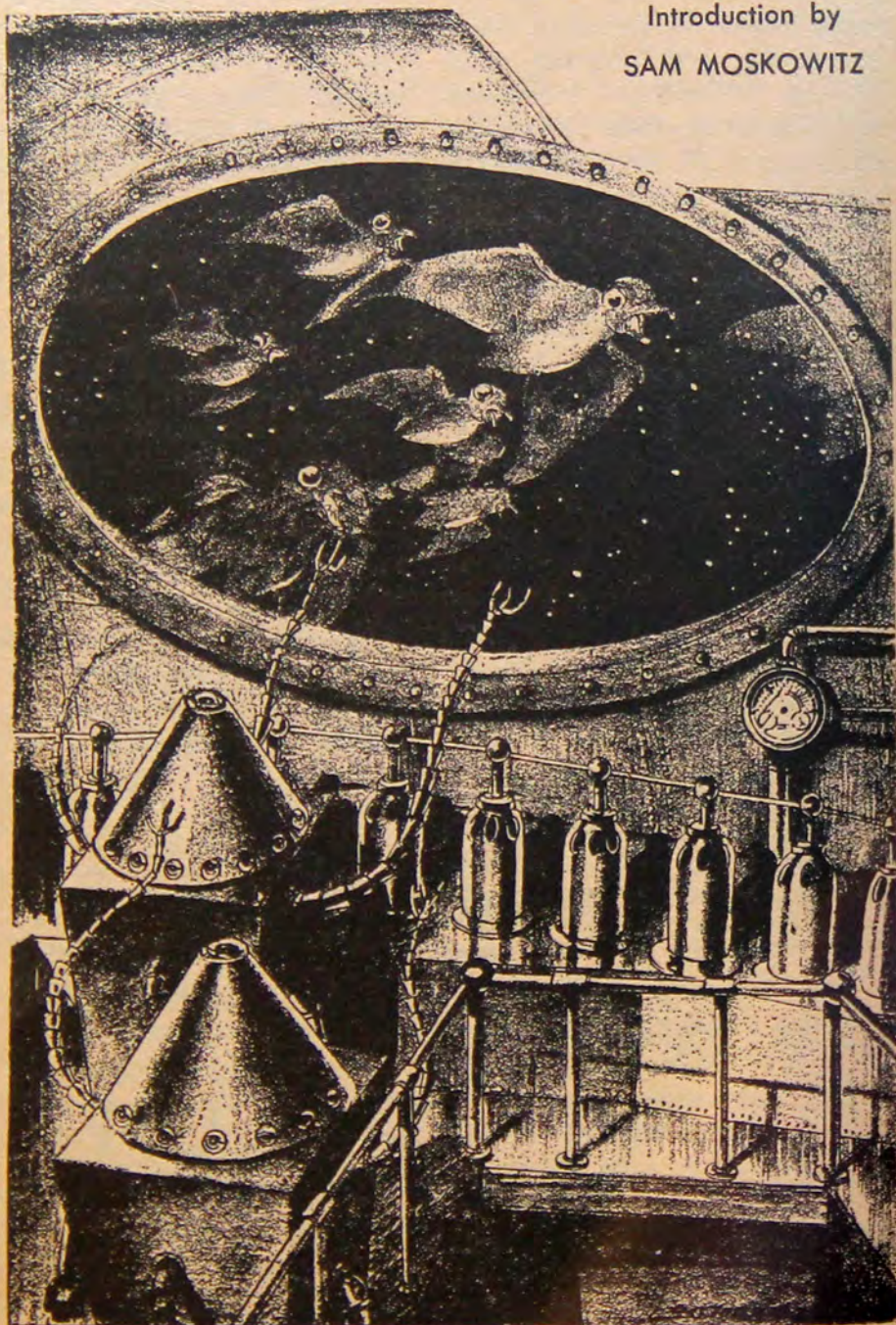


A Classic Reprint from AMAZING STORIES, February 1932

Introduction by  
SAM MOSKOWITZ



# the Planet of the DOUBLE SUN

By NEIL R. JONES

*THERE is no denying the popularity of the "series" story, particularly when they center about a fascinating pivotal character. No greater testimonials to the acceptance of the "series" story can be offered than the past success of entire magazines built around such talented heroes as Doc Savage, The Shadow, Nick Carter and Operator Five.*

*Science fiction has no dearth of characters that possess this wide appeal. Back in the heyday of the dime novel, Frank Reade, Jr. and Jack Wright invented aircraft, submarines and tanks on a weekly schedule. Second only in popularity to Sherlock Holmes, among A. Conan Doyle's inspired characterizations was Professor Challenger who ranged so effectively through the epics of The Lost World and The Poison Belt.*

*AMAZING STORIES has been the birth place of a number of popular science fiction characters, in-*

*cluding Buck Rogers, Adam Link, John W. Campbell's Arcot, Wade And Morey and Edward E. Smith's Seaton, Crane and DuQuesne. Certainly most favored by the readers was the remarkable Professor Jameson, a character who debuted in the July, 1931 issue of AMAZING STORIES in The Jameson Satellite. That story is notable on two counts; it introduced the Zoromes, a strange race of space adventurers with flesh and blood brains in metal bodies, and it presented one of the early stories of the earth satellite. It did not, however, establish Professor Jameson's popularity, doing little more than set the stage. The second story, The Planet of the Double Sun, was the one really responsible for eliciting a strong response of approval.*

*Seemingly immortal, his human brain in a metal body, Professor Jameson, once an earth man, would now explore the universe with the Zoromes. And*

what he found was several cuts above the ordinary run of adventure. With all their advanced science and their metal bodies the Zoromes were far from immortal and before they departed from The Planet of the Double Sun, their existence as a functioning unit would be considerably in question.

In this story the reader will find elements of the psychology that made Isaac Asimov's masterpiece *Nightfall* so effective, though there is no direct link or influence between the two tales. The special success of Neil R. Jones also bears a corollary to Asimov's, since in this instance, *The Planet of the Double Sun* is

essentially a murder mystery. The research for the culprits and the perils along the way, provide suspense that augments the various scenes on the strange world.

The momentum provided by *The Planet of the Double Sun* was to a great degree responsible for carrying the Professor Jameson series through 21 published stories which ended just about 20 years after the publication of the first in 1931. This reprinting provides the opportunity for the modern reader to experience some element of the "series" magic, which has infected countless readers of all types for generations.

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#### The Machine Men of Zor

PROFESSOR JAMESON stood in the fore of the space ship and gazed philosophically into space, ruminating upon the past, present and future, and upon the strange events of his life. How weird and unbelievable it had all been. Yet, here he was, one of the machine men of Zor, a convert of the dying world.

Forty million years had passed into the uttermost realms of eternity since that far gone day on which the professor, in the year 1950, had ordered his dead body enclosed in a rocket and shot into space on the belief that

his corpse would withstand the rigors of time eternal. His funeral rocket had become a satellite of the earth, a cosmic coffin, pursuing its lonely way within the silent, restful graveyard of space, the endless vacuum between worlds—a meteor amid cosmic dust.

For more than forty thousand centuries, the body of Professor Jameson, true to his theories and predictions, had remained wholly intact, untouched by the hoary palm of time. The vacuum of space had preserved his dead body, and forty million years later, when the expedition from Zor had found him, he was in the

same state as upon the day of his death.

Born of the sun's incandescent mass, the earth, with its sister planets, was destined to return to its death within the fiery globe. Following the venture of Professor Jameson, kept secret from the world by his nephew, Douglas Jameson, the world had continued its rapid strides in scientific progress until one day, centuries later, mankind had destroyed itself in a great war. Out of the reigning chaos, the remnants of agonized humanity had degenerated into barbarism and savagery, finally disappearing entirely from the earth.

Then there had come various other cycles of living beings who, in their various forms, ruled the earth for their allotted time and then, like mankind, had faded into dust and obscurity. There had been the ant-cycle, and the bird-cycle, as well as the Terseg invasion from Mars. The latter represented a horde of queer animals with wings, who, being gifted with scientific intelligence, had, through necessity, journeyed across space to the earth, to escape the chill, dying atmosphere of the little red planet.

But to all this history subsequent to his death and journey into space, Professor Jameson had been completely oblivious.

With the distant stars as his only companions, he had roamed in the state of death upon his orbit around the huge ball of the rotating earth.

During this entire period the sun slowly lost its heat as did the earth and the other planets of the Solar System. The earth's atmosphere became rarer, and slowly wasted away. Life did not find it easy to flourish as it once had. The rotation of the earth gradually slowed up, and, attracted by the sun's immense gravitation, gradually circled in closer to the solar luminary. The sun's great pull would soon draw its planets back to the flaming folds from which they had been hurled out on their career.

Then came the Zoromes, wanderers of the seas of space, who, in their space craft, passed the vicinity of the dying world. The machine men from Zor had discovered the strange rocket, and they had brought Professor Jameson back to life, removing his brain from the body, stimulating it into activity once again, and placing it in one of the metal machines.

The professor allowed his glance to drop from the darkness of space, studded with its fiery points, to his metal anatomy. A great metal cube upheld by four jointed, metal legs constituted his body, while six metal tentacles curled outward from the

upper structure of the cube. A cone shaped head of metal surmounted the body, enclosing the brain. A series of eyes encircled the head, and one eye was in the peak, possessing the power of looking straight upward.

He was now a Zorome, one of the deathless individuals of a far-off world of the Universe. Millions of years ago the Zoromes had renounced their flesh and blood bodies and had invented the machines which knew no death but only repair and replacement. Theirs was a life of eternity and continual adventure, and being given the choice of eternity or death, Professor Jameson, after a bit of hesitation and consideration, had thrown his lot with the machine men.

#### Blue and Orange Suns

**G**AZING once more into the boundless depths of the cosmic void, the professor, who had been labeled 21MM392 by the Zoromes, contemplated two close-set discs of light which the space ship rapidly approached.

Another machine man walked to the side of the professor and aroused him from his dreamy reveries by a telepathic observation.

"We are nearing one of the double suns."

"How weird and beautiful

they are," said the professor, transferring his thoughts to his fellow Zorome. "One of them is a blue sun; the other an orange sun. Are there many of such?"

"Yes," replied 8B-52. "We have also found triple suns, each one of a contrasting color. Of course, even the double suns are not numerous, but among the trillions of suns in space they are not hard to find."

"I recollect," remarked Professor Jameson, "that the astronomers of my day and age viewed a few of them through their telescopes, but they were so far off, and the telescopes were so comparatively inadequate to cope with such inconceivable distances, that little was ever learned of the double stars, though they were known to exist."

"I have seen them before," stated 8B-52. "If you think the double suns beautiful, wait until you see their planets."

"I can imagine," mused the professor.

"You can imagine nothing compared to what you will see," returned the Zorome. "We are heading for the planet nearest the two suns. There are four planets to the system, and they all have their orbits about both suns. Occasionally, in the case of double suns, you will find that some of the planets revolve around each of the suns while

others of the same system, having their orbits farther from the suns, revolve around both. The suns, as in this case, invariably revolve about a common center between them, passing completely around one another at intervals."

"That would tend to produce eclipses," said the professor.

"It would," agreed the machine man. "There would be no lunar eclipses, however, seeing that the first planet possesses no moons."

"If it did possess moons," ventured Professor Jameson, "what queer, varying effects of moonlight we might witness. There would be a full moon, one side colored blue and the other orange."

"We shall observe such a phenomenon from one of the other planets before we leave this system," stated 8B-52. "The second planet has two moons and the third one has four moons. The fourth and last planet, however, like this one, has not a single moon."

Together they gazed in rapt wonder at the fascinating contrast of blue and orange colors of the great flaming globes.

"Then we shall land on the inner of the four planets?" asked the professor.

"Yes, 21MM392," replied another of the machine men who had just come up and joined the

two. He was the leader of the expedition, 25X-987. "It should be a novel experience, your first meeting with the planet of a double sun."

"I have had many a wonderful adventure with you since you took me from my rocket," said Professor Jameson appreciatively. "It is with keen anticipation that I look forward to this exploration before us. As you say, it will be my first sight of a planet having a double sun of bi-colors."

More of the Zoromes crowded about the three. The machine men were never tired of hearing the discourses of Professor Jameson. He was educated and had taken quickly to their ways and philosophy. He was an interesting figure among them, and in their emotionless, companionable manner they had grown fond of him. His viewpoint was that of an earth-dweller of some forty million years before, and his ideas, though sometimes appearing grotesque to them, were indeed unique.

And now they discussed the double sun and the retinue of planets as the space ship raced on at a fantastic speed ever nearer the bi-luminary of the starry heavens.

Time meant little or nothing to the Zoromes. They never slept, their bodies required no food or fuel of any kind, and

there was no night or day in space. They took no trouble to measure time by any manner even though back home on the planet, Zor, the machine men kept a record of time by which they might measure history. The machine bodies of the Zoromes never irked them as flesh and blood anatomies would have done, and time being merely relative, as it truly is, passed swiftly for them. Monotony was an unknown quantity among the machine men of Zor.

The twin globes of the two suns gradually grew more flaming and brilliant as the space ship neared the inner of the four planets. The blue sun appeared slightly larger than its orange contemporary, though less brilliant.

#### A Wondrous World

**S**LOWLY the space flyer of the Zoromes descended upon the planet of the two suns.

"How beautiful!" expressed Professor Jameson in awe. "What unparalleled splendor!"

"It is indeed so," agreed 25X-987.

The sunlight from the two suns, which were situated several million miles away from one another, presented an alluring color effect upon the side of the planet facing them. From one portion of the rotating planet,

an observer would have seen the blue sun in the east just above the horizon, while the orange sun was just past its zenith. From another position upon the planet, it would seem that the orange sun was just sinking, while the blue sun rapidly neared its zenith.

It was at this latter point that the space ship came to rest upon the surface of the strange planet bathed in its unworldly glory. Looking down from the cosmic traveler far above the atmosphere, the surface represented a weird blend of blue and orange hues. The view upon the planet was even more vivid and alluring, the two colors blending, clashing and contrasting as the case might be, depending upon the nature of the topography.

The Zoromes left their space flyer and walked out upon this strange planet of kaleidoscopic beauty. In temporary silence they viewed the exotic magnificence of the world they had come to explore—the planet of the double sun.

Never, thought Professor Jameson, had he seen aught to parallel its awesome, unearthly elegance. Truly, the mental vision of heaven by the early saints of Christendom could not have excelled this world of paradise for the optical senses.

A rolling, undulating landscape of hills and valleys

stretched away in every direction. Beautiful trees grew out of a luxuriant riot of vari-colored vegetation, their tall tops bending over on every side, feathery festoons of misty, trailing creepers adorning their branch ends swaying ever so gently in the breeze. Many shades of moss carpeted the lower extremities of the massive tree trunks, while in the upper foliage of the forest giants, birds of lovely feather and plumage trilled sweetly or else echoed strange calls entirely foreign to the ears of the Zoromes. Lovely shrubbery, interspersed here and there with open spots of violet sward, dotted the landscape as far as the eye might reach. Flowers of gorgeous hues bedecked the sun-kissed hillsides, their lovely heads nodding dreamily, as if welcoming these strange creatures to their wondrous world.

From where he stood with his companions upon a comparatively lofty eminence, Professor Jameson gazed out over a silent sea whose waters spread away to meet the far distant horizon. The crystal clear atmosphere of the planet appeared to be of a rarefied nature, or else it supported little dust, for several stars of the first and second magnitudes were clearly visible within the sapphire vault of the sky's illimitable depths. The blue sun, being of a slightly fainter

intensity than its lesser companion, now occupied the zenith, being not quite directly overhead, while the orange sun rested upon the watery horizon, preparing to sink out of sight.

THE latter sun threw a rippling path of strange-hued rays across the violet-tinted ocean which lay calmly lapping its flowered shores. It was such a lane down which one might have expected the immortals to have walked. Had the Zoromes been of a nasal sense, intoxicating fragrances of the verdure's surrounding blossoms would have crept up to them from the dense foliage bordering the sea.

The orange sun's burnished disc drew gradually toward the vague line which marked the blending of violet water with sapphire sky. The burning orb slowly sank among a few wisps of multi-colored clouds drifting on the far distant horizon of water like dim, ghost ships. Sinking, sinking, as if reluctantly bidding its blue contemporary farewell, it passed slowly into the translucent depths of the peaceful sea which lapped a distant shore.

And now, except for the orange and golden sunset, a wonderful, blue transformation took place, and many of the blossoms were seen to close their petals. It was a deep, somber blue, and the



Zoromes felt a strange influence overcome them, as if an intangible presence held their minds in a grip of morbid imaginings. Like an oppressive mantle, it altered the previous cheerfulness of the beautiful world.

Near the shores of the ocean, the Zoromes had noticed thousands of rough, craggy protuberances projecting above the water line, literally thousands of them extending in heterogeneous array for some half mile from shore. Now, as the blue sun reigned supreme in all of its azure majesty, mysterious ripples broke the surface of the silent sea, and strange animals of the water crawled out upon the miniature islands. They were medium-sized creatures, fully half the size of the machine men, and were equipped with eight flipper-like appendages.

Raising their heads to the blue orb in the sky, they voiced in unison a weird, wailing cry, which rang dismally in the ears of the Zoromes.

"This is nearly as oppressive as your dying world, 21MM392," spoke 25X-987, addressing the professor. "What a contrast there is here between the shining of the orange and blue suns and the blue sun alone."

"I should say that it was much more oppressive here at this time than on the dying world which you called Earth," ob-

served 72N-4783, an eminent philosopher of Zor. "I have the feeling that there is an unseen presence about us."

"Perhaps it is the influence of the blue sun and the dismal wailing of those water animals," suggested Professor Jameson.

"No," replied 25X-987. "Such things do not affect us. We are too accustomed to strange scenes for that. We shall journey over the planet and see what we can find."

"In the space ship?" asked 9G-721.

"No. We'll leave the space ship here with half our number. The rest of us will explore, using the mechanical wings."

#### Exploration

AND so it happened that half of the Zoromes, twenty-five in number, were detailed to stay with the space ship while the remainder, including 25X-987 and Professor Jameson, went upon an extended journey of exploration over that part of the planet in the vicinity of the interstellar flyer.

With the mechanical wings attached to their metal bodies, the Zoromes flew low over the surface of the planet, and were soon far from their companions and the space ship. The wings were capable of propelling the machine men at a fast rate over the sur-

face of the world, and they traveled steadily with few stops until the setting of the blue sun.

Then there fell an intense darkness, and down from the sky gleamed a multitude of fiery stars. There they stretched across the dark expanse of heavens like the flaring sparks of some mighty, universal conflagration, which, in a literal sense, they truly were. It was equally true that among their flaming sparks there were many dark, cooling embers which had once been brilliant sparks themselves. Of the latter rank was the earth, one of the cold, dead cinders, and soon its cooling sun would also become a burnt-out ember. Such is the law of the Universe.

With the setting of the blue sun, the Zoromes descended for a conference.

"The night will not be long," said 25X-987. "The orange sun will soon rise."

"The planet has three times as much daylight during the present situation of the suns as it has darkness," spoke 8B-52. "The suns revolving about one another give to their planets different phases of daylight as well as the varied periods of daylight and darkness. There is usually more daylight than darkness in the case of these double suns, but occasionally the two periods of daylight and darkness are equal. The period of darkness is never

longer than the period of daylight, unless the planet's axis is tipped as was the earth's."

"I do not experience that uneasy feeling since the blue sun went to rest," mentioned 72N-4783.

"Nor I," exclaimed 9G-721.

"It has something to do with that blue sun," said 25X-987.

"When the orange sun is not in sight," added the professor.

"We shall find out the reason before we leave," stated 25X-987.

#### The Canyon of Death

TRUE to 25X-987's prediction concerning the rising of the orange sun, it was not long in coming. First there was a suggestive lessening of the darkness in the east, followed by a bronze haze which gathered rapidly until in a burst of glory the flaming orb of the great sun broke above the horizon.

Under the dazzling brilliance of the solar orb, the Zoromes took to the air once more, continuing their tour of exploration. They found they were approaching a comparatively barren section of the planet. Deep canyons lay below them, and there grew but little vegetation.

25X-987, followed by his twenty-four companions, soared down out of the sky and into the deepest canyon, the high, rocky walls rising far above the Zoromes as

they flew lower and lower into the depths. Professor Jameson judged the bottom of the rocky defile to be some two miles below the surface. Farther and farther they sank within the cavernous maw of one of the great scars which extended across the face of the planet.

Finally the bottom was reached, and the machine men of Zor found themselves in a semi-darkness which had not yet been penetrated by the sun's rays. Indeed, the suns would of a necessity be high in the heavens to send their rays down into the long, ragged pit in which the Zoromes now found themselves.

"Look-" exclaimed 9G-721. "It is a pit of death! See the bones!"

Following the wave of 9G-721's tentacle, the rest of the machine men saw that the floor of the canyon was littered with white, gleaming bones. They were strewn about profusely, and in the semi-gloom of the deep canyon shone pale, mysterious and forbidding.

"What could have occurred here?" asked the professor. "Surely, it must have been a wholesale destruction of life."

25X-987 gazed in rumination at the moldering bones. "I wonder," was all he said.

Eagerly, the machine men inspected the bones carefully, attempting a reconstruction in their vivid imaginations concern-

ing the probable appearances of the dead creatures. How might the living possessors of the bones have looked? What sort of animals were they, and why had they died in such wholesale numbers? Ah, it was a mystery, and if there was anything of which the Zoromes were inordinately fond, it was mystery. They searched for evidence of weapons used in the slaughter, but they found none, enhancing the obscurity of the situation.

The machine men spread far out, examining both sides of the canyon, but there were only the white heaps of bones to mock them.

"They were creatures who walked on three legs," informed 8B-52, who had been spending his time with another of the Zoromes examining the bones. "They possessed three upper appendages, but they were not tentacles."

"The upper appendages were more like those of 21MM392 when we found him in the rock-et," spoke 5F-388, the other machine man who had been inspecting the bones. "They were jointed."

"Like my arms, you mean," supplemented the professor.

"Yes, that's it," affirmed 5F-388.

"Do you find the bones of any other creature besides those of the Tripeds?" asked 25X-987.

He received negative replies from the others.

"It would seem then that it was a battle which involved but one species," observed 965A-10.

"Not necessarily," countered 25X-987, enjoying the mystery of the situation. "The victors of the fray could possibly have emerged from the conflict unscathed, or else removed their dead. We do not know as yet whether there was a battle. These creatures might have died of a plague."

"I am certain they were intelligent beings," spoke one of the Zoromes. "We found these articles on some of them."

He extended to 25X-987 several small, metal articles. One of them was a curiously formed ring which had been taken from a digit, or finger, of one of the Tripeds' upper appendages. The Zoromes gathered around their leader to examine the trinkets. They were especially interested in the ring.

"There is some sort of an emblem upon it," spoke the professor.

"Three double suns!" exclaimed 25X-987. "What do you suppose that——"

965A-10 did not finish his telepathic speech which was suddenly interrupted by a message from down the canyon. Incessantly it rang in their minds.

"Come! I've found something!"

## CHAPTER II

### The Tripeds' Bones

THE Zoromes, as one man, made their way quickly to their companion, who had announced his find, some of them running rapidly on their four legs while others took to the air, their mechanical wings gliding them rapidly through the crystal atmosphere of the planet.

Quickly they swarmed about the machine man who had summoned them. He stood before the canyon wall, pointing upward.

"Hieroglyphics," exclaimed Professor Jameson excitedly.

There, upon the wall, were carved and painted an intricate set of pictures and symbols.

"What does it mean?" asked 9G-721.

"That we must decipher this and perhaps learn of the fate of the Tripeds," replied 25X-987.

"Look" spoke the professor, waving a tentacle at a scrawled figure upon the wall. "There is what the Tripeds looked like! See—the figure has three legs, and there are also three jointed arms!"

"And there above him are the two shining suns," said another of the machine men, pointing out the solar orbs upon the wall or rock.

"He is running," observed 72N-4783.

It was even as 72N-4783 had

said. The Triped was sketched in the act of running, casting a fearful glance over his shoulder. Nothing pursued him, however, and the Zoromes were at a loss regarding the reason for his flight.

"Here is another picture," stated one of the machine men, "and it seems to bear a connection with the other in some respects."

"Only one sun is shining in this picture," stated 25X-987.

"The blue one," commented the professor.

"And the Triped is falling down dead!" exclaimed 3R-579.

The engraver, who had put the pictures upon the canyon wall, had executed this particular sketch with masterful skill. Still casting a fearful look of terror and anguish over his shoulder, he was in the act of pitching forward dead. Around him lay many other silent companions who had fallen to rise no more.

The Zoromes now contemplated the next picture group. It was a strange one. One of the Tripeds was depicted in the act of leaping off the heights of a rugged cliff. Another, with upraised bludgeon, was about to crash it down upon the skull of a comrade, while others, apparently horror stricken, rushed forward to foil the consummation of the terrible deed. Above this scene the blue sun held sway.

The last group of pictures was the strangest of all. The orange sun shone brilliantly, surrounded by a blue ring. The Tripeds were shown running hither and yon, while above them in the air flew dim, shadowy, menacing forms. The Tripeds were evidently trying to avoid them.

"What does it mean?" queried several of the machine men.

"The two suns are in eclipse for one thing," said 25X-987. "As for those creatures in the air, we have not met them here as yet."

"We have seen but few creatures of any kind, come to consider the matter," observed Professor Jameson. "There were the water animals who voiced their weird cries, and we have seen many birds of varying species, but do you know that in all our traversal of the forests we have seen no animals?"

"That is true," mused 72N-4783.

They now inspected a new row of pictures above the ones at which they had been looking. In one picture the orange sun shone alone. Below it, the Tripeds were engaged in various peaceful duties. In the next picture, both the blue sun and the orange sun shone. The Tripeds were still engaged in the occupations of their everyday life. In the third picture, which was the last of that group, the blue sun shone by it-

self in the azure sky, and below it not a Triped was in sight. Only one object was visible, and this appeared to be a symbol of some kind. There was a round, white object, under which rested a six pointed cross.

#### Weird Symbols

IT is the skull of a Triped with three of the upper appendage bones laid across one another below it," explained 8B-52.

"The skull and cross bones," remarked Professor Jameson. "In my day and age upon the earth, such an emblem meant death."

"And that is probably just what this means too," considered 25X-987. "There is something sinister in that blue sun, though I am at a loss to know why it should be so."

"Then our morbid feelings we experienced beneath the sole reign of the blue sun were not our imaginations?" queried the professor.

"Never," replied 25X-987. "It is not like the Zoromes. That blue sun held some terrible menace over the Tripeds."

"Perhaps its rays killed them," ventured 43V-73.

"I doubt it," spoke Professor Jameson. "They appeared well and happy in the sunlight of both the solar orbs."

"But," argued 43V-73, "could

not the rays of the orange sun have nullified the death rays of the blue sun?"

"Possibly," was the professor's partial agreement.

"Behold!" cried one of the Zoromes, pointing a long tentacle above them.

The attention of the machine men was focussed directly upward through the single eye in the peak of their heads. Far, far above them on the canyon's western lip there shone a blue haze.

"The rising of the blue sun!" exclaimed 25X-987.

The machine men of Zor followed the canyon's long, winding course. Sometimes it grew narrower and then again it would broaden out once more. Small side canyons now commenced to run into the larger crevice, many of them being far below the level of the main canyon floor, so that the Zoromes often looked into the dark, giddy depths of canyons within a canyon. Several times they found piles of bones of the long dead Tripeds, some of them crumbling to a white powder when touched. Occasionally they came across mysterious writings and illustrations.

One of the pictures appeared to warn all trespassers to avoid searching the canyon any farther. It was an ominous warning to go back. The symbol of the skull and bones lent it emphasis. But still the machine men fol-

lowed the deep canyon's course, and now it commenced to get darker, and the crevices and chasms in the rocky floor grew more numerous, so that a good share of the time saw the machine men of Zor on the wing.

"The orange sun is setting," said 25X-987. "The blue sun has passed its zenith."

"Have you noticed anything peculiar regarding those suns?" asked the professor as he watched the ebbing glow of burnished bronze upon the high cliffs above them.

"They appear nearer," replied 25X-987.

"But they are not."

"No. It is merely their revolutions about one another."

"The distance between them never varies at any time."

"The orange sun has gone below the horizon," spoke 25X-987.

"How beautiful it is when they are both shining, and how depressing and deathly when the blue sun shines alone."

#### Suicide and Tragedy

THE Zoromes continued on between the towering walls of rock. The blue, gloomy haze which now settled down about them like a dismal shroud of despair seemed scarcely to lessen the Stygian blackness, lending to it only an eerie, sombrous feeling of intense sadness.

"This is what one upon my planet in my day would have called 'giving a person the creeps.'" remarked the professor.

"It is queer," agreed 25X-987. "In all our millions of years of travel we have never before experienced such strange sensations, such indescribable and undesirable feelings. I believe it is what you explained to us as fear, 21MM392, that frame of mind we have never yet known."

"It might be termed that," replied Professor Jameson, analyzing the situation of the machine men. "Never having known fear before, you are not in a position to know whether or not your sensations are born of fear. I have known the sensation of fear many times in my past life upon the earth, and can readily recognize it. Our present sensation is not so much of fear as it is an ominous warning of danger which constantly disturbs our minds. Were it fear, my friends, we should experience the desire to depart from the canyon at once, spread our wings and fly back to the space ship. As it is, we have not the slightest inclination to do so."

The professor's logic was convincing.

Ahead of them there suddenly occurred a commotion. The Zoromes milled excitedly about the edge of a ragged pit.

"Seize him quick; he knows not what he does!" came the telepathic message ahead of 25X-987 and the professor who, absorbed in their conversation, had lagged in the rear.

"He's gone!"

"We were too late!"

"What's up?" inquired the leader of the expedition, flying quickly over the heads of those before him.

The professor followed swiftly behind him.

"7L-4208 developed a sudden disease of the mind, we believe!" came the reply. "He took off his wings, laid them down upon the edge of yonder crevice, and before anyone could restrain him, had jumped!"

"Head first!" added another of the machine men who had witnessed the mad act.

"Such occurrences are rare and do not happen for ages at a time!" exclaimed 25X-987. "Go down to the bottom of the pit, and see if he can be saved."

Swiftly, several of the machine men flew down into the darkness and out of sight. It was a long while before a reply came up to them.

"He is a mass of wreckage!"

"His brain! His brain!" inquired 25X-987 anxiously.

The leader of the Zorome expedition received an answer in three cryptic words laden with deep portent. "It is destroyed!"

"7L-4208 is dead!" lamented 25X-987 in regret. "21MM392, you have witnessed something which is practically unheard of—the death of a Zorome. Your coming added one to our ranks now our number is the same as before. Evidently something went wrong with 7L-4208's brain, prompting him to do the rash, unreasonable act that he did."

"Either that or else it was the dismal influence of the blue sun," spoke Professor Jameson suggestively.

"Impossible," stated 25X-987. "We are not susceptible to such influences."

DO you remember my sensations just before we left the dying world, and how near I came to doing the very same thing as that which 7L-4208 just did?"

"Certainly," replied 25X-987. "But you must remember that your mind is a great deal different than ours in structure, even if we do enjoy a mutual exchange of ideas. We are immune to any outward attempts to sway our judgment."

"Indeed," agreed the professor, "our minds are much different."

"Silence!"

The caution came suddenly from one of the machine men. Each and every Zorome halted and stood motionless that his



passage over the canyon floor should emit no noise. The rattling, scuffing and clatter of metal limbs against rock ceased.

"Do you hear it?" asked the machine man strangely.

"Hear what?" asked 25X-987.

"Listen—there it is again!"

#### Mystic Sounds

AND now to the Zoromes there came a hum, a low, droning buzz as if from far off—yet very near. For a time it hung on a long, monotonous, doleful note, which gradually arose to a faint wail.

"What an awful cry that was!" observed 72N-4783.

"If I possessed bones, it would have chilled them," said Professor Jameson.

"Did you recognize how nearly the last half of that cry resembled the sound emitted by the water animals we saw on the tiny islets of the ocean?" asked 25X-987.

"Yes," replied the professor, "but that cry came from something else—not from the water animals."

"There it is again!"

"I hear several—they mingle together!"

"It is coming nearer!"

"From where?"

"Around the bend ahead of us!"

"No, from behind!"

"Out of the air above us!"  
"From the walls of the canyon!"

"It emanates from all around us!" exclaimed the leader of the Zoromes. "How unusually excited my men have become, this is not their usual way! I too feel a tensity—it is strange."

In truth, the Zoromes were not acting like their usual selves. Excitement strode rampant among them. Some of the machine men betrayed a bit of nervous panic which was radically unlike them. Awe had supplanted their customary, stolid indifference.

Above, the blue sun now poured its suffused light straight down into the canyon, its azure orb set like a flaming jewel in the depth of sky. Like a scattering of lesser gems, the fiery stars gleamed in riotous profusion beyond the circle of its aura of closer light.

The low buzzing and hum became more intense, and appeared to rise and fade all about them. Frequently the hum would rise and terminate in a dismal wail. They were the most deathly cries the professor had ever heard, and his companions, the Zoromes, seemed strangely affected.

"Help!"

The cry rang in the minds of the machine men.

"Help!"

With a tremendous leap, one of

the Zoromes had repeated the act of 7L-4208, jumping into a deep cross canyon, his wings folded uselessly against his metal body. From the doomed man, there came an unintelligible gibberish mixed with wild thought pictures.

"He pushed them off!" elucidated 8B-52 excitedly to his superior who had leaped to the edge of the precipice. "22D-5 shoved 429C-257 and 98S-533 off the edge just before he himself leaped! The cry for aid came from 429C-267!"

"What madness is this?" asked 25X-987 in desperation. "What possesses my men,"

From the dark canyon's depth into which the three Zoromes had pitched to their deaths there issued a whirring noise. Up out of the gloom there hove a dark object which flew aimlessly in and out of the darkness a moment before it came to rest upon the edge of the pit.

"98S-533!" exclaimed several of the machine men simultaneously recognizing their companion.

"I spread my wings just in time to check my swift descent!" stated 98S-533. "Someone pushed me off as I was standing on the ledge looking down!"

"It was 22D-5!" informed 8B-52. "He also pushed 429C-267 just before he leaped himself!"

"This is terrible!" stated 25X-

987. "There is a presence within this canyon whose menacing influence is irresistible. We must see if our two comrades are within our power to save, and then we shall quit this gloomy place."

22D-5 and 429C-267 were found to be irreparable. Their metal skulls had been crushed like egg shells.

Like a horde of departing birds, the machine men spread their metal wings and flew far up to where the canyon walls began, evacuating the blue depths of the immense crevice with its insidious humming and unseen, haunting death which played grimly upon the minds of the space wanderers.

"I have never encountered such a horrible place as this before," deplored 25X-987 to the professor, as up through the air they coursed far above the canyon. "We have met and overcome much flesh and blood opposition in our wanderings, and we have successfully repulsed the attacks of scientifically organized beings of other planets without casualty to our ranks. Here is an enemy or invisible entity which wreaks death by suggesting a self-imposed destruction."

"What are you going to do?" asked Professor Jameson.

"Return to the space ship, bring it up here, and with our scientific apparatus discover why our comrades plunged to

their deaths. We shall then remove the menace, whatever it is."

#### The Insidious Menace

A CALL came from the rear. "We are short four men!" "We must go back," stated 25X-987, "and rescue them!"

"27R-410 is beyond rescue!" stated one of the machine men. "When we had arisen half way up through the canyon, he unscrewed his head and threw it back into the depths! His body flew onward aimlessly for a ways before it crashed into a canyon wall and smashed to pieces!"

"We must go back!" repeated 25X-987 resolutely.

"To return is death!" impressed Professor Jameson upon his friend's mind. "We shall return in the space ship if we return at all! It is rash suicide to turn back! You saved me from that once, and now I am determined to save you!"

"You are right, 21MM392," agreed the leader of the space expedition finally. "We must leave this vicinity as soon as possible. Our group now numbers eighteen. We must hurry back to our comrades."

Swiftly they flew back over the barren country of the canyons. Beneath the smoldering glow of the blue sun they saw afar off on the horizon the thin line of vegetation which marked the begin-

ning of the great forests.

"That sound—that terrible humming sound!" warned 25X-987. "I hear it again! We are being pursued! Put on speed!"

"It is no use," declared Professor Jameson. "The terrible sound comes from before us as well as from behind us."

"Let us gain the space ship where we are certain we shall be safe."

"We'll be much safer when that blue sun has set," opined the professor. "You know, I believe that some form of radio activity emanating from that blue sun is responsible for all this."

"Would it create that humming noise as well as bring disorder and death into the minds of my unfortunate men?"

"Perhaps."

"We shall find out."

"Where are the rest?" asked the professor, looking back.

"There is no one behind us."

"We have flown far ahead of them," observed 25X-987, "unless——"

"Unless they have succumbed to the menace," finished Professor Jameson.

25X-987 sent out a call. There came an answer from behind, and as the two machine men wheeled in the sky they perceived upon the horizon three black dots which rapidly overtook them. They proved to be three of the Zoromes.

"Where are the others?" asked 25X-987. "There should be thirteen more of you."

"They dove to their destruction along the way back!" exclaimed 8B-52. "This is a veritable death hole!"

"Were they attacked?"

"No. Either something happened to their wings or else they left us voluntarily."

"Some of them flew madly into one another, cleaving each other's wings off and thus ending their lives," said 305N-56. "I could declare that some of those accidents were no more than vicious attacks. They were completely demoralized. It occurred just after you and 21MM392 forged ahead of us and out of sight."

"This is the worst yet!" ejaculated 25X-987. "Thirteen of them—I have lost twenty now!"

Struck dumb by this latest tragedy within their ranks, the five remaining Zoromes winged their way rapidly back over the luxuriant forests and dense verdure toward the space ship and their companions they had left with it. And as they sped on over forest, hill, valley and stream, the blue sun set in a murky haze of azure, bringing on the darkness.

The Zoromes immediately felt a peace of mind as the blue orb disappeared below the horizon. The malignant pressure upon

their minds abated, and no longer did they sense the sad promptings of the evil influence. The humming in the air had ceased a short while before sundown.

### CHAPTER III

#### Death's Feast

PRESENTLY they neared the space ship, and as they did so the telepathic communications came thick and fast.

"A terrible thing has befallen us while you were gone!" stated a voice from the space ship. "We are nearly wiped out—but two of us remain!"

"What happened?" demanded 25X-987, fearing the worst.

"A strange thing occurred among us! Our comrades went crazy mad, killing each other and themselves!"

"You mean—you mean—during the reign of the blue sun?"

"Yes—that was it!"

"And were there humming noises?"

"Many of them—and the water animals came up and wailed."

"There are but two of you remaining? What happened to the rest?"

"Some of them are at the bottom of the ocean," replied 69B-496. "They flew above the rocky crags and disappeared under the surface when the water animals voiced their weird cries. Then, too, several of them smashed in

each other's heads in hideous combat. 4C-9721 even spread death among us with the ray gun before we overpowered him. He later answered the lure of the wailing water animals. He is somewhere out there."

69B-496 pointed a tentacle into the darkness toward the silent sea with its rough, jagged islets.

"They were possessed of the devil!" exclaimed Professor Jameson.

"What do you mean?" queried 25X-987.

"Merely an earthly expression which at present comes nearest to solving the situation."

"Where are the rest of your tentacles?" inquired the leader of the Zorome expedition, glancing over 69B-496.

The latter machine man stood before them with but two of his six tentacles remaining. In place of the other four, there projected only ragged, metal stumps.

"The ray gun wielded by 4C-9721, did it," replied 69B-496. "It cut a clean swath clear through 149Z-24, but luckily it didn't hit his head, and he can be repaired."

"Bring me down," issued a new voice, breaking in upon the thought transmissions.

69B-496 reached upon a shelf and brought down the peaked head of a Zorome who opened and shut his metal eyelids a few times.

"Place his head on a new body," ordered 25X-987.

"It was horrible!" exclaimed the head of 149Z-24 suddenly. "I saw them! I came near to going, and I saw them!"

"Saw them? Saw what?" queried 25X-987.

"I didn't get a good look at them, but I saw the things just the same."

"What things?" asked Professor Jameson.

"I don't know," replied 149Z-24. "They were dim and shadowy objects which floated about in the air. I had only a glimpse of them when 4C-9721 shot the ray gun among us. There seemed to be a fascinating, enticing lure they held forth to me. It was irresistible, and I came near to giving in and going when the ray gun cut through me. Then of course I couldn't and after a while the persuasion left me."

"Go where?" asked 25X-987 excitedly, eager to get to the bottom of the mystery. "Explain yourself! What were your feelings, and what made you want to go?"

"I really don't know," answered 149Z-24. "I never felt that way before. There seemed to be no definite incentive, and I do not remember any particular lure. It was a strong persuasion for me to give up thinking—that was all they asked of me—just to give up thinking. That humming

and wailing was a voice—an audible voice, not a thought voice. Yes, there were the thought voices, too, but they appeared to linger in the background, as if waiting. The wailing and humming voices were the more insistent."

"Hypnotism!" explained Professor Jameson. "Strange creatures are hypnotizing our forces to extinction!"

"Yes, but what are they?" asked 25X-987.

"And where are they?" added 69B-496.

#### The Mystery Deepens

25X-987," warned the professor, "we now are but seven where we came fifty-one. I advise that we leave at once to avoid complete extinction."

"But they can't get us inside our space ship, and I am going to return to the canyon of the bones to see if our companions are really beyond recall. I shall also solve the mystery, and wreak out revenge upon whatever creatures that have killed my comrades."

"Your revenge will but lead you on to destruction," stated Professor Jameson.

"But perhaps our companions, who fell back into the canyon, may not be past rescue," entreated 25X-987.

"We should investigate that most assuredly," stated the pro-

fessor, "but I wouldn't do it while the blue sun shines alone in the sky."

"That is the mystery," mused the leader of the Zorome expedition. "What has the blue sun to do with it?"

"I would forego the satisfaction of knowing," warned the professor. "It would mean stepping into a death trap."

The seven Zoromes prepared for the return trip to the canyon of the dead. The head of 149Z-24 was mounted upon a new body, and new tentacles were placed on 69B-496.

The orange sun had peeped above the eastern horizon, and now the planet of the double sun was once more transformed into a vision of celestial loveliness, a veritable Garden of Eden.

The space ship cruised far above the weird forest with their bright plumed birds and queer lack of animal life. Off toward the barren canyon of death they headed. It was only a short time after the rise of the orange sun that the blue sun hove into view, following closely upon its contemporary.

"See how close together they are," observed Professor Jameson.

"Yes," said 25X-987. "Before the sunset, there should be an eclipse."

"The orange sun is the more brilliant of the two, even though

it is a bit smaller," spoke the professor. "When the orange sun comes between the blue sun and the planet, there will be a blue ring around the orange sun."

"There is the canyon," said 25X-987, pointing to the barren lands far below where a great ragged rent cut the surface of the strange world, disappearing into the far flung horizon.

Under skillful manipulation, the space flyer was lowered into the ominous depths of the shadowy canyon, the walls rising menacingly as if ready at any moment to close in upon the space ship of the machine men, crushing it beneath millions of tons of rock debris. Or so it seemed to Professor Jameson who felt ill at ease, and was possessed of grim, gloomy forebodings.

Slowly they settled down upon the canyon floor among the white clumps of scattered bones, many of which crunched hollowly beneath the dark hull of the space ship.

"Search up and down the canyon," ordered 25X-987. "See if you can find the remains of the thirteen men we lost in leaving the place."

The search was made, and remains of most of the dead Zoromes were found. Their metal bodies and brain cases were discovered smashed and crushed where in their mad plunges plan-

etward they had come into contact with the rocky terrain.

"We are safe from the devastating death as long as the orange sun accompanies the blue sun in the sky," warned Professor Jameson. "To remain when the blue sun shines alone is rank suicide. Every one of our companions either killed himself or was killed by a comrade. None of them was killed forcibly by anything on this planet, yet some compelling influence drove them to suicide. Now that we know our friends to be unquestionably beyond our aid, I would advise most urgently that we leave at once."

"Not until I know, and have been at grips with, whatever killed so many of our men!" stated 25X-987 firmly.

"To remain is death!" counselled Professor Jameson.

"But we are now prepared, where before we were taken unawares," said the leader of the expedition from Zor. "We shall build up a mental resistance against the menace which seeks to derange our minds."

#### The Eclipse

**B**EWARE!" warned the professor. "I can now understand the reason for so many white bones in the canyon! The Tripedals died of the same malady beneath the terrible rays of that

damnable blue sun as afflicted your men!"

"We shall meet and destroy the menace!" was 25X-987's ultimatum. "Remember that we are Zoromes!"

"And that forty-four of us have fallen prey to the unseen evil within the last rotation of this planet!" reminded the professor. "Confidence has supplanted your caution entirely, 25X-987!"

"The suns! The suns!" exclaimed one of the machine men suddenly. "They are touching!"

"The beginning of the eclipse!"

"The orange sun is crossing before the blue one!"

A small tip of the blue sun had already disappeared before the encroaching, orange orb, and very gradually the great solar spheres moved into conjunction with their first planet.

And then upon the ears of the machine men fell a faint humming noise which increased in volume and intensity.

"The death call!" exclaimed 149Z-24 excitedly. "It is the death call!"

Now, there came several wails, rising to a more piercing pitch than the Zoromes had yet heard them during their brief stay upon the planet.

"Into the space ship!" commanded 25X-987.

Eagerly the machine men obeyed the order. But even within

the space ship the dismal howls and terrible humming vibration were heard. Every now and then there occurred a wailing noise which apparently issued from within the space ship itself, drifting suddenly back to the outside once more, as if the author of the hideous sound had passed through the walls of the interstellar craft.

"Look!" cried 69B-496 in alarm. "I see them! I see them plainly!"

"Where?" queried the machine men in unison.

"There!" exclaimed the Zorome, pointing above him with wildly waving tentacles.

"The shadows!" exclaimed 25X-987. "They are the shadows which fly about!"

And now all of the Zoromes perceived them as the two suns merged into an eclipse. Wide, flapping, shadowy forms they were, flying on leathern wings, the air being full of them. Queer, round heads surmounted the bat-like bodies. A pair of bright, gleaming eyes were set in the head, while below them from a wide distended mouth issued the frightful wails and dismal humming.

"You can see right through them!" ejaculated the professor.

"And they are flying through the rock walls!" added 8B-52.

"Here comes one of them for the space ship!" warned 149Z-24.



Directly toward the space flyer from Zor the ghostly creature flew, and with a piercing wail came right through it as if the ship had not been there. The phantom swooped straight down toward 25X-987 and Professor Jameson where they stood a bit apart from the rest of the Zoromes. It enveloped them and passed, the two machine men being clearly visible to their companions all the time. The wraith continued on and out of the space craft, leaving the two machine men standing together in surprise and consternation.

"The thing passed right through us!" exclaimed 25X-987 in surprise. "It must be an optical illusion!"

"That medley of sound they are making is no illusion," said the professor. "I am not superstitious, but I believe that here is something entirely beyond us. We had best leave while we may."

"Turn the ray guns upon them!" commanded 25X-987, gazing upward through a transparent section of the space ship at the horde of encircling bird creatures.

The machine men obeyed his bidding, and presently several iridescent fingers of light were probing upward to where the ghostly creatures wheeled and circled on the wing. Where the destroying rays touched the can-

yon walls the rock disappeared, leaving dark holes, but the rays had no effect whatever upon the phantoms who continued their aimless course above the space flyer.

#### Amid the Phantoms

VOICING their weird, depressing cries, they gazed downward upon the space ship of the Zoromes, regarding it with a solemn mien.

"They resist the ray!" cried 305N-56. "It leaves no impression upon them!"

"Seize 149Z-24!" cried 69B-496. "He has gone mad!"

Several of the machine men seized their companion, who had staggered towards a section of the craft's delicate mechanism with an upraised metal bar, evidently bent on destroying the apparatus.

"Those creatures have his mind in their power!" exclaimed 25X-987. "Quick! We must get out of here! Rise out of the canyon immediately!"

Swiftly the space ship arose from the floor of the canyon, leaving the pathetic piles of scattered bones far below. Through the midst of the phantoms they passed, not so much as perturbing them in the least. Back and forth they flew in the space occupied by the interplanetary craft as if it were not there.

A singular fact which Professor Jameson noticed concerned the queer conditions regarding the passage of the phantoms through an opaque object. Though possessed of the ability to disappear within the solid walls of the canyon, and the power to fly through the space craft at will, Professor Jameson saw that they never flew through one another. Often their wings would strike together in contact, placing either one or else both of the creatures off balance temporarily. How queer, he mused. The phantom creatures who voiced their evil, menacing cries were barely visible, it being possible for the professor to discern the cliff wall through their semi-transparent bodies.

The space ship flew above the ghostly crew, but their weird calls still lingered, and the Zoromes were possessed of the forlorn and dejected spirits which had previously been engendered by the blue moon. At a far height above the canyon the leader of the Zoromes ordered the space craft to be halted. He had no sooner stopped the ship than from below there came the humming sound which the machine men had now come to regard in loathing and disgust.

"They're coming!" admonished 305N-56.

"Wait!" ordered 25X-987.  
"Don't start away yet!"

From below, two of the dim apparitions flew up around the space craft, flying back and forth through it several times, giving voice to their sepulchral wails, the solemnity of their faces entirely free of changing expression. As they flew about the interplanetary ship, through the machine men, and through any solid object they encountered, the phantom creatures grew dimmer and dimmer, until they were entirely invisible. Only their weird cries were heard, and these grew faint and dwindled away.

"The orange sun is nearly past the blue one," observed 8B-52 after the last faint hum had died out.

"The eclipse is nearly over," spoke 69B-496.

"What manner of creatures could those things have been?" pondered 25X-987.

"I believe that I have the secret at last," said Professor Jameson with gravity. "I have solved the riddle of the blue sun and the deaths of our companions."

"What is it?" asked 25X-987 eagerly. "Speak, 21MM392!"

"With all your super intelligence," stated Professor Jameson, "I don't believe you would have ever solved the problem. During all of your millenaries of exploration among the cosmic realms of space you have never encountered the likes of such cir-

cumstances as we find on this planet of the double sun. With all your super knowledge, you lack the one item of experience which my earthly life gave to me quite coincidentally, and which now places me in a position to understand the amazing circumstances through which we have gone.

#### Professor Jameson Explains

WHERE we stand upon this planet there are really two worlds—the world we see about us now and the world of the phantoms. The world of the phantoms, however, is in a different dimension than this one, being upon a different light and color vibratory scale. The creatures we saw are not really phantoms in the literal sense of the word. They merely appear as phantoms to us, just the same as we do to them. They are of concrete proportions in their own plane of existence, even as we are real in our own life.

“When the blue sun shines alone, it exerts a strange color and vibratory effect upon whatever part of this planet it strikes. It produces the strange character of partially bringing together these two worlds, each of a different dimension. The presence of the orange sun neutralizes this effect. The depressing influence of the blue sun which we noticed so quickly is due to the fact that

it brings together the sound and thought transferences of these two worlds. The strange quality of the blue rays has not the power to bring the two worlds into bodily contact, however, and that explains the reason for the phantoms flying through the opaque objects of this world.

“When the blue sun is alone in the sky, the voices and thought transferences of the two worlds mingle as one. The strange apparitions from the other world of this planet are responsible for the deaths of our companions as well as for the wiping out of the Tripeds.

“Do you remember the drawings we found on the rock walls in the canyon of death? Everything was depicted as peaceful beneath the reign of the orange sun alone, as well as during the shining of both suns, but under the spell of the blue sun, we saw a great havoc wreaked among the Tripeds. Suicide and murder stalked rampant among them, and death finally took its toll of the entire race just as it destroyed our companions.

“Then we saw the illustrations of an eclipse of the suns, the blue sun being eclipsed by the orange one. Beneath it, we saw the Tripeds pursued by this malignant horde of shadowy appearing birds, phantoms such as we just saw. They are visible to us only during an eclipse. A mysterious

action of the blue rays around the orange sun during an eclipse brings about a partial visibility of this hidden world, though I truly believe that while the blue sun shines solitary the denizens of the other world can always see us. It stands to reason.

**T**HE CREATURES we saw from the other world are of a warring, destructive nature. By a hypnotic power peculiar to them, they seek to destroy the animals of this world by mentally reaching across the boundaries separating the two planes of existence and wiping them out by overpowering, mental suggestions of murder and self-destruction. This power, as you have already witnessed, is great enough to even counterbalance the super-intellect of a Zorome, though I believe that they themselves are possessed of no great intelligence. Their propensity for hypnotism is not necessarily derived from a magnitude of brain power. I believe it to be a birthright similar to that of the electric eel of my own planet about which I once discoursed to you. Hypnotism and occult power is their birthright even as the power to exude electric shocks is the eel's natural ability."

"Why didn't they kill the birds we saw in the forest, and also the water animals?" asked 25X-987, greatly impressed by the pro-

fessor's impressive conclusions.

"That I can't say for sure," replied Professor Jameson. "It explains the lack of animal life in the forests. As to the birds, I might venture the suggestion that they are so much like the creatures of the other world that they have sentimentally been spared. Perhaps the water animals' environment renders them impregnable to the suicide inducements of the other world entities. Then again, they may have something in common with them. Their cries were similar, and they emerged from the water only when the blue sun shone alone."

"You are a genius, 21MM392!" exclaimed 25X-987 admiringly.

"Not necessarily," said the professor. "You see, when a young man at college, I was very much enthused at one time in hypnotism, and though unable to exercise it myself, I read a great deal concerning it."

"With all our traveling from planet to planet—from sun to sun—from system to system—we have never before come across what you call 'hypnotism'. I can readily perceive that it is the key-note to this mystery, and were it not for you, the puzzle would forever have remained unsolved."

"And can you now understand why it is imperative that we leave at once?" asked the professor, gazing apprehensively at the

blue sun. "Even now the orange sun has passed from before the face of the blue one, and is sinking beneath the horizon."

"Now I realize how 149Z-24 saw the shadowy forms when he came near to answering their lure," said 69B-496. "The light from the ray gun combined with the blue sun's rays and the fact that he was under the hypnotic spell gave him the power of vision to see them."

"We must hurry from here," announced 25X-987 gravely. "21MM392 has spoken correctly. It is death to remain!"

#### CHAPTER IV

##### The Juggernaut

THE space ship rose upward on a slant, and as it did so, the orange sun, whose great shining sphere had rested half above and half below the horizon, sank out of sight. The blue sun now occupied the sky, and it would not be long before it, too, would follow its orange contemporary to rest.

Almost immediately, with the cessation of the orange sunshine, there arose upon the air the vibrant humming accompanied by its concert of sad wails. The volume of sound swelled up and around the speeding space craft, and the apprehensive Zoromes knew that in, out of and around their ship, the ghostly creatures

from the invisible dimension flew, eager to lure them to self-destruction.

"Keep control of your brains!" exclaimed 25X-987 wildly. "Concentrate as you never have concentrated before, or it is certain death!"

One of the horrible wails directly at their ears came to mock the machine man's command. Swiftly the space ship sought to leave the heavy atmosphere.

Somewhere below in the control room there came a rending crash of metal. Professor Jameson and 25X-987, in company with 8B-52 and 69B-496 rushed into the compartment to ascertain the cause of the furore.

"149Z-24 has broken loose!" ejaculated 372V-22.

The machine man who had spoken was firmly holding his mentally deranged companion with a grip of entwined steel tentacles.

"Put him in the buckler!" ordered 25X-987. "We have no time to waste if we are to leave this accursed planet of the double sun!"

But the order was never executed. All at once there occurred throughout the space ship a terrific shock. With a terrible impetus of increased motion, the interplanetary craft multiplied its speed and whirred madly on through the dense atmosphere of the globe. The Zoromes were sent

tumbling to the floor, their metal bodies and limbs rolling into grotesque heaps at the far ends of the space craft chambers.

Hurriedly they regained their feet.

"The ship will crash!" exclaimed 25X-987 wildly. "149Z-24 has broken the controls of the mechanism which regulates our speed! We are doubling speed every moment!"

"We'll crash or else burn up in the atmosphere like a meteor!" cried 8B-52.

The wind of their passing whistled eerily around the space craft. The shrieking arose to a hissing roar as the space flyer of the Zoromes rapidly gained speed on its mad rush through the sea of crystal ozone.

"Where are we heading?" asked 25X-987, expecting to be smashed into atoms at any moment.

69B-496 glanced at a dial.

"We are pursuing a long arc, in relation to the planet," he said.

"Upward or downward?" asked 25X-987 in mingled hope and dread.

"Downward!" came the hope shattering reply. "The curve of the arc is slightly greater than the curve of the planet's surface so that in view of our present altitude we shall not crash right away."

"But in that time we shall be

burnt up with our space ship!" cried 305N-56, his tentacles waving excitedly.

"The friction is becoming terrific!" exclaimed 25X-987.

"There is nothing we can do but wait for a miracle!"

"Or death!" added Professor Jameson.

The hissing roar had climbed the scale of sound vibrations until it was now a terrible whine. The space ship juggernauted on through the planet's atmosphere, carrying the seven machine men to perdition in its inevitable crash which the passing time brought rapidly nearer.

"It is the end!" prophesied 372V-22. "The accursed planet will claim us all!"

25X-987 appeared to have lapsed into a strange stupor, a dazed condition. He said nothing.

"We are halfway there!" came the notification of 69B-496 at the dials.

#### Super-Hypnotism

A WAVE of suffocating heat swirled through the interplanetary craft. The friction of the terrific speed was beginning to manifest itself. It appeared to be a race between the atmosphere and the lithosphere, to see which would claim the space ship first.

"There is nothing we can do," came the resigned observation

of Professor Jameson, "but—"

"Leap!" came the startling thought wave from the crazed 149Z-24. "Leap!"

"Leap!" echoed 25X-987, a strange concourse of thoughts mingling with the suggestion of 149Z-24.

"Leap out before we crash!" cried 149Z-24 wildly. "Save yourselves from sure death!"

"Leap out!" mused 69B-496, turning the matter over in his mind.

"Yes!" exclaimed 149Z-24 enthusiastically. "It's the only way!"

"The only way!" repeated 305N-56 mechanically. "Yes, it is the only way!"

"Come, jump out and be free!" urged 149Z-24.

"Stop!" cried Professor Jameson. "Enough! You are yielding to the will of the phantoms of the other world! They are leading you on to suicide!"

The machine men were oblivious to his warning. Evidently they had not heard him.

"Leap!" was 25X-987's only thought. It was rapidly nearing a conviction under the masterful hypnotism of the unseen creatures from another dimension. Already, they had made 149Z-24 their tool and devoted emissary and were largely spreading their insidious influence over the little group of machine men through him.

"The only way!" reechoed 8B-52.

"Cease!" pleaded the professor in a superhuman mental effort. "Do not yield!"

"I'll leap!" was the ultimatum of 305N-56, as if in reply to a request.

He moved slowly toward the door of the space ship. Professor Jameson sprang forward to bar the way. 149Z-24 was before him, however, and came to grips with the professor before he could reach the egress and prevent 305N-56 from leaving the craft.

The machine man appeared to execute the act by no volition of his own, and Professor Jameson knew it to be another prompting of the hypnotic menace.

"Leap!" continued 149Z-24. "The only way!"

305N-56 moved to the space ship door, flinging it open. Had it been in the fore of the craft the onrushing atmosphere would have smashed him backward like a feather to the far end of the room, but the egress was in the rear. Without another thought impression, 305N-56 leaped out into the deep blue sunlight and was gone. Eagerly following suit, 25X-987 and 8B-52 moved toward the opening.

"Don't!" warned the professor in vain, madly attempting to struggle from the tentacled deadlock of 149Z-24. "You are crazy!"

A sickening feeling obsessed the professor as the two machine men jumped. 149Z-24 now said nothing, and the professor perceived that his mind was in a chaos of terrible resolves. The professor knew that he was viewing the destructive thought impulses of the flying phantoms. He no longer sought to check his companions' mad intentions, knowing full well that it was useless. Helplessly he looked on as 69B-496 and 372V-22 took the fatal leap.

And now 149Z-24 released the professor suddenly and backed away. Was he about to leap too?

Then into the mind of the mentally deranged Zorome, Professor Jameson saw the horrible thought, the terrible command from the other dimension, come slowly stealing.

"Death to 21MM392!"

The professor faltered and backed away from the machine man who stood dazedly before him. The open door clanged dismally while the screaming wind still shrieked gloomily. The depressing sunlight of the blue sun spread a melancholy, azure glow into the interplanetary craft.

With the quickness of a cat, 149Z-24 grasped a heavy metal bar behind him and rushed down upon the unprotected 21MM392 to crush his metal skull.

Professor Jameson, the instincts of self-preservation still

dominant in his clear thinking mind, slumped forward as the crazed machine man struck. Two quick actions occurred simultaneously. As the heavy, metal bar missed the ducked head of Professor Jameson and placed a great dent upon his metal cubed body, the latter's tentacles closed quickly about 149Z-24's jointed legs and lifted him off the floor.

Staggering to the opening of the space ship, the professor hurled the metal body of 149Z-24 down upon the great planet which was spinning dizzily past below them.

#### The Last of the Zoromes

PROFESSOR Jameson made his way to the fore of the craft after having closed the door, and now he gazed out to see what lay ahead of him. The space flyer raced along, apparently on a horizontal position with the planet, its broken, uncontrolled propulsion mechanisms running wild, but the professor knew that the distance between the space ship and the planet was gradually closing.

He was the last of the Zoromes, spared but for a short interval following the fate of his machine comrades. He would soon crash to his death with the space ship.

Contrary to the assertion of 305N-56 that the space flyer



would double and redouble its speed until the friction of the air burned it up, the interplanetary craft from Zor did nothing of the kind. Though the friction with the atmosphere had produced an unusual warmth within the interior, the speed of the ship had failed to rise above a certain maximum. This was due to the solidity of the air which did not allow the tremendous velocities attained in free space.

Far ahead of him, Professor Jameson perceived a dull, pinkish glow lighting up the distant sky line in the direction the space ship was headed. The blue sun was sinking below the horizon, and the inky blackness of night hovered near as the unpiloted space flyer catapulted onward at such a remarkable speed for terrestrial travel.

The far-off pink glow the professor had discerned upon the horizon in the azure dusk had now mounted to alarming proportions, spreading a red, lurid flare far up into the sky. It was a long way off. Rapidly the space craft ate up the distance, and in the complete darkness which had now fallen, the professor saw the red, angry flare to be a tremendous holocaust leaping skyward from the bowels of the planet.

Great, scarlet tongues of flame licked upward angrily for many miles from the terrible inferno the uncontrolled space ship now

recklessly approached. Huge fragments of rock many times the size of the space craft, along with red spurts of fountainous lava, vomited skyward. It was such a volcano as human imagination could never conceive in its actual picture. The vastness of the awesome display and the boundless magnitude of the spectacle lent the impression that a ravaging eternal fire was about to consume the entire world. It was a vision far beyond the conception of Dante, beside which his inferno would have appeared belittled by the contrast.

Into this hell of upcast molten rock and seething flame the space ship of Zor careened in its mad flight. It contained the solitary machine man, 21MM392, known previously to men of the earth as Professor Jameson. As the space ship raced into the first ring of smoke and flame, the professor realized that here was a dramatic climax to his equally dramatic career. He would be burned into gas, and the residue of his body and of the space craft would be converted into lava. The crash of the ship of space would occur in a swirling lake of living fire, or else a hurtling boulder cast out by the tremendous fury of the perpetual flame and seething activity would crush the space ship in flight.

Professor Jameson, the last

Zorome of the ill-fated expedition, awaited his end with a patience born of martyrdom and philosophy. He had been a martyr to science in his earthly life, and among the Zoromes he had become a confirmed philosopher. Death offered no terrors to him. It was life's greatest adventure, if, however, a bit mysterious and menacing. But what could constitute adventure without mystery or menace of some description?

#### Through the Inferno

THE hell of the raging conflagration enveloped him, and produced a roaring as if all the elements of the Universe unloosed at once. Red, raging flame licked hungrily about the speeding space ship, and swirling smoke spread its murky haze around the ill destined craft. Glowing rock debris and spattering, liquid fire showered the metal sides, while by a miracle the huge boulders missed the ship in its mad flight through the raging hell.

A dizziness and weakness assailed the mind of Professor Jameson within its metal skull. The terrific heat, which would have shrivelled the body of a flesh and blood creature, killing it instantly, was now beginning to affect the metal machine man's brain a bit. The space

ship was intensely heated, parts of its metal shell glowing red. The skull of Professor Jameson was growing hot, and with a sudden lurch of dizzy senses, his consciousness departed and he knew no more. The professor's last sensation was that of being whirled rapidly over and over as the space flyer glanced from the side of a huge, smoldering, upflung rock and gyrated dizzily down into the lake of fire.

Why was it that Professor Jameson had eluded the sinister fate of his fellow Zoromes to succumb to the living fires? Why had his mind escaped the irresistible lure of the phantoms from the other world? The sagacity, wisdom and power of intellect of the Zoromes had outweighed his own in most respects—yet they had fallen before the hypnotic spell to which he had remained immune.

The truth of the enigma lay in the fact that Professor Jameson's mind, as 25X-987 had once remarked, was a great deal different from the gray matter of the machine men of Zor. In justice to the Zoromes, those wanderers of Cosmic space who had stored up the knowledge of millions of years, let it be said that the hypnotic influence of the winged phantoms depended not upon the power of intellect. Their weird power of mind

across the barrier of an invisible dimension exerted its influence through the susceptibility of the mind's structure.

Professor Jameson's brain structure was radically different from that of the Zoromes and the Tripeds, and as there was no harmonizing of his mind matter with that of the winged phantoms on the other plane of existence, the professor had been immune to the fatal lure.

The professor attempted to compose his thoughts. His mind rolled sluggishly in a riot of confused mental pictures. He appeared to be drifting in an immense, unending blackness of eternal mystery. He groped—he sought about him, and found he had nothing to reach with, nothing with which to apply the sensation of touch. He scarcely knew whether or not he existed, and imagined himself merely a shadow among shadows, a bare hint of existence. Where was he—what had become of him? He wondered vaguely, but there was no manner in which to satiate his inquisitiveness. All was mystery.

For a long time he felt the presence of objects near him he could not touch, and then out of the depth of blackness before him there shone a dull, gray light. It grew slowly to gradually fill up his vision. The light whirled like a mammoth pinwheel and

then slowed up, resolving itself into three spots of varicolored light surrounded by finer points of scattered brilliance. His blurred vision was clear once more, and he seemed a bit more conscious of himself. Something long and circular lay before him. Involuntarily he moved a bit, and the thing moved. It was a tentacle—his tentacle. Then he was not removed from the body—not dead even. But where was he?

His senses and thinking power now emerged from its state of temporary incapacity to function properly. He looked upon the other side of him, lifting the eyelid shutters of the eyes on that side of his head.

He saw the interior of the space ship. Once more he looked out through the transparent side of the interplanetary craft at the three comparatively large splotches of light he had previously seen so indistinctly. They were grouped close together.

Two of them were bright disc-like objects which shone against a velvety blackness while the third object appeared as a semi-disc which glowed less brilliantly. Professor Jameson gave a gasp of incredulity. He was once more out in space far from the planet of the double sun which was represented by the half circle of light. The two round objects were the double sun, one orb blue and the other orange.

How had he escaped the volcano's fiery depth into which the uncontrolled space ship had madly rushed in its wild, unrestrained flight? The last thing he had remembered before his heat disordered brain had given way to unconsciousness, was the terrific, glancing impact with the red hot boulder cast from the blazing inferno's chaotic activity. A great indentation upon the side of the interstellar traveler mutely testified to the collision with the volcanic rock. And then, the professor remembered that through the window of the spinning space ship he had obtained a few fleeting glimpses of the white hot lake of fire rushing up at him with incredible velocity.

#### Eternal Loneliness

WHAT had happened? Had this final sight been the delusion of an overheated brain? Evidently the glancing blow dealt by the huge chunk of volcanic debris had driven the interplanetary ship back into space where its uncontrolled speed had rapidly taken it from the vicinity of the planet. A plausible solution suddenly occurred to the professor. Possibly the lake of fire he had seen approaching, following the collision with the hurtling boulder, was but the reflected mirage of the lake's fiery

surface upon the bank of lurid smoke clouds hovering far above the blazing holocaust. Suffice it to say, however, that he had been miraculously delivered from the hellish fate to which he had considered himself inevitably consigned.

He arose, and made his way to the control room where he glanced at the partially wrecked machinery. He found the dials and consulted them, finding that the space ship pursued a course around the double suns. The space ship had become a satellite of the blue and orange suns even as the four planets which encircled the suns. Professor Jameson found that the orbit of the disabled space craft was midway between the first and second planets. The space ship had long since ceased its own mad speed, making the professor wonder how long he had remained unconscious. For an earthly day? Had it been a month, a year, or—or an age? It made little difference, for there in space, time was an unknown quantity, and when one is devoid of senses, time ceases to exist. The professor had no knowledge of how long he had remained unconscious and could calculate no approximate guess.

The space ship's machinery was irreparably wrecked, and Professor Jameson was doomed to a solitary, lonely life of per-

petual existence in his annual course around the double suns, enabled to watch at all times the various phases of the planet on which had occurred the death of his fellow comrades. He was the last of the Zoromes, and the only escape from the monotony of the existence which lay before him was by suicide. The professor contemptuously shunned this expedient of release.

For over forty million years he had lain preserved in death within his rocket container, to be found and brought back to life by the Zoromes. And now he was consigned by the irony of fate to a similar existence, except that, this time, he was not bereft of life and the sensation of living. His was to be a perpetual life of loneliness, in trivial comparison with the life of a flesh and blood creature of any planet.

The stars and passing comets would be his only companions, silent ones of the cosmic Universe, and perhaps occasionally a passing meteor would flit its temporary greeting before continuing its aimless pilgrimage on into the realms of eternal mystery.

Would a space ship from Zor ever chance that way some time in the eonistic future to release him from his cosmic prison?

There were many of the machine men expeditions scattered throughout space, but his disabled space craft represented the proverbial needle of the haystack, and the haystack but a solitary haystack among billions. It was a forlorn hope, with chances of a trillion to one. Better were the chances of a space expedition from one of the four planets of the double sun finding the wrecked space traveler.

Perhaps in the ensuing ages measured only in geological history, the simple forms of life upon these planets would rise through various progressive scales of evolution to an inevitable position of scientific prominence, where the art of space flying would be conquered. Then would the professor's eons of loneliness be abruptly ended, plunging him into a series of new and startling adventures.

Such a hope must lie far within the interminable future, and the fruits of such a hope were to be born only of an undying patience and a wonderful philosophy. Moodily, and in deep, meditative rumination, Professor Jameson, lost in the twisting labyrinth of his own thoughts, stared across the depths of vacuum to where spun lazily in space the planet of the double sun.

THE END