

The Project Gutenberg eBook of **Traveling Companion Wanted**, by **Richard Wilson**

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: **Traveling Companion Wanted**

Author: **Richard Wilson**

Illustrator: **Diane Dillon**

Illustrator: **Leo Dillon**

Release date: **April 14, 2016 [EBook #51759]**

Language: **English**

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

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRAVELING COMPANION WANTED ***



Traveling Companion Wanted

By Richard Wilson

Illustrated by DILLON

**[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Galaxy Magazine June 1959.
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]**

***To share exps., relieve at wheel—must be
able drive under grt. pressure—in return
transp. doz. mi. or so under ocean bottom!***

You remember Regan. He's the man who fell overboard in a spacesuit and found that there really is a passage to India. It winds down from the Champion Deep in the Atlantic and comes out somewhere off Bombay. It took Regan a week to pop in one end of that underworld river and emerge at the other. He was delirious when he bobbed to the surface and was picked up by the Chinese motorship. Starved, of course; had to spend a long time in the hospital after he'd been transferred to shore.

The newspapers and radio and television made quite a thing of it. Reporters managed to interview Regan while he was still weak and maybe talking a little crazy. They got together afterward and agreed among themselves on what parts to leave out. Then Regan sold the first-person rights to a syndicate. He insisted on writing the installments himself, but a lot was edited out while the staff writer was re-doing it.

I didn't hear Regan's unpublished story till I met him in the bar at the Palmer House in Chicago. He'd been attending a geophysical meeting that I'd had to cover and we'd both got bored with it about the same time. I thought I recognized him from his pictures and said so. Regan seemed glad to have a non-longhair to talk to, and he talked.

You know why Regan had been wearing a spacesuit in the first place; he'd become something of a hero on the return trip of one of the Earth-Mars hops after a meteor struck. Regan went out through the airlock to make repairs. It was his job as chief of maintenance. Patched up the hole and went back in. Routine, he said.

But the skipper messaged a report to Earth, and when the spaceship reached the way station to take on landing fuel, the press was waiting for it. The photographers were along and they wanted Regan to re-enact the repair scene. He didn't want to, but the skipper insisted because it would be good public relations. So Regan climbed into the spacesuit again and took along his mobile repair gear and tinkered away on the hull while the photogs snapped away from a patrol boat.

That was when the repair unit went out of whack.

Its mobility factor wasn't supposed to do anything more than move him around on the hull to wherever he had to go. He'd worked with it a hundred times in test sessions and once in reality and it'd always been a lamb. But this time it went all screwy and shoved him off the hull. In some way one of the conduits wrapped itself around his arms like an octopus, pinning them so he couldn't reach the controls. And in some other way the tiny rocket engine zipped over to full power and plunged him down toward Earth.

If it had headed him out toward space, it would have been all right. The patrol boat could have overtaken him in a few hours at most and hauled him aboard. But Regan was heading Earthward and soon he was down where the traffic's pretty congested. The patrol boat made some valiant efforts, but after a couple of near misses with transcontinental rockets, it gave up. Better to lose one person than a couple of hundred.

Radio messages were sent to low-flying craft and ships at sea. These didn't do any good, except that a trawler was able to spot the position where Regan, in his spacesuit, smacked the water and went under. The trawler didn't have a radio transmitter. It waited a while, and when nothing came up, it put about for land. A day later, the spot where Regan had gone down was alive with would-be rescue ships, submarines and diving equipment.

But Regan never came up—not in that ocean, at any rate.

I knew this story pretty well, so Regan didn't elaborate on it. He'd blacked out, anyway, soon after he hit the atmosphere and didn't come to till he was close to smacking the surface. That's when it began to get interesting.

You've seen enough undersea movies to know what the ocean is like, so we won't go into that. This is what happened when Regan got down to what should have been the bottom:

There was a big crater there, with the bottom stretching away in all directions from the cavity—but the hole itself kept going down. Funnel-shaped, Regan said. He could see it quite clearly because he was plunging into it head down. The tentacles of the conduit were still wrapped around his arms and the mobility gadget's rocket was naturally working almost as well under water as it had in space.

After a while, it got dark, with Regan still zipping along into the depths of the funnel. He'd long since passed the stage of being merely worried; now he was scared. By this time, it was entirely black, but Regan could sense that he was being carried along swiftly.

Not because he thought it would do any good, but because he had to do something, Regan experimented with his feet. He found that after some back-stretching calisthenics he was able to bring his right boot up near his waist. Maneuvering it with total disregard for his sacroiliac, Regan managed to hook the boot under one of the coils the conduit had made around him. Gradually he was able to loosen it enough to give his left arm some play and from there it was relatively simple. He switched off the rocket engine, switched on his headlamp and looked around.

Regan said it was quite a sight, in a reverse sort of way. Nothing anywhere. With the rocket turned off, he kind of floated around aimlessly, going nowhere in particular. He should have been going up, but that didn't happen. He swirled like a lazy eddy. A school of things that were caricatures of fish—big, white, revolting things—swished over and puckered blindly into his faceplate, then went away. Otherwise there was nothing.

Regan was pretty discouraged. By this time, he'd been in a slow spin for so long that he had no idea which way was up. He had the equipment for getting up—there were about two hundred hours of fuel in the rocket engine strapped to his back—but no way seemed any better than another.

He remembered that the funnel had steadily narrowed and so he tried experimental bursts from the engine to see if he could reach one of the sides. Eventually he got to something that wasn't water. It was a sort of mud. Regan studied the markings on it for a possible clue. No go. Regan was a spaceman, not an oceanographer.

So, since it was better than doing nothing, Regan got himself into a drift parallel with the mud side and switched on his rocket.

He whizzed along at a good rate, staying close to the mud wall, but not knowing whether he was going down, up or around in circles at the same depth. After what he judged to be some hours of this, the mud began to be streaked with a gray substance and, still farther along, it appeared to become rock. Regan didn't know whether this was good or bad.

More hours went by, apparently. Regan was wearing a watch, but it was hidden under the heavy sleeve of his spacesuit. He dozed off, he said, and when he snapped back into consciousness he noticed that there was another wall, far off, opposite the one he was rocketing along.

It was gray, too, as far as he could make out in the light of his headlamp, which was weak over distances. What woke him up fully was something that went skimming past him at a much greater rate than his own. It was a cask, its wood brown as if from long submersion and its hoops rusted into redness. The cask was turning lazily end over end, but it outdistanced him and disappeared ahead as he watched. It had been traveling out in the middle of the passage.

Regan pondered this for a while and then reasoned that there was a swift current, swifter in the middle even than his rocket propulsion at the side of the channel. He worked himself out toward the center, then switched off his rocket, experimentally. By watching the rock side of the passage, he was able to gauge that he was moving much faster.

The watching, however, had a hypnotic effect on him and Regan felt himself dozing off. He tried to fight it but reasoned finally that there wasn't much point. So he turned off his headlamp and let himself go to sleep.

He felt weird when he woke up. He was hot and sweating. He remembered instantly where he was. It was no comfort to him. He felt entirely hopeless, even more so than if he'd been marooned in space. At least there was traffic out there. Here there was just himself, with a wooden cask up ahead and nightmarish fish somewhere behind.

He also felt weak. Spacesuits come equipped with water, of course, if they're the repair variety, and Regan drank sparingly through the tube at the base of his faceplate. But his suit carried no rations, so he tried to ignore his hunger.

He drowsed again and switched off his headlamp. This became a pattern for him—a semi-conscious nightmare of smooth, eerie motion, punctuated with sips at his water supply and hopeless watching through the faceplate, blinking away the sweat. Regan talked to himself, he said, and sometimes sang, to keep himself sane in the silence and loneliness. It probably helped, although some of his talk was pretty idiotic.

It was after one of his dozes—whose duration he had no way of measuring even by his thirst and hunger, which were constant—that he awoke to something new. Automatically he switched on his headlamp, then switched it off again, realizing what the newness was.

The passage he was being washed through was no longer dark; there was a radiance in the water now.

Regan twisted himself around to see what the light came from. Up ahead, apparently. As it got stronger, his eyes began to ache. It was a gorgeous ache, Regan said, and he stared ahead almost hypnotized. He made an effort and focused on the walls of the passageway he was being thrust along. They were white with streaks of black in them—like marble, but without marble's glossy hardness. He could see all parts of the tunnel now; it was roughly circular and had narrowed to a

diameter of about two hundred feet.

Regan could only suppose that he was nearing the surface—that he'd been sweeping through some U-shaped fissure—and he adjusted himself kinesthetically to the theory that he was now traveling up instead of down. This took a lot of doing and occupied his mind.

His spirits soared with his imagined ascent and he could visualize himself traveling faster and faster until, with a pop, he would be thrust into the air and fall back to float on the surface. Regan wanted most desperately to be able to look at the sky again. It would be kind to see land, too, but a ship or a plane would do temporarily.

He was half lost in this reverie when he had to make a second adjustment. Remember, he thought he was going up, as from the bottom of a well. Therefore he was puzzled, as the radiance increased to daylight strength, to see one wall of his tubular, water-filled prison darken to deep green while the other turned a sort of blue-white-pink.

He was moving in the same swift rush of current, his body positioned so that he was facing the green half. He twisted as if to face the opposite way in an elevator and then became giddy when the entire concept of his surroundings did a ninety-degree flop.

In that split second, Regan realized that he wasn't traveling vertically, but horizontally.

The well he had pictured himself in now took on the aspect of a river, with the bright blend of colors the sky, and the deep green the river bed. The banks of the river were above him. Regan gave himself a tiny rocket assist to rise.

He wasn't at all prepared for what he saw. Far away beyond the green plain through which the river was racing was a city.

Unmistakably it was a metropolis of Man, not towering or turreted, but massive and with a relative newness which spoke of life. And as he had this thought, he could see other, smaller dwellings closer by, one-storied and circular, in a variety of colors.



He noted then that the level of the river was higher than that of the land, that the marblelike banks which channeled the racing water had become a transparent, glasslike substance which rose and curved in a seemingly endless archway. The torrent completely filled the half-transparent tube, flowing smoothly so that he almost had the sensation of flying above the ground.

Regan maneuvered toward the top and from there he saw the road. It paralleled the river and ran in a straight line as far as he could see. While he watched, a vehicle sped along it from behind, paced beside him and then pulled ahead. The driver was only vaguely visible, but he had a reassuringly human appearance. The man in the car, which was a three-wheeled, boxlike affair of brilliant yellow, looked neither left nor right.

Regan yelled instinctively and waved. The cumbersome motion turned him over on his back. Opportunistically, he studied the sky from his new position, but could make nothing of it. There were no clouds, only the blue-white-pink brightness that seemed to extend to infinity.

Something flashed across his field of vision. Regan caught only a glimpse of it, then reasoned that it must have been a bridge, spanning the enclosed river. He twisted himself around to a prone position and tried to think constructively.

Somewhere there had to be an exit to this land. For his sake, there had to be, although of course this guaranteed nothing. But surely these people made use of this abundant supply of water. It would be fresh and good to drink after its long passage through the Earth, despite its source in the salt ocean. They would use it for irrigation, probably, and perhaps somewhere it was channeled for transportation—of a more comfortable kind than his own. And they might use it for power. Certainly its rushing strength would be tapped.

This thought scared him. He pictured a giant hydroelectric plant into which he would be swept and in the bowels of which his body would be mangled by the blades of a turbine.

He had to slow his mad passage. He maneuvered the equipment attached to his spacesuit and pointed the rocket exhaust ahead of him. He flicked on the power and felt his speed being cut. The powerful current pressed from behind him like a live thing, but the rocket thrust was strong, too. His progress slackened to the pace of a canoe.

Balancing himself behind the makeshift braking apparatus was difficult, both because the torrent threatened constantly to turn him end for end, and because his strength was only a memory of itself. But somehow Regan managed to achieve an equilibrium which allowed him to look about and reassure himself that the city was still there. Its position had shifted on the horizon to a point slightly behind him, but there apparently was no end to the expanse of this underground world. The road was there, too, still parallel to the roofed-over river.

A surge of hope went through him as he spotted a man walking along the road.

Regan braked himself still further, until his speed matched that of the man. The man's costume was a brief one—knee-length trousers, a vestlike garment over a white skin, and sandals—so apparently the climate was tropical.

Regan stared hard at the man, mutely begging him to turn. Both Regan's hands gripped the rocket tube; he didn't dare let go to wave. Then, as though he had been reached telepathically, the man looked in Regan's direction. Regan couldn't make out his expression, but apparently it was one of disbelief. The man stopped, took an indecisive step and then ran toward the river. He jogged alongside it and now Regan could see his face clearly.

It was an intelligent face—round, broad-nosed, the eyes almond-shaped and the hair abundant and black. The man's body was stocky and powerful, graceful as he ran beside the tubed-in river. He waved and smiled, and Regan hoped his own answering smile was visible behind the faceplate of his spacesuit.

Regan doubted that telepathy had anything to do with making the man notice him originally; nevertheless, he thought furiously: "How do I get out of here?"

The response was made more to Regan's obvious predicament than because of thought transference, he was sure; at any rate, the man pointed, then raced ahead.

Regan lost sight of him for an agonizingly long minute or two, then saw him again, standing and pointing up. Another bridge was spanning the river. The man gestured to it emphatically, then pointed ahead again and held up two fingers. Alternately he pointed to the bridge and gestured with his fingers. Regan decided that this meant there would be some sort of help for him at the second bridge beyond. He nodded his head vigorously.

The man seemed to see the motion. He nodded and smiled.

Regan cut the power of the rocket engine and let the current speed his journey. The man outside increased his own pace, and when another bridge swept overhead, he nodded and held up one finger. Regan trembled with relief at this confirmation of the pantomimed message. He fought back the weariness that had begun to creep over him again, and clung doggedly to the rocket whose exhaust regulated his speed to that of the running man.

Regan thought the bridge would never be reached. He felt supremely weary. He was sopping wet, his eyes kept going out of focus, his throat ached, and his head was throbbing with jagged pains. It took all his waning strength to cling to consciousness.

Finally the bridge was in sight; then overhead. The running man pointed up. Beyond the bridge, the glasslike covering ended.

Regan was out of the tunnel.

The river widened now and its velocity eased. But the current was still a powerful one. Regan pointed the rocket tube so that it thrust him upward. His rubber- and steel-clothed head broke the surface. He felt a surge of freedom.

In his joy, Regan lost control of the rocket-brake and was twisted crazily about. Instinctively he shut off the power; he was swept ahead. As the river whirled him forward, he saw the man on the bank point ahead to the right, wave him on and gesture that he would catch up later.

It was with relief that Regan let himself be carried forward by the strong current. He was traveling out of the mainstream now. In a few minutes, the river was so broad that he seemed to be barely moving, but this was merely an illusion of contrast.

Then Regan saw the mesh fence. It was a giant strainer across the river, apparently fashioned to prevent debris from being carried into the structure which straddled the river beyond—without doubt the hydroelectric plant whose existence he had dreaded.

Regan was swept into the fence. It gave, cushioning the shock, and he pulled himself along it toward the bank. He reached it but lacked the strength to pull himself onto land.

Nearby, hugging the huge mesh fence, was the cask which had passed him back in the dark of the tunnel.

Just as Regan was passing out, he saw the stocky man in the knee-length shorts come into sight, running as fast as he could make his legs pump.

When Regan came to, he found himself being carried on the back of an open truck. He was lying there like a sack of cabbages, being bounced around as the truck sped over a bumpy road. His undersea friend was squatting next to him on the bed of the truck, holding onto the side to keep from being jolted off.

He smiled when he saw that Regan had regained consciousness and patted the chest of the spacesuit. He pointed in the direction the truck was going, but Regan was flat on his back and weak and couldn't turn to look. The jolting was making him sick.

The road became smoother and soon they entered the city. Regan said it was the damnedest place he ever saw. Everything looked like a beehive. He meant that literally, he said. All the buildings were circular, with doors down at the base and no windows. They were all different sizes and all colors. Some of the bigger ones towered up pretty high, but just how high was hard to say. They weren't built in stories, but in one continuous curving line from bottom to top.

The truck would pass through a square or a park now and again and the buildings in the distance looked like a mass of soap bubbles, all pastel colors under that blue-white-pink sky. The truck stopped in front of a big yellow beehive. Now that he was close and not being jolted around, Regan could see that the building was constructed of a kind of oversized bricks, about a foot square. They weren't joined with mortar, as far as he could tell. Apparently their own weight and shape held them together as they rose up and formed a dome. And the color was within the bricks, not painted on.

Two men, taller than his friend, came out of the building carrying a plank. They loaded Regan onto it and carried him stretcher-fashion into the building. The friend tagged along behind.

There was a sort of anteroom inside, with a man at a desk. The bearers stopped while the man took down a gadget that looked like a chessboard with buttons and pushed down half a dozen of them. Then he held out the board to Regan's friend, who pushed down some of the buttons in a different combination. After that the little friend went away, first patting Regan on the chest and smiling.

Regan was carried into a rotunda in the center of the building. The floor rose and took them to the top level. The bearers carried him off to the side and he saw the floor drop down again. They took him to a windowless room which had light radiating from the walls, and dumped him off the plank-stretcher onto a high stone table. Regan climbed down. He supposed they were being as gentle as possible, considering his great weight in the spacesuit.

Regan's weight also manifested itself to him. He felt the heaviness of a person who has been buoyed up for a long time in water, but is now on land.

All this happened, except for the clank as he was set down, in complete silence. He was entirely isolated from outside sound, of course.

He lay there, feeling less sick but still hot and dizzy, trying to compose his stomach. After a while, he felt calm enough to drink a little water through the tube inside the faceplate.

A rotund man wearing a kind of white tunic came into his field of vision. Regan could see him only from the waist up. Like the friend he had met at the river, this man had abundant black hair. But his face was fat, with puffy cheeks and sagging jowls. He was much older. His hands were pudgy. He wagged them in what might have been a gesture of delight or greeting; it was hard to say which. His expression was one of pleasure. He stood at Regan's side and smiled at him. His hands felt over the headpiece of the spacesuit, then went thumping down the rest of it.

"I'll be out of the damn thing soon," Regan thought. But apparently it was too much for the fellow. Regan tried to gesture to the fastening at the back of his neck to show how it was done, but he was unable to raise his arms. He realized then how exhausted he was.

The rotund man in the tunic patted him on the chest—it seemed to be a universal gesture—and went away.

Regan felt at peace in the room. He felt that now he was going to be taken care of and that

everything, somehow, was going to be all right. He went to sleep.

He woke up ravenously hungry. He seemed to be alone in the room. His encased body felt as heavy as the whole world. He tried to raise up to bring his mouth to the water tube. He couldn't. He cried out in a voice that was weak even inside the confines of his suit. No one could possibly have heard and no one came. He tried to raise his arm. The muscles strained and quivered. By using all his strength, he was able to lift it a few inches above the table. Then the arm fell back on the stone with the barest tap of sound.

The jovial fat one reappeared. He was carrying a metal box with two dials on it and wires coming from it which ended in kinds of suction cups. He stuck one of the cups to Regan's faceplate, fastened another one to his ear and twirled a dial.

"Please get me out of this suit," Regan said.

The man's face lit up with pleasure. He nodded and patted the chest of the suit. Then he spoke.

The language was a guttural, fast-paced one. Regan had never heard anything like it.

"Please," he said. "Please get me out."

The man continued to smile. He beckoned and two other men appeared. They took turns listening to Regan plead to be released. They smiled, too, though obviously none of them understood a word. Without gestures, it was impossible for Regan to convey his plight.

They stood around him, chattering in their outlandish tongue. Others joined them. They all had the same look about them. Friendly, smiling faces and hands that patted him on the chest. It became a confused nightmare as still others streamed in, as if he were the main attraction in a fifty-cent tour.

But apparently there was method in their milling around. They measured him from top to toe, from side to side, in circumference and in depth. They used steel tapes and calipers and jotted down their findings in little books or punched them out on button-studded chessboards. They wheeled in a huge contraption which must have been a camera and clicked it at him from every angle. They lifted his arms and legs and chattered with excitement to see how peculiarly he bent at the joints.

It was as if Regan were a new kind of animal that had swum into their ken and which they were classifying, or which they would classify at their leisure after they had measured it in all possible ways.

They kept it up for an eternity and a half. Regan's vision got hazy, his throat burned and his stomach ached in irregular spasms.

He was barely conscious when the two bearers came back in, loaded him on the plank and took him out into the rotunda. The throng of scientists followed. The floor-wide elevator sank to the main level and they all went out into the street.

A big, rectangular, doorless, bus-like vehicle was standing there. The bearers, with a great deal of effort, propped Regan up in the front seat. His head lolled back inside the suit. The shift in position blacked him out temporarily. He came out of a period of nausea to hear himself saying over and over:

"You open it at the back of the neck. I'd do it myself if I could move my arms. You open it at the back of the neck."

The bus was in motion. It rumbled through the streets among the pastel beehives. In Regan's state, they were so many bouncing balloons being pointed out by madmen in white smocks in a caricature of a vehicle under an impossible sky.

They eventually reached a kind of park or estate. Shrubs and trees were neatly set out and a big golden beehive stood at the end of a long drive. They took him inside, half fainting, sweating, gibbering to himself.

Through half a dozen anterooms they went, to what could only have been a throne room. It was sumptuously hung with tapestries. There were guards standing at post and a thick carpet led to a dais on which were two huge chairs. A tall, slender, dark-haired man sat in one of them. The other was empty.

There was a confused kind of ceremony in which everyone got down on one knee before the man on the throne, and a ridiculous struggle began, to get Regan into a semblance of the same position.

The king, or whatever he was, gestured, and Regan found himself being dragged up on the dais and sat on the other throne.



Then the nightmare took a turn for the worse. From an anteroom came a procession of women bearing gifts. They were the first women Regan had seen in this underground world, but he was less interested in them than in what they carried.

Food.

Baskets of fruit.

Platters of meat.

Cups of liquids.

The smiling creatures curtsied before the thrones and set out the feast in front of Regan. One of them, dressed in a single pale blue garment belted at the waist, laid a basket of fruit in his lap.

Regan began to quiver in a fever of frustration.

It got worse when, at a sign from the king, everyone helped himself to some of this or that, raised it to Regan in a kind of toast and began to eat.

If any of them noticed that Regan didn't join them, they were polite enough not to take offense.

The feast over, everyone went for an after-dinner ride. The king went, too, riding in a richly draped palanquin on wheels, ahead of the squared-off bus.

This was the royal tour. Points of interest were visited. Regan's bleary eyes and uncomprehending brain half observed gardens, factories, schools, a sporting event, a parade, a farm and dozens of examples of the culture of the world of people who were kindly starving him to death.

In his semi-delirium, he once reproached himself for being such an unappreciative guest and wondered what they must think of this emissary from outside who was such a cumbersome clod. He had come to them in the strange trappings he apparently preferred, so how could he blame them for respecting his costume and leaving it to him to wear it or remove it as he chose? In his own world, he wouldn't strip a visitor or skin a stray dog.

A bump in the road and the shudder it gave the bus jolted his eyes fully open. Ahead was the hydroelectric plant spanning the river. They were going to show the king where Regan had come from.

The procession pulled over to the bank next to the mesh fence which screened debris from the water flowing into the plant. On the bank lay his mobility unit, which apparently had been detached before they trucked him into the city originally. The king got out of his palanquin and examined it curiously. Then he got back in and they drove along the bank to the other side of the hydroelectric plant. The river continued its swift passage, apparently unslowed by the drain on it.

Regan thought the river looked tremendously inviting. In its depths, he could be free of the well-meaning crowd of sightseeing guides. The river represented peace, an end to being shown around, measured, observed, exhibited and tantalized. In it, he could die calmly, without any

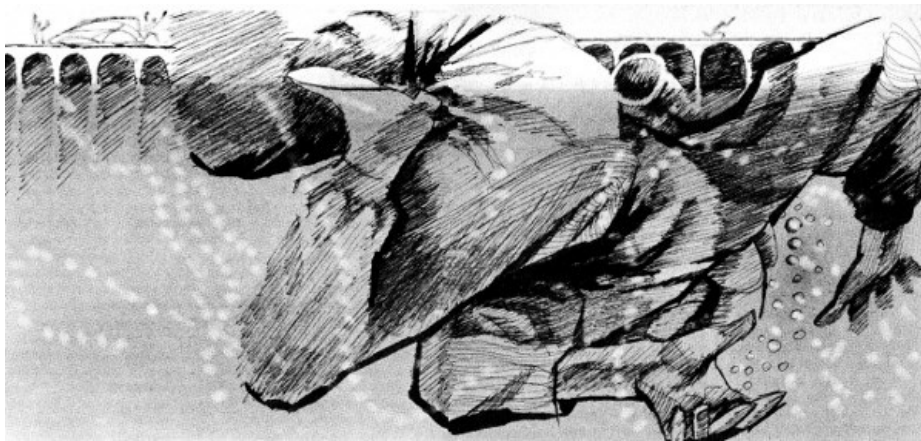
frustrating diplomacy.

A bridge spanned the river below the plant. By the gestures of the scientists, he gathered that they were going to cross over to see interesting things which lay across the river. The bridge was a narrow wooden one. Parallel to it was the stone framework of an unfinished replacement. They proceeded slowly over the rickety, railless bridge.

The approach to it was banked, so that Regan was tilted in his seat, toward the outside. The bus leveled off as it reached the wooden planking and Regan tilted the other way. A loose plank under a wheel sent him swaying back again. With all his remaining strength, he leaned with the tilt. It was just enough to send him off balance.

They reached out to pull him back, but it was too late. He was out of the bus and dropping the short distance to the water.

The current was so swift that he went only a little way under, then bobbed up and was rushed along, turning over and over. As he revolved, he caught glimpses of consternation on the bridge. He saw the bus back off and race along the road on the bank, hands waving out of it. But it couldn't catch up with him. He was moving too fast.



The even motion of the river was soothing. Regan took a swallow from his tube and relaxed. There was a dull ache in his stomach, but no more stabbing spasms. Maybe he was dying. He didn't care.

Regan knew he was in a hospital even before he opened his eyes. The ether-and-disinfectant smell told him that.

It was taking an effort to thrust his eyelids up. He moved his arms and felt them close to his body. He raised one hand to his face and rubbed his closed eyes. Of course they'd have got him out of the spacesuit.

He opened his eyes.

A brown-faced man was leaning over the bed. He was wearing a white smock and had a fountain pen in the breast pocket. Beyond the man—the doctor—there was a window. A perfectly ordinary window, through which Regan could see the sky. A blue sky with white clouds in it.

The doctor smiled at Regan and said in English: "How do you feel, son?"

Regan tried to speak but couldn't.

"This is Bombay," the doctor said. "Bombay, in India. It must be quite a surprise to you, but I'm glad to say you'll be all right."

"What?" Regan asked vaguely.

"It's strange, of course," said the doctor. "You should be on the other side of the world, by all that's natural. We communicated with the American authorities when we saw your identification. It is extremely odd. Still, here you are, and you will be well. Quite soon, too."

"But—" Regan began. Then he gave up. He said nothing more until after he'd eaten and slept and the doctor asked him if he felt strong enough now to see the reporters.

"Two more, sir?" the bartender at the Palmer House asked.

I nodded.

"Naturally they thought I was delirious," Regan said, "or had been. They had to accept the fact that I'd been through the Earth. Not through the center of it, or anywhere near it—they tell me that's practically solid nickel, or molten, or whatever. But there was no disputing that I'd gone down in the Atlantic and come up in the Indian Ocean. They'd seen me go down and they'd seen me come up and obviously I'd been somewhere in the interval. I hadn't walked, that was for sure.

"They credited my story of the underground river. The Greeks had a word for it, they tell me. The Greeks thought the Alpheus River wandered down under the Adriatic and came up in Sicily. I don't know much about their river, but mine apparently follows the Earth's curve maybe a dozen miles below the surface.

"But nobody wanted any part of my story of the city and the king and the beehive houses and the rectangular bus. Delirium, they said. Oh, they were kind about it, but they said it. So did the geophysical boys upstairs, in their eight-syllabled way."

The bartender brought fresh highballs, but Regan still held the glass the old drink had been in. He put it on its side on the bar and stared at the open end. I got the image—a tunnel filled with rushing water, a tunnel under the world.

Regan almost echoed my thoughts.

"Tunnel under the Antarctic," he said half to himself. "That's where it must have been, that city. Down there, deep under the ice. Used to be tropics, you know."

"The Antarctic?" I said.

"Before the ice came, before the Earth's axis shifted. Those people—they didn't evacuate, I guess. They went underground. Funny they should have built themselves houses the same shape as those of the Eskimos who stayed above-ground in the North—like igloos. But probably that's just coincidence. You don't find igloos in the tropics. I'd guess their beehive houses are naturally influenced by the cavern they live in—their little universe."

Regan looked up. He grinned and set the empty glass upright on the bar. "I've had a lot of time to think about it. They're awfully nice people, all of them. I could have had a wonderful time if I'd been able to climb out of that damn spacesuit. In time, I could even have communicated with them passably well. Good-looking women, too."

He looked at me speculatively. He opened his mouth as if to speak again, then smiled and shook his head.

I said it for him: "You're going back."

"Yes," he answered. "Yes, I'm going back. I know the coordinates of the entrance to the passageway and its dimensions and the kind of equipment I'll need. Nothing elaborate. In another year or so, I'll have enough saved up, I think. Get myself a little space launch; one of the smaller ones, lifeboat size. Fit it out with food and water—and some picture books, of course, to show them what it's like where I come from. I'd take somebody along with me if I could find anyone who wanted to go—and who believed me."

"I believe you," I said. "But—"

"Sure. You'd be crazy to go. Wife and kids. I've got none of that. Mostly what I want to do, I guess, is prove those longbeards upstairs are cockeyed."

"I hope you do. Maybe you'll let me write about it when you get back."

"It'll be a good story," Regan assured me.

"I'll be waiting for it," I promised.

That was five years ago. Four years ago, Regan went, as he said he would. He went alone, in a little space launch.

I'm still waiting to write the end of the story.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRAVELING COMPANION WANTED ***

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.