

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

APRIL, 1955

Vol. 3, No. 3

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 3, No. 3. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscriptions 6 issues \$2.00, 12 issues \$3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, New York. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright 1955, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. APRIL 1955.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

the
visitor
from
space

by . . . J. Harvey Haggard

There was life in outer space,
chill, deadly and unknown. But
what it sought on Earth it found.

"NORTHERN FEDERATION
ARMIES REPULSE HUGE ATTACK BY
SOUTH HEMIS IN ANTARCTICA!"

That was the headline.

Nothing to give anyone the d.t.'s. It had been going on for twelve years now. The war between the upper and lower hemispheres had run the full gamut of horror and atrocity. Upon its initial outbreak in 1996, the most terrible weapon of all had been the Z-bomb, manufacturers of this annihilative weapon having scaled the entire alphabet in destructive omnipotence.

Three years later came the quintiray.

On the seventh anniversary of the conflagration the South Hemiglobers introduced the necro-annihilant. But somehow the secrets of atomic disruption have a habit of slipping through the fingers of mere men. So both sides had the new weapons after a short time.

The twelfth year—but I have just given you the headlines.

More important was the newscast going on in a subterranean chamber in the upper part of the Northern Hemiglobe.

J. Harvey Haggard's science-fiction stories of a decade ago are quite as exciting in retrospect as this, his newest, yarn. And that is just about the highest tribute we could pay him, for the present yarn is as skillful a blend of future science and surmise, of prophetic insight and awareness of current trends, as any seeker after such qualities could desire. It is not surprising he has remained one of the best known writers in the field.

A very excited voice was saying hoarsely over the Hertzian waves, ". . . We know now that we must seek grounds for some common understanding, some bond of unity, between ourselves and a visitor from the depths of space."

Yes, it could not be argued away. A neighbor had come in from the cold abyss of nothingness, from the interplanetary depths that stretch with the curving arms of infinity from star to star, universe to universe, nebulae to nebulae.

The strange blue-tailed comet had soared in toward Earth, leaving a luminous trail, and landing eventually in the hills of what had formerly been Alberta, of the Dominion of Canada. The residue had not been merely interplanetary shrapnel. It had carried a passenger. Within this alien shell was what we call sentience. It had been something that moved and absorbed matter, something that used energy, transforming it from barren radiation to fluid motion, which moreover, had the direction and originality of thought.

Few in that world of 2008 A.D. were surprised by the fact that the creature from space had been a repository of deliberation, capable of weighing causes and reactions, capable of giving explanations and deductions of import.

There was a visitor from space . . . and it thought! Suddenly, terribly, the multitudes of Earth, now engaged in the prosecution of a devastating war, knew a terrible,

secret, inner fear. During the decades past the regular succession of ruinous battles had gradually numbed the shock-inducing centers of the myriad brains who participated in the great struggle. It took a thrust from a new angle to really penetrate the mind-consciousness of the race in such a manner as to bring about that most paralyzing of sensations—cold, rationally motivated fear.

Everyone knew that super-intelligences lived in outer interworld space. For nearly a century the existence of a super-race in interstellar depths had been suspected. Twenty-five years ago it had been proved. Yes, beyond any reasonable doubt, there was life in Outer Space vastly superior to anything that had ever been evolved on Earth.

Just what it was no one knew, because it was invisible. Just how it lived or why, no man could fathom. But then, all life is veiled in mystery, and dark surmise. It had taken Gordon Heindrick Fells, Einstein's heir, as he was often called, to prove the existence of super-consciousness in spacial depths. He had proved it convincingly enough, to the satisfaction of all mankind.

But until that night of November 3rd, 2008 A.D., no man had ever been rash enough to say that he had actually seen and conversed with a visitor from beyond the Solar System.

The Prime Benefactor of the Top-half, the Northern Hemisphere,

made the startling announcement. Bertrand Willington Bedaull was well known to the multitudes, even to the enemies down under, who naturally, hated and despised him. His calm, assured tones had interrupted the holocaust often, speaking by radio, pleading with all men to have patience and faith. But that calmness was gone now. He spoke brokenly, apprehensively into the microphone, and everyone who listened trembled with apprehension.

The strangest of honors had been conferred upon the Earth.

Why? Why? The thoughts went surging through the minds of all the listeners, even before the last reverberations of Bedaull's historical words had died away on the airwaves. Why had a super-intelligent being finally decided to visit this small globe in the Solar System? Had mankind finally fought its way upward to a plane of intelligence that equalled that of the other universes? Or had the super-being, wearied of what was happening on Earth, arrived now to put an end to it?

In the lower hemiglobe, lying under the Southern Cross, Dictator Garbanzo Calash held a hurried conference. History will record that he acted quickly, that the gestures of his stumpy fingers were faster than usual, and that he was restraining intense and almost overwhelming emotions. Since none in that gathering of ministers was his usual, unperturbed self, no one of

importance noticed how Garbanzo Calash trembled.

A momentous decision was reached in the lower war chamber. There would be one fateful, terrific swoop, a concentrated thrust of armed ferocity. All the quinti-rays, concentrated in a highly focused beam, would converge on the superb wing of the main rocket navy. There was one thing that Garbanzo would not consider—leaving of the visitor from space in the hands of the upper enemy.

Subways from every major railway in the upper country led to Mammo Caves like arteries to the heart of some vast, multicellular organism. Here, deep in the bowels of Earth, a tall, gaunt man sat at a desk, compressing his lips and looking agitated.

Prime Benefactor Bedaull stared from a small window into a busy street, where military vehicles raced to and fro like agitated termites beneath an unexpectedly overturned nest.

Mammo City was buried deep. But under the glowing of tiny artificial suns in the cavern ceiling it would have been hard to distinguish this lower city from a surface metropolis of fifty years before. The government buildings comprised a central fortress, ringed in by frowning bulwarks of quinti-ray repulsors, each manned by numerous uniformed guards provided with the deadliest of weapons. Prime Benefactor Bedaull turned eagerly as an academic man clad

in white tropicals hurried into the room.

"Well, Dr. Emsley?" demanded Bedaull. He leaned forward as he spoke, his eyes searching the newcomer's face.

The medical man shook his head dubiously. His face was gaunt almost to the point of emaciation and his gray eyes wavered when they met the other's inquiring gaze.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid . . . I don't know what to say. You see the creature—whatever its nature—has necessarily been living in an entirely different environment, exposed to direct cosmic rays."

Bedaull frowned impatiently. He began speaking in a hoarse, disturbed tone, relating the sequence of events to emphasize their gravity. "His rocket was out of control when it swept in toward Earth. Luckily our radar warned us of its approach. We were able to send out repulsor beams that cushioned the fall, and helped make the landing possible."

"Yes, I know that, of course."

"We averted a possible accident. Whoever he is—or whatever *it* is—should appreciate what we did. Confound it, doctor, what is the matter then?"

The other was still frowning in obvious puzzlement. "Well, sir," he began, and stopped.

"Out with it, Dr. Emsley. As my personal physician, you may speak your mind. Surely you must know that."

"What I would say is that naturally this creature has not existed in an atmosphere of any sort. Somewhere in interspatial depths, he existed by an alien means. His body absorbed cosmic radiation. But the air pressure of our Earth-surface level would have been fatal. If we hadn't suspended him in a vacuum almost instantly, he'd have died."

"Maybe we're making too much fuss over him," said Prime Benefactor Bedaull. "Asking him those questions, hounding him night and day."

Dr. Emsley shrugged lean, tired shoulders.

"No, that doesn't seem to bother him. He solved the problem of quinti-ray defense, *just like that.*" He snapped his fingers loudly. "Also he explained the nature of light quantum, an old problem that's defied us, when you come down to it. The information he's placed in our hands will undoubtedly result in our vanquishing the lower hemisphere. There's no doubt about it but . . ."

Suddenly the atmosphere trembled under a terrific impact, interrupting the smile of gratification that was spreading over Bedaull's face. Almost instantly, vast amplifiers began to shriek a warning of enemy attack.

The red-uniformed man looked at his personal physician. Dr. Emsley stared back at Prime Benefactor Bedaull. Bedaull rubbed his hands together. He continued his smile of satisfaction.

"It's just as I expected. Garbanzo couldn't resist what he felt was an opportunity when he found out about our visitor from space. So he's attacking—with quinti-rays."

"Yes," breathed Dr. Emsley, looking upward as though he were actually observing the beginning attack. "And our visitor has already shown us how to repulse their bombardment."

They watched the upper air battle from a visor-screen. On its oval they saw squadron after squadron of dart-shaped ships hurtle down toward the upper surface above Mammo City. Every time the crimson quinti-ray beams knifed down, a purple corpuscular substance absorbed it, dissolving the redness, causing the aircraft to vanish into a thin mist of disintegrating particles. After thirty minutes, more than a thousand of the Lower Down aircraft had been reduced to flaming wreckage.

"Confound it!" burst out Bedaull angrily, following with more picturesque expletives. "Three of them got away."

"But only three," emphasized Dr. Emsley. "That's pretty good shooting, if I may say so. A mighty good average."

"Yes," put in Bedaull irritably, "but with the instruments they've got they'll be certain to analyze the repulsor for the quinti-rays. We'll be on an even keel again by next week. Stalemate again."

Following the attack, the chief

physician had relaxed. He looked very worn and tired again.

"It's an old story," he said wearily.

"But at least," exclaimed the Prime Benefactor, "we still have our visitor. He'll be able to give us new and still greater weapons. Don't forget that. We should be everlastingly grateful he thought it advisable to visit us rather than our enemies Down Under."

"I—I'm not sure," said Dr. Emsley hesitantly. "I think it advisable, sir, for you to accompany me to the side of Kryzal Kaght."

Something in the physician's manner warned Prime Benefactor Bedaull that a trying ordeal lay ahead. He withdrew a tiny silver phial from his pocket, and removed from it two tiny pills. He swallowed them, scowling.

"Neuro-energizers," he explained to Dr. Emsley. "Small wonder I have to take artificial stimulation."

Passing many militant guards, they walked into a high-walled, brightly lighted corridor and descended deeper into the bowels of the Earth.

There, suspended in a great vacuum tube in an inner chamber, loomed the visitor from space, Kryzal Kaght.

Tall, gelatinous, almost transparent except for the green pulsations that seemed to serve as energy supply streams, Kryzal Kaght stood surveying them. A dark lamp was trained upon him from inside the

tube. Much of his visibility came from fluorescence, particularly noticeable in the two shimmering columns, corresponding to human legs, which held him upright.

A series of writhing upper tentacles performed a manual function, but perhaps the creature's most striking characteristic was the noble evanescent head, covered with tiny tendrils that swept back like a magnificent crest. The tendrils vibrated delicately as thought-waves thundered into Bedaull's mind. The limbs below the head changed shape, sometimes quivering like thin flat ribbons, and at others coiling and jerking in more deliberate fashion. A dull phosphorescence pervaded the visitor's inner being, but the glow of deep light seemed to be growing steadily dimmer.

The Prime Benefactor inclined his head. He stood very erect and stiff in his crimson uniform, not accustomed at all to paying homage to anyone. Even the ring of soldiery, guarding the circle of the inner cavern, seemed startled.

"Kryzal Kaght," he said solemnly. "You have done us the greatest of honors. We are deeply indebted to you and highly appreciative of your visit."

Dr. Emsley leaned against the tubed glassite of the chamber that housed the space visitor, peering worriedly at the indistinct blob of matter that housed its brain.

Inside the vacuum chamber, the iridescent play of light swirled hur-

riedly for a moment, then subsided slowly. A thought-wave came into their minds. There was no effort to the transport of intelligence. It arrived, full-fledged and unquestioned, in their consciousness. At the same time they sensed anew the strange weakness in their visitor.

"I am very pleased, men of Earth, that you greet me so," came the thought.

"Why should we not honor and respect you?" said the Prime Benefactor. "In a few short hours you have solved atomic mysteries that have puzzled our scientists for years."

Kryzal Kaght remained strangely impassive.

"There are other mysteries," said the thought-wave knowingly. "Greater ones. The solution of one question inevitably leads to the asking of another. That, in a sense, is the eternal equation."

"Wait!" Dr. Emsley said. "How do you feel? Is something bothering you? . . . your physical being?"

"No," came the answering thought-wave. Yet there was a growing lassitude in the creature's manner. He conveyed a curious, mystifying feeling of completion and satisfaction with the negation. "I'll be all right. For centuries I've longed for something also. Now I stand upon the threshold of achieving it."

"Here on Earth?" asked Prime Benefactor Bedaull wonderingly.

"Yes. I shall find it here. You

are a gracious host, men of Earth."

Abruptly a ringing noise vibrated through the chamber, seeming to issue from nowhere. Almost instantly, a three-dimensional image materialized. A hated, familiar figure, it was clad in the rough leather garb of the Down-Under Barbarians. At its emergence, a thousand heat-guns appeared in the hands of the circling soldiery, were aimed, and steadied. But a thundrous thought-wave sent them reeling.

"Do nothing rash," warned Kryzal Kaght. "You are looking upon a projected image of the other dictator, Garbanzo Calash. He has a right to be here. It is my duty to be impartial."

"You—you—" Unable to control himself, Bedaull flung himself at the apparition, burying his fingers in the throat of Garbanzo. But his fingers passed through thin air.

Garbanzo laughed harshly, looking around with amused understanding.

"Some day we'll meet face to face in reality," he promised. Then the dictator from Down Under turned to offer his respect to Kryzal Kaght.

Inside the vacuum chamber, the nebulous visitor slumped against the wall. For a moment a sound like a low moan came to their minds. At one side, the physician wrung his hands, his mouth twisted into a tortured pattern.

"Your position is hopeless, Bedaull," Garbanzo said tauntingly.

"By this time you ought to know it. We've launched an attack against the Peninsula. With three fronts active, our victory is assured."

"Well, now that you've said it," retorted Prime Benefactor Bedaull, "I'll just admit that the front in Asia has been broadened considerably. It now includes Africana. Garbanzo, you weren't expecting that, were you?"

The visitor from space said nothing. Only an amoebic mass of matter remained, dripping down the glass wall. It made a shuddering puddle on the floor.

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded Prime Benefactor Bedaull.

"Look here!" exclaimed Garbanzo. "If you've done anything to injure him, I'll . . ."

"Wait!" It was Dr. Enoch Emsley. "I'm afraid it's no use."

"But the visitor from space," protested the Prime Benefactor. "What's the matter with him, doctor?"

"He has what he came for," returned Dr. Emsley, refusing to meet Bedaull's gaze, one hand tugging wearily at the lobe of his ear. "You've given him the greatest gift you could have bestowed."

"What's that?" demanded the image of Garbanzo Calash in bewilderment.

"Successful culmination," returned Dr. Emsley. "He is of a race of superior beings. He and others of his kind are intensely aware that they are as superior to us as we are to the lower animals. That's

why they've never made an effort to contact us. Far out in space, at the end of evolution's road, they live through eternal time, knowing no limitations of thought, creation, and positive power. They have everything—except one thing. Even perfection, sirs, must have its flaw."

He paused, nodding.

"Out with it!" The two dictators spoke together. Bedaull continued, "What is his reason for visiting Earth? What precious thing do we have here which he cannot attain in Outer Space?"

Dr. Emsley turned his gaunt face toward the dictators fearfully. One of them was a reality of flesh and blood. The other was only a projected image. Yet he felt almost afraid to speak his tremendous knowledge. At length his thin lips moved to form words.

"There would seem to be nothing on this Earth that Kryzal Kaight could ever want," he said exhaustively. "Nothing on Earth. Neither

wars, nor pestilences, nor famine, hunger nor agony did he desire. We have only one thing on Earth that he can't have in Outer Space. That is death. Death might have come to him through the impact of his rocket on the Earth. We averted that. Death could result from the poisons and pressure of an atmosphere his body isn't equipped to withstand. Since cosmic radiation does not penetrate the Earth's envelope of air in the primitive form he needs, we are unable to avert this latter form of destruction.

"Gentlemen, the only reason this super-intelligent being from Outer Space ever came to Earth was that he wanted to commit suicide!"

Garbanzo's image faded slowly. Prime Benefactor Bedaull of the Upper Hemiglobe stood with clenched fists. The quivering puddle of expiring matter in the vacuum tube pulsated a last feeble thought of deepest gratitude.

