



CHECKMATE to DEMOS

By H. B. Hickey

Dave had to win the chess game—for if he lost, the Earth would be destroyed . . .

YOUR move," said Entar, Gardook of Demos, a sly smile on his face.

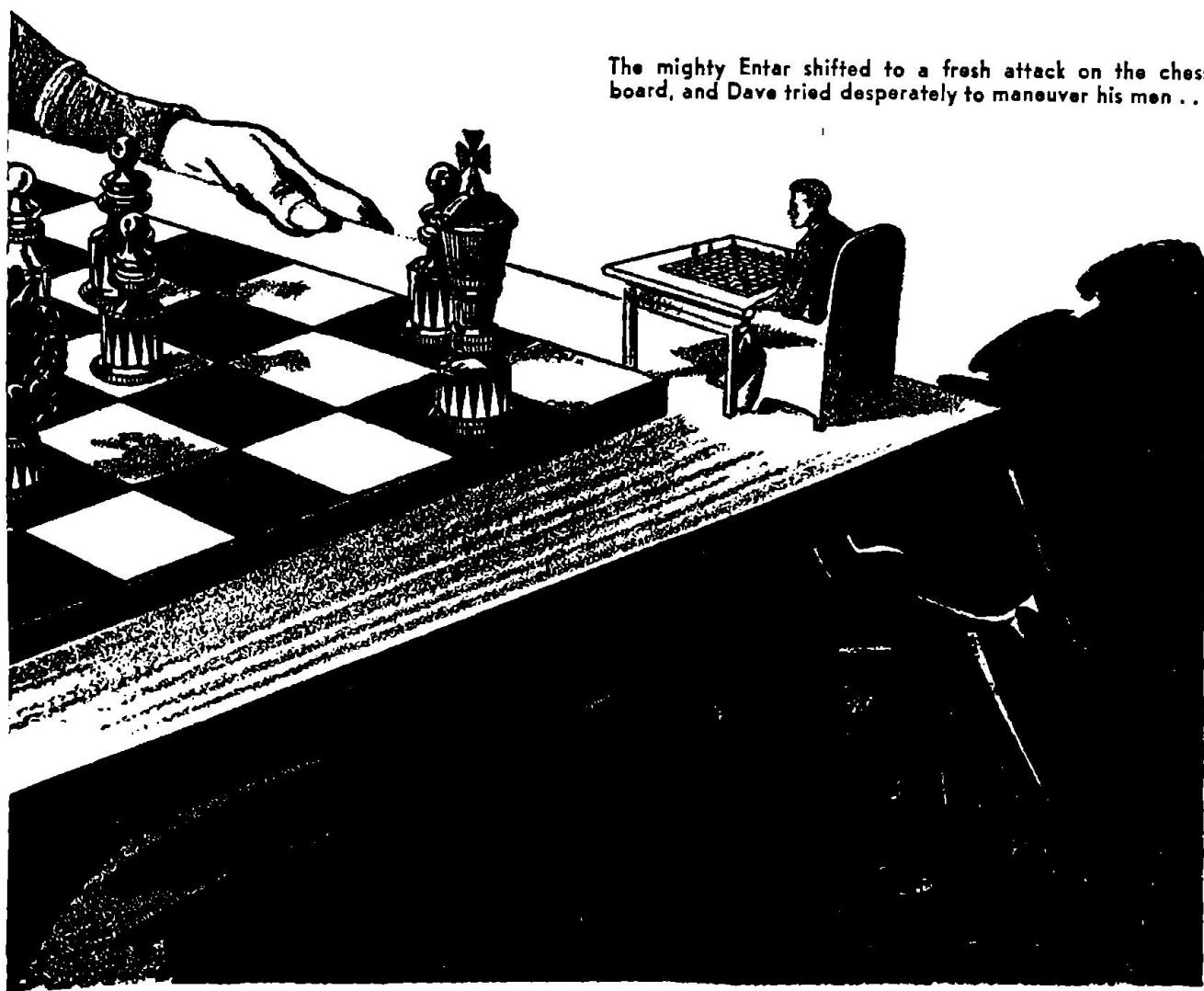
Fenir, Gardook of Tamuz, stared balefully at the enormous checkerboard before him, then turned to Blatt in a silent plea for help. But the Gardook of Nisan had none to offer.

They sat thus, the three lords of the

three sister worlds, each intent on the two-foot squares of stone in the great gaming board. Two of Fenir's four hands toyed tentatively with a couple of pieces on the board while with his other hands he drummed a tattoo.

But no amount of thought was going to help Fenir. No matter which pieces he moved, or which way he moved

The mighty Entar shifted to a fresh attack on the chess board, and Dave tried desperately to maneuver his men . . .



them, there were always Entar's pieces to sweep them from the board.

"All right," Fenir said at last. "I give up. You win."

He tossed across the board a necklace that had the radiance of a dozen suns. When the Gardooks played they played for stakes that were worthy of the lords of planets. And when a Gardook lost he paid gracefully.

Fenir shoved his chair away from the board and rose and stretched himself to his full height, which was slightly more than eighteen feet. His great mouth opened in a yawn that would have seemed vulgar in a commoner.

"Tired?" Entar asked. He carelessly stuffed the necklace in his pocket.

"Fenir is always tired when he loses at kven," Blatt grinned.

"True," Entar said. "But I thought you'd both stay for some dvina after the game."

At mention of the royal vintage of Demos, Fenir's eyes brightened momentarily. It seemed that he might succumb to the lure. But then he shook his head and stifled another yawn.

"No, I'd better not. Really. You know, it's not all kven and dvina being a Gardook. There are problems of state to face every day, and that takes a clear head. Believe me."

Entar and Blatt broke into good-natured peals of laughter.

"And he always pleads affairs of state when he loses at kven," Blatt said. "Tell the truth, Fenir, and admit you're a bad loser."

"Not at all," Fenir said, knowing he was pinned down.

He made a grand gesture. "But after all, you can't expect me to keep my interest awake with the sort of stakes we play for."

"What?" Entar gasped. "Did I hear you right?"

"Certainly." It was said with all the

dignity Fenir could muster.

Entar and Blatt were staring at him with mouths agape. Then slowly, a joyous smile spread across Entar's face. All four of his hands beckoned to Fenir.

"Well," Entar said. "Well! Now you're talking my language. When it comes to a sporting proposition the Gardook of Demos takes a back seat to no one. Name your stakes and let's get at it."

"Oh, you know he was just talking," Blatt said.

IF THERE had been a chance that

Fenir would back down, Blatt had ended it. Fenir glared at him, then plumped down into his chair and pulled it up to the board.

"For a man who never gambles, you do a lot of talking yourself," he said sourly.

"Come, come," Entar said. He was already arranging his pieces, his four hands darting swiftly about the board.

"Tell you what," he suggested. "I'll give you three marbas handicap and play you for Tamuz."

"Hold on," Blatt interrupted. He knew what a foolish wager could lead to. "Besides, the law prohibits that. A Gardook can't give up his realm."

"Always the spoil-sport," Entar grunted. The Gardook of Demos had a cruel streak in his nature and he sometimes disliked this Blatt, with his kind and thoughtful ways.

"Think of something big," Entar urged Fenir. "Anything. I'll snap it up so fast it'll take your breath away."

Fenir was stumped. He had put himself in a bad spot and he didn't like it at all. He could not think of anything of unusual value he cared to risk against Entar, who was considered the greatest kven player of the three planets. Fenir searched for a way out.

"Something of tremendous value," he

mused, as though to himself. "But something not prohibited by law. I really can't think of a thing."

"Well, I can," Entar said. "It fits this delicate case as though made for it. Your astronomers discovered a likely looking little planet the other day, didn't they?"

"So?"

"I hear it's rich in radioactive minerals. That makes it very valuable. But I'm sure you haven't yet claimed ownership of it for Tamuz. And that means it isn't yet part of your realm. So you can gamble it away without breaking the law. Right?"

"I guess so," Fenir muttered. Then he brightened. "But I can't think of anything you own that's of equal value."

"You underestimate me. If you win you get my own secret formula for dvina, plus the services of my own head brewer for a period of five years!"

Fenir's mouth dropped, and even Blatt was aghast. They knew that Entar would rather lose two or his arms than the sole ownership of that precious dvina of Demos which was his pride and joy.

"That certainly is sporting," Blatt said. "If not for my vow I'd be tempted to risk something of my own for a share of that formula."

Now Fenir's eyes glittered. This was worth shooting for. He swept three of Entar's marbas from the board and hunched forward. "My move first?" he asked, eager for every advantage.

"You move first," Entar said magnanimously.

After due deliberation Fenir pushed a marba forward two squares. Entar countered with a like move. Fenir advanced another marba, playing it safe.

Now Entar showed why he was acknowledged a true master of kven. Lacking three of his first line pieces, he

could not afford to play safe and trade one for one. He began to bring up his big pieces for slashing attack.

"Teva to Gardook's Blen three." He moved the heavy piece one square forward and one sideways.

Fenir, still playing it safe, advanced another marba. Entar slid a Blen, a tall, graceful piece, in a slashing move across the board.

DESPERATELY Fenir tried to form his more numerous pieces into a solid wall of defense. But Entar gave him no chance. By the sixth move Entar was brilliantly shifting a Blen to his Teva five. Fenir was forced to bring his second piece out of the back line. His Gardoona, with her black crest, went up to the space his Blen had vacated. Entar moved a marba and Fenir took it with a Teva.

"Blen to Gardook's Teva five!" Entar chortled. Blatt said, "Brilliant!"

From there on it became a rout. Fenir was allowed to have the momentary pleasure of taking a big piece with a marba, and then found that Entar had by his sacrifice bottled up Blena and Gardoona. In order to protect his Gardook Fenir had to give up both Tevas. But Entar was already after the Gardoona.

"Blen to Gardoona three," Fenir said.

"Teva to Blen six!"

Now both Gardook and Gardoona were under direct attack. Fenir searched wildly for a way to create an impasse which would end the game with a tie. He was too late. With a growl he swept his remaining pieces off the board, admitting defeat.

"All right," he said. "The new planet is yours."

Entar made him a mock bow of thanks.

"What do you intend to do with it now that you've won it from Fenir?"

Blatt asked the Gardook of Demos.

"The usual thing, I suppose. First have it ray-blasted thoroughly as a sanitary measure, and then send in robot crews to work the radioactive lodes."

He frowned at Blatt, whose forehead was furrowed. "What the deuce are you pondering now?"

"Well, I admit the necessity of ray-blasting for reasons of sanitation. But what if the place is inhabited?"

"Inhabited? Certainly it's inhabited. With vermin and disease carrying beasts, like every other place we've ever taken over!"

"You know what I mean," Blatt said. "What if there are beings there who are intelligent? Like us. The first blast would wipe them out. That would be murder!"

"What a philosopher," Fenir groaned. "He thinks of things that have never in history come up, and are not likely to arise now."

"Nevertheless," Blatt persisted, "according to our laws about the killing of sentient beings . . ."

"The odds against it are a sextillion to one," Entar said.

"Even so . . . The possibility exists, however remote."

"All right! All right!" Entar thundered. "In deference to our friend's conscience I will first have the planet scouted. And I will order it done at once. Satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," Blatt smiled. "Now how about some of that dvina?"

DAVE HARKNESS looked down a long line of empty tables and chairs and then scowled at his opponent. They were going to be the last to finish. Binky would be on needles and pins by now, and Ellen would be raging because her evening paper was late.

If not for the fact that it was a breach

of etiquette, Dave would have asked his opponent why the devil he didn't move. Couldn't he see that he'd lost? But at last his opponent was coming out of his reverie. His lips moved as he shifted a piece.

"King to Bishop one."

"Rook to Queen two," Dave said, and suited the action to the word.

The other man spread his hands in defeat.

"I resign. Good game, Mr. Harkness."

Dave didn't even take the time to thank him. Before he could leave the tournament hall he had to get a complete record of every game that had been played that night. Then he had to find out who his next opponent would be.

Only when all those things had been done did he start home. On the way he stopped for a sandwich and a cup of coffee. At a convenient newsstand he picked up Ellen's paper.

He had been right about Ellen. After hanging up his hat and coat, Dave took the paper into the living room. Ellen glowered at him.

"About time!" She let him give her a peck on the cheek and then opened the paper to her favorite comics.

"Your lord and master is waiting for you," she said over the rustle of the pages.

Her remark had been unnecessary. Already Binky's strident voice was calling down the stair well. "Dave!"

Dave ran for the stairs and took them two at a time up to the floor above. If he didn't hurry Binky would have another attack. And that meant more doctors and more bills. Then Dave was at the bedroom door and stepping inside. He caught sight of Binky. As always, at that first glimpse, Dave sucked in a quick, shallow breath.

That thing on the bed, that thing that

had once been a man, that grotesquery without arms or legs, that gargoyle face; that was Dave Harkness's handiwork!

Once Dave had been a happily married man, possessed of a pretty wife and a good job and many friends. And then, on a clear dry summer night, it had happened.

There had been dancing and laughter and a good many drinks. Afterward there was the urge to go for a drive, and the feeling of power that came when his foot went all the way down on the accelerator and the big car hurtled along the road. And then the panic that swept over him when he saw the other automobile pull out of the side road and knew that he could not stop in time.

Out of the wreckage of the other car they had dragged a thing that a few minutes before had been a human being. That life still lingered in the crushed and mangled fragment of a man was a miracle.

The doctors said there was no hope. They were wrong. With unbelievable tenacity that pitiful creature had clung to life, and willed himself to live, and *had* lived. That was Binky.

It could have meant the end of Dave's hopes for a future. It might even have meant prison for him. He was willing to accept those. But his insurance company had something to say about it. They refused to pay Binky's claim. Somehow, they discovered that his car had been on the wrong side of the road.

Dave had felt a moment of relief. Then he had gone to the hospital to see Binky, and he had found that he could not bring himself to tell him. Instead, Dave had offered to take Binky into his home, to care for him as long as he lived. It seemed little enough to do for this man from whom he had taken arms

and legs, to whom he had left only a mind and a will to live.

ELLEN had unwillingly accepted the situation. For a long time she and Dave were nurse and servant to Binky. They installed him in the master bedroom. They did everything in their power to make him comfortable. They became his hands and feet. Binky was a tyrant and they were his slaves. But that was not enough for Binky. One night he had called Dave.

"Sit down, Harkness. Here, on the bed, next to me." Binky's voice was shrill and his black eyes followed Dave's every movement.

"You know, Harkness," he continued, "I almost feel sorry for you. Does that surprise you? You took away my limbs; in place of them you've practically given me your own. You would gladly change places with me if you could."

"Gladly," Dave said softly.

"Yes. But there was one thing I valued more than life itself. I had a dream, Harkness. And just as you must perform the acts of my own limbs, Harkness, just so will you fulfill my dream for me."

"I don't . . ." Dave began. Binky stopped him with a curse.

"Listen. I'm going to tell you about my dream, about the one thing that occupied my thoughts always, about the dearest thing you took from me:

"I was going to become the greatest chess player in the world! Not just *one* of the greatest, Harkness, but the very best of them all. And I would have done it. All my life I have practiced and studied.

"Do you know what I do when you and your precious wife are not around? I close my eyes and play chess with myself! I pretend I am playing the great masters. And I defeat them just

as surely as if I were playing them in reality. No man lives who knows more about chess than I do. No man lives who has my *mind*.

"But I will never be able to play a real match! You can't realize what that thought did to me, how it ate into me like acid, just as the acid from my car battery ate into my face. To think that I could never play a match, never enter a tournament.

"And then I thought of you, Harkness. Through you I'm going to make my dream come true."

"But I don't even know how to play," Dave protested.

"You'll learn. When you turn on the light you'll see cases of books that came today. They're chess books. And there's a board."

"But suppose I have no knack for the game? I may never be as good as you."

"I don't expect you to. It's impossible. But you don't have to be that good. That's where my plan comes in. When you have a great mind like mine you can solve any problem."

And he really *had* solved it, Dave thought now as he let out his breath and stepped into the room. The solution had seemed as impossible as Binky's dream, but it had worked. If I told the tournament officials, Dave thought, they wouldn't believe me.

"He played even slower than I said he would," was Binky's greeting. "But you won."

"Yes, I won."

"In twenty-three moves?"

"In precisely twenty-three moves, each one of them exactly as you planned it."

DAVE'S voice was dull. For two years now there had always been the same questions and answers. One year Binky had spent teaching him the fundamentals of chess. It had

turned out that Dave had little talent for the game; but under Binky's tutelage he had become a better than average player. Then Binky had made him join a chess club.

During the next two years Dave had played several games each evening at the club, and each evening he had brought home a record of the games for Binky to analyze. Dave had begun to win his games; when the sectional eliminations for the national tournament began, he had been chosen to represent the club.

"Let's have those scores," Binky said. "Who's your opponent for tomorrow?"

"Fellow names Lensinger," Dave said. He sorted out the transcript of Lensinger's game of that evening and held it up so Binky could read it.

"What a fool the man is," Binky grated. "Second only to the man he beat. Listen to this, starting at move twenty: Bishop to Knight three, Queen to Pawn, King to Queen two, Pawn to King's Rook five."

"What about it?" Dave asked.

"Good grief, Harkness, that's exactly the game Philidor and Captain Smith played in London in March, 1790! And Lensinger's opponent let himself be taken just as Smith did. You can look it up."

Dave didn't bother to look it up. He knew Binky would not be wrong. His mind was truly phenomenal; he could recall instantly any game he had ever seen or read. And he had read, or made Dave read to him, every important game to date.

"There's only one man in this sectional worth playing," Binky said. "That's Morton. Three years ago he beat Mike Finn, the Irish master, and he once played Sazonoff to a draw. But let's get on to Lensinger. Take this down."

For an hour his voice droned on. If Lensinger had White, Dave was to play a Sicilian Defense. If Dave moved first he was to play a King's Bishop opening. In either case Binky could plot out Lensinger's probable line of play.

"This fellow has no initiative. It will be straight stuff. I've given you the line of attack. On the seventeenth move you'll take his Bishop with your Queen and he'll find he's bottled up his own Queen with his pawns. On the nineteenth move he'll resign."

For a moment Binky's eyes lost their brightness and he sighed heavily. Dave put a water glass to his mouth and he took a few sips.

"All right. Now let's take the other games tonight."

Dave took up the sheaf of scores and began to read rapidly; names of players and progressions of games came in a swift stream of words. But fast as he read he knew that Binky's mind was recording every syllable.

"That's all," Dave said at last. "Got it?"

"Of course. God! Everybody calls himself a chess player! Take that fellow Granz, the third game you read. You'll probably play him. He considers himself a follower of Capablanca, but he's picked up only Capablanca's weaknesses."

Dave shrugged and got up to leave. He knew Granz and knew that to everyone but Binky the man would have been a fine player. Yet, when the time came, Binky's genius acting through Dave would crush Granz. And Morton would go down to defeat too. There was no doubt left in Dave's mind that Binky would realize his dream.

"Better go now," Binky said. "My heart is starting to act up."

Dave wondered how bad Binky's heart really was. Ellen said Binky was faking, but then she hated him.

Now Binky would go to sleep, probably to dream of future games. But for Dave there would be no sleep for hours. He had to stay awake until he had memorized the next night's play, as planned by the monster he himself had created.

ENTAR was in a jovial mood.

"So you finally got here," he said as Blatt entered the room. Behind Blatt came Fenir, and Entar's smile grew more expansive.

"Fenir too! Excellent. I was afraid you wouldn't be able to come."

"What's the occasion?" Fenir asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," Blatt grumbled. "Entar's message brought me away from an interesting experiment."

"Don't worry," Entar grinned. "This will keep you interested enough. My scouting expedition to that new planet I won has just returned. And since Blatt was the cause of the expedition I wanted him to hear the report. You too, Fenir. You'll get a chuckle out of hearing about Blatt's intelligent beings."

The Gardook of Demos clapped his hands twice and an instant later a young man in the uniform of the Gardook's personal staff entered the room.

"I've read this, of course," Entar said in an aside. "But I don't mind hearing it again. Go ahead, Kresan."

The young man drew from a case he carried a sheaf of reports and began to read:

"Our party, consisting of twelve ships and a thousand men, left Demos on the nineteenth day of Ooyar, our destination the new planet X. We reached our goal on the sixtieth day of the same period and hovered in space for preliminary survey.

"The planet, as reported, is comparatively minute. Intense radioactivity

was noticed, apparently a result of some sort of eruptions. Noting nothing untoward, we ventured closer and effected a landing on the sixty-first day.

"Our first landing was made on a body of liquid, thickly stocked with low forms of marine life. Proceeding from that point, we cruised to land and came down under cover of darkness, as our instruments showed activity below. Our choice of site was fortunate, as it turned out that we had landed near a large center of population."

Kresan paused for breath and Entar said, "Now the fun starts. Continue."

"The planet is infested with vermin of all types, most of them disease carriers. There is also a variety of four footed creatures. However, the dominant species resembles ourselves somewhat, walking erect on two legs; but due to various ray bombardments have developed only two arms and hands, and being also of puny size.

"In the opinion of our scientists it is this lack of auxiliary arms which has hindered the development of the species and caused it to remain at a low level.

"Our first task was to scale ourselves down to size. This we did, having brought equipment to meet all contingencies. Then we ventured abroad.

"The planet is called Earth by its inhabitants. It is divided into a great number of separate principalities, each of which seems to be constantly at war with its neighbors. We had landed in one of the largest of these principalities. We found there a representative collection of the different races of Earth, but they are hardly distinguishable except by color and body configuration.

"However, such minor differences are given what seems undue importance to an impartial observer.

"THE inhabitants, in great part, live tightly packed into cities. Since

transportation is exceedingly primitive the cities are filled with noxious vapors given off by vehicles. A particular sort of vehicle is so worshipped by the populace that its sale and use is uncontrolled, although hundreds of thousands are killed and mangled yearly beneath its wheels. Disease is rampant, filth is found everywhere. The inhabitants exist by means of robbery, the victims being each other. The chief robbers are acclaimed and honored.

"Several principalities, it is true, among them the one in which we landed, have made persistent attempts to control the aggressive and destructive tendencies of individual persons. Little success is apparent.

"Freedom is everywhere worshipped as a god, and nowhere to be found. True distinction is greeted with ridicule, its possessor often destroyed. All manner of strange religions and rites exist; inanimate objects and long dead beings are invested with holiness."

"Enough!" Blatt cried. "This is the worst yet."

"Unbelievable," Fenir said. "Our prehistoric ancestors were far advanced over these creatures."

"Wait. You haven't heard the worst," Entar told them. "Read on, Kresan."

"Poverty is more than common; in fact, for the great majority of Earth's inhabitants, starvation is the greatest hazard to be avoided. Cooperation between men and nations is given lip service; institutions for its achievement are established, and then studiously disregarded.

"Although these creatures pride themselves on what they call science, they have not yet attained the faintest glimmer of understanding of the universe. They have succeeded in prolonging the lives of many, only to feed those saved into the maws of war, thereby

destroying the distinction between fortunate and unfortunate.

"Of self-knowledge and truth they have none. They lie habitually, being unable to admit truth even to themselves, and they know not why.

"With an intuitive realization of their inevitable doom, many render their lot bearable by the consumption of drugs which produce insensibility. In passing, it may be remarked that it is often impossible to distinguish the latter from many of their fellows who do not resort to such drugs.

"The radioactivity which brought the planet to our attention was caused by a series of atomic explosions, produced by the victors in a war just ended. Not content with this horror, these creatures plan fresh wars in which more destructive weapons will be utilized. A further extension of bestiality will be the use made in the next conflict of intentionally spread diseases.

"In closing, and fearful lest this report seem exaggerated, the commander of this expedition reports that millions of these Earthlings find recreation in the witnessing of exhibitions in which men batter each other mercilessly."

KRESAN'S voice stopped, and for a moment there was silence. The grin had faded from Entar's face. He looked grim. Fenir and Blatt were aghast.

"Good grief," Fenir said at last. "Can such things be?"

"I saw it with my own eyes," Kresan assured him.

"Well?" Entar asked Blatt. Entar's grin had returned, a bit malicious now. "What do you think? Are these creatures civilized? Or sentient beings? Those were your expressions, I believe."

"Incredible," Blatt said. "Not even the blue men of Krinza sank so low."

"That's all I wanted to hear," Entar

said. "I'll order the ray-blasting to begin at once. Or do you have more misguided sympathy? Or more philosophy for us?"

A slow flush mounted to Blatt's cheeks.

"Since you bring it up, yes."

"Come now," Fenir snorted. "You're just being difficult."

"Let him rave," Entar said. He was laughing. "This gets funnier right along."

"Perhaps," Blatt said. "But the point I wish to make is a fine one, and therefore one which you especially, Entar, should appreciate."

Blatt's compliment was acknowledged with a mock bow and he went on.

"It is true that we have never before encountered such bestiality and malignance. Nothing even approaching it, in fact. Yet it is in that very circumstance that I find hope!

"The excesses of other worlds have been limited in comparison with Earth's. But limited by what? By a lack of intelligence. After all, it does take some intelligence to conceive such horrors as disease warfare. And where there is a ray of intelligence there is hope."

"You're impossible, Blatt!" Fenir said. "There's a good chance they'll blow their solar system apart with their atomic toys."

"They probably will," Blatt admitted. "It is almost a certainty they will. But as long as some intelligence exists, they have a chance to save themselves."

"I deny such intelligence exists on the planet Earth," Entar said. "And if they want to save themselves they'd better do it soon. My fleet is in readiness to leave right now."

"To kill a child is as much murder as to kill a man," Blatt warned. "By the same token, if you destroy the germ of sentience it is as though you had de-

stroyed it full grown."

"I found no such germ in Kresan's report. Did you, Fenir?"

"Not I."

"Then it's two against one," Entar said. "Order the fleet to leave, Kresan."

"One moment, please," Blatt begged. He turned to Kresan.

"Perhaps there was something you did not report, something which may have seemed unimportant."

"There was one interesting thing," Kresan admitted. "They play a game which is much like kven. But with their usual belligerence. Their finest players often seek unfair advantage, and many of them cultivate unpleasant mannerisms designed to upset their opponents."

"Aha!" Blatt shouted. "I thought there would be something. And you, of all people, Entar, must admit that kven is a game requiring intelligence."

"It's probably not at all like kven," Entar said angrily.

"They are played much the same," Kresan informed him. "I have with me the score of a game played between two experts."

HE BROUGHT out a sheet of paper and laid it on the table. The three Gardooks gathered about it while Kresan explained.

"What we call a Gardook is there called a King. A Garoona is a Queen, a Teva a Knight, a Blen a Bishop, and a Marba a Pawn. The game is called Chess."

"Well?" It was Blatt's turn to crow.

"It means nothing," Entar retorted. "Look at this score. Experts, mind you! Any child of Demos could defeat them in ten moves."

The Gardook of Demos knew the weakness of his argument. He was more than a little angry. Blatt had put

him to a great deal of expense already. And there was a good chance the planet might not repay him.

"In five moves," Blatt was saying. "But this may not represent the best play of Earth."

Entar's eyes narrowed. He was quick to note that Blatt had slipped up by venturing into conjecture. Perhaps, the Gardook of Demos thought, he might take advantage of the slip and come out with a profit. It would be a good joke.

"So now they are masters of kven," Entar snorted. "Next thing you'll be saying one of these Earthlings might beat me!"

"Anything is possible," Blatt said.

"Care to bet on that?"

"You know I don't bet."

"In other words, you're not prepared to back up your beliefs. Kresan, you may as well get started."

"Hold on," Blatt said. "This is all fun to you. But it's serious business with me. So serious that I'm willing to break my vow."

Entar was instantly contrite. Basically he was a good hearted man.

"No," he said. "I wouldn't want you to do that. But since you are my friend, and this means so much to you, I am going to make you a proposition."

"What is it?"

"I am going to Earth with my fleet. And when I get there I am going to search out the greatest player on the planet and have a game with him. If I beat him we ray-blast the planet. If he beats me I turn around and come home and forget we ever discovered the place."

"That's not an even gamble," Blatt protested.

"Best I can do. But I'll be kind. When we blast them we'll do it from all sides at once. They'll never know what hit them."

WARM weather was hard on Binky. His breathing, beneath the thin sheet which covered him, was shallow and labored. Yet his eyes remained bright as ever.

"This is it, Harkness," he said softly.

"This is it," Dave agreed. "Too bad it has to be Resnevsky I play for the championship."

His last word produced a change in Binky. Eyelids puffy and dark from lack of sleep came down over the dark eyes. Binky's breathing seemed to stop; and for a moment Dave thought he was dead. Then the eyes opened.

"The *championship*," Binky whispered dreamily. "And against Resnevsky! I'm *glad* it's Resnevsky. To win from anyone but the best would be a hollow victory."

"I think I understand," Dave said.

"Yes, I think you do. You've worked hard for this, harder than you would ever work for yourself."

"After all . . ."

"No. I know what you were about to say. But your attitude isn't that of a man unwillingly paying a debt. You've put your whole heart in this, just to give me what I want. How easy it would have been for you to make just one slip! And there would have been an end to your drudgery, your slavery. No more games to memorize, no more to play."

"But you're not that kind, Harkness. You wouldn't even think of cheating. You're a fine man, a *good* man."

The effort of speaking had tired Binky. For a moment he was silent. Then he smiled wanly.

"Too good a man to hate, Harkness. I stopped hating you a long time ago. I want you to know that, before you leave tonight." He stirred slightly. "Well, this is the last. After tonight you'll be your own man again."

"What if I lose?"

Binky smiled at that. His eyes lifted to the clock Dave had put on the wall beyond the foot of Binky's bed.

"You won't lose. When that clock strikes midnight you will have made your thirtieth move. The game will be over; your debt to me will be paid in full."

It turned out that Dave's wife had been thinking the same thing. When he came downstairs she was waiting for him. Dave saw that she had been drinking. She often did that now.

"Binky's Little Robot!" Ellen laughed. Lately she had taken to calling Dave that. "If it isn't the Zombie of Chess, all set to go out and win the championship!"

Then she was suddenly serious and her hand was on Dave's sleeve.

"You've *got* to win, Dave. It means our freedom."

Very gently he removed her hand.

"Not for me, Ellen. Maybe for you it's right to feel that way. But not for me. As long as Binky lives I'm going to take care of him."

TONIGHT Dave Harkness was news. There were reporters and photographers, and flashlights kept going off in his face. By his nerveless, logical play he had become classified as a cold fish, a perfect foil for Resnevsky's brilliance.

Dave wondered what they would say if he told them why he could play so swiftly, so emotionlessly, without apparent thought.

Resnevsky was already on the dais, beneath the electric board which would flash every move they made to the audience. He was chewing on the stub of a cigar, rocking back and forth on his heels. Championship play was no novelty for him. He saw Dave coming and smiled and put out his hand.

"Quite a crowd," Resnevsky said

pleasantly. "Let's give them a good show."

Then they were sitting down and Resnevsky's face was tight and composed, the cigar jutting out of the corner of his mouth. His eyes were narrowed to slits.

Dave drew White and the match was on.

As Binky had predicted it was Queen's Gambit, declined, precisely the game which Resnevsky preferred. Dave's opening was intentionally aggressive, leaving Resnevsky an apparent play for the isolation of Dave's Queen's pawn.

But Resnevsky was no man to underrate an opponent. He choose to ignore the opening in favor of a development of his middle. When his attack came the way had been carefully prepared. His caution was suddenly gone.

Queen to Bishop five, the electric board flashed.

There was a gasp from the audience. The move had come out of a clear sky. They waited tensely, expecting to see Dave show signs of panic.

They were disappointed. His counter move was made swiftly, without hesitation. Binky had expected Resnevsky to bring his Queen down and had made provisions for it.

Within two moves Resnevsky had withdrawn his Queen. What had seemed an impregnable position was being assailed from all sides. Resnevsky slowed down, as Binky had said he would.

Dave had time now to look over the audience. From this point on the game would proceed according to blueprint. Resnevsky would find what looked like a certain winning combination. By the time he discovered his mistake it would be too late.

But the audience couldn't know that. They were all sitting erect, their attention fixed on Resnevsky and the board.

They were all waiting eagerly for one of his famous flashes of brilliance.

Not quite all of them, Dave saw. His eyes were drawn to a man he had seen the night before. It would have been difficult to avoid noticing this spectator. Despite the warmth of the evening he wore an overcoat buttoned up.

Probably a chess fanatic who had pawned his only suit so that he could buy a ticket to the championship match. There were plenty like that. Yet this spectator was too relaxed to be one of them. He seemed not to care whether it was Dave or Resnevsky who won.

Resnevsky had found his combination by now and Dave had to turn back to the board. Looking at it, he almost doubted Binky for a moment. Resnevsky's black pieces were solid, his own white ones spread widely.

It was almost impossible to believe that in another ten moves the game would be over. Resnevsky certainly did not believe that. He was smiling.

Then Dave's Knight began its relentless advance across the board and Resnevsky lost his smile. Step by step he was driven back. It was too late for brillance now. Every move he made was putting him deeper into the hole.

He was so completely bewildered that Dave felt sorry for him. Resnevsky was actually talking to himself!

"How did this happen to me?" Dave heard him mutter.

The cigar was tilted downward as Resnevsky studied the board. So far the audience did not realize that the match was over. But Resnevsky realized it, even before Binky had said he would. Dave looked at his watch: eleven-thirty, the twenty-ninth move. Then Resnevsky was smiling up at Dave, a trifle sadly, a little bitterly.

"My congratulations, Mr. Harkness. Some time you must tell me how you did it."

SOME time, Dave thought, he would tell them all. Some time the name of Dave Harkness would be erased from the record books, and Binky would have what was rightfully his. Binky didn't want it that way; not yet, he had said.

There were more pictures and a good deal of polite cheering, and then a good deal of handshaking. And then the hall began to clear and the lights were dimmed and Dave was free to go.

It was just outside the door that he found himself next to the man in the overcoat.

"He could have beaten you, you know," the man in the overcoat said.

His voice was strangely metallic, and a little hollow, like a phonograph record. Dave stared at him blankly and paused, and in that interval they fell behind the last remnants of the crowd.

"But of course," the strange man continued. "Even after the twenty-sixth move; in any one of twelve different ways."

His first guess had been right, Dave thought. The man was a chess fanatic, the kind who could figure out any problem—after the game was over.

"You're probably right," was what Dave said. "I wish I had the time to discuss it with you. But I haven't."

He tried to move ahead and the other stepped directly in front of him. For an instant Dave was angry, and he had an impulse to shove the fellow aside.

Instead, he said, "Look, now, why don't you move along?"

And suddenly they were not alone. There were now six or seven men who had seemingly materialized out of thin air, all of them ridiculously buttoned up in heavy coats. There was also a limousine drawn up at the curb, with another coated figure at the wheel.

"What kind of crazy joke is this?" Dave demanded. Inside, he was a little

frightened. None of these men were smiling.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," the first one said. "I merely wish to play a game of chess with you."

The door of the limousine was open now and they were moving toward it. Dave looked around wildly for a policeman.

"Hey," he said, "you can't get away with . . ."

But they *were* getting away with it. He was inside the big car and they were all around him and the car was moving smoothly off. And as they turned the corner there was a policeman. When he saw the size of the car the policeman tipped his hat.

Then they were off the narrow streets and onto a main artery and rushing toward the edge of the city. Dave made one desperate lunge for the door and was caught short. Gently but firmly he was pushed back into the seat.

"That was foolish," said the leader of the group. "You might have injured yourself. And really, I just want to play a single game with you."

Suddenly Dave had it. This fellow was a fanatic, all right. But a rich one; rich enough to arrange a kidnaping merely for the pleasure of playing a game with the champion. But why the overcoats?

He found he had spoken the question aloud.

"It is uncomfortable," the leader admitted. "And I felt frightfully conspicuous. But I suppose I should have been even more conspicuous without it."

He was unbuttoning the heavy coat and shrugging out of it. And then Dave saw that he had four arms.

JUST how big the thing was, Dave could not tell. It seemed to be round and as tall as a three story build-

ing and it filled all of the great clearing in the woods near the city. And yet, strangely enough, he could not see it.

What he really saw, Dave realized, was a sort of black hole in the bright moonlight which illuminated everything else in the countryside. Whatever this thing was, it had the quality of absorbing light.

For a while the car had coasted along without lights, and with nobody speaking. Now they had stopped before this thing and everyone was getting out. Dave found he was in the center of the group. They stepped into the blackness and through what must have been a door, because suddenly the blackness was gone.

Light came from nowhere, yet was everywhere, illuminating immense curving walls of some strange metal. Yet this space they were in constituted only a part of the whole, for there were doors leading to other parts of the place.

There was an instrument panel on one wall. There was also a goodly amount of furniture, but of gigantic proportions.

"Look here—" Dave began. His captor cut him short.

"Just one moment, Mr. Harkness, if you will. Kresan and his men don't seem to mind, but I find my present scale confining."

He and the rest went out through a door, leaving Dave alone. After a few minutes there was a high pitched humming that faded quickly.

The thought of escape entered Dave's mind, but before he could get fairly started he heard them coming back and returned to the position where they had left him. Then the door was opening and they were back in the room. Dave's eye popped; he was thankful he had not run.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," the leader said. "I hope our present size doesn't

frighten you."

It was hard to believe. But there could be no doubt about it. That face, now grown so enormous, was the same one which had confronted Dave outside the tourney hall. The gigantic furniture in this room made sense now.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the leader was saying. "I am Entar, Gardook of Demos." He gestured vaguely. "A Gardook is somewhat like a king, or a president. Demos, of course, is another planet, rather distant from Earth."

He turned to one of his companions, his equal in height.

"Better scale down a chair and table and kven board so that our guest may play in comfort, Kresan."

Then Entar turned back to Dave.

"Before we go any further I should like to make certain everything is clear. Please correct me if I am mistaken. This year there is no international chess tournament. But two of the contestants in this national tournament which you won were former world champions. Resnevsky, whom you defeated this evening, has defeated the European titleholder. Therefore you may be considered not only national, but world champion. Is that correct?"

"I . . . I suppose so," Dave said.

"Good. Now we had better begin. You may have first move."

But as they were seated, Entar towering above Dave, the Gardook hesitated.

"I suppose I had better warn you," he said. "It wouldn't be fair otherwise."

"Warn me about what?" Dave asked. He was completely bewildered.

"That you had better not lose. The stakes in this game are high."

"Stakes? I don't understand."

Entar seemed nettled by the delay. Then he muttered, "I suppose not," and turned to Kresan. "Contact the fleet."

A part of the instrument panel on the

wall slid away and its place was taken by a great screen. While Dave watched, the screen glowed, darkened, and was suddenly filled in with a background of stars. Against this background were ranged a full dozen circular ships, like the one in which Dave sat.

"Those ships are twenty thousand miles out in space," Entar said. "If you should win this game they will never come any closer."

"And if I lose?" Dave asked.

"Within five minutes after you lose they will have circled this diminutive planet and blasted it with rays which will kill every living thing on it."

DAVE'S mind whirled. He would have liked to think this was all a dream. But it wasn't. This gigantic, four-armed creature was as real as he was. Those space ships were real. And Entar meant what he said.

"Wait," Dave blurted. "You don't understand. I didn't really win that game tonight. It wasn't I . . ."

"That's ignoble," Entar said. "Trying to crawl out of it. You'd better begin playing before I change my mind about giving you a chance to save your planet."

Dave had no choice. In a daze, he moved a pawn forward in a routine opening. Entar shifted one of his pieces. Dave fought grimly to regain his composure. If he had to go through with this he might as well do his best.

He dawdled over his next move for long minutes, finally pushed up a Knight. Entar's move followed immediately, and he was smiling. Another two moves and the Gardook of Demos was chuckling.

Dave stared at the board helplessly. His own feeble skill would never win this game. Desperately he wracked his brain for some plan. In a few moves Entar had established the fact that he

was an unbelievably expert player.

Now Dave knew how Resnevsky must have felt. Now Dave wished with all his heart that Resnevsky had won. Resnevsky might have had a chance.

And yet Dave knew that was not true. With Earth at stake, there was only one person who might be good enough to beat Entar. Only Binky would have had a ghost of a chance.

"This is ridiculous," Entar was saying. "Kresan, order the fleet to prepare to blast."

"Wait," Dave begged. He had to think of something. If he could only talk to Binky!

"Wait," he said again, "you're taking an unfair advantage of me."

Entar's eyes narrowed to slits. "How do you mean that?"

"It's my wife," Dave said. "She's not well."

"What has that to do with it? Besides, she won't suffer long."

"But I can't keep my mind on the game. If I could only talk to her."

Entar made a gesture of disgust. "Kresan," he said. "can you arrange for Mr. Harkness to speak to his wife?"

"Yes. We can cut into the telephone circuit. It will take only a few minutes. What is your number, Mr. Harkness?"

Dave told him the number in a dull voice. His ruse had failed. But perhaps not completely. If he could speak to Binky for just a minute there might be something Binky could think of.

Kresan was turning some dials and there was the sound of a telephone ringing. The room was filled with it. Then Ellen's voice came in, loud but strangely unclear.

"Who is it?"

Kresan said, "Just speak naturally. She will hear you."

"It's I, Ellen," Dave said. She be-

gan to laugh crazily and he had to shout above her laughter. "Plug in the extension in Binky's room. I must speak to Binky."

But Ellen kept laughing. Suddenly Dave realized his wife was drunk; drunk and almost hysterical.

"I've got to talk to Binky!" Dave shouted desperately.

"That's funny" Ellen laughed. "Very funny."

Ellen hadn't laughed like that in years. It wasn't only liquor that was making her laugh now. Suddenly, just before she spoke, Dave knew why she was so happy.

"You can't talk to Binky. And he can't talk to you. It's very funny, Dave, but Binky wasn't lying about his heart. He died a half hour ago!"

ELLEN'S voice kept hammering inside Dave's head. He could still hear her. Binky was dead! The only one who might have saved the Earth. And he was dead!

"I think we have wasted enough time with these tricks," Entar was saying.

Dave nodded. No use in delaying further. What difference would another hour make. Might as well play and get it over with.

He made an attempt to think out a line of play. But that was useless. Entar blocked him before he had made two moves. It was no use. No matter what he played, Entar would win in another few moves. Dave reached for a piece, not caring which one his hand would touch first. Why prolong the agony?

"Hold it!"

Dave's hand stopped in mid-air. His jaw dropped. He must be going mad! That was Binky's voice he'd heard!

He looked around wildly. He was going mad. Binky was dead and he was only hearing an imaginary voice.

His hand came down on a Bishop. And the voice spoke again:

"Take it easy, Dave."

"But how. . . ?"

"I don't know. Dave. Somehow I knew you'd won tonight. I knew I was dying. But I suddenly knew I had to play one more game. I willed myself not to die, and part of me lived. I don't know how or why. But it did."

"Don't make me talk more than I must. It's taking all my will power to hold myself here and concentrate on this game. Just do as I say."

"All right," Dave whispered.

"We'll play him safe until I get a line on his game. Pawn to Queen five."

Dave moved the piece obediently and Entar shifted his Knight to Bishop four.

"Knight to Bishop five."

Entar suddenly looked up at Dave and then moved his own Knight over.

"Queen to King three."

"What?" Dave asked. He hadn't heard Binky's whisper. Binky repeated what he had said.

"What are you muttering about?" Entar grumbled.

He seemed perplexed now and took his time about shifting his own Pawn. When he looked at Dave again his eyes were thoughtful.

Every move now was debated, the result of long and careful deliberation. Binky's voice was less urgent.

"You're getting him now!" Dave whispered.

"Yes. He's never seen this one. The game Colle and Gruenfield played in Berlin in '26. Queen takes Pawn . . . Check!"

But Entar had lost his troubled look, and now when he moved his King out of check he was smiling. Binky's voice was suddenly frightened.

"No! I didn't think of that!"

"What's the matter?" Dave said.

"Are you trying to take my mind off

the game?" Entar demanded. Dave shook his head. He'd better watch himself.

"*He outsmarted me,*" Binky whispered. "*If I follow up with Pawn to Queen five he'll crack down with his Bishop. He's good, Dave. Maybe too good.*"

There was a sinking feeling in the pit of Dave's stomach. But Binky had not given up. He called off moves and Dave played them.

Twice it seemed that Entar was stopped cold and in trouble. Each time he extricated himself neatly and was in stronger position than before.

With superlative play Binky held the middle. His voice showed the strain he was under as Entar shifted to a fresh attack. It seemed that nothing, not even Binky, could stop the Gardook of Demos.

Then the worst happened. Binky's voice was growing faint.

"Dave! I can't hold myself here! Too much strain. I can't see the board any . . ."

"Binky!" Dave cried. "Binky!"

But there was no answer. Binky was gone. They had lost.

ENTAR leaned back and looked at the board. Dave's outburst had upset him momentarily, and then his next three moves had finished the game. The Gardook toyed with Dave's king, which he had just taken.

"Too bad," he began. "Of course, you play very erratically. Under other circumstances I should say, better luck next time. But there won't be a next time."

Dave didn't bother to answer. His head was sunk on his chest.

"Still, you did as well as could be expected," Entar said.

"As well!" Dave was bitter. "If Binky could have held on we might have

beaten you!"

"Binky? We? What are you talking about?"

"You asked me if I was trying to upset you," Dave said. "I wasn't. I was talking to someone you couldn't see. Someone who died over an hour ago. You couldn't hear him, but you could hear me."

"This fellow is a worse loser than Fenir," Entar said. He turned to Kresan. "I'm afraid losing has unsettled his mind. Better give the order to the fleet."

A flush crept up into Dave's cheeks. He was angry.

"I may not know how to play chess, but I'm not crazy!"

"Don't take it so hard," Entar told him. "I didn't say you can't play chess at all."

"The fleet is ready," Kresan interrupted. "As soon as Harkness has left the ship they will start the ray-blasts."

"Whether you said it or not, I really can't play," Dave said, ignoring Kresan's interruption. "Without Binky to plan my games I couldn't have beaten most average players."

Kresan was moving toward him but Entar waved the fleet commander back.

"Wait. This sounds interesting. Almost plausible, in fact. I noticed his play in the tournament. Like an automaton. And just now; he started badly, became suddenly strong, and then finished as though he didn't know what he was doing."

"That was when Binky faded out," Dave said.

"And just who is Binky?" Entar asked.

There didn't seem much point in it, but Dave told him. Something about Entar inspired confidence. Dave started at the beginning and told the whole story, even the things he had never told Ellen for fear she would not have

let him keep Binky at home.

"It was partly his fault," Dave said. "But after all, he was the one who lost most. I tried to make it up to him."

"Even though you were not legally responsible?"

"It wasn't a question of legality. I couldn't have lived with myself if I hadn't taken him into my home. And then, when he told me of his ambition, I simply had to do everything in my power to help him attain it. He was entitled to whatever happiness I could give him."

Dave found that Entar was looking at him very strangely. He laughed shortly.

"I suppose it's hard to believe my story," he said.

"Not so difficult. The more we know, the less skeptical we are likely to be."

"Well," Dave shrugged, "it doesn't matter now. Binky is gone and it's all over. He's the only one who could have beat you."

"Not even your Binky could have beat me," Entar assured him.

"We'll never know. Now, if you'll show me how to get out I'll be going. And you can carry out your threat."

"I don't think so," Entar said. "No, I don't think so."

"But I lost," Dave said in astonishment. "Even with Binky's help I lost."

"Binky lost. But you didn't lose. There isn't enough intelligence on this planet of yours to have saved it. But there is something else that's more important than intelligence. You have that something else."

"I don't understand," Dave said.

"Naturally. Well, in a little while we shall be on our way back to Demos. Before Kresan takes you out to the automobile I would like to shake your hand. Goodbye, Mr. Harkness."

ALL the lights in the house were on when Dave stopped the car before it. He came up the walk slowly, shaking his head like a man pulling himself out of a dream.

Ellen was waiting for him inside; and now she did not seem drunk at all. Her arms went around Dave. For the first time in many months her cheek was pressed against his in affection.

"I'm sorry, dear," Ellen said. "I must have upset you terribly. But it seemed as though suddenly a tremendous load was off my shoulders. I just went crazy, I guess."

"It's all right. I realize what you've been through since Binky came. He's really dead, isn't he?"

"Yes. It happened about midnight, I think. He looked quite peaceful, as though he knew you'd won."

"Poor fellow. He was a great man, Ellen."

"Perhaps. And so are you, Dave, in a different way."

"I don't understand," Dave said for the second time that night.

He thought that perhaps it was because he was very tired that he could not see what Ellen and Entar meant. He had only done what was right. He was sure that anyone with a good heart would have done the same.

COMING NEXT MONTH:—

WAR OF THE GIANT APES

By ALEXANDER BLADE

A thrilling tale of super science. What were these strange giant creatures of Mars? Had man finally discovered a race of beings superior to him? And was it a mistake to bring one of them to Earth? Read this tale of dramatic action in the big April issue.

Queen of The Gods

By Frances Yerxa

THE major wife of Zeus and the undisputed power among the Olympian gods, was Hera. Her principle virtues were those of marital accord and felicity and she is regarded as the patron of married couples. She hated, above all, any example of immorality, both among humans and among the gods, and one of her major activities was the punishing of violators of her precepts. With this sense of justice, she became harsh and vindictive and often shrewish. Furthermore she was extremely vain and proud of her appearance.

A very lovely story is told which reflects upon her vanity. It seems that the sea-nymph Theitis was marrying a mortal named Peleus. All of the gods and goddesses were invited except Eris who was the goddess of discord. Of course, angry at not being invited, she decided to throw a monkey wrench in the works. Actually she hurled down a golden apple on which was inscribed the phrase, "For the Fairest." Of course all of the goddesses immediately claimed it, but after a short while the argument reduced itself to deciding between Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite. Hermes decided that a young shepherd named Paris should choose among the three.

Paris was put on the spot. Each goddess tried to bribe him. Hera offered him an extensive rule and great power. Athene promised him military power and glory and Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world. Paris chose Aphrodite.

Thereafter Aphrodite became known as the Goddess of Beauty. Eris had her little revenge. And Hera of course blew her top. She completely expected that Paris would have chosen her. When he didn't she resolved to have her revenge on him. She is said to have caused the Trojan war. Zeus favored Troy, and Hera and he often quarreled.

Hera is almost always represented as seated on a throne, a very dignified, and beautiful, but matronly type. She carries a scepter and on her head is a crown. By her side is a peacock, indicating her vanity.

The Romans of course had their equivalent of Hera but they called her Juno, the wife of Jupiter. Juno more typified the matronly type than Hera and she appears more human and lovable. Juno watched over and guarded the life of every married woman, from the time she was born to the time of her death.

Hydraulic Helper

By Marvin Kentley

INDUSTRY has stepped in with another gadget that will help to simplify the world's work. Like so many of the inventions that strongly influence the design of material things, this new device is simple—extremely so.

Imagine that you were confronted with a problem—let's say, for the sake of discussion that you encountered the problem that troubles ship-owners. The hatches through which a freighter is loaded are large and massive and difficult to open. Yet they must be opened and closed frequently. To do this by hand, as it so often has been done, is a hard job. To do it with an electric motor would make it a simple job, the only trouble being that a very large electric motor of some hundred or so horsepower being required. Obviously an electric motor will not do. What would be nice would be some sort of a gadget that could store up several hundred horsepower and release it for the brief time necessary to operate the hatch door.

There are a lot of ways of storing power, but one of the simplest is in the form of a compressed gas, a gas conveniently squeezed by hydraulic power.

The hydraulic accumulator as it is known is

nothing more than a pressed steel cylinder of very small size, ranging from a few inches in diameter to a few feet. Inside the cylinder is a rubber bag containing air and when unstressed the capacity of the bag occupies about two-thirds of the space of the cylinder. Leading into the cylinder is a tube carrying oil and connected to a pump driven by a small electric motor geared down so that it can create a strong pressure.

It is a well-known fact that when a gas is compressed, energy is stored in it. Now the little electric motor forces the hydraulic fluid into the cylinder. This compresses the bag containing the gas thus storing energy in it, energy which may be released at a great rate.

This gadget has been applied to the problem mentioned above. It has saved as much as a thousand dollars per day. But its use is almost incalculable. Bomb-bay doors, doors of any kind, machine tools, almost anything that requires a strong impulse for a short time can make excellent use of this apparatus. Very likely you will see it in lavish use on familiar things like automobiles, where it can be applied to opening trunks and hoods, convertible tops and doors.