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Title: Crisis!

Date of first publication: 1942

Author: Cyril M. Kornbluth (1923 - 1958) writing as Cecil Corwin)

Date first posted: March 22 2013

Date last updated: March 22 2013

Faded Page eBook #20130344

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Mary Meehan & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

CRISIS

By Cyril M. Kornbluth

(Writing as Cecil Corwin)

1942

If the Karfiness hadn't cut herself badly while she was trimming her chelae one morning, the whole mess might never have happened. But fashion decreed that the ropy circle of tentacles about the neck of the female Martian would be worn short that year, and everybody in the Matriarchy, from Girl Guide to the Serene Karfiness herself, obeyed without question.

That was why her temper was short that morning, and why she snapped at the Venusian Plenipotentiary who had come to chat with her concerning the space-mining rights for the following year. The worthy lady glowered at the gentleman from Venus and shrieked, "By the Almighty, if you fish-faced baboons so much as try to lay a flipper on a single free electron between here and Venus I'll blow your waterlogged planet out of space!" And, unfortunately for the Venusians, she had the navy with which to do it.

The principles of compensation operated almost immediately; the Plenipotentiary ethered back to Venus, and Venus severed diplomatic relations with Earth. Should you fail to grasp the train of events, stop worrying. Those are the facts; the Karfiness cut herself and Venus made warlike noises at Earth.

Earth was in a very peculiar situation. Only a century ago it had begun really intensive spacing, with freight exchanges and mining. Venus and Mars, and in a smaller way Jupiter, had been a space culture for millennia. Earth had not had the elaborate machineries of foreign offices and consulates, embassies and delegates and envoys that the other planets maintained. Terra had gone into the complicated mess of astropolitics with her eyes serenely closed and the naive conviction that right would prevail.

To the cloistered Bureau of Protocol in Alaska came a message under diplomatic seal from the Ambassador to Venus, right into the office of Code Clerk Weems.

Carefully he scanned the tape and lead that closed the pouch. "At it again," he said finally. "I sometimes wonder if the whole thing wouldn't go smash if we read our own mail before every other great power in space."

Dr. Helen Carewe, his highly privileged assistant, opened the pouch with a paper knife and a shrug. "Take it easy, career man," she advised. "Your daddy had the same trouble before they promoted him to Washington State. We get all the dirty work here in Nome—have to explain how and when and why the inviolable mail sacks arrive open and read." She scanned the messages heavily typed on official paper. "What," she asked, "does 'Aristotle' mean?"

"Inexcusable outrages on the dignity of a representative of Terra," said Weems after consulting the code book. "Sounds bad."

"It is. Oh, but it *is*! They took Ambassador Malcolm and painted him bright blue, then drove him naked through the streets of Venusport."

"Whew!" whistled Weems. "That's an 'Aristotle' if ever I heard one! What do we do now?" He was already reaching for the phone.

"Cut that out!" snapped Dr. Carewe. She could speak to him like that—or even more firmly—because she was more than old enough to be his mother. The number of career men she had coached through the Alaska Receiving Station would fill half the consulates in space—and with damned good men. Brow wrinkled, she brooded aloud, "While this isn't definitely spy stuff, we ought to know whether they have a line on our phones. Don't get Washington; try Intelligence in Wyoming."

Meekly, Weems rang the Central Intelligence Division. After a hasty conversation he turned to Dr. Carewe. "They say that we're being tapped—probably by Martians. What do I do?"

"Thank the man nicely and hang up." Weems obliged.

"Now," said Dr. Carewe, "the sooner Washington hears of this, the better. And if the Martians hear of this later, *much* better. What we have to avoid is the Martians' being able to let the Venusians know with any degree of credibility that Earth is very, very angry about the Aristotle. Because that will get Venus very angry and virtuous. Which will get Earth very dignified and offensive—snotty, I might even say."

"I notice," commented Weems, "that Mars is practically out of the picture. Except as a silent purveyor of fighting ships to both sides, is that it?"

"It is. You learn quickly and cleanly. We'll have to go to Washington ourselves with the pouch."

"And report," said Weems, "to—Oh, my God!—Osgood!"

"Exactly," said she. "Oh-my-God Osgood."

And there was good and sufficient reason for the alarm in her voice.

In the chaste marble structure that housed the diminutive Foreign Office that Terra thought it sufficient to maintain, there were to be found persons who would be kicked out of any other department of the government in two seconds flat. But because astropolitics was something new to Earth, and because there had to be some place made for the half-witted offspring of the great legislative families, this chaste marble structure housed a gallery of subnormals that made St. Elizabeth's look like the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton on a sunny day. Or so the junior members thought. Not the least of these half-witted great ones was Jowett Osgood, the direct superior of Weems, to whom he would naturally report.

Weems and Carewe were announced with a strange pomp and circumstance; they entered the big office and found Osgood rudely buried in what was supposed to look like work. Weems stood dumbly as Dr. Carewe coughed sharply.

"Ah?" grunted Osgood, looking up. "What is it?" He was a gross man.

"A pouch from Venus. We decoded it, and we think it deserves your immediate attention. We didn't phone the contents because of tappers on the wires." Weems handed over the decodings, marked very prominently in red: CONFIDENTIAL—MAKE NO COPIES.

Osgood scanned them and heaved himself to his feet. "Gad!" he grunted. "We must brook no delay—arm to the teeth!" He turned on his dictaphone. "Henry!" he snorted. "Listen to this! To Bureau of Protocol—" Dr. Carewe snapped off the dictaphone and shoved him back into his well-padded chair.

"This," she said between her teeth, "is entirely up to you. Take it from us, immediate action is demanded to smooth over this incident. You won't be able to pass the buck on to some other department; this is right in your lap. And you won't be able to delay the affair until you've forgotten it; even you can see that. Now, *what are you going to do?*"

Osgood considered the matter with great dignity for two full minutes. Finally he announced, "I don't know."

"My suggestion is that you appoint Mr. Weems here a sort of goodwill ambassador for special, but very vague, work. And give him an unlimited expense account. This thing mustn't get any further. Keep it between us three that the message arrived officially on Earth. The fiction will be that it was lost in space and that nobody has received official confirmation of the Aristotle. Any unofficial reports will be considered as sensational tales concocted by newscasters. That's the only way to keep Earth off the spot. And what a spot it is!"

"I see," said Osgood. "Be advised that I shall follow your suggestions—as closely as is compatible with the dignity of this Office."

Outside, she informed Weems, "That last was face-saving and nothing else. From here we go to Venus—spreading sweetness and light. Always remember, young man, that our interceptor rockets are pretty good, but that the Venus bombers are pretty *damned* good."

"War," mused Weems. "Nobody wins, really—it wouldn't be nice to see New York blown to pieces, even though we could do exactly the same thing to Venusport. Sweetness and light it is."

Venus politics are no joke. The fish-faced little people have at least two parties per acre and the dizziest system of alliances and superalliances that ever bewildered a struggling young diplomat. Typically, there were absolutely no points of agreement among any of the parties as to foreign policy, and yet the Venusian embassies spoke with authority that was backed up by a united planet. Their military forces were likewise held in common by all the countries, but there were "state militias" engaged in intramural activities and constant border fighting.

Weems knew the language, and that was one very great advantage; also, he spent the long rocket trip to the foggy planet in learning what he could of the political setup. He arrived with a fanfare of trumpets; at the pier he was greeted by a score of minor officials. This was a deliberate insult from the Venusian army, for not a single high-ranking officer was present. He glossed it over for the sake of a splendid ovation from the population of Venusport, who were thoroughly hopped up with esteem for him. He was the shining young man who would assure peace and prosperity for the two inner planets, and the populace was all for him.

But, he knew very well, if one nasty word came from Earth, officially recognizing the Aristotle, their mood would change suddenly and savagely. And that was what he had to be ready for. He didn't trust the fat-headed Osgood.

From city to city he made a grand tour, speaking with very little accent before huge audiences of the little people and meeting few really high-up officials. Everywhere he went he met with disapproval from the public officials.

"How," he complained to Dr. Carewe, "they get together on a complicated issue like disliking me, I don't understand."

With a grim look about the hotel room, she explained, "It's the army. They must be partly in the pay of Mars. You're the finest thing that's happened in the way of friendly relations between Earth and Venus. If you take root long enough to get your message over, they won't be able to pounce on Earth, to the benefit of nobody except the red planet. So they're trying to cool things off." Again the nervous glance around the room.

"What's that for?"

"Dictaphones. But I don't think there are any. So at the risk of getting mushy I'm going to tell you what I think of your job. I think you're working like a madman, with some of the finest, single-hearted devotion to the cause of peace that I've ever seen. If you keep this up and handle the rest of your life the way you're handling this part you won't be immortal—not the way Osgood is going to be, with a bust in the rotunda of the capitol and a chapter in the history books.

"No, you're going to be something different. There are going to be Venusians—and Martians and Earthmen—who'll talk about you many, many years from now. About how their fathers and grandfathers stood in the rain to hear you talk." She looked over her spectacles. "Which reminds me—get out on that balcony and don't make any slips."

He pressed the very old, very great lady's hand silently, then, mopping his brow, stepped out to the ledge beyond his window. It was in the twilight zone of perpetual rain, and the crowd of white pates and faces before him was hardly visible through the wisps of steam. He looked about uneasily as he turned on the fog-piercing lights that flooded him with a golden glow, so that the Venusians could see their superman. As he began to speak into the mike at his lips, there was a hoot of reproof from the crowd. And then there were others. Something was going the rounds; he could feel it.

Very distinctly there was a shrill cry from the sea of faces, "*Liar!*" And others echoed it, again and again. He tried to speak, but was howled down. A firm hand snapped off the lights and closed the window; Dr. Carewe dropped him into a chair, limp and shocked. She handed him a slip of paper that had just been delivered.

With her lips tightly compressed she said, "They knew before we did. Osgood spilled it—all."

They shot to Mars before assassins could take any tries at them. Weems was completely washed up and discredited on Venus; knew it and felt like it. What had his fine words been in the face of a stern, righteous declaration from the Foreign Office on Earth to the Foreign Office on Venus—gleefully published far and wide by the Mars-bribed officers in the latter—hurling the most frightful accusations of violating diplomatic immunity?

God only knew, brooded Weems, why Osgood had chosen precisely that moment to sound off. He had said fighting words, too: "—back up our determination to shield the weak with deeds as well as—" Ugh! What was the matter with Osgood? The Martians couldn't touch Earth's Foreign Office; they bred them dumb but honest there. Why had Osgood—? Did he want to be an Iron Man? Did he think he could get further faster in time of war? Or did he actually, honestly believe that by this half-witted note insulting a friendly planet on account of a mere violation of etiquette he was striking a blow for justice and equality?

It probably was just that, Weems decided. And Dr. Carewe agreed.

When they landed on the red planet Weems felt very low, and was scarcely given a new lease on life by the warm reception he received from Martian notables. He was welcomed Earth fashion, with a band and speeches from a platform to twenty thousand cheering Martians. They could afford to treat him kindly; he'd failed utterly and miserably to block a new, magnificent source of income to Mars—the onrushing Earth-Venus war.

Mars wouldn't get into it. Oh, no! Mars didn't need colonies or prestige. When you have a navy like the Martian Matriarchal Fleet you don't need colonies or prestige. You just sit tight and sell the scrappers your second-rate equipment at premium prices.

At his first official reception he stood nervously among the ladies of the court. He had just received news from the Earth diplomatic colony that Venus had replied to Earth with a note just as stiff, charging that Earth was impeaching the authority of the Venusian Foreign Office with respect to its planetary jurisdiction. In plain language that meant: "Our army is bigger and better than yours. Knock this chip off—if you dare!"

One of the elegant ladies of the Matriarchal court sidled up to him. "We were presented to each other when you landed," she said, in French.

"Of course!" he said delightedly. "I remember you perfectly!" But all Martians looked alike to him.

"I was wondering, Mr. Weems, whether you would care to attend a party I'm giving tomorrow evening. I feel there would be features extremely entertaining to you."

"Delighted, madame!" He beckoned over Dr. Carewe.

"Your social secretary?" asked the Martian lady. "I'll give her the details."

Then the Karfiness entered regally and all the ladies of the court twiddled their curtailed chelae with deep veneration as she folded up in a basketlike affair.

"Mr. Weems," she said graciously. He advanced and bowed, Earth fashion, for all of his encumbering furs. "Mr. Weems, we are delighted to see you here. Such a refreshing change from those slimy little Venusians!" Her English was perfect, though lispy.

"And I, madame, am delighted to attend. If there is any message I can take back to Earth from you—any word of friendship—you have only to say it."

She regarded him amiably. "The people of Earth know well that the people of Mars are wholly committed to a policy of amicable industrial cooperation. Nothing will please me more than to reassure my friends of the third planet that there is no end of this policy in sight."

What did that mean? wondered Weems. Was she playing with him?

"I trust," he said, "that you are wholeheartedly working in the interests of peace among the planets?"

"So I have said," she said simply. "So I shall always say."

Incredible! Did she take him for an imbecile? Or—or—

"Thank you for this kind assurance," he said, bowing again and retiring.

When he had cornered Dr. Carewe he said agitatedly, "I don't get it at all. I simply don't understand. Is she lying into my teeth? The least she could have done would have been to turn aside the questions. I never dreamed I'd get an answer at a time like this!"

"Neither did I," she said slowly. "Something is rotten in the Matriarchy, and it isn't the customary scent of senile decay peculiar to dictatorships. The biology of the Martians demands a dictatorship, what with their weird reproductive methods. Unless there were a strong and centralized authority they'd slump back into barbarism after a few thousand years of unrestricted matings. Here's one dictator who's loved by the dictatees."

She was silent for a moment, then said, "To change the subject, I have the place and time for tomorrow's party. The lady is—I knew you couldn't tell one from another—director of a munitions and fabrication syndicate."

"Thanks," he said vaguely, taking the memo. "That's the perfect spot of irony to top off the evening—in fact this whole damned mission that failed."

He went to the party with Dr. Carewe, both thoroughly wrapped up in fur and wool against the Martian indoors ten-below temperature. And they carried thermos flasks full of hot coffee for an occasional warming nip in a dark corner. Anything but that would be unmannerly.

His hostess presented Weems to her husband-brother-nephew, an example of the ungodly family relationships into which their anatomy naturally led. The creature was very much smaller than the female, and spoke only Martian, which the Earthman could not handle except sparingly. He got the idea that they were talking about auriferous sand, but how they got onto the subject he did not understand. He excused himself as quickly as he could and retreated for some of the steaming coffee.

"Earthman, of course!" said a hearty voice.

He turned to see a curious, stubby person, quite human in his appearance, but with a somehow distorted look—as though he had been squeezed in a hydraulic press. And the person wore elaborately ornamental trappings of a blackish-silver metal.

"You must be a Jovian," he said, corking the thermos. "I've never seen one of your people before. You're more—ah—human than these others."

"So they say. And you're the first Earthman I've ever seen. You're very—ah—*long*." They both laughed; then the Jovian introduced himself as a pilot on the regular Io-Mars freighters. He waved off Weems' introduction. "Don't bother, Weems," he said. "I know of you."

"Indeed?" There was a pause. With the diplomatic instinct to avoid embarrassment whenever possible, the Earthman asked, "Why don't your people appear more often on Earth? You could chuck some of that osmium you have to wear here on Mars."

"This?" the Jovian gestured at his trappings. "A mere drop in the bucket. I have a hundredweight in each shoe. But the reason is that the Earth is relatively undeveloped in its space culture—though, of course, much better developed than Jupiter. There are so few of us—fifty million on the whole planet." He shrugged whimsically. "We're growing, of course. There was a polygamy decree a few years ago—did you hear of it?"

"No—I'm sorry to say I know nothing at all about your planet. I'm in the diplomatic service. Studying Venus, mostly."

"So? Perhaps you are the wrong man to come to, then. We know nothing about these matters. Is there a person more appropriate to whom I ought to broach the idea of a rapprochement between our two worlds?"

Weems was rocked back on his heels. Unheard of! Diplomacy as casual as this was tantamount to an interplanetary incident. The Jovian continued as casually as before, "You see, we've no navy and don't need space rights. It's strictly commercial, so we haven't got any Foreign Office. We hardly trade at all with Venus and Earth, and our Mars relations are settled by treaty once every four of Mars' years."

"Excuse me," said Weems abruptly. He had just caught a high sign from Dr. Carewe, who was holding a flimsy like a dead rat. He sidled over to her inconspicuously.

"Well—what turned up?"

"The chip," she said breathlessly, "has been knocked off. I just got this from our Embassy—by messenger. It's a copy of the note the Earth F.O. just sent to Venus. The Earth F.O. not only assures Venus that not only does Earth impeach the Venus F.O. but that she is prepared to put its jurisdiction to trial." She handed him the flimsy.

He scanned it almost unbelievably. "The so-and-sos," he commented inaudibly. "That about fixes our little red wagon, Doc. Though we have an ally. Jupiter wants its place in the sun."

As the woman stared with amazement, he introduced the Jovian to her and explained the situation. The squat man listened with increasing anxiety as he dilated on the relations that would exist between the two worlds.

"Will we really," he asked at length, "need all those men—actually twenty-five on our end!—to handle a little thing like a military alliance?"

"Lord, yes!" breathed Weems. "Code clerks, secretaries, subsecretaries, second-subsecretaries—lots more."

"May I ask," said the woman, "why this sudden interest in protocol and procedure has come up on Jupiter?"

The Jovian looked a little embarrassed. "It's a matter of pride," he explained. "The three other planets have their own secret codes and messages. We're the only planet that hasn't got sealed diplomatic pouches absolutely inviolable in any jurisdiction! And so our Executive Committee decided that if it's good enough for them it's good enough for us."

"I see," said Weems thoughtfully. "But how is it that you, the A pilot on a freighter, are their Plenipotentiary without even identification?"

"As a matter of fact," confessed the Jovian with some hesitation, "I was given a note, but it seems to be lost. Do things like that really matter?"

"They do," said Weems solemnly. "But you were saying—?"

"Yes. They chose a freight pilot to avoid taking a man off real work. It's our principle of the economization of kineses. Without its operation we'd have all sorts of superfluous men who did only half a man's work. And do not forget that to a people of only fifty million that is no small matter. We need every man, all the time."

"As to the treaty necessary," said the woman, "would you prefer it to be secret or published?"

"Secret," promptly replied the Jovian. "It'll be more fun that way."

Up dashed a very young subattaché from the Earth Embassy. "Excuse me," he shrilled, his voice breaking. "But you have to come at once. It's important as—as the very devil, sir, if you will excuse—" He found himself addressing empty air and an amused Jovian. The two Earth people had flown to their sand car. They had been awaiting the summons.

The ambassador was waiting for them, grim and white. He was no fool, this ambassador; his punishment for that was the dusty job on Mars instead of an office on Terra. He had just removed the earphone clamps, they saw; the diplomatic receiver set was on his desk.

Without waiting for a question from them he said, "The good word is—*ultimatum*."

"God!" said Dr. Carewe, her old face quite white.

"When?" snapped Weems, taking out pencil and paper.

"Note delivered to Venus F.O.—that's the note from Earth—and ten minutes or so later lynching of Venusians on the staff of the Earth Embassy by an outraged populace. Foolish defense by Earthmen attached to the Embassy. Several of them killed. Stronger note from Earth. Why didn't Venus F.O. notify immediately and offer indemnification? *Very* strong reply from Venus F.O.—chip on the shoulder. Earth knocks off chip. That's the last you saw at your party. Then ultimatum from Venus giving Earth twelve *dicenes* to apologize profoundly and offer an indemnity in good faith."

"And when is the time up?"

"The twelve *dicenes* will come to an end"—the ambassador consulted his watch—"about forty-eight hours from now."

There was a long pause, broken at last by a muffled groan from the ambassador. "Damn it—oh, damn it!" he wailed. "Why do the idiots have to fight? There's trade enough for everybody, isn't there?"

"And, of course," said Weems, "Earth will never back down. Not in a million years. They're built like that. And if they did back down, Venus would be sure of herself and force a war."

"Well," said the woman quietly, "are you just going to *sit* here?"

"Suggestions are in order," said the young man unhappily.

"You'll have to work like hell to stave this off," warned the woman.

"Ready and willing, Doctor. Tell me what to do."

Considering that the art of diplomacy is, ultimately reduced, the system found most practical in actual use when stalling for time to rush ahead with military expansion, it is not very remarkable that the two roving delegates did what they did with such neatness. The system was there for them to use.

Use it they did, to the fullest extent. They shot ethers through to most of the crowned heads of the inner planet; radioed Earth confidentially meanwhile to stand by for the answers from Venus; contacted the Martian Protocol Division regarding an alliance for trade purposes alone.

They were so thoroughly efficient in their functioning that after ten hours of this the bureau chiefs back on Earth fell to their knees and prayed for a letup of this lunatic barrage of red tape that came, unasked-for and unanswerable, from a minor embassy on Mars.

Venus was bally well baffled. At first they made some pretense of replying stiffly to the muted threats from the Embassy on Mars, then gave up and hung onto the ropes, trying to decode the weird messages. It *must* be code, they decided. How could a message like "Advise your F.O. investigate frog ponds for specious abnormalities" be anything but an uncrackable cipher? They set their experts to work. The experts decided that the message meant: "All Earthmen on Venus are advised to sabotage production machinery and destroy records." But they were as wrong as they could be, for the message meant just what it said. Its value was on its face.

The consulate and the staff were drafted by the Embassy to aid in the good work of confusion; the ambassador himself sat for ten hours writing out messages which bore absolutely no relation to each other or the world at large. And if you think that sounds easy—try it!

Meanwhile the inseparables, Mr. Weems and Dr. Carewe, had been separated. The woman was gathering data from Martian libraries and Weems was paying social calls at the palace, interviewing secretaries without number. Meanwhile, authentic, distressing news releases kept rushing to him, causing him great pain. The first thing after the ultimatum he heard had called in all spacers except those related to navigation—fueling stations, etc. Venus retaliated in kind, and furthermore towed out the gigantic battle islands used to fuel fighting ships. Earth retaliated in kind, and furthermore began skirmishing war games around midway between Terra and Luna.

By the time the ten hours of lunatic messages were elapsed, the two great fleets of Earth and Venus were face to face midway between the planets, waiting for orders from the home planets to fire when ready.

"For the love of Heaven," he pleaded with a secretary to the Karfiness, "they won't even wait for the ultimatum to elapse. There's going to be a space war in two hours if I don't get to see Her Serene Tentaculosity!" The title he bestowed upon her was sheer whimsy; he wasn't half as upset as he was supposed to be. It was all for effect. He rushed away, distraught, with the information that he couldn't possibly see the Karfiness, and aware that the munitions interests of Mars would by now be rubbing their chelae with glee.

He reached a phone and rang up the ambassador. "Okay," he informed him. "Stop short!"

The ambassador, badly overworked and upset, stopped short with the messages. Venus and Earth were baffled again, this time because there was nothing to be baffled by. The strange silence that had fallen on the F.O.s was alarming in its implications. The diplomatic mind had already adjusted itself to the abnormal condition; restoration of normality created almost unbearable strain. Messages rushed to the Embassy; the ambassador left them severely alone and went to bed. From that moment anybody who touched a transmitter would be held for treason, he informed his staff. It was as though the Mars Embassy had been blown out of the ground.

"They are now," brooded Weems, "ready for anything. Let us hope that Venus hasn't lost her common sense along with her temper."

With that he set himself to the hardest job of all—waiting. He got a couple of hours of sleep, on the edge of a volcano, not knowing whether the lined-up Venus fleet would fire on the opposite Earth fleet before he woke. If it did, it would be all over before he really got started.

Even Weems hadn't imagined how well his plan was taking root. Back on Earth the whole F.O. had gone yellow, trembling at the gills lest they should actually have to fight. And it was perfectly obvious that they would, for when planetary integrity directs, no mere individual might stand in the way.

There was a great dearth of news; there had been for the past few hours of the crisis. Since that God-awful business from the Mars Embassy stopped and the entire staff there had—presumably—been shot in the back while hard at work fabricating incredible dispatches, there was a mighty and sullen silence over the air, ether and subetheric channels of communication.

On Venus things were pretty bad, too. A lot of Earthmen had been interned and the whole planet was sitting on edge waiting for something to happen. It did happen, with superb precision, after exactly seven hours of silence and inactivity.

There was a frantic call from, of all Godforsaken places, Jupiter. Jupiter claimed that the whole business was a feint, and that the major part of the Earth fleet was even now descending on the Jovians to pillage and slay.

The official broadcast—*not* a beam dispatch—from Jupiter stated this. Earth promptly denied everything, in a stiff-necked communiqué.

Venus grinned out of the corner of her mouth. In an answering communiqué she stated that since Venus was invariably to be found on the side of the underdog, the Venus Grand Fleet would depart immediately for Jupiter to engage the enemy of her good friends, the Jovians.

Earth, to demonstrate her good faith, withdrew her own fleet from anywhere near the neighborhood of Jupiter, going clear around to the other side of the Sun for maneuvers.

Lovers of peace drew great, relieved sighs. The face-to-face had been broken up. The ultimatum had been forgotten in Earth's righteous stand that she had *not* invaded Jupiter nor intended to. This made Venus look and feel silly. This made the crisis collapse as though it had never been there at all.

And just after the Venus fleet had reported to its own home F.O.—this was three hours after the ultimatum had elapsed without being noticed by anybody—there were several people in the Earth Embassy on Mars acting hilariously. There was a Jovian who gurgled over and over:

"I didn't know it would be this much fun! We'd have gotten into the game years ago if we'd known."

"And I," said the ambassador, "have the satisfaction of knowing that I've given a pretty headache to the best code experts in the system. And all by the simple expedient of sending a code message that means just what it says."

"And I," said Weems, upending a glass, "have aided the cause of peace between the planets. If I can get to the Karfiness and let her know that she's being played for a sucker by the munitions people—"

"Let it come later," said Dr. Carewe. "I wish I could live another eighty years to read about it in the history books. But it really doesn't matter, because they'll say something like this:

"Toward the end of this year there arose a crisis between Earth and Venus, seemingly over matters of trade. It actually reached a point of ultimatums and reprisals. Fortunately the brilliant, calm and efficient work of the Hon. Secretary of Recession, Jowett Osgood, saved the day. He contracted a defensive alliance with Jupiter, the combined might of the Earth-Jovian fleet crushing any idea of victory that may have been the goal of the Venusians."

Dr. Carewe laughed loudly and raucously as she refilled her glass.

[The end of *Crisis!* by Cyril M. Kornbluth]