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Featured Complete Novelet



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Our quiet brains built
a ship from the key-
stone of matter itself

Galactic Heritage

"I am a hundred billion miles from Earth as I write this. . . ."

HE CALLED himself Jim Rush. No uglier giant had ever come striding in out of the rain to make a name for himself under the big top. He had the thickest eyebrows I've ever laid eyes on—and the boniest face.

When you've been in the Carny game as long as I have you don't let new faces get on your nerves. But Rush was out of this world! When I looked at him I seemed to

be in a dark room, sweating and stumbling over things. Then the room would vanish, and he'd be sitting on the platform at my side, his face a big piece of jagged glass glinting in the sunlight.

It was just my nerves, of course. Just a midget's overheated imagination. I'm sure he wouldn't have looked that way to Dali. It didn't last anyway. In his street clothes, and most of the time on the platform all he

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

did was scare the living daylights out of me.

But hold on tight now—we're going around a curve! I had him figured out all wrong. He was the kindest big guy in the world. He was kind to me, and that meant he'd have been kind to anyone—a stray kitten, a broken-down short-change artist in an iron lung.

The first time Rush spoke to me the bally talker was adding a foot to his height and wrapping a tape-measure around his biceps.

"Step in closer, folks! The kiddies want to see him too! That's it—that's fine! Do you know where this big man was born?"

"The Constellation Cassiopeia," Rush said. "Or the Great Nebula in Orion! If he was really smart, he'd keep them guessing!"

Coming from Rush, whom I'd taken for an uneducated man, that remark gave me a jolt. Me, I've read a lot and know as much about the stars as the average cultured bartender.

I opened my eyes wide. "He's not kidding anybody!" I said.

Rush chuckled. "No, I suppose not."

He looked at me. "Tell me something, Ralph. How do you spend your spare time? I've often wondered."

My full name is "Tiny" Ralph Moffatt. But I like to be called by my middle name. I stand three feet two in my stockings, and you don't know what loneliness is if you've never had to climb on a chair to look into the eyes of a friend. Chances are, you'll have made the trip for nothing, for a midget doesn't have many friends.

That's why I answered so quickly. "Read a little," I said. "Go to the movies in the village. Stand on a crate and shoot pool with Pop Carden."

"How would you like to chew the fat with me some evening?" Rush asked. "I do a little—well, call it tinkering, in my spare time. I'm interested in electronics. Know anything about electronics, Ralph?"

DID I? I can build the cutest little radio set you'd care to see, blind-folded, with one arm tied behind me.

"If it's a machine," I said, "I can call the turns on the power source without looking at it!"

He grinned. "Great, Ralph! Why not make it this evening?"

So we practically shook hands on it, sitting there on the platform, with the crowd gawking up at us and the bally talker

giving us a frenzied buildup.

When the crowd thinned out after the tent show he gave me his address. He lived in the village, up two flights of stairs on a crummy street.

"When the landlord saw how big I was he jacked up the rent!" Rush explained. "Guess he figured my tread would wear holes in the carpet."

"That's a pitch!" I wisecracked. "Me, I ought to get a room for nothing."

He looked at me gravely. "Don't ever let it get you, Ralph. Your size, I mean. It's not important."

That made me like him even better.

"I'm getting out of this rig and into my work clothes," Rush said. "Hungry, Ralph? Like to join me in the pie car?"

I hesitated—then told him I was on a diet. It wasn't true, but I hate sitting on a stool in the pie car alongside of grown men. The food display counters are so far out of reach.

"See you at eight!" I promised.

The goose-necks were blazing when I slipped out into the twilight, straddling a rain trench, and ducking around behind the animal cages until I was out of sight.

An hour later I was climbing the stairs to his room. I'd dined alone in my tent, on canned salmon. But nothing could dim the bright glow that was in me. I like people who tinker—in dirt road garages, and big laboratories fitted up like a grease monkey's idea of paradise.

I was out of breath when I reached the second floor landing. But I've a sound heart and it wasn't the climb that started it jumping. It was the droning.

I was almost at the door of Rush's room when I heard it. It was loud, very loud, and somehow it scared me. It seemed to come from both inside and outside my skull, if you know what I mean.

But it was nothing to get worked up about. In the woods at night, when you're looking up at the stars, you can hear all kinds of eerie sounds—if you let yourself hear them. Just as if the sky had a life of its own, a hidden, whispering life, shared by the rocks and the gaunt trees.

But I wasn't in the woods now.

There was no excuse for what I did. I quickened my stride and walked right into Rush's room without knocking. I threw the door open and there he was, standing before a big, bare table littered with everything in

the Little Giant Fact Book of Electronics.

There was a brush yoke, and a four-way switch attached to a fractional machine which looked as if it could generate all kinds of static without frying an arc. There was a Bunsen cell setup. That's a primary electric cell using zinc and carbon electrodes. The right kind of Bunsen cell will deliver a terrific current.

There was a big, metal eye, threaded at one end, attached to a rod and holding a crystal chunk of something ruby-colored that glittered in the loop of the eye. There was a multi-speed motor with inside wiring, and something that looked like a cuckoo clock perched on an hour-glass.

But I had no time to study the rest of the gadgets, for there was something in the middle of the table that started my heart jumping again and narrowed my vision like a vise.

It looked like a little, shriveled monkey. Wires ran from its skull to a big, gleaming object shaped like a diving bell, and its mouth was opening and closing as if it were trying desperately to say something.

The droning I'd heard in the hall was coming from the apparatus.

When Rush saw me he smiled quietly, as though he wasn't in the least put out. He clicked off the apparatus, detached the wires from the little beast's skull and tucked it under his arm, almost tenderly. It clung to his sleeve, like a frightened marmoset.

IF COURSE! It *was* a marmoset! I expect scientists use them whenever they run short of white mice. But they're also Carny animals—the kiddies love them. I told myself a little wildly that Rush must have raided the stock cars to get so many of them. There were at least a dozen marmosets in the room, jumping about in cages.

"There are definite limits to animal intelligence!" Rush said. "Speech, for instance. This little creature can't talk even now. But I've learned a lot from him. I'm making real progress!"

"Are you?" I managed to choke out.

Rush made a gesture of apology. "Forgive me, Ralph!" he said. "I didn't mean to plunge right into the middle of things. But there are certain things about the brain psychologists won't discuss if they can help it. It makes ninnies out of them!"

He seemed terribly keyed up. His eyes were shining, and he was staring at me as

though I were the answer to something that had been torturing him for a month.

"Look, Ralph!" he said. "I know it's asking a lot on the strength of a short acquaintance. But will you let me adjust this helmet to your head for a minute or two? It's not dangerous. I've made sure of that!"

So it was a helmet—not a diving bell! I just couldn't picture myself wearing it, so I'd jumped to a ridiculous conclusion.

I looked him straight in the eye. "You mean—you want me to take the place of that monkey?" I gulped.

Rush smiled quickly. "Heck no. The monkey couldn't wear it. Its brain isn't complex enough. It would fit you, though. Will you let me try it on?"

"For size?" I got out.

He shook his head. "Size has nothing to do with it, Ralph. It's the complexity of the brain itself." A pleading look came into his eyes. "It's just that I'm close to something tremendous. It doesn't matter to me in the way it would matter to Einstein say—or Jeans! It's big in a different way."

It never occurred to me that he'd take my stunned silence for consent. Before I could retreat toward the door he'd picked up the helmet and was fitting it to my head.

It did seem to fit, though it was as heavy as a metal bathtub, or felt as heavy. It pressed against my skull and weighed me down, so that he had to help me into a chair, and make some adjustments to enable me to bear it.

The helmet got still heavier when he stepped swiftly to the table and turned the juice on. There was a droning, but it didn't seem so loud now that I was close to it.

I was close to nothing else.

The floor moved, carrying Rush from me, so fast his big body blurred. The walls were moving too, rushing away from me. The marmosets blurred inside their cages. Wavered, and turned brittle. Their eyes puffed up like toy balloons, their bodies splintering, whipping away into emptiness.

The table vanished in a blaze of light. There was nothing to hold on to. The chair dissolved under me, but instead of falling I felt myself plunging forward, straight toward a blazing wall that was swallowing up everything in the room.

It ceased to be a wall when I passed into it. It became a wrenching and a tearing that took hardly a second to separate my brain from my body and hurl me piecemeal

into an abyss of howling blackness.

When the howling stopped I decided I'd had some kind of epileptic fit as a result of excitement.

There was a swaying beneath me, deep, terrifying, as if I were clinging to the roof of a collapsing building. I could smell the damp earth, and my face was drenched with sweat and I was clinging to something all buckled into folds like an old leather harness.

Then the elephant trumpeted.

I let out a yell. I was perched on the neck of the beast, right up between its ears, clinging to its wrinkled hide. It was raging mad, swaying to and fro, rattling its leg chains and swinging its trunk about.

My clothes had vanished along with the helmet.

I DON'T know what saved me. Sheer blind panic, I guess. I just let go and dropped to the ground, without thinking about it. It was cutting corners with death, but it seemed only a moment before I was running through the night, the trumpeting falling away behind me.

I headed straight for my tent, but it wasn't modesty that drove me in that direction. People who'd be shocked by a midget in the buff would be scandalized by a baby in its bath. I didn't give a hoot for the blushes of somebody's maiden aunt—only for my sanity.

My tent was as black as pitch, but I didn't stop to fumble around for the light switch. I knew exactly where my spare trousers were and—an old sweater, a pair of shoes.

In my old clothes I looked as tough as a midget can look. Picture a three-foot pug, ready to climb into the ring with a heavy-weight and start slugging. When the universe reels you're apt to get scared, then angry. Don't ask me why, but that's the way it is.

I wasn't furious with Rush exactly, but I had to get back my faith in the reality of the world around me—its solidness. You couldn't pass through a solid wall and right out into the dark, swaying night!

You just couldn't! I was still telling myself that twenty minutes later, at the top of the rickety stairs that led to the House that Rush Built. A house within a house, that opened on blazing emptiness? I had to make sure.

I wasn't even sure I'd find Rush when

I reached his room and flung the door open. My head was pounding from climbing the stairs so fast again, and there was a screaming inside me.

What next, little man?

The room hadn't changed at all. Rush was standing before the table, where I'd left him, and on a chair near the door were my clothes. Every stitch I'd had on before the universe started reeling. The helmet rested on the seat of the chair, as though I'd dissolved under it, allowing it to sink gently to rest on my empty clothes.

When Rush saw me his face lighted up, as though I'd stepped out of a door in the sky with a lot of blazing jewels in my arms. But his expression changed when he saw how ill I looked.

There were no mirrors in the room, but I didn't have to see my face to know how ill I looked.

"Are you all right, Ralph?" he asked, with real concern. "You'd better tell me exactly what happened. Take your time now. The details are important."

I told him.

I don't know why, but I never expected he'd burst out laughing. Nothing about my experience had seemed ludicrous to me, so his reaction came as a shock.

This is what he said. "You're small, Ralph, and an elephant's back is quite an expanse of territory to you. It's dead against the law of averages, but that law stretches sometimes! It's really terribly funny!"

"Is it?" I said, coldly.

The amusement went out of his eyes. "Forgive me for laughing, Ralph. I didn't really mean to. I owe you an explanation, and I'll try to give it to you, in one-syllable words."

"That's kind of you!" I said. "The only thing you haven't thrown at me is the dictionary."

Rush shook his head. "I'm asking you to forgive me, Ralph. You've helped me, and I'm grateful. You've helped me more than you know!"

The charm was still there, the winning friendliness. I told myself I was quite mad to trust him, but somehow I couldn't help myself.

"The greatest mysteries are simple things," he said. "Take the human brain. It has changed a lot and it goes right on changing. But what do we know about it, really? You can cut away most of the

brain and be none the worse for it. A man can think, act, plan, feel with only a walnut-sized part of his brain."

Rush nodded. "There's a big, quiet part which he doesn't seem to need. Some psychologists call it the quiet brain. It does its work without giving itself away."

"What kind of work?" I asked.

"Extra-sensory work," Rush said. "But telepathy, clairvoyance are just ground swells in the quiet brain. Just rudimentary stirrings, of no great importance in themselves. But where there are ground swells there must be a solid core of something tremendous, something that can move and shake. And build, Ralph."

THE big fellow paused long enough to flash me a cheerful smile. Then he went on.

"I like that word, build. New cells, new bodies even. But I'm after something more basic than that. You can change the body's structure, bruise it, burn it with the quiet brain, if you try hard enough. But what I did to you was more vital, more in the line of what I'm trying to accomplish."

"What did you do to me?"

"Gave your quiet brain an electronic prod, and sent you right out through a solid wall. You can send the body anywhere, if the quiet brain is sufficiently stimulated. But that's just kindergarten stuff. With the right kind of electronic hookup I'll have my big job solved. I'm on the inside track now, thanks to you!"

Rush smiled. "Funny thing. When you wore that helmet your mind was open to telepathic suggestion. I made you want to come out in front of the animal cages. I implanted the thought in your mind. And that's where you did come out. The elephant just happened to be in the way."

It was pure madness, of course. No man, not even a midget, could be expected to take him seriously. But somehow I couldn't tear my eyes from his face. I can usually tell when a man's lying. I'm sensitive to the little facial quirks that mirror the mind's duplicity; I've trained myself to be. There was nothing evasive about Rush.

"It was easier with a small body, of course," he said. "A powerful mind acting on a small body can do more with it. It's curious, but even animals have a quiet brain. Those marmosets taught me a lot—how speech, intelligence, everything, really comes

out of the quiet part. The quiet brain is the real evolutionary mechanism across the ages. It's stimulated by cosmic rays and it develops the brain you use, the active, walnut-sized part."

He looked at me. "That's just a fascinating bypath, of course. My big job just skirts it, and widens out into something more tremendous."

"What is—your big job?" I whispered.

I was taking him seriously now, despite myself. I felt bad though, really physically ill.

"That can wait, Ralph," he said. "Until tomorrow, eh? You must be tired. What you need is a little shut-eye."

"That's easy to say!" I choked. "You think I'll sleep?"

"Why not, Ralph? Life isn't any stranger than the things we dream about. You've had quite a jolt tonight, but tomorrow you'll take it in your stride."

I'd started to turn when he picked up the helmet. "No sense in taking the town in your stride," he said. "It's a long trudge back to your tent. A real Carny never walks when he can travel in style!"

Before I realized what he was about he he was adjusting the helmet to my head again.

"I'll bring your duds over first thing in the morning," I heard him saying. "Think yourself back into your tent—"

His voice was drowned out by the hum of the circuit.

It was awful all over again. A spinning and a whirling—the floor dissolving and the walls rushing off.

When the droning stopped I was back in my tent on the outskirts of the town, my knees knocking together and my teeth chattering like chipmunks in a haunted forest.

I didn't sleep a wink until the sun came up.

He was right, though. It didn't seem so terrifying in the bright noonday glare, with the Midway filling up, and the bally talkers waving their megaphones as though they really believed the ground to be solid, the sky filled with little fleecy clouds.

There's always a lull before the worst of storms.

I was alone on the platform. Rush and the rest of the troupe were inside rehearsing. The show wouldn't start for another hour, and I'd walked out ahead of time to park myself on a nursery-sized chair on the brink

of the Midway.

I was sure that something terrible was going to happen.

You know the feeling. Everyone has it at times. It's worse in the autumn, when the leaves coil up and blow away and the wind howls through the bare trees. It's bad enough when it's just something vague inside you that tells you the world is out of whack. But it's worse when your head is under the chopping block.

Just by believing Rush and taking him seriously, I'd made myself a part of it.

YET it started quietly enough. I heard a faint coughing inside the big canvas tent at my back, as though someone had stepped into a draft of cold air and out again.

Then the coughing became a wheezing, a rumbling, and the platform began to sway.

I leaped up in sick horror. The explosion was deafening. It seemed to come from deep inside the tent, but it was more than just a blast of sound. A cyclone accompanied it, and a screaming. When I swung about there was a spiraling funnel of radiance pouring out of the tent through a big rent in the canvas.

I could see straight into the tent through the radiance. It was weird, mind-numbing. Like looking through a periscope poked into a furnace filled with waltzing men and women.

Inside the tent people were whirling about like leaves in a blast furnace. The fact that they were my kind of people made it all the more nightmarish.

Then I saw Rush. He was sitting on the inside platform, staring down at his palm. His big, bony hand looked like an upset spider, twining its legs around a little metal disk. The disk was smoking but he didn't seem to want to let go of it.

He was grimacing in an angry sort of way, as though he'd exploded a box of matches by accident and was furious with himself.

I can't explain it, but I had a hunch he'd done just that—exploded the disk by accident.

But suspecting that didn't lessen my terror. If you've never seen a Carny show fill with smoke you can't know how terrifying it is. So many things can happen to start a panic, and send innocent people to prison for life.

Hysteria can twist the human brain, make

it callous to grief. Children can be trampled by men with children of their own, without a backward glance. Even cowardice doesn't explain the utter demoralization that can sweep people trapped in a burning tent.

I shut my eyes for a minute. I was afraid to look.

When I opened them someone had put the fire out by ripping down a flap of canvas and stamping on it.

But everyone was staring at Rush. Shrieking, shouting, converging upon him as though he'd tried to set fire to the universe. There was a maniacal glint in the eyes of the troupe, as though they were going to bypass the law and tear him limb from limb.

It was the old Carny dread of fire, mounting to a subconscious frenzy, and fastening on Rush as the man responsible. The very fact that he was slow in getting up weighed against him. It seemed to confirm his guilt.

Rush was slow in getting up, but not slow in streaking for the outside platform. He swung himself up beside me in a long, impetuous leap, grabbing a dangling rope and plunging out through the still smoking tent flaps like a clockwork orang-utan.

"We've got to beat it, Ralph!" he shouted. "I can't explain it to them. They wouldn't understand."

I started to shout at him that it was his own funeral pyre and I didn't care how fiery it got. He could rot in the jug for all of me. I was washing my hands of him then and there.

But then I saw the look on his face. He was pleading with me like a stricken deaf mute, as though my loyalty had robbed him of the power of speech and if I let him down now, he seemed to be saying, he'd go somewhere where it was cold and dark, and hang himself to the nearest tree.

At least a dozen witnesses saw me cook my own goose. By throwing in my lot with him I was making myself an accessory. What had I to gain by taking to my heels? It was pure madness!

We were both out of breath when we reached the village. "I just took that midget beam-generator out of my pocket to toy with it, idly, as you'd flip a key, or a coin!" he grunted. "The first thing I knew—"

"You toyed with it too hard, I suppose!"

"I'm afraid so, Ralph!" he admitted. "But no harm has been done. They got the fire out and my big job is finished. There's nothing to keep us here."

I had an answer ready for that one. If he wanted to hop a freight, it was all right with me. But why did I keep silent? Why did I let him think I was checking out too?

WHEN he spoke again we were almost at the door of his room.

"Everything's ready, Ralph!" he said. "I'm going to send you right out on the mountain. I'll follow in a car. It's a long drive going through the bleakest country east of the Great Smokies. When you get a glimpse of it from the mountaintop you won't envy me the drive!"

"I didn't know you had a car," I said. Then I flared up. "If it's *me* you're talking to, you're not sending me anywhere! But I'd like to know where you think you're sending me!"

He laughed. "You'll go, Ralph," he said. "Deep down you trust me, like me."

That was too much for me. I tried to shrug it off, but inside me there was a gnawing dread which got worse when we reached his room.

I had all I could do to keep from screaming when he picked up the helmet again.

"Ralph, frankly, I'd rather not tell you until I get there myself," he said. "How about it? Will you trust me?"

What could I say? I'd trusted him beyond reason already, but when the noose is over your head there's not much sense in making a break for it.

The helmet didn't seem to make any sound at all this time. But maybe the sound was drowned out by his voice, for he spoke very loudly.

"You'll find something there, Ralph—a big metal cylinder crumbling into rust. But the heating apparatus still works. Just press the little knob at the bottom of the big, circular panel you'll find in the middle compartment."

There was a strange eagerness in his voice. "One thing more, Ralph. Look in the—well, clothes-closet to you! You'll find a surprise!"

I heard the droning then. His voice grew fainter: "Relax now, Ralph. This is the last trip you'll ever take on Earth. I'm implanting the destination in your mind now. That's it—easy does it! Be seeing you in about eight hours."

The whirling again.

When the droning fell away I was lying on my back staring up at the sky. My clothes

were gone again, and an icy wind was raising goose pimples on my shoulders and chest.

I didn't stay on my back. I leaped up so fast the landscape went every whichway for a minute. Pinwheeled, blurred—ran away from me in a bubbly streak.

Then it settled back into place and I was staring up at the bleakest forested region I'd ever seen. There's a bald mountain in the Adirondacks that's like a big bare skull set down between spruce trees filled with black crows and a cawing that never stops.

But this mountaintop was twice as barren, twice as bleak. A gray-green slaty barrenness that stretched to a circle of dark green firs as stark as sentinel cranes standing guard over the ruins of a vanished race.

But there were no ruins that I could see. Just a waste of stone and rubble, blackened here and there as though by fire, and made even bleaker by chilling flurries of snow.

Luckily I didn't have to search for the cylinder. It was right there before me, looming up against the firs, a big, half-buried mass of yellow metal all crushed in on one side.

I walked around it in a kind of daze, telling myself I'd be crazy to freeze to death, even though I was too desperate and frightened to care much whether I lived or died.

I was a little afraid the cylinder might vanish when I touched it. But it was solid enough, coated with hoar frost and so cold it sent a tingling coursing through me.

When I reeled back and studied it, I saw that I could get inside. There was a big circular opening at one end, covered by a metal flap. The flap was heavy, and I wasn't strong enough to give it a vigorous heave. So I simply wedged it up with my shoulders and crawled inside on my hands and knees.

There was a suffocating deadness in the air I was breathing a few minutes later. I could breathe the air, and I could see the panel, looming up in the choking darkness. There was just enough light to see by, but don't ask me where it came from.

AT LEAST he hadn't lied. The heat came on just as he'd promised when I pressed the right knob, and I found myself in a warm little compartment with the cold shut out.

A half hour later I was still sitting there, wondering why he didn't come. Then I remembered he'd said eight hours. I remem-

bered something else he'd said.

"Look in the clothes-closet, Ralph! You'll get a surprise!"

I got up and went stumbling around in the shadows.

It wasn't a closet, really—just a yard-high, yard-wide niche in the metal wall. But there was a garment hanging there, on a metal peg.

I took the garment out. It had a musty smell, but it wasn't the smell that brought a sudden catch to my throat.

It was a little one-piece suit, just my size! My size!

For an instant I almost passed out from shock. Then I was laughing wildly and pulling the garment on. It wasn't an ordinary suit such as I'd shed under the helmet. It was a helmeted suit, but the helmet was small and transparent, and could be pushed back, leaving my face exposed.

It was bulky, too. A little like a diver's suit, with pleats in it, and there were boots in the locker to go with it, and fuzzy mittens.

It fitted me like a wrinkled glove. Even the pleats and creases fitted me, draped themselves to my body as if months of wear had molded the suit to my way of walking and sitting.

The instant I had the suit on I went out on the mountaintop again, a bursting wonder in my chest. When emotion's overwhelming that's where you feel it, in the chest, like a warmth and a throbbing spreading out.

I went back after a moment, because a blizzard was coming up. But I kept going out and back, stamping around in the snow, not minding the cold at all now.

I was outside when I heard him coming up the mountaintop. He was singing at the top of his lungs, as though he were coming home from a journey in a far country and could hardly wait to share the wonder of it.

Long before he came into view over the top of the crest, with the two little metal cylinders under his arm, I knew who he really was.

He shouted and waved to me and I waved back.

He was out of breath when he reached my side.

"You've guessed, Ralph?" he said, stamping the snow from his shoes.

"Guessed?" I cried. "Brother, I know now, I remember!"

His eyes began to shine. "We had to buck

an alien world, Ralph. You remember that? With our ship a wreck, our hopes of getting back blasted, we knew we'd have tough sledding. For you amnesia, self-imposed. You had to stay sane while I tried to work something out."

"You've stayed sane too, brother!" I told him. "And now you've won through? You can build a new ship?"

He looked at me. "I think so, Ralph. All those experiments paid off. I've found out how to stimulate the quiet brain as it has never been stimulated on Earth. Our quiet brains, Ralph. Simply by studying the quiet brains of animals and a few humans. You were a great help to me, because you have something which humans lack."

"My amnesia vanished when I found the suit!" I said. "Did you know it would?"

"I thought it might, Ralph!" he said.

"Ralph's not my real name, brother!" I said. "You know that."

"It's our human name, Ralph, and you felt and thought and acted like a human for twelve years. I sort of got to like you all over again."

"It's all right, brother," I said. "Any name suits me the way I feel now!"

"I'll still call you Ralph, then."

He showed me the two little cylinders then, and scratched his head, just like a human mechanic, a grease monkey rolling up his sleeves. My brother Rush! Only—Rush wasn't his real name either. He was my genetic twin opposite. I was the small twin.

H E'D BEEN good at electronics as a kid, back where we came from. We didn't call it electronics in our world, but the worlds aren't so different, the people on them not so different either. In the deep, pulsing core of the Great Nebula there are green, pleasant, warm little worlds. One of those worlds was home to us.

"We won't need helmets," my brother said. "There's more of what it takes in these cylinders. They're mass-building cylinders, polarized to convert diffuse energy back into elementary matter, under the direction of our quiet brains. We have a better than even chance of building a ship as real as this mountaintop!"

"And we've a head start over humans," I said. "We know how to construct a ship just like the one that was smashed up, down to the minutest detail. We've a clairvoyant mind picture of it."

He was singing again when we drove the cylinders deep into the frozen soil, two hundred feet apart, and stood back and let our quiet brains soar.

The energizing flames darted out just as he'd known they would. Between the cylinders, in great fluttering pinions, and our quiet brains built a ship from the keystone of matter itself, from disintegrating stone and the cosmic dust.

Thought can do things to energy, to matter—not conscious thought, but the kind of thought that shaped the Universe of Stars.

How can I describe it to you?

If you'd been there you'd have seen something like a bursting energy shell first, then a banked mass of swirling light and the ship taking shape under the light.

But how can I make you feel the breath-taking wonder of it? You've never built a ship that way, a ship you'll be going home in, your ship!

You've never seen it grow from the inside out, with all the intricate parts falling into place, the gleaming controls and the smooth bulkheads, so neat and precise, and the great pulsing power drive building itself up like a living thing.

I think I blinked more than I should, and my eyelids got wet, and froze to my cheeks. You know how it is when you've done some-

thing tremendous that shakes you to the depths. When you're through, you don't feel like saying much. You just feel humble and very little, and the bigness of the accomplishment takes away your breath.

So we just looked at each other, my brother and I, and then we looked at the ship. My brother slung his big, loose-jointed arm around my shoulder and we went inside.

I'm writing this now in the pilot jetty, a hundred billion miles from Earth. I'm putting it all down just as it happened, before my human memories dim.

I'm going home, see? And I might remember too much if I took it all with me. How the earth looks after an April thaw, with the spring peepers going full blast in woodland pools, and how the stars blaze down on frosty nights.

Shucks, I even liked the Carny tents in the spring. The rioting colors and the toy balloons and the whistling peanut carts.

Yeah! Well, writing about it helps to get rid of it. I don't want to take it with me.

Near to me now, blazing bright, there's a pinwheeling rush of familiar stars. Another star cluster and another—and another! After all, I am going home, and in my book there's nothing better, nothing to compare with that!
