

Vol. 1

No. 4

VARGO STATTEN

BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

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New Worlds to Conquer

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Title: It Came From Outer Space

Date of first publication: 1954

Author: John Russell Fearn (1908-1960)

Date first posted: Oct. 8, 2021

Date last updated: Oct. 8, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20211009

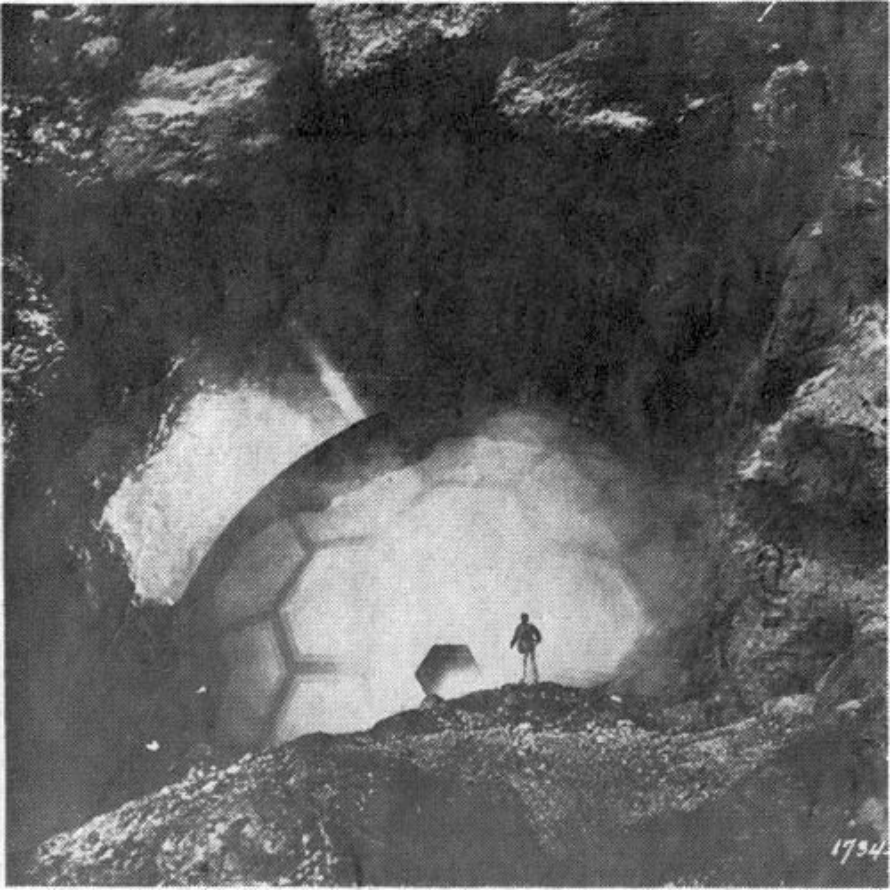
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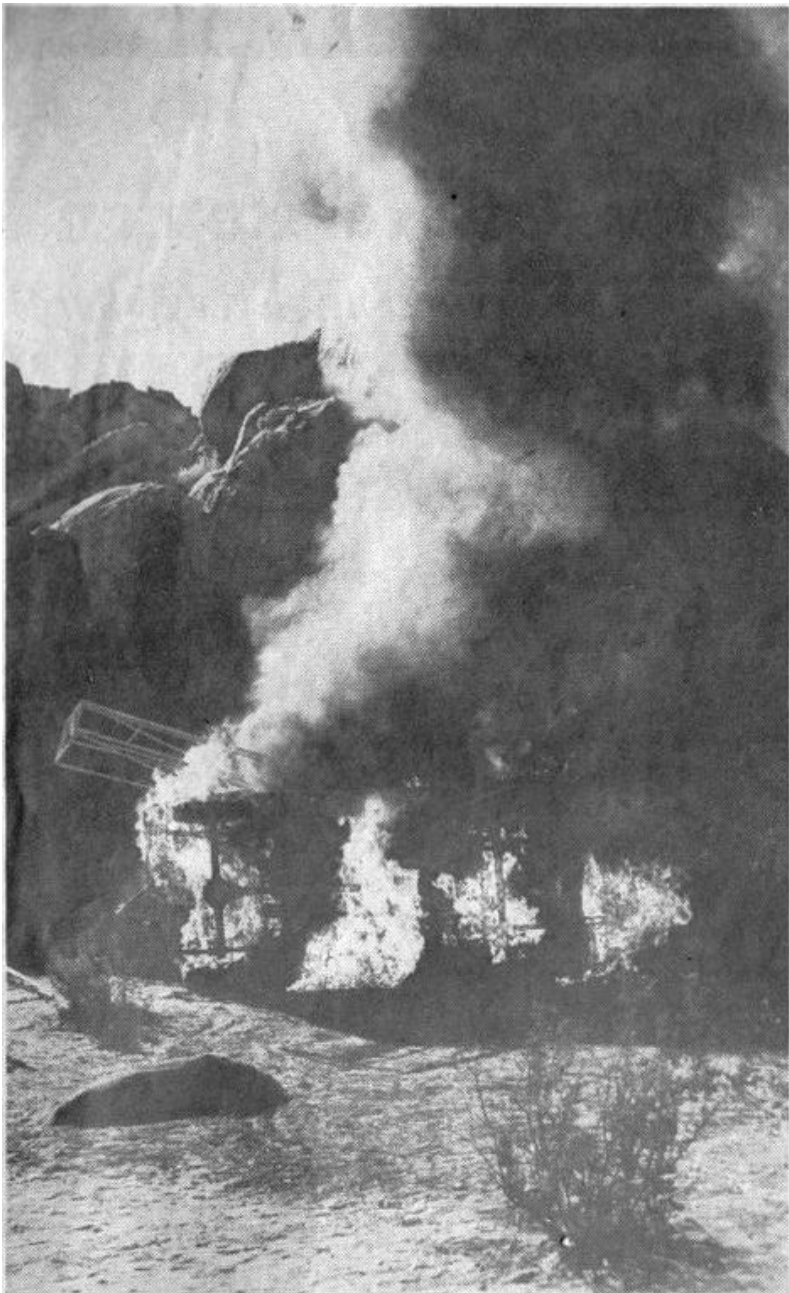
FROM UNIVERSAL-INTERNATIONAL'S FILM
IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE



Scientist John Putnam (*Richard Carlson*) looks upon the celestial world with school-teacher Ellen Fields (*Barbara Rush*) in this scene from Universal-International's first 3-D picture of
7 DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD!



Scene at the crater where the great Space Ship crashed. The story deals with the landing of a mysterious space ship and the adventures that followed, and of **7 DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD!**



(Photographs by permission of Universal-International Pictures)

John had already reported his alleyway encounter with Frank and George—to the accompaniment of Sheriff Matt's usual scepticism. Now John felt suddenly light-headed with self-justification. But it was the telephone message arriving at that moment that turned the sheriff's disbelief into a grudging acceptance of the unbelievable.

Dr. Snell, and his assistant from the University, had mysteriously disappeared.

It Came From Outer Space

From Ray Bradbury's Great Science Fiction Story

By

John Russell Fearn

Originally uncredited.

First published *Vargo Statten British Science Fiction Magazine*, May 1954.

RE-TOLD TO VARGO STATTEN MAGAZINE READERS

by Courtesy of

Universal-International Pictures

There were two things to keep John Putnam busy on that particular night. There was the awesome vastness of the universe around him, to be explored in all its haunting beauty by the powerful telescope he had set up in his bungalow at Sand Rock, Arizona. There was the girl beside him, who was beginning to share his interest in astronomy, and there were also stars in her eyes. To John Putnam, at that moment, the world was a very wonderful place.

John Putnam could have said that all was right with his universe. He had just sold another article, he could see security in the immediate future, and he had just exchanged with Ellen Fields the first shy, tentative talks of marriage. The glow on their faces was an expression of their joint inward joy.

And then the intimate moment of two people, alone with their own world and their own private thoughts, was blotted out with all the suddenness of a sponge brushed across a blackboard. Above them was a rushing whine of noise that was accompanied by an eerie glow, lighting up the desert sky. Across their vision rushed a fierce and overpowering ball of fire. There was something magnificent yet sinister about it as it devoured the last few miles of its journey, to create still further magnificence as it hit the earth in a crackle of brilliant sparks, followed by a smoke cloud that would have paled a bomb explosion into utter insignificance.

The earth was reverberating to thunderous vibration as John Putnam rushed to his telescope.

"It must be the biggest meteor ever to hit the earth, and it fell over by the old Excelsior mine," he exulted. "I'm going to get Pete Davis to fly us over in his helicopter. As a story this might be the scoop of a lifetime!"

When the helicopter landed John turned to Ellen: "You stop here with Pete, while I take a closer look."

Scrambling over the rough, boulder-strewn area he made for the mouth of the newly-formed crater. Once only he put his hand out to steady himself, and the rock he touched was lava hot to his fingers. But that was only a minor inconvenience. For the present he was the exploring scientist, wrapt in the conjecture of his thoughts.

This was no meteor!

Amazed, he saw a six-sided aperture in the strange thing that had landed. Disbelief warred with the evidence of his own eyes. He was looking at an open hatchway—and inside something that wavered in ghostly malevolence beyond—with a watery eye set high up in the hazily nebulous cloud that was this incredible "something".

An illusion, he told himself. But there was no illusion about the way the hatch was suddenly slammed shut. There was no trick about the landslide caused by the door's slamming.

From beyond reach of his vision he heard Ellen call his name.

DOUBTS

“There’s something down there that isn’t a meteor,” he said as he returned to his companions, who had now been joined by the local sheriff and newspaper reporter. “This is something none of us understand, but I’m sure there’s life aboard this queer spaceship that has landed.”

The reporter gave him a pitying look, but the expression on the sheriff’s face was one of contempt. Only Ellen’s eyes showed any understanding as he emphasised to the lawman the advisability of cordoning off the immediate neighbourhood.

As he turned to board the helicopter he knew only too well the doubts and the deep-rooted prejudices he was up against. This was man’s deliberate habit of veering away from anything that was outside the immediate orbit of his daily experience.

His face was set and bleak as they drove back from the airport. The car was running through the thin light of early dawn, when Ellen clutched his arm. And so they saw it together. It was a horrible, shadowy, spectral thing—yet sickeningly and malevolently alive. As it hovered the thing drifted in front of them and it seemed to be wrapped around with some curious menace.

But even before John had braked the station wagon to a stop they were through the trailing cloud of that hovering, incredible ectoplasm. Ellen shuddered.

“How terribly right you were,” she whispered shakily. “Let’s get out of here. I’m frightened, John!”

As they drove back to John’s bungalow the second event occurred in that awful night the earth will never forget. Behind notice boards, that forbade other than authorised entry, Deputy Sheriffs, Pressmen, and a T.V. truck were grouped. The crater they were looking at was more than a thousand yards around. That alone was a physical thing they could understand. Some of them had already seen the morning newspapers, and their attitude was tinged by memory of that one cynical headline:

STAR-GAZER SEES MARTIANS!

Driving back to the site after breakfast John had determined to persist in claiming what he had seen. He made straight for the one doctor in the party: “Now do you believe what I said?” John demanded.

The doctor seemed to take his cue from the amused smiles of the crowd, hesitated and said: “It must have been a meteor. Everything points to it as an explanation.”

John turned away bitterly, fighting against the galling knowledge of being odd man out. Sheriff Matt watched the young man’s stubborn stand with growing anger, and he had added cause for his feelings. Like most rural communities there was a tendency for the sexes to fall in love from the cradle. Until John had turned up Matt had always looked on Ellen as his future wife.

“I knew Ellen’s father—I was his deputy,” Matt said fiercely. “And I likewise know this town. We all think you’re not the man for Ellen, what with your star-gazing—and now this crazy story!”

“This town!” John exploded. “I came here to get away from crazy prejudice.”

Matt felt that at last he had succeeded in hitting Putnam on the raw. He said drily: "Putnam, you frighten them. What they don't understand frightens them."

"I'm frightened too!" conceded John.

Matt dodged that particular issue.

"You don't care if you're destroyed socially. But leave Ellen alone. She depends on this town for her living."

The newspapermen were clustered round Ellen. John rescued her, drove off with tense-faced concentration.

"I wish they'd only found one of them—had received the same fright we had," she said passionately.

They drove past the Joshua tree where they had last encountered the unaccountable. John wondered bitterly what really he was supposed to be looking for . . . As the car rolled on they saw George and Frank, the local telephone engineers, at work by a telegraph pole. They pulled up.

"I read the papers—don't let 'em rib you too much," the friendly George said. "You two seen anything strange this morning?"

"You'll hear something strange if you grab this test-phone," a worried Frank said, and there was a curiously puzzled frown on his face. John took advantage of the invitation, accepted the proffered set.

There were strange, sinister noises across the wires that as suddenly died. "Beats me hollow," George said. "Haven't heard noises like that since I first started. Guess we'll take the truck up the line and test out."

John summoned up a smile, said: "We'll go in the opposite way, see what we can see."

The two telephone engineers rode through the warm sunshine. The countryside was at its loveliest and the world seemed a very desirable place just then. And then the brakes were screeching madly, as the truck came to a halt. George staggered out. Breath was a thick wad of cotton waste that clawed chokingly at their throats. They were dumb with the very mystery of their own fear.

Now the thing they feared became clearer to their vision—this misty being who straddled the road like a cloud. It hadn't any real shape—only an eye that was malevolent, hypnotic and irresistible.

George panicked, fell on his back. But the eye followed him, seemed to peer into his life and his soul—to immerse him in its bondage. And at the other end of the road John also stopped his car. A stricken chilliness had fallen across his consciousness. Ellen said urgently: "Did you see anything, John?"

His voice came out of a troubled day dream, his thoughts shaped by some power beyond his normal control. He said bleakly: "I think we ought to go back and find Frank and George."

THE HORROR BEGINS

When the two reached the truck it was deserted.

There was a smear of blood on the floor. Ellen's eyes picked up the iridescent trail that crept over the desert, competing with the honest sunlight. Then a hand touched Ellen's shoulder and she screamed. The scream stopped as she recognised George, but it was a George who looked different, a shadow of the man they'd known.

"What's the matter, George?" John asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"What's worrying you?" George asked in his new, flat monotone.

Ellen fought the rising hysteria, said: "We'd best get along," and tried to summon up a friendly smile for George. Trying to act the part of innocents they made for the car. But as they drove away they were both burning with unanswered questions and fears.

Frank, propped up against a rock, woke up to the sound of the retreating car. "George, what happened?" he asked, rubbing the back of his head. Then he rubbed his eyes instead. George was standing looking down at him. And another George—the spit image of the first—was stretched out on the ground.

The standing George said: "Don't worry. It is in our power to transform ourselves to look like you or anyone. For a time it will be necessary. We would not—we could not—take your souls or your minds; so do not be afraid."

There was level, passionless logic in the voice. The ice-cold eyes stared down at the recumbent Frank.

Meanwhile, Sheriff Matt, much against his will, had agreed to drive out to the scene with Ellen and John, but there was no sign of the two engineers, nor of the truck. It only added fuel to the burning quality of the sheriff's scepticism. John felt madness growing up in his mind.

But that was before they returned to town and he saw Frank and George again, started to run after them. As he skidded round the corner he was met by the sight of an empty street. And then he saw the pair, standing in the back entrance to one of the town stores. He yelled their names, went rushing madly across the roadway. Frank and George stood facing him, both strangely immobile.

"Keep away," George warned, and the voice was inhuman in its utter lack of variation.

"What have you done with them?" John managed to gasp at length.

"Your friends are alive. They will not be harmed if you do as we say. Give us time or terrible things will happen. Things so terrible you have yet to dream of them."

While this drama was being acted out in Sand Rock, two hoboos waited the return of their companion, Tom. With their donkey they intended to bed down in the old mine. This disused place would make a good lay-up. Then the donkey snorted, and it was a snort of fear. For Tom now had an identical partner, just like his two companions. Watching, Tom knew that the eye was on them, and that its sinister hypnotic alchemy was duplicating the bodies of his two mates.

CAPITULATION

Doggedly Sheriff Matt had clung to his disbelief until he received his first two distracted visitors: Frank's wife and George's girl friend. Matt called John and Ellen to listen to their stories. Frank had come home, a different Frank altogether, who had collected his clothes and mumbled an excuse to the effect that he had an urgent job to do elsewhere. George had done precisely the same thing at his lodgings; and looking at the dewy young beauty of his girl friend, so the sheriff had to admit that he was inhuman indeed.

John had already reported his alleyway encounter with Frank and George—to the accompaniment of Matt's usual "tell it to the Marines" reaction. Now John felt suddenly lightheaded with self-justification.

"You've got to believe that what I saw to-day was only what looked like Frank and George!" he rammed home his belief with an emphasis that at least seemed partly to convince the lawman. But it was the 'phone message, arriving at that moment, that turned the sheriff's scepticism into grudging belief.

Dr. Snell, and his assistant from the University, had mysteriously disappeared since their visit to the crater.

"Would they have any special use for Dr. Snell?" the Sheriff asked with sudden diffidence.

"Sure, he's an astronomer," John answered drily.

THE TRUTH

The truck was found abandoned at the edge of the crater. Here, in touch with that one reality, Matt couldn't help but put up one last stand against the theories John had advanced.

"I'd give anything to be back where we were this morning, with me able to call you a fool," he blustered.

And suddenly Matt realised that it could never be, that the extravagances his practical mind hated so much were rooted in malignant and terrifying fact. John tried to grin his understanding of the other's viewpoint.

"Wouldn't it be a fine trick if I wasn't really John Putnam—but something from another world come to give you a lot of false leads?" They stood looking at each other in growing horror.

Ellen had escorted Frank's wife to her home and was now driving John's car towards the mine. She had only gone a couple of miles before she saw Frank standing stupidly right in the middle of the road, his body outlined mistily in the darkness. She pulled up, the welcoming smile freezing on her face. She said, trying to summon sympathy to dispel her awful fear: "Frank, I'll take you home."

But Frank's voice came in that tone she dreaded. He said: "No, take me to the mine." He turned his head stiffly and looked at her, just looked. But that was enough for his purpose.

And back in Sheriff Matt's office they were waiting—waiting for they knew not what. Until the telephone shrilled and the message was for John Putnam. His hand shook as he replaced the receiver, and turned to Matt.

John said thinly: "They've got Ellen!"

The minutes that followed were a kaleidoscope of hurry and hellish thoughts. At the Joshua tree Matt pulled up the car at John's urgently restraining hand on his wrist. "They want to see me alone," he said, as if that explained everything.

"How long will it take?" Matt asked sympathetically.

"As long as they decide it should take," John said fatalistically.

He waited until dawn at the appointed rock. It was a slow dawn, long drawn and cold, until he first saw her. She was standing outlined against the first morning sun, her hair streaming in the breeze. Urgently he called to her but she moved off.

Learning new points of fear with each step he followed until he reached the entrance to the old mine, calling her name frantically as she disappeared into the gloom. From the impenetrable blackness came the deep boom of a male voice:

"Stay where you are!"

"Why? What are you doing?" John shouted back.

"We're repairing ship," the booming voice came back. "By nightfall we will have left your earth. We have souls and minds and are good. But we are not yet ready to meet in friendship—because you would be frightened by our appearance. Only an accident brought us here."

The voice went on: "We hold your friends hostage. Keep your people away or we will destroy them."

John's voice rang out: "Stand out in the sun. I've got to see you as you really are—or I can't take the responsibility of protecting you."

Fundamentally it was an excuse, but it was an excuse to see and “know”—to be the first, perhaps the only man to do so. His breath was tight in his throat as he heard movements in the mine entrance. He knew he was going to look on what no other man would see for perhaps a million years.

He saw the glowing centre of the eye—the centre of the creature’s very life—as the glowing fluid source of power grew larger in the darkness, moving towards him.

A vague outer shape was taking its dimensions from the clean dawn light—huge and awesome—surrounding the exaggerated optic fulcrum of the whole being. John was shaken and shattered by that full view. His mind was reduced to shimmering disgust. What had come from outer space was a cross between a diving suit and a mummy case—something that fell obscenely between an amoeba and a translucent octopus. It had a smear rather than a body, yet with an odd elephantine dignity. John’s knees felt as jellylike as the creature confronting him. He tottered back staring, felt suddenly grateful to hear the impatient honking of Sheriff Matt’s car.

He turned, gasping and ran . . . and ran . . . and ran. Matt listened to John’s shocked accounts of his experiences, but his uncrushable impatience with other than strong-arm tactics was uppermost. It was as if the Sheriff had never admitted the visitors’ strange power as evidenced in their body-changing process.

Matt had no time for the deal that John so strongly advocated. He raged like a tough sheriff out of a Western romance. Despite all pleadings Matt’s lips were a thin line of determination, his intention was to gather a posse immediately they hit town. John gave up the hopeless struggle of argument, asked to be dropped off at his own bungalow.

And he was just in time to discover that ominous, iridescent track disappear slowly from carpet and furniture. All his clothes had gone. So, there was another John then—working at the mine on the spaceship’s repairs. He felt suddenly proud. When the other bodies had been taken over, then the visitors had to terrify and confuse their victims first to overcome hostile and repugnant intelligence. To duplicate his body he knew that they knew they didn’t have to scare or hypnotise him.

He now realised beyond doubt that Matt’s intended attack on the mine was a mistake. The survival of the hostages—perhaps the survival of the civilised world, depended on him alone. Although uncertain and humble, he alone understood.

ATTACK

He'd say nothing of this to Matt. Instead he would act. But by the time he reached town the sheriff was already raising a posse. Cars and trucks, guns and pistols, and inflamed feelings. John took in the ominous scene and grabbed Matt's car, to race to the mine ahead.

Half way there they saw the telephone truck racing behind. The driver looked like Frank, but for that glassy stare. "If he wants it that way, then let him have it!" the Sheriff growled. They pumped the driving cab full of bullets, saw it skid into a boulder and go up in flames.

As the posse resumed their journey John had already reached the minehead. His torch stabbed its foetid darkness. About him he could feel life vibrating but it was life that was not as his own. John felt an atmosphere that made his spine creep, an atmosphere as tangible as rain. His torch was shining ahead when the beam picked up her figure. There were no longer stars in her eyes. This was not the Ellen he knew and loved.

He said bleakly: "You're not Ellen."

The Woman-With-Allen's-Body said, in that frighteningly expressionless voice: "They're on their way—you brought them."

"Look, I came to warn you," he said urgently. "You don't know how hard I tried to stop them. You've got to get out."

"Just a few more hours!" the woman said.

His foot stubbed a sizeable pebble and he heard it splash far below. He shone his torch downward. At his feet was a jagged edged, water-logged pit. "You wanted me to fall into that!" he challenged. "Why?"

"You are no longer to be trusted," the woman said. "I'm sorry—we didn't want to use violence." She raised a small object in her hand and a ray flashed. John ducked only in time and his own gun spoke. There was a sob in his voice as he fired at The-Woman-With-Allen's-Body. She swayed outwards and fell into the chasm below. He'd never wipe that awful memory from his thoughts.

He went forwards to the inner tunnel. Clearly in the gloom he could now see the equipment and the spaceship. The doubles of the hoboes were at work—human bodies inoculated with extra-global intelligence.

Now John was quite close to them. The leader of the group turned. And John had come face to face with himself. His space self mocked: "Could you kill me too?"

The tone seemed more human than the others. Resentment and sorrow were mingled in the weird challenge. The voice continued: "Kill me—or yourself—your future self!"

"I came here to help, not to kill," John said and his voice was dry as the desert outside. And he could not avoid looking beyond the man to the machinery. The other John warmed to John's inquisitive stare.

The other John said serenely: "Look at its power! Power to drive this ship through space—to tear your earth apart. You know how long we've worked on it? A thousand years—a thousand years of reaching for the stars. Now at last we've conquered space."

John listened, awed. "Ah, the dreams we've had!" the other John said. And John shared his grief at the primitive attitude of Twentieth Century Earthmen—men now closing in with their guns, and blind unheeding violence in their hearts.

“Listen,” called John. “There’s still a way. Let the others go and I’ll try and hold off the mob.”

“And if you fail?” asked the other John. “We’d rather have it end here than to fall into their hands!”

He reached for a switch on the machinery.

“Wait,” shouted John. “You speak of how wonderful it was to be going to other worlds. A thousand years of work, and you’re willing to see it all end. Is that the way you want it? When there might still be a chance.”

At least the other John was listening. And John knew this was the crux—the beginning of understanding, or the end of all. “You can always reach out and destroy us,” John said gently, pointing to their fabulous equipment.

The fate of the human race hung suspended. John looked at his other self and suddenly knew that it was all right. He heard the other John say: “Send them out!”

The hostages were released from behind a rock and Ellen was in the lead. She looked at the other John, and at John—twins to the eye but not to the heart. Unerringly she went to the real John and was clasped in his arms. John took one last look, then turning quickly, he led the hostages from the mine, along the tunnel, and out into the daylight.

Over the brow of the hill he could see the posse coming. Left over dynamite in the tunnel! John remembered it. They laid the charge as the posse closed in. Matt was in the lead, thirsting for blood, but the explosion threw them to the ground as it sealed off the mine.

Matt made the best of it: “I guess that takes care of them . . .”

John said triumphantly: “Yeah, that takes care of them . . .”

The hostages and the posse grouped together, well away from the sealed mine: John alone, with his new but fast dying knowledge, understood just how much the explosion and its respite “took care of them!”

FAREWELL

So he was the least surprised when the earth rumbled again beneath their feet; when the top surface of the mine shuddered in agony against some pent-up internal power; when the roof of the mine-cum-crater burst outwards and upwards, displaying an overwhelming glow to the heavens.

When that glow travelled, with a mighty accompanying scream of released strength and purpose, up . . . up . . . into the limitless sky, whizzing its farewell to those who were unready, heralding with lights its barrier smashing approach to yet another of the worlds clustering, as planets and stars, in the outer recesses of space which baffles and tantalises all men everywhere . . .

“Well,” said the matter-of-fact Matt, as the luminous ship swept through the vault of heaven. “They’ve gone.”

“For good?” asked Ellen.

John looked into the sky, trying to hold fast to his vision of the future, towards a readiness to understand all things which would, perhaps, one day come to MAN.

“No,” he said, “just for now. It wasn’t the right time for us to meet. But there’ll be other nights—other stars for us to watch.”

He was part of life—and he would marry Ellen and they would share all their lives. All?—except one sector, one part, which, then and for ever, would be reaching out to capture all the unknown—the essential and undying John Putnam of whose future humanity and destiny he had been privileged to obtain a glimpse.

“They’ll be back . . .” he said.

And those around him clearly didn’t believe . . . already . . . and already . . . he was lonely and individual again.

[The end of *It Came From Outer Space* by John Russell Fearn]