

STARTLING STORIES

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A Complete Novel



FLIGHT INTO YESTERDAY

By CHARLES L. HARNISS

From space to the Moon, from the Moon to the Sun, Alar the Thief pursues a strange destiny, seeking the self that he must find to free civilization! 9

Two Complete Novelets

- CONQUEST OF LIFE.....Eando Binder 80
Anton York inherits the secret of eternal life, and with it the seeds of destruction! A Hall of Fame classic reprinted by popular demand
- FORGOTTEN ENVOY.....Sam Merwin, Jr. 122
Carden Layne, the man who hails from another world, begins his new career as an Earthian—as a pugilist in the boxing ring!

Short Stories

- THE INCREDIBLE DESTINATION.....Rene LaFayette 96
For centuries, men could not follow James Dolan's star route
- DIMENSION: PRAECOX.....Blair Reed 107
Folks were in for a rude awakening when they saw a disembodied hand
- IMMORTALITY.....John D. MacDonald 113
There are more universes than man has dreamt of in his philosophy
- HISTORY LESSON.....Arthur C. Clarke 137
Shann and his people fight to escape the white terror

Features

- THE ETHER VIBRATES (Announcements and Letters).....The Editor 6
- ROCKET TARGET NO. 2.....R. L. Farnsworth 93
- THE ROAD TO SPACE TRAVEL (Part II).....Willy Ley 116
- SCIENCE FICTION BOOKSHELF.....A Department 155
- SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS.....A Review 157

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the incredible destination

James Dolan's heroic route to the stars was centuries old before man in his ignorance was permitted to journey thereon!





by **RENE LaFAYETTE**

AMONG the many tales of the early voyagers of space, the story of James Dolan should rank high. It did not at the time. It was not even known for five hundred years and then it was received as bric-a-brac for the curious items in the almanac. James Dolan, as a name, is lost in the modern history book. For five centuries it was synonymous with charlatan, for in those ancient days when man was fixated on his birth planet, Earth, he came to believe very little of what he was told about space. Five headed dwarfs and nine-tailed dogs "from Venus" had too often been shown in side-shows.

Space travel, in the vernacular, was a flop. Seventy-five years after the first voyages the economic system in vogue did not fret about universal expansion. It concentrated on such things as food production and birth control

and although here and there men dreamed about future sovereignty of the universe, the mass opinion was opposed. It is very difficult to overcome the inertia of a government or a people. They had Mars. It cost seventeen thousand dollars to transport one man and his baggage to that apparently worthless sphere and the men who had that kind of money had, in the main, no reason to risk their lives going off to a frontier. Only one ship in eight arrived. The return cargo was of small value.

Jupiter, Saturn, Venus and the rest had little to offer an Earthman. The violent fate of the U. S. Jupiter Survey Expedition, the tales of cannibalism in it, the incredible agonies of its members put space travel back many, many years. They had not properly prepared and that, in an expedition, is fatal to more than the one voyage.

**The third in a series on
the Conquest of Space**

JAMES DOLAN had survived Jupiter with Commander Harding. Dolan was, according to the discolored newspapers in ancient archives recently uncovered at New Chicago in the Earth Galaxy, neither a giant nor even a "superman." He was about five feet five, he was slight and he had mild eyes. He lost a hand, his right hand, on Jupiter where he had been severely frozen. He had lost considerable weight sharing the remaining supplies with the sick. He had come back, testified before a Congressional Committee in favor of Harding and had then dropped out of existence so far as the world knew.

For eight years his name and person were forgotten. During that time he could have been found, any Sunday, at the Explorer's Club in New York City, buttering his toast with a mechanical hand, drinking polite tea and answering in quiet monosyllables when the conversation drifted to him. He was not newsworthy. He did not endorse either cigarettes or deodorants or take a vice president's job with an airline. Few knew and fewer cared what James Dolan was doing.

He had a room in Hartford which was too full of books, maps and old clippings to admit much freedom of his person and a cub reporter, taking an interview there five years after the return wrote a humdrum piece on poverty and the forgetfulness of the world.

That piece and the files of the Harding Expedition were all that city editors had that April day when James Dolan, M.E., E.C., C.M.H., calmly announced that on the following Saturday, conditions favorable, he would take off for the nearest star.

He got headlines for one edition of the World-American and five inches on page fourteen in all the other papers. Abruptly the city editors ran out of copy. They had no morgue on Dolan. They had a release from the Explorer's Club that Dolan would carry Flag 1980 for proper planting. Reporters trying to contact Dolan found him not at home.

It never occurred to these newshawks that even an explorer must eat and that expeditions cost a huge sum of money and that, having no announced backer, Dolan must therefore find salaried work expedient. And he was at work.

In the laboratory of the Hartford Arms Corp. main plant several astonished engineers read the afternoon edition and took it instantly to Dolan.

He was at work behind a battery of sonic guns making standard vibration tests; dull

work but necessary. He was in his shirt sleeves and he had a smudge of gun grease on his chin. He smiled pleasantly.

"Yes," he told them. "I am going Saturday." And he started back to his meters.

"But my god, Jimmy," said the chief engineer, a forthright man. "You can't just sit around here if you are going on a trip like that in four days. Take your time off. Good heavens!"

Jimmy shook his head. "I've calculated my departure on something else than weather. My pay check Saturday morning will just exactly settle my bills. Now if you will be so kind—"

The chief engineer blinked. "You mean that on a hundred and fifty a week, you've financed a trip to the nearest star?"

"In eight years you can save a lot out of a hundred and fifty a week. Particularly if you live on crackers and sardines," said Jimmy, smiling. "I—"

"See here," said the chief engineer. "You need your time. I'll give you time off. What do you think this company is?" He looked helplessly at his fellow engineers. "Has he told any of you?"

They shook their heads.

"You leave that junk alone," said the chief engineer. "I'll see that it's all right. The nearest star. Good heavens!"

Jimmy thanked him, wiped his hands on a piece of waste and went to his locker for his coat. He could use this time. He had been working for sixteen hours every day for eight years but half of that had been for Hartford Arms. There were details. A few details before he jumped several light years through zero.

But he did not get much of that time to himself. As he started to leave the plant gate the Government intercepted him. The newshawks did not have the scientist files. Intelligence did.

The man was large, bored and factual.

"I've got orders to pick you up, Mr. Dolan. There's my car. Shall we get along?"

Jimmy Dolan stopped dead still. The disc he saw was regulation enough. "What could you want? I haven't done anything?"

"All rocket fuel is under Government license, Mr. Dolan. The commission wants to talk to you. There's a military plane waiting about ten minutes from here."

* * * * *

Dolan went to New Washington and answered questions. The office was at

the end of a very long corridor and the name on the door was obscure. Yet all uranium fuels were controlled from here and the small, spectacled person behind the desk, appointed obscurely and working even more obscurely, had something to say.

"You can't go, Mr. Dolan. I am sorry. We have no excess fuels. You should have applied to us before you made your release. I am afraid now that you will find yourself looking a little foolish. Uranium stockpiles are low enough, you know. I am sorry." And he closed the file with a final little slap.

"If I need a passport," said Jimmy, "I shall be glad to get one. But I am not aware of any Earth mandate in the place where I think I will land. Alpha Centauri has no ambassador here, that I know."

"That is State Department business, Mr. Dolan," said the little man. "The problem here is fuel."

"Then we have nothing to discuss," said Jimmy mildly. "I am not using rockets and I have no need whatever of atomic fuels. I have much work to do. If you permit me to return in the plane which—"

"You what?"

"I am not using rocket drives."

"You are telling me that another drive exists?"

"Yes," said Jimmy, mildly.

"You invented it?"

"Well, let us say that I used some known principles. May I return by the military plane? I have much to do."

They let him go. But he had five Defense Department experts with him. The trip was a very quiet one. The five men had some sort of idea that they were a prison guard and that communication was impolite. They had orders to inspect the intended vessel, seize all atomic fuel there, disable the rockets and return with Mr. Dolan to Washington for further conference.

It was almost midnight when the bomber landed finally at Hartford and it was two in the morning when a cab stopped beside a high board fence in the poorer section of Hartford. They alighted and Jimmy let them in through the gate. He closed it carefully. Hartford had been strolling past this vacant lot for six years in the belief that some junkman used it for storage and pilots had been flying over it continually without penetrating its upper net.

There was a small, dirty shack in one corner of the yard and when the light was

lighted in this it streamed out through the cracks to show a sphere. The weird lighting impressed the Defense men a little and they became brusque.

JIMMY watched them cover the entire ground of the yard with counters and test the ship.

The Army man was the first one who saw the lack of tubes. "Who are you trying to kid, Dolan? You've got the motor elsewhere and you've stored the fuel where it won't be touched until the last minute. It's late and we're tired. If we have to cover this whole state to find it, we will. Now what's your answer to that?"

"There's no fuel," said Jimmy. "I don't use tubes."

"There's *got* to be fuel!" said the Army man violently.

"Well—of course there is a fuel of sorts. But it isn't under government jurisdiction. I have called it Fuel 105, since that is its atomic weight. It is here in this package."

He showed them the cigar box on the desk and they opened it. Something was wound with copper wires and attached to a light cord. "That is the shield, don't remove it," said Jimmy. "You've heard of Gordon McGregor. He brought it to me at my request from the Martian mines. It had no value until I refined it. It is the remains of a meteor, of which there are many on the Moon and Mars. It has a half life of six years when it is refined."

"It don't radiate," said the chief investigator, poking an all purpose scope at it.

"Its radiation is not measurable," said Jimmy. "At least not by your means."

"You've got to tell us about this," said the Army man.

Jimmy sat down on a barrel head and lighted a cigarette. He was very tired and his mechanical hand wouldn't hold the match right. "Gentlemen, I majored in magnetics under the great Marston. I had to work hard to get through school and he made me an assistant instructor when I was an upper classman. He gave me his notebooks when he died ten years ago. When my wife and boy died I went to Jupiter. When I came back I heard from McGregor about these particular meteors. I worked for two years before I knew I had a magnetic field of a type hitherto unclassified. There are five kinds of magnetism now known generally. This is the sixth."

"It is your duty," said the chief investigator, "to give this to your Government."
 "It is a potential weapon," said Jimmy. "I do not work for the Government. When I have demonstrated beyond all doubt that wars are no longer necessary on Earth because unlimited territory is available to man, the formulas will be made accessible. Until then they are my property."

THEY took this sullenly. There were no Congressional laws to cover it. A citizen was, after all, a free citizen. Such a discovery could only be pre-empted in time of actual war and there was no war. The man from the Navy's judge advocate's office said so, put the wound package back in the box and stood up to go.

The chief investigator was not satisfied. The Army man, a scientist himself, wanted proof.

"We don't even know that this works," said the Army man suspiciously.

"It is a force field. The old, old force field. But it is a repellent," said Jimmy. "It will repel at the rate of fifty thousand horse power per gram and its magnetic speed is several hundred times that of light. Better activators will be found. This one will, for the moment, have to do."

They were still uncertain. Jimmy took a microscopic grain of it, laid it with copper tweezers on a brass anvil and braced it there. The grain was wrapped in infinitely fine wire. Jimmy cautiously waved them aside, lowered a metal hood over the grain and threw a small switch.

A can on the table hurtled away, struck the far fence and fell flattened. A large crack ran through the boards at the end of the yard. Jimmy flipped the switch back while he still had a working place.

They stood in the shadow painting light for a moment, staring at this mild, small man. And then they quietly took their leave.

On Thursday, the newspapers had to have more news and they printed what they could. The stories they dug up on this date do great credit to an editor's ability to keep a story alive and very small credit to the scientific logic of that ancient time.

Even though superstition itself was more reliable than the greater part of the theories of matter and mind than at present, there was no real excuse, except perhaps a discreditable thirst for publicity, for the bombast which was delivered against Mr.

James Dolan, M.E., E.C., C.M.H.

Any new scientific discovery, the gist went, would long since have been known intimately to every sub-instructor in every university in the world. There were no astonishing new discoveries to be made—a statement which curiously recalled the gentlemen who resigned from a patent office about a hundred thousand years or more ago "because everything has been invented by now," thirty years after the first voice-wire communication was discovered, though fifty years beyond that date the "electric light," "an early means of artificial illumination" was first used.

There were no prohibitions against the Defense Department people talking on a subject not covered even by that nebulous word, Security, and while their names are not to be seen in these moldy old prints at New Chicago, it must have been from that source that decrying material came.

Magnetism was magnetism. There were five kinds. That was the end of it. The several thousand kinds later discovered give one pause to wonder at the human desire for limitation.

The absolute masterpiece of all these stories is one which states that a new force, if discovered for such purpose as inter-star travel, might unbalance the delicate atomic disintegration of the sun, probably by pushing against its corona.

But if others thirsted for publicity here, Jimmy Dolan did not. His mechanical hand was very clever at cutting wire in the proper lengths but it was not very good at clock-work mechanism. He was sweating over a crude magnetic radar when the reporters sensed him out in his lair.

It was Friday afternoon and Jimmy had worked night and day since leaving Hartford Arms Corp. but he was very gentle and polite to the reporters.

They sat around smoking hard, scribbling hard, staring hard and asking hard questions. They had been briefed by all the data which detractors had put out.

"Is it true," said one of them, "that a man can't stand a loss of gravity. Doesn't it hold him together inside or something?"

This one creaked. They had asked it scores of years ago of the first Martian expeditions.

Jimmy was patient and explained it wasn't true.

"But it will take you ten or fifteen times a normal lifetime to get there," said another, quoting another detractor.

"I will not travel at 'finite' speeds," said Jimmy. "I intend to make many times the speed of light."

"That will make you several times the size of the universe," countered another. "My math prof—"

"That's theory," said another reporter. "Isn't it, Mr. Dolan?"

"Yes, that is theory," said Jimmy.

"But if you hit any space dust," said one youth, "it will pulverize you, won't it?"

"Yes, if I hit any," smiled Jimmy tolerantly.

"You just takin' a chance, then?"

"No, I have a guard field which will disintegrate rather large objects before the ship can touch them. I will then be passing through gas. This may be erosive but not fatal. The guard field is the ordinary city field protection against guided missiles with which you are probably familiar."

"You intend to be long on this trip?"

"About two months in transit. I have air and supplies for eight months."

LOOKING skeptical, they took notes, saw another can flattened, inspected the ship and generally took up valuable time.

"Give us some dope about your own life," said a reporter.

"It's been just an average sort of life," said Jimmy.

"But you want a statement issued, don't you?"

"Yes!" he said suddenly. He took an offered cigarette and a light. He was smoking a lot. There would be a long time in which to break the habit and this was indulgence.

"Gentlemen," said Jimmy. "Earth is starved for land. The doubling of the average life span has made poverty common and not even wars have been able to keep up with the birth rate. Man needs to stretch out. When he has new territory beyond surveying, he will no longer indulge in spiteful conflict here on Earth. The solution to war and famine lies in the conquest of the stars. Many men have already given their lives to make such a thing possible. This dream is not a new dream. A hundred scientists today could have undertaken this project, but perhaps they do not share this dream.

"My task is to find habitable planets, to demonstrate this type of drive as an economical means of reaching them and to turn men's minds to new systems, new worlds and new freedom.

"Pardon me if I sound like an idealist. But I am afraid there is no other excuse."

They stared at him, impressed. He was such a mild little man. He was working with so very, very little. He had a dream. They did not share it but they could respect it.

They reported him fairly well but there were bigger things in the news that day. A movie actor had been pronounced insane and that seems to have put space travel on page three.

He was equally luckless when he departed. Several of his friends were there at four-thirty to bid him good speed. But a ten alarm fire had gutted a tenement at three-five and the press services were busy counting the dead and dying.

At the appointed moment the ship drifted upwards without the usual flame and flash, that spectator-searing departure which had always marked earlier voyages. It grew smaller overhead against high-riding white cumulus formations, began to pick up speed, was a momentary target for a practicing corporal on a new radar sight at the nearby flying field and then was gone.

Flight to the stars had begun.

The most remarkable part of this departure was the seeming absence of any interest in what James Dolan's brain might have contained. But the world was tired of the dreariness of Martian travel, of the sideshow freaks, even of marvelous gadgets. It was an age when Man trembled of the brink of his most astonishing discoveries and yet old and weary, supposed that all new things lay behind him.

Dolan's log does not find the fact curious. He knew he was an explorer. He knew the lot of explorers who reach too far beyond the accepted fact to reach the understanding of men as well.

Dolan's log is humdrum. It remarks on several things which man was a long time learning. Speed indicators were needed. He made a scale of star colors so that, as the color of a destination changed the speed could be judged. He accurately described distortion of bow stars. He found six new rays. And he plotted the curve of space, a feat in itself.

He had five weeks in an iron and copper sphere with its curious, spring walls to change shock to something a man might stand. He had five weeks to record what he had done wrong and what he had done right and he recorded them. James Dolan might

not have been a fire-ball hero but he was a very thorough man.

For five weeks he made notes and changed his courses and speeds to fit hitherto undiscovered phenomena. He ate sparingly of his stores and drank as little as possible of his water, a fact recorded with human abruptness every few days, "I wish I had a gallon of lemonade", amid a jumble of scientific recordings.

His heat unit failed in the last week and he had to spend the last five days in a suit while absolute zero did odd things to canned food and made a brittle ice-pond of the air which had been in the sphere.

And then he found his star. And found it was the wrong star.

Three dimensional navigation had been invented. A dozen books or so had been written upon it. But three dimensional navigation at finite speeds of thirty or forty thousand miles an hour is very much different from that required in maneuvering a ship traveling around a million miles a second.

When Clavesty first achieved the speed of light and passed it for four minutes several years before this in a rocket drive job, he commented that the man who could draw the pattern of space seen from that speed had not yet been born. Clavesty was right at the time and, as far as human observational powers are concerned, is right even to this day. Space plays strange tricks.

JIMMY DOLAN, riding his sphere, looking with mild eyes from his leaded ports on undiscovered dead systems, flaming comets and blazing stars never before recorded by man, had not counted upon his force shield shedding light particles to the extent that it did. A simple fault in the proportion of the field had distorted actual direction. Having no way to measure speed, he had come to a place where it was nearer to approach a small, unknown star than to cut back to Alpha Centauri.

If he believed in Providence, perhaps it influenced his decision. He braked down more rapidly, turning the while, and spent five days of torture, sluggish against the forward end of his craft.

Hours were measuring sticks but they had ceased to be days and nights now. Dates meant nothing. He devised a galactic calendar and time measure in a crabbed hand as he lay pressed by force against the springs and cushions.

It was a small star, about twice the size of Sun. He named it Galileo and closed in, braking against the particles and the star to find any planet.

It was a fifteen planet system, a remarkable thing. And the planets were in some sort of plane, giving him the idea that an underlying law was here which might be expected to work with every star, a singular error for so thorough a man.

And now began, there in the unlovely interior of his unnamed vessel, the unraveling of a puzzle. He lacked instruments to test for atmosphere and gravity and, uncomfortable as he was in the absolute zero with a failed heater, he had to find a good planet as soon as he could.

He did one of the crudest and at the same time most accurate calculations in current record. He arbitrarily assumed that a double sized sun would have a livable planet six orbits out instead of three or four. He had no reason whatever for such a supposition. He only knew he was cold and hungry and thirsty and that he would not live long on the amount of air he could get into his suit from the blocks of frozen stuff in the tanks. He spotted and headed for Planet Six.

Face pressed to the leaded panes, he could see the clouds of an atmosphere. He saw greenness and the silver of water under them. He braked and came within two hundred miles of the surface, stopping there for a moment. He felt healthy gravity and it did not appear to be too strong. His ship was already in atmosphere for the sky was less black now.

He opened a tiny petcock. It blew in, not out. It was atmosphere. It turned oxygen paper green and tested nul methane, nul ammonia, positive nitrogen. He let his sphere fill. The light of Galileo was already making his ship warm and even if he could not discard his mask, there were fewer knives in his lungs now. He had been breathing forty degree air for days. He let himself have the luxury of full atmosphere.

He was excited. He sprang to one and then another of his ports, craning to look straight down. He saw that he could land in what appeared to be a temperate zone and that he would be choosing morning. That this planet turned was obvious. It must have a fifteen hour day. It was bigger than Earth. Much bigger.

Jimmy lowered away. He coaxed his vessel over the area chosen and dropped to five miles. And then he stood staring at a port.

He opened it and looked out. He took off his helmet and mask after several careful whiffs of atmosphere and looked out again.

He was about five miles north of a large and sprawling city whose white buildings blazed in the morning light.

The city was planned in widening circles like a stone dropped into a pool. The buildings were low. Things were moving in the streets.

It gave Jimmy a slight turn. He wondered if he had navigated to some strange spot of Earth by error. He had not looked for beings. And while Jimmy Dolan was unconcerned about the dangers and travails of space, he was a very shy and retiring man. Stage fright took him. They might suppose him a god. Then again they might think he was a monster. Still again, they might have a society much superior to his own for certainly their architecture was wonderful.

He saw a tilled field and dropped toward it to discover that it had been lately harvested. With more than a little trepidation he landed upon it, opened his airlock and stepped out. He had come on this voyage without so much as a bean shooter. He had no magic tricks. All he had were his knowledge and his dream.

A biped animal was standing near a wall and Jimmy bolstered up his nerve. The thing was tan and about eight feet tall. It had two arms which ended in paws and it had two eyes. It could almost be considered a normal thing except that there was no intelligence in its eye nor curiosity in its movements at seeing Jimmy approach. If this thing was an example of the being with which he had to deal, he felt he could be confident. He came within two feet of it and still it did not move nor look frightened.

"Excuse me," said Jimmy, "I am a man named Dolan. I come from a planet smaller than this one which goes around a star you might be able to see at night—"

HE FELT silly. The thing could not possibly understand his words. It was not even interested. But his embarrassment made him talk to it.

"I want water and food," he said and made motions of eating and drinking.

It looked very inquisitive indeed.

And then there was a peal of laughter behind him and he whirled to see a small creature standing by his ship, a biped with merry eyes, a tawny skin and a red, laughing mouth.

A "boy" or a "girl." Not human. But not quite inhuman. He or she was laughing at him.

A voyage in space shakes a man as any space surgeon can say, even today. Jimmy was more shaken than he knew. There was a rock there and he sat down suddenly upon it. Relief at being here was stronger than he knew.

He or she came up to him, still laughing. A jabber of language, obviously sentient, ended with the word, "Blitho" repeated several times, punctuated each time with laughter.

Jimmy Dolan knew he had been caught talking to some approximation of a cow.

After a while he made her, for the race was bi-sexual, understand that he could *not* understand. This stopped her laughter and she became interested in the ship, his clothes and condition. She had evidently believed before this that he had somehow been rolling this sphere across the fields and was an odd import from some strange country.

By signs he informed her he had come from the sky and when she had exhausted her list of countries of her world, each time getting his negative, she became very sober. She beckoned and he followed her to a round hut where stood a group of older people.

They had seen him land as the "girl" had not but they only nodded solemnly when he pointed to himself and to the sky. This did not seem to stretch their imaginations but it did stir their speculations.

They talked to one another while the "girl" brought water and a mound of food on a slab. Jimmy sat down, sampled his wares, clandestinely added an antiseptic tablet to the drink and began to put the hot edibles down. From time to time he looked at his hosts.

Their riches could not be great but they were well enough fed. They stood a little smaller than himself and he had begun to realize the increased gravity and knew this would account for such a thing. Their arms were a little too short and their legs a little long, which gave them a cranelike appearance when they were thin with age. Their faces were not at all ugly but they had a strangeness, a certain displacement of feature which was a trifle disconcerting. But their voices were low and obviously well mannered. Here were civilized, sentient beings, humanoids.

Jimmy looked at the rolling country of their corner of their world. The vast city

was out of sight over a green hill. It was not an unpleasant place. Not at all.

It was luck which had brought him here. If Jimmy Dolan's luck had stayed this good in the year to come, he would be part of our clumsiest jingles now.

He was given a pallet on which to sleep inside the hut and when he saw it would not be discourteous to do so, he stretched out and was instantly unconscious.

When he woke again the shadows outside had changed and they confused him. It was dawn, not afternoon when he had oriented himself. He had slept a day and a night nearly around, sixteen hours his watch told him, and when he woke and felt how stiff he was he knew that he had been, there in the ship at the last of the voyage, very close to collapse. He stood up and found the family gone. Prowling a bit he found a bucket of water, dropped an antiseptic tablet into it and stooped to drink. And he was shocked to see what looked back at him. Unshaven and dirty, he would never have done in anything higher than a hobo jungle.

He went to his ship. The ground was well worn around it but nothing had been touched within it. Evidently crowds had been here. Jimmy found that with true scientific thoroughness he had forgotten shaving soap and toothpaste and razor. He had a clean khaki suit, however. He took a scalpel from the surgical kit he had brought, a small can of mechanic's soap and repaired to a brook near the house. Behind a screen of shrubs with much pain and travail he remedied his condition. He had cut his chin, for scalpels make bad razors and brooks poor mirrors.

He was sitting on a bench up against the house writing in his log when the deputation came. They stood waiting with patience until he looked up and then one man, dressed simply in blue linen-like cloth and badged with a carved animal of some sort on his shoulder, stepped forward and smiled at him.

There ensued a very unsatisfying conversation, done mostly in signs. Jimmy saw that they took it very easily that he had come from the sky, saw that he had communicated the idea of stars to them and found that they had names. But they had no awe of him. They were a little curious and rather pleased.

They gave him good food and ate breakfast with him. He sighed with relief at not having been mistaken for a god. But after a bit this aroused his curiosity. What sort of a society was this which could accept men

from other worlds without fright or superstition.

HE WAS to learn many things in the days that followed. He was to find that the main curiosity was the metal about him, for there was almost no metal used on the entire planet. In his turn he was to goggle at children playing with ten and twenty carat diamonds and rubies and other precious stones he could not immediately name. He found, eventually, that this was a society without a religion of any kind. The people, it might be said, worshiped their own people's creations and seemed to be unconscious of sin as an entity.

The "girl" whose name was Muleen, was pretty in her way and she smelled fragrant. She spent her time either laughing with him or sitting very quiet looking at him.

Daily he expected to find a crowd out from the city but no one came and at last he adventured it. He could not leave without looking at this marvel and so, one morning, he communicated a desire to travel and found the "girl" a ready companion.

He had learned a few of her words. She had mastered a few of his. They conversed now in standard signs, standard only to them, and a jargon which could not be creditably rendered.

When she found where he was going she frowned and hung back. But he went on and at last she kept pace with him. He wondered if some giant might not rule in the place with ogres for soldiers and amused his fancy with it.

From a hill they saw it lying a gleam in the crystal morning. The endless vista of towers and walls impressed him and he swung anxiously on, Muleen dropping back a trifle and looking a little afraid.

They came to the first rampart, a gate, a gate a hundred meters tall and magnificently wrought in a yellow metal. One side of it hung limply from its hinges and there was no guard.

Jimmy went on through it, pausing only to look at a plaque which he could not read and going on, looking for people.

There were no people. In all this vast city there were no people. The streets were unpaved and grown heavy with grass and stray domestic animals ranged here, feeding docilely. It had been these which Jimmy had seen from above.

When he had gone a mile into it he was

convinced. There were no people. There were tall towers and ruined walls, broken stairs and gaping doors. But not one inhabitant.

He stopped. It was so quiet one could hear the ringing in his ears.

Muleen whimpered a little and hung close to him. Jimmy went on, traveling toward the center, walking over piles of alabaster masonry, struggling through creepers and small forests which blocked the streets.

Now and then he entered a building and came forth. There were never any possessions within, no bodies, only debris. But there was metal. Strange yellow stuff it was, soft and pliable. He classified it as gold and twisted several pieces of it from broken gates.

Gradually the tomb began to depress him and when he had reached the center he was almost as superstitious about the place as Muleen. She kept tugging him to come back but he had to finish his photographs, attempt to describe this strange architecture and make certain there were no clues.

In the exact center of the town a great white dome arose. It was flanked with wide courts on various levels. He was about the enter the dome when a cry from Muleen stopped him.

There were two animals, curiously like wolves but larger. They stood with malevolent eyes, sole possessors of this gigantic city. Jimmy started toward them, fishing in his pocket. They held their ground, even crouched toward him. Jimmy took his cigarette lighter, pulled up the wick and lit it. They blinked at its light. He thrust it at them and they ran, terrified.

Muleen was begging him now.

Jimmy gave it up. He looked at the golden filagree work on the dome, at the plaques, then at the broken pavement and the now distant wolves. He turned and walked rapidly back the way they had come.

He was to discover that there were a thousand such cities at least on this planet, imperishably built in all things except people. Any inhabitants here lived an agrarian life. There were no rulers, no clans. They used little if any metal. They had no weapons beyond tipped spears.

The planet was a riddle. He spent the next dozen days trying to master enough language from Muleen's baby brother to ask intelligent questions about it. Had this race been exterminated by disease or was it a different peo-

ple who lived here on the plain?

He could gather a little. The city had been abandoned as long as anyone knew. What had chanced with the peoples therein, no humanoid present could tell.

JIMMY went back again. He could find no graves, no statues, no clues. And then he gave it up for the moment and began to classify animals and plants and use his camera thoroughly. At night he set himself the problem of finding Sun in this strangely studded sky. Sun was very small and he had to redraw all his charts by known distances, directions and sizes.

There were no birds here, no insects. But there were many quadrupeds and several kinds of fish.

Jimmy was getting impatient. He had conquered space to the stars. That was his main project. Men could spend the long and necessary time being naturalists when they followed in his tracks. He had been the first. He wanted to get back and, very humanly, say so. His dream, should he make Earth safely, was realized. Man, conquering space, could conquer, at last, himself.

He fixed his heating unit, he loaded his tanks and one pleasant day touched the back of his hand to his lips in their fashion of good-bye and stepped into his ship.

Muleen wept. He gave her his pocket comb and an old school ring and once more kissed the back of his hand.

He was glad to be aloft again. This time he drifted for some hours, watching the planet turn, dropping down to find empty cities beside the great rivers and seas, rising again, locating new ones and inspecting them. They were all empty. They were all white and gold tombs, meaningless and mute.

When he wearied of this and exhausted his last film, he set his force beam against Galileo and went through the agonies of acceleration for the next four days.

He had chosen what he thought was Sun. He was very lucky. It was Sun. And on the twenty-seventh of April, James Dolan, M.E., E.C., C.M.H. landed at the Hartford Municipal Airport before the eyes of embarking and departing passengers and a bored despatcher.

Ten minutes later he was on the phone, trying to contact the President of the United States. He did so. And for twenty-four wild hours, James Dolan was a hero complete with parades.

The State Department came to his hotel in Washington and sat around on radiators and window sills when the chairs were gone and said complimentary things.

The Defense Department wanted to know about this new drive and the sixth order of magnetism. And then the photographs came back from the Government darkroom and the photographs were blank.

Jimmy stood looking at their grey opaqueness. He frowned. He tried to recall just when he might have been careless with them. He tried to recall passing some comet which would have contained penetrating rays. He could not. And then he looked at his camera.

Absolute zero does things to shutters. The contracting metal had torn from its pins and the leaves lay useless in the bellow. One had stayed locked in place.

He showed them his camera at the Defense Department and suddenly they seemed cool and strange to him.

"Mr. Dolan," said the secretary, "I have some rather bad news for you. The metal which you brought back is a copper alloy, copper and silver. It has been in manufacture for the past century at the Revere works in Boston. It is the same metal."

Jimmy stared at him. He looked back at the blank photographs.

"Mr. Dolan," the secretary continued, "in the absence of other evidence, it is my painful duty to inform you that this department no longer credits your tale. That you went into space with a new drive is sufficiently laudable. That you have invented a new magnetism is in itself a wonderful thing. May I suggest that you confine your claims to these rational items and so gain your measure of reward. If you will now make a statement to the press assembled in the next room to the effect that this is pure hoax designed to attract attention to your inventions, I shall even then be happy to cooperate with you."

Stunned, Jimmy let the blank negatives fall. He leaned against the desk, trying to say something which would be adequate. He was a mild man. But his mechanical hand drew deep scars into the mahogany as it closed. He turned and went to the press room, thinking hard.

He faced them, these languid, half interested reporters who already had the secretary's decision.

"Gentlemen," said James Dolan, "I went into space and to the system of a star. I went

because I believed in something. I believed that Earth, released from excess population, interested in new accessible territory, would be at peace within itself and turn all its efforts to a mastery of the Universe. There are thrones for every ambitious ruler in the stars. There is land to raise food and sweet air to breathe. Gentlemen, I made this voyage. That I have brought no proof is a misfortune which only your faith in me can mend."

They looked at him cynically. There had been the famous Gerault who had met the Queen of Venus, he said, but had never left his yard. There had been fakers by the hundreds. No one had had enough imagination to claim a voyage to a star. They remembered now what his detractors had said when he went forth.

"Possibly," said one reporter, "you may have an accurate and more convincing account of your voyage."

DOLAN stood up straight. His mild eyes were not mild now. "I traveled for five weeks, once reaching an approximate speed of five million miles a second. I found a star and on its Sixth Planet, a humanoid society. I found a thousand dead cities of gold where only the herds and wolves ranged. I have returned. Within a week I shall set forth again."

This gave them a little pause. They were not bad fellows. They would write what they had heard and they wrote it.

Three months went by and there was no further word of James Dolan. Six months passed and he did not return.

And then a wag wrote a comic piece in a Sunday paper about finding a million dead cities of solid diamond and women with wings and cows that talked, and Earth relaxed. Dolan was somewhere. Hiding, probably. Down on the Amazon or even on Mars where any outcast was free to come and go. And another wag coined a phrase by calling a musical comedy producer's blurb a "Dolan". It stuck.

For five hundred years it stuck. And Dolan never came back.

They used his force drive as a weapon against men and named the Sixth Field after the man who exploited it and wrote its equations. And Dolan did not return.

A little over five hundred years after his first take-off, a metallurgist named Smalley

(Concluded on page 115)

THE INCREDIBLE DESTINATION

(Concluded from page 106)

was prospecting in the northern section of the Gulf of California where an earthquake had caused the seas to recede some thirty miles. He found a curious deposit and his party opened a grave.

There was a space ship, badly smashed, and a man in it. No water or mud had reached the interior but the man had been killed in the crash. There were leaded film

cases, an imperishable log and a stack of debris which appeared to be the remains of a strange animal. There were samples of soil and rocks. There was much cargo, too much cargo.

James Dolan had almost made it home. They gave him half a dozen lines in one edition of the World-American. There had been a murder that day.