

# L. RON HUBBARD



A  
Matter  
of Matter

GALAXY  
P R E S E N T S

# A Matter of Matter

**Y**OU have seen the gaudy little shops along Broadway. Well, this is a warning not to patronize them.

Planets can be bought perfectly legally from the Interior Department of the Outer Galactic Control and you don't have to follow up the ads you read and hear over the radio; for no matter what they say, there is many a man who would be in much better health today if he had not succumbed to:

IT'S A POOR MAN  
WHO ISN'T KING  
IN SOME CORNER.  
EMPIRES FOR A PITTANCE.  
THRONES FOR A MITE.

Easy Payments, Nothing Down.  
Honest Mike

It sounds so simple, it is so simple. Who would not be an Earthman in this vital day? But who would be a fool?

Chuck Lambert was not exactly a fool. He was top-heavy. He let his imagination sweep away all such things as petty logic, shaped up the facts into something which satisfied his dreams and went merrily along, auto-blinded to anything

which shadowed what he wanted to believe. Lady Luck, that mischievous character, is sometimes patient with a fool—and sometimes she loads with buckshot and lets him have it.

When he was eighteen Chuck Lambert, having precociously finished college, got a job moving packing cases and found, after six months of it, that his boss, a septuagenarian named Coley, received exactly three dollars a day more than Chuck and had had to wait forty years for his advancement. This was a blow. Chuck had visions of being president of the company at the age of twenty-four until he discovered this. The president was taking some glandular series or other and was already ninety and would live another hundred years.

Discouragement lasted just long enough to call Chuck's attention to Madman Murphy, the King of Planetary Realtors, whose magnificent display, smooth conversation, personal pounciness and assumption that Chuck had decided before he had closed a deal, opened wide the gates to glory.

Chuck was to work hard and invest every dime he could scrape into Project 19453X. This included, when it would at last be paid for, a full and clear deed of title, properly recorded and inviolate to the end of time to heirs and assigns forever, to the Planet 19453X. Murphy threw in as the clincher, free rental of a Star-Jumper IV and all supplies for the initial trip.

When he was out on the sidewalk, Chuck suddenly realized that it was going to take him eleven years of very hard work to pay for that planet, providing he starved himself the while and had no dates, and he went back in to reason with Madman Murphy.

“Look, Mr. Murphy, it stands to reason that all these

minerals and things are worth a lot more than the price. I'm more valuable *on* that planet than I am here working as a clerk. Now what I propose—"

"Young man, I congratulate you!" said Murphy. "I envy your youth and prospects! Godspeed and bless you!" And he answered the phone.

An aide took Chuck back to the walk and let him reel home on his own steam. He couldn't afford, now, an airlift. He had eleven long years before him when he couldn't afford one. He was perfectly free to walk unless his shoes wore out—no provision having been made to replace them in this budget of eighty percent of pay. He was particularly cheered when the aide said, "Just to stiffen your resolution, and for no other reason than because Madman Murphy really likes you, you understand that this is no provisional contract. If you don't pay, we garnishee your pay for the period and keep the planet, too. That's the law and we're sorry for it. Now, God bless you and goodbye."

Chuck didn't need blessings as much as he needed help. It was going to be a very long and gruesome servitude.

As the months drifted off the calendar and became years, Chuck Lambert still had his literature to console him but nothing else. It is no wonder that he became a little lopsided about Planet 19453X.

He had a brochure which had one photograph in it and a mimeographed sheet full of adjectives, and if the photograph was not definitely of his planet and if the adjectives did not add into anything specific, they cheered him in his drudgery.

Earth, at this time, had a million or more planets at its disposal, several hundred thousand of them habitable and only a hundred and fifty colonized. The total revenue derived by Earth from these odds and ends of astronomy was not from the colonies but from the sale of land to colonists. The normal price of land on New World, being about one and one-half cents an acre, was a fair average price for all properly colonized planets. Unsurveyed orbs, nebulously labeled “Believed habitable,” were scattered over the star charts like wheat in a granary.

On the normal, colonized planet, Earth’s various companies maintained “stations” where supplies, a doctor and a government of sorts were available. On Planet 19453X there would be no doctor, no supplies, and no government except Chuck Lambert.

He realized this in his interminable evenings when he sat, dateless, surrounded by technical books, atlases and dirty teacups. The more he read of the difficulties overcome by the early colonizers on warrantedly habitable planets, the thinner his own project began to seem.

He would cheer himself at these times by the thought that the whole thing was only costing him twenty-five thousand dollars and blind himself to the fact that better-known bargains often went for two hundred fifty dollars on the government auction block. Chuck was top-heavy with imagination. He let it be his entire compass.

At the end of three years he had made a great deal of progress. The librarian had come to know him. She was a pleasant young thing who had her own share of imagination—and

troubles—and it gave her pleasure to dredge up new books for Chuck to imbibe. Her guidance—her name was Isabel—and his voracity put him through medicine by the time four years had passed, electronics by five and a half, geology by six, mineralogy by seven, government theory by seven and a quarter, space navigation by eight, surveying by nine, and all the rest of the odds and ends by eleven.

She was rather good-looking, and when she had finally lost her first, elementary desire to marry a millionaire, she began to understand that she was in love with Chuck. After all, when you spend eleven years helping an ambitious young man to plow through a dream, you are likely to be interested in him.

She would have gone with him without another thought if he had asked her. But his last visit to the library was a very formal one. He was carrying a bouquet and he said a little speech.

“Isabel, I hope some day to prove a worthy investment of your time. I hope to be able to bring you a three-headed butler or maybe a dog in a matchbox to show my appreciation of your interest. Tomorrow I am faring forth. Goodbye.”

This was all with some embarrassment. He wanted to ask her but he was afraid of her a little, libraries having that air.

She took the bouquet and suddenly realized she was liable to cry. She wanted to say something close and intimate, something to cheer him in his great adventure, something he could hold in his heart when the days and nights were lonely. But all she managed was a “thank you” because a child with

a runny nose was clamoring to be heard on the subject of having lost his last book.

Chuck went away. When he reached the steps, and the moldy dignity of dead men's immortality no longer gripped him, he suddenly expanded. He was almost off on his great adventure. He would come back and lay a planet at her feet—or at least would invite her to one. He would catch her out of the library and propose to her and they would found a race of kings quite unlike the youngster with the runny nose.

He expanded and his dreams got bigger as he walked. He went down to the company and, with something of a grand air—spoiled a little because everyone was so busy—said that he was off tomorrow for Planet 19453X and glory. The girl gave him his time and asked him, after he had told her about his voyage, what his forwarding address would be. He started to explain that he was off for beyond beyond and would have gone far when he saw by her fixed, polite smile that she hadn't heard a word he said.

But there was still Murphy. In the morning when he came down to the office he expected his hand to be pumped, a bottle of champagne to be broken across his space helmet and ribbons to be cut. Instead he found a sallow-faced, bored clerk reading a racing form and the clerk had never heard of him. Madman Murphy never came in on Saturdays.

Chuck went into a passionate explanation and the clerk finally consented to look in the files. He did this with such a superior air that Chuck almost murdered him.

The contract was found, the payments were checked, the clerk was finally satisfied—if somewhat surprised, for the

number of such that were finally paid out were quite few—and called a man named Joe to tell him that a Star-Jumper IV was to be placed at the disposal of one Chuck Lambert.

Chuck took his deed, checked the notary's commission, checked the description, checked the location and, in short, wore the clerk's patience entirely out. Finally Chuck took it and went to the registry office, which was closed.

The janitor, however, proved of aid and informed him that he could send it in by registered mail, retaining a photostat. Chuck thanked him and was not further balked, for a lithographer was near at hand and eager for business.

At the port, Chuck landed with his light luggage, left it under cover from the light drizzle which had begun, and went to find Joe. It took six searched hangars and a coffee shop to locate the greaseball and then it seemed that Joe had thought the ship was to be ready for Tuesday. However, much pressing got consent for today.

The next six hours were worse than the past eleven years. Chuck was here, so very near his goal, that seconds stretched out into light-years for him. What constituted his grand gesture was all muddled up and tangled with a number of details like Joe needing another cup of coffee and the starboard magnetrons being worn out on the Star-Jumper and having to be replaced and the hydraulic jack which wouldn't function and after an hour's repair had to be abandoned for another one which had stood right there all the time.

If Chuck had not got out of that port that afternoon he would have died of apoplexy, youth or no youth.

He was almost ready, the ship was finished, the port



clearance secured and Joe given a final cup of coffee, when he found out that the food supplies he had had shipped to the port could not be found.

It was dark, a rainy, wet dark, when he finally rose from the port, entered the acceleration height, put down his throttle and was gone. Chuck Lambert had never tasted such sweetness. The 4G sag was nothing to him. The age and obsolescence of the ship was nothing to him; his empty stomach was entirely forgotten. Here was sweetness. After eleven years he was on his way.

Now, inasmuch as the Sunday feature sections you see do such a fine job of telling how space travel looks and feels and as you may have done some of it yourself and so don't need to be told, a light-year-by-light-year description of Chuck Lambert's voyage to Planet 19453X is not necessary.

He saw the strange phenomena of light changes, size changes, star displacements and elongations and he felt all the bodily discomforts and euphorias and he saw the dark stars and luminous masses and, in short, he gloried in it. He wrote a log which sounded like a piece of poetry done by at least Julius Caesar. Space and the Universe were his onion. He ran out of dimensions like a spilled wineglass.

If he left anything out and if he missed anything, it was because after three or four days of it he had to get a little sleep.

He spent the following month filling his log, checking his course and building up a paper empire which stopped only because most of his supplies were not paper-wrapped and he ran out of writing materials.

Probably few men have ever owned as much conquered Universe and purchased earth as Chuck Lambert in those long weeks of his voyage. But all things must come to an end and all dreams must break. Chuck Lambert landed at last on Planet 19453X.

Now it happened that he had paid very little attention to his ship. The Star-Jumper was old and cranky and full of missing rivets. Her type had been developed for courier service in the first Colonial Revolt and about fifty thousand like her had been sold at a hundred dollars apiece to a man named Fleigal in Brooklyn. Her sole virtue was her near approach to perpetual motion, but of her drawbacks there is not enough paper here to adequately condemn them. Like any military job she had neither grace nor charm, safety nor comfort. And she managed this landing in a way calculated to drive any veteran of the spaceways entirely off his usual imbalance. She would not sit down.

Had Chuck been a more experienced navigator he still would not have understood why. And he was very far from that. When he reached the star, he had to brake to a full stop in the middle of the system and take five hours' worth of painful navigation to make sure the star was the right one. Then he used up two days examining orbits and the planets which ran in them to find 19453X, a thing which any professional would have finished up before he had the star itself within a light-year.

But the hunt-and-poke system at last gave results and Chuck, without observing at least one very strange fact about this area, tried to get down.

19453X had an atmosphere and a great many clouds. It was about seven times the size of Earth. It had no seas but seemed to possess a remarkable number of marshy areas which left the dry land at about one-fifth. It had numerous ranges of mountains and great, stretching plains. Chuck had all this down and noted with some enthusiasm, for it was his world, all his.

And then the Star-Jumper drifted somewhere between ground and sky, no power, no lifts, nothing.

Chuck became aware of this situation after a moment or two. The leaded ports were not such to permit a very good view below. He put a trifle of power to the magnetrons because he was anxious to get there.

He had his kingdom all organized and his palace half built when he touched and his head was full of such a confusion of thoughts that he was not instantly aware of anything wrong.

Then he unbuckled himself from the pilot's seat and started to get up. Two things happened. He hit his head on the overhead and the ship came off the ground.

He was not aware of the second fact until he opened the door to the rear compartment. He thought he must have left a throttle open and hastened back to the seat. His feet got no traction. No throttle was open. The Star-Jumper was going skyward at an amazing rate.

Chuck buckled himself in again and, with patience, put the ship down once more. He stayed there at the controls and watched, just in case. He was in a grottolike valley,

honeycombed, colorful hills before him and beside him. These promptly began to recede once he shut the power off. He was rising!

Chuck was no electronic genius. He had read the books. And they didn't have any answers for this. He assumed a high wind and poured on power. Back went the ship, bump, bump against the ground.

He didn't want to bother about this anymore. He was too anxious to see his planet, stand on it, feel it and taste it. If his ship wouldn't stay landed, then there were ways to do it.

He coaxed the controls until the Star-Jumper skittered over the ground. A big cave opened up in the hill ahead and he resolutely put his ship's bulk into it. It was a tight squeeze and it didn't help the paint, but the Star-Jumper's eccentricity was foiled. Whether it would or no, now, it had to stay down.

Chuck got up. He put on his helmet, took down some extra oxygen cartridges, buckled on his flying belt and was prepared to explore. That he was having difficulty in here getting traction and bumping into things, he did not heed. He was space-dizzy already. He had been knocking around in this interior for so many weeks he couldn't register any difficulty. He didn't.

He opened his air lock, closed it behind him with commendable caution, opened the outer port and started to jump down.

But he didn't jump *down*. He went up and hit the cave roof with a clang, to cling there like a bat upside down and

completely bewildered. He was walking wrong end to and getting traction like a fly and, personally, it didn't feel good.

He stood there, head down, thinking about it. Nothing in the numerous books Isabel had dug out for him had contained any such data as this. Carefully he walked toward the light and came close to the opening. There he slipped and "fell" straight up over the lip and would have kept on going to the absolute zero of space if his flying belt hadn't been in working order. It was. About a thousand feet up, Chuck got it going and, with considerable gratification, power-dived back to his planet and by dint of some adjusting, made a soft landing in a clay bank, straight up.

The clay was very sticky and mired his boots considerably and, belt still going, he managed to clamber out of this strange bog to dry land. He tried here to turn his jets off and, much to his surprise, when he turned them off, he stayed right side up just as he thought he should.

Chuck heaved a very deep sigh of relief in that moment. For a while there he thought he had run into something which was way beyond his engineering depths; with some confidence now he struck out afoot for the first ridge which would let him over and into the broad valley he had spotted coming in.

Spaceports, being insulated the way they are, have a nasty knack of obscuring the view and he did not realize until he reached the crest that he had, indeed, a lovely, lovely planet.

It was green and purple and gold and the docks and rivers shined below him. Trees waved in a gentle wind, grass rippled, brooks laughed. It was charming.



*It was green and purple and gold and the docks and rivers shined  
below him. Trees waved in a gentle wind, grass rippled,  
brooks laughed. It was charming.*

He went down the slope, careful because he didn't seem to be able to restrain a bounding tendency he had never before noticed in his walk, and knelt reverently beside the first brook. It was his, all his.

Incautiously he started to remove his helmet, being all unguarded before this greenery, and promptly began to suffocate. It was not the pressure. As far as pressure went, that was about equal. It was the quality of the air. As soon as he started to breathe it he started to suffocate. He had enough promptitude to clamp his helmet back on and give himself oxygen and only that saved his life.

Was it because the air was poison? But no, he didn't seem to be poisoned, only unsatisfied. He stood there and blinked in the bright daylight at the lovely trees.

He looked at the brook. The water was laughing, but was it laughing at him? He scooped some up in his fingers, half expecting it to turn into vitriol, but it was cool and moist and pleasant. He opened his helmet air lock and inserted a cup of it, and when he got it through and got the swallow down he was instantly sorry. It came right back up.

It wasn't that it tasted bad; that would be a relief. It just wasn't the sort of thing his stomach wanted and his stomach didn't know why.

This made Chuck a trifle bitter.

A pretty brook, lovely clouds, obvious air. He made a hurried recheck of his oxygen supply and decided he had enough for a couple of months if he was careful of it. But what of his lovely kingdom?