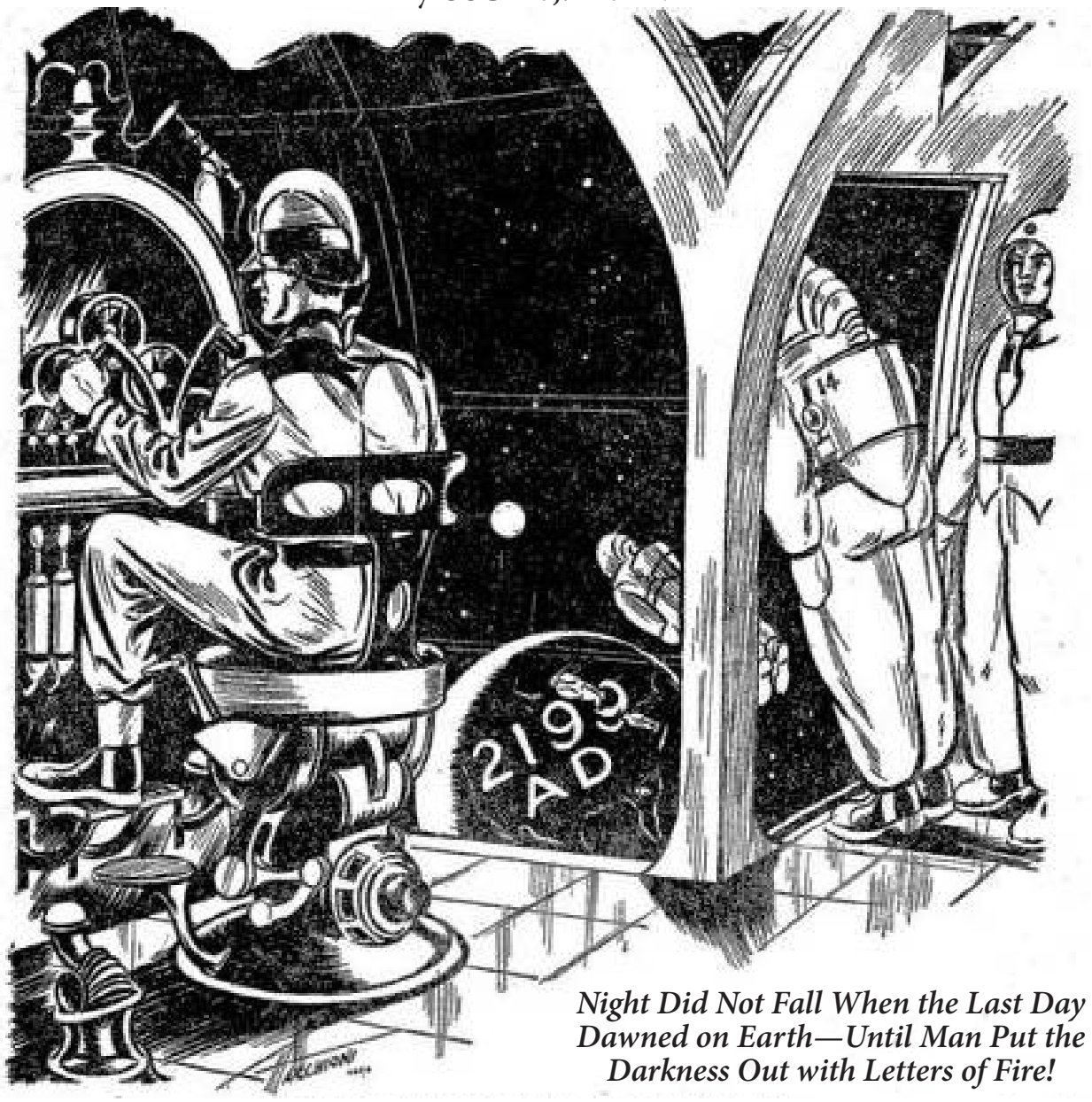
BLIND VICTORY

By OSCAR J. FRIEND



Night Did Not Fall When the Last Day Dawned on Earth—Until Man Put the Darkness Out with Letters of Fire!

THE space-freighter, Rex, carrying a cargo of twenty thousand tons of Wiltonite, had passed the orbit of Mars and was decelerating. Flagship of the government fleet of rockets operating between the uranium mines on Jupiter and the fueling ports of Earth, the Rex was king of the space-ways.

Inside the ship, two young men in the uniform of Confederated World Space Service stood together in the chief navigator's office. So much alike there could be no doubt they were brothers, Robert Carroll was the commander and Martin Carroll the first astrogator of the vessel. Both of them tall and lithe, blue-eyed and brown-haired, less than eighteen months difference in their ages, these famous brothers had been inseparable from their early childhood.

Bob, the elder, was rated the best pilot in the service. Martin, the astrogator, was a mental

marvel. Without the use of instruments, paper or pencil, he could triangulate any sort of course or maneuver. Bob could estimate what the reactions were going to be as fast as his brother could finish his equations. The two of them functioned as a perfect team. That was the reason the Rex was the crack ship of the service.

"Well, yonder is the old ball of mud — rolling serenely on her way through space," said Captain Bob Carroll with a sigh of great relief as he turned from the eye-pieces of the electro-telescope.

Martin Carroll's sensitive face registered faint triumph as well as relief as he turned it toward his brother.

"So you were somewhat worried over the continued silence of the communication system, after all."

"Frankly, yes," admitted Bob, smiling now. "It was queer—that sudden blanking out of the communication beam before we left Jupiter. But there's Earth right where she belongs. We'll be home in three days and likely find out the trouble is in our own directional beam tube.

"Exactly sixty-five hours," Martin corrected. "There's no doubt that Wiltonite fuel has made commercial space travel a success. It's the most powerful explosive ever perfected. But what makes you think the radio trouble may be in our own equipment? We've picked up the Martian stations without any trouble."

A SHADOW of concern flitted across Bob Carroll's face. "You're too damned technical, Mr. Carroll," he said affectionately. "Let me tell you that old terra firma looks mighty good spinning along there on her way to meet us. God bless the inventor of the electro-telescope."

"Describe," said the chief astrogator lazily, making no move to get up from his chair and peer into the telescope's eye-piece for himself.

His eye fastened to the 'scope, the older brother gave a concise astronomical report on Earth as he observed it. Martin Carroll listened intently, his head cocked slightly to one side with the alert air of a terrier.

"Sounds all right," Martin admitted in relief as the captain finished. "We'd better go to the conning tower and set the final figures up for the first relief pilot. I've just worked 'em out for correct deceleration with forty million pounds of deadly dead weight in the holds. You loaded the Rex up to the gills this trip, didn't you?"

"Clear up to the hairline," his brother admitted shamelessly. "Without Wiltonite the heavy rockets don't space. The Rex is the only craft that dares carry a full cargo of the explosive stuff. You wouldn't be a bit anxious over Marcia, would you?"

"Would you?" countered Martin from his seat at the table.

A faint grimace of pain crossed Bob's face as he stood behind his brother. He thought of the words Marcia Warren had spoken the only time he had ever openly declared his love.

"Don't, Bob!" the girl had protested brokenly. "Don't tell me that. Don't make it any harder for me. Your brother — Martin — loves me, too. I simply couldn't—tell him I didn't care. So I can never marry you as long as Martin lives—and cares. Can I?"

White-faced and strained, Bob had replied: "No, of course not. I—didn't know about Mart. But I should have guessed that both of us would love you. Forgive me, Marcia. I guess I can stand it if—if you marry Mart."

"But I don't love Mart—like that," Marcia had replied gravely. "It's you, Bob. But you wouldn't want me to do any differently, would you?"

"God forbid," Bob Carroll had said stoutly.

He had folded Marcia tenderly in his arms, and kissed her gently on her fair forehead. Thereafter, never by word or tone or inflection when the three of them were together could Martin Carroll tell that they had reached a

triangulation in their private lives as great as any equation he had solved in space.

Now the captain affectionately rumpled the wavy chestnut hair on his brother's head and crammed the chief astrogator's cap on the mussed-up locks.

"You bet I would!" he said fervently. "If anything were to happen to John Carroll or that adopted sister of ours I think I'd go crazy. Come on."

"If anything happened to either Father or Marcia, I believe I would die," said Martin Carroll simply as he rose and placed his hand on his brother's shoulder.

"What? And leave me to jockey the Rex through space all by myself?" chafed Bob, throwing an arm tenderly about the young man's shoulders.

FORTY-eight hours later the dully glowing blue disk that was Earth swam out of the black immensity of space and assumed its familiar outline and color. And still the radio beam was dead, although the Rex's radio operator had no trouble communicating with Mars or Jupiter. Communication with Earth was impossible, although Earth rolled majestically onward in a perfectly normal fashion.

There was only one thing wrong—something was missing that the captain of the Rex overlooked at first, so busy was he in scanning the planet itself. It was Scott, the first officer, who brought the matter to his attention.

"Look! Captain Carroll—the umbra and penumbra of Earth are missing!"

Bob started and stared. Swiftly he adjusted the controls of the electro-telescope. Scott was right. Difficult to see against the refractionless black of space, but always present and extending for hundreds of thousands of miles out on the shadowed side away from the Sun, the false shadow and the true conical shadow of Earth were missing.

"The shadows are sometimes difficult to see," said Martin Carroll from his chair at the chart table.

"No, Mart!" exclaimed his brother sharply. "Scott is right. There is no umbra. Earth is casting no shadow and there is sunlight all around it. There is no night! It—it's impossible!"

"Check your instruments!" Martin Carroll ordered as he clutched his head with both hands to concentrate on the crazy problem. "What time is it?"

"Two-seven, P. M., Eastern Standard Earth Time," informed the first officer, glancing at a chronometer set among the star clocks.

"Then we are roughly one million miles out," said the chief astrogator. "Bob, set the manual controls for one degree right ascension and give half a burst from number three port rockets. We'd best swing in an orbit around Earth and make sure we aren't suffering from optical illusions. I've got to figure this thing out. No radio communication...no shadow... no new source of light..."

The little group fell silent as the Rex responded to the helm and curved in a great trajectory on the new course. Faint groans of apprehension escaped more than one pair of lips as the fact became established beyond all doubt that the entire world was bathed in perpetual sunlight!

Which, of course, was impossible.

"Good God !" cried the pilot as the Western Hemisphere came fully into view. "What is that? Letters of fire!"

NO longer requiring the electro-telescope, the captain and first officer stood shoulder to shoulder and stared out through the forward observation port. In huge, glowing letters —like the neon signs of the twentieth century—stretching across the entire width of the United States of America from the Pacific to the Atlantic, was a two-word phrase.

SAVE EARTH

"Save Earth," read Bob Carroll aloud. "From British Columbia almost to Florida—save Earth. It's a huge signboard in space!"

"Look!" exclaimed the first officer, clutching his commander's arm.

Bob Carroll continued to stare. Down below, on the great globe of Earth, the nine huge letters winked out of being. In their stead, in the middle of the continent, appeared a number. It was a date.

2199 AD

The Rex's commander read the date aloud in a queer voice.

"But that's wrong!" cried Scott. "This is July of the year Twenty-two hundred and ten. Or are we going mad?"

Martin Carroll lifted his head suddenly.

"Bob, did you say Twenty-one ninety-nine?'

Before the captain could verify this there was a gasp from Brewster, the pilot.

"Look!" he shouted. "The date has blinked out and the words have come back!"

They had, indeed. At intervals of one-minute durations that incomprehensible signboard of Earth flashed its changing message :

SAVE EARTH — 2199 AD
SAVE EARTH — 2199 AD.

That it was an urgent message of some kind to somebody there could be no doubt. That it was centrally controlled was obvious.

"I tell you it's Twenty-two ten!" shouted Scott, clutching his captain by the shoulder. "Let's get down there and find out what the hell's wrong, sir. I've got a wife and three kids down there who may be needing me!"

"Snap out of it, Scott!" said the commander sternly, giving the officer a little shake. "Of course this is Twenty-two ten. But that Twenty-one ninety-nine has a special significance."

Captain Carroll turned to look at his brother who had risen to his feet and was advancing toward the observation port, his blue eyes wide and staring.

"A special significance," the astrogator repeated. And then both brothers exclaimed together:

"The Interplanetary Garden!"

THERE wasn't the least warning that June 12, 2210, was going to be any different, astronomically speaking, than any other June 12 of mankind's recorded history. But there was a startling departure from the usual order of things. For June 12 did not end. It was the last day.

The sun lowered as usual below the rim of the western horizon, but twilight, dusk, and dark did not follow in their proper order. Instead, the daylight seemed to grow stronger.

Simultaneously, all over the world, radio communication went completely haywire. It was worse than the static of a thousand sunspots. Of all the mad things to happen, the most grimly significant was this utter and absolute failure of wireless transmission. So dependent had Earth become on wireless impulses that there ensued at once an indescribable state of chaos. All stratosphere liners and airline transports lost their power and directional beams and were grounded—or plunged to destruction. The electromagnetic gravity nullifier, developed in the second half of the twentieth century and unlocking the door to spatial flight, went out of commission as completely as radio and wireless power. For no fuel had yet been developed—not even Wiltonite—that would, without the gravity nullifier, lift the lightest rocket at sufficient initial velocity to escape the attraction of Earth's mass.

And all communication with interplanetary

rocket ships and with the power stations on the colonized major planets was cut off abruptly as though a master surgeon had severed the vocal chords of all Earth.

NIGHT did not fall. True, the Sun rose in the east and set in the west with monotonous regularity, proving that Earth was still properly spinning on its axis, but there was only perpetual day. Earth began building up terrific temperatures which would have killed people off like flies had it not been for the weathercast stations that dotted every continent.

These weather-control stations, developed in the twenty-second century, reached their highest peak of efficiency in 2195 under the direction of Professor John Carroll. Now they were functioning full blast to prevent men and plants and animals from being steamed alive, while scientists sought frantically for the cause of the catastrophe and a remedy.

The polar caps were rapidly melting and the seas were rising at an alarming rate, driving people inland from coastal countries and inundating island after island. And over everything hung the humid, steaming atmosphere of a tropical jungle, an atmosphere that wasn't content to remain just that, but was slowly approaching the temperature of live steam.

Finally a couple of mathematicians got together with three astronomer-physicists, and they plotted the course and direction of the constant bending of light rays. To their amazement, the answer they got was—the planet Mercury!

This was ridiculous! The most elementary school child knew that the two inferior plants—Mercury and Venus—were uninhabited and uninhabitable, that organic life was impossible on those two outposts of the Sun where rivers could be only molten bismuth on the one and the coolest temperature could be only live steam on the other.

In the past two hundred years every space pioneer who had dared explore inward toward the Sun had failed to return. The intense heat of the Sun was incinerating, fatal.

All of which didn't change the fact that the figures showed the sphere of artificial agitation which bent the Sun's rays around the Earth and caused tidal waves, blanketed wireless, rising temperature, and all the other ills and inconveniences which led up to the door of utter annihilation—was on Mercury. It was at this point that science bowed its head and called upon Professor John Carroll.

Professor Carroll was retired now. He lived quietly on his farm near Fort Wayne, Indiana, and raised weird mutations of fruits and vegetables from the four known worlds under a weather-control system of visible light beams of his own devising. He was in his glass-enclosed pagoda with the air-conditioning unit running full blast when the delegation came to see him.

"Indeed, gentlemen, this is a surprise," the professor said in his dry, gentle voice as he recognized more than one friend—or enemy—in the group of savants who waited upon him. "Let me hasten to bid you welcome to my humble abode. You are acquainted with my ward, Miss Marcia Warren?"

THE visitors reddened a trifle more than the mounting temperature of the weather warranted and hemmed and hawed as the professor amiably shook hands. Marcia smiled graciously, overlooking the confusion of her guardian's callers. She knew why they were embarrassed.

The three men were here to eat humble pie.

For Professor Carroll was a versatile man. Not content with being the director of weathercasting for the entire world, in the year 2199 he had written a book on the flora and fauna of the several planets. The title of this revolutionary masterpiece was "The

Interplanetary Garden." In this book the professor devoted three chapters to theory about possible life on Venus and Mercury.

The dissension Charles Darwin had caused with his "Origin of Species" was a mild breeze compared to the tempest Carroll stirred up with his theory of sentient metallic life on Venus and helium creatures of intelligence on Mercury. Before the end of the year the otherwise creditable book was suppressed and the professor was removed from his high office. Indeed, the year 2199 was not one to be easily forgotten by the Carroll family.

"Ahem—er—not to beat aimlessly around the bush, Professor," said Dr. Thornley Bedloe, dean of mathematics and physics of World Science Institute, "we have come to talk to you about the alarming condition now confronting Earth. At the present rate of increasing heat, in spite of the weathercast stations, the deadline of continued existence for the human race is July the nineteenth. That is scarcely a week away. Professor Carroll, it is my wish and the wish of all my colleagues to offer you our abject apologies for what we did to you and 'The Interplanetary Garden' eleven years ago, and to ask of you — that is — oh, for God's sake, can't you do something to avert disaster? You foresaw things in your great work of which the world did not even dream. Can't you figure some way out?"

"Yes, Professor Carroll," urged the leader of the World Cabinet. "Why should an alien form of life such as must exist on Mercury suddenly make war on us — and without warning? Why should this happen to us?"

"I see," said Professor Carroll, quietly. "Then you are agreed that other forms of life than the carbon compounds—than even physical and organic compounds—might possibly exist on planes that man does not dream of and cannot begin to presume to understand?"

"There can be no other answer," said Dr. Bedloe earnestly. "We know that no form of life similar to man can exist as close to the Sun as Venus. And patient cross-checking has shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that something upon Mercury is artificially causing the terrible refraction of light and the warping of the Sun's rays to destroy Earth. It is all so senseless. Not how, but why the inhabitants of Mercury would destroy the world!"

PERHAPS, from their standpoint, it is not so senseless," contradicted Professor Carroll. "Let's see — Mercury is about two-fifths the diameter of Earth. It receives about seven times as much light and heat from the Sun that Earth does. And only one-half of the planet is habitable — providing we agree that certain forms of life exist that can stand from four hundred to eight hundred degrees of temperature."

"You speak of an assault on Earth without warning. How could creatures of a possible helium or gaseous structure, whose very life force is heat so intense that solid metals such as tin and lead flow like water, even begin to communicate with us? And why would they care to do so? There is nothing in common between us—not even as much as there is between a man and a mold.

"And why should they attack Earth by turning perpetual sunshine on it? For what other reason than to raise Earth's temperature to a degree which their form of life could tolerate?"

"You — you mean the Mercurians would — would attempt to colonize Earth?" whispered Dr. Bedloe, aghast at the horrible thought.

Professor Carroll shrugged. "Why not? They won't be the first creatures to demand more lebensraum."

"Good God, man! You are jesting!" cried the cabinet leader.

Professor Carroll dropped his suave and lackadaisical manner. "On the contrary, gentlemen," he said crisply, "I mean every word

of it. I have been checking with instruments for day after day. I can assure you that those of you who arrived at Mercury for the answer to our trouble are one hundred percent correct. Mercury, or the inhabitants of Mercury, are responsible for our plight—their purpose is undoubtedly colonization—their form of life is unquestionably alien and strange —and there is nothing that I can do about it."

"You — you mean there's no hope, then?" whispered Dr. Bedloe.

"There was none before you came to me," corrected Professor Carroll solemnly. "There may be little now, but there is a chance. As it is impossible to take a rocket ship off from Earth to combat our enemy, we must use a ship that is, obviously, already away from Earth. Since there is no chance of communicating with such a ship by radio, we must communicate visually, and we can only hope that the recipient of our necessarily brief message has the intelligence to interpret it properly and take the right steps. The rest will be on the lap of the gods."

"What kind of a solution is this?" complained Bedloe bitterly, while the others merely groaned in despair. "I know it is just a gamble," said Professor Carroll. "But it is all we have. My two sons aboard the Rex are due back from Jupiter the day after tomorrow. I know they are in a fever of uneasiness due to Earth's radio silence. They will be studying Earth carefully as their ship approaches. And I must have immediate and complete control of all the weathercast bureaus in the Western Hemisphere! I will chart a series of horizontal red and yellow beams of light from station to station that will spell out a comprehensible message to my boys. It has to be on a vast scale so that it can be read before the Rex comes close enough to be trapped by Earth's gravitational pull above the power of their rockets. And I want that message to start flashing as quickly as possible. That's all I can do, gentlemen."

FOR the next twenty-four hours the telegraph wires hummed all over the United States. Electricians and mechanics worked and sweated like madmen all over the country in their frantic efforts to hook up the weather beam stations as per the explicit directions telegraphed from temporary headquarters set up in Chicago.

At last Professor Carroll, with an anxious-faced but brave Marcia at his side, sat before a huge control board and began manipulating master switches which in turn manipulated and activated numerous other switches across the face of the continent.

"Our red beam is shooting northwest from Chicago," announced Dr. Bedloe anxiously from the window of the tall building. "I only hope that the entire system is functioning as it should."

"How can we tell?" demanded one of the technicians.

"We can't," said the professor, smiling faintly. "We are too close to the sign. We would have to be at least ten thousand miles out in space in order to read it."

"How far do you think it can be read?" demanded Dr. Bedloe.

"With the electro-telescope, at least a million miles," Carroll replied, glancing at his watch and flipping out a series of switches before pressing home a second series.

"The Chicago beam has changed direction," announced Dr. Bedloe from the window.

"We should be spelling or writing the date — Twenty-one ninety-nine," explained the professor. "Sixty seconds of that and then back to 'SAVE EARTH'. And that is all we can do from now on, gentlemen. Except that you might start praying that the Rex is coming back to Earth on time and that the Carroll boys will interpret my message correctly—and then be able to figure a solution."

"Save Earth!" snorted Bedloe. "Twenty-one ninety-nine, A.D.! I think your message is

crazy, Carroll."

"Yes," said the professor succinctly as he manipulated his switches. "You thought so in Twenty-one ninety-nine."

BREWSTER, the young pilot of the Rex, turned his strained face toward his captain. "What can be causing those letters, sir?" He asked curiously.

"There is nothing that could do it except the light beams of the weather-cast bureaus," explained Bob briefly. "It's obviously a message for the eyes because Earth's radio won't function."

"Weathercast stations!" exclaimed Martin Carroll. "That date! Bob, only Dad could have hooked up those stations to flash that word. That message must be from him. And you know what happened in Twenty-one ninety-nine."

"Will any Carroll ever forget!" growled Bob. "That was the year Dad was disgraced for his theories about Mercury published in 'The Interplanetary Garden.'"

"That's it!" cried the astrogator sharply. "Somehow that's a message to us from Dad. And the clue is in that book. Haven't we a copy aboard the Rex?"

"Yes—in my cabin," said Bob. "Come."

In the privacy of the commander's cabin Martin sprawled at ease on the berth while his brother read aloud the section of Professor Carroll's book on the sunward planets. An hour later Martin expelled a tremendous sigh.

"That's it," he said. "Dad has told us as plainly as by a two-way hook-up that Earth is in trouble, and the danger spot is Venus or Mercury. Let's get to the navigator's office and run some tests to see if we can check it."

It was four hours later that Martin Carroll lowered his tired head to rest his feverish face in his hands. His brother stared down at the back of his head with eyes that were wide with horror.

"Good God, Martin!" he murmured. "It's incredible! Mercury attacking Earth by bending the Sun's rays. Why, we don't even know there is life on Mercury. We have only Dad's theory that intelligent life doesn't necessarily have to conform to organic carbon patterns."

"We do know now," said the younger brother, smiling wearily. "Every test, every gauge, every equation works out to an artificial disturbance and ray distorter on one spot on Mercury. We've got to destroy it and do it quickly, or all life on Earth will most certainly perish."

"That's why Dad sent his visual message," Bob commented gravely. "But how did he think we could save—"

Bob Carroll broke off suddenly and stared at his brother in a peculiar manner. Martin, particularly sensitive to things like this, again raised his head.

"You've thought of a way, Bob," he accused quietly. "What is it?"

"A way, yes," answered the captain slowly, solemnly. "But a terrible way. And it means an inevitable sacrifice."

"You mean—make a bomb out of our ship—blast that spot on Mercury out of existence?"

"Exactly," said Bob in a curt, flat tone. "Maybe bomb Mercury itself out of existence. Who knows what our cargo of twenty thousand tons of Wiltonite at full acceleration with a detonator head on the Rex will do?"

Martin passed his hand over his face and shuddered.

"My God!" he whispered. "The holocaust would be awful."

"The crew!" murmured the captain of the Rex. "We can't demand such a sacrifice of them. There is only one thing to do. We'll have to compute our course and cut across between Earth and Moon at a height of fifty thousand miles from Earth and let all the men dive from the aft port in space suits. They'll make it safely to Earth, and we can rocket on."

"Like parachute troops of the twentieth century, eh?" said Martin, smiling wanly. "Yes, that will work, Bob. But listen—" he hesitated slightly, then went on—" there's no need of—of us both going. One of us can do the job successfully. Remember Dad and Marcia. You wouldn't—er—flip a coin, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't," Bob replied softly. "But you are right, Mart. There's Dad —and Marcia. And one of us is enough to unload this egg on Mercury. So you're going to bail out with the rest of the crew and carry on for those we love."

"No, Bob," protested the other, starting up in swift protest. "That isn't fair. If one of us must die, it is best that I—"

"Skip it!" interrupted the captain. "I've already made up my mind, and I'm skipper of this potential bomb. Come on to the control room and figure the proper triangulation for me to make a bull's-eye on the dirty Mercurian spot causing all our trouble, while I talk to the entire crew and explain things."

MARTIN CARROLL held out his hand, and his brother gripped it. "Wait just a minute, Bob," he said brokenly. "We're practically saying good-by right now. And we've never been separated before."

Bob uttered a little snort and his arms went around his brother in a great big hug. His lips were pressed for an instant against the younger man's forehead—just as he had kissed Marcia Warren not so terribly long ago.

"So long, bud," he murmured affectionately. "Take good care of them. You know I know you're capable."

"Yeah," muttered Martin, pressing his face firmly against the cheek of his brother. "So long—skipper."

They walked to the control room arm in arm, and Bob left the astrogator there to work out his new equation while he went to address the assembled crew.

Martin spoke quietly to the young pilot who got the message from the loudspeaker.

"Brewster!"

"Yes, sir?" answered the pilot.

"We haven't any time to lose. Get your space suit and supply equipment and come back here to get me at the last minute. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. Gladly, sir."

"Go ahead. I'll take over."

A bit later the captain entered the control room with a space suit over his arm.

"Here, Martin," he called crisply. "Let me help you get into this thing. The crew are waiting at the port aft air lock. I'll give you the gauge readings before I fasten the headgear, and you can call off the proper equation to set things so I don't miss the mark. I can easily correct minor discrepancies by manual control as I near the target —such as the pull of the Sun throwing the ship off."

"If it weren't for that necessity we could both jump ship and trust to initial control settings to take this flying bomb there."

"I know that!" said Bob impatiently. "Quit stalling, and get into this suit."

"Are you ready, sir?" came the voice of Brewster from the door.

"Yes," whispered Martin Carroll softly as his hand crept up along his brother's arm to his chin. "I'm—ready!"

As he said this, Martin suddenly doubled his fist and let drive a murderous short-arm jab that connected squarely with Bob's jaw. The captain grunted and started sagging, crumpling at the knees.

"Here, Brewster!" Martin called out sharply. "Get the captain into this space suit he brought. Snap into it! We're changing places. He's jumping ship with you men. I'm taking the Rex on to Mercury. Is the detonator fused to the hold and properly set?"

"Yes, sir, but do you think—" began the pilot in a trembling voice.

"I know," snapped the astrogator in a hard tone. "Get that suit on my brother. Now then,

read the position to me from the gauges."

"Yes, sir," said the stunned Brewster, complying.

"Good," nodded Martin Carroll. "Set up this triangulation—and as you hope to live out a normal life, don't make any error!"

He called out an equation, and felt the great freighter tremble slightly as the craft responded to the firing order the pilot set up.

"Now, I'll take the control board," he said shortly, sliding into the padded chair before the banks of keys. "Take Captain Carroll back to Mr. Scott's care. Dive out when I ring this alarm bell. And see that the last man sets the automatic airlock before he abandons ship. That's all!"

"Yes, sir. And good-by, sir! I'm saluting you, sir!"

One minute later the strident note of an alarm bell rang throughout the huge ship. As the freighter cut across the face of Earth at elevation of fifty thousand miles, the aft port lock opened on the airless void, and white-suited men began diving gracefully down toward the great globe that was home.

Like large snowflakes they drifted downward from the lock of the rocket whose tail tubes were already glowing red with the accelerating bursts of Wiltonite.

THIRTY-TWO hours later, from his drifting position in space with First Officer Scott beside him, Captain Bob Carroll tried to look Sunward. He couldn't see the flash, nor hear the terrific concussion, but he knew that his brother had succeeded in his heroic endeavor. For, like the sputtering fuse of dynamite, a line of living light seemed to ripple Earthward.

In something like eight minutes the line of light rippled across space, struck the Earth almost like a visible shock, and magically a cone of black shadow sprang out from Earth on the side away from the Sun.

And it was night again where night should be.

It was another week before Bob Carroll and his crew were rescued just off the Pacific Coast and rushed by stratoliner to Chicago. Here, in the midst of the wildest rejoicing, Bob made his report to his father. The bitter lines about the spaceman's mouth had softened somewhat as he enfolded Marcia Warren in his arms and rested his head on her shoulder to cry.

"It was wonderful! Simply miraculous!" praised Dr. Bedloe. "But what I cannot understand is why you let Martin make that sacrifice. I—er—always understood that the old tradition was for the captain to stay with his ah—ship."

"He couldn't help it—if it's any of your business, sir!" spoke up Brewster fiercely. "Martin Carroll knocked the captain out."

"Oh!" said Dr. Bedloe, glancing at the former captain of the Rex. "Queer that he should choose to make the sacrifice. And I wonder that he was able to pilot the ship so successfully into such sheer brilliance of light."

"Oh, you damned fool!" grated First Officer Scott. "You don't know much of anything, do you? Martin Carroll was stone blind from birth! Now, let's get out of here and leave what's left of this family in peace."