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# SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

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## NOVELETTES

- INVISIBLE ONE**.....By Neil R. Jones 6  
*Presby could rescue his wife—but then she could never see him again.*
- THE GIRL IN THE BOTTLE**.....By Jack Williamson 36  
*The allies of the Nazi dictator were not of Earth. . . .*
- VENUSIAN TRAGEDY**.....By Max C. Sheridan 78  
*He was willing to give up his natural body for Kaldee—but it did no good.*
- THE RADIUM-BUGS**.....By Helen Weinbaum 102  
*They said he was unfit to live—but only he could protect their world.*

## SHORT STORIES

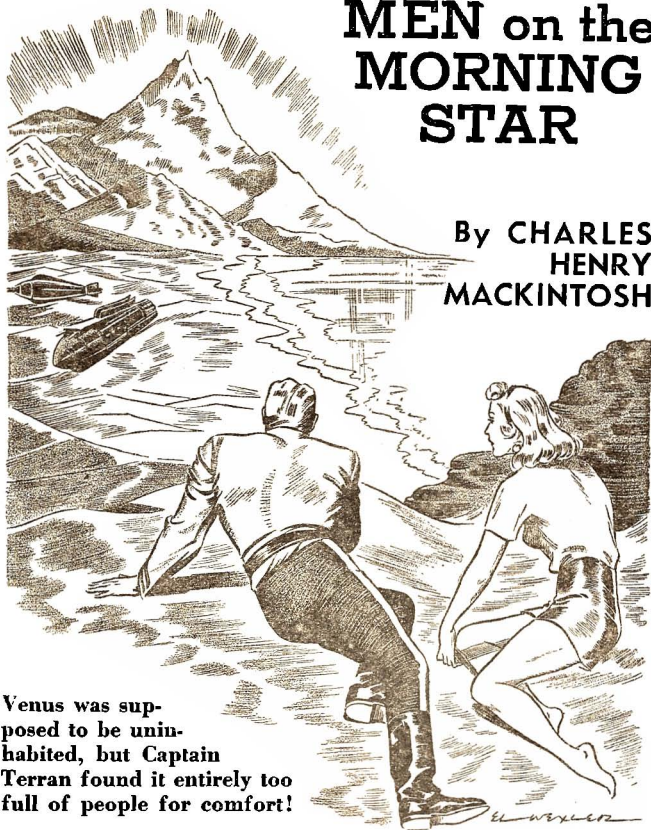
- THE INVASION**.....By Robert Willey 25  
*The strangers would not answer Man's signals—so they had to die.*
- MEN ON THE MORNING STAR**....By Charles Henry Mackintosh 57  
*"Uninhabited" Venus was too populous for Captain Terran's comfort!*
- STRANGE PLAYFELLOW**.....By Isaac Asimov 67  
*Robbie was only a machine, but he was Gloria's only friend.*
- REBIRTH OF MAN**.....By Basil E. Wells 94  
*The Great Ones doomed themselves by the success of their own experiment.*
- PHANTOM FROM NEPTUNE**.....By Henry Andrew Ackermann 121  
*A Super Science Brief*

## SPECIAL FEATURES

- MISSIVES AND MISSILES**..... 4
- FANTASY REVIEWS**..... 120
- THE PREVIEW**..... 124

# MEN on the MORNING STAR

By CHARLES HENRY MACKINTOSH



**Venus was supposed to be uninhabited, but Captain Terran found it entirely too full of people for comfort!**

**C**APTAIN ARTHUR TERRAN of Space Police had no orders to attempt a landing on Venus in his one-man scout-rocket *The Crystal Arrow*, but he had no orders against it, either, since it would never have occurred to his superiors that anyone could be mad enough to attempt such a landing, through

unknown miles of zero visibility. It had never been done, in the centuries-long record of space flight—which was an altogether excellent reason for Captain Terran to attempt it!

There had been many tense minutes, as his ship nosed down through the dense cloud-blanket, but his hunch that there

might be a deep zone of comparative clearness above the surface had checked through. Suddenly, his ship emerged from the clouds, and, half a mile down, he saw clearly a wide and sandy beach bordering a blue-gray lake. The purring blast of the nose-jets cushioned *The Crysteel Arrow* down gently as a feather, till the fin-jets could take up the roll of power and ease her back and down on an approximately even keel.

—And now, in another minute, he would be the first human-being ever to have set foot on the surface of Venus!

So?

—Then who, or what, was the creature running toward his ship, already not three hundred yards away across the sandy beach?

If a Venusian, then evolution on Venus must exactly have paralleled that on Earth, which was a bit too much for even an amateur biologist to believe.

He rested his arms on the rim of the three-foot circular sally-port, his right hand, out of sight, touching the butt of a blaster, and waited for welcome or war as the case might be.

A curiously graceful runner, that fellow out there . . . gosh, it *wasn't* a fellow, it was a *girl*—a girl beating him to the conquest of Venus, a girl all alone apparently, or the reception committee surely would have been larger!

His hand instinctively fell away from the butt of his blaster, though an odd corner of his mind quarrelled with him that women have been known to be more dangerous than men.

Still, she didn't seem to be hostile, or even armed, so far as he could see. Indeed, the closer she came the more it seemed to him that she was just plain *scared* rather than hostile or even glad to see him.

What could have scared her, here on Venus? —Tyranosauri? Sabre-toothed tigers? *Natives*?

She was flapping her little hands at

him now, frantically, in a gesture which could mean only: '*Get away!*'

He grinned down at her as she arrived, sobbing for breath, beneath his sally-port. She was a lovely little thing, despite her evident terror and exhaustion—or perhaps she appealed all the more to his protective instinct because of them.

"A nice welcome, I must say," he mocked, crinkling his eye- corners to point the pleasantry. "Here I have come thirty million miles to pay you a visit—picking almost the shortest distance between Earth and Venus, at that, I must confess—and all I get for my pains is, '*Get away!*' Lady, I don't bite, I assure you. Name is Arthur Terran, Art to my friends. Space-pilot, first class. Captain of *The Crysteel Arrow* . . ." He was talking mostly to give her a chance to recover her breath and her own voice. "Tell me," he added, dropping the mask of humor, "what's the matter?"

She gave him his answer in a five syllable rattle like machine-gun fire: "*Rocket-racketeers!*"

"You mean that space pirates are *here* on Venus? What in h—I mean *what* are they doing here? I thought their hide-away was on the dark side of the moon, and their racket was pirating shipments of refined ores?"

"It was . . . it is . . . but . . ." she gulped like a little girl swallowing her gum . . . "but . . . they followed father to Venus! They must have had spies in the Crysteel Labs on the bright side of the moon. Father's chief technician there, you know. They must have heard what he found here on his first trip, and, of course, they'd never overlook a chance like that!"

"Of course not," he agreed. "What *did* your father find?"

"That's the secret!" she gasped. "Nobody must know—I don't myself."

"The Rocket-racketeers must know at least a little something?" he suggested.

"Oh, yes, they know he has a new plas-

tic—something having countless times the strength even of crystal, and one which can be worked at comparatively low temperatures once, and then no temperature they can get in the Labs will touch it again . . .”

“But that’s obviously impossible,” he broke in. “If heat will melt the stuff once it will do it again . . .”

“It won’t any such thing,” she broke in in turn. “It’s not a chemical reaction at all. It’s some completely new and strange rearrangement of atomic structural pattern. Comparatively low heat starts the reaction, then nothing can stop it or touch it again. Father discovered it quite by chance when he cushioned down on his blasts here on . . .” she broke off suddenly, and bit her lip. “Here on Venus,” she concluded, unconvincingly sketching a gesture towards the far horizon.

TERRAN lifted his eyebrows at her. “You might as well break down and confess that it was right here on this beach,” he suggested. “I’m no Rocket-racketeer, you know. I’m on the other side, your side. S. P.—Space Police; that’s me!”

She looked at him over a bitten knuckle. “How did you know it was right here?” she gasped.

He laughed. “I didn’t, I just guessed; but, of course, I do know now—you have just told me!”

“Why . . . why, you!” —She could think of nothing to add.

“I’m all right,” he reassured her, “and you are all right, and your father’s secret is all right. The only ones who are all wrong, and in wrong, are those Rocket-racketeers. Now, just where did you say I could locate them—without their knowing I’m on my way, of course?”

She shook her head violently. “I didn’t say . . . you mustn’t! I came to warn you to get away while you can, and bring

back a big ship of the Space Police. Why, they’d *kill* you on sight!”

He grinned again. “I’m by way of being quite a killer myself—only in the line of duty, you know; yet, after all, that is my business, in a way.”

“But there are *five* of them!”

“And only one of me, huh? Well, I’ve known worse odds, and I’m still here, all alive-o!”

He climbed through the three-foot sally-port, feeling as clumsy, under her gaze, as a bear emerging from winter quarters. She moved back a little to make room for him, but remained quite close and didn’t seem to be scared any more, not, at least, of him. He patted her on one shoulder, gently and reassuringly, though feeling none too good himself.

The Rocket-racketeers were no push-over, he knew that—what member of Space Police didn’t? The whole force had been after them for more than a year and, so far, the score had been five Space Police ‘missing’—probably permanently. They were tough babies, all right; and the new plastic this girl had told him about—well, she’d told him enough to see that it should mean the entire revolution of spacecraft construction, for one thing, and probably of the whole technique of plastic engineering. Since they didn’t stop at killing Space Police on the mere pilfering of a few packets of refined ores, what could stop them now they were on the trail of a billion dollar secret such as this? Still they *must* be stopped.

“Where is their hangout?” he broke off his soliloquy.

She gestured back in the direction from which she had come. “Not far beyond the crest of that sand dune. They are using their space ship—and father’s—as a base.”

“What can you tell me about their habits? Do they all stick together all the time, or is there any chance of chopping them down on even terms, one at a time?”

“I see what you mean,” she nodded

thoughtfully, "but you'll have to be awfully careful, because they have father's new sonic pistol, you know!"

"Sonic pistol?" he repeated. "What's that? Never heard of it!"

"It's another of father's new things," she explained, not without pride. "I don't really know how it works, but I know what it does."

"And just what does it do?" he prompted.

She staggered him with her answer. "It puts people to sleep! —Or, rather," she qualified, "it sends them into a kind of trance, like a sleep-walker."

HIS technically trained mind leapt the gaps in her sketchy account of the new weapon. "Does it send out an actual sound? Can you hear it?"

"No," she shook her head, "you can't hear anything. The first thing you know there's a funny feeling in your head and after that you don't know anything at all, until the sonic is shut off. Meanwhile, you are completely under the control of whoever has it trained on you."

"You say the Rocket-racketeers have it now? Have they used it on your father? Didn't it make him tell them, or lead them to, whatever they want of him?"

"No, and that's something I can't quite understand. Father says it works just like hypnotic control, but . . ."

"AND," he corrected. "That's just the reason, because hypnotism can't make people go against their own sincere inner convictions, you know. Persistent attempts to do so tend to break the trance entirely. I suppose the sonic would renew it automatically, but it wouldn't do any good."

"That's just what happens with father," she agreed, "and it does make them so mad! I'm afraid they will . . . try some other way!"

He guessed the implication she could not bring herself to put into words, and respected her feelings.

"We'll have to stop that!" he said.

"Do you think we really can? Look, I can use a blaster. I'm quite a good shot with one. Father made me practise and practise. Have you an extra one?"

"Lady, I have a young armory," he answered, "and I'll see that you are armed, all right; but I don't want you mixing in any fight with these fellows. They are tough numbers, I'm telling you! I'll give you a baby blaster, one small enough to hide away somewhere—but not in those clothes, I guess . . ." He broke off suddenly, exclaiming "What the heck?"

The girl had stiffened, turned half away from him and his ship, facing towards the dune over which she had come. Two dots, about the size of tangerine oranges, showed bluish-red against the sugar-white sand at the crest of the dune.

His right hand flashed down upon the butt of a blaster . . . but he couldn't draw! There was a curious tingling in the region of his medulla. His whole motor-system seemed to be inhibited from action. He could still order his muscles to jerk out that blaster, but they couldn't obey. Just before he stopped even wanting to draw his weapon, he noticed that the stiffness had gone out of the girl, and her hand was flashing towards his holster. *Tricked* after all, eh?—His mind went entirely blank.

Almost at once, it seemed, full consciousness and command over his own muscles returned to him. Automatically, his fingers clenched on—nothing! The blaster was gone from its holster. Simultaneously, he heard the sound of it, like a high wind whistling through a narrow knot-hole. His eyes were still focused on those two tangerine-sized dots at the dune crest and, unbelievably, he saw one of them explode in a spat of blue-grey smoke. The other dodged down out of sight. He swivelled his eyes and again saw the girl standing beside him, leaning a little for-

ward, blaster at the point, her eyes fixed upon the far dune crest with an intensity which left no consciousness of him.

"Tumbling asteroids, *what* a shot!" he admired.

She did not take her eyes from the dune as she answered, "I told you I could use a blaster."

"I'll say you can, lady! —You can use mine, and I'll go get me some more." He turned to crawl through the sally-port.

He was quickly scrambling out of the port again, with blasters on both hips and one hung by its lanyard about his neck.

HE TOOK the lanyard from about his neck and threw it over her's. "I'll bet you shoot almost as well with the left hand as with the right," he said, "and so, I'll admit, do I. That gives us four shots to their four, huh, when they come again?"

"If they come again," she corrected.

"Huh? You think they'll wait for us to come to them? Well, maybe that would be the safer play for them, but I don't think you're right. We could take off and bring down the whole Space Fleet on them. They'll be back to collect us, pronto . . ." He broke off suddenly, and the girl gasped to hear the high wailing note of a blaster.

Her eyes swivelled from him back to the dune, just in time to see the lower arc of a circle blown cleanly from its crest. "Where did that shot come from?" she demanded incredulously.

"From me, lady," he confessed. "You couldn't see because I used my left hand and fired from the hip. I shoot better blind from the left, and there wasn't time to aim. Lucky hit, huh? That's even-Stephen, one for you and one for me!"

"Did you *get* him?" she asked.

"Sure did. Blew off the top half of his head along with that bite in the dune crest. That's the both of them now . . ."

"But there are three more!" she reminded him.

"You are right, of course—and maybe those three are with father right now, trying to worm what they want out of him! —Oh, Art, let's *hurry!*"

He showed all his fine teeth, both at her use of the friendly abbreviation and at the sudden reversal of sentiment, but said only, "Okay, let's get going!"

Both carried blasters in both hands as they moved warily towards the crest of the dune, using the blasted arc as a sight.

Struck by a thought, Terran said, "Hurray for our side—we've already cut 'em down to our size!"

"But there are three of them," she repeated.

"Well, there are three of us, aren't there? If it was your father taught you to use a blaster that way, I wouldn't want any better third man on my side!"

"Father isn't third man, he's *top* man," she told him, but she smiled when she said it, and he grinned back.

"Okay with me, lady . . ." he began, but she broke in impatiently:

"I wish you'd quit calling me 'lady'! My name is Londra Landrey."

"And a very nice name to have," he assured her before getting back to business. "Look, now, where do you suppose the other three of those racketeers are likely to be, about this time? We still have work to do, haven't we?"

She nodded, but gloomily. "I hate all this killing . . ." she began, but he broke her away from that line of thought.

"It's kill or be killed in a pinch like this," he reminded her, "and I see no reason why we should be on the receiving end just because we don't *like* to kill!"

"I'm going to use the old gag of sneaking my space helmet above the dune-crest ahead of our heads," Terran said when they had arrived. "It may work. It nearly always does."

It didn't work on that occasion, because

there was nothing hostile on the other side of the dune. Nor were there any headless corpses. Both had been removed, and the sonic pistol had gone, too.

"Blast!" exploded the captain. "This means they'll be on guard, as well as that we've lost the sonic!"

HE SCANNED the terrain thoughtfully. The long pirate ship lay less than a hundred yards to their right, its nose pushed up into the dune. The starboard sally-port was closed and there was nothing at all in sight between them and the ship, but he knew only too well that there might be, probably would be, observers either at the polished crysteel prow or stern cones or anywhere along the longitudinal polished band where the two halves of the ship had been welded together under almost inconceivable pressure. They couldn't see in because of light refraction, but anyone watching from within could see out almost as clearly as if he were outside.

He didn't like to use his voice, not knowing how far sound vibrations might carry in the watery air, so he gestured to the right and downward, indicating that they would keep the dune-crest above them and slip along till they were just beyond the spot where the prow of the pirate ship touched the dune.

There again, he baited the old trap with the top of his helmet, and again there were no takers. At this point, however, the dune-crest came to so fine a feather-edge that he was able to stir away a tiny observation trough, without either of them having to lift a head above the barrier.

Another, smaller ship—obviously the Landreys'—lay about thirty yards to the right of the long pirate ship, angling a little away from it, with its starboard broadside turned towards their observation point. There was no one in sight between the two ships, though it was obvious that the sand between the two had been

trampled again and again. The starboard sally-port of the smaller ship was open, but the shadows within were too deep for them to see more than that.

Through that open port came suddenly the most nerve-wracking sound that human ears can hear—the gurgling scream of a fellow human-being venting unbearable agony!

The sound shattered Londra's nerve. "It's father," she cried, "they are torturing him! Oh, Art, we must help him!"

The captain's jaw set. He sensed that it was a trap, but he knew they couldn't just continue to crouch where they were and wait for repetitions of that tortured scream. "Blasters at the ready in both hands," he snapped, "and come *fast!*"

They were barely over the crest when the sonics caught them, one from each end of the smaller ship. The third pirate must be inside, extorting the scream . . . so far the captain thought, and then he thought no more.

He came back to the consciousness of a man's voice speaking somewhere near him. He was in black darkness but, by twitching his facial muscles, he sensed that he wore a padded blindfold. His hands were bound behind his back, his legs lashed at the ankles and above the knees. He was seated on a flat surface, leaning against a curved one, a quick curve, which he recognized as the side of a small space ship.

"If I had guessed," the voice was saying, "I would have bitten out my tongue before I made a sound; but I thought they were just trying to make me talk, and I thought it better to scream than to do that!" —That must be Londra's father speaking, and this must be the Landrey ship.

"Is Londra there?" he spoke.

"Oh, Art, are you all right?" her voice came back promptly.

"I'm blindfolded and trussed up, if you can call that being all right," he answered.

"So are we all. Father is here, too, and they didn't hurt him badly. Father, this is Captain Arthur Terran of Space Police. Captain, this is my father, Dr. Landrey, Chief Technician for Luna Crysteel."

A MASCULINE chuckle came across to him. "A bit formal, under the circumstances, eh, captain? Wonder what would be my correct response? I can't very well say 'How do you do?' because you've just told us. I can't say I'm 'glad to see you' because I can't see through this blindfold. I can't even say I'm 'glad you're here', though misery is supposed to love company, because I'd much rather you were free and anywhere else but here. Guess I'll just have to fall back on the good old Americanism, 'Glad to meet you!'"

"I'm glad to meet you, too, Dr. Landrey. —What has happened while I've been 'out'?"

"Nothing much," the doctor answered wearily. "They brought you in here shortly after I was fool enough to bait their trap for them, and then they questioned you as to what Londra had told you. You wouldn't answer, and that undoubtedly saved your life because they knew she must have told you something that seemed very important to you, or you would have answered frankly and at once, under the sonic. They asked Londra what she had told you, and she wouldn't answer either. Then they went away after tying and blindfolding both of you. They've had me this way for days, it seems. They left only a minute or so ago. I'm afraid they'll be back soon. Probably gone to get something to eat."

"For us, too, do you suppose?" the captain inquired hopefully. "I could chew on a slab of your new Venusteel, the way I feel now!"

"What's that you say?" the doctor's voice snapped like a whiplash. "What have you been telling him, Londra?"

She answered in her little-girl voice. "I didn't tell him anything, father. I didn't know enough to tell. He *guessed*—about the new plastic, I mean—just from my saying the Rocket-racketeers were after a new plastic you discovered when you cushioned down on your rocket-blasts here on Venus. It was uncanny!"

"I know very little, Dr. Landrey," the captain broke in on the chilly silence, "nor need you worry about the little I do know. I'm on duty, a captain of Space Police, and I neither know or remember anything beyond the line of duty."

"That is as it should be, Captain Terran," the older man replied stiffly. "This process involves billions," he added, a little less stiffly, and a few seconds of silence followed.

The captain broke it to ask, "Are there any more sonic pistols, other than the two in the hands of the pirates?"

"No-o-o," the doctor dragged out his negative. "I made only two in pistol form for hand use. Of course, there is also my experimental set."

"Where?" snapped the captain.

"It is, or was in the port locker in the control cabin forward," the other answered. "But it's barely portable and, in any event—even if the pirates haven't removed or destroyed it—the 'hypnote', as I term the sonic effect, cannot be directed from the experimental set. It broadcasts in all directions, but, within a much more limited range, it is equally effective."

"By golly," breathed the captain, more to himself than to the others, "if only I could get my hands on it!"

"What could you do with it, Art?" Londra inquired.

"I . . . I'd rather not raise your hopes by being too definite," he answered, "but I've studied sonics at S&P.U., of course, and I have the germ of an idea. Maybe it will work, maybe it won't. Anyway, first I shall have to get my hands free. You are all tightly tied, huh?"



"Tight enough to stop the circulation," the doctor answered grumpily, and Londra's report was equally hopeless.

"What is it they've tied us with?" the captain queried, wriggling his wrists in an attempt to feel the material of his bonds. "Not metal, anyway. Feels a bit like old-fashioned rawhide."

"I think that's what it is, or a synthetic similar product," the doctor told him. "They tied me while I had my eyes—and my mind—open. The material looked like strips of rawhide."

"Huh!" grunted the captain. "Ain't that a break!"

"A bad break, I would call it," the doctor objected. "Rawhide like this would hold an elephant, or a gorilla anyway!"

"Not if the gorilla had sense enough to use his *teeth* on it!" crowed the captain. . . .

**"I'M FREE!** My wrists are free!" Londra exulted, after sustained gnawing. She tore away her blindfold, and then theirs. "Have you a knife on your person, Art?"

"There's one in my right side pocket, if they haven't taken it."

They hadn't taken it.

"Just a moment," the captain exclaimed, as he felt her hand emerge from his pocket with its prize. "Don't cut through all the turns of the thongs. Cut just one place and unwind, so we can use the thongs again to make it look as if we were still tied, see? Save the blindfolds, too. We can wear 'em pushed up on our foreheads, ready to whisk down—leaving a chink—and get our hands behind us again, in case those fellows get back before we are ready for them."

"What are we going to do to get ready for them?" the doctor demanded practically, caressing the swollen veins in his forearms and legs.

"Stay right where you are for the time," the captain counselled. "You, too, Londra.

Get back down and be ready to look like prisoners again at a moment's notice. I'm going exploring. First, I want some blasters for all three of us to have in our hands behind us. Next, and most important, I want to see whether the experimental sonic is still in that port locker in the control cabin."

Their own blasters, all four of them, had been thrown through the hatch into the rear engine room. The captain reclaimed them, gave one each to Londra and her father, and stuffed the other two into his own belt. Then he swooped forward into the control cabin.

"He ought to have let me go after that set," the doctor grumbled irritably. "After all, it's my equipment. He'll probably smash something . . ."

"Art knows what he's doing, father!" Londra snapped, her nerves on edge. "He has an idea—let him work it out!"

The doctor subsided, muttering something unintelligible about a serpent's tooth; but at that moment the captain reappeared, stepping as if on eggs, carrying a long narrow base of some black plastic, on which was mounted a bewildering hookup of silvered tubes.

It wasn't bewildering to the doctor. "That's it!" he exclaimed with satisfaction. "It looks all right. What are you planning to do with it?"

The captain answered his question with another. "Since this set broadcasts, is there any danger that the operator would hypnotize himself?"

The doctor chuckled. "I did, the first time I tested it."

"So? What happened?"

"I got a nice three-hour nap, that was all. Then Londra came in, saw what was happening and switched off the set."

"Did you note your own . . . keynote, you call it?"

"Yes, and I know Londra's, too, but why do you ask? Are you thinking of putting either or both of us under control?"

You can control only one person at one time, you know. The 'hypnote' must be sounding continuously."

"I want you to put *me* under control," the captain astonished them. "Can you feel around for my keynote without putting yourself under?"

"I think so," the doctor assured him. "My rate was even higher than Londra's, and my judgment would be that you, with your carefully controlled nervous system, will have a lower rate than either of us."

"I should think it would be the other way."

"Well, it isn't!" snapped the older man, and Londra broke in:

"But why do you want father to put you under control, Art? Shouldn't you be the very one to keep alert?"

"If I understand this rig right," the captain explained, "your father can simply order me to *carry out the plan in mind*, after he has me under control, and I would act accordingly. Is that right, sir?"

"The plan in *your* mind, you mean? Hum. Well, yes, I see no reason at all why that should not be perfectly practical, but it would be the same as leaving you a free agent, wouldn't it? What's the sense of it, anyway?"

"Well, you see, sir, I have a hunch. It may not work, and if it doesn't, I'll have to rely on quick action with my blasters . . ."

**T**HE sound of heavy boots clumping down into the gritty sand interrupted to warn them that one of their captors had just jumped down from the sally-port of the larger ship.

"Quick, doctor," the captain exclaimed, setting down the set between Londra and her father, "curve your bodies towards each other to hide this set, as if you had been talking to each other. Let me get back into place and fake my ankle bonds, then get me under control and leave my keynote on. Finally, arrange your own

blindfolds and thongs so that you'll look okay to those babies when they come in out of the brighter light."

Clump . . . clump . . . clump, three sets of clumsy space boots sounded through the sand towards the partly-opened sally-port of their prison.

The captain was back in his old place, his head fallen a little forward beneath the loosened blindfold, as if asleep. His long legs stuck straight out in front of him, the thongs wrapped around at ankle and knee as if still securely tied. Londra and her father seemed equally helpless.

The heavy sally-port groaned protestingly under the pull of a hairy hand. At once, the captain began to jerk at his leg bonds.

"I'm getting free," he gurgled, as if unaware of the pirates' approach. The bonds flew apart with a snap. "I'll have my hands free in a moment," he exulted, twisting his shoulders strenuously.

"Get the sonic on him quick!" rasped a voice from behind the one who was now knee-high on the sally-port.

The pistol came to the point in the hairy hand, and, after a second, the captain stiffened out again.

"Got him! Come on in—I'll hold him so he won't hurt you!"

"Cut the comedy, Jim," harshed a taller, less apelike form, following him in. "Come on, Jake," he commanded the last to enter, asserting his leadership. He waved a blaster to accent the order. The last man carried the other sonic.

Then the captain flashed into action, while the one who held the sonic on him let his lower jaw fall in unbelieving amazement, for both hands appeared from behind the back of his supposedly helpless victim, holding blasters. The blaster in the captain's right hand whined, shortly, a snapped-off note. To Londra's horror, the right forearm of the pirate leader thudded to the cabin deck, its blaster still clutched in its fingers.

The captain swivelled his blasters to cover the two men armed only with sonics. "Drop those pistols," he shouted above the agonized howling of his first victim. They obeyed as if the weapons suddenly had glowed white hot.

"Now, Dr. Landrey," crisped the captain, "as Londra picks up the first sonic and shuts it off, you do the same thing at the same second to your set. Is that clear?"

"Oke," gurgled the scientist gleefully, forgetting his dignity for the moment.

"Down on your faces, all three of you!" the captain concluded his crisp commands, enforcing the order with his brace of blasters.

It was obeyed.

LATER, when the two sound men had been trussed up to the captain's taste, and the leader had been anesthetized and his arm dressed, Dr. Landrey's insistent demands for an explanation could no longer be diverted or denied.

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me you know more about the operation of my sonics than I do myself?" he demanded.

"No, sir, no, indeed," the captain disclaimed. "I claim only to have remembered, from my college days, how to stop your sonics from working."

"But, but," protested the scientist, "my sonics are less than three months old. No-one—except on Venus," he conceded with a grin—"ever heard of them before, or could have taught you, in your college, how to render them inoperative!"

"It's the principle of the thing, sir," the captain explained. "You had your experimental set virating at my keynote, and then the first pirate cut in on the same note. The one cancelled out the other. I was certain to be entirely a free agent from the second any one of the pirates cut down on me with a sonic."

"If you were so certain," Londra put in reproachfully, "why couldn't you have let us in on the secret?"

The captain grinned. "Oh, I wasn't so certain as all that," he conceded. "I'd heard the principle, but I'd never seen it demonstrated. Why, your father has just told us the sonic pistol has only been invented less than three months. I had to take a chance that the principle really was a principle."

"What if it hadn't worked, captain?" Dr. Landrey cut in grimly.

"Well, in that case, we would have had to kill them!"

"Will you stop talking about killing people!" commanded Londra, but with admiration in her voice.

The captain grinned at her again, boyishly. "All right, let's talk about feeding people instead of killing them. Three people, Us!"

"Can't feed people with talk!" Londra gave him back his grin and then vanished into the forward cabin where the food was stored.

"Captain Terran," her father began gravely when she had gone, "I have a proposition to make to you. Luna Crysteel is going to need a powerful police force of its own, in developing this discovery and shipping material to the plant on the moon. Will you organize and head that corps? I'd like to know that you are in charge if we run into more trouble, as well we may with billions at stake. Londra would like it, too, I'm sure."

The captain's eyes went forward to focus expectantly on the girl, as she returned carrying a loaded tray.

She nodded. "I heard what father said, and I'm all for it, Art!"

"Well, if you can stand having me practically in your hair, I'm for it, too," the captain agreed.

"But when do we eat?" he added plainly.