

A SCIENTIFCTION NOVEL COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

STARTLING STORIES

15¢

JULY

EARLE
BERGEY

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

**THE LIFE
DETOUR**
*A Hall of Fame
Classic*
By DAVID
H. KELLER

The
**KINGDOM
OF THE
BLIND**
*An Amazing
Complete Novel*
By GEORGE
O. SMITH



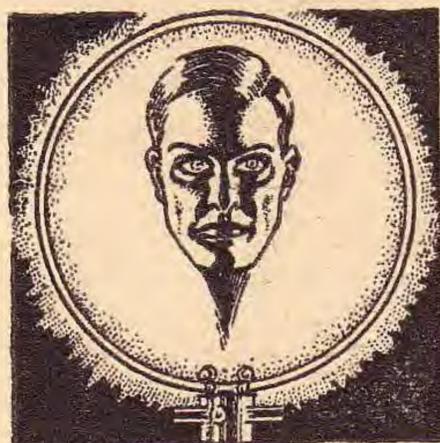
STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 15, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

July, 1947

An Amazing Complete Novel



The Kingdom of the Blind

By GEORGE O. SMITH

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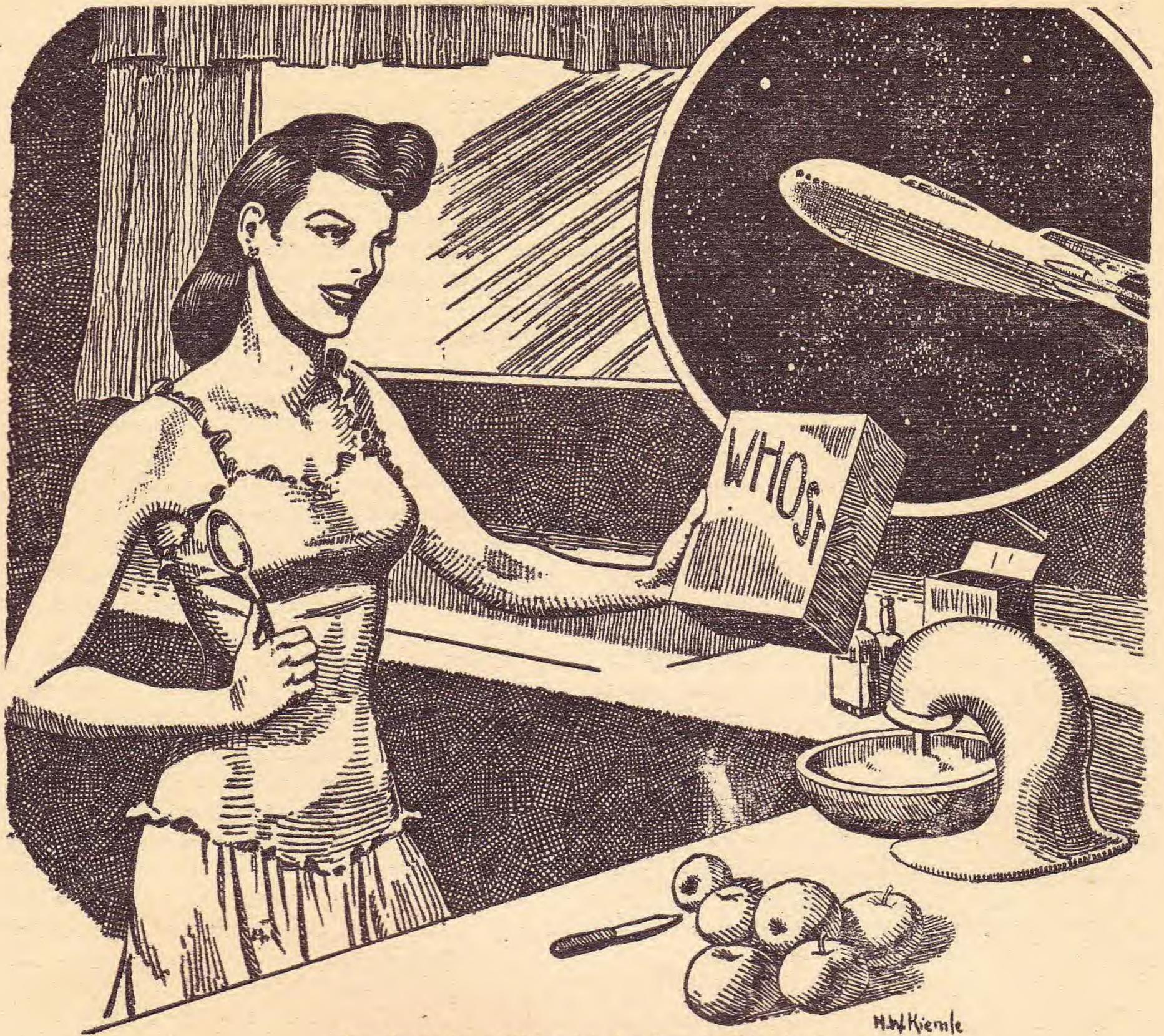
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Oona began to put things into her largest mixing bowl

SUPER WHOST

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

If you ever want a free trip to Mars, all you have to do is mix six slices of diced Super Whost with granulated sugar, chopped apples, golden syrup and—a large grain of salt!

THERE'LL always be an ad-man. Oona, scanning the stereo, saw the 'caster's handsome profile fade discreetly into a panoramic view of Marsport at night.

"The city of perfumes," he said in a cadenced tenor. "Ten days of unoblivious wonderment in the heart of the luxury capital, with side deviations to the polar ice caps,

the Purple Desert"—the view in the stereo shifted appropriately with his words—"and the System-famed wine district on the left bank of the Grand Canal, for yourself and a guest of your choice. That's the eximious first prize in the Super Whost contest.

"Why not compete? All you have to do is to send in an entry of not over two hundred words in length, accompanied by the seals

from ten family-sized pacs of Super Whost. Begin with the words, 'I prefer Super Whost at every repast because . . .' and then carry on with the reasons why you always opt Super Whost.

"Perhaps it's the high degree of tensile crispation, perhaps it's the sure effect of Super Whost on the salivary glands. Aggregate your reasons, whatever they may be, and send them in for the contest!

"The second prize in the Super Whost contest—Super Whost, the chronometrized carbohydrate—is a week on Mars, also at the Grande Hotel de Bellona, with two days' deviation to the wine district. Third prize is the latest edition all-Diesel 'copter put out by the Luffa Engine Company, complete with . . ."

Oona shut the stereo off. She wasn't interested in any prizes below the first two. A trip to Mars! Neither she nor Jick had ever been out of the earth's atmosphere, except once when Space Ports Inc., had entertained their employees with an all-day fourth-of-July picnic on one of the Space Rafts.

Oona hadn't really cared for it. They were up high enough to see the curvature of the earth, and it had been interesting to look down and watch the weather happening below, but the raft had been under a dome, of course, and something in the set-up had made Oona dizzy whenever she thought of it. She was sure it wasn't the same thing, not at all the same, as being on another planet.

She pulled the seals from the ten family-sized pacs of Super Whost toward her and studied them for inspiration. Why did she prefer Super Whost? Well, of course it was the most convenient stuff in the world, and it had rather a nice taste.

But the real reason she'd bought the ten pacs—there was an awful lot of Whost in them for just her and Jick to get through—had been to get the seals so she could enter the contest. But she could hardly give *that* as a reason.

After a few moments she drew the mouth-piece of the dicta-type toward her and began.

"I prefer Super Whost at every repast because . . ."

It was harder work than Oona had thought it would be. Her mind seemed to dry up when she tried to think of reasons for opting Super Whost. She spoiled five rekkablanks before she came out with an entry which pleased her.

It was really pretty good, she thought,

reading it over. That phrase about "rich sapidity" sounded well, and so did that bit about the "deep luxuriance of Super Whost's high tensile crispation."

And she'd finished with a ringing tribute to Super Whost's super-convenience for the super-busy modern woman. Darn it, she ought to get the second prize at least.

She stuck the ten seals in the envelope with her entry, ran it through the postage meter and slipped it into the teleport. There! Her entry was in the contest.

Jick would be home in a little while. It was time to think about supper. Before she got the bollo tongue out of the deep freeze and popped it into the tenderizer (they'd have taro roots with it, and some of those little mange-toute peas, and of course Whost), she opened the storage cabinets and looked at the Super Whost again.

WHAT a lot there was of it! She always tended to forget how big the pacs were when she wasn't looking at them. That wouldn't have bothered her at all, because Whost was nice to have on hand, but of course it was all chronometrized, and that meant that if you let the pacs go past the date stamped on them the Whost disintegrated.

Instead of coming out all hot and buttery and delicious (well, it did taste pretty good), you had nothing but a lot of crumbs, as tasteless as sawdust. All that Whost to eat up before May Seventeenth! That was a pac every four days.

Jick broke down on the third day.

"Listen, honey," he said, "isn't there anything in the system to eat besides Whost? Seems like we've had it at every repast for the last week.

"I know it's convenient for you and all that, but I'm getting so I hate the taste of it, and after I eat it I feel as if I'd swallowed helium-filled balloons mixed with slivers of corundum. How about having some rolls?"

Oona nodded. She had to admit that Jick was right; she'd barely been able to get down her own share of the Whost at lunch, and she'd given Jick more than herself because he was bigger than she.

It had been too much of a good thing. And even eating Whost strenuously the way they'd been doing, they had only finished two-thirds of the first box. She'd have to work out some other method of dealing with it.

At the meeting of her maroola club next afternoon, Oona was silent and distraught. She couldn't get her mind on the game. While the other girls drew loos, doubled and built their citadels, Oona looked blankly at her hand, seeing, instead of the brightly-colored hexagons, nine and one-third family-sized pacs of Super Whost.

She couldn't just put them in the garbage reducer. Whost, no matter what the makers said, was in the luxury price-group. It had cost too much to throw away. She could cut it up in little pieces and use it for stuffing lamb shoulder, she guessed, or—

"Double loo!" Neta Dubonet cried excitedly. "And whidget. That puts me out. My goodness, Oona, what's the matter with you? You're playing like you're asleep."

"I'm sorry," Oona replied with an effort. "I know I'm not playing very well."

"I should say not. Maybe you'll feel better after the refreshments—Jobella said she was trying a new recipe on us today."

"Um-hum," Oona answered vaguely. "Um-hum. Yes."

The refreshments, when they came, looked quite good. A mold of calavo, geela nut and fraisette, steaming hot theo, and—*what* was that? Oona poked cautiously with her fork at the pale-blue surface. That was spilal paste on top, but underneath—she might have known it—was Whost.

It almost took her appetite. She got down a few mouthfuls of the geela mold and drank her theo, but Jobella commented with some acerbity on how the new recipe hadn't made a hit with *everyone*, and Oona had to explain that she was slimming for her frontless swimming suit.

After the repast they played some more maroola, and then Jobella awarded the prizes.

"Neta has high score," she said, handing a little box to her (Oona thought it looked like a somni-spray case) "and poor Oona gets the consolation prize. Just a second."

Jobella went out of the room for a minute and returned lugging a huge box. With a sinking heart, Oona began to untie the big silver bow and strip off the iridescent nylo-wrap. It was, as she had feared, ten family-sized pacs of Super Whost.

IT WAS plain enough what had happened, Oona thought as she caught the air-bus. Jobella had entered the Whost contest (the seals were all gone from the pacs), and she'd

decided that consolation prize for the maroola club was a good way of getting rid of all that Whost. It was expensive enough to make a good present, but gosh. *Gosh!*

Oona stored the new installment of Whost under the dishwashing unit and began to get supper. Once in awhile she looked toward the garbage reducer with a speculative eye. All she had to do was to pick up a pac of Whost and . . .

Jick chimed at the front door and Oona ran to let him in. "'Lo, honey," she said, embracing him warmly. "Have a good day?"

Jick looked at her. His usually good-tempered face seemed harassed.

"Not exactly," he replied. "You know that check pool we have on Fridays?"

"Um-hum."

"Well, I got a prize. First time in solar history I've won anything. You know what it was?"

"*What?*" Oona cried, facing him. For some reason, her heart had begun to pound.

"Ten of those beblasted pacs of Whost! That stuff! *Ten—pacs—of—Whost!* I brought it home, Oona, but if you want to put it in the garbage reducer, it's all right with me. I don't think I ever want any of it to eat." He shoved the box toward her and went into the shower room to depilate his face.

Oona now had twenty-nine and one-third family-sized pacs of Super Whost. May twenty-eighth was the latest date any of them was chronometrized for. Why not just put them in the reducer? They hadn't cost her anything.

Oona wavered. Then her jaw set. No, by golly, she wasn't going to throw them away. Jick's union was negotiating for a wage increase, but even if it went through those boxes of Super Whost represented darn near a week's wages.

She drew the seatette out of the wall in the kitchen and began to think. Crumbs for sautéing? Whost in chunks with gelatine? With geela and almond flavor, baked as a sort of imitation macaroon?

Next morning, as soon as she was through with breakfast, Oona set to work. She got out spices, sugars, eight or ten bottles of flavoring, an assortment of fresh and processed fruit, four kinds of flour and one of the pacs of Whost.

By late afternoon, she had used it in thirteen or fourteen things. Most of them had been messes, one or two had been reasonably zestful. She had discovered that

Whost went badly with meats or cheese and excellently with apples. On the basis of these facts, what procedure suggested itself?

Oona glanced at the dial—an hour and ten minutes until Jick would be home. She began to dump things into her largest mixing bowl, the one that had been through the dishwasher four times already that day, with nervous speed. In less than half an hour a wonderful aroma, rich, deep, and insinuating, had begun to diffuse itself through the house.

"Sump'n smells good," Jick said after he had kissed her. His arm still around her waist, he inhaled deeply. "Apple pie, hunh? Or maybe Deep Dish Golden Tart. Smells mighty zestful, whatever it is."

"It's just a little recipe I made up," Oona answered him. "I had some stuff I wanted to use. Gee, Jick, I hope it appeals."

It did.

"Is this all there is of it?" Jick demanded indignantly, after three helpings of Oona's concoction. He was picking up crumbs from his plate with the tines of his fork. "Make it again tomorrow night; make twice as much. I could eat it every night for a month. What's it got in it, honey? It's the best desert you ever made."

"Oh, apples and things. Lots of things."

Jick looked at her, frowning a little. After a moment he got up and brought the dicta-type over to the table.

"Put it on a rekkablank right away, sugar," he advised. "'Member that Frozen Delight you made, and then you forgot what went in it? Wouldn't want that to happen with this."

OBEDIENTLY, Oona began to talk into the machine. "Three cups of chopped apples, three-quarters cup of Demerara sugar, six slices diced Super Whost"—she saw Jick, on the other side of the table, raise his eyebrows slightly—"one quarter cup of golden syrup, one quarter teaspoon of salt. . . ."

"There *are* a lot of things in it," Jick said when she had finished. "I suppose the rum gives it that velvety taste. Or maybe it's the toasted almonds and the geela nuts. Anyhow . . . listen, baby, whyn't you send it in to BETTER REPASTS? Honest, it's a world-beater."

Oona wriggled a little. Jick was so prejudiced in her favor that he thought every-

thing she did was wonderful. The recipe really wasn't extraordinary.

"Oh, I don't know," she said.

"You sure ought to send it in. It might win a prize or something. What's the name of it?"

"Unh—Apple Whee."

"Good name." Jick scrawled "Apple Whee" at the top of the rekkablank and laid it on the table. "And have it again tomorrow night, will you, kid? Have it lots of nights."

Now that Oona had the Super Whost off her mind, she began to enjoy planning the Martian trip. The first prize included a complete traveling-trousseau for the winner, and even the second prize offered a complete sports outfit and one for evening too.

But what about Jick? She'd be darned if she was going to go prancing up to the Grande Hotel de Bellona dressed like a stereo star and have him looking like a poor relation. Jick was not only the sweetest man in the solar system, he was darned good-looking with that deep chest and dark hair and everything. If he had some new clothes he'd look like a billion dollars.

She got out the savings-book and studied it. Darn. She saved hard on everything but somehow. . . .

Finally she video'd Berstein, her old boss, and within five minutes had agreed to work part-time for him, four days a week, from ten until three. Berstein had almost cried when she got married. The chronnox in the kitchen was a wedding gift from him and his wife.

Oona rang off with his loud, thankful hal-lujas echoing in her ears. Ten to three wouldn't be bad—it would give her plenty of time to get home and make Apple Whee for Jick.

The days went by. They had Apple Whee at least three evenings a week and the savings-account began to fatten up. Oona took to spending her noon hour looking in the windows of the smarter men's shops.

According to MALE, VIRILE, and PRO HOMINE, very dark crimson evening clothes were coming into vogue this year and that color would be simply zestful on Jick. The pants baggy over the knees, she thought, tapering down into a deep, tight cuff with no lapels on the jacket.

Naturally, Jick would have to make the final decision himself. There was something too horrid about the sort of woman who picked out a man's clothes.

One thing she was sure of, Jick was going to get evening things. She bet with herself that every man in Marsport dressed for dinner without even thinking about it. Jick was as good as any of them—*Darling* Jick! They were going to have a fine time.

Some nights, of course, she found herself wishing he'd get tired of Apple Whee. Goodness knows, she was getting tired of making it. But she had used up thirteen of the family-sized pacs of Super Whost, and if Jick could stand it, so could she.

Maybe, after a while, they'd be able to eat Whost out of the pac again. The idea seemed a good deal less unpleasant than it had. And there was still a lot of Whost left.

It was on Friday, a little more than three weeks after Oona had gone back to work for Berstein, that Jick chimed so vigorously at the door Oona was afraid he'd break something.

"Golly, Jick," she said panting—she had run to let him in—"why all the speed? Is something the matter? Or were you afraid I'd eat up all the Apple Whee before you got home?"

"Apple Whee! *Ha!*" Jick roared at her. His face was flushed. "Is anything the matter! *Ha!* Woman, look at your mail!" He thrust an envelope at her. "It just came. Woman, look at your *mail!*"

Oona accepted it rather gingerly. It was a long, thin envelope, and it had obviously been ripped open in a hurry by Jick's forefinger.

"You opened my letter?" she said.

"You bet I did! You bet I did! So perish all tyrants! Don't stand there and hold it, Oona—look at it!"

HIS excitement was highly contagious. With trembling fingers Oona pulled the contents of the envelope out. Two pale blue pasteboard oblongs slipped through her unsteady hands and fluttered to the floor. His face one vast beam, Jick picked them up and handed them to her.

"Look," he said pointing, "see what it says?"

"S.S. Catena," Oona read, "First Class Passage, Round Trip, Greater New York to Marsport."

"See? What did I tell you?" Jick said.

Oona felt a stab of perplexity. She'd told Jick she thought she'd enter the Super Whost contest, and he'd said yes, it might be worth trying. What did he mean, what did I tell

you? It had been her idea.

"Look at the rest of it!" Jick urged. Oona pulled out a long, flimsy strip of paper. "Marsport Hostel," she read, "is honored to inform you that a suite of rooms has been reserved in your name . . ." Marsport Hostel? But it had been the Grande Hotel de Bellona, hadn't it? What was all this?

"You haven't figured it out yet, have you, honey?" Jick said. Her confusion seemed to delight him enormously. "I knew you'd be surprised.

"I—what?"

"It's the Apple Whee," Jick explained at last, smiling vastly. "I sent the recipe into BETTER REPASTS, and you won the grand prize in the all-terra finals. I told you it was a world-beater, didn't I? Didn't I? Now will you believe me when I tell you you're a good cook?"

Oona nodded. She was too full of emotion to be able to speak. Grand prize in the BETTER REPASTS contest! Why, she hadn't even known they'd been having one. And if she had, she wouldn't have had the nerve to enter it. Usually they paid a dollar for every recipe they took, and they'd turned down the two she sent in last year.

"Would you like a glass of soma?" Jick asked. "Maybe the excitement's been too much for you. You look sort of pale."

"No, I'm all right," Oona replied absently. Two trips to Mars—heavens, what was she going to do with them? Maybe they could take one of them this year and save the other until Jick's next vacation. Or, if they wouldn't let her do that, Neta Dubonet and her husband would love to go.

Oona groped her way along the wall to the cushions of the pneumaport and sat down. Jick sat down too, put his arm around her waist and began talking about all the fun they could have on Mars.

"By the way, Jick," Oona said when he paused for breath, "did I get any other mail?"

"Unh? A post card or something." He fumbled in his pocket and produced a bill for the new eutex, a notice from the film library that WORLD OF ARLESIA had arrived and was being held until called for, and a letter from the manufacturers of Super Whost.

Oona was almost afraid to open it. In a way, it did seem a little improbable that she could have won another trip to Mars and yet, when she thought how hard she'd

worked on her contest entry and how much Whost she and Jiek had eaten up, she was sure she couldn't have taken anything less than second prize. It had been a darned good entry. At last she pulled the ribbon which unsealed the envelope and drew the enclosure out.

"Dear Contestant," Oona read, "the manufacturers of Super Whost, the chronometrized carbohydrate, take pleasure in inform-

ing you that your entry was placed forty-fifth in the recent Super Whost contest by the judges.

"Your prize goes forward to you today by prepaid air freight. We know that you, as a Super Whost enthusiast, will be as delighted by the prospect of receiving, free of charge, twenty family-sized pacs of delicious, high tensile crispation Super Whost as we are by sending them to you. . . ."

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 9)

printing more letters even if it does mean cutting some of the verbage out of 'em. It was nice to see Gwen Cunningham back again. I do get a kick out of her letters even if I don't agree with the contents. The letters are really improving, thank heavens, and I can read them and understand them without needing a dictionary of fan-slang, or what have you.

I see that I missed making some sort of comment on the pictures. Bergey's, yipes! Bergey didn't do the cover! I *thought* it was much better than his usual stuff. Except for the yellowish sky it's a darn good pic. Along with Alvin R. Brown, I too, long for a good blue sky. How about it?—137 Eads Avenue, San Antonio 4, Texas.

We remain on record as believeng THE SOMA RACKS an excellent story. Believe it or not, it did have a point to it, as anyone who has ever been afflicted with a handyman around the house, past, present or future, should discover. At any rate we are glad you liked Leinster's fine novel and did not agree with Dear Gwen. Nobody likes to be called a murderer, even ye ed.

UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

by Rosemary

My Dear Editor: Never, *never* have I been so very upset over a story no less. I was left dangling in midair and *darn* this Murray Leinster anyway!

The story?? Oh, good, super, solid, swell—but. . . . THE LAWS OF CHANCE was *not* finished. In the middle of nowhere he stopped! Why?

Frinstance—so Frances kissed Steve and they became man and wife—so what? Where and how did Lucky find his girl? Did these survivors build a colony? How many captives were bumped off? I could go on and on.

Honestly I've worried about the future of these people until I can't take it any more. I'll probably go into a raving dilemma one of these days and my husband will have to go on a diet for lack of a cook. May I add that, outside of all my ravings, this STARTLING book is terrific!—432½ East 8th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Dear heaven, Rosemary, at least Frances and Steve had themselves a preacher marriage—think of the future social structure if they hadn't! Or why not think about it? Lucky's probe gave indication that the girl he was after was among the released prisoners in the liberated base. And naturally the idea was to rebuild the conquered territory as rapidly as possible. All of these

answers are available on the right-hand column of page 65, March, 1947, issue. The bump-off total has not been released due to reasons of military security or something.

Back to the range, Rosemary.

VERGER VIBRATES

by K. Martin Carlson

Dear Editor: For some time I have been on the verge of typing out a letter to *Startling Stories*, but never took the time to do so.

Now, I've finally done the deed. I want to put in my 2c worth of praise for "THE HALL OF FAME". May it ever burn brightly. Please carry on with the old Classics. WHEN PLANETS CLASHED was another very good novelet by Wellman. I don't recall ever having read it before, and I've been reading stf since 1921. Yes, I've read STARTLING and many of the others ever since the first issue.

In the arguments about the best artists, let me recommend Virgil Finlay. Any fan want a folio of his illustrations? Thanks for your kind review of my KAY-MAR TRADER. I'm glad you don't praise overly much. Give it right from the shoulder. We fans think better of you for it.

I like to read your comments on each letter. Your letter section is half the fun of getting STARTLING and it is the first place I turn to, when I open it up.—1028 3rd Avenue South, Moorhead, Minnesota.

Thanks. We're glad to learn that at least one old timer thinks we are still on the radar beam. We like Finlay too—along with Stevens. They make a grand pair of artists and we wish we could latch onto more of their work. However, both are doing plenty for SS and TWS nowadays, so their appearances will come with increasing frequency.

TIME TO RIPOSTE

by Norm Storer

Dear Editor: In spite of the fact that I may be verbally dissected after entering the portals of TEV, I shall still write to you. Mainly to compliment you on a darn good ish.

Yeah, that Leinster yarn really hit the spot. And Belarski adds immeasurably to the outside appearance. On the whole a very pleasing cover.

The inside pics, too, are welcomed after all those issues with just Marchioni for the lead story. And who did the pic for "When Planets Clash"? Fair. Just one criticism on Finlay . . . why the professional fencing pose on page 13? That was certainly no place for it.

Choice of stories in a hurry, so's I can get on to TEV: