

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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	The Sane Men of Satan	2
	by Jacques Jean Ferrat	
	Nightmare on the Nose	53
	by Evelyn E. Smith	
	Planet for Transients	62
	by Philip K. Dick	
	Moonflowers and Mary	74
	by George Whitley	
	Listen, Children, Listen	83
	by Wallace West	
H. L. Herbert President	The Vertigo Hook	93
	by Richard Ashby	
	Date of Publication, 2083 A.D.	99
	by William Morrison	
Leo Margulies Publisher	The Undoing of Carney Jimmy	110
	by Dal Stevens	
Sam Merwin, Jr. Editor	The French Way	113
	by Curtis W. Casewit	
	Some Kinds of Life	119
	by Richard Phillipps	
	The Whispering Gallery	128
	by William F. Temple	
	Everybody Knows Joe	143
	by C. M. Kornbluth	
	The Forest of Knives	146
	by A. Bertram Chandler	
Alex Schomburg Cover Design	Universe in Books	189
	by the Editor	

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the french way

by . . . Curtis W. Casewit

When a skier starts to fly after kissing a girl there can be but one answer—love. However getting him down again is another matter.

IT HAPPENED ON A spring morning in the Rockies.

There was no wind. The sun shone on the snow. A very young skier looked at the peaks that surrounded him and at the girl with pigtails that stood by his side. He wondered why her lips and her eyes were constantly open. After enough wondering he leaned over them, feeling an urge to change this condition, whereupon the lips closed instantly and the eyes shortly thereafter.

At the same time the young man seemed to lose all earthly contact. His feet did not exist, his head had gone, his heart became a zig-zagging bubble. He was seized by delight. Then suddenly he felt his face afire and his body drifting, drifting skyward. Before he knew what had happened he sat atop a fir tree.

"Upon my word, Doris!" he called down to the girl, for even in such odd circumstances he took pride in his language.

At first she was much too bewildered to reply. She merely gazed at the bottoms of his skis and at the top of his head. After awhile she said somewhat throatlessly, "Oh darling!"

At this, young Howie Stucker

One of the great pleasures in editing a magazine like this one, which spans the entire field of science fiction and fantasy, is the legitimate inclusion of stories such as "The French Way." It is too short to cause more than a faint rumble of discontent from those who demand logic with their portions of the improbable and packed with sheer joy for those who don't give a darn as to why's and wherefores.

felt impelled to a quick descent. The branches of the tree prevented his climbing down and he had to throw his skis and poles to the ground. When he followed them he was astonished to discover that, instead of falling rapidly past the branches, he was floating down gradually, as though a jumbo-sized parachute were holding him back.

A moment later Howie had his skis on. Anxiously he looked at sky, tree and girl. This had been his first encounter with the God of Love. He said, "Eros! Be gone!" and Doris looked up dreamily, thinking that Howie meant her.

As she heaved a desperate sigh the young man drew nearer once more and began an immediate and thorough study of her lovely features. But he was still frightened and he had earnest intentions of saying, "Let us go!"

Yet for a very good reason he said nothing. One hand was around her waist firmly, the other on his pole, not so firmly.

When, after sixty delicious seconds he finally said, "Let us go!"—it was too late. Unleashed like a kite Howie soared up. Soon he was way above the trees.

Doris remained below, clapping her hands and uttering little squeaks of happiness.

After a discreet while she heard a, "tsk, tsk, tsk," behind her. Turning, she saw an instructor named Julien Dendeloup, French Method.

"Ah!" this worthy exclaimed "Deez cez vonderfool!"—and he grinned and shook his massive head.

Doris happened to feel **very** little interest in Julien, whom she knew, and very much for Howie's Icarian maneuvers, which she knew not. So she told Julien to be quiet.

Presently Howie began banking slowly, his body in an almost rigid position. The wind at this altitude tugged at his long hair and made ripping noises at his pants. He was flying with perfect control. He seemed happy.

Before very long clusters of people began to form around Doris and the Frenchman—and as their commotion and cheering grew, the ski patrol came.

"Hey, Howie!" they shouted. "Get the hell out of the air!"

But the youngster was then zooming thirty feet above ground, at a rate of thirty miles per hour. Though generally obedient he saw no reason to comply. Doris was proud of him anyway and the patrolmen were merely envious of his accomplishment of a feat they could not match.

Howie's intransigence brought the head patrolman, who asked Doris what had happened. When she didn't answer he addressed Julien Dendeloup, who shrugged his wide shoulders and gave a wide grin. Accordingly the headpatrolman called into the sky "Hey *kid!* Come on down!"

Howie took no heed.

At this point Doris' feet were getting cold and the Frenchman was making passes at her. So in her tiny voice she cried "Howie—*Howie!* Please come down."

Her wish was an order. The Flyer immediately tried to nose his skis downward and by bending his knees attempted a slow landing. He saw Doris' hand waving, her pigtails bobbing—he saw the saplings, the fir-trees, the people. Fear suddenly gripped him because he *knew* that he could not land. His body was now feather light, his heart beat quickly. He had become perfectly and unalterably airborne.

In the meantime the mayor had joined the head patrolman and the other fellows. The mayor was motivated by laws and regulations and though he could call a *gelandesprung* when he saw one he knew very little about skiing.

"Do you have a jumping license?" he asked.

"No!" cried Howie. "I wish I did." And then thinly, "I cannot come down anymore!"

The mayor reported these weird circumstances to the newspaper of the little mountain town. By the time the newsmen arrived from the surrounding counties it was noon and Howie still circled over the crowds. At this stage, the mayor went to the Chamber of Commerce.

They were more pleased than alarmed and they decided, though silently, to keep this attraction in the sky as long as possible. The mayor of course agreed but he enjoyed the art of public speaking and organizing generally, so he had a loudspeaker connected and ordered everyone onto the slopes, ". . . especially those with a college education or a high-school diploma."

His request was immediately followed by the two horse-and-buggy doctors, the room clerks and a number of other people, including a science fiction writer and the director of the ski school. The latter was the first to think of a rescue.

He had brought a megaphone, through which he told Howie to try a landing on the upper slope. This was good advice. He reasoned that if Howie would just fly horizontally until he collided with the mountain-side, he would be saved. Howie tried hard but as soon as he approached the ground he bounced up again.

Thereafter there was much frantic talk.

Telegraph machines began to hammer and telephone lines were jammed. Advertising was cut on the radio programs and sponsors began to complain. The Chamber of Commerce doubled its collective activity.

By three p.m., Mountain Standard Time, Sports Authorities had arrived from Sun Valley by automobile—others followed by air and rail, including a number of "specialists" and members of the Press.

The New York Times had sent Frank Elkins in a specially chartered plane. John Jay Pictures, Incorporated, dispatched none other than the great John Jay himself. Some malicious tongues claimed at a later time that it had all been a projection of his new cameras. A number of noted reporters appeared on the hill, then disappeared in the bars.

But all the same the chairlifts were now grinding incessantly and cars crawled along the only highway, bumper to bumper, like legless beetles. The slopes were completely awash with people. Swarms of photographers ran about, using the last afternoon sun. Above the melee flew Howie and over their heads danced the Strucker shadow.

At five p.m. (M.S.T.) a group physicians, cosmopologists and astrochemists arrived. There were immense difficulties in getting these notables to the slopes because they had never seen nor used skis. After much fussing the mayor found several pairs of snow-shoes for them and painstakingly they were guided up to the spot where Doris sat.

She hadn't moved—nor for that matter had Howie's rival. The Frenchman felt at home with the disconsolate girl. At intervals she began to cry, which he found particularly delightful. He then whispered sweet words into her ears. When the sun gave her a headache he rushed off for a slab of virgin snow.

He watched her spreading it on her round forehead and on her cheeks and because he was a *gourmet*, he immediately thought of peaches and *Crème Chantilly*. When she sat still he watched the classic curve of her neck and the distinction of her profile. "Payshawng," he murmured, payshawng. Zey are discasing now!"

There was indeed much debate. The scientists had brought a number of instruments, with which they

fumbled tirelessly. An aircraft engineer, speaking from a tree, requested a motor-testing machine—or possibly a canning suction machine. But there were of course none available.

Some cowboys, all frills and gay satins, wanted to use a lasso but the idea was discarded due to the danger of strangling Howie. The science fiction man wove some excellent plots including one about *space police*, which didn't materialize either.

Meanwhile, Howie seemed to resemble his shadow, which swam back and forth over the spectators. His eyes had sunk into their sockets, his nose was running, his hair disheveled. He looked very pitiful. Occasionally he was heard mumbling, "Eros—be gone!"

But no one understood this, least of all Doris, who would not leave.

Finally the Military Authorities appeared. A colonel declared that they had a helicopter at the base only forty miles away. The idea was unanimously accepted, even by the Chamber of Commerce. Shortly afterwards the plane put in an appearance over the mountain tops.

There was a general feeling of relief. A hush fell over the crowds and even Doris, who had been sobbing for a good many hours, dried her tears. They all rose, holding their breath. Howie automatically straightened himself in the air.

Julien took one last daring fling. He worshipped peaks and girls, especially Doris. And he was very

much occupied with her sun-bleached hair and the golden fluffiness of her neck, where a bit of rosy skin shimmered through here and there.

At last the helicopter came down in the vicinity of Howie. The pilot asked for the immediate removal of Howie's skis and when they tumbled to the slope hope swept over the masses.

But the Flyer's movements were so erratic, that the machine, though pursuing each of his many turns and loops and involuntary *ruades*, had no power to catch up with him. Moreover there was much danger of the blades shearing him to fricassée.

After an heroic half hour it became clear that it was impossible to get him into the cabin. Even the Military admitted that the notorious Captain Skorzeny, who in 1945 recaptured one Benito Mussolini from the Allies, couldn't have done any better.

The pilot tried a last resort—the dropping of a rope-ladder. But this didn't work either and the maneuvers were at length given up.

As Doris entered a stage of delirium Julien Dandeloup, the skier of the French Method rose. He touched her arm and said at the top of his voice, "Ladeez and shentlemaan! Leessan to *me!*"

He took the girl by one hand and dragged her to the center of the slope. "*I can,*" he said loudly, "*save ze 'Owie!*"

There was a mumbling and murmuring. When it ceased he shouted, "Ze ski patrol! Bring forr sledzes!"

The men came with the sledges. They were placed on top of one another, and upon this improvised platform Julian now stepped. Doris stood beside him, an agonized expression on her face. The Flyer was above them, listening and watching as best as he could.

"You know why it eez impossible for 'cem to come down?"

No one knew.

"I tell you—*eh?*"

Silence fell over the throng—only the trees whispered.

"Becoze ze man up zere *kissed 'er gorjuss leeps.*"

The scientists shook their heads. The younger set giggled.

"And becoze," Julien went on, "Ze heart now is light." The Frenchman's hand flew into the air, demonstrating the weight of the Flyer's heart.

"Eet eez very simple to let 'cem daysawnd!"

Excitement grew. Questions rose. How—how—why? Laughter was wedged amid cries of indignation. There was much shuffling around Julien and Doris.

Howie kept circling above, his shoulders and arms drooping.

"I show *you!*" Julien said. "*Voici la methode Francaise!*"

He placed the girl in front of him. She turned. "What are you doing with me?" Her face was the essence of fright.

Julien pointed to the sky. "You want 'cem down—*no?*"

She kept quiet then and the Frenchman placed his hands on her shoulders. Then he leaned close over

the golden neck. Brushing the pig-tails aside he pressed a delicate kiss behind her left ear.

Before very long the Flyer began to make jerking motions, then to fall. Gravity seemed to pull at him—but still in midair he gained a tentative control. Gently, persuasively, Julien repeated his performance behind Doris right ear.

Howie cried, "My heart—my heart!" But he came down slowly, as if drawn by invisible wires. Soon

afterwards he was over the trees and then—in a cloud of snow dust—back on the ground.

A rash of applause broke out and the patrol stumbled upward with more sledges and a horse and buggy doctor hurried with his little black bag. He found no bones broken, for it is medically proved that there are no bones in the heart. The hero was immediately rejoined by Doris.

There was no embrace—not even in the French way.



You will notice in several stories of FU, especially in A. Bertram Chandler's "The Forest of Knives," that the author refers to this rather mildewed old world of ours as Terra and its inhabitants as Terrans. Which is a practice so long accepted among fanciers and practitioners of science fiction that it no longer draws comment.

Yet the word terra is all wrong, a near-comic malapropism in this application. For while terra actually does mean earth in Latin, it means earth in the sense of soil or dirt, not in any planetary sense. The word for our poor old world in Latin is Tellus and its creatures Tellurians. Yet so deeply has this quasi-literate convention become bred into science fiction that we have reluctantly given up combatting it. So our authors will probably continue to call our planet dirt, its people dirties or dirty ones. At that, perhaps they are a good deal closer to the truth than they ever dreamed.