

# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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## Featured Complete Novelet



# THE MOON THAT VANISHED

By LEIGH BRACKETT

*A fallen satellite of the Planet Venus is the lure which leads three hunted beings to the mysterious island of smiling death!* 13

## Two Other Complete Novelets

- YESTERDAY'S DOORS..... Arthur J. Burks 65  
*Back through the ages travels amnesiac Dean Hale!*
- MIRACLE TOWN..... William F. Temple 86  
*When a stranger visits Peterville, molecules go haywire!*

## Ten Short Stories

- THAT MESS LAST YEAR..... John D. MacDonald 38
- GALACTIC HERITAGE..... Frank Belknap Long 43
- "I LIKE YOU, TOO—"..... Joe Gibson 52
- THE SQUARE PEGS..... Ray Bradbury 101
- THE COSMIC JACKPOT..... George O. Smith 109
- DATE LINE..... Benj. Miller 117
- REVERSE ENGLISH..... John S. Carroll 125
- SOFTIE..... Noel Loomis 133
- NO WINTER, NO SUMMER..... Donald Laverty 140
- REFERENT..... Brett Sterling 148

## Features

- THE READER SPEAKS..... The Editor 6
- THE FRYING PAN..... A New Fanzine Review 171
- SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW..... A Department 174

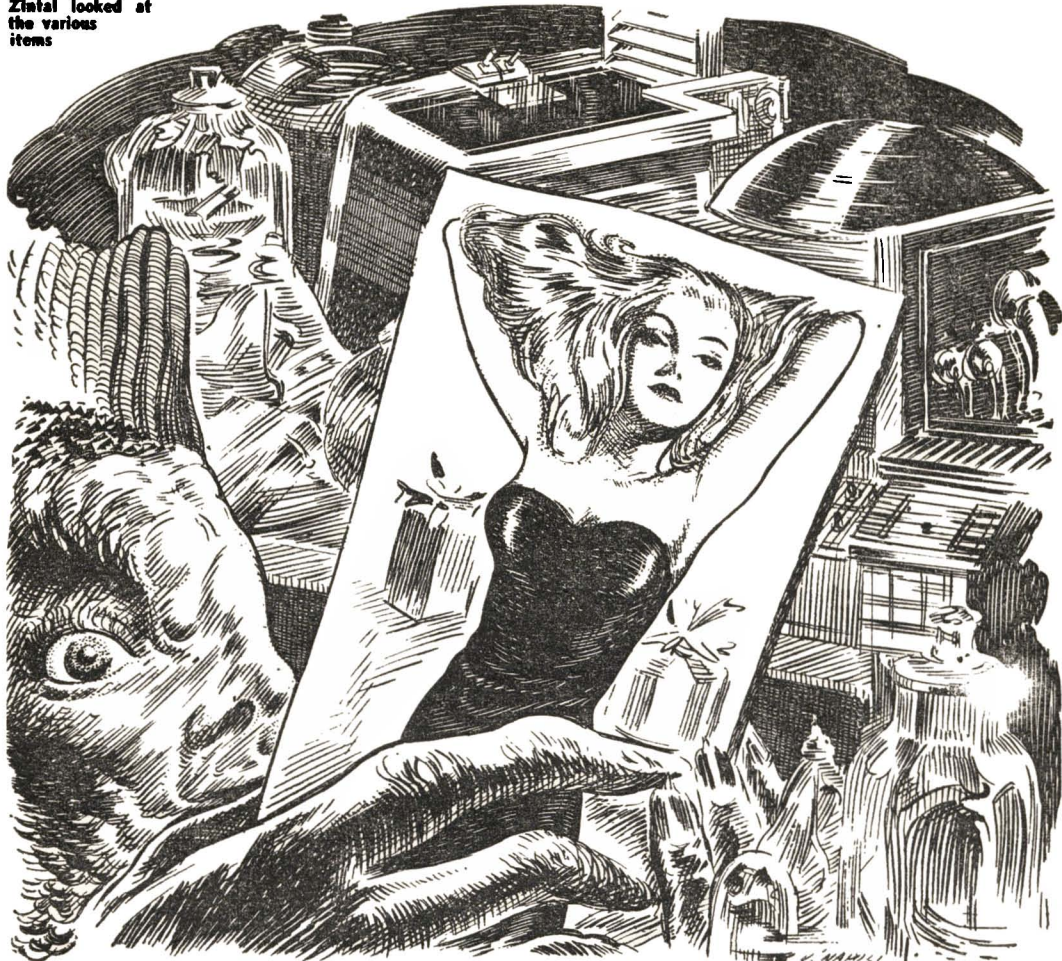
*Also See Features on Pages 85, 108, 124, 132, and 147*

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Zintal looked at  
the various  
items



By **GEORGE O. SMITH**

# The Cosmic Jackpot

**MARS AND TERRAN GET ON SPEAKING TERMS  
WHEN THEIR SLOT MACHINES SWAP PAYOFFS!**

**Z**INTAL, the Martian physicist, turned from his Martian companions and crossed the room toward a large, ornate machine. From his pocket Zintal took a couple of shiny Martian coins and dropped them in the slot, and pressed a number of buttons in sequence.

He waited. The machine clicked faintly

and made a noise similar to a Compur shutter set to one second. Then a small door became illuminated below the keyboard.

Zintal opened the door in a semi-absent-minded way and reached in for his purchase. His absent-mindedness disappeared. It would have remained, of course, had he received what he paid for. But instead of the desired

purchase, he held in his large greenish hand a small red cylinder.

Zintal grunted angrily and said: "*Ve komacil weezro!*"\*

Whereupon Zintal hurled the small cylinder back into the delivery receptacle and slammed the door. He had no idea of what "Lovepruf Lipstick" could have been, and as for its cosmetic value, even the most wanton of Martian wantons had not fallen to the bizarre idea of using red makeup on their normally healthy green complexions. The fact is, Zintal had punched the "Reject" button before he realized that the lettering on the cylinder was profoundly dissimilar to any type of lettering he had ever seen. This included a horde of Martian mathematical symbols and ideographs representing physical identities and, naturally, the cursive and printed forms of Martian cryptology.

He reached for the little door but he was too late. Back out of the return-chute there came two silvery coins that Zintal picked up idly.

Again his indolent air died a-borning, and again he swore: "*Ve komacil weezro!*"

**F**OR all Zintal could tell at this moment, they might have been a good grade of platinum or pure iridium, or any other silvery metal. But as a medium of exchange on Mars they were worth exactly nothing.

Zintal could not even tell that the letters on the obverse side referred to: (1) a condition of freedom, (2) faith in a familiar deity, and (3) the date of coinage. On the reverse side the lettering was equally desolate of meaning to the Martian. There was: (1) the country of coinage, (2) a statement of value, and (3) a phrase in— Well, that itself would have stopped Zintal right in his tracks. Zintal, the Martian physicist, could no more conceive of a planet where more than one language existed than he could, at the time of reading, have deciphered the statement, "E pluribus unum."

Zintal aimed a kick at the offending machine, then beat upon its side with a massive green fist. He probed into the delivery re-

ceptacle angrily until the communications grille came to life and a cold official voice demanded that he cease trying to make the slot machine deliver without the proper deposit. Zintal snarled and, muttering Martian imprecations, returned to his friends.

Even on Mars it is sheer futility to argue with a slot machine.

\* \* \* \* \*

Johnny Edwards was addressing a large, attentive group, but one small portion of his mind was contemplating Norma Harris, his secretary. In the terms of the day, Johnny Edwards "went for" Miss Harris in a rather large and affectionate way, but since the human race still lacked the faculty of mental telepathy, he was unaware of her opinion of him.

Her real opinion, that is. There was, is, and probably always will be a deep, underlying difference between the enjoyment of holding hands in a moving picture house or cooperating in a goodnight kiss and the idea of first-degree matrimony.

Johnny Edwards was inclined to conjecture thus whenever he was doing something routine, or something for which he had prepared.

This was one of those occasions. The Edwards Merchandiser was his baby. He knew its tricks backward, forward, and in advance. Now that he was starting production—not engineering, mind, but real production—of the Edwards Merchandiser, he was running off the rehearsed speech with half his brain on the job, the other half being bent toward the puzzle of Miss Harris' affections.

She wrinkled her nose at him, which caused him to stutter over a word, which caused him hastily to bend his entire contemplation on his talk. He discovered, with no surprise at all, that he was in the self-apology section.

"—ah—er—I was saying, humorously, that this idea may be likened to electricity or nuclear physics as a field. Both were and are expected to remake the world. The physicists and the imaginative writers of the day contemplate and describe great works and great ideas.

"But are we any closer to interplanetary travel now than we were before the war? Some say yes, some say no. Is any house being heated with the power from the fission of uranium? The fact is, gentlemen, that while

\* This expression is high grade Martian and the expostulation of a Martian physicist, therefore its translation into good English is near-impossible. However, a very rough transliteration of the phrase is—

Ve—Personal pronoun—I

Komacil—Verb past-indicative—was

Weezro—Verb Transitive—Gypped!

No doubt such phrases will become more and more familiar to all Terrans now that contact with Martians has been made. (G. O. S.)

some men contemplate massive feats, other men are working in smaller ways to benefit the world. No doubt the early workers in electricity did not foresee the complete overhauling the world would get when the electric light came along.

"So it is with the Edwards Merchandiser. It will be called a slot machine and it will be popular. Its relationship to science will be scoffed at by those brains and aesthetes who cannot correlate the principle of the spintharoscope with the dollar watch.

"Suffice this description. In the Edwards Merchandiser there is a matter transmitter. By-passing all the confounded legal red-tape now ensuing among government, public and private carriers of packages and letters, union labor, and others, the Edwards Merchandiser is a new idea and therefore is permitted to operate without trouble.

"In the slot, you place a coin. Upon the keyboard you tap out the name or description of the item you desire. The window flashes the proper cost if you have not deposited properly. Upon receipt of the proper amount, the operator then sends you the item you have purchased. It is as simple as that. Anything that will fit the delivery cubicle here, behind this door, can be bought and delivered! Admittedly, some items may be difficult to obtain on an instant's notice. Yet the organization of the Edwards Merchandiser is such that it can and will deliver if it is humanly possible."

**H**E PAUSED amid a round of applause. A hand went up at the rear of the office, and Edwards nodded at the questioner.

"I'd like to see a demonstration, please."

Edwards nodded again. "Yes," he said. "But I must ask that you don't try to stump me. I am not running a you-can't-stump-me game."

"I don't want to stump you," the man disclaimed with a smile. "Anything will do. Just show us."

Edwards smiled genially. "Miss Harris," he said affably, "will you please step over and use the merchandiser for the gentlemen present?"

Norma Harris smiled. She always smiled when Johnny Edwards asked her to do something. She hoped that eventually she could convey the idea that she would smile as happily when asked to sew buttons on or darn a sock. She'd deal with cleaning out the furnace when she came to it, but for the time

being Norma was being affectionately helpful.

There was, of course, every opportunity to be taken for hinting. This was nothing new; it was just one possibility out of a long line of hints. Quietly smiling, Norma Harris extracted two dimes from her purse and dropped them in the slot. Then on the keyboard, she tapped out the name of a product familiar to her and waited.

Strangely named product, if you went for semantics. "Lovepruf" apparently means something to prevent the tender emotion when what it really meant was that it was un—

Norma opened the little door at the click of the machine and reached in. Her hand came out quickly and she said, "Oh!" in sharp surprise.

"Oh—what?" asked Johnny Edwards.

Frowning with puzzlement, she handed him a small package.

Johnny Edwards looked at it. It was ornate and compact, covered with a glassine substance that might have been cellophane. It meant nothing to him. Had Johnny Edwards been a Martian, he would have known what it was, and he could have used and enjoyed it. But since neither Johnny Edwards nor your present correspondent was able at that time to read Martian, and Zintal's memory failed him in the ensuing period, the true identity of the package is one of the minor mysteries of the Solar System.

"What is it?" asked Johnny.

"I don't know," she returned.

"Isn't it what you asked for?"

"No," she said.

Edwards swore under his breath. This was a fine demonstration to inaugurate the sale of a new machine. It was as bad as the automobile show where the Bland sedan had stalled on the stage and had to be pushed off instead of roaring away like the others did. It was like the child prodigy who forgot the seventh line of "Horatio at the Bridge." Yet like the Lohengrin who sang the last aria too long and remarked in a second-balcony whisper, "What time does the next swan leave?" he, Johnny Edwards, was capable of turning disaster into at least a minor victory.

"This is deplorable," he said in solemn tones. "Obviously something went cock-eyed at the merchandising center. Well—" he laughed—"people have been beating on

the sides of slot machines for a couple of hundred years, but with the Edwards Merchandiser, no man need abandon his money to the maw of an insensate machine. Observe what we do with an error, after which Miss Harris will try again and will without question succeed.

"Frankly," he said as Miss Harris deposited the package into the receptacle once more, "I'd have preferred that the error-demonstration take place after the success. I would have planned it that way if I'd planned a failure. But— Okay, Miss Harris?"

She nodded brightly, jingling the coins in her hand. Abruptly she dropped them and, in her attempt to catch them, inadvertently kicked them under the desk.

"I can sure mess things," she said apologetically. She took two more dimes from her purse and dropped them in the slot, tapped out the name, and opened the door. With a slight blush, Norma Harris handed Johnny Edwards a small cylinder of red plastic.

"Woman eternal," he said dramatically. "Will you gentlemen watch Miss Harris install a new face right here and now, or will you take my word for it that this is a Lovepruf Lipstick?"

It was quite obvious that regardless of the previous failure, the Edwards Merchandiser was a howling success.

SEVERAL hours later, after the party broke up, Johnny Edwards returned to his office to see Norma probing under the desk with a yardstick.

"What gives?" he asked.

Norma held up two coins.

"Where did you get those?" he asked.

"Out of the machine," she told him.

"Yeah, but—" He picked them from her palm and looked them over carefully. "I'm no numis—munis—"

"Numismatist," she offered helpfully.

"I'm not one of them, either," he snapped. "I don't know rare coins, Norma, but I'd say that I have a pair here that might be truly rare."

Norma looked at him. "Johnny," she said in an awed voice, "I have a brother who is an archeologist."

"I know. Has Tony shown you anything like these?"

"No," she said. "But he has trained me to notice letters, characters, and ideographs. The printing or engraving on these coins is

very similar to the lettering on that package!"

"Yeah, but—"

Norma giggled in semi-hysteria. "Would it be economically just to pay for uncertain merchandise with uncertain coinage?"

"But you—"

Norma sobered. "Somewhere, someone got—temporarily, of course—a Lovepruf Lipstick for his two dinero, here, and hurled the thing back into the machine just as we did that package of mahooleylickum we got. Then in return, we get two dinero and someone, somewhere, is wondering what the legend 'One Dime' means."

"Ow!" groaned Johnny Edwards. "My aching imagination!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Indubitably"\* said Zintal, "these coins are an alloy of silver, but not a particularly valuable one, I'd estimate."

"You could smelt down any of our coins," replied Vorhan, the metallurgist, "and you'd be able to sell the metal for less than half of its coinage worth."

"True," admitted Zintal. "But—"

"Well," grinned Vorhan, "is it the money or the principle of the thing?"

Zintal grunted amicably. "Normally, I'd be inclined to eschew principle for a bit of hard cash. But this is one of those inexplicable things that prompts me to cry 'principle by all means.' Y'know, Vorhan, I'd gladly forfeit both of those coins to know where they came from."

"Probably worth it," smiled Vorhan. "Obviously, Zintal, those coins came from some civilization extra-Martian."

"But where?" demanded Zintal. "I—"

"You do not doubt their un-Martian origin?" Vorhan interrupted.

"Not at all," said Zintal unhappily. "They are too concrete as evidence to deny. But where?"

"I am not too familiar with the other planets of the system—" Vorhan began.

Zintal snorted ungraciously. "This sys-

\* Naturally, Zintal did not say 'Indubitably' or anything that resembles it phonetically. So until the general public becomes better acquainted with the newly-written English-Martian cross-referred dictionary, we will give as free a transliteration of the Martian into its nearest English connotation. This is not only permissible but highly recommended, since (to quote a less remote parallel) when a Frenchman watching a baseball game leaps to his feet and screams "Murte d'arbite," he really means "Kill the umpire." Conversely, when the American is watching a baseball game in Paris and yells "Commit violence upon the official scorekeeper," he really means "Murte d'arbite!" (G. O. S.)

tem?" he laughed. "Vorhan, go take yourself an elementary course in astronomy. The outer planets are completely unfitted for any kind of life. The inner planets are equally vicious. The surface of the nearest is fully four fifths water, and the next one in is completely wreathed in clouds. What kind of life could evolve with all that water?"

"There is the innermost," said Vorhan hopefully.

"Airless," replied Zintal. "Besides which, there is but a narrow zone where the temperature might lie at a reasonable level. Only a couple of the satellites of the outer planets might be acceptable, but it is generally accepted that the atmospheres of these satellites is either non-existent or high in pre-foilage methane. The closest one, I think, is the more likely, but it is well known that its atmosphere is normal at about sixty per cent relative humidity. You can have it, Vorhan."

"Give it to your mother-in-law," snorted Vorhan. "I don't want it." Then he speared Zintal with a very sharp glance. "So you're the physicist," he said. "Instead of telling me the places where they ain't, try to think of some place where they could be"

Zintal looked out of the window at the black sky, and waved an all-embracing arm. "Out there there must be a myriad of nice dry planets," he said. "I—"

"What," demanded Vorhan, "is the velocity of propagation of the Mesonic energy level?"

Zintal grunted unhappily. "What is the velocity of propagation of gravity?" he asked. "Until we can get far enough away from this planet to have it make a difference, we're stuck. It used to be, 'wait until we can modulate it,' but we've done that. Now—" Zintal shrugged.

"So what are we going to do about it?" demanded Vorhan. "Sit here and stew ourselves into a psychoneurose?"

Zintal smiled boyishly. "I've just licensed a machine. I'm going to buy stuff with it until it makes with the same kind of mistake."

**V**ORHAN looked at the machine with mingled admiration and sorrow. "We've used them for fifty years," he said. "This is the first time there ever has been anything like this. You'll be like the man who spent his entire life winning the bet that a shuffled deck of cards would eventually come up in the original sequence."

Zintal nodded. "You provide me with a better answer," he challenged.

Vorhan shook his head. "I can't, confound it!" he growled.

Zintal smiled. "Well, this is the machine that produced the strange coins. I'm buying everything I can through it just in the hope. Someday it will repeat."

Vorhan laughed. "In the meantime," he said half-humorously, "I am going out to hunt a needle in a haystack."

Zintal turned to his workbench and handed Vorhan a large cylinder of a crystalline metal. "This will help you," he said.

Vorhan laughed. The bar of metal was a powerful permanent magnet.

He tossed the magnet to Zintal and turned to the physicist's machine. From his pocket he took a couple of coins and dropped them in the slot and pecked out the name of a product on the keyboard. There was the usual *whirrrrrr*, and then from the communicating grille there came that same haughty, ultra-virtuous voice, saying:

"Please refrain from the use of spurious coins!"

Zintal hurled the little door open and cursed a round Martian oath, commending the machine to a first-class Martian hell that consisted of being immersed in water up to the scalp. For on Zintal's soft green Martian hand had spilled a boiling-hot mixture. Not only did it burn, but it was a foul mixture of something dissolved in water!

"Now what in the name of sin is this?" he demanded, setting the container gingerly on the workbench and covering it quickly with a glass bell-jar to keep in the obviously poisonous vapors.

\* \* \* \* \*

Johnny Edwards yawned with a jaw-breaking stretch. Norma Harris yawned sympathetically and told him to stop.

"It isn't the company," he assured her. "It's the hour."

She nodded sleepily. "We've spent most of the night at this," she said. "And so far we've collected very little of interest. But we sure have a fine collection of products. More darned toothpaste, cigarettes, candy bars, lipstick, tobacco, gin, mosquito dope, soap, pencils, camera film, postage stamps, ink—"

"Looks like a drug store," he grinned.

"—but nothing of unearthly coinage," she finished sleepily.

"Good thing I own the company," he said.

"Otherwise I'd be stuck for more stuff than any family of thirteen could use in seven million years. I'll return it in the morning and retrieve my coins."

"You should be nearly out by now," observed Norma.

"Just a few more," Johnny admitted. "Then we give up for the evening. Well, how about coffee, Norma?"

"Black," she requested, "and bitter!"

Johnny pecked at the keyboard and within a few seconds, the machine announced that it had delivered of itself and that the door should be opened and the merchandise removed.

Johnny gulped. "This isn't coffee," he said, holding up a small metal cylinder.

"What is it?" asked Norma sleepily.

"I don't know."

Norma came fully awake. "That isn't the same as before," she said.

Johnny nodded and dropped more coins in the machine. It clicked furiously, delivered his three-hundredth package of cigarettes, whereupon he pressed the return button and sent them back. From the return-coin slot there dropped—two of the strange coins.

"Well," said Edwards. "This is it!"

"Send 'em a note?" suggested Norma.

"In whose language?" demanded Johnny.

"Send 'em a diagram of the Solar System," she said.

"Which Solar System?" he demanded.

"Send 'em ours."

"And who'd recognize it?" he said, pouring more coins into the machine.

**H**IS luck waxed and waned. For the first half hour, it was pretty much a hit or miss proposition, in which he made connection three times. His "take" consisted of one soft-wood cylinder "wrapped" around a strip of graphite and a good grade of pencil it was, a box of brittle-dry not-quite-cubes that had neither spots like dice nor did they bound merrily (although they fractured thoroughly), and a light-weight metal cylinder with a tiny wing-nut contraption on one end. Johnny turned it experimentally and shortly afterwards, both Norma and Johnny left the office to get coffee across the street—while the office aired out. They got more coins, too, as an afterthought.

Then as the night wore on towards morning, Johnny Edwards began to drop his coins at regular intervals. During the first hour

of this, they received a package of rectangular pasteboards that indicated that someone else played an unearthly game of poker, pinochle, or bridge; a folder of needles which were quite earthly save for the lettering on the cover; and a bottle of some goeey-thick mess that Johnny dropped on the floor. The glass broke, and the mess spilled out on the rug. Subsequently, Johnny Edwards had to hire a taxidermist to remove the rug from the floor—some one made a mighty good grade of mucilage.

Then as the timing became more regular, they received a book of common paper printed in the same complex characters and the cover of which was luridly painted.

"Great howling rockets," growled Edwards, "is that what we're communicating with?"

Norma laughed and picked up a copy of Johnny's favorite magazine. "Is this how we look?" she asked humorously.

The book was followed by a set of picture cards depicting a few scenes of unearthly origin but with no printed characters—buildings and a small bridge over a narrow span of water; trees that looked normal enough in a forest scene. They got a ball of plastic twine, a hard-cover volume containing nothing but listings of ideographs; a package of evil-smelling, ultra-dry things like desiccated prunes; a wide strip of some sort of cloth; and a jar of cream that might have been a cosmetic—for something—but might have worked better as a soldering flux, since it skinned the outer surface of Johnny's pocket knife in a trice.

The pile of items grew as their coincidence increased—and then ceased entirely.

Morning dawned bright and clear but unhappily, for the contact had ceased abruptly and no more strange items came through.

"Me—I give up," said Johnny. "I'll run you home, Norma."

"The devil you will," she said with a very tired yawn. "Little Norma is going to hit the studio couch in the Ladies' Room."

"But what will your parents think?" he objected.

"I'll tell 'em the truth," she said.

"The truth?" he gasped, viewing the collection of unidentifiable and utterly useless items on the desk. "They'll never believe that!"

"I know," she said happily.

She left the office and it was some time before Johnny Edwards realized that Norma

didn't mind the idea of the all-white shotgun.

\* \* \* \* \*

Zintal held up a package of cigarettes with puzzlement. "Do you eat 'em, feed 'em to the wilgil, or burn 'em in a dish?" he asked.

"They might be poison."

"Undoubtedly." Zintal placed the cigarettes under another bell jar.

The deck of cards he riffled through with knowing deftness. The dictionary he filed carefully away, and the bottle of ink went under another bell jar. It was, he admitted, the most palatable smelling item of the bunch. The box of candy he threw into the fireplace with a deep, distasteful wrinkle of his wide, flat nose.

He accepted the little cylinder from Vorhan, twisted the wing-nut and inhaled deeply. The distaste on Zintal's face diminished and was replaced with a sigh of satisfaction. He marked some Martian characters on the end of a rough-surfaced board with some of VerLong's finest Lovepruf Lipstick and put the handy, soft crayon away for future use.

**T**HE set of picture postcards he ran through but shook his head because they were not indicative of anything but a slightly strange city of rather large size. The scene of hundreds of thousands of ultra-minute creatures basking in what was obviously a vast body of water he shuddered at first and swore at second because the figures were indistinct through a magnifier. The Atlantic City postcard was consigned to the fireplace. The magazine cover depicting one of America's shapeliest was viewed with intelligent gratification though without the usual wolf-whistles.

This went on for some time, and finally Zintal hit the coincidental timing perfectly, and they began to catalogue the items.

Now, be it remembered that Zintal was a physicist of Martian repute, and therefore he had an advantage over Johnny Edwards in making a wild guess as to the origin of the contact. His only misleading evidence was the obvious belief that no sentient life could evolve on an overly-wet world such as Terra. It was, however, equally obvious that the strangers did not object to water as strenuously as did Martians. Martians could take it or leave it alone, absorbing enough for their daily needs from contact and losing only by evaporation.

Despite the training of ages of Martians to the contrary, Zintal was beginning to

revise his opinion.

Then, because this sending of just plain "things" was beginning to pall—especially in view of the fact that everything Zintal received was alien and useless and the reverse must be equally true on Terra—Zintal began to think in terms of what might be useful in making contact with an utterly alien and unknown race.

He sat down at his drawing board and started to sketch the constellation, Orion. If the other race were in this section of the Galaxy, they would recognize Orion. He grumbled because he had no star-map to ship along, and the merchandising agency claimed there was none at hand. But a hand sketch—

Orion, if recognized, would be followed by the very characteristic stellar layouts of Sirius and Centaurus in the hope that these systems might harbor the aliens. He would, as a hazard, include Sol and the planetary system; perhaps if the aliens were not of Solar origin they might be sufficiently advanced in astronomy to recognize Sol. He—

The door opened abruptly, and several Martian police entered.

"Zintal, Physicist, we arrest you for the crime of attempting to obtain merchandise without payment. Do you deny inserting spurious coins in the machine?"

"I—we—"

"Come along," said the foremost policeman angrily. To his side-kick, he said: "What some people will go through to try to beat a slot machine."

Zintal shook himself free of the official handclasp and reached for one of the bell jars. From it he took an atomizer which he turned upon the policemen. They retched, and while they were in the fiendish grip of completely overturned stomachs, Zintal grabbed his machine and left.

He dropped the atomizer, and the odor of *Nuit de Noël* filled the air with the most foul stench ever carried on the thin air of Mars.

\* \* \* \* \*

Norma Harris entered the room brightly and found Johnny Edwards hard at work. He looked haggard, and Norma knew that he hadn't been asleep at all.

"What—" She stopped and pointed at the job he had been tinkering with.

He nodded, seeing that she comprehended.

"No, Johnny!"

"But somebody's gotta go," he said desperately.

"Not you," she said, running forward and



wrapping her arms about him. "Not you."

"Why not?" he asked. "Who else?"

"But—I—"

"I'll take no chances," he said. "First goes a bottle of air. Then other items that will insure safety in that other place. Then me. And once I'm there we can work on their gadget and get it set up so that this haphazard business can be made into something certain."

**N**ORMA nodded unhappily. "Any luck since—"

"No. But we'll get together again. You watch!"

The machine behind them buzzed and Johnny turned. "I set up a gadget to feed nickels into it at regular intervals," he explained. "We're going to get a fine collection of Terran pencils until they hit us again. Looks as how *They* just got one."

From the receptacle, Edwards took a folded tape measure and a sizable bottle of—nothing.

"Air," he said, looking at it.

"And size," said Norma. "He—she—or it wants to come here!"

He nodded. "You analyze that air, will you? I'm going to finish this other gimmick!"

"How do you analyze air?" she asked plaintively.

He tossed a ten-dollar bill at her. "Go buy yourself a canary," he said with a grin. "And not one on a hat!"

There came, at regular intervals, a four-handed chronometer with certain intervals marked vividly. Next came a small six-legged animal that sniffed the air uncertainly but showed no discomfort.

That settled Johnny Edwards. His curiosity would probably kill him, but it might have killed him anyway. So— He pushed a lever. . . .

He stepped out of the cabinet and sneezed in the ultra-dry air. Zintal blinked in astonishment and looked concerned.

"But I wanted to go your way," he said.

"Where the devil is this?" demanded Edwards.

"They're after me for trying to use slugs,"

Zintal complained. "What are these things worth on your world?"

"The sun is rather small, here," Johnny observed. "Is this Mars, or is that another sun entirely?"

"Perhaps it is your wet skin that makes you smell so," said Zintal, sniffing. "I think that the police may understand once you are seen—and smelled. Phew!"

"You're a double-dyed monstrosity," said Johnny amiably. "Somewhere along about here we should start learning one another's talky-talky. Me Johnny. Me good!"

The machine clicked again and Norma stepped out. "Me Norma," she said, mocking him. "You explain Daddy!"

"Me clipped," he grinned at her. "What's that?"

"Newspaper," she grinned. "Thought you'd like to see it. It claims that the White Sands Laboratory does not expect any successful attempt to reach any other celestial body within the next fifteen years."

**W**ELL, that's how it started. From a glorified coin merchandising machine to interplanetary travel in a few roundabout jumps—or jerks. It was easier to take off by rocket for Luna from Mars than from Terra, and the original Mars-Luna rocket carried only a super-glorified slot machine. Then it became a simple matter to take off from established bases on Luna and head for Venus. Then, in a comparatively short time it became feasible to plant the slot machines on every imaginable planet and satellite, and the art of constructing rockets returned to the fireworks department.

Oh—just to tie in a loose end—the Martian police were duly convinced once they came, saw, and stood back with great green hands pinching wide, flat noses. And the same police official who was originally there to bring back the errant physicist was helpful.

He combined the Terran couple in Vantlaz.\*

\* The definition of this word is not quite clear. Even Martian opinion differs pertaining to its definition; the Martian female believing it to be a desirable state while the Martian male insists that it is entirely one-sided and too restrictive pertaining to his freedom. (G. O. S.)