

# THRILLING Wonder STORIES

VOL. XLIV, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION WINTER ISSUE

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THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Published quarterly by STANDARD MAGAZINES, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Copyright, 1954, by Standard Magazines, Inc. Single copies, 25c; Subscription (12 issues), \$3.50; Add 40c for Canadian, 75c for foreign and Pan-American subscriptions. Re-entered as second-class matter August 28, 1953, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication please include your postal zone number, if any. Winter, 1955 issue. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



## The Portable STAR

By ISAAC ASIMOV

*Holden made love to his friend's wife. He couldn't help it!*

**I**F SPACE voyages are "romantic," Holden Brooks was certainly carrying on the tradition when he stepped into the cabin of his best friend's wife, with one straightforward objective in mind.

He did not signal. He merely opened the door and walked in. She was waiting for him as, somehow, he had

known she would be, wearing a loose night garment. She held out her arms to him and they trembled slightly. Her dark hair fell below her shoulders, accenting the pale roundness of her face.

Her name was Celestine Van Horne and her husband sat in one corner of the room, idly pinching his ear-lobe.

Holden paid no attention to the husband's presence. He stepped directly to Celestine and placed his hands on her shoulders. She swayed toward him and they kissed violently, longingly, over and over again.

Breathlessly then, he swept her from the floor, cradling her in his arms. Her eyes closed, and her hand stroked the back of his neck gently.

Holden had turned toward the bed when, for the first time, someone spoke.

It was scarcely an impressive speech. Philip Van Horne was scarcely an impressive man. His sandy hair was thinning, his frame was slight, and his eyes were a pale blue. He rose from his chair and said with an air curiously compounded of indignation and bewilderment:

"What's going on?"

Holden placed his soft burden on the floor and looked at the man who had spoken. Holden was taller than Philip by half a head and more massive. His lips drew back, showing strong teeth in a broad face. His shoulders hunched a little. The light of battle was glowing in him.

Celestine, having backed against the bed, watched with a feral pleasure.

Philip looked nervous. He said, sharply, "Holden, stop it."

Holden moved forward with little shuffling steps. His fist shot out, catching Philip on the side of his head and sending him to his knees. Celestine's laugh was high-pitched and strained.

Philip got to his feet with an effort and stumbled toward the door. His wife was there before him, spread-eagling herself as a barrier. She was still laughing.

Philip looked over his shoulder in hor-

ror. "Don't do it, Holden. Don't!"

Holden didn't. A puzzled look seemed to soak into his face. His hands, which had risen to encircle Philip's neck, fell limply.

Celestine, her eagerness fading, moved away from the door, and sat down on the bed. She lit a cigarette.

Holden said, "I'm sorry, Phil. I knew what I was doing, but I just *had* to. I—"

"I know," said Philip, brushing his knees. "It's *they*."

"That's right," said Holden. "I'm sorry, Celestine."

"Oh, well," she said, shrugging.

Philip said sharply, "Put some clothes on, Celest."

His wife raised her eyebrows. "Now don't be silly, darling. I wasn't myself. No one was."

Holden Brooks was still apologizing. "They just push buttons and have fun. You understand how it was, Phil? There was no way I could stop—"

"Oh, shut up," Philip said, "and go away."

The door signal flashed.

"That's Grace," said Holden. His eyes went quickly from husband to wife. "Listen, there's no use saying—"

Philip said, "She knows what the situation is."

Grace Brooks edged in. She was a little thing with a triangular delicately-boned face that ended in a pointed, dimple-centered chin.

She said in a low voice, "I was getting afraid to be alone."

Holden took her hand. "All right, Grace. Let's try for some sleep."

When the Van Hornes were alone, Celestine stubbed out her cigarette and placed it in the small vent that puffed it out into the poisonous atmosphere of the alien planet on which they were stranded.

They stared distrustfully at one another. There was nothing to do, nothing to say. They were slaves; both of them; all four of them.

Slaves more thoroughly than any Earthly understanding of the word. . . .

IT HAD been exciting when it was first suggested. Holden Brooks and Philip Van Horne worked in adjacent offices in the Administrative Service of the Housing Unit in which they lived. Both had accumulated half-year sabbaticals, and some months earlier Holden had bought a space flivver none the worse for being second-hand. Why not, then, a shared-expense space tour?

"There's no point in having a space-flivver," Celestine said, when the four of them talked it over, "if you don't use it. Air and water last just about indefinitely with a good recirculating system, which the ship has, and power is no problem. So that just leaves food to think about. And we can renew stocks almost anywhere."

Grace said, "I don't think I could drink recirculated water."

"Nonsense, darling. Pure water is pure water, even if it comes from perspiration or sewage. You're just being medieval if you worry about that."

It worked out well. The controls of the space-ship were simple enough, and in a week Philip could handle the ship as well as Holden could. The *Spacio-nautic Handbook*, with its details on all inhabited planets, stood always ready to direct them to this or that interesting one.

In fact, the entire vacation might easily have been a complete success had not the ion-beam alignment in one of their micro-piles lost focus, first fitfully, and then permanently.

Holden Brooks put his fingers through his brown hair in dismay and said, "Well, we just can't make any Jumps through hyperspace, that's all."

"Wasn't the ship overhauled before we left?" Celestine demanded, sharply.

Philip bit his lip. "You can't predict these things, damn it."

"Then what do we do?" Grace wanted to know, her thin voice tremulous.

"Pull in for repairs, I guess," Holden said, dubiously.

And because their Jumps, after all, were amateurish ones, it turned out that

there was no inhabited planet within half-a-light-day distance. None, that is, that the ship could reach in reasonable time by traveling through normal space.

Holden checked the handbook twice, then Philip checked it.

There was only one star in the neighborhood and there was only one planet in its family where the gravity was not impossibly high, and the temperature not impossibly extreme. The handbook called it Sigmaringen IV, and placed a dagger mark next to it which meant, conventionally, that it was uninhabited and uninhabitable.

Grace looked troubled. "It sounds horrible. Can't we fix the beam in space?"

Philip said, "Focusing a beam in the absence of a gravitational field is for an expert, not for us," and they headed for Sigmaringen IV. Their ship dropped to the planet's surface on the noiseless, flameless, gravity-shield of the field-vortices produced by the two micro-piles that were still in working order.

WHAT made Sigmaringen IV sound horrible to Grace was the *Handbook's* information on the planet's chemical makeup. The thick atmosphere consisted exclusively of nitrogen and argon in a proportion of three to one, with small quantities of the other inert gases. There was no water on the planet, no trace of free oxygen or of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, not more than a trace of carbon in the soil. The soil consisted almost entirely of aluminum and iron silicates, with a heavy overload of free silica which, whirled aloft by perpetual winds formed an apparently permanent "cloud layer."

"Just like Venus," muttered Phil. "Old home week." His thin, solemn face twisted into a half-smile.

It was "day" when they landed, but the only light was the dull gray that filtered diffusely through the dust clouds.

Grace shuddered and said, "We should have ultra-waved for help."

Holden's troubled eyes looked down

upon his wife out of a perplexed face. "I thought of that, too, but it would cost an awful lot. Isn't that right, Phil?"

"A year's salary for each of us," Philip said incisively. "They don't send repair ships through hyperspace for half-credit pieces."

The first day on Sigmaringen IV was passed in adjusting the beam-focus. On the whole, it was a creditable job, and by the time the planet's rotation brought them and their ship into the night-shadowed half, it seemed obvious to both men that the ship would survive one Jump at least, probably half-a-dozen.

Holden stood up, put down his ergometer, and said, "It's night. Might as well leave the take-off for morning."

Philip yawned. "Why not? Better check with the girls, though."

For a wonder, the girls raised no objection. Grace frowned a little, but confined herself to a murmured, "If you say so."

The first night on Sigmaringen IV, in retrospect, was uneventful. Over the morning coffee, Celestine bubbled excitedly about her odd dream. Holden, with initial creaking, began to recount one of his own.

Finally Grace, with a marked reddening about the cheek-bones, said, "I won't tell you my dream. Let's get away from this horrible place."

Celestine laughed. "Darling, that sounds terribly sexy. You *must* tell us. Were we in it?"

Grace said, "We're being watched. I'm *sure* of it."

"Oh, come," said Celestine. "There's no carbon on this wretched world and even I know that means there can be nothing living on the planet."

Phil said, "Actually, we have nothing to keep us here. We can go."

Holden mopped his lips and got up. "I'll take first shift."

In five minutes he was back. He said, "Funny things! I can't get the ship started!" He stared at them out of bovine eyes.

"What do you mean?" Celestine demanded. "The beam is focused, isn't it?"

"Nothing's wrong with the controls as far as I know. I just can't get close to them. When I try, I get—" He waited a long time and then, as though he had failed to think of another word, he mumbled, "Scared!"

"Scared?" In various tones, all three said that.

Holden, visibly suffering, said in a choked voice, "You try it, Phil."

Philip got silently to his feet, walked out.

In less than five minutes, he also was back. "Scared stiff," he whispered. "Couldn't touch a thing."

"Are you two mad?" demanded Celestine.

Philip ignored her. He turned to Grace, "What was your dream?"

Grace's small face was white and against it the makeup stood out harshly. She said, "I dreamed we were surrounded by children and they were curious about us. I dreamed they were watching us and wouldn't let us go. It was very real and I—I still feel it."

Philip said, "I felt it, too." He looked troubled.

Celestine said, "Darling, this is too ridiculous. Grace is open to suggestion. She's a sweet girl, but she's sensitive, and this is a gloomy world. That's *all*. Now let's leave."

Philip said, "How?"

CELESTINE looked at her husband with something approaching contempt and said, "If I knew how to handle the controls—"

"You'd be just as badly off," said Philip.

Grace said quietly, "They're watching us right now."

Philip looked at her thoughtfully, raised his eyebrows, and leaned back in his chair to flick the polarity knob that controlled the transparency of the ports.

"I doubt there's anything to see," he said.

He was quite wrong.

At a distance of a hundred yards from the ship and spaced some five to ten yards apart, a series of mounds could be dimly, but definitely, made out through the sandy murk. Five could be seen. Philip frowned and stepped hastily to the other side of the ship. He transparented the opposite port. Six mounds there.

"Apparently," he said, "we are surrounded."

"They're just mounds of earth," protested Celestine.

Holden said, "They weren't there when we landed."

Grace said, "They're not material. They're energy creatures. They use earth-mounds as—as clothing. Or adornment."

"Such nonsense," said Celestine.

Philip said, "If those things are telepathic, their thoughts and emotions may be leaking across. Grace is most sensitive to them."

"And I'm the least sensitive—is that it?" Celestine was suddenly furious. She got to her feet, "Is this a joke of some sort? Are all three of you up to games to panic me?"

Grace burst into violent laughter and Celestine turned on her with eyes glaring. She shrieked, "It's funny, is it?"

Grace shook her head but could say nothing. She whooped and shouted and held her sides. She grew weak from laughter until it subsided into breathless sobs.

Then Philip giggled and burst into unrestrained laughter. Holden joined him, his bartone brays overriding all.

Celestine was in tears. "Of all the nasty, contemptible—" She stuttered in her attempt to find appropriate adjectives, and then before she was anywhere close to recovering her emotional equilibrium she, too, was swept away on a tidal wave of shrill mirth.

Grace cried, "Stop it! Stop it!"

Slowly, and in the order in which they had begun, they stopped. Celestine was last, flushed, a handkerchief over her mouth.

Grace said, agonized, "They're pushing buttons. They! They!" Her forefinger jabbed toward the port. "They can make us do anything."

There was no argument. They all felt it now. Even Celestine's last argument sounded timid and weak when she said:

"The *Handbook* says there's no life on the planet."

"The *Handbook*," said Philip, gravely, "bases its reports on a quickie expedition, probably, that reported no oxygen, no carbon and no water, after passing through the atmosphere and manipulating a reflection spectrometer. Ordinarily that means no life, but I'll just bet that no expedition ever thought it worth their while actually to land on this planet."

Grace stared out the port and whispered, "Children about an ant-hill. Watching them scurry. Putting obstacles in the way to see what the ants would do. Maybe stamping on a few."

Philip said, "No telling when they'll get tired, either. Holden, I think we better start recirculating water."

"Must we?" Grace asked faintly.

"Now don't be ridiculous, darling," said Celestine with sudden sharpness. "The wastes are electrolyzed and the hydrogen and oxygen are compressed and stored, then combined again into water as pure as pure. It's so pure we have to add mineral tablets to it."

Holden moved into the engine room. A moment later, the faint hum of the recirculator could be heard.

Philip sighed. "Well, they let us do that."

AS THE ten-hour day period progressed, Holden tried three more times, to get the ship started. Philip tried twice. Neither succeeded.

Holden said tensely, "I say, attack. I say, shoot a few of them down. We have blasters."

"They won't let us, you fool." In his own discouragement, Philip was growing careless with epithets.

Holden paid no attention. He said,

"I'm willing to try. I'll put on my suit, go out there, and shoot them down. If they don't let me, they don't let me, but I'm going to try."

Philip said, with shrill anger, "What's the use? If we can't even go near the controls, how do you expect to get near them?"

Celestine said sharply, "Oh, shut up, Phil. At least Holden is showing guts. Do you have any better suggestion?"

"No."

Holden climbed into his space suit. His fingers, large and clumsy in the enclosing metallo-latex, snapped on his helmet. He hefted a blaster and marched in stubborn silence to the airlock.

Philip shrugged and said to Grace, "It isn't going to do any good, and it might be dangerous for him. Don't let him go, Grace."

"Don't do it, Grace," Celestine said, quickly. "Don't stop him. It just kills Phil to see someone else with backbone."

"Don't be foolish," Philip said. "Has it occurred to you that we can't afford to lose him? I can't pilot this ship all alone."

Grace said in a monotone, "I don't think he's in any danger. I just don't feel any danger for him."

It was suddenly lonely, with just the three of them watching Holden Brooks through the port. He was a large, robotic figure, murkily grotesque, slogging on heavily as he leaned into the wind. Sand spurted up from under his mesh boots at every step.

They could see him raise his arm, point his blaster, and involuntarily they held their breaths.

The featureless mounds of soil that were their alien tormenters did not move.

Holden fired. The subsidiary bonds that held together the molecules of one of those mounds were neutralized in the force-field emitted by the blaster. All at once, without sound or flame, the mound blew apart into impalpable dust. Except for some remnants at what had been its base, it was gone.

Holden aimed at another and another. Then they, too, were gone.

Inside the ship, Celestine cried excitedly, "Good! Good! He had guts and he's doing it. So much for caution."

Philip was silent, his lips compressed. Then suddenly he said, "Look!"

He pointed. Where the first mound had stood before it disappeared as if by magic, a new mound stood.

At each spot where the blaster had had its effect, and which had been blank a moment before, a mound once more puffed up out of the ground. Holden, looking to right and left, let his arm drop. As he stood there staring, his attitude of frustration and discouragement were plain even through the impersonal lines of his suit.

Slowly he turned, and slowly he trudged back to the ship. . . .

The four space voyagers ate without appetite, and sat helplessly about the clutter of the meal.

After awhile Philip said, "They *are* energy creatures, as Grace said. Blasting the soil in which they dress themselves is like tearing a man's shirt. He can always get another one." He paused thoughtfully, before he said, "If we could only attack their minds directly!"

"How?" grumbled Holden.

"There's such a thing as psychology." Philip reminded.

"Yes, but what do we know about their psychology?" demanded Celestine.

"Nothing." Philip shrugged. "I grant that. But they're intelligent. They must have emotions or they wouldn't enjoy playing with ours. They can frighten us. Suppose we could frighten them. They're only children, if Grace's intuition is right."

"The blaster didn't frighten them," said Holden.

"They knew it wouldn't kill them," Philip pointed out, "so there was nothing to be afraid of. They'd fear death, I suppose, but how do you go about killing energy beings? Now what else would they fear? Pain? Loss of security? Loss of loved ones?"

"Ghosts, too," added Celestine, disagreeably. "Have you thought they might be afraid of them?"

Philip looked at her with his eyebrows raised in approval. "You're right!" he exclaimed. "The unknown! Any creature is afraid of what it doesn't understand, of something outside its experience."

Holden said, "The ship is outside their experience. They're not afraid of it. I'm sorry to say."

"The ship is just another form of matter," said Philip, "and we're just another form of mind wrapped in matter." He looked thoughtfully out at the mounds, just barely seen now in the dimming light. And he said musingly, "Now what *wouldn't* they understand?"

Grace said dreamily, "The sun, the unclouded sky, the stars. They've never seen any of those."

"I dare say you're right," said Celestine. "But we can't bring the stars down to them, so that's no good. Stars aren't portable."

Grace rose to her feet. Her face suddenly looked dreamier than ever. Her lips were parted. She moved slowly to Holden and deposited herself on his lap with a gesture that was almost abandon. She lifted her face to his with a slow smile. When she spoke her words were slurred.

"Ta' me t'bed, Hol'n. I feel so *fun-nee-ee-ee*." She put her cheek against his and giggled.

Holden reddened, and said protestingly, "Now, Grace—"

Grace tossed her head back and looked at Philip and Celestine upside down. She said, "W'rried 'bout *them*, are you? J'st a pair o'—"

At the accusation that followed, Philip's eyes opened wide, but Celestine only said, with dry amusement, "Why, the little she-devil!"

Holden got to his feet in confusion, holding his wife desperately, while she squirmed against his body in a manner to make her meaning and emotion unmistakable.

"*They're* making her do this," he muttered. "I—I'd better take her away."

It was half an hour before he reappeared.

He said, "She's herself now, but she's—got a headache. She's embarrassed about what happened, how she acted in here. You won't mention it to her, will you?"

Celestine shrugged. "Nothing she said or did shocked us."

Holden said miserably, "How can we stop it all? If we just sit here and let them poke our minds here and there, we'll find ourselves killing each other or doing other terrible things."

Two hours later Holden, in gruesome proof that he had been prophetic, had invaded the Van Horne cabin to claim Celestine, and had nearly killed Philip in the process.

NOW he was gone again, and Philip sat on the edge of the bed, elbows on wide-spread knees, fingers intertwined loosely, his face dazed and unhappy.

Celestine said, with abruptness, "Well, there's no use brooding about it. It couldn't be helped. Do you want a sleeping pill?"

Philip looked up, and when he spoke it was not exactly complimentary to her. He wasn't even thinking about Celestine. What he said was:

"A portable star."

"What?" His wife stared at him.

"Something you said earlier," he said. "A portable star. It might work." He stood up. His hands balled into fists and he moved about restlessly. "We can't just let things go on, can we?"

"What are you going to do?"

Philip didn't answer. He just tore out of the cabin and on into the engine room. With feverish, inspired haste, he dismantled the water recirculator and removed the gas cylinders. Cautiously he twisted the hoses together, clamped them into position with wire from the electrical stock supply drawer and fitted an Elgin tube of transparent quartz



over the combined nozzles. Turning again to the water recirculator he loosened the pencil-thin catalyst-chamber, squinted a moment at the spongy platinum-black it contained, and slipped it in his pocket.

He moved back into the common room and pulled his own space-suit from its rack. The other three in the party were waiting for him—Holden, with a hang-dog look on his face, and his eyes sliding away from direct contact; Grace, pale and scrubbed-looking, as though fresh from a sponge bath; and Celestine, wearing new makeup, though it showed traces of an unsteady hand in the application.

Celestine asked Philip, "Are you leaving the ship?"

"That's right," he told her grimly. "Help me with this, Holden."

Holden lifted the cylinders onto the back of the suit, strapped them in place just next to the oxygen cylinder that would supply Philip's respiratory needs. He passed the two hoses over Philip's head.

Philip shifted the catalyst-chamber from his trousers pocket to the pocket in his space-suit. He dipped his finger into a glass of water and ran it around the inner surface of the quartz jacket he had drawn over the twinned hoses.

Celestine began, "What do we do for water if you—" and let her question fade into silence.

"Take care of yourself, Philip," Grace said uncertainly.

"Thanks," he said tightly. He placed the helmet over his head.

Once outside the ship, Philip Van Horne felt cut off from all things human. He had polarized all ports to full opacity before leaving the ship, and now no spark of light invaded the solid blackness all about.

Slowly he moved away from the ship, bucking the steady wind. Hearing its whistle against his suit was the only sensation he could recognize. Dimly he sensed the natives, curious, waiting for him.

He halted and cracked open the gauges to both cylinders. When he felt the gentle push of gas within the quartz jacket he put his gauntleted hand over it.

He lifted the nozzles. *They* could see him, he hoped, or could sense him by whatever method it was they used. A sudden thought chilled him. What if they lacked the sense of sight, or any sense corresponding to it? Desperately he refused to think of such a thing. They *had* to be sentient!

He raised the catalyst-chamber toward the open top of the quartz jacket. For a single moment, he was furiously certain that this would do the trick. But only for a moment. He paused, hands lifted halfway. Could anything work so simply, after all? To try, to fail, to have to return to the ship to report failure—

His hand moved, stopped again. Swift thoughts came.

The creatures—call them that—were emotion-controllers. Was the doubt of his success his own? For a moment he had been certain, and then—

Had the triumph he had felt spilled over too openly? Were they now canceling it out in their own way?

Once more, half-heartedly, he made a tentative gesture of raising the catalyst-chamber, and instantly depression hit him, as dark as the night that surrounded him. It would not work. How could it?

And that thought decided him. The depression had come too quickly, too patly. It had not come from his own mind, but from *theirs*. He could fight it now, and he did.

He fought the despair, fought his own apparent knowledge of inevitable failure. Closing his mind to what was trying to seem to be bitter certainty, he lunged at the quartz tube with its leaking gases swirling upward.

He fought the fear that followed. But it grew until it became the same fear that had kept him from taking the controls of the ship. However, the ship's controls were complicated. There were

fifty motions involved, each with its fresh surcharge of fright. And here it was necessary only to touch one object to another.

In the dark, he could not tell by sight how close chamber was to quartz except for the position of his arms. But he knew there must be only inches left. He compressed those inches, and his forehead slicked with perspiration.

He fought with what remained of his untouched mind, and momentarily he

the open end, it sparked in his hand like a star, twinkling and shifting tirelessly.

And the aliens were gone!

Philip could now see that. Out here it has been as black as tar before. It was as black as tar now, except for the dim blue star in his hand. But there was a lightness in Philip Van Horne's mind that was clear enough in the information it gave him. The touch of the aliens had been so constant a factor for over two full days that, with it removed, it

### *Isaac Asimov's Future History*



**I**N THE current issue of our companion magazine, *Startling Stories*, we're presenting a "future history" by Poul Anderson. This special feature shows how some of Anderson's stories fit into a large and consistent pattern.

Here now—on the opposite page—is a similar future history from Isaac Asimov. We call it a "page" from his notebook because the scheme was not originally worked out as a consistent pattern and includes only about one-quarter of his total writings. Another quarter would be included in his robot history (mentioned in the note), and the remaining half is miscellaneous.

Asimov says of his history, "It's not the beautiful job that Heinlein did, but was actually made up *ad hoc*. My cross-references in the novels are thrown in as they occur to me and did not come from a systematized history.

"The fact that I reach only 48,000 A.D. may be surprising—it surprised *me*! I had never once thought of the actual dates of my stories and now that I come to write them down, I find that I haven't been so far flung as I thought. If some reader checks my stories carefully and finds that my dating is internally inconsistent, I can only say I'm not surprised."

The latest Asimov story in this framework is *The Portable Star*.

—*The Editors.*

felt the dim contact of metal against quartz. Contact broke off immediately in a perfect agony of despair, but that one moment had sufficed. The moisture he had introduced within the quartz was a second catalyst, and between the effect of powdered platinum and water traces the hydrogen and oxygen combined in chemical action and burst into flame.

Pale blue, dancing in the residuum of dusty air that blew into the jacket from

was as though a boulder had been heaved from his crushed body, leaving him free to stand once more.

He called into his radio, "Holden! Holden! Get to those controls!"

Turning, he ran back to the ship as fast as he could pump his encased legs. . . .

**T**HE two men were at the controls. The two women were asleep.

At last Philip had a chance to explain

# A PAGE FROM ISAAC ASIMOV'S NOTEBOOK

## A. EXPLORATION OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Year	Title	Event
1975	<i>Trends</i>	{ First man-carrying flight to the moon, against social resistance.
1985	<i>The Singing Bell</i>	{ Settlement of the moon proceeds; mining operations set up.
2000	<i>The Martian Way</i>	{ Mars settled. Much of humanity still rebels against settlement of other planets. This is finally overcome.
2020	<i>Ring Around the Sun</i>	{ Venus settled. Mail service between planets established.
2050	<i>Marooned Off Vesta</i>	{ Passage across asteroid belt no longer a matter of exploration. Commercial flights across the belt begin.
2100	<i>Heredity</i> <i>Callistan Menace</i> <i>Christmas on Ganymede</i>	{ The moons of Jupiter are settled. Human eyes turn toward the intergalactic spaces. The hyperspatial drive is discovered about 5000 A.D.

## B. EXPLORATION OF THE GALAXY

5500	<i>The Portable Star</i>	{ Flights to other stars become feasible in small space cruisers. Very little of the Galaxy explored.
6500	<i>Misbeforgotten Missionary</i>	{ Organized space exploitation begins. Mankind begins spreading outward.
8500	<i>Sucker Bait</i>	{ Population has increased to the point where the inner regions of the Galaxy are overcrowded. Government-sponsored emigration to the outer reaches are begun. Most of the Galaxy is now mapped and well-known. The old political structure is now incapable of handling the vast numbers of worlds. Earth's last atomic wars render its crust largely radioactive about 10,000 A.D. and that is the last straw. The Galaxy breaks up into numerous political organizations.

## C. GALACTIC EMPIRE

30,000	<i>The Stars, Like Dust</i> <i>(Tyrann)</i>	{ The star-regions begin to agglomerate into larger groupings. The empire of Tyrann grows and declines. Trantor grows less spectacularly, but more solidly.
34,500	<i>The Currents of Space</i>	{ Trantor has grown until half the Galaxy is under its sway. The Squires of Sark, with their control of <i>kyrt</i> -rich Florina, are the last independent group seriously to contest Trantor's hegemony. Trantor becomes the Galactic Empire officially, about 35,000. Earth is all but forgotten.
36,500	<i>Pebble in the Sky</i> <i>Blind Alley</i>	{ Galactic Empire is at its height. Earth completely forgotten as origin of humanity. Slowly the Empire grows static and decadent. Hari Seldon is born about 47,000.
47,000 to 47,500	<i>Foundation</i> <i>Bride and Saddle</i> <i>The Big and the Little</i> <i>Dead Hand</i> <i>Now You See It—</i> <i>—And Now You Don't</i>	{ The Galactic Empire settles into final decay. Its last battle with the rising Foundation dates at 47,200. The Mule rises and falls somewhere about 47,300. The Second Galactic Empire is established at 48,000.

Note: A similar historical pattern can be constructed for those stories which do include the development of positronic robots, beginning with *Strange Playfellow* and ending with *The Caves of Steel*. There are also many stories that fit into neither pattern.

more in detail to Holden, who still couldn't seem to take it all in.

"It wasn't just light," Philip was saying. "They knew what light was, from the steady gray illumination of their cloudy skies. The illumination may have been whiter, but they recognized it for what it was. To them, it was still just a piece of their sky that had come down to the surface. Flame was something else again.

Holden shook his head, "I still don't see why."

"It was *blue* light that flickered and shifted, and could be carried about. That was the main point. It was light that could be held in the hand. It was a portable star, and not just featureless light in the sky or from a ship. Remember flame can't exist on this world of theirs with its atmosphere of nitrogen, argon, and sand. In millions of years nothing could possibly have burned on Sigmaringen IV until I got the compressed hydrogen and oxygen from the water recirculator and let them burn in one another. The aliens were faced with the unknown, the incomprehensible. They

were only children, after all, and they ran."

Around the space-ship now was the comforting blackness and emptiness of space; the friendliness of the stars.

Holden sighed deeply. "Well, we'll be Jumping soon, and then we'll just be a day or two outside Earth. We can report these energy creatures, only . . . Phil?"

"Yes."

"There's no point in telling what happened to us."

"No, I suppose not."

"Let's just forget it all. It was mental control. It's better to forget."

Philip said, "Much better."

His words rang hollowly in his own ears. Mental control or not, he would live with the memory of Celestine barring him from the door while Holden pursued him with clutching fingers; the memory of Celestine laughing wildly.

Forget?

In his mind, he could hear Celestine laughing and, quite uselessly, he put his hands over his ears.

"What's the matter?" said Holden.

"Nothing," Philip said drearily.

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