

SUPER-SCIENCE

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SPECIMENS

by GEORGE H. SMITH

The trip to Venus was made in a completely automatic spaceship. There were human beings on board but they had nothing to do. — The aliens had noticed this fact

GENERAL Oxford so far forgot himself as to grab the arm of the Secretary of Space as the first high whine of braking rockets broke through the quiet of the New Mexico afternoon.

"She's right on time, sir! The *Mayflower* is coming back from Venus right on time!"

"Yes, Oxford. I can hear as well as you can," The Secretary said somewhat testily for enthusiasm was not a trait he admired. He preferred solid, sensible, conservative officers in his department, officers whose way of looking at life matched his. He had no use for young fools like Lieutenant Bates who was on this first Venus ship.

"Look! There she is, sir... there she is!" Oxford pointed

upward to where a thin stream of rocket exhaust could be seen faintly against the cloudless sky. "She's coming in straight as a die."

"Small wonder," said the Secretary drily, "since the automatics are faultless."

"Ah yes... I had forgotten," Oxford sighed. "It's not like the old days when Jim Christian and I set the old *Aries* down on Mars."

"No, it isn't and we can thank the scientists for it."

"Yes, sir. Those four boys didn't have to do anything except read a good book and get ready to greet the Venusians, if any. That whole ship is the last word in complete robot operation."

"That's right, general. Even my not-too-bright son was able

to wangle a place on that crew," Secretary Bates said trying to hide the warmth that crept into his voice as he spoke of his son.

With an ear-shattering roar, the *Mayflower* dropped down on its fins with a braking jet of flame to ease the landing.

"Perfect! Perfect," the general breathed.

"Of course it was perfect," the Secretary snapped as he led the way toward the ship, but his hurried pace betrayed his anxiousness to see his son.

"One side...one side for Secretary Bates," the General said as they pushed through the crowd of reporters and ground personnel. "Look, sir! The hatch is opening."

The round airlock halfway up the side of the ship had swung open to the accompaniment of cheers from the crowd. A ladder glided automatically into place and everyone waited expectantly. But no one came down it.

"Do you suppose that something is wrong, sir?" Oxford asked the Secretary.

"There's only one way to find out," Bates said, his face

white. "Let's go on board."

The two of them, followed by several other officers, climbed up the ladder and into the interior of the ship. A brief inspection showed that it was empty. Not one of the four crew members was on board. In the main cabin they found a cage containing six small, two-legged creatures who were vaguely humanoid but obviously lacking in intelligence.

"What do you suppose it means, sir?" Oxford asked and as though triggered by the sound, the thoughts came into their minds.

"GREETINGS, PEOPLE OF EARTH. THIS IS A MIND TABLE PLACED IN YOUR SHIP BY THE PEOPLE OF VENUS. IT SEEMS TO BE SPEAKING YOUR LANGUAGE, BECAUSE MENTAL IMAGES ARE UNIVERSAL. WE SALUTE YOU AS THE FIRST TO CONQUER THE SPACE BETWEEN OUR TWO PLANETS. WE ARE VERY FAR ADVANCED IN MOST THINGS BUT HAVE BEEN DELAYED IN THIS BE-

CAUSE OF THE CLOUDS THAT SURROUND OUR PLANET. WITH THE KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM YOUR SHIP WE HOPE TO SOON BE ABLE TO RETURN YOUR VISIT.

WE WERE AT FIRST PUZZLED BY THE FOUR CREATURES WE FOUND IN THE SHIP, FOR THEY WERE SUCH PRIMITIVE LIFE FORMS. WE COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE THE BUILDERS OF THE SHIP AND WE WERE PUZZLED UNTIL WE REALIZED THAT THEY WERE EXPERIMENTAL ANIMALS USED TO TEST THE EFFECTS OF SPACE FLIGHT ON LIFE.

WE WERE NOT SURE THIS WAS A CORRECT ASSUMPTION UNTIL WE DISCOVERED THAT THE SHIP WAS COMPLETELY AUTOMATIC. KNOWING THEN THAT WE WERE RIGHT, WE TOOK THE

LIBERTY OF TURNING THE CREATURES OVER TO OUR SCIENTISTS FOR VIVISECTION IN ORDER TO GAIN INFORMATION THAT WILL AID US IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF OUR SHIPS.

IN RETURN FOR THE ANIMALS WHICH WE USED, WE ARE PLACING A GROUP OF LABORATORY ANIMALS OF OUR OWN IN THE SHIP WHICH WE TRUST WILL BE OF SIMILAR USE TO YOU. WE THINK THAT WE HAVE MADE A FAIR EXCHANGE AND HOPE THAT YOU WILL AGREE. GOODBYE UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN. WE HOPE FOR GREAT THINGS BETWEEN OUR PLANETS."

The Secretary of Space covered his face with his hands. "Laboratory animals," he gasped. "Oh My God!"

THE END
