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NO. 1

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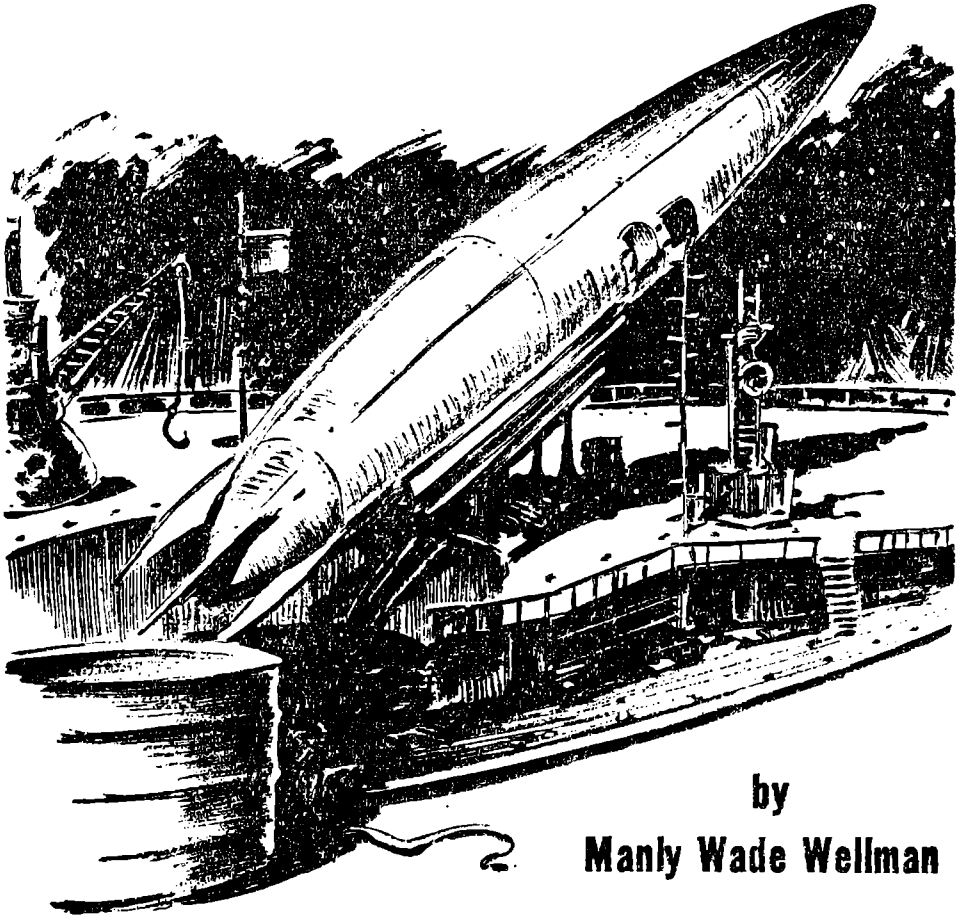
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THE SKY WILL BE OURS

THE dart-formed space craft launched accurately from a metal tube on Earth many miles deep, came to Moon's disk as to a target.

The station crew, overalled and helmeted against airlessness, watched her come in and nose deep into volcanic ash that was epochs old. At the



by
Manly Wade Wellman

Two against eternity, they took off on the strangest of all voyages—to blaze a new frontier for tomorrow's world!

radio voice of Dr. Condit, chief of the station, three moved forward and stood as the lock panel slid open.

Out stepped a slight figure—commander of the craft. Then a chunky one—his first officer. Finally, a little swaggeringly, came a figure with a certain rangy stalwart grace that could



Fetterman hit him and ran toward the long-shot rocket.

not be hidden completely by the inflated fabric of his space-overall.

"That'll be the man," Dr. Condit told himself, and tramped lightly across, his gloved hand out.

The newcomer was turning his head this way and that inside the polarized plastic globe of his helmet. Anyone's first glimpse of a lunar landscape was worth drinking in.

"Cadet Fetterman?" asked Dr. Condit. "I'm your new commander, Condit. Glad to see you. It's been some time since the Board approved anyone for space-flight training."

"Yes, I'm Fetterman." The newcomer was big and young and glum. His hair inside the helmet was dark and disordered, his eyes were moody, his square jaw set with something of grimness. Condit went on:

"Follow me, Fetterman. I'll show you your quarters. You'll start training at once."

Luna's gravity, barely a sixth of Earth's, almost betrayed Fetterman as he made his first steps after Condit. His feet, stoutly booted in metal, seemed to float out from under him as in water. But he kept from falling and made shift to adjust himself. Condit approached a sprawling, low block of a building, made of soapy lunar rock mortared together in big slabs. He touched a button on a metal door, which opened and admitted them to an airlock. They passed through an inner door into a lighted, air-filled hallway. Condit unshipped his helmet; so did Fetterman.

"The gravity!" was the cadet's first word. "It's—"

"Of course. We've stepped it up to Earth and a quarter. For spaceflight, you'll have to be able to take up to

seven g's." Condit moved on, walking heavily now. Fetterman clumped after, scowling.

"Straight ahead," Condit informed him, pointing, "is the doorway to the men's dormitory. Only five male cadets besides yourself. We had three others, but they—were unfortunate." He paused. "Come in here. There's someone you must meet, and better now than later."

He led the way through a side door, into a small study-like chamber. Someone sat at a desk, making space-graphs with the aid of a compass and a slide rule, but rose as Condit entered. Fetterman saw that this was a woman, young and robust, almost sturdy, with back-swept blonde hair. Blue eyes turned to Condit, then to him, then widened in something like unpleasant recognition.

"Yes, sir?" the woman asked.

Dr. Condit said formally, "Cadet Hunt, may I present Cadet Fetterman. I rely on you to become acquainted very quickly." He bowed and went out.

Cadet Hunt drew down the corners of a red mouth that ordinarily might be good-humored. Her widened eyes began to narrow.

"And so," she said to Fetterman, "you're the one they want me to marry."

FETTERMAN felt distinctly foolish.

"Look," he said, "let me put this helmet down on your desk, may I? And sit down?"

She nodded almost grudgingly, and herself dropped into her chair. "I know it isn't your fault," she went on. "I suppose you don't like me any better than I like you."

"You don't even know me," he pointed out gruffly. "How do you know whether you like me or not?"

Cadet Hunt's mouth relaxed its grim curve and became more handsome. "The same thing happened to me that happened to you, Fetterman — that's your name? I was chosen for physical health and certain reactions and qualities—"

"I know," put in Fetterman. "They're trying to develop spaceflight to a point where the ships will be maneuverable — won't have to stick to predetermined orbits like model planes on a wire. A ship that can dodge is a safer ship—but they can't build them unless they have crews strong and able enough to stand the gaff. There's a sucker born every minute, but only one sucker can become a space flyer in a year."

The girl nodded. "And I was last year's choice. I came because it was my duty. Because the Board doesn't take no for an answer. But," her voice grew harsh again, "when I left Earth, I had to leave somebody behind. Fetterman, we're supposed to marry, because we're both the right space-type and our children would be ditto. But I'm in love with someone else."

He grinned. "Small world, isn't it? Or—should I say, small Moon—You see, Hunt, I'm in love, too."

She smiled back, and with relief. "Then maybe we'll understand each other." She got up and walked across to him. "Your girl nice?"

"Wonderful," he sighed. "Just a little thin—fragile—dark and—Ow!"

The girl was replacing a pneumatic hypo in its container. "I was told to give you that injection while your attention was distracted," she told him.

"Nothing devastating or even dangerous, Fetterman. It only makes you more adaptable by action on your blood. You get adapted plenty here, you know."

He rubbed the punctured arm and glowered.

"Okay. Now let's talk about your love-life."

"Don't try any revenge while I tell you. He's sensitive, Fetterman. Not a physical lump like you, but strong enough. He's been called a poet. He can think, and decide, and—"

"A physical lump," broke in Fetterman savagely. "Just because I happen to be the exact physical and temperamental type that, according to international law, can be drafted for this service . . . oh, skip it, Hunt. Where do I sleep?"

"Tired already? That happens when you first come to the Moon. Dormitory's on back along the corridor to the right."

"Good night," he told her. "By the way, do we use first names?"

She shook her bright head. "Not regulation. I'm Hunt. Good night, Fetterman."

Sudden vibration shook him awake. He sat up in bed—no, he wasn't in bed. He sprawled in a sort of arm-chair, held by a loose harness of straps. Ahead, through a pane of glass, he saw a pitted, jagged rocky plateau dipping, slanting, diminishing . . . the surface of the Moon! And dropping away from him.

"Snap out of it, Fetterman," came the voice of Cadet Hunt. "You're having a rocket lesson. And never mind questions. You slept pretty sound, so they dumped you in and had

me take you off. Part of the adaptation process."

He lifted his head, turned it. She was seated beside him, her hands busy on an instrument panel. One hand fingered a row of keys like those of a piano, the other constantly touched and changed a series of dials, levers and gauges. Her eyes were on the dropping landscape beyond the glass. The two of them were alone in a humming, quivering little cubicle, no larger than seven feet by five.

"Watch how I operate these controls," she said. "These keys control the jets for speed. The gauges are for fuel, alarm systems, radar, skin temperature, and so on. That's a duplicate set right under you big coarse nose."

Fetterman looked down and studied them with interest. Nothing like this back on Earth; the Moon was the jump-off for the planets, and all the experimental work was being done there, where free-space conditions could be easily simulated and where an accident wouldn't endanger civilian lives. His big hands, knowing and curious, touched the controls.

"You want to run this scow?" asked the girl at once. "All right, take over."

She folded her arms. Fetterman bit his lip and prodded cautiously. The vibrations of the compartment grew more intense. Before him the landscape suddenly enlarged, bloated—was charging up at him.

"The high keys, the high keys!" Cadet Hunt coached him in a voice that was sharp with disgust, not fear. "High keys, quick, or you'll crash us!"

Fetterman obeyed her injunction, pressing the higher bracket. Abruptly the landscape shifted and fell away

behind and below. His eyes saw only stars and sky.

"Now you're trying to loop the loop! Level off!"

He found the middle register. The craft seemed to straighten out. Unfamiliar mountains and craters slid past. He dared to steal a sidelong glance at his companion. "How am I doing?"

Her slim forefinger tapped a dial before him. Its needle had moved to the red side of the card.

"Weaker fuel mixture or your tubes will crack," she informed him, and folded her arms again.

He glanced around in terror, found the lever marked FUEL FEED, and fiddled with it. The needle fell back from the danger area, and then he had time to see the surface of the moon rising toward him once more. His fingers on the keys again brought them to safety. He spared an arm long enough to mop perspiration with its sleeve. "How do we get back home?" he asked.

"Homesick already?" the girl sniffed. "All right, you're beginning to understand those key-controls. Swing to the right, make a hundred-eighty degree turn."

"Like this?" And he touched the keys to the left of the middle register. A moment later he almost sprawled from his seat. The harness that held him groaned. Grimly he changed his hands on the keyboard, his eyes on the scene below. He had reversed his course, and brought them back into the straight route.

"Good for the blood pressure," observed Cadet Hunt, her hands trying to restore order to her hair. "That would have killed you a day ago—be-

fore those injections and the special adaption-rays you slept under."

"Killed me?" repeated Fetterman.

"Look at the accelerograph." She pointed yet again. "That was a four-point-four G turn. You need a specially conditioned body to endure that kind of thing without getting all kinds of nasty internal disorders. And that's nothing to when we try for Mars and Venus." She clicked her tongue. "What men it will take to endure it!"

"Like your poet?" he inquired nastily. Look, isn't that the rocket port below us?"

"It is. Set her down. Quick, or we'll overshoot. Decelerate—yes, that's right—now, land—"

Agonizedly he labored over his controls. Abruptly the humming ceased all around them. Fetterman sighed. "Thank goodness, we got back safe."

A laugh answered him. "Now it can be told. You haven't been off Luna."

He stared, and Cadet Hunt laughed the merrier. She was positively pretty in laughter. "I mean it, Fetterman. You think I'd have sat by so calmly if it were a real trip, and you in charge? This compartment is part of a centrifuge, complete with gadgets for sound and vibration plus moving pictures to suit any adjustment of the controls. It happens to every cadet on his first day."

"Clever," growled Fetterman. "How would that poet have handled it?"

"He'd be smart enough to see through the deception. And your dark lady, how would she admire you with that scowl on your face? By the way, what does she call you?"

"Slug," said Fetterman bitterly.

"Slug? For being slow and heavy? I like it. I'll call you that too."

"I thought first names were out," Fetterman reminded her.

"That's only a nickname. My advantage over you—because I haven't one, and wouldn't tell you if I had."

"Then I'll give you one," announced Fetterman. "I'll call you Butch."

He opened the hatch, and they stepped out into the corridor.

THE rest of the first day's routine was fascinating and wearing.

Dr. Condit made exhaustive tests of Fetterman's endurances—another centrifuge, simulating the pull of five times Earth's gravity, almost crushed him, and a pressure-chamber all but telescoped him. By contrast he was dropped in a free-falling elevator until his eyes bulged in his head and left in a decompression tank until he fainted. Dosages, rays and fatigue injections duplicated in him the numerous illnesses that space-travel brings on, and his reactions were studied. Finally, barely able to stagger erect, he heard Dr. Condit speaking as if from a distance.

"Remarkable physical equipment, Cadet Fetterman. You will be able to help quite measurably in our attack on the problem of spaceflight. Cadet, these are your colleagues."

Four young men and two young women were sitting in a square, bare room. They were robust, hard-trained specimens, all dressed in gray uniforms, like himself and Cadet Hunt. One, who wore on his left sleeve two narrow blue brassards, rose and faced Fetterman.

"My name's Trevna," he announced. "Senior here."

Fetterman tried to keep his head on an even keel long enough to nod it.

Trevna made the other introductions

quickly. "These women are Tromborg and Millbanks. The other men, Sterling, Goff, Burmitz."

"I thought," said Fetterman, bowing his way around, "that there was another man; Dr. Condit spoke of five besides myself yesterday."

He was aware of massed chill in the stares of his mates. He stopped talking. Trevna ran blocky fingers through his gingery hair and nodded to Cadet Hunt.

"Tell him," said Trevna.

"Slug," began the girl, "you have lots of usages to learn. Every now and then something happens to a cadet here. When that is the case, we don't speak of him or her—names or circumstances or anything. That makes it a trifle easier."

Fetterman felt more baffled than ashamed. "Sorry," he said. "My mistake."

"Don't apologize," Cadet Hunt told him, very drily. "Only remember."

"Turn around here," chimed in Trevna.

Fetterman did so, and Trevna, without any warning, dealt him a heavy buffet on the jaw. Unprepared and still groggy, Fetterman reeled backward, keeping his footing with difficulty, until he found the support of the wall. He leaned there a trifle, then moved forward.

He'll do," Trevna was telling the others. "Takes a wallop like that, on top of the first day's tests and doses, to show if a man can stand up. I've known cadets to lose their senses for an hour. Evidently Fetterman can take it—"

Then Fetterman had reached his side. Trevna saw the blow, tried to duck away, but too late. Fetterman's

fist thudded into his face, spun him around, and dropped him heavily on his nose and one shoulder.

"Evidently Trevna can't," said Fetterman with difficulty.

Trevna tried to rise, then subsided. Two of the other men, Goff and Burmitz, had risen quickly and closed in from either side.

Fetterman pulled himself together. He had a couple of punches left in him, he thought, maybe three . . . He kept his eyes on the larger Goff, then suddenly whirled and uppercut Burmitz. Before Burmitz could recover, he turned back to Goff, dodged a powerful swing, and landed two blows of his own. Goff was down across Trevna, and he faced about again to dispose of Burmitz.

But it was not Burmitz who scored on him. Somebody hit him from behind with an instrument of some sort—blunt or sharp, Fetterman couldn't tell. He blacked out.

When he came to, it felt like only a few seconds later, and his head seemed to be in Cadet Hunt's surprisingly soft lap. In her right hand she held a neat cylindrical billet of heavy plastic. She dropped it to the floor, where it clanged, and let go of him. When he sat up, she smiled.

"Sorry, Slug, but juniors can't rule the roost around here. Not even in primitive affairs like fist-fighting. Understand?"

THE Lunar day its, of course, approximately thirty of Earth's. The experimental station chiefs had chopped it up into convenient twelve-hour periods, with arbitrarily designated sleeping periods, mornings, noons and afternoons. Lunch for the cadets took no longer than thirty minutes, for it

was administered in assembly-line fashion. You either ate one course in the allotted time, or you didn't get the next. When they had finished, Trevna rose from the long table and gave an order.

"Column of twos. Seniors ahead."

They lined up. "Here, beside me," Cadet Hunt told Fetterman, and they fell in at the end of the column. Trevna, in front with Burmitz, led them out to a room where they donned fabric overalls, and plastic helmets and oxygen packs. Then they marched to a lock-panel and into the open.

Dr. Condit, also space-overalled, waited there. His radioed voice came to their earphones: "Double crews for flight. Take the four scout craft on the field."

The cadets hurried to where four metal teardrops stood on their small ends in launching pits on the alloy-faced plain that served as landing field. Each was some thirty feet over all, eighteen feet at widest beam, and studded fore and aft with rocket nozzles. The light lunar gravity-pull made it easy for them to hop up like so many squirrels, to the entry panels near the blunt noses of the craft.

"In here, Slug," Fetterman's earphones brought Cadet Hunt's voice. She indicated the scout craft at the left end of the line, and herself sprang up and into the forward chamber. He followed. Inside was a space not much larger than a clothes closet, with hammock-like harness for two operators to lie in. A small radium bulb gave light, and showed controls of all types on the walls. The girl fastened the door behind them and pressed a button marked "oxygen."

"Crawl out of that armor and stow it in the locker under your feet," she

directed. "Throw off your tunic, too. You'll need all the freedom you can get."

She suited her own actions to the word, quickly folding away her over-all and tunic, and appearing bare-armed in a scarcely adequate jersey.

"All cadets in place? Name yourselves in order of seniority."

"Trevna here," came the first and "Hunt," followed the voice of Fetterman's companion. Others sang out, and "Fetterman," said Fetterman last of all.

"Good," said Condit. "Each craft has one senior cadet and one junior. Senior cadets, take the controls."

Cadet Hunt's knowing blue eyes slid around the instrument panels. Her fingers touched this dial and that. A vision screen lighted up, little points of red, green, blue and yellow radiance made themselves visible. She held her hands hovering above the keyboard.

"In order from the right—take 'off!'"

Cadet Hunt hastily dialed the televisor. Fetterman saw an image of the four ships, broadcast from a ground unit. The right-hand teardrop's rockets bloomed and it shot away. Next. Next. Cadet Hunt fingered the controls, and they followed. The televisor showed them in a diagonal formation far up in starry emptiness.

All this was wonder to Fetterman, who was recalled to himself by the soft, businesslike tones of Cadet Hunt: "Stand by to take over, Slug."

"Now, Butch?" he demanded but the answer came in the radio-borne words of Dr. Condit:

"Ships left front into line—close interval! Junior cadets take over, seniors stand by."

Fetterman obeyed because he had to. He sensed a smile on that short, pleasant mouth beside him. She said: "Remember what you learned in that fake flight today. Don't stop to puzzle over anything. I'm here to get you out of jams."

Eyes on the vision screen, he kept the throttles full out until he came into line. At once a new order: "Diamond patrol formation—first ship lead, second left flank, third right flank, fourth rear!"

It took thought and nerve to obey. Other formations were commanded and executed. Finally: "All loop—tight and fast!"

"He means somersault," Cadet Hunt told Fetterman at once. He put both hands on his keyboard and the nose of the ship came up in his lap. A moment before he had been floating free—now it was as if the devils of space were trying to spread him over the floorboards. He heard the girl moan a trifle, and he found time to be thankful for the harness that held him in place and lashed him together. His hands kept the combination on the keyboard, as he swept his hurtling craft on, on, and over in a curve almost too sharp and sudden for the plates to hold together . . .

"OUT! Out! Straighten out!" Dr. Condit was shouting, and his hands, seeming to weigh tons, shifted position. The ship slid into a new straight trail through space, and pressure and pain went from him. Cadet Hunt breathed deeply. He glanced at her, saw her chafing her temples under disordered whorls of tawny hair. Again Dr. Condit; his voice sounding oddly strained:

"You're learning well, Trevna and

Burmitz, but you might have done it more smoothly. Goff and Tromborg, a little quicker response to orders next time; space-flying means instantaneous reaction. Number four ship—Hunt and Fetterman—did the maneuver best of you all. Congratulations, Fetterman. Don't fall below that standard."

The doctor had mentioned three ships. Three only, though four had made up the class. Fetterman opened his lips to comment, then suddenly closed them again. Instead he followed Cadet Hunt's gaze to the vision screen. The view on it showed three teardrops speeding along. Then it moved away to where against starry blackness, glowed a quivering blob of pale radiance—a flame that once had been a magnificent flying structure of steel and plastic, crewed by a magnificent young man named Sterling and a handsome, able girl named Millbanks.

"Attention to orders!" Dr. Condit was crisping out. "Line of ships—Fetterman, come up into the lead. Now, ninety-degree turn to the right."

As ever, changing direction at the breathless speed of space-flying was an agony. But Fetterman wondered how much of that agony was of his spirit, that was not to be allowed to mourn for lost comrades.

He had not much time for wonder, because the rest of the flight lesson was thrilling and demanding. They turned. The seniors took over for the landing, and when they entered their quarters the radio operator told Dr. Condit of a report from home. Two new cadets had been approved and would be out within a week.

After dinner, which by contrast with lunch was leisurely and savory, Cadet Hunt conducted Fetterman to a

lounge. The others were there, watching a drama broadcast from Earth, something quaint and ancient called "Once Among Animals." She showed him a comfortable sofa, and sat beside him, but clicked her tongue when he would not watch the comedy.

"Listen, Slug," she whispered, "I'll violate the code to remind you of it, this once more. You simply can't bother about those who don't make the grade."

"They're dead," he replied shortly. "Long before their time."

"Not in this business. Their time was up when they flopped it."

"Maybe we'll do the same thing next flight."

"Maybe we will. Snap out of it, Slug." She put a small, strong hand on his big one. He turned his palm over to grasp hers, but she snatched it away.

"Remember, no romance?"

"No romance, Butch."

She made a little mouth in the dusk. "I don't like that."

"You mean, being called Butch? But I still don't know your first name."

"Well, if you won't call me by it in front of the others—it's plain old sissified Mary Ann."

"Quiet, you drivellers!" Trevna barked then, very much the commanding senior.

FETTERMAN soloed the next day, immediately after breakfast. Dr. Condit congratulated him on his performance, saying that he had learned faster than any other cadet in the history of the school; but Hunt diluted these compliments when he joined her.

"It's the advance in treatments, injections and the rest," she told him.

"You were made suitable much faster than the earlier cadets."

"I begin to think you're jealous," Fetterman said amiably.

"Maybe you're right."

"Come along to lecture."

The cadets gathered in a small, dim chamber, where an assistant instructor showed them pulsations of color on a lighted screen and talked softly and monotonously. Fetterman knew what was to happen—hypnosis, familiar in modern universities as an aid to retention. He relaxed dutifully, and let himself become calm, detached. After a moment, Dr. Condit began to speak on spacial navigation, reciting complex formulas which sank deep into his receptive mind.

"Your calculations in solid trig, and even their mutations through the time element, will give most of you no trouble," the doctor said smoothly. "What is important, and must call for painstaking attention, is the judging of points in space and time on which to base your calculations."

All this as if from far away. To Fetterman it seemed that the central surface of his brain had become a smooth waxen expanse onto which the words and what they meant were engraved. He absorbed the lecture without paying attention. Part of his semi-tranced consciousness turned elsewhere.

Beside him was something, someone. It lived, breathed, it had blonde hair growing to a peak in front—and blue eyes and a brave spirit—all this he knew without looking. She was there, Cadet Hunt. If he put out a hand to touch her . . . he didn't need to.

"Butch," he said, incoherently tender.

"Please don't call me that," she whispered. "Mary Ann, remember?"

Dr. Condit continued, seriously. "To sum up, the space navigator must keep all these matters in his mind properly classified according to element, scientific, personal, mystical or other—and see that they coalesce or succeed each other in proper rhythm to show him his proper position and logical behavior in consequence."

Fetterman was sure, in the free part of his mind, that the words were beautiful, touching, inspiring. When the lecture was over lights came on. He started, as if waking, and let go of Mary Ann Hunt's hand. But she smiled.

"Well?" she said gently.

"Very well indeed," replied Fetterman. "Why didn't we think of it sooner?"

But the voice of Dr. Condit broke in: "Cadet Hunt!"

They both stood up. "To my office, Cadet Hunt," said the doctor. "Cadet Fetterman, dismiss."

Fetterman stared as the girl walked away with Dr. Condit. Trevna moved up beside him.

"Listen, old man," Trevna was saying, with a strange tenseness. "It's not my idea, really—only the school director's. After all, I'm senior cadet, scheduled for a big experimental flight. And it's always man and woman on those, a pair who must collaborate in their life as well as their work—"

"What are you driveling about?" wondered Fetterman, and turned around to face him.

Trevna made an embarrassed gesture. "I thought you understood. I'm to get Cadet Hunt."

"You get her? You? Haven't you already got a girl?"

"I did have Millbanks. You know what happened." Trevna shrugged. "I was deeply attached to Millbanks, but she's gone. Now—"

"Now you get my girl? I don't think so." Fetterman began to walk away. His stride and manner were purposeful. Trevna followed, catching up in the hall.

"What do you think you're going to do, Fetterman?" he demanded.

"I," said Fetterman carefully, "am going to find that dried-up old son of a scientist and wrap his slip-stick around his skinny gullet. Then I'm going to—"

"You can't. I won't let you. I'm senior cadet and I can command—"

He caught Fetterman by the shoulder. Fetterman wrenched away and strode on to the door of Dr. Condit's office. Trevna followed again and slipped in front, barring his way.

As once before, Trevna struck powerfully and without warning. But Fetterman paritally slipped the blow, sidled back and shook his head clear of fog. He grinned.

"This will be a pleasure," he said.

FETTERMAN shuffled in, thrusting his head forward to court a blow. The blow came, Fetterman slid inside it and hit Trevna savagely in the midriff. The senior cadet doubled up and almost fell, catching Fetterman's forearms to escape another blow. Fetterman foiled an attempt to trip him, rocked Trevna backward with a quick push that broke the hold, and almost tore off Trevna's head with an uppercut. Trevna fell in a corner, got up and

fumbled in his belt-bag. He drew forth a small pistol.

Fetterman leaped in, catching Trevna's right wrist, and straightened the arm toward him with a violent pull. Moving fast, he got his left arm over Trevna's elbow and tightened his embrace at once, forcing the prisoned wrist down and back. A moment later he had his adversary in a hammerlock. Trevna writhed and grunted.

"Drop that gun," said Fetterman.

Instead, Trevna managed to pull the trigger. Fetterman applied fierce strength to his hold on the twisted arm. Trevna yelled in agony, and the arm seemed to come off in Fetterman's hands. It was broken.

The fog of conflict was still upon Fetterman, and he only half-noticed the rush of cadets and attendants to carry away his injured foeman. His brain cleared and he found himself in Dr. Condit's office, facing the doctor across a desk. In a corner stood Mary Ann Hunt, her face troubled and pale.

"Why should I lie about anything?" Fetterman defiantly answered Condit's demand for information. "Trevna tried to stop me from coming in here and straightening things out concerning Cadet Hunt. He wasn't able to do it."

"You've flown in the face of authority," Condit accused.

"I'm studying to be a space-flyer," countered Fetterman. "Anyway, wasn't I supposed to have Cadet Hunt? Wasn't—"

"By an oversight, the instructor was not told that she had been repaired with Cadet Trevna," Condit informed him. "He gave you both the hypnotic suggestion that you would love each other. I now propose to counter-hyp-

notize you and put an end to this trouble. Look at me."

Fetterman stared him between the eyes. "You will relax," Dr. Condit began to mutter. "Relax . . . forget . . ."

"Oh, stop it!" exploded Fetterman. "Perhaps I was hypnotized once, but it won't work again."

"It failed with me, too, Slug." That was Mary Ann Hunt, who now ventured a smile.

Condit still held Fetterman's eyes. "A ship has been readied, provisioned, set for launching. No better craft was ever assembled for space-flight. It is thought by experts that the chances are better than even that it can reach the planet Venus and make a landing—a safe one—the first interplanetary flight. Cadet Trevna, as senior male cadet, was assigned to the attempt. Cadet Hunt would have been his associate. Takeoff time is less than thirty minutes away."

"I've changed all that," reminded Fetterman with ironic cheerfulness. "Trevna belongs in a hospital for some days."

"Wherefore," Condit continued, "next senior male cadet—Goff—gets the assignment. Cadet Hunt, report to the ship."

She did not move. Condit touched a buzzer, and a uniformed mechanic appeared.

"Put her into space-armour and put her aboard," directed Condit. Again he buzzed, and a cadet appeared—Goff.

"You're in charge of this cadet, who is under arrest," said Condit. "Take this pistol. March him to the cells. Confine him there. Then report aboard the ship that takes off for Venus. You're replacing Cadet Trevna."

Goff saluted and took the pistol. Fetterman marched out before him, boiling. They marched in silence along the corridor. Then:

"Turn around, Fetterman," said Goff.

Fetterman did so. Goff, lean and tawny, smiled encouragingly. The pistol hung loosely in his hand. "Hit me," Goff said.

Fetterman stared, scowling. "Are you as fantastic as the rest of these people?" he inquired.

Goff shook his head. "Probably I'm the only sane one. Hit me. Then run to quarters, get into space-armor. Report aboard the ship instead of me. Fly off with your girl."

"What's back of this?" Fetterman almost groaned. "You land on Venus, signal back. Other ships land. Space-flight moves forward. You're a hero, famous, your fortune made—"

"Ah," broke in Goff, "but Cadet Hunt is along. I," and his voice grew soft, "was all set with Cadet Tromborg. She's green, but she's learning . . . and I want to go through life and space with her . . . understand?"

"Perfectly," said Fetterman, and hit him once. Goff fell limply, but smiled up and found the strength to wink.

A monster javelin of a long-shot rocket was set upright in a metal-lined pit. He clambered up grab-irons, past many yards of engine and fuel-storage hulks, to the tiny control room at the nose. Inside sat Mary Ann Hunt, her helmet off, her bright head bowed. He unshipped his own helmet.

THROUGH the staring dark flamed the great javelin craft. Mary Ann Hunt, at the controls, finished her search for the proper combination to

stay on the course, and turned to Fetterman.

"I'm glad," she said, and sounded as if she meant it. "Still, you're so new to this . . ."

"People learn to fly by flying," he rejoined sententiously. "We'll have weeks in space, more flying time than Trevna and Goff put together. Ready to chance it?"

"Why ask me?" she smiled. "And aren't you supposed to kiss me or something?"

They were interrupted by a shrill, dry buzzing. "Televisor signal," said Mary Ann, and flipped a dial. A small screen lighted up and upon it showed the face of Dr. Condit.

"By the authority vested in me as governmental chief at this post," he said formally, "I hereby assign you, Cadet Fetterman, to the trial flight to Venus."

"Why, thank you," said Fetterman, feeling very good-humored.

"By the authority vested in me as governmental chief at this post," went on Dr. Condit's voice from the screen, "I approve the partnership of Cadets Hunt and Fetterman, and instruct them to make a safe landing on the planet Venus, there awaiting further expeditions from Earth. Until otherwise informed, they will be considered as joint governors of any colony there begun."

"Thank you, sir," said Mary Ann Hunt, putting her hand in Fetterman's. "If we were rude—sorry, but we had to be."

"Continue to hold hands," Dr. Condit bade them. "By the authority vested in me as governmental chief at this post, I pronounce you man and wife. Now carry on."