

SATURN

MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY

VOL. 1, No. 5

MARCH, 1950

CONTENTS

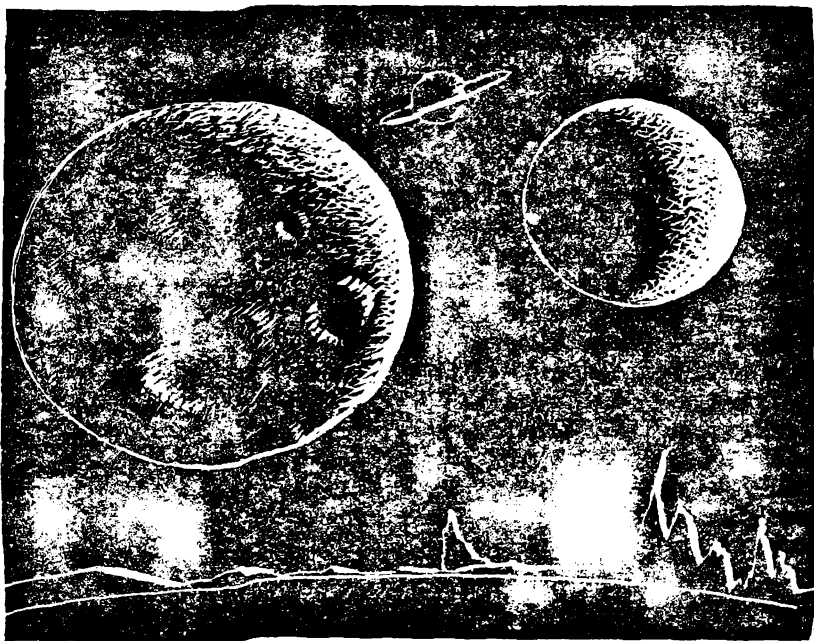
RED FLAG OVER THE MOON <i>by Romney Boyd</i>	4
THE ORZU PROBLEM <i>by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.</i>	12
THE SKITZ AND THE UNSKITZ <i>by Jefferson Higbe</i>	25
SPUTNIK SHOES <i>by Charles A. Stearns</i>	39
THE POWDER OF HYPERBOREA <i>by Clark Ashton Smith</i>	52
NEVER MARRY A VENERIAN <i>by Charles L. Fontenay</i>	63
REQUIEM FOR A SMALL PLANET <i>by Ray Cummings</i>	66
THE STARS ARE WAITING <i>by Marion Zimmer Bradley</i>	84
ALAREE <i>by Robert Silverberg</i>	95
SHAGGY DOG <i>by Charles E. Fritch</i>	109
<i>Editor and Publisher</i>	ROBERT C. SPROUL
<i>Art Director</i>	WILLIAM CLARK
<i>Editorial Consultant</i>	DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

SATURN, MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY is published bi-monthly by CANDAR PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., at 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office, 218 W. 43 St., New York 36, N. Y. Copyright 1950 by CANDAR PUBLISHING CO., INC. Entered as Second Class Matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Single copy 35c; Subscriptions: Yearly (6 issues): U. S. and possessions \$2.00; Canada \$2.25; Foreign \$2.50. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope. The publishers assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. The names of all characters used in these stories are fictitious; any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental. PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

SPUTNIK SHOES

by CHARLES A. STEARNS

He found a new way to play hookey — by taking a little stroll into outer space!



IT TOOK them twelve minutes to do in Willy Martin. That is an all-time record. Willy, who for several years had gone quietly about his business of cleaving the skulls of lovely young women with a

hatchet, as they slept, knew that death often comes easily, and must have been surprised that in his case it took so long.

By the time they finished with him, he was parboiled and basted to a turn, and no long-

er had the slightest interest in exposing the grey matter of slumbering females.

When he had cooled off enough to be approachable, the prison doctor came in, examined him, and pronounced him well done. The men came with a litter, unshackled him from the Chair, and bore him off in triumph.

He had lost, but with a flourish.

And, as was customary in that sovereign state, they removed Willy's scorched prison garments from him and clad him in a cheap, but neat, blue serge suit. They took off his heavy shoes, which, it is significant to note, were not of leather, but an obscure *ersatz* material which had carbonized and was as hard and crackly as glass when the thing was over.

Had anyone bothered to measure—which they did not—the electric potential of the shoes, they would have discovered a faint, but quite discernable magnetic field of curious properties building up in that strange material. It should have been dimagnetic, but it was not. It had subtly changed.

They put the shoes, with the clothing, in a cardboard box that had once carried canned

peaches, and replaced them with thin, patent-leather oxfords which would do for the state-sponsored funeral. Willy Martin, as someone remarked had extremely small, neat feet.

After being washed and shaven, the cadaver of Willy was taken to Potter's Field and interred with scant ceremony, and the malignant influence which that young man had cast upon a world he did not understand should have been gone forever.

Should have been.

PROFESSOR SACCHARINO, sere and disillusioned at fifty-two, sat like Siva the Destroyer with folded arms and idling brain, effecting effortlessly the apathetic silence, if not the respect, of his rabble brood.

He was a plump, gouty man, with receding hair and receding hopes. He was not, in particular, day dreaming, for all of the dreams of a specialized failure past middle age are dead, and he had once been a specialist. Once. But now there were only a one-room country school and forty grubby waifs between himself and starvation.

Having once been a practicing instructor of economics in

a famous and exclusive New England private school, he understood this full well, and loathed the vacuous faces before him as he had objectively loathed them for four years.

Once, Professor Saccharino was fond of telling himself, he had liked young people. In fact, it had been his excessive affinity for one of the older girl students at the New England school which had forced his banishment to this intellectual Siberia. In a manner of speaking, he had been banned in Boston, and had come west for his health.

It was late spring, and flies swarmed through the open, screenless windows. He swatted them angrily, but his urchins knew better than to try it. Bitterly enough, he supposed they had learned that he was a master in the old, heavy-handed tradition.

Actually, in these dull, endless hours, he would have looked with gratefulness upon an infringement of regulations, and today he was not disappointed.

He did not recognize the breach at once, but when the realization was borne upon him at last, and he saw who it was that had transgressed, he exulted quietly, and sat, observ-

ing the criminal from the corner of his eye, savoring his position.

It was the boy known, ironically enough, as Brainy Phelps. He had a large, useless head, a hideous complexion, and ears that were somewhat cylindrical. In considering this gargoye, whom he considered his personal nemesis, Professor Saccharino liked to remind himself that such Huck Finnish atavisms as Brainy Phelps were on their way out, evolutionwise. Like the vermiform appendix and the wisdom tooth, they could be considered as a nasty reminder of man's earthy origin.

The act was incredible enough. Brainy had simply unbuttoned his shirt, and was examining, with intent to incise with jackknife, a boil upon his stomach.

Nor was Professor Saccharino the only person who viewed this operation with interest. In the next seat sat Cassandra Watson, who, though still in the eighth grade, was almost fifteen years of age.

Cassandra was old for her age. All of the men who sat on the green benches in front of the general store as she came flouncing by agreed that

she was old for her age.

Cassandra liked males of all shapes, ages, and sizes. Brainy Phelps, ignorant of this fact, was engrossed in his pustulectomy. He was thirteen and had no interest in girls.

Cassandra leaned over and pinched him. It was strictly a playful pinch, but playful pinches have a habit of stinging.

"Quit that," said Brainy, in a low voice.

She did it again.

He lashed out with his bare foot. The foot was like rhinoceroshide, and the sturdy nail raked her shin, bringing a trickle of blood. Cassandra yowled.

It was at this time that the Assyrian came down, like a wolf on the fold.

BRAINY PHELPS was a young man inured to ordinary pain, and rather philosophical about the unfairness of boyhood, but when it was all over he felt faint.

He had expected his hind-quarters to burn incessantly, and to that end he had followed Professor Saccharino docilely into the cloakroom. This, in itself, should have aroused his suspicions, for the administration of justice usual-

ly took place before the eyes of the school, as a warning.

He was trustful, however, and the first inkling he had that all was not well, came with brutal swiftness, in the form of a fist in his mouth.

Afterward, as a critical veteran, he had to admit that it had been a pretty fair beating. Even his Old Man couldn't have done better. He was locked in the cloakroom, alone for the remainder of the afternoon with his seditious thoughts, and peace reigned outside his prison.

But peace was not in his soul. Professor Saccharinio had not laid a hand on Cassandra Watson. The beating might have been considered the divine right of kings and schoolmaster, but *that* was injustice.

The longer he thought about it, the madder he got. "Hell," he told himself, looking up at the small window. "I could get out of here if I wanted to."

Professor Saccharino's topcoat, the fine relic of better days, hung on a hanger against the wall. He spat upon it, and for a moment the coat was the object of all his resentment.

He backed away and favored it with a calculating look. Then he took out his jackknife and opened it. So often is crime

accomplished in a momentary passion and repented at leisure.

A dozen quick strokes and the die of his future was irretrievably cast forever. The coat hung in shreds.

In another moment, heart pounding, he had scaled the lunch pail racks, thrust a leg through the window, and dropped to the ground, where he availed himself of free flight across the field and into the brush.

BRAINY PHELPS had never owned more than one or two pairs of shoes in his life, there was nothing farther from his mind than footwear as he picked his way through the Dumps.

The Dumps were for the city of Topeka, which was some twelve miles distant, and they were a huge, strange and wonderful acreage.

Presently he trod upon a broken bottle, which pained him considerably and would have *penetrated* any ordinary foot, and he was hopping about, cussing the glass, when he discovered the shoes of Willy Martin.

They were of a dead, charcoal black, and curled slightly at the toes, and they had no

strings, so that he could step into them with ease and even shuffle around a little. The state had not given Willy Martin shoestrings for fear that he might cheat it of its pleasure.

The inner soles, touching the pads of his feet, made them tingle as when he used to walk on the dry ice that Aeolus Green, the grocer, threw out behind his store.

This did not frighten him. Instead of removing the shoes, as he should have done, he delved into his capacious pockets and brought out a ball of string. He unsnarled a few feet of it and sat down to lace the shoes securely upon his feet.

He got up and took a few wide-legged steps, admiring the shoes. They flopped a little, but they didn't fall off.

A raw, red gully stretched in front of him. Beyond lay the open meadow.

He had vaulted that gully a thousand times, but never as now. When he rose in the air, the shoes clicked together, exactly as a nail clicks to a magnet, and stuck! His feet were rudely jerked from under him. A mighty force swished him along through the grass and weeds. His shoulders and back bumped against the high places, but the feet remained a

good twelve inches above the ground, impelled by some strange, invisible undertow.

Brainy thought at first that some hidden cable had snarled him, but he soon saw that nothing was attached to his shoes.

He didn't cry out. It happened too swiftly. But his head, bumping the ground, and his bruised elbows, gave him food for hurried thought, and then as suddenly as it had begun, his heels were digging a furrow in the turf, and he came to rest.

He sat up. He was a hundred yards from where he had started, and he seemed to have run into a gently rising hillock.

He bent over and pried his feet loose from one another, with some effort, and observed them with stunned silence. He was not notably superstitious, but that he had discovered something wonderful—and perhaps terrible—he could not doubt.

He made as if to remove the shoes, then hesitated. The power seemed to accumulate only when the shoes were *together*, indicating that they somehow complemented each other. (His own reason was somewhat foggy, but that was the idea.) If he removed them, and they got together, he would never see

them again. Also, someone might take them away from him.

Brainy Phelps sighed, took a good, hard look at his feet, and stood up. He took a cautious step, then another. Nothing happened. He inched the shoes closer together. Still closer. They clicked together and he felt a kind of lateral strain upon the material.

Then, very lightly, he leaped. It was not more than a couple of inches that he leaped, but he was instantly scooting along on his stomach. His clawing hands caught a bush and hung on grimly until he could double up his legs and pry the shoes apart.

"Godlemighty!" he testified.

PRESENTLY Brainy Phelps found himself gazing, with foreboding, upon his own doorstep. He had arrived home with conscious effort, for he would rather have been almost anywhere else on earth. He knew his limitations, however, and figured, practically, that he might as well eat once more before running away, if he could get by with it.

He went in and the Old Man was lying, fully clothed, on the couch, snoring. He wore a green silk cowboy shirt and

tooled cowboy boots with red leather tops. The boots had cost thirty dollars. They were fine boots. An expensive, broad-brimmed white Stetson hung upon the corner of the chair.

The Old Man was really only a millworker, but he always dressed like a rodeo cowboy and it made Brainy real proud to see him walk down the street, even if he did have to walk a block behind. There were a couple of bottles in bed with the Old Man, and he smelled pretty high, so there wasn't any danger for a while of his waking up.

It was at such times that he was able to steal enough money out of the Old Man's pockets to buy food for them. He made good money, and seldom missed a dollar or two. Of course, when he did, it meant a good lambasting, but they had to eat.

Brainy found some beans and threw them in the pot along with yesterday's greens. Then he cut some long strips of hog jowl and added them to the concoction, which as anybody knows makes real eating. He could hardly wait, it made him so hungry. There was some cornbread that the widow Fisher, who had her

cap set for the Old Man, had sent over, and he put that in the oven to warm while the other cooked. Then he went out behind the woodshed and sat down on a log to think.

His thoughts were practical. "If a body could lock his arms about his knees, and lean forward in just the right position, he might be able to keep from bumping the ground." He had the ominous feeling that the strange force of the shoes continually accelerated them, and that they might have no top speed within the imagination of man. A body couldn't be too careful with a thing like this.

First he made certain that no one was in sight, and then he aimed himself at a little juniper bush, assumed a scientific position, and jumped. He soared along, just brushing the tops of the weeds, and it was a wonderful, exhilarating feeling. The juniper gently caught him.

His heart pounded all over again with the excitement of discovery. To tell the truth, he had had a notion that it was all a dream, what had happened back there at the Dumps.

He was preparing to take off again, but a car was roaring up the lane. He watched

it with fascination until he could recognize the driver. Then he ducked behind the shed.

Professor Saccharino got out of the car. He picked his way fastidiously through the mounds of tin cans and rubbish on the front lawn, and knocked on the front door. The mutilated coat was over his arm, and his round face was an implacable mask.

Maybe the Old Man wouldn't wake up. Maybe he would give up and go away.

But he didn't give up. He just kept knocking louder, until the Old Man, inside, bellowed like a bull, and asked who the hell it was waking him up in the middle of the night. When the Old Man was real drunk, dynamite wouldn't wake him.

He heard them talking together.

"Boy, come here!" That was the Old Man.

He didn't breathe. Stealthily he drew himself up to the rear window of the shed and slithered onto the flat tin roof, where he lay flat, hoping they wouldn't see him.

"I'm a comin' out there to you, boy!" The Old Man took off his broad, fancy belt, carefully removed the expensive

gold buckle, and took a couple of swipes at the air for practice.

"There he is—on the roof!" screamed Professor Saccharino suddenly.

They had spied him, then. He stood up shakily.

The Old Man put the belt behind his back and smiled a crooked, hypocritical smile. "Come down here, son," he said.

"See here," snapped Professor Saccharino. "I mean to have payment for this coat after the boy is disciplined. I want that understood, sir."

"Shut your mouth," the Old Man said. "You boy! Come down here."

"No," said Brainy.

The Old Man's mouth sagged. He had never before been openly defied. He snatched a splintered plank from the ground, threw it, and it whistled through the air, barely missing Brainy's ear.

Brainy retreated to the other side of the roof. Beyond lay the open fields and the prairie. Beyond that, Topeka, and vaguely a billion miles away, the mountains and freedom.

He heard a scuffling sound behind him. The Old Man was coming up.

He put his feet together, looked down at the shoes, prayed to a divinity he hardly knew, and jumped.

At once he was swishing through the air, and the pressure upon the tendons of his legs was as if he squatted upon a magic carpet. The Old Man had seen him jump. He slid to the ground and came running around to head him off.

But when he saw that Brainy hadn't landed, but was gliding away just above his head, he cursed and made a grab for him. He was still a couple of sheets in the wind, it seemed, and when he saw that he couldn't quite reach his son, he let loose with a string of cusswords that filled Brainy with grudging admiration.

It had been Brainy's bad judgment to direct his course parallel with, and above the main road, and the Old Man ran along beneath him, high-heeled boots pounding the dust, and getting in a hurried swat with the belt now and then.

After a couple of minutes he was out of breath, and Brainy had a brief respite. He thought that he had gotten away, but he saw them climb into Professor Saccharino's automobile and take after him.

The Old Man opened the door and climbed upon the hood, then to the top of the car. He looked like a daredevil rider, but it really wasn't too dangerous, for they were only moving about ten miles an hour.

The car glided closer, and the Old Man's lean, ugly face was level with Brainy's own, and his arms were outstretched like the wings of a big buzzard. Then Providence intervened. The car had to swerve for the corner, and the Old Man fell off.

The last thing he heard was the Old Man hollering at him.

BUT THE TRIUMPHANT deliverance of Brainy Phelps from his enemies was not without its drawbacks. He had gained considerable speed by now, and was stirring up quite a breeze, which revived him mentally, and caused him to consider the future.

He would continue upon his course, he decided, until he came to a tree. He would grab the tree, climb down and continue on foot to the railroad tracks, where he would hitch a ride on a freight to the West Coast. This might be a less pleasant mode of transportation, but until he learned to

control the magic shoes, it would also be less dangerous and unpredictable.

Presently he *did* pass near to a tree, but its topmost branch was beneath his feet and he could not reach it. Then he knew that he was in real trouble. *He was gaining altitude.*

It made a cold band of fear around his stomach. For all his weakness in most of the liberal arts, Brainy was strong in geography, for the simple reason that he was an escapist at heart, and all escapists are good in geography. He was aware of the curvature of the earth, and he sensed the truth—that instead of maintaining their level in flight, the wonderful shoes were in reality moving at a *tangent* to the surface of the earth. He couldn't have explained it to anybody, but he knew, all the same.

That was just after six o'clock. A little before seven, it occurred to him that he could take off the shoes, but he was now fifty feet above the hard and uncompromising ground, and he didn't dare.

By eight o'clock it was getting dusk, and he could see the outline of the Capitol Building in Topeka. He figured he was doing at least thirty-five

miles an hour.

Over to the right, a black car that might, or might not be the Professor's, was following him, but he welcomed it. And in the outskirts of the city a firetruck, alerted, followed him for a couple of blocks with extended ladder, but they just couldn't seem to get together, quite. The ladder got tangled in some electric cables. He could hear lots of sirens.

That was all for a while. Just before midnight a helicopter appeared above him and put down a rope ladder. He was already a hundred miles west of Topeka and picking up speed.

It was only a small 'copter. The ladder blew horizontally in the wind, and the 'copter labored to keep up. Finally it fell behind.

He was cold, and the wind was harsh in his face. He ducked his head, and dozed once, fitfully and briefly, curled in a kind of ball. He wished that he had a jacket.

They had all given up, and he knew now that he would crash into the mountains, and that would be the end of that.

But he didn't. He opened his eyes in the early light of dawn, and there was frost on his lids, and he could scarcely

get his breath. Below him was the gray foothills, and the peaks rose on either side. He was too stiff to move. The sunrise was the last thing he saw, reflected on the snow-capped summits. The cold pressed in. He grew drowsier, drowsier, and slept, unknowing and uncaring.

And his velocity, as he hurtled above the earth, accelerated in a steadily increasing curve, and the Earth fell away more rapidly than ever, and presently, had he been able to see it, it would have appeared as a great sphere behind him. The frost of outer night was upon his eyelids, however, and he did not know when he passed the sonic barrier, for he was frozen solid as three-day-old cornpone.

THE FORM of Brainy Phelps, a pitiful little lump of static molecules, drifted among the stars.

The strange force that was in the shoes, and which could not have been artificially or naturally duplicated within a billion years of trying, so precise was its value, had no limitations and soon approached light speed. It was all the same to Brainy, of course.

Certain watchers, however,

from a dark planet within the galactic rim, detected the appearance of a small, unidentified object one day within their firmament, and being a naturally curious race, sent out a ship with tractor beams to capture it and bring it in.

It was Brainy, of course, and they detected the singular power in the shoes at once and were very favorably impressed. They had not known that any race other than themselves possessed the secret of space travel—much less without a ship—and they had been around quite a long time and knew a lot of worlds.

But Brainy was indifferent to this too, and it occurred to them that if they would converse with him, they must first thaw him out.

This they achieved, but it was quite a job, for the molecular structure of the body had been broken down, to a great extent, by the freezing and thawing, and the brain, in particular, had almost to be rebuilt from the cortex up.

When they finished, Brainy Phelps yawned broadly and awakened.

They talked through the use of pantomime and a few words mutually learned. It was not very satisfactory, and natural-

ly they could not learn from him whence he came, since his term for Earth was meaningless to them. Just the same, they were able to place his origin with some accuracy because of his trajectory, and the effect of continuous bombardment of cosmic radiation upon his cells.

They were kind and considerate, and it made Brainy feel pretty important the way they took him for a major scientist of his race, even if he couldn't quite see them. The spectral values of their bodies were such that his eyes were not adapted to the task, and he had to squint, but they were still only shadows.

They were a gregarious race, and were looking, just as aliens always are, for a hospitable world other than their own to settle on.

"You mean an Invasion?" said Brainy who had heard dark rumors of such things before.

"Of dear, no," they said. "Rather infiltration. We have a very adaptable life-form, and there is a saying here, 'When in Syxygia, do as the Syxygians do!' The Terrans will not even know we are there, and we will be able to contribute a little, perhaps, to the native culture.

We are peace-loving and completely non-aggressive. Of course, you must help point out the proper planet."

"I don't know," Brainy said. He wasn't so sure that he wanted to go back and face the Old Man and Professor Saccharino. "What if they find out we're there?"

The aliens shuddered all through their amorphous bodies. "Please!" they said. "We mustn't think about it. It would be so messy!"

"Okay," Brainy said. "When do we leave?"

"The assumption of human form will take a few hours. Then we may go."

"Make it snappy," Brainy said. "I'm kind of hungry."

IT WAS FIFTEEN to eight, that mellow spring morning that it happened.

Professor Saccharino had not mellowed, however, with the passing of the seasons, and recalled, as in a dream that black afternoon two springs ago when he had been less sure of the inevitability of his drab life than now.

Since daybreak this morning he had felt a curious restiveness, and almost longed for the clamour of settling down to the daily pattern of study.

That, at least, would furnish company for his thoughts.

He glanced at the clock on the wall, took the school bell off his desk and went to the door.

He jangled it a couple of times and drew back to let them pass before him, like a general inspecting his troops. They came in a subdued stream past him, the scrubbed little boys and girls of the primary classes, the all-wise ragamuffins and coquettish damsels of ten, and the older students, either sullen or preoccupied by each other.

Cassandra Watson came through the door. The passing of the seasons had done wonders for Cassandra. It was rather too bad that this was her last year. She favored him with a smile and a distracting wiggle.

He nodded.

An unruly redhead marched before his field of vision. A familiar head.

It did not seem strange at the moment, though he had last seen Brainy Phelps flitting over the tree tops in the gener-

al direction of the Pacific Ocean.

More featureless faces. Then he saw the head again, and this time there could be no doubt.

"You," he said and grabbed the boy's arm.

Brainy looked up at him and grinned. It was a secret, undismayed grin, and it disturbed Professor Saccharino more than he could say.

Brainy wriggled loose from his grip and took his seat beside the other two red-headed boys that were sitting in the front row.

Professor Saccharino, observing them, shuddered as though with the ague. There were three of them there, uncombed unbrushed unkempt, waiting to be instructed.

They were all identical.

He ran to the window and threw up the sash, leaning far out to gulp the fresh air and revive himself, for he felt faint and ill.

But it was no good.

The schoolyard was full of Brainies.

THE END