to stop! THEY hadn't heard him. 'X Minus 1 ..' Came the communicator .. The giant ship shuddered. The roar was like a thousand Niagaras, swelling and beating. 'Too late', he croaked. 'Too late.'

The Bunk was a solid sheet of hardened steel drawing him down, crushing him in a tight embrace, crushing, drawing, like a giant Magnet. There were other roars in his ears now, an internal roaring, which reached a terrible all consuming intensity and then gradually faded to be replaced by cool, sweet oblivion.

Lanyard came to with the panic still within him. He opened his eyes fearfully. With a start of surprise and relief he realised the noise and the crushing had gone.

He felt light and his arm movements were effortless.

The significance struck him. He'd made it! He was on the way to the Moon! He grasped a toggle, switched it to the On position. The aft VISOR began to brighten.

He touched the Focus Control and the giant disk that was Earth swam into view with surprising clarity. He groped in his overall pocket once more, for tomorrow's ration finding it somewhat difficult under the strange conditions of Free Fall. He lit up and noticed, in a detached way, that the smoke hovered around his head in thick dense clouds.

Then it **started!** He **didn't** notice at first except that

he was sweating too much for comfort. 'I shouldn't be this hot.' He muttered to himself. He knew that the Heat and Refrigeration units were automatic and that they should function at a pre-set, comfortable temperature regardless of conditions outside. He glanced at the Heatmeter and stared with surprise. The reading was way above normal!

It was visibly rising... something was wrong! The panic was back once more, hopelessness was now added and he was thinking: 'I was mad to volunteer for this attempt... mad. What chance have we got of reaching the Moon?

Not a snowball's chance in hell?' He was strangely calm now that death was so near. He thought 'I may as well contact Earth and tell them what's happened.' He switched a toggle and the thought flickered through his mind that it was rather strange they hadn't contacted him before now? Nothing happened. 'That's fine,' he whispered bitterly. 'Radio out of commission too!'

Idly and bitterly he brooded over the Controls which wouldn't be used until the ship was in the gravitinal field of the Moon, it being automatically controlled. With an abrupt start his eyes fell upon the Gyro-control. The ship was turning! It was mad! This couldn't happen! Every factor had been computed and allowed for... unless... Yes!..

That must be it. They must have realised something was wrong back at Earth and they were bringing him back.

He felt elated for a moment until he remembered it was still getting hotter. He'd be burnt to death before then. In an hour he was in terrible agony. Rather than wait for such a slow painful death, he shot himself.

Far out in the depths of space another ship, shaped in the much publicised form of a saucer, 'On Earth' turned in the direction of Mars and was soon lost to view, not that anyone was **there** to view it. The only being near enough to have seen the ship was dead... Had died thinking the breakdown of the Fridge and radio units had been accidental.....

----- THAN INTERPLANETARY WAR!

THE DOOR

By ALAN HUNTER

Illustrated by alan hunter

The old man looked at the door through weak, unfocused eyes, eyes that were now useless for any of the tasks he had been expected to perform. There was a death's head in the door and a fleshless arm that beckoned in revolting welcome. He knew that it was his own distorted reflection in the mirror-bright surface but now, at the last moment of resolve, he hesitated. About to receive death he tried to picture Heaven with warm friendly faces, constant peace and ever-interesting work idleness was not for him.

He tried also to picture blue skies, trees, flowers and birds but the effort was too great such things seemed so far away now. The final picture of Heaven was so like the life he was leaving that he felt his resolve slipping.

Beyond that door was death, cold and dark and lonely with no sound of voices, no sight of friends. Anything less like Heaven he could not imagine. But he could not reverse the wheels of time - his eyes were dim, his hands shook continually. Everyone had been so kind but it was not kindness he wanted, it was work, to feel wanted and useful. He'd been active all his life and the thought of having to stop now was worse than his fear of death.

He had a few more years yet before this door no longer beckoned but demanded. Those last few years of amused tolerance would be unbearable.

His friends were all gone now, beyond this same door. They had shown no fear so why should he! Behind him was a young world in which he had grown old, as others must before the Great Day came. He was useless, an anachronism, but it hurt him deep inside to be going like this, friendless and alone. This was the penalty of choosing death instead of waiting for his Time with everyone to wish him farewell. But that was only custom, he knew, and no



tears would be shed for him, either then or now. The old were expected to die - so that the young could live!

His hands trembled at the door lock; a tear slipped down a sunken cheek. Beyond that door lay the small, dark chamber of death! As he entered, the lithe figure of a girl appeared around the bend of the passage leading up to the door. She was running. 'Uncle John!' she screamed wildly, 'Don't do it! Stay with us. You need not go yet. Uncle John!' But the door had closed.

Helplessly the girl watched the pressure indicator on the wall. It was useless, she realised, to attempt to open the door. The safety lock would remain on for many minutes yet. Then the indicator touched zero and she knew that it was too late. Uncle John was now a burst corpse floating in the vacuum of space, a cosmic milestone marking the path of the giant spaceship on its centuries-long journey to the stars.

He had been wrong, however, about the tears. They fell from the pathetic, stunned eyes of the girl - the only tears to mourn the death of the ship's oldest inhabitant

SCIENCE FICTION HAS RUINED MY SOCIAL LIFE!!!

By Dan Morgan

Every now and again I bump into some character who seems to be quite an intelligent type, and in the course of conversation pop the inevitable question, 'Do you read Science Fiction?' Upon the rare occasions that I get an answer in the affirmative a life long friendship is guaranteed, but what about the others? As there is not much chance that the people concerned would read a fanzine I'll give you a few authentic results of my efforts to spread the good word.

Number One was a Yorkshireman of about forty years of age, an insurance inspector. After several interesting discussions upon such subjects as Psychology, Occult phenomena and general Philosophy, I decided that here was a potential reader of good Science Fiction. Realising that he would dismiss anything of a too sensational nature I carefully selected a copy of *Astounding* which struck me as having an adult viewpoint. A few days later he returned the mag with the following remarks: 'I'll agree that there's a lot of sound reasoning in these stories but basically they are nonsense! You may be sincere about this type of fiction, but I think that the majority of these people are writing with their tongues in their cheeks upon a purely commercial basis. I could never get interested in this stuff, and frankly, whilst reading it I was bored stiff!!'

My second subject was even more vehement. He practically threw a copy of *New Worlds* back at me, and said:

'This stuff is a lot of nonsense, it's impossible! These people don't know anything about science, they're just a lot of charlatans!' He followed this up with a number of remarks to the effect that if he wanted to read fairy stories there was far better material available by Hans Andersen or in the *Arabian Nights*.

I was getting rather discouraged by this time, but I decided to have another try. I had a friend who usually read my Short Story manuscripts, which up to this time had been non-Science Fiction. After his enthusiastic

reception of much of my previous stuff I thought that he would probably be able to assimilate my particular brand of Science Fiction. I handed him the manuscript, but again I was wrong! After reading the story through with an expression of suffering, he looked up at me sympathetically and said, simply: 'You're really quite mad, old chap!'

It is interesting to note that the story concerned was accepted and will appear shortly in a well known British Stg mag.

My zeal to kindle interest in our favourite form of literature is a direct result of my opinion that people who do not read Science Fiction are really missing something

However, from my unfortunate experiences as a missionary I have come to the conclusion that if you try to introduce the average man to a new idea, he immediately thinks that you've got an axe to grind or that you're trying to sell him a bill of goods. The man in the street may come around to reading the right kind of fiction in time, but any attempts to hurry along the process on the part of well meaning fans are doomed to failure.

Dan Morgan,
17 Swan Street,
SPALDING,
Lincs.

ATTENTION !

Fans in Manchester and the North-West, now get together at the, 'Nor-west Science Fiction and Fantasy Club'. Meetings are at the Waterloo Hotel, Waterloo Rd, Manchester, Town. Contact the Secretary, Dave H. Cohen at 32, Larch Street, Hightown, Manchester 8.

FROM OFF THE SCAFFOLD

Well, folks and here's No.2, hope you like the change in size and half print. No.3 will be all print 'I hope' but it sure takes time, but I was warned of this. Hope you all found the spelling mistakes, I'm unable to blame the press for this even if it is over forty years old, guess I should have spent more time on my 'edification'. Well, we've had great doings in little old England, we won a Test Match hold the middle-weight title of the world, a Big hand to Randolph Turpin. But most of all we held a Convention in London. The guest list read like a Who's who in fandom those present included Forrest J. Ackerman and his wife, Walter Willis, Lyell Crane, and A.C. Clark. I was sorry not to be able to have that drink with every one. Perhaps next year? It was due to start at 11 am, but like all well planned events it didn't. This gave us time to get to know each other better, it was during this period I met Bob Shaw and James White 'of SLANT' two great guys. By now it was time for lunch.

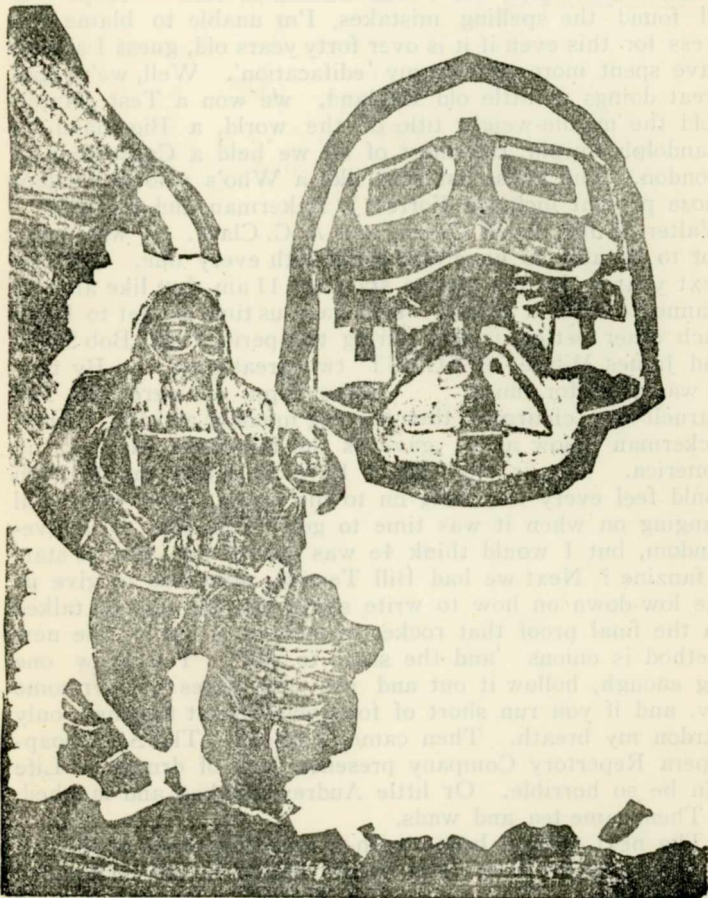
About 2pm we were 'off' Ted Carnell was chairman, then the big moment arrived, Forrest Ackerman 'know as 4e' gave us the low-down on S. F. in America. 4e is No 1 fan I have no doubts on this, you could feel every one hang on to his words, 'they were still hanging on when it was time to go'. I'm new to active-fandom, but I would think 4e was one of the first to start a fanzine? Next we had Bill Temple, who was to give us the low-down on how to write serial s.f, but instead talked on the final proof that rocket propulsion is out! The new method is onions 'and the same to you'. You grow one big enough, hollow it out and use it's gases to over-come e.v. and if you run short of food you can eat the shell, only pardon my breath. Then came, 'I quote' The S.F. Soap-Opera Repertory Company presents, 'roll of drums'. Life can be so horrible. Or little Audrey laughed and laughed.

Then came tea and wads.

The next session began with a recording made at the den of the London circle, 'The White Horse' no one understood what this was about except the 'Horse'. (continued p 26

THE DEAD AREN'T DISAPPOINTED

By Peter J. Ridley



The old man pushed into the crowd round the tele-news stand and stood watching the changing headlines.

"Venerians smash New York in unprovoked attack. Ambassador declares war. Simultaneous raids on all big cities".

There followed scenes from the devastated cities. The crowd stood silent. The news was not unexpected, war had been brewing for months. The carbon di-oxide breathing inhabitants of Venus had never got along with Earthmen, and they were especially jealous of the Earth's colony on Mars.

"Look at the old boy over there", whispered a young Army officer to the girl at his side. "He's a Martian, third generation at least, and has been a spaceman too".

"Oh Martin, you are clever. How did you know?"

"Simple enough", he answered proudly. "Look at his chest, terrific size isn't it. Martians' chests are always that way, the thin air makes the development a necessity."

"But you said he was a spaceman too", she persisted. "Yes, watch how he walks, a kind of sagging roll. All spacemen walk like that, it's the effect of long periods without gravitation."

She looked at him adoringly.

The old man with the queer walk emerged from the crowd and moved slowly down the street. He wanted to go home. Home to the endless rolling red deserts of Mars, home to the peace and tranquility of the great Canals. He hadn't realised just how much he wanted it until the news of the war had jolted him. Now he knew that he hated the busy bustling Earth, with its roaring streets, all night news casts, babbling crowds, and blaring music. He wanted the silence and dignity of Mars with a fierce desire which seemed to grip his mind with claws of fire. Why the declaration of war should be the catalyst to trigger this desire he didn't know, perhaps the idea of the increased hustle which would be its result. He must get away, must get back home.

He'd been a spaceman one, perhaps he could sign on with a ship bound for Mars. With this thought in mind he stepped on to an automotive pavement. Changing direction several times he at last found himself being carried along beside the twenty foot high electrified fence which bounded the Space Field. As a gateway came into sight he stepped off the pavement and approached the guard who stood stiffly at the entrance.

"What do you want, Old Timer?" queried the guard goodnaturedly, he'd been standing there for two hours with nothing to do but salute V.I.P's as they swept through the gate in their big cars, and he welcomed a diversion.

"A job", replied Sam Jat uncompromisingly. "A job on a Mars freighter."

"'Fraid you'll be unlucky Pop, but I'll ring Staff and see. What kind of a job d'you want?"

"Anything on a Mars ship."

"O.K., hang on here", the guard retired to the sentry box and used the telephone there.

A few minutes passed, Sam fidgeting with his hat. Eventually the guard hung up the 'phone and came towards the waiting man.

"Sorry, Pop, all full up, too many young spacemen about to leave any jobs for the old 'uns. Don't worry though there'll be plenty of ordinary work about now, what with this war."

Sam Jat wanted to tell him that nothing else would do, that he must get back to Mars away from this mad, rushing world, but he didn't.

"Thanks, sorry I troubled you."

"That's all right Pop, glad to help," the guard would have liked to talk, but Sam walked away.

Too old, that was always the tale, they needed young active men in space, no room for old crocks. How could he get to Mars? He had very little money, not a third of the fare. He couldn't get a job on a ship.

The old man continued blindly down the road, bumping passers unheedingly.

He had one more chance! If he could stow away on a space-barge, one of those engineless freight vessels which are given a trajectory and initial speed by tugs and then left to wend their dark way through space to their destination completely unmanned. If he could do that?

Sam Jat's pace took on purpose, he headed determinedly for his lodgings.

The door opened to his voice and he entered. What would he need? Sam pulled over a pad and jotted down the items. A good space-suit, one of the new types with a solid oxygen supply which would last an Earthman two months, and a Martian perhaps three. Food tablets. Some O and H cubes, for water. It was a short list.

Sam counted his credit chits. Enough and some to spare. As to getting aboard the barge Sam felt that

it should be fairly easy. M.M.E., the engineering firm, sent many consignments of mining equipment to Mars by barge, and he was acquainted with one of the night watchmen there. Though Sam knew the old fellow wouldn't knowingly betray his employers he also knew that a few drinks, and some skilful pumping would suffice for the information he required.

Sam Jat leaned back in his chair happy. He could almost feel the hot, crumbling rock beneath his fingers and hear the whisper of the red sand at his feet. He roused himself, he must catch the old nightwatchman before he left for work.

Sam's lean brown hands trembled with suppressed excitement. Soon he'd be on his way home. He had learnt from the watchman of a shipment which was to be loaded for Mars to-morrow. Sam even knew where the consignment was stacked in M.M.E.'s yards and what number was stencilled on the cases.

Crouched in the shadow of a bush which grew near the high electrified fence round the M.M.E. yards Sam waited. There was a rustle in the undergrowth, a terrified rabbit burst out and flung itself against the fence. There was a flash and a smell of burnt fur. A weasel slid out of the grass, hissed as it caught the smell of scorched flesh and disappeared. Away across the yard a bell jangled in the block-house. A guard sauntered across to the place, took a

look at the smoking corpse and called back.

"I told you so, just another damned rabbit."

Sam waited until everything was calm again, then he went to work. He climbed silently into the new lightweight suit he'd bought that afternoon, then produced a large elastic balloon (used for meteorological work), he ran a piece of rubber tubing to his portable heater unit and placed an H cube in the combustion compartment.

The balloon began to fill and pull upwards, Sam tied it to the stem of the bush, praying that it would hold. While the balloon filled he placed the rest of his scanty equipment in the pockets of his suit, all except for a kit of minute dura-steel tools which he held in his right hand. The balloon was full and round now, the bush creaking under its strong pull. Sam slipped a clip over the neck of the balloon and grabbed hold of it, pulling the slip-knot which held it to the bush free with his teeth.

Silently he rose into the air and aided by a kick soared over the deadly fence deep into the yards. As he released the clip Sam thanked the Gods for the negligence of the guards. Gas hissed softly from the balloon as it dropped gently earthwards. Sam moved into the concealment of the giant

packing cases towing the partly deflated balloon behind him. Securing the balloon and dumping his other stuff Sam crept back to the edge of the dump of packing cases. All was quiet, though light streamed from the open guard house door and he could hear soft laughter occasionally from the men within.

Working slowly but silently with his tiny tools, Sam removed a plank from the side of one of the cases, he shone his flash into the darkness inside. There was a mass of protective wadding. Sam pulled it out carefully until there was enough room for him to climb inside. Careful exploration amongst the fluffy wadding convinced him that he'd struck lucky. This was a big machine, but one which allowed sufficient room for a smallish man to squeeze into. Sam removed more of the fluffy packing until he had a space large enough for his purpose, then he climbed out again, carefully collected all the wadding and tied it into a bundle. Removing the heater unit from the balloon he substituted the bundle of wadding, which though bulky was very light, then he freed the balloon and it rose gently into the night sky, where prevailing winds would carry it out to sea.

Sam worked for a while on the plank he had removed, fitting it with bolts on the inside so that he could secure it from within. Finally he was done and stowed his tools in the case, had a last look

round to see if he'd forgotten anything then climbed inside himself and pulled the plank up after him. Within he bored himself a couple of minute holes, which would serve as ventilators and spy holes, then rolled himself up and went to sleep.

The slight jerking of the case as the auto-loaders went about their work wakened Sam. Peering through one of his peep-holes he could see only darkness, but he guessed that his packing case had been loaded on to a carrier for transport to the Space Field.

After a while Sam felt the push of acceleration, then a few minutes later he knew the carrier was slowing. A jerk as the carrier stopped sent Sam forward, he bumped his head and swore. More swaying and jerking, then the case was still. The peep-holes showed light now, Sam squinted out. They were on the Space Field all right, and Sam could see the blunt nose of the barge. His view was blocked out by a man's back, Sam could see he was a soldier. Presently he heard the first soldier talking to another. Their tones came faintly to the man inside the packing case.

"Why all this fuss over a space-barge, that's what I want to know."

"Didn't you hear? They're sending a shipment of plutonium out to Mars, couldn't spare a Navy ship."

"Huh! Damn silly I call it. Why the Venerians have only got to wait for the barge out in space and take the cargo."

"Oh yeah! I'd like to see anyone get aboard this barge in space, her shields 'ud stop a wild planet, no ship could get within fifty miles of her."

"Well, I still think it's a screwy idea, what if"

They moved away and Sam could see the field again.

A handling machine passed his field of vision carrying a large grey-lead box, followed by another and another.

Suddenly Sam felt his packing case rise and whirl round. A handling machine was loading him into the barge, his small world tilted at a crazy angle and Sam could no longer reach the peep-holes to look out. More gyrations, this time Sam was shaken like a single pill in a box, finally the case bumped and settled down. Further bumps, then a scraping sound. Sam managed to reach his peep-holes again, at first he saw nothing but blank metal, he caught sight of the arm of a handling machine and a length of cable. He realised that the cargo was being secured.

The rattling and banging of the handling machines tailed away into silence, there was a dull clang, and then silence once more. Sam took a morphedrine tablet,

he was too old a man to stand the fury of acceleration concious, and closed his helmet, space-barges weren't always air-tight.

Sam came to in the blackness. For several minutes he hung half conscious wondering why it was so dark. Floating, he thought, the balloon over the fence, but the night is so dark, no stars. Then he jumped to full consciousness. He was in fact half floating, must be well away from Earth. With the ease of an old space-man he twisted his almost weightless bulk and groped for his tools. Handicapped by the darkness, and the difficulty of working without gravity it took Sam nearly an hour to get the bolts free.

He pushed the plank up, and was surprised to find that the lights were on. Someone careless had left them on he supposed. An unpleasant thought occurred to him. Supposing the authorities had decided to give this important cargo some human guards? Taking care not to make any loud noise Sam slid the plank back and climbed out into the side of the packing case. Letting go he dropped slowly towards the bare metal of a corridor between the tiers of packing cases, which completely filled the space between floor and ceiling. Sam steadied himself against a case as he reached the space-line which was strung along the corridor. He closed his hand over it, there was no quiver in it so Sam started to pull himself along.

The fact that a space-line had been rigged proved that the barge was manned. Sam stopped frequently to "listen" to the space-line, no tremors, however, disturbed his journey to the bow of the barge. He had reached the forward hold, where the smaller cases were lashed in huge blocks when his audi-phones detected the noise of conversation. Though the sound was quite close Sam couldn't make out any words distinctly. He surveyed the vicinity for a hiding place. Irregularities in the sizes of the packing cases provided a number of "caves" in their serried ranks. Sam wedged himself into one of them. The sound of talking was louder now. Sam peered cautiously out and caught a glimpse of a group of space-suited figures pulling themselves along the line.

Funny they've got suits on thought Sam, there must be air in the barge otherwise even the sensitive audi-phones couldn't have picked up their conversation, probably a leak and the air getting thin accounted for it.

Sam was about to grab the space-line again when there was a rumble and whoosh, dust and small pieces of wood flew in the direction in which the space-suited figures had gone. He felt himself pulled the same way and clung on to the edge of a packing case. Soon the disturbance ceased. Sam still clung to the packing case.

"Got it," he murmured into his suit. "The air got poisoned somehow and they've had to let it out. Lucky I didn't open my helmet."

He was standing with one foot against the floor. A regular throbbing in the metal began to build itself up until he could hear it in the audi-phones.

"Now they're putting a clean atmosphere into the barge".

Sam watched the pressure gauge in his suit until it indicated an equality of pressure inside and outside, he fumbled with his helmet. No need to waste his oxygen, might need it later. Sam got his helmet open and took a couple of deep breaths. Soda water, he could smell soda water. He slammed his helmet shut again and turned the oxygen input valve up until he felt better. Soda water - carbon di-oxide - Venerians! No wonder they'd worn space-suits and let the air out of the barge.

The space-barge had no air locks, but there were some small doors which could be opened manually amidships, that must be where the Venerians had let the air out, Sam decided.

Presently from the security of his "cave" Sam watched the now unarmoured Venerians return the way they'd come. He counted them carefully. Five, but there might be more of them in the bows.

Sam waited till they had disappeared from view round a bend in the corridor, then followed. They would, he reasoned, hardly expect a fellow stowaway and wouldn't bother with any precautions.

Sam peered cautiously round the bend. The Venerians, six of them, had fitted up a magnetic platform and were wearing metal shoes. They were therefore standing in quite ordinary attitudes and working busily with some apparatus. Sam, who like most space men had a smattering of Venerian tuned up his audiphones and listened to their talk.

His impressions were jumbled since he could only understand about half of what was being said, but Sam gathered that they were assembling atomic jets, with which the barge would be deflected from her course and taken to a rendezvous with a Venerian Space cruiser.

For a while Sam slumped in self pity, hardly able to comprehend that all his struggling would be for nothing, then his will stiffened and he turned his mind to thinking how he could circumvent the Venerians and get the barge to Mars. Sam wasn't thinking of the invaluable cargo, or the war, he just wanted to get to Mars and the Venerians were in his way.

Suddenly he realised that his audiphones were still tuned up and that one of the Venerians was speaking.

".....without this plutonium they can't defend Mars, we'll smash every town and kill every Earthman on the planet, then we'll sow millions of Venerian plants all over it. They'll soon change the atmosphere into an approximation of our own, then we'll have a colony."

Sam's stomach suddenly felt as if a cannon ball had materialised inside it as he heard the Venerian. He imagined the bombs falling in the fairy-spired villages, killing the great chested long limbed people, smashing the silence. He saw the filthy bloated Venerian growths sprawling in their vicious life over the clean red sand, and then he saw the chattering, slimy Venerians coming and building their noisy cities, black and smoky, all over the Planet of Silence.

The cannon ball in his stomach became red hot. Sam was filled with a great rage. He almost started forward into the Venerians but commonsense held him back, even with the element of surprise he couldn't hope to kill them all. There must be another way. Then in their suitlessness Sam saw his chance. Disdaining the space-line he made his way in sprawling leaps down the corridor. Behind he could hear excited shouts as the noise of his progress reached the Venerians. They were too late. Sam reached the doors, spun the wheel and released them before the Venerians had time to get off their platform. The carbon di-oxide rushed out into space. As he clung to the door, buffeted by the

turbulent eddies of gas, Sam laughed.

The body of a Venerian came gyrating through the corridor and urged on by the last of the gases curved out through the door into Space. Sam's eyes narrowed, one at least had freed himself of his magnetic shoes and had begun to chase him, perhaps the others had reached their suits, then he relaxed, five suits lay by the door where the Venerians had discarded them. That left only one who could possibly have survived.

Sam scouted carefully down the corridor, moving in slow easy jumps. A movement in one of the crevices between the cases caught his eye. As he raised his gun Sam saw a heat beam arrow out from the dark crack. For a second he looked wonderingly at the mess of molten metal and charred flesh that had been his leg, then as the air hissed from his suit Sam carefully burnt the Venerian to a crisp.

The discovery of the shambles aboard the space-barge created quite a stir in Marsport. The story however was plain, and the Government, carefully claiming credit for Sam's presence aboard gave the old spaceman a hero's burial.

They carried his body, in a large plastic coffin, out of smoky Marsport, along the busy Canal Road, lined with murmuring crowds to a place just below the Deimos Bridge. They buried him there,

where had he been able Sam could have seen the black bulk of Marsport to the west, heard the rumble of traffic along the Canal Road behind him, and viewed the passing ships on the Canal.

Sam had been away a long time.

(Scaffold.) The Auction followed this, the auction was in the hands of Ted Tubb. This was the first of two auctions and the bidding was good. The only thing wrong was a few dealers (in S. F.) raised the prices beyond the reach of some of us. I met Ted a little later drowning his sorrows over having to see all these items go for (money).

Dinner came next, or rather running Buffet, only I didn't run fast enough. John Keir Cross spoke after dinner, on the trouble it was to get the B. B. C. to broadcast S. F.

Guess this is all for now. more next time
We live and learn! said the prisoner, as the hangman placed the noose around his neck and so did I. The cover of No.1 got 'hung' and good! One fan say's. Thanks for Sludge since I'm always anxious to read and enjoy as many fan-zines as I can and the lifeblood 'What! my blood?' of publishing is criticism, I'll endeavour to give my reactions which are; Blimey! now I know why its called Sludge, the cover looked as if thats what you used instead of ink. Thanks Fred for the other remarks, neat well spread out. Spread out! I had too, nothing to put on the 'blank' pages.

Peter J. Ridley's bind was layout and cover I promise to sign my editorials in full as well Pete. Vincent Clarke said 'dont I know papers scarce', I know now! Alan Hunter said 'first issue left much to be desired' the cover! Alan as a lino-cut on page 6 of this issue. As for contents, Bob Shaw and I tied for first place. No mention of anything else except, who the hell's Margon? I hope you like the story by Thennek Thims. The lino-cuts on pages 1 and 10 Margon did. What with printing and lino-cutting I'm behind with my mail, but will attend to it now. Bob Foster.

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