

★ PLANET ★

★ STORIES ★

T. T. SCOTT, Pres. & Genl. Mgr.

MALCOLM REISS, Mgr. Ed.

W. SCOTT PEACOCK, Ed.

FOUR PLANET NOVELETS OF OTHER WORLDS

- WAR-GODS OF THE VOID** Henry Kuttner 2
 Ever Northward on Venus, Vanning strode—the mindless slave of the War-Gods' deadly virus.
- SPACE OASIS** Raymond Z. Gallun 30
 'Paradise Asteroid' it was called—but Norman Haynes meant it to be a spaceway's Hell.
- VAMPIRE QUEEN** Thornton Ayre 52
 Patrolman Curt Stanley trailed the Queen of the Starways into a space-trap of no-escape.
- STELLAR SHOWBOAT** Malcolm Jameson 78
 Behind the curtains of the Showboat of Space, Death waited for its cosmic entrance cue.

A WEIRD OUTSTANDING PLANET NOVEL

- CITY OF THE LIVING FLAME** . . . Henry Hasse 92
 It was flame from outer space, and it was alive. Unshackled, it would bring doom to all mankind—and Jim Landor had just slain its keeper.

THREE PLANET SHORT STORIES

- QUEST OF THIG** Basil Wells 23
 Man's emotions are sometimes more deadly than terrible weapons.
- THE THOUGHT-MEN OF MERCURY** R. R. Winterbotham 44
 To plan escape, the prisoners had to think—and their captors could read minds.
- PRISON PLANET** Bob Tucker 69
 'Rat' was a criminal—yet he lived by a code that the Ancient Gods might honor.

P. S.'s DEPARTMENTS

- THE FEATURE FLASH** 51
 Meet Wilbur S. Peacock, whose Planet yarns you've met before.
- THE VIZIGRAPH** 118
 Kicks and kudos, bombs and bouquets from the paying customers.

Cover design by Leydenfrost

Fall Issue, 1942
 Volume 1, No. 12



20c per copy



THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE

PLANET STORIES: Published quarterly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 461 Eighth Ave., New York City. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1942, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. This issue dated August 1, 1942. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. For advertising rates address THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. Printed in U. S. A.

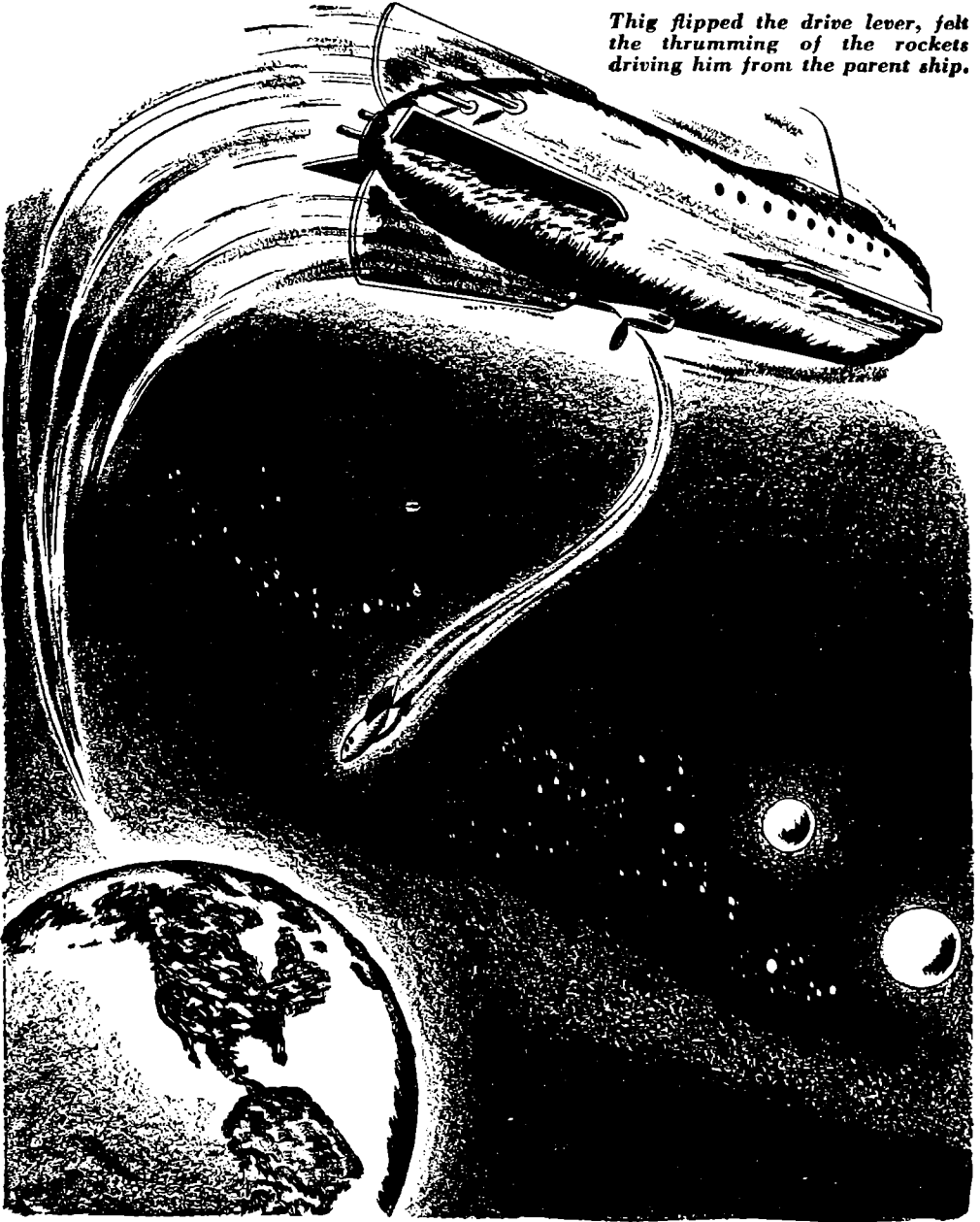
QUEST OF THIG

By **BASIL WELLS**

Thig of Ortha was the vanguard of the conquering "HORDE." He had blasted across trackless space to subdue a defenseless world—only to meet on Earth emotions that were more deadly than weapons.

Illustrated by Hoskins

Thig flipped the drive lever, felt the thrumming of the rockets driving him from the parent ship.



THIG carefully smoothed the dark sand and seaweed of the lonely beach over the metal lid of the flexible ringed tunnel that linked the grubby ship

from another planet with the upper air. He looked out across the heaving waters of the Sound toward Connecticut. He stared appraisingly around at the luxuriant

green growth of foliage further inland; and started toward the little stretch of trees and brush, walking carefully because of the lesser gravitation.

This was shorter than the average Earthman—although on Ortha he was well above the average in height—but his body was thick and powerfully muscled. His skull was well-shaped and large; his features were regular, perhaps a trifle oversize, and his hair and eyes were a curiously matching blend of reddish brown. Oddest of all, he wore no garments, other than the necessary belt and straps to support his rod-like weapon of white metal and his pouches for food and specimens.

The Orthan entered the narrow strip of trees and crossed to the little-used highway on the other side. Here he patiently sat down to wait for an Earthman or an Earthwoman to pass. His task now was to bring a native, intact if possible, back to the carefully buried space cruiser where his two fellows and himself would drain the creature's mentality of all its knowledge. In this way they could learn whether a planet was suited for colonization by later swarms of Orthans.

Already they had charted over a hundred celestial bodies but of them all only three had proven worthy of consideration. This latest planet, however, 72-P-3 on the chart, appeared to be an ideal world in every respect. Sunlight, plenty of water and a dense atmospheric envelope made of 72-P-3 a paradise among planets.

The explorer from another world crouched into the concealment of a leafy shrub. A creature was approaching. Its squat body was covered with baggy strips of bluish cloth and it carried a jointed rod of metal and wood in its paw. It walked upright as did the men of Ortha.

Thig's cold eyes opened a trifle wider as he stared into the thing's stupid face. It was as though he was looking into a bit of polished metal at the reflection of himself!

The Earthman was opposite now and he must waste no more precious time. The mighty muscles of the Orthan sent him hurtling across the intervening space in two prodigious bounds, and his hands clamped across the mouth and neck of the stranger. . . .

LEWIS TERRY was going fishing. For a week the typewriter mill that had ground out a thousand assorted yarns of the untamed West and the frigid desolation of the Northwoods had been silent. Lewis wondered if he was going stale. He had sat every day for eight hours in front of that shiny-buttoned bane of the typist, but there were no results. Feebly he had punched a key two days ago and a \$ sign had appeared. He hadn't dared touch the machine since.

For Mr. Terry, that hard-hitting writer of two-gun action, had never been further west of Long Island than Elizabeth, and he had promised his wife, Ellen, that he would take the three children and herself on a trailer tour of the *West* that very summer. Since that promise, he could not write a word. Visions of whooping red-skinned Apaches and be-chapped outlaws raiding his little trailer home kept rolling up out of his subconscious. Yet he *had* to write at least three novelets and a fistful of short stories in the next two weeks to finance the great adventure—or the trip was off.

So Lewis left the weathered old cottage in the early dawn and headed for his tubby old boat at the landing in an attempt to work out a salable yarn. . . .

"Hey!" he shouted as a naked man sprang out of the bushes beside the road. "What's the trouble?"

Then he had no time for further speech, the massive arms of the stranger had wound around him and two hamlike hands shut off his speech and his wind. He fought futilely against trained muscles. The hand clamping his throat relaxed for a moment and hacked along the side of his head. Blackness flooded the brain of Lewis, and he knew no more.

"**T**HERE it is," announced Thig, dropping the limp body of the captured Earthman to the metal deck-plates. "It is a male of the species that must have built the cities we saw as we landed."

"He resembles Thig," announced Kam. "But for the strange covering he wears he might be Thig."

"Thig will be this creature!" announced Torp. "With a psychic relay we will transfer the Earthman's memories and meager store of knowledge to the brain of Thig!

He can then go out and scout this world without arousing suspicion. While he is gone, I will take Kam and explore the two inner planets."

"You are the commander," said Thig. "But I wish this beast did not wear these clumsy sheathing upon his body. On Ortha we do not hamper the use of our limbs so."

"Do not question the word of your commander," growled Torp, swelling out his thick chest menacingly. "It is for the good of our people that you disguise yourself as an Earthman."

"For the good of the Horde," Thig intoned almost piously as he lifted Terry's body and headed for the laboratory.

Service for the Horde was all that the men of Ortha knew. Carefully cultured and brought to life in the laboratories of their Horde, they knew neither father nor mother. Affection and love were entirely lacking in their early training and later life. They were trained antlike from childhood that only the growth and power of the Horde were of any moment. Men and women alike toiled and died like unfeeling robots of flesh and bone for the Horde. The Horde was their religion, their love-life, their everything!

So it was that the bodies of the Earthman and the Orthan were strapped on two parallel tables of chill metal and the twin helmets, linked to one another by the intricacies of the psychic relay, put upon their heads.

For ten hours or more the droning hum of the relay sucked Terry's brain dry of knowledge. The shock upon the nervous system of the Earthman proved too violent and his heart faltered after a time and stopped completely. Twice, with subtle drugs they restored pseudo-life to his body and kept the electrical impulses throbbing from his tortured brain, but after the third suspension of life Thig removed his helmet.

"There is nothing more to learn," he informed his impassive comrades. "Now, let us get on with the plastic surgery that is required. My new body must return to its barbaric household before undue attention is aroused. And when I return I will take along some of the gleaming baubles we found on the red planet—these people value them highly."

An hour later, his scars and altered

cartilage already healed and painless, Thig again scraped sand over the entrance to the space ship and set out along the moonlit beach toward the nearest path running inland to his home.

Memory was laying the country bare about him, Terry's own childhood memories of this particular section of Long Island. Here was the place where Jake and Ted had helped him dig for the buried treasure that old 'Notch-ear' Beggs had told them so exactly about. Remembrance of that episode gave Thig an idea about the little lump of jewels in his pocket. He had found them in a chest along the beach!

He was coming up on the porch now and at the sound of his foot on the sagging boards the screen door burst open and three little Earth-creatures were hugging at his legs. An odd sensation, that his acquired memories labeled as pleasure, sent a warm glow upward from around his heart.

Then he saw the slender red-haired shape of a woman, the mate of the dead man he knew, and confusion struck his well-trained brain. Men had no mates on Ortha, sex had been overthrown with all the other primitive impulses of barbarism; so he was incapable of understanding the emotions that swept through his acquired memory.

Unsteadily he took her in his arms and felt her warm lips pressed, trembling, against his own. That same hot wave of pulsing blood choked achingly up into his throat.

"Lew, dear," Ellen was asking, "where have you been all day? I called up at the landing but you were not there. I wanted to let you know that Saddlebag Publications sent a check for \$50 for "Reversed Revolvers" and three other editors asked for shorts soon."

"**S**HOULDA got a hundred bucks for that yarn," grunted Thig, and gasped.

For the moment he had been Lewis Terry and not Thig! So thoroughly had he acquired the knowledge of Terry that he found himself unconsciously adopting the thinking and mannerism of the other. All the better this way, he realized—more natural.

"Sorry I was late," he said, digging

into his pocket for the glittering baubles," but I was poking around on the beach where we used to hunt treasure and I found an old chest. Inside it I found nothing but a handful of these."

He flashed the jewels in front of Ellen's startled eyes and she clung, unbelieving, to his arm.

"Why, Lew," she gasped, "they're worth a fortune! We can buy that new trailer now and have a rebuilt motor in the car. We can go west right away. . . . Hollywood, the Grand Canyon, cowboys!"

"Uh huh," agreed the pseudo Lewis, memories of the ferocious savages and gunmen of his stories rendering him acutely unhappy. Sincerely he hoped that the west had reformed.

"I saved some kraut and weiners," Ellen said. "Get washed up while I'm warming them up. Kids ate all the bread so I had to borrow some from the Eskoes. Want coffee, too?"

"Mmmmmm," came from the depths of the chipped white wash-basin.

"HOME again," whispered Ellen as she stood beside Thig twelve weeks later and gazed tearfully at the weathered little gray house. She knelt beside the front stoop and reached for the key hidden beneath it.

"The west was wonderful; tremendous, vast and beautiful," she went on as they climbed the steps, "but nowhere was there any place as beautiful as our own little strip of sky and water."

Thig sank into a dusty old swing that hung on creaking chains from the exposed rafters of the porch roof. He looked down at the dusty gray car and the bulbous silvery bulk of the trailer that had been their living quarters for almost three months. Strange thoughts were afloat in the chaos of his cool Orthan brain.

Tonight or tomorrow night at the latest he must contact his two fellows and report that Earth was a planetary paradise. No other world, including Ortha, was so well-favored and rich. An expeditionary force to wipe the grotesque civilizations of Earth out of existence would, of course, be necessary before the first units of new Hordes could be landed. And there Thig balked. Why must they destroy these people, imperfect though their civilization

might be, to make room for the Hordes?

Thig tried to tell himself that it was the transmitted thoughts of the dead Earthman that made him feel so, but he was not too sure. For three months he had lived with people who loved, hated, wept and sacrificed for reasons that he had never known existed. He had learned the heady glory of thinking for himself and making his own decisions. He had experienced the primitive joy of matching his wits and tongue against the wits of other unpredictable human beings. There was no abrupt division of men and women into definite classes of endeavor. A laborer thought the same thoughts that a governor might think. Uncertainty added zest to every day's life.

The Orthan had come to question the sole devotion of the individual to the Horde to the exclusion of all other interests. What, he wondered, would one new world—or a hundred—populated by the Hordes add to the progress of humanity? For a hundred thousand years the Orthan civilization had remained static, its energies directed into certain well-defined channels. They were mindless bees maintaining their vast mechanical hives.

There was that moment on the brink of the Grand Canyon when Ellen had caught his arm breathlessly at all the beauty spread away there beneath them. There were mornings in the desert when the sun painted in lurid red the peaks above the harsh black-and-whites of the sagebrush and cactus slopes. There was the little boy, his body burning with fever, who nestled trustingly against his tense man's body and slept—the son of Ellen and the man he had destroyed.

Thig groaned. He was a weakling to let sentimentality so get the better of his judgment. He would go now to the space ship and urge them to blast off for Ortha. He sprang off the porch and strode away down the road toward the beach.

The children ran to him; wanted to go along. He sent them away harshly but they smiled and waved their brown little hands. Ellen came to the door and called after him.

"Hurry home, dear," she said. "I'll have a bite ready in about an hour."

He dared not say anything, for his voice would have broken and she would have

known something was wrong. She was a very wise sort of person when something was troubling him. He waved his stubby paw of a hand to show that he had heard, and blindly hurried toward the Sound.

Oddly enough, as he hurried away along the narrow path through the autumn woods, his mind busied itself with a new epic of the west that lived no longer. He mentally titled it: "Rustlers' Riot" and blocked in the outlines of his plot. One section of his brain was that of the careless author of gunslinging yarns, a section that seemed to be sapping the life from his own brain. He knew that the story would never be written, but he toyed with the idea.

So far had Thig the emotionless, robot-being from Ortha drifted from the unquestioning worship of the Horde!

"YOU have done well," announced Torp when Thig had completed his report on the resources and temperatures of various sections of Terra. "We now have located three worlds fit for colonization and so we will return to Ortha at once.

"I will recommend the conquest of this planet, 72-P-3 at once and the complete destruction of all biped life upon it. The mental aberrations of the barbaric natives might lead to endless complications if they were permitted to exist outside our ordered way of life. I imagine that three circuits of the planet about its primary should prove sufficient for the purposes of complete liquidation."

"But why," asked Thig slowly, "could we not disarm all the natives and exile them on one of the less desirable continents, Antarctica for example or Siberia? They are primitive humans even as our race was once a race of primitives. It is not our duty to help to attain our own degree of knowledge and comfort?"

"Only the good of the Horde matters!" shouted Torp angrily. "Shall a race of feeble-witted beasts, such as these Earthmen, stand in the way of a superior race? We want their world, and so we will take it. The Law of the Horde states that all the universe is ours for the taking."

"Let us get back to Ortha at once, then," gritted out Thig savagely. "Never again do I wish to set foot upon the soil of this mad planet. There are forces at work upon

Earth that we of Ortha have long forgotten."

"Check the blood of Thig for disease, Kam," ordered Torp shortly. "His words are highly irrational. Some form of fever perhaps native to this world. While you examine him I will blast off for Ortha."

Thig followed Kam into the tiny laboratory and found a seat beside the squat scientist's desk. His eyes roamed over the familiar instruments and gauges, each in its own precise position in the cases along the walls. His gaze lingered longest on the stubby black ugliness of a decomposition blaster in its rack close to the deck. A blast of the invisible radiations from that weapon's hot throat and flesh or vegetable fiber rotted into flaky ashes.

The ship trembled beneath their feet; it tore free from the feeble clutch of the sand about it, and they were rocketing skyward. Thig's broad fingers bit deep into the unyielding metal of his chair. Suddenly he knew that he must go back to Earth, back to Ellen and the children of the man he had helped destroy. He loved Ellen, and nothing must stand between them! The Hordes of Ortha must find some other world, an empty world—this planet was not for them.

"Turn back!" he cried wildly. "I must go back to Earth. There is a woman there, helpless and alone, who needs me! The Horde does not need this planet."

Kam eyed him coldly and lifted a shining hypodermic syringe from its case. He approached Thig warily, aware that disease often made a maniac of the finest members of the Horde.

"No human being is more important than the Horde," he stated baldly. "This woman of whom you speak is merely one unit of the millions we must eliminate for the good of the Horde."

Then it was that Thig went berserk. His fists slashed into the thick jaw of the scientist and his fingers ripped at the hard cords overlying the Orthans' vital throat tubes. His fingers and thumb gouged deep into Kam's startled throat and choked off any cry for assistance before it could be uttered.

Kam's hand swept down to the holster swung from his intricate harness and dragged his blaster from it. Thig's other hand clamped over his and for long mo-

ments they swayed there, locked together in silent deadly struggle. The fate of a world hung in the balance as Kam's other hand fought against that lone arm of Thig.

THE scales swung in favor of Kam. Slowly the flaring snout of his weapon tilted upward until it reached the level of Thig's waist. Thig suddenly released his grip and dragged his enemy toward him. A sudden reversal of pressure on Kam's gun hand sent the weapon swivelling about full upon its owner's thick torso. Thig's fingers pressed down upon Kam's button finger, down upon the stud set into the grip of the decomposition blaster, and Kam's muscles turned to water. He shrieked.

Before Thig's eyes half of his comrade's body sloughed away into foul corruption that swiftly gave way to hardened blobs of dessicated matter. Horror for what he had done—that he had slain one of his own Horde—made his limbs move woodenly. All of his thoughts were dulled for the moment. Painfully slow, he turned his body around toward the control blister, turned around on leaden feet, to look full into the narrowed icy eyes of his commander.

He saw the heavy barrel of the blaster slashing down against his skull but he could not swing a fraction of an inch out of the way. His body seemed paralyzed. This was the end, he thought as he waited stupidly for the blow to fall, the end for Ellen and the kids and all the struggling races of Earth. He would never write another cowboy yarn—they would all be dead anyhow soon.

Then a thunderclap exploded against his head and he dropped endlessly toward the deck. Blows rained against his skull. He wondered if Torp would ever cease to hammer at him and turn the deadly ray of the weapon upon him. Blood throbbled and pounded with every blow. . . .

BAM, Bam, Bam, the blood pounded in his ears. Like repeated blows of a hammer they shook his booming head. No longer was Torp above him. He was in the corner of the laboratory, a crumpled blood-smearred heap of bruised flesh and bone. He was unfettered and the blood was caked upon his skull and in his matted hair. Torp must have thought he had

killed him with those savage blows upon the head.

Even Torp, thought Thig ruefully, gave way to the primitive rage of his ancestors at times; but to that very bit of unconscious atavism he now owed his life. A cool-headed robot of an Orthan would have efficiently used the blaster to destroy any possibility of remaining life in his unconscious body.

Thig rolled slowly over so that his eye found the door into the control room. Torp would be coming back again to dispose of their bodies through the refuse lock. Already the body of Kam was gone. He wondered why he had been left until last. Perhaps Torp wished to take cultures of his blood and tissues to determine whether a disease was responsible for his sudden madness.

The cases of fragile instruments were just above his head. Association of memories brought him the flash of the heavy blaster in its rack beneath them. His hand went up and felt the welcome hardness of the weapon. He tugged it free.

In a moment he was on his knees crawling across the plates of the deck toward the door. Halfway across the floor he collapsed on his face, the metal of the gun making a harsh clang. He heard the feet of Torp scuffle out of silence and a choked cry in the man's throat squalled out into a senseless whinny.

Thig raised himself up on a quivering elbow and slid the black length of the blaster in front of him. His eyes sought the doorway and stared full into the glaring vacant orbs of his commander. Torp leaned there watching him, his breath gurgling brokenly through his deep-bitten lips. The clawing marks of nails, fingernails, furrowed his face and chest. He was a madman!

The deadly attack of Thig; his own violent avenging of Kam's death, and now the apparent return of the man he had killed come to life had all served to jolt his rigidly trained brain from its accustomed groove. The shock had been too much for the established thought-processes of the Orthan.

So Thig shot him where he stood, mercifully, before that vacant mad stare set him, too, to gibbering and shrieking. Then he stepped over the skeleton-thing

that had been Torp, using the new strength that victory had given him to drive him along.

He had saved a world's civilization from extinction! The thought sobered him; yet, somehow, he was pleased that he had done so. After all, it had been the Earthwoman and the children he had been thinking of while he battled Kam, a selfish desire to protect them all.

He went to the desk where Torp had been writing in the ship's log and read the last few nervously scrawled lines:

Planet 72-P-3 unfit for colonization. Some pernicious disease that strikes at the brain centers and causes violent insanity is existent there. Thig, just returned from a survey of the planet, went mad and destroyed Kam. In turn I was forced to slay him. But it is not ended. Already I feel the insidious virus of. . . .

And there his writing ended abruptly.

Thig nodded. That would do it. He set the automatic pilot for the planet Ortha. Unless a rogue asteroid or a comet crossed the ship's path she would return safely to Ortha with that mute warning of danger on 72-P-3. The body of Torp would help to confirm his final message.

Then Thig crossed the cabin to the auxiliary life boat there, one of a half-dozen space ships in miniature nested within the great ship's hull, and cut free from the mother vessel.

He flipped the drive lever, felt the thrumming of the rockets driving him from the parent ship. The sensation of free flight against his new body was strangely exhilarating and heady. It was the newest of the emotions he had experienced on Earth since that day, so many months before, when he had felt the warmth of Ellen's lips tight against his.

He swung about to the port, watched the flaming drive-rockets of the great exploratory ship hurl it toward far-away Ortha, and there was no regret in his mind that he was not returning to the planet of his first existence.

He thought of the dull greys and blacks of his planet, of the monotonous routine of existence that had once been his—and his heart thrilled to the memories of the starry nights and perfect exciting days he had spent on his three month trip over Earth.

He made a brief salute to the existence he had known, turned with a tiny sigh, and his fingers made brief adjustments in the controls. The rocket-thrum deepened, and the thin whistle of tenuous air clutching the ship echoed through the hull-plates.

He thought of many things in those few moments. He watched the roundness of Earth flatten out, then take on the cup-like illusion that all planets had for an incoming ship. He reduced the drive of his rockets to a mere whisper, striving to control the impatience that crowded his mind.

He shivered suddenly, remembering his utter callousness the first time he had sent a space ship whipping down toward the hills and valleys below. And there was a sickness within him when he fully realized that, despite his acquired memory and traits, he was an alien from outer space.

He fingered the tiny scars that had completely obliterated the slight differences in his appearance from an Earthman's, and his fingers trembled a bit, as he bent and stared through the vision port. He said a brief prayer in his heart to a God whose presence he now felt very deeply. There were tears in the depths of his eyes, then, and memories were hot, bitter pains.

EARTH was not far below him. As he let gravity suck him earthward, he heaved a gasp of relief. He was no longer Thig, a creature of a Horde's creation, but Lewis Terry, writer of lurid gun-smoking tales of the West. He must remember that always. He had destroyed the real Terry and now, for the rest of his life, he must make up to the dead man's family.

The knowledge that Ellen's love was not really meant for him would be a knife twisting in his heart but for her sake he must endure it. Her dreams and happiness must never be shattered.

The bulge of Earth was flattening out now and he could see the outlines of Long Island in the growing twilight.

A new plot was growing in the brain of Lewis Terry, a yarn about a cowboy suddenly transported to another world. He smiled ironically. He had seen those other worlds. Perhaps some day he would write about them. . . .

He was Lewis Terry! He must remember that!