SPECIAL MOON ISSUE

SPACEWAY

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SCIENCE FICTION

ANDRE NORTON • ROBERT E. HOWARD

MONSTERS OF THE MOON—FESTUS PRAGNELL

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SPACEWAY

SCIENCE FICTION

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HELLO, LUNA!

This is the period when the thoughts of a great many of the world's people will be directed toward that silvery disc which illuminates our night skies. For the first time in the history of mankind man is about to, or already has—depending upon when you read this—set foot on the surface of another world! Momentous, stupendous event! Perhaps the most outstanding single happening in the entire history of the human race!

The fortunate men who make this first moon landing will be immortalized in earth's history. Millions not so fortunate will wait anxiously for the results of this great adventure and for the astronauts' safe return.

Many people feel that our arrival at this stage in human history has been extremely rapid since that October day in 1957 when the first Sputnik was hurled aloft to circle the earth in solitary grandeur and usher in the Space Age. However, having been raised on science fiction, where things have always been done in a matter of moments on individual initiative, this writer has found our progress to be incredibly slow. In 1957-59 it seemed certain that the Soviets would have a man on the moon not later than 1962. In fact, a bit of yellow journalism (why not dishonest?) about that time stated that the Russians had already landed and constructed bases on the far side. This was presented as a fact article, not fiction. Well it is remotely possible that this is one of the things our astronauts will find when they get there—but who wants to bet on it?

What **will** they find? Undoubtedly a jumbled world of soft ashlike soil, spotted with plains (maria), jagged mountains and covered with holes (craters), a world which covers almost as much land area as North and South America combined, so that they are going to be able to explore only a very tiny portion of it. Beyond this we can only speculate. Will they learn that most of the craters have been caused by meteorites striking the surface, or will they determine that they have been caused by volcanic action—or by a third and unknown factor? Will they find traces of atmosphere, perhaps intensified in the craters? More important, will they find traces of life, past or present? Will their findings help us to determine how the moon—and, incidentally, the earth—originated?

Well, if we could answer all of these questions, there really wouldn't be any pressing reason to go there. Not that we wouldn't anyway. As long as a challenge exists, man will eventually answer it! In fact, a recent article suggests that Hilton is already planning moon hotels!

In this issue of SPACEWAY we are reprinting from an English magazine, TALES OF WONDER, a couple of stories about our neighbor

world. They are being presented just as they first appeared, blubs and all, and we believe it will be fascinating to see what portion of them prove true to fact. Because most English astronomers take a more lenient view toward the possibility of life on the moon than do their American counterparts, this is reflected in the science fiction of the two countries. Thus it is possible for the English writer to endow Luna with life without being guilty of the worst sort of pure fantasy.

The two stories presented here offer interesting contrasts. To this writer, it seems that the moon beasts visualized by Festus Pragnell are not beyond the bounds of probability, granted some slight atmosphere and heavier concentrations of air in the moon craters and caverns—which almost certainly exist. There is also, of course, the possibility of miniaturized life of some sort, but it seems highly unlikely that it would be sentient. Several writers have pointed out that cells this small just couldn't sustain advanced life. (So, of course, tomorrow or the next day we will find a race of super-intelligent inch-high creatures!)

In dealing with the possibilty of life-forms on the moon, the question of the Lunar atmosphere, naturally, becomes of primary importance. Does it exist at all and, if so, to what extent? It would seem that our previous landings should have already settled this question, but so far as we know they have not. We have had one positive indication that such an atmosphere (extremely rarified) does exists. Repeated study of the radio waves of the Crab Nebula as they are occulted by the moon has indicated a slight refraction which can best be accounted for by a thin halo of gas. Also some moon observers claim to have spotted thin clouds hanging low over certain craters at times. If this is true, it would mean a considerable thickening of the gas halo in these localities. The bulk of the regular atmosphere probably consists of argon, krypton and xenon, but the gas concentrations over craters, if they exist, would most likely be mainly carbon dioxide. This could certainly support some sort of plant life in these localities, and there are scientists who claim that where plant life exists, so also will animal life. One wonders if this concentration of air in the craters might not be dense enough at times to replace the jet blackness of the heavens with a deep violet and perhaps carry sound? Several pet theories about the moon have already been exploded. It is **not** covered with an extensive dust layer—and there **is** color there—though apparently very subdued.

Let us hope that speculation about the moon will soon be replaced by hard fact. And that, before the end of this century, we will have started to open up a new world for colonization—either in the moon caverns or under artificial domes.

* * *

MONSTERS OF THE MOON

By

FESTUS PRAGNELL

A Young Star-Gazer Pits His Strength Against the Colossal Fauna of the Moon, Where Water is More Precious Than Gold

Under the Spinning Earth

IT was a place of deathly stillness . . . Harry Johnson, young recruit to the great Lunar Observatory, found the strange silence a little frightening. The Earth, now so far distant, had always been full of noise and movement; but the Moon seemed for ever wrapped in a sombre cloak of lifelessness.

Johnson's face was covered by a canvas mask and his hands with light gloves, to protect him from sunburn. Beside him the enormous telescope sloped up like some monstrous cannon to the glass dome of the observatory, towering around him like a gigantic soap bubble.

Like a bubble, too, that fragile structure would have burst had it been on Earth; but here on the Moon, where all things weighed less than a sixth of their Earth weight and there were no winds, it was as firm as the rock on which it was built.

The Sun was rising, and making a very slow job of it. For three days Johnson had watched its upward crawl and the gradual shortening of the inky shadows. It would be another four days yet before it reached its highest point in the sky.

Outside the observatory, those jagged rocks which lay in the shade were unthinkably cold—hundreds of degrees below zero—while those in the sunshine were at furnace heat. The Sun itself was blue and twice as bright as it seemed from Earth, while the sky was jet black and the stars glittered with a brightness that hurt the eyes—all because there was so little air.

Earth was half full, looking sixteen times as big as the Sun, steadily spinning in her fixed place in the sky . . .

A telephone bell interrupted Johnson's thoughts. Glad even of this break in the deadly monotony, he lifted the receiver, placed it to his hooded head.

"Harry Johnson speaking," he announced, "Look-out at Observa-

tory A, in the Gulf of Dew."

"Hello, Johnson," came the reply. "Tycho Crater look-out speaking. I have an urgent message for you. A herd of flying bulls, about ten in number, has been sighted on the plain between us, moving rapidly in your direction. Will you warn the people at the settlement and the mine to watch in case the bulls pass close to them?"

Johnson replied, grimly: "Thanks! I'll warn all stations at once. The bulls are not visible from here yet."

As he promptly passed on the warning to the settlement and the mine, his face wore an anxious look, yet in his eyes was the light of keen curiosity. When first he set foot on Earth's satellite he had heard of the "flying bulls," but up to now he had never actually seen any of them.

Yet he knew that these great lunar monsters, something like the extinct buffalo of Earth, but many times bigger than elephants, were one of the gravest problems the settlers on the Moon had to contend with. Actually, they did not fly, but covered the ground in tremendous leaps, their immense bulk scarcely affected by the slight gravitation.

Ordinarily they lived in the vast lunar craters, where there was air, vegetation and moisture sufficient to sustain them. But like the few other surviving species of lunar life, they were so constituted that they could venture out on the airless plains to seek fresh herbage in other craters.

It was on these mercifully rare occasions that they became a menace to the adventurous souls of Earth who had come to work in the great Moon mines or observatories. For in spite of their reduced weight, the hurtling forms of the massive beasts could smash any flimsy structure that was in their path.

IS Earth's satellite the cold, dead world that it appears to be through the telescope? The fact that it has no atmosphere is no indication that it does not support life, for astronomers now tell us that some air and warmth—even vegetation—still linger in its deep craters. In these, too, may lurk strange animals, grown to tremendous proportions, which would prove formidable enemies to Earth's first settlers on the Moon.

To the Rescue

AFTER entering the warning in his logbook, Johnson went to the eyepiece of the small telescope to see if the approaching herd had yet come into view. The observatory was built high up on the rocks, but he could see for only a comparatively short distance owing to the sharp curvature of the lunar surface.

The landscape was nothing but barren rocks with jagged edges and bottomless ravines. In the Sun they shone dazzlingly, but the shadows were an intense black, softened only by the pale earthlight. As he gazed, it occurred to Johnson that whoever had named this place the Gulf of Dew must have a quaint sense of humour. For, like all the Moon, it consisted of nothing but naked rock; there was no air, no moisture of any sort, except for what lingered at the bottom of the deep craters.

Directly in his line of vision was a small collection of settlers' houses, built of heat-resisting metal to withstand the pitiless glare of the Sun. Away to his right was the mine which supplied

them, not with valuable minerals, but *ice*. But for that mine none of the settlements could have existed, for the immense frozen underground lake it tapped was the only source of water that had been found on the Moon.

On the near-by horizon, sharp and jagged as the edge of a saw, and so close that he felt he could reach out and touch it, Johnson saw something move. Swinging his telescope, he picked out two moving grey lumps, and realised that he had caught his first glimpse of the dreaded flying bulls.

Then something else caught his eye: a tiny flashing light in a dark shadow. As he swung the telescope round again, the pin-point of light flickered on and off, and with a start he remembered that half an hour before he had seen a clumsy, space-suited figure coming from that direction. Now, apparently, the occupant of the suit was in trouble. There could be no other explanation for the flickering light.

Picking up an electric torch, Johnson flashed an answering signal through the glass wall of the observatory, then gasped as the answer came, in Morse.

"Harry," the light spelled out. "It's Mary. Come quick. A big rock has fallen on my leg and I can't move."

Johnson crossed the floor of the observatory in two giant strides. Mary Black, daughter of the Chief Engineer at the mine, was among the few women settlers on the Moon who ventured forth in the open more than was absolutely necessary. She often came to visit him at the observatory during his long vigil, for they were firm friends; and the fact that she was in danger made him forget all else, even his duty to guard the great dome.

With a shudder he had realised when he first caught sight of the flashing light that the signaller, whoever it might be, was in deadly peril. But Mary! Her danger was greater than she knew; greater than the slow advance of numbing cold or the possibility of a torn suit allowing her air supply to escape into the vacuum.

For while he was spelling out her message to himself, Johnson had again caught sight of the flying bulls—and they were bearing straight down on the spot where she lay helpless in the shadow!

A double door—for all doors on the Moon are double, to prevent loss of air—admitted him to a room where a dozen space-suits hung on the wall. With trembling fingers, he hastily fitted a metal helmet over his head, drew on a suit of fur and rubber, tightened the connections and made the air-tanks secure under his arm-pits. Then, after assuring himself that the supply was working properly, he put thick fur gloves over the only part of himself still exposed.

The Moon Bouncer

WHILE going through this tedious process, which could not be rushed, he was thinking rapidly, trying to decide how he could best get to the girl in time to save her. The ground between the observatory and where she lay was a treacherous mass of high precipices and yawning crevasses. To make this journey on foot was out of the question. He might take a roundabout route in a caterpillar-wheeled tractor; but even then he would not get there in time.

There was only one way of covering the distance in anything like the time it would take the flying bulls to get there; and that was to ride a Moon bouncer. This would enable him to progress in a series of leaps and bounds, just as the monsters did.

The bouncer was a curious contrivance of rubber and air used by the settlers mainly for sport. It required a great deal of practice to become adept in its use and it became an extremely dangerous toy on anything but a fairly level stretch of ground. But Johnson had spent nearly all his time off duty in

mastering the art of bouncing; and he was prepared to take risks in a situation like this.

Being so keen on the sport, he always kept his bouncer in one of the buildings near the observatory; and he lost no time in getting there. Out through the four exit doors he went, passing through each one as the others closed behind him. Until, once out in the open, where there was practically no air, his suit billowed out around him, giving him the appearance of a stout, furry animal with a shiny metal globe for a head.

The Moon bouncer rested in its rack in the little out-building, a steel-tipped rubber cylinder ten feet high, which he rolled outside and stood against the wall. Climbing on the roof, he entered the tiny compartment at the top of the bouncer and set the machine going.

Down he sank as the bouncer compressed itself, ready to take its first leap upward. Johnson thought he had never known these things take so long to start; and all the time those hurtling beasts were drawing nearer . . .

The rubber cylinder shut itself up like a concertina until it was scarcely a yard high. Then suddenly the machine slipped its catch, allowing the rubber to spring back to normal, and Johnson's body sank deep into the cushion of air as it bore him aloft.

In the slight gravity and airlessness of the lunar surface these bouncers soared to astonishing heights, bounding along like elongated rubber balls. Johnson found himself high above, looking down on the great glass dome of the observatory. For a moment he hung poised up there; then began the downward plunge, and he steeled himself for the sickening drop.

Human bodies are built for earthly conditions; and even practised bouncermen like Johnson often felt as they looked down from that tremendous height that they could not fall all that way and live. For the beginner it was a frightful ordeal, for one had to lie on one's face in the little compartment and keep both hands on the controls.

He seemed to fall at a terrific speed, yet the rocky landscape came up beneath him with almost painful slowness. Then there was a grinding concussion as the steel bottom of the cylinder struck the rocks, crushing him into the soft rubber on which he lay.

A moment later he was shooting upwards again, and he noticed that the bouncer was developing a slight tilt. Carefully, he moved the controls, bringing the cylinder upright before it could overbalance. For if a bouncer inverted itself in its flight and struck the ground upside down it meant almost certain death for the occupant.

His first bounce had carried him about three hundred yards. His second bore him a little farther; and with each subsequent leap he so managed the controls that he bounced a greater distance, though not so high. Soon he had left the observatory far behind and was travelling over tumbled rocks in the direction of where Mary lay.

Leaping Juggernauts

THE metal base of the bouncer crashed down on the smooth space in front of the ice mine, then up again, down again a quarter of a mile beyond, and still on . . . and on . . . . Not far ahead Johnson could see the grey, hairy forms of the Moon beasts rising and falling as they leaped towards him, travelling like kangaroos, but with bounds as huge as his own.

Somewhere between them was Mary. He could not see her yet; but he kept a watchful eye on the rock in whose shade she was hidden. With each leap, he glanced ahead at the approaching monsters and tried to calculate whether he would reach the girl before those hurtling juggernauts descended upon her. Yes; he could just do it, but there would be no time to stop the bouncer and get out. . . .

Then his whole attention was taken

up in controlling the bouncer. So rough were the rocks beneath him that he could not find a level stretch on which to descend until he had almost struck the ground. Once he bounded off a sharp slope and rose again so awkwardly that it took him three more bounces to regain proper control.

It was then that he saw that his next bounce would carry him beyond where Mary lay. Straining his eyes, he managed to catch the gleam of the earthlight on her metal helmet as she lay in the black shadows. How cold she must be as the icy touch of those frigid rocks crept through her protective suit!

He saw that the flying bulls were close upon her; a dozen great forms herded closely together, slowly bobbing up and down as they bounded towards him. For a moment he was stricken with panic at the sight of that headlong dash of many hundred of tons of flesh. It seemed sheer madness for one puny human being, encased in a rubber cylinder, to oppose such tremendous weight.

The first four beasts bounded harmlessly past the spot where the girl lay helpless; but the rest bore down upon her, and Johnson saw that one would land right on her in its next leap. Bitterly he realised that his vague idea of freeing the girl and dragging her to safety had been impossible from the first. Before he could bring the bouncer to a halt the herd would have passed over both of them.

It was a desperate impulse that led him to guide the bouncer to meet the nearest of the remaining beasts, as it rose in a spring that seemed certain to end in awful death for the girl.

The force of the impact knocked him almost senseless as the bouncer struck the monster in the flank, sending it hurtling sideways to the ground. Though the weight of the machine was nothing to that of the great, shaggy beast, its speed was sufficient to give it a severe jolt and change the course of its downward flight.

But Johnson did not see where it landed. He felt the bouncer slip sideways as it fell after the monster. Then it struck a rough rock awkwardly and rose again in a low somersault.

Hazily he was aware of lying on his back with the bouncer falling upside down. The steel tip pointed to the Earth, hanging in the sky, and for a moment he had the curious feeling that he had bounced off the Moon altogether to fall all those hundreds of thousands of miles to the parent planet . . .

There was no way of knowing how high he was above the tumbled rocks, nor how fast he fell. Expert though he was, it was impossible for him to turn the bouncer the right way up before it struck the ground; he had fallen too far for that.

Above him loomed the huge bulk of the last of the flying bulls as it leaped after its fellows. The shock could not be far off. He tensed himself and held his breath.

There came the thud of rubber on rock, and the bouncer changed its course. It had struck a sharp pinnacle of rock a glancing blow which had torn a huge gash in its side.

A moment later, it hit something squarely, yet not with the annihilating crash Johnson expected. Instead, it seemed to meet something soft; then it slowed up and stopped.

All was dark and silent . . .

The Lake of Ash

AT first he thought he must have fallen into a lake; then he remembered that there was no such thing on the Moon. Soon he realised that, by an amazing stroke of luck, he had come down on one of those huge stretches of volcanic ash that dotted the surface of the Moon.

When Earth's satellite was young, her volcanoes belched forth lava and light ashes like those that buried Pompeii. Without winds to scatter

them, great heaps of these ashes still remained, to be disturbed only when some lunar animal burrowed into them to sleep through the long night.

Johnson remembered that some of these lakes of feathery ash were as dangerous as quicksands. Whether he could get out of this one or not depended on the weight of the ash. If the particles were light and loosely packed he might be able to struggle out of the bouncer and reach solid rock.

He tried the door of the compartment. It would only open a little way; but as he scraped the ash into the bouncer with his hands, he found that it had been rammed tight by the impact. Soon he came to where it was loose, enabling him to open the door wide enough to provide an exit.

Hopefully he began to burrow his way through the ash like a mole, pushing it behind him into the compartment, until at length a pale grey light filtered down to where he floundered about beneath the surface. Then he paused awhile to rest. The space-suit was big and cumbersome, and he was very hot inside it.

He did not stop for long. For despite his own perilous position, he had not forgotten the girl's plight up above. Would he be able to escape this insufferable heat and reach the solid surface before she succumbed to the awful cold?

His renewed struggles were useless, however. For the light above grew dimmer, showing that he was only getting deeper into the ashes. Presently his feet touched something solid; it was evidently the rocky bottom of the lake of ash. He breathed a prayer of thankfulness that at least he could not sink any farther and paused again to recover his breath.

He wondered how much more of this his suit would stand without developing a hole that would let the air out and leave him to suffocate. It was very uncomfortable, he reflected, to be so hot about the head and chest and yet have his feet nearly frostbitten. For the rock beneath seemed as cold as ice, even through his thick, lead-weighted boots.

He thought the deathly silence must be playing him tricks when he seemed to hear someone calling his name. Nevertheless, it stirred him to renewed activity, and he again struggled to free himself from the clinging ashes. But this time he pushed himself forward, following the gentle slope of the bed of rock beneath his feet in the hope that it might lead him to the edge of the lake.

Desperately he struggled, until the light shone brightly above him and at last he realised that his head was above the surface of the ash. Rubbing the dust from the window of his helmet, he looked up and saw the black sky with its glittering stars. A few more steps and he stood at the foot of a towering cliff, while far behind him the great stretch of ash shone in the sun like dusty snow.

Skirting the edge of the lake, he scrambled up the face of a jagged rock and thence to the top of the cliff, which gave him a view of the shadowy regions beyond.

Anxiously, he searched for signs of the helpless girl, praying that she had not only escaped the hurtling monsters, but had managed to withstand the frightful cold. Then he caught sight of her glinting metal helmet, only fifty yards away. The next moment he was taking swift, ten-feet strides towards her.

Her space-suited figure lay with a huge rock across one of its legs. He caught a glimpse of her pale face inside the helmet as he flung himself against the farthest end of the rock.

Then he saw her mouth open in a soundless scream as she raised her arm and pointed in the direction in which his back was turned.

HE swung round, and gasped in astonishment at what he saw. Making its way over the rocks towards them was a tremendous snake-like creature, a brilliant red in colour, sixty feet long and two feet thick!

Instantly he recognised it as one of the fierce Moon snakes which he had seen before, though not at such unpleasantly close quarters. These monstrous serpents preyed upon the flying bulls; no doubt this had been one of a number which had been pursuing the huge beasts, and having got left behind, had turned its attention to easier prey.

Amazingly agile, they could leap over the rocks like coiled springs, writhe along like the serpents of Earth, or crawl like a centipede on the dozens of legs which lined their long bodies. Usually, their attack was unexpected because of the tumbled landscape, which provided them with numberless hiding places, and the eternal silence that gave no warnings.

But, fortunately, the girl had seen the loathsome creature as it crawled over a rocky crag. Johnson gave it one horrified look, then again put his shoulder to the rock and heaved, motioning to Mary to pull her leg clear. But the girl lay quite still, staring at the approaching monster. Extreme cold had numbed her limbs; she was helpless.

Frantically, Johnson pushed and shoved, until at last the huge boulder overbalanced and rolled out of the way. The snake was not far from them now. Mary tried to stand up, but could not. Feebly she tried to push Johnson away, pointing towards the settlement as though telling him to leave her there and save himself.

For a moment he thought of picking her up and carrying her to safety; but the snake was now only a few yards away. It was travelling slowly as though certain of its prey, but in a second, Johnson knew, it would launch itself at them with lightning speed.

Mary was wearing a belt with space-pistol and ammunition, to guard herself against such terrors as these. In his haste to leave the observatory, Johnson had forgotten to arm himself. Touching her helmet with his own, he shouted as he hurriedly tore off the belt:

"Get down that hole—quick!"

He pointed to a crack in the rocks, leading down into blackness, just wide enough to admit her body. Painfully Mary crawled towards it while he turned to face the monster, determined to hold it off until the girl had lowered herself into the crevasse.

Raising the pistol in his gloved hand, he pressed the button even as the reptile hurled itself at him. He felt the recoil, saw the flash, but heard no sound except for a slight puff which reached his ears *via* the bones of his arm.

The monster shivered throughout its length as it sank to the ground, a ragged hole in its side showing where the explosive bullet had struck. As it fell Johnson leaped aside and fired a second shot at the ghastly head, between the beady eyes.

Simultaneously, the three lobster-like pincers on one side of its body moved swiftly towards him; but another leap carried him beyond their reach. Mortally wounded, the monster threshed and writhed, lashing its long tail in all directions, snapping at him with its huge jaws while he leaped from rock to rock to avoid them.

But his main object was to escape those menacing claws which sprouted out behind the head, three on either side. For he knew that a bite from these dreadful pincers was just as poisonous as the serpent's sting. At the same time, he had to avoid being crushed to pulp by its lashing tail.

It was only his puny size compared with the monster's huge bulk that enabled him to evade his formidable enemy as he darted about between the putting rocks, constantly jurmping out of its reach like an elusive grasshopper

on Earth. But he had no time to take aim and fire more shots at the reptile. Until, after several minutes, which seemed an eternity to Johnson, it began to show signs of succumbing to the injuries he had inflicted.

The creature's struggles became weaker, its pincer-claws snapped feebly. Finding temporary refuge behind a massive rock, Johnson levelled his pistol again at the Moon snake's monstrous head.

In the Cavern

TWICE he fired, just as the serpent coiled itself up and sprang at him in a last desperate plunge. The shots went home, blasting the head to nothingness; but as he turned and leaped away he felt something sharp strike his hand, knocking the pistol from his grasp.

One of the flailing pincers had cut through his thick glove into his flesh; and he felt the bite of the deadly poison as he fled from the monster, now writhing wildly in its death throes, and bounded towards the hole in the rocks down which Mary had disappeared.

Even as he slithered into the crack, he pulled the glove from his injured hand and deliberately pressed the wound against the unthinkably cold rock which lay in the shadow. Oddly, he felt nothing, since the nerves were destroyed so rapidly they had not time to transmit pain. Then he was falling freely through the black depths.

Owing to the slowness of his fall, he seemed to drop for hundreds of feet into what was a vast subterranean cavern, of which there were many on the Moon. Just before he landed he saw the gleam of an electric torch beneath him and realised that Mary was safe. As he touched the rocky floor with his feet she came limping up to him.

Touching his helmet with her own, so as to carry the sound, she inquired anxiously: "Are you all right?"

"Yes," he lied, trying to hide his injured hand behind him. "How do you feel now, Mary?"

"Much better, thanks to you. I'd have frozen to death if you hadn't come to my rescue when you did—or been swallowed alive by that frightful snake. But there *is* something the matter with you. You look as though you were going to faint—and what's wrong with your arm?"

"I got bitten," he admitted. "I had to cauterise it. It didn't hurt at first, but it's beginning to now—a little."

He swayed and slumped to the floor. Mary bent over him, a horrified expression on her face as she saw the injured hand. Johnson smiled weakly.

"Do you think you could find your way out of here and bring help? I'm afraid I can't make it myself."

"I think so," said the girl. "But I don't like leaving you here. You're badly hurt——"

"Oh, I'll be all right till you get back. It won't take you long once you've found a way out of here."

Though inwardly he was wondering if they would meet again as Mary, with a doubtful look, turned her back on him and limped off into the darkness. He watched her wavering, flickering light as she picked her way along the floor of the cavern, searching for an exit within her reach. He had no doubt that she would find one, for the Moon was full of enormous caves such as this, from which many holes and cracks led to the surface.

Then the glimmer of the torch was swallowed up in the blackness. All was dark and silent as the grave once more. . . .

Patiently, Johnson waited; how long he could not tell, nor did he care. For although he did not realise it, some of the poison from the snake's bite had found its way into his system in spite of his prompt, courageous treatment, and was affecting his brain, breaking down his resistance.

He wondered how long it would be before he froze to death, lying there on

the hard stone floor of the cave. Though as he felt about him with his gloved hand he encountered small patches of soft moss, something like the plant which grew in the craters, supporting the monsters which took refuge in them. That meant that it could not be very cold in here and that there must be a little air.

He was more comfortable now. A numbness crept over him, making him insensible to the pain of his injured hand. Perhaps that meant he had not long to live. What did it matter? Better to die now than be rescued, half revived, and then die slowly and painfully. Or recover, only to become a one-armed wreck.

Better to die now . . .

Putting his left hand round the back of his neck—for his right was useless—he took hold of the tap which would let his air supply out into the near-void. It was only when he tried to turn it that he realised how weak he must be. He had to exert every ounce of his remaining strength to move it.

Exhausted, he let his arm fall back, then prepared to await the end. Through the crack in the roof of the cave whence he had come, he could see a star—one blue, glittering star. That was all he could see, all he would ever see again.

One bright blue star . . .

The Discovery

JOHNSON awoke to find a nurse bending over him. Hazily, he realised that he was lying in bed in the little hospital near the observatory. All pain—all numbness—had left his body; he felt fresh and alert, as though new life had been instilled in it by some powerful stimulant.

"You reacted wonderfully to the new energising treatment," said the nurse. "We're quite up-to-date here, you know. You'll be up and about again in a couple of days."

"But—but I turned my air-tap off. How——?"

The nurse smiled.

"You thought you did; but because you used your left hand you turned it on farther instead of cutting off the supply."

Puzzled still, Johnson scratched his chin, on which was several days' growth of beard. The look and feel of his arm seemed somehow unfamiliar to him.

"That's a very nice artificial limb," said the nurse. "You'll be able to do anything with that arm when you get used to it."

She left the room, and Johnson sat up in bed to gaze out of the window in the direction of the observatory. He could distinctly see the great telescope glinting in the sunlight, but of the shiny glass dome there was no sign.

He stared for a moment, bewildered, then suddenly the explanation dawned on him. The flying bulls! They must have charged up the mountainside past the settlement and smashed their way through the expensive dome while he, who was entrusted with the task of guarding it, was struggling in the lake of ash over a mile away!

Ruefully he gazed towards the observatory, visualising the shattered fragments which must lie around it; unless by now they had been cleared away by his fellow assistants. Apparently none of them, working in the surrounding buildings, had been aware of the onrushing monsters, or an attempt would have been made to divert their path of destruction.

He should have been there to warn them. Not that they themselves would have been in danger, for their quarters were strongly built against such emergencies. He had warned the settlement and the mine as a matter of routine; but he never imagined the hurtling beasts would ever pass that way.

Despondently Johnson faced the thought that this meant the end of his career on the Moon. He would have to return to Earth now and start afresh, for the astronomical body which employed him would not accept any excuse

for his deserting his post and causing a loss of thousands of pounds.

The following day, Mary came to visit him, looking none the worse for her adventure. Excitedly she explained how she had found a way out of the cavern and run right into a search party which, led by her father, had gone out to look for them once their absence was discovered.

Johnson winced at this, then blurted out:

"I—I wish you hadn't rescued *me*. Why didn't you leave me in the cavern to die? It would have been far better——"

Mary stood aghast, amazed at his outburst. "What are you saying?" she demanded.

"I love you, Mary," he went on, miserably. "I was going to ask you to marry me, but I can't expect you to marry a poor man."

"What do you mean—a poor man?"

"Why, they are sure to discharge me for leaving the observatory to get smashed. You couldn't have a husband without a job, could you?"

"But, Harry," she exclaimed breathlessly. "Haven't they told you? It may cost two thousand pounds to replace the dome, but the lake of ice you discovered is worth twice that much!"

"Lake of ice——?" he stammered, mystified.

"Yes! You see, when Dad picked up the glove you tore off your injured hand there was ice on it. You must have come in contact with moisture under that ash where your bouncer landed; or, rather, the warmth of your body melted some of the ice.

"Anyway, Dad fetched the shovelling machines, and there under the ash, only a few feet down, was a huge lake of ice stretching for at least a mile below the surface. It's what all the Moon companies have been searching for since they first came here and there's a big reward for anyone who makes such an important discovery.

"Why, Harry," she cried, as the cloud lifted from Johnson's face, "you're rich!"

THE SOLAR RELIC

James D. O'Dell

Where pock-marked soil of grayish-white peers into a sky
Of endless points of fiery flame too cold to warm ice by,
There exists a starling world of contrast, white and black,
That has been the ceaseless aim of men, for many ages back.

It holds within its frozen dens, a mystery aeons old,
A secret vast within its past that many sages told.
It knows, as many an unthinking breed, things the thinking yearn.
But like a germinating seed, it will not heed or learn.

A frozen ball of rock and dust, it heeds the touch of man;
A thousand deeds of misconceive are within its knowledge span.
For ages told, it has been so, and for ages so will be,
A world dead, on velvet bed, of black infinity.

In ages come, the men of earth will come to know it well,
To understand its frozen night and burning day as hell.
But never will they understand the reason it is so,
The burning fire, the funeral pyre of many years ago.

For way back then these startling men destroyed their place of wealth,
And cannot now remember how it was in greatest health.
But it knows, as many an unthinking breed, things the thinking yearn.
But like a germinating seed, it will not heed or learn.

On Earth's Satellite They Found A New-Born Race Of Tiny Creatures—Mankind In Miniature!

LUNAR LILLIPUT

By

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

Author of *The Kosso, Mr. Craddock's Life-Line*, etc.

CHAPTER I

THE PIONEER

IN a room over a public-house in the West End of London there used to meet a queer group of people styling themselves the Interplanetary Society. Queer, that is, to outsiders. . . . For these people—m a i n l y enthusiastic young men, though with a sprinkling of thoughtful and learned elders—would sit and discuss over their beer and chips, ways and means of reaching the Moon.

They were no idle dreamers. They believed in themselves and their object, and went ahead with their research ignoring the gibes directed at them. They believed the rocket was the ideal vehicle for space travel, experimented with small rockets that fizzed and buzzed, incontinently exploded or did nothing at all, and certainly nothing that was expected of them.

This was because the Interplanetarians could not hit upon the right fuel. Then, in 1939, Mr. Janns, their research chemist, discovered a fuel that was a gift from the gods.

It was a liquid, the most powerful explosive in the world, yet as stable and easy to handle as milk. A gill of it contained enough power to speed ten one-thousand-ton space-ships off the face of the Earth at seven miles a second, leaving enough in reserve to blow up the Houses of Parliament. Using this fuel, the Society built a rocket exactly nine-and-a-half feet long and fired it—unmanned, of course—at the Moon.

Three nights after the firing of the rocket, an observer at one of the telescopes at Greenwich Observatory saw a little flash of light between the horns of the crescent Moon. A flash . . . and then a steady white flame—the automatic signal flare on the rocket. Very faint, tiny and remote it was, and it burnt only for a few seconds, a ritual fire in honour of man's conquest of the outer void. Then it went out. But it was enough. The way was clear. . . .

The experiment did not attract the

serious attention it deserved. The public is notoriously unimaginative, and at the time it was absorbed in the festivities of Christmas. But the novelty of it caught the fancy of a multi-millionaire, bored with this world's pleasures.

It was a new game to play. He offered to pay for the building of the Interplanetary Society's first man-carrying rocket-ship. It cost him just eight-hundred-thousand pounds. He said that was the last one he would pay for, wished the Interplanetarians luck, and went back to racing.

The Interplanetarians called their ship *The Pioneer* and asked for three volunteers to navigate it. Every soul in the Society volunteered. Finally, the three chosen were Captain Cassel, the best all-round authority on astronautics; Clemence Cassel, his wife, because she argued so strongly that her sex be represented, and because they knew that she could not bear to be separated from the Captain; and one blithering idiot who always pretended to know far more about it than he did—myself.

The very rich and very bored gentleman who had provided the money for *The Pioneer* had also allowed us the run of his vast estate on the west coast of Ireland. Here was laid a wide concrete runway, half-a-mile long, pointing straight at the sea.

Now, imagine if you can a huge torpedo-shaped body on four wheels, spaced like those of a roller-skate, four great wheels of tempered steel in streamlined sheaths. Then two expansive wings, shooting out from the body like an air-liner's; the fins of a tail-plane at the rear; and, sticking out from between them at various angles, the blunt nozzles of rocket exhausts. At the sharp bullet-nose, four more exhausts pointing the opposite way, for retarding the speed, and above them the strong quartz windows of the control-cabin.

There you have an outline picture of *The Pioneer* as it stood at the landward end of the concrete runway on that miserable November morning when it was due to start on its tremendous voyage.

In England, as in other countries, young scientists with vision are working to solve the problems of rocket-flight, paving the way for man's conquest of space, and ignoring the ridicule with which they are assailed. Already a rocket trip to the Moon is a practical possibility, which could be turned into reality if only the money were forthcoming to enable this first step towards interplanetary travel to be made. In this delightful story our author, himself a member of the British Interplanetary Society, anticipates such an event, and in vivid imagination pictures the surprises that may be in store for the pioneers who make the perilous voyage.

It was chilly and dull. The sky was just a grey blanket of rain-cloud. The morning mists were thinning, but were still dense enough to veil the far end of the runway on which we stood. We sheltered under the towering nose of *The Pioneer* from the impalpable drizzle that was drifting down.

In contrast to the weather were the flushed, eager faces of the Interplanetarians as they chattered excitedly around us like a lot of magpies, on tiptoe with nervous tension.

"Don't forget to bring back that bit of lunar rock," cried Chapman, the enthusiastic geologist.

"Did you want peppermint or pineapple?" smiled the Captain.

"Ask the Man in the Moon what he's grinning about," called someone, while

another solemnly warned Clemence against flirting with the Selenites.

"Don't be silly," she replied. "How can we sit and gaze at the Moon when we're on it?"

THE START

AS we joked and chaffed I was trembling inside like a jelly from stark fear. My mouth was dry, and I had to keep clearing my throat. I hoped my cowardice didn't show . . .

The Captain took out his watch. "'"The time has come," the Walrus said . . .'" he quoted gently.

Something within me jumped convulsively. "Well, thumbs up, you fellows," I said, with a fine air of good-humoured ease, while a thousand anticipations of disaster rushed madly about in my mind.

"Thumbs up!" came the cry, as the Interplanetarians jerked their thumbs skyward in a simultaneous expression of good luck. Then they rushed forward to help us up the ladder.

Believe me, I was glad of that help. One by one, Clemence first, then the Captain and I, we went up the short ladder, crawled along the broad sloping wing and wriggled our way into the interior of *The Pioneer*. Safely inside, we waved our last farewells, and a frantic cheering came back in response.

Captain Cassel shut the air-tight door, and abruptly the babel outside was cut off. Dead silence. . . . We would not hear any exterior sounds for a long time now, if ever again.

There were three extremely well-sprung chairs facing the front observation window, below which was the control-board with its switches, levers and dials, looking like the dashboard of a motor-car. It was, indeed, just like sitting in a big, luxurious car.

The Captain took the centre seat and grasped the steering-wheel which controlled the front wheels of *The Pioneer*. Clemence took the farther seat, and I the one near the door. We sat there deep in our thoughts, staring at the rain-blurred window-pane, waiting until the Interplanetarians had retreated to a safe distance.

I glanced at the Captain. His bronzed face was inscrutable, but I noticed how fiercely he was gripping the steering-wheel. I looked past him at his wife, whose face was visible to me in profile.

How can I describe the beauty of Clemence? She was the loveliest woman I ever saw. Pale golden hair, eyes of clear blue, a warm, sympathetic mouth . . . these descriptive terms are totally inadequate. Her beauty was ethereal; and yet she had a roguish sense of humour that bubbled up at the most unexpected times.

I watched her now as she sat gazing out of the window. Her face was rather pale, her mouth firmly set. It was plain that she was defying the apprehension she felt. But in those steady eyes there was, wonderfully, a glint of her unconquerable humour. I knew she was inwardly smiling at her keyed-up state.

By heaven, I told myself, there's a woman for you! I must confess I had loved her for years; but I always backed hastily away from such thoughts whenever they crossed my mind, for the Captain was my dearest friend.

"Lord, I *am* scared!" I said, voicing the only other thought in my head.

"So am I!" exclaimed both the others simultaneously.

We all laughed, and felt relieved. There is nothing like admitting to a fear to ease it.

"Well, here we go to glory, one way or the other," smiled the Captain, and quite casually turned the starting switches.

A moment's breathless suspense followed, while the fuel filtered from the main tank along the thin pipes to the

firing-chamber of every rocket at the rear.

Then came a fierce jerk. The springs of my chair squeaked protestingly. The landscape seemed to quiver, then went sliding backwards at an ever-increasing speed until it became a streaming blur. All I could see distinctly was the white ribbon of the runway flying swiftly under our wheels as we sped along it faster than any express train.

The mist ahead receded as fast as we approached it. Then suddenly it thinned, and I glimpsed the end of the runway and the oily sea beyond. An awful vision crossed my mind of *The Pioneer* shooting over the cliff and falling with an almighty splash into the sea. . . .

But suddenly the ribbon narrowed and fell away beneath us. We had taken the air, and were hurtling rapidly up towards the grey pall of heaven. A clammy mistiness swirled outside the window for a moment, and then we came through into the sunlight, soaring high over the clouds.

I caught a split-second's glimpse of a black dot—an aeroplane—floating over that snow-white expanse. I wondered vaguely what the pilot must have thought of the huge rocket which had erupted so suddenly from placid cloudland.

But the clouds were now but a distant, white haze below us, and I turned my gaze to the empty blue sky above. The Captain gently turned the switch which sent more fuel into the rockets, and as we accelerated the sky deepened into a darker blue, became violet-purple, while faint stars appeared and gleamed more brightly as their setting grew blacker and blacker.

Soon the sky was of a blackness more intense than soot, and dusted with myriads of stars—a vast concourse impossible to perceive from the depths of the sea of atmosphere which covers the Earth.

We were in outer space!

"WE'VE done it," I said, rather obviously.

"Yes," agreed the Captain tersely, and glanced at the instrument-board. "H'm. . . . Two-and-a-half miles a second. Now let's try a spot of real acceleration. Hold tight!"

The injunction was unnecessary. As we accelerated I was pressed back in my seat by an invisible, but immensely strong hand. The chair became a block of granite, and every bone in my body seemed to be grinding against it as I fought to breathe. My chin was forced back relentlessly until I was staring helplessly at the roof.

This painful state of affairs continued unmercifully for some minutes. Then, just as my neck was on the point of breaking, the strain eased. I stared dazedly around. Clemence and the Captain were feeling their necks gingerly.

"Are there any other exercises you would like us to perform?" Clemence asked of her husband. "A hand-spring or two, or perhaps a neat knee-bend?"

"The fuel is even more powerful than I thought," the Captain said ruefully. "We must use it more gently."

After that our acceleration was so gradual that we did not notice it. And when we had steered the ship on a fair course for the Moon and set the controls, we found time to look around. One by one, we slid back the steel shutters over the port-holes in the walls of *The Pioneer* and peered out into space.

The red dot of Mars fascinated us most. We examined it through the three-inch refracting telescope, and argued over the canals. For even through airless space they did not appear clearly, chiefly because the glass of the port-hole limited our power of magnification.

"One day, perhaps, we shall go there and see for ourselves," said the Captain. "This trip to the Moon is only

the first step—the first, uncertain step of a child learning to walk. I dream of the time when man will roam, free and unfettered, far beyond this cramped solar system into other realms, incredibly remote. Where distance means nothing and Time alone is omnipotent. Where——"

"Where pigs fly, and Jabberwocks whiffle, and retired Captains don't act all dramatic," went on the incorrigible Clemence. But I could see that inwardly she was as enthusiastic as her husband.

Idly, I slid back a port-hole cover on the opposite side of the cabin, and overawed by what I saw, called my companions. For there was the Earth, our parent Earth, a weirdly beautiful sight.

It was a globe of colour. The dazzling opalescence that was the Atlantic Ocean bordered one side of a misty patchwork of quiet pastel hues, in which olive-green struck the predominant note. Spattered across it were dreamy wisps and islands of cloud. There were no sharp outlines; the colours merged into each other almost imperceptibly, dulling into grey where they approached a dark strip on the eastern side, the widening black crescent that was the coming of night.

The whole effect was oddly unreal. It resembled nothing so much as a delicate, illuminated Chinese lantern hanging against a midnight sky. It was all so different from what I'd expected. I had imagined clearly defined coastlines and acute detail, like the globe map standing on its pedestal in my study.

My study! Where was it on that great sphere? Why, the immense sea of streets and buildings that was London was but an indeterminate, microscopic point somewhere on the slope of that huge, coloured ball. Not only London, but every place I could think of, every place I had longed to visit and thought too far away—New York, Hollywood, Bagdad, Bombay, Shanghai, Cape Town, Sydney—towns,

rivers and mountains, even mighty Everest, lay there before me, included in one all-embracing glance.

"To think," said Clemence softly, "that crawling all over that globe, like . . . like microbes, is the whole of the human race—except us! Going about their business, their silly little stocks and shares and wars and parades, so sure of their importance."

She laid her hands wide apart on the thick glass, as if she would clasp the globe hanging out there against the firmament.

"And I can encompass all mankind with my two hands!"

Silently I slid the cover back. "Gives me the willies to look at it," I said. "It makes me realise what an amazingly risky thing we've done to leave those familiar, safe places and step blindly out into the darkness where none have been before."

The Captain slipped open another window-cover, revealing the crescent

Moon, looking small and distant as it does at its zenith on Earth.

"Forget all that," he said, "and keep your thoughts instead on our goal."

CHAPTER II

THE LANDING ON THE MOON

LIFE continued pleasantly enough in *The Pioneer*.

The time came when we approached the neutral field of gravitation between the Earth and Moon, and we lost all weight and floated about like bits of gossamer. This event, of course, had been anticipated, and provision made for it in the form of an electrically magnetised floor and the adjunctive steel-soled boots. But we enjoyed floating about.

Clemence draped herself in a long white sheet and drifted about the cabin, moaning like a disembodied spirit, while the Captain struggled frantically in mid-air trying to fasten up one of his steel-soled boots.

We watched his antics with amusement. He kept trying to brace his foot against something so that he could pull his laces tight, but whatever he set foot on, he almost immediately drifted away from it. He grew more and more breathless and impatient, squirming himself into strangely contorted and very inelegant attitudes.

He noticed us regarding him, and glared at us upside down between his feet. "Wha' you—staring at?" he demanded.

"A tipsy Peter Pan, I think," said I.

"The rudeness of some people!" he remarked bitterly, and grabbed hold of the floor-magnetising switch. The strong current immediately began to draw us steadily down, feet first.

Clemence, a fighter to the last, clutched a wall bracket and hung on grimly. Just below her on the wall was a row of metal discs of various sizes, each with a handle in the centre and a thick rim of tough rubber. Unwisely, she changed her grip to these things. They immediately came loose, and she drifted floorwards clutching a disc in each hand, for all the world like a cymbal-player in a Salvation Army band.

"What are they—saucepan lids?" she asked.

"It's my own invention," answered the Captain. "I've kept it up my sleeve, for the other silly blighters in the Society would have laughed it out of existence."

"Like they tried to do to my wheels," I rejoined warmly, remembering the merriment first evoked by my suggestion that *The Pioneer* should have wheels.

"Oh, blow your wheels," said the Captain unkindly. "I'll bet we come an awful cropper when we try to use them. Now, *this* idea will work. If we should encounter a small meteor——"

I saw the idea at that, and burst into loud, derogatory laughter.

"You should have known better," I said scornfully. "Why, if even the very tiniest meteor hit us now, the friction heat generated would melt the whole ship in a flash!"

Providence must have been watching us very closely at that moment. "I don't——" began the Captain, when—

Zip! A brilliant streak of light shot between us. For a second we stood there, rather startled. The line of light seemed to hang and glow, then faded as a wave of hot air struck me in the face. There came the faint hiss of escaping air. . . .

The Captain picked up two of the smaller discs, located the tiny holes, and pressed the discs over them. The rubber rims adapted themselves to the curve of the walls and clung there like suckers.

"You see? That meteor, about the size of a grain of sand, passed straight through the ship. Of course, the pressure of the air in here is holding those discs there. They're only tem-

porary patches, but effective enough until we can get the holes welded up. Any questions?"

He smiled at me mockingly. Clemence laughed at the expression on my face.

I tried to carry off the situation with aplomb. I smiled back condescendingly, even with faint approval, as though I thought it quite a good idea, although it *could* have been a little better. Then I strolled with studied carelessness to the control window, racking my brains furiously for an excuse to change the subject.

I found it, so unexpectedly that it gave me a shock. For the whole sky outside the window was full of Moon.

A great, glaring, yellow-white expanse it was, wrinkled and seamed with mountain ranges, and blotted with ring craters half filled with shadows. For a moment it appeared to me that the whole mass was rushing towards us like an immense projectile. . . .

Then suddenly I grasped the fact that it was *we* who were moving so rapidly. *The Pioneer* was falling headlong on to the Moon!

IN THE CRATER

MY cry brought the Captain hurrying to the window.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, and flung himself at the controls. The Moon was suddenly half obscured by boiling gases shooting out from our retarding rockets under the window. The powerful braking effect produced hurled me forwards against the glass and kept me pressed there. I heard an awful clatter behind me as Clemence came to grief amongst the rest of the "saucepan lids," which had been jerked loose.

The Captain manipulated the rocket switches expertly. I sensed that we were sweeping in a wide curve; then the deceleration eased and we were able to crawl into our seats.

The retarding rockets had stopped, and I saw that we were now speeding horizontally over the Moon's surface, perhaps twenty miles above it. The Captain was shutting off our rear rockets one by one, and our speed lessened as the gravitation of the Moon gained effect.

We dropped in a sloping dive towards the *Mare Serenitatis,* which seemed to offer that flat, unbroken area we needed for a landing-place. But as we skimmed over its surface we were dismayed to find it an uneven succession of rolling ridges on which it would be madness to attempt a landing.

At length, on the far side of the old sea bottom, we swooped over the mountains of a small crater, and as the encircled floor came into view we saw that it was as flat as any place we were likely to find on the Moon's scarred surface. Far ahead, towards the other wall of the crater, I imagined I caught a glimpse of a patch of green on the landscape. But before I could make certain of this, the Captain said:

"Now to test your wheels, old man!"

Instantly I was eager to see how my derided invention would work out. All this time, with amazing skill, the Captain had been balancing the impetus of the rockets against the downward pull of gravitation, aided by small supporting rockets under *The Pioneer's* body and the delicate exactness of the controls. By further dexterous manipulation he brought our height down to a few hundred feet, then to a matter of mere feet.

We were on a perfectly even keel. By peering down sideways under our left wing, I could just see one of the wheels hanging motionless a yard above the rushing ground. Slowly it bridged the gap, and touched, and was instantly sent spinning so rapidly that I feared for the bearings.

The finely tempered springs took the shock easily. We bounced, bounded a hundred yards, touched again and

jumped again, like a giant frog. The retarding rockets spat fury; our leaps grew less, and eventually we slowed up, came to a halt. . . .

So ended the first space flight.

I remember sitting there dazed, trying to grasp the immense importance of what we had done. I tried to think of some grave and noble words to say, something that children would read in their history-books centuries after. Immortal words like "England expects. . . ." But all I was conscious of was that I'd bitten my tongue in the jolting and bouncing, and so couldn't pronounce any memorable words if I had thought of them.

Clemence said them for me:

"Thumbs up!"

We made the familiar gesture in unison.

We had come to rest a mile or more from the foot-hills of the nearest mountain wall of the crater. On the horizon, clear and sharp against the sable sky, lay the distant saw-teeth of the mountains on the other side of the crater. In between stretched only the rocky floor, veined and drifted, as by a gentle wind, with volcanic dust black as iron filings.

The drift of this dust impelled me to make an immediate test for atmosphere. I discovered that, after all, the Moon *had* an atmosphere, but consisting only of nitrogen, very pure and very attenuated.

"We can't expect to find any life, then," commented the Captain. "No one can live on nitrogen alone."

"Not sentient life," I agreed. "But there may be some sort of plant life." And I told them about the green patch I thought I glimpsed before we landed.

"Pickering's vegetation!" they exclaimed almost together.*

* Professor Pickering, the American astronomer, claimed that he observed the growth of vegetation in certain craters of the Moon, notably Aristillus and Linné.

"WE must investigate that," said the Captain. "Whither away?"

I pointed to the far side of the crater. The Captain grasped the steering-wheel again.

"Hold tight! I'll try to coast her over."

He switched on a couple of the rear rockets at low power. *The Pioneer* immediately began to roll smoothly forward, her magnificently sprung wheels carrying us without a bump. It was like riding in a huge motor-bus. Faster and faster we went.

"Ah, this is what I've been praying for," muttered the Captain crouching over the wheel like a speed demon. "A straight run, no pedestrians, no traffic-lights and no police cars."

I sat back in my comfortable chair with real contentment. All my life I had been reaching for the Moon. I thought of all those summer nights I had laid back in my deck-chair gazing longingly up at its remote plains and craters, dreaming of the day when I might set foot on them. And the winter nights, too, walking the wet and windy streets while the pale, high globe peered fitfully and mockingly down at me between the hurrying rain-clouds.

Now at last I was there! Could life hold more?

Then, across the Captain's bent shoulders, I saw again that lovely profile of Clemence, and straightway forgot all thoughts of the Moon. She was gazing ahead at the lunar landscape, slightly flushed with eagerness and excitement, with her fair hair still dishevelled from the confusion of our landing. A careless flaxen lock hung over her eyes; she pushed it back abstractedly, but it kept falling.

I became as rapt as she was. I fell into a dream world far more remote than the one I had gained. There was a cottage with a sloping flower-garden that looked out over the sea. And there

was Clemence . . . Clemence smiling over the sunlit breakfast-table and pouring my tea, Clemence walking with me in the mellow evening dusk, Clemence . . .

Oh, what vain imaginings! This was reaching for the Moon indeed. With aching realisation I had reluctantly to accept the fact that to Clemence I was never more than a friend—a dear friend, I hoped. She and the Captain lived in their own private and happy world, needing only each other. I was a welcome visitor, but not a dweller therein.

With an effort I lifted myself out of a mood which was degenerating into mere self-pity, and regained something of my former satisfaction at having achieved a life-long ambition. Inarticulately, I tried to communicate this to the others.

"All our reaching for the Moon——" I began, and paused confusedly, struggling for other words. But Clemence smiled across at me with such sweet, understanding sympathy that I knew it was unnecessary to express myself further.

"Vegetation, ho!" bawled the Captain just then.

There, some miles ahead, could be seen a horizontal green line, which broadened visibly as we sped towards it.

"A cabbage patch?" breathed Clemence, peering intently. Then the view was blotted out by whirling clouds of gas, vomiting silently from our retarding rockets. The Captain was putting the brake on.

We sat there for some moments staring at the impenetrable veil and wondering how close we were getting. Presently the Captain switched off, the gaseous veil vanished, and we saw that we were still travelling at a fair pace towards a great stretch of green plants, the edge of which was barely a hundred yards off.

We were heading for a collection of what seemed to be white stones about a yard high. I scanned them rapidly. They were buildings—miniature buildings; and in the streets between them tiny human figures swarmed!

"Stop!" I cried hoarsely. "We're heading for a city!"

CHAPTER III

THE CITY OF THE SELENITES

THE Captain had realised this at the same moment. He hauled feverishly at the steering-wheel, striving to avoid the Lilliputian town on the border of the green patch.

But it was too late. *The Pioneer* crunched in a wide curve over the city like a pitiless juggernaut. The buildings were ground into white powder, while the luckless inhabitants, darting this way and that under our terrible metal wheels, were squashed like beetles or smothered by flying debris.

Frantically we had been doing all we could to bring our ship to a standstill, and finally she jerked to a reluctant halt. The carnage was at an end.

White and shaken, we surveyed the damage we had unintentionally wrought. Our path through the miniature city was marked by a swath of tumbled wreckage and dead and dying Selenites—little creatures scarcely more than two inches in height. A crowd of them was retreating rapidly towards the forest of green plants that began on the outskirts of the city, while a few remained behind to rescue the injured.

They were so human-looking; it was an amazing sight. From our viewpoint at the window of *The Pioneer* it was like gazing down at some earthly town from a low-flying aeroplane.

But there was something strange about the general appearance of the town. Then I saw that it was a queer mixture of architectural styles. Flanking some buildings that might have been lifted out of Regent Street was a domed Indian temple, minarets and all,

while farther down was a row of glass and chromium erections, then a turreted castle; and away to the right I glimpsed a fine replica of the Kremlin. And the highest of these buildings was no more than seven feet tall.

Little white vehicles which I instantly recognised as motor ambulances came slowly twisting their way through the ruins, and from under our very wheels the drivers picked up the wounded. I saw a manikin dressed like an Arab stop to shake his tiny fist up at us.

I cleared my throat. "Who could have guessed it?" I muttered huskily.

"I feel like a murderer," said Clemence miserably.

The Captain tried to console her. "We cannot be blamed. We didn't dream there were any living creatures on the Moon. What makes it seem so bad to us is that they are of human shape. If they happened to resemble, say, spiders or lizards we should not be nearly so upset at running over them. Anyway, who's to say that their minds aren't totally lacking in human emotion?"

I thought of the little man's demonstration of anger and of the ambulance attendants risking their lives to save the injured, but kept silent and looked out upon the city once more. I noticed that at every road junction and open space there stood one or more of those peculiar green plants which, as they stood almost as high as some of the buildings, at first sight appeared to be trees. But they were like no trees on Earth, for they had no leaves—only a few pendant green balls like unripe oranges. These little balls seemed to be expanding very, very gradually, and when they reached a certain size they burst, scattering a shower of seeds in all directions.

"How do these Selenites breathe?" pondered the Captain wonderingly. "Surely they don't breathe nitrogen?"

He took a test of the atmosphere. "It's *air!*" he exclaimed presently. "Now where the devil does the oxygen come from?"

Neither Clemence nor I was in the mood for puzzles, but the Captain, with the enthusiasm of the scientist, was already getting into his space-suit.

"We must go out and investigate," he decided.

THE OXYGEN PLANTS

CLEMENCE and I donned our space-suits less hurriedly. These suits resembled diving-suits: there was the same globular head-piece, cylinder of compressed air, and leaden weights on the feet to help the wearer to walk normally under the influence of the weaker gravitation. We were connected together by some yards of telephone wire, and so attired we passed through a small air-lock out on to the Moon.

We stepped gingerly about the half-ruined city, from which the inhabitants had completely vanished, taking their dead and injured with them.

I stooped and peered into one of the houses. It was like looking into a very small doll's house. Each room was furnished with exquisite craftsmanship, down to the minutest detail. There was even a meal laid on one of the tables, which had evidently been hastily abandoned.

A tiny, far-away voice whispered in my ear.

"Look, Bill. A set of Chippendale."

It was Clemence's voice, sounding faintly over the telephone wire. She was gazing in through the open window of a house timbered in Tudor style.

"I can't understand it," I confessed. "This amazing resemblance to terrestrial things. . . . It's beyond coincidence."

As we explored further, my amazement grew. There seemed no object here that did not have its replica somewhere on Earth. I looked back at all

the buildings we had wrecked, and my remorse returned.

The Captain's voice broke into my thoughts.

"I've been examining these plants; they explain the air mystery. What little soil there is here is very chalky, as one would expect an old sea-bottom to be. The plants absorb carbon dioxide from the chalk, and with the aid of their chlorophyll the energy of the intense sunlight is used to separate the carbon from the oxygen. But they do not immediately exhale the oxygen: they use it as an aid to propagation. As they produce it so they store it in little round seed-pods, which expand like toy balloons under the increasing pressure from within, until finally they burst and scatter the seeds just as we have seen them do."

He waved his arm towards the great field of plants that spread beyond the city to the cliff-like wall of the crater, and along it in either direction for as far as the eye could see.

"There must be thousands of these pods bursting every hour to release enough oxygen to keep up the content. The air is far too thin for us to breathe, of course, but it must be just about in the right proportion for *them*."

"Speaking of *them*, where are they?" I said.

"Hiding out among the plants, no doubt."

I looked over the field of plants, growing almost visibly in the bright sunlight, and noticed for the first time a road cutting across them, a wide road that started at the city boundary and went straight as an arrow for the crater wall. What was at the end of it? Another city nestling under the wall?

We were all three curious to know, so we began a trek to satisfy our curiosity.

To the Selenites it must have been an enormously wide road. To us it was but a path that we had to negotiate in single file, or else tread over the plants. We would not do the latter for fear of treading on concealed Selenites, and Clemence especially took great care in setting down her lead-soled shoes even on the road. This anxiety was typical of her; she hated hurting any living creature.

THE DOOR IN THE CLIFF

IN a clearing among the plants on the right-hand side of the roadway we came across an astounding thing.

It was the biggest building job the Selenites had attempted, and in isolating it like this from the city they evidently meant to make some sort of monument of it. It was a miniature skyscraper, already twenty feet high, but only half finished. The bare girders at the top supported two toy cranes, but there were no workmen upon them.

There was not a soul in sight. The tiny black oblongs of the upper windows looked at us like blind, empty eye-sockets; the lower ones had been glazed. and glittered in the sun. We saw at once what this structure was going to be, and I think we all softly whistled our amazement together. For it was, in the making, *an exact replica of the Empire State Building!*

On we trudged along the road, making no comment, but each trying to grasp the significance of this. Was it a deliberate copy of the famous New York building? How, then, could the Selenites know of such terrestrial achievements? Or were the ideas which we Earthlings believed our own shared by the two races—common inspiration?

I extended this fascinating theory. I thought of the whole cosmos, with its myriads of probably inhabited worlds, and all these various races sharing the same common collection of ideas, thinking the same things, doing the same things, and each imagining itself unique.

My mind played with this day-dream for several Lilliputian leagues; actually, we walked about half a terrestrial mile. Then the Captain

stopped so suddenly that I bumped into him. He pointed silently ahead, while Clemence, standing behind, tried hard to see around me, almost overbalancing in her eagerness.

We had reached the foot of a great cliff that went sheerly up for a thousand feet, then carried peaks which we could not see upward for many more thousands of feet, up towards the dark sky and the splendour of the stars. I, who had felt a big, clumsy Gulliver ever since we left *The Pioneer,* now felt Lilliputian in my turn.

What the Captain was pointing out was a deep doorway, about man-size, cut squarely in the face of the cliff. The slanting rays of the Sun reached into it for a short distance like a glaring limelight, but beyond the sharp edge of that illumination lay the darkest gloom, and the Selenite road disappeared into a tunnel of black mystery.

I looked up at the slate-grey face of the cliff, and detected on it large, rectangular patches that seemed to be of a different and smoother texture than the rough rock, though of the same dull hue. And at that moment a voice that was neither the Captain's nor Clemence's, but a tired, faded, very gentle voice, spoke in my receiver.

"Welcome, friends! Please come through the doorway, and have no fear."

It was the English language, but it was not an English voice. The Moon had an apparently inexhaustible stock of surprises for us, and custom had not yet staled her infinite variety, for once again I could only stare blankly and speechlessly at the others. From their expressions I gathered that they also had heard the voice in their receivers.

"Well?" croaked the Captain, at last.

Clemence indicated the doorway, then cocked her thumbs up and nodded vigorously. I made signals of assent, too. So the Captain led the way in.

As we passed out of the intense sunlight into the intense darkness, green and red patches swam in the void before me; but this was only my overworked retinæ playing tricks. We shuffled slowly along in the stygian gloom until presently a thin, vertical line of light appeared in front of us and to the right. It widened rapidly, revealing its cause to be a metal door that was sliding open and showing beyond a brightly lit room.

A powerful draught came blowing along the passage. It was like being in the slip-stream of a giant air-liner. We battled our way against it, and finally got into the room almost breathless from exertion. The metal door slid back behind us, and the pitch-black hole of the tunnel vanished as though it had never existed.

We were in; but it might not prove so easy to get out. . . .

CHAPTER IV

THE LAST OF THE LUNARIANS

THE place we were in was a fair-sized chemical laboratory. The ceiling lifted to a high dome, illuminated with concealed lights, and a long glass-topped bench, covered with the paraphernalia of the chemist, ran down the centre of the room. All around the walls were shelves of bottles and retorts, except the farther wall, which was one big window looking out on to a scene so dimly lit that we could not make out what it was.

All this was the impression we received at first glance; then our attention was immediately absorbed by the lone creature sitting by a control panel, facing us.

"My goodness!" breathed Clemence. "What is it?"

I find it hard to describe this creature without seeming absurd and fantastic. We have a tendency to laugh at anything which goes strikingly against our notion of the fitness of things; and the appearance of this creature (if he resembled anything at all) was like that

of the fabulous griffin . . . a sort of humanised griffin.

There was the same eagle head, with the sharp, downward-curved beak. Yet, when you saw them more closely, the eyes did not have that piercing look of the eagle, but a soft and kind regard, and the eyes themselves seemed very weary. Drab feathers covered the throat and upper chest, but merged into grey fur lower down. The arms and legs were like those of an ape, but far more delicate, and the fingers were long and supple. All the queer being wore in the way of clothing was a thin metal belt with cloth pouches.

The Creature spoke, and I fancy there must have been a microphone and some sort of broadcasting apparatus behind that panel, for his words came clearly over our wires.

"I suppose your sense of humour must be aroused by my strange appearance; but you will become familiar with that, as you have with the kangaroo and giraffe. That habit of mind which you humans call your sense of humour has always baffled me. . . . But you can trust me when I say it is safe for you to take off your helmets. There is breathable air here."

We did, and there was.

"There is a bench behind you," came the voice. "Sit down."

There was, and we did.

"And now, sir," said Clemence, suddenly taking over the reins in her eager fashion, "tell us the story of your life."

"I expect," replied the Creature, "that this impetuosity is another part of human nature which I cannot reconcile with my conception of reason. But, nevertheless, I realise that your curiosity must be appeased before we discuss matters which arise from your conquest of space. . . ."

Straightway he began an account of the history of himself and of his race. We sat there entranced for hours as we listened. Our bench became hard and uncomfortable; we abandoned it and squatted on the floor at the feet of the Creature like disciples of an ancient philosopher.

Didactically, but interestingly, he unfolded to us a tale so unearthly that while I sat there lapping it up, knowing from what we had seen and experienced that it could hardly be other than true, one detached part of my mind kept doubting the reality of all this—not only of this creature and this room, but the whole business of our trip to the Moon, the Selenites' city and the green plants, that unforgettable view of the Earth from space, *The Pioneer* and the Interplanetarians.

"Gosh!" that obstinate, incredulous part of my mind kept repeating. "This is *Alice in Wonderland* gone crazy!"

A STORY OF AGES

IN this narrative I can give only a brief and concise account of the wondrous story which we heard.

The Creature, whose name, phonetically, was Larn, was the last of a race of similar beings, called Gend, which inhabited the Moon in the unbelievably distant past, although only yesterday in the vastness of astronomical time. But in his day the race was already beginning to dwindle, for the Moon was growing old; the atmosphere was thinning, and the seas had almost completely dried up.

For a time the botanists of the Gend had tried to stave off the atmosphere peril by cultivating the oxygen-producing plants. But, through lack of moisture, the soil began to get as hard as rock or crumble into dust, and those plants we had seen were among the few patchy but hardy survivors. Presently the atmosphere became so thin that the dying population could no longer remain out in it unprotected. They had either to build air-tight cities on the surface or bore them out underground.

But the Selenites were not great builders, whereas they had a ray which was ideal for boring. It had the effect of annihilating all matter on which it

was directed, with controllable intensity. Actually, it crowded the atoms of matter so closely together that the material within the orbit of the beam shrank to an incredibly minute size. Again, the Gend were creatures of the Sun, and did not relish living in the depths of the ground. So some genius conceived the idea of using the ray to hollow out mountains and making dwelling-places therein.

Then a period of intense engineering activity took place. The Gend chose some of the craters which were complete rings of mountains, and hollowed out the interiors of these mountains all the way round the circle. They let expansive windows into the slopes and cliffs of the mountains; these were the rectangular patches I had seen from outside, now silted over with volcanic dust and in many places obliterated by land-slides. So they evolved great circular cities, planned, like modern blocks of flats on Earth, to cover a lot of ground compactly and yet admit the maximum amount of sunlight.

They inhabited these cities for many hundreds of years, but still the population lessened, and the survivors began to abandon their half-empty cities and congregate in this one at the edge of the dried-up bed of the Sea of Serenity. Time dragged on, and in a thousand years the population of this last lunar city had dropped to a sterile handful, despite all the attempts of the biologists to stop the decline.

It seemed that the end of the race was inevitable. But they decided on one more great effort. If they could only reach the Earth, that green and virgin planet, conditions there might give them a new lease of life. And so they built a space-ship, much on the lines of *The Pioneer*, but big enough to take the whole seventy Gend that remained.

"They wanted me to go," said Larn, "but I was deep in a biological experiment, and too fascinated to leave it unsolved, whatever the cost. I had been working a long time on the problem of prolonging life, especially the life of our race. But they had little faith in me and were impatient to go, so they left regretfully, promising to return later to fetch me.

"I well remember the ship rushing over the plain within the city and rising into the sky. Your choosing that plain on which to land was not wholly coincidence; it is one of the very few flat stretches on the Moon. . . . I watched the progress of the ship across space through the large telescope here in the city—I will show it to you presently—until, suddenly, it disappeared. One moment it was there, and then there was a great flash of light and it vanished instantly, utterly; all there was in the field of the telescope were the remote, unblinking stars.

"Just a flash in space—and I was the last of the Gend! A great meteor must have struck the ship. I felt appallingly lonely. I buried myself desperately in my work—and found what I had been seeking, *the elixir of life!* The irony of it!" added Larn, bitterly.

EXPERIMENTS IN LIFE

THE last of the Gend went on to explain to us how he had treated himself in a manner that would prolong his life for—as far as he knew—ever. "Though sometimes now I seem to feel the burden of the centuries," he interpolated, as though doubting his immortality.

After this, he set himself to develop the experiment further and actually create life so as to re-populate the empty cities and provide the companionship he craved. But he suffered an interminable series of disappointments, and an era had passed before he got the cells of life to flourish at all.

Then all the creatures which he tried to evolve into beings like the

Gend invariably died at a certain stage in their development. He spent an eternity trying to find the reason for this, but the problem remained obstinately insoluble, and eventually he abandoned these attempts to resurrect his own species and tried to develop other forms of life. Every attempt failed. . . .

"I almost went mad at that," said Larn. "I wandered about this dead city like a lost soul and cried to the desolation of it, 'Am I to remain alone like this for ever?' Then I came to the telescope and gazed through it at the Earth. Why, that world was teeming with life! The most intelligent species was *homo sapiens*. I decided to start new experiments along these lines, and finally I evolved that race of pigmy creatures you have seen. They would not grow larger because of a deficiency in their pituitary glands."

Apparently this was not the only deficiency: the creatures seemed to be devoid of reasoning power. They lived only by imitation. Larn's attempts to educate them were fruitless. They could not conceive themselves repeating any action of his, because he and they were so dissimilar in appearance. They remained dull and listless.

But when Larn built a special attachment to the huge telescope which enabled them to see the Earth and its inhabitants, they woke up amazingly. They saw creatures which appeared to be reflections of themselves busily doing things, and at once their imitative instincts were aroused. They took charge of the telescope and promptly commenced to copy all mankind's deeds. They watched the Earth constantly, and their memory and grasp of detail were unfaltering.

"This laboratory became a busy confusion," Larn went on. "It became impossible for me to continue my work. I had discovered that nitrogen was filtering slowly up from the depths of fissures in the Moon, and that outside in the crater the surviving plants were still giving off enough oxygen to make quite a passable supply of air. So, realising that these midgets would never develop much power of creative thinking, I turned them out into the crater. There they flourished and built their imitation city—a muddle of buildings they had seen at various times on the Earth.

"But they still have access to the telescope. I arranged that, because I must admit I still have some affection for the little creatures. That road you came along branches off in the dark tunnel and runs down to a cavern beneath this laboratory where they live through the cold lunar nights. . . . Now I will show you the telescope."

He made as if to rise, but Clemence broke in hastily:

"Just a minute, please. How is it that you know our language so well?"

Larn quietly turned a switch on the control-panel beside him, and instantly a familiar voice filled the room.

". . . *at times. Further outlook, unsettled. Here is the First News, copyright by Reuter, Exchange Telegraph and Central News* . . ."

We laughed. The answer was obvious. A mind like Larn's would have no difficulty in analysing the meanings of the languages he heard on the radio. He had a wonderful set there. In rapid succession he tuned in Rome, Moscow, Berlin, Cracow, Pittsburg, and others.

"I can speak all these languages," he said, "and they are all primitive, clumsy attempts at definition. But . . ."

He tuned in a French station, and the melody of a small string orchestra stole into the laboratory. It was a sad, bitter-sweet air—the Minuet from Debussy's *Petite Suite*.

"There is the true voice of man," said Larn. "There he expresses every nuance of his thought and emotion. Your music has greatness!"

He switched off the radio, rose on his curious, furry legs and walked slowly and hesitantly, like a feeble old man,

across the laboratory. Amid the maze of shelving was a small door, and he opened this and stood on the threshold of another room.

"Come," he said. "I would show you some of the greatness of my own race."

CHAPTER V

THE DESERTED CITY

WE arose stiffly and followed him. The room in which we found ourselves was like the interior of an observatory. Down from the roof loomed the thick barrel of a telescope. It was like some great gun poking into the room, and the upper part of it was lost in shadow.

Yet, as Larn explained, the part we saw in this observatory was but a small portion of the eye-piece alone! The main body of the telescope went reaching up for thousands of feet before even the pivot was passed, and somewhere up in the peak of the mountain above were situated the immense lenses. A thin tube ran from the eye-piece to a glass case on the floor. I peered into this case, and was startled to see one of the Lilliputians, a tiny figure in a white smock, run down a miniature spiral staircase and disappear under the floor.

"Their observer," said Larn. "The air in that case is maintained at the low pressure suitable for them."

He detached the thin tube, leaving the eye-piece free. At his invitation, I applied my eye to the lens; and there, seen at a sloping, sideways angle, but clear and sharply etched in the noon sun, was the Empire State Building rising out of the busy streets of New York! So this was what the Lilliputian had been observing! Larn did mysterious things to levers and wheels, and New York rapidly shrank and became just an island off a long coastline. The island slid suddenly to one side; and the telescope swept eastward across the grey-green waves of the Atlantic. It halted at the west coast of Ireland; then the landscape rushed up at me so quickly that I involuntarily jerked my head back. When I looked again, there was a long white band running across some green fields in the light of a rosy sunset. It was the concrete runway from which *The Pioneer* had taken off.

"I have for long watched your activities with interest," murmured Larn, and slid the field of the telescope rapidly across Ireland and the sea to southern England.

He focused some large open space in South London. It was Blackheath in twilight, and across it crawled, like glow-worms, the tiny, fore-shortened buses with their lights already on. We swooped down upon one of them like an eagle and followed it along the road. I could read the advertisements on it and see through the windows a sedate row of passengers sitting there, all unconscious of the eye that watched them across a quarter of a million miles of space.

The telescope left the bus and took to the grass by the wayside. Then Larn showed me the really amazing quality of the instrument. He focused one errant blade of grass so clearly that I could perceive traces of an early frost upon it. A blade of grass in the dusk two hundred and fifty thousand miles away!

"In the building of this telescope," Larn explained, "we used a new light-gathering system, on the refractive principle, with a transparent material far more effective than glass. Of course, at the height at which the lenses are, the absence of atmosphere allows of an almost unlimited degree of magnification."

Now he swung the view over the trees of Greenwich Park and picked out the main dome of the Observatory.

"I happen to know that some of your London Interplanetarians are there already, gazing up at this satellite

shining in their eastern sky. They think they are looking at a world devoid of cities or life, and both are here before their eyes. But the cities are camouflaged and the life is too small for their poor instrument to distinguish."

Clemence and the Captain had their turn at seeing these things, and then Larn directed the telescope to other worlds. In time I shall be writing a separate treatise on some of the astronomical marvels we saw, so they must now be left. But the mystery of the Martian canals was solved for us, and the far-flung suns of this galaxy became as neighbours, revealing secrets to that all-seeing eye which my pen is incapable of describing.

Sufficient to say that there are other inhabited worlds than this, and strange is the life upon them. But from what we saw it was evident that there is a power which moves the Universe, and beside it all life is a weak, meaningless thing. . . .

THE RAILWAY

AFTERWARDS, Larn let us into the city of his lost people. He would not come himself, saying he had other work to get on with. Perhaps this was so, but I imagine there was another reason—that the melancholy journey would affect him too much emotionally. He was an extremely sensitive being.

"You will find a railway," he said, "which is about the only mechanism still able to work. There is enough power in the City Accumulator left to drive it."

He gave us further particulars, then we donned our helmets and passed from the observatory through an air-lock—for the city was airless—and down a flight of metallic steps to the city floor.

The view had been dimly discernible from the window of Larn's laboratory. Imagine the largest cathedral interior you ever saw, with the beams of a setting Sun striking through the stained-glass windows across the nave like bars of old gold, and multiply that scene a hundred-fold. Only in this case the windows were so dust-grimed as to be barely translucent, so that the sun-rays which did penetrate them were of a dull amber, and in places almost invisible.

There you have an idea of the first general effect that we gathered. The farther wall of this vast interior was too remote to see in the feeble light. Up the sloping wall that leaned out over us the windows mounted one above the other, and became converging lines of brown squares, steadily diminishing as they went up, to meet and vanish at an indefinite point near the invisible roof.

To left and right along the gallery stretched an immensely long row of these sloping, foggy beams, becoming small in the distance and disappearing round the gradual curve of the crater. And in all that lengthy perspective not a thing stirred. The silence and stillness of the tomb reigned over all. It was a place of solemn mystery. . . .

The light from Larn's window streamed out above us, a solitary white torch-light in the golden-brown gloom, and picked out the shine of metal rails on the floor. We walked forward and found the railway. There was a train of open trucks on the lines, and in the foremost was a lever like the "Dead Man's Handle."

"It's a Tube as ever was," said Clemence over the telephone.

We entered the foremost truck, and the Captain started it up by depressing the handle. So began a tour which I shall never forget, although in this narrative I have not space to describe in detail the ancient city of the Gend. That, too, must be the subject of a special treatise.

At first, as we rolled along at steady speed, we exclaimed aloud at the things we saw, and discussed them vigorously. But as the miles reeled on, our conver-

sation died into contemplative silence. The brooding atmosphere seeped into our inner thoughts.

There were the houses of the Gend, endless rows of them. They were simply screens of walls, high enough for privacy; few of them had roofs, because the Gend had not wished to block out any of the precious daylight. There were areas that had been parks, and tall monuments worked with a queer technique of art dotted the ways.

I sat there taking in all this and trying to visualise the city as it was when it was inhabited. But it was hard to imagine this desolate place teeming with life, or that the griffin-like creatures had ever occupied those seats in the string of trucks that rolled smoothly along behind us.

Some of the windows in the mountain-side had been cracked and starred by meteorites, and one was completely smashed in. At some time a great mass of rock had crashed down, ploughed across the city's floor, and driven many travelling machines into a deep crater. Thank heavens it had missed the line! I should not have wished to walk back from that spot, for it was on the far side of the mountain ring.

The Captain stopped the train at this window and we peered out through the jagged aperture. This was the inner rim of the circle of mountains, and the flat plain of the crater floor stretched away like the asphalt surface of a giant school playground. Only an expanse of bare grey rock; no green plants here.

DEATH TAKES AN IMMORTAL

ON the verge of the horizon we could just make out a line of cliffs and peaks. That was where we had left Larn in his hidden observatory, diametrically opposite to us.

"Phew! Haven't we come a distance!" muttered the Captain.

We leaned on the rail of the truck and gazed at the scene in silence. Over all, like a pall, hung the nearly black sky. The Earth was behind us, and invisible; the Sun was a fiery ball, and the hard, sharp points of the stars glittered like millions of bits of quartz.

What I had seen in those stellar depths through the giant telescope stirred in my memory, and suddenly an intense realisation of the magnitude of the cosmos swept over me. A wave of strange emotion that stranded me, a lonely mite, on a solitary spur of rock, from which all space and time fell away in bottomless gulfs in every direction. Our voyage in *The Pioneer* had been just a hop between two specks of dust! Man on his planet was a newly-born, blind kitten, crawling along the edge of the infinite with its billion mysteries unexplored, unguessed at. . . .

The Captain's rapt, solemn face told me that he, too, was moved by some similar profound feeling, and for once even Clemence was not able to be facetious.

Presently we continued on our way, and in time a white light appeared

ahead under the leaning columns of faded sun-beams, telling us that we had almost completed the circuit of the crater. As we came up to it, Clemence remarked that the long, lighted window overhanging the railway line reminded her of a signal-box at night.

I had a ludicrous vision of Larn in a railwayman's peaked cap, and this seemed to bring into my head all the railway jokes I had ever heard. The others were in a lighter mood, too, and as we climbed the steps and stood waiting in the air-lock for the automatic pumps to fill the place with air, we exchanged sallies and witticisms, laughing explosively.

I think this was because of the relief we felt at leaving that great mausoleum behind us. When the air was of sufficient density for us to remove our helmets, we opened the door of the lock and passed into the observatory, still laughing.

Then we stopped short. For on the floor beneath the eye-piece of the telescope lay Larn, on his back, his beak-mouth agape and eyes staring emptily. Quickly the Captain knelt and examined him.

"The poor fellow's dead," he said, almost immediately; and Clemence, who a moment before had been almost choking with merriment, suddenly melted into tears.

CHAPTER VI

THE LILLIPUTIANS' REVENGE

WE came down the dark passage with a gale tearing behind us, for we knew not how to shut the sliding door of the laboratory from outside, and the air in the room was rushing out.

Somewhere in the darkness we found the Lilliputian road, and followed it out into the light. There was the spreading field of green plants, silently waving in the wind that burst from the tunnel's mouth with us.

The lunar day was drawing to a close. The opposite crater wall was just a black shadow, hardly discernible from the jet sky. The Sun was sinking towards it, and in that tenuous atmosphere the solar prominences were clearly visible, radiating from the great disc like red-tinged fronds.

We went along the road, past the half-completed replica of the Empire State Building, our minds still dazed with the thought of Larn's death. That a being who had lived for millions of years, and apparently expected to live for many more, should suddenly collapse and die during our brief visit, seemed more than a mere coincidence. Or was it only coincidence after all?

After the shock of the discovery had passed, we had carried Larn's body into the laboratory and laid it on the couch beneath the window. What could we do further? It was impossible to think of burying him in that rocky place.

"This laboratory will have to be his crypt," the Captain had said, as we took our last look at him lying there with the light (which we found no way of extinguishing), shining on him and reaching out above him through the window, out into the shadowy city of his people. Then we had left.

We plodded on. . . .

The Captain's voice sounded suddenly in my telephone receiver.

"Did you notice that Lilliputian observer in the glass case as we came in from the city?"

"No."

"There was one. He was staring at Larn's body on the floor. He bolted underground when we entered. I wonder whether he has gone to the town to tell the others?"

I looked up and down the long, narrow road. The higher spires of the Lilliputian town were just visible ahead over the multitudinous, closely packed spore-cases, which were continually

bursting here and there like miniature bombs. A dazzle of reflected sunlight near the town showed where *The Pioneer* stood.

"No sign of him, though," I said.

"They had cars, you know," interpolated Clemence. "He may have driven to the town already."

"Possibly. I wonder if they will think we had anything to do with Larn's death . . . ?"

"And I wonder, too, if we really had," said the Captain, slowly. "The effect of that elixir was fading, I'm sure. The fellow was dead tired—worn out; you could see that. I think the excitement of encountering real, *responsive* life at last, after an unbelievable age of solitude, was a bit too much for his old heart. He concealed his feelings pretty well while we were there, but I observed signs that all the time he was emotionally upset—all on edge. And the shock——"

On that very word we received a shock ourselves.

Absorbed in our discussion, we had reached the border of the plain of plants, where a stretch of bare ground separated us from *The Pioneer* standing on the outskirts of the town. At least, it *had* been a stretch of bare ground. Now it was covered by an army of Lilliputians.

Yes; a real army! Dense phalanxes of troops were drawn up in orderly array behind a line of field-guns, rows of little pink faces all turned towards us, rows of sharp little rifle-bayonets directed towards us. The guns looked like scale models of howitzers to our eyes, but they completely dwarfed the tiny gunners who stood at the ready beside them; and the muzzles were elevated at a high angle to cover us.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the Captain, in a whisper. "They've pinched the British Army uniform!"

I had been thinking that they looked somehow very familiar, and the Captain had hit upon the reason. They had meticulously copied the uniforms of the British Army—of all possible armies!—and were neatly clad in khaki. An officer with a Sam Browne belt, carrying a cane—or what passed for one—stepped forward between the guns and stood looking boldly up at us.

It would have been laughable if it were not for those pitiful ruins in the town at the back of them, where *The Pioneer* stood immobile, a giant shell on wheels, like some mechanical beast crouching over its prey.

CLEMENCE APOLOGISES

FOR a moment longer we stood staring at each other, we three Gullivers and the toy army that challengingly barred the way to our rocket-ship.

"Can't we outflank them?" I suggested. "Get round them to the ship?"

"No, I think they would fire if we attempted to escape that way," said the Captain. "We must try to talk to them. Some of them may possibly have heard Larn's radio often enough to know a little English. For all we know, they may even have radio themselves. It's worth trying, anyway."

He had in a pocket of his space-suit a spare telephone-receiver with an amplifier that made of it a powerful loud-speaker, small though it was. This instrument had been constructed by a thoughtful Interplanetarian against the chance that we might want to speak to possible outsiders while unable to remove our suits. Now that foresight was justified.

The Captain joined the instrument up with the wires that connected us, and held it out towards the Lilliputians as if about to speak. Whereupon, Clemence calmly took it from him.

"*I'm* going to do the announcing, Cap.," she told him. "You're sure to lose your temper and start shouting at them; and Bill here is about as eloquent as a deaf and dumb oyster. What they need is soothing down, then a little peaceful persuasion. Leave it

to me. I'll talk to them like a mother."

The Captain demurred for a moment, and muttered something I couldn't catch about "apron strings," but let Clemence have her way. Holding the receiver out, she stepped forward a pace.

There came a stir in the ranks of the midget army; but the officer raised his tiny arm, and instantly the agitation subsided. Then Clemence began to speak in her serene, sweet voice, which sounded in our receivers, faintly but very distinctly.

"Dear people, I find it very hard to express our sorrow for the harm we have done you. We are shocked and dismayed to think of that awful accident; our feelings cannot be put into words. But we do wish you to understand that it *was* only an accident. There was nothing we wished less than to harm you. We have only the kindliest intentions——"

The little officer's arm dropped. Whether or not it was meant as a signal I cannot say for sure; but instantly the line of artillery fired a salvo. We could not hear it, but we saw all the little guns jerk back on their wheels in recoil and long clouds of smoke, like flour dust, roll out towards us.

"The little fools!" I cursed, thinking they had missed us. "Come on, Cap., let's——"

But the Captain did not hear me, for Clemence had swayed and fallen back limply into his arms.

"My God! They've hit her!" I heard his agonised cry, and in an instant reaction of rage, grief and panic, lest the Lilliputians fire and harm Clemence again, I blundered heavily forward and charged the line.

I must have been a frightening sight to those tiny creatures. They broke ranks straightway and fled before me like startled mice. I careered after them as they streamed towards the ruins of the town. Then that confounded telephone wire pulled me up like a tethered dog and I could only stand and swear like mad at them, and in blind rage kick their pieces of artillery after them with my leaden-soled boots.

In the midst of this senseless outburst of fury I thought of Clemence, and hurried back to assist her.

One of those miniature shells, about the size of a small pistol bullet, had caught her on the left shoulder. Fortunately, the steel buckle of the strap which fastened her air cylinder had taken the direct force of the impact, but the missile had exploded, and a fragment of it had penetrated the material of the space-suit and entered her body just above the heart.

The Captain was supporting her, with one hand over the rent in her suit to stop the air from escaping. She was pale and unconscious.

"Help me with her," said the Captain, hoarsely.

We lifted her and carried her gently towards *The Pioneer*. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the scattered midget army swarming about the city, confusedly hesitating between fleeing farther and staying to watch.

To get the unconscious Clemence into the air-lock of the ship and through it to the cabin was a task of constant anxiety and fearful impatience. But at last we got her into her bunk under the curving wall, took off her helmet and cut away her suit. As we were binding her wound, she began to murmur. Her long eyelashes fluttered, and presently she half-opened her eyes and regarded us, at first dully, then questioningly, then finally with recollection and faint amusement.

"Don't try to talk, dear," said the Captain softly.

"You're right, Cap.," she whispered. "I shouldn't. That last little speech was an awful flop . . . wasn't it? Got the bird . . . properly. You said . . . I'd talk myself . . . to death one day, Cap. Looks as though . . . you may be right."

"Nonsense, Clem, you'll be all

right," said the Captain, almost fiercely, and for the first time since the shooting I noticed his face. It was as pale as his wife's, and set in rigid lines. His eyes were burning with the terrible conflict of emotions that seized and tortured him. Utter despair fought with tentative hope, and tenderness with bitter rage.

THE DEPARTURE

I SAW that he was stricken to the heart; and it was starkly apparent to me that my love for Clemence, though it consumed me, was flaccid and insensitive beside the Captain's passionate worship. Instantly, those silly dream castles of mine collapsed like the unsubstantial things they were, and I knew they would never be rebuilt. If Clemence lived, all I craved was the continued warmth of her friendship.

If Clemence lived! My throat went dry with fear at the thought that I might lose her for ever. I touched her hand timorously, and she smiled wanly up at me and closed her eyes.

"I think she will sleep now," the Captain whispered tensely. Then he arose, walked over to the rear port-hole and looked grimly out.

I followed him. The fortnight-long lunar day was steadily, though imperceptibly, closing. The enormously elongated shadow of the opposite crater wall was creeping towards us, a sluggish tide of darkness.

But still the Lilliputians were out and about. Between the jutting tubes of our rear rocket exhausts I saw them reforming their ranks among the ruins, righting their overturned guns, and apparently preparing for an offensive.

The Captain's mouth tightened at this. For the first time in my life I saw him in a cold rage, silent and white with anger; and I was in sympathy with him. The callous shooting of Clemence had aroused in me an intense hatred for the Lilliputians that I had not known was in my nature.

The tiny gunners were busying themselves again. Suddenly one of the guns ejected a wisp of smoke and—crash! the glass window starred before our eyes. Air immediately began to seep out. The Captain slammed the air-tight shutter over the port-hole.

"They've asked for it," he said grimly. "We've got to get Clem back to Earth, Bill, and we're going to start right now. Notice our rear tubes are pointing right at that refuse-heap and its crawling inhabitants? When we start, the exhaust gases will wipe them out like a spray of insecticide. That'll be poetic justice, if you like!"

It shows what a mental state I was in, for I agreed fervently. We took our seats at the control panel. Then the Captain, with a face as merciless as a condemning judge's, reached for the switch that would release the scorching, rushing gas to shrivel that tiny army behind us.

And at the crucial moment came the voice of Clemence, sharp and clear.

"Stop it, you idiots!"

We spun round in our seats. Clemence had raised herself on an elbow and her drawn face regarded us anxiously. We rushed over to her. The Captain tried to get her to lay back; but she was obdurate.

"I've got to get another speech off my chest first," she said, and I was relieved to note the firmness of her voice. "You two are behaving like a pair of silly boys. Going to take a grand revenge, eh? You'd exterminate all those little mites just because they knocked me stupid for a few minutes?"

She paused for breath, then continued in gentler tones.

"We are to blame—not them. They are only a reflection of ourselves. Their action was an imitation of war as they have seen it on Earth. We destroyed their city, and naturally they take it as an act of war and try to wipe us out in return. Perhaps they think

we killed Larn, too. Humanity has been showing these little creatures too many bad examples, especially in the misuse of force. We should give them something better to imitate. . . ."

The Captain sealed her lips with a kiss, smoothed her hair tenderly, and pressed her gently back on to the pillow.

"We shall," he murmured, and she looked trustingly at him. I felt embarrassed and ashamed, and fiddled about with my globular helmet. The Captain straightened up.

"Put it on," he said to me. "We're going out."

Presently we stepped out on to the Moon again. A fusillade of tiny shells greeted us. We heeded them not, but went to the back of *The Pioneer* and set our shoulders to the wheel—or, rather, to the covers of the wheels. Straining and pushing, we got the great vehicle moving slowly—dreadfully slowly, despite the fact that the lesser gravitation had lifted five-sixths of its weight from it.

Previously the Captain had set the front wheels by wrenching the steering-wheel round, so that as we inched the ship along, the battery of rocket-tubes began to swing away from the model city and point out over the empty field of plants. We puffed and struggled for nearly twenty minutes, and most of that time the shells exploded all around, spurting up little fountains of soil and chips of rock, and scoring bright patches on the bulging side of the ship. But, miraculously, not a splinter touched us.

In time the bombardment ceased, and the little people just stood at a safe distance and watched us. I like to think that they were beginning to comprehend what we were doing, and that another feeling was filtering in to oust the animal hate from their minds. But perhaps the brutal truth was they had run out of ammunition.

Be that as it may, we continued to shove unmolested. All the time some lines from a play kept floating about at the back of my mind, but I could not seem to pin the words down.

At last we had pushed the ship many yards from the town, with its tail pointing obliquely away. The gases could do no harm now, except to some of the plants, which could not be helped. We looked our last at the fantastic city and its army of occupation that must soon perforce retreat before the coming night. Then we climbed back into the ship.

Clemence was sitting up now, and it was clear that she would never allow her wound to bother her overmuch. Her eyes were shining, and her elated smile absolved us of all our sins. Contritely, without a word, we took our seats at the control-panel. The Captain turned the switch. Came the jerk of the recoil, and away we went rushing over the ground.

It was then, as the level floor of the crater fled beneath our wheels, that those elusive, yet so familiar words of Portia came at last into the forefront of my consciousness.

The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. . . .

When I looked again the ground was gone. The rocky plain, the Lilliputian town, the dead crater city of the long-forgotten Gend, and Larn sleeping in his lonely tomb—all had vanished like the figments of a dream, and we were speeding out towards the promise of a green bubble floating in the vastness of space, the ball that was our home and the home of our kind.

INTRODUCTION TO "GARAN OF YU-LAC"

During the middle of the 1930s in a small Pennsylvania town, a young man, without financing or experience, was trying to publish a science fiction magazine. The magazine was "Marvel Tales," though it started life as "Unusual Stories," and about the only thing ever accomplished by it was the uncovering of several stories which are now considered near-classics by some science fiction fans.

One day the young man answered a knock on his front door and found standing there a charming young lady, clutching a box of manuscripts. The fascinating person was Andre Norton and the manuscripts were "The People of the Crater" and "Garan of Yu-lac." Because this particular publishing episode came to an end shortly thereafter neither of these stories were published.

Over the years, the original manuscript of "The People of the Crater" was lost, though a shorter version of it did eventually see print in the first issue of FANTASY BOOK, under the pen-name of Andrew North, and was later anthologized several times.

The other—and we believe, better—story, "Garan of Yu-lac" is now being published for the first time.

Those who believe a story can't be any good unless it was written in the 1960s—or at least the 'fifties—had better skip this one; but those who know that some of the very best science fiction, such as the Burroughs' stories, A. Merritt's great fantasies, the Skylark tales, John Taine's gripping dramas, Robert E. Howard's powerful weird yarns and dozens of others of equal stature, were all written in the earlier portion of this century, will find "Garan of Yu-lac to be on a par with any of these.

"Garan of Yu-lac" combines the vivid "other world strangeness" of the Burroughs' stories with the magic and witchery of those of A. Merritt—with perhaps a touch of Howard tossed in—but certainly it is no carbon copy.

We have been requested by Miss Norton to advise our readers that this story was an early experiment in her writing career; but, since we have never recovered from the loss of Burroughs and Merritt, we could wish, despite Miss Norton's polished, sophisicated and extremely popular stories of today, that she had continued with just a few in the same style as "Garan of Yu-lac."

—The Editor

Only a dedicated few battle the corrosive forces which are destroying the planet Krand

GARAN OF YU-LAC

By ANDRE NORTON

PART ONE OF THREE

Illustrated by Carleton Palmer

CHAPTER ONE—*Lord of Yu-lac*

Often have I (who was Garin Featherstone in the world beyond the Mist Barrier, and am now Garan of the Flame, mate to that Royal Lady, Thrala, Daughter of the Ancient Ones) listened to the half-forgotten tales of that regal race who fled from a dying planet across the void of space to land upon the antarctic continent of our young world and blast out there the great crater of Tav for their future dwelling place.*

From time to time, we are told, they renewed the vigor of their line by calling from the world without the barriers they had erected, certain men. I had been one of those so called. But I came in a later age and in a dark time. For evil had come into the crater and conflict riven the dwellers therein apart. And now at present, since that crushing defeat we wreaked with the help of outraged nature upon Kepta, Lord of the Black Flame, and those who followed him, but two of the Ancient Race remain, my lady wife and her brother Dantan.

At the moment of his overthrow Kepta had made certain dark promises concerning our uncertain future and also some gibing reference to the far past which had caught my interest. For he said that the three of us, Thrala, Kepta and I, were bound together. We had lived and fought before, even as we would live and fight again.

There is a Garan who lies in the Cavern of the Sleepers and whose story Thrala has told me. But before him—long before—there were others.

For when I questioned the Daughter about Kepta's words, she took me into one of the curious bubble-like rooms where

* *People of the Crater*, FANTASY BOOK No. 1, 1946.


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are mirrors of seeing embedded in tables. And there she seated herself on a cushioned bench, drawing me down beside her.

"Far and long have we come, beloved," she said softly, "but not so far or not so long that I cannot recall the beginning. And you remember?"

"Nothing," I answered, my eyes on the mirror.

She sighed. "Perhaps that is but just—mine was the fault—so mine the burden of memory. What we did, we two, in the great city of Yu-lac on the vanished world of Krand, has lain between us for long—long. It being gone at last, I half fear to summon it again."

I arose abruptly.

"Let it be then."

"Nay!" she caught my hand. "We have paid the price, three times over have we paid it. Once in Yu-lac and twice in the Caverns. Our unhappiness is gone, and now it pleases me to look again upon the most splendid act I have ever witnessed. Behold, my lord."

She raised her slender hands above the mirror. It misted.

* * *

I stood on a fancifully carved balcony of opalescent stone looking down upon a fantastic city not yet awakened from the hours of sleep. In the rosy sky, strange seeming to my half-earthly eyes and yet familiar, were the first golden strands of earthly dawn. Yu-lac, the Mighty, lay below me and I was Lord Garan, Marshal of the Emperor's Air Fleet, peer of the Empire.

By birth I had no right to either title or position, for my mother had been a lady of the court and my father an officer. They broke the law forbiding mating between different clans and castes by their secret marriage and so doomed me from birth to be one of the Wards of the State and the lowliest of the low.

Luckily for me, and those unfortunates like me, the Emperor Fors, when he ascended the Rose Throne in the Palace of Light, issued a decree opening army service to state wards. In my fifteenth year I made my choice and submitted myself to the military brand.

The life was a hard one, but it was escape from far worse and, having some ambition and ability, doubtless inherited from my father, I rose step by step. Fourteen years later I was Marshal of the Imperial Air Fleet and a military lord, created so by the Emperor's own hand.

But the soldier who stood on the balcony, looking down upon the wondrous beauty which was Yu-lac in the dawn, was neither happy nor contented. All his hard won honors were no more to him than the divers scars which seamed his flesh. For he had

dared (though no man knew it) to raise his eyes and heart to one as far above him as Krand's red sun was above her yellow fields.

I, a veteran of countless small border wars and raiding parties, was as love sick and despondent as the youngest and most callow recruit uneasily slumbering in the barracks below my tower. Though I resolutely put aside my unholy longing throughout the day, yet at night and in the dawning my memory and dreams broke loose from control, nor did I try too hard to leash them.

Like the penitent priests in the great temple of On I tortured myself by memories which inflicted twice the pain of any body hurt. By my companions I was counted a seasoned warrior, cold of heart and uninterested in aught but the pressing affairs of my office. And yet——.

Three years—— By On, could it be so long? Then I had been commander of the Emperor's flag ship, the thrice happy vessel which was selected to bear the Lady Thrala from her temple school in Toran to her father's crystal palace which crowned the central hill of Yu-lac.

The Imperial Princess had been surrounded by the countless courtiers of her suite, but one blessed night she had slipped away from them all and entered the control cabin where it had been my heaven-directed whim to stand watch alone. Thrala, not Imperial Highness, had she been when our snatched hour was fled.

Twice had I seen her since. Once on the day when I had knelt at the Emperor's feet to receive the staff of my office and had dared to raise my eyes to that golden throne at his right hand. And the second? It was in the royal pleasure gardens where I was waiting an audience. She had passed with her ladies. Who was I with the military brand seared deep in my shoulder muscle to look upon the Peerless One?

The castes of Krand were rigidly ordered. A man might rise to honor in any one but he could not pass into another. A peasant might become a lord of the land and a noble but neither he nor his sons might serve at court nor in the fleet.

So a soldier of the forces, even though he bore a title, had no right to long for a daughter of the Learned Ones. They were our rulers and great nobles, as far above the commoners in the breadth of their knowledge and in their ability to harness and bend to their will both men and natural forces as I was above the mindless slaves of the fields, that sub-human race which the Learned Ones had produced in the laboratories. They were a race apart, blessed—or cursed—with superhuman powers.

But Thrala was my beloved and all the decrees of the Emperor

and the chains of ancient custom could not alter that fact nor blot her image from my heart. I think I would have finished out my life, content at last only to worship my dreams of her, had not brooding Fate decided a far different future for all the pigmy men creatures who crawled about that globe which was Krand.

That morning I was not left long to indulge in self pity and fruitless longings. A tiny bell chimed in the room behind me, giving notice that someone desired to enter my sleeping chamber. I crossed to the disc on the wall and ran my hand across it. Upon its polished surface then appeared the likeness of my aid-de-camp, that young rascal, Anatan of Hol.

"Enter," I said into the mouth tube beside the disc, my voice thus unlocking the door.

"Well, scamp, what scrap have you gotten into?" I asked resignedly, being well used to meeting in the early morning a contrite but guilty young officer who wished me to get him out of some entanglement his reckless, youthful spirits had plunged him into.

"For a wonder," he answered brightly, "none. Praise be to On. But there is a messenger from the palace below."

In spite of my self-schooling, my pulse quickened. I turned again to my calling disc and ordered the military clerk in my inner office to assure the messenger that I would receive him as soon as I was properly accoutered.

Anatan busied himself with laying out my trappings and equipment while I splashed in my adjoining bath. He kept up the while a steady chatter of gossip and rumor from both barracks and Court.

"Lord Kepta is going to pay us a visit," he said.

I dropped the tunic I had reached for.

"Kepta of Koom?" I asked shortly, hoping that my perturbation had not been noted.

"Who else? There is only one Kepta that I have knowledge of." His sudden round-eyed innocence did not deceive me.

But Anatan, for all his careless talks and ways, had ever been loyal to me and I did not fear that he would betray me now. There was no one I hated more than Kepta of Koom, who had the power to crush me like an insect and who would be only too quick to use that same power should he ever suspect the true state of my feelings towards him.

In every pile of fruit there is one piece softer and more inclined to rot than the others—and that same piece unless removed will, in time, corrupt the rest. To my mind the Master of Koom was the rotten piece among the Learned Ones.

He did not mingle much with the rest of his caste fellows but kept close to the huge black stone citadel of his dark, wind-swept city, there carrying on secret experiments in his laboratories far under the crust of Krand. Just what those experiments were, not one of the Learned Ones could tell, but I had my suspicions and they were not pleasant ones. To all knowledge there is both a dark and a light side and, if rumor spoke true, Kepta turned to the dark far oftener than he did to the light. I had heard stories and even traced a tale or two, but without proof what could I do? Lord Kepta was a Learned One by birth and I was a state ward, who by the Emperor's favor had won to some fame and position. Should I care to retain both, or even my life, it would be well for me to forget vague stories.

Kepta was highly popular with a certain class of officer in my corps. He entertained lavishly at intervals and his purse was always open to those in temporary financial difficulties. But to my suspicious mind it appeared that he wished to get as many of the soldiers as possible under obligation to him. I had always some civil plea of duty ready in answer to his frequent invitations and, under my guidance, Anatan, and the better sort of his comrades, did likewise.

It was not often however that the Master of Koom ventured out of his tall keep. He preferred to entice his company to him, rather than to issue forth to seek it beyond his fortress. But for the past month there had been a mustering of the Learned Ones within Yu-lac and he had doubtless been summoned to join them by the Emperor.

If he were coming to take his place among his peers he had not been expected so soon, that much I knew. As Commander of the Airport of Yu-lac, I had been given no warning of his coming so that I might make ready a berth for his private ship among the pleasure and traveling craft of the Emperor's household. His sudden, almost unannounced arrival meant trouble for everyone, I thought with an impatient frown.

I buckled on my jeweled scale armor, made more for ceremonial show than defense, and snapped the catch of my sword belt. From Anatan's hand I took my silver war cloak and left the apartment.

The ramp which led from my private suite to the public offices curled about the center core of the cone-shaped tower in a graceful, though steep, spiral. Its walls were floridly frescoed with conventionalized scenes of warfare and the chase, occupations always bracketed together in the minds of my race. But here and there mirrors of vision were set deep into the smooth finish of the painted surface so that the passerby might be in instant

touch with any part of the great military depot of which the cone tower was the heart.

It pleased me now to check upon the efficiency of my under officers as I passed. Here I caught a glimpse of one of the almost obsolete mounted troops returning from early morning maneuvers. The men rode at ease, their small, scaly-skinned grippon mounts eager for the shelter of the stables, dragging their heavy armored tails in the dust of the parade ground. But two such troops remained and their duties were light—acting as the Emperor's guard when he wished to travel in state.

Commerce, in the persons of the frontier-breaking city merchants, had first demonstrated the advantages of deserting our island-infested seas and mountainous lands for the quicker and easier mode of travel by air. The military was not long in following the example set it. Infantry and grippon troops were speedily disbanded; the arrogant and all-powerful Air Force developed and consolidated its position within a single decade. The navy vanished from the decaying harbors of Krand, unless a handful of ships, rotting as they rolled at anchor, could be dignified by a title which had once been proudly borne by half a million war vessels.

Not content with the profits and the supremacy it had raped from the forces of defense, the Air Ministry was attempting, as I had first suspected and could now prove, to establish an iron-bound monopoly. What wild goal they had set for themselves only On knew, and yet, despite all warnings, rulers of Krand refused to stir against them.

I fingered my sword hilt as I went. Men no longer turned to metal to solve their hates and passions; the weapon I wore was but a pretty toy, borne purely as insignia of rank. War meant more subtle armaments—liquids that burnt or froze, death which curdled the very air about its victim. And horrors undreamed of by mankind-at-large had been evolved in the distant laboratories. A spark leaping out—what man could foresee the end? And this gathering of the Learned Ones at Yu-lac. No wild border tribe was in revolt; the five great nations were at peace as they had been for years. It was said on every hand that there was naught to fear—— Yet was I troubled and my hand sought my sword hilt by way of reassurance.

The messenger from the palace, a smart young officer attached to the Emperor's guard, was alertly awaiting my arrival.

"The throne desires the presence of the worthy Lord Garan," he recited formally. "He will be pleased to present himself in the Hall of the Nine Princes upon the third hour."

"To hear is to obey, in this as in all things," I murmured the

standard reply demanded of a recipient of a royal message.

He slipped to one knee and touched the pavement before me in salute.

At the third hour? Then I still had time to break my fast before I must go. Taking Anatan by the arm I went into the eating chamber used by all those who lodged within the confines of the tower. We took our seat at a polished table which stood with one side tight against the wall. Anatan thrust down a tiny plunger in the table top twice. The wall panel facing us sank back and our food bowls slid out. The stuff was well flavored and highly nutritious but so prepared with artificial colorings and tastes that no one could ever swear as to the original content of any dish. This fashion, introduced by the over-civilized city dwellers, had never found favor with me and I longed for the cruder but, to me, more succulent dishes one found set out in the frontier camps or in small country inns.

The city dwellers, sated as they were with all the refinements life could offer, had lost many of the true joys of living. Their scented "pleasure palaces" were regarded with a sort of righteous horror by the sturdy country folk. And, unless the many tales we heard were illfounded, the secret police might indeed have found much to interest them in one of those beautiful, almost dream-like, castles.

As if he had read the thoughts passing through my mind, Anatan broke the silence.

"There is a new 'palace' in the Sotan quarter."

"So," I observed indulgently. "Did you chance upon it last night?"

He shook his head in mock regret. "It is not for the likes of me. Kanddon of Stal was entering as I passed and I saw Lord Palkun's guards by the door."

"High play then?" I wondered aloud as he named the two most wealthy and influential men below the rank of Learned Ones who maintained residences in Yu-lac.

"That and other things." He grinned in a knowing manner which ill became his boyish face. "If the Lord Garan visits there would he not be needing a companion?"

"And when, puppy, have I wasted unwise moments behind the curtains of a 'pleasure palace'? But this I promise you," I spoke lightly enough, not being able to read the future, "when I enter that one in the Sotan you shall be at my side."

"Done! And that is a promise, my lord," he rapped out eagerly. Thus did we leave it as I clambered into the one-motor flyer which was to transport me across the city to a landing stage behind the crystal walls of the Emperor's palace.

CHAPTER TWO—*The Master of Koom*

It being yet early morning, the air lanes above the bulk of the city were uncrowded by the pleasure and business craft which would hover, dart down and across, during the later hours. Save for a patrol or two that I passed, no one disputed my course until just before I swung my ship in to land upon the stage by the middle, slanting spire of the citadel.

Then it was that a slim, black, two-passenger, whose rakish lines spelt both speed and ease of handling, cut illmanneredly in before the nose of my ship and came down, with its belly hugging the very landing spot I had marked for my own.

With a hot speech ready for the impudent youngster who had so high-handedly usurped my coveted place, I brought my tiny flyer in to berth it beside the shining black speeder. But it was no sprig of the court whom I confronted when I stepped out.

For with a slight smile, holding, to my mind, more than the suspicion of a sneer, curving his finely cut lips, the tall Master of Koom lingered by the entrance to the down ramp. His arrogantly held head was bare of either ceremonial crown or helmet and his crisp black hair was ruffled by the morning wind, the same wind which tugged at the heavy folds of his long orange cloak.

By his side was his air commander, sulky fellow, Japlan of Toc, who had been held in ill repute among fighting men for many years. He, at least, made no pretense of desiring my friendship, but he scowled so belligerently that the knotted skin of his forehead drew his eyebrows together to form one bushy bar.

"Our worthy Lord Garan," purred Kepta. "May we venture to congratulate the victor of Tarnan upon his exploit? Japlan developed a severe attack of jealousy when the news of your success reached our poor backwater. I marvel yet at his full recovery. It is full, is it not, Japlan?" he baited his surly officer.

"Oh, aye," growled that one, all the while making very plain to read upon his face his true opinion of me and all my works.

My training as a soldier had not fitted me for the tongue- and thought-twisting ways of court speech where one can praise a man fairly to his face when you despise him heartily. So, as my speech was apt to be as blunt as my thoughts. I did not care to play the courtier more than was necessary.

"You do me too much honor, my lord," I answered, with all the courtesy I could summon. "A word of praise from the Master of Koom is not to be lightly dismissed."

His drooping eyelids lifted a fraction and his smile grew more pronounced.

"Your days at court have polished the soldier to produce the finished courtier, Lord Garan," he observed, and now the sneer was broad and ill-concealed.

A man of my own caste and rank would have felt my fist grate against his teeth for less. His position held him above my resentment, as well he knew, yet never before had his hostility been so open. I wondered, my blood quickening in my veins, if he had uncovered some trace of my active and inquisitive distrust of him. His mask of good-fellowship had cracked and I had seen the real man who was using that mask for his own purposes.

So, though my muscles tensed, I controlled my rising anger. But someday, On willing, I would face that sneering devil man to man.

"I give thanks to the Master of Koom," my reply was as chill as I could make it but still formally polite.

He gathered his cloak closer about his broad shoulders and turned away abruptly with Japlan at his heels. I waited a moment or so, allowing them a start before following them down the ramp.

As I hesitated there, the sleek lines of the Koomian's flyer caught my eye and interest. Ships were my life and new designs always held me enthralled. Though I dared not linger to examine it closely, I knew that its shape, especially the outward appearance of its motor compartment, suggested some startling new development, something very different from our most modern product.

Apparently the workmen of the dark northern island had chanced upon some new form of propulsion, producing as a result an engine much smaller and more compact than any I had ever seen.

Reluctantly I tore myself away, knowing that Kepta would suspect if I lingered too long. But I determined, as I set foot upon the ramp, to discover the secret of the trim craft before its master whisked it away from Yu-lac again.

The ramp ended in a single broad step and then I was out upon the green and amber pavement which led to the Hall of the Nine Princes. Towering columns of burnished copper supported the roof of the covered passage but the sides were open to the scented winds. To my left, four deep steps of dull green stone cut into the first of the wonder gardens which made the inner hold of the sprawling citadel a place of marvels and delights.

To the right, the steps leading down were steeper, giving access to a bronze landing where a half-dozen or so gayly painted skiffs bobbed on the yellow, petal-strewn water of one of the

five canals. As it was yet early, none save a solitary guard paced the passage. No lady, in spite of my daring hopes, swayed along the garden paths, or floated petal-wise on the canal. There was only a gentle brooding quiet.

But the Hall of the Nine Princes was occupied when I entered. One of the smaller council chambers and reception rooms of the palace, it was furnished with a massive table, hewn from a single paht log and treated with the famous carbonizing process of the Emperor's laboratories until it was as hard and durable as the age-old rocks of the Imurian Sea. Precisely in the center of this board, placed so that its occupant faced the single entrance to the chamber, was a chair of the same substance and, on either side of that, backless benches.

By virtue of my position I was well known to the Emperor and the members of his all-powerful council. For the most part the latter were just, though severe, men, requiring of those under their authority a steadfast and utterly devoted loyalty to the state. Once convinced of my trueness, they had granted me an almost free hand in my own department, asking merely for a semi-monthly report. In the past, since I had assumed my high office, our relations had been friendly enough, though never growing warmer than the austere formality of the court permitted.

But now there was a change in their attitude. Long years of almost constant warfare and soldiering had supplied me with that sixth sense permitted those who live under the thin hem of Danger's cloak. And now I felt instantly the tension, the certain chillness, which met me even as I stepped within.

Whether I stood in personal peril of some sort, or whether some event beyond my control had aroused them, I had no means of knowing. But that same feeling, which had guided my hand to my sword that morning as I had hurried to meet the Emperor's messenger, again twitched my fingers towards the weapon on my hip. I felt the skin across my shoulders roughen. There was trouble here.

"The Marshal of the Fleet greets the Lord of the Air, the Ruler of the Five Seas, the Beloved of On——" I began the formal saluation.

"Enough," the Emperor's voice severed my greeting dryly. "Be seated, Lord Garan—there." He motioned towards a stool some six paces to the right of where I stood. I obeyed, but now my tongue moved in a mouth suddenly gone dry. There was danger here—to *me!*

"You maintain a secret system of information, do you not?"

"Aye, Great One. That being part of my duties."

"And is this also part of your duties?" he handed to the attendant at his side two metal plates. The man arose from his seat and, passing around the table, came to stand before me, holding what he bore so that I might look upon it.

Incised in the soft surface of the metal were drawings and formulas totally strange to me. Wholly bewildered, I raised my eyes to the cold mask which was the Emperor's face.

"These I have never seen before, Sire. Nor do I understand their meaning."

"And yet they were discovered among the private records of your intelligence office," he answered meaningly.

I faced him squarely. "I repeat, Great One, these I have not seen before."

Whereupon Malkus of Throt, a lean, bare bone of a man, totally devoid of all the softer emotions, cackled faintly behind his skinny hand. That evil parody of a man's full-throated laughter aroused me, doubtless even as he had intended.

"Is the Marshal of the Fleet standing trial for wrongdoing, Great One? I beg you, my lords, be a little plainer with your servant."

The Emperor frowned. "A complaint has been lodged against this nation and you by the men of Koom——"

Koom! The name burst red hot in my mind. Koom! Then I had been right in assigning some devilish meaning to Kepta's unannounced arrival.

"Certain private matters of the Master have been spied upon——"

I started. There my conscience was not clear. I had been searching for the key to the dark riddle of Kepta. Of that I was guilty.

"And now, even as Lord Kepta had foretold, these are found among your records." The Emperor's mouth was grim.

"Sir, and my lords, I can only say as I have before, these plates you show me I have never before seen. If they were found among the records of the Fleet, I have no knowledge of how they came to be there. But I promise you," I ended through twisted lips, "that I shall not be long in delving to the bottom of this strange matter."

Malkus cackled again, his thin screech of indecent mirth echoing through the chamber. "Behold virtue aroused," he mouthed in glee.

I rounded upon him swiftly. "You mock me, my lord?"

He shrugged but vouched me no other answer. I rose to my feet. With steady hands I unfastened the buckle of my swordbelt and drew it from around me.

"Since, Great One, it seems that I am no longer worthy of your trust, I will give back into your hands this symbol of my office. I was naught but a plain soldier, and a soldier am I content to be. Little do I know of government policies, but in my thoughts it is clear that a scapegoat is desired for some matter of state. If I can serve Yu-lac best by my personal disgrace, I stand ready for orders. For I know that I have been faithful in all things to the best of my ability."

"Now that, my lords, can be said by few in Yu-lac today," a voice sped clear across the room. I turned.

In the doorway stood a man of my own years, a Learned One by his dress. But even among the great ones I have known but three others with his air of powerful self-control. The Lady Thrala had it, and the Emperor, and—Kepta. But the Koomian's was an alien power unlike the others. Who this newcomer might be I did not know, but that which is the innermost part of me, the indestructible part, recognized and hailed a leader of men.

"'Greetings, Thran," the Emperor arose.

"And to you, Sire, be peace. Let all be well with you, my lords."

With easy grace he crossed the room to stand beside me.

"And now what is this I have chanced upon? Why does the noble captain hand back his sword? With what may any man living reproach Garan of Yu-lac?"

"But a short while ago," I said bitterly, "I too might have asked an answer to that last question of yours, my lord."

His eyes met mine and I felt a certain warmth spread through me.

"I have watched you, Lord Garan. And speaking freely before this council I say that there is no other man within the bounds of the inner sea that I would sooner place my trust in. Thran of Gorl says it!"

The Emperor smiled, a wintery cleft in his mask. "Take up your sword, my lord. Where proof of wrong doing is lacking, there can be no arguments for or against a man. But it would be well to get to the heart of this matter, for your own sake. A word spoken into the ear of a wise man is more to be heeded than the whisper of a passing breeze."

Thoroughly bewildered by this sudden about face, I buckled on my belt and dropped to one knee to touch the floor before the council.

"Have I your leave to depart, Great One?"

The Emperor nodded. I turned to go but somehow I knew Thran's eyes were on my back until I stepped from the chamber. Some game, whose stake or purpose I could not fathom, had been

played, or perchance the play had just begun. But that I was a piece in the game I had no doubt.

Still puzzling over that strange meeting in the Hall and the Emperor's parting words, I turned aside into the gardens instead of returning directly to the landing stage and my flyer. Clearly I had been ordered to set my house in order and produce the person or persons responsible for the appearance of the Koomian documents among my records. I must, without delay, set in motion my secret machinery of observation and deduction.

But my thoughts kept wandering back to the idea that someone had attempted to discredit me with the council, tried to so force me out of my position. That could mean only one thing—I was a menace. The air ministers, with their ever-growing power, Kepta of Koom, from whom every drop of blood within me shrank in revulsion—which moved against me now?. For the past year I had been burrowing into the secrets of both, striving to uncover the mysterious something which I KNEW lay there waiting to be discovered.

Somewhere on Krand there was a center of disturbance responsible for every frontier outbreak, every rising of the city mobs, even for the infrequent air accidents, of that fact I was firmly convinced. But—proof? What man may summon a shadowy feeling to testify in his behalf?

That thought brought curiosity in its wake. Why had Thran of Gorl, whom to my knowledge I had never before set eyes on, come at the exact moment when his speech in my favor could most aid me? I had thought that I was familiar with all the Lords of the Learned Ones but he was a stranger. And yet a man of his personal magnetism and powers should be widely known. Gorl was a rocky island far to the north; it contained no cities of any importance and its population was mostly made up of needy fishermen. Who was Thran of Gorl?

Intent upon this and other problems, I had wandered deeper into the gardens than I had intended. And now I came upon a wide, smooth lawn of thick yellow moss where were gathered a group of ladies watching the antics of a pair of those tiny creatures called Anas. I would have retreated at once but one of the maids, catching sight of me, called out:

"My lord, take pity on our plight. San-san's Ana has fled into the bushes and will not come out because these two evil ones have pulled its fur. There it lingers crying. Will you rescue the poor thing for us?"

It was Analia who so called to me, Anatan's younger sister, the daughter of an old and noble military family. Now at her asking, I dropped my hindering cloak and doffed my helmet

before, encouraged by their cries, I pushed into the thick bushes.

The Ana came to me without urging and I brought it out in triumph, my hair sadly ruffled and a couple of long scarlet scratches across my forearm. These Analia was pleased to exclaim over and nothing would do but I must be borne off into a neighboring glade where there was a fountain and my trifling hurts could be looked to.

In their artless company I forgot something of my ever-present worries. I had never really been young or enjoyed the delights of thoughtless youth. On my fifteenth name day I had assumed the place and troubles of a man, and since that day I had never relaxed for a single hour my vigilance against a world which I knew by hard-won experience to be a difficult place in which to exist. But now, for a short half hour, in the company of the court maidens, I recaptured a slender portion of that unexperienced youth.

It was ended all too soon. But I did not begrudge it because of that ending. Through the slender fronds of the fern trees came one I knew well.

Thrala of the Learned Ones stood smiling at us.

Every ripple of her black hair seemed to net itself about my heart and the wonder of her held me numb. I was content to stand and watch the play of expression on her face as her ladies with cries of joy-filled pleasure gathered about her.

CHAPTER THREE—*The Sotan Pleasure Palace*

"Greetings, my Lord Garan," she smiled into my eyes.

"And to you, Flower of Yu-lac," I touched the hand she held out to me to lips and forehead.

"You have neglected us, my lord. Do the cares of your office weigh so heavily upon you that you cannot grant us an hour or two of your company?

I stood agape, unable to summon my wits in quick reply to this gentle mockery. "I am, as always, at your command, royal lady," I stammered.

"Then you will obey me now," she countered swiftly. "Attend me to the Blue Pool, my lord. I have need of another pair of hands to aid me there. Nay, little ones, stay you here."

So dismissing her maids she born me away with her. But instead of following the path to the Blue Pool, she sought a tiny rockery and there took her place upon the stone bench.

"Sit you down, Garan; I have much to say and little enough time in which to say it. First—let me look at you. How long?

Three years, is it not? I can even tell you the number of hours in the days. Why were you not born——? But enough! You have done well for yourself, Garan."

"Only because——" I began eagerly, but her soft fingers flew to seal my rebellious lips, barring a rush of rash words.

"Not that, Garan, not that! It is of other things we must speak. You seem to have delved in dangerous pools of knowledge, asked awkward questions of the wrong people. And what have you learned?"

I shrugged. "Little enough. Each path ends at last in a blank barrier."

She nodded. "Oh, they are clever, clever. But you have made something of a beginning. For that—well, watch behind you of nights, Garan. You walk a rotten bridge; be sure that it does not break to plunge you into a gulf. But from this hour forth you shall not fight alone, soldier. Know you one Thran of Gorl?"

"I looked upon him for the first time an hour since."

"Thran, like you, has been laying his ear to the ground and so has heard things not meant for him. Twice has his path of secret watching crossed yours and thus he learned that there was another who mistrusted the future. For all of us, Garan, are not idlers and children playing in the sun. Some of us prepare for the coming storm——"

"Then you have some definite idea of what comes?" I broke in eagerly.

"Not yet. There was a new pleasure palace opened in the Sotan district a week ago."

I frowned, bewildered by her swift change of subject. "So my aid told me."

"It might be well for you to visit it, Garan."

"But——" I began a hasty protest.

"Oh, it is well enough known that you enter not into such joys, but allow yourself to be persuaded—tonight. Nay, more I cannot say. Be—careful, Garan. Now go and quickly, before my maids come seeking me. Three years, Garan——" Her soft voice trailed away as she sent me from her. I dared not look back.

In a daze created by my own unleashed emotions, I sought the landing stage and my flyer. The black ship from Koom still rested there, aloof and striking among the brightly-colored craft which now thronged the surface of the platform, but I spared it no more than a single passing glance. My thoughts were all for that interview and what might lie hid within those two words of hers—"three years."

I did not come wholly to myself again until my flyer landed upon the stage of the defense tower and I saw Anatan's boyish

figure crossing hurriedly towards me. Then I remembered the promise I had so lightly made him that morning. The impossibility had become true.

"Zacat of Ru has come in, my lord. He is awaiting you in the wardroom," burst out the young officer almost before my feet had touched the floor of the landing stage.

"Bring him to my private rooms at once!" I ordered.

Now Ru was the northermost colony of Yu-lac's glittering chain of dependencies. For three months of the year its wind-harried plains were well nigh uninhabitable. But wealth lay in its stark mountains for the taking so we held it in a jealous grip. A line of fortified posts, tiny oases of civilization, were the bounds we had laid upon that grim land.

Zacat was an officer of the old school who controlled both men and country with a heavy, but always just, hand. Him I trusted above any other of my under officers. An event serious enough to bring him to Yu-lac was grave enough to shadow the future. It was with a feeling of sudden cold that I paced my inner chamber awaiting his arrival.

"Hail, lord." The burly figure in the doorway drew himself up in formal salute.

"Enter, Zacat. Glad am I to clasp your hand again. But what fortune brings you out of your snow-rimmed north unheralded?"

"An ill fortune, Garan." He measured me with his eyes as he replied and then, with an air of relief, he added, "It is well. You are no city-dwelling lordling yet. There is no fat, no quivering hand, no murky eye, to betray you. Are you still the lad who followed me into Ulal in the old days?"

"I have not changed, war dog. Nor, I see, have you. Give me an open fight and I will be glad——"

"An open fight!" he grimaced. "That is what I cannot grant you, by the Hair of the Dark One! What man can battle shadows and win?"

To hear my own thoughts issue from this northern captain was startling.

"What is to do in Ru?"

"Nothing that I can lay my hand upon or it would speedily end, you may be sure," he said significantly. "But there is a growing uneasiness, whisperings I cannot trace to their source, baseless rumors, mutinous talk. I tell you frankly, Garan, today I stand alone in Ru."

"You want help?" I hazarded.

He shook his head. "You should know me better than that, lad. When was I ever one to run whining to my masters? Nay, no help in the material sense. But sometimes two heads upon a

problem think better than one. I want to talk freely to the one man in the Empire I may fully trust. There is trouble in Ru, and I cannot smell it out. For the first time my every support has failed me——"

"There you do not suffer alone," I cut in harshly.

"What mean you?"

"Save for you, Anatan of Hol, and one other (I thought of her in the garden) I, too, stand alone today. This morning the Emperor questioned my loyalty."

"What!" He was on his feet, staring at me in outraged amazement.

"It is true. All because, like you, I have tried to sift to its base this mass of intrigue which grows ever heavier throughout Krand. I, too, have been fighting shadows, Zacat."

"So," he sank down in his seat again, "that is the way of it, eh? Well, lad, it seems to be Ulal over again, but this time we must fight with our wits—not our fists. Let us exchange tale for tale and discover what has been happening these past years since last we stood together."

"Tell me of Ru," I urged him.

He frowned. "It is hard to put into words the feeling which grips me when I go from post to post. On the surface all is well; there is no trouble. The country is at peace with the barbarians; there is no disturbance at the mines. And yet I feel as if I were passing across a bridge, the undersupports of which had been destroyed. The thought haunts me that the heart of this bad business lies naked to the eye if I were only clever enough to find it. It is a demon-conceived business.

"Last month the yield from the Sapit mines was less by ten per cent than it should have been. And yet the engineers face me with bland explanations which I have not knowledge enough to question. There have been several hundred suicides within the past three months. The new recruits are in bad condition, mentally, morally, physically. Three beast-men were killed near Headquarter's Fort and there is nothing to show how they were able to penetrate so far into the settled lands without being sighted. Unnatural lights have appeared in the sky and twice a dump of highly inflamable oa ore has been set afire by mysterious means. There is a new secret religion being practiced by the mountaineers. Little things all but, taken together, enough to make a man think deep."

"Whom do you suspect?"

He shrugged and then answered me obliquely. "There was a man from Koom who made a journey through the mountains."

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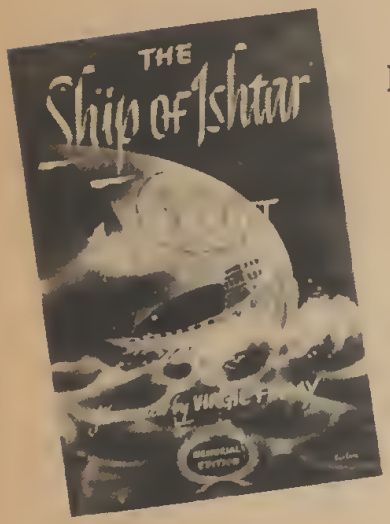

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A LETTER FROM MR. SCI-FI

SPACEWAY'S feature columnist, *Forrest J Ackerman, has reached an all time peak in his professional productivity. August will see the publication of his Ace Book about the life and career of Boris Karloff,* THE FRANKENSCIENCE MONSTER, *a feat of writing and compilation which he accomplished in 12 days. In its 12th year, his own magazine,* FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND, *has gone monthly, requiring 12 issues a year from his typewriter and photo archives—plus a 13th reprise edition annually! For s. f. comicbook fans he has created a character which we will call the "Draculady" if he doesn't think of it first, and favorite "swordcery" artist Frank Frazetta brings her to life on the cover of the first issue of the magazine which features her name:* VAMPIRELLA. *But enough introduction—we understand there are 17 other things that Mr. Ackerman is working on and to discuss them all would fill up the 5 pages allotted for his column.* —Editor.

Dear Reader

Thirty seven years ago—and to me, with all that's happened in between, it seems a thousand—37 years ago the very month I prepare this column (May), I wrote a report of an imaginary event of the future called "Science Fiction on the Air!" This serialized article began in the June 1932 issue of *The Time Traveller,* first of all "stf" (scientifiction) fanzines. I was only 16 at the time and I am not going to take up your time with a reprint of the whole article but I do want to quote a few portions from it as preface to a point.

"RADIO City calling the world! Radio City calling the world!

Hel-lo, science fiction fans! This is Forrest J Ackerman speaking to you for the first time from the top of three mile high Trainor's Tower where TTT's new broadcasting station STF is located.

"We've got a billion dollars backing us and we've bought up all wavelengths for the whole darn day. Boy, this is the day of a life time."

Well, in the last third of March and beginning of April, 1969, I spent *eleven* days that were quite beyond my wildest imaginings when I was 16. Altho I dreamed *then* of interviewing Hugo Gernsback, "Doc" Smith, Edmond Hamilton and other giants of the first decade of science fiction (but all this taking place over the *radio*, not TV), the elasticity of my braincells did not stretch at 16 to the concept of 34 sci-fi folk & myself flying in to Rio de Janeiro from France, England, Spain, Uruguay and the USA (all expenses paid—I think for extras I only spent $11 in 11 days) to participate in a Science Fiction Symposium of Films & Literature.

During the course of my imaginary *SF on the Air!*, I had author Henry "He Who Shrank" Hasse say, "You all know of my company—Universascope Productions, founded especially for the production of science fiction classics—and I am pleased to announce that THE SECOND DELUGE, Nth MAN, SECOND SWARM, SUNKEN WORLD, MODERN ATLANTIS, GOLDEN GIRL OF MUNAN and GLADIATOR are all scheduled for early release." (Actually, Philip Wylie's superman, GLADIATOR did reach the screen 6 years later; and about 10 years ago I found myself the agent selling Homer Eon Flint's Nth MAN to American International Pictures. Regrettably, the Flintale has not been filmed.)

A quarter hundred scientifilms in 7 days! That's what we were shown in Rio. A revival of METROPOLIS with its legendary director Fritz Lang himself making the introduction ... KING KONG...FANTASTIC VOYAGE...THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL...VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED... THE DAMNED...FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH... INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS...DESTINATION MOON...WAR OF THE WORLDS...THE TIME MACHINE...THE 10th VICTIM! Films from France, Poland, Czechoslovakia. All 12 chapters of FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE. All free! Anyone was welcome to walk in off the sidewalk, every afternoon from 2 to 6, and see this smorgasbord of fantastic filmfare for nothing!

Robert A. Heinlein gave a *most* illuminating speech about the making of DESTINATION MOON, 20 years ahead of its time. George Pal & Yvette Mimieux received a warm welcome for

their personal appearance in conjunction with the revival of THE TIME MACHINE. Arthur C. Clarke interrupted his "100 billion dollar film project" in New York long enough to fly to Rio to accept the first Black Monolith Award on behalf of Stanley Kubrick & himself for 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY.

With Clarke in Rio while he was being interviewed for one of their 10 newspapers, I made notes that: he saw "2001" for the firstime 3 days before it was premiered and the firstime was "mystified," the second time "overwhelmed." To date, from the book & film, he estimated he had made "roughly a quarter million." He wd like to see his own "Deep Range" filmed and his mind-croggling classic "Childhood's End" *is* to be filmed by Universal. Works by other authors that he personally wd like to see on the screen were, he said, van Vogt's "Slan" and Bradbury's "Martian Chronicles," Wm Sloane's "To Walk the Night" and—"Telepathy!" he cried as he & I expressed the same thot simultaneously—Olaf Stapledon's "Last & First Men." As of Rio, he had seen his own picture 14 times and understood the record to be 33. He said there was no truth to the rumor that there wd be a sequel to A SPACE ODYSSEY called SON OF HAL....

You haven't lived till you've been aboard an Argentinian plane headed for Brazil, high above the Amazon jungle with its storied river snaking below you, lightning pitting your wingtips, realizing that if you crash your leader will be Harlan Ellison (but what a glorious White Goddess Yvette Mimieux wd make!)—and then Robert Bloch disappears into the men's room and a few minutes later an apparition emerges: hair combed down over the forehead, a bristling black mustache, it cd only be... *gulp!*... yes, it is... shade of Schickelgruber... ADOLF HITLER! Alive and—well?—on his way to Rio! Better Fred Astaire (or better yet, Ginger Rogers) shd have come out of that mad lavatory but—Robert Bloch entered and Adolf Hitler emerged!

In Rio we from the States met up with friends old & new from abroad. From England there were Brian W. Aldiss, John Brunner, JGBallard, Val Guest (director of the classic CREEPING UNKNOWN) and Wolf Rilla, director of the excellent VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED. John Wyndham, author of the latter, had been invited but unfortunately died just at that time, age 65. From Spain came the extremely knowledgable science fiction film historian, Luis Gasca; from Uruguay, Marcial Souto, spearhead of the s. f. movement in his country; Michael Caen, co-editor of France's MIDNIGHT FANTASTIC filmagazine, and his confrere, Jacques Sadoul; and from America, North, a di-

tinguished Honor Roll including, in addition to those previously mentioned, Philip Jose Farmer, Damon Knight, Sam Moskowitz, Frederik Pohl, Robert Sheckley, Kate Wilhelm, Poul Anderson, Roger Corman, Roman Polanski, Alfred Bester, BARBARELLA's "Angel" (John Philip Law) and others. Leading all the rest in South America, of course, was the wizard who somehow talked the Ministry of Education into spending about $50,000 on science fiction, Jose (Pronounced Joe Say) Sanz, and his active assistants, Monica Leib & Fred Madersbacher, also leading Brazilian s.f. writer, Andre Carneiro.

As a result of the international cultural exchange, the Brazilians are starting a professional science fiction magazine of their own, producing a translated edition of *Famous Monsters,* and many more American & British authors will have their works published in Portuguese.

Here are two quotable quotes I noted during speeches by, respectively, John Brunner & Fred Pohl, each in turn quoting another author. "The past is a far country—they do things differently there."—HPHartley. "We have suffered like animals long enough—now it is time we suffered like men."—HGWells. They impressed me; hopefully they will you.

I shall probably have more to say about the Sci-Fi Symposium of Brazil in my next letter but before closing this one I have a few other bits of information to impart.

AE van Vogt is experiencing a surge of creative power and has been signed by Ace Books to produce 6 novels at the rate of 1 every 2 months! His first will be THE BATTLE OF FOREVER followed by either QUEST FOR THE FUTURE or THE OTHER-MEN. New *Galaxy* editor Ejler Jacobssen, editor many years ago of *Super Science Stories,* is enthusiastic about Van's "A Stage of Kings," which will be featured in the Sept. *Galaxy.*

We lost a giant in the field since last I wrote. KARL FREUND. The man who photographed the scientificinemasterpiece METROPOLIS and was cameraman on or director of such other memorable films as FAUST, the GOLEM of 1920, DRACULA, MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE, SATANAS, THE MUMMY, THE HANDS OF ORLAC and its remake, MAD LOVE. On the outstanding night of Sat 19 Apr, Mr Freund was an honored guest at the capacity-packed 5-hour-long Dracula Society Awards Banquet in Hollywood where he was acknowledged with a standing ovation by people who appreciated his accomplishments including Vincent Price, Geo Pal, Robert Bloch and many other distinguished guests. Two weeks later, to the day, in his 79th year, he was dead. A friend of 35 years, author of "The Werewolf of Paris" (filmed as CURSE OF THE WERE-

WOLF), Guy Endore, read a eulogy to Freund's memory at the funeral.

For we the still living, two great affairs loom large in the near future: on the Pacificoast, the 22nd Westercon, a "funcon" for sci-fantasy fans that runs from 3 July thru 6 at the Miramar Hotel, Santa Monica, CA. Drop around! For the whole world, 29 Aug thru 1 Sep, the 27th World Science Fiction Convention at the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel in St Louis, MO. Both affairs feature art shows, movies, auctions, masquerade ball and plenty of panels & speeches by authors, editors & artists. I'll be at both —hope to meet you at one or the other. (Just think, you can tell me in person how much you hate the term "sci-fi" The last fan who did expects to be out of his hospital bed and convalescing in a wheelchair around Xmas. Of 1970)

Sciencerely

Forrest J. Ackerman

PEOPLE OF THE BLACK COAST

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Despite a short life, the name of Robert E. Howard has become one the most popular in fantastic fiction. One wonders to what heights he might have risen had he chosen to live a normal lifetime. We are not brash enough to claim this story is one of his best, yet it does show flashes of his descriptive genius.

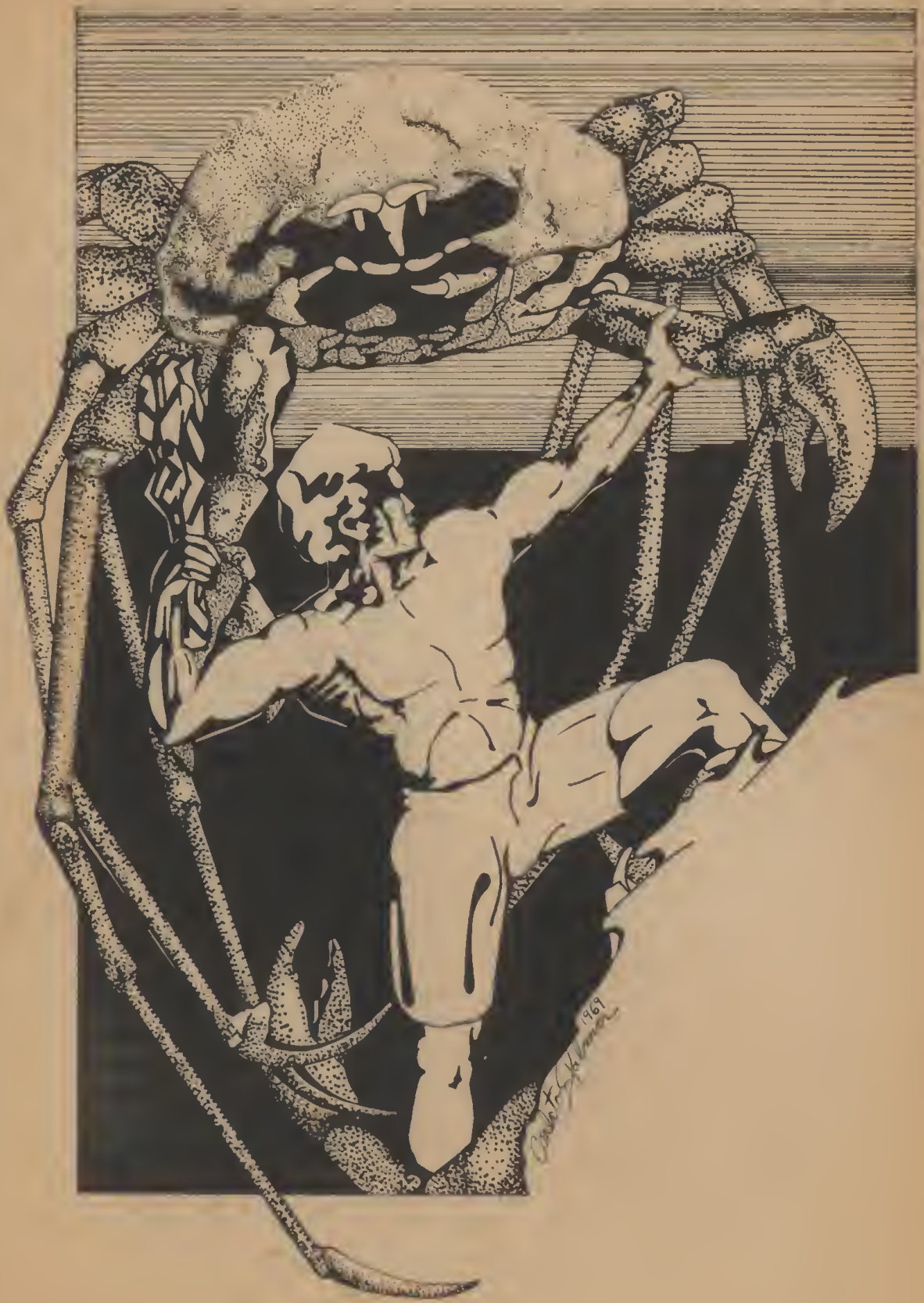
ILLUSTRATED BY CARLETON PALMER

This comes of idle pleasure seeking and—now what prompted that thought? Some Puritanical atavism lurking in my crumbling brain, I suppose. Certainly, in my past life I never gave much heed to such teachings. At any rate, let me scribble down here my short and hideous history, before the red hour breaks and death shouts across the beaches.

There were two of us, at the start. Myself, of course, and Gloria, who was to have been my bride. Gloria had an airplane, and she loved to fly the thing—that was the beginning of the whole horror. I tried to dissuade her that day—I swear I did!—but she insisted, and we took off from Manilla with Guam as our destination. Why? The whim of a reckless girl who feared nothing and always burned with the zest for some new adventure—some untried sport.

Of our coming to the Black Coast there is little to tell. One of those rare fogs rose; we soared above it and lost our way among thick billowing clouds. We struggled along, how far out of our course God alone knows, and finally fell into the sea just as we sighted land through the lifting fog.

We swam ashore from the sinking craft, unhurt, and found ourselves in a strange and forbidding land. Broad beaches sloped up from the lazy waves to end at the foot of vast cliffs. These cliffs seemed to be of solid rock and were—are—hundreds of feet high. The material was basalt or something similar. As we descended in the falling aircraft, I had had time for a quick glance shoreward, and it had seemed to me that beyond these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cliffs, rose other, higher cliffs, as if in tiers, rampart above rampart. But of course, standing directly beneath the first, we could not tell. As far as we looked in either direction, we could see the narrow strip of beach running along at the foot of the black cliffs, in silent monotony.

"Now that we're here," said Gloria, somewhat shaken by our recent experience, "what are we to do? Where are we?"

"There isn't any telling," I answered. "The Pacific is full of unexplored islands. We're probably on one. I only hope that we haven't a gang of cannibals for neighbors."

I wished then that I had not mentioned cannibals, but Gloria did not seem frightened—at that.

"I'm not afraid of natives," she said uneasily. "I don't think there are any here."

I smiled to myself, reflecting how women's opinions merely reflected their wishes. But there was something deeper, as I soon learned in a hideous manner, and I believe now in feminine intuition. Their brain fibers are more delicate than ours—more readily disturbed and reached by psychic influences. But I had no time to theorize.

"Let's stroll along the beach and see if we can find some way of getting up these cliffs and back on the island."

"But the island is all cliffs, isn't it?" she asked.

Somehow I was startled. "Why do you say that?"

"I don't know," she answered rather confusedly. "That was the impression I had, that this island is just a series of high cliffs, like stairs, one on top of the other, all bare black rock."

"If that's the case," said I, "we're out of luck, for we can't live on seaweed and crabs——"

"Oh!" her exclamation was sharp and sudden.

I caught her in my arms, rather roughly in my alarm, I fear.

"Gloria! What is it?"

"I don't know," her eyes stared at me rather bewilderedly, as if she were emerging from some sort of nightmare.

"Did you see or hear anything?"

"No," she seemed to be adverse to leaving my sheltering arms, "it was something you said—no, that wasn't it. I don't know. People have day dreams. This must have been a nightmare."

God help me; I laughed in my masculine complacency and said:

"You girls are a queer lot in some ways. Let's go up the beach a way——"

"No!" she exclaimed emphatically.

"Then let's go down the beach——"

"No, no!"

I lost patience.

"Gloria, what's come over you? We can't stay here all day. We've got to find a way to go up those cliffs and find what's on the other side. Don't be so foolish; it isn't like you."

"Don't scold me," she returned with a meekness strange to her. "Something seems to keep clawing at the outer edge of my mind, something that I can't translate—do you believe in transmission of thought waves?"

I stared at her. I'd never heard her talk in this manner before.

"Do you think somebody's trying to signal you by sending thought waves?"

"No, they're not thoughts," she murmured absently. "Not as I know thoughts, at least."

Then, like a person suddenly coming out of a trance, she said:

"You go on and look for a place to go up the cliffs, while I wait here."

"Gloria, I don't like the idea. You come along—or else I'll wait until you feel like going."

"I don't think I'll ever feel that way," she answered forlornly. "You don't need to go out of sight; one can see a long way here. Did you ever see such black cliffs; this is a black coast, sure enough? Did you ever read Tevis Clyde Smith's poem—'The long black coasts of death—' something? I can't remember exactly."

I felt a vague uneasiness at hearing her talk in this manner, but sought to dismiss the feeling with a shrug of my shoulders.

"I'll find a trail up," I said, "and maybe get something for our meal—clams or a crab——"

She shuddered violently.

"Don't mention crabs. I've hated them all my life, but I didn't realize it until you spoke. They eat dead things, don't they? I know the Devil looks just like a monstrous crab."

"All right," said I, to humor her. "Stay right here; I won't be gone long."

"Kiss me before you go," she said with a wistfulness that caught at my heart, I knew not why. I drew her tenderly into my arms, joying in the feel of her slim young body so vibrant with life and loveliness. She closed her eyes as I kissed her, and I noted how strangely white she seemed.

"Don't go out of sight," she said as I released her. A number of rough boulders dotted the beach, fallen, no doubt, from the overhanging cliff face, and on one of these she sat down.

With some misgivings, I turned to go. I went along the beach close to the great black wall which rose into the blue like a monster against the sky, and at last came to a number of unusually large boulders. Before going among these I glanced back

and saw Gloria sitting where I had left her. I know my eyes softened as I looked on that slim, brave little figure—for the last time.

I wandered in among the boulders and lost sight of the beach behind me. I often wonder why I so thoughtlessly ignored her last plea. A man's brain fabric is coarser than a woman's, not so susceptible to outer influences. Yet I wonder if even then, pressure was being brought to bear upon me——

At any rate, I wandered along, gazing up at the towering black mass until it seemed to have a sort of mesmeric effect upon me. One who has never seen these cliffs cannot possibly form any true conception of them, nor can I breathe into my description the invisible aura of malignity which seemed to emanate from them. I say, they rose so high above me that their edges seemed to cut through the sky—that I felt like an ant crawling beneath a Babylonian wall—that their monstrous serrated faces seemed like the breasts of dusty gods of unthinkable age—this I can say, this much I can impart to you. But if any man ever reads this, let him not think that I have given a true portrait of the Black Coast. The reality of the thing lay, not in sight and sense nor even in the thoughts which they induced; but in the things you know without thinking—the feelings and the stirrings of consciousness—the faint clawings at the outer edge of the mind which are not thoughts at all——

But these things I discovered later. At the moment, I walked along like a man in a daze, almost mesmerized by the stark monotony of the black ramparts above me. At times I shook myself, blinked and looked out to sea to get rid of this mazy feeling, but even the sea seemed shadowed by the great walls. The further I went, the more threatening they seemed. My reason told me that they could not fall, but the instinct at the back of my brain whispered that they would suddenly hurtle down and crush me.

Then suddenly I found some fragments of driftwood which had washed ashore. I could have shouted my elation. The mere sight of them proved that man at least *existed* and that there was a world far removed from these dark and sullen cliffs, which seemed to fill the whole universe. I found a long fragment of iron attached to a piece of the wood and tore it off; if the necessity arose, it would make a very servicable iron bludgeon. Rather heavy for the ordinary man, it is true, but in size and strength, I am no ordinary man.

At this moment, too, I decided I had gone far enough. Gloria was long out of sight and I retraced my steps hurriedly. As I went I noted a few tracks in the sand and reflected with amuse-

ment that if a spider crab, something larger than a horse, had crossed the beach here, it would make just such a track. Then I came in sight of the place where I had left Gloria and gazed along a bare and silent beach.

I had heard no scream, no cry. Utter silence had reigned as it reigned now, when I stood beside the boulder where she had sat and looked in the sand of the beach. Something small and slim and white lay there, and I dropped to my knees beside it. It was a woman's hand, severed at the wrist, and as I saw upon the second finger the engagement ring I had placed there myself, my heart withered in my breast and the sky became a black ocean which drowned the sun.

How long I crouched over that pitiful fragment like a wounded beast, I do not know. Time ceased to be for me, and from its dying minutes was born Eternity. What are days, hours, years, to a shattered heart, to whose empty hurt each instant is an Everlasting Forever? But when I rose and reeled down to the sea edge, holding that little hand close to my hollow bossom, the sun had set and the moon had set and the hard white stars looked scornfully at me across the immensity of space.

There I pressed my lips again and again to that pitiful cold flesh and laid the slim little hand on the flowing tide which carried it out to the clean, deep sea, as I trust, merciful God, the white flame of her soul found rest in the Everlasting Sea. And the sad and ancient waves that know all the sorrows of men seemed to weep for me, for I could not weep. But since, many have shed tears, oh God, and the tears were of blood!

I staggered along the mocking whiteness of the beach like a drunken man or a lunatic. And from the time that I rose from the sighing tide to the time that I dropped exhausted and became unconscious seems centuries on countless centuries, during which I raved and screamed and staggered along huge black ramparts which frowned down on me in cold inhuman disdain—which brooded above the squeaking ant at their feet.

The sun was up when I awoke, and I found I was not alone. I sat up. On every hand I was ringed in by a strange and horrible throng. If you can imagine spider crabs larger than a horse—yet they were not true spider crabs, outside the difference in the size. Leaving that difference out, I should say that there was as much variation in these monsters and the true spider crab as there is between a highly developed European and an African bushman. These were more highly developed, if you understand me.

They sat up and looked at me. I remained motionless, uncertain just what to expect—and a cold fear began to steal over

me. This was not caused by any especial fear of the brutes killing me, for I felt somehow that they would do that, and did not shrink from the thought. But their eyes bored in on me and turned my blood to ice. For in them I recognized an intelligence infinitely higher than mine, yet terribly different. This is hard to conceive, harder to explain. But as I looked into those frightful eyes, I knew that keen, powerful brains lurked behind them, brains which worked in a higher sphere, a different dimension than mine.

There was neither friendliness nor favor in those eyes, no sympathy or understanding—not even fear or hate. It is a terrible thing for a human being to be looked at in that manner. Even the eyes of a human enemy who is going to kill us have understanding in them, and a certain acceptance of kindred. But these fiends gazed upon me in something of the manner in which cold-hearted scientists might look at a worm about to be stuck on a specimen board. They did not—they could not—understand me. My thoughts, sorrows, joys, ambitions, they never could fathom, any more than I could fathom theirs. We were of different species! And no wars of human kind can ever equal in cruelty the constant warfare that is waged between living things of diverging order. Is it possible that all life came from one stem? I cannot now believe it.

There was intelligence and power in the cold eyes which were fixed on me, but not intelligence as I knew it. They had progressed much further than mankind in their ways, but they progressed along different lines. Further than this, I cannot say. Their minds and reasoning faculties are closed doors to me and most of their actions seem absolutely meaningless; yet I know that these actions are guided by definite, though inhuman, thoughts, which in turn are the results of a higher stage of development than the human race may ever reach in *their way*.

But as I sat there and these thoughts were borne in on me—as I felt the terrific force of their inhuman intellect crashing against my brain and will power, I leaped up, cold with fear; a wild unreasoning fear which wild beasts must feel when first confronted by men. I knew that these things were of a higher order than myself, and I feared to even threaten them, yet with all my soul I hated them.

The average man feels no compunction in his dealings with the insects under foot. He does not feel, as he does in his dealings with his brother man, that the Higher Powers will call upon him for an accounting—of the worms on which he treads, nor the fowls he eats. Nor does a lion devour a lion, yet feasts

nobly on buffalo or man. I tell you, Nature is most cruel when she sets the species against each other.

These thinking-crabs, then, looking upon me as God only knows what sort of prey or specimen, were intending me God only knows what sort of evil, when I broke the chain of terror which held me. The largest one, whom I faced, was now eying me with a sort of grim disapproval, a sort of anger, as if he haughtily resented my threatening actions—as a scientist might resent the writhing of a worm beneath the dissecting knife. At that, fury blazed in me and the flames were fanned by my fear. With one leap I reached the largest crab and with one desperate smash I crushed and killed him. Then bounding over his writhing form, I fled.

But I did not flee far. The thought came to me as I ran that these were they whom I sought for vengeance. Gloria—no wonder she started when I spoke the accursed name of "crab" and conceived the Devil to be in the form of a crab, when even then those fiends must have been stealing about us, tingling her sensitive thoughts with the psychic waves that flowed from their horrid brains. I turned, then, and came back a few steps, my bludgeon lifted. But the throng had bunched together, as cattle do upon the approach of a lion. Their claws were raised menacingly, and their cruel thought emanations struck me so like a power of physical force that I staggered backward and was unable to proceed against it. I knew then that in their way they feared me, for they backed slowly away toward the cliffs, ever fronting me.

My history is long, but I must shortly draw it to a close. Since that hour I have waged a fierce and merciless warfare against a race I knew to be higher in culture and intellect than I. Scientists, they are, and in some horrid experiment of theirs, Gloria must have perished. I cannot say.

This I have learned. Their city is high up among those lofty tiers of cliffs which I cannot see because of the overhanging crags of the first tier. I suppose the whole island is like that, a mere base of basaltic rock, rising to a high flung pinnacle, no doubt, this pinnacle being the last tier of innumerable tiers of rocky walls. The monsters descend by a secret way which I have only just discovered. They have hunted me, and I have hunted them.

I have found this, also: the one point in common between these beasts and the human is that the higher the race develops mentally, the less acute become the physical faculties. I, who am as much lower than they mentally as a gorilla is lower than a human professor, am as deadly in single combat with them as a

gorilla would be with an unarmed professor. I am quicker, stronger, of keener senses. I possess coordinations which they do not. In a word, there is a strange reversion here—I am the wild beast and they are the civilized and developed beings. I ask no mercy and I give none. What are my wishes and desires to them? I would never have molested them, any more than an eagle molests men, had they not taken my mate. But to satisfy some selfish hunger or to evolve some useless scientific theory, they took her life and ruined mine.

And now I have been, and shall be, the wild beast with a vengeance. A wolf may wipe out a herd, a man-eating lion has destroyed a whole village of men, and I am a wolf, a lion, to the people—if I may call them that—of the Black Coast. I have lived on such clams as I have found, for I have never been able to bring myself to eat of crab flesh. And I have hunted my foes, along the beaches, by sunlight and by starlight, among the boulders, and high up in the cliffs as far as I could climb. It has not been easy, and I must shortly admit defeat. They have fought me with psychic weapons against which I have no defense, and the constant crashing of their wills against mine has weaken me terribly, mentally and physically. I have lain in wait for single enemies and have even attacked and destroyed several, but the strain has been terrific.

Their power is mainly mental, and far, far exceeds human mesmerism. At first it was easy to plunge through the enveloping thought-waves of one crab-man and kill him, but they have found weak places in my brain.

This I do not understand, but I know that of late I have gone through Hell with each battle. Their thought-tides have seemed to flow into my skull in waves of molten metal, freezing, burning, withering my brain and my soul. I lie hidden and when one crab-man approaches, I leap and I must kill quickly, as a lion must kill a man with a rifle before the victim can aim and fire.

Nor have I always escaped physically unscathed, for only yesterday the desperate stroke of a dying crab-man's claws tore off my left arm at the elbow. This would have killed me at one time, but now I shall live long enough to consumate my vengeance. Up there, in the higher tiers, up among the clouds where the crab city of horror broods, I must carry doom. I am a dying man—the wounds of my enemies' strange weapons have shown me my Fate, but my left arm is bound so that I shall not bleed to death, my crumbling brain will hold together long enough, and I still have my right hand and my iron bludgeon. I have noted that at dawn the crab-people keep closer to their high cliffs, and such as I have found at that time are very easy

to kill. Why, I do not know, but my lower reason tells me that these Masters are at a low ebb of vitality at dawn, for some reason.

I am writing this by the light of a low-hanging moon. Soon dawn will come, and in the darkness before dawn, I shall go up the secret trail I have found which leads to the clouds—and above. I shall find the demon city and as the east begins to redden, I shall begin the slaughter. Oh, it will be a great battle! I will crush and crash and kill, and my foes will lie in a great shattered heap, and at last I, too, shall die. Good enough. I shall be content. I have scattered death like a lion. I have littered the beaches with their corpses. Before I die I shall slay many more.

Gloria, the moon swings low. Dawn will be here soon. I do not know if you look in approval, from shadowland, on my red work of vengeance, but it has to some extent brought ease to my frozen soul. After all, there creatures and I are of different species, and it is Nature's cruel custom that the diverging orders may never live in peace with each other. They took my mate; I take their lives.

Roderik Hyne considered himself a sultan, but the members of his kidnapped harem had other ideas

FATHER IMAGE

By ***BASIL WELLS***

ILLUSTRATED BY TOM CHRISTOPHER

The rift in the ochre crust of Mars appeared very shallow and unimportant as seen from Earth, and even enroute. But now, as the first shreds of atmosphere heated the *Toreador's* extruded shields, Roderik Hyne could see that it was a broad gash, rock-walled, in an area of red sandless shale, of at least nine miles in depth and thrice as wide.

Above the equator the rift dwindled into a series of canyons and worn out hills. Southward it was much the same. But for one hundred miles a great valley, its unusual depth giving promise of denser atmosphere, awaited them.

"So!" roared Hyne, his prominent blue eyes bulging in his unshaven red face, "I was capturing this ship for nothing! There was no place for men on Mars! We should sit and let the hell bombs destroy us all, eh?"

His huge palm swatted at the bony shoulders of the little man in the control chair beside him, the blow dislodging young Ian Varll's heavy-framed glasses. "See. There's water."

Varll coughed and muttered something inaudible. He groped for his glasses with manacled hands and, fortunately, soon snagged them. Then he continued to calculate the amount of retro required, and prepared to release the first nested spinner chutes.

Hyne, who had been a minor helper at the spaceport in Central Florida where the pioneering rockets for Luna were reconditioned and refueled, knew nothing about either piloting or astrogation. That was why he had spared Ian Varll, the ship's astrogator, in the bloody massacre that had wiped out the other four

crew members. Now he gripped hard and bellowed angry commands.

"I have done this," Hyne was shouting, bobbing his balding round head with its wild five months' fringe of pale brown hair. "I, like Noah, have escaped the atomic floods. The seeds of a new race, my children, are aboard this ark of steel."

"We're almost ready to land—sir," Varll said, and into the intercom he warned: "Brace yourselves with the bedding and pads toward the bow . . . And pray!"

The retro rockets spat and the nested spinner-chutes jolted. Sweat was beading in huge drops on Varll's freckled nose and

chin and forehead. He had never attempted landing a spacer—he had been an astrogator, nothing more.

There was a terrific jolt, a sense of rebounding tons of fire-tested metal on extended springy pseudopods, and they were at rest. And right side up, the ship's tapered nose jutting skyward.

Outside, as Varll activated the vision screens, they saw a cliff-walled valley many miles in width with a central, island-dotted lake. The lake was at least three miles wide by five miles in length, and it was an irregular sort of rectangle. The islands and most of the visible valley seemed to be covered with a reedy dense carpet of greenish-yellow growth. Here and there were taller clumps of darker bluish vegetation resembling trees.

"Here," cried Hyne, "the children I sire will build a great civilization. My name will be remembered forever. The father of a nation!"

"We better check on your harem," Varll said dryly, "to see if any are left alive." He hit the intercom button.

"You okay back there?" he demanded.

"Just shaken up a bit," Janice Gore's strong young voice answered. "The other two women and myself seem to have got the worst of it. The four little girls are playing as if they were back home on Earth."

"That's good news," replied Varll. "*Captain* Hyne will be pleased."

"Tell that bloody-handed old monster," Janice Gore's voice was a scream, "that we have two guns full of bullets waiting for him . . . If you are listening, Bloody Hyne, take warning!"

Hyne rammed his face up close to the intercom mouthpiece. His huge blue eyes were bulging and his normally scarlet face was slowly purpling.

"I ain't putting up with any more nonsense!" he bellowed. "While we was in space I let you shut yourselves off, an' kept you fed. But now we got down safe an' that's that. No more food nor water. You either get smart an' be my women or you starve."

The taunting laugh of the sturdy young tennis star whom he had kidnapped and forced aboard five months before, was his reply.

"What good are seven dead females in your grandiose plans for starting a nation?" she demanded. "And we will die, by bullets or starvation, before we submit to you.'"

"Wait until you go thirsty for a week," Hyne's ugly, scrag-whiskered head nodded. "Fancy feelings an' hunger don't mix for long. You'll sell your soul for a loaf of bread, an' your body for the butter an' water to wash it down."

Ian Varll interrupted this exchange of pleasantries by a sharp hiss.

"Something moving over on the largest island," he said. "Humped looking, larger than a big dog, and pale. Could be edible—need something to supplement this yeast-algae mess we try to synthesize."

"Fresh meat, huh?" Hyne said, licking his lips. "Maybe it's poison to us though. Ain't that right? All off-planet fruits and meat got to go through the synthesizer."

"We don't know, Hyne," Varll said. "The lichens in the lunar caverns were inedible, but we never reached Mars or Venus. Now, with most of Earth blasted apart, no more ships will follow.

"Meaning we'll eat Mars-side food or die."

Hyne looked toward the island. His eyes narrowed. Varll could test the alien food. If it was poisonous to the human body Varll would die only a few days earlier than Hyne had planned.

And after Varll, should the captive astrogator die, there would be the old maid, Lois Tabor—fifty if she was a day, and incapable of child-bearing.

"I'm sending you to the island aboard the two-man pressurized skimmer," he told Varll. "You will have the old-style rifle we found aboard, and three of the cartridges. When you have killed the animal, and gathered specimens of possibly edible plants, you will place them aboard.

"You will have twenty hours of oxygen and the skimmer's controls will be sealed for remote control."

Varll said nothing, but his pale grey eyes behind the thick-rimmed glasses were hot with contempt or hatred. Hyne did not care which. Once Varll had killed and sampled the beast Hyne would leave him stranded on the island as a sort of laboratory animal . . .

* * *

Night came abruptly there in the vast abyss that gouged across the Martian equator. The uncertain, ever-moving light of the two swift moons of Mars flooded the spreading carpets of reedy growth and cast moving shadows around the huge spacecraft.

Out on the island the cheerful yellow flare of Varll's campfire was visible, lending an illusion of other life in this wasteland valley. And beside Hyne loomed the sealed two-man skimmer that Varll had ridden across the lake, and that had carried back the dressed carcass of a lemon-furred, vicuna-like beast, and a mass of tubers, roots and fruits that the younger handcuffed

man had collected. He was carrying the last of them inside the spacer.

"Send over the load you've collected," had been Hyne's orders. "I'll fly over to join you in the morning."

He had not said what morning, thought Hyne with a snarling grin. If Varll lasted out a week, or possibly two weeks, he would know that the atmosphere was dense enough to sustain life, and that the flesh and tubers were good.

"You are a hateful, ugly animal!" the voice of Lois Tabor, the older woman who had engineered the capture of the two rifles and made half the ship off limits for Hyne, cried hoarsely over the intercom. "That boy will freeze to death tonight or die of oxygen starvation."

"Aw shut up, you old bat!" Hyne roared back at her. "Worry about your own food and water and air. You'll be begging in a day or so."

"Never!" Lois Tabor said stoutly, and the voices of her sister-in-law, Enid Tabor, and the tennis star, Janice Gore, echoed her defiance.

"Should have shot that old dame first off," Hyne muttered under his breath. "Way she took on about me killing her brother you'd thought she was his mother. Guess she did raise him . . . Without her I could have soon knocked some sense into the others. But she had to find them guns."

Hyne eyed the barrier of plastic and spare metal plates and gear that protected him against a chance snapshot from the other part of the ship. Only in a space suit with two buffer envelopes inflated about it did he dare show himself. The envelopes, designed to protect an astronaut traveling over jagged lava or stone, would turn the light caliber slugs the rifles fortunately fired.

Varll had carried food and supplies to the three women and the four small girls barricaded aft there—with a fishline-sized wire around his throat that a swift jerk could start blood spurting. But now that Varll was not available they would have to come to him, their arms discarded, begging for scraps of food and sips of water. Soon—soon!

For the thousandth time he cursed them for sentimental fools. Back on Earth, in any of the metropolitan huddling places that had felt the kiss of the hell bombs, they would have been something less substantial even than cinders. And in the country they would be suffering the slow insidious wasting that radiation had induced.

He had taken the only completely logical step. Cut the red tape. Kill any crew members or civilians who objected. Waste

no time taking off, but capture as many females as possible for the mothers of his off-planet settlement. Three women of mature age were available—that accursed Lois Tabor had looked younger before takeoff—and four below teen-agers snatched from the arms of dying fathers or mothers. A big saving in weight and food, and a promised yield of several score sons and daughters.

The machine gun and the automatic rifle must have chopped-down more than thirty of his ground crew fellows and passengers before he finally fought his way aboard with his terrified little band of prisoners.

Luckily he had recognized Ian Varll and had clouted him over the head. Hyne knew little more than the theory of astrogation and ship operation. He had been a second helper to a helper on the crew. So he had herded his little harem of females aboard, dragging behind him young Ian Varll . . .

Varll had a medium range portable talker on the island. Hyne had insisted that he carry one. While his guinea pig was digesting the alien fare lustily, or knotting into ghastly death or sickness, Hyne would be listening and learning.

He signalled. No response. Again.

"Yes?"

"How was the llama steak, Varll? Or didn't you eat any?"

"I tried a little chunk, *Captain*. Cooked the rest of it, still drying over the coals . . . So far no misery."

"If we can get by for a year or so," Hyne said, "eating the native growths and animals, our crops would help."

"With what we have?" Varll laughed humorlessly. "A little sack of raw goobers, raw peanuts, from some health faddist's luggage. An unopened box of sunflower seeds from the same source. And a half-empty tin of yellow popcorn . . Am I right?"

"With such food we can feed millions," declared Hyne.

"I'd give my shirt for some potatoes and soybeans instead," Varll shot back. "But we use what we have . . . It's not too cold over here, what with the sleeping bag. And I see the vegetation protects itself by curling tightly and extending fluffy fans of leaves."

"Keep your eyes and ears open, Varll. I'll join you in the morning unless something comes up."

"By the way, Hyne." Varll's voice was almost amused, "I am breathing the Martian atmosphere. Rather thin and weak on oxygen, but definitely breathable . . . Disappointed?"

"Of course not." Hyne fought to control a riot of conflicting emotion; blinding rage that Varll had escaped his trap, tempered by the realization that now they would be able to exist beyond the confines of the space ship and that he would really be able

to establish his new world. He made his voice as pleasant as he could, "Why, that's great. I was worried about that."

But he knew now that Varll must die. It had been a mistake to send him to the island. He regretted giving him the three cartridges. One would have served. Now he must go to Varll, trick him into the open, kill him.

The control section of the ship could be sealed against the rebellious women while he made the short hop to the island and back. With Varll dead the surrender of the women would be merely a matter of time. The Tabor woman could be locked in a cabin and used as a subject for the testing of edible herbs and meat.

Then, in truth, would he become the patriarch of this great sunken valley....

* * *

Morning saw him waddle forth from the airlock in his suit of space armor. Over this pressurized bulk he wore two thick layers of material that would fend off sharp rocks or arrest bullets. Despite the lesser gravitation of the desert planet he walked with difficulty.

From an open port in the lower section of the upthrust bulk a rifle cracked, twice. He felt one slug, like a tapping fist, against his chest. The other must have missed . . . Lois Tabor! Should know she was wasting ammunition.

Then he was in the skimmer, safe from further attack, and he doffed the cumbersome suit. He might have to put it on again if Varll tried to hide out or ambush him on the island, but he could control the tiny powered wing better with his own hands.

He circled upward and around the squat pointed bulk of the ship. This area looked level and fertile enough for the planting of crops. Yet, if there were rodent-type pests or insects or trampling herds of brutes, might not one of the islands prove more easily protected? Hyne cursed. This founding and coddling of a new community overtaxed his meager store of knowledge.

To him it had seemed a simple matter of procreation, with the women and resultant children shouldering most of the work and routine responsibility. He had seen himself a sultan surrounded by willing servants and obedient houris.

Far to the north, on a westward drift toward the pole, he could see the mirror flashes of other small lakes and ponds. The huge depression seemed to be well-watered and somehow protected from the flooding storm clouds of fine sand that roamed the planet's desolate crust.

He climbed higher into the thinning air of the abyss. Nine miles, and then almost ten. The skimmer's broad wing was

almost without support now, the rocket jets lifting it. And then the slowly lifting ship met resistance and Hyne dropped it down.

A transparent dome, unsupported for all he could see, covered the valley. What a stupendous feat of engineering, he thought. Or was it some sort of induced barrier, a stasis shield—was that it?—left behind by some ancient race when it quitted Mars forever and headed for another more fertile planet?

The space-ship must have plunged through. Probably sand had blown upon that covering, whatever it was, partially concealing the extent of the rift. Perhaps, a chilling thought, some of the native Martians were still here?

But now he had other business. Varll must be eliminated. He circled down toward the half-mile square of the hilly island and landed beside a large reed-grown pond.

Here was the pale ash circle of Varll's fire. Near it lay the stripped bones of the lemon-furred creature, and on a rack of reedy-looking sticks strips of blackened flesh were hung. He growled as he saw something else. The handcuffs that had never been off Varll's wrists for five months lay, cut across, on the mucky black ground . . . The repair laser torch on the skimmer, of course!

Hyne cursed his own stupidity and reluctantly donned the cumbersome space suit and the two buffer envelopes. It was a tight squeeze through the hatchway. Then he changed his mind and went back inside. He sent out the talker's call signal.

Varll must have the portable talker with him as well as the rifle and sleeping bag. Probably some other tools from the skimmer as well, and a knife of some sort. He had dressed the beast.

"I am here to take you back to the ship, Varll," he said.

"So I see," Varll's voice replied. "I am staying here, Hyne. You can keep the mainland—I claim the islands."

"Why—you cowardly puppy! I'll hunt you down. Smash you. This is war, you poor fool. You can't hope to stand against me."

"Better take off, Hyne," warned Varll. "You'll never take me."

Hyne threw down the portable talker, careless of possible smashed transitors and irreplaceable circuitry, and burst out through the hatch. He headed toward the rocky hills lifting above the greenish-yellow of bushy trees and the ever-present reedy growth.

A bullet spanged off the helmet of his overpadded suit.

"One," he grunted, his lips twisting into a savage grin.

Farther into the hills. A narrow well-trodden path wound along a shallow valley. As he progressed other fainter paths joined this one. Suddenly another faint blow on his shielded helmet was followed by a whipcrack report.

"Two," Hyne said, and this time he laughed aloud. "The fool. Wasted both bullets. Now all I have to do is track him down."

By now he had come perhaps a thousand feet from the skimmer. He was confident of destroying Varll, but the weight of the suit and its clumsiness in climbing slopes, or crossing broken ground, galled him. Varll was weaponless, unless a clubbed rifle or a knife could be considered a weapon. Hyne outweighed the younger man's one forty-five by sixty pounds, and he was a head taller.

He slipped out of the suit, locking its outer closure and pocketing the key. No use chancing Varll's finding of the suit and using it for protection... Then he took up his needle-hurling, thousand shot rifle—the needles all explosive, rather than paralyn-tipped, and a rocket pistol, and started off.

The Martian air *was* thin. For a few moments he was giddy and somewhat nauseated. He took deeper, faster breaths, as though hyperventilating before diving, and began to feel better.

There was no sign of Varll. He began to realize how large a task this might prove to be. The bare reddish and dull black upper slopes of the hills were pocked with caves, and lower, behind the green-yellow growth, other dark openings showed.

Suddenly two rifles were firing, from behind him, and he flung himself into the shelter of a clump of reddish, rotten boulders. A bullet had clawed lightly along his forearm, but the blood swiftly clotted and he did not bother to bandage it.

Damn! Somehow the women had escaped from the sealed cabin and were taking a hand in the fight One of them, doubtlessly Janice Gore, had swum across to the island with an extra rifle and ammunition. She had likely worn one of the emergency pressure envelopes, standard in all staterooms, to shield her from the chill water crossing.

Now he was pinned down, unable to reach his protective suit, locked fortunately, and here he would lie until darkness allowed him to steal away.

Time passed slowly. Twice, as he tried to shift his position, a bullet spat fragments of the soft reddish rock into his eyes and mouth. He raged and beat with his big fists at the alien rocks that shielded his body.

Then he heard a sound that brought chills to his flesh. The rocket-jets of the skimmer were warming. Varll must have used the laser torch to cut through the locked hatch—with a breathable atmosphere the skimmer need not be pressurized. And he knew that he had been neatly tricked into leaving the ship by those seemingly wasted first two bullets.

Quickly he got to his feet. No bullets creased rock or his flesh.

They had both gone to the skimmer now. He ran, thick fingers finding the key to the suit's closure, and then struggling, face purpling, into the comforting shelter of the suit. Then again he ran toward the lake.

The skimmer was gone. Looking across the placid waters he saw it close beside the mother ship's squat, needle-tipped bulk, and the cluster of tiny human figures—four larger than the other four—about it.

If they thought he would remain here, marooned on this prison rock of an island . . .

Then he saw the talker that Varll had carried and the sleeping bag and the untouched rack of dried, smoked meat. He took up the little radio communicator and signalled.

"I order you to return at once!" he sputtered, once an answer came through. "You cannot desert me like this. Without me the whole flight from a doomed Earth is without meaning."

"We give you the island." That was the harsh, unwomanlike voice of Lois Tabor. "You deserve a bullet instead. But never leave it. We will destroy you if you do."

Hyne laughed silently. Fools! He could swim ashore any night now and lie in ambush until the ship was empty. Once he possessed the ship . . . Oh, they would pay for this!

But if Varll set up the ship's detector screen to cover this island and its surroundings he would know that some object was leaving it. The warning would alert them.

"You will change your minds," he said gruffly. "You need a man to protect and direct you."

"And we have a man!" That would be Janice Gore's voice, the girl who had swum across the lake. "Ian Varll is young and intelligent and kind. It is he who decided your life be spared."

"That weakling dog? Pah!" And Hyne snapped off the talker.

The time to act was now before they could set up a system of alarms and the detector screen. Once he was safely on the mainland their detectors would be unable to determine the difference between him and the vicuna-like beasts living there.

In the daylight? But the space-suit would also double as an underwater suit. The lake was shallow. Varll had mentioned a depth of less than fifty feet. With luck he would not dip below half that while walking ashore.

Out of sight of those on the other side Hyne found a narrow cove, rock-walled and deep, that led down into the lake. The suit was not buoyant enough to float, he found, so there was no need to carry extra weight.

The water was clear above and about him. A wide tongue of somewhat slippery rock, covered with pinkish ooze, extended

toward the shore. He followed this wide shelf and was elated to find it carried him to within a hundred feet of the mainland. Beyond that a jumble of large and small boulders and ugly grey patches of bulbous slimy growth—dolphin-sized and larger—extended.

Carefully he shuffled from rocky ledge to rocky boulder. He had no wish to become wedged between two of the boulders. He was safe enough here; Varll and the women were not on the shore where they might sight him, but much further back. A careful crawl through the reedy grasses to a clump of sheltering trees . . .

Careful shuffle of broad space-booted feet. Steer clear of that fungoid-looking grayness. Seemed to be covered with sharp green spines. Detour along this series of flat-topped boulders. Twenty feet more to go, possibly less.

And then the collapse under him of an apparently solid, huge, rounded boulder. A splitting in half and an engulfment into a cavity, bluish, and pink and yellow-white layered. A huge valved shell that closed on his space-suited thighs and came crunching inexorably together.

Then he was free, his body numbed, as was his mind, with the shock of the double dismemberment. The water was tinged pink about him. He felt the strength draining from his thick-muscled body as blood emptying from a filled bladder wrinkles and deflates it.

He knew that this was the end of his plans and the end of his life. He was amazed to find that he was almost glad. It was an end to the hate and scheming and futility of his existence.

At least the colony he had planted here on Mars would not die. The children born into it would not be red-cheeked giants with great muscles and boundless vitality like his own. His name would be forgotten, or cursed.

Instead they would revere the memory of a slender little man with thick-rimmed glasses and a gentle voice . . .

It was finished.

Something in Maern's past made him invincible because he always knew what was going to happen next

THE RUTHLESS MAN

By GERALD W. PAGE

ILLUSTRATED BY JERRY BURGE

There was no light in the street or in the windows of the houses on either side; no light from the stars or moon because of the ray curtain that blacked them out during emergencies. The only sound was Graham's hoarse, rasping breath and the striking of his running feet on pavement. That was the way of police hunts—almost the only sort of emergency these days. Police robots could see in the dark, could hear sounds a man could not. Lawrence Graham knew as much about the capabilities of police robots as any man alive and because of that, stronger even than the fear that gripped him, he had the conviction that running was hopeless.

A light struck out of the blackness at him, blinding him more effectively than the utter blackness of the curtained night. He threw up his arm to shield his eyes from the stabbing pain. He tried to stop running, to twist to one side, to drop to the ground and roll clear of the light—anything to escape that stabbing pain—but his actions only cost him his balance. He sprawled hard, striking the pavement painfully. Now there was a sound. Graham heard the purring of robot motors and knew they were surrounding him.

Again Maern had won. Damn the man, damn his luck—— Why did he always win? How did he always know? He was human. He was fallible. He had to be.

Yet——

Yet he won, as he always won.

Graham knew what was coming. He was a traitor and in wartime Maern could not tolerate traitors. The standing order

was that anyone convicted or even suspected of treachery, no matter how high placed that man might be in government, was to be put to death upon capture. There was never, to Graham's sure knowledge any questioning of prisoners—which only added to the mystery of how Maern always knew. Maern was utterly ruthless. He tolerated no delays or risks—and execution was an automatic part of capturing a traitor.

A robot moved closer to Graham. He could feel the vibrations of its movements in the pavement on which he lay. Fear and panic subsided and anger took their place but there was no strength left in him. There was only the cold night seeping into his bones and the weakness from running. After all this time the fight had finally gone out of him. He was beaten; he admitted it bitterly to himself.

Again Maern had won.

Something cold touched the back of Graham's neck. Cold as death, he told himself. He swore aloud, then suddenly the weakness left him. He shoved himself up, determined to fight anyway, to at least die trying.

But he never made it to his feet. The cold at the base of his neck became warmth and a comfortable blackness settled over him . . .

* * *

Lawrence Graham awoke, alive and confused, unable to remember. He lay on his back, staring up at an unfamiliar ceiling. He could not organize his thoughts, could not place his surroundings. He was comfortable and rested, but it took moments for his strength to return, the chaos of memory to untangle.

Then he realized where he was.

He was on a bunk in the cabin of a spaceship. There was safety webbing over him, but he was not strapped down. He could feel the vibrations of the ship's engines and life support systems through the bulkhead. He remembered what had happened to him and found time to marvel that he was still alive. He felt no pain, though there was a numbness in the elbow which had struck the ground in falling. He reached back behind his neck and touched the place where the robot's repressor arm had touched him. There was soreness there. Apparently the robot had merely stunned him. How long he'd been out, he couldn't guess. Nor could he understand why he was still alive.

He removed the webbing and swung his feet over the edge of the bunk. Gravity seemed lighter than Earth-normal, but it was still substantial. Maern insisted on gravity aboard Empire ships being maintained at about one-half Earth-normal. Graham hadn't been in space enough times to be able to tell if this were

one-half g or not. All he really knew about artificial gravity systems aboard spaceships was that they existed. He started to rise but found himself still too weak to make it.

The tiny cabin's single door opened and a small wispy man entered.

"Feeling all right now, Larry?" the man asked.

"I feel just fine, Doc," hiding his weakness.

The small man smiled. Another man came into the room, a taller and heavier man. Graham knew the tall man, just as he had known Doctor Brubaker. Almost anyone on Earth—or any planet of the empire—could have identified Maern's bodyguard Surgenor from vid and flimsy photos.

Brubaker approached Graham. His slim, sensitive surgeon's hands fluttered nervously, right palm brushing against the knuckles of his left hand. He cocked his head to one side as he spoke.

"You are a lucky man. I've never known Maern to save the life of a traitor before. Is your neck still sore?"

"Some."

"It'll go away. I better give you a check up, Larry."

Graham was still wearing the same clothes he'd worn when the robots had tracked him down, with the exception that his jacket was gone. At the doctor's insistence, he removed his shirt and submitted to a routine checkup. While the doctor worked, Surgenor leaned against the steel bulkhead near the cabin door, seeming even colder than Brubaker. But Surgenor's feelings weren't hidden behind the professional mask the doctor wore. Professionally his feelings were there to be seen by anyone. He was a machine that killed when Maern asked or directed or when it seemed like something Maern would like to have done. Brubaker and Surgenor made quite a team: healer and assassin. Personally, Graham couldn't see too much difference between them.

"You seem none the worse for your ordeal," Brubaker finally admitted. "However, you could still use that vacation I've tried to get you to take. Your nerves are still on edge, of course."

"Of course," Graham agreed, putting his shirt back on. Then he added, "We're on a spaceship. Where am I being taken and why?"

"I'm only a doctor," Brubaker said.

"You're aboard the *Earthling*," Surgenor said. "There's no need to keep it from him, Doc."

Brubaker looked away from Graham. "He *is* a traitor. But I guess he might as well know. We're en route to Sirius where

Maern expects to make decisive contact with the remnants of the Tau Ceti war fleet." He turned and left the cabin.

Surgenor continued to lounge against the door, smoking a cigarette. "Your jacket and shoes are in the locker," he said. "Put them on. Maern wants to see you. And hurry it up."

As he walked down the companionway, followed by Surgenor, Graham finally asked the question that was disturbing him. "Why wasn't I killed?"

"Because Maern didn't want you killed. He has some use for you alive."

"What sort of use?"

"I don't know."

"There's no one closer to him than you," Graham said. "You have to know." He spoke cautiously, chosing his words carefully.

"You were an important government official," Surgenor replied. "Anything left undone that Maern might want finished?"

"Nothing," Graham said. He had been one of Maern's chief advisors, the Minister of Internal Affairs, for all practical purposes the governor of Earth. A possibility occurred to him. Perhaps Maern felt he was too highly placed to reveal publicly as a traitor—that he had been brought into space so that he might be disposed of without trace. Or it might even be that Maern was arranging a hero's death for him during the heat of the battle with the Tau Cetians . . .

But no. That was too theatrical. And of course Maern could have arranged an accident back on Earth—could even have made it seem as though he'd been killed by the underground. It was something else . . .

They took a lift up four levels and walked down another passageway which led to a single door at its end. The door was open and beyond Graham could see a darkened ramp, leading up into blackness. Suddenly Surgenor stepped in front of him and stopped him by shoving his hand against Graham's chest.

"What the hell is this?" Graham asked.

Surgenor's face twisted with an unfamiliar display of emotion. Those cold gray eyes blazed. "You'd better listen to what I'm saying, Graham," he stated in low, rasping tones, as if the words came out only with great effort. "Right now you feel lucky. And maybe you even think you can kill Maern and ruin his plans. You must feel like you're leading a charmed life, just being still alive. But you're not. You can be put out of the way permanently anytime Maern decides. I might even move on my own judgment."

Surgenor removed his hand from Graham's chest and indicated the open door. "Inside," he said.

Slowly and with a mounting feeling of apprehension, Graham walked through the open door and up a gently sloping ramp . . . into the star-studded blackness of space itself.

He stopped and caught his breath, held it against the vacuum of empty alien space. Then he realized he could feel the gentle movement of circulating air against his face. Slowly, with some misgiving, he attempted a shallow breath. There was air.

He walked to the end of the ramp and stopped. Inches from his toe he could see the empty nothingness of space. He felt a brief, illogical surge of panic. *There's air,* he reminded himself, more to fight back the panic than for any other reason. *There's air and gravity and this can't be empty space.* But his senses argued the logic of his mind.

Abruptly he felt a hand against his back and knew it was Surgenor's hand, shoving him forward, off balance, into the star-studded blackness of space.

Then he realized he was standing on something solid and reassuring, though when he looked down he could see only the blackness of space and the blazing stars. The panic gave way to a feeling of light shock which quickly gave way to surprise and abashment. It was an illusion—all of it an illusion of the space surrounding the ship. Graham was standing on an observation deck.

"I'm glad to see you, Graham," a familiar voice said.

It was a deep voice, somehow serene, but certainly not untroubled, certainly not mellow but quiet. Graham turned and saw the dark figure of Maern standing a few feet away, his craggy, solemn features illuminated by the glow from the illusory stars. The face was smiling and Graham marveled, as he always did when coming face to face with Maern, at the way the power in those features gave a kind of rugged handsomeness to an otherwise mediocre countenance. That was part of Maern's power, of course—a part of it like always knowing what his enemies were doing. Every aspect of the man's being seemed to radiate an almost supernatural sheen.

"You may go, Surgenor," Maern said.

"I'm not sure he isn't dangerous, sir," Surgenor protested. "He might try something."

"He's unarmed," Maern pointed out. "You worry too much, my friend—for which I am grateful. But I'm safe alone with Graham. I can assure you I will not die at his hands."

There was reluctance in Surgenor's brief hesitation before his murmured, "Yes sir." Obediently, he left.

Graham faced the man he wanted to kill. Behind Maern, he could see several spaceships, all emblazoned with the red and

silver sunburst of the Armada of Earth. Glancing in the direction of the ship's tail, Graham saw only blackness and a faint mist left by the ship's drive. He looked back at Maern, who was as motionless as a statue.

"We're pretty far into space," he said.

"Yes," Maern agreed.

"The ships aren't in free-fall. They're accelerating."

"Right."

It was possible with the drives his ships were equipped with, Graham knew. But it was madness for a ship to continue accelerating this far out, even with the stasis envelope that permitted a ship safety at great speed. Madness—or was it merely confidence? Maern always seemed to know just what he could get away with.

"You'll have to be wrong sooner or later," Graham said. "Some day you'll make a wrong decision and that will be it. All of it."

"Does it bother you that I'm always right?" Maern asked. "I always am, you know. But there is more to my infallibility than you could guess—and there is a purpose in the way I do things. Someday you might understand. In fact, I know you will."

"I have to admit you have great luck," Graham commented.

"Do you think Empires are built on luck and that the decisions which keep an Empire intact are the fortunate guesses of a good gambler?"

"I don't believe in fortune telling."

"Nor do I," replied Maern. "Yet I've known all along that you would turn against me and I knew you would be with the group we raided yesterday. I gave the order to spare you before the meeting was raided. I've known the names of the others at that meeting for some time. I always do, Graham."

Graham sensed that he would learn nothing by continuing this line of conversation. Maern was an expert at fending off what he wanted to fend off, an expert at playing people like pieces on a chess board. And Graham resented Maern's pose as oracle.

"You've never yet let your idea of a traitor survive," Graham said. "Why me?"

The rugged features of the Emperor softened in the blazing glow of the raw starlight. "Because I am ruthless, Graham. Absolutely ruthless. And because I have you in mind for a rather special job which only you can do. You can't understand it, I know. But I have chosen *you*, of all people, as my successor."

There was a silence as deep as the stretches of space that seemed to surround them.

"You seem speechless," Maern said. "Of course that news would astonish you, but you must know I do not intend to let

all this collapse when I die—as I shall, you know. I could hardly leave it to the computers that seem to do must of the real work these days."

"I'm not going to play your game," Graham said.

"It's no game," Maern said seriously, then resumed his train of thought: "Oh, computers are clever instruments. This room, this illusion—it's all done with computers, you know. We're in a stasis envelope and if you looked out into space the red shift would have distorted the stars, for the ship travels well above the speed of light. Yet my computers can calculate how the stars should look if we were not subject to that distortion and they provide us with that illusion. The illusion we are not." He paused as if to let his words sink in.

"But we are subject to certain distortions and though the machines may create illusions for us, it is necessary that men remember reality. The ruler must be a man very much aware of reality. I cannot leave a machine to soothe people without leaving someone in charge who knows more than the machine."

"I won't play your game," Graham repeated.

The silence was broken by Maern's laughter. "In due time," he said, "you will understand what I have done and how I have done it. And perhaps you will not entirely disapprove. But I see that your hatred is too great to permit understanding just now."

The door opened and Surgenor came up the rampway, though Graham had not seen how Maern summoned him. The bodyguard stopped at the top of the ramp and gave Graham a sullen, deadly look.

"Return Mr. Graham to his cabin," Maern said. "And treat him with all the respect due my second in command."

Surgenor gaped at Maern, then Graham.

"Oh yes," Maern seemed to be enjoying Surgenor's bewilderment. "He is second in command in the Empire. He's to be my successor, Surgenor. See that he is treated with respect and accorded every honor. But also keep a close watch on him—to see he doesn't hurt himself."

"But sir——" Surgenor began.

"In time you will understand." It was dismissal.

Surgenor led Graham back to his cabin.

Days became weeks as the fleet droned on toward Sirius and in that time, Graham did not see Maern. Time passed slowly and Surgenor watched over Graham like a mother hen looking after a chick. Graham had access to every part of the ship except Maern's cabin and the control decks. But there was no one to talk to but Brubaker.

The doctor was Maern's private physician and saw to the

health needs of most of the officials in the government. He listened patiently to Graham, but behind his tolerance Graham sensed condescension. But Graham talked anyway.

"There has to be an answer," he said. "Just look at the record. What shows up as the foremost feature of Maern's reign?"

"He always knows," Brubaker replied.

They were in the ship's lounge, an elegantly appointed room fitted with tables and chairs and a good robot bar. Brubaker sipped scotch. Graham's beer sat untouched on the table in front of him.

"He always knows," Graham echoed. "Always. You're his doctor; how does he do it?"

"Maern doesn't talk much about himself," Brubaker said.

"Okay. Look—fifteen years ago Maern suddenly popped into prominence from nowhere. He was brilliant, a skilled politician, masterful, magnetic. People were drawn to him. The weak confederacy that was the First World Government was no match for him. In two or three brilliant maneuvers Maern took over the presidency, then reorganized with a stronger government—the Empire. Stronger and more repressive. But there were needed reforms and a program of expansion of our space colonies."

"You keep forgetting the old government," Brubaker said. "It wasn't much of a government. You keep forgetting that."

He drained his glass, set it on the table and shifted in his chair, staring off past Graham's shoulder, letting him know the conversation was over. Graham sighed, leaned back and sipped his beer. It was no longer cold.

It was the expansion program that provided the popular emphasis under which Maern reorganized the government. The colonies became important and strong. Man moved into space and the Empire was born. Moving outward to planets of other stars, Earth culture and science was expanded. Maern won over the public with countless speeches in which he emphasized that when Earth finally contacted a really powerful intergalactic culture, Earth would not be swept under. It was an idea with romantic appeal, and more importantly it made economic and commercial sense as well. Space travel was not as difficult as it once had been. There had to be other races in the Galaxy and contact was inevitable, ready or not.

The first race contacted inhabited a planet orbiting Tau Ceti. They were humanoid but not human. Their cultural and technological level was on a par with that of Earth. Their home world, close not only in distance but in geological and chemical composition and size to Earth, was just as overcrowded as Earth.

They needed colonies and the resources of other planets. The two planets, the two cultures were pretty much alike. War came almost immediately.

But Maern proved ready for it. It was almost as if he expected it.

He was a brilliant strategist in space. As brilliant in space as Julius Caesar or Napoleon were on land. His brilliance at times resembled recklessness, for he always seemed to know if the enemy would overlook a move and he put his ships where they would do the most good—even though common sense dictated that he was leaving gaps through which the enemy would move. The enemy never did. Maern always knew exactly what they would do and made only those moves which would stop and defeat them. Maern was winning the war for Earth.

But the war was an aggression and it was expensive. So increasing numbers of people opposed Maern. People such as Graham, who saw Maern as a ruthless, genocidal maniac; a man to be stopped. Despite an early rise to high public office, Graham was a leader in the underground—had been for years.

Had Maern known all this time?

"You know the trouble with you?" Brubaker suddenly asked.

Graham snapped out of his reverie. "What?"

"You don't know when you've won. You refuse to accept victory."

"I haven't won yet," Graham said.

"Yes you have. It's all over the ship you were arrested as a traitor, along with lots of other malcontents. All the others are dead. But not you. You're alive and have been named the second man in the Empire. Yet you still keep on trying to figure out a way to win your revolution. That's pretty silly—also stupid."

"I don't think so." Graham got to his feet and walked out of the lounge, leaving Brubaker sitting there with his empty glass.

He walked slowly up the passageway toward his cabin, his mind still brooding over the events that disturbed him. Only the fact that his nerves were keyed up enabled him to hear the slight noise that informed him he was being followed. He started to stop and turn, but something warned him not to. Whoever it was was being much too quiet, too cautious.

Graham reached his door and casually opened it. Then he dove into his room with a sudden spurt of movement.

There was a burst of brilliance and a deafening noise and heat poured in from the corridor. Graham smelled the distinctive odor of heat gun charge. The door and part of the wall of his cabin glowed cherry red and Graham coughed with the effort to breath. He got to his feet and rushed for the door. He knew

he was making a fine, noisy target, but it was that or suffocate in his room.

He stumbled into the corridor, blinded and coughing as smoke and flame burst forth behind him. There was no second shot. He heard the commotion of people coming, answering the automatic fire alarm, rushing to see what had happened. Someone grabbed his shoulders and steered and shoved him to a place where the air was clear and cool. Graham offered no resistance as he was forced into a chair and someone pushed a glass of water into his hands and said, "Drink this."

It was Maern himself.

"You're all right," Maern said with assurance. "Someone tried to kill you. He failed." After a second he added, "Now you know how I feel."

Graham drank the water, but said nothing. Someone? He knew that someone's name and so did Maern.

Surgenor.

Two days later, Graham was called to Maern's cabin.

"Have you found the man who tried to kill me?" he asked.

"No. Forget that. It won't happen again, I think. Besides, there are more urgent matters at hand. We've sighted the Tau Ceti fleet."

"So?"

"This will be the decisive battle of this war," Maern said. "That fleet is all that remains of the Tau Ceti space force. They are numerous, but they have been beaten back, cut off from their home world, from any world where they can receive aid or supplies. It was the hope of the Tau Cetian generals to gain time by coming here to lick their wounds and build a strategy with which to defeat us. But we have tracked them down. We will meet them in battle and they will fight with us, ship for ship, giving no quarter, receiving none. They know us now. They have little time to plan their fight and cannot break us. But they will fight as desperately as they can. It will be very close but we will win."

"If you know all that, then why not radio the news to them." There was bitterness in Graham's words. "Let them know and maybe they'll just give up."

"I wish it were that easy. I wish I could win this war without taking any lives.

"I'll bet."

"So I fight to take as few lives as possible."

"You've killed a great many Tau Cetians and sent a lot of the Empire's finest to their deaths to do it."

"Yes. But in the long run, Graham, I've saved more lives than

either of us can comprehend. But it has taken effort—and time. I've waited a long time for my ambitions to be fulfilled. You have also waited long."

"I have no ambitions."

"Oh, but you do. It might interest you to know that this coming battle is my reason for having you here."

"And just what is your reason?"

Maern laughed. "In due time. All will be plain within hours. Painfully so, I'm afraid. But I will tell you that an announcement has been made throughout the empire."

"What announcement?"

Maern smiled. "You have been proclaimed my successor."

An hour after his audience with Maern, Graham heard the battle alarm go off.

It clanged through the ship, reverberating from the bulkheads with paralyzing insistence. Men ran past Graham in the corridors toward battle stations and stand-by posts. The almost leisurely pace of a holiday jaunt gave way to grim purpose and the attitude of the crewmen who passed him seemed to match Graham's own. For the first time, Graham realized, no one was watching him, that he could move freely, if cautiously, to almost any point in the ship. If he weren't weaponless, he could kill Maern. The thought flared actinically in his mind. But where could he find a weapon?

He headed for his cabin.

The alarm stopped clanging before he reached his level. The companionway was empty. The silence was tomb-like. Graham found himself walking quietly, like a man in a mausoleum. It was a foolish gesture, irrational and instinctive. But it saved his life.

He turned a corridor and there stood Surgenor, gun in hand.

Surgenor saw him and fired—but not quickly enough. Graham dived into the cross corridor.

There was no place to run, no place to hide. Graham hugged the wall and listened to the pounding of Surgenor's feet as the bodyguard raced toward the intersecting corridor. Surgenor must have figured Gaham would run, for when he turned the corner and found himself face to face with Graham, he seemed startled. And Graham moved before he could recover.

Graham threw himself into a low tackle and they fell in a heap. The gun flew from Surgenor's hand and ricocheted off the wall. It skidded down the corridor deck away from the struggling men. But now Surgenor's hands were groping for Graham's throat, the blunt fingers brushing his neck. Somehow

Graham shoved him back, struck out with his right fist, felt it strike Surgenor's face, and heard his grunt of pain.

Graham tried to strike again, but Surgenor was too quick for him. A hard malletlike fist landed on Graham's face, snapping his head back and filling his mouth with the taste of blood.

Graham fell clear, rolling against the wall with painful impact. His strength was ebbing fast. He was too old for this, Surgenor too young for him.

Surgenor had gained his feet, was coming for Graham.

Suddenly the whole ship rocked with impact. Graham was thrown across the corridor but he caught a glimpse of Surgenor, reeling to keep his balance. Graham reached out and twisted frantically to avoid collision with the far wall. Then, miraculously, it was over. Graham looked around and saw Surgenor, sprawled on the deck a few feet away, blood spilling from a gash in his face and the back of his head looking somehow odd.

Graham realized that Surgenor, being on his feet and moving when the gravity unit acted up, had fallen against the deck head first. The bodyguard was dead.

Graham wasted no time being thankful. He was not that callous. Then he saw the gun on the floor. He must have stared for ten seconds before the full import of that came to him.

He was no longer unarmed.

He took the gun and began his search.

There was only one place on the whole ship where he could expect to find Maern. It took a little while to realize that, but when the thought came, Graham knew it was his answer. Maern would be on the observation deck, watching the battle.

No one passed Graham as he made his way there. No one tried to stop him. He reached the door and it opened easily. He saw Maern, seemingly hanging in space, and Maern saw him.

And he saw the gun.

"So Surgenor is dead."

"He's dead."

"It's a shame. I wish there had been another way."

Taking his time and making very sure of his shot, Graham aimed and fired.

A gout of energy flared from the weapon's muzzle and streamed toward Maern. But the blast stopped short of its target, and Graham realized Maern had beaten him again. He'd protected himself with a force field.

"I knew you were coming," Maern said. "I wasn't unprepared. This meeting between the two of us is as much the purpose of this voyage as the defeat of the Tau Cetians, after all. These two events might even be said to be interlinked, part of one

another in time. Do you understand that? You must realize now that when I say I know everything that is going to happen, I am telling the truth."

The weapon hung heavily in Graham's numb hand, like an anchor attached to his arm. "So—you have the power to see into the future."

"No," said Maern. "Only the power to see into the past. I have no paranormal power at all, unless it's completely latent and unknown to me."

Another hit buffetted the ship and a portion of the blackness that surrounded them was flared for a brief period by the blast.

"To what purpose did you let me keep my life?" Graham asked, in sudden anger.

"It should be apparent to you by now. I know the past—my past. And this is it. I come from the future."

"You're talking madness."

"It's true. I am from the future."

Graham could see Tau Cetian ships speeding seemingly toward them, then veer off. Another Tau Cetian missile struck the ship and he felt the gravity beneath his feet fluctuate. Somewhere across space a ship exploded into bits and pieces, with a bright, blinding flash of light.

"There isn't much time," Maern said. "I was a clerk in the archives of the Historical Research Center on Earth some several centuries from now. I kept records and writings on this period of history and because I had a photographic memory, I could recall almost any fact about the period without having to look it up. I compiled the reports of researchers who traveled to this era by time machine. I suppose I longed to time travel myself."

"Time travel's impossible," Graham said.

"Not really," Maern said. "I became fascinated by the character of Maern and the way he built an Empire for Earth. Then one day a traveler who had seen Maern said a strange thing to me. He said I looked just like him. That remark started it all. It came to me, after a time, that Maern could have made his moves just the way he did only by knowing what would happen. His total lack of background before appearing as a political figure gave rise to another theory. Suppose he were really from the future? Slowly I came to the realization that *I* was Maern—that I would go back in time and become Maern and give the commands and do the acts of his life. I would build an Empire because I knew what the empire would accomplish."

"You can't change the past," Graham said. "That's impossible too."

"I never changed the past. I came back and insured it. There was no other Maern but me. I was Maern all along. The actions I had memorized as a clerk were the actions I committed as emperor. Had I not come back, there was serious danger history might be changed. When I presented my arguments and offered substantial proof to my superiors they resisted only for a time. Besides, psychiatric evaluation said I could do it. So I was given permission to return to the past—and here I am."

"And all you've accomplished is war and destruction."

Again a spaceship—Graham could not tell if it were the Empire or Tau Cetian—exploded out in space. Maern said, "I have accomplished unity. The battle is almost over. Tau Ceti will lose—*has lost.* It will be taken under the wing of the Empire and together they will form a coalition that will be strong enough to meet the greater Empires of the more centralized powers in the Galaxy on a nearly equal basis. Had Earth and Tau Ceti not joined, those other Empires would have simply swallowed them up as insignificant. The first contact with them is only a century off. In that time Earth and Tau Ceti must be made strong enough to remain independent. I know they survived—at least up until the time I left my own age. I have been ruthless in forming this empire—absolutely ruthless—but I believe it was worth it."

"Are you trying to tell me there will be no more wars?"

"No. Merely that we will not lose our independence for centuries to come. We will have very few wars in that time because we are making a strong alliance."

"I don't believe any of this."

"You will, with time," Maern said. "For you will form an alliance with Tau Ceti out of the ashes of this war. You will come to believe the things I say, Lawrence Graham, because history is more ruthless than any man."

So you really are mad, Graham thought. I failed to kill you and can do nothing to stop you and you're raving mad. Yet——

He saw a Tau Cetian ship explode, then another. Almost on the same beat, an Empire ship was shattered to nothingness.

"The fighting——" he started to say.

"I know," Maern said. "Tau Ceti has lost, but a few of her ships fight on. Learn to admire their spirit, Graham. You'll build a stronger alliance than I have an empire. It's up to you, but you can't really help doing it. History *is* ruthless."

It came almost on cue. There was a blinding brightness that seemed to drop like a sheet before Graham's vision. The ship rocked again with impact. But this time there was noise, loud and explosive noise such as could never have traveled the vacuum

between two ships in space. Graham fell back, rolled down the ramp unable to stop himself. He did not lose consciousness. He got to his feet and started up, but as he did he saw the safety door slid into place, cutting off the observation deck itself, and the twisted metal and gaping blackness of space that was not an illusion, but the real thing, and he knew that all that had saved his life was the force field between him and Maern.

The door behind him opened and Graham rushed out into the corridor. People were there, crowding around. Graham tried to talk. He couldn't. Dizziness swept over him and he fell to the floor, unconscious.

He returned to consciousness in his own cabin. Brubaker stood beside his bunk, looking down at him.

"You're all right," the Doctor said. "Bruised is all. Banged up. A few small cuts. You're lucky. Maern is dead."

"I know," Graham said.

"The Tau Cetians have surrendered. Admiral Flanders wants your orders."

"Huh?" Then Graham remembered. "Oh, that's right——"

He sat up and in his mind he could see Maern standing on the deck, the ships of war projected in a three dimension image about him. He heard again the man's fantastic story. Could a man really be that ruthless? As ruthless as history itself, doing everything history dictated? Even to naming the man to succeed him when death came, as he knew all along that it would?

Maern was more ruthless, more dedicated than I ever thought, Graham said to himself. He looked up at Brubaker. "Get me Admiral Flanders," he said in a hoarse voice. "It seems I have an empire to make whole."

On a far-off world at the edge of the solar system, Denton Barry fights the little gray men who are not men

REQUIEM FOR PLANET X

By GEORGE HOPKINS

They were coming! The little manlike things that were not men. Barry could hear their shrill shouts through the door he had just fastened.

Two gray bodies lay on the floor near the mask he had torn from his face when the gas had touched his brain. He kicked the bodies and hurled the mask across the room.

He laughed insanely.

His brain seemed to be on fire; he shook his head to clear it.

"The gas almost got me," he said.

The piping, birdlike shouts of the man-things were louder and he could hear them pounding on the door.

"I wish I had gotten that third one!" he shouted angrily. "I will now!"

He took a few steps toward the door, stopped and shook his head resolutely.

"I'll find Lara first," he cried.

Across the room was another door. It gave to his push and he leaped through.

The room was huge. Its stone walls and vaulted ceiling was a glittering sweep of inlaid precious stones. The two great central columns that supported the ceiling blazed with jeweled fire.

Row upon row of crystal cases stood in orderly ranks down the length of the room.

He uttered a cry of amazement.

In the cases were people. Not the man things, but people like himself. They looked alive, but even his gas crazed brain knew they were dead: embalmed.

Thousands of crystal cases—the room was a tomb.

"Lara! Lara!" he shouted.

His voice echoed mockingly back to him.

"Did they put her in a case like they did you? She's human, too—like you. Why don't you help me find her?

The madness in his brain grew stronger and he screamed at the people in the cases.

"You *will* help!"

Anger surged up with the madness and he carried case after case to the door and pushed them against it.

His mood changed and he ran down the central aisle toppling cases over, laughing as they broke. The gas from them rolled around him.

The past became the present in his tortured mind and he was back on Venus after a run in the asteroid belt. In his pocket was a rare gem found only in the belt. It was for a wedding ring. They had quarrelled, he and Lara, but he was certain all anger would be over. They had always forgiven each other.

There was a terse note from her in his room. She had left for Planet X with Dale Rodman. Angrily he gathered all the data he could find on the mysterious planet.

Soon an energy shell swept out of the unknown; tapped out its message and then drifted a useless bit of cosmic flotsam. The four planets awoke to its message.

"We have landed."

Planet X! The word swept around the system, another ship had reached planet X, out on the far perimeter of the solar system. Would it fare better than the first? A derelict manned by a delirious madman who had babbled of a dead world, a dead city blazing with gems—and had died while transmitting his message. Fortunately, the mechanism of the energy cell was automatic—or his fate and his discovery would have remained unknown . . .

Denton Barry, with John Lincoln by his side, had lifted the Ceres to search for the planet. A piece of cosmic debris had crashed through its hull injuring the change over drive. He'd been forced to return for repairs.

Six months of silence from the Astarte—Dale Rodman's ship—and the inhabitants of the inner worlds forgot. Only a few remembered. Barry tried to kill his memory.

He was in a bar. Lincoln had been with him but left when a messenger whispered to him. Barry did not care, let them all go.

He snarled silently at the woman singing. He hated her and wished she would stop. She had dug deep, centuries deep, into the past for her songs. He cursed the sentimental nonsense. Fuzzily he raised his empty glass and shouted at the Mercurian bar maid. She hurried to him.

A Venusian entertainer dropped into the chair across from him and tried to smile coquettishly. He scowled at her and drank.

Sentiment made the singer's voice full throated and beautiful.

"Suddenly there is a valley——"

The room disappeared from in front of Barry and the face of the Venusian was that of another.

Blue eyes that laughed and golden blonde hair——

"Where hope and love begins," came the song.

The blue eyes were no longer laughing; they were hate filled and anger hardened.

"Yes," Barry grinned mirthlessly, "once there was a valley. Now where is it?"

The imaged face disappeared and it was a Venusian across from him. He looked at the mottled face painted to resemble earth women; the false breasts——

After ten years of hell in the space lanes he had met Lara and had learned to dream again. Then the note and the energy shell. Hate and anger exploded within him.

"Why am I talking to you?" he snarled cruelly at the entertainer. "Get the hell away from me, you damned fish!"

He waved his empty glass at the barmaid and it was refilled. He drank it at a gulp and the room spun. He raised his hand to signal for another but pitched forward across the table.

He felt a hand shaking him and heard a voice breaking through the fog on his brain. Slowly he raised his head to curse his disturber.

It was a woman. His eyes swept up the white dress to the face. An elderly face, wrinkled but kind, with a sweetness years had not dimmed.

Lara's mother——

He shook his head. It must be another drunken dream. It had been weeks since he'd had any other kind.

He saw Lincoln standing behind her. She was no dream, but reality and he staggered to his feet.

"Den," she said softly, "will you find Lara for us? You are the only one we can ask. We will pay you all we have."

He shook his head. Anger made his voice harsher than he intended.

"Why should I? Let Rodman take care of her. She went with him."

Tears came into the woman's eyes. "I guess that's true—but I'm sure she went only for the excitement. She didn't care for him. Anyway, I won't bother you any more. We hoped you still cared. That's why I came to Venus."

Barry glanced at Lincoln; the Englishmen nodded almost eagerly.

"I'm sorry I tried to hurt you," he smiled. "We've just been

waiting for the Ceres to be repaired. We plan to leave tomorrow. You won't have to pay a cent."

The woman thanked him and suddenly her voice changed. It sounded like many voices: high, piping, like angry birds.

He was on a strange planet, walking on a road so ancient it was worn smooth by the frigid wind that whispered across it. There were statues lining the road, and they also were carved by the Master Sculptors: wind and time.

Suddenly, from nowhere, little gray men seized him and with surprising strength bound him. They shrilled at him with assurance and then angrily. He saw some of them running into the Ceres where Link was working on the propulsion and change-over units. As the gray men lifted him in rubbery arms and carried him down the road, he found himself wondering how life could possibly exist on this incredibly cold, sunless world. Then abruptly he realized they were not men—but robots! He saw another ship and recognized it as the Astarte. By it was the remains of a man's space suit.

They carried him through huge gates that opened automatically, and he realized he was in a domed city. They marched along a ramp into a huge building and through a room with walls lined with strange machines: a museum. One of the machines he recognized: it was a ground car used on the four planets of his own sun. He saw a name on it—from the Astarte.

They put him on a table in the next room and lashed his arms and legs to it.

He felt a cold chill of dread pass over him. What could he expect from these little gray men who were not human—not even alive, just androids?

Three stayed with him and the rest twittered out of the room. They removed his space helmet and pressed a mask over his face. He realized vaguely that the air was breathable before a pungent gas bit into his nostrils and then into his brain. With insane strength he broke his bonds, threw the mask aside and, followed by the robots, ran aimlessly...

Then the past fled and he was back in the present. He heard some one shouting a song.

"Suddenly there is a valley——"

"Who's that singing?" he snarled at the people in the cases. In his mad rage he hurled case after case to the floor and tried to shake the occupants. They crumpled to dust at his touch.

"Who's singing?" he shouted again and then realized it had been he.

His mood changed and he ran down the aisle.

"Lara!" he screamed.

Then suddenly she was before him. The room's artificial light glinted on golden blonde hair; a slight smile was on her lips. She stared fixedly at him with unseeing eyes.

Again he cried her name and tried to take her in his arms. His hands struck crystal. He shouted insanely and tried to tear the case open with his hands. He laid it on the floor and kicked it. The crystal shattered and he glanced fearfully at the other broken cases whose occupants had turned to dust at his touch. Timidly he touched her; her body felt cold and rigid.

Abruptly he was aware of shrill shouts and the sound of heavy blows on the door. He picked her up and started to run wildly around the room. Partial sanity returned to him as he saw a dias at the end of the room opposite the door. It was higher than his head and a narrow stair led up to it. Behind it a silver curtain stirred slightly.

"Might be a door there, Lara," he cried.

He ran up the steps and tore the curtain aside. Behind it was an alcove half filled with a large crystal case with a seated man in it. Jeweled fire blazed from his cloak and a sword lay across his lap.

"Lara, I'll use that. It's like the jungle knife I used when——"

He was in the Venusian jungle. Link was with him and they were hacking their way through the tangle of rain forest growth. Drums sounded as the natives talked to each other. Strange how the drums were saying over and over——

"Lara—Lara—Lara——"

The past fled and he was in the alcove holding Lara and shouting her name. He stood her up against the wall at the back. Then he saw a small, jeweled book swinging from a chain around her neck. He opened it—her diary.

"I wish I hadn't left with Dale," she had written. "We are preparing to land on Planet X. Suddenly I'm frightened. I wish Den were here . . ."

Barry turned a page——

"They have taken me to their city. Dale is dead. He tried to use his gun when they attacked. It was turned against him. Denny, Denny, I wish you could come after me. You could save me, I know . . . They are coming back now. Good bye, Den."

The door crashed open and Barry prepared his defense. Fortunately they had not taken his gun. Now he examined it and found it to be in working order.

The little gray men had stopped inside the door and were reverently picking up the cases he had piled there. They were shrilling their hate because of the broken ones. Barry ran to the front of the dias and shouted at them. Shrilling angrily, they

ran down the aisle. His gun raked them and they faltered, but more came through the door. Still more fell before the gun's energy charges. Halfway to the dias, they broke and fled.

He looked out of the window. Scores of the gray creatures were scurrying toward the building. It was only a matter of minutes now. He looked at his gun. The charge was nearly exhausted. Two, maybe three short blasts were left. His gaze wandered to the two huge columns that supported the ceiling.

"Lara," he whispered excitedly, "I can sever those columns with the gun and the ceiling may cave in on the androids. I think the arch of the alcove will protect us. I'll have to wait, though, until they are all in the room."

Gray shapes crowded the doorway.

"When they charge again, honey," he said, his unsane mind not accepting the fact that she was not alive, "I'm going to cut the columns. You stay back there and you'll be safe. There's a ground car in the museum. Maybe you can get it and drive to the Ceres." Then he shook his head and added, "No, don't do that. Link is dead."

He saw a movement behind the cases. Little shapes hugged the floor and flitted from row to row. They were coming in from side entrances he had not seen. He knew there would be no wild charge this time but a well planned attack, undoubtedly in waves.

He couldn't blast the columns until all were in the room. He would have to hold them someway. He looked at his almost useless gun and shook his head.

A glimmer of light struck the case on the dais and glittered on the forgotten sword. He struck the case with his fist, but it did not break. He tried kicking it, but it was stronger than the cases in the main part of the building.

He glanced toward the androids. They were sifting through the cases faster now and some were poised behind the first rows.

"Don't be frightened, darling," he said to the motionless form in the alcove. "I'll get you out of here."

He pushed against the case and it rolled off its base. With the tinkle of the breaking crystal, a shrill piping of rage came from the androids. Some started to charge, but an authoritative voice stopped them.

Barry grabbed the sword and waved it over his head. He pulled on the jeweled robe and with it in his hand he ran to Lara and draped it over her shoulders.

His mind was still in no condition to accept the truth and he continued to talk to her.

"Watch this," he said, "and don't be squeemish. They're only robots. They were probably created when this planet started

breaking away from its own sun. Something to carry on after the humans were all dead. They were taught to embalm the humans—perhaps because they thought they might someday be able to return to life under the warming rays of another sun. They couldn't have imagined that their planet would go into an orbit so far out that that sun would be visible only as a bright star. Now the androids seem to feel that they must embalm every living humanoid they see."

The androids were moving slowly and carefully. He looked down the aisle toward the open door. Gray bodies moved in the other room.

"No escape that way, Lara," he shouted.

They were coming now from the front row of cases and more sifted through the entrances. They walked slowly toward the dias, waving knives and clubs, and shrilling their conditioned hate for the destruction he had caused.

He met them at the edge of the dias as they crowded up the steps. The wild battle cry of the jungle Venusians came from his lips as he swung the sword. Knives struck his legs and thrown clubs thudded against him. A madman, he felt no pain and no exhaustion.

He heard a voice singing:

"Suddenly there is a valley——"

Behind him the body of the girl relaxed and she slipped to the floor. Her chest seemed to move—and then she lay motionless.

Barry cursed and swung the sword wildly, realizing he had been the one singing. He continued to curse and swing blindly until he realized the androids were retreating again.

A new group came forward and they carried ladders. Behind them was a packed mass of the gray bodies.

Barry glanced at the walls. No more androids were in sight. He whipped the gun from its holster and raised it. The androids stopped and some started to run.

He aimed at the columns and pressed the firing button. A stream of energy struck one column and then the other. He thrust the now empty gun back into its holster and waited. The energy of the gun quickened the movement of the molecules of the columns and the stone glowed for an instant. Suddenly there came two quick puffs of vapor and the tops of the columns were gone.

The ceiling cracked and with startled cries the androids looked upward. Barry leaped back into the alcove and wrapped the cloak around Lara's body and then threw himself across her.

With the roaring crash of falling stone came the dry twinkle of breaking crystal and shrill cries from the androids.

Dust settled in a cloud over Barry and one stone struck the dias and rolled across his legs. Then there was a sudden quiet except for the thud of an occasional stone slipping from its position.

He reached back and tried to roll the stone off his legs. It would not move. With insane anger he pushed at it and it rolled over. He stood up. There were no androids in sight and where the crystal cases had been were tons of stone that had once been the ceiling.

He picked Lara up gently. The rigor was gone and he swung the lax form across one shoulder. Gripping the sword tighter he picked his way gingerly across the rubble and into the museum. He met no androids. Apparently all that had been in the room were buried under the rubble.

He ran to the ground car, broke out a space suit for Lara and a new mask for himself. Somehow he managed to get Lara's limp body into the suit. He donned his own mask and ran to the entrance. He fumbled along the wall until he found the lever which controlled the doors. Then he was back in the car and had started the sealed energy-motor. The car rolled forward and through the open doors. Just as he reached the bottom of the long ramp, five of the androids ran out of another building and onto the ramp. He felt the car shudder when it struck the gray bodies and then he was in the street..

As he whirled the car toward the airlock of the domed city, he saw three vehicles coming at high speed from the opposite direction. He gave the ground car all the acceleration it would take and soon realized the pursuers were no longer gaining. It would be only minutes before he would be at the double doors of the airlock. If they opened automatically, as he believed they did, they could make it. If he had to stop——

The twin doors of the huge lock were close now. He never slackened speed. Either they'd open or he'd crash them. With Lara dead, it no longer mattered. Then it struck him, and he found himself no longer caring.

But as he flashed down upon it, a sighing came to his ears. Not a second too soon the twin portals swung wide and they were in the lock. A moment of darkness as the doors closed behind them. Then ahead a glimpse of the faint glow which passed for daylight on Planet X. The outer doors had opened and they were quickly through. He turned off the road and was forced to slow down for the rougher terrain. As he passed the Astarte, he became aware that his pursuers had also exited from the city.

Near the Ceres he stopped and, with Lara across his shoulder, he ran for the open landing hatch. He heard shrill cries and

looked back. The android cars were slowing to a stop. He raced up the suspension steps leading to the open hatch. He pressed the automatic and the steps started to retract just as the leading android reached them. Closing the hatch, he laid Lara carefully on an acceleration chair.

"Link!" he shouted. His voice echoed but there was no answer.

He ran to the controls and engaged the antigrav unit. The ship lifted sluggishly. Link had not finished the repair work. He ran back to Lara, removed her space suit and his own, then carried her to the pilot's cabin and strapped her in a seat close to his own.

Then he saw Lincoln. A gun lay near him and broken thongs were on his wrists and ankles. Barry ran to his friend and pressed his hand over the heart. There was no beat. Nearby lay a mask and four android bodies.

He picked Lincoln up and carried him to the copilot's seat. Now that the madness had left him, he felt tired and listless. He put his hand to his side and it came away covered with his blood. A glance at his screens told him they had left planet X far behind. The ship was on automatic and required little attention. He thrust an energy shell into its tube, slowly giving it the grim message it was to carry.

"Denton Barry, on the interplanetary ship Ceres, leaving planet X. Regret to inform Lara Petri, Dale Rodman and John Lincoln all dead. Ship not operating properly. Am using sun's gravity to carry us back into the system. Do not anticipate enough power left to pull out of sun's gravitational field."

He closed the tube and the shell leaped out into space—vanished. It would reappear days later and billions of miles distant at the Vesta receiving center.

His sight dimmed as he strapped himself in the seat between Lara and Link.

"Good-bye, honey," he whispered, "or will it be 'hello?' " He gave a tired sigh and slumped into his seat.

The ship raced on through the dark of space, its own fantastic speed accelerated by the gravity of the distant sun.

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Denton Barry opened his eyes. He had little time to feel surprise that he was still alive, when a blonde head and luminous blue eyes, misty with tears, bent over him.

"Lara, honey," he whispered. "Am I mad or dead?"

"Neither, dear," she said softly. "Link recovered and repaired the ship while I was regaining consciousness. He says the energy waves from the sun neutralized the gas. Now we are headed home."

Myles Cabot enlists strange allies in his battle with the Martians

THE RADIO MINDS OF MARS

by Ralph Milne Farley

PART THREE—CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATED BY MORRIS SCOTT DOLLENS

SYNOPSIS

Myles Cabot has been transported to the planet Venus via a matter-transmitter. There he meets Princess Lilla of Cupia. (The Cupians are human, but instead of ears, they communicate by means of antennae which grow from their foreheads. They also possess vestigial wings.) Myles and Lilla are mated and their son Kew becomes King of Cupia.

The Cabots' Venusian castle is attacked by the spaceships of invading octopus-like beings from Mars, who can both read and send thoughts.

Lilla escapes, but Myles and Kew are captured by the Martians. They are taken to the city of Yat which is inhabited by Whoomangs—an assorted collection of creatures who have been given human intelligence by the insertion into their brains of a weird grub-like worm known as a "soul."

Cabot and his son are imprisoned with the dragon-like King of the Whoomangs and Nardeen, a furry "golden" girl of another continent.

But the four allies escape and find refuge in a hillside cave, where they form an alliance with a small Whoomang known as a "cat-rabbit" whose thoughts the Martians cannot read. After an attack by the Martians, they decide to try to implant a Whoomang "soul" into the brain of a captured enemy, hoping thus to turn him into an ally. They have just completed the operation when they hear a noise at the rear shaft of the cave. Cabot cries, "Someone comes! Our hiding place is discovered!"

Alternately clicking and speaking—he was wearing his radio headset, and so Kew could hear his words too—he gave his commands: "Jacky, you're tiny enough to hide in a crack somewhere. Dohro, carry the unconscious Martian to the cave-mouth, and be all set to take off. Kew and Nardeen, be all ready to hang onto Dohroo's wing-shoulders."

"But you?" Nardeen breathed.

"I'll stand here, and shoot it out with the intruder. The Martians have felt my arrows before."


MSD 1969

"Good old Dad!" Kew exclaimed. His blue eyes shone with admiration.

But it was no Martian who came down the shaft. First there emerged the huge head of a snake, over a yard wide. Then there followed a serpentine body fully thirty feet in length, not wholly snakelike, for there were rudimentary arms and hands.

"Queekle Mukki!" Cabot exclaimed.

"Yes," clicked Dohroo, "my renegade prime minister, friend of the invaders!" He clicked a sharp command, but no answering hiss came from the snake.

Terrified, little Jack scuttled out from his hiding place, and dashed past the snake and up the shaft. The snake snapped at the little cat-rabbit as it passed, but missed and turned its attention back to Cabot. Cabot loosed an arrow at its great flat head, but the arrow glanced harmlessly off the tough hide. Then the snake struck like a python. All the breath was knocked out of the man, and his bow and arrows scattered from his nerveless hands.

With a croaking hiss, Dohroo flopped forward, sunk his hind claws into the sides of the snake's head, and began pecking at its body with his heronlike beak. The snake shook him, as a terrier shakes a rat; but he hung on, spreading his leathery wings so that their air resistance would impede the shaking.

Cabot sat up weakly and groped about. One hand felt the knife with which he had performed the brain-operation on the Martian. Directly opposite him was the mid-section of the serpent, braced and quiet so that the front end might do the shaking. Through the thick hide, Cabot could see the palpitating of the great heart; and at that spot he struck—struck unerringly.

One last convulsive heave, and the thrashing of the snake gradually slowed down. Dohroo unhooked his claws from the creature's head, stretched and then furled his ruffled wings.

"So be it always to traitors!" he clicked.

Cabot got heavily to his feet and staggered over to the front end of the snake. Brandishing his bloody knife, he announced, "I'm not taking any chances. I'm going to sever its spinal cord."

He studied the creature's head, to locate the exact position of the base of its skull. Then straightened up with an expression of incredulous surprse. "Wasn't Queekle Mukki a Whoomang?" he clicked.

"Most assuredly," the dragon replied.

"But there is no scar for the insertion of a soul. Look!"

Dohroo arched his long heron-neck and peered intently. Then shook his heavy head. "True. Then this is *not* my renegade premier. And now I notice that this snake is slightly smaller

than Queekle Mukki. It is a *wild* snake and hence not tabu. I shall feast well tonight."

"Not until I skin the carcass. Our clothes are wearing out, and its hide will make good leather."

"Let me do it, Dad," Kew suggested. "Your hands are in bad shape."

So the young Cupian deftly severed the head and commenced to remove the skin, while Nardeen watched.

Cabot, freed of work, sat down to rest for a moment. Suddenly he cried, "The Martian! He's gone!"

The net lay torn and empty. While all his captors had been intent on the fight with the serpent, the captive had recovered from the anaesthetic, and had gnawed his way to freedom.

"Come on!" shouted Cabot, jumping to his feet, and gathering up his bow and arrows. "Up the shaft and after him. The operation was evidently a failure. If he gets away, he may warn the rest of our enemies."

"If he can crawl down the face of the cliff, he will undoubtedly head for the three space-ships parked on the plain below," Kew suggested. "Dohroo had better fly down there with me to guard them. And Nardeen had better stick pretty close to the top of the shaft, so as to tip us off if you get into any trouble, Dad."

"Very good plans," Cabot shouted back as he headed for the shaft.

He gained the plateau above. And there, to his surprise, squatted Dohroo, with the escaped Martian snuggled close beside him, its six tentacles wrapped about the dragon's slate-gray leathery body. The two of them did not seem to be engaged in any sort of a struggle. Bow in hand, Cabot drew warily near.

"It's all right," Dohroo clicked. "He's one of us now. The inserted soul has taken charge of his brain, and he's a Whoomang. The operation was a success."

"Yes, I am a Whoomang!" the Martian proudly announced.

Little Jack, the cat-rabbit, hopped timidly up and joined them. Dohroo flew back to the cave, picking up Kew at the ships en route. Cabot and Jack and their new Martian ally clambered down the shaft again.

A council of war was then held while Kew continued to skin the dead snake.

"With this Martian to front for us," Dohroo suggested, "we can return to Yat and stir up a revolution. Or we could send him there to spy for us."

Cabot shook his head. "His thoughts would still speak the truth to all his old associates. He could not keep himself from betraying us."

"Why not send Jacky as a spy?" Nardeen suggested.

But again Cabot shook his head. "Cat-rabbits have been proscribed by the Leader."

The Martian's mind flashed agreement to both of these objections.

"Do you know what I think?" said Kew, holding up a stretch of snake hide that he was stripping off. "Why not have our new ally make a 'sending' for reinforcements, and then trap them when they arrive?" He lowered the skin and hacked some more. "What do you think, Martian?"

"Strange!" came back the wordless reply. "My mind caught only your opening and closing sentences. There was a thought-free gap between."

Nardeen exclaimed, "Can it be that the operation is beginning to affect his mind? To destroy his telepathic powers?"

All stared anxiously at the Martian.

Then sudden comprehension flashed across Myles Cabot's rugged features. "By the Great Builder!" he cried. "I have it! The snakeskin is what does it. Queekle Mukki can neither read nor send thoughts, because his brain is encased in snakeskin. Kew just now held a piece of skin between himself and the Martian and intercepted all thought transference. If we make him a cap of snakeskin, he can keep his thoughts to himself."

"But then I won't be able to receive thoughts, either."

"You can use your eyes to learn things. Hold on a minute! I have a better plan. Fly back to Yat with a branch of flowers. Wear a snakeskin cap, so that your thoughts will not be tapped. Sneak up on several of your countrymen, one by one, chloroform them, and bring them back here for us to operate upon."

The plan was agreed to. The cap was made and tested successfully. The Martian set out for the capital city in one of the three captured sky-ships, while each of the members of the oddly assorted group anxiously awaited his return.

The next day the black and silver ship reappeared on the distant horizon, and then nosed down and parked beside the two ships on the plain below. Their friend—they recognized him by the fact that he still wore the snakeskin cap—slittered from the ship, pulling after him three other unconscious Martians which he dumped upon the rocky ground. Raising one tentacle aloft, he beckoned with his three-fingered hand to the watchers in the cave-mouth above.

Kew and Nardeen grasped Dohroo's shoulders, Cabot took Jacky in his arms, while Dohroo clutched Cabot with his hind claws and flapped down. They all walked up to view their returned friend and the three captives. Cabot motioned to his friend to remove the snakeskin cap. But instead of doing so, the Martian beckoned him to draw closer. Cabot hesitated.

Suddenly the three supposedly unconscious hexapods uncoiled and darted forward. With a startled click, little Jacky jumped from Cabot's arms and with prodigious leaps disappeared into a nearby thicket.

"Save Nardeen!" Kew clicked, flinging himself at one of the oncoming Martians, which promptly grabbed Kew's wrists and ankles. The other three hexapods swarmed over Myles Cabot. He was unarmed, and even if armed would have been no match for so many.

He heard the thought of one of his captors, "Here come the other ships."

Dohroo heard it too, and seizing the golden girl in his talons, sprang aloft, just as four more enemy ships shot down over the edge of the cliff. They rained a volley of bombs at the rising pterosaur, but somehow he managed to dodge all the missiles, which exploded harmlessly on the floor of the plain. Dohroo and his precious burden gained the cave-mouth in safety.

The Martian reinforcements were not needed, for Cabot and his son were already completely overpowered. Unable to continue the struggle, they were led to two of the ships.

The armada set forth. As they circled the cave they dropped a few parting bombs. Cabot resolutely shut his mind to the existence of the shaft. Quite evidently their late ally had not thought of it either, or the cave could have been easily captured.

"What happened to the Martian who had been here with us?"

"He is a prisoner in Yat. The Leader unmasked him, probed his thoughts, and then sent us here, disguised, to capture you."

"What will be done with him?"

"We do not know. The Leader is intrigued with the operation which you performed on the traitor, but has not yet decided whether to attempt to remove the brain-maggot, or whether to kill the traitor and then perform a post-mortem."

Throughout the rest of the trip Cabot strove to fill his mind with thoughts of distant scenes, Cupia, America, abstruse mathematical problems, anything to keep from divulging any secrets about the cave which now sheltered Dohroo and Nardeen, and presumably little Jacky too. Whenever he found his thoughts straying to the cave, he would shift the scene to that cleft in the rocks at Luno Castle where he had last encountered the invading Martians. Thus, although the suspicions of his captors were frequently aroused, they could not fathom his intentionally scrambled thoughts, and hence finally ascribed the whole situation to the inferior brains possessed by human beings.

Cabot hoped that Kew, in one of the other ships, was being equally tactful.

They reached Yat without event, landed on the plaza, and were

paraded through inquisitive throngs of Whoomangs to the palace dungeons, where they were locked in separate cells.

From one of the guards Cabot soon learned an exciting bit of news: the Martian traitor had escaped, and five other Martians were also missing! The guard appeared vaguely envious of these five, but could not quite explain why. This was the first time that Cabot had encountered unclarity of thought among the Martians. As near as he could make out, the traitor had bribed his guards by a promise of some great reward.

"What reward could he offer?" Cabot wondered.

He was still wondering when he was led before the Leader two days later.

"I am afraid that I shall have to put you to death," the large Martian announced.

"Why the reluctance?" Cabot asked. "My execution was all planned the day I escaped."

"The reason why I should prefer to spare your life is that I need you to effect an alliance with Cupia. Your son, through whom I hoped to accomplish this, is dead. And so now——"

Kew dead! Cabot's heart contracted with a sharp grip of pain, and he paid no further heed to the Leader's chain of thought which went on and on. Kew dead! His little son! His devoted pal!

"You're not listening," snapped the Leader.

"How can I think of anything but my dead son." His mind's eye flashed back to the picture of Kew as a baby, nestling in Lilla's arms, and the many times that Cabot had saved him in the past. Had all his efforts, all his dangers, been for naught? Well, at least, Kew's presence had enriched the planet for nearly twenty years.

The Leader again interrupted. "Your thoughts, Myles Cabot, are very confused and confusing. This is no Cupian baby that has died. It is your full grown son, King Kew XIII."

"How did it happen, sir?"

"He escaped. Mysteriously. Lots of mysterious things have been going on here in Yat recently. But he was waylaid and slain by one of the priests of the Whoomang religion: a beaver, I believe. I have not yet decided whether to reward the beaver for preventing Kew's escape, or to punish him for killing a potential ally. Anyway the body is now laid out in the temple awaiting the emergence of the soul. A quaint Whoomang custom! Though why they should believe that your son actually has a soul is beyond me."

Cabot had never seen this ceremony, but he had been through the temple where souls were bred, and he had heard the ceremony described. Some Whoomang beast, in a white hood and a white robe emblazoned with a red swastika surrounded by a red tri-

angle, would stand beside the corpse with a butterfly-net in hand waiting patiently hour after hour, sometimes for days on end, to catch the moth when it should emerge from the brain which had harbored it as a grub. Then the moth would be conveyed to a little wicker cage, to be bred to a moth of the opposite sex. The resulting eggs would be placed in trays of ground-up meat, there to hatch into maggots, each of which would be inserted into the brain of a new victim of Whoomangerie.

"I see that you are well acquainted with the custom," the Leader commented.

Cabot snapped out of his revery. "But are you sure that it is Kew? There must be some mistake. My son, so alive! I cannot picture him as dead."

"What mistake can there be? There is only one Cupian in all Whoomangia. Well, that is that. I now offer you your life, for an alliance."

Why not? Might not a policy of appeasement prevent further encroachments by the Martians. The Leader now had the upper hand. He would win the war anyway. So why not avoid—well, at least, postpone—the slaughter?

Then Cabot thought of the results of appeasement policies on earth and was not so sure. Besides, was the Leader really completely on top even now. What of the Whoomang Martian and the other missing five?

There flashed into Cabot's mind an explanation of the disappearance of these six. The Whoomang Martian, with the enthusiasm of a new convert, had sought to proselyte his former friends by telling them of the feeling of mental superiority which a new soul produced. Of course! How simple! The ex-Martian was taking his new converts back to Dohroo and Nardeen. Other brain-maggots still remained in the carcass of the cat-rabbit, and Nardeen could perform the operation.

"We will discuss the alliance later. No ships are now missing, so the fugitives must be proceeding on foot, as you would call it, though we hexapods have no feet." He shot a mental command to one of the Martian attendants, "Gather the fleet and scour the plain to the northward. Bomb any Martians whom you see scuttling away from here, and bomb to kill! Take Cabot back to his cell."

Late that night the cell door was unlatched and a Martian slithered in. Cabot tried to probe its intent, but the result was a total blank. Never before had he failed to learn what was in the mind of one of these invaders.

Suddenly the mental barrier was removed. The thought came clear, "I am the Martian to whom you gave a soul, O Cabot. The reason that you could not read my thoughts is the snakeskin

hood, which I have now removed. Here is a priest's outfit. Put it on. The hood is lined with snakeskin."

Cabot took it, but before putting it on he asked, "Where now?"

"To the temple. The priesthood are loyal Whoomangs, who can be depended upon to resist the usurper. For they know that he intends to destroy their religion as soon as he dares."

As he donned the hood and gown, Cabot thought, "Well, at least I shall see the body of my son. Perhaps I can even arrange for Christian burial, or at least a burial according to the rites of the Lost Religion of Cupia—Lilla probably would prefer that. But about the loyalty of the priesthood? I wonder. One of them killed my son. If I can learn the identity of that beaver, I'll save the Leader from any further indecision as to whether to punish or reward him—I'll do the punishing myself."

With these thoughts, shielded from all telepathic tapping by the snakeskin lining of his white hood, Cabot followed the gliding Martian. They kept to the shadows. Finally the Martian took a torch and led the way through unfrequented passages until they reached the temple without going outdoors. Here, in the glare of radio-induced light, they were greeted by a pterosaur much like Dohroo, but wearing priestly robes like Cabot's own.

The beast squatted before them, held a pad of paper to the floor with one wing-claw, and wrote with a stylus clutched in the other, "Welcome, Myles Cabot. I entertained you here once before, many years ago, when my brother Boomalayla was king."

"Brother?" Cabot wrote. "I thought he was your husband!"

"Our bodies were mated physically, but our souls were brothers, bred in the same tray. Take off your snakeskin, so that we can exchange thoughts through this converted Martian. There is much to do, and little time in which to do it."

Cabot and the Martian both doffed their caps, and immediately Cabot found himself en rapport with the she-dragon high priestess through the medium of the brain of their hexapod ally.

"I wish to see the body of my son," was Cabot's first expressed thought.

"Body? Certainly you jest. Hasn't the Martian told you the facts?"

"I didn't have time," the Martian interposed.

"Haven't you even the body?" Cabot's face was agonized.

"Your son lives, Myles Cabot. His supposed death was merely a pretense to deceive the Leader of the Martians."

"Yes, here I am, Dad," exclaimed Kew, entering the room. "They just now told me you had arrived."

"My son! My son!" Cabot cried.

In another moment the two men were happily slapping each other on the back.

"And all the deserting Martians are here too," the she-dragon added. "All have been operated upon. A more difficult job it was than inserting a soul in one of the native animals of this planet; but you taught us how, Myles Cabot, just as your compatriot, Namllup, introduced the original system. And all these converts have been supplied with thought-shields, make of snakeskin."

"But where did you get enough snakeskin?"

"You can thank your little cat-rabbit, Jacky, for that. He followed you here on foot all the way from the cave in the cliff, got in touch with the converted Martian after his escape from prison, and then trotted all the way back to the cave with a message to Dohroo, our exiled King. Dohroo flew here under cover of night with the rest of the skin of that snake which you killed."

At that moment an agitated beaver hopped up and handed the dragon priestess a note.

"Great Builder!" she exclaimed. "Now we're in for it! Queekle Mukki has arrived on a tour of inspection and demands immediate entrance—in the name of the Leader. What shall we do?"

Cabot grinned. "What we're in for," he declared, "is merely some more snakeskin, and one less opportunist. Here in the smooth court-yard of the temple, Queekle's serpentine body can get no grip for a fight. Let him be shown in. Then you, Priestess, leap on his head with your hind claws. Give me a knife, and I'll do the rest. This is how Dohroo and I killed the other snake in the cave."

Queekle Mukki was ushered in. Priests of all sorts—reptiles, green dragons, furry creatures small and large, even insects—stood around, all clothed in the conventional hood and gown with its red symbols; and among them stood Myles Cabot, similarly garbed. The temple portals swung shut.

Then, with a raucous croak, the she-dragon hurled herself at the head of this traitor to her King and her country. She spread her leathery wings and braced herself to resist a shaking. But before Queekle Mukki had had time to recover from his evident astonishment at this new development, Cabot had stepped in with his knife and had stabbed the great serpent's heart. Scarcely pausing, he then plunged his blade at the base of Queekle Mukki's skull, noting as he did so the presence of the soul-scar, which had been absent from the otherwise similar snake which he had killed in the cave.

"As Dohroo mistakenly declared when we slew the other snake," Cabot triumphantly shouted, "I now say in the name of the rightful King of the Whoomangs: So be it always to traitors!"

"And let us *not* catch his moth-soul when it emerges," the High Priestess added, "for it seems to be a tainted breed, though it is true that Boomalayla and I came from the same tray as Queekle Mukki."

"A defective mutant, no doubt," Cabot suggested. "You are wise in not perpetuating the strain."

"And now what?" the she-dragon asked.

"Let us quickly skin the snake and make some more thought-shields. While Kew and I do this, set all the priesthood to weaving large strong nets. Dispatch someone to the mountains to pick the blue flower of death."

"Unnecessary. We grow it here in the temple, to use for an anaesthetic."

"Good. Prepare proclamations for distribution by the little messenger bats. Then as soon as all this is completed, we march on the palace."

Day was just dawning. The silver sky was pinkening in the east. The radio-induced lighting of the temple and elsewhere throughout the City of Yat was switched off. Full daylight came.

By noon, everything was in readiness. As many of the priesthood as there were snake-skin hood-linings to supply, marched out of the temple, and across the plaza into the palace. One of these priests of the red swastika and red triangle was Myles Cabot. He carried under his robe little Jacky the cat-rabbit, who had reappeared in Yat that morning. In their midst slithered the convert Martians. Kew, King of Cupia, remained behind in charge of tactics at the temple.

At the door of the Leader's chamber the procession was halted by guards, but their frantic thoughts met with no response. So far as they were concerned, the ether was blanketed.

Nets appeared from beneath the robes of the strange congeries of priest-beasts. And when the guards had all been ensnared, decoction of death-flower, poured on them from phials carried by the priests, put a speedy stop to their writhings.

This all took scarcely a moment.

The procession then forced open the door, and entered. The Leader met them half way from his throne to the door, visibly agitated.

Although all but one of the members of the procession were effectively shielded from the Leader's thoughts, that one exception was the little furry animal carried on Cabot's arm beneath his robe. Muffled clickings in Morse Code told Cabot what the Leader was thinking.

"There came a sending for help from just outside my door. Where are my guards? How dare you enter here without my permission?"

The two intermediate-sized hexapod scientists from Mars slithered down from the dais. Five other Martians ranged themselves beside their Chief. These were the only enemy in the room. No match for the fifty-odd members of the Whoomangian priesthood, and their score of Martian allies.

Cabot whipped back his hood with a regal gesture, and stepped forward. His thoughts now made contact with those of the Leader.

"Beast from another world," he flung the thought, his blue eyes flashing, "the Martian conquest of the planet Poros is ended. Will you surrender peacefully, on our promise to spare your life, or do you prefer to fight?"

"Fight, of course!" the Leader valiantly declared. He fixed Cabot with one of his six baleful eyes. "Myles Cabot, step over to me."

Once more Cabot experienced the hypnotic power of the Martians, sometimes effective, sometimes ineffective. The mystery of its fluctuations, he was never to solve.

Now he meekly obeyed the command. Strive as he would, he could not resist its impelling force. He knew that all the rest of his army, due to their snakeskin thought shields, had not the slightest idea of the debacle which was taking place. And instantly the Leader knew it, too.

Cabot's army would not strike without a signal from him, a signal which now could never come. Cabot felt the Leader gloat as this information reached his consciousness.

"Take up your stand beside me and face your misguided followers."

With dragging feet, Cabot obeyed.

"Now signal them to remove their hoods."

Cabot held up his hand. His reluctant mind figured out how to make a gesture which would signify the command: "Unmask!" In another instant, his whole army would be subject to the Leader's will—the whole revolution would have crumbled.

Cabot felt little feet clawing at his other arm, and his heart leaped as he realized that Jacky was up to something. But the moment that the earthman realized it, the Martian Leader by thought-transference realized it too.

"Strike down that cat-rabbit! Quickly!" came the Leader's peremptory command.

Every bit of Cabot's will-power rebelled. Slowly, like the movements of a sleep-walker, his upraised hand moved down to knock the little animal off his shoulder. But before the blow fell, Jacky, quick as a squirrel, seized Cabot's hanging hood in his little mouth and leaped frantically upward.

The hood fell in place over Cabot's head and face. His eyes gleamed purposefully through the eye-slits. The spell of hypnosis was broken. As Jacky loosed his grip and fell toward the hard stone floor, Cabot's arms shot forward and caught him.

For one brief instant Cabot pressed his little savior to his heart. Then he raised his hand and swept it in front of him with a quick down stroke, the prearranged signal for action.

Nets swirled. Phials of death-flowers were unstoppered. In a few moments the great Leader of the Martians was an inert nerveless prisoner, along with his few remaining henchmen.

Several of the priest-beasts rushed out into the corridors and main hall of the palace to send the messenger bat-lizards in a fluttering swarm to the temple. and soon leaflets briefly recounting the downfall of the Martians, were being distributed.

Two of the converted Martians rushed as fast as they could make their tentacles writhe, to the plaza to drive a space-ship full speed to Dohroo to inform him that he was King once more, in actuality; as he had always been in the saddened hearts of his loyal subjects.

As the unconscious Leader, his two scientists and five guards, were being dragged off to the temple for the implantation of the mothgrubs which would render them forever loyal to their conquerors, Myles Cabot turned his thoughts to communication with Mars. It had not occurred to him before to ask the Martians about this possibility, but now he realized the importance of heading off any more invasions, if possible.

Turning to one of the ex-Martians he asked, "The machine you use for communicating with your home planet—where is it?"

"I'll lead you to it," the hexapod replied, opening the door to a small chamber adjoining the throne-room.

A mass of coils and tubes and plates met Cabot's gaze. He scratched his head, pursed up his lips and narrowed his eyes. But this confusing assortment of mechanism proved to be as inexplicable as the cosmic-ray motors of the Martian space-ships had been. Nor could his guide help him. The minds of only the Leader and his two scientists were capable of mastering the intricacies of this machine, and the three lay drugged and unconscious over in the temple. Well, there was nothing to do but wait; and Cabot chafed at waiting, after so many waits thus far.

Great was the rejoicing of the Whoomang population over the success of the coup. Their rejoicing redoubled when Dohroo, their King, flapped in from the northward. Later Nardeen the Slim arrived by sky-ship and was reunited to Kew of Cupia, Cabot's son.

The next day, the ex-Leader and the two Martian scientists, having recovered from their brain-grafting operations and now meek and loyal subjects of the Whoomang King, showed the Radio Man the secrets of their interplanetary communication. It employed not radio but rather the speed-of-light component of sound.

"My own invention!" Cabot exclaimed disgustedly. "And I never recognized it!"

Here was one place where a Martian could tell a lie, for here actual sounds were transmitted, rather than thought-images. So word was sent to Mars, by the ex-Leader in person, that the planet Poros had proved uninhabitable to their race, and that the remaining members of the expedition were wasting away with some strange contagious disease. Any attempt at rescue would not only be futile, but would also run the risk of spreading the disease to Mars. The Martians on Mars were warned, if they valued their lives, never again to attempt to set tentacle on Poros.

Then, after Cabot had thoroughly mastered the details of the apparatus for possible future use by himself, it was dismantled.

An eternal treaty of peace and mutual defense against aggression was sworn between Dohroo and King Kew. Scatter-brained little Jacky, the cat-rabbit, was made a high-ranking court attendant, as a reward for his faithful services.

Every Martian on the Whoomangian continent was now a Whoomang, admitted to full citizenship. None were in Cupia. Those who remained in Vairkingia, Nardeen's native land, could easily be handled, if and when they returned.

"And now back home to Lilla," Cabot exulted.

"But what about rescuing *my* people?" Nardeen demanded.

Kew read her lips.

"All in good time," he replied, placing his arm possessively around her slim furry waist. "But first you are going back with me to Cupia to become my Queen."

"What!" Myles exclaimed. Like the usual blind parent, he had been too engrossed in affairs of empire to think of this exquisite girl as other than a mere friend and ally. "Why that will never do! My human ears and lack of antennae are recessive in Kew. If he marries a person with the same traits, every second child will be human, instead of Cupian! It's the Mendalian law of heredity."

"We can fix that easily, Dad," Kew replied, grinning. "We'll have only one child."

And Nardeen the Slim blushed red beneath her golden fur, as she snuggled close to her future husband.

* * *

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MARTIAN INTERLUDE

BY GENE HUNTER

On Mars life was simple and pleasant . . . or had been until that fateful night when the first flame appeared in the sky . . .

LAST NIGHT I dreamed I was a boy again, for a few brief moments. It was one of those strange, uncanny dreams where you find yourself only half asleep, and the dream is controlled partly by the subsconscious mind, partly by the conscious.

For a while I was a boy again, and I stood by one of my people's beloved canals, staring down into the deep blue water in the man-made stream. Before me, on the other side of the canal, stretched the endless, shifting desert that was my world. Behind me and to the right the scene was the same, while to my left lay the tiny oasis that was the present home of my people.

In those days the water was free, the gift of our god, L'Tor, who had spent his life in the building of the canals so the small cities and the roving nomads of our near-dead world could live. Those were the days of the Good Men, before political intrigue and the perversions of the New Civilization had stopped the flow of precious water, driving my people away from their deserts and into the hated cities.

I was twelve then, in the last year of my boyhood. During the next year my body and my mind would change and mature, and I would become a man. I would discard the rude gryph-skin I wore about my loins and don the colorful dress and toga of the adult.

For years I had looked forward to the day when I would leave my childhood behind me, but now, with manhood almost

upon me, I was suddenly afraid. I wanted to remain a boy forever, to always know the joys and ecstasy of youth. But even as I stood there on the banks of the canal, my hands clenched, the tears streaming down my cheeks and my heart burning with a strange shame—even as I prayed to L'Tor to keep me a boy forever—I knew that it could not be.

Like the other desert children, I was doomed. I wondered if they ever realized the thing that was happening to them—if they ever cried and prayed as I did. I know now that they did not. They would accept manhood as inevitable—as a duty, as something to look forward to and enjoy. It was I who was different.

Like the others I would assume the cloak of manhood in a few more months. I would mate with the girl selected by my father, and I would beget children. And when my people again felt the urge to travel, I would mount my family on a great gryph and I would go with them to find a new home.

When we chanced to meet another roving tribe, I would go into battle with my people against them. If we were victorious, I would help to slaughter their remaining men; I would help capture their gryphs and their women, and richer and more powerful, we would go on our way. This would be my life for a few years, and then, if I chanced to survive the wounds of battle and the rigors of our nomadic life, I would begin to wither and die.

At thirty I would be a cold, naked corpse, and my mate and my mistresses and my children and my friends would stand over me and weep and pray for me. Then my mate would burrow a shallow grave with her bare hands and when my friends had lowered me into it, she, weeping with a religious and emotional hysteria, would cover my body with the sand. They would leave, then, and soon a new spirit would shine in the firmament above.

Thus it would be. Thus it had ever been.

Then I dreamed that night came, and I made my way back along the canal bank to my tribe's oasis. After the evening meal, the men sat about the entrances of their tents and talked far into the night, while the women worked and the children slept. In the dream my sleep was fitful and disturbed. I was alternately hot and cold, and at last I awoke in a cold sweat.

It must have been very late, for the men had all retired and the camp was still except for the occasional bay of a logar or the low moan and stirring of a sleepless gryph. I stood outside my father's tent and looked at the stars in the crisp air above.

But they weren't stars to us in those days. Every light shining in the sky was the soul of a departed Martian warrior, and the two balls of fire that raced across the skies were not the prosaic moons of Deimos and Phobus, as we know them today. The larger was the spirit of the great L'Tor, and the smaller that of his mate, V'Dra. I thought of praying again to my god, but in my heart I knew that to pray for foolish things was sacrilege.

Then I saw a hissing flame and heard a roar like that of a thousand gryphs, and I thought that the spirit of L'Tor had come down from His kingdom to carry me away. The strange noise awed me, and I dropped to my knees, praying fervently, with all my heart.

Then I awoke....

As is the custom with old men, I tried to drift back to sleep in the hopes that I might recapture that dream of long ago, but all attempts at sleep were fruitless then. It was early morning, but instead of rising as usual, I lay there and thought of that long ago day when that dream had been a reality.

The boy who had been myself a decade and a half ago rose from his prayer and turned to face the direction of the coming of his god, but it was not L'Tor come to translate me. For many days we wondered about the phenomena, then we heard of the coming of the Earthmen. The flash and the roar had been the exhaust from the first Terrestrial ship to land on our world.

Now the Earthmen have been here for fifteen years, and I know that basically they have done good things. But it is hard for a pre-Terrestrial Martian such as myself to grasp the new scientific marvels they have brought. For the children who do not remember the old days, this rejuvenated world is a good one, but I cannot help but yearn for the past.

Once I dreaded maturity, and prayed that something might happen to save me from it. Now I regret that the old order changed—that I was not allowed to live my life as one of my kind should.

So now I write this in my little room, and when I finish I shall make a pilgrimage few men make any more. I shall go down to the edge of the Great Canal, long dry now that the Earthmen have taught the city dwellers the secret of synthetics, and as night falls I shall watch the souls of L'Tor and V'Dra race across the star-studded sky, and soon perhaps another new light will shine forth, as one of the last of the old Martians departs his world....

RATING SPACEWAY

We would like to call your attention to the illustration on the inside covers of this issue. This excellent drawing was done by Joe Ferrier for the magazine the BARSOOMIAN and reprinted with the permission of the publisher, Paul C. Allen. As you may guess, the BARSOOMIAN, an excellently lithographed publication on a good grade of paper, is devoted to the life and works of Edgar Rice Burroughs. If you are a Burroughs' fan and have not seen this one, we strongly recommend that you send 60 cents to Paul C. Allen, P. O. Drawer D, Iron Branch, Rochester, N. Y., for a sample copy. The drawing, of course, illustrates a scene from one of the John Carter Mars stories.

In the time which has elapsed since the "on-sale" date of the first revival issue of SPACEWAY, we have received additional education in the difficulties of getting good distribution of a science fiction publication. The problem lies with the smaller dealers who feel they can't sell enough science fiction to allow display space. Then, too, there are any number of chain outlets who restrict their display space to only certain established magazines. There are also distributors in certain areas who follow the same practices and charge you for the privilege of stripping the covers off and returning them. (Did we hear someone mention the "land of opportunity"?) The result of all this is that the total sale of your publication must come exclusively from those dealers who will display the magazine. Since these may constitute less than half of the total number of those who sell magazines in a given area, the situation is not too good for a new publition. The small dealer may have some justification in being selective in the mags he elects to display, but we do feel that the distributors, enjoying what amounts to a monopoly in their area, are performing a public service and should give all publications equal sales opportunities. Otherwise they are conducting their own private censorship. We might add that this system of "prematuring"—returning without placing on sale—is costing the reader money, since it is the largest single factor in the higher cost of magazines.

We have given some thought to the problem of "beating" this system; the obvious answer is to ship your magazines direct to the dealer who will display them. But through the regular distributing channels this cannot be done. In fact, about the only way it could be done would be through dedicated science fiction fans acting as distributors. While it is true that some fans will go to great lengths for their hobby, it seems unlikely that many of them would care to tackle this—unless they had some incentive other than the opportunity to make some money. On the other hand, many fans publish their own "fan" magazine, while others would like to. It has occurred to us that it might be possible to combine a professional publication with a fan effort. We have worked out a way which this might be done at a reasonable cost.. What we propose is a magazine published in a number of different editions, with a certain portion of the contents being "standard" while the remainder would be an individual fan mag. This would give the fan mag publisher a magazine he could sell on the newsstands in his area and still have the satisfaction of his own publication. Anyway, we would be very pleased to hear from any amateur publisher—or would-be publisher, or for that matter, anybody—who might be interested in this plan. Our present committments prevent us from trying this with SPACEWAY, but we were tentatively thinking of the revival of FANTASY BOOK in a format similar to SPACEWAY. We'd like to hear from you.

Because we had so many things to discuss this issue, we have room only for a few letters.

Wm. M. Miller of Saltsburg, Pa., writes:

"I wish to say thanks for the June '69 issue of SPACEWAY. I'm too young to remember the old SPACEWAY, but I think the new one will be just as good if not better. This issue was fine and I wish you much success for the future."

Bart Bush of Ponca City, Okla., says:

"Remarkable! I received SPACEWAY No. 2 in the mail today. Issue one was good, but no. 2 exceeded all the things I'd hoped for. I really enjoy Forrest Ackerman's column. His information sure is helpful! And his and Francis Flagg's story was tremendous! Same goes for Jim Harmon's 'People of the Valley.'

"I hope that in future issues you'll have an ad section, and a Convention section and a fanzine rating page. I believe that contests would be unusual and very interesting. How about giving away the cover of SPACEWAY as a prize?"

And Harry Cooper, Chicago, Ill.:

"I wish to commend you on your entertaining magazine. I enjoyed reading 'Radio Minds of Mars' very much. Farley is a decent writer but he can't compare with Edgar Rice Burroughs, Rider Haggard or Kline—"

"A good story doesn't have to be plausible as long as it is good science fiction. I dislike the sugar coated chemistry type of science fiction we see today. The best of luck to you."

Please keep your letters coming. We like to know whether you are still "with us" and whether we please or displease you.

We wonder how many of our readers liked the idea of the "moon section" in this issue—and would, perhaps, like to see a "Mars section" next time? Jerry Page has promised us an article for the next issue called "The Magnificent Worlds of Edgar Rice Burroughs" which might make a good beginning . . . This issue will also contain Harl Vincent's "Space Rangers," Thomas Clearey's "The Hardskin" and James L. Bell's "The Percom is For Living," a generous installment of "Garan" and others. We also have a dandy new serial coming up soon, "Contest For the Stars" by Jerry Page, as well as a novelet by Jack Lewis and Geo. Hopkins called "The Mind Masters," and a Burroughs type novella by Chas. Neutzel. All new stories.

Incidentally, we are holding a book and magazine order for a party in Atlanta, Ga., who apparently had his address only on his check.

In closing, we'd like to mention that we are not very happy about the skipped dates, but we have no other way to get the dating far enough ahead to please our distributors. Besides which we have encountered some delaying situations.

(MORRIS SCOTT DOLLENS)