



Zoo by Edward D. Hoch

The children were always good during the month of August. This was especially so when it began to get near the twenty-third. For every year on the twenty-third of August, Professor Hugo's Interplanetary Zoo came to the Chicago area. The great silver spaceship would settle down in a huge parking area. It would remain there during its annual six-hour visit.

Long before daybreak large crowds gather. Lines of children and adults, each one clutching his or her dollar, would wait restlessly to see the Professor's Interplanetary Zoo. Everyone was eager to see what race of strange creatures the Professor had brought this year.

In the past they had been treated to three-legged creatures from Venus. Or tall, thin men from Mars. Or snake-like horrors from some even more distant planet.

This year, as the large silver spaceship settled down to Earth in the huge parking area just outside of Chicago, the children watched with awe. They saw the sides of the spaceship slide up to reveal the usual cages made of thick bars. Inside the cages were some wild, small, horse-like animals that moved with quick, uneven motions and kept chattering in a high-pitched tone.

The citizens of earth clustered around as Professor Hugo's crew quickly collected a dollar from everyone in the audience. Soon the good Professor, himself, made an appearance. He was wearing his many-colored cape and top hat.

"Peoples of Earth," he called into his microphone.

The crowd's noise died down and he continued. "Peoples of Earth," he went on, "this year we have a real treat for your dollar. Here are the little-known horse-spider people of Kaan—brought to you across a million miles of space at great expense. Gather around the amazing horse-spider people of Kaan. See them, study them, listen to them. Tell your friends about them, but hurry! My spaceship can remain here for only six hours!



And the crowds slowly filed by, horrified and fascinated by these strange creatures that looked like horses, but ran up the walls of their cages like spiders. "This is certainly worth a dollar," one man remarked. "I'm going home to tell my wife."

All day long it went like that. Finally, ten thousand people had filed by the barred cages which were built into the side of the spaceship. Then, as the six-hour time limit ran out, Professor Hugo once more took the microphone in his hand.

"We must go now," said the Professor, but we will return again next year on this date. And if you enjoyed Professor Hugo's Interplanetary Zoo this year, phone your friends in other cities. Tell them about it. We will land in New York tomorrow. Next

week we go on to London, Paris, Rome, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. Then we must leave for other worlds!

He waved farewell to them. And, as the ship rose from the ground, the Earth peoples agreed that this had been the very best Zoo yet...

Two months and three planets later, the silver spaceship of Professor Hugo settled at last onto the familiar jagged rock of Kaan. The horse-spider creatures filed quickly out of their cages. Professor Hugo was there to say a few parting words to them. Then the horse-spider creatures scurried away in different directions as they began seeking their homes among the rocks.



In one such home, the she-creature was happy to see the return of her mate and little one. She babbled a greeting in the strange Kaan language. Then she hurried to embrace them. "You were gone a long time," she said. "Was it good?"

The he-creature nodded. "Our little one enjoyed it especially," he said. "We visited eight worlds and saw many things."

The little one ran up the wall of the cave. "The place they call Earth was the best. The creatures there wear garments over their skins, and they walk on two legs."

"But isn't it dangerous?" asked the she-creature.

"No," the he-creature answered. "There are bars to protect us from them. We stay right in the ship. Next time you must come with us. It is well worth the nineteen commocs it costs.

The little one nodded. "It was the very best Zoo ever..."

