

HE planet created by the Futuremen is the only one in the System that contains a place where normal humanoid beings are accustomed to walk upside down. The Institute of Pure and Applied Gravitation, covering several square miles of ground, has for years conducted experiments on the effect of variable gravity on plant life, and one of its Rare Plant Departments is maintained under reverse gravity.

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Once inside, of course, a visitor soon becomes accustomed to seeing top and bottom interchanged, and soon loses any idea that he is walking on his head. But as seen from the outside, the entire group of buildings and greenhouses presents a weird appearance.

Only the plant life bears its familiar aspect -- and this is the one thing that is really abnormal. Grown under natural gravity, it has been transplanted here in the usual Earth fashion, and then subjected to reversed gravity.

Plants Grow Huge

The appearance of the plants is thus affected amazingly. With gravity pulling them upwards, they grow to many times their usual height. These experiments have already led to valuable discoveries of hitherto unsuspect functions of plant cells.

The Upside-Down Institute, as it is called, is but one of the many wonders of Futurian life. The transportation system is another.

Futura is the one planet that maintains practically free lateral and vertical transportation for all inhabitants. The costs are paid by taxes on special magnetic clothing sold only by the government. A man wearing this clothing need only step into the proper lane, at certain designated station, and be whisked away at a speed close to a hundred miles an hour.

As seen from below, he has all the appearance of flying, and the Futurian skies, full of soaring men, women, and children, never fail to intrigue visitors.

Eases Land Shortage

The new planet has had a great effect on System economic life. Five years after completion of its core, it was ready to receive immigrants.

But even before that, the news of its creation had spread panic among land speculators, and eased the land shortage.

The Interplanetary Government could complete its landscaping at leisure, while the Futuremen went on to other tasks.

Futura's orbit is an ellipse, averaging about 160,000,000 miles from the sun. By treating the planet as a huge space-vessel, and giving it the proper acceleration from time to time, its motion can be easily controlled. The use of gravity screens prevents it from disturbing

the stable orbits of Mars and Earth.

Futura itself is smaller than Earth, but has much more available living space. Its surface is mostly dry land. Only two small artificial oceans have been created to serve as planetary reservoirs, and from these, a network of canals radiate over the entire surface.

However, the planet does not show all the regularities of design some government officials hoped it would.

#### Planet Still Shrinks

The reason lies below the surface. Though previously packed down under high pressure, the materials used in its construction have undergone further shrinkage that is still continuing. Great folds in the surface have formed the beginnings of mountain ranges, wide-spread depressions indicate the beds of new, natural oceans. Already the Rising Hills promise to put the Himalayas of Earth in the shade, and the Vanishing Lake has a water level a thousand feet below that of the neighboring dry land ... when it has a water level at all. It dries up during the summer, to reappear during the fall.

In addition to the expected inhabitants, Futura has had a great many unwanted immigrants.

These have been smuggled in on unfumigated space

1

Despite a Few Unwelcome Immigrants, Such as Jovian Fire-Men and Carnivorous Plants, the Futuremen's Strange World Still Remains the Ideal Place to Live! ships, in a gigantic System-wide racket that has only recently been broken up by the Planet Patrol.

#### Serpent-Men Under Control

As a result, one large area is in the hands of Martian Serpent Men, a semi-humanoid race whose fierce murderous habits had set the other inhabitants of their native planet against them. Of the thousand or so survivors of this almost extinct species of Mars, almost half succeeded in reaching Futura.

Here conditions of life have proved so favorable for the development of their eggs, that their numbers have increased tenfold. But the planet government has now limited their expansion, and they offer no threat to the planet's future.

The Jovian fire-men, flame-breathers who had been threatened with extinction by the gradual cooling of their native planet, also emigrated without Government consent, and settled near the giant volcano which had formed in Futura's southern hemisphere. They too gained a new lease on life.

The shrinking of the new planet's surface had naturally led to the evolution of considerable internal heat. This heat was particularly evident in the volcanic region, and had the double effect of making life tolerable for the Jovians, and

impossible for most other races.

#### Carnivorous Plants Appear

Along with the unexpected animal immigrants, Futuria has also found itself supplied with unwanted plants. A living forest, composed of carnivorous vegetative and semi-vegetative forms undoubtedly owes its formation to spores brought in on unfumigated ships. So too do the Fungus Plains, a flat area some fifty miles in diameter, that shines with a queer greenish light of its own, and at night serves as a gigantic natural lighthouse for space ships racing in from the outer planets.

Mycologists estimate that more than ten thousand varieties of molds and other fungi grow here in great profusion. Unfortunately, the predominant kinds seem to be relatives of the exceedingly virulent Saturnian varieties, and most animals live no more than a few moments after setting foot within its borders.

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#### Inhabitants Like Futuria

Of course, not all of Futuria's immigrants are unwanted. Great numbers of people from all hitherto existing planets have taken up their abodes not far from the Equatorial Canal, where the climate is most pleasant. They have come in bewildering variety, and form the most cosmopolitan population yet seen within the System.

They have built up, with Government help, three main cities -- Lunar City, named for the Futuremen's home, Cometstown, for the teardrop-shaped vessel, and what may come as a surprise -- Gragville, named, it need not be said, for the great robot himself.

The choice of a name for Gragville came only after an excited and somewhat amusing controversy that lasted for more than a month.

The mayor of what had at first been known as Settlement Number Three wrote to Newton asking that either he or Simon accept the honor of having the city named after himself, and be present at the dedicatory exercises. Simon, who had long since passed the stage of seeking such honors, refused at once.

Curt Newton, who had other matters to interest him at the moment, and could not spare the time needed to visit the city, declined politely, stating that the planet's name was honor enough, and suggested instead that the new metropolis be named after either Grag or Otho. And as he temporarily needed the services of neither the android nor the robot, he shipped them both off to Futuria, and the delighted but worried mayor of Settlement Three now found himself facing a real problem.

#### Synthetic Men Seek Honor

Should the city be named for Otho or for Grag? The two synthetic creatures were both anxious for the honor,

and all the quarrelsomeness in their natures came to the fore.

The mayor, too discreet to show his preference either way, proclaimed a special election to settle this great question, and for several weeks both Grag and Otho threw themselves into electioneering with all the vigor and skill of veteran politicians.

It was a bewildering and not uncommon experience for a voter to find himself approached by the two rivals at once, each securing a firm grasp on some part of his clothes, and extolling his own virtues.

It is doubtful whether either Grag or Otho won many voters in this fashion, for their usual victim was too paralyzed with fright to understand what either of them said. The real decision was apparently the result of a whispering campaign -- or rather, of two whispering campaigns, one of which failed to achieve its effect.

#### Voters Become Divided

Otho's tactics were to split Grag's supporters into two rival groups -- one in favor of Gragville, the other in favor of Robotstown. In this way he hoped that even if he didn't obtain a majority of the votes, at least he would be able to win.

However, Grag's supporters saw through this maneuver, and made it clear that they were heartily opposed to Robotstown. The name didn't necessarily apply to Grag, and then too it might have been misleading.

At the same time, following Grag's directions, they repeated to any listeners they found that Otho had been made a fool of by one Bror Ingmann, Terror of Space -- as narrated in "Days of Creation." This lie had already been exposed, but it still found ignorant believers, and Gragville squeaked through to a narrow victory.

Grag magnanimously permitted a suburb of his city to be called Otho Heights -- to be greatly chagrined some time later when he learned that the suburb had outgrown the town proper and was considered far superior as a residence.

#### Mystery Shrouds Mountain

No description of Futuria would be complete without some reference to the Haunted Peak, an unexpected evidence of superstition to find on a planet which had been constructed synthetically and should have been entirely without mystery. But even before the planet was officially opened to immigration, strange reports were circulated about mysterious noises and events occurring in the neighborhood of a peak not far from the South Polar Ocean.

There was no evidence that any familiar life-forms had made the peak their home, and an official investigating committee denied absolutely that this part of Futuria was

inhabited.

Popular opinion still insists, however, that the peak had become the home of invisible men from outer space.

Astonishingly enough, this belief is shared by none others than Curt Newton and the Brain.

"Some day, Simon," observed Captain Future, "we'll have to investigate that place. There should be at least as much to learn as from a study of past civilizations."

"Some day, lad," agreed the Brain. "Meanwhile, we have our studies on magnetogravitational waves to occupy us."

Curt Newton nodded. And yet, he had a feeling that the Haunted Peak might be even more important than the investigations that now occupied the attention of the Futuremen. Some day, as he had observed ...

Reluctantly, he relegated the idea to the back of his mind. It was a mystery that for the time being must remain unsolved.