

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Scrimshaw

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Scrimshaw

Author: Murray Leinster

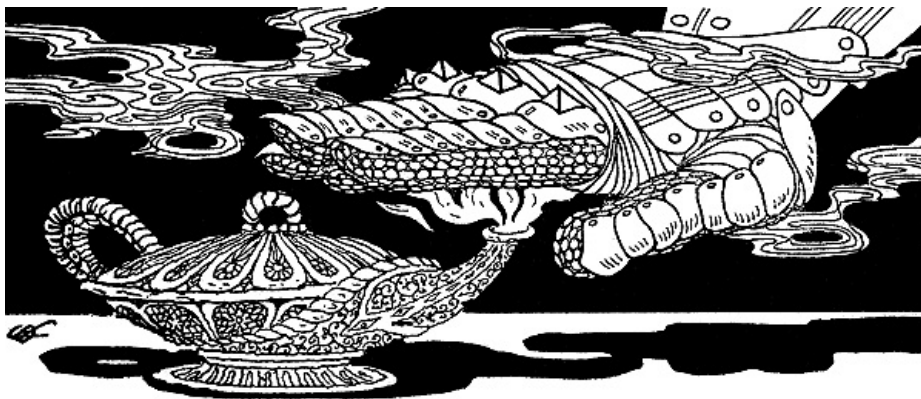
Illustrator: Kelly Freas

Release date: December 10, 2007 [eBook #23791]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCRIMSHAW ***



SCRIMSHAW

The old man just wanted to get back his memory—and the methods he used were gently hellish, from the viewpoint of the others....

BY MURRAY LEINSTER

Illustrated by Freas

Pop Young was the one known man who could stand life on the surface of the Moon's far side, and, therefore, he occupied the shack on the Big Crack's edge, above the mining colony there. Some people said that no normal man could do it, and mentioned the scar of a ghastly head-wound to explain his ability. One man partly guessed the secret, but only partly. His name was Sattell and he had reason not to talk. Pop Young alone knew the whole truth, and he kept his mouth shut, too. It wasn't anybody else's business.

The shack and the job he filled were located in the medieval notion of the physical appearance of hell. By day the environment was heat and torment. By night—lunar night, of course, and lunar day—it was frigidity and horror. Once in two weeks Earth-time a rocketship came around the horizon from Lunar City with stores for the colony deep underground. Pop received the stores and took care of them. He handed over the product of the mine, to be forwarded to Earth. The rocket went away again. Come nightfall Pop lowered the supplies down the long cable into the Big Crack to the colony far down inside, and freshened up the landing field marks with magnesium marking-powder if a rocket-blast had blurred them. That was fundamentally all he had to do. But without him the mine down in the Crack would have had to shut down.

The Crack, of course, was that gaping rocky fault which stretches nine hundred miles, jaggedly, over the side of the Moon that Earth never sees. There is one stretch where it is a yawning gulf a full half-mile wide and unguessably deep. Where Pop Young's shack stood it was only a hundred yards, but the colony was a full mile down, in one wall. There is nothing like it on Earth, of course. When it was first found, scientists descended into it to examine the exposed rock-strata

and learn the history of the Moon before its craters were made. But they found more than history. They found the reason for the colony and the rocket landing field and the shack.

The reason for Pop was something else.

The shack stood a hundred feet from the Big Crack's edge. It looked like a dust-heap thirty feet high, and it was. The outside was surface moondust, piled over a tiny dome to be insulation against the cold of night and shadow and the furnace heat of day. Pop lived in it all alone, and in his spare time he worked industriously at recovering some missing portions of his life that Sattell had managed to take away from him.

He thought often of Sattell, down in the colony underground. There were galleries and tunnels and living-quarters down there. There were air-tight bulkheads for safety, and a hydroponic garden to keep the air fresh, and all sorts of things to make life possible for men under if not on the Moon.

But it wasn't fun, even underground. In the Moon's slight gravity, a man is really adjusted to existence when he has a well-developed case of agoraphobia. With such an aid, a man can get into a tiny, coffinlike cubbyhole, and feel solidity above and below and around him, and happily tell himself that it feels delicious. Sometimes it does.

But Sattell couldn't comfort himself so easily. He knew about Pop, up on the surface. He'd shipped out, whimpering, to the Moon to get far away from Pop, and Pop was just about a mile overhead and there was no way to get around him. It was difficult to get away from the mine, anyhow. It doesn't take too long for the low gravity to tear a man's nerves to shreds. He has to develop kinks in his head to survive. And those kinks—

The first men to leave the colony had to be knocked cold and shipped out unconscious. They'd been underground—and in low gravity—long enough to be utterly unable to face the idea of open spaces. Even now there were some who had to be carried, but there were some tougher ones who were able to walk to the rocketship if Pop put a tarpaulin over their heads so they didn't have to see the sky. In any case Pop was essential, either for carrying or guidance.

Sattell got the shakes when he thought of Pop, and Pop rather probably knew it. Of course, by the time he took the job tending the shack, he was pretty certain about Sattell. The facts spoke for themselves.

Pop had come back to consciousness in a hospital with a great wound in his head and no memory of anything that had happened before that moment. It was not that his identity was in question. When he was stronger, the doctors told him who he was, and as gently as possible what had happened to his wife and children. They'd been murdered after he was seemingly killed defending them. But he didn't remember a thing. Not then. It was something of a blessing.

But when he was physically recovered he set about trying to pick up the threads of the life he could no longer remember. He met Sattell quite by accident. Sattell looked familiar. Pop eagerly tried to ask him questions. And Sattell turned gray and frantically denied that he'd ever seen Pop before.

All of which happened back on Earth and a long time ago. It seemed to Pop that the sight of Sattell had brought back some vague and cloudy memories. They were not sharp, though, and he hunted up Sattell again to find out if he was right. And Sattell went into panic when he returned.

Nowadays, by the Big Crack, Pop wasn't so insistent on seeing Sattell, but he was deeply concerned with the recovery of the memories that Sattell helped bring back. Pop was a highly conscientious man. He took good care of his job. There was a warning-bell in the shack, and when a rocketship from Lunar City got above the horizon and could send a tight beam, the gong clanged loudly, and Pop got into a vacuum-suit and went out the air lock. He usually reached the moondozer about the time the ship began to brake for landing, and he watched it come in.

He saw the silver needle in the sky fighting momentum above a line of jagged crater-walls. It slowed, and slowed, and curved down as it drew nearer. The pilot killed all forward motion just above the field and came steadily and smoothly down to land between the silvery triangles that marked the landing place.

Instantly the rockets cut off, drums of fuel and air and food came out of the cargo-hatch and Pop swept forward with the dozer. It was a miniature tractor with a gigantic scoop in front. He pushed a great mound of talc-fine dust before him to cover up the cargo. It was necessary. With freight costing what it did, fuel and air and food came frozen solid, in containers barely thicker than foil. While they stayed at space-shadow temperature, the foil would hold anything. And a cover of insulating moondust with vacuum between the grains kept even air frozen solid, though in sunlight.

At such times Pop hardly thought of Sattell. He knew he had plenty of time for that. He'd started to follow Sattell knowing what had happened to his wife and children, but it was hearsay only. He had no memory of them at all. But Sattell stirred the lost memories. At first Pop followed absorbedly from city to city, to recover the years that had been wiped out by an axe-blow. He did recover a good deal. When Sattell fled to another continent, Pop followed because he had some distinct memories of his wife—and the way he'd felt about her—and some fugitive mental images of his children. When Sattell frenziedly tried to deny knowledge of the murder in Tangier, Pop

had come to remember both his children and some of the happiness of his married life.

Even when Sattell—whimpering—signed up for Lunar City, Pop tracked him. By that time he was quite sure that Sattell was the man who'd killed his family. If so, Sattell had profited by less than two days' pay for wiping out everything that Pop possessed. But Pop wanted it back. He couldn't prove Sattell's guilt. There was no evidence. In any case, he didn't really want Sattell to die. If he did, there'd be no way to recover more lost memories.

Sometimes, in the shack on the far side of the Moon, Pop Young had odd fancies about Sattell. There was the mine, for example. In each two Earth-weeks of working, the mine-colony nearly filled up a three-gallon cannister with greasy-seeming white crystals shaped like two pyramids base to base. The filled cannister would weigh a hundred pounds on Earth. Here it weighed eighteen. But on Earth its contents would be computed in carats, and a hundred pounds was worth millions. Yet here on the Moon Pop kept a waiting cannister on a shelf in his tiny dome, behind the air-apparatus. It rattled if he shook it, and it was worth no more than so many pebbles. But sometimes Pop wondered if Sattell ever thought of the value of the mine's production. If he would kill a woman and two children and think he'd killed a man for no more than a hundred dollars, what enormity would he commit for a three-gallon quantity of uncut diamonds?

But he did not dwell on such speculation. The sun rose very, very slowly in what by convention was called the east. It took nearly two hours to urge its disk above the horizon, and it burned terribly in emptiness for fourteen times twenty-four hours before sunset. Then there was night, and for three hundred and thirty-six consecutive hours there were only stars overhead and the sky was a hole so terrible that a man who looked up into it—what with the nagging sensation of one-sixth gravity—tended to lose all confidence in the stability of things. Most men immediately found it hysterically necessary to seize hold of something solid to keep from falling upward. But nothing felt solid. Everything fell, too. Wherefore most men tended to scream.

But not Pop. He'd come to the Moon in the first place because Sattell was here. Near Sattell, he found memories of times when he was a young man with a young wife who loved him extravagantly. Then pictures of his children came out of emptiness and grew sharp and clear. He found that he loved them very dearly. And when he was near Sattell he literally recovered them—in the sense that he came to know new things about them and had new memories of them every day. He hadn't yet remembered the crime which lost them to him. Until he did—and the fact possessed a certain grisly humor—Pop didn't even hate Sattell. He simply wanted to be near him because it enabled him to recover new and vivid parts of his youth that had been lost.

Otherwise, he was wholly matter-of-fact—certainly so for the far side of the Moon. He was a rather fussy housekeeper. The shack above the Big Crack's rim was as tidy as any lighthouse or fur-trapper's cabin. He tended his air-apparatus with a fine precision. It was perfectly simple. In the shadow of the shack he had an unfailing source of extreme low temperature. Air from the shack flowed into a shadow-chilled pipe. Moisture condensed out of it here, and CO₂ froze solidly out of it there, and on beyond it collected as restless, transparent liquid air. At the same time, liquid air from another tank evaporated to maintain the proper air pressure in the shack. Every so often Pop tapped the pipe where the moisture froze, and lumps of water ice clattered out to be returned to the humidifier. Less often he took out the CO₂ snow, and measured it, and dumped an equivalent quantity of pale-blue liquid oxygen into the liquid air that had been purified by cold. The oxygen dissolved. Then the apparatus reversed itself and supplied fresh air from the now-enriched fluid, while the depleted other tank began to fill up with cold-purified liquid air.

Outside the shack, jagged stony pinnacles reared in the starlight, and craters complained of the bombardment from space that had made them. But, outside, nothing ever happened. Inside, it was quite different.

Working on his memories, one day Pop made a little sketch. It helped a great deal. He grew deeply interested. Writing-material was scarce, but he spent most of the time between two particular rocket-landings getting down on paper exactly how a child had looked while sleeping, some fifteen years before. He remembered with astonishment that the child had really looked exactly like that! Later he began a sketch of his partly-remembered wife. In time—he had plenty—it became a really truthful likeness.

The sun rose, and baked the abomination of desolation which was the moonscape. Pop Young meticulously touched up the glittering triangles which were landing guides for the Lunar City ships. They glittered from the thinnest conceivable layer of magnesium marking-powder. He checked over the moondozer. He tended the air apparatus. He did everything that his job and survival required. Ungrudgingly.

Then he made more sketches. The images to be drawn came back more clearly when he thought of Sattell, so by keeping Sattell in mind he recovered the memory of a chair that had been in his forgotten home. Then he drew his wife sitting in it, reading. It felt very good to see her again. And he speculated about whether Sattell ever thought of millions of dollars' worth of new-mined diamonds knocking about unguarded in the shack, and he suddenly recollected clearly the way one of his children had looked while playing with her doll. He made a quick sketch to keep from forgetting that.

There was no purpose in the sketching, save that he'd lost all his young manhood through a

senseless crime. He wanted his youth back. He was recovering it bit by bit. The occupation made it absurdly easy to live on the surface of the far side of the Moon, whether anybody else could do it or not.

Sattell had no such device for adjusting to the lunar state of things. Living on the Moon was bad enough anyhow, then, but living one mile underground from Pop Young was much worse. Sattell clearly remembered the crime Pop Young hadn't yet recalled. He considered that Pop had made no overt attempt to revenge himself because he planned some retaliation so horrible and lingering that it was worth waiting for. He came to hate Pop with an insane ferocity. And fear. In his mind the need to escape became an obsession on top of the other psychotic states normal to a Moon-colonist.

But he was helpless. He couldn't leave. There was Pop. He couldn't kill Pop. He had no chance—and he was afraid. The one absurd, irrelevant thing he could do was write letters back to Earth. He did that. He wrote with the desperate, impassioned, frantic blend of persuasion and information and genius-like invention of a prisoner in a high-security prison, trying to induce someone to help him escape.

He had friends, of a sort, but for a long time his letters produced nothing. The Moon swung in vast circles about the Earth, and the Earth swung sedately about the Sun. The other planets danced their saraband. The rest of humanity went about its own affairs with fascinated attention. But then an event occurred which bore directly upon Pop Young and Sattell and Pop Young's missing years.

Somebody back on Earth promoted a luxury passenger-line of spaceships to ply between Earth and Moon. It looked like a perfect set-up. Three spacecraft capable of the journey came into being with attendant reams of publicity. They promised a thrill and a new distinction for the rich. Guided tours to Lunar! The most expensive and most thrilling trip in history! One hundred thousand dollars for a twelve-day cruise through space, with views of the Moon's far side and trips through Lunar City and a landing in Aristarchus, plus sound-tapes of the journey and fame hitherto reserved for honest explorers!

It didn't seem to have anything to do with Pop or with Sattell. But it did.

There were just two passenger tours. The first was fully booked. But the passengers who paid so highly, expected to be pleasantly thrilled and shielded from all reasons for alarm. And they couldn't be. Something happens when a self-centered and complacent individual unsuspectingly looks out of a spaceship port and sees the cosmos unshielded by mists or clouds or other aids to blindness against reality. It is shattering.

A millionaire cut his throat when he saw Earth dwindled to a mere blue-green ball in vastness. He could not endure his own smallness in the face of immensity. Not one passenger disembarked even for Lunar City. Most of them cowered in their chairs, hiding their eyes. They were the simple cases of hysteria. But the richest girl on Earth, who'd had five husbands and believed that nothing could move her—she went into catatonic withdrawal and neither saw nor heard nor moved. Two other passengers sobbed in improvised strait jackets. The first shipload started home. Fast.

The second luxury liner took off with only four passengers and turned back before reaching the Moon. Space-pilots could take the strain of space-flight because they had work to do. Workers for the lunar mines could make the trip under heavy sedation. But it was too early in the development of space-travel for pleasure-passengers. They weren't prepared for the more humbling facts of life.

Pop heard of the quaint commercial enterprise through the micro-tapes put off at the shack for the men down in the mine. Sattell probably learned of it the same way. Pop didn't even think of it again. It seemed to have nothing to do with him. But Sattell undoubtedly dealt with it fully in his desperate writings back to Earth.

Pop matter-of-factly tended the shack and the landing field and the stores for the Big Crack mine. Between-times he made more drawings in pursuit of his own private objective. Quite accidentally, he developed a certain talent professional artists might have approved. But he was not trying to communicate, but to discover. Drawing—especially with his mind on Sattell—he found fresh incidents popping up in his recollection. Times when he was happy. One day he remembered the puppy his children had owned and loved. He drew it painstakingly—and it was his again. Thereafter he could remember it any time he chose. He did actually recover a completely vanished past.

He envisioned a way to increase that recovery. But there was a marked shortage of artists' materials on the Moon. All freight had to be hauled from Earth, on a voyage equal to rather more than a thousand times around the equator of the Earth. Artists' supplies were not often included. Pop didn't even ask.

He began to explore the area outside the shack for possible material no one would think of sending from Earth. He collected stones of various sorts, but when warmed up in the shack they were useless. He found no strictly lunar material which would serve for modeling or carving portraits in the ground. He found minerals which could be pulverized and used as pigments, but nothing suitable for this new adventure in the recovery of lost youth. He even considered

blasting, to aid his search. He could. Down in the mine, blasting was done by soaking carbon black—from CO₂—in liquid oxygen, and then firing it with a spark. It exploded splendidly. And its fumes were merely more CO₂ which an air-apparatus handled easily.

He didn't do any blasting. He didn't find any signs of the sort of mineral he required. Marble would have been perfect, but there is no marble on the Moon. Naturally! Yet Pop continued to search absorbedly for material with which to capture memory. Sattell still seemed necessary, but —

Early one lunar morning he was a good two miles from his shack when he saw rocket-fumes in the sky. It was most unlikely. He wasn't looking for anything of the sort, but out of the corner of his eye he observed that something moved. Which was impossible. He turned his head, and there were rocket-fumes coming over the horizon, not in the direction of Lunar City. Which was more impossible still.

He stared. A tiny silver rocket to the westward poured out monstrous masses of vapor. It decelerated swiftly. It curved downward. The rockets checked for an instant, and flamed again more violently, and checked once more. This was not an expert approach. It was a faulty one. Curving surface-ward in a sharply changing parabola, the pilot over-corrected and had to wait to gather down-speed, and then over-corrected again. It was an altogether clumsy landing. The ship was not even perfectly vertical when it settled not quite in the landing-area marked by silvery triangles. One of its tail-fins crumpled slightly. It tilted a little when fully landed.

Then nothing happened.

Pop made his way toward it in the skittering, skating gait one uses in one-sixth gravity. When he was within half a mile, an air-lock door opened in the ship's side. But nothing came out of the lock. No space-suited figure. No cargo came drifting down with the singular deliberation of falling objects on the Moon.

It was just barely past lunar sunrise on the far side of the Moon. Incredibly long and utterly black shadows stretched across the plain, and half the rocketship was dazzling white and half was blacker than blackness itself. The sun still hung low indeed in the black, star-speckled sky. Pop waded through moondust, raising a trail of slowly settling powder. He knew only that the ship didn't come from Lunar City, but from Earth. He couldn't imagine why. He did not even wildly connect it with what—say—Sattell might have written with desperate plausibility about greasy-seeming white crystals out of the mine, knocking about Pop Young's shack in cannisters containing a hundred Earth-pounds weight of richness.

Pop reached the rocketship. He approached the big tail-fins. On one of them there were welded ladder-rungs going up to the opened air-lock door.

He climbed.

The air-lock was perfectly normal when he reached it. There was a glass port in the inner door, and he saw eyes looking through it at him. He pulled the outer door shut and felt the whining vibration of admitted air. His vacuum suit went slack about him. The inner door began to open, and Pop reached up and gave his helmet the practiced twisting jerk which removed it.

Then he blinked. There was a red-headed man in the opened door. He grinned savagely at Pop. He held a very nasty hand-weapon trained on Pop's middle.

"Don't come in!" he said mockingly. "And I don't give a damn about how you are. This isn't social. It's business!"

Pop simply gaped. He couldn't quite take it in.

"This," snapped the red-headed man abruptly, "is a stickup!"

Pop's eyes went through the inner lock-door. He saw that the interior of the ship was stripped and bare. But a spiral stairway descended from some upper compartment. It had a handrail of pure, transparent, water-clear plastic. The walls were bare insulation, but that trace of luxury remained. Pop gazed at the plastic, fascinated.

The red-headed man leaned forward, snarling. He slashed Pop across the face with the barrel of his weapon. It drew blood. It was wanton, savage brutality.

"Pay attention!" snarled the red-headed man. "A stickup, I said! Get it? You go get that can of stuff from the mine! The diamonds! Bring them here! Understand?"

Pop said numbly: "What the hell?"

The red-headed man hit him again. He was nerve-racked, and, therefore, he wanted to hurt.

"Move!" he rasped. "I want the diamonds you've got for the ship from Lunar City! Bring 'em!" Pop



licked blood from his lips and the man with the weapon raged at him. "Then phone down to the mine! Tell Sattell I'm here and he can come on up! Tell him to bring any more diamonds they've dug up since the stuff you've got!"

He leaned forward. His face was only inches from Pop Young's. It was seamed and hard-bitten and nerve-racked. But any man would be quivering if he wasn't used to space or the feel of one-sixth gravity on the Moon. He panted:

"And get it straight! You try any tricks and we take off! We swing over your shack! The rocket-blast smashes it! We burn you down! Then we swing over the cable down to the mine and the rocket-flame melts it! You die and everybody in the mine besides! No tricks! We didn't come here for nothing!"

He twitched all over. Then he struck cruelly again at Pop Young's face. He seemed filled with fury, at least partly hysterical. It was the tension that space-travel—then, at its beginning—produced. It was meaningless savagery due to terror. But, of course, Pop was helpless to resent it. There were no weapons on the Moon and the mention of Sattell's name showed the uselessness of bluff. He'd pictured the complete set-up by the edge of the Big Crack. Pop could do nothing.

The red-headed man checked himself, panting. He drew back and slammed the inner lock-door. There was the sound of pumping.

Pop put his helmet back on and sealed it. The outer door opened. Outrushing air tugged at Pop. After a second or two he went out and climbed down the welded-on ladder-bars to the ground.

He headed back toward his shack. Somehow, the mention of Sattell had made his mind work better. It always did. He began painstakingly to put things together. The red-headed man knew the routine here in every detail. He knew Sattell. That part was simple. Sattell had planned this multi-million-dollar coup, as a man in prison might plan his break. The stripped interior of the ship identified it.

It was one of the unsuccessful luxury-liners sold for scrap. Or perhaps it was stolen for the journey here. Sattell's associates had had to steal or somehow get the fuel, and somehow find a pilot. But there were diamonds worth at least five million dollars waiting for them, and the whole job might not have called for more than two men—with Sattell as a third. According to the economics of crime, it was feasible. Anyhow it was being done.

Pop reached the dust-heap which was his shack and went in the air lock. Inside, he went to the vision-phone and called the mine-colony down in the Crack. He gave the message he'd been told to pass on. Sattell to come up, with what diamonds had been dug since the regular cannister was sent up for the Lunar City ship that would be due presently. Otherwise the ship on the landing strip would destroy shack and Pop and the colony together.

"I'd guess," said Pop painstakingly, "that Sattell figured it out. He's probably got some sort of gun to keep you from holding him down there. But he won't know his friends are here—not right this minute he won't."

A shaking voice asked questions from the vision-phone.

"No," said Pop, "they'll do it anyhow. If we were able to tell about 'em, they'd be chased. But if I'm dead and the shacks smashed and the cable burnt through, they'll be back on Earth long before a new cable's been got and let down to you. So they'll do all they can no matter what I do." He added, "I wouldn't tell Sattell a thing about it, if I were you. It'll save trouble. Just let him keep on waiting for this to happen. It'll save you trouble."

Another shaky question.

"Me?" asked Pop. "Oh, I'm going to raise what hell I can. There's some stuff in that ship I want."

He switched off the phone. He went over to his air apparatus. He took down the cannister of diamonds which were worth five millions or more back on Earth. He found a bucket. He dumped the diamonds casually into it. They floated downward with great deliberation and surged from side to side like a liquid when they stopped. One-sixth gravity.

Pop regarded his drawings meditatively. A sketch of his wife as he now remembered her. It was very good to remember. A drawing of his two children, playing together. He looked forward to remembering much more about them. He grinned.

"That stair-rail," he said in deep satisfaction. "That'll do it!"

He tore bed linen from his bunk and worked on the emptied cannister. It was a double container with a thermware interior lining. Even on Earth newly-mined diamonds sometimes fly to pieces from internal stress. On the Moon, it was not desirable that diamonds be exposed to repeated violent changes of temperature. So a thermware-lined cannister kept them at mine-temperature once they were warmed to touchability.

Pop packed the cotton cloth in the container. He hurried a little, because the men in the rocket were shaky and might not practice patience. He took a small emergency-lamp from his spare spacesuit. He carefully cracked its bulb, exposing the filament within. He put the lamp on top of the cotton and sprinkled magnesium marking-powder over everything. Then he went to the air-

apparatus and took out a flask of the liquid oxygen used to keep his breathing-air in balance. He poured the frigid, pale-blue stuff into the cotton. He saturated it.

All the inside of the shack was foggy when he finished. Then he pushed the cannister-top down. He breathed a sigh of relief when it was in place. He'd arranged for it to break a frozen-brittle switch as it descended. When it came off, the switch would light the lamp with its bare filament. There was powdered magnesium in contact with it and liquid oxygen all about.

He went out of the shack by the air lock. On the way, thinking about Sattell, he suddenly recovered a completely new memory. On their first wedding anniversary, so long ago, he and his wife had gone out to dinner to celebrate. He remembered how she looked: the almost-smug joy they shared that they would be together for always, with one complete year for proof.

Pop reflected hungrily that it was something else to be made permanent and inspected from time to time. But he wanted more than a drawing of this! He wanted to make the memory permanent and to extend it—

If it had not been for his vacuum suit and the cannister he carried, Pop would have rubbed his hands.

Tall, jagged crater-walls rose from the lunar plain. Monstrous, extended inky shadows stretched enormous distances, utterly black. The sun, like a glowing octopod, floated low at the edge of things and seemed to hate all creation.

Pop reached the rocket. He climbed the welded ladder-rungs to the air lock. He closed the door. Air whined. His suit sagged against his body. He took off his helmet.

When the red-headed man opened the inner door, the hand-weapon shook and trembled. Pop said calmly:

"Now I've got to go handle the hoist, if Sattell's coming up from the mine. If I don't do it, he don't come up."

The red-headed man snarled. But his eyes were on the cannister whose contents should weigh a hundred pounds on Earth.

"Any tricks," he rasped, "and you know what happens!"

"Yeah," said Pop.

He stolidly put his helmet back on. But his eyes went past the red-headed man to the stair that wound down, inside the ship, from some compartment above. The stair-rail was pure, clear, water-white plastic, not less than three inches thick. There was a lot of it!

The inner door closed. Pop opened the outer. Air rushed out. He climbed painstakingly down to the ground. He started back toward the shack.

There was the most luridly bright of all possible flashes. There was no sound, of course. But something flamed very brightly, and the ground thumped under Pop Young's vacuum boots. He turned.

The rocketship was still in the act of flying apart. It had been a splendid explosion. Of course cotton sheeting in liquid oxygen is not quite as good an explosive as carbon-black, which they used down in the mine. Even with magnesium powder to start the flame when a bare light-filament ignited it, the cannister-bomb hadn't equaled—say—T.N.T. But the ship had fuel on board for the trip back to Earth. And it blew, too. It would be minutes before all the fragments of the ship returned to the Moon's surface. On the Moon, things fall slowly.

Pop didn't wait. He searched hopefully. Once a mass of steel plating fell only yards from him, but it did not interrupt his search.

When he went into the shack, he grinned to himself. The call-light of the vision-phone flickered wildly. When he took off his helmet the bell clanged incessantly. He answered. A shaking voice from the mining-colony panted:

"We felt a shock! What happened? What do we do?"

"Don't do a thing," advised Pop. "It's all right. I blew up the ship and everything's all right. I wouldn't even mention it to Sattell if I were you."

He grinned happily down at a section of plastic stair-rail he'd found not too far from where the ship exploded. When the man down in the mine cut off, Pop got out of his vacuum suit in a hurry. He placed the plastic zestfully on the table where he'd been restricted to drawing pictures of his wife and children in order to recover memories of them.

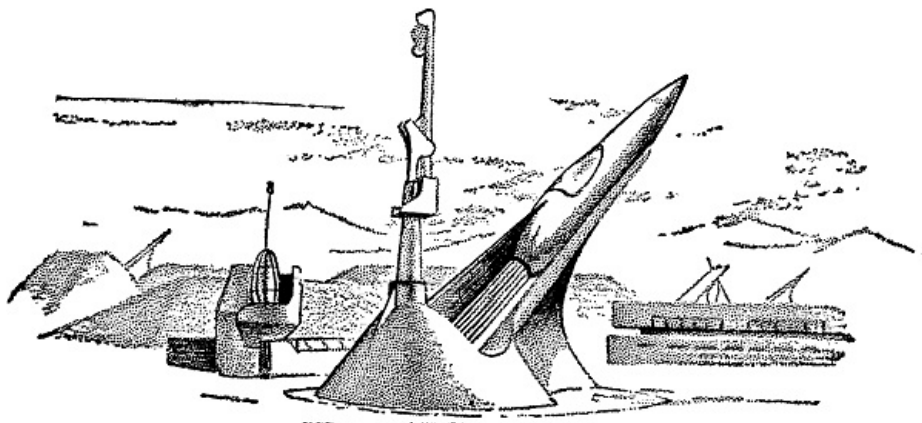
He began to plan, gloatingly, the thing he would carve out of a four-inch section of the plastic. When it was carved, he'd paint it. While he worked, he'd think of Sattell, because that was the way to get back the missing portions of his life—the parts Sattell had managed to get away from him. He'd get back more than ever, now!

He didn't wonder what he'd do if he ever remembered the crime Sattell had committed. He felt, somehow, that he wouldn't get that back until he'd recovered all the rest.

Gloating, it was amusing to remember what people used to call such art-works as he planned, when carved by other lonely men in other faraway places. They called those sculptures scrimshaw.

But they were a lot more than that!

THE END



Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from *Astounding Science Fiction* September 1955. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed. Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCRIMSHAW ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid

the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of

obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.