

# THRILLING WONDER STORIES



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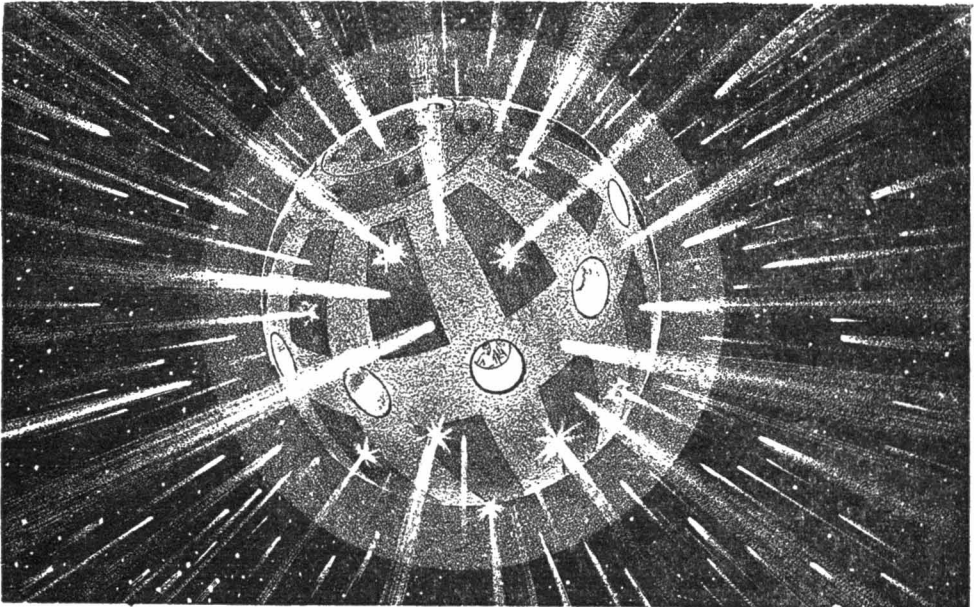
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### ● ON THE COVER

The cover painting depicts a scene from *HANDS ACROSS THE VOID*, a short story by Will Garth which appears in this issue.

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*There were the on-rushing dwindling stars*

# THE GREAT ADVENTURE

Georg Arpin's Scientific Experiment Plunges a Mighty Space  
Ship Through the Outermost Realms of Infinitude!

By **RAY CUMMINGS**

*Author of "The Space-Time-Size Machine," "Around the Universe," etc.*

**T**HE blazing black firmament, to young Thom Dohn, had never seemed so beautiful as now, these first hours on the flight from Earth to Mars. The eight-ton alumite spaceship, *Starflight*, seemed hanging poised, centered in the vast globular abyss of black space—a little world of itself, with sunlight, earthlight and all the light of myriad blazing stars glistening on its sleek hull.

Never so beautiful, this familiar celestial scene. But Dohn knew that the glories of interplanetary space on every trip he had made were always like this. It was an unchanging, unchangeable scene; the glory of infinitude, making him seem so small, so unimportant.

The knowledge that something was wrong with the *Starflight* came to Dohn with the feeling of the deckgrid shuddering under him. Like the aura of a purple flash from a Banning gun, a play of deranged electricity leaped past him. It crackled, expanded, gathered like purple balls of St. Elmo's fire on the minaret spires of the control turret.

The shouting of the frightened passengers mingled with commands from the startled ship's officers, Dohn, himself a passenger, found himself with the group that milled before the control turret. The great dome of blazing firmament was slowly turning now. The ship was off her course, rotating end over end! Wrecked in space! A

hurtling derelict.

The deranged electricity for a minute or two hissed and crackled with ionized air, leaping in glorious purple balls. But there was no glory to Dohn; just confused terror.

Then the electronic crackling went dead. And in the sudden silence there was a despairing, confused shout from the navigator chief.

"We're all right! The air and pressure mechanisms are unharmed."

A derelict on which one might breathe, and eat and drink until the food and water gave out. A derelict, hurtling—somewhere. Lost in infinitude.

Somebody beside Dohn must have mumbled that.

"Not by accident!" came the answer. "I did it! I wrecked us, so you couldn't stop our great adventure!"

Here among them was old Georg Arpin, wild-eyed, waving his arms. He was the designer and builder of the *Starflight*—largest, finest space ship so far constructed. And this was the maiden voyage, with Arpin on board—a madman, dancing with exultant, frenzied glee, his face contorted as he shouted:

"I did it! Kill me now if you like! You can't stop what's going to happen. I built into this vessel my great discovery. An electronic force that is expanding us in size! The *Starflight* and everything and every one of us humans within the aura of the magnetic field which is around us—all growing larger! Can't you see the aura?"

**H**IS wild gesture made Dohn and them all stare past the glassite dome to where in space, close around the vessel the dim, mysterious yellow-green aura was apparent.

"I did it! Our size is changing. Every second, in geometric ratio, we are doubling our size!" A madman. But was he? "Soon we will be as big as Earth! Then twice that! Four times that!"

A madman. But he was only mad with lust; lust for the great adventure—the lust of science to probe the unknown.

The navigator chief had seized him now; but still he screamed:

"All right, kill me! That's all you can do. Like you, and you, and you—all of us helpless to do anything except *get larger*—size gigantic! Our great adventure into the infinity of largeness!"

The navigator chief did not kill him. He was an old man, this builder of spaceships, with a frail and ailing body; and the frenzied rush of his lustful passion snapped something within him so that suddenly his wild words choked in his throat and he went limp in the navigator chief's grip, with goggling mouth and staring glazed eyes that still seemed trying to see his great adventure.

Arpin died. And with him died the knowledge of how he had done this thing that to Earth, Sun, and all the starry Universe was destined to bring destruction!

The most momentous catastrophe of which the human mind can conceive was at hand. But by instinct, to each man himself is the center of the Universe.

To Dohn came a numbed terror. For a day of the ship's Earth time routine, with the others on the doomed vessel he ate and drank and slept a little; and numbly watched the amazing cyclorama of the changing firmament. But other days came and passed, and even the knowledge of inevitable doom can be accepted. There were times when Dohn would sit and watch, just awed, and then almost trembling with eagerness to see more, and more.

The gem-strewn firmament with its background of domed blackness rotated slowly. Then it steadied. Earth was a distant, small, mottled yellow-red crescent, with the moon just a little shining dot. The Sun was to one side. And, quite suddenly, it seemed, Dohn realized that of all the apparently unchanging scene, Earth was changing.

He stared. Surely that crescent Earth looked smaller than it had a moment ago. A shrinking crescent, steadily dwindling. And the dot of the moon was dwindling. Already it was like a star of so small a magnitude that it trembled, almost beyond visibility.

Then, when he blinked and looked again, the moon was no longer there. Too small now to be seen.

To Dohn it was as though the *Starflight* must be speeding away, so that the moon vanished and the image of the receding Earth was dwarfing by distance. For a long time he watched while the Earth crescent shrank to a little blurred point of light. The Sun too, was shrinking, seeming to draw away. And Venus, Mars, and the blazing glory of Jupiter—all seemed receding.

Then, with a shock of amazement and awe so great that he forgot his terror, Dohn abruptly saw the reality. Earth, Sun, the other planets of the Solar System were not further away. They were closer—incredibly closer—and tiny, despite their proximity.

**T**HE great distant stars had seemed unchanged. But presently, everywhere in the firmament motion was apparent. The planets, myriad blazing stars, the trailing sweep of stardust of the Milky Way, itself a billion, billion giant worlds; the gigantic, infinitely remote star clusters, the tremendous nebulae—all were in motion.

As though compressed by some Titanic force, visually they seemed shrinking. The dots of them were merging into little patches, and the glowing patches themselves were all coming together and shifting closer.

Venus had been a crescent a moment ago; now it was too small for that, so that it became a dot again. Sun was a round, blazing small ball. And here was the tiny glowing ball of Earth; an Earth not a million miles distant now, for Dohn saw it out there beyond the *Starflight's* stern, seemingly no more than a mile away!

Through the momentous hours the *Starflight* hung poised, throbbing, quivering with its weird electronic aura enveloping it. And Dohn knew now that it was a monstrous thing, ever becoming more monstrous.

The crawling, dwindling, shrinking of all the scene went steadily on. The vast infinitude of space! Dohn heard himself laughing hysterically. Why, here were Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Ura-

nus, Neptune, Pluto and all the rest—the whole little Solar System was hovering here with the *Starflight* in the midst of it. But these were just tiny glowing models of worlds, miniatures hanging so close that you might measure their distance in feet, and so small that he might have held some of them in his hand.

Then he could see that their oncoming was a rush, a hurling forward as they were drawn inexorably by the gravity pull of the Titanic bulk of the *Starflight*. There was Earth, the first to come.

Just a few minutes ago he had guessed it might be a ball fifty feet in diameter. Then it had been no bigger than his own body; and then it was small enough to hold in his hand. Clouds enveloped it as it hurled itself forward. Behind those clouds, what horrible scene of human terror must be transpiring!

The destruction of Earth! Titanic catastrophe!

But Dohn was laughing with wild hysteria. Here came Earth—an insignificant ball that one might catch in his hands. Why no, in another few seconds it was even smaller than that. A pea. A tiny thing that swooped like a grain of metal drawn by a great magnet; swooped and struck against the fin of the *Starflight*.

The destruction of Earth! Momentous catastrophe! But Dohn saw it as a tiny puff of light, a spark that flared for a split second and was gone!

Then the other planets came. Tiny puffs at the impact. Sun was a speck of glowing gas that briefly puffed as it hit the *Starflight's* hull.

Momentous destruction. The Solar System was gone! Monstrously the poised *Starflight* occupied the space where seconds ago the Solar System had been.

And then here were the on-rushing, dwindling stars. Numbed, Dohn and all the other humans on the monstrous vessel sat and watched the bombardment.

From above, below and to the sides, incredibly swift now and every instant accelerating, the tiny points of light came rushing.

**T**HE destruction of the Universe! But the shining hull of the *Starflight* only showed infinitesimal dots of burned smears where they struck. And watching them, Dohn saw myriad little light flares, each to mark the end of a world!

Then at last the bombardment was thinning. The end of the Universe? Why, it had been more than one Universe. The black void of space had yielded a dozen patches of huddled stardust, each itself a universe. Little glowing patches that for an instant as they whirled close had shown themselves to be a billion-billion specks of worlds that showered against the *Starflight* almost unnoticed.

Then there were intermittent showers, almost too small and vague to be seen. Each had been a universe with myriad individual worlds, some of them larger than the diameter of the Solar System. But they impinged on the vast hull of the *Starflight* now like grains of dust whose destruction was too small to notice.

And then at last it was over, and Dohn saw only the dark, black void of empty space. But was it wholly dark? Was it empty? Slowly he came to realize that color everywhere was beginning to glow in the blackness. A gray. A vague, silvery gray. Then green. A faint, prismatic sheen. Everywhere in this vast enclosing dome of infinity, now there was color.

Again, quite suddenly, Dohn's viewpoint changed. There were vast shapes of something to be seen now, everywhere in the immensity of the enclosing firmament dome, as though here were not empty space but a vast concave enclosing surface of something that might be solid—like the inside of a hollow ball, with the *Starflight* poised in its center.

He had thought all that, just a moment ago. But now his viewpoint changed, and abruptly he realized that the circular remaining space about the *Starflight* was no longer vast! The distant enclosing surface that might be solid was not distant!

Ten miles away? Or only one mile? What difference? The whole scene was shrinking. Everywhere there was

that prismatic, concave aspect of solidity—above, below and to the sides. And the *Starflight* hovered, throbbing, filling all the little emptiness that was left.

And Dohn was numbly staring at the enclosing solidity that now was so close. A moment ago he had thought he was seeing Titanic molecules, monstrous things that crawled and whirled and pressed near each other. There had been space between them. It was a solidity that was not solid.

For a moment he had almost thought that the *Starflight* might have threaded its way into that crawling, jostling throng. But the spaces off there were shrinking. Everything visually was seeming to pack together.

The creation of matter! Visually it seemed now that here was the creation of solidity, taking place before his numbed gaze. Here was color. The prismatic color of glowing electrons, atoms, molecules, optically compressed now into what the human mind conceives to be solidity.

That last hour held for Dohn only a blurred confusion. On the quivering *Starflight* the little group of humans—the last humans—stared at their doom. Some prayed. Some raged. Some screamed. And some, like Dohn, sat numbed while the last little remaining emptiness of space closed in upon the *Starflight*.

There was a brief, horrible time of a chaos of sound and light; and then darkness and silence as Dohn was hurled into Eternity.

The end of everything. Destruction of all the Universes—the most momentous catastrophe of which the human mind can conceive. . . .

**I**N the big shining laboratory where the males of scientific work were gathered, the young male Orkk sat and watched what the males said was a most interesting scientific happening. The young Orkk was mildly interested, but mostly he was thinking of the young female he was destined to mate.

Here on the shining raised place, the males of scientific work were watching with their instruments a grain of

matter in which it had been discovered that something unusual was happening.

One of them was telling about it now to the assembled group of listeners. Something was to be seen in that tiny grain of matter; something that had no right to be there.

An enlarged image of the particle showed, by projection on the shining side-wall of the big laboratory; and the young Orkk idly gazed at it.

The leading male of scientific work was excited. The alien thing which had appeared in this particle of matter, so small a thing that the humming instruments of magnification could barely see it, was growing. And it had no space in which to grow.

Orkk was thinking mainly of the beauty of his young female. But he did see the tiny puff as the particle of matter finally exploded. The generated

heat of the conflict within it had caused it to unite with the atmosphere here in the laboratory.

The sound was nothing. The brief, tiny puff of light was so small that even the enlarged image of it on the big shining wall here, was barely visible. The speck of matter was destroyed. The tiny gases from it were dissipated into nothingness in the big laboratory.

To Dohn on the *Starflight* that had been so momentous a catastrophe! But the young Orkk was thinking that the males of science were foolish to be interested in such an infinitesimal happening in the infinity of smallness.

He thought of his young female as his gaze drifted to the laboratory's big window. The shining scene out there was beautiful. The firmament of distant glowing Universes—infinity of largeness—was glorious, and important.