

STARDUST

the magazine
unique

Vol. 1

No. 1

March 1940

20c

QUEST OF THE GODS

BY

ROBERT

MOORE

WILLIAMS

DE CAMP

FARLEY

HORNIG

JAMESON



Gaseous Nebula In The Constellation Of Orion

STARDUST

... The Magazine Unique !

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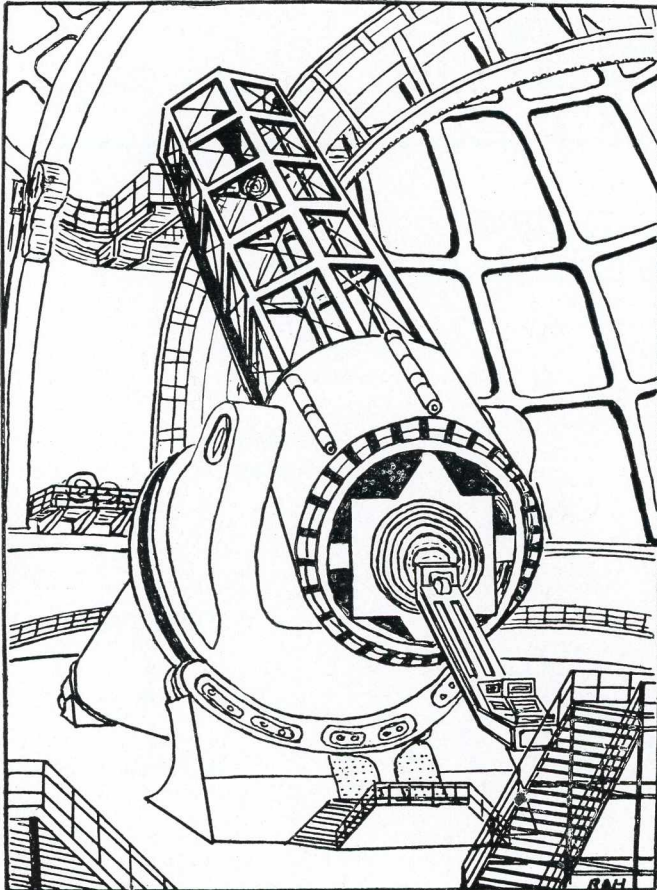
NUMBER 1

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LET'S DISCUSS IT EYE TO EYE WITH THE EDITOR

Doubtless many of you were rather skeptical when you heard that a printed, semi-professional, science-fiction fan magazine was about to be published. Doubtless many of you scoffed openly, saying: "It's been tried before. . ."

But STARDUST is an actuality, and it is my sincere hope that any skepticism which may have been prevalent heretofore, will now have entirely vanished. STARDUST is here! With the firm support of fandom and loyal science-fiction fantasy readers, it will remain!

EYE TO EYE . . . that is our policy. EYE TO EYE with you, the reader. This magazine is yours, it is for you! But there is still another purpose to STARDUST.

STARDUST is destined to revive the old spirit of the fan world, most prevalent in the days of the FANTASY FAN, and MARVEL TALES. STARDUST takes up the threads from there, but there is a difference. Where before existed failure, in the new era which STARDUST shall unfold, success will be the vanguard. There is a reason for this too.

The fantasy world has been in a dormant state too long. True, the cobwebs of slumber have been partially dispersed of late, what with the successful culmination of the 1939 WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION, and with the formation of plans for the next. But yet, there is a vacancy. And that vacancy is the chasm which lies between the true fan field, and that of the larger, but as yet inactive group of fantasy followers who have up to now taken a back seat, and have been content to

slide along.

To date this chain has not been severed. The chain, that is which separates these fans from the field of active fandom. To that end STARDUST is dedicated.

It cannot be denied that both the professional and the amateur fan publications have failed in this endeavor. They have tried it is true, but nevertheless, they have failed. What then must be done?

A common ground must be found on which these two great factions can tread, side by side. I firmly believe that STARDUST has found that ground. We know that a strictly professional magazine is inadequate to the task, and similarly do we know that a strictly amateur publication is inadequate. But what of a magazine which lies between these two? A semi-professional publication? A magazine that may safely sever that obstructing chain between the active and the passive fan group!

To that end STARDUST has its aim. To awaken interest! To provide that common bond! To unite the passive group and that of the active fans into one huge fantasy organization! If we can do this, then next year, here in CHICAGO, we will see not hundreds, attending the 1940 WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION, but thousands!

In this initial issue a number of experiments have been made. Fiction has been interspersed with non-fiction. This has been done for a purpose. I want to see just which of the two is favored the more. What you the reader decide, will be my future Editorial policy. It is entirely up to you.

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RETIREMENT

(OH FOR THE LIFE OF A GOD ! MAYBE . . .)

BY

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

This story is truly out of the ordinary. It is a yarn that for satirical humor, we feel cannot be beaten. Mr. De Camp is famous for his humorous satires. And this present tale is no exception. Mr. de Camp has brought us a really masterful touch of burlesque.

The Gods which the teeming millions of human beings have worshiped since the beginning of time have always been looked upon as unthinkable deities. The author throws a new light on this subject and shows us that these deities have troubles of their own—and that sometimes even a God must work!

The lines of people going into the entrance shuffled forward impatiently, like people crowding in to see a popular movie. Just outside the entrance a handsome man in a swank gray uniform kept repeating: "Pick your proper line, please. Don't push; there's plenty of time. Pick your proper line, please. Single lines only, please. Yes, Madam, this is the right place. Pick your proper line, please. What, Sir? A Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarion? The left-hand line, with the other Protestants. No, Sir, we haven't got a special entrance for you. I'm sorry, but you'll have to complain to the Chief Registrar. Pick your proper line, please. . ."

Inside the gates thirty clerks were hard at work. "Name and dates, please? Address and occupation? Fill out these blanks, please, and take them to window number 37. Next! Name and dates, please? Address and occupation? Fill out—you can't write? Then take these blanks to the scribe at the end of the hall, down there. Next! Name and—oh, you want the Chief Registrar? Gentleman with the beard, at that desk over there. Next!"

But the gentleman with the beard was not at his desk, a fact that caused considerable annoyance to the complainant and some confusion among the clerks. The complainant finally sat down to wait, fuming.

The Chief Registrar had in fact found his trouble-shooting job a little too much, and had slipped outside. Complaints, complaints, always complaints. He was sitting on a boulder and looking morosely at the never-drying river of new arrivals when somebody said, "Hey, Pete!"

He looked up at the man with the snowy whiskers and the turban, who was sitting astride an animal that looked like a mule except that mules aren't normally covered with golden scales.

"Playing hookey again?" asked the man on the beast.

"Yes. If I didn't get some fresh air it's crazy I would have gone. Always complaints! Always foolish questions! Always people ins.ting that in the

such-and-suches are let in, *they* must have arrived at the wrong place." He glared at the lines. "May they stay here to become as bored as I am! We don't get *quite* as many through here as we used to, but there's still plenty. Let me think: 20,200 a day average, means 1,680 per hour, or twenty-eight per minute."

The other man got off his beast and sat down too. "That usher from the Radio City place seems to be handling traffic pretty well." He pointed toward the man in the gray uniform, who was still chanting "Pick your proper line, please."

"Yes. He's much better than that policeman we had. I hope some more of those ushers arrive soon. How is things around at your entrance?"

"Oh, we don't go in for as much red tape as you do. Of course we get people mixed up sometimes, but what of it? There's plenty of time to straighten them out."

"Have your arrivals been increasing lately? I heard they have."

"Mmm—yes, mostly Africans lately. I have Abu Bekr in charge now. He seems to like the work, and I don't, so it satisfies everybody." The man with the turban grinned, the grin of a clever, practical man. "You take life too seriously, Pete."

"Maybe so." The Chief Registrar rubbed his nose. "What's new? So busy I am, I don't get around."

"Nothing much. There's been trouble at the Club again."

"Julius Caesar?"

"Uh-huh. He's still trying to get in. I've opposed it as much as I could, but I'm kept so busy finding berths for my new arrivals that I can't do much. He of course claims that having been a real live man once, he's as much entitled to membership as the rest of us. I claim that as he was worshipped as a god, he's a god by definition, and is therefore ineligible."

The Chief Registrar said, "I sometimes think we're too hard on the gods. After all it isn't their fault that they were never live men."

"There you go, Pete. You're not practical. If we let down the bars we'd soon be overrun with Roman Penates and Chinese Feng-Hsui and all the spooks that anybody ever imagined."

"Maybe so. But you got to admit that those Roman Emperors are in a funny fix, neither one thing nor the other."

"I suppose you're right, although Julius wasn't an emperor. I don't see why they don't get together with the Pharaohs and the Japanese Emperors and form their own society. Matter of fact I suggested it to one of them—Vespasian, I think it was—and he said the Romans were willing, but the Pharaohs and Tennos were too proud. It's just one of those questions that'll never be settled, like Madame Blavatsky's status. I think—hello, what's this?"

A being was approaching by leaps, frequently turning somersaults in the middle of them. It was also singing. As it came closer, the Registrar and the man in the turban saw that it was small and black, with four arms.

It stopped its bouncing and came up. "Hello," it said, grinning. "You remember me, Pete? I'm Ong Kha."

"I remember you," said the Registrar. "You don't know Mohammed, do you? This is Ong Kha, god of the east-Altai Bashkirs. About what are you so happy, Ong?" The Registrar was a good-natured man when not riled by too long an exposure to new arrivals, but there was a trace of condescension in his voice. After all, he had once been a live man, whereas this grotesque little being was merely the product of the collective imagination of a tribe of barbarous Mongol stockmen.

But the little god didn't seem abashed. "My last worshipper just died!" he chortled. "I passed him and stamped his papers ten minutes ago. No more records! No more prayers to listen to! No more nothing! Ohboy!"

"Tell us about it," said Mohammed.

"You know my people? Live in yurts, never take bath? Well, ten years ago this new government they got in Russia—U.S.S.R., you know—send around bunch of agents with tractors and sheep-dipping stuff, to teach my people how to do things. My people ignorant, you know, and they scared of agents. They specially scared after agents shoot a couple for obstructionism, they call it. Agents wonderful men to them, know everything. So when agents say, you don't worship old Ong Kha any more, he 'ust a lot of bunk, he can't help you, they believe agents. All but shaman. Shaman make his living out of me for forty years, so he stick to me. Pretty soon nobody in tribe worship me except shaman. Shaman good guy, but I think he never going to die. But one cold night he dance around magic fire and beat drum too long, and catch pneumonia. He croak. So I got no more worshippers, no more work to do. Ohboy!" Ong Kha jumped into the air, turned two flips, and went, singing.

Mohammed and the Registrar looked wistfully after him. The latter mused, "He's got no more worries anyway. It's too bad we could not work something—"

"Maybe we could."

"Huh? But we can't contact them directly—"

Mohammed smiled that sly smile of his. "No, but maybe we could work something just the same."

"Oh, you mean through a gnome or troll or some such being? Oh no! Remember what happened the last time you tried that! You got that fairy to hop in at the christening of that German general, that von Ludendorff, and give him a sectarian complex. So when he grew up he tried to revive the old Teutonic paganism, and Wotan and Hoenir came down and threatened to turn our places inside out if we didn't stop monkeying. They were afraid they'd have to go back to work. No, my friend, you don't start anything like that again!" The Registrar shuddered. He had an abiding dislike for those bellowing cross-gartered Valhallans.

Mohammed still grinned. "I admit that was a mistake. But I think we could work it right this time. Start something brand new, for instance, so that none of the old gods could complain."

"Well, what?"

"It ought to be in the Near East, for one thing.

Those people seem to go for spreading new religions. Do you know Mani?"

"That little shrimp? The founder of Manicheism? Yes."

"He's our man. You can talk him into almost anything if you try. Look, I'll get him and meet you here tomorrow, at about this time."

* * * * *

Mani was a slight, nervous man who seemed anxious to please everybody.

"Well—" he said, "Well—I don't know gentlemen. This business of having to depend on an earth-spirit to do our dirty-work for us—I don't like it. You know—you know I haven't any worshippers to worry about. Not any more, since they wiped out my Albigenss. But—but I'd like to do you a favor, of course. Only—only you can't supervise these earth-spirits, to make sure they do what you want. Besides, there aren't many left on earth; they've mostly come up here since the people down there don't believe in them so much anymore. I mean—you know what I mean. They can't live there unless people do believe in them. I mean."

Mohammed leaned forward and said implacably, "There are a few djinns left around Mesopotamia, aren't there?"

"Why—why yes, I suppose there are. Yes, there's one old fellow who hangs out in a cemetery near Bagdad. But gentlemen, are you sure this is what you want? Are—are you sure it's wise? Of course I'm glad to help you out and all that, but—but I don't know . . ."

"Listen," snapped Mohammed, "This is our only chance to get away from an eternity of record-keeping and running errands for our dear sweet congregations. If we wait until all the earth-spirits have left earth, there won't be any way at all for us to influence things down there. I don't care how you do it, Mani, so long as you enable us to retire permanently. We've earned our vacations, I think! You can have 'em invent a whole new pantheon for all I care. That'd be the new gods' worry, not ours, and they don't exist yet. Understand?"

"Y-yes, gentlemen, of course I'll be glad to help. Is that what you think—I mean is that your idea too, Pete?"

The Registrar looked worried, though he tried not to show it. "Yes, Mani. Mohammed seems to know what he's about, so you go ahead and do what he says."

Mani sighed resignedly. "Okay, I'll get in touch with this djinn. Let's see, his name's Sakhr and he lives under the ninth tombstone in the fourth row . . ."

He wandered off, muttering. Mohammed grinned after him. "I think this'll work, Pete. Don't look so worried. Just think of all the fun we can have after we've retired!" . . .

* * * * *

The years passed, and the Registrar's boredom grew by small increments. He wondered whether it would go on increasing indefinitely, or whether it would finally approach a limit like a repeating decimal.

Then one day the office of entry was thrown into confusion by Mohammed, who galloped in on the golden-scaled Al-Boraq, breathing hard.

"Quick, Pete!" he shouted. "Get up behind me! They're after us!"

"Who's after us?" asked the Registrar. But before

Continued on page 21

EINSTEIN IN REVERSE

EVEN EINSTEIN CAN BE WRONG !

By

MALCOLM JAMESON



It is an established fact that the Universe is in constant motion. What then would the Universe look like if seen from "Absolute Rest" if such a condition could be possibly attained?

The author of this short story tells you the answer to that problem, but in answering it another, greater problem appears!

"H-M-M," grumbled the Professor, gnawing at his scraggly beard as he withdrew his hand with the dividers from the dim visiplate on which the images of all the stars shone faintly. "Are you sure you applied components for each and every bit of motion?"

"Oh, quite," assured Harry Longwill, his experimental pilot. "Check with me if you like. Here's the figure for the Earth's rotational velocity, its orbital velocity, the Sun's own motion toward Vega, our rotational velocity about the axis of the Galaxy, the drift of our Galaxy toward the Ultimate Point, Zeta, plus the other eight factors you gave me, and finally there is the rotational speed about the Ideal Center of the Whole Universe."

"Ah," breathed the Professor, relieved. "It seems all to be there. And we have been accelerating all this time along a resultant exactly contrary to those figures?"

"Yes, sir. It is more than three months now since we hopped off on this voyage—braking ourselves in Absolute Space, so to speak. In another few minutes we should have exactly overcome all those velocities. Then we can observe the real movements of all the heavenly bodies, not merely have to deduce them as heretofore."

"It will astonish the world," said the Professor, thinking rosilily ahead to the day when he would mount the rostrum of the Great Hall of Science and read his paper to an admiring world. He had already selected its title: "The Proper Motions of the Universes as Seen from Absolute Rest."

Longwill looked back at the visiplate. Outside the scintillating points of the universe gleamed much as they always had, or at least so he thought when he first looked. Yet, strangely, the stars seemed a bit smaller and closer together, and the black areas of the reaches of the Extra-Universe seemed larger and more intense. Presently the whole of the Earth's own Galaxy seemed to be but a cloud of fine mist, clinging to the periphery of the space ship itself, and the outlying brilliant clusters of the far-off Island Universes seemed much nearer. Yet they, too, had shrunk. They were barely visible as minute puff-balls of smoke, just a few yards away.

Twist the viewfinder as he would, he could get no other picture, and his astonishment was deepened as

the faint mist he was watching became even more nebulous, as if it were vanishing into the pores of ship itself.

"What do you make of that, Professor?" asked the Pilot.

The last faint glimmer of anything outside had vanished. As far as vision could reach in any direction there was—nothing. Nothing but the void and the utter darkness of starless space. The Galaxy, the Universes and all about them had vanished. There was no more of anything except the lonely ship and its two curious occupants.

For a moment the Professor's expression was one of deep bewilderment. Then he tugged ruefully at his beard and gave an apologetic little laugh.

"Sorry, Longwill, that I got you into this. To be truthful, I did not expect such a tragic ending. It was terribly careless of me. I admit. You see, in my anxiety to be the first to achieve absolute motionlessness, I overlooked some of its implications. We are all that there is, now.—You and me."

Longwill stared at him. Was the Professor mad?

"As you know, Einstein demonstrated that when an object attains the maximum possible speed, that of light, its dimension in the direction of its motion becomes zero."

"Yes, but . . ."

"It follows from that, that since we have dimensions in three or more directions, we must have some speed in each of those directions, but somewhat less than that of light . . ."

"Naturally, but . . ."

"Well. That those dimensions we are used to have always been stable and finite indicates that our speeds in the various directions have been stable and finite. Had we gone faster in any particular direction, we would have shrunk correspondingly. Now, we did not do that. On the contrary, we reduced our speed in every direction until we achieved zero velocity. That put us at the other end of the Einsteinian curve. Our dimensions being limited by our velocities, now have no limits, because every conceivable velocity we had has been cancelled. Hence we have become infinite in size. The universe we knew, being itself finite, is therefore tucked away somewhere in the interstices of one of your or my atoms!"

Longwill looked glum.

"And our points of reference with it?"

"Yes. There is no way back. Once we become infinite, there is nothing we can do about finite things."

"But we're still accelerating," objected Longwill. "Then what?"

"Oh, dear," said the Professor, reaching for his slide rule. "That raises another problem."

THE END.

DOUBLE WORLD

First of a Series of Articles on the Universe

By

HENRY BOTT

Author of "Life on other Planets"

"Hurtling through the tenuous vacuousness of matter known as space, around the primary sun, at a rate of about a 1,000 miles per minute, speeds a closed system of two planets, planets of an appreciable size. The larger, 8,000 miles in diameter has within its mass, the center of gravity of the system, this center of gravity being located approximately halfway between the center and the surface of the larger planet. The second member of this system, located at approximately 240,000 miles from the center of the primary with a diameter of about 2100 miles, revolves around the center of gravity once for every 29 rotations of the primary on ITS axis. The force of gravity on the secondary is but one sixth of that of the primary due to the relatively small mass of it, that is, about one hundredth of the primary's. Though the primary has internal heat and definitely exhibits an atmosphere, it's complement, the secondary has neither and appears to be a cold, dead, utterly fruitless, companion of an inhabited world."

Thus, possibly would an extra-terrestrial observer describe the double system of which our Earth is the "primary." And he would be perfectly right in so doing, for our companion world is not so much a satellite as it is a twin world. Unlike the other satellitic systems of the sun's family, the Earth-

Moon combination is the only one which the bodies involved, revolve around a common center of gravity. All other satellites revolve around the center of gravity of the mother planet. Thus, we have found the first unique difference in such systems.

There are two hypothesis which account for the Moon's formation, but it is only the latter of the two listed here that is considered to be plausible. After the "catastrophe" (as Doctor E. E. Smith so aptly states) in which a passing sun through gravitational forces tore from our luminary gigantic masses of gaseous matter, all was not complete and from the still plastic Earth, there tore loose, through centrifugal force another mass of gas which took up a position about the parent body, condensed, and formed what is now known as the Moon. So states the first of the theories. But the one that is given the most credence by astronomers and celestial mechanicians is the one which says that along with the Earth-mass that was torn from the Sun there came with it a similar, though smaller volume of gaseous material, which, after the usual condensing and cooling processes became the secondary of the larger Earth. So much for that.

"But," ask the skeptics, "if the Moon was formed at the same time as the Earth, why is it that it has not similar characteristics, such as an atmosphere, and vegetation, for after all it was presumably formed of the same original-stuff as the Earth." The answer is not too difficult.

To begin with: there is a fundamental, immutable astro-physical law which states that in order for a body to possess an atmosphere it is necessary for it to have sufficient mass (and hence sufficient gravitational attraction) to prevent the molecules of the gas composing the atmosphere from escaping through the kinetic energy of their motion which in turn depends on the nature and temperature of the gas. Now it so happens that the Moon's mass, about one hundredth that the Earth's, is too little to exert a sufficient, adequate, gravitational pull to keep the high velocity molecular particles where they belong, and thus through hundreds of thousands of years, the molecules escaped one by one, and left the Moon's surface to be ravaged by the intense heat of the sun. Rapidly, any vegetation or animal life was destroyed and soon nothing but a barren landscape was exposed. Under the extremely strong sunlight during the lunar day, the surface of the moon acquired a high temperature since there was no gas to diffuse the sun's rays and then at night with almost equal rapidity this heat was radiated for the same reason. Soon the surface became nothing more than a gigantic radiator, utterly hostile to any life. This constant

Luna and Its Craters



heating and cooling would mean constant expanding and contracting of the surface matter and therefore we would expect the surface of the Moon to be completely level, that is, a Gargantuan plain. Though we expect the moon to look like a tremendously enlarged billiard-ball, even a superficial examination of the surface through a small telescope will disclose the fact that it is anything but like that. Pock-marked, mountainous, interlaced with plains, and spattered with huge craters, Luna's surface area is the picture of a battered planet.

What caused those enormous depressions known as "craters?" One theory is advanced that they are the remnants of erstwhile active volcanoes. Yet this explanation seems somewhat inadequate when analyzed. Why should volcanoes have been so numerous on the Moon? Why should these same volcanoes have been of such a tremendous size? These and a thousand other questions remain to be answered satisfactorily before the hypothesis may be used.

A second and somewhat more logical explanation, though by no means completely satisfactory, is that innumerable meteors crashed into the airless moon-sphere. This is more or less verified by conditions on Earth where several large meteors have landed and as a result left gigantic holes almost identical with the craters of the Moon. An excellent example of the effect of meteors forming craters may be obtained from a simple experiment in which marble or other small, hard spherical objects are dropped into stiff mud. This simulates conditions very nearly.

But, wherever these craters originated, the fact remains that they are there. The erosive action of heat and cold is shown by the slow crumpling of the sharp edges of the craters and though we can neither see this action directly, nor that of the actual collisions of the meteors, we still have a pretty accurate picture of conditions on the companion of Terra.

Now to sum up conditions on the Moon's surface: a Lunar day is intensely hot, a night intensely cold. The surface is dotted with craters. Mountains of enormous breadth raise their tops. Barren plains (Why meteors haven't made indentations into these plains is still unexplained) cover a large portion of the area. No atmosphere tempers the weird, horribly, depressive appearance of the deserted landscape.

Undoubtedly, the first solar body to be visited by man, will be the Moon. So comfortably close as compared with any of the planets, yet so desolate and uninviting! But of what use would this worthless world be? If inefficient rockets dependent upon the initial velocity given them, are used, then the Moon would make an ideal stepping stone to the other worlds since it would mean the conservation of precious fuel. Furthermore; what astronomer wouldn't sell his soul for the "perfect seeing" that would be available on the airless observatory of Luna. No longer would a ten-mile column of air, disturbed by convection currents, interfere with the use of astronomical instruments. As to mineral wealth—well, that is still a moot question—possibly, yes, possibly no.

Oh what a boost to man's ego when the first Earthman, clad in a space suit impervious to lack of air, or cold or heat, steps from the air-lock of the first crude vessel, upon the pock-marked surface of the moon, and hesitantly (from emotion) says, "I claim this world in the name of Earth!"

*Next month Mr. Bott
discusses Saturn in detail*

Mathematical Chart of the Solar System

HEAVENLY BODY	MILES FROM SUN	DIAMETER IN MILES	YEAR AS TO EARTH	GRAVITY AS TO EARTH	DENSITY	MASS AS TO EARTH	SURFACE HEAT °F	NUMBER OF SATELLITES	POSSIBILITY OF LIFE %
SUN		864,392		27.9			10,000		0%
MERCURY	35,960,000	3,009	.31	.27	3.80	.04	195.3		30%
VENUS	67,200,000	7,575	.61	.88	5.09	.81	151.2		50%
EARTH	92,897,000	7,918	1.00	1.00	5.52	1.00	60.0	1	100%
MARS	141,540,000	4,216	1.88	.38	3.95	.108	-38.7	2	30%
JUPITER	483,310,000	80,728	11.86	2.64	1.33	316.94	-231.7	11	0%
SATURN	886,120,000	72,430	29.45	1.19	.73	94.92	-291.3	9	0%
URANUS	1,782,700,000	30,878	84.01	.96	1.36	14.58	-340.8	4	0%
NEPTUNE	2,793,400,000	32,932	164.78	.98	1.30	16.93	-364.7	1	0%
PLUTO	3,680,000,000	?	249.16	1.2	?	?	-376.8	?	0%

THE MARTIAN ENIGMA

BY
CHESTER S. GEIER

The Science Fiction Editor has a truly responsible position. For he must read, analyze, and pass judgment on countless letters sent him by readers, both pro and con. I wonder how many Editors' would not laugh if they received a letter from a reader who claimed he was a Martian! I admit it sounds preposterous, but nevertheless, that is the theme of this story.

The author takes just such a stand as would you or I on this matter, but there is a climax proving that fact is stranger than fiction! There is cause for wonder in this tale, and food for thought! One never knows! . . .

PHILIP CAMERON, Editor of Astonishing Tales, finished reading the fan letter, and with a grunt of disgust, tossed it into the wastebasket. They were all the same, a lot of drivel from some science fiction reader who desired to see his name in print.

He wearily reached for another from the stack on his desk, read it, grunted, and threw it into the waste-basket. The next letter was better, so he placed it in the wire basket on his desk along with the others which were different enough to merit printing.

As time wore on, the pile of letters diminished, until only one remained.

Hopefully, Cameron reached for that last letter, and began to read it. As he did so, a smile spread over his haggard face, and a moment later he chuckled. He read it again.

Editor:

I, Zorm 12-H-27, late a gentleman of Mars, have affixed my thought-recorder to one of your crude typewriting machines so that you may know my opinion of your magazine.

Understand that I expect to see this letter in print. The noble opinions of Zorm 12-H-27 are not to be taken lightly. I expect you to print this missal by my imperial demand!

You are very fortunate in that your government permits the publishing of such magazines as yours. I, Zorm 12-H-27, was exiled from Mars for writing the literature you know as science-fiction.

However, the science in your stories is very childish, to say the least. The principles with which the authors seek to confuse the readers are elemental. They are things which we of Mars have known for hundreds of years. But since your people are as yet a primitive race, I'll try to overlook that.

I am irked by those savages who write to the column desiring such crude improvements as trimmed

edges and smooth paper. I do not see how things like that can benefit an already crude magazine. Instead, why do you not print the stories on thin strips of metal, and run them through a machine changing the words to sound? I find it maddening to have to stare at printed pages for hours on end.

F. Homer Wood's story, "The Madmen of Mars," made me very angry. He pictures us Martians as a decadent race filled with a lust for blood, whereas we are quite the opposite. When I overcome the lassitude that the heavy gravity and dense atmosphere of your planet has induced in me, I shall ray him out of existence.

Zorm 12-H-27.

Cameron placed the letter in the wire basket, marveling at the ingenuity of some science fiction readers. What would they think of next? This idea of pretending to be an exiled gentleman of Mars was quite novel, and would hand the other readers a laugh.

It did hand them a laugh, as the weeks following the publication of the magazine showed. Letters flowed into Cameron's office regularly, nearly all of them dealing humorously with Zorm 12-H-27.

CAMERON was filled with elation, for the "Bone of Contention" column had been too formal and uninteresting of late, and these letters would rejuvenate it immensely.

There was another letter from the person masquerading under the pseudonym of Zorm 12-H-27. Cameron leaned back in his swivel chair and began an eager perusal of it.

Editor:

I was very much pleased to see that you had heeded my advice and printed my letter. However, I did not like the reply which you added at the bottom.

You, apparently, are under the impression that I am writing these letters under a false name. Be cured of the illusion! I am exactly the person I say.

I saw that F. Homer Wood had another story in the issue. I did not bother to read it, for he has displeased me beyond words. Do not print any more of his tales or the most dire consequences will follow.

The other stories were all entertaining, but again there was an annoying lack of science. Do your authors think that a rocket ship and a planet constitutes science fiction?

The crude drawings of those barbarians, Gold, Weggo, and Pall, are so absurd as to be laughable. Why are illustrations necessary anyway? Cannot the readers visualize in their own minds exactly what

the author means?

When are you going to print the stories on thin strips of metal?

Zorm 12-H-27.

Cameron tried to find something humorous in the letter—but failed. This person was obviously carrying his pretense a little too far.

He was grateful to Zorm 12-H-27 for having awakened such widespread interest in the column, yet he agreed with several readers who had sent caustic letters condemning the fake Martian for such pompous foolishness.

Cameron would have liked Zorm 12-H-27's letters much better had they been written in a humorous vein. But as it was, they were written—well—just as a Martian would write them.

As he had expected, another letter came from Zorm 12-H-27. With a suspicious glint in his eye, he began to read it.

Editor:

I, Zorm 12-H-27, want the imbecile readers of your magazine to understand that I will permit no foolhardy liberties to be taken with my name.

For instance, that moron, Dick Spring of Kansas, wishes to know if I resemble a walking bellows. By the Gods of Mars, what audacity! How can my fine, deep chest, my large, well-formed head, be compared to such idiocy?

His letter, as well as the others which appeared in the column, have enraged me to the point where I will cease to tolerate the writers' existence. Know you, Editor, that if I so desire, I can be ruler of your world. Your great armies with their puny weapons could not stand against me!

So much for that. The purpose of this letter is really to tell you that I can no longer read your stories with enjoyment. There is no science, no great problems to puzzle over.

Sometime next week you will receive a story from me. It will be a perfect example of science fiction, and I want your authors to study it intently so that they will understand what kind of stories I desire.

Of course, you will print it. There need be no bickering about that, and a monetary payment is not necessary. Remember, if my story does not appear in the next issue, you will receive a taste of my ray gun.

Zorm 12-H-27.

AFTER reading the letter Cameron let out an exasperated snort. This was more than he would stand for. He moved to throw the missive into the wastebasket, but remembering the readers who would be watching the column for it, he shrugged, and placed it in the wire basket.

Cameron was very busy during the following week, choosing stories for the next issue of Astonishing Tales. His desk was piled high with manuscripts, but they slowly vanished as he waded through them, rejecting here and accepting there.

Suddenly he gave a start and peered closely at a thick sheaf of papers that his hand had just pulled from the mass. Under the title there was typed very neatly, and very precisely, the name "Zorm 12-H-27!"

Wondering, Cameron read the lengthy story through. Science! The story was permeated with it. But it was so ponderous and intricate that Cameron,

The Magazine Unique

who had had more than a good education, could not understand it.

The plot was good. One hair-raising situation followed another in breathless succession. But the characters were wooden puppets, wielding bizarre weapons, and spouting whole pages of incomprehensible mathematics. Even in their lightest moods they bantered each other with overwhelming theories.

He slapped a rejection slip upon it, and put it aside to be mailed back. The story disagreed with his policy of good adventure stories with the science subtly woven in. Cameron decided that Zorm 12-H-27 must be a super-intelligent lunatic.

In the press of business, he soon forgot about Zorm 12-H-27 and the story, but several days later he was abruptly reminded of both.

It was morning, and he was driving his car toward the executive offices of Astonishing Tales. Suddenly he noticed that a huge crowd was gathered about the building. He parked a few blocks away, and on foot approached the excited, chattering mass of people.

And then he saw the reason. One whole corner of the huge building had been gouged out as though by a giant scythe! Windows everywhere were shattered. A car had been hurled against a building on the opposite side of the street much as if a tremendous gust of wind had blown it there.

Into his dazed and uncomprehending mind came snatches of words. "... Funny looking guy ... had something in his hand ... pointed it at the building ... sounded as if an explosive factory had blown up ... a lot of blue radiation, too, like lightning ... little guy disappeared in a puff of smoke. ..."

That was enough for Cameron; he recalled Zorm 12-H-27 and his story. Unseeing, he stumbled into the building, and up the stairs to his office. There, he sank limply into his swivel chair.

Cameron shivered. Only a terrifically powerful device could have wrought such havoc as that outside. And to think that he had scoffed at the idea of an actual Martian residing on Earth and reading fantasy literature!

But what had happened? How had the catastrophe come about? Cameron pondered these questions, thinking of the ray gun, and that last stray phrase he had heard, "little guy disappeared in a puff of smoke. ..."

OF A SUDDEN, he sat bolt upright. Of course, that was the answer! The ray gun had been a device made to function on Mars where gravity and atmospheric density were less. Doubtless, the delicate mechanism of the device had been affected by Earth's heavier pull and atmosphere in such a way that when fired it had reacted like a shotgun plugged with mud. The titanic force contained within it had exploded, and had dissolved into atoms the being known as Zorm 12-H-27.

Cameron gazed into space, and his hand with the force of long habit reached for a letter. Mechanically, he read what an exiled noble of Jupiter had to say about Astonishing Tales. He did not snort; he just stared at the letter long and suspiciously.

THE END.

COMING

CRYSTAL OF DEATH

By Jack Williamson

All of us recall that great short story in the September, 1938, issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*, "Robots Return," written by Robert Moore Williams. Your Editor is proud to present the sequel to that story, concerning the fate of the "Original Five," created by man.

Ever since the era of "Frankenstein" the robot race depicted by science fiction authors has been classified as a race of monsters who turn about on their creators and destroy them. The author of this story stoutly denies any such characteristic of the "metal men" and goes on to prove how the hand of man, reaching down through the end of time is clasped firmly in friendship and loyalty by the race he created thousands of years before. You will thrill to the deep emotion that is prevalent throughout this novelette, and we feel that you will be as pleased as we were when we first read it. But on with the story . . .

As though sustained by the strength of a dream enduring forever, the ship floated serenely in the haze of a rising sun. Soft rays haloed the globule with the fineness of polished silver. It was a bright illusion gleaming in the dawning.

Slanting downward, the ship slid into the vagrant wisps of mist rising from the sea, and hugged the shore toward the rising sun. It circled a small knoll, then settled down on top of it, between two large trees, where grass was growing, circled and settled as though reaching an elusive goal after long, long years of searching.

On massive hinges a lock swung inward. Nine stood in the opening, staring from lusterless, fixed eyes over the shoreline that sloped gently down to the sea. There was something of hunger in his eyes, vast, unappeasable hunger. And something of perplexity. But mostly there was hunger.

He stepped from the lock, and Seven and Eight remained where he had stood. Both were silent. Eight looked. There was nothing to be seen, except the land sloping down to the sea, and ahead, a low, flat meadow-plain where grass and shrubs were growing. Eight kept his thinking to himself, but when he spoke, his words betrayed his meaning.

"Is—Is this the place?"

He stirred in startled unease, and hurriedly spoke again. "I'm sorry . . . I must have been talking to myself . . . But, always, when we have landed to try again, I have asked myself—Is *this* the place . . ."

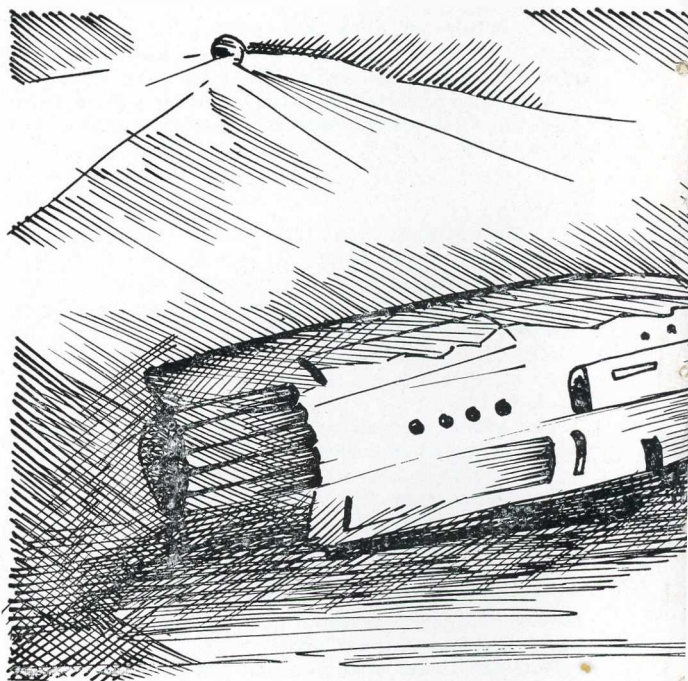
Nine looked at him. "I don't know. Nobody knows, exactly, any more. But it was somewhere near here, on our own planet . . ." The radio beam showed the awe that he felt. "After we have searched half the Universe, we find the answer—if it exists at all—is here, on our own planet. . . . Our records say that the Original Five found themselves beside the sea. They did not mark the spot. They went inland, across marshes, to the mountains, where they found ore. In response to the questions of those who came after them, they pointed toward the sea, in this direction. The Five are dead. And the ship in which they came—if it still exists—is along this shore, somewhere. We will have to search. But we have searched for so long . . ." The words faded from the radio beam, and it was in Nine's thinking how long that search had been. And how fruitless.

But a dream that could start in slime and look for-

THE QUEST

A SEQUEL TO "THE ORIGINAL FIVE"

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



From the Metal Men there came a thunder . . . fire . . . they watched.

ward to the end of time would not be daunted by a fruitless search.

"Foolishness!" Seven interrupted. "A waste of time and effort. Obviously, the ship has rusted to nothing by now."

"No!" Eight spoke quickly, as if to evade the thought contained in Seven's statement. "Remember—on Earth, when we found who our ancestors had been—we found almost completely rust-resistant metal. If that last surviving group of men built their ship—that vessel they launched in hope that they might live again on some world where the destructive bacteriophage was not—of that metal, then it would not have rusted away. It would be here, on our planet, somewhere . . ." Eight's words went into silence, as if to hide his thinking—his odd erratic thinking that persisted in returning to one central idea.

Seven stared at him, but the metal of Eight's face was emotionless. And if the cunning cells that were his eyes showed the trace of an age-old yearning, it was a hope that was well guarded—guarded mostly from Eight himself.

OF THE GODS

OBOTS RETURN"

RE WILLIAMS



ring roar . . . they brought fruit . . .

"I honestly believe," Seven spoke slowly, "that you not only hope to find that ship, but to find the men in it still alive . . ."

There was a startled flicker of light from Eight's eyes, as if Seven's words had touched the quick of an ancient hunger.

"I had not dared—hope that . . ."

Nine looked up suddenly, but said nothing. Seven turned his head away. "Men were of flesh, and flesh decays. Eight thousand years . . . I know they were in suspended animation—whatever that means—when they blasted from their planet, but eight thousand of our years . . . Even if it is only a little more than four thousand of their Earth years, the records brought back by the second expedition show that men did not live even a hundred years. Logically . . ."

"This is not a matter of logic. Men were of flesh, and flesh dies. That is logic . . . But the dreaming of that race was stronger than decay and death and slow time, the dreaming that started in slime and looked forward to the end of time . . . A dream as strong as that dream will not die easily. No! There is hope that men, who were our ancestors, will live

again. Somehow, someday, there was in their dreaming the strength to defeat death and time . . ."

Seven said nothing, but over the radio beam Eight could feel the perturbed pulse of his thinking. Seven was trying to follow logically something that only dreamers knew; he was trying to snare in a trap of logic the elusive magic that belongs to dreams.

Eight spoke again. "I remember their world, grim and gray, and forlorn, their cities in ruins, crumbling into dust, their civilization gone . . . But I remember most of all, the proud, blind eyes of a forgotten statue, eyes that seemed to follow our ship as we left their world . . . Night was falling and dusk was creeping in over the ruins of a mighty city. Men were gone . . . But the blind eyes of that forgotten statue seemed to follow our ship, as if we carried in our hands the fate of the race of men . . . That, I think, was prophecy . . ."

Eight was silent. Up from the sea came a shoreward pressing wind bringing with it a soft moaning from the face of the waters. It stirred the leaves of the two trees with an infinitude of scratchy rustling.

Nine spoke. "First, find the ship. If it is in the sea, there is, probably no hope. But if it is on the land—But how could it be on the land? It would have been found long ago."

"And," Seven interrupted, "What was wrong that the Original Five deserted it? They manned it. They would not have left it . . ."

"That," said Eight quickly, "is our best hope. If it had landed in the sea, the Five would not have been able to escape from it. The sea water would have short-circuited them. It must have descended on land. As to why they left it—something must have happened, something they could not control, but what that could have been . . ."

Eight shielded his thinking. For he could not, would not, think of the Five as deserters. But something had happened. What—

"First," Nine spoke slowly, "We must try again to find the ship. Bring the instruments."

Unquestioningly, Seven and Eight turned back into their vessel, emerged carrying between them a tripod tipped with a metal box. They stepped carefully to the ground, set up the tripod. Eight re-entered the ship, and returned with a coil of wire somewhat like a spider web. Nine took it, fitted the slender rod extending through it into an opening in the metal box. He moved studs. From inside the box there came a soft hum as of flowing energy. The coil wavered, then promptly steadied in one direction.

Nine looked at it, looked at the ship. His words came over the radio beam.

"It points to our ship." He looked at Seven.

"I will take it away," said Seven.

He entered the vessel. The lock closed. A deep-throated hum rose from the ship, the vast, full-bodied hum of throttled energies. It leaped a notch up the scale as the ship rose with it, to vanish into the mist which the sun was already dissipating.

Nine bent over the tripod. Eight watched. The coil of wire wavered indecisively, as if it had a mind of its own, and was trying to make up that mind, but was having a hard time doing it. Eight watched. Silently and intently. Each time the coil wavered, he could feel the throb of his thinking. He didn't have a heart—an atomic motor served instead—He didn't fully understand what a heart was; but if he had had one, it would have been pounding in rhythm to the wavering of that coil of wire, that coil he

had watched for months now, along the low shore line, in various places. And, as always, it could not make up its mind which way it wanted to point, or whether it wanted to point at all.

"The metal of our bodies is influencing it," said Nine. "The atomic energy vortex that powers us—there is leakage. Not much, but enough to influence this apparatus. Some day I hope we will be able to shield completely our driving units, so we can work directly with sensitive electrical equipment. We will have to withdraw . . ."

Ten yards away, they paused, cut their driving energy to a minimum, turned to watch the coil of wire. And this time—here on this little knoll raised a few feet above the level of the flat surrounding country—the coil steadied, found a direction in which it could believe.

There was a tremendous upward surge of exultation in Eight's shout.

"See! It points! We have one line! Somewhere along that line the ship of the last men is waiting! It has to be . . ."

At last! At last . . . There was a singing in his mind, a deep pressure of wordless thinking, a pressure that would not go into words. A clear, clean, singing sound, like the note of a bugle blowing at dawn, when all the world is hushed in anticipation.

Nine spoke slowly. "Don't build up your hopes too high. It may be pointing a body of ore, although, in this flat land, I do not see how there could be ore. But don't build up too many hopes. We haven't found the ship yet, and even if we do . . ." He didn't finish the sentence, but Eight caught the meaning. Even if they found the ship . . . Eight thousand years were so long . . . No, he mustn't let himself hope. How could men, frail creatures of weak flesh and sudden death, sleep away so many centuries?

"Do . . . Do you think . . ." Eight could not say the words.

Nine studied the coil of wire. "Whatever it is pointing, may be inland or out at sea. There is no way of knowing until we have established an intersecting line—Do I think we will find men still in suspended animation?" The words dripped one by one from his mind, slowly, methodically, as if he were marshalling them to picture elusive thoughts. "Again, I don't know."

Eight was persistent. "What do you think?"

Nine placed rods in the ground to establish the direction in which the coil of wire was pointing. "You mean—What do I hope? There is a difference between hoping and thinking . . . It is best, in this case, not to think . . ." He looked up into the sky, and over the radio beam, the call went out. "It was by a fond belief in the impossible that the ancestors whom we seek achieved things beyond the thinking. So I do not think, one way or another, about finding them, or whether, if found, they will be alive or dead. I merely follow an ancient pattern; I work and hope. I will examine, inch by inch, every foot of shoreline on this planet, if need be, searching for that lost ship, and the only reason I can give is an old, old reason—I hope the impossible is true . . ."

Something ages old stirred in Eight as he listened, something that had started in slime, started on a planet lost across the light years, a vital something sired by the pressure of blind forces seeking life in a million forms, something that he had momentarily glimpsed in the proud blind eyes of a forgotten statue standing in the dusk of a lonely world, blind eyes that seemed to follow the ship of the little metal

men in the sure knowledge that it, somehow, was a part of destiny.

Down from the sky, in answer to Nine's call, Seven brought that same ship in a rush of whistling wind, in a throbbing, subdued roar of throttled pressures. He watched from the open lock while Eight and Nine carried in the tripod, and his eyes went to the metal rods stuck into the ground.

"A line?" he spoke.

Nine answered him. Seven said nothing more. Eight felt the pulse of Seven's vague thinking. Could the dead come to life again? Could man, by some strange power, defeat his obvious fate? Was there new life ahead, or was there only the dust of those who had gone before? Was there a chance that the robots would not have to face the future alone? Would the metal men have an ancient comrade with them? How could that be? Were there in the Universe things stronger than decay? Eight thousand years . . .

The ship rose easily under the pressure of titanic energies, slid down the coastline over that moaning sea, came to rest, under Nine's skilled guidance, on the open shore. Again the instruments were carried out and again Seven—still trying to force into logical coherence something that existed beyond the proper bounds of logic—took their ship away.

Again the coil wavered indecisively, as if it had a mind of its own, and could not quite make up that mind to point to the grave of the last man, as if it, too, tried to avoid saying that men were no longer in the Universe, anywhere. Eight watched, and within him the pressure of energies he did not know he was releasing balled his steel fingers into mailed fists. Nine, too, was uneasy. They waited. It was Nine who whispered. "It points!"

Straight down the shoreline in the direction from which they had come the coil of wire pointed. And then a little of the exultation was gone from Nine's voice. "No . . . That can't be correct . . . That instrument must be out of order!"

He backed off and sighted along the coil. "It . . . It is pointing directly at the spot where we took the first reading. That can't be correct!"

Rebelling, Eight answered. "It has to be correct. The instrument is pointing something." He bent, sighted along the coil of wire, and there was sudden, constricted awe in his voice. "That knoll, where first we landed . . . It is pointing directly to it . . . That knoll . . ." The meaning that was in his voice did not need words.

Nine stared at him. "But how can that be? That knoll has two large trees growing on it."

"In eight thousand years trees will grow. This shoreline was not the same then, and that tiny knoll is the only raised spot. I wonder . . . I wonder . . ."

Nine did not answer. He lifted his head, and over the radio beam his thinking went out. With a whistling rush of wind Seven brought the ship down from the farther reaches of the sky. Seven was silent. But it was an awed silence.

They left the tripod on the shore. They had forgotten it. They had forgotten everything, except that knoll. *Why should there be just one knoll in this flat shoreland?*

The ship slid under the trees, landed to one side of the knoll. Nine stepped quickly from the lock, then came Eight, then Seven. Nine's eyes went to the ground, which rose perhaps three feet at its highest spot, then gently sloped down to the level of the surrounding land.

"Is it possible we landed on the thing we sought, and did not know it?" Nine asked. Eight did not answer. He dropped to his knees. The soil was soft. Eight's taloned fingers dug into it. He threw it to both sides of him, in great handfuls. Within him age-old atomic motors surged in rhythmic beat, throbbed with pulsating power as if they understood the purpose that drove them, as if they had been designed for this end, and exulted achieving their destiny. Eight dug with his hands, kneeling, his head hunched down. And Nine instantly dropped beside Eight, sent the taloned steel of his fingers tearing at the soil.

There were tools in the ship for digging. That, Eight had forgotten. Or he did not care. This was something that needed doing with his hands. Or so it seemed to him.

They struck roots and tore them out of the way. The soil hardened, but the steel fingers were tireless.

Seven watched them, his head bent forward, an odd, apprehensive light in his eyes. He moved toward them, as if to help, then turned and went back into their ship. He returned with shovels.

Three feet, four feet. The soil was sandy now, and Nine examining it, spoke. "I wonder . . . Could this have been soft sand, quick sand, eight thousand years ago?"

Eight dug on Six feet, seven feet, ten feet!

He forced the tool into the sand and the tool would not go. He stopped instantly, dropped his shovel. His fingers scooped again at the sand, touched something hard and rough, touched metal that the years had pitted and flaked, that years had weakened, but which resisted yet. Hard metal. His shout echoed in ringing exultation.

"The ship! It's buried here! We've found it."

He used the vocal apparatus and his shout faded away into the silence of the open spaces where shrubs and grass grew now, and a few trees, where in the long ago the ship of man had landed, and landing . . .

In Eight's voice was rising triumph, for they had found the long-lost vessel. There was, also, a touch of a rising fear. The ship was here, buried under sand and soil, with trees growing beside it. But what of those who had been inside it? There was something of fear in Eight's voice. Now—soon—they would know. But what if they found only silence in the ship, and dank dead air, and death itself?

Nine scooped at the sand with his hands, cleared a rough circle. "There is no need excavating the entire ship, searching for a lock. It would be rusted shut. We will cut the steel of the hull here."

It was Seven who brought the cutting torches, while Eight and Nine scooped at the sand, brought the heavy lines that fed the burning arc. He stood at the edge of the pit, looking down. He called softly.

"Wait . . ."

Eight and Nine looked up. Seven stirred uneasily, his eyes going to the sky and coming back. "Over the radio in our cruiser, I sent out a call. This is something in which the whole of our robot race is interested. Wait . . . They are coming, all that can be spared from essential duties. They will want to see, to know . . . This is our last hope to find our ancestors, the gods who created us, and then went to sleep, or went to death . . . I had thought we would never find this ship, but I was wrong. And now I do not know—and dare not guess—what will be inside it. But wait, for they are coming." Awk-

wardly, he voiced the words, using the clumsy vocal apparatus.

While the morning sun climbed up the sky, they waited. The shoreward pressing wind blew stronger now and the leaves of the two trees rustled louder.

Then out of the sky they started to come, one ship by one, and from each ship as it landed there came its quota of little metal men. They came hurrying to the open pit, staring from fixed, sombre, hungry eyes. So long—all during their known history—moved by some unknown force, they had searched for their ancestors, for those who had gone before them. They had wanted to know, though they had never understood exactly why they wanted to know. To the nearer stars, their fleets had gone out, returning empty-handed. They had found planets, but nowhere had they found their ancestors. Then new telescopes had revealed another system to them, a system linked with an old star map they had, and a ship had gone out, returning with the startling news that there, on a planet circling a tiny sun, their race had been created, the last of their creators fleeing that planet. Now they had found the ship that had carried their creators.

Their vessels dotted the meadow land. Little metal men . . . Little men men . . . They stood, a silent mass, surrounding that opening in the ground. They waited, and watched. The ether was thick with the questions rising. The air moved in throbbing waves as they used the old, old vocal apparatus.

Nine lifted the cutting torch. Blue flame licked from it, and his eyes automatically closed to slits. The flame glared in yellow incandescence. Tough, that metal of their ancestors was still tough. Hard! The flame bit into it, slowly as Nine moved it in a circle, leaving one remaining six inch section. He cut out a hand-hold, and the taloned fingers of Eight, grimy with dirt, slid into it. Nine cut away the retaining section. Atomic motors surged, and Eight lifted the heavy metal circle, lifted it upward to hands that reached for it from the edge of the pit, hands that eagerly reached to help.

A push of dank, heavy air forced its way upward, forced its way out of the darkness festering in that hole. Nine leaned over and a beam of light flashed from his forehead. Eight was beside him, on hands and knees. But there was only darkness, and if Eight knew what he had expected to see, he knew only that he did not see it.

Nine looked up at the circling faces. "I'm going down." He slid into the hole, floated softly downward as he cushioned his fall on the device that bent gravity.

"I follow," said Eight.

"I will wait," said Seven. "Two are enough." Seven watched beside the hole, trying to see, and most of all, to understand. For eight thousand years his kind had striven to see and to understand. Now they would see, but was there no understanding anywhere?

The beam of light flashing from Nine's forehead guided Eight. Dust was under his feet dust inches thick. The ship was silent, tomblike. There was no sound anywhere, except a thin, excited, but subdued murmur of robot voices coming through the opening above them. The ship slept as it had slept through the many years, the dark and silent sleep of death.

Nine spoke, peering in the darkness. "This must have been a workshop and a storage room. See . . . There are tools, pitted with rust. And spare parts

on those shelves."

Had robots worked here, or had men? Who could say what had happened on that mad voyage.

"There is a stairway going farther down," said Eight. He moved forward, Nine following. Muffled and hollow, echoing from the empty places below, the sound of their footsteps came to their ears.

There was a room below, and it opened sternward into a larger room filled with bulky apparatus. Their light bored into the darkness, fretted over the heavy machinery, silent now and covered with dust.

"Here was the driving machinery of the ship. Useless now. But of the operators . . ." The words faded out, as if Nine was thinking, or trying to think of those who had operated these sullen, vast machines, measuring the pulse of energy flowing out from them to drive a ship across the void. The engines waited, but the engineers were gone.

Or were they gone?

"Look!" Eight called softly, stepping forward.

There were three of them, seated before gauges, their sightless eyes still watching the instruments. Long, how long had they kept their vigil thus, waiting, waiting, for the voice of a command that had never come?

"Oh . . ." Eight's voice was hollow with awe. "Oh . . ." A monosyllable.

"Robots," Nine whispered. "They were the operators, their duties were to attend these machines . . ." He stepped forward and his steel fingers went softly to brush against a shoulder. At the touch the figure toppled, fell with a subdued clang against the metal floor.

"Oh . . . For a moment I had hoped that new energy would bring life to them . . . But they are rusted past all use . . . Dead . . ."

"They must have been specialized comrades of the Original Five, and their last order must have been to watch here. They watched, and waited, while all of their energy drained away, waiting for another order, an order that never came."

There, in that silent engine room, a vast loyalty had kept an ancient faith. Eight's thinking choked him.

Nine answered slowly. "Yes . . . Yes . . . And seeing these, I think I understand what happened. Even, I think, I understand a little why we have searched all these years . . ."

"We must search farther," Eight interrupted. He did not say why. But here, in this ship, the sight of a robot watching dead gauges with sightless eyes, a robot that had kept its vigil beside silent driving engines until all of its energy had flowed away, had aroused, had brought to quickening, an age-old yearning, a timeless loyalty. And Eight, too, in that moment, knew why the robot search had gone on, and would go on, until there was no longer any faint gleam of hope anywhere in the Universe.

There was an answer to all questions. There was an answer to why the robots had sought their ancestors. Eight knew that answer. But what of the ancestors?

They forced their way through the ship, through doors rusted shut, through other doors that swung with protesting squeaks. They found a narrow room, where there reached to the ceiling an orderly arrangement of long narrow boxes braced with strong rods, boxes to which heavy wires ran from the hooded bulk of some kind of a motor that was at one end of the room.

In the long ago that motor had functioned.

It functioned still. Eight, bending over it, felt the soft pulse of dim vibrations. Nine studied it carefully.

"A primitive atomic motor of some kind. No moving parts to wear away. That is why it continues functioning. But . . ." Nine shook his head, his voice ending in a raspy sigh. "It is the only thing within this ship that still operates . . . Men . . ." He blundered over the words. "Man is gone . . . The dust that mantles everything, that shrouds this motor and these boxes, that hid the bulk of the driving engines at the stern—this dust is all that is left of their bodies. We can take it in our hands, but it flows away, just as . . . just as our hopes are slipping between our fingers . . . Dust . . . Dust is all that is left of man . . ."

He choked and the words were weak, as if the energy driving him—and the motivating impulse that drove the robot race—were dying out, into dust dissolving. For they had dreamed of finding man, of finding their creator. They had found his ship. And all that was left of him was dust—*inches thick*.

The hoping of Nine died out, and Eight felt the slow pulse of his vague thinking. Something of dreams was going from Nine, was going from the robot race. The ancient comrade whom they sought—the gods who had created them—they were no more. All that was left was dreams, and dreams, even when they had the strength to start in slime and look forward to the end of time, somehow needed human flesh for tenancy. Without the dreamer, the dream was unimportant. Without the dreamer, or the hope of the dreamer, the substance, was, somehow, lost.

Nine sighed. The light burning at his forehead wavered, grew dim and indistinct. Darkness crept in and around it. Always, around the light, darkness crept in.

Slowly, slowly, they went on through the ship. And at last they knew the answer.

"This is the ship that took men from Earth," Nine whispered, as if he had no strength for the full voicing of words. "But there are no men here . . ."

Gone—The thought echoed through Eight's mind—Gone . . . Gone . . . the last hope of finding man. If they were not here, they were nowhere in the Universe. Did they then, belong to the past, to the things that are gone and will eventually be forgotten?

They had searched in vain. They had searched half a Universe. All of it they would have searched, in time . . . But now there was no hope. There was nothing now . . .

Eight knew it was useless to rebel against that fate. It was worse than useless. But vague, rebellious thoughts were stirring in him. Only they would not cohere, they would not reach a conclusion.

They went up, Nine leading. Above them loomed the opening they had cut in the top of the ship. They floated upward, out . . .

From the robot ranks a sigh arose. There was a momentary flash of questions over the radio beams, there was a husky whimpering of many voices. It died, all sounds and all beams died. Pressing forward the robots saw Eight and Nine, read the meaning without words.

"There are . . . There are no men," said Nine.

They stood without moving. There was no tremble, no flicker of eyes, no shift of limbs, no turning of heads. They heard his words, they, who had searched so long—without knowing exactly why—And they knew that now the search was fruitless.

★ ★ STARDUST

Then a trembling flutter ran through their ranks, a sigh, that ran in whimpering echoes, through the crowding metal men.

Little metal men . . .

Nine spoke again. "I know . . . I understand now, what must have happened. The ship landed on soft sand. The Original Five went forth from it to do the task for which they had been created—to serve man. They went forth to find a place on this world where he could build his new home. Perhaps they went several miles . . . When they returned the ship was gone. . . . Gone. . . . They did not know it had sunk into the sand. They only knew it was gone. They did not know what to do, but they knew they needed man. So they went inland, to the mountains, where they found ore, built others, started their long search, built ships. . . . They did not know how to find the planet from which they came. They only knew to search, they only knew they needed man. . . . That is why we have combed half a universe for him. Because loyalty, and the need of man, were built into the Original Five. They *had* to search, they *had* to find him. . . . But now . . . now . . . we know he is no more . . . we know he is gone, forever . . ."

Again that strange awed murmur came from the robot ranks, a murmur built of little whimpering sounds, tiny wailings. Now, even in the moment when they realized their destiny, their last hope died. The Five had never explained the reason for their quest—perhaps had never clearly known it themselves. Now, when the robot race learned what had driven them, they learned also that their search was fruitless. A whimpering, wailing murmur, as of dwarfs whispering disconsolately that their master is dead, ran through the robot ranks, ran through the crowding little metal men. . . .

Eight listened. By some unconscious process he had always vaguely known what Nine was explaining. He knew. And he rebelled. The grooves in his brain substance were so deeply rutted that he could not think otherwise.

Coming from some unknown void, his rebellious thoughts cohered. His cry was loud and somehow shocking in that hushed, sorrowing silence.

"Wait. . . . We looked, and there were no men in sight, so we said there are no men. . . . But wait. . . . He was in suspended animation when he blasted from his planet. And that means. . . . Wait. . . . I remember. . . ."

Like a falling star, again he dropped into that dark opening. Nine, with sudden life, dropped behind him, caught up as Eight went clattering down those stairs, caught up and almost drove ahead of him.

The ancient, atomic motor still kept its eternal vigil. Their lights tore great holes in the darkness. Nine was puzzled, not understanding, but driven, somehow, by fresh hope sired by Eight's actions.

Eight was examining the boxes which lined the room. He was up near the ceiling, his light flashing down, his fingers poking at the dust. Nine rose up beside him.

The box had a glass top. Eight scraped at the dust, his light boring through the glass top.

Nine's shout roared through the room.

He slept there still. A thin, barely visible haze from a glass tube running around the inside of the box played over him. His eyes were closed. There was no sign of breathing. He slept.

Eight was whispering. "See, there is some kind of a timing mechanism, broken now. That is why he never awakened."

This was man. Larger than a robot, taller, a strange brown color. This was man, this was the dreamer, helpless in the mists of sleep.

Eight stared. There was hunger in his eyes, and a deep-seated awe. For Eight had found his god!

They worked with the mechanism of the box, they solved the secret, they lifted the sleeper out, and between them, they carried him from the ship, outside, where there was sun and wind.

From the little metal men there came a shout that grew into a thundering roar. They brought water, they brought fruit from the trees, they brought fire, they watched.

And when the sleeper slowly stirred, to stare in strange comprehension at them, and when he drank the water they had brought, and gingerly tasted the fruit, they knew at last, that their search had not been hopeless.

Their ancient destiny fulfilled, their ancient loyalty unbroken. They had sought man, and they had found him, and he lived again. They brought the others from the ship, men, and women, gently laid them in the sun and wind.

Something that had started in slime, and looked forward to the end of time, took life again. . . .

* * * * *

NEXT MONTH . . .

"LIEDERMAN'S GENERATOR"

A Sequel to "The Man Who Looked Like Steinmetz"

By Robert Moore Williams

SEX IN SCIENCE FICTION

BY

CHARLES D. HORNIG

Editor of "Science Fiction" "Future Fiction"

Science-fiction: With sex, or without! That is the question! But what is the answer? I hope to prove that the best solution is: sex, with definite qualifications.

Sex is necessary in good science-fiction, much of it anyway, but it must be handled correctly. I know that lots of fans will jump on me for making this statement, but I think that is due to a misinterpretation of the word "sex" in connection with science-fiction.

By "sex" I mean genuine, realistic love interest—not the immoral, lustful phase that we find in the "sexy" magazines. After all, science-fiction must first of all be good *fiction*. Good fiction must be *true-to-life*. In order for a story to be true-to-life, it must take into account that people are human and fall in love, even though they may be great scientists.

But science-fiction stories should in no way be love stories. Many times it is necessary to have clinches in order to make the characters appear real, but there is no need to go further than the surface of their love-lives. The love (or "sex") interest in science-fiction stories should be wholesome and ideal—nothing lewd.

At this point, you may think that I am arguing for "love" interest and against "sex," but I think that the word "sex" is necessary, because the love interest that culminates in the clinches under controversy, is a mutual attraction between two people of opposite sexes, and does not mean love in general—love of science, of kindred souls, of ideals.

So I believe that sex has a place in science-fiction, as in any good fiction, but to moderation. It should always be subordinate to the fantasy angle of the story, and be used only for the improvement of characterization.

But now another problem comes up. If science-fiction fans are people, they must be interested in sex—so what harm is there in mixing the two, even overloading the sex angle? Well, it's true that only the very immature find no interest in sex, even the "healthy" kind, but I think it's a matter of *mixture*.

To draw a simile, let's take pickles and ice-cream. Lots of us are crazy over both—but not together. They just don't mix well. I think it's the same with sex (in this case, meaning enough sex to stimulate a *mood*, as in sexy literature) and science-fiction.

Good science-fiction stories tend to place the fan on a higher mental plane, a psychic condition that broadens his horizons and causes him to identify himself with the generalities of possibility—to lose his present identity in speculations of the future. There

is a very hackneyed phrase (which I must plead guilty of helping to perpetuate) about science-fiction taking one "out of the hum-drum work-a-day world." I think that phrase is so overworked because it is true. *Now*: the sex-mood does just the opposite. It is mostly animalistic. It eliminates the higher mental plane. It battles the escapist attitude of science-fiction, spoils the illusion of glorious psychic expansion, and, in fact, reduces the reader to a lustful, very down-to-earth personality.

Science-fiction, to be realistic, must take the fan far way in space and time, but sex need bring him only as far as the nearest female. I think the difference lies in *scope*, and therefore it is bad to have both *moods* in one story. I'm not contradicting myself, for I believe, as I said at first, that a little wholesome love interest belongs in a good story, but it should not create a sex-mood—for if it does, it counteracts the valuable psychological effects of the science-fiction theme.

To remain healthy, a person should not diet upon any one train of thought—no matter how commendable. A science-fiction fan is in a poor state if he is *always* cut off from reality, if he is *always* escaping into the world of possibility. Similarly, a person who thinks constantly in terms of sex is in a bad way. But every normal person must face reality, and sex plays an important part, because we are animals for all our lofty thoughts and meditations.

Sex and science-fiction!—we need them both: but not together!

Mr. Hornig will be back next month
with another interesting article.

Don't miss the World's Science
Fiction Convention in Chicago - 1940

"WATCH YOUR G'S"

(A SHORT ARTICLE ON SPACE ACCELERATIONS)

BY

RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Little though it may be known, one of the most frequent and serious errors committed by authors of both the past and present, in dealing with science fiction, is to accelerate a space-ship beyond all comprehensible reason.

Literally speaking, velocity never hurt anyone, and this would be true even in the scope of a speed exceeding that of light—or faster, if such a speed could in any conceivable manner be attained. Compare my opening chapter, "Faster Than Light," in the collaboration, "Cosmos," published by the Fantasy Fan a number of years ago. Here you will see what I mean.

But when we say, acceleration, we speak on quite a different matter. All of us are subject to the acceleration of gravity, known as "G", 32.16 feet per square second. When an elevator speeds up, we may even be subject to G and a half, or possibly even two G, illustrated and evidenced by our apparent, mysterious increase in weight, as would be shown were we standing at the time upon a spring scale.

In a recent article by an air-plane test pilot, the author stated that he frequently experienced 4 or 5 G momentarily, and that he believed that it would not be exceedingly harmful to sustain even 6 G, if not for too long a time, but that 9 G would most assuredly prove fatal.

With this information it is interesting to test the hypothetical accelerations achieved in the general

run of science fiction stories in which space ships are used in the plot construction. If the ship in question, (any one of hundreds available) starts from rest and attains a velocity of V feet per second, after T seconds, its average acceleration has been V/T . (Or, if the author says V feet per second after traveling S feet, the formula is $V^2/2S$.) In order to get the number of G's, divide by 32.16, and then add one. To convert miles per hour into feet per second, multiply by 22, and divide by 15.

To illustrate my point, that the accelerations inevitably used by the authors' are completely impossible, and incomprehensible, let us cite an example hypothetically:

Suppose the author says that his ship was going a thousand miles per hour—ten seconds after leaving the attraction of Earth. This would mean an acceleration of a little over 5 and $\frac{1}{2}$ G. (Meaning that a 160 pound man would weigh 880 pounds.) At most, the space traveler might possibly be able to stand this acceleration for a few seconds! Yet, this speed, above mentioned, is quite moderate to some of those recounted in most space traveling yarns! I remember distinctly having read one story in which the acceleration given the space-ship would have caused the man inside to weigh the unthinkable sum of some *five million tons!* . . . So I advise you science-fiction authors to "WATCH YOUR G'S" in the future!



HOPE'S END

HARRY WARNER, JR.

HARSH STALK THE GLOOMY SPECTRES WITH THEIR TRAINS
OF EARTH MISDEEDS THAT HOLD THEM TETHERED HERE—
WITHOUT THE STYGIAN BLACKNESS OF THIS SPHERE
ARE NOISOME SIGHTS: OLD TERROR-FILLED REFRAINS
REPEATED O'ER AND O'ER BY EIGHTEEN OLD
DETESTED ONES,—ARE SUNG WITH NO SURCEASE;
PLAY ON THEIR VIOLS AS IF STIRRED BY A BREEZE.
BUT SUDDENLY A NEWNESS SEEMS TO HOLD!
LIKE FIRE-STUFF IN VAIN THEY SEEK ESCAPE
OF SOL'S GREAT FORCE,—THE MOCKERS IN THEIR PLAY
VERMILLION SHADOWS CAST A LIGHT MORE GAY!
EACH PHANTOM STOPS HIS WILD CARESSING RAIL,
CERISE THE COLOR GROWS, A SUDDEN PALE—
RINGS OUT A BELL ATOP THE HIGHEST CAPE!—
A WAVE OF LAUGHTER, AWFUL SOON IS HEARD;
FROM EVERY SIDE THE JESTERS JOKE AND JEER—
THAT I AM DEAD—AND LILITH IS NOT HERE

THE SCIENCE FICTION SERVICE

PUBLISHER --- TO YOU

SPECIAL FOR MARCH

THEY FOUND ATLANTIS By DENNIS WHEATLEY

A \$2.00 EPIC OFFERED FOR 95c

This department is founded for the benefit of the reader. In this department, every issue, an unusual bargain will be offered to the fantasy follower, which he may secure for himself if he so desires. This special monthly number will be selected carefully from the thousands of items at our disposal, and will be presented to you at a cost both nominal and worthy. All the items offered at these special prices by the SERVICE are guaranteed to be brand new, taken from the shelves for the first time. The special for this month is indeed a wonderful bargain. **THEY FOUND ATLANTIS** was published in 1936 by the J. B. Lippincott Co., of London and Philadelphia. The book sells for \$2.00 at all leading dealers. It has a beautiful three color jacket, and two hand drawn end papers. The book itself contains over 325 pages.

Here is a slight preview of the story:

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The SCIENCE FICTION SERVICE department has at its disposal any item in existence pertaining to science fiction. If you have any special book, magazine, etc. that you wish to obtain, write us and we will get it for you. Address all communications to the SCIENCE FICTION SERVICE, c/o STARDUST, the magazine *UNIQUE*!

RETIREMENT

Continued from page 6

the Prophet had time to speak, the question answered itself. A door at the end burst open, and in swarmed a mob of obsolete deities armed with baseball bats. In their lead was Thor, swinging the biggest bat of all. (His famous hammer had been taken away from him and locked up some centuries before, because of the damage he did with it by showing off, e.g. as to how big a pillar he could shatter with one blow.) Behind Thor came Lir and Khepera and Marduk and Quetzalcoatl and Ares and Callo and Kaumpuli and Njorth and Angus Og and Anu and Dionisyus and Lubare and Dangu and Forseti and Lun and Horus and Enlil and Mukasa and Katonda and Vitharr and Osiris and Kibuka and Kitaka and Frey and Hephæstus and Gunnodoyah and Wamala and Agreskui and scores of other retired gods.

"There they are!" roared Thor, pointing. "Get 'em!"

The Registrar wasted no time asking more questions; he swarmed up on Al-Boraq, and the beast raced out the main entrance, scattering new arrivals right and left.

"What—what's it all about?" the Registrar puffed finally.

Mohammed took his time about answering. "It's my fault," he admitted finally. "I ought to have remembered that Mani was a syncretist."

"Syncretist? What's that got to do with this?"

Mohammed looked back over his shoulder. "I guess they've stopped chasing us now.

"You remember when Mani said he was going to

get hold of the djinn? Well, he got hold of him all right, and had him work some magic on a Babylonian baby so that the kid would start a new religion when he grew up.

"But Mani was a syncretist, of course, which meant that he'd try to please everybody by including all their divinities in his pantheon. The new religion was a howling success. But as it was built according to Mani's ideas, it was the grandest syncretism the world ever saw. It included *everybody*, even poor old Moloch. The result is that all these retired gods suddenly find that they've acquired a few million worshippers apiece, and have to go back to work! And they don't like the idea. And they blame us for it, quite rightly.

"I think we'd better stay away for a little while until they calm down. Old Charon is having to get his boat fixed up for running people across the Styx—a boat that hasn't been used for around a thousand years. He says his only consolation is that maybe he can wangle an outboard motor for it, so he won't have to row any more, the way he used to."

Mohammed looked back at his companion. "Don't look so glum, Pete. Even if we don't get our retirement as a result of my little scheme, we have one thing to be thankful for. There won't be any more of these retired gods loafing around and kibitzing while we're hard at work. In fact, it'll make our jobs a lot easier to put up with, knowing that all those birds are being kept busy too. Misery loves company, you know!"



EYE TO EYE

Continued from page 4

I believe that you will agree that STARDUST presents the cream of the crop in literary work, after you have perused the entire issue. Your comments are desired, pro and con. Spare neither the flowers nor the lash . . . I want them both. Now for a surprise!

Next month I have the extreme pleasure to present the long awaited sequel to THE MAN WHO LOOKED LIKE STEINMETZ, by Robert Moore Williams! This novelette, LIEDERMAN'S INVENTION, will leave its impression upon the pages of history as did its predecessor. You will acclaim it! Make sure your copy is reserved beforehand, as only a limited supply will be available. Other famous names to watch for in the future are: JACK WILLIAMSON! WILLY LEY! AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG! ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS! L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP! CHARLES D. HORNIG! RAYMOND A. PALMER! FORREST J. ACKERMAN! etc., etc. The best of authorship write for STARDUST!

I want you to take special note of the SCIENCE FICTION SERVICE in this issue. This department will be a regular feature each month. In it, we will offer rare books, current and past, for sale at unheard of bargains. If you are a collector, or are interested in getting the "cream of the crop" in fantasy fiction, then you must read this department with interest. Also, beginning with this issue, each subscription of \$1.00 for seven issues of STARDUST, will be sent a choice of any of the novels listed on the SCIENCE FICTION SERVICE page. There are limited supplies of these famous stories.

Whether STARDUST shall have a Reader's Page in the future is up to you. Your comments will decide that.

Well, 'tis time to close shop for this issue. I'll be back next time though with more scribbings from my Editorial pen. Let me remind you that the success of STARDUST depends entirely upon you. So stand by me, shoulder to shoulder, and I will see you in this column every month, EYE TO EYE! . . .

Coming ! ! ! Poisoned Soil . . . by Willy Ley

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