

GODDESS OF WORLD 21—Hated By Women—Preyed On By Men

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION

FANTASTIC

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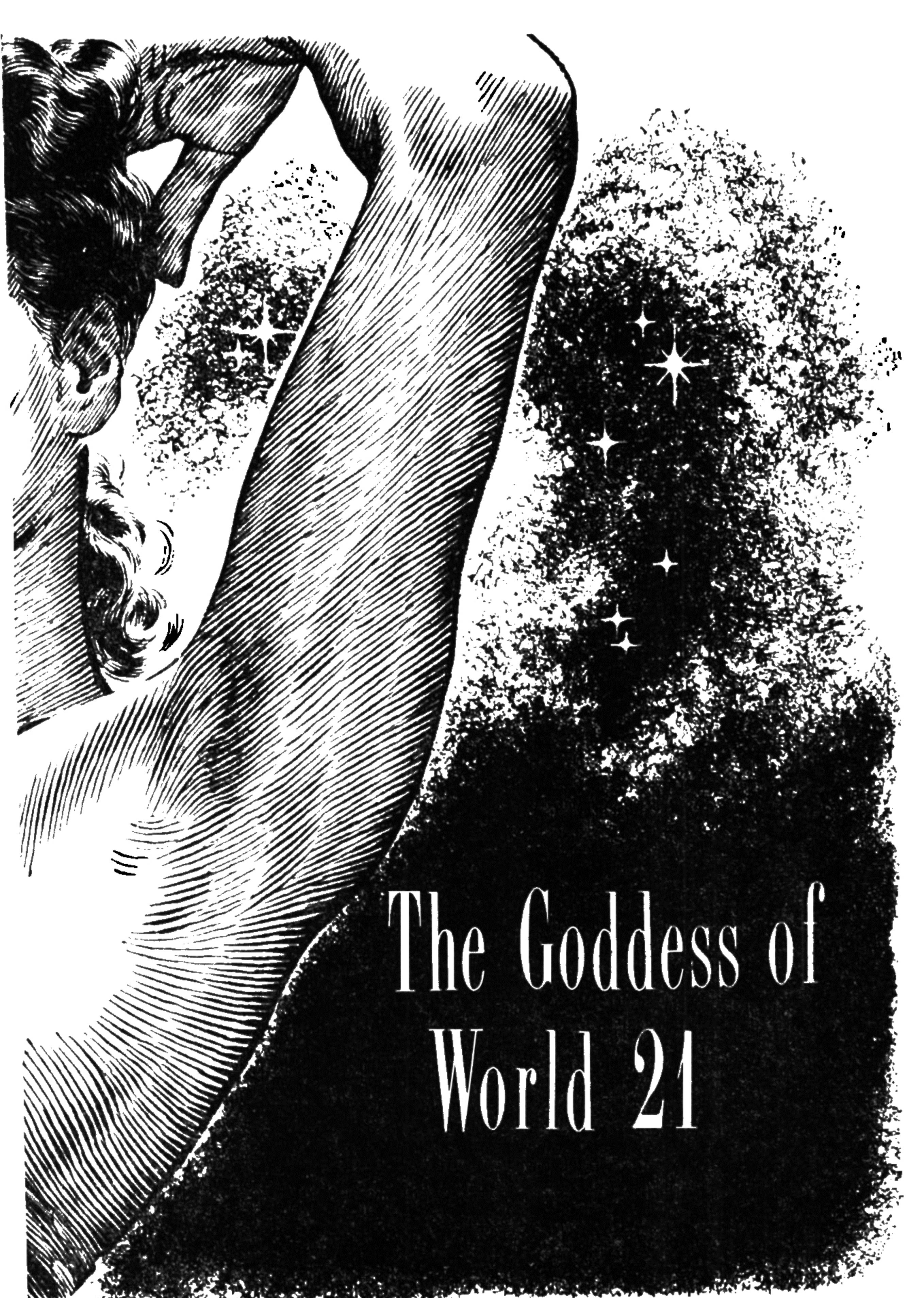
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A visit with Victoria involved a long and



The Goddess of World 21

hazardous climb, but was worth the danger.

The Goddess of *World 21*

By HENRY SLESAR

Victoria was due for trouble—with her love life among other things. How could she keep a boy friend around when her softest sigh was likely to blow him halfway back to town? And how many guys were likely to climb a hundred feet for a kiss? How many? Well, placed end-to-end they would have reached the farthest space station without a rocket.

THE Universal Press Service Building was a squatly chunk of stubborn granite, set down defiantly amid the airy structures of downtown New York. It was all business and a block wide, yet some peculiar characters came through its entrance. Today was no exception.

This morning, it was a disreputable man in second-hand space gear, with dusty mismatched boots and a week's stubble on his brown lined face.

He shuffled his way through the lobby, avoiding the eyes of the UPS employees moving in and out of the elevators. He mumbled a question to one of them, and was directed to the fourteenth floor. The frosty receptionist who guarded that portal dropped her

temperature by ten degrees when she saw him.

"Er—this guy Stu Champion," he said. "Can I see him?"

"In reference to what?"

The man unzipped the front of his jacket and lifted out a folded edition of a newspaper. It was a battered copy of the *Callisto Clarion*, and from its condition, obviously more than six months old. He shoved it under the girl's nose, and she backed off to look at the squared half-tone that adorned Stuart Champion's syndicated feature column. It was a flattering portrait, but it was unmistakably Stu, with his young, narrow face, bristly black hair, and slightly Oriental eyes.

"This is the guy, ain't it?"

He rattled the newsheets rudely.

"Why, yes. But Mr. Champion is rather busy—"

The man's face, a testament to the rigors of outer space with its burned, pitted flesh and raggedly engraved lines, suddenly adopted a knowing leer. He scratched the wiry growth on his chin and said: "You just tell him I been to Gulliver. That's all you do. You tell him that."

The receptionist frowned, but the cryptic request was effective. She dialed Stu Champion's office and repeated the message. He seemed equally puzzled, but he growled affirmatively.

"Third door down the hall," the girl said.

The UPS reporter was half-hidden behind the debris of papers on the scarred wooden desk. He was crouched hungrily over the typewriter, scowling like a wild animal caught at its meal. But his face changed when the whiskery stranger entered.

"Mr. Champion?"

"That's the culprit. What can I do for you, Mr.—?" The deliberate pause didn't work. The man just stood there.

"You wrote this article, right?" He produced it, and

waved the paper in front of Stu's face accusingly. "I was on a freighter making the Callisto run. That's where I saw it. I came back last July. I ain't doing much space work now. Okay if I sit down?"

He sighed with fatigue, as if the long speech had winded him. Stu nodded him into a chair, and cleared a path through the papers in front of him.

"Let's start from scratch," he said. "I gather you work the merchant ships. Right?"

"Yeah." The man looked at the floor. "Only not for a while. I flunked the exam last July."

"Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Mackey. Russ Mackey."

Stu reached over and took the folded newspaper.

"*Callisto Clarion*, January. Sure, I wrote the article, Mr. Mackey. Only not for the *Clarion*. My column gets syndicated to around eight thousand papers through twelve star systems. You could have read it anyplace." He smirked a little, but Mackey's reaction was a wooden stare.

Stu Champion looked him over carefully. He was a down-and-outer, no question of that. A space bum, picking up odd jobs on the merchant

fleets until the Space Authority caught up with the fact that too much acceleration and cheap whiskey had wrecked too many of Mackey's blood vessels and arteries. Now he was drifting around the spaceports of Earth, telling whoppers and cadging drinks from tourists.

Stu cleared his throat. "Just what do you need from me, Mr. Mackey?"

"Like I told the girl. I been to that place you wrote about, Mr. Champion. Gulliver, I mean. I thought you'd like to hear about it."

Stu spread open the news-sheets, hiding his sneer behind them. He was sure now that his analysis was correct. Mackey was trying to turn some wild space yarn into hard cash. But he was up against Mr. Skeptic himself.

"I see," he said gently. "Well, I write an awful lot of cra--articles, 'Mr. Mackey. I better refresh my memory."

He turned to his column. It was pleasant, reading his own words.

GULLIVER Giant planet . . . or giant hoax?

Not since the mad and merry days of the 20th Century, whose Flying Saucers kept the populace in a perpetual

state of happy anxiety, has Dame Rumor enjoyed herself so much. This time, her stock-in-trade is a tale concerning a planet roughly described as eight times the size of Jupiter, whose atmospheric advantages have produced a race identical to Earth's in every respect but one. The inhabitants are all the size of Jonathon Swift's hapless hero Lemuel Gulliver, on his excursion to the land of the Lilliputs. These Brobdingnagians (to plagiarize Mr. Swift even further) are purported to be entirely civilized and well advanced, leading ordinary lives—working, playing, making love, getting into scrapes, catching head colds, and in general, behaving like the rest of us. This planet, popularly called Gulliver, is the subject of much fascinated speculation. As a tourist attraction, it would obviously rival anything in the cosmos. Not even Damon Scully's ubiquitous Space Circus, with its fifteen-foot giant, could hope to rival the lure of Gulliver. There's only one problem. Nobody knows where Gulliver is. In fact, there's some question whether Gulliver exists anywhere outside of the spacemen's famous imagination. This last statement will undoubtedly inspire hundreds of

indignant letters. Fine; my publishers set great store by indignant letters. But allow me to state here and now that I refuse to pass judgment on Gulliver's reality or lack of it. Yet it must be admitted that none of the reports are supported by tangible evidence. (I am ignoring that gigantic pair of shoes so carefully constructed by those whimsical students at Princeton.) No one has claimed to have made landfall on Gulliver itself. But spacemen have "seen" their enormous spaceships, and have "discovered" tracks on uncharted worlds, tracks supposedly made by the Gullivers themselves on exploratory jaunts. I'm no lawyer, men, but that ain't blue-ribbon evidence. There's room for speculation . . .

Stu Champion pulled his eyes away from the print, and smiled at his visitor.

"Okay," he said. "I'm willing to listen. But you might as well quote the price in advance."

Russ Mackey looked shrewd. "I don't want nothing in advance, Mr. Champion. I'll tell you everything I know. If it leads you someplace, it oughta be worth five grand."

"Five grand's a lot of money."

"Not to the guy who finds Gulliver."

"And you can lead me there?"

"I didn't say that, Mr. Champion. I left the joint in a big blind hurry after the giant put my tail rocket back into shape. My instruments was on the blink, too. I just set the pilot and drifted out with my fingers crossed—"

"Whoa!" Stu cried. "You lost me, pal. You trying to tell me you've *been* to this Gulliver place?"

"That's right. Only don't ask for directions, Mr. Champion. I can't help you that way."

Stu leaned back in his chair, and found something unusual happening to him. He was *believing* this bearded, shifty-eyed bum.

"Okay," he said. "Let's hear it."

Mackey leaned forward.

"There ain't too much to tell. Me and a pal of mine, we got hooked up with a mining company out working the Antares chain. We were operating a two-man cruiser running ore samples to the home planet. One day, we're out on a routine flight and get swatted by a meteor shower—that fine stuff, you know? They call it Hell Rain—and we conk out from the heat. Next

thing I know, I wake up with the instruments and radio burned out, and my pal fried to hamburger. He wasn't pretty, and he didn't smell so good neither. I shot a photo of his body to satisfy the legal beagles, and then dumped him through the airlock."

He spoke of horrors with the spaceman's affected carelessness. Stu grimaced.

"Me, I was lucky," Mackey continued. "Just minor burns. Only I didn't know where the cruiser was. There was no record on the instruments, and I didn't know how long I was unconscious. By the time I get my senses back, the ship's caught in an orbit. I got to the landing controls fast as I could, but I couldn't set her down without bending the tail. You know what that means."

"No," Stu said.

"It figured the planet would be uncharted. I'd never get the cruiser off again with a bent tailpipe. Curtains."

"But you *did* get off?"

"Sure," said Mackey. "That is what I'm telling you. *She* got me off."

"She?" Stu said. It was a switch. So far, Mackey's story followed the well-established plot line of the typical space-whopper: the old Robinson Crusoe stuff, embellished with

tales of alien beasts stranger than anything in Scully's Space Circus.

"That's what I said," Mackey insisted. "I dropped down on this planet, and first thing I know, this sky-high dame is bearing down on the ship. I was scared, let me tell you. She was big as a house — maybe a hundred feet tall. And *pretty*, you know? A real looker. I see her comin' through the viewport and almost passed out. She shouts something at me. It was so loud, I could feel the cruiser vibrating. Next thing I know, she's bending down and looking in the viewport. Biggest goddam blue eye you ever saw—so much of her and all good lookin'!"

Stu found himself chuckling. "Sure it wasn't a dream?"

"It was for real! She's looking at me with a grin big as a crater. Then she says something like 'domino' . . ."

"Domino? What did that mean?"

"I dunno. But that's what she said. 'Domino?'—like it was a question. Then she musta seen how scared I was, because she says, 'Don't be scared. Please don't be scared.' . . ."

"In English?"

"Perfect English. Just like you and me speak."

"Um," Stu grunted.

"I know it sounds crazy. Anyway, I got out of the ship and told her what the trouble was. She bends over and fiddles with the cruiser like it was a toy. Next thing I know, she's straightening out the bent tailpipe. I didn't waste no time after that. I climbed in and got ready to blast off. She looked kind of surprised, and begged me to stay awhile. She says her name's Victoria, and she's plenty lonely up there—"

"Victoria?"

"That's what she says. She wants me to keep her company, get it? Only I wasn't buyin' it. She seemed harmless enough, but I figured her big brother might come along any minute. So off I went."

"Easy as that?"

"So help me. I shot the cruiser out into space, hoping to get picked up by an Earth ship. I was lucky, let me tell you. In about forty hours, a patrol vessel spotted me. When I didn't respond to their radio signal, they sent out a grapple and pulled me alongside. That's how I got back to the home planet. I told them the story, but they thought I was delirious. Guess I was. I was runnin' up a

fever by that time, so they dumped me on a hospital ship, Earthbound. That's where I had my last exam." He scowled at the memory.

"And that's the whole story?" Stu said.

"That's it. From the direction I was traveling, I'd figure Gulliver was one of that ring of planets on the fourth vector of Antares. That's the closest I could figure.

Stu whistled. "You're talking about several billion miles and some nine hundred worlds, pal. All uncharted. It would take a lifetime to visit them all."

"Maybe so," Mackey said grimly. "Only who knows? You could be lucky the first time."

"Sure," Stu said. He reached into his trouser pocket and came out with some folded bills. He peeled two off the top and passed them across the desk. "Go on, take it. I'm not backing out of our deal. This is just a down payment."

Mackey took it uncertainly. "Okay, Mr. Champion. I won't kid you; I can use the dough."

He stood up and went to the door. Then he turned and said: "Only I'm tellin' the truth, Mr. Champion. Understand?"

"Sure," Stu said sourly, waving his hand.

The reporter sat chewing his thumbnail for five minutes after Mackey left. His half-hour's entertainment had cost him twenty bucks. Yet for a while back there, the son of a gun had actually convinced him. . . .

He turned back to his typewriter, shrugging.

It was an hour later that the name clicked in his mind. He whirled away from the machine, and tripped the lever on the ancient intercom on his desk. As usual, it was on the blink.

"Claire!" he bellowed.

His secretary, an owl-eyed spinster who thought Stu was Hemingway reincarnated, came scurrying through the doorway.

"Yes, Mr. Champion?"

"Look—do you remember an article I did on a guy named Domino last year? Dr. Domino."

"It sounds familiar."

"It had something to do with a laboratory of his. In Wisconsin, I think." He rubbed the short hair on the back of his head. "What the hell was it called?"

"I could check the files, Mr. Champion."

"No, wait! I remember

now. It was called the Biocellular Lab. Something to do with growing arms and legs—"

Claire swallowed. "Oh, yes. I remember the story. He was a sort of—crackpot."

"I dunno. But dig it up for me, sweetie. It's important."

Her eyes melted at the thought of such a significant assignment. She hurried out of the room, determined to make an outstanding effort.

She succeeded. In five minutes, she was waving a galley proof in front of Stu's eyes. He snatched it from her hand and read it over swiftly.

NEW ARMS AND LEGS?

Wisconsin Laboratory

Plans to Grow Them

Hold your hats, kiddies—now the Mad Scientists are getting ready to grow arms and legs and assorted organs right in the laboratory. The outfit dedicated to this ambitious project is innocently named the Biocellular Laboratory, near Kenosha, Wisconsin, and is operated under the direction of a gentleman known as Dr. Alvin Domino. Dr. Domino, who looks nothing like the Hollywood concept of the screwy savant, is a tall, muscular gent with dark black eyes and a temper to match. This was on exhibit

when I called on the good doctor on a recent trip he made to this city. When I asked him about his laboratory's activities, his reaction was something less than friendly. However, he was willing to admit, grudgingly, that the Biocellular Lab was engaged in work "roughly in the nature of" growing new limbs and organs for those who have been deprived of them. He stated that such work is not new, but that his techniques are radical and require many years of controlled experimentation. That was about all I could learn from Dr. Domino, before he clearly indicated that my departure would not be a sad event. Taking the hint, I left. If any of my readers are interested, I must warn them that any letters addressed to Dr. Domino will in all probability go unanswered. . . .

"Is it what you want?" Claire asked anxiously. She felt it must be.

"I dunno. Things don't connect. But suppose you set up an appointment with Dr. Domino for this morning? I'll requisition a copter and fly out to this Wisconsin lab of his—"

"Then you won't be going to the Circus?"

He looked at her blankly.
"What?"

"Oh, my goodness!" Claire slapped her right cheek. "I left it on your desk this morning, and forgot to remind you."

"Left what?"

She fluttered through the papers on his desk. When she came up with the envelope, she breathed a sigh of relief.

"Here it is! Stupid of me. I'm so sorry, Mr. Champion—"

"Okay, okay. Let's have a look at it."

There was a stiff yellow card inside, and a brief note. The card read:

ADMIT ONE
SCULLY'S SPACE CIRCUS
"Greatest Show in
the Universe"

The note read:

Dear Stu—

Hope you can make the show today. About time you gave us a free puff. Have some great new acts that you'll get a kick out of. Look forward to seeing you.

Damon

"Stu and Damon!" the reporter said disgustedly. "Since when does that sneaky bum get so friendly?"

Then he read the P.S.

P.S. If you see a seedy character named Mackey today, watch out for your wallet.

D.

The UPS copter pilot commandeered by Stu Champion grinned appreciatively when told their destination was the circus ground in Basil, New York.

"Man, that Venus Snake Dance is something," he said. "I caught it down in South America last year."

Stu growled something and slumped in his seat. The pilot was talkative throughout the half-hour journey upstate, reminiscing about the more erotic aspects of Scully's spectacle. But Stu was too busy with his own speculations.

Stuart Champion had picked up a fair camp of enemies in his fourteen years as a reporter, but not one was more enthusiastically reciprocated than Damon Scully. Single-handed, Scully had done more to distort the ideals of Phineas T. Barnum than any man in the universe. Old Phineas wasn't above a few questionable gambits himself, but Scully had outdone the old maestro in spades. It wasn't Scully's oc-

casional hoaxes that troubled Stu. It was his shameful exploitation of the alien creatures that inhabited the twelve Earth-colonized star systems. Stu had done a blistering article on the subject once, but he was disgusted at the outcome. Attendance at Scully's Space Circus had almost trebled after its appearance. "Shocking!" said his loyal readers—and then immediately made their reservations.

They checked in at the copterport at one o'clock, and the pilot vanished into the stream of human traffic pushing its way towards the plastic bubble-tent that housed the show. Stu used his press card, and was saved an hour's wait.

Once inside, he had to admit to a thrill of crude excitement as he surveyed the garish, 3-D posters that circled the bubble. This wasn't a circus in the old-fashioned sense. The entire affair consisted of a 300-degree circle of individual attractions, each on a pay-as-you-enter affair. It was nothing more than a glorified freak show, but with curiosities beyond the wildest dreams of any circus impresario before Damon Scully.

Stu pushed his way through the goggling, gawking crowd

and started for Damon Scully's office, located between the Jupiter Snow Girl and the Eating Trees of Betelguese. But his footsteps slowed as he realized that some new additions had, indeed, been made since his last visit.

He paused at one of them, gawking a bit himself at the brilliant poster that heralded the attraction.

**COME IN AND
KILL THE DRAGON!**
*See if You can Slay the
Monster from Ursa Minor!*
Razor-Sharp Swords
Provided FREE!
*Watch the Dragon Repair
Itself Before Your Eyes
Safe Enough for Children*

The crowd behind him began to push, and he allowed himself to be shuffled forward, his eyes hypnotically on the poster. Before he was really certain of his intentions, Stu found himself dropping a coin into the entrance machine and moving into the exhibit. He stopped thinking about Damon Scully; he let his mind become a blank. Yet deep down, he knew that the poster had magnetized him as surely as it would any yokel from the hill country; that he was aching with curiosity to see this Dragon and

try his hand at slaying it....

At the entrance, to the right, was a rack of gleaming broadswords, and a recorded tape said: "Take one, take one . . ." He lifted one out, hefted it in his hand and found its fine balance pleasing. When his fingers closed around the gracefully curved handle, his heart began pounding, and he shivered slightly with the sense of satisfaction this instrument of slashing death provided him. He shook it in anticipation, and continued down the corridor where the Dragon would be located. He felt elated, uplifted; an inner voice told him that disgust would follow later, but now he didn't care, he didn't give a damn. . . .

Then he saw the Dragon.

The man in front of him, a pudgy tourist with camera, binoculars, and portable radio strapped around his chest, paled suddenly and dropped his sword. But then the taped voice spoke out its words of instruction and reassurance.

"Don't be alarmed at the appearance of the Dragon, ladies and gentlemen. This incredible beast, discovered in the mud jungles of World 12 in Ursa Minor, is completely vegetarian and non-belligerent. As you can see, it resembles a blob of animated

bubble gum (the announcer chuckled here) with tentacle projections which provide it with locomotion. At the moment, it may appear to be some ten feet tall or a mere five feet; this is the result of the Dragon's peculiar elasticity. Now I'm going to lift the front of the Dragon's cage, and you yourself will be able to demonstrate the most remarkable characteristic of this alien beast: its ability to repair its own body when damaged. Strike hard and fast at the Dragon with your sword. Don't worry about it striking back. Some fifty thousand visitors to the Space Circus have attacked the Dragon, and without danger. Strike where you please. The elongated growth on top constitutes the Dragon's head. The tentacles — there are twenty-two of them— are its 'arms' and 'legs.' Strike swiftly, and kindly do not spend more than thirty seconds in the cage; there's a long line of people behind you. Thank you very much!"

The pudgy man with the paraphernalia seemed emboldened by these words. When the cage lifted, and the blubbery pink thing inside swayed silently before him, he set upon it with a horrendous screech. Again and again, he

brought the broadsword down on the yielding flesh of the Dragon. His first blow slashed an opening in the beast's side that was quickly closed over. His second hacked off a tentacle. Swiftly, the beast shifted to cover the detached member with the rest of his body, and seemed to absorb the rubbery flesh back into itself. Again and again the little man wielded the sword, the perspiration streaming down his fat, round face, his eyes wild and dangerous. It was obviously a moment of terrible, primeval happiness.

Then it was Stu's turn. But something had happened to his pounding pulse as he watched the little man vent a lifetime's frustrations on the dumb freak from an alien world. The disgust was coming on him, and his excitement disappeared. He paused in front of the swaying pink thing that was busily contorting itself back into shape. Then he shrugged his shoulders and moved on without lifting his sword. He dropped it in the bin at the exit gate, and went out. He felt better now.

He went to find Damon Scully.

Stu located him behind a beautiful receptionist, a beau-

tiful secretary, and finally, a beautiful mahogany desk. The circus man jumped to his feet when Stu entered, smiling broadly.

Scully was a small-boned man, but tall and erect. His sleek face was handsome, in a lined British sort of way, and he had long abandoned a rough New York accent for an affected London turn of speech. He might have been fifty or sixty; there wasn't any telling. He took care of himself, pampering his body with Vitamin-ray treatments that kept his skin smooth and his eyes clear, his white hair lush and lustrous.

He extended his hand, and Stu took it grudgingly.

"Glad you could make it," Scully said. "Thought it was about time you saw our new attractions, old man."

"I really haven't seen them all," Stu drawled. "Tell you the truth, Mr. Scully, I was more interested in the postscript on your letter."

Scully smiled, revealing perfect white teeth.

"Ah. You mean this Mackey chap. A real Baron Munchausen, don't you think?"

"I dunno. But what I can't figure out, Mr. Scully, is how you knew he was coming to see me this morning."

Scully chuckled. "Trade secret, Stu. I manage to learn a great number of things. I'm a business man."

"Then you don't think he was telling the truth?"

"Oh, I don't say that. The question is, old man—what do *you* think?"

"I told him I'd look into it."

"Then you *are* interested?"

"Perhaps."

"Good," Scully said briskly. "Then maybe you and I can discuss business. I'm an admirer of yours, Stu. I'm not sure you believe that, but it's true. You're smart and you're stubborn. You have a knack for finding out things."

"So?"

"So I'd like to make a little deal. Pay you whatever is necessary to work on this Gulliver story for me. Track it down. If you find Gulliver—I'm willing to pay a great deal more for the exhibition rights."

"I don't get you."

"What could be plainer? If you could apply your talents to locating these giants, you might well uncover the greatest circus attraction of the century. What do you say?"

Suddenly, Stu felt happy. He stood up, and put his fists on his hips.

"Look, Mr. Scully. I don't know if I can track down this

nutty story. But one thing I do know. If I *did* find Gulliver, the last man on Earth I'd tell is you!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really! I'd sooner do business with a flock of buzzards, Mr. Scully. Understand? I'm going to look for this giant planet. And I hope I find it—just for the pleasure of including you *out*!"

He didn't give Damon Scully a chance for the last word. He stalked out of the office, past the beautiful secretary, past the beautiful receptionist, past the Jupiter Snow Girl exhibit, past the Sex Dreamers of Mercury, and out of the bubble-tent.

The pilot wasn't at the copter when Stu returned. He had him paged, and waited impatiently for his return.

"Wow," he said to Stu as he climbed into the vehicle. "Did you see that Sex Dreamers exhibit?"

"Never mind," Stu grumbled. "Switch on your auxiliary jet. We're going to Wisconsin."

They were twenty miles past the factory sites of Kenosha when they spotted the white, L-shaped building that housed the Biocellular Laboratory of Dr. Alvin Domino. It was almost four

in the afternoon when they cut the jet and dropped slowly to the parking lot behind the building. Stu was glad to see their journey end, if only to halt the running monologue of the copter pilot. He would be happy never to hear of Scully's Space Circus again.

Dr. Alvin Domino was waiting at the entrance of the building, but not with open arms. His arms, huge muscular limbs with long hairy fingers, were folded against his burly chest, as if to contain the displeasure he was feeling. He scowled when Stu approached, and led him wordlessly into an inner office.

He seated himself behind a bare metal desk before exploding.

"Now look, Champion! If you're after another story, you can turn right back. I've nothing new to report. And if I had, I wouldn't want your kind of cheap publicity—"

"Hold it!" Stu snapped. "You got me wrong, doc."

"I don't think I have. Our work here deals with a sensitive area of medicine. The wrong kind of newsbreak can do us unlimited harm. That last piece of yours set us back months."

"I'm sorry about that, Dr. Domino. But that's not why I'm here today."

"Then why are you?"

Stu hesitated. Ever since Russ Mackey's visit that morning, he had been debating the answer to this inevitable question. He knew he could direct the interview into several paths, depending upon Domino's mood and his own ingenuity. Now, face to face with Domino's apparent belligerence, he decided the best approach was the boldest.

"I'm here to give you a message," he said carefully.

"Message? From whom?"

"From Victoria."

In the split-second that followed, Stu knew that he had pressed the right button. Domino's dark, brooding face opened with surprise. He gripped the sides of his chair and stiffened his back as if a jolt of electricity had stabbed through the metal tubing.

"How did you know?" he said hoarsely. "How could you?"

Stu, who knew very little, merely looked wise. He lit a cigarette with studied casualness.

"The important thing is," he said delicately, "that I do. But you know what they say about a 'little knowledge,' doctor. If I were to print a story on the basis of my meager information, it could

do more harm than good. But if I knew all the facts—"

"It's been so long," Domino muttered. "So many years. We were beginning to forget . . ."

"You can see my side of it, can't you?" The reporter spoke earnestly. "I've got a job to do, same as you."

"Yes," Domino said blankly. "But you can't print it. You really can't. You'd ruin the work of almost twenty years . . ."

"I wouldn't want to do that. But I have to know, doctor. I can't suppress a story without a good reason. It's against every instinct."

The doctor stood up.

"All right, then," he sighed. "I'll tell you the whole story. Maybe then you'll understand why publicity now could be so disastrous."

"I'm sure you'll be doing the right thing," Stu said, with an inner sigh of his own.

Dr. Domino lead him through the door into the laboratory proper. It was neatly divided into some eight areas, bustling with chemical activities. The white-frocked workers, many of them women, looked at Stu's business suit curiously as he trailed the doctor between the long rows of laboratory benches.

They paused at a door

marked LABORATORY ANIMALS, and Domino said:

"I think this will begin to explain our problems."

They entered. The room was banked high with wire cages, and the small animals behind the bars made a symphony of scurrying, squeaking noises.

Dr. Domino lifted a hand towards the left wall.

"Over there," he said wearily.

Stu looked. It was only one cage, and it covered the entire wall. He stepped back involuntarily when he saw the occupant of the great cage—a guinea pig the size of a large dog.

"The girl's name is Victoria Bray," Dr. Domino said.

Stu Champion sat back in his chair, a silent listener, watching the man's dark eyes.

"Her father was a research worker at the Laboratory. I would guess that our particular specialty interested him because of his daughter's deformity. A childhood accident had deprived her of three fingers and the thumb of her left hand. She was only ten when he came here; she was twenty when she became the subject of our experiments."

The light from the window slanted across the doctor's

face, intensifying the gleam of remembrance in his eyes.

"Until that moment, our work had been confined to experimental animals. The greatest proportion of our attempts had been failures; some had resulted in horrible malformations; others in death. Occasionally, some hormone extract would produce a semi-effective result. Once we produced a new tail for one of the mice. We were overjoyed, until the tail continued to grow at an abnormal rate, then overburdened the mouse's blood supply and killed it.

"Our next success came shortly after. We had developed a pituitary serum that actually succeeded in replacing the amputated leg of a guinea pig. We watched the animal for months, waiting for auxiliary effects. There seemed to be none. We had similar results with other animals, until we were convinced that our goal had at last been reached."

The doctor paused. There had been no exhilaration in his announcement.

"Almost a year went by before we experimented with a human subject. We know now that a year was too short a time, but we were intoxicated with our triumphs. We

were possessed, uplifted, exhalted. And no one more so than Douglas Bray, the father of Victoria, who offered us his child with all the holy fervor of a religious fanatic.

"We hesitated at first. Most of us knew the girl—a beautiful young woman, so fresh and engaging that her deformity could subtract nothing from her appeal. But the girl seemed as fanatically eager as her father. So we relented, and Victoria Bray became the first human subject of our serum.

"If you have seen Victoria, then you already know part of her tragic story. Within a month, regrowth was detected. In another new month, new fingers and a thumb appeared, perfectly formed, and, except for minuscular differences, perfect mates to the rest of her hand.

"It seemed like an unqualified success until Victoria herself began to notice the change in her clothing size, the sudden tightness of her finger rings. Three months after the experiment, she had gone from a height of five foot four to six foot one. It was only then that we began to detect size changes in the laboratory animals as well.

"But these changes were trivial compared to the ac-

celerated rate of growth taking place in Victoria's body. The human constitution seemed to react drastically to the regrowth serum. Within six months, Victoria was a pitiful shut-in at her father's house, now a frightening fourteen feet tall. Based on our calculations, her rate of growth was increasing daily. We worked ceaselessly for an antidote, without success. By the time eight months past, Victoria was a giant, perfectly proportioned, but some twenty-five feet high—with the process giving no indication of coming to a halt.

"We were horrified, of course. But here I must admit to another kind of horror which seized us, a more selfish concern. It could not be much longer before Victoria's size became public knowledge; like Alice's nightmare, even her house was becoming too small to contain her. We foresaw a time when she would be the object of general fright and curiosity. Her father knew this, too, and the weight on his mind and body became too much to bear. He died of heart failure. Victoria lifted his poor dead body to her gargantuan tears as if it were a doll."

The doctor bowed his head.

"The horror I speak of is the horror of publicity."

Stu Champion shifted uncomfortably.

"You must understand our viewpoint. The Biocellular Laboratory has been engaged in this work for almost twenty years. Our central ambition has not yet been realized. In the interim, we have given science the keys to advancement in other, related fields. But our efforts rely solely on the charitable contributions of sympathetic individuals. Our work is costly; without this support, it ends. And if public sympathy were turned against us, our project is finished. And we knew this plain fact—if the world were to see the monster we had created in Victoria Bray, our doors would be shut forever by the horror and loathing of public opinion."

He paused, as if waiting for a question. When he found Stu silent, he continued.

"The solution had already occurred to many of us. The Earth could only reject a creature such as Victoria had become. So the Earth must be disowned. Secretly, we engaged the services of a journeyman space captain and his crew, to locate for us a compatible world where Victoria

could spend her remaining years. The choice was World 21 in the fourth vector of Antares. Victoria was almost full grown—some eighty-five feet—when we made this sad voyage, providing her with every means of survival we could manage.

"That was almost six years ago. During that time, myself or some member of the laboratory has visited the poor creature some four or five times. It's almost three years since I saw her last. She lives in dreadful loneliness on that godforsaken planet, a forgotten martyr to science . . ." He blew his nose harshly. "Since that time, we have been trying to utilize the serum for other purposes. We have brought it to such a state of perfection that we can create such giant specimens as you saw within a week. Perhaps we will have the means for increasing the yeild of man's food animals. We are not certain of its potential; we are still too concerned with attaining our original goal."

"And what about an antidote?" Stu said.

The doctor shook his head.
"We have tried."

After a silent moment, Stu got to his feet.

"Thanks for being so frank with me," he said. "I won't

promise to print nothing at all of what you've told me, Dr. Domino. But I promise not to release a word that could harm the laboratory. I'll see that you see everything I intend to print."

"I don't suppose I can expect more than that," Domino sighed. "The press," he added wryly, "seems to have more privileges than science. But I plead with you to remember this promise, Mr. Champion."

"I'll remember," Stu said.

Within a month, the sizeable resources of the Universal Press Service provided Stuart Champion with the newest in photon-powered star ships, a six-man vessel called the *Newshawk*.

The captain, a jovial, thick-shouldered man named Ethan McCracken, spent several hours with Stu and the navigator, a blue-bearded young man named Stern. But Stu Champion wasn't revealing their final destination. They had to be satisfied with plotting the course in the general vicinity of Antares' fourth vector.

There were few personal arrangements for Stu before the departure date. A bachelor, with no family and surprisingly few close friends, he waited eagerly for the space

voyage. It would be his first out of the solar system, and the reward that awaited its conclusion excited him.

In the first few days of the journey, he sensed the grumbling attitude of the five-man crew. Captain McCracken maintained his jovial air, but the navigator and the rest seemed openly disgruntled about their assignment. McCracken laughed off the complaint when Stu approached him with it.

"They're natural surly grumblers," he said cheerfully. "All this 'secret destination' stuff never sits well with them. Don't let it bother you, my friend."

Stu made the explanation do, but he was uncomfortable for the rest of the voyage. When they made the dimensional jump that brought them into the Antares system, he was glad to remove the mystery that shrouded the flight by announcing the exact destination. It didn't improve the nature of the crew, but Captain McCracken chuckled with satisfaction, and set to work plotting the route to World 21 with his navigator.

Forty-eight days after blast-off, the speck that was to become World 21 appeared in their viewscope.

It was a pale, greenish

speck, and the faint path of two tiny satellites could be observed swinging in an erratic orbit around the planet.

Within thirty hours, the speck was a fuzzy, glowing ball, delicately green in color, its markings clearly delineating its seas and mountains and land areas, its vast, arid stretches of volcanic soil, blistered with craters.

In the space of another Earth day, the ship was descending towards the surface of the hospitable world that was Victoria Bray's home.

Under McCracken's direction they left the ship in space gear, despite the benevolent atmosphere recorded on the *Newhawk's* telemeters.

"Standard precaution," he told Stu with a grin. "I've seen these 'friendly' atmospheres turn into poison without warning. Better go slow, Mr. Champion."

The terrain gave beneath their booted feet like sponge, and the planet's light gravitational pull sent them gliding into the air with every step. The sun over their heads was smaller than the star of Earth, but it was warm and brilliant. The sky was cloudless.

They set to work creating the usual encampment of the

space explorer, a bivouac of supplies and weapons forming a ring around the ship, a temporary home and fortress. Later, they would widen the circle and explore the terrain for important or curious specimens.

But Stu Champion's mind was concerned with only one of the planet's features.

But did it exist?

It was dawn before he knew.

He had spent the night inside the ship, preferring the leathery comfort of the bunk to the sleeping bags affected by the crew. Stern, the navigator, was standing guard duty, and it was the sound of his rifle, cracking through the silence of the dawn outside, that brought Stu Champion to his feet.

He rushed outside and found the crew alerted, with their own weapons drawn. He followed the direction of their eyes, and knew that Dr. Alvin Domino had told him the truth.

Over a rocky escarpment to the east, the small hot sun of World 21 beginning to ascend behind it, was the peak of a golden mountain.

There was a stirring around its edges, as of tiny delicate trees swaying in the morning breeze.

Then the mountain grew, rising slowly over the cliff, until the gargantuan blue eyes of Victoria Bray were revealed, peering in curiosity and fright at her tiny visitors.

"*Don't!*"

Stu Champion's shout brought Stern's rifle down.

"What *is* it?" The navigator's face was gray, but the captain's chuckle brought color into his cheeks.

"What's the matter, Ernie? Don't you recognize a woman when you see one?" He chuckled again, but he brought his own rifle into firing position. "I'll admit she's a mite bigger than the gals back home . . ."

Stu stepped in front of them, signalling to the great blue orbs still peering at them. He removed his space helmet, despite McCracken's warning, and cupped his hands over his mouth.

"It's all right!" he cried. "We're friends! We're friends, Victoria!"

The sound of the girl's name in the still air reacted on them all. Captain McCracken and his navigator exchanged surprised glances, and the girl's outsize eyes blinked suddenly. Her head began to rise above the horizon, until it blocked the small sun ascending behind her,

casting a long shadow on the six men and their space vessel. Her elbows appeared next, and Stu realized that she had been crouching over the mountain, and was raising herself to her full height.

And an impressive height it was—at least a hundred feet over the pitted terrain of the planet. There were some two or three miles separating the giantess and the ship; the distance gave them a chance to study her as she rose to her feet.

She was a beauty, all right, by anybody's standards. They stood gaping at her, awed by both the superb contours of her body and by her incredible size. The sun etched her figure sharply against the morning sky. She was something unreal, something out of an alien dream, yet something as real and desirable as a man could know. . . .

"She's coming for us!" It was a shriek from the first engineer. Stu whirled towards him.

"Take it easy! She's harmless—"

But the fear was mounting. The giantess was striding towards them, with hesitant steps, but with steps that covered acres. She grew larger in their sight, and the crew of the *Newshawk* began

edging back towards the ship.

"She could squash us," Stern said quietly. "Like bugs—"

"I said take it easy!" Stu took a bold step forward. "She's not hostile, I tell you. She's more afraid than any of us."

But even the captain was keeping his rifle level.

Then Stern fired again.

"No!" Stu shouted.

The damage had been done. The pressure bullet struck the giantess just above the knee cap. She cried out and clapped her hand over the tiny wound, and her face darkened with surprise and anger. Her steps quickened towards them.

"Look out!" the engineer said. "She's after us!"

It was a panic signal. He broke for the ship, scrambling to climb the ladder. The other crewmen followed hastily, despite Stu's urgent commands to hold their ground. McCracken was the last to make the climb.

"Come back!" Stu said. "She's only frightened. She won't harm us!"

McCracken paused at the top of the ship's ladder. "Better come back with us, Mr. Champion. That gal means to do mischief."

"No! You've got to let me talk to her!"

"I'm not risking my ship and crew, Mr. Champion. I'm taking the *Newshawk* off this place."

"You can't leave. You've got your orders!"

"My orders don't compel me to endanger my ship. That woman can stomp on us, Mr. Champion; we wouldn't have a chance. Best thing to do is blast off. You coming along?"

Stu looked back over his shoulder. The girl was standing still now, watching them.

"No," he said.

"Then we leave without you. I'll send a patrol ship here if you want—"

"You can't do that. You mustn't tell anyone."

"Suit yourself, Mr. Champion." He grinned suddenly. "It's not a bad place to visit. But I'd hate to be stuck here."

Then the door clanged behind him.

A moment later, the *Newshawk* engines were whining the preamble to blast-off, and Stu Champion ran with sinking heart to the safety of a nearby crater.

Then the rockets roared, and the *Newshawk* trembled and rose into the sky.

He looked towards the still-ed giantess, whose eyes were turned to the ascending ves-

sel as it disappeared from sight. She looked baffled, uncertain.

Then Stu came forward again.

"Victoria!" he cried.

She turned her gargantuan eyes towards him, her brow furrowed with puzzlement. Then, carefully, she took ten steps in his direction, and slowly went to her knees.

"Who are you?" she said, in a controlled whisper. Yet the voice was stentorian.

Stu shouted his reply.

"My name is Stuart Champion. I'm a friend. Dr. Domino sent me—"

She smiled suddenly, clapping her enormous hands together in a girlish gesture of delight. The sound she made echoed sharply over the mountaintops.

"Dr. Domino! How wonderful! It's been so long—" Then several feet of ridges appeared in her forehead. "But your ship. It's left without you!"

"I know," Stu said. "It doesn't matter, Victoria. I've—I've come to stay with you a while."

"To stay?" The puzzlement remained on her face. Then a thought seemed to cross her mind, and her eyes widened. "Are you—did the laboratory—"

"No, no!" Stu said hastily. "Nothing like that. I'm just here to keep you company, to see how you're getting along. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" Even now, with the giant face only yards away, the girl seemed beautiful. It was made even lovelier by the bright glow of pleasure that suffused it. "Why should I mind? It's so lonely for me here—you must know that—"

"Yes," Stu said uncomfortably. "Yes, of course. Victoria, I want to be your friend. I want you to tell me everything—about how you live here, and what your problems are, and what you think about. Will you do that?"

"Of course!"

"You've had visitors before, Victoria. How did they—I mean—" Stu wiped his moist brow. "How did they manage to get around this place? How did they keep up with you?"

The girl laughed. "Don't worry. I won't have to carry you."

She clambered to her feet, and the ground beneath Stu shivered.

"I'll be back," she promised.

He watched her retreat back towards the mountain. When she was out of sight, he

dropped to the cool, gritty loam of the planet, and allowed the tension of the past hour to tremble through his body. By the time the giantess returned, he was calmer.

She was carrying something, a toy in her hands.

"Here," she said happily. "Dr. Domino brought it with him on his last trip."

She set the object in front of him, and the toy suddenly became a trim, ruggedly built, two-bladed copter.

"You *can* fly it, can't you?"

"Yes," Stu said. "I can manage it."

He climbed into the cockpit and strapped the safety belt around his middle. He checked the guages and found the ship well fueled. Then he started the engine, and coaxed the copter several feet off the ground.

"Where to?" he shouted.

"Follow me!" Virginia Bray said joyfully.

It was an unforgettable ride.

Stu kept the copter just behind the giantess as she strode nimbly towards their destination. He clocked her groundspeed at better than two hundred miles an hour. Every now and then, she'd look back over her shoulder at the little whirring object

behind her, and she would laugh happily. Once, when Stu steered the small craft close to the Niagara of blonde hair that spilled over her back, she smiled playfully and blew a light gust of breath at the rotors, sending the copter into a sideslip. It was only a small pleasantry on her part, but Stu kept a respectful distance from Victoria after that.

Beyond the mountains, they came to Victoria's home.

From a distance, it seemed nothing more than a crude metal structure of almost primitive simplicity, a stolid square building without ornamentation. Half a mile beyond it was another, smaller structure of the same drab composition, but windowless. To the left was a curious mound of curved, transparent plastic, like an endless tunnel stretching towards the horizon.

But when Stu Champion dropped the copter to the ground, Victoria's living quarters loomed before him like the mightiest of fortresses ever built on Earth.

"I don't spend much time here," the girl told him as he left the ship. "Dr. Domino and the others built it for me. But I don't need it as shelter; the weather rarely changes

here. And it's sort of—" the giant features became wistful—"sort of dreary. They did the best they could, but still—"

She entered through the massive doorway. The structure had been divided into three areas, comprising living, dining, and sleeping quarters. The furniture was rudimentary, and cast in the same drab metallic material in which the house had been built. It must have been a monstrous chore for Dr. Domino and the others to construct this incredible dwelling-place, but all their dedicated efforts had made a cheerless home for the pitiful giant they were abandoning. It was depressing.

Stu made the long walk from room to room, until he was stopped by the first sign of color. It was an unframed canvas some twenty-feet square, hung over the fantastic altar that served as Victoria's bed. The painting was of an Earth scene, the colors strangely muted and crude, but the intensity of the images was almost shockingly vivid and compelling.

"I painted that," the giantess said, shyness in her booming voice. "There are clays in some of the craters, with strange colors. I—I learned

to mix them. It gave me something to do."

"It's wonderful," Stu said. "Seriously, Victoria, it's very good." He turned to look at her, but found himself craning to catch her eyes. She realized what was happening, and backed away to give him more normal vision.

"What are those other two buildings?" Stu asked. "The smaller place out in back, and that plastic tunnel?"

"The smaller building is a power plant. It supplies all my electrical power, and runs the servo-mechanism for the hydroponic greenhouse."

"Greenhouse? Is that what the tunnel is?"

"Yes. Dr. Domino installed it. It gives me a constant supply of fruits and vegetables—gigantic specimens by Earth standards, but it takes quite a lot to satisfy my appetite."

"Is that all you eat?"

"I'm afraid so. I've become an involuntary vegetarian. But it's not so bad. There are worse things . . ." She looked towards the painting.

They toured the greenhouse and the power plant, and Stu found his admiration for Dr. Domino increasing with every step of the inspection.

"What a job! It must have cost plenty—"

"I know it did. It cost the laboratory so much of the money they needed so desperately. But Dr. Domino felt so obligated to do all this. He's a wonderful man . . ."

"What's that over there?" Stu pointed toward the west, past the greenhouse, at an enormous hill of turned earth. A slab of metal protruded from one end, and there were markings on its face. "It looks like—"

"It is," Victoria said. "It's a grave. It's Koko's grave."

"Koko?"

"A dog. He was one of the experimental animals, treated with the same serum that— He was a giant, too. I brought him with me here, for company. But when he reached his full size, he wasn't to be trusted anymore. He—he almost killed one of the laboratory people when they landed here three years ago. He was just being playful, but—"

Suddenly, Stu Champion realized that Victoria Bray was about to cry. Women's tears had never particularly troubled him before, but Victoria was no ordinary woman.

"Now, listen," he said feebly.

But it was too late. A sten-

torian sob left her throat, and she put her hands over her face. But as if she realized how grotesque her tears would appear to the tiny creature who watched her, she ran off in tremendous strides, back to the house.

Stu Champion's visit to World 21 lasted forty-five of the planet's brief, sunny days —a mere three weeks by Earth reckoning. In that short period, he learned enough about Victoria Bray and her strange fate to write a column a day for the next newspaper year.

He learned about her first desolate months on the barren world, months in which suicidal despair and the will to live fought a battle within her overgrown body.

He listened, with amazement, to the story of Victoria's self-education program —a program of reading and study which had enabled her to become expert in subjects few women of any size had mastered. She had learned four languages, on a world where words were unspoken. She had gathered enough electronic knowledge to construct a gargantuan sound system, with parts specially created for her on Earth, with which her giant ears could listen to taped recordings of

the finest Earth music. (She played a Beethoven symphony for Stu one evening, and the sound deafened him for hours afterward.) She was well-versed in the physical sciences, and her understanding of the mechanisms which gave her light and power, and supplied her with food, was extraordinary. She had digested an Everest of great literature, specially printed in foot-high letters, and poetry came as easily to her thoughts as prose.

She was a freak. She was a phenomenon. She was an object of curiosity and fascination. She would make wonderful copy for his column.

But Stu Champion was troubled. He began to realize that Victoria Bray was a woman, too.

His visit to World 21 had the strange, unearthly qualities of a dream. And oddly enough, it ended with a dream.

He dreamt that he was back behind the desk in the Universal Press Service Building, busily pounding the typewriter to meet an onrushing deadline. Claire, his owl-eyed secretary interrupted, and the expression of her face announced some unusual visitor.

He rose from his chair,

THE GODDESS OF WORLD 21

facing the doorway. The vision that entered was surrounded by haze, yet sharply etched as if by strong sunlight.

"Victoria!" he cried.

She floated towards him, her arms outstretched, her golden hair flowing behind her. She came to him soundlessly, her lips parted.

"Stu," she said. "I'm all right now, Stu! Dr. Domino found the antidote. Oh, Stu . . ."

The desk, the debris of papers, the demanding deadlines, the confining walls of the office disappeared. They were on a grassy plain, rimmed by tall green trees, the sky a brilliant blue overhead. Victoria Bray was in his arms, her golden head against his shoulder, her small, delicate fingers stroking his cheek.

"I'm willing to pay a great deal," said a voice. "For the exhibition rights . . ."

It was Damon Scully, and he was chuckling.

Stu broke the embrace. "Get out of here, Scully!"

"Now really, old man—"

"Stu!" Victoria clung to him, frightened by the tall, sinister figure approaching them. "Stu, what is it? What does he want?"

"She'll make a wonderful

exhibit," Scully said. "Come in and Kill the Giant. Razor Sharp Swords Provided Free. Watch the Giant Shed Enormous, Feminine Tears. Safe Enough for Children . . ."

"Get away from here!"

But it was no longer Damon Scully advancing upon them. It was a pudgy tourist, with portable radio, binoculars, and camera swinging from straps around his neck. He was licking his lips, and his face was damp with sweat, and there was a gleaming sword in his right hand. . . .

"No! Stop!" Stu Champion screamed.

But the blade was descending in a glittering arc, and Victoria was screaming, screaming. . . .

"Stu! Stu!"

Half in and half out of his dream, Stu Champion lifted his head.

"Stu! Come quickly!"

He jumped to his feet, following the booming sound of Victoria's voice.

"What is it? What's happened?"

"A ship!" She was pointing a finger over the mountain-top. "A ship's landed!"

He ran for the copter, and started the blades whining. Victoria directed him to the site of the landing, some

forty miles from her living quarters.

"It's the *Newshawk*!"

And that was the way Stu Champion's visit ended, with cheerful halloos from Captain Ethan McCracken, and a tearful farewell from the goddess of World 21.

"I'll be back, Victoria. Do you understand? I promise to come back."

"Will you really, Stu?" A pool of glistening moisture flooded the corners of her eyes.

"Yes! But I must go back now. There's a lot I have to do. I want to see if I can help you—"

Then he was climbing aboard the star ship, behind the broad back of the captain.

"Been some changes since our last trip," McCracken chuckled as they entered the ship. "Had to get me a whole new crew. Wouldn't come back for love or money . . ."

Stu Champion turned in the direction of McCracken's smiling eyes. A thin, white-haired man looked up from the viewport and grinned engagingly at him.

"I wouldn't have missed this for the world," he said. "Thanks for the opportunity, Stu."

It was Damon Scully.

It was some time before Stu Champion could bring the anger in his voice under control. Damon Scully filled the gap by saying:

"Certainly owe you a debt of gratitude, Stu. You've really hit on something—big." He laughed softly.

"How did you get here, Scully? This is a UPS ship."

"I'm afraid you're wrong. The *Newshawk* is a journeyman, available to anyone with the price. UPS doesn't have control over it. Right, Captain?"

McCracken grinned. "That is right, sir."

Stu glared at him. "And no control over your tongue, either."

"Let's not be too high-minded," Scully said. "If you must know, Captain McCracken and myself have had an understanding about this expedition from the beginning. It's strictly business, Stu. You can appreciate that."

Stu turned towards the viewport, his cheeks burning. He watched the greenish globe of World 21 grow smaller, then he came back wearily to Damon Scully's side.

"Listen, Scully. You may as well know the truth. That's

not Gulliver down there. The girl is from Earth; her name is Victoria Bray—"

"And a lovely thing she is," Scully answered. "Spare yourself the trouble, old man. Once I was able to trace you here, it was simple to get the rest of the story. I know all about our giantess, and Dr. Domino. But that doesn't mean I've lost interest."

"What do you mean? If you think you'll ever get Victoria into that freak show of yours, you're mistaken!"

"Really? You seem to know a lot about—Victoria. But look at it this way, Stu. The poor child's spent six lonely years on that miserable planet. Do you think she'd pass up the opportunity to return to Earth?"

"Yes! If it meant coming back as a monster—a circus spectacle. She'd never consent to it!"

"Is that what Dr. Domino says?"

"That's what I say. And as for Domino, she wouldn't hurt him for the world. That's another reason she won't return to Earth."

Scully smiled, and placed a thin hand on Stu's shoulder.

"I've always said you were a bright lad, Stu. You're right, of course. That thing—I mean Victoria, would never

consent to such foolishness. I've known that all along."

Stu frowned. "I don't get it. If you knew it, why did you make this trip?"

"Oh, curiosity, I guess. You see, Stu, that's one of the reasons for my success. I'm as curious as any one of the rubbernecks who visit Scully's Space Circus. Maybe more so. That's why I know how to please them. I just wanted to see this mile-high woman for myself."

"And you'll leave her alone?"

"That's an odd question to ask me. After all, you're the famous columnist. If you write up her story, there won't be any leaving her alone. Every space bum in the universe will be paying her a call."

"I've thought of that," Stu said tightly. "That's why I'm not writing the story . . ."

His answer seemed to amuse Scully, who chuckled and then fell silent. The silence was maintained until the *Newshawk* was slipping into the orbit of the planet Earth.

It was ten days after Stu's return to work at the UPS building before Volkman, the managing director, started asking questions.

Stu was snugly ensconced behind the paper fortress of his desk, lackadaisically tapping out a gossip column for the next editions, when Volkman came stomping into his office.

"All right," he growled. "If the mountain won't come to Mohammed—" He dropped his bulky body into a chair and scraped it forward to thrust his massive chin towards the reporter.

"Hi," Stu said carelessly. "Didn't know you were in town, Mr. Volkman."

"You knew damn well I was in town. I've been sitting upstairs for almost two weeks, waiting for some good copy on Gulliver. But all I've seen is a bunch of your usual drivel. Whatcha doing, Champion? Saving it up?"

Stu locked his hands under his chin. "Nope. Nothing to save up, Mr. Volkman. Story turned out to be a dud."

"Don't give me that! You were so positive, couple of months ago. That's why I went out on a limb for you, Champion. That's why I okayed that fancy trip of yours. You know what it cost UPS?"

"I've seen the cost sheet."

Volkman slammed a palm on the desk. "Then let's have some good copy! Did you find Gulliver or didn't you?"

"No."

"Then what did you find?"

"Nothing."

"What?"

"It was all a mistake, Mr. Volkman. There's a gal on World 21, all right. But she's not really a giant. Oh, she's a little bigger than most dames, maybe." Stu kept his eyes on the floor. "But nothing special, nothing to write about."

Volkman's face started turning color.

"You're hiding something, Champion! You promised me a big newsbreak, and now you won't even talk about it! Something smells bad, Champion!"

"I tell you there's no story! The gal is perfectly normal. She's up there for—scientific purposes." He knew it sounded lame.

Volkman got up, his face mottled, his lips white. "Okay, pal. Have it your way. But I'm going to sit up in that office for another week, and I'm going to be watching your output. And if something doesn't break through on this giant story—you can start watching the want ads."

When Volkman left, Stu sighed and flipped the intercom switch. As usual, it was on the blink.

"Claire!"

His secretary scurried in. "Yes, Mr. Champion?"

"Requisition me a copter. For this afternoon."

"Yes, sir. Where to, Mr. Champion?"

"Wisconsin. Put in a call to the Biocellular Lab and tell Dr. Domino I'm on my way out. Okay?"

"Yes, sir."

She returned a few moments later, and the look on her owlish face was slightly baffled.

"He said he'd be expecting you, Mr. Champion. The only thing is—he sounded *angry*."

Stu frowned. "Everybody's angry today. Must be the weather." She thought there could be no other cause.

Stu arrived at the Biocellular Laboratory only three hours from the time of his secretary's phone call. But Dr. Alvin Domino seemed to have maintained the angry mood that Claire had reported. His dark face was cloudier than usual, and he didn't speak until they were alone in the inner office.

"All right," he said crisply. "Let's have it."

"Look, Dr. Domino. I don't know what's upset you, but I'm here in good faith."

"You've been to 21, haven't you?"

"Yes. I've been there. And I've seen Victoria."

The doctor's features softened. "How—how is she?"

"Well as you might expect. It's a hell of a situation that kid is in. But I guess you know that."

"I know it," Domino snapped. "I can't look at the stars any more without feeling the pangs of guilty conscience. You don't have to spell it out for me, Mr. Champion."

"I didn't come for that. I came to ask for help."

"Help? What kind of help?"

"For her, for Victoria. For some solution to this thing—"

"We've been all through that."

"Maybe not enough. Maybe you haven't really tried. That girl can't survive out there, despite all your fancy servomechanisms. One of these days—"

"That's enough!" Domino said angrily. "What gives you the right to plead her case? Victoria's nothing more than a story to you, Champion. Bread and butter! Circulation!"

"That's not true! I haven't written a word about my trip, and I don't intend to. Publicity could kill her—"

"Publicity will kill her," Domino said gratingly. "And you can share the blame!"

Stu blinked. "What are you talking about?"

"No use acting innocent, Champion. Of course you didn't write the story. You had a better deal, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"Then suppose I show you?" Domino flicked the intercom switch. "Miss Forbes—bring me Scully's circular."

"Scully!"

"Yes. Mr. Damon Scully—a friend of yours, I believe." His anger was evident.

"You're dead wrong! I don't have anything to do with that snake!"

Miss Forbes was prompt. Domino passed the circular over to Stu's waiting hand, and watched his face as he scanned it.

It read:

*Damon Scully's
Space Circus Announces
The Greatest Attraction
of Modern Times
VICTORIA
The Giant Goddess
of World 21
A Hundred Feet of
Spectacular Pulchritude
Special Excursion Trips
Starting Sept. 1*

There was more descriptive copy, but Stu Champion stopped reading. He crumpled the

paper in his hand, and glared at the doctor.

"You're wrong!" he said hoarsely. "I had nothing to do with this. It's the last thing in the world I wanted."

Domino sighed, with great fatigue. "It doesn't really matter now. The damage is done . . ."

"We have to do something! We have to stop him!"

"Stop him? How? In a little over a month, he'll start his excursion trips. There'll be a carnival on World 21 in a month. And God knows what will happen to Victoria." His despair was obvious.

"Couldn't we get her off the planet?"

"It took us six months to find World 21, six more to make it livable for Victoria. There's no time, no time—"

"But this will kill her!"

Domino shrugged. "When they come to gape and to laugh, she won't be responsible for her actions. Just like Koko—"

"Koko?"

"A harmless puppy. But when grown to giant's size—a killer. It can happen to Victoria, too. When they begin to plague her, she'll defend herself. Someone will be hurt. And then—"

The two men sat silent for a while, each pondering the

dreadful possibilities of the situation.

Then Stu Champion spoke.

"Doctor—how did you get Victoria to 21?"

"We used a star ship that was employed in building the artificial satellites in Andromeda. It was a tremendous vessel, with great capacity, designed to open completely down the side of its hold, so that Victoria could leave the ship without making it necessary to destroy it."

"Is that ship still available?"

"Why—I imagine so."

Stu chewed his lip, before meeting Dr. Domino's now-curious gaze.

"I want you to do something for me, Doctor. Something I've been thinking about for some time."

"And what's that?"

"I want you to create another giant."

The space lanes of World 21 were suddenly heavy with unaccustomed traffic.

In the middle of Earth's August, four supply ships of Damon Scully's Space Circus landed within a mile of the home of Victoria Bray. Damon Scully himself supervised the unloading of the odd paraphernalia which was to become a new circus grounds.

Prefabricated hotel quarters were erected, refreshment stands, souvenir concessions, business offices. Enormous signs and pennants were raised, announcing the great attraction of World 21. And after all the gay carnival trappings were arranged to Damon Scully's satisfaction, a grim battery of artillery, equipped to fire atomic shells, was stationed at the site.

It was only after these defensive preparations were completed that Damon Scully, with portable loudspeaker equipment strapped around his shoulders, began the long walk to the doorway of Victoria Bray's home.

He flicked a switch, and spoke soothingly into the microphone at his lips. His pleasant voice, magnified to a volume that made the ground quiver, said:

"Victoria! Victoria Bray! This is Damon Scully speaking."

There was no answer from the towering metal edifice.

"There's no need to be frightened, Victoria. We haven't come to harm you. I'd like to talk things over."

Silence.

"Come out where we can see you, Victoria. You can't stay in there forever. We

don't wish to resort to anything drastic."

Still no reply.

Scully frowned, and looked over his shoulder at the crewmen who were watching him anxiously. Then his voice hardened.

"You don't seem to understand the circumstances, Victoria. If necessary, we'll shut off your power supply. My men are already in the powerhouse, awaiting my signal. We can stop that pretty greenhouse of yours, my dear. Think of all those magnificent plants, withering on the vine. You'll be a mighty hungry young lady without them. Think that over."

He waited a moment, and then gestured towards the powerhouse. A moment later, the slight hum that pervaded the air stopped abruptly.

"Hear that, Victoria? That silence means your power is off. You'll starve without it. Now be sensible, and come out where we can talk."

Scully waited, rocking confidently on his heels, knowing that he had played his trump.

Then the massive door was swinging open.

The sight of its movement sent the men behind Scully hurrying towards the comforting shadows of the atomic cannon. But Damon Scully

held his ground, his hands on his hips.

Then the giant emerged.

A gasp of concerted awe rose from the tiny figures that surrounded the house. But it was caused by more than the size of the human who came into view.

The giant was a man.

Damon Scully stood stunned.

"All right, Scully!" The voice boomed towards them. "You can do your talking to me."

The circus man recovered his speech.

"Champion! What the hell—"

"I said talk, little man!" The awesome figure moved forward, and the movement was too much even for Scully's bravado. He joined his crewmen at the artillery. Then, as if gathering courage once more, he halted his backward progress, and forced himself to laugh into the microphone.

"This is wonderful!" he said. "Marvelous! My old friend, Stu!"

"I said talk, Scully! Make your little speech. Then take yourself and the rest of your vultures off this planet!"

"What made you do it, Stu? Did you fall for our dear little Victoria? Is that it?"

"I won't wait forever, Scully."

"No, no. Of course not. But you'll have to admit, old man—it's a shock to see you." He nodded his head towards a member of his crew, keeping his eyes fixed on the giant face. "Brannigan! Better get the men working on those posters. Seems we have a *double* attraction on World 21. Not just one giant—but two! What an exhibit! The Brobdingnagian Lovers of World 21!"

Stu Champion's rage was giant-size, too. He cursed aloud, and lifted one foot from the ground as if to stamp out this insect-size menace. Scully's aplomb deserted him, and he ran to safety. When he spoke again, his voice was naked with purpose.

"That's enough of that, Champion! One more trick like that and we fire! These are atomic cannon, my friend. They're giant-killers!"

"Get off the planet!" Stu cried. "You have no right here!"

"Haven't I? Your size hasn't increased your mental powers, friend. You and Victoria are the trespassers here. World 21 has been purchased by my corporation, as of

August One. Do you think the Interstellar Police would blame me for killing a trespasser? Then think again, Champion."

"I don't believe you!"

"Ah, but you do. You know me too well. Your friend Domino never went so far as to take legal possession of this world from the government interstellar land office. But I have. So watch yourself, Stu—or we'll be digging enormous graves."

Stu glared helplessly at the tiny figures at his feet. Then he turned back to the house.

"You can't hide forever!" Scully shrieked. "Your power is off. You'll starve—both of you. Be smart, Champion. Cooperate—"

"Go to blazes!"

Victoria was waiting for him, sitting on the edge of the bed with her face in her hands.

He looked around the room that had once appeared so monstrously huge to him, and knew now how cramped and bare it had been for the woman who made it her home.

He approached her slowly, marveling again at how small and fragile she really was. He put an arm about her shoulder, and her blonde head moved to rest against his chest.

"What's going to happen to us?" she said.

"I don't know," he said bitterly. "Those are small people out there—smaller than you ever were. Sooner or later, they'll leave us alone."

He stroked her hair, not believing his own words. Scully would leave them alone only when the last exhibition dollar had been wrung from the last tourist.

"We'll have to do as he says," the girl whispered. "We'll have to, Stu. We can't live without the power supply."

"I know. We'll do as they want, Victoria. But that doesn't mean we're giving up. If I can get to that toy artillery of theirs—"

"No, Stu! They'll kill you!"

He smiled and put out his hand.

"Come on, Goddess. Let's go outside."

He put his arm around her, and they pushed open the great door.

"Magnificent!" Scully cried gleefully. "Wonderful! The greatest love affair in the universe. The—"

He was saying something else into the portable microphone, but no one could hear it. For suddenly, his words

were drowned in a roar of sound that shook the ground beneath their feet—sound so violent that its impact made fissures appear on the dry hard surface of World 21. And, incredibly, the sound was increasing—an onslaught of noise that made the little men clap hands to ears and scream involuntarily.

Victoria clung to Stu's arm. "Stu—what is it?"

"A ship," he whispered, eyes on the sky. "A ship, Victoria—"

It was a ship—and the angry, enveloping roar was nothing more than the braking of its rockets as it settled heavily on the small planet. But it was a ship like none ever launched from Earth, a gondola-shaped vessel of blinding whiteness, a vessel of such great immensity that the Scully supply fleet was dwarfed to the size of space rafts.

"Man the artillery!" Damon Scully shouted.

No one heard the command. The knot of crewmen gathered around the weapons tightened, watching the fantastic gondola complete its landing, wondering what sort of alien creatures would emerge.

Their answer came quickly. A panel slid open, and a sky-

scraper-tall ladder made contact with the ground beneath.

Then the occupants climbed out.

There were two of them.

They were humanoid, male, clothed in close-fitting garments of dull brown. Their hair was white and shoulder-length, and their eyes were penetringly black and lustrous.

The eyes moved slowly across the landscape of World 21, until they met the eyes of Stu Champion and Victoria Bray—at their own level.

Then the giants smiled.

"Who are you?" Damon Scully shrieked into the loud-speaker. "Did Domino send you?"

They looked down at the circus man, and turned to each other. There was an exchange of whispers, and then the first giant spoke.

"English?" he said cordially.

"American!" Scully said.

"I referred to your language," the giant answered softly. "I am Analta, and this is my brother Doati. We will converse with you in English, unless you desire otherwise."

"Who are you? Where do you come from?"

"We are merely visitors, from a galaxy we call Inolani, and a world which I believe

you have named—" He rubbed his great jaw and grinned. "Gulliver."

"*Gulliver!*"

"This is our first contact with the people of Earth, but we know a great deal of your civilization. We have listened to your radio messages, and obtained knowledge of your languages. But we have been reluctant to bring our two cultures together, despite the evolutionary traits we seem to share. You see—there's rather a difference in our size."

His grin widened, and he turned to his brother. The second giant stepped forward, his eyes on Stu and Victoria.

"Our government sent us on this expedition," he said, in a voice even gentler than the first speaker. "Recently, we heard rumors concerning a young woman—" he nodded courteously towards Victoria—"who had been stranded on a world in an uncharted system. A young woman whose size made her an oddity in the eyes of the Earth people. I see we were not misinformed."

"But what do you want?" Scully said.

"We came on a mission of mercy," Analta explained. "To rescue what we believed was one of our own kind.

Now," he chuckled, "there seem to be two."

Stu Champion stepped forward.

"We are not from your world, Analta. We are freaks—man-created giants."

"Yes," Analta said tonelessly.

"Then you can leave," Scully said. "There's no mission of mercy here—"

"Isn't there?" Doati said. Slowly, his gaze wandered over the carnival trappings ringing Victoria's home. His eyes rested on the atomic cannon.

"No!" Scully shouted. "Go back to your own world. We have business here."

"Ah, yes," Antalta said. "I have heard of business."

Doati looked again towards Stu and the girl.

"Our world is a good world," he said. "Our hills are green and our soil is fertile. Our science is designed for the good of all our people, and we no longer know war."

Stu stared at him. "Why do you tell us this?"

Doati shrugged. "My brother and I—we were despatched as messengers of mercy. If there is help that can be extended here, we do not wish to fail our mission."

Analta joined him. "Doati

speaks well of our world, but we are not paradise. There is sometimes enmity and conflict, despite our aversion to war. We have not conquered all disease nor controlled all evil emotions. But it is a good world—an exceptionally good world—for giants."

"Stu," Victoria whispered. "Stu, do you know what he's saying?"

"Will you take us?" Stu Champion asked. "Will you bring us to your planet?" His voice was anxious.

"If this is your wish," Analta said. "We would be very happy. There is much we can learn from each other . . ."

"Brannigan! Mitchell! Dover!" Damon Scully was shouting. "Artillery positions!"

There was a scuffle of tiny figures on the planet's surface, as Scully's crewmen took positions behind the minuscule weapons with their giant-size threat.

"These are atomic cannon, Analta," Scully said. "Do you know what that means?"

Analta frowned. "Yes. What is your intention?"

"Our intention is simple. We wish to be left alone."

"Very well," Doati smiled. "We have not come for aggressive purposes. We will

leave at once—if our friends are ready."

"Your friends aren't ready! Your friends are staying here!"

"But if they wish to leave—"

"They don't have anything to say about it! Now return to your ship. We mean business!"

"Business," Analta repeated softly. "What a useful word!"

"We have a saying on Earth, Analta. The bigger they are—"

"Of course," Doati said. "We are not authorized to interfere in local matters. But I believe you are making a mistake."

"I'll worry about the mistake," Scully said. "This planet is private property, authorized by the government of Earth. Your very presence here could constitute an illegal invasion. If you don't want trouble between our worlds—get out now!"

Analta sighed, and conferred briefly with his brother.

"Very well," he said. "I am sorry, my friends."

Something dropped from his great hands. Something round and brilliant, many-faced and sparkling like a

diamond of boulder size. It landed soundlessly on the earth before the little figures.

"What is that?" Scully said.

"It's a gift," Analta said gently.

Scully stared at it, suddenly frozen in his tracks. He tried to speak into the microphone, but the words were blocked in his throat. With great effort, he turned to the crewmen behind him, and saw their own eyes fixed on the huge, glittering stone.

Then he forced a cry.

"It's a trick! A trick! Artillery—artillery—"

But the men poised at the hair-triggers of the atomic cannon were immobile. Their eyes widened as they stared at the coruscating gem. They stood rigid as statues, absorbed, hypnotized.

"Now," Analta said quietly, "I think we may go. Will you climb aboard, my friends?"

Stu Champion yanked his eyes from the object on the ground, and pulled Victoria with him to the gondola-ship.

"What is it?" Stu asked.

"We have done them no harm," Doati said. "It is an object we find useful in the hunting of—small animals. Climb aboard, and we will remove it from their sight."

Victoria went into the ship

first, and Stu followed. After a while, they were joined by Doati, who went to the control panel of the ship. Then Analta returned.

In the sky they watched the small planet disappear in the viewport.

"Your friends will be themselves again by now," he said.

"They're not our friends," Stu answered bitterly. "They were going to exploit us—make a carnival out of our world. And we were going to be the prize curiosity . . ."

"Curiosity," Analta said musingly. "Yet they're curious little things themselves. So tiny, yet so puffed up with a sense of importance. Our people will be most amused when they hear our story, and see our little specimen."

"Specimen?" Victoria said.

"You'll have to forgive me. But when I returned for the gem, I found it hard to resist bringing one of the little beings with us. He will make a most remarkable exhibit!"

He produced a round, transparent container, capped by a fine mesh. He held it up to their sight. The little figure within was beating the sides with helpless rage, and Stu wondered if Damon Scully had heard the giant's words.

THE END

FANTASTIC