



ASTOUNDING **SCIENCE FICTION**

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

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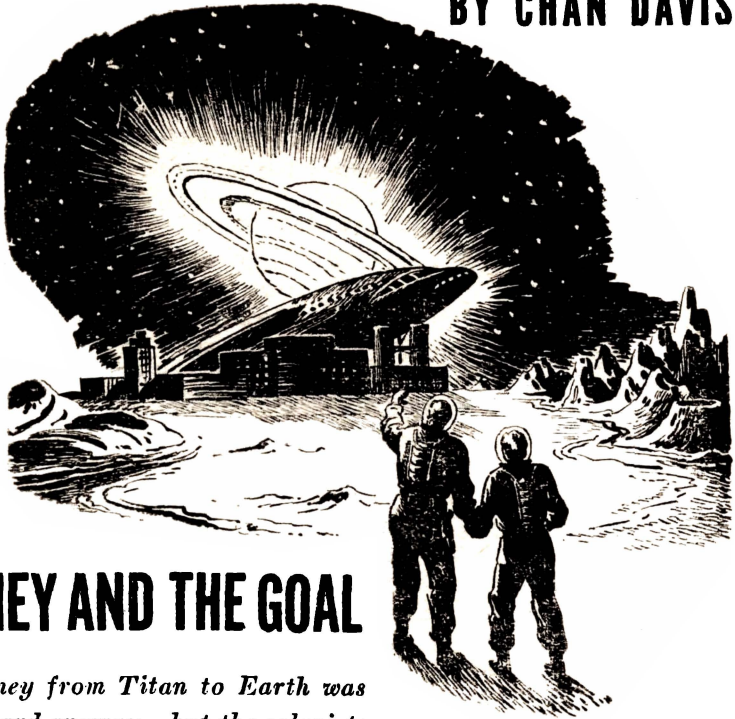
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AST-16





THE JOURNEY AND THE GOAL

The journey from Titan to Earth was long and hard anyway—but the colonists were forbidden to make it. Two, defying all laws tried it—and found that there are two kinds of laws: Man's which can be broken, and Nature's—which can't.

Illustrated by Orban

Jack and Evlyn met after work to go up together to the Observatory.

This trip was a regular thing for them, partly a habit, like any ritual, but mostly a holy pilgrimage. Jack had been making it ever since the time, fifteen years before, when his father had first told him of the many other worlds far in space outside their own. The tales had wakened his imagination, and his father, hard put to it by some of the boy's ques-

tions, had one day answered Jack's pleas and taken him to the "Sky Room." There was a man named Creeden at the Observatory who had been willing and able to answer his questions, and — there had been the tiny, inconceivably distant stars. Mr. Creeden had shown him the planets through the telescope, and had smiled at the rush of questions which each one brought forth. Eagerly, Jack had looked and listened, wishing si-

lently that it was possible for him to go himself to all these strange worlds, to see himself all these incredible things of which he was told.

The longing had lasted. Even when Jack had had to start work in the mines, his friendship and almost apprenticeship to Mr. Creeden had continued. He had studied; slowly, because there was so much he did not know, and with difficulty, because at first he had patience only for the stars themselves and not for the seemingly unrelated subjects which Mr. Creeden insisted he must also know. Creeden had told him that in the place from which he had come Jack would have been able to spend all his time in studying instead of working in the mines, and neither would his teachers have had other duties beside education. Jack came to hate, as Creeden did, the dictator, Montiel, who denied them all this. The hate, like the curiosity, was part of Jack's longing, but always strongest was the dream of some day crossing space.

And then he had met Evlyn Winters and told her of his longing, and she had understood it, she had shared it; and it had become, no longer Jack Rowell's dream, but the dream of Jack and Evlyn. And when, later, they had gazed upward at the great, starred sky of night and said, like many more before them, "We shall live together always," they had thought, not of a life in this place that was their birthplace and their home, but of a life *there*, up there, of a new home on one of the distant, shining worlds of the sky.

They planned, and made a kind of

joke out of working great detail into the plans, just as if there was hope that they might be fulfilled. Yet the serious core of the thing was always there; repeatedly they were shocked by the enduring intensity of it, by the unabating lure of the impossible.

Inevitably, their thoughts turned finally to one in particular of the planets they saw. For they knew that only there could they breathe the native air — stride barefoot the living soil — look at the stars direct, without inevitable intervening panes of artificial glass. Anywhere else they must dwell always within protecting metal domes, air-tight, insulated, and sterile, and eat none but synthetic foods; they must, in short, live as they were living here, on the planet Titan. Oh, it was natural that Jack and Evlyn should have turned to that one particular planet: the home of their ancestors—Earth.

Creeden was sitting before the calculator when Jack and Evlyn got there. He glanced up as they entered.

"Hello, Tony," said Jack, and "Hello, Mr. Creeden," said Evlyn.

"Come on in," Creeden responded, strangely without his usual cheer, and punched a few more keys. "You can go out to the observatory and wait, if you want to; I have to finish the landing trajectory for the FB-916."

"When's she due in?"

"About five hours, I think. Tell you when I'm through." This time he hadn't even looked up; Jack and Evlyn didn't bother him further.

The observatory was kept evacu-

ted, like those of Luna. The inside of the telescope had to be evacuated anyway, exposed as it must be to the emptiness that is where Titan's atmosphere would be if Titan had an atmosphere. And, that being the case, all parts of the scope proper had to be open to empty space too, to avoid sharp temperature differentials that could ruin the optical properties or even crack the mirror. Temperature was still a problem. During the Titanian day the scope had to be carefully shaded, lest the sun's radiant heat warm it unevenly.

Jack and Evlyn put on two of the spacesuits that were stacked beside the air lock, then stepped through into blackness. Jack groped, pressed a stud beside the door—and stars flowed brilliantly across the ceiling. Jack felt again the old wonder. He knew that really nothing had happened, the roof had merely slid back into the low wall. But it seemed as if the whole universe of light had been poured into the room with them.

The sun was not up, it had not been for fifteen "days" now. If it had been, they would not be here like this; the one time Jack had looked at the sun he had had to close his eyes against the demonic brightness of it. The sun was not up, but Saturn loomed low over the eastern horizon, in the position it always occupied. It seemed to fill half the sky with its soft-limned streaks of pastel red and blue. To Jack's eyes, used to the dimness of a planet where power was at a premium, it looked garish even beside the unrestrained, overflowing whiteness of the stars. Old faithful Saturn, for-

ever hogging Titan's sky. And somewhere out there, Earth modest among the thousand stars, too dim to find unless you knew its position in advance, too distant for you to distinguish its vague disk or crescent; but certainly there, somewhere. Somewhere, too, was the ship which had left the Mother World such a short time before.

They looked for a long minute, then turned back toward the air lock. Jack looked back once, and felt pity for his friends in the mine who had never seen the sky.

Just inside the door they stopped. Creeden had just extracted from the machine a centimeter-wide strip, whose twin was now being fed to the calculator. Silently, invisibly, the machine calculated a course for a spaceship thousands of miles away.

Creeden stood, and crossed the room to file the strip. Jack had long since grown used to the Earthman's short stature—not even two meters—but he could see it still startled Evlyn. And to think that on Earth Creeden would be considered tall!

Ordinarily Creeden would have put on a spacesuit and gone with them back to the scope, or else taken them up to the photography room. He did neither. Instead, he motioned them to take off their suits and sit down in the weblike, fragile-looking metal chairs beside his desk. When they had done so, he gave an odd smile and said abruptly, "Montiel won't let you go to Earth, you know."

Jack and Evlyn looked dumbly at each other; they had never told anyone of their dream.

"Oh, I know you've been thinking about it," Creeden went on with calm understatement. "I've overheard some of the things you've said, and I knew long ago that Jack had something like that in the back of his mind. But you can't do it."

"We know that," said Evlyn.

"Do you know why?"

"Yes," answered Jack. "Montiel knows that if he allows emigration he may not have enough men left to run his mines, because no new colonists are coming here any more."

"There's a story behind that, too. You may not know the whole thing, so I'd better tell it from the beginning." And he told how, long before, when man was first extending his rule from Earth to the other planets of the system, the World State had broken down into rival factions, just as Seventeenth Century English companies had competed with each other in the development of what was then the New World. But this time the schisms had lasted. The Asian Commonwealth had established its rule over half of Mars, most of the remainder going finally to the European Union. America—a nation actually comprising only about half of the continent of that name—had had to be contented with a disappointingly barren Venus, plus a small share of Luna; so, impatient for further conquest, it had reached for the outer planets.

The asteroids, surprisingly enough, proved to be valuable as refrigerators—large-scale sources of liquid oxygen and other low-boiling liquids. Encouraged, America had struck outward again. The other nations

had not followed just then, for, having temporarily neglected rocketry research in the all-out exploitation of their new colonies, they had no ships capable of making the Jupiter trip at opposition. When Titan was finally colonized, it was by Americans, with Jack's and Evlyn's grandparents among them. The new world had sent back pure titanium, a rarity on Earth, and a scarce isotope of mercury; and it had prospered.

Creeden broke off the narrative as the calculator emitted a series of sharp clicks, indicating that the tape was finished. He went over, took it out, and inserted it in the coder which he had previously connected to the microwave transmitter. The co-ordinates of the landing trajectory would now automatically be beamed from the antenna outside the dome to the incoming spaceship. Creeden sat down again and proceeded.

Titan's trade had been limited to America, but it had not been many years before the Titanians realized that the other nations, too, were good markets for their products. They had rebelled, under Montiel's father; America had made little effort to keep them subject, and they had set up their own government, like several other planet-colonies before them; Montiel's father had become the first dictator, though he had not been called that at first. Again Titan prospered—until disaster struck.

The mercury isotope which had been their most profitable product was obtained on Earth as the end

product of a radioactive disintegration series. It could be manufactured cheaply and simply in a small pile, wherever it was needed. Titan's mercury became valueless. The young nation was reduced to exporting titanium—a bulky substance, therefore wasteful of rocket fuel. They were forced to live a Spartan life, using a minimum of food, power, and even air. Immigration abruptly stopped, and, in compensation, those already present were forbidden to leave. The dictatorship was established and the dictators blamed all the unpleasant economies on Earth's imagined effort to starve the independent state into submission.

Here Jack interrupted the history with a thought which had been bothering him for the past few minutes: "Say, Tony, if you knew all along about our wanting to return to Earth"—he said "return" unconsciously—"why didn't you ever say anything about it before?"

"There's a reason for my bringing it up just now," Creeden smiled; and the way he phrased his answer brought Jack the first glimmerings of a wild hope. "You'll see what I mean in just a minute. Let me go on."

"You may not know that we're in a worse position now than we ever were before. We have nothing to offer but titanium. Well, that's a pretty common element everywhere, the only difficulty lies in extracting it from Martian and Earthian ores. Recently there's been work done on improved methods of extraction.

Pretty promising work. You see where that leaves us.

"Montiel won't face the possibility that Titan may have to become a dead world. He's trying to keep down the inner planets' demand for new sources of titanium by increasing our output. That's why you're working longer hours than your parents did; that's why I'm working in the mines part time now; that's also why Montiel's keeping news of the danger from the people. He doesn't want anyone to consider leaving now."

"Is anyone considering leaving?" asked Jack.

"Yes."

"Yourself among them."

"That's right," Creeden admitted.

"Then we can go?"

"Slow down there, slow down," smiled Creeden. Then he added, with it seemed some reluctance, "Maybe you can— Do you want to go?"

Jack, surprised at his own calmness, said simply, "Yes, we do."

"I tell you. I may have to give that ship a course correction in as little as an hour; but that gives me time to take you down to see some friends of mine. They're also— shall we say, a little discontented with the way things are going.

"I guess you realize we don't like the idea of Montiel's guards finding us out. I wouldn't be telling you all this if I wasn't pretty sure you'd want to help us. How about it?"

Evlyn assented immediately, but Jack pondered. There had been anticlimax, both in Creeden's last words and in his tone. Jack per-

sisted, "Is there any chance of our going to Earth?"

"Oh, you can—" Creeden checked whatever he had started to say. "Maybe. Yes, there's a chance." He broke the ambiguous silence by starting toward the door. Jack and Evlyn followed.

Creeden was slightly out of breath when the three of them reached Mildred Robertson's home. She lived on the ground level, at the extreme outer edge of the dome. It had been a long walk down that dim, metal-sheathed corridor, and no one raised under Earth's terrific surface gravity, as Creeden was, can ever learn the effortless five-meter stride of the native Titanian. Nor was the dome's low air pressure helpful to one accustomed to the rich, dense atmosphere of Earth. Jack and Evlyn had tried to hold themselves back for the sake of the little Earthman, but habit is strong. A man on a bicycle has a hard time holding himself to a pedestrian's pace.

Creeden dropped his hand to the small photocell beside the door and shut off the light to it for a second. Removing his hand, then replacing it several times more, he traced a rapid combination. A low buzzing told them someone was covering the corresponding photocell inside; the door swung open.

"Well, hello, Tony," said the woman who stood before them, "come in, come in, we've been waiting for you. Is this—?"

Creeden said, "Mildred Robertson—Jack Rowell and Evlyn Winters."

"I'm glad to know you," she said, almost too heartily, and ushered them to seats opposite the one she then took. "Glad to know you. Mr. Rowell and Miss Winters, this is Art Rand." She indicated a tired-looking fat man sitting in the darkness of a corner. Jack and Evlyn said hello. Art Rand grunted.

"I think," said Tony Creeden to Mildred Robertson, "we'd better begin by telling these two something about our organization." He stopped as she bent upon him an almost hostile look; when he went on, it was that look which he answered. "We've got plenty of time, Mildred. Even I don't have to leave for nearly an hour. And you remember what we agreed before." Art Rand nodded.

Creeden began, "As an organization, we're not much. You'd be surprised how effective Montiel's guards are. We can't go out and recruit chance acquaintances; the mere attempt could be suicide, you know. We have to be dead sure a person's with us before we can give even a reasonably broad hint of the organization's existence.

"And occasionally one of us gets caught. There have been two so far. That danger's always there, and it means we have to organize on the cell-system, so that each member knows only a few of the other members. Once I spent about fifty days trying to sound out a friend of mine, wondering whether I dared ask him to join. In the end I decided not to. It turned out, much later, that he had already been a member! You see, even though I'm one of the lead-

ers I still don't know more than a fraction of our men.

"Yes," he answered Evlyn's unspoken comment, "we three, Rand, Robertson, and myself, are the leaders. Each of us knows roughly a third of the cell captains, and a scattered few of the members of the cells."

Evlyn commented vocally on this. "Why do you bring us here? Why didn't you just ask us to join cells?"

Mildred Robertson answered: "In the first place, Tony has told us we could trust you absolutely. And you two are more important than you realize—" She stopped, under the combined frowns of Rand and Creeden.

Jack, mystified though he was by the by-play, decided to take a shot in the dark. Hoping it was not all wishful thinking, he finished the sentence for her: "Because your organization is working for a return to Earth, and you want us two to go, soon."

Evlyn looked up at him sharply, and he could not read her expression. Mildred Robertson's face spelled, plainly enough, eager assent: but again she was restrained from speaking.

Creeden said, "You may have noticed that this room is on the very outside of the dome. Mildred got it for that very reason. It's not only on the outside, it's on the eastern face, the side toward the spaceport. From that room in back of Mildred, there's a little passage through the inner shells, through the insulation, to the outer shell. At the end of the passage, there is a ring of explosive

lithium capsules set into the outer shell; there's a welding set to repair the outer shell should we ever . . . er . . . make a breach in it; and there are several spacesuits. Everything's set up for someone to make his escape from the dome, cross the two hundred meters or so to the spaceport, and stow away on an outbound ship. We know how the stowing-away can be accomplished; we've even got hold of some acceleration dope."

"Am I right, Tony?" said Jack, more diffidently this time. "Do you want us to be the first?"

"We don't know who is going first," was the answer. "Why should you?"

Mildred Robertson asked, "Do you want to go?"

Jack noticed in passing that this was the same apparently superfluous question Creeden had put before, but both he and Evlyn answered quickly, "Yes." They exchanged smiles at the accident of speaking together: amused smiles, but very determined smiles.

"Mildred," Tony Creeden put in, "don't you want to reconsider? It's only fair to tell them—" Art Rand lifted his hand and Creeden stopped.

Mildred said to Jack and Evlyn, "Then you shall go. The FB-916 will leave again for Earth in . . . when does it leave, Tony?"

"Between nine and ten hours, depending on how fast they unload her and load her up," was the laconic answer.

"Ten hours from now you'll be on your way."

Amazed happiness made a blurring



in Jack's eyes. He looked over at Evlyn and again they smiled quietly together, and the blurring became a little harder to control. In Jack's mind formed the old picture. himself, Jack Rowell, surrounded by *green*, the strange green, the living green of the far world which was his dream's goal. He didn't have complete mastery over the picture; sometimes it would close the green around him, in walls and ceiling such as he knew here. He could abolish the ceiling by substituting the starry night sky. The sky of Earth's day he could not imagine.

Oh, Jack did not lose himself in daydreams. He heard and remembered all Mildred Robertson's instructions: how to don the space-suits; how to leave the dome, cross the plain to the spaceport, and enter the port; when inside, how to avoid the tunnel which was the usual means of reaching the spaceport; where on the ship to stow away—she knew all the details, even to the stowage of the cargoes,—and more. He heard and understood.

But always at the back of his mind was the imagined sight and sound of Earth, and the scoffing thought,

"You don't need to keep imagining now, Jack. This is real."

They slept in Mildred Robertson's home, in the room next to the passage.

Jack had a dim dream in which Creeden quarreled with Robertson and ended by shooting at her the one word, "Murderer!" Then he thought it might have been more than a dream, for he was awake and Evlyn was calling, in the voice of a small child, "Jack, I'm afraid." She came to him and lay weeping softly, her head on his chest.

Much later Jack awoke again, to hear a strange voice in the next room saying, "—and he told us there was an excessive heat loss from this part of Level I and the guards would have to check the insulation. My cell captain told me once that if that ever happened I should—"

"Yes," came Mildred Robertson's voice, sounding suddenly weary, "you did right to let me know. When will the guards arrive?"

"They will start checking almost immediately. I don't know how long it will take them to get here."

"All right. Go to Art Rand, Level 5, Number E626; tell him what you've told me. Remember not to mention it to anyone else except—once—to your cell captain. You can go now.

"Good work," she finished.

Awkwardly, "Thank you"; and the smooth swish and thud of the door's closing told that the stranger was gone.

Jack was already fully dressed, and now he slipped into the room where

Robertson sat, and stood before her. She raised her head, slowly. "You heard that?"

"Yes."

"You know what it means?"

"Maybe."

"It means that if you two stay here you may be dead today. As far as you're concerned, that's essentially the whole story. You can take your choice. You stay, and maybe you'll make that ship, maybe you'll be caught. Or you can leave; there's still time for you to be at work this morning as usual, with no one the wiser. Miss Winters?"

Jack followed her eyes; Evlyn stood in the doorway behind him. "What—?" she said sleepily.

Mildred Robertson repeated to her the things Jack had heard. Evlyn asked her, "What about you?"

"Hm-m-m!" she chuckled mirthlessly. "Yes, what about me. They're sure to find our little passage through the dome eventually. Altogether, it may be a week before they kill me. Probably less. Possibly I might get away."

Jack realized for the first time how hard it would be to hide or to adopt a disguise in the isolated and well-policed domes of Titan. Once you were marked by the guards, you'd have a hard time avoiding them. He said nothing.

"Well, let Art and Tony and me worry about that. What are you two going to do?"

Jack was startled: he'd forgotten the question still needed answering. Evlyn frowned briefly. But her vague fears of a few hours before seemed

to have been dispelled by this concrete threat. She nodded toward the passage entrance. "Earth," she said, with more firmness than even Jack felt. She looked appealingly at Jack, who said, "Of course."

Mildred Robertson had been sitting, chin in hand, like a despondent statue. She shook her head, roused herself with visible effort, and led the way into the back room they had just left. Once she was moving, her despair seemed to leave her, and she resumed her energetic manner of the night before. She led the way to the wall which was the innermost shell of the dome. In the wall you could just make out the shape of a small door. She worked a catch, the door opened, and all three of them ducked into the blackness of the passageway.

Around them were the plastic layers of the insulation, unseen but occasionally brushed against by a hand in passing. The narrow doors through which they went were entranceways through the successive metal shells which incased almost the whole dome. The normal exit was by tunnel, so only at the observatory was the smooth regularity of the shells' perfect spheroids broken—at the observatory, and here.

The last door they passed through was carefully fitted to serve as an air lock port. Jack could tell by the sound as it closed behind them. That should mean that the next shell was the last, so that this space they were now in must serve as the air lock when one left the dome into the vacuum outside.

Robertson's next words confirmed his guess. "The next door," she said,

"you'd better not open till you're ready to leave. Breathing might become rather difficult. Here are your spacesuits. You might put them on now; you'll have to stay here, and as you've noticed it's rather cold." That very distinct understatement somehow gave away the fact that her casual tone was assumed. Whatever else she was, she was not calm.

She finished, "If the guards don't come, I'll be in again before you—go. But the guards might come. If you hear someone inside who fumbles around with the catch on the door and doesn't open it right away—then it's the guards, not me; get out." She was by now quite thoroughly chilled, and thoroughly glad to leave.

Jack and Evlyn groped their way into spacesuits, closing face plates and chest flaps but leaving their air masks open. Already invisible to each other, they were now partially inaudible; the porous air masks would deaden any sound to a whisper.

They scooped up two little piles of insulation, sat down on opposite sides of the passage, and waited for their eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. This, their eyes would not do, for here there was *no* light. Jack's eyes tricked him, scrawled meaningless red splotches on the blank darkness; that was all.

After a while it occurred to them to turn on their communicator sets.

Evlyn said, "I *am* afraid, Jack."

Jack couldn't answer: he was silenced by an abrupt suspicion of her. Suspicion that she would not go through with this, that she had never really shared the dream.

She went on, "I'm afraid, and last night I thought we shouldn't try to go. But then I saw that staying here wouldn't be—possible. Not anymore. It was possible before, but not now that we've been offered a chance to leave."

Anything Jack could have said would have been inadequate.

They sat there listening to the sound of their own breathing, and to a surrounding silence like that of outer space.

"Listen!" said Evlyn, and momentarily cracked her face plate. "Yes, I thought I heard something."

Both of them closed air masks and started the suits' air supply, ready to leave the dome if necessary. But the inner door immediately began to move under Jack's hand, and he knew it was Robertson coming. He couldn't see her, nor could he hear her with his suit sealed, yet he could feel her presence as she entered, and another's. He opened his face plate and heard her voice: "It's about time for you to go, according to Tony. The guards haven't arrived yet, but we don't know when they may. Oh, this is Art Rand with me; I don't know if you can see him."

As a matter of fact, Jack had found that he could see a little; the newcomers had left all the doors open behind them, admitting a little light. He could see faintly the stooped, worried Robertson; the fat, placid Rand; and a hulking robot that was the spacesuited Evlyn.

They all stood silent, conscious of the situation. Jack started a pitiful attempt at formal thanks to Robert-

son and Rand. The latter cut him short: "Don't thank us, Rowell. Good luck to you." It was the first time Jack had heard his voice, and it was the most sincere and friendly voice Jack had ever heard.

Suddenly Evlyn said, "Miss Robertson, if you're in such danger here, why can't you get away along with us? You—"

"No; no," was the quick answer.

"Why not? Both of you—because if you're found here, Mr. Rand, you'll be as badly off as she is. It's the only safe thing for you to do."

"It's not the best—" She was interrupted by a low cry from Rand. Looking down the passage, Jack thought he saw a flickering glow on the wall where it took a bend. Then against the glow was silhouetted the retreating figure of Art Rand. Mildred Robertson whispered swiftly, "You're a little early, but better get to the ship as fast as you can just the same"; she followed Rand into the darkness, and, presumably, into the hands of the guards.

Jack had no time to be puzzled. There was the urgent business of their own escape. He and Evlyn had set off the explosive caps which cracked the outer shell before Robertson had completely closed the door behind her; air pressure pulled the door shut with a swift *thlook*, and popped a section of the outer shell. The two spacesuited figures stepped through the breach from darkness into Saturn-light.

At first they could see nothing but all-pervading radiance, but Jack had

the presence of mind to lead Evlyn along the shell until they were out of sight around the curve of the dome. After a while they were able to look around them.

It was the first time Jack had ever stood on the ground! It was strange to think of walking a floor so uneven and so wide in every direction. It was strange to think of walking freely under the stars. So strange was it that part of Jack's picture of Earth seemed realized right there.

The spaceport was about two hundred meters away, almost between them and Saturn; were they to move some meters to the right they would see it silhouetted against the giant disk. As it was, they could just make out the port's pillbox-shaped buildings. Projecting upward above the largest was the aspiring cylindrical bow of the spaceship.

They started eastward, watching the outline of the ship swell forward into the sky as they drew nearer it.

As soon as he was used to the rough footing, Jack looked back over his shoulder. The plain looked very different when you faced away from Saturn; the irregularities made a confusing pattern of streaked light and dark. And to see the dome from the outside, this dully, smoothly glinting metal egg that had been their universe — this itself was almost frightening in its novelty. He spoke into his communicator set, telling Evlyn to turn around and look. They had time to spare for this sight they had never seen before nor would again. Hadn't they been told they were early for the ship's take-off?

So they stopped and turned--and

saw a spacesuited figure emerge from the hole by which they had left.

Jack, realizing Evlyn and he were probably silhouetted against Saturn, as seen from the dome, pulled the girl down to the ground beside him. Calmly, Evlyn said, "Yes, I see. Do you think it's the guards? We've got guns, you know." They both pulled their weapons — old rocket pistols, firing missiles as large as fists. There were twin tubes slanting outward and backward from the combustion chamber, to carry the initial blast away to the sides, so you could hold the weapon in front of you like a pistol to aim it.

The guns might not have been used since the dome was built, but they should work. Jack had leveled his sights on the figure at the base of the dome when Mildred Robertson's voice sounded coolly in his ears: "Don't shoot." Of course! That was who it was. And her communicator was tuned to theirs. The voice went on, "Don't wait for me. I'll follow you to the ship if I can make it, but don't—"

Jack and Evlyn interrupted her almost simultaneously. "Look! Someone else is coming out of the air lock." In fact, not one, but two, bulging spacesuits had appeared.

Mildred Robertson said calmly, "That'll be Art," and turned around in time to get a bullet in the face and one in the belly. The first was explosive. Her suit deflated instantaneously and settled to the ground with her dead flesh inside it.

Jack fired twice, then jumped to his feet and ran. Evlyn was still

firing, but followed quickly. They ran, not toward the spaceport, but at an angle to the right, so as to get out of the direct line from the dome to Saturn. When Jack judged they'd gone far enough to be safe, he called a halt. They cut toward the spaceport then, at the habitual loping five-meter stride that is the walk of the Titanian. Once Jack tripped on an unseen obstacle, but on Titan a fall hardly decreases your speed at all.

They were quite close to their goal when suddenly Jack's shadow leaped forth on the ground in front of him. A searchlight from behind! Shoving Evlyn sharply to the left, he ducked to the right himself, and, when he was out of the beam, let the weak gravity pull him down to a sprawled-out landing.

Evlyn wasn't in sight. Had she escaped the beam before she was hit? The lines of faint fire which arrowed past above him at intervals were, he knew, rocket projectiles like those in his own weapon. Some of them exploded when they hit the ground far beyond, but, of course, he couldn't hear them.

He tried to locate the searchlight. It wasn't easy, because there was no air out of here to reveal the path of the beam; but the light was just about where he'd expected, and soon he made it out.

"Evlyn?" he said into his mike, breaking the intolerable silence.

"Yes?" came the voice in his ears. "You O.K.?"

"Yes. How about you?"

"O.K. so far. Look, let's shoot at the light."

"I see it. Yes, all right."

That was all, yet now they were fighting side by side instead of being isolated on the vast hostile plain. Jack fired several times. The guards' fire at him became abruptly more accurate, and the searchlight began to swing to the right. That was O.K.; if it was on him it couldn't be on Evlyn. Then he was directly in its path, and its reflector became a blinding little sun and a perfect target. Miraculously, he got it, and slid behind the barely adequate cover of a rock before the guards' shots could find him.

Evlyn was still shooting. "Wait, Evlyn," he said. "Hold your fire for half a minute. Without their light they'll forget exactly where you are; remember, they're looking toward Saturn so they can't make out the features of the ground as well as we can. Then we can run for the port."

"I'm out of ammunition anyway."

Jack waited silently, patiently, looking up at the same stars he'd seen and yearned for fifteen years ago. The "Sky Room."

Evlyn, somewhere out of sight, whispered in his ear, "Do you think we'll make it, Jack."

"I don't know," he said, attempting a matter-of-fact tone. "Are they coming after us?"

"I haven't seen them, but they probably are."

"Let's start. We're pretty close to the port, we'd just as well run as crawl. Let's go."

He sprang erect himself, and ran zigzag toward where the shape of the waiting spaceship cut a corner out of Saturn. Around him appeared the

momentary fiery traces of the small rocket-bullets which sped by him unheard. All missed him. Twenty meters from a spaceport entrance he again stopped and took cover. That was the entrance he could safely use—unless guards had been sent to cover it by those who had seen him and Evlyn. He'd have to chance that.

Best for the two of them to rush the entrance together. He called, "You O.K.?"

He waited anxiously. "You O.K., Evlyn?"

Silence. He strained to hear the sound of her breathing, heard only his own. Then he got his answer: a short, strangled cough.

He looked around him. She had been heading for the same entrance as he, so she should be nearby. He caught a glint from something over to the left, faced around. There she lay. He crawled to her.

Behind her face plate, above the monstrosously machinelike body of her spacesuit, her small face seemed disembodied, ethereal in the starlight. But the eyes that looked from the face—

Jack squatted beside her. "Where are you hit?"

The eyes moved downward, as if pointing. Jack saw that her right hand was pressed to her side. Probably she was stopping the hole in her spacesuit.

"Down there on your side?"

Almost inaudibly, "Yes."

Jack watched in anguish, not trusting himself to speak further. What could he do? There was no haven for her back there in the dome. They'd have to go ahead. He looked

over his shoulder at where the distant dome occulted stars. Somewhere between there and here guards might be coming toward them. He'd almost forgotten about the guards.

"We've got to try to make the ship," he said unsteadily. "I've got to carry you."

She seemed to be nodding. He bent to lift her, but set her down again in horror. It must have been pain that had made her writhe so suddenly and so terribly, yet she had made no sound. Either that or her communicator's mike wasn't working. When she'd spoken, before, he'd scarcely heard it.

He looked again at her face as she lay there. She was smiling!

Then she coughed terribly, and her face disappeared. The face plate was covered with blood. Jack's brain registered the fact that Evlyn's mike wasn't working, for he hadn't heard the cough; and the fact that Evlyn was dying. Register the facts was all he could do. He felt burned out inside.

He registered the fact that Evlyn's spacesuit was deflating. Deduction: her hand was not on the hole. Therefore: he must stop the leak. Second deduction: she was unconscious. Therefore: he could carry her without her feeling pain.

Blinded and mad, reckless of the fire of the guards behind him, gingerly carrying the inert bundle that was a wounded human being, Jack Rowell raced to the spaceport entrance. After that his brain automatically followed the directions given it so long before: down this corridor, through this hatch—He didn't think.

When he was safely in the prescribed compartment of the ship, he administered the acceleration dope to himself and Evlyn. If the guards found them before the ship took off, he'd rather be under the dope than awake. He wouldn't want to know about it just then.

"I finally got him on the visor," Jack said wearily, the Earth slang sounding strange on his lips. "The Secretary himself. I tried to make him listen, but no soap."

"What did he say?" Evlyn was too weak to lift her head from the pillows.

"Just what his assistants said. He seemed surprised I should ask him

about it. I'd try to argue with him and he'd repeat what he said before, as if he thought I hadn't understood. It was as good a way of stalling me off as any, I suppose." He made a hopeless gesture. There was no reply from Evlyn.

We must make a strange picture, Jack thought for the hundredth time since their arrival on Earth. Shockingly tall, head and shoulders above everyone else — when we stand upright. Evelyn lying, cramped, in the hospital's longest bed, I leaning back in a wheelchair that had to be specially made. Freaks. So the Secretary must have thought this afternoon: That bean-pole yokel, that freak.



Aloud, "No, he wouldn't even discuss it with me. Said Titan's produce wasn't useful any more, so Earth wouldn't use it any more. Didn't know where the Titanians could go; all the other colonial planets have been abandoned except Mars and Venus. And he didn't care."

"Where *can* they go, Jack? Where can *we* go?"

He answered the first question. "They can't come here, that's certain."

Evlyn shuddered assent.

"Mars, maybe." Jack pulled himself up from the chair with great effort, leaned against its back to catch his breath. Consciously imitating the Earthmen's short, awkward steps, he stumped across the room to the window, and looked out, his eyes slitted against the piercing fire of the May sunshine, the agonizing glare of sun on Arizona sand. He stood there, torturing himself by looking as directly as he was able at the violent colors of hell.

"Do you think Tony knew?" he asked meditatively.

"He must have suspected better than anyone," said Evlyn slowly. "After all, he lived here; he knew how different Titan was."

"But not how different we were."

"No . . . Mildred Robertson suspected, and Art Rand."

"They knew most of it," said Jack, feeling no resentment against those who had damned him without warning, had withheld the warning Tony Creeden had wanted to give. The only concession they'd made to Tony had been to wait for Evlyn and Jack to volunteer, rather than asking

them. Though Jack understood all this now, there was no resentment at all.

"They knew most of it," he repeated. "What was there to know? The gravity—they knew about that. They knew what we should have thought about ourselves: a child that grows up in a low gravity has long, thin bones; not a matter of heredity at all, but purely environment. I don't think they did know that that child's bones are also brittle, very brittle, and his muscles very weak.

"They didn't know," he went on savagely, still torturing himself, "that the first step I took on the new planet I'd fall and break my arm in too many places to count."

"No, they didn't, or they wouldn't have let us go," Evlyn said gently. "They wanted to find out. They wanted to send guinea pigs, and we were good choices."

"They'll find out all right, soon, without our telling them—when they have to abandon Titan and come here themselves."

"They won't," she reminded him.

"No; no. Not Robertson and Rand. The rest—some of the things, they couldn't have known. The air. Higher air pressure here, more oxygen, but also more nitrogen. They couldn't have guessed how bad that would be. It's just like the mental dullness that gets underwater divers on Earth when the pressure goes up too high. I don't spend twenty hours a day sleeping any more, but I feel slow and stupid. *And I am*. I can't remember. I can't think."

"I know." There was subdued horror in her voice.

"That's the worst of it. Then there are the infections — I've been relatively well for five days now, Evlyn, but it won't be long before I've got another of those diseases that Earth doctors never knew about. Children here develop lots of immunities early and painlessly, but the dome we were in was so nearly sterile we never needed those immunities; the minute we breathed this air everything hit us at once. At least that's what the doc told me. Your doctor might have a different explanation.

"And the *light* here. Of course it's just because our irises are almost atrophied, so our pupils can't contract to shut out enough of the brightness. Knowing the explanation doesn't help." He realized that while he'd been talking he'd let his lids drop. Brutally, he forced his eyes open, forced them to follow moving objects outside: a plane on the horizon, a copter circling above the hospital. The blue sky shimmered, the white clouds danced. Pain spilled forth inside him, stimulating his dulled brain.

Evlyn was speaking behind him. "Why are you saying all this, Jack?"

He shrugged foolishly. "Maybe because I got myself all ready to say it to the Secretary this afternoon and then got stalled before I got it off my chest. I don't think so, though. I think I'm saying it to see if I can change my own mind."

"Change your mind?"

"That's right. And I can't change it. I still feel the same. I'm still glad we're here." He made his struggling way back to the wheelchair and

sank again into its supporting cushions. "No, not glad we're here. Not that exactly.

"Evlyn, when we were waiting on the plane outside the spaceport, just before you were . . . just before we got away . . . I thought for a while it was all pointless, our going out and taking the chances we took. It wasn't. It's not pointless, if the dream's big enough. And Earth was, then."

"Even if I had died?" She seemed to ask purely from curiosity.

"Even if one of us had died. On the ship, when each time I went to sleep I wondered if you'd be alive when I awoke. Even then it was worth it to me—"

"And to me. And after we got here, even though it was so different from what we expected. We *had* to come, Jack."

"That's it, Evlyn, that's it. I think you always saw this, but I'm just seeing it now: The dream *is* big enough, it still is, it was worth it to come here, it's worth it now. But what was it we wanted? Not any one planet. We thought it was that, but it was simply crossing space. All along, the journey was more important than the goal.

"And if the days we spent in the spaceship were torture, and the days since then, well, that's unimportant too. Just crossing space—"

"The sky's still there at night," murmured Evlyn.

"It's still there. It doesn't matter that Earth isn't in it any more. Alpha Centauri is. And Sirius. And the dream."

THE END.