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REVIEWS

MELCHAM BERRY

TOP PICKS

ROBERT PULLMAN

COVER

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# CASTAWAYS OF EROS

NOVELET By NELSON BOND

Eros was a lovely space-ride. Tangled woods, Pale  
area. But Eros had its terrors, too, terrors of a for-  
gotten frontier. Men to assist, the wrecked  
Mendys had to dig deep into their  
fighting Terman sub-memories.

**B**UBBY couldn't help winking. Pop would stand up just a little bit straighter. Not that he was ashamed of Pop; it wasn't that at all. It was just that the Facelium stood so straight, his shoulders broad and firm. Standing beside him made Pop look sort of thin and puny; his chest caved in like he was carrying a heavy weight on his shoulders.

That was from studying things through a microscope. Anyhow, decided Bubby with a boys' loyalty, that S.S.P. man probably wouldn't even know what he look for if somebody put a microscope in front of him. Even if he was big and steady and broad-shouldered in his green bloom.

Mom said, "Bubby, what are you muttering about? Do stop sidling!" Bubby said,



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"Yeeman," and glared at Moira, as if she, in some obscure way, was to blame for his having been imprisoned right out here in the middle of Long Island Sound, where everybody could hear and laugh at him. But Moira, studying the handsome SSP man suspiciously, did not notice. Dick was doing something in the ship. Elsewhere stood quietly beside Moira, crossing subtly to The Patch as it wouldn't be seen by the thousands of eyes of rocket motors. Crumpton Mowley had buttonholed an embarrassed young woman, was complaining to her in loud and certain terms that modern interrogation practices were "Bank bellywash, Mister, and a del-rated dipshit!"

The Patrolman said, "Your name, please, Sir?"

"Robert Ernest O'Brien Mowley," said Pop.

"Occupation?"

"Research physicist, formerly. Now about to become a hard-core writer."

"Age of wife and party . . . former residence . . ."

Overhead, the sky was blue and thin-clear as a bowl of skimmed milk; its vastness limited in sharp relief, to the west and north, the mighty spans and arches, the fancy domes and flying buttresses of Great New York. The spacecraft fed a hundred shafts of light from one field lifted air loads, giddy, colored meters with gyroscopes again. From another, a West Coast satellite swung upward to lose itself in thin, dim heights.

The craft by the board was the one in which a flock of interplanetary craft made homeward flight. Luggers and lingers and emitters. Bobby ran, with sudden excitement, the sharp, staccato press of the Solar Space Patrol men-of-war.

Here, in this field, the GOC's—the General Spacecraft Crafters. From one of which, it soon as Pop got clearance, their ship would take off. Three days! Bobby felt an eager spluttering of his pulse; his stomach was growling with a host of butterflies. Their ship!

The space officer said, "I think that takes care of everything, Dr. Mowley. I presume you understand the hard-core laws and regulations?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Very well, then—" Space-red hands made official motions with a hand-stamp and pen. "Your clearance. And my very best wishes, Sir."

"Thank you," said Pop quietly. He turned. "That's all, Ready, Mister? Elsewhere! Moira?"

Bobby bounded forward. "Can I push the button, can I, Pop. When we start, can I?"

DICK was waiting before the open lock of the Carthagen. Dick could do anything, everything at once. He took The Patch into the clasp of his left arm, helped his mother aboard, said, "Shut up, kid, you're enough to wade the dead. Watch that grandpa, Billy. Papers all set, Pop?" And he tucked The Patch's sleeping clock with an oily finger. "You are just like your ma, he said unobtrusively, and for baby giggled. Elsewhere cried, "Dad—those dirty hands!"

"Everything is in order, Richard," said Pop.

"Good. You folks go in and strap down. I'll stay. Here comes the cradle-monkey now."

Pop said, "Come along, Robert," and the others went inside. Bobby waited, though, to see the cradle-monkey, the man under whose orders spacecraft lifted gear. The cradle-monkey was a stout man with graying lips and arms and temples. He looked at the Carthagen and smiled, then at Dick.

"Finally come, huh?"

"That's right."

"Well, it's god-damn-ignity' value, don't try to blast off with y'r side jets hoarse'. Take a seven-point-mission reader on y'r A-10 gauge, over rollers only!"

"Careful to you, button-holer!" grinned Dick. "I've had eight years on the speller box. I can hit my cue."

"Oh, a realizer?" There was now, grudging respect in the groundman's tone.

"Well, how was I f' know? You ought t' see what some o' them jumpy-jacks do to my cradle—burn 'em black! Oh, well—" He backed away from the ship.

"Clean after!" said Dick. He closed the lock. Its entrance slid into place, whooping

retroactively. Bobby's ears rang suddenly with the mild compression of air, when he swallowed, they were all right again. Dick saw him. "What are you doing here, kid? Didn't I hear Pop tell you to come below?"

Bobby said, "I'm not a kid, I'm almost sixteen."

"Just old enough," promised Dick, "to get your seat warmed if you don't do what you're told. Remember, you're a sailor on a spaceship now, Pop's the Skipper, and I'm First Mate. If you don't obey orders, it's mutiny, and—"

"I'm obeying," said Bobby hastily. He followed his brother down the corridor, up the ramp, to the bridge. "Can I push the button when we take off, huh, Dick?"

After his high expectations, it wasn't such a great thrill. Dick set the raps and dials, told him which button to press. "When I give the word, kid." Of course, he got to sit in the pilot's bucket-chair, which was something. Moira and Eleanor and Mom had to sit down in acceleration harnesses while Pop and Dick sat in observation seats. He waited, all ears and nerves, as the door trembled, slunged away. Pop set the hyper-navigation, three faint, dull thrills was a magic signal in the silence.

Then there came a signal from outside. Dick's hand was in understanding response; full again. "None!"

**B**OBBY jolted the button in frantic haste. Suddenly the silence was shattered by a thunderous detonation. There was a massive hand pressing him back into the seat, jolting leather of his chair; the chair retreated on silent channels, permissive compression bracing heavily, shunting the shock. Across the room a lovely hammock-like organoid roared.

Then it was over as quickly as it had begun, and he could breathe again, and Dick was leaning across the turret on foot that waddled quickly because up was down and top was bottom and everything was funny and mixed up.

Dick cut in the artificial gaves, checked the meter dials with a hurried glance, smiled.

"Dead on if! What to check, Skipper?"

But Pop was standing by the observation post, going as Earth already half-like in

the vastness of space. Earth, dwindling with each passing moment. Bobby moved to his side and watched. Moira, too, and Eleanor and Mom, and even Dick.

Pop touched Moira's hand. He said, "Moira—I'm not sure this is fair to you and the children. Perhaps it isn't right that I should force my dreams on all of you. The world we have known and loved lies behind us. Before us lies only uncertainty . . ."

Moira sat up, smiled and reached for a handkerchief. She turned her back to Pop for a minute, and when she turned around again her eyes were red and angry-looking. She said, "I've want to go on, don't you, Bob?"

Pop nodded. "But I'm thinking of you, Moira."

"Oh me!" Moira moaned indignantly. "Hear him talk! I never heard such nonsense in my life. Oh never! I want to go on. No, never mind that! Richard, isn't there a kitchen on this boat?"

"A galley, Miss, below."

"Galley . . . kitchen . . . what's the difference? You two girls come with me. I'll warm three men up starving, I will!"

**A**FTER that, things became so normal as to be almost disappointing. From his eager reading of such magazines as *Newton's Tale* and *Cosmic Fiction Weekly*, Bobby had conceived wild-travel to be one long, momentous chain of adventures. A super-thrilling serial, punctuated by interludes with spacepirates, narrow breaches with mutants, sabotage, treachery—hair-raising, heroic and horrifying.

There was nothing that that to detract the calm and peaceful journey of the *Carthagine*. Oh, it was enjoyable to stare through the observation panel at the flame-dotted pall of space—until Pop tried to turn his curious interest into educational channels; it was exciting, too, to peep through the convenient screens of their floating home—except that Dick heard their orders that nothing must be touched, that he must not enter certain chambers, that he mustn't push his nose into things that didn't concern him—

Which offended Bobby, who was sixteen OK, anyway. fifteen and three-quarters.

As they ate and they slept and they ate again. And Pop and Dick applied each other at the central banks. Most spent endless hours with comb and mirror, devising elaborate hairstyles which—Bobby reminded her with impudent observation—were so much wasted energy, since they were sitting in a place where nobody could see them. And Matt loitered about in the galley, performing vicarious with floor and stuff, and in the recreation room, Eleanor studied The Poohs, and lost innumerable games of cribbage to Grandpa Mosley who cheated outrageously and groined, between hands, about the double-blind conventional way Dick was handling the ship.

And somehow those blank days sped by, and they were nearing their destination. The way planetoid, Eros.

Pop said, "You deserve a great deal of credit, son, for your fine work in rehabilitating the Cuckooles. It has performed beautifully. You are a good spaceman."

Dick flushed. "She's a good ship, Pop, even if she is thirty years old. Some of these old, hand-fashioned jobs are better than the flash junk they're turning off the belt nowadays. You've checked the destination and trajectory?"

"Yes. We should come within landing radius in just a few hours. Our drives at 100,000 precisely and make such minor course alterations as are necessary, no problem." Pop smiled happily. "We're very fortunate, son. A mere fifteen million miles. It's not often Eros is so near Earth."

"Don't I know it? It's about a hundred million at perihelion, but that's not the lucky part. You may had to pull strings to get the government land grant to Eros. What a place! Atmosphere . . . water . . . vegetable life . . . all on a hunk of dirt fifty-seven miles in diameter. Finally, I don't get it! Eros must have terrific means to have the attributes of a full-sized planet."

"It does, Richard. A tremendous one."

"Magnificent!" Dick gasped. "Why don't people tell me these things! Boring stuff, Pop, we're rich! Blessed planetoid!"

"Not so fast, son. Eventually, perhaps not today. First we must establish our claims, justify our right to own Eros. That means work, plenty of hard work. After that, we might be able to consider a mining

operation. What's that?"

Bobby jumped. It was Matt's voice. But her cry was not one of fear, it was one of excitement.

"Bob, look! Off to the—the left, or the east, or whatever you call it. Is that our new home?"

Bobby did not need to hear Pop's reply to know that it was. His evil's smile of loath was enough, the shine in his eyes as he peered out the observation port.

"Iron!" he said.

It looked all right to Bobby. A nice, clean little sphere, spinning lazily before their eyes like a top someone had set in motion, then gone away and forgotten. Silver and green and rusty brown, all still faintly blurred by distance. The warm rays of old but collected gully, gully, brown mud that covered half the planetoid's surface, and mountains cut long, jagged shadows into sheltered plains beneath them. It was, thought Bobby, not a bad looking little place. But not anything to get all dew-eyed about, like Pop was.

Dick said softly, "All right, Pop. Let's check and get ready to set 'er down . . ."

## II

IT WAS not Dick's fault. It was just a tough break that no one had expected, planned for, guarded against. The planetoid was there beneath them; they would land on it. It was as simple as that.

Only it wasn't. How did they have any warning that the problem was more complex until it was too late to change their plans, too late to halt the irreversible movements of a groundling spaceship. Dick should have known, of course. He was a spaceman; he had served two tours on the Earth-Venus-Mars run. But all those planets were large; Eros was just a mass. A spinning top . . .

Anyway, it was after the final coordinates had been plotted, the last bank control unchangeably set, the rockets on, that they saw the curved knife-edge of Mach slicing up over Eros' rim. For a long moment Dick stared at it, a look of angry despair in his eyes.

"Well, blast me for an Earth-bibbing idiot! Do you see that, Pop?"

Pop looked like he had shared Dick's sensation.

"The night air. We forgot to consider the diurnal evolution."

"And now we've got to land in the dark. On strange terrain. Awful! I should have my head examined! I've got a plugged tube somewhere!"

Grampaw Mowley huddled in, appraised the situation with his incomparable ability to detect something amiss. He moaned and rattled his cane on the floor.

"There's absolutely nothing," he informed the walls, "in this hemisphere stuff. But why should my cane get an' his nose get so plugged stupid?"

"What can't be cured," said Pop mildly, "must be endured." We have the forecast watch-stands, see. They will help in some extent."

That was their opinion. As they neared the planet its gravitational attraction seized them tighter and tighter until they were completely under its compulsion. Dick swept down upon them, the sunlight faded, faded, grew dim. Then as the ship moved forward, suddenly all was black. The yellow beam of the search stabilized rickshaw shadows, bringing maily rage and rounded two into one, resulting relief.

Dick snapped, "Was your barometer, everyone! Don't weep. This case will stand a lot of heat-up. It's tough. A little bit of luck—"

But there was preparation on his forehead, and his fingers played over the control banks like lightning bolts.

There was no further need for the artificial grave. Time expired, strongly, inevitably, an attractive power almost as potent as Earth's. Dick cut off the grave, then the hopes. As the last machine-created sound died away from the cabin, Bobby heard the high wailing of atmosphere, tapping and trailing at the Cochranes with tiny fingers.

Through howling Babylon they tumbled dantly and far moments that were ages long. While Dick labored frantically at the controls, while Mince watched with fatal breath, Mace said nothing, but his hand caught Pop's. Mowley cried: "The French chose to let Grampaw scawled.

And then, suddenly—

"Hold tight! We're grounding!" cried Dick.

And instinctively Bobby braced himself for a shock, but there was only a shuddering jar, a loosening of the seat that bore upon their cushions, a jolt, for that. A sudden, heavy grinding and the groan of metal forced. Then a labor-saving momentarily caressed him. Because for the first time in days the Cochranes was completely motionless.

Dick grinned daintily. "Well," he said. "What?"

Pop unhooked his safety belt, climbed gingerly out of his hammock, moved to the port, did look in look-plate. Bobby said, "Can you see anything, Pop? Can you?" And Mace, who could read Pop's expressions like a book, said, "What is it, Bob?"

Pop shook his chin. He said, "Well, we're hooked safely, Richard. But I'm afraid we're—er—sited in a way landing field. We seem to be under water!"

He heaved his verdict immediately. Inexpediably. Far from the stark beneath the door leading from the control turret to the press-chamber of the ship, came a dark void that opened and pulsed and strained and gurgled. What?

Dick cried, "Hey, this is bad! We'd better get out of here—"

**H**E LEAPED to his controls. Over more the plaintive beam of the hepatomas shined through the cabin, gray ground and dashed as the motor caught, something forward exploded dully, distantly. The door wailed and trembled, but did not move. Again Dick tried to jet the barometer. Again, and yet again.

And as the fourth wail, there ran through the ship a violent shudder, broken moral ground shilly from forward, and the water began bulging and churning through the tank. Deeper and swifter. Dick cut motor and turned. His face an angry mask.

"We can't get loose. The entire nose must be stove in! We're leaking like a sieve. Look, everybody—get into your hedges. We'll get out through the airlock!"

Mace cried, "But—but our supplies, Dick! What are we going to do for food, clothing, furniture—?"

"We'll worry about that later. Right

now we've got to think of ourselves. That's why, Bobby! Thanks for getting 'em out. You girls remember how to climb into 'em? Eleanor—you take that overboard one. That's right. There's room for you and The Parrot.

The water was almost ankle deep in the central room by the time they had all donned space suits. Blasted figures in tubercular bulgers, they followed Dick to the airlock. It was weird, and a little bit frightening, but to Bobby it was thrilling, too. This was the sort of thing you read stories about. Escape from a floating ship. . . .

They had time—no, not time—to gather together a few precious belongings. Eleanor packed a canteen with baby food for The Parrot. Miss a handful of provisions hastily swept from the galley bins. Pop remembered the medical kit and the tool-kit. Grampaw was lashed down with blankets and clothing. Dick burdened himself and Bobby with armloads of such things as he saw and improvised need for.

At the lock, Dick issued final instructions.

"The air in the bulgers will carry you right to the surface. We'll gather here, count noses, and decide on our next move. Pop, you go first to find the way, then Miss, and Eleanor, Grampaw."

Thus, from the heart of the doomed *Cambalator*, they fled. The airlock was small. There was room for but one at a time. The water was waist—no, breast—deep—by the time all were gone was Bobby and Dick. Bobby, whose imagination had already assigned him the command of the foundering ship, wanted to uphold the ancient tradition by being the last to leave. But Dick had other ideas. He shoved Bobby—*not too gently*—into the lock. Then there was water, black, cold, forbidding, about him. And the water door opening.

He stepped forward. And floated upward, feeling as uneasy, quibbly feeling in his stomach. Almost immediately a hand something clamped against his impetuous helmet; it was a hand-ripped bulger flap; then he was buckling and floating on shallow Mack wavelets beside the others.

Above him was a blue-black, star-gammered sky; off to his right, not distant, was a rising sun-disk that must be the main

land. A dark blob popped out of the water. Dick.

Dick's voice was rattling through the radius of the space-helmet. "All here, Pop? Everybody all right? Great! Let's make out for the shore, there. Stick together, now. It isn't far."

Pop said, "The ship, Richard?"  
"We'll find it again. I found up a marking buoy. That sound thing over there isn't Grampaw."

Grampaw's voice was hoarse, belligerent. "You bet y'r head it ain't! I'm on my way to werry busy. The last one ashore's a sorry!"

Swimming in a bulger, Bobby found, was silly. Like paddling a big, warm, soft rubber rowboat. The stars winked at him, the soft waves explored his face-plate with curious, white fingers of spray. Pretty soon there was sand scraping his boots. . . . a long, smooth beach with rolling hills beyond.

**I**N THE sudden quiet of dawn, it was impossible to believe the night had even been brightening. Throughout the night, the Minsky clan huddled together there on the beach, waiting, silent, wondering. But when the sun burst over the horizon like a clanging, brass gong, they looked upon this land which was their new home—and found it good.

The night did not last long. But Pop had told them it would not.

"Less minutes on its side," he explained, "is about ten hours, busy minutes, Earth time measurement. Therefore we shall have 'days' and 'nights' of five hours, short days or twilights. This will vary somewhat, you understand, with the change of seasons."

Dick asked, "Don't that a remarkably slow rotation? For such a tiny planet, it must? After all, even in only one hundred and eighty odd miles in circumference—"

"Less, too many perturbations. Some of them we have discussed before. It approaches Earth more than any other celestial body, excepting Io and an occasional meteor or comet. When first discovered by Wey, in 1898, the world of science marvelled at finding a true phantom with such an uncertain orbit. As perturbation it comes



lay within the orbit of Mars, at aphelion it is far outside.

"During its near approach in 1868-69, Eros was seen to vary in brightness at intervals of five hours and fifteen or twenty minutes. At that time, a few of the more imaginative astronomers offered the suggestion that this variation might be caused by diurnal rotation. After 1971, though, the planetoid fled from Earth. It was not until 1973, the period of its next approach, that the Kosmos-Changewick expedition visited it and determined the old presumption to be correct."

"We're not the first men to visit Eros, then?"

"Not at all. It was investigated early in the days of spaceflight. Two research institutions, the Royal Geographical Society and the Intersplanetary Service, sent expeditions here. During the Black Douglas period of terrorism, the S.M.P. set up a brief military occupation. The Galactic Metals Corporation at one time attempted to establish mining operations here, but the Bureau refused their permission, for under the Synarcade of '68, it was agreed by the Triumvir that all asteroids should be settled under land-grant law.

"That is why," concluded Pop, "we are last now. As long as I can remember, it has been my dream to take a land grant colony for my very own. Long years ago I decided that Eros should be my settlement. As you have said, Richard, it necessitated the settling of many things. Eros is a wondrous little planet; the man who came to win a title prize. More than that, though—" Pop lifted his face to the skies, now blue with hazy morning. There was something terribly bright and proud in his eyes. "More than that, there is the desire to carry a home out of the wilderness. To be able to one day say, 'Here is my home and I have worked into being with my own hands.' Do you know what I mean, son? In this wondrous world of ours there are no more earthly frontiers for us to dare, as did our forefathers. But still within us all sits the deep, instinctive longing to have a new home from virgin land."

His words dwindled into silence, and, unperceptibly, Bobby felt awed. It was Grampaw Mosley who bore the quiet

moment into a thousand spluttering fragments.

"Talkin' about lawin'," he said, "Eroses we law us a few vines! Hey!"

Dick roared himself.

"Right you are, Grampaw," he said. "You can remove your budger, I've tasted the air; it's fine and warm, just as the report said. More, while Moss and Brown are fixing breakfast, suppose you lay out our blankets and spare clothing to dry? Grampaw, get a fire going. Pop and Bobby and I will get some wood."

Thus Eros greeted its new masters, and the Mosleys faced morning in their new Eden.

### III

GRAMPAW MOSELEY wiped his G-mustache with the back of his hand. There were no napkins, which suited him fine.

"It wasn't," he said, "a bad meal, but it wasn't a first-class one, neither. Them synths an' concentrates ain't got no more flavor than—"

Bobby agreed with him. Synths have wasn't too bad. It had a nice, steady taste. And synths coffee tasted pretty much like the real thing. But those synths eggs tasted like nothing under the sun except just plain, awful synths eggs.

Four Eros days—the equivalent of forty-two Earth hours at sea—had passed since their crash landing. In that short time, much had been done to make their beach camp-site comfortable. All members of the family were waiting now for Dick to return.

Pop said seriously, "I'm afraid you'll have to get them and like them for a little while, Father. We can't get fresh food until we've settled; we can't settle until— Ah! Here comes Dick!"

"I'll see 'em," grumbled Grampaw, "but be damned if I'll like 'em. What'd you say, Dicky-boy?"

Dick removed his helmet, scratched himself from his budger, shook his head.

"It looks worse every time I go back. I may not be able to get in the cockpit again if the ship keeps on settling. The whole gear agit with open when we hit, the ship is full of water. The floor and

tegar and things like that are mined. I managed to get a few more things out, though, from tools, guns, wire—stuff like that.

"How about the hypersonic?"

"Let him out, Rob," said Moss. "He's hungry."

"I can eat and talk at the same time, Moss. I think I can get the hypersonic out. I'd better, anyhow, if we're ever going to leave the ship, we'll need power. And atomic power is the only kind we can get in this wilderness." And he shook his head. "But we can't do it in a day or a week. It will take time."

"Time," said Pop easily, "is the one commodity which we are over-supplied." He thought for a minute. "If that's the way it is, we might as well move."

"Move?" demanded Gimpson. "What's the matter with the place we're at?"

"For one thing, it's too exposed. An open beach is no place for a permanent habitation. So far we've been very lucky. We've had no storms. But for a permanent camp-site, we must select a spot further inland. A fertile plain, where we can start crops. A place with fresh, running water, natural shelter against wind and cold and rain—"

"What'll we do?" grunted Dick. "Flip a coin?"

"No. Happily, there is a spot like that within an easy walk of here. I discovered it yesterday while studying the terrain." Pop took a stick, scratched a rude drawing on the sand before him. "This is the coastline. We landed on the west coast of this inlet. The land we see across there, that low, flat land, I judge to be delta islands. One mouth of an old, fresh-water river, watering fertile valleys on either side. There, I think, we should build."

Dick nodded.

"Fish from the sea, vegetable from our own farms—is there any game, Pop?"

"That I don't know. We haven't seen any yet."

"We'll find out. Will this place you speak of be close enough to let our ruminants working on the Carchedon? Yes? Well, that's that. When do we start?"

"Why not now? There's nothing to keep us here."

**THEY** packed their meager belongings while Dick finished his meal; the sun was high when they left the beach. They followed the shore line southeast, the ground rising steadily before them. And before evening, they came to a rolling vale through which a sparkling river meandered lazily to the sea.

Small wonders unfolded before their eyes. Moving along, they had discovered that there was game on land. Not quite earthly, of course—but that was not to be expected. There was one small, furry beast about the size of a rabbit, only its color was vivid red-green. Once, as they passed a wooded glen, a pale, hawklike creature stole from the glade, watched them with soft, curious eyes. Another time they all started violently as the familiar voice of a Pterod creature vibrated mysteriously from above them; they looked up to see an oval, orange and red-green bird gliding down at them.

And of course there were insects—

"There would have to be insects," Pop said. "There could be no fruitful vegetable life without insects. Plants need bees and stinging ants—or their equivalents—to carry the pollen from one flower to another."

They chose a site on the riverbank, a half mile or so from shore, and overlooking the sea. They selected it because a spring of pure, bubbling water was nearby, because the woodslands descended away into lush fields. And Pop said,

"This is it. We'll build our home on yonder bank. And who knows—" Again their gaze that strange look in his eyes. "Who knows but that it may be the shore from which, a time being, there may spring many colonies, that fleet hoppers, and hounding, and mariners, until at last there is a great, brave city here on this part of the delta—"

"That's it, Pop!" said Dick suddenly. "That's the name for our settlement. Delta Port!"

**SO, SWIFTLY**, sped the next weeks, and Bobby was not able, afterward, to tell where they had gone. Time lightens labor; labor burdens time. But facing hours left in their wake tangible evidence of their passage—a domain, a growth in Delta Port.

One of Pop's big moves had been an attempted reorganization of their work-hours on an Eris basis.

"We cannot here," he explained, "try to maintain our Earthly habit of sleeping through night hours, working during the day. Therefore—"

And he laid out for them an intricate and elaborate "nine day work" he had devised: broken into alternate sleep-and-labor, meal-and-recreation periods. It was an ingenious system. But—

It didn't work.

Despite previous habits, after a short time men and women, old and young alike, found themselves yawning during as dark as day. There was a general quickening of life's tempo to meet the conditions prevalent on Eris; the familiar "three meals a day" ceased to have meaning; the old habit of sleeping eight hours at one stretch became anomalous under a day which waxed and waned from brightness to dark in that length of time. Impulsively at first, then more and more openly, all found themselves working into a new routine. A design for living under which they tumbled into bed for four hours of darkness, slept restlessly and heartily, woke again, pursued a half dozen hours of work or play, then capped over noon.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world. And Pop, never satisfied until he could explain such things, finally found an answer.

"I remember, now, that way back in the early years of the Twentieth Century a group of psychologists from one of the American universities tried an experiment. They put two men in a sealed, walled, soundproof room which was neither dark nor light, but was kept constantly a dull, twilight gray.

"They gave the men—who all their lives had lived on the accepted Earth standard—instructions to sleep when they felt drowsy, eat whenever they felt the desire to do so. After an exceptionally short time, the life-habits of these human guinea pigs altered remarkably. They began eating not three a day, but at intervals ranging from every three to six hours.

"As for sleeping, the experimenters found it natural to cut-way for four hours

instead rather than sustain strength on one, long, tiresome eight hour sleep-period.

"This experiment was duplicated in 1937, under John Calvery of Columbia, with identical results. The research doctors were forced to the conclusion that that is, on Earth, responsive to the conditions under which he must live. That is, he has adapted himself to Earth's phenomena, but could he truly strain its natural and normal, un-inhibited desires, it would live precariously as we live on Eris, are living? At a nine-day pace of alternate fast and six hours?"

IT WAS just like Pop to get excited about a problem of that nature when there were so many other things crying to be done. But Bobby was surprised, from time to time, to discover that in a pinch Pop could lock up with an answer to a whopping question quite unrelated to the field of empirical science.

It was Pop who, when Dink was having trouble making their minute supply of nails and screws do for the construction of the cabin, offered the suggestion that the joints be joined by lathwork. It worked. Dink logs drove-tailed beautifully; the cabin walls stood firm and looked better than if laboriously spliced together with wood.

It was Pop, too, who did something about the plate problem. Unable to bring the plates with them in their hasty flight from the wicker Cartholium, the Mosley family had made make-shift flat with large flat, washed leaves, then with shells taken from the beach, at last with weather slabs placed down by Geampian.

Pop, annoyed with these clumsy substitutes, spent several hours wandering by the shore, through the hills, up the river, finally returned one afternoon triumphantly bearing a lump of grayish mud as large as his head, ignoring all caustic queries and comments, he set about molding this into a plate—and after much fagging, succeeded in fashioning it into a reasonably shape.

It seemed to follow him but a while that the finished product was dehydrated and washed. He set it out in the sun to dry; a day later carried it triumphantly to the table and demanded his meal be served in it.

"Pottery!" he said. "From a fine clay

had up Eric River?"

Then he placed his pottery plate on the table with firm hands, and in that imperceptible way, it promptly fell into two pieces.

But a beginning had been made, and evidently enough it was Mavis who became involved in this obscure art of ceramics. The blueprints continued to cut from wooden slabs for some weeks, while Mavis began to her fingers with mud that inevitably turned to crumb, fragile clay—and then on; for she completed a bowl made of substance from which all mud-gains and small pebbles had been painstakingly sifted, and which had been allowed to dry slowly under damp glass. And this time it did not crack. Within a fortnight, a complete set of crockery made its appearance in the refinery department.

At which point Dick began talking vaguely about the construction of a kiln, and Mavis started thinking about the possibilities of decorating her proud young chinaware.

In the weeks passed, and it was surprising how much had been accomplished, and how complete and happy life could be, even without the minutiae of small comforts to which they had once been accustomed, and which, on Earth, they had expected and accepted unthinkingly.

There was no time to entertain them, but somehow nobody seemed to miss its restless, glowing presence in the living room, not even Betty whose greatest interest in life had come from the nightly adventures of *The Red Foxglove*, transmitted through the courtesy of United Synchro-Corvek. Grampaw Moseley made meals with a buttered ham; he had salvaged from the *Cerberus* they all sang, and sometimes they danced, too. There was what Mavis liked; she'd be heard all up and down and dance and dance, even though her partners were Dick and Pop, who didn't dance the modern waltz-step way well, and Betty, who pretended to dislike it very thoroughly, but thought it was kind of fun.

**G**RAMPAW owned a cribbage set, too; they played it, and chess, and card games during games that kept them house-bound. Dick, in occasional hours of leisure, showed a fair athletic field outside. Then

had a quota' run, a badminton court (a little unused, but nobody minded) and a doubleboard plane; also a few sand-pit for The Beach.

Pop had planned the house with his usual mathematical precision. From its first two rooms, built with an eye to affording swift egress, came several wings. Before long it had four separate bedrooms, a kitchen, a dining-room, and the living or meeting room, which Grampaw called the "get-together" room. There was also a central refreshing room, and another would be added as soon as Dick devised a method of applying the house with fresh, running water.

Meanwhile, Mom and Eleanor and Grampaw Moseley were to be thanked for the steady improvement in their meals.

Grampaw had early set out his farm; it was a right to see him huddling up and down the neat even rows, working his springing crops, wearing at least indolopers. Luckily the waked condition of seeds had not suffered the fate of Mom's luscious eggs and flour supply; the Moseleys had already collected tentatively at stable residues, hay, crumpled leaves of lettuce—and in another month or so there would be more substantial root and fruit stocks. Potatoes, parsnips, beans, turnips, leeks, tomatoes, corn, salad, onions.

And wheat! That was the crop most readily watched, most hopefully awaited. Wheat meant bread; bread was life. And the wheat was rippling up in soft, green waves.

Meanwhile, Tom itself supplied many— if unusual!—foodstuffs. Every member of the family watched, carefully, the eating habits of *Evansia quadrifida*, adapted to their own diet the fruits, seeds, berries, eaten by native animals, and avoided those things which, so native how horrid to look on, the birds and beasts refused. Some day, when Pop's laboratory equipment could be brought from the mother ship, they would find out about their questionable foods. But for now, it was best to be on the safe side.

Artificial light remained a problem. There were ray units hidden in their bedrooms, but they used these only in cases of necessity; they had no oil fat lamps even if they had owned lamps. Eleanor made a few fat

ervey, all shapes and sizes out of orderings, but these captured and dropped and lasted for a short time. Almost the Canteeniers were all sorts of books, telling how to make caniles properly. But these were, by now, water-soaked and illegible.

So they continued to get by with little illumination, looking forward to the day when Dick should succeed in raising the hypostomic motor from the ship. Then they would have all the light and heat and power they wanted. All from a couple of wires, or a handful of sand swept up from the beach.

All was peaceful and quiet. Until one day there came a startled dinor from the fields, the sound of excited footsteps, and Grampaw came hobbling into the house yelling, "Whore's n' gun! Marthy, analyze it, where'd y' put n' gun?"

Dick grinned and winked at the others and asked, "What's the matter, Grampaw? The moles getting into your garden?" And chuckled as Grampaw grabbed up his pterogon and hobbled away. Chuckled, that is, until the old man's answer came flaring back over his shoulder.

"Moles be darned! It's human-bein's, that's n' n' it is, fo-tradin' on me prop-erty!"

Then Dick roared, "Hey, Grampaw, wait! Put that gun down! Don't try to—Come on, everyone!"

They all went tumbling from the house. And it was exactly as Grampaw had said. Approaching Delta Port, some on foot, some on wild animals curiously horridlike cars that they had six legs and long, shaggy hair, came a big group of men and women. Six in number.

Their leader was a man of Pop's age, a balding man, heavy-set and capable-looking. Beside him rode a thin, broad-looking woman of forty-odd. Next came a short, pudgy, white-haired man; then, leading behind him two youngsters, a boy of Bobby's age and a girl slightly younger, came the last member of the party. A thin, tall young man with a crop of cinnamon-colored hair.

The two groups, one entering the house, one emerging from it, saw each other at practically the same time. For a moment, no one spoke on either side. Dick had taken the gun from Grampaw's hands, had ac-

cidentally concealed it. And now Pop broke the silence.

"Greetings, stranger!" he cried heartily. "You're plenty welcome to Delta Port!"

Then came the shockingly unexpected reply, from the leader of the newcomers.

"Greetings yourself, Mister! And what in tarnation tarnation are you doing on my land?"

#### IV

GRAMPAW MOSELEY was a man of action. He groped for the rifle swinging loosely in Dick's grasp. He said, "Gee-ow! Mister! I set eyes on that lot of pop-ular I know—"

Dick said, "Hush, Grampaw!" and looked at Pop. Pop looked baffled. He watched speechlessly as the curious drew up beside them, the members dismounted from their odd beasts of burden. Then he said, hesitantly, "There seems to be some misunderstanding here, stranger. Allow me to introduce myself and my family. I am Robert Moseley. This is my father, my wife, my son and his wife and child, my other children—"

The heavy-set man made no offer to shake hands. He greeted, "Merriest! I'm Sam Wilkes. This is my wife, my dad, my kids." He stared at the house, the cultivated fields. A look of grudging respect was in his eyes; there was a touch of awe, too. "Been doin' all right for yourself, ain't you? For a squatter?"

Pop said slowly, "Squatter, sir? I'm afraid there's some mistake. This property—is a matter of fact, this entire place—is a mine under Earth landlord law. Now, if you will be kind enough to explain your presence—"

"Yours!" Sam Wilkes' ruddy countenance darkened with outrage. "Earth land-grant! Buzze, where'd I put that—Oh, here it is! Take a look at this, Mr. Marthy!"

He slapped a strip of parchment into Pop's hand, and Pop unfolded it carefully. Dick looked over his shoulder. One of the curious, six-legged beasts skittered nervously and Bobby started. The rusty-dashed boy who had dismounted from a grained imp-ibly. He said, "What's the matter, shiny, you want no land?"

Bobby said, "Oh, course not!" and watched the animal from the corner of one eye. "What is it?"

"A goodish. We brought it here from home. Finest thing on legs. What's your name?"

"Bobby. What's yours? And what do you mean—home?"

"Sam. They call me Junior. Why, home is Mars, of course. Where'd you think?"

The word was being echoed now by Dick.

"Mars? This is a land grant charter issued by the Martian government! But—but—Pop, show him yours!"

"Don't do nothing" of the sort, said" stamped Grampus indignantly. "That there strip o' hair is pathy fake! Don't explain nothing" to 'em. Just tell 'em to get!"

The sly-poly tactics of Sam Wilkes turned a questioning eye on Grampus.

"Who's the antipe?" he demanded disdainfully. "Sounds to me like one of those big-talking, poor-scrappin' Earth soldiers I fit in the Upland Redoubt."

"Upland Redoubt?" howled Grampus. "Was you one o' the rebels we chased from the forests to the Pole? I might of knowed it! Guess that you, Dick!"

"Please, Grampus!" begged Dick. He looked at Wilkes. "My father was right, Mr. Wilkes. There is a dreadful mistake here. Apparently the Colonial office of Earth and Mars have disagreed on the ownership of this planetoid; your government has issued a land-grant on it, and so has ours."

"Course," said Wilkes, "we Martians. That's very oddish news—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Pop firmly. "Your odd is between Earth and Mars at this moment. It is a part of Earth's empire."

"Is it now," Bobby asked Junior, wide-eyed, "that puny gang hide in the Martian forests? I heard—"

"Shush, no! We used to live in the Redoubt, they want no pirates anywhereabouts. Why you ever in Chicago, Shamp? Is it you? There's a building there two miles high!"

"Two and a half," said Bobby complacently. "And it covers six city blocks. And my name's not 'Shampy'."

"—you'll notice," Wilkes was growling.

"My grant is dated prior to yours. There fore laws is mine, no matter which government's claim is number. That's Interplanetary law."

"You seem to forget," Dick pointed out, "that we've established a permanent settlement. As strikers, you may be considered licensed explosives with only the privilege of a study party. We will extend to you the courtesy of fines for the legal three months, but after that time—"

"You'll extend to us?" Wilkes' face was flushed. "Why, for a land credit, I'd—"

"Shut 'em, Dick!" yelled Grampus excitedly. "Don't let 'em get away with that talk! Shut 'em!"

"Nobody," rumbled a deep, pleasant voice, "is going to touch anybody." The tall, shaly son of Sam Wilkes rapped himself behind his father. Bobby noted with sudden approval that the young man's broadened features were corded; there was a crisp, firm set to his lips; he looked like a man who could handle himself equally well in a ballroom or a brawl. He said "Send the women away, Mr. Manley. I think we can not settle this matter."

MORRIS stopped forward, confronted the young redoubt bobby. "And who are you to be giving orders to us? Maybe Martians treat their women like cattle, but Earthmen—"

"That will do, daughter," said Pop. And he nodded. "But that's not a bad idea, Wilkes. There is no reason why we should not be able to settle this question in a friendly manner. Mr. Wilkes, if you and your daughter would accept our hospitality, I'm sure Martha can find you a cup of tea. Wilkes, if you and your son would care to sit down with us, we can—Bobby, run and get some water for the Wilkes' horses. If they are horses!" he added deliberately.

"Goodness!" called Junior Wilkes indignantly. "I'll help you, Shampy. What's the matter with that crew of yours? She looks like an civilized woman."

"Yeah? Then why does your brother keep staring at her all the time? Come on—" Bobby strained desperately for a suitable term; called his stevedores, came up triumphantly. "Come on, Stinky!"

"When they had watered and fed the

goldfish, Junior wanted to see around the lake. Bobby showed him, while the other boys marveled wistfully.

"You folks aren't lucky. This is the best part of the whole planet. . . . I mean of what we've seen so far. We got here a couple weeks before you did, and we've traveled a couple hundred miles looking for a good location. Hey, it sure was awful where we cranked up! Dad named it Little Hell, because it's so hot and sandy and terrible. No fresh water. One big hot, salt lake. Red mountains and desert land. All water, Red said—he's my brother. He's mean."

"So's mine," said Bobby. "Are Martians people?"

"What do you mean? Of course they're people. Same as you. Men that left Earth because there was too damn much fighting and stuff. And of course Earth tried to claim Mars as a colony, but Mars won its fight for independence."

"Earth just let 'em go free," scoffed Bobby. "They didn't want any drink-up old planet, anyhow!"

"No? Then why did they—Hey! What's that?"

"Quinn. Know how?"

"Do I? I can hear you!"

"Huh!" said Bobby. He glanced at the house, but no one was paying any attention to them. Pop and Dick were deep in conversation with the Wilkes, father and son. The two old men were aside on one corner of the porch rubbing salt in old wounds, re-lighting the battles of Marsman's Canal and High Plains, re-narrating the campaigns that had led to Martian independence and a better understanding between the blue and red planets. Deane and Mann were peering dinner; Mann had disappeared. A thin and lovely figure stood on the steps looking at Bobby and Junior. Junior called, "Hey, Ginger—come on down if you want us." She came.

Bobby said, "What did you call her for?"

"What's her name? You Yidd a girl can talk you playing games?"

"Huh!" said Bobby again. There was something else about playing games with fourteen-year-old girls. It didn't help much that Ginger, with shyness, fern-eyed anxiety succeeded in leaving both himself

and her brother in two games of go-fits and one of shuffleboard before the dinner-gong rang.

Dinner was a tranquil experience. Conversation had done absolutely nothing to clarify the issue. Both parties were aware of their conviction of ownership in Eros. Pop leaned his claim on the establishment of a permanent base at Delta Port. Wilkes insisted that priority of arrival was his proof of occupancy.

"So lots of us," insisted Wilkes, "has got to leave. And since we can't—"

"Can't?"

"Our ship crashed," explained Red Wilkes, watching Mann, "on landing. It is a total wreck."

**B**OBBERY thought, glumly, that Mann was a total wreck, too. He had held hopes for Mann, since their arrival on Eros she had turned into a pretty nice guy, cheerful, willing to work, bread-baking. Now, for some obvious reason, she had piled her hair up on top of her head, put powder on her face and nail stuff on her mouth. She wore a dress instead of pants, and she was missing and priming around like a prize horse. No doubt she thought she was being frisking.

"So," continued Wilkes, "since we can't leave, your family must."

And Dick laughed out loud.

"Cheerless!" he said.

"What?"

"We've wanted this," said Dick, "trying to decide which family must leave. The truth is, neither of us can! Because, you see, we cranked up in landing, too. Our ship lies out there five fathoms deep in Delta Sound!" He roared. "So that's that, folks. And I'm afraid, Mr. Wilkes, that under the present circumstances, your family will be the one to ultimately depart from Eros."

"Good! Why?"

"Because of the internationally recognized laws of squatters' rights. You must know the requirements a settler has to fulfill in order to establish claim on land! He must declare his purpose of settling upon leaving the parent planet—"

"We did that," said Red Wilkes, "before we left."

"I know. And four months later he will

be visited by an inspection ship of the U.S.P.—"

"We know that, too."

"—upon the arrival of which," Dick continued, "he must show advancement in the following colonization projects: (a) Establishment of a power plant or unit; (b) construction of a suitable dwelling or dwellings; (c) satisfactory advancement of natural resources, including fauna, fisheries or other means of livelihood and sustenance—"

"Get to the point!" growled Wilkes.

"Immediately. And with pleasure. You cut me dead or, as you have told us, you left Mars even before we left Earth. But whereas we have turned our time to good account, constructing the comforts, which you now see about you, your family has squandered precious weeks wandering over the face of Eros seeking a favorable location.

"If I am not mistaken, the Solar Space Patrol's inspection is only six short weeks in the offing. And judging from our experience, you cannot possibly satisfy the requirements of the land-grant code in that short space of time. I entreat you that the planting of a garden would, in itself, spell an end to your ambitions."

Sam Wilkes was on his feet, shaking with rage.

"That there law is nonsense, Moseley! The land law allows us a full year to establish a settlement—"

"Ah, yes! The land law. But you forget that there are unusual circumstances. You families with equally valid rights have claimed Eros. Land law is overruled, and the law of equities' dominion comes into effect.

"So, I'm very sorry for you, Wilkes. But I hope we can be friendly neighbors for the short time you remain here with us on Eros."

**W**HILKES was a statue of doom. The rigidity of his method enough to let him stare slowly to his own.

"Is— is that right, Bob?"

And the youngest Wilkes smiled.

"I'm afraid it is, Dad."

Sam Wilkes brought his fist down on the table. The hand made crockery chancel and trembled.

"Then, by God! I'll have no more of this

talk or no more plummy hospitality. Bob! Ginger, Pop—come on! We're getting out of here! We've got work to do!"

Pop said slowly, "I'm sorry, Wilkes. But—"

"Sorry! Bob!"

"And just where," roared Gumpaw, losing it, "might y' be going?"

"Not far. Right across the river. You can't claim all of this fertile valley—yet! And you haven't cleared that ground."

He stamped to the door, turned there for one, final warning.

"—and I advise you Moseleys to keep off our land, too! We're going to be mighty busy puttin' out right to own this planet. I understand there's pots around these parts that are darn disturbin'. I'd hate to make a mistake and shoot my ducks by accident. Come on, Mame!"

Bessie Wilkes looked at Mame. They were, tired features sagged pitifully. She wet her lips. "Mrs. Moseley—"

Mame said, "Bob, don't you think you're being a little harsh, maybe?"

But there was a streak of granite in Pop, too. And he was angry, white as only a dried brimstone can be. He said in a cold and level voice, "I think, Mather, you should get Mrs. Wilkes' wraps."

And they left. Ginger Wilkes turned to wish us her tongue at Bobby as they got on their goodbyes and only toward the river. And James made a gesture which Bobby returned to hand. But Red Wilkes didn't even look back. So there was no good reason why Mame should have suddenly burst into tears and gone to her own room. . . .

## V

**IT WAS DICK**, who brought home the bad news. Two Eros days had passed since the Wilkes took their angry departure from the Moseley home. In those two days, an unhappy atmosphere had settled down over the house at Delta Point. Minks said little or nothing, Mame just wept around the house. The Pooch got indigestion and cried interminably; even Gumpaw Moseley was grumpier than usual. Bobby tried to forget the depression by playing games. He got it up as a bad job. It wasn't any fun playing by yourself, and Dick and Pop were



too busy to play with him, if only—

But women in Janus Wilkes! And Gump, too!

At dinner time, Dick came into the lower deck, a thoughtful look in his eyes. When they were seated he said, suddenly, "Have any of you seen the Wilkes lady?"

Gump said "I see Old Man Wilkes. He was pickin' his land down by our wash-dory, once on the opposite side o' the event. For all I know, I checked a rock at 'em!"

Bobby looked interested.

"You hit 'em, Gump?"

"I don't never miss. In the right log."

"I bet he believed."

Gump said his upper plate loudly.

"Ware a halter, darn him! He just pulled up his pants-leg and made a fist at me. Decept o' fool's got a wooden leg!"

Pop said, "Why did you ask, Richard?"

"I was wondering if any of you had noticed what I did."

"What do you mean?"

Dick started to answer, stopped, then, "Come," he said, "It's dark. I'll show you."

They followed him out to the porch.

From there the Wilkes settlement could not ordinarily be seen. Which is why, as they stood there, one and all gaped astonished.

The thick, black London night lay heavy about them everywhere except in the direction of the Wilkes' new home. There it was light; startlingly, dazzlingly, brilliantly gay and bright! Like a great white dawn on the first of July.

"Power!" cried Pop. "Atomic power! They must have a hypnotic!"

"They never said they hadn't. They told us their spaceship cracked up; we just took a few minutes that since we hadn't been able to salvage out hypnosis, neither could they."

Bobby said wonderingly, "Gee, Pop, it looks like at home, doesn't it? I'd hope lights were so bright."

Pop said, "I'm afraid we've under-estimated our competitors, out. If they have power, they can accomplish all we have, and more! And in one-tenth the time."

"That's just," said Dick slowly, "what I'm afraid of. There's only one answer to this challenge. I've got to get our hypnosis from the Castaways. And quickly."

"But you said—"

"I know what I said. But I also know what they can do. In those days they can have a house . . . a fine, big, plastic house that will make our hand-hewn log cabin look like a cowshed. They'll have electricity, fuel, running water, all the things we've had to do without. When the inspectors see their house and compare it with ours—Mum—get me my bulge. I'm leaving for the north shore."

"Tonight, Richard?"

"Immediately."

Pop said, "And Bobby and I will go with you."

THEY were there before morning. The shore looked much as Bobby remembered it, except that now there was a raft there, the craft which Dick had used to take out to the main ship on previous visits. The three of them boarded this, paddled out to the bobbing buoy that marked the Castaways' warty resting-place.

Dick donned his bulge, weighted his boots, and went below. The sun rose higher in the east. After a while, green warlocks rolled and Dick was up again.

"It's no use, Pop. It's like I said. The ship has continued to settle; the airlock is jammed tight against the bottom. I can't get in any more."

Pop said, "And I suppose there's no way to attach a drag to the ship, work it loose?"

"It would take more power than we have," gloomily.

And then Bobby remembered, suddenly. He said, "Hey, Dick—"

"Never mind, kid. Help me off with this suit."

"But listen, Dick, I read a story once—"

"Do what your brother asks, Robert."

"Will you let me search, Pop? Listen, Dick, in this story a rubbery jet hooked out of his spaceship. So he re-entrained the main-beams and got in through the rudder jet."

"He . . . did . . . what?"

"Unfastened the main-beams—"

"I heard you! Dick's face had suddenly brightened. "Great day in the morning, Pop—I bet it'll work! Hand me that jack-wrench . . . that's the one! So long!"

And he was under water again. This time he stayed under for more than an hour. He bobbed up, finally, while Pop and Bobby were having sandwiches. Pop said, "How's it going, Richard?"

"Give me a fresh capsule," demanded Dick. His tank the moment, replenished his supply pack, disappeared. A long time passed. Too long a time, Bobby began to feel apprehensive. He didn't say anything, though, because he knew Pop was feeling the same way. And then—

"There he is!" said Pop. And sure enough, Dick was coming up out of the water slowly. Trembling slowly, Bobby saw why. It was because he was wrapped by a square feet field in his arms, a familiar square box. The hydraulic motor of the Caribbeans!

"Get it!" gasped Dick. "Easy, now . . . it's heavy. I hope it'll work. It's been under water so long—"

Joyfully, they lugged it all the way back to Delta Post. It was deep-time when they got there, but they were too excited to sleep. By five- and candle-light, Dick worked on the salvaged power unit, patching, wiring, repairing. And at dawn he had it hooked up. He raised his head gloriously.

"Get ready, folks! Here's the blow that creates the hopes of the Wilkes class. Behold—light!"

And he closed a switch. There was a throbbing beam, a glow, a moment of bright, joyous, welcome light. Then an angry growl from deep in the bowels of the atomic box. And a sudden, blinding flash of blue light—

Darkness! And from the darkness, Pop's voice.

"Behind! It was under water too long, too. Too long!"

"Too long," retorted Dick dejectedly.

IT WAS Grampus Mowley who revived their dejected spirits. When they had rested, he came to them, pounding his cane on the floor, cracking it down with unexpected vigor.

"You young uns gitme a pain! Baber, I've advanced 'er. An' you, too. Dicky-boy! Acher! (But we was lifted just because a lilly-bushin' little old box won't sit up right.)"

"We was gitme" along for forty without no atomic motor, wasn't we? Baber's a friendly, com'fable countryman? Well, why can't we go on like' like we was? We'll solve the heat an' light problem some other way, that's all!"

Pop said, "I know, Father. But in time! After all, when the inspectors come—"

"Inspect on my food! They's one thing we got that the dud-blamed Wilkeses can't git with all their heat an' fire power an' hot-an'-cold mornin' water, ain't they?"

"Wh-what's that?"

"Vinter! One o' the requirements is the water's got to git him a garden growin', ain't it? Well, we got one. An' the Wilkeses ain't. An', depend it, they ain't got to grow about no tomatoes an' huckleberries out of a metal box! So they belly-acher' and git back to work, the two of 'em!"

His words were hard, but the bitter medicine cured the ill. There was truth in what he said. So, putting behind them all dreams of motorized accomplishment, the Mowley family once more returned to the task of making comfy and comfortable their home at Delta Post.

Dick tackled once more the problem of running water for their home. This time he solved it with the aid of Grampus's capably cooperation. A huge tank, set into the stars, stored the water. A hand pump drew it from the stream. An old, hollow brass dashhook, pierced with drill-holes, secured to the end of the Tinker pipe, made an excellent spray for the shower.

Grampus worked his farm frantically. Morn and Honor and Moira spent hours in the kitchen, jarring and preserving the produce he was now harvesting. Bobby's chores piled up till it seemed he had scarcely any time left for playing. He was enjoying himself, though. It was fun feeling that his efforts were helping toward putting the Wilkeses where they belonged.

Moira wanted to be thriving on this pioneer life, too. She had developed a sudden love for the country, even after a hard day's work she would sit out, almost every evening, for a tramp about the countryside. She didn't show very good sense about it, though, for like so out she'd go out all bed-dozed up in a dress and high-heeled shoes, and come back flushed and excited and

badly eating that she was raising her best chicken.

Once Bobby decided to go walking with her, but she slipped away before he could announce his intention. He lost her down by the river-bank, and since an hour of sun and duck remained, decided to go swimming. He had been in the water but a few minutes when the beach parted and there was Junior Wilton.

"Hello," said Junior.

"Hello, yourself," said Bobby.

Junior said, "I'm looking for Ed."

"Well, he's not here," Bobby continued pecking. The beach cracked and he thought Ed was just gone. He looked up, suddenly feeling loneliness close in upon him. But the other boy was still there. He was tentatively fumbling at his shirt-belt. Bobby said, "You can come in if you want to, I guess this river don't belong to nobody."

**THEY** swam together for quite a while, neither wanting to break the silence. It would be, thought Bobby vaguely, an act of diplomacy. To Pop and Dick and the family. Or maybe, if Junior spoke first. . . .

When they were drinking, such as his own side of the river, Junior spoke. He said, "You ever play sports any more?"

"All the time," said Bobby stiffly. He hadn't laid a hand on the sports since that afternoon. "We have a lot of fun," he said.

"Well, so do we," said Junior. He added, "Anyway, I can have your sports' run after you leave here. My Dad said so."

"Don't hold your breath waiting," sneered Bobby. "I guess I'll be living in your big house after you go away."

"It's a nice house that yours"

"Did I say it wasn't?" Bobby had seen it. It was a beauty. But why not, with the lightning power of an atomic machine to supply the labor of creating plastic, operate the lifts and perform all the hard manual labor? "You ought to see our garden, though. We've got crows and beans and all sorts of things."

"No kidding?" Junior looked hungry. But he shook his head. "Anytime you see me, mostly I'd rather see them than any home-grown stuff."

"I bet," sneered Bobby. He had finished

drinking. He turned awkwardly. "Well—we see you!" he said.

"Tomorrow night," said Junior. And, shakily, that was a date. He couldn't break it, after that, even if he had only been being polite. And it sort of got to be a habit to swim together for a little while every evening. He didn't tell Pop because Pop would be mad. And Junior didn't tell his old man, because he knew he'd get whaled. . . .

And the weeks raced by on major feet. One day, one day, slowly after breakfast, Bobby went out to see how clear the weather was, so he could go fishing. Instead he went—and came facing back into the house.

"Pop?" he yelled. "Dick! A ship! I think it's the Patrol ship. Coming here!"

They came running. And it was the Patrol ship. It circled high above them like a giant eagle, then, with a flat, thundering clatter of jules, dropped to rest in a field between the properties of the two leading clans.

## VI

**THE COMMANDER** of the Patrolship Down was Lt.-Col. Travers, third ranking officer of the 8th Fleet. He shook Pop's hand warmly.

"Glad to meet you, Dr. Murchey. I've heard so much about you, I feel as if I already know you. My nephew was a student in several of your classes at Midland U. He told me you were a very capable instructor. . . . and if I may judge from what we noted from above, I might add that you are an extremely capable colonel as well as professor."

Pop wiggled. "Why—why, thank you, Colonel."

"This fine farmstead," smiled the spare officer, "and that aviation well I see across the river. . . . these also, and your magnificent dwelling. . . ."

Pop hesitated, even more embarrassed.

"Colonel," he faltered, "I think I'd better explain immediately that all is not mine. There are two groups of claimants to this place. Ourselves and a family named Wilton. Marjorie. Our property is here; theirs is across the river. I—uh—have named Wilton man."

Travers' face softened.

"Indeed? Then he was right, after all?"  
 "Not 'What'?"

The question was answered by the appearance of a man in drill uniform who stepped from the Entry. A lean and capable-looking man, hard-bitten of feature, stared at eye and right of lip. Colonel Trevor said, "Dr. Minsley, permit me to introduce Mr. Wade, survey agent of the United Ocean Corporation."

Wade acknowledged the introduction with a crisp nod. Then, "What's this about there being two claimants to East?" He turned to the ship's commander. "This makes a difference, doesn't it, Colonel? My information was correct. Therefore it becomes your duty to make a lead, exhaustive study of the subject's accomplishments right now. And in the event their projects have not been completed in accordance with the provisions of the Espionage Rights Code, Section 181A, Paragraphs vi to six, inclusive—"

Trevor's lips quivered nervously. "What does he mean, Dick? What is he talking about?" and Dick nodded slightly. "I think I know." He stepped forward. "I take it, Mr. Wade, that the U.O.C. has filed a claim on the possession of East in the event that our anti-matter projects should not satisfy the inspector's requirements?"

"Quite right, young man. And I might add—" Wade was openly hostile. "I might add that I have obtained permission to accompany Colonel Trevor on his inspection tour, in order to verify his findings. If I am not satisfied—"

"That will do, Mr. Wade!" Colonel Trevor was under orders to treat his passengers as a guest; there was no obligation that he lay the eye upon. The glint in his eye, the set of his jaw, indicated the direction in which his sympathy lay. "I am quite capable of handling this. Ah—Good day, Mr. Wilkes, I presume?"

"Hardly, Skipper. Yeah, I'm Sam Wilkes." The real matter glared around widely, across the room, and of mummy, glared at Pop conspicuously. "What's wrong here? Ha! Minsley! Turn around!"

"Dr. Minsley informed us that you and he were both claimants to East. Therefore I shall immediately visit your two establish-

ments in order to determine which, if either of you, has the better justified his claim.

"Lieutenant Thruhead, you will serve as my aide."

THIS is begun. Pop took the two Patrolmen and the civilian with to Delta Port, pointed out with pride the many things accomplished within the past months. He met, in Col. Trevor, an admiring audience. The commander was conspicuously delighted with what he saw.

"Gosh, man! You did all this without power! This is the pioneering feat of the decade! Look, Lieutenant! Running water . . . electricity . . . that furnished! Marvellous! You deserve a wealth of credit."

"Not," pointed out Wade critically, "you mentioned the biggest fact yourself."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wade?"

"Without power!" snapped Wade. "Minsley, where are your lights? Where's your power plant? How about heat? And this cooking equipment—it's developed?"

Pop said mildly, "We have no hypersonic, sir. But you will notice that we have derived satisfactory substitutes for power-driven gear. Hand-pumps draw our water, light is supplied by these oil-burn lamps, and heat is centrally heated by these open fire-places. We are—" He faltered. "We shall, of course, order a complete hypersonic unit from Earth, install it as soon as possible."

"I'm afraid that's not quick enough," sneered Wade. "Colonel Trevor will undoubtedly remember the requirements of the law in that respect. Chairman must display, at time of inspection, a power-plant of atomic, motor, or hydraulic drive capable of generating a minimum of 1,000 lagging units per diem, and so arranged as to provide draftings and other structures with heat, light and power. You have no such equipment, have you, Dr. Minsley?"

"No, Sir—"

"You have not, Sir?"

"No."

"Very well, then," Wade smiled thinly, closed the book back in which he had been jotting notes with a plastic sound of finality. "May I suggest, Colonel, that we see the other claimant's plantation?"

After they had left, Colonel Trevor shaking his head reprofully at Pop as if to say

he was scow but helpless before the arguments of this interloper. Pop sat down and propped his chin on his fist. Yesterday he had looked like a man of thirty; all of a sudden he looked old and weary and disinterested. He said, "Well, there it is, Martha. I've dreamed my dream, and now it's over, and I've failed."

"No you haven't Rob. The Colonel is on our side. He's a good man. He'll—"

"But the law is on Wade's side. If our claim is confirmed, Iron will become a dirty, smoky mining camp. This soft beauty, these green rolling hills, will also with the cluster of houses, unless—"

And suddenly he was again a man of action. He came to his feet suddenly.

"Martha, Elmore, Dick—everybody! Get those packages out of the storage closet. Grampaw, get the loader from the shed. Bobby, you run and tell Sam Wilton to keep those inspectors out of his house for a half hour or so."

"Why, Pop?" demanded Dick. "What are you going to do?"

"That I'm going to see that Sam Wilton gets this place, that's what! Oh, I know—there won't be any question of his sharing it with me. He's too hard and stiff-necked a man for that. But he's not kind of man, with all his faults. A pioneer with the daring to come to a new world and try to build it into a home of his own."

"We've known for weeks that all he needed to justify his claim was a good supply. Well, by thunder, we've got a fine supply! And we'll give it to him, look, stock and barrel, to keep him out of the Corporation's hands! Now, stop, everybody! Hiss! Hiss—where is this girl?"

"She stayed down by the river, Pop."

"Well, that her, Bobby, go tell Sam Wilton what I just said!"

Bobby scowled.

HE WAS making wet when he got to the Wilton house. That was because he took the shortcut, which meant plunging right into the river and swimming across, clothes and all. The inspectors and their noisy companions would have to take the long route, around the bend.

Mr. Wilton wasn't in the house when he got there. But Mrs. Wilton was, and Gr-

got, and both gasped as they saw him. Mrs. Wilton bustled forward.

"Sweet stars above, child, what are you doing here? Get those clothes off; you'll catch your death of cold. Ginger—go get me a jar of Junior's oint—"

Bobby said, "There's no time for that, Mrs. Wilton. Where's her husband now, where's your husband?"

Ginger said, "Don't tell him, Ma. He's just been to town because he knows we can't pass the inspection requirements—"

"You—you star up?" bellowed Bobby. "You suppose forsooth! You don't know anything about it, Mrs. Wilton, get your husband, Mam and Ma and the rest will be here any minute now. They're—"

And he explained. His explanation sent them into a flurry of excitement; there was even deeper excitement when Sam Wilton, hardly summoned, heard the same story repeated. For once the lathery corners of his mouth relaxed into something like a grin. He swore, and slammed a big hand on his knee.

"That old man is going to do that for us, some? Well, tomorrow we jet! And to think I—Junior, go find Red, Hip!"

"Red's not around, Pa. He went toward the river."

"Confound him! Just when we need him most, Well—I'll go meet the confounded rascal, and there as long as I can. And look here, you—what's your name?"

"Bobby."

"I won't forget this, Bobby! Not by a jugful. If I hadn't been such a stubborn, pigheaded old hound, I'd have delivered with your Pa long afore this. There's plenty of room an' food for two families, the two damn!"

Then followed a half hour of labor as swift as it made all the accomplishments of the past months seem small like by comparison. Mam and Elmore arrived, bearing armloads of canned goods and preserves; Grampaw and Dick brought the loader across the river on a raft, and piled high on the loader were fresh vegetables that jumped the over-caused Wilton containers in replication. It was fast work, but efficient. And when, about three-quarters of an hour later, Wilton came from the house straight accompanied by the two officers and the Col-

journal investigator, the job was finished, and a good but glowing two-family group arrived here.

Colonel Travers' inspection of the food-supply was perfunctory. It needed not be otherwise. One glance sufficed to show that there was in the Wilkes household enough food to maintain a dozen families for at least a month.

And there was a smile of grim satisfaction on his lips as, turning to his aide, he said, "Very well, Lieutenant. You may make a notation that the Wilkes household has been inspected and found satisfactory in all respects." He looked at Wade purposefully and repeated in a firm tone, "In all respects."

A H, HE WAS so dumb, that Colonel. As Bobby had seen the wrinkles in his eye as he glanced into the pressure closet. Because, thank! there wasn't any matching Mom's way of doing up preserves. With little red hands ground each jar, and her face, radiated lambasting telling what was inside.

"In all respects" he said again. And reached for him Wilkes' pudgy pie. "Congratulations. Set. You've earned possession of the planetoid Eden. Your power-plant is among the finest it has ever been my pleasure to view; you have judiciously cleared and planted the required number of acres, and food supply is well above the minimum requirements."

"But not here!" Wade's face was an ugly red. "I'm not satisfied, Colonel. There's something fishy about this. The furnishes we inspected were hardly out of the yard stage. The corn was only knee high, the vegetables were sprouts. These people couldn't have raised all this produce."

Now Wilkes spluttered helplessly, "Why I—"

And Pop came to his rescue. Smoothly, suavely.

"For he did, Mr. Wade. On the farmstead across the river. These are the early crops, the ones you've just seen are the late harvest."

"But—you claimed these were your crops?"

"Did I?" Pop stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Well, maybe I was bragging a little.

You see, I've been working for Mr. Wilkes. A sort of share-cropper, you might say."

"Now I get it!" bellowed the angry woad. "I thought so. It's shellbagger, that's what it is! Don't you see, Colonel! These men are conspiring to defraud us. To cheat the Corporation. Momley has deliberately given his crops and food-supply to Wilkes!"

There was again a wrinkle in the Colonel's eye. He said, soberly, "And suppose you're right, Wade! What then? There's no law against a man giving away his possessions to another man, is there?"

"As an inspector for the Solar Space Patrol, my only interest is in seeing that a settler's domain fulfills the requirements of the Squatter's Rights Code. Mr. Wilkes has fulfilled those requirements. I am not interested in the how or why. Therefore under the power invested in me by the Triune Planetary Government, I hereby declare and award—"

And then a crafty brilliancy flamed Wade's eyes.

"Stop!" he cried.

Colonel Travers hesitated. "Pardon, Mr. Wade?"

"Since you are such a stickler for duty, Colonel, I wish to call to your attention a further stipulation of the Squatter's Rights Code. One you have evidently forgotten. The Code says, Section 111B, Paragraph 10, 'Such requirements, having been fulfilled, it shall be lawful to award the settled property to any family group comprised of at least six adults who pledge intention to make the property their permanent home—'

Now Wilkes said, "Well, what's the matter. Don't we intend to make this our permanent home?"

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. Wilkes. But I ought to inform you that you will not be able to do so, since you do not fulfill the last-mentioned paragraph."

"There's six of us!" defended Wilkes stoutly.

"But the law," insisted Wade, "requires six adults! May I ask, Mr. Wilkes, how many of your family are more than twenty-one years of age?"

D.K. winked softly. Pop's jaw dropped. Wilkes' face turned crimson. And Bobby computed hastily. This was the best,

democratic blow. The Wilson household contained only four adults: Old Man Wilson, Sam and his wife, and Red Junior and Ginger were just kids.

With sudden regret, Bobby realized that they should have arranged their conspiracy in reverse. There were six adults in the Monday clan, Moira having just celebrated her twenty-first birthday. But it was too late for that now. As friendly as Colonel Travess was, he could not openly countenance a flagrant, deliberate transgression of all propriety in the Mondays.

In their last, desperate race had failed. And now none of them would win ownership of Kro. All their lovely hopes and dreams had been in vain; their new-found friendship with the Wilsons a dying pretense. . . .

Wade could not restrain himself from elaborating on the situation.

"No, my friends," he chuckled, "your death wish is proper reward. Under the circumstances, I shall not do what I had earlier planned on doing. I was going to give each of you, with the Corporation's compliments, a firing squad for having so diligently opened up this new colony. Now I see no reason for so doing.

"In the future, it might be well to remember the law provides many hospitals to the ingenious man. That is a hard lesson, but a fair one. Were you but six adults—"

And then there was a sudden stir at the doorway. A deep, rumbling, familiar voice. That of Red Wilson.

"You crew might lead for a hansom master, Mister!" he said. "But you're crawling at a faster pace. Because it so happens that we are six adults. As a matter of fact, we're more than six adults. There are two of us!"

Wade spun, checked. The others looked, too, and in all eyes there was surprise. All, that is, but Ginger. She was hugging her knees, rocking back and forth comfortably, looking very much pleased with herself and with the world in general. She said, "I know it, I know it all the time."

"Know what?" said Bobby, but his question was lost in Wade's loud demand.

"Yes of you? What are you talking about? Who is this young whippersnapper?"

"That," said Sam Wilson conversation-

ally, "is my son. And I'd be careful if I was you, Mister. The last guy who called him names is still pukin' up walls. See, I reckon you know what the hell you're talkin' about. But the rest of us don't. So if you'd please explain it would be greatly appreciated all around."

DIED WILKES grinned. He said, "Moira, it's honey." And Moira entered from the porch. There was a smile on her face and somehow there was a smile in her eyes, too, and Bobby got the strange feeling that if you could see inside her, there'd be a smile in her heart. She looked at Moira, and Moira gave a little gasp, like she could tell just by looking at Moira what Moira meant. Red Wilson continued to grin. He said, "Colonel, commanders of space vessels have the privilege of marrying folks, haven't they?"

"Why—why, yes," said Travess.

"Then," said Red mildly, "here'd you like to get out the little black book and start trying knots? Because, you see, Moira has told me she's willing to take a chance."

Pop said, "Moira, darling, you're not just doing this because . . . because . . ."

"No, Pop, I'm doing it because I want to. Because I love Red and he loves me. It's been that way since the day we met. We—we've been moving slowly for the past six weeks. We mean to break the news soonest we learn. And now seems to be about the best time."

"Particularly," pointed out the green-tube, "since our marriage joins two families into one family. And I think that will split your guts, Mr. Wade!"

Wade was no longer crimson. He was purple. "You can't do this, Colonel!" he screamed. "It's illegal. Anyway, they won't be truly related. The two families will just be in-laws—"

But there was an open, admiring grin on the lips of Lieutenant-Colonel Travess, S.S.F. He said, "Maybe I can't do it, Mr. Wade—but by the Pleistoles, I'm going to! And as for the law—according to all decisions I've ever read, in-laws are valid relatives. You're the one who was prying about the law providing many hospitals for ingenious men. Well, here's a big, juicy hospital. How do you like it?"

"W-ah, howled, "I protest! It's unfair! I refuse to allow—"

But Wilkes looked at his father hopefully. "Shall I, Pop?" he asked.

And Sam Wilkes shook his head. "No, son, it ain't fair! Not on your wedding day."

"Which gave Dick an idea. He rose, grumpy.

"It's not my wedding day!" he said. "Wah—"

But somehow Mr. Wade had vanished. Toward the ship.

**A**FTERWARDS, Colonel Tarvon lingered to check books all around.

"Comment you both," he said, "but the dog spirit you have shown; the fine work you've done in making Erin a member of the Solar family. You prove what I have always claimed—that the pioneer spirit in Man is not dead, nor will it ever die so long as there remain new frontiers to conquer.

"Well, I must go now, but I'll stop back by here on my next swing around the Belt. Perhaps a year from now, perhaps a little less, I'll bring the things you ask for. A new motor, some tools, silverware—I have your list."

"Don't forget the books," said Pop.

"I won't." The Captain made a note.

"And the tools." That was Old Man Wilkes.

"No, I'll bring them."

"And bring," said Moira, "a wedding ring—"

Heaver said, "Oh, nonsense, Moira! In another year The People will be top and the wedding rings."

"Bring," said Moira doggedly, "a wedding ring." And blushed.

Bobby blushed, too. It was, he thought, indeed of Moira to be so brazen. And her only married! Golly, did she have to look so far ahead! And, anyway, with Ginger standing right there—

He said, "Hey, Stevie, how about a game of quads?"

"Sure," said Junior.

And Ginger said, "Ma, too." She put her hand in Bobby's. She said, with startling frankness, "I like you! Maybe I'll be you by my boy."

Bobby shook loose. He said, "Aw, you don't give—"

But she had her way. She played quads with him and Junior. And she won. Which may have been symbolic, though it didn't occur to Bobby that way. Maybe she would always have her way. And maybe she would always win—whatever she wanted.

Yet for a while there would be peace on Erv . . .