

WHEN THE MOON DIED BY DON WILCOX

SEE
BACK
COVER

AMAZING STORIES

SEPTEMBER
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AMAZING STORIES



BEAST OF THE ISLAND

by ALEXANDER M. PHILLIPS

FACE IN THE SKY

by THORNTON AYRE

and Stories by

KUMMER - SHURTLEFF - WILLIAMS

SEPTEMBER
1934

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FACE in the SKY

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre.

First published *Amazing Stories*, September 1939.

There couldn't be a Face in the sky. Not a living one. But when it spoke, an awe-stricken world rushed to obey its command.

CHAPTER I

Nebula 76K

The year 1990! And a world bristling with preparedness armament awaited the last war. But then the unexpected happened.

It was formless at first. It resembled an electrical storm far away in the region of the Pole Star. Yet in some way it differed from an electrical haze; it was more after the style of a nebula, an oval patch of mist appearing as large as the sun. And, most amazing thing, it was within the boundaries of the Solar System. A nebula *inside* the solar system . . . ?

Unquestionably it demanded the attention of the scientists. It certainly sharpened the curiosity of Stuart Bates, the thirty-five-year-old assistant astronomer of the New York Observatory. That he was just an assistant rankled strongly with Stu; he knew that the impatient chief, Boyd Granville, had only become the ruler of the observatory through influence and not through knowledge. What the Sam Hill did he know about science anyway? Didn't he always rely on the younger man for data?

Certainly the husky, blond headed Stu was well able to take care of the responsibility. He had his pet ideas, too. He believed he might one day communicate by radio to other worlds. Jane Carter, the young television actress, was with him in that. They'd got engaged on the strength of it. When time permitted they worked towards that common and of bridging the interstellar gap. Without doubt, the flaxen haired Jane knew all the scientific answers, even if she was an actress of world renown.

When Stu came to study the reflector's photographic findings of the nebula, he did not quite know what to think; neither did the Chief. It was peculiar indeed, but that mist—through the telescope—looked devilishly like a malignant face! The eyes were there, the nose, the mouth and jaw, capped by a lofty forehead; but as yet the phenomenon was so distant the details were none too accurate.

Of course it could only be chance that the nebula looked that way. Just the same, the Chief advised suppression of the real facts in case the susceptible public got the idea wrong. So the unknown nebula became Nebula 76K in the records of the observatory and the Chief promptly dismissed the idea from his mind.

Stu was rather loath to drop the investigation, but force of circumstances compelled him to do so. He was suddenly ordered by other observatories to make all observations of Pluto and check the current astronomical report that the little ninth planet had developed a gouge on its surface representing a penetration to perhaps 30 miles inside its mass. Stu checked the observation easily enough. The giant reflector revealed that the far-flung little world had a V-shaped notch in its side. The reason was fairly obvious. Some dark, wandering meteor of the void had struck the planet a terrific blow and torn a massive chunk out of it.

Stu logged the matter in the routine way, made his own private notes about it—as he always did when anything unusual happened—and passed on the desired verification to other observatories.

Then he resumed his studies of Nebula 76K. In two nights it had become considerably bigger and the details were much clearer. The resemblance to a face was more startling than ever. Staring into the mirror with keen blue eyes Stu fancied he could make out slumberous optics hidden by a doming forehead. Somehow, though he was by no means a nervous

individual, the contemplation frightened him a little. There was something eerie about that immovable visage floating out there among the northern stars.

He was in something of a quandary too. The Chief had said the matter was finished with: for that reason he dare not bring up the problem again. The Chief was touchy that way. But on the other hand. Stu scratched his thick blond hair and finally gave up the riddle, went on with routine work and wondered how much of the face was actual and how much due to his fertile imagination.

In this short space of a week the face grew to proportions easily discernable to the naked eye. Night after night, when the weather permitted, it became visible in the north—large enough now to encompass Ursa Major on the one side and Cassiopeia on the other. The Pole Star itself had been obliterated.

Scientists began to get jittery. The public was more than jittery; it was definitely frightened. The vision of that distant, immovable face like a watching god, brooding over city and country alike, was unnerving. Stronger minded ones managed to laugh at it, but even they were inwardly alarmed. No one could look at the Face and remain unmoved.

Stu had no theories to offer. Even if he had he knew better than mention them. Theories were only for the Chief. And very antiquated ones they were as a rule.

“Just the same,” Stu said thoughtfully, when he and Jane found the time for one of their rare get-togethers, “it is queer. Darned queer!”

“Take a look at it from here!”

The girl, five foot two of slender, blonde loveliness, was standing by the window of this little experimental hut in the Adirondacks she and Stu had bought. The solitary window looked due north—and there in the winter sky hung that grey white face, coldly inimical.

“Any ideas about it?” the girl asked, as Stu joined her. She turned her pretty, softly moulded face towards him. Its beauty was definitely enhanced by the yellow scarf she wore tucked in the neck of her blouse.

“No ideas at all,” Stu grunted moodily. “Anyway, it can’t be a real face.”

“Why not?”

“Why, because— Because it’s beyond all reason! Anyway, we didn’t come here to look at that; we’ve radio work to do.”

He turned aside and sat down amid the jumble of radio equipment filling the center of the little room. The girl joined him, her deep gray eyes pensive.

“The more we work on this darned thing the more I think that communication between worlds is impossible,” Stu growled. “We’ve tried every conceivable system and arrangement, and what do we get? Nothing!”

“Granting the waves reach a planet what guarantee have we that they understand them, that they even have instruments?” the girl asked quietly. “I don’t know whether you’ve ever read Felminoff’s theory of life on other worlds, but he says radio is the last method to use. Vibrations would be a better scheme—or even signs of some sort. I’ve a feeling we’re on the wrong tack, and I’ve said so for long enough. Only you won’t listen!”

Stu glanced up with a faint smile. “I guess it isn’t much use listening, Jane, when I can’t follow the advice. I’ve no means of producing vibrations over millions of miles, so radio is the only alternative.”

“I don’t know that you haven’t. In that radio apparatus you’ve got the basis of remote control anyway. You could control anything for a hundred miles and more; extending the

vibratory influence is only a matter of study.”

“Oh, to hell with it. Felminoff’s not always right anyway. I think you pay too much attention to him.”

The girl shrugged her dainty shoulders and sat down beside him. She had used up all the ideas in radio she knew in an endeavor to produce the right one for interplanetary communication, but without avail. Even with Stu’s trained knowledge added to them nothing had emerged beyond remote control, and that definitely was not much use.

“Anyway,” Stu grunted at last, “there may be something in the idea at that. Might make a basis for space travel. I’ve made a model rocket that would carry any man over the gulf if he had the security of radio control right behind him.”

He glanced towards the bench where a tubular object with small firing cylinders lay discarded.

“Radio communication is so much easier,” he sighed, and for a moment or two sat surveying the mass of apparatus. Then with a grunt of impatience he switched over the power of the mountain stream-driven generator to a powerful receiver, sat back and listened.

The cracklings of static from the electrically ridden air burst from the speaker. Amongst the din, half formed, was the jumble of stations, belated news from overseas, ships’ signals, a dance band, all blurred with the obliterating stream of atmospherics.

Jane sat wincing; Stu frowned heavily—until both of them began to notice that there ran through the jumble a thin thread of speech, extremely faint, extremely deep, that took several seconds to impress itself on the pair.

Jane started forward suddenly, her face amazed. Stu sat up too from his lounging position. For a split second or two the voice was clear.

“People of Earth, you must prepare to obey my wishes! I am watching you. . . .”

The voice, faint though it was, was a deep inhuman bass, filled with a rich quality denied to any human throat.

“What the hell—!” Stu exclaimed blankly, as the words were repeated once more in that sepulchral profundo. Then they stopped suddenly. . . .

“Who—who’s saying that?” Jane stammered at last, startled.

“I dunno. Stopped now all right.”

Stu was right—but in that brief period of voice he had noticed something. The detector on his apparatus, pointing to the source of the communication, had stopped with its needle erect. Pointing upwards, to the north. To the face!

He gave a quick glance at the girl. She had seen the indicator too. She shouted now over the cacophony of resumed stations.

“The—the Face? Did the Face say *that*?”

Stu switched off. The silence seemed suddenly intense.

“Couldn’t have been,” he muttered, giving a short laugh. “It’s too absurd! Somebody playing a joke.”

“The indicator wasn’t, though, and it points north and up!”

Jane got to her feet, clearly uneasy. She moved over to the window and stared northward. The Face was still there, unmoving. Abruptly she spun round.

“Stu, let’s get back to the city,” she said quietly. “I’m getting nervous—honest I am! I don’t like sitting up here hearing things like that. If it was a joke we’ll soon know. Oh come on, *please!*”

Stu shrugged, imagined he looked calm. Inwardly he was far more worried than he cared to admit. O.K. for a girl to be a bit jittery of course, but not for him. He picked up her heavy coat and held it for her.

“Let’s go,” he said simply. “Maybe we both heard things.”

That neither of them had been mistaken about the voice was revealed the following morning when the papers carried headlines about the mystery call. Not that the matter was the isolated concern of America. The entire western hemisphere had heard that faint bass, had wondered what it implied, who was responsible.

It required no effort of genius for the reporters of various countries to link up the voice with the face in the sky which had been coming visibly nearer night by night. A wave of panic swept the more nervous of people. An inhuman bass voice from a place unknown and a face in the sky had all the ingredients necessary for a first class sensation.

As usual, when in a jam beyond their understanding, the people turned to science for opinion. The New York Observatory, among others, came in for plenty of questioning. Not that they could explain much anyway. They published prints of the face as seen through the telescopes, and observed that it was most likely a nebula that looked like a face. The voice they could not explain, and that was why they sounded unconvincing.

Radio engineers were equally baffled by the voice, but they had resolved, they stated, to get their detectors to work if the voice was repeated and find out exactly where it came from. They knew it came from overhead to the north—but that might mean anything. Trouble was that the atmosphere was so upset it made detection difficult.

For a week the voice was not heard again and humanity breathed a trifle more freely under the belief that it had been a clever hoax. Stu, busy every night at the Observatory, was not so sure. In fact, the idea of the voice coming from the face was one that rather appealed his fantastic imagination.

And beyond doubt the Face was still approaching. In every part of the western world men and women were watching it. In the week of the voice’s silence it had certainly become larger, occupying a quarter of the sky and blotting out the stars behind it. The nose and mouth, hard and firm, were distinguishable. So were the deep set, unblinking eyes and lofty forehead. It was as though Colossus brooded over the affairs of men. It was frightening—horribly so.

The more Stu studied the visage through the telescope, always accompanied now in this period of emergency by the Chief, the more he wondered about a theory forming in his mind. Certainly he dare not publish it: its fantasy was opposed to the cold ethics of his profession.

But at least there was no harm in trying it out on Jane. He waited until she had a free night, then reeled it off to her in the cosy warmth of her uptown apartment.

“Suppose,” he said slowly, “it’s the face of an extra-universal being?”

The girl lay back on the divan, pondering, the light catching the exquisite silver ripple of her hair.

“You mean that our solar system is an atom in a macro-universe and that somebody in that macro-universe is watching us?”

“Just that. The voice said he was watching us, didn’t he?”

“Yes, that’s true, but— It can’t be right, Stu, because a Face couldn’t stay immobile so long. I mean it would surely move a little? Think of the time it’s had the same expression!”

“That’s just it!” he cried. “It strengthens my idea. Don’t you see, the time relationship is different? A mere glance from that being might last a year or a century to us. I’m sure I’ve got

something,” he went on keenly. “The Face is getting nearer too. That, as I see it, means that our solar system as an atom in a macro-universe, is moving nearer to the position of the Face.”

“But,” Jane said seriously, “if the time relationship is so different how do you account for the voice being audible? That doesn’t take a year or a century to make itself understood. And anyway, how does a voice reach into our little world from a vast supra-universe?”

Stu frowned. That lay as a sudden barrier in the path.

“Damned if I can figure that bit,” he confessed, shrugging. “It involves sound and vibration mechanics beyond my knowledge. But it’s possible a master scientist might make himself audible. Either it is the voice of the Face itself and we cannot see the movement of his lips as he speaks—or else it is a separate voice transmitted to us by methods too complicated for us to understand.”

“Hmmm . . .” Jane said, by no means satisfied. She got to her feet and poured out drinks. She seemed about to say something as she handed Stu his glass, then both of them glanced toward the softly playing radio in the corner as the program was cut off to give place to the emergency announcer’s voice.

“Attention everybody! We are asked by the Medical Board to issue the following bulletin—An outbreak of severe erysipelas has suddenly appeared in western coastal towns of the Americas, and in several inland towns as well. The disease is highly contagious and in an effort to prevent it spreading until the medical faculty have determined the cause, you are each one asked to refrain from visiting or contacting anybody known to have this ailment. Emergency measures and isolationary procedure will be taken later. That is all.”

“How—how horrible!” Jane whispered, shuddering. “Wonder what started it? Sounds like something out of the middle ages. I hope to Heaven it keeps away from here. My theatrical work is finished if anything marks my skin.”

She turned, surprised, as Stu remained silent. He was sitting staring in front of him, glass unheeded in his hand.

“Anything wrong?” Jane asked briefly.

“Eh? Oh, no! Sorry!” He sat up and finished his drink. “Just something caught my fancy. This erysipelas has given me a new line.”

“Doesn’t take much to start your imagination working, does it?” the girl smiled.

He grinned back at her. “Men with imagination can rule the world,” he observed; then he looked at his watch. “But I can’t stop here any longer otherwise I’ll miss my sleep. Hard going at the observatory these days; I’ve nearly forgotten what a bed looks like. Guess we’ll have another shot at the radio in the Adirondacks when all this has been cleared up, eh?”

“Of course!” She rose too as he got to his feet. He held her for a moment.

“Not frightened any more?” he murmured.

She grimaced. “No time to be! I’ve two pictures on schedule at the studio and that’s keeping me plenty busy. When you get some more spare time let me know. I’ll try and fix it.”

“Right! And try not to worry.”

He kissed her gently, left in a thoughtful frame of mind with strange half formed ideas buzzing round his brain. Outbreak of erysipelas? Face in the sky? Voice? The scientific training he had had somehow insisted that there was a clue in all this, but what it was still escaped him.

CHAPTER II

Epidemic

Like an all consuming tide the erysipelas epidemic swept down on the world, not limiting itself to the western hemisphere but attacking other parts of earth as well, including Russia, India, and many parts in Europe. In fact it seemed that nowhere was immune from it—except perhaps in the far north of the earth, where it was presumed the cold prevented the disease getting a hold.

On the day following the news bulletin warning, the effects of the unexpected scourge were more than evident on the faces of New Yorkers. Men and women appeared at their places of business with ugly burning patches and scars upon their hands and faces, and on other parts of their bodies hidden by clothing. Isolation was all very well, but work had to go on when one's living depended on it, and since the victims experienced no actual feeling of illness they went about their work as usual.

From a feeling of uneasiness and alarm, the emotions of the American, British and European people changed to real terror, particularly as the Face in the sky loomed nearer. And on the very night following the outbreak of erysipelas there came another message in that profound bass voice. This time everybody with a radio set heard it. Stu heard it in the observatory as he checked over recent photographs of the Face with the technical staff and the Chief.

In dead silence the little group listened.

"People of Earth, listen! I am watching you. As the representative of my people I am observing everything you do. For centuries now—to you that is—you have been sunken in bestiality, have spent your time devising new means to destroy each other. Do not attempt to understand me, for that is impossible. I have science and knowledge beyond your imagining. I am in a world far beyond yours, a world wherein your entire universe is but a molecule. Some of our powers you have already felt.

"You are being attacked by powerful cosmic rays which burn and blister your skin. The attack will continue until you have all decided to observe the true standards of civilization. You have a world groaning under the weight of engines of war. One by one you will destroy those deadly armaments, rid yourselves forever of the threat and scourge of war.

"If you do not, you will be destroyed by us—by cosmic rays—as beings unfit to populate a fair planet. Destroy them—or be destroyed! I shall continue to watch you, and until you learn sense the cosmic ray attack will continue without pause. You have been warned!"

The voice stopped dead, its deep thunderous tones rolling through the reaches of the Observatory. For a space the staff stood in motionless amazement, then Chief Granville, ox-like and empurpled of face, whirled round to the telephone and snatched up the receiver.

"Hallo there!" His booming voice was acid with impatience. "Get me radio control headquarters quickly!"

The others stood waiting and listened to his sharp comments.

"You couldn't? No exact detail? Above? Huh! What the hell's the use of a radio control center if you can't do something? Eh? I don't want excuses! I want action!"

He slammed down the receiver and came forward slowly, his bulgy blue eyes glaring in anger.

“Some station!” he snapped. “They can’t determine where the voice actually came from. They know it’s from above, but exactly whereabouts above is open to doubt. A good deal of confusing static to.” He pondered, scratched his half bald head. “Loath though I am to admit it, it looks very likely that this face is the genuine article. After all, an extra-universal being, watching us, would look like that.”

He glared round for approval. Stu smiled bitterly. Just like the Chief to be told exactly what the phenomenon was, *by* the phenomenon, and then produce it as his own idea.

“See something funny in the idea, Bates?” the great man barked.

Stu gave the slightest of starts.

“Not exactly, sir. I was just recalling the fact that I had the same theory of an extra-universal being some days ago. Only I said nothing about it—”

“Said nothing about it!” Granville echoed sourly. “If you’d had any idea so mighty as that nothing would have kept you quiet! And let me tell you, Bates, I don’t like my own theories taken out of my mouth so promptly. Remember, you are not chief astronomer!”

“I’m hardly permitted to forget it,” Stu retorted.

The staff grinned as they looked on. The Chief’s eyes narrowed. He stood with his feet apart.

“What other *original* ideas did you have?” he asked dryly.

“That was the only one. If you don’t believe I thought of it you can ask Miss Jane Carter, the television actress. She’s my fiancée, and I told her all about it—”

“Oh, you did!” Granville exploded. “Then let me tell you something, Bates! Whatever your theories may be—and this one I do not believe in any case—it is your duty to state them first to the observatory board, to *me*—not to outsiders! Suppose you happened on something of world import? I suppose you’d tell it to this actress associate of yours first?”

Stu slammed down the wad of prints he was holding. He kept his voice level with difficulty.

“O.K., I’m through!” he blazed. “You and I never did hit it off, Mr. Granville, and now seems as good a time as any to call it quits. I’ve got other ideas further to the supra-universal being idea, but I’ll be damned if I’ll pass them on to you! Keep your blasted observatory and all that goes with it. That goes for you as its chief, too. Science! You don’t know the first thing about it!”

“Collect your salary in lieu of notice from the cashier and get out,” Granville breathed. “Maybe you’ll learn in time not to steal other people’s theories.”

Stu swung round to the doorway, slammed the portal viciously in place and strode to the cashier’s department. With his month’s salary in his breast pocket he scrambled into hat and coat and emerged into the street.

It only began to percolate upon him as he walked along that he was really fired—fired by an ignoramus, when he, Stu, was the rightful heir to the title of Chief Astronomer. Pity kindly Professor Walters, Head Director of the Observatory Board, had been swayed by influence to institute Granville.

“Oh, hell!” Stu growled. “What’s it matter anyway? Just let him try and solve scientific mysteries from now on! Will he get tied up! And anyway I *have* a new angle. Maybe I’m better free, to work it out.”

He debated as he walked along, finally took a chance. Instead of going to his own apartment he headed for Jane Carter's place. To his delighted surprise the girl herself opened the door, gave him a smile of welcome.

"Well, Stu, you're lucky to catch me in; only been home a few minutes. What's on your mind? We're quite alone if it's anything important. Maid's night out, you know."

"I'm fired," Stu said, leading the way into the drawing room. "That idiot Granville got the same idea as me about an extra-universal being—once he'd heard that radio voice tonight. I told him I got the same idea days ago. Result—fired! Seems to think I was copying him. Not that I mind, of course."

"Maybe you were not very tactful," Jane murmured.

"Well, maybe not. Anyway, I've got more theories. I suppose you heard the voice on the radio tonight?"

"Oh, yes—but I doubt if anybody will listen to a plea for world disarmament. Presidents, dictators, and kings love those steel protections a good deal even if the people don't. I'll wager that rulers will think the thing a joke."

"The erysipelas plague isn't a joke."

"True. Just what are you getting at, Stu?"

"I'd like to fully convince myself that this erysipelas *is* produced by cosmic rays," he said thoughtfully. "That's part of my new theory. I can't quite see how cosmic rays could so suddenly increase to such power as to cause burns. The only way to check up is to travel up into the stratosphere—and that's where you come in. You've a private high level plane."

The girl smiled. "Up on the roof right now. I came home from the studio in it as a matter of fact. It's all yours."

"You're game to come up into the stratosphere with me?"

"Why not? It's safe enough."

"Swell! Give me fifteen minutes while I dash home for a few pocket instruments. I'll join you on the roof."

Within the time he had specified Stu returned, found the girl already seated in her neat, costly little stratosphere bus on the roof top parking space. She handed him a helmet and fur lined jacket, then he dropped in beside her and closed the airtight doors.

The girl gave the power to the engines. Without a sound the plane lifted into the night, swept upward through the busy traffic High Levels and into the darkness of the little frequented heights.

Stu glanced back once or twice toward the receding bowl of spotted light that was New York, then he turned to look at the altimeter. They were up 7 miles and still climbing rapidly. The exterior thermometer registered -60° F. Presently the girl closed the switches that allowed gas valves to operate and so inflate the emergency balloons on top of the machine, turning it into a gondola. It sailed up swiftly over the top of the troposphere layer into the stratosphere.

"I guess that thirty miles up, the top of the ozone layer, will be as much as we can manage," the girl said at last. "That do?"

"I think so." Stu was already at work with his small but accurate pocket instruments, working by the light of the illumined dashboard. Finally he shifted his position towards the window trap. Since most of the ship was solidly sheathed in radiation-proof linings, and the windows too were specially devised to stop deadly free-space emanations, the test trap was the only useful position. Taking care to keep his hands sheltered he went to work.

Jane glanced at him once or twice as the machine reached the limit of its atmospheric rise. She saw him glance out of the window toward that brilliant, inhuman face, more clearly visible than it had ever been before.

“Say, that’s queer!” he ejaculated finally. “My instruments show that the increase in cosmic rays, for this height, is about fourteen percent. That isn’t enough to cause burns down on the earth, especially after traveling through the thick lower layers of air.”

“Fourteen percent increase!” Jane echoed. “But—but *why?*”

“There’s only one explanation,” he answered slowly, thinking. “For some reason the Heavside Layer is thinner than it used to be. It also proves that the voice is *wrong* because fourteen percent cosmic wave increase could not burn a piece of paper, let alone flesh! Cosmic rays, then, are not the cause of erysipelas. It either means that the force of rays has been cut down, or else the voice told lies.”

There was silence for a moment.

“Jane, I’ve a lot of thinking to do,” Stu said pensively. “I think I’ve gotten onto something at last. Let’s get back to earth.”

She nodded silently and turned back to the controls, sent the machine slowly down from the heights.

Back on the roof of the apartment block Stu stood for a while thinking, hand resting on the plane’s bodywork.

“Just what are you driving at, Stu?” the girl asked at last. “Are you trying to prove the face in the sky is a phony?”

“Just that,” he assented quietly, straightening up. “I had a theory about an extra-universal being before; now that’s all washed up. But I’m not sure just what I *am* driving at.”

“Well,” the girl smiled, “you can always contact me by phone and I’ll be ready to listen.”

“Of course.”

He went down with her to her apartment, left her shortly afterward. He pondered as he walked home through the busy streets; he was still at it when he entered his apartment and stood slowly taking off his gloves. Then he stopped, eyeing the right glove sharply in the bright light.

“What the . . .” he started to mutter. That glove was coated on the palm with a fine grayish blue dust.

For several seconds he stood puzzling, then he recalled how he had unconsciously placed his hand on the bodywork of Jane’s plane. He turned swiftly, snatched the glove up, and headed for the little room that did service as an experimental laboratory.

His analysis did not take long.

“Barium platino-cyanide!” he whistled, his eyes gleaming. “The plane must have been covered in it. Boy! Is that something!”

It was on the following day that the erysipelas plague took a turn for the worse. Several people, it was reported, had died from the ravages. Whatever it was causing the trouble—and most people believed the Face and cosmic rays were back of it—the sores produced on humanity became deeper and deeper, destroying vital nerve centers, arresting hearts’ action, creating a toll of death in all directions.

Real worry dropped like a blanket over the world. People were afraid to venture outside, but still there were those who realized that it made no difference whether they were outside or

in. So they went about their business with vague pretensions to normalcy. But it was plainly evident that business had slowed up, that the pitch of life was altered. Terror was driving its roots deep into the western hemisphere, and to a less extent into the east. The Easterners were more stoic, even though they suffered as badly as anybody else. Only in the far north was there freedom, and hither there traveled vast armies of people.

Hundreds dying, a Face in the sky, and the solution was—voluntary disarmament. The Face had said so.

At the New York Observatory the egotistical Granville found himself hard pressed for explanations he could not give. Professor Walters, Head Director of the Board, was getting annoyed—seeing Granville for the irate buffoon he really was. He demanded that Stu Bates be found and brought back. But Stu wasn't coming back. At least not then. He had too many ideas of his own to work out.

He was convinced by now that he was on the track of the hottest scientific mystery of his generation. He went to work in his own individual way, piecing together bits and pieces of the problem as he had encountered them. He felt very much like a detective.

He also went to the length of buying several lengths of lead sheeting which he fashioned into a rough shield inside his little laboratory. So far he had escaped erysipelas; now he remained thoroughly convinced he was immune.

He began a study of his private notebook, in which through the years he had logged down all interesting events at the observatory. On this occasion it was the V-shaped wedge made on Pluto by a meteorite that held his interest. Time and again he read the notes he had written down, then he waded through a thick, clumsy volume on "Contemporary Astronomics."

"It's possible," he breathed at last, shutting the book with a bang; "but first I've got to make absolutely certain. Wonder if Jane is at home or the studio? Try home first."

He turned to the telephone, dialed Jane's apartment. The maid's voice came over the wire.

"Oh, hallo Maisie! This is Stu Bates. Miss Carter there?"

"Yes, sir, but— She can't answer the phone, Mr. Bates. She's ill—has been these last two days. The Plague's struck her."

"What!" Stu stared before him in stunned horror for a moment. "Why wasn't I told?" he demanded savagely. "Dammit, girl, I've got a telephone!"

"I rang again and again, sir, but there was no answer."

Stu gave an inward groan. He remembered now. Professor Walters had rung up twice to plead with him to return to the Observatory. When the telephone had kept on ringing he'd ignored it; clearly, it had been Maisie.

"You can't come here, you know," the maid's voice resumed. "It is against the law to contact a—"

"To hell with the law!" Stu retorted. "I'm coming!"

He slammed down the receiver and whirled into his hat and coat. For the moment everything else was forgotten. In fifteen minutes he arrived at the apartment. The quiet, trim Maisie eyed him anxiously.

"I would have come and told you, sir, only the law forbids me to leave a sick house, and —"

"Damn the law!" Stu bellowed. "Where's Jane?"

He was shown into the girl's room. She lay in bed, her silvery flaxen hair draped on the white pillow. Her bare arms were covered in bandages, her white face labeled with plasters

that barely hid the hideous scars beneath.

“Hallo . . . Stu,” she whispered in a faint voice. “Thank God you came. I—I couldn’t let you know. I guess I’m in a pretty sorry mess!”

“What’s the doctor say?” Stu demanded, breathing hard.

“What can he say? You know what this disease does. It just takes its course. I think I contracted it at the studio—”

“I can stop it!” Stu broke in tensely. “You need lead shields, like I’ve got. I’ll make one for you! A little box and . . .”

Her bandaged hand reached out towards him slowly.

“I’m—I’m afraid its too late for that, now,” she muttered, her lips dry and flaky. “The doctor said it was only a question of hours before . . . before my heart is attacked. That—that means . . .”

“But this is idiotic!” Stu screamed. “I can’t stand around and let you tell me you’re going to die. God in Heaven, no!” He glared round savagely. “Where is that hell-fired doctor anyway? What’s he mean leaving you alone like this with only a maid?”

“Maybe you’ve forgotten, Stu, that mine isn’t an individual case. Nobody can have proper full-time attention these days.”

Jane stopped, biting her lip at some inner anguish. Tears came into her eyes. Stu waited in silent mental torture until her paroxysm had passed. She spoke again, weak voiced.

“What—what made you ring up at last? Did you *guess*?”

He waved an impatient hand. “No—no, nothing like that. I wanted to borrow your plane again, as a matter of fact. I’ve a new slant and need a daylight test of the stratosphere.”

“It’s—it’s parked on the roof. Take it, Stu—leave me alone for a bit. Please. Maisie will look after me.”

“Why doesn’t somebody else come and help you?” Stu demanded desperately. “Your father for instance? He’s only in Chicago. Where can I find him? What’s he look like? I’ll go get him—”

“He died yesterday,” Jane said quietly.

Stu scratched his head, trying to collect his wits.

“Please make your experiment,” the girl insisted. “I’ll be all right until you get back. If you’ve any ideas at all please follow them through. All humanity might be saved. Even *I* might be saved.”

That decided him. “O.K.!” he snapped, and swept past the somber Maisie in the doorway. From the corridor he headed to the roof top. It did not take above a moment or two to single out the girl’s parked plane. He scrambled in, set forth his little array of instruments, then slammed the door. The engine roared.

Set faced, he drove with dizzying speed into the morning sky.

Nor did he stop at the level of the previous night. He went up beyond the top of the ozone layer, aided by the maximum lifting power of the balloon buoys. At a height of 50 miles he stopped, staring at the black sky with its powdering of stars, then he donned dark glasses and studied the glaring, spotted sun.

The Face now was not visible, being on the other side of the world. Not that that interested him now. At length he went to work with his instruments before the window trap.

He stood watching the movement of a testing needle, gave a deep whistle of triumph. Once more he glanced at the black sky. The Heaviside Layer *was* thinner; by daylight the fact

was obvious. The coloration of the infinite was darker than should normally have been the case. Instead of gray-black, the usual shade for this height, it had a darkness nearly approaching the incomprehensible black of outer space.

Stu smiled grimly to himself as he packed up his instruments. Then he sat at the controls again and returned to the rooftop parking ground.

Without a second's hesitation he raced into the building and down to Jane's apartment. He was surprised when the door opened to reveal a grave faced man with pince-nez.

"Oh—er—" Stu was momentarily at a loss for words.

"I'm Doctor Madison," the man volunteered, in a quiet voice. "I take it you are Mr. Bates?"

"Yes, but—"

"So the maid told me." The medico glanced back at the maid in the room as she sat on the divan with a handkerchief to her face. "I'm sorry, young man," he went on seriously, "but—well, I was summoned ten minutes ago. I arrived too late."

Stu felt himself go white. He caught at the doorpost.

"You don't mean that—that Jane—?"

Dr. Madison nodded slowly.

Stu spoke mechanically. "Can—can I see her?"

"You may look from the door, certainly, but the law forbids contact with anyone suffering from the plague, be they alive or dead. Actually, you had no right to come into contact with Miss Carter before, but we'll waive that."

Stu walked to the bedroom door in a daze, stood looking at the still figure in the bed, the sheet drawn up over her face. For several seconds he remained motionless, biting his lip. The only sounds in the world were the deep breathing of the doctor and Maisie's muffled weeping.

He turned at last, stupidly. "I'll—I'll have to arrange the funeral details," he muttered. "Her father's dead and—I was her fiance."

"I understand that the television studios have arranged the funeral," Madison said quietly. "She was a famous star, you know."

"Yeah—yeah of course. O.K., thanks. I'll—have to think it out."

Stu dried up completely. He turned away and went down the corridor, lost to the world. Suddenly, on the very verge of what he knew was the solution to the Face in the sky, his life had fallen in pieces. He was stunned, bereft of the power to think.

CHAPTER III

Disarm—Or Die!

Stu could not think properly for nearly a week afterwards. He attended the immense funeral accorded the girl, saw her coffin lowered into the earth. More than that he could not stand. He fled back to his apartment, spent days fretting round in his little lead protected laboratory trying to collect his demoralized thoughts, trying to force his mind to marshal together the facts he had obtained.

It was while he fought this battle with himself that things rose to a dangerous pitch in the world around him. He was aware of them as events detached, through radio reports and television. On the very night that Jane had died the voice had spoken again, repeating its command for the destruction of armaments or death to humanity through cosmic rays.

Stubborn government leaders challenged the Face, the so-called extra-universal being, to do its worst. They would not consent to destroy armaments. *They* would not, no—but a humanity tortured by insufferable burns, forced to watch their loved ones perish under the influence of the unknown, demanded action. Deputations rose up in America, England, and Europe, swept in mobs against the portals of government and screamed for the destruction of armaments.

The demand was coldly refused.

And as the hordes demonstrated, as Stu moodily gazed from his window upon the almost paralyzed city of New York with its surging, angry people, most of them disease stricken, the Face loomed over it all, bigger than it had ever been, filling all the evening sky. A sky that was all brooding eyes, tight lipped mouth and cruel jaw. Never had a more incredible vision loomed in the heavens of man.

Slowly, Stu began to drag himself out of his depression. In his hands was a possible solution to all this. Jane would have wanted him to carry on. There were millions of Janes in the country, perhaps doomed to die as she had. He turned, tight lipped, suddenly the master of himself again.

He could not work here with the babble of an excited population disturbing him. Methodically, he collected together all the stuff he needed, including his lead shields, packed all the stuff in his car then started off for his shack in the Adirondacks. The quieter atmosphere of the country cleared his brain a little. He drove at a moderate speed, ignored the silent people he occasionally passed as they stood looking up in horrified fascination at the Face looming over all the land.

And now, away from the screening edifices of the city, he saw a peculiarity about that Face that arrested his attention. The lower half of it was obliterated by a perfect curve, which made the chin taper down on each side to pointed ends and cut the center squareness right out. For a long time it puzzled him as he drove along; then as the deepening bay of dark spread slowly up the Face, allowing the stars to show in the dark portion, a gleam of understanding came into his eyes.

He stepped on the gas and drove with an impatient savagery through the deepening night, reached his isolated foothill hut at last and passed inside, switched on the mountain stream-driven generator. The lights came up.

Throwing off his hat and coat he set to work with notepad and pencil, working right from the beginning of the problem to the existing conditions. An hour later he sat back, pondering.

“If my guess is right the Face will be directly overhead in two more nights,” he muttered. “At a height of one hundred miles, and a stratosphere bus will only do fifty. How to get up a hundred miles?”

That stumped him for a moment. Then out of the mist of memory came an observation Jane had once made.

“In that radio apparatus you’ve got the basis of remote control anyway. You could control anything for a hundred miles and more.”

He snapped his fingers in decision, twisted round and began a search of the bench. At last he found what he wanted—the model rocket he had made for early space flying experiments, lying now with its discharge cylinders forlornly empty.

“But not for long!” he breathed, snatching it up. “Boy, this is going to tell me something!” He gave it an affectionate pat, then set to work with his tools. He wielded them far into the night, only stopping toward dawn when he grew too weary to concentrate. Before he retired he gave a final glance out of the window. The Face was still there to the north, but a quarter of it was obliterated by curved, starlit dark.

“Face!” he snorted contemptuously. “Hell, and to think I once thought of an extra-universal being. I must have been nuts!”

With that he threw himself on his bunk and fell into exhausted slumber.

It was on the following day, as Stu worked away isolated from the world, that Governments were forced into concerted action by the people they controlled. Seeing the higher ups would not of themselves take any steps to obey the commands of the Unknown, the people acted for themselves. They paraded in vast armies, laid hold on their particular country’s armaments and began a rampage of destruction.

Throughout the day the true nature of the rank and file of earth’s humanity became revealed. Rulers looked on helplessly as countless millions of dollars’ worth of material was blown up, fired, wrecked, or sunk. The average man and woman, realizing the choice lay between death or the obliteration of war menace, acted with savage promptness. Nation joined nation as the average man and woman went to work in yelling, resolute hordes and invaded the armament factories that had so long loomed over them like Golgothas of steel.

Even to Stu’s ears, far though he was from the city, there came the sound of violent concussions as munition works were blown sky high. His television, which he consulted from time to time, brought to him scenes that were staggering in their import. He saw sudden and absolute disarmament. He saw views of monstrous ships of war sinking at sea. Scenes flashed from the Americas, from Europe, from Britain, from Pole to Pole indeed. Planes were crashing, munition works vomiting flame and destruction, millions upon millions of people milling around in fanatically enthusiastic myriads, intent on destroying the substance of the shadow that had so long fallen across their progress. Nothing else mattered. Business, normal routine, pleasures—all that was swept away in a mad orgy of obedience to the Face in the sky, and Common Sense!

The disarmament went on far into the night with its thunders and concussions. The sky was livid with red. And the Face was there again, taking account of everything—or so the hoarse voiced announcer declared over the radio. Stu glanced at the man’s worried face in the television, then smiled bitterly.

“Wonder just how gullible the average man is?” he murmured, and peered through the window. As on the previous night, the Face was half obliterated by a circle of dark; and this night the dark had encroached further than ever. On the next night, according to Stu’s calculations, the Face would be at its closest.

Throughout the night, and all through the next day, the destruction of armaments went on. Years of work, fortunes in money, were destroyed in those hours by war sick millions. Cannons ran in rivers of molten steel, shells exploded harmlessly in the sea. Engines of war were blasted asunder. In something like sixty hours the desperate arms’ race of half a century was wiped out. The people were satiated. They waited—for relief, went home under the smoke ridden skies. They waited for the first word telling them the Plague had stopped. They had obeyed the command and eradicated armaments, even if it had been against the wish of their war-minded rulers.

But relief did not come. The erysipelas plague was still going on. Bitter, smoldering with resentment, the people of the world awaited an explanation. It came in the late evening.

Stu had his radio on, also waiting. In silence he sat listening as the static ridden bass voice rumbled forth across the interplay of electric forces.

“People of Earth, you have done well. You have obeyed. You have realized the folly of war and destruction. The cosmic ray attack will cease in two more days. The cosmic forces have indeed been stopped already, but such is our distance from you it will take two days before you notice the benefit. I am satisfied. From now on I shall withdraw, a process which to you will seem as slow as my approach.”

Stu switched off as the voice ceased, sat grimly smiling to himself.

“Of course you’ll withdraw, because you can’t do anything else!” he said slowly. “And of course the erysipelas will stop in two more days because there won’t be enough sunspots to keep it going! Cunning and clever—but what’s back of it?”

He shrugged, got to his feet and picked up his rocket projectile. He gave a final once over to the firing cylinders and the remote control pickup mechanism he had embodied. Finally he satisfied himself the thing was dead in tune with his radio transmission waves.

Tugging open the door he carried the rocket outside and centered it on the heavens. Directly overhead was the Face, three-quarters of it eliminated by a circle of black through which stars shone. He surveyed it pensively, stared round the deserted landscape and mountains for a moment, then ignited the rocket’s firing cylinders. In a second or two it hurtled upward with a swoosh of air.

Reaching inside the door, watching the tiny, receding spot of flame that marked the rocket’s position, he operated the dials of his radio transmitter, controlled the experimental tube on its flight into the loftiest levels of the earth’s atmosphere.

Precalculation of the rocket’s speed and distance of the Face revealed to him exactly when the rocket had reached as high—and higher—than the Face. Only then did he handle his controls more delicately, knew that the flying tube had opened a small container and close it again. Then he guided his investigator slowly back to the earth, until it fell gently outside the shack door.

Instantly he raced with it into the bright light, tugged off the container top and shook out a little heap of blue-gray crystals.

“Barium platino-cyanide *crystals!*” he yelled. “Last time it was dust. I was right! The Face is made up of these crystals! It doesn’t live, and never did! Everything, except the voice,

fits in!”

He stood brooding over the stuff, brows knitted, trying to fit in the last pieces of the problem. Then at last he rose from his profound thought as above the drone of his generators he heard the sound of approaching feet on the mountain path. He turned sharply, just in time to see three men come through the doorway.

One of them he immediately recognized as Professor Walters, head director of the Observatory Board. The other two looked like officials of some kind or other.

“Why, Professor!” Stu cried, amazed. “How did you know I was here?”

Walters’ broad, kindly face was troubled.

“I’m afraid your own radio speech brought us here,” he said quietly. “These two gentlemen are from radio headquarters. The voice transmission tonight came through well enough to be properly located. It came from here. Naturally we do not need to look further. Your generators are still running. Bates, just why did you do it?”

Stu stared, open mouthed. “But—but this is ridiculous, sir! I never caused that voice. I’m still trying to figure it out. I have solved everything but that.”

“The voice came from these mountains, approximately here,” said one of the officials. “We took a plane here immediately. Since these mountains are higher than the general land it naturally looked as if the voice came from the north and from above.”

Stu scratched his head in bewilderment. Then Walters moved forward.

“Bates,” he said, in his level voice, “you say you have solved everything else. If you have, you’ve accomplished a miracle. I have arrived at no conclusions and certainly Granville did not. I had the Board dismiss him as a matter of fact. Just what *have* you found out?”

“Plenty! First, what do you figure the Face is?”

“I don’t know. No scientists believe it is a genuine face, of course, but its exact nature is a mystery. What are your views?”

Stu smiled contentedly, felt it was ample repayment for his work to have the big man standing there listening to him.

“You may remember the recordings of a V-shaped wedge on Pluto some time ago?”

“I remember. A meteor, wasn’t it?”

“A meteor of tremendous size collided with Pluto and chipped out a V-shaped piece. Pluto, you may recall, has a considerable percentage of platinum and barium in its makeup, and what slight atmosphere it does possess is mainly cyanogen.^[1] Doesn’t that suggest to you that a good deal of Pluto’s surface and subsurface would be composed of barium-cyanide? Cyanogen gas unites easily with metallic ores, you know.”

[1] Lexy’s “Speculations on Pluto.”

Walters raised his bushy eyebrows in some surprise, nodded slowly.

“That meteor,” Stu went on keenly, “smashed a huge piece out of Pluto. The piece became dust, drifting in a big sea in space. A sea of barium platino-cyanide crystals. The meteor went on into space, invisible. It happened, by the sheerest of coincidence I admit, that that dust formed into the outlines of a face, and there is no wind in space to disturb dust, so it just remained. You follow, sir?”

“Ah-ha,” the big man acknowledged.

“As anybody knows, barium platino-cyanide is fluorescent when reacted upon by X-rays. It happened that that dust was released in space simultaneously with the sun developing

extreme sunspots. Eddington showed us long ago that X-rays increase enormously when sunspots are prolific, and never in the sun's history have spots been so prolific as recently. First, they created violent electric storms in the stratosphere; they weakened it a great deal. Then the X-rays reached out across space far enough to touch that barium dust. It fluoresced, glowed, and looked to us like a giant face. At the same time the rays were coming to Earth from the spots and passed easily through the weakened Heaviside Layer, causing what looked like erysipelas, actually X-ray burning."

The three men were leaning forward now in intense interest.

"It was *not* cosmic rays," Stu said quickly. "Cosmic rays had increased fourteen percent, and that was not enough to burn anybody. The weaker Heaviside Layer was responsible, of course. It showed me that the voice had told lies, anyway. Naturally, Earth was drifting closer to the dust field all the time—and tonight it is as close as it ever will be.

"I got the first clue when I found that erysipelas was striking the world. X-rays might be the cause, I thought, particularly as in the sunless Arctic there was no sign of the disease. X-rays might react on crystals suspended in space. A night test of the stratosphere showed no signs of X-rays because the sun was on the other side of the earth. Because of its distance away, the crystal cloud was affected by solar X-rays just the same. The Earth was not then casting a shadow on it. That came later, when the Face was really near. When I saw the Face being eclipsed by the Earth, as it blocked the X-rays from the sun, I tumbled to the idea that the Face was a phony.

"Actually, I had had a guide before that. Parts of the dust had drifted through space and the plane I experimented in had barium dust on it. By daylight I found X-rays very prevalent, and so decided to protect myself with lead shields. Well, the composition of Pluto, X-rays, and erysipelas all seemed to fit the Face. To make completely sure I sent test rocket into the Face; it came back with a load of barium crystals inside it. That cinched it."

Walters stood in thoughtful silence.

"Certainly a fine piece of scientific, deductive reasoning," he said at last. "And entirely accurate because the points hold together. But Bates, about the *voice*?"

Stu shook his head.

"That's had me licked all along. Back of the voice there must be somebody who had reasoned it out like me and took advantage of a natural phenomenon to make the world disarm. A laudable idea, of course, but how it was accomplished I don't know. The voice said tonight the cosmic ray attack—so called—would end in two days. That's correct, because sunspots will then have gotten to the place where X-ray attack will diminish enormously. The Face too will recede because we are already past the barium field of dust. But the voice—"

Stu stopped suddenly. His eye had caught the detector needle of the radio, as he had switched it off after listening to the voice. He jumped forward, stared at it as it pointed upward and northward.

"Of course!" he cried hoarsely, swinging round. "Sure it points above—*higher up this mountain range!* The main range is slightly northward of here and I'm only in the foothills. That's where the real source of the voice is! Come on!"

He snatched down hat and coat and led the way outside. Talking eagerly among themselves the four of them blundered up the mountain activity, watching keenly as they went, their way well lighted by the half eclipsed Face in the sky above them.

Higher they went, and higher, always northward. For an hour, for two, for three, into the upper reaches of the Adirondacks. They calculated they must have ascended at least 1800 ft. above Stu's foothill shack before Walters in the forefront, suddenly stopped and pointed ahead to a level stretch skirting a precipice.

Upon it, clearly revealed, though the windows were in darkness, was a good sized shack.

"There!" he cried, as excited as a schoolboy. "Come on!"

He raced forward and reached the door, thundered imperiously upon it. At last there came a quick sound from within, the sound of bolts shooting back, then the portal swung wide and permitted a flood of light to stream in the dark.

Against it stood a tall figure in a smock. Stu pushed past into the light, then stopped dead. The man was Dr. Madison!

Stu twisted round to stare into a room replete with radio and other machinery. But to the machinery he paid no heed. His whole gaze was centered on the figure at the far corner. Jane Carter! Pale, yes, but unscarred, and certainly very much alive.

"Jane!" Stu's voice split the sudden silence.

She came forward, smiling a little. Stu felt his heart racing wildly as he reached out and touched her. She was solid all right.

"No—no," he panted. "I'm going nuts or something. I—Who are you, anyway?" he demanded, whirling round on Madison.

The man smiled a little. "David Carter, Jane's father. I guess this is a terrific shock to you, Stu, but—"

"Shock! It's mad—insane!" Stu shouted. "I saw Jane buried and then—"

"No, Stu, you didn't," the girl interposed quietly. "You saw a *coffin* buried, but I wasn't in it. Matter of fact I was here at the time."

"Suppose you start in to explain things, Mr. Carter?" Walters asked quietly. "I gather you are responsible for the voice?"

Carter inclined his head. "We have done nothing wrong, my daughter and I. We only destroyed the menace of war forever and brought a saner balance to the people of the world. A finer civilization will rise out of it. The erysipelas was not our doing either; the sun caused it."

"I'm aware of that now," Walters nodded. "But what's the reason for all this?"

"Yes! What?" Stu demanded, throwing an arm round Jane's shoulders.

"The only way to go to work at the vital moment was to maintain strict secrecy," the girl herself said quickly. "I couldn't even let you into it, Stu, in case you accidentally let something slip. So I pretended to die. With make up, false scars, and what bit of acting ability I possess it was not very difficult. Father, as a bogus doctor, did the rest. You never saw me closely after my supposed death, remember. And Maisie was in the know."

"Ingenious, but what's the idea?" Stu snapped.

"We maintained secrecy in case we should be accused of the X-ray attack, for which of course we were not responsible," said Carter. "Jane here relayed to me your theory of an extra-universal being, and I decided I could use it to build up my own idea. You see, long ago I knew the Face was not genuine. I have always loathed the drift toward war. I calculated I might, with a bit of luck and ingenuity, force humanity into disarmament. I accomplished it in the way you know. I've had this shack up here for years, experimenting with methods for interplanetary communication—just as you have, lower down the mountain range."

"But the voice!" Stu cried.

“That was easy,” Jane smiled. “At the studio we often make voices which have no person to utter them by impressing the appropriate sound waves on film then running the film over a photoelectric apparatus in the fashion of talking pictures. I had no difficulty in learning from a technician how to create a voice of terrific depth; simplest thing in the world. You can make any sound with the correct film technique.

“The first message was run through by father up here when I was with you, and he made it faint to give the impression of distance. When I handed him your extra-universal being idea he decided to use it and made some appropriate speeches.”

“Naturally I took a long chance,” Carter smiled. “If the disarmament had not taken place before the end of the sunspot X-ray attack I would have been stumped.”

“For such knowledge you must have a tremendous grasp of science,” Walters remarked, frowning.

“Just what I’m thinking,” Stu said in surprise. “Jane told me you were a lawyer in Chicago, sir.”

Carter smiled. “Ever heard of Felminoff?” he asked briefly.

“Not *the* Felminoff, the famous scientist, theorist, and pacifist!” Walters cried.

“I’m afraid so,” Carter chuckled. “Only, like any man, I do not like ridicule. I was afraid that was what I would get when some of my theories were published so I assumed a name. Also I thought it better to keep the name of Carter out of it—in relation to myself—when Jane became famous. Nobody could say she’d gotten her success because of a famous parent. See?”

Stu began to grin. “No wonder you had it all doped out!” he cried. “Gosh, if only I’d known you were trying to do interplanetary radio! Now I see where Jane gets her scientific—”

He stopped suddenly, staring in front of him. He glanced up suddenly at the scientist.

“Say, maybe we’ve both been wrong!” he cried. “Why bother with radio? In one of your treatises you suggested signs— Well, why not? Fire a sign of barium cyanide into space and activate it with X-rays! That will surely attract a Martian or Venusian?”

Carter snapped his fingers. “You’ve hit it! It never even occurred to me.”

“Then the Face has served a useful purpose after all,” said Walters, smiling. “And the rest of the world will never know what has taken place in this shack tonight. As to you, Stu, I want you to come back to the Observatory as chief astronomer and—”

He stopped, coughing slightly.

For Stu had not even been listening. Neither had Jane. They were enfolded in each other’s arms.

[The end of *Face in the Sky* by John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre)]