

# SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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COVER BY VAN DONGEN • ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEECHAM • EBEL • EBERLE • ORBAN

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# WHAT GOES UP

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

ILLUSTRATED BY BEECHAM

What goes up must come down, as they say about even the stock market. It was true enough, until Edgarson found a world where the law of averages was repealed. They ran strictly to flat top square waves: very square.

"All right, space rat, out you go," the junior officer said with a wide, boyish grin.

"Couldn't we talk this over?" Edgarson asked, edging down the gangplank with a certain dignity. "I mean, to leave me in this backwoods—" He gestured at the dusty, deserted landing field, the raw brick buildings, the tar road; all the signs of a low-order atomic civilization.

"I assure you," Edgarson went on, "I would be glad to work my passage if you'd just take me to some civilized—"

The port closed with a clang. Edgarson sighed and walked away from the ship. My God, he thought. I don't even know the name of the planet where they've gone and dumped me!

He pushed back his shoulders as he reached the tar road. Behind him the ship lifted, silently and efficiently, and was gone. Once the ship was out of sight, Edgarson allowed his back to slump.

Those damned starships . . .

But he couldn't blame them. A stowaway has no rights. He had known that. But what else could he have done?

After his businesses had gone bankrupt on Moira II, Edgarson had to get out, but fast. The fastest way without capital was to hide aboard a long-haul transport.

The ship had taken off just in time. The authorities of the Belt Stars, of which Moira II was the proudest jewel, were quite strict



with what they termed "irresponsible" bankruptcies.

Unfortunately, the ship's captain was equally strict with unpaid-for weight. They had dropped Edgarson's scrawny 132 pounds on the first oxygen planet on their course.

What was he going to do now?

Edgarson glanced back at the signs in front of the little spaceport. Luckily they were in Fammish, one of the great interstellar tongues. The planet was called Porif. He had never heard of it.

One of the signs pointed to the city of Mif. Edgarson followed it, hands in his pockets, scuffing his feet along the rough tar.

This, he told himself was the end. The absolute end. He'd never get off this place. Four times he had made fortunes, and four times lost them in the maddening uncertainties of beltstar finances.

I'm through, he thought. Might as well hang myself.

A passing vehicle almost made hanging unnecessary. An antique gas job, it was rolling along at a good seventy miles an hour. Edgarson heard it, turned, and there it was, swaying over the entire road. His eyes bulged. It was coming straight for him.

At the last moment he unparalyzed his muscles enough to leap into the ditch beside him.

The car ground to a halt a hundred feet up the road.

"You maniac!" Edgarson screamed in passable Fammish. Suicide was all very well. But when one is almost killed—

"What are you doing now?" he shouted at the man, who was backing his car. "Coming back for another try?"

"Terribly sorry," the man said, smiling pleasantly. He was large, red-faced and red-headed. "Did not mean to frighten you."

"Frighten me!" Edgarson said. "The hell with that. You almost killed me."

"Oh, no," the man said, eyeing him closely. "You're not old enough."

"Sure I'm old enough," Edgarson said. "Anyone is old enough to die."

"You must be an outworlder," the redheaded man said. "I should have noticed your accent. Well, friend, you can't die here. Not yet."

"I can die any place or time I want," Edgarson said, feeling silly.

The redheaded man thought that over for a moment, rubbing the side of his nose with a freckled forefinger. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Thirty-six."

"I thought you were about my age. Here on Porif you can't die

before you're fifty-four. At least, not during this cycle."

Edgarson didn't have any immediate answer for that. He just gaped.

"My name's Fals," the man told him. "Could I offer you a ride into town?" Edgarson climbed into the car. In a few moments Fals had it careening crazily over the road.

"You'll kill us both," Edgarson gasped as the landscape whizzed by.

"Well, I *am* a touch euphoric," Fals said. "But the statistics are against it. I won't kill either of us. And the car's insured."

Edgarson rode the rest of the way in stoical silence. He didn't know what sort of place Porif was, and until he found out, he determined to keep quiet. He didn't want to break any taboos. He knew that in the bewildering array of planets in the civilized galaxy, there were some pretty odd spots. Places where reason and common sense went to hell on a trolley. Places where the law of gravity was repealed for six months out of the year, and the verities of Earth science were looked upon as polite fiction.

Natural law, as defined by Earth and Belt scientists, didn't mean much to old mother nature. Perhaps she just hadn't wanted to construct a logical, consistent type of universe.

Edgarson was prepared to accept, tentatively, that he couldn't die before the age of fifty-four. On Porif.

"Here we are," Fals said cheerfully, pulling up in front of a small brick house in what must have been a suburb of the city. "Is there anything I can do for you? Any favor, anything?"

He *must* be euphoric, Edgarson thought. But he wasn't going to let the opportunity slip past him.

"I'm temporarily embarrassed for funds," he began smoothly. "If you could—"

"Say no more," Fals said. "Be my guest. Stay at my house. I couldn't refuse you anything, right now."

"You couldn't?" Edgarson asked, his eyes narrowing.

"Practically nothing. I'm at the extreme peak of an altruist upswing. One of my personality characteristics. It'll pass in a day or two, of course. I'll probably regret all this exceedingly. But come in."

Just outside the doorway he stopped. "Don't mind my sister," he said in a confiding whisper. "Hetta's not feeling so good. You know how ectomorphs can be? Well, she's just coming out of the bottom of a depressive trough. Be nice to her." He

laughed uproariously and kicked open the door.

Inside, it was what he had expected of a lower atomic age dwelling. Lumpy couches, blobby pictures on the wall, ridiculous curtains and overstuffed chairs.

Edgarson looked around warily, trying to figure out his next move. Either his patron was slightly off his track, or there was something unique about this planet. *Depressive trough*. Even citizens of the more sophisticated regions didn't have that sort of knowledge at their fingertips.

"Are you a psychologist?" he asked Fals, sitting down on a chair.

"No," Fals said. "I'm a fireman, usually."

"Usually?"

"Yes. I'm on a vacation now. All of us are."

"Then who fights the fires?"

"What fires?" Fals asked, surprised.

Edgarson was about to start over when the depressive sister came in.

"Oh, I'm tired," she said, ignoring Edgarson and collapsing on the couch. "Tired and unhappy."

Edgarson stared at her for a moment, before remembering his manners and standing up. The girl was as redheaded as her brother, but slim where he was

corpulent. Ectomorph, had he said? Well, Hetta was slender, but she was also filled where a female ectomorph should be filled.

Edgarson felt his spirits brighten. Suicide could wait. This might prove interesting. There might even be some exploitable commercial angle.

For a while conversation was desultory. Fals turned on a little screen which seemed to be a primitive brother of solidovision. He was soon engrossed in what purported to be a comedy program.

The redheaded girl, Hetta, didn't stir. Once she murmured something about the cruelty of the world, but it was too vague for Edgarson to answer.

Finally, she lifted herself off the couch and essayed a tentative smile.

"You see?" Fals whispered. "She's out of the trough."

Edgarson shook his head. A fireman who didn't fight fires, but who had a pretty accurate psychological knowledge. Well, he'd have to find out.

"I think I'll make supper," Hetta said, and jumped off the couch.

The meal was very pleasant. Hetta was fascinated by the great outside world she had never seen. She listened breathlessly

to Edgarson's tales of interstellar commerce, and of the ridiculous drop in the stock market on Moira II that had wrecked him.

She put the soup on the table and asked, "How could that happen?" Edgarson smiled at her charming naivete. "Weren't you in a cycle?" she wanted to know. "Didn't you *know* the market was going to drop?"

Edgarson did his best to explain how business worked. How you could occasionally detect trends, calculate rises, prepare for drops. But not always. And that, even at best, market calculation was guesswork.

"But that's ridiculous," Hetta said, frowning prettily. "How can you live in such an uncertain world? I'm glad it's not that way here."

"You must excuse my sister," Fals said, smiling. "She doesn't know anything of the outside world—"

Edgarson ignored him. "How does it work here?" he asked the girl.

"Why, it's down in the books," she said, as one would instruct a child. "The statistics books. If a business is going to be good, the statistics books tell you."

"Aren't the books ever wrong?" Edgarson asked, gently.

She shook her head. "Not during the cycle."

Just then a bell clamored. Fals got up and answered the telephone.

"Yes, yes, yes. Hm. All right, I'll check it." He put down the receiver. "Fire in the 31st Warehouse district." He thought for a moment. "I don't believe it's going to spread."

"You might as well be sure," Hetta said. "I'll bring in the book."

"Hang on," Fals said into the telephone. Hetta struggled back with a fat volume. Edgarson walked over and watched.

The book was entitled *Fire Statistics, City of Mif, Cycle B*.

"Here it is," Fals said, turning a page. "Margat Building, 31st Warehouse district. Just as I thought."

Looking over his shoulder, Edgarson read: "Margat Building, probability 78.4% against a major fire before 18 Arget."

"Hello," Fals said into the telephone. "You're not due for a fire before 18 Arget, and here it isn't even Hovl yet. Don't worry about it. I'll burn itself out pretty soon."

The man on the other end seemed to be giving him an argument. Fals said into the phone, sharply, "Don't tell *me*, pal. I'm a fireman. It's in the book. Probability 78.4 against. Call me if it spreads." He hung up.

"That's how it goes," he said to Edgarson. "These warehouse owners would root a man out of bed for every little flash fire. I don't know why they don't read the statistics on their own buildings."

"I don't get it," Edgarson said. "Was there a fire in that warehouse?"

"That's what *he* said," Fals said, finishing his soup. Hetta cleared the plates and brought in the meat course. "Probably a wastebasket or something. They always look bigger than they are."

"But if he reported a fire—" Edgarson began.

"It can't be a big fire," Hetta told him. "Otherwise it would be down in the statistics."

"Statistics can be wrong," Edgarson said, remembering several beatings he had taken on sure things.

"Not these," Fals said.

The telephone rang again. "Hello?" Fals said. "I thought so. Of course it burned itself out. No, you didn't disturb me. Don't worry about it. But please, buy a fire statistics book. That way, you won't have to be calling the fire station all the time. I assure you, when a real fire is due, we'll be on the spot—*before* it happens. Good night."

"Could I see this fire book?" Edgarson asked. Fals handed

him the big volume, and Edgarson leafed through it, reading entries at random.

"Joenson farm," one entry read. "Probability 56% no major fire before 7 Novl."

"Mif State Park," read another. "Prob. 64% no major fire before 1 Egl. Prob. 89% fire by 19 Egl, destroying fifty-four acres NE corner."

The rest of the entries followed the same pattern.

"I don't understand this," Edgarson said, closing the book. "I know you can determine a probability, even about fires. That's how insurance works. But how can you know there won't be a fire before the date the book gives? I mean, even if the probability is seventy percent—and I don't see how that's arrived at—there's still a thirty percent chance that there'll be a fire sooner."

"Not here," Fals said, with a touch of local pride. "Not on Porif. Any probability of fifty-one percent or better is as good as one hundred percent during the cycle. We don't believe in exceptions here. What's probable is certain."

"Does that work with everything?" Edgarson asked.

"Of course," Fals told him. "That's why I knew I wouldn't kill you with the car. The statistics for this cycle show that no



one under fifty-four is going to be killed, except under certain specified circumstances which you didn't come under."

"How long is the cycle?" Edgarson asked.

"Ten years. Then a new one starts. Come in the library. I'll show you some of the other books."

Lining one whole wall was a set of books called *Business Statistics, Cycle B*. Leafing through them, Edgarson found that they contained predictions for every business on the planet through the present cycle. They showed the probable profit and loss figures weekly. The businesses that would bankrupt were down, as well as the ones that would boom.

Skimming, Edgarson read: "Jeonings Carbon, common stock. Selling, 145, 1 Marstt. In two weeks, prob. 56% to 189. Constant to Egl, 89% prob., then rise to 720. A period of leveling at 700, then a short steep incline to 842—" That was a summary, of course. A week by week breakdown followed.

"Is this true?" Edgarson asked.

Hetta glanced over his shoulder. "Oh, of course. The stock is at 189 right now. And the rest will follow."

"My Lord," Edgarson said,

and closed the book. If the entry were true, a man could make a fortune by investing now. Invest and sell when it reached 842. Make a profit of—

"Wait a minute," he said. "This can't be true. Everyone on the planet would buy this stuff. That would change the prediction."

"No," Fals said, grinning. "The probable purchases of stocks are estimated pretty closely. No one's going to overload on one stock. We scatter our money around, buy good and bad. We Porifans don't care so much for quick profits."

Edgarson thought it over. He'd have to find out if this prediction business worked every time. If it did, he had stumbled on a gold mine.

A *predictable* stock market, he told himself. Predictable businesses, fire losses. They probably predicted earthquakes and floods, too. A smart man could make a fortune in a year. Or less.

Of course, he'd need some capital to invest at the start. He'd have to find some way of getting that.

Edgarson discovered, suddenly that Hetta was glancing at him. That was significant. But she was also pretending that she wasn't looking at him. That was even more significant.

Edgarson decided that it might

not be too difficult to raise the initial capital.

The next morning, Edgarson went to Fals' library. The Porifan didn't own all the statistics books, but he did have everything that pertained to the city of Mif, and its immediate area.

Ignoring breakfast, Edgarson began to read, skipping back and forth between the 190 volumes of *Business Statistics, Cycle B*. It was quite a book.

It told the future history of every business on the planet, and Edgarson was unable to doubt its validity. The conservative, quiet air of the books was almost proof in itself.

"Jacnx Mauf. Co. Common 23. 13 Luggat, rise to 26, prob. 76%  
19 Luggat, rise to 28, prob. 93%  
1 Mener, drop to 18, prob. 98%."

How could he doubt it?

Edgarson made the attempt, in the spirit of caution. He ate breakfast at lunchtime and went to the Mif central library. According to the evidence in old newspapers and outdated statistics books, all previous predictions had been one hundred percent correct. One hundred percent!

Edgarson checked further. He found that a cycle lasted for ten revolutions of the planet around its primary—ten years. That there was a gap between cycles,

evidently for the purpose of collecting and publishing the statistics for the next cycle. The cycles were always labeled A and B, one following another.

Checking one cycle against another, Edgarson found that there wasn't much difference. Some new businesses, the closing of some old ones; a few points change in probability-ratings. But no real turnover.

Edgarson wasn't interested in theories; he wanted profits. Still, he felt obliged to find out some of the reasons why. Accordingly, he dug into a stack of reference books.

Late that night, he walked back to Fals' house. He had skimmed the history and psychology of Porif, and he was able to extrapolate a few answers from it.

According to their own psychology books, the people of Porif were simpler, less unpredictable than the complex peoples of Earth and the Belt Stars. It was possible to get a coherent, predictable picture of a Porifan's personality; a feat impossible with an Earthman.

The hard thing, Edgarson knew, was individual psychology. Once you have that mastered, the psychology of aggregates is far simpler.

Edgarson found that the Porifans were conformists. Con-

sciously and unconsciously they believed their own statistics, and wanted to preserve them. Individuals went out of their way to fit into their predicted niche. On perverse Moira II that would never work.

The favorite hobby of most planets is war. A very few are more interested in art, or religion. On Porif the passion was, and had always been, statistics and probabilities.

And nature seemed to help them. The perverse old lady had repealed the usual law of averages on Porif. Instead of a constant leveling process, high predictions stayed constant. So, if a fire started ahead of time, there was never a draft to fan it into a conflagration. If a man was in an auto accident before his predicted moment, he somehow was thrown clear.

Nature conspired to make Porif an understandable, predictable place to live.

A perfect place for an Earthman to make a quick fortune.

Edgarson slept on it. The next morning he walked down to Fals' library to consider his problem again. Seating himself in Fals' overstuffed chair, he popped a native variety of plum in his mouth and thought.

The first step in making a fortune was to raise capital, and

the first step in raising capital was to marry Hetta. Securing some of her funds through marriage, he could speculate—if a sure thing can be called speculation. He had about six months until the end of cycle B. He could be rich by that time.

And marrying Hetta wouldn't be too unpleasant a task, either. Edgarson liked ectomorphic redheads, properly filled.

No time like the present, he told himself. Hetta had gone to town, shopping, and Fals was off waiting for a fire to start on an outlying farm.

Edgarson pulled down the index to the *Human Statistics* book, Cycle B. (170 volumes, cross indexed). Hetta, he found, was on page 1189 of volume 23. Her classification was *unstable ectomorph, female, auburn, 32-saa3b*.

According to the book, a person of Hetta's makeup had a primary five day elation-depression cycle; normal for auburn ectomorphs. The trough usually occurred at sunset of the third day. During that time, auburn ectomorphs desired comfort, poetry and understanding, soft music and beautiful sunsets.

Edgarson grinned, jotted the information on a pad and read on.

The elation-high occurred on the fifth day, and lasted for al-

most two hours. There was a strong tendency toward amorosness at such times (89% probability), and a desire for adventure, mystery, the unknown.

Edgarson grinned even wider, and read on.

Superimposed on all this was a longer, gentler cycle, characterized as a secondary tenderness swing, over a period of thirty-five days.

And a great deal more pertinent data.

Edgarson drew up a graph of Hetta's cycles for the next month, with appropriate comments and advice to himself, and read the last paragraph.

Hetta's instability was one common to ectomorphic red-heads. A pathological tendency, very repressed, probability 7%.

Which, he knew, was Porif double-talk for never.

Armed with this data, Edgarson began his wooing.

"Let me tell you about the great planets," he said to her at the height of her elation period. "Let me tell you about space."

"Oh, please do," Hetta said. "I so wish I could travel!"

"And why not?" Edgarson said, sliding his arm gently across the top of the couch. "Why not speed between the stars in a two-bunk scouter? Know the adventure of strange ports! The thrill of distant places!"

"How wonderful," Hetta said, and didn't flinch when the arm gently touched her shoulder.

When he wasn't wooing Hetta, Edgarson was busy with Business Statistics. He made up a list of ten businesses that were going to boom, figured out how long he would hold stock, what he would invest the profits in, how much he could buy on margin.

His profits at the end of a month, he estimated, would be in the hundred thousands.

"You are so delicate," he said to her, at the extreme tip of her tenderness swing. "So fair, so gentle."

"Am I?" Hetta asked.

"Yes," Edgarson said, with a sigh. "I wish—"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing." He sighed again, and proceeded to give her a fictitious account of his childhood. It served its purpose. All Hetta's latent tenderness came to the fore.

"You poor boy," she said.

The omnipresent arm was around her.

"I care for you, you know." Edgarson said huskily, feeling ridiculous. He was used to the breezy give-and-take approach of Earth and Moira II. On civilized planets a definite understanding was reached within five minutes or so. But that wouldn't work on

Porif, or on a girl with Hetta's character-coefficients.

Edgarson proceeded as a tender-hearted lover, wondering when Porif would emerge from its purple period.

While he wooed her, Edgarson extrapolated an easy ten billion dollar profit from the *Business Statistics*. He had it all figured out now; how he would make his initial profits, how much he would plough back, how much he would extend himself on margin, how much save.

And the other things. Land he was going to buy, farms and waterways. Insurance companies, banks, federal investments. The ten year cycle had only a few months to go. He wanted a measure of security during the gap between cycles.

The climax of his love-making came at the trough of Hetta's depression. He bought her candy; he showered her with tenderness, love and understanding. A phonograph was playing Hetta's favorite song at the moment Edgarson proposed. And to top it all, before their eyes was a magnificent, multicolored sunset; a sunset lovers dream of.

It wasn't chance, of course. Edgarson had planned it carefully. The sunset had been listed in *Weather Statistics, Cycle B, combined with Holinim's Greater Book of Sunsets.*

The proposal was a predictable success, odds 89.7% for. They were married three days later.

Armed with more of his wife's money than even he had expected, Edgarson started to invest. He had five months to go, and he was going to make the most of it.

The statistics books were one hundred percent accurate. Edgarson's profits came through exactly as he had planned. Down to the last decimal point, the books were right.

He tried to put his brother-in-law on to a few good things, but Fals was in a sullen period. He held on to a small block of mediocre stocks, resolutely, and refused to speculate.

"What's the matter with you?" Edgarson asked him, one day when his profit had hit eight hundred thousand. "Don't you believe in your own statistics?"

"Of course I do," Fals said, glowering at him. "But this isn't the way we do business here."

Edgarson stared at him, baffled. He was unable to understand a man who didn't take money when it was practically handed to him. It was the Porifans' most inhuman characteristic.

"Aren't you going to invest in anything?" Edgarson asked.

"Of course I am," Fals said.

"I'm buying a block of Heemstl limited."

Edgarson went over to *Business Statistics*—now his bible—and looked up the concern. The book gave it a 75 percent probability of a sizeable loss during the cycle.

"What the hell are you buying that for?" Edgarson asked.

"Well," Fals said, "They need some more operating capital. Young concern, you know. I figure—"

"Please stop, you weary me," Edgarson said. Fals looked even more sullen and left.

What could you do, Edgarson asked himself. Of course you had to have people investing in poor stocks. Not *everyone* can get rich. And it was very noble of the Porifans, to support their failing businesses. But what could you do with people like that?

Take their money, he told himself.

The next months were feverish ones for Edgarson. It was necessary to buy at exactly the right time, sell at the right time. The Porifan stock market was like an orchestra. Delicacy in timing had to be observed, to get everything possible out of it.

Edgarson's businesses spread.

He didn't have much time for Hetta during these months.

Building a great fortune was absorbing, night-and-day work. But he figured he would make it all up to her later.

Besides, she thought he was wonderful.

With the cycle nearing its end, Edgarson planned out his procedure for the hiatus. During the year gap, new predictions would be assembled and published. But Edgarson wasn't going to be caught napping.

Most of his businesses he felt, were bound to bridge the gap between cycle B and A. They were sound concerns with high probability ratings. But he wanted to be sure, so he sold his fluctuating wildcat stocks and put money in farms, city real estate, hotels, parks, government bonds, anything that looked sound.

He put excess profits in the banks. It was possible, he supposed, for a ninety-five-percent-good bank to go busted. But not five of them! Not ten of them!

"I've got a good tip for you," his brother-in-law said, two days before the end of the cycle. "Buy some Verstt. Buy it big."

Upon looking it up, Edgarson discovered that Verstt was on the verge of receivership. He looked at Fals coldly. The Porifan probably resented his presence here. Didn't approve of the way he was cleaning up the cash, and wanted to slow him down

"I'll think it over," Edgarson said, ushering Fals to the door.

How could you argue with an idiot?

The day came, ending Cycle B. Edgarson spent the morning at his telephones, waiting for news.

The phone rang.

"Yes?" Edgarson asked.

"Sir, Markinson company stock dropping."

Edgarson smiled, and put down the telephone. Markinson had been a good investment. He'd ride any loss down. After he got through this depression—if that was what it was—he'd have ten more years to recoup in. And then he'd get out!

Take a lot, leave a little, that was his motto.

The telephones started ringing constantly. More of his businesses were failing, dropping, going bankrupt. The bottom had dropped out of manufacturing. Iron ore was slag on the market. Mines were worthless.

Still, Edgarson wasn't alarmed. There was still real estate, farms, insurance, waterways, federal projects—

A telephone call informed him that his largest farm had burned to the ground, crops and all.

"Good," Edgarson said. "Collect the insurance."

Another call informed him that his chief insurance company

had gone bankrupt, as had its underwriters.

Edgarson started to sweat. He was having a few bad breaks, but—

It did go on. Telephones rang night and day. The banks started to fail! One after another, Edgarson's gilt-edged concerns dwindled and dropped. And the damndest things happened to Edgarson's other concerns.

Farms were burnt to the ground, roads were flooded, canals were exploded. People were hurt on his line, and sued. Tornadoes hit, earthquakes followed. Dams built to last a century burst. Buildings collapsed.

Coincidence, Edgarson told him, holding on to his morale with a death-like grip.

Then the federal government announced that it would go into temporary receivership, if anyone would take it.

That killed a few more of Edgarson's billions.

It made depressions in the belt group seem like mild prosperity.

It took just under a month to strip Edgarson of most of his holdings. Too numb to think, he stumbled into Fals' library. His wife was there, curled up in a corner. Evidently she was depressive again. Fals was standing, arms folded across his chest, staring at him self-righteously.

"What happened?" Edgarson croaked.

"During the hiatus," Fals told him, "All odds are reversed."

"Huh?"

"Didn't you know that?" Fals said. "I thought you were a big finance man."

"Give," Edgarson said.

"How do you think the statisticians get their figures?" Fals told him. "If the major predictions came true all the time, they'd be one hundred percent. During the gap, everything that was below fifty percent probability—and therefore never came about—obtains."

"Gah," said Edgarson.

"Look, suppose you wanted certain odds to average out, as they must. Something is ninety percent certain. It works out one hundred percent of the time for ten years. In order for the prediction of ninety percent to be right, it would have to be ten percent wrong for ten years, or 100 percent wrong for one year.

"Understand? If a business is ninety percent sure of success for the ten year cycle, it has to be 100 percent sure of failure for that year. It *must* fail."

"Say it again," Edgarson mumbled.

"I think you understand it now," Fals said. "That's why all

of us buy low-probability stocks during the cycle. They work out fine during the gap."

"Oh, Lord," Edgarson said, and sat down.

"You didn't think your stocks would go up forever, did you?" Fals asked.

Edgarson had thought just that. Or rather, he had taken it for granted. Logically, he knew Fals was right. On other planets, odds are constantly averaging. Not on Porif. Here, everything went one way or the other. Ten years, during which time all the highs obtained. Then a year, during which the former lows obtained.

Of course, it averaged quite nicely. But what a way to do it!

He was dimly aware that Fals had left the room.

Somewhere a telephone was ringing.

"Yeh?" Edgarson said, taking it on the library extension. He listened for a while, then hung up.

He had just been informed that he was several billion dollars in debt, largely due to marginal buying.

On Porif they had prisons for irresponsible bankruptcies.

"Well," Edgarson said, "I guess I'll just have to—"

"Stand still, damn you," Hetta said, getting to her feet. She was holding a pistol in both hands.



It was an old, chemically operated revolver, of a sort that civilized nations hadn't used in centuries. But it was as capable of killing as a more modern arm.

"Oh, how I hate you," Hetta said, in her flamboyant style. "I hate everyone, but you the worst. Stand still!"

Edgarson was calculating the odds against his jumping out the library window safely. Unfortunately he didn't have a book handy to give him the figures.

"I'm going to shoot you in the stomach," Hetta said, with a smile that made his flesh crawl. "I want to see you die slowly."

That did it. Hetta's seven percent instability was coming out, exactly as the minor odds against tornadoes, floods and earthquakes had come out. She was a murderess!

No wonder, Edgarson thought, she had been so easy to marry.

"Stop swaying," Hetta said, taking careful aim.

Edgarson crashed through the window, the explosion of the gun deafening him. He didn't stop to see whether he was dead or not, but ran full tilt for the spaceport.

He hoped the odds were in his favor.

"O.K., space rat," the grin-

ning young officer said. "Out you go." He pushed Edgarson down the gangplank.

"Where am I?" Edgarson asked. He had climbed aboard the ship before an irate mob seized him. The captain had taken him one stop, but no further.

"What's it matter?" the officer asked, prodding him.

"If you would consider taking me to a civilized port—" Edgarson began.

The port slammed behind him.

Well, this is the end, he told himself. This was the end of the road, the absolute blank wall. Here he was, on another backwoods planet. He'd never get off this one. Might as well commit suicide.

"Hello," someone said. Edgarson looked up. In front of him was a green skinned native. On each of his three arms the native wore a bracelet of what looked like platinum. In each bracelet was what looked like a gigantic diamond.

The native was wheeling a wheelbarrow filled with dirt. The wheelbarrow seemed to be made of solid gold.

"How do you do, friend?" Edgarson said, walking up to the native and smiling.