

The suddenness with which we found ourself whirled from virtual obscurity to our present world-famous position, delightful though it otherwise was, has prevented us from finding out by press-time just who Joseph Dickinson is. Who he is, we mean, besides being the author of this fresh and funny story about a rocketry expert, an astro-ape named Beans, an externally voluptuous Ice Maiden with a Ph.D., a General whose name may well be Blimp, a singular note-in-a-bottle; and other matters connected with a Cape closely resembling Canaveral (where it would not surprise us one bit to learn that toddlers really do learn to count by repeating Five, Four, Three, Two, One, Oh, —!).

THREE FOR THE STARS

by Joseph Dickinson

A WARM AND PLEASANT EVENING. A million stars blinked in the Florida sky (verified by the Chamber of Commerce). A million insects chirruped (denied by the Chamber).

Charles Crumpacker did not see the stars. The bar had huge windows for that specific purpose, and he avoided them. He did hear the insects, with pleasure. They reminded him of long ago nights, and a brass bed in the attic room of an old and solid white house. In the mild summer darkness there had been crickets, and the inquiring notes of a tiny owl which had

nested in the eaves. Uncomplicated days, of basic pains and joys. One could weep, on a quiet night, for no reason other than quick, unidentified sorrow.

Now, Crumpacker considered, his life was no more complicated than the ten million parts of a space ship. And tomorrow, if each of the ten million bits of his life functioned perfectly in the split second allotted it, the ship would leave the ground. The positive performance of ten million more ifs and, several months and thirty-five million miles later, it would perhaps land upon the planet Mars.

A hatch would open. An astro-ape named Beans, clad in a tiny space suit, would step out to scamper about for a quarter of an hour. Summoned, then, by a raucous bzzter in the helmet of his suit, Beans would re-enter the ship, clutching his little bucket of specimens. And so, several months later, a space capsule would float by parachute gently into the sea, to bob about until picked up by cutter or copter.

"If," muttered Charles Crumpacker. He repeated the word several times, and wondered why he had not followed his boyhood dreams of crime.

As it were, due to the Crumpacker method of re-entry thermal reduction, the Crumpacker theory of alternate propulsion, the Crumpacker-Barstow studies on high speed vibration, the—oh, theories and studies out the old gazoo—the United States hoped on the following day to eliminate the gap in the race for space. Alternate propulsion was only a theory (although tests had been impressive), hence the ape. Crumpacker was glad it was to be an ape. Yet he had become so fond of the affectionate little beast in the past year that he felt its death in the chill of space might yet leave him with the guilt of murder.

At the thought of Beans, Crumpacker grinned. If the press knew the real reason for that name . . .

The Press. Crumpacker sighed.

They would swarm tomorrow. There was widespread interest in the project, for the knowledge was common that this was to be a shot to end shots. The date, in fact, was known. The destination of the rocket was believed to be the moon, however, and nothing had been done to dispel the rumor. Success or failure, the greater goal was bound to provide a better press.

Only months before, the Russians had sent two monkeys and a mouse to the moon. It had been intended that the moon be circled, and the animals return. But the ship had passed the moon and was now God knew where in space, its occupants lonesomely dead. The SPCA had been mad as hell.

Crumpacker had a sudden horrible vision of monkey skeletons, the ghostly crew of a wandering space ship. He forced his complete concentration on the cocktail napkin. The bar's name was there, in red, and he traced the letters with his finger. There were too many bars called the Satellite, or the Space Room, or Astro Room, even the Launching Pad. The name of this one was Pete's. Crumpacker was glad.

"Like the old maid's nipple," said Crumpacker. "It's not much, but it's sumptin."

The bartender looked up quizzically. "How's that?"

"My mother used to say that," said Crumpacker. "She was an old maid."

"Yeah?" said the bartender uneasily.

"Yeah," said Crumpacker, and pushed his glass forward. "Fill 'er up."

As he raised his glass, Crumpacker watched his hand. It shook. The ice tinkled wildly against the glass. Tired, thought Crumpacker, and knew how true it was. From center to skin, he was tired. His right eye had developed an embarrassing twitch. He had the perpetual numb and nauseous ache of fatigue. He sipped bourbon now, and wished for cold pitchers of milk and the freshly ironed sheets of an attic bed.

The elbow in his side was persistent, and finally penetrated the numbness. "I ast if you're one of them scientists," said the owner of the elbow.

Crumpacker blinked away his weariness. The man was redfaced and wiry, his hands gnarled and knobby. Crumpacker nodded. "Thought I'd seen you out there," the man continued. "Ust to work out there myself. Diggin' holes and pourin' cement and stuff like that. Seen you come out one day and look over one of them skyrockets that never got off the ground. Blowed all t'hell."

Crumpacker, a little smashed, asked: "Ever sleep in an attic?" Then he said never mind to the hole digger's grunt.

"You one of them who's gonna shoot at the moon? When?"

"Tomorrow, maybe."

"Gonna shoot a man up there?"

Crumpacker shook his head, looked furtively about, whispered: "Keep a secret?" The cement pourer nodded eagerly. "Mice," hissed Crumpacker.

"Mice?"

"A million mice. They'll eat the moon so the Russians can't have it."

The man's eyes widened. "Eat the—." He caught on, momentarily considered anger, then chuckled. "Pretty good," he conceded. Then he sobered. "Course, you ain't gonna hit the moon."

God Almighty, thought Crumpacker. "Maybe not," he admitted.

"Can't hit it," said the man. Crumpacker shrugged. "Wanna know why?" Crumpacker made a noise. "I'll tell ya why." Another noise from Crumpacker. "The moon's a reflection of the sun, ain't it?"

"Yep," said Crumpacker.

"Well, you know what a reflection is, don't ya? You bein' a scientist and all."

"I have a general idea," said Crumpacker.

"It ain't nothin', that's what. A reflection ain't nothin'." He tapped Crumpacker's lapel, and spoke deliberately: "And how—can ya hit—nuthin'?" And he winked knowingly, secretively.

Crumpacker said: "But—." Thes he closed his mouth and gazed for the first time out of the

window at the stars. There was an odd relief in such smug logic.

He sat until midnight and drank bourbon and thought of the world being flat and on the back of a turtle. As he was lurching out, the bartender extended a special invitation for Monday. There was to be a grand reopening under a new name: The Blast-Off. Crumpacker swore at him.

2.

The General, from a doorway ambush, took Crumpacker by surprise, as a good general should. "Do it today, eh, Crumpacker!" The General's voice was a machine gun staccato. "Give her hell today! Show Ivan, by God! Show him he doesn't own space! That's where we'll fight the next one, Crumpacker! Space, by God, there's the ticket! No room down here anymore. Not like the old days! I remember Anzio, by God—."

"I remember Babylon," said Crumpacker.

"Eh?"

"Never mind."

The General, muttering, turned in at a lavatory. No room, mused Crumpacker. No room for war. Never thought we'd run out of room for that.

Is that the Reason? Crumpacker wondered. Or is it to assure the reelection of the present administration? Or are we pioneers and space our last frontier? He

laughed. Hell, I haven't even seen Niagara Falls. Or is it as a minister told me once—"for the greater glory of God"?

The Reason—must even the search for that be so complex? If I am ever asked, Crumpacker decided, I shall say that I, for one, am doing it just for the hell of it. He shook his head to dismiss his thoughts, was immediately sorry, and vowed to drink a better brand of bourbon.

In the final minutes of the countdown, Crumpacker's hang-over had numbed into a faint giddiness. He was glad that things were going well. Although he grudgingly admitted that it probably wouldn't make a damn if things did foul up, with the sternly energetic Greta Barstow pottering about as though the telemetering receiving station were about to hatch.

Crumpacker winced into a metal folding chair. He narrowed his eyes, unblurred them on Greta Barstow. Remarkable woman. Strange woman. Neck up—uncosmeticed, tight haired, bespectacled scientist. Neck down—even a laboratory smock could not camouflage the voluptuous bust, circling in and down and around to a dandy bottom.

"Dandy bottom," mused Charles Crumpacker.

Greta Barstow turned to him her cold face of science. "I beg your pardon?"

"Perfectly all right," said Crumpacker. "Ever sleep in an attic?"

"Dr. Crumpacker," said Greta, and her voice was crackling ice, "if you can emerge from your disgusting fog, I suggest—."

"Cert'ny," said Crumpacker.

What turns your gears, Dr. Barstow? Crumpacker wondered. What makes you go? Do you have a million parts like that damned steel cigar out there? Do you have printed circuits instead of veins? A telemeter for a heart? There's something obscene about that body, Barstow. Like breasts upon an IBM machine.

He had been associated with the Great Barstow for three years. Three years of that great brain clicking, those great breasts bouncing. Never a smile, never a flirtatious feminine word or glance. Their association had produced great things. Their theory on the cosmic radiation of the Van Allen belts, their studies on high speed vibration, thermal re-entry, weightlessness . . . Yet sometimes—fleetingly—it occurred to Crumpacker that he would enjoy violating Dr. Greta Barstow in the back seat of a Model T on the edge of a moonswept golf course.

"Play golf?" asked Crumpacker, and was ignored.

He stooped to scowl at the sub-carrier discriminator. It scowled back. How do you do it, you sunna bitch? How do you reach out and

catch the heart beat of a monkey, catch it out of the air?

I know your guts, thought Crumpacker. I know the theory and the facts. Facts, God, facts. The fact is that you thrust out your ghostly little fingers and pluck a heart beat out of space. Facts, God, facts. We can build a brain and make it work. We know why it should work and how we want it to work, and it works. Why does it?

How do we know, he considered, that like the good Doctor F., we are not creating monsters? Suppose, instead of a heartbeat, we are radioed back the faintly remembered tom toms of a jungle tribe, a sound which has beaten in the pulse of generations of apes since once, long ago, an ancestor munched a bit of fruit and vaguely worried over the sounds made by a tribe not far removed from his.

Crumpacker smiled sadly, remembering his goodbye to Beans. The ape had clutched him affectionately about the legs. What must you think of us? the scientist wondered. We've subjected you to conditions, humiliations you were never scheduled for. You submitted humbly, and repaid us with love. You learned. You know what to do—you will, at least, react—when the hatch opens and you step out, a tiny, pathetic, unwondering creature on a dead planet. And all the time, your heart and lungs and liver, every

throb and drip and sensation will spark through the power pack upon your back and leap into the ship back through nothing to us.

I wonder if you'll follow your heartbeat back, Beans, old boy? More likely you'll follow the Russian monks into eternal space. Then how long before by sheer averages you're pulled into the atmosphere of an unknown planet? Will some alien child wish on your glow as you flame into cinders and sprinkle down upon another world? Or will you plunge into the dust of a dead and airless moon, belching and breaking wind contentedly to the last? Hell, we'll probably push the boom button before you're a hundred feet off the ground and spread you all over the launch area. I like you, Beans. I'd hate to see you smeared.

But if—just if—you get into space, return or not—ah, Beans, what will you see? What will you feel? We've protected you against the things we know. Heat and cold and weightlessness and acceleration. You have a shield of hydrogen to protect you from the cosmic rays of the Van Allen belts. But what of the things we don't know? What belts and clouds and rays that our wildest imaginings can never reach—dear God, we're the first cave man staring into the first fire, afraid of what it means, yet extending our fingers to its heat.

"I don't want to go," Crumpacker announced suddenly.

"Go where?" asked Greta Barstow.

"To Mars."

"Fortunately," sighed Barstow, "you're not. I doubt—."

"I want to stay here," Crumpacker continued. "I want to raise children and go to church and sit on porches and read books by Horatio Alger and drink beer."

Greta Barstow's eyes glittered. "I warn you, doctor, that I intend to complain about your drinking to General Moreland."

"I never drink to General Moreland," said Crumpacker haughtily. He turned back to the subcarrier discriminator. He shook his head, winced, and bent closer. "By God," he said happily. "It's busted."

Greta Barstow stepped quickly to his side. "What?"

"It's busted," Crumpacker repeated. "Not working. The whole thing's off for today. We can all go home and knit our spacesuits."

Greta examined the machine. She straightened, and sneered at Crumpacker. "Really, Crumpacker," she said. "This can be fixed in a matter of seconds."

"Rats," muttered Crumpacker. He brightened slightly. "Fix it with a hairpin, Barstow," he directed.

"Don't be absurd. The simple replacement of a dual triode regulator. An elementary—."

Crumpacker took the front of Barstow's smock in his hand. "Goddamn you, Barstow," he said sadly. "Goddamn you and your dual triode regulator. You couldn't use a hairpin, could you?"

Greta Barstow pulled one way, Charles Crumpacker pulled the other, taking with him a sizeable chunk of smock as well as some undergarments. "No," he murmured.

Several technicians had leaped the moment cloth began to tear. When they seized Crumpacker, he was staring at the clothing he held in his hand, and still murmuring "No."

Greta Barstow was trying to cover her bosom with her hands. It was not difficult. "Not you, Barstow," said Crumpacker. "Not you." He began to weep softly. "Why, Barstow? Your damned symmetrical scientific mind? Here, gentlemen," he addressed the technicians, "souvenir nose cones."

"Give me those," snarled Greta Barstow.

They led Crumpacker away, and there was the sober silence that follows a scene. The General broke it. "All right, men," he said. "Let's get on with it. Let's do it for Charlie Crumpacker." He lowered his head. "Another martyr to the space war," he concluded impressively, and thought smugly that he had always known that Crumpacker was a nut.

The ten million parts func-

tioned. They clicked and whirred where clicks and whirs were planned. They kissed and separated. Circuits were made and broken. Regulators regulated, relays relayed, cogs cogged. The steel cigar was lighted and with smoke and fire hoisted itself from its ash and Beans went away to Mars.

3.

Each day intensified the interest on Earth in the small ape floating through huge space. Poems were written about him. He inspired at least three books and countless short stories. There were seven songs written. One—"Monkey Talk on Mars"—was composed of unintelligible sounds and sold two million records.

There were few minds, in the weeks that followed, that did not sometime try to join the little ape in the black and sparkling space. And no ape ever before inspired so many people, individually and in congregation, to pray, as the Ruler of Space was deluged with pleas for the success of the project. Only small children and Crumpacker, in a rest home, prayed for the safe return of the ape.

Most important to science, but almost unnoticed by the public, were the countless reports documenting the functioning of the ape's body. Each beat of Bean's heart, each impulse of his brain,

filtered back through space for analysis. Jacozzi, of the National Research Institute, sparked a major controversy by claiming to detect, after five weeks, a definite change in the pattern of Beans' brainwaves. The controversy was still raging when, at six weeks, all contact with the space ship was lost.

The American scientists, of course, maintained that even if the spaceship were lost, the achievement was an unparalleled success. The Russians extended their sincerest sympathies, but mild congratulation, maintaining that nothing had been learned, after all, that their two monkeys and a mouse had not provided months earlier. The American military flatly stated that we were now ahead of the Russians in everything. The Russians sneered and sent Gagarin to the moon. The SPCA was mad as hell, and introduced a bill into Congress which would prohibit the use of anything other than a human in future space experiments. That organization insisted, furthermore, that the destroy button be instantly pushed, so that somewhere in space Beans would be mercifully spared a long dying.

It was pointed out to these humanitarians that the explosive packet was no longer with the ship, that its intent had not been the mercykilling of a monkey, but to prevent an erratic rocket from

plunging into Miami. Once the ship had escaped the earth, the packet had left it in the final stage. Anyway, said the scientists, everyone seemed in a big hurry to fail. The ship was entirely automatic, after all. There was no reason to believe that the ship would not perform its mission and return as planned, with Beans still fat and healthy.

So for six weeks more, the scientists remained at their receivers, hoping, but failing, to reestablish contact. And then, one day, the world watched the sky.

The capsule came floating down by parachute into the sea, scarcely a hundred miles from the calculated spot. Radar spotted it miles high, and the cutter practically reached out and caught it. The scientists were cursing happily, completely losing their aplomb. The General did some mental word rattling, and muttered: "Show Ivan, by God!" Ramirez, a technician, barked his knuckles as he undid Beans from his metal home. As many hands reached to open the hatch, one of the scientists murmured reverently: "It's been on Mars. My God, and came back here." The hatch was opened. The moment's silence seemed long.

A gaunt man named Donnelly chuckled uncertainly. "He—he looks a little the worse for wear."

Crumpacker was there, his reward for gentle madness, and he

touched Donnelly's shoulder reassuringly. "He's been a long way, George."

The ape blinked up at them, squinting into the sun. His fur seemed sparcer, and splotted with white. His pinched monkey face was even thinner than before. "Beans," said Crumpacker softly. "How was it, boy?" The ape blinked rapidly a few times. Then his white teeth appeared, very slightly, in a grin. He clutched Crumpacker's hand. "Frightening," said the ape clearly. "Damned frightening." And his head lolled, senselessly.

"I don't believe it," murmured Donnelly.

The shocked silence continued after the ape had been lifted gently from the capsule and carried inside. Finally the General cleared his throat and laughed uneasily. "Damned beast sounded almost human. Guttural, of course. Just grunts and—"

"I heard him," said Ramirez. "He said—"

"Don't be a jackass!"

"His—his fur is almost white," muttered Ramirez, "and his eyes—"

"Shut up!" the General shouted. He looked at the stunned faces, changed his tone. "Men, men," he soothed. "Men, we're all overwrought. We've been under a terrible strain, working against terrible odds—"

"We're all martyrs to the god-

damn space war," sighed Donnelly.

The General scowled, but let it pass, for the tension was broken. "Let's see what our ape—or whatever the hell it was—brought back," said Donnelly.

Ramirez lifted the receptacle gingerly from the capsule and placed it on the deck. The men crowded forward. Donnelly elbowed them back. "Easy, fellows," he said. "You'll all get a look."

"From another world," whispered one of the men. They gazed reverently into the container. There were mostly rocks, not unlike those on Earth, except for a strange rust-colored moss which covered several, and the bottom of the container was spread with a thin layer of purple dust. But in the middle, nestled in among the rocks, was a bottle. It was wide mouthed, eight or nine inches long, and of an almost translucent glass, which seemed to vary from purple to blue, like glass that has been long in the desert sun. Inside the bottle was a small scroll.

The men, murmuring, moved back in awe. "Is—is it a joke?" breathed Crumpacker.

"Could—could it have been in the ship when we launched?" asked Donnelly. "Did any of you men . . . ?" He had only to look at their faces to know the answer. He touched the bottle lightly, drew back his hand.

"Take it out," whispered Ramirez.

"Mars is a dead planet," said Crumpacker.

"Dead, hell!" said the General. "Take it out, Donnelly," he ordered. "Dead, hell! An ally!"

Donnelly took the bottle cautiously in his hand, gazed at it as it changed from purple to blue to purple in the sun. He tilted it, and the scroll dropped into his hand. "A dead planet," he said. He closed his eyes tightly, exhaled in a sobbing gasp. "My God," he said, his voice shaking. "Another civilization. What door are we about to open? What secrets are on the other side?"

"Open it," hissed Ramirez.

Slowly, slowly, Donnelly placed the bottle upon the deck. With quivering hands, he began to unroll the scroll.

"Easy, for God's sake!" cried the General.

They stared, fascinated, as Donnelly spread it between his hands. The writing on the scroll was in blue, a delicate script.

"We've communicated, by

God!" shouted the General exultantly. "Wait'll Ivan hears about this, by God! If we can only decode it!"

"It—it's in Spanish," said Ramirez hesitantly.

The General snorted. "Don't be a jackass!"

"I can read it," Ramirez insisted. 'Tt's funny Spanish, but that's what it is."

"Ramirez," said Crumpacker eagerly, "read it. What does it say?"

Ramirez squinted uncertainly at the scroll. "Well," he said uneasily.

"Hah!" said the General. "Just as I—."

Ramirez tightened his jaw. "It says—by God, it says: 'No cream today. Leave three quarts milk, and a kiss for me.'" He giggled hysterically. "It's signed 'Mary!'"

The kneeling men were silent, watching the paper as a breeze fluttered it in Donnelly's hand. At last Crumpacker began to chuckle, very softly. Oblivious to the watching men, he rose to his feet and blew a kiss at the sky.

Coming soon . . .

Subcommittee

by ZENNA HENDERSON

The Secret Songs

by FRITZ LEIBER

Napoleon's Skull Cap

by GORDON R. DICKSON

The Fifteenth Wind of March by FREDERICK BLAND