

Make Mine Mars

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Make Mine Mars

"X is for the ecstasy she ga-a-ave me; E is for her eyes—one, two, and three-ee; T is for the teeth with which she'd sha-a-ave me; S is for her scales of i-vo-ree-ee-ee ..."

Somebody was singing, and my throbbing head objected. I teemed to have a mouthful of sawdust

T is for her tentacles ah-round me;

J is for her jowls—were none soo-oo fair;

H is for the happy day she found me; 'Fe is for the iron in her hair..,"

I ran my tongue around inside my mouth. It was full of sawdust—spruce and cedar, rocketed in from Earth.

"Put them all to-gether, they spell Xetstjhfe . . ."

My eyes snapped open, and I sat up, cracking my head on the underside of the table beneath which I was lying. I lay down waited for the pinwheels to stop spinning. I tried to it out. Spruce and cedar . . .Honest Blogri's Olde Earthe Saloon . . . eleven stingers with a Sirian named Wenjtkpli...

"A worrud that means the wur-r-l-l-d too-oo mee-ee-ee!"

Through the fading pinwheels I saw a long and horrid face, a Sirian face, peering at me with kindly interest under the table. It was Wenjtkpli.

"Good morning, little Earth chum," he said. "You feel not so tired now?"

"Morning?" I yelled, sitting up again and cracking my head again and lying down again to wait for the pinwheels to fade again.

"You sleep," I heard him say, "fourteen hours—so happy, so peaceful!"

"I gotta get out of here," I mumbled, scrambling about on the imported sawdust for my hat. I found I was wearing it, and climbed out, stood up, and leaned against the table, swaying and spitting out the last of the spruce and cedar.

"You like another stinger?" asked Wenjtkpli brightly. I retched feebly.

"Fourteen hours," I mumbled. "That makes it 0900 Mars now, or exactly ten hours past the time I was supposed to report for the nightshift at the bureau."

"But last night you talk different," the Sirian told me in surprise. "You say many times how bureau chief McGillicuddy can take lousy job and jam—"

"That was last night," I moaned. "This is this morning."

"Relax, little Earth chum. I sing again song you taught me:

X is for the ecstasy she ga-a-ave me; E is for—"

My throbbing head still objected. I flapped good-bye at him and set a course for the door of Blogri's joint. The quaint period mottoes:

"QUAFFE YE NUT-BROWN AYLE" "DROPPE DEAD TWYCE"

and so on—didn't look so quaint by the cold light of the Martian dawn.

An unpleasant little character, Venusian or something, I'd seen around the place oozed up to me. "Head hurt plenty, huh?" he simpered.

"This is no time for sympathy," I said. "Now one side or a flipper off—I gotta go to work."

"No sympathy," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. He fumbled oddly in his belt, then showed me a little white capsule. "Clear your head, huh? Work like lightning, you bet!"

I was interested. "How much?"

"For you, friend, nothing. Because I hate seeing fellows suffer with big head."

"Beat it," I told him, and shoved past through the door.

That pitch of his with a free sample meant he was pushing

J-K-B. I was in enough trouble without adding an unbreakable

addiction to the stuff. If I'd taken his free sample, I would

, have been back to see him in 12 hours, sweating blood for

more. And that time he would have named his own price.

I fell into an eastbound chair and fumbled a quarter

into the slot The thin, cold air of the pressure dome was

clearing my head already. I was sorry for all the times I'd

I cursed a skinflint dome administration for not supplying a richer air mix or heating the outdoors more lavishly. I felt

food enough to shave, and luckily had my razor in my wallet. By the time the chair was gliding past the building where Interstellar News had a floor, I had the whiskers off my jaw and most of the sawdust out of my hair.

The floater took me up to our floor while I tried not to think of what McGillicuddy would have to say.

The newsroom was full of noise as usual. McGillicuddy was in the copydesk slot chewing his way through a pile of dispatches due to be filed on the pressure dome split for A.M.

•ewscasts in four minutes by the big wall clock. He fed his copy, without looking, to an operator battering the keys of the old-fashioned radioteletype that was good enough to serve

•or local clients.

"Two minutes short!" he yelled at one of the men on the "Gimme a brightener! Gimme a god-damned bright-'P* The rim man raced to the receiving ethertypes from rCammadion, Betelgeuse, and the other Interstellar bureaus. He yanked an item from one of the clicking machines and

•caJed it at McGillicuddy, who slashed at it with his pencil and passed it to the operator. The tape the operator was cooing started through the transmitter-distributor, and on all local clients' radioteletypes appeared:

•Jto

"FIFTEEN-MINUTE INTERSTELLAR NEWSCAST AM MARS PRESSURE DOMES."

Everybody leaned back and lit up. McGillicuddy's eye fell on me, and I cleared my throat

"Got a cold?" he asked genially.

"Nope. No cold."

"Touch of indigestion? Flu, maybe? You're tardy today."

"I know it."

"Bright boy," He was smiling. That was bad.

"Spencer," he told me. "I thought long and hard about you. I thought about you when you failed to show up for the night side. I thought about you intermittently through the night as I took your shift. Along about 0300 I decided what to do with you. It was as though Providence had taken a hand. It was as though I prayed 'Lord, what shall I do with a drunken, no-good son of a spacecook who ranks in my opinion with the boils of Job as an affliction to man?*' Here's i the answer, Spencer."

He tossed me a piece-of ethertype paper, torn from one of i our interstellar-circuit machines. On it was the following dialogue:

ANYBODY TTHURE I MEAN THERE I

THIS MARSBUO ISN GA PLS

WOT TTHUT I MEAN WOT THAT MEAN PLEASE

THIS IS THE MARS BUREAU OF INTERSTELLAR NEWS. WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HORSING AROUND ON OUR KRUEGER 60-B CIRCUIT TELETYPE QUESTIONMARK. WHERE IS REGULAR STAFFER. GO AHEAD

THATK WOT I AM CALLING YOU ABBOUUT. KENNEDY DIED THIS MORNINGPNEUMONIA. I AM WEEMS EDITOR PHOENIX. U SENDING REPLLACE-MENT KENNEDY PLEAS

THIS MCGILLICUDDY, MARSBUO ISN CHIEF. SEND- ! ING REPLACEMENT
KENNEDY SOONEST. HAVE IDEAL MAN FOR JOB. END. !

That was all. It was enough.

"Chief," I said to McGillicuddy. "Chief, you can't You wouldn't—would you?"

"Better get packed," he told me, busily marking up copy, i

"Better take plenty of nice, warm clothing. I understand Krueger 60-B is about one thousand times dimmer than the sun. That's absolute magnitude, of course—Frostbite's in quite close. A primitive community, I'm told. Kennedy, didn't like it. But of course the poor old duffer wasn't good enough to handle anything swifter than a one-man bureau on a one-planet split. Better take lots of warm clothing."

"I quit," I said.

"Sam," said somebody, in a voice that always makes me turn to custard inside.

"Hello, EUie," I said. "I was just telling Mr. McGillicuddy that he isn't going to shoot me off to Frostbite to rot."

"Freeze," corrected McGillicuddy with relish. "Freeze. Good morning, Miss Masters. Did you want to say a few parting words to your friend?"

"I do," she told him, and drew me aside to no man's land where the ladies of the press prepared strange copy for the (coder sex. "Don't quit, Sam," she said in that voice. "I could

•ever love a quitter. Wh>t if it is a minor assignment?" "Minor," I said. "What a gem of understatement that is!" "It'll be good for you," she insisted. "You can show him

•tut you've got on the ball. You'll be on your own except for the regular dispatches to the main circuit and your local ^tit You could dig up all sorts of cute feature stories that*d fet your name known." And so on. It was partly her logic, partly that voice and partly her promise to kiss me good-by

• the port.

•TO take it," I told McGillicuddy. He looked up with a pleased smile and murmured: "The power of prayer . . ."

The good-by kiss from Ellie was the only thing about the jonmey that wasn't nightmarish. ISN's expense account stuck me on a rusty bucket that I shared with glamorous freight Hke yak kids and tenpenny nails. The little yaks blatted

•benever we went into overdrive to break through the speed <<f light. The Greenhough Effect—known to readers of the

•oence features as "supertime"—scared hell out of them. On

•r&nary rocket drive, they just groaned and whimpered to mcb other the yak equivalent of "Thibet was never like this!" The Frostbite spaceport wasn't like the South Pole, but it ^•B like Greenland, There was a bunch of farmers waiting lor their yaks, beating their mittened hands together and ex-

••*«"• long plumes of vapor. The collector of customs,

a rat-faced city boy, didn't have the decency to tarn them over and let the hayseeds get back to the administration building. I watched through a porthole and saw him stalling and dawdling over a sheaf of papers for each of the farmers. Oddly enough, the stalling and dawdling stopped as soon as the farmers caught on and passed over a few dollars. Nobody even bothered to slip it shamefac' fly from one hand to another. They just hanc.t-J.it over, not caring who saw—Rat-Face sneering, the farmers dumbly accepting the racket.

My turn came. Rat-Face came aboard and we were introduced by the chief engineer. "Harya," he said.

"Twenny bucks."

"What forr

"Landing permit. Later at the administration you can pay your visitor's permit. That's twenny, bucks too."

"I'm not a visitor. I'm coming here to work."

"Work, schmurk. So you'll need a work permit—twenny bucks." His eyes wandered. "Whaddaya got there?"

"Ethertype parts. May need them for replacements."

He was on his knees hi front of the box, crooning, "Triple ad valorem plus twenny dollars security bond for each part plus twenny dollars inspection fee plus twenny dollars for decontamination plus twenny dollars for failure to declare plus—"

"Break it up, Joe," said a new arrival—a grey-mustached little man, lost in his parka. "He's a friend of mine. Extend the courtesies of the port."

Rat-Face—Joe—didn't like it, but he took it. He muttered about doing his duty and gave me a card.

"Twenny bucks?" I asked, studying it.

"Nab," he said angrily. "You're free-loading." He got out

"Looks as if you saved ISN some money," I said to the little man. He threw back the hood of his parka in the relative warmth of the ship.

"Why not? We'll be working together. I'm Chenery from the Phoenix."

"Oh, yeah—the client"

"That's right," he agreed, grinning. "The client What exactly did you do to get banished to Frostbite?"

Since there was probably a spacemail aboard from Mc-Gillicuddy telling him exactly what I did, I told him. "Chief thought I was generally shiftless."

"You'll do here," he said. "It's a shiftless, easy-going kind

of place. I have the key to your bureau. Want me to lead the way?"

"What about my baggage?"

Tour stuffs safe. Port officers won't loot it when they know you're a friend of the Phoenix."

That wasn't exactly what I'd meant; I'd always taken it for granted that port officers didn't loot anybody's baggage, no matter whose friends they were or weren't. As Chenery had said, it seemed to be a shiftless, easy-going place. I let him lead the way; he had a jeep waiting to take us to the administration building, a musty, too-tight hodgepodge of desks. A tot of them were vacant, and the dowdy women and fattish men at the others, didn't seem to be very busy. The women were doing then- nails or reading; the men mostly were playing blotto with pocket-size dials for small change. A couple were sleeping.

From the administration building a jet job took us the 20 kilos to-town. Frostbite, the capital of Frostbite, housed maybe 40,000 people. No pressure dome. Just the glorious outdoors, complete with dust, weather, bisects, and a steady, icy wind. Hick towns seem to be the same the universe over. There was a main street called Main Street with clothing ibops and restaurants, gambling houses, and more or less fancy saloons, a couple of vaudeville theaters, and dance baffs. At the unfashionable end of Main Street were some Cum implement shops, places to buy surveying instruments and geologic detectors and the building that housed the Inter-MeQar News Service Frostbite Bureau. It was a couple of front rooms

on the second floor, with a mechanical dentist Wow, an osteopath above, and a "ride-up-and-save" parka •nporium to the rear.

Chenery let me in, and it was easy to see at once why Kennedy had died of pneumonia. Bottles. The air conditioning must have carried away every last sniff of liquor, but k itUl seemed to me that I could smell the rancid, homebrew stuff he'd been drinking. They were everywhere, the rdics of a shameless, hopeless alcoholic who'd been good for nothing better than Frostbite. Sticky glasses and bottles werywhere told the story.

I slid open the hatch of the incinerator and started tossing down bottles and glasses from the copy desk, the morgue, the Mbertype. Chenery helped, and decently kept his mouth

shut. When we'd got the place kind of cleaned up I wanted to know what the daily routine was like.

Chenery shrugged. "Anything you make ft, I guess. I used to push Kennedy to get more low-temperature agriculture stories for us. And those yaks that landed with you started as a civic-betterment stunt the Phoenix ran. It was all tractors until our farm editor had a brainstorm and brought in a pair. It's a hell of a good idea—you can't get milk, butter and meat out of a tractor. Kennedy helped us get advice from some Earthside agronomy station to set it up and helped get clearance for the first pair too. I don't have much idea of what copy he filed back to ISN. Frankly, we used him mostly as a contact man."

I asked miserably: "What the hell kind of copy can you file from a hole like this?" He laughed and cheerfully agreed that things were pretty slow.

"Here's today's Phoenix," he said, as the faxer began to hum. A neat, 16-page tabloid, stapled, pushed its way out in a couple of seconds. I flipped through it and asked: "No color at all?"

Chenery gave me a wink. "What the subscribers and advertisers don't know won't hurt them. Sometimes we break down and give them a page-one color pic."

I studied the Phoenix. Very conservative layout—naturally. It's competition that leads to circus makeup, and the Phoenix was the only sheet on the planet. The number-one story under a modest two-column head was an ISN farm piece on fertilizers for high-altitude agriculture, virtually unedited. The number-two story was an ISN piece on the current United Planets assembly.

"Is Frostbite in the UP, by the way?" I asked. "No. It's the big political question here. The Phoenix is against applying. We figure the planet can't afford the assessment in die first place, and if it could there wouldn't be anything to gain by joining."

"Urn." I studied the ISN piece closer and saw that the Phoenix was very much opposed indeed. The paper had doctored our story plenty. I hadn't seen the original, but ISN is—in fact and according to its charter—as impartial as it's humanly possible to be. But our story, as it emerged in the Phoenix, consisted of: a paragraph about an undignified, wrangling debate over the Mars-excavation question; a fist-fight between a Titanian and an Earth delegate in a corridor;

a Sirian's red-hot denunciation of the UP as a power-politics instrument of the old planets; and a report of UP administrative expenses—without a corresponding report of achievements.

"I suppose," I supposed, "that the majority of the planet is stringing along with the Phoenix?"

"Eight to one, the last time a plebiscite was run off," said Chenery proudly.

"You amaze me." I went on through the paper. It was about 70 per cent ads, most of them from the Main Street stores we'd passed. The editorial page had an anti-UP cartoon showing the secretary-general of the UP as the greasy, affable conductor of a jetbus jammed to the roof with passengers. A sign on the bus said* "Fare, \$15,000,000 and up per year." A road sign pointing in the direction the bus was heading said, "To Nowhere." The conductor was saying to • small, worried-looking man in a parka labeled "New Agricultural Planets" that, "There's always room for one more!" The outline said: "But is there—and is it worth it?"

The top editorial was "a glowing tribute from the Phoenix to the Phoenix for its pioneering work in yaks, pinned on the shipment that arrived today. The second editorial was anti-UP, echoing the cartoon and quoting from the Sirian in the page-one ISN piece.

It was a good, efficient job of the kind that turns a working newsman's stomach while he admires the technique.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Chenery proudly.

I was saved from answering by a brrp from the ethertype.

"GPM FRB GA PLS" it said. "Good-afternoon, Frostbite Bureau—go ahead, please." What with? I hunted around and found a typed schedule on the wall—that Kennedy had evidently once drawn up in a spasm of activity.

"MIN PLS" I punched out on the ethertype, and studied ftesked.

It was quite a document.

0900-1030: BREAKFAST

1030-1100: PHONE WEEMS FOR BITCHES RE SVS

1100-1200: NOTE MARSBUO RE BITCHES

1200-1330: LUNCH

1330-1530: RUN DROPS TO WEEMS: GAB WrTH

CHENERY 1530-1700: CLIP PHOENIX, REWRITE PUNCH & FILE

SUNDAYS 0900-1700: WRITE AND FILE ENTERPRISERS.

Chenery spared my blushes by looking out the window as I read the awful thing. I hadn't quite realized

how low I'd sunk until then.

"Think it's funny?" I asked him—unfairly, I knew. He was being decent. It was decent of him not to spit in my eye and shove me off the sidewalk for that matter. I had hit bottom.

He' didn't answer. He was embarrassed, and in the damn-fool way people have of finding a scapegoat I tried to make him/ feel worse. Maybe if I rubbed it in real hard he'd begin to feel almost as bad as I did. "I see," I told him, "that I've wasted a morning. Do you or Weems have any bitches for rate to messenger-boy to Mars?"

"Nothing special," he said. "The way I said, we always like low-temperature and high-altitude agriculture stuff. And good farm-and-home material."

"You'll get it," I told him. "And now I see I'm behind clipping and rewriting and filing stories from your paper."

"Don't take it so hard," he said unhappily. "It's not such a bad place. I'll have them take your personal stuff to the Hamilton House and the bureau stuff here. It's the only decent hotel in town except the Phoenix and that's kind of high—" He saw that I didn't like him jumping to such accurate conclusions about my pay check and beat it with an apologetic grimace of a smile.

The ethertype went brrp again and said "GB FRB CU LTR" "Good-by, Frostbite. See you later." There must have been many days when old Kennedy was too sick or too sick at heart to rewrite pieces from the lone client. Then the machine began beating out news items which I'd tear off eventually and run over to the Phoenix.

"Okay, sweetheart," I told the clattering printer. "You'll get copy from Frostbite. You'll get copy that'll make the whole damned ISN sit up and take notice—" and I went on kidding myself in that vein for a couple of minutes but it went dry very soon.

Good God, but they've got me! I thought. If I'm no good on the job they'll keep me here because there's nothing lower. And if I'm good on the job they'll keep me here because I'm good at it Not a chance in a trillion to do anything that'll

get noticed—just plain stuck on a crummy planet with a crummy political machine that'll never make news in a million years!

I yanked down Kennedy's library—"YOUR FUTURE ON FROSTBITE," which was a C. of C. recruiting pamphlet, "MANUAL OF ETHERTYPE MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR," an ISN house handbook and "THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANIZATION SECRETARIAT COMMITTEE INTERIM REPORT ON HABIT-FORMING DRUGS IN INTERPLANETARY COMMERCE," a grey-backed UP monograph that got to Frostbite God knew how. Maybe Kennedy had planned to switch from home brew to something that would kill him quicker.

- The Chamber of Commerce job gave a thumbnail sketch of my new home. Frostbite had been colonized about five generations ago for the usual reason. Somebody had smelled money. A trading company planted a power reactor—still going strong—at the South Pole in exchange for choice tracts of land which they'd sold off to homesteaders, all from Earth and Earth-colonized planets. In fine print the pamphlet gave lip service to the UP ideal of interspecific brotherhood, but— So Frostbite, in typical hick fashion, thought only genus homo was good enough for its sacred soil and that all non-human species were more or less alarming monsters.

I looked at that editorial-page cartoon in the Phoenix again and really noticed this time that there were Sirians, Venus-ians, Martians, Lyrans, and other non-human beings jammed into the jetbus, and that they were made to look sinister. On my first glance, I'd taken them in casually, the way you would on Earth or Mars or Vega's Quembrill, but here they were, supposed to scare me stiff and I was supposed to go around saying, "Now, don't get me wrong, some of my best friends are Martians, but—"

Back to the pamphlet The trading company suddenly dropped out of the chronology. By reading between the lines I could figure out that it was one of the outfits which had overextended itself planting colonies so it could have a monopoly hauling to and from the new centers. A lot of them had gone smash when the Greenhough Effect took interstellar flight out of the exclusive hands of the supergiant corporations and put it in the reach of medium-sized operators like the rusty-bucket line that had hauled in me, the yaks, and the ten-penny nails.

In a constitutional convention two generations back the colonists had set up a world government of the standard type, with a president, a unicameral house, and a three-step hierarchy of courts. They'd adopted the United Planets model code of laws except for the bill of rights—to keep the slimy extra-terrestrials out—with no thanks to the UP.

And that was it, except for the paean of praise to the independent farmer, the backbone of his planet, beholden to no man, etc.

I pawed through the ethertype handbook. The introduction told me that the perfection of instantaneous transmission had opened the farthest planets to the Interstellar News Service, which I knew; that it was knitting the colonized universe together with bonds of understanding, which I doubted; and that it was a boon to all human and non-human intelligences, which I thought was a bare-faced lie. The rest of it was "see Fig. 76 3b," "Wire 944 will slip easily through orifice 459}," "if Knob 545 still refuses to turn, take Wrench 31 and gently, without forcing—" Nothing I couldn't handle.

The ethertype was beating out:

FARM—NOTE FROSTBITE

NOME, ALASKA, EARTH—ISN—HOUSEWIVES OF THE COLDER FARM PLANETS WOULD DO WELL TO TAKE A LEAF FROM THE BOOK OF THE PRIMITIVE AMERINDIAN SEAMSTRESS. SO SAYS PROFESSOR OF DOMESTIC SCIENCE MADGE MCGUINNESS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NOME'S SCHOOL OF LOW-TEMPERATURE AGRONOMY. THE INDIAN MAID BY SEWING LONG, NARROW STRIPS OF FUR AND BASKET-WEAVING THEM INTO A BLANKET TURNED OUT COVERINGS WITH TWICE THE WARMTH AND HALF THE WEIGHT OF FUR ROBES SIMPLY SEWED EDGE TOEDGE—

That was my darling, with her incurable weakness for quote leads and the unspeakable "so says." Ellie Masters, I thought, you're a lousy writer but I love you and I'd like to wring your neck for helping McGillicuddy con me into this. "Dig up all sorts of cute feature stories," you told me and you made it sound sensible. Better I should be under the table at Blogri's with a hangover and sawdust in my hair than writing little by-liners about seventeen tasty recipes for yak manure, which is all that's ever going to come out of this Godforsaken planet

Rat-Face barged in without knocking; a moronic-looking boy was with him toting the box of ethertype spare parts.

"Just set-it anywhere," I said. "Thanks for getting it right over here. Uh, Joe, isn't it?—Joe, where could I get me a parka like that? I like those lines. Real mink?"

It was the one way to his heart. "You betcha. Only plaid mink lining on Frostbite. Ya notice the lapels?"

Look!" He turned them forward and showed me useless little hidden pockets with zippers that looked like gold.

"I can see you're a man with taste."

"Yeah. Not like some of these bums. If a man's Collector of the Port he's got a position to live up to. Look, I hope ya didn't get me wrong there, at the field. Nobody told me you were coming. If you're right with the Phoenix you're right with the Organization. If you're right with the Organization, you're right with Joe Downing. I'm regular."

He said that last word the way a new bishop might say: "I am consecrated."

"Glad to hear that. Joe, when could I get a chance to meet some of the other regular Boys?"

"Ya wanna get In, huh?" he asked shrewdly. "There's been guys here a lot longer than you, Spencer."

"In, Out," I shrugged. "I want to play it smart. It won't do me any harm."

He barked with laughter. "Not a bit," he said. "Old man Kennedy didn't see it that way. You'll get along here. Keep ya nose clean and we'll see about The Boys." He beckoned the loutish porter and left me to my musings.

That little rat had killed his man, I thought—but where, why, and for whom?

I went out into the little corridor and walked into the "ride-up-and-save" parka emporium that shared the second floor with me. Leon Portwanger, said the sign on the door. He was a fat old man sitting cross-legged, peering through bulging shell-rimmed glasses at his needle as it flashed through fur.

"Mr. Portwanger? I'm the new ISN man, Sam Spencer."

"So?" he grunted, not looking up.

"I guess you knew Kennedy pretty well."

"Never. Never."

"But he was right in front there—"

"Never," grunted the old man. He stuck himself with the needle, swore, and put his finger in his mouth. "Now see

what you made me do?" he said angrily and indistinctly around the finger. "You shouldn't bother me when I'm working. Can't you see when a man's working?"

"I'm sorry," I said, and went back into the newsroom. A man as old as Leon, tailoring as long as Lepn, didn't stick himself. He didn't even wear a thimble—the forefinger was calloused enough to be a thimble itself. He didn't stick himself unless he was very, very excited—or unless he wanted to get rid of somebody. I began to wish I hadn't fired those bottles of Kennedy's home brew down to the incinerator so quickly.

At that point I began a thorough shakedown of the bureau. I found memos torn from the machine concerning overfiling or failure to file, clippings from the Phoenix, laundry lists, style memos from ISN, paid bills, blacksheets of letters to Marsbuo requesting a transfer to practically anywhere but Frostbite, a list of phone numbers and a nasty space-mailed memo from McGillicuddy.

It said: "Re worldshaker, wll blv whn see. Meanwhile sggst keep closer sked avoid wastage costly wiretime. Reminder guppy's firstest job offhead orchidbitches three which bypassed u yestermonth. How? McG"

It was typical of McGillicuddy to memo in cablese. Since news bureaus began—as "wire services"; see his archaic "wiretime"—their executives have been memoing underlings in cablese as part of one-of-the-working-press-Jones-boys act that they affect. They also type badly so they can slash up

their memo with copyreader symbols. This McGillicuddy did too, of course. The cablese, the bad typing, and the copy-reading made it just about unintelligible to an outsider.

To me it said that McGillicuddy doubted Kennedy's promise to file a worldshaking story, that he was sore about Kennedy missing his scheduled times for filing on the ether-type, and that he was plenty sore about Kennedy failing to intercept complaints from the client Phoenix, three of which McGillicuddy had been bothered by during the last month.

So old Kennedy had dreamed of filing a worldshaker. I dug further into the bureau files and the desk drawers, finding only an out of date "WHO'S WHO IN THE GALAXY." No notes, no plans, no lists of interviewees, no tipsters—no blacksheet, I realized, of the letter to which McGillicuddy's cutting memo was a reply.

God only knew what it all meant. I was hungry, sleepy and sick at heart. I looked up the number of the Hamilton House

and found that helpful little Chenery had got me a reservation and that my luggage had arrived from the field. I headed for a square meal and my first night in bed for a week without yaks blatting at me through a thin bulkhead.

It wasn't hard to fit in. Frostbite was a swell place to lose your ambition and acquire a permanent thirst. The sardonic •sked posted on the bureau wall—I had been planning to tear it down for a month, but the inclination became weaker and weaker. It was so true to life.

I would wake up the Hamilton House, have a skimpy breakfast and get down to the bureau. Then there'd be a phone conversation with Weems during which he'd nag me for more and better Frostbite-slant stories. In an hour of "wire-time" I'd check in with Marsbuo. At first I risked trying to sneak a chat with Ellie, but the jokers around Marsbuo cured me of that. One of them pretended he was Ellie on the other end of the wire and before I caught on had me believing that she was six months pregnant with a child by McGillicuddy and was going to kill herself for betraying me. Good dean fun, and after that I stuck to spacemail for my happy talk.

After lunch, at the Hamilton House or more often in a tavern, I'd tear up the copy from the printer into neat sheets and deliver them to the Phoenix building on the better end of Main Street. (If anything big had come up, I would have phoned them to hold the front page open. If not, local items filled it, and ISN copy padded out the rest of their sheet.) As in Kennedy's sked, I gabbed with Chenery or watched the compositors or proof pullers or transmittermen at work, and then went back to the office to clip my copy

rolling out of the faxer. On a good day I'd get four or five items—maybe a human interester about a yak mothering an orphaned baby goat, a new wrinkle on barn insulation with native materials dial the other cold-fanning planets we served could use, a municipal election or a murder trial verdict to be filed just for the record.

Evenings I spent at a tavern talking and sopping up home brew, or at one of the two-a-day vaudeville houses, or at the Clubhouse. I once worked on the Philadelphia Bulletin, so the political setup was nothing new to me. After Joe Downing decided I wouldn't get pushy, he took me around to meet The Boys.

The Clubhouse was across the street from the three-story capitol building of Frostbite's World Government. It was a little bigger than the capitol and in much better repair. Officially it was the headquarters of the Frostbite Benevolent Society, a charitable, hence tax-free, organization. Actually it was the headquarters of the Frostbite Planetary Party, a standard gang of brigands. Down on the wrong end of Main Street somewhere was an upper room where the Frostbite Interplanetary Party, made up of liberals, screwballs, and disgruntled ex-members of the Organization but actually run by stooges of that Organization, hung out.

The Boys observed an orderly rotation of officers based on seniority. If you got in at the age of 18, didn't bolt and didn't drop dead you'd be president some day. To the party you had to bring loyalty, hard work—not on your payroll job, naturally, but on your electioneering—and cash. You kept bringing cash all your life; salary kickbacks, graft kickbacks, contributions for gold dinner services, tickets to testimonial banquets, campaign chest assignments, widows' and orphans' fund contributions, burial insurance, and dues, dues, dues.

As usual, it was hard to learn who was who. The President of Frostbite was a simple-minded old boy named Wither-spoon, so far gone in senile decay that he had come to believe the testimonial-banquet platitudes he uttered. You could check him off as a wheelhorse. He was serving the second and last year of his second and last term, and there was a mild battle going on between his Vice-President and the Speaker of the House as to who would succeed him. It was a traditional battle and didn't mean much; whoever lost would be next in line. When one of the contestants was so old or ill that he might not live to claim his term if he lost, the scrap would be waived in a spirit of good sportsmanship that the voters would probably admire if they ever heard of it.

Joe Downing was a comer. His sponsorship of me meant more than the friendship of Witherspoon would have. He was Chenery's ally; they were the leadership of the younger, sportier element. Chenery's boss Weems was with the older crowd that ate more, talked more, and drank less.

I had to join a committee before I heard of George, though. That's the way those things work.

It was a special committee for organizing a testimonial banquet for Witherspoon on his 40th year in the party. I

wound up in the subcommittee to determine a testimonial gift for the old buffer. I knew damned well that we'd be expected to start the subscription for the gift rolling, so I suggested a handsome—and—inexpensive—illuminated scroll with a sentiment lettered on it. The others were scandalized. One fat old woman called me "cheap" and a fat male pay-roller came close to accusing me of irregularity, at which I was supposed to tremble and withdraw my suggestion. I stood on my rights, and wrote a minority report standing up for the scroll while the majority of the subcommittee agreed on an inscribed sterling tea service.

At the next full committee meeting we delivered our reports and I thought it would come to a vote right away. But it seemed they weren't used to there being two opinions about anything. They were flustered, and the secretary slipped out with both reports during a five-minute adjournment. He came back and told me, beaming, "Chenery says George liked your idea." The committee was reconvened and because George liked my idea my report was adopted and I was appointed a subcommittee of one to procure the scroll.

I didn't learn any more about George after the meeting except that some people who liked me were glad I'd been favorably noticed and others were envious about the triumph of the Johnny-come-lately.

I asked Chenery in the bar. He laughed at my ignorance and said, "George Parsons."

"Publisher of the Phoenix? I thought he was an absentee owner."

"He doesn't spend a lot of time on Frostbite. At least I don't think he does. As a matter of fact, I don't know a lot about his comings and goings. Maybe Weems does."

"He swings a lot of weight in the Organization."

Chenery looked puzzled. "I guess he does at that. Every once in a while he does speak up and you generally do what he says. It's the paper, I suppose. He could wreck any of the boys." Chenery wasn't

being irregular: newsmen are always in a special position.

I went back to the office and, late as it was, sent a note to the desk to get the one man subcommittee job cleaned up:

ATTN MCGILLICUDDY RE CLIENT RELATIONS NEED SOONEST ILLUMINATED
SCROLL PRESENT HOMER WITHERSPOON PRESIDENT FROSTBITE

HONORING HIM 40 YEARS MEMBERSHIP FROSTBITE PLANETARY PARTY USUAL
SENTIMENTS NOTE MUST BE TERRESTRIAL STYLE ART IF NOT ACTUAL WORK
EARTHER ACCOUNT ANTIBEM PREJUDICE HERE FRBBUO END.

That happened on one of those Sundays which, according to Kennedy's sardonic sked, was to be devoted to writing and filing enterprisers.

The scroll came through with a memo from McGil-licuddy: "Fyi ckng w/ clnt etif this gag wll hv ur hide. Reminder guppy's firstest job offheading orchidbitches one which bypassed u yesterweek. How? McG"

There was a sadly sweet letter from Ellie aboard the same rust-bucket. She wanted me to come back to her, but not a broken man. She wanted me to do something really big on Frostbite to show what I had in me. She was sure that if I really looked there'd be something more to file than the copy I'd been sending in. Yeah.

Well, the big news that week would be the arrival of a loaded immigrant ship from Thetis of Procyon, a planet whose ecology had been wrecked beyond repair in a few short generations by DDT, hydraulic mining, unrestricted logging, introduction of rabbits and house cats and the use of poison bait to kill varmints. In a few thousand years maybe the planet would have topsoil, cover crops, forests, and a balanced animal population again, but Thetis as of now was a ruin whose population was streaming away to whatever havens it could find.

Frostbite had agreed to take 500 couples provided they were of terrestrial descent and could pass a means test—that is, provided they had money to be fleeced of. They were arriving on a bottom called Esmeralda. According to my year-old "LLOYDS' SHIPPING INDEX"—"exclusive accurate and up-to-date, being the result of daily advices from every part of the galaxy"—Esmeralda was owned by the Frimstedt Atomic Astrogation Company, Gammadion, gross tonnage 830,000, net tonnage 800,000,

class GX—"freighter/steerage passengers"—insurance rating: hull A, atomics A. The tonnage difference meant real room for only about 850. If she took the full 1,000 she'd be jammed. She was due to arrive at Frostbite in the very early morning. Normally I

would have kept a deathwatch, but the AA rating lulled me and I went to the Hamilton House to sleep.

At 4:30, the bedside phone chimed. "This Willie Egan," a frightened voice said. "You remember—on the desk at the Phoenix." Desk, hell—he was a 17-year-old copyboy I'd tipped to alert me on any hot breaks.

"There's some kind of trouble with the Esmeralda," he said. That big immigrant ship. They had a welcoming committee out, but the ship's overdue. I thought there might be a story in h. You got my home address? You better send the check there. Mr. Weems doesn't like us to do string work. How much do I get?"

"Depends," I said, waking up abruptly. "Thanks, kid." I was into my clothes and down the street in five minutes. It looked good; mighty good.

The ship was overcrowded, the AA insurance rating I had was a year old—maybe it had gone to pot since then and we'd have a major disaster on our hands.

I snapped on the newsroom lights and grabbed the desk phone, knocked down one toggle on the key box and demanded: "Space operator! Space operator!"

"Yes, sir. Let me have your call, please?"

"Gimme the bridge of the Esmeralda due to dock at the Frostbite spaceport today. While you're setting up the call gimme interplanetary and break in when you get the Etmeralda."

"Yes, sir." Click-click-click.

"Interplanetary operator."

"Gimme Planet Gammadion. Person-to-person, to the public relations officer of the Frimstedt Atomic Astrogation Company. No, I don't know his name. No, I don't know the Gam-nadion routing. While you're setting up the call gimme the local operator and break in when you get my party."

"Yes, sir." Click-click-click.

"Your call, please."

"Person-to-person, captain of the spaceport"

"Yes, sir."

Click-click-click. "Here is Esmeralda, sir."

"Who's calling?" yelled a voice. "This is the purser's of-fce, who's calling?"

"Interstellar News, Frostbite Bureau. What's up about the ihip being late?"

"I can't talk now! Oh, niy God! I can't talk now! They're going crazy in the steerage—" He hung up and I swore a little.

"Space operator!" I yelled. "Get me Esmeralda again—if you can't get the bridge get the radio shack, the captain's cabin, anything in-board!"

"Yes, sir."

Click-click-click. "Here is your party, sir."

"Captain of the port's office," said the phone.

"This is Interstellar News. What's up about Esmeralda? I just talked to the purser in space and there's some trouble aboard."

"I don't know anything more about it than you boys," said the captain of the port. But his voice didn't sound right.

"How about those safety-standard stories?" I fired into the dark.

"That's a tomfool rumor!" he exploded. "Her atomics are perfectly safe!"

"Still," I told him, fishing, "it was an engineer's report—"

"Eh? What was? I don't know what you're talking about." He realized he'd been had. "Other ships have been an hour late before and there are always rumors about shipping. That's absolutely all I have to say—absolutely all!" He hung up.

Click-click-click. "Interplanetary operator. I am trying to place your call, sir." She must be too excited to plug in the right hole on her switchboard. A Frostbite Gammadion call probably cost more than her annual salary, and it was a gamble at that on the feeble and mysteriously erratic sub-radiation that carried voices across segments of the galaxy.

But there came a faint harumph from the phone. "This is Captain Gulbransen. Who is calling, please?"

I yelled into the phone respectfully: "Captain Gulbransen, this is Interstellar News Service on Frostbite." I knew the way conservative shipping companies have of putting ancient, irritable astrogators into public-relations berths after they are ripe to retire from space. "I was wondering, sir," I shouted, "if you'd

care to comment on the fact that Esmeralda is overdue at Frostbite with 1,000 immigrants."

"Young man," wheezed Gulbransen dimly, "it is clearly stated in our tariffs filed with the ICC that all times of arrival are to be read as plus or minus eight Terrestrial Hours, and

that the company assumes no liability in such cases as—"

"Excuse me, sir, but I'm aware that the eight-hour leeway is traditional. But isn't it a fact that the average voyage hits, the E.T.A. plus or minus only fifteen minutes T.H.?"

"That's so, but—"

"Please excuse me once more, sir—I'd like to ask just one more question. There is, of course, no reason for alarm in the lateness of Esmeralda, but wouldn't you consider a ship as much as one hour overdue as possibly in danger? And wouldn't the situation be rather alarming?"

"Well, one full hour, perhaps you would. Yes, I suppose so—but the eight-hour leeway, you understand—" I laid the phone down quietly on the desk and ripped through the Phoenix for yesterday. In the business section it said "Esmeralda due 0330." And the big clock on the wall said 0458.

I hung up the phone and sprinted for the ethertype, with the successive stories clear in my head, ready to be punched and fired off to Marsboo for relay on the galactic trunk. I would beat out IS clanging bells on the printer and follow them with

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

IMMIGRANT SHIP ESMERALDA SCHEDULED TO LAND FROSTBITE WITH 1,000 FROM THETIS PRO-CYON ONE AND ONE HALF HOURS OVERDUE: OWNER ADMITS SITUATION "ALARMING/1 CRAFT "IN DANGER."

And immediately after that a five-bell bulletin:

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN

FROSTBITE—THE IMMIGRANT SHIP ESMERALDA, DUE TODAY AT FROSTBITE FROM THETIS PROCYON WITH 1,000 STEERAGE PASSENGERS ABOARD IS ONE AND ONE HALF HOURS OVERDUE. A SPOKESMAN FOR THE OWNERS, THE FRIMSTEDT ATOMIC AS-TROGATION COMPANY, SAID SUCH A SITUATION IS -ALARMING" AND THAT THE CRAFT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED "IN DANGER." ESMERALDA IS AN 830 THOUSAND-TON FREIGHTER-STEERAGE PASSENGER CARRIER.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE PORT AT FROSTBITE ADMITTED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS CIRCU-

LATINO ABOUT THE CONDITION OF THE CRAFTS ATOMICS THOUGH THESE WERE RATED "A" ONE YEAR AGO.

THE PURSER OF THE SPACESHIP, CONTACTED IN SPACE, WAS AGITATED AND INCOHERENT WHEN QUESTIONED. HE SAID—

"Get up, Spencer, get away from the machine."

It was Joe Downing, with a gun in his hand.

"I've got a story to file," I said blankly.

"Some other time." He stepped closer to the ethertype and let out a satisfied grunt when he saw the paper was clean. "Port captain called me," he said. "Told me you were nosing around."

"Will you get out of here?" I asked, stupefied. "Man, Fve flash and bulletin matter to clear. Let me alone!"

"I said to get away from that machine or I'll cut ya down, boy."

"But why? Why?"

"George don't want any big stories out of Frostbite."

"You're crazy. Mr. Parsons is a newsman himself. Put that damn-fool gun away and let me get this out!"

I turned to the printer when a new voice said, "No! Don't do it, Mr. Spencer. He is a Nietzschean. He'll kill you, all right. He'll kill you, all right."

It was Leon Portwanger, the furrier, my neighbor, the man who claimed he never knew Kennedy. His fat, sagging face, his drooping white mustache, his sad black eyes enormous behind the bull's-eye spectacles were very matter-of-fact. He meant what he said. I got up and backed away from the ethertype.

"I don't understand it," I told them.

"You don't have to understand it," said the rat-faced collector of the port. "All you have to understand is that George don't like it." He fired one bullet through the printer and I let out a yelp. I'd felt that bullet going right through me.

"Don't," the steady voice of the furrier cautioned. I hadn't realized that I was walking toward Downing and that his gun was now on my middle. I stopped.

"That's better," said Downing. He kicked the phone connection box off the baseboard, wires snapping and trailing. "Now go to the Hamilton House and stay there for a couple of days."

I couldn't get it through my head. "But Esmeralda's a cinch to blow up," I told him. "It'll be a major space

disaster. Half of them are women! I've got to get it out!"

"Ill take him back to his hotel, Mr. Downing," said Portwanger. He took my arm in his flabby old hand and led me out while that beautiful flash and bulletin and the first lead disaster and the new lead disaster went running through my head to a futile obbligato of: "They can't do this to me!" But they did it.

Somebody gave me a drink at the hotel and I got sick and a couple of bellboys helped me to bed. The next thing I knew I was feeling very clear-headed and wakeful and Chenery was hovering over me looking worried.

"You've been out cold for forty-eight hours," he said. "You had a high fever, chills, the works. What happened to you and Downing?"

"How's Esmeralda?" I demanded.

"Huh? Exploded about half a million miles off. The atomics went." ^

"Did anybody get it to ISN for me?"

"Couldn't. Interplanetary phones are out again. You seem to have got the last clear call through to Gammadion. And you put a bullet through your ethertype—"

"/ did? Like hell—Downing did!"

"Oh? Well, that makes better sense. The fact is, Downing's dead. He went crazy with that gun of his and Chief Selig shot him. But old Portwanger said you broke the ethertype when you got the gun away from Downing for a minute— no, that doesn't make sense. What's the old guy up to?"

"I don't give a damn. You see my pants anywhere? I want to get that printer fixed."

He helped me dress. I was a little weak on my pins and he insisted on pouring expensive eggnog into me before he'd let me go to the bureau.

Downing hadn't done much of a job, or maybe you cant do much of a job on an ethertype without running it through an induction furnace. Everything comes apart, everything's replaceable. With a lot of thumbing through the handbook I had all the busted bits and pieces out and new ones in. The adjustment was harder, needing two pairs of eyes. Chenery watched the meters while I turned the screws. In about four hours I was ready to call. I punched out:

NOTE MARSBUO ISN. FRBBUO RESTORED TO SVC AFTR MECHNCL TRBL ETILLNESS.

The machine spat back:

NOTE FRBBUO. HW ELLNSS COINCDE WTH MJR DISSTR YR TRRTRY? FYI
GAMMADION BUO ISN OUTRCHD FR ESMERALDA AFTR YR INXPLCBL SLNCE ETWS
BDLY BTN GAMMADION BUGS COM-PTSHN. MCG END.

He didn't want to hear any more about it. I could see him stalking away from the printer to the copydesk slot to chew his way viciously through wordage for the major splits. I wished I could see in my mind's eye Ellie slipping over to the Krueger 60-B circuit sending printer and punching out a word or two of kindness—the machine stirred again. It said: "JOE JOE HOW COULD YOU? ELLIE"

Oh, God.

"Leave me alone, will you?" I asked Chenery.

"Sure—sure. Anything you say," he humored me, and slipped out.

I sat for a while at the desk, noticing mat the smashed phone connection had been installed again, that the place had been policed up.

Leon Portwanger came waddling in with a bottle in his hand. "I have here some prune brandy," he said.

Things began to clear up. "You gave me that mickey," I said slowly. "And you've been lying about me. You said I wrecked the ethertype."

"You are a determinist and I was trying to save your life," he said, setting down two glasses and filling them. "Take your choice and I will have the other. No micfceys." I picked one and gulped it down—nasty, too-sweet stuff that tasted like plum peelings. He sipped his and seemed to enjoy it.

"I thought," he said, "that you were in with their gang. What was I to think? They got rid of poor Kennedy. Pneumonia! You too would have pneumonia if they drenched you with water and put you on the roof in your underwear overnight. The bottles were planted here. He used to drink a little with me, he used to get drunk now and then—so did I—nothing bad."

"You thought I was in their gang," I said. "What gang are you in?"

"The Frostbite Interplanetary Party," he said wryly. "I would smile with you if the joke were not on me. I know, I know—we are Outs who want to be Ins, we are neurotic youngsters, we are led by stooges of the Planetary Party. So what should I do—start a one-man party alone on a mountain-top, so pure that I must blackball everybody except myself from membership? I am an incorrigible reformer and idealist whether I like it or not—and sometimes, I assure you, I don't like it very weD.

"Kennedy was no reformer and idealist. He was a prag-matist, a good man who .wanted a good news story that would incidentally blow the present administration up. He used me, I used him. He got his story and they killed him and burglarized the bureau to remove all traces of it. Or did they?"

"I don't know," I muttered, "Why did you dope me? Did Downing really go cra^y?"

"I poisoned you a little because Downing did not go crazy. Downing was under orders to keep you from sending out mat story. Probably after he had got you away from the ethertype he would have killed you if I had not poisoned you with some of my heart medicine. They realized while you were ill and feverish that it might as well be one as another. If they killed you, there would only be another newsman sent out to be inveigled into their gang. If they killed Downing, they could blame everything on him, you would never be able to have anything more than suspicions, and—there are a lot more Downings available, are there

not?"

My brain began to click. "So your mysterious 'they' didn't want a top-drawer story to center around Frostbite. If it did, there'd be follow-ups, more reporters, ICC people investigating the explosion. Since the news break came from Gammadion, that's where the reporters would head and that's where the ICC investigation would be based. But what have they got to hide? The political setup here smells to high heaven, but it's no worse than on fifty other planets. Graft, liquor, vice, drugs, gambling—"

"No drugs," said the furrier.

"That's silly," I told him. "Of course they have drugs. With everything else, why not drugs?"

He shrugged apologetically. "Excuse me," he said. "I told you I was a reformer, and an idealist. I did not mention that I used to be an occasional user of narcotics. A little something to take the pressure off—those very small morphine sulphate tablets. You can imagine my horror when I emigrated to this planet twenty-eight years ago and found there were no drugs—literally. Believe me when I tell you that I— looked hard. Now, of course, I am grateful. But I had a few very difficult weeks." He shuddered, finished his prune brandy and filled both our glasses again.

He tossed down his glass.

"Damn it all!" he exploded. "Must I rub your nose in it? Are you going to figure it out for yourself? And are you going to get killed like my poor friend, Kennedy? Look here! And here!" He lurched to his feet and yanked down "WHO'S WHO IN THE GALAXY" and the United Planets Drug Committee Report.

His pudgy finger pointed to:

"PARSONS, George Warmerdam, organic chemist, news-ppr publr, b. Gammadion 172, s. Henry and Dolores (Warmerdam) P., studied Gammadion Chem. Inst. B.Ch 191, M.Ch 193, D.Ch 194; empl. dir research Hawley Mfg Co. (Gammadion) 194-198; founded Parsons Chem Mfg Labs (Gammadion) 198, headed same 198-203; removed Frostbite 203; founded newspaper Frostbite Phoenix 203. Author, tech papers organ chem 193-196. Mem Univ Organ Chem Soc. Address c/o Frostbite Phoenix, Frostbite."

And in the other book:

"—particular difficulty encountered with the stupefiant known as 'J-K-B.' It was first reported on Gammadion in the year 197, when a few isolated cases presented themselves for medical treatment. The problem rapidly worsened through the year 203, by which time the drug was in widespread illicit interplanetary commerce. The years 203-204 saw a cutting-off of the supply of J-K-B for reasons unknown. Prices soared to fantastic levels, unnumbered robberies and murders were committed by addicts to obtain possession of the minute quantities remaining on the market, and other addicts, by the hundreds of thousands presented themselves to the authorities hoping more or less in vain for a 'cure.' J-K-B appeared again in the year 205, not confined to any segment of the inhabited galaxy. Supplies have since remained at a con-

stant level—enough to brutalize, torment, and shorten the lives of the several score million terrestrial and extra-terrestrial beings who have come into its grip. Interrogation of peddlers intercepted with J-K-B has so far only led back through a seemingly endless chain of middlemen. The nature of the drug is such that it cannot be analyzed and synthesized—"

My head spun over the damning parallel trails. Where Parsons tried his wings in chemistry, J-K-B appeared. When he went on his own, the quantity increased. When he moved to another planet, the supply was cut off. When he was established, the supply grew to a constant level and stayed there.

And what could be sweeter than a thoroughly corrupt planet to take over with his money and his newspaper? Dominate a machine and the members' "regularity" will lead them to kill for you—or to kill killers if need be. Encourage planetary ignorance and isolationism; keep the planet unattractive and depressed by letting your free-booters run wild—that'll discourage intelligent immigration. Let token parties in, fleece them fast and close, let them spread the word that Frostbite's no place for anybody with brains.

"A reformer and idealist I am," said Portwanger calmly. "Not a man of action. What should be done next?"

I thought it over and told him; "If it kills me, and it might, I am going to send a rash of flashes and bulletins from this Godforsaken planet. My love life depends on it Leon, do you know anybody on Mars?"

"A Sirian fellow named Wenjtkpli—a philosophical anarchist. An unreal position to take. This is the

world we are jo, there are certain social leverages to apply. Who is he to ay—?"

I held up my hand. "I know him too." I could taste that eleventh stinger again; by comparison the prune brandy was mellow. I took a gulp. "Do you think you could go to Mars without getting bumped off?"

"A man could try."

The next two weeks were agonizing. Those Assyrian commissars or Russian belshazzars or whatever they were who walked down prison corridors waiting to be shot in the back

of the head never went through what I did. I walked down the corridor for fourteen days.

First Leon got off all right on a bucket of bolts. I had no guarantee that he wouldn't be plugged by a crew member who was in on the party. Then there was a period of waiting for the first note that I'd swap you for a mad tarantula.

It came:

NOTE FRBBUO HOW WELL XPCT KP CLNT IF UN-ABL DROP COPY? MCG MARSBUO.

I'd paved the way for that one by drinking myself into a hangover on home brew and lying in bed and groaning when I should have been delivering the printer copy to the Phoenix. I'd been insulting as possible to Weems to insure that he'd phone a squawk to McGillicuddy—I hoped. The tipoff was "hell." Profanity was never, ever used on our circuits—I hoped. "Hell" meant "Portwanger contacted me, I got the story, I am notifying United Planets Patrol in utmost secrecy." Two days later came:

NOTE FRBBUO BD CHMN WNTS KNO WOT KIND DAMN KNUCKLHED FILING ONLY FOURFIVE ITMS DAILY FM XPNSVE ONEMAN BUO. XPCT UP-STEP PRDCTN IMMY, RPT IMMY MCG MARSBUO.

"Damn" meant "Patrol contacted, preparing to raid Frostbite." "Fourfive" meant "fourfive"—days from

message.

The next note would have got ISN in trouble with the Interplanetary Communications Commission if it hadn't been in a good cause. I'm unable to quote it. But it came as I was in the bureau about to leave for the Honorable Homer With-erspoon's testimonial banquet. I locked the door, took off my parka and rolled up my sleeves. I was going to sweat for the next few hours.

When I heard the multiple roar of the Patrol ships on rockets I very calmly beat out fifteen bells and sent:

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

UNITED PLANETS PATROL DESCENDING ON FROSTBITE, KRUEGER 60-B'S ONLY PLANET, IN UNPRECEDENTED MASS RAID ON TIP OF INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE THAT WORLD IS SOLE SOURCE OF DEADLY DRUG J-K-B.

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN

THE MASSED PATROL OF THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANIZATION DESCENDED ON THE ONLY PLANET OF KRUEGER 60-B, FROSTBITE, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MASS RAID THIS EVENING. ON INFORMATION FURNISHED BY INTERSTELLAR NEWS REPORTER JOE SPENCER THE PATROL HOPES TO WIPE OUT THE SOURCE OF THE DEADLY DRUG J-K-B, WHICH HAS PLAGUED THE GALAXY FOR 20 YEARS. THE CHEMICAL GENIUS SUSPECTED OF INVENTING AND PRODUCING THE DRUG IS GEORGE PARSONS, RESPECTED PUBLISHER OF FROSTBITE'S ONLY NEWSPAPER.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

FIRST UNITED PLANETS PATROL SHIP LANDS IN

FROSTBITE CAPITAL CITY OF PLANET.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

PATROL COMMANDER PHONES EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW TO INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE FROSTBITE BUREAU REPORTING ROUND-UP OF PLANETARY GOVERNMENT LEADERS AT TESTIMONIAL DINNER

(WITH FROSTBITE)

FROSTBITE—ISN—ONE INTERSTELLAR NEWS REPORTER HAS ALREADY GIVEN HIS LIFE IN THE CAMPAIGN TO EXPOSE THE MAKER OF J-K-B. ED KENNEDY, ISN BUREAU CHIEF, WAS ASSASSINATED BY AGENTS OF DRUGMAKER GEORGE PARSONS THREE MONTHS AGO. AGENTS OF PARSONS STRIPPED KENNEDY AND EXPOSED HIM OVERSIGHT TO THE BITTER COLD OF THIS PLANET, CAUSING HIS DEATH BY PNEUMONIA. A SECOND INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE REPORTER, JOE STCNCER, NARROWLY ESCAPED DEATH AT THE HANDS OF A DRUG-RING MEMBER WHO SOUGHT TO PREVENT HIM FROM SENDING NEWS OVER THE CIRCUITS OF THE INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH PATROL SEIZES PARSONS

•INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN

FROSTBITE— IN A TELEPHONE MESSAGE TO INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE A PATROL SPOKESMAN SAID GEORGE PARSONS HAD BEEN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AND UNMISTAKABLY IDENTIFIED. PAR-

SONS HAD BEEN LIVING A LIE ON FROSTBITE, USING THE NAME CHENERY AND THE GUISE OF A COLUMNIST FOR PARSONS' NEWSPAPER. SAID THE PATROL SPOKESMAN;—"IT IS A TYPICAL MANEUVER. WE NEVER GOT SO FAR ALONG THE CHAIN OF J-K-B PEDDLERS THAT WE NEVER FOUND ONE MORE. APPARENTLY THE SOURCE OF THE DRUG HIMSELF THOUGHT HE COULD PUT HIMSELF OUT OF THE REACH OF INTERPLANETARY JUSTICE BY ASSUMING A FICTITIOUS PERSONALITY. HOWEVER, WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY IDENTIFIED HIM AND EXPECT A CONFESSION WITHIN THE HOUR. PARSONS APPEARS TO BE A J-K-B ADDICT HIMSELF.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH PARSONS CONFESSES

(FIRST LEAD FROSTBITE)

FROSTBITE—ISN—THE UNITED PLANETS PATROL AND THE INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE JOINED HANDS TODAY IN TRIUMPH AFTER WIPING OUT THE MOST VICIOUS NEST OF DRUGMAKERS IN THE GALAXY. J-K-B, THE INFAMOUS NARCOTIC WHICH HAS MENACED—

I ground out nearly thirty thousand words of copy that night Bleary-eyed at the end of the run, I could barely read a note that came across:

NOTE FRBBUO: WELL DONE. RETURN MARS JIMMY: SNDNG REPLCEMNT. MARSBUO MCG.

The Patrol flagship took me back in a quick, smooth trip with lots of service and no yaks.

After a smooth landing I took an eastbound chair from the field and whistled as the floater lifted me to the ISN floor. The newsroom was quiet for a change and the boys and girls stood up for me.

McGillicuddy stepped out from the copy table slot to say: "Welcome back. Frankly, I didn't think you had it hi you, but you proved me wrong. You're a credit to the profession and the ISN." Portwanger was there, too. "A pragmatist, your McGillicuddy," he muttered. "But you did a good job."

I didn't pay very much attention; my eyes were roving over no man's land. Finally I asked McGillicuddy: "Where's Miss Masters? Day off?"

"How do you like that?" laughed McGillicuddy. "I forgot

to tell you. She's your replacement on Frostbite. Fired her off yesterday. I thought the woman's angle—where do you think you're going?"

"Honest Blogri's Olde Earthe Saloon," I told him with dignity. "If you want me, I'll be under the third table from the left as you come in. With sawdust in my hair."