



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS
PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

AMAZING STORIES

Scientific Fiction

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No. 9

In Our Next Issue

POWER, by Harl Vincent. The destiny of the world depends largely upon power. Man is only a weakling. The falls of Niagara are a giant. And to those who possess and control this thing called power belongs unlimited possibilities for autocratic control of their fellow beings. The days of wind-mills and water-mills are gone. And there is hardly any assurance that our new and latest forms are going to remain forever the best. Our well-known author, for instance, who is definitely interested in the science of electric power, offers some astonishingly interesting possibilities for a certain substitute of our present-day power-making history of the future.

TUMITHAK OF THE CORRIDORS, by Charles R. Tanner. It is not necessarily cowardice that makes a people retreat further and further from an enemy which has ruthlessly brought complete destruction and death to thousands. It is sensible caution that comes with experience. But always there is someone—in generations far removed, perhaps—who dares to risk all in an effort to release his people, from the bonds of such enslaving fears. (Crowded out of December issue.)

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN, by Neil R. Jones. Here is another sequel relating the extraordinary adventures of Professor Jameson, who first started his voyage in a ship of his own construction, in which he was placed in suspended animation and was later rescued when his ship was found, and was at first mistaken for a satellite. Very much more exciting even than its two predecessors.

THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT, by Paul H. Lovering. (A Serial in two parts) Part II. In old times the nations of the world were usually ruled by men. Yet there were some ruling Queens. Queen Elizabeth, for instance, governed with an iron hand. And every now and then some woman would be known to do her part in settling the destinies of nations. Now there is a growing tendency to place women on an equal footing with men in the fields of politics. Who can tell how far-reaching these tendencies may become? In the concluding chapters our author tells us.

And other unusual science fiction

In Our December Issue

The Inevitable Conflict

(A Serial in two parts) Part I

By Paul H. Lovering..... 776
Illustrated by Morcy

Pirates of Space

By B. X. Barry..... 799
Illustrated by Morcy

Sky Cops

By Harl Vincent and Chas. Roy Cox..... 818
Illustrated by Morcy

Trial by Television

By Fred Kennedy..... 828
Illustrated by Morcy

What Happened to Professor Stockley P

By E. M. Scott..... 836
Illustrated by Morcy

The Blattids

By Morrison Colladay..... 844
Illustrated by Morcy

The Interplanetary Blues (A Poem)

By Charles Cloukey..... 853

What Do You Know?

(Science Questionnaire)..... 853

In the Realm of Books 855

Discussions 855

Our Cover

this month depicts a scene from the story entitled, "The Inevitable Conflict," by Paul H. Lovering, in which Mowbray's hastily rigged-up machines and his trained men, with the aid of the women from the "Legion," do justice to the faith of Mowbray in a terrific battle for the continued independence of the United States of America, from the Mongolian Empire. Part I published in this issue.

Cover illustration by Morcy

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Pirates of Space

By B. X. Barry

STRATEGY is a very powerful factor in the successful maneuvers of warfare, as we know it at the present time. Often better than the strongest line of defense, or the most destructive weapons, is the careful study of the enemy's condition and the discovery of its vulnerable spot. In fighting pirates of interstellar space in the future—when interplanetary travel has emerged from the field of speculation—probably fighting fundamentals, very similar to our own, will need to be followed, although destruction will be ever so much more complete and much swifter. In this story by a well-known writer—new to our pages—ingeniously thrilling situations occur, which help to make it an excellent tale of interplanetary significance.

Illustrated by MOREY

CHAPTER I

A Chase Through Space

BEGINNING at 8 p. m., San Francisco time, on the memorable night of June 20, 2099, News-and-Views broadcasters began heralding the startling, thrilling, pulse-quickenng story of the current flight of the spaceship *Agular*. The craft was a regular interplanetary liner on the Earth-Mars-Venus route of the Astro-Via Lines, Inc. As a result of the soul-stirring story excitement was rife not only in the Americas but throughout the Eastern Hemisphere as well.

Spacegrams were being flashed to Mars, Venus and other planets of the civilized explored universe. There was every reason to believe that other planets besides the earth would receive the news with as much tumultuous excitement and public concern.

At the hour noted, according to the dispatches, the liner, carrying a full complement of officers and men and some two hundred and eighty passengers, entered the earth's atmosphere from the West at a rate of speed never before known at such a low altitude. Observers in the mountain observatories in California and Colorado reported the ship to be falling. Millions held their breaths, figuratively speaking, until a radiograph a few seconds later stated that the *Agular* was firing all her forward guns terrifically in a wild, pyrotechnically marvelous, volcanic effort to break her fall. So forceful were these explosions within the earth's atmosphere that their effect was felt in all Western cities and the smooth surface of the Pacific was blown

into violent surgings producing mountain-high waves. It was estimated that at least ten times the usual amount of explosives was being used by the *Agular's* rocket guns with each blast. This estimate was later officially confirmed.

The full and gorgeous view of the wild flight of the *Agular* within the earth's atmosphere was plainly visible to millions in parts of Western Canada and Mexico and all of the United States lying west of the Mississippi River. It was a weird, wild, nerve-tingling and never-to-be-forgotten sight—a magnificent, mechanical comet shooting tail-first into the great air-cushion upholstering the globe.

The *Agular* was forced to use her rocket guns to within a few hundred feet of the earth's surface and the atmospheric effect, of course, was most surprising and unusual. People were blown from their feet on the higher floors of skyscrapers and on the various levels gusts of air blew through street tunnels like blasts pumped from some great air gun.

The entire spectacle and holocaust produced by the flight took only a fraction of the time involved in the telling of it. In fact it was only a few seconds after the first News-and-Views dispatch began to wave through the ether before a flash came over that the ship had landed, probably perforce, at a rugged and unfrequented point in the Colorado Rockies. So far as was known, this dispatch said, the ship had landed safely and no lives had been lost. For some little time the people of the earth were forced to await a first-hand story from Captain Harold Kane of the *Agular*. Finally the story came through and then many mistakes and misapprehensions were corrected. We quote from a News-



The third member of the crew was a monstrosity, a human quadruped, covered with heavy, black, shaggy fur.

and-Views radio of the time, using only that part of the text uttered by the doughty captain himself:

"The public on the planets of the civilized and explored universe will have to thank my superiors in the Spaceservice for their consideration in permitting me to make this report direct. This also accounts for the delay in making the real facts known. A short radio conference with Government authorities in Washington and the Astro-Via Lines officials in New York was necessary before it was ordered that I report personally on the News-and-Views channel.

"Pardon a brief personal allusion, but it is necessary to recall that there was a considerable controversy at the time I was given command of the *Agular*, one of the largest liners in Spaceservice. There were those who argued that I was too young to be entrusted with such authority and responsibility. I have had my ship now only two years and it is with the deepest regret that I now have to report on a near catastrophe. I hope, however, that the public of the three planets connected by our line will decide that the interests of all concerned have been conserved with as much judgment as might have been displayed by an older and more experienced man.

"May I say in beginning that at no time was the *Agular* actually falling and"—after a pause—"our landing was not forced. We had to put down at the Tri-planetary Foundries on the slopes of Mount Massive, Colorado, to land two distinguished passengers, one a representative of the planet Venus, and the other of the planet Mars, in connection with the important interplanetary project now being carried out at this great metalworks. We will be under way in a few minutes for our regular port on Long Island, making a brief stop at Goddard Spaceport, Chicago, to dispatch passengers and interplanetary mails.

"Our mad flight, a part of which was within the earth's envelope, was due to circumstances of rather an alarming nature. At a point within the moon's orbit we were almost overtaken by battleship X-13 of the Pirates of Space. X-13, it will be remembered, was the first of the earth's Space-navy battleships to fall into the hands of these pirates. This ship, armed with thermo and disintegration ray mortars of high power, attempted to overhaul us and relieve us of our treasure. We realized that, if the pirate ship were successful in overhauling us, after robbing us, they might have trained their thermoguns and rayguns on us, disintegrating our big liner or melting us to scrap, thus meting out a horrible death to every soul on board.

"To avoid such a calamity, we had nothing but our speed in flight to rely upon. Being a smaller craft of superior comparative rocketpower, we knew we were faster. We turned tail and fled directly towards the earth.

"Our gravity neutralizers at such speed were powerless to check our mad headlong flight earthward and so we had to use all the power of our rocketguns up to a point which seemed to be within a few thousand feet of the earth's surface. Our neutralizers then began to function, repelling

the earth with sufficient force to enable us to make our landing without mishap.

"I desire to say in conclusion that it was a well-calculated, if not a perfect landing. We settled to earth quite easily within twenty feet of the exact spot calculated by our navigators at a point in space near where we first sighted the space pirates."

That was all. Captain Kane always could be counted on for brief and candid oration and diction.

As has been indicated by Captain Kane's remarks, his affairs, through no fault of his own, had become involved in politics. He realized that powerful and rather sinister influences were working against him and that the plot had support among a certain selfish element within the Spaceservice itself. He was conscientious in the performance of his duties and, therefore, he did not believe that any power could succeed in holding him back from advancement.

So, it was with a light heart that he speeded to his home port on Long Island. He naturally supposed that he would be publicly commended on his success in having saved the big space liner and her crew and passengers from the hands of the Pirates of Space, whose relentless, destructive and murderous depredations already had made history. The spirit of youth is ever cheerful—sometimes without real reason. Had the young captain known the exact state of affairs, he would have had no cause for exuberance.

The blow came within a few minutes after he had reported at the main offices of Astro-Via Lines, Inc. in lower Broadway. He was summoned to the president's office and in a few minutes his usually sunny sky had clouded. His soul was plunged into gloom.

The president's greeting was cold and his few remarks terse and icy.

"You will be relieved from duty beginning at once and until further notice," said the president, "pending an investigation of your altogether hazardous flight within the earth's envelope. The Interplanetary Commerce Commission already has the matter in hand—"

"But—but," stammered Captain Kane, who had been rendered almost breathless by the suddenness of the attack.

"No 'buts' in this service," said the president with finality. "Good day, Sir. If you should be needed again you will be notified."

With a heavy heart and an inward stormy rebellion against the injustice of the whole matter, Captain Kane slowly walked out of the great building out upon the fourth level of the street.

A busy crowd surged about him. The traffic at this point and hour was dense. There was much to interest any young man who had just returned from space, but Captain Kane paid no heed. His brooding anxious thoughts occupied him completely. Almost in a daze he wandered about from square to square and from street level to street level for the greater part of the day.

CHAPTER II

Pirates of Space

FOR those readers who may have had only the general historical records available, a brief review of the history of the activities of the Pirates of Space might not come amiss at this point. It will give a better

knowledge of all affairs and events which led to the unhappy predicament of the young spaceship commander.

Official Government records set forth that just eighteen years prior to Captain Kane's mad universally exciting flight within the earth's atmosphere the people of the planet Mars were in the throes of bloody and uncontrolled rebellion.

The Earth Republics dispatched the largest battleship of the spacefleet to protect earth interests on all space lanes leading to Martian ports. Like action was taken by the cooperating and allied governments on the planet Venus.

At the time it was held by some that one ship representing each neutral planet would be entirely inadequate to cope with the situation, but this proved untrue, despite the fact that the earth expedition did end disastrously.

The Martian rebellion leaders had no desire, it seems, to vex either the earth or Venus forces and kept their bloody war well out of space. In fact they confined it to their own planet. The rebels led by Thaxos, present King of all Mars, easily captured the Martian space navy and at once marooned it at the big Spaceport at Krox, Martian naval base.

All Martian ships remained out of spacelanes until Thaxos had won his bloody wars and had made permanent his court and throne.

At the time the earth spaceship X-13, later the pirate flagship, joined the Nendus of the Venus spacenavy, there were wars and rumors of wars upon earth, as will be remembered. The spacenavy was reported to be in a wild state of disorder, with a chance of the rebellious spirit of Mars infecting all earth. Stern leaders and wise heads on earth finally succeeded in quelling the widespread disquietude, but their peaceful efforts could not reach out to the warship X-13 with its frenzied and bloodthirsty crew recruited from daredevil adventurers of all universal ports.

Messages to the commander of the X-13 as she rode the spacelanes, millions of miles out in the great void, were answered by the radio operator.

"Commander cannot be reached," came the startling message just before the mutiny got under way. "He is having trouble with the crew. I am barricaded in my cubby and I do not know exactly what to expect. Situation appears grave."

The radio operator aboard the X-13, a mere boy, yet with the heart and spirit of a Viking of early earth history, remained loyal and kept his messages flashing earthward while the officers of the ill-fated X-13 fought their heroic and unequal battle with the maddened blood-crazed crew. Finally these messages stopped coming through. This was within a brief hour after the slaughter started. The hero's last message read:

"Nendus of Venus must have picked up my calls but she has not approached us although she is but 30,000 miles off on Mars-Venus lane. May be afraid of violating neutrality or else feels she cannot desert her post. I don't know. Still barricaded in cubby. God forgive me but I am afraid. I hate to die like this but I can only die trying. From what I can see decks fore and aft are shambles. . . . Officers must be dead and mutineers in possess. . . . My last. . . . They are ramming my door. . . . Soon a knife at my throat or a raygun at my solar plexus.

. . . I will die sending. . . . Door is shattering . . . only a—They are—"

And so died or was made captive one of the earliest of the earth's spacenavy heroes.

One individual, a giant renegade Martian named Quantok, is believed to have corrupted the entire crew of the X-13 and to have brought about the mutiny with his tales of wealth and beautiful native women to be found on some of the small habitable asteroids in space. He had been with the original Martian Asteroidal exploration expedition before joining the earth navy as an expert space navigator.

The X-13 as a pirate craft, naturally could not touch any point on Mars, Venus or earth and yet it had to have a base, where explosive could be made for its rockets, lubricant for its machinery and all of its thousands of articles of supplies could be procured. Quantok was probably the one man in the universe who knew of many such bases on the smaller planets off the beaten lanes of space travel.

From such a base he operated, waylaying and "scuttling" or rather disintegrating space passenger craft and merchantmen after relieving them of their treasure.

His first great coup was when he captured the small auxiliary spacebattleship N-130 and added it to his fleet. Later he augmented his fleet with another small battlecraft, the *Hadenda* of Venus. He never molested Martian craft, due evidently to the fact of his nativity.

The crews of these ships—or such of them as refused to join his bloody pirate forces—were forced to walk naked from the ship's locks out into space, after their pressure clothing had been taken from them.

Many were the fights that were had with Quantok and his merciless bloody forces through the years. Always these fights were losing ones for the forces of law and order.

A hundred explorers and warriors from various bases were recorded to have started out to find and destroy Quantok and his base, but to find this base among the asteroids was like seeking a mustard seed in a great bin of wheat. Either these police explorers never returned, or they ran afoul of Quantok's forces and were ruthlessly murdered or their craft melted with all on board. A few there were who returned after many moons without having found any trace of Quantok, his ships or his base.

So it was that the foul-hearted Quantok remained at large in interplanetary space, a relentless stalker of beautiful women and a merciless murderer of brave and stalwart men.

CHAPTER III

A Hissing Inferno

CAPTAIN KANE was revolving these known facts about Quantok in his mind as he walked the street levels of lower Manhattan. His was ordinarily a sunny disposition. He seldom gave vent to hate, but at the moment his heart was full of loathing of the diabolical desperadoes of space who were responsible for his unjust dismissal from Spaceservice. Could he have laid hands on Quantok, it is certain there would have been one less outlaw to harass civilized planets! He believed in his heart that some day he would get his chance to square accounts with this merciless marauder of space. He determined that when this chance came he

would give his life if necessary to rid the universe of the archmurderer and his pirate band.

He entered a skyscraper and took a lift to the fourteenth street level from which he could see the buildings towering above him some 300 stories in the air, and he could get a glimpse of the sky through the darkening street canyon. The sky was speckled with small atmosphere-going craft, as was usual at this point. As he gazed upward at his elements, the upper air and outer space, he longed to be away from the metropolis.

There was one man he knew to whom he could always take his troubles and be sure of sympathetic audience. This man was his uncle, Donald Hazzard, the great inventor, the man who had raised him, after he became an orphan at five years of age. Hazzard was head of the Tri-planetary Foundries in the Colorado Rockies. His uncle, he knew, was a busy man, but never too busy to see and counsel with him. He determined he would go to this great man, his only living friend and relative, and lay his soul-burden down.

He entered a building and entered a lift which, like a bullet, shot past a seemingly never-ending succession of floors until it finally reached the air-level platform. Here he signalled a trans-continental taxi-plane and after stopping at his lodgings in the Tarrytown section of New York City to pick up a trunk and a bag he was off for the Rockies. Within an hour, just as the dark of evening was falling, the glare of the great foundries could be seen from a hundred miles away.

The spectacle of these foundries had to be seen from a birdseye view point to be appreciated. It was one of the most magnificent panoramas to be seen on any of the planets. The great radio furnaces were located on the highest of the triple peaks of Mount Massive, 14,600 feet above sea level. A great shaft or tower of whirling incandescent flame stood at this point, extending a mile in the air. It was spinning like a top in a specially prepared and lubricated socket. This was the aerial which caught radiated heat from the earth tropics and the sun's rays.

Below this great shaft of revolving flame, a mile-and-a-half down the mountain was a large round lake of fire—a fireclay-lined crucible a mile in extent, and filled with a molten gravitite, the new weightless metal. Hal Kane's uncle, Donald Hazzard, the inventor and the head of the foundries, had discovered this metal and had invented the process of producing it in quantities.

The lake was a veritable fiery fountain of hell—a surging, seething, pitching, bubbling, spouting, splashing cauldron of living incandescence. Together with the great aerial shaft of flame, it fanned a great glare miles into the sky. It was this glare which was visible from all directions for a hundred miles or more according to the clarity of the atmosphere.

The heat naturally was terrific, and only special processes, invented by Hazzard to control it, made it bearable to the executives and laborers employed at the smelting works.

The meteorological and geographical efforts, too, were most extraordinary, as conditions generally for miles around were completely altered. For instance, time was, when eternal snows capped the triple peaks of Mount Massive and vicinity. This snow in winter was from twenty to ninety feet deep. Great glaciers with their crushing weight of snow and ice glided slowly down the mountain sides. That is history.

Now, there are no snows on these mountains. The great radio furnaces of the Tri-planetary smelters and foundries melt the snows as they fall. The resultant precipitation goes to irrigate intensified growing crops in the valleys below. Here in the valleys are grown the plant foods compressed into the more expensive of food tablets. The cheaper food tablets are synthetically manufactured as is generally known.

The landing field and small settlement of the foundries were located on the east slopes of Massive, a mile and three-quarters below the plant. It was here the executives and laborers had their homes and where the officers and laboratories were located. In these laboratories Dr. Hazzard was to be found at almost all hours.

The settlement was called Hazzardville and it was here that Captain Kane's air-taxi discharged its passenger. The driver collected his fare and turned the nose of his plane west, hoping to pick up a return fare at the nearby town of Leadville.

Captain Kane walked directly to his uncle's laboratory and was admitted. He found his uncle in conference with the Martian and the Venus dwellers; representatives of their planets in the work going forward at the plant. The hour was 9:30 in the evening which was the same as 9:30 in the morning to Dr. Hazzard, for he often worked clear around the clock.

"How are you, Hal, my boy?" said Dr. Hazzard, as Hal was shown into the conference room. "We all have been following your troubles on the Views-and-News. Sorry, my boy, so sorry, but a good two-thirds of the universe seems to be in sympathy with you. The others, I am afraid, have selfish interests and ulterior motives." The two shook hands heartily and then Dr. Hazzard turned to his conferees. One was Tanex of Mars, a giant standing twelve feet tall, but not a giant among his own people, being a little below the average Martian height. The other was Anoda Vena, a Greek god standing but five feet two. A midget in the eyes of the earth and Mars, nevertheless as perfect a physical specimen of manhood was not to be found on either earth or Mars. His garb of tightly fitting animal skin resembling chamois was studded heavily with precious gems, such as proclaimed Venus dwellers to be the most generally wealthy of all known inhabitants of the planets of space.

Dr. Hazzard's eyes ran proudly over the form of his nephew. The doting uncle believed his nephew compared favorably with either of the visitors who were picked men of their people. "Need I present my nephew?" he asked. "You rode on his ship; you must have met him before."

"Yes, indeed," spoke up Vena, "he saved our lives and gave us a great thrill."

"We have all agreed that you have been given a little the worst of it," said the Martian throatily and Hal wondered if he caught a ring of insincerity in his voice. If so, it was remarkably well disguised.

"I am not complaining," asserted Hal resignedly, "I am only hoping that some day I will be given the opportunity to lead a force of craft in a punitive expedition against Quantok and his whole horrible pirate horde. If I ever get such a chance, I promise to either sweep the realms of space clean of him and his ilk or die in the attempt.

"Well spoken," applauded Vena.

"And like a true earth man," added Tanex, but Hal

believed that he noted a slight tinge of sarcasm in his tone, although he admitted in his mind that this might have been due to his own anxious and harried mental state.

At this juncture a bright, beautiful blond girl bounded into the room. She appeared to be about seventeen. Her beauty might have indicated she was a native of Venus had it not been for her height, which was more of earthly proportions. On closer view the visitors noted she was, in many characteristics, totally unlike the people of any known planet. Her beauty could not be described in words, although the adjectives, "gorgeous," "dainty" and "magnificent" suggested themselves.

The girl ran directly towards Dr. Hazzard, but suddenly beholding Hall she turned sharply and ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him lustily.

"Cousin Hal," she fairly cooed, "I just had to burst right in here, if I was ever going to see you and Daddy. It just seemed like I was never going to see you at all. I trust your visitors will pardon me."

The young captain seemed overjoyed to see the girl and returned the greeting in kind. Dr. Hazzard hastened to present the girl to his guests.

"This is my ward, Miss Beth Lee Hazzard. She and Captain Hal were children together. Neither remembers their parents. Being a physician, among other things, I raised them both without a woman's help. I believe they do me credit; at least, I am recklessly fond of them. This little girl has been my closest confidant. She knows more about my work and affairs than I do. We can discuss anything of a scientific nature in her presence." Then to his ward. "Sit down, Betty; I am sure my guests will be glad to have you with us for awhile."

The admiring glances in the eyes of the guests proved the doctor was right. In fact Hal thought the Martian looked at the girl just a trifle too closely. The doctor was too engrossed in the affairs of the conference to notice the deep interest the Martian seemed to be taking in the girl. He plunged back into the trend of conversation that had been interrupted by Betty's appearance.

"Well," Dr. Hazzard continued with conviction, "Hal has said he would like to engage the pirates personally and someone will have to sweep the skies clear of Quantok and his followers. That is certain, for as long as he is at large our whole Tri-planetary enterprise will be held up—and we are powerless to proceed."

The others nodded a silent assent. They knew that Dr. Hazzard was recognized as the great scientific and mechanical genius of the universe and that his inventions and discoveries were many and marvelous. Greatest of these was his new-type spaceflier designed to ride an active radio channel as a boat might ride a canal.

Radioed impulses traveling at the rate of 186,300 miles a second operated the mechanism of this spaceflier and caused it to develop, in space, a speed in exact proportion to the impulse which drove it forward. In other words, the craft was designed to travel by the action of radio, or at an approximate rate of 1,000,000 miles an hour, enabling it to fly from the earth to Venus in something over 93 hours, depending on the time necessary to accelerate and decelerate at the take-off and landing. The engineers' estimates of time required for acceleration and deceleration were given as an hour-and-a-half at each end, making a total estimated trip-to-Venus time of ninety-six hours.

This speed was a little greater than twice as fast as any velocity of travel before known and 2,000 times as fast as any rate of travel known on earth up to the time of the invention of the Donvorth rocket motor in 1999, just a century previously.

In order to maintain this speed, it was found it would be necessary to have auxiliary relay radio power stations fixed in space, to be located about 500,000 miles apart.

It was to construct these gigantic relay stations that Dr. Hazzard's foundries were casting enormous weightless-metal cubes. These metal cubes were to measure a mile in extent each way. They were being fashioned with an inward bulge to put the greatest pressure of manufactured inner air on the joint edges of the cubes. The casting forms had been placed further down the slopes of Mount Massive. Gravity delivered the fluid metal through conduits from the lake of fire to smaller vats near the forms. In these vats a final process was completed which made the metal weightless. Then pneumatic pressure pumped it while it was in the liquid state into the forms.

It was the project to tow these cubes to the proper places in space by rocket motors. Once placed they would become veritable Cities of Space with homes, machine and repair shops and power plants within their confines.

Naturally, as the scientist explained, the Cities of Space could not be placed while the space lanes were threatened by bloodthirsty pirates. The menace was one to torture the souls of men on all civilized planets and to fill their hearts with dread.

To a scientist like Dr. Hazzard the situation was most trying and vexatious.

All this was discussed in the presence of Captain Hal and the girl Betty, who were combining business with the pleasure of being in the presence of their beloved guardian.

It was finally agreed that the civilized planets of the universe must carry the war into the very teeth of the pirates to remove once and for all the horrible menace from the lanes of space. Just when would the rulers of the three great planets act drastically, the conferees asked one another. All expressed the belief that the proclamation of a general war against the pirates would not be long in coming.

This conclusion seemed to give them all satisfaction, for Dr. Hazzard produced cigars and all lolled back to enjoy a few cool inhalations of the weed before resuming their discussions. But their peace was not to remain long undisturbed.

Suddenly came the interruption like a burst of hail in midsummer, but a thousand times more alarming. . . . Five quick sharp bells from the News-and-Views radio set in the corner of the room. . . . This was the general alarm signal used by the broadcasting service to announce the coming of a message of unusual importance to all the world.

Had the matter been of local interest to the Western Hemisphere of earth the signal would have been three bells—or for the Eastern Hemisphere four bells. The five bells indicated that the flash was of world moment and it caused all in the room to jump from their chairs. Dr. Hazzard rushed forward and threw open the view-screen switch and turned up the sound tubes for greater audibility.

CHAPTER IV

A City Laid Waste

SOON the shadowy outlines on the television screen began to take form. They pictured a city and much of its surrounding countryside laid waste. Fires still smouldered where thermogun rays had evidently started wild conflagrations. Bodies of dead and maimed were strewn about the streets and ruins. In an improvised shelter on the edge of town the workers of the Red Cross could be seen moving about among the survivors and engaged in their tasks of mercy. It was too widespread a scene of havoc to be described much in detail. It was a pitiful—a harrowing view.

In words distinct and nervously measured came the accompanying report:

"A battleship out of space which could have been none other than the X-13 flagship of Quantok, the pirate, has destroyed Albertville, Ontario, site of the Canadian rocketfuel factory and magazine, the largest in the world. The city and the magazine were sacked.

"Thousands are dead. The exact number is unknown. Practically all buildings in the town and surrounding country were burned. Thousands are homeless. Some of the dead and much of the property were reduced to dust by disintegrating rays.

"The town defended itself with all the powers it possessed, but the rayguns of the battlecraft, being of superior range, melted down the mortars of the fort at the magazine. The garrison forces at this point were the first to die. The garrison numbered 5,000 officers and trained fighting men.

"Townspople fought the invaders in the streets hand to hand and with such weapons as were available. They succeeded in killing a number of Quantok's men and here develops an element of weirdest mystery. Among the corpses of Quantok's followers was a type of physically perfect yet strange human being not identified with any known planet. Each of these bodies had a metal circlet about the neck on which was engraved in Martian characters: 'Quantok, Rex, Enslaved Fighting Forces,' then a number.

"This is the first time that Quantok has invaded a realm of any of the Tri-planetary Alliance. Capitals of the worlds are shrouded in dread that the pirates will pillage further at another time.

"From Washington comes the suggestion that the spacenavies of Earth, Venus and Mars unite in a war against Quantok. This, doubtless will be the outcome. The first war ever to be waged in space is regarded as but a few hours away."

Then came the closing signal, a short buzz, indicating the end of the dispatch, which, like all News-and-Views bulletins, was brief, considering the unprecedented importance of the news.

Dr. Hazzard sprang forward and turned down the machine.

"Horrible!" ejaculated the visitor from Venus. He seemed dazed by the frightful import of the news dispatch.

Dr. Hazzard was standing in front of the television with his hands before his eyes as if to shut out the full horror of what he had seen. He finally found words.

"Deplorable!—but—thank God," he exclaimed fervently, "At last it is to come, the war we all have been praying for. The war that will make the lanes of space safe for civilization and commerce. Let us hope that we will soon see the end of this carnival of pillage, rapine and murder."

Each of those present echoed the prayer in his own language and each then continued to express surprise and horror at the sacking of the peaceful city and the attendant slaughter. Then, for a while, they sat looking at each other without saying a word. Each seemed too engrossed in his own thoughts, aroused by the momentous news, to find any heart for conversation.

Captain Hal was the first to speak. "My standing with the Astro-Via Lines does not affect my rights as an Ensign in the Spacenal Reserves," he asserted with a show of pride. "I will radiophone Salt Lake City for a taxi to convey me to Washington to await assignment. Gentlemen, I must leave you."

"Oh, must you really go?" cried Betty, jumping up and throwing her arms out to him. "Why I have only been with you a moment. It seems that you are never home."

"Goodbye," said Dr. Hazzard, shortly, extending his hand to the young captain.

Betty looked at her uncle, then she echoed his words and actions. "Goodbye," she said, and extended her hand. The others did likewise. Captain Hal strode out of the room and made direct for the Hazzardville spaceport where the taxi could be expected to pick him up and whisk him to Washington all within a few seconds—And so he was on his way to volunteer for war before war actually had been declared.

When Hal had gone, Betty turned to the three conferees with a puzzled expression. "What I cannot understand," she pondered, "is why the combined spacenavies of three planets would be necessary to combat a freebooter with but three battlecraft at his command, and two of these of inferior size and armament?"

Before answering, Dr. Hazzard surveyed his pretty ward lovingly—indulgently. Then he explained:

"For the same reason, Betty, that many hounds might be necessary to run down three foxes with a great field to forage in. If we knew Quantok's base it would be easy for us to go and get him. As it is, he can swoop in from the far reaches of space and utterly annihilate any craft flying without adequate convoy. This, he can do, easily, before the officers or crew of such a craft realize their danger.

"The far reaches of space and the great speed necessary to space flying make possible such surprise attacks," continued the great scientist. "The darkness of space, too, is a factor. A pirate craft flying between its intended victim and the sun, yet out of line to cast a shadow on the victim, would present a dark or blind side. In other words the pirate craft flying under conditions, as described, is invisible save for a slight aura or corona. This is not easily distinguished by a look-out or observer. Now do you understand, my dear?"

"Perfectly," replied Betty, "and I believe I will retire now."

Although she did not realize it Betty's subconscious mind probably reminded her thus: "Hal is gone now, why stay longer? We need sleep."

Dr. Hazzard kissed the girl, and the others waved a good night to her as she left.

The moment she was gone the big Martian turned to Dr. Hazzard and said, "I know you will pardon me, doctor, but your ward, Miss Betty, interests my scientific mind most strangely. There is something altogether unearthly about her. I do not mean her beauty alone. I refer, as a scientist, to her traits, her characteristics, her entire general appearance. She has a slight resemblance to the people of Venus, yet she is not from Venus. Neither is she of the earth or Mars. She is utterly unlike any of the peoples of the known universe. Do not regard me as impertinent, please. As a scientist, I have a right to be curious—and I am speaking as a scientist. Who were the parents of that girl? Where in the universe *did* she come from?" The Martian's forehead was corrugated. There was no doubting his sincerity.

Anoda Vena, the representative from Venus, leaned far forward in his chair. The rapt expression on his handsome and highly intelligent countenance betrayed that he, too, was deeply interested in the history of this girl, Betty, whose name was the only earthly mark identified with her.

Dr. Hazzard looked at his guests and smiled a queer, half sad, half glad little smile. "There is no end to it," he said, resignedly. "Always the same questions arise. Usually I withhold the story, but it really is a matter of deep scientific interest."

"Gentlemen," he said after a pause as he arose and began pacing the floor. "The nativity and the parentage of my dear little ward are a mystery of the universe—a mystery so deep that it may never be solved—a mystery strangely linked to tragedy."

CHAPTER V

A Child of Mystery and Tragedy

DR. HAZZARD continued to pace the floor near his visitors. The changing expressions on his face were a study.

"Gentlemen," he began again, at length, "You have awakened memories—memories that are both pleasurable and painful. If it had not been for that tragic night I would not have Betty with me now. Yet I cannot look back on it all without a realization of the tragedy which accompanied her advent into this world.

"Betty's life story is strangely interlaced with the record of my own accomplishment. It is as though a daughter were sent to me to sustain me through the hardest and most gruelling struggle of my life."

The visitors from the far-away planets shifted in their chairs in nervous interest in the old inventor's measured words. It were as though they instinctively felt that the story of the strange, beautiful girl was of universal import. And so it proved many months later, when the civilized peoples of all explored planets were torn by a strife—a struggle which appeared at times too great for human ingenuity and stamina.

"It was when we first began using radio transmitted power for atmosphere craft," continued Dr. Hazzard. "I had just perfected this invention and had begun the erection of this laboratory and these foundries to produce weightless metal. The metal was to be used in the production of craft to meet the great and growing demand of traffic around the earth.

"I was no more than comfortably fixed here in my

home and laboratory in June, just eighteen years ago, when one night a terrific storm arose. The army of workmen took refuge in their construction barracks a mile above the laboratory and I held to my little cot here. I was hoping that the great storm would abate, but it became fiercer with each succeeding moment. It was as if the heavens were on fire and with each blast of terrific electric force drenching rain fell, driven with a fury by a gale of fiendish proportions. Flood waters from a cloudburst ran down the old mountain in torrents and I remember I was standing at the window breathing a prayer of thanks that our shelters had been completed before the storm had swept upon us.

"Suddenly, out of the roar of the storm, came a series of short sharp blasts, audible only between crashes of thunder. The blasts were accompanied by a scream of soul-racking intensity. I looked up to the east and a sudden great glare of lightning revealed a strange egg-shaped spacecraft, falling, as it seemed, out of the heavens. An instant later there was a frightful crash and the spaceship collided with the rocky side of the mountain not a hundred yards from where I stood at the window.

"Despite the roar of the elements, I determined to fare forth and see what could be done for the poor unfortunates who might still be living in the crushed shell of the strange spaceflier. I managed to manipulate one of our searchlights so it fell full on the wrecked craft. Then I rushed bareheaded and coatless from the house.

"In one quick survey I saw that the spaceship was not of this world. It was a small affair, evidently built for cruising, and on its battered sides I saw a strange symbol—a rampant dragon of weird aspect, coiled around a tree of unknown species.

"The hulk was so terribly battered that I had little hope of finding life within. After some manipulation, however, I managed to pry loose a bent and twisted trap, using a loosened piece of the wreckage itself as a lever. Cold-lights were still glowing inside the twisted hulk and I beheld three bodies, crushed and bleeding. One was crashed against the control board. This was the body of a man. I reached it and found life extinct. Another, also a man, was lying prone. Death had evidently been instantaneous.

"A third body, that of a woman, I found in a bunk aft. The bunk had served slightly to break the force of concussion, but every bone in the body was broken. There were frightful gashes about the head and torso. The legs were torn and bleeding, but the bosom still rose and fell. There was yet life.

"As gently as possible I dragged this body from the crushed shell of the spaceship and out into the raging night. With great difficulty I managed to finally reach the door of my quarters. Carrying my precious human burden I laid it on my bunk. I began, with the thoroughness of a sympathetic and deeply interested physician and surgeon, to make an examination of the injuries.

"A startling fact became apparent within a few moments. The woman was about six or seven months with child. Her poor torn, crushed body was beyond my aid, but she might live for a few moments. It occurred to me that I might be able to save the baby.

"Because of her crushed hipbones I saw at once that a natural birth would be impossible. I decided instantly that another gash cut deep into the torn and mangled torso could not mean much under the circumstances. It

was a matter of seconds. I had no time to wait for ether to act. I used a local anesthetic, applying it with a sponge and fairly bathing the parts in strong solution as I cut quickly and deep.

"More rapidly, probably, than any emergency operation had ever before been performed, I finished the work. Then I paused for an instant. I had, lying beside a dying mother, a beautifully formed but pitifully premature girl baby. The mother gasped out her own life in sacrifice as the girl baby's chest expanded with the first breath of a new life on a new planet. Gentlemen—a marvel, I might almost say a miracle of the universe had happened.

"I had saved a life and lost a life almost in a single minute earth time, but I was still far from being completely successful in my efforts. I realized that the baby would have to have perfect incubation to live.

"With speed that I am sure I have never equaled since, I procured a galvanized iron boiler and cut a square hole in the bottom. Then I turned it bottom side up on its lid and with a small electric laboratory torch I welded the lid on, hermetically sealing the boiler save for the door which I had cut in the bottom. I fitted the door with rings of bent wire to act as hinges. Into this I introduced electric bulbs and a thermometer to produce and register the exact degree of heat necessary to re-create, as nearly as possible, the conditions within a living, palpitating human womb.

"The mother died, but my hastily improvised incubator saved the child, whom you know now as Betty, my beautiful ward.

"I gave her my personal care and all of my time and all of my prayers, but the reward was certainly worth my efforts."

The old scientist paused for a moment with a preoccupied look in his eyes and ran his hands through his mop of snow-white hair. His auditors sat breathless with interest. Dr. Hazzard turned suddenly on his visitors and said:

"And now, gentlemen, comes the part of the story that will especially interest you as scientists, for it was through Betty's entrance into this world that my greatest idea was born.

"My radio flyer had been proven practical for flight within the earth's atmosphere at speeds never before attainable, but it was not practical, so far as we knew then, for flights through the vacuum of space. The reason was that the radio-transmitted energy was available only when relayed at intervals of from 3,000 to 5,000 miles. I believed that relay stations in space were an impossibility. Finally, however, I so perfected transmission that power could be transported on radio waves from 50,000 to 100,000 miles. Suddenly, an improvised incubator, which I had used to save Betty's life, gave me the idea of how to construct radio stations in space.

"It occurred to me that if I could produce living conditions in an ordinary tin container, I could enlarge upon the idea, constructing giant containers of weightless metal in the order of one mile 'linear' dimensions. It was the idea to have these giant containers towed to points of vantage along the space lanes and used as power transmission stations and actual cities of space.

"My idea, I believe, was sound, but we have been unable to carry it out because of the depredations of the bloodthirsty pirate, Quantok. Once he is out of the way we can begin flying our radio-powered craft in

space at a speed of 183,000 miles a second, the actual speed of light itself. You see my radio stations are simply large incubators in which I can produce earth conditions and make community life possible anywhere in the outer void."

Both listeners were deeply impressed and betrayed the fact by their demeanor.

"A most thrilling and unusual story and one of great interest to any scientist," commented the man from Venus.

"Certainly an enthralling account of an inter-planetary mystery plot," observed the giant from Mars. "And," he added, "was there nothing on the wrecked mystery ship that would throw light on its mission on earth or the place of its embarkation?"

"There may have been," pondered Dr. Hazzard slowly and thoughtfully. "I have often wondered myself, but the truth is I was so occupied saving the baby's life that I did not go near the wreck for weeks. The fact is, I hardly gave the matter a thought. The baby and my laboratory work occupied every second of my time. When I finally found time to visit the wrecked spaceship it had been drenched by the flood. It was so thoroughly muddied, trampled and ransacked by workmen, newspapermen and curiosity seekers generally, that it was practically denuded of all articles which might have helped to solve the mystery.

"I know, though, that newspapermen from Denver went over the ship carefully. They got together some small scraps of papers and 'scripts,' but these had been so scattered by the gale and drenched by the flood that they revealed nothing of a tangible nature. Some words in a language entirely unknown to earth dwellers were found, but even these were so faded and drenched as to be utterly impossible to decipher. The mechanism of the craft, too, was so twisted and impaired that it also failed to reveal any secrets. All we know is the nature of the metal of which the craft had been constructed. This was an alloy containing at least two metals previously unknown on earth."

"It is surely a most perplexing and baffling mystery," noted the giant Martian.

"Indeed it is," agreed the man from Venus, whereupon the three scientists retired. Had they known the mystery was to deepen on the morrow they probably would not have slept so soundly that night.

CHAPTER VI

A Strange Disappearance

WHILE Dr. Hazzard and his visitors were yet asleep Betty, whose dreams had been filled with vague visions of a nature which had tended to upset her usually cheerful disposition, arose and dressed hurriedly. She donned a simple costume for traveling, hurriedly tossed some other articles of apparel and toilet in a valise. Picking up the simple luggage, she ran to her foster-father's desk. This desk served as his "office," at times when he was very busy, and Betty knew he spent much time at it.

Betty sat down and with much pretty wrinkling of her finely chiseled brow she wrote a note. The text began:

"My Darling Daddy:" and it ended:

"I hope you will forgive me and realize that all

is going to be for the best. Your loving Betty."

Betty placed the note in the very center of the desk and then ran out of the laboratory and down to the spaceport. She had not long to wait. An around-the-world flyer soon halted at the station and Betty hurried on board. Ordinarily the guards insisted that all passengers show tickets, but Betty was known, from early girlhood, by many of the spacecraft and airship men, who stopped on local trips at Hazzardville port. So the guard simply nodded to her as she climbed aboard.

The flyer was a local. It stopped at many stations on its way to New York, London and other European and Oriental ports on its way around the world to San Francisco and New York again, passengers boarding and leaving the carrier at every station.

When the conductor reached Betty she paid cash fare and then requested as a favor that he and the guard would forget that they had seen her. She was frank in stating her reasons and the conductor with a wise wag of his head and an exclamation of deep understanding agreed to her strange request.

"Believe me, Miss Betty, under the circumstances I will forget I saw you," agreed the conductor, "but as you were the only passenger who got on at Hazzardville I would advise that you pay fare from Salt Lake City where several other passengers boarded the craft."

Betty did as was requested. The conductor left her and soon she was lost in her own thoughts. The misgivings of her dreams had been dispelled by the morning sunlight. She was herself again taking happy enjoyment in her flight. Could she have looked back to the laboratory of her beloved foster-father she would not have been happy at all. For Betty had overlooked something.

In the mountains gusts of wind much stronger than zephyrs are common. Betty had not noticed that windows on both sides of the laboratory building were wide open. A gust of wind stole in one side of the building, lifted her note from her "daddy's" desk and carried it playfully out through the opposite window. In seeming childish enjoyment of its prank the wind caught the note and whirled it high, speeding it up the mountain side to the top where it fell into the bubbling lake of fire and was consumed.

When Dr. Hazzard missed Betty it was mid-afternoon, but he was not alarmed at the time. He reasoned that she had made a hurried trip to Denver probably to do some shopping and that she would return late in the evening. When she did not put in an appearance as expected and when the night and all the next day passed and she did not return, his anguish may be better imagined than described.

His visitors comforted him as did all the men at the plant, but he was frenzied with grief and anxiety. Early on the morning following Betty's departure radios throughout the universe crackled with a general alarm notice of her disappearance.

After days of brooding, almost maddening anxiety, a strange feeling of comfort stole over the aged scientist. He seemed to realize subconsciously or, if you will, spiritually that his ward was safe and would return to him. Otherwise he might have been greatly hampered in the performance of certain heavy and important duties, which the inner councils of the government already were outlining for him.

Within a few days after the general alarm incident

to Betty's disappearance the ether began to ring with the broadcast of the declaration of war by three planets simultaneously. The call to arms followed immediately.

Dr. Hazzard and his visitors were called to Washington to enter as an advisory committee to the War Board. The three scientists were experts on interplanetary navigation, transportation and other matters of outstanding emergency moment. Their presence was regarded as essential to any plans of war that might come up for consideration. The foundries, to which Dr. Hazzard had devoted his life, were left in the direction of his heads of departments, with the privilege of choosing their own "boss" from within their ranks.

As the war was not a matter for the army, save as defense forces on earth to protect rocket-fuel, ammunition and war plants and the general public safety, the army was not augmented. The Spacenavy, however, was recruited to a strength never before recorded.

That ominous tenseness that has gripped peoples involved in all wars from time immemorial seized the souls of the three great planets involved. The usual bustle of preparation was noticeable everywhere—the grief at leave-takings and the thrill of patriotic fervor sweeping on in unfettered glory . . . a tornado of public spiritedness and a unity of deadly vengeful purpose filled the land.

CHAPTER VII

War

THE three planets involved in the greatest struggle of all time to preserve interplanetary commerce were in constant radio communication. Conditions on all the planets were the same. It was a universe mad with frenzy of punitive war.

Declarations of war on the three planets were simultaneous. There was a concerted movement of all ships in the three spacenavies. At one universal command they rocketed out into space where Quantok, the cruel, crafty and bloodthirsty Martian pirate, had held sway for eighteen years simply because the field of his operations was so extensive that it had been impossible to run him down. Now the greatest triumvirate of the universe had combined to stalk him relentlessly. They were determined to fight, if necessary, to the last ship and the last man. It is little wonder that the earth ran riot with excitement, zeal and patriotic fervor.

At a given signal, flashed through all space, the Spacenavies of the great planets set out for their common hunting ground. Viewed through powerful telescopes from the earth the gathering of the fighting forces was a spectacle that the outer starry realms had never before presented. Rockets bursting in unison from a myriad of craft of all natures together with the natural starry heavens furnished pyrotechnics no dreamer of fantastic dreams could have conjured in his wildest imagination.

It was with a great show of satisfaction that the regular passenger and freight transporting lines announced that their regular liners would leave on schedule and under heavy convoy.

The earth spacenavy battleships were designated by the letter X and numbers 1 to 300. The ship X-13 with X-60 and X-200, of course, were missing from the array as they had fallen into the hands of Quantok the pirate. It was believed that these and the Venus ship were the

only fighting craft he possessed. A sad and disastrous mistake this proved to be.

Captain Kane was assigned to the command of the X-4, the fourth largest fighting craft in the navy. Each ship, as will be remembered, was stepped back a number in designation as some new and larger craft was put into commission. Thus it was always possible to tell the size, the armament and fighting strength of each craft by its number and thus it will be seen there were only three ships greater in the Spacenavy than the battlecraft X-4, commanded by the famous Dr. Hazard's nephew.

In the glorious taking off of the armada, Captain Kane's ascended from Washington as did the X-1 (flagship) and the X-2 and X-3. Other ships took to the space from various points and bases, all converging into a fleet at a point 100,000 miles from the earth's envelope.

Here a brief exchange of advice was carried on which amounted to a council of war and then there were maneuvers. These maneuvers, designed to test the accuracy of the pilots and engineers of the gigantic fleet, numbering some 2,000 craft, presented a spectacle never to be forgotten and never before produced in history of all the planets.

It was viewed with thrills and enthusiasm through the giant telescopes on all three planets, but was most plainly visible, of course, from earth. Those who had the fortune to view these maneuvers, naturally, were envied by their fellow men. No words can describe the spectacle. It has to be imagined.

It will be remembered that since the women won their right to equality in both the army and navy of the earth in the year 1980, these ships were manned by both women and men. The women had their own officers of equal rank with the men. The same was true of the craft of Venus and Mars and had been so for probably two centuries before earth peoples were forced to recognize the rights of women to serve and fight beside their men.

Where possible it was the custom on the ships to have married or betrothed couples recruited for such service. This was not compulsory. Single members of both sexes were in service and were now ready to fight shoulder to shoulder.

On his induction into the active war service Captain Kane had won the rank of Tilotik, a word borrowed from the Martians and a rank created after a study by earth engineers of Martian navy methods. This office was next to admiral and was available only to young men who had spent enough hours in space to constitute a fourth of their lifetime. They had also to qualify as expert space navigators and spacecraft engineers. They were supreme in command of their individual ship unless the ship carried an admiral.

The female Tilotik, while of equal rank on a craft, could qualify more easily. She had to be an engineer and to possess almost equal knowledge to that of the male of her rank, but, because of the motherhood element, her actual service in space was not regarded as important. Man was still supreme in that the female Tilotik had a voice in command, but orders were issued by the male. Their orders were passed along to the females by their Tilotik. It is true, however, that the word of the female Tilotik carried, in many instances, even more weight than the word of the male. This was the case particularly in the medical, commissary, and recreational activities.

Since embarking on a ship, that to him was strange, Tilotik Kane had not met the woman of equal rank on his craft and he was due for the surprise of his life.

It was during the maneuvers that a woman stepped forward and saluted. In the natty uniform of her rank she presented a picture worthy of a Michelangelo and all other masters who have followed him.

Tilotik Kane returned the salute and then looked down into a pair of blue eyes nestling under a riot of golden curls. These curls simply would not stay fixed under the jaunty navy headgear. Tilotik Kane almost fell to the bridge in surprise.

"I am to occupy this bridge with you," trilled a voice like the music of the spheres. The voice, the eyes, the curls, there was no mistaking. The next in command was Betty Hazzard.

"Why—why—why—how did you get here?" blurted Tilotik Kane.

"I just qualified, enlisted and used my uncle's name to swing influence enough to be assigned to this craft."

"Your own scientific attainments would have accomplished it without influence," commented Tilotik Kane proudly and then he became the navy officer and so did Betty. They saluted briskly and went about their affairs without another word.

After the maneuvers all ships spread out to form a dragnet covering as much space as was commensurate with safety. The combined navy had to be in a position to converge if necessary, and yet had to guard three planets. It was without doubt the biggest job, the most astounding job, ever assigned to men and machinery.

It was accomplished by forming circles within circles with the flagship in the center. The outer ring of ships were the smaller and fleetier scout craft. They served to dart hither and thither in space in an effort to locate Quantok, the pirate, his craft and his base.

Orders were that Quantok, if possible, was to be taken alive and that his flagship under no condition was to be destroyed until it had been traced to its base. Somewhere in the vast void it was known Quantok had located and doubtless had conquered a planet rich in all materials needed to make his operations possible. The prime object of the drive against him was to locate and forever destroy this base as well as all craft of any nature which operated from it.

To tell the detailed movements of the fleet would be to detail a history of the war which is available to all in eclectic history. It will be remembered how in the early months of the war the forces of Quantok managed to get through the guard of ships and destroy the city of San Francisco with frightful loss of life. The horrors of the sacking of the Pacific Coast metropolis still serve to almost paralyze the senses of those who read of them in the records. No less terrible was the subsequent sacking and destruction of the capital city of Velspi, on Venus and the naval base at Krox on Mars, a location every nook and corner of which was as familiar to Quantok as his home dooryard. It was at Krox that Quantok got his training.

We draw the curtain over many of these horrors to follow the fortunes of Tilotiks Kane and Betty Hazzard. It was their idea which broke up the formation of circles early in the war. They ordered the formation into three lines guarding the three planets from the direction of outer space or if you prefer a more scientific designation—from the region of the asteroids.

Counting the ships that were used in these lines of defense and those used to convoy the regular space liners the Supreme Command of all the forces, Admiral Wentworth of Earth, had but a round dozen ships of heavy armament with which to attack Quantok's forces once he was located. These ships were the X1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Earth Space navy, V1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Venus navy and K1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Martian navy. In addition to this fighting force a large number of smaller and fleetier craft was used for reconnoitering as has been described.

Cut off from his raids on the planets, Quantok, whose strength was surprising but overestimated by him in his great egoism, made bold on the memorable October 19 to attack the combined navies of the universe or such part of this force as was included outside the planetary lines of defense.

On the date named Quantok came to the attack from the day-side of space, quietly, like the spirit of death. Only when his thermo and disintegration rays began to stab out like fingers of fate, did the allied forces realize that his three battleships had been augmented by hundreds of small fleet craft, so small and fleet, that they could not have carried crews of more than ten men each. Like a scourge of hornets these small craft came into the zone of battle. They resembled the tanks of the great World War of history in size and armament, but not in shape and speed.

They were egg-shaped, faster than any known craft and practically invisible. They darted hither and thither in and out around and about the great craft of the allied navies. Their network of deadly rays moved about at well regulated and highly destructive angles.

The heavier craft of the allied navy, once their commanders had regained their presence of mind, began to stab back with rays so powerful that the swarm of deadly gnats was fairly shattered. The tiny craft of Quantok began falling like boll weevils under gusts of poison gas.

But, in the meantime, the bloodthirsty Quantok was collecting his toll. The great flagship, X-1, came athwart a network of the disintegration rays and before it could maneuver away it blew up in a cloud of dust with the loss of every soul on board. The X-2 and X-3 threw a blast of rays into the void created by its disintegration and a half a hundred stinging hornets either blew up in flimsy dust or else were melted to shapeless metal masses—to become meteors in space.

With Tilotiks Kane and Betty Hazzard on the bridge the great X-4 came into the breach at this point and one of the three great battlecraft of the pirate blew up with one vivid vibrating puff of pulverization.

There was a roar of great enthusiasm within the X-4 at the moment. It was followed by a sickening tear at the vitals of those on board. All the top rockets of the X-4 exploded at once and the craft plunged thousands of miles, belly first, through space.

Betty caught at Kane's arm.

"You missed us," she said calmly.

"You mean we missed them," said Tilotik Kane breathlessly.

"Just what happened?" breathed the girl.

"When we trained on the pirate craft, or an instant later, half of Quantok's little busy bees swung to train on us. We would have been dust to be scattered by passing craft for eternity if we had been a split second

later. No time for orders. I just had to get away from there. With one little touch of the button I exploded all the rockets I had on top and just dropped as far as the combined recoil would carry us. Now we will shoot a similar blast from our keel and get back into action."

"Aye, aye," said Tilotik Betty her eyes beaming on her peer in command.

Another sickening pressure which brought all on board to their knees and the great X-4 was back in the zone of battle. She noted that in her absence the X-2 had disappeared.

Like firemen playing a battery of hoses, the X-4 began sweeping space with everything she had in the way of rays. So fast and furious was this barrage that it was impossible for a moment to tell what toll was being taken. Then, suddenly a radio from the X-3 said that neither Quantok nor any of his fleet was anywhere to be found. He had retired as suddenly as he had attacked.

"That can be explained," radioed Tilotik Kane in reply. "His small craft can carry little fuel. They are efficient only for a short time and then must make it back to their base for more power. But believe me, Glorious God, they are all hell while they last and it probably won't be long before they are back again with all their stingers set for action."

A strange fact about the battle was that Quantok had seemingly ignored the Martian battlecraft and that all from that planet had escaped. Could it be that he actually had scruples about destroying people of his own nativity? In the light of what happened at Krox, where whole garrisons and a city full of noncombatants were slaughtered, this hardly seemed reasonable.

News-and-Views commented on this fact in its story of the battle and in describing the plunge of the X-4 it said that "the ship of Tilotiks Kane and Betty Hazzard had escaped destruction by a breath."

In this way Dr. Hazzard, who had been busy every minute, learned the whereabouts of his beloved Betty. No more fervent thanksgiving probably ever reached Heaven than that which welled from the lips and heart of the white-haired old scientist.

CHAPTER VIII

Strategy

WITHIN an hour after the battle the story of Tilotiks Kane and Hazzard and their exploit, after accounting for a great number of the enemy's lost ships, had reached the farthest reaches of the known civilized universe. They immediately became the outstanding heroes of the war.

When the matter of appointing successors to Admiral Wentworth and his feminine peer in command was discussed, the names of Kane and Hazzard immediately came to the fore.

This brought a storm of protest from the disgruntled political interests which stood always in opposition to the Hazzard family and its strong following.

This misguided minority came forward with fangs bared when it was suggested that Kane and Hazzard be made admirals in supreme command of the allied fleets. It was swept aside, however, by the overwhelming support given the candidates by the peoples of Mars and Venus. As had been the case through all history the disgruntled selfish minority was forced to retire

with colors drooping, if not positively dragging in the dust. As usual the disgruntled minority wondered just how it all had happened.

In the next two battles of the war the new Admirals Hazzard and Kane did not figure. This was fortunate as their fighting fleet had been weakened and they had not seen fit to strengthen it at the expense of the lines of craft that were guarding the planets.

In a surprise attack Quantok and his forces, now reduced to two battlecraft but augmented by swarms of "hornet" craft, bore down on the line protecting the planet Venus. Admirals Kane and Hazzard kept in touch with this battle. In fact, at times, they directed it from a point far away in space. The battle was short, sharp, but hardly decisive.

The attackers were repulsed and forced to retire, but only after a frightful loss of life and armament on both sides. Ten battleships of the second class with the forces of Venus were blasted and nineteen melted with all on board. On the other hand the swishing, sweeping rays and disks of destruction emanating from the allied fleet off Venus accounted for hundreds of Quantok's "hornet" fleet. These tiny craft with their human freight disappeared from space forever like snowflakes in sunshine.

An almost identical attack and with like results was attempted by Quantok against the Martian line. All speculation that Quantok was inclined to favor craft of his nativity was dissipated in this battle. He attacked with a ferocity even greater than in previous battles. The Martians, while losing heavily, were able to hold Quantok and his "hornets" until the latter had to leave the field evidently to refuel.

Quantok's retiring fleet could have been followed and harassed from the rear during any of these retirements, but Admirals Kane and Hazzard had warned against this as it would have meant weakening the forces of defense and leaving vital positions unguarded. The earth admirals suspected that Quantok was possessed of a force in reserve, a conclusion that later proved correct.

Any general or admiral will admit that good guessing has won more than one battle and Admiral Kane proved an admirable guesser or, if you prefer, his was a keen intuition.

In a council of war he reasoned that the next attack of Quantok would be directed against the Earth line of defense. He believed Quantok had more small or "hornet" craft than he had fuel for at his base and that this had been the reason for his original sacking of the rocket fuel factory in Canada and his subsequent raids on San Francisco and other points. Also it had been his reason for trying to break through the Venus and Mars defense lines.

To checkmate the suspected next move of Quantok he finally consented to weaken all the planetary defense lines by ordering 100 battlecraft from each to draw close to his position in space and to stand by. These craft were ordered not to engage in the fighting, unless all his ships were destroyed, but to remain ready to perfect a strategy which he believed would win the war and render Quantok and his flagship *hors de combat*.

His own ships were carrying far less fuel than was needed for any sustained maneuvering, so he began releasing them one by one and sending them earthward (the nearest ports) for fuel.

He was overjoyed when Quantok remained inactive for two months and allowed all but one of his ships time to refuel.

Then just as Old Sol was seen to blaze from Mother Earth, giving the pirates of space their night side conditions under which to attack, a report was radioed forward that Quantok had been sighted telescopically some million miles away. His advance was plainly marked by the coronas showing about his fleet. The number of the fleet could only be estimated.

Soon the fleet could be seen from the high-powered telescope aboard the X-1, formerly the X-4 and now the flagship. The television while ominous was more highly spectacular than can be described in the words of the languages of all the planets.

Steadily earthward they sped, like a great torchlight procession out of the fiery depths of hell. They were all unmindful that craft from the Mars and Venus lines were closing in on them from all directions.

SUDDENLY, as they approached the woefully inadequate fleet of Admirals Kane and Hazzard, the fanning, writhing metal and heart-searing rays of destruction began to stab out into the night. In a spiteful sputter of all the power available the giant rays of the admirals' fleet spat out derisively to meet the oncoming horde. The doughty X-1 was manned by men and women most expert of all the universe in handling concentrated destruction. The rays from the X-1 cut, slashed, dipped, swung, flashed and fanned at the oncoming enemy. Rays began finding marks on both sides.

Just as the Quantok fleet swung into range the rays from the X-1 splashed into a fiery inferno against the sides of the one remaining dreadnaught of Quantok's fleet, sending it up in a fitful piteous spurt of dust. Gunners who hit this mark smiled while their girl companions actually giggled, for such are the emotions engendered by war. The flagship was left alone with the hornets.

Years back in dim history a great general had described war with one word, "Hell." He should have lived to see a wide stretch of heaven ablaze with death-dealing shafts and to have seen hundreds die at one blast of a ray gun. Then he might have had added "War is Hell with trimmings." The trimmings, in this instance, were being stitched on with needles of flame sticking out from a swarm of craft, like quills on the backs of porcupines.

Admiral Kane was bobbing his great craft about like the proverbial cork on the ocean in his efforts to dodge the sputtering devils of death. At the same time his gunners kept fanning and brushing the heavens with rays. The craft on which Quantok rode in the most desperate endeavor of his career to wreak vengeance on a hated civilization seemed to be charmed. It, too, bobbed and bounced about. It was dealing destruction by the very maneuvers it used to dodge it.

The little "hornets," it appeared to Admirals Kane and Hazzard, were doing most of the work. Both admirals stood on the bridge—and at the brink of eternity smiling. Any instant might be their last. They were existing, by some kind quirk of fate, in a nest of death-dealing squirming serpents of light and any moment might mean a fatal sting. But they smiled as they continued to fight side by side for the right to live and enjoy life unhampered and unmolested.

During the height of the battle Admiral Hazzard looked full into the eyes of Admiral Kane. There was something wistful but hardly hopeful there. It did not seem possible to either that they could long escape this Niagara of hissing death.

Admiral Kane reached out for the briefest second imaginable and pressed the girl's hand.

"If it's good-bye, well then good-bye," he said, "but we will die fighting."

"It's only the beginning," she replied confidently with a new-born hope in her voice. The words were ended with a jerk as the X-1 plunged in a wild downward swerve. It came up again instantly with a sweep of its top lights that sent a half hundred hornets hellbent for eternity.

Both admirals knew that they were surrounded by fleets from the defense lines of three planets and these craft were not fighting as per absolute orders. They both knew that Quantok's end was nearing, but how they themselves could escape destruction in that bubbling cauldron of death was a problem too deep for human thought or analyzation.

Suddenly it was seen that the flagship of Quantok—the old X-13 of the Earth Spacenavy and a fighter to test any man's skill—was singling them out for combat. Dodging the first volleying barrage of rays, both the earth admirals leaped to the fray. Because of the swarm of "hornet" craft, they had been unable to reach this craft and they had been fairly bursting with the desire to do so. Betty and Kane returned to the battle, after the first wild plunge to salvation, with everything turned loose. Their rays fought, feinted and stabbed, with Quantok fighting back just as fiercely. Giant splashes of light belched out into space as rays broke on rays. They were fighting in a close duel of crossed swords and face to face as fencers might. With giant rays they parried and thrust.

For some time they fought thus in blinding light. The fighting became too wild and hysterical on the part of Quantok to make good judgment an asset. It became sheer insanity. It appeared that Quantok, fiend of the skies, had gone stark mad in his desire for victory at any price. His "hornets" were being blasted from around his flagship as corn might pop in a popper. His losses were terrible to contemplate. No one knew his strength. Admirals Kane and Hazzard could only vaguely guess at it, but one thing seemed obvious and that was that such fighting could not continue for long. Yet Quantok continued to fight, mayhap, in sheer desperation. Never on land, sea, air or in the great outer void had such a devastating, horrible, deadly battle been fought.

Admiral Kane realized with a quick intake of his breath that his ship, the X-1, was fighting alone. The other ships of his personal fleet had been swept from the skies one by one. His was one craft fighting a great squadron of craft in space. His heart fell within him. He looked over commiseratingly to his girl pal to see if she realized the condition. One glance was enough to prove to him that the girl knew it only too well. She answered his look in words.

"If we can just get Quantok, it doesn't matter how soon we go after that," she said steadily and resignedly. "The orders are to get him alive," he responded, "but it's too late to consider any such orders now. One of us is going to hell. I am about to ram him with all forward

guns spraying rays at capacity." There was both desperation and determination in his voice.

"Aye, aye," replied the girl simply and the order was given, but fate in one of her whimsies saw to it that the order was never carried out. The great fighting ship of Quantok disappeared from sight. It was not destroyed; it just let loose all its top rockets and plunged. Quantok did just as Admiral Kane had done in the previous battle. The Earth admirals, realizing what had happened, duplicated his maneuver and plunged after him, but he had had a second's start and had made the best of it. He disappeared from the field of strife.

Two reasons accounted for this. His hornets were running out of fuel and he feared to fight alone as the pitiful remnant of the earth's forces had done. He evidently suspected that Admiral Kane was about to close in and the coward in him asserted itself.

But this retreat was not to be like the last. It was impossible to follow craft that were practically invisible when inactive, but Admirals Kane and Hazzard had worked out a little trick. This promised further excitement if not complete success.

A radio sputtered out the words:

"Objective accomplished."

It came from the fleet which had been drawn from the planetary line defenses and which had been inactive in the battle.

"Our strategy has worked," said Admiral Kane to Admiral Hazzard.

"That only means more fighting," replied the girl, "Get the location and we will motor to another and let us hope a more successful carnage. It is no time now to let them get their breath. They may have more bees in their little hive."

This time it was Admiral Kane who said "Aye, aye."

CHAPTER IX

The Planet of Horror

THE strategy which Admiral Kane had taken so much care to accomplish was the result of a sudden idea. It had occurred to him when he realized that the hornet craft were so small that they had to return often to a refueling base. He believed that it would be a simple matter to drive one of these ferocious little fighters into the open, surround and capture it. This little trick he reasoned would lead to the discovery of the location of Quantok's base and make a direct attack on his stronghold possible.

"It will mean the beginning of the end of the war," he had told himself so he forthwith ordered a number of ships from each planetary line to form into a fleet with this one and only purpose in view.

When he received the radiogram that the strategy had been accomplished he was overjoyed and paced the bridge in his exuberance.

Betty sensed that something important had happened. "Good news?" she asked, drawing close to her chum and peer in command.

"The best ever," said Admiral Kane. Then he told her. He ordered that the little stinger of space be brought forthwith to his flagship. This was done.

After surveying the doughty little prisoner which had been nosed alongside his flagship by a convoy he believed he could get the tiny craft aboard and was able to do so.

It was hauled through a trap in the side of the flagship just as a launch might be hauled on board an ocean-going yacht, back on dear old Earth. With it came the commanders of the fleet which had accomplished the strategy. The man was of Venus, a brave and attractive fellow. His peer in command, who was also his wife, was beautiful as are all Venus women.

The man reported that his fleet had formed a hollow cube as directed in the plan of the strategy and had caught the tiny spaceflier within this snare. He said the little gnat had tried to fight its way out of the trap with everything it had in the way of armament. Finally it exhausted its fuel and had to stay in its prison. The surrounding fleet had then simply nosed in and held the little hornet as snug as the proverbial bug in a rug but not so comfortably.

Admirals Kane and Hazzard believed the crews of these gnat flyers were about ten men, but were surprised to find only three souls aboard. And such a crew as it proved to be and what this crew finally revealed—

The little peanut, as the Venus captor referred to it, held secrets of a nature to make civilization quail. A guard was called forward when the hornet crew was ordered out on the deck of the X-1. The officers present shuddered when they beheld these nondescripts fare forth. They were ordered to the cabin at once where a parley began.

The commander of the little craft was a renegade Martian, of wicked snarling visage and rude demeanor. Near him stood a handsome and perfectly formed little fellow who resembled a man of Venus but was not of Venus. Around his neck was a metal band. The third member of the crew was a monstrosity, a human quadruped, covered with heavy black shaggy fur. Its four feet were hand-like, its nose dog-like, its eyes deep-sunken but intelligent. At the moment the monster's eyes were pathetic. Not only were these eyes intelligent they were highly expressive and were expressing fear and pleading as plainly as eyes could speak. The forehead was high and the ears like those of a spaniel only smoother, maybe, more like those of a bloodhound. He walked on all fours to the cabin and then stood half erect, apparently with difficulty, beside his fellows.

Admiral Kane faced the commanding Martian and said:

"Well, Goliath, what have you to say for yourself?"

Admiral Kane had believed the fellow would understand English and he was not mistaken. The giant fairly growled out his reply:

"You can't torture any information out of me."

"You will not be tortured," assured the admiral, "but you may face a firing squad in the event that I find you too uncommunicative."

"Me, no care," and these three words ended the interview so far as the Martian was concerned. Admiral Kane ordered him placed in irons and taken to the brig. Then he faced the little fellow.

"You understand English?" began the admiral.

"Very little, but I am well versed in Martian," replied the prisoner with an air as brave and frank as even an earth dweller could desire.

"Good," said the admiral, changing to the Martian tongue, "I am in a position to offer you your life in exchange for information, which we are determined to get whether you give it to us or not. I see by the inscription on the neck band you wear that you are a slave. I

will not only give you your life but will guarantee your freedom as well if you talk freely and truthfully. Lies will insure your death—"

"I have no reason not to talk, except to save my family from torture and death," said the prisoner. "My life means nothing, my freedom much. Slaves of Quantok are enemies of Quantok. You and I meet on common ground, but unless Quantok is defeated, nay, unless he is forever crushed, my loved ones will pay in torture for anything I may reveal."

"I am beginning to understand," said the admiral with a glance at Betty whose eyes were glazed with pity for the poor serf.

"What sort of a person is this?" then asked Kane pointing to the quadruped.

"I am aware you are ignorant of our little planet," was the answer. "He is Yarth, a dagnan, or if you will a dogman of Dagnarth."

"A what?" exploded Betty.

"I am Farnald. I come from Dagnarth, the largest of the asteroids, a planet twice the size of your moon and half the size of your earth. A small island or continent on our planet is populated with these dogmen. They have developed a larynx and can speak. They are lovable, loyal, faithful and good when they are properly directed. They have nearly all the human traits and are skilled manual workmen. Under Quantok's regime they have been forced to use all their animal instincts and have been more ferocious than wolves. This, I assure you, is quite against their natures."

"But—" drawled Kane, puzzled, "we have no knowledge of the planet of which you speak."

"It is, to you, invisible—our planet—we took good care of that. We desired no outside communication whatever. We were too weak for war and were lovers of peace. I am proud to be a Dagnarn, sir, even in captivity. Quantok found us. He had engines of war. We had no weapons, nothing but implements of peace. With his ray guns he defeated us in a frightful war. We were practically helpless. But we would have fought on. There was only one move that beat us. Quantok made merry by capturing our small children and slicing them up and teasing them with rays before our eyes.

"We could not see much of this sort of thing without yielding. If you do not win this campaign against Quantok my children's torture will pay for this information I am giving you"—and the dogman blinked his expressive eyes and nodded his head as if he understood. His elongated jaw dropped. His mouth was open. He panted evidently from the excitement caused by his companion's fervent recital. The panting was more dog-like than human and Kane for the first time beheld the dogman's teeth. They were the sabre-shaped canine tusks of a wolf. Appraising the dagnan or dogman, Kane estimated that he could not be more than half human, and must be highly dangerous when his animal instincts were in the ascendant. In contrast the wholly human being was symmetrically muscled, handsome, gentle and highly intelligent.

Admiral Kane broke in when the speaker paused, "Your planet is named?"—he suggested.

"Dagnarth. Dag is our word for God. Our planet was consecrated by its people to spiritual service, but when Quantok succeeded in subduing and subjugating us he turned all the man power to the service of evil. He used all humanity on Dagnarth in the production of our

small, fleet, type of spaceships and to the manufacture of the Martian type of armament with which to equip them. For eighteen years we have been forced to work double time, often on half rations. So much man power was used to produce war engines that few were left to produce food. When we objected, even mildly, we have seen our loved ones subjected to slow torture. In case of a refusal to work or to yield, in any event, death by torture to some loved one resulted. You cannot imagine the horror in which we have lived, worked and prayed for eighteen long years—years in which every hour seemed an eternity of suffering and woe. There is no worse state for a proud intelligent people than abject slavery." The speaker's voice was trembling with emotion. He paused a moment then, in a low voice, he added, "Our women have been shamed. We have all been ready to die yet we have dared hope for succor and have toiled and prayed on."

Betty was biting her lips.

"I quite understand," said Admiral Kane. "Then you will lead us to this stronghold of Quantok." This was not a question; it was stated as a point in fact.

"Yes," said the Dagnarn, "but my own people will be forced by Quantok to battle to repel you. I quail from seeing so many of my people slain, but better death than slavery."

"I have a plan," vouchsafed the admiral, "and I believe it will minimize losses among your people. They all have radio?"

"Yes, but every second now is precious. My story of invisible Dagnarth has aroused your curiosity, but if you would attack Quantok while his fleet is refuelling and reconditioning you had better hasten."

Admiral Kane desired more facts but the last utterance of the Dagnarn electrified him.

"You have the freedom of the ship," he said to the Dagnarn, "but Yarth, the dogman, what of him?"

"He will be docile with me."

"Then he has the freedom of the ship, too."

"I will be near when you desire any further information. Need I express my gratitude?" concluded Farnald, the Dagnarn.

"Your eyes and those of the dogman, too, have already done so," replied the admiral.

An instant later space was filled with radio flashes and a great fleet, converging from earth, Mars and Venus, was descending on Dagnarth, stronghold of history's most fiendish master-criminal.

Finally, when the asteroid was but 20,000 miles away it came into view on the television lens. It appeared a land of beauty—yet of horror unspeakable.

CHAPTER X

The Old War Horse

ADAMIRAL KANE radioed an order for all craft to assemble at this even distance from Dagnarth. He called Betty, Farnald and Yarth into conference.

"I have a plan," he said "which I believe will save useless slaughter." Then turning to Farnald, "Your people, you told me, all have radios?"

"Yes," said the Dagnarn, "there is no household, craft or building without a powerful receiving set, but I anticipate your plan and it will not operate." He paused.

"You would call on all Dagnarns and Dagnans to attack their oppressors as you attack from space. This is impossible. All radio on Dagnarth is under remote control. Any message designed to undo Quantok would result in the switching off of all sets from one central point. Your call to arms would only be begun when all radios would be silent."

"Then we will strike at once!" said Kane, "and may God protect the innocent ones caught in the slaughter. Before I give the order to attack, there is just one question. How does your planet maintain its invisibility?"

"By a great glare of lights which float 200 miles out from the planet. These great lamps are weightless—lighter than our atmosphere. They glow perpetually with cold light and without renewal. We borrowed the secret of these lights from a small insect which is silver-colored yet is invisible in utter darkness or in sunlight."

"Oh," exclaimed Kane, "I see. We too have a silvery insect on our planet that is invisible at night, but we have never fathomed its secret. It is called the silverfish. But this is no time for a discussion of entomology. We fare forward!"

Like a great avalanche, the combined fleet swept to within 5,000 feet of the surface of Dagnarth. The massed battlecraft almost shut out the sun as it hovered over the dayside hemisphere of the little planet.

Television screens pictured a scene from the surface of the planet that resembled a fish-hatchery stirred with a paddle. Everywhere was darting, feverish activity. The hornet fleet did not rise to meet the enemy, but giant rays began darting upward like jets of lurid light from a thousand active volcanoes. An answering jabber of rays bent sullenly surfaceward.

A tenseness filled the atmosphere. Orders were that the attacking fleet should be careful to destroy no craft or structure unless such destruction was deemed positively essential.

At a command of Admiral Kane, giant thermo and disintegration rays were swept around all airports and fuel storage magazines. Particular attention was paid to wiping out the enemy's supply of rocket fuel as rapidly as possible.

These great storage yards were located with the help of the Dagnarn. Then it was an easy matter for the attacking fleet to send a few ships to soar above and sweep the plants with bold swishing strokes of ray guns. They were brushed out of existence much as a painter might swing a brush to block in his background.

This was not accomplished, of course, without resistance. The heavy mortars guarding these spots would flare with fountains of defiant flashes, but one by one they were reduced to pulverization or melted into metal junk. The loss of life necessarily was frightful, but care was taken not to wantonly slaughter non-combatants.

The idea of Admirals Kane and Hazzard in this campaign was to put the enemy out of a condition to resist as soon as possible. The objective was the Government palace and radio tower. The admirals wished to capture the palace and the general radio control and broadcast station with the idea of notifying all denizens of Dagnarth that the fleet was a friendly one destined to end the terrorism of Quantok.

Admirals Kane and Hazzard ordered their fleet to draw yet closer to the surface. The movement was concerted and exact. The great hollow shell of craft that

inclosed the invisible planet simply squeezed in with the compactness of a rubber glove.

Incidentally the movement was highly dangerous, for it brought the entire fleet in range of smaller and more numerous destruction-ray batteries on the surface. It caused renewed and diabolical activity on the part of Quantok's defensive forces for an instant—just an instant.

Then a most unexpected thing happened!

All radios sputtered an S-C-D. (Special Code Dispatch.)

This called for a lull in operations. The great fleet was ordered to withdraw. This movement was accomplished with the precision that could be found only in the perfectly trained forces of the three great planets. The dispatch came over in the special family code of the Hazzard clan. No one could understand it but Kane and Betty. They looked at each other in surprise mingled with joy!

"I am on cruiser X-192, which came up with the earth-line forces. I desire immediate transfer to the X-1. That ship will rise to a point five miles out of range of all surface guns where we will pick it up and I will board it.

Dr. Hazzard."

A few minutes later, at a point within the atmosphere envelope of the invisible planet, Dr. Hazzard stepped aboard the X-1, mounted to the bridge and affectionately greeted his nephew and his foster daughter.

"Well, well," he said almost jovially, "Did you youngsters think you were going to have this war all to yourselves? You can't run away from me. Here I am. I had to be with you, but I am not going to interfere with the way you conduct your campaign. A most surprising thing has happened and that's my own private affair, but I have to be landed at the palace on the invisible planet as soon as possible, so go ahead with your war."

Admiral Kane introduced Farnald and Yarth. "I had better acquaint you with what we know about the invisible planet——"

"No need," assured Dr. Hazzard, with a wave of his hand. "I have had a sound-and-sight set tuned in on this bridge ever since I left the earth, just after the first space battle. I have heard every word and have seen every movement here. We start even. Let's go. But wait! Farnald had better tell you something that I know that you do not know!" Then turning to Farnald. "Explain to them the status of your aged monarch and conditions as they exist in the royal palace."

Farnald drew in a breath and began. "Our aged king who ruled by kindness had knowledge of the planet, its politics, geography and affairs that Quantok needed. Torture failed to bring this information so Quantok ordered a truce. He gave the king his castle and allowed him to retain his crown, although he is but a figurehead. King Torod accepted these conditions as he desired to live and work and pray for the emancipation of his people.

"Quantok did not want the Royal Palace anyway. He desired larger and more luxurious quarters where he could maintain his enormous harem made up from native captive girls and women he had abducted from raided spaceships——"

"That is all I wanted them to know," said Dr. Hazzard. "I learned it through my sound-and-sight set, by training it on the King's apartment. I got in direct

touch with him and had a long two-way conversation. He awaits our coming, but has been unable to get control of the radio, the control room of which is located in a tower between the two administrative buildings." Dr. Hazzard turned to Admirals Kane and Hazzard. Placing a hand on the shoulder of each he said, "Now my children go ahead with your war, but remember you can't win unless you succeed in landing an army. Get every craft down on the surface and give 'em Hell!"

"I hesitated because of the great loss of life among the Dagnarns and Dagnans," explained Admiral Kane.

"I know it," replied Dr. Hazzard, "but better dead than slaves. Fortunes of war, my boy, fortunes of war. I said give 'em Hell! I am not butting in, just giving you the benefit of an old man's experience. You can't kill a rattlesnake with kindness."

"As usual, you're right," agreed Admiral Kane as he looked quizzically at his peer in command.

"Still the old boss," she observed affectionately and then asserted varieties of the prescribed hell began to break loose!

"Squeeze 'em," ordered Admiral Kane to all his craft, "squeeze 'em like an anaconda crushes a goat."

The net began to tighten!

Rays played in the atmosphere of the little planet like sparks from a great grindstone. It *was* hell and no mistake. It proved momentarily disastrous to the attacking forces. The squeeze brought the great fleet into range of all surface mortars. Great ships were being puffed and whisked into nothingness at a most alarming rate. Betty trembled visibly in contemplation of the frightful loss of life.

Dr. Hazzard grasped just the tips of her fingers and applied a consoling pressure. "It cannot last long," he comforted. "We have destroyed all their fuel supplies. It is their only ammunition. Their lights must soon go out!"

"God grant it," breathed Betty in fervent prayer.

The great ships were now fighting desperately—diabolically within a few hundred feet of the surface.

CHAPTER XI

The Landing

THE resistance offered by the surface forces was still stubborn and terrific. Every form of surface weapon that had weathered the frightful attack from the skies was brought into play in one final desperate effort to prevent the landing of the forces of the triplanetary invaders.

The anaconda squeeze of the triumvirate, however, was of such titanic force, that the years spent by Quantok in preparation for just such an attack proved to be wasted years indeed. Right it appeared was again to prevail over the cruel and frightful forces of evil. Despite a veritable inferno of slashing, sputtering destruction rays from the surface, the invading ships soon began to bump the ground on the once invisible planet of dread.

One by one they squeezed their way to the surface, bumping in gentle regular and rhythmical array. At the radioed command of Admirals Hazzard and Kane they formed a hollow protected line of march or lane to the great palace of rose quartz. The palace now shimmered in the light of the cold illumination from the artificial stars of this new-found planet—until now following its

orbit unknown, a thing of mystery—a stranger in the family of celestial bodies.

Other craft from the tri-planetary forces were ordered to surround the radio tower in a wall to protect the landing forces. This was possible because of a great plaza or open parked circle which extended in symmetrical landscape for some three-quarters of a mile in all directions from the administration buildings.

Kane and Betty in a breath caught the beauty—the magnificence and architectural grandeur of this new and strange planet. In their breasts welled a dual and deep resentment against the dastardly Quantok, whose great cruelty and greed had turned this celestial sphere into a planet of horror—a visible and material hell among worlds.

Forces of Earth, Mars and Venus began pouring out of the great spaceships ready for the advance towards the tower, the palace and the Administration buildings—these were the immediate objectives of the landing forces.

The advance was not to prove easy. The invaders were met by madly fighting forces of the enslaved souls they had come to save. The Martian renegades, headed by the diabolical Quantok and his slaves, the Dagnarns and Dagnans, began using every force at their command to repel the advance. It was clear that the renegade Martian leaders desired to protect the tower at all costs and prevent Admirals Kane and Hazzard from broadcasting the real and kindly nature of the invasion.

The renegade Martians and the graceful natives of the planet met the advance with rayguns, but the fighting methods of the dogmen were a sickening revelation.

Admirals Hazzard and Kane, at the head of the forces pressing forward toward the great tower, beheld a great dogman fall upon a giant invading Martian. The dogman pinioned the Martian's arms and legs to the ground with four great hand-like claws. Then the dog jaws opened and closed clamp-like on the throat of the Martian. There was a lurch and a jerk of a shaggy doglike head and the Martian's throat was torn open with sabre tusks.

The sight was ghastly, but neither the man nor the girl turned away. It was war!

The advance pressed on over bodies left torn and maimed by the snarling, yelping dogmen, all around were little mounds of dust and ashes that had been human forms before the blasting needles of rayguns had found their marks.

The guard at the tower was the pick of all Dagnarth. The fighting there was furious—hellish. Both sexes engaged in this frightful melee. Each man picked his man and each woman her woman for deadly hand-to-throat combat.

Kane and Betty were battling shoulder to shoulder towards the tower entrance, where the elevators to the sending room would carry them aloft. Farnald and Yarth were at their heels.

A Dagnan sprang at Admiral Kane . . . his jaws were distended and his tusks bared. The earthman met the attack with a fine sparkling needle of light from a raygun and the poor, doglike, half-human form puffed into nothingness.

The advance went on. Betty and Kane with the ever faithful Farnald and Yarth pressed forward. Finally they made the tower and fought their way up to the sending room. Kane was forced to puff out the lives of a dozen

faithful guards and operators who held the elevator doors and mechanism against the invaders. There was no time to try to explain to these poor men that the very soul of the planet depended on the success of the invaders.

Kane with Betty close at hand grasped the universal switch which opened all radio receiving sets on the planet. Yarth took the air and with an eloquence born of the first hope to spring into his breast in a decade voiced his message of glad tidings.

The people were quick to get the message and to understand that they had been duped by Quantok and made to resist their friends in devilish conflict. Runners were sent into the ranks of the Dagnarns and Dagnans calling on them to blast their commanders dead and to lay down their arms.

THE war was beginning to subside in all quarters save at the very gates of the palace, where Quantok was making a last stand with a concentrated force of renegade Martians and poor, misguided, hypnotized, but nevertheless powerful dogmen.

To this point of hellish conflict rushed Kane and Betty. Following close at their heels were the ever faithful Farnald and Yarth. They were jostled by milling throngs among which hundreds were already beginning to throw away their rayguns.

An instant later they were in the thick of the fighting at the palace portals. Wildly battling forces surged around them. Kane stabbed to the right and left with deadly rayguns held in either hand.

Suddenly his eyes beheld the giant form of Quantok. The fiendish Martian stood in arrogant smugness, a hellish smirk on his visage, giving commands. Kane leaped for the fiend! They grappled!

The earthman was no match in real brute strength for the giant. Quantok seized the Admiral in a great bear-hug, pinning Kane's arms to his body. Slowly the giant Martian beat the form of the earthman backwards with the idea of snapping his spine.

Betty was about to spring to the side of her lover when she was engaged by a hideous mongrel hag of a dogwoman. The hag was snarling forward toward Betty with her jaws wide open, her fangs bared. She was a sight to strike terror to the bravest heart. Betty ordinarily might have turned, sickened by the sight. But this was war and Betty a warrior. Betty turned the needle of light of her raygun on the monster and puffed out the hybrid life.

Then Betty sprang to the aid of the man she loved. She reached his side and pressed a tube to the heart of Quantok at the instant when it seemed that the backbone of Kane must surely snap. A click as the button of Betty's raygun found contact and Quantok's hold on Kane loosened and he sank to the ground. Betty had been careful only to paralyze Quantok. She had no idea of killing him. It was her will that he should live to be executed legally as a penalty for outraging all the laws of the Interplanetary League of Nations.

Seeing their leader fall prone, the other fighters of the Quantok forces began to fall back, the dogmen snarling and the Martians and natives muttering in surprised wonderment.

The fighting all along the line had resolved into separated individual tussles. These died out, one by one, like embers.

The war was over, but Dr. Hazzard, like the wizard he was, still held a rabbit in his high hat of destiny.

When Betty and her lover mounted the steps of the great palace they found Dr. Hazzard sitting on the top of the flight awaiting them. He had brought a cobpipe from some remote hide-away in his jacket, and was blowing earthly clouds into a new but friendly sky.

"We'll talk to His Majesty, my children," he said, "and I can tell you now that you will be surprised." With this he blew a great gust of mellow smoke skywards and crossed his legs in an attitude of comfort and peace.

Farnald and Yarth had withdrawn to a discreet distance and were waiting command of their new-found friends.

"Not just yet," interposed the admiral, "I am returning with Betty to the Tower. There is a message I would broadcast to all the people. Then I will return here and we will take up the matters of interplanetary adjustment with the king."

"Have it your own way," said Dr. Hazzard, as he lolled back comfortably. So Betty, Kane, and Yarth made their way through the milling but now friendly crowds to the great tower shimmering in majestic beauty against an azure sky.

The elevators were not manned, but Kane had no trouble running a cage to the top and he stepped into the broadcast room with Betty at his heels.

He threw the great switch and briefly, with Yarth acting as interpreter, he outlined on the air the purposes and accomplishments of the invasion. He called upon all the people to seek the protection and seclusion of their homes and to stand by and await further news and instructions to follow a conference of the friendly invaders with His Majesty, the King. Then Kane dismissed Yarth and the lovers were alone at last.

When he turned to Betty he found her gazing out over the city from the great windows of the tower.

He moved slowly to her side. It was their first opportunity to view their newly discovered land. The beauty of the town is difficult to describe. The administration buildings of rose quartz occupied the center of the great plaza, as has been described. Flowers of brilliant hue were revealed in the far corners of the park in spots that had escaped being trampled over during the battle.

Beyond the plaza streets were arranged in circles extending out to the limits of the city. These circular streets were intersected by straight cross streets cutting the circles like spokes in a wheel. Monorail car lines, hung on single supports like bridge-lamps, were doing a landoffice business, as the people returned to their homes.

Other people evidently connected with the administration were seen to be converging in orderly array on all sides of the great plaza.

Kane moved close to Betty and took her hand.

"You are a brave girl," he said, "and you have been through a great deal. I hope you have not suffered too keenly."

"I have known not the slightest anxiety except for your safety," she said, and her warm, soft shoulder brushed his own.

In an instant he had her in his arms and was crushing her to him. She yielded with a tremor of intense bliss and raised her lips to his.

"This, then, is my reward," he murmured.

"And your victory," she added, "the surrender is complete and unconditional."

After a brief heaven of this sort Betty said, "Come, we must return to the palace. Daddy will be waiting for us."

CHAPTER XII

The Surprise—Conclusion

THE lovers found Dr. Hazzard awaiting them still seated on the top step of the great palace flight. He had drawn a great crowd and was attracting no end of attention. He was visibly a little impatient.

"The King has requested our presence in the throne room," he said, "so you youngsters had better step on the gas."

"Hitting on all eight," responded Kane with a grin and the trio marched into the great palace flanked by a royal escort, sent by His Majesty to attend them.

Ornate and magnificent are the two words to describe the great palace interior and must suffice. Within the palace order had grown quickly out of wild excitement. Within the throne room the array of courtiers was as formal and as majestic as though the nation had known no strife.

The visitors from the distant planet, Earth, advanced slowly. The King noted Betty and Kane and seated them at his right and left. An interpreter was at hand and explanations and expressions of gratitude and understanding were in order.

Dr. Hazzard, a little fagged, threw himself down on the lower step at the base of the throne. There he awaited patiently for a lull in the conversation of the King with the young people. He was still smoking his cobpipe and still wearing his battered fedora. These were his uniform and his equipment. Royalty spelled nothing in his studious, laborious life of service. His battered hat was his own crown. In meeting the King he was meeting a peer, for he, too, was a king—a king of engineering—a king of all science.

Finally Dr. Hazzard arose. He removed his battered headgear and bowing to His Majesty asked permission to speak.

Briefly he told the story of the tragedy that had brought Betty, as an unborn baby, to earth. The King sat aghast.

"Early in the war," he concluded, "I recognized your type of spaceship as being the same that brought Betty to our world. She is from this planet. Will you solve the mystery?" he pleaded simply, addressing the King and drawing his foster daughter into his arms.

The King, his eyes moist, stepped from the throne, while a great hush fell over the assembled throng. The King advanced to where Betty was standing in the loving and protecting arms of her foster-father. To the surprise of all His Majesty gathered the doctor and the girl into his own arms.

"She is my own beloved granddaughter, God be praised!" said the King.

Betty turned and kissed the aged Emperor. Tears glistened in her eyes. Admiral Kane stood and looked on wonderingly. Then the King explained:

"When Quantok began the campaign to enslave my realm," he said, "I regretted for the first time that we had held ourselves aloof from the other planets. There

was no place to which we could turn for aid. Finally my son, the Crown Prince Preeda, agreed to spirit a ship from under the watchful eyes of Quantok's guard and attempt the journey to Earth. He chose his own closest chum and schoolmate to accompany him—a youth of great courage. His bride of only two years insisted on going along, although she was in a delicate condition. They never returned and we never were given another chance to send out a ship for help. This adopted daughter of yours and this granddaughter of mine, you see, is the real queen of this realm. The throne is rightfully hers. The people will demand that she rule them.”

There was a great shout at this announcement. Dr. Hazzard was visibly pleased. A great light shone in his fading eyes. “I knew,” he murmured to himself, “that my Betty could be no less than a queen.”

In the great throng was one who could not take the news with rejoicing. Admiral Kane stood apart. His head was bowed, his eyes sorrowed. The announcement was tragedy to him. How could he, with the rank of an admiral, ever hope to marry a queen.

Betty was quick to realize the thoughts that were torturing her lover's poor, tired brain. She withdrew from the arms of her doting guardians and went to the side of her man. She took and squeezed his hand. Then she whispered to her newly found grandfather.

The aged King voiced a command and within a few moments the great throne room was all but emptied. Then turning to his friends he said:

“These children are tired. They are hungry, too; heart-hungry and hungry for food.” A male and a female attendant escorted Kane and Betty to a private room where a delightful meal was served and where they could dine alone. The room was one that looked out over the beautiful palace grounds where an army of laborers were now engaged in removing reminders of carnage.

Beyond was another unpleasant scene. Quantok and those of his renegades who had survived were being publicly executed.

Kane, who had looked out, pulled the blinds. Automatically the room was flooded with the soft glow of cold light bulbs, concealed in the ceiling.

He sat down discouraged. Betty, like a tired petulant child, crawled up in his lap and nestled.

“It's no use,” Kane half sobbed. “You will never be able to withstand the clamor of the people that you take the throne and rule here. I cannot marry a queen.”

“No? And why not?” pouted Betty giving him her lips. “You are my king. A queen is only half a queen without her king. I can confer on you any rank I please. In your own world you are a king among men. It is my royal order that you prepare yourself for a wedding at which I am to be the bride. Disobey me and I will throw you into my darkest dungeon and then I will move into the dungeon and live there with you,” she was

slowly brushing his curly hair back from his brow. “You will live in the light and I will return to my work and my people,” said Kane, but his voice carried no conviction.

“You will obey my royal command!” said Queen Betty and her voice carried the utmost conviction. Then she added with a little chuckle, “You may as well learn to obey me, for I am the sort of a girl who will be very, very exacting with a lover. You do not have to say or do a thing. I will fix everything up and I will do the explaining to my people. You are the savior of this planet. My people will be proud to have you for their king—almost as proud as I will be.”

The young lovers did not take leave of each other until an attendant came and assigned them to their individual, beautiful and luxurious sleeping quarters. As they kissed and parted they promised to meet at breakfast. Betty's foster-father and her grandfather, the King, intruded on her privacy only long enough to kiss her good night. She was a much beloved maiden, and one who might in time become dreadfully spoiled, were it not for her natural queenly bearing and composure.

Days followed days. The lovers were living in a heaven. Betty kept her promise to fix everything up. Dr. Hazzard suggested that Admiral Kane be decreed a “prince among men.” As such a prince his marriage was regarded as fitting among the simple, yet highly learned and artistic people of the realm.

And as the days followed days the planet of horror became a planet of peace, plenty, and unalloyed happiness for all peoples. Under a protectorate of Earth, arranged by radio through the good offices of Dr. Hazzard, the planet was assured of a future free from strife.

Within a few months the aged King died in the arms of his granddaughter. Betty took the throne with her king.

Dr. Hazzard had to return to earth but promised to visit Dagnarth as often as possible.

The young king and queen knew nothing but bliss. On earth Kane had political enemies. On this planet of peace he was idolized with his queen by the people. On Dagnarth he had only friends. He was free at last from petty earth jealousies.

On earth Kane is referred to as the astronaut—the space-gob—who became a king.

On Dagnarth he is called the Royal Lover.

From the turrets of the great rose quartz palace Kane and Betty can look out over a prosperous peaceful city. Beyond is a countryside teeming with productive activity. They delight in this view, standing side by side, hands clasped.

We leave them standing thus. Betty turns to Kane and their lips meet.

“My king,” thrills Betty.

“My queen,” responds the former Admiral Kane of the Earth Spacenvy.

THE END