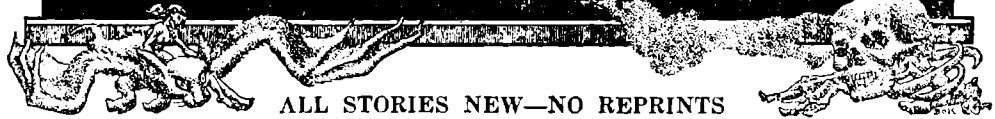


Weird Tales



JANUARY, 1942

NOVELETTES

THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH	H. P. Lovecraft	6
<i>Malignant Nightmare—Dancing in Grotesque, Fantastic Saraband—Surges Through the Streets of a Horror-Ridden Seaport!</i>		
PARASITE MANSION	Mary Elizabeth Counselman	73
<i>A Curse—Vicious, Soul Destroying—Was Upon the Beautiful Old House</i>		
WHO CAN ESCAPE	Seabury Quinn	104
<i>Death Seems so Certain, so Final—But the Land of the Unquiet Dead Has Many Exits . . .</i>		

SHORT STORIES

THE WHITE LADY	Dorothy Quick	34
<i>For a Mere Cock and Bull Yarn—the Tall Trees Ghost Did a Remarkably Thorough Job of Haunting!</i>		
DEATH THUMBS A RIDE	Robert Arthur	49
<i>Introducing the Very Latest Things in Phantoms . . . a Hitch-Hiking Ghost—an Ectoplasmic Hobo!</i>		
THE GHOST OF LANCELOT BIGGS	Nelson S. Bond	61
<i>Featuring the Resurrection of that Crackpot, Crackjack Mechanic of the Spaceways!</i>		
THE PHANTOM SLAYER	Fritz Leiber, Jr.	91
<i>He Slew Wantonly—for the Sheer Hellish Fun of It!</i>		
TABLE FOR TWO	Arthur Leo Zagat	120
<i>"Maybe I'm Nuts—but I Thought I Heard Someone Whisper 'Good-by!'"</i>		

VERSE

THE CURSE	Page Cooper	119
SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS	Irwin J. Weill	102
THE EYRIE		123
WEIRD TALES CLUB		126

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, 90c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1941, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

173
Vol. 36, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, Associate Editor.

Lancelot Biggs was dead; or else missing in the gray nothingness of negative space . . .



The Ghost of Lancelot Biggs

BY NELSON S. BOND

*The shade of that gangling genius of the spaceways—Lancelot Biggs—
comes back to haunt his old ship mates.*

FOLKS say I'm hard-boiled; well, maybe so. My mama told me a long time ago—when I was a brat in three-cornered britches—that if you keep

your upper lip rigid and a steely glint in the old optics and *le craque sage* dripping from your tongue, not many people will be hopping around, pushing chips off your shoul-

der and daring you to take off your glasses.

And mama was right. So I'm commonly known as "that smart-Aleck Bert Donovan," and folks think I'm hard-boiled—but I didn't feel like any ten-minute egg the afternoon Diane Hanson, her pop, Cap Hanson, skipper of the freighter *Saturn*, and I came home from Lancelot Biggs' funeral.

Lancelot Biggs was dead. Or missing for more than seven weeks in the gray nothingness of negative space—which is the same thing. He had hurled himself into this desolate matrix universe deliberately, sacrificing himself to save the lives of his friends and shipmates when we were all doomed to die horribly by crashing head-long into massive Jupiter.

Since the life-skiff in which he had entombed himself was tiny, poorly provisioned and inadequately supplied with water, there was no longer the faintest glimmer of hope that he might, somehow and miraculously, have survived. Even had he found some way of escaping the minus boundaries of the weird nega-universe into which he had fled. Therefore, today he had been formally "buried." In spirit, so to speak, or by remote control. The way the old boys in the 19th Century used to bury lost mariners. With a long cortege and a tall stone, engraven with the words: *Here lies So-and so—Lost at Sea.*

Only this being the enlightened 22nd Century and we being a bit more reasonable, Biggs' marker read: *In Memory of Lt. Lancelot Biggs—Lost in Space.*

So we were a sad looking trio when we came back to the apartment which Lase Biggs and I used to share near Long Island Spaceport. Cap Hanson had lost the finest First Mate to ever tread the ramps of a space-jugger, I had lost the best friend a man had ever had, and Diane—well, her loss was the greatest. She had lost the man she loved, the lean, gangling man to whom, had not fate's grim hand inter-

vened, she would now be married.

And like I said—folks call me hard-boiled. But I reckon I'm only gently poached compared to the men who operate under the title of Big Business, because when we entered the apartment the telephone was jangling like an opium addict's nerves, and when I picked it up I was talking to the Assignment Clerk of the I.P.C., the Corporation from which we draw our weekly credit checks.

"Donovan?" he yelled. "Is that you, Donovan?"

"Mmm," I said.

"Is Captain Hanson there?"

I glanced at the skipper, whose arms were about his quietly sobbing daughter. He was a gruff old codger, Hanson; a more irascible space-tyrant never lifted gravs. But he had a heart buried somewhere beneath that crust, a heart that was now as hurt and grieved as my own.

"Why?" I asked.

"Never mind why!" snapped the A.C. "Put him on!"

I said grimly, "Okay, Buster! I'll play toddle-top with you. I'll *put* him on now and *take* you on the next time I see you. Skipper—" And I handed him the phone.

Whatever the A.C. told the Old Man, it threw a jolt into him. I saw Hanson stiffen like a rheumatic neck, and he roared, "*Wha-a-at!* Impossible! Why, you damned young jackanapes, don't you know the staff and crew of the *Saturn* are in mourning? We won't—"

THEN there was clacking from the car-piece, metallic and ominous, and the Old Man's face turned from crimson to an outraged mauve. But anxious lines corrugated his brow and he forced a modulated acquiescence to his voice.

"I see," he said thoughtfully. "So that's the way it is, eh? Well—" Grudgingly "—all right, then. But I don't like it, sir. And you may tell your superiors—"

The A.C. must have hung up on him. He turned to us slowly. "Sparks—" he said.

Diane Hanson stared at her father. "Daddy, what is it? Is it—some news about Lancelot?"

"No, honey," said the Old Man gravely. "Don't keep that hope burning, dear. You'll only torture yourself. This is something entirely different. Something—" His stifled anger burst out afresh—"something dastardly! They should be boiled in oil, the whole rotten kit and kiboodle of them! But I'm helpless. Orders are orders. Sparks, get in contact with the staff and crew immediately. Tell them to pack their duffle and be aboard the *Saturn* by midnight."

I said, "What! But, Skipper, we were granted leave to mourn Biggs—"

"I know it! But the Corporation has countermanded our leaves. We're to lift gravs at twelve sharp for Europa. Polarium has just been discovered there, and the whole solar system has gone crazy. Prospectors from every corner of the universe are blasting for Europa as fast as their jets will push them. And since the *Saturn* is the fastest lugger in the I.P.S. fleet, we've got to get there and stake claims for the Corporation.

"I—I'm sorry it has to be this way, Diane. I don't want to leave you. But the clerk said if I refused to take command, they'd appoint someone else—"

"I know, Daddy," said Diane. She forced a wisp of a smile to her lips. She understood as well as I did what he was trying to tell us. The Old Man was—and is—one of the greatest skippers who ever blasted a rocket. But he's an old man in fact as well as title. Twice before our employers had threatened to remove his command, ground him, give his bridge to a younger officer. A man of action, the Skipper dared not look forward to the day when he had to bid farewell to space. To

refuse this emergency command would be to risk everything. And so:

"I understand, Daddy," said Diane Hanson. "But you don't have to leave me."

"And, Sparks, tell Todd he'll serve as First Mate," the skipper told me. "Wilson will be Second—*hey?* What did you say, Diane?"

Diane's voice was gentle, but there was a tightness about her eyes and lips I recognized. I'd seen it before, on her father's face. I knew what it meant. Stubbornness mixed with a dash of determination.

"You won't leave me," she said calmly, "because I'm going with you!"

"You're going with— Oh, no! No, you're not! This isn't any shuttle for a girl. There's danger out there near Jupiter, honey. I won't let you—"

"You can't stop me, Dad. Can't you see I've got to go? Please! I'll go crazy sitting home here by myself. And besides, it was out there—near Jupiter—that *he*—"

Well, I saw how she felt. And I didn't much blame her for feeling she had a right to make at least one farewell trip to the part of space wherefrom her lover had disappeared. The Old Man growled softly. Then he wiped his glasses with a sort of savage vehemence. And he said, "Well, then, get your things packed. And Sparks—call Chief Garrity. Tell him to have the hypos and all control equipment ready for immediate flight—"

Thus at twelve midnight sharp, Earth time, which is 7-R-4 Solar Constant, the *Saturn* lifted gravs for Europa, the second satellite of monstrous Jupiter.

THERE'S no use boring you with the routine details. We blasted from a Long Island cradle, set course and constant for Europa, waited till we were about six hours away from the Earth's gravitational field, then cut over to the V-I unit—the "velocity intensifier" invented by

Lancelot Biggs which had made the *Saturn* the fastest ship in space, increasing its speed potential from a slovenly 200,000 *mph* to something only a trifle less than the limiting velocity of light.

In the old days, before the installation of the V-I unit, a shuttle to Jupiter meant a journey of about a hundred days, more or less, depending on the positions of the planets. Now, however, the *Saturn* had a speed potential of 650,000,000 miles per hour! Which *didn't* mean that we could actually get to Jupiter in an hour. There were other factors which had to be allowed for: initial velocity, deceleration upon approaching our goal, and all that stuff.

To make a short story stubby, though, we could look forward confidently to setting foot on Europa within two days at the most.

Which gave us a big jump over the rest of those who were high-balling it for the wealth-laden satellite.

Dick Todd, looking awkward and a trifle embarrassed in his First Officer's braid, came to my turret at the end of our first day's flight. Things had happened so suddenly that no one had found time to tell him the score. He was one huge question mark on toes.

"How come, Sparks?" he demanded. "What's this all about? First we're on leave of absence, then they dump us in the *Saturn* and shove us off for Europa. Why?"

I said, "The answer's as simple as your half-witted brother. What do you get from the bank, stupid?"

"Loans," said Todd promptly, "at five percent. But what has that got to do with—"

"The correct answer," I sighed, "is—*shekels!* The sinews of war, lamebrain. Cash. Gelt. Credits. The root of all evil. Filthy lucre. There's a polarium-rush at Europa, which if I'm any prophet will make the old gold-rushes on mama Earth and the radium-rush on Venus in

2078 look like Bargain Day in the Ladies' Basement.

"The Corporation that supplies our bread-and-butter wants in on the ground floor. So we're elected the official claim-stakers."

"Polarium!" echoed Dick. "That's that new element, isn't it? Number 106? The impossible one?"

I stared at his First Officer's stripes sourly.

"When I think of the genius who used to wear those stripes," I sighed, "and then look at *you*— Oh, well! Listen to papa, whackypot. Polarium is Element No. 106, yes! But it ain't impossible, no! Because they found it. And I have yet to hear of anybody finding anything which doesn't exist. It's a brand-new discovery, apparently rare as ideas in that spongy bulb you hopefully call your 'brain,' and it's *so* new that nobody knows, yet, exactly what its properties are.

"Nevertheless, it's got a cash value. So we're on our way to collect some of the aforesaid same."

Todd said aggrievedly, "That's not a very nice way to talk to a superior officer, Sparks. Damned if I wouldn't report you—if I had any idea who to report you to. But—Europa, you said? That's kind of dangerous, isn't it? Our attempting to land there, I mean."

"No more dangerous," I told him, "than attempting to brush the teeth of a sabre-toothed tiger. Any time a ship gets within umpteen miles of Jupiter, pal, it's hold your hat and breath and give the prayerbook a quick rattle. That hunk of red goo has gravitational power—spelled with a capital, 'Phew!' More spaceships than you have porcupines have fallen within old Jupe's drag, crashed on the planet. And not a man has ever yet managed to escape, get back to tell us what it's like.

"From what we know or can guess, the planet is not inhabited or habitable. But

that's guesswork. Until we can explore it as we've explored its satellites, we'll never know. And we'll never be able to explore Jupiter until some clever jasper invents an anti-gravitational shield—"

"Say!" enthused Todd. "Now, there's a great idea, Sparks! I think I'll work on that!"

I looked at him and groaned.

"*You* invent an anti-gravitational shield? What are you going to use for brains? Buttons? I've never known but one man in my life with the genius to pull that miracle—and he's dead. Lancelot Biggs. I hope that wherever he is he can't hear you. He'll be rolling over in his grave so fast they'll call him 'Revolving Biggs.' Either that, or he'll come back and haunt you for daring to—"

And then it happened. Todd, who had been listening to me petulantly, suddenly stiffened. His jaw dropped . . . his eyes popped out like marbles on stalks . . . and his hair climbed two full, quivering inches off his scalp.

"S-s-sparks!" he wailed. "D-d-don't say that! Behind you!"

Then he keeled over in a dead faint. I turned. My heart took a running leap for my lips, and I think I screamed. Because I was staring at a thin, wavering nebulosity—a form gray and ghastly—a transparent simulacrum of—

Lancelot Biggs!

WHAT happened next, I wouldn't rightly know. All I know is that for the first time I realized how a deep-rooted tree must feel when a pup comes sniffing at it with malice in his eyes. My brain said, "Get going, babies! Double-quick!" But my pedal extremities were as nerveless as a batch of yesterday's dough.

But there was nothing wrong with my senses. On the contrary: they were as sharp as a creditor's letter. And for the first time in my life I realized that the old stories

you hear about ghosts are on the up-and-up. For this shimmering wraith of Biggs carried along with it all the visual, audible and olfactory accoutrements with which the ghosts of lore are usually endowed.

My ears hummed with a high, thin singing; a sort of weird, unearthly harmonic vibration. There was a biting odor in my nostrils, a scent so subtle I could not tell whether it were charnelly repugnant or just plain annoying. The phantom itself was gray, drab, colorless. Immobile. Tense, strained of visage. For a moment its white lips seemed to move—

Then it was gone! As quickly as it had come it was gone, and the paralysis left my limbs, and I was on my knees beside Todd, shaking him.

He came out of his blackout howling. "Did you see him, Sparks? It was Biggs' ghost! Standing right there—"

"What the hell's going on in here?" interrupted the irate voice of Cap Hanson. The door had burst open; he stood in the archway with Diane a few feet behind him. "What's all this, Mister Todd? The two of you groveling on the floor—drunk again, eh? Well, my two fine sirs—"

Todd pulled himself to his feet uncertainly. His voice was cracked, incoherent.

"N-no, sir! S-something horrible. This ship is—is *haunted*, sir! I saw—*Uppb!*"

My elbow caught his bread-basket just in time. His next words represented my own private opinion. But I didn't want Diane Hanson to hear them. After all, it isn't soothing to a heartbroken gal to learn that her lover has turned into a noisy, malodorous, spaceship spook.

"Haunted?" roared Hanson. "Are you mad, Lieutenant Todd? What do you mean, haunted?"

I tried to catch the skipper's eye so I could give him the business to lay off the quiz program for the time being. But my

finger-flagging came to naught. Diane shouldered past her father and into the room. Her voice was intense, eager.

"Sparks," she said, "tell me! It was—*he*, wasn't it? Lancelot?"

Too late, Dick understood why I'd poke-checked him. He turned red and began gobbling like a block-bound turkey.

"N-no, Miss Diane. N-nothing like that. Bert and I were just having a little horseplay. We'd had a drink—"

"Don't lie to me, Dick! It *was* Lancelot! It must have been. I—I saw him myself!"

Well! That was one for the books. It was our turn to gape. Cap Hanson stared from one to another of us wildly.

"What's this? You saw Lancelot, Diane? Where?"

"In my cabin. An hour or so ago. I was trying to take a little nap. Something wakened me—I don't know what—and I saw him standing in the middle of the room. He was so pale. So thin, and so sad. Oh, Daddy—"

SHE buried her face on his shoulder. Hansen said, "Now, there, honey!" He looked like an accident hunting for some place to happen. He stared at us dismally.

"Is that the truth, boys? Is that what you saw?"

We nodded. I said, "I'm not what you might call a superstitious guy, Skipper, but I know what I see. It was his ghost, all right."

Todd wailed miserably, "And it was all my fault. I brought the haunt on by bragging—"

"Nonsense!" snapped the Old Man. He wore a worried frown on his pan. He released Diane, took a few swift paces across the room, spun, came back to us. "Sheer nonsense!" he repeated angrily. "It isn't reasonable!"

I said, "Yeah, I know. That's what folks have been saying for centuries, Skip-

per. That ghosts aren't reasonable. But the fact remains, people *see* them—"

"That's not what I mean. I don't give a hoot about the possibility or impossibility of a ghostly afterworld, I'm just saying that it's not reasonable we should see a ghost of *Biggs!* Lanse wasn't that kind of boy. He wouldn't come back from the—from Beyond for no better purpose than to frighten the living daylights out of his old friends and the woman he loved. He was a logical man—"

"Here's what I think! If you saw Biggs—"

"We did!"

"Very well! Then it wasn't his *ghost* you saw! It was some sort of projection of him. Don't ask me what kind, or how he did it, or where he is. But I'll bet my last cent—Lancelot Biggs is not dead!"

The pronouncement galvanized Diane. Her eyes shone and she cried, "Oh, Daddy—do you mean that?" Looking upon her joy, I groaned inwardly. It was cruel of the Old Man to reawaken false hopes in her like that. As I said before, I know what I see. And that vision of Biggs didn't look like the projection of a living man's image. It wasn't flat. It was transparent and tri-dimensional. And filmy—

I opened my mouth to protest. But I never got one chirp out of my peeper. For at that moment the turret audio rasped to life, Chief Garrity's grizzled face gleamed on the screen, and the C. E.'s Scottish burr accosted us with accusing indignation.

"Captain Hanson, sirrrr!"

"Yes, Chief?"

"Will ye be so kind as to accept my rreseegnation, sirrr, ee-fective ee-meejuttly! I willna ha' fairther dealin' wi' sooch scand'lous nonsense as is now goin' on down here!"

Hanson snarled, "Resignation be damned, Chief! I've got troubles of my own. Don't come bellyaching to me because you can't handle your own men—"

"'Tisna *my* men are ablatherin'!" declared the Chief in high dudgeon. "'Tis one o' y'r ain men who by all rights should be dead an' planted these past seven weeks! 'Tis the ghost o' the late Lootenant Biggs—down here tryin' to gie my men orrorders f'r the *con*-struction o' some fantastic machine!"

I THINK we all must have said something, but what I said I can't remember. For I was conscious only of Hanson's exuberant roar. "See? I told you so!" and of Diane's glad little cry, "Daddy! Let's go down!"—then we were all high-balling it down the ramps toward the engine room.

What we found there was Bedlam. Bedlam in greasy overalls. The hypos, hooked up the V-I unit, were perking along in their usual smooth fashion. The rotorpistons were chugging back and forth in their channels with the calm precision of a five-year-old sucking a lollypop. But in one corner of the room the members of Garrity's black gang were huddled, wide-eyed, white-faced, closer than a duffer and his topped drive; in another corner stood Chief Garrity, staring with speechless wrath at a figure in the middle of the floor.

The figure was that which we had seen up topside. The wavering spectre of Lancelot Biggs.

It's funny how the mind works. Even in that moment of stress I found myself thinking that translation into the afterworld had not done much to improve Biggs' handsomeness. He didn't look much like the chubby cherubs or stalwart angels you see pictures of. He was the same old Biggs I'd known and loved. Tall, gangling, lean to the point of ridiculousness—dressed in space-blues rather the worse, I thought, for wear—tousle-haired, grave-eyed, with that old familiar Adam's-apple bobbing up and down in his scrawny throat like a half-swallowed orange.

There was one difference, though. He was not quiet, motionless, as he had been when I had seen him in my turret. There was a look of fretful anxiety in his eyes. He was gesturing impatiently to his awe-struck watchers, motioning them to approach him. His lips were moving, but no sound issued from them. There was in the air that same high, thin whining I had noted before; that same sharp, rather ammoniac odor.

Then Diane cried, "Lanse! Oh, Lanse, darling—" and rushed forward. Straight toward, up to, into and *through* the spectre of her lost lover. And she stopped, dazed. Her arms waved wildly. "B-but he's gone! He's not here? Where did he—"

I choked weakly, "D-don't look now, Diane, but you sort of—cr—broke him up. Little chunks of him are floating around you."

Which was the God's-honest truth, so help me! When she burst into that phantom, it popped apart like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Shattered into a thousand little shimmering, quivering bits, as an image will shatter in a quiet pool when you chuck a rock into it. Diane stepped back. The hunks of Biggs came drifting back together again. I saw, now, that he wore a happy smile. His lips moved, and we read the name he spoke. "*Diane!*"

Hanson whirled on the scowling Chief Engineer.

"How long has he been here, Chief? What's he want?"

Garrity's reply was as sultry as a Venustian sunset.

"And joost how, Captain Hanson, would I be capable of knowin' the *de*-sires of a disembodied speerit? I'm a mon of broad experience, sirrr, but I dinna pretend to comprehend *ee*-cleesiastical mysteries. *Shoo!*" He waved his arms at the ghostly Biggs. "Go 'way, ye bodiless demon! 'From ghoulies an' ghosties an' all sairts o'

beasties an' things thot go "Boomp!" in the night, O Laird, deliverrr us!" "

Hanson turned to me in desperation.

"He's trying to tell us something, Sparks. You and him was friends. Can't you understand him?"

I was already pondering that problem. It was plain that Biggs' motions were not purposeless, that he was trying to communicate some message. I stepped forward, facing the wraith, formed short words clearly on my lips.

"Lanse—can you hear me?"

He shook his head.

"But you can read writing?" I had some crazy idea of scribbling messages to him for his perusal. Of course, it was a one-way ticket to the Observation Ward if anybody ever found out I'd been holding a chalk-talk confab with a ghost, but—

He didn't like that idea, either. He raised both arms. Then he did a funny thing. He started waving his paws in the air. Left paw—right—right again—left—left—

Todd groaned, and looked for a soft spot to faint on. "Not only a spook," he wailed, "but a *dancing* spook—"

"Shut up!" I yelled. "Cap, shove that alleged Mate through the airlock. This ain't cuckoo—it's *code*! Go on, chum! I'm getting it!"

For:

"S . . . p . . . a . . . r . . . k . . . s. Lancelot Biggs was left-righting to me, "g . . . o . . . t t . . . o b . . . e b . . . r . . . r . . . i . . . e . . . f. Power limited. Tell Chief line inner hull posi-charge steel lining, throw nega-circuit through outer. Have Todd revise course to following trajectory . . ."

I'll spare you the rest. It was all technical. So technical, in fact, that I couldn't make head or tail of it. There wasn't a man aboard the *Saturn* who could. It was, furthermore, absolute proof that we were

dealing with no spook, but with L. Biggs himself. For this was typical "Biggsian" mathematics.

And he was right in saying his time was short. He was beginning to fade before he had completed the algebraic and mechanical formulæ he wigwagged to me. Toward the end I had to strain my eyes to find out which hand he was wiggling. But I caught the last waves.

"Follow instructions blindly," he signaled, "and we'll soon be together again. Luck! My love . . . Diane . . ."

Then he was gone.

BOY, now, I'll tell you the following hours were hectic. Our normal complement is a twenty-men crew, of which only six men are engineers or engine-room helpers. And the job Biggs had laid out for us was weighty enough to stagger the resources of a Patrol repairship.

But Hanson turned on the heat, and when the Old Man shoots the juice, things hop! We drafted everyone on board. Staff, crew, engine-room, Ordinaries—even Slops and the mess boy burned blisters on the pinkies performing the task Biggs had assigned us.

Most of us bent to our labors eagerly. Myself, for instance—I didn't know what Biggs had in mind, or what the final result of our efforts would be. But I knew damned well that Biggs never gave purposeless orders. Some good would be the end of this fantastic webwork of plates, wires and coils we were weaving through, in and about the *Saturn*.

Diane, despite the fact that her hands soon became raw and sore, insisted on doing a share of the manual labor.

"I must, Sparks!" she declared. "I'd never respect myself again if I didn't help in some small way. Because he promised this would bring us together again. Where, I don't know—" She straightened, staring at me speculatively.

"I don't know!" she whispered. "Sparks—he never told us where he is!"

"He didn't have time," I reassured her. "His power was limited, he said. But everything's going to be O.Q."

But later, Dick Todd raised the same point, when I spoke to him in the control-turret. He had been checking the course Biggs had designated. Now, frowning, he laid his computations before me.

"You see what this means, Bert?"

"Yeah," I said, looking at the rumpled sheet. "It means you ought to wash your hands more often. Well, what?"

"This course," said Todd nervously, "sets a direct trajectory to—*Jupiter!*"

I said, "O.Q. So it sets a direct traj—*What did you say?*"

"Jupiter!" repeated Todd miserably. "I've checked and rechecked it. I can't be wrong." He stared at me, small dancing lights of fear in his eyes. "Sparks," he whispered, "that *was* Biggs we saw, wasn't it?"

"If it wasn't," I told him, "I'm a ring-tailed baboon. And no cracks!"

"But everyone seems to be taking it for granted he is still *alive*." Todd sidgedet nervously. "That his orders will help us, somehow. Suppose—suppose, Sparks, our *first* hunch was right, after all? That Biggs is really dead? And that it *was* his ghost we saw?"

I wet my suddenly dry lips. "Go on!" I said.

"They say the dead are lonely," husked Todd. "And Biggs, who died in the loneliness of negative space might be doubly so. Suppose he wants company. After all, he didn't promise us success. He only said, 'We'll soon be together.' But where, Sparks—where? In this world, or—"

I shook myself savagely. I couldn't deny that his words had given me a bad case of icicles on the vertebrae. I knew something else, though, too. That Lancelot Biggs, alive or dead, had never yet given me a

bum steer. And that I, for one, meant to see this thing through—or bust!

Bust! I didn't like that word, either. Not when I thought of our new course, and us blasting hell-for-leather toward massive, crushing Jupiter.

THEN somehow twenty-four hours, Earth standard, had passed. And by labors verging on the miraculous, we had completed the task set before us. And now, with the second part of Biggs' instruction before us, we were standing in the control turret of the weirdly altered *Saturn*, watching the small hand of the chronometer creep toward the thin black mark that represented our deadline.

Cap Hanson, who had been a bulwark of strength when there was work to do, was as squirmy as a hen on a cactus egg now that all we had to do was wait. He paced anxiously back and forth between the control-banks and the visiplat. Once he squinted through the perilens and turned to me nervously.

"You're *sure* you got that message right, Bert?" he demanded for maybe the thousandth time. "You couldn't have made a mistake."

"I could have," I reassured him, "but I'll bet you my pension I didn't. I've been pushing keys for too long not to get my did-da-dits straight, Skipper."

"We're awfully close to Jupiter," scowled the Old Man. "*Awfully* close. I—I don't like it. Not only that—but we're running away from Europa as fast as we can. If the Corporation ever finds out about this—"

"They can't miss," I said. "They know how long it should have taken us to get to Europa. Matter of fact, Cap, we should be landing there right now. We're going to lose a little time in establishing those claims. But if by losing a little time we can find Lanse Biggs again, why—"

"*Awfully* close!" complained the skipper. He turned to Todd suddenly. "Dick—we can't risk it! There must be a mistake somewhere. Jupiter fills all space before us. If we get caught in its gravitational power, we'll all be killed.

"We've got to turn back. Send the message down to the engine room. Reverse motors and lift!"

Diane cried, "Daddy! But Lanse—"

"I'm sorry, honey. But we can't risk twenty lives and a quarter million credits' worth of Corporation property on the hazard of finding one man. Give the order, Mr. Todd!"

Todd said willingly, "Aye, sir!" and reached out to push the audio stud. My heart sank. The needle was almost upon the split second that should have seen us putting Biggs' mysterious plan into operation. I yelled, "Skipper, *please!*"

"Give the order, Todd!" repeated Hanson regretfully.

But Todd's hand never reached the button. For just then there came a terrific, straining lunge of the ship; the floor seemed to slip beneath my feet, I toppled headlong to my knees. Plates groaned and creaked in metal agony. I felt a sensation of wild acceleration, a dizzying sense of speed intensified, plunging us forward—downward—

And Todd cried, "Too late! Too late, Skipper! God help us—we're falling onto Jupiter!"

I TOLD you folks, say I'm hard-boiled. People also claim I'm a wingding. They say lots of things about me—none of them nice. But I'll say this one thing for myself in self-defense. That once in a million times I show a good streak of common sense.

This was one of those times. While everyone else was wailing and hollering and going off the top of their buds, I got smart and carried on.

I roared, "Dammit all, Lanse *knew* this was going to happen, and planned for it. Depress that No. 3 lever, Todd! Shoot the juice through those coils we've been building!"

And Todd was so rattled that he obeyed me. Like I told you before, we'd created a wild-looking network of wires all over the framework of the *Saturn*. We had even constructed a whole new inner hull, juicing it according to some diagram that didn't appear to make sense.

Now rheostats rheostated and condensers condense and the air got so full of electricity that my teeth began to hum like bees in a bathtub. And it got hot in the control-turret. But—

But our frightful plunging motion ceased! Not just like *that*, you know; I don't mean we stopped stock-still and hung motionless in space. But we drifted into an easy glide. A gentle, leaf-in-the-breeze sort of motion.

Cap Hanson's jaw fell down to his fourth button. A gasp worked its way up out of his lumber region. "It—it's impossible!" he said. "I—I don't believe it!"

I didn't either. For what we were seeing mirrored on the turret visiplate was something no man in the universe had ever seen before—and lived to tell about it. We were seeing the troposphere, the stratosphere, the surface atmosphere of the massive planet Jupiter at easy visual range. And we were drifting to solid ground so gently that we were in no more danger than a parachutist approaching a field full of sofa cushions!

It didn't even occur to me, then, to notice how far off the scientist's had been in attributing fantastic characteristics to unstudied Jupiter. Because its density was so much less than Earth's, they had envisioned it as a gaseous or semi-liquid planet. Which was so much hogwash. It was a normalized core surrounded by blankets, thousands of miles deep, of atmosphere. It

was lush, luxuriant, green. Steamy with vapors, riotous with vegetable life. Protected by its swaddling clothes, it was the most likely abode of life Man had ever found outside his native Earth!

But as I say, I scarcely noticed this at first. I was conscious only of my own pulse-numbing astonishment, of the casual, lazy motion of our ship, of Captain Hanson gasping beside me in a cracked, incredulous voice, "Anti-gravitation! *He's found it!*"

Our task was not yet done. The instructions called for the lifting and depression of a dozen more studs. But by now, Dick Todd—who is a damn sight better navigator than he is a mental giant—was hunched over his controls playing the intricate keys like a master organist.

In three hours that sped by like as many minutes we had gained the surface of Jupiter. We sought the declension points Biggs' ghost had set forth to us. We hovered over the juncture . . . spotted a small, glistening mote of silver beneath us . . . lowered on our amazing anti-gravitational beam. It was a perfect landing. Less than an eighth of a mile from the lean, gangling, radiant, unspace-suited figure who came racing across the field toward us—

AFTERWARD, when everyone had stopped trying to talk at once, and a modicum of coherence worked its way into our glad reunion, I pressed Biggs for explanations. He grinned in that amiable, modest way of his.

"Why, it wasn't much, really, Sparks," he protested. "I never was lost in hyperspace, or negative space, at all! You see, when I cut myself loose in the life-skiff from the 'infinite mass' of the *Saturn*, in order to reestablish the ship's finiteness, I also made my *own* craft finite again. Which is pure common sense. Anything less than infinite is necessarily finite—"

"Comes the dawn," I groaned. "And I like to think I've got brains. But go on!"

"Well, by sheer accident, the spot in space where I became finite again happened to be here. On the surface of Jupiter. I was pretty much surprised, as you can guess, to learn that this is a definitely habitable planet. Good air, plenty of food and water—no handicaps but its tremendous bulk." He sobered momentarily. "None of the others who ever crashed here survived, I guess," he said. "I've found three or four spaceships, broken to bits—"

"Well, anyway—I realized that the only way for me to ever get away was to find some method of counteracting the planet's terrific gravity. And it suddenly occurred to me that the answer lay in a laboratory curiosity created way back in the 20th Century. A piece of magnetized steel that floated within upright supports above a counter-magnetized plate.

"I adapted this principle and gave it a few refinements of my own. The instructions I gave you created a dual magnet-hull for the *Saturn*. Inner hull positively charged, outer hull negative. Counterbalance, you see. The outside of the ship repelled the gravitational attraction of Jupiter so strongly that it could never have landed. The inner hull tempered the effect of the outer so that an easy, drifting motion was obtained. You could vary the speed of this simply by altering the amount of E.M.F. running through the coils—"

"We discovered that," interrupted the Old Man. "But you still haven't told us, son, about your 'ghost.' You like to scared the almighty hell out of all of us. How—"

Lance grinned shyly.

"Well, I can't take credit for that, Skipper. You see, it was sheer accident. I found a deposit of some strange new substance here on Jupiter with the most peculiar properties. The stuff seems to polarize light at its source—and reorganize it

into a tri-dimensional image at a distance which can be controlled by electric power

"When I discovered that my own life-skiff couldn't make the long trip to Europa or Io, I decided to project my image out into space in the hope I'd find someone. The telekaleidoscopic rays—I guess we can call 'em that till we get a better name—are naturally attracted to metals. This cut down the haphazardness of the attempt.

"It was sheer chance, though, that you should be my rescuers. Though I might have known you wouldn't abandon me without a long search. I—I'm mighty grateful to you, sir."

His words struck Hanson like a thunder-clap. And the Old Man groaned.

"*Omigawd!*"

"What's wrong, Skipper?"

"I just remembered—we was supposed to be on Europa twenty-four hours ago! By this time, all the available claims will be gobbled up. When the Corporation learns about this, we're all going to be sunk!"

Diane said indignantly, "Ridiculous! You've made the first landing on Jupiter, Daddy. Surely that should be enough glory for them."

"That's glory," admitted Hanson dolefully, "but it ain't enough glory for *them*. I know this outfit, honey. I been working for them, man and boy, for nigh onto forty years. Their motto is: Get all you can and then some!"

"It ain't going to matter to them that we found our lost First, discovered anti-grav, and made the first landing on a new planet. No sirree! They sent us out to find polarium deposits, and if we don't come home with the best claim—"

Biggs said, "Polarium? Did you say polarium, Cap?"

"That's what I said," groaned the skipper. "Now be a good boy, Lanse. Go 'way and let me suffer in peace."

"Why," grinned Biggs, "I don't believe there's any reason to suffer, Captain. Because, you see, that strange new substance I mentioned—the one out of which I constructed my telekaleidoscope—is polarium! There are tremendous deposits of it here on Jupiter. Why not? This is the mother planet of Europa—"

SO—there you are! That's Lancelot Biggs for you. Screwball, genius, wizard and luck-box extraordinary. Toss him in a mud puddle and he'll come up clutching a diamond every time. Not once in a while. Every time.

And I guess it was just about now that the Old Man slipped me the high-sign to drag hips out of there.

"Look, Sparks," he suggested, "how about you and me take a little walk and explore this here new planet?"

I said, "Oh, I'm quite comfortable here, Cap—"

He jabbed an elbow into my ribs ferociously. "Are you coming peaceable?" he hissed, or do I have to pull off your leg and beat you over the head with the bloody stump?"

I got it then. Diane and Biggs. They were eyeing each other like two marshmallows ready to melt. So I said, "Well, all right, Skipper. If you want to. 'Bye, folks!"

And do you know—they never even heard me?