

OPERATION LUNA



"STRENGTH! That's freighter Number Six."

"No, Mitch, it can't be."

"Let me get at the telescope . . . Mitch is right, Lemmy. She's still very small but no other object in the heavens could look like that."

"We're overtaking her rapidly. In an hour or so we'll be passing her."

"I'll say we will—at a thousand miles a minute!"

"Not if we slow down. We could drop down to her speed and coast alongside her."

"What? The whole fleet, Jet? Think of the fuel consumption!"

[N Jet Morgan, Doc, Mitch, and little Lemmy, science opera addicts have four friends whose voices and manner-

isms are as familiar as the zip-fasteners (pressurised) on a space-suit. There is Jet, for instance, the indomitable captain, possessor of enough stiff upper lip to grow several R.A.F.-type moustaches on; Mitch, the Australian engineer who, if not a genius, has all the know-how needed to plot the narrow course between an orbit and an obit.; Lemmy, the radio operator, whose nerves twang with electronic predictability whenever alien presences are around; and, lastly, Doc Mathews—who tells their adventures with a not too clinical detail—perhaps the most level-headed member of the quartet in or out of free-fall.

Two of their adventures are well known. The first described how, in 1971-2 they went from Moon Base with a fleet to Mars and there found hordes of zombie Earthmen who—when not whistling at beetles they thought were sheepdogs—were building a fleet for the Martian invasion of Earth. This adventure ended with the flagship Discovery—and what was left of the fleet—returning to the Moon with the news of the pending invasion. The next gripping sequence concerned their return to Mars to persuade the enemy (as it turned out there was only one of them) that Earthmen never never would be slaves—and why not go to Alpha Centauri instead?

It now turns out, however, that the four friends had had an earlier and

perhaps greater adventure six years before. This was Operation Luna, when they made the first journey into space.

The time is sixteen seconds off zero hour, October 19, 1965; the place, somewhere in the Australian outback miles from anywhere else in the Australian outback. In the space-ship Luna, Jet Morgan counts down the seconds.

"7 . . . 6 . . . 5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . Contact."

Nothing is heard for a while after take-off, only the scream of the ship through the atmosphere and the roar of her rockets, then Earth Control comes through, followed a little later by Lemmy.

"Calling Luna, Calling Luna, your speed is now 3,770."

"Oh Jet, what's happening? I can't move. Oh I can't stand it."

Lemmy, it must be understood, is nowise strong or silent, though his comment could also suggest he was either kidnapped or had no briefing for the trip. After the rocket motors cut out and the atomics take over, however, his companions also join in his cries of anguish. There is reason: "We must have hit 15 G's at least," says one of the quartet later.

Shortly afterwards, when they win free of gravity and nothing falls except Lemmy's h's, Luna loses radio contact with the Earth, 142,000 miles below (if below is the right word) and the first hint of strange things to come appears—strange, uncanny music that has no apparent source.

Unfortunately, only Lemmy can hear these weird sounds; instead of being warned of danger, the rest of the crew find an easier explanation in the condition of Lemmy's sanity.

"He shouldn't have come along," says Mitch. "He's a psychological misfit."

On this unhappy note the first part of the story of Operation Luna comes to an end.

Charles Chilton, author of the other two *Journey Into Space* serials earlier issued by the BBC Transcription Service, got the idea for *Operation Luna*, the first of the series, at an Interplanetary Conference held in Zurich some years ago. There, one of the speakers declared that, in his view, the first man to set foot on the moon was already born. Noting this, Charles Chilton settled on 1965 as a good year for his story.

Into it he has put enough suspense to run an anti-gravity unit: a fleet of strange space-craft on the dark side of the moon, a trip back in time to the Earth of pre-history; a "Voice," mysterious and kindly (that is at last met face to face by virtue of a three-dimensional televiewer); and various "forest creatures" and "Time Travellers" in good measure.

The four leading players are Andrew Faulds as Jet Morgan, Alfie Bass as Lemmy, David Williams as Mitch (replacing Don Sharp), and Guy Kingsley Poynter as Doc. Deryck Guyler is the Time Traveller, and other parts in the serial are played by David Jacobs. Van Phillips, as before, wrote the sound effects and incidental music.

(*Operation Luna* 2YA, 7.30 p.m., July 29; 3YA, 10.0 p.m., July 31; 4YA, 7.30 p.m. July 31; 1YA, 7.15 p.m., August 1.)

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N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 25, 1958.



JET MORGAN and his crew photographed from a convenient point outside the spaceship Discovery during one of their earlier adventures. Mitch (Don Sharp, at left) will be played in the new series by David Williams