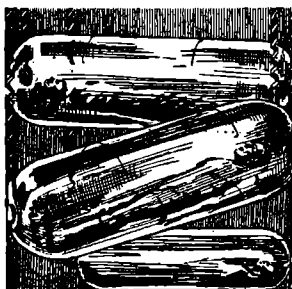


# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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*A Novel of the Future*

## THE SLEEPER IS A REBEL

By BRYCE WALTON

*Because he is branded a misfit, Deker volunteers for Nirvana—which brings him surcease for aeons—but at each awakening he is again tormented by evil reality!* 13

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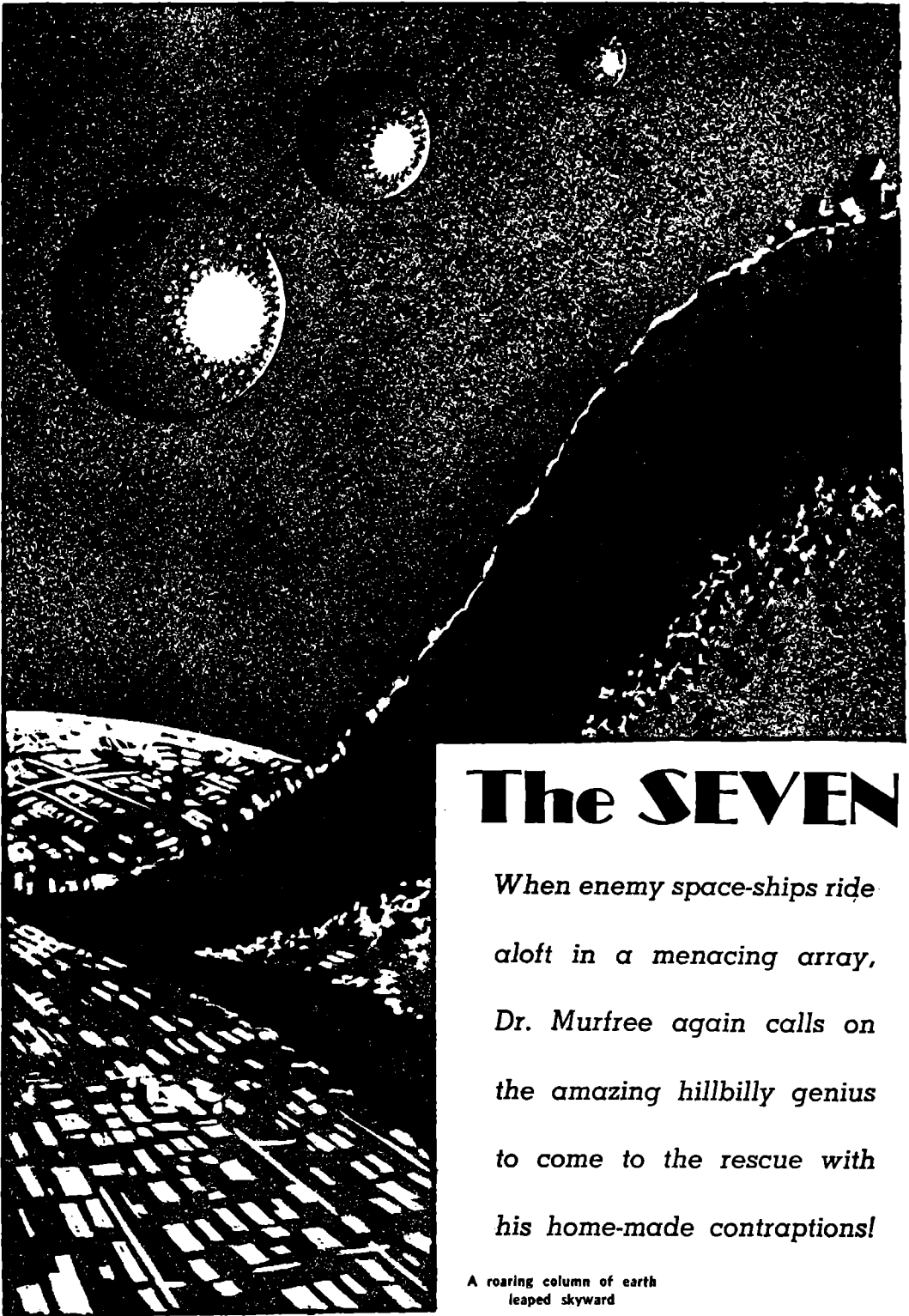
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Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating “The Sleeper Is a Rebel”

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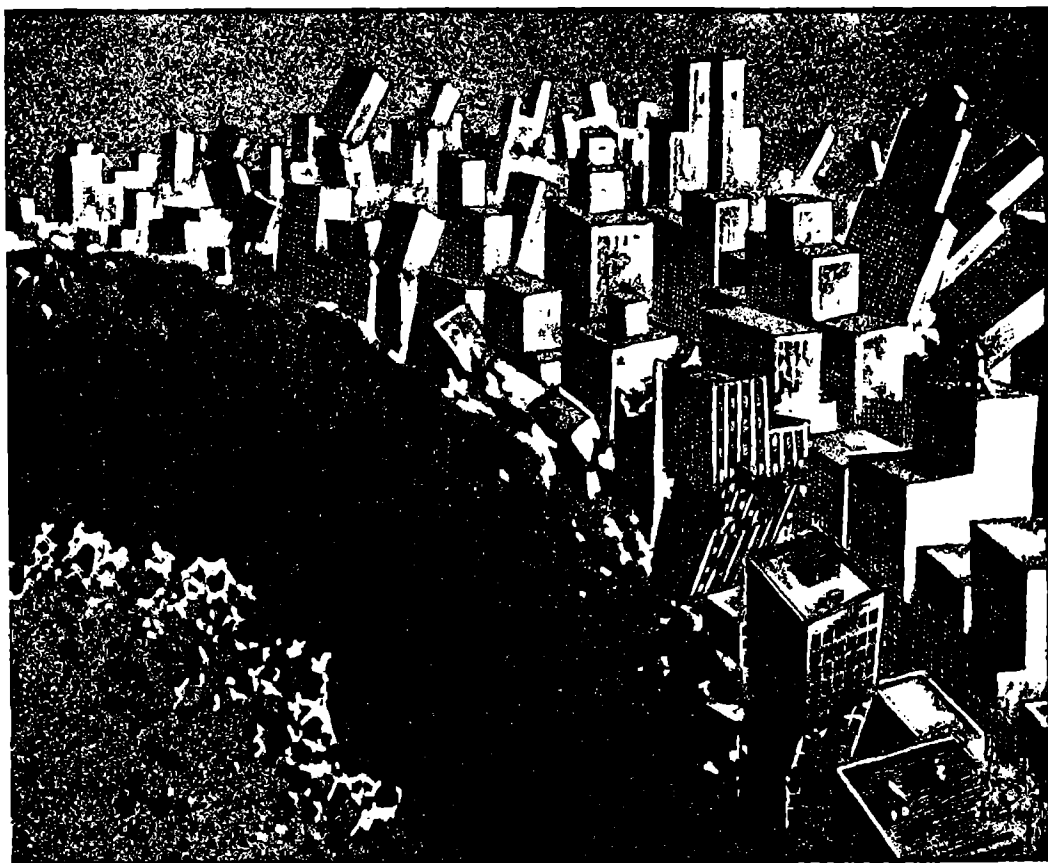
Read Our Companion Science Fiction Magazine—STARTLING STORIES



# The SEVEN

*When enemy space-ships ride aloft in a menacing array, Dr. Murfree again calls on the amazing hillbilly genius to come to the rescue with his home-made contraptions!*

*A roaring column of earth leaped skyward*



# TEMPORARY MOONS

## CHAPTER I

### *Trouble in the Sky*

**T**HE U. S. Signal Corps announced the discovery of a new satellite of Earth in the latter part of July, and newspapers everywhere broke out in a rash of pseudo-scientific comment. The new satellite had been picked up by Signal Corps radars, in the course of experiments to work out a technic for detecting guided missiles at extreme range, while they were still rising in their high-arched flight beyond the atmosphere. The radars picked up indications of an object of appreciable size at a distance of four thousand miles, which—the moon-

echo aside—was a record for radar detection.


Immediately the observation was made it was repeated, and repeated again and again, for verification. When the confirmatory fixes were computed, a course and speed for the unseen object proved it to have exact orbital speed and direction. It was circling the earth between three and four thousand miles up, and made a complete circuit of the globe in 2 hours, 15 minutes, 32 seconds.

On the same day this discovery was released to the newspapers, Dr. David Murree—formerly of the Bureau of Standards—

A Bud Gregory Novelet by **WILLIAM FITZGERALD**

mailed a check to Bud Gregory on the shores of Puget Sound. Also on the same day he received the papers of incorporation of a company to be called Ocean Products, Inc. He was in the peculiar position of having to get rich on Bud Gregory's brains because Bud wouldn't, and somebody had to. That same day, while Murfree was busy on the Atlantic Coast, Bud Gregory went fishing with two of his tow-headed children on the other side of the continent.

Two weeks later—in the early part of August—a second new satellite of Earth was discovered. It was closer to Earth than the first—barely 1500 miles up—and it made a circuit in 40 minutes 14 seconds. The first and farther new satellite was under continuous radar observation, now, and the fact that it was a tiny moon of Earth was completely verified, though it had not been sighted by any telescope. This newer, second satellite, of course, moved much too fast for any astronomer to hope to pick it up either visually or on a photographic plate.

 **N** THE day of the second satellite's announcement, Murfree assigned half the stock in Ocean Products, Inc., to a trust-fund for Bud Gregory and his family. That day, Bud Gregory stayed home and dozed beside a portable radio. It was raining too hard for him to go fishing.

The third and fourth new satellites—periods of 1 hr. 19 min., 12 sec., and 3 hr. 5 min., 42 sec. respectively—were discovered only two days apart. The fifth was found two days later, and the sixth and seventh were spotted within an hour of each other, when they were in conjunction and only five hundred miles apart, 7500 and 8000 miles up.

Murfree was very busy around this time. He had a gadget that Bud Gregory had made, and it couldn't be patented, and it couldn't be talked about, but it needed to be used. So he was getting Ocean Products, Inc., a mail address in New York and a stretch of ocean frontage on the Maryland coastline. He was having painful conferences with high-priced lawyers—whose point of view was as remote from that of a scientist as possible—and with low-priced electrical-installation men. He was run ragged. But Bud Gregory was sitting in the sun out on the Pacific coast, in blissful somnolence and doing nothing whatever.

Nobody suspected anything menacing in the existence of seven hitherto unsuspected

and still invisible moons. Popular songs were written about them, radio programs exhaustively exploited them for gags, they were worked into three comic strips, and they headed for oblivion. But they did not reach it. When first danger was traced to them, Murfree did not hear about it for a time because he was painstakingly setting up Ocean Products, Inc., as a going concern which would pay taxes and comply with all laws, and give out no information about its dealings to anybody. Bud Gregory was living a life of placid, unambitious uselessness.

The first indication that the moons might be other than merely captured meteorites came when a graph appeared in an astronomical journal, tracing their orbits. Their orbits were at very odd angles, not at all near the plane of the ecliptic. They criss-crossed and overlapped, and at least one of them passed very nearly overhead above every spot of the earth's surface every twenty-four hours. The arrangement was too perfect and too exact to be chance. It was design. The moons were not meteorites following paths dictated by the circumstances of their capture. They were artificial objects, doubtless blackened so they could not be seen against black space, traveling on courses which allowed them to survey and perhaps to threaten every spot on earth every day.

The scientific article which pointed out these facts suggested that they might be guided missiles sent up from earth and expending no power while they waited for the commands which would send them hurtling down upon a chosen target. Or they might not be earthly, but space-ships.

They might even be a fleet of exploring vessels from the planet of some other sun, which did not make contact with humanity but observed in preparation for purposes which could only be guessed at. Everybody guessed it to be conquest at the least.

Panic welled up among the people of the earth. If a space-fleet of some alien race had grim designs upon Earth, the danger was great. But if men had made the ships and sent them secretly up into the heavens, they meant more than danger. They meant doom. And whether their crews were men or monstrous creatures from beyond the abyss of interstellar space, their existence and silent menace produced terror and panic and—men being what they are—fury amounting almost to despair.

Murfree was busy. Very busy. But he realized that the danger of the seven invisible space-things was more important than any of his private affairs, and he knew the only man on earth who might be able to do something about that danger. He boarded a plane for the West Coast to see Bud Gregory.

Two nights later Murfree drove cautiously down a winding narrow road through fog. His headlights cast a golden glow into the dense white pall of a Puget Sound fog-bank, and the fog gathered up the light and threw it back. Murfree drove at the barest of crawls. He could see the edge of the road on either side, and the mist-wetted trunks of second-growth trees, but it would be very difficult indeed to pick out the beginning of that disused logging-road which led to Bud's shack.

**B**UD GREGORY was, of course, something so extraordinary that nobody ever felt the need for a word to describe him, and he lived in a tumbledown shack somewhere in this cut-over land. It was easy to miss the way at the best of times. At night, and in such a densely obscuring fog, it would be difficult indeed to find it. Murfree slowed the car until it barely moved, straining his eyes for a sign of the turn-off.

His relationship to Bud Gregory was at least peculiar. Murfree had been a physicist in the Bureau of Standards when a monstrous atom-pile started up—seemingly of itself—in the Great Smoky Mountains. Murfree alone had realized the nature of the phenomenon and set out to track it down. In tracking it, he'd come upon Bud Gregory, who had an incredible facility for making things that the physicists of the world could not yet imagine, not without knowledge of physical laws they expected or hoped to learn in a hundred years or so.

Bud Gregory was unwittingly responsible for the atomic pile, and Murfree got him to stop it.\* But Bud fled, afterward, in terror of sheriffs—and work. He was almost illiterate and utterly without ambition, but he had an intuitive knowledge of how to make things that nobody else could understand.

Murfree, now, had a device which was the stock-in-trade of Ocean Products, Inc. He didn't understand it. He didn't hope to. It

was beyond him—as far beyond him as, say, the mental processes of a mathematical prodigy who extracts fourth-power roots in his head. But he did know that despite Bud Gregory's violent aversion to work of any sort, he was the only man on earth who could cope with the sort of menace the seven new moons of Earth constituted. So he'd flown across the continent to beg, persuade, or bully Bud into action.

Bud was drawing ten dollars a day from Murfree for doing nothing, right now. It was the height of his earthly ambition to sit in the sun, drink beer, eat hog-meat, not bother anybody and have nobody bother him, and not have to worry about work. So Murfree had some faint hope of influencing him.

Right now he thought he saw an opening in the woods to the left. He could not be sure, but he stopped the car and got out to see. The radiance of his car's headlights in the mist enabled him to be certain. It was the beginning of a no-longer-used trail into the second-growth, not merely a gap in the young trees. There were no recent automobile-tracks, but Bud no longer had a car.

Bud once had one, bought for twenty-five dollars and which he'd impossibly caused to bring his family across the continent. His son Tom had wrecked it some months past. Evidently, he hadn't found another sufficiently dilapidated to suit him.

Murfree turned to go back to his car. Then he heard a plaintive noise overhead. Instinctive cold chills ran down his back. A child's voice came from mid-air over his head.

"Mistuh! We're lost!"

Murfree froze. There was a slight scuffling sound. Straight up in the air over the treetops. A voice hissed in empty air toward the stars.

"Shut up! You want him to tell Pa?"

There was no sound of a motor up aloft. There was no sound anywhere except his own motor's murmurous purring and the dripping of condensed fog from the trees. There could be no flying craft overhead. Not possibly!

The child's voice wailed, up above the tree-tops.

"B-but I w-want to go home!"

The other, angry voice, a boy's voice, spoke again. It was halfway but no nearer to the voice of a man. It was hushed and threatening.

"Air you a-goin' to hush your mouth?"

\*See "The Gregory Circle," *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, April, 1947.

Then, suddenly, Murfree's heart beat again. Scientist or no, he had felt unreasoning, superstitious terror at the wailing of a child in the night and fog above the treetops. But the phrasing of that angry boy's voice was familiar. It was not local phrasing or accent. It was Smoky Mountain talk, and Bud Gregory and his tribe of children talked that way.

**M**URFREE raised his own voice, though it shook a little at the sheer impossibility of the whole affair.

"Up there!" he called. "This is Mr. Murfree! Aren't you Bud Gregory's children?"

A pause. Then the little girl's voice, startled and glad.

"Yes, suh, Mr. Murfree! We were out fishin' and we went to look at Seattle and comin' back we got lost."

Murfree swallowed.

"Where are you, in heaven's name!"

"Right over your head, suh, in our fishin' boat." This was the boy, dubious and uneasy. "We can see your headlights, suh. If you' goin' to see Pa—"

Murfree swallowed again. This was plainly sheer insanity. Two of Bud Gregory's children might very well be in a boat, and fishing, even two hours after sundown. But a boat in which one went fishing should not be floating some forty or fifty feet above treetops at least two miles from the nearest water. Murfree would have credited himself with sudden lunacy, but that he knew Bud Gregory.

"Can you—steer the boat?" he demanded insanelly.

"Yes, suh!" That was the boy's voice again.

"I'm right where the road to your house turns off," said Murfree. He was acutely aware of the absurdity of standing in fog on a lonely country road, speaking conversationally to the sky. "I'm going to turn in now. Can you follow my headlights?"

"Yes, suh!"

"Then try it," said Murfree. "I'll stop and call up every so often."

He got back in his car and turned into the woods-road. This was not common-sense, but things connected with Bud Gregory rarely were. Bud Gregory could make things. Once he'd made a device which stopped neutrons cold. Period. That was to get even with somebody who'd threatened to sue him.

Once he'd made a device which turned heat-energy into kinetic energy, to make his rickety car pull up the Rockies in his flight from Murfree's knowledge of his abilities, and Murfree's intention to make him work. Once he'd made a gadget which stopped bullets—and guided missiles—and then threw them unerringly back where they started from.\* And he'd made a device which was a sort of tractor-beam which drew to itself selected substances only.

A bit of iron at one end of a curiously-shaped coil made the device draw to itself all iron in the direction in which it was pointed. But a bit of gold in the same place made it draw gold. Lead, or stone or water or glass, anything placed as a sample at one end of the coil made even the most minute distant particle of the same substance move toward it with an irresistible attraction. Murfree was using that device, now, in Ocean Products, Inc.'s Maryland-coast establishment, and Dr. Murfree was getting much more than ten dollars a day out of it.

But nothing that had happened previously gave him quite as queer a sensation as this. He drove into the trail, winding and twisting through the fog and among growing brush and spindling trees.

From time to time he called upward. Each time a voice answered happily from the emptiness overhead.

Something hammered at his mind, telling him that this was the answer to his journey across the continent, but he was a sane man, after all, and this happening was not sane. He almost drove into Bud's house, in his agitation. He braked just in time as peeling, curling clapboards materialized out of the mist ahead. He stopped and sat still, sweating. He heard somebody stirring heavily inside the house before him.

Then he heard a splashing sound off in the mist. Voices. Bud Gregory loomed up in the radiance of the headlights.

"Who's that?" he demanded uneasily. "What you want? Who you lookin' for?"

Murfree got out stiffly. Bud Gregory greeted him with unfeigned warmth and hospitality—because Murfree was paying him ten dollars a day to do nothing. But Murfree was hopelessly uneasy until there were sounds nearby and two children appeared. One was Bud's eight-year-old daughter, and the other was his fifteen-year-

\*See "The Nameless Something," *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, June, 1947.

old son. The boy carried a string of fish. He looked distinctly uneasy. The little girl grinned shyly at Murfree.

"Thanks, Mistuh Murfree," she said bashfully. "We was gettin' scared."

Then Murfree swallowed a huge lump in his throat and shook hands with Bud Gregory.

## CHAPTER II

### *A Problem of Inertia*

**N**EXT morning Murfree drove the four miles to the town nearest Bud Gregory's shack. Bud had found an abandoned building on a patch of cut-over land, moved in happily, and thrived while waiting for the owner to put him out. Murfree had made other arrangements. The shack was in an impossibly bad condition, but it suited Bud and his family, and there was only so much that could be done about that. In other matters, though, things were different.

Murfree went after the newspapers, and found the beginning of what he had been afraid of. Radars kept constant watch on the seven newly-discovered satellites of Earth. Some fourteen hours before the newspapers closed their forms, the nearest of the seven had dived down from its normal height of 1500 miles to a bare 500, hardly beyond the thinnest part of the earth's atmosphere.

It went hurtling across the North Atlantic at that height. Then, simultaneously, a Newfoundland-to-Eire transatlantic plane ceased to communicate, and the radars reported that some object was rising from the earth's surface as if to join the nearest satellite. It did not, of course. To have done so would have required an impossible acceleration which would have burned up any earthly object. But the rising object plummeted up beyond the air, wavered, and then rose swiftly again—this according to the radars.

Earth's great telescopes were turned to the position reported, and they saw the missing air-liner. It was then eight hundred miles up and twisting its great aluminum wings crazily as it went straining out into space. A second satellite was almost overhead. That passed on. The liner wavered again, and a third satellite hurtled into line

and the upward journey recommenced.

The effect was exactly as if it had been snatched off the earth by the first and flung up for another to catch and draw higher in a ghastly team-work of murder. The passengers and crew of the plane were dead, of course. They could not live even for seconds in the absolute vacuum of space. The plane went wavering up and up, pathetically a tomb for its occupants, until it vanished abruptly some seven thousand miles from Earth, exactly where it would have met the fifth of the seven strange objects in its orbit.

Murfree felt rather sick. He had not expected exactly this, but something on this order. The newspaper accounts were hysterical, but they could offer no explanation. There was still no clue to the origin of the hurtling things in space. They might have come across the void from some distant sun, or they might be the work of men. A nation on earth equipped with such weapons as space-ships and atomic bombs might cherish notions of world conquest. But the fate of Germany and Japan was warning against too great ambition.

The seven objects might have been sent up as targets, as tests of the ability of other countries to combat such threats. If the rest of the world was helpless against them, why, then their makers might unmask themselves and attempt world rule. If they were vulnerable, their origin would remain a mystery.

Murfree drove back with the papers. As he reached the house, Bud Gregory came shambling out, yawning.

"The moons are space-ships, all right," said Murfree grimly.

Bud blinked sleepily. "Moons? What's that you say, suh?"

Murfree held out a glaring headline. "Don't you read the newspapers, man? This is why I came out here to see you!"

Bud took the paper. He sat down at ease on the porch.

"Mostly," he admitted, "I read the funnies, suh."

He read the news-account without great interest. He was the only man on earth—it had seemed—who was capable of figuring out such a thing as a space-ship or a tractor-beam such as had undoubtedly snatched the air-liner out into space. But he was totally undisturbed by the news. He handed the paper back and yawned again.

"Right interestin', suh," he observed.

"You had breakfast?"

"Listen to me!" commanded Murfree. "About a month ago. . ."

He told Bud in detail just what had happened up to now—the discovery of the moons and the significance of their orbits. He finished harshly:

"I came out to ask you if you can make some gadgets that will handle those things! Did you have a hand in making them?"

**B**UD blinked. "No, suh. You been payin' me ten dollars a day to live on. Why sh'd I go to the trouble of workin'?"

Murfree said more grimly still: "I thought so. But they're bad business. This is only the beginning, I suspect. What can you do that will take care of them? What do you need to work with?"

Bud said placidly, "I don't need nothin', Mistuh Gregory. They ain't bothered me. Why sh'd I bother them? I don't figure on workin' myself to death, not when I got ten dollars a day comin' in."

"They came near bothering you!" Murfree told him. "They near got two of your children shot!"

Bud Gregory stared. "How's that, suh?"

Murfree told him curtly about his incredible experience of the night before; of being hailed from mid-air and serving as a guide to two of Bud's children in mid-air in—they said—a fishing-boat. Bud nodded with vexation.

"Oh, that!" he said. "That was our boat, sure 'nough. That boy o' mine, he likes fishin', same as me. But the engine in that boat wasn't no good so I fixed up a drive for it same as I did for my car before it got wrecked. You know, suh, the dinkus I made to make it pull hills."

This was a device that turned heat-energy into kinetic energy and made all the molecules of a block of—say—iron try to move in one direction instead of at random. Bud had made racing-cars on dirt-tracks reach unbelievable speeds, so that he could make two-dollar bets on them.

"And then," Bud added apologetically, "he drove that boat right fast, and her bottom was pretty rotten, so I got scared he'd git her stove in. So I fixed up a—uh—dinkus that kinda lifted her up some. Kinda like a dinkus I gave you, suh, only this one pushes water away, so's it lifts up the boat. I done it because it was easier'n puttin' new planks on. Like to see it, suh?"

"I would," said Murfree, with vast self-control.

Bud called drowsily to his son and gave him orders. The boy reluctantly went down to the boat, tied to a one-plank wharf before the door. An arm of Puget Sound ran into this cut-over land and provided Bud and his family with fishing. The boy climbed into the boat. He pushed off. Then Murfree tensed.

The ancient, unwieldy, tub-shaped craft literally shot out to the middle of the estuary before the shack. It traveled like a bullet, leaving no wake to speak of. What wake there was was only of its keel. The boat itself simply did not touch the water. It had lifted until only its keel-board slithered across the tops of the ripples like a single ice-skate over ice.

Out in the center, the boat turned. Murfree could see clearly. It just barely touched the surface. It accelerated like a crazy thing. It hit eighty miles an hour—and boats do not do that. Then the boy slowed, stopped, and busied himself in the cockpit. Then the launch rose straight up from the water. It lifted smoothly to a height of some forty feet, the height of a four-story building, and stayed there in mid-air. It was unhandy when the boy drove it, aloft. There was no effective rudder. But after a moment or two the boy lowered it to the water and drove it back to the wharf.

"Li'l rascal!" said Gregory, fondly. "I had that fixed so's it wouldn't lift the boat more'n a coupla feet. What's he want to git up that high for?"

Murfree said unsteadily, "Of course that's worth several million dollars. It makes all helicopters and most aeroplanes obsolete."

"Shucks!" said Bud, grinning. "You want me to make some more of 'em! You know me, Mistuh Murfree! I'm settin' pretty right now. I'm drinkin' beer and eatin' hawgmeat and not botherin' nobody and nobody botherin' me. I don't aim to work myself to death. I'm perfectly satisfied just the way I am with just what I got!"

"And I," said Murfree, "am pretty well satisfied with the gadget you've got in that boat. It's part of what's needed, anyhow. I'm going to Seattle to buy some stuff for you to work with. And while I'm gone you might think about this!"

**H**E PASSED over the rest of the papers. But he pointed to one from Seattle.



Alone among the newspapers of the United States, the *Seattle Intelligencer* did not feature the carrying-off of an air-liner to space as its lead story. The *Intelligencer* featured a photograph of its down-town section, where above the tall buildings an elongated object hung in mid-air. Murfree had just seen that same object in mid-air, so even the fuzziness of the news-photo did not keep him from recognizing it as Bud Gregory's fishing-boat, floating serenely over a startled and frightened city. And the headlines told the rest:

SPACE-SHIP HOVERS OVER  
SEATTLE!

Lesser headlines reported:

All U. S. Arms Against Invaders  
From Space!

And there was a third head:

Anti-Aircraft Guns Arrive Too Late to  
Open On Invader Over City! Shoot On  
Sight Is Army Order!

While Bud grew panicky at the danger his children had been in, Murfree drove out the woods-road. He was going shopping for something Bud Gregory could turn into a weapon against the seven ships which circled the earth, in space.

The world armed—quite uselessly. And now that there could be no doubt of the artificial nature of its new satellites, or that they contained crews of highly intelligent beings—quite possibly men—all the world struggled to enter into communication with the mysterious craft.

Short waves, long waves, micro-waves, frequency-modulated waves, amplitude-modulated signals, every conceivable type of radiation signal, was beamed at the small, invisible, hurtling objects as they swung madly about the globe. There was no acknowledgment and no reply. Acres of mirrors were set up, and focussed to make visual signals by reflected sunlight, following first one, then another of the unseen fleet. This, too, was ignored.

And Seattle was not the only city to fancy itself examined by something out of space. Tehran, a village in Shropshire, England, a sizeable city in Czechoslovakia, and Durham, N. C., all firmly reported that they had been inspected at close range by space-craft.

Only Seattle could produce photographs, though, and all from Seattle were fuzzy and

indistinct. The reason may have been that certain quite clear pictures which showed a fishing-boat floating in mid-air, with two tow-haired children looking interestedly over the gunwale, were dismissed as obvious fakes.

Then the farthest-out of newly-discovered moons made news. It left its orbit and approached earth. The next-farthest joined it in descent. The two of them then set themselves up in a sort of Trojan system with the fourth of the newcomers to be discovered, all three following the same orbit and seeming to pursue each other round the earth, one-third of the complete circuit apart. They were, then, just 3,500 miles away.

This was proof enough that the space-ships had plans for action of some sort for the future. An impotent and defenseless planet discovered its impotence and defenselessness and waited with the idiotic curiosity of the defenseless to see what would happen.

Murfree came back from Seattle. Bud Gregory dozed contentedly in a chair tilted back against a tree before his door. When Murfree waked him to discuss what was needed, Bud looked uncomfortable but stubborn.

"Mistuh Murfree," he said doggedly, "you're a good friend of mine. I reckon you' the best friend a man ever had. You pay me ten dollars a day, rain or shine, and I'm settin' pretty. I'm satisfied. I don't want no more money. I don't want nothin' excep' what I got. You been mighty good to me, Mr. Murfree, but when you get started talkin' about doin' something about those things up in the sky that nobody ain't even seen yet, you' askin' me to go to a lot of trouble over somethin' that ain't none of my business."

He settled back in his chair, useless and completely contented.

"We're going to need a drive like you've got in the boat, only a lot bigger," said Murfree, "and a lift like you've got in the boat, and some sort of weapon that I guess you'll have to figure out."

"Mr. Murfree," said Bud, amiably, "I like you, and all that, but I ain't goin' to work myself to death for nobody!"

**M**URFREE regarded him shrewdly. "You sound stake-bound," he said grimly. "You must have some money ahead out of what I'm paying you."

"Yes, suh," agreed Bud. "My wife's savin',

and the children ketch fish and shoot squirrels an' gather woods-greens. I got almost three hundred dollars cash-money ahead. I don't see no reason to worry about nothin'."

"Those space-ships that snatched the airliner—"

"They ain't bothered me!" said Bud doggedly.

"If they come from another solar system they know we're civilized! They're going to try to find out if we're helpless! Unless they find out we can defend ourselves they may decide to take us over! If they come from somewhere on earth, they're surely trying to find out if the rest of the world can defend itself! And if we don't prove we can, they'll surely try to take over!"

"Mistuh Murfree, I don't bother nobody."

"Listen to me!" said Murfree. "You remember that gadget you gave me?"

Bud blinked and nodded. It was a device of coils and scraps of glass and an iron wire that turned white with frost when it was switched on. A sample of a given substance at one end made it draw similar material in a straight line through the length of its main coil. That device was now the basis of the Ocean Products corporation Murfree had just formed.

There was an elaborate installation on the Maryland coast, with dynamos and electrodes sunk out in the sea offshore, and with much more complicated, closely-guarded apparatus that Murfree had designed to do nothing whatever while looking very busy. But every so often he pointed Bud Gregory's device out to sea and turned it on, in strictest privacy. A morsel of gold, or platinum, or any rare element needed, fitted in place at the small end of its coil. And the device pulled molecules of gold, or platinum, or whatever the controlling sample might be, out of the sea.

It worked like a quite impossible magnetic beam, though instead of iron it attracted whatever its operator chose. It even broke down chemical compounds, as if some sort of electrolysis were at work. And there are at least traces of every known element in the sea:—gold to the extent of one-sixth of a cent in every cubic foot of seawater. A hundred pounds of gold, or thirty of platinum, could be brought to the coffers of Ocean Products, Inc., in any twenty-four hours of operation. And was brought.

"I'm using that gadget," said Murfree, "to pull gold out of sea-water. I'm getting

rich with it."

Bud Gregory relaxed.

"That's fine, suh! I'm mighty glad!"

"You're getting rich too," Murfree added casually. "I formed a company and assigned you half of it. I thought your children might like to be rich when they grow up."

"Maybe they will, suh, maybe they will!" agreed Bud. "That's right nice of you!"

"You can draw twenty or fifty or a hundred dollars a day if you like," Murfree added, "and I've bought this shack and twelve hundred acres of land around it and it belongs to you now."

Bud looked alarmed.

"But lookee heah, suh!" he protested. "The sheriff's goin' to come around with a tax-bill—"

"I'm paying the taxes," said Murfree. "Out of your money. I'm handling your money for you. Of course I'll turn it all over to you any time you say." Then he said deliberately, "It's a certain amount of trouble, though, looking after your land taxes and income taxes and state taxes and investments and trust funds and so on."

"You take some of the money for y'trouble, suh," said Bud generously. "Take all y'like, suh, long as I got what I want."

"The pay I want," said Murfree grimly, "is some gadgets. A lift and a drive a lot stronger than the boat has. And some weapons. I want you to make them for me."

Bud grinned.

"Tryin' to make me work, suh? Then just let the money go hang, suh! I got ten dollars a day, and if that stops I got near three hundred I ain't used yet. I don't have to worry!"

**W**ITH a shrug Murfree turned away. "That's what you think," he said drily. "All right! I'm turning your money over to you. All of it. You handle it! I'm through!"

He walked toward his car, and paused to add:

"You'll be arrested within a week," he said casually, "for not filing income-tax forms. There'll be warrants out for you for failing to report state property. You'll be up against it because you're an employer and you've got to keep your social-security records straight and the fees paid. Within two weeks you'll be working night and day paying fixes and clearing up red tape, and you'll go to jail if you don't. Good-by!"

Bud Gregory started up in alarm.

"Lookee heah, suh! You cain't go off like that!"

"I'm going," Murfree told him. "I'm practically gone. I've made you rich and your children too. If you'd rather go to jail than work yourself to death staying out, it's no business of mine!"

He opened his car-door and stepped inside. But Bud Gregory jumped up and shambled anxiously after him.

"But, Mr. Murfree!" he protested. "Look heah! My gawsh, Mr. Murfree! You cain't do that to me! Uh—uh—if you want some kinda dinkuses, o'course I'll try to make 'em, suh. But don't go off and leave me with all that trouble, suh! Please!"

### CHAPTER III

#### *Ruthless Enemies*

**E**ITHER the crews of the space-ships were aliens to humanity with no knowledge of mankind, or else they were men and conducting a ruthless war of nerves and an exhaustive test of the ability of the world outside their nation to defend itself. Four days after the seizure of a transatlantic plane, four coaches of the Trans-Siberian Railroad went skyward, accompanied by a tumultuous mass of roadbed and other debris.

Two days later a building in the Georgetown section of Washington, D. C., went screaming heavenward in a shapeless mass of collapsed timbers. Two days later still—there was no warning of it. otherwise—radars in the Pacific area noted a rising object. Telescopes caught it some twelve hundred miles out. It was a tramp-steamer, its bottom a rusty red, rising forlornly through nothingness toward some unguessable rendezvous among the stars.

The steamer could not be identified, and it would be weeks before its name could be guessed at by its non-arrival at any port. But unquestionably it had had a crew, and every man was now a frozen, distorted corpse somewhere in its hull. Men, or monsters gratifying scientific curiosity, the crews of the seven space-ships were ruthless.

Waves of panic went over the globe. The loss of life, of course, had been relatively

small. It would not yet total a hundred persons. But the blank indifference to human communications and men's total inability to fight back bred terror. Every human being on earth was at the mercy of the unseen things in the skies. And there was not only no way to fight, there was nowhere to flee.

Every spot on earth came under the gaze of at least one of the space-ships at least once each day. There was no single human being who could not be snatched away to strangulation in emptiness at the will of whatever creatures manned the satellite space-ships hurtling round the earth.

It may be that Murfree, who knew what Bud Gregory could do, and Bud himself were the only two people on earth who did not feel a raging and infuriated despair. Murfree made trip after trip to Seattle, frantically urging the completion of the changes he had ordered in an object he'd found and bought with funds of Ocean Products, Inc.

Union rules were complicated. There was a threat of a jurisdictional strike. But he paid time-and-a-half, and double-time, and double-time-and-a-half, and, nearly three weeks after his arrival at Bud's shack, a puffing tug towed a squat, flat barge into the estuary before Bud Gregory's door. Murfree went out in the ultimate of impatience. He paid lavishly. The flatboat was anchored and the tug steamed away. Then Bud went dubiously out to look the creation over.

It was not impressive. Murfree had found a huge watertank in Seattle, intended to store hot water for an industrial installation. It was seven feet in diameter and twenty-odd feet long. He'd had it transformed into a monstrosity.

There was now a one-foot thickness of heat-insulating material covering the outside. There were six protruding ports, with quartz-glass windows, allowing a man inside to look out in every direction. There was a manhole intended to allow the entry of a workman to clean out the tank. It was now closed by an inconvenient small door. There was a sort of wooden floor within. There was more insulation inside. That was all.

"My gawsh, Mr. Murfree!" said Bud. "What' you goin' to do with this thing?"

"You're going to do something with it," Murfree told him. "It's air-tight, its insulated, and it's got windows. Give it a

space-drive and a way to steer and some weapons to fight with, and it'll be a space-ship. That's what I've got to have!"

"You mean, suh," said Bud incredulously, "you'll go up in this thing?"

"I'm scared green," admitted Murfree, "but somebody's got to go up."

"But—uh—why you? And why sh'd I work myself to death—"

"You're a sensible man, Bud," said Murfree. "You attend to your own business. It's very wise. But it's fools like me, who don't like monkey-business, who keep things going. I don't want to risk my neck. But even less do I want to risk that my daughter might grow up in a world ruled by creatures from outer space with five eyes and eighteen hands. And less still do I want to risk that other men may turn this earth into a tyranny!"

**B**UD looked unhappily at the bulging object before his door.

"You crazy!" he said vexedly. "They got some trick stuff to use, those fellas."

"Tractor beams, anyhow," Murfree agreed. "That's how they snatch things out into space. How'll you beat that, Bud? And what'll you whip them with? Or are they too much for you?"

"Shucks!" said Bud. "It ain't that!" Then he complained: "But it's goin' to be so doggoned much work! And I figured I wasn't goin' to have to worry about nothin' any more!"

At just the intant of his complaint, the citizens of Illyria, Mo., went unwarned about their daily business. They knew about the space-ships, to be sure. There had been known cases of persons and things snatched from the surface of the earth and hurled away into the void.

Any place, at any time, might be the scene of another such tragedy. But there were so many places! Actually, the citizens of this small town tended to think of the newspaper and radio accounts of danger as a part of that pageant of entertaining or boring—and sometimes gruesomely thrilling—events that world news is to most people.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. A warm sun beat down upon the tree-shaded streets and trimly clapboarded houses of Illyria. The three-block business district displayed a normal morning's activity. Farm trucks and farm wagons lined the curbs. Pleasantly perspiring citizens moved about.

It was a town in which everybody spoke to everybody else, because everybody was acquainted. Horses switched their tails at flies; stout farm women fanned themselves as they shopped; the soda-fountain had its thirsty customers, and two men were loading bags of chick-starter feed into a farm-truck. It was such a placid, somnolent morning as ten thousand others had been.

Then there was a ghastly roaring sound and the edge of the town reared upward toward the sky, exactly as if it had been built upon a gigantic carpet and somebody had picked up one end. Those in the business district looked at the roofs and roads of the northern section of the town, turned up at right angles toward the sky. Then—

Nobody knows, of course, how it felt to the people of Illyria, as the ground at once crumbled and rose beneath their feet. Nobody can guess the sensations of the doomed people as a square mile of countryside, including the small and thriving town, went plunging upward as if into an abyss.

A terrible, confused, chaotic mass of houses and earth and trucks and horses and humans and trees and sidewalks shot skyward. It accelerated swiftly. The roaring was drowned out by a shrieking of air as the hundreds of thousands of tons of matter, including nearly eleven hundred human beings, seemed to fall toward the zenith. But the shrieking of wind grew high and far away as the tumbling stuff reached heights where the air was very thin.

As the air grew more and more attenuated, of course the sound grew ever fainter. And presently, when what had been a quiet and orderly and peaceful small town had passed the limits of the atmosphere, when every living thing that breathed or grew was burst or frozen in the pitiless cold of space—then there was no sound at all. Not even grinding noises from the bumping-together of masses of earth and stone, and frozen, once-living things.

Earth prepared to fight, with empty hands. Elaborate plans of defense were suggested, of course. It was proposed to manufacture bombs in vast quantities and so sprinkle the earth with them that any sized objects would prove fatal to a space-ship which approached them. How the bombs were to be detonated was not worked out.

The rocket-missile program of every nation on earth was expanded with convulsive haste. Crank inventors—and impostors—

arose and clamored throughout the land. At least one individual persuaded a group of patriotic and well-heeled citizens that he had not received a fair hearing in Washington.

He demonstrated a disintegration-ray model most convincingly and received fifty thousand dollars in cash to pay for a full-powered ray-generator which would explode the space-ships even as far away as Luna. Then he vanished overnight to South America with the funds, and his demonstration equipment proved to have caused the alleged explosions by quite normal detonation of small charges of T.N.T. by electric wires.

**T**HERE were organizations formed to overwhelm the space-ships with heat-waves. There were proposals to erect gigantic sun-mirrors ten miles on a side, and frizzle the space-ships in their focuses.

More immediately practical, if equally dubious, were proposals of certain politicians and newspaper owners. They shouted as an act of faith that the space-ships were of human origin, which was quite probable, and that their seizures of unrelated objects and now the destruction of a small town were acts of war, though intended only to terrify the nations later to be subjugated.

When Earth was convinced of its helplessness, the nation responsible would reveal itself as the master of the planet. And the way to defeat this plan was to bomb, now, the nation responsible. Blast it with atomic bombs from one end to the other. Destroy it utterly. Unless, on warning of the world's intention, it surrendered its arsenals and recalled and gave over the secret of its ships. Unfortunately, there was no convincing proof that any particular nation was the guilty one.

Murfree heard these several proposals on the portable radio that Bud Gregory would not allow his son to carry too far away from him. Bud had a placid interest in soap operas. When he began to work on the apparatus for Murfree, the radio was sure to be blaring somewhere in the background. And he worked reluctantly. Murfree watched restlessly.

"If there's anything I can do without understanding it, I'll be glad to!"

Bud turned over the work with alacrity.

"Why, yes, suh! I need another coil just like this heah one. You do the best you can, suh, and if it needs fixin' after, I'll fix it."

He settled back happily while Murfree went urgently to work, duplicating as well as he could the unreasonable curves whose variations from regularity seemed to have a pattern he could not ever quite grasp.

"This here's for the drive, suh," said Bud in deep contentment, tilted back in his chair. "It's right simple, suh. When you put somethin' at the small end of that coil, the dinkus draws other stuff of the same kind along the line that goes out the big end. If you put somethin' at the big end, the dinkus pushes that kinda stuff. Put water at the little end, the dinkus pulls water, put it at the big end, the dinkus pushes against it."

"Like that thing I've got!" Murfree said abruptly. "I make it draw gold and platinum. It's a tractor beam! Like the space-ships!"

"Yeah," said Bud. He yawned. "O'course y'can't make a beam that'll pull anything and everything. You got to push or pull a special kinda somethin'."

Murfree waited, working.

"Suppose," he said after a moment, "suppose you put two different things on the same coil, one at each end. Would it pull one and push the other?"

Bud nodded and yawned again.

"O'course, suh. You're doin' that coil right good, suh."

"Listen!" said Murfree sharply. "Suppose I mounted a lot of different things on a disk, and mounted it so I could swing them one at a time into place—would it work?"

He spoke eagerly, urgently. Bud listened, blinking drowsily.

"Sure, suh," he conceded. "That'd work. You go ahead and do it if yuh want to. It'll be all right."

He dozed as Murfree worked more swiftly still. He had the frustrated feeling that comes of doing work one does not understand. He wound these coils, with their scraps of glass here, and their arbitrary other wires at odd angles and with improbable curvatures there. They meant nothing to him. By all he knew of physics the coils would not do anything at all. But he had seen such coils and their working before, and he made them. Because Bud Gregory understood them.

**M**URFREE worked twelve hours straight for three days in succession before he came to assign more or less arbitrary values to the different parts. He could not see how those values came into

being at all, any more than a savage who learned to wind an electro-magnet could comprehend lines of force or the meaning of ampere-turns. On the fourth day, a town in Southern Spain was obliterated.

Murfree did not stop at twelve hours' work, then. He kept on, his lips tense, mounting the crude apparatus in place inside the watertank he'd had so absurdly prepared. Bud Gregory yawned and went to bed. Murfree worked all through the night, grim-faced and growing momentarily more exhausted.

When Bud came out next morning and saw him working stiffly with a welding-torch, he blinked at his guest.

Then he said, "You sure in a hurry to get this dinkus done, suh! Heah! I'll do some for a while. You take a li'l nap."

From Bud, the generosity was extreme. Murfree flung himself down and was instantly asleep, dreaming vague nightmares of continuing to put together devices he did not understand with the constant fear that he was doing them wrongly.

Bud Gregory woke him, shaking him roughly, and Bud's face was scared and drawn.

"Mistuh Murfree, suh!" he panted. "Wake up! The radio says big trouble's loose! Those space-ships, suh, they're killin' folks by thousan's! And they' a-comin' this way, suh! We got to git started!"

A tinny voice came in the manhole of the absurd tank in which Murfree had worked himself into a stupor of fatigue. Bud Gregory's son Tom held the radio close by the opening so that its blaring was audible within.

"—space-ship has been playing tractor-beams slantingly on the countryside as it sweeps on its way. Columns of earth and stone leap upward, miles high, then fall back to earth as the beam is cut off. They're crushing everything they fall on. This ship has already practically wiped out Phoenix, Arizona, and Denver has been hard hit! Every inhabited place is being blasted, either by being jerked skyward to crash down again, or buried under thousands of tons of falling stuff. . . ."

There was a harsh click.

Another voice broke in, "A second space-ship has begun destruction! Its orbit crosses the United States just south of Chicago and passes close to Seattle on the Pacific Coast. It's smashing everything! It will reach the

coast in—"

Murfree was dazed, fresh-wakened from sleep to hear of coming disaster. He was stunned, too, by the picture of unlimited destruction turning all the earth into a chaos of tumbled earth and uprooted cities, mankind wiped out save for a few horror-numbed survivors!

The noise of the radio cut off abruptly. The manhole door was closed. Instantly thereafter the unwieldy tank lurched violently. Murfree felt a sensation like that in a swiftly ascending elevator. And, still dazed from his heavy slumber, he saw through a port that the earth dropped swiftly away below.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Struggle in Space*

**I**N THE wildest imagination never was such a space-ship pictured as went wabbling up from before Bud Gregory's shack by Puget Sound. It was shapeless and ungainly. It bulged with its layers of exterior insulation. It had no bow and no stern. It had no streamlined rocket-tubes, no gyros, no neat and efficient instrument-board.

The ship had no control-room or air-lock, there was no space-suit on board and there was literally nothing of the commonly envisioned precision about its design. There was nothing to help in navigation. It was, quite literally, a hot-water tank tumbling and wallowing up toward the sky.

Features on the ground dwindled and were wiped out by increasing distance. The sea seemed to flow beneath, and the mountains to come sliding over the horizon to huddle below. Clouds raced to positions under the wabbling creation. The sky turned darker. It became purple. Then it was black, with savagely gleaming stars, and white-hot crescents of unshielded sunlight smote in the ports and played upon the interior insulation of the space-going water-tank.

Bud Gregory turned his head. He was deathly pale, and sweat stood out on his forehead.

"Mistuh Murfree, suh!" he panted. "You take over! I'm scared!"

He was. Murfree took the controls. He had put together almost all of the weird

assemblages of wire and bus-bar and improvised sections of glass. He knew how to work the ship, if it was a ship, even if he did not know how the ship worked.

There was the pressor-apparatus acting on water, pushing on all the moisture not only of the sea but held in suspension in the surface earth, and the underground waters also. That would hold the thing away from Earth. It was well beyond atmosphere, now.

Murfree, with a fine determination to be calm, swung another beam into action. Like the pressor-apparatus it worked on water, and also like it, it fanned out. At its striking-point it would pull on water-particles, but it would be so attenuated by its fanning-out that gravity could safely hold all liquid down. The pull would not stir water, but the ship itself. It would pull the craft in the direction of the beam—as long as the beam pointed toward moisture.

The ungainly craft, in fact, could rise to almost any height above earth, and could pull itself around the earth's curvature, but the higher it rose, the less efficient its drive would be. There were, though, other beams that could be used.

There were patched-together assemblages of wires and glass with disks of cardboard at both ends. Turned on, with iron glued to the cardboard disks at the small ends of the coils, they would draw iron and be drawn to it. With the iron at the large end of the coils, they would thrust against iron and be thrust from it.

Rotation of the cardboard disks enabled any of twenty-odd different substances either to draw and be drawn, or to repel and be repelled, and any combination of repulsions and attractions was possible. And at least one beam could be changed from the widest of wide-angle pressor-tractor-action beams to the narrowest of pencil-rays.

"I'm heading east," said Murfree. His voice sounded queer even to himself. He was not prepared for space-navigation save as the constructor of this ship. He could not think grandiosely of a moon-flight, or even of a jaunt to Moon, which was sure and entirely practical. The wallowing water-tank he skippered was now no more than four hundred miles from earth.

"We've got to watch the ground," he said hoarsely. "If that space-ship is still smashing things, there'll be gouts of earth leaping

skyward, where its tractor-beams play. Watch out of the ports, but keep out of the sunlight. It'll fry you!"

Bare sunlight would be deadly, yet he headed eastward by the sun. He drove on. There was no vast reach of empty space about him. There was, rather, the monstrous spread of the earth below. It was visibly curved, at this height, but still it was the hugest of imaginable objects.

**T**HERE was silence. Utter stillness. The bright and savage stars above. The misty, slightly curved and soft-seeming earth below. The horizon was a dim haze, a thousand miles and more away.

There was no meaning to distance. The Pacific still seemed almost below, and yet they could see far beyond the Rockies to the Dakota plains. Clouds overlay the earth here and there. A tiny discoloration was a city. A winding string was a river. Anthills were the Rockies themselves.

Then Murfree saw a tiny, tiny, threadlike projection from the earth. It leaned to northward, and it looked like a speck of yellowish lint. Actually, it was a roaring column of earth and stone, leaping ten miles skyward as a space-ship's tractor-beam jerked it toward outer space. Then the beam cut off. Slowly, slowly, slowly, the monstrous column ceased to look like a thread of lint and dissolved into a brownish mist.

It drifted groundward in slow, slow motion—hundreds of thousands of tons of sheer destruction plunging from the sky. It would destroy all that it struck, as well as being itself the destruction of all of which it was composed. But all its motion seemed infinitely deliberate. It would take long minutes for the upflung column to fall upon and destroy the small city it was destined to obliterate. Murfree had to look twice to see.

Then he sighted the line of the column's rise. He swung a tractor-repeller beam to bear.

"There's a space-ship somewhere yonder," he told Bud shakily. "You know these gadgets! See if you can do anything. It's in the beam!"

The device of Bud Gregory's designing quivered suddenly. It was set to attract iron on a wide angle. Somewhere in its range was iron—aloft. Bud Gregory crawled to it, whimpering a little to himself. He was horribly frightened.

"I'd ha' got my fam'ly in this," he said

despairingly, "only my wife was over to town."

He worked the tractor-pressor beam with trembling fingers.

"Yeah, it's caught onto somethin'," he said between chattering teeth. "I got it pullin' iron and pushin' brass at the same time, now. That'd have to be a space-ship. It wouldn't be no shootin' star, anyways. Now. . . ."

He pushed a control over all the way with his stubby, mechanic's fingers. The beam seemed to strain impossibly.

"It ain't pullin' apart!" said Bud anxiously. "I'm goin' to spin those disks, suh."

He spun the disks which governed what substances were pulled and which were pushed upon by the device. The tractor-beam end of the coil pulled at different metals and assorted other materials, changing the subject of its attractive force a hundred times a second as the disk spun. The pressor-beam end of the device as violently thrust away as many different substances, and changed them as often.

Nothing could stand that! No device ever made by men could take the racking strains created by all its separate parts vibrating wildly, trying fiercely to tear themselves apart. No control-board could work, no relay operate, no system of wire connections remain intact. And—no detonating device could possibly remain unexploded.

There was a sudden, violent, soundless flame. It was not in mid-air but in mid-space, perhaps a hundred miles higher than the wabbling thing in which Murfree and Bug Gregory rode the skies. Something huge and speeding madly blew itself apart with a terrible violence suggesting atomic explosive going off.

"There's one," said Murfree unsteadily. "How'd you do it?"

"I dunno," said Bud as shakily. "I just give it the works."

"There's another ship using a tractor-beam further south," said Murfree, swallowing. "While we're here we'd better—"

"Ow!" Bud Gregory snatched his hand out of a ray of sunlight. Unfiltered by air, it was like the glare of a blast-furnace, only hotter. "Golly! I burnt myself!"

The flying watertank wobbled crazily, and Murfree looked in a new direction. He could see for an incredible distance. But for the haze which blotted out details at the horizon, he felt that he might have seen all of Amer-

ica at once. But there, thrusting upward like needle-points pushed up from below, he saw the spouts which were columns of earth and stone and houses, and human beings.

"Somewhere yonder," said Murfree, rather sick. "Try it, Bud."

**B**UD GREGORY swung his contraption. He worked it to and fro and up and down.

"Mmmm—this heah's got a feel to it," he said pleasedly. "You can tell when somethin's in the beam, suh. I think I got that fella!"

Twin cardboard disks spun on their bearings. Something detonated in space, a thousand miles away. When every separate particle of brass in a complicated mechanism was violently attracted and then violently repelled, and then every particle of aluminum, and iron, and carbon and every other commonly used material was separately subjected to the same process in very fast succession, why something had to happen.

Any fuse would go. Any explosive would be detonated. Any delicately adjusted mechanism would be twisted and bent and jammed and anything which could fire would fire at random. Everything that could happen wrong would do so. And any machine which was loaded with potentialities for the destruction of others would be loaded for itself as well.

Two of earth's seven artificial moons were still-expanding masses of vapor.

Bud Gregory said, "We—uh—we got them, suh! Le's go back!"

Murfree said evenly, "Better not, Bud. It occurs to me that the gadgets they've got are pretty much like yours. Maybe there's another man who thinks like you do—who can make things like your dink-uses. Only he's working for men who want to kill people. You, for instance. Especially you. Maybe he'll be in one of the other five space-ships. Better hunt for them, Bud. We'd both feel safer!"

Bud Gregory searched space beyond the padded walls of the space-going water-tank. It was six feet by twenty, inside, and crammed with utterly unlikely, spidery contraptions of copper wire and glass and oddments.

Everything in it was improvised and everything was inconvenient. Murfree had to bend his shoulders to stand beside the apparatus which kept the tank aloft and



relatively stable with regard to earth. Bud Gregory sat cross-legged, fumbling with one of his devices.

It took him twenty minutes to find an object which was repelled and attracted alike when the tractor-pressor beam applied to iron and brass and aluminum. It was a space-ship. Bud spun the cardboard disks and its every internal part jerked violently and unpredictably. Murfree saw a tiny pearl of expanding vapor among the stars.

It was half an hour before Bud found another. He spun the cardboard disks. He found two more very readily—and they blew up—but he had to search for over an hour before he located the last. They did not see the last explode, but Bud was sure.

"When the beam's pullin' and pushin' somethin' big and solid," he explained, "it's got a different feel. You can tell when they blow, suh. We go home now, suh?"

Then Murfree agreed to descend. But it had taken a long time to attend to the duties incumbent upon the two-man crew of a flying hot-water tank. The air inside the cramped and crowded space was foul. Murfree knew that his head was heavy, and he found himself panting. He saw Bud Gregory working on something, but he fought to keep his own alertness while he sent the tank down at a slanting glide toward the Pacific coastline. It had never gone much over a thousand miles into space.

"I'm fixin' the air now," said Bud. "You be careful, suh, about landin'. This heah's kinda scarey!"

The air grew fresher. Markedly fresher, though earth was still far away.

"That's right nice," said Bud, well pleased. "The stuff we breathe, suh, it's made outa two kinds of stuff." He referred, of course, to oxygen and nitrogen. "When we breathe, part of the air joins up with somethin' else. Don't it, suh?"

"It does," said Murfree drily.

**B**UD knew no chemistry. He just knew facts, without knowing how he knew. Oxygen does combine with carbon to form carbon dioxide, which fouls the air.

"I—uh—fixed one o' these dinkusses to pull on the good stuff," said Bud pleasedly, "and push on the—uh—carbon, and it breaks that bad stuff apart. We get the good-breathin' stuff back and the rest is soot, suh. Funny, ain't it?"

"Very," said Murfree.

He was past amazement at anything that Bud Gregory might do. He could make out the outline of Puget Sound and he sent the lumbering space-vehicle toward it in its descent. Suddenly he felt a sudden ironic frustration. Bud Gregory's tractor-pressor beam would extract gold from seawater. That could not be revealed, because it would smash all the world's economy and lead to disaster and starvation as a result of the enrichment of the world's resources.

It would be found that the same tractor-pressor beam would make a space-ship practical. It had made this one, and interplanetary flight would be ludicrously easy. Right now, for instance, a beam sent up to earth's ancient and legitimate moon, could be made to draw even this inconvenient space-craft there, and cushion its landing, and keep the air within it breathable indefinitely. But—

"Bud," said Murfree quietly, "what would happen if you made that gadget draw—say—human flesh or human blood?"

"It'd draw it, suh. Why?"

"And suppose," said Murfree as quietly as before, "at the same time you made it push away—say—human bone?"

"It'd push—" Then Bud Gregory paled. "Migawsh, suh! Anybody you turned it on would come apart!"

"It'd be a death ray," said Murfree savagely. "And it's very possible—it's extremely possible—that the space-ships we just smashed were made by men, and that they got the necessary tricks from somebody whose brain works like yours does, who can make dinkuses that will do anything that's wanted. If so, I hope he was in one of those ships!"

"Yes, suh," said Bud, uneasily.

"Meanwhile, we can't tell anybody," said Murfree grimly. "We humans are able—with your gadgets—to make ships that can travel to the planets or maybe to other stars. With your gadgets we could make the world over, I suspect. But we daren't. Because in giving the world the power to roam among the stars, we'd have to give them the power to slaughter each other by millions. We can't make a space-ship without making a death-ray, Bud. So we can't have space-ships. It's too bad!"

"Yes, suh," agreed Bud, uncomprehending. "It sure is. Uh—ain't that the river that goes in past my shack?"

*(Continued on page 112)*

## THE SEVEN TEMPORARY MOONS

*(Continued from page 71)*

Murfree nodded. He let the space-going tank settle down to earth. It had been aloft for nearly four hours. Sunset was near. The wallowing, clumsy object landed on the weedy grass before the shack in which Bud Gregory lived. Bud crawled out of the manhole-turned-into-exit-port. Murfree, very pale and looking very sick, stayed inside. He backed out of the opening as Bud returned from the house with the portable radio in his arms.

"The radio's goin' crazy, suh," he said amiably. "All seven of those space-ships blew themselves to pieces and folks are rejoicin'! But there was a lotta damage done today!"

Murfree completed his exit. He was paying out a length of string behind him.

"Do you want this thing?" he demanded, gesturing toward the swaddled, bulky monstrosity.

"No, suh. What'd I want with it?"

Then Bud Gregory gasped. Murfree jerked the string in his hand.

**I**NSTANTLY the tank heaved itself free of the ground. There was a sudden violent surge of wind, and the cumbersome thing was hurtling skyward. It seemed to fall away from the earth. It vanished into the darkening night sky with a thin shrill whistling of wind about itself.

"I adjusted every pusher-beam to repel everything I could," said Murfree grimly. "It'll push away from water and air and iron and brass and aluminum and rock, and every sample of every material we had. It'll run away from the sun. It'll flee from every planet and every meteorite, and if there's any space-ship anywhere it will push away from that. It'll hunt for the farthest place in all the universe from any other particle of mat-

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ter! It will isolate itself forever."

Bud blinked. "Yes, suh," he faltered.

Then Murfree said wearily, "Those space-ships are destroyed, and if men made them, maybe the man who devised them. Whoever or whatever made them, won't dare that trick again!"

"No, suh," agreed Bud.

"So I'm going back East to my family," Murfree told him, "and try to forget all this. All the ambitions men ever had, we can realize, but we daren't, because men have the ambition to kill and enslave other men, too."

"Yes, suh, that's right," said Bud. He added hopefully. "You won't want me to make no more dinkuses, suh?"

"Never again!" said Murfree. "But you're rich, and your children, whenever they want to be. I won't bother you, though."

"Shucks!" said Bud cordially. "You ain't bothered me none, suh. You pay me ten dollars a day, and I can set and drink beer and eat hawgmeat and not worry about nothin'. Why don't you stay over a day or so and try it, suh?"

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