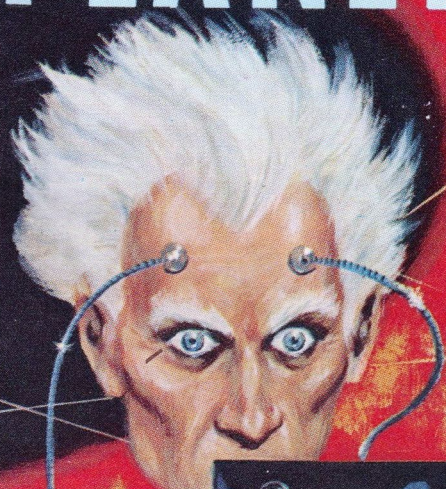


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and the I-machine

KING OF THE FOURTH PLANET



ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

First Book Publication

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John Rolf fled his own guilt when he abandoned the corruption of Earth for a life of meditation on the many levels of Mars' mountain, ruled as tradition had it by a king with amazing powers. In this serene climate, Rolf perfected an invention that would explore the human mind—and thereby unearthed a menace that threatened to annihilate the ancient Martian culture.

The discovery confronted Rolf with the crisis of his loyalty and his past. To defy Earth, to save Mars?

Yet only the KING OF THE FOURTH PLANET would have the power to do so—and everyone believed the king to be a myth.

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“Writing seems to be in my blood; it’s the only occupation I enjoy. I’ve been at it ever since I was a kid. If I may parody Mark Twain, who apologized because there was a certain amount of information in *The Innocents Abroad*, and said he was sorry but that “information appeared to stew out of him like the precious ottar of roses out of the ottar,” words appear to stew out of me. There is really nothing I can do about this except direct them at a typewriter and hope they will emerge in the form of stories or books.”

KING OF THE FOURTH PLANET

by

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

ACE BOOKS, INC.

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KING OF THE FOURTH PLANET

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PROLOGUE

AMONG THE STORIES told by that hardy breed of men who go to space, men who are daunted by nothing, one story is told that makes even them shake their heads in wonder and disbelief. It is a story of incredible events, of impossible happenings, of inventions beyond the minds of men. Even spacemen, talking to each other in quiet corners of saloons when their ships are at rest, tell this story in whispers.

It is a story of Mars, of the Red Planet, and of an incredible person called the King of the Red Planet. It is a story of Suzusilmar, that mighty mountain which is located in the heart of the great desert of Mars, a mountain so deep that its granite bottom is thought to rest on the core of the planet itself and so high that the metal spire which tops its seventh level seems to touch infinite space itself.

This is a very strange mountain. Higher than Everest on Earth, but with breathable air at the top—air that is synthesized there by some scientific wizardry—in the long ago of which neither men nor Martians remember anything, a race of giants carved six distinct levels out of this granite mountain, the Martians say, the first and lowest level being the floor of the desert itself, making Suzusilmar a mountain of seven levels. These levels are large areas, each with its own distinct architecture, its own buildings and parks. On each level Martians live, each level with its own customs and inventions, each level different, only an intangible something called *the law* being the same for all levels. At the four sides of the mountain great flights of steps, narrowing at the top, lead upward from the desert, reaching even to the highest level where the metal spire is a lance aimed at the

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depths of space. Broad at the bottom and narrow at the top, the steps symbolize that many will try to climb this mountain but that few will succeed, the Martians say.

Spacemen say that the King of the Red Planet lives at the top of Suzusilmar.

They also say that many years ago a human came to Suzusilmar, a big man with a great shock of white hair, fleeing from Earth. They say that the Martians of the Fourth Level, which resembles Earth in many ways, made him welcome and that he found a home among them, there to work at something that had best not be mentioned, even by spacemen.

They say, too, that the Company for Better Planetary Relations, which is a fine-sounding name under which to hide thieves and looters, once sent a great ship to Suzusilmar. As to what happened to the ship, and the men aboard it, the stories they tell seem incredible to ordinary men.

But ordinary men do not go to space and do not know from first-hand experience the terrors and the wonders of the worlds that lie afar in the sky.

Chapter One

JOHNN ROLF was a big man with a great shock of unruly hair that never would stay in place. It was snow white now, but in the old days that he thought were forever gone and forgotten, it had been coal black. Women had loved to run their fingers through it in those days, thinking to bring some kind of order to it, but he had been impatient of such antics even then, claiming that life did not need a woman to give it meaning, that it had meaning in its own right. This was an opinion which his wife had not shared, as she had not shared many other things in his life. Choosing to divorce him long ago rather than come with him to Mars again, she was on Earth. Or so he assumed. Their daughter had chosen to stay with her mother, on the Home Planet. If his parting with his daughter had wrenched his heart, the trauma was long since forgotten.

Here on Mars a dream more important than a wife or a daughter might come to full flower. It was a big dream. John Rolf had always been the kind of man who dreamed no little dreams.

As he bent to the task of adjusting the little silver antenna, much finer than any hair on his head, on the little instrument that he called a *teliknon*, in which he hoped a mighty dream might come to flower, he heard the drum-fire of landing rockets far away and far below. Though they had had them once, the Martians had no space ships now, and seemed to find this lack no great inconvenience. The sound of rockets meant that a great ship—and men—had come to Suzusilmar. Since there was no place for a space ship to land on the levels of the mighty mountain itself, he knew it must

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land somewhere on the fringes of the vast rat-warren of a city that circled Suzusilmar at the level of the desert.

Men, many men, had been in the lower level for months. Rolf had seen none of them, but Jalnar, the almost blind beggar who tapped his way with a long staff as he pleased over the vast mountain city, had whispered to him that his own kind were here. Thallen, Rolf's teacher from the Fifth Level, had also mentioned this fact, carefully watching the human for some reaction that indicated a hunger for his own kind. When Rolf had not reacted to the news, Thallen had sighed softly, though whether the sigh had indicated pleasure at some slight progress in his human pupil, or despair that any progress would ever come about, Rolf had not known. Thallen was quite capable of keeping his own counsel. The knowledge of their presence even in the lower level had been an irritation, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, somewhere in the back of Rolf's mind. His dream might be of and for them, but they could not share it yet.

Besides, the people of the Red Planet had a saying, "Where men are, there is trouble."

It was not that the Martians were strangers to trouble. On the lower levels, they knew it in all its forms. Perhaps on the higher levels they knew it also, for there, Thallen said, they always trod softly, as do those who know they walk on eggs with very thin shells, as do those who know that their actions, their words, perhaps even their thoughts, may disturb and unsettle balances precariously held afar.

Sometimes, Rolf thought, even the half-blind Jalnar touched with his staff the stone slabs in front of his shuffling feet so gently that he seemed to fear a slightly harder tap with this wooden stick would disturb the planet to its core of magma.

As the sound of rockets had disturbed him herel

With an effort of will, John Rolf put all thought of rockets, of men, and of trouble out of his mind. Plugging tiny phones into both ears, he turned the current into the *teliknon*. Almost instantly, a musical tone sounded in his ears, sounded, then was silent. Nothing that he could hear indicated that the *teliknon* was operating yet he knew that equipment so sensi-

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tive it could detect the energy output, the radiations, from a flying gnat was in operation.

Though it had been built here, with the help of the super-skilled technicians of the Fourth Level, with Thallen often watching in silence, the *teliknon* was Rolf's invention. It was also the greatest dream he had ever known. It was not his dream alone, it had been shared by all of Earth's great humanitarians, its great social scientists, its great philosophers, and its great thinkers.

It was a dream of a world without fear and without hate, without war and without much of its disease, without hunger, poverty, and crime. During all of Earth's bloody history, this dream had existed, in one form or another, deep in the hearts and the minds of men.

Was it always to be only a dream?

Rolf hoped not. He hoped that some day it would come true. He hoped that the tiny instrument on the workbench in front of him would be the means by which it could come true.

When it was perfected, the *teliknon* would make it possible for men to read each other's minds.

When concealment was no longer possible, where base designs and evil thoughts and greedy motives were perfectly clear to all, everyone would be honest.

Rolf hoped to manufacture *teliknons* by the millions, to sell them at a minimum price to all who could pay, and to give them free to those who could not pay for them.

When everyone had a *teliknon*, Earth, the Home World, would be Paradise Regained! Even the Company for Better Planetary Relations would have to mend its methods and its manners. John Rolf knew, from experience, that a true miracle would be needed to improve the morals of the Company.

Here on the Fourth Level of Suzusilmar, such an invention as the *teliknon* was far more likely to be brought to perfection than any other place on Mars or Earth. Something seemed to be in the air of the Fourth Level that was conducive to new discoveries. No one knew exactly what this *something* was but it seemed to be here. The Martians themselves called this area circling the vast mountain at its middle the Level of

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Invention. They claimed—and they had proof to back it up—that any device not in violation of the laws of nature could be perfected here.

Thallen, willing to talk for once, had confirmed that this was true. Here on this level Rolf had seen devices which he knew that scientists on Earth had been trying to build for decades. One such device, a method of generating electric current, produced enough power to light a small city back on Earth. It was no bigger than a man's fist, it would last about ten years, and the cost of replacement was only a few cents.

Thallen, and other Martians of the higher levels, seemed to regard such inventions with the amused condescension of an adult regarding the bright toy of a child. Even the inventors of the Fourth Level did not become really excited about their discoveries. For some reason inexplicable to Rolf, except in terms of what the Martians called The Law, and which he did not pretend he understood, they did not take their inventions to the lower levels and use them there to improve the welfare of other men of the Red Planet who were still in the savage and barbaric stages of growth.

The Martians were not missionaries. They did not try to interest anyone else in their discoveries. They were not, in fact, much interested in them themselves. A discovery that would have made a human famous over all of the Home Planet, they seemed to regard as merely an interesting mental exercise which in itself was only training for higher things.

What were these *higher things*? Here the Martians grew very vague. But when Rolf had come here many years before, following his own dream, they had made him welcome. He was still welcome. Everyone from the savages on the First Level up to Thallen on the Fifth Level, including Jalnar, the almost-blind beggar who wandered where he would, treated the human with respect. It was as if they, somewhere in their hearts, shared his dream.

He made an adjustment on the *teliknon*.

Lightning walked with splashing feet of fire through his brain!

There had been no premonition that this was coming. The

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teliknon—if the lightning was coming from this source—had never acted up like this before.

Flashing, the lightning vanished. It left behind the *stillness*.

This was not such a stillness as John Rolf had ever encountered before. In it, accentuating it, were tiny rustlings, little squeaks and chirps heard far off, like the voices—perhaps the hearbeats—of the gnomes and elves that Martian legends said lived in the red deserts. Rolf had the startled impression that this stillness was a communion between many life forms of diverse natures, some of them so alien that he would not even recognize them as living at all.

He knew that all of this was in his own mind, that the *teliknon* had suddenly opened a channel—or removed a barrier—between him and other forms of life.

For the first time, the *teliknon* was working.

He was entranced by this fact. Then, as the working seemed suddenly to deepen with no conscious direction from him, something came into his mind that made him jerk back as fast as would the appearance of a knife-brandishing killer from the First Level. This was a flood of emotion. It was no such emotion as Rolf could remember ever feeling. Fear was in it, and anger, with hints of the sexual energies, and lust and greed, but mostly there was hunger in it.

Raw hunger!

It was not really hunger for food or for sex, it was hunger for power. On the whole of Mars, on the whole of Earth, there was not enough power to satisfy, to sate, and to ease this hunger. This hunger fed upon itself and grew greater with its own feeding. A face was connected with it, the face of a man that Rolf had never seen. And never wanted to see. The face was young, with prominent cheekbones, and snapping black eyes that glared out at the world, now with feverish intensity, now with cold calculation, as the mind behind the face raced itself in trying to understand how best to take the world.

As he caught a glimpse of this face, the emotion deepened. Sudden tremors began in Rolf's body. He tried to control them—and found he could not. Almost instantly, the tremors became muscle spasms so heavy they were acutely painful.

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Blackness appeared in front of his eyes. His breathing was suddenly heavy. He tried to cry out. His voice was a hoarse gulping sound. He forced himself to his feet.

Instantly, his muscles gave way under him. He fell forward and was unconscious before he hit the floor.

His falling body broke the wire that connected the tiny earplugs to the *teliknon*.

Chapter Two

COMING BACK to partial consciousness, he was aware that somewhere a voice was speaking anguished Martian. "*Rolfen! Vaden us! Vaden us!*" He knew this was Thallen's voice telling him to wake up but the anguish in it surprised him. Thallen had always seemed to him to be beyond emotion.

Opening his eyes, Rolf looked at Thallen bending over him. The wrinkled face of the ancient Martian had no happiness on it.

"*Es emol tesun!*" Thallen asked. "What happened?"

"I—I don't know," the human answered. He stared around in growing bewilderment. Somewhere in the back of his mind a memory of a lightning flash, of a silence, of a human face, and of a flood of raw emotion was swiftly fading away. When the memory was gone, he could not even recall that these things had ever happened, only that *something* had taken place. Confusion on his face, he stared at Thallen. Trying to get to his feet, he discovered he did not have the strength for it.

"You stay right there and don't try to move," Thallen said hastily, in quick Martian. "I'll get someone to help carry you up to my physician. Thallen went out of the big room that

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Rolf used as a laboratory, only to return quickly with four Martians and a device that could be used as a carrying litter.

Ignoring Rolf's protests, they put him on the litter and bore him to the broad steps that led upward to the Fifth Level. At Thallen's polite request, they began the steep ascent. Looking down, Rolf saw, far below, several men and a woman moving upward. Perhaps they had come with the ship that he had heard land before something had happened. He would have liked to wait and talk to them. His ears had grown hungry for the sound of the old language he had spoken on Earth, he suddenly realized.

But Thallen would permit no waiting. The litter bearers, all Fourth Level Martians, obeyed him without question. He belonged to the Fifth Level. Here on Suzusilmar it was accounted wisdom to grant any rare favors a visitor from a higher level chose to ask.

Rolf, feeling weak again, lay back on the litter and was glad to be carried. Half way up the worn steps, he suddenly sat up. Thallen was instantly at his side.

"What is it, Rolfen?" Worry showed on the Martian's face.

"The silence touched me again," Rolf answered.

"Silence?"

"Yes. The stillness. A voice whispered in my mind. *Stop here. Go no farther!* What does it mean, Thallen? Often, when climbing these steps to visit you, I have felt a barrier as thin as a spider-web—"

"Such a barrier exists. Its purpose is—" Thallen's gaze went down the miles of steps to the sprawling rat warren on the floor of the desert. "It is not a physical thing. It touches the mind—But, no more. Move faster!" he said to the litter carriers.

At the top of the steps, where the Fifth Level began, stood what looked like a scarecrow, strayed to Mars from some farmer's field on Earth. This was Jalnar, the half-blind beggar of Suzusilmar. Jalnar wore no shoes, not even sandals. His robe was black and patched. Leaning on a stick of wood, he watched from almost sightless eyes the little procession come up from below.

Thallen bowed to him. The litter bearers bowed to him.

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Jalnar bowed in reply. As the litter bearers hurried on, Rolf was aware that the half-blind eyes of the beggar followed them. If a mystery was here, the human was content to let it go unprobed. Another mystery was taking place inside him. As they reached the Fifth Level, peace had come into him. The feeling in him was that some long-sought goal had been reached. Was the Fifth Level truly Paradise, as many Martians claimed? If it was, then he was an intruder in Paradise, for mingled with the peace that had come into him had come a feeling of uneasiness.

Under the light of the far-off sun, the Fifth Level of Suzusilmar *did* look like Paradise. There was no manufacturing here, no industry, no hustle and bustle of trade. Instead, the whole level was a vast circle of park-like lawns where flowers bloomed and shrubbery gave off sweet odors. Fountains splashed here and between the trees, little lakes gleamed like polished silver. Among the trees were little homes where the Fifth Level Martians lived.

Above it, climbing into the infinite sky, was the Sixth Level. Few lived there. Above that, where the towering metal spire was a spear thrust at vast space, was the Seventh Level. No one lived there. Occasionally a few Martians visited that dizzy height but they did not remain long.

The physician, a look of inquiry on his face, rose to meet them as they entered. He was a slender Martian, tall, with quiet features and eyes that seemed to look either outward or inward, as he chose. Thallen's tongue flowed like water in explanation and the physician signed for them to enter his examining room. There Rolf was laid on a table. The litter-bearers went out noiselessly. The examining room was simply furnished. Light flowed in from all sides and from a round sky-light in the roof. Up there was a small metal spire, apparently a duplicate of the vast spire that reached upward from the Seventh Level, but much shorter. The only piece of equipment that Rolf could see was a device that resembled a Chinese abacus, with different colored beads on strings. The physician, whose name was Unardo, seated himself behind this abacus, and Thallen, his bronze face as immobile as a statue of one of the ancient gods of Mars, sat at Rolf's head.

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Unardo looked at Rolf, then his eyes lost their focus and seemed to look inward, at some private world that existed within him. Watching him, Rolf was certain that this Martian was no longer seeing him. Lying down, Rolf glanced upward toward Thallen at his head. Thallen seemed to have stopped breathing.

The physician lifted a hand. With one finger, he touched a bead on the abacus, moving it. Somewhere a soft note sounded, then was still. Rolf had the startled impression that in response a note sounded within his body, in harmony with the note the physician had struck, but an octave higher. This bewildered him. How could his own body give off a musical tone? He was in the process of trying to decide that he had heard no such note as an echo when the physician moved another bead on the abacus. Another note sounded somewhere in Rolf's body, in harmony, but now an octave lower. Then the physician moved other beads on the abacus, so fast the eyes could hardly follow his twinkling fingers, so that the treatment room was filled with some strange melody. Again the echoes came from John Rolf. As he tried to understand how this could be, he began to realize that he was feeling much better, that the weakness was leaving him, that strength and balance were coming into him.

Then the physician struck one final note, his eyes looked outward at Rolf as if checking the results of his treatment, he smiled, and rose from his seat. Behind the human, Thallen dared to breathe again. Rolf found himself rising from the table, he found, miraculously, that he could rise, he also found that he had the strength to stand. He stammered his thanks, he started to ask questions—dozens of them were clamoring at his lips—but Thallen waved the questions aside with a gentle smile that was like that of a father stilling the queries of a young and very curious son. Thallen was also moving Rolf toward the door, as if it was time to leave.

"But I have to pay him," Rolf protested. He turned to the physician. "How much do I owe you for your services?"

Unardo looked blank, then turned questioning eyes at Thallen.

"Hush," Thallen said gently, to Rolf. "You owe him noth-

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ing. This is the Fifth Level of Mars! Here there is no owing or being owed, no paying or being paid."

Rolf knew that he had been helped, that strength and balance had been poured into him. He had no idea how this had been accomplished though he guessed that what looked like an abacus was actually a control device for some kind of energy. Thallen was unwilling, or unable, to explain. When they reached the steps leading down to the Fourth Level, Rolf was still trying to argue the points.

"Jalnar has gone," Thallen said, looking round for the almost-blind beggar. He seemed a little disappointed at Jalnar's absence. "As for you, Rolfen, I suggest you be very careful when you return to your workshop. It may be that you have visitors, and a surprise, waiting for you there."

Refusing to answer further questions, Thallen turned away. John Rolf, still very much bewildered, went down the great steps alone.

In the middle of the vast flight, the silence came again. It was muted now, and somehow friendlier. It was less of a barrier. In it was no voice telling him to stay away. On the other hand, no voice told him to return. Just silence, and a feeling that here was something that his mind was not yet ready to probe or to understand.

He paused for an instant to glance at the scene before him. Below, dropping away for level after level, the great steps led downward for miles until they reached the broad desert plains of Mars. At the base of the mighty mountain, little structures that looked like doll houses from this height clustered in a great circle around Suzusilmar. Supplied by water bubbling out of the foot of the mountain, irrigated fields of green stretched out to the desert's dege.

Above him were two other levels, and at the top, the tall metal spire like an antenna of some gigantic radio station in the long-forgotten past, stretched its slender finger out to high heaven.

If it had even been used as an antenna, the radio station that had worked through it had long since vanished. As had the architects who had planned the great terraces that circled

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this vast mountain and the stone masons who had carved the terraces out of stone as hard as granite.

Martians on the second and third level thought that giants had done the stone work here. On the first level, they believed that the same giants had built the mountain itself. On the Fourth Level, which Rolf called home, they didn't know. On the higher levels, they would not talk at all on this subject.

Certainly the work had been done long, long before. The steps, cut out of the hardest stone Rolf had ever seen, had risen a foot when they were new. Now they were as thin as slate shingles at the lower levels, worn this way by countless feet. At the higher levels there had been less traffic and the steps had had very little wear.

Rolf had often wondered what kept the Martians of the various levels separate from each other. Those of the lowest levels were thieves and killers. On the higher levels was what they would regard as great wealth. But they never tried to steal from the higher levels. They could advance to a higher level on merit, they could visit any higher level they wished, and often did, but they would not or did not attack the higher levels. Nor would a Martian from the higher levels interfere in any way in lower level affairs.

This was *The Law*, Thallen had explained.

Rolf entered his quarters. Two men turned quickly to greet him. He had the vague impression that he caught the scurry of footsteps in the rear rooms. The sight of the two men drove all thought of the footsteps out of his mind.

He did not know these men, he did not need to know them. He knew the type. The broad, forced smiles, the arrogant, cocksure carriage, the hands extended instantly to him, the impression they gave that in their opinion they owned the Earth—and Mars too, now that they were here—all combined to tell him that these were Company men in the best and the worst tradition. They seemed to run a race to greet John Rolf. The one with the broadest smile, with high cheekbones and black eyes, reached him first. Rolf did not extend his hand in greeting but this man grabbed it anyhow, clutched it, held on to it, pumped it firmly, and began to talk.

"Mr. Rolf! It's an honor to meet you, sir. We have come

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all the way from Earth to consult with you, sir. My name is Hardesty. I'm with the Company for Better Planetary Relations. Perhaps—"

"I know," Rolf said.

"You know?" Hardesty was taken aback. Rolf utilized the man's momentary confusion to retrieve his hand. "How could you know? Who leaked the information to you? No one knew we are establishing a branch office here—"

"I know you work for the Company," Rolf explained. "I did not know you were establishing a branch office. No one leaked anything to me. As to how I knew you were with the Company, your manners told me."

"Eh?" Hardesty seemed pleased.

"Every one who works for the Company always has perfect manners," Rolf continued.

"Thank you, sir," Hardesty said, beaming.

"And no morals," Rolf said.

Hardesty's face lost its beam. For a second, hate looked out of his black eyes as a glare that glittered. It was instantly veiled. Hardesty, suddenly laughing, instantly began to pretend that what Rolf had said was a joke. "That's a good one, sir. I'll have to remember to tell that to the old man. You remember him, sir, old H.B. A great man, sir, a great man."

"I remember him," Rolf said, acid in his voice. "An unprincipled thief. Neither a dollar, nor a woman, were safe with him."

"Sir—"

"Don't act shocked, young man. You know the truth, or you wouldn't be here as manager of the branch being established here. You probably know so much that the old man rewarded you with this post, to get you to shut up."

"Sir!"

"Blackmail is not a recent discovery," Rolf continued. "Unless the Company has mended its morals—and it never does—promotion for a young man is based exclusively on marriage to the daughter of some executive, or upon blackmail."

Hardesty's black eyes popped with anger. But behind the anger was alarm; how could this old fool know so much?

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The second man stayed behind Hardesty. Rolf was suddenly aware of the presence of this second man. As he glanced at the second man, he saw a smooth face, bold blue eyes, and a repressed manner. He knew instantly the function of this second man. This was another type he had not forgotten. He did not ask to be introduced.

"You are bitter, sir," Hardesty said, regaining some of his shattered poise. "Perhaps this was true when you were with the Company, Sir. But times have changed. We're not perfect; we don't pretend we are. But we are doing our best." The smile came back to Hardesty's face. "Permit me to introduce my assistant. Mr. Beller, meet Mr. Rolf."

Rolf took the hand. He didn't like the feel of it and he let go of it immediately. "Perhaps times have changed but styles in killers haven't," he said to Hardesty.

All the poise that Hardesty had regained he instantly lost. "Sir!"

"I hired them in the old days too," Rolf said. "Innocent-appearing young men who had only one quality to recommend them—their speed with a gun."

"I beg your pardon!" Beller said, explosively. He looked quickly at his boss and his hand moved toward his coat. At Hardesty's head shake, the hand stopped moving.

"I had to kill a couple of them myself," Rolf continued. "The trouble with them is—they get ambitious too. You had better watch this one." He nodded toward Beller. "If he ever gets the evidence he needs, he'll blackmail you too. Keep your hands in sight, Mr. Beller, lest you prove my point."

Again Beller's hand came reluctantly from inside his coat. Rolf looked full into the blue eyes of the man. When they faltered, he turned his attention back to Hardesty. "What do you seek from me, young man?"

"Your co-operation, sir," Hardesty answered.

"My co-operation?"

"Naturally, sir." Hardesty tried a weather-testing smile. When it seemed to be successful, he picked up his courage again. "You have been here a long time. You know your way around, you know the language, you know the customs, you know what is here that is valuable—"

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"Oh," Rolf said.

"It's not that we are not prepared to pay fair prices, sir. We most certainly intend to deal fairly with the natives."

"I see," Rolf said. "Generous of you, I'm sure."

"You know what art objects are here, you know what inventions are here that might be worth taking back to Earth for development. Sometimes these goonies have made really important discoveries, I understand. Maybe that's one of them, sir." He nodded toward the *teliknon* on the work bench. "You also know the important people. You know how it is, sir. When you open up a branch in a new place, it's better to get in on the ground floor."

"I see," Rolf said. "Men have been here for several months, on the lower levels. Were these Company men?"

"I don't mind telling you, sir—they were. And still are."

"Then you must know what is here," Rolf said.

"We have a general idea."

"Then why do you want me?"

"You can make it easier for us, sir. Also you may know of things our men have missed. Of course, we are willing to take care of your end. You will be well paid."

"Paid?" Rolf said. This was a word he had almost forgotten.

"Naturally, sir. I know you must have brought quite a pile with you from Earth but this may be all used up by now. From what I hear, you're working part time—"

"I am working," Rolf said. "I went to work as soon as I arrived here."

"Huh. But you must have brought plenty—"

"I didn't bring a dime," Rolf said.

"What? But you were loaded!"

"I gave it all to Sylvia, in the divorce settlement, to meet her needs and to rear and educate our daughter," Rolf said. "I work the equivalent of twenty hours a week here. I am paid nothing, but the exchange system based on work units takes care of all of my needs. If I want specialized equipment, my Martian friends here are glad to make it for me, at no charge."

Hardesty's face revealed conflicting emotions as he listened. He was startled at first at the thought of a man giving away

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all of his wealth in a divorce settlement. His face said, "The damned fool! She really took him to the cleaners!" When Rolf said he was not paid for working on Mars, Hardesty's face showed doubt, the expression saying, "Only a fool works for nothing!"

Rolf refrained from saying that on the Fifth Level, he had just insulted a Martian by trying to pay him. Deep in his mind he knew that he wanted no part of these two men, or the Company they represented. The only problem was how to get rid of them. He wanted to be left alone, to think about the things that had just happened to him on the Fifth Level, to wonder about a Martian named Unardo, and to think about a strange little instrument that resembled a Chinese abacus, which gave off musical tones when the beads were moved, and by some method which he did not pretend he understood, brought healing to a man's body and peace to a tortured mind. He had seen a miracle that fascinated him. He wanted to be alone to think about it, to wonder, perhaps to dream.

As he watched the expressions change on Hardesty's face, he was aware that somewhere deep within him he was touching the fringes of the silence, the inner stillness. He was beginning to see something there, to see it dimly, as in a glass darkly. It was not something that he wanted to see. Coming along with it were emotions, raw—

Suddenly he saw what he had not wanted to see. It was the face he had seen when the *teliknon* had worked for the first time, when the silence had first appeared. It was Hardesty's face! As he recognized this, the flood of raw emotion, of eternal hunger for power, threatened to pour again into his mind. He felt it strike him and he knew he flinched away from it as from a blow. He also felt that it did not strike now with its former impact. Either some barrier had been built which was stopping the full flow of it, or some shunt had been constructed which was turning the full raw current aside from his mind. As this happened, he got a glimpse of the genius of Unardo; he was grateful for the wonder-working skill of that Martian of the Fifth Level. Except for Unardo's work, he knew that he would be fainting

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again as his mind shattered before this flow of angry energy. Now the only effect of it was a slight tremor in his fingers.

But he knew Hardesty now, knew him intuitively, whereas until now he had only known the type. Now he knew the man. The man was worse than the type.

"So you won't co-operate with us?" Hardesty said.

"You have nothing to offer me and I have nothing to offer you," Rolf said. He turned to the door and opened it as an invitation to them to leave, then, as he got the door open, stared at what he saw there.

Jalnar was tapping his way along the path to the door. Finding it open, he bowed. His stick tapped softly on the floor as he entered.

"What's this?" Hardesty said.

"A Martian friend," Rolf answered hastily.

"A *friend*?" Hardesty's gaze went over the tattered robe, the gnarled feet without sandals, the almost blind face. "You keep strange company, Rolf. The time was when you would have had beggars like this thrown out the back door. Now you welcome them and call them *friend*." Contempt, raw and undisguised, was in his voice. He made no effort to conceal it.

"Perhaps both the times and I have changed," Rolf said softly. He made Jalnar welcome, explaining that the two humans were just leaving. Jalnar nodded but whispered that he had no wish to intrude, that he would just stand against the wall while the humans finished their talk.

"This is your last chance to go along with us," Hardesty said, to Rolf.

"I'm not going with you," Rolf answered. "Your way and my way parted long ago."

"But, man, there's a mint in this place," Hardesty said.

Rolf shook his head. He nodded again to the door. The silence had gone from his mind but it had left memories of its content. Now, more than ever, he wanted to be alone to think. Or at least he wanted to be free of human company. With Jalnar one could be silent.

"Okay," Hardesty said. "You've asked for it. You'll get it."

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His manner said that since arguments had failed, he was now going to bring up his heavy artillery.

"Go bring her in, Beller," he said.

The smooth-faced man nodded and moved to the rear. He went out of sight there. An instant later he returned. He wasn't exactly pushing her but the forceful way in which he held her arm indicated that this young woman was coming into the room whether or not she wanted to.

The young woman's face was a mixture of emotions. She tried to pull her arm out of Beller's grasp and failed. She tried to hold herself erect, to walk firmly and proudly into the room but this effort failed too as her feet dragged. She gave one glance upward at John Rolf, then hastily turned her eyes down to the floor. When she was fully in the room, she was only a few feet from Rolf, but she was still looking down. Her shoulders sagged in shame.

"I want you to meet my secretary," Hardesty said. His tone of voice was that of a man revealing an ace until now hidden in the hole. "Her name is Jennie."

"Jennie?" Rolf said doubtfully. He knew that company executives usually brought young women with them on protracted planetary trips. They called these young women *secretaries*. This was a polite term. Back of it there might—or might not be, depending on the young woman—an uglier meaning. "What does this have to do with—"

The young woman looked up. Now for the first time Rolf saw her eyes clearly. In them was such shame that he had never known. In them was something else too, a longing and a love greater than anything he had ever glimpsed in the eyes of any woman.

This fact startled him. Why should any woman, particularly any young woman, look at him with longing and with love? Why should there be another odd quality in her eyes, as if she wanted him to know her, as if beyond all other things she wanted him to remember her?

Then he did recognize her. He did remember her. At the memory, shock rolled through him.

This young woman, grown now, was his daughter!

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Chapter Three

FOR A SPLIT second, the scene held frozen and motionless. During this interval John Rolf realized that the hunger in his daughter's eyes had an answering echo in his own heart. Involuntarily, as if she were still a child, he held out his hands to her. Once this had been a signal for her to run and jump into his arms. It was still such a signal! Before Rolf fully realized what was happening, she had torn herself loose from Beller and had thrown herself into his arms. She kissed him perhaps fifty times, then locked her arms around his neck, dropped her head under his chin, and began to cry.

For a time it seemed to Rolf that the old days had come again. Patting her gently, he tried to comfort her as he would have done if she had still been a small child. "My dear! What is there to cry about?"

"I'm c-crying because I'm h-happy," she answered, looking up at him. "If you had known how I longed to see you again—" Again the tears came.

John Rolf was acutely uncomfortable. He thought he had left his past behind him, on the Home Planet. Here was part of it, sobbing out her heart in his arms.

"You were only a child when I left," he tried to say. "It did not seem wise to bring you to Mars. Your mother would have objected and the courts would have upheld her—"

"Let her object! Let the courts go hang!"

"But they have the power," Rolf protested. "Also, there were no other human children here on Mars."

"This would not have mattered."

"But a child deserves to grow up with her own kind."

"A child deserves to grow up with her father," Jennie

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answered him. "I don't care what the child psychologists say!"

"But your mother—"

"Has become a chronic alcoholic who spends her time chasing men!" Jennie told him.

Rolf stared at his daughter in startled dismay. "My dear! There is such a thing as respect for your parents!"

"Then let them earn my respect," Jennie answered. The tears disappeared. She looked at him from suddenly thoughtful eyes. "That goes for you too!"

At the expression which came over his face, she was suddenly dismayed. "Daddy, I don't mean to be harsh, I don't mean to be bitter. It is just that I was miserable on Earth. I thought if I came here, where you were—" Again the tears flooded her eyes.

Rolf comforted her as best he could. Deep in his heart, he knew that he needed comfort himself. He felt as if the burdens of the world were being placed on his shoulders, yet he knew that he could not refuse them. Turning to Hardesty, he caught the look of triumph on his man's face—and knew that he faced additional problems.

"Thank you for bringing my daughter to me," he said.

"No thanks are needed," Hardesty answered. "She came as my secretary."

"Oh," Rolf said, in a voice that was suddenly toneless. "On a Company contract?" The words were choked from his lips.

"Naturally," Hardesty said.

"We're on Mars," Jennie spoke. "The contract is not binding here!"

Hardesty chuckled. "I think you will find that the contract empowers the Company, or its representatives, to use necessary measures to enforce its contracts anywhere." His chuckle grew stronger. "One of the best minds the Company ever had invented these contracts."

John Rolf was suddenly aware that his daughter was looking at him. He did not like what he was seeing in her eyes.

"The Company was having trouble getting young men to go to the planets," Hardesty continued. "A genius solved

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this problem by the invention of the secretarial contract. After this, the young men had no objection to prolonged stays on the planets."

Rolf was silent. If there was fury in his heart, he was doing his best to conceal it. Jennie was still looking at him.

"The young genius in human relations who invented this secretarial contract got a big leg up as his reward," Hardesty continued. "He became vice president and eventually president."

John Rolf was aware that his daughter's eyes were still on him. "The secretaries who signed these contracts didn't *have* to become mistresses of the young men," he said, his voice choked. "There was absolutely nothing in the contracts that said they had to, but if they did, adequate provisions were made—"

His voice faltered into silence. Hardesty laughed again, one of the most cruel sounds John Rolf had ever heard. Jennie continued to look at him.

"He's talking about you," Jennie said. "You were the young genius who became president of the Company."

"I—" Rolf choked. "All of this is true. All of it belongs to my past. When I saw the monster the Company had become, the monster I had helped create, I—I chucked the whole thing. When I could no longer stand the sight of all the bright young men who filled the Company employment offices to overflowing, using every bit of pull they had in an effort to secure preference, when I realized that deep in their hearts every one of them was a wolf, striving to better himself at the expense of his companions, when I grew very, very tired of looking at all the beautiful young women, also thronging the employment offices, each one of them using every wile she had, including sex, to get the chance to sign one of those secretarial contracts, I knew there was something wrong with the whole human race, including me. What I saw in the Company made me realize we were not humans, we were well-educated, polished, suave animals. We *looked* human, we wore human bodies, but the jungle was deep in the heart of all of us. I chucked the whole thing, and came

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here, in a desperate effort to find a solution to the problem of the jungle in the heart of every man."

When he finished speaking, the look in Jennie's eyes had changed. It had lost its hard bitterness, had softened. Rolf felt much better.

"Have you succeeded?" Hardesty asked.

"I have made a beginning," Rolf said. Involuntarily he glanced at the *teliknon*, then, realizing that such a glance might be revealing too much, he looked quickly away. "The Martians have solved the problem. The answer is here, in Suzusilmar somewhere, but the Martians either cannot or will not reveal it."

"Why not?" Hardesty asked. "If they have anything that is really good, we could make it worth their while."

"I think they have some idea that no one can use anything wisely until he has earned the right," Rolf answered.

"This one does not seem to be very far advanced," Hardesty said, nodding toward Jalnar. Leaning on his staff with his back against the wall, the almost blind Martian looked like a bent, wrinkled scarecrow. "Maybe he hasn't earned the right to use this mysterious something that you think will save humanity."

"Perhaps not," Rolf answered. "There are many mysteries here. He is not the least of them."

"What's mysterious about a blind beggar?" Hardesty asked.

Rolf shrugged, indicating he had no answer. Hardesty, motioning to Beller to follow him, moved to the door. He stopped as Jennie called to him and looked inquiringly at her.

A smile was on her face. Looking at her, Rolf thought proudly that he had sired a beautiful young woman for a daughter.

"I didn't hear the whole story but I gathered that you wanted my father to co-operate with you," she said to Hardesty.

"Why, I—" Hardesty glanced at Rolf. He did not want his own private motives put too clearly into words. "It's a business matter. Nothing that need concern you, my dear."

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"Business matters should concern your secretary, Jim," she answered. The smile on her face grew warmer. Approaching Hardesty, she stood looking appealingly up at him. "If you and Daddy are going into business together, I think I should know about it."

To Hardesty in this moment, she must have looked like a soft, fluffy, and very desirable kitten. The smile on her face was enough to make any man's emotions jump.

"We're thinking about it," Hardesty answered. "He seems a little reluctant but I am sure he will see his way clear to co-operating with us." He grinned at her and reached out and caught her chin in his hand. "Don't you worry about it. Just stay here and get acquainted with your daddy again. We'll come back in a day or two for another talk."

She slipped her chin out of his hand. "There's still one thing that puzzles me, Jim. You came to me back on Earth and offered me a contract as a secretary."

"So I did," Hardesty answered promptly. "I heard you were looking for an opening and I thought you would be very glad to come to Mars and visit your father."

"So I am," Jennie answered quickly. "You don't understand how glad I am to be here with him."

"That's very good," Hardesty beamed. "Then I have done both of you a favor."

John Rolf, listening, knew perfectly well the meaning in Hardesty's mind. It was a meaning that sickened him. He had seen Company politics work too often to fail to understand that Hardesty fully intended to use Jennie to force his co-operation. It was his guess that Hardesty had no intention of letting her know this. She might not like being used as a pawn in company politics.

Jennie's smile grew softer. "What I want to know, Jim, is this: When you offered me a secretarial contract back on Earth, did you plan to use me, and this contract, to force my father to make a deal with you here on Mars?"

Jennie's voice was gentle, a whisper in the silent room.

"Of course not, my dear," Hardesty said hastily. "I was merely trying to do both of you a favor—"

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"I think you are a liar," Jennie said.

"My dear—"

She hit him full in the mouth with her fist.

It was as sharp and as sudden a blow as John Rolf had ever seen struck. And as powerful a blow as he had ever seen a woman strike. It sent Hardesty reeling backward.

Knowing what was going to happen next, Rolf whirled toward Beller. The blue eyed man had started to reach inside his coat. Rolf did not think he could reach the killer before the gun was drawn, but he knew he had to try.

"Stand still, Daddy!" Jennie called sharply.

Rolf caught his body movement. At the same time, Beller, looking at Jennie, froze the movement of his hand. Rolf turned to look at his daughter. A tiny gun was in her hand. A split second after she had slugged Hardesty, she had drawn the gun from her jacket pocket. Now it covered Beller. The blue eyed man looked dazed.

Jennie backed swiftly against the wall until she was standing beside the almost-blind Jalnar. He did not seem to realize what was going on—or that anything important was happening. With one gun, Jennie tried to cover both Hardesty and Beller.

Hardesty was getting to his feet. Blood was on his lips. "You little bitch—"

The gun in Jennie's hand swung to cover him.

At the same instant, Beller drew.

Rolf tried to cry out, tried to leap at the man. He knew that both efforts were too slow. He knew also that Beller would have no compunction about shooting a woman.

Beller's gun came free from inside his coat. As he brought it up, something swished past Rolf's head. It struck the weapon and went on across the room. The gun was knocked from Beller's hand.

"If you try to pick it up, I'll put a bullet in your boss!" Jennie said.

Beller made no effort to bend over.

Rolf turned his head. The staff was gone from Jalnar's hand.

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Jennie gestured with her tiny gun toward the door. "Get out of here, both of you!" she said.

Rage threatening to burst into the flaring flame of murder was on Hardesty's face. He had been out-generalled by a woman. He had been struck in the mouth by a woman. At this moment, he would enjoy nothing so much as he would enjoy killing the woman who had done this to him.

The woman was covering him with a gun. He knew she would shoot him if he did not obey her.

Hardesty went out the door. Beller followed him.

They had entered as wolves. Leaving, they looked like whipped dogs with their tails between their legs.

Rolf turned to his daughter. She dropped the gun on the floor and threw herself into his arms. She was crying again. "D—daddy, I don't know where I got the courage to hit him in his big fat mouth," she blubbered, and wiped her nose on his jacket.

"If I had had a son, he could not have struck a better blow," Rolf said, pride in his voice.

"Y—you always wanted me to be a boy. Well, I'm not. I'm a g-g-girl!" Again she wiped her nose on his coat.

Over her shoulder Rolf watched Jalnar. The almost blind Martian was fumbling his way across the room. Rolf moved to help him.

"No," Jalnar said.

Rolf backed away. Jalnar got down on his hands and knees. He found the gun Beller had dropped, then, as if it was hot, quickly took his fingers away from it. He continued his fumbling search until he found his staff. Clutching this, he got to his feet and moved toward the door.

"My deep thanks to you," Rolf said. "Surely you will stay longer."

The almost-blind eyes turned toward him. From the lack of expression in them, Rolf was willing to swear that Jalnar could not see him—or not clearly. Yet it was Jalnar who had thrown this staff with deadly accuracy!

"No thanks are needed," Jalnar answered, in soft Martian.

"I would like you to meet my daughter," Rolf said.

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"I am honored, I am deeply honored." Jalnar bowed almost to the floor.

Jennie was silent. She had stopped crying. Now she looked with incredulous eyes at this almost-blind Martian. "It is I who am honored," she said.

Jalnar bowed again, then tapped his way out the door. They could hear his staff tapping its way into the distance.

"I don't know why I said I was honored to meet him," Jennie whispered. Her eyes sought her father. "He must be almost blind, Daddy."

"He is."

"Then how could he see well enough to throw that staff?"

"I think perhaps he can see sometimes in a way that words cannot describe," Rolf answered.

"But—but if he hadn't thrown it, Beller would have killed me," Jennie continued.

"I know that," Rolf answered.

"I—I owe my life to a half-blind Martian beggar. He—he had to feel to find his staff again. How could he see well enough to throw it?" Incredulity and awe were deep in Jennie's voice.

"An equally important question might be how he happened to be here at just the exact moment when he would be needed," Rolf said, musingly. He shook his head, to clear it of thoughts that went far beyond the world of the senses, to causes and effects that possibly had their roots in other dimensions, in other worlds of frequency.

"Daddy, I don't understand," Jennie whispered.

"This is Suzusilmar," Rolf answered. "Things are here that no man has ever understood—and very few Martians."

He watched the awe deepen in her eyes as he spoke. "Suzusilmar and its seven levels make up the greatest mystery of Mars. Perhaps the greatest mystery of the whole Solar System," he continued. "Here the word *mind* has a different meaning than it has on Earth. For centuries past the counting, here on this mountain, the Martians have probed the meaning of this word. Even now they have not reached the bottom of its meaning. Perhaps it has no bottom. Perhaps *mind* is only another word for infinity; and the little pieces of it that

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we have, and call our *minds*, are only little bits of infinity—working through all the vastness of space-time, building a mosaic of twice ten billion worlds with ten times ten trillion life forms that we call men and Martians.” His voice faltered away from the meaning of the words that he was using.

“It’s so weird—and so wonderful,” Jennie whispered. “Somehow I feel as if just now I have finally touched just the fringe of the meaning of life.”

He smiled at her. “Keep that feeling of wonder, my dear. It’s the most important feeling you can ever have. Now, enough of this. You must tell me about yourself and what you have done since I saw you last. I’m still so shaken with the knowledge that you are here that I am hardly in control of myself.”

Both forgot the guns on the floor. Much later, Rolf was still listening to her when a knock came on the door. Apologizing, he rose to open it.

A man in the space uniform of the Company stood there. At the sight of him, Jennie screeched and fled. John Rolf stared in perplexity at the man who entered.

Tall and lanky, with arms and legs that seemed to join his body at improbable angles, the man who entered looked like an Ichabod Crane of space. He caught a glimpse of Jennie fleeing toward the rear and yelled at her.

“Hey, Jenniel Wait! Don’t run off on me again. Jenniel!”

The door slammed shut behind her.

The tall man looked disappointed. For the first time, he really became aware of John Rolf. “Are you John Rolf? Are you Jennie’s father?” He did not wait for an answer to either question. “Glad to meet you, sir. I’m Bill Hoker. Back on Earth, Jennie told me a lot about you, that is, she did when she was willing to talk to me at all.”

Rolf found one of Hoker’s long arms stretched out to him. He took it. The hand was warm and friendly. If Hardesty and Beller were wolves, this man had something of the puppy about him, curious and inquisitive, but very friendly and very willing to wag his tail at anybody. Rolf liked him instantly, but he was also aware that Hoker wore the uniform of the Company.

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"You're worrying about the uniform, sir?" Hoker said. "I worked my way to Mars, as a cook's helper on the ship. Jennie didn't even know I was aboard."

"Could I ask why?" Rolf said.

"Why—hell!—beg pardon, sir. It was because Jennie was coming here, on a secretarial contract. The only way I could get here too was to sign on the same ship."

"Then Jennie was the reason you came?"

"Naturally, sir. Your daughter is a very fine woman." Hoker's grin was boyish. He was a little embarrassed, but too honest to deny his own feelings. Hoker twisted uncomfortably on his long legs and looked down at the floor.

He saw the two pistols still lying there. The grin on his face went away. He reached down and picked up the little weapon. "This is Jennie's gun," he said. "On my way up here, I saw Jim Hardesty. I ducked out of sight on one of the levels and he didn't see me. Hardesty was bleeding from the mouth." His eyes looked questioningly at John Rolf.

"There was a little trouble," Rolf said.

"I'm not astonished," Hoker answered. "Is—is Jennie all right?"

"Of course I'm all right," Jennie answered, entering. "And I'll thank you for my gun. I may need it again, now that you are around." She smiled at Hoker.

A hurt look on his face, he yielded the gun. "Jennie, you know I wouldn't harm a single hair on your head."

"I know that, silly!" Her smile was a heart-warming thing. "I was only teasing." She turned to her father, to introduce Bill Hoker over again.

John Rolf hardly heard a word she said. He was engrossed in the change in her appearance. All traces of tears were gone from her face, all the little-girl characteristics from her manner.

Then Rolf realized that Hoker was speaking to him.

"I love your daughter, sir. I want to ask your permission to marry her."

"My permission?" Rolf gasped. "Why don't you ask her?"

"I have asked her at least a dozen times," Hoker answered, grinning. "She has turned me down every time. I thought, if

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she knew I had your permission, she might weaken the next time I asked her."

John Rolf sighed. The ways of a man with a maid—and a maid with a man—were included among the many wonderful things of Earth that he thought he had forgotten forever.

One part of John Rolf was very glad to have Jennie here with him, and Bill Hoker too. Another part of him—that part which longed to see his dream of the *teliknon* come true—was worried that their presence might delay the perfection of this instrument.

This second part was even more worried about Jim Hardesty. This was a breed of wolf that John Rolf had known too well in the old days to have any illusions about the purity of his motives or the legality of his methods.

Chapter Four

"BUT DO YOU really wish to give to all men a means by which they can read each other's mind?" Thallen asked, for perhaps the tenth time.

Thallen, even by Martian standards, was old. His face was wrinkled and his step was slow. Only the eternally bright twinkle in his eyes revealed the youthful spirit within him. Living on the Fifth Level, he had taken Rolf under his wing as soon as the human had arrived in Suzusilmar. They were sitting in Rolf's laboratory, with the *teliknon* on the workbench.

"It has to go to all men," Rolf explained for perhaps the tenth time. "If only one man has it, he will use it to build himself a vast personal empire."

"You seem to have a poor opinion of your own race," Thallen observed.

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"There are exceptions, of course," Rolf answered. "Many of the great scientists, many of the true psychologists, would use it wisely, as a tool to help others. But they would not be able to keep it secret. Sooner or later it would pass into the hands of lesser men."

"You have a similar situation here on Mars," Rolf continued. "You do not give guns, or even bows and arrows, to the Martians of the First Level."

"It is not I who keep these weapons from them," Thallen said hastily. "It is the Law."

"Who made this Law?"

"Why—I—It is our tradition."

Rolf grinned. They were old friends, each at ease with the other. "Every time I ask you about the Law, you start squirming. There is more here than meets the eye."

"This is precisely what I am trying to point out to you, as delicately as I can," Thallen answered. "There is more in the *teliknon* than meets the eye."

"I hope so," Rolf answered.

"Are you prepared to face this *more*, are you strong enough?" Thallen asked.

Rolf shrugged. "We will cross that bridge when we come to it. Back on Earth we have what we call the challenge-response theory. This says that it is only facing our challenges, and responding adequately to them, that we become strong."

Thallen sighed. He was going to say more, but a commotion in the outer room announced the arrival of Jennie and Bill, home from school for the day. Thallen took his quiet departure as Jennie and Bill entered.

"How does it feel to be school kids again?" Rolf asked them.

"It still feels strange," Jennie answered. "They have us back in their equivalent of kindergarten. They're showing us pictures and giving us the Martian words for them. I never even heard of a language like Martian. French was simple in comparison to it. And the arithmetic! Just simple arithmetic! They don't use the decimal system based on ten. Their system is based on twelve."

"We had such systems on Earth long ago," Rolf answered.

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"I guess going to school is just part of the price we have to pay to become citizens of Mars," Hoker added. "Personally, I would rather work the required twenty hours a week than go to school."

"You have to go to school before you can even work," Rolf answered. "Both of you asked to become citizens."

"We have to become citizens," Jennie said. "If we go back to Earth, Hardesty will pull his secretarial contract on me. And if they catch Bill, either here or on Earth, they will put him in jail for jumping ship." She smiled at her father. "Anyhow, I want to stay here with you, Daddy."

"Thank you."

"Did they bring the furniture for my new room yet?" Jennie continued. Upon being told that it had arrived, both went happily off to look at her new quarters.

As soon as they had decided to become citizens, the Martians had sent crews of workmen to build an additional room on the house that Rolf occupied. It was Jennie who pointed out to them that *one* room was not enough. When Rolf tried to explain her reasons to the Martians, they had difficulty understanding why two bedrooms were needed, one for the woman, another for the man. Given the reason, the Martians had shrugged and had built an additional room for Jennie.

By the time they had finished inspecting her new room, both were hungry. They went with Rolf to the common kitchen and dining rooms where all Martians of the Fourth Level ate together. If the food was strange, their stomachs had soon learned to accept it as adequate. Each night after eating, it was their custom to stroll to the stone wall that gave them a view downward and outward over the levels below them. Jennie and Bill liked to look at the view, which was magnificent, but Rolf knew privately that his real reason for going was the hope that he would look down and see that the great ship from Earth was gone.

It was a hope that was never rewarded. The ship stayed where it had landed, just outside the cultivated area on the floor of the desert. Tonight, in the sunlight, the glint of wings was visible around it.

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"They brought along a helicopter, knocked down," Bill Hoker explained. "It's a special job with vanes designed to work in the thin air here. Scuttlebutt had it that this was Hardesty's idea. He thought it would be useful."

"I imagine it will be," Rolf answered. "How many men did he bring on the ship?"

"At least a couple of hundred, not counting the secretaries."

Two hundred men! Rolf let his gaze wander around the mighty mountain that was Suzusilmar, from the broad levels below them up to the slender finial that marked the top of the metal spire that reached out toward the blue of infinite space. He did not know the population of this place but certainly there were at least a hundred thousand Martians living on or around the mountain. Two hundred men would not make much of an impression on them. However, Rolf knew he would feel much safer if he knew Hardesty's plans.

"I must work harder," he muttered half aloud.

"At what, Daddy?" Jennie asked.

"Nothing, my dear. I was merely thinking aloud."

Her eyes regarded him thoughtfully. "I think what you meant was that you must work harder finishing the *teliknon*, so you can use it to find out what Hardesty is planning. You're still worrying about him."

"My dear—" Rolf protested.

The slow tap of a staff on stone sounded behind them. They turned as Jalnar made his cautious way to the parapet beside them. He bowed to them and they bowed in return. Leaning on his staff, he stood staring from almost-blind eyes at the scene below them.

"I remember this spot long ago," he said, in soft Martian. "It was very beautiful then. Is it still beautiful?" His voice had a wistful, pleading tone in it.

"It certainly is," Rolf answered, also in Martian.

A soft breeze, rising upward from the heated desert far below, blew across their faces. Jalnar turned his face to this gentle breeze.

"But there is trouble in the wind," he said.

Turning, he tapped his slow way from them.

From the parapet, they watched the sun sink slowly over

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the horizon of Mars. It was hard to realize this was the same sun whose rays brought warmth and life to Earth. From the Red Planet, it looked small and almost insignificant but its passing left a distinct chill in the thin air. There was no afterglow and little sunset coloring except for a yellowish haze that came from some dust storm working its way across the distant desert.

Rolf's eyes went back to the ship. Lights were glowing inside it now. A chill greater than the chill of the Martian night went through him.

When they returned to his quarters he began work on the *teliknon* immediately. For test purposes, Bill Hoker was a willing subject. Rolf discovered that to establish rapport between two minds, very careful tuning was necessary. Did this indicate that the mind of each human being operated on a specific wavelength and that occasionally, by accident, two humans tuned to each other? Rolf suspected this was true but could not prove it. The stillness seemed to be a way of cleaning some kind of debris out of the mind preparatory to making it receptive. When the impression of Hoker's mind came, Rolf found that this young man was full of unanswered questions, also that his mind was an agitated thing which jumped from thought to thought with lightning speed. Rolf knew he was not touching more than the fringes of Hoker's mind, the surface thoughts, the fleeting ideas. Depths existed which he did not attempt to plumb. He had the impression of a vast abyss into which he could plunge and lose even his own identity. He carefully skirted this area.

Testing Jennie, he found a vast, incomprehensible difference. At first, he did not know what this was, then he realized that this difference, this other-phase thing, came from the fact that she was a woman and that it probably represented the sexual component. Her mind was much calmer than Hoker's. He picked up the warm tenderness of her feeling for him. Mixed with this warmth was some as yet unresolved anger that had come from their forced separation when she was a child. She had needed him then. He felt a touch of guilt at his own failure in this area. Again he had the

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impression of the vast abyss into which he could plunge and lose himself.

Mind, even the mind of an individual, had incredible depths.

After the experiments, both Hoker and Jennie seemed relaxed and at ease, as if they had suffered no ill effects. But Hoker had questions. Among other things, he wanted to know why no transmission lines ran from the Fourth Level downward. Electricity was generated on the Fourth Level, easily and cheaply. Why weren't transmission lines run down to the lower levels? Why weren't the small, inexpensive generating units taken down the mountain? Electricity would be very useful on the lower levels.

"It is against Martian law," Rolf tried to explain. It was a poor explanation. He did not try to convince his listeners of its fairness. He knew if they went to Thallen for an explanation, the elderly Martian would only squirm away from the question. "There are things on the Fifth Level that do not exist here on the Fourth," Rolf told Bill and Jennie. "No one here misses them because we have never had them. Nor would we know how to use them wisely if we had them." He was thinking of the strange abacus that Unardo had used as a treatment instrument and which had produced what had seemed to him to be musical tones in his own body.

What were the depths and the heights of the mind? Going to sleep, Rolf was puzzling over this problem. He awakened with a start. His impression was that he had been dreaming. In his dream, something had gone wrong. Through his open window, the light of the nearer moon was in the sky. Something else was also in the sky, a sound that brought him out of bed in an instant, the dim, fading whisper of helicopter vanes spinning in the Martian night.

The whole house was dark. And silent. Too silent. Bill and Jennie were probably in bed. Without turning on a light, he made his way into the living room, to stumble over something lying on the floor and to fall in such a way that his head struck the wall. Stars exploded in front of his eyes. He lay on the floor, dazed.

As consciousness came slowly back, he was aware of

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snuffling sounds in the room, of gulping, choking noises that sent cold chills over his flesh. As he listened, he realized these sounds were coming closer to him. The cold chills intensified over his body. The crawling thing touched him. The touch jolted him back to consciousness and sent him scrambling to his feet. He was fumbling in the darkness for a weapon when the choking sounds from the floor formed into language.

"Mr. R—Rolf?"

"Bill! Is that you?" Relief flooded through Rolf as he realized the crawling thing over which he had stumbled was Bill Hoker. The relief did not last long. As he found the light switch, he was already wondering what Bill was doing on the floor.

When the lights came on, Hoker was sitting up and was making ineffectual efforts to stand up.

"Where's Jennie?" Rolf's voice was sharp.

Hoker nodded toward the couch. "Right there." His eyes widened as he realized the couch was empty. "She *was* there. We were sitting there in the dark." A touch of crimson appeared on his face as he realized he was talking to Jennie's father. "You understand how it is—"

"I understand. I was young myself once." Rolf's voice was snappish. "Where is she."

"I—I—" Confusion appeared on Hoker's face. "What am I doing down here on the floor?" He got painfully to his feet and shook his head. "My nose is all stopped up, as if I had been gassed." His eyes widened as he looked at John Rolf. "Do you suppose that somebody shot gas into the room and knocked me out. *Jennie!* Where's Jennie?"

"I don't know, but I can guess," Rolf answered. "With Hoker following him, he moved quickly outside and strode to the edge of the parapet. The lights of the great ship were still visible. Blinking lights showed where a helicopter was landing.

"He sent Beller and some of the boys, in a helicopter, to gas us and kidnap Jennie!" The growl of a great dog sounded in Hoker's throat. "I'll kill that Hardesty if it's the last thing I ever do."

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"You'll have to stand in line and take your turn," John Rolf answered.

"We'll go get him!" Hoker said. "We'll get Jennie back!"

"Right!" Rolf said. "But first, we want to know Hardesty's plans." He turned quickly to the room that served as his laboratory. Anger was deep in him, a boiling rage of it. As he settled himself on his stool, and turned on the *teliknon*, he was aware that Hoker, standing behind him, was no less angry.

"Do you know Hardesty's frequency?" Hoker whispered.

"I found it the first day he landed," Rolf answered. "By accident." Momentary caution moved in him. "If anything should happen to me, take me to Unardo, or to Thallen, on the Fifth Level."

"What could happen?" Hoker asked.

Rolf waved the younger man to silence as the stillness came. Very cautiously he tuned the *teliknon*. The stillness deepened into silence. Flickers of raw emotion passed through his mind. A face came and went. It was Hardesty's face. Triumph was in Jim Hardesty again. He was talking to Jennie. The face faded as the tuning shifted. Rolf carefully retuned the *teliknon*. He had the impression of the abyss again. Carefully he skirted it, probing with the delicate fingers of thought for the rapport with Hardesty's mind that he sought. Flickers of raw emotion came again into his mind.

What happened came like lightning out of a clear sky.

The abyss opened.

It gulped him down.

In Jim Hardesty was a maelstrom of spinning energies which combined hate and fear, greed and hunger, triumph—and now that he had Jennie back, lust.

John Rolf's ego, the center of consciousness in his mind, that part of him which said "I", was sucked into this maelstrom. In this shift, called identification by the psychologists, John Rolf forgot who he was. He thought he was Jim Hardesty. In point of fact, except for a thin segment of his consciousness which knew this was not true, and which protested, in vain, he was Jim Hardesty!

This was the abyss he had skirted. It was the loss of

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personal identity. Now he had fallen into it. The ego had slipped its moorings. He had stopped being himself. He had become something else.

He was Jim Hardesty as Hardesty talked to Jennie in the ship.

"Have you contacted him?" Bill Hoker asked.

Rolf, sitting on the stool in front of the bench, did not answer. Hoker's first thought was that the man was engrossed in the rapport the *teliknon* was providing. He waited, fidgeting, then asked the question again.

Rolf still did not answer.

"Can you hear me?" Hoker asked. Things were here he did not understand and which he did not like. He moved in front of Rolf and looked at the older man's eyes.

The eyes were not blinking. Sightless, they stared across the room. At nothing.

Alarm rose in Bill Hoker.

"Mr. Rolf!" he screamed the words now. "Wake up!"

The eyes continued their sightless stare.

Hoker hastily disconnected the *teliknon*.

Rolf's body continued to sit on the stool. Its eyes did not blink. Its ears did not hear. Its mind did not respond.

The body was present. It was a will-less thing, a machine made of muscles, bone, and blood. The master of it, the "I" of it, was elsewhere.

Hoker grabbed Rolf's wrist. The pulse there was very faint. The heart was barely beating.

Picking up Rolf, he carried the unconscious man into the living room and laid him on the long seat. Here he frantically tried to revive him.

Of this effort, John Rolf knew nothing. He did not know what was happening to his body. He did not remember that he had a body. With Jim Hardesty, he *was* Hardesty. Hardesty's body, Hardesty's feelings, Hardesty's mind, were his. What Hardesty wanted to do, Rolf wanted to do. Completely helpless, he was held prisoner in the energies swirling through Hardesty.

Hardesty himself did not know that anything unusual had happened.

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"I want one question answered," Hardesty said to the young woman who faced him. "What's your old man got up there on the Fourth Level?"

The question confused Jennie. As soon as she had recognized Hardesty, and realized she was back in the ship, she had expected anything to happen to her, up to and including sexual assault, except this question. It surprised her so much that she answered it without thinking.

"A way to read minds, an electronic device that he can use to read the mind of another person," she answered.

The idea startled Hardesty. He was accustomed to thinking of his own mind as his private property, his secret hiding place where he could think any thought he chose, could contemplate any action, no matter how evil, without anyone else knowing about it. If Rolf could read his mind, then Rolf would know what he was doing! This idea shook up the young executive. He didn't want Rolf to know what he was doing. If old H.B. could get Rolf's mind-reading instrument, and use it to read the minds of his junior executives, there would be a mighty rolling of heads among the personnel of the Company for Better Planetary Relations. Perhaps Rolf planned to sell his mind-reader to old H.B.! Maybe this was what the old wolf was up to here on Mars!

Hardesty was badly shaken. He snarled at Jennie as if she was responsible for her father's actions. Then he saw what could happen if he could get control of Rolf's mind-reader!

He could be president of the Company within a year!

Once he could really get the goods on old H.B., there would be no question of immediate promotion!

Rolf's mind-reader would give him all the evidence he needed.

"That old wolf! Now I understand why he dumped everything on Earth and came here to Mars! He was following the main chance!"

"I don't think this was what he had in his mind at all," Jennie protested. "I think he was looking for a way to do good, to help people."

"To do good!" Hardesty laughed. "Old John Rolf doing good! I could tell you of some of the good he did, the men

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he broke, the lies he told, the smaller companies he gobbled up, the legal tricks he used. His secretarial contract was only one trick!"

"That was true once," Jennie answered, fighting the anger rising to explosive heights within her. "He's trying to make amends for what he did, he's trying to pay back."

"He's trying to grab for himself the biggest thing that ever came along," Hardesty answered. "And you're defending him."

"He's my father." She faced Hardesty. "And I love him."

He hastily backed away from her. "If you hit me in the mouth again, I'll kill you."

He threw up an arm in time to turn her blow aside. She struck again. He caught both her arms. Panting, she tried to squirm free.

"When I get time, I'm going to tame you," he said.

She knew intuitively the mistake she had made in revealing to him the existence of the *teliknon*. Now he would want it, would stop at nothing to get it. Could she stall him? "What's the matter with taming me right now?" she demanded.

"I don't have time."

"What's so important?" She let herself sag into his arms.

"That mind-reader is important," he answered. "If those Martians try to keep me from getting it—"

"What will you do to them? Don't you know this is their holy mountain? They will defend it with their life's blood."

"What will they defend it with?" Hardesty answered. "Knives on the First Level, spears on the second, bows and arrows on the third, crude guns on the fourth. Above that—nothing!"

"But this is their holy place. You ought to have some reverence for the sacred place of another race."

"It will be even holier—meaning full of holes—when I get through with it," he answered.

"Oh, Jim, you're so impetuous." She let herself sag even deeper into his arms. "You can see about that tomorrow. Tonight—" She let her words train into suggestion.

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For an instant, the lure of sex caught him. During this instant, she dared to hope. Then the lure failed.

"There will be plenty of time for that some other night," he answered.

He flung her backwards on the couch. The steel door of the ship clanged behind him as he left.

Jennie knew she had failed.

Again the ego of John Rolf shifted. Drawn by some subtle thread of sympathy, he stopped being Jim Hardesty. For a microsecond, he remembered who he actually was. Then the thread of sympathy acted. He did not return to his own body. He became his daughter.

Fury was boiling in her. Now the softness that he had found in her earlier, the phase of sex that made a woman gentle, was gone from her. She was a cat filled with the mad desire to scratch and claw and bite. Given the chance now, given a gun, she would shoot Jim Hardesty down like a mad dog running loose in the streets.

John Rolf became this fury. He was caught and pulled into this maelstrom, trapped and made captive there.

He did not know how long he stayed in this condition. Time had lost all meaning to him. Hours may have passed before Jennie began to regain even a little calm.

All Rolf knew was that suddenly the identification shifted again. He was no longer his daughter.

Instead he was a tall, gangling man sweating as he carried something up an enormous flight of stone steps.

This man was afraid, confused, and very, very angry. There was something he wished to do but before he could do it, he had to carry this bulky object up these interminable stairs.

This tall man was talking to himself. From this, Rolf learned his name.

It was Bill Hoker.

Rolf, through Hoker's eyes, also saw what Hoker was carrying up the steps.

It was a limp, apparently lifeless body.

John Rolf did not even recognize this as his own body.

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Chapter Five

BILL HOKER had no difficulty in finding Unardo. Although it was night, the nearer moon was still giving light. The first Martian Hoker met on the Fifth Level seemed to know immediately what Hoker wanted. He not only pointed out the way but insisted on helping the human carry his burden.

Unardo, roused from slumber, came quickly to the door. Hoker was startled at the sight. Unardo, like most Martians, wore no night clothes. Seeing who it was, Unardo beckoned them into his treatment room. The Martian physician asked no questions. Directing Bill Hoker to stand against the wall and not move no matter what happened, Unardo, still naked, seated himself behind the abacus.

At this moment, John Rolf shifted his identification again. He ceased being Hoker and became Unardo. He was instantly aware of the vast difference between Hoker's mind and the mind of the Martian. Hoker's mind had been heavy, with the feel of Earth about it. Unardo's mind was a light, airy thing, with a sensitivity in it that Rolf had not known that any mind could possess.

In spite of this sensitivity, however, the mind of the Martian physician was not sufficiently acute to detect the fact that it had a sudden, intruding visitor. Unardo did not realize that the ego of a human being, the I-principle of the man he was trying to help, had become resident in his own mind, was seeing through his eyes, was hearing through his ears, and was feeling with his emotions.

In the mind of Unardo, John Rolf suddenly felt very comfortable. It was as if there was an affinity between them, an ease and a comfort, that was congenial to him. Absent also

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was the vast maelstrom of emotions that had spun through the minds of the humans with whom he had been identified. There were other differences too. The mind of Unardo moved with a faster rhythm than had the minds of the humans, it also had a much broader span. In it there was a gentleness, a kindness, a compassion, that Rolf found most pleasing. Rolf was aware, however, that the maelstrom of emotions had once surged through Unardo's mind. But, across many, many periods during which Mars had circled the sun, the Martian physician had purged himself of his hates and his greeds. When these had gone, the fear had also gone. In the mind of Unardo was a vast pool of peace. But vast as it was, it could be disturbed.

The body lying on the treatment table was disturbing it now. Unardo knew what had happened. He knew that the ego, the I-principle, of his human friend had fled from the human body. This much was clear. But what Unardo did not know, what was disturbing the pool of peace in his mind, was whether or not the I-principle could be brought back.

Once freed the I-principle might not be willing to return to its prison of heavy flesh. Or it might be unable to. If the I-principle did not return, then the body of John Rolf would die within the space of a few hours. Without its master, without the sense of its own identity, the human body was a battery that would swiftly run down.

Finding these things in Unardo's mind, John Rolf was not concerned about them. Nor was he concerned about the body lying on the treatment table as belonging to him. Even when Unardo's mind gave him the information that this was his body, his mental reaction was—so what? The I-principle knew itself as being immortal. What difference what happened to that body?

Unardo began to manipulate the abacus. Now, from the mind of the Martian physician, Rolf caught glimpses of the intricate nature of this device. He was amazed, bewildered, and to some degree enchanted. This was not magic, this was a science of tone, of harmony, of energy flowing in measured quantities, all under the control of Unardo. Now through Unardo's eyes he could see what he had not been able to see

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through human eyes, that as each note rang out, shimmering lights suddenly burst from the abacus, to shower over the body lying on the treatment table in bursting rainbow colors.

As the tones sounded and the waves of rainbow colors flowed into the body, similar colors began to come into existence within the body itself. These did not seem to be within the physical structure of flesh and bones but to come into existence in another duplicate structure made of some kind of fine matter moving at so high a frequency that ordinary eyes did not see it. The energy level in this duplicate body was very low. One thing that Unardo was attempting was to add energy to this body of fine matter.

This was a slow process. Its success to a large degree depended on Unardo's skill in matching specific rhythms in the duplicate body of fine matter. Since there were many rhythms in different parts of it, this was an intricate process. It was also a dangerous process. A wrong note, an off-beat frequency, an error in timing, and damage might be done not only to the body of fine matter but also to the body of flesh and blood which lay on the treatment table.

Rolf felt tension begin to mount in Unardo. This was not a tension of emotional conflict, it was the tension that would inevitably result from increased energy flow. The Martian physician was generating energy within his own body which was also flowing to the body on the treatment table and that both the energy from the abacus and the energy from Unardo were being manipulated and controlled to some degree by mental effort alone on the part of this physician of the Fifth Level of Suzusilmar. Here was mind acting directly on energy!

If it was possible, and Unardo was demonstrating it, what were its limits? This was a question that did not have an answer. Perhaps there were no limits. Perhaps the only limiting factor was the quality of the individual mind manipulating energy.

Rolf suddenly realized that only part of Unardo's mind was concentrating on his work with the abacus and on his work in manipulating energy. Another part of it was seeking him.

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Unardo's purpose was clear enough. He wanted to put the I-principle of John Rolf back into the body lying on the treatment table. When this was accomplished, the Martian physician could really begin to work. This was a ticklish task. First, the I-principle had to be found. This alone might take more time than the body would live. Once found, it had to be induced to re-enter its own body.

The thought horrified John Rolf. He began to fight against it.

As if he sensed this rebellion, Unardo sighed. He began to work slower and slower with the abacus. A sense of defeat was in the Martian. He had gone as far as he could, or dared, at this moment. If he went further, delicate nuances might be badly disturbed in the pattern of the future that was being woven by minds greater than his. He would try again later. When he let the little abacus go into silence, the body on the treatment table had more energy in it. But not much more. Not enough. Without the I-principle, it simply would not absorb enough energy to bring it to adequate function. Sighing, Unardo slumped behind the abacus.

At the door, Bill Hoker dared to breathe again.

"Will—will he be all right?" Hoker asked, in broken Martian.

Unardo spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "I will do my best—but the future I do not know. The situation is very delicate. A puff of wind at the wrong moment—and he will blow with it."

Hoker's face fell. "If there is anything I can do—" he began.

"There is nothing you can do," Unardo answered.

"I—Well, I've got something to do," Hoker said.

"Then by all means go do it," Unardo answered.

"When he wakes up, tell him I'll be back later," Hoker said. As he tip-toed out of the treatment room, his face was grim.

Unardo settled his mind. He made it again a pool of calm peace. Then, methodically, he began to seek the I-principle of John Rolf.

Knowing this meant a return to his body of clumsy flesh,

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the human fled. To flee required an act of will and little more. Its own wish, its own will, was an adequate control of the I-principle in its detached state.

John Rolf went upward. When he chose to slow his rush, he was high above Suzusilmar, high, high, high on the borders of infinite space itself. Below him, the red planet was a ball wrapped in darkness. He was not high enough to see the sun but he could see the stars. In the far-off meadows of heaven, the stars gleamed like beacons marking paths into infinity. They whispered in John Rolf's mind, saying softly, *Come to me. Come to me.*

The I-principle knew the stars were not beyond its reach. If it so chose, it could leave this little ball of darkness called Mrs, it could leave these fly specks called planets of the solar system, it could find its way into space itself and there forget that it had ever been a man. A longing for freedom, for star flight built up in the I-principle of John Rolf.

This desire, freed now to function in the I-principle, could take him onward and outward. It could take him to the farther stars. If the body on the treatment table died, what would it matter to one who was roaming the star paths?

He started to move outward, then stopped, and hung, irresolute. Something was calling to him. He concentrated his mind to find the source of the call. It came from the body down below. Inexplicably, the body wanted to go too. It also wanted to roam the star paths. Even the dim life that was in it now dreamed of the paths to the far-off stars!

Rolf felt a sudden sympathy for this body. Slowly, his desire shifted. He began to want to return to the body that had been his home for so many years. He not only wanted to return to it, he was going to return to it.

As he started downward, a maelstrom of raw emotion suddenly caught him. As this impinged upon him, he suddenly realized that returning to his own body might not be as easy as he had anticipated. He fought against the flood of emotion, fought helplessly. It pulled at him with the weight of planets. Before he realized what was happening, he was Jim Hardesty again. It had been Hardesty's wild emotion

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that had trapped him, Hardesty's emotion transmitting like a powerful radio station!

Rolf discovered that the freedom of the I-principle was very precariously held. A puff of wind, a burst of wild emotion, might shatter this freedom forever!

The I-principle might be free to roam the stars. It could also get itself trapped in the maelstrom of anybody's emotion. The only place where it was really safe was in its own body.

How was he going to reach this body?

Hardesty, with a maelstrom of anger boiling in him, was speaking to a group of men just outside the space ship.

"Listen, you muckers, everything is all set and ready to go. The ground level goonies are well organized and well armed. They will lead the attack up the mountain. If they get knocked off, it's no skin off our noses. I want you as a reserve force, to do two things. First, keep them moving. If they try to turn back, mow 'em down from the rear. Get it into their thick heads that the only way they can go is up."

Around Hardesty, the men nodded assent. Ugly-looking ruffians, they were most of the large crew that Hardesty had brought from Earth especially for this purpose. Rolf recognized the type. In his day he had employed them himself, for work such as was planned here. Perhaps it was only just that he should twist and writhe at the thought of what these men would do on Suzusilmar.

Beller was in charge of these men. Through Hardesty's eyes, Rolf recognized the slender little gunman with the ice-cold blue eyes standing in front of the men.

Suddenly, inexplicably, Rolf shifted identification again. For a split second, he hoped he was going to be free. But another maelstrom of emotion caught and held him. He became Beller.

The body of the slender little gunman had a sour smell that provoked feelings of nausea. Rolf slowly realized that this sourness came from dope. He knew then that Beller, and probably everyone else here, was loaded with dope. Hardesty knew how to use drugs to make men into slaves.

Beller was eager for what lay up above, eager for the killing, eager for the looting. So were all the others. If they

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followed a pattern that on Earth for uncounted centuries had led to destruction, famine, and despair, they only followed the human way. Had the problem of the conqueror been solved here on ancient Mars? So far as Rolf's experience went, the only place where such a solution had been achieved was the higher levels of Suzusilmar, perhaps at the Seventh Level.

"The second thing I want you to do is to form a reserve force to attack in case the goonies get stalled!" Hardesty shouted. "Is all of this clear?"

Nods ran through the crowd at his words. These men were heavily armed, each with an automatic weapon. Better weapons had been invented on Earth but they were a close monopoly of Earth Government. Even the Company for Better Planetary Relations was not able to obtain them.

"You take orders from Beller," Hardesty shouted. "Now get going!"

As the men moved away toward the nearest flight of steps that led up the mountain, Rolf went with them. Beller had a compact two-way radio with him, for communication with Hardesty.

As this group moved into the shambles of narrow streets on the desert around the base of the mighty mountain, Martians began to appear out of nowhere. They asked few questions. The sight of these humans told them that the time had come.

The wild desert tribesmen had been well prepared. They had been given automatic weapons and hand grenades. Told by Beller and his men to move upward, they went furtively at first. Resistance began at the second level. With hand grenades thumping and with automatic weapons spouting fire, the wild tribesmen went through this resistance as if it had no existence.

Beller and his reserve group followed them. John Rolf, trapped in the maelstrom of emotions spinning through Beller, went with the waspish little gunman.

Rolf was beginning to recognize the correlation between these emotional maelstroms and his entrapment in them and identification with them. The emotions trapped the I-

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principle, trapped the ego, caught and held captive the sense of I-ness in a human being. He had been able to escape from Unardo because the Martian physician had made of his mind a pool of calm peace.

Rolf knew that Beller's mind would never know the meaning of peace. But it might be calm, for just a moment. He waited for such a moment. When it came, he slipped out of it before the maelstrom could catch him again.

To say that John Rolf was glad to be free from the mind of Beller would be to understate his reaction. He rejoiced in his freedom. Yet as he rejoiced, he also knew there was something in the I-principle that was his which was somehow akin to the emotions Beller was feeling. Tenuous as it might be, there was a bond of sympathy between them somewhere. Rolf sensed this bond of sympathy as being the common racial heritage which all men shared. Beller and he might represent the antipodes of thought, but both were human.

As the unit of consciousness that was John Rolf, the I-principle, escaped from Beller, he was trapped again. This time it was by a single man, a very angry, very frightened man who was feeling his way down the long slanting steps of Suzusilmar. Rolf tried to fight against this identification. Finding he had not the strength for it, he let himself go, knowing he could wait again for the inevitable moment of calm that would eventually come.

To his surprise, he found that this man was Bill Hoker.

Hoker's mind was also a mixture of emotions, all of them violent, but something else was here too, a sense of justice and of fair play that had not been present in Hardesty's mind or in the mind of Beller. It seemed to Rolf at this moment that the human race must have many grades of mind in it. Hoker was a higher grade than Hardesty or Beller. Also in Hoker, though choked and twisted by anger and fear, was a feeling of love.

Hoker might look clumsy and he might make mistakes because of his own eagerness but he had a hunger for something better than he had ever known, something higher, something finer. This search for something higher was at the heart of his love for Jennie. Hoker was on his way to the ship,

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to try to find and rescue her. Rolf knew instantly that he would go with this man. Jennie was dear to the heart of both of them.

Hoker had just reached the Second Level when the charge of the wild tribesmen began. He ducked quickly into hiding and let the Martians go past him up the flight of steps. Knowing there were other steps, he thought of searching for them, giving up this idea when he realized that the whole Second Level was aroused and alarmed. Here in this night lit with the light of only one moon he could never find his way to another flight of steps leading down. That he could stay alive long enough to reach them was doubtful. The Second Level Martians were not civilized by any means.

Waiting his opportunity, Hoker slugged one of them for a weapon. It was only a knife but a knife was better than nothing. When the tumult coming from above told him that the fighting had begun at the higher levels, he started down to the cluster of shabby buildings at the lowest level. Reaching the bottom without being stopped, he turned aside.

"Hey, you!" a voice called from the darkness. "Who are you and what are you doing here? Get over here!"

It was Beller's voice. Turning, Hoker caught a glimpse of a mass of men standing quietly in the shadow of the wall that circled the mountain. A powerful light not only blinded him but also revealed the ship's uniform he was wearing.

"I got lost," Hoker quickly explained. "I thought you were up the mountain."

It was a wild explanation but it worked, largely because Beller not only did not know him personally but also because the waspish little gunman had too much on his mind at this moment to spend time questioning a straggler.

"Get back there with the others against the wall and don't get lost again," Beller told him.

"Yes, sir," Hoker promised.

He lost himself among the men in the shadow of the wall. They were fully armed, he saw. A sense of eager expectancy pervaded them. In low undertones they were talking to

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each other about the wealth each expected to pick up for himself when the conquest of this mountain was finished.

Hoker thought desperately that now he could never reach Jennie. John Rolf, recognizing the probable accuracy of this conclusion, waited for a moment of calm. When it came, he left Hoker and began the search for Jennie himself.

She was not hard for him to find. Just the act of thinking about her seemed to draw the I-principle to her. John Rolf became his daughter and settled down in the emotional field she generated as if it was almost his own. Between them, at deep levels, a close rapport had always existed.

Rage was still in Jennie Rolf, rage ocean deep and sea bitter, but she had it under better control now. A deep and crafty cunning was present in her mind. Startled, Rolf recognized this cunning as once having been his own. Not for nothing in the old days had his enemies said he was most dangerous when he was smiling!

"Jennie," Rolf whispered, in his daughter's mind.

There was no answer. He tried again, struggling hard to break through to her. All he succeeded in doing was in making her think about him. She thought she was doing the thinking herself. He began again, trying harder now, to tell her who and where he was. This time he succeeded a little too well. Suddenly aware of this thinking, she thought it meant she was losing her own mind. Instantly, she went into panic. Pounding at the steel door, she began to scream. As the emotional maelstrom built to greater intensity in her, Rolf was completely trapped again. He could only wait for her to become calm.

Caught and trapped in the emotional field of his daughter's mind, Rolf felt like a lost ghost. Yet he was not a ghost in the traditional sense of the word; he was the I-principle. He wondered if this sort of thing had actually happened many times in the past on Earth. Legends of ghosts were as old as human history. Was this their true source?

Like Earth, Mars had its legends too, of strange and impossible things, including the legend of the King of the Red Planet. This was another subject that Thallen had been unwilling to discuss, evasively turning aside all questions. From

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the wonder-working power of this king, Rolf had decided he was a mythological figure built out of the hopes, the dreams, and the unfulfilled desires of generations of inhabitants of the Red Planet.

Yet, now, trapped in the maelstrom of Jennie's emotions, as he thought of the king, power, a sense of completion, and a feeling of glory came unexpected and unbidden into the mind of John Rolf. It was as if the very act of thinking of the king had brought these impressions to him. With them came a sense of wisdom and understanding overwhelming in its vastness. The impression that touched Rolf's mind was that somewhere there existed an intelligence great enough to grasp the inter-relationship between every Martian on all of Suzusilmar, to take into consideration the humans who were now here, and to hold all of them in the palm of one hand! All of the history of the Red Planet seemed to be synthesized in this impression. But nothing of the future was there. The future was not formed, the decisions that made it come into existence were not yet taken. There was one other impression that came into Rolf's mind, that of a love so great that it could make gentle the wrath of hurricanes, the tumult of tornadoes, the shaking of earthquakes.

Rolf's mind reeled from this contact. Then the contact was broken. Rolf did not shut it off. It was deliberately broken—by someone else. It was as if he had touched a great mind which had sensed he was touching it. The great mind had broken the contact as does one who breaks the connection with an unwanted and unbidden telephone caller.

Broken, the contact left Rolf with a feeling of great power existing somewhere. But where? He had not even the faintest impression of the location of the power.

Jennie was suddenly calm. It was as if the power and the love that he had contacted had flowed through his mind to her, bringing with it calmness and a sense of peace.

Rolf knew that he wanted to renew this contact. He tried. And failed. As inexplicably as it had come, it had gone.

Something else had come instead. He was being hunted! The identity of the hunter he could not discern but his mind

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was clearly aware of the fact of the hunt. Somewhere, in the great world of mind, something was searching for him!

The knowledge brought near panic with it, panic and an urge to flee! He stubbornly resisted this impulse. Instead, he tried to reach Thallen, mentally.

He encountered only an abyss, a silence that was alive, that held hints of energies beyond his comprehension, or depths beyond. He could not penetrate this abyss. Nor could he reach Thallen. Putting aside the knowledge that he was being hunted, he tried again to reach Jennie's understanding.

She was calmer now.

"Jenniel" Rolf whispered.

Her reaction told him that she heard him. Again panic started up in her.

"Don't be alarmed," he whispered hastily.

"Daddy?" she answered, incredulously.

"Yes!" Rolf said.

"I can feel your thinking. But—but where are you?" Her eyes went around the little room in which she was held prisoner, seeking him.

He tried to explain, then dropped the attempt as her alarm grew at her failure to understand. How could he be so close to her? What was the I-principle? Was he dead? Was this his ghost talking to her?

"Don't try to understand, just accept it," Rolf urged her. "Explanations can come later. Just believe in me as you believed in me when you were a little girl."

This brought into her mind a multitude of memories of him. It also brought what he was seeking, trust, confidence, and faith in him. She became more calm. When she had been a little girl, she had been sure in her own mind that her father could solve any problem she had. This sureness came back to her now. She waited for him to tell her what to do.

"You have to get out of here," Rolf said.

"How?" she asked. "Jim Hardesty has the key. The door is locked on the outside."

"The most important thing for you to do is to remain calm,"

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Rolf told her. "This will give me the freedom to leave you and to return to you."

She did not understand, but she was still a small girl with implicit trust in her father. Detaching from her mind, Rolf went through the ship.

Now that he was becoming familiar with the operation of the I-principle detached from a body, he realized he was seeing and feeling and hearing, was aware, in a totally different way in this state than when he was looking through the eyes of someone else. His perceptions now were both more sharp and more dim. He could see form, he was aware of outlines of three dimensional material objects. He was also aware of the fields surrounding these objects and of the colors associated with these fields. He sensed an enormous range of frequency. Delicate nuances of color, of frequency, and of emotional tones were available to him for examination. The most important thing was to stay clear of the boiling maelstroms that were the emotional fields of other life forms, whether they were human, Martian, or something quite different.

Rolf went invisibly through the ship. Two men were on guard at the main lock, two engineers were on duty, the space radio operator was in the radio room, and the astro-navigator was sick in his bunk. The secretaries were in their own rooms, except for those who were with Hardesty, who was in the main control room.

Rolf knew that if he had ten men he could capture the ship. But he did not have ten men, he did not have one man, he did not even have his own body.

At the thought of his body, an unease came up in him. It was up the mountain somewhere. He had fled from it. Now it needed him, if it was to continue living. But Jennie also needed him. It would have to wait.

Searching through the ship, Rolf found a secretary whose mind was fairly calm. Impinging upon her, he found that one of her duties was to take food to the sick astro-navigator. Very carefully, Rolf suggested in her mind that it would be nice if she also took food to Jennie. She thought this idea was coming from her own mind, a delusion that Rolf was

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careful to let her keep. She went to the ship's larder and prepared a thin soup for the navigator. When he was too sick to eat, she decided to take the soup to Jennie.

Rolf slid back into Jennie's mind, told her what was going to happen, and what she must do.

When the secretary unlocked the door, Jennie slugged her on the side of the jaw. It was so hard a blow that it knocked the startled secretary unconscious. It also spilled soup over everything.

The door was open. Jennie went out it. Her first thought was to go to the control room and slug Hardesty. To her way of thinking at this moment, he also needed a taste of her fist. Rolf had to use strong persuasion on his daughter to get her to change her mind.

"You've got to take me up the mountain," he told her again and again.

To her, it seemed that a desire was growing stronger and stronger in her to see her father. Elements of the small girl still lingered. She needed his physical presence now as she had never needed it before.

Going out the after lock of the ship, she fled across the desert toward the nearest stairway leading up the mountain of Suzusilmar. Up there in the darkness broken only by the dim glow of the nearer moon, muted shouts, the rattle of automatic weapons, and the occasional thud of hand grenades marked the progress of a small-scale war. Jennie heard them, vaguely, but did not at all understand their meaning. Nor, in her mad flight, was her father able to give her that meaning.

She had completely forgotten his instructions to be calm. So strong an emotional maelstrom had come up in her that he was rendered helpless.

Before she reached the bottom of the flight of steps leading upward, the sounds of battle up above grew stronger. Now, she realized their meaning. A flood of fear came up in her as she realized she could not climb this flight of steps.

The fear became panic. Turning, she fled into the maze of wretched streets that circled the base of Suzusilmar.

Within minutes, she knew she was lost.

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Chapter Six

As SHE realized she was lost, Jennie Rolf felt again all the old feelings of terror she had known as a little girl. During the days after her father had inexplicably left for mysterious Mars, she had felt lost most of the time. As the years had passed, she had built a barrier around this segment of her personality and because she was no longer aware of it, she had assumed it did not exist. It did exist, she discovered now, behind the barrier. The years they had been hidden seemed to have given the feelings additional strength. Emerging now, they were a horror that added itself to the emotional maelstrom spinning through her.

Cold night, the thin moon of Mars, the vast bulk of Suzusilmar rising above her, and the sounds of battle! How could a human live in the darkness of this alien planet when her own feelings were rising from the past to torture her?

It was enough to have to face this night on Mars. Facing her own childhood feelings was too much! Through the horror rising in her, she cried out silently for her father. This too, she had done many times when she was small. There had never been an answer then but she expected an answer now. He had been with her, somehow, whispering in her mind, only minutes before. Or had this whispering been delusion, the hallucination of distorted and distorting emotions? She did not know which was true. Vaguely the memory of his whispered words came back.

"Be calm. Accept."

This much she remembered. How could she be calm when

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she was alone in the middle of a dark street in a city of an alien planet? There was a nightmarish quality about her surroundings, a feeling of wildly distorted dream. She told herself this could not be real. The feel of the rough surface of the street under her feet and the stench in the air told her it was real. This was no dream. This was happening to her!

The first level had never had street lighting. Any illumination was provided by individual Martians for their own premises. No Martian was showing a light tonight. Far down the street she caught a glimpse of a flaming torch carried by a group of Martians hurrying toward the flight of steps that led upward. She ducked hastily into a side street.

The group of Martians with the torch went trotting past. She could hear their excited voices. They sounded like animals hurrying in the night on the scent of prey. Hardesty and his men with their talk of loot had roused these animals from their ancient ways and had set in motion forces that could not be predicted as to outcome.

As the Martians went past, she heard stealthy footsteps coming down the alley toward her. Her breath catching in her throat, she turned to run. Through a narrow twisting alley that stank with filth, past closed doors, she ran.

The footsteps followed her.

"Jenniel" a voice called to her. "Jenniel!"

Her first thought was that some Martian knew her name and was calling to her. Then she recognized the voice.

"Bill!" she called.

"Jenniel" Bill Hoker answered. "Jennie, where are you? I just caught a glimpse of some woman dodging into the alley ahead of that bunch of Martians—"

At this point, they found each other. Bill Hoker felt the meeting was worthwhile. He had never been so fervidly kissed in his life. Or so often. Jennie, in her turn, had never been hugged so hard. Nor had she ever liked being hugged so much.

"Jennie, I was going to the ship, to rescue you," Hoker gasped. "How'd you get loose?"

Instead of trying to explain, which she knew was impossible

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anyhow, she kissed him again. He found this a satisfactory explanation.

"I took your father to the doctor," he said at last.

"The doctor? What's wrong with him?"

"I don't know," Hoker answered. "I don't think that Martian doctor up above knows either. Or if he knew, he didn't say. Maybe he didn't think I'd understand if he did tell me."

"Where is he?"

"In the office of a Martian doctor on the Fifth Level," Hoker answered. "He told me to take him there."

"Then that's where we're going," Jennie decided.

"How?" Hoker asked.

"There are other steps leading upward," Jennie answered. "We'll find one of them."

Moving toward the right, they began to circle the base of the great mountain. They went through narrow streets filled with evil smells and Martians who were more aroused by the events of this night than they had ever been in all of their history. To take Suzusilmar by force! To defy the Law! To climb the mountain of the gods by their own strength! This dark dream was hidden deep in the heart of every dweller at the base of Suzusilmar. It had remained for a human, Jim Hardesty, to bring the dream to the surface and to give it direction and purpose.

The sounds of battle slowly faded behind them.

Now that she was with Bill Hoker, Jennie had regained much of her lost calm. This in turn gave the trapped I-principle that was John Rolf's sense of his own identity the chance to be free of her.

He did not seek this freedom. In a night as filled with turmoil as this one there was great danger that he would be pulled down into the emotional maelstrom of the battle raging above. Also, as long as Jennie was seeking his body, she was doing what he wanted to do. He remained with her. From the depths of her own mind, his thoughts gave added direction to her emotions. In the depths of her adult mind, vestiges of the father image she had of him still remained, adding color and warmth to her feelings. In a night that

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had been—and still was—haunted by madness, Rolf found this emotion very congenial.

Also, Rolf knew he was being hunted. By who or what he did not know.

Up, high up above the turmoil rising from the battle in progress on the lower levels of Suzusilmar, Unardo, the Martian physician, sat behind his little abacus. He had been sitting in this position for hours, with his eyes looking inward. His fingers did not move to the beads of the abacus. He knew from the sounds of slow breathing that the body on the table was still alive, though just barely. Life still lingered there though its glow was weak. Life in a human body would not long exist without the I-principle with which it was associated. Unless inspired and continuously replenished by this great principle, the heart would lose its will to beat, the arteries would lose their will to circulate the blood, the brain would lose its ability to perform the associative function, the frontal lobes would lose their creative drive, the respiratory center in the mid-brain would lose its interest in the levels of carbon dioxide which in turn would cause the lungs to stop breathing. The human brain-body was an intricate mechanism with each part fitting together like a hand in a glove. The greatest calculator ever made was a crude and clumsy device in comparison to a single cell of the human brain.

Like a vast engine with a little stored power, the human mechanism would continue functioning for a time on the basis of its own inertial drive. But if the I-principle was too long absent, there would inevitably come what humans called death.

Unardo did not clearly understand the views of humans on death. They seemed to regard it with horror—though for what reason he had never been able to ascertain. Unardo would have liked to have had the opportunity to study this strange species that had come brawling across space. He knew they regarded death much as a reader regards the end of the book he is perusing. Unardo, and no Martian, held such a view. To them, death was only the end of a chapter.

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A new chapter would be beginning.

Always, after a chapter ended, a new chapter would begin.

The Martians believed that the history of every I-principle already included many chapters, which were usually not remembered. The future would write many more chapters, perhaps on Mars, possibly on Earth, maybe on some other planet of the Solar System, perhaps on some of the stars that sparkled in the vastness of infinite space. The I-principle was immortal. It built many bodies, many forms, which could and did die but it was beyond death. It brought its own quality of life to the body it built and occupied, adding its own touch of creative individualism, giving meaning and glory to the form.

At least, this was the Martian view. In accordance with this belief, Unardo had no anxiety over the loss of body life. He would help his human friend if he could, but if he could not, then a new chapter would begin somewhere. Perhaps Unardo would never know where the new chapter started but he was certain it would start, somewhere. This Martian physician did not fear body death. How could he have been a physician if he feared what he was trying to prevent? His effort to help John Rolf stemmed from many motives, not the least of which was a warmth for the human himself. In addition, there was a reverence for all life, in whatever form it was found. There was a third reason, which had to do with the work Rolf was attempting here on Mars, not only in developing the *teliknon* but also in drawing the correct conclusions to be derived from the function of proven mind-reading. These conclusions, as Unardo well knew, were not only subtle but far-reaching in their implications. Anyone who understood them, even in part, began immediately to be aware of and to live in a different kind of universe than the one he had previously thought existed.

In quietness and in silence, Unardo worked. Far away there was shouting. He did not hear it. Then came the sound of guns, the thump of hand grenades. He did not hear these either. He was looking inward, feeling inward, concentrating inward, searching through his own private inner world which in some mysterious way reflected the whole universe. Unardo's

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mind was a deep pool. There were depths in it as infinite as space itself.

As Unardo worked, he kept a fraction of his attention on the sound of breathing coming from the body on the treatment table. When his trained sense of hearing told him that the breathing was becoming too labored, Unardo's long fingers went out to the abacus in front of him, touching this bead and that bead. As the soft musical tones whispered through the quiet room, the body on the table responded to them. Each time its response was a little less. Unardo knew there was a limit to the number of times the body would respond when its own I-principle was missing. The body could not be compelled to take on energy foreign to it except within definite limits. When these limits were passed, it would sigh softly as it stopped breathing forever.

Suddenly, Unardo's concentration was broken by the opening of the outer door. The sudden explosive noise sent a shock wave through Unardo's nervous system. His body trembled, his face lost its enigmatic, Buddha-like expression. He felt sweat spurt on his body.

Humans were coming!

Unardo had one thought; they must leave at once.

Before he could get to his feet, they had entered the room. One of them, he saw, was the young man who had brought Rolf to him. The second one took one look at the body lying on the treatment table, then ran to it.

"Daddy! Daddy, darling! Wake up, Daddy, wake up!"

The body on the table took a deep breath, then changed its breathing rhythm completely. Its eyes opened. There was glaze in them but as the hands went out to Jennie, the glaze was already disappearing.

John Rolf had slipped out of his identification with Jennie. The I-principle had gone back into its own body. As it did this, life seemed to come again into the flesh.

To John Rolf, this body was suddenly like an old and very comfortable suit of clothes. It was where he, the I-principle, belonged. It was—home.

John Rolf was alive again.

To an outsider, all of this would have seemed relatively

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simple. A man had been near death. His beloved daughter had entered the room. By some subtle alchemy, she had brought him back to life. In the long history of the human race, this sort of thing had happened time and time again.

Seeing this happen, sensing the subtle nuances involved, Unardo hastily changed his mind about asking these two humans to leave. The female, he saw, had accomplished what his best skill had been unable to do. She had brought the I-principle back to the body. In doing this, she had brought life to him.

Unardo felt the sweat begin to dry on his body. A benign smile appeared on his face, which again assumed something of the expression of Buddha. Unardo did not know how the I-principle had been brought back to the body but in his mind was the thought that the king had had a hand in this somewhere.

To John Rolf, as he re-identified with his own body, as he became himself again, as the I-principle flowed again into its old neural network, there followed a period of confusion that almost amounted to nightmare.

As he became himself again, censors in his mind began very swiftly to hide the memory of his true identity as the I-principle. The censors were deft and quick. In split seconds, this memory became a series of brilliant but unconnected mental images like a vivid and beautiful dream that is slipping away upon awakening. As Rolf watched, helpless, all of the mental images became a single one, that of a single star gleaming in the far-off depths of infinite space. He had the impression that vast and wonderful meaning was filed under this single image but even this impression faded and was gone.

The censors belonged to his conscious mind, which he was now beginning to use again. This mind, developed to handle the every-day problems of living, had to have censors to hide from it the real depth and the real wonder of the universe. It could not grasp such vastness. Its solution to the problem was to chop the memory into disconnected fragments and then store everything under a single image, that of a star shining in infinite space.

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John Rolf's emotions went into a state of nightmarish shock. His emotions could not change their strength and their sense of direction as swiftly as could his conscious mind. It moved swiftly, but they, like heavy-footed horses, moved slowly. The result was disturbance and a feeling in Rolf of nightmare. He had been somewhere else, he had been *something* else. His emotions knew it. Now he was himself again. Which was he? He grasped with taloned fingers at Jennie and his voice suddenly rose in inarticulate words.

Now Unardo went into action. He motioned for Jennie to stand aside and quickly resumed his place behind the little abacus. As he started to work, Rolf saw him. With this came the memory that Rolf had been hunted. Now he knew the identity of the hunter.

"You—you were hunting me!" he whispered.

Unardo nodded. "I tried to find you, I tried to bring you back." The Martian physician shook his head at this memory. "I intended no harm, my friend. Instead, I sought to help."

Rolf sighed and was quiet.

"Now if you will compose your mind to calm and lie very still—" Unardo continued.

John Rolf made a calmness in his mind. Unardo touched the beads of the tiny abacus. Again the musical tones throbbed in the room. Soft and soothing, like elfin music from some lost fairyland, the tones whispered through Rolf's body. Now that the I-principle was back in place, his body answered the tones, lifting a human echo to a Martian treatment process. The tones built into a harmony as the elfin music whispered its soft message of well-being to a weary body that was swiftly losing its weariness.

Unardo had a smile of confidence on his Buddha face now. He worked as does one who knows exactly what he is doing, who is moving along a familiar path.

Like a pale ghost across the room, Jennie clung to Bill Hoker as she watched. Somehow in this moment they seemed to be two frightened children living in a world they did not understand.

On the treatment table, Rolf felt strength and warmth flow back into his body, felt his heart pick up its normal

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rhythm, felt energy flow over neural paths. As the tones went into silence and Unardo signed that the treatment was over, Rolf sat up on the table. Jennie flew to his arms. He caught her, hugged her, held her close to him.

Warmth was in his body. In his mind, somewhere, was the image of a single shining star.

He did not know what the image meant or if it meant anything. He had traded the meaning of that image for the meaning of the human warmth of holding Jennie in his arms. This warmth related him to all of humanity. In a way, it related him to all life everywhere, on the Home World or on the Red Planet. Perhaps eventually this warmth would also relate him to all the stars in the far-off infinities as the evolving human race of which he was a part went that way in its fast journeying.

In the background, as though he savored and tasted this warmth too, and found it good, the face of the Martian physician was again that of a bland, smiling Buddha.

The room was filled with the sound of voices. Jennie was desperately trying to tell her father that he had been with her, down in the ship, and he was both frowning and smiling, frowning because the censors in his conscious mind had hidden all knowledge of the fact that he had been with her, smiling because of the happiness bubbling up within him.

Then, when even Jennie had run out of breath, a lull came in the excited talk. Other sounds began to intrude. The sounds had been present all along but the warmth in the room had taken their meaning away from them. Now their meaning came through.

The sounds of battle were moving up the mountain.

The outer door opened. Hurrying footsteps came across the reception room. The door of the treatment room opened. The Martian knife held in a stabbing position, Bill Hoker turned. He let the point of the knife drop down as he saw who was there.

Thallen entered. All of the natural serenity of the Fifth Level Martian was gone. His face was twisted and he was

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breathing heavily, like a man who has run a footrace and has lost. He was barely able to bow.

"You are summoned," Thallen said. His eyes went to the humans. "All of you are summoned to the Seventh Level."

Unardo bowed. Now the face of the Buddha had eager expectancy on it. Unardo smiled. His face was as bright as spring on the bleak deserts of ancient Mars.

Rolf frowned. He trusted Thallen but questions were forming in his mind.

"Who summons us?" Rolf asked.

"The king," Thallen answered. "The one who holds this mountain in the palm of his hand, he summons us."

John Rolf did not know whether he was thrilled or frightened by this. There was a lot of both, he thought.

From below the great wave of voices and of battle sounds lashed at the stone ramparts of Suzusilmar.

Chapter Seven

IN THE CONTROL room of the space ship, Jim Hardesty listened to Beller's radio reports. He did not like what he was hearing.

"What do you mean—they've got us stopped? They can't stop me!" Hardesty yelled into the microphone.

"Anyhow they've got us slowed," Beller answered, hedging. "Those Fourth Level guns may be a single shot but those Martians up there make that one shot count. They're shooting down. It's like shooting fish in a barrel. Our Martian boys are the fish. The steps are covered with dead Martians. They've got a road block erected at the Fourth Level and are shooting from behind it. Our Martian boys are beginning to think twice before they charge."

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Hardesty swore viciously. He wasn't going to be stopped! Then, as another thought crossed his mind, he asked a hasty question.

"Of course I haven't committed the boys we brought from Earth," Beller answered. "I wouldn't do that without your orders."

"Good," Hardesty said. The news that his reserve was still intact cheered him. "Exactly where are you?"

"We're on the Third Level, to the left of the steps, and out of sight," Beller answered.

"Then you've won the Third Level?" Hardesty asked.

"Of course," Beller answered. "Most of the Third Level Martians were waiting to join us. Those who tried to fight were knocked off by their own people. But this Fourth Level is a different situation. They fight like humans." To Beller, this was a compliment.

"I don't care what they fight like, you've got to keep our Martian boys moving upward," Hardesty ordered. "If they are stopped for any length of time, they may turn nasty."

"I know," Beller agreed. A shiver sounded in his voice.

Neither Hardesty nor Beller were under any illusions about the lower level Martians. They were savages. Capable of hard fighting as long as they hoped for loot and thought they were winning, they were incapable of sustaining themselves as a fighting force for any great length of time. Once they were effectively stopped, they would begin to think of their own safety. They might remember something they had momentarily forgotten, something called *the Law*. Fear would rise in them and they would flee down the mountain.

In a day or two, licking their wounds and seeking the cause of their troubles, they might even decide that these alien humans who had come across space in the great ship of steel were responsible for everything.

They might even attack the ship.

Hardesty was reasonably certain that even if they used the weapons he had given them against him, they could do no real damage to the ship, but the turmoil would ruin trading—and profits—for many months. The Company auditors would require an accounting from him. Old H.B. could

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get very nasty with minor executives who made too many mistakes.

Sitting in the control room, Hardesty began to sweat. Then he began to pound on the table with his fist.

"Nothing is going to stop me! Nothing! Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir," Beller's voice came over the radio. "I hear you. But those goonies up above are shooting very straight. Our Martian boys don't like it."

"You don't like it either," Hardesty challenged. "You're turning yellow on me!"

"You wouldn't like it either, if you were here," Beller answered. "If we don't find some way to get at these goonies from above, or from another direction, we're stopped."

"What are you hinting at?" Hardesty asked.

"You've got a helicopter and a pilot sitting down there beside the ship," Beller answered. "Why don't you bring the helicopter up and drop a few grenades on these Fourth Level goonies from above? Give them a taste of their own medicine, blow out the road block, and give our Martian boys a chance to get through to them."

"I'll do that," Hardesty said, instantly. "You stand by with your reserve force and keep in touch with me by radio. I'll show you how to blast a way through these Martians!"

Beller's idea had instantly become Hardesty's idea. This was in accord with Company practice, where the ideas of a subordinate were always appropriated by his superior, if they seemed workable. If tried and found to be unsuccessful, the subordinate who had the ideas in the first place took all blame for them.

Changing the frequency of the ship's radio transmitter, Hardesty called the pilot of the helicopter.

"Get your ship ready. We're going up," Hardesty told him.

"But it's still night," the pilot protested. "Better wait for a couple of more hours and we'll have enough daylight to see where we are going."

Hardesty hesitated for an instant. If he waited until day, he knew he might lose his Martian allies. Ordering the pilot to get the ship warmed up, he went to the storage lockers and secured a case of hand grenades. Rousing one of his secre-

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taries, he put her on duty at the radio. Going out the main lock, he told the guards on duty there to permit no one to enter the space ship until he returned.

Outside was the night. One of the moons of Mars was sliding down toward the horizon. The vast bulk of Suzusilmar was a huge shadowy giant on Hardesty's left. The desert air was thin and bitter cold. Hardesty suddenly began to shiver. Now that he was outside it, he realized how snug and comfortable the spaceship had been. Here in the late reaches of this bleak, bitter night, Mars was an alien world, perhaps a world where humans should never have come.

The case of grenades was heavy in Hardesty's hands. In spite of the biting cold, Hardesty felt a thin film of sweat appear on his skin. For a moment, the impulse to drop the case and flee back to the protection of the space ship was strong in him. He fought it down and forced his legs to carry him across the sand to the place where the spinning vanes of the helicopter were already beginning to stir up clouds of dust.

Hardesty went under the vanes and entered the ship.

"Take her up," he said to the pilot.

"Yes, sir."

As the ship lifted, Hardesty went forward to the plastic nose. Prying the top off the box of hand grenades, he got them ready on the floor beside him, then turned his attention to the automatic weapon already mounted in the nose. A vicious thing, this gun would fire a stream of small slugs at a muzzle velocity in excess of 3,000 feet per second. In the thin air of Mars, slugs did not lose their speed as fast as they did on Earth.

On the side of the mountain, flashes of light told him where the fighting was.

"Go up and come down from above," Hardesty ordered.

He thought, with resentment, that dropping hand grenades from a helicopter was a damned primitive method of fighting. When he became president of the Company, he was going to get the laws changed so that Company men would have available to them for use on other planets an adequate supply of fission bombs! He had tried to get them for this trip but

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even old H.B. had been horrified at the idea, pointing out the stringent laws governing the use of fissionable material and how it was their duty to obey the laws. Privately, Hardesty knew that what old H.B. actually meant by his fine talk of duty was that he knew no way to obtain possession of fissionable material without risking a stiff jail sentence, but just the same, the yellow streak in old H.B. had left him in the position of having to fight a stiff battle with automatic weapons and hand grenades. At the same time, he also knew that his weapons were superior to anything the Martians possessed through the Fourth Level. The higher levels had no weapons at all, so far as he had been able to ascertain. Once past the Fourth Level, he would be able to walk the rest of the way.

As the big vanes of the helicopter beat the thin air of ancient Mars, Hardesty got on the radio to Beller.

"Our boys are ready," Beller told him. "We're just waiting for you to blow out the road block up above. However, there is one problem—"

"What's that?" Hardesty demanded.

"These Martians from the First and Second Levels are trying to drift away and start looting the Third Level," Beller said.

"Shoot any looters!" Hardesty ordered.

"Yes, sir," Beller said, with relish.

The pilot lifted the ship until it was even with the Fifth Level. Looking down, Hardesty could see the buildings of the Fourth Level below him, the streets, the little parks as dim outlines in the Martian night. He could also see fairly clearly the broad flight of steps leading upward. Like a stairway to Heaven, he thought. The dead bodies strewn on these steps just below the Fourth Level told him that this route to Heaven had become a detour through hell. Little spurts of flame reaching downward from the road block where the steps reached the Fourth Level told him that the detour was still in effect.

He had the pilot bring the helicopter to a position where it was directly above this road block. The Fourth Level Mar-

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tians were so busy watching the enemy below that they had not as yet seen this new enemy above them.

While he waited for Beller to report that the Martians were again ready to charge, Hardesty was aware that the first, far-off glints of dawn were in the sky. Somewhere off on the other side of spinning Mars, the sun was coming. In the thin air of the Red Planet, sunrise was an event seen afar, first as a whisper of light in the sky, then eventually as a blue glow dancing in the high sky. In time, the blue glow would work its way down to the desert surface of the planet where it would begin to reveal, softly and gently, the harsh outlines of ragged mountains and raw desert. On Mars, as if the sun wished to be very careful in bringing its full light to the weathered outline of this ancient world, the dawn came as a soft gentleness. Impressionistic painters and poets from Earth had found the dawns of Mars worth all the effort of the trip to the planet. The painters had tried to capture this soft glow in color but had largely failed in the attempt. Seeking for words to describe the dawns here, the poets had also failed in large part. Earth's languages had no words to describe Mars.

Jim Hardesty had no interest in poetry or in art. But he was interested in the coming of dawn. Would good light give him a better chance for a successful assault on the defenses of the Fourth Level? Or would it give the defenders better targets?

Hardesty decided he would keep the Martians at the road block so busy wondering what was happening to them that they would not have time to find targets down below.

Beyond the Fourth Level, the great flight of steps stretched upward with road blocks or barricades. Only on the Fourth Level did the Martians seem to find their possessions worth fighting for. Those of the higher levels did not seem to care, which made things easier for the invader.

However, there did seem to be something the higher level Martians cared for—their lives. Looking upward, Hardesty saw tiny figures toiling slowly up the long flight of steps. They were fleeing for safety to the top level, he decided.

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Now he noticed again the tall spire that topped the Seventh Level. Was there a pale glow around it? Did a radiance shine there? Was the spire actually bathed in gleaming luminous light?

Staring, Hardesty decided that his eyes were tricking him. On Mars men saw mirages, mistaking their own hallucinations for reality. He decided the glow around the spire was only a mirage.

His radio came to life as Beller called him.

"I've got our Martian boys all lined up and ready to charge," Beller said.

"Good."

"I've told them that a god of Mars in the form of a great bird will come down out of the sky and blow the road block out of the way ahead of them."

"What?" Hardesty said, startled.

"You're that big bird, sir, you and the egg-beater," Beller continued. "All you have to do is swoop down and drop a few grenades—"

"I've already planned it that way," Hardesty said, irritated because Beller had anticipated his thinking.

Back on Earth, he had often seen the Company president show similar irritation when his thinking had been anticipated. How irritated old H.B. when he got Rolf's mind-reading gadget into operation and could really anticipate the president's thinking! And when he was president, no smart young puppy on his way up would be able to out-think him! He would know what was in the minds of his junior executives before they knew it themselves. As for his secretaries, he would know the minute one of them even thought of two-timing him!

"We're waiting for your signal, boss," Beller said, far below him.

Glancing at the sky, Hardesty saw that the full light of dawn was at least an hour away. When the first rays of the sun reached the Seventh Level, he wanted to be there to greet them.

"Turn 'em loose!" he growled at Beller.

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"Yes, sir, boss," Beller answered.

Beller left his transmitter on. Coming over the radio, Hardesty could hear the shouted commands of his waspish killer as Beller and his men moved the Martians to attack again. Through the plastic nose of the ship, he could see the flashes of their weapons as the wild tribesmen started to move against the barricade erected at the Fourth Level.

"I want you to drop the ship down to within a couple of hundred feet of that road block," Hardesty told the pilot. "But keep the ship moving."

"Yes, sir," the pilot answered. "But what if they start shooting at us?"

"That's why I want you to keep the ship moving," Hardesty said. "If they come too close, put on all the power you've got and pull out."

To the Martians at the road block, the helicopter did seem to be a giant bird. They had glimpsed it in the night sky but they had not guessed to what use it would be put. They had had no experience with war from the air.

Hardesty filled his jacket pockets with hand grenades. He got other grenades ready to one hand. As the helicopter swooped down, he brought the automatic gun in the nose to bear on the dark shadows lurking behind the darker shadow of the road block. He pulled the trigger.

A stream of slugs screamed downward.

Behind the barricade, the Fourth Level Martians went down as if a death ray had struck them. Hardesty saw the Martians jerk as the slugs hit them, he saw them fall, he saw them sprawl to the sides. He saw others, mortally hurt, try to leap over the barricades in their death agony.

With one hand, Hardesty kept the gun going. With the other hand, he scooped up grenades from the floor. Pulling the firing pins with his teeth, he dropped them through the hole in the bottom of the plastic nose.

Where the grenades hit, great gouts of smoke, flame, and rubble spurted upward. As if a giant was kicking them aside, great holes were torn in the barricades.

The Fourth Level Martians hastily began to shoot at the helicopter.

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From below, screaming like demons, the wild tribesmen of the First Level charged upward at the holes the grenades had blown in the road block.

Chapter Eight

BY THE TIME they had reached the Sixth Level, Rolf found that his legs were weak and his heart was pounding heavily. Above, leading to the Seventh Level, was another flight of steps. As he looked at them, weariness came up in him.

Jennie and Hoker were both panting but Thallen and Unardo walked as if climbing these steps was no more than mild morning exercise for them. Resolutely the two Martians moved toward the steps leading up to the next level. Rolf tried to follow and found his legs would not carry him.

"Daddy, are you all right?" Jennie asked.

"Rolfen, sit down," Thallen said, becoming aware of Rolf's plight for the first time. "I did not notice. I—I was too engrossed in—in—"

Protesting that all he needed was a little rest and that it had been a trying night, Rolf sagged to a seat on a stone bench carved and set in place here when Mars was young.

The others waited for him.

Below, the sounds of battle were momentarily still. In spite of the silence, the night was alive with expectancy. In the dim light of the single moon that was in the sky, Suzusilmar seemed to wait.

Time past the counting had rolled over this mighty mountain since the days when the terraces of the different levels had been cut in it, since the great flights of steps had been constructed. During these many years it had seen conquerors

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come and conquerors go across the surface of the Red Planet. Petty princes, kings of the desert tribes, wild, warring hordes had swept in from the surrounding deserts and had launched their assaults upward, to fall back and become the dwellers of the First Level, the desert floor. These had been native conquerors. Suzusilmar knew how to deal with its own breed of wolves. Now there had come across space others of the same wild, lawless breed. Would this mighty mountain know how to deal with these?

Fifth Level Martians were coming up the steps. Gathering his breath, Rolf watched them. They did not seem to be refugees fleeing from the coming conqueror. As if they had an appointment with destiny, they walked with their heads up, moving up the steps with effortless strides.

Rolf had been hearing the slow *tap-tap-tap* of a staff on stone for some time before he caught a glimpse of the bent figure toiling up the steps. He recognized Jalnar, the half-blind beggar. He wondered if Jalnar would find a place of refuge here. He would have asked but in his mind was turmoil and the dim memory of a vast experience now filed under the image of a single star. He wanted to talk about the *teliknon* and the part it had played in the experience he had had.

Thallen forbade questions.

"Too much else holds my mind now to answer questions, Rolfen," Thallen said gently. "Later, we will talk, if there is a later."

"Do you mean there is a chance that Hardesty will succeed?" Rolf asked grimly. Somewhere in his mind was the thought that this mountain could not be taken. Or perhaps the wish.

"There is always that chance," Thallen found thought to answer. "Here we know much, but one thing we do not know—the future. There was danger that every little prince who came against the mountain might succeed."

"But—" Rolf protested.

"We have no magic here to make danger go away. On this mountain we have always walked on eggs with very thin

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shells—and do tonight,” Thallen answered.

“But you said the king held this mountain in the palm of his hand,” Rolf said.

“So he does. But if his hand trembles, the mountain will fall. It will crush his hand, and him, and us,” Thallen answered.

The three humans shivered and drew closer to each other. In an alien world, they formed a little island of human warmth. In the far distance, across the red deserts, a thin blue glow was visible in the sky—the coming sunrise.

“There’s the helicopter from the ship!” Jennie said, pointing. She moved closer to her father. “Do—do you suppose they’re looking for me.”

“They don’t even know you’re not in the ship,” Hoker said. “My guess is that Hardesty has sent out the helicopter to see how the attack is going.”

“It seems to have slowed,” Rolf said.

“If you are ready, Rolfen—” Thallen said.

Rolf rose from the stone seat. Again he noticed Jalnar. The half-blind Martian was moving very slowly up the stone steps. Involuntarily, Rolf started toward him. Thallen’s voice halted him.

“I was going to help Jalnar,” Rolf said.

Thallen’s voice was suddenly warm. “You who have hardly the strength to walk yourself would try to help a worthless beggar?”

“Well, perhaps I can’t do it. But he needs help.”

“And we need to be at the top,” Thallen said. “I have confidence in Jalnar. He has the strength to reach the Sixth Level. If the attack over-runs him, he will turn aside and find a place to hide. But your desire to help a blind Martian does you great credit, my friend.” Thallen’s voice had overtones of wistfulness in it, plus a soft gentleness.

“Come now,” the Martian continued. “Remember who summoned us. On our world, one who disobeys such a summons is rash indeed.”

“But—” Rolf still tried to protest.

“The one who is great enough to hold this mountain in the

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palm of this hand is also great enough to look after the welfare of a blind beggar," Thallen said. "Come!"

Rolf felt he had no choice except to follow. As they moved up the steps that led to the Seventh Level, Rolf could see a nimbus, a kind of halo, that was now clearly visible around the tall spire that reached like a spear toward the reaches of infinite space. He was aware of shifting patterns of form and color moving within the nimbus. Trying to follow the shifting patterns and the changing colors caused pain in his eyes. A sort of giddiness rose in him.

"Are you all right, daddy?" Jennie asked again.

"Of course," Rolf answered. He put firmness in his voice that he was far from feeling. In his mind, somewhere, was still the image of a single star. The censors were having difficulty in keeping the associated memories away from his conscious mind which was already hard-pressed with the knowledge that trouble was free in this haunted night and was climbing the steps of Suzusilmar behind him. His conscious mind felt that it had had enough of trouble.

His legs found the strength to reach the top. Here he gaped in surprise at what he saw. A door was open in the base of what he had always thought was a solid shaft of metal reaching toward the far-off stars.

Beyond the door, from which a violet glow was streaming, was a room.

"How—I didn't know that was here," Rolf said.

"It has always been here," Thallen answered. "The giants who carved the terraces in the side of Suzusilmar and erected the spire here, also constructed the temple-theater inside. Come."

As Thallen went through the door, he stepped very softly. Following behind Thallen, Unardo walked like one entering a holy place.

With his arm around Jennie, Bill Hoker was giving her courage from his own limited store. Rolf would gladly have given courage to both of them, but he found he had none to spare. Pausing just inside the door, he looked around. Wonder rose in him.

The room was circular and was much larger than had

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looked possible from the outside. Seven circular tiers descended to the center of the room. There, rising up perhaps three feet above the floor, was a circular dais.

Except for a path to the center, and a stool there, the dais was completely occupied by the biggest abacus Rolf had ever seen. Unardo's treatment abacus had at most a dozen strings with perhaps forty brightly colored beads strung on them. This abacus had hundreds of strings. The beads numbered in the thousands.

Rolf thought that this abacus was for a super-being, a super Martian. Years of training would be needed to handle the beads on this instrument.

Rolf wondered if Thallen would operate it. He saw that the Fifth Level Martian was moving along the stone walk that circled the room at the level of the door. Turning, Thallen signalled for the humans to follow him. Apparently Thallen was not to be the operator.

Slowly the thought came into Rolf's mind that the Martian who would operate this abacus would be the mysterious king. The thought sent a chill up the human's spine and at the same time it aroused in him a sense of tingling anticipation.

But where was the king? The dais was empty.

A dim glow came down from the pointed roof, illuminating the beads of the big abacus on the dais. Rolf had the impression that vast energies were being drawn down from the metal spire which thrust its spear out toward infinite space. These energies were being focused on the big abacus.

In this spot had been brought to focus a science so vast that human science seemed small in comparison. Science was ordered, systematic knowledge that led to control of the forces of nature. What these forces were, how vast the subtle energies, how far-reaching in their effects, no man as yet knew.

Here on Mars for uncounted centuries had been those who knew. Or they had been here once. Did their knowledge remain? The Martians seated quiet and immobile around the room gave the impression that they thought it did. Perhaps this temple-theater was a holy place of Mars, so holy that

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Thallen had taken a great liberty in bringing humans here at all.

However, Thallen had not brought them of his own initiative. He had been ordered to do so.

Thallen led them to seats on the top tier of the temple-theater. He made Rolf sit on his right. Jennie sat on Thallen's left, with Hoker beside her. Unardo sat beside Hoker. Rolf felt as if Thallen regarded them as children who might say or do the wrong thing at any time, with disastrous consequences, and that they had been seated so that they might do the least mischief.

Was danger in this temple-theater? What danger was here compared to the danger that was coming from below, if Hardesty won the battle down there?

As the victor, Hardesty would operate in the Company tradition. Hardesty would be ruthless. Operating on Mars, Hardesty would give no heed to human law.

Sitting quietly, Rolf realized that danger was present here in this temple-theater and that it was of such magnitude that Hardesty's ruthlessness was as nothing in comparison to it. Trying to put his finger on the exact source of the danger, Rolf found he could not do it. It did not seem to come from any one source. It seemed to be present in the very air of the circular, sloping room. The place was silent. Too silent. The Martians gathered here looked as if they hardly dared breathe. New arrivals went on tip-toe to their seats. Each seat had a small stone bench in front of it. On each bench was a small abacus similar to the one Unardo had used. There was an abacus on the bench in front of him. When Rolf reached out an exploring finger toward it, Thallen hissed sharp protest in his ear. Rolf quickly withdrew the exploring finger. He turned his attention to the glow of color, mixing with tiny sparkles of light, that was slowly increasing in the temple-theater. Both told him that energy was flowing down the metal spire outside and was filling the room.

Complete silence still held the room. This reminded Rolf, vaguely, of another silence he had encountered deep within his own mind. As this memory tried to surface, the censors

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in his mind got very busy again, hiding the memory out of sight. Knowledge of this silence was good in its place and in its time. But out of its place and out of its time it might create as much havoc with the mental equipment of his conscious mind as fissionable material reaching critical mass.

Diiiiiiiing!

So unexpected was the sudden sound in this place of silence that Rolf almost jumped. A quick glance from Thallen's eyes told him to remain where he was. Thallen glanced at Jennie and at Bill Hoker. They sat without moving.

At first, Rolf did not know the source of the sound. Then he saw one of the Martians reach forward, his hand moving as fast as the head of a striking snake, and move a bead on the abacus in front of him.

Dooooooooong!

Another note, in perfect harmony with the first one but an octave lower, rang through the room.

Before it had died into silence, the hand of another Martian had darted to the abacus in front of him, then another and another and another, so that the temple-theater was filled with dancing sounds, each in perfect harmony and in perfect rhythm, which seemed to be the first movement of some lost symphony of the Red Planet.

Rolf's first thought was that this symphony was part of some religious ritual in progress here. His mind returned again and again to the religious theme. Each time the theme was rejected as being inadequate. The religious motif might be a partial explanation but it was not a total explanation of all that was happening here. In this little temple-theater a super-science was in operation. Rolf saw this very clearly when he realized, with another start, that these Martians from the Fifth and Sixth Levels were not playing a remembered melody but were improvising, were creating this music, were making it up, and that each note that was struck had to be in perfect harmony with all the notes that had gone before and in addition had to add some slight new touch to the theme being developed!

This was a feat to amaze the mind of man. On Earth, symphony orchestras were under the direction of a conductor

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and played from written notes. Here there was no conductor, or none as yet, and the symphony which they played had never been written! They were writing it as they played it!

The air in the room itself seemed to be the sounding board from which the music was coming. As he listened, Rolf realized that his body was also in some degree becoming a sounding board for this music, as it had in Unardo's treatment room. He was aware that his body resonated to these notes that flooded through the room.

Rolf waited with bated breath for the arrival of the conductor, for the coming of the king. He assumed this king would be some Martian from the Sixth or Seventh Levels whom he had never seen.

A king great enough to hold this mountain in the palm of his hand!

At the thought, eagerness rose higher in John Rolf. And higher still!

Chapter Nine

AS HE SAW the wild tribesmen of the First Level charge through the holes his grenades had blown in the road block at the beginning of the Fourth Level, the call of battle shot like fire through the veins of Jim Hardesty. His life on Earth, all of the time he had spent with the Company, had been a dull, boring affair. It had all been in preparation for this moment, when he could come alive in wild battle on Mars. This was life, this battle, this wild struggle! Here a man could know fully the meaning of life—because death was so very close. One had meaning only in relation to the other.

Hardesty felt his heart begin to beat faster. His nostrils were flaring like those of a warhorse that has heard the

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brazen call of the trumpet. He shoved open the plastic window so he could see and hear what was happening down below.

The roar of battle, the blasts of automatic weapons, the shrill yells of the charging tribesmen, brought up in him all the history of fighting that his ancestors had done on the Home World.

"Take her down!" he shouted at the pilot.

"But Mr. Hardesty, they're fighting down there!" the flier protested.

"That's why I'm going down!" Hardesty shouted. "I'm going to lead it!" Unknown and hitherto unplumbed depths in his blood, his heredity, and in his psyche, were responding to the sights and the sounds of battle. In his mind's eye, he could see himself leading a wheeling cavalry charge to strike the final, fatal blow at the flank of a reeling army, sending his enemies down into confusion and defeat.

The pilot hesitated.

"Take the ship down!" Hardesty screamed.

As the pilot reluctantly obeyed, Hardesty shoved more hand grenades into his jacket pockets, then lifted the automatic gun from its mounting. Taking fresh clips from the supply rack, he shoved them into other pockets.

Simultaneously, two things happened. A burst of shots from the left of the Fourth Level road block revealed where the Fourth Level Martians had had their own reserve force waiting. When the barricade was breached, this reserve force had gone into action. Methodically moving forward, it was shooting the tribesmen who had reached this level. At the same time other Fourth Level Martians were bringing up doors ripped from houses and sheets of metal taken from shops to replace the breached road block.

The second thing was the discovery by the Fourth Level Martians of the helicopter above them. They turned massed fire on it.

Their fire was accurate.

Hardesty saw holes with radiating cracks appear in the tough plastic nose of the helicopter. He heard the howl of slugs striking metal and bouncing off.

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When he had been shooting at the Martians, it had been fun. When they were shooting at him, it was not funny at all.

"Take her up!" he shouted at the pilot.

There was no answer.

The pilot's compartment was above and behind the nose of the ship. Turning, Hardesty jerked open the door leading to it.

The pilot was already falling. He had gotten to his feet and was in the act of falling when Hardesty opened the door. He fell forward and down, his hands clutching weakly at Hardesty.

Blood was gushing from his mouth.

Trying to speak, the pilot choked. His hands clawed at his chest where a slug from a Martian gun had found its mark. His eyes suddenly went out of focus. The strength went out of his muscles.

Hardesty realized he was holding a dead man in his arms.

Slugs were still ripping through the plastic nose of the ship. Somewhere a motor was clanking ominously.

The great vanes that supported the ship were slowing.

Hardesty snatched up the microphone. "Beller!" he screamed.

"Yes, sir. Everything is going fine down here, sir," Beller answered.

"It's not going fine up here. I'm crashing!" Hardesty shouted.

"Sir!"

"Bring up your reserves, Beller! On the double!"

Hardesty's orders were interrupted by the crash of splintering metal. As it fell, the craft had turned a little to its side. The ends of the vanes struck first, in a bed of flowers that bloomed in the center of a little park. Dust and flowers exploded upward. The cab was thrown forward. As the impetus of the spinning vanes was transmitted to it, the cab tried to roll. The vanes were torn from their mountings. The scream of splintering metal cut the air.

Jim Hardesty had the impression that he was caught in a spinning top. His head hit the side of the cab as it turned over, then the body of the dead pilot was thrown against him.

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The dead body seemed to try to cling to him. He shoved it away. It fell on top of him again as the turning cab struck a tree at the edge of the little park and came to rest in a thump of metal.

Shoving the body of the dead pilot off him again, Hardesty clutched the barrel of the automatic weapon and crawled to the door of the cab. The opening was all that was left, the door itself having been lost in the first crash. Hardesty fell out of the door, striking the ground with a jolt that rattled the hand grenades in his pockets. For an instant, he was afraid they might explode, then he realized they could not explode until he had pulled the pins. He did not try to get to his feet and walk. Instead he crawled. With the hand grenades rattling in his pockets, he sounded like a mechanical pig. A clump of shrubbery caught his eye ahead. He crawled to the middle of it, taking refuge there under a bushy, fern-like tree with branches that almost reached the ground.

In his immediate vicinity was silence. In the distance, at the road block, shots and shouts continued. He could not see what was happening there.

Martian voices chattered near him. In the gray light of the dawn, he caught a glimpse of Martians cautiously approaching the wrecked cab of the helicopter. Hardesty got his own weapon ready but did not use it. Perhaps they would find the body of the pilot and would assume he was the only occupant of the ship.

They found the body of the pilot all right but they did not make the mistake of assuming he was the ship's only passenger. The marks Hardesty had made as he crawled away told them that a second occupant had escaped. They were beginning to follow his trail and Hardesty, under the fern-like tree, was sweating when a great burst of automatic rifle fire from the direction of the road block pulled them away.

Beller and his men were going into action.

Crouching under the shrub, Hardesty felt the call of battle rise again in him.

He knew that these Fourth Level Martians were nearest to humans of all the inhabitants of this mysterious mountain.

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Humans would fight to defend their homes. So would these Martians of the Fourth Level. In addition, they had another motive, to defend the levels higher than theirs, levels which they regarded as sacred.

He had underestimated these Martians of the Fourth Level. He had thought of them as weaklings who would run when attacked by automatic weapons. He knew now they would not run. The only way through them was to kill them. The question in his mind was whether even Beller and his men could smash their way through the road block and could gain access to the Fourth Level, where their superior weapons would give them a great advantage. He also realized he should have sent up a diversionary attack at another flight of stairs, to split the defenders.

Now his forces were committed. He had to win here, he had to win during this dawn that was now becoming clearer in the sky, or he had to lose. If he lost, he would be hard-pressed to explain to the Company his flagrant waste of money on Mars. The Company had a tendency to overlook costs when the operation was successful. However, if an operation failed, the Company auditors started looking for wasted pennies. Eventually the auditors were certain to learn, and report to the president, that Hardesty's real reason in launching this attack had been that of personal gain, and that what he really wanted was an invention a human had made here, this for his own profit. Eventually old H.B. would be certain to learn that a mind-reading device existed. He would promptly want it for himself.

Trust old H.B. to know a good thing when he saw it. Also trust him to steal it if he could!

Crouching under the fern-like shrub, Hardesty's mind was working very fast. It began to work even faster when he realized all of this reasoning was actually an assumption based on premise that he would escape alive himself. This premise could easily be false!

Under the shrub, Hardesty began to sweat again. The cold dry air of Mars sucked the perspiration from his body as rapidly as hard-working sweat glands squeezed it out. The rattle of gun-fire grew louder. He had no guarantee that

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Beller would press the attack of the reserve force. The waspish gunman might suddenly remember that his own life was important. Beller might forget that his boss was in trouble here on the Fourth Level, if the fighting got too tough.

Hardesty did not know what the Fourth Level Martians would do to him if the attack failed and they caught him afterwards. They might skin him alive and swing his squirming body over the parapet of their level, as a grim warning to others who might be tempted to attack their sacred mountain.

All of this added up to one fact. The attack could not fail! *It could not!*

He had to win. *Had to!*

Crawling to the edge of the shrubbery, he lifted himself to a crouching position. Cuddling the automatic gun under his left arm, he pulled grenades from his pockets. He held them against his body with his left arm.

From this spot, he could see the road block. The Fourth Level Martians were trying to get it back into place. Gunfire from below was making their task difficult.

Crouching, Hardesty ran forward. Pulling pins with his teeth, he threw the hand grenades one after another. Then he threw himself flat on the ground.

Thump! THUMP! Thump-thump!

The exploding hand grenades sounded like an angry giant stamping the surface of the Red Planet under his feet.

Under his body, Hardesty could feel the mountain twitch and jerk like an annoyed and frightened animal.

Chapter Ten

THE MUSIC in the temple-theater crescendoed and hung there on a long chord as if it was waiting for someone to appear. Or

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was this music a supplication for someone to come? Rolf did not know. He knew that no one came.

The music did not end. Somewhere a Martian touched another note. With almost endless variations, the theme went through a whole symphonic movement, to come finally to climax on another supplicatory chord which was a blend of all the tones produced by every abacus in the room.

Again the supplication produced no answer. And a new movement began higher up the scale and more intense in its pleading. As the notes swept through his body, Rolf began to respond more completely to them so that his emotions seemed to be in the music and the music in his emotions, both blended together in a harmonious unity. He could feel his mind start to move in the same rhythm. At first, the censors of that segment of his total being called his conscious mind, found this rhythm unsettling and tried to suppress it, knowing that it would bring memories with it that were too large for the conscious mind to handle. Then, slowly, the censors themselves began to move into the unity, began to go with the rhythm, but even this did not seem to be dangerous here in this temple-theater at the bottom of a slender spire that was pointed like a spear at the vastness of high heaven.

Rolf was still dazed by the fact that this music, this harmony moving toward an incredible unity, was a spontaneous creation, that it was coming through many minds, through many fingers, without a note being either off key or out of time. Was there an invisible conductor on the dais in the center of the temple-theater?

Rolf shivered at the thought. Perhaps Martian eyes could see into a range of the spectrum invisible to human eyes. He studied the dais carefully. Nothing was there that he could see.

Diiiiioong!

Rolf heard the wrong note as a jarring dissonance, he felt it all through his body as little prickles of quick pain that would have been torture if they had lasted longer.

A shock wave rolled through the Martians. Rolf caught

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a glimpse of the one who had struck the wrong note. His hands uplifted, the Martian seemed to be in acute pain.

More than this, Rolf had the impression that unless this error was instantly corrected, unless it was made the starting point of a new and higher harmony, unless—He did not know what would happen. Doom seemed to whisper in the air.

It was Thallen whose fingers darted to his abacus, striking a new note, then, swiftly, three other notes that used the wrong note as a foundation and began to build to a new symphonic movement, making the start of a new rightness out of what had been a wrongness. The other Martians instantly followed Thallen's lead with the result that the little temple-theater was suddenly flooded with the movement of a new harmony.

Rolf had the dazed impression that the mountain somehow righted itself and settled back into place as the new flood of brilliant, spontaneous music rang out.

Only hands that moved quicker than the paws of cats, only minds that were faster than lightning, could have achieved this result.

Rolf noticed again the Martian who had struck the wrong note. He had slumped forward so that his head was resting on the stone bench beside his abacus. Rolf knew instantly that he was dead. Remembering the little prickles of pain that had run through his own body when the wrong note was struck, he guessed what had killed this Martian.

Now he understood, at least in part, why the higher level Martians had always seemed to walk on eggs with very thin shells. The price of a wrong note, of a wrong step, was death. However, the higher level Martians seemed to accept this danger as a necessary part of life. Rolf was certain that no one had been forced to come to this temple-theater. Awe, and more than awe, came up in the human. He knew he had caught a glimpse behind the curtain of mystery that hung like a shroud of Suzusilmar. But it was only a glimpse. It hinted at far greater mysteries than it revealed.

If a wrong note had resulted in death for the Martian who had struck it, what would a wrong action mean? Rolf pre-

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ferred not to think about this possibility. He had the impression that enough power was either already concentrated or was being concentrated in this temple-theater to shake the mountain to its roots, perhaps even to shake the planets. Back on Earth the power of the atom was under rigid World Government control, with no nation and no individual allowed private use of the hellish stuff. Rolf suspected that the enormous power that could be liberated from the atom, and which was still frightening half of Earth's people, was very small in comparison to the power being concentrated here.

He did not know the nature of the energy here. He suspected it was coming in from space and was being transformed, modified, brought to focus, and given direction by the Martians who were manipulating the little abacuses. The musical tones were not the energy but were only the audible component of it, a device that enabled the Martians to hear how the energy was moving. A mighty science was here, the science of energy being moved in precise harmony and in perfect balance, with the audible component expressed as the movement of a great symphony that was rising higher and higher as if it was imploring someone—a king or a god—to appear in answer to its appeal. There was a feeling of life in this music as if the energy itself in some strange way was alive and was responsive to the massed wills of the Martians in the temple-theater.

The movement reached its climax in another supplicatory chord. But no one, not a king and not a god, appeared. Thinking about the king, Rolf found old memories from Earth passing through his mind, of kings on horseback directing their armies, of kings on their thrones wearing jewelled crowns, of kings wielding scepters as symbols of their power. This memory montage was largely derived from paintings he had seen in art galleries. Every king that Earth had had in all of its kingdoms had had his portrait painted by the best artist in his realm. Rolf had always regarded such painting as monuments to the vanity of men.

The chord held for what seemed an eternity. Then it stopped. Every Martian sat like a stone statue in front of his abacus. Not a hand moved, not an eye-lid flickered. The

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air in the temple-theater seemed to twist and turn and writhe from the intensity of the energy compressed in it. Little sparkles of blue light danced in the air, reminding Rolf of the image of a star.

The temple-theater was silent.

Into this silence came two sounds, one, the far-off rattle of automatic weapons firing, the second, the slow, *tap, tap, tap* of the end of a staff on stone.

The second sound could only mean that Jalnar had failed to find a hole to hide in on the Sixth Level and had found his way here to the temple-theater at the top of the mountain, seeking sanctuary, hoping that here he might be safe, if only for a little while.

A rush of sympathy came up in Rolf, twisting at his middle. Like Jalnar, he knew what it meant to be hunted, and if he did not know what blindness meant in a literal sense, he knew what it meant to feel that he was blind. Here on Suzusilmar Rolf had always felt as if his eyes were not revealing to him a hundredth part of what was here.

Following the sympathy, came horror, as Rolf remembered what had happened to the Martian who had struck the wrong note. If a skilled Fifth or Sixth Level Martian had made a mistake here, and had died because of it, what would happen to blind Jalnar in this place of super-charged energy? A single wrong tap of the staff might send the beggar to his death!

Rolf felt an impulse to leap to his feet and run to Jalnar, to take the beggar by the arm and lead him away from this spot where death could lurk in the single wrong tap of a staf.

"Sit still!" Thallen's voice whispered, in Rolf's mind.

Rolf caught the impulse to leap to his feet before it had become action. He did not look at Thallen—this was forbidden too—but he knew the Fifth Level Martian was very much aware of what he was feeling.

"Do you want to let him get killed?" he tried to say.

"*Be still!*" Thallen answered. "Lest the lightning strike us!"

Rolf was quiet. He told himself that this was Mars. If Jalnar was to be saved, it was the job of a Martian. The

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Martians knew the rules and the law. He was a human, and an intruder. If they chose to permit a half-blind beggar to wander into a heavily charged area where his death could come at any instant, this was still their world.

The tap of the staff grew louder. Jalnar appeared in the door of the temple-theater. His staff felt for the first step leading down. He found it and felt very carefully for the stone surface. Watching the end of the staff feel for the stone step, Rolf felt something akin to agony. The end of the staff found what it was seeking. Leaning on the staff, Jalnar paused. He seemed uncertain what to do next.

Rolf thought that surely some Martian would rise now to escort the beggar to a place of safety. Surely they would not want this rag-clad scarecrow in their temple!

Not a Martian moved.

Slowly, Jalnar lowered one foot to the first step, then the second foot. The end of his staff sought for the next step below. Still no Martian moved. They sat like statues, each in his place. The temple-theater was completely silent. The air in the place seemed to writhe in torture from the energies contained in it.

A soft rhythm that sounded like a drum beat became audible. Muted and slow, as if it came from vast space itself, the drum beat had no discernable source.

Then he saw it did have a source. Each time Jalnar's staff touched the floor, the drum beat sounded. Rolf was now aware that the staff was maintaining a regular rhythm even when Jalnar seemed to be using it to feel his way down the steps. Looking closely, he could see the steady movement of Jalnar's wrist.

While the Martians sat like statues and John Rolf held his breath, the blind beggar, a cautious inch at a time, made his way to the bottom of the temple-theater. Surely now, Rolf thought, some Martian would take him to safety!

Not a Martian seemed even aware of his presence. They, like the three humans, seemed to be holding their breath. While the air twisted and writhed and dim pin-points of light flickered through it, the Martians sat in silence.

Nor did they move when, with great caution, the half-

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blind beggar began to feel his way up the dais in the center of the circular temple-theater. Rolf could not guess at the intensity of the energy concentrated on that dais but he knew it must be enormous. At any instant, he expected smashing fingers of electrical flame to leap from the huge abacus and wither the beggar to charred flesh.

But no flame leaped. The end of the staff found each step leading up to the top of the dais. The rhythm of the drum beat did not falter.

Jalnar stood erect on the dais. His patched, scare-crow robe stood out from his body as if a wind was blowing there. This was no wind, this was the effect of heavy electrical charge.

Nor Rolf wanted to scream. His vocal chords were too paralyzed to move. He could only watch—and hope the horror inside him would climb to no greater heights.

His hope was in vain. The horror did climb higher. Jalnar found the entrance that led to the center of the huge abacus. He seemed to think that at last he had found a place to hide. An eagerness showed on his twisted face. With the staff held in front of him, he moved forward with a surer step. His manner was that of a long-hunted animal that has found a place of refuge.

Moving to the center of the huge abacus, Jalnar found the stool for the operator. Sitting down on it, he lowered his staff to the floor.

Instantly the drum beat stopped.

The air in the temple-theater was suddenly hot. The silence was that of the void, of great space. In the whole place not a Martian seemed to be breathing. They waited. The whole mountain seemed to wait with them. Perhaps all of Mars waited. Jalnar, like an animal secure at last, also waited. Then, an inch at a time, his right hand with its twisted, claw-like fingers went out toward a bead on the huge abacus. Rolf had the vague impression of a monkey that has somehow wandered into a room where a huge calculator is housed. Seeing the keys, the monkey was curious. He reached out to touch one. There would be no way for the monkey to know that the key he touched might release energy that would rock the planet to its molten core!

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Jalnar touched a bead on the abacus. The energy responded. A single note as solemn as the start of a great hymn rang through the temple-theater.

Instantly, as if this was what they had been waiting for, every other Martian in the temple-theater came to life. Their fingers darted to the abacuses in front of them. The room was filled with harmonious sound, a great bugle note of it. The twisting, tortured, hot air suddenly became alive with pulsating color.

Jalnar's crooked fingers went to another bead, then to another, and to another, his hands moving like those of a harpist. In the space of seconds, the temple-theater was alive with the rising crescendo of another, vaster symphonic movement.

This Martian who could hardly see his hand in front of his face became the leader of all those assembled here. He also worked spontaneously, improvising note by note. The symphonic movement changed its flow and its direction like a mighty river breaking into hundreds of small waterfalls but never losing its sense of direction or a drop of its current. It, too, seemed to move toward some majestic climax that was as yet unreachd.

All of this done by a blind beggar.

John Rolf sat numb and silent in his place.

In his mind was the sudden, shocking knowledge that he was looking at the king of the Red Planet!

It was Jalnar, a half-blind beggar, whom the Martians here had been summoning. It was Jalnar, a wretched scarecrow, who held Suzusilmar in the palm of his hand!

Even as the rational part of his mind insisted this was impossible, Rolf remembered how accurately Jalnar had thrown the staff when Beller had tried to shoot Jennie. He also remembered that Jalnar had just happened to be present at the right time and in the right place to prevent what would otherwise have been a tragedy. Had Jalnar guessed what might happen? Even if the future was not open before him, he might get intimations of what was coming.

A sudden gulp rose in Rolf's heart when he remembered how often he had spoken to Jalnar, thinking him only a

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beggar. It was not Jalnar who was blind, it was he, John Rolf, who could not see! Before his eyes many times had passed the greatest one of all Suzusilmar and he had not known it. He had seen only the beggar! Shame came up in him, for being blind, and as the symphonic movement rose higher and higher, awe gulped at his middle, twisting the emotions there. Again the I-principle slipped its mooring.

He became Jalnar. In Jalnar was the kind of humility that comes after all pride is gone, after all vanity has been washed away and lost in something greater than the self. In identifying with Jalnar, he had also become every other person present in the temple-theater. Beyond the confines of the theater, he was aware and was to some degree identified with every Martian on Suzusilmar, perhaps in some sense with the mountain itself. The Fourth Level Martians, fighting now for their lives; Jalnar was with them. He was also with the wild tribesmen charging upward from the lower levels. He was with the humans leading and directing the attack.

Nor was this all of the wonder here. For Jalnar was something beyond all of this. He was the energy coming in from infinite space, flowing down the tall spire that was a spear aimed at high heaven. One with this energy, he directed and controlled it. It flowed as he willed.

In this blind beggar was a super-mind, a mind great enough to know not only the secrets of the Seventh Level but also to see and understand the hates and fears and hopes of all who dwelt on Suzusilmar. But this super-mind, great as it was, could not see the future. It created the future, building it spontaneously and extemporaneously out the present, as this vast symphonic movement was built. The Martians here participating in this spontaneous symphony were training themselves to become super-minds in some dim future when Jalnar was gone, to take the place of the king when the king had become something else.

Rolf understood why he and Jennie and Bill Hoker had been brought to this temple-theater—to give this super-mind models of human minds, since Hardesty was human, in the event that Hardesty succeeded in fighting his way past the Fourth Level. All the minds present would be hooked up in

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a synthesis, would be blended into one mind, if necessary, to meet the threat raised by Hardesty and the Company which he represented.

Thus was the I-principle of John Rolf built into a synthesis of minds of Mars, as a blind beggar gathered and blended energies great enough to enable him to hold the whole vast bulk of Suzusilmar in one twisted hand.

As the music and energy built toward crescendo again, Rolf became aware of increasing strain and of growing weight. Then the music went into silence.

The light of dawn was coming in through the open door of the temple-theater. The sun had climbed over the edge of the horizon of Mars, rising higher in the dawn where shouts of triumph told of victory down below. A great wave of shouting rolled up the mountain.

Chapter Eleven

TO JOHN ROLF, it seemed that he was listening with many ears, including those of his own body. The people of the Red Planet heard different sounds than those who had evolved on Earth with its thicker air and its heavier gravity. Martian ears could hear sounds as high as 25,000 cycles. Human ears stopped hearing around 16,000.

Through the Martian ears, Rolf heard sounds that he did not normally hear, little squeaks like mice, little rustlings like invisible silk blowing in an unseen wind. Somewhere energy at enormous pressure was hissing. He also discovered that Martian noses smelled a different range of odors than human noses. Here on this arid world centuries of adaptation had given the Martians noses that enabled them to detect the

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slightest hint of moisture in the air. This ability to smell water had saved the life of many a Martian lost on the vast deserts. There were also differences in the emotive life. Martians were aware of a whole range of fine emotions beyond anything Rolf had even known existed.

But it was not what the Martians smelled that interested them most at this time. It was what they were hearing.

Down the mountain someone screamed.

An automatic gun rattled an answer.

The scream went into abrupt silence.

A shiver went through the Martian mind. The shiver was their cognizance of death. As Martians died down the mountain, the Martians in the temple-theater felt the death that had come.

Far down the mountain a hoarse voice bellowed. "Set guards at the Fifth Level, Beller. Shoot anybody who comes too close. You come with me."

This was Hardesty's voice. It carried clearly in the dawn air.

Jalnar's crooked fingers changed their rhythm on the abacus around him. Now the regular movement of the beat was overridden by wild and sudden bursts that sounded like women weeping in despair. Rolf's memory finally told him what this was. It was the death march of the desert tribesmen. This was their wild lament when one of their number died. He had heard it a few times skirling like Scottish bagpipes from the desert below.

Played here now it could have only one meaning, that death was coming up the mountain. But whose death?

Neither Jalnar nor the massed mind working in unison with him knew. Who would die was still in the balance, still undetermined.

Shouts sounded down below. Automatic weapons answered, closer now.

In the temple-theater the death march grew louder.

Rolf was aware that Jennie was calling mentally to him. Alarm was rising in her. Her heart was saying that she needed him. He tried to soothe her, to tell her that everything

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would be all right, knowing that he had no confidence himself. She sensed his lack of confidence. So did Jalnar.

"Peace, human," Jalnar's voice whispered in his mind.

Rolf tried to obey but his mind would not be quiet. Didn't they understand the situation? Hardesty would not leave anyone alive who might cause him trouble in the future.

"I know," Jalnar said, in Rolf's mind.

"But why don't you stop him—"

"More important than stopping him is the justice of our action," Jalnar's voice whispered. "I am weighed in the same scale with him, and so, human, are you."

"But you have power—"

"With power has come responsibility," Jalnar answered, I-principle talking to I-principle.

Rolf was suddenly silent. Now he glimpsed for the first time the meaning of *justice* as Jalnar meant the word. It weighed the value and the worth of a man, it saw his motives and where they took him, it saw Hardesty clearly, it saw the men and the Martians he killed, it also weighed their value and their worth, the whole becoming an equation of enormous complexity. Now Rolf understood the reason for the humility that he sensed in Jalnar's mind. The Universe was so big, so complex, that even a super-mind became humble.

The music continued the slow rhythm of a funeral march. Pressures built up in the temple-theater until the air hissed with subtle tension. Outside, coming closer and closer, were the sound of shots and the occasional thumps of hand grenades. Rolf knew beyond any doubt that Hardesty had forced the road block at the Fourth Level and was on his way to the top of the mountain. Through the open door of the temple-theater came the rattle of footsteps on stone.

Humans had reached the top of Suzusilmar. Rolf could dimly hear them talking outside. They had discovered the open door leading into the temple-theater and were wondering what was inside.

"Go in and find out what's in there!" Hardesty shouted.

From inside, the first thing seen was the blunt snout of an automatic gun coming slowly around the edge of the door.

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The head of a man appeared above and behind the weapon. His eyes grew large as he stared down into the temple-theater. For an instant, he looked inside, then the head and the muzzle of the gun withdrew.

"Just a bunch of goonies making funny music in here, boss," the man said.

The music went into silence. Inside the big abacus, Jalnar sat like stone. Around the temple-theater the Martians sat without moving.

Hardesty appeared in the doorway. He had an automatic pistol in each hand, weapons he had secured from a man who had been killed in the final assault on the Fourth Level. His face was matted with thick black whiskers. From a cut under his left eye, blood was running in a slow trickle down into the whiskers. His clothing was torn.

Victory was in his eyes. He carried himself with the self-assured manner of one who has won a battle and knows it. As he moved through the doorway and on to the top level, the music began again. Very softly, it echoed his footsteps, making a funeral march of them.

Beller was directly behind Hardesty. The wasp-like little gunman's face was also covered with whiskers and with the smoke and the dust of battle. He looked like a rattlesnake that has struck home to the mark and is well satisfied with itself. He had a single automatic pistol in his right hand.

Hardesty's eyes went around the temple-theater. Of all here, he saw only one person.

"Jennie, how in the hell did you get here? I left you in the ship." Surprise was in his voice.

Jennie sat as if frozen.

"Get over here to me," Hardesty told her.

A flurry of notes swept through the music as Jennie tried to rise. Her legs seemed to have no strength. She tried again. This time she was prevented from rising by Bill Hoker's arm on her shoulder.

"You sit still," Hoker said. He got to his feet. At the same time, Rolf rose.

"No!" Jennie gasped, grasping their intention. "He'll kill both of you!"

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A flurry of hot notes ran through the room.

"Jenniel!" Hardesty's voice was as hot as the notes.

She got quickly to her feet, to face her father and Bill Hoker. "I love both of you," she said. "I'm not going to let either of you get killed trying to protect me. Both of you stay out of this."

"You love me?" Bill Hoker whispered.

"I said it and I meant it," Jennie answered. She stepped up to the stone walk that circled the temple-theater behind the top row of seats.

"No!" Bill Hoker and her father said, in one breath.

"I'll do my own slugging!" she answered, moving resolutely toward Hardesty.

They looked at each other. "That's what I was afraid of," her father said. Both followed her.

As Jennie moved along the walk, her heels made hard resolute thumps on the hard stone. Suddenly changing, the music moved into rhythm with her heels. It was not playing a funeral march now. Instead there was a martial air about it, a sense of courage, of strength, and of resolution.

Hardesty looked past her, at Bill Hoker. Recognition showed on his face.

"How in the hell did you get to Mars, Hoker?" he demanded.

"I came on your ship, Mr. Hardesty," Hoker answered.

"Well, I didn't know it. But—no matter. You won't go home on it." His voice was grim with warning.

"Maybe you won't either, Jim," Jennie spoke.

The gun in Beller's hand covered her. Behind Beller, other men had now entered, all with drawn guns. She ignored them all.

"What do you mean by that?" Hardesty challenged.

"Nothing that I can put a finger on," she answered. "But you have intruded into the holy place of all Mars. No human has ever been here before. Who can say what will happen to such an intruder?"

"You're here," Hardesty challenged.

She nodded. "But I—we—came by invitation."

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She moved closer to him. He flinched and glanced at Beller. "If she slugs me, gun her down."

Licking thin lips, Beller nodded.

"The same goes for the two with her," Hardesty added. Again Beller nodded.

"What makes you think I would slug you, Jim?" Jennie asked.

"You did it once," Hardesty answered.

"But that was long ago," Jennie said. Her voice was soft, with an appealing note in it. "Things are different now."

"Yeah," Hardesty said. "They're different now. Now I'm on top. And you've come crawling to me on your belly, trying to save your life, the life of your old man, and the life of your lover!"

"Crawling?" She spat the word at him. "I crawl to no man!"

Rolf caught her arm before she could swing with her fist. He struggled with her for a split second, forcing her to be quiet. While he struggled with her, the notes in the temple-theater went crazy, yet he had the impression, when Jennie was quiet, that they had helped him.

Hardesty grunted his approval when Jennie was quiet and for the first time, seemed to become fully aware of Rolf.

"Oh, hello, John," he said to Rolf. In using the given name, Hardesty revealed that in his own mind at least he was now the president of the Company. He was being polite to a man who was not his inferior but whom he intended to use in many ways. "Nice to see you again."

Hardesty did not offer to shake hands. The president did not shake hands with the janitor. Also, he had a gun in each hand.

"I'm taking over here, John," Hardesty continued.

"Yes, in a way," Rolf said.

"There's no need for you to worry about anything. I'll see that you are well taken care of." As he spoke, Hardesty's eyes flicked to Jennie, indicating clearer than words that he intended to protect her father as long as she co-operated with him—and no longer.

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Jennie flinched at the meaning but managed to hold her tongue. Rolf was silent. He did not trust himself to speak.

"By the way, John, I've decided we can use that gadget of yours," Hardesty said. "What you call it now? *Teliknon*? That mind-reading thing of yours. I'll promote it for you back on Earth. When we are finished here, you can run down to your lab and get it for me."

Hardesty's tone was casual, like that of the president of the Company telling an errand boy what to do.

Once, John Rolf would have violently resented this order and the manner in which it was given. Rolf had been proud, once, until a blind beggar had taught him something of humility. His pride had been washed out in his glimpse of the super-mind in operation.

"Yes, Mr. Hardesty," Rolf said.

Jennie looked at him in stunned surprise.

"Well said, human," Jalnar's voice whispered in his mind.

If there was confusion in the depths of Rolf's mind, if he was very much aware that he was being pulled in many directions at the same time, he did not let his face reveal it. In his heart was the hope that Jalnar would strike dead this insolent young puppy.

If Jalnar had any such intention, he did not let a whisper of it escape from his own mind.

For the first time, Hardesty became fully aware of the music and of the temple-theater. His eyes went around the room. No sense of wonder appeared in them, no real feeling for what might be here showed on his face.

"What are these gooks doing?" he asked.

Rolf kept his emotions under control. "This is their holy place," he answered.

"I've already told him that," Jennie spoke. "It doesn't make any difference to him."

"I don't care how holy it is, I want to know what they're doing," Hardesty answered.

"Perhaps they are praying, in their way," Rolf answered quickly. The words popped out unbidden. This was not what he would have chosen to say, if he had had time to choose his words with care.

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"Hunh!" Hardesty said. The word—it was really not a voiced sound—was a cross between a grunt and an oath. It conveyed contempt and nothing else.

He turned to the men who had followed him into the temple-theater. "Take up positions around the top. Shoot anybody who moves," he told them.

As they moved to the positions he had indicated, he spoke to Beller.

"You follow me."

Beller nodded. Hardesty began to walk down the steps that led to the center of the temple-theater. Beller followed him. Rolf, Jennie, and Bill Hoker, followed the wasp-like little gunman.

The music moved into rhythm with Hardesty's footsteps. Now, again, it picked up the wild air of the funeral march of the desert tribesmen.

Chapter Twelve

AT THE BOTTOM of the temple-theater, Hardesty stopped suddenly and whirled to snap a question at Rolf.

"These gooks are keeping time to my feet!" he said. "What are they trying to do, insult me?"

Rage was in his eyes.

"Not at all, Mr. Hardesty," Rolf answered. "It is—this is their way of honoring the winner."

Rolf was lying and he knew it. In his mind, he felt Jalnar writhe at the lie. Another Martian, seated on the front row writhed even more, missing a note. Instantly the room was filled with a wild jangle of discordant sound. Dim flickers of light like heat lightning on the far horizon danced in the air. A million points of coruscating light flickered red like minute stop-lights suddenly stopping the flow of invisible traffic.

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Jalnar's fingers moved with feverish haste on the abacus. He caught the disharmony and hastily began to build a new harmony out of the discordant jangle of sound. Every Martian in the room worked feverishly to aid him. Slowly, as if it was reluctant to let go, the wild jangle cleared. Again the music became the sweep of a vast symphony. In the process the funeral march vanished.

On the front row, the ancient Martian who had struck the wrong note had slumped forward. Rolf, wondering if it was conceivable that his lie had somehow caused this death, was in agony himself.

"Peace," Jalnar whispered. "The funeral march was for him. You had nothing to do with it."

Hardesty turned his attention to the dead Martian.

"What happened to him?" he asked Rolf.

"I—I don't know."

Hardesty gestured to Beller. "Take a look at him."

The waspish gunman moved forward and bent over the Martian, pushing at the body. It toppled sideways. Beller straightened up and looked at Hardesty.

"Dead," Beller said.

Hardesty had seen many dead men and many dead Martians in the darkness that had just passed. One more should have made no difference to him. This one seemed to make a difference. He became afraid. He turned to Rolf.

"What killed that gook?"

"I—perhaps a heart attack, Mr. Hardesty. The altitude is high and he was advanced in years."

Hardesty's hot eyes held Rolf's face as he spoke. Sweat was washing the blood down his whiskers now.

"How can he have had a heart attack?" Hardesty demanded.

"I'm not a doctor, Mr. Hardesty. I'm only guessing. He's the second one who has died here tonight." Rolf pointed upward to the body of the first Martian who had died. "See that one. He died just like the one you saw."

"What happened to them?"

"I—"

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"Don't tell me you don't know. You were herel" The guns in Hardesty's hands were pointed directly at Rolf.

"But, Mr. Hardesty—"

"I can get along without you," Hardesty interrupted.

There was no mistaking the threat in Hardesty's eyes. "If they died just like that, one of us could also die the same way. It could be me. It could also be you. If it is you, I will know why." The guns in his hands jabbed forward.

Deep in his mind, Rolf sent out an imploring call to Jalnar. There was no response.

Rolf looked imploringly at the half-blind Martian hidden in the center of the huge abacus on the dais. Jalnar was too busy on the keys of the abacus to notice him.

"Jim!" It was Jennie who spoke. She went directly to Hardesty, ignoring the guns. "Can't you see Daddy doesn't know the answers? I was here too when the first Martian died. I don't know what killed him. We can't tell you what we don't know."

"He's stalling me," Hardesty answered.

"When he's this scared?" Jennie shook her head. "No, Jim. He's telling the truth."

Hardesty's eyes weighed Rolf. "He *is* shook up," Hardesty admitted.

"Jennie is right, Mr. Hardesty," Rolf spoke. "I—this is the first time I was ever in this temple-theater. There is much here that I don't understand—"

"Maybe I understand it." Anger glinted again in Hardesty's eyes. "Myabe they killed him to try to scare me!"

"But that's—" Rolf caught the words before they left his lips. He had been about to say that this was a paranoid delusion on Hardesty's part, a statement which would probably have gotten him shot if he had said it.

"They can't scare me!" Hardesty shouted. "You tell 'em they can't do it. If they try—"

The gun in his right hand suddenly jerked toward an old Martian sitting on the front tier. His wrinkled face was the color of old leather. His eyes closed, he was groping for the beads on the abacus in front of him.

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As the gun moved in Hardesty's hand, the music swirled as if in protest. The gun exploded.

The ancient Martian clawed at his chest, gulped for air, spewed blood from his mouth, opened his eyes to take one last lingering look of horror at his fading world, and fell forward across his abacus—dead.

The purpose of the murder was clear enough—to teach these Martians that they must neither scare nor thwart their conqueror.

For a moment, the little temple-theater was as still as death itself. Tension surged to incredible heights, to a level where it seared the soul with its intensity. Rolf knew that the body of the dead Martian was lying across the abacus in front of him, but he did not know what this meant. When Thallen dashed down from the top row, Rolf saw that the body was already beginning to flicker with flame. The body lying across the abacus was acting as a short. Thallen did not dare touch it. He ran directly to the dais. Jalnar was already extending his staff. With it, Thallen shoved the body from the abacus. A finger of electrical flame reached two feet toward him but did not reach him. When the body was off the abacus, he quickly returned the staff to Jalnar and raced back to his position in the top tier of seats.

The music rolled again. Now it roared and thundered, now it flickered with lightning, now it caught the beginning of a harmony, lost it, caught another, lost it, as Martian fingers darted frantically from bead to bead on their abacuses. Up toward the middle of the room, another Martian missed a note, and died instantly, his body suddenly flickering in flame but not falling on the abacus in front of him. John Rolf held his breath for fear that the energy now flowing wildly might never be balanced and harnessed again. On the dais in the center of the temple-theater Jalnar's fingers moved too fast for the eye to follow. Rolf had the impression that the whole mountain was rocking on its foundation, also that his weight had suddenly increased.

Then, a wild note at a time, the music found a harmony and held it. Slowly the mountain seemed to settle down. Slowly the energy became again the flow of a great river

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moving in great depth through wide channels, instead of a violent flood pouring through a bursting dam.

"What—what happened?" Hardesty gasped.

"I don't know," Rolf answered.

"You saw that electricity jumping."

"I saw it," Rolf said.

"Are they trying to scare me again?" Hardesty's voice was wild. "I'll have 'em all shot if they try it. You tell 'em I said that."

"I am sure they understand you already," Rolf said.

"You tell 'em to make certain they know what I'll do."

Rolf moved toward the dais. He bowed and repeated Hardesty's message in Martian.

Inside the big abacus, Jalnar nodded. His fingers were still moving lightning fast among the beads. The energy was back in chains now, the great river was back within its banks. The music was flowing smoothly and evenly. Would it burst its bounds again? Rolf suspected that the answer to this question lay in the super-mind of the blind beggar. It all depended on his skill with the abacus, on the speed within his mind, on the accuracy with which he evaluated the emerging situation.

"He just nodded," Hardesty said.

"That was enough to show he understood," Rolf said.

"Who is he?"

"He's sort of the leader of the Martians," Rolf said.

"Oh." Hardesty's grunt had satisfaction in it. He had found the head man. This was what he wanted. "Get him out of that cage and down here. I want to talk to him."

"I—I don't think it would be wise to disturb him," Rolf faltered.

"Why not?"

"Because—because he holds this whole mountain in the palm of his hand," Rolf said.

"What?" Hardesty said.

"So I have been told," Rolf said.

"So you have been told!" Hardesty mimicked. "What the hell has happened to your brains?"

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"The Martians worship him," Rolf said. "To them, he is the king of their world."

Surprise flickered across Hardesty's face, then turned to laughter.

"Let's get this king down here so I can talk to him."

"I'm trying to tell you what the Martians believe," Rolf said. "If you harm their king, all of Mars will rise against you."

Hardesty laughed again. "And as long as I hold him hostage, all the gooks will be real nice and do what I say? This suits me just fine. Tell him to come out of that cage and come down here."

Before Rolf could protest again, the music stopped. Every Martian in the temple-theater froze into immobility behind his abacus. The feeling in the room was one of great weight slowly growing greater.

On the dais, Jalnar fumbled for his staff. Finding it, he used it to aid him in rising slowly and painfully to his feet. The staff tapping ahead of him as if it was searching for the path his feet must follow, he found his way down from the raised dais. Reaching the floor, he tapped his way to Hardesty and stood quietly in front of the human.

The weight of mountains seemed to be in the air of the room.

Hardesty took a close look at Jalnar's face and recoiled.

"Hell, Rolf, he's blind!" he gasped. "One side of his face is paralyzed. He's drooling at the mouth. The only way he can stand is by holding on to that staff."

"I—" Rolf tried to say.

Hardesty turned quickly to him. The anger that had been in his eyes had suddenly become rage.

"You've been trying to stall me!" he shouted at Rolf. "You've been trying to make me believe a blind cripple is the king of this mountain!"

Rolf tried again to say he had been telling Hardesty what the Martians believed, not what he knew to be true himself. But Hardesty would not listen. A product of the Company, he was sure in his own mind that every man was trying to trick him, to take advantage of him, to cheat him in some way. When he saw a blind Martian standing in front of him,

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he was completely sure in his own mind that Rolf, whom he knew as an ex-president of the Company, had been trying to deceive him.

"What's your game, Rolf?" Hardesty said. "Talk fast or you will never talk again."

Rage boiled in his eyes. The guns in his hands were centered on Rolf's heart.

The temple-theater was completely silent. The feeling of great weight grew stronger. Somehow in the distance, outside but loud in this quiet place, men were shouting. Rolf had no mind for them. He was facing death and he knew it. Bill Hoker was breathing heavily but it was Jennie who moved, to step in front of Hardesty's guns.

"You can go with your old man," Hardesty told her. "I can have all the secretaries I want. I don't need you."

"No doubt you can, Jim—"

Jennie's voice went into silence. She was looking at Jalnar. As if he was oblivious of everything around him, the blind Martian was slowly lowering himself to the floor. When he had reached it, he reached forward and kissed Hardesty's foot.

Hardesty stared at Jalnar. He had been expecting almost anything, except this. This he did not understand. He held the fire from his guns while he looked at Rolf for an explanation.

Rolf knew that Jalnar had saved his life. Or had postponed his execution for a few minutes. Inside himself, the human was sick. Somewhere in his mind a dream as bright as the image of a star was crumbling. He had believed in Jalnar, had believed that by some mystery beyond his comprehension this blind beggar was actually a secret king, a super-mind.

Would a king kiss the foot of a conqueror? Would a super-mind abase itself before a man little higher than a beast? Had humility no limits?

"Peace, human," Jalnar's voice whispered in Rolf's mind. "I *am* the king of this mountain."

"You're not acting like it," Rolf shot back, mentally.

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"How would you know how a king of Suzusilmar would act?" Jalnar answered.

The question shook John Rolf. How would he know how a king would act? What did he know of the motives of a super-mind, what factors it was taking into consideration, in what balance it was weighing its actions? Perhaps it saw goals he could not even vision!

There were others present who could not see these goals. One of these was Bill Hoker. He saw Jennie step into the line of fire of Hardesty's pistols. He endured it as long as he could. Hoker was not really aware of Jalnar on the floor. All he knew was that Jennie was in danger. When he could stand this no longer, he acted.

Rolf caught a glimpse, out of the corners of his eyes, of the blur of Hoker's fist heading for Hardesty's jaw. All the weight of that impulsive young man was behind it.

The first did not reach its target. The gun in Beller's hand cracked sharply, viciously, in the temple-theater.

Chapter Thirteen

AS THE CRACK of the pistol rang in Rolf's ears, it seemed to him that events in the temple-theater began to move in slow motion. He was aware of everything that happened as it happened, whether it seemed slight but was actually important or seemed important but had no significance. He saw Hardesty's startled movement as he jerked back when Beller's gun exploded. He saw Jalnar's hand dart swiftly for the staff lying on the floor beside him. He saw Jalnar start to get to his feet. He saw Beller, holding the still smoking gun in his hand, lick his thin lips with a red tongue as if he liked to taste the feeling of power that killing gave him.

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He saw Jennie's frozen face go from horror to terror, then saw her grab Bill Hoker's arm.

He saw the stunned expression on Hoker's face as the latter realized he had been shot, he saw the hole in the jacket Hoker was wearing, he saw Hoker's hand go to this hole. Hoker dug at the hole with his fingernails as if somewhere inside him an itch had developed. Entering below the heart, the bullet had gone clear through Hoker's body. What internal organs had been hit, Rolf did not know, but blood was flowing from Hoker's front and from his back. He also saw Hoker fall.

Rolf not only saw all of this, he was also intimately connected with all that happened, he was a part of it. He felt, to some degree, Hoker's pain, he felt a little of Beller's sense of power that came from killing and which made him a killer. He felt Jennie's horror and Hardesty's surprise. He was also aware of something bigger than any of these, a bigger pattern and a bigger purpose that was playing through this temple-theater than human hopes and fears, a purpose that worked through and with the energy chained here. As this identification took place, as he became this something bigger, he also understood the meaning of the weight that had been increasingly pushing down on all of them. His mind reeled at this meaning.

As Jennie tried to hold Bill Hoker up, his knees suddenly buckled under him. He fell backward, sprawling on the floor. The stone around suddenly showed a spew of scarlet. He gasped for breath. Froth appeared on his lips. He looked upward, searching for something that he wanted to see. His glazing eyes came to focus on Jennie's face. This was what he wanted to see before he died.

Rolf was aware that Jalnar was on his feet, with his staff held in his hand like a spear ready to be thrown. Now, suddenly, Jalnar had the appearance of a prophet out of the Old Testament of Earth. He seemed to have grown inches taller as he drew himself erect.

Had the time for humility reached an end?

Lifting his staff, Jalnar pointed it at the abacus on the dais. A single note rang through the room. This was a solid tone

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with a feeling of vast power in it. Every Martian in the room reached for his abacus, each striking a tone identical with the one coming from the big abacus. The feeling of power grew stronger.

At the back of the room, Unardo got to his feet. Picking up the small abacus from the bench in front of him, he trotted down the steps toward the center. Behind him, a human lifted a weapon to shoot, then dropped the muzzle and looked at Hardesty for orders. Hardesty did not see him.

Unardo dropped to his knees beside Bill Hoker. He set the little abacus on the floor in front of him, then squatted cross-legged behind it. He took one quick glance at Bill Hoker, as if estimating the damage done, then his eyes went inward.

The great single note rolled even stronger through the temple-theater, building higher and higher until the floor was vibrating in unison with it. Rolf felt the great note surging through his body. The single tone began to take on a definite rhythm until it became similar to that of huge temple gong struck by a giant.

Unardo reached for his abacus, touched a bead there. A tiny tinkling silver note came from it, a soft, gentle tone whispered of life and death, asking which was the stronger.

Rolf knew he was holding his breath.

Jennie dropped to her knees beside Hoker, caught his head in her arms, then sat down and gently pulled his head into her lap. She glanced up at Hardesty, a look filled with fury.

To John Rolf, all of this seemed to happen in slow motion. To Jim Hardesty, it seemed to happen very fast. He looked at Beller, growling a question.

"He was starting to slug you," Beller answered. He ran his red tongue around his thin lips again. If there was emotion in this slim little man, it was buried far under the surface. If he had any feeling of guilt, it did not reach his face.

"Oh," Hardesty said, in understanding. "Good!"

So far as he was concerned, the matter was settled. He paid Beller to kill men. But at the same time he had the impression that somehow or other he had lost control of the

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situation. He had not told Jalnar to stand up. He had not ordered this Martian to come down from the top tier and sit on the floor and start making tinkling noises on a little machine.

"What the hell's he doing?" Hardesty asked. He pointed a gun at Unardo to indicate whom he meant.

"Trying to save Hoker's life," Rolf answered.

"Hunh!" Hardesty's grunt conveyed his opinion of an effort to save the life of a man who had a bullet through his guts. Even on Earth, the best doctors often couldn't do it, with the best hospital facilities available to them.

There were no hospitals here. There was only a Martian working the beads on a tiny abacus in a temple-theater where a great note was ringing like a rhythmic beat of a gigantic gong.

Then, for an instant, another thought crossed Hardesty's mind. Was it actually possible to save Hoker's life by this method? After all, this was Mars. Could things be done here that could not be accomplished on Earth? As this thought crossed his mind, a look of baffled wonder appeared on his face.

The look of wonder lasted only an instant, then was gone as he decided that Rolf was deceiving him again. His face hardened. He gestured with one gun at Unardo.

"Tell him to get to hell back up there where he came from," he said to Rolf.

"But a man's life is at stake," Rolf protested.

"He tried to slug the boss," Beller spoke.

"Please—"

"The boss said for that gook to get back where he belongs," Beller said. "Are you going to tell him what the boss said?"

"I'll tell him," Rolf promised. He hastily translated into Martian what Hardesty had ordered.

Unardo did not even look up. So far as his expression went, he had not even heard what was said.

Pain was twisting Hoker's face. Jennie was trying to ease the pain by holding him tight. Her effort was not successful.

Somewhere down the mountain, from another world, men shouted in alarm.

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"Didn't he hear what you said?" Beller demanded. The voice of the little gunman had the buzz of an angry wasp in it.

"I—I think he takes orders from Jalnar," Rolf answered. So closely was his mind knit into the group mind functioning here that he did not know whether this thought was his own or whether it came from Jalnar.

The result was that both Hardesty and Beller turned to face the blind Martian. Somehow, the impression of a beggar was gone from Jalnar now. He was standing erect, the staff loosely gripped in both hands, and the look, the regal bearing, of a king was on him. His eyes were still blind but that did not matter. The look of a king was on him. Rolf was very much aware of it.

The single deep note still rang through the temple. Superimposed on it was the beat of the vast gong. The feeling of weight was still increasing.

"You are right. Unardo takes orders only from me. Tell them this," Jalnar spoke to Rolf, in slurred Martian.

"This is no time to bluff," Rolf answered. "They'll kill you."

"What are you two saying to each other?" Hardesty interrupted. Rolf and Jalnar were speaking Martian, which Hardesty did not understand. His deeply rooted fear of being tricked made him think that they were plotting against him.

"He said—" Rolf began.

"You had better not try to lie!" Beller spoke. The weapon in his hand was centered on Rolf.

Rolf sought in his mind for English words to report what his tongue did not wish to say. Words were hard to find. In the distance, the shouts grew louder. There was no mistaking the alarm in them now. On the floor, Bill Hoker, with his head in Jennie's lap, fought for his life. Sitting cross-legged in front of him, a Martian physician was so completely concentrated that he seemed completely unaware of his surroundings and of the fact that death was here in the room with him. The single note with the beat of the huge brass gong in it grew stronger and stronger. The feeling of the weight of mountains resting on the temple-theater grew more and more obvious.

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"What did he say?" Beller repeated.

"He said that I had told you correctly, that Unardo takes orders only from him," Rolf answered.

Rage boiled in Hardesty's eyes and made a rigid mask of his face. The knowledge that someone else was giving the orders here was more than he could take.

"He doesn't know what he is saying," Rolf said desperately. "He doesn't understand about guns—"

"He'll learn!" Hardesty answered. He pulled the trigger of the gun in his right hand. Rolf saw him do it, saw the muscles tighten, saw the movement of the trigger finger, heard the soft click of the falling hammer.

The gun did not explode.

Between the fall of the hammer and the explosion of the powder in the cartridge in the firing chamber something was interposed.

Hardesty looked down at the gun. A startled expression appeared on his face. He reached the obvious conclusion instantly.

"Empty!" he said.

He had used the gun many times and had forgotten to replace the clip when it had been emptied.

"This one's not empty!" Beller said.

The little gunman pulled the trigger on his gun. The hammer fell. The gun did not explode.

Again something interposed itself between the fall of the hammer and the explosion of the powder.

Beller looked at the weapon, then at Hardesty. One gun could be empty. Two could not, were not empty, unless coincidence was stretched very far.

Jalnar held himself as straight as any king had ever stood. He said nothing. His face revealed nothing.

Outside the shouts of alarm grew louder.

Inside, over the great tone flooding through the temple-theater, came the little tinkling sounds of the abacus Unardo was manipulating.

On the floor, Bill Hoker's breathing became more labored.

John Rolf had the impression of tremendous energies flowing through his body, through the floor under his feet,

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perhaps through the whole mountain. He also had the impression of vast power under perfect control, that a great river flowed swift and deep and powerful within its channel. Weight pressed upon his body.

Jalnar seemed to grow taller.

There was a clicking sound as Beller jerked the clip from his gun. He stared at it from eyes that suddenly had alarm in them. The bright ends of cartridges showed in the clip. He snapped open the chamber. A cartridge flew out showing the gun had been loaded.

"It must have been a misfire, boss," he said to Hardesty. "That's it, a misfire!" Beller's hope for an ordered universe, one that he thought he understood, lay in his belief that the cartridge in the firing chamber had been defective and had failed to fire.

He snapped the clip back into the weapon, jerked the slide back, watched the cartridge feed home into the firing chamber, pointed the gun at Jalnar and pulled the trigger.

The hammer fell; the weapon did not fire.

"Two misfires in succession are not coincidental!" Hardesty said. His voice was a gulped sound, a broken noise made by a man who is finding his universe is no longer secure beneath his feet.

Both Hardesty and Beller stared at Jalnar.

Jalnar spoke to Rolf in slurred Martian. "Tell them that the powder will not explode. Tell them that it will not explode because my control of the energy flowing through this room extends down to the level of the atoms and below that. Tell them the atoms obey me, including the atoms in the powder of their guns."

Now Rolf's lips would speak again. They found English for the soft Martian tongue. Hardesty and Beller stared at him. They understood the words. The fact behind the words they did not understand.

"I was wrong," Rolf said to them. "Jalnar does understand about guns, much better than we do."

Hardesty turned and yelled at the men around the top of the temple-theater, ordering them to gun down this blind Martian who now stood so tall and straight. They obeyed

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Hardesty. Guns came up to point at Jalnar. Above the tinkle of the abacus Unardo was using, above the great note in the room, came the spiteful sound of hammers falling—uselessly!

The men looked at the useless weapons, then at each other, each seeking from the other an explanation. There was no explanation that their minds could accept.

Beller shifted the gun to his left hand. His right hand went under his clothing. It came out with a knife in it.

A knife did not depend on the explosion of powder for its effectiveness. It depended on muscles and the will of the user to drive it home. Beller had both. Like a duelist, Beller lunged. The point of the blade was aimed at Jalnar's stomach.

Jalnar lifted his staff. He pointed it at the knife. Soft light flared from the end of the staff, striking the knife in Beller's hand.

The knife vanished. Up to the wrist, the hand vanished with it.

Stopping his lunge, Beller stared at his hand. As if he did not believe what his eyes saw, he shook his head, lifting the hand in front of his face. Apparently the force that had instantly dissolved both the knife and the hand had had a cauterizing effect, stopping the flow of blood and sealing the stump. Beller stared.

In the temple-theater, the note still held. On the floor, the froth was going away from Hoker's lips. Unardo did not look up from his little abacus.

Jalnar stood tree-tall.

Hardesty's eyes went to the stump of Beller's hand. With his other hand, Beller was now feeling for the missing fingers. He seemed to think this was something done with mirrors and that his eyes had been tricked. His probing fingers found nothing.

Hardesty looked at Jalnar. He still saw a blind Martian with drool at the corner of his mouth, a figure he had once regarded with contempt. All contempt was gone from him now. Terror had replaced it. Now he saw in this blind, drooling Martian the dreaded figure of death itself. Under the grime and around the blood spots, Hardesty's face began

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to grow gray. His eyes started to bulge in their sockets from inward pressures. He dropped his guns.

"You've won!" he whispered.

Jalnar moved his staff. Hardesty and Beller flinched. Both expected death from this dread figure.

Jalnar did not point the staff at them. He set the end of it carefully on the floor.

"You wished to climb Suzusilmar?" Jalnar said, bowing.

Neither answered. Neither was capable of speaking.

Jalnar straightened up. Again he seemed to be tree-tall. He brought his blind eyes to focus on the two humans. Watching, Rolf knew that Jalnar did not need to use his eyes any more than Unardo did. Both were capable of looking inward at some world hidden from the sight of men, which had its own kind of vision.

"You shall have your wish," Jalnar said.

Both seemed to understand him. Perhaps he was speaking directly to their minds in the mind-matter meshed state that seemed to exist now in this temple-theater. Neither answered. Nor did any sign of relief show on their faces. Perhaps both knew that the meaning of his words was not quite what it seemed to be.

It was John Rolf who suddenly spoke, protesting, "You can't let them go free. They will return to Earth, organize another expedition, and come again to cause trouble."

"How will they get to Earth?" Jalnar answered.

The question seemed meaningless. "The ship—" Rolf began, then was silent. The door of the temple-theater, lighted now by the light of the risen sun, was growing dark. Was something obscuring the sun?

A human ran through the door. Pointing backward, he shouted two words, "The ship—"

"Go and see, all of you," Jalnar said.

Hardesty and Beller turned and began to climb the steps to the door. Their motions were stiff and mechanical. They walked like men moving to their own execution.

The shadow grew darker in the doorway.

Hardesty and Beller reached the door of the temple-theater, looked out, and drew back. Consternation was on

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their faces. Looking over their shoulders, Rolf saw the source of their consternation and of the shadow.

It was the ship that was causing the shadow, the ship that was obscuring the sun.

The ship that should have been at rest on the floor of the desert far below was floating in the air of the Seventh Level of Suzusilmar.

Rolf knew now that the growing weight he had been feeling was the many tons of this ship as it had been lifted here.

The locks were closed. Through the thick plastic portholes the faces of two guards looked out and the faces of many frightened secretaries.

The drive was not functioning, nor did it need to function. The ship was lifted by an energy greater by far than that generated by its own driving equipment.

Hardesty, Beller, the men who had been inside the temple-theater but now were crowding outward, stared at the ship. Each man knew that this ship was their only way to return to Earth.

The ship was moving. A foot at a time, it was rising. Gathering speed it was turning as it moved. It was becoming smaller as it was lifted higher and higher into the thin air of ancient Mars. Moving toward the sun, which was the direction of Earth, it became a dot in the infinite sky. Then it was gone from their sight.

Hardesty and Beller looked at Rolf.

"You will get your wish to climb Suzusilmar," Rolf said. "But those who climb this mountain must start at the bottom and earn their way upward."

His hand came up and he pointed downward. "Go," he said. "Go."

They went. First with a stiff, zombie-like walk, then at a stumbling trot, then at a run. Hardesty and Beller led. The others followed. Reaching the top of the great flight of steps, they vanished downward.

Rolf moved slowly to the top of the steps. The great wave that had flung itself up Suzusilmar was receding in the form of individual men running for their lives. Seeing the flight,

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the desert tribesmen suddenly remembered where they were. Each in his own mind began to think of something called *the Law*. The tribesmen joined the flight so that the movement downward became a mad panic.

Rolf saw men and Martians lose their footing on the great steps and fall head over heels. Legs and arms and heads were being broken down there. At the Fourth level, rallying some of their forces, the Martians there were shooting at those who fled, encouraging them to move faster.

In the clear air of Mars the ship had vanished, its tons of metal gone like an insubstantial ghost in the depths of space toward the sun. Listening, he heard the great tone go into silence in the temple-theater. Now the music came again. On a slowing tempo, the great symphonic movement began to move slower and slower. The great river was being returned to its normal flow. Turning, he saw that the glow was disappearing from the tall spire that reached like a spear toward infinite space.

The music closed on a great single chord. When it had gone into silence, the glow had vanished from the spire.

A tall Martian appeared in the door of the temple-theater, to look for Rolf, then to smile when he saw the human and move toward him. Behind him came two humans. Rolf looked at them, then looked again to make sure he was seeing correctly, then moved toward them with his hands outstretched and a glad cry on his lips.

Jennie flew into his arms, to be hugged and kissed. Behind her, Bill Hoker was grinning like a puppy that has been in a world of monsters and has suddenly found itself back among its friends.

"Bill—" Rolf choked over the word. "What—"

"I don't know what that Martian doctor did or how he did it," Hoker answered. "I—I had a bullet through me. I was dying. I—" A look of wonder appeared on his face. "It felt like millions of tiny hands went to work inside me, sewing me up. After they had sewed me up, they made the broken tissues flow back together, smoothly and evenly. Then strength came in, from somewhere. I began to feel whole again. I—" Jerking open his jacket, he pulled out his shirt.

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Blood stains were still visible on both jacket and shirt. The blood had not quite dried as yet. Hoker found the spot he was seeking, where the bullet had entered his flesh. He exhibited it to Rolf.

What had been a bullet hole was now a round white spot on brown skin. Tissue had been replaced here. Hoker fingered the spot, stared at it. Awe was in his eyes when he looked up at Rolf.

"The energy, and the mind to direct it, that can stop powder from exploding in cartridges, can also repair torn tissue," Thallen spoke. There was a faint smile on the face of the Fifth Level Martian. "If Jalnar is directing it, this energy will repair the damage done by a bullet—or it will lift a great ship from the desert far below and send it—" Thallen's eyes sought the distant sky.

"The ship?" Rolf asked. "Where was it sent?"

"Home," Thallen answered. He did not seem to wish to explain further and Rolf, with other and more important questions tumbling over each other in their efforts to get said, did not desire to press the matter.

"Jalnar! He actually is—"

Thallen nodded. "He is king here."

"But he is blind, and his hands are twisted, and he looks like a beggar," Rolf said.

Again Thallen nodded. He seemed to seek in his minds for words to say. Finally he found them. "You saw Martians die in the temple-theater tonight when they struck a wrong note."

"Yes," Rolf said.

"Jalnar has a super-mind but the energy in the temple-theater, the energy that he controls and directs, is a torrent of enormous power. He controls it mentally. But he has made mistakes, even a super-mind may err. When he erred, the energy twisted and tortured him, almost blinded him, made claws of his hands."

Thallen's voice became a whisper in the morning of Mars. "Some day he will make too big a mistake and it will kill him. He takes this risk, willingly, for all of us. When he dies, one of us will take his place. There will be a new king."

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The whisper went into silence, then came again. "You sought to invent a device to read minds, thinking to use it to improve the lot of men. Your dream was good. For this reason you were allowed to go forward with it as far as you. But what you did not know was that from the Fifth Level on up, all of us are being trained to read minds. Jalnar does it best of all of us. That is one reason he is king. What you did not know also, and what you almost found out tonight, was one of the dangers of reading minds, the abyss, the emotional maelstrom, the identification that is a part of the process. When Jalnar steps upon the dais, he faces this abyss and becomes one with all of us. Only he has the super-strength of mind needed to do it."

Thallen's face was still. If there was a memory of pain anywhere in his mind—and there must have been—it did not appear on his face.

"But why is he not received with all the honor due his power?" Rolf asked.

"He is, by those who know him. From the Fifth Level on up, we know who he is and respect him greatly. The lower levels, though—" Thallen shook his head. "To the three lower levels, he is only a superstition. So he goes there as a beggar. If they knew who he was, they would besiege him with pleas for favors, one seeking preference over the other. On the Fourth Level, they begin to suspect that back of the superstition there is a basis in fact. But they don't know, yet, they're not sure. The process of becoming sure is what makes them eligible to climb to the Fifth Level. Do you see how it is, my friend?"

"I see how it is," Rolf answered. "No man—and no Martian can see greatness in Jalnar, or in anyone else, until greatness is first of all in him."

"Yes," Thallen whispered. "And when you see greatness, you also see responsibility."

They were silent, there at the Seventh Level, with Jennie and Hoker clinging to each other like frightened children, with Thallen looking into the far-off depths where the ship had vanished, with John Rolf feeling wonder rising again within him. In Rolf's mind a dream that he had seen crumble

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to dust was coming to life again. With it now was the image of a single far-off star.

He was aware of sounds behind him, the whisper of many feet. Turning, he saw that the Martians were coming out of the temple-theater. Each carried an abacus. Unardo was with them. They walked past and began to move down the long steps of Suzusilmar.

Another sound came, the slow *tap, tap, tap* of a staff on stone.

Jalnar came out of the temple-theater. He paused to close the door, then moved in the path of the others, his staff tapping its slow cautious way ahead of him.

Rolf, Jennie, and Bill Hoker would all have run to him, perhaps to prostrate themselves before him, but Thallen forbade it. Instead, as Jalnar came even with him, they bowed to him.

Very gravely, he bowed in return.

Then, his staff feeling the way, he moved down the flight of steps.

"Where—what?" Rolf whispered.

"Many bones, many heads, are broken down below, many are suffering there," Thallen answered. "Under Jalnar's direction, they go down Suzusilmar to mend the damage done in the night just past."

It seemed to Rolf to be fair that Martians should help Martians. Another thought came into his mind. "Will they—will they also help the humans who caused all of this damage?" To him, it was a momentous question.

"Of course," Thallen answered, smiling.

For the first time John saw clearly what he had only sensed before—the greatness that was here on Suzusilmar, the holy mountain of Mars. A greatness that was not only of science, which went beyond science into a realm where life knew no enemies, but only friends.

Watching the procession move down the mountain, the higher level Martians leading with Jalnar hobbling along behind them, he grasped fully the greatness of the supermind in this blind beggar who leaned upon a staff as he moved, a beggar great enough to hold this mountain in the

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hollow of his hand, great enough to marshal the energies of infinite space through his mind—and also great enough to go down the mountain of Suzusilmar to bind up the wounds of his enemies.

In this moment, one human saw clearly the greatness of one Martian. Perhaps in this moment the two planets of Earth and Mars moved a little closer together.

In the human, in John Rolf, in this moment, the sense of wonder and the memory of a single glowing star blended together to become a glowing radiant light in the depths of his soul.

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EPILOGUE

AMONG THE stories spacemen tell to each other—and these tales are often wonderful works of art—there is one that is inexplicable. It is the story of how a great spaceship, thought to be on Mars on Company business, was found in the middle of the Sahara Desert, on Earth, with only a few guards and many frightened secretaries on board. All the secretaries and the guards could or would tell was that they had been on Mars, quietly and peaceably attending to Company business, when they had been lifted as if by a mighty hand, they had been hurled across space, and they had been gently set down on Earth.

To the Company, to old H. B., these stories were not good enough. Company property could not be treated in this way! Rising young Company executives could not vanish like this! Loudly demanding justice of Earth Government, the Company began a furious investigation.

After certain investigations on Mars, and after talking at great length to the secretaries on the ship, the Company dropped its investigation, and said no more about justice, deciding that this was too dangerous a word for use in this situation. If the Company did not mend its morals as a result of its discoveries—and no one really expected *that*—it at least improved its manners.

Spacemen also tell the story of a band of humans living among the wild desert tribesmen around the vast mountain called Suzusilmar. These men have no desire to return to Earth, knowing the Company has no use for beaten men, particularly so if these men might tell bad stories about its methods. Nor do they have any way to return to their home planet. Suzusilmar is surrounded by hundreds of miles of desert which they cannot cross without transportation.

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The leader of these men, so the stories go, is Jim Hardesty.

It is said of these men that they wanted to climb Suzusilmar and that now they have the chance to achieve their desire. If they wish to climb the mighty mountain, all they have to do is to learn how to walk on eggs with very thin shells. The steps are open above them!

The story is also told of a tall, white-haired human who lives very comfortably on the Fourth Level of Suzusilmar, with his daughter and her husband, all of whom have become citizens of Mars. They say that these three have much leisure time, which they use to the fullest, for cultivating the delicate nuances needed to be known by those who would walk on eggs with very thin shells. Perhaps the children who will follow them—this is their real hope—may learn to take a few more steps toward the higher levels of the mountain that are above them—and beyond these, toward the levels of the infinite sky where the image of a single star hides within it all the meaning of a lost galaxy.

The story is also told of a blind beggar who taps his quiet way along all the levels of Suzusilmar. If occasionally someone spits at him when he ventures down to the floor of the desert, he does not mind. From the Fifth Level on up, they bow to him in reverence and consider him as being the nearest of all of them to the infinite sky.

Meanwhile, Suzusilmar is like a great dream that has its roots in the core of Mars and its top in a metal spire that points to the depths of vast space. Who dreamed this mighty dream? Who carved the terraces in this vast mountain?

No human, and no Martian—except perhaps a blind beggar known to some very few as the king of the Red Planet—can rightly say that he knows.