

PLANET STORIES



T. T. SCOTT, Pres.

MALCOLM REISS, Gen. Mgr.

W. SCOTT PEACOCK, Ed.

TWO NOVELS OF THE VOID

- JUGGERNAUT OF SPACE** Ray Cummings 2
 Never had a greater need for Earth's valiant champions appeared in her history. She was doomed—unless five futile humans could battle her cause.
- THE BUBBLE DWELLERS** Ross Rocklynn 78
 Only Sydney Hallmeyer could halt the deadly menace spawned on Vulcan. Only he could face fiendish Zondat—and he was helpless, a labor slave in Vulcan's depths.

TWO THRILLING NOVELETS OF THE FUTURE

- THE LAST MONSTER** Gardner F. Fox 38
 It was Irgi whom the four from Earth had to conquer to gain the secret of immortality—a tentacled monstrosity whom Earthly weapons could not harm.
- BATTLEFIELD IN BLACK** George A. Whittington 65
 MacPartland's "Avenger" was fighting its deadliest battle, searching for a ghostly attacker—in a spacial battlefield where weapons could not function.

THREE SHORT STORIES OF THE STARWAYS

- MUTINY** Larry Offenbecker 29
 This was Rawson's first command—and mutiny rode the rocket wash.
- BEER-TRUST BUSTERS** A. R. Stuart 53
 "Let's do Dudley Dirty! It's not right that one guy should control all beer!"
- FORMULA FOR CONQUEST** James R. Adams 110
 Twilken's formula could save three worlds—or doom them to eternal slavery.

P. S.'s DEPARTMENTS

- THE RINGERS** Guy Gifford 52
- P. S.'s FEATURE FLASH** 64
- THE VIZIGRAPH** 121
 If you can't take it, don't dish it out—these guys and gals play for keeps.

Fall Issue, June-Aug., 1945
 Volume II, No. 12



20c per copy



THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE

PLANET STORIES: Published quarterly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1945, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. Application for second class entry at Postoffice, New York, N. Y., pending. All rights reserved. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. For advertising rates address THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City.

Printed in U. S. A.

MUTINY

by LARRY OFFENBECKER

This mercy rocket was Rawson's first command; and his last, it seemed—for mutineers had taken over, then lost the ship in a quicksand pool.



Illustrated by DOOLIN

CAPTAIN TODD RAWSON snapped angry eyes at the directional needle that indicated that his space ship the *Star Flight* was holding

steady to her course like a bullet. He had ordered differently.

He was savagely kicking back his chair when the televisor leaped into life.

"Calling the *Star Flight*," the control officer from Saturn intoned, "Calling the *Star Flight*."

Rawson clicked a switch, continued to glare at the directional needle. "Rawson—*Star Flight*." His voice was richly vibrant and charged with emotion. "Running into spatial storm. Must detour to tangent to course. Will be late."

"For God's sake!" The voice from Saturn was urgent. "The plague is wiping out the entire colony! Hurry!"

"We'll get the serum there! Out!"

Rawson glanced once more at the un-wavering needle of the direction indicator, and he switched off the televisior with such abrupt force that he broke off the dial. He tore from his desk and rumbled like a Jupiter avalanche across the vibrating deck of the *Star Flight* into the rocket room. "Mr. Durk, I ordered the rockets reversed"

The crew men looked up, winking at each other. This was it!

Durk raised a short, blunt body like a Venusian alligator and lumbered to attention. His voice came in a hoarse growl.

"The Old Man—you young punks think you know everything! The old man would 'a' headed right into the storm!"

Captain Rawson flushed slightly and felt the tips of his ears turn hot as he stared at the man who was twenty years his senior—the man who had twenty-five years of experience in space flight.

"I'm the captain here," Rawson said in a voice as steady as the beat of the motors. "My commands are to be obeyed without question."

"Sure, now, you're the captain." Durk winked slyly at one of the crew. "You got a gold star and the fixings. But we ain't goin' to get ourselves killed on account o' something you learned in a book."

Surprisingly Rawson laughed, a deep-throated laugh, although he knew that he had to break this man or be broken himself. His words lashed out like a cat-o-nine tails at the senior officer.

"Mr. Durk, don't let your bitterness defeat your common sense. The old man knew all the tricks. You know them. But space navigation has advanced to a science. It requires more than rule of thumb knowledge."

"I ain't going to reverse the rockets!"

Rawson looked at the stolid faces of the space hardened crew. Veterans all. The underofficer's men.

WHEN HE SPOKE, Rawson's words came in smooth, clipped phrases. "Mr. Durk, I'll explain briefly why it would be fatal to head straight into the storm. The instruments indicate that the storm drift ahead of the ship is heavily charged with electrons. Our space ship is a charged body. Breaking the relation of the space ship and the drift down mathematically we have the equation

$$V \text{ equals } q/r$$

where V is the velocity of the ship and q the potential of the electronic charge in the center of the drift, and r the radius."

Rawson watched the underofficer's face grow longer and longer, but determinedly he continued.

"Should we head directly into the drift we will be up against the following law—the shorter the distance in which a given amount of work is done the greater the force that must be exerted. We will be stalled in the center of the drift. To avoid disaster, the direction of the drift must be at right angles at every point to the space ship. Do you follow?"

Mingled with the lack of comprehension in Durk's eyes was intense bitterness—bitterness over not being appointed captain of the *Star Flight* after the death of the previous chief officer, whom Durk affectionately called "the old man".

Durk was starting a growl deep down in his alligator throat when the situation was taken out of his hands by the immutable laws that Rawson had just expounded.

The vessel jerked with a huge shudder that threw Rawson and the rest of the crew off balance.

With a screech of metal the space ship picked up speed as it was drawn into the potential in the center of the drift as well as being pushed by the power of its rockets.

With greyhound leaps, Rawson tore toward the control dials and twisted the wheels of the gyroscope. The ship groaned and reeled. It refused to heed the control.

"Power! Reverse the power!" Rawson screeched into the intercom. "Reverse the rockets!"

He felt the instruments tremble under his hands like reeds. Suddenly the rockets went dead. Then as the crew reversed the power, they roared to life again.

The *Star Flight* jerked in a death struggle. The rockets rattled and screamed as if sand had been thrown into the atom chargers.

Slowly the ship turned over, tilting at right angles to the drift.

A blinding flash like a bolt of lightning flamed across the power panels. The lights suddenly died. The ship was in darkness.

Rawson tore at the emergency switches, got them under control. A banshee wail sounded throughout the *Star Flight*. "Emergency Emergency!"

In the darkness in back of him, Rawson heard the alligator bark of Underofficer Durk. "Ship out of control, eh? We're drifting, eh? See if your book learnin' 'll get yuh out o' this!"

Rawson turned, and his voice was icy. "Mr. Durk! Consider yourself under arrest!"

"Ha, ha, ha—"

Durk's laugh made the short hairs on Rawson's neck tingle. But Rawson snapped back in a voice that he tried to hold steady. "You're an excellent under-officer, Durk—when you obey commands. But you'll never be captain!"

THE SPACE SHIP was plunging forward like a running blindman, directly into the belt of minor planets.

"Awh—I got a right!" Durk cried bitterly. "Ain't I been second in command for ten years? I know all the ropes—"

"You lack training in science and mathematics. That's vital these days!"

"I'll be captain yet. Wait and see! Yah can't arrest me. The crew won't take your orders without my say-so. And yah can't report me. It's yore word against me and the crew!"

Rawson lifted his chin courageously. He knew Durk spoke the truth. And he knew that he'd never break Durk by force—

Fighting the man's will would only build up the volcano pressure inside him

more intensely. Rawson determined on a psychological trick. He would allow Durk his chance at command.

"Very well, Mr. Durk. Let's see what you can do." He spoke with forced calm. "Take command."

Rawson's crane-like legs patted on the jerking deck of the space ship, and as he entered his cabin he was smiling grimly to himself.

He sat down in darkness, and his smile widened when the emergency lights flashed on. Durk was a good man for things like that.

Rawson was turning over some papers on his desk when a young cyclone burst through the open door without knocking. "Captain, sir!" young Seymour cried, bounding forward. "I overheard—"

Rawson snapped to his feet. "Mr. Seymour, attention! Please leave and enter like a gentleman."

The cabin boy folded up like a tornado that had lost its wind. Meekly he turned and walked out of the cabin, closed the door. A rap sounded.

"Come in."

As Seymour entered, Rawson hastily turned the sheet of paper on his desk face down. He greeted the young man with a smile.

"That's better. Always be a gentleman. If for no one's but your own self-respect."

"Yes, sir." Seymour had troubled eyes. "I came to report I overheard the crew talking. Said somethin' about taking over. I don't get it, sir. Does it mean mutiny?"

Rawson shot one word at the cabin boy. "Durk?"

"Yes, sir. It was him said it."

"You know you're a stool pigeon?"

The boy's freckled face looked flustered. "I—I didn't mean, sir—that is." He gulped. "I thought it was my duty, sir."

Rawson smiled and there was fatherly tenderness in his voice. "Good, Mr. Seymour. I like your loyalty. You'll make a Star Point man yet."

Rawson picked up the paper from his desk. "I have just signed a recommendation that you be admitted to the class of the year 2356."

Young Seymour's freckled face spread wide in a grin—so wide that it drowned out

his face. "Gee, sir. Thanks. Gee! *Star Point!*"

"I've been keeping an eye on you," Rawson continued. "I saw you studying in your spare time."

Rawson leaned back and reflected. "I was like that ten years ago. I worked hard! And this is my first command. I'm proud of it."

His voice cracked out suddenly like a whip. "And by God, no man, nothing, will make me dishonor my gold star or take it away from me!" His eyes stabbed at Seymour. "Now, what about Durk and the mutiny?"

"He says you're a sissy, sir. Afraid of the storm. He says you ain't got no business—"

"Very good, Mr. Seymour. That will be all."

RAWSON watched with a fond smile as Seymour departed.

Rawson had no intention of letting his precious cargo of serum be lost or his first space ship wrecked because of Durk's desire for the captaincy.

He picked up a volume "*Cross Currents of Space*" from his book shelf and opened it. After poring intently through many pages, he snapped to his crane-like feet with a grin.

They were approaching Orus—the planet which was covered with borax sand.

Rawson drew together his gangling frame, hung together with tremendous muscles and casually strode on his long legs into the control room.

The crew worked under the emergency lights dismantling the control panel. Durk's bullying voice urged them to speed like the slave whips of Jupiter. His face marked with his years in the space lanes like a freighter's meteor scars was covered with streaks of oil.

"Orus dead ahead," Rawson remarked with a grin. "It wouldn't do to set the *Star Flight* down for repairs."

Durk's mouth was bitter as an alligator's. "We're going down!"

Rawson strolled away whistling and grinning inwardly.

The rockets pounded as they were adjusted for the landing. It was a fairly simple job and Rawson knew Durk could handle it.

From the port in his cabin Rawson saw the *Star Flight* settle on a reef between a dark and forbidding pool and a swampy morass. Beyond was white, hilly sand.

Rawson turned sharply, on guard, as he heard heavy steps clump into his cabin. Durk and six of the crew.

"Well, Mr. Smarty, we got you now!" Durk's hoarse voice bellowed in triumph. "Yore under arrest!"

Rawson's muscles rippled and his blue eyes cracked with electric sparks. "Arrest?"

"Yeah! Not bein' in command in an emergency! Put him in irons, boys!"

Todd Rawson looked at the faces of the crew. By the tough lines about their eyes, by the grime in their skins, they showed that they were one with the underofficer—veterans of the spaceways who bowed only to experience and strength.

"This is mutiny You know that, Mr. Durk!"

"No, it ain't!" the other said flatly. "You deserted yore duty. Me and the crew'll make it stick before the court-martial back home!"

Rawson saw that the underofficer had the force to back him up. "You won this round, Durk. But it's only the first." He smiled coolly.

A young cyclone thundered into the cabin. "Hey, what's going on here?"

"Mr. Seymour!" This from Rawson.

Young Seymour hesitated, but his freckled face was blazing. "Yes, sir." He replied mechanically. But his fists were balled and he advanced angrily on Durk. "You can't do it! Captain's got more brains than the whole bunch of you!"

"Shut 'up, Squirt!"

Young Seymour lunged at Durk and pounded his fists again the alligator toughness of the underofficer. Durk deftly cuffed the cabin boy and knocked him into a corner.

Seymour rose slowly, wiping the blood from the cut on his lips. He charged again with head lowered and balled fists.

Durk gave him a brief glance. "Throw him in irons."

Two hard space men grabbed Seymour by the arms and hauled him, kicking, out of the cabin. The boy's words came floating back. "You're goin' to be sorry, Durk—"

Rawson stared at his underofficer stonily. "Well?"

Durk scratched his chin reflectively. "Hmmm, guess we won't need to put you in irons. You won't try to run away in all that white sand."

Between several of the crew Rawson climbed out of the space-port. He jerked his crane-like body almost double as he bent into a heavy, hot searing wind like a breath from hell.

Toward one side the white, slimy ooze pond stretched like an oily sheet of death between the steep white cliffs that pitted it. It was about five times the width of the space ship and lay utterly lifeless, yet Rawson had a feeling of danger lurking beneath its surface.

RAWSON was the third man in the single file that fought its way on the slippery, glassy surface of the narrow neck of rock that lay at the tip of a finger of morass pointing at the slimy pool.

"We're gonna keep yah in one of them caves over there," Durk pointed beyond the line of cliffs that hemmed in the morass. In back of these, as far as Rawson's eyes could see, stretched white, bleak sand dunes.

A strong odor of swamp came to Rawson's nose. Swamp gas. Mixed with it was the alkaline taste of the sand that the hot wind drove into their mouth, eyes and nose.

Rawson carefully balanced himself on the isthmus of rock and stared with misgiving into the pool.

The crew man ahead of Rawson slipped.

He clutched wildly at Rawson, missed him, and rolled down the glassy slope into the pool.

The ooze parted heavily, with effort, and then surrounded him like a huge, sucking mouth.

The man screamed. "Quicksand Help! It's sucking me down—eeeeeh—."

With horror Rawson saw the white, slimy mess suck him down—down—

Rawson's voice screamed against the shriek of the wind. "Throw him a line!"

The man's struggling head sank below the surface. A frantic hand fought against the ooze, sank steadily deeper. The hand disappeared. Bubbles from the man's dy-

ing breath broke the surface. The slime drifted together again and was smooth and liquid again with the peace of death.

Rawson shuddered.

He stared at Durk who was looking dumbfounded into the pool. One of the crew had been lost under Durk's command. Would there be others?

When the chill winds of night came, Rawson was sitting inside a cave that looked down on the sink hole.

Rawson was carefully, meticulously, studying the crew and the lay of the land, like a general studies the ground before a battle.

He looked down into the depression which was like a huge inside-out face. The ridge on which the space ship rested looked like a monstrous nose between the two giant eyes—the farther eye the quicksand pool and the nearer a shallow swamp over which hung the swamp gas.

The crew was camped by a small fire near the swamp. Near them lay young Seymour, with his hands and feet bound.

Even in the cave the wind moaned incessantly and drove the bitter sand into Rawson's mouth. It blasted across the glassy ridge and whipped the fires beside the space ship.

If I can rescue Seymour, Rawson thought, we'll control the ship, if we manage to hold the control room. But he realized the difficulty.

Between the cave and the whipping fires of the crew, Rawson could see the mist that hung low over the swamp, just out of the reach of the wind. Sometimes a little of the mist was carried away and brought to his nose—swamp gas.

On silent feet, Rawson crept toward the swamp. The guard did not look up.

Rawson lay beside the soft, decayed soil and vegetation. Under cover of his body he snapped his automatic lighter. He hurled the blazing light into the swamp.

He leaped back.

Immediately a flame flashed across the swamp and leaped toward the sky and the roar of the explosion brought the entire crew to their feet with their flame ray weapons in their hands.

They stampeded toward the safety of the space ship.

Under cover of the explosion, Rawson rushed toward Seymour, picked him up

and fled with him into the darkness of the sandy desert, beyond the hills.

"Gee, sir!" the boy said after he recovered from his astonishment, and they lay in hiding on top of a tall hill and looked down on the excited bustle of the camp. "Did you do that?"

Rawson smiled grimly. "Nothing to it. Swamps create marsh gas, or methane gas, which is highly inflammable. A little fire will make a stagnant pocket of the gas go up with a bang."

Young Seymour looked at the lights of the camp with troubled eyes. "I'm sorry you rescued me, sir."

"What's this, Mr. Seymour?"

The young fellow avoided his captain's eyes. "I been thinking, sir, that—well, maybe, Underofficer Durk is right."

"So Durk's been talking to you, convincing you that I haven't enough experience to command a space ship!"

"I feel miserable about the whole thing, sir. It's—oh, gee, captain. Durk's got the ship and the men and he's had twenty-five years in the spaceways. He ought to know what's doing."

Rawson's voice was suddenly raw as Jovian liquor. "All right, Mr. Seymour. I understand. Get going!"

THE BOY slunk away like a whipped dog. Once he hesitated and looked back, and then with lowered shoulders, he ploughed his way through the sand toward the space ship.

Rawson watched him go. He felt as though he had been deserted by his last friend.

This leaves me all alone, Rawson thought. Me against the crew. I've got to get command of the ship. The serum's got to go through. Saturn's depending on me.

I still say Mom's right. You've got to know how to do things and have the guts to carry them through. I'm not quitting.

And Jennifer Kane would be disappointed in me if I quit on my Star Point oath. She was so proud when I graduated. And when I received my promotions. Moved from underofficer to commander in three years. No wonder Durk is so bitter.

But it takes scientific knowledge these

days—that's it. Science will win a way out for me—

Rawson's mind began to work like an intricate machine. Thousands of stimuli of knowledge had been injected into his brain during his training; now his mind began to select and analyze these stimuli for the purpose of finding a solution to his predicament.

Rawson's self-respect was the rock of his courage.

I'll have to do this alone, he thought. As he saw that the crew members about the space ship had quieted down and that the camp was still for the night, he rose and fought his way against the wind toward the space ship, across the slippery neck of rock.

The space ship was dark and silent. A crew man nodded sleepily beside the fire to the left. Yet he had to be careful. Other members of the crew might leap out at him at any moment.

He slipped inside the space ship. He found the space suit. He donned it quickly, fastened the space helmet around his head. The space suit would help him in any emergency.

He was moving from the lockers to the control room past the port when a guard saw him. The man grabbed for him. "Gotcha!"

But the muscles strung on his bony frame exploded in power and the crew man fell aside. Rawson leaped through the lock and landed on the white ridge beside the quicksand pool.

The guard's yells brought the rest of the crew, and they advanced on him from all sides.

He backed slowly from the menacing circle, looking for an opening through which to dart. But they came from both sides of the ship. In his rear was the slimy quicksand. He backed toward it.

One of the crew's stumbling feet loosened a boulder and it came hurtling toward Rawson. He leaped aside but his crane-like feet landed on gravel and he started to slide off balance backwards.

The crew realized before Rawson did what was happening. "He's sliding into the quicksand! Stop him!"

Rawson felt the pressure of the wet sand on the space suit. He struggled for a hold on the rocks. They came away in

his hands. He slid deeper.

He felt the suction at his feet, climbing up to his waist, over his shoulders.

The white quicksand went over the space suit visor and cut out the light of the moon. Still he kept sinking, slowly, steadily, in the depths.

WITH AN EFFORT he forced his hand to his belt and adjusted the levers to permit oxygen for his breathing to swell the space suit.

He could breathe, but he could not control his movements. The pressure of the wet sand weighted heavily on him and smothered him in a blanket of darkness.

He moved down slowly as on greased feathers into a bottomless pit. His legs dangled limply, drifting now this way, now that. He put his arms out to steady himself, but the muck gave way before him.

He heard only the slight bubbling sound of the oxygen escaping through the vent in his space suit.

He felt a sucking pull on his body and on his limbs as he went down—down—

At last he hung suspended. His weight balanced the density of the pressure of the sand.

His mind worked furiously—in a race with death.

He remembered the slight alkaline taste that had penetrated to his mouth and nose back on the surface. Alkaline?

He had read about that—in the "*Cross Currents of Space*"—Orus was the borax planet.

And suddenly his training in the chemistry of borax rushed through his frantic mind.

He smiled grimly to himself as he reached for the heat ray gun at his waist. No, it hadn't been lost. He detached it and forced it through the quicksand in front of him.

Carefully he aimed the heat ray gun upward, pressed the trigger.

Light so bright and intense and so hot that Rawson felt the heat and light in the clutching quicksand bored a hole through the muck.

It was a thin rod of penetration, about two inches wide and extended straight upwards to where Rawson thought the edge of the pit would be.

Long and patiently he trained the heat ray gun.

And as he waited a chemical change took place before his eyes. In the light of the heat ray gun, he saw a thin rod of white porous mass forming. It extended through the quicksand upward along the line of the heat ray.

And as he watched, the white mass melted into a clear liquid. He kept the heat ray gun concentrated until its power died and the weapon became a useless piece of metal.

Rawson had won. He had created liquid glass.

Patiently he waited for the liquid to harden. Would it make it possible for him to escape this quicksand death?

For hours he hung suspended in the ooze. When he judged that there had been time enough for the liquid to harden into glass, he extended his hand toward it.

His groping fingers found a strong, smooth rod fused to the rock above.

Hand over hand he made his way up, forcing himself through the heavy ooze. When he reached the top, he crawled out, half dead and staggered to firm ground.

He stumbled. But he saw at a glance that he had drifted far from the place where he had fallen in. The space ship was several hundred yards away, completely hidden by a hill.

A few feet more, he staggered and stumbled into a dank pool. He took off the space helmet and drank deeply and crammed some concentrated food pills into his mouth.

His muscles were sore and weary. He knew he had to rest. He found the coolness of a cave. Hardly had he dropped to the sandy floor when he fell into an exhausted sleep.

FOR HOURS he lay and his body regenerated its youthful vitality.

He stirred restlessly in his sleep when he felt the pressure of another hand on his. He sat up abruptly, on guard.

A freckled boy's face was looking down on him with wonder in the blue eyes. "Captain Rawson, sir," Seymour said. "I was explorin' and found you here. Gee, sir, how did you escape out of the quicksand?"

Rawson regarded the young man with wonder. "Sit down, Mr. Seymour."

Rawson explained about the borax and his escape. "But what about you and Durk?"

The boy made circles in the sand with his foot. His eyes avoided the captain's. "I couldn't stand it, sir. My conscience. It wasn't right. You're the captain, no matter what Durk says."

"Thanks. Okay, let's get going."

Purposely they strode across the sand toward the space ship. But as they neared the top of the hill beyond which lay the space ship, they heard a series of loud explosions. Rawson recognized those sounds.

With a rush he was on top of the hill and staring at the space ship.

The explosions came from there. The ports were closed and there was no one on the bridge.

The ship was taking off!

Rawson's skeleton-like body shuddered in dismay. He yelled but he knew it was futile. No one could hear him above the roar of the rockets.

And if they did? Durk might find it convenient to report that the captain had been lost on the expedition.

For once in his life, Rawson admitted fear to himself—to be deserted on this waste planet!

The space ship quivered under the impact of the rockets. And Rawson noticed a queer thing about that vibration—it was normal in itself, but it was never intended to occur on a glassy cliff that sloped into a quicksand.

The vibration loosed the pull of gravity of the ship—its steadiness on the ridge—it slipped sideways.

It slipped sideways into the quicksand.

The space ship moved sideways over the edge of the cliff and started to sink beneath the lake of quicksand.

As the bottom half of the hull disappeared below the surface of the ooze, the top ports opened and the crew began leaping from the hull onto the cliff.

Rawson counted them. They were all there. All sixty—there should be sixty-one. But one had been lost in the quicksand at the first landing.

The crew stood huddled in a bunch and watched the top of the hull disappear below the quicksand.

Rawson's crane-like legs carried him toward the crew. Their faces showed repentance.

It was a miserable bunch of men that faced him, and the most miserable of all was Underofficer Durk.

Rawson for a moment said nothing. He watched the last air bubbles that seeped up from the space ship at the bottom of the quicksand. The bubbles broke one by one. The sand smoothed out again, leaving a slimy smoothness that revealed nothing—that failed to betray the loss of all hope.

Rawson's voice whipped like a lash. "Well, Mr. Durk! Have you thought of a solution of the predicament of the crew and yourself?"

Durk's eyes did not meet Rawson's. Durk's voice mumbled. "Yore the captain, sir."

Rawson shuddered within himself. He was the captain—captain of a space ship that no longer existed. They were stranded on a desolate planet with no food and no weapons.

Weapons? He still had his heat ray gun, but it was burned out—no good.

Wearily Rawson turned to young Seymour. "Bring me my space suit."

It took but a few minutes for the boy to run back to the cave and fetch back the space suit. Slowly Rawson climbed into it.

He turned to Durk. "I'm going into the quicksand. Perhaps I'll be able to find something—something—" He sighed. "If I don't return, well, it's up to you."

He leaped far forward, felt his feet sink into the clutching quicksand.

The muck enfolded him like cold, slimy snake coils twisting around and crushing him.

As he sank below the surface, he heard the bursting air bubbles above him like sibilant whispers of death. The dread, crushing quicksand drew around like crushing giant hands.

This time Rawson had no heat ray gun to help him escape!

His lips twisted helplessly under the pressure of the sand and the water. It was like being buried alive in cement that had not yet hardened.

His feet struck something solid. The hull. Using his feet as leverage he forced himself forward against the grasping ooze, until he came to one of the ports. It was open and the quicksand had oozed in.

RAWSON managed to grasp the railing by sheer muscle and forced himself inside. The shifting, liquefied sand covered the entire top deck.

But the door to the lower hatches and the control decks had sealed automatically. He turned the lever and pushed the door of the hatch inwards.

The pressure of the sand hurled him inside like water shot from a nozzle.

He raced for the farther door—raced to beat the moving quicksand that oozed forward like some giant amoeba.

Rawson won by a second. He opened the door and dived inward. Quickly he closed the door and sealed it as he felt the pressure of the muck against it. The metal locks would hold.

He stripped off the space suit and hurried to the rocket deck. Everything was in order. A member of the crew had automatically cut off the disintegrator motors at the call "Abandon Ship!"

Rawson set the speed at idle. He turned the rocket levers. For a moment the ship trembled as the exhaust gases fought against the pressure of the quicksand in the tubes.

The rockets thundered in full power. Rawson waited. The heat of those exhaust gases was tremendous—made ten times so by their compression in the ooze.

Heat! That was it!

But would the rockets be powerful enough to change the composition of the quicksand?

He felt the heat of the compressed gases through the floor of the hull, and their motion through the muck was accompanied by a loud glub—glub—glub— Sounds like the choking of a primeval monster.

This sound gradually died out, and the heat became intense. Rawson removed his shirt and whipped the perspiration from his eyes. The sweat dripped down his arms and made little wet spots on the floor. He began shifting from foot to foot as the heat became uncomfortable on the soles of his feet.

There was no way to seeing what was going on outside the space ship. All the ports were blocked by the muck.

Presently he touched the dials. The indicator moved from "idle" to "take-off." He gunned the rockets.

The ship lurched forward, groaned, and wallowed deeper into the ooze. It was no go.

Rawson returned the power to idle and waited patiently. Perhaps it could still be done.

Perhaps—but more likely not!

Rawson was not ready to despair. He waited with the courage of his conviction that a way could be found through science.

He waited for three hours, and then he touched the controls again. He set the dials to depress the nose, pulled the lever for the reverse. Then he punched the needle for full power. He geared in the traction.

The space ship leaped backward with a jerk, found firm footing, and crawled with accelerated power. It surged swifter and swifter like an unleashed Neptune cyclone.

And as he felt the motion of the vessel beneath his feet, Rawson looked up and saw the light stream through the muck that covered the port windows.

He had broken free!

By instinct he guided the vessel all alone to a new landing. He had to be navigator, engineer, pilot, and do the many tedious things that require many hands and brains to control a ship.

SEVERAL days later they were near Saturn and Rawson had just received congratulations on bringing in the serum in time to save thousands of lives. He sat at his desk, his skeleton frame hunched like an ostrich, when a young cyclone burst into his cabin.

"Captain, sir," young Seymour cried, bounding forward. "I overheard—"

Rawson snapped to his feet. "Mr. Seymour, Attention! Please leave and enter like a gentleman."

Meekly the cabin boy walked out, closed the door. A rap sounded.

"Come in." And as the lad entered Rawson said with a smile, "That's better."

"Yes, sir. I came to report I overheard the crew talking."

"Durk?"

"Yes, sir. Underofficer Durk says you're voted the best darn space commander that ever flew the stars. And that he'll lick the denims off anybody that says different."