

Adventures in Space and The World of Tomorrow

THRILLS

INCORPORATED



ROGUE ROBOT
A FUTURISTIC NOVEL
also
THROUGH VENUSIAN MISTS
and others...

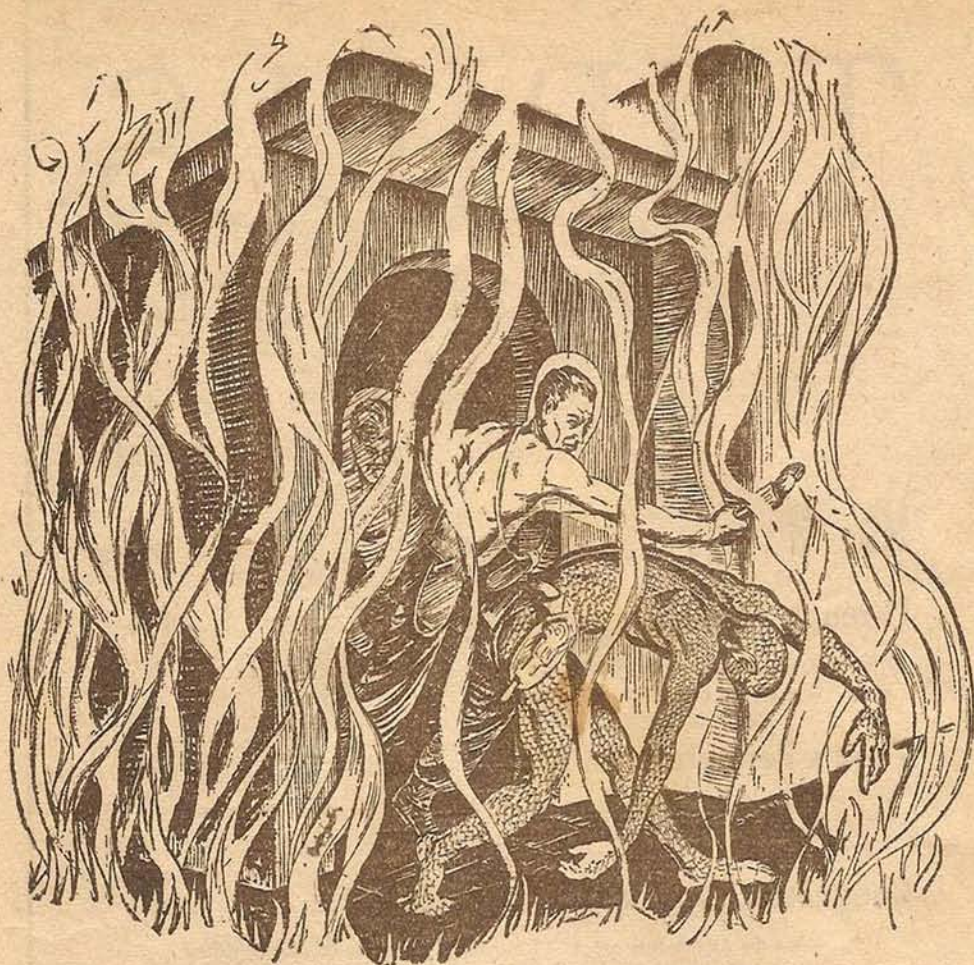
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T.BRAND

Missing Page: Inside Front Cover

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Through Venusian

JEFFREY LUDD rose from his chair in the air-conditioned Welfare Office in Venburg, the rudimentary, and only, city on Venus. His heavy jowled face wore an expression of sullen rage as he stared down at Welfare Officer Streeter, lean, sun-dried, thin-lipped.

"You're a fool, Streeter," snarled the big man. "You're stuck on this sweltering spot, letting yourself get burned out, dried up—what for? A lousy pension at the end of your term. I'm offering you a chance to feather your nest while you're here. And you haven't got to do a thing for me—just turn a blind eye, that's all."

"Get out, Ludd," said Streeter quietly.

"It takes a lot to rouse me to physical action in this heat, but you're getting close to it. On your way. I'm expecting my new assistant on the next spaceliner, and I don't want him to get a wrong impression of me. He might judge a man by his acquaintances."

Ludd's amber eyes gleamed balefully. He seemed on the verge of hurling his massive bulk at the coldly smiling man in the chair, but instead he wheeled about and strode from the room. A blast of hot humid air rolled in from outside as the door slid open, then it closed automatically, and again kept at bay the sodden waves of Venusian heat.

Streeter helped himself to an ice-cold drink, glanced at his watch, then picked up the electrooculars, switched them on, and peered through them and focussed them through the clear plastic window. The per-

IN the middle of the battle to make Earth a paradise two adventurers found it was all they could do to keep the world from starving . . .

petual mist over the Venusian landscape was pierced by the electroculars; he saw the dull gleam of metal in the air as the spaceliner from Earth dipped, flattened out, and came to smooth rest at the landing platforms.

The side airlock in the craft opened and the passengers emerged, most of them known to Streeter—staff of Ludd's Plantation, a couple of members of the Venusian Provincial Council, old Dr. Creel, and a young stranger.

"My new assistant," murmured Streeter. He grinned slightly, noting the gestures and movements, indicative of lively, excited interest. Then the grin changed to a frown as Ludd came into focus, strode up to the young man and engaged him in smiling conversation for a few minutes.

Streeter put down the electroculars and left the office, walking over the soggy ground and through the vicious heat mists which limited visibility to less than twenty yards. Ludd had gone by the time he reached the new arrival.

"You're Lionel Bright?" said Streeter, and introduced himself.

"That's right." Young Bright puffed

"ADVENTURE!" Streeter fastened on to the word. "Why, this is just a small-time town with the climate of ten African jungles rolled into one. Nothing happens here, except an occasional breach in the regulations in the employment conditions of the Venusians. By the way," he said, frowning. "That fellow Ludd who spoke to you at the landing platform; he's the cause of most of our trouble here. He's not satisfied with grabbing the best land around Venburg and using the Venusians to work it for him; he's trying to get around the conditions awarded to the natives. Our job — yours and mine — is to see that he doesn't get around them. He's making a fortune here, but he isn't making it quick enough to suit him. As you know, the Atomic War on Earth wiped out vast areas of food-producing lands, rendered them sterile, and now we rely to a great extent on the Green Planet here for the essential chlorophyll which is infused into our artificial food tablets."

"Yes, of course," said Bright. "If it hadn't been for that requirement I doubt whether we'd have achieved space travel as quickly as we did."

"When a man's hungry he'll do anything

Mists . . . by Ace Carter

slightly. "Golly! This heat—it's terrific. Is it always as bad as this?"

"To-day's about normal," replied Streeter, taking the young man's bag and leading the way to the Welfare Building. "Sometimes we get really hot days. Still," he added, as he slid open the door, "there's no need to get out too much. The whole place here, office below and quarters above, are sealed. And when you do go out you'll stick to wearing your heat-resistant suit and helmet." He eyed the young man curiously. "What made you apply for this job?"

"A change—adventure," replied Bright with a little laugh. "I've never been off the Earth before, and I thought this would be a whole lot better than sitting in an office feeding figures into an electronic calculator."

for a feed," commented Streeter. "And we can't have Atomic Wars and food—not on the same planet." He took up the electroculars and handed them to the young man. "Take a look through that window and you'll see Ludd's processing plant where the chlorophyll is extracted from the leaves harvested by the Venusians."

"It's a huge place," remarked Bright, after looking through the electroculars. "It must have cost him a fortune."

"And he's trying to get back a bigger fortune in return," said Streeter grimly. "There's been rumors that an artificial substitute for chlorophyll is being sought. If that happens, Ludd's schemes will crash badly. That's why he's so keen to grab what

he can, and to work the simple Venusians to death if necessary."

"That place over in that direction," said Bright, swinging the electroculars. "What is it? There's a wall around the grounds, and a sort of tower above the main building..."

"Dr. Creel's place," said Streeter. "He was supposed to be working on the artificial chlorophyll, but no one knows much about him. He's a sort of mystery man here. Supposed to have come out from Earth to get away from it all, and do some experimenting in peace. He was on your liner, by the way."

"I know, but he didn't speak to a soul. Sat poring over papers and books... Gosh!" The young man's voice rose. "There's a man in that little tower room. He's looking down through the metal grille."

"Old Doc. Creel looking over his estate," smiled Streeter.

"No, it isn't the Doctor," said Bright. "I know what he looks like."

"An assistant then," yawned Streeter. "Come and have a drink."

"Thanks. Just a moment... He's gone now, gone from the window, anyway. It looked sort of startling to see a human face up in that little tower." Lionel Bright took his drink, then he was up again exploring with the electroculars. "He's there again," he announced. "I wonder..."

"Don't," said Streeter. "Have another drink."

He looks worried, harassed," said Bright, still looking. "You know, it—it almost seems as though he's locked in up there, a prisoner."

Streeter laughed. "Keep going," he said. "An imagination like yours should take you to all sorts of interesting situations."

"Well, take a look for yourself," said Bright, reddening. "See what you think."

STREETER took the electroculars and focused them. The man's face was close, a stranger to him. Fellow about forty, square faced, suggesting a stocky body. He was looking through the grilled window, his brows contracted. He moved away for a moment, then came back, apparently he was prowling around the confined space of that

little tower room. Streeter lowered the electroculars slightly, taking in the high walls surrounding Dr. Creel's property. He started slightly. A Venusian was walking up and down on great splayed feet outside the western wall, like a sentry. Queer! Queerer still was the sight of another Venusian who suddenly appeared at the angle of the south and west wall. The two natives stood together, their wide lipless mouths moving in conversation, then they separated and resumed their pacing.

"Something is going on there, Bright," remarked Streeter slowly. "Whether that chap is a prisoner or not I can't say, but there's a guard been placed outside the walls."

"Isn't it our job to investigate?" asked Bright eagerly.

"Our job," replied Streeter, "is to watch the Venusians, to see that they aren't overworked or their social customs interfered with. The humans on this planet are protected by the Security Council Officers. But," he went on, seeing the younger man's look of disappointment, "there's nothing to stop us from taking a walk as far as Dr. Creel's place, if you feel like it."

"Do!"

"All right. Get into that heat-suit first, otherwise you'll think you've been wading through hot water after you've walked a few hundred yards." Streeter frowned thoughtfully. "Put your Welfare Officer's badge on. The Venusians have a great respect for officials. And I think I'll take my raygun." He pondered a moment. "Yes, and a length of cord won't go amiss. We may manage to get over that wall, and cord is always useful in a climb."

"You intend to climb up to that—" began Bright, excitedly.

"We'll see," interrupted Streeter. "May not be anything in it, but no one ever fell down through being prepared. Ready now?"

The two men, covered by the heat-resistant material, left the building and walked over the warm oozing ground. Ahead, seen dimly through the mist, was one of the many fertile valleys of Ludd's plantations, where a team of Venusians, their scaly arms working rapidly, were picking the vivid green crop. Streeter led the way, skirting the valley, picking his path over the sodden

ground. The softness gave way to hot black rocks as they drew nearer to their destination, and then, with startling suddenness the high stone wall loomed up through the shifting fog.

"Someone coming," muttered Bright.

"Leave him to me," counselled Streeter, as a bulky figure approached. The Venusian guard stopped abruptly, one long arm slipping around behind his back and returning with a raygun gripped in the creature's two fingers. The black lidless eyes under the flat green reptilian head were menacing, but Streeter appeared undisturbed. "Greetings," he said in the dialect.

THE Venusian responded, and as his eyes fell on the Welfare Officer's badge he slipped the raygun back into its holster. For a few moments Streeter engaged the Venusian in conversation, then the latter, his scaly face creased in a smile, turned and resumed his pacing.

"What did he say?" asked Bright curiously.

"All he knows is that he's to keep watch on the wall, and to use his raygun if necessary," said Streeter.

"But he isn't suspicious about us—Welfare Officers. The poor devils trust us implicitly; they associate this badge I'm wearing, with their rights and privileges and conditions . . . Come along this way. He won't be back for a few minutes. I'll get on your shoulders and when I reach the other side I'll throw the cord back over the wall and you can climb over after me. I'm mighty curious now about our mysterious Dr. Creel."

"Yes, he struck me as a weird sort of chap when I saw him on the spaceliner," said Bright. "Didn't speak to a soul, glared around suspiciously all the time he wasn't buried in his papers . . . You're going to get over here?"

Streeter had stopped, looked around quickly, and nodded. Bright bent down and then straightened up slowly with the other man on his shoulders. A few moments later he was over the wall and had sent the cord snaking back.

"Now we are in it," said Streeter, when Bright joined him. "We're trespassing, and if our friend, Dr. Creel, has any lethal de-

signs he's more or less within his rights to blast us with a raygun. I only hope we're not being watched through electroculars."

THEY walked towards the house, pausing every now and again to peer through the mist. They stepped from the dark blue-green lawn on to a vitrified surface from which rose the wall of the house. Keeping close to the wall, and walking softly, they reached the tower, which apparently was a stair-well from the lower to the upper floor and extending above the house to form the little room above.

The metal grille gleamed faintly, but there was no one now at the window.

"Funny if that chap was just taking a look-see over the grounds from above, and is now back downstairs chatting with the Doc," murmured Streeter. "Ouch! What's up?"

"He's there," said Bright, who had clutched at the other's arm. "I just saw his face for an instant."

"Well, that's something," admitted Streeter. "Come on, around this way. There's a lower roof to the left, over the porch. We can climb on to that, and then on to the higher roof, and then we should be able to work around the tower."

Half-a-dozen steps along the path Streeter stopped suddenly. "Back against the wall," he whispered. "Someone coming—a Venusian by the sound of it."

A Venusian it was. The heavy thudding steps of the flat feet told them the identity of the approaching figure before it appeared, a dark shadow in the enveloping mist.

There was no possible chance of escaping detection. The Venusian must pass within a foot of them if he kept to the vitrified path around the house. The flopping footsteps came closer. Streeter tensed himself, and even as the Venusian stopped, and reached behind for his raygun, Streeter had leapt forward and the butt of his own gun caught the creature behind the neck. He sank limply to the ground.

"I DIDN'T bargain for a patrol inside the wall," he muttered. "Should have, I suppose, but I couldn't see this low down with the electroculars. Come on. We'll have to move quickly now. There may be others . . ."

Using Bright as a ladder Streeter clambered on to the low roof, after which, with the aid of the cord he helped his assistant up after him. They reached the higher roof and warily made their way to the tower, which they approached from the rear.

He worked his way around to the front of the tower until he was at the window, holding to the metal grille.

"Hullo," he called softly.

A smothered exclamation came from inside, and a white startled face appeared at the window.

"It's all right," said Streeter reassuringly. "We've come to help you. I take it you're a prisoner up here?"

"Yes," gasped the other. "But how—"

"We'll go into that later. The grounds are surrounded by Venusian guards, and there are others just below. I'm a Welfare Officer, by the way. Now, quickly, what's it all about? For a start, you're being detained here illegally?"

"Yes, yes, by that villain, Dr. Creel. He's a —"

"All right! Call him all the names you like, when you get out. This is a job for the Security Officers."

"No—not yet," said the man in frightened tones. "If Creel has warning of a raid he'll finish me off. He's desperate. And his guards and spies would warn him."

"H'm." Streeter pondered. It would be a risk anyway to try to get out of the grounds. "Just stand aside," he said at length. "I've got a raygun here. I'll bust this grille with it."

HE withdrew the gun, and a softly hissing ray sprang from its muzzle and played on the metal grille. The bars turned blue, but held. "Might have guessed," he muttered. "They've been impregnated against ordinary ray-frequencies."

"What about the roof?" It was young Bright's voice.

"An idea," admitted Streeter. He hoisted himself up with the aid of the bars, and played the gun on the reinforced plastic roof. "That's better!"

In less than five minutes he had lowered himself through the hole in the roof and was in the dim hot little room, where he was shortly joined by his assistant.

"How did you manage to find me?" was

the prisoner's first breathless question.

"My young assistant, just up from Earth, happened to spot you through the electrooculars from our office. It's on rising ground, and the angle is just right for a view of this place. We also saw the Venusian guard, and that naturally made us suspicious. So," said Streeter simply, "we called."

"Thank goodness!" said the man fervently.

"Why are you being kept here?" asked Streeter.

The other hesitated so long that Streeter repeated the question. "I—I suppose I can trust you," said the man. "Briefly, my imprisonment here has to do with—with synthetic chlorophyll."

"Ha! Dr. Creel's rumoured to be working on that."

"No—I have been working on it. Dr. Creel and his partner Ludd—"

"Partner — Ludd!" repeated Streeter in astonishment.

"Yes, they're partners in the plantations here, but they've kept the partnership secret. I have the formula for synthetic chlorophyll, and Dr. Creel wants it. He's offered me a big sum for all rights to it, so that he can either use it to recoup Ludd and himself from any losses in their plantations, or else to suppress the formula altogether."

"I see. Well, now it's our move."

"What are you going to do?"

"Burn the lock off the door for a start," replied Streeter. "Then downstairs, and get the Security Office on the visiphone. If Creel gets in the way, that's going to be unfortunate—for him!"

But Streeter had barely time to level the muzzle of the raygun before he was shocked by a wild yell from Bright, followed by a gasping curse from the other man. Streeter spun round. In the far corner of the little room, Bright was reeling back, his hand clutching the wrist of the prisoner who was holding a raygun.

"What the devil—"

"Grab the gun, Streeter," yelled Bright. "Don't let him point it at you."

"Drop it!" snapped Streeter, pointing his own gun at the man's hand. "Drop it, I say, or I'll blast your hand off!"

The man's struggles ceased. His eyes

glared hate, but he opened his fingers and the raygun dropped to the floor, where it was pounced on by young Bright.

At the same instant the door was flung open, and an elderly dark-faced man stood in the opening, holding a raygun before him.

"DON'T move, any of you," he snapped. "We're armed too, Dr. Creel," said Streeter coolly. "If you use that gun on one of us, the other will blast you where you stand. I'd say it was a stalemate."

The doctor lowered his gun. "How did you get in?" he demanded. He looked past Streeter at the other man. "You — Knowles!"

"Just what is this?" said Streeter. "Were you keeping him prisoner or not?"

"I!" The Doctor staggered. "Why, of course not. This is the first intimation I had that he was here. I've had guards placed around the house to keep him, and any other of Ludd's criminal associates, out!"

"And you're not Ludd's partner in the plantations?"

"Are you mad?" snapped the Doctor. "Ludd's been trying to bribe me to keep off my researches in synthetic chlorophyll. Naturally, I refused to listen to him."

"I'm beginning to see," said Streeter softly. "Bribing is a habit with Ludd. He tried to bribe me to turn a blind eye to any breaches in the regulations of the Venusians' working conditions." He turned to Knowles. "And where do you come in? I don't want any more lies, by the way."

"Oh, you'll get the truth now," said Knowles dejectedly. "I was to conceal myself here while Dr. Creel was away. He's been putting a guard around his house while he was here, so Ludd suggested I get in while Creel was paying a visit to Earth, and hide and live on synthetic tablets for a few days, until he returned. He put his guard back on this morning, but of course I was already here. I was going to get down to-night and try to force Dr. Creel to drive over to Ludd in his aircar—which he would have done because my raypistol would have been in his back all the time."

"You — you scoundrel!" burst out the Doctor.

"Go on," commented Streeter.

"Ludd was going to force a deal with Dr. Creel. If the Doctor refused—" Knowles shrugged.

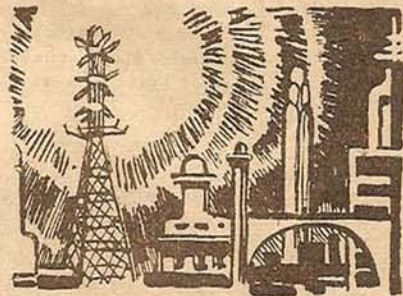
"I TAKE it you're prepared to give that as evidence?" said Streeter.

"Yes," said the other man eagerly. "I'm not taking it all. Ludd's the boss, and he's going to get his share."

"You'll get yours, too," Streeter reminded him sharply. "I'd hate to think of what would have happened if one of us had come here alone. Or if I hadn't had a raygun."

The other was silent.

"He intended shooting us down as it



was," went on Streeter grimly, turning to the Doctor. "But he wanted to get us inside and off our guard, and dispose of us quietly."

"And you thought I was keeping him prisoner," said the Doctor. "Tell me, how did you discover his presence here?"

"I didn't. It was my young assistant here, who had an enthusiastic fancy for peering through the mists of Venus." Streeter eyed his assistant. "By the way, why did you suspect he wasn't a prisoner, Bright? I take it you knew when you gasped and I accused you of nerves."

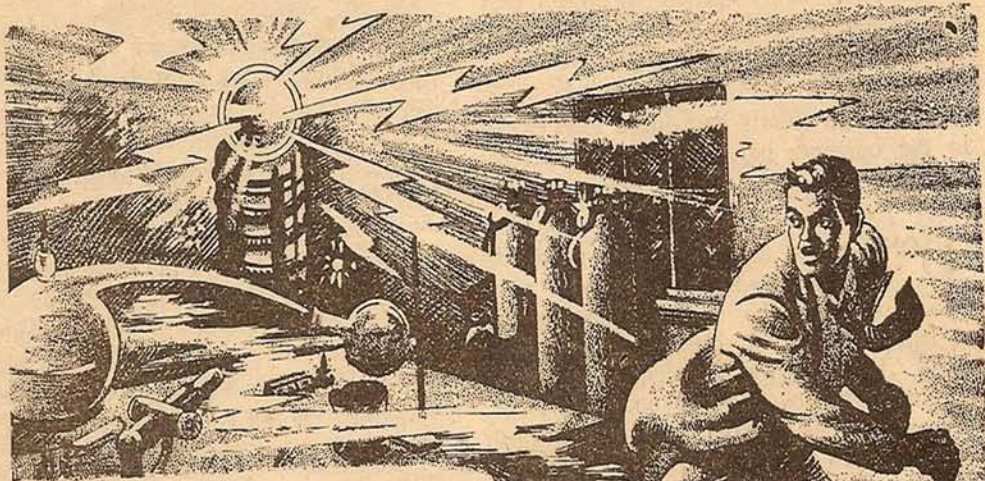
"He told us he was locked in the room," said young Bright, grinning. "Yet, when I leaned against him as you were operating on the lock—which of course wasn't locked—I felt the outline of a raygun in his hip pocket. I knew then that he couldn't be a prisoner when he had the means of blasting his way out. I was ready for him then. As soon as he made a move I pounced on him."

"I said you had nerves," remarked Streeter dryly. "I'll amend that to nerve. And thanks, Bright."



Astonishing
Science
Short, by Ron Conway

Time's



He wheeled round and raced for the door . . . there was a sudden flashing and hissing of light and a circular blue beam of light shot out through the eye-like window!!

TO add three to two gives five and when a further three be suddenly added the sum is then eight; but these are mathematical problems and almost certainly seem of no account to the reader at the moment and most certainly did not to John Cox on a certain night in the spring of the year. It was later that his brain began to be plagued with such simple scientific problems.

BUT to return. June the tenth. A spring night and a time when men's hearts are said to turn to a problem of another sort. A problem that many, including John Cox, later wish they had not contemplated with the gravity they gave to it on that fateful night.

John was a tall young fellow, broad of brow and thoughtful of face. Not the sort one would think who could contemplate any problem lightly. And definitely not the sort who would throw caution to the four winds with the abandon we will note when we look in on a scene on the night of June 10.

On the edge of the town, close by the Radiation Research Laboratories stands a quiet old house that had been in the Cox family since before the first Atomic War.

It was of stone and plastic in the best style of its period with a set of steps leading up from a garden path to the front porch. Below, looking like an evil eye, the round window of the cellar blinked out toward the front gate.

By this gate stood two people in what particular positions it will be needless to state in view of the conversation that followed.

"I have given our relationship every possible consideration," John Cox was saying, with a gravity of tone which he thought well fitted the seriousness of the situation. "I have reached the conclusion . . ."

"Oh, John!" broke in a soft feminine voice with all the allure of young love swelling through those two simple words.

Permutation . . .

"Don't say any more just now. Look at the moon! I always feel so romantic on such a night."

"I must say this, May," John said with obvious determination.

"Oh! Very well. If you must," she surrendered, a nervous anxiousness appearing on her face.

"Thank you," he replied politely. "I find you most co-operative. Now, as I was saying . . . Oh darn! I've forgotten. What I mean is . . . May! Will you marry me? Now? To-night? I have the license. Do say yes. It's so dreadfully lonely in this house at nights. I'm the last of the Coxes and I'm sure we're right for each other. I've thought it all out. I . . ."

May was laughing as she stopped all those words with a truly feminine answer. She was laughing because he had taken so long to make up his mind that she was beginning to believe that he never would.

Before he could tell her all the things he had thought of she had him in the driver's seat of his new 804 rocket car. An hour and they were waking the Justice who lived just across the border. Sleepily he came out, opened the door, beamed when John slipped a handsome fee into his hand and led them inside.

His scrutiny of the marriage license was brief, and then he laboriously noted down the particulars in his register.

"John Barton Cox . . . May Enid Doyle . . . Dated this 10th day of June. All right now, folks. Just step in here and we'll see you accommodated. Next to no time and you'll be married."

HOW right he was. Ten minutes later the couple came out Mr. and Mrs. John Cox. John still hadn't had time to say most of the things he had in mind to say but he didn't seem to care anymore as he drove his 804 back to the quiet house on the edge of town. Once the door closed behind them their lives are their own for a space of three years.

It would be pointless to guess at what went on in the Cox household but it is certain enough that others considered them a happy couple. At the laboratories John's special piece of research pushed ahead in a

way that satisfied his superiors and his advances in salary were correspondingly good.

But we look in again on the night of June 10 just three years later. The second bedroom is a scene of hustle and activity as John paces up and down anxiously while May lies serenely in the bed.

"Where's Doc. Garner? What's keeping him?" he kept asking in nervous jerky tones. "I graphed a message out for him half an hour ago.

"Do sit down, John," May pleaded quietly. "Do sit down! I'll be all right. After all . . . well! This has been happening to females ever since evolution decided on this particular mechanism of reproduction."

The door-bell tingled tunefully and John darted forward, and in a moment had the door jerked open to admit the bustling, fat little form of Doc. Garner who went straight into the second bedroom and dumped his black bag and wheeled on the anxious John.

"Get out of here!" he commanded.

"But what . . ." John said helplessly.

"Get out!" Doc snapped. "Go down into that crazy lab of yours in the cellar and fool around till we're through here. I've a nurse coming along in a few minutes. Stay down there till I come."

With a hopeless look toward his wife John Cox turned and went down the steps into his cellar laboratory. The door shut soundlessly behind him and he sat down on a stool at his bench and tried to pretend some interest in the complicated electronic circuit he had built around the bench and towering up toward the ceiling. Lying open on the bench was a book titled "Some Preliminary Researches into the Problem of Time Travel."

After some minutes of quiet straining of his ears to try and hear what was going on up above he shrugged his shoulders and wiped his glasses nervously before turning on the apparatus. The giant electronic tubes hummed into life and a faint blue light suffused the whole lab.

For close to an hour he checked, made alterations, slight adjustments, increased and decreased power and noted his results but he was nervous, careless. Most of his at-

tention was directed towards the stairs leading down to the lab. door.

Suddenly, he heard the Doc. coming and he wheeled round and raced for the door. His foot caught on a trailing lead and he fell. There was a sudden flashing and hissing of light and a circular blue beam of light was shot out through the eye-like window toward the front gate. Then, with a sudden flashing splash of light the apparatus fused and the room was thrown into darkness.

"It's a boy!" Doc told him as John Cox rushed up the stairs past the practitioner to see his wife.



AND at the gate in front of the house stood two people in what particular positions it will be needless to state in view of the conversation that followed.

"I have given our relationship every possible consideration," the tall young fellow was saying, a gravity to his tone which made it obvious that he believed these momentous words had never been spoken before. "I have reached the conclusion . . ."

"Oh, John!" broke in a soft feminine voice with all the allure of young love swelling through those two simple words. "Don't say any more just now. Look at the moon! I always feel so romantic on such a night."

He was broad of brow and thoughtful of face and made a noise in his throat that might have signified anything. The small, pretty girl took a natural enough interpretation of it and slipped an arm around John's waist and smiled up into his face as she lay her head against his shoulder.

He took the girl in his arms and was about to kiss her when Doc. Garner came bustling down the path. Just newly out of the light from within, and being a little shortsighted, he gaped for a moment, excused himself and went past.

"Say!" the young fellow began. "What are you doing in my house?"

"Don't worry him, Dear," the girl pleaded.

So the Doc. went and the young fellow acted with precision and alacrity. Then he cleared his throat again. But perhaps we should leave them there to their privacy.

A FEW moments later the girl helped John behind the wheel of the rocket car standing at the kerb and she smiled happily.

"Just like you to surprise me like this. You've sold the 804 and bought this new model," she laughed.

"Uh yes! Yes!" stammered John, too surprised to say anything more as he tried the controls on this rocket car which he had never seen before. But with a desperate grin he set it in motion and they moved off together away from the house.

Less than an hour and they were waking the Justice who lived just across the border. Sleepily he came out, opened the door, beamed when John slipped a handsome fee into his hand and led them inside. Then the bald, amiable Justice gave them a toothy grin and scatched at his pate in consternation.

"Say!" he asked worriedly. "Haven't I seen you two before? Got a good memory for faces I have."

"I'm afraid not." John told him precisely. "You see I'm the last of the Coxes." What with all the radiation deaths these days it wasn't hard to be the last of a line. He took the marriage license and read it laboriously, noting the particulars in his Register.

"John Barton Cox . . . May Enid Doyle . . . Dated this 10th day of June. Say! This here is dated just three years ago. Took your time, didn't you, mister?"

"Three years . . ."

"Why, John!" laughed the girl, blushing. "And you've kept me waiting all this time."

John made some rapid decisions. He decided that he'd best keep quiet about the mistaken date on the license. It seemed to please May the way things were. But the Justice, still scratching at his head and muttering, finally decided.

"Just step in here and we'll see you accommodated. All right now, folks. Next to no time and you'll be married."

Ten minutes and Mr. and Mrs. John Cox stepped through the door and headed toward the waiting rocket car. John headed his car back to that house on the edge of town—his house. The house that had been in his family since before the first Atomic War. And he, the last of the

Coxes, proudly carried his young bride across the threshold. Into the privacy he might have wished.

"Oh, John!" May cried happily as he sat her down. "You've hired servants for me. I just knew you would. Listen to their baby crying. I'm sure it's such a Darling. What a surprise."

"But, May . . ." John tried to say something.

But May, being a woman, didn't really think he could have anything important to say if it had to be said in that tone of voice. So she interrupted him with a dutiful kiss and they were embracing in the hallway when a white-gowned nurse hurried from the second bedroom and stopped dead in her tracks.

"Well!" she said, her tone expressing the whole pent up force of her indignation. "Mr. Cox! Well I never! And with your poor wife having just gone through agonies for you. A son! A son to a man like you."

BUT her indignation was too great to allow her more words and she stalked off in the general direction of the kitchen. May looked at John for a long moment and then laughed at his perplexed face.

"She doesn't seem to approve of you leaving me stand here," she giggled. "Perhaps we should . . ."

She paused in a modest fashion, and John looked toward the main bedroom and grinned weakly.

"No!" he said anxiously. "Don't suppose it is very right of me. You run along in. Want a word with . . . with that woman before I go to bed."

"Silly!" the girl laughed. "Let it wait till morning."

She took his arm and together they went into the main bedroom and the door closed behind them. In a moment the girl gave a squeal of delight as she opened a drawer of her dressing table and saw the neatly arrayed clothing.

"Why, John!" she cried happily, rushing to him. "You've thought of everything. However did you manage to buy them?"

"I . . . well!" he stammered in amazement.

The whole situation was beyond him. He couldn't understand. He made a mental note to call and see Doc. Garner and have a check. Perhaps he'd been pushing himself a bit, too hard lately.

AND in the hall John Cox was climbing the stairs with a disgusted expression on his face. All that work and equipment ruined just because he didn't watch where he was going. Still, he thought, it could have had serious repercussions. Those circuits were tricky. In the hall he met the nurse hurrying out from the kitchen and she stopped and stared at him with an accusing expression to her face.

"If it weren't for your wife and baby," she began, "I'd leave this house this very minute. The idea. Your wife giving birth to your son in the second bedroom and you making love to another woman in the hall. The idea!"

"But . . . but . . . surely . . ." was all the consternated John Cox could gulp out before the nurse had stalked into the second bedroom to attend to the wants of the newly arrived baby.

He followed the nurse into the room and made pleading gestures at her but she ordered him out as she made the sleeping woman and the baby comfortable. Then she settled herself down in a chair to keep watch through the night. John Cox shrugged his shoulders and turned and left the room. He made a mental note to see Doc. Garner and get a new nurse. This one was most certainly mad—not someone he wanted to trust his son with.

Deciding that he couldn't sleep he went back down to the cellar to clean up and leave things tidy so that he could set up some new experiments when he'd decided on a possible field of enquiry. One thing he was sure of. He was finished with Time Travel. That fellow Korenz was obviously looking for the impossible when he suggested that a way may be found to travel through time.

Next morning he climbed the steps wearily into the hall to shower before hurrying off to the lab. As he approached the door of the bathroom it opened and May Cox stepped through. He stopped, stood there and stared in horror. He couldn't understand it. Last night . . .

and now there she was, up and about and looking just as pretty as that first morning of their honeymoon. Suddenly his surprise vanished and sheer anxiety took its place.

He rushed to her side and threw an arm around her.

"Darling!" he said. "Are you all right? You shouldn't be up and about. Not . . . not after last night."

"But, John!" the girl said in surprise. "Why ever not?"

"Well! Because you shouldn't. It isn't every day a woman has her first . . .

"Goodness, Mrs. Cox," cried the nurse as she rushed in upon them from the kitchen. "What are you doing out of bed?"

"But . . ." began the girl in startled wonderment.

"Leave her to me. Completely to me," commanded the nurse as she took Mrs. Cox from the man. "You get about your business."

Unhappily John headed for the bathroom. The door closed behind him. As it did so there came a sound of boiling milk from the kitchen and the nurse gave a shriek and ran.

"My goodness!" she cried. "The milk. You stay right there."

Chuckling, May Cox went back to the main bedroom and slipped back into bed with a greater feeling of importance than she had ever known in her life before. When, a moment later, John Cox came into the room with a towel around him she giggled and hid her head beneath the bed-clothes.

BUT though she waited for several minutes she didn't find her husband coming to her side. And when at last she peeped from the bed she was just in time to see his figure disappear out the door into the hall.

"Well!" she said. "I like that. All that fuss and then he doesn't say a word."

But before she could be really annoyed her husband came through the other door carrying a small tray and coffee things.

"Hah!" he said inanely. "You're awake! I've made coffee on the small stove upstairs.

That enormous kitchen out back scares me. Got to look after you, you know."

"But . . ." May began, but then changed her mind and decided to humor him. He seemed upset this morning. Perhaps he was worried about taking time off from the lab? Something must be wrong to explain his strange behaviour.

Why did he keep changing his clothes? First—that lab outfit. Then—well then a towel. Now he looked as if he had just climbed out of bed and slipped into a dressing gown. But May wasn't the only worried one. John was trying to work out why his wife had been able to anticipate his proposal the previous night. She must have been very sure because she had gone to the extent of hiring a servant as a surprise for him. But before coffee was over they were both laughing and happy.

Then, perhaps a half hour later they strolled arm in arm out the door and went up the stairs. John was proud of the house and was showing his bride over, room by room. When they came back to the foot of the stairs they came up against the nurse who stopped and gaped at them.

"Up and down stairs of all things," she snapped angrily. "The morning after . . . and you take her up and down stairs."

"My wife is feeling perfectly well." John replied tartly, "and I'll thank you to be civil."

"Well!" the woman steamed as she spun round and headed back to her second bedroom, where she gathered up her things from the chair by the door and stalked out of the house, slamming the front door behind her. Never had she been so insulted and the tears of rage in her eyes were such that she hadn't dared try, and look at the helpless young baby she was deserting.

In the second bedroom John Cox looked up from his wife and son long enough to catch a glimpse of the nurse hustling out the door with her bag.

"We seem to have lost our nurse," he said in a relieved voice. "I can't say I'm not glad. She's been saying the strangest things. I'll send a graph to Doc Garner asking him to get us another."

"I feel so well I think we might save by not having one now." May replied gently.

"And this," John Cox was telling his wife just outside the door, "is the second bedroom. In this famous room have been born a whole line of Coxes since the house was built before the first Atomic War."

Arm in arm the young couple strolled in together. Then, four people stared at each other in shocked surprise. The men looked from the women at their sides to those opposite and then back again. Then, the wives of these men were looking from man to man in horror.

"What the devil! . . ." John Cox began, starting up from the bed and advancing on this intruder. But then he stopped suddenly and his mouth fell open as he stared at that same face he'd been seeing in his mirror every morning since he first started to shave.

For more than a minute not a sound was heard in the room. Then the older man managed to ask weakly.

"Who are you?"

"John Cox. And who are you?" came the reply.

"John Cox."

"But you can't be," snapped the younger man, stepping up beligerently toward the other. "This is some fool game. A prank to ruin my honeymoon."

"Nothing of the sort," snapped the other. "You're an impostor."

"Ask my wife?" the younger man snapped.

"Who is he?" demanded the older man of the girl standing.

"John Barton Cox," she smiled happily. "We were married last night."

"June 10," the older man said slowly. "So were we—three years ago."

"Then what the devil are you doing in my house?" demanded the younger man angrily.

"Our house," cried the woman in the bed.

"You keep out of this," May snapped in reply. "It's John's house."

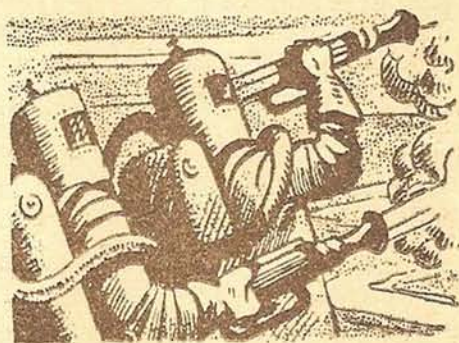
"Wait a minute!" the older man began slowly. "You were married last night, June 10? You proposed to this girl at the front gate? She is May I presume? Then you drove over the border and were married by a Justice named Bently Wills?"

"Yes! That's true," snapped the younger man. "But what has that to do with you?"

"Lots," he said thoughtfully. "You see . . ." he paused. "You see you're me. Your wife is my wife."

"I'll be damned if she is!" snapped the younger man, stepping forward angrily.

"JUST a minute," pleaded John Cox the elder. "Let me explain. Before you were married you were interested in the works of Korenz and his Time Travel hypothesis. You intend to set up experimental circuits in the lab downstairs. In three years time you'll be tinkering down there waiting for the Doc. to come and say it's all over. You'll have a son. You'll trip and the circuit will go wild. That accident will produce the effects Korenz dreamed of—Time Travel. It will swing the You of three years ago into the present. That is what happened last night."



The younger man stood silently for a time and then he shook his head in disbelief. "You mean to say that I'm you as you were three years ago? That May and I have been swung forward into our future?"

"Precisely!" nodded the older man. "Think! Didn't you notice anything strange about last night?"

"Heavens! Of course!" nodded John Cox. "The marriage license dated three years ago. The strange model car. The clothes for May. I think . . . It's astounding."

They talked for more than an hour and the men settled it between themselves and agreed that since they both had equal right to the house they would share it and John Cox, the elder, agreed to see that John Cox,

the younger, secured a position at the laboratories. There, it was agreed, they would be brothers.

And it seemed that all was settled until John Cox, the younger, began to get the itch to tinker in the cellar. That wasn't the beginning but it was what brought on the crisis in the Cox home. For every day the older couple had watched the younger pair living out their past step by step and they laughed and chuckled over their mistakes and quarrels. But with the younger man bringing home equipment for the cellar laboratory the aspect of the case took a sinister turn. To the older man the prospect was ominous.

That night he faced his younger self over the table after dinner and he spoke quietly as he said.

"John! You've got to stop playing about with that Korenz circuit. It's dangerous. Don't you see what you're doing? Don't you understand? You're like a shadow coming three years behind, doing the things I did just as I did them. Don't you see? You've got to stop."

"My John's no shadow and he'll live his own life. Not some silly way you want to make him," the younger May snapped irritably and the older woman smiled in understanding for she knew May's secret.

THOUGH the argument went on it was useless with John Cox the younger determined to do as he pleased without interference. At last, in exasperation the older man blurted out:

"Can't you see!" he growled. "In three years from the day I married there were two of us and if you keep up there'll be another one of us shortly. Work it out man. Don't be such a fool. Assuming no other influences at work. Work it out. I have. A thousand times. A million. Two, five, eight, eleven . . . Twenty-four years and there are seven John Coxes. Seven! And seven wives and six children. Work it out man. You've got to stop. This house won't hold twenty people."

"You're a fool, Cox," the younger man snapped. "I'm living my own life. If you think I'm going to be fool enough to make every stupid mistake you made you can forget it. And just remember once and for all—I'll do as I damn well like."

That threw a blanket of armed truce over the Cox household until the night of June 10. Then, for reason of the fact that it was three years since the younger couple had been married and six since the older had done the same thing, they were having a private party in the Cox household.

For the first time in some months things looked as if friendship could be restored between the men. But the older man was gloomy and every movement the younger woman made only seemed to make him more and more suspicious. Every once in a while he would ask anxiously after her health and when she replied each time:

"I'm feeling wonderful, John," he would relax back into his chair with a sigh. Perhaps he had been wrong.

But with the hour creeping around toward eight the younger woman turned pale and her husband was at her side immediately. Quickly he helped her into the second bedroom and rushed outside to send a graph to the Doc. Garner. As he turned away from the instrument he saw the older man jamming his hat on his head and stalking out the front door.

"Heh, John!" he called. "Don't walk out on me now?"

"I've been through this once before," called back the man, a cynical smile twisting his lips.

In the second bedroom John Cox paced up and down anxiously while his wife lay serenely on the bed.

"Where's Doc. Garner? What's keeping him?" he kept asking in nervous jerky tones. "I graphed a message to him half an hour ago."

"Do sit down, John," May pleaded quietly. "Do sit down! She'll be all right. After all . . . well! I went through this once you know."

THE door-bell tingled before John could say anything and he plunged out to open it to the Doc who bustled in and went straight to the bedroom and dumped his black bag and then wheeled on the anxious man who stood close beside him.

"Get out of here!" he commanded.

"But what . . ." John said helplessly.

"Get out!" Doc snapped. "Go down into that crazy lab of yours and fool around. I'll call you when I'm through. Don't make any mistakes this time."

With a hopeless look toward his wife John Cox turned and went down the steps into the cellar laboratory. The door shut behind him soundlessly and he sat down on a stool at his bench and tried to pretend some interest in the complicated electronic circuit he had built around the bench and towering up toward the ceiling. Lying open on the bench was a book titled "Some Preliminary Researches into the Problem of Time Travel."

After some minutes of quiet straining of his ears to try and hear what was going on up above he shrugged his shoulders and wiped his glasses nervously before turning on the apparatus. The giant electronic tubes hummed into life and a faint blue light suffused the whole lab.

For close to an hour he checked, made alterations, slight adjustments, increased power and noted his results but he was nervous, careless. Most of his attention was directed towards the stairs leading down to the lab. door.

Suddenly, he heard the Doc. coming, and he wheeled round and raced for the door. His foot caught on the trailing lead and he fell. There was a sudden flashing and hissing of light and a circular blue beam of light was shot out through the eye-like window toward the front gate. Then, with a sudden flashing splash of light the apparatus fused and the room was thrown into darkness.

"It's a boy!" Doc told him as John Cox rushed up the stairs past the practitioner to see his wife.



JOHN COX, the elder, had been gone from the house for more than two hours when he at last returned. He was grinning with a devilish sort of delight and as he stepped from his car a further array of cars pulled to the kerb behind his and soon the street was busy as the workers hustled into the house with their loads and returned for more.

He refused to tell anyone what it was all about but had the soundproof doors leading into the second bedroom securely shut so that no possible disturbance could be caused to the new mother who was proudly admiring her son.

MEANWHILE, other things had come to pass as the reader will no doubt have remembered. Across the border a young couple were stepping from a Justice's place and they seemed well content with themselves.

"Mrs. John Cox," she murmured happily, "I so want to be somewhere alone with you."

The tall young fellow, broad of brow and thoughtful of face, looked down into the eyes of his bride and smiled.

"It won't be long now, May," he promised her. "We'll be back at the house in less than an hour and then . . . well! We can have all the time there is alone if we wish."

That thought seemed to please her well enough and she became a danger to his safe driving on the way back across the border to that old house by the edge of town. Once the door closed behind them their lives became a bedlam.

When John Cox, the eldest, really determined to do something he let no expense get in his way and the chaotic sounds of revelry which greeted the bride and groom was something of a surprise for them. A host greeted them in the hall and welcomed them home and then escorted them into the spacious living room where a table was set for the wedding feast.

"How wonderful you are," May cried in amazement. "Such a surprise—and all your friends here to welcome us. Oh, John!"

Behind his curtain John Cox, the eldest, cursed silently as his paid guests took their places for the banquet. When he saw the expressions on the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Cox he began once more computing the sum of two plus three plus three plus three till his brain reeled and then he silently crept away to his attic room where he could worry in peace over his treatise on the "Inevitability of Patterns" . . . he had some good material on hand . . .



Certain adjustments were naturally necessary in the Cox household but altogether the young couple took it pretty well. And even John Cox, the eldest, took it well—until the youngest John Cox began to tinker round in the cellar.

Conquerors from

A GREAT day had arrived for those aboard the space ship Hope. The day when the ship was to return to earth. The day when the chosen few were to go back and take up life and repeople the lands again. A day that had been looked forward to since the ship had first soared off into space twenty-five years before.

Some sadness dwelt in the hearts of those aboard for they remembered that Professor Dale, the man who had made their escape possible, had not lived to see the day he had worked and planned for through those five horrible years of total atomic war upon the earth. Greed and lust for power had driven the two great nations of the earth into an all-out struggle for supremacy.

Atomic bombs were dropped in thousands and the dust and radiation were carried on the winds till it slowly drifted across the lands in a creeping death that killed all things that came in contact with it. One man had forseen this and he alone was ready for the day when earth would be no longer tenable. All his great wealth and colossal genius had been turned toward that one task—the building of the huge ship Hope.

In his plans he had included space for all things living that would be necessary for the re-establishment of life on earth. For the rest the ship was almost a tiny land in herself. The great atomic jets gave her power and the dynamos purred incessantly in their tasks of maintaining the intricate systems by which the small colony of people had been able to live for twenty-five years.

Now, the endless days of floating in space were passed and checks had shown that the earth was once more safe for men. Safe, too, for plant and animal life.

"Perhaps it's better this way." Elvin Dale said quietly when he had completed his plans with his staff of advisors. "Had the effects of the radiation been less severe, less all-embracing, men might have been able to maintain life on earth. That could have been worse than death with mutants of a million sorts springing up all over the earth and no uniformity remaining among men. Now we can start again. Start with all the experience and knowledge of the past to

aid us. We can begin life anew and grow in the way of peace and scientific freedom my father dreamed of."

The son of the famous professor was a short, stockily built man with a large intelligent head and small eyes. His face had the peculiar tan common to all those aboard the Hope. Synthetic sunshine beamed from the lighting fixtures at appropriate hours of the day and supplied the necessary properties of the normal sunlight they had not seen since they had been rocketed into space from a dying earth.

"What a shame your father didn't live to see this day," Moreen Fleming said quietly. "He would have been proud. When the earth is peopled again they will remember him—always. And what an earth it will be this time. With all those creatures that were a plague on man wiped out, and only those of your father's choice remaining, a new Utopia will be born."

Elvin smiled at the girl. What she said was true, but he always found her enthusiasm amusing. It was so typically a part of the feminine world as he knew it from his reading. Yet with that quality there went a tall, slim figure and laughing eyes which could glisten mischievously as she tossed her red hair. That she was on his special advisory council was sufficient proof of her standing in intelligence and learning.

With Elvin watching the controls carefully the great ship came down through the atmosphere of the earth and scientists kept careful check to make sure that their predictions concerning the atomic radiations were correct. As they came down slowly closer and closer to the earth they were jubilant for there was now no trace of the dread scourge left.

TO their surprise certain forms of plant life still survived and they began then, through powerful viewers, to make a careful check for signs of animal life. They could find none and by mid-afternoon they had come to a final decision to land and send a scout party out to check the city.

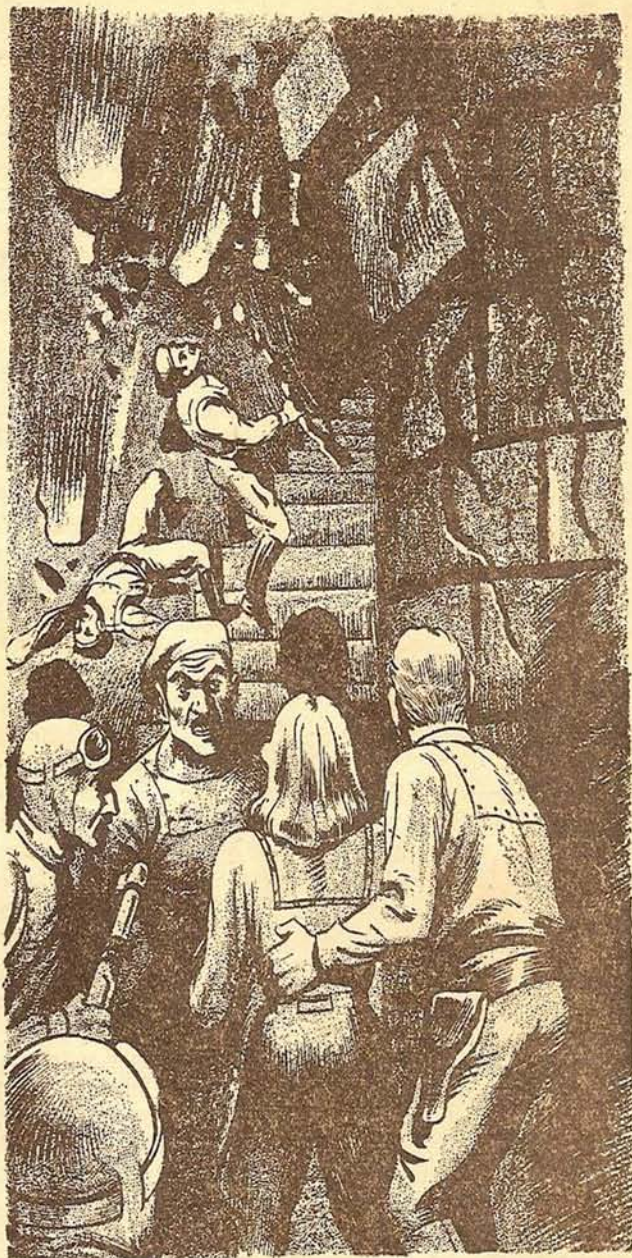
Three hours later this party returned with one member missing. Once in the city they had split up and gone in various directions according to a plan. When all but the mis-

Below

Back to rebuild the world came the survivors of the atomic devastation . . . but first they had to wipe out the menace which wanted to undermine civilization quicker than they could build

by
**Rick
Harte**

Half way up, the wall began to crumble away. "Jump clear!" roared Elvin. "They're undermining our escape route."



ing man had reported back the whole party made a search for him, but no trace could be found.

"We won't worry!" Elvin Dale decided quietly. "From these reports he can come to no possible harm. Shut the hatch for the night and we'll commence landing operations at dawn."

With the dawn of the following day the Hope was a scene of unsurpassed activity as the well-trained groups of workers went about their tasks of getting the precious loads of life from the ship and back to earth. With specially designed rocket cars moving into the city with their loads the

operation went on with that smoothness of co-operation that only long years of enforced living in the Hope could have attained.

But though the settlement was established by night-fall and the plans already set in operation to bring the city back to life, there was no sign of the missing scout. He had vanished, completely and without trace.

Could the missing scout have returned he might have told them more, but from the moment he had been captured and dragged away he was lost to the people of the earth. Deep below the city there was excitement almost beyond belief as the

captive was dragged into the presence of the ruler.

For a long time the ruler stood and stared at the shrinking prisoner and then, uttering a horrible shriek, he leapt forward and up and sank his teeth deep into the throat of the scout. Shrieking, dancing, leaping about, the company formed into patterns and with ritual devoutness they followed the lead of their ruler.

Before long that horrible feast was ended and the broken bones were dropped into the murky stream which flowed through this central meeting place of the sewer-dwellers.

When there was more quiet the old ruler sat apart from his fellows and seemed deep in thought. Finally he announced:

"We must have more of this food. I find it good. We are cunning and must be careful. Since we became cunning as we are there have never been such times as these. Such food is precious and we must act carefully."

The company seemed to agree, but mostly they just accepted the orders of the wise one. He was older than they and more cunning and his memory went back a long way. His father's father's father had been of the first to be born with great cunning. And always they had been rulers—the clever ones.

So for many weeks they did nothing but keep watch until the leader could wait no longer and he led a party out from their fortresses and they waited for a lone man to come their way. When, at last a man came hurrying down the street they attacked quickly and overpowered him and vanished. Down in the hidden banquet hall another primitive ritual feast was eaten that night.

Above, another man was reported missing and Elvin Dale ordered a thorough investigation to be made. There was some treachery in the city—something they had not yet faced. It worried him.

"I wouldn't worry," Moreen tried to soothe him. "It's just that the outside is so inviting. Curiosity leads them away to investigate. I've felt the urge myself."

"Perhaps!" he admitted quietly. "Perhaps it's that."

BUT when four others had disappeared without trace in the next four days Elvin no longer believed Moreen's sugges-

tion. He called a council meeting and the matter was discussed. The result was that the edict was issued that at all times people were to be at least two together. This seemed to be successful for now, three days passed and nothing happened, no further disappearance was reported.

But below the city another council meeting was held and the cunning ruler grinned evilly.

"They move in pairs now. That is more difficult. But I have plans for us. Ever since the creeping death left the earth I have thought we should leave our dwellings below the city and live above. One thing had been against this—food! Now, we must go up and conquer these strangers and then we can establish ourselves once more. Food will no longer be a problem."

At first the ruler sent out larger parties and in this way they brought two captives back from each raid and many were the savage feasts held in their banquet hall. But as time went on this new and wonderful food became more difficult to get and the old ruler himself made a spying tour through the city and even out to the outskirts where the land was blossoming with crops and the live-stock were fattening.

For two days the cunning ruler hid and watched the activities of the men and he saw that they worked and fed the herds and that some of the fattest of the stock were killed and taken away. Curious to discover what happened to these he made further searches and found where the carcasses were cut up and taken away once more. And then, at last, he discovered that they were eaten by the men who had come from the strange ship from the sky.

Slowly a plan was forming in his cunning brain and when he returned to his people he revealed this plan to them.

"The numbers of these strangers are few," he began in his own language. "And we are many. If we feast from them as we will then soon there will be no more. These strangers are clever ones. They grow their food and kill only those who cannot produce others. We, too, must learn to work and feed our captives that they may have off-spring which we can eat. This way we will have a stock of food for ever. Never again will there be great famines during which we are forced to turn against our-

selves and fight with only the strongest surviving."

"The plan is a most clever one," a wise old companion replied. "But what do these strangers eat?"

"The seed of the grasses they grow and many other things," the old leader replied. "Nothing that will be too hard for us."

SO the raiders thereafter brought down the females of the strangers and working parties brought food for the frightened, cowering captives. At first they wouldn't eat, but finally hunger forced them into accepting the food their gaolers brought them.

But the old leader puzzled for no young were born to his captives in many weeks and he at last perceived that they were not as his people and so he ordered that two male prisoners be taken to place with the females. This was done two nights later and his working parties toiled under his orders to keep their prisoners fed.

Meanwhile, Elvin Dale was reduced to sleepless nights for all his plans to tap some source of information on the mysterious disappearance of his people had failed. One third of the number of his settlement were already vanished without a trace.

Then through hours of discussions the council of the settlement argued the ways in which the losses they had been suffering could be halted. But despite all their suggestions they left the meeting with solemn faces and worried brows.

But arms failed to prevent the inroads of the enemy on the numbers of the settlement. Week by week more people vanished. Panic began to seize the remainder. Flight was the only course open to them now. But when the council met again and a vote was carried to this effect Elvin Dale told them quietly.

"It is now too late. Our numbers are so reduced that we haven't sufficient to provide even an emergency crew for the Hope. We have no choice but to remain."

This news was greeted with a solemn silence from the awed gathering.

"Then we must move to another site," demanded one quickly.

"You all know that whatever our enemy is it is extremely intelligent," Dale replied softly. "Are we to suppose it would not follow us?"

There was a scoffing tone to his voice

which successfully silenced any further suggestions from the council. But none of them fully realised just how intelligent their enemies were.

To the cunning old leader of their enemies it was as if a new life were suddenly opened to him. He spent much time in and around the city spying on the settlement workers, using every cunning trick he knew to remain hidden. As he watched the work going on he realised the possibilities of such a way of life and he learned much. All that he learned he taught to his chief followers.

Finally the leader decided that it was time to make an open assault on the settlement and completely overpower it and begin the life he had been planning for his people. So that when night came again his legions crept from their haunts and into the streets.

Success came easily at first as their surprise attacks brought them captives as they had done in the past, but above the city a rocket car was prowling and a beam of light splashed down on to the streets and Elvin Dale peered down through the powerful viewer and caught in the white patch of light he could see his enemy dragging away yet another victim.

"Good God!" he gasped out in horror as he watched them scuttling away. "Something we didn't think of. The sewers, deep under the earth and protected from the outside once the system was stopped."

"What is it?" Moreen asked quickly, shrinking away from the horror registered on the face of her companion.

"Look!" he said.

She hesitated for a moment and then took one look before she turned back to him, her face pale and contorted by what she had seen.

"How horrible!"

"Interesting though!" he murmured quietly. "From what I've read of them they always possessed a cunning, but some freakish mutation must have risen and survived to produce the level of intelligence they have shown. We've got to act quickly. This looks like an open attack. Alert all patrols! Signal a general warning. Order all women and children fortified in their homes. We've got to wipe these horrors out. Wipe them out completely."

"To think they could survive to conquer us," Moreen said disbelievingly.

But by the time the orders had been flashed through on the general network and the patrol cars made ready the streets were swarming with the deadly enemy which had appeared in force from below. From the air it was easily seen that they were functioning under a strict discipline and leadership as they moved methodically in to the assault on the few buildings where the entire remaining settlement was housed.

When Elvin commanded the first swooping attack on the forces in the streets the lines broke as the deadly blast of fire-balls crashed from the patrol cars down into them. But before any real damage was done an order must have been given for they broke into small parties and scuttled for the shelter of the nearest buildings.

Many were charred to nothing by the fire-balls before they could reach the buildings, but most escaped.

"Land!" Elvin ordered quickly. "We've got to attack on foot."

Swooping down the patrol rocket cars settled in the streets and the force of men massed behind Elvin, every man holding an atomic fire-ball gun. Quickly Elvin split his force into four parties and appointed leaders. Then, whichever way the enemy came from they found a force advancing toward them with those deadly balls of flame shooting out from the guns the settlers carried.

"Retreat!" the cunning old leader ordered his army. "We can't get close enough to them to fight. Retreat!"

THOUGH these words sounded like nothing more than shrieks to the advancing force of settlers the enemy army understood and they began fleeing away from the scorching blasts that were crashing among them with a deadly precision. Through all the streets of their pursuit the streets were littered with their bodies and here and there an occasional mangled body of a settler told where they had fought back for a moment.

Back and down into the sewers they retreated and Elvin sighed his relief as the last of them vanished. Then, suddenly, he was snarling angrily as he saw a further party making their escape and he saw, too,

why his men were not firing. The horrible foe was dragging Moreen Fleming with them as they fled. She was their captive.

"After them!" screamed Elvin fiercely. "To the vents! We'll follow till there's not a one of those swine alive."

Some of the patrols were reluctant to go down into the great system of canals and passageways which was the deep underground channels of the sewerage system of the great city. But when Elvin led the way they fought down after him and a great beam of light splashed out ahead of them as they blasted a path through the back-most ranks of the enemy.

"Leave nothing alive!" came Elvin's angry order.

But even in this emergency the cunning leader of the attackers was not without a plan and he fell back toward the huge underground cavern where he had housed all the prisoners who remained of his captives. There, he decided to make a stand with the remnants of his force.

Blasted savagely by the settlers the great hordes which had descended on the city had been broken up into smaller groups and less than a quarter of the survivors managed to get to the gaol. The sewer canals ran deep in blood and carried the heavy tang of burnt flesh where the carcasses were floating away to the outlet far out under the sea.

At the vast cavern the forces halted and Elvin gasped in horror as he surveyed the scene before him. Men, women, children whom he new personally cowered back in the clutches of the gaolers and the remaining force of invaders stood in tight ranks before them for experience had already taught the cunning leader that the fire-balls did not blast when a captive was near. So he marshalled his forces around the captives and waited.

He did not dare order his legions out to attack though they outnumbered the men from above by twenty and more to one. He began a slow retreat into the inner recesses of the sewers always keeping a line of captives close to the rear-guard. So the slow retreat went on with Elvin watching and puzzling. Every time he caught sight of Moreen he wanted to hurl aside his deadly atomic fire-ball gun and rush in and attack with his bare hands.

Knowing, however, that such a move would be futile and end in his own capture he had other plans and he snapped his command:

"Six of you return above and come back with weapons, anything, knives, primitive swords, anything capable of killing."

The patrolmen hurried away and the cat and mouse game continued with the retreating horde dragging their captives with them and the snarling, angry men following as they watched the brutal treatment being meted out to their friends and women who were the captives of the deadly enemy.

FOR more than an hour this slow retreat went on and Elvin anxiously waited for the return of his men. At last they came. They carried a curious assortment of weapons gathered mostly from the museum of primitive arts. When these had been handed round there were still not enough to go round and Elvin commanded those who still remained only armed with fire-ball guns to stand guard and fire if the position got out of hand.

Then, he, with his primitively armed force, moved forward and the cunning old leader of the enemy became filled with fear and shrieked his order for a sudden swift retreat. But before the headlong flight had gone more than a hundred yards they were trapped in a dead-end canal and there they milled in a great horde for a time before their leader could get them organized into disciplined lines which he commanded to attack.

The first of them charged forward in a vicious, shrieking wave which Elvin met with a swinging sabre. Fiercely he slashed back and forth as the foremost of the enemy reached him, leaping up for his throat and snarling their rage and hatred.

Blood flowed as the patrolmen fought savagely back and enemy dead lay all around. Once Elvin went down and was buried for the moment beneath the horde of vicious creatures who dived to attack him. But swishing blades drove them off and Elvin got to his feet with blood streaming from his wounds.

Scarcely had that first wave been beaten back than another followed. The sabre smashed in his hand as it struck against the

floor and Elvin called for an assault directly on the massed enemy where the prisoners were still being held. Using his fists and his boots now as his only weapons, Elvin led that attack in and soon they were in the midst of the enemy ranks and forcing captives free of them.

One after another the prisoners got free and fought with the patrolmen, but the numbers of the enemy were too great and they were being pushed back in retreat now. But with them were retreating all but very few of the former captives and these swelled the ranks of the settler force.

Soon they were back where the fire-ball guns could be brought into action and once these began crashing among the enemy the cunning leader shrieked his order and his forces melted away into the side canals and the settlers were left alone. None spoke for a time for the shock of the battle and the horror of what they had seen was more than they wanted to think about.

Elvin had an arm around Moreen supporting her and he forced his mind to practical things by a sheer feat of will.

"We've got to get out of here quickly," he snapped in a gasping fashion. "Those fiends will attack again. They're more cunning than any fighters I've read of. Make it quickly."

Some ran, some had to be carried as the force retreated back through the sewers to a point where they could begin a climb up to the surface. Half way up the wall began to crumble away from beneath them and to fall down toward the massed settlers below.

"Jump clear!" roared Elvin shrilly. "They're undermining our escape route."

Read

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TWO men from the wall were caught and crashed down amid boulders to a death by crushing in the canal below, but the remainder made their escape back to the crouching group of settlers. Then they listened attentively to Elvin's next plan and those who could raced away as fast as possible and those who remained moved as quickly as possible.

So far they had not seen their enemy again since the recovery of the prisoners, but they showed the evidence of their work in the treachery of the crashing wall and all knew that they must be working unseen still. The fastest of the escaping settlers reached a point where there were two outlets to the surface above. They commenced to climb the first and then waited.

Soon the remainder of the force were gathered as if to ascend the steps. But almost immediately an ominous crumbling was seen where a force was at work somewhere behind the wall.

"Now! Fast!" yelled Dale shrilly. "It's our only chance."

His force needed no further urging and they poured up the other escape with the strongest of them helping the women and children who were too terrified to make a sound. One after another they clambered to the safety of the street and Elvin was among the last to reach the top. His foothold began to crumble away and a hand reached out and snatched him up from the beginning of a fall and pulled him up to the street. The two light-carriers who followed him were not so fortunate and crashed to their death.

Angrily, patrolmen blasted fire-ball after ball down into the darkness, but only angry shrieking came in reply.

"Gas!" Dale said quickly. "We've got to gas the sewers. Call a council meeting. We've got to get production going immediately. There's no time to be lost."

But the cunning leader of the underground enemy had seen enough of the settlers' means of fighting and he decided that they soon would be coming back again. With this in mind he ordered most entrances undermined and then he led his force in an escape from the sewers that brought them out in a field beyond the outskirts of the city.

From there he retreated still further till his force was hidden among the forests which had survived the years of deadly radiation. Scouts were sent out and they returned mid-way through the morning that something was being filled into the sewers and that this stuff killed any who breathed it.

"Then we'll get them into the sewers again," he shrieked.

So when Elvin got a flash that the enemy force was beyond the city attacking the live-stock he rushed his men out in rocket-cars and they zoomed down with fire-ball guns blasting. And immediately the stricken hordes of the enemy retreated and fled into open sewers.

"They'll be killed there quickly enough," laughed Elvin, relieved.

BUT from time to time they saw the scouts of the enemy reappear and then vanish again. Sensing that there was something more to this than he could see Elvin led a force from the rocket cars to the main opening where the last enemy scouts had been sighted and almost immediately he knew what it was. The wall of the sewer had been collapsed in blocking off the city from this channel and so that was safe for the hiding enemy.

"It means going down there again," he growled angrily.

"No! No!" Moreen protested desperately. "You don't know how cunning they are. That's what they want you to do. Get more gas. Please Elvin."

His small eyes gleamed as he listened and he saw the wisdom of the move. There wasn't any sense in taking risks, not now they had rescued all the prisoners they could. A few minutes was sufficient for rocket cars to return with a load of gas which was speedily pumped down into the section of the sewer.

Before long the men saw the earth heavy with the hordes of enemy which were escaping before the deadly gas could overcome them. These were without order now and they split into small groups, raced away singly or stood their ground and died. Above them a rocket car was busy with two fire-ball guns blazing their charges down at the fleeing masses.

No man there was prepared to show mercy to these merciless creatures who had survived the wrath of the Atomic Wars to mutate and flourish with a gifted intelligence worthy of Professor Dale himself. But, then, with the death of the cunning old leader the force was without control and soon disintegrated entirely with every individual fighting his own battle and struggling for his own survival with that primitive instinct that even their superior intelligence had not made of no account.

In their scattering thousands they fled from the fury of the attack which assailed them from all sides. Every possible type of weapon was being used by the settlers and when fire-ball guns exhausted their charges they were used as clubs on the fleeing and routed armies. From the city children came and they joined in the battle when all supplies of lethal might had been exhausted and men were forced to fall back on those primitive weapons used by man in any emergency since the dawn of time.

"Not a single specimen must be left alive," ordered Elvin coldly. "Not a trace of this murderous species must be left to blight the future of the new Utopia planned by my father."

BUT one man disobeyed this order. His scientific interest was aroused and he could not resist trapping a pair, male and female, and hiding them away among the trees of the forest. Such specimens had never before occurred in the whole long record of recorded science. And to these two creatures he determined to devote his life of study.

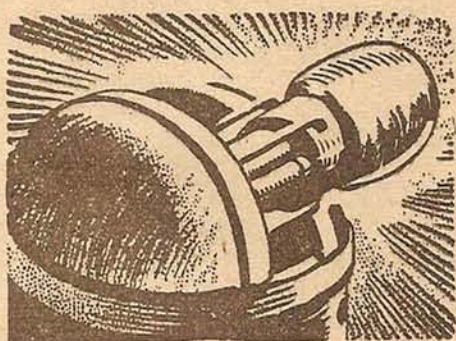
When that carnage was done the settlers returned to the city to celebrate and long through the night they drank and sang. There was nothing now to stop them from the achievement of their aim. Out of the carnage of the past they intended to build a future without fear and a future without death.

Scientists had long known the essentials of decay and these theories were now to be put into practice in the new society until such time as all the lands of the earth had been reclaimed for the use and benefit of mankind.

But one man was prepared to spend much more time alone in the forest and since he was one who had suffered captivity at the hands of the dread enemy he was thought to be somewhat mad and Elvin Dale dismissed the reports that came to him concerning his brother scientist.

Weeks slipped by until that day when the curious scientist failed to return from the forest. A party went to search for him.

That day he had come up to his cage to study his captives again and in his hand



was the book wherein he recorded the history of his strange captives. But, shocked, he saw the two bodies lying on the floor of the rock cave as if dead. Anxiously he prodded at them but they did not move. Knowing the worst he had opened the door and went inside and stooped over his specimens.

In a fury of movement those two creatures came to a sudden life and sharp teeth sank deep into the scientist's throat before he could utter a sound. And before that pair vanished into the depths of the forest they ate well in a savage and horrible ritual feast.

The search party, headed by Elvin Dale himself, found the spot and he picked up the book and slowly read the inscription.

"A Study of Two Mutant Rats."

"Rats! Rats!" he burst out angrily. "From the dawn of time they have been a plague upon man and now these super-intelligent-horrors are loose to breed and flourish. In a year they'll be thousands strong. Gloating, learning from us, watching us, those monstrous creatures have come up from the sewers to be a curse and an enemy to man. God! If only there weren't any rats."

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Rogue

The Stowaway

THE huge spaceliner glided into port, her long bulk agleam with lights. The crowd of a thousand-odd tourists, back from their week's tour of Mars, poured from the spaceship on to the elevator towers, descended the two hundred feet on the elevator platforms, and were either flown away in their aircars or, those whose homes were close by, in their terracars.

Gradually the lights of the spaceliner were extinguished until only the crew's quarters in the bow of the machine were showing against the black background. The fore airlock opened allowing a glare of light out to dissipate the gloom, the crew emerged and the last to leave, young Spacecaptain Arthur Downs, extinguished the last of the lights and sealed the airlock behind him.

Spacecaptain Downs was the last human being to leave; but he was not the last traveler to debark from the *S.L. Venturios*.

Stowaways on spaceliners were rare; but rarer still were stowaways who concealed themselves in the atomic fuel-converter chamber, situated between the jet vents and the inner hull, and alive with atomic energy and heat. In that tiny chamber a human being would exist for perhaps a minute; yet it was in that inhospitable spot that the unauthorized passenger had stowed itself.

As the gyro passed over the *Venturios* and flew on to the next platform a dark figure emerged from one of the jet vents. It moved slowly, jerkily, at first; it staggered for a few steps, then straightened up and stood still for a moment. Then in the cylindrical head a pair of green eyes glowed, electronic eyes which took in the scene—the rows of spaceliners, the platforms, the enormous Administration Building, still with illuminated windows—took in the scene and recorded every detail that the electronic eyes could pick out. And the resultant picture passed along the nerve wires, and was filed away in the robot consciousness for further use. And that was Experience for the Robot, but unlike human experience it was not confused by war emotion.

Deep in the mechanical consciousness were rudimentary emotions, by-products of

the electrical nerve patterns; but they were introverted emotions which could not reach out and find their counterparts in humanity. The Robot was a self-centred world within itself. Everything outside itself was alien and hostile.

Instinctively it knew that that low-flying gyro was its enemy. The cold green eyes looked upwards, followed the flight of the little machine, waited until it had moved some distance, and then the Robot stepped from beneath the spaceliner and on to the elevator platform. It found the controls, knew at once the principle of the mechanism, which was after all merely an elementary principle, while the Robot was a vastly complicated and compounded system of those principles.

Reaching the ground the Robot paused once more, then keeping in the shadows of the line of spaceliner hulls it moved towards the distant Administration Building. The lights suggested humans, and humans were its enemy—humans who thought themselves Masters! But the humans must not be aware of its approach. The Robot must destroy the humans quickly, unexpectedly, before they could turn to technical devices which they used as weapons. . . .

In the gyro the Patrolman blinked at the visiscreen in the floor of his craft. At first it had looked like a man prowling around the Administration Building, but now the tiny figure was definitely revealed as metallic.

"A Robot!" he gasped. He pressed the radio switch and spoke to the Administration Building. "Ground Patrol." And when Ground Patrol Office answered, "Indication of a Robot south side of Administration Building." And Ground Patrol, after a preliminary gasp, repeated the message.

A moment later the huge Spaceport was ablaze with light.

Men—or Robots?

SPACECAPTAIN Downs' first call after leaving the Administration Building was to one of the beautiful residences clustered around the Spaceterminal, the official residence of one of Spacetours Direc-

Robot by Belli Luigi

tors. One reason for the call was to pick up his aircar which he always garaged for the week while on a trip, at the spacious garage in the house grounds. Another reason, and more important one, was Ann Morrow.

The sliding door of the house was opened by an elderly Spaceport Attendant, a thin faced, severe eyed woman, who lived in the official residence and did intermittent duties both there and in Administration Building. The severity of her face relaxed at the sight of the young Spacecaptain.

"She's waiting for you, Mr. Downs," she remarked.

"Thanks, Miss Francis," grinned Arthur; and a moment later Ann was in his arms. "Good to be back from the Workshop Planet to old Earth," said the young man. "I hope you won't be disappointed in Mars when we go there on our honeymoon, darling."

"Disappointed on our honeymoon!" Ann

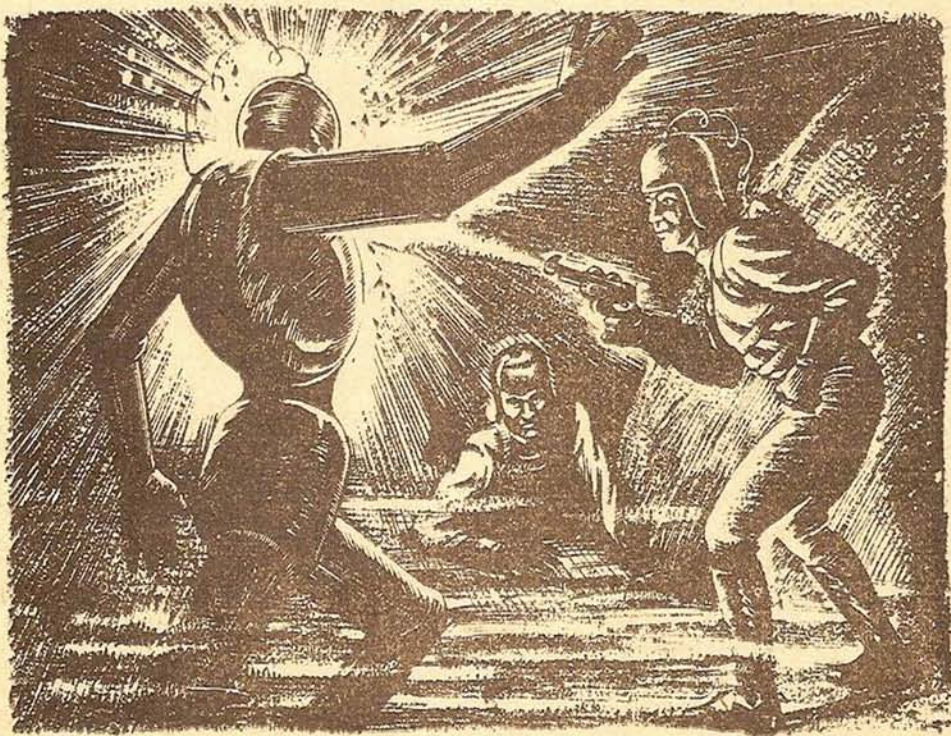
smiled, her deep blue eyes looking into his. "I certainly hope not."

"It's just a big workshop, you know, all the overflow of the masses of industrial plants on Earth. Still, as you've never taken the trip before it'll be an experience."

In the living room a tall, tanned faced, grey-haired man rose as they entered. One-time Spacecaptain Morrow, a pioneer space-pilot, Ann's father, was now as a result of his skill, unremitting labour and driving force, a Director of Spacetours Limited and its several subsidiary companies. It was a position to which his future son-in-law aspired, but Arthur Downs knew that if he did win to a directorship it would be by his own efforts; for inflexible conscientious old Dan Morrow would not lift a finger to influence the Board in favour of relations or friends. He had given service himself, and he expected it from others.

And Arthur, every bit as independent himself, would not have had it otherwise.

He waited until the thing was almost on top of him before he attempted to fire—and, with the gun directed at one glowing eye, he pulled the trigger . . .



He was determined to achieve his ambition without the aid of nepotism.

"How are things this end, sir?" Arthur shook hands. "You've been busy on the Board lately. Anything new?"

"There is." Dan Morrow's rather hard grey eyes were tired. "The company is reaching out, Arthur. We're planning a new type of spaceliner, a super-liner to make possible regular trips to Asteroidal Belt 17. As you know, the present ships for that trip are too small for economic running, but, the problems associated with building a super-liner are very formidable indeed."

"I know that, sir," agreed Arthur. "I suppose the Company will transfer the main workshop for the job to Mars?"

"No!" Dan's tones were positive. "Absolutely out of the question. It would take more than a year's preliminary, and unnecessary, work. We have most of the equipment already installed in our Earth workshops. Certain industries lend themselves to the conditions on Mars, but Space-liner construction is not one of them." He paused, then went on more slowly, his eyes on the younger man. "There is a way to overcome the chief difficulty, that of obtaining sufficient skilled labour."

"I think I can guess it," said Arthur shortly.

"Perhaps you can. We haven't reached a decision yet, but I hope things will be finalised at the next meeting, and the Board agree to approach the Central Government Council for permission to use intelligent Robots."

Arthur's jaw set, and hostility peered from his eyes; hostility that was immediately reciprocated by the older man. The use of Robots was the one subject on which the two men could never agree, and more than once it had threatened a serious rupture between them. It was a question on which both felt too deeply to keep a discussion down to impersonal academic level.

"I quite agree with the principle of using Robots," said Arthur. "But they must be the type we are using on Earth now—fixed, single-purpose Robots. You know my views on that, sir?"

"Only too well," said Dan Morrow. "The Board discussed the matter for three sessions, and the few who dissented from my

suggestion had views similar to yours. They think the present set-up, that of using fixed, non-intelligent Robots, doing one set operation on the mass-production line, to be quite satisfactory. I spoke for hours trying to convince them otherwise. I pointed out that the limited use of intelligent Robots on Mars which was sanctioned by the Central Government Council as an experiment has proved successful so far. And by the time I had finished the opposition was weakening."

"I hope they stick out," said Arthur.

Ann interrupted. "Well, don't argue about it, you two," she said hastily. "We'll soon know what the Board decides."

"It's going to decide my way," said her father. "I'll keep at the Directors till they do."

"Listen, Mr. Morrow," said Arthur urgently. "I understand and appreciate your ideas about efficiency, service, and all the rest of it. But you know as well as I do that when we build walking Robots who can perform highly skilled tasks, we're virtually creating a new race. We're certainly creating an intelligence."

"Nonsense," snapped Dan. "We can limit their intelligence."

"Only up to a point," said Arthur. "If you're going to build an electronic brain, capable of performing skilful tasks, work that requires thought and judgment, at what point are you going to limit that thought capacity? You can't build a robot mind with a low ceiling of intelligence and expect it to do high grade work."

"No; but the intelligence can be specialised."

Arthur laughed. "I don't think you believe that yourself, at the back of your mind, Mr. Morrow. The Robot intelligence is specialised at the time it is built, but a Robot of that kind is capable of absorbing experiences and learning. And its learning capacity will increase. It can, in theory, and I think in practice, become greater in logical and coldly thoughtful processes than its creator."

Old Dan's face twisted into a scornful grin. "Old-fashioned Frankenstein Monster stuff!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Arthur hotly. "It's you who are old-fashioned. If you'd

troubled to take a course in Robotology, as I have—"

"All right," cut in Dan harshly. "You needn't ram your technological achievements down my throat."

"Dad!" Ann moved over to him. "Arthur didn't mean to do anything like that. You're unreasonable."

"That's enough, young lady," said her father. "I've reached my present position by work—practical application of what I've learnt. And all the technical knowledge in the Universe is worth nothing if it isn't applied to some useful end."

"But this is Technology gone mad!" said Arthur savagely. "The sort of thing that wiped out millions, and came within a fraction of destroying every vestige of civilization three hundred years ago. In those days it was the hydrogen-helium bomb. Just look back on History—first it was hand weapons, crude mechanical things; then small explosives which grew to larger ones; then the first crude atom bomb, and finally the hydrogen-helium bomb. It was just a matter of progressive inevitable steps. We've built up something since then, but we'll smash everything if we start unrestricted creation of intelligent Robots. We'll end up enslaved to mechanical monsters."

"There is no other economical substitute for a good intelligent Robot," persisted Dan. "A man can work only eight hours a week under present high-pressure conditions. A Robot works almost continuously. There's no argument against it. Why, Robots will cut the time for the completion of our super Spacecraft to a fraction. Even you should see that."

"After all, Arthur," said Ann, "there will be a limit to the number of intelligent Robots being built."

"Of course," said her father. He smiled. "They don't breed, you know."

"There'll be no limit," said Arthur. "That's the whole trouble. If the C.G.C. allow our company to build them and use them on Earth, every other company will make an application, and it couldn't be refused. There'll be thousands and thousands of intelligent Robots on the Earth, and they will be learning—learning all about us, about our weaknesses and our shortcomings. And don't forget that after the first Robots have been built the Technicians will improve

on them. I tell you there's no limit to the capacity of a Robot of that kind. And, *they will breed!*"

"What!" Old Dan stared. "Are you feeling all right, young man?"

"For practical purposes they will breed," persisted Arthur. "What is to prevent Robots from building Robots?"

A Shock

DAN MORROW frowned. For the first time something akin to doubt appeared in his expression. Only too well he knew that some of his future son-in-law's arguments were well founded. For years the Central Government Council had refused applications to build intelligent Robots, and its refusal had been based on similar arguments to those of Arthur's. Immovable Robots on the mass-production line, yes, but not the other kind. And there was no guarantee that the C.G.C. would permit them now, but Dan, who had already sounded out several influential members of the Council, had a pretty shrewd idea that the application, coming from the huge Spacetours Company, would be favourably considered.

Already the C.G.C. had weakened to the extent of allowing twenty intelligent Robots to be built and used on Mars, and their reactions studied and noted.

Arthur, seeing the older man's slight indecision, pressed his advantage.

"Mr. Morrow," he said deliberately. "It's only a matter of another six months and we shall have the report on the Mars Robots. Dr. Cardew of the Scientific Council—"

"He's another alarmist," snorted Dan, bristling at the name. "He's always been opposed to progress."

"Dr. Cardew," persisted Arthur patiently, "insisted that those Robots must not be brought to Earth on any condition until the trials are completed and the report studied. Why not compromise and wait on the report?"

"We've already had a preliminary report. There's nothing to indicate that any of the twenty Robots are exhibiting other than the reactions expected."

"Another six months won't make that much difference," urged the young man,

"Not when you consider the issues at stake."

"Six months production loss is much difference," said Dan Morrow doggedly. "And the Mars Robots are doing highly skillful work at amazing speed, and improving every month."

"Improving—yes, learning!" said Arthur. "Just wait, that's all. I won't be surprised to learn any time now that one of the things has cut loose out there on Mars. I only wish," he said passionately, "I were a Director. I'd fight this thing to the finish."

Old Dan eyed him in silence, his eyes cold, his shaggy brows contracted.

"If you're going to be ruled by imaginative emotionalism, and by old-fashioned prejudice," he said slowly, "you'll never be on the Board. At least, not while I am in a position to oppose your nomination."

"Father!" Ann flared at him, her blue eyes ablaze. "You've no right to oppose Arthur's nomination just because you don't see things his way."

"I've a right to oppose anyone with a retrograde outlook. The Board has to be progressive. . . ."

He was interrupted by the quick squirt of sound from the visiphone. He operated the switch, and the two-way screen glowed to life. It pictured the figure of an elderly grey-uniformed official of Spacetours Limited against the background of the Chief Patrolman's Office in the Administration Building.

"What is it, Pearson?" asked Dan Morrow.

"I have to report the presence of one of the Mars Robots at the Port, sir. All Directors are being advised."

"What!" Dan's eyes bulged. He half turned towards the staring Arthur, then he turned back to the screen. "Yes, go on," he snapped.

"Yes sir. An intruder was located by Airpatrol and identified as a Mars Robot. Ground Patrol was advised, lights were ordered, but a search failed to locate the intruder, which was in the vicinity of Administration Building when first seen. After the search was completed Patrolman Jamieson, returning to his quarters near the Administration Building found that the door had been smashed open. He entered, armed with his pocket raygun and found the Robot inside. Jamieson used the gun, burning a small hole in the Robot's left arm, but the

Robot turned on him and smashed him down. Jamieson is in hospital with a fractured skull and severe lacerations to the head. He made a statement before he was removed."

"And, the Robot?"

"No trace, Mr. Morrow. It escaped. . . ." The Chief Patrolman's eyes dropped. "It—it escaped, Mr. Morrow," he went on slowly, "with—with the raygun."

"What! A Robot—with a raygun! At large!"

"Yes, sir."

"I see. Thank you, Pearson. . . . One moment. Any indication as to how the Robot got here?"

"No, sir. It must have either stowed away on one of the ships, or else was concealed on one deliberately. The only ship to come in to-day from Mars was *S.L. Venturous*."

Dan Morrow pressed the switch, and the screen dulled again. Then he turned, his eyes icy.

"You heard that, Downs?" he said. "The Robot came on your ship to-night. A surprise—or is it?"

Fugitive

IT was not immediately that the full implication of Dan Morrow's words struck the young Spacecaptain. When it did his tanned cheeks flushed angrily.

"Are you suggesting that I brought that Robot here?" he demanded.

Dan jerked his thumb towards the visiphone screen. "You heard Pearson. Your ship brought the Robot, with or without your knowledge."

"Great Scot, you can't seriously believe that I'd smuggle a thing like that in to Earth! It doesn't make sense. You know my ideas. Haven't I been arguing against—"

"Yes, and this could be a way of emphasizing your argument," pointed out Dan. "You bring one of these Robots in from Mars, turn him loose, and prove your point. The fact that the Robot might kill a few humans—there's Jamieson in hospital with a broken skull for a start—is neither here nor there to you, so long as you prove your point."

"And you think I've done that. . . . Ann."

Arthur turned quickly to the girl. "You don't believe this?"

She made no answer, but there was troubled doubt in her eyes.

"Ann!" He gripped her arm fiercely.

"It—it looks queer, Arthur," she said in a small voice.

"It looks worse than that," cut in her father. "If you want my opinion I'd say that not only did he bring the Robot here, but he made sure the thing's actions wouldn't be left to chance."

"What do you mean, Mr. Morrow?"

"I mean that I still hold to the idea that no Robot, built to do technical or mechanical work, would become a rogue of its own accord. But if its electronic brain were tampered with by someone with a knowledge of Robotology. . . ." He allowed the sentence to trail away.

"Your father," said Arthur quietly, "is accusing me of what is virtually murder. He's suggesting that I gave this Robot's brain a twist, a criminal twist, and brought it here and turned it loose. Do you believe that?"

Again Ann hesitated. "I'm trying hard not to believe that, Arthur, but—but it did come over on your ship and, well, everything points to what father suspects."

He eyed her steadily. "I know exactly what it points to. Your father has made an excellent case against me. Now, I'm telling you that I know nothing about it, that the first I knew of an escaped Robot was when I heard of it on that screen. I want a straight answer from you, Ann. Do you believe me or not?"

She returned his gaze with equal steadiness. Then the troubled cloud cleared from her eyes.

"Yes, I do, Arthur."

"You little fool!" exploded her father. "Why, the whole thing is crystal clear! We'll see what the Central Justice Council make of it, anyway. See if he can fool them as easily as he's fooled you." He moved over to the visiphone, his hand outstretched towards the code buttons.

"What are you going to do?" asked Ann, alarmed.

"What else can I do but bring a charge against him? It's my duty."

"Wait a moment," said Arthur. "Pearson will have already reported to the C.J.C.

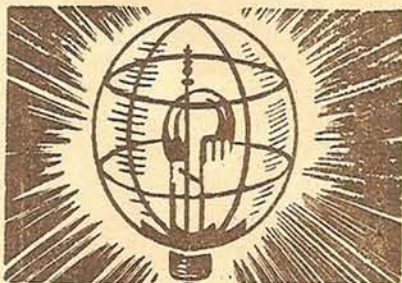
There's no need for you to do anything in a hurry. I might be able to assist in catching up with this Robot—after all, I have a pretty sound knowledge of Robotology, which should be useful. But if you charge me, and I'm locked up—"

"That's exactly what you deserve," growled Dan.

He pressed the code buttons, and the screen glowed, but Arthur did not wait for the picture of the local C.J.C. Chargeroom to appear. He drew Ann to him, kissed her, and ran from the room.

"Hey!" Old Dan's voice followed him. "You're only going to make things worse for yourself by running away."

Arthur ignored him. He went straight from the house, raced down the wide path



to the garages and climbed into his aircar. No sense in staying to face a charge which would be circumstantially against him.

He gritted his teeth as he operated the controls and the aircar, after its short run, lifted and shot up into the darkened sky. No! Better to be a fugitive, and perhaps try to hunt down that Robot. If he caught the thing, put it out of action, at least he would be preventing more violence, and even perhaps saving the lives of the monster's potential victims. And there still remained a chance that a message may come through from Mars giving details of how the missing Robot escaped. A slim chance, but the only hope the young Spacecaptain could cling to at the moment.

He pressed the control lever over to its limit and the speedy little craft rocketed through the night, its beam light cutting an amber tunnel of light through the blackness.

His destination was the home of his friend and tutor, Dr. Cardew, one of the greatest living authorities on Robotology. As he flew he pressed the "Official News" button

of the radio and immediately the level impersonal voice of the Official Announcer filled the little cabin, repeating the same warning over and over again.

"Aircar No. XBA661 to be apprehended. Spacecaptain Downs required for questioning. All Airpatrol Cars attention. Aircar No. XBA661. . . ."

He switched off the announcer, and at the same time he saw the familiar distinguishing purple lights of a Central Justice Council craft.

Pursuit

THE Official craft was lower down and as yet some distance away, but unfortunately it was directly in his path. It would be necessary now to make a wide detour, and that meant loss of time, of greater risk of discovery, for the longer he was in the air the more chance there was of his craft, with its conspicuous large painted number being seen in the exploring beams of the Official craft.

As though to emphasise that risk a great beam suddenly shot out from the Official craft and illuminated, with blinding brilliance, another craft. Almost immediately the beam faded, but other beams were shooting out from Official aircars further away, picking out every flying craft.

Arthur's heart sank. The hunt was definitely on, and he was being forced to swing away east instead of going south where Dr. Cardew's house was located. A huge fleet of Central Justice Aircars were scouring the skies above the greater city area, picking up the wavebeats of every other craft and briefly examining each one with the powerful beams, looking for XBA661. And it would be only a matter of time, perhaps minutes, before his craft would be picked up.

And below, Official terracars would be out, their crews vigilant, ready to move to any point at which he might land, directed by the investigating aircars. Better to land now, rather than wait until he was forced down and his whereabouts radioed to those below.

He was still considering which would be the better course when a purple-lighted aircar moved across in front of him, barely a

mile ahead; the great glaring beam shot out and picked up a craft on the left. His turn next! Setting his teeth, Arthur made his decision. He would try to make Dr. Cardew's. At least he would get as close to the house as possible, and trust to completing the journey on foot, dodging the terracars and the patrolling Officers.

He pointed the nose of his little craft downwards and skimmed low over the tall buildings, the aircar travelling at top speed. He was heading south-east, but he could make up the detour in a matter of a few minutes, once he got a clear run.

He looked in the direction of the Official craft. Its beam had faded again, the inspection of that other craft having been accomplished, but the purple lights were now swooping down on his trail. The buildings below were long dark blurs as the young spacecaptain, using all his skill, piloted his tearing little craft over the flat roofs, banking and twisting unexpectedly.

He shot a quick glance behind through the transparent rear port, and was surprised to see that the Official aircar had turned away and was no longer following him. He frowned. Strange! There was no doubt that his aircar had been observed, and no doubt that the super speed of the Official craft could more than match his own speed. He did not slacken speed, however, but pressed the little craft on, gradually veering around towards the south. . . . And then, suddenly, he understood—understood what he should have grasped immediately. Ahead, three purple-lighted cars were converging, coming from different directions. Of course! The Official craft were assigned different sections of the Greater City area, and the one from which he had escaped had simply called to the others in the area to which he was heading, and here they were, waiting to intercept him!

He gasped, and automatically increased speed. The Official craft, which had appeared with such startling suddenness from the right, easily kept pace with him, the beam revealing the telltale number on the side of his craft. Then the beam faded, and small alternate blue and red flashes came from the Official craft, the command to ground his aircar. And the other pursuing craft had arrived, circling him, hemming in the little aircar, and all flashing out that

imperative command to return to the ground.

Arthur obeyed the command—suddenly. He dived abruptly, shot towards the ground at terrific speed, and gauging the angle with a precision born of his years of handling spacecraft, flattened out over the little park, and at the last second reversed the jet controls. The craft shuddered and creaked alarmingly under the strain, and as it touched the ground Arthur was flung forward violently. Only the padded safety-bar holding him to his seat prevented his crashing through the nose of the machine. He recovered quickly, and shut off the reverse controls just as the machine was beginning to move backwards, and stepped from the aircar.

Above, the Official craft were circling lower preparatory to landing in the roadway, a matter of a hundred yards distant. He raced across the grass in the general direction of Dr. Cardew's house, reaching the edge of the little park as the first of the Official craft came to rest on the road.

The brightly-lit road in front of him would have to be crossed, which meant emerging from the comparative gloom of the park. But as he hesitated the thin penetrating wail of a C.J.C. terracar decided him. He raced across the road, a clear-cut figure under the light, and a shout from the grounded Official craft indicated that he had been observed. And as he reached the other side of the road the terracar, its siren screaming, came into view.

He could hear the shouts of the Officer who had first seen him, and an answering cry from the terracar, and then the pounding of feet behind him. He ran swiftly, turning down every side street in an effort to confuse his pursuers, but it seemed impossible to turn them from his trail. And to make matters worse, he had succeeded in confusing himself. He knew he was heading in the general direction of Dr. Cardew's home, but was not now sure of the exact location.

But when he turned another corner his heart gave a great leap. There, not two hundred yards away, was the big house. He was about to make the last dash when a chilling thought struck him: it would be impossible to reach the house, situated as it was on the other side of the brilliantly

lit road, unobserved by his pursuers. Instead of making the dash he shrank back against the shadow of the walls, and as the pursuing footsteps came closer he darted into the blackness of a doorway.

He saw the figure of the Officer pass the doorway, waited, then peered out. Only one Officer was chasing him now, proving that his twisting and turning tactics had been partially successful in that they had made the pursuers split up. The Officer had now come to a halt, and was standing, apparently nonplussed, on the edge of the roadway, his green uniform and red-trimmed cap conspicuous in the light. Then he turned and retracted his steps, and Arthur, his heart thudding moved further into his retreat as the Officer began moving slowly towards him, flashing his torch into the doorway of each building.

He could hear the footsteps coming closer and closer as the man made his inspection. The Officer was at the next building when Arthur, feverishly debating within himself as to the next move, tensed his muscles, and waited, every nerve in his body quivering. Then, footsteps again, and a blinding light full in his eyes!

An Ally

THE young Spacecaptain sprang almost at the instant when the light appeared. He swung his clenched fist, gauging the distance as best he could by the shadowy figure behind the powerful torch. It was a wild swing, but a successful one. Before the man was fully aware of the presence of the young man he had dropped like a log under the impact of knuckles on his jaw. The torch went out and dropped with a clatter to the ground.

And his primary need now was to remain free. He could hear the wailing of the terracars as they swept along the roadways in the vicinity. At present, at least, he had no hope of escaping from this area; his only hope was to get to Dr. Cardew's—but he dare not risk entering that pool of light where his Spacecaptain's uniform would mark him out to any of the Officers who might at any moment arrive.

His uniform! He gave a start, and his eyes gleamed. Why not? He bent and

dragged the unconscious Officer back into the darkness of the doorway. . . .



"So that's the story, eh?" Dr. Cardew, bald-headed, thin, wrinkled, but suggesting wiry strength of body, and possessing keen dark restless eyes that indicated undiminished mental activity, had listened without comment while his nocturnal visitor related the events preceding his arrival. "And now you want me to hide you?"

"Only for a few days, Doc." urged Arthur.

"You can stay a few years as far as I'm concerned," replied the Doctor indifferently. "I'm not worried about that. Personally I believe every word you've said. And, furthermore, I consider myself partly responsible for your predicament, for it was I who taught you Robotology and pointed out the dangers of the use of intelligent Robots. And, another point, I want to get on to the trail of this Robot myself; catch the thing undamaged and hear from its own speaking-box just what its reactions and ideas are. Now that we have found one which has turned on its makers, it will be a more conclusive example of what could happen in the future than all the arguments I could offer." The Doctor eyed the young man for a few minutes. "You could certainly assist me, Downs, and I don't see why you shouldn't."

"If you could persuade the C.J.C.—" began Arthur.

"I'm not going to try," put in Dr. Cardew. "My ideas are not popular among certain influential persons, and there would be a howl if the C.J.C. allowed you to remain at large, after your little bit of handiwork to-night, at my request. No, it shouldn't be in the least difficult to rig you out in some sort of disguise—different clothes, perhaps a bit of padding here and there, and a few wrinkles. . . . Not difficult at all. However, we'll discuss that in the morning."

Unexpected Visitor

"YOU'LL do." Dr. Cardew, a gleam of amusement in his keen eyes looked at that young Spacecaptain, or rather, at the changeling which had been Spacecaptain Downs only the night before. Arthur

was dressed in one of the suits of brown overalls and the brown skull cap of a jet-service station technician, and he looked considerably older and plumper. The former effect had been achieved by a skilful touch of grey on the hair showing beneath the skull cap and on the stubble which was the result of his not shaving; the latter by carefully arranged pads about his middle. A close scrutiny would reveal the features of the young Spacecaptain, but a casual inspection would not penetrate his disguise. "You'll pass," said the Doctor. "Although you do look rather like an older relation of yourself."

"Thanks for all your trouble, Doc," said Arthur.

I'll go now, Downs, to see what this summons to the C.J.C. means. I'm pretty sure that they've called me in order to have me assist in locating the Robot. In the meantime, you remain here in the study. I've told my assistant that you're working on some jet-control calculations under my direction, so he won't disturb you. Fortunately, I have quite a few jetservice technicians popping in now and again for instruction, so the attendant won't be in the least suspicious."

For some moments after the Doctor left, Arthur sat frowning, thinking of the Spaceport and of the small cluster of houses of the Spaceport Officials. Ann, all alone. . . . He rose impatiently, and took down one of the Doctor's books on Robotology, and gradually found his thoughts absorbed in the work. But when he came to the chapter headed, "The Instability of the Electronic Brain," and read graphic descriptions of the horrible possibilities associated with unstable Robots, his fears returned. Try as he would he could not free himself from a growing foreboding, until it filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else, including the book he held before him.

He flung the volume on to the desk. He couldn't stand this any longer. He would have to get in touch with Ann. He didn't want to alarm her unnecessarily, but a warning would certainly do no harm. And he also wanted to reassure himself of her safety. There was a risk in using the visiphone; old Dan might possibly be in the house, as he often slipped over during the day. And Miss Francis, although

unlikely to be there at that hour, being more often in attendance in the evening, may possibly be at home. Still, he was reasonably sure of Miss Francis. She wouldn't give him away.

He pressed the selection of buttons, and presently the screen glowed and he was looking at the image of Ann in the living room of her home.

"Yes?" The girl's voice and expression were pleasant but impersonal. "If you want to speak to my father you will find him in the Directors' Room at Administration Building. The code call is . . ."

"Ann!" There was relief in Arthur's voice at seeing her thus, safe and unharmed, after all those crowding black thoughts of the past few hours.

The girl frowned. "I beg your pardon. I'm afraid I—Oh!" Her eyes widened. "Arthur! I *thought* there was something familiar about that face. What on earth have you done to yourself?"

"Just a little disguise, my dear," smiled the young man. "You're all right?"

"Of course—but I've been terribly worried about you. Don't you think it would be wiser to give yourself up? I'm sure you'd be cleared sooner or later, Arthur."

"No." He shook his head. "Things looked bad against me at the start. The case your father made out against me seemed fairly conclusive. But now, things look worse. I've bolted, refused to obey the commands of the C.J.C., and assaulted one of their Officers. I've got to stay free until that Robot is caught. If it's destroyed I'll have almost no chance of proving my innocence. The Central Justice Council has to get the truth out of the Robot if I'm to be cleared."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Ann doubtfully. "But I hate to think of you being chased and hounded down, Arthur."

"Never mind about me," he said quickly. "Think of yourself, Ann. I believe that that Robot won't be far away from the Spaceport. I want you to be particularly careful of your movements, and warn your father, too."

"I don't think—" she began.

"I *know!*" he interrupted. "I've had a feeling of impending trouble for hours, probably only imagination of course. But this is not imagination. Just wait a moment,

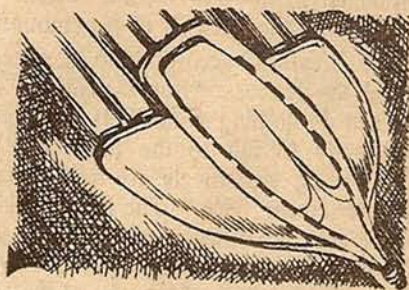
Ann. . . ." He picked up the book from the desk, quickly flicked over the pages. "Now, just settle yourself comfortably for a few minutes and I'll read some of this chapter on electronic brains. I don't want to frighten you, but Dr. Cardew, who wrote the book, and who, by the way, is looking after me for the present, is an expert on his subject. Listen. . . ." He commenced to read, slowly and carefully, pausing every now and again to look up into the image of Ann's interested face.

And it was during one of these interludes, after a rather long paragraph, that he looked past Ann, and his shocked eyes almost started from their sockets.

"What—what is it, Arthur?" she cried.

He could not answer for a moment. The words choked in his throat. He pointed behind her at the figure standing in the doorway; the dully shining metallic figure with the cylindrical head from which glowed a pair of green eyes.

"There's no one—" began the girl, turning. Her voice stopped abruptly; she was silent for an instant, then a frightened scream came across the visiscreen, as the Robot walked deliberately towards her.



The Robot Strikes

WITH horrified eyes the young Space-captain stood staring at the drama which was being enacted before him on that glowing square screen of the visiphone, a drama that was stark reality.

The Robot walked up to the girl, who, her back to the screen, seemed petrified under the cold stare of those electronic green eyes.

"Ann!" Arthur's voice roused her. "Run—*run!* Get out into the open for heaven's sake."

She half turned to face the screen, her

face deathly white. Then she made a quick movement to one side, but the powerful metal arms shot out swiftly, and a jointed metal hand closed over her upper arm in a cruel vice-like grip. She screamed and struggled futilely, and the Robot's other arm, moving with characteristic swiftness, came up and the hand crushed over her mouth.

The two figures, the monstrous Robot and the slim young girl in its grip, were completely filling the screen now. Ann's agonised eyes were turned imploringly to the screen; little spots of blood had appeared on the metal fingers crushed over her lips.

"My God! It'll kill her! Robot!" Arthur's voice was raised in a shout. "Robot, listen to me!"

The Robot paid no attention for a moment. It was looking down at the weakly struggling figure of the girl, crushing her closer and closer until it seemed that her body would be broken against the hard cold metal of its own. And then suddenly the girl's struggles ended, and she was a limp figure in the metal arms. Only then did the Robot lift its face to the screen.

"If you've killed her," shouted Arthur passionately. "I—I'll—" He broke off, choking with the intensity of his emotion.

"She breathes, according to her kind," replied the Robot. "But I shall kill her. You can do nothing to me." It allowed the girl's body to fall to the floor, the soft thud coming sickeningly to Arthur's ears over the screen. "See." The Robot held up its left arm, which was seared and had a hole in it just above the elbow. "Your raygun could do only this to me. I am more powerful than you humans who made me.

"If you kill that girl you will be pursued, and you will be blasted into slag. You will not exist any more."

"I am being pursued now," replied the Robot. "But I shall not be blasted. I have a raygun." The hand slid into one of the slots in the leg, designed in the building of the Robot as a receptacle for tools, and emerged grasping a gun. "I think of all things. I am intelligent." The metallic voice had in it a faint quiver, suggesting that it was under the influence of some rudimentary emotion, possibly that of self-satisfaction. "I have an aircar outside," went on

the Robot. "The human who owned it is crushed and lifeless. I am powerful."

The Robot bent below the screen, and when it came into view again it held the limp body of the girl in its arms. "I shall crush this human."

"Don't!" Arthur's agonised voice ran out as the Robot raised the girl high. "That girl. She is mine;"

"You are illogical," said the Robot. "I have her, therefore she is mine. She is only human, so I shall destroy her."

"But I want her. Listen," said the young man desperately, "that girl is important. Her father is a very great man, and she is very valuable to him. You must not kill her. If you do kill her you will be destroyed yourself in the end, no matter how many humans you kill. Understand?"

He waited in an agony of doubt and apprehension as the message entered the brain of the Robot and passed from cell to cell in that intricate maze behind the circular funnels of ears and the glowing green eyes. At length the Robot, its mental functions having arrived at a logical conclusion, spoke.

"Whether I destroy her or not every human will try to destroy me. But I am greater than all humans."

"I tell you—" began Arthur, but the Robot spoke again.

"But if she is valuable and I keep her I cannot be harmed, for to harm me the humans would have to harm her." Again that peculiar quiver was in the level metallic voice. "I am powerful, and I can use my power over humans. But I am intelligent, and I use my intellect to prevent humans from interfering."

The Robot's arms were lowered. It tossed the girl over one arm and stretched out the other, and the screen became blank and dead. Arthur, his face white and strained, stood staring at the dull screen, his brain numbed by what he had seen and heard.

Ann, taken away by the monstrous thing, tossed about in unfeeling metal arms which would carelessly and unemotionally break the bones in her arms and legs and body if she dared to struggle. Ann, in the power of a horrible creation which could not understand the meaning of pain, and would not be merciful even if it did. And, worst of

all, Ann used as a shield, as a protection, should the occasion arise, which eventually it must!

He shuddered, and the sweat stood out in great beads on his forehead as he thought of the possible agony, mental and physical, which the unfortunate helpless girl might have to undergo before she was rescued. If she was ever rescued!

He straightened up, his mouth set in a thin grim line. There was nothing for it now but to contact the Central Justice Council on the visiphone and risk identification. He must call the Council, report that the Robot now had an aircar, and that it had taken with it the daughter of Dan Morrow. As he made this decision the door opened and Dr. Cardew entered the study. He looked in surprise at the young man's strained ghastly face.

"I've heard the news," said the Doctor quietly. "I see you have, too, but although it's a shocking business—a man battered beyond recognition of anything human, and the Robot in possession of an aircar, you mustn't allow yourself to be—"

"You haven't heard everything," cut in Arthur in a choking voice. "The Robot has Ann—Ann Morrow!"

"What!" Dr. Cardew stared unbelievably.

Arthur, as rapidly as he could force out the words, told of what he had seen and heard, and at the end of his story he said, "And now, got the C.J.C. as quick as you can, and tell them—tell them you saw and heard what I've just told you. They'll put every available Officer on to the job. The result of an all-out chase might mean Ann's death, but there's nothing else to be done. The Robot will have to be captured or destroyed. And then call Dan Morrow at Administration Building and tell him. You—you'd better not mention me." The young man's face twisted into a bitter smile. "It's ironical," he said "The very man who was championing the use of intelligent Robots has been struck at by one—struck through the person who means everything to him, his only daughter."

The Wrecked Aircar

DR. CARDEW'S aircar stood outside the huge Administration Building at the Spaceport. Arthur, in his role of a jetservice

technician, remained in the car and kept his face concealed by bending over one of the motors, a spanner in his hand. The Doctor had decided to inspect the vicinity in which the Robot had murdered the owner of the aircar which it now possessed, and Arthur, rather than remain cooped up in the Doctor's study had accompanied him, and he was now waiting anxiously for the famous Robotologist, waiting in the hope that the latter's inspection, and subsequent deductions made from his profound knowledge of Robot psychology, would suggest the future moves of the Robot.

The Doctor emerged from the wide colonaded entrance and walked quickly to the aircar, his quick step indicating some suppressed excitement.

"Well, young man," he said, entering the aircar and seating himself at the controls. "Our Robot is following the behaviour pattern I expected, so far. It did not stray far from the Spaceport—it was actually hiding in the Administration Building."

"The Robot was made of ray-proof material because it was designed to work where humans could not work, in atomic furnace rooms and the like; and it knows that humans cannot go into such places. That, by the way, was why the raygun had so little effect upon it. Actually, the only effect was from the heat of the ray which burnt only a small hole in the arm. The only really vulnerable spots are the eyes, which are the foci of its locomotive nerves—it sees through the eyes and its footsteps and hand movements are guided by what it sees. One eye destroyed would destroy the movements of one arm and one leg to a great extent. Both would have to be shot out with a raygun to kill movement. It's difficult, even after we track it down."

"And that seems hopeless now," groaned Arthur. "There's been no report of the stolen aircar?"

"Yes; it was seen heading north."

"To Northfield?" said Arthur. "It might make for the Spaceport there, Doc?"

"It would not know of the existence of Northfield," pointed out the Doctor. "If it happened to stumble on the city and find its Spaceport then it would keep in the vicinity of the Spaceport; but I do not think it will go far from here." As he spoke the Doctor swung away from the city and

headed north, keeping over the wide roadway, which was divided by a thin black line into two sections, one for terracars and the other for landing aircars. "I've an idea," he explained as he brought the aircar very close to the ground, "that the stolen aircar is not very far away. Knowing the direction it took was of vital importance, for the Robot mind would automatically follow a landmark, such as the road below, at least while it was guiding an aircar. That rocky country to the left and right is altogether strange and foreign, and until its brain has become accustomed to such a landscape the Robot will avoid it. And of course it knows that it must have a smooth strip of road on which to bring down the aircar." They had reached a point where the land dropped away sharply on each side of the road, and the Doctor circled slowly, his keen eyes peering through the floor window. He shook his head at last, and the craft spiralled up and went further north, and at every likely spot, where the formation suggested caves, he repeated his circling inspection.

"Perhaps the C.J.C. Officers are correct after all," he said at length, disappointment in his voice. "They seem to think that it will keep going north, and eventually reach Northfield. We've already covered more than a hundred miles. Might as well get back. There may be fresh developments which might give us a lead later on."

"You don't think it might have turned off the main roadway to one of the smaller towns?"

"It would have been observed. Everyone has been warned and—" The craft gave a slight lurch as the Doctor broke off and gave a little involuntary tug at the steering control.

"What is it?" asked Arthur quickly.

"It might be IT!" Dr. Cardew's eyes were gleaming as he swung the craft around and commenced to circle lower. "Look! See—under those branches. No, no. . . . Not there. I'll point the nose directly at it. . . . There!"

"Yes, yes. I see it. Metal, silver." Arthur craned forward as they approached the spot in a steep dive, saw the glittering metal clearly in the rays of the afternoon sunshine. And as he looked, an icy dread filled him.

"The stolen aircar had a silversheen

finish," said the Doctor. "My calculations that it wouldn't be taken far—"

"But it's crashed," said Arthur dully. "It's smashed up amongst the rocks and trees. And Ann. . . ."

The Attack

THE two men stepped from the aircar which the Doctor grounded on the roadway, and the latter laid a restraining hand on Arthur's shoulder as the young man began hastily scrambling down the rocky bank from the road.

"Not so fast," cautioned Dr. Cardew. "Whatever may have happened to the girl the Robot could still be in action. Our proper course would be to radio back to the C.J.C. and have men out."

"Not yet," said the young man grimly. "If Ann is—if anything has happened to her, yes; but if she is still alive and a horde of Officers come here the Robot will become desperate and kill her, either deliberately or in using her to protect itself, as it threatened to do. We'll look around first, Doc."

The spot where the silver aircar was seen was no more than five hundred yards from the roadway, but so dense was the green growth of trees and bushes that the men had to orient themselves by looking back at the place where their own aircar was resting and take a line from that. As they drew nearer, the Doctor suddenly uttered an exclamation. He pointed to a clump of bush.

"See that, young man. It's been pushed aside and broken, and certainly not by a crashing aircar."

"You mean the Robot? It came back this way?"

"I mean something very different," said the Doctor. "Follow me, and by very careful. The Robot came this way **dragging the aircar!**"

"Dragging it!"

"Exactly. Don't overlook the enormous strength in those Robots, Downs. It's grounded the aircar safely on the roadway and brought it down here and concealed it under trees and bushes. We'll see in a moment. But go warily. It may be in the aircar still, although I rather think it has sought somewhere to hide, a cave, from which it can emerge from time to time to

make attacks on humans. That would be its plan."

They followed the broken track through the bushes until they came upon a dense mass of small trees and bushes heaped high, and completely covering the stolen aircar. Only a faint silver gleam revealed its presence.

"The strength of the thing," muttered Arthur, looking at the splintered trunks of the small trees where the Robot had torn them down. He moved closer to the Doctor. "Let me go first," he said. "And give me the raygun."

"We'll go together, young man," Dr. Cardew withdrew his pocket raygun. "I'm quite capable of using this."

Slowly they drew up to the little aircar, but no sound or sign came from within. Carefully the Doctor parted the branches and peered through, Arthur craning after him. They looked into the interior of the aircar which was empty. Arthur drew a quick breath as his eyes, looking through the transparent window, fell on a dark sinister looking stain on the floor of the craft.

"It—it's blood!"

"I'm afraid so." The Doctor nodded slowly. He patted the young man's shoulder. "But keep a hold on yourself." He led him from the window around to the other side. "We've got to have all our wits about us if we are to catch up with—"

The rest of the Doctor's sentence was a gasp as a brilliant, blue-white streak cut across the air, followed immediately by a sharp crack as a tree trunk, not ten yards away, split down the middle and burst into flames.

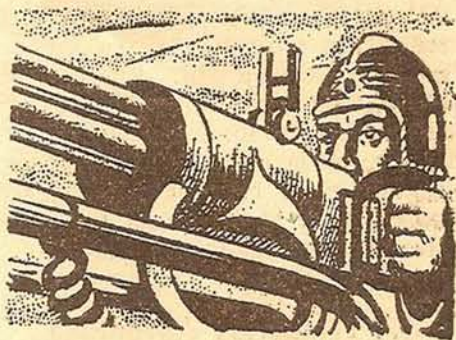
"A raygun!" shouted the Doctor. "Quick—behind those rocks!" He flung himself forward as he spoke and lay flat on the ground behind an outcrop of rock. As Arthur joined him, another lightning-like streak appeared this time only a matter of inches above their shelter, struck and split a rock just behind them and sent a column of smoke and flame into the bushes, which flared and crackled fiercely. Another and another shot from the raygun followed, each discharge sending out flame which hungrily attacked the trees and undergrowth. The two men, unable to expose themselves to the murderous ray-

gun, crouched behind their rock, almost stifled by the smoke and scorched by the approaching flames.

"We'll be cooked alive if we don't move," shouted Arthur.

"We'll be blasted if we do," panted Dr. Cardew. "Your handkerchief—tie it around your mouth."

"Put your head down and follow me then," said the young man. "Through there . . . see?" He pointed as the smoke eddied away for a few seconds, revealing a blackened strip fringed by glowing red saplings. What lay ahead was a matter only for conjecture, but there was no time to think of anything but the immediate emergency, of the torturing scorching heat, of the leaping flickering flames. Even a



blast from a raygun would be a merciful end compared with death in this inferno.

Arthur led the way. Keeping his arms up to shield, to some extent, his face he stumbled over the hot blackened ground, his feet stirring up fresh spurts of flame in the smouldering grass. He swerved and ducked as ruddy glowing pillars loomed up through the smoke, the slim trunks of trees from which the branches had been burned. He could hear his companion's thudding footsteps close behind him, and from time to time he looked back to see the dark figure of the Doctor through the shifting haze of smoke and drifting glowing embers. But at length the sound of his friend's footsteps no longer reached him. He stopped. Ahead the air was clear. The fire was, in this direction at least, almost spent, a fact due to the sudden dropping away of the ground, but the thought of making that last dash to safety without his companion did not occur to the young man.

He turned and stumbled back whence

he had come, shouting wildly. An answering choking shout responded, and presently he saw the lurching figure of the Doctor, and then a dense wave of smoke blotted it out again. He plunged forward, grasped the Doctor's arm and tugged madly.

"Only—a—few—yards," he panted.

"Can't make it." And as that last despairing gasp was forced from his lips, Dr. Cardew's knees sagged and he would have fallen into the hot blackened ashes underfoot but for Arthur's support. As it was, the young man bent and caught the sagging man on his shoulder, straightened up, and staggered heavily forward, his breath coming in great heaving gulps, his sight almost gone in that mass of smoke, his body a great living focus of agony as he urged his flailing limbs to obey his will.

On one of the brief shifting gaps in the smoke he saw the clear sky ahead, and the sight acted as a spur. He floundered forward, even achieving an awkward run, and the effort was the last required of him. He broke out into the cool air, stood for a moment on the crest of the rise, then dropped slowly to the ground, the burden of the Doctor's body rolling from him.

A Temporary Advantage

A SUDDEN startling thought caused Arthur to sit upright and turn to the Doctor, still lying on the ground, his chest heaving, but showing signs of returning consciousness. He shook him violently, and as the other opened his streaming eyes, Arthur shouted at him. "The raygun—where is it?"

Dr. Cardew stared, uncomprehending; then he raised himself on his elbow. "The—raygun," he repeated. "The—Oh!" He looked back into the smoking bushes. "It's there. Back at that rock. When the tree branch fell on me I let it fall." He attempted to rise, but Arthur pulled him back.

"Don't get up yet. The Robot isn't far away. It might be watching us. It's probably on the other side of this valley, in a cave. We're helpless without that raygun." Arthur rose to his knees and peered cautiously across the little valley to the rising ground on the other side.

The rise was rocky and sparsely dotted

with stunted trees; it was probably honeycombed with caves and hollows any of which would afford a place of concealment. But he shook his head. No. The Robot must be closer than that to have been in a position to watch their movements and get a line on them before using the raygun. He turned to the right, and saw a similar formation, rising rocky ground. More promising, for anyone in one of those caves would look down on the spot where they had been attacked. He was about to mention his suspicions of the Robot's whereabouts to the Doctor, when the latter silenced him with a gesture.

"Back," he whispered urgently. "Crouch down—quick."

Arthur obeyed, and as he did so he heard a steady succession of thudding sounds, intermingled with a grating as of metal striking rock. He lay flat in the grass, his heart thumping against the ground, as the sounds, steady, deliberate, came closer. He lifted his head a little, looked in the direction of the approaching sound, and clenched his hands tightly. There, coming through the thick bushes, was the Robot, bearing in its arms the passive figure of Ann Morrow. The girl's clothes were torn and ragged, her hair wild, and one sleeve of her ripped dress stained with blood.

The sight caused a quiver of mad rage to surge through the young man. He half rose as though to fling himself at that soulless metal monster, but the Doctor's restraining hand was a silent reminder of the futility of such an action. Instead, he lay still, while the monster strode past, skirting the smouldering trees and eventually coming to a halt on the edge of the sloping ground to the valley.

"The aircar," whispered the Doctor. "It's remembered that fire will damage the machine. My God!" he exclaimed. "It's going to walk straight through that smouldering bush with the girl. . . . No—don't!" He gripped Arthur's leg as the young man rose. "Wait! It might not—"

Ann's voice, raised in a scream, reached them. "Don't take me in there! I'll burn—don't you understand—I'll burn!"

"I can't stand this any longer." Arthur was on his feet, shaking off the Doctor's grasp.

"Wait a moment, it's hesitating."

The Robot had stopped. Its great cylindrical head bent down, its glowing eyes looking into the girl's face.

"Yes," came the metallic voice. "You will burn. You are only human. I shall not burn. I am greater than fire. It cannot harm me. I am a Robot, greater than humans."

"There'll be no holding that confounded monster now," muttered Dr. Cardew. "Every triumph it has over human weakness aggravates its abnormal superiority."

The Robot, instead of walking into the smouldering heat, turned sharply. Arthur, with a gasp, found himself looking into those green glowing eyes. At the same instant Ann saw him. She uttered a cry, and struggled madly, but the Robot's arm held her tightly.

"Arthur—Arthur!" That agonised cry, coupled with her pigmy struggles in the cruel metal arms, was too much for the young man. Ignoring the Doctor's warning shout he rushed towards the Robot.

The Robot stopped dead, its brain responding slowly to this amazing development—a weak, helpless human rushing fearlessly to attack it! Not only did the Robot halt, but it moved back several steps as it adjusted its brain to the phenomenon. For a moment Arthur thought that it would drop the girl in order to use the raygun which was clenched in its right hand, but the thing made no attempt to do this. On the contrary, it held her tighter, indicating only too clearly that its mind was impressed with the thought-pattern that the girl was its protection. And it proved too, to the anxiously watching Dr. Cardew that some element of doubt as to its invulnerability still lingered in the recesses of the electronic brain.

And then, with amazing swiftness, the Robot tossed the girl over its shoulder, gripping her with its left hand while its right hand, holding the raygun, was raised. Arthur had a glimpse of the deadly muzzle as he dropped to the ground, but it was not this manoeuvre that saved his life. It was Ann, her body writhing, her legs kicking that did that. Her foot struck the metal hand holding the gun, deflecting it only slightly, but sufficient to cause the stabbing blue-white ray to shoot past the young man

and to blast, instead of a human target, an outcrop of rock.

Arthur lay on the ground helpless, expecting at any second the searing blast which would end his life as swiftly and disastrously as a flash of lightning. But the blast did not come. Instead he heard the sound of stone crashing against metal, and he looked up to see the Robot, its arms outstretched staggering back under the impact of a small rock which, hurled with desperate strength by the Doctor, had struck the monster full in the face.

The impact caused absolutely no damage to the Robot, the deep-set glowing eyes being impervious to ordinary mechanical damage, while its toughened metal skin was similarly immune, but the fiercely hurled rock threw the thing off its balance, causing it to stagger; and as it moved back its foot came to rest on one of the many loose rocks which shifted under the weight. The Robot swayed, its huge body trying automatically to regain its balance, but failing. The arms stretched outwards, allowing the struggling Ann to fall to the ground. The metal hands spread open, and the raygun dropped. And then the Robot itself, with a heavy clanking sound, toppled over and lay sprawled on the ground.

Crippled!

With a shout Arthur sprang to his feet and raced over towards the sprawling Robot. His objective was the raygun, a few feet from the Robot's outstretched arm. But the Robot, although lacking the supple agility of a human, was possessed of extraordinarily efficient jointing, and the upper half of its body swung up at its jointed middle before Arthur had taken more than a few steps. Either divining the young man's purpose, or automatically seeking the weapon which had proved so spectacularly efficient, the Robot's arm swept out in an effort to grasp the gun, but failed to reach far enough. Arthur pounced on the gun, jumped back quickly as the monster rose to its full height and made a swift movement towards the young man. Deliberately Arthur levelled the weapon at one of the glowing green eyes as the Robot came towards him.

A thrill shot through the young man as,

with a low hiss, the gun belched forth its blue-white streak. The charge struck the Robot's head, sending out a spurting mass of brilliant sparks, and causing the thing to stop in mid-stride. There was a deep scar in the side of its head and a little rivulet of molten metal ran down its cheek and congealed—but the eyes were untouched.

"You cannot harm me with a raygun," came the cold metallic voice. "A raygun kills men. Nothing can kill a Robot." It moved forward again, and Arthur turned and ran from it, but stopped and wheeled around suddenly. He realised that the Robot, convinced that it was immune from anything but superficial damage by the raygun, would move straight towards him, and he wanted time to steady himself and take careful aim. He waited until the thing was almost on top of him before he attempted to fire; and with the gun directed at one glowing eye, he pulled the trigger.

The flash from the raygun and the shout of triumph from the young man were almost simultaneous. The Robot stopped, swung around on one leg and staggered drunkenly, and a throbbing sound, suggesting an emotional current, issued from its fixed slit of a mouth. And when again it faced him Arthur saw that one eye alone glowed in the cylindrical head, and where previously the other had been was now a blank, black socket. Below this dark hollow were little bubbles of congealing metal from the effect of the superheated blast, bubbles which grotesquely suggested tears.

Again Arthur skipped back and levelled the raygun at the remaining eye. If he could destroy that eye the Robot's nerve centres would be destroyed—it would have no power to move. But it would still have the power to accept messages through its ears, translate them into meaning in the aural centres of its artificial brain, and respond. And that meant that the thing could be carried back and questioned as to the manner of its escape from the neighbouring planet, could answer, and in so doing remove the suspicion now hanging over the young man.

Carefully Arthur took aim at the glowing target, but before he could press the trigger the Robot swung away and, with one arm hanging uselessly and one leg dragging, it moved across to where Dr. Cardew, supporting the wild-eyed Ann, was anxiously

watching the duel between the man and the monstrous machine.

"Run!" shouted Arthur. "Get back to the roadway—to the aircar. Leave the Robot to me, Doc. Get Ann away."

"The raygun has destroyed one arm and one leg," came the Robot's voice, accompanied by a throbbing hum which made the words difficult to understand. "But it will not damage me further. I have learnt now. I will destroy you, and I will again have the girl to hold before my eye."

As it spoke the Robot lurched over the ground at amazing speed considering its crippled state, one arm moving like a piston while the other hung limp, one leg shooting outwards and jerking the body forward, the other alternately propping up the swaying body and dragging heavily behind, grooving the ground in its progress.

Dr. Cardew, alive to the new menace, swung the girl from the path of the approaching monster, and the two ran towards the still smouldering bushes, stopped and commenced to make a detour around the blackened area. Arthur ran forward, his gun ready to spurt destruction to the Robot's remaining eye, at the same time shouting to the others.

"Back to the roadway, Doc—to the aircar. Radio the Officers to come out here. I'll keep the Robot busy. It can't get away."

For a moment Arthur considered his chances of following the Robot through the smouldering vegetation, and diverting its attention, or slowing it up, by attacking it with the raygun from the rear; but after he had taken several steps into the burnt and still burning area he retreated quickly. No human being could get right across that patch of heat alive.

But he might still be able to divert the Robot by using the raygun, the weapon of which the thing was now afraid. He levelled it, pulled the trigger—and nothing happened. The weapon, thanks to the Robot's earlier prodigal use of its charges, was now empty!

Fight For The Aircar

WITH a muttered exclamation Arthur flung the useless weapon aside and raced in the direction taken by Dr. Cardew

and Ann. He came in sight of the roadway as the Robot reached the bank, well ahead of the other two, and commenced climbing doggedly up towards the grounded aircar. Dr. Cardew, leaving Ann, ran to the bank, reaching it by the time the Robot, about twenty yards to the right of him, had climbed half way.

Arthur caught up with Ann, slipped his arm around her waist and helped her across the uneven ground.

"It looks hopeless," he panted. "If only I had a live raygun!"

"Oh!" Ann clutched his arm fiercely. "Look! It's fallen!"

The Robot, hampered by its almost useless leg, had toppled backwards. The clanking thud as it struck the ground and rolled back heavily for a few yards, was music to their ears. The Doctor, meanwhile, spurred on afresh by this setback to the Robot, was clawing his way upwards.

But the Robot was again upright in a moment, and steadily, and this time cautiously pausing to ensure its balance, climbed to the roadway.

"Ann!"

The girl, intent on her efforts, raised her head, and a scream of fear issued from her lips as the Robot, taking a few stumbling steps down the bank, grasped her arm with its good hand and hauled her up and dragged her across to the aircar.

Both Arthur and Dr. Cardew stood petrified with horror at this sudden, unexpected—but from the Robot's viewpoint—logical move. The Robot wanted an aircar, but it also wanted the protection which the girl's presence would offer, and now it seemed like achieving both those aims.

With a hoarse cry Arthur ran forward. In that awful moment in which Ann was being dragged across the roadway in the steely grip of the mechanical monster, he did not hesitate to sum up his chances against the giant strength of the Robot. He flung himself against the metal arm and tugged madly, but he may as well have attempted to wrench a steel girder from its foundation for all the impression he made.

"An aircar!" The Doctor's voice, raised in a hopeful shout, reached him as he clutched at the arm. "Someone coming. Keep at it! I'm coming!"

Arthur could hear the other's running

footsteps as the powerful arm swept him up from the ground as if he were a baby. He felt the metal fingers gripping his shoulder in a crushing grasp, and dimly he realised that at least the monster must have dropped Ann, since only one of its hands was effective.

The hand released him suddenly and he staggered back. He had a fleeting glimpse of that single glaring green eye, then he saw the metal arm, its hand clenched into a fist, upraised. He flung himself to one side as that terrible fist descended, felt the impact of a blow on the side of his head, and was whirled into the blackness of unconsciousness.



"The Robot Will Come"

"ANN?" That was the first word that rose to Arthur's lips after he had struggled back to painful consciousness.

"She's all right." It was Dr. Cardew's voice that answered him.

Arthur closed his eyes for a few moments. A blessed wave of relief and thankfulness passed over his clouded mind. It was good to lie there—to relax, and know that Ann was safe . . . Languidly he opened his eyes again and saw that he was in the bedroom he had occupied the night before in Dr. Cardew's house. The Doctor was standing beside the bed, a different person from the wild-eyed, tousled man with the soot-blackened face whom Arthur last remembered as running towards him just before the Robot struck. Except for a few strips of flesh-covered dressing on his face and a singeing of his hair the Doctor seemed little worse for the experience.

Arthur raised his hand to his aching

head, touched a patch of dressing, and winced.

"You're lucky," commented Dr. Cardew. "If that blow had landed direct it would have cracked your skull like an eggshell, young man, but nothing that a few days' rest won't fix. For the rest—a few burns and scratches."

Arthur struggled up to a sitting posture. "The Robot! Where is it?"

"That's what the C.J.C. Officers have been trying to find out since yesterday afternoon," replied the Doctor. "It got away. Took off just as that private aircar—which brought us back by the way—landed. It headed back this way, but we lost sight of it behind the clouds. It must have taken that aircar to the maximum altitude."

"And there's been no sign of it since?"

"None whatever. But," said Dr. Cardew positively, "I am quite sure that it isn't very far away. And I am equally sure that it will again attempt to reach Ann, sooner or later. Its mind is definitely impressed with the thought-pattern that that girl is essential to its protection; and yesterday's experience has made the impression very deep. I should say that despite—or because of—its crippled condition it is more deadly than ever. I've contacted Dan Morrow on the visiphone and warned him never to leave Ann in the house alone until that Robot is caught or destroyed."

"How is she? Her arm was injured, and she's had a shocking experience. Is she—"

"Don't worry about her. She had a nasty gash on the arm from the Robot's fingers, and, as you say, a rather severe shock, but from what I heard from her father she is almost her own self again. You were by far the most severe casualty, and a day or two should fix you up."

"And what about Mr. Morrow?" asked Arthur. "Is he still of the opinion that I'm behind that Robot's presence here?"

Dr. Cardew shrugged. "He's a stubborn man, Dan Morrow. I'm not sure what he thinks about that, but we should know very shortly. I had a rather sharp talk with him over the visiphone, and as a result he's

coming over to see me. He should be here any minute now."

"He knows I'm here?"

"Of course. And the fact that he hasn't reported your whereabouts to the C.J.C. already is evidence that he is beginning to doubt your guilt."

Arthur sank back on to his pillow, relieved at the Doctor's words. More than anything just then he longed to hear from old Dan's own lips that old Dan was mistaken and unjust; for in spite of the old man's rather unyielding nature and, at times, narrow outlook, the two had got on reasonably well together, and it would be good to get back on to the old footing. It would certainly make things more comfortable for Ann.

He lay waiting impatiently for the expected visitor, and when at length Dr. Cardew returned and announced his arrival Arthur sat up and greeted Dan Morrow with eager friendliness: a friendliness that was not reciprocated.

"I've come around to thank you," said old Dan gruffly. "Ann has told me what happened yesterday, and what nearly happened. Dr. Cardew here had quite a lot to say about it over the visiphone too. You risked your own life, and probably saved Ann's, and I'm naturally grateful. If it wasn't for that I should have handed you over to the Central Justice Council. As it is, I merely suggest that you obey the law and give yourself up for questioning."

"I see," said Arthur dully. "So you still believe that I'm responsible for the Robot's being here?"

Old Dan did not reply at once. His cold eyes rested on the young man in the bed; his shaggy brows contracted in a frown for a moment, and Arthur knew in that moment that he was still under a definite suspicion. And knowing Dan Morrow he should have known how difficult it was to get an idea out of that stubborn mind.

"We won't discuss that," said Dan shortly. "You've had a bad time. As I said before, I'm grateful for what you did for Ann. But if anything had happened to her . . ." He broke off, and his veined hands knotted into hard fists, and his eyes blazed briefly. He recovered quickly. "I'm

not saying anything more just now. I've an open mind on the subject."

"You've a closed mind on most subjects, Dan," put in Dr. Cardew. "You get an idea into that skull of yours and it stays locked in."

Dan whirled on him savagely. "I know my own mind, Cardew, if that's what you mean. As for your ideas," said Dan, a sneer in his voice, "we'd never have any progress if we all carried on like fearful old women as soon as anything new was mentioned."

"So in spite of what's happened you still think that those electronic monstrous imitations of man should be created in numbers, simply in order that Spacetours Limited can reap greater profits and build super-spaceliners quickly and cheaply?"

"You can't stop Science," snapped Dan.

"That," said the Doctor, "is the whole trouble. You can't! Once you give Science a free hand without any regard to the consequences on humanity it will gallop on to destruction, dragging mankind with it. Science almost succeeded in destroying everything on this planet in the Atomic War." He paused, and added, "That Robot can profit from experience . . ."

"I know all about your theories, Cardew," said Dan. "You've been howling calamity at the Central Scientific Council for years, and this sort of thing must be very satisfactory, from your point of view. Well, it will take more than one Robot—and one that's probably had its brain tampered with—to convince me, my friend."

Dr. Cardew sighed. "You'll learn in time, Dan. I only hope you'll still be alive to profit from your experience."

"What do you mean?" growled Dan. "You trying to scare me, Cardew?"

"I'm trying to warn you," said the Doctor quietly. "Whether you will concede that I know anything of Robotology or not—"

"You should," admitted Dan. "You've been thinking and talking of nothing else ever since I've known you."

"Very well. I suggest then that you get out of that house. Move away, perhaps to Northfield, until that Robot is caught."

Dan stared. "Are you mad?"

"You will be if you don't take my advice.

The Robot is going to pay you a visit, Dan. Somehow it will try to get at Ann. She's a fixation in its brain. **It will be coming to your house, Dan!**"

The intensity of the Doctor's tone caused Dan Morrow to stare. Then he laughed, but it was a feeble attempt at scornful merriment. "And I'm to bolt like a frightened kid, eh? Run away from a machine!"

"I've warned you, Dan. That's all I can do. But I've never been more deadly serious in my life."

"You can't allow Ann to run a risk like that, Mr. Morrow," said Arthur passionately.

"What risk?" demanded Dan. "A risk that your friend here has thought up." He frowned. "I think it's a lot of exaggerated nonsense," he said at length. "But for my daughter's sake—and for her sake only, mind!—I'll arrange for a guard around the house. I'll feel a nervous old fool for doing it, but I'll tell the C.J.C. that it's your idea, Cardew."

"By all means," assented Dr. Cardew. "I shouldn't like the members of the C.J.C. to think you a nervous old fool, when actually you're just a foolhardy old idiot!"

"Good day!" Old Dan, directing a venomous look at that bland faced Doctor, strode from the room.

A Warning To Ann

IT was perhaps an hour after Dan Morrow had left when Arthur was roused from an uneasy doze by Dr. Cardew re-entering the bedroom. He sat up quickly, for the Doctor's expression was one of repressed excitement.

"Ann?" said Arthur quickly. "Has anything happened?"

"She's all right," said the Doctor. "At least I've heard nothing about her, but I've just heard something about the Robot. It came over the news a moment ago . . . My stolen aircar was found right outside the Spaceport in the airpark."

"Great Scot!" gasped Arthur.

"It was the logical place to park the aircar," pointed out Dr. Cardew. "There are hundreds of aircars there, and they're coming and going all day. No doubt the

Robot flew into the airpark and simply concealed itself inside the aircar by lying on the floor, perfectly satisfied that the craft would not be picked out amongst all the others. Which, in fact, was correct. The aircar was there all night, but of course there were the usual odd aircars which off and on keep the number up to twenty or thirty all through the night."

"And the Robot itself?" said Arthur anxiously.

"Still missing," replied the Doctor, "But it's suspected now that it went into the adjoining terracar park and got away in a terracar. Anyway, it abandoned the aircar and a terracar has been stolen. A description of the vehicle has been broadcast, and C.J.C. Officers are on the lookout, both the ground patrol and the gyro airpatrol. It can't get far. But," added Dr. Cardew, "I doubt if the Robot will try to get far. It is probably obsessed with the need to conceal itself, until it can get protection."

"You mean—Ann?"

The Doctor nodded. Arthur flung back the bedclothes and stepped shakily to the floor. Dr. Cardew gently restrained him, but Arthur shook the other's restraining hand from his shoulder. "I'm not going out, Doc," he said irritably. "I'm going into the study to contact Ann, or her attendant, on the visiphone, and I'm going to keep in touch with her frequently during the day. I couldn't lie here in bed while that confounded monster is at large and its whereabouts unknown."

"A good idea, young man," agreed the Doctor. "But for goodness' sake relax between calls."

Somewhat to Arthur's surprise it was Ann herself who answered the visiphone. She was in pyjamas and dressing gown, and the only visible effect of her terrible encounter was a small strip of plaster on her upper lip where the Robot's silencing hand had cut her mouth. But there was a pallor on her cheeks which suggested that the strain of the ordeal had taxed her inner reserves.

"Arthur!" The smile that sprang to her face at the sight of him in the screen banished the drawn expression for a moment. Her eyes became animated. "I was just about to call Dr. Cardew to learn

how you were." She eyed him critically. "You should be back in bed, you know. You look washed out."

"Same to you," said Arthur with a faint grin. Then he added, on a sober note, "You've heard the news about the Robot—about the aircar found not half a mile from where you are now?" And when she nodded, he said, "Dr. Cardew had a talk with your father, Ann. He suggested a guard around the house."

"I know. Dad came back and told me. He's going to arrange with the C.J.C. to place the guard here from tonight."

"Tonight! He ought to do it right away, Ann. There's no telling when that thing will try to get at you."

Ann smiled deprecatingly. "It certainly won't come here in broad daylight, Arthur. If it was mad enough to try, it would be seen by someone."

"I'm not so sure," demurred the young man. "The thing does the most diabolically shrewd things, and yet after it's done them we realise that they're logical. Who'd have thought it would have calmly driven its aircar into the airpark, and be confident that the craft would be virtually lost amongst all the others? In any case, I want you to promise to keep the doors and windows locked. At least you will get warning if it has to smash its way into the house. And keep your attendant near you."

"You're giving me the creeps," complained Ann. "But I promised Miss Francis is out just now—that's why I was able to get out of bed and come downstairs—but she'll be back any minute . . ." Ann stopped suddenly and half turned. "There she is now by the sound of it, Arthur. I'll have to rush back up to bed. You can call again during the afternoon if you like, but I shan't be worried until it's dark; and by then we'll have guards with rayguns patrolling around the house. So don't you worry, there's a dear."

Hastily Ann switched off the visiphone and moved quietly from the room to the circular staircase outside the door. On the third step she paused and listened for the sound of Miss Francis' movements at the rear of the house, but heard nothing.

She returned to her room. After all, it was bright enough in there with the huge

sheet of one-way glass in one wall, faintly ribbed by the thin-edged louvres which, at the press of a switch would turn, blot out the window and make the room restfully dark. But just now she did not feel like lying in darkness. She went over to her bed, removed her dressing gown and sat down on the edge of the bed, and for the first time she faced the way she had entered.

And then her widely staring eyes beheld, standing against the wall beside the door, the huge figure of the Robot!

Another Visit

THE single glowing green eye was fixed on Ann. The Robot took limping steps forward, and the silence of those steps on the soft floor covering enhanced the suffocating sense of horror for the unfortunate girl. She stared dumbly, unable to utter the scream that rose to her constricted throat.

The Robot stopped, and its monstrous cylindrical head bent down towards her. Then it spoke.

"I shall now take you with me in the terracar," said the Robot. "Then I shall get another aircar and I shall conceal myself, and I shall emerge and destroy humans, for I am stronger and more intelligent than humans. You shall be with me, for then none shall try to destroy me."

The monster turned, and at the same instant an earpiercing shriek filled the room, and standing in the doorway Ann saw her attendant, Miss Francis, her long thin face white as chalk, her eyes almost bubbling from their sockets.

"Go!" cried Ann desperately. "Get help! Call Arthur! Call—" A metal hand clamped fiercely over her mouth, blocking her cries, and she felt herself being jolted violently as the Robot made a crooked leap towards the attendant.

But Miss Francis, after that first shock of surprise acted with amazing speed, a speed attainable only under the compulsion of desperation. With one horrified stare she turned and sped down the stairs, her thin, piercing screams testifying to the direction she had taken. Her repeated cries of "Help! Oh, help!" were suddenly faint as she closed a door behind her.

The Robot, clutching Ann, descended the stairs slowly and carefully, one leg stiff and rigid, as it found each lower step. The door through which Miss Francis had rushed led into the living room, and it was now locked, but from inside came faintly the babble of her voice. The Robot stopped doubtfully, then suddenly it dropped Ann, raised its fist and crashed it through the tough plastic of the door.



Back at Dr. Cardew's house Arthur had remained in the study, endeavouring without success to smother his nagging worry-



ing thoughts beneath the printed pages of the Doctor's books.

As a result of these conflicting arguments which he turned over and over in his mind, Arthur's nerves were in a state of tension bordering on breaking point. And when the visiphone suddenly emitted its buzzing spurts of sound he almost leapt at the instrument, pressed the switch, and brought into the study the image of Miss Francis; and brought too the piercing chattering cries as the horrified woman babbled out her story.

"It's here—here!" she screamed. "It's got Ann! It's coming to get—"

A rending crash from the door behind her caused her to turn to face the threat of the mad monster. But Arthur, after catching a glimpse of a gleaming metal fist in the shattered door, waited no longer. He raced from the room to the laboratory and burst in.

"It's at Ann's," he cried. "I'll get the aircar out. You tell her father. Meet me outside."

Dr. Cardew, without a word nodded and ran to the study, spoke over the visiphone

to Administration Building of Spacetours, and emerged, hatless and still wearing his white plastic laboratory overall, and leapt into the aircar which Arthur had brought from the garage. And with a prolonged hiss the aircar, with the grim-faced young space captain at the controls, sped in the direction of the Spaceport.

One-Man Job

AS the aircar swooped down on the runway outside the house, Arthur set the siren screaming a warning at the crowd which had gathered and was spilling over the white strip. There was a scattering, and he piloted the craft skilfully over the heads of the onlookers and almost burnt out the jets with the suddenness of the reverse action as he brought it to a stop almost as it touched the ground. He flung open the door and raced towards the house, followed by the white-overalled Doctor.

He saw ahead of him a thick cluster of people, apparently gathered around something or someone, and with a stab of fear in his heart he flung himself at the group and elbowed his way to the centre.

"Ann!" His voice choked as he looked down at the still form clad in thin torn pyjamas. A uniformed Emergency Medical Officer was bending over her, and as Arthur uttered her name, the long eyelashes moved, and she looked up, recognition driving fear from her eyes. "Ann!" He was down beside her. "Are you hurt?"

She shook her head. "Fainted," said the Medical Officer. "Rather severe shock, but she'll be all right."

"Arthur!" Ann's eyes widened and she struggled to sit up, ignoring the restraining hand of the Medical Officer. "Miss Francis! She—she's in there—with that monster!"

"You mean—you think . . ."

"I—I don't know what's been going on in there since. I don't want to think—Dad!"

Dan Morrow pushed his way towards his daughter. His drawn face relaxed when he saw her standing beside the young man. He grasped both her wrists and held them tightly, without uttering a word; but the unutterable relief in his eyes was eloquent of the strain he had undergone.

"I didn't get Dr. Cardew's message immediately," he said. "I left the Administration Building to walk home slowly, and I was half-way here when the message came. The operator called my office first and gave the message to my secretary, and then it was sent out through the address system. I came on by foot." He looked towards the house. "Is it in there?"

"Yes," snapped Dr. Cardew. "And so is Miss Francis."

He clutched the other's arm and pointed. The Robot had appeared at the back doorway and was limping out on to the porch. In its arm it held Miss Francis, apparently as yet unharmed, her face a ghastly mask of fear. And in its hand the Robot held a raygun.

"It has found it!" said Arthur through his teeth.

"Arthur!" Ann was at his side. "There's a terracar down in the bushes. The Robot is going to make for that."

Several C.J.C. Officers, armed with rayguns were spread out across the grounds. The Robot, after taking a few tentative dragging steps, stopped, and a hush came over the crowd as the thing spoke.

"I shall destroy this human if anyone tries to destroy me," it said. "I shall destroy any human who stands in my path. I found the gun I sought."

And no sooner had the words left its slotted mouth than the raygun was lifted, a blue-white streak shot from its muzzle, and the uniformed C.J.C. Officer directly ahead of the Robot was disintegrated into a burst of white-hot flame.

A gasp went up from the crowd, and the other Officers moved back as the Robot limped forward.

"They'll have to bomb the thing," said Dan. "There's no other way."

"And blow that woman to dust!" said Arthur. "No! There is another way." He turned swiftly, ran to the nearest Officer and before the bewildered man, who was anxiously watching the Robot, could comprehend what had happened, snatched the raygun from his hand and raced along the grass in the direction of the clump of trees.

"What—" began Dan Morrow. "He's going to where the terracar is hidden. I'm going too." He made a move after the young man, but Dr. Cardew stopped him,

"No you don't," he said shortly. "If it was merely a matter of trying to prevent the Robot from getting to the terracar the Officers could do that. But fortunately they're not trying anything so foolhardy. They can't stop the thing—they'd be blasted if they did, and that woman is in the line of fire. Young Downs has something else in his mind. He's probably going to try to get a shot at it from ambush, and that's a job for one man. You stay here and leave it to him, Dan."

Final Encounter

BEHIND the clump of bushes towards which the Robot was advancing Arthur found the terracar. As Dr. Cardew had suggested he was going to try to get a shot at the Robot from ambush, and he intended using the car itself as his place of concealment. He flung open the door and stepped into the long tube-like body of the vehicle, and through the window and slightly moving foliage he had intermittent glimpses of the limping Robot. It stopped every now and again, the raygun threatening the Officers, while across its powerful arm its human burden lay, not daring to move.

Arthur waited, every nerve tense, but the hand that held the raygun was steady. Only too well he knew that there would be one chance—one shot only, and with that shot he must strike the glowing eye. Even then there would be a terrible risk for the Robot's prisoner. A slight movement on the part of the Robot and the blast would strike the metal of its body, and the white hot blast would spread over the tough surface and Miss Francis would be seared to death. While a slight error on his own part would have the same tragic effect.

But as the Robot reached the shield of low trees and bushes around the terracar the unexpected happened. One of the Officers, seeing the imminence of the Robot's escape took a desperate chance and fired. The blast streaked across the intervening space, missed the Robot's head by inches and struck the patch of trees. A white streak of flame shot upwards, and the next instant the trees and bushes were a mass of flame and smoke.

Arthur saw the Robot's head turn towards the fire behind which rested the

terracar, and then the monster raised the raygun and bolt after bolt of blue-white streaks were released from the gun as the Robot backed towards the terracar. It plunged straight into the burning bushes, and the frantic woman, uttering a scream of agony squirmed and struggled on its arm; and the Robot, preoccupied with the operation of its raygun allowed her to fall to the ground. The woman had risen to her feet and was running madly before the Robot gave chase. It limped after its quarry in giant strides eating up the short distance. The Officers were shooting wildly at the Robot, but although one of the ray bolts struck it on the side of the body, sending out a brilliant burst of sparks, it failed to check the monster's lurching rush.

The screaming woman was running towards the house as offering her a refuge, and then a gasp went up from the crowd as, in a whirl of flying burning branches, the terracar shot from the fire and streaked like a rocket towards the Robot.

It was over in a matter of seconds. Arthur, at the controls, with the terracar jets flat out, directed what was virtually a projectile at the Robot. He had a glimpse of the gleaming figure of the Robot as the terracar ate up the short distance, and then a crash as the monster was tossed into the air, and he felt himself being jolted forward against the front screen, and an excruciating pain in his right shoulder which took the brunt of the impact.

As the terracar rolled over on its side he shut off the controls, clawed at the uppermost door and scrambled out. But already the Robot had risen to its feet and had turned vengefully towards the cause of its disaster. Arthur crouched behind the vehicle, saw the green eye glaring. The temptation to fire the raygun was almost irresistible, but he waited. There could be no mistake this time. The Robot came closer. And in the hush the Robot's voice, harsh and throbbing, spoke clearly, carrying to the eager ears of all that expectant crowd.

"It is you again," said the metallic voice. "Ever since I escaped from the domination of humans on Mars you have been trying to destroy me. You have maimed me. Now I shall destroy—"

The burst from Arthur's raygun cut the sentence short. From past experience with the Robot he knew that a threat was no sooner uttered than, with lightning like speed, it was carried out, and this time he did not wait. Even as his own raygun spat flame the Robot's arm had been raised, but it never completed its movement. The blast struck the green eye squarely; there was a burst of flame, the blue-white tinged with a green glow, and the Robot, still standing was sightless. Two blackened sockets were now in the big cylindrical head. There was something almost pathetic in the way the thing turned its head slowly from side to side, the sightless sockets seeming to be searching for light. It attempted to move, lurched, and collapsed flat on to the ground.

Conclusion

THE Central Justice Council Officer, kneeling beside the prostrate Robot, rapidly wrote in his tablet as the helpless monster spoke. In the little cleared circle of the vast crowd, which was being kept back by a ring of Officers, were Arthur and Dan Morrow, and Ann, who was supporting the shocked Miss Francis; and kneeling alongside the C.J.C. Officer was Dr. Cardew who was addressing the questions to the Robot.

"Well," said Dr. Cardew at length, having completed his questioning, "I think that is quite conclusive. The Robot says it escaped from the Mars factory, hid itself in the atomic fuel-converter chamber of the *S. L. Venturios* because it knew that no human could follow it there. The whole idea behind the escape project was simply to get away from human domination. It is No. 1 of the intelligent Robots and therefore the most experienced, and that was why it was the first to attempt escape and to resent domination."

"Others will escape," came the Robot's voice, throbbingly. "Robots are greater than humans, therefore they will destroy humans. Robots will come here, and they will restore my eyes, for they are skilful, and I shall walk again."

"I'll have the Central Scientific Council send a man out to remove the head and destroy the electronic nerves completely," said Dr. Cardew shortly to the Officer.

On the porch Dan turned to the young man. "I owe you an apology," he said simply. "I owe you more than that, in fact, more than I can ever repay you. You not only saved Ann and, I think, Miss Francis, but you and you alone destroyed the threat of that monster."

"No, Mr. Morrow. Dr. Cardew—"

"He did a great deal," put in Dan Morrow, "but your efforts made all the difference, Arthur. And I realise now that you have been right all along the line and I—I have been utterly wrong. I have been quick to condemn you, but I'll be quick to make amends." Old Dan paused; he looked a very old man after the stress through which he had passed. Then he went on very deliberately, "When you take my place in the near future as Director—"

"What!" The exclamation came simultaneously from Arthur and the girl.

"I'm getting on," said old Dan with a tired smile. "And I'm getting out while there's time for me to enjoy a rest. You will be my nominee, Arthur."

"I—I don't know what to say, Mr. Morrow," said the young man.

"You owe me nothing. I owe you a lot," Dan looked at his daughter. Then he held out his hand, and the two men exchanged a firm grip.

Dan Morrow stepped from the porch out into the open. "I'm going to see the last of the Robot," he said. "You two won't want to see any more of it. No doubt you've something more interesting to discuss."

"We have!" grinned Arthur.

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