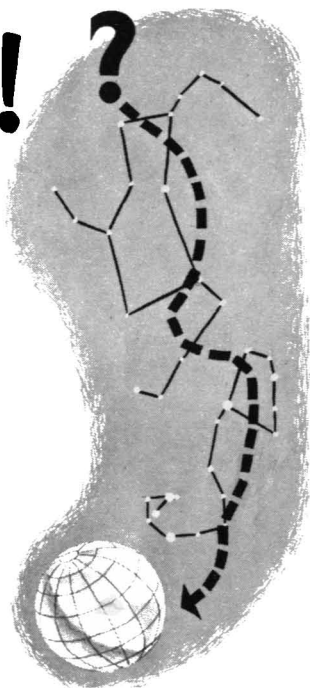
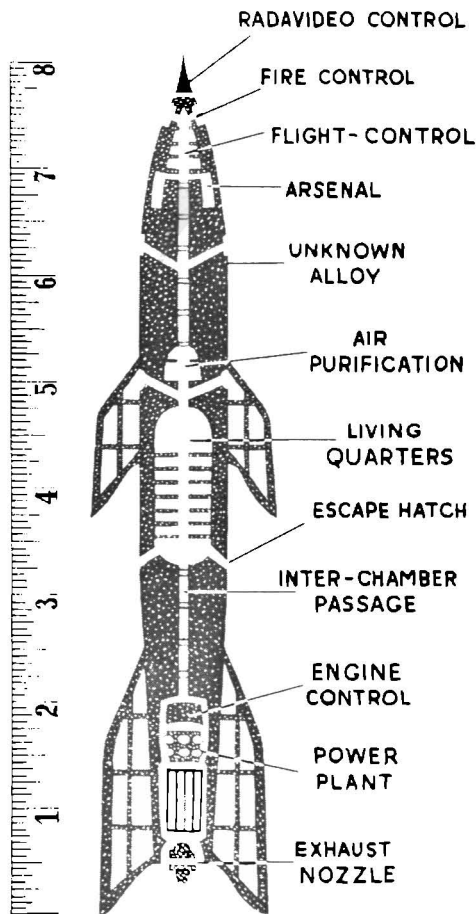


In this ISSUE!



INVASION from the MICROCOSM

A master story-teller of science fiction and a tale with many surprises . . . including the new approach to space-ship construction illustrated on this page. It is a space-ship that comes from . . . where? SEE PAGE 4.

ORBIT

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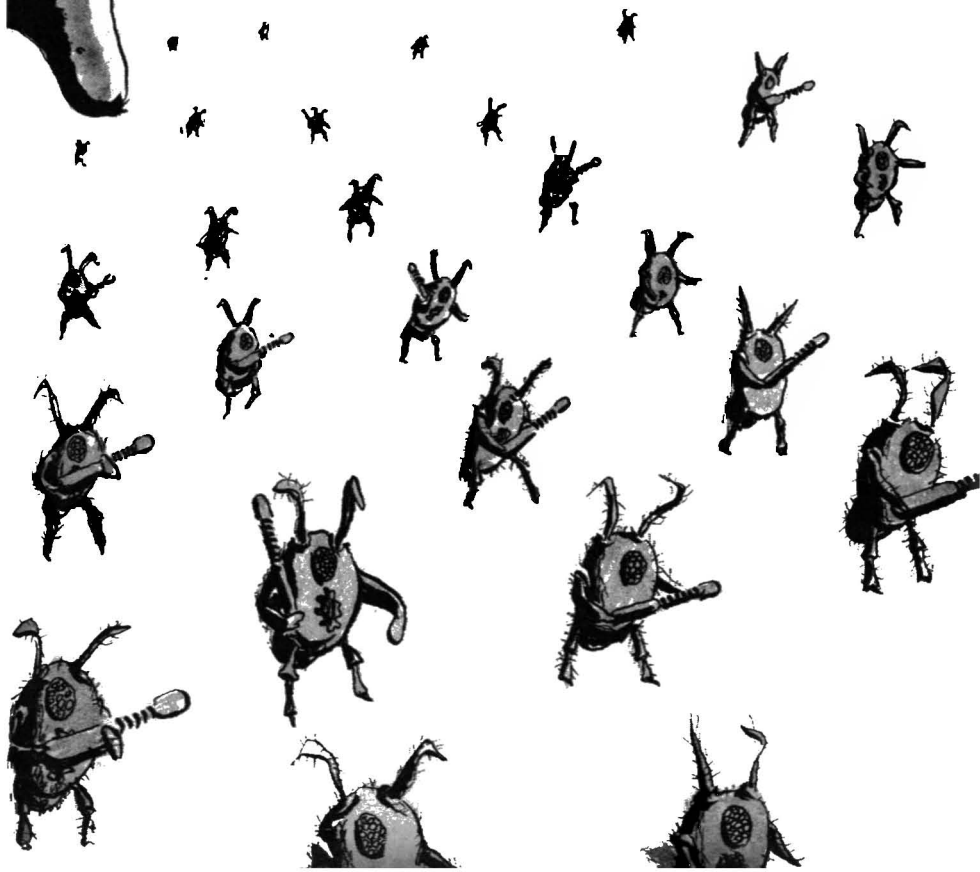
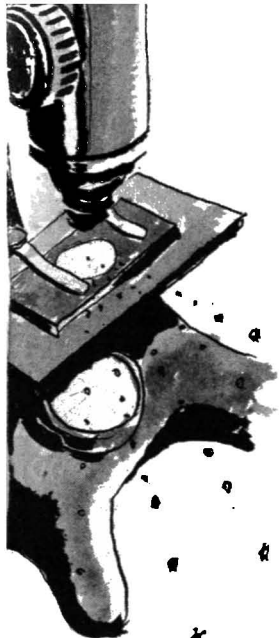
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INVASION

from the

MICROCOSM



THE POOR PROFESSOR WAS

**A VOICE CRYING IN THE
WILDERNESS . . . UNHEEDED,
UNBELIEVED . . . UNTIL A
WOMAN'S TOUCH PROVED
HOW RIGHT HE WAS!**

by August Derleth

IRAN INTO Tex Harrigan that day at the Cliff-Dwellers' Club. He was sitting moodily at one of the windows looking out over the sunlit lake.

"What's the matter?" I said. "You look like the last rose of summer. Reporter's blues?"

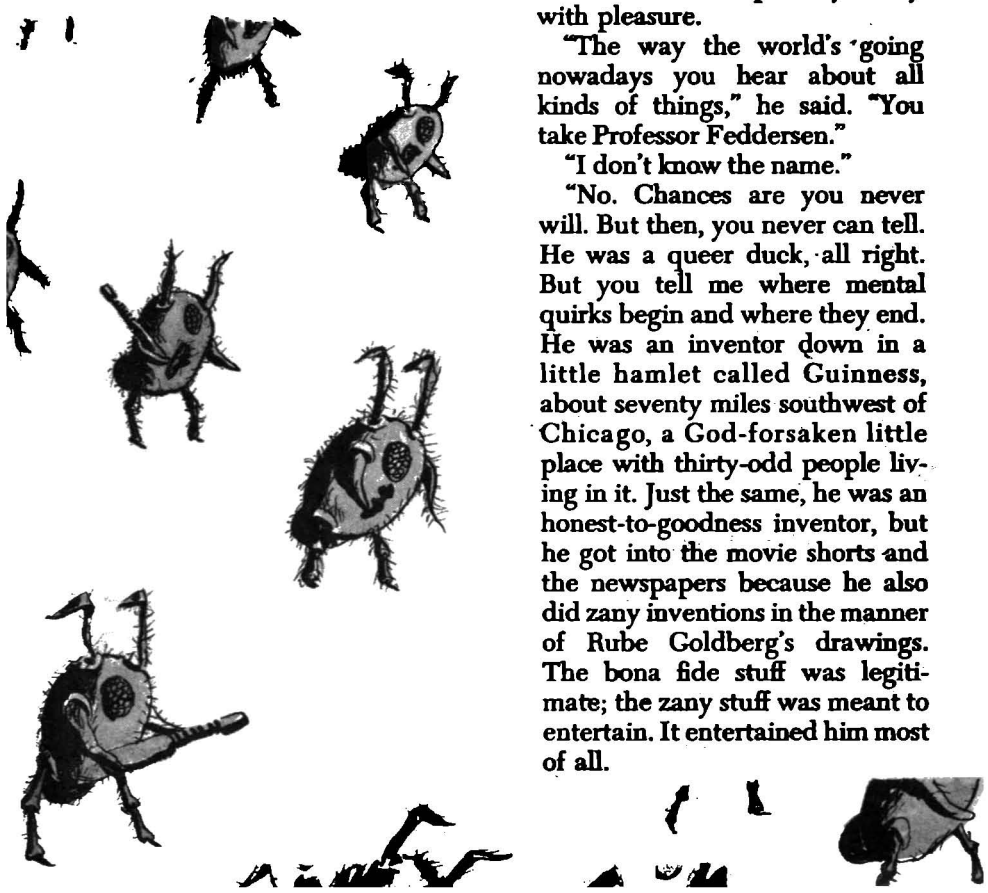
"I've been thinking," he said.

I said I was glad to hear it, but he did not look upon my levity with pleasure.

"The way the world's 'going nowadays you hear about all kinds of things," he said. "You take Professor Feddersen."

"I don't know the name."

"No. Chances are you never will. But then, you never can tell. He was a queer duck, all right. But you tell me where mental quirks begin and where they end. He was an inventor down in a little hamlet called Guinness, about seventy miles southwest of Chicago, a God-forsaken little place with thirty-odd people living in it. Just the same, he was an honest-to-goodness inventor, but he got into the movie shorts and the newspapers because he also did zany inventions in the manner of Rube Goldberg's drawings. The bona fide stuff was legitimate; the zany stuff was meant to entertain. It entertained him most of all.



"We used to do routine stories on him. He was a tall, willowy old fellow, with a dome-like skull, out of which sprouted a few thin wisps of silky hair. He had fierce, intent eyes, black, as I recall them, and a thin, pursed mouth, high cheekbones, hollow cheeks, bushy eyebrows, half white. He could be engaging enough; he had a good sense of humor. The last few times, however, I noticed him getting more and more serious, and it wasn't like him.

"Well, I got sent down on a routine assignment — he'd done some whacky thing designed to operate a slough of household gadgets while a machine rocked the baby to sleep—and he opened up on me.

"Tell me, Harrigan," he said, 'do you ever think very much of this world of ours?'

"I said I didn't have time to think about it a hell of a lot.

"No, nobody has. Still and all," he went on, dead serious, 'I wonder if we oughtn't to think about it a little more. Here we are; we don't know where we came from or where we're going, and lately the thing's been bothering me. Now we're in the middle of atomic experiments, and I've been thinking. What if we exist in relation to some greater universe just as atoms exist to us?'

"It took me a while to digest that. I turned it over and over in

my mind, but of course it didn't make sense. He could see I was having difficulty.

"Just imagine how big we must look to an ant. We know how small an ant looks to us. Well, suppose we're no bigger than ants to creatures on other worlds.'

"Sure,' I said. 'That's easy. That's the way it was in the days of the brontosaurus.'

"An atomic world,' he said. 'Suppose an atom holds a universe. After all, size is relative. It might be possible for a duplication of our own universe to be held within an atom. On the other hand, we might seem atomic in size to even greater universes.'

"I began to smell a story. 'Listen,' I said, 'you're on to something. Give out.'

He hedged. He wasn't ready to admit anything but that he'd been giving the problem some thought. In the end he took me over to a microscope and told me to look into it. I did.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"Nothing but a green dot, a pin-point or smaller.

"Let me magnify that.'

"He did. The point came out a little more clearly.

"If you look close you'll see that it has a body, what passes for legs, arms, a head. Could be tentacles.'

"Bacteria?' I guessed.

"A form of life,' he said.

"Where'd it come from?"

"You tell me."

"I kidded him. I accused him of playing with atoms. He had access to the cyclotron at the University of Chicago, and it might have been. He didn't track along. He was too preoccupied to joke."

"Well, about two weeks later, Cary called me into his office and asked me whether Feddersen wasn't my boy."

"Sure," I said. "What's he invented now?"

"Cary threw me a press dispatch. 'Scientist Warns of Sub-Microscopic Invasion.' The old boy was giving out stories about an invasion by creatures from an atomic world. 'Ha, he's off his nut,' I said."

"Go to see him."

"Orders were orders. I ran down to Guinness."

"The old boy looked haggard. Can you beat a deal like that? Invasion by an army you couldn't see? He was dead serious."

"What's it now?" I asked. "Have they begun to move in on us?"

"He just led me over to his work-bench and pointed. 'What do you make of that, Harrigan?'"

"That' was a pretty peculiar outfit, admittedly. About the size of a matchbox, I thought at first it was a working model of a torpedo. But, no, it looked more like a pocket in miniature."

"Try to lift it, said Feddersen."

"I tried. It was heavier than lead. I could hardly budge it. 'What is it?' I asked."

"He told me. He had found it almost buried in the ground of a woodlot adjoining his property. He had got it into the house only with the help of two neighbors. He had immediately attempted to discover of what metal it was made; he had not yet been able to do so. Since it was so obviously the work of — well, for lack of something better to say — human hands, he had tried to find an opening in it. He had not succeeded in this, either. Yet it seemed clear that it was a model of some kind of rocket, probably operating on a jet principle like those with which our government has been experimenting. It was possible that it was one of their models, manufactured to scale. Feddersen might have got it anywhere—I was wary of him, knowing his zaniness. It was not beyond him to have put together an elaborate hoax, and for all that I knew about it, he could have told me the thing was made of Martian granite."

"Except, of course, that he didn't."

"And how does that tie up with your warning of a sub-microscopic invasion?" I wanted to know.

"I don't know that it does. But

I've been wondering where the invaders came from — and how they came. Perhaps this is the answer.'

"He never cracked a smile, and he seemed genuinely worried.

"That thing," he went on, 'is capable of carrying millions of them.'

"And what do they do for artillery and machine guns or whatever they use?"

"He brushed this aside. 'Oh, they wouldn't need weapons as ancient as that,' he said.

"Or maybe they're vegetarians and intend to devour all the foliage.'

"Or carnivores,' he agreed soberly. 'I have thought of that. If they have a basal metabolism similar to that of our own shrew, they could make away with a good deal of food in a day.'

"Well, he went on to talk about his observations. Seems he had been putting the things under the microscope . . ."

"Hold on, Tex," I cut in. "If he couldn't see them with the naked eye, how could he put them under the microscope?"

"Why, they were everywhere. He could scoop up a handful of dust and find them. What he saw disturbed him.

"I'm convinced they're making preparations for some major action against mankind,' he said.

"I thought he was kidding. 'Oh,

come,' I said. 'If they're as small as all that, what can they do?'

"You forget that they may have weapons far beyond our comprehension. Death rays, paralysis rays, poisons unknown to our science — why, the possibilities are unlimited. And since they're invisible to the naked eye, what can impede their movements? I think it an extremely fortunate fact that they chose my home for their base of operations — a coincidence, of course, but how fortunate for the human race!"

"What could he do? I asked him.

"For one thing, we'll have to contain them."

"Hal! That's a term I've read a lot of times with reference to Europe and Asia. Ever since Locomo."

"The principle's the same,' he said, never cracking a smile. 'As far as I know now, their base of operations doesn't extend beyond the house — or perhaps beyond this room. So in effect they're contained right here within these walls.'

"I conceded that he had made a beginning. He could call out the militia at any time. I could imagine the boys of the National Guard shooting up a couple of million microscopic invaders.

"There wasn't much of a story to be had in Feddersen. I got him

a two-column spread on an inside page, and I figured that was that.

"But no, inside a week he was back. He was trying to alert the Secretary of Defense to the dangers of planetary invasion. It made quite a story. I got it first on the teletype. Can you treat a thing like that seriously? Well, neither could the wire services. 'Amateur Scientist Says We Are Under Attack,' they put it. 'Cause for Alarm, Holds Alarmist Inventor.' Feddersen telephoned me; he was indignant.

"By that time, of course, Cary had told me to pick up another story on him, preferably with a comic slant.

"I ran out to his place and found him stewing around, in a pretty frantic state.

"'Look, Harrigan,' he said, 'I know positively these fiendish aliens are perfecting some hellish assault on our civilization. They mean to take over the Earth, no less.'

"'That's a pretty large territory for microscopic armies.'

"'Don't make fun of me. This is my field, and I know what I'm talking about.'

"'You scientists are all alike. It wasn't more than three decades ago most of you were keeping up the fiction that the atom wasn't fissionable.'

"'No one's infallible,' he agreed. 'Just the same, we're under attack,

and I can't seem to get anyone to take me seriously.'

"Now, I'd never really studied Feddersen's microbes. I undertook to do so. I looked at those bugs or specks or whatever you want to call them until I began to feel like one. As a matter of fact, I got so I thought of them as microscopic imitations of human beings. They certainly seemed to have a pair of arms and a pair of legs. They had excrescences I'd call heads. Feddersen confirmed all this. But how many bacteria come out looking vaguely like men? God knows!

"Feddersen had something under a slide and I had to take what he told me it was. An alien invader from an atom-size universe. It might have been a form of bacterial life, for all I knew. Some of them seemed to give off a black effusion — in miniature, like a squid, you know. Some of them appeared to be carrying something — but that may have been an optical illusion; if they were microscopic, what they carried was almost sub-microscopic. I couldn't say they carried weapons. Feddersen could and did.

"'I put it to you,' I said to him, 'that this is nine-tenths imagination on your part, Feddersen.'

"He denied it, angrily. 'Harrigan, I'm the scientist—not you. I'll take your word for journalism; you'll take mine for science.'

"I tried a new tack. Then, if they're intelligent beings, no matter how small, they must know we're on to them."

"Of course. And it doesn't trouble them. They aren't afraid of us, don't you see? That only proves my contention."

"I couldn't see that and said so. Trouble with people like Feddersen is they're apt to become dogmatic at the drop of a hat. Feddersen figured he couldn't be wrong; maybe you get that way after the kind of publicity he was accustomed to getting for every one of his zany or sane inventions."

The waiter came up and asked whether we were drinking. Harrigan ordered a whiskey and sour; I did the same. Harrigan lapsed into brooding silence.

"What became of Feddersen?" I prompted him.

"I was coming to that. I didn't get much of a story out of him that day. I couldn't do a comic turn, Cary's orders or not. There wasn't any reason to doubt Feddersen's sincerity—only his judgment."

"He gave me quite a rigmarole that day. He had things pretty well figured out. He was sure that the invaders were in some sort of communication with their home star or planet or whatever it was—maybe even an atom-sized microscopic world inside our own planet—and that, once conditions

were right, a full-scale invasion would begin.

"But if we can't see these things, how can we fight them?" I wanted to know.

"We'll devise some means," said Feddersen. "Science always comes through."

"Seems to me the first thing to be done is find something to make them visible. If one can be seen under a microscope, then a million ought to be plain to the naked eye."

"A million in one spot, yes," he agreed. "But they won't be in one spot. So far they're just in this room, and they've gone back to their ship."

"Oh, it is their ship?"

"It must be. They've taken possession of it, and they're using it for their immediate base."

"How did he know that? Why, he said, by watching their movements, the directions they took. Always to and from the queer thing he had dug out of the ground across the road. He had not actually seen any of them going in or out of the craft—if that's what it was. But he had been able to see concentrations of them without the aid of his microscope—thin green lines, thinner than a hair—which he took to be marching columns. Marching columns! That's how far gone he was. Could I put down anything about it for newspaper use without

making him look like the grandfather of all the whacks? No, I couldn't."

Our drinks came, and once more Harrigan sat looking out of the Club windows to the lake, not watching the boats, but just staring. He shook himself presently, and went on.

"Well, the end came sooner than I expected. It was only about a week later when the telephone rang one day and there was Feddersen at the other end of the wire, so excited he could hardly talk.

"'Harrigan — another's come in!'

"'Another what?'

"'Another of those queer ships — space ships. It came flying through the window, broke the glass, and came down beside the first one. I've been trying to get in touch with you for quite a while . . .

"'How long ago?'

"'About an hour.'

"'I'll be right out.'

"I went out and sure enough, there was another of those curious rocket-like craft. I say 'craft' because I don't know what else to call them. Models, maybe, Miniatures. I've said that before. As I say, that's what they might have been. I'm not a scientist, only a reporter, and my job's just to report what I saw. And that day I saw two of those things,

side by side, and the busted window, with the glass inside, showing it had been broken from the outside. Circumstantial evidence, of course. But of what?

"Feddersen was sure he knew. the full-scale invasion was about to begin. But why in Guinness? Why not Chicago or New York or London? Simply because Guinness was where they had first landed. And with what weapons? Feddersen thought he knew that, too. They had some sort of disintegrators. He even had what he called proof for me. He rolled up one pants leg and showed me where he had been attacked.

"'I felt those pricks and got out of the way just in time,' he explained.

"There were tiny holes in his flesh, all right. They could have been made by a red-hot pin. They went in perhaps an eighth of an inch. Can you imagine how much disintegrating they'd have to do to take over our world? Ha!

"The only thing I couldn't quiet explain to my own satisfaction was that second craft or model or whatever it was. How had it come there? Or had Feddersen gone to the lengths of catapulting it through the glass into his house? And, if so, how had it come to settle down so easily beside the other one? No, there was a mystery there. Of course, he could have arranged to catch the

thing in a hammock or some such arrangement, and then lowered it to where I saw it. But how far-fetched can you get?

"Are they wounds or not?" he demanded.

"Sure. Pin-pricks," I said.

"What kind of evidence do you want, Harrigan?" he asked.

"Only something my readers can believe."

"Well, then, take a picture of those two things."

"No sooner said than done," I told him. "Just the same, it won't be enough for our readers. We have a highly intelligent body of readers . . ."

"His answer to that was unprintable."

"I figured that something was bound to happen sooner or later to bring the thing to a head. And something did. Not quite what I figured, though. Professor Feddersen simply disappeared. Something made a shambles of his study. His niece telephoned the police, and I went down as soon as the wires began to carry the story. The police were looking for me, anyway."

"Seems Feddersen had let out a shout and, when his niece had come running to see what it was all about, he had said, 'They're attacking. Get hold of Tex Harrigan at the *Register* and tell him to come right out.' She had tried, but I was on an assignment some-

where else. She had gone into his study to report that, and he had vanished. Moreover, all the furniture on one side of the room had sort of fallen together, as if something had crushed it. She went straight to the telephone and called the police.

"When I got there, the room was still the way she had found it. So she said at the time. Actually, though, there was one little difference. Was it trivial or important? I wouldn't begin to say. She mentioned that later. At the moment I was busy looking at the damage. The chairs looked partially burned. So did the desk and the rug. The two rockets by the window were untouched. Everything looked just as if something had begun to eat it away — like termites — because there weren't any *remains* except the untouched portions of the furniture."

"What made me uneasy, however, were the things on the floor. Feddersen's eyeglasses, for one thing. Fragments of what I'm pretty sure were human teeth. Some wisps of silky half-white hair. Now, add that all up with a little imagination and you can come to some pretty startling conclusions. But leave out the zealous imagination, and you have a highly explosive minus quantity. Feddersen could have arranged the scene with ease."

"He was never seen again."

"Two little things, though, have always nagged at me.

"First, those models of rocket ships. Of course, we gave the story a big play, and the ships or models were eventually picked up and examined by other scientists. They were found to be almost solid, of some kind of metal or metal alloy with which our own men weren't familiar, but which they felt sure had been put together by Feddersen. Inside they had tiny canals or passages, almost like flaws in the structure, leading to pockets or rooms, and some kind of incredibly minute instruments of which the scientific brethren could make neither head nor tail.

"Well, by the time we got the report from them, the head we gave the story was a natural—'Feddersen's Zaniest Invention!'

"The other thing is fascinating material for speculation.

"I said, you remember, that the room was just as Feddersen's niece found it, with one trivial change. The microscope was still in place and, when I had a moment that day Feddersen disappeared, I scooped up a handful of dust and put it under glass. Those little green things were still in it, but every one was dead as

a doornail. I tried again and again to find something alive. I couldn't do it.

"Finally I cornered the niece. 'Look,' I said, 'just what happened when you came into the room?'

"'Why, I saw Uncle was gone and I ran out to call the police.'

"'And then?' I prompted.

"'I came back in to make sure he wasn't here. He wasn't.'

"'So that's all?'

"'That's all,' she said. 'Except . . .'

"'Except what?'

"'Well, forgive me, Mr. Harigan, it's hardly worth mentioning. It's a very small thing. When I came back the second time and looked, I had the impression the furniture was still wasting away, but before I could collect my thoughts I felt something pricking me on the legs. I never know what kind of bugs or things my uncle works with, and I never care. But I had no intention of being bit up. So I went out and got some powdered DDT and sprinkled it all over. Did it matter, do you think?'

"'Hal! Did it matter? Did it, indeed! Think of it—. Possibly an entire interplanetary invasion wiped out by one dose of DDT!' * * *