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Front cover painting by Harold McCauley illustrating "Meet Me In Tomorrow"

Published bi-monthly by Clark Publishing Company, at 1144 Ashland Avenue, Evanston, Illinois. Second-class entry applied for at the Post Office, Evanston, Illinois. Application for additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio, is pending. We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or artwork.

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FEBRUARY ISSUE ON SALE
DECEMBER 1



TOURISTS TO TERRA

By Mack Reynolds

DIOMED of Argos, son of Tydeus, drew his sword with a shout and rushed forward to finish off his Trojan opponent before help could arrive. Suddenly he stopped and threw up a shielding arm before his eyes. When he could see again, one who could only have been Aphrodite, Goddess of love and beauty stood between him and the unconscious enemy. She was dressed as though for the bridal room, her Goddess body, breathtakingly beautiful, revealed through the transparent robe she wore. She was attired for love, but held a short sword in her hand.

Aphrodite smiled at him in derision. "Now, then, Prince of Argos, would you fight the Gods?" She advanced the sword, half mockingly.

But the Greek was mad with bloodlust, half crazed with his day's victories; he snatched up his spear, muttering, "Pallas Athene aids me," and rushed her.

**They came from a far sun in a distant time,
seeking thrills on alien planets. Earth was their
latest stop and its puny humans promised good sport!**



Illustrated by Joe W. Tillotson

Her eyes widened, fear flashing in them, and she began to rise from the ground. The barbaric spear flashed out and ripped her arm; blood flowed and she dropped the sword, screaming.

Diomed heard a voice call urgently, "Go back! Go back immediately to —" And the Goddess Aphrodite disappeared.

He whirled to face the newcomer and saw another God confronting him. The extent of his action was beginning to be realized but Diomed had gone too far to turn back now; he charged his new opponent, shield held high and sword at the ready. The God lifted his hand, sending forth a bolt of power that brought the Greek to his knees.

Diomed's eyes were filled with sudden fear and despair. "Phoebus Apollo," he quavered.

The God was scornful. "Beware, Diomed," he said. "Do not think to fight with Gods."

The Greek cowered before him.

LATER, in the invisible space ship, hovering five hundred feet above the battle, Cajun faced her, his features impassive and his tone of voice faultless. He was boiling with rage beneath his courtesy.

"I will present your complaint to the Captain, but I would like to remind the Lady Jan that she has been warned repeatedly against appearing in the battle clothed as she is and without greater defenses. It

was fortunate I was able to appear as soon as I did. If you'd been injured seriously, I hesitate to say what repercussions would've taken place on the home planet."

Her eyebrows went up. "Injured seriously! Just what do you mean by that? Do you realize this horrible wound will probably take half the night to heal? You saw that barbarian was insane, why didn't you come to my assistance sooner? You haven't heard the last of this, you inefficient nincompoop. When we return home I'll have you stripped of your rank!"

Cajun's face remained blank. "Yes, your ladyship," he said. "And, before I go, may I deliver a message from the Lady Marid? She said they await you in the salon."

She drew a cape about her and without speaking further, swept from the compartment.

A muscle twitched in his cheek. "Parasites," he muttered savagely, and turned to go to his own quarters where he could change from this ridiculous glittering armor, into his own uniform as ship's officer.

The Lady Jan stormed into the salon where the others had gathered to try the new concoction the steward had named ambrosia. Some of them still wore their costumes, others had changed into the more comfortable dress of their own world.

Her eyes blazed at them. "Who in the name of Makred told that Greek he would conquer anyone he

fought today, even a God? The damned barbarian nearly killed me!"

The Lord Daren laughed gently. "It was Marid; she was playing the Goddess Athene. The sport was rather poor with that new bow of hers so she thought she'd inflame one of the Greeks and see just how berserk he would become if he thought he had the protection of a Goddess."

"He could have killed me!"

"Oh, come, now, Jan, you were barely scratched. Besides, Marid didn't know this Greek, Diomed, was going to run into you, or that he'd have the fantastic nerve to attack whom he thought one of his Gods."

She took up a goblet of the new drink, but she wasn't placated, "I'm of the opinion this stop shouldn't be made; it's too dangerous. I'm going to insist Captain Foren blast the city and obliterate both sides of this barbaric conflict."

THE Lady Marid, who was still dressed in her Pallas Athene armor, broke in. "Don't be so upset, Jan. We're sorry that brute hurt your arm, but what can you expect on this type of cruise? They guaranteed us thrills, didn't they? The very dangers we face are what we're paying so highly for." She laughed lightly. "Besides, that costume you wear as Aphrodite. Really! I don't know why you didn't get worse than a scratch on

the arm. These Greeks aren't exactly civilized — nor exactly cold-blooded, either."

The other's face went red and she snatched another of the drinks from a tray. "Nevertheless, I'm going to complain. This war is absolutely too perilous to be part of the tour. And after all the trouble we went to in order to learn their fantastic languages and customs. Why I was under that damned Psycho-Study Impressor for nearly two hours!"

Captain Foren had entered behind her. "I agree with you Lady Jan, and can only apologize. I should've realized last week when Lord General Baris, fighting in the battle as the God Ares on the Trojan side, was speared by this same Greek. The company would never hear the end of it, if, on one of these cruises, a passenger was seriously injured."

The Lord General Baris shrugged. "It was wonderful sport. I killed a score of the beggars that day. I don't know how that one found a chink in my armor. I'll take measures against my costumer when we return home." He grinned wryly. "I doubt if the Emperor would appreciate having one of his generals killed in a primitive war, while on leave."

"I think I'll have to take a crack at this Diomed, myself," Lord Doren said.

The Lady Marid laughed. "If I know you, you'll do it with a

blaster from a hundred feet in the air above him."

Doren smiled in return. "Of course. Do you think I'd make a fool of myself by going down into their battle as Baris does? It's insane. This hand to hand conflict is much too risky."

The Captain changed the subject. "I'm sure you'll all appreciate our next stop," he said. "I plan to visit an even more astounding planet than this. We are to fight the swamp dragons of Venus."

"From what distance, Captain?" Lord Doren drawled.

The Captain smiled. "Their poisonous breath reaches half a mile, so it will be necessary to use long distance weapons."

Lord General Baris scowled. "It sounds too easy. I like to fight humanoids; there's more thrill in killing when your opponent looks like yourself, as do these earthlings."

The Lady Jan was nearing the nasty stage of intoxication. "It wouldn't be so thrilling if you weren't provided with defenses making it practically impossible to be hurt. You wouldn't enter these battles if you weren't sure you'd come out safely."

"I wouldn't deny it. Sport is sport; but I have no desire to be killed at it. At any rate, I'm opposed to killing these swamp dragons. It sounds as though it would be boring, and, Makred knows, we had enough boredom butchering those dwarfs at our last stop."

The Lady Marid backed him. She also thought Venus unattractive. If the Captain was of the opinion this war was too dangerous, wasn't there some other conflict on this planet?

The Captain told them he'd consult with his officers and let them know in the morning.

ONE thing was sure, Captain For-en thought, as he made his way toward the officer's mess. He'd have to get this group of thrill-crazy wastrels away from Troy. If one of them was hurt badly, he'd undoubtedly lose his lucrative position on the swank cruise ship.

The idea was his own, really, and a good one. In a luxury mad world the cry was for new titillations, new pleasures, new planets on which to play, new drugs to bring ever wilder dreams, new foods, new drinks, new loves; but, most of all, new thrills.

Yes, the idea of taking cruise ships of wealthy thrill seekers to the more backward planets and letting them join in primitive wars, had been his. It proved the thrill supreme. His cruises were the rage of half a dozen planets, and the company had increased his pay several times in the past few years. But he knew it could crumple like a house of cards, given one serious injury to a wealthy guest. The theory of the cruise was to let them kill without endangering themselves.

The stop at Troy, had, as a rule,

been a successful one. The Greeks and their opponents were both highly superstitious and readily accepted the presence of the aliens from space as Gods taking place in the battle. Usually, they were too terrified to take measures against the strangers in their gleaming armor, but today had been the second occasion in which a tourist had been injured, in spite of scientific, protective armor.

His officers were awaiting him in the mess hall. They too had been conscious of the wounds suffered by the thrill seeking guests, and hadn't liked it. Lady Jan was the daughter of a noble strong enough to have them all imprisoned, if the whim took him.

Captain Foren growled, "Have any of you an idea? I proposed the Venus trip, but, although they admit being leary about further risks here, they prefer fighting humanoids."

First Officer Cajun said, "Perhaps it would be better to head for the home planet, Captain."

Captain Foren shook his head. "We can't do that; the cruise has another week to go. If we went back now it would be obvious that something had happened and just bring matters to a head. If we can give them another week of thrills, possibly they'll have forgotten their wounds by the time we return."

The Chief Engineer turned to Cajun. "At what stage of development is this planet?"

"I believe it's at H-2. Why?"

"I was wondering at the possibility of going forward a few thousand years in time and participating in a war that dealt less in hand to hand conflict. They could have their fill of killing, with a minimum of danger—protected, of course, with suitable anti-projectile force fields."

CAJUN went over to the ship's Predictinformer and spoke into its mouthpiece. "What will be the military development of this planet in two or three thousand years; and would it be safe to take the ship into that period?"

They awaited the answer, which came approximately one minute later. "Probability shows the inhabitants of Terra will begin utilizing explosives for propelling missiles in two thousand years. About five hundred years later they will have developed this means of warfare to its ultimate. Safety for the ship is indicated."

Captain Foren mused, "That sounds practical. We could participate in some war in which our passengers could use such weapons as snipers, from a distance." Another thought struck him. "Besides, the Lord General Baris is quite intrigued with the possibilities involved in fighting the humanoids here. He had spoken of transporting large numbers of his troops to Terra and using the planet for a training ground in actual combat. Undoubtedly, the earthlings of the

future would make better victims for his soldiers than these more primitive types. It might be well to look at the future of this planet."

The First Engineer said, "Such a step would wipe out the development of civilization on the planet."

Captain Foren shrugged impatiently. He ordered Cajun to make immediate preparations to take the ship forward twenty-five hundred years, and gave instructions to a sub-officer to locate a suitable conflict as soon as they arrived, so that the guests could begin their participation when they awoke in the morning.

The ship arrived effortlessly in its new location in time, but when the sub-officer returned from his patrol, First Officer Cajun took him to the Captain's quarters himself.

He saluted. "I don't believe this is quite it, Captain."

"Why not? Weren't there any wars in progress?"

Cajun said, "It wasn't that. There were several. They don't seem to have reached the development for which we were looking. For instance, in the region in which we've landed, the first stage of a conflict between two nations have begun. The countries are called Mexico and the United States and they're fighting over the northwestern possessions of the former, although, as always, both sides claim they are involved for idealistic reasons. However, the fighting still consists, to an extent, of hand to hand conflict. The sol-

diers carry explosive propelled missile weapons, but they're usually slow in loading and single shot in operation. Swords are carried at the ends of these weapons so that after it is fired the soldier may dash forward and engage his enemy personally."

The Captain was glum. "That's as bad as before, and I can't risk our passengers in any more hand to hand combat."

"Sir, these humanoids on Terra seem slow in progressing but I have an idea if we move forward another hundred years they will be using automatic weapons, and hand to hand combat will be antiquated. The calendar system they use calls this the year 1845. I suggest we travel forward to 1945.

Captain Foren made a snap decision. "All right, we'll go forward a century. As soon as we arrive, have a patrol go out again."

WHEN Captain Foren awoke in the morning, the hot desert sun was already well into the sky. The invisible space ship had stationed itself a hundred feet off the ground in an area in which there were no signs of habitation and few of the works of man. He strode leisurely to the control room and returned the greetings of the morning watch.

"Any word from the patrol as yet?" he asked.

First Officer Cajun was worried. "No, sir, and he should've been

back long before this."

"I trust nothing has happened to him. Has he reported at all?"

"Only once, several hours ago. Evidently there is a globewide war raging." Cajun ran his tongue over thin lips. "Our passengers should have excellent sport. In fact, Captain, if you can spare me, I would like to participate myself."

Captain Foren looked at him and laughed. "You, also? I'm afraid this must be a racial characteristic, this love of imposing death. I must confess, on my first trips, I too liked to join in the sport." He turned and glanced out an observation port. "What is that steel tower down there on the desert?"

"We couldn't decide, Captain, unless it's some structure for conducting tests of some sort or other. The surprising thing about it is that our instruments detect radioactivity . . ."

The Captain interrupted sharply,

"Has anyone checked the ship's Predictinformer on whether or not this era is completely safe?"

Cajun said, "I assumed that you had, sir." He stepped to the instrument and spoke into its mouthpiece. "What is the military development of this planet? Is the ship safe?"

The Predictinformer began its report. "In the past thirty-five years military science on Terra has developed tremendously under the impetus of two world-wide conflicts. At present the dominant power on this continent is experimenting with nuclear fission . . ."

Sudden fear came into the eyes of the captain of the thrill ship. "That radioactive steel tower! Blast off," he shrieked, "Blast off!"

The Predictinformer went on dispassionately, ". . . and is about to test an atomic bomb against which this ship's defenses would be . . ."

It got no further.

THE END