

# The Project Gutenberg eBook of Operation Earthworm, by Joe Archibald

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OPERATION EARTHWORM \*\*\*

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*Here he is again, the irrepressible Septimus Spink, in a tale as rollicking as an elder giant juggling the stars and the planets in his great, golden hands and laughing mirthfully as one tiny world—our own—goes spinning away from him into caverns measureless to man. With specifications drawn to scale, Joe Archibald, whose versatility with the quill never ceases to amaze us, has managed with slangy insouciance to achieve a rare triumph over space and time, and to aureole Spink in a resplendent sunburst of imperishable renown.*

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## operation earthworm

by ... Joe Archibald

**Septimus Spink didn't need to read Jules Verne's "Journey to the Center of the Earth." He had more amazing ideas of his own.**

*Interplanetary Press, Circa 2022—Septimus Spink, the first Earthman to reach and return from New Mu in a flying saucer, threw a hydroactive bombshell into the meeting of the leading cosmogonists at the University of Cincinnatus today. The amazing Spink, uninvited, crashed this august body of scientists and laughed at a statement made by Professor Apsox Zalpha as to the origin of Earth and other planets.*

*"That theory is older than the discovery of the antiquated zipper," Spink orated. "Ha, you big plexidomes still believe the Earth was condensed from a filament, and was ejected by the sun under the gravitational attraction of a big star passing close to the Earth's surface. First it was a liquid drop and cooling solidified it after a period of a few million years. You citizens still think it has a liquid core. Some of you think it is pretty hot inside like they had atomic furnaces all fired up. Ha, the exterior ain't so hot either what with taxes we have to pay after seven wars."*

*Professor Yzylch Mgogylvy, of the University of Juno, took violent exception to Septimus Spink's derisive attitude and stoutly defended the theory of adiabatic expansion. It was at this juncture that Spink practically disintegrated the meeting.*

*"For the last seventy years," he orated, "all we have thought about was outer space. All that we have been hepped up about is what is up in the attic and have forgot the cellar. What proof has any knucklehelmet got that nobody lives far under the coal*

*mines and the oil pockets? Something lives everywhere! Adam never believed anythin' lived in water until he was bit by a crab. Gentlemen, I am announcin' for the benefit of the press and everybody from here to Mars and Jupiter and back that I intend to explore inner space! I have already got the project underway."*

*A near panic ensued as representatives of the press made for the audio-viso stellartypes. "You think volcanoes are caused by heat generated far down inside the earth. They are only boils or carbuncles. Awright, where do earthquakes come from?" Here Spink laughed once more. "They are elastic waves sent out through the body of the Earth, huh? Their observed times of transmission give a means of finding their velocities of propagation at great depths. I read that in a book that should be in the Terra-firmament Institute along with the Spirit of St. Louis."*

*Septimus Spink walked out at this point, surrounded by Interplanetary scribes, one of whom was Exmud R. Zmorro. Spink informed the Fourteenth Estate that he would let them have a gander at the model of his inner space machine in due time. He inferred that one of his financial backers in the fabulous enterprise was Aquintax Djupont, and that the fact that Djupont had recently been*

I AM seeing and listening to that news item right now which has been repeated a dozen times the last twenty-four hours as if nobody could believe it. I am Septimus Spink, and descended from a long line of Spinks that began somewhere back at the time they put up the pyramids.

All my ancestors was never satisfied with what progress they saw during when they lived, and they are the reasons we have got where we are today. And if there was no Spinks today the scientists would get away with saying that the Earth was only a drop from the sun that got a crust on it after millions of years. And they want to send me back to get fitted for a duronylon strait jacket again.

An hour after I shut off the viso-screen, and while I am taking my calves' liver and onion capsules, my friend and space-lanceman, D'Ambrosia Zahooli comes in. He just qualifies as a spaceman as he takes up very little and is not much easier to look at than a Nougatine. Once D'Ambrosia applied for a plasticectomy but the surgeons at the Muzayo clinic just laughed and told him there was a limit to science even in the year 2022. But the citizen was at home when they divided the brains. Of course that is only my opinion. He is to fly with me into inner space.

"Greetin's and salutations, and as the Martians say, 'max nabiscum,' Sep," Zahooli says. "I have been figuring that we won't have to go deeper than about four thousand kilometers. All that is worryin' me is gettin' back up. I still do not fully believe that we won't melt. Supposin' Professor Zalpha is right and that we will dive down into a core of live iron ore. You have seen them pour it out of the big dippers in the mills, Sep."

"Columbus started off like us," I says. "Who knew what he would find or where he ended up? Chris expected to fall right off the edge of the world, but did that scare him? No!"

"Of course you can count on me," Zahooli says. "When do we start building this mechanical mole?"

"In just two days," I says. "Our backers have purchased an extinct spaceship factory not far from Commonwealth Seven. Yeah, we will call our project 'Operation Earthworm,' pal."

D'Ambrosia sits down and starts looking chicken. "We wouldn't get no astrogator in his right mind to go with us, Sep. How many times the thrust will we need over what we would use if we was just cutting space? We start out in about a foot of topsoil, then some hard rock and then more hard rock. Can we harness enough energy to last through the diggin'? Do you mind if I change my mind for a very good reason which is that I'm an awful coward?"

"Of course not," I says. "It would be a coincidence if you quit though, my dear old friend, and right after Coordinator One found out who was sipping Jovian drambuie on a certain space bistro last Monday with his Venutian wife."

"You have sold me," Zahooli says. "I wouldn't miss this trip for one of those four-legged turkey farms up in Maine. It is kind of frustratin' though, don't you think, Septimus? We are still not thirty and could live another hundred years what with the new arteries they are making out of Nucrolon and the new tickers they are replacing for the old ones."

"Let us look over the model again," I says. "You are just moody today, D'Ambrosia."

It still looks like it would work to me. It is just a rocket ship pointed toward terra firma instead of the other way, and has an auger fixed in place at the nose. It is about twenty feet long and four feet wide and made out of the strongest metal known to modern science, cryptoplutonite. It won't heat up or break off and it will start spinning around as soon as we cut loose with the tail blasts.

"How much time do we need and how much energy for only four thousand kilometers?" I asks Zahooli. "We got enough stored up to go seventy million miles into space? We'll cross that bridge when we get to the river."

"You mean the Styx?"

"That is one thing I will not believe," I sniff. "We will never find Attila the Hun or Hitler down there. Or Beelzebub."

All at once we hear a big rumbling noise and the plexidomed house we are in shakes and rattles and we are knocked out of our chairs and deposited on the seats of our corylon rompers. The viso-screen blacks out, I get to all fours and ask, "You think the Nougatines have gone to war again, D'Ambrosia?"

"It was not mice," Zahooli gulps. "It is either a hydroradium plant backfired or a good old-fashioned earthquake."

After a while we have the viso-screen working. The face of Coordinator Five appears. He says the worst earthquake in five centuries has happened. There is a crack in the real estate of Department X6 near the Rockies that makes the Grand Canyon look like a kid just scraped a stick through some mud. Infra-Red Cross units, he says, are rocketing to the area.

"There might be somethin' goin' on inside this earth," I says. "If you don't poke a hole in a baked potato its busts right open from heat generated inside. Our project, D'Ambrosia, seems even

more expedient than ever."

"That is a new word for 'insane' I must look up," Zahooli says.

Professor Apsox Zalpha comes out with a statement the next morning. He says the quake confirms his theory that the inside of the Earth is as hot as a Venutian calypso number, and that gases are being generated by the heat and that we haven't volcanoes enough on the surface to allow them to escape.

Exmud R. Zmorro comes and asks me if I have an opinion.

"Ha," I laugh. "I have many on file in the Neuropsychiatatorium. Just go and take your pick. However, I will give you one ad lib and sub rosa. There is more downstairs than Professor Zalpha dreams about. Who is he to say there is no civilization in inner space as well as outer? How do we know that there is not a globe inside a globe with some kind of space or atmosphere in between?"

Exmud R. Zmorro says thanks and leaves in quite a hurry. I snap off the gadget and head for my rocket jeep, and fifteen seconds later I am walking into the factory where a hundred citizens are already at work on the inner spaceship. It is listing a little to port from the quake but the head mech says it will be all straightened out in a few hours. It is just a skeleton ship at the moment with the auger already in place and the point about three feet into the ground.

D'Ambrosia Zahooli comes in and says he has been to see Commander Bizmuth Aquinox. "He will give just enough of the atom pile for seventy million miles," he says. "And only enough superhydrogenerated radium to push us twenty million miles, Sep. I think we should write to Number One. I explained to the space brass that we have got to come up again after going down and have to reverse the blast tubes. It is radium we have to have to make the return trip. I says a half a pound would do it. You know what I think? I bet they don't believe we'll ever git back. And was their laughs dirty!"

"Skeptics have lived since the beginnin' of time," I scoff. "They laughed at Leonardo da Vinci, Columbus, Edison, a guy named Durante. Even the guy who first sat down at a pianer. We will take what we can git, pal, and then come back and laugh at them."

"I wish you was more convincin'," D'Ambrosia says. "I have claustrophobia and would hate to git stuck in an over-sized fountain pen halfway to the middle of this earth."

"Hand me those plans," I says sharply. "And stop scarin' me."

Three months later we have it made. Technicians come from four planets to look at the Magnificent Mole. The area is alive with members of the Interplanetary Press, the Cosmic News Bureau, and the Universe Feature Service. Two perspiring citizens arrive and tear up two insurance policies right in front of my eyes. An old buddy of mine in the war against the Nougatines says he wants to go with me. His name is Axitope Wurpz. He has been flying cargo between Earth and Parsnipia and says he is quite unable to explain certain expense items in his book. A Parsnipian D.A. is trying to serve him a subpoena.

"You are in, Axie," I says. "A crew of three is enough as that is about all the oxygen we can store up. Meet D'Ambrosia Zahooli."

"Why is he wearing a mask?" Wurpz quips.

"You are as funny as a plutonium crutch," Zahooli says.

"No hard feelin's," Wurpz says, and takes a small flask out of his pocket. "We will drink to Operation Earthworm."

As might have been expected, we run into some snags. The Euthanasia Society serve us with papers as they maintain nobody can commit suicide in the year 2022 without permission from the Board. Gulflex and other oil companies protest to Number One as they say we might open up a hole that will spill all the petroleum out of the earth all at once, so fast they couldn't refine it. A spark could ignite it and set the globe on fire like it was a brandied Christmas pudding. But then another earthquake shakes Earth from the rice fields of China to the llamas in Peru just when it looks as if we were about to be tossed into an outer space pokey.

The seismologists get together and agree that they can't possibly figure out the depth of the focus and state that the long waves have to pass through the epicenter or some such spot underground. Anyway, all the brass agrees that something is going on in inner space not according to Hoyle or Euclid or anybody else and that we three characters might just hit on something of scientific value.

The Magnificent Mole is built mostly of titanium, a metal which is only about half as heavy as steel and twice as rugged. It is not quite as big in diameter as the auger, for if it was any Martian moron knows we would scrape our sides away before we got down three miles. We store concentrated chow to last six months and get the acceleration couches ready. We are to blast down at eighteen point oh-four hours, Friday, May 26th, 2022. Today is Wednesday. The big space brass, the fourteenth estate haunt the spot marked X.

We get it both barrels from the jokers carrying press cards. They call it Operation Upside Down. At last three characters were really going to dig a hole and pull it in after them. Three hours before Dig-day, Exmud R. Zmorro interviews us. We are televised around the orbit.

"Laying all joking aside, Spink," the news analyst says dolefully, "you don't expect this to work."

"Of course!" I says emphatically. "You forget the first man to reach New Mu was a Spink. A Spink helped Columbus wade ashore in the West Indies. The first man to invent a road-map all citizens could unfold and understand was a Spink."

Zmorro turns to Zahooli and Wurpz. "Don't ask us anythin'!" they yelp in unison. "You would only git a silly answer."

"A world inside of a world you said once, Spink. Ha—"

"Is that impossible? You have seen those ancient sailing ships built inside of a bottle, Mr. Zmorro," I says.

He paws at his dome and takes a hyperbenzadrine tablet. "Well, thank you, Septimus Spink. And have a good trip."

It is Friday. We climb up the ladder and into the Magnificent Mole. "Check everything," I says to Wurpz. "You are the sub-strata astrogator."

"Rogeria. I hope this worm can turn," Wurpz says.

Zahooli checks the instruments. We don't put on space suits, but have a pressure chamber built in to insure against the bends. I wave good-bye to the citizens outside and close the door.

"I have got to git out," D'Ambrosia Zahooli says and heads for the door. "I forgot somethin'."

"Huh?"

"I forgot to resign," he says, and I pull a disintegrator Betsy on him and tell him to hop back to the controls.

"Awright, we have computed the masses of fuel we need. Stand by for the takeoff—er, takedown. Eight seconds. Seven—Six—Five—Four—"

"I know now my mother raised one idiot," Zahooli says.

"Three seconds—two seconds—one second!" I go on. "Awright, unload the pile in one and three tubes! Then when we have gone about five hundred miles, give us the radium push."

Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-o-o-om! The Mole shudders like a citizen looking at his income tax bite and then starts boring. There is a big bright light all around us, changing color every second, then there is a sound like all the pneumatonic drills in all the universe is biting through a thousand four-inch layers of titanium plate. And with it is a rumble of thunder from all the electric storms since the snake bit Cleopatra. In less than five seconds we turn on the oxygen just in case, and I jump to the instrument panel and look at the arrow on a dial.

"Hey," I yell, "we are makin' a thousand miles per hour through the ground!"

"Don't look through the ports," Wurpz says. "In passin' I saw an angleworm three times the size of a firehose, and a beetle big enough to saddle."

"Git into the compression chamber quick," I says to him. "You are gettin' hallucinations."

I turn on the air conditioning as it gets as humid in the Mole as in the Amazon jungle during the dog days. The boring inner spaceship starts screeching like a banshee.

I look at the instrument panel again and see we are close to being seven thousand miles down, and all at once the gauges show we are out of energy. I look out the port and see a fish staring in at me, and a crab with eyes like two poached eggs swimming in ketchup.

Then we are going through dirt again and all of a sudden we come out of it and I see a city below us all lit up and the buildings are made of stuff that looks like jade run through with streaks of black.

The Mole drops down about a thousand more feet and then hits the floor of the subterranean city and we land like a fountain pen with its point slammed into the top of a lump of clay. Bo-o-o-o-ing! We twang like a plucked harp string for nearly five minutes and I hit my noggin against the pilot's seat.

When I pick up my marbles I look around for either an Elysium field or a slag heap but instead a creep is staring down at me. He looks part human and part beetle and has a face the color of the meat of an avocado. His head is shaped like a pear standing on its stem and has two eyes spaced about six inches apart and they are as friendly as those of a spitting cobra irked by hives. He is about four feet tall and has two pairs of arms. I guess I am still a little delirious or I would not have told the thing he would make a swell paper hanger.

The subterranean creep throws a fit and belts me with four fists. "Dummkopf!" it says, and then I really get scared as he has got a lop of hair falling down over one eye and has a black mustache the size of a Venutian four centra stamp over his mouth which is like that of a pouting goldfish.

I get to my feet and grab for a railing, and I see Wurpz and Zahooli held by two other monsters that look more like beetles than the one standing beside me.

"Zo!" the creep with the mustache says. "It is a surprise I talk Universa? We have radar and telepathometers that give us everything that is said in the upper world."

I think back and try not to. In the hermetically sealed cylinder back upstairs among my Americana Spink I have some photographs, Circa 1945. One is of a citizen of old Nazi Germany who was supposed to have cremated himself in a bunker. Papers there record that my forebear, Cyril Spink, had his doubts at the time.

"I am the Neofeührer, Earthman," this creep says. "I will conquer the universe."

"Look," I says, pawing beads of sweat as big as the creep's eyes from my brow, "have you been testin' atom bombs and worse down here?"

"Jar."

"There, I knew Professor Zalpa was off the beam," I yelp at Wurpz. "This is what is causin' the earthquakes."

"Come, schwine," the creep says. "I will show you something. The tomb of my ancestor. Then to the museum to show you how he arrived in Subterro in the year 1945. This is the city of Adolfus. Mach schnell! Heil Hitler. I am Agrodyte Hitler, grandson of the Liberator."

The short hairs on the back of my neck start crawling down my spine. We leave the Mole and walk along a big square paved with a mineral we never saw upstairs. Thousands of inhabitants of Subterro hiss at us and click their long black fingers. We walk up a long flight of steps and come to a cadaver memorial and on the front there are big letters and numerals in what looks like bloodstone that says: ADOLPH HITLER. 1981.

"Jar, Earthmen, mortal enemies of Subterro's hero, you thought he did not escape, hah? Come, we go to the museum."

We do. In a glass case is an antique U-boat. "I can't believe it," I says to Zahooli.

"Neither do I. We never took off. They have us locked up in the booby hatch in Metropolita. We went nuts."

"He escaped in a submarine, bringing three of Nazi Germany's smartest scientists with him. He brought plans showing us he could split the atom. He brought working models." The creep laughs mockingly. "We have certain elements down here also. Puranium, better than your uranium. And pitchblende Plus Nine. It will power our fleet of submarines that will conquer Earth. It is nearly der tag! We will leave through the underground river that our benefactor found three miles below the surface of the ocean near Brazil. It spirals down through this earth and empties into Lake Schicklegruber eighty miles from here."

"And Hitler took one of those Subterro dames as a mate, huh," I says. "It figures. He was not human himself."

I get another cuffing around but I am too punchy already to feel anything. The next thing I know I am in the Subterro clink with Wurpz and Zahooli. D'Ambrosia says maybe we will get released from the strait jackets soon and get shock treatments and find ourselves back in Metropolita in our favorite night spot.

"We have to be dreamin' this," I keep telling myself. The guard looks in at us and he has little slanting eyes.

"How did Jap beetles get here?" I ask Wurpz. I shiver. I think of all the Subterro subs pouring out of a hole under Brazil and sinking all Earthian merchant marines, and shooting guided missiles that will land all over the U.S. They could have rays that would reach up over a million miles and wash up space traffic.

Then we get another jolt. They bring us our chow and say it is angleworm and hellgrammite porridge as that is what the Subterro denizens live on mostly. There is a salad made out of what looks like skunk cabbage leaves. We found out later that Hitler's brain trust had made an artificial sun for the Subterrors and they had been given greens for the first time and increased in size over a hundred per cent.

"We have got to escape," I says to my pals.

"That is easy," Zahooli sniffs. "First we have to break through the walls here, get to the Mole which can't never move again, and then fight off maybe six million creeps. We would git reduced to cinders by ray Betsys the minute we hit the street."

I sigh deeply and reach into my knapsack. I find some lamb stew and tapioca pudding capsules and split them with Zahooli and Wurpz. Then I come up with a little box and glance at the label. It says, URGOXA'S INSECT POWDER—Contains Radiatol.

I get up nonchalantly and call the guard to the barred window. Beetlehead sticks his face in close and asks what I want. I empty some of the powder into the palm of my hand and then blow it into his face. The Subterro sentry's eyes cross. His face turns as pale as milk and he collapses like a camp stool.

"Eureka!" I yelp. "We are in business, pals."

I hide the box of bug powder when I hear two other creeps come running. They start yakking in Universa and in bug language both. Agrodyte Hitler appears and looks in at us.

"What happened, Great One?" I ask very politely.

"We will perform an autopsy," Hitler's grandson says, and turns to another beetlehead. "Open the door," he says. "I am showing my guests something before we exterminate them. Too bad about Voklogoo. Most likely a coronary entomothrombosis. Achtung! Raus mitt!"

"It means get the lead out in old Germanic literature," I says to Wurpz and Zahooli.

"It is curtains," D'Ambrosia gulps. "In about five minutes we will be residue."

The Neofeuhrer is like all egomaniacs before him. He wants to brag. We get into a Subterro Jetjeep and drive about twenty miles through the underground countryside to the entrance to a cave guarded by some extra tall Subterrors. Hitler the Third leads us into the spelunker's nightmare and we finally come to a big metal door about eighty feet long and twenty feet high.

Agrodyte pushes a button and the steel door lifts. Then we walk up a flight of steps to the top of a dam and take a gander at a fleet of submarines that makes Earthian pig-boats look like they belonged in antique shops.

"We will take you for a ride in one," the dictator of Subterro says. "After that I will turn you over to the executioner."

"We need lawyers," Wurpz says.

We cross a thin gangplank and enter the sub. The lights in it are indirect and are purplish green. Hitler Number Three shows us the telepathic machine, the radar, and the viso-screen that pictures everything going on upstairs on Earth, and on Mars, Jupiter and all other planets. There are four other beetleheads on the sub and they carry disintegrators.

"These Subterro U-boats," our genial host brags, "can go as fast in reverse as full speed ahead, as the situation warrants. They are alive with guided missiles no larger than this flashlight I have here, but one would blow up your Metropolitana and leave hardly an ash."

He looks at me, and then goes on: "We will proceed to the lock that will raise us to the underground river and cruise along its course for a few hundred miles. It is the treat I should accord such distinguished visitors from the outside of Earth, nein?"

The skipper of the Subterro sub pulls a switch and there is a noise like three contented cats purring. The metal fish slides along the surface of the underground lake and comes to a hole in a big rock ledge.

We see all this through a monitor which registers the scenery outside the sub within a radius of three miles. The sub slides into the side of the rock, and then is lifted up to the underground river that winds and winds upward like a corkscrew to the outlet under Brazil. Every once in a while a blast of air that smells like a dentist's office goes through the sub from bow to stern and I ask why.

"There is such terrific potency to the power we use from our puranium," Hitler Number Three says, "that we purify the air every few seconds with formula XYB and Three-fifth. The basis of the gas is galena."

I nudge Wurpz and Zahooli as the Neofeuhrer goes over to converse with his crew. "It is our big chance," I whisper. "You watch how they run this tub for the next few minutes. Then when I cough three times you be ready. I do not know how much powder it will take to knock off the big bug as he is half human. Once I blow this insect powder at the same time as the purifying blast is to take place, you two be ready to jump Agrodyte. I noticed that a small purple light flashes on over the monitor just before that stuff turns loose. It is a warning so the beetleheads can take deep breaths."

"Sep," D'Ambrosia Zahooli says. "I take back all the insults of the past five hours. Shake."

"I am doin' that already," I says. "We have to work fast while we are in the underground river."

We wait. The Neofeuhrer comes walking back to where we are sitting. The purple light flashes on, and I count to three. Just as the blast of air loaded with XYB plus cuts loose I throw all the bug powder left in the box into the current. Hitler Number Three breathes in a big gob of it and buckles a little at the knees.

"Grab him!" I screech. "Don't let him yank that disintegrator loose. Hit him with anything you see, pals!"

I see the other beetleheads collapse like they had been hit with bulldozers and I know now that insecticide is more dangerous in Subterro than all the radioactivity harnessed up on six planets.

Agrodyte Hitler, however, has some moxie left in him as he has two of his hands around Wurpz's throat, the third around Zahooli's leg and is reaching for a ray Betsy with his fourth. He grabs the disintegrator just as I belt him over his ugly noggin with a wrench about two feet long and which was certainly not made of aluminum or balsa wood.

"Himmel!" the Neofeuhrer gulps. "Ach du lebensraum!" He has to be hit once more which is

enough and we tie him up with rope that looks like it was made out of plutonium filaments.

"Well," I says. "We have a sub from Subterro. Wurpz, you just sit there at the controls and make sure that needle on the big dial don't move as I am sure this creep has it on robot so that this tub will automatically follow the course of the river."

"We are sure takin' a powder," D'Ambrosia yelps. "Look at the monitor!"

We see fish gaping at us from the screen that even Earth citizens with delirium tremens never saw, and I look quite anxiously at the instrument panel.

"A thousand miles per and we are climbin'," I says. "I am glad this Hitler used old Germanic on his subs, and that I majored in it once. I—er—I am gettin' arthritis all at once! The bends! Uh—er—look, peel them suits off the other creeps and fast, Zahooli, as I bet they can be inflated and made into compression chambers. They have got connections that plug into something."

We pull on the suits which were too big for the beetleheads and for a good reason. More bends than there are in the Ohio River are with us before we plug into the right socket. The suits bulge out until our feet almost leave the floor. I grin through my helmet at Wurpz.

The sub keeps purring and purring. The altimeter registers four thousand feet. It is a caution, an altimeter in a sub. Two hours later we shoot out through a hole deep under the coast of Brazil and I know we are in the ocean as the monitor shows some old wrecked ships about three miles from us. We disconnect the Subterro anti-bends kimonos and peel them off. Agrodyte Hitler is moving two of his arms when we climb toward the surface.

"Hah, we will make a sucker out of history," I says to Wurpz. "And wait until we show this creep to Professor Zalpa and Exmud R. Zmorro."

We come to the surface and contact an Earthian Franco-Austro atomic luxury liner. The skipper's pan registers on the viso-screen. "This is Septimus Spink," I says. "Commander of Inner Spaceship Magnificent Mole. I have come from the center of Earth with a captured Subterro submarine and Agrodyte Hitler, the Neofeuhrer. Over and out."

The universe goes into a cosmic dither when we slide into a berth in Hampton Rhodus. Thousands of citizens hail us as we ride to Metropolita in a Supercaddijet. Behind us in a truck trailer made mostly of transparent duralucite is our captive, the descendant of Adolph Hitler and three dead Subterro beetle people.

"Well, you won't give up so easy on a Spink from now on," I says to Zahooli. "We are heroes and will get medals. First thing we have to do, though," I says to Coordinator One sitting in the jet sedan with us, "is to take care of the hole Earth has in its head. All we have to do is drop that new bomb down the tunnel we made and it will wash up all those subs that are left and most likely cause a flood that will inundate Subterro. What do you think?"

The brass is still tongue-tied. "One thing I must do and that is see that a certain insecticide manufacturer gets a plug on Interplanetary TV," I continue. "Ha, we took the bugs out of this planet. It should work quite smooth from now on."

"I still believe in reincarnation," D'Ambrosia Zahooli says. "I have the darndest feeling I've been through almost as big nightmares with you before, Sep."

*Interplanetary Press, Circa 2022, Junius XXIV—Professor Apsox Zalpa, eminent professor of cosmogony, and Exmud R. Zmorro, leading news analyst of seven worlds, have entered the Metropolita Neuropsychiatorium for a routine checkup. They emphatically denied that it was connected in any way with a lecture given recently by Septimus Spink, first man to explore inner space, at the Celestial Cow Palace in San Francisco. Both men expect to remain for two weeks. "Of course there is nothing wrong with either of us," Professor Zalpa told your correspondent. "But if you see a beetle, please do not step on it. It could be somebody's mother."*

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