

Jeff awarded himself a day off and took Mona around the city

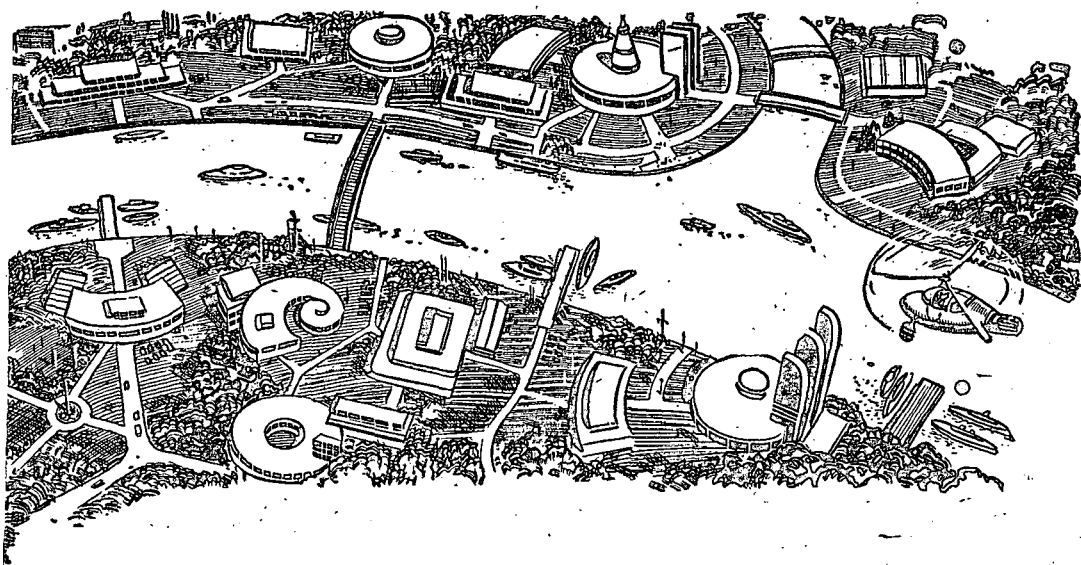
I

THE Solar Visicasting System owned and occupied its own building on the Avenue of the Planets in Nuyork. The Visibuilding, as it was known, was one hundred and seventy storeys of imposing steel, stone and glass, terraced and scalloped in the most modern design. In it were the five hundred huge studios in which SVS produced the shows which were visicast through its thousands of affiliates all over Terra and, since they

had built hundreds of coaxial satellites, throughout the Galactic Federation. There were thirty storeys filled with clerical help, script girls, page boys and the stenographers' pool. There were forty storeys of executives—the higher you went the more important the executive, culminating finally in the private office of the president of the network, which occupied the entire 170th floor.

In studio 100-C, they were rehearsing

He Had a Galaxy Full of Prospective Customers



LOVE THAT AIR!

a movelet by

KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

the Galaxy Gaieties. They were doing a costume piece on the musical, and in one corner of the studio they'd built a field, complete with babbling brook, towering trees, and such scarce Terran animals as horses and cows. The rehearsal was temporarily at a standstill while the director argued with a representative of Nojul, Ransome, Denning and Eeee, the advertising agency. The latter claimed that the makeup on one of the cows didn't

look authentic, while the director was patiently explaining they'd used the best research man in the business.

Jeff Reynolds had taken advantage of the lull to make a date for lunch with Mona Parker, the beautiful star. Having accomplished this, he blew her a kiss and started to leave. The director saw him.

"Jeff, boy," he called. "You like?"

"What's your rating?" Jeff asked.

"Two thousand fifty-four on the Beel-

But He Had Only One Product to Sell—Himself!

son Rating. Two thousand fifty-three on the Stoooper."

"Then I like," Jeff replied. "I love. I adore. And you're a sweetheart."

"I love you, boy," the director said and went back to his argument with the advertising representative of Fleet Chairs—"Treat Your Seat to a Fleet"—who sponsored the show.

Jeff left the studio and entered the Level Converter. As he stepped in, he noticed a small, handsome man heading energetically for the studio. He was Guy dolla Moran, vice president in charge of network programs. Although there were plenty of official reasons why he might visit the studio, Jeff knew that he was going to ask for a luncheon date with Mona Parker. He grinned to himself, imagining the expression on the vice president's face on being turned down.

After a varied career as writer and director, Jeff Reynolds was the supervisor for night-time visicasts for SVS. The next step up, if he could make it, was a vice presidency. It was generally agreed in the industry that Jeff was a young man who was going places.

He always drank Martian whisky on the rocks, bought all his clothes at Tookes Brothers, and said the things that were expected of rising young executives. The only thing that might mar his prospects was that Guy dolla Moran was his immediate superior and they were both interested in the same girl. But Jeff was confident of the outcome. He knew that Mona also went out with dolla Moran, but he was sure that she was merely being politic. And he was equally certain that dolla Moran would accept the whole thing with good grace when he realized that the best man had won. Jeffry was also well aware that the president of SVS, Matthew Anderson*,

*Matthew Anderson, only a few years older than Jeff, was considered the top man in visicasting circles. His reputation stemmed from the time when, as a mere vice president, his influence caused the election laws of Beta Hydri III to be changed. Since that time, the president of Beta Hydri is the man who receives the most box tops (from Wheatley's Toasted Comet Pops, of course) from the visiscreen audience. Only those persons owning a visiscreen set are eligible to vote. Whenever advertising or visicasting men get to talking shop over their Martian-whisky-on-the-rocks sooner or later the conversation will get around to the sheer genius of Matthew Anderson.

thought highly of him and this was an important factor.

UPSTAIRS, Jeff had to see one of their regular writers whose latest script he was rejecting. The writer listened in bewilderment while Jeff told the latest funny story and then explained that he didn't like the story.

"I didn't feel it in here," he said, thumping his chest, when the writer demanded to know why he didn't like it. "I love you, sweetheart, but you've got to hit me."

Looking as if he'd like to, the writer picked up his script and departed. Keeping a close eye on the time, Jeff saw three more writers. One he told that they all loved his script and they only wanted a few changes; if he'd rewrite the lead character, change the motivation, and give it a new ending, they'd buy it. The second writer wanted an increase in his rate and was treated to a long story of how production costs were going up. The third one was a new writer they were considering for a new show and Jeff raved over every idea they discussed, although he privately concluded the fellow was a troublemaker. He wanted to introduce too many new, untried ideas.

After the session with writers, Jeff dropped in on two producers and a stage designer and went over plans for shows coming up the next day. Then he just had time to dash to the conference room for a general discussion of the new script on their biggest dramatic show. Guy dolla Moran, John Leeds, the script editor, Al Lemster, the director, and Veno Harrison, the writer, were already there waiting for him. He noticed that dolla Moran looked less friendly than usual.

As they always did at these conferences, the rest of them relaxed in various poses and prepared to hear Guy dolla Moran read the script aloud. There had been a time when the vice president had considered himself an actor and he read scripts with considerable feeling.

He read the first line of the script and

leaned back, closing his eyes. "I'm seeing it," he explained. He always offered the same explanation, but as the rest of them were also in some stage of seeing or feeling it, they paid no attention.

"Good," he said after a moment of silence. "Am I right, boys?" The others quickly agreed.

The reading of the script went fine for six or seven pages, but then dolla Moran read a line and when he'd finished seeing it he was frowning.

"No, Veno," he said, shaking his head. "My mother wouldn't understand that line. Am I right, boys?"

There was total agreement from all ex-

place, Veno. After all, I'm not a writer." He continued with the reading. At the end of the script there were only some three hundred lines that needed rewriting and everyone was agreed that they had a good script.

Jeff Reynolds rushed off to a meeting with the network censor and they managed to cut offensive things from ten shows before lunch time.

Mona Parker was waiting by the studio door when Jeff arrived. Downstairs, they grabbed a helicab and went to the Venusian Haven for lunch. The food there was good, the tables nicely secluded, and there would be sure to be one

~~~~~ Brethren of the Ulcer ~~~~~

ONE of Ken Crossen's most popular stories was the inimitable THINGS OF DISTINCTION (SS, March 1952) in which he performed a wicked bit of vivisection upon galactic hucksters. Carrying on the tradition, Mr. Crossen returns to the fray with a new dose of insecticide for the advertising moguls—the brethren of the ulcer. Some of the characters you've met before appear briefly herein, though it is not actually a sequel to THINGS OF DISTINCTION. It is fun though, with many a sage bit of thinking concealed beneath the gimmicks and gags.

—The Editor

cept the writer. "I don't get you," he said. "What kind of a criticism is that? We got an audience of twenty-seven billion on this show. Who's writing for your mother?"

Four pairs of eyes stared reproachfully at him.

"You don't understand, Veno," Jeff said gently. He'd been a writer himself and he understood them. "If Guy's mother wouldn't understand it, then it's got to go. I've met Guy's mother and let me tell you she's a very unusual woman."

"She'd have to be to have produced him," the writer muttered. But he said it so low that only John Leeds heard him and he managed to turn his snicker into a cough.

"Then we're agreed," Guy dolla Moran said, marking the script with his blue pencil. "You'll think up something in its

or two visigossips there who would report them as an item on the next visicast.

After a couple of drinks and a leisurely lunch of Sabikian pheasant, Jeff proposed for the twenty-seventh time. And for the twenty-seventh time, Mona said maybe.

"Of course, I love you," she said, "but I've got to think of my career. If I were to marry you now, Guy would be furious. He might even convince the sponsor that they should get a new star for the show. But if you get to be a vice president, he wouldn't dare to fire me then."

"And if I don't get to be a vice president, you might marry him. Is that it?"

"A girl could do worse," Mona said. She reached over and patted his hand. "But even if I married him, I'd still love you. You know that, dear."

"Of course, dear," he said bitterly. "Come on. We'd better get back to the shop. It's the early bird that catches the vice president."

"Don't you mean that catches the worm," Mona said doubtfully.

"Same thing," Jeff snapped. He signed the check and they went out and took a helicab back to SVS.

"Will I see you tonight?" he asked as they reached the door of her rehearsal studio.

"I don't know," she said. "Check with me later, will you, darling?"

"You mean if dolla Moran doesn't ask you, then you'll go with me? I had a date with you last night, so it's his turn tonight if he wants you. Is that the idea?"

"Don't be dreary," she said coldly. "I'm free, Terran and twenty-one."

"Plus," he said savagely and headed for the Level Converter.

II

WHEN he reached his office, there was a facsimile-memo on his desk asking him to go to the president's office as soon as he returned from lunch. He left a videotape for his secretary and took the Level Converter to the top floor.

He stepped off the Converter into the small office of Anderson's secretary. She gave him a friendly smile and waved him on through the door that was marked private.

With the exception of the small cubicle for the secretary, the entire top floor was given over to the private office of Matthew Anderson. He was looked upon as a creative executive, and the decor was planned accordingly. His desk was, naturally, at the far end of the floor. A conveyor belt, made to resemble an old-fashioned cobblestone walk, ran from the doorway to his desk, winding through a pleasant little woodland, at one point arching over a small stream. Artificial birds, perched in the artificial trees, occasionally chirped excerpts from popular opera.

The ceiling of the office was at least

two hundred feet above the floor. Altairan artists had created small clouds to float about near the ceiling and there was a control panel under Anderson's desk so that he could make a small amount of rain fall over the forest. Above the clouds there was a miniature Solar System, with the planets wheeling about the sun in the proper fashion. A concealed spotlight constantly played on the third planet in the tiny system.

Nearer to the desk, there was a well-stocked bar, with two bartenders in constant attendance. Since the bartenders were Algolians, who cannot hear any sound below the supersonic level, their presence was no threat to office secrets.

Jeff Reynolds was still sulking over Mona, so he ignored the conveyor and walked across the office to the desk. By the time he arrived, some fifteen minutes later, he was in better humor, although it was not helped by seeing Guy dolla Moran seated beside the president's desk.

"Jeff, boy," Anderson said warmly. "How's it going, boy?"

"Great," Jeff said.

"It always goes all right with Jeff," Guy dolla Moran put in. "He's a sweetheart, that boy."

"I love you, Guy," Jeff said automatically as he dropped into a chair.

The president of SVS beamed at his two assistants. "Jeff, we've just been talking about you," he said.

"It's not true," Jeff said in mock horror. "I am dentalized by Toothsavers, I'm always up in the air with Mummer, I treat my seat to a Fleet, my best friends do tell me that I need a Ransome Halo, and I was seduced by the sponsor's maiden aunt on a Lover's Carpet."

The last was a reference to the J. C. Lover Carpet Trust, whose slogan was "Nobody can resist a Lover's carpet," and the other two men dutifully laughed at the familiar office joke.

"The thing is," said Anderson, "we got a problem. A toughie. Guy and I were talking it over and he said you were just the boy to solve it. You know, I think he

was right about you after all."

"It just shows," Jeff said, "that the Denebian cannibal was right when he said you can't keep a vice president down. They'll always come up with some kind of an idea." He was suspicious of any recommendations from Guy dolla Moran.

"Love that boy," Guy said lightly.

"Now this is just off the cuff," Anderson said, "but you can pick up the details later. Our trouble is on Acamar Two. It's a Class C planet and trade agreements were signed a little over a year ago. We were on the ball right away and made our usual arrangements. We put up half the money for Acamarans to build their own visistations. Our usual contract, with them agreeing to carry a reasonable percentage of our shows. Guy, how many affiliates do we have on Acamar Two now?"

"One hundred and one, Matt."

"One hundred and one affiliates," Anderson said, "and they're not carrying a single commercial show off the network at present."

"How come?" Jeff asked.

"That's the problem, boy. Glad to see you getting right to the core of it. They're carrying enough sustaining shows so we can't accuse them of breaking the contract, but the minute we sell a show, they drop it and pick up another sustainer. I don't have to tell you that our sponsors are all raising hell over the thing."

"Even the sustainers draw a small audience," the vice president said. "Am I right, Matt?"

"Right, Guy. They're fighting us."

"If they didn't have visicasting before," Jeff said, "maybe they just haven't accepted the medium yet."

"Wrong track, boy," Anderson said. "They took to it like a rocket takes to space. In addition to our affiliate stations, there's something like a hundred independents. They got big ratings, everyone of them. There are close to a billion visisets on the planet."

"Commercial resistance?" Jeff asked.

THE President shook his head. "They carry plenty of commercials on the independents, all native products. And I've seen reports showing that the native products have increased their sales three hundred per cent since they started using visicasting. But they won't listen to our advertising. Most of our sponsors have opened branches on Acamar and they're selling nothing. A great big doughnut. It's serious, boy."

"Rugged," Jeff agreed. It hardly sounded like a job for him, but if Anderson had been convinced that it was there wasn't much he could do about it.

"So far," Anderson continued, "we've been protected against the advertisers trying to make deals directly with the Acamaran independent stations because there's a Federation law against it. But we've just learned that the Planetary Association of Manufacturers is bringing pressure on the Congress to repeal the law. We've got to work fast."

Jeff nodded, still not sure what they were driving at.

"Well, it's all yours, boy," Anderson said. "Clean this one up and you'll be solid. There might even be a little promotion."

"Wait a minute," Jeff said. "Just what is it you want me to do?"

"Clean it up," Anderson snapped. "Straighten them out so they start using our commercial shows. My secretary's already made a reservation for you on an afternoon flight. She'll tell you what time you're leaving. See her on anything else. Get on the ball, boy."

"Who's in charge in our Acamaran office?" Jeff asked.

"An Acamaran. I think his name is Tokka. He's vice president in charge of Acamar, but you'll be in charge when you get there. I've already dictated a visitape on it."

"Tokka? Is that his first or last name?"

The president looked at the vice president and the latter responded. "I think," he said, "that Acamarans have only one name."

"What kind of life on Acamar?" Jeff asked.

"What kind of life?" repeated Anderson. He seemed to be losing his patience. "The kind of life that won't buy our commercial shows, that's the kind. Don't bother me with details, Jeff, boy. Nobody ever got anywhere by standing around asking questions."

"Jeff'll take care of it," Guy dolla Moran said. "Am I right, lover boy?"

"When were you ever wrong?" Jeff returned, being careful to keep any suggestion of irony out of his voice. He turned and trudged back through the artificial forest.

Anderson's secretary handed him his reservation on the Pan-Galactic Spaceways and told him that his ship took off at four that afternoon. He had about an hour to make it. She told him that she'd also made a reservation for him at the Bahari Hotel in Azoi City, the capital of Acamar. She too was unable to tell him anything about the natives of Acamar.

By this time he was convinced that the whole thing was a scheme of dolla Moran's to get him away from Mona Parker. He strongly suspected that every experienced troubleshooter in SVS had already fallen down on the job and that dolla Moran had seized upon it as a perfect method to get him out of the way and at the same time stop his rapid advancement in the company. He'd never thought about it before, but dolla Moran probably wouldn't like the idea of another V.P. in the same department.

III

HIS suspicions only increased his frustrated anger. Even if he were right, if the mess on Acamar was completely insoluble, there was nothing he could do about it. He'd still have to go to Acamar and fall flat on his face in an orderly fashion. To protest the assignment would be the quickest way to become unemployed.

He stopped off at his office and told his secretary he'd be away for a few weeks.

Just on the off chance that he might come through, he left a few orders for his assistant which he knew would be beyond that young man's ability. There was no point in giving the company the idea that his department could run just as well without him.

He stopped at the rehearsal studio to see Mona, but they were in the midst of a scene and an associate producer told him that they wouldn't break for another hour. There was nothing to do but go without seeing her. He left her a note and went downstairs.

A heli cab took him to his apartment and he packed. He saw that he still had a few minutes to spare. A rather pleasant idea had occurred to him. Another cab quickly carried him to the main offices of the Fleet Seater Trust and the magic name of the Solar Visicasting System succeeded in getting him sandwiched in between two regular appointments.

Old Homer Van Fleet, president of the chair trust, scowled at him. "Well, young man," he said, "I hope you've come to tell me that you people are going to do a better job for me."

"I believe we're doing a pretty good job," Jeff said. "The show has a big rating and I've seen the reports of your increase in sales since you started sponsoring Galaxy Gaieties."

"That's generally true," Van Fleet said, "but there are a number of spots throughout the Federation where you're not delivering. Now—"

"That's what I wanted to discuss with you," Jeff interrupted hastily. "I'm just on my way—catching a space liner in just a few minutes, in fact—to Acamar to clean up the trouble there. It occurred to me that there's a way you might be of some help—and perhaps get a bit of a jump on other manufacturers in the area."

"How?"

"Galaxy Gaieties is one of the most popular visiscreen shows in the universe," Jeff said, "and I think we can safely say that Mona Parker is the best

known and best loved visistar in the Federation. I believe that it might be of considerable assistance if she and the show went to Acamar on a personal appearance tour."

The old man looked at him from his little shrewd eyes. "That would cost more money, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, sir, but I believe it would be well-spent. These new planets may feel left out of things and it might give them the idea that Fleet Chairs is interested in all aspects of their comfort."

"Maybe you got something," the old man said. "I'll give it a thought. Glad you came around, young man. Like to see you people on your toes."

Jeff took the hint and left. A heli cab got him to the spaceport with a few minutes to spare. He felt sure that Homer Van Fleet was going to take his suggestion and it was with considerably more cheer that he boarded the space liner.

There was as yet no regular passenger line to Acamar Two and it was a testament to the power of SVS that the liner swerved a few light-years off her course and stood by while a lifeboat delivered Jeff Reynolds to the second planet in Acamar's orbit.

The spaceport on Acamar was a small, but attractive spot on an island in a lake. As he entered the main building, Jeff caught his first glimpse of Acamarans. Having already traveled about the Federation he was prepared to accept almost any form of intelligent life, but the Acamarans were humanoid in their general outlines. They seemed to average about five feet in height, although there were a few who were taller. He guessed that their weight was about proportionate to that of Terrans. They all were dressed in clothes similar to those worn on Terra. Their faces were more animal-like and they had rather prominent buck teeth. There was something just a bit rat-like in their faces, but it was not at all unpleasant. He also noticed that their faces were covered with soft brown hair and that they had broad flat tails protruding from their clothes.

A heli cab, almost as modern as the ones on Terra, took him to his hotel. It was a long enough ride to give him a fair impression of Azoi City. None of the buildings were over two or three storeys in height; although the flatness was rather startling at first, he soon found them pleasant to look at. More than half the streets were broad canals, filled with water, and to his surprise he liked the effect. He remembered vaguely having read that once a Terran city had had such canals in the place of streets. Although it was already night, looking down, in the soft light of street lamps, he saw a handful of young Acamarans swimming in the canal and felt a fleeting kinship with them.

He had dinner in the hotel. To his relief, the menu included a wide variety of Terran foods. He thought of trying to learn something about the planet, but realized that it would be easier and more efficient to get it from the local SVS vice president, so he went to bed early.

THE following morning, he breakfasted in the hotel, then called a heli cab and directed it to the Solar Visicasting building. It turned out to be the only tall building in the city. On Terra its fifty storeys would have seemed minute; here it towered over the city.

A few minutes later he was shaking hands with an Acamaran.

"I am Tokka, vice president in charge of operations here," he said. He spoke excellent Terran, the only evidence that it wasn't his native tongue showing in a slight struggle between the sibilants and his buck teeth. "Mister Anderson notified me you were on your way. I am glad to have you here, Mister Reynolds."

"Thank you," Jeff said. He found himself liking the Acamaran, alien though he was. "I hope you won't feel that it's a matter of someone coming in to take over. It's not that at all, Mister Tokka."

"Please. On Acamar we do not go in for formal titles, just as we have never adopted your custom of two or more names. Please call me Tokka."

"Then call me Jeff. We're really not so formal on Terra. In spite of our names and titles we usually call each other baby or sweetheart."

"I've noticed," Tokka said dryly. "Now, how would you like to approach our problem, Jeff?"

"Well," Jeff said, "I suppose I should learn as much as possible about the planet and your people. By the way, I've never seen an Acamaran before last night, yet there's something familiar about your race. What are your antecedents?"

"As you must know," Tokka said, "there is some relationship between all peoples of the galaxy. One species forges ahead on this planet, another species develops on that one. We Acamarans belong to the order known on Terra as *Rodere*. I believe that certain of our own anthropologists have classified us as *Rodere Erectus*. As to our more specific class, you probably find the teeth and the tail familiar clues."

Although many forms of Terran animal life had vanished years before, Jeff Reynolds had once been a steady visitor to the Terran Museum of Ancient History. Suddenly he remembered why the Acamarans had seemed familiar.

"Beavers," he exclaimed.

"Exactly," Tokka said, nodding. "We are closely related to the form of life you knew as beavers. On your planet, they remained stationary on the evolutionary scale, while on Acamar the same life form continued to develop."

"Then that explains the canals, the reason for almost every home being surrounded by water."

"Of course. My ancestors built their homes in water and so this has become traditional in our architecture. The same influence restrains us from building what you once called skyscrapers. In many of the older houses here, you will also find a traditional door built below the surface of the water. Your ancestors lived in caves and trees, so your architecture has featured cave-like apartment houses and the towering structure of the tree. There is emotional security

in retaining some aspect of the patterns of our beginnings."

Jeff would have liked to pursue the subject further, but he reminded himself that he was here on business.

"You know why I'm here?" he asked. Tokka nodded.

"What is your own theory about it?" Jeff asked. "Surely you, as an Acamaran, should be able to know why the stations here will not carry any of our commercial shows. Or why Terran products don't sell here."

"To my shame, I should," Tokka said. "Unfortunately, we Acamarans have not had your experience in such matters. I'm afraid it is beyond my rather simple mind. It is true that the Terran manufacturers have done nothing to adapt their products to our needs, but this should not stop all sales. So far as Terran advertising is concerned, I have been able to arrive at only one conclusion."

"What's that?"

"Well, it may be that your advertising is so subtle that we are unable to perceive the essence of its influence."

"Too subtle?" Jeff exclaimed in surprise. He'd heard many criticisms of Terran advertising, but to the best of his knowledge this was the first time anyone had ever accused it of being too subtle. He could hardly believe his ears.

Tokka nodded vigorously. "That is my theory. Perhaps you will be able to discover if it is correct. You see, even now, we have had very little contact with you Terrans. We have had access to much of your literature, both visual and audio, and we have learned and adopted a great many of your customs and fashions. But since we have had very little direct contact, I'm sure there are psychological factors which escape us. Surely a race like yours, so much more advanced than mine, must be more subtle in your methods of influencing sales."

"Maybe," Jeff said doubtfully.

IV

JEFF spent most of the day carefully

wading through a great mass of reports. Even with the explanations Tokka offered, they made very little sense to him. He agreed to have dinner at Tokka's home, so they left the office early and made a brief tour of Azoi City. With the slight architectural difference, there were many reminders of Terran cities. Where there were Terran and Acamaran stores side by side, it was impossible to tell them apart. Window-displays and outside signs would be identical. Yet Jeff noticed that Acamarans, strolling along the walks on either side of the canals, would pause to look into the Terran windows, then walk on. But when they stopped to gaze at the same display in an Acamaran store they would invariably end by entering.

After a while, he noticed that there seemed to be an unusual number of dentists in the city. And nearly all dental offices carried a sign announcing they specialized in "dental amputations." Jeff expressed his curiosity.

"One of the penalties of civilization," Tokka explained. "In more primitive times my people used their teeth to cut down trees which were utilized in constructing our homes and dams. The continual use kept our teeth sharpened down to the proper length. But now we have become mechanized and our teeth serve only to eat our food. As a result, our front teeth continue to grow throughout our lives. At regular periods, we must have the teeth amputated or they would get so long that we would not be able to eat at all."

That night Jeff had dinner at Tokka's home, meeting the rest of the family. He learned that Acamarans didn't use the husband and wife designation, common on most planets, but merely referred to their "mates" with nothing in the reference to indicate sex.

It was a pleasant evening. There was a close family feeling in Tokka's home which Jeff had seldom seen in Terran homes. He liked both Tokka and Ghamik, and even enjoyed it when the three small children all climbed on his lap at

once and demanded that he tell them a Terran story.

The following day there was a visitape from the home office announcing the decision to send The Galaxy Gaieties to Acamar on a personal appearance tour. Considerably cheered up by it, Jeff went out with Tokka on a round of the local advertising agencies and the independent visiscreen-stations.

By the end of the second day, Jeff Reynolds was in a greater confusion about Acamar Two than he had been before leaving Terra. He had examined hundreds of pages of local advertising copy, and had absorbed a great deal more in the rehearsal and actual visicasts of numerous local shows. As near as he could tell, their advertising was about on a par with that of Terra perhaps a thousand years earlier. It was crude, dogmatic and bumbling. Yet he sat in with dozens of studio audiences and watched them rush out to buy the product the minute the show was over. He visited homes to watch the visiscreen and again saw the observers rush out to buy as soon as the show went off the air. He had to confess—but only to himself—that on at least two occasions he had felt a faint desire to respond in the same fashion. It was, to put it mildly, baffling.

"It it's not a question of subtlety," Tokka suggested, "perhaps there is some difference in the metabolism of our two races, since our advertising fails to move you just as yours fails to reach us."

This was so obviously silly on the face of it that Jeff didn't bother to even answer. And at the end of two days Mona Parker arrived on Acamar and he firmly pushed the problem from his mind.

"Isn't it wonderful, darling?" she greeted him. "Our sponsor suddenly decided to send us here for a personal appearance tour. We'll be here all of two weeks. And now you can start showing me this quaint little society."

"Simply wonderful," Jeff agreed. He'd decided, with a sudden flash of intuition, not to tell her his own part in the personal appearance tour. It might make

her start feeling sorry for Guy dolla Moran as the victim of a trick. It was enough that Jeff was himself aware of having gotten the better of the vice president.

The actual appearances didn't start until the following day, so Jeff awarded himself a well-earned day off and took Mona around the city. At first, he was slightly annoyed at her obvious condescension about the Acamarans, but he was so delighted to be with her that he soon forgot it.

That night they had dinner together, then danced until quite late. Afterward, at Mona's insistence, they went for a midnight swim in the canal in front of her hotel. Then she invited him to her rooms for a goodnight drink. This was the first time she'd ever done this and he wondered if it weren't the romantic result of the three moons which sailed lazily above Acamar II.

SOME three hours later, a deliriously happy young visiscreen executive returned to his own hotel. The fact that this left him a bare two hours of sleep was unimportant and his auto-intoxication brought him briskly out of bed at the proper time. Even the brave new world had not basically changed the actions of young men who thought they were in love.

His elation carried Jeff to the offices where in about two minutes it deserted him. The cause was the man who sat in a chair talking to Tokka. It was Guy dolla Moran.

"Jeff, boy," the vice president cried. "How are you, sweetheart?"

"Fine," Jeff said with false heartiness. He pulled himself up out of the shattered remains of what had been a victory and tried to be natural. "How are you, baby? Long time no see."

"Never felt greater," the vice president said. It was obviously the truth, Jeff thought ruefully. "Matt and I thought I'd better run up here and see that the personal appearance of the Gaieties gets the old personal touch. And while I'm

here, I thought I might as well check in early and go over the results of your little mission."

"Oh," Jeff said, all too aware that there were no results.

"Tokka here has been giving me a rundown on what you've been doing," the vice president went on. "Not good, baby, not good. I love you, Jeff, boy, but you're not using the old thinker."

"You think I'm missing something?" Jeff asked.

"It's a big problem, boy, and you've got to take a bigger look at it. I don't think you can even begin to think it out until you've been over the whole situation. I've just been telling Tokka I think the two of you ought to take a swing around the whole planet. Say about two weeks of finding out how they do out in the corn belt—if they have any corn."

Jeff saw the idea at once. Mona Parker was scheduled to be in Azoi City for two weeks and then she'd return to Terra. Guy dolla Moran wanted him to wander around over the planet for two weeks. His face tightened.

"Of course it's only a suggestion," the vice president said. "You think I'm wrong, lover? What say we call Matt and leave it up to him. He's the one who gets paid for thinking, so we might as well let him do it. What do you say, sweetheart?"

Jeff knew when he was licked. He knew that Anderson had already been sold on the idea or dolla Moran would have never suggested calling him. "No," he said slowly, "you're right, Guy. Absolutely right. It's a wonderful suggestion. Tokka and I will start out in a day or two."

The vice president was shaking his head, more in sorrow than in negation. "Not the SVS way, sweetheart," he said. "You know that. You know what Matt always says. 'If it's worth doing now, then it was worth doing yesterday.' Just before you came in, I had Tokka call and charter a cruiser for the two of you. We have to move fast, boy. Am I right?"

"You're right," Jeff said wearily. He tried not to see the grin on the vice president's face as he and Tokka left.

Once before they took off, he tried to call Mona, only to get the message that she'd left to meet Mr. dolla Moran. Jeff glumly climbed into the cruiser and they left Azoi City.

Things in what dolla Moran had called the corn belt were no different than in Azoi City. The Acamarans would look at Terran advertising in utter boredom and never go near a store. They would take one look at local advertising and bolt to spend their money. Even Tokka reacted exactly the same way as the other members of his race and no ad ever failed to send them all scuttling for the nearest vendor. It was maddening.

By dint of constantly urging Tokka on from one place to another, they managed to cover the entire planet in thirteen days. It was the evening of the thirteenth day when they landed back in Azoi City. Jeff immediately called Mona, only to learn that she had already left with Mr. dolla Moran. His only hope had been that the vice president had gone back to Terra after getting rid of him and that he would still have a stolen twenty-four hours to spend with the star. With that hope collapsed, he finally consented half-heartedly to go home with Tokka.

There was a happy reunion between Tokka and the rest of the family, which only made Jeff feel worse. There was a quite good dinner, but he failed to taste a single bite of it. Afterward they all sat down to watch the visiscreen.

There was a quite good dramatic show on, but Jeff only stared at it blankly. Then it was time for the commercial. The minute it started, he recognized it as the one for an Acamaran drink called Aquicola. He'd checked the particular ad any number of times—and had even tried the drink, which he thought horrible—so Jeff displayed little interest. He was vaguely aware that the family suddenly seemed restless, then a moment later he found himself in the grip of an uncontrollable yearning for Aquicola.

He leaped to his feet and joined the others in a rush for the kitchen.

The case of Aquicola in the refrigerator lasted only a few minutes while they all guzzled happily. Jeff himself consumed three bottles before his strange thirst abated.

"Lucky you put in a supply today," Tokka said to Ghamik. "We'll have to pick up some more tomorrow. Something must have happened." There was now a puzzled frown on Tokka's face as they went back into the living room.

V

THE commercial had been replaced by an Acamaran announcer who wore an apologetic expression.

"My dear friends," he was saying, "I wish to extend the apologies of Aquicola, the independent stations of Acamar, and myself for the commercial which was just visicast. Due to circumstances beyond our control, the advertising was entirely too strong. Until we can locate the trouble, we are signing off."

"So that was it," Ghamik said, getting up and turning off the set.

Jeff was staring at the visiscreen with a puzzled air. Finally he turned to Tokka. "I don't understand," he said. "As near as I can remember that advertising copy was exactly the way it was when we checked it. I don't see where there was a single word changed."

"Words?" said Tokka, looking as puzzled as Jeff. "Of course, they were not changed. The only change was in the essence of the advertising."

"But how can you change the essence without changing the words?" Jeff wanted to know. "And why did such a small change suddenly affect me? I've never had such a reaction in my life. I felt almost hypnotized."

"That's right, you did get it this time," Tokka cried. "Perhaps my original theory was correct, but in reverse. Perhaps because we are a primitive people we are the ones using the more subtle advertising. Of course, that's it. I

had completely forgotten that the more primitive the race, the more acute the sense—" The Acamaran broke off and looked bewildered. "But that can't be right either. If it were, we would be more susceptible to your advertising, not less."

"You left me back among the asteroids," Jeff said. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"The advertising, Jeff. If ours was more subtle than yours, then yours would overpower us. If yours was more subtle than ours, then ours would overpower you. But neither works that way. Can it be—but no, that is utterly impossible. You do use perfume and—"

"Perfume?" interrupted Jeff. "What does perfume have to do with it?"

"But everything," said Tokka. "You must know that. You do use some perfume we can sense, so it must be a matter—"

Jeff interrupted again. "Are you trying to tell me that you use some kind of perfume to overcome sales resistance?"

"Of course. Everyone does—don't they?"

"And it comes out of that set?" Jeff asked, gesturing toward the visiscreen.

"Naturally—"

"And you have one perfume that will make everyone rush out for an Aquicola, another that will make everyone want a new suit, a third to create the desire for a new helicar—a different scent for every product you manufacture?"

"Yes, yes," Tokka said. "But surely you do, too. Doesn't everyone? Is there any other way?"

Jeff leaned back and counted slowly up to ten. Then he opened his eyes and looked at Tokka. "If you have such scents, why do you bother with advertising copy at all? Why not just spray out the scent and forget about commercials?"

"We used to do it that way," Tokka said, "before we came in contact with you Terrans. But we were anxious to learn, and your commercials seemed

such an entertaining custom, so we adopted them and used the scent at the same time. Do you mean that you have never used such scents?"

"I'll tell you all about the history of advertising later," Jeff said. "Right now we have a date." He grabbed the startled Tokka by the hand and dashed from the house, almost falling into the canal in his haste.

IT TOOK a dozen calls before Jeff found that Guy dolla Moran and Mona Parker were having dinner in something called The Blue Dam. A hastily summoned helcab took them to the restaurant. A headwaiter pointed out the table and Jeff marched down upon it, with the excited Tokka in tow.

"Well, Guy, old sweetheart," Jeff said as he reached the table, "your troubles are all over. Hello, Mona."

Instead of the smile he'd expected, the visiscreen star glared up at him. "Jeffrey Reynolds," she said, "don't ever speak to me again." She got up and swept away in the general direction of the rest rooms.

"Now what's the matter with her?" Jeff said.

"You know how it is, baby," Guy dolla Moran said. "Women are sensitive about some things. You shouldn't have been so open about your little pleasures."

"Little pleasures?" Jeff said. "What little pleasures?"

"Taking a little jaunt around Acamar with an alien female," the vice president said. "Not only an alien female, but one who is married. Not the thing to do, Jeff boy."

"Female," repeated Jeff, looking from dolla Moran to Tokka. "Do you mean he—I mean she—I mean—oh, hell."

"Exactly, sweetheart. Of course, Tokka is a female—and up until now I thought a happily married one."

Jeff stared dumbly at Tokka.

"I am a female," Tokka said. "But what he is suggesting is utterly alien to our culture. It is impossible, in addition to being untrue, as you know."

"But—" said Jeff, gesturing toward the handsome tweed suit Tokka wore.

"Oh, the suit," Tokka said. "We were quite taken with Terran clothes when we first saw them and quickly adopted them. It wasn't until very recently that we discovered males and females on Terra dressed somewhat differently. By that time individuals on Acamar had become accustomed to whichever type of dress their fancy had first hit upon, so no one bothered trying to conform to a rule which seemed to have very little sense. You see, Jeff, on Acamar, except for mating there is no importance placed on the sex of the individual. So I'm afraid it never occurred to me to mention it to you. I'm sorry."

"I'm afraid," dolla Moran said smoothly, "that Mona will not be inclined to accept that story. I do, of course, but Mona tends to be more old-fashioned in her concept of morality."

"I'll straighten that out later," Jeff said impatiently. "In the meantime—"

"In the meantime," the vice president interrupted, "not only have you fallen down on the job, but you've been leading what many Terrans might consider an immoral life. You both must be aware of the morality clause in your contracts. I was going to leave a memorandum in the morning, but since you're here you might as well know you are both through at SVS."

"But you can't fire us," exclaimed Jeff. "I've got—"

"Of course, you have an explanation," dolla Moran said. "I understand about those things, sweetheart. I've traveled around to the planets and I've had my fun—more quietly, it's true. But unfortunately I am not a major stockholder in the Solar Visicasting System and I'm afraid the others are less broadminded. Now, I do wish you'd leave so that Mona will feel that she can return to our table."

For a moment, Jeff stood and glared at his late superior. Then he turned and strode from the room. Tokka followed.

VI

SO STUNNED was he by the sudden developments, it was several days before Jeff Reynolds really began thinking about what had happened.

In the meantime, he had taken a job, along with Tokka, at one of the independent visicasting stations. Within a couple of weeks, he had a good understanding of the Acamaran methods.

One night there was a conference between Jeff, Tokka, Ghamik, and a number of leading Acamarans. After it was over, Jeff was ready to return to Terra.

Since he no longer had the great network back of him, it was not a simple matter to return. But after a delay of a week, with the aid of a friend or two on Terra, he managed to have one of the space liners stop by and pick him up.

His first day back in Nuyork was a busy one. He first went to the local offices of the Galactic Federation, then set out to make a number of appointments by visiphone. At eleven o'clock, he showed up for the first one, at the office of Homer Van Fleet. This time he was kept waiting slightly longer than the time he'd called before, but he was soon shown in to the large private office. But instead of the blunt-featured old financier, he was facing a quite attractive young woman.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "There must be some mistake. I had an appointment with Mister Van Fleet."

"No mistake, Mister Reynolds," she said with a smile. "I am Leesa Van Fleet. Father is home sick today, but he said that I should see you. I checked with him when you called this morning."

"Well, that's nice," Jeff said. "That is, I don't mean that it's nice that he's ill—well, you know what I mean."

She smiled and waited.

"I have two things to discuss with you," Jeff said. "I'll take up the least important first. I believe your company still has the practice of paying a five per cent commission on anyone who sug-

gests a new product and a new market."

She nodded.

"Fine. Incidentally, I also have a free suggestion. For the Acamaran market, which will very soon open, design a new chair with a built-in tail rest. Now, then, I expect you normally have a considerable waste of wood in building chairs?"

"Yes," she said.

"My suggestion is that this wood be pulped, then pressed into bars, small canes, and such, with a small amount of flavor added and sold on Acamar."

"Flavored wood. Mister Reynolds?"

"Flavored wood," he said. "You see, Acamarans are evolved from beavers. As a result of civilization, they no longer gnaw on wood and they have a lot of tooth trouble. So the idea is a sort of wood candy, on which they can gnaw, obtaining a flavor and preserving their teeth. I wouldn't be surprised that it might be a bigger business than chairs. And I have an excellent advertising program worked out for it. Which brings me to my second point—it's rather lengthy and I wonder if we might not discuss it over lunch?"

"I think that would be very nice," she said.

After a more than pleasant luncheon, Jeff Reynolds hurried off to keep his other appointments. It was a full afternoon and it was shortly after four o'clock when he arrived at the SVS building. He went immediately to the top floor. After exchanging a few words with the president's secretary, he stepped on the conveyor path and was whisked through the small forest.

In addition to Matthew Anderson and Guy dolla Moran, there were four other men sitting there in the private office. With the exception of one man, they all seemed to be rather disgruntled.

"Sorry I'm a few minutes late, gentlemen," Jeff Reynolds said as he stepped off the conveyor. "Pressure of business, you know."

"What's the meaning of this Reynolds?" Anderson demanded severely.

He indicated the one man who did not seem annoyed. "Jones here demanded that we all get together to hear you. I tried to point out that you are no longer connected with SVS, but he still insisted on it and would offer no explanation. Naturally, since he is the largest stockholder. . . ."

"Naturally," Jeff said. He looked over the assembled men. "I believe you gentlemen together hold all of the shares in the Solar Visicasting System. Ranging from Mister dolla Moran who owns two shares to Mister Jones who owns two hundred thousand."

"We own all the shares," Jones said.

"Fine," Jeff said cheerfully. "I have a proposition to put to you, but first I have another small matter to bring up. I have been seeing a number of important Terran industrialists today, including the owner of the Jet Rocket Tobacco Company. Do any of you gentlemen happen to smoke Jet cigarettes?"

From the shaking heads, it was evident that none of them did.

"As you know," Jeff continued, "Jet cigarettes do their advertising on a rival network. That is perhaps the reason no one here smokes them. We might, however, put them in the category of potential clients of SVS. I have just given six packages of Jet cigarettes to Mr. Anderson's secretary. I suggest that we have them brought in and all of you try them. Remember that Jet cigarettes are longer, that the harmful ingredients found in other cigarettes have been removed. Light a Jet and be space happy."

THE six men looked at him as if they had suddenly been offered proof that he was insane.

"If you ask Mr. Anderson's secretary for the cigarettes now, or within the next thirty seconds, she will give them to you. If you want them after the time period is up, they will cost you fifty credits per package."

"What sort of nonsense is this?" demanded one of the stockholders. "Giving us a lot of advertising fiddle-faddle and

saying you'll sell us 'ordinary thirty-unit cigarettes for fifty credits."

"I believe," drawled Guy dolla Moran, "that the colloquial expression is that he's blown his space plates."

"Just a minute." It was the man named Jones. "As the majority stockholder, I insisted that the rest of you be here. I did so because this young man phoned me and said that he had proof that our stock could be worthless tomorrow. At his suggestion, I checked with Charlie Lane at Planetary Association of Manufacturers. Charlie assured me that he knew what he was talking about. I don't know why he's talking about Jet cigarettes either, but I suggest that we hear him out."

"Thank you, Mister Jones," Jeff said. "My proposition, gentlemen, is this. The six of you own all the stock of the Solar Visicasting System. I am suggesting that each of you sell me one-half of your stock and that one of you sell me an additional share. This, you will say, will give me control of SVS, and you will be quite right. But it will also save the company and make your remaining shares more valuable than they have ever been. Incidentally, I expect to pay each one of you exactly one credit for the half he turns over to me."

There was an excited babble of voices from the angry men.

"This farce has gone far enough," said Matthew Anderson. "I suggest that we call in the Galactic police."

"Sales resistance, eh?" Jeff said cheerfully. He pulled a small atomizer from his pocket and pressed the trigger. There was a soft hissing sound, although no spray was visible.

"What the—" began Anderson, only to break off. Startled expressions appeared simultaneously on the faces of the six men. Two of them started searching through their pockets.

"Light a Jet and be space happy," one of them repeated.

"Your secretary," said another to Anderson. "I think he said she had some."

As one man, the six of them rose and

ran across the office. Jeff Reynolds pulled a Jet cigarette from his pocket and puffed happily on it.

A few minutes later, the six men reappeared, walking back through the artificial forest. Each of them puffed on a cigarette. Beyond them, Matthew Anderson's secretary stood in the doorway, a puzzled frown on her face and her hands full of money.

"A great smoke," Anderson said as they came up. "I don't know how I happened to overlook them before."

"Light a Jet and be space happy," Guy dolla Moran said joyfully.

VII

JEFF REYNOLDS waited, smoking his own cigarette. After a moment bewildered frowns appeared on their faces. Six pairs of eyes swiveled toward Jeff.

"How did you do that?" demanded Jones.

"With this," Jeff said, holding up the atomizer. "Total cost of the experiment—less than one credit."

"You mean you sprayed something in the air that made us have to buy Jet cigarettes?"

Jeff nodded. "I could as easily have made you have an irresistible desire to sell me your stock, but I thought you might appreciate a more normal commercial application."

"It can apply to other products?" Anderson asked.

Jeff nodded again. "This," he said, "is the secret of why our advertising failed so miserably in competition with Acamaran advertising. The Acamarans have been using these scents for years. They took up our commercials because they thought them entertaining, but this is the sales force. There are as many different scents as there can ever be products. With this formula, gentlemen, the people can be made to buy *anything*."

"Or do anything?" asked one stockholder. He was a well-known Federa-

tion politician and very prosperous.

"Yes," said Jeff. "The things done, however, would have to be limited by ethical considerations."

"Of course, of course," the politician said hastily.

Jeff was all too familiar with the expression he saw on the faces in front of him. "I might add," he said, "that the secret process for this formula is duly patented under the monopoly laws of the Federation. It is owned by the newly-owned corporation of Tokka, Ghamik, Tishtiri, Azrak, Khamis and Reynolds. I am, by the way, the majority stockholder."

This brought them rudely back to reality and they stared at him with speculation.

"There are two ways the new advertising medium can be used," Jeff said. "Certain changes could be made in our visicasting system, making it necessary for everyone to buy new visiscreen sets. The new ones would have a built-in attachment which enables the scent to be sprayed into the room. We could still go on using advertising copy, although the actual selling will be done by the secret process. As you may have noticed, it has no noticeable odor. It can be mixed in proportion to affect any form of life in the Federation. On Acamar, for example, their senses are more acute than ours so that the mixture that worked for them had no effect on us. On the other hand, the process can be introduced directly into the air by a company representing advertisers. Some such method as low-flying heli-cars dusting cities. I imagine we could get the Federation to allocate time channels so there would be no confusion."

There was a long silence. "In connection with your first method," one of the men said ironically, "I suppose you've also arranged to cut yourself in for a slice of the visiscreen set manufacturing business?"

"Of course," Jeff said. "By the way, the process can also be used in connection with the dramatic end of visicast-

ing. For example, in crime shows, we might use a mixed formula which would set up a hatred for law-breakers and a love of our police force. Or in a comedy, we can hypo the script by a formula which will make everyone think it is very funny."

"Then there are the love stories . . ." one of the men said dreamily.

"Gentlemen," Jones interrupted, "all of this makes interesting speculation, but I suggest that we face the fact that young Reynolds has us over a jet-engined barrel. I suggest that we sell him one-half of our combined shares, at the stipulated price. I will provide the extra share he demands."

There was some grumbling, but they all finally agreed. The transfer of stock was soon accomplished and Jeff gravely paid out six credits.

"I suppose," Matthew Anderson said, "that you will want my resignation now."

"Why, I love you, Matt. boy," Jeff said. "I wouldn't think of firing you—as long as you keep on the ball. At the present, I have only one administrative change to suggest." His glance passed over Guy dolla Moran like a breath of winter.

"Anything you suggest," Anderson said eagerly.

"We must have in the neighborhood of a million offices throughout the galaxy," Jeff said. "In growing to such size, it is inevitable that some departments lag behind others in the progress. I imagine that a deplorable situation which I noticed on Acamar exists everywhere. I suggest that the creative end of SVS is more than adequately manned, but that we need comparable talent in a department which is often neglected. We have a man who is ideally suited for what I have in mind. I suggest that our Mr. Guy dolla Moran be made the executive vice president in charge of all SVS restrooms."

"Excellent," Anderson said briskly.

The new executive vice president muttered something, but it was inaudible.

"I love you, Guy, boy," Jeff said as he left the office.

News travels fast in the big networks. Jeff Reynolds stopped off briefly in his old office and then went downstairs. Mona Parker was waiting in the lobby, looking more beautiful than ever. When she caught sight of him, she ran forward and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Jeff," she exclaimed. "I've just heard the news. You're wonderful. Are you taking me to dinner tonight?"

Jeff Reynolds carefully disengaged the arms from around his neck. "I'm afraid not," he said. "I'm sure it would be pleasant, but I must think of my career. I doubt if it would do me any good to be seen with a mere actress.

And I'm sure my fiancée would not approve."

"Your fiancée?"

"Yes. Leesa Van Fleet. We became engaged at noon today. A charming girl." He took a second atomizer from his pocket and sprayed gently before walking on.

Miss Mona Parker, glamorous star of the Galaxy Gaieties, turned and rushed off in a different direction. Later, the visinews reporters were to describe her mad dash all over Nuyork and have a prominent analyst offer a technical, and entirely wrong, explanation of why she had been seized with an uncontrollable desire for sour grapes when the nearest ones were on Vega IV.



If you enjoyed this story you'll like

THE CAPHIAN CAPER

By

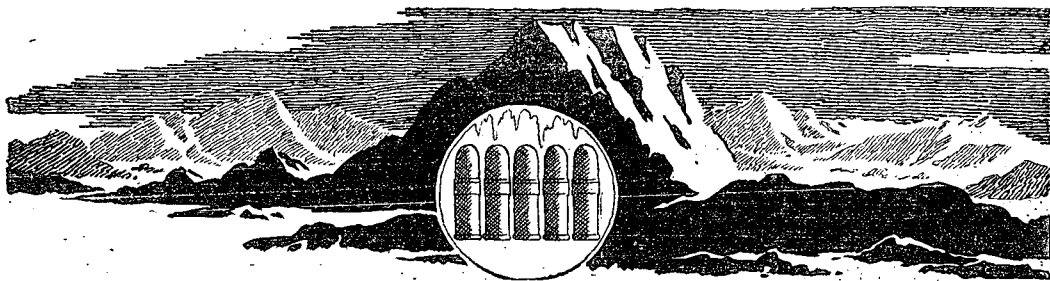
KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

Manning Draco and his arch-foe Dzanku play a life-and-death game of words—on a planet where Time misbehaves!

Featured in the December Issue of

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

On Sale at All Stands—25c Per Copy!



THE CHILDREN

a novelet by

MIRIAM ALLEN de FORD

McElroy would never have started that time travel business if he'd known the future would reach out and sock him in the jaw!

I

I THINK," said Dr. Schultz brusquely, "that this is a preposterous and essentially unscientific project. There is nothing new about the experiment itself; it was first announced nearly twenty years ago, in 1952, before the British Association. We have been using it ever since, and we know the effect remains good for periods up to five years. Longer—even immensely long—periods are merely supererogatory.

"As for the other aspect of McElroy's proposal, involving the possible future discovery of means of time-travel, that seems to me the wildest of unscientific speculations. I don't know how the rest of you feel, but so far as I am concerned, I do not favor lending the resources of

the International Association for the Advancement of Science to this harebrained proposition."

Kemet Ali cleared his throat. As chairman of the IAAS, his chief asset was his unflinching tact. But before he could begin, James McElroy, his earnest eyes peering through his spectacles, spoke up.

"May I say just a word?" he asked. He was too thin, and gray hairs showed already among the brown. His voice still had the deadened quality it had displayed ever since his personal catastrophe six months before. But there could be no doubt of the continuing keenness of mind of this brilliant young geneticist who had actually become one of the most valued workers on the IAAS staff soon