

## The Space-Being and the Iron Man

One day there came strange news. Everybody was talking about it. Round eyes, bushy mouths, frightened voices – everybody was talking about it. One of the stars of the night sky had begun to change. This star had always been a very tiny star, of no importance at all. It had shone up there for billions and trillions and sillions of years in the Constellation of Orion, that great shape of the giant hunter that strides across space on autumn and winter nights. In all its time this tiny star had never changed in any way. Now, suddenly, it began to get bigger. Astronomers, peering through their telescopes, noticed it first. They watched it with worried frowns. That tiny star was definitely getting bigger. And not just bigger. But bigger and Bigger and BIGger. Each night it was BIGGER. Bigger than the Dog-star, the large, coloured twinkler at the heel of the Hunter Orion. Bigger than Jupiter, the great blazing planet. Everybody could see it clearly, night after night, as it grew and Grew and GREW. They stared up with frightened faces. Till at last it hung there in the sky over the world, blazing down, the size of the moon, a deep, gloomy red. And now there could be only one explanation. That star was getting bigger because it was getting nearer. And nearer and NEARer and NEARER. It was rushing towards the world. Faster than a bullet. Faster than any rocket. Faster even than a meteorite. And if it hit the world at that speed, why, the whole world would simply be blasted to bits in the twinkling of an eye. It would be like an Express train hitting a bowl of goldfish. No wonder the people stared up with frightened faces. No wonder the astronomers watched it through their telescopes with worried frowns.

But all of a sudden – a strange thing! The star seemed to have stopped. There it hung, a deep and gloomy red, just the size of the moon. It got no smaller. It got no bigger. It wasn't coming any nearer. But it wasn't going away either. Now everybody tried to explain why and how this was. What had happened? What was happening? What was going to happen? And now it was that the next strange thing occurred – the astronomers noticed it first. In the middle of the giant star, a tiny black speck appeared. On the second night this speck was seen to be wriggling, and much bigger. On the third night, you could see it without a telescope. A struggling black speck in the center of that giant, red, gloomy star. On the fifth night, the astronomers saw that it seemed to be either a bat, or a black angel, or a flying lizard – a dreadful silhouette, flying out of the center of that giant star, strait towards the earth. What was coming out of the giant star? Each night, when the astronomers returned to their telescopes to peer up, this black flying horror was bigger. With slow, gigantic wingbeats, with long, slow writhings of its body, it was coming down through space, outlined black against its red star. Within a few more nights, its shape had completely blotted out the red star. The nameless, immense bat-angel was flying down at the earth, like a great black swan. It was definitely coming straight at the earth. It took several days to cover the distance. Then, for one awful night, its wings seemed to be filling most of the sky. The moon peered fearfully from low on the skyline and all the people of earth stayed up, gazing in fear at the huge black movement of wings that filled the night. Next morning it landed – on Australia. Barrump! The shock of its landing rolled round the earth like an earthquake, spilling teacups in London, jolting pictures off walls in California, cracking statues off their pedestals in Russia. The thing had actually landed – and it was a terrific dragon.