

MANY WORLDS OF EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

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SPACEWAY

JUNE
1970

SCIENCE FICTION

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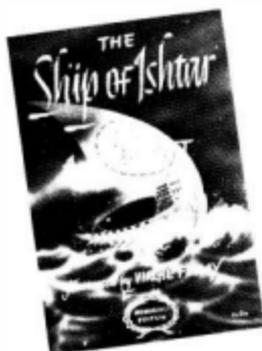


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MARS IN SCIENCE FICTION

More fiction has been written about Mars (excluding earth, of course) than any other planet in our solar system. Mars has always exerted a powerful attraction for many people. Perhaps it is time tribute is paid.

Stories of Mars fall into several different categories. In this issue of *Spaceway* we have endeavored to present varying types. For instance, the reprint *Hybrid Enigma* concerns a Mars in which most of what we know, or think we know, about the planet is ignored. This was true when it was first published and, in view of the findings of the Mars probes, much more so now. One thing we can feel safe in asserting is that no swamps will be found on Mars' surface.

The City in the Syrtis, on the other hand, sticks closer to known conditions. Our earthman wears an airmask, as would be necessary in the thin, oxygen-less atmosphere. And if the atmospheric pressure is indeed, as the Mariners indicate, only ten millibars (about 1 per cent of ours), a pressure suit would be needed.

Other stories have used the device of huge rifts in the planet's crust to avoid the airmasks. Under present assumptions of the atmospheric pressure, we would estimate such a rift would have to be about 30-50 miles deep and have its own oxygen supply!

Another favorite "dodging" stratagem has been to locate the story millions of years in the past when, it was presumed, the planet had more atmosphere.

Not so extensively used, but probably the most plausible, are those narratives with an underground location.

Today, as exemplified in "Farewell, Mars," we are witnessing the birth of a new type of story. Man is gradually beginning to realize that he can, or will be soon able to, change the conditions of his neighbor worlds by a process of Terraforming—or planetary engineering . . .

If conditions on Mars are somewhat as we now believe them to be, it should be comparatively easy to change the face of the planet. Oxygen could be released from what is regarded as a form of rust in the red deserts, and much of the carbon dioxide atmosphere could be converted to oxygen by the introduction of certain earth plants. Mars with an atmospheric pressure of 10 millibars, mostly from carbon dioxide, is no place for man. Man, however, could probably adapt to a Mars with an atmospheric pressure of 100 millibars, if the gas were mostly oxygen. This may seem wildly improbable, but today men are talking about putting an atmosphere on the moon—a far more difficult task! At least, until we actually get there, it helps to keep fiction about Mars in the realm of probability—nor does it necessarily mean a Mars inhabited only by earthmen, since the original inhabitants could have adapted to most any conditions; in fact, there's a good story possible in a conflict between earthmen and Martians over changing the atmosphere!

In any event, we are due for a change in the type of fiction written about the red planet. For the most part, tales of great and dying civilizations and swashbuckling earth heroes aren't going to be taken very seriously from now on. Because we are a great admirer of the John Carter stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs—which, we feel, are so much more than mere adventure books. This makes us very sad. It is even more depressing when one considers that Mars is still the best bet for extraterrestrial life in our solar system . . .

To escape the domination of Earth, Mars must prove
its ancient heritage

FAREWELL MARS

By *GERALD PAGE* & *HANK REINHARDT*

ILLUSTRATED BY JERRY BURGE

The patrol raider resembled a blue and red insect against the darker blue of the Martian sky. Pressed into the protective darkness of a doorway, Frost watched it pass over the ruined village then, almost lazily, so effortless were its movements, curve around for a second pass. It made three passes above the ancient ruins then arced away to fly a course almost parallel to the dead canal that once carried water through the Syrtis Major. As the flyer vanished into the darkening sky, Frost stepped from the doorway, his gaze still riveted on the vanishing speck.

"They'll be back," he said, after a moment.

"They couldn't have seen us," said Larr.

Of the four Martians, Larr was the tallest. He was almost as tall as Frost. His face was thin and his eyes narrow slits above ridge-like cheekbones. It was as if the loose skin of his neck had been gathered and pulled back to be fastened at the nape of his neck. But through the narrow slits of Larr's eyes, gleaming like overfed bonfires, Frost could see all the hatred and fear Martians had learned to feel for Earthmen in the seventy-five years since the coming of the first Terran spaceships.

"Their instruments could have detected us," Frost pointed out. "And believe me, they did. That ship flew on, but others will be along soon to land and take us prisoner. We have to leave."

"We have unfinished business," said Larr.

The Martian leaped before Frost quite realized what he meant. He struck the Earthman with such force that Frost fell backwards to the rough ground and as he fell he saw the glint of light from the blade of Larr's raised knife.

He caught the wrist of Larr's knife arm. It was a desperate move and Frost knew it; for, while he stopped the downward plunge of the knife, he could not prevent Larr from cutting him. Frost felt the point of the knife rake against his forearm, digging into the flesh with burning pain.

Frost's right fist lashed out and he felt the impact as his knuckles connected with Larr's jaw. There was a satisfying cracking noise and Larr jerked back—stunned momentarily but certainly not out. But before he could recover, before even Frost could hit him again, Trann and Elak grabbed Larr's arms and hauled him off the Earthman.

They pulled Larr back and Frost got to his feet. There was a numbing pain in his left forearm and blood poured from the gash down the back of his hand.

Larr stopped struggling in the grasp of his fellow Martians. He glared at Frost with savage hate.

"I challenge you!" he shouted. "I challenge you to combat in the old way. With swords."

"Nuts to you," Frost said disgustedly.

Shara was ripping away the slashed sleeve of Frost's shirt so she could treat the wound. He looked down at her, seeing the intensity of the compassion in her face as she took a tube from the first aid kit and spread the salve over the wound. The contrast between her and Larr was stark and complete, yet they both wanted the same thing. Both, like Frost himself, were searching for the Place of Secrets. When the bleeding stopped and an itching sensation announced that the gash was beginning to heal, Frost saw her glance up at him and he stared full into those large, soft black eyes and saw the fear she felt for him. Did she know, he wondered, that she was the real reason for the hatred Larr bore him?

"Frost," said Larr, "you're afraid."

"Get him out of here," Frost said wearily.

Elak barked an order and then remained as Trann led the reluctant Larr away. As he marched off to the other side of the village Larr called back over his shoulder. "I challenge you, Earthman! Duel to the death!"

Then he and Trann vanished around the corner of a ruin.

Frost was only vaguely aware of the anger welling up within himself. There were too many things to worry about. He sat down on a stone slab, a broken part of a collapsed dwelling wall, and held out his arm so Shara could wrap a bandage around his wound.

Elak looked down at him. There was in this Martian's old and weathered face a look of sadness that lent him an appearance



of frailness that was an utter lie. Old he was, yes, and born on a bleak, cruel world of low gravity and fierce storms and beasts and men. The gravity of Frost's native world would render most Martians helpless yet, after seeing the fierce spirit of this old man as he trudged across Syrtis Major in search of something most men called legend and some called lie, Frost believed that if there were any man born on Mars who could withstand the tug of terrestrial gravity it was old Elak. The others were beginning to show signs of wear from their long search: Larr's bitterness and jealousy was becoming frustration; even Shara's beauty was beginning to fade a little, which affected Frost most poignantly for Shara was young, barely into womanhood and in the years that should have been the fullest of her life. Yet while the others withered as they came closer to their goal, old Elak flourished and grew stronger.

Or had—until now. Now his face reflected a look of sadness that should not have been there.

"We can't wait for Larr to cool off. The patrol will be back for us within minutes," Frost said.

"Larr has challenged you," said Elak.

"So? I don't choose to accept his challenge."

"Of all the men from your world, Frost, you have tried the hardest to understand our ways. There is no refusal to a challenge. You know that."

"There's no time to duel. Surely you realize what's at stake."

"I realize it."

"And you want me to go through with that damned duel?"

"I do not want it, but it must be. I suppose you would call it a matter of honor. Can you understand that?"

Shara finished the bandage. Frost got to his feet. "I understand we can reach the Place of Secrets tonight or tomorrow if we make good time. To risk capture by the patrol, when we're so close——"

"I know, I know," said Elak, in the tone of a very pained man. "We have few ties with the past these days and those traditions we do have are important to us."

"But Larr doesn't stand a chance. I'm from Earth. I'm faster, stronger than he is. Besides, I don't want to kill him."

"Larr already has drawn blood. He is fast enough. As for strength, you must fight with swords, which calls for skill, not strength. Skill and endurance. In spite of your people's planetary engineering, the air of Mars is still thin for an Earthman's lungs. And Larr wants to kill *you*."

Frost could think of no further argument. "Hell," he said. "Where do I find a sword?"

The ruins once had been a village of perhaps forty structures, nestled on the edge of a small crater. The crater's diameter was perhaps a hundred yards and its central peak had been flattened into an oval platform about a yard above the crater floor. In the village's prime, the crater had served as a gathering place.

Here had been held festivals that celebrated the holy days of the Martian religion, weddings and good fortune, occasions of great moment, the visits of important men. Here was the harvest celebrated in those days when Mars could give forth a harvest; here was celebrated the sowing. In this crater were offered crops and goods for trade with men from other villages during the marketing season. Here were held the games, the contests, and the duels.

Thus it was again.

Frost climbed to the platform in the center of the crater. Time and the thin pale air of Mars had corroded that podium into a pocked, rough hillock, but it was still relatively smooth and, though the ground covering it was soft and loose with the sand of Mars, it offered no real treachery to the footing of the duelists. In his right hand Frost held a sword which Elak had given him.

It was a good sword, fashioned by the master swordsmiths of Mars. Its long, double edged blade was sharpened so that the nicks, inevitably gathered in the clashing of sword against sword, barely showed. The guard belled out to protect the grip and the swordsman's hand and from the hilt there jutted two strips of metal, about two inches long each, parallel to the flat of the blade. The purpose of these strips was to engage the opponent's sword, so that the blade could be broken or the sword torn from the antagonist's hand.

Elak, Trann and Shara stood on the floor of the crater watching. Frost's gaze settled on Shara's pale drawn face. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Elak raise his hand in the signal. The hand dropped—

And he was fighting for his life.

Frost was barely able to parry Larr's first swift lunge. The Martian quickly recovered and continued the attack, his steel weaving bright deadly patterns in the air with such deft fury that Frost could barely defend himself. Frost had learned to fence for sport, but was only passably good—and that was years ago. Larr was a master swordsman and bare seconds into the fight, Frost knew he was outmatched and that Larr was prolonging the fight for his own amusement.

The duel was fought in silence except for the bright touch of steel to steel and the breathing of the opponents—Frost's, heavy and exerted; Larr's, calm and measured. Again Larr's sword

whistled through the thin air and its point tugged briefly at the fabric of Frost's jacket, parting it, but not cutting flesh. It was a game and the rules were Larr's.

Then Frost found himself off balance and in that same instant the flat of Larr's blade struck the Earthman's leg, knocking it out from under him.

Frost sprawled heavily to the ground. He rolled over on his back and saw Larr gathering to lunge.

Instinctively Frost's hand closed and he realized he held a handful of sand. As Larr began the lunge, Frost hurled the sand into the Martian's face and rolled.

The action took Larr by surprise and blinded him, but did not stop the lunge. The blade stabbed deep into the ground inches from Frost's twisting body.

Frost brought the flat of his sword around like a club to connect with Larr's head. The Martian groaned and fell sideways to the ground. Frost gathered up the stunned man's sword.

Larr was on his back. He shook his head, trying to clear the pain and confusion from his mind. He wiped the sand from his face with his hands. When he looked up he found himself staring at the point of Frost's sword.

"It's over," Frost said.

Larr looked up at him. "I still live."

"Then we'll resume our battle when we reach the Place of Secrets," said Frost. "But not before then."

He withdrew the sword point from Larr's face and cast the weapon aside.

He leaped down from the podium. Suddenly and unexpectedly, Shara was in his arms. She was sobbing. Frost did not hear the Patrol raider until it was almost overhead.

It came in low, using the terrain as a baffle to its sound. It sped over the village then veered toward the crater as the pilot spotted them. A burst of warning fire kicked up dust around the fugitives and then the flyer was curving around to land beyond the crater rim. Two other ships zoomed over them.

"Let's get out of here," Frost shouted.

Dragging Shara after him, he ran toward the crater rim and the village beyond where there would be no room for the flyers to land and where the ruins offered some small hope of a hiding place until an escape could be made.

He reached the rim of the crater and lifted Shara in his arms to carry her up the slope. In the light gravity her weight was like a child's. He crested the rim and jumped, holding her face against his chest for her protection. But he landed on his feet and managed to maintain his balance.

As he released the girl, he saw Elak and Larr coming down the crater wall.

"Hurry," he shouted. "It's getting dark. If we can reach the canal——"

At that moment, Trann reached the top of the rim and stopped to look back.

Frost shouted to him. "Hurry, you fool——"

The Martian youth was silhouetted against the sky as he looked back. A guardsman probably shouted for him to stop, but the wall would have prevented the words from reaching Frost's ears. Trann turned to run down the slope but as he did so a beam of light suddenly flashed from his chest and stabbed upward into the descending dusk.

The light seemed to grow from Trann's body. For a moment it seemed to Frost that the boy had been transformed into a beacon. And then abruptly the beam was turned off and Trann toppled down the slope, transformed not into a beacon but a corpse.

For a second paralysis gripped Frost and the others. The body stopped rolling and lay face up before them. Frost stared down and in that instant the face of the youth was etched upon his mind. Then he awakened to the need for action.

"Run," he shouted. "Try to reach the canal."

Shara was still staring at the dead Trann like a bird watching a weaving snake. Frost jerked her away and shoved her toward the ruins.

On Mars stars are visible even during the day and when night comes, it comes quickly. The village, but moments ago a mass of fallen stones and crumbling monoliths like a neglected graveyard, was now a place of shadows among which even moving shadows might not be seen if they moved cautiously enough. Frost pushed Shara through the shadows across the littered uneven ground toward the edge of the village.

Glancing back he saw patrolmen standing on the crater wall. Others, he knew, would already be searching the ruins. Searching in pairs, armed and scared, ready to shoot at anything that might be an enemy. Within minutes there would be some sort of light rigged to reveal the configuration of the rubble and anyone hidden in it. The trouble, Frost realized, was that the ruins did not extend to the canal. There was an open area to cross and it would be suicide to cross it in the light. But there was no hope of reaching the canal before the patrol got a light going.

"We'll have to hide," he said. He saw a slab leaning on two rocks and shoved her under it, following after her. There was just room for the two of them.

Just as he slipped into the protective shadow of the slab, the flare arched upwards, a fluttering fuse that burst into brightness and hung above them casting down a pattern of brilliant light and dark, pitching shadows upon the ruins. Shara gasped as the light fingered into the darkness of their hiding place. Frost shut his eyes against the sudden brilliance.

Time became a gulf of interminable brightness filled with the sounds of men searching for fugitives. Frost and Shara held their breath.

Then the flare sputtered out and a deeper darkness settled over the ruins.

It was now or never. Frost slipped from under the slab, pulling Shara after him. They started running. From somewhere across the ruins Frost heard a voice calling for another flare.

Then someone was calling for them to stop. They veered to one side. Through the darkness stabbed a thin beam of light like a solid blob of something intensely, brightly hot. They veered again, this time toward where the beam had heated the thin Martian air. The next shot was wide to the other side of them. They continued running a zigzag course toward the canal, and the shots still missed them by a wide margin.

Then Frost heard the *Whoosh* of a flare flung into the night air. He glanced back and saw the brightness of its fuse as it arched upward, like a meteor rebelling against gravity. In perhaps another second, it would be illuminating the entire area.

But they were at the edge of the canal. Frost took Shara in his arms and dropped. They struck rough, rubbery vegetation and sprawled downward toward the canal bed. With stunning impact, Frost hit the ground and Shara tumbled on top of him. Hastily, he dragged her into the partial security of the undergrowth.

They were in what was the closest thing to a jungle to be found on Mars. On all sides thick sprouting trunks rose up to form a dark latticework against the artificial daylight of the flare above them. Here in the canal bed, the trunks of the plants were far enough apart that Frost and the girl could move easily among them. But the closeness of the overhead fronds gave reasonable protection against being seen.

From above, somewhere, came the sound of voices speaking in urgent tones. Frost could not tell what they said.

"Elak," Shara whispered at his side. "Elak and Larr! We must wait for them!"

Frost listened to the distant voices: a patrol officer snapping orders for the search. "We can't wait here," he said after a moment.

"We can't leave them."

"They'll catch up with us."

He took her arm firmly and started off through the thick vegetation, moving carefully, trying not to disturb the huge stalks. The glow from the flare died out and all was darkness again but they dared not move faster. Yet when the next flare came, it was further behind them than Frost thought it would be.

That was good: the patrol had chosen the wrong direction to search.

How long they went before they stopped to rest, he could not say. The voices had vanished long ago and the light from the flares had not, for some time, penetrated the jungle through which they moved. Finally, near exhaustion, they found a small clearing. Frost sat down to rest with his back against a thick bole. Shara slumped beside him and almost instantly went to sleep.

Exhaustion numbed his body but Frost could not sleep. He wondered about Larr and Elak: had they managed to escape? If they caught him, would Larr tell the patrol where they were going? Not likely. Larr hated all earthmen. He would tell the patrol nothing, not even to save himself. Especially would he tell them nothing about the Place of Secrets.

And the patrol would not understand that.

When Earthmen reached Mars they found a humanoid people living a savage and perilous existence on a hostile world, somehow extracting sustenance from the bleak wastes and energy from the pitifully thin air. The earthmen founded colonies and began the process of rejuvenating the dying world. Oxygen was released from the sandy deserts. The process was speeded up by the growth of hardy earth vegetation, aided by the heavy concentration of carbon dioxide in the Martian air. Despite loud protestations to the contrary, the native Martians were treated like colonials. For the most part, not harshly; but as an inferior people. Separate cities were built for them, too bright and clean to be called ghettos, but too utilitarian and functional to be called homes. Earthmen fed the Martians and cared for them like children and the effect on the Martian spirit was devastating. Inevitably, the more spirited grew to hate the Earthmen.

The Earth people continued to regard them as subservient children. Tales of the ancient Martian civilization were scoffed at. Show us the proof, asked the Earthmen. We see only ragged beggars and filthy desert nomads. Show us your gleaming crystal cities, your paintings and works of art, your science, and we will believe. Until then, we will guide you toward civilization.

Among the savage nomads who wandered the deserts of Mars there was now talk of a holy war to drive the Earthmen from the planet. And to this group Larr belonged.

But there were other Martians with more wisdom than Larr and with a deeper insight into the lost past of their race. They spoke of the ancient ones who vanished with the science they had built while Earthmen still capered in their primordial caves. There were places, they claimed, where records of the old civilization were hidden away: works of art and science that topped the art and sciences of Earth. They felt that once these things were shown to the aliens, their attitude would change and they would come to regard the Martians as a people of equal stature. Earth scientists scoffed at this, of course. Most of them even believed the canals were some sort of natural phenomena. To believe otherwise, would force them to admit that there had once been a science on Mars advanced enough to build them.

To Frost, who was a renegade by virtue of a technically (he had gone into the desert to search for the Place of Secrets without official sanction or permission), the attitude of his people seemed somehow more alien than that of the Martians. His crime was not a serious one and certainly did not justify pursuit by an armed patrol under orders to kill the fugitives. But there was rumor of rebellion and that, he supposed, magnified any misdeed to major proportions. The authorities feared he would join the nomads and lead an attack on one of the Earth colonies.

Frost did not realize he had slept until he awoke and saw weak daylight pouring through the foliage around him.

The light shone through interstices in the network of vegetation above him like bits of bright paint upon a dark ceiling. He glanced at his watch, but it had stopped during the night. He could not determine the sun's position through the undergrowth but he was fairly certain it was still morning.

He bent to wake Shara but before he could touch her shoulder he heard a noise behind him.

His only weapon was a hunting knife he wore in his belt. His thumb flipped the catch of the strap that held the hilt, and a fluid movement eased the knife from its scabbard and into his hand. But the movement was as wasted as it was quick—for there stood Elak and Larr.

"I hoped the patrol would do my work for me," Larr said.

"I wondered if you two escaped," Frost said, putting away the knife.

"I've no intention of dying until I settle with you, Earthman."

"Hush!" said Elak. Across his shoulders he carried something. In the shadows Frost could not tell what. Now he hefted

the burden from his shoulder and let it drop to the ground. "Your duel has been fought," he told Larr. "Frost won. It is over."

"It isn't over. He won by a trick, not skill. The duel is just delayed."

"You're a fool," Elak said in a tone that would tell even Larr that the subject was at an end. At Elak's feet Frost now saw, was a creature about the length of a young wolf and on Earth it would have weighed about as much. But its articulated shell gleamed reddishly where vagrant rays of sunshine managed to touch it. Elak drew his hunting knife and with the serrated edge sliced through the carapace to the white crablike meat within.

"We have only canal slugs to feast on, I fear, and here there can be no luxury such as a fire by which to cook the meal. My apologies, old friend," said Elak, jerking loose a handful of meat and offering it to Frost. "These days Martian hospitality isn't what it should be."

"That doesn't matter," Frost said, tearing loose a morsel with his teeth. "I'm afraid canal slug tastes much the same, raw or cooked."

The noise made by the new arrivals had awakened Shara and she greeted Elak happily and affectionately. Her attitude toward Larr was less friendly. She nibbled doubtfully at the piece of meat Elak handed her. Frost noted that the night's rest had restored some of her vitality.

* * *

By noon of the next day the vegetation around them began to thin out so that huge patches of deep blue sky were visible. By late afternoon they reached the end of the canal growth.

The canal itself was petering out. The bed was sloping gently upward and the banks, long assaulted by erosion, were wearing away. The canal's end was not yet in sight, but Frost knew it could not be far away.

And he knew also that if the patrol spotted them now there was no place to hide.

Staring at the distant eroded mountains, Frost asked, "How much further?"

"Not far," answered Elak. "With luck we can reach the place within a few days."

Frost, to whom Elak had often given the directions, nodded. If only their luck held out.

The ground between the foothills was littered with rocks and boulders jagged and rough because the hills protected them from the thin but perpetual wind that wore away at everything on the Syrtis. Presently, as Frost had known it would, the canal gave out and the travelers found themselves climbing hills and thread-

ing their way between outcroppings of rock and littered boulders, making their way toward the mountains. Then they reached the first mountain—their destination—and there the climbing began in earnest.

It was Frost who went up the side of the mountain first, for he was an Earthman, with an Earthman's bulk and clumsiness—but used to an Earthman's weight. Like a cat up a tree, he clambered up the face of the mountain carrying, coiled over his shoulder, a long rope. The rock face was pocked and dented, giving plenty of purchase for his hands and feet and with his Earth muscles, he made his way up much faster than the others could. At the top, on a terrace edge, he secured one end of the rope to a jutting stone, and dropped the other end to his friends below.

The sun was low on the horizon and could be seen between two westerly peaks. It was swollen and magnified by the depths of atmosphere through which its light traveled until its image was large for the Martian sun. Its color was reddened but it was pallid and blanched compared to an Earthly sunset.

First up the rope to the ledge was Shara. Exhausted by the day's strain, she dropped to a sitting position beside him as he gripped the rope to ease its contact with the stone edge of the ledge as Elak climbed up. When Elak was within reach, Frost grasped his arm and felt fingers almost as strong as his own close about his wrist. He pulled the old Martian to the ledge.

Boisterously, Elak laughed. "We're almost there," he said. "Through that cleft and along the path behind it to the top of the mountain and then——" His eyes were alight, like those of a child. He bent down and clasped Shara's shoulders in his gnarled, strong hands and said, "My daughter, we are almost there. Soon you can rest and sleep—if the excitement of what we find will permit such things." He laughed again and a deep smile curved Shara's lips.

Frost laughed and turned back to check on Larr.

Instead, in the waning light he caught the glint of sunlight reflecting from metal. As he stared into the sky he caught the glint again.

"Patrol ship!" he shouted. Elak stopped laughing and, getting to his feet, stared where Frost was pointing.

"Get Shara out of here," Frost said. "I'll help Larr."

"Larr would leave you and be grateful for the opportunity," Elak reminded him.

Frost waved him away. "You and Shara run. We'll be right behind you."

Without further argument, Elak helped Shara to her feet and

then led her through the cleft in the rocks behind the ledge. Frost glanced up. The patrol ship was mere seconds away. Peering over the ledge he saw that Larr was beginning his climb, hampered somewhat by the fact that there was no one below him to brace the rope, as he climbed.

"Patrol ship!" Frost shouted. "Hold on. I'm going to try to pull you up!"

Frost braced himself and gripped the rope firmly with both hands. Straining not only against Larr's weight but against the wind that whipped the dangling man about like a bobbin, Frost pulled Larr upward. As he pulled, the patrol ship closed the gap between itself and the ledge.

Suddenly it was almost on top of Frost. Light streaked out from lasers mounted on the flyer's fuselage. Bits of the ledge vaporized around him and stone turned red with the heat but still Frost pulled the rope with its dangling burden.

The flyer sped by, circled around to return. Frost was not hit, but he was more shaken than he cared to admit. Suddenly Larr's hand reached over the edge, clutching for a hold. Frost let go the rope and reached to help the Martian.

The patrol raider came back. It again fired its lasers and the air and the rock around Frost heated and bubbled as he helped Larr to the ledge.

Then Larr was on the ledge and they were running for the cleft. Larr dove between the rocks and Frost was right behind him. A deep pass was cut through almost solid stone for some distance back, offering plenty of protection from the raider. Frost turned and saw the flyer slow its flight as it began circling. "It's looking for a place to land," he said. "And it'll have others here before long."

"They were shooting to kill," Larr said. "They must want us badly."

"We'd better find Elak and Shara," Frost said.

"If the patrol is coming after us, we'll endanger Elak and Shara. It's more important that we slow the patrol down—to give them time to reach the Place of Secrets."

"True, but I can't think of any way we can do that."

"I can," Larr said.

Frost did not see the rock, but he felt it. It crashed onto his head and slow, pulsating blackness, streaked with bursting pinpoints of red, flowed through him. Warm greyness ebbed over him like a tide and then he felt nothing.

The hard toe of a boot kicked his ribs.

The pain that jabbed through his side somehow blended with

the ache in the back of his skull and they became, together, a low, agonizing throb behind his eyes. He clenched his teeth to bite off the groan that came to his lips and he tried to shut his eyes more tightly against the pain. "He's coming around," he heard a voice say in English. Rough hands gripped his shoulders, lifted him to his feet.

A beam of light caught his face as he opened his eyes. He turned his head away from the brightness.

"That's him, all right," came a voice. "Even with that stubble on his face, that's him."

The light moved away from Frost's eyes.

"Where are the others?"

"He's the one we want. But we'll search anyway. Get him over where I can ask him a few questions."

Frost's eyes were beginning to adjust to the darkness. He was still in the pass where Larr had struck him. And through the cleft he could see the ledge where patches of laser-heated rock still glowed redly in the night. A patrolman stood on either side of him and a patrol captain faced him. The two patrolmen started to shove Frost up the pass, to a place where it widened. Frost tensed.

"You can ask question here. You'll get the same answers."

Darkness hid the look on the Patrol captain's face, but his stance and attitude hinted at a contempt that was matched by his voice when he spoke. "You're under arrest, Frost. You don't choose the place where I ask you questions."

There was no real alternative and nothing more to gain but bruises, so Frost let the patrolmen steer him up the pass to the place where the captain wanted him. There, he was permitted to sit on a rock. One of the patrolmen spent several minutes examining Frost's scalp.

"I don't think he has a concussion," the man said. Gingerly Frost felt the place with the tips of his fingers. It hurt to touch and the skin was broken. Moreover, there was a lump, already the size of an egg and still growing.

"Your rebel friends don't seem to like you any more than we do," said the captain. Then he pointed to the bandage on Frost's wrist. "What happened there?"

"I was cut. It's almost healed."

"Modern medicine. We gave that to the Martians, you know. Your rebel friends cut you?"

"My friends aren't rebels."

"They act that way. You know a lot of Martians don't want war."

"Neither do my friends. They are trying to prevent it."

"Then why run? Why not just explain to us?"

"You keep shooting at us. You killed one of us, remember?
A boy."

"You shouldn't have run. Our first shots were warnings."
"Warnings, hell."

The Captain, a big red-faced man with sandy, tousled hair, shook his head as if he were dealing with a hopelessly stupid person. "We'll turn these mountains inside out until we find what we're looking for. What good does it do your friends if they find an arsenal and we blow it up and them with it?"

So that was it, Frost realized. The patrol believed they were trying to reach some kind of weapons cache from which the tribes could be armed. It was a logical enough assumption. If the tribes were gathering to drive off the invaders, then it followed that they had weapons hidden away.

But it was wrong.

Frost had seen a band of tribesmen days before, riding to join the gathering army. It was a band of old men and children, of tired work-worn women. They were armed with sticks and rocks and bits of iron broken from tools furnished them by Earthmen. It was a pitiful army that was gathering and it could do nothing more than die bravely. For their arms were hopeless.

"We aren't searching for weapons," Frost said.

The captain stared at him, unbelieving, unsympathetic.

"We were searching for a treasure cache. Art treasures. Art created by the ancient Martians and stored away near here. We had hopes that with those treasures we could convince the Earth officials that the Martians were capable of a culture of their own. That we could buy time and opportunity to rebuild that culture."

"Oh, come on."

"It's true."

"It's a fairy tale. There was never any ancient culture. We never found any trace of any advanced culture on Mars. No cities, no artifacts, nothing but the legends of the Martians—old wives tales. You're an archeologist. You should know that."

"A lot of Mars hasn't been explored by Earthmen."

"Bull. We've got satellites around the planet. There's nothing there. You know it, I know it. Let's quit kidding ourselves. What was your real reason? I say it was an arms cache."

"What's your name, Captain?"

"LeFevre. Why?"

"Because, Captain LeFevre, you've just made a statement to rank with the old belief that man would never reach the moon.

I want to be sure to know your name when the historians ask me for it."

LeFevre laughed. He waved to one of his men. "How about some coffee for me and my guest? Then get to a radio and see how the search is progressing."

The man brought them steaming cups of coffee, then went to the radio and called for a check.

Frost was watching the man making the radio call. LeFevre sipped his coffee then said, "Frost, why not tell me the truth?"

"I have."

"You've handed me a lot of crap and that's all you've done. Frost, I'm not impressed and I'm not patient. I'll find your friends and if it's around here, I'll find that arms cache. You can make it easier on you and me both if you'll just tell me where the cache is."

The patrolman turned away from his portable set and said, "All's progressing normally, sir. No one has anything to report."

"Good enough," said LeFevre. He turned back to Frost. "I've given orders to take them alive. My men are armed with paralasers, not heat guns. You don't have to worry about anyone getting killed. Why not talk? When we get you back to Marsport you'll tell us everything anyway."

"That'll take too long," Frost said. "I can't wait that long to have you believe me."

He threw the hot coffee into LeFevre's face and followed it with his fist. LeFevre cried out, then went limp in a way that told Frost he would be out for some time. But before the big patrol captain could hit the ground, Frost grabbed him and yanked the paralaser out of its holster.

The patrolman at the radio reacted first, but Frost fired the gun before the reaction could become anything more than a startled jerk. The patrolman fell limply to the ground as Frost fired twice more, rendering the other two patrolmen helpless before they could raise an alarm.

Frost forgot the throbbing ache in his head as he dragged the unconscious men over against the wall of the pass where he felt they would be safe. A plan was forming in his mind and he had no desire to see helpless patrolmen killed or injured through his actions.

He leaped easily to the rim of the pass and pulled himself up to a level plain. There he saw two patrol flyers, just as he knew he would. Here and there throughout the mountains there were probably others, wherever the ground was level enough to permit landing. But he was interested only in these two flyers, at the moment. This was the danger zone.

The flyers were unguarded. In the stores of one of them he found some tenting and a few blankets. The tenting was fire-proof and useless for his purpose. But the blankets would burn nicely.

He checked the fuel gauges of each flyer and chose the one with the fullest tank. He tore the blankets into strips, then removed the entry fuel valve cap. Carefully, using a metal rod to guide the blanket in, he stuffed the strips down the fuel pipe. He could smell the acrid fumes of the fuel. Carefully he laid the strips out to give himself as long a fuse as possible, but since he could not trust a knotted blanket to burn, he could count on only five or six feet dangling from the tank.

He found a lighter and set fire to the end of the blanket. Then he ran. He ran from the flyer and toward the protection of the largest rocks he could find and he leaped behind them with a single bound of his Earth hardened muscles, rolling to the ground just as his improvised molotov cocktail exploded behind him.

The eruption was ear shattering. A gout of flame leaped toward the sky where Phobos and Deimos were racing pinpoints of light in blackness. Twisted, heated bits of metal, along with clumps of dirt and rock, whirled into the sky to rain down around Frost who lay face down on the shaking ground. And then the second flyer exploded, as if it were a bonus to Frost's industry, and again the ground shook and fire and dirt and bits of heated metal rained for yards around as a Fourth of July display gone mad lighted the sky.

Then it was over and silence clamped down with a last raining of small debris. Frost got to his feet and started running in the general direction in which he believed the Place of Secrets lay.

Once he saw patrolmen. He crouched behind a boulder and waited as they ran past, toward the explosion he had caused. They would all rush back to see what had happened. That would delay the search for awhile. For long enough, he hoped.

He lost track of time as he made his way through the rocks and across the top of the mountain toward a monolithic rock that stood like a finger pointed toward the stars. It was still night when Frost reached the monolith and began searching for the secret entrance Elak had described to him.

The boulder that hid the entrance was rolled away. From deep within the tunnel, Frost could see a hint of light filtering back from the great cavern where the treasures were stored. With some relief he realized the others were in there waiting for him. But they probably did not realize that they were waiting for him. Larr had probably told Elak and Shara that he was dead.

But revenge for the trick Larr had played was secondary. It was what was at the end of the tunnel that was important. The artistic wealth of a vanished culture waiting to be revealed to the eyes of men who did not believe that culture ever existed. A discovery to revise the thinking of one people toward another.

Paintings done by Martian Da Vincis and Renoirs. Sculpture by the Michelangelos and Rodans of this world. Chalice of silver and other precious metals. Crystals shaped by hands frailer and more delicate than the hands of Earthmen. Tapestries depicting scenes alien even to the Martians who lived today. Books. Sketches. Jewelry. The records of a vast, perished culture. Perhaps the greatest single discovery in archeological history.

And the awakening, perhaps, of a people . . . the reawakening.

He made his way down the tunnel toward the light. He came at last to an opening the size of a doorway.

He stepped through the opening into the light which was cast by torches set in brackets in the cavern walls. And as he did so, he saw Larr leap to his feet in astonishment. He saw that—and more.

He saw Shara standing behind Larr, her face streaked with tears. He saw Elak, stooped and ancient, the strength and power stripped from him, leaving him nothing but his age—like the scum at the bottom of an emptied cooking pot. And he saw the cavern—

It contained nothing.

No paintings or statues, or works of delicate craftsmanship. The cavern was littered with dust and rusted bits of formless metal and the tattered remnants of what it once contained. The works were gone, the records were gone. Dissolved, like the culture itself. There was nothing left but dust and decay and amid the dust Frost saw a skeleton and by its shape and configuration, he knew it for the skeleton of an Earthman.

Then Larr, yelling like a madman, leaped and his hands closed tightly on Frost's throat.

The attack took Frost by surprise. He was carried over backwards, Larr on top of him, those iron fingers digging into his windpipe. With a heavy thud Frost landed in the dust of the vanished civilization.

Recovering from the unexpectedness of the attack, Frost jerked his arms around and drove his fists heavily to either side of Larr's head, behind the ears. Frost felt Larr's fingers go slack with a spasmodic movement. He followed up quickly, backhanding Larr's chin with his right fist.

Larr fell limply across the Earthman. For a moment Frost

was too weak to move him and Elak grabbed Larr's shoulders and shoved him to the floor. Frost got to his feet, the breath rasping in his tortured throat.

Elak spoke first. "We are truly dead," he said.

His words echoed amid the dust and litter.

Frost said nothing. There was nothing to say.

"Oh, my friend," continued Elak, "that which we hoped to find is vanished. The great works, the ringing poetry, the great writings—the works of science and philosophy are gone. Look around the Place of Secrets, Frost." He lifted what remained of a book. It crumpled like soft dirt in his hands. "See how well time keeps her secrets?"

"But how?" Frost asked.

Elak pointed to the skeleton, face up in the dust.

"We were not the first to reach this place. How long ago this man came I can't say. But he opened the cave and found the treasures and died here. The air got in and after all those centuries, these things disintegrated . . ."

"Exposure to the air destroyed everything," Frost said. He turned away. "It was an Earthman who broke in here—one of my own people. We're going to destroy your people and everything they've ever built. After thousands of years we bring peace to the Earth and export our worse traits to the stars."

"Do not blame your people. This man did not intend to die here. He did not do it to destroy the treasures. Even the government that oppresses my people exists in the belief it is helping them."

Shara was crying. Frost went to her and took her in his arms.

"Well," he said, "it was a pretty foolish idea. So we would have proved that once there was a great civilization on Mars. Would it have proven anything else? Would it have changed things?"

"We'll never know, now," she said. "But it might have returned pride to us. That is important. We might even have sold the treasures for our freedom."

"There is no pride in using the product of your people's greatness to ransom your own planet," Frost said.

"But what else was there to give us hope?" asked Elak.

Frost had no argument to that.

With a soiled handkerchief, he dried Shara's tears. Then he turned and looked around.

The chamber was vast, ankle deep with dust. Far back Frost saw several openings.

"Have you explored back there?" he asked.

"What is the use?" asked Elak.

"If we could find just one damned relic we might be able to prove our point."

"But——"

"Books and drawings might disintegrate in time and wood might crumble. But statuary and jewelry will withstand exposure to air and so will some technological hardware. All we have to find is something that proves our point. That's all."

Frost bent over the still unconscious Larr and slapped his face lightly to bring him around. Larr mumbled something and made a face. Frost dropped him back into the dust and started for the back of the chamber.

He chose one of the openings and began searching through a series of chambers, each smaller than the main cavern. But the floor of each was littered with the pointless residue of the Martian past. To light his way, he carried a torch taken from a bracket in the wall of the main chamber. With it he peered into shadowy corners and crevices, any place where he might find something. He found nothing. He ran his fingers through the dust in a hopeless search for bits of jewelry, for gems and metal which would hint at the level of craft behind their making. He found nothing.

He searched the final chamber and gave up, knowing there was nothing in any of them. He turned back, cursing.

And heard Shara calling his name.

There was an urgency in her tone, an excitement long missing from her voice. He saw her running toward him. "Come quickly," she urged.

She led him back to the main chamber and through one of the other openings, through a series of chambers not unlike the ones he had searched. But in that last chamber, instead of a solid wall, there was a door. A great metal door, heavy and secure and tight against the air.

"Look!" cried Elak, running a hand over the door's surface. "It's not even rusted."

Frost didn't recognize the metal of the door. He touched it: cool, smooth, but unfamiliar. "Even if there's nothing on the other side," he said, "this door will prove our point and interest a lot of scientists as well."

There was a wheel in the center of the door. Larr tried turning it but it held firmly against his efforts. "I can't get it open," he said, his voice heavy with frustration.

Frost gripped the wheel and exerted all his strength. Stubbornly, the wheel refused to budge. He let go and rubbed his hands on his trouser legs, then gripped the wheel again, more

carefully. This time he paid more attention to his leverage and again he exerted all his strength. The wheel resisted . . .

Then it stopped resisting. It moved a fraction of an inch. Then another. And another. Very slowly, it began moving steadily as Frost twisted it around. And suddenly it was moving easily, whirling freely on its axis.

Not only was the wheel moving, but the door itself.

Frost stepped back. The door swung out and to one side. There was a light in the room beyond.

A pale blue light; and its source was a sheet of intense pale blue radiance hung like a curtain in the center of the room.

Frost stepped through the door, staring at the sheet of light and not knowing what to make of it. Shara moved up beside him and he placed his arm around her.

"What is it?" she asked.

It was Larr who answered her. "It's one of the god machines," he said. "Like the legends say. One of the machines that give power and strength."

"Whatever it is," Frost said, "it proves a great deal about the ancient culture. Apparently the thing has been operating for centuries on a single power source that is still functioning. Moreover, with all the magnetic field detection instrumentation we have orbiting Mars, we haven't been able to detect a trace of it."

"This is our answer," Larr said. "This is what will save us. It is a god machine. It can give us strength and power and we can drive the invaders from our world, once and for all."

"We don't know now what it is," Elak said. "To find out we'll have to turn it over to the Earth authorities."

"No!" shouted Larr. "We can use it ourselves. Earthmen don't need power. We do!"

Elak stepped toward him. "It's time you stopped being such a fool. The patrol will be here soon. They must see this."

"Stand back!" Larr said. He looked around wildly. Near the curtain of light there were several small boxes neatly lined up. On the faces of the boxes were dials, suggesting controls of some sort. Larr picked one up. "We'll see what the god machine will do for me," he said.

Elak moved to stop him but Larr pushed him away. For all his strength, the old man was no match for the younger.

Frost leaped for him but Larr moved aside, his fingers twisting at the dials of the box.

Frost was closer to the boxes than to Larr. He grabbed one. He had no idea what the things did, but he hoped he might be able to counteract anything Larr did.

As his hands closed on the box, something happened.

From the center of the shining curtain a beam of light stabbed out and touched Shara.

She started to scream but the sound died frozen on her lips. A corona of radiance formed about her: coruscating, multicolored light that formed into a second curtain, smaller than the first, with Shara inside it. Something seemed to lift the girl up and the colors churned and shifted furiously. Frost imagined he could see images within the light: vast strange cities, magnificent machines, spreading alien landscapes, worlds hurtling in space. Then there was a brilliant white flash and the light and the images vanished.

And Shara vanished too——

Frost shouted her name but there was no answer. He turned toward Larr and murder boiled within him. But before he could take a single step, a second beam of light stabbed out toward the Martian. Colored light spread out from him. Frost no longer cared. Still holding the box he'd picked up, he leaped for the figure within the light.

They grappled and the light churned and beat around them like the ocean against rocks. Something tugged at Frost's stomach and something else froze him where he stood, he and Larr locked in deadly struggle yet unmoving. Then suddenly motion returned. They were surrounded by the light and a vast emptiness that Frost could only sense. Then they were dropping through nothingness. Frost's feet hit solid ground. Involuntarily he released his grip on Larr and fell sprawling.

Upon *grass!*

Real grass. Thin, green leaves, pointed at the top. Grass such as grows upon the Earth but which does not grow naturally on Mars.

"I don't believe it!" Frost ejaculated in numb bewilderment. Shara sat on the grass a few feet away, staring awedly about her.

"What happened?" Larr asked, no longer sure of anything.

Frost got to his feet. Of the three, only he had ever experienced anything remotely related to what had just happened. Only before he had traveled by spaceship to reach another planet and it had taken months, not seconds.

And this planet, he realized, could not be anywhere within the solar system.

They were on a hillock. At the foot of the hill was a small, golden lake. All around was quiet, gentle forest, verdant and inviting.

And beyond the forest, what?

For one thing, undoubtedly, the ancient Martians.

"It was a god machine after all," Frost said. "And it's going to buy a lot of freedom for the Martians."

"I don't understand," said Shara.

"I barely understand. But this is another world. That curtain of light is some kind of matter transmitter. That's why there's no trace of the ancient Martians. Centuries ago, they must all have migrated, taking their belongings with them, leaving only the most primitive nomads behind and leaving also a library to inform anyone who could learn to read the books what had happened and how to follow."

Shara was still unable to comprehend. "But the artifacts, the proofs we hoped to find——"

"As I said, they must have taken everything with them. They moved to a better world because Mars was dying. Probably there are other hidden chambers on Mars, other libraries, perhaps other transmitters.

"But my people are still practically slaves," Larr said.

Frost shook his head. "Not anymore. This belongs to them. Earth has space travel, but not like this. We're barely able to send probes to Jupiter. This thing opens up the stars, the entire universe."

"And you Earthmen will take it away from us."

"I think not," Frost said. "Out there, somewhere, the ancient Martians still live. They've had thousands of years of progress since they left Mars. You think we want to meet them with their relatives as our slaves—knowing that they would know that even our method of reaching them had been stolen from those we hold in contempt? Nope. Earthmen are very practical. There'll be a proportional number of Martians in all our expeditions from now on. You can bet on it!"

Larr stared around him. His eyes settled on the golden lake and the forest beyond. "I have never seen a place like this," he said.

"We have such forests on Earth," Frost said.

"No wonder you are such possessive people. To live on a world where you must fight vegetation for living space..."

Frost laughed. "Let's see if we can figure out how to get home," he said. "We've got what we came for."

"No," said Larr. Then he added, "I mean, you may have what you came for, but I don't have what I came for. Somewhere on this world are my people. Somewhere is the proof of what I search for. I— I don't know how to say it."

"I understand," Frost said.

"No, you don't," Larr said. "But I realize now that you come

close to understanding. You return. You and Shara. I have to stay here. I have a people to find."

Frost knew that arguing would do no good.

Larr moved away from him. Frost took Shara in his arms. He touched the dials of the control box. And as the light gathered about Frost and Shara, Larr turned away and started toward the small lake.

They each moved a bit closer to their destiny.

THE BARSOOMIAN

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Judged by Earth standards, the Dodeks were wild—
a race of hippies who cared for nothing material

CUBE IN A DODECAGON GARDEN

By EMIL PETAJA

ILLUSTRATED BY SUZANNE

"You, then, are Psych Conover's *wunderkind*?" Doctor Lancett's myopic eyes made no effort to disguise what lay behind them in that computer-rigid mind. Skepticism, for example. Challenge.

"Don't know about that, Dr. Lancett, but I am H.P. Clark Hauran, reporting to you for duty on Project Dodek. Here are the orders." Clark had intended to keep his attitude military brisk, with of course the tincture of awe due such an important figure in the space thrust that had carried man to the very fringes of his galaxy, but the fishy stare and the gratuitous undertone of contempt in his voice (what could a wetnose like H.P. Clark Hauran accomplish that six dedicated and seasoned Human Probes had either died or gone mad trying to accomplish?) iced his nerves and sweated his palms just a little. Psych-Head Conover's "I have every confidence in you, Clark" was long gone.

Still, Clark pushed up a grin. He took a couple of deep breaths while he waited for the wispy little man with the cybernetic psyche to run through the transfer-of-ship papers and other credentials, glad about the little personal note Conover had scrawled at the bottom. Dr. Lancett made no comment, dropped the papers into a slot of the incut console of the enormous computer complex behind them. MEM must read and assimilate them, too. Dr. Lancett and the computer-ship worked together. They were a team. It seemed to Clark that Lancett's eyes took on an affectionate gleam whenever he touched the nerve endings of the console. It was like Paganini touching his Strad.



Clark didn't repress his whistle of admiration, running his eyes across the computer's bulk.

"So that's MEM!"

Lancett nodded; his fingers lingered with tactile pleasure on the glowing studs which blended his mind with the big brain's.

"MEM's banks contain all of the information man has learned about all of the other forms of intelligent life, non-intelligent too, since we first made contact with a live planet. Other Fleet ships provide the means of travel, the weaponry, etc., but it is MEM's informational storehouse which enables us to evaluate and interpolate alien ecologies, from past experience. For instance, MEM's language components enable us to communicate with virtually any manner of intelligent transference of knowledge."

Clark smiled appreciatively. It was a natural easy thing for him to do, smile. Sensing the crotchety computer-master's affection for his Big Brain made it that much easier.

"Of course MEM is only wires and microtapes without you," Clark said.

Lancett's eyes flickered with suspicion; he despised diplomacy that smacked of toadying, even in a good cause. He found none of it here. Clark's nature was open, friendly, honest. His frank expectation of being liked annoyed a lot of people, still he could not be otherwise if he tried. This curious quality of empathy had brought him far with the Fleet in a very short time. Clark was twenty-one. Psych Conover's "Wunderkind." It was this open warmth of his toward any and all that he met, plus a capacity for detecting chinks in a non-compatible's armor which had decided Psych Conover to try him on this mission. Six seasoned Probes had tried to make contact with the Dodeks and failed. He would try Clark and his seemingly naive capacity to like everybody. Maybe that would work.

Clark understood. Now, he decided, his immediate job was to make Dr. Lancett like him. Not as much as he liked MEM, of course. Old Lancett was a thorough-going egghead. His contempt for emotionalism was well known with the Fleet. Still, there had to be some kind of a bond between him and Clark, as there was between Lancett and MEM, if Number Seven Human Probe was to do any good on this vital mission.

Reaching Lancett would be the prologue to the real show.

"I don't hold with Psych-Head Conover's theories," was the computer-master's opening gambit in the battle. "Brotherly love, pah! How can a Terran biped 'love' a scaly lizeroid or an animated puffball?"

"Local anthropologists learned to empathize with dwarvish

headhunters who painted their faces and filed their teeth," Clark said mildly. "I don't think Dr. Conover wants us to go to bed with them. Only understand them. Try to dig their emotional capacities as well as their mental processes. He believes that what they *feel* is at least as important as—"

"I have seen too many colonies wiped out by such namby-pamby philosophies in all my years," Lancett interrupted. "I'm not a militarist in any sense of the word, nor a sadist. Nor even a racist. But it takes two to play Conover's game and I have rarely seen an alien race that was imbued with this love-one-another balderdash. Look what happened on Alpha XXI, for an example? Seventeen ships destroyed during landing phases. After non-aggression pacts had been signed!"

"You're digging pretty far back, way before Conover," Clark said cheerfully. "The history books sidestepped the truth, as they have a habit of doing. Terra already had designs on other satellites, not to mention a big chunk of the planet itself not named in the agreement. The Alphans were one jump ahead of us, that's all."

"I could cite a hundred—a thousand—more."

"Sure you could. Aliens aren't exactly anxious to give up their homes to our colonists. Why should they? Isn't it better to forget the old horrors? Since Conover, the Fleet has accomplished more, with less bloodshed, in the two decades he's run things—" Clark broke off, aware of doing just what he ought not to be doing, alienating the computer-master. He didn't have to teach his grandfather to suck eggs. "Our batting average is pretty high, isn't it, Doc? First we started sending in small unarmed ships; now only one man—a Human Probe—umbilicalled to you and MEM by a mindar installed in his brain, to check the planetary ecology and flash back chemical samples of the environment from the auto-readers in his suit. After all, one man can scout where an armed group is sure to meet up with antagonism, even by peacefully inclined aliens."

"The Probe-Scout system is insane!" Lancett grumbled. "Project Dodek is a prime example."

"Conover feels that if we can establish the Dodek behavior pattern——"

"Behavior pattern! Six seasoned scouts dead! What more does he want?"

"Whatever it is," Clark grinned, "I'm *it*."

Underneath them, surrounded by a force field, was the planet the Fleet's mathematical nomenclature system had dubbed "Dodek"; actually nothing whatever was known about this lonely world winging around its lonely sun like an afterthought, far

apart from all the brilliant constellation clusters so familiar to Terran astrogators by now. Radial probes indicated that there was some kind of life under that force field and that it was intelligent. Yet responses to all of the usual message patterns beamed down to it were not forthcoming. Dodek was, apparently, a hermit world. Its force-field wore the significant sign: "Do not disturb." Which was very odd. Normally a world so isolated from this galaxy and the next should be anxious for friendly visitors.

The Fleet's motives here were more urgent.

The starships had plunged too far into the vast emptiness in this frontier thrust. Fuel was perilously low. There was a big question mark about the Fleet making it back to the last base at all without being permitted to siphon up some of the raw mineral with which Dodek, if the Fleet's detectors could be trusted, was liberally endowed. Since the Dodeks weren't interested in using it, being homebodies, why wouldn't they permit the Fleet to scoop some up and be on their way? Why had they destroyed the six Probe-scouts sent down to reconnoiter and make this simple request? Why? What were they all about?

It was Clark Hauran's job to find out—with the help of Dr. Lancett and 'MEM.'

He *hoped*.

Clark's teleport drop left him gaping among white-fingered trees, in the clearing of a forest some distance from the probed nucleus of intelligent life. The Dodek city. Clark moved from the center of the small clearing into the trees, which looked to be as much mineral as vegetable with their satiny silical bark and the elliptical jouvence blue pods that tinkled musically when he brushed through. The tree copse had been selected from the pre-insanity phases of the unfortunate six spies who preceded Clark; the small forest was overcast by a cyanine mist, as was this whole section of Dodek, a characteristic signpost of the blue quartz needed for star fuel, apparently leaping right out of the planet's surface in great outcroppings.

Clark's sensors were so involved with the alien scene—and animal wariness against whatever had killed or maddened the others—that he forgot to snap on the mindar.

The aroma of the silicate forest and those dangling pods was pungent, chemical, yet not unpleasant. As for the trees and the silvery-blue moss under his feet, they stimulated his unconsciousness with thoughts of vague childhood-related beauty. *Elfin*. Yeah. That was the word that popped up. He glanced to all sides of him for things to leap out from behind those chromite trunks. Nothing. When he ventured deeper into the trees he found that

his boots made no sound at all on the spongy moss. He decided that a curious ambiote relationship existed between the vegetable and mineral life here.

It was charming. The chemical tang was exhilarating. Still, he remembered with a start, something here on Dodek had killed six Probe-Scouts and he was number Seven. The six previous scouts had been far more knowledgeable about alien environments than he. They had seen sights that would make the average Terran scream or vomit. *What worse sights had they seen here?*

"So far so good."

He said it out loud and his forefinger flicked the radial switch on his belt.

His mind caught Lancett's rough intake of breath. "It's about time!" the computer-master griped. "Vocalize! You know we can't read your mind! MEM can pick up your smallest whisper and correlate almost any kind of word-jumble that you can send us, but you have to give us something to work on. Vocalize!"

"Sing, baby, sing!"

"Such levity——"

"——is needed at a time like this, if not always!" Clark finished lightly. "Trouble with you is you have no sense of the absurd."

Lancett's silence was ominous. Clark tried to regain lost ground with the computer-master by describing everything he saw about him with scientific accuracy. What he saw and heard and touched might well determine his next move, save his life. MEM would analyze and interpret it, adding to it what the other six had relayed to the computer-ship. Mechanical probes went only so far. The human brain and human sensors were more fluid, more mobile. After all, human beings, not machines, would eventually face up to an alien environment and its way out inhabitants. A single Probe-Scout could move in hopeful secret where boatloads would blunder about, engendering antagonisms. Clark was certain, within that freewheeling empathy he possessed, that one did need a sense of the absurd and all the humor he could muster, dealing with aliens. They had their joys, their terrors, their wild dreams. Their quixotic social games that no computer could read accurately *because they were idiomatic*. Colloquials. *Per se*, they made no sense at all. It was like trying to get solemn about Jimmy Durante singing "Inka-Dinka-Doo."

This was where Dr. Lancett and Clark parted company.

"What now, Doc?" Clark asked cheerfully.

"Your resumé is accurate but it offers no more than what we already know about Dodek."

"The others cracked up later. Where and when, exactly?"

"They left the drop point where you are now and proceeded directly west, using their polar compasses."

"How far?"

"Slightly over two miles. Two-point-two by your pedometer. They came to a strange mineral mountain . . ."

Clark found the mountain. It was high and sugarloaf shaped and pure glass. He stared up its shiny smooth surface, chuckled. Dr. Lancett heard him and frowned verbally.

"What is it? Why do you stop?"

"Just taking five, Doc," Clark grinned. "Besides, I kind of expected to see a beautiful Princess sitting up there at the top on a golden throne."

"Princess? Princess?"

"Yeah, Doc. Like in the fairy story. Remember?"

"No."

"Well, there was this beautiful Princess, see. Her father the King wanted her to marry a valiant Knight in Shining Armour. You know the type. And he had to figure some way of riding straight up that steep sheet of pure glass to get——"

"Please! Proceed with your journey. Around the glass mountain."

"Sure, Doc. Around it. Anyway, there isn't any Princess, damn it. If there was . . ."

"What is it?" Lancett's tone was sharp, detecting a hint of what had happened to the others. Madness, then involuntary suicide. Two of them had blundered back to the forest; MEM had retrieved them, but their minds were pudding.

"There's something in the atmosphere," Clark said.

"We read nothing your synthesizer can't handle. A slight over-balance of oxygen. Check you gauge, please."

Clark checked his gauge. Dr. Lancett was right. "On the nose," he said. "I really don't think it is the air, come to think of it."

"What then?"

Clark shrugged. "A psychic aura? Like a—a sensual pre-cognition?"

Lancett thrust such notions aside brusquely. "You will proceed around the mountain and change course by two degrees, south. From this point on you should make excellent progress for the 5.7 miles that will take you to the City Gate."

"Right. I'm off like a herd of turtles."

"Clark!" Lancett's tone was snappish, but worried, too.

"Sorry, Doc."

"It's not that, Clark. Whatever this—this *aura* is, resist it!

Don't give in to foibles and fancies. Keep a tight rein on your mind."

"That's what you told the others?"

"Of course! Fight it!"

Clark whistled. He moved his long legs forward, thoughts crackling and snapping in his brain like firecrackers.

First view of the Gate, after it ceased to be a cobalt smudge against the veils of silver-blue mist and took on form and substance, brought Clark up sharp. He gulped, moving up to it with halting strides. It was wild. By any standards on any planet in the galaxy, the Gate was fantastic. Clark had listened to the descriptions of it on MEM's microtapes, but they were meaningless because it was impossible to relate them to human architecture or human art. Fashioned out of a deep yet iridescent malachite green (its basic framework was the ubiquitous crystalline metal with which the planet abounded) it had an insane kind of intertwining of decorative threads of every other color visible in the human spectrum and beyond it. There was no attempt at objectivism; it was pure design and that design was non-euclidian. The hundreds of color tones swirled and interlaced with a near-circularness and a deliberate discordance of line and angle that shocked Clark's mind; seeing it actively *hurt*.

Still, it was a gate. It performed a useful function. That was something and Clark clung to that, staring and swallowing. He didn't dare even dwell on the further indiscretions that must lie beyond it...

Clark swept his eyes across the Gate. Up and down. Side to side. Then he began to giggle.

"Clark!"

Clark tittered.

"For God's sake, Clark! Snap out of it! *Fight* it, I told you. None of the others let go this soon. I knew Psych Conover was wrong to send a mere boy."

"You're wrong, Doc. You're wrong! I'm laughing because I'm beginning to dig it. It's—*fun*."

"Fun? We sent you down there to have fun?"

Clark pulled his facial muscles tight and sober. "Right, Doc. Right, right, right. So I'm at the very gates of the Dodek city. They're weird and wacky and when I let go I—I begin to dig. Now what?"

"Aliens have their own ideas of beauty," Lancett pontificated. "Even on Terra some of our artists go to lamentable extremes. But you must not give way. Face it. Read it carefully. MEM needs all the further information obtainable. Before you go

through the Gate, steel yourself to describe every facet of it for clues."

"Clues, Doc?"

"About what is inside. What's inside drove six hardheaded Probes crazy. This may be our last chance, Clark. Keep that seriously in mind every second. Now..."

"I'm reading, I'm reading. Yes. You know, I think I'm beginning to detect a kind of grotesque series of symbols. Like repeated letters or words."

"Writing! *Good!* The others didn't find this at all. I think they were too overwhelmed, too outraged."

"Yeah, Doc. I think it is writing of some kind. It's deliberately overblown, besides the fact that it is completely alien, which makes it all the harder. But—here goes!"

By concentrating his attention on each single whorl or tri-dimensional wriggle Clark projected it into the master code of alien idioms which it most resembled, little as that was. Painstakingly he gave MEM that information, then closed his eyes while he waited for the communications components to come up with something. It was a great comfort to retreat into blackness after all that riot of color and form.

"It is not like anything we have ever come across," Dr. Lancett said finally. "But, allowing for the extravagant flourishes which the Dodeks indulge in, I think we've come up with something."

"And?"

"The context is uncertain at best. There are a whole series of possible translations. First, the City is not called a city. It is called THE GARDEN OF SINGING JEWELS."

"I like that."

"The next part isn't quite so pretty, I think. It reads, '*Enter, creature. Yet leave you all manner of thought outside. We—*'" Lancett sputtered over a thesaurus lineful. "*We—abhor, have contempt, are indifferent.*" Something like that. Plainly, the Dodeks are hedonists. They dislike mental activity. What we think of as 'sense' they—"

"Call nonsense?"

"Perhaps we have arrived here at the time of some important celebration. A kind of planetary *fête champêtre*. Religious or orgiastic, some of these aliens take their fun very seriously."

"'Away dull care?' Or 'to hell with tomorrow, let's have a blast!'"

"I warn you, Clark, severely, that falling in with any alien idea of 'fun' is the beginning of insanity. Who knows what manner of bibidants or drugs they indulge in, or what their effects might be on the human organism! Keep in mind what

happened to your predecessors. Fight all temptation to join in their fun and games! Think!"

"I'm thinking," Clark said.

Yet the Gate to the GARDEN OF SINGING JEWELS advised the visitor not to think. In the GARDEN thinking was taboo.

There was no problem about getting in. Off-center of the gate was an ornate knob that glowed. You had only to push this knob and the whole thing opened up. Whatever the Dodeks were, they were not inhospitable, once you managed to get through the force-field, which was obviously designed to prevent any all-out surprise attack from the sky. Loners and random pilgrims were very welcome.

Clark closed his eyes and gave the knob a palm push. He closed his eyes because it was at this exact point that the unfortunate six had had their minds swept away into limbo. Any shreds of information which MEM and Dr. Lancett had managed to glean after the Gate had opened was beclouded with nonsensical babbling and meaningless gibberish. And, adroit as MEM was about transposing the most idle comment into scientific terminology, the collapse must have come swiftly indeed.

They had *seen*.

The sight had driven them mad.

At least that was how Clark figured it. Visual sensors, he decided, were the most vulnerable. The Gate hinted at what was inside. He might well stop up his ears, too. Hold back another sensory stimulus. Get used to *smelling* the Dodek environment first. But Clark decided he could handle the aural. He would touch nothing, though, and if there was the least suggestion of any olfactory drug, such as a hallucinatory gas, present, he would turn up the tank-air. It wouldn't last long, but it would give him time to cut and run!

Another thing:

Don't think.

How could he not think? You can switch off one or more of your sensory organs or divert them. But how can you switch off all your thought processes?

One way was to cut off Dr. Lancett and MEM. At least he would cease to be involved with deliberate thought-patterns for the time being. Keep his thoughts random and free-flowing. Maybe they would understand about this. It would prove he was trying to fall in with the Dodek dictum, at least!

Clark grinned as he snapped off the mindar. He could see Lancett sputtering and swearing about it. Too bad about that. Clark's Probe training had instructed him that he was expend-

able. Find out all you can and relay it back to MEM at once. Then die if you must. But get what you were sent down for *first*.

Clark had his own ideas. Those other Probe-Scouts had gone by the book and look what had happened to them . . . Something was wrong. Dead wrong. Even if Clark didn't care about saving his own skin (which he did), he knew he must play it differently if his mission were to succeed. Very differently! Lancett would just have to sweat up there and turn blue until Clark was able to turn on his think-tank again, and that would not be until he had left the GARDEN.

That aphorism on the Gate was a warning.

His aural nerves began to quiver and he titilated from every side. His olfactory cells drank in strange rapturous sensations. Clark found himself pulled along into the GARDEN. He thought the Gate oozed shut behind him, but he didn't open his eyes. Prudently, he held back, savoring the GARDEN only with his ears and his nose.

The jewels *were* singing.

It wasn't any kind of music Clark had ever heard before. It wasn't Bach or Sibelius or Scheunberg—or even the psychedelic composer Appish Waite who splatted in the notes with his toes.

It beggered description. It howled and sobbed and tinkled against his eardrums in great swooshing torrents of sound or shimmering cascades of twittering birds. After listening for awhile—swimming with the tide—Clark decided it wasn't so bad. The secret of the whole thing was: *Give in. Don't fight it.* Dr. Lancett was wrong about holding back, about resisting. That was what the other six had done and that was what had driven them mad!

The odors were heady and peculiar; there was nothing even slightly human-oriented about them; Clark tried not to envision rotten logs and perfumed harems and uncorked vats of glacial acetic acid, less the Dodeks probe his mind and object. Litte by little he realized that the smells, too, were calculated, symphonic. It was an effort to fight *not* fighting, but he managed.

Accept. That had to be the key. The old axiom, "if you can't lick 'em, join 'em." Six grimly determined Probes had destroyed themselves. Clark had no desire to add himself to the list. He would try to adapt to the Jewel-people and their ways.

Clark accepted the stimuli they offered him, absorbed, and after a while enjoyed in an inexplicable way. It took time and he gave himself time before opening his eyes for the full treatment.

"Dig." He said it aloud. "Make yourself hip. You hated

your first olive. You thought what a stupid thing to do to a nice cold glass of gin sprayed with vermouth."

Shrinking the whole complex mass of sensation down to the simplest terms helped. The sign on the Gate warned: *Feel, Man! Make the scene but stop thinking. We don't dig labels or cubby-holes. We swing wide, Man! Take your machines and your intellectual stresses and shove!*

Flowing free, Clark managed to sidestep the desire to pin all this down. Paradoxically, by *not* doing what he was sent down to this far-flung planet to do he was accomplishing more than he possibly could by concentrating on his task.

Open up, Man! Open up wide! Enjoy the universe!

Clark opened his eyes and saw.

He had prepared himself somewhat for the wildness and not having the whole mad combination of sensual stimuli hit him all at once, as it had the others, helped. Still—the riot of bursting color-fires palpitating and gyrating on all sides was almost more than a human mind could tolerate. His sanity hung in the balance. It was like many four-dimensional doors swinging open on eternity.

Clark fought. Then he remembered not to fight; to let it all pour in. The floodtide of those bursting singing Jewel-Creatures, seeming to fly and bounce into him and out of him, taking shreds of his consciousness along with them in their passing, made it impossible to think. Only feel. Sensate. There was little of emotion about the all-senses-symphony—it was pure Mozart. The Jewels sang. The odors played on his nose-nerves; now delicate, now vulgar and raw. The dazzling every-color Jewels danced.

Clark realized that one among them was talking to his mind. Casually, but with sympathy.

"Give, Man!"

"Yeah, yeah. I am. I am."

"You're trying, Man. And we love you for it."

Clark continued to gape and revel in the constantly changing patterns of sensation, the fire-glory of the Dodeks themselves and what they did brushing into and through his mind when he was able to open up, was an entireness-of-beauty of which he had never dreamed. Yet there was no feeling of vascular strain. It swept him clean and pure and rapturous. The Dodeks (what a name for such radiance!) were not over-stimulated by any manner of drug. This was their natural evolved state.

Clark related and blended as best he could.

"I love you," he said. It was a reverent-pure thought. One loved what made one happy and, man, this was happy.

"Sure, Man. That is what existence is all about. To feel. To enjoy. To be of and with everybody, not just one. We love you a whole lot, Clark Hauran. The others who came to the Garden were appalled. They hated us. So—we let them have it. All. No, Man. We didn't kill them. We are lovers, not killers. They rejected us and that is what killed them. You? You see Princesses on Glass Hills. Yeah, Man. We dug you then. The aura inside of you that digs these things hit us and we were happy to have you visit the Garden. Give, Man! Take! Be!"

Clark took more than he gave, avidly, because he didn't have much pure sensation to contribute. It was all as though he had yearned for such oneness his whole life, without knowing he did. Human man is happiest when in close contact with a loved one; this, as the Jewel said, was love multiplied by a million. The doors of infinity were wide open. All the stops were out. Pure ecstasy poured in for everyone, with nobody ignored or neglected.

After all, though, Clark Hauran was human and with human purpose.

No matter how he tried to prevent it, responsibility and guilt crept in. It was bound to, actually. Clark was conditioned to it and far too involved to be permitted to dismiss these things. He had friends out there. Good friends. His whole life had been pointed toward this target. He must slough off the strange beyond-human splendors of the Garden and wrench back to duty.

If it cost him his life or his sanity, so be it.

His hand went regretfully to the mindar switch and flicked it. The Jewels and their patterned sense-dreams retreated.

"Clark!" Lancett shrilled. "I was afraid you were gone!"

"Would you have cared?" Clark wondered gently.

"Cared? Of course!"

"Because of the Fleet or——?" It was stupid, demanding love from the crotchety egghead at this point, but—after that overwhelming flood—he had to know that some wisp of the same thing existed above the force-field.

"Clark," Lancett's voice quivered, "if I had a son . . . I mean, I've been thinking hard, sweating out your call. Praying you were all right. It's hard for me to admit I could be wrong about anything, but——"

"That's enough, Pops. I'm okay, for now."

"You've made contact with the Dodeks?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe them for MEM? Give us some idea what we are up against?"

"All I can say is that they don't kill deliberately."

"Then you're safe!"

"Not necessarily."

"You must convince them that we have no designs on their world. If they care nothing about progress, explain how important it is to Terra. All we ask is to be permitted to siphon up as much raw fuel as we need to take us back to the Base."

"I'll try."

Clark clicked off the mindar so that the Jewel would enter his mind after he had swept off most of the tainting thought.

"You heard?"

"Yes. We are indifferent to your hustle-bustle."

"But you won't let us die?"

"We are indifferent," the Jewel said again. "To us, by your emphasis on devices and take-overs you have missed the whole point of existence."

"I know. Pure empathy and love. Still—some of us are working on it."

"One doesn't *work* on it. One achieves. One grows."

Clark gulped. "Then you won't give us the fuel? You could name your spot and we wouldn't move a step out of the restricted area. The mineral is everywhere. All those barren stretches."

"We will consider, Man."

Clark shivered, waiting. He was all too aware how awkward his plea had been. He ought to have persuaded the Jewels that beauty existed in the Terran worlds, too; that there were millions of humans anxious to discover the kind of nirvana the Dodeks had achieved. If it took growth of the soul, perhaps Man needed to grow a few more centuries. If it could not be presented as a gift, or taught, then human floundering after cosmic truth ought to be pitied. Man *was* trying.

Clark realized that the Jewels had read his thoughts when their spokesman finally said, "Very well, Man. We will mark the spot where you shall mine. We will place a careful barrier around it. No more of your kind will be permitted to enter the GARDEN OF THE SINGING JEWELS. It was a mistake to allow any of you in, but we were curious. We put down our shield just a little. It won't happen again."

Clark lingered, drinking in more of the beauty. But now the sounds and sights and odors were dimmed. It was as if the Jewels had welcomed him with open arms as a convert first, but he had disappointed them. He made a wild grab of senses and total consciousness. He must not lose this wonder!

"Can I come back some time?" he choked.

"I think not, Man. You are not ready."

"But you said I was—hip! I see Princesses on Glass Hills.

I do! I see these things all the time. I'm not like those others. They don't understand my need for—for——"

"Love? See, Man? You can hardly say the word the way we feel it. It is an embarrassment among your kind. Hate is more normal."

"Not to me!" Clark wailed.

"No. Not you, Man. You are further along."

"Then let me stay with you!" he burst out. Suddenly to leave the Garden was to lose the rarest of dreams.

"Sorry, Man. You haven't made it yet. But then, you are only a—a cube, and we are..."

The rapture faded. Clark found himself trudging through the palpable blue mist toward the glass hill and the forest. It was as though a great hand had reached down inside of him and scooped out something that could never be replaced. The doors to eternity were slammed and sealed tight.

Sure Clark had an unusual capacity for love, for a human. For love, beauty and whimsy. But it could never match the Jewels in the Dodek Garden.

After all, he was only a cube and they——

"No," he sighed, alerting Dr. Lancett that he was situated and ready for teleport, "they don't dig labels."



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THE MANY WORLDS OF EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

By *GERALD W. PAGE*

In 1911, when Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote his first story, "Under the Moons of Mars," he was 36 years old and likely thought himself a failure. He told no one, not even his wife, that he was writing the story until he sold it. And, in fact, he chose to mask his identity behind the pseudonym 'Normal Bean' (which a typographer changed to 'Norman Bean') Burroughs had been a policeman, a gold miner, a private in the U. S. Cavalry, an ad buyer and salesman, an office manager, a treasurer and an 'expert accountant'—a job he got without qualification other than pure bluff . . . but a job he held for some time before quitting of his own accord. But Burroughs' first story sold and a legend began—perhaps a score of them. "Under the Moons of Mars" was published in book form, later, as "A Princess of Mars" and was the first of a series of books set on the red planet. Burroughs followed up his initial success with an historical novel and then he wrote a third book.

He called it "Tarzan of the Apes" and never again would he need to think of himself as a failure. He became one of the most successful writers of all time, and one of the most widely imitated. For he brought a certain important quality to the writing of adventure stories of the type then referred to in the pages of all fiction pulp magazines as 'different' stories.

He brought a unique and fabulous imagination.

Edgar Rice Burroughs was very likely the first writer to create highly detailed worlds for his stories. Worlds uniquely his own. He created a Mars called in the tongue of its ancient inhabitants, Barsoom. He created the Africa of Tarzan, the Venus of Carson Napier, the Land that Time Forgot, the land of Pellucidar within the hollow earth . . . Each would be a com-

plete and detailed world, very real unto itself. That was the hallmark of the writing of ERB. That was the source of the legends. Magnificent worlds born of the imagination of a man who once may have thought himself a failure. Worlds that would fire the reader's imagination in a way no other writer could duplicate. Because there would be so very many worlds, all so real, each peopled with characters as real as the worlds. . .

* * *

He was the greatest swordsman of two worlds. A man of Earth, a captain in the army of the Confederate States of America, a prospector and adventurer in the old west—and now the leader of the greatest army on Mars, the army of the empire of Helium. A leader of copper skinned Heliumites and giant four-armed green men, he is called Warlord of Mars. Transported to Mars from a strange cave in Arizona where he was trapped by Apaches, he now pursues adventure across the dead sea bottoms overgrown with orche moss, through the great Toonolian marshes, through the thin air of the dying planet aboard flyers created by the ancient nearly lost science of Mars. He is a man who can leap higher than any other creature on this world, who is stronger than any other man, because his muscles were bred for the heavier gravity of his own world. He is the man who exposed the false religion of the Holy Therns and cast down the evil goddess Issus. He is the man who won the hand of Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium. He is John Carter of Mars.

Why does a man nearing middle age, a failure in many prosaic jobs, decide to write a book about Mars? There has been much conjecture as to the source of Burroughs' idea to do a story set on Mars. It has ranged from suggesting that he stole the idea from an obscure novel by Edwin Lester Arnold (called *Lieut. Gulliver Jones: His Vacation*, and retitled *Gulliver of Mars* for the recent Ace pocket novel) to pointing out that Burroughs was stationed at Fort Grant, Arizona and that the desert terrain of Arizona is not all that different from the dead sea bottoms of Mars which ERB described in his stories.

And indeed it is likely the answer may well lie in Arizona. Jerry Burge has suggested (in *Lore* No. 4, February 1966) that the most likely source of the idea to do a Mars story was Percival Lowell's "Mars As the Abode of Life," published in 1908. Lowell, the famous astronomer, was the man who first formulated the theory of the Martian canals, a system of man-made channels to carry water from the polar caps to the drier areas of the planet. Lowell, who lived and worked in Flagstaff, Arizona, described an inhabited Mars whose surface was not too much dif-

ferent from Arizona. His book was a best seller and very likely (since ERB notoriously ignored fiction and read mostly non-fiction) ERB encountered Lowell's ideas, if not Lowell's book, since newspapers everywhere played up the ideas Lowell advanced in his book. The idea that Mars was inhabited by an ancient, scientifically advanced but now dying race, coupled with ERB's tremendous imagination could probably have led nowhere else than to the writing of "A Princess of Mars." It is certainly a more reasonable theory than that ERB used as a model a book that has no resemblance to his own, other than the use of the word 'Mars.' The real blow to the "Gulliver Jones" theory lies in the fact that Arnold wrote his novel with an almost total ignorance of scientific opinion of Martian conditions, whereas Burroughs, while primarily interested in entertaining readers, seemed quite aware of the opinions of scientists of his day in regard to Mars.

Burroughs wrote ten complete Martian novels before his death in 1950. In 1964 an eleventh volume was published, containing two novelets (one of which, published as a 'Big Little Book' in the early 1940's was actually by ERB's son, John Coleman Burroughs). It is possible that there would have been more than just ten Mars novels, but in 1912 Burroughs wrote his third novel and opened up another world and a truly remarkable character...

* * *

He was nobleman . . . and savage. Son of a titled Englishman, raised by Kala the ape after the death of both his parents. He taught himself to read from the books he found in the cabin where his parents died. The first human language he learned to speak was French. In his life he led a rich and varied career; an agent of the French secret service, member of the British House of Lords, officer in the RAF, holder of extensive lands in Africa . . . yet always he returned to the jungle where Kala had reared him. Repeatedly he cast aside the veneer of civilization and returned to the jungle where he ruled. He was John Clayton, Lord Greystoke. But he was better known by the name which the great apes gave him: Tarzan.

A truly remarkable character, one of the cornerstone events in the history of imaginative literature . . . Tarzan reflected much of the idealism of the early 20th century, as well as certain philosophical ideas then in fashion, namely the 'return to nature' and the 'noble savage.' For Tarzan was a man completely attuned to nature: a creature of the jungle like the apes that raised him, yet a man with the nobility of man unspoiled by

civilization. Although Tarzan never thought his fellow men to be very noble creatures, he himself represented the noblest ideals which man is capable of. And this noble savage captured the imagination of the world.

The name Tarzan has fallen into common public usage in many languages. Tarzan has been a success not only as a character in stories for magazines and books, but in newspaper comic strips, comic books, movies, radio and television.

Fourteen actors have portrayed Tarzan in about forty movies. A fifteenth actor (Ron Ely) starred as Tarzan for two seasons on television. No Tarzan movies ever lost money and preparations are under way to film and release more. The chances are very strong that your grandchildren will enjoy new Tarzan films in their lifetime just as your grandparents did.

Is it any wonder that no fictional character (James Bond and Sherlock Holmes *not* excepted) has ever been more imitated than Tarzan?

During the twenties, the thirties and the forties, almost every pulp adventure writer made his living by imitating Burroughs in some fashion or other, writing interplanetary adventures in the mold of the Mars stories, or lost world stories with the unmistakable influence of the master. Many writers have tried to create their own Tarzan.

Some, such as William L. Chester's "Hawk of the Wilderness" and its sequels, and C. T. Stoneham's "The Lion's Way" were quite successful. More so, perhaps, were Otis Adelbert Kline's "Jan of the Jungle" and the Bomba novels, a series of juvenile books written under the pen name Roy Rockwood. For years, Fiction House, one of the most successful pulp magazine companies, published *Jungle Stories*, which featured a novel each issue about the jungle man Ki-Gor. The series, written by several writers under the pen-name John Peter Drummond, ran from 1938 to 1954. Ki-Gor was a blond Tarzan somewhat more in the mold of the movie character portrayed by Johnny Weissmuller than ERB's book characterization. Fiction House also published comics, among them *Jungle Comics*, which featured a jungle man identical to Ki-Gor in every way save that his name was Kaanga. In another comic, *Jumbo*, Fiction House published the adventures of a female Tarzan named Sheena. In 1951 Fiction House published a single issue of a pulp magazine featuring stories about her, but it was unsuccessful. Later she appeared once or twice in *Jungle Stories*. But her biggest success outside of the comics was a television series which ran for three seasons in the late fifties.

A few years ago an American publisher, aware that the copy-

rights to the early Tarzan novels had lapsed, concluded that he was safe in publishing a series of unauthorized Tarzan novels. Written by two TV writers, the paperbacks sometimes featured whole sections lifted almost word for word from actual novels by Burroughs. This series was ended through legal action by Burroughs' heirs, legal action that established their ownership of the name 'Tarzan.'

There is today on network television a cartoon series that is a parody of Tarzan. While only Tarzan (and his son Korak) remain of the comic book jungle heroes, European and Asiatic movie makers frequently produce films based on the Tarzan motif. Actual Tarzan movies continue to show a profit, and the TV series was rerun as a summer replacement on the CBS network a year after NBC cancelled it. Paperback editions of all the Tarzan novels continue in print and many are available in hardbound permanent editions.

Tarzan was, far and away, the greatest success of Edgar Rice Burroughs. But Tarzan was not the end of that great imagination's products . . .

* * *

Neither fool nor anti-hero, yet he was catapulted into adventure by one of the greatest blunders in history. He aimed his spaceship for the planet Mars but through miscalculation found himself reaching Venus instead. Here he found a world, called Amtor by its inhabitants, a world shrouded by a double layer of clouds, a world of tall trees and fierce beasts and strange civilizations and harrowing adventures. And a princess named Duare. Luckily, Carson Napier was a man with a sense of humor, a very important factor to survival on the planet Venus . . .

And humor was also an important factor in the enjoyment of the four Venus books by Edgar Rice Burroughs, "Pirates of Venus," "Lost on Venus," "Carson of Venus" and "Escape on Venus." For here Burroughs indulged not only his highly developed dry wit, but his penchant to indulge in occasional social satire as well. Humor was a part of the Burroughs character and traces of it are to be found in most of his writings. The social structures of the lost races his characters encountered quite frequently bore a resemblance to certain social practices of our own civilization, permitting him to frequently prick at the fat balloon of human folly and foible. But so filled are the Venus books with humor and satire that one cannot entirely escape the idea that Burroughs was toying with the idea of doing a strictly humorous series.

Not that humor predominates to the exclusion of everything

else. Story, as always, is first. Action and incident and inventive detail abound. But still ERB doesn't hesitate to point to the absurdity of his fellow man by creating such cultures as the Havatoo, a carefully planned society of the type many would-be social reformers advocated in the thirties; and the Zanis, a take-off on the fascist governments that were ruling Germany and Italy at the time. Zani is, of course, an anagram for Nazi and certain of the leaders of the Zani bear an interesting resemblance to certain political leaders of the '30s of whom Burroughs was less than trustful.

But, despite the social satire, the anagrams and the borrowing of certain characteristics from people who lived in his own world, ERB did not let these factors predominate. In the Venus books, as in the Mars books and the Tarzan books, story came first. For Burroughs was, as always, very conscious of himself as entertainer. He had specific ideas about the obligations a writer owed his readers. Least among these obligations was sermonizing or propagandizing.

* * *

You stand upon a rough plain carpeted with primeval shrubs and grasses. Behind you stands a jungle more fierce than any of Africa or Asia. Your eyes lift to the horizon. . . or where the horizon ought to be. For there is land there and land beyond that. But no horizon. The land continues to rise upward until distance gives it an obscuring haze. Overhead a miniature sun burns fiercely, eternally, forever hanging at high noon. In the sky a great winged creature lazily swoops toward some distant prey. So great is this beast, so strange in configuration that it resembles nothing so much as a pterodactyl. And from the distance comes the call of another beast, a noise so great it might well be the call of a dinosaur or the trumpeting of a mammoth. And indeed that is possible, for you stand on a plain of the Earth itself, a plain of Pellucidar, the land at the Earth's core.

The first novel in the Pellucidar series was written in 1913 and titled "At the Earth's Core." In it, a young adventurer, David Innes, accompanies an inventor named Abner Perry in the testing of the iron mole, a vehicle designed to drill through solid rock into the earth itself. On their first test run, however, they are unable to turn the direction of the mole and find themselves boring deeper and deeper into the earth's crust. They eventually emerge in a land inside the earth. They have arrived in Pellucidar. The adventures of Innes and Perry and other Burroughs characters in this land of eternal noon carry through seven books: "At the Earth's Core," "Pellucidar," "Tanar of

Pellucidar," "Tarzan at the Earth's Core," "Back to the Stone Age," "Land of Terror" and "Savage Pellucidar."

In the fourth book of the series, with David Innes a prisoner, an expedition is organized on the surface of the earth to rescue him. Among the rescuers is Tarzan himself, as well as his friend Ch̄f Muviro and twelve of his Waziri warriors. They voyage to Pellucidar by dirigible through the opening at the North Pole and when they arrive they find a land rougher and more exciting than any they had encountered before. For Pellucidar is quite a rugged world indeed, and even Tarzan's fantastic sense of direction is useless in a land with no stars and no moving sun. He promptly becomes lost.

For there was no resemblance save the superficial one that both contained jungle between Tarzan's Africa and Pellucidar. Burroughs was not a man to constantly rename a single world and use it repeatedly. Each of his worlds is different from the others. Africa differs from Pellucidar which differed from Barsoom, which differs from Amtor. It was a unique talent of Edgar Rice Burroughs, this ability to create so many different worlds.

The many lost worlds within Tarzan's Africa, for example. Ancient Opar, outpost of lost Atlantis; the land of the Ant-Men; Pal-Ul-Don . . .

Graustarkian Lutha, where adventurer Barney Custer fought to save Princess Emma von der Tann in "The Mad King."

Poloda, the planet "Beyond the Farthest Star" where an Earthman known only by the name Tangor found a world so steeped in the war raging there that war had become a way of life and generation after generation had never known peace.

There was the past: The prehistoric world of "The Eternal Lover"; England in "The Outlaw of Torn" during the time of the War of the Roses; ancient Rome in "I Am a Barbarian!" which was written in 1941 but not published until 1967.

There was the old west in "The Bandit of Hell's Bend," "The War Chief" and others.

There was the future: Grabritain, that ferocious lost land which Jefferson Turck of the 22nd century rediscovered in "Beyond Thirty." The world within the moon in "The Moon Maid."

And, perhaps the strangest land of all: Gaspak, "The Land that Time Forgot," where evolution itself is laid out as if for display to rule the lives of the land's inhabitants.

And there are others. The fertile imagination of Edgar Rice Burroughs covered far too much to be covered in the few words available here.

Most of Burroughs books are available in paperback. There

are two books about him. Richard A Lupoff's "Edgar Rice Burroughs: Master of Adventure" is not a well done book but recounts many of ERB's story lines and for that reason is well worth reading. But it advances many theories about Burroughs which seem rather absurd. The best book about ERB is "The Big Swingers" by Robert W. Fenten (Prentice-Hall, 1967), a biography. An excellent essay on Burroughs appears in Sam Moskowitz's "Explorers of the Infinite" (World, 1963), an essay which the reader is advised to look up if he wishes better to understand the impact of Edgar Rice Burroughs on science fiction.

For the serious Burroughs fans, there are several magazines published about Burroughs. These are amateur non-profit journals, but on the average they maintain very high quality. One of them, ERB-dom won a Hugo award as best fanzine of 1965. The price for ERB-dom is \$2.00 for four issues from C. Cazedessus, Jr., P.O. Box 550, Evergreen, Colo. 80439. Another excellent ERB fan mag is the BARSOOMIAN, also 4 issues for \$2.00 from Lt.JG Paul C. Allen, USNR, U.S. Naval Base Subic Bay, Public Affairs Office, Box 1, FPO San Francisco, Ca. 96651.

There is also a club of Burroughs collectors and fans, the Burroughs Bibliophiles. This organization has a membership around 1000 members and publishes a large and handsome fanzine, THE BURROUGHS BULLETIN, which was the first ERB fan magazine ever published and which is still edited by Vernell Coriell, its founder back in the 1940s. The Bibliophiles also issue a newsletter called THE GRIDLY WAVE featuring news of interest to readers and collectors. Moreover they have put several rare works of ERB back into print in well-done, inexpensive editions. Membership is \$3.00 annually to Mrs. Marguerite Coriell, Sec'y, 6657 Locust St., Kansas City, Mo. 64131.

* * *

For years he thought himself a failure because he held many jobs yet found success elusive. Then, in secret, he wrote a story and sold it. He wrote others and they too sold. Success no longer eluded him. His romantic fantasies grew from the germs of the ideas popular in his day: an astronomer's theory of life on Mars; the ideas of the naturalist philosophers; even Darwin's theories of evolution. Each of these ideas he transformed into a world of vast adventure and excitement. He was imitated by many but none of his imitators could equal him; none could match that special quality that set him apart. For each of those worlds he created was unique and fascinating and believable in its own right. There are many worlds of Edgar Rice Burroughs. And the secret is that a great imagination is a great genius . . .

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The creature Ross found was telepathic . . . and hungry!

THE HARD-SKIN

By THOMAS CLEARY

Ross had been on the planet less than ten minutes when the thing hit him. The sudden blow at the base of his skull pitched him violently forward, leaving no time for him to break the fall with his hands. He had heard and felt the grating of a sharp hardness on the flex-band that allowed movement of the helmet, joining it to the rough fabric of the suit.

Rolling to one side, he saw a blur of gray-green fur as the thing attacked again. In an instant, it was at his throat, teeth grinding, rasping at the flex-band at his neck. The face was close to his visor, and he looked directly into the creature's eyes, clear and flat, colorless tunnels into the head.

He swung his arm up to thrust it away, but before the movement was half completed, a resounding *thump* on the chest drove him down again. He lost sight of the animal. Staggering to his feet, Ross grabbed for the curved tube at his belt. Twenty feet away, the animal crouched low in the scraggly bush, eyes on him, waiting. He blipped the button, firing a half-charge before it could spring. Pencil-thin blue light lanced to the spot where, an eye-blink earlier, the animal had crouched. Its leap carried it sidewise out of the line of fire, just in time to avoid the paralyzing beam. Ross fired again, and again, and the animal escaped each burst with a simultaneous leap.

Ross waited, and the creature relaxed, squatting on powerful haunches. Gun in hand, he studied it. It was shaped like a large rabbit with rear legs larger than the front, all ending in wide, soft pads at the feet. The lumpy head had huge membranous ears set low on each side of powerful jaws; Ross knew of the long, sharp teeth they contained. Like a rabbit, Ross thought,

but with the jaws and teeth of a mastiff. Obviously a carnivore.

The thought that came to him almost seemed to be his own. Yes, a carnivore, attacking food. And he was the prey.

The thoughts were not words, but emotions and pictures in his imagination. His imagination? He had not thought of it before, but he could imagine how he looked to the creature; silver metal-fabric suit, dark-visored helmet, strange things bound around his middle, a silver tube in his hand. The picture was one of himself, and he could see the pyramid of his ship behind him. Behind him! Then he knew he was seeing through the eyes of the rabbit while looking at it.

Another thought. The blue light will harm, perhaps kill. Move from the light before the hard-skin can point. The hard-skin is slow, slower than any other. The blue light must strike to harm, and it will be easy to avoid it.

The thing was telepathic. Ross had heard of telepathic races on other worlds, but had not encountered any in his years of prospecting.

All of the feelings and sensations of the other vanished, leaving him again looking into the eyes of a strange animal. But he had sensed how it had seen him, reacted to him. Then it had shut him out, closed the link between them.

Ross turned on the communicator, broadcasting his voice into the alien atmosphere. "Can you hear me?"

The rabbit disappeared in a blur of motion, tiny dust-trails betraying that it had sought cover in a larger clump of the low scrub. Thought: The Hard-skin screams its thoughts in all directions, makes vibrations that can be sensed from very far away. The disturbance will bring others, and they will attack. It would be best if they did not come.

Ross switched off the communicator. Frightened by noise. But the fear was not of the noise, but of the others. The message was subtle, deep in his mind, just over the sub-conscious level. It was like a whisper.

He tried to calm himself. How do I, he thought, reduce the intensity of my thoughts? He tried to make his mind serene, almost a blank. Then trickled a thought into his consciousness. "That better?"

No response. Rabbit stayed hidden.

"Damn!" Ross thought. "First contact on the planet, and I blew it."

He waited some minutes, peering into the gray brush. The rabbit was well camouflaged. Then a thought crept into his mind.

Contact? Hard-skin desires contact? Infinite curiosity.

Ross understood. He sensed that Rabbit had not considered

contact with other beings. He tried to keep his mind clear of his own thoughts, and let the inquisitiveness of Rabbit seek him. Slowly ideas drifted into his mind. Contact? Would contact bring food, or danger? All other contact, accidental during the brief struggle with others, brought pain. Brought death to one, food and life to the other. Hard-skin would be food now, if he were like others. Others would have screamed in agony when the neck-cord was crushed between sharp teeth, and would have been eaten by now. Even the slow shell-covered things, when eaten, gave their pain off like poison, and it was felt and endured. Hard-skin had not given pain when bitten. Anger and surprise, but not pain. And Hard-skin came from another place, a place like this, far away, farther than any imagining.

These thoughts washed over Ross' mind in waves. Intense curiosity pervaded the message, and under that, a level of hunger, bypassed by the curiosity, but not forgotten. Ross was, after all, food.

Ross allowed his own ideas to come into his mind now. No, I am not food for you. My hard-skin protects me from you, from pain, from being eaten by any other. And I have a weapon that can harm. It can bring death, if I wish. But I do not seek food. I have no hunger, as you do. My ship, the thing I came in, has much food, and I take it without pain to myself. I seek other things, metals and stones.

The bush stirred, far off to the right. Ross had not realized that the rabbit had moved. Now it was peering at him, under the converging cover of low branches. It stopped, appeared to be listening.

If Hard-skin could keep his thoughts quiet, "Rabbit" could sense to find whether others are approaching.

Ross attempted to blank out his thoughts. After a moment, Rabbit approached.

Hard-skin wishes to know many things, already knows many things unknown to Rabbit. Hard-skin does not wish to eat Rabbit, and Rabbit cannot eat Hardskin. Contact with others is not painful to Hard-skin, and Rabbit feels no pain from him. But danger is present here, because others may sense the mind-thoughts and attack. Others can kill Rabbit, if not Hard-skin.

Ross knew he was to accompany the creature to a place of safety. A den, a lair . . . he could not call it a home. Rabbit gave him an image, a picture of the den.

It was a home, of sorts, and was comfortable for Rabbit. The cave was on a hillside, chosen for its view, and was equipped with running water—if the liquid in the picture *was* water—diverted from an underground spring, bringing in fresh fluid,

flushing out waste. Natural ventilation was provided by openings strategically placed in the walls and ceiling of the one large room, taking advantage of the prevailing winds.

The only entrance was trapped, deadfalls triggered by innocent-appearing stones, mounds, pressure points, the idea clearly being that only Rabbit himself could safely negotiate the passage. Ross had visions of another rabbit impaled by a single stalactite, pinned to the floor of the tunnel like a fly to a specimen-board. More than one intruder had met a similar fate, crushed by tons of stone, guillotined by a slab of sharpened stone, flesh ultimately dried and stored by Rabbit against a siege.

Ross thought: How did you learn these things? You have had no contact with others, no sharing of knowledge.

An answering thought: That thing most necessary is done. Rabbit has crushed the neck-cords of others in the dens they have prepared. The traps are seen and remembered, and things like them have been made.

Then Rabbit shut him out again. The thread of thought was broken, and he looked only at a strange, mute animal. Ross had caught the barest flicker, just as the blocks descended, and he knew he had not been told everything. Rabbit was holding back. It had not told Ross how to avoid the traps. Ross was to be led into them deliberately, would be stripped of the protective suit, his flesh dried and stored. He began to understand the intelligence of the creature. It had failed in the first attack, and now it would trick him, outwit him.

Hunger roared into his mind, buzzing like a thousand bees. He could feel the twisting, churning knot of its insides, juices flowing, frenzied with anticipation. Rabbit had let him feel the hunger.

Thought: The hunger comes when a moving thing is seen, a thing that lives and can be eaten. The hunger makes pain until the thing that moves is killed and eaten.

Then it turned back into the brush, selecting a pale, low growing grass, and ate mouthfuls of it. The taste was repulsive, and it was a move of desperation. But the level of the hunger was less intense.

Rabbit ate a half-dozen clumps, carefully skirting small nodules on the base of the stems. Moving easily, it trotted into the deeper part of the thicket, out of Ross' sight. It came to him that he should follow, that Rabbit's fear of detection by others impelled movement. It could stay here no longer. Ambling along in the direction of the cave, Ross was certain that Rabbit would lead him safely past the traps. His suspicion had been detected, affirmed and answered.

He had walked nearly a mile when it occurred to him that he should stop and look up, along the side of a low bluff fifty yards ahead. The vegetation was taller here, twice his own height. Above the path, the limbs of a tree-like growth held a shaft, sharpened on one end, laid carefully in notches in the supporting branches. Behind it, a springy fork was held in tension by levers. His eye found and followed a thread—tendon, probably—down the main trunk and along the path to a point at the base of the bluff where the growth forced passage through a narrow opening. It was a crude sort of one-armed crossbow, its three-foot bolt aimed two feet above the concealed trigger, and Ross did not doubt its effectiveness. He had been shown the first of the traps.

Remembering his own weapon, he understood that the mindless crossbow could not signal a warning to a telepathic enemy.

Ross was impressed with the care given to the selection of the cave. Well hidden among stones and brush, the opening in the hillside commanded a view over miles of valley, ending in a range of mountains to the west. He received a picture of the creature waiting here, sensing its prey in the valley below, stalking and devouring any unwary food-animal.

Ross hesitated at the cave entrance, uncertain. Suppose the cave contained weapons? The picture of the animal decapitated by the guillotine returned to him, from his memory this time. He had not seen the rabbit for some time, yet he knew that it was in the cave. Waiting for him. It had shown him one trap. Would it show him the others?

The answer came almost instantly, and it was as certain as though it had been his own thought. The Hard-skin will not be attacked. Outside is danger; the cave is safe. The hunger is strong, and Hard-skin resembles food, but other, stored food will be eaten. Only if the Hard-skin dies will the flesh be eaten, if the skin can be opened.

Ross stepped into the cave opening, waiting while the visor cleared, adjusting to the dim light. Twenty feet into the tunnel his attention was riveted to a spot on the floor, a mound of soil. Directly above it a stalactite hung, poised like a stone dagger. He stepped around the spot.

Two other traps were passed in the same manner. At a turn in the tunnel, he kept close to the wall, off the path, away from the hair-thin straws protruding from the opposite side. In minutes he was in the cave.

It was exactly as he had seen it before. The spring, the openings chiseled into the wall, the dried flesh hung in a niche, all were familiar. He could see no weapons. The animal stood near

the back of the room, near a large pool of liquid from the spring. Taking a smooth tree branch between its forefeet, Rabbit levered a wedge-shaped stone from the central part of the circlet of rock at the end of the pool. Clear liquid rushed through the opening, raising the level of the smaller pool that filled a depression in the floor toward the entrance.

Ross' gaze followed the flow of the fluid, which ran sluggishly in spite of the gradient. As he watched, the rising level of the lower pool caused a shift in the attitude of the stones in the wall of the cave. The largest of them was borne up by the inexorable buoyancy of the displaced fluid; it floated. As it rose, it pressed upward on a thick shaft of the same sort of wood the lever and the lance had been fashioned from; this in turn moved a thick slab of stone into the entrance, slowly sealing the cave, and Ross, inside.

He shot a quick, questioning look at the animal. Doubt flooded his mind, instinct urging him to move through the remaining opening, and yet he was certain that Rabbit had not deceived him. The thought had been clear, the intent sure. There would be no attack.

Rabbit's thoughts came to him with more strength. It did not whisper now. The opening can be cleared again. Another stone holds the liquid in the lower pool. When it is moved, all action is reversed. Ross received a picture of the stone sinking, opening the crude door. Stepping closer to the pool, he examined the floating stone. It appeared to be porous, probably of volcanic origin, and was obviously quite light. The arrangement of the door-lever was simple, but effective, and closed the opening with a mass unlikely to be moved aside by any intruder.

Questions leaped into Ross' mind. He switched on the communicator. "Where did you learn this?"

Rabbit cringed at the noise, ear-flaps folding down tightly. And it was puzzled, only half understanding the message. Ross realized that his idea had been garbled with words, pronouns, conceptions alien to the animal. If this telepathic, tool-making, being could be called "animal." He tried again with simple images and emotions. How was this closure made? Seen in the cave of another and copied? Devised by you?—image of Rabbit with thoughts of attacker repelled by closed entrance.

I—image of Rabbit—desire to take life of others—image of killing and eating, not have life taken—image of being killed and eaten. Hunger is great, need for flesh is great and pressing at all times. Plants and grass are eaten to ease hunger, but if flesh cannot be killed and eaten, pain comes and it is felt that death follows soon. All things here are done to protect life and

obtain flesh. Some were seen and copied, but the entrance-stone was not seen. Image of the pyramidal space ship. Hard-skin has seen and copied the thing that he came here in?

How was Ross to explain? He tried to image a building, a factory, with hundreds of men clambering over a half-completed ship, bringing it from the skeletal stages through the addition of the outer protective layers, the wiring, testing, launching into orbit. Rabbit watched him closely, groping for details. The intense feeling of curiosity pleaded for more information, almost sucked the thoughts out of his brain. He answered quickly, as thoroughly as possible. The need for a greater expression of abstract ideas became acute, and he was hard put to explain with pictures and emotions fathomable by the creature. One question was troubling Rabbit particularly: the many men were the same type of being as Ross, yet they were different. They had no "hard-skins."

They didn't need them, since they didn't eat each other. Ross pictured a cafeteria, hundreds eating, talking, without fear of each other. He even attempted to suggest the humor that passed between the workmen in the factory. Sharing of food, the courtesy of offering to others before oneself, the feeling of satisfaction and fellowship after a lunch or dinner, all were depicted. Rabbit absorbed each item of information greedily, the vacant tunnels of the clear eyes belying the intensity of his emotions. The tools, worn around the center of the Hard-skin. What were they?

Suit, Ross corrected. Weapons, communicator, signals, air supply. Men could not breathe the air of this world, and were forced to carry air from their own world. Ross glanced at the gauge on his wrist. He had over twenty hours supply before he would be required to replenish the dwindling supply from stores in the ship.

Rabbit was instantly tense, electrified. Crouching, the animal crept around Ross, circling to a position between the man and the cave entrance. Its mind had suddenly gone blank when it began its movement. Ross turned, keeping his face towards it.

The telepathic blocks lifted slightly, allowing a single thought to penetrate.

How long is twenty hours?

The enormity of his blunder sank in upon him. The animal would wait him out, now. Ross slipped the gun from the clip at his belt. Rabbit had successfully dodged each of his first shots, but they had been taken in haste, in the open. It would be different in the confines of the cave. If Rabbit tried to stop him, attacked him, he would be forced to kill it.

The Hard-skin will not be attacked.

"Damn it, my name is Ross!" The shout echoed inside the helmet. Sweat trickled down from his temples, and he was breathing heavily. Calm down. Sure, this is a little snug, closed up in here with a telepathic, cannibalistic rabbit, no wonder I'm sweating. But there've been tight spots before, plenty of them, tighter than this. And you don't lose your head. Not and live to tell it, you don't. Now, then. Let's see just how smart you really are, rabbit-with-the-big-teeth. You hear everything I'm thinking, don't you?

Blank.

Well, you do. Ross. That's my name. A name is a word that men call themselves, so men can tell one from the other. Individualism, in a plural society. I live and work with others, except when I'm out in these God-forsaken planets prospecting. And we get along, and help each other, and share ideas, and build things together. And the first man knows something, or learns something, he tells others, and soon everyone knows it. And we can all use it. You dig this, so far?

The creature remained motionless, ready to spring. Ross lowered the curved tube of the gun. A glimmer of curiosity flicked out to Ross.

This is what its like. Ready?

Ross pictured a city, the biggest, busiest city he'd ever seen. He remembered soaring buildings, nuclear power plants, department stores, air cabs, jack-hammers in the hands of treaded robots, libraries, bars, dancing girls, bevatrons, walnut-paneled business conferences, chewing tobacco, opera, steel mills, waterfront docks, skid-row bums, lovers on the grass in the park. Lights, noise, bustle and color.

He could feel the struggle in the animal's mind as it attempted to assimilate the image.

Yeah. As smart as you are, there's still a few surprises around for you. That's what we've done, and we're not as intelligent as you are.

Questioning, a not-understanding.

That's right, not as intelligent as your race. This—what I've shown you is only a small part—this took a trillion people forty thousand years to accomplish. Big numbers. Well, this is *one*. We'll see if you can extrapolate. This is *two*, and this is *ten*. He pictured individual blades of grass: that would be in a common frame of reference. Ten clumps of ten, grouped together, that's a *hundred*

The lesson continued for a time, and the creature indicated that it grasped large numbers. But understanding failed at

millions. Ross tried to impart the impression in his mind of limitless time, of eons passing. Of this, Rabbit could not conceive. He thought: Time beyond the time of my life? No knowledge of that can be had.

Beyond its knowledge. No history, no past tense, since it lived in the present and prepared for the future. This, Ross thought strongly, is going to present a problem—but to you, Rabbit, not to me.

The things I have shown you are the realities of the place from which I come . . . my cave. Only my cave is the whole world, and the stars that you can see at night. And this is the result of learning, and the learning of many, not just one alone. We—the members of my race—pass knowledge on to each other, to succeeding generations, to the children . . .

Question: Explain?

The young of the race. We care for the little ones until they are ready to care for themselves. Pictures of the reproductive processes, conception, growth in the womb, birth, and a kind of time-disoriented change from infancy to adulthood.

And we tell the children all that has gone before. The memory of the last man has all the important information of all men, from the first.

Question: Is this the reason for enough flesh? For living without fear of being killed and eaten?

This is the reason, this and taming animals for our use. Without this contact, you will always remain as you are, cave-dwellers, starving, killing each other. You will never reach the stars. You will not even be able to walk on your own world openly, to explore, to learn its secrets.

Reach the stars? Rabbit reach the stars?

A surge of excitement swept through Ross' brain. Rabbit was sensing, tasting the freedom the other possessed. It was easy for him to give the animal the feeling of soaring elation that comes with free flight in a field-suit, the flashing over mountains, floating over deserts, fields and cities, hovering over the ocean, at will. He imagined the animal in a field-suit, flying free, showing a gathering of other rabbits how it was done.

Not a shred of emotion showed outwardly, but Ross knew that he had reached the creature, fired its imagination.

Rabbit, he continued the thought, you are far more intelligent than I. My race was many generations inventing the weapons and tools you have made by yourself. Image of many men struggling to make a snare, cruder than the one in the cave entrance. Image of men using clubs for weapons, slowly evolving to spears, to throwing sticks, to bows and arrows. This, thought Ross,

took centuries. Many, many lifetimes of cooperation and the passing on of learning. Without this contact, each of the many men I have pictured would have remained an animal, like the slow things you hunt. Together, we have reached the stars, and we do not want for flesh, nor do we fear anything on our world.

He paused, letting the meaning of the thought come fully to the other's comprehension. Rabbit was not letting him see its thoughts: it was again as though he were looking at an animal. He could sense that the animal was occupied, that it was racing onward through a maze of probabilities and possibilities, digesting the ideas he had planted. In Ross's own mind, a trickle of thought seeped into his awareness. Before it had time to form, he blocked it, submerged it, focusing his attention on the rabbit.

Sharply, a thought stabbed into his brain. How long would it take me to become as powerful and safe as you are? The power of the question dazzled him, and he understood fully the urgency of it. He attempted reckoning an interval of a few decades, perhaps less. I do not know, he thought, how long you live.

The reply surprised him. Life is ended by killing. My own life will not end, because I will not allow any other to kill.

Then you have another advantage, that of immortality. I will age and die, after many years, because I will wear out in time.

How would contact be made with others?

Ross pulled himself together mentally. He thought honorable thoughts, of truth, honesty, and forthrightness. Be direct, Rabbit. Go forth into your world, and make known to the others of your race those things you have learned from me. When they know, as you do, that they can be without fear and hunger, they will join you.

NO! They will attack and kill!

They will not attack—not when they have heard that you have knowledge that can free them.

They will attack. They will kill, as soon as my presence is shown them. It has always been so.

Ross shoved the trickle of his own uncertainty down hard, concentrating on the animal. He pictured Rabbit on a small hillock, calling to others of his race, giving them pictures of cities, space ships, animals kept for food, flesh and more flesh. The others crept up slowly, listening, trying to understand. Because of his knowledge, they would give Rabbit the right to lead, to decide the course of their new lives. They would obey him, would bring him the best of all the flesh for his own food, would fear him, while he feared none.

Rabbit was shaken. Decisions had always been simple, bordering on the instinctive. Now, unprepared, it was thrust into

a new situation, facing a new way of life, with its rewards, for a few seconds' exposure. The creature moved toward the lower pool in the cave, and Ross knew that it had decided.

A stone blocking the pool's exit was removed, and the liquid rushed through the opening. The floating stone sank with the level of the falling fluid, and the stone in the cave entrance slid aside.

When the cleverly contrived door had fully opened, Rabbit turned to look at Ross once more. It waited, its mind closed, while he trembled inwardly with the effort of controlling his own thoughts. He guessed why Rabbit hesitated.

They will not attack.

With blinding speed, the creature darted through the tunnel and disappeared down the hill. Ross could see nothing but pale sky in the oval opening. Ross waited for perhaps two minutes, and then, edging around the concealed trigger mechanisms, left the cave.

He had almost reached the opening in the hillside when, like terrible thunder, the message boomed and echoed inside his head.

OTHERS! I HAVE KNOWLEDGE! LEARN FROM ME. TOGETHER WE CAN HAVE FLESH. I CAN LEAD THE WAY TO THE STARS.

Ross looked for the animal. The thought had had no direction, and for a moment he could not find it. He cringed as the message began again, with a power that was almost painful.

DO NOT ATTACK. I HAVE LEARNED A THING THAT WE MUST ALL KNOW. WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT FEAR. WITHOUT HUNGER. LEARN THIS THING FROM ME.

Ross spotted it now, hundreds of yards away. It had sought a small hillock, just as he had pictured. Attempting to stand upright, it seemed to be mimicking his own stance.

I WILL GIVE YOU MY KNOWLEDGE, AND YOU MUST GIVE ME YOURS. ALL KNOWLEDGE TOGETHER CAN GIVE US...

A blur parted the bushy growth behind and to the left of Rabbit. It struck with vicious suddenness. The message was instantly replaced by waves of searing, paralyzing pain. Rage was mixed with anguish as the neck-cords were bitten through. It was all over in seconds, and the pain ebbed quickly with the consciousness. A last thought wavered into his mind: *Hard-skin... they have not let me lead...* The faltering, dying mind went blank once more.

Ross watched as the second rabbit gripped its victim in its jaws, tossing the carcass over a shoulder and across its back. As it scurried away, he projected a thought with all the strength

he could muster. PUT IT DOWN. THAT FLESH IS MINE. I AM LARGE AND STRONG, YOU ARE SMALL AND WEAK. I WILL KILL YOU IF I CATCH YOU.

It had the desired effect. Even with the burden, the animal tripled its pace and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Back in the ship, Ross programmed the computer for the next planet on his schedule. The things men do for the company, he mused.

After the worst of the acceleration was past, Ross had a martini, very dry, in a real glass, a luxury usually reserved for the evening hours on a planet's surface. The pseudo-gravity of the ship's increasing speed provided a just-right stability.

He spoke to the computer.

"Record this in the ship's log. Twelve August, 2274. Landed Planet Xi, White Dwarf 07693, coordinates 12-67-14-12. Encountered sentient life, telepathic predator, quadruped. High order of intelligence, no civilization. Absence of contact between individuals prevents attainment of superior levels of accomplishment. Exploration of planet delayed until larger force, properly trained, can be assembled. Approach with extreme caution. Armored suits strongly recommended. Beings exist in complete isolation with each other, have no concept of organization, communication, cooperation. All future landing parties should be aware of their inability to grasp deception. Since they rely solely on individual experience, they are remarkably gullible. This naivete should prove very useful in future dealings with them. Also, they appear to be abnormally egocentric, and susceptible to suggestions along that line.

However, any attempt at deception must be accompanied by the belief, at the time, that no falseness is possible. Like lying to oneself. This can be done successfully by imagining that the lie is truth, however unlikely."

For a time, he was submerged in thought, wondering. However unlikely The creatures had tremendous mental capabilities, speed, physical strength and, apparently, determination. What if he had lost the gamble? It was not really a gamble, but what if his subterfuge had backfired, and the rabbits had made the contact that would link all their minds into one working force?

They would, he knew, progress rapidly. Perhaps too rapidly. Would they become the new masters of the universe, the new prospectors, searching the galaxies for raw materials—and for flesh?

He made another entry in the ship's log, directing it, through channels, to the Chairman of the Space Exploration Council.

* * *

GARAN OF YU-LAC

By *ANDRE NORTON*

IN THREE PARTS—PART TWO

Illustrated by Carleton Palmer

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

Lord Garan, Marshal of the Air Fleet of the city-state of Yu-lac, one of several powerful nations on the planet Krand, is in love with Thrala, a Learned One and daughter of the Emperor, far above his station in a caste-ruled world.

Garan has been investigating the activities of Kepta of Koom, a Learned One, who is involved in a plot against the civilized nations of Krand.

Summoned before the ruling council, which is acting on the complaint of Kepta, Garan is accused of traitorous activities. He is saved from outright dismissal by the intercession of a stranger, Thran of Gorl.

Later he learns from Thrala that the "Dark Lord," as Kepta is known, is mistrusted by a few others, of whom Thran is one. She also tells him of a new Pleasure Palace opening in the city, which is Kepta's headquarters in Yu-lac.

Returning to his quarters, Garan finds a visitor, an officer and old friend from a province of Yu-lac, Zucat of Ru. They are discussing the Dark Lord.

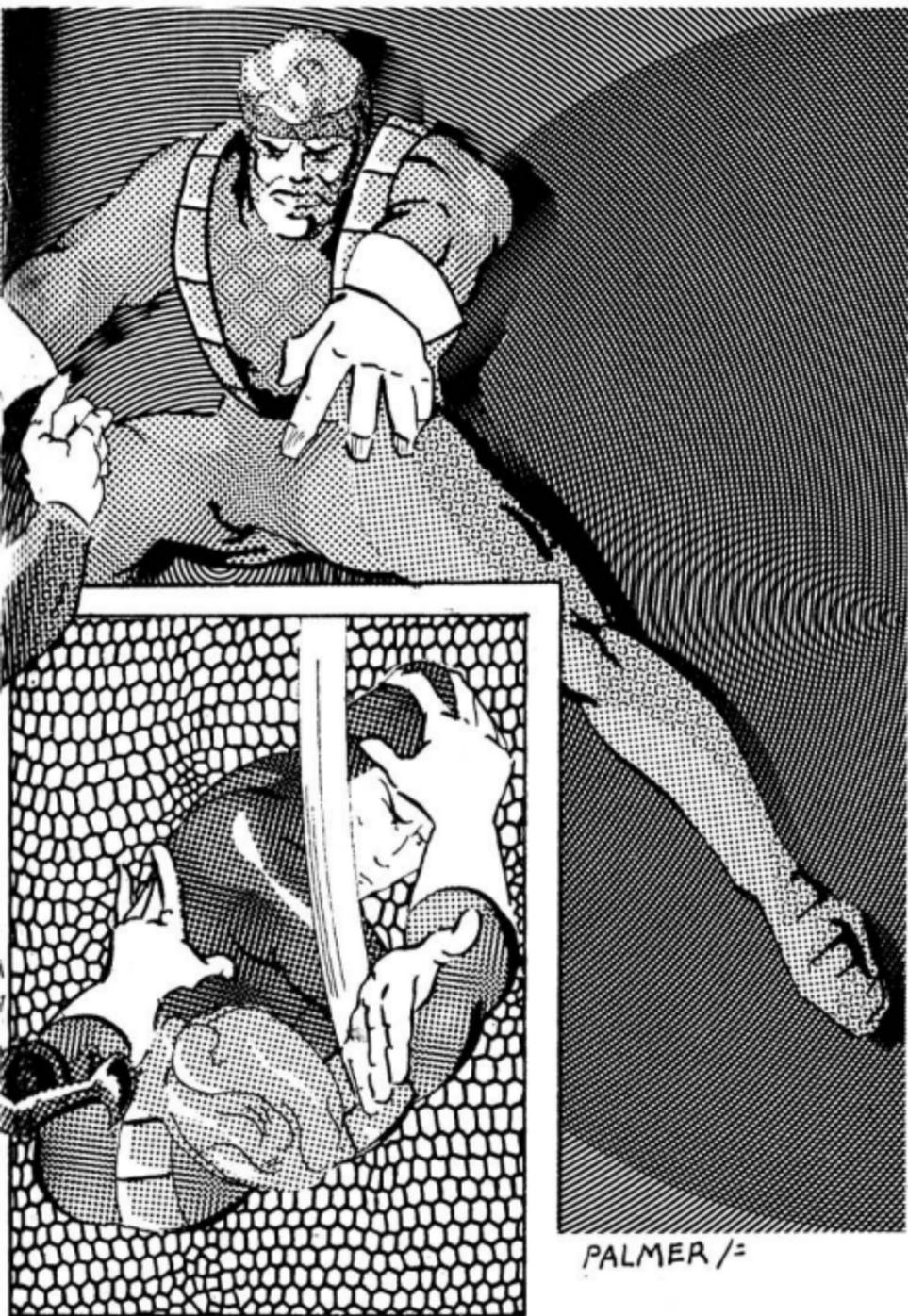
"Koom! Ever Koom!" I brought my fist down on the arm of my chair.

"Aye, ev'er Koom," he echoed me heavily. "And now, what phantoms do you pursue to no purpose?"

"Bread riots in the province of Kut, due to an unexplained failure of the peestal crop. There was rain in abundance, the soil is the richest in the Empire, but this year the fields were strangely barren. And the Learned Ones did not explain it, at least to me.

"Then there is this new cult of the Wandering Star or some such nonsense. I have had to discipline four of my men for attending its meetings and inciting disturbances afterward. Someone has been smuggling bottles of portucal into the barracks and I have had one man hung for introducing the practice of inhaling the smoke of the rait leaves. You know what that leads to?" He nodded and I continued: "Like you I feel an interest in Koom. So much of a one that I have set certain machinery in motion during the past three months."





PALMER / =

"And the result?" there was eagerness in his demand.

"Exactly nothing. And yet I do not think that the investigators I dispatched there were utter fools."

"Traitor?" he hazarded.

"Perhaps. But what can I do? Within an hour I have been warned to guard my own person. And then this business of finding secret Koomian documents among my records. The Emperor ordered me to produce the man responsible for their being there or answer for the deed myself." I went on to explain to Zacat all that had passed when I stood on trial.

"What do you know of this Thran?" I asked in conclusion.

He shook his head. "Nothing. Gorl is insignificant enough, a fish-smelling outcrop of rock in the upper sea. I was on garrison duty there once shortly after I accepted the brand. There were no Learned Ones there then at any rate. But the Lord of Gorl has interested himself in your affairs to some purpose. I would keep him in mind. Also, what does Kepla here? He has had in the past little liking for the company of his caste-fellows."

"When do you return to Ru?" I asked him suddenly.

"Early tomorrow," he replied in some surprise. "Why do you ask?"

I smiled. "Then tonight you shall be the traditional soldier on holiday——"

"What mean you?" he cut in.

"Tonight we shall visit together a new pleasure palace in the Sotan quarter."

He eyed me with some disgust. "Little did I think that Garan of the Fleet would come to the visiting of pleasure palaces——" he began when I interrupted him.

"We go on a mission. I have reason to believe that there lie certain interesting facts for a discerning man to discover. You should know me better than to so completely doubt me, Zacat."

The puckered lines on his forehead smoothed out. "Three years of absolute power and soft living often change a man to his hurt, lad. I did not want to believe you were what your words stamped you."

"Then you will come?"

"And gladly. After all," there was sly humor in his tone, "I am not adverse to seeing the interior of a pleasure palace at another's expense."

"Good, it is agreed then. And now, what say you to holding morning inspection with me?"

"Done! That is more to my taste than all the pleasure palaces in this hot-house city of yours."

So with Anatan and Zacat at my heels I set about my daily

rounds. And it seemed to my mind, sharpened as it was by the affair of the morning, that I uncovered enough on that tour to arouse suspicion in the mildest of men. A fraction's delay in carrying out a straight order, a trace of slackness which persisted in spite of my rebukes, a faint beginning of blight upon the crack troops, a certain heady recklessness to be noted in the younger men—— I saw it all, and the result brought home to me, as nothing else might, how I, and others like me, stood in the growing shadow of some formless danger.

I knew that Zacat had also seen what lay plain before us and that he too was sifting and weighing impressions gained on the morning tour. We sat at meat in the eating hall but there was little talk between us until we had finished and I turned to him.

"Well?"

He shook his head. "What man can discipline shadows? What I have seen here is but what I face in Ru. And what advice have I to give when I cannot put in order my own house? But I swear upon the Sword Hand of On Himself, lad, that in this I am with you to the end, be that what it may. Now let us to this palace of yours, since you are so determined upon it."

We sought my dressing room and there got ourselves into rich but inconspicuous undress uniforms, for I hoped to conceal our identity if I might. Anatan had been warned to do likewise and, after I had fastened a pouch heavy with the bar-like coins of the city to my belt, we found him without the door, breathing hard through pure excitement.

"Hold in mind," I cautioned him, "that we must remain unknown if possible and tonight we are on duty. Do not allow yourself to be separated from us and, above all, keep a quiet tongue between your teeth."

"To hear is to obey, lord."

I took one last look about me. Some inner sense must have warned me that it would be long before I returned down that corridor. "Let us go."

On the landing stage a plain flyer, unmarked by any betraying insignia, awaited us and we climbed in. Anatan took the controls and we arose in lazy spirals from the military quarter. According to my aid, we must land on the public stage adjoining the palace, as only regular and well known habituates were allowed the privilege of using the private stage on its roof.

Zacat protested this strongly but my desire for secrecy led me to overrule him, to my regret. A few moments later the violet lamps of the public stage were below us and Anatan set the flyer down. The attendant approached to wave us into line

with the other ships and accept the fee Anatan had ready for his hand. Zacat and I kept in the background, our helmets pulled far down so that their bird-like beaks overshadowed our faces.

Anatan pouched the receipt for the ship and we sought the ramp which led down to the street level. There, without being noticed, we slipped into the throng. Yu-lac was always at its best after nightfall. Then did the rhythm of its life grow loud and full, an illusion of carefree gaiety cloaking the idle pastimes of the city dwellers.

"To the right," Anatan guided us.

I literally gasped when I beheld our objective for the first time. Wealth must have been poured forth like water to create the dream which stood before us. The walls, carved with beasts and flowers were of a creamy crystal faintly flushed with rose which shaded to deep saffron at the foundations.

The broad portal was open according to regulations but a thin shimmering curtain veiled the delights within from the eyes of the casual passerby. On the twelve rose steps leading up to it lounged the bodyguards and serving men wearing the liveries of half a dozen or more of the wealthiest lords of the city. All castes save the military were represented.

A slim brown slave girl, with the slanting, provocative eyes of a Teriation, stood waiting to draw the curtain for our passage. She flashed a sly and impish grin at me.

"So you favor us tonight, Lord Garan?"

My faint hope of recognition was gone.

"Aye, moon-flower. Shall an humble warrior of the Fleet be barred from partaking of your joys?"

"Never!" she laughed strangely. Then, plucking from her girdle one of those flute-like whistles of her native desert land, she blew a low sweet note.

A slender white hand slipped through the curtain and beckoned us within. The Teriation smiled.

"The guide awaits you, my lord. Enter."

With my two companions I passed through the slit in the curtain.

CHAPTER FOUR—*Ila and Lania*

The square entrance hall in which we found ourselves was lighted with a mellow yellow glow from one of the new sun lamps. A broad archway, veiled in purple shot with metallic green faced us. With hand upon the folds of this curtain stood our waiting guide, a maid from the ice-bound shores of Northern Ahol. Her slight limbs were swathed in amber silk and wide

bands of soft copper confined her breast and waist. The artfully tangled mass of her red-gold hair concealed all but a thin white wedge of her face.

At our entrance she sank forward to her knees and touched her hands, palm down, to the pavement. "Will the noble lords be pleased to follow me?" Her voice was thin but shrilly sweet.

Zacat plucked at my arm. "They seem to take too much pleasure in our company, lad. I feel as if we were walking into the mouth of a sapt cage."

I pressed his fingers in warning. But I too felt a tingle awaken my flesh. His illustration was apt. Only three days before had I witnessed a wornout and aged grippon being coaxed along the ramp which led to the cage of a giant sapt. And he had gone willingly enough to his end, trusting the men who urged him on.

The girl held back the curtain. Without hesitation I entered.

Like a golden bowl, carved to meet the lips of some mountain godling, was the room in which we found ourselves. It was oval in shape, ringed by twenty archways like the one through which we had come, each curtained by a sheet of bewildering and melting color. Overhead the walls domed sharply into a cone, the point of which was open to the stars.

From where we stood the floor sank down, by a series of wide steps completely encircling the room. In the center of this nest of ever narrowing rings was a shallow oval pit from which arose lazy strings of colored, scented vapor. The massive steps were crowded with heaps of priceless metallic fabrics, flagons of gem-set stone, tiny tables heaped with dainties. And here lounged most of those who had preceded us, ministered to by the beauties of the palace.

And they were beautiful. Never before had I seen all the race types produced beneath Krand's sun assembled together, each startling in her loveliness. Like the brown-skinned Teriation at the outer door and the white Aholian at my side, each was a perfect specimen of her race.

I heard Anatan draw a deep breath and Zacat chuckle.

"A pleasure to loot, this place," the latter observed dryly. "It is not hard to understand why these palaces are barred to those below the rank of wing officer. A few of my Ruian lads in here——"

"By the Breath of Zant," broke in Anatan, "look to that maid in black. Have you ever seen her like?"

He pointed to one of the Lapidian cave dwellers. Her hair, bleached to bone whiteness by the generations her people have dwelt away from the light, was wreathed around her proud head in heavy coils. From throat to heel she was wrapped in dead

black, but her white arms were naked to the shoulder. She was a striking and outstanding figure as she moved slowly through the ranks of her more brightly-robed companions.

"Would you linger here, my lords? Or are you for the inner courts, perhaps?" the Aholian asked softly when we had looked our fill.

"The inner courts," I answered quickly before Anatan could protest.

We followed her around the uppermost step from which opened the twenty curtained archways. Anatan tugged at my cloak, whispering: "Ask to see the Lady of the Palace. It is customary to do so upon the first visit."

Wondering where he had gained his knowledge, I obeyed his instructions. The Aholian nodded and straightway pulled aside a flame and silver hanging at another door. Many were the wonders through which we passed. I remember one room that was walled with transparent crystal behind which swam living monsters from the outer seas, queer things with phosphorescent bodies or jaws gleaming in the dim light. And there were other chambers as strange or as weirdly beautiful.

Then at length we came into a small room, white-walled and -floored. But the dome was lacquered night-black, studded with great stars of crystal. Here on a couch of vivid scarlet rested her who was ruler of all this maze of color.

By her dress and heavily painted face she was a woman of Arct. In contrast to her maids without she was hideously plain. Thin to the point of emaciation, her sheath-like covering of silver net revealed every bone and hollow. Her face was thickly enameled after the fashion of her country, huge purple circles about her sunken eyes, orange slashes for lips and the rest flat white.

But her glorious hair was her claim to a place in that palace of charm. Black and very long, it was undisfigured by any fastenings or pins, rippling in freedom down to lie upon the floor when she was seated.

However, it was not at the ruler of the pleasure palace that I stared open-mouthed in amazement, but at the man who lolled, thick of tongue and sprawling of limb at her feet. Thran of Gori, a two-handed wine cup in his unsteady hands, leered up at me. Dragging upon her couch for support, he rose waveringly to his feet.

"Other friends of thine, Ila? But then I cannot complain if others seek out the same treasure which draws me hither. Must I go?"

She shook her head and the eyes she turned upon us were chill

with unfriendliness. "Stay, my lord. As for you, my lord strangers, I bid you welcome to my domain. But whisper your desires into Lania's ears and what you wish shall be set before you." She motioned towards the Aholian. So negligently did she dismiss us.

Thran laughed jeeringly and swayed towards me. "This sweet is not for your plucking, soldier. Go search other gardens for your spoil."

Something clicked faintly against the throat buckle of my cloak and fell down into the folds of my sash. Playing the abashed boor, I edged myself and my companions out of the chamber, leaving Ila and her lordling to the solitude they so desired.

My fingers touched Anatan's shoulder and I put my lips close to his ear.

"Do you amuse this Lania for the nounce."

He glanced at me quickly and then slipped forward to keep pace with the glide of the Aholian handmaid. I fumbled in my sash and drew forth an oval silver bead the size of my thumb. A moment's inspection under the direct rays of one of the corridor lights revealed the faint line of cleavage about its middle. I was familiar enough with such devices for the safe keeping of secret messages. A single twirl of my fingers separated it into halves and then I was unrolling a bit of writing silk.

"In the Room of the Grippons. One hour from now. Trust no one here," I read.

In silence I passed the note to Zacat. He scanned the single line and then grinned wolfishly. "We seem to have bayed upon a hot scent after all, Garan. The Room of the Grippons it is. Now it lies with us to play the roisters. Your boy Anatan will aid us there."

It gave me a twinge of uneasiness when I looked up to see Anatan's dark head so close to the golden one of the Aholian. For it was plain to the most stupid beholder that they had reached some understanding and were embarking upon a flirtation. The boy must be warned not to play the fool now.

I quickened my steps and came up to them. By displaying the manners of a pothouse bully I shouldered Anatan away and hailed his companion brusquely. "How now, mistress. We have paid our duty to your lady, now lead us to your haven of joys. Set your wonders before us."

Anatan was about to protest my unseemly behavior when, using a fold of my cloak as a blind, I thrust Thran's message into his hand. A tug at my back informed me that he had read and understood.

"What would you, my lords?" asked Lania, sweetly submis-

sive. "Wines? We have the best. Heady white vintages of Ru, rich purple streams from Hol, golden from Koom—and others in abundance. Dancers to amuse you? In one of our halls the golden maids from the forbidden temples of Qur tread the mystic mazes of the olden gods, the like to be seen nowhere else in all Yu-lac. Or do you wish companions for the evening? A girl from the deserts of Teriatia, as hard to withstand as one of her country's fierce winds, a Lapidian of the silver hair and passionate lips, a woman of Arct with all the pleasing city vices at her command? All nations, all natures have we here."

"The temple dancers," selected Zacat quickly and I applauded his choice for, of the three Lania had given us, that seemed the least likely to involve us in future difficulties.

Without a word she turned into a cross corridor which soon became a ramp leading downwards. Then for the first time I saw a shade of uneasiness cloud Zacat's face. Anatan was definitely sober and walked a little behind, as if he had his doubts of our enterprise. At the time I believed him sulking, but later I learned that he had good reason to distrust our hasty choice of evening entertainment. Hol borders the tropic jungle land of Qur and he suspected what lay at the foot of that ill-omened ramp.

Although Krand was united in the worship of On and had been so united for centuries, yet there still persisted in such primitive nations as Qur and Ru temples to the olden gods, those dark entities our people worshiped before they dragged themselves up out of the pit of the beast. I, myself, knew very little concerning these forbidden and now secret practices; in fact, few but the adepts did. And of those adepts Qur was the last stronghold.

A thin piping, so high in scale that our human ears could barely distinguish its notes, broke the silence. And with that piping came a low throbbing, as if air, dead and heavy with the weight of untold years, was pulsing out the measure of some unhuman rhythm.

Zacat hesitated suddenly, shuffling his feet and changing step. "Rhythm—hypnotic control," he murmured. "Do not surrender to it."

Anatan, too, was constantly changing step, from stride to shuffle and back. Clumsily I began to follow their example. The ramp seemed to run down into the depths of Krand itself and there was no break in its smooth polished walls. The ever-glowing lights, placed at intervals in the roof above our heads, changed gradually in shade from warm gold to icy blue and then to a sort of misty grey. But still the strange shrill piping and

the deep throbbing marked the measure of our steps while we hopped and shuffled to escape its binding spell. But Lania went onward unconcerned, without a backward glance.

At last we came out into a sort of ante-room floored and walled with dull grey. Lania lifted up her high voice in a wailing cry and at once a section of the wall moved inward exposing the darkness beyond.

"A precaution we must take," Lania nodded towards the secret door. "Some of our enchantments are not for common eyes."

Through the slit-like door louder came the weird music, sounds which seemed to have some strange life and being of their own. The Aholian passed within and we followed, but Zacat, always quick of wit, snapped loose his sheathed sword and placed it in the crack of the door so that it remained open a good two inches.

We were in utter blackness, a darkness so thick that it seemed a tangible veil. A hand touched mine and my fingers closed about Anatan's gemmed wristlet. A moment later I heard Zacat's heavy breathing at my right.

"Wait and watch, soldiers," there was faint subtle mockery in Lania's voice.

The strange and broken rhythm was growing louder, menacing. "Move your fingers, your hands, in opposition to it," whispered Anatan. I felt his wrist twist free from my grasp. Obediently I strove to carry out his suggestion.

Then, out of the darkness above us, came a single ray of light, green and yet grey. A light which seemed the corrupting emanation of something vilely and anciently dead. There was a scheming wary evil in that light. As we watched it, fascinated, winged shapes of gold swam into and through it, circling ever downward until at last they touched a black pavement, the blocks of which might have been hewn in the quarries of that Elder Race, they who held Krاند before human foot touched its surface.

The great golden wings drooped, closed and were gone as if their wearers no longer had any use for them. Then the fifteen shapes of living yellow began their dance. Wild and beautiful, yet full of an age-old meaning which was utterly evil, was that dance. Each pose of seductive invitation, each gliding step, seemed aimed to draw out of the depths of the watcher that darker part of him which is his heritage from the beasts.

When I sensed this, I fought with every ounce of strength within me to master those far indwelling thoughts and passions which the dancers recalled with their weaving spell. Before me I saw again the blood drenched streets of Ulal when we sacked it, and all that chanced therein when, drunk with blood lust, we

poured into the city which had withstood our might for so long. And there were things done that day—

I clutched in the dark at my companions. "Come, let us out of here!" I cried. I felt them awaken under my hands as if they were shaking themselves free of some numbing dream. And then we turned and fled from the sight of those golden dancers and the evil web they were weaving about us.

Setting our fingers in the crack of the hidden door we tore it open. Zacat retrieved his sword and then we were on the ramp, eyes strained and staring, hearts pounding as if we were engaged in a race which was taxing us to the very limit of our strength. We were halfway up when an amber shadow joined us.

"The dancers are strong meat, soldiers," again mockery overlaid Lania's tones. "Too strong for you, it seems."

I rounded on her, half in earnest, half playing the role I had set myself. "Give us no more of your devilish mysteries. We wish human pleasures, not those subscribed to by night demons!"

"To hear is to obey, lord. What say you to a quiet supper in a private room—with suitable companions in attendance?"

"That will do, mistress," Zacat growled acceptance.

With the air of knowing well how to please us, she led the way through a maze of turning, twisting corridors and elaborate chambers until we came into a small, but fanciful, room done in steely blue. Four life-sized figures quartered the hemisphere that was dome and wall. Great, grey grippons they were, rearing as though in anger.

I did not need Zacat's sudden grip upon my arm to tell me where I was. We stood in the room Thran had appointed for our meeting place.

There was a low divan at the far end of the chamber and there Lania bid us seat ourselves while she went to give orders for our serving. But as she was going she looked full into my face.

"The room pleases you, lord?"

"Well enough," I answered shortly.

To my utter amazement she laughed and flung back her head, so that for the first time we saw clearly the face beneath her tangled mass of copper curls. Anatan rose to his feet with a sharp cry of mixed discovery and chagrin.

"Analia!"

"Even so, brother." Again she laughed. Then going to our right, she twitched the curtain hanging there. Thran stepped forth, all signs of drunkenness gone from him, again the keen, masterful figure I had seen that morning in the Hall of the Nine Princes.

And he led by the hand Ila, but now there was a subtle dif-

ference in her bearing as if beneath her paint lay hidden another identity.

"Do you not know me, Lord Garan?" she asked softly.

And straightway I was on my knees, staring open-mouthed into that hideously defiled face, for it was my lady Thrala who stood there, disguised beneath the paint and garish robes of the women of Arct.

She turned to Thran with a smile. "We are better mummers than we had thought, my lord. Nay, Garan, I am not the Ila you saw before. Ila and Lania are—elsewhere for this hour. We take their places. The real Ila is somewhat different——"

"Which is not surprising," observed Thran dryly, "since she is a creature of Kepta's. Now let us to business. The hours fly only too swiftly when danger spins the world."

CHAPTER FIVE—*The Taking of Thrala*

"Is it altogether wise to speak here?" demanded Zacat bluntly. "Walls of pleasure palaces are reputed to possess more than one set of ears."

"Not here. This room is safe. Ila and Kepta have seen to that for it serves their purposes at times," answered Thran. "And what has happened to the Lord of Ru that he has developed so suspicious a mind?"

"Naught—that I can lay hand to," he growled.

"Naught that you can lay hand to. That may be well said of all of us. And yet for two years you, Lord Garan, have pried and spied in closed way. Even in distant Gori there has been uneasiness in the air. Nor are we wrong, any of us," his voice rose triumphantly, "for this very place wherein we sit gives lie to the confident peace of our world. Know you who is behind Ila, who so subtly planned each soul-tarnishing joy of this muck-heap? Kepta, the Koomian! He, who this very morn attempted to involve you with the Council, Lord Garan, and so rid himself of one who was beginning to suspect too much.

"That night demon Ila is his match for twisted wits and this whole wonder box her trap to capture those Kepta wishes, Kandon of Stal, Palkun, and all the rest. And who are we who are not yet blinded, who can still see clearly enough to turn aside from Kepta and all his works? A handful against a world. Some twenty of my caste, the Lord of Ru, you and your young aid here. And whom can you lean upon?"

"Frankly, no one—except those you have named. My entire corps is pervaded by a taint to which I can lay no name. In my mind the whole of Yu-lac is rotted by some vile distemper."

"For Yu-lac substitute Krand and you will be nearer the truth. Kepta has builded better than even he guesses. For, knew he his power, we would all suddenly cease to be. To be plain, Kepta has been an earnest seeker after what we know as the 'Dark Knowledge' and he is very pleased with the powers which have answered his summoning, so pleased that he wishes to make all Krand partake of his joy."

"We have been at fault, we Learned Ones," broke in Thralla; "too long have we drifted, losing interest in aught but the depths of our own learning. Had we been alert, sentries against the forces of the Outer Dark as we were in the older days, this evil would not have come among us. Would See-leen, the founder of our race, have suffered Kepta to live one hour beyond the discovery of his practices?"

"You forget," there was sadness in Thran's rich voice, "See-leen headed a united people. What army follows us? Nay, we must fight alone, perhaps a losing fight."

"And how do you propose we fight?" cut in Zacat. "By force of arms? I think Kepta has more potent weapons."

"Just so. Therefore we must penetrate his defenses by guile, for, before we lay our plans, we must know the purpose and place of his attack. One of us must enter Koom."

"Impossible," I said curtly.

"Why?"

"Do you think that I haven't tried it?" I rounded on him. Learned or no, I knew my duty and had always performed it to the best of my ability. "When I took leave three months ago I made a personal attempt. I returned no wiser. With this——" I unbuckled my war cloak and pulled it away from my throat to expose a thin blue scar line. "That was to be a death blow."

"So," Thran eyed me intently, "I did not know of that."

"Nor anyone else until now. What man is proud of failure?"

"But our problem remains," said the Gorlian.

Thralla shook her head. "To the contrary, it is solved."

"What mean you?"

"That I shall go to Koom. Kepta will not suspect me. Why should he? Have I not kept apart from all laboratory work, shown no interest in knowledge seeking, so that even my father thinks me a discredit to our caste? I will go to Koom for a pleasant adventure and its Master suspect nothing."

"Nay!" the word burst from between my lips with the force of a sword thrust. "You can not do it! If what I suspicion of Koom be true, no clean living mortal dares to venture there and hope to come forth again unbesmirched. Kepta plays with pitch."

"And who is Lord Garan to say me aye or nay?"

Surely then, in that one wild moment, I must have revealed my jealously guarded secret for all the world to gape at.

"The humblest of your many servants, Royal Lady. Yet even I dare to say nay to your will in this matter."

"He is right enough," agreed Zacat heavily. "Koom is no place for a woman."

Thran nodded in agreement. But Thralla was unconvinced. What further arguments she would have brought forward to bolster up her plan, we never knew, for suddenly from the domed roof above us came the soft tones of a chime. Thran and Thralla froze and then looked at each other with eyes in which excitement burned like a flame.

"That is a warning," said the Gorlian, "someone is coming along the passage. We must go."

"The inner corridor," suggested Thralla. "Show them, Thran."

He arose and stepped to the curtain from behind which he and Thralla had entered. The bare wall split into halves, revealing a narrow door through which we squeezed, one by one.

"Get you through, Thran," whispered Thralla. "Remember, a woman's voice alone closes this portal."

Obediently he joined us in the corridor beyond but the Lady Thralla did not follow. Instead the halves came to with a snap, and we were left bewildered in the dark. Thran flung himself at that blank wall.

"'Tis the rankest of folly!" he stormed. "She cannot play Ila well enough to deceive any of that woman's intimates."

At his words I comprehended for the first time the trick Thralla had played upon us. Having ridded the room of us, she was about to face the newcomer whomever he might be. My shoulder was beside Thran's in a futile attack upon that stubborn door.

Someone dug fiercely at my back with long nails.

"Let be!" it was Analia screaming in my ear. "This door opens at the sound of a voice alone. Let me try."

Accordingly, Thran and I stepped back, granting her the position she demanded. We kept silent while she repeated some formula in the high, shrill voice that was Lania's.

A dark crack appeared lengthwise and with its coming we could both see and hear what passed in the Chamber of the Grippons. I, for one, was not surprised to see Kepta's dark handsome face with its faintly sneering smile. But behind him stood another. Thran clutched my arm.

"Ila!"

The real Ila it was, the Ila of the white and black chamber, with her starved body and glorious hair, her painted face and

her spite-filled voice. Facing her, proudly erect, was Thrala. Two Ila's, yet how different.

"—an unexpected pleasure," Kepta's smooth tones ran on. "The Lady Ila is honored that you should find pleasure in wearing the type of dress she has introduced to Yu-lac. Yet I fear that we must be rude enough to ask the cause of this delightful meeting——"

Ila put an end to his baiting of Thrala for she had seen the telltale billowing of the curtain across the secret door where we crouched. These tapestries had been woven so that they were transparent to those behind them but solid to those within the room.

"Fool!" she spat at Kepta. "She is not alone. Get her away——"

At that I ripped aside the curtain and sprang forward, sword in hand, but I was too late. For Kepta, with the quickness of one of those tree reptiles which inhabit the forests of Qur, jerked Thrala toward him and thrust her fighting form into Ila's merciless arms. He met my attack by spinning the divan across my path.

I went down, cursing, and a moment later Thran and Zacat were on me. But I caught a glimpse of Anatan hurtling our bodies and now but two paces behind the Koomian.

Raging savagely I gained my feet. Zacat, bellowing vengeance, was already off and I was not far behind him. But we had not far to go, for rounding a turn in the corridor we came upon Anatan beating furiously at the wall with fist and sword hilt.

"They passed through here!" he cried as we came up to him.

But on the smooth curve of the wall there was no mark of door. There Thran and Analia found us baffled. The Learned One had mastered his rage.

"They have fled to Koom," he announced with finality. "Only in Koom will they be safe, for they know all Yu-lac will be aroused against them."

"Koom it is," I admitted the force of his argument. "It is well that——"

I turned when he caught my wrists. "Where go you?"

"To Koom."

"How?"

"I have a flyer——"

He interrupted at once. "They would bring you down within six miles of their sea wall. There is another way."

"And that?"

"Through that place where you saw the dancers of Qur. That hall is part of the ancient Ways of Darkness, the corridors hollowed out beneath the shell of Krandy by those entities who

labored here before man came to rule. The way to Koom is there for that man who dares to take it."

"I dare any road," I returned hotly.

Zacat showed his yellow teeth. "With good steel in hand a man may pick and choose his road. When do we start?"

Thran drew a sheaf of writing leaves from his belt pouch and held them out to me. "Make out a request for instant leave for you and Zacat——"

"Anatan also!" cried the boy. "Nay," he added, seeing dissent in my face, "I will go if I must follow after in your tracks."

"For the three of you then. I will see that it reaches the proper authorities. We must have provisions and weapons——"

Zacat touched his sword but Thran shook his head.

"Some of the dangers we must face, if legend speaks true, are to be met with something more potent than steel."

"So?" I broke in. "Well, the resources of my office lie open to us. Give me half an hour within the great armory and I swear I can provide us with the means of leveling all Koom to dust."

It was Analia who made the decision for us. "Let Lord Garan return to his armory and get the weapons he has spoken of. I will see him through the private ways. And an hour before dawn we will meet in the tenth court. Go you with Lord Garan, Anatan."

"An hour before dawn? So long?" I demanded, ever seeing Thrala struggling in the bony arms of that she-demon and Kepta's slow smile hinting of nameless evils. To go about calmly, collecting weapons, provisions—— Every throbbing nerve within me rebelled wildly. I wished to rush in upon the Master of Koom, to slay and slay until the red blood bubbled across the floor. The knowledge that Koom lay an hundred air miles off our coast, and that it would be longer by the Ways, did nothing to temper my impatience.

"He dares not harm her," Thran said quietly. "Nor would he if he could."

"You mean?"

"Today he asked the Emperor for Thrala as his mate."

My fingers curled as if to seek a shadowy throat. Never had my hatred of Kepta been so intense. That creeper in the dark to aspire to——her! I smiled and saw Analia shrink from that smile.

"Another score between us," I muttered and then added aloud, "Of your kindness, show me these private ways of yours, mistress. The sooner I am about my business, the sooner we can march upon the spoor of this hunter of the Pit."

"An hour before dawn in the tenth court," Thran reminded us.

I nodded curtly and, with Anatan, followed the quick-witted Analia from the room. By divers winding, hidden ways hollowed in the walls, we stumbled after her. I learned later that from the first those three, Thran, Thrala and Analia, had watched the building of the pleasure palace, having guessed its purpose. The master designer of its wonders had parted with his own set of plans for a price. Plans wherein each secret lay plainly marked. For whole days and nights at a time since its opening, Thrala and Analia had played their parts within its walls, coming and going with ease through passages that Kepta and Ila thought known only to themselves.

We came out at last into a narrow alley, ill-lit and deserted.

"Mark well this place," Analia bade us as she let us out. "When you return here, tap three times with your sword hilt. Now go quickly before you are sighted."

Once out of that dark lane Anatan had little difficulty in finding the way to the public landing stage where we had left the flyer. We had little time, for already the city was quieting down for the few hours of slumber before sunrise. I was, I will admit, taking small notice of the street along which we hurried, for my thoughts were intent upon the contents of my military store house and I was listing mentally those weapons and accouterments which would prove of greatest service to us.

Thus it happened that the first warning I had of trouble was when a raving, slaving something charged me out of an opening between two buildings. I strove to draw my sword, but abandoned the effort at once. There was no time for steel.

I caught a fleeting glimpse of my attacker before he closed with me. His features were set in the horrible rigidity of the rait user. Foam dribbled from his cracked lips. His crooked fingers were extended ready to dig at my eyes, a favorite form of attack of those whom rait turns into beasts. And to my added horror, I saw that he wore the trappings of an under officer in my own force.

My startled cry and the shrieks of my attacker brought Anatan around too late. Fast clasped as I was in the fellow's grip, he dared not strike for fear of wounding me.

I braced myself against the shock of meeting and managed to get in a sharp blow upon the side of his throat just before his stubby fingers dug and tore at the flesh of my neck above the edge of my corselet. It was that one blow which must have saved me, for it landed, more by the luck of fate than by any intention of mine, upon a nerve and so momentarily checked him.

With a crash of body armor we landed on the pavement, my attacker still tearing at my throat, while I, wriggling like a

serpent of the outer sea, strove to free myself from his hold. With a snap his stained teeth came together a scant half inch from my flesh and I realized with a mixture of fear and horror that I was struggling in the hands of one of those unfortunates which rait turns into carnivorous hunters. I was only meat to appease his ravenous and unnatural hunger.

Now freed from the first shock of surprise, I caught his wrists in one of those holds taught by the Lapidians, by which they can force a man to break his own bones. The thing astride me howled and snapped again, this time grazing my skin.

I bore down upon his wrists and then his teeth closed upon my left hand, piercing it to the bone. By the Grace of On, I managed to hold my grip long enough for Anatan to come to my rescue. With all his force he brought the heavy pommel of his dress sword down upon the rait smoker's unprotected head.

The man blinked and sighed, then rolled away from me. I was able to scramble up unsteadily. Blood dripped from my wounded hand to spatter on the pavement. But to my utter amazement we were alone. The noise of our fight and the cries of my attacker had brought no one. I looked about the deserted street and then at Anatan. He nodded soberly and I knew that the same thought which whirled through my dizzy head occupied him also. We had been set upon by design.

Someone had laid a trap and we had walked heavy-footed into it. The rait smoker had been placed there for our disadvantage.

"Let him lie," Anatan jerked his head towards the limp body of my late opponent. "We had better reach the flyer while we are still able."

Agreeing heartily, I twisted the corner of my cloak about my bloody hand and we took to our heels in earnest. Though we passed into more brilliantly-lighted and well-peopled avenues we did not slacken our pace. Shortly we were panting up the ramp to the landing stage.

There we must wait while the sleepy attendant brought out our flyer. And I, for one, did not breathe freely again until we were both within the narrow confines of its closed cabin.

"Make for the armory," I directed Anatan, "and land on its roof. I shall take no more chances this night. When we return try to make a landing within that alley."

"Difficult business," he commented.

"But better than another meeting with a rait smoker. And it can be done by a careful man."

A second later our landing gear touched upon the flat roof of the squat combined treasury and armory wherein were kept the secrets of my force for the protection of all Yu-lac.

CHAPTER SIX—*The Ways of Darkness*

By the mist of light from the tiny radium rod I carried in my belt pouch I located the trap door covering the ramp which led from the roof. Around my neck night and day I wore the key which unlocked this and every other door within the confines of the military quarter. This I now put to use.

But it required Anatan's strength as well as mine to raise that ponderous slab of metal-bound stone and lay it back upon the roof. Again my radium rod came into use, lighting the thick dark below us.

Having in mind just which store rooms I wished to plunder, I sped down the ramp and through the maze of narrow corridors it gave upon, until, at last, I came to a door marked with a broad scarlet strip. This I unlocked, my fingers trembling so that the key clinked against the lock plate, for I firmly believed that I was running a race with time itself.

Within, neatly laid up in glass-fronted bins, were suits of scales made to cover a man from head to foot, even to his finger tips. They were light in weight but chemically treated so as to withstand all known death vapors and heat rays. Pointing these out to Anatan I gave him his orders.

"Sort out enough of these for all of us. I will join you later on the roof."

Leaving him there, I went down yet another ramp to the floor below, there seeking out the room where were stored certain new ray throwers of a radical type not yet issued to the corps. On the testing field they had made an excellent showing in both accuracy and range, but as yet their worth had not been proven to the full satisfaction of our experts.

Six of these small torch-like rods I laid aside and with them extra charges of green, violet, and infra-red lenses. To the new and untried weapons I added an equal number of the regular pattern in use, again with extra charges. And then, as I turned to go, I came upon a belt of grippon hide equipped with a large radium light cell, the sort of accouterment worn by those venturing into the Lapidian caves. This I added to my spoil.

Back again on the roof I found Anatan, there before me, impatiently pacing about the flyer. Besides the indestructible scale-suits he had found four war swords of the ancient pattern, swords that were meant to be used in hand to hand combat on the field and not as dress ornaments.

We replaced the trap door and I locked it. Then back in the flyer Anatan pressed the lever which sent us soaring upward. Avoiding the patrols, flying their regular beats above the city, we circled back over the route we had come.

Luckily the pleasure palace was easy to identify from the air and Anatan speedily discovered our alley. Then, in spite of his doubts, he accomplished an expert piece of maneuvering, setting us down upon its pavement not ten paces from the door. If we had not been in one of the smallest of private ships he could not have done it. As it was there were but two hands breadths between its polished sides and the alley wall.

We gathered up our spoil and, so laden, went to the door. At my knock it opened smoothly without sound and Analia peered out, bright gleam of her dress and ornaments dulled by the shadows.

Again we traversed those crooked ways within the walls until we stepped through an opening into a small, bare court. There were Thran and Zacat crouched above a tattered strip of yellowed fish skin, the substance upon which the ancients of our race had recorded their deeds.

"You return so soon? That is able work, Lord Garan. Now what do you bring us?"

I explained hurriedly my choice of weapons and held forth one of the scale suits for Thran to examine. In the light the crystalline, octagonal scales possessed a jewel-like sparkle. Zacat smoothed it with all the love of a fighting man for a good tool of his trade. But his interest was thoroughly aroused when Anatan produced the antique war swords.

"Good steel." He ran his thumb down the shining blade of one. "This would I rather have than all the ray rods in Krاند. For steel never plays a man false. That is a clever lad, that Anatan of yours."

"It seems that you have robbed your armory to some purpose," agreed Thran, checking our spoils for the second time. "Nor have we been altogether idle while you were gone."

He waved his hand towards a corner of the court and there were heaped small concentrate food containers and jars of the so-called "water" drops which are issued on the march through desert countries. So treated, enough food and water to suffice a man for days might be carried in a belt pouch no larger than my two fists. In addition there was the map over which they had been stooping when we entered.

"Little enough do we know of the underground ways. Save for the perverted Lapidians, we humans have shunned the below surface paths," Thran pointed out as he smoothed out his map, "but always there are those who seek knowledge in strange places. Such was the soldier Kem-mec, who lived in Yu-lac some five thousand years ago.

They were excavating then for the foundations of the first

of the great defense towers and, in order to provide it with an indestructible base, the builders went far deeper below the surface than they had ever pierced before. On the twenty-seventh day of evacuation they laid open a section of one of the Ways of Darkness.

"Kem-mec sought and obtained permission to enter and explore the unknown passage in view of its possible future use for military purposes. He was unable to gather any followers and went alone. The equipment of that day was, of course, vastly inferior to that our underground explorers rely upon today, but he did manage to explore and map a large section of the Ways honeycombing the rock upon which Yu-lac stands. There were abundant indications that these huge tunnels and chambers had been hollowed out by mechanical means and it is supposed that they were the products of the skill of that un-human race which preceded us in the mastery of this planet.

"His first trip below merely aroused Kem-mec's thirst for further knowledge. He went again and again and finally failed to return. In the meantime it was considered best by Amest, the Great, Emperor of Yu-lac at the time, to close the opening.

"He made this decision suddenly after receiving the confidential report made by Kem-mec upon his return from his next to last trip. It can be readily surmised that the soldier-explorer had discovered something highly dangerous to the city. What it was was never made public.

"Up until half a year ago all Kem-mec's earlier reports and maps moldered undisturbed in the library of the Learned Ones at Semt. But when I wished to look through them, moved by curiosity, I discovered them gone, with the exception of this single map which had been caught against the upper cover of the coffer in which they had been kept. The attendant informed me that Kepta of Koom had, with the permission of the head librarian, withdrawn them for private study.

"Then this place was built and a passage delved to intercept one of the Ways Kem-mec had mapped. At the same time Kepta developed a sudden interest in the age-old temples of Qur, paying them several semi-secret visits. And Qur is, as we know, the last stronghold of that weird faith distilled from the forgotten rites of the Older Ones.

"In leaving me this one map, however, Kepta left a potent weapon. For this traces what we need most now, a route under the sea to Koom. And tradition has it that it was over this route Kem-mec went on that last journey from which he never returned. The fate which overtook Kem-mec five thousand years ago may still await those who follow in his steps today. But it

was this path that Kepta and Ila took this night, of that I am certain. Somewhere along its length may lie the menace which caused Amest to seal the Ways. Does that menace still exist?"

Zacat snorted. "We can but go and see."

I was already laying out the scale suits and portioning the weapons. Thran laughed. "It seems that Kem-mec's kind have not deserted his calling. Let us prepare then."

We shed our dress armor and undertunics, then pulled on the tight-fitting scale suits. The basic material, upon which the protecting scales had been laid, had elastic properties which made it cling to the skin of the wearer. A grotesque mask equipped with oax-lenses, which had the power of magnifying distant objects and also enabled those who used them to see clearly in all but absolute darkness, hung down across our shoulders ready to be pulled on.

Once so encased, we were, as far as I knew, invulnerable to any known weapon. The smooth surface of the scales would dull and turn the shapest blade and withstand as ably burning or freezing rays.

Over the scale suits we girded the swords Anatan had brought, hooking to their belts in addition both an old and a new type ray rod. Extra charges for our rods and the small cans of supplies went into pouches of grippon hide, to be carried slung over our backs.

But when we were ready and turned to the door a fifth reptilian figure was awaiting us. Analia, her red wig gone and her dark hair loose about her throat, was engaged in locking about her waist the radium cell belt. To this she calmly proceeded to hook ray rods before stooping to pick up a bag of supplies.

"Analia!" cried her brother. "What madness——?"

"I go," she interrupted him calmly. "Where Thrala has been, there will I follow. And you can not say me nay. I enter this venture with open eyes, even as I have done from the first. And the Ways of Darkness can hold no more of danger than has this palace in the past. I go."

And with that she turned and vanished through the door. I turned to Thran who was folding the remaining scale dress, Anatan having brought six for some reason, into as small a package as he might before slipping it into his supply pouch. He looked up at me with a trace of smile.

"When a woman speaks with that voice, Lord Garan, it is best to allow her her own way at once, for years of argument will not bring her to your way of thinking. Analia will not delay us; she has proved her strength and courage in her mistress's service many times in the past. She goes."

So I was forced to leave it, but the thought of a woman sharing the perils of the unknown was certainly not to my liking. And my resentment was shared by Anatan who was enraged. Only Zacat cared nothing, being eager to test the dangers of the path before us.

Analia was waiting for us in the hall and under her expert guidance we threaded the web of corridors and chambers in search of that ramp up which we had charged such a short, and yet such a long time ago. In spite of my unspoken doubts we attracted no attention in any of the rooms through which we passed. Our strange dress marked us as entertainers of some sort to the few half-drunken fools we did encounter.

Once again we found and descended the broad ramp, but this time there came no suggestive piping rhythm to entangle our feet and minds, only a dry and dusty silence such as is found in the primeval mountain temples of Ru, a silence full of the dust of vanished centuries. Now the lights did not change color, only grew paler as we advanced, until at last they faded away altogether and we halted to adjust our masks with their darkness-piercing eye shields.

The black pavement was again under foot but now no corruption-filled ray came from above and the winged, dancing shapes were gone. Here Thran took the lead, hurrying us forward across the vast emptiness of that deserted hall.

Another ramp, this one so steep that we must clutch a hand-rail of time-smoothed stone, opened before us and without hesitation, Thran darted down it. Halfway down he sank to his knees and picked up some object which he held out to us. On the palm of his scale glove twinkled a scrap of the glittering stuff which had embellished the robes of Thralla and Ila.

"We follow the right road as this messenger tells us," he said and tossed the scrap away. But I stooped and searched for it, tucking it into my pouch.

Down and down into an ever-thickening darkness we went, darkness which might have overpowered us entirely had it not been for our oax-lenses. Analia would have switched on her radium cell lamp, not knowing what, or who, might lie in wait for us below, but Thran would not allow it. As long as we could see at all it was better not to give warning of our approach.

Now I noted a sudden change in the character of the walls. Before they had been of smooth glistening stone, but now they were of great blocks of some gray substance which had a faintly unpleasant sheen as if coated with thin slime. Thran nodded towards them.

"We are entering the Ways. No one who has ever seen the handiwork of the Older Ones can mistake it."

On and on went the ramp, growing ever steeper so that we were forced to break somewhat our headlong pace and keep a tight hold on the supporting rail. I was wondering apprehensively if it might not become too steep for our footing when it suddenly gave way to a deep trough-like path running almost level into the dense dark before us. As I stepped out upon that weird roadway I felt that those who had constructed that avenue for their own forgotten purposes were wholly alien to me and all warm-blooded creatures like me, so alien that I could not imagine their true forms and missions. What service had this road and the others like it rendered them? Why had it come to be?

The first few steps convinced me that it had never been intended for human feet to follow. For it possessed a rounded raised center which made us slip and slide. In order to maintain our footing we were forced to slacken our pace to a mere crawling shuffle.

I can not tell for how many miles and how many hours we followed that straight, unbranching path. But thrice we stopped to nap and break out meals from the supplies we carried. There was nothing to see or hear, only the darkness, pierced for a few feet by the power of our lenses.

During the third stop Thran brought out his fish-skin map and Analia trained the light from her belt upon it so that he might trace out the way we had come and the way we had yet to go.

"There is a sharp turn to the right and that is the path we must take. We must be almost upon it now."

"Then let us on to it," said Zacat, rising to his feet. "So far there has been little in this snake hole to interest a fighting man. Where dwells the danger from which Kem-mec fled to fill his master's ear with wild tales?"

"Before us somewhere, my lord. And I have some belief in Kem-mec and his tales. Shall we go on and prove them?" He rolled up the map and put it back in his pouch.

We rose to our tired feet and went on. As Thran had shown us on the map, our road split abruptly into two, one spur going to the right. Anatan and his sister had already turned into it when a gleam on the surface of the other branch caught my eye. My fingers closed upon a second small shred of robe. I held out my find to the others.

"Could the map be wrong?" I demanded of Thran. "This says so."

"Unless that is bait on a false trail."

"True. But there is only one way to make sure."

"And that?"

"Divide our party. Each follow a spur. See, I shall set a small infra-red charge in my ray rod. For as long as it burns I will follow this road. If I come upon nothing during that time to uphold my choice I shall return here and follow yours. Do you the same."

Thran agreed at once. "That is the wisest course. Who goes with you?"

"Zacat," answered that individual at once. "We have hunted together before."

"It is well." He hunted through his pouch to find and adjust the charge in the rod at his belt and I did the same. When at last the two were burning we bade each other farewell for a time, setting out upon the routes we had chosen, Thran, Anatan and Analia to the right, Zacat and I straight ahead. My hand closed about those two scraps in my pouch as we went.

We had gone some distance when Zacat lifted the edge of his mask and sniffed the air.

"Do you scent nothing?"

I followed his example. The musty dryness of the air was tinged with a faint odor, an odor at once sweet and yet faintly corrupting.

"Aye," I answered.

"I like it not. There is a stink like that in some of those old mountain tombs. Something unpleasant awaits us ahead. But that is little reason for holding back."

The stench grew worse as we advanced and to my amazement the light from my ray rod slowly changed color, taking on a purplish hue. I called this to Zacat's attention.

"Some devilish business. There are things better for men to leave alone. Our friend of Koom has been hunting in forbidden ways. But now he is being hunted, which is a different matter. Let us rout out this smell."

We abruptly came to a sharp turn in the path, the first we had encountered. Cautiously rounding the bend, we found ourselves on the edge of nowhere...

To be concluded

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The winds uncovered the city and the ancient
intelligence lurking there...

THE CITY IN THE SYRTIS

By *CARLETON GRINDLE*

ILLUSTRATED BY JERRY BURGE

HE WAS CALLED the Man Who Hunted the Canals. On foot or in tractor he wandered the deserts and mountains and ice fields of Mars searching for things wiser men knew did not exist; for there was no intelligent life on Mars save that which rode the rockets from Earth. In the cities of the Earthmen he was a source of amusement for the men who told stories, some of them even true, about his exploits. He could not enter a tavern without hearing the stories about himself, could not pass a group of children without hearing derisive laughter. Yet still he searched. Through Elysium and Cebrena, across Aetheria, Nodus Alcyonus, from Hecates to Chaos to Morpheos, Nosamon to Nelis. He walked through fine red sand, across plain and crater, over the hills, searching for any sign at all that once there was intelligent life on Mars. It was a fool's search and he was called the Man Who Hunted the Canals because of it. His name was Golding and he at last came to a city deep within the Syrtis Major.

It was unlike any city any man ever saw.

Crystal spires rose from the desert like the tips of Christmas tree ornaments to catch the light of a distant sun and send it back in dazzling twinkles. Curving metal strips—walkways or highways—curved along the spires. Elaborate structures whose existence defied the laws of stress and gravity and perhaps even sanity, twisted and lifted themselves from their grave's covering of fine red dust. It was a half buried city and perhaps Golding was the first man to find it merely because the wind had shifted the sand away from it for the first time in centuries. But Gold-

ing did not wonder at that. The weak and insignificant wind of Mars blew among the spires and shapes of the city and played music on the alien materials.

As Golding stepped from the dust of the Syrtis onto the ancient strip of a road a feeling ran along his spine to tell him that all around him were the ghosts of Martians come to welcome their first visitor from Earth. He stood for a long moment listening to the music of the suffocated wind, watching the glintings of almost transparent sunlight from the spires.

"O God," he said at last and went into the city.

It was said of Golding that he was insane. If so, those grounds, those buildings; the rooms and hallways, the furnishings, the works of art and science that he found—all were equal to his madness.

Until at last he came to something that surpassed it.

He had no idea that it was that fantastic. It seemed to him just to be a room. In one of the tallest buildings of the city he rode a shaft of air, straight up as if he were carried by invisible hands to the uppermost level. He stepped out onto a platform and there before him was the room.

It was circular, the ceiling dark, the walls coral, the floor pale translucent gold. There were no windows in the wall, no furniture in the room. No seams where panels joined in the wall, floor or ceiling. In the center of the room was an opening.

From that opening, a light.

Golding walked slowly toward the opening, half expecting another gravity shaft. He stood at the edge and looked down.

Far below something glowed, pale and lambent with soft yellow light in the darkness.

It was a mystery but in the time he had already spent in the Martian city, Golding's sense of the mysterious had jaded. For all its strangeness, the glow at the bottom of the shaft was just another puzzlement, just another wonder in a storehouse filled with wonders. He stared down at it, had not the slightest idea what it was—and shrugged his shoulders. He turned away.

But deep within the shaft, something stirred.

Long serpentine tendrils shifted and twisted in the darkness.

A yellow glowing tenacle touched the smooth wall of the shaft.

Touched—tried to climb—could not.

An alien mind sent out a command to the walls about it. The walls obeyed.

And above, Golding did not know.

Nor really did he care. He was tired. Tired from a day of impossibilities, from a day of events past his imagining. The room was warm and though it lacked furniture, Golding was a



man used to sleeping in the desert. This was luxury enough. He folded his jacket for a pillow and went to sleep there in the room.

As he slept, he dreamed.

For the past twenty years his dream had been the same. He was walking through the desert. He climbed a low Martian hill and as he topped it he saw before him a canal. It stretched as far as the eye could see and in it blue water lapped against a barge wherein stood seven lovely pale faced women who wore no airmasks in the Martian atmosphere. It was the old dream, the one he fed on because he searched for something other men scoffed at. Now that he had found the city he would need new dreams.

In the night, something woke him.

He awoke with a start. The room was darker now, the only light the glow from the central shaft. There had been a sound. Golding was sure of that.

"Who is it?" he called.

For answer: silence.

For comfort: not even echo.

For his imagination—

Golding was not a morbid man, but no man spends years wandering an alien desert with nothing to feed his spirits but raw hope, without his mind being affected in some way. Now, from Golding's memory there came a score of impressions long filed away as forgotten. Sounds made by small dry things blown across the sand: sounds made by living movement in the desert: sounds of strange insectile life forms, most of which were still unclassified. And sights. Mirages. Incidents coated with the dust of years suddenly vivid to him. And things he had imagined and then discarded as silly came back to him and seemed no longer silly . . .

He got to his feet and walked to the open shaft.

He stared down.

He saw only the pale yellow glow of the light. It was not so strong as to hurt his eyes, but he could distinguish no feature, not even a shadow, within the light. It seemed larger, as if it were nearer the lip of the shaft. It was a puzzle, but only another puzzle. He could not let it occupy his mind for long.

He returned to his sleeping place and slept dreamlessly until morning.

But he arose determined he would find another place to sleep if he spent another night in the city. And then he ate and went to continue his exploration.

During the day he toured a single building wherein were housed the records of the old Martians.

He saw their rise from savagery to civilization recorded in holographs that formed before his eyes and played out their tales with the skill of the product of a master film maker. He saw the Martian's rise and the wonders of their civilizations. He saw the construction of the City and how it was intended to protect and care for its inhabitants. But he saw nothing of the manner of their passing. When he had seen his fill, the day was spent.

And like a fool, Golding returned to the tower room with the shaft.

He stood staring down into the shaft for several minutes. And he noted two things.

First he noted that the light was somehow closer to the top than it had been. Or so it seemed. Secondly, the wall of the shaft itself had changed.

Before it had been smooth, like glass. Now it was rough and pitted. So pitted he believed it offered sufficient hand and foot holds for him to climb down in it. But he did not feel it had changed for his benefit, but to accomodate the light. And that frightened him.

He turned to run.

He never made the door.

It seemed to him that the air he breathed in his airmask grew sweeter and somehow lighter. It was as if someone, or something, were singing to him . . . though there was perfect silence in that chamber save for his own rasping breath. He was suddenly very tired. The day had taken much from him. He wanted to sleep. He saw no reason to find another place.

He made his way to a place near the wall and slid to the floor. He lay, his body curved, his eyes closed. . . . He thought about the Martians. Of what he had seen in their records. They had been dreamers, like him. An odd time for such a thought? Yes. But now Golding was about to dream

Across the room, a sound, unnoticed by the man who was passing into slumber. The wall of the shaft grew rougher. Still far below the edge of the shaft, tendrils touched the wall, found traction, climbed. . . . An alien mind reached out and saw that the man was sleeping.

Sleeping and dreaming.

Dreaming he walked the desert.

Dreaming he found the canal.

Water lapped the banks; cool blue water, its surface like moving glass: rough yet smooth at the same time.

And on the water there floated a barge.

The barge, driven by six pale faced maidens serenely floated toward the place where Golding waited. In the bow of the boat

a seventh maiden stood. Her long skirt was made of a translucent material that did not hide her long, slender legs. Her waist was supple and her bare breasts pale and strong with youth. Her hair was pale, filmy red and her oval face had the calmness of a desert with no wind and her blue staring eyes focused directly at Golding, beckoning, promising. The barge moved slowly, the movements as it drifted toward him becoming an eternity. But then the boat was pulling to the edge of the canal and eternity ended.

But Golding did not move.

It was the same dream. Did he really need a new one now?

The woman stepped from the barge and came toward him.

She stopped two yards away. She held out her arms. A smile touched her lips. She beckoned him.

"Come to me," she said.

Golding stepped forward.

From the maiden there seemed to spread a light, pale, yellow, lambent. Golding heard a sound.

Golding stopped.

The woman held out her arms to close about him. Again he heard the noise. Had he heard it before?

"Come to me, Golding. Come."

"No—"

"Yes. Into my arms. It has been so long. You can't imagine how long. Come to me as those others came so long ago—the ones who built this city for me. Come, Golding, come!"

"What are you? What are you doing?"

The noise again. Still the arms were held out for him.

He stepped away from her. "I know," he said. "you're feeding on my dreams. Whatever you are, that's what you're doing. You aren't what you seem to be. You did it to the Martians and now you—"

"Come to me Golding."

He stepped another step back. "Oh, no," he said.

The yellow light flickered, then shimmered. Then frosted like a yellow pane of glass in winter. Then, as if the glass warmed, the frosting cleared from Golding's vision and he saw. But he no longer saw a woman on a barge. He no longer saw her hands and arms held out for him. Instead, he saw something else and that something held out tentacles.

Golding turned and ran.

He ran to the lift shaft and rode down to the ground level and ran from the building. Ran to the edge of the city and into the desert beyond. Across the desert and how far he never knew: but when at last exhaustion forced him to stop and look back he

could not see the city. But already the wind was carrying the fine desert dust to and fro in small clouds.

He went to an Earthman's city and told his story. Most men added his tale to their storehouse of tales about him and were not even impressed when Golding took his savings and bought a ticket back to Earth. But a few men did believe him and they continue searching for the city. But it has never been found—at least not yet.

Yet they still search. They scour Syrtis Major and Elysium and the other deserts of Mars, looking. And the wind still blows and someday the wind might free the city once again.

* * *

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**A
LETTER
FROM
MR. SCI-FI**



SPACEWAY'S feature columnist, *Forrest J Ackerman*, recently celebrated his 53rd birthday in a whirlwind of parties and professional activities on both coasts of the United States—East, New York and Philadelphia; West, Los Angeles and San Francisco—with friends such as Donald A Wollheim, Sam Moskowitz, Judy-Lynn Benjamin, James Warren, Philip José Farmer, Ross Rocklynne, Robert Bloch, Stuart J. Byrne, E. Mayne Hull and A. E. van Vogt. In Philadelphia he attended FANS' annual Science Fiction Conclave and in New York arranged for the publication of a Dell collection of short stories by van Vogt and a series of anthologies by himself. He taped a *To Tell The Truth* program—but about that television appearance we'll let him tell you himself.—Ed.

Dear Reader

If (it would almost have been by accident because the announced times were all later scrambled) you saw them ask "the real Mr. Ackerman" to stand up, you may be interested in some of the things that went on behind the scenes in conjunction with the show.

Because one little kid in my neighborhood once got a look inside my home and decided I was a "wizard" and an enterprising newspaper freelancer heard about it, I got dubbed The Wizard and the next time a newspaper feature about me appeared it was all about how The Wizard was getting crowded out of his home by everything from rocket models to monster masks. A New York representative of the *To Tell The Truth* program saw the

article and either clipped it out or later remembered it; in any event the day eventually came when she called and asked me if I'd care to be flown to NY to appear on the program. It suited me fine.

If you're not familiar with the format, two other people impersonate you and do their best to convince the panel of 4 that they are you. They do not have to tell the truth (if they are asked a question to which they don't know the answer) but you do.

The day I met the men who would pretend to be me—Ron Funk, motion picture actor, and Bert Wanchauer, printer—the man who briefed the 3 of us queried me for about 2 hours in the presence of my "doppelgangers" so that they wd get a good idea of what kind of questions they might be asked.

"Name a couple of important books by Ray Bradbury."

"*The Martian Chronicles* & *Fahrenheit 451*," I replied.

"What book did Robert Heinlein write that the hippies have latched onto?"

"*Stranger In A Strange Land*."

"What big science fiction movie hit did Arthur C. Clarke write?"

"2001."

"Who was Cecil B. White?"

"*Cecil B. White?!?*" The question had been asked in the same casual fashion as the rest, as tho I were being asked "Who was Cecil B. DeMille?" But my voice shot up to an octave that wd have made even Yma Sumac envious as I expostulated (the only word for it, even tho it's a moribund word fast disappearing from the vocabulary of modern man)—I expostulated, "Why not ask me who was Clinton Constantinescu? Or Hendrik Dahl Juve? Or Epaminondas Thucydides Snooks?" Because, you see, Cecil B. White was about as obscure an author as you cd come up with. Only members of First Fandom—or even Eofandom—have any likelihood of ever having heard of him. Offhand I'd say the man wrote about 3 stories in *Amazing* about '27 or '28 and that was it. (Checking Don Day's Index I see I'm absolutely right: "Lost Continent" in '27, "Retreat to Mars" & "Return of the Martians" the next year. We were never to hear of him again. I seem to recall that he was an astronomer at the Mt. Wilson observatory of California and I see I have a note in my Index that his real name was Wm. H. Christie. I hope I have not told you more about Cecil B. White than you really cared to know.) So naturally I was staggered that any mundane type man wd even know the name. He laughed at my reaction. "Really did my homework, didn't I?" he chuckled.

Next question: "Did Boris Karloff & Bela Lugosi ever make a picture together?"

"Yes, several."

And so it went.

During the rehearsal they suddenly threw me a curved ball: without asking they *informed* me that I wd be narrating during the showing of some silent footage from FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN. Actually, this was alright with me, but I wanted to be able to talk intelligently about what was going to be shown and asked if I'd be seeing the footage prior to air time. I was assured I wd be. Came time to preview the fatal footage, it was no where to be found. Grown men were groaning all over the place, running around like heads with their chickens cut off. (And a New York entertainment exec without his chick is as frantic as a victim of fowl play.)

The sands of time ticked away while I, clock-eyed, looked at a vacant video screen.

At last the word came thru: the missing film had been found 4 blocks away on the 44th floor of an abandoned warehouse. (A warehouse is where they keep ware-wolves.) Even now, fleet like the wind, a messenger in a springy pair of Ray Bradbury keds was racing in & out of traffic.

But he lost his race with Old Father Time.

The free TV monitor time was all used up by the time the film-clip arrived.

"Never mind," I was told. "We'll tell you what happens. It opens with this scene of Larry Talbot in his coffin and the full moon is in the sky and he begins to turn into the wolfman. Then there's a big fight in the lab and after that a dam bursts. Got it?"

"Got it."

Only at the penultimate moment they found time after all to project the footage before the show actually took place and it was fortunate they did because I was all set with some fast patter about, "Well, here we are, folks, with Larry Talbot, last of the Big Time Lycanthropes, and you see there how he's sprouting 5 o'clock shadow—" only they omitted that scene and skipped ahead directly to the big lab battle! So when we were finally on camera, I told (during the fight) how Boris Karloff had originated the role of Mary Shelley's Monster in 1931 and had become a household word for bogeyman in his lifetime; how "Dracula" Lugosi had later inherited the role, and Lon Chaney Jr, and—then a little devil possessed me.

A mini-demon.

I timed the palaver just right so that at just the moment the dam came on the screen I was saying, "...and the whole series

of FRANKENSTEIN films culminated in this one, which was the best *By a dam site—*"

Pause.

And before people could make up their minds if I meant what they thought they'd heard, I hurried on with: "And there's the site of the dam, folks, and it's bursting and destroying the monsters."

The publisher of *Famous Monsters* reported to me that at the moment I said "dam site," 3 associate producers backstage fainted. However, he is a notorious exaggerator, and I later checked his story and found it was only 1 associate producer and 2 assistants...

On the air the panelists spent most of their time querying the "other" Forrest Ackermans (something about my 2 heads or 10-drills must have given me away) and I thought I was getting away with murder and would wind up with 500 bucks when they wrong-guessed; but came the Moment of Truth, they must've been slans and read my mind 'cuz *pow! pow! pow!* 3 out of 4 picked me out. My winnings dropped drastically to \$25 (which I spent on informing everyone in creation of when the program would be telecast—and then the schedules were changed without informing me) and a pair of pipes. (I don't smoke—and I don't need any suggestions as to how to apply them to the time-slot programmers!)

After all of the foregoing, you say you don't feel the world is *ready* for 3 Forrest Ackermans?

How do you think I feel, then, to discover there is another Forrest Ackerman?

And living right in the city of my birth!

When I mentioned this to Ray Bradbury, he astonished me by informing me there's another Ray Bradbury! An elderly gentleman, once again here in the LA environs.

And to cap the climax, for years there's been a perfectly legitimate Boris Karloff around Hollywood!—born with the name and never having anything to do with movies!

Talk about twin worlds, twilight zones & doppelgangers—!

Well, now let's talk about Radcliffes. Annual awards given out by the Count Dracula Society. The big banquet of the year is coming up toward the end of April and interested parties should contact Dr Donald Reed for further details at 334 W 54 St, Los Angeles 90037. Fritz (METROPOLIS) Lang & Fritz (GREY MOUSER) Leiber will be among those honored, with Ray Bradbury, Geo. Pal & many other celebrities expected to be in attendance.

In a superhuman burst of creativity, A. E. van Vogt is producing 6 sci-fi novels for Ace paperbacks in a period of 12

months. Watch for CHILDREN OF TOMORROW, QUEST FOR THE FUTURE, I—YOU—, THE OTHER MEN, THE BATTLE OF FOREVER and INDIAN SUMMER OF A PAIR OF SPECTACLES—!

Zenith Rand, Planet Vigilante, who had a couple of "spicy" space adventures long before Capt. Future came on the scene or Perry Rhodan became Peacelord of the Universe; randy Zenith is being brought back into print in a (are you ready for this?) sf anthology titled BRAVE *Nude* WORLDS!

A California high school (Burbank) now has 2 daily classes in science fiction appreciation. Seventy of the students were recently given a tour of my SF Museum.

Harry Harrison, in San Diego, has created a course in sf on the college level. Philip José Farmer will guest lecture and THINGS TO COME will be shown.

Dr Willis McNelly, who for several years now has instructed a course in science fiction at Calif. State College (Fullerton), is collaborating on an anthology, MARS: WE LOVE YOU.

I am creating archives of science fiction *film* material—stills, pressbooks, magazines, etc—for the Univ. of Wyoming.

Masterminded by James (THE IMMORTAL) Gunn, Kansas U. will create a sci-fi course *on film!*

Scientifilms for 70: STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, THE HOUSE THAT STOOD STILL, THE FORBIN PROJECT, THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, NO BLADE OF GRASS, WHEN DINOSAURS RULED THE EARTH, BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES, TROG, TUNNEL BENEATH THE WORLD and CHILDHOOD'S END.

News & comments welcome at Box 35252 Preuss Station, Los Angeles, CA 90035.

Yours Sciencereally



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HYBRID ENIGMA

A NOVELET

By MAX SHERIDAN

¶ To stay in the city was certain death—but beyond was a planet of living nightmares!

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

DR. NEIL HAYDEN kicked viciously at the clod of red clay, watched it roll over the edge of the precipitous cliff. He didn't see it splatter on a ledge below, for the light of the setting sun was thin and wan. Tiny Phobos, already high in the evening sky, didn't appreciably help to dispel the vague mystery of the jagged terrain which descended abruptly into the dusk.

It had been a long and tortuous climb up the precarious trails from the broad valley. And before that it had been a gruelling trek through the swirling red sands from Martropolis to the base of the rugged mountain range.

Far across the desert, quiet in the hush of evening, he could faintly see lights pinpointing the city from which they had come.—Rather, from which they had been ejected!

The muscles tightened across Hayden's broad chest. His blue eyes smouldered darker in memory of inhumane humanity. It was the same old story that followed in inevitable sequence wherever bigoted and selfish men met an obstacle to their greed.

He kicked at another clod. Then, with a shrug that dismissed such reaction as puerile, he turned back toward the camp where fires licked fitfully at the gloom, casting dancing wraiths of light into the shadows where a dozen tiny tents cowered from the vast unreality of the plateau.

Sudden commotion shattered the dusk. A woman's scream rose thin and clear. Male shouts and the scuffing of thick-soled boots told of frantic action. A harsh voice screamed a frenzied warning:

"Kela, look out!"

Ten-foot leaps powered by Hayden's earthly muscles carried him



to the circle where the campfires valiantly fought the blanketing dusk.

Then he saw the creature which crouched over a motionless human shape. It was sickeningly anthropoid in outline, and the low gutturals it mouthed were almost semantically lucid.

"A Gethlone!" Hayden's heart was suddenly sick. Was that still form Kela? The vibrant and piquant loveliness of the Martian girl forever ended?

Automatically he snatched his weapon from its holster, leaped toward the center of the circle. No. He couldn't fire from this angle. The explosive pellet would kill the girl, if she were not already dead!

He edged warily around the gargantuan monster, trying for an opening. But the sentient beast wheeled slowly, then snatched up the silent form and bounded between the sickly fires into the lurking dusk.

"You fool! Why didn't you shoot?"

Hayden turned, slowly surveyed the ruggedly handsome but contorted features of the man who confronted him.

"You should know why, Sarn," he said quietly. He understood the other's irrational criticism. Sarn thought the world of his foster sister, and it was more than an affilial affection.

"Better that she die now than be torn apart by the Gethlone!" Sarn returned bitterly.

Hayden shook his head. "If she isn't already dead, the beast won't kill her. Have you forgotten?"

Marl Landron, Kela's father, stepped between them. His face seemed shrunken, sphinxlike, and his eyes were inscrutable ebony.

"Dr. Hayden is right, Sarn. Our task is to find the Gethlone's lair. What do you propose, Neil?"

Hayden hesitated. "How did it happen? Why didn't the beast's mental aura warn you?"

"Must be a 'Gethlonis Superioris,'" the old man returned. He paused, shook his head. "They're capable of emitting an euphoriant and analgesic mental wave. We didn't suspect a thing until it was among us."

Hayden nodded. "Sarn, you take Malin and Ornis and scout the section north of camp. Use infra-red head lamps and goggles, and dose yourselves with 'hypnotant' before you leave." The Earthman looked questioningly at Marl Landron.

The elderly Martian nodded. "I want you to take charge, Neil."

"All right. Marl, you and Zeni take the section to the west and south to the cliff's edge. Yaldin, you and Canil cover the eastern sector in the same way. Azil and I will search the face of the cliff for caves. Veldar, you stay with the women. All of you take a dose of 'hypnotant' and keep your guns ready."

In a few moments all had taken a swallow of the acridly bitter hypnotic which dulled the thalamic receptors to outside mental influence. They adjusted their infra-red head lamps, donned goggles and went their designated ways.

Hayden led the way to the cliff's edge, the slender Martian close at his heels. In silence they sought the crevice where they had so laboriously gained the edge of the plateau during the day.

Now, in the turgid gloom, the crevasses and crags loomed darkly, threatening a thousand pitfalls and dangers. Phobos, Mars' nearer moon, swam almost visibly from west to east, but its pale mysterious light merely silhouetted the spires and pinnacles. Only where the infra-lamps sent their cavorting beams was there anything lucidly visible.

"If only those Martropolis Earth-hypocrites had at least let us bring a 'Synaptibeam,'" Hayden said bitterly. "But no. They are afraid of anything that smacks of neural influence in the hands of the 'Patriots.' They turn us out with nothing but primitive pellet guns to cross half a world of wild and rugged country!" He picked his way slowly among the jagged crags, watching intently.

"And hope that we don't," agreed his Martian companion. "They'd like to have murdered us outright, but they'd have had even my mild and decadent countrymen to cope with. This was easier and safer—for them!"

Now they were in a deep crevasse, picking their way down toward a rugged rib which jutted out from the wall of the precipice. Moments later they were working their way along its uneven crest.

Out toward the end, they paused, turned toward the precipitous cliff, intently searching its pitted and creviced face under the light of their infra-lamps. Hayden shook his head. There were a million nooks and crannies. Any of them might widen into a recess in the rock wall.

"We've got to find her!" The Earthman jerked his head to and fro with frantic impatience, following the beam with quivering intensity. "It's almost the season for Gethlone parturition, and if those horrible little offsprings start on Kela—"

"I'm not a scientist, Doc," Azil reminded him. "I've heard tales of the strange beasts, but all I know is that they have a brain section which can send out hypnotic waves."

Hayden shuddered. "It's a great deal worse than that. The beasts aren't mammals, although they faintly resemble an Earthly gorilla. They're a type of primitive marsupial-like form peculiar to Mars. They bring forth their young alive, like the marsupials, but the little monsters are infinitely more numerous and even less mature. —Almost microscopic in size, and definitely embryonic in structure, except for taloned upper limbs and precocious mandibles."

Azil held up a thin, corded hand. He directed his light beam up and to the left of where they stood.

"What was that?" he whispered. Hayden strained his eyes trying to pierce the concealing gloom. Then he saw a flicker of movement. Something had sought cover in a dim recess where a rocky corner blocked the beam.

Slowly they worked their way back along the ridge, over to a narrow ledge, and along its precarious shelf to a spot just under the opening in the cliff. It was a good dozen feet above them, and there wasn't a niche in the smooth face sufficient for a hand-hold.

"Can you boost me up?" Azil asked the Earthman. Hayden shook his head.

"We couldn't possibly reach it. Anyhow, it's my job."

He edged around cautiously as far toward the brink as possible, scrutinized the ledge above in the light of the infra-beam.

"No!" Azil's whisper was vehement. "Even *you* couldn't make that jump! Let's try to approach it from above."

Hayden's voice was harsh. "Can't," he said. "It's a sheer face that only a Gethlone could manage. I'll have to try this." He cleared his throat.

"Hold your weapon ready," he said. Then, crouching low, he called on every ounce of earthly vigor in his bunched muscles, sprang for the ragged ledge.

On Earth it would have been an utterly impossible feat. Even here on Mars where Hayden's Earth-normal muscles had a more than two-to-one advantage, it was a pitifully long chance.

He heard Azil gasp as his outstretched fingers grasped at the jagged rock. One hand caught a projecting rib. It came loose in his fingers and brought a shower of dust and particles down into his eyes.

The other hand scraped painfully along the jagged rock, shredding the skin on his clutching fingers. Then his frantically searching fingers found a crevice, and held.

He heard Azil let out a deep breath as he found a hold with the other hand and slowly drew himself up to the questionable safety of the ledge.

Ahead of him yawned a shoulder-high opening into the cliff, and Hayden caught the stench of filth and rotting flesh. Almost certainly it was the lair of a Gethlone.

Cautiously he crept ahead, searching the opening with the infra-light which was invisible to the eyes of the Gethlone. The stench increased, and Neil held his breath in nausea.

Ahead, dimly, he saw that the opening widened to a larger cavern, and he searched anxiously for a sign of the Gethlone. But there was nothing yet. No sound.

Wait, there was a rustling over in one corner of the cavern chamber. A soft sound like many mice.

He edged his way along one wall to a point where his light partially illumined the corner. He gasped.

He could see a dim shape of roughly human outline. As he watched, he caught a slight movement of the figure on the floor. Saw it twitch!

Quickly he directed the light beam around the chamber, saw no signs of the Gethlone. The stench became almost unbearable as he picked his way across the rocky floor.

His stomach cramped at the sight of half-eaten, putrescent carcasses and gnawed bones which littered the place. Some of them looked faintly as though they might once have been human!

But that form across the cave in a rocky alcove was the thing of importance! Could it be Kela? — Alive?

It seemed an eternal march across the floor between those ghastly things that stank. It seemed even that they multiplied in his path!

At last he leaned close over the crumpled figure, tugged at its clothing. Cloth pulled loose in his hand. He stared down, utter horror jerking at his nerves with puppet strings!

On the ledge below the cavern, Azil waited in silence for the return of the Earthman. His usual Martian stolidity was still shaking slightly from the suspense of Hayden's leap.

The calm of the night seemed completely at variance with the

stress of circumstances. Far below him the vagueness of the tortuous ridges and buttresses appeared to be brightening to harsher, clearer outlines.

He glanced toward the eastern sky, saw a second pale orb adding its tenuous light to Phobos'. Deimos was rising, contributing to the intermittent phenomenon when Mars' two moons both presided in the darkling sky.

In the added visibility, the rim of the cliff above him etched a clear line against the night, and he searched its length for some way which might be used from above to follow Hayden.

There was none, at least which a man might follow. He listened intently for any sound from above, where Neil had disappeared. But the night held only those vague tenuous sounds which are forever enigmatic to mortal men.

Then above and an hundred feet to the right, a shape loomed large and ebon on the edge of the cliff. Azil studied its outline assiduously. — If it were a man, he mustn't shoot.

But the huge shape turned suddenly, and the Martian recognized familiar and hideous anthropomorphic characteristics. He jerked his pellet-gun up, aimed at the hulking silhouette, started to squeeze the trigger, then hurriedly released the pressure.

For, as the figure turned further toward the light of the two moons, Azil saw that the middle pair of the Gethlone's grasping tentacles held a form which he knew must be that of Kela!

Back in the necrotic stench of the fearsome den, Hayden stared down at the body on the rocky floor. Beads of perspiration appeared on his face.

It was the body of a man. Or part of the body of what had been a man. Oh yes, it was still alive—or nearly so.

But it wouldn't be for long, for the tiny, livid Gethlone young were burrowing their way rapidly toward vital organs. And then, not even the hypnotic lethargy induced by the parent Gethlone could longer keep life from leaving the ravaged husk.

Hayden shuddered, almost retched. He remembered a strikingly similar Earthly parallel. He remembered the vicious Eumenidae wasps which paralyze caterpillars with a sting, then lay their eggs, to hatch into voracious grubs in the dormant but living body.

He turned away, wondering as he did, what poor prospector it might have been whose body served as living food for the vicious

embryonic Gethlone young; hating with a terrible hatred this hideous species of an alien world.

A frantic cry from outside brought him from his shocked lethargy; sent him bounding out the cavern entrance.

"Neil!" Azil's scream broke the brooding night, echoed and reechoed with a thousand harsh voices from the myriad faces of the buttresses and crags. "Neil, she's coming!—The Gethlone's climbing down!"

Hayden looked up, saw the dark bulk limned against the somber red of the cliff, saw the alien monster clambering like a bloated spider down the smooth face. And in two of its tentacular limbs it held a body. Kela's!

The Earthman's mind raced along a thousand pathways. He couldn't shoot now. He couldn't wait until the Gethlone reached the ledge. He couldn't—

Wait, there might be a way! Frantically he searched for a crevice in the wall above his head, found one. He drew his knife from its sheath, pulled himself up, found another niche for a foot.

There he hung, plastered against the sheer wall. He waited breathlessly until the prehensible phalanges of the Gethlone's lower limbs appeared directly above him, seeking for supporting niches. Then he swung the double-edged knife with all his strength.

He heard an answering roar of pain. Hot liquid splattered his upturned face. He swung again at the monster's other lower limb, then dropped swiftly back to the rocky ledge.

The Gethlone bellowed in frightful hurt and anger at the top of its mighty lungs, and its half-severed lower limbs hung useless.

But still it held its burden, handicapped as it was, crawling slowly and painfully down toward the ledge.

Hayden waited in tense preparedness, gun in one hand and knife in the other. He had to handle this exactly right!

He bided his time until the Gethlone's back was within reach, then drove the knife to the hilt. The beast squalled its pain and rage, dropped sprawling to the ledge. It released its burden, turned on the Earthman with gaping maw and frightful fangs, screaming its defiance and hate.

Hayden dared not shoot yet, for Kela's body lay just behind his foe. He waited tensely while the Gethlone tried to stand, then roared in anguish and came at him on its four stout upper limbs.

Warily Hayden waited until it was almost upon him, then he

raised his gun, pulled the trigger. The bullet plowed into the hideous body; exploded with a violence that toppled the loathsome monstrosity over the brink of the ledge to plunge to the depths below.

"Neil!" came a frightened hail from below. "Neil—are you all right?"

Hayden reached for breath, straightened his knees.

"Okay," he said. "I'm okay." Then he bounded toward the limp form on the ledge.

"Thank Hala for that!" came Azil's fervent answer. "Is Kela hurt?"

Neil didn't answer. He took the girl in his arms, felt for her pulse.

Her eyes opened. She looked up.

"I'm all right," she said faintly.

Hayden's taut muscles relaxed. Now that the hypnotic control of the strange beast was gone, she would recover rapidly.

"Azil," he called. "Get some rope from camp and let it down on us."

An hour later, the group stood around Kela at the edge of the plateau. The women took over, swathed her in blankets, poured cups of hot Martian 'sevra' down her throat, and bundled her off to bed. She protested, but had to wave her thanks to Neil.

The Earthman turned aside Marl Landron's fervent thanks, Sarn's heartfelt praise, and the congratulations of the rest.

"Mainly luck and the help of 'Hala'," he said.

"Either 'Hala' or your Earthly 'God' may have helped," said Marl. "But we have a saying on Mars that: 'Hala oils the wheels, after they've been set spinning'."

The next morning the battle of the travelers against a rugged and hostile world began anew. Twice during the night the guards had fired at Gethlone; guards rendered immune to the hypnotic aura by proper dosage with "Hypnotant."

It seemed that this particular area abounded with the alien beasts, and Hayden knew that at least one reason was the myriad of caves honeycombing the cliffs. Another was its value as a vantage point for attacking the prospectors and hunters who occasionally dared the **Valine Plateau.*

"Hi!" said Neil, looking up as Kela walked over rather shakily to join him by the fire. "How do you feel?"

"Fine!" she said. "At least, I'm alive, thank's to you."

"Feel like traveling a little? I'd like to get at least fifteen or twenty miles away from here by nightfall."

"I know," she returned, cinching the broad belt around her which held her pellet gun, knife, and antidotes for common venoms. "I'll be all right."

The Earthman admired the way the wide leather belt set off the girl's trim waist and very human feminine charms.

"I'd better help with the packing," she said. "I'll see you soon."

Hayden watched her go. She certainly didn't look like a Martian had been fancifully supposed to look, in pre-colony days. But then, neither did any Martian. They looked completely and normally "Homo Sapiens," but the somehow disquieting fact remained that they were actually a different species!

"Homo Martianis," the anthropologists termed them.

Neil remembered almost the exact wording of "Solar Anthropological Cultures":

" 'Homo Martianis' has evolved on Mars in nearly perfect parallelism to the Earthly evolution of 'Homo Sapiens.' In fact, the primitive forebears of 'Homo Martianis,' according to paleontological evidence, bear such a thorough similitude to the 'Cromagnon,' 'Pithecanthropus,' and other ancient progenitors of 'Homo Sapiens' that it leads one to the inevitable conclusion of the 'Universality of Life.'

"It lends itself to the almost unanimous acceptance by scientific minds that life has evolved along almost identical channels, wherever, it may have arisen.

"Indeed, it would seem to support the 'Spore Theory' of planetary-inoculation with protoplasmic life. And it is almost certain that such hypothetical Life-spores were of common origin for both Earth and Mars."

The text and implications of such a theory didn't particularly offend Hayden. What he did mind, subconsciously, perhaps, was the more pertinent data which followed:

"The fact that there is a variance in the hereditary determinants between 'Homo Sapiens' and 'Homo Martianis' is certainly no reflection on such a theory.

"The existence of fifty-two chromosomes in the cells of the Martian species as opposed to forty-eight in the Earthly prototype may very well be a simple variance in the final evolutionary stages due to the extreme nature of the isolation mechanism which has

heretofore separated these species of common origin. Note, in support of this theory, the wide divergence between Australian, New World, and Old World species on Earth, some of which have no homologues in the other sectors.

"The one disquieting factor, now that Mars has been colonized by Earth-people, is the disturbing anomaly that Earth-Mars human hybrids are many times non-viable, but when viable are attended by a wide variance in physiological and psychical characteristics from either of the parents.

"It is a further anomalous phenomenon that when the hybrid offspring are viable, they carry the typical 'Heterosis' or extreme vigor of hybrid species. (Note the pronounced viability and vitality displayed by the Earthly hybrid, the Mule,—itself a product of the forty-eight chromosomal Equine and the Forty-six chromosomal Asinine forebears)."

The Earthman shifted uneasily, got up and packed his scanty belongings, most bulky of which were his medical supplies and equipment.

Irrelevantly he thought of an enigmatic Earthly coincidence which had always puzzled him. Surprisingly enough both man and the equine species are each endowed with forty-eight chromosomes for each somatic cell. And Hayden had often conjectured on the strange origin of myths which had given the lore of Man its Centaurs—those fabulous half-men half-horse creatures of legendary antiquity.

He grinned to himself at the whimsical parallel, then drew on the heavy gauntlets which protected him from the venomous bites of the 'Scatels' and 'Varones' which lurked unseen in the rocks and brush of the broad mesa. They were mean little vermin. Something like centipedes and scorpions, only worse.

Soon the tents were folded and rolled, the food and cooking equipment stowed away in the heavy packs. It was truly a primitive pilgrimage. There were not even covered wagons, for the precipitous range they had negotiated allowed of no vehicles.

Hayden thought bitterly of the Solar League officials, now all Earthmen, who during the last hundred years had gradually usurped even the allotted powers of the Martian Governor, who by edict was of Martian descent.

He remembered with a fierce anger the gradual change of the supposed political and social equality between Earthmen and Martians to a manipulated pseudo-serfdom controlled by the huge Earthly

corporations which had financed the original exploration and exploitation of Mars.

It was indeed a sad commentary that even in interplanetary affairs agreements, treaties and pacts meant no more than they had on Earth to those who had tasted of power and wealth, and wanted more.

Gradually, the intellectual but peaceful Martian people had been led deeper and deeper into the velvet-gloved tyranny, under the guise of protection and advancement. Only during the last few years had the underlying iron hand started to evidence itself. Only in the last few months had the discontent sent deep roots through the Martian peoples, leading to the organization of the "Patriots," whose cause Dr. Hayden and a few other earth-humans had championed.

But it hadn't helped. The clutch of the greedy powers was too strong for sporadic and isolated opposition, and the known leaders had finally been told to get out of Martropolis and its system of smaller cities, "or else."

Landron, Hayden, and others had known very well what "or else" meant, and had also known that only through time and careful organization could they hope to cope with the unscrupulous parties in power. Thus they had started, almost defenseless, on the long pilgrimage toward the primitive and unsettled wilds of Syrtis Major, which lay just North of the equator.

There they hoped to build a new civilization where, in time, they could enlist enough recruits from the Martian world to prepare for a concentrated effort to break the inequitable control of the Earth trusts. There, in Syrtis Major, they would be joined by groups from all the Martian cities. Reasoning people who had learned that escape and future development was the only solution to their problem.

"Ready, Doctor?"

Marl Landron had left the group and was helping one of the Martian men strap on a pack of Hayden's equipment.

"I believe so," the Earthman returned. "How is Kela?"

"She'll make it all right. She has tremendous vitality, for a woman. In fact, more than most of our men."

Hayden nodded. The lovely girl was certainly able to hold her

own on a forced march. She always did more than her share of the chores and difficult tasks; always ready to lend a helping hand.

Soon they were on their way again, Hayden acting as scout; for his Earth-muscles gave him a very decided advantage in scaling rocky buttresses and buttes to select their route.

Marl Landron was nominally the leader of the group, for his knowledge of Martian terrain was profound. Not only that, but a great if enigmatic intelligence looked out through his expressionless eyes. There wasn't much about Martians or Mars or Life that the old man didn't know.

Ahead of them the plateau was a broad green expanse of verdant grass and mosses, dotted here and there with jagged extrusive masses of rock which evidenced an original volcanic inception. Twisted and gnarled coniferous trees perched atop their massive barrel-like boles which hoarded the water for the long dry seasons.

Sarn Halin came up beside Hayden, his long strides almost matching the Earthman's. Kela's foster brother was certainly a fine specimen among Martian men, and Neil realized that he would make a fit husband for the girl. But deep inside, he resented Sarn. Resented the man's affection for Kela, and the devotion, born of life-long association, with which the girl regarded Sarn.

"We should be bearing a little more to the west, shouldn't we?" Sarn's voice was casual, but it incited a resentment in the Earthman.

"I don't believe so," he returned shortly. "I'll take another observation from the big butte a mile or two ahead."

"The country is getting lower, almost marshy," Sarn replied. "We might run onto a Lara, and they're particularly active during this season."

Hayden didn't answer; didn't make any attempt to alter their route. Sarn's suggestion was common sense, but entirely unacceptable to the Earthman. He strode along with the long swinging gait of the Earth-born in the 38% Martian gravity.

Ahead of them the vegetation was changing to a darker, more profuse green. Straggling "Phenedae" were appearing occasionally, their broad spongy disks each covering a wide area of grass, sucking up all available moisture. Great hideously red pulpy fruit topped the stems which reared stiffly above the spreading sucker-like vines; and each red fruit pod was a mass of tiny life.

The "Phenedae" were an unique type of parasitic vine which sheltered in its woody fruit thousands of hydra-like animalcules;

half vegetables, half animal, which in symbiotic communion with the plant, took nitrogen from the air and combined it in usable form for the Phenedae. In return, they were furnished a heavy nectar that oozed from the pores of the sponge-like fruit.

Hayden recalled the really interesting thing about the Phenedae. The nitrogenous compounds formed through the symbiotic efforts of the animalicules were exceedingly unstable, and could be detonated by various means, even by a concussion or blow. And when the fruit was more mature, dry, even a jar or a loud noise was sufficient. It was indeed a strange way nature had devised for scattering the seeds of the symbiotic parasites.

Hayden was beginning to feel ill at ease. Ahead of them the ground was becoming constantly more moist. Rank grass, the presence of increasing numbers of the Phenedae; all pointed toward marshy ground ahead. Ordinarily he wasn't at all bull-headed, but he couldn't bring himself to acknowledge Sarn's warning and turn back.

Anxiously he searched for the rocky butte he had set as his goal. It lay dead ahead, across a broad low area of tangled shrubs and high grasses. He strode through the luxuriant growth with a confidence he didn't feel. Now his heavy boots made sucking sounds, but he didn't look at Sarn.

Suddenly it happened. Great writhing arms came out of trenches in the marshy ground. At least a hundred writhing sucker-studded tentacles rose, contorted, converged toward the two men.

Hayden was a dozen feet in the lead—almost in the middle of the writhing trap. He shouted a warning. Sarn leaped back, just escaped the thick powerful arms that reached for him.

A Lara! Hayden's mind raced, even as he drew his knife, slashed viciously at the converging arms. "Land-octopus" was the name given it by Earthmen. But there was a remarkable and usually fatal difference!

Each set of tentacles or "trap" was merely a unit extension of the master-beast or main nerve center which lurked in a marshy retreat nearby. And from the controlling life-center ran thick connecting underground trunks to a dozen or more traps which lay in wait for animal life on the firmer ground.

"Watch out for the other traps!" Hayden yelled, his knife flashing but ineffective against the leathery tentacles. "Warn the others!"

By now the arms had converged and met over the Earthman's

head, forming a thick-barred impenetrable cage. Slowly the cage shrank, tightening toward him as the tentacles over-lapped and intermeshed.

Sarn yelled a warning back to the group a few hundred yards behind them; started toward the trap which held Hayden.

"Don't get close!" warned Hayden frantically. "The tentacles will have you before you can cut even one!"

"Then what can I do?" Sarn asked helplessly.

"Spring the other traps.—Use your gun. Shoot the ground ahead of you.—Then you'll know that the Lara is somewhere near the center of the circle of traps!"

By now Marl Landron and the rest of the men had joined Sarn. They spread out and advanced cautiously, firing the explosive bullets into the ground ahead of them.

Here and there other tentacle traps sprang up as the explosions triggered their reactive mechanism. Before long ten units of waving tentacles formed a rough circle around a dense profusion of rank grass and green water near its center.

By now the enmeshing arms had closed within a few feet of Hayden, who was still slashing at the leathery surfaces.

The men closed in around the swampy pit at the center of the circle of traps, and the muffled explosions of bullets threw fountains of mud and viscous green water high into the air.

Hayden was tiring rapidly, and one of the closer arms touched his shoulder, bared by a rent in his shirt. He jerked away as he felt the insidious suction that would eventually drain the blood from his body, leaving it an empty husk.

"Don't waste your ammunition!" he shouted, gasping for breath. "Even a dozen direct hits wouldn't kill it!"

Sarn knew that was true. The huge, submerged bulk of the Lara was of too low an organization for a few hits to seriously injure it. He knew also that shooting blindly into the viscous mud of the swamp wouldn't produce many direct hits.

"What can we do?" he called to Hayden. "We don't have any explosives, or we could blast it."

Hayden didn't know, and he was busy slashing, slashing; trying to delay a little longer the time when those crushing tentacles would begin drinking through the suction discs.

Then he had an idea!

"The Phenedae," he gasped. "Gather as many of the fruit as you can!"

Sarn got the idea, told the men. He ran back, enlisted the help of the women. Soon hundreds of the big red fruit of the Phenedae were littering the ground around the pit.

"Let's try it," said Sarn abruptly. He took the small plastic tent which one of the men handed him, spread it out and with the help of the others rapidly heaped the spongy pods on it. Then four men each took a corner; made of it a massive bundle, tied it tight. Laboriously they maneuvered it over the edge, into the water hole.

"Ready?" Sarn shouted. The Earthman couldn't answer. The thick tentacles were compressing his body, expelling the air from his lungs. And already the skin around the suckers leaked drops of red.

Sarn and the other men raced back a hundred yards from the Lara pit. Then Sarn drew his gun, aimed carefully at the sinking bundle.

The sound of his shot was lost in the muffled roar of the explosion as the unstable nitrous compounds detonated, sending mud and water and pieces of black protoplasm high into the air.

Sarn raced forward into the falling debris; called sharply to Hayden. There was no answer.

Around the central pit of the Lara, its traps were convulsing, contracting their tentacles into quivering bundles of contorted limbs.

Savagely Sarn hacked at the leathery tentacles which still held the Earthman in tight embrace. Then Marl and the rest of the Martian men joined him and soon they had cut enough of the thick arms to pull Hayden free.

When Kela saw the limp form, she threw herself down, put her arms around the Earthman, sobbed softly.

"Oh, Marl—is he dead?—Is Neil dead?"

Sarn gently pulled her to her feet, and his eyes held a strange mixture of tenderness and hurt.

"No," he said. "Just bruised and short of oxygen. He'll be all right."

In the difficult days which followed, only the masterful Marographic knowledge of Landron kept them on a negotiable route toward Syrtis Major.

Both Hayden and Sarn were indispensable in their tireless vigor

and constant efforts to each do more than the other. But without Marl Landron's almost mystic ability, they would have pursued many a blind valley or box canyon. And their situation was desperate enough without further complication.

Food was running low. Shoes and clothes were wearing painfully thin, and strength and vitality, particularly among the women, were flagging fast.

"We've got our most dangerous area to cross within the next few weeks," Landron warned the men gathered around him for the morning council; a morning ritual when he coached them on the zone ahead, made suggestions for finding a suitable route.

"We're approaching the Lystian Meadows—one of the few really wet spots on Mars." The old Martian turned to Hayden, his jet eyes inscrutable in the wizened leathery face.

"Neil, for your benefit I might say that our legends tell us that this is the probable birth place of the Martian race.

"It is the lower extremity of the valley which the Lystian River has cut for thousands of miles from the melting fringe of the polar cap.

"Almost due south it follows its tortuous route through gigantic ranges and fantastic forests, along the Eastern boundary of Syrtis Major, and eventually to the Lystian Meadows.

"Here its precipitous course abruptly changes to the leisurely pace of a thousand tiny streams winding their way sluggishly among islands and deltas choked with vegetation.

"And it literally teems with inimical forms of life.—It is easy for any Martian who has encountered and survived its difficulties to understand why his ancient forebears forsook the land of their inception to migrate to the more arid regions further South.

"There, at least they were comparatively free from the insidious bacterial infections and fantastic vermin which are ever more dangerous to Man than life-forms of formidable size."

Landron paused, addressed his words more particularly to Hayden and Sarn.

"In final word of warning," he said. "Be cautious rather than too ambitious. Use your good judgment rather than unthinking vigor to battle your obstacles."

Then the group resumed its daily march, Sarn and Neil forging ahead to search out the easiest route. Ahead of them the mesa dropped

away in massive steps of purple hills to the haze-shrouded lowlands which marked the boundary of the Lystian Valley.

Far in the sagging distance the morning sun painted tiny silver streaks in the lurking green of the valley below. Here and there hazy discs of water seemed almost to float above the scene, shimmering evanescently through the deep blue haze of far-away things.

Carefully the two men picked their way down past crags, around buttresses, and through narrow defiles. Each was intensely alert, for here again was typical Gethlone terrain, and neither had forgotten the frightful experience early in the journey when they had almost lost Kela.

Kela. There again was the thought. In recent weeks Hayden had become increasingly aware and ashamed of his feeling for the girl, and even more impatient with his inner dislike for Sarn Halin.

With annoyance and a deep pain of frustration, he told himself bitterly what he already knew. Almost fiercely he reminded his emotions that Kela was a Martian; an alien species; and that deeper feeling between them was utterly unthinkable.

He vindictively tortured himself by reviewing the enigmatic but irremediable fact that union between Earth-humans and Martians was taboo. In fact, it was considered miscegenation by the Solar League, and outlawed as such under penalty of death.

Not that the decision of the League was incorrect or unjust; for during his medical career, Hayden had seen the offspring from illicit inter-unions, and even yet the memory was painful.

Such hybrid were monstrous in their departure from physical resemblance to either of their "Homo Martianis" or "Homo Sapiens" parents. And if that were not enough, the viable specimen of such crosses possessed a virulently malignant psychic structure at complete variance to either of its forbears.

This malign and alien outlook, coupled with the heterosis; the extreme vigor and vitality of such hybrids as lived to mature, made the ruling of the League the only sensible decision in order to protect both human races from probable destruction by mutant hybrid descendants!

It was a tough and bitter mental morsel, and it didn't make the Earthman any more receptive to the fact that Marl Landron quite apparently expected his daughter and foster son to eventually make a match.

"Neil!" came Sarn's cry from a ridge across to the right. "Watch out—Gethlone!"

Hayden swung in the direction of Sarn's point, saw a flash of motion over the edge of an iron-stained rib of rock. There was no hint of the Gethlone's mental impact, for all the party had taken the thalamic drug in preparedness. But the physical threat still remained, and their ammunition was getting low.

Rapidly they returned to the group, warned all to be prepared. Then they chose an alternate route, to the east of the concealing buttresses, which led into a narrow defile which wound a tortuous and precipitous way down toward the valley. It was a more difficult route to negotiate, but both Sarn and Neil agreed on its selection.

It was a rugged trip down toward the haze-tinted green of the Lystian Valley. Three times they camped at nightfall in the confines of the narrow defile where each word spoke again with a thousand decreasing voices.

Every movement was a harsh clamor that echoed from wall to wall until each human felt like screaming his defiance at the insistent sound.

Twice, high above on the edge of the flanking cliffs, the swollen silhouettes of Gethlone appeared limned against the pale lumen of the sky as if listening to the murmuring ghosts of sound.

Once Hayden had to suture the Martian Zeni's hand where ragged gneiss-like rock had slashed it like broken glass. Once he injected Yaldin's wife with the antidote for the deep sharp sting of the scorpion-like "Varone," when she had forgotten to shake out her gauntlets before putting them on.

But these more or less minor ills didn't worry Hayden so much. It was the thought of the unknown menaces which the ancient valley might hold which bothered him. It was the fear of insidious and unknown germ life that kept him up until the midnight hours, poring intently over "Martian Parasitology and Human Disease."

On the fourth day, almost at noon, they thankfully emerged from the narrow crevasse out onto a sloping bench which overlooked the rank growth of the lowlands. Silently, wearily they made camp to rest from their tortuous descent.

During the afternoon the Earthman studied assiduously. And the glimmer of his reading light was a fitful beacon far into the night for those who could not sleep.

Few slept, tired as they were, for the weird sounds of marsh-life

were stridently menacing, and the fierce buzzing of countless flying insects kept them busy with nets and gauzes.

When morning crept wearily into the east, the pilgrims arose, eyes lack-lustre and sunken, once more to begin the daily battle. Slowly the night-sounds faded before the cold reason of day, and the throbbing tune of the insects sank to a lower key.

"Neil, I want to see you a minute."

Hayden turned at Kela's voice; wanted to take her clean cool loveliness in his arms. He answered curtly.

"Yes?"

"Please try to get along with Sarn," she pleaded, her entreating eyes green as the deep emerald of her wispy scarf. "He isn't like himself. Even he and Dad had a quarrel last night."

"What about?" the Earthman asked shortly, then wished he hadn't, for it certainly was no affair of his.

"Oh,—I don't quite know," the girl answered unevenly. She looked out across the vista of marshy lowlands, profuse with matted vegetation and gravid with enigmatic menace. "Please try. We need you both so much."

Hayden watched her trim figure as she turned with the parting plea and went back to her work. Then Sarn, too, was feeling tension. Neil knew that in all fairness he must see that no further incident involving Kela arose to antagonize her foster brother.

For certainly he, an Earthman, had no right whatever to interfere. Furthermore they desperately needed Sarn's whole-hearted cooperation during the grim elemental battle which remained before them.

It was slow, infuriatingly frustrating work trying to find a route through the tangled morass. Sometimes they fought through a mile of protesting lianas and sucking mires, only to come to wide sloughs of bottomless green slime.

Each time they turned back from the unknown dangers of the bubbling depths, Neil wished with all his soul for a boat or raft. But there was nothing whatever available more substantial than the tangled creepers and soggy moss.

Sarn had been sullen, morose, all day and he answered Neil's friendly queries with curt monosyllables. Something was definitely bothering him, and Hayden got the impression that it was more than a subconscious jealousy of Kela.

"Neil!" came the sharp exclamation from behind. "Doc—Marl's been bitten!"

In a moment he was beside the old Martian. Azil had slashed the leather boot top on Landron's right leg, revealing a single deep puncture that was already discolored and oedemus.

The Earthman gasped, then his movements were deft and quick as he removed the boot, slashed the thick cloth of the breeches leg and turned it back.

"My kit," he said tersely. While Azil was getting it he asked in clipped words: "When did this happen, Marl? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Yesterday morning," the old man said. His weathered countenance was completely emotionless, but his eyes were dull. "Thought it was only a sharp thorn."

"It was no thorn," Hayden said. "But I don't know of any vermin with a single fang. Though perhaps it might have been—" He left his sentence unfinished as he deftly made deep crossed incisions over the puncture and applied the suction cup.

"How do you feel?" he asked Marl.

"All right. Perhaps a little weak."

"If this happened yesterday morning," said the Earthman thoughtfully, "it's not a common venom, or the reaction would have been very evident long before now. We'd better make camp for today and see that the puncture's well drained."

They chose a grassy promontory which was considerably higher than the dank marsh around it. Rapidly they prepared for the night.

It was a long one. Full of the resulting progress of unknown things and the seething, bubbling sounds of the swamp. Once a small flying reptile got caught in the insect netting of Yaldin's tent and hissed its venomous hate like a tiny siren until it was extricated and killed. Several times foot-long amphibious 'Golats' slithered up from the water, drawn by the enticing smell of living things.

In the morning Hayden examined Marl's wound. The discoloration and local inflammation was rapidly subsiding, and he declared himself able to go on.

All day the grim little Martian kept up with the group. But Hayden watched him closely. That evening he took a blood sample. After an hour's work with his reagents and portable microscope, he called Zeni and checked type, then gave Landron a transfusion.

Each day was an endless thwarting of effort in the swamp's intricate maze. Some days they might gain a thousand yards, as

measured by guessing the distance of the high range behind them. Other days it seemed that they lost ground.

And after each day's gruelling effort, Hayden would call on some member of the party who had volunteered, and would give Marl another transfusion.

Sarn had not contributed. He had not volunteered, and Hayden had not asked him to. Neither had he called on the women yet. They needed all their strength.

One evening Marl called the Earthman to him. He was already in his sleeping bag, trying to obtain a maximum of rest for the day to follow.

"What is it, Neil? Which bug got me?" he asked.

Hayden shifted uneasily.

"You might as well tell me," the Martian said, an expressionless grin creasing his leathery features. "I presume it's a matter of time. But I've got to hold out till we get to Syrtis!"

"All right," Hayden said in sudden decision. "You've a right to know. It's 'Plasmodium Trypanosoma,' a flagellate phagocytic protozoan named for two Earthly types, part of whose characteristics it combines. In layman's terms, it is a tiny protozoan animalcule with a flagella or tail for rapid swimming. And it, like the amoeba, folds itself around its food and absorbs it.

"The tiny, living bits of protoplasm are carried around in the bodies of the Martian flying scorpion, or 'Dena', and complete part of their life cycle within this host. It's something similar to the life story of 'Plasmodium Vivas,' one of the organisms which cause 'Malaria' on Earth, which is carried by the 'Anopheles' mosquito.

"As is common in such relationship there seems to be some sort of symbiosis between the Trypanosomic Plasmodium and its host. It apparently aids the digestion of the 'Dena,' and after spending half its life cycle in the alimentary canal of the scorpion host, finds its way into the protein fluid in the scorpion's sting sack and is injected into any new animal host which the 'Dena' may happen to sting.

"The insidious phase of the continued life cycle in the new host is that the only food absorbed by the 'Plasmodia' is 'Erythrocytes'—the red blood cells!"

"Creating a kind of pernicious anemia," Marl completed quietly. "I understand."

"The worst of it is," continued Hayden, "that any specific drug

which affects this parasite also is lethal to the white corpuscles of the blood. And without those protective phagocytes," he continued bitterly, "a dozen different types of disease germs would kill you within a matter of a few days."

Landron nodded. "Do you think you can keep me alive long enough to reach Syrtis? I'm the only one who knows this country at all, and mapping it would be an almost impossible task."

"It's possible," said Hayden, his lips compressed. "But we have no blood bank other than the members of the group. And I don't know how long they can stand the constant drain."

"Time will tell," said the old man grimly. "Unfortunately it's the only way!"

Now the members of the party redoubled their efforts to traverse the confusing maze of the Lystian swamps. And each day Landron and the other Martian men grew a little weaker.—Marl from the increasing anemia, and the others from the donation of blood more frequently than their bodies could stand.

Finally Hayden was forced to accept Kela's repeated and insistent offers. He drew a sample and retired to his tent to check for type. The precaution was almost unnecessary, for Martians possess an almost universal blood type. Only in one out of ten thousand was there a factor incompatible with the other type. But it paid to be sure.

With deft fingers he prepared a serum from the sample of Kela's blood, tested it against an incubated serum of Landron's.

The Earthman blinked his eyes. A heavy flocculant precipitate was forming in the test tube!

He carefully repeated the test. The same thing occurred. His mind was racing.—This wasn't the ordinary reaction, even between the rare X-type and the A, or universal-type Martian blood! It was—

Hayden almost threw down the tube, strode rapidly to Marl Landron's tent.

"What is this?" he demanded without preliminaries. "Why didn't you tell me about Kela?"

The old man looked up with dull eyes. "Oh." He grinned faintly. "So the secret is out."

Neil had no regard now for the other's condition. He had to know!

"Why was it kept a secret all these years?" he demanded roughly. "Didn't you even tell her?"

Marl shook his head wearily. "I had made up my mind to tell her tomorrow." He paused, brushed a thin and shaky hand across his lips. "I knew the time had come."

"But why not before now?" Hayden persisted, puzzled anger creasing his forehead.

"It's a long story," returned Landron weakly. "Tied up with vicious hatreds of loyalist Martians in the early days of the coming of the Earthmen to Mars. I'm not proud of it. And the years of time have slowly wiped much of the vengeful hate from my mind.

"With age," he continued with a twisted smile, "the heavy passions of youth slowly give way to a more semantic concept of Life's meaning. One gradually gains a greater tolerance for both objective and subjective conflicts."

He paused, closed his eyes. Landron's strength was rapidly failing, and Neil knew that a transfusion must be given rapidly.

Sarn, the only man who had not contributed blood, was not to be found. Hayden didn't dare call upon the men who had contributed this soon again. Finally he accepted the offer from one of the women.

Marl had lapsed into a sleep which was almost a coma. He didn't even awaken as Hayden gave the transfusion.

Early the next morning Hayden made it a point to see Kela as soon as she had dressed.

"Kela," he said. "Marl has something to tell you. I want you to hear it from his lips."

She looked up at Neil in puzzlement at his tone, quickly finished coiling the long black braids of her shining hair, then hastened toward Landron's tent.

When she came from the tent an hour later, her green eyes held a strange mixture of sadness and of—exuberant joy.

"Oh Neil!" she cried. "I don't know what to say!"

The green eyes glistened with a hint of moisture, and her lips quivered.

"I know the shock it must be," Neil said tenderly. "A lifetime of background and emotions and loyalties jerked out from under you in a single moment! It's something that one can't assimilate immediately."

She straightened her slim shoulders, held her head high. She held out a hand.

"Hi, fellow Earthman!" she greeted.

Hayden held onto the slim hand, drew her into his arms.

"I've wanted to do this for so long," he told her gravely. He felt the nod of her head against his shoulder. "Now you can't marry Sarn, a Martian," he continued. "You'll have to be content with one of your own species—like me!"

She drew back her head, looked at him steadily for a moment with wide clear eyes, then she slipped from his arms.

"Marl's terribly weak, Neil," she said hurriedly. "I'm afraid that he—" Her voice faltered, then was clear again. "He can't last much longer without more blood."

That day they carried the old Martian in an improvised litter, and they had to lean low to catch his words of advice concerning their route.

As soon as they had made camp for the evening, Hayden followed Sarn out on a point of solid land which jutted above the level of the soggy terrain.

"Sarn," Neil said brusquely. "I don't know what the matter is between you and your foster father, but I want you to know that he's dying. We need blood for him, and need it badly!"

Sarn Halin jerked out of his reverie, stared at the Earthman a moment and started to speak. Then a twisted grin crossed his face. He shrugged.

"Suit yourself," he said, baring his arm for the physician.

Minutes later Neil was working swiftly in his tent. When the serums were ready, he tipped a beaker, let a thin stream trickle into the liquid in the test-tube.

For the second time he saw the thick white precipitate form.

Quickly he repeated the test and got the same reaction.

Slowly he turned, put down the tube, and stumbled out into the night. He stared up at the enigmatic depths of the fire-flecked sky. But even the mysteries of the heavens didn't seem to compare with the one he had just discovered.

For Marl Landron had raised not one—but two foster Earth-human children!

In the long, difficult days and endless nights that followed, Neil nurtured his guilty secret. He couldn't quite bring himself to risk his new-found happiness with Kela. He couldn't tell her of his discovery. Yet he knew that he must.

Marl was sinking more and more frequently into prolonged comas from which he emerged only long enough to haltingly discuss their route. It no longer even helped very much when Hayden

gave him the very sparing transfusions which he dared take from the rapidly weakening Martian men and women.

For it seemed that the insidious parasites had multiplied to a point where the new red corpuscles of the transfused blood seemed only a morsel for voracious appetites.

Then one day they reached the edge of the Lystian Meadows and gratefully made camp on the pungent shrub-covered slopes of the Martian Appalachians. In another two days they gained the top of the range to stare down at the broad green coolness of virgin forests and fertile plains. Syrtis Major!

It had been a long and difficult struggle, and only time would tell whether they would eventually gain the major sociological goal which they sought.

When camp had been made, Marl Landron asked to be propped up so that he could see. And for long hours his enigmatic old eyes looked out across their new domain.

That night Neil luxuriously lounged back on the soft dry grass and studied Kela who sat with fingers laced behind her head, looking up at the sky. Her face was lovely, almost startlingly beautiful under the pale light of Phobos and Deimos.

Strange moment! Not often did the two moons compete for supremacy in the Martian sky. Nor was it often necessary for a man to be entirely truthful in the fantastic game of Love.

But Hayden knew that he must tell Kela his secret. Must let her know that Sarn was not barred from her affections by racial reasons.

"Kela," he said at last. "I have something to tell you. Something I should have told you days ago."

"Not about another girl?" she teased, scooting over to rest her elbow on his knee.

He shook his head and continued with the story.

Kela watched his face intently while he talked, and even by the wan light of the tiny moons her eyes were deep green feminine enigmas.

When he had finished, she laughed softly, kissed him lightly.

"Yes, I know," she said. "Dad told Sarn and me a month ago."

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RATING SPACEWAY

• Our apologies for the long delay in producing this issue of SPACEWAY. But for awhile it appeared there was to be no future for the mag. The January issue had finished out several thousand dollars in the red, and we had every reason to believe the June one would do better. While we were preparing the copy for the fourth issue, returns began coming in on the second. They were not good and it quickly became apparent that we'd be lucky if it did as well as the first. It didn't, not nearly as well. We began to feel like the goat butting his head against the concrete dam—except we had more at stake than our head. It looked very much like we should stop and go off somewhere and lick our wounds—and never, never, never have anything to do with s-f publishing again. Still—we had one more issue yet to be heard from. Why not wait and get some idea of how it was doing? After all, we *had* put some economy measures into effect and it was a good issue.

Since you are now reading that fourth issue, it seems unnecessary to state that the third one *did* do better. It is a rather pleasant feeling to realize that, after ten issues (counting the original eight) of unsuccessfully trying, you have finally succeeded in coaxing an issue into the black, not counting our own work, of course . . . That is, it is until you stop to think that, if sales merely hold up, you still must carry three more issues before obtaining any financial benefit from it. This we will now attempt to do—with no more delays. We hope you'll stick with us. We believe there should be a place for SPACEWAY—if we can just reach those readers who have quit the field or taken up pocket novels because they didn't care for the material being published. So if you like the mag (and from your letters, many of you do) please tell your friends about it.

By the way, we wish to thank all those fans who bought the old F.P.C.I. books and mags from us. These sales have gone a long way toward making it possible to carry on. For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with this material (mentioned elsewhere in this issue) these are the original F.P.C.I. publications, not reprints or used, other than by age. They were published in the late '40 and early '50s. Those books on which we still have stock (on good book paper, with a few exceptions) have been sewed, bound with soft covers (jacketed when available) and are generally being sold for half cover price. If you did not get copies before, now is your chance. The supply of many titles is running low.

Incidentally, due to the decision to include the extra Mars stories in this Issue, we were forced to hold over "Space Ranger" and "The Percom is For Living." They'll be in the next issue along with other good science fiction. Also a friend who works in the space industry has promised us an article on the new space feats now being planned—if he can get clearance on it.

We seem to have opened the Pandora Box with our comments in the October Issue on the distribution situation and received a number of letters regarding the difficulty of finding this or that magazine. We also received a number of pledges to subscribe to FANTASY BOOK if we revived it. At present, though, we feel we should concentrate our energies on *Spaceway*. We do wonder, though, how many of you would buy a copy of GARAN OF YU-LAC and PEOPLE OF THE CRATER, if they were published as a clothbound book?

Leading off an abbreviated letter section are some comments from Ed Kessell whom (to our pleasure) we met at the St. Louiscon:

Bought your Sept.-Oct. issue of SPACEWAY today and have to comment on your comment on distribution agonies . . . I've sold books professionally and worked for public libraries. As a bibliophile (a kindly term used to refer to someone who haunts bookstores and owns a couple of thousand books and magazines), I've kept a close eye on publications and magazine stands and your summary of the problems inherent in getting a "sci-fi" (this should please Forrest Ackerman) on the stands is painfully accurate.

From Ray Reistoffer, Marcus, Iowa.

Got the latest SPACEWAY. Seems you get better as you go along. I like the idea of your printing the Norton serial. Hope you keep this type of story up . . . By the way I sure enjoy those Morris Scott Dollen covers. I hope you can keep him. Interior illios were nice this issue also.

Leslie Lee Braker, Deer Creek, Ill.

I enjoy your magazine very much and am especially fond of Andre Norton's writings.

Karl Edward Wagner, Canton, N. C.

What is this miracle that has come to pass? I am poking around a dingy newsstand and I uncover a copy of SPACEWAY. At first I thought the dealer had not cleaned out his stock in 15 years, but then I saw the date and my mind really flipped. I fully expect to pick up a copy of STRANGE TALES or UNKNOWN the next time I look. (*don't know about that, but you might find VENTURE!*) So F.P.C.I. still lives in Alhambra. Here in the eastern wilderness the name has become shrouded in legend . . .

Walter H. Schwartz, Minneapolis, Minn.

Glad to see SPACEWAY back. I have the first four issues and about twenty of F.P.C.I.'s hardcover books. I hope you can consider publishing such again. Perhaps "Garan of Yu-lac" in a few months, after it has finished in *Spaceway*.
C. J. Probert of Toronto, Can., comments on the June SPACEWAY.

Regarding June SPACEWAY—enjoyed the Hubbard, Nuetzel, Harmon and Liebscher very much. The Kris Neville was poor for him and dealt with one of the most overworked of topics (who am I putting on—you know that). The Flagg-Ackerman collaboration was fine—up to the last twenty or so lines. Let's have some consistency in style. And personally I preferred the measured, dignified Flagg of the earlier part over the Ackerman that was revealed in the ending. The reference to José Farmer jarred me in what I had assumed up to then was a '30s tale. (*This entire story was rewritten and modernized by Mr. Ackerman. It is doubtful if one part could be classified as Flagg and another Ackerman, though there may very well be a difference in the writings of the youthful and the adult Ackerman.*) Artwork good—except for the Roy Hunt. Particularly liked Jon Arfstrom's drawing for "Battle of Wizards." SPACEWAY's a good buy—better than many more established rags (can think of two right off the bat)
Israel Marks, Schenectady, N. Y.

I travel 15 miles to Albany to secure my copy of SPACEWAY. But it is certainly worth it. Be assured that if you revive FANTASY BOOK I'll be the first to purchase same. I enjoy SPACEWAY very much . . . Thanks for acquainting me with the works of Morris Dollens.

Chuck Hughes, San Bernardino, Ca.

This latest SPACEWAY is the greatest. You seem to be making each issue progressively better. I liked every one of the stories. Be sure to keep Mr. Ackerman's column in there, it's terrific. Keep it up.

E. J. Sturt Jr., Weirton, W. Va.

After several years of avoiding s.f. in the monthly magazines, I find your publication (Oct.) and to my surprise, it is not too bad . . . "Requiem for Planet X" was good, except the last paragraph should have been deleted. When will writers ever learn all stories don't have to be Hollywood endings? "People of the Black Coast" and "Garan of Yu-lac" were not bad. I think the moon stories were out of place with recent events . . . How about a rating of stories by fans? (*We'd be happy to, if you fans would just send us your ratings!*) A good idea for FANTASY BOOK but I don't think you can pull it off. (*You seem to be right.*) If you do, let me know and I'll subscribe . . . Like I said before, your magazine is not good. But read some of the competition and you look better. Good luck.



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