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By D. D. SHARP

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By LEIGH BRACKETT

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Vol. 11, No. 2

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By LEIGH BRACKETT



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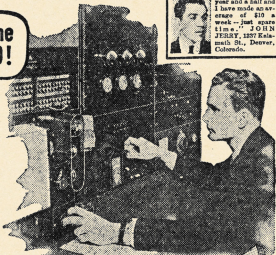


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THE ETHER VIBRATES

A Department Where Readers, Writers and Sergeant Saturn Get Together

AS WE take off this issue for our flight in the good ship **STARTLING STORIES** let's glance over the manifest and see what we shall be carrying on our next trip.

There may be some readjustments, by the way, in take-off equipment in the rocket ships of the future if the new Jet Plane is any indication. This new development, a success after two thousand years of trials and attempts by man, is a method by which a propellerless plane, depending on jet propulsion alone, starts smoothly and slowly and builds up terrific speed without the need for take-off springs, or cushions, or hammocks of any kind. There will be an article on this Jet Plane in **THRILLS IN SCIENCE** next issue, where you rocket fans can get more information on the subject.

However, right now let's consider the book-length novel which will be featured in the next issue. This story, **IRON MEN**, by Noel Loomis, is a powerful sequel to **CITY OF GLASS**, published in our July, 1942, issue.

This new novel takes up the story of the world of five hundred thousand years in the future with the grandson of Hart Niles and works out the final kinks in the problem of rejuvenation of mankind, plus solving a couple of extra catastrophic problems which present themselves.

In this novel Mr. Loomis presents an interesting theory of a runaway planet with incredibly heavy mass, a new set of unique characters in the iron men, and a clever solution to the desperate problems of two worlds.

You should enjoy every word of this novel—although some of you coy little harpies will never admit it—and you certainly cannot complain that **IRON MEN** is not a "Novel of the Future Complete in this Issue."

The state rests.

The Hall of Fame Classic which will come to you as a side dessert will be **THE RADIATIONS OF THE CHINESE VEGETABLE**, by C. Sterling Gleason. This you should relish, and you don't have to like chop suey or chow mein to do so, you—you bamboo sprouts!

We have already given you a hint about one of the **THRILLS IN SCIENCE**, and that is enough for you to digest at this moment. Sure, there will be several brilliant new short stories which many of you will like and some few of you won't. In fact, the old Sarge can tell you right now—but why should I open this mail before you even write it?

I have on hand several cards and letters recommending future Hall of Fame Classics for reprint, but I can't undertake to discuss them here and now. Rest assured that the

stories will be checked and considered—if available—and will be announced in time.

Right here, before we don our gas masks and delve into the mail bags, let me fulfill a promise made in **REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS**. This is



(SERGEANT SATURN)
as seen by E. Everett Evans

the item of reproduction of Pee-lot E. Everett Evans' drawing of Sergeant Saturn. Here it is, although it really belongs at the tailgate of this department to show you space yardbirds how the old Sarge feels after a workout with you.

Now we shall get along to the anvil chorus, colloquially known as sunrise on a guinea farm, or a braying burro in a tin barn.

ETHERGRAMS

We will lead off with a scattergun shot at all you sharpshooters.

TWADDLE!
By U. G. Figley

In my nearly 80 years I have never read such twaddle as in the letter department of **STARTLING**
(Continued on page 8)

Here's an amazing new 3-point way to learn music!

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JOE BONOMO
1841 BROADWAY NEW YORK, 23, N.Y.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

STORIES. Now if these Byzantine logothetes, these prognathous phagocytes, who feast like Ephraim, don't like SS, why don't they quietly quit reading it, instead of writing insulting and impudent letters to the editor? I am quite sure if I ever get tired of its contents I will just decently quit, pronto, and write no sassy letters.

Now go ahead and jump down my collar.—Bryan, Ohio.

The correct nomenclature, Pee-tot Figley, is drivle, but you may call it twaddle if you like. And in answer to you, let the old Sarge observe that these sassy junior pee-lots don't want to quit reading STARTLING STORIES; they just like to express themselves. So, let 'em have their fun. Once in a while they come up with a right intelligent letter.

I have here a letter from Kiwi Howard S. Greenberg of 4418 No. St. Louis Ave., Chicago 25, Ill., who has a nice collection of pseudo-science magazines that he is willing to dispose of as he is going into the Armed Services. Anybody who needs certain magazines and certain issues might write to Kiwi Greenberg to learn what he has.

To continue.

THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

By C. C. Walker

Dear Sarge: The last shall be first with C. C. and the first shall be last. "Beyond the Singing Flame" was good. "The Serum Rubber Man" was all right and was written for some of the peelet space monkeys to wrap their tails around, which calls for no strain on their intelligence. "Wanderer of Time" was better than "Singing Flame." "Get Your Extra Here" was two shorts in one short. Like a two pants suit. Guaranteed 50 percent wool. Only question in regard to it is: Why did Perkin want to get back to that family?

Thrills in Science: Post-tively! Without them S. S. would be like a yardmaster without a yard.

This Startling War: News and Notes from the

(Continued on page 103)

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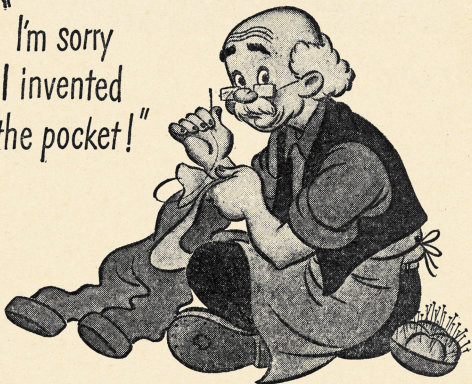
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I invented
the pocket!"



IF I HAD KNOWN that some Americans would be using pockets to hold all the extra money they're making these days, I never would have invented them.

Pockets are good places to keep hands warm.

Pockets are good places to hold keys . . . and loose change for carfare and newspapers.

But pockets are no place for *any* kind of money except actual expense money these days.

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Bonds buy education for your kids.
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You'll make me very happy if you do.
You'll be happy too.

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Shoving Mayo aside, Rick swung his shackle chain (CHAP. VI)

SHADOW OVER MARS

By LEIGH BRACKETT

*Out of the Roaring Turmoil of the Red Planet Emerges
Resolute Rick Urquhart—Destined to Rule the Universe,
and to Dare Destruction for the Sake of the Woman He Loves!*

CHAPTER I

Company Press-gang

RICK stood perfectly still in the black blind notch of the doorway. The thunder of his own blood in his ears drowned any other sound, but his eyes, cold pale amber under tawny brows, watched the narrow tunnel of the street.

Three shadows came slipping through the greenish pools of moonlight on the age-worn stones.

Rick's left hand rose and steadied. Harsh echoes rolled and slammed between the packed, still rows of houses. Two of the shadows fell without a sound. The third stood upright in a shaft of Phobos-light and screamed.

Rick saw him clearly—a black anthropoid from the sea-bottom pits, one of the queer inhabitants of an evolutionary blind alley you were always running into on Mars. Some said they had once been men, and degenerated in their isolated, barren villages. Others said they were neither man nor ape,

An Amazing Complete Full-Length Novel

just something that got off on a road that went nowhere. Rick didn't care much. All that interested him was that the black apes were trained now like hounds to course men for the press-gangs of the Terran Exploitations Company.

Rick had no wish to slave in the Company mines until he died. He hit the black boy hard in the midriff and shut him up for good. After that, there was silence.

Rick had never heard silence like that before except on the dead worlds. The Company press-gang was beating the whole Quarter, from the stews on the Street of Nine Thousand Joys north into the angle of the city wall, but the noise they made doing it didn't seem to touch the silence of Ruh. It was like the alloy skin of a spaceship, that you couldn't touch with fire or acid or steel.

He went on, down the narrow twisting street. Doors and windows in thick walls, like gouged-out eyes. There were people behind them, all right. You could smell them. Hundreds of centuries of people, too many of them, living there. But it was like walking through the catacombs in the Terran Moon.

That was because there was a new law on Mars—a world worn threadbare and weary with the weight of time, where the little laws of the city-states had been enough since men could remember. Ed Fallon had come from Earth with his Terran Exploitations Company, and now the Company was Law—at the frontiers, beyond ordinary law, making its own rules and breaking men's backs over them. The floating Terran population fought the Company when they could, feebly. The human Martians of the city-states like Ruh barred their doors and windows and prayed destruction on every alien head.

Quite suddenly Rick was up against the city wall, and there was no longer any place to go.

Back of him the crimpers were working in. On the other side of the wall, even if he could climb its enormous bulk, was a three-quarter-mile drop straight down, to the bottom of the dead sea.

Rick turned. His eyes held a green glint.

TWO Martian miles away across the sea-bottom, a rocket ship went up from the Company port, slamming like a bullet into the black sky. Southward the broken towers of King City stood high over the flat roofs. A good mile beyond that, hidden in a shallow valley, was New Town, the brawling frontier gateway to half the world

whence Rick had come. There were no lights anywhere.

Unseen men fought and cursed and screamed, but the silence didn't go away.

Rick settled his thick wide back against the wall and let his left hand swing free with the weight of the blaster.

Somebody yelled. They had found the dead anthropoids. Rick heard boot-heels hitting the stones, coming closer.

Quite suddenly there was light.

If he hadn't been flat against the wall he wouldn't have seen it. He realized then that the houses on the left didn't run flush to the city wall. There was a gap about two feet wide, and about twenty feet along it somebody had opened a door, a thin, dim crack.

Rick slid into the tunnel, sideways, and fast.

A woman's harsh, angry whisper snarled something in Low Martian. A squat shadow moved across the bottom of the light. The door began to close. Rick's shoulder hit it just before the bar dropped. Something tumbled away from it with a whooshing gasp. Rick went in, kicked the door shut behind him, and dropped the bar with his right hand. The left held the blaster.

Nobody moved.

The room was cut in the thickness of the city wall. It was little. It stank. The roof touched Rick's rough, tawny head. There was a shelf bed covered with musty blankets, a table of ancient Martian work, hand carved from "yrl-wood" and worth more Universal Credits than Rick could make in ten years of sweating in a glory-hole, two worn matching chairs, an old woman, and a dwarf.

The dwarf was curled up in the ashes of a dead fire, gasping. He was no more than a child, thin, with green, slanting eyes. The old woman lay on the shelf bed. Rick took her for just a dirty old woman, until she looked at him.

Her eyes were like moonstones, and Rick would have believed she was blind, had he not noticed her brilliant, deep red pupils.

"Just take it easy," he said, in crude Low Martian.

They said nothing. They watched him. Rick's skin crawled.

Back in the street there was noise, but he could tell that they had lost him.

He squatted down against the door. His chest heaved, and his shirt, of iridescent Venusian spider-silk, stuck to his body.

"I'm staying here until they go," he said.

The dwarf hugged his knees. His eyes burned like green coals in the smoky lan-



As the pylon crumpled, Rick changed his course (CHAP. IX)

tern light. The old woman didn't move or speak. From somewhere out of the tangle of blankets a small red lizard appeared and flicked down onto the dirt floor.

"I will read your future," the old woman said slowly.

Rick laughed. "I'm strapped. I got kicked off my ship for slugging the mate, and my pay is all in the pockets of girls I met afterward. If they have pockets."

"I will read your future."

He scowled at her, and then shrugged. There was no way in or out but the door at his back, and certainly nothing to fear from them physically. The noise in the street was no nearer.

"Suit yourself."

"You do not believe?" said the old woman.

"That stuff's all right for women. Me, I believe in what my hands make."

She smiled, showing needle-sharp teeth like a snake's fangs in the wrinkled dark leather of her face. Her eyes stayed on Rick, with that queer intent stare.

She got up slowly and went to the table. She lifted away a cloth and revealed a silver bowl filled with clear water.

Rick laughed, without malice.

The old woman's blood-red pupils flared wide. "You're a spaceman."

"I was born in a tramp hull, and I never been out of them since."

"The spaceship is built on a certain world. Is it chained to that world?"

"Gosh, no! What are you driving at?"

"The mind is not chained to the body, Earthman. Thought is like a ship. It can go anywhere. It can open the Gate and walk along the roads of Time. Time is real, as real as this Mars you stand on and as easy to reach, once you know the way."

RICK was scowling, his yellow eyes in-tent. Maybe. But I don't believe in a future laid out for me like a treadmill. I make my own as I go along, and too many things can happen."

"Yes. But only one thing does happen. Tonight you ran away from your fellow invaders. You would have been taken for the mine gangs had not my misbegotten grandson opened the door to hear the excitement. And so, for the moment, you are safe. You came to a crossroad. You took one fork. All your possible futures stemming from that moment of choice recede onto another plane in favor of the actual one. Life, Earthman, is a series of crossroads."

"And you think you can shoot your mind up the line a-ways and sort of look over the

next one?" Rick asked her.

"Yes."

Rick laughed. "Not bad. Then a guy could always know in advance which road to take, so he'd find the pot of gold and not the mud puddle."

"You still don't believe."

"I've always liked to gamble, myself. Anyway, it doesn't matter."

"No," she said slowly, "it doesn't matter."

She was looking at his face again, his hands, his eyes.

"Contradictions," she murmured, as though Rick wasn't there. "Work has made him thick and coarse, but the bones are fine. The jaw, the nose, the cheekbones, showing through the flesh as the iron ridges show under the moss of the sea-bottoms. But the mouth has yet no shape beyond self-indulgence, and the eyes—the eyes sleep!"

Rick laughed again, easily. "Is that why you want to read my future?" His muscles were relaxing. The noise in the street outside had blurred into distance again. The recent strenuous business of getting rid of his roll was catching up to him. He yawned.

He wasn't going to sleep. His mind was still on top. But he felt comfortable. The red lizard skittered across his feet suddenly like a tiny comet.

The old woman's voice had dropped to a whisper. "Perhaps," she said.

She bent her head over the water in the silver bowl.

It got quiet. The air was warm and close. The dwarf hugged his knees in the ashes. The old woman's breathing rose and fell with a slow deep rhythm, like the breathing of the sea. The red lizard moved in silent little rushes over the stone floor, going nowhere.

Rick's mind played idly with the picture of roads stretching ahead in an infinite network. If you got onto one road, and didn't like it, why couldn't you simply cut across the hills to another?

The roads gradually took on a scarlet color. They moved and shifted. He tried to keep track of them, but they flowed around too much. His eyes began to ache. He shut them.

"Yes, this is better," he thought. "Pull down a nice dark curtain. Wake me at seven, Ma."

The weight of his own head jerking against his neck muscles brought an instinctive grab at slipping consciousness. He opened his eyes, starting half erect.

The old woman was standing by the table, still half bent over the looking-bowl. Her mouth was open, the breath going in and out

snakily over her sharp teeth. She was staring at Rick.

The dwarf was on his hands and knees, motionless with fear, like a fly stuck in amber. The red lizard ran and ran and ran, with a terrible silent purpose, getting nowhere.

Rick's body felt as cold as a toad's belly in the rain. He started to get up. The crazy pattern of the lizard's movements drew Rick's attention. Yet without looking at them he could still see the old woman's—whorls of pale cloud caught around a blood-red star.

"What are you trying to do?" he asked her thickly.

He tried to forget the lizard. Part of his brain was already trapped in the scarlet maze. His face twitched.

"Hypnotize me, you shriveled hag! All that bunk about the future! Hypnotize me!"

Sweat ran out of his hair. He braced his feet. His left hand rose, bringing the atom-gun up.

"You'd put me under and then throw me out to those crimps!" he accused her.

Her gaze pressed against his, beating back his strength. Her crimson pupils blazed. Little red suns, burning and terrible.

"You cannot fire, Earthman," she snarled.

He fought his own finger on the blaster's firing stud. The red lizard ran and ran, winding blood-bright threads around his mind.

Suddenly, from somewhere, the old woman caught up a knife.

The force of her thought hammered at him. "You cannot fire!" it said. "You cannot fire!"

Rick's muscles stood out like thick ropes. He sweated heavily, crying with weakness.

The old woman started across the room.

"I saw your future, Earthman," she whispered. "Your future, if you live."

SHE set the point of the knife against his throat. "I saw your shadow over Mars," she mumbled.

Rick's veins swelled. His face twisted into a death grin. The knife point bit. Then his finger pressed down on the firing stud.

As her face fell away from him, he could still see her eyes, burning red. He laughed, hoarsely, a beast sound without humor. Blood ran hot down his neck, but the knife had clattered to the pavement and she hadn't cut him deeply.

The dwarf let go a thin high scream and dropped flat, hiding his face.

Rick turned. After a while he got the bar up and the door open. He went out. The cold night air shocked some of the diz-

ziness out of his brain, but it felt sluggish in his skull like it had been stunned.

"My shadow," he whispered. "My shadow over Mars."

He went back down the street. The anthropoids still lay where he had shot them. The invulnerable silence of Ruh hung heavy in the moon-shot dark.

He began to shake suddenly with reaction. Weakness overcame him. He leaned against a wall, his chest laboring.

Four black shadows came slipping on silent paws from a side turning. He didn't hear them soon enough. Whirling around, he fired, but they were already on top of him. He went down, under a weight of sinewy bodies, beast-quick, strong, with the musky smell of the furred animal.

Rick's head cracked hard on the stones. He fought for a while, a blind instinctive thrashing of the body. Presently he became quiet.

One of the anthropoids stayed flat on the street. The other three drifted away into the silence, bearing his heavy weight with ease.

Some time later a small, hunched shadow slid out of the narrow space under the city wall and went swiftly south, toward the broken towers on the hill.

CHAPTER II

Trouble at the Mines

PHOBOS had set in the east. Deimos was no more than a red ember, low over the desert. The King City of Ruh lay silent under the sullen glow, its empty towers open to the wind. The moonlight was like a splashing of old blood on the stones.

Only in the lower teirs, that had been the rooms of state, the public offices, the libraries and treasure-houses, were the walls still sound. There was life there.

One flaring torch burned in the throne room, where kings of the line of Karadoc once sat, when there were salty blue seas on Mars, and green hills above them. Only the high seat and the people around it were in the light. Surrounding them was spacious, empty darkness, rustling with old flags, heavy with the ghosts of old glories, breathing out the dry sharp taint of death.

Llawn the dwarf crouched on the ceremonial rug, woven from the long bright hair of virgins whose dust had long since been blown away by wandering winds. The dwarf had been talking for a long time, half

chanting, his voice ringing thin against the stone walls. His green eyes were crazy and wild in the torchlight. Suddenly he had ceased to be a child.

From the left side of the throne a woman watched him. She was not old in years, but she was ancient in pride and sorrow, as though some inner fire, banked but unquenchable, had sapped and dried her.

At the right of the throne stood a man. His tough, sinewy body was half bared in the harness of a common soldier, much worn, but his arms and accouterments were bright. His face was lean, scarred, sullen, and savage, and his eyes were the eyes of a caged wolf.

This was Beudach, chief of the fighting men of the Ruh—a warrior without a battle. His soul hung with the tattered banners in the hall. To his King he had given his heart, and his whole knowledge of arms and the way of using them. Now he watched the grandson of the seeress as a prisoner watches the turning of the key in his cell lock.

On the throne itself sat a boy.

He was dark, and bright, and beautiful. He was like a swordblade, or a new spear, and the fire that smoldered in his mother blazed in him. He was Haral, last of the line of Karadoc, with the plain, ancient iron Collar of Ruh locked proudly on his young throat.

Llaw the dwarf stopped speaking.

For a while there was silence. Then Haral spoke.

"His shadow over Mars," he said slowly.

"My grandmother saw it, Lord," insisted the dwarf. "She was a great seeress."

"The rule of Mars to an Earthman," mused Haral. "The outland yoke hammered on our necks to stay."

The woman cried out, but the wolf-faced man was before her, bending over the throne.

"Now, Lord! Now is the time to strike, if there's any blood or pride left in the men of Mars!"

The boy rose, slowly. The torchlight crimsoned his white skin.

"Beudach."

The wolf-faced man dropped to one knee. "Send Parras to me."

Beudach went away, smiling.

"Do you know where this Earthman is?" Haral asked Llaw.

"No, Lord. But I will find him." He licked his lips. "There is a blood debt."

"It shall be paid."

The woman set her hands on the arm of the high seat and laughed, once, silently.

Beudach returned. There was a man with him, a plump, smiling, youngish man in a sky-blue robe. His eyes were like those of the dead seeress, moonstones flecked with red.

"I want word given to the leaders of every city that pays seizin to Ruh," Haral said to him. "Say that the old Banner of the Twin Moons is raised again, this time against the tyrants of Earth. Tell them to gather what strength they can, and hold it in readiness, and to send their chief warriors here to Ruh, secretly, for a council of war. Llaw!"

The dwarf sprang up.

"Go with Parras. Give him the description of this Earthman, Rick, so that he can warn the cities to watch for him. Then go yourself and spread the word through Ruh."

LAW and Parras bowed and started out. Haral stopped them.

"Wait. You must give them a slogan." He laughed, boy-like, his face aglow with excitement. "Give them the old one, the oldest one on Mars—the cry of the sailors and the seaboard men when the oceans rose out of their beds, and after that the cry of the people who live in the deserts and the wastes where the seas were. Tell them, Parras—'The wind is rising!'"

The dwarf and the seer went out. Haral sprang down from the high seat. He caught his mother and whirled her around and kissed her, and then pulled Beudach's sword from the scabbard behind his left shoulder.

He shouted and threw it high in the air. The blade turned over and over in the torchlight, hurling red sparks at the darkness, and fell. Haral caught it deftly by the hilt.

Beudach watched him. There were tears in his eyes.

Ten days later Ed Fallon, head of the Company, was standing at his high window, gazing out at the vast panorama of Mars. He heard the door of his office open, but he didn't turn his head. He didn't have to. Only Jaffa Storm's tread had that particular strong, uneven rhythm.

"Come over here," Fallon said. "By gosh, it's worth looking at."

Storm put down his sheaf of reports on Fallon's desk and went over to the wide glassite window. He was a big man, nearly seven inches over six feet, with a body like a gladiator's under his black, close-fitting coverall, and his slight limp gave no impression of weakness. There was a 'Mickey' holstered on his lean hip.

He stood beside Fallon, dwarfing even his thick-chested, powerful build. He said nothing, but his black eyes saw everything with

a sombre, rather terrible thoroughness.

"My baby," said Fallon. He struck his red-haired hands together and laughed. "She's growing up, Jaffa. Pretty soon she'll have all of Mars to play with."

His eyes had sparks in them, watching the surging strength of his baby—the Terran Exploitations Company, called simply, The Company.

Fallon's office was on the top floor of the Administration Pylon. It was walled with glassite, and gave a full-circle view of the Company world—laboratories, processing division, foundries, forges, tool shops, the vast pit-head housings with their train sheds, and beyond them, far enough away to be safe from the rocket-blasts, the Company spaceport, whence the cargoes of Fallonite went Earthward.

Apart from all these, behind charged walls of metalloy, were the barracks where the Company work-gangs lived, while they lived.

The pylon was high enough to show other things, too. The seabottom, spreading away into pale distance under the Martian sun, its gaunt ribs showing naked through the blue-gray moss. And to the south, the Old City of Ruh, like the broken crown of a dead king dropped and forgotten on its soaring crag.

Death was out there. Age and cessation. Fallon thought no more of it than he did of last year's wornout shoes. He watched the life of his Company, the thunder and sweat and surge of machinery and the men who bossed it, and it was his own life, his own blood and sweat and surging energy.

Young, that baby, like Earth's intrusion onto dying Mars, but already stretching out muscular hands to close around a planet. A planet whose central government was no more than a feeble token, with the real power scattered wide among the city-states still clinging to the deserts and the sea-bottoms and the barren hills. A planet practically untouched by outland hands until the discovery of Fallonite. It was disunited, ingrown, weak, an easy touch for the first strong man who could see wealth and power springing out of its fallow fields.

"By gosh," said Fallon again, softly, "it's worth looking at."

"Yes," said Storm, also softly. He limped over and sprawled his huge length onto a couch, pulling cigarets from his breast pocket. His thick hair was blacker than his coverall, his skin hardly lighter. He was a Terro-Mercurian, born and bred in the blazing, thundering valleys of the Twilight Belt, where legend had it that the babies came with horns and tails, and with all the heart burned



Storm followed Rick, lacing the coffins with the devastating ray (CHAP. XIV)

out of them with the heat.

Fallon turned back to his desk, looking with distaste at the stack of papers.

"Bah! I'd rather be back in the foundry than mess with this stuff."

"You're a liar," said Storm. "You're a conniving, crafty old fox, and you love it. You never were a laboring man at heart, anyway."

FALLON looked at him. He decided to laugh.

"You're not a comfortable guy to have around." He sat down. "How you coming with those new men?"

"Like always. There's one big yellow-eyed devil I may have to kill. I hope not. He's strong as a horse."

Fallon chuckled. "Nothing like a cheap labor supply! And as long as I pull the strings that make the New Town go, it'll be jammed with the best supply there is—floaters, homesteaders, placer men, space-hands, bums—guys who can vanish with no kicks but their own."

"Until the law moves in."

Fallon roared with mirth. "Yeah! That worries me a lot!"

"Uh huh. Just the same, I hope they don't get leery about going into the Old City. I'd rather take 'em there. Not so tough on our men. The Marshies just sit tight and hope we'll kill each other off. In the New Town, they don't like crimpers."

Fallon shrugged. "That's your worry, Jaffa. Just keep those pits open, that's all I want."

"You'll get what you want."

Fallon nodded. He sweated over the papers for a time in silence. Storm sat still, smoking. Outside, the Company hurled its rude and alien noise against the quiet of Mars.

Presently Storm spoke. "I was in Ruh last night. Old Ruh."

"Have a good time?"

"Fallon, I smell trouble."

The red-haired man looked up. "Trouble?"

"The city feels different. It has felt different, since that last raid ten days ago."

"What the devil! Are you going psychic on me? The Marshies won't even say good morning to us. And besides, those ancient, washed-out little twerps wouldn't have the getup to make trouble."

"Listen, Fallon." Storm leaned forward. "I spent four seasons in the cliff-caves of Arianrhod, down on the edge of Darkside. The people aren't human, but they know things, and I learned a few of them."

His dark face twitched slightly. "I walked

through Ruh last night, and I felt it, through the walls and the darkness and the silence. There's a new feeling in the people. Fear, restlessness, a peculiar urgency. I don't know why, yet, or what it will lead to. But there's a new thing being whispered back of those closed doors. They're telling each other 'The wind is rising!'"

His sombre black gaze held Fallon. After a while, in the stillness, Fallon repeated the phrase.

"The wind is rising."

He laughed suddenly. "Well, let it! It'll take a bigger wind than any old Mars has left to blow my walls down!"

The telescreen hummed, calling for attention. Fallon flipped the connection.

"Kahora calling—Mr. Hugh St. John," the operator said.

"Put him through." Fallon winked broadly at Storm and then composed his face to a friendly smile. The screen flickered and cleared.

"Hello, Fallon," Hugh St. John said. "Are you busy?"

"Not for you. What's on your mind?"

"Mind? I'm beginning to wonder if I have one!" St. John's sensitive, aquiline face looked tired and discouraged. He had untidy fair hair and blue eyes that were unexpectedly shrewd and penetrating.

"Things not going so well, huh?" Fallon said.

St. John laughed bitterly. "The whole purpose of the Unionist movement is to promote understanding between Earthmen and the Martians, so that each can give his best to the other without hurting either. And what have we done so far? We've caused a complete break between the Pan-Martians and the Moderates, and the feeling between our two races gets worse every day. No, Fallon. Things are not going so well."

"Are there any new rumors of—well, trouble? Rioting, let's say?"

"We have contact now only with the Moderates, and there aren't many of them, as you know. They're shunned as bitterly as we are. And of course here in Kahora we don't know much about the Outside. You know what a Trade City's like. I should think you'd have more chance of hearing than we."

"There's nothing that I know of," Fallon said innocently. "Look here—you need more money?"

ST. JOHN nodded. "Well, if we could carry on our work in the Polar Cities, there's a bare chance. The Thinkers are revered all over Mars, and if we could win them over they might swing native opinion

our way. But you've already given so much it seems wasteful."

"I still got plenty. How much?"

"Well, about five thousand U.C.'s ought to be about right."

"Make it six, and let me know when you need more. I'll send the draft through right away."

St. John's eyes glowed mistily. "Fallon, I don't know what we'd do without you!"

"I'm not giving away anything. Mars means as much to me as it does to you." Fallon raised his hand. "So long pal."

"Good by. And thanks."

The screen went dead. Fallon leaned back in his chair and grinned.

"The fool," he said. "The dear, sweet, lily-livered fool!"

Storm watched him with faint amusement. "Sure of that?"

"What do you mean?" snapped Fallon. "I've brought that Union Party up practically by hand. Give them something to focus their opinions on, and they start tearing each other's heads off in no time, never knowing it's what I want them to do."

Storm shrugged. "I wonder?" he said.

"By heavens, Jaffa, you're so suspicious I wonder you trust yourself."

"I don't," said Storm quietly. "That's why I've stayed alive."

Fallon stared at him. And then, for the second time, the telescreen hummed—emitting a series of short, nervous sounds. The "urgent" signal.

Both men went to it, quickly. The screen sprang to life. A man in greasy coveralls leaned forward as though he were trying to come through physically. There was blood running down his face.

"Trouble in Number Five drift. That new gang has gone wild."

"How bad is it?" demanded Fallon, his tones sharp, hoarse.

"They took the guards. Beat 'em down with their shackle chains. That big guy Rick, he's leading them. After grabbing four Mickeys, they dug in behind some ore cars, and they got four Mickeys."

"A Mickey never gave you that."

The man wiped blood off his face with his fingers. "They're throwing ore fragments. My guess is they'll make a rush for the shaft."

"Very well, I'll be right down." Fallon killed the screen and turned to his companion. "How many men in that gang, Jaffa?"

"Thirty-two."

Fallon made another connection and spoke briefly to the huge white Venusian on the

visaplate. The picture showed racks of arms and other huge men in the background. It had been Jaffa Storm's idea to have an all-Venusian corps of Middle-Swampers for his strong-arm work. Being outlanders and fairly savage, they had interest in two things only—food and fighting. Storm saw to it they had plenty of both.

"Vargo send fifteen men down to Number Five drift." Fallon said. "Take a high-power Banning shocker. There's thirty-two guys down there want to play rough, and they're all yours!"

CHAPTER III

Break for Liberty

MAYO McCALL looked down through the glassite wall of her booth ten feet above the floor of Number Five drift. Thirty feet to her right was the shaft where the Fallonite ore went up to the surface. To her left was the brilliantly-illuminated tunnel that followed the vein out under the waste of the dead sea-bottom.

Mayo McCall watched the men running back and forth below. Quite calmly she reached out and closed the switch that controlled her testing beam—the ray that spanned the head of the drift and checked every carload of dull red rock for Fallonite content, the chemically amorphous substance that was already beginning to revolutionize the Terran plastic industry.

Mayo was alone. No one on the drift floor was paying any attention to her. She folded her arms on the table in front of her and peeled back the sleeve of her dark green technician's coverall. She pressed a hidden stud on her wristwatch.

The lens and half the silver case rose, revealing a microscopic two-way radio. Mayo counted five slowly, watching the men below. Her brown eyes held a deep glow. She had a strong, supple body whose curves even the coverall couldn't hide, and hair of a rich, warm mahogany color that made her skin look like cream.

"Go ahead," the radio whispered.

Softly, distinctly, without moving her lips, Mayo McCall spoke.

"There's trouble with a new gang, here in my drift. Set the amplifiers and recorders. I'm going down . . . Wait. A bunch of Venusian guards just arrived with a Banning shocker. This looks big. It may be just what we've wanted."

"Be careful, Mayo. You know what

they'll do if they discover what you're doing."

"I know. There goes Fallon and Jaffa Storm. This ought to be good. Stay with me."

She pulled her sleeve down carefully. The loose cloth covered the radio. She opened the door of the booth.

The drift was empty now for as far as she could see. She went quickly down the plastic steps and turned left, going silently and keeping close to the red rock wall. The rails of the dilly road glinted burnished silver in the white glare.

From up ahead, around a bend in the tunnel, came the sudden brittle whine of a heavy-duty shocker cutting in.

The first beam was low power. Crouched behind an ore car, Rick felt the shock run through him like liquid fire. It made his heart pound, but the pain wasn't too much to take.

There were twenty-two men spread out beside him along the rail. The other nine had been put to sleep with the Mickey shock-guns of the guards, in the first scrimmage. The focus of the Banning was widened to take in the lot.

"Jimminy! We can't take that!" one of the men cried out shrilly. "They'll step up the power."

"Shut up," Rick told him. The Venusian, Vargo, called to them. He looked innocent and happy, incongruously like a nice old lady with the dead-white hair coiled high on his head.

"You come out now, eh?" he said to the miners.

No answer. Vargo looked around. Jaffa Storm had just come up, running easily with his odd, limping stride. Fallon was some distance behind him. Fallon waved his hand.

"It's your show, boys!" he shouted.

He stopped, not too close, and lounged against the wall.

"Advance your power at the rate of one notch per second," Storm said quietly. The Venusian with the Banning grinned and took hold of the small lever. "I will count to ten," Storm said clearly, to no one in particular.

It grew very still under the cold brilliance. Rick peered around a wheel. The manacles clashed softly as he raised the Mickey in his twitching, jerking hand.

He didn't fire. The little guns had a shorter range than the distance a strong man could throw an ore fragment, which was why the rebels still had opposition. The Company men moved back beyond ore fragments.

Rick watched the lever click forward on the Banning. Little blue lights began to flicker on the rim of the wheel in front of him. His body began to jerk with the same erratic violence. Each separate nerve stood out in coruscating agony.

JAFFA STORM began to count. Jaffa Stern's voice echoed under the stone vault with the rhythmic impersonality of a clock tolling.

When he said, "Five," one of the rebels miners began to scream.

"I'm coming out!" he shrieked. "I'm coming out!" Jaffa Storm stopped counting. He held his hand out, flat. The current stayed level. In the dead silence the man crawled across the rock, his shadow black and inhuman beneath him. His wrist-chains dragged, clashing.

Six others followed. Rick watched them. Once he tried to raise the Mickey, but his hand was like an old man's, palsied and without strength.

Storm began to count again.

Three times the advancing lever was stopped while men crawled and whimpered across the rock. When Storm said, "Ten," there was only one man left beside Rick. He must have had a weak heart. He was dead.

"Cut your power," Storm said.

The Venusian looked surprised, but he thumbed the stud. The whining stopped. Rick's body went lax. He lay face down, breathing in hoarse animal gasps. Sweat lay like thick oil on his skin.

"Rick," Storm said. "Are you ready to quit?"

After a long while Rick laughed.

"I suppose," said Storm, "you think I'll kill you anyway."

Rick's words had no shape to them, but their meaning was plain.

Storm nodded. He gestured to the Venusian. The man got up, and Storm sat down behind the Banning.

The guards and the dough-faced exhausted men moved back, against the wall. They didn't speak. Their breathing sounded harsh and loud. A still white glare filled the drift.

Storm lighted a cigarette, without haste. He placed matches in the pack, weighted it, and threw it. He didn't appear to strain at all, but the pack struck the wall behind Rick with audible force.

Presently Rick got his knees under him. He picked up the cigarette and sat back against the rock, dragging smoke deep into his lungs. It was quiet enough so that the

faint sizzling of the illuminating tube sounded very loud. Rick looked up at it.

It was sunk in a trough in the ceiling and protected with heavy wire screen. There was no way to break it. Rick knew that. He'd already tried every way there was. The main switch for the whole length of the tube was back near the mouth of the drift. There were also switches for the individual sections, but they were not within his reach.

He sat almost at the peak of an oblique bend in the drift. To his left the tunnel ran into a dead end, without side galleries or even cover of any kind. Most of it, because the bend was shallow, was in clear range of the Banning.

Almost directly in front of him, in the opposite wall, was the dark opening of an abandoned side gallery. It probably led into a cul-de-sac, although it might, just possibly, cut into one of those endless mazes left by the giant mud-worms of prehistoric Mars, whose tunnelings remain fossilized under the sea-bottoms. In either case, it would mean only the difference between a fast death and a slow one, and as for reaching it, it might as well have been on Phobos.

Off to his right, across the naked, pitiless stone, Jaffa Storm dropped his cigarette and stepped on it.

He leaned forward. His hands touched the Banning with gentle delicacy. He tilted the muzzle high and flashed an experimental beam. This time the focus was tight, the power-whine hysterically high.

A thin stream of pale and crackling fire licked out, touched the opposite wall, and was gone. The smoking surface was fused like glass.

Quite suddenly one of the chained men turned his face to the wall and began to vomit.

Rick crouched down behind a metal wheel. His yellow eyes had the cold cruelty of those of a cat. His body was

relaxed and still.

Jaffa Storm leveled the Banning, his dark face betraying neither pleasure nor interest.

He laid the beam on the disc of Rick's wheel and let it stay.

The nearness of the charge sent fire shocking through Rick's flesh. The wheel began to heat. Blue flames danced on its rim. Sweat poured down Rick's face, and dried, and the skin reddened angrily. His eyes were tortured.

He sprang suddenly, sideways along the rail, toward another wheel. The beam flicked over his head and came down ahead of him. He leaped back, making a dash the other way. Again the beam was quicker.

He dropped behind the wheel again. The beam found the disc and stayed.

RICK measured the distance to the gallery opening. He laughed silently, without humor, and gathered himself.

From the empty drift, beyond Storm and the men and the Venusian guards, beyond Ed Fallon, leaning white-faced against the wall, came a woman's voice.

"Stop!" it said.

Hasty footsteps rang against the tunnel vault. Voices broke loose in a nervous babble. The heat and the blue fire went away from the wheel. Rick looked around it, cautiously.

He saw the girl and she was beautiful. Even in that technician's coverall she made a lovely picture as she hastened to Jaffa Storm. Her hair clung in deep sorrel curls around her face, her brown eyes were blazing. She was so full of fury that she actually seemed to give off light.

"Stop that," she said. "Stop it!"

Fallon was coming up behind her. He looked rather sick.

"I've stopped," said Storm, mildly.

"It isn't enough for you to take these men

[Turn page]

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

All the same except one . . . which is the odd picture?



ANSWER:
Number five. He is only "two-haired"



off the free streets and chain them up and make slaves of them. You have to murder them, too!"

Storm rose lazily, motioning the Venusian back to the Banning.

"Do I do all those things, Miss?"

"Don't try to be funny! You know it's the truth."

"How do you know I do?"

"Everybody knows it!"

"Do they. Do they really." Storm's hand shot out so quickly that it was only a blurred flash. He pulled her close and said with friendly curiosity, "Or are you just trying to make me admit it, perhaps for someone else to hear?"

His free hand went over her with impersonal swiftness. She struggled, striking at him with her left arm. He laughed. He caught her wrist, and there was a faint snap of metal. He held her tight and peeled the sleeve back.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I thought so."

He stripped off the watch-radio and crushed it under his heel.

Fallon whistled softly. "I better take her up to the office."

Storm nodded. His black eyes were warm. The girl lay quiet in his arms. The neck of her dark-green coverall had been torn open, and her throat and cheeks were smooth like new cream.

"You're awfully strong," she whispered. She shivered and let her head roll back against him. Her eyes were closed. "I guess I'm caught."

"M-m-mh."

"Are you going to kill me?" she asked him.

"That might depend."

She raised her lashes. "I don't think I want to die yet."

HE LAUGHED. He held her off, facing him, so he could look into her eyes.

"That's awfully quick work, baby."

"Time doesn't mean much in a spot like this."

"You're a liar, precious. A most beautiful, lovely liar."

She said nothing. Her lips were warm, rosy and alive.

"I can read your mind," Storm said.

"You're awfully smart," she murmured.

"Because I can't read it myself."

Storm laughed again, softly. He bent his towering height and kissed her, taking his time.

In the middle of it, with her mouth still pressing his, she brought her knee up, hard, with deadly accuracy.

Rick shouted. Jaffa Storm doubled up, his face twisted with stunned agony. The girl kicked him again, on the knee, and broke free.

"I've trained my mind, too," she yelled, and ran.

The Venusians burst into a sudden raucous howl of laughter at Storm, who was huddled over on his knees, retching. The manacled men joined in.

Fallon made a grab for the girl. He missed, but some of the guards ran out and her way back to the shaft was barred. From behind the ore car Rick bellowed.

"The light switch!"

Her gaze flicked from him to the switch near the tunnel mouth, all in the instant between one step and the next. The switch was on the opposite wall, away from the guards. She moved.

"Don't fire!" Fallon yelled. "I want her alive." He began to run, with half a dozen big Middle-swampers loping past him. The girl was going like a dark-green comet.

Jaffa Storm got up. He kept his body bent, but his feet were steadier than Rick knew his would have been. There was no expression on his face, not even pain. He struck the Venusian away from the Banning. He laid him out cold, and never glanced at the body.

He fired. His beam went between two Venusians, close enough to singe them, and hit the wall five feet to the girl's left. She didn't falter.

"Stop that!" Fallon yelled furiously. "She's got to be questioned!"

Storm fired again. The Venusians had scattered out of the way. The girl dropped flat, rolling. The beam missed her by the minimum margin, and then Rick was on his feet, running fast across the stone pathway.

He shouted. Storm's attention wavered slightly. Without breaking stride, Rick threw what was in his left hand.

It was an ore fragment. It was heavy, and jagged. It took Storm across the left side of his face and knocked him flat.

The light went out.

The Banning was still on. Its beam made an eerie unreal shimmer in the blackness. Rick's eyes adjusted quickly. He was heading for the tunnel mouth before Storm hit the ground, and in the bluish glimmer he made out the girl's shadow, racing for the same place. Elsewhere, pademonium was on a holiday.

Nobody chased them. They were afraid of the Banning. There was a heaving and profane commotion back against the wall.

Somebody got hold of the Banning finally and screamed, "watch out!" and started to flash the beam around. Rick and the girl collided at the tunnel mouth and fell. The tongue of flame licked the air, crackling, where their heads had been, and flashed past. Before it could come back they had plunged into the pitch darkness of the gallery.

It turned. They crashed the blind wall and clawed around the corner, and behind them the Banning beam hit the rock and chewed away in baffled fury.

"Come on," Rick said.

They went, faster than any sane people would have dared. They fought the rock walls and the trash of abandoned digging on the ground, the darkness, and themselves.

Three times Rick thought, "This is it. End of the tunnel. Dead end!" Then his groping hands would slide around a corner, and they'd go on.

Suddenly, quite suddenly, the drift changed. The floor was round, like a huge pipe, instead of level. There was no debris. The walls were curved, with a curious regular smoothness under the hand.

After a while they slowed, and then stopped. The silence lay as dead and heavy as the darkness. Their hoarse breathing had a quality of sacrilege, like noise in a tomb.

INSTINCTIVELY they moved close together, close enough to touch. Rick's wrist-chains clashed softly.

"They haven't followed," the girl whispered.

"No. They'll send the black boys. The anthropoids."

Silence. Blood drumming hot behind their ears.

"We're in one of those mazes I've heard about, aren't we?" the girl murmured. "Where the big worms used to crawl before the sea-bottoms hardened."

"That's right."

"Is there any way out?"

"I don't know. Sometimes worm tunnels lead into a pit, or a cliff face. Sometimes the roof has been cracked. About this one, I don't know."

"Not a very good chance, is it?" But her voice showed no fear.

"I wouldn't give odds."

Silence. Their breathing, their body heat, their fear, mingling in the thick dark.

"What's your name?" Rick asked the girl.

"Mayo McCall. What's yours?"

"Richard Gunn Urquhart, but Rick's enough."

"Hello, Rick."

"Hello, Mayo." He found her shoulder and

shook it. "You have courage, baby. Ha, I hope you ruined that big scut for life."

"That rock of yours didn't do him any good."

"I got a hunch it didn't finish him," said Rick. "I hope it didn't. I'd like to see that guy again, some day."

"And Fallon?" she asked him.

"Fallon and the whole blasted Company," Rick's voice was vicious. "I'd like to boot them clean to . . ."

After a while Mayo whispered, "Maybe you could, if we're lucky," Mayo whispered, after a while.

"What do you mean?" asked Rick. "Go on, explain."

"If we live, I might show you how," said the girl, "We'd better go now. Which way?"

"Which wrist am I holding?"

She moved it slightly. "The left."

"That's the way we go, then. And baby, you better be lucky!"

CHAPTER IV

Into the Depths of Mars

WIND moved sighing through the broken walls, and the dusk came down to join it. Far out across the western wastes Phobos rode the last pale glow of the sun edging the rim of Mars. Ruh lay silent, barred and shuttered, but not asleep.

With night shadows crept through the streets. Some of them came drifting in through secret portals in the city wall and then sought the heights of the King City, where they vanished. Upon entering the flaring torchlight in the throne-room, however, they became men.

Fighting men. Of different ages, sizes, coloring, in the harness of different city-states, but all alike in one thing—the look they bore. The look of wolves in a cage.

They sat around a table of blood-red wood worn hollow by the arms of centuries of war-chiefs. Haral the boy king, leaned forward like a bent blade from his high seat, and the eyes of Beudach, who stood always at his right hand, were as steel in the fire.

Only one shadow remained in the Quarters. It was small and hunched and swift-moving, and its eyes burned emerald in the Phobos-light. It went from door to door, whispering, asking, and the name it said was "Rick."

High up against the stars, in the ruined Tower of Destiny, Parras, the Seer, bent his fresh young face above his looking bowl. His

mind reached out across the sea-bottoms, the sand deserts, the age-worn hills. It touched other minds, asking, and the name it said was "Rick."

To the green-eyed shadow and the mind of the seer came an unvarying answer.

"Not yet."

"Wait, then," Parras would tell them. "Keep watching. There is a blood debt to be paid. 'The wind is rising!'"

Down in the mine gallery, Rick put his hand on Mayo's shoulder. "Hold it," he cautioned the girl. "I thought I heard something."

They stood still. Presently Rick heard the noises quite clearly, somewhere far behind them in the stale blackness of the worm-bore. The soft scrambling noises of many creatures, running.

"What'll we do?" Mayo asked.

"Keep going, I guess. I've only got one Mickey, and that won't even slow 'em down. Tired?"

"I'm all right. What happens when they catch us?"

"Ask me then."

They went on again. The going was fairly easy, the floor smooth and the turns gradual. Rick knew they must have left their original bore long ago, branching off into only the stars knew how many intersecting tunnels. He had no idea how long they had been wandering, only that it was too long. They simply kept going because there was nothing else to do.

The anthropoids, fresh and running easily by scent, drew closer by the minute. Rick hung back a little, behind the girl.

Quite suddenly Mayo gave a strangled cry and fell heavily. There was a dry sound of something splitting. Rick tried to stop, tripped, and went sprawling.

There was a smoothly serrated surface under him. It tapered upward, widening to the sides. He scrambled up and followed it, with Mayo beside him.

"The tunnel's blocked," she gasped. "Rick, it's blocked!"

"Sure. Here, climb up." He pulled her onto the top of the obstruction and began to crawl. Presently his head hit the roof. He reached out, groping. The obstruction curved into the side of the bore, sealing it completely.

Rick let his breath out, hard. He lay still, utterly relaxed, and listened to his heart. It was like thunder. The sweat felt cold on his skin. Mayo lay beside him, breathing unevenly.

Behind them, another sound grew louder, closing in.

After a while Rick pushed himself backward and turned around. He got the Mickey in his hand and sat waiting. His body was like lead. He slid his right hand out the length of the chain and found the girl's slender palm.

She gripped his fingers, and her grasp was cold, like ice. They sat listening to the soft rushing footsteps.

Suddenly she spoke, rather loudly. "What is this thing, Rick?"

"Don't know." He ran his knuckles over the smooth serrations. "Hey! Yes I do, too! It's the guy that built this tunnel—the old crawler himself. He died here, and turned to stone."

He laughed, not because it was particularly funny. He gave the fossil a crack with the barrel of the Mickey.

It rang hollow.

RICK hit it again, harder, and then he remembered the brittle cracking sound when Mayo fell. He got up on his knees, balled his fists together, and struck down with all his strength.

It nearly jarred his teeth out, but he knew. "Oh, cracky!" he whispered. "If I only had a pick, or a big maul!" He laughed again, sharply. He slid the heavy manacles as far down as they would go on his hands, wrapped the chain around them, and went to work.

He had a crack started when the anthropoids began to swarm up over the slope of the worm's tail.

Mayo took the Mickey. Rick went on pounding. They were so far back in the cleft between the fossil and the roof that the brutes had to come at them from the front only, and not many at a time. Mayo did all right with the Mickey, for a while. The shock-charge put the leading anthropoids to sleep, and their bodies rolled back to trip the ones coming up behind them. It was a blind fight. The blackness was choked with the sound of feet and moving bodies, and a rank animal smell. The anthropoids worked silently.

Rick drowned everything else with the smashing thunder of his manacles on the echoing stone.

"The Mickey's dead, Rick," Mayo reported at last. "The charge is gone."

"Come here. I've made a hole." She found it. "Can you break the edges back?"

"I think so." He heard her kicking, beating and straining. Things snapped. Anthropoid paws found his leg and pulled him backward. He swung. He didn't have hands any more, only a numb mass bound together with metal. The mass hit something, and

for the first time there was a scream.

"It's coming!" Rick heard Mayo say.

He swung again. The blackness was full of bodies. Every time Rick swung he hit something. There was a new smell, warm and dank and sweetish. His arms were wet.

There were too many bodies. They weighed him down. He went on swinging until his arms were held tight. He kicked. Things smashed and fell away from his boots, but they came back again. Presently his legs were held, too. He heaved and twisted. Some of the paws were shaken loose. For a moment he was almost free. He got in a few good ones, and then he was down again. From a great distance Mayo's voice was calling out.

"Rick! Rick, come on!" it said.

He tried it, but it was no good. And then suddenly a cyclone hit the heaving mass on top of him, and there were gaps in the paws that held him. Mayo screamed and tugged at him.

He used strength which he didn't know he had left, to thrash free. Mayo plunged down the hole, dragging his feet after her. An anthropoid grappled with him. He slugged it with his irons and dropped through into the inside of the fossil worm. Two of the brutes tried to get through the hole at once and jammed there.

Mayo helped him up and they staggered away down the worm's interior.

They were knee deep in dust. The intestinal structure had fallen away, crumbled, and dried, while the outer shell hardened. The clouds that rose behind them slowed the anthropoids. Rick and Mayo went on, far beyond their physical strength driven by a raw, primitive urge for survival.

It came to Rick dimly, after a while, that something was happening.

"Falling in," he said thickly. "Vibration—cracking it."

It was horrible in the dark. Smothering dust, the noise of splitting destruction everywhere. Parts of the shell had become homogenous with the hardened mud, and apparently that was caving in, too. The miners always feared the treacherous strata away from the true rock that held the ore veins.

There were screams again behind them.

"When we reach the head there won't be any place to go," Mayo said suddenly. "Solid rock."

The cracking ran forward over their heads. A falling mass grazed Rick's shoulder. He pushed the girl on faster. Dust rolled strangling against their lungs. There was a terrible, crushing, bottled-up thunder.

Their heads struck the top abruptly. They

dropped, crawling. The space narrowed in on them. The dust thickened. Mayo whimpered hoarsely. There was ripping, splitting crash! Dead end . . .

SEVERAL days later, Hugh St. John was standing on the terrace of his apartment, well up in the tallest building in Kahora, the Trade City for Mars. His sensitive young face was drawn and grim. He nervously was smoking a slender Venusian cigarette.

Kahora was halfway around the planet from Ruh and Fallon's Company. It was night. Diemos rode low in the purple-black sky above the glassite dome that covered the city, shielding its polyglot inhabitants from the naked weather of Mars.

Down below, the streets of Kahora lay like a little web of jewels. St. John listened to the city's pulse. It was a slow, quiet beat. The business that went on here was the sterile handling of things already made and done, figures added up by sleek men who spent their idle hours in the Dream Palace and the exotic night clubs. Even the air was artificial, carefully cleaned, scented, and kept at an even temperature.

He had been in Vhia, the Trade City for Venus. That hadn't been so bad. Venus was a young planet, lusty and strong. Even the glassite dome hadn't been able to keep out the savage beat of the rains and the sense of hot jungle just outside. Men were busy there, too, the heart and brain of the commerce of a thrusting, aggressive world. Where there was enmity with the Venusians, it had been a healthy one.

Here everything was old, passive, faded and worn out. Even the Martian hatred of the Earthmen, the invaders, was a silent thing, festering in barren darkness. The stream of Martian trade flowed through Kahora like the chilling blood of an old man already three-quarters dead.

St. John's mouth twisted bitterly. The only living thing on Mars was Ed Fallon and his alter ego, the Company. Alive, he thought, like an evil beast—hungry, independent, and fatal.

Presently the robot servant at the door identified and admitted the man St. John had been waiting for.

"Mak," St. John cried. "Mak, did you find out anything?"

Eran Mak shook his head. He was Martian, a Low-canaler from over Jekkara way, and he looked like what he was—a civilized bandit. The dubious fame of his people went as far back into Martian history as the history itself. He was a small, tough and

wiry, with a slender dark face, a friendly smile, and eyes like drops of hot gold. He wore a cluster of tiny bells in his left ear, and his clothing, the fashionable white tunic of the Trade Cities, gave him the satanic look.

"I'm afraid there's not much hope, Hugh," he said quietly. "I finally made connections with Christy. Since they found out about Mayo, he's scared green. She and this fellow Rick got away all right, into an abandoned drift, but heaven only knows what happened after that. Christy says they sent the black boys after them, and only a few came back. Some of them were all messed up—crushed arms and such, as though they'd been caught in a cave-in. So I guess they're both done for."

He lifted his lean shoulders. St. John turned away.

"Were you in love with her, Hugh?" Eran Mak was one of the few who could venture to ask such a question. He was St. John's best friend.

"I don't know. I don't think I could have sent her there if I had been in love with her. And yet, when I knew she was caught, and her radio suddenly stopped sending, my heart turned to ice." Suddenly he shivered. "Mak, if she's dead, then I killed her!"

"She knew what she was doing," Mak consoled him.

St. John shuddered again. He sat down and put his face in his hands.

Eran Mak crossed the terrace and also seated himself, the little bells tinkling faintly as he moved. He smoked a cigarette in silence. Then he frowned.

"This is going to make Fallon awfully suspicious," he said.

St. John drew a long breath. "That's true. Well, I'll stall him as long as I can. Anyway, I cashed his last draft!" He rose abruptly. "I don't know how we can manage to continue the work without the rat's money."

"It may not matter. There's a storm brewing, Hugh. One devil of a big thundering storm. It's all under cover, but here and there a little puff of breeze warns of a gathering tornado. It may blow us all clean off Mars."

"And this world's last chance for life will be gone. I've failed, Mak. My whole plan has been a fool's dream from the beginning."

HE GRIPPED the rail of the terrace, looking out over the jewelled city.

"Think what we could give them, Mak, if they'd only let us! The strength, the new ideas, the new roads to travel! But they won't allow it. They slam their doors in our

faces, and the Martian Planetary Government only refrains from kicking us off into space because they don't want open trouble with Earth and Venus.

"Only Ed Fallon gets anywhere. He's going to own all Mars in a few years, because of that cursed ore he discovered. Money will make such a big noise in the Government's ears that any yelling the people do won't amount to a penny whistle in a hurricane. And Mars will be just as dead, either way it goes."

He hit the rail hard with his hand and started pacing.

"My only chance of getting rid of Fallon failed when Mayo was caught before she could get proof of what he and Storm are doing. With that, I might have gone to the Interplanetary Coordination Authority—their Labor Board would have made an investigation. But now it's too late!"

He sat down again.

Eran Mak set the tiny bells chiming with his fingertip.

"You know what I think?" he answered. "I think the job needed a bigger man than you, or me, or any of us. It would take a whale of a big man to unify Mars—all the scraps and pieces of us from Jekkara to the Pole, withdrawn into our little city-shells, sitting in the dust and hugging our memories. If we could find a Goliath like that, there might still be a chance.

"You might as well ask for Phobos to balance those bells in your ear." St. John leaned back and closed his eyes. He looked indescribably bitter and tired.

"Besides," he added, with a faint smile, "if we found a Goliath, someone else would find a David to slay him."

CHAPTER V

Latent Fires Astir

THERE was fresh air. There was pain. There was darkness, threaded with a greenish glow. Rick stirred.

After a long time he was on his hands and knees, coughing in the dust. Back of him about three feet he was aware of a solid mass walling him in. Ahead there was a ragged rift in the blackness, through which seeped moonlight.

In the moonlight, he saw Mayo's face, still and white as stone.

He put his hand on her throat. It was warm. There was a pulse-beat. The discovery brought him happiness and relief.

He spoke to her. She moaned faintly, and that was all.

Rick crawled past her and shoved against the stuff barring his way. It was rotten, already half gone from the shaking of the slide. Presently the hole was big enough to get through.

It came to him to wonder why the worm's fossil head had not collapsed with the rest of it. There was enough moonlight coming in now to show how close they had come to dying. He looked at the upper surface, almost touching his face.

Then he understood. The worm's digging end had been sheathed with armor plate like the point of a drill, and it was still as strong as a granite arch.

Rick patted it and smiled. Then he crawled out, backward, dragging Mayo's dead weight.

He found himself high on the face of a crumbling cliff. The worm had died with its head not two feet from open water. Now there was no water. There was a lonesome, aimless wind and a maze of shadows racing under the swinging moons, and the cold dry smell of dead land.

At the foot of the cliff was a tumbled slope covered with gray-green moss, and then the desert began. It stretched as far as Rick could see, in bleached waves of sand that rolled like surf under the wind and the moon-shadows.

Out across it, far out, there was a city.

The city lay in the bed of the dry sea, thrusting its marble spires to the sky in a stricken gesture of prayer. Even while Rick watched it, it flickered like a breaking dream, obscured by drifting veils of dust.

It was the only thing in the whole landscape that held even a suggestion of human life. Rick got stiffly to his feet. His whole body ached, but he could make it work. He went down the cliff, sliding, half falling, dragging the unconscious girl. His shackle chain made a loud ringing jangle against the rock.

He got Mayo up into his arms. Her throat and arms were foam-white in the moonlight, her thick hair falling dark against Rick's skin. They were both half naked, dusty, stained with blood.

He walked out across the sand, setting one foot doggedly before the other. The swinging chain tolled in the silence like a cracked bell.

He was close to the city when little winged people appeared. Rick remembered having heard legends of them. Like the anthropoids, they were end-products, the left-overs of a race incredibly ancient, once powerful, now reduced to a mere forgotten handful clinging to empty cities lost in the sand—cities

that had once been island kingdoms in a blue sea.

The winged ones drifted out from the white towers, out across the little racing moons. They were light and indescribably beautiful, and their wings shimmered with soft secret fires like opals under mist. They clustered round and followed Rick, who tramped on doggedly. They tossed on the wind like huge petals, making no sound. Rick could see their eyes, glowing with a faint phosphorescence.

Presently a marble wall loomed up in front of Rick and halted him.

He laid the girl carefully on the sand and turned around. He had no particular idea of what he was going to do. The gossamer creatures fluttered down onto the blowing sand. They were human in body, slender and graceful, wearing only short kilts. There were both men and women. Their skin was covered with a fine silky fur, almost like bird-down, and they were no more than four feet tall.

One of the men landed nearby. His handsome little face held neither friendliness nor enmity. "You are Rick," he said in a clear, soft voice. Then he whipped a pencil-tube from his girdle and fired.

Rick slid down into utter darkness. The last conscious picture he took with him was not of the man with the tube, but of a tiny woman, poised like the Winged Victory of Samothrace in the greenish moonlight, watching him with huge, still eyes.

It was the eyes most of all he remembered.

HE LAY on his back, comfortably, on a pile of silks and furs. He was rested and without pain, except for a slight stiffness. His hands were still chained.

The little woman sat beside him, her slender body shining like new gold in a flood of sunlight from a huge arched window high in the wall. A second glance told Rick she was little more than a girl, with all the beauty that blossoms just across the threshold from childhood. Her hand lay small and warm on Rick's bare chest.

"I have been finding out if you live," she said. "You live strongly."

Rick laughed and sat up. "What's your name?"

"Kyra."

He shook her hand gravely. It was like a doll's hand.

Somebody near stirred and yawned.

"Your mate is awake," Kyra said. Her speech was pure High Martian, and a little difficult for Rick to follow.

"Mate?" He shook his head. "No. Just a swell girl I almost died with." He got up. Mayo was sitting up on a second heap of furs and bright cloths. She smiled.

"Hello, Rick. For heaven's sake where are we, and how did we get here?" She stared at Kyra.

Rick told her what he knew. "The city is called Caer Hebra," Kyra explained. "We have lived in it always, since the world was. There were many of us, once."

Rick looked around him. They were on a sort of broad terrace, inlaid magnificently with colored stones Rick had no names for. The pattern had a curiously infinite quality, without beginning or end. It did strange things to anyone who looked too long. Above them, the roof soared in a pure arch of veined marble.

Only one great window could be seen. There were bas-reliefs on the walls, alive and almost breathing. They showed men and women like Kyra, only they were as big as Rick and Mayo. There were trees in the pictures, birds and beasts and once a sea with ships on it.

Rick also noticed a low, carved railing, and in the centre of it, steps. They were wide enough to march an army down, and they descended majestically into blue shadows and—sand!

It choked the vast hall below, flowing around the waists of sculptured figures, leaving here and there an impotent pleading hand or a half-smothered head where the statutory had been set lower. It crawled out from the high window, lapping at the steps.

Rick became aware of a peculiar rustling sound, like the breathing of a sleeping giant, the rubbing of the desert against the outer walls.

"There are many levels below this," said Kyra. "When my father was a child he played here, and there was no sand." She looked up at the window. A feathery plume blew in and sifted down to the terrace. Rick shivered.

He realized presently that both he and Mayo had been washed and treated with ointments. Kyra set food before them, bringing it from a table beside a massive bronze door. They ate.

"Kyra, what goes on here?" Rick said. "I remember some guy rayed me. How did he know my name?"

Kyra explained, and Rick's face hardened. "A blood debt!" he said. "By golly, if they think they're going to sacrifice me, they're wrong!"

"My people will come at dusk to carry you

back to Ruh." Kyra's luminous eyes held a shimmer of tears. "They will kill you," she whispered. "And you live — so strongly!"

She caught his hands suddenly, stretching her little self up to him. "I've heard them talk. I know the prophecy—your 'shadow over Mars.' They hate and fear you." Her next words were almost choked by tears and eagerness, and came tumbling out in an incoherent flood.

"I think you would bring life to Mars instead of death," she said. "You have life in you, so much life, and we are dying. Don't let them kill you, Rick!"

He smiled and stroked her feathery soft hair. "Better not let your people hear you talk like that. They know you're here?"

"No. Oh, Rick!"

She looked up at him. He bent and kissed her small trembling lips and suddenly she pulled away from him. For the first time she was shy. Spreading her wings, she darted away up the shaft of sunlight and was gone.

RICK sat down, rather helplessly, and looked at Mayo. There were tears in her brown eyes.

"Yeah," said Rick softly. "Isn't it!"

"Rick, I don't understand. What prophecy?"

He told about the seeress.

"I didn't mean to kill her! But she had me crazy. Also she tried to knife me." He tilted his head back so Mayo could see the half-healed cut on his throat.

She didn't say anything. She sat staring at him with such an intent and yet distant look that presently he moved restlessly.

It wasn't so much her look that disturbed him. It was because her hair was afire with sunlight and her skin was like Venusian mist at dawn, lucent pearl flushed over with sultry warmth. A muscle began to twitch in his cheek.

She rose and put her hands on his arms and studied him.

"The old woman was right," she said. "Kyra's right. There's strength in you, Rick. It's sleeping, but it's there. You've never done much with your life, have you?"

"I've enjoyed it, most of it."

"But you haven't built things. You haven't been going anywhere. Have you thought, Rick, that maybe there was something in that prophecy?"

He laughed. "I'd look fine, wouldn't I, as a shining savior!"

"I think," she said quietly, "you might look

very fine."

He didn't move for a long moment, didn't breathe. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her. Presently, they drew apart.

"Rick, we must have a talk," she said then. "There isn't much time, and we've got to do something!"

"There's nothing to do, baby. Maybe later, there'll be a break. But right now, unless we can sprout wings like the kid, we've got to wait. Anyway, they've got nothing against you. You're in the clear."

"Don't tell me that!" Mayo stirred impatiently against the white fur on which she was lying. "Listen, Rick. Back there in that tunnel you said you wanted to drive Fallon and his gang off Mars."

Rick nodded. His cat-eyes blazed.

"Then will you come in with us, with Hugh St. John and me?" she asked him. "Rick, I tell you union is the only hope for Mars. Maybe you're the man who can bring it about. That old woman didn't talk like a hysteric, an ordinary crystal-gazer. She talked sense. That conception of a fan-shaped future is fundamental even on Earth. Many scientists accept it as sound theory."

She sat up, flushed and shaken with excitement, gripping his arm with hurtful strength.

"Take hold of your future, Rick! Mould it, build it, make it a great, towering thing that people will remember as long as they have tongues to talk about it!"

He stared at her, through her and beyond her. He began to tremble.

He rose abruptly, pacing the inlaid terrace. "My shadow," he whispered. "My shadow over Mars."

Mayo straightened slowly, watching him. An odd look came into her face—a faint, uncertain fear.

"Why not? By golly, why not!" He stopped, talking to her not as an individual but only as a point on which to focus his voice. There was a fire in him suddenly. The blaze of it spread through him until, in the sunlight, he looked to her like legendary Talos, still hot from the forges.

"Why not?" he repeated. "Fallon, St. John, Storm—why not me? Take hold of my future. Sure. My future, and a world. A whole round world just waiting for somebody to pick it up. Some guy's hand will grab it. Why not mine!"

Silence, with the marble vault still echoing.

"Rick!" Mayo whispered.

He only half saw her. "You know who I am?" he said slowly. "Richard Gunn Urquhart." He pronounced it as though it

had a tremendous cabalistic meaning. "I never realized that before. I guess I never really knew I was alive."

He threw back his head and laughed.

Silence, and the ringing echoes. The sunlight faded from the window. Mayo sat on the heap of furs and bright silks, unstirring.

He knelt beside her and took her in his arms.

"We'll go up together," he said. "You're the woman I need—a strong woman, to go beside me like a sword. Together, Mayo! And I'll give you Mars to wear on a chain around your neck!"

He kissed her. Her lips were cold and unresponsive, and there was a bitterness on them, a taste of tears.

He drew back, suddenly chilled. "What's the matter?"

SHE looked up at him. Tears welled and ran down her cheeks, shining palely in the dying light. She was not sobbing. There was an emotion within her too deep for sobs.

"I love you, Rick," she told him.

"Sure. And I love you."

"No. There's no love in you, Rick. Not the kind of love I mean. Part of you has come awake—the sleeping thing the old woman saw and was afraid of—your strength. But it hasn't any soul."

His eyelids narrowed. "What are you talking about?"

"I thought you were the man we needed, just as Kyra did. A strong man, to bring life to a dying world. But you don't even know what we're talking about. You'll bring death, Rick. Death and destruction, if you live."

He released her slowly and stood up. "I don't get it. You wanted me to take Mars, didn't you?"

"I wanted you to save Mars. To build, to restore, to create."

"Have I said I wouldn't?"

"Will you?"

He tried to hold her gaze and then turned away irritably. "Bosh! Give me time! I haven't even started to think yet."

"Will you give Hugh his chance to work, as he's dreamed of working?"

He turned on her, with a look of feral ugliness.

"Listen Mayo. I've never worn anybody's collar. I'm not making any promises, or any guesses. I don't know how anything's going to shape up. But whatever I build I'll build in my own way, on my own plans." He swore furiously. "If that isn't just like a dame! For the first time I realize what a chance this offers. After a lifetime of taking the

boot from the guys higher up, I see a way to maybe get a little higher than anybody else. And right away you start tying my hands, shutting gates on me!"

He went over to the rail and stood scowling at the sand below. Then he came back.

"All right, I'll be honest with you. All this is a pretty new idea, though I guess I've been thinking about it in the back of my mind ever since the old woman said that. But I don't give a hang for Mars, or the Martians, or Hugh St. John. I care about Richard Gunn Urquhart, and it's good that I do because nobody else does or ever has. I want two things—to pay Storm and Fallon back what I owe them and to see what I can make for myself out of a world nobody else can handle. You got that?"

She nodded. "Yes, Rick. I've got it."

He watched her silently. Then he laughed.

"All this rowing, when I'll maybe be dead in a couple of days anyhow!" He dropped down beside her. "Look, Mayo. We found each other. We'll always belong to each other, because two people can't go through what we did without fusing a part of them together. But there's more than that with us. We don't know each other yet, and there's lots of ways we won't agree. But somewhere, somehow, we click, and that's the important thing. I never felt that way with anybody else. It's as though a part of me had been missing, and suddenly it just slipped into place."

He stared at her with a sort of comic wonderment. "Hey! You know you're the first dame I ever stopped to explain to? Anybody else, man or woman, until a couple of minutes ago, would have got their teeth slapped in!"

Mayo laughed suddenly, a shaken sort of laughter that ended in a sob. She put her arms around him.

"You're just a kid, Rick," she said. "You never grew up." She drew his head down. "Maybe," she whispered, "there is a soul there somewhere. Maybe it just needs love to wake it up."

Their lips met. And then, in the dim silence, the brazen doors crashed open.

CHAPTER VI

Doom from the Throne

UP ABOVE, the little racing moons seemed close, frighteningly close against the starshot sky. The wind cut like a knife. Rick lay motionless in the cradle of broad straps and watched four pairs of wings

beat the night above him, at the ends of four stout ropes.

Off to his right Mayo McCall lay in a similar cradle, carried by four more of the little men of *Caer Hebra*.

The Mars landscape slid by silently, far below. There were endless reaches of sand, flowing under the restless wind and the shadows, chains of mountain peaks, worn blunt by the feet of uncounted millennia, and the desolate wastes of the sea-bottoms. Here and there a marble city gleamed under the moons, like the face of a dead woman half concealed by vines and creeping verdure.

Presently, far off to one side, Rick saw the great sprawling blaze of the Terran Exploitations Company. The winged men began to drop in a long arc, and then the towers of *Ruh* lifted darkly into the night sky.

Jagged fingers of stone shot up as though to grasp them. Rick's heart stuck in his throat. Blurred light and shadow flickered past him, carved monsters brushed his flesh—and then, with no more than a slight jar, he was lying on a broad terrace, with Mayo not far off. Kilted warriors stood with drawn swords in the shadows. The men of *Caer Hebra* folded their wings and bowed with easy grace of men who give respect but not servility.

The man they bowed to was lean and sinewy, harnessed in the worn leather of a common soldier. A wolf-faced man, with eyes that caught the moonlight in points of brilliant greenish flame.

"Loose their feet," he said.

He gave Mayo one slow look that sent the blood up into her face, and then turned to Rick. He watched while the Earthman got to his feet, his chained hands clasped in front of him.

Rick waited, not speaking. His eyes had the same remote and deadly look of a captive tiger.

After a long time the lean man laughed softly and nodded.

"I am *Beudach*," he said, as one speaking to an equal. "My master waits."

He bowed ceremoniously to the men of *Caer Hebra* and motioned them to precede him. The guards closed in. Mayo moved close to Rick. Her hands were bound, but their elbows touched.

They followed *Beudach* into the tower. No one noticed the shadow sliding down the moonlight on silent moth-wings; a small shadow that swooped in and clung trembling to a stone gargoyle, hidden in heavy darkness.

Far below in the deserted streets of *Ruh*, a man walked restlessly. A huge man clad

in black, whose boot-heels struck the worn stones in uneven rhythm. He walked alone. Men watched him from behind locked shutters, but no one moved to touch him. The polished butts of twin blasters glinted on his lean hips. His course was aimless, his expression strangely remote.

Quite suddenly he stopped. He raised his head slowly, turning a bit where he stood, like a hound questing.

His black eyes lifted to the towers of the King City. The light of the twin moons caught in them and burned, a phosphorescent green. Then he smiled and limped swiftly away toward the city wall. . . .

The throne room blazed with an extravagance of torches behind bronze-shuttered windows. Smoke hung in a blue haze under the carven vault. Through it faded banners and tarnished shields caught the shivering light in glints of dull crimson, purple, and gold.

Twelve men sat around the blood-red table, war chiefs from the twelve principal city-states that owed homage to Ruh. The boy-king Haral was in his high seat, and his dark, worn mother sat at his left, watching them all with bitter rage.

The hall was still when Beudach came in with guests, guards, and prisoners. But Rick, looking at their proud, sullen faces, knew that there had been trouble a moment before—high tempers, with words to match them. Jealousy was here—the scramble for precedence. They were fighting for that, before they thought of the battle of Mars.

Beudach took his post at Haral's right. The men of Caer Hebra bowed and moved to places at the table. Rick and Mayo were left alone before the high seat, the guards withdrawn somewhat behind them.

From a dense patch of shadow near Haral's feet came a quick harsh sigh, like the hiss of a coiling snake. Llaw the dwarf moved out into the torchlight, smiling.

Rick faced them all, erect and easy, his elbow touching Mayo. His hard face was impassive. Inside, he was tense.

"You know why you are here?" Haral inquired.

"I do."

THE boy-king stood up. He trembled with excitement.

"You men!" he cried. "You fighting men of Mars! Here is the Earthman of the prophecy. Through him alone can the invaders gain dominion over our world."

He flung out his hand. The gesture was theatrical. It might have been funny. It wasn't. There was a great blazing dignity

in the boy. Rick nodded to himself with a reluctant admiration.

Haral's voice rang like a silver trumpet. "Look at him, you men of Mars! Tonight we stand at the crossroads. Tomorrow there will be only one highway, leading straight to victory—and freedom for Mars!"

A shout went up, and on the heels of it Parras the seer stepped out of the shadows behind the high seat.

"Lord," he said. "I must tell you this again. I have sent my mind into the future, and I have seen a third road. A black road, Lord, not far ahead. I can only say—be quick!"

Haral laughed. He was young. Very young. "We have destiny by the throat tonight, Parras!" He turned to the dwarf. "The debt is yours, Llaw. And according to the blood right, you can choose your own way to collect it. There is the Earthman. See that he pays!"

The dwarf leaped down from the dais, silently, with the deadly grace of a cat pouncing.

"Wait a minute!" said Rick.

Beudach's wolfish eyes flickered with disappointment. Haral stared at Rick in wonder. "Would you plead for your life?" Haral asked.

Rick laughed. "That would do me plenty of good wouldn't it! No." He nodded to Mayo. "It's about this girl."

Haral frowned, almost as though he hadn't noticed her before.

"I want her turned loose, not touched." Rick said. "You have nothing against her."

Beudach was not disappointed now. He was pleased.

"Lord, she is his mate," Llaw said.

Rick ignored him. "We met in a tight spot, and got out of it together. She hardly knows me." He didn't look, but he hoped she wasn't blushing.

"It's not important now," Haral answered. "Llaw!"

Rick opened his mouth angrily. Llaw gestured. The guards moved in. Rick shut his teeth together, leaving them bare, and shoved Mayo carefully out of the way.

He put three men down with his shackle chain and two more with his feet before somebody slammed the flat of a sword blade down across his temple. He felt two more blows before the darkness closed in. Through the last of the light he saw Beudach's face, set in an expression of disgust. Beudach was looking at Llaw. . . .

When Rick again regained consciousness, there were jagged streaks of crimson across the black. They came with a strangely reg-

ular beat. Somewhere far off a woman was screaming. It was not a fear-scream, or hysteria. It was the angry shriek of a clawed animal.

Rick opened his eyes.

Red waving curtains hid the throne room. There was movement beyond them, distant and unreal. The shrieking came from beyond the curtains, and a swinging clash of hammers on metal that seemed very close.

Presently he realized that the redness was pain, pain so intense that almost he could see it.

It seemed to him that he was high up, very high, looking down upon the crimson, hazy sea.

The screaming stopped.

There was darkness again for a period of time. When it lifted he could hear only a sort of uneasy mutter. The pain had shifted for his mind had slipped free into dimensions where it was aware of the pain but was disconnected from it. He opened his eyes again.

His head was hanging forward. He saw his own body, erect, stripped naked, shining with sweat like polished bronze, streaked with blood. His feet rested on a transverse ornamental beam of some dark blue wood, cracked and darkened by age. The hilts of two heavy daggers stood up through his arches. The daggers were bright in the torchlight. Very bright.

Far below him was the stone floor.

SLOWLY he turned his head. It was heavy and took a long time to turn. He saw his left arm stretched out against the wall. The fingers of his hand were curled laxly around the hilt of a third dagger, driven through his palm into a crack between two blocks of stone.

He knew without looking that it was the same on his right. He let his head drop forward again.

Mayo knelt on the stones. Her face was turned up to him. He smiled.

Llaw the dwarf crouched, hugging his knees, almost in the attitude of a man worshipping. He was alone. His gaze fixed on Rick, unwinking, burning with a deep, insane light.

Back further, the twelve war-chiefs and the men of Caer Hebra sat at the blood-red table, drinking, talking low in a desultory way. They avoided each other's eyes and did not look up. Haral slumped in the high seat, staring at the rug of virgin's hair. His face was white, sick. Beside him the Queen-Mother sat unmoved, watching the man on the wall. To her he was not human, not

worthy of the sympathy she would have given to a beast. He was an Earthman.

Beudach rose suddenly from the dais. His face held a cold fury and his hand twitched over his dagger hilt.

"By the gods of my people!" he snarled explosively. "Isn't this enough?"

Llaw smiled faintly. He didn't move. Pararas spoke out of the shadows.

"Lord, I beg you," he said. "Finish this!"

Haral raised his head, carefully not looking at Rick. "Llaw?"

"By the blood right, Majesty," said Llaw softly. "This is my choice."

Haral fell back in his high seat.

Beudach stared upward. His eyes met Rick's dark amber gaze, and gradually a silence came over the hall so that the slow splashing of blood-drops onto the stone floor was clearly audible.

"I am ashamed," said Beudach. "For my people I am ashamed."

He turned suddenly, moved forward, set his foot under Llaw's chin and threw him flat. Then he drew his dagger.

"Blood right or not, Earthman, you deserve a man's death!" he cried. His hands swept back for the throw.

Llaw yowled like a mad cat and flung himself at Beudach, incredibly swift. Beudach staggered. The knife whirled, glittering, through the torchlight, struck wide, and dropped clanging onto the stones. Beudach snarled and got his hands around Llaw's throat.

Suddenly, out in the vaulted halls beyond the bronze doors of the throne room, a man screamed. And as though that sound were the trigger, a perfect fury of noise burst out.

Every man in the throne room came to his feet. No one spoke. Blades flashed out of scabbards. Beudach raised his head, and between his wide-spread feet the heels of the dwarf drummed a diminishing tattoo and were silent.

Beudach dropped the body. He didn't look at it. He went to Haral, drawing the sword that hung behind his shoulder.

Mayo was standing now, pressed against the wall. By stretching her bound hands high she could reach Rick's feet, but not the dagger hilts. She looked up into his face. She tried to speak, but nothing would come. His sweat and blood dropped onto her white skin, shining in the red glare.

Rick's lips formed the words, "I love you." He smiled. And then the bronze doors crashed open and Jaffa Storm was standing there, with his Venusians and the black anthropoids crowding in behind him.

CHAPTER VII

A Change in Management

FULLY conscious, Rick watched from the high wall. His mind was clear, detached, perfectly sane. But in his eyes, in his face, something had changed. It was like the chilling and tempering of the weapon from the soft hot steel. Never again would he be careless and happy-go-lucky.

He watched the Martians fight and go down under the blasters of Storm's men. Guards came. The hall was choked with warriors. The huge white-haired Venusians, the blasters, and the black apes cut them down.

From outside, in the halls and the streets beyond, from over the whole city, rose an animal howl, mingled with the thunder of fighting and the saw-edged whine of Banning shockers.

In the throne room, one by one, the torches were trampled out.

After a time there was silence. In the darkness of tattered flags and forgotten glories, one torch still burned in a high sconce, spilling a red and shaken light over the man pinned by knives against the stone wall. The Venusians and the apes withdrew, taking their dead. Outside fighting still continued, but the sound of it was distant, muffled. Mayo had not moved from the place where she pressed close against the wall, touching Rick's feet.

Jaffa Storm came and stood before them.

He looked upward for a long while without speaking. Then he smiled and stretched his giant body, muscle by muscle, as a panther does. His black eyes held a deep pleasure.

"The wind is rising," he quoted softly. "Bah! it's blown itself out! These men were the leaders of Mars. What's left—a few barbarians and the Thinkers at the Pole—are nothing." He laughed quietly. "I knew they were here. I knew you were here. I have as much knowledge as their seers. Perhaps more."

Mayo had slid silently to her knees, her bound hands on the shadowy floor.

Storm studied Rick. "There was some prophecy, wasn't there? And a blood debt." He nodded. "You've caused me a lot of trouble, Rick. That stone hurt. You made me look foolish when you got away, and you inspired a lot more men to try it. Besides, there was something—else."

Rick laughed, a harsh whisper of sound.

"That's true. I saw you take the boot from a girl."

Storm nodded. He leaned over and caught Mayo by the shoulder.

She came up fast. She had Beudach's knife in her hands. Storm let his breath out, hard. There was a blur of motion and sound. The dagger rang on the stones and Mayo was lifted in Storm's arms.

"You're a strong man, Rick. You'll live for quite a while. I don't think anyone will come here just yet—there's no one left in the King City, and they're still busy down below—and if anyone does, I don't think they'll take you down."

"Such an idea pleases you, doesn't it," sneered Rick.

Again Storm laughed. "It does," he said. "You were to rule Mars, weren't you, according to the prophecy? They cling to the belief of the fan-shaped future, the infinite roads. Somewhere, Rick, you took the wrong turning!"

He went away. Rick watched the warm sheen of torchlight in Mayo's hair as far as he could see it, and then listened to the limping tread of Storm's boots fading down the hall.

He was alone.

He tried, once, to see if he could move the blades that pinned him. After that he hung motionless, breathing in deep, harsh sighs.

Presently, somewhere in the dimness, something stirred.

It was Beudach, dragging himself from under a heap of bodies by the high seat. He crawled among them on his hands and knees, searching the faces. Save for his labored breathing, he made no sound, not even when he found what he sought.

In the guttering torchlight, Rick saw the ivory gleam of Haral's body as Beudach raised it in his arms. Rising slowly to his feet Beudach walked, erect and without swaying, to the dais and laid the boy in the high seat, his dark head prepped against the carved back, his hands along the arm rests. The red light caught in his open eyes, and on the worn bosses of his collar.

Beudach found a sword and laid it across Haral's knees. Then he sank down on the dais.

After a while he raised his head and looked at Rick. There was a light of prophecy in his eyes.

"You will not die," he panted, solemnly.

In a whisper, fully as hoarse, the man on the wall answered, "No."

"You will rule Mars."

"I—will—rule—Mars!"

SILENCE. Presently Beudach nodded. "For good or ill, the road is taken. And you're a man."

"Beudach," Rick said.

"Yes?"

"With my own hands, Beudach—my own hands!"

Beudach looked from Rick to the dead boy and back again. He smiled. Then he let himself down from the dais and began to crawl slowly and painfully across the floor toward Rick.

Suddenly he stopped.

"Someone's coming," he muttered.

Out in the darkness of the corridor there was a soft rustle of movement, and then a faint scream—shocked and strangled.

"Rick! Rick!"

The quick silken rustle of wings in the dusk, and then Kyra was clinging to the carved stones beside Rick, her great eyes wide, stunned, and tearless.

"I followed them, Rick," she whimpered.

"I thought maybe there'd be something, something I could do to help you. Oh, Rick."

He smiled at her. "You can, baby." His speech was slow and thick. "You can pull out these knives."

Her tiny face whitened, but she nodded. From the floor Beudach spoke.

"Wait. Hell fall. The ladders are still here. Help me."

She fluttered down. Between them they raised one of the light metal ladders that had been used to get Rick up there.

Very, very slowly Beudach climbed it and pulled the daggers from the Earthman's feet.

After that, Rick was only partly conscious when they pulled the blades from his hands. He knew that Kyra's wings beat rapidly as she held him up. He sensed Beudach's wiry, dogged strength. He tried to help them, but there was a coldness on him, and a roaring in his ears.

Presently there was a hot sting of wine in his throat. He lay propped against the wall at the foot of the ladder. Beudach crouched beside him, with a goblet. Shaking with exhaustion, Kyra was binding strips of cloth around his hands and feet.

Beudach dropped the goblet. There was a cold sweat on his face. He raised something from the floor beside him.

The iron Collar of Ruh.

"Listen, Earthman. Our time is finished. Whatever time is to be on Mars will be new, and different. And it will be your time."

He stopped to fight for breath.

"This collar is the symbol of kingship over half of Mars. Where Ruh and the Collar

lead, Mars follows. I'm going to put it on your neck. There's a hidden blade in the lock. Only one or two men in each generation know the secret, and when anyone else tampers with it he gets his death from the poison on that blade, and the lock stays locked. The collar will be your key to the loyalty of Martians. What you do with that loyalty will bring your own destiny upon you."

He stopped again. Rick whispered, "Why do you give me the collar?" Rick whispered.

"Because that's the way the road leads. Because you will destroy the Company, and the men of the Company. Because there is no Martian left with strength to wear the Collar—now. Things may not be that way always, but the future will have to take care of its own."

He placed the iron collar around Rick's throat. It was still faintly warm from Haral's young flesh.

Beudach looked a long time into Rick's cold, fathomless yellow eyes. Once his hand moved, almost as though to take the collar back. Then he closed the lock.

"There's a secret passage leading to safety out of this place," Beudach went on. "Press the sixteenth boss to the left of the main hall, up, then down. More than one lord of Ruh has gone that way to safety. And hurry." He looked once more at Rick. "Remember, Earthman—that collar won't save your life if you betray it."

Rick's eyes held no emotion.

Kyra fluttered away to find the sixteenth boss. Beudach crawled to the dais. He leaned his shoulders against the right side of the high seat.

Kyra came back. She took hold of Rick, half dragging, half carrying him to a narrow black rectangle in the wall.

Beudach sighed. Slowly, as though he were settling down to sleep, he fell sideways and lay still, with his head on Haral's feet.

Then came a grating sound as Kyra sealed the secret passage with a block of stone, and cold dry black closed around Rick. . . .

MANY hours later, the glassite-walled office on the top floor of the Company's Administration pylon, Jaffa Storm was sprawled lazily on a couch, smoking. He did not appear to be paying much attention to Ed Falkon.

Fallon was moving with short angry strides up and down in front of the desk. His blocky face was ugly.

"Blast it all!" he burst out finally. "To pull a stunt like that over some dame was reckless folly. Do you know how many men you got killed?"

Storm shrugged. "They were Venusians. They like to die fighting. I've got more coming."

"Sure, that's easy. But what about the Martians you left dead all over the streets? You fool! Don't you realize it may get us kicked straight off the planet?"

Storm's eyebrows went up derisively. "Who'll do the kicking?"

"The Martian Planetary Government will complain to Earth, and the Interplanetary Coordination Authority!"

"You don't say?" Storm sat up. His black eyes were remote and faintly contemptuous. "I've already lodged a complaint with the MPG. It won't go any further."

Fallon stood still. His eyes grew narrow.

"They had two Earthlings prisoner, didn't they?" Storm went on. "One a woman, and both employees of the Company. They pined the man up on the wall with knives, didn't they? The devil only knows what they were going to do with the woman. All right. We had to rescue them, didn't we? And where could we go for legal protection? Besides, we have evidence the Marshies were getting ready for a massacre. The Planetary Government doesn't want trouble, Fallon. They've got nothing to back up their trouble with."

He laughed. "Along with the complaint I sent a big fat check to be used on one of their restoration schemes!"

Fallon smiled, without humor. "Clever kid. And what about Ruh? What about all the Marshies this side of Kahora? How are they going to feel about you blasting their king and their top men to Kingdom Come?"

"They can feel any way they want to," said Storm evenly. "I've got blasters. I've got a ring of Bannings around the walls, and plenty of Venusians, with more coming. There's no law on Mars but strength—and I've got that, too."

There was a new and insolent note in Storm's voice which worried Fallon. He turned back to the desk and sat down.

"All right, Storm," he said. "Maybe you're so smart you can get away with it."

"You bet I can get away with it. Listen, Fallon! Those men in the throne room were plotting to get your scalp. We'd have had to fight them sooner or later. I preferred it sooner."

"You preferred it. Yeah. You use my men and equipment, you risk my company and everything I've put into this dustball of

a planet, just because you had a personal grudge to satisfy. And all of it without saying a word to me. Maybe you think you'd be better off running this show."

Storm's gaze slid speculatively over Fallon.

"You've got it so it practically runs itself." He leaned over and crushed out his cigarette. He went on casually, "You're getting flabby, Ed. Physically, I mean. You're turning into the typical tycoon, the guy who sits behind the desk and grows a veranda, and only gets a kick out of doing tricks with his brain. I've watched you, when I've had to take some of those tough boys to the wall. You don't like it, Ed. It makes you sick. What happened in Ruh made you sick, and you were so scared you almost passed out. You're getting old, Ed, beginning to slow down and get cautious. I've put over the first blow, but there'll be other blows. Other companies, hijacking, throat-cutting, all the rest of it. Mars isn't a world you can afford to get old on, Ed."

Fallon sucked his breath in, softly. "You're a liar, Jaffa."

"Take it any way you want," retorted Storm.

"I'll take it the way you mean it. You want the Company for yourself."

"The Company means Mars, Ed. I want Mars."

Fallon nodded. He did not seem particularly surprised. He let his red head drop forward, crumpling slightly upon himself where he sat.

His movement, when it came, was very quick. Jaffa Storm was a little quicker. The blaster echoes faded quickly into the sound-proofing. There was a seared spot on a pillar next to Storm's head. Fallon still sat behind the desk. He had now neither a face nor any further interest in the future of his Company.

Storm rose and limped over to the tele-screen. He called Vargo and gave instructions. Then he went out, fastening the door behind him.

A few moments later he let himself into a locked apartment in another part of the compound.

Mayo McCall rose from the couch where she had been lying and stood back against the wall. She did not tremble or cry or become hysterical. She said nothing. There was something dead in her brown eyes.

STORM smiled and sat down. He admired her frankly. Her clothing had been brought to her from her old quarters. In place of the ragged coverall, she was

wearing a simple draped tunic of dull bronze cloth that made her hair look like fire. The cut of the garment emphasized the supple magnificence of body that the coverall had only hinted at.

"I've taken over the Company," Storm said quietly.

Her brows rose slightly. She watched him, speechlessly.

"Don't you want to know what I'm going to do with you?" asked Storm.

"Does it matter?"

"Maybe. Because I'm not going to do anything."

She stared at him.

"Well, perhaps I should say anything—for a while." He studied her for a long moment, half smiling. "You made me an offer once, Mayo."

She laughed. "Don't tell me it's still open!"

"It could be." He leaned forward. "Listen, Mayo. I own the Company, and the Company will own Mars. This is a fallow world. The ploughing of it will grow a crop of wealth and power that hasn't been known since the development of the frontier continents centuries ago on Earth—and wasn't known then, really, because they were only playing with pieces of a world."

His black eyes held a deep, smoldering heat.

"I've never seen a woman like you, Mayo. I don't know what it is. I've seen plenty of them with as much looks, maybe more. But you've got something different, something that's you. And I want it. I want it so much that I'm not going to pay off what I owe you—unless you make me. Those are the cards, Mayo. Play 'em any way you want to."

He stood up. "I've got plenty of time. I don't mind waiting. In fact, I rather like it. Just remember that I'll get what I want, one way or the other, in the end."

CHAPTER VII

Tapper of Minds

QUIETLY Rick lay on a shelf-bunk covered with silks and skins. There was a small window above him. Greenish moonlight fell through it, giving shape to the tiny cell-like room. It was, ironically, almost identical with the room in which Rick had met the seeress and her blood-thirsty grandson—and the prophecy. It was hollowed in the thickness of the City Wall, and from

above or far below on the dead sea-bottom the window would show merely as an irregularity in the stones.

There was one door, leading into the passage that came under the streets of Ruh from the throne room. The passage branched here. Kyra, exploring cautiously, had found that it led through a balanced stone into a back street of the Thieves' Quarter.

The little hideout had been thoughtfully provisioned, evidently as a traditional duty rooted in more turbulent days of the city's history. There was clothing, food, wine, weapons, and everything necessary to the care of wounds.

Rick held his hands up in the shaft of moonlight and flexed the fingers. Already, in the four days he had been here, the wounds had begun to heal well. It was the same with his feet. The daggers, fortunately, had been razor sharp and had slid through between bone and tendon with a minimum of damage.

Rick smiled faintly. He dozed again. He had been sleeping a great deal. His body, naturally strong and toughened by the hard life he had led, was almost normal again.

Presently there was a flutter of wings outside, and Kyra pulled her tiny, lithe self through the window.

Rick woke immediately. "Did you find her?"

"Yes! Oh, Rick, she was so happy to learn you are safe. She said that only to know that was enough."

"How was she? Has Storm bothered her?"

"She's in no danger, right now," Kyra explained. "I gave her the knife. She tells you not to worry, to be careful, and—and she sends you—this!"

She placed her soft little lips against Rick's. Then, quite suddenly, she was crying, curled against his chest. He stroked her.

"You're tired," he said. "You've done too much for me, and I've put you in too much danger. Her wings rustled sharply. "Oh, no! Rick, you need me!"

"Not that much. You saved my life, kid. Now go home, where you'll be safe."

"Rick, I can't go home! They—I don't know what they'd do to me. Besides, there isn't anything there I want, any more."

He tilted her head back. The moonlight gleamed on her young face, the slender curve of her throat.

"You know what you're saying, Kyra?" he asked her.

"I know."

"And you know what I have to say back to you."

"I know," Kyra nodded her pretty head.

"It isn't any use to tell you that this isn't love the way you think it is, and that you'll get over it."

"I won't go home, Rick. You can't make me. You can make me fly away a little, but I'll come back." She spread her wings and stood up. The moonlight made her delicate fur glisten like hot silver and touched a dim opaline fire from her wings.

"I love you, Rick, but it's more than that. I love Mars. You're going to make Mars a world where people can hope, and look forward. You don't know what it is, Rick, to be young in a dead city, with nowhere to look but back! And I want a part in the building. Even if it's just a little tiny part, to know that I've helped will be enough. You can't take that away from me."

He looked at her for a long moment, without speaking. A strange, stony look hardened his face briefly. An expression almost of cruelty came into his eyes as he squared his jaw. Then he shrugged.

"No, I don't suppose I can, short of killing you," he said quietly. "All right, Kyra. We'll play it that way."

She dropped cross-legged by the low bunk, smiling, triumphant.

"Anybody around the Company see you?" Rick went on.

"No. Not any of the times I've been there." "Learn anything more about Storm, or the defences of the place?"

"No more than I've told you. Rick, I don't think anybody would live through an attack! On our side, I mean."

"Probably not. How does Ruh look, Kyra?"

"I saw torchlight in the streets when I came back. I think there will be trouble, very soon. Oh, Rick—there was one thing I overheard while I was hiding on a roof tonight. Storm has raided the New Town twice for men, already. The pits are working on a triple shift. Men have died."

Rick nodded. "Storm's not wasting any time." He sat up, swinging his feet over the side. "Get the bandages, baby, and tie these up, tight."

She started to protest, and then went obediently to work.

"I can't wait any longer," Rick said, half to himself. "Once they start it'll be too late, for all of us!"

The balanced stone moved silently, a few minutes later, and they stepped out warily into a narrow rat-run, hugging the foot of the Wall. It was densely shadowed, de-

[Turn page]

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serted except for varied smells. From somewhere ahead came a low, confused, but angry murmur.

Kyra darted off into the air and came back presently to say that there was a mob gathered in the Thieves' Market, with more people coming steadily from the better Quarters of the city.

She caught Rick's arm. "They'll kill you," she whispered. "They'll tear you to pieces."

Rick smiled. It was a strange smile, without humor or humanness.

"Go on," he said. "Lead the way."

Kyra turned obediently, but her wings trailed on the dirty stones.

They went along narrow, twisting streets between buildings so ancient that the dust of their erosion lay heaped in the sheltered corners. There was nothing human in sight, nothing but rags of washing hung banner-wise from the black windows to show that people lived there at all. But Rick could sense them, in the reeking air of the place. People among whom evil was as commonplace as breathing. Phobos had set in the east, but Diemos hung low over Ruh, so low that the towers of the King City seemed to have impaled it.

The crowd roar grew steadily louder. There was an odd quality in it. There was fury, but it was the fury of a dirge rather than a war cry.

They came to the end of the street. The mob roar, the mob smell beat back at them. The tossing glare of torches blotted out the moon. They looked into a broad square, jammed solidly with people. The leaning, settling houses shouldered up around it, and here, too, were people—hanging out of windows, clinging like swarming bees to every balcony and overhang that would give them footing.

The noise burst suddenly into a great shout, and then tapered off to silence. The voice of one man rang out, thin and bitter like a trumpet call across the field of a lost battle.

Rick began to work his way forward. No one bothered to look at him.

The man stood on a scaffold in the center of the square—the gibbet where the thieves of the Quarter meted out their own justice. He was small and wiry and grizzled, dressed in the rags of a gold-mesh tunic. His face was twisted, lined with scars, his eyes a slanted reddish topaz that burned like the torch flames.

"You know why you're here," he was shrieking. "You know what has been done. You know the men who would have freed us

are dead, and our young king with them."

He paused, to let the sombre snarling response of the crowd die down.

"You know," he said quietly, "what there is left for us to do."

The yell that answered him was a pure blood-cry.

"You know they have the weapons, the walls, and the strength. All right! But they can't stop us. We won't come back—we know that, too—but before we die we'll wipe the Earthman's Company from the face of Mars!"

In the instant of silence before the shout, Rick raised his voice.

"Wait!" he bellowed.

An angry mutter spread across the square. The little man looked down at Rick. His eyes dilated. His breath sucked in harshly, and suddenly he flung his hands out to silence the crowd.

The quiet spread out from his urgent hands, crawling across the upturned faces, lapping the walls like still water, until the snapping silken rustle of the torches sounded plainly.

Rick began to climb the steps onto the scaffold.

He went slowly, but erect and without limping. He wore a purple cloak that swept from his big shoulders to his heels, held at the breast with the symbol of the Twin Moons in burning emerald.

He walked onto the platform, under the swinging chains of the gibbet. He raised his bandaged hands to the clasp and let the cloak slip down.

No one voiced a single word. Only a breath, one huge indrawn sigh, swept from wall to wall and was silent.

Rick stood perfectly still. His supple, thick-muscled body was half bared in the plain leather harness of a soldier, and around his throat, dull and battered and worn with centuries, the Collar of Ruh gave back an iron gleam to the torches.

THE thief in the golden tunic goggled at him. "Who are you?" he asked.

Rick didn't raise his voice, but it rolled back off the walls.

"Richard Gunn Urquhart, the leader of the prophecy."

A sort of moan rose out of the crowd, a beast cry before blood. The thief flung his arms out.

"Wait! Wait, you people!" He stepped close to Rick, his fingers curled hungrily on his dagger hilt. "How did you, an Earthman, get the Collar of Ruh!"

"Beudach himself took it from Haral's

neck after the massacre and put it on mine. You know the story of the lock. You know I'm telling the truth."

"Beudach!" whispered the thief. The name ran eerily across the square, half voiced—Beudach . . . Beudach!

"An Earthman," said the chief. "An Earthman, with the Collar of Ruh!"

He drew his knife.

Rick's face was impassive. He didn't look at the knife. He stared out over the crowd with a steady gaze.

"Listen, you people," he said. "When Beudach locked the Collar on me, he said, 'For good or ill, the road is taken.' And it is. This, out of all the roads Mars might have walked, is the one that came topmost on the wheel. You can't change that. Nobody can change it. They tried to. They pinned me to the throne-room wall with knives, but they couldn't change it."

His voice had a queer ring in it. Not fierce, or threatening, or pleading, but as though he were so completely confident that he had stopped thinking about it, and was only rehashing what they must already know.

"I'm not an Earthman. I was born in deep space, and the Jekkara Port was the first ground I ever set my foot on. I belong to no world, and no race. I belong to myself, to give my loyalty where I will."

He waited, and then went on.

"Mars isn't lost, unless you go ahead and lose it," he said. "You will, if you tackle the Company this way. Kyra! Kyra, come here and tell them what you saw."

The sea of faces turned to watch her as she rose out of the dark street and came fluttering down beside Rick on the scaffold. She touched him, timidly, afraid of the crowd. Rick put his hand on her gently. Then he faced the crowd again.

"The Earthman of the Company left me hanging on those knives, to die," he shouted. "It was Kyra who saved me—she and Beudach. I owe my life to Mars."

He smiled down at Kyra.

"Tell them, baby," he whispered.

She told them. "You would die," she finished, "and never touch them."

An uncertain mutter of talk ran across the square. The thief leaned forward. His knife was still raised, but he seemed to have forgotten about it. His topaz eyes held a curious, unwilling respect.

"You," he said. "How would you do it?"

"If I tell you that, Jaffa Storm will know it almost as soon as you do. He has powers as great as your seers—stone walls don't stop his mind. How else do you think he knew your leaders were here ready to be

killed? If he hadn't been so busy, and felt so safe, he'd have been back to spy on Ruh before this."

"Then we would just have to trust you," the thief said softly. He began to balance the dagger idly in his hand. "Beudach was a dying man."

"Tell them, Kyra," Rick said.

She stretched herself in the torch-flare, her wings spread wide.

"Listen, you Martians," she cried out furiously, "Jaffa Storm put chains on Rick and tried to make him be a slave in the mines. When Rick wouldn't submit, Storm tried to kill him. Four nights ago he left Rick hanging on the wall to die, and he took Rick's mate back with him to the Company. What more reason could a man have to want revenge?"

There was a sort of light shining out of her. Her soft young voice carried like a flute.

"Rick will lead Mars to greatness," she told them. "He will bring life back to the dying. He will give you unity, and strength."

For a long time there was silence. Then the shout came—a crashing thunder of salute that shook the stones.

Rick turned to the thief in the golden rags.

"Keep them ready," said Rick. "It won't be long. I'll send word back by Kyra when to strike."

The thief nodded. Rick held up his hands to the crowd. He smiled, but his eyes remained cold and remote, untouched. Then just as silently and as mysteriously as they had appeared, Rick and Kyra departed. . . .

OUT across the sea-bottom, in the office that had been Fallon's in the Company Administration pylon, Jaffa Storm was busy—busier than Rick dreamed. He was not doing anything physically. He was sitting perfectly still, elbows on knees, his eyes closed, and his knuckles pressed in a certain curious way against his temples. He had been in contact with Rick's mind before. Now that he had the wave-length, so to speak, it was much easier to tune in. He laughed softly when Rick made his statement about Storm's mental powers and the danger of telling the battle plan.

Storm did not move until Rick was through speaking—until he had examined the unspoken things inside the Earthman's head. Then he rose, stretching, and nodded.

"A good plan," he said. "Very shrewd. It has even a fair chance of succeeding. Opposing brute force against brute force is always a gamble . . . Let's see."

He flicked on a light under a sort of table

of thick frosted glass, and spun a selector dial. Presently a three-dimensional full-color miniature of the Polar area—a glorified relief map—took shape on the screen.

Jaffa storm sat down again, taking the same position. He stared at the screen, but his eyes were looking into some other place, much farther away.

CHAPTER VIII

Gathering Storm

HUGH ST. JOHN sighed, stretched out in a long chair, and closed his eyes.

"Well, that's that," he said to Eran Mak. "The last shot in my locker, the last credit in my bank account. I'm finished."

Eran Mak said nothing. He was sitting on the balcony rail, smoking, watching the easy life of Kahora under the sunlit dome. His swarthy piratical face was shadowed and sombre.

"I hoped maybe you, as a Martian, would have better luck," St. John said dully. "But they didn't let you any farther than they did me."

The bells in Eran Mak's ear chimed as he shook his head.

"Well, there goes Mars. Mak, just who and what the devil are these Thinkers, that they're too blamed good to see anybody?"

"Nobody knows, really, except that they're the First Race, supposedly the original Martians, which would imply that the rest of us came from somewhere else," Mak answered. "Or else they're non-human and preceded us in evolution. I suspect they're just a bunch of smart people who liked to live in peace and comfort, and so withdrew themselves behind a wall of legend, glamour, and fear."

St. John found the strength to smile at that. "What I love about you Mak, is your simple faith in everything. But these Thinkers have done a lot of good from time to time."

Mak nodded. "Sure. Theoretically at least they guide the viewpoint of Mars—when they feel like bothering. It has to be some big important split, like the inter-hemispheric war back in Sixty-two Thousand and Seven, when the Sea Kings had trouble."

"Wouldn't you think this was important?" inquired St. John.

"I suppose," said Eran Mak quietly, "the Thinkers have aged with the rest of us."

There was a long silence. The city whispered below. Warm sunlight fell through

the high dome, bringing a soft jewel lustre to the buildings of colored plastic, a delicate shimmer to the web of walks and roadways arching between them. The air was soft, neither warm nor cool, pleasantly scented.

Eran Mak swore with a deadly calmness and got up, sending a shower of music from the bells.

"I'm going back to Jekkara, Hugh!" he growled. "I want to breathe air again, and wear something that doesn't make people look twice to see if I'm male or female. Want to come down with me?"

"Yes, thanks, I may as well." St. John looked up and laughed, rather sheepishly. "I don't know why Mars should mean anything to me. But this is like giving up hope for a friend."

He looked down at the plastic pavement. "If I only knew what happened to Mayo."

Mak put a hand on his shoulder. St. John rose and followed him inside, to start packing.

The telescreen hummed.

"The devil with it," said St. John. He went on into the bedroom. The buzzer continued to hum stridently. Presently the tempo changed to the short insistent "urgent" signal.

St. John swore and hit the switch. The screen flickered and cleared, showing the interior of a crude public booth, liberally scrawled, carved, and initialed. The man in the booth was a stranger, big and tawny and yellow-eyed, dressed in the usual gaudy silk shirt and tight pants of a space-hand on earth-leave. His hands were bandaged.

He was not a usual space-hand. St. John suppressed a shiver of excitement.

"Hugh St. John, here," he said.

"Urquhart," answered the man. "Richard Gunn Urquhart." He pulled the bright shirt open at his throat. "You know what that is?"

Eran Mak, standing behind St. John, let his breath out in a startled curse.

"By the planets! The Collar of Ruh!"

Rick nodded. "For Mars. A united Mars. Mayo says that's what you're after."

"Mayo!" St. John gripped the edges of the screen. "Where is she? Is she all right?"

"Jaffa Storm's got her, but she's not been harmed. It's a long story, and I'll tell you later. Right now I want to know something. Do you want union enough to risk your neck for it?"

St. John drew a long breath. His eyes met Mak's briefly. "Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

"All right." Rick sketched in the details

of the massacre at Ruh. "The Marshies are all set to go. The men of the New Town will be, too, when I get through with 'em. Storm has been crimping here already, and the people don't like it. But frontal attack won't be enough. Somebody's got to help us from the inside. If we can get Storm, the rest will be easy."

ST. JOHN frowned in a worried manner. "What about Fallon?"

"Storm killed him four days ago. Nobody but Storm and Mayo know about that, and probably the Venusian, Vargo. Do you think you can work it with Storm to get permission to land on the Company's 'copter deck?"

St. John frowned. "I don't know whether Storm has definitely connected Mayo with us or not, but I think he was always suspicious of me. I'll be honest with you. He'll probably let us land, all right, and then he'll blow us to Kingdom Come."

"You willing to try it?"

"Mayo's there—you're sure of that."

"I'm sure. I'll tell you about that, too."

"All right." St. John leaned closer.

"There's just one thing. Who the dickens are you, and what do you want out of this?"

Rick held up his bandaged hands. "To get these around Jaffa Storm's throat."

The bells in Eran Mak's ear rang faintly. "I know you. You're Rick, the man Storm was trying to kill, the man who helped Mayo to get away, down there in the mines."

Rick stared past St. John at Eran Mak. "Well?"

Mak's hot golden eyes dwelt on the iron Collar. "I'm a Jekkara man myself. But if Beudach of Ruh put that on you himself, it means plenty." He shrugged, smiling. "What have we got to lose, Hugh?"

St. John's hands trembled slightly on the edges of the screen. He was still studying Rick, with an odd intentness.

"Not a thing," he said softly. "Not a blamed thing. All right, Rick. I'll fix it with Storm somehow. Then what?"

"Then fly down to the New Town. I'll be waiting, with everything set to go. And make it fast, St. John! Fast, before anything gets to Storm."

In the meantime, Jaffa Storm had finished his mental exploration—an effort that left him exhausted, despite his physical strength. He, of all the creatures on Mars, human, semi-human and sub-human, had seen beyond the veil of mystery that hid the Polar Cities and the Thinkers who dwelt in them.

Jaffa Storm was pleased with what he saw with his mind's eye. He gave instructions to Vargo concerning the Company's defenses,

and took off northward in a one-man flier. He returned less than a full day later, tired, exultant, and bearing in his arms something wrapped up in a curious shining cloth—a something that, for all its small size, bent Storm's knees with its weight . . .

After finishing his talk with Hugh St. John, Rick walked down the main street of the New Town. It was night again. He had waited purposely until the life of the place was going full strength.

Ochre dust rose in clouds from Rick's boots. The unpaved streets, marked out at random by lines of shacks and lean-tos, were crowded with men—space-hands, placer miners, homesteaders, drifters, bums, thieves, con men—and women to match. They were predominantly from Earth, but Venus, the Asteroids, and every planetary colony was represented.

Most of the buildings on the main street were saloons and crude copies of expensive amusement places. Dream Palaces, joints dealing in exotic drugs at cut-rate prices, a couple of three-dimensional cinemas showing films several years old, and numerous girl shows featuring, "The Exotic Beauty of a Hundred Worlds—No Minors Allowed." The noise was terrific.

Rick steered around a developing brawl in mid-street and stopped in the comparative shelter of an archway. He watched for a while. There was a tension about the crowd. An ugliness that had, as yet, no direction to it. Every man was armed, most of them with blasters.

He glanced up at the sky, measuring the distance between the two moons. He nodded and went on. Presently he turned into the swinging red plastic doors of "The Furnace—Hottest Spot on Mars." And the biggest spot in the New Town of Ruh.

A bunch of tired-looking Venusian girls were putting their polished-emerald bodies mechanically through a routine Rick had seen five years ago in Losanglis, back on Earth. Hard-looking men, in various stages of drunkenness, leaned on the ringside tables and carried on loud one-sided conversations with them. The long bar, backed up by an interplanetary array of liquors, mostly, and a cheap Florent mirror—the type that is sensitive only to the infra-red heat rays given off by living bodies, transforming them into visible reflections with interesting results—was jammed from end to end.

RICK elbowed his way in. He ordered thil, a potent cold-green liquid from the Jekkara Low-Canals, and sipped it, studying the mirror.

Suddenly somebody down the line let out a bellow.

"Rick! Rick Urquhart!"

The volume of other noise lessened a bit, for others nearby had been startled by the tone, and the next words rang clearly.

"My stars! I thought you was dead in the Company pits!"

At the word "Company," a brassy silence descended upon the Furnace.

Rick scanned the mirror. He saw a gangling, sinewy shape gesticulating frantically at his reflection. "Texas!" he yelled, and pulled himself up on the bar.

He was aware that he had the attention of everyone in the place, including the tired chorus girls.

He walked down the bar, past rows of mugs and glasses, reached over and pulled "Texas" up beside him. They pounded each other. Texas had a tough, good-natured face with the bones sticking through his leathery skin, bad teeth, high-heeled boots, and a liquor breath that could stand by itself. He had herded meat-animals on three planets and an asteroid, and was the closest thing to a friend Rick had found in his wanderings.

"For Pete's sake, yuh old sheepherder!" yelled Texas. "I thought the crimpers got yuh, last time we was over in the Old Town."

"They did," answered Rick. "But I started a small riot in the mine and was lucky enough to get away." Rick's voice carried quietly all over the room. "I hear Storm's coming here for his men now."

An animal snarl from the crowd answered this last remark.

"Nobody gets away from the Company," somebody near Rick said. "How come yuh managed it?"

Rick held out his wrists. "See those marks? You think I was wearing shackles for the fun of it?" He spoke to the crowd. "Yeah, I was lucky. I got away down an abandoned drift. But the others didn't. You know what they used on us? A Banning, full power. I've seen what happens to the guys the Company takes! I've lived in the barracks and sweated in the mines and had the living blazes kicked out of me, right along with them. I was lucky. Now I'm telling you. Unless we do something about Jaffa Storm and that gang of his, we'll all die in the pits before we're through!"

"Sure," said Texas, after the noise had died down. "But Storm holds all the aces, Rick. I'd shore like to tromp his head in, but can anyone get inside to do it?"

"I can," Rick said.

He watched the men lean forward hungrily.

"Listen, you guys! Maybe you know there was some trouble in the Old Town a few nights ago. Well, I was there. I saw Storm march his men in and blast down their king and a bunch of Marshie leaders. The Marshies are going to hit the Company tonight, with everything they've got. Are you going to let them have all the fun?"

He waited until he could make himself heard again.

"And I'm telling you this, too! Unless we fight along with the Marshies, we're done. And why shouldn't we? Gosh, they're human too, and we've both taken it from the Company long enough! We're going to have to fight the Company sooner or later. How long do you think the little guys like us can last on Mars, fighting Storm and the Marshies both?"

He let them think about that, for a moment.

"I've got it fixed to get inside the compound tonight," he said quietly. "I owe Jaffa Storm a big debt, and I aim to pay it off. How many of you guys want to be there when we open the gates?"

The air was full of waving fists and a great harsh roar.

"You take 'em, Tex," Rick said. "Get 'em there fast, and quiet. Keep separate from the Marshies until the fighting begins, but work with them. I got that end all fixed. Get volunteers to take up what 'copters and atmo-planes there are in this dump and clean out the Bannings by the gates. Take every weapon you can scrape up, if you have to loot the warehouses—and if I don't manage to do what I'm planning to do, you and the Marshies can kick the gates down, anyway, together!"

At the same moment Kyra had been trying to win co-operation from the Martians with but meager results. The thief in the golden rags was scowling sullenly. He was proving stubbornly antagonistic.

"Earthmen!" sneered the thief. "When men spill blood together in the same cause, it makes them brothers. Should we become brothers to them?"

The men around the table let out a yell.

"No!" they shrieked. There were five of them, representing every Quarter and class in Ruh.

Kyra beat the air impatiently with her wings.

"These Earthmen have done you no harm," she said. "They mean you no harm. They've suffered from the Company as much as you have, and they have a blood debt. By our own laws, can we deny them the right to pay it?"

The men thought about that. The thief started to say something. Kyra spoke first. "Together, Martians and Earthmen both, we can destroy the Company. We'll have weapons, and strength. Alone either one of us would fail. This, even if—Rick should be killed, we can go ahead and win." She waited a moment, and then cried out, "The Earthmen will go, whether we do or not! Will you let them have all the glory?"

The men around the table rose and howled that they would not.

"We'll fight!" they bellowed. "Down with the Company!"

CHAPTER IX

Flames of Revolt

AFTER a search Rick found St. John and Eran Mak on the 'copter field just beyond the shacks of the town.

"You fix it with Storm all right?" Rick asked.

"Yes," answered St. John. "Told him I had news from the Polar Cities—something so important to him and Fallon that I was scared stiff. Don't know whether he believed me or not."

"Doesn't matter, as long as we get there."

More time passed. Noise, movement, and light died in the New Town. St. John threw down the stub of his cigarette.

"Time now, Rick?"

"Yeah. Let's go."

They climbed into the neat little flier. Eran Mak took one last look at the sky.

"The moons are right together, Rick," he said. "Favorable omen for Mars. Chance, or did you plan it that way?"

"What do you think? Shut the door for Pete's sake, and let's go!"

Because he was looking for them, Rick saw the crowds of men moving across the sea-bottom from Ruh. They went without lights, spread out widely, hugging the shadows. Rick hoped that owing to the rough terrain and the confusing moonlight they could get close to the Company walls without being spotted.

The Company compound was blazing with light, everything going full blast. While they watched, two ships went up from the port, trailing comet-tails of flame across the night. The little 'copter trembled in the air-wash the rocket-liners left behind them.

"Wait a minute!" Rick said suddenly. The others looked at him, startled. He was watching the rocket-flares. "How do I know?" he

muttered. "Storm read our minds before. How do I know?" He burst without warning into a rowdy ballad about a spaceman's daughter and a lonesome comet, shoved St. John away from the controls, and took over himself. His eyes blazed with excitement.

"Have you gone crazy?" St. John snapped. But Eran Mak studied Rick shrewdly.

"There are more things in heaven and Mars than you Earth-born people know," he said. "Telepathy, for one." He glanced quickly at the way the 'copter was heading now. "Come on, Hugh. Let's sing!"

Using the ballad as a screen for his thoughts, Rick shot the 'copter toward the spaceport and brought it low over a dark and deserted area on its outskirts. Then he handed the controls back to St. John.

"Storm may not have been as busy as I thought," he explained. "He may have picked my mind clean, for all I know, and set a trap for us all. Anyway, I got a better idea, and a better chance of getting by with it. Get back to the men, double quick, and tell 'em to stay way back from the Company until I'm through. Then come in swinging!"

"How will we know when you're through?" "You'll know!"

St. John frowned, looking quickly at the spaceport. Rick's jaw hardened.

"He isn't running out, Hugh," Eran Mak said quietly. "Let's go."

"Sorry," St. John said curtly.

Rick grunted and dropped out the door, ten feet or so to the ground. The 'copter speed away. Rick stood still, looking around him, and then headed for the loom of a row of launching racks about a half mile away. Apparently no one had noticed the furtive landing. There was no reason why anyone should have, at that distance from the field.

From the small size of the racks he judged the ships cradled there were private jobs belonging to officials of the Company. That was exactly what Rick wanted. Everything was dark around them, too, which meant that nobody was going anywhere just now.

Rick crawled face downward for the last few hundred yards. That was fortunate, because he avoided the electric-eye warning beams, which were set to catch a man knee-height from the ground. Presently he was in the shadow of one of the huge tilted tubes. The racket of the port itself, where men slaved to load Fallonite and unload supplies, was close to him.

The rack was not locked. There was no reason to keep it locked. Rick slid inside, through the double-lock into the cradled ship. A nice, opulent, easy-to-handle baby, convertible for atmosphere travel. Sweating

with the need for haste, Rick found a bulger in the locker and put it on. Then he strapped himself into the pilot's seat and got busy.

THE thunder of the warming motors must have brought people running, but Rick didn't wait to see. He took off long before the tubes were safely heated, and once a spaceship has begun thundering there isn't much anyone can do about it.

He made a long screaming arc upward clear of the thin air-blanket. Then he flipped over, got the rotors going, and swooped back toward the Company compound. On the way he dumped fuel, watching the gauge carefully. Mayo's bungalow prison was way off from the Administration pylon, but he was taking no chances.

He came in high and pushed the ship's nose downward, aiming it like a bomb over the pylon and the north wall. Then he locked the controls, pushed the ignition wide open, and bailed out, blasting blue blazes out of the bulger-rocket to get away from there.

The force of the explosion threw him around, even so. It was beautiful. The pylon crumpled down like a dropped wedding cake, and the walls flattened outward. After that everything was hidden by smoke and flying debris.

Rick smiled, his teeth glinting wolf-like in the moonlight. Then he changed his course, shooting away toward the far side of the compound where Mayo was.

On the way he saw men pouring up out of the folds and creases of the sea-bottom, flowing toward the breached walls. Earthmen and Martians, running together over the gray moss, blasters and slice-bars swinging beside sword-blades and the spiked knuckledusters of the Low-Canals. Just men, now, carrying the same hate in their hearts, charging the same barricade.

Rick nodded. "Make 'em bleed together," he thought, "and you've made brothers. For a while, at least. And a while is all I need."

He dropped down, into the dark and quiet back lot of the compound, and found Mayo's bungalow from Kyra's verbal map. He climbed out of the heavy bulger, laughing at the weakness of his knees and the way his heart pounded. Excitement of the ship and the wrecking, sure. But there was more to it than that.

The bungalow was unlocked. He knew the minute he opened the door that it was empty. He went through the rooms, calling Mayo's name, and then he saw the blood on the carpet, a trail of it, fresh and wet. He turned cold, and very quiet.

He followed the erratic spatter of red drops

across the paving outside, to a little shed that might have housed a 'copter, kept secretly for an emergency. The trail ended there.

Rick ran back. He yelled for Kyra, but there was no answer, though he had sent her to watch, to help Mayo escape if she could. There was a tremendous roar of fighting now, where Storm's Venusians were standing off the Terro-Martian rabble. Rick ran toward it, more slowly now because the wounds in his feet were making themselves felt. On the way he saw the prison-barracks of the work-gangs had been thrown open according to his instructions.

Things were a little confused for Rick after that. He was caught up in the fighting, but he only half saw the men he blasted down. He was looking for St. John and Eran Mak—not because he wanted them, but because he wanted their 'copter. He was thinking of Mayo and Jaffa Storm, and he was not quite sane.

Between the men of Ruh, New Town and Old, and the liberated slaves, the Company resistance was crushed, utterly. Rick's stunt with the crashing ship had almost done it alone, and without Storm to egg them on the Venusians were weakened. It was quiet again in a surprisingly short time. At last Rick found St. John and Eran Mak standing at the edge of the enormous crater made by Rick's ship. The ruined pylon lay like a giant scrap pile over one edge. The two men were bending over a twisted metal object.

"Heaven only knows," St. John was saying. "I never saw anything like it before. But it's probably just as well we didn't have to face it."

Eran Mak touched it, shivering slightly. "It was made for death. You can feel that." He saw Rick then, started to hail him, and changed it to a startled, "What's wrong?"

"Mayo. Storm's taken her—had a 'copter hidden out. Where's yours?"

"Won't fly," said St. John briefly. "Debris hit the prop." His face was white and strained, suddenly. "We'll find a tele-screen and get the MPG busy right away. Also the Interplanetary authorities. He may get away from Mars, but he'll be caught when he lands." He caught Rick's look of leashed fury and flinched. "It's all we can do right now! Come on."

THEY found a screen in the laboratory, which was untouched by the blast. While St. John made his reports, Rick paced restlessly, limping with pain but unable to sit down. They were alone in the office, the three of them. Eran Mak leaned

against the door, smoking, watching Rick with hard, speculative eyes.

St. John switched off the screen. "Now. Let's talk business," he said.

"The blazes with business," snarled Rick. "I'm interested in Mayo."

"Heaven knows I am, too. Everything's being done that can be done. There are men outside, Rick, waiting to know what we're going to make of Mars."

Rick's mouth twitched in a half smile. "They're my men. I brought 'em together, and I control them." He hit the Collar of Ruh with his knuckle. "There's no law on Mars but strength. Storm knew that, too. Now I've got the strength. I'm willing to play along with you, unless you get under my feet too much, and I'm not going to run things the way Storm did."

"Until you have to," St. John said, "or until you feel like it. Mars is your plaything now, is that it?"

Rick's face hardened, his cold cat-gaze turned inward.

"I told Mayo I'd give her Mars to wear on a chain around her neck," he said. "I don't know what I'm going to do with it, yet, aside from that. Whatever looks the best to me. But the devil with Mars, and you, too!" He limped over to the screen, reaching for the switch. "Maybe I can get a 'copter from the field."

He heard Eran Mak's bells chiming faintly, and then in a sudden jangle of music. He turned around. The wounds in his hands and feet made him clumsy, but even so his blaster was almost drawn when Eran Mak took him across the temple with the heavy barrel of his own weapon. Rick sagged to the floor and lay still.

St. John licked his lips. "You shouldn't have done that, Mak," he said hoarsely.

"Why not?" The Martian was perfectly composed, tying Rick with brisk efficiency. "The big boy is as irresponsible as a child

and just about as safe to play with as a tiger. Think for yourself what Mars will be like in five years, under his rule."

St. John nodded slowly. "A barbarian emperor has never brought anything except war and cruelty. But without Rick we'd never have won."

"No. But he did that for himself. Not for you, nor me, nor Mars." Mak rose and stood scowling at Rick, swinging the bells back and forth with his fingertip. "What to do with him is the sticker. I don't want to kill him, and there is his personal following to think about. That cursed Collar!" Mak snapped his fingers suddenly. "Get me some acid out of the lab. I can get the lock open with that. Without the Collar Rick is nothing to the Martians, and if we tell the Earthmen that Rick ran out on them with several million credits of the Company funds, it'll finish him for good."

"That's dirty, Mak!" St. John protested. "Sometimes," said the Martian patiently, "a dirty blow wins a clean fight. Think of Mars, not Richard Gunn Urquhart. Go on, Hugh! Move!"

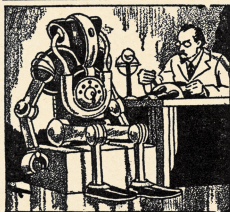
Hugh St. John moved.

CHAPTER X

A Shrewd Plan Fails

IT TOOK Richard Gunn Urquhart a long time to collect himself. He came to slowly, in a series of mental jerks. From that, and the pendulum sensation in his head and the dead-frog taste in his mouth, he knew he'd been drugged with tsamo, a Martian narcotic.

The roof over him, when he could see it, turned out to be the ceiling of a spaceship's cabin. Through long training, Rick's subconscious did a quick weighing and sorting [Turn page]



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of the sounds filtering in from outside. The ship was in port, lading, and not yet cradled.

He felt shaky. He was in no rush to wake up—until he discovered that his right wrist was manacled to the bunk stanchion. After that, things began to come back to him. The tsamo made him stupid. Connected thinking brought the sweat of physical effort to his skin, but finally he had the pieces put together, well enough. He sat up, yelling, shaken and blazing-eyed with fury—and desperation.

No one answered. The cabin door was closed, and he was alone. He fought the cuff-chain for a while, gave it up, and subsided into a quietness that had nothing of peace in it.

He saw the letter, propped on the table beside the head of his bunk.

It was addressed to him. He tore it open.

Rick:

This is admittedly a dirty trick, but you left us no choice. The future of a world was more important than you, or us; so—

Fifty thousand credits have been placed to your account in the New York Main Office of the First Interplanetary Bank of Earth. Perhaps that will help to poultice the bump on your head. Don't try to come back to Mars. Both Martians and Terrans have been given a slanderous but logical account of your actions and will probably shoot you on sight. Moreover, as you said, there is no law on Mars but strength—and now we have the strength. Be sensible, and keep your head where it will be of use to you. Good luck.

Eran Mak.

There was also a postscript.

Don't worry about Mayo. We're moving heaven and Mars to help her.

Rick's lips pulled back from his teeth in a snarl. He crumpled the letter and threw it away. Quite suddenly he was violently sick. He lay quiet for a while, cold yet dripping sweat. The dulled racket of lading flowed past his ears, engines, winches, men yelling, the thump and crash of heavy loads.

He pulled himself up and began bellowing again.

Presently a boy came in, carrying a tray. He was like a million ship's boys on the Triangle. His ragged slops flapped loosely on his ankles and his face had a look of habitual wariness, like that of a hunted but vicious animal. He set the tray down, keeping out of Rick's reach.

"Where am I?" Rick asked.

"Jekkara Port." The kid studied him, obviously impressed by Rick's size and mature toughness.

"What ship?"

"The Mary Ellen Dow, outbound for Earth. We take off in three-four hours."

Despite the handcuff Rick stood up. "That means they start cradling in just a few minutes, and after that I'm stuck! Get me the skipper."

"Not a chance. No one ain't comin' in here but me, till after take-off. That's orders. 'Sides, they're busy." The boy turned toward the door again, but his attention lingered on Rick's bandaged, big brown hand.

Rick relaxed. He pointed to a purple bruise under the kid's eye and grinned. "I see you got some battle scars, too. Over a dame, I'll bet."

It was no dame. The cook had a hang-over. But the kid expanded with pride.

"Yeah," he said. "Some dish, too. Happened at Madame Kan's. Ever been there?"

"You bet. Best place on Mars."

"It's okay," said the kid condescendingly. "But I don't like these Martian babes much. Too skinny."

"That's right. Bad tempered, too." Rick winced. "Golly, what a head I got! Who doped me?"

"I dunno. You was out cold when they carried you in. That was three days ago. You musta taken a deep breath, all right!"

"I guess so." That wasn't hard to figure. Eran Mak had knocked him out and then kept him that way with drugs. It must have been Eran Mak, then, who had taken the Collar of Ruh. Rick gave the boy a sudden look of intimate intentness. "Kick that door shut and come over here. I want to talk to you."

"I ain't got the key to that cuff on me."

"I know that. Listen, pick up that letter and read it."

THE boy obeyed, warily. His eyes began to bulge. "Fifty thousand credits!" he said hoarsely. "My stars!"

"You could buy Madame Kan's, with that."

"No," said the kid softly. He was looking way off somewhere, and his face had changed. "No. I'd get my master's ticket and then I'd buy my own ship—or part of it. A ship that would maybe go out—clear out to The Belt and even Jupiter."

"You can have it, kid."

The boy turned around and looked at him. His mouth twisted sullenly. He started to go out.

"I mean it," Rick said. "Listen, you fuzza-tailed sap! I'm playing for something bigger than fifty thousand measly credits. If I don't get off this ship before she starts

cradling, I'll lose something plenty important. I'm offering to buy the key to this handcuff for fifty thousand credits."

The kid stared at him. He tried three times before he could get the words out. "Ain't got the key."

"I've been a ship's boy myself. You can get it."

The kid ran his hands through his hair and across his face. He seemed to be having trouble breathing. "I ain't fallin' for no bunk like that!" he cried out suddenly. "I'll get eight bells beat out of me for lettin' you go, and that's all I'll get."

"Gimme that letter." Rick went through his pockets and found a stub of pencil. The boy tossed the wadded paper on the bunk, still not coming close. "What's your name?"

"Yancey, William Lee Yancey."

Rick smoothed out the letter and wrote carefully on the back of it. Then he tossed it back. The kid read haltingly:

To whom it may concern. William Lee Yancey has done a job for me worth fifty thousand credits. My account in the First Interplanetary Bank of Earth, New York Main Office (see other side), is to go to William Yancey.

Richard Gunn Urquhart.

A slow, hot glow came into the boy's eyes. He rolled the paper tight and hid it on him.

"Wait," he said, and went out.

Rick waited. He waited a thousand years, and his heart wore a hole through his ribs. He stared at the cabin wall, but all he could see was Mayo's face the last time he remembered it, with the sweat and blood of his impalement glistening, jewel-like, on the white skin and the dark eyes full of sorrow and terror and love.

The kid came back, and he had the key.

"Swiped it out of the Skipper's extra pants," he grinned. "They're hookin' the tugs on. We got to hurry."

Rick could hear the powerful electro-magnets of the roaring tugs clamping onto the ship's skin, ready to wrestle her into her launching cradle. The job would take several hours, but after it was started there was no way on or off.

The lock clicked. Rick flung the cuff off and they went to the door. There was no one in the corridor. Officers were on the bridge, crew strapped into their launching hammocks. Sometimes the cradling was tougher on the crew than the take-off.

The warning bell rang through the ship. Airlocks were already shut. The boy pulled Rick's sleeve. "Waste chute," he said. "This way." They ran. Rick's feet were still stiff

and sore, but he could use them all right.

They found the chute, slid in, and let the compressed air blow them gently out. The tugs made a deafening clamor, heaving and straining to shift the huge bulk. Nobody noticed the two men running from the shadows under the hull of the Mary Ellen Dow. It was not quite dawn, with Diemos dying in the western sky and the sun not born yet in the east.

Rick paused in the shelter of a towering empty cradle, and saw that the boy had disappeared. Rick smiled crookedly.

"Didn't trust me not to clip him and take my letter back," he thought. "Yeah. Well, he's smart, at that."

He promptly forgot the kid and the fifty thousand credits in deciding what was the safest and quickest way to steal a 'copter. In his spaceman's dress he could get by all right unless Eran Mak and St. John had plastered his description around too much on the telescreen. Finally he shrugged. That was a chance he'd have to take.

He walked on, erect and not too fast, acting as though he belonged there. He only stopped once, to pick up a piece of heavy scrap that fitted nicely into his curled-up fingers. There was about him a cold, withdrawn look—of ruthless concentration.

The 'copter field was a good mile and a half from the rocket field. Jeeps sped back and forth between them and the huge warehouses, sheds, and repair shops. Even at this early hour Jekkara Port was awake and hustling. Before long, one of the jeeps slowed down and the driver offered Rick a lift.

REFUSAL would have been more dangerous than acceptance—spacemen never walk if they can help it. Rick climbed aboard.

The driver, an indistinct dark shape in the gloom, talked as he sent the little car bucketing across toward the 'copter field.

"You just in, pal?"

"Yeah."

"Then you ain't heard the news, I guess."

"No."

"Well, the Terran Exploitations Company has had the blinking stuffings knocked out of it. Some of our guys finally got smart and took the law in their own hands. Looked like for a while the Company was gonna own the whole cussed planet, but now us little guys are gonna have a look-in. Swell deal, all around. This new government they're putting together is all right."

He burst into sudden laughter. "Only thing is, we got to get in harness with the

Marshies. Well, it's their world—and if they let me pick my own, I won't mind!"

"Yeah," said Rick. "That's fine."

"Suits me." The light was getting stronger now, with the suddenness of Martian dawns. "Funny thing about that Urquhart bird, though. Rick, they call him. Fed everybody a lot of pious bunk about the future of Mars. Got the fight going, and then ran out on his pals with about everything in the Company safe. Took a collar with him, too—some gimmick that's sacred to the Marshies, or something. He better never come back to Mars if he wants to stay healthy."

Rick said nothing. The 'copter field was still too far away.

The driver rattled on. "Lot of guys is going to buy land here. Build cities, make the earth good again. Yeah, there's a great future on Mars. I'm gonna bring my wife and kids up from Terra. There'll be a lot of work to do, and it'll mean something when we get through. Why, my boy might be President of the MPG some day!" He turned to Rick. "Why don't you grab yourself a piece of this? Ain't no future in space except old age and the grav-bends . . ."

His voice trailed off. His eyes got wide. "Hey," he said. "Hey, you're—you're—Rick!"

Rick hit him with his loaded fist. But the driver was tough, too, and quick. He was half stunned in spite of his rapid twist, but he fell across the horn and made it bleat like a scared goat—a goat enlarged to the size of a small spaceship. Drivers in other jeeps began to slow down and look around.

Rick kicked the guy clear out the ground and grabbed the wheel himself. Somebody yelled. More horns began to blare. Jeeps circled around, whipping red veils of dust behind them. Rick jammed his foot down on the throttle.

The dregs of the tsmo in his system wiped out all the emotions in him other than his main determination to get where he was going. Only a complete lunatic could have got away with it. He did. He shot full speed toward the 'copter field, horn and throttle pressed wide open, and left it to the other men to get out of his way.

They did. Some of them so narrowly that a sheet of tissue paper would have been torn between the passing wheels, but they did. They weren't quite crazy enough to stand against the driver who didn't care whether they stood or not.

Rick crashed through onto the edge of the 'copter field. By this time there were alarms ringing and men running around, but nobody was quite sure yet what the trouble

was. There was a sleek, fast little ship warming up out on the tarmac. Rick went for it. Three startled mechanics scattered away from his jeep. Rick jumped out and let it tear on by itself.

The owner of the 'copter came from the other side of the ship. The mechanics closed in. There was a lot of noise. Rick hunched his shoulders, still cuddling the hunk of scrap in his fist. He knocked two of the mechanics cold. The third was too dizzy to get up, and the owner took one look at Rick and ran away.

Rick was clear of the ground before anyone else could get close enough to do anything.

He pushed the motor wide open, heading for a low range of hills in the distance. Other 'copters, six or seven of them, were shooting up from the field behind him in furious pursuit. Rick spared one hand for the telescreen. He listened briefly and then smiled, not because anything was funny.

His escape from the Mary Ellen Dow had been discovered, and the skipper was screaming to high heaven about it. The driver of the jeep had been revived sufficiently to tell who slugged him, and the field dispatcher was sending out a general alarm over the theft of the 'copter.

SUCH calls were addressed variously to the Martian Planetary Patrol and to Hugh St. John. Rick had never known anything on Mars to move that fast. The driver had been right—there was considerable feeling about that Urquhart guy, and none of it was friendly.

Rick left his screen on as an aid to keeping track of what Mars was doing about him. Angry, red-faced men tried repeatedly to make him answer direct calls. He left his transmitter off and didn't even bother to curse them privately.

The pursuing ships hung right on his tail, but he had played in luck. There wasn't anything there good enough to overhaul him. The hills swept up under him, worn and red and barren, scarred with hollow canyons like cavities in an old man's teeth. Rick's tawny brows got a deep cleft between them.

His pursuers couldn't catch him, but he couldn't get away. His position had been radioed all over Mars, and pretty soon there would be MPP ships circling in, and probably a few of St. John's. All landing fields where he might go for fuel would be warned and closed against him. The 'copter didn't look like it was going to be much help to him.

He thought all that over, studying the

landscape—screwed up tight inside but not panicky. Just coldly weighing his chances.

There began to be calls in quick Martian rattling through his receiver. MPP men signaling position, and getting close.

Far away down the tired line of hills Rick saw a red cloud rolling in from the desert. He let his breath out in what might have been a laugh and kicked the rudder bar. The little ship made a tight arc across the sky, fled screaming, and plunged a few moments later into the heart of the sandstorm.

CHAPTER XI

Men of Valkis

DEEP into the sandstorm plunged Rick's 'copter! It was one of those howling, angry khamsins that burst up from nowhere when the lonesome winds meet each other and start quarreling. They had swept up over the hills now, swirling their dusty cloaks in each other's faces. Anything less scientifically stabilized than the 'copter would have been smashed into the ground within ten minutes. But the little craft took the punishment bravely, bouncing wildly in the twisting currents, going where they pushed her, but riding them, her automatic stabilizers keeping her level. Rick set the controls and locked them. She'd fly on all right, all by herself.

There was a standard emergency escape kit in the rack. He strapped the harness around him, tied a thick cloth tightly over his face, and dropped through the hatch.

He fell into stifling sheets of sand. They wrapped themselves around him, crushed and beat and tore him, worked into his clothes and into his eyes and mouth and nose. He pressed the plunger on the escape rig. He was dropping fast, too fast. In the roar of the storm he couldn't hear whether or not the lighter-than-hydrogen synthetic gas was going into the balloon or not. Seeing anything much was out of the question.

After a while his rate of descent slackened and he was conscious of pressure by the harness. Relief brought a quick cold sweat out on him. He thought about back in the old days when a guy had to depend on a chute for a low altitude jump, and thanked Providence for whoever it was that thought up the synthesilk balloon which could be inflated in three seconds from a pressure tank and a man live through almost anything there was in the sky.

The 'copter would head empty out of the

storm and with any luck the hounds would waste a lot of time chasing her. By that time Rick could have lost himself in the hills—providing the wind didn't slam him flat against a cliff he couldn't see.

It didn't, quite. The balloon bobbed out suddenly toward the edge of the storm. Noting the difference in the light, Rick uncovered his eyes, shielding them with his hands and peering through the merest slits. Dimly, very dimly like the shadow of a submerged rock under his feet, he saw a ragged pinnacle, and then ahead of him a vast looming shape that looked solid.

He doubled his knees into his chest and took the impact as he would have taken a fall, on his flexed legs. It jarred him badly, but no more. He pulled on the cord that let gas out of the bag, clinging desperately to the eroded rock. The wind dragged at the balloon, and the balloon dragged at his harness, and pretty soon his fingers were bleeding with hanging on, but he hung. In a minute or two the deflated bag flapped down around him.

It didn't weigh much, only a couple of pounds. Rick eased with infinite care out of the harness and let it drop. Then he just hugged the rock and waited.

The storm went away as suddenly as it had come, leaving drifts of red dust in the sheltered places—partly from the desert, partly dropped in the wind's fresh gnawing of the eroded cliffs. The sky was empty of ships. Down below him there was a ravine, with little tangled canyons leading out of it—leading to anywhere you wanted to go, to nowhere, to death.

Rick judged the position of the sun with great care, and began to climb down.

He reached the floor of the ravine without trouble, chose a canyon that extended in the direction he desired to go, and started to walk. He walked as silently as possible, stopping frequently to listen. In his former visits and his association with Martian space-rats, he had picked up a working knowledge of who—or what—lived where on the planet.

This was Shunni country, and had been vaguely something else before. "Before," on Mars, means a long, long time. Somewhere ahead, beyond the foothills, was the Low-Canal town of Valkis, and the whole area had been intensely Pan-Martian. Rick didn't know how they'd feel about the Collar of Ruh, here on the other side of the planet. He could guess their sentiments about an Earthman, however. Any Earthman, but especially one named Richard Gunn Urquhart.

The canyon twisted aimlessly. It was hot. It was dry. Rick's tongue began to swell, with a taste like mouldy feathers. There had been no water on the 'copter—evidently the mechanics had not finished servicing her. His feet began to throb. It was quiet. Under the high walls of the canyon, with a narrow strip of sky overhead, it was like being dead and in the grave, but not yet buried. As time wore on, Rick began to expect a shovelful of dirt in his face any minute. The dregs of the tsamo in him did queer things to his mind.

HE CAME finally to a sharp elbow bend. There was a cleft in the left-hand wall, like a window, and he looked out across foothill slopes at a town huddled, like an old, old woman in ochre rags, beside a sluggish, dull canal.

That was Valkis. Valkis was a bad town. It was a thieves' market, a hideout for wanted men, a sinkhole of vice, a place where a lot of women and quite a few men went and were never heard of again. But it had something, or was supposed to have something. A landing field and a couple of camouflaged hangars that concealed ships such as no honest men ever possessed. Sleek things with souped-up motors that even the MPP ships couldn't touch.

Rick studied it with hard cat-eyes. He could afford to rest a while, now. Go down the slopes with the night and the shadows, later on, and hunt. And after that—well, there'd be time to plan.

He turned around, thinking about a safe place to hide and sleep, and discovered men had silently surrounded him. He hadn't heard so much as a breath or the whisper of a sandal on rock, or the rubbing of leather harness. But they were there.

They were on both sides of him. Tall, hard-faced solemn men with blank, hard, solemn eyes, with barbed spears in their hands and knives in their belts and the animal sheen of strength in their olive skins and olive-purple hair. Shunni barbarians.

Rick and the Shunni studied each other without speaking for some time. Finally one huge man pointed his chin at Valkis beyond the rock-window.

"You want to go to Valkis, Earthman-called-Rick?"

"You know me?"

"Every man on Mars knows you. The seers have sent into every village the picture of the man who united Earth and Mars."

Rick nodded. "I want to go to Valkis."

The Shunni nodded back, slowly, with dignity.

"We are like brothers to the men of Valkis," he said. "You will go there."

Rick's eyes flickered. The men began to close in, still quiet, still solemn. Rick raised his hands slowly and leaned back against the canyon wall.

"Look," he said. "I'm tired. I'm unarmed, I've had all the roughing up I want for a while. Just take it easy, and I'll be good."

They took it easy. Very easy, for barbarians with a deep and ancient hate in their souls. Too easy.

And they were as brothers to the men of Valkis.

After a while, as they wound their way down the barren foothill gorges, Rick got the idea that there was some deep emotion behind the blank solemnity of their eyes. He got the idea that they were very happy men.

They came to Valkis in the quick thin dusk. Because of the condition of Rick's feet, the Shunni had carried him most of the way, on a rude litter of spears and skin robes. It was as though they wanted him to rest and regain strength. They kept him bound.

Rick guessed that some telepathic message had preceded them. The narrow streets, the roofs of the flat stone houses and the mouths of the dark alleys between them were crowded with people. Lithe rat-faced little men dressed in gaudy rags, and their lithe little women with bells in their black braids and their ears and around their ankles, making a wicked, whispering music up and down the shadowy streets.

There was no talk, no jeering nor cursing. Rick walked erect between his Shunni guards, and the Martians watched him with their eyes of emerald and topaz-slanted eyes that showed no white around the iris—and nobody made a sound. The last of the light ran westward out of the sky, and then, in the darkness, a drum began to beat.

It came from somewhere ahead, in the center of the town. It boomed out six times with crisp authority, and was silent. As though it were a signal, the crowd began to flow into the street behind the Shunni, following, without speaking. The tinkling of the bells ran like canorous laughter in the stillness.

The drum sounded again, six more single blows. Then, abruptly, harps came thrumming in, the queer little double-banked things they play along the Low-Canals, that have such an unhealthy sympathy with human nerves that they act more like drugs than music. The drum began an intricate

throbbing to an off-beat rhythm. As one man, Valkis sucked its breath in, and let it out in a long sigh.

RICHARD GUNN URQUHART walked steadily, his face blank, his eyes hooded. His hands, tied behind his back were cold. Sweat trickled over his skin and presently, along the right side of his face, the muscles began to twitch.

As they entered the town, he had seen the landing field, to the north along the canal.

They came to the water suddenly, running black and sluggish between banks of sunken stone. They turned north, and up ahead there were torches flaring orange against the night. The houses faced upon a square, the pavements of which had been worn hollow by countless generations of sandaled feet.

The drummer and the harpers were there. They were old women, wearing only a semblance of clothing, all of their bodies that were uncovered, without paint or ornamentation, even their heads shaved clean. They were lost in a ritual (dance), their eyes glazed, their leathery shoulders twitching sharply as they breathed.

They crouched in a semi-circle around a gigantic slab of stone, raised no more than twelve inches above the ground level and polished black as though many hands had stroked it. Stone steps led down, under it.

Rick's gaze stabbed briefly around, looking for a way out and not finding it. Too many people, too much strength. He would have to wait until they untied his hands and removed the long hobble that let him walk, but not run. The Shunni had not, for one second, given him the slightest chance to escape.

They took him down the steps.

He began to remember things he had heard about the gods of Valkis. Just talk, the idle scuttlebutt of the spaceways. Valkis kept its secrets well. But people talked, anyway, and what they said wasn't pretty.

They went down a long way in the dark and came out in a long square-roofed place that looked like a temple. The roof was supported with squat stone pillars. The first thing Rick noticed was the heat. Mars is a cold world, and down here it was as hot as Venus. Fires burned on round brick platters between the lines of pillars, tended by more of the shaven hags.

There was something more than fire. There was steam. He could hear the hiss of water over hot rock somewhere, from a hidden inlet from the canal. Stiffing clouds of it drifted around, making the stones and the people glisten with sweat. The music was

faint now, hardly more than an echo.

The mob flowed on around a huge pit sunk in the floor of the temple. It was about twelve feet deep. It was empty. It was clean. There were four doors in the walls, closed with curtains of crimson silk.

The Shunni halted Rick at the edge of the pit, and then for the first time somebody spoke.

A man, who might have been the mayor of Valkis, or the high priest, or both, came and stood in front of Rick. He looked the Earthman up and down, and the sheer distilled hate was almost like a visible aura.

"Look at him," the man whispered, staring at Rick. "Look at him!"

The stone walls took the whisper and played with it, so that every person in there could hear. They all looked.

"The Shadow over Mars! The shadow of outlaw rule, the shadow of death for our world and our people. Look at him! A thief and a liar—the man who put the yoke on our necks and nailed it there! But for him, there would have been no union."

A sound ran through the place like a wolf licking its teeth.

Rick smiled, not because he felt like smiling.

"It's too bad for you, isn't it?" he said. "As soon as the new government is set, they'll clean you out of here like a nest of reaches. I don't wonder you're sore. The old way of no law at all was so much nicer."

The little man stepped back and kicked Rick with a diabolical accuracy below the belt.

"Untie the Earthman," he said. "Drop him into the pit. Drop him gently."

Once more, the Shunni were very, very kind. . . .

CHAPTER XII

Perfumed Death

GIDDY and winded, Rick crouched on the stones, getting his wind back. Faces peered down at him, wreathed in the coiling steam. Once again there was silence. This time it was a hungry thing, crouched and waiting.

It was hot, with the heavy oppressive heat of a low jungle. The air was dead, unstirring, acrid with sweat. Now there began to be another odor under that. A rich dark smell of rotten earth—earth fattened with other things than dirt. A smell utterly alien to the dry thin air of Mars, where

cactus and brittle scrub is all that grows.

Then he discovered the perfume.

It stole through and over the coarser smells, clear and poignant as the single note of a violin above the basses. It was faint, as though with distance, and yet it set all Rick's nerves to quivering.

It was like the perfume the girls wear on the Street of Nine Thousand Joys, if you could take it off the body and put it on the soul. It promised all the sensual pleasures he knew, and a few he didn't know, and still there was nothing crude about it. It was the kind of perfume angels would wear while they were making love, spreading sweetness from the shaken silver feathers of their wings.

He was still all alone in the pit, and there was still no sound. The crimson curtains hung motionless.

Rick's mouth tightened angrily. He glanced, without letting them see that he did, at the faces rimming the pit. They were expectant, waiting, the eyes unwinking, the mouths sucking shallow breaths over teeth bared and glistening to the firelight. They'd been here before, and they knew what was coming.

It was the waiting that got you. The silence, and the wondering. The muscles began to jerk again along his right cheek. He stood erect, and walked deliberately to the center of the pit. Then slowly so that they could see that his hands were steady, he put a cigarette in his mouth, lighted it, and drowned the match-flame in a long, easy plume of smoke.

That impressed them, a lot more than he'd dreamed. There was no tobacco on Mars, no climate nor soil to grow it. Smoking was still a new and startling thing.

A few of the Martians began to cough. The fumes were clinging heavily to the misty air, and their throats weren't used to it. Rick grinned and blew some more their way.

A sharp sigh sped around the pit suddenly, and the faces swayed inward. It had nothing to do with the cigarette. They were looking at something behind Rick.

He whirled and saw Mayo McCall standing there across from him, as though she had just stepped through the silken curtains.

She wore the torn, green coverall that bared her throat and shoulder, the dregs of the firelight poured red glints into her hair. There was sweat on her face, and drops of blood. She looked at him, and all her heart was in her eyes.

Rick's lips parted, but no sound came. He stood staring for a moment, and then he moved toward her—slowly at first, then more

rapidly, until he was almost running. His bandaged hands reached out, and all at once there were tears on his cheeks.

"I love you, Rick," Mayo whispered, and stepped back through the curtains, and was gone.

Rick cried her name and ripped the crimson silk away. There was a shallow niche beyond it. It was empty, and the solid stones mocked him with the sound of his own voice. He beat on them.

"Mayo!" he screamed, and the Martians let go a feral howl of laughter.

Rick turned around, half crouched and snarling. His eyes blazed crazily. That was what they'd been waiting for. That was part of the game.

"Mayo, Mayo!" his soul seemed to cry. "Where did you go, how did you get here, why did you run away?"

The sides of the pit were swimming before his eyes, as though he were drunk. The heat, cursed heat! The perfume!

"Steady down, Richard Gunn Urquhart!" he heard himself say. "Steady—or you'll make a fool of yourself!"

He was swaying on his feet, but he didn't know it. He discovered he was still holding the cigarette. The bandages held his fingers close together so it hadn't dropped out. He took another drag on it. The smoke did something—he didn't know whether it was better or worse. Anyway, it killed the lovely effluvium of that wretched perfume.

He saw movement out of the corner of his eye and turned to find Kyra standing in the second doorway.

She stood on tiptoe, her wings outspread. They, and her huge dark eyes, held deep opaline lights. She was smiling, and in her hands was the Collar of Ruh.

A THIN animal wail went up from the watching Martians—sheer hate made vocal. It touched an answering chord in Rick. The Collar grew large before his eyes, dwarfing Kyra, dwarfing the pit. It became as large as Mars. It was Mars.

"I know the prophecy—your shadow over Mars," Kyra said. "Life to Mars, instead of death. Your life—you live so strongly."

Rick hardly heard her. His blood beat thunderously inside his skull. Kyra, Mayo, everything was drowned in a hot flood of desire. Mars. Power, wealth, Richard Gunn Urquhart the space-rat made into the guy at the top of the heap.

He laughed up at the Martians, savage laughter, and taunted them with the filth of three worlds and a dozen dialects. The dull iron bosses of the Collar blinked redly, like

somnolent eyes. Dying Mars, awaiting the conqueror.

He reached out to take the Collar.

It slipped through his fingers. Kyra smiled and vanished through the curtains.

Again Rick cried out and wrenched the hangings down. Again there was nothing but a shallow niche and emptiness, and hard stone under his hands.

And once again the Martians laughed.

Rick staggered back to the center of the pit. He did not cry out now, nor curse. He looked with narrow, empty eyes at the faces peering down, the dark fresco of them above him in the steam, studded with hot jewels and the white glitter of teeth. He was afraid.

The perfume stroked his olfactory nerves with fingers of soft flame. It was pleasant. It sent ripples of sensuous delight through him. Yet because it was a part of what was being done to him he feared it, and especially so because it was pleasant. The animal was close to the surface in Rick, and it spoke.

"Bait for the trap," it said.

He raised the hand that held the cigarette, and it was not until then that he realized he was on all fours. That frightened him most of all. He dragged hungrily on the butt, burning slowly in the wet air. It made him dizzy and sick, but he could stand up again.

He did, and there was a naked girl poised in front of the third door—a green-eyed wanton with coppery hair curling on her white shoulders and her red lips brimming with secret laughter. She twitched the curtains aside and beyond them Rick saw the Street of Nine Thousand Joys, bright with lanterns and the warm light spilling out of familiar doorways, human and safe with voices, quarrels, music, the smell of wine.

The Street of Nine Thousand Joys, where Richard Gunn Urquhart was just Rick the space-rat, without a prophecy, with no enemies and no destiny but tomorrow's hang-over. Escape.

"Go back and be just Rick again," something was telling him. "Forget Mars and the Collar and the woman named Mayo. Get good and drunk and forget, and stop tearing your heart out. Above all, escape!"

The girl tossed her head and moved away, watching him over her shoulder. Rick followed. He called to her to wait, lurching unsteadily, fighting down a childish urge to cry. She shook her curly head mockingly and fled before him down the dappled shadows, and Rick ran after.

He heard the wicked scream of laughter from above him just an instant before he crashed headlong into a blank wall of stone.

He dropped, stunned. The girl, the Street, vanished, and there was only an empty niche like the others.

Rick lay still. Presently he began to sob, his mouth relaxed and wet like a child's.

The Martians grew silent. They were waiting again.

The perfume soothed Rick. It was like a woman's fingers, comforting. His mother's fingers. Into his mind came a picture of the fourth door. Beyond that he would find rest. That was where the perfume came from. He could go beyond that curtain into the darkness, alone and in peace. He could sleep. He could forget.

Quite slowly, he got to his hands and knees and began to crawl toward the fourth door. There was no sound anywhere now. The Martians seemed to have stopped breathing.

Something kept trying to jar Rick's mind awake again. A smell, an acrid familiar reek that clashed with the perfume. He didn't want to wake. He ignored it and went on crawling.

He came to the fourth door and thrust the crimson hangings back. Before him was a dark passageway, slanting sharply down. The perfume breathed from it, and under it, suddenly strong, the rich smell of earth. A latent memory made Rick reach out and feel the emptiness, not quite knowing why he did. The passageway was really there.

He crawled into it. The last thing he heard as the crimson draperies closed behind him was the laughter of the Martians like the spring cry of wolves on a hilltop.

IT WAS easy to crawl, half sliding, down the slope. Presently he could sleep, and forget. . . .

Pain, a savage searing stab of it between his fingers. It shook through the drugged clouds in his brain. He tried to push it away, but it slashed and stabbed and wouldn't go, and the involuntary reflexes of his body fought to do something about it. He raised his hand, and again the acrid smell assailed him. There was a little red glow in the darkness.

The cigarette stuck between his fingers had burned down and was searing the tender flesh. The bandage was smoldering.

He pushed the butt out and hugged his hand to him. The pain helped to clear his head. Memories came back to him—the cryptic torture in the pit, the Martians watching him. Rage boiled up to help the pain. He was aware suddenly that the perfume was stronger, and a clear terror of it came to him. It was a drug, and it was going to get him under again.

Slowly he was sliding down the shaft.

He pressed his boots hard against the opposite wall and peered down. Far below was a phosphorescent glimmer, a glimpse of space. And—flowers!

White flowers, pale and lovely, swaying as though a vagrant breeze blew over them. Infinitely beautiful, breathing perfume, calling to him . . .

Yes. Calling to him. In his mind.

"Come!" they whispered. "Come and sleep!"

"What are you?" he asked. "Where do you come from?"

"There were many of us when the world was young," droned the answer. "We grew in the green jungles. We ruled Mars before man could walk erect."

The men of Valkis had found them, then, some time in the ancient past, a handful of them clinging on beside some sheltered volcanic spring. And they built a temple, and the flowers lived on.

They were beautiful. They were friendly. They smelled nice.

Rick slipped farther toward them. His head was swimming again.

"How did I see Mayo?" he asked the flowers. "What were those things out there?"

"We take the images uppermost in a man's mind and let him see them, the things he wants most."

The thought broke off short. "Why?" Rick asked drowsily.

"Come," said the flowers. "Come, and sleep."

Sleep. The smell of the fat black earth came strong under the perfume, and the animal instinct of his body told Rick what it was fattened with.

He braced his feet frantically to stop his sliding. He was afraid. He knew, now. But it was too late. The drug had him, and he couldn't fight.

He began to slip again.

His burned hand hurt him, rubbing the rock. Cigarette burn. Tobacco. Out there in the pit, it had helped, a little. Even a little—Perhaps, being a drug, it fought the other drug. It wouldn't hurt to try.

He fumbled the pack out. His hands were clumsy from the bandages, and they shook. He dropped the pack. It slid away down the shaft and dropped among the flowers.

"Come," they said. "Come and sleep."

He hunted through his pockets. Feverishly, panting. He found one crumpled cigarette, dropped out of the pack and forgotten.

He was careful not to drop it, nor the matches.

He filled himself with the smoke, over and over. It nauseated him, but it fought the perfume, a little, enough so he could think. Not clearly, but enough. Enough for him to claw his way back up the shaft, inch by inch, pressing his boots against the stone and inching his back up, digging with his nails into the irregularities of the rock, climbing with his muscles the way a snake glides on his scales, because he had to or die.

The flowers were angry. They were hungry. They hurled the perfume at him in drowsy clouds, but the harsh smoke fought it back. He reached the level space behind the curtains and lay there, shaking and exhausted. The cigarette was used up. He took to slapping his own face violently, pressing the raw burn, anything to keep his mind awake.

There was no sound outside in the temple but the faint crackling of the fires. Rick peered through the curtains. The gloating faces were gone from the pit rim. They hadn't waited. There was nothing to wait for. Nobody had ever before come back up that shaft. Rick went out and studied the walls.

The old women who tended the fires would not be watching the pit, either. They would be huddled over their bony knees in the heat, dreaming of the days when they wore little bells in their hair and had chimed the hot-eyed men into dusky chambers beside the Low-Canal.

THE walls were old, old beyond counting. The blocks had settled and moved a little, so that their surface was not even. The walls could be climbed. Evidently, because the Martians were not affected, atmospheric pressure kept the perfume lower than the pit edge. He'd be safe, when he got up there.

He climbed, biting, his lips to keep his drowsy brain awake.

After an eternity he reached the top and lay panting on the stones, covered with cold sweat. He began to shudder, violently. Gradually his head cleared.

It was very still in the temple, full of steam, full of shadows and wickedness. The old women crouched by their fires, dreaming, the wrinkled skin twitching across their shoulders, now and then, as though a hand stroked it. Rick began to move, through the quivering darkness behind the farthest line of pillars against the wall.

He reached the stairs and crept up them. The drummer and the harpers were gone from the square. The cruel, noisy life of Valkis was going on in the surrounding

streets, but apparently this place was sacred to religion. It was deserted now.

Rick slipped quietly into the black water of the canal and began to swim northward. Lights blazed across the water here and there. Men and women thronged the bank in front of the canal-side houses. But Rick was a good swimmer, and no one saw him. He hauled out on the edge of the landing field.

There was nobody around, no reason for anybody to be around. Rick found a scrap of iron and pried the lock off the nearest hangar. There was a 'copter inside, a sleek wicked little thing with an illegal motor.

There was only one place on Mars Rick wanted to go. He went there, like a comet rushing to perihelion.

He went to Caer Hebra.

CHAPTER XIII

City of Horror

CAER HEBRA came into Rick's view, just before sundown, its marble spires almost drowned and lost in the drifting sand. He set the 'copter down on a massive terrace, stained and cracked but still retaining its perfect symmetry, and climbed out.

Before his boots touched the ground he was surrounded by the little winged men of the island kingdom. No women greeted Rick this time. The small ivory faces of the men were stern, and their small furred hands held pencil-tubes.

Rick was not conscious of fear. He was not conscious of anything but the need in him.

"Is Kyra here?"

The leader nodded slowly. No one spoke. Many wings made a sad, silken rustling in the lonely wind. Sand etched light feathery patterns on the marble beneath their feet.

"I will see her," Rick said.

The leader nodded again.

"It is her wish, and the wish of the dying must be heeded," he said. "For that reason, Earthman, you will live to go away from Caer Hebra. Come."

The word "dying" shocked Rick. It cut through the numbness of his inner mind. He started and cried out, "Kyra!" There was no answer. The little men motioned him on. He obeyed.

She lay on a heap of soft furs, high up in a tower where she could look out across the dry sea. She held out her hands to Rick and smiled.

"I knew you would come," she said.

Rick took her hands, gently, as though they were flowers and easily crushed. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Baby, what's wrong?"

"The black Earthman burned her," said the leader, behind him. "She will not live."

Kyra's fingers tightened on him. "I followed them, Rick. You sent me to watch Mayo, and I did. I couldn't stop him from taking her, but I followed their ship. It went very fast, and I lost it, but I kept flying north and after a long time I sighted it again. I went down to it, and Jaffa Storm came out from the ice dome and saw me. But I broke the controls, Rick. With a stone I broke them, so his ship couldn't fly. And it was dark, very dark for an Earthman's eyes, so I got away."

She was drawing him down to her, as though he were too far away for her to see him clearly.

"I tried to get back to Ruh, to the Company, to find you, Rick. But I couldn't fly that far. I couldn't. I knew you'd come here, only I was so afraid it might be too late."

Rick knelt down beside her. He looked over his shoulder at the men.

"Get out," he said.

They were angry. For a while they didn't move. Rick's yellow eyes took on a peculiar, almost phosphorescent glow. Kyra had forgotten that her people existed. Presently they turned and left.

"North," said Kyra. "North, in the Polar Cities under the ice dome."

"I wouldn't have had you do it," Rick whispered.

The rosy light fell across her face from the sunset, warming the ivory pallor. Her great eyes held a soft brilliance.

"Don't be sad for me, Rick."

He said nothing.

"I'm not sad. I haven't lived many years, but there isn't anything more I could have had from life. I've loved you, Rick, and in a way we've been mated, haven't we? I helped you to create a new world, even if it was only a little bit of help. Not many women have given life to a planet, have they, Rick?"

"No."

"I'll live in that new world. We believe in rebirth. Some day my soul will have a new body, and it will remember. It will say to me, 'I did this. With Rick, I did this.' And I will be happy."

She fumbled suddenly at the zipper of his shirt, drawing it down. She thrust her hands inside, against his chest.

"So strongly—I can feel it beating. That's Mars, Rick. So much life and strength, and we were so tired."

He bent over and kissed her. Then he stretched out beside her, holding her like a child in the curve of his arm, her head against his shoulder. She went to sleep, smiling.

The sun went down in the dry waves and Phobos came up from the western horizon as though borne on the afterglow. By the time Diemos had marched from the east to his nightly mating, Rick knew that Kyra would not be disturbed if he arose and went away.

He laid her back in her nest of furs. From some forgotten corner of his childhood the sign of the cross came unbidden. He made it and went out.

SILENTLY the little men of Caer Hebra stood in the wind and the moonshadows and watched him take off. It was not until he had flown north for some hours that he realized why his eyes and throat were sore and the skin of his face stiff as though with dried sea-water. . . .

He had been flying for a long, long time. He was cold and cramped, and the fuel gauge needle kept fluttering over to pat the terminal E.

The terrain below was a desert forgotten of God and man. Now, in the Martian spring, the gorges ran full with the thaw-water that fed the canals. There were mosses and lichens and a few tough flowers. But the black rock was rotted and split by time, ice, wind and water, and it looked as untouched by humanity as the Moon.

Far ahead he could see the soaring edges of the ice cap—the core that remained through every summer. He checked his course against the location of the Polar Cities, which were mapped but seldom visited. When a curious visitor did drop in, he returned with a weird tale of voices that spoke in his brain and told him, gently but with unmistakable firmness to go away again. Nobody, except in ancient legend, had ever found the entrance to the ice domes under which the Cities were hidden.

Since these domes were regular in shape and never melted, even slightly, in high summer, it was assumed by some that the mysterious Thinkers kept them that way artificially. The Terran invasion of Mars was too young and too much interested in money to bother with half-legendary cities that no one had ever seen. A Martian, of course, observed the tabus with strict etiquette, and most of the few Earthmen who

had heard of the Polar Cities put them down as a legend growing around a natural freak.

Rick's motor began to miss. He nursed and coaxed it onward, toward the glittering rim of ice knifing the pale sky. Presently it died altogether and no amount of cursing or praying could start it again. Rick pulled the glasses from the locker beside him and scanned the ground.

He saw the domes, three of them clustered together in a circle. They were far off, glistening like drops of water on a stone.

He still had altitude. He played the light 'copter like a glider on the wind, fighting for every inch of headway. He made it, almost. Just before he was forced to make a landing he sighted Jaffa Storm's ship on the ground, a tiny speck beside one of the domes.

He landed safely on a broad strip of rock ground flattened by moving ice, well out of sight of the domes. He was not sure that that made much difference for he was by now thoroughly convinced of Jaffa Storm's telepathic powers. But instinct and training made him go cautiously, just the same.

An area of tumbled boulders offered cover. Rick slipped and stumbled between them until, after a long time, he could look out onto the level space before the domes where Storm's 'copter was.

He had no weapon except the scrap of metal, which he had dropped into his pocket. There had been no blaster in the ship, and no way to get one.

Neither could he discover any cover. Rick walked out across the open ground. The lean Martian sunlight touched the domes. They were huge and perfectly round, and the light shone through them, pellucid and pure, like light through raindrops. High above them, shearing off half the sky, was the pale ice-green blade of the polar cap.

Nothing stirred. There was no sound. The 'copter had a desolate and forgotten look until he got close enough to see that someone had been working on it, repairing the controls. He studied them. The job had been competently done. The ship would fly. Yet the ship was still there.

Rick looked around him, standing still beside the little ship. His ears, his eyes, the nerves of his skin were tuned so acutely that they ached.

Silence. Empty earth and the enigmatic domes like huge animals asleep and not telling their dreams to anybody. Over all the crushing impersonality of the ice and above that, the cold pale sky.

Rick shivered. His cheek muscles twitched

and the lids narrowed cat-like over his yellow eyes. He went toward the nearest dome.

There were footprints in the bare ground. Many lines of them, going both ways. The mark of the left boot was light. There were no signs of Mayo's prints.

RICK followed them, walking steadily but without haste. The stories of the mental compulsion to go away returned to him. He felt no compulsion whatsoever. Either the legends lied, or something had been changed inside the domes.

He followed the footprints up to the curving clear wall, and nothing happened. Nothing at all.

He found the entrance. It was a hallway half-closed with intermeshing sheets of crystal that slid back into the ice and could not be told from it. A man could be caught between those crystal panels. He could be crushed and cut apart, or trapped unhurt to die slowly in a little shining cell.

He stood for a moment or two, listening to the stillness. Then he went in.

His footsteps rang back at him like echoes in a bell. Several times, through tricks of light and perspective, he thought the doors were sliding in. But he reached the interior safely. In spite of himself he was shaking and covered with sweat.

He was looking at a city.

It was sunk below ground level, so that he was even with the tops of the spires. It was not very big, limited to about ten thousand inhabitants. But it was the most beautiful thing Rick had ever seen, and the most unpleasant.

He'd been in the Lunar cave-cities. He'd walked through the fantastic monuments of an unknown race on Phobos, and on Venus he had seen a drowned empire under the silver sea. But this beat them all. It turned his stomach over.

The buildings were all made of the same material—a colorless plastic that took the prismatic sunlight from the dome overhead and played with it, so that the walls seemed to be full of drifting jewels. That was all right. It was the shape of the things that got you.

Wherever the Thinkers came from, whatever they were, they had either brought with them or discovered an alien geometry. The buildings swept the eye along curves and angles that veered sickeningly toward another universe. The shapes of them, the meaning of them, gave the mind a shock. It was like the dream of a crazy surrealist painter brought to life, unhealthy and fascinating.

There was a swift musical clashing behind Rick. He turned around, and found that the way had closed behind him. There were no controls of any kind, so far as Rick could see.

He went down transparent steps to the city.

It was dead. He could feel that. The silence had been there too long, and the streets had stopped waiting. The leaning walls looked at him malevolently, not liking the echoes his feet called forth. Rick's eyes began to smolder.

He stopped abruptly, filled his lungs. "Mayo!" he yelled.

The cry broke into a million fragments and tinkled back at him with a sound of subtle laughter. He went on, holding a course for the far side of the city. From up there by the entrance he had seen another flight of shining steps and a hall, leading into the adjoining dome.

He wondered if Jaffa Storm had let him get inside and then gone out by another way with Mayo.

It was about then he heard the music.

It came softly, and in some strange way it was linked with color, so that Rick saw and heard it at the same time. The harmony was like the buildings. It was not born in a normal mind—normal, at least, by human standards. It came from everywhere, like the air. Rick supposed the system resembled a public address system of some kind, serving the whole city.

He could feel his brain crawling around in his skull, trying to hide.

The colors came stronger, pulsing like veils of mist through the eerie streets. They kept sliding off the edges of the spectrum into something else. They did things to the emotions, the nerves, even the intestinal functions. The music plucked at Rick's mind, stimulating it with notes and rhythms it was never meant to hear.

He began to think, suddenly, that he could understand the symbolic meanings of the buildings and where the curves led.

After that, for a while, he lost track of things, or very nearly. Some stubborn piece of his consciousness ran over the nightmare hills behind him, crying out, and nothing could stop it. Abruptly its cry got through to him and dragged him back, balanced delicately on a hairline between two worlds.

He was stark naked, and he was embracing a crystal pillar of no shape that he knew under the sun.

He sprang away from the pillar in shuddering nausea, clawing and clinging to his sanity.

"Wait," he thought. "Storm's doing this. He pushed a button somewhere to start this concert, like the guys that lived here used to do. He's looking in your mind and laughing to beat the devil, watching you fall apart. You going to let him laugh?"

Rick straightened up. That would mean Storm was still here, to be caught and killed. Things might yet work out.

Cords knotted up under the sweat on Rick's face. He pulled his strength, every bit of it, together, and sheathed his mind against the music and the colors. He started walking toward the nearest wall of the dome. He watched his feet and counted the steps, carefully, one by one.

If he were wrong, and Storm had gone away, it would mean disaster! But wait! He had to quit thinking things like that.

He reached the wall. He was not steady on his feet, but he was still counting. Far away along the curve he saw the steps again and went over and climbed them. Suddenly he realized that the hellish concert was over.

He sat down on the top step and waited until he had stopped shaking. Then he went into the next dome.

CHAPTER XIV

Storm Makes an Error

NO BUILDINGS were here in this dome, no houses. In the center was a gigantic structure of metal and plastic. It hummed faintly, and a pale, shimmering radiance came out of it.

Ranged around it were row upon row of soft couches covered, coffin-like, with the transparent plastic. People lay upon them, either dead or asleep.

Rick could find no sign here of Storm and Mayo. He looked for the entrance to the dome beyond, found it, and started out across the floor.

The creatures under the plastic shields were not human. They were anthropoid but, somehow, in the texture of their flesh and the shape of their features, there was something alien. They lay quietly. If they breathed or stirred, Rick couldn't see it. But they were not dead, for their flesh was warm-looking and not decayed.

He supposed that these were the Thinkers, who had built the city he had just left behind him. They seemed to be sexless. Their nude bodies were all alike. They had a perfection and beauty of form as unpleasant as their buildings.

Rick walked steadily toward the archway leading into the last of the three domes. He was not frightened or even excited. A man such as he came to the end of things, and one way or another, that was that. He looked around for a weapon, anything that could be used as one. There was nothing. He flexed his bandaged hands and went on.

There was no shelter, no cover of any kind around the steps and the archway. Rick did not try to hide. It was no use hiding from a telepathlike Storm. What Rick wanted now was the finish, as quickly as possible. He wanted Storm.

There was no thought of death in his mind—for himself.

He climbed the stairway. He caught a glimpse of what looked like a vast laboratory and machine shop, and then Jaffa Storm was standing above him on the top step, his heavy blaster leveled at Rick's muscular body.

Rick stopped. Storm smiled at him, quite pleasantly.

"Where's Mayo?" asked Rick.

Storm jerked his head slightly, backward. "In there. She's quite safe. She won't be able to help you, though. I had to tie her up right at the beginning and keep her that way. She's a wildcat." His black eyes looked Rick up and down. "Too bad you're going to miss the fun of seeing me break her."

Rick said nothing. His hands hung limp beside his naked thighs. His face was expressionless, his eyes veiled. He was halfway up the crystal steps, something less than his own height below Storm's feet.

"How did you like the concert?" Storm said.

Rick didn't answer.

Storm laughed. "Don't bother. I know. I was watching your mind every second." He indicated the sleepers beneath their coffin lids. "Curious tastes those birds had. I still don't know what they are or where they came from. I can't get through to their minds. I think that mentally they're not here any more, but have gone on into some realm of pure thought. The bodies, I think, are synthetic."

He broke off and stood studying Rick, as though he wanted to impress every feature, every line on his memory.

"I never want to forget you," he said. "I have never before met a man I hated as much as I do you. I think I hate you because you're nearly as strong as I am, and that makes me afraid. I'm not used to being afraid. I don't like it."

"You've lost Mars," said Rick. "I took

that from you."

"No," Storm said slowly. "No, you haven't. You messed up my plans, all right. You came blamed near killing me, too. Very smart of you to realize at the last minute that I had probably read your mind and would be ready for you. I was mighty busy, as you can imagine, and I didn't get the switch until it was too late to do anything but jump out of the way. As it was, I received a nasty cut from some flying metal, and my disintegrator was smashed to glory."

He swore abruptly, though, softly. "I wish I could think of a way to kill you that would really satisfy me."

Rick's mouth twisted in what was almost a lazy half-smile. "You can't kill me, Storm. This is my road, not yours."

Storm stared at him a moment. Then he laughed. "By Jupiter, you believe that, don't you?"

Rick nodded. "You knew I was coming."

"Yes. I kept track of the little one—what was her name, Kyra?—of her mind, until I knew she couldn't do me any harm, and I kept pretty close check on yours, too." He chuckled. "St. John and the Martian pulled a fast one on you, for fair! I always told that thick-headed Falton he underestimated them."

RICK'S eyes, after the mention of Kyra, had become deadly in a peculiarly cold way, as though no ordinary human emotion could express what he felt. He still had not moved.

"But you've lost Mars," he repeated.

"No. That's the difference between us, Rick—the difference that's going to cost you everything. I trained my mind. It works for me, not I for it. When I found out what you were planning to do, uniting the Martians and the Earthmen against me, I knew you had a fair chance of succeeding. So I used my head.

"I'd been curious about the Thinkers for some time. The Martian seers, who might have discovered the truth, were forbidden to pry by their hereditary tabus. No Earthman had the power. But I did, and to blazes with tabus. I found out that the Thinkers thought-barrier—the mental compulsion felt by anyone trying to enter the domes—was merely a broadcast by a mechanism similar to a television. It was automatic, and gosh knows how long it's been running. I cut it off, of course, for your benefit.

"Anyway, after I forced my mind past that barrier, I found out that the Thinkers have simply—gone away. They're still

alive, because I can feel the vibrations from their brains, but they've withdrawn somewhere beyond this world. I suppose they reached the point in their peculiar evolution where pure thought was the only unconquered realm left.

"But they left things behind them, Rick. An armory of weapons and machines such as men have dreamed of but never been able to produce. Disintegrators. Mental amplifiers. Energy projectors that make our Bannings look like children's toys. The Thinkers were named for a reason, you know. By gosh, I wish I knew what they were, where they came from! I'll hazard a guess, though. I think they were pre-human, and that their introverted culture was driven out by the appearance of man on the planet. So they built the domes, and that incredible city, and surrounded themselves with tabus, and lived peacefully in their own way.

"They went through a period of scientific invention that must have lasted an incredible number of years. Invention just for the kick of it, too. They never passed any of it on to humanity, and only used themselves that they needed for their own comfort. Like that dingus there."

Storm indicated the huge humming mechanism in the center of the dome.

"That warms them, feeds them by direct energy, keeps their bodies alive while their minds are playing around free in space and time," he said. Queer buried sparks came in his black eyes. "I wish I could follow them," he whispered, "for a little while."

Rick leaped forward, without warning.

He threw himself flat, clutching at Storm's ankles. It was the time he had waited for—the single second when Storm's mental attention was on something other than the brain of Richard Gunn Urquhart.

Storm's blaster beam flared obliquely, almost roasting the skin on Rick's back but not quite hitting him. Rick grasped the cloth of Storm's coverall and yanked with all his might. Storm fell back on his shoulder-blades, and the blaster let off a second time, at the top of the dome.

Rick's bare feet found traction on the steps and flung him forward again, his whole weight across Storm's body. The big man lost some more breath, and Rick clawed for the blaster.

The fall must have hurt Storm, but he didn't let it stop him. He used his free hand, and his knees, and his heavy boots. He was strong. Rick was a big man, and powerful, but Storm was stronger. He beat the living daylights out of Rick, but he

couldn't shake him loose from that blaster.

Rick curled his naked body up, tightened his muscles, and took it. There was only one thing in the universe that mattered—the blaster. He got hold of Storm's thumb and worked, doggedly.

It broke. It tore clear out of the socket in a mess of ripped flesh and tendons, and Storm screamed like a wounded horse, and that was that. Rick had the blaster.

He broke away, to get off far enough to use it. One of Storm's boots took him squarely in the abdomen. Rick rolled back down the steps and lay there, trying to retch his insides out. The blaster skidded away across the crystal floor.

STORM got up. He looked at his hand. He pulled out his handkerchief and bound it tightly, using his teeth. Then he leaned against the wall of the arch and vomited.

At the foot of the steps, Rick was trying to get to his hands and knees, and sobbing aloud.

Storm noted where the blaster was. It had skittered far away, much farther away than Rick could hope to move for some time. Storm went down on the other side, into the laboratory dome.

Mayo McCall lay in the shelter of a machine too big and heavy for her to tip over. She was tied securely, and gagged. She needed no voice to tell Storm her thoughts. Her eyes told enough.

"You can kiss him good bye—what's left of him after I'm through," he whispered.

He found the small mechanism he was looking for, placed conveniently with others he had intended to take out to the 'copter after he was done with Rick. It was a harmless-looking little gadget—a shield over a prism inside a triangle of slightly luminous metal.

Storm wasn't sure how it worked. He guessed at cosmic ray frequencies, snared by the triangle and concentrated through the prism. But he knew what it would do.

He placed his left hand carefully behind the shield, his thumb over the control stud, and went back up the steps.

Rick had crawled to within ten feet of the blaster. Storm smiled. He pressed the stud. A little gossamer thread of radiance spun out from the prism. It touched the blaster. The metal crumbled to dust and then vanished.

"Rick—Ricky!" Storm said gently.

Rick turned his head. The great central machine hummed quietly, and the Thinkers dreamed their cosmic dreams, and paid no

attention to the man who crouched naked on their floor, or the black giant who stood on their steps with destruction in his hands.

"You can't kill me," Rick whispered.

Storm laughed, without sound, and pressed the stud again.

Rick moved. Where he found the strength in himself he never knew, except that it was that or die, and he wasn't ready to die. He rolled sideways. The beam missed him, eating a snaky groove in the floor. The outermost row of coffins was close to him. He pulled himself behind the nearest one. They were solid to the floor. They offered cover, and though Storm could follow him mentally, he couldn't see to aim.

Rick started working back across the dome.

Storm followed him. He laced the coffins with the crumbling light, leaving them ruined, the bodies within them partially destroyed. The Thinkers never stirred. Their minds were too far away, to be caring what happened to their flesh.

Rick played Storm with a sort of insane mixture of cleverness and sheer courage. He stayed behind each particular coffin until the beam had eaten dangerously close. Then he rolled or slid obliquely across the crystal floor, each time in a different direction, so that he was always screened except for an occasional second. Storm might have hit him, right handed. Left-handed, he couldn't.

Not at first, anyway. But Rick knew his luck couldn't hold forever. He felt like a plucked hen, with nothing in his hands, not even a rock.

His eyes blazed and narrowed suddenly. He began to circle, so that presently he would come back to the path they had already followed, where the ruined coffins were. Storm came doggedly after him. Storm was in no hurry. He was enjoying himself.

Rick came up to the coffin he wanted. It had been eaten away so that the plastic top was partly gone. The body inside was in two pieces now, cut clearly through the middle. There was no blood, no viscera, no abdominal cavity. The flesh looked like sponge rubber.

Rick, crouched behind the coffin, reached up and took hold of the legs.

He waited a long moment, his brows knotted in concentration. Storm stood erect, smiling faintly, playing his disintegrator beam on Rick's shelter. Because of the arrangement of the coffins Storm's whole body was exposed to Rick's view if he looked over the top or around the right-hand

end. From the left-hand end Storm's legs were hidden by the corner of another couch.

Rick whipped his unpleasant weapon down. It was lighter than human legs would have been, but heavy enough.

BUT Storm laughed, avoided it easily without taking his eyes from Rick's coffin. Suddenly he flicked the disintegrator beam upward, aiming above the right-hand corner.

At the same instant, Rick's head and shoulders thrust up over the left-hand corner. He hurled the trunk section of the Thinker's synthetic body at Storm's head—and he did it left-handed.

Storm was slow, a fractional instant, caught off balance. The clumsy thing struck him. It was not heavy enough to stun him, or even do more than stagger him back against one of the coffins. But it was heavy enough to hamper him, and the dead arms went around him almost as though the reflexes still lived in their inhuman flesh.

Rick moved. He had never moved so fast in his life. Bruises, aches, weariness, the pain he carried with him—nothing mattered. He moved. He hit Storm before the carrion had slid free of his arm, or been shaken off.

Storm fired at Rick, but the beam went past him, and then Rick's hand chopped down edgewise across Storm's wrist and the deadly little prism dropped.

Rick got his bandaged hands where he had told Hugh St. John he wanted them.

He held them there, his eyes half closed and happy, cat-like, long after there was any need. Storm didn't die easy, but he died.

"Instinct," whispered Rick conversationally to the blackened face below his. "I'm left-handed. You didn't know that. You watched my mind figure out what I was going to do, and because you're right-handed you figured how it would be—only I'm left-handed. So you shot in the wrong place. Instinct, see? There was no conscious thought in my mind to tip you, and your own instinct crossed you up."

Storm didn't answer. He couldn't answer—now!

CHAPTER XV

Rick Settles Scores

YES, Storm was dead. But Rick didn't mention that to Mayo when he staggered into the laboratory dome and untied

her. There aren't any words at a time like that. They clung to each other for a while, and Mayo cried a little, and Rick did, too.

After a time, when the world had stopped swinging quite so wildly around them, Rick got up and began walking around, looking at the machines. He was a good mechanic. He was able to figure out what most of them were for, within reason. He was wearing Storm's black coverall. Storm's cigarettes were still in the breast pocket. Rick lighted one. His face was expressionless.

"What are you thinking, Rick?" Mayo said.

He didn't answer. Mayo got up and went slowly to the collection of mechanisms Storm had gathered together.

"He told me all about what happened," she said. "Hugh and Eran Mak will govern Mars well. Things will be good, if they're left alone to do what they've dreamed of."

Still Rick didn't answer.

Mayo picked up a small tube and aimed it at him.

"You can't have Mars," she said. "I won't let you have it, to play with."

He stood looking at her for a moment, with nothing in his eyes but a blank coldness.

"Yesterday I was in Caer Hebra," he said, as though to himself. "Kyra talked to me. I heard her."

Mayo was puzzled. She let the tube waver a little, and suddenly Rick was laughing at her.

"A tough baby, you are! And by Jaffrey, I'm not so sure you wouldn't use it, at that!" He turned away, blowing smoke at the lucid dome. "How do we get out of here?"

"I watched Storm. I know where the controls are. I can turn on the thought-projector, too, if we want to. But, Rick—what are you planning?"

"Don't you trust me?"

"No."

He went back to her.

"Now do you trust me?" he asked again, after a while.

"Less than ever. Oh Rick, won't you please—"

He stopped her words with his lips. "I haven't said anything, have I? Now let's clear out of this place."

Mayo's eyes held a cold doubt, but she nodded. Later, when she thought he wasn't looking, she slipped the tube into the pocket of her coverall.

"What about all this stuff?" she asked. "It's dangerous, Rick."

"It's been safe this long, I guess it'll keep

a little longer. We'll pass the problem on to Mak and St. John and let them sweat about it."

"You're going to see them?"

"Yeah."

Rick reached into the pocket of his cover-all and pulled out the little energy projector Storm had used—the prism in the shining triangle. He turned the thing over in his hands, scowling at it, and then dropped it on the pile beside Mayo.

"Where's the control, honey?"

"For this dome, it's over there on the left. Or do you want to go back through the city?"

"No," he said. "I do not want to go back through the city." Mayo went away. When she came back he put his arm around her shoulders as they crossed the dome to the hidden entrance.

They took the fuel from Storm's 'copter and carried it to Rick's and took off. Presently Rick noticed that Mayo was crying quietly.

"What's wrong?"

"I was thinking of Kyra. Storm told me all about it. He would. I'm glad you could be with her."

"Yeah," said Rick. "Yeah, she died happy."

They sighted pursuing ships several times, but nothing could stay with them. Rick lapsed into a sullen, brooding silence and snarled at Mayo every time she tried to speak. Finally she gave it up. She sat with her eyes closed, and a couple of grim, tight lines hardened into the corners of her mouth.

Presently Rick turned on his transmitter and got in touch with the Company. The switchboard operator goggled at him and then began pushing plugs frantically. In a couple of seconds Hugh St. John was looking out of the screen at Rick, with Eran Mak behind his shoulder.

THEY both saw Mayo at the same time, and came crowding against the screen as though they wanted to get through to her. Especially St. John. Rick watched him sourly. "That guy's crazy about her," he thought. "He's so crazy about her his blood's almost tepid. The lily!"

They hardly noticed Rick at first, until Mayo had told about Storm and the Polar Cities, and what Rick did there. Then St. John turned to him.

"I'm glad you came back," he said gravely.

"That's fine," Rick answered. "You made it so easy for me, too."

"We did what we thought was right, Rick."

"That explains it okay, then," snarled Rick.

"It whitewashes the whole thing. Doesn't matter what you do to a guy as long as you think it's right. Right for whom, St. John? And if you say 'Mars' I'll beat your head off as soon as I land."

St. John's mouth tightened. Behind him, Eran Mak smiled and nodded. His golden eyes were bright.

"I never thought of you as a chicken, Rick," he said. "But here you come, home to roost. Too bad you have Mayo with you. I've got a feeling it would be much simpler just to shoot you down over the field."

"Uh huh," Rick said. "That's one reason I have her with me." The bells tinkled faintly in the Martian's ears, and Rick shuddered. "You better tell all those MPP boys to clear the air for me. I'm coming down."

"Better make it the landing field," St. John said. "You ruined the 'copter deck in the compound. We'll send a car for you."

"And an armed escort?"

"And an armed escort."

"I'm coming in peace," said Rick. "How I go out again is something you can worry about then."

St. John gave him a cold and level look, and nodded. The screen went dead. Mayo leaned back in her seat again and closed her eyes.

"Rick," she said quietly. "I love you. I'll go anywhere with you, do anything with you, except one thing. Think about it. Think hard, before you do anything."

"I've done nothing else but think, for a long time," Rick said.

They didn't speak after that. Rick swooped in to the old Company field where he had stolen the ship that wrecked Storm's plans, and made his landing. A car was waiting for them, with an escort of jeeps manned by Martian Government men. Rick submitted quietly to a polite but thorough search. They found no weapon on him. They did not search Mayo.

The car sped smoothly away toward the compound. Rick glanced up at the distant towers of Ruh on the cliffs above the sea-bottom, and his eyes were as cold and depthless as amber glass.

Martian G-men, mostly soft-muscled political office-holders, ushered them into the building St. John was using in place of the now non-existent Administration Pylon. St. John met them at the door of the office and persuaded the escort to go away. They didn't want to. They looked at Rick much as the men of Valkis had, but for a different reason. On the face of it they were outraged by the supposed sacrilege to the Collar of Ruh. In reality, they were worried about

the new Union Government and what it was going to do to their jobs.

They did go away, however, leaving Rick and Mayo alone with St. John and Eran Mak. The Martian was lounging in his habitual position on the window sill, smoking and swinging the bells back and forth in his ear with a monotonous forefinger. He watched Rick through the smoke, his eyes yellow and unwinking as a hawk's.

St. John took Mayo in his arms. Rick turned away irritably, not wanting to see either of their faces. He let them talk, a few low words, while he sprawled out wearily in a big chair and got a cigarette going. He felt suddenly as old as Mars, and as tired.

"There are no words to thank you, Rick," St. John said presently. "This is a very strange situation. I'm grateful to you with all my heart, and yet I wish you weren't here. I'm afraid of you, and afraid of what may have to be done."

"At least you're honest about it," Rick said.

"There's no point in deception." St. John sat down behind a desk piled high with papers. He looked at the mess and sighed. "Forming a new government out of what we have to work with is no easy job. I've been over to Kahora several times, and Mak's been wearing his legs off running back and forth to Martian headquarters. I've stayed here because it seemed to be the focal point of all the trouble and I thought I could handle things better if I did. Also, the Company had to be taken care of. My heavens, the things Storm had been doing!"

RICK glanced almost lazily at St. John. "Yeah. You haven't got recognition and charter yet from the Interplanetary Authority, have you?"

"Not yet. But there's no question that we will, considering the circumstances."

"That is, all the circumstances but one," replied Rick.

St. John nodded slowly. "That's what you came back for, isn't it?"

Rick jumped up. "My stars!" he roared. "What did you think I'd do? Who did all this, anyway. Who was it sweated in these cursed mines, and took the beatings and the burnings and the kicks in the teeth?" He thrust his hands out. The bandages had come off, showing the raw new scars. "Was it you got pinned to the wall in Ruh, or me? Was it you that Beudach put the collar on, or me? Was it you that talked the Marshies and the Earthmen into fighting together, into being blood brothers from

here on out? Was it you stuck your neck out there in the Thieves' Quarter, maybe to get a knife in it, and was it you stole that ship and crashed it on top of Jaffa Storm?"

His voice was making the windows rattle. His face was blank and hard with fury, the veins like whipcords on his temples. He stopped suddenly and paced back and forth a little, and when he spoke again his voice was only a tight whisper.

"By jumping jingoes, I've given too much, St. John," he said. "Blood and sweat and the fear of dying, while you were sitting on your hands, wishing. If you and Eran Mak think you can get rid of me with a crack on the head and fifty thousand credits to show for it, you're crazy!" He laughed and swung around so he could face both of them. "Would you be satisfied, St. John? Would you, Mak?"

There was a long silence. Eran Mak smoked quietly, enigmatic as the sea-bottom outside.

"No, I don't suppose I would be," St. John said slowly, at last.

"The question," said Eran Mak, "is not whether you're satisfied, but whether or not you can do anything about getting satisfied."

Rick smiled.

"Tell 'em, about what's up there under the Polar domes, and what Storm was going to do with it," he said to Mayo.

She told them. But her eyes, like Eran Mak's, were on Rick.

He gave them plenty of time to think it over. They didn't like it. The thought of all that power frightened them. St. John reached out once for the telescreen, and stopped.

"No, I wouldn't trust the Marshies that far just yet, if I were you," Rick said with a laugh. "All right, so there's force there. But I don't have to use it."

"May I remind you you're a prisoner here," Mak said.

"Sure. So was I on the Mary Ellen Dow. A guy goes through a certain number of things, and he gets so he doesn't care any more. Like I said, I don't have to use it."

He was close behind Mayo now. Quite suddenly he caught her around the neck with one arm and held her while he snatched the tube out of the pocket where she had hidden it. Then he let her go and stepped back.

He aimed the tube at a chair. A little pink tongue licked out and touched it, and there was nothing but a heap of dust.

"Disintegrator," said Rick. "Now, maybe you'd better get busy with the telescreen. A planet-wide hook-up, see? Maybe you'd

better tell everybody just what happened here the night of the raid."

Mayo got up slowly and stood facing him. "You know what that will mean," St. John said.

"Sure. Your geese will be pretty well fried, won't they? The fine altruistic saviors of Mars won't look so hot, will they?"

"Think a minute, Rick, before you do this," St. John said. "Men fight any way they can to win what they want. Believe it or not, Mak and I are honest. You have fifty thousand credits, remember."

"Not any more. They bought my way off the Mary Ellen Dow."

Eran Mak whistled. "So it meant that much to you!" He slid off the sill and stood up. "What will you take in place of Mars?"

"What could you give me in place of a world?" countered Rick.

They stood looking at him, St. John and Mayo and Eran Mak. He scowled, his jaw set stubbornly, his eyes hooded and sulky. He was careful that he should not see Mayo's face.

St. John sighed. He reached out, slowly like an old man, to press the connection on the telescreen.

"Wait!" Rick said hoarsely.

They stiffened, staring at him. There was sweat on his face and his hand trembled slightly.

"Wait," he said. "Listen. Yesterday Kyra died in Caer Hebra. She died smiling. She said she'd live again, in the new Mars, and remember that she helped make it. Helped make it—with me! And by Jaffrey, I did do it! I pulled this messy dustball together and made it tick. Nobody else could have done it. Nobody but me!"

HE PAUSED and rubbed his hand over his eyes. "I don't know why I give a cuss what Kyra said. I don't know whether she'll live again, or remember. But if she did— Oh, rats! Mayo, come here."

She came. There was a glow starting back in her eyes.

"Listen, Mayo. Is this what the prophecy

meant, my shadow over Mars? The shadow that's there now and will always be there, because I put Mars together with my two hands? I've been thinking, Mayo. I can get this world, or at least I can make a blamed good try at it. I can milk it dry, maybe, but—well, there are other worlds, and I'm young yet, and I—" He pulled her close to him. "Does that make sense, Mayo?" I'd rather have you than Mars. Like I told you once, you're part of me, and if I couldn't have you, I wouldn't care what else I had. You know something? All the time I was getting away to come back here, I wasn't really thinking of Mars. I was thinking of you."

"I said you had a soul, if you could ever find it," Mayo whispered.

Rick put his lips on hers. "Bosh, for my soul. I found you." His arms tightened.

St. John and Eran Mak turned away.

"Other worlds," Rick murmured after a while. "There's always Outside—the Belt, and even Jupiter. Ships get better every year, and they need trail-breakers out there. Unless you want to stay here, without me."

She stopped his lips with hers.

Rick started to laugh. "I guess I'm crazy. Looking at St. John over there, behind that desk all stacked up with papers, already getting bags under his eyes worrying about politics and charters and chiselling bums, I'm glad I don't have to. I got to thinking about that, too. Breaking trail is fine, but building the road afterward is just a lot of hard work, and somebody else can have it."

He moved forward, holding Mayo tight in his arm. "Okay, you guys. You've got the grief. But don't think I'm through blackmailing you. I'm sticking you for the best blamed ship that flies, all fitted up, and a crew to match, and first trade rights for what I bring in from the Belt. And listen." His voice dropped and he flushed uncomfortably.

"Just in case Kyra does come back—build a good road, will you? I'd kind of like her to remember me and think that my shadow over Mars was still a good one."

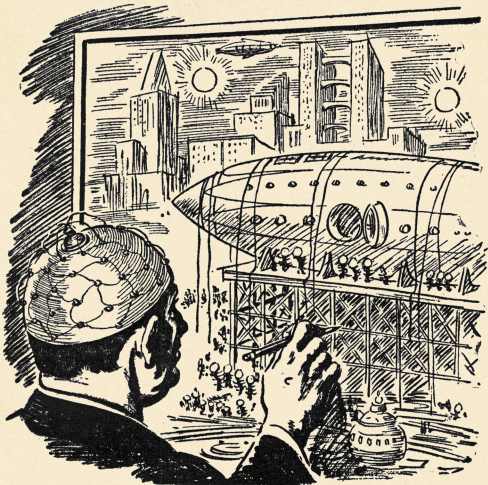
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THE idea struck Professor John Bickering in a telephone booth in a drug store on West Seventeenth Street. Bickering had been heading for a book shop where he bought most of his volumes on psychology, when he remembered he had left his electric razor connected to his hotel room current.

The razor was a gift from an aunt in Toledo. He hoped he could make contact with the hotel clerk before it would be ruined.

But once in the phone booth, Bicker-

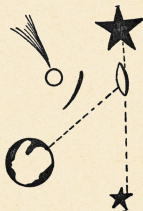
ing noticed, absently at first, the markings on the wall. An instant later his call and the razor were forgotten.

The markings were familiar. He had seen them, or rather their counterparts, on the backs of old magazines, in book fly-leaves, wherever in fact some member of the American public found it necessary to pass time.

They were doodlings.

Bickering himself was often guilty of doodling. Whenever time was heavy on his hands, he found a scrap of paper and

printed his name backwards. Then he enclosed the name in a neat square and topped the whole thing off with a heavy circle. But the marks on this wall were different. They looked like this:



For a long time the professor stood there in the cramped quarters of the booth, staring at the hieroglyphics. His thoughts rushed back to the recently-completed last passage of the twenty-third chapter of his new book:

It is true that instincts are but tested ideas and beliefs which have been passed germwise down through the generations and with which the progeny are endowed as soon as they become mentally conscious. The workings of the subconscious mind may be exaggerated examples of this mental inheritance.

Bickering had not given any undue amount of thought to that passage when he wrote it. It but paved the way for Chapter twenty-four which was to deal with the "subconscious mind." But the book itself represented the professor's greatest undertaking. Originally entitled *Basic Thought Reactions to Certain Stimuli and Other Manifestations of a Psychological Nature Encountered in Certain Experiments*, the name had been shortened by the publisher in the advance contract to *Thought Roots*.

Bickering had put his all into the writing of that book. He had intended it to make himself the Charles Fort of the psychological world, and he had hoped to capture the Trolheim Award.

The Trolheim Award was a tidy sum. It was offered to the man who contributed the most valuable and unusual de-

velopments in this branch of science. With the money he thus hoped to win, the professor had set his heart on buying a house and private laboratory offered for sale in West Eureka on Highway Number Seven at County Road H. For weeks now he had dreamed of emptying his cramped hotel quarters of all their apparatus and moving to that suburban home.

BICKERING was convinced that the first twenty-three chapters of his book were not only "valuable," but distinctly "unusual." He had begun with the postulation that the Darwinian theory as applied to man was only partially correct; that man had not evolved entirely on this earth, but that he was undoubtedly of extra terrestrial origin; and that, therefore, the human intellect was not the result of eons of growth and development, but rather of gradual disintegration from a super-intellect of some remote age.

But Chapter Twenty-four he felt was destined to be a distinct let-down. In it he had planned to discuss the subconscious mind. As yet, however, he had not come upon a single experiment to be considered worthy of including in the book.

Now as he stood there in the telephone booth an idea suddenly struck him. Doodlings, eh? Funny, he had never thought about them before. But they were the essence of subconscious activity. And this one was the most amazing example he had ever seen.

The professor took out his notebook and carefully made a copy of the drawing on the wall. Then he opened the booth door and motioned the drug clerk.

"I don't suppose you can tell me who drew this?"

The clerk craned his neck and looked puzzled. "You from the telephone company?" he asked.

"No, I . . . I'm a detective," Bickering lied glibly. He took out a huge calabash pipe, began to fill its bowl. "I'm trying to trace someone, and I thought possibly you could . . ."

But the clerk could not tell. Every-

body scribbled in telephone booths. The only thing he could say for certain was that the marks had not been there three weeks ago, for at that time the booth had been freshly painted.

Bickering realized that if he wanted to find the person who had made those marks—and to develop his idea for Chapter Twenty-four it was absolutely essential to find the doodler—he must dig up a more recent copy of them.

There was one factor in his favor. Doodlers always wrote the same words or made the same designs.

The professor made a thorough job of his search. He started on West Seventeenth Street and walked to Grant. From Grant to Aldrich, Aldrich to Oak, and Oak back to Seventeenth. At each shop and store which had a pay telephone he entered and examined the booth. He saw doodlings of a thousand different varieties, but none of the design for which he was searching.

Then in a corner cigar-store his luck returned. The telephone booth there was occupied by a perspiring heavy-set man. While talking, he was busy scribbling on the wall.

The design was the same as had caught Bickering's eye in the drug store.

Time seemed to drag interminably after that. But at length the man hung up the receiver, mopped his face and came out.

Bickering seized him by the arm.

"You drew that!" he announced.

The man backed away slowly.

"Don't be frightened," Bickering said, "I'm quite sane. I simply noticed those marks you made, and I'm wondering if you'd mind telling me why you drew them. You see, I'm a professor of psychology, and I'm writing a book called . . . well, never mind the title. Do you always draw that when you have nothing else to do?"

"Sure." The heavy-set man smiled. "Habit of mine. Don't mean a thing." He turned and headed for the door.

"Wait." Bickering ran after him. "You don't realize, sir, how important this is. I'm on the verge of a great scientific discovery, and I need your help.

When my book is published, those drawings you made on the telephone booth wall may make you a fortune and win you undying fame. I can't say for certain yet, but I believe your subconscious brain, alone among thousands, is capable of spanning the infinity of time and space."

"You mean you're not selling something?" the man asked.

IMPATIENTLY Bickering shook his head and rapidly began to touch on the high points of the theory that lay behind his book. As the man listened, a spark of interest entered his eyes. At length he nodded slowly.

"Okay. I'm Mason Felspar of the Felspar Electric Company. If you really have something, I'm the guy that can be shown. Where do you live?"

Half an hour later in the cramped laboratory of his hotel apartment, the professor motioned Felspar to a chair and took out his notebook copy of the telephone drawings. Stacked about them on shelves and tables were strange pieces of apparatus, most of them Bickering's own inventions which he had used from time to time in conducting experiments.

"I'm going to analyze the marks on this drawing for you," the professor said. "You think they're meaningless because you've written the same ones thousands of times. The fact is they are a part of your subconscious brain.

"Now look closely. At the top of the drawing you drew what is obviously a star. A little lop-sided perhaps, but still a star. Below on a direct line is a second star. And moving between the two stars is a black cigar-shaped object.

"In the middle of the drawing, between the two stars, is a small ring with a tail, flanked by a curved line. At the bottom is a circle. Or let us call it a globe."

"Just doodlings," said Felspar. "I been doing it for years."

"Now," continued Bickering, unmindful of interruption, "let us accept these marks for what they represent. We have then two stars, a globe, a cigar-shaped object, and a smaller globe with

a tail. Or to boil it down still farther: two stars, this Earth, a projectile, and a comet. Crude as it is, the ring with the tail can only represent a comet. You even have the path of the trajectory, as shown by the curved line. Do you see?"

"I . . . that is . . ." faltered Felspar.

"Now I don't know how much you know about the origin of man," continued the professor. "You may possibly have read of Mu and Atlantis. You may have read your Darwin, Heckel or Lamarck. But I believe the theories of those men to be full of discrepancies. It is possible that some races or all races did not develop on Earth at all, but were originally foreign to Earth and came from somewhere in extra terrestrial space. As an elementary example, that in itself would account for the many skin pigments and the great ethnological difference found today."

Bickering paused to exhale a mouthful of tobacco smoke.

"And it is also true," he said, "that basic thoughts and ideas are handed down through the generations, a regular part of man's inheritance."

"But what are you driving at?"

Bickering stiffened. "Don't you see? I'm convinced that your drawings open the door to the past. They point conclusively to the fact that life on this Earth is not only the result of evolution but also mass migration from another planet. Looking at your drawing again.

"You have a projectile—a space ship, let us say, filled with life—leaving one planet of one star system, bound for another. Half way a comet approaches the projectile's path and comes sufficiently close to alter the projectile's trajectory. What is the result? The projectile misses its destination and comes to rest instead on Earth. And so powerful was the remembered thought of that occurrence it has continued down through thousands of years, through the brains of millions of men until it reached expression with you."

Felspar sat rigid in his chair. His eyes were open wide, and rivulets of perspiration were trickling down his face.

"I'm double dogged," he said slowly.

Bickering opened a drawer in his desk, took out a sheet of paper, a pencil, and a ruler.

FROM a cabinet at the far wall he drew forth a concave piece of aluminum studded with tiny knobs, each of which was connected by a network of tiny wires. In the center of the top surface was a single quartz ball.

"Now," he said, "I'm going to try an experiment. I'm going to put this portable thought-amplifier on your head and leave you alone for an hour. There's nothing at all to fear. I've been using this thought-amplifier in my experiments for weeks, and they're . . . er . . . quite harmless. Unlike my brain-stimulator, they have no power connection but simply intensify mildly the wave lengths of thought set up by your brain while in action. On this paper I want you to write anything and everything that comes to your head. Anything, do you understand? Try and give your subconscious brain free rein."

Felspar nodded. The professor gently placed the aluminum disc on the man's head and adjusted a delicate control. Then he passed through a connecting doorway leading to his sitting room and closed the door behind him.

Finally the hour was up. Bickering returned to the room to find Felspar slumped disconsolately in the chair.

"I'm afraid it didn't work," the heavy-set man said. "That blamed salad bowl only gave me a headache, and I couldn't think of a thing to write except this. I . . . I don't even know what it means, but the words seemed to come of their own accord off the pencil."

Bickering seized the paper and stared aghast. Over and over again in parallel lines Felspar had written:

**FIRST WARNING. CEASE ACTIVITIES
AT ONCE.**

Next day after an almost sleepless night Bickering came to a conclusion.

He must probe deeper into Felspar's subconscious brain, and he must do it in such a way that the man would be unaware of what was happening. He must

find other "patients" whose doodlings would be in harmony with Felspar's. Surely in a city of this size there must be other men and women whose inherited mental whims could be of significance and value. As for Felspar's written warning, that was a mystery which at present defied explanation.

The professor wrote ten pages of his Chapter Twenty-four describing his initial experiment with Felspar. He spent the afternoon making a tour of the city. By five o'clock he had discovered five other persons in different walks of life, each of whom was a highly specialized doodler.

"Flip" Talbot was a reporter on *The Evening Standard*. His subconscious markings consisted of a large round circle which Bickering accepted as the Universe. Near the center of the circle was a group of small dots which resembled the Milky Way. And off to the side was the age-old symbol of the sun, a circle bordered by many wavy lines.

The other four were of lesser importance. John Albright, a plumbing fixture salesman, drew interlocking triangles. The brothers Halstead made pyramids of squares and rectangles. And Miss Alice Reynolds, a pretty stenographer, drew a conglomeration of them all: squares, triangles, dots and circles.

By diplomatic persuasion and vague offers of potential fame Bickering succeeded in making the five agree to meet at his hotel room that evening at eight o'clock. Mason Felspar had already promised to be there.

Bickering knew of course that doodling was only done under certain conditions and that if he wanted his guests to work at the highest point of efficiency he must reproduce those conditions. He went, therefore, to the offices of the telephone company and interviewed the manager of the service department. He wanted, he said, five telephones installed on the wall of his hotel laboratory, to be ready within the hour.

THE manager's jaw dropped.

"Five phones!" he gasped. "What are you going to do with five phones?"

"You needn't mind connecting them," Bickering said blandly. "I simply want them mounted on the wall."

From the phone company the professor made his way to the Zephyr Music Store, where he purchased a portable electric phonograph and one record.

"We have some other nice records," the clerk said.

Bickering shook his head. "This one is quite sufficient."

By the time he had returned to his hotel apartment, he found the five phones in their places, mounted on the laboratory wall.

Bickering fastened a pencil on a string to each phone. Then he opened a large packing case and took out his brain-stimulator. This was the machine he had spoken of to Felspar, simply an enlarged and more powerful version of the aluminum thought-amplifier. It was a large box-like affair with three Micro-Welman tubes and a series of intricate dials and verniers on its panel.

The professor had designed both the stimulator and the amplifier for psychology experiments in Chapters Five, Seven, and Nine. Both machines had worked successfully, and he had almost, but not quite, sold them to a manufacturer for professional distribution. Bickering had made five samples of the amplifier, but unfortunately under tests they had removed all of the patients' hair.

The stimulator also was constructed in accordance with the theory that the brain while in the process of thought sets up a vibratory field. When tuned to the proper wave length, it received those vibrations, strengthened them, and redirected them back to the brain through the ear.

Bickering got a screwdriver and a pair of pliers and set about connecting the receivers of the five telephones to the stimulator.

It was close to eight o'clock when he finished. Felspar was the first to arrive. The others followed promptly. By eight-fifteen Bickering was ready to begin his experiment.

"You are each to select a telephone,"

he told them, lift the receiver to your ear and wait. I won't tell you whether you will hear anything or not. But while you wait, do anything you wish. Scribble, write, doodle, anything. I'll return shortly."

He placed one of the aluminum amplifiers on each of his guests' heads and then started the phonograph with the record he had purchased. It was Liszt's *Liebstraum*. There was an automatic repeat device, and the professor hoped the music would place his five guests in the proper mood. He switched on the brain stimulator, passed into the next room and shut the door.

But when he returned to the laboratory twenty minutes later, he found things different than he had expected.

"Flip" Talbot, the reporter, had turned the record on the other side. It was playing *Classics in Swing*, and Alice Reynolds, the stenographer, had pushed her amplifier rakishly far back on her head and was beating the rhythm of the music on the chair arm with the palm of her hand.

The only person who had made a mark by his telephone was Felspar. On the wall he had written in a flowing hand:

SECOND AND LAST WARNING. YOU ARE INTERFERING WITH FORCES BEYOND YOUR POWER. IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE YOU WILL CEASE ACTIVITIES AT ONCE.

Bickering frowned as he gnawed his pipe stem and eyed Felspar shrewdly. Was the heavy-set man pulling his leg? But no, Felspar was staring at the wall, apparently stupefied by what he had written.

The repeated warning troubled Bickering. First warning of what? Who was doing the warning? Surely not Felspar. And what was all this prattle about forces beyond his power? Apparently greater stimulus was needed to make the experiment a success.

A THOUGHT came to Bickering then, and his eyes lighted. The brain stimulator derived its power from an ordinary six-volt storage battery.

But he had been talking to the hotel engineer only yesterday, and that individual had offered him the use of a small auxiliary refrigeration dynamo in the hotel engine room.

"Better not say anything about it to the manager," the engineer had said in his friendly way. "And go easy when you make your connections. The thing sets right next to the main dynamo and the elevator motor, and there's plenty of hot juice there."

Bickering took out a large coil of double insulated wire, connected one end to the brain stimulator and dropped the free end out the window. Then he rode down the elevator to the basement. The engineer was not in sight. Impatiently the professor opened a basement window and caught the other end of the wire. He proceeded to connect it to the refrigeration dynamo, working with clumsy haste and paying no heed to the fact that the wire hung perilously close to a small sign which read:

DANGER. VOLTAGE.

Finished, he returned to his laboratory and switched on the brain stimulator again. The tubes glowed orange, then cherry red, and a dull drone came from the interior of the box.

The receivers of the five phones were still connected to the machine. Bickering motioned each of his guests to an instrument and sat down in a chair to await results.

Results were startling. Felspar picked up his telephone receiver and uttered a howl of pain. His face contorted into an expression of stark terror.

"Turn it off," he yelled. "Turn it off!"

But Bickering did not turn it off. He said quietly. "Don't be frightened. I'm simply amplifying your thought processes. Try and relax."

A wild light leaped into Felspar's eyes. Seizing the pencil, his hand jerked to the wall, began to move rapidly. He drew first his usual symbol: the two stars, globe, dot with a tail and cigar-shaped object. Then he began a new design.

The professor, who had stepped to his side, stared. With strangely artistic skill Felspar's pencil was flying back and forth, forming outlines and background. As he watched, Bickering saw the picture of a city take form. A city fantastic. There were two suns in the sky. There were streets and avenues, flanked by cube-shaped buildings. And here and there were groups of strange-looking creatures, like nothing Bickering had ever seen before.

Wafer-shaped heads, curious elongated bodies, a dozen appendages in the place of arms and legs—the creatures were for the most part lying on their backs. By the drawn expression on their faces they seemed—or did Bickering imagine this?—to be dying of suffocation.

Felspar was working frantically now. Beads of perspiration were on his brow, and his eyes were glassy, with a far-away expression.

In the center of his drawing he began to sketch a high platform, raised above the city. The perspective and the detail were in perfect proportion. On the platform a strange cylindrical shape took form. There were fantastic insulators on its surface. On either side a network of wires and cables hung down. Workers clustered about it, gave the impression they were fighting against time to finish its construction. It was a weird, unreal drawing.

His pipe cold, the professor paced to the brain stimulator and turned the power rheostat another notch.

"Felspar," he said, "what are you drawing?"

Without hesitation the heavy-set man wrote:

"The city of Calthedra of the planet Lyra of the system, Aritorius."

PROFESSOR BICKERING gulped. "What is happening on that planet?" he demanded.

"The citizens are building a titanic air preserve. The oxygen atmosphere of the planet is disappearing due to the rapid recession of the two suns. With this machine the citizens hope to capture

the atmosphere of some other planet and transport it to their own."

"When is this happening?"

Like a man in a trance Felspar wrote the answer:

"Now!"

Icy fear seemed to chill Bickering's spine. He had hoped to penetrate by way of the subconscious brain the mysteries of the past. But in some inexplicable way he was not doing that at all. He was delving into the secrets of time and space at the present instant. He was seeing across thousands of light years to another world.

What was the answer? Was it cosmic telepathy? Had he, by amplifying the thought vibrations of Felspar's brain, produced a wave-length which could annihilate time and distance and receive similar vibrations across almost infinite space?

One thing was certain. When he had transferred this to the written page, his book, his Chapter Twenty-four would be a masterpiece. Unquestionably the Trolheim Award would be his.

Not until then did Bickering become aware of the other occupants of the room. John Albright and the Halstead brothers were simply standing by as on-lookers. But Terry Reynolds and "Flip" Talbot were sketching on the wall beside their phones.

The reporter's writings were as yet indistinguishable, but the stenographer's, the professor saw to his amazement, included the likeness of a huge cannon mounted on a rectangular base. Shooting from the muzzle of that gun was a cigar-shaped object. A projectile!

Hands trembling, Bickering turned the power of his brain stimulator to its last notch.

He saw then that "Flip" Talbot was writing a series of statements in column form. They read:

The chemical content of the atmosphere of the planet Earth is, with the exception of a deficiency of coronium similar to that of Lyra.

It is absolutely vital to all Lyranians that our atmosphere be replenished. Because of the cosmic recession of our two suns, heat on Lyra is diminishing, vegetation is dying, and as a result oxygen and nitrogen are escaping.

Migration from Lyra to Earth is at the present time impossible. Both the size and expense of such an undertaking make it impractical. Also, as our astronomers have proved, the near-by double nebula will produce a new sun within a comparatively short period of time. This new sun will amply replace the two that are now receding into space.

In our dying moments we are making a last and final attempt to capture that which is essential to our life. We are shooting a projectile to Earth. This projectile the moment it lands will automatically begin the process of capturing the Earth's atmosphere, breaking it down into its component atomic parts and storing it under pressure.

As the need demands, that atomic matter will be hurled into the fourth dimensional continuum and transported through a disruption of the spacetime coordinates back to Lyra. In short, the projectile, once it is on Earth, will serve as a branch power station, replenishing our atmosphere. It will arrive . . .

Bickering leaped to the reporter's side and gripped his arm.

"Will arrive when?" he shouted. "When?"

There was a blank stare in Talbot's eyes as his pencil moved over the wall:

First January, 1944, 11 p.m., Earth time!

With a wild cry Bickering glanced at the clock. It was ten o'clock. In one hour the greatest event in the history of mankind would occur. In one hour the first projectile from an outer planet would reach this Earth. And he—John Bickering—was the first person to be aware of its passage.

He had been wrong in his analyzation of Felspar's first drawing. No comet would change the trajectory of this projectile's path, for the simple reason that there was not any comet. This event was not one which had happened in ages past. It was happening now. Felspar's first drawing had been a blind. Apparently the citizens of the planet Lyra could not prevent the transmission of their secret by way of his subconscious drawings, but they had changed the details so as to give a completely wrong impression.

THE professor raced across the room to the one "good" telephone.

"I'm going to call the newspapers,"

he cried. "It's the story of the age."

But he got only half way. Felspar who had been standing motionless, suddenly lifted one arm above him.

"Stop!" he cried.

Bickering turned. There was a quality and a tone to Felspar's voice that was altogether foreign. The man's face was crimson now; his breathing was coming in short gasps.

"Stop," he repeated. "You are to make no move to warn the people of your race of the projectile's arrival. You are to keep the facts you have learned in this room to yourself."

"Are you mad?" Bickering demanded. And then like a flash of light he understood.

The race of that other planet whose movements he had tuned in were aware of his activities. They were acting through Felspar's brain to prevent information of their plans being broadcast, Felspar was but a robot responding to their command. He had no conscious knowledge of what he was doing.

Why? Because they knew there was not sufficient atmosphere on Earth for two planets. Once the projectile had landed and begun its operations, the population of Earth would be doomed.

Unmindful of Felspar, Bickering gave a mighty leap toward the phone.

But Felspar, equally agile in spite of his bulk, darted to the laboratory table and scooped up a bottle of acid. Poising it over his head he emitted a wild shout.

"We all die together, Bickering . . . you, myself, and the others," he cried. "They whose thoughts you have been reading have willed it so!"

Bickering could see the man's facial muscles contract as he made ready to hurl the acid. And then . . .

Then the door of the elevator somewhere on the floors below clanged harshly. Through the silence the cage began to drone up the shaft.

Simultaneously the brain stimulator machine on the table erupted into life. Bickering remembered with a start the hotel engineer's warning about the refrigeration dynamo's proximity to the main dynamo and the elevator motor.

He remembered too that in his haste he had made haywire connections. The filaments of the three Micro-Welman tubes lit up like incandescents. The panel began to vibrate violently, and the dials whirled of their own accord.

The elevator reached the floor level of the outer corridor. Suddenly an arc of purplish fire shot from the brain stimulator. There was a terrific roar as the box flew into a thousand fragments. Bickering felt himself hurled across the room and bludgeoned against the far wall. A cloud of fallen plaster and debris rose up in a choking cloud, and a blaze of colored lights whirled in his vision. Then blackness, and he knew no more . . .

Hours later when Bickering opened his eyes, the white walls of a hospital were about him, and the familiar figure of Mason Felspar stood beside the bed. "What . . . what happened?" the professor asked weakly.

"Plenty," replied Felspar. "But you're supposed to lie quiet and not talk and . . ."

"Tell me!" demanded Bickering.

"Well—" the heavy-set man touched gingerly a bulky bandage on his forehead—"I don't know exactly. I brought you here and signed you in under another name. You see the hotel manager is madder than a wet hen. The last I saw of him, he was standing on the sidewalk, looking up at a big hole in the hotel wall and wringing his hands."

"I don't care about the hotel manager," cried the professor. "What happened?"

FELSPAR shrugged. "All I can say is that I wasn't responsible for what I did or wrote there in your room. Once you had that salad-bowl on my head and turned on that machine, another power seemed to be in control of my thoughts. Talbot and the girl, Reynolds, said the same. By a miracle none of us was hurt, but the hotel is a wreck. If you want to get all the dope, why

don't you turn on your radio. It's just about time for the noon news broadcast."

Bickering reached across the table beside his bed and turned the switch of the radio there. A man's voice was talking:

"... and at a late hour authorities were still mystified as to the cause of the explosion at the Sheridan Hotel. . . . Continuing our survey of world news: . . . Washington, D.C., The U.S. Navy Department reported today that Allied battleships operating in the Caribbean Sea sighted and sank what appeared to be a Nazi super-submarine of enormous size.

"The mystery U-boat was discovered near Belize, British Honduras, and was apparently having engine trouble, since it made no attempt to submerge. No member of the craft's crew was in evidence at any time, but when Allied warships approached hidden weapons firing what was described as 'a powerful electric bolt' attempted to bombard them.

"A communique from the Nazi capital disclaims any knowledge of such a super-sub, and stories told by witnesses at Belize of seeing a great crimson streak in the sky and observing a black cigar-shaped object fall into the sea have been discredited. . . . This concludes the news broadcast for today. Goodbye until tomorrow."

Bickering looked across the bed and rubbed his jaw with his unbandaged hand.

"So it was true," he said slowly. "Do you realize, Felspar, what this means? It means that complete destruction, complete spatial doom was saved us by a hairsbreadth."

Felspar swallowed hard and said nothing.

"And yet I wonder," Bickering continued, "I wonder if it matters so much. After all, man has been spared annihilation from without, but now he's left to fight and kill himself off by wars of his own making."

THE DAY OF THE BEAST

By D. D. SHARP

Terror Spreads Over Deep Canyon Mesa When a Scientist's Formulae for Accelerated Life Runs Riot with Nature's Insect Forms!



I AM a chemo-biologist, a solitary worker. The things which I am about to relate are in themselves so strange, that I am afraid they will strain your credulity, especially when I admit that they were the results of experiments with the basic elements of life. Looking back over the weird events of those days when I was out in Deep Canyon, they often seem to be entirely unreal. And only when I meet Donald Shane and he talks about his part in them do they become definite and ghastly realities.

I was seeking the laws of causation, the principles which govern the factors of growth. I had the most sanguine hope that I might thwart Nature, which is so lavish with life for the species and niggardly with her allotment to the individual.

At the beginning of my experiments in the field of cytology,* I had my laboratory near the outskirts of a small Western town. But when some repulsive monstrosities resulted from my first attempts at chemical stimulation of cell growth, I felt it advisable to move to a more isolated district.

My first success was one-sided. My formulae stimulated only certain cell tendencies, the bone-producing ones. The dog into which I had made the injection grew to the size of a pony. Its teeth grew out like tusks, interlocking and protruding beyond the upper and lower jaws, so that I was obliged to give it nourishment through a tube. But all other cell activity remained normal. The muscles, skin and flesh stretched, trying to keep attached to the huge bones. The dog was never able to move after the second week.

But I was greatly encouraged, for I had accomplished cell activity under artificial stimuli. It was not that I wanted to produce large animal growths. My purpose was to find the secret of cellular division and multiplication, so that I might stimulate or retard it at will.

One does not need a fertile imagination to visualize what might result from perfect artificial cell stimulation. Wounded or diseased tissue could then be extirpated by skilled surgeons and regrown; so also could

* The study of cells and their activities.

new teeth, arms, legs—the possibilities were astounding.

I most certainly would have tried other solutions upon my monstrous dog, in the hope of stimulating the growth of flesh to conform to the bones, had it not been for some of my inquisitive and meddlesome neighbors, who reported the dog to the police. In the end I was ordered to kill it.

After that I set about trying to find the flaw in my formulae.

I TRIED new combinations and the result was as startling as in the case of the dog. In trying to promote the flesh growth, I experimented upon a cat. I had an idea that my fluid would probably act more uniformly if given internally, then if injected directly into the veins. I poured a small quantity of the solution into a graduating glass. Then I started to put the cat into a common gunny sack, so that I might handle it more easily. But when the feline clawed my arm violently I involuntarily released it.

It sprang upon the laboratory table and overturned the solution, and in my effort to

EDITOR'S NOTE



SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "The Day of the Beast," by D. D. Sharp, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFITION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time as selected by our readers.

We hope in this way to bring a new permanence to the science fiction gems of yesterday and to perform a real service to the science fiction devotees of today and tomorrow.

Nominate your own favorite! Send a letter or postcard to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. All suggestions are more than welcome!



The thing advanced upon me, its eyes those of a devil

save the solution I paid little attention to the cat at that time. I did notice, however, that it shook its head and pawed at its eyes. The chemical was not caustic, but it must have been painful to such tender organs as the eyes, for the cat hissed, and leaped out the open door and was gone.

At the time I was out of one of the ingredients for my formulae and had to wire for a refill before experimenting further, for the cat had spilled all that I had.

A few days later the cat came in, meowing piteously. Its eyes were large and globular and spread so that they actually touched each other across its face. I was sorry for the cat, for I realized that light was now exceedingly painful to its eyes. The daylight blinded it, so I caught it rather easily, and put it in a dark room.

Now I was sure that my new solution was the one I needed to correct the flaw in the first experiment, and I waited eagerly for my refill, hoping to be able to bring the cat's whole body up to the proportion of its eyes. But the delay was fatal, for in the meantime the cat escaped. Then imagine the presence of a pop-eyed cat running loose through the

town, one that hid by day and prowled by night, and peered into windows as it grew hungry.

The town really became crazed with a superstitious fear by the time it was captured. Eventually the animal was discovered to be a product of my laboratory and I was asked to abandon my experiments or move to a less inhabited location. People did not seem to understand the purpose of my work.

For a few months I remained where I was, inactive, but plotting a defiance against the "narrow-minded" citizens. But when I heard of a stone house under the cliffs at the mouth of Deep Canyon, I realized that my work must come before my pride, and so decided to move.

It was an isolated spot and it struck me as ideal for my work. Accordingly, I arranged for a two years' lease, and had my equipment moved, together with some rabbits, two goats and a horse. The place was some miles off the main highway, and one got to it over a little-used road which wound across bare mesas and down into Deep Canyon.

As soon as I was established in my new quarters, I prepared the two solutions and

mixed them, and injected a small quantity into one of the rabbits. For some weeks I thought my experiment was a complete success, and I set down the formulæ carefully in my diary so that the discovery should not be lost in case anything happened to me. Then I found there was still a serious error to be overcome. I could start growth, but I had no means of stopping it.

For long weeks after that I worked hard trying to find some method of retarding the inevitable cellular multiplication after it had reached the desired growth.

It was about that time that Donald Shane drove out to see how I was faring in my new quarters. Don was a young, likable chap with whom I had become acquainted in the town which had treated me so sourly. He was boyishly interested in cytology, and with everything that concerned my adventures with the unknown elements. We had formed quite an attachment for each other.

I met him outside the door to welcome him to my hermit quarters. As his car stopped, he leaped out and rushed to me.

"Well, here I am, Professor," he shouted, grinning broadly. "I got to worrying about you away out here by yourself. I was afraid one of your monsters might swallow you. I guess that's about the only excuse I've got for not waiting for an invitation."

I didn't say much as I grasped his hand, but merely mumbled something about how glad I was to have him. But I was really touched that the young man should take so much trouble to come so far to see me. It was no small trip over those wild bare mesas.

I remember now how he held onto my hand, and there was something in his fine gray eyes which gave me the feeling that here was a friend such as few men had; the kind of a friendship that brushed away the twenty years' difference in our ages.

Don was talented and energetic and there was no prophesying what he might do for the good of the world. He had and still has an insatiable zeal for knowledge, and a courageous and daring persistence that should carry him far. But I am getting ahead of my story.

HE FOLLOWED me into the house, and after we had talked for a while about commonplace things, I took him around. In one corner I showed him a perfectly developed rabbit about the size of a big hog, and told him I would soon have to kill it, for it was growing so fast it would soon be too big for its cage.

Donald was enthusiastic. It was evident he wanted to know my formulæ, and seemed afraid something might happen that might cause the loss of my discovery to the world. But at that time I was not ready to give anyone the secret, for I wanted first to correct its flaw.

After that trip he came out rather often, and he always displayed a sincere enthusiasm

—such as one man rarely betrays for another's discovery.

My experience with the rabbits proved I needed something smaller to experiment with. I wanted more time to study a specimen before it outgrew my control over it. Donald tried to get me some white mice, but unable to find any in the town, he ordered two dozen from the East. In the meantime I had to kill the last of my rabbits.

At that time my mind was wholly upon my work and I fretted at the delay in going on with the tests. The night before I had captured a spider, one of the Lycosidae* or Salticidae**. This species was rare in our canyon, so I had placed it in a large-mouthed bottle, intending to give it to Donald when he came again, for he was making a collection of spiders.

There the thing remained sulking in the bottle upon the laboratory shelf. Impulsively one day I picked up my tweezers, uncorking the bottle. I lifted it out. Then I immersed it in my new solution and dropped it back into the bottle, naturally recorking the bottle. I knew that the spider would be ravenously hungry in less than an hour, so I got the fly swatter and went to the barn on a still hunt for blue-bottle flies. I was still killing them when Donald drove up. He had the white mice and had driven out directly from the express office.

I told him about the spider and he was anxious to see it, so we went back into the laboratory, taking my small catch of flies. The spider was circling around and around at the bottom of the big bottle, its legs feeling with a ceaseless insistence for some exit from its glass cage. The solution was certainly having a fine effect and the spider must have been very hungry.

I opened the bottle and reached my tweezers down for the frantic insect, but it leaped out upon my hand and buried the claw joints of its falcet[†] deep into my flesh, and sank its proboscis, feeling for blood to satisfy its acute hunger.

I threw up my hand involuntarily, as one will, in disgust at seeing it feeding upon my own blood. But I was not afraid of its sting, for I knew enough about spiders to realize that the small amount of poison in its sac would not harm me.

Don laughed boyishly. The spider hung on and I brushed it off against the shelf. It fell behind the table and among some demijohns and jugs, and though we searched around for it we could not find it.

"We must find it, Professor," Don insisted. "It's somewhere around here."

We hunted methodically, moving every bottle and box in that part of the room, but our search was unrewarded. It was evident

* A family of swift-running spiders with a peculiar eye arrangement.

** A family of leaping spiders with a somewhat similar eye arrangement.

† Appendages, one at each side of a spider's mouth.

the spider had escaped through one of the many cracks about the floor of the old house. Don was more uneasy about it than I. His vivid imagination had it growing to mammoth size and preying over the country side. And, though I knew as well as he that spiders are predacious, I told him I was certain it would show up around the place before it had grown very large, and then I could either capture or kill it.

Don left the next morning after we had inoculated one of the mice with my new serum. No more had been said about the escaped spider, and Don promised to come back the next Sunday, hoping to find the mouse as big as a packing-house hog.

Frankly, I was more upset by the loss of the spider, at that time, than I would admit even to myself. Not that I had Don's fear that it would run away and spread havoc over the country, for I believed it would be hungry and hang close about the house. There was no food for even a spider on those bare malpais mesas which surrounded the canyon.

What did disturb me was the thought that it might crawl into my room and feed upon me during the night. I have a horror of sucking parasites. Further, the doors to my bedroom did not fit well. There were many crevices through which the insect could crawl to pounce upon me as I slept.

I had an imaginative and restless night, and little better one the next. On the third day after inoculation, the mouse was big as a wharf rat and eating greedily. It would take a month at least for it to grow as large as the packing-house hog Don had spoken of.

CELLULAR division is rapid. Its progression may be likened to the fabled price a certain king offered the blacksmith to shoe his horse; one cent for the first nail, two for the second, four for the third, eight for the fourth and so on. However, as the mouse had fewer cells than the rabbit to start with, its growth was much slower.

Knowing this, I supposed that it would take an even longer period for the escaped spider to attain an appreciable size. Imagine my surprise and concern on the fourth day, to find a hideous, short-furred mass in a badger's hole just outside my door. That hole was eight or ten inches in diameter, yet the thing in it was so large as to fill the hole's mouth completely. It required a second look for me to accept the mass as the tiny spider I had treated but a few days before.

It must have been very hungry to be running around now. For, though the sun had already gone down, it was quite light in the canyon, and I knew this species to be nocturnal in its habits. I was so startled by the size and ferocious look of the thing, I allowed it to escape from the hole before making the slightest attempt to confine or kill it. Then I had no opportunity at all, for the monster leaped, spreading its eight legs and

glaring hungrily at me from each of its eight eyes. It leaped again with such swiftness that I escaped it only by a miracle. I fled into the house and slammed the door after me. Then I heard one of my goats bleating.

Arming myself quickly with a heavy board—I had no gun in the house—I ran outside to kill the thing, for I was in terror of what it might grow into. I might have killed it then, but the goat became panicky and fled with the black mass of the thing sticking down hungrily upon it. The spider's proboscis sunk into the large vein of the animal's throat, its long-jointed legs clutching like the tentacles of a devil fish upon its victim.

I have since tried to account for the extraordinarily rapid growth of that spider. Why should it have developed so much more quickly than the mouse? For a long time I concluded it was because the spider, being a blood-sucking insect, therefore assimilated its nourishment more quickly than the mouse. Since then I have arrived at another conclusion.

I cannot prove my theory, and anyone is at liberty to advance his own explanation for the differences in growth. My own is that the spider, although the smaller, has far more cells than the rat, more even than a cow or other brutes, but simply that the cells are smaller. This would give a larger number of cells to start dividing and they might swell with blood much as a tick does.

This theory is partly substantiated by the fact that the spider has four times as many eyes and twice as many legs as the rodent, indicating its whole organism is much more complicated.

I spent two days searching for that spider, armed with nothing but a board for a shield and a stout stick for a weapon. I found no trace of it until the third morning when I started early on my continued search. Out by the barn was a ghastly bulk of evidence indicating that the thing had not quitted the place.

I was disquieted, even alarmed by the exhibition of the destructive power of that predaceous monster. For stretched out I saw Barney, my horse, lying dead in its stall, shrunken and withered as though he had been drained of every drop of its blood and moisture. Here and there upon his body were deep incisions where the big spider had buried the hooks of its falces into the hide. The depth and width of the incisions told me plainly that no life would be safe, either human or animal, while the spider was at large.

I knew there was no time to be lost. I must hunt the thing down immediately and kill it. It would grow larger and more dangerous each day.

Yet the stick and plank I carried about were ridiculously ineffective weapons against anything of the proportions implied by those wounds.

Don had promised to come out again the

next morning and he might, as he occasionally did, bring along his .30-30 Winchester rifle for a shot at stray lobo wolves or coyotes upon the mesa. I decided to keep to the house that day and wait for Don, hoping he would bring along the gun. If he did not bring it I would, of course, ask him to go back for men and guns at once.

I determined to be ruthless now and get the thing killed as soon as possible. The way the thing leaped at me, the shrunken horse, and the size of the dark hole where the proboscis had entered its neck to drain the warm blood from the beating heart, all put a queer, chilly fear upon me.

I went back into the house and locked my doors. I spent the rest of the day miserably and all night my imagination played with the ghastly thought of what the monster could do should it kill me before I had time to warn Don or the surrounding ranches. I knew that when it could find no more food about the place it would steal away into the night to pounce upon man or beast.

Soon after dark I heard it drop to the roof from the canyon wall. It had a scratchy crawl as it crept over the flat top of the house, and the timbers creaked and groaned. It seemed light-footed, but heavy. Then I heard it leap to the yard.

After a moment when I heard the goat bleat pitifully, I poked the four-hundred-foot beam of my flashlight through the window and searched the yard, but the thing leaped away from the blade of light and took the goat with it. A few minutes later I heard the rats squealing as their cages were smashed.

AFTER that all was silent for a long time, and then the thing seemed to smell or sense my own warm blood. It came close to my bedroom door which opened directly outside. I leaped from my bed and grabbed the stout stick I had brought into the room with me, and turned my flash upon the door. The beast scratched and pried. The claws of its fangs crept in under the door, five or six of them at a time, as the thing rasped heavily and the thick oak door creaked under the strain.

It kept that up most of the night and I was glad for the coming of day when the bright clear sky and the new sun drove it back to the cliffs. I went outside and found the hulk of the goat and the mice, but otherwise everything seemed calm and peaceful. There was not a breath of wind or a speck of cloud.

About noon Don came. I rushed over to his car.

"Did you bring your gun?" I asked before he had stopped.

He stared at me in alarm.

"Then you haven't found it!"

"Great heavens, Don! It's horrible!"

"You mean it's gone?"

"I don't know," I admitted, "but I think it's hiding somewhere up in the cliff."

"How big is it now?" he asked.

"It must be as large as a calf. I haven't seen it for two days, but it was very heavy upon the roof."

Don dragged out his .30-30 and worked the lever. He looked over the mechanism carefully and filled the chamber with cartridges. This completed, he turned to me and smiled.

"This is real 'big game' hunting."

"I'm glad you feel light-hearted about it, Don. I don't," I said seriously.

He grinned broadly.

"I did feel frightened and awed at first," he admitted. "I was prepared for most anything from that witches' brew of yours, Professor. I was afraid it had grown too big to be killed by this time. Now it will be sport to hunt the thing."

"Don't be careless, Don," I cautioned. "There never was a leopard as quick as that spider is."

I then related how swiftly it had leaped at me two days before.

His gray eyes sobered again.

"It would be hard on you, Professor, if it got away and killed somebody. I don't believe you'd ever get over it. We've just got to find the thing and now's a pretty good time to start."

We hunted all that afternoon without results. We ate no lunch and talked little, saving our breath for the climbs. About twilight we came back to the house without having found a trace of the spider. Don took some raw steak which he had brought out for me and put it where I had staked the goat.

We were both excited. I was apprehensive, but Don was eager. He was like a boy on a lark, and determined, as a matter of pride to get that spider.

I ate no supper, but Don munched some cakes and drank several cups of black coffee to keep him awake. I knew I should never sleep until that spider was destroyed.

Don had not finished his cakes when we heard the thing land upon the house. He leaped from his chair, swallowing a mouthful of cake, and grabbed his rifle. There was an air of conquest about him as he leaped toward the door, which he flung open and was out into the night before I could stop him.

"Wait, Don!" I cried. "Don't go out there!"

I had been sitting at the far corner of the room trying to read in order to hide my uneasiness from the boy. He got outside the door before I could get to my feet.

Almost immediately I heard him shout: "Help, help!" Then bravely as though striving for control: "No, Don't come. Oh! Oh!" His shriek ended in a low moan.

I grabbed a straight chair as a weapon and picked up my flashlight as I passed the table.

I flung the door open. Don had slammed it shut behind him.

Outside everything was silent. A moon hung its pale crescent close down against the high rim of the opposite canyon, and cast a sickly glow over the white limestone cliffs above. As my eyes searched alertly for the terror I knew was lurking near, I saw a long white rope swinging down the cliffs. It curved gracefully over toward the house like a white telephone cable and under the beam of my flashlight it glistened with the peculiar sheen of raw silk. Of course, it was the web by which the spider had descended to the house, and for a moment my eyes followed that silk cord as it swayed back and forth in the night breeze, for I knew that at the lower end of it was the monster.

Out of the shadows of the house, at my very feet, reached a hooked tentacle and crept across the door sill. Another repulsive claw felt its way up beside the first and caught the yellow glow of the lamp back inside the room. I leaped back and struck out with my chair. Then I poked the beam of my flashlight into the dark shadows of the cliff where the thing crouched.

There it was, as big as a burro, and under it was Don with its hooked falces buried in him and its proboscis seeking about for the best spot to drain the blood from him. Its eight big eyes glared at me balefully, while its eight long, two-hooked, seven-jointed legs flexed themselves and began dragging Don out of the light.

The Winchester was lying near the door where Don had dropped it when the spider clutched him. With a bravery born of terror I ran and grabbed the gun. Raising my weapon I poked the beam of my light around the house. The thing was gone!

I MADE a quick search about the premises with the long blade of my light, playing it over the barn, upon the demolished rat cages, and then upon the chalk-white cliff. There it was, I saw with a gasp, almost a hundred feet above the house, climbing its silver ladder and carrying Don up to its lair. Every one of its eight large tentacles was silhouetted against the white cliff and at their center was the dark circular mass of its body. Below it dangled Don's arms and legs as the spider climbed the silky rope.

I darned not fire. The drop alone would be enough to kill Don. There was only one thing to do, infuriate the thing, dare it to attack me. I ran to the long flow of the rope and shook it with great jerks and heaves. The thing merely raised long tentacles at me and rasped heavily. I shook again, and like a boat going down the chutes, it slid toward me. Evidently Don was not badly hurt, for he hung above to the web and followed slowly. But I had no time to watch Don, for the monster was now far enough below for me to risk a shot,

I raised the rifle and fired, not even trying to locate the gun sights in the dim light, but aiming instinctively. I missed. The spider seemed to fall from its hanging position, but as it neared the ground it swung itself from the cliff and leaped toward me.

The sight of it paralyzed me as some terrible unreal nightmare. I felt every moment I should wake up grateful to find it was all a dream. With a last effort of my will, I shook from myself the hypnotic fear of the terror above me and marked a spot as near as I could at the center of the glittering malicious eyes. Those eyes were as large as hen eggs. But my shot told and the thing fell short of its leap for me and writhed a moment where it had fallen.

It had dropped between me and the house and as it crouched ready for another leap, I ran for the protection of the barn, and dodged behind it. The thing faced me not twenty feet from my refuge. Hate, rather than hunger, now burned in its terrible eyes. My two bullets had torn away one eye and three of its tentacles, which gave it a lopsided gait as it crawled toward me. The thing was mutilated, but it was not frightened.

It seemed anxious to attack, and stalked me, feeling out with its five unharmed hooked tentacles, feeling out to seize me, as it advanced. Its eyes were those of a devil, and every one of them focused upon me as though the diabolical brain back of them had no fear and wished to turn upon me the great strength I had given it. I was almost paralyzed with fear.

It leaped again and I felt the falces bury into my shoulders and thighs with a deep numbing pain as it pulled me down, knocking the gun from my hand. Even caught in the terror of such death, I remember thinking anxiously of what a menace the monster would become to the ranchers and townfolk for a hundred miles around. I made a last desperate effort to wrench free and another hooked tentacle clawed into my arm and I felt the sharp point of the proboscis raking about my throat, feeling or scenting for the veins.

There came a report and then another and another and the big pulpy mass wilted and covered me. I choked and fought and felt the claw joints of the falces slip from my flesh. When I was able to crawl from under the mass of short-furred flesh, Don was standing weakly beside me. He had found the gun under the light of the moon and had finished the monster.

"Don!" I cried. "You are all right?"

He smiled and nodded his head. "Only claved a little. Can you get to the house?"

"I believe I can," I answered, and limped toward the open door with the hurt of my wounds beginning to sting and burn.

When we were inside the house and had washed and bound each other's wounds, I limped over to the bottle of solution I had

last prepared. The horror of the thing to which I had given so much strength was still upon me. I grasped the big bottle and dashed it to the concrete floor. Then I took my log book and ripped from it the pages of my complex formulae and struck a match.

"No, Professor!" Don cried, and leaped from his chair. "No! Professor," Don repeated. "Age is too cautious. Merely trying to save what is, rather than creating something more perfect. The best is yet to be. Let me have your secret. I will carry on. I am not afraid. Daring has always gained more than it has lost!"

I was impressed. I did not strike another match, but locked the sheets of the formulae in a steel safe. And that is where they now are. I have not given the secret to Don, neither have I destroyed it. Don may be right. There would be much benefit to mankind, should Don or I find some way to stop

the cell multiplication after it is started. But, there is the chance that no way to stop the dangerous growth might be found, and much harm might be done to mankind by an unscrupulous fiend, or foolish scientist, should my formulae fall into such hands.

It impressed me that the monster spider and the fight we had with it should be a lesson in caution, a warning that I might have been encroaching upon the Great Keeper's grounds.

And yet—what shall I do? What is right, and what is best? I do not know.

So I am writing down the whole history of my discovery and of its menace, and asking all of you, who are so wise, and you who are so foolish, to dare an answer. You may be either benefited or destroyed—you who were my first thought at the time of my investigations, and who are now my only concern. What shall I do?



OUR NEXT HALL OF FAME SELECTION

THE RADIATIONS OF THE CHINESE VEGETABLE

By C. STERLING GLEASON

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Now She Shops "Cash and Carry" Without Painful Backache

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)



This STARTLING WAR

News and Notes from the
Science Front



ELECTRONIC EAR NOW TESTS SMALL CALIBER SHELLS—An "electronic ear" to match the famed "electric eye" is now used in ordnance plants to test shells for the deadly little 20-millimeter automatic cannon which our airplanes and our warships now carry in such profusion.

"Sonotest," which is the device's name, was originally designed to test counterfeit coins and tests the shells by the sound they make when dropped on an anvil. Properly made ammunition, without cracks and with copper rotating bands well seated, have a certain vibration frequency or tone pitch which, by an electronic hook-up, causes a green light to flash. Duds flash a red danger signal. One girl can test as many as 1,800 shells an hour with this gadget.

LAND TORPEDO ROLLS AT TARGETS—A new type of aerial land torpedo is the invention of C. T. Bjorkman of Alhambra, California. It is simply a thick, biscuit-shaped container for high explosive with the necessary detonating fuse. It is dropped after being set spinning in advance and allowed to roll up to targets unreachable by ordinary bombing, such as tunnel entrances, power-plant or warehouse doors and the like. Sounds good if it doesn't hit a hump.

HOLES IN PROPELLER DIMINISH NOISE—Propeller noise is one big reason why soundless airplanes have yet to be built. Even with engine noise entirely muffled, the roar of the propeller would give notice of the plane's passage. To abate this, Clyde E. Ellett of Los Angeles has devised a prop with tapered air passages leading from front to back surfaces. Air passing through them, he claims, breaks up the noise-making air pocket behind the blades. In the future, perhaps we shall be bombed in silence.

GUN'S FIRING PIN ELECTRICALLY RELEASED—A weapon in which the firing pin is released by an electromagnet instead of by the customary mechanical sear is the invention of G. N. Albee of Winchester, Massachusetts. The trigger serves simply as a switch for closing the firing circuit, current for which is provided by dry cells pocketed in the butt. Albee claims for his gun a smoother, more positive action than that found in more conventional weapons.

NEW MACHINE USES EARTH'S CURVATURE TO GIVE MAPS TRUE PERSPECTIVE—A machine created by Dr. W. H. Bradley, K. E. Lohman and A. H. Frazier of the U. S. Geological Survey promises to be a boon to our wartime cartographers. It is the first of

its kind to make allowance for the curvature of the earth and for the refraction of the air in translating maps into true perspective pictures.

This invention, capable of handling maps of any scale range, can be operated to make as many control points as desired, from which a regional profile may be drawn and the drawing defined further with the aid of photographs.

NEW GAS MASK GIVES SOLDIERS NEW PROFILES—A new type of lightweight "assault service mask" sporting a new profile has been developed by the Chemical Warfare Service. Giving protection against all known war gases, it has the air-purifying canister attached to the left cheek of the facepiece, thus providing minimum interference with vision and rifle firing. Formerly a hose, vaguely resembling an elephant's trunk, connected the facepiece with the canister, which was carried in the container on the chest.

The new mask weighs less than half as much as the older standard type and will float in water, thus easing the burden of troops fording a stream or evacuating a ship.

U. S. GRENADES NO LONGER TELEGRAPH PUNCH—Hand grenades now used by our armed forces no longer telegraph their punch as they leave the hand that heaves them, thanks to a new silent primer which has been substituted for the shotgun-shell variety hitherto in use. The latter went off with a sharp snap at the moment of throwing, thus often notifying the enemy a grenade was on the way.

The new primer contains milder detonating ingredients which produce a softer sound as it explodes and ignites the grenade's internal time fuse.

A SIMPLIFIED SEMI-AUTOMATIC RIFLE—A semi-automatic rifle of simplified construction has been patented by T. F. Horan of New Haven, Connecticut. It is gas-operated like the Garand, but instead of having the take-off for the powder gas near the muzzle, it has it only a short distance in front of the chamber. The piston has a short stroke and does not necessarily move parallel to the bore.

Various alternative means are shown for applying its power to a solid rod-like piece of metal that thrusts backward into the stock. This unlocks and opens the breech, simultaneously compresses a long helical spring which furnishes the energy for the return stroke which inserts a new cartridge and closes the breech.



Mr. Domney couldn't have him sitting in the window riffling through book pages like a college professor

THE MAD DOMNEYS

By VERNE CHUTE

They Were Just an Average and Normal Family Before the Coming of Cecil, Who Disrupted the Household—and How!

NOONDAY sunlight streamed in through the big bay window with its southern exposure, making a lacy pattern on the plain nine-by-twelve rug, which had cost Ann Domney twenty-eight dollars at Hallock's. Oliver Cromwell Domney's paces across the shaft of light made it flash off and on like the electric sign on his "New, Used and Out-Of-Print Bookshop" over on

the main street of Lakeland.

Oliver glowered at his assembled family. Five were there. The sixth, happily, was absent. It was this sixth and newest member of the household that was the thorn in Domney's side.

For a genial, good-natured bookseller with one eye almost constantly in the *Publishers' Weekly*, Mr. Domney wasn't running true to form. His short, squat

figure didn't lend itself very well to long-distance pacing, either. At the moment he looked more like a man who had been wrestling with a stevedore than with the strange esoteric problem that had dumped itself at his fireside. His hair was mussed, his shirt collar lay limp against his perspiring neck and the tail end of his shirt was exposed most indecorously.

The problem this time, Domney thanked his stars, wasn't the usual family lament about having to live on the *wrong side of town*. Yet this one was much more important.

"MY DECISION is made," he cried suddenly. "He's got to go, and I don't care if he tells all of Lakeland. We never invited him here in the first place." His voice weakened. "Every time I'm ready to ask him to leave he looks at me with those funny eyes of his—and I'm speechless. I don't understand it. I can't even argue with him. I think he's got us hypnotized—damn!"

"Oliver!" Ann Domney gave her husband a wifely look of disapproval. Her nice eyes, seemingly awed by the preview of her husband's shirt tail, came off their target long enough to turn a side-ward glance at her three children—Sally and Quincy, who were of high-school age, and little Chagrell.

Domney muttered on. . . .

"Sh-h-h," Ann cautioned. "He may be listening. Your shirt, dear. And, please, don't be so agitated."

"Agitated?" howled Domney. "I never get agitated!" He began stuffing his errant shirt tail into his pants pocket much to the delight of Sally and Quincy. Little Chagrell shrieked with all the exuberance of his six precocious years.

"You're funnier even than Cecil," he cried out.

Cecil! That name to the rest of the Domneys was like the cry of "fire!" in a crowded theater. The Domneys almost held their breath.

Then Sally was uncurling her slim legs from the head of the leather couch. She nervously looked at the mantel

clock. It was nearly time to get back to school. *Across the tracks. On the right side of town!* Deserting the couch, she essayed the piano stool, fitting between the two like a canary with two perches.

"Will you light?" howled her father.

Then he was staring through the beaded portières of eucalyptus buds at the hall phone. He was having an idea. He made a dash for the phone, dialed a number. He swung around, stared back at his family. A half-defiant look was in his eyes. "The library," he exclaimed. "Now we can settle the question, for once and for all. There's just one thing I want them to tell me—just one thing!"

Domney had always considered the public library as unfair competition. Yet they'd never know. He cleared his throat, indicating to his family that he had made his connection and that someone was answering from the other end of the line. Domney knew it to be the anemic, unimaginative Miss Purdy.

He said: "Domney's New and Used Books—no, no, I mean this is Mr. Domney. Oliver Domney. Say, young woman, I'm calling for information. Yes, information. I want to find out something about cats—do cats ever talk?"

There was a pause. Then Domney nodded into the mouthpiece, said fervently. "Yes, yes, that's it. Any kind of cat—alley cat, Persian, Angora, Siamese, Manx—any of them. Do they ever talk? Yes, of course, in English!"

Domney stopped shouting. He paled, pulled his ear back from the wall. His lips formed strong, silent words. Then his indignation boiled over.

"Of course I'm not drunk!" Domney slammed the receiver back on the hook.

SALLY'S face reflected her father's hopeless look. "At school they're already calling us the 'Mad Monkeys,'" she declared.

"Do they!" put in Quincy, adding, "as if it wasn't bad enough for us to be *dated*."

"Oh," said Ann Domney. Then she looked startled. "Dated?" She turned dutifully toward her husband for an explanation.

Domney shook his head, went on with his pacing.

"Quincy, you explain it so mother can understand," Sally said. "Oh, well, I'll do it. Mother, being 'dated' is like having button shoes . . . a horse and buggy . . . bay windows . . . like living on the wrong side of town."

This was plain enough for Ann Domney. "Oh," she said again, looking hopelessly at her husband.

But Domney was hitching up his trousers like a woodchopper getting ready to go to work. "By Jupiter! I'll order him out of the house!"

"But, dear, you *did* bring Cecil home with you from the bookshop, you know," Ann Domney reminded her irate husband. "That night you brought home that bundle of specially old books."

"I did not!" Mr. Domney repudiated this accusation indignantly. "I merely put him out of the shop and said scat. I couldn't have him sitting there in the window and riffling through the pages of books like a college professor bent on research, could I? What would people say? And I couldn't tell people where he came from, because I didn't know. Just suddenly, that first day, he was there. And how on earth could I tell *anybody* that Cecil could talk?"

Mrs. Domney sighed again and closed her troubled eyes. Then suddenly her face wound up in a strange, incredulous smile. "Say, maybe it's *us*! If no one else heard him say those things?"

Domney looked startled. "Maybe we are crazy. Yet when he first showed up at the store he seemed all right—until he began to read and talk to me when we were alone. But at home—ow!" He smacked the top of his head. "When I opened the back door and let him come inside I was a jackass!"

"What's a jackass?" piped up the shrill voice of the six-year-old.

Domney gave his offspring a gloomy look. "A jackass, my son, is a dealer in second-hand, rare and out-of-print books. And when I let Cecil come inside, what did he say at once?"

Quincy came to life long enough to give the answer, the answer they all

knew by heart. "Do you have any salmon? Not the pink, the *red*."

Sally gave a mocking laugh. "Such gall. He always has to have the best. You'd think he was the mayor of Lakeland, instead of a tramp! Not the pink, the *red*!" she mocked.

"Mother,"—this from the pride and joy—"why did Cecil want the *red*?"

"Hush, Shaggs—I mean, Chagrell. Red salmon is considered the best." She turned sympathetic eyes upon the twins. "I'm sorry, dears, about what they say at school. We should never have mentioned Cecil, nor—nor had that stage manager here. Cecil was hurt by that. He said it was to—to—profane his art."

"You're always sticking up for him," protested Quincy.

ANN DOMNEY had no answer, and Oliver Domney seemed to have run out of words. He sank into the folds of the plain leather couch. It groaned and protested as the stuffing crunched beneath his weight. One of the coiled springs caught momentarily, then released with a "*ping*" that jarred Domney's thoughts and brought him halfway to his feet. What he said under his breath was no blessing.

Sally's voice broke the strained silence. "I'd say *drowned* him!"

"No, darling," Ann Domney hastened to correct. "Not *drowned* him, *drown* him—why, Sally! What are you saying? You'd feel differently if Cecil were in his grave." She looked toward her husband.

But Mr. Domney, who could quote anything from Beowulf to Edgar Guest, had nothing to say. His well-chosen words fled from him. He stared toward the head of the couch and his muttering ran together, turned into one startled bleat.

A cat had moved into view from behind the couch.

And what a cat! No Persian, Angora, Siamese, this one—nor was he like any other cat in the world. Slowly and gracefully he walked to the center of the room, as silent and dignified as if he were consort to Bastet, the Egyptian cat

goddess. Even his color defied description, although in the light of the parlor, it seemed to hold to a sheen of powdered blue and gray.

Stretching himself, he sat up, as proud and pompous as the upright statuette of the cat usually found in art stores.

"Nice day," he said politely. Looking sideward at Sally and at Mrs. Domney, he added significantly, "I was asleep—most of the time."

Sally (a silly little thing, Cecil had once said) looked scared. "Oh," she cried, and moved closer to her mother. "I really didn't mean what I said about—about *drowning*."

"*Drowning*," said Cecil, looking at the elder Domney.

Mrs. Domney smiled uneasily. "I do hope you had a nice sleep." She nodded at her husband to say something.

Domney's face was the color of red salmon, and Cecil didn't embarrass him further. Yet his gesture was patronizing to the extent of showing the Domneys that they were being well repaid for the favor of his society.

"It seems," he reflected, "that someone mentioned something about a grave."

Ann Domney's face flamed. Then she bit her lip and looked at Sally. Cecil went on, quoting:

"For rain it hath a friendly sound
To one who's six feet under ground;
And scarce the friendly voice or face
A grave is such a quiet place."

Domney moved at last, came to life. "*Renaissance*," he said. "Edna St. Vincent Millay."

Cecil nodded quite gravely. "Excellent. Most excellent."

Domney almost looked pleased. Looked pleased until he happened to notice the stark, accusing eyes of his family. Basking in the approval of a cat, they seemed to say. Domney crunched back into the depths of the horsehair couch.

Amused tolerance was heavy in Cecil's slanty blue eyes, then. He regarded the Domneys more closely, as though he considered this family a strange species, but a trifle uninteresting. He turned his head, indulged in an expansive yawn.

Then he purred softly:

"Whoever it was who said 'He who sleeps, eats' was wrong." He looked naïvely at one paw, then at the other. "Perhaps there is a spot of red salmon in the ice-box."

Cecil's subtle request brought quick action from Mrs. Domney. She rose quickly, flung open the dining-room door and hurried toward the kitchen.

Oliver Domney's brow was furrowed as he mumbled to himself. "Let's see, 'He who sleeps, eats.' Ah, that was . . ."

"It is a Spanish proverb," said Cecil helpfully.

CECIL moved back, sat down with his paws in front of him. He proudly watched his tail curl over them. It was a beautiful tail, as blue and smoky as the sky above a brush fire. He was very proud of that tail. He looked sympathetically at little Shaggs, then at the twins. They had no tails, nor did the elder Domney have a tail.

Evidently Cecil decided not to say anything of their shortcomings, although it seemed that if there was any talking to do it would be up to him. The Domneys knew it was funny about them. They chattered continually when he was out of sight, but let him put in an appearance and they were suddenly struck dumb.

Cecil watched Domney sink deeper into the protesting leather. "I can see that Aunt Sarah is due for a visit," he said pointedly.

Domney started. Then he said weakly, "We brought the couch up from the basement today. Please don't say anything."

Cecil didn't commit himself. Then he must have forgotten all about Aunt Sarah as a heavenly odor was wafted in from the kitchen. When the attar of salmon became too irresistible, Cecil lowered his eyes. With the unhurried, dignified restraint of his royal blood, he moved toward the kitchen.

The parlor Domneys thawed back to life. Little Shaggs, to whom nothing was sacred, cried out: "Go catch a mouse!"

"Shaggs!" cried the elder Domney.

But it was too late. Cecil had halted. Visibly shocked, he turned around and spoke icily.

"Mr. Domney, you seem to have little control over your moronic offspring. Catch a mouse, indeed! What does he think I am?" Cecil's azure eyes narrowed with sudden pity. "It is regrettable that your illustrious name should be carried on by such as he. Now, your grandfather—"

Domney went pale at Cecil's reference to his ancestral paterfamilias. "Leave my grandfather out of this!" he shouted.

Cecil looked startled at the extent of Domney's outburst. "Very well," he said stiffly. "A secret is a secret. Just don't shout." He swung around, took another sniff of the essence of *salmo salar* and strolled on to the kitchen.

Sally grabbed her father's hand. "Dad, what was it about your grandfather?"

Quincy's eyes flashed with boyish eagerness. "Was he a pirate, maybe—or a bandit?"

Domney shook his head vaguely. Stumbling to his feet, he glared toward the kitchen. He was nearing the breaking point.

"Me!" he cried. "Me buffaloesd by a cat! Madness, that's what it is. I am mad. Mad!!!"

"I am but mad north-northwest," Cecil quoted from the doorway. "When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw. . . ."

"Hamlet!" shouted Domney. Catching up his hat he ran from the house.

AN HOUR later the phone rang in Domney's Old, Rare and Out-of-print Bookshop. Oliver Domney jumped nervously, almost ran into his only customer, a lady who seemed intent on buying a book. Domney juggled the receiver loose, heard the excited voice of his wife.

"Come home at once," she implored. "Cecil is leaving."

"What?" Then, "Oh, he is, is he? Well, that's just fine. Let him go!"

"But that's not it," wailed his wife. "Do you know where Cecil's going?"

Domney didn't. But his wife didn't keep him guessing. "He's going over to Mrs. Ames! And you know Mrs. Ames!"

Domney did. Everybody in town knew the number one gossip of Lakeland. Ann Domney whispered. "Cecil says something about your grandfather. What is it about your grandfather?"

Domney let out a yell that jeopardized the sale of a dime book. While his customer stared, Domney waved his free arm and shouted. "No cat's going to tell me where to head in. Let me speak to him! No, hold him. I'm on my way home!"

Domney jammed the receiver back on the hook, reached for his hat and coat. He grabbed an armful of books, which he was forever "stealing" from stock, ushered the lady toward the door.

"Sorry, closing," he told her. "I've got to go home to talk to our cat!"

* * *

Cecil moved majestically back and forth in the dining-room. His tail indicated his emotion. And so it was with all cats. When a cat's tail is held straight out behind it he is concentrating on the hunt; when it is lashing from side to side he is angry; when it curls tightly against his body he is scared or worried. But when it is held high, it means success, contentment. Cecil's tail floated above his head like a proudly carried banner.

The side door banged open. Cecil leaped backward, his blue hair standing. Domney rushed into the room, saw Cecil and slid two feet across the floor on a throw rug.

Cecil recovered himself. "You seem to be in a hurry," he remarked.

Domney blinked. "Yes," he said, catching his breath. "I was—in a hurry."

"No doubt your haste is indicative of the news you have heard," Cecil suggested. "It is true. I am taking quarters with the lovely Mrs. Ames, who I notice takes two quarts of milk each morning. Certified. I am certain that she will feel remunerated by my presence."

Domney took a deep breath, said earnestly, "Let's talk this over, man to

man—I mean, cat to cat—er—I don't know what I mean. Say, we've got to have a showdown!"

Cecil watched his host with apparent amusement. "Please do not get yourself excited. It says in your genealogy in the bottom bookcase that your family is susceptible to fainting spells."

But Domney was thinking of Mrs. Ames again. He waved abstractedly toward her house. "You can't go over to that old battle-axe's!"

"I don't choose to barter. Still, if I remain, there is also the question of a book."

"What book?"

Cecil turned away. "The book to which I have reference is that of Phineas de Piedra. I am the avatar of Lest who was consort to Bastet, Egyptian cat goddess. My communication with earthly things is through the passages of Phineas de Piedra. Where the book goes, so go I. I am—" Cecil broke off with a very un-catlike oath.

OLIVER DOMNEY hadn't heard a word. He was anxiously helping his wife through the kitchen. She was loaded down with packages—antipastos, shrimp, imported sardines, two bottles of certified milk.

"Did you tell him?" Ann asked her husband. She saw Cecil then and amended. "Did you two have a nice talk? Oliver, you know, is going to bring home a case of red salmon, and we're to have delivered three bottles of certified milk. Three!" She shuffled the packages so Cecil would be sure to see them.

"Cecil is staying," said Domney quickly.

Ann laughed nervously. "We—hope you'll be very happy here, Cecil."

"Mohammed," said Cecil, speaking in parables again, "cut off a piece of his cloak rather than disturb his cat asleep on it. Cardinal Richelieu numbered among his friends, his cats."

"What about Napoleon?" demanded Domney.

Cecil shuddered. "Don't mention his name. He was an aileurophobe."

"That's what I'm getting to be," cried Domney, his temper simmering close to the top. "Yes, a cat-hater. Everybody in Lakeland thinks I'm crazy. My business is gone. I'm going broke."

Cecil looked hurt. "So it is riches you prefer rather than honor and a good name." He was thoughtful for a moment. Then he mused, "Your grandfather also preferred worldly goods."

"Never mind my grandfather!" shouted Domney. He looked into the horrified eyes of Ann. "Yes, that's it. My grandfather was hanged in England for stealing a horse. What of it? What of it, I say?" He swung around to Cecil. "Of course, it's money I want. It's the basis upon which we work, it's—" He stopped short, gasping. "Me," he cried wildly. "Me, arguing with a cat!"

Ann looked at Cecil. Her eyes were imploring. "Please don't mind Oliver; he's all wrought up. And please don't go over to that horrible Mrs. Ames."

Cecil jumped lightly upon a chair. "I will stay," he said with resignation. His eyes closed. "Perhaps it is better that I have my last days in comfort."

Domney came out of his stupor, blinked. He tried to keep the hope out of his voice. "You don't feel well? You mean, you're going to—to die?"

"I have but a few days of Brahma left."

"Oh, my," said Ann sympathetically. Domney tried to assume a look of deep concern. "A few days of Brahma, you say?"

Cecil opened one eye. "Please don't become alarmed."

Domney's eyes squinted with rising suspicion. "How long is a day of Brahma?" he demanded.

Cecil opened his other eye. "A day of Brahma," he recited, "is a hundred days of Maya; and each day of Maya is a thousand years."

Domney was staggered. "He has but a few days of Brahma left," he said weakly. "A few hundred thousand years!"

A warning shout, and Quincy and Sally came piling in through the back way. They were full of news. The

hotel company, which had been contemplating buying up part of Lakeland for a resort, had decided on East Lakeland, a mile from Domney's store. If this was true, the present town property would be almost worthless. The town would move eastward.

But Oliver Domney really groaned when he saw something that dwarfed the hotel company problem into insignificance. Outside at the curb, a cab was unloading its prim, spindly-looking passenger. Aunt Sarah.

Domney looked like a man whose number had come up on bank night when he wasn't there. With a smile on his face that looked like a caricature, he went to meet his sister.

WHEN the Domneys finished swarming over dear Aunt Sarah they bore her into the parlor. Then they froze into silence. Their rapid fire talk stopped as though cut off with a knife. Cecil was sitting at the head of the horse-hair couch washing his face with his paws. He looked solemnly at Aunt Sarah, at the couch, then at Mr. Domney. But he said nothing.

Aunt Sarah, a frail, voicy creature, was doing all the talking, anyway. She gave Cecil a superficial glance.

"Well," she said. "Well. So this is your cat that talks, is it? Personally, I hate cats." She smiled coldly at Cecil. "Go ahead—talk! Say something!"

The Domneys stared, aghast. But nothing happened. Cecil inspected one upraised paw, then closed his slanty eyes.

Aunt Sarah rambled on. "Ann, you and Oliver have a strange sense of humor. You had me really frightened when you wrote me that your cat could talk." She raised her eyebrows. "Oliver, such fantastic jokes are bad for the children."

"Yes, yes, Sarah." Domney took a deep breath, added lamely, "It was all in fun."

He sank more deeply into the horse-hair couch. It gave him a chance to change the subject. "Sarah, this couch is a dandy. We all like it, don't we children?"

Sally and Quincy nodded dutifully. Mrs. Domney turned fearful eyes upon Cecil. She said defiantly, "It is a beautiful couch."

Cecil merely stifled a yawn, placidly rubbed his paw across his face. Then he jumped lightly off the couch and moved out of the room.

Shagg's thin voice broke the silence. "I like to play on the couch, too. Mother, can we take it back to the cellar when Aunt Sarah goes home?"

A crash interrupted Aunt Sarah's quick query. Mr. Domney had fallen off the couch.

While her husband got frantically to his feet, Mrs. Domney tried to explain. "Oliver's nerves have been terrible. Shaggs—I mean, Chagrell—is always plaguing us about having that couch for his own. But of course it belongs right here." She gave Chagrell a slight push. "Better run along now and play. Sarah, you will stay for dinner, of course."

Aunt Sarah blinked. "Dinner? Why, I expect to be here for a month."

* * *

With Aunt Sarah's visit a measure of saneness came back to the Domney household. Before the week ended normalcy had returned. Cecil's presence was a constant threat, yet he hadn't spoken once, nor had the subject of the horse-hair couch been raised again.

Yet Aunt Sarah was suspicious of the family's asserted love of the couch. They overdid it; in the evenings they raced to be the first to enjoy it. They had mock fights over the privilege of sitting on it.

Cecil watched the antics of the Domneys with scorn and pity. He said nothing. His life seemed to flow along the normal channel of catty existence. He slept much in the daytime, fared forth at night to discuss, possibly, feline problems with the local members of his race.

Then, one afternoon Aunt Sarah got little Chagrell alone.

"Chagrell," she coaxed, and there was artifice in her words. "Tell Auntie why you like the couch so well."

"Because Mama and Daddy do."

Cecil, who was half-asleep on a footstool, opened one eye.

"And, why," persisted Aunt, "do Mama and Daddy like it so much?"

Cecil got hurriedly to his feet. For once he lost his dignity and galloped from the room. Shaggs' words followed him. "They like the couch because you are going to leave your money to Daddy."

AUNT SARAH was gone when Domney came home that evening. Domney was too full of bad news to notice her absence at once. The reports seemed to be true about the hotel company building in East Lakeland. The store and lot he planned to sell would no longer interest them.

Domney failed to see the stark look in Ann's eyes as he told her about it. "People are talking, too. They seem afraid to come into the store. I guess they really think we're mad."

"You're not *mad* now," promised Ann. "Wait till you hear about Aunt Sarah."

"What? What about Aunt Sarah?"

"Gone!" Ann waved her hand in a hopeless gesture. She told him what Shaggs had said.

Domney's spirits sank to a new low. "She could have helped us," he moaned. "I was counting on it. Ann, I haven't told you how badly we needed a loan from Sarah. With the children in high school and Shaggs coming along, we've had to keep up. That extra money didn't come from the business—it's money I've borrowed to keep us going. An out-of-town concern. Now everybody will hear about it!"

"Oh, Oliver," breathed his wife. Then her troubled eyes softened and she patted his shoulder.

"You might as well have the rest of it," said Domney, sinking to the couch. "Loan's overdue. Friday is the last day."

Ann Domney's frightened eyes lingered on his face. "Oliver, please don't worry. Something is bound to come up."

"Not a chance," said Domney. "I'll have to dance to their music!"

"Music?" said Cecil from the door-

way. "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter. . . ."

"Keats," groaned Domney, seeming not to notice that Cecil had begun to talk again.

"Shelley," Cecil corrected. He licked the crumbs of red salmon from his chops, looked humbly out of the window. "Perhaps it was Keats. . . ."

An hour later two visitors were shown into the parlor by Mrs. Domney. The man with the brief-case told her they must see her husband at once. Yes, it was very important. He was, he said, Mr. Hale, a lawyer. His companion was Mr. Curtis, a client.

Ann Domney gave a sharp look at Cecil, asleep on the couch, then went in search of her husband. As soon as she was out of sight the attorney opened his brief-case, while the other man began rubbing his thin fingers through Cecil's silky fur. The men conversed in a whisper.

Cecil sleepily opened one eye, then closed it again to continue his dream of a warehouse full of luscious *red* salmon. This was an exceptionally good dream. The warehouse was next door to a creamery where thousands of bottles of certified milk came down a runway to join the cans of *red* salmon.

"Domney will be a sucker for this offer," said Attorney Hale. "Remember now, as a private buyer, you're to offer him five thousand dollars for his building and lot. With Domney thinking the company wants to build in East Lakeland this offer will tickle him pink."

"*Red*," corrected Cecil, drowsily.

"Humph, what was that?" cried the attorney. He looked around, but there was no one else in the room. He laughed shortly, patted his companion on the shoulder. "Sure. He'll be *red* all right—*red* in the face!"

Curtis gave the lawyer a funny look. He shrugged. Whispering, he said, "If Domney knew we had the adjoining and surrounding property tied up he could hold out for thirty thousand and get it."

"Sure thing." Hale laughed again. "But that five thousand cash you have on you will do the trick."

WHEN Domney hurried into the room the attorney was apparently interested only in the books in the case. He looked up, shook hands with Domney.

"I'm Anthony Hale from Cedar Grove, and this is Mr. Curtis who is interested in acquiring a place in Lakeland."

Mr. Domney shook hands eagerly. He picked Cecil up off the couch and set him on the floor. With the toe of his shoe he edged him toward the door. Cecil slipped aside and retired haughtily to the footstool where he sat and watched with unblinking eyes. Mr. Domney saw a ray of hope in the men's visit.

"Then the resort people still are interested in my place?" he asked. "Is that it?"

"No," said Mr. Hale.

Cecil blinked. He turned and walked scornfully from the room.

"No," repeated the attorney. "But Mr. Curtis is one man who is glad that the resort people are confining their operations on the other side of town. He wants something quiet—like Lakeland will be. He's interested in your property."

Apparently to get his victim's mind off the resort company he moved back to the bookcase. "By the way, Domney, I see you have an unusual book here." He pointed to a large vellum book bound with straps. "I'm a bibliophile, and this book entrances me. Is it for sale?"

Domney straightened his glasses, took the book in his hand. "*Felis Domestica Vagari*, by Phineas de Piedra, the Mystic," he read. "I didn't really mean to bring this one home with me. I don't go in much for magic." He raised his eyebrows as he stared at the title. "Strange about this book. I just happened to buy it about a month ago in a lot from a traveling book scout. If you care for the book, it is yours."

Mr. Hale was genuinely delighted. "Why, thanks," he cried. He took the book and placed it on the table close to his brief-case so he wouldn't forget it.

Domney offered the men chairs.

"About this deal—" he began.

Mr. Curtis shared a glance with the attorney, then cleared his throat.

"There's nothing much to discuss. I've already looked over your property and the location as *is* is all right. I'm prepared to offer you what I can get other property for—five thousand dollars." He dug into his wallet for a slip of paper. Five one-thousand-dollar bills came into view.

Domney stared at the money. He tried to smile. "But that's less than I paid for the property twenty years ago. I couldn't think of such a deal."

Mr. Hale cut in. "Mr. Domney, don't think of Lakeland as of twenty years ago, nor of today. Think what it will be a year from now. Under the circumstances I think five thousand dollars is a fair price."

Domney steeled himself, began to argue the merits of the location. His arguments turned into a speech. As good a speech as he had ever given before the Rotary Club.

"And, gentlemen," he ended, "I have a great undying faith in our city. Our fathers, our grandfathers—"

He stopped in midair. Cecil had returned to the room and was watching him. Domney was startled by the look Cecil was giving him. It was something akin to admiration. Domney felt suddenly pleased with himself.

"Yes," he went on, fervently, "our grandfathers left us this heritage—to live in this unspoiled community. Why, in cities of far less qualifications, a lot such as mine would sell for—for twenty thousand dollars!"

"Please, please, Mr. Domney," interrupted Hale again. "We are getting a little off the subject." He looked at his client and nodded his head as if absently.

Mr. Curtis' eyes became a little hard. "I'll pay seventy-five hundred," he said. "And not a cent more!"

DOMNEY appeared not to believe his ears. He looked triumphantly toward Cecil. Then his heart dropped. Cecil looked displeased.

Not only was Cecil displeased, but he was moving past Domney toward the dining-room door. Domney's eyes dilated as he watched Cecil move past. Cecil was talking from the side of his mouth!

Domney looked helplessly at Mr. Curtis and Mr. Hale. "Just a minute," he mumbled. "I'll be right back." He hurried out of the room in Cecil's wake.

When he returned a few minutes later he saw that the attorney had the papers spread out on the desk ready to sign. A deed with the correct legal description was ready for Domney's signature. There was even a notary's seal half-way out of its leather case.

"Gentlemen," said Domney hurriedly. "I'm afraid there's been a mistake. But don't worry, I won't take advantage of you. I know now it isn't my house here you want to buy."

Mr. Hale looked startled. "No," he said, "no, of course not! We're dealing on your property down town. The store lot."

Domney faltered, looked toward Cecil in the doorway. Half-closing his eyes, he steeled himself. "That property is not for sale," he said faintly.

The men stared, apparently not believing their ears. Domney stared, too, seemingly equally shocked by his own words. Yet he held on. In twenty minutes the men had offered him ten thousand dollars; a half-hour later, with Domney dizzily holding out, the price was settled at thirty thousand dollars! And Mr. Curtis was counting out the five thousand cash to Domney to bind the deal.

What happened in the interval between the men's going and his own near collapse on the couch, Domney was never quite able to tell. It was enough that when his family joined him he had the deposit of five one-thousand-dollar bills in his hands.

He grinned into the faces around him. No council of war, this. A family con-

ference, with Oliver C. Domney thrilling to the proud looks of his family.

"Now the Mad Domneys can have everything they want," he cried. "First we'll move to the right side of Lakeland; a fur coat for you, Ann; a new suit for Shaggs; a prep school for Quincy and Sally. And a whole truck-load of red salmon for Cecil!" He looked around the room, startled. "Why, where is Cecil?"

"Cecil?" they queried.

"You bet, Cecil!" cried Domney. "He's the big boy around here from now on! It was Cecil who put this deal over. I would have taken Curtis' offer of seventy-five hundred, but Cecil told me to hold out. He heard the men say they'd pay thirty thousand dollars. I held out!"

There was a mad scramble to find Cecil. But Cecil seemed to have vanished into thin air. He was nowhere to be found. All that was left was his memorial, a memorial which would stand for many a day in the Domney backyard. A monument of tin and paper labels—empty salmon cans.

NEAR down the street, Cecil stopped for a last look at the Domney residence. His tail was floating above his head, and there was a satisfied, pleased look on his face. He mumbled something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like a quotation. Then, as if impelled by some supernatural force, he set out to overtake Mr. Hale.

Mr. Anthony Hale, hurrying along the sidewalk with the equally silent Mr. Curtis, stole a look at the vellum-bound book Domney had given him. Cecil was following close enough now to see the gilt title letters glittering in the light of the fading day. He couldn't make out the letters, but he didn't have to; he knew that title by heart.

It read: "*Felis Domestica Vagari*, The Wandering Cat, by Phineas de Piedra, the Mystic." And it was taking him off voice now. "Where are you?"

Thrills in SCIENCE

Thumbnail Sketches of Great Men and Achievements

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

Destruction of the Phlogiston Theory

I. THE GAS TRAP

ROBERT BOYLE, the hard-headed, hard-thinking scientist, freed chemistry from many of the out-worn theories of Principles and Elements handed down from the ancients. But one of these elements did not die so easily, because too little was known about it. This was the miracle of fire. Just why did things burn? What happened to them when they were reduced to ash or clinkers? Would man eventually burn up and destroy the world by fire?

In the early part of the Eighteenth Century a scientist by the name of Georg Ernst

the oxygen in the air which combined with the base, not something from the base that entered the air. In fact, nobody knew what air was or how it acted on animate bodies. But three men came along in the same generation, two Englishmen and one Frenchman, who were destined to slay this last dragon of the ancient theories.

The first man to strike a mortal blow was, oddly enough, a man who believed in the phlogiston theory. This was Joseph Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen.

Joseph was born into a family of English weavers in 1733. He was the eldest child of a brood of six. When his mother died the family was broken up, and Joseph went to live with his father's sister, who saw that he got a good education—for the ministry. But Mrs. Sarah Keighley was a broadminded woman and she held open house for all sorts of religious discussions whether they agreed with her philosophy or not.

Thus Joseph Priestley learned to have an open mind. He graduated from an obscure little college called Daventry Academy where freedom and frankness of thought were encouraged. But he couldn't come to grips with religious philosophy and get a satisfactory answer, so he turned to the study of science on the side. He didn't get very far until he met Benjamin Franklin at London in 1766.

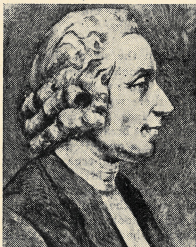
It was probably this contact with the great American which influenced Priestley to migrate to the United States in his old age.

But it is in his first important discovery that we are now interested. He began his chemical research while a minister at Leeds in rather impoverished circumstances.

He knew little about chemical research, and he had no money with which to buy expensive apparatus. Instead of a handicap, this proved a big advantage, for it made him apply his open mind and common sense to his problems.

It all began that night he and a couple of friends were discussing Jake's and Nell's brewery in the building next door. The fermenting beer gave off a mephitic air of some kind which would not support combustion.

"It's phlogisticated air, of course," said one of his companions. "It has taken up as much phlogiston as it can hold and so can't support further combustion."



JOSEPH PRIESTLEY

Stahl brought fire back to scientific life under the new name of "phlogiston." The phlogiston theory was perilously close to a reversion to alchemy, and it lasted for nearly one hundred years.

Briefly the phlogiston theory was this: "Substances which will burn are made of phlogiston," Stahl said. "This is the principle of fire, combined with a base. When matter burns the phlogiston leaves it and combines with the air. When the air takes up all the phlogiston it will hold, the fire goes out—unless more fresh air is admitted."

Stahl said much more—enough to last nearly a hundred years—but he never did get around to figuring out that his phlogiston was

"It doesn't spoil the beer though," added the second man.

Priestley had already embraced the phlogiston theory, and doubtless many a stein of the beer, but he was struck with the possibilities of air in this special air given off by the fermenting process. Nobody had done much in the way of investigation. But how to grab a handful of air and pin it down? That was the problem.

"John would think of that angle," said the first man to Priestley. "He's a regular trough for beer."

Trough! The choice of words suddenly struck Priestley right between the eyes. That was it—make a water trap for the "mephitic" air.

After his friends left, Priestley fell to considering the problem. And he hit upon a simple contrivance so workable that it is amazing no one of his predecessors had thought of it. He used an earthenware wash-tub in which he fitted a shelf with holes in it. A number of glass jars and some tubing made up his equipment.

He filled the tub with water to a level above the shelf, filled his bottles with water and fitted them with the necks down over the holes in the shelf and then ran his tubing from the covered brewing vat through the water and into the mouths of his bottles and jars. Simple, wasn't it? And, aside from the quality of subsequent equipment, there has been no practical improvement on Priestley's pneumatic trough in the years since.

They trapped the brewery vat gas which bubbled up into his bottles to push the water down and out into the tub. Thus, Priestley gained the first pure samples of carbon dioxide known to science.

Now he set to work to learn its properties. But the main thing is that he invented an apparatus—the principle of which is today familiar to every high school chemistry student—by which men could capture gases and study them.

From this first experiment Joseph Priestley discovered the action of carbon dioxide on water and became thus the father of soda water. For some odd reason he thought the drinking of this synthetic vichy would cure scurvy, and he sold the British Admiralty on the idea to the extent that his apparatus was installed on two British battleships for the manufacture of "soda water."

Thus, when Englishmen turn up their noses at the idea of soda fountains on American battleships, we can truthfully point out that the first pair were installed by the British Navy itself.

For his invention and his discovery of soda water Joseph Priestley won great recognition from the Royal Society and also the Copley Medal, the highest honor within the Society's power to bestow. And all the while, because he wanted so hard to believe in it, he had no idea that they had dealt the phlogiston theory a mortal blow by supplying the pneumatic trough, an instrument with which to work on the problem.

II. THE HUMAN ROBOT

IT IS pretty hard to conceive of a man so cold and emotionless that he is like a machine. Nevertheless, one such man did live. His name was Henry Cavendish, and he was actually a human calculating machine. He was born in 1731 at Nice, where his mother had gone for her health.

For a man so important to the scientific world Henry Cavendish has left practically nothing behind him of his personal life for us to estimate the man himself by.

He went to school at Hackney, and left no mark behind him. He studied at Cambridge for four years and quit without a degree. He never married. He made no attempt to get his notes or scientific papers published because he wasn't interested in fame or renown. In fact, Henry Cavendish was a great deal like the farmer's mule; he simply did not care.

Only occasionally did he attend the Royal Society meetings, because he preferred to stay at home and work with his instruments and meters and gauges. Whenever he gave a dinner himself, which was not often and never for more than three guests save on one known occasion, he always ordered his butler to serve a leg of mutton.

On this one special occasion he forgot himself so far as to invite four scientific guests. His butler, upon being informed, asked:

"And what shall I serve, sir?"

"A leg of mutton, of course," snorted Cavendish.

"But that will not be enough for five per-

sons, sir."

"Serve two legs," ordered the master.

Whenever Cavendish went riding, he had a meter called a way-wiser which he set for the distance he wanted to ride. This apparatus counted the revolutions of a rear wheel somewhat like a spoke meter. When it had measured exactly half the distance, Caven-



HENRY CAVENDISH

dish would order his coachman to turn around and return home over the same route traveled. The day's recreation was over.

He knew to the week how long a suit of clothes could be expected to wear and he

replaced them meticulously. The cloth and pattern never varied. When he died at the age of seventy-nine his clothes, though new and of good somber material, were forty years out of style.

He rose and bathed and shaved and worked and went to bed by a schedule that would have been the envy of a railroad time-table. He performed every experiment from fifty to one hundred times before striking a mean average. Yes, indeed, Henry Cavendish was nothing more or less than a human robot.

He was a wealthy aristocrat who cared for nothing but his ceaseless measuring and calculating. Wanting for nothing, he wanted nothing. And he weighed everything he could get at, from hydrogen gas to the mass of the earth.

It is impossible to present a chronological account of this man's discoveries. Many of his papers were not even discovered until after his death, and many more were not even written down, remaining merely masses of figures in his notebooks.

When he had got the answer to a problem he simply dropped the matter and turned to something else. Many a discovery of importance lay untouched and unreported in his files while other scientists worked earnestly away at the same problem.

The greatest single achievement of Cavendish was, of course, his discovery of the compound nature of water. This came as a sort of by-product to his hydrogen experiments. At the suggestion of Priestley he decided to explode a mixture of this "inflammable air" and regular or "dephlogisticated air" in a closed vessel so he could capture exactly what remained.

Cavendish neither believed nor disbelieved the phlogiston theory; he merely used its terminology because it was handy.

He exploded various mixtures of the gases with his passion for exact weighing and measuring. Priestley had thought that a combination of the two in the correct proportion should give ordinary air with its normal amount of phlogiston.

But Cavendish never got a surplus of one or the other. And when he used two parts of hydrogen to one of oxygen, the water

over which his vessel stood always rose to fill the space where the gases had been. There was no such stuff as the mythical phlogiston.

This baffled Cavendish for a while until he remembered that Priestley had demonstrated to James Watt several years before Stahl's famous experiment of using inflammable air (hydrogen) to reduce lead oxide, and that Watt had noticed a small amount of water in the vessel. Nobody had attached much importance to this oddity. Perhaps the hydrogen had been imperfectly dried. Besides, they were working over a water trap, and moisture could have got into the gas chamber.

So the methodical Cavendish decided to eliminate the water. He used mercury as the liquid gas trap and exploded his gases in a closed container above this fluid metal. And he found that a quantity of water was formed whose weight was exactly the combined weight of the two gases. Which proved that water, instead of being the typical simple element all earlier chemists had thought, was a compound of two gases with a definite formula which we now write as H_2O .

Instead of being highly elated at his astounding discovery Cavendish, having solved this particular problem, entered it in his notes and went on about other experiments.

Henry Cavendish was no theorist. He didn't care a fig whose theory was correct or even who had a theory. All he knew was that he combined carefully measured amounts of gases together, hydrogen and oxygen, and exploded them in a sealed chamber. What he wanted was the same weight as a residue in some form or other or a concrete reason why not. He got his answer—in water—and he entered the results in his notebook and moved on to other matters.

It was not for nearly twenty years that the full weight (no pun intended) of his discovery became known to him. It remained for a Frenchman to add what Priestley and Cavendish had learned about hydrogen and oxygen to what he himself knew and deal the coup de grace to the lingering phlogiston theory.

III. THE COUP DE GRACE

BORN to wealth and in the same class as Henry Cavendish, it can truthfully be said that Antoine Laurent Lavoisier was the exact opposite of the machinelike Englishman. The great Frenchman was perhaps the first scientist to apply the theory of mass production to his profession.

He firmly believed that the subject and field were far too vast to be canvassed by one mind. So he set up a central laboratory and invited all scientists and thinkers to visit him, to use his laboratory, to bring their problems to let his staff of workers delve into them.

He gave dinners which became the talk of Europe. He entered actively into politics and advanced theories on farming, on the rights of man, on science in general. During his very active career he prepared more than

two hundred papers and reports on all manners of subjects for the French Academy of Sciences. And he died under the guillotine because "France had no use for learned men."

Lavoisier was born in Paris in 1743. His family had risen step by step during the past hundred years to the top of the legal profession. Even Antoine attended a law school, took his degree and got a license to practice. But his heart was not in the musty tomes of law.

Before this he had studied at the College Mazarin which was noted for its scientific faculty. Thus, when Rouelle, the chemist, gave a series of chemical lectures at the Jardin du Roi young Lavoisier was completely captivated. He was fired by Rouelle to renew his researches into science.

He started out to study the weather, set-

ting up an elaborate system of barometers and recording their readings several times a day. His relatives assisted him, his father buying all the instruments he wanted and even arranging for correspondents in various provincial cities.

Nothing came of this adventure in meteorology because Lavoisier passed on to the study of geology. The abundance of gypsum around Paris—which gave the stuff its commercial name, plaster of paris—led Lavoisier directly to chemical analysis. For he wanted to find out what made burnt gypsum set with water into the hard plaster so useful to man in commerce and the arts. He was about the first chemist to apply an entirely quantitative method.

At the very outset he realized the importance of weight in chemical experiments, and this fact was responsible for his future great discoveries. And by 1770, Lavoisier had a good idea of what his life work would be. Nothing he discovered was reconcilable with the phlogiston theory. So he was determined to destroy such a fallacious and untenable premise.

His doubts about the theory were caused by the fact that metals and other substances upon combustion in air always gained weight instead of losing it when giving up phlogiston to the air. To the adherents of the theory this was all right because phlogiston, they believed, weighed less than nothing. Thus, a substance which gave it off would gain weight by the process.

To Lavoisier this did not make sense. Nowhere else in Nature had he found an example of negative weight, and his quantitative work had shown him that no matter what transformations he put matter through, the total ingredients remained exactly as heavy as before.

This, then, was no problem which could be solved offhand. He would have to build a solid and tenable theory from the very bottom, repeating all the famous experiments of the past, checking everything carefully, and rejecting all summations and theories of past or present which did not fit the facts.

Right here was the difference between the three men who may be said to have fathered the chemical revolution and founded the modern approach to chemical knowledge. Priestley never planned his work carefully and had no idea of overthrowing the phlogiston theory.

Cavendish considered science only as an absorbing sport, a lifetime puzzle to be weighed and checked and worked out for the sheer pleasure of finding the correct answer. Lavoisier, on the other hand, mapped out a definite campaign.

He knew what he wanted—a tenable, workable theory into which every new fact discovered would fit into its proper place. Phlogiston did not supply this theory. Ergo, he would work out one of his own.

There would be no half-baked theories based on shaky facts, no blind groping after a vague discovery and then trying to make the new discovery fit into a preconceived theory. Nature didn't produce senselessly and without law and order. Neither would he.

The foundation stone of his new creed was the doctrine of the conservation of matter.

This, he knew, could not be proved by positive methods. The best he could do was to demonstrate how it applied to each specific case. So he began with that old claim of the phlogistians that boiling away water turned it into earth. This statement did not jibe with what Lavoisier had learned in his quantitative work.

But no accurate measurements had ever been made before. Lavoisier remedied that. He proceeded to boil distilled water for a hundred and one days in a tared glass vessel. Then he weighed the residue and scale left by the evaporated *distilled* water and weighed the glass vessel. He found the sediment cor-



ANTOINE LAURENT LAVOISIER

responded exactly with the loss of weight from the glass vessel in the process, and not from transmutation of water into earth. The water had completely passed off in the form of steam and water vapor.

Thus, he knocked in the head the pet statement of the phlogiston and transmutation chemists. From this beginning Lavoisier went on to burn sulphur and phosphorus, collecting their combustion products and proving that in each case they weighed more than the unburned substance.

They had definitely taken something out of the air to combine with. We know now, of course, that this was oxygen to form oxides, but prior to Lavoisier nobody knew this. And Lavoisier had not yet got around to measuring and weighing the air he used. He wasn't working with gases.

This was the contribution of Priestley and Cavendish, and yet to be applied to and reconciled with Lavoisier's slowly formulating theory.

The phlogistians argued that no matter how much metal you used, you couldn't make it absorb more than a fifth of a given quantity of air. Wasn't it more rational to say that the air remained free and combined with something from the metal, losing part of its volume in the process?

This, of course, was before Priestley proved that that one-fifth something in nor-

mal air was oxygen. So Lavoisier was not ready to answer this objection.

Then, at one of his dinners in 1774 he met Joseph Priestley and heard first hand the Englishman's account of his discovery of oxygen. Although Priestley, faithful to the phlogiston theory, called his gas mere dephlogisticated air, Lavoisier knew better. This information was exactly what he needed to go ahead.

So Lavoisier built pneumatic troughs and tackled the gas angle of his problem in conjunction with his metals and compounds. It only required a little careful laboratory work for Lavoisier to prove that his metal took from the air that active gas responsible for combustion—oxygen—leaving the inert eighty percent balance we now call nitrogen.

He duplicated Priestley's experiments with red oxide of mercury and got the concentrated gas which made a candle burn with white brilliance. But where Priestley had been content to let the matter rest, Lavoisier was not. He knew that the English scientist had made a marvelous discovery of a new gas.

With this difficulty cleared up, Lavoisier pounced upon the next stronghold of phlogiston—the theory of the regeneration of a metal from its calx by a mere heating with charcoal. It was already known that charcoal burned in air gave off a gas which clouded lime water.

Lavoisier reasoned that if he could find such a gas in a closed vessel after heating a calx with charcoal this would prove that the charcoal just took from the calx the active air (oxygen) which the metal of the calx had previously extracted from the atmosphere.

This proved to be the case, and the positive existence of oxygen was established. And although Lavoisier was not given to rash speculations, he was so enthusiastic in this case that he got a little ahead of himself and generalized to the extent that Priestley's new gas must be the "acid principle" because so many products of combustion could be dissolved in water to form acids. Thus, he called the newly discovered gas "oxygen" or acid former, and the name stuck.

But Lavoisier paid for his rashness by missing one of the greatest discoveries of the age—the synthesis of water. He didn't carry his experiments out far enough. He, too, was misled by the water vapor of his water trap. He burned some of the inflammable air (hydrogen) in oxygen in the hopes of finding an acid such as those formed by burning sulphur or phosphorus, and he overlooked the meager amount of moisture which was formed and which was concealed because of the water trap.

And thus matters stood, the cycle incomplete, until Lavoisier heard of Cavendish's experiments with a mercury bath instead of water. This news came through the Royal Society of London, which august body had probably blasted the information out of Cavendish by accident. Instantly Lavoisier rushed to confer with the human measuring machine.

He got scant courtesy, but he got his information. And Lavoisier returned to Paris to complete the arrangement of his theory on the conservation of matter. Every detail now fell into place, each iota of weight was accounted for, everything tallied and balanced, and the phlogiston theory had received its death blow. And Lavoisier propounded his law of the conservation of mass.

Metals grew heavier when they were burned, forming oxides by taking Priestley's gas, oxygen, from the air. The amount of weight they gained was exactly equal to the amount of weight the air lost. The air consisted of two gases, oxygen and nitrogen. Oxygen combined with metals and other combustible substances to form oxides. When it combined with hydrogen it formed oxide of hydrogen, otherwise water, leaving the metal behind and restored to its former state. That was absolutely all.

Nothing was gained and nothing was lost by weight when all ingredients were taken into consideration. There was no such mystical substance as magical phlogiston, and matter was indestructible regardless of what changes it could possibly be put through.

The field for modern chemistry had been cleared of its last bit of debris and was now wide open for the invasion of active minds which could start from known facts and drive forward to many remarkable conquests.

Lavoisier, however, was not so fortunate. Due to his political activities, his scientific attainments were discounted. The scientist was overshadowed in the minds of the bloody revolutionists by the politician, and he was finally imprisoned and then beheaded on the sixth of May, 1794. The terrible and bloody Coffinhalts had presided at the tribunal and he had said:

"The Republic has no need for learned men. Let Justice take its course."

Thus, France executed its most distinguished scientist and one of the greatest benefactors of modern civilization.

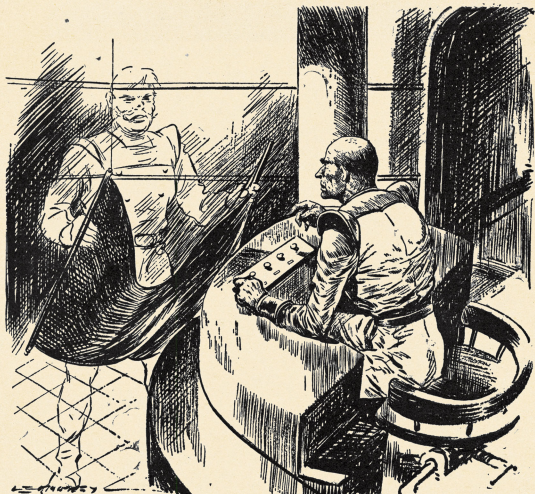
"It took but a moment to cut off his head," said Lagrange, one of the witnesses, next day, "but another like it won't be produced in a hundred years."

Time has proved *Monsieur* Lagrange correct.

More **THRILLS IN SCIENCE** Next Issue

FEATURING

THE INVENTION OF THE JET PLANE



Enko Ensros saw a huge chart seem to remove itself from the wall

THE INVISIBLE VANDALS

By CHARLES STODDARD

*A Clever Scheme for a Cruel Revenge Goes Haywire
When Fate Plays an Ironic Trick on a Martian Pirate!*

THE harsh voice of Enko Ensros rose like that of a Martian tiglian as it went rolling through the tiny laboratory. "Barker! Where in Pluto are you?"

For a moment there was no reply. Through the diatex walls Enko could see the space craft outside, coming in from their looting excursions laden with stolen treasures of the spaceways. They raced in boldly, braking with a tre-

mendous rocket flare. Here on the Rock there was no danger of being trailed by Planet Patrol craft.

Ensros' eyes glittered. His luck had been bad of late, but there was still plenty of loot to be gathered. Now he was lusting for action. His eagerness to be off made Barker's delay in answering seem intolerable.

"Barker!" There was a snarl in his voice now. "Where are you?"

Unexpectedly, he heard footsteps beside him, and a faint chuckle. "Here, Ensros. Don't lose your temper."

The slim bald Martian pirate whirled around, but saw no one. A frown creased his purplish blue face.

"None of your tricks with micro-phones, Barker. Are you in this room or not? I want to talk to you."

"I'm right beside you," answered Barker's voice. Now a bottle of Ringler's acid rose slowly in the air and hovered there a moment. Dr. Erasmus Barker flicked off a tiny speck of dust from near the lip, then the bottle was set down again. "I happen to be invisible."

Enko's purplish eyes bugged almost out of his head, his lips parted stupidly. The pirate ships outside were spewing forth their crews of wealth-laden, battle-scarred buccaneers. Ensros had forgotten them completely. "You mean you—"

"Yes, my friend." There was no mistaking the gloating tones in Barker's voice. "I'm invisible." The voice suddenly became as rasping as a magsteel file. "I'm beyond the law now, and so will you be soon. Are you still sorry you helped finance my experiments?"

Ensros did not answer. Through his mind were passing swift and terrible visions, strange contradictory visions of invisible men. Neither the Planet Patrol nor the hapless victims could see him and his cutthroat crew, but in his mind's eye they were clear enough. He saw himself shooting and stabbing without fear of reprisal. He saw himself picking up rare Neptunian jewels, precious asteroid minerals, invaluable products of the skilled hands of Saturnian pigmies. Master of every planet on which he trod, he came and went as he pleased, with a freedom such as no one else in the System possessed!

BARKER had not waited for an answer. He was talking almost to himself now. "A slight treatment with the proper porphyrin sulfonic acid, and I can make myself, my clothes, and my weapons completely transparent, with

a refractive index no greater than that of ordinary air. Of course, the proper electromagnetic vibrations are also necessary, but there's no need to go into details. The point is that I've succeeded."

Slowly Ensros came to himself. "Never mind the bragging. We're going to put your discovery to good use."

"Yes, to excellent use. Remember what I told them at the time they kicked me out of the Great Mars laboratory? I predicted they'd be sorry. I said—"

Impatiently, Enko Ensros cut short the scientist's expressions of triumph. "To Pluto with what you said. What I'm trying to think of is, what place do we hit first?"

"That's what I'm attempting to tell you," Barker chuckled. "Here we are on the Rock, a comfortable little planet which my astronomer colleagues on Mars have decided doesn't even exist, simply because they couldn't locate it with their telescopes. We can return here after our little forays into the great world and disappear from sight. Strictly speaking however, *disappear* won't be the right word. If we make proper use of my invention, we won't ever *appear*."

Ensros' gleaming teeth gritted against each other as a feeling of rage swept over him. When was this space-blasted idiot going to come to the point?

Dr. Erasmus Barker arrived there almost at once. "We can't aim for anything like the Interplanetary Mint," he pointed out. "That's defended by an automatic system which would work whether we were invisible or not. You have to remember also that the guards will have big guns, whereas we'll have nothing but sidearms and small atom-cannon."

"Never mind the guns," growled Enko Ensros. "It would take plenty of luck to hit us. What I want to know—"

A huge chart of the planetary system seemed to remove itself from a wall of the laboratory and spread out on a bench. "Ever hear of Playground Planet?"

For a moment, Ensros was so startled he forgot his irritation. "That? Isn't it

what they call—”

“Sick Man’s Planet,” answered the voice of the invisible professor. “Exactly. It’s used as a sort of sanitarium, especially for those permanently disabled. The place is crowded with helpless invalids, and guarded by only a small police force.”

“But what,” demanded Ensros, “have they got that we want?”

“Food, weapons, money. People are sent there to begin their lives anew. To encourage their feeling of independence, they are allowed to bring their personal fortunes with them, to go into business for themselves. Can you imagine, Ensros, what it will be like to rob about a million helpless people, rendered more helpless than usual by the fact that they can’t see you?” Barker’s voice trailed off in a chuckle of delight.

The old pirate nodded. He could imagine, all this and more. A look of satisfaction spread across his face. The cold brutality of the scheme meant nothing to him. It was his business to be brutal. If these people had what he wanted, to Pluto with them.

ENKO ENSROS rose, gleefully rubbing his hands together.

“Get your chemicals ready, Barker. I want to get started as soon as possible.”

“I’m ready now.”

“Good.” The old pirate turned away, muttered to himself, then turned back. “I was forgetting. There was something else I wanted to talk to you about. Let me see—oh, yes, the telerad.”

There was indifference in Barker’s voice. “What of it?”

“The blasted thing went out of order. I think it needs a new grid, or something of the kind. And you know how impossible it is for us to get new parts.”

“Not interested.”

Enko Ensros pretended patience. “Look, Barker, the telerad’s important for keeping up the morale of the men. They get comedy, music and all kinds of vision play programs. They can keep up with the news. Now you’re a scientist. If you could just put in a few minutes on the thing.”

“Enko, you’re a fool. I’ve got more important things to do than help amuse a group of idiots. I’m not going to waste my time trying to fix a grid. Once we strike at Playground Planet, you’ll be able to pick up as many telerad sets as you please. Wait till then.”

“You don’t really understand, Barker.”

The scientist’s voice was suddenly fierce with a rage which had been too long repressed, a rage which now threatened to burst all reasonable bounds. “It’s you who don’t understand, Ensros. Do you think I’ve spent all these months on this rocky God-forsaken place simply in the hope of making money? By Sol, you ought to know me better by now!”

“You’re not after money? What then?”

“Revenge, you fool. When I was at Great Mars Laboratory, there was a man by the name of John Linton who took great interest in prying into my affairs. Personally, I felt that if I wanted to carry on experiments of a kind commonly frowned upon, it was no one’s business but my own. Linton felt otherwise.”

A light dawned in the slender pirate’s eyes. “So *he* was the one who got you kicked out. I never heard you mention him before!”

“No. I kept it to myself, locked away in the recesses of my own mind. And now, when the moment of his doom is approaching, when I’m counting every second until I see his fearstricken face, until I watch him cringe before me and beg for his life, you expect me to start delaying. You want me to putter around for the sake of a lot of blasted fools who can’t even twiddle their thumbs without something to look at!”

Ensros thoughtfully stroked his smooth chin. “This Linton lives on Playground Planet?”

“Dr. John Linton is in charge of the invalid colony.” There was incredible cruelty in Barker’s voice. “You realize now how I’m looking forward to seeing him again. Too bad he won’t be able to see *me*.”

On Playground Planet, John Linton

patted a small head, said cheerily, "Feeling better now?" then moved on without waiting for an answer. The sight of the little wan face was almost more than he could bear. Krover's disease was bad enough when it struck at adults, but when it hit children, it was even more heartrending.

"They're coming along wonderfully, Dr. Linton," said a nurse. "Thanks to you."

He smiled without amusement. "Thanks to me? What makes you think I'm doing anything for them?"

"Well, Doctor, you've stopped the progress of the disease, and saved their lives."

"That isn't enough. Can I give them back what they've lost? Can I make them capable of going back into the great world again, or can I restore their confidence in themselves?"

The nurse's eyes dropped. "Not completely, of course. That's one of the most unfortunate effects of the disease, the way it undermines their courage and belief in themselves, almost as if it struck at the brain directly. But you've done more than any one else could. Why, over at the discharged patients' colony, they worship you."

"I don't see why. They leave the hospital rated cured. Put them up against a normal person, however, and you realize what they've lost. If there were only some way of making them feel useful again, of making them realize they're more than paying their own way through life." He shrugged. "But I don't see how."

SOMEWHERE a visiphone was ringing. Linton was aware of the horrified voice of the switchboard girl, then of a shriek that seemed to penetrate the entire hospital. He cursed savagely under his breath. That girl should have been aware by now of the effect of sudden noises on the patients. He strode rapidly in her direction. Either she'd learn to control herself under all circumstances or she wouldn't be needed here.

He didn't have to get to the switch-

board to find her. She came running toward him. "Dr. Linton!"

"Quiet, you little fool. You're in a hospital. Remember?"

Her voice dropped to a terror-stricken whisper. "A guard just phoned in. He's the only one left alive, and he doesn't know how he escaped. He thinks they deliberately let him, so that he might phone."

"Who let him?"

"Pirates, Dr. Linton. They attacked suddenly, and—"

"Just a minute," he interrupted coldly, trying by the calmness of his own manner to bring her back to normal. "We haven't many guards, I'll admit, but there are certainly enough of them to handle any pirate crew attempting a landing. Are you quite sure the guard really said they were pirates?"

"He didn't see them, sir." She seemed to swallow hard. "They must have drifted down by parachute. They were invisible."

"Invisible?" Linton stared at her unbelievably. "The guard must have gone crazy."

"That's what I thought, sir. I started to tell him that, but he didn't answer, and for a moment I thought maybe it was just a practical joke. Maybe he had been caught by a superior officer while phoning. Then another voice cut in. He said he had a message for you."

"Yes?"

The girl looked at him fearfully. "He laughed first, so I thought it was supposed to be another joke. But the minute I heard his voice, I knew it wasn't. The mere sound of it made my blood run cold."

"We can warm your blood again with infra-rays easily enough."

"Yes, sir. But I've got to tell you what he said. He told me his name was Barker, Dr. Erasmus Barker."

"Barker!" The name exploded from John Linton's pale lips.

"That's it, Doctor. He said he had an appointment with you, and not to forget."

Linton was silent. His mind went

back to the time when Barker had faced the University Council, sneering, defiant, vengeful. The man's experiments had been horrible. He had deserved more than that which had happened to him. Linton recalled now the purpose of those long-forgotten experiments. Something having to do with the refractive index of transparent living tissues. Lower the refractive index to that of air, increase the permeability of the tissues to light and invisibility would result.

So Barker had at last succeeded in attaining the goal of invisibility. Now he was back, seeking revenge.

The nurse's voice was uneasy, frightened. "There may not be much truth in the story, Doctor, but all the same—"

"Oh, it's true, I'm fairly sure of that. I'm going over to the discharged patients' colony."

"But if this madman is looking for you, it won't be safe!"

"He'll find me wherever I go." Linton's voice was casual. "Besides, the patients are expecting me. I can't disappoint them."

He turned abruptly, and left her.

DURING the next hour, there were further reports of the progress of the invisible invaders. Then suddenly, without warning, Linton knew they had found him.

"How do you do, John?"

It was Barker. Despite the passage of years, the mocking voice was unmistakable. It was like him, too, to make his entry abrupt and at the same time casual. A credulous victim might, in this way, be lulled into a false sense of security. He might even doubt that his intentions were as cruel and murderous as Linton knew they must be.

"You've taken a great deal of trouble for me, Barker."

"But it will be worth it, John. Ah, I'm glad to find you here, so peaceful among your patients, doing good as usual."

The patients were listening curiously to this conversation between the visible man and the invisible. Linton stole a glance at them, and a glimmer of hope

flickered in his mind. He had warned them of what would happen, and he was pleased to see how well they were taking what would be a shock to any normal man.

He answered Barker simply, paying no attention to the man's sneering tones. "Yes, I think I've helped them. But, naturally, you're not interested in that. All that you want to do is kill me."

The invisible Barker sighed. "You're taking it a bit too calmly, John. I was hoping you'd cringe a bit, show fear."

Suddenly, the blast from an atom-pistol seared Linton's face. By an effort of will he forced himself to pretend a lack of concern he certainly did not feel. Barker was moving around now, and Linton faced in the direction from which his footsteps seemed to come.

"This cat-and-mouse game won't get you anywhere, Barker."

"It's fun, though." Linton could imagine Barker's lips drawn back in a savage snarl. "It's the thing I've been looking forward to for years. Isn't it, Ensros?"

"Kill him now and get it over with," growled a deep voice impatiently. "We've got a job to do."

"All in good time, my dear colleague."

Linton had turned toward where the pirate had seemed to stand. Now he turned back toward Barker again. With an abruptness that Barker could not have anticipated, he lunged savagely at the invisible figure.

He could hear Barker's mocking laugh as the invisible scientist avoided him. "Not so calm as you seemed, eh, John? I thought you wouldn't be really pleased at the prospect of dying."

Linton lunged again, and again he missed. He came to a stop, panting for breath.

"It's no use, John. Your ears don't locate my position well enough. Your motions aren't sufficiently well coordinated. But you're beginning to put up a struggle, and that pleases me. Including myself and Ensros, there are twenty-five of us altogether. Just enough for a little game of tag I'd like to play."

"Twenty-five?" repeated Linton blank-

ly. "There can't be. I haven't heard enough noise for that many people."

"But there are, I assure you. Exactly twenty-five. Now, what I propose is this."

What playful form his cruelty would have taken next John Linton never knew.

Unexpectedly, he yelled, "There are only twenty-five of them. Get them! Don't be afraid."

The expected atom-blast barely missed him as he flung himself flat on the ground.

The next moment, the once peaceful colony was a madhouse filled with writhing, snarling forms, locked in grim, violent struggle.

Two of the patients had leaped forward to seize the invisible form of Barker as he triggered his atom-pistol. Others had closed in upon Ensros and the other pirates. Barker, taken by surprise, was yelling insanely. Ensros was cursing with the rich experience of twenty years filled with violence on the spaceways to lend variety to his language.

LINTON picked himself off the ground and again hurled his body into the fray. The atom-pistol blasted once more, then twisted desperately in the air. Linton could follow what was happening by the movements of the arms that fought Barker's maniacal attempts to turn the weapon upon himself. He brought his arm down fiercely, and there was one more blast before the invisible gun clattered to the ground!

Barker relaxed suddenly in the grip of the strong arms that held him. A patient had brought a heavy metal bar down vigorously on the head of Enko Ensros while several more of his comrades gripped the pirate from behind. Ensros sighed gustily, and gave up the now vain struggle.

The last desperate pirates, overwhelmed by superior numbers, who seemed to come from everywhere, were sullenly surrendering. Linton said a few brief words, and some of the patients went for plastijackets, within

which their prisoners would be completely helpless.

"You scoundrels will have to turn visible sooner or later," Linton told the captives grimly. "The effects of whatever drug you've used can't help wearing off as you dilute it with food and drink. And then, I suppose you know what you face. Trial for piracy and murder, then finally annihilation."

Ensros had revived and was cursing again.

"Blast you, Linton, I still don't see how you caught us."

"It was simple enough. The moment I heard that Barker was here, invisible, I made my plans. The one thing I wanted to be sure about was how many companions he had. When he told me that, I gave the signal for the attack."

"That doesn't explain a thing."

Linton seemed puzzled. "I thought you knew by now that the patients who did the job were victims of Krover's disease. Luckily for me, they'd undergone the usual retraining course. And in a way it's fortunate that you showed up. You've given them back their confidence in themselves. They don't consider normal people superior to them any more."

Ensros laughed harshly. "Hear that, Barker? What's it about?"

Barker's voice came dully. "I don't know, Ensros. I've never heard of Krover's disease."

"The news has been on the telerad for weeks."

"The telerad!" The voice of Enko Ensros was filled with fury. "Ours has been out of order. Barker couldn't find time to fix it."

Linton stared. "So that's why you attacked this planet! I was wondering why you were such fools. Barker perfected a process for producing invisibility. Then you invaded the one place where it didn't make any difference whether you can be seen or not! Couldn't you tell from the way those patients moved, from the sureness with which they followed you when I couldn't?"

"You mean that they were—"

"Blind," said Linton. "They're accustomed to invisible men!"

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

Science Front: Well, Startling is the name of the mag, ain't it? If recent isostic levels are too much for the silt and sediment they can board this Time-Travel gadget and catch up with the war.

Strangers on the Heights: Fattens and tolerance is a virtue that C. C. is all broke out with. He ain't got the killer instinct. If he did have he would pause for a moment here and say things unbecoming to a gentleman. So we clutch our raiment about us and hasten to a more worthy subject.

The Cover Picture: Bewshrew my right arm if it is not Snaggle-tooth himself! None other than he could be inspired that C. C. is all broke out with. Count the snags. I make it nine. Snaggle-tooth is a hopeless maniac, we fear. We have long suspected it. When we think of him associating for years with our sciagramatic schollast we cannot be surprised. Gaze on your villainy, you Jug cuddler!

The beautiful wench is most concerned about the snaggle-tooth crackpot. She looks as if she was used to that sort of thing. As if it were an everyday occurrence except Saturday afternoon and Sunday. Could the picture have been posed by some of the gang at the main office? Nice looking hero. Have a hunch that a good hero is needed around that office every day in the week and every hour of the day.

Donnell's picture on page thirteen appears to be an x-ray print of the xenotic fumes from a certain jug which is the property of a Saturnalian biophor whose identity my natural delicacy forbids me to mention. Picture is good.

Finlay—Paul. Pages 69 and 91: Very good. All right now, you headachers get busy on that next issue.—4612 Regent St., Duluth, Minn.

This, pee-lots in general, is a classic example of orderly restraint in the decomposition of a letter. Kiwi Walker has shown admirable self-control, even though he does get a bit personal with the senior astrogator and adjacent assistant, one Snaggle-tooth. Well, to get on to greener pastures before the old Sarge chokes up with emotion . . . (By the way, I can't answer the Perkin question.)

YOU TAKE THE REST

By Ken Krueger

I hope that you notice that this missile is typed on only one side of the papah and double-spaced so that you won't strain your itty-bitty eyes. But enough of this small-talk to you, Small Fry. Shall we go on to bigger and better things? Meaning of the cover, the Summer, 1944, issue of Ye Olde Shippe S.S.

Furst—The covah. Said I on first noticing this masterpiece on the newstand, "YIKIE." On later perception I reconsidered and said (censored). Honestly though, I'll admit that it matched a part of the lead story, but don't you honestly think that that maybe it smelled, just a little bit? I thought it stunk.

Next—The inside illustrations. Congratulations. You have discovered an artist who is really good. By all means let's see more of Donnell. The picture on page 13 is good. You wanna sell the original? It takes first place in the mag. Second, of course, goes to Virgil Finlay for his two, but they seemed a little off the usual Finlay standard of quality merchandise. (I heard that on the radio.)

Third goes to the remaining Donnells, fourth to the cover, and the rest you can keep. I don't include the Paul illustration as it was not a new one. No more than I rate the reprints in the mag for, while good, they have been rated before by better people than me so I'll let them go by. And please shoot the guy who drew the pic on page 83. It's worse than the cover.

Now for the stories. First place goes to **STRANGERS ON THE HEIGHTS.** It is a very good story. In fact, the best of its kind I've ever read. I especially liked the references to Fort, Lovcraft, Bierce, Blackwood, etc. (Yeh, I know. What's an etc.?)

WANDERER OF TIME came in second with the other two shorts tied for the rotten last. Don't you think that "crackpot scientists" are on their way out? If I counted reprints, Clark Ashton Smith's story would have been first.

Your Features—Only one high point in interest. Sarge Saturn gave us blazes. And just 'cause we squawked about the cover and its "Novel of the Future Complete, etc." I'll admit you had a novel of the future this time. Only it was more of a novelette than a novel. (A mere 59 pages, last month's ran for 77 pp.) Thanks for the friendly(?) talking to though. But you didn't needa get so huffy about it.

Now to all of the nize people who may be reading this. How about sending in a list of any and all fantasy books and mags that you have for sale or swap? If you don't get a reply right away don't get sore at me for as I write this the summer season on the Great Lakes opens again and I must put on my Sailor suit and go a-voyaging. I'm home at least once every two weeks though and I guarantee that I'll answer any and all letters I get. So how about kicking through with a few lists, huh?

Well, Sarge, as one fighting man to another—don't get too knobbed up again this trip out. And, by the way, I hope you get around to reviewing **MICROCOSMOS** in this issue.—125 Edna Place, Buffalo 8, N. Y.

Why, Kiwi Krueger, I thought last issue's curtain lecture was a masterpiece of fatherly counsel, gentle as swan's down. Pee-lot Krueger doesn't know me very well, does he, folks? And what's this gripe about the length of the novel? But, of course, you deliberately overlooked the reduction in type size which gives you considerable more reading matter per page.

No sale on originals. Sure, we'll ray the artist on page 83 at dawn. I don't know much about crackpot scientists. Please take the galley watch and serve hash with powdered aspirin while I try the next case. Here comes a Kiwi who likes the cover.

CONFUSED ABOUT THE WHOLE THING

By James Russell Gray

Dear Sarge: Guess what I found in my mail box today, hiding behind an evil assortment of advertisements and unpaid bills? That's right, the Summer issue of **STARTLING STORIES.** I got a lot more enjoyment out of it than I did out of the bills. This might be due to the fact that the former was illustrated and the latter were not.

Which reminds me that I like your cover this time. The zombie-like creature is appealing—in a morbid sort of way. Looks like something that just crawled out of a grave; truly, a masterpiece of horror. The man is nice and manly. And the woman is a honey! If Bercy keeps on drawing such beauties I'm going to have to admit that he's a topflight artist. His women get more beautiful every cover.

I have no complaints about any of the artwork this time. If I was rating the drawings, I'd place the Finlay on page 60 first, I guess, although the Donnell panel on page 17 appealed to me more. On account of the gal, of course. If we could ditch the man and the cat, I'd like to ask her for her telephone number. Very pretty eyes she has, don't you think?

If one of Mr. Gallup's employees should come around and say, "We're taking a poll, buddy. How'd you like **STRANGERS ON THE HEIGHTS**?" I'd say, "Mister, I'm for it. Best thing Wellman's done since **SOJARR OF TITAN.** You can also put down that I like fantasy."

I'd put the Hall of Fame story second. Smith certainly has a wonderful style; it's really poetic

[Turn page]



prose in spots. And he's a master at weaving moods.

I note some of the cash customers pan your department "This Startling War." Chalk up my vote to retain it. After all, we aren't descendants of an ostrich that we must hide our heads in the sand and ignore the biggest thing that is happening in the world. And out of this war discoveries are coming that will change the whole course of our lives in the years to come.

There is one thing that you do, Sarge, that I want to thank you for. I'm very much interested in fanzines, and I appreciate the advertising you give them. **STARTLING STORIES** is the only professional magazine, as far as I know, that does this. This should win you the good will of all fandom.

As usual, I read the review of the very first thing. Believe it or not, I feel that this department is always worth the price of the magazine. Although sometimes it is better than at other times. This was one of the other times. I'd rate Joe Kennedy's letter first. I also liked Jerry Pace's remarks, and I agree with him heartily about wanting a volume of the complete works of Weinbaum. You sort of let yourself go in your comments on the letters, didn't you? Did you have a hangover? Or was it just a question of the worm turning? You interest me where you dare people to snipe at you. Would you consider quotations from Shakespeare as full-grown wit? Another thing, if wit isn't "full-grown" do you consider it half-wit? I'm very confused about the whole thing. Hoping you're the same.—*Box 204, Hartshorne, Okla.*

You know, Kiwi Gray, your lackadaisical air intrigues me. The blase and bored report makes me think you need a good snort of Xeno. And did the old Sarge dare anybody to snipe at him? I must have had a hangover. That is worse than bravado; it's sheer insanity. Like a clay pigeon giving a Bronx cheer to a choice party of trapshooters. The trouble with most wit—including the Sarge's—is not that it's half-wit. It's half-whetted. Is this a sharp remark? Now I'm confused.

Thanks for your kind words about the fanzine reviews and other things. You may have a tablespoonful of thin cream with your bananas tonight. Or an extra zipper for your space suit.

CHIT AND CHAT

By Tom Pace

Thanks, Joe! Many thanks, friend Kennedy, for your kind approval. By the way, notice that the Sarge gave your letter the same heading that he gave mine last issue? Let's form an "Of This and That Club"! (FIVE will get you six that you can't guess what heading he will put on this letter!)

Say, are—were you an American Boy fantasy fan, too? Back in January of 1936, I had just recovered from a bout with pso-monia (no, I can't spell it!) in which I took a count of 9 and 99 1/2/100ths. Somebody sent me a year's subscription to the A.B., and the first yarn I read was "Blind Eyes of Magic," a Ted Dooliver and Alan Kane yarn. Good, too.

Then there was "Infra-Red Destroyers," "No Man's Space," "Dooms Tocsin" . . . please, editor, does Claudy still write?

But back to the review of the Summer SS. The cover was fine . . . the best yet by Bergey. But to offset it, look at the awful one on the latest TWS. Someday, you'll publish current issues of TWS and SS, both with good Bergey covers. Then I'll die of shock. No kidding, really a good cover pic.

The Donnell illustrations were pretty good. They are much like those of an artist named Margarian. They aren't as good as your blurb promised, tho' . . . i.e., "a mixture of Finlay and Paul." But better than Marchioni.

The Finlay picture on page 60 is fair, but I have seen better. The one on page 49 is . . . at first, I refused to believe it was a Finlay. !!!! They must be getting low.

I note with distaste that Marchioni got in, and applaud Paul's picture for Smith's H. of F. tale. Very good indeed.

The novel was fine. I liked the "explanation" of Witchcraft, Demonology, monsters, werewolves, etc.

And the crossed-lines were a fine touch. Note to Mr. Weilmann; there was an "anon" story in a certain mag a year or two ago concerning what happens to people who meddle too much in things that are sort of . . . queer, including writers, specifically mentioning Poe. He could have said Fort, Lovecraft, and Ambrose Bierce, too.

Take care, Mr. Weilmann. That "Patch Merrick" series in TWS isn't finished yet, nor the "John Thunstone" series in another mag. We don't want you joining the . . . shall we call it a casualty list? No kidding, be careful. I'm superstitious.

Morrison's tale was fair, except that little meek guys with bráwny wives are too liable to turn into tough guys when confronted with some problem in super-science, time-travel, etc.

Volton Cross is now on my list of "E" (for Excellent) authors. "Wanderer of Time" gave out with much more than the title leads you to expect. More by this master of the Mystical-Science-Weird Yarn.

"Beyond the Singing Flame" . . . ahhhhh! This, *mes amis*, is not only the best H of F yarn since I started reading SS; it is the best I have ever read in the mag. It is classic, with 7 capital letters, and an exclamation point! Like this: CLASSIC! This is among the most beautiful writing I have ever read. Sure, the big words make it hard reading, but it is wonderful, nevertheless. Why don't you get a new yarn from Clark Ashton Smith?

I would like to see the H of F tale looks promising. "Day of the Beast," by D. D. Sharpe, huh?

Why not drop out *Thrills in Science and This Startling War!* Then you could put in another short story, or change one of them to a novelet. Hey?—*Estaboga, Alabama.*

Well, your letter clears up one point for us, anyway, Pee-lot Pace. It proves that the old Sarge is not Shakespeare. Shakespeare never repeats, somebody said once somewhere. Don't ask me why. You should attend a Xeno-fest sometime and get the old space dog to spout some of his paraphrases on Shakespeare.

Thanks for the pencil sketch at the foot of your letter. You flatter the old Sarge. So I was decorated with my own high Xenosan order for defending Ray Cummings, eh? When did I do that? Not that I wouldn't if I deemed it necessary to maintain an even keel, of course, but the old Sarge tries mighty hard to stay neutral. I begin to believe that I'm tight most of the time. I can't remember things anymore. Do you think Xeno has any effect on me?

You will note that Kiwi Walker doesn't agree with you on the abolition of the departments. I can remember that far back, anyhow!

SARGE, YOU WRONG ME
By Art R. Sehnert

Dear Sarge: **STARTLING STORIES** hit the stands here yesterday, and I note your remarks anent my acid pen. Frankly, Sarge, I still think the Spring issue smelled from front to back—with the notable exception of the Finlay drawings. However, this is not to reiterate that opinion, but to take exception to a few of your remarks. To begin you are decidedly mistaken in saying that I accused you of printing only letters praising your efforts. Actually it makes little difference.

I was telling you what I thought of the Spring issue. In mentioning the Hall of Fame Classics I mentioned that this was a misnomer. It was and is. You admitted as much in this Summer issue when you stated that the Weinbaum was reprinted for Weinbaum fans, not because it is an accredited classic.

In this connection I bespoke of a few stories which are classics and do dwell in the Hall of Science-fiction Fame. Those were legitimate and what I consider sensible suggestions. In reference to my own

personal conclusions on whether or not you would even make an effort to secure such stories—I spoke my mind. Would you have less?

I did not write this "diatribe" merely to be writing a hate letter. The only conclusions that I can draw are those from reading your magazine. If your ability and/or ambition goes no farther than the Spring issue, then I have no alternative other than speak what's in my mind. Perhaps you don't like criticism—few of us do—but if I feel that critical remarks are necessary then certainly I'm not going to desist from making them.

Since writing that last letter I have run across the issue containing the story "The Giant Atom" which I think proved to be a good story. "The Giant Atom" I liked a lot better than a great number of stf stories that I have read, but "The Great Ego" well, polecat aroma is a nicely descriptive phrase.

Since you have seen fit to speak wisely of the other letter in The Ether Vibrates column, let's clear up this little difference as soon as possible.—1414 Poplar, Memphis, Tenn.

Well, Pee-lot Sehnert, you got quite a load off your chest. And I still state that this is the second letter only that I have ever received from you. While it is a bit strong in certain ways, in all fairness to you, I am printing it essentially as is. Sure, you're entitled to your opinions, and when you don't step beyond the bounds of good taste, we'll always print 'em. I'm truly sorry if what I said in the Summer issue annoyed you, but the old Sarge intended for you to notice it. It wasn't what you wrote, you know; it was the way you wrote it.

Let's not get into a family argument here in front of all the kiwis—it's bad for morale and discipline. So I won't pin your ears back this time—but I will whisper a wee bit of advice. You should keep carbon copies of your letters, so you can look back and see just what you wrote.

Anyway, all is forgiven. [Turn page]

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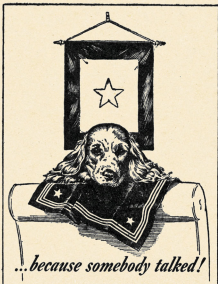
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...because somebody talked!

GOOD TO DIG IN

By Pfc. John M. Cunningham

Dear Sarge: Your latest issue of SS was rather unique and more superb than past issues. It feels good to dig into the excellent writings of our old favorite, Manly Wade Wellman. He can always be depended upon to give best reading pleasure.

Though your cover illustrations are more less punk, the interior illos more than make up the defect.

My real compliments however do not point to the fictional part of this Summer issue. Rather it points to that section devoted to "THRILLS IN SCIENCE." Orehids to you, Mr. Editor for the article "THE BRIDGE BUILDER." Tom Paine was a great man who is all too soon forgotten by the people to whom he devoted his life, happiness, and wealth. Yes, it was he who was the TRUE father of the American Revolution, and the brainwork on that marvelous guardian of rights, the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. My authority? His booklets "COMMON SENSE," "CRISIS" (1, 2, 3), "THE AGE OF REASON," and others too numerous to mention. Howard Fast, in his splendid book, "CITIZEN TOM PAINE," gives an intimate and true outlook on the life and thoughts of this great American patriot.

I suggest that you pick shorter Hall of Fame Classics so as to give us longer stories (novels).—CAAF, Chico, Calif.

You are quite right about Thomas Paine, Kiwi Cunningham, and we only wish we could make these thumbnail sketches of famous inventors and scientists longer. There are many interesting facts about great men which everybody ought to know, but our purpose in THRILLS IN SCIENCE is merely to highlight one great discovery or invention or theory in each.

Let's get further. There seems to be a complaint from the nut and bolt locker.

MORE POLTON CROSS

By Austin Hamel

Dear Sarge: I realize you have fully explained the blurb *A Novel of the Future* in the last issue, but really, was the last feature a novel? 59 pages in my book does not mean a book-length. I know that you are sending a new space-saving print, but nevertheless, if you were still using the old print the story would not reach 70 pages.

But enough of that minor stuff, let's get into the real business. Congratulate Manly Wade Wellman for his extra fine story, *Strangers on the Heights*. It is seldom you read a story with so much meaning. I am sorry that all those things happened to the author in the course of writing the yarn, but at the end he leaves you rarin' for a sequel. D'ya think we'll get it?

Donnell really captured the story for you. Bergey also did on the cover. Excellent work for both of them. Try Donnell on the covers, and give Bergey a very much needed new space-saving print, but that I have been noticing Finlay's work, but recently you have been handing it to us in larger scoops. Many thanks.

All of the artists did superlative work with the exception of one Mark Marchioni. I hate to criticize his goshawful work when I think of the stuff he used to do.

After those two Fantasies, I imagine the next novel will deal with Science fiction. I enjoyed the two fantasies (*The Great Ego*, and *Strangers on the Heights*) immensely, and think you should give us more of that treatment. But a good SF tale will be welcomed now.

Hurray for Leigh Brackett! I was tickled silly to hear about her novel in the next SS. Here's hoping it will reach 99 pages!

The Hall of Famer was typical Smith. Excellent. But the other Smith (Ford) gave us one of the biggest hunk of huck in many a day. Morrison's tale was ancient. Henpecked husband goes to future. Finds he is able to combat with monsters, but is deadily afraid of his wife. Comes back to present, and gets up enough courage to snap at his wife. Surely one of Morrison's worst.

As I have mentioned, the artists did excellent stuff. The best was the Finlay on page 69. Then the Paul, then Donnell on page 17.

In closing may I please beg for more Polton

Cross? Even a novel! I am glad to know that he is going to do a story for the Summer TWS, as advertised in Spring issue.—#090 East Tremont Ave., Bronx 62, N. Y.

As you will have noted by now, Pee-lot Hamel, your grouse about the length of the novels in our new style type was answered to Kiwi Krueger, as well as being partially answered by yourself. You ask for more Polton Cross. Okay. We will see what we can do for you along that line one of these days. Sorry you didn't think so much of the other short stories. Perhaps we should dip all our stories in Xeno before sending them down to the printer. That would put spirit in every line, no? But the next speaker doesn't agree with you, I note, so maybe I'll just send you a small vial of Xeno for personal use.

SEASONING FROM THE SAGE

By Benson Perry

Dear Sarge: I have just returned from a man-hunt. You can tell Bergey that if he falls into one of my bear-traps it's his own fault. After all, one shouldn't have to wear sun-glasses when looking for STARTLING STORIES. But let's turn to more pleasant things like the stories. Not a bad one in the bunch.

1. "Wanderer of Time" receives 9.6; it is a major classic! That is a story that I will never forget. The following parentheses are for adjectives that I am unable to fill in).

2. "Beyond the Singing Flame" gets 8. It is with reluctance that I admit that some fantasy is good. But trips like "The Great Ego" and Leigh Brackett's stories is strictly down-the-space-lock stuff. I will consider offers to rent the original Singing Flame story to me.

3. "The Serum Rubber Man" receives 7.7. That is really good reading. Say, Sarge, didn't you mention a story named "Doodleplast, Inc."? How come we never saw it? This is a request for not only a sequel, but a series of Doodle-Plast stories.

4. "Get Your Extra Here!" is an excellent short at 7.

5. "Strangers on the Heights" will get 7, too. Come now, Sarge, let's not have this voodoo-pseudo-science-fiction. With shots of xeno I staggered on to the middle of the story and found it pretty good. I realize that everybody except me will like it so I will live up the ETHER VIBRATES by saying it's not so hot.

With tremendous willpower I push open the space lock into the ETHER VIBRATES ROCKET SHIP, expecting to see a violent riot between kiwis, Frog-eyes, and ye Sarge. Instead, Frog-eyes is sleeping in the corner; the kiwis are juggling yo-yos and uttering vile oaths like "you cad," and Sarge is singing in the xeno shower. For some strange reason you have cut out the space-chatter; do you realize how dry the dept. is now? I don't understand one of your replies. In it you deny that S.S.'s covers are all green. Anyway, your inside illustrations are good. How long before we see the last of Finlay (horrible thought)? If you are looking for freaks I can show you a guy who lives around here who doesn't like Finlay or Weinbaum!

So with a manly stride across the room I walk into the trap-space-lock and sail off into the void.—68 Madbury Road, Durham, N. H.

Yes, Pee-lot Perry, the old Sarge did mention DOODLE-PLAST, INC., and this serum rubber get incident is the first story about the Doodle-Plast organization. So you haven't missed anything yet. We understand that Ford Smith has the second yarn under construction, but I'll tell you more about that later. I hope you change your mind about Leigh Brackett after reading SHADOW OVER MARS in this issue. Anyway, let me know. I can always stick your head into a rocket blast.

[Turn page]



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CONDENSED NOVELS

By Joe Kennedy

Dear Sarge: The Summer STARTLING STORIES? Fairly good. Hall of Fame terrific. "Wanderer of Time" refreshingly different. Novel passable, Morrison short below average. "Serum Rubber Man" punks. The water was apparently cut short to save space. The ending seemed horribly awkward. Finlay good, Paul, too, Donnell not bad, either. That takes care of artwork and fiction.

Abstract brain-wave department: Overjoyed to hear about the Brackett novel. Leigh is always tops. Sarge says that any story taking place one day from now is a Novel of the Future—then accuses us readers of hair-splitting! Sorry to hear that post-card size publications can't be reviewed in the fanzine section. This explains why my magnificent QX THE CARDZINE was omitted. (This sounds like a plug, doesn't it? It is!)

At last. A show-down! Saturn demands good letters, sane insults and gentle humor. Alas! What the results will be, I doughnut know. I do know one thing that would improve the section. More friendly atmosphere among the letter-writers. Maybe a serious discussion. About fandom, religion, rocketry, writing, art, fantasy—anything. You'd think we pen-pushers were a bunch of robots. Every man for himself. Let's unfuck folks. The old senior astrologer has an idea there: If there's no room for a fellow's complete letter, give him a mention or a comment on the gist of his ideas. Would increase impression of jump-in-boys-it's-all-one-big-party. You dig?

Jack Townsend's missive was amusing. Indeed. Also Ken Krueger's. Saturn has a treat to see Alce over here in STARTLING STORIES. His comments on "THE ETHER VIBRATES" bring up the other side of the question. (What question?) I don't agree with Broadwell. Please leave the war bond ad in. It's usually superior to the stories. Hamel was interesting. Likewise Oliver, as usual. Disagree about Spring. Issue being poor, tho.

Other good letters by Vistinghoff, Kennedy, Motorcycle Joseph (not me), Kennedy, Hassid, Dallas, Kennedy, Virginia Lelake, Kennedy, Huggins, Kennedy—oh, what the Hack! They were all good.

Before closing, here is something extra-special. A new way to save paper. You will be able to print booklength novels in 2 columns on every page. Condensed fiction. To show you what I mean, I have written a novella in this revolutionary style. It appears below.

Chapter 1: Hero. Space-ship. Take-off. Destination: Pluto. Reason: Rescue heroine. Why: Kidnaped. Villains: Pirates.

Chapter 2: Arrival: Pluto. Encountered dangers: (a) Bems, (b) blizzard. Method of escape: (a) running, (b) putting on winter underwear.

Chapter 3: Discovery: Vitamin-pill plant. Eats. Becomes superman. Rescue. Heroine safe. Assorted mush. Finish.

Sensational, isn't it? This will enable STARTLING STORIES to go weekly. I am indeed a master mind.—84 Baker Street, Dover, N. J.

Anyway, you are indeed something, Kiwi Kennedy. The main trouble about condensing novels is that most of the junior astrologers like them full length. As for your breezy comments about THE ETHER VIBRATES, maybe we will get a little air-conditioning yet. Jump right in, all you pee-lots, and fire anything in that you like.

MICKEY SLIPS US HIS FIN

By Martel I. Mickey

Dear Sarge: Scientific fiction is one of the great promoters of world-consciousness for, through its stories of interplanetary adventures, it is causing people to think of the world as a whole. At heart we are all of us Earthians or Earthmen, although for centuries we might have been born in some particular part of the earth, be it America, be it England, be it Australia, or wherever it may be.

In fact we are emerging from nation-consciousness to the broader and less limited outlook of world-consciousness. The present war is compelling us to think of ourselves as free people of the earth, as Free Earthians. And Free Earthians acting together as a unit, under the organized effort termed the United Nations, welded together in the determination to carry out the righteous end of freedom for all Earth people, will be able to accomplish something toward that worthy end.

For many years scientific fiction stories have been telling of a world government where all people of Earth work together as a unit, indeed a super-national or Earthian unit.

Scientific fiction is putting this message of world unity across in a way which is entertaining, in the form of stories—scientific fiction stories—planet stories. World government will not always be something in the future, when we take steps toward its realization.

It was about the 10th day of August, 1936, that the writer, after having worked on a plan for a world state which he later abandoned, made the independent discovery of the World Supernation, or the intact realm of all the world's people, occupying the entire world and having no boundaries. To this general idea he gave the name of supernationality, and this was first made known by him in Junction City, Oregon, a town of nearly 1300 people, 110 miles south of Portland, Oregon, in the fruitful valley of the Willamette River.

This town where the idea of world supernationality was first made known has a name which is indeed appropriate in that this means indeed the City of World Adjoinment, where all people of the world acting together as Earthians, work as ONE, a unit which includes all races, all nations, all creeds.

Scientific fiction has indeed told in its planetary stories of such Earthianity, for indeed it is. But through the long centuries, nation consciousness has become so much the habit of people, that they need to become Earthianized in order to prepare them for a world state—and this will come about gradually.

As the Earthian idea unfolded, it was seen that supernationality was a part of Earthianity which is a family of sciences defining themselves as knowledge of our planet as a whole and in general. In this family of Earth sciences of which the newly found one of supernationality or geopolitics is a part, are such worthies as geography, geology, geodesy, geo-chemistry, geophysics, world or general history, and practical astronomy which is a half-brother in this family or group. Earthianity has at last put all these earth sciences under one head.

Scientific fiction is coming to be seen more and more as promoting the sense of world unity, and it will continue to do so.—Room 700, Hall of Records, Los Angeles 12, Calif.

Well, we've been asking for something to talk about over and above mere comment on stories and artwork, so Kiwi Mickey drives up and unloads. Nobody can foresee just what the future holds, but you are dead right about one thing, Martel.

The nations of the world are going to unite in a super-national brotherhood or mankind is going to perish from the earth. And good riddance, say some of our sour and dour philosophers. But it is up to us to see that man builds better in the future—and that is where science-fiction readers and Science Fiction Leaguers can do their part to help.

We earnestly do want a better world, don't we? Well, let's all do our bit to help bring this state of things about, hard though the row may be to hoe. We can begin by spreading a little sunshine and tolerance here in this department, as Kiwi Kennedy suggested.

So what are you little ogres waiting for? Start spreading! Frog-eyes, Wart-ears and Snaggle-tooth have been conducting a little chemical research. They have concocted a new floor-sweeping compound out of powdered aspirin and Xeno. You birds spread it around and sweep down the decks, huh? The old Sarge now turns the astrologation chamber over to the class.

Happy spacings, my little pets!

—SERGEANT SATURN.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Wartime paper rationing makes it impossible to print enough copies of this magazine to meet the demand. To be sure of getting YOUR copy, place a standing order with your regular newsdealer.

REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

By
SERGEANT SATURN

AS WE have a pretty fat manifest this voyage, kiwis, of fanzines, the old Sarge will not take up time and space with a lot



of back-seat driving. Let's get right at the white meat of this section.

CENTAURI, 515 Ocean Ave., Pismo Beach, Calif. Editor, Andy Anderson. Quarterly. 10c per copy, three issues 25c.

Ah! Thirty pages of white art paper between two slick white covers with black-and-white drawings. Good contents page, neat headings, contents black type. A very good job and a nicely balanced issue. The old Sarge didn't quite get the symbolism or the significance of the illustration on the back cover. It looks like a Tibetan lama is getting ready to go bowling with a young superman Nazi's head and got tangled up in a spaghetti machine. All in all, a very professional looking issue.

CHANTICLEER, first issue. 25 Poplar, Battle Creek, Mich. Editor, Walt Liebscher. 10c per copy.

Nice start here. Thirty nice white art paper pages between slick white covers. Front cover has a pink roster with black and yellow trimmings—looks like airbrush work. And what's this? A satire on Captain Future on page 14. Contents page is a little too bunched, perhaps because there is a lot on it. Can't tell you much about the back of the mag as the old Sarge got stuck on the artwork on the first page of the book section—page 24. More power to you, Editor Liebscher.

COSMIC DIGEST, 217 So. 6th St., New-castle, Ind. No editor's name. Free to Service men; three copies for 5c to others.

A sunburst! Seven sheets of assorted colors with single-spaced copy. A lot of news and information. Hand-lettered headings, no artwork. Needs better stenography in stencil-cutting. Otherwise, interesting data, with promise of future improvement.

DIABLERIE, 1299 California St., San Francisco 9, Calif. Editor, Bill Watson. Published at odd intervals. No price listed.

This is a very neat number—eleven white, crisp sheets of clear-cut black copy with hand-lettered headings and spot cuts in varying colors. Quite attractive. Cross-eyed dame on the cover seems to be ordering the dog out of the house, although the title says, "The Accuser." Nicely arranged contents page. (Walt Liebscher, please note.)

FAN SLANTS, 628 So. Bixel St., Los Angeles 14, Calif. Editor, Mel Brown. Published spasmodically. Price 10c; 3 for 25c. This number seems a combination of *Diablerie* and *Cosmic Digest* as to format. And a lot for the money! Sixty-four pages of assorted items, artwork, etc. Excellent job, including a sketch on back cover by the well-known J. Allen St. John who used [Turn page]

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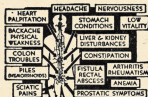
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to paint cowboys and horses for the old Sarge's western novels. This fanzine is a good buy.

FANTASITE, 1710 Arizona Ave., Santa Monica, Calif. Editor, Philip R. Bronson. Published irregularly. 15c per copy; three issues for 40c.

This, too, is an uptown job of twenty pages—neat headings, clean-cut stencils, but no artwork save for Adam playing the role of Hermes in a helmet three sizes too large on the front cover. At least, the helmet covers his face to the upper lip, and we know it must be Adam because he has no navel. Nice issue.

FANTASTICONGLOMERATION, 236 1/2 N. New Hamp, Hollywood, Calif. Editor, Forrest J. Ackerman. 10c per copy.

Five sheets of assorted colors between white covers, with front cover a montage of photos which seem to depict Lon Chaney's horror career in the movies as conceived by various scientification fans. A nice job of this "Topsy" publication that "just grew." Though how Serviceman Ackerman finds time for this work we don't know. Thank, Ack, for the several bits of artwork for the old Sarge to moon over.

FANTASY FICTION FIELD, 6401 24th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y. Editor, Julius Unger. Weekly. 5c per copy; 6 for 25c.

Good old weekly standby. Nothing new to report on this newsweekly, save that it holds up well. A good bet for all fans, especially along the Eastern seaboard.

FAPAZINE, 25 Poplar Street, Battle Creek, Mich. Editor, E. Everett Evans. Quarterly. No price listed.

Eight neat pages, white with single-spaced black typing. Interesting, but still not set in formal format. Needs contents page, masthead, more stuff—including artwork! Hey! What's this illustration on page 4? A picture of Sergeant Starn! Yeah, that's how he feels, all right, after a gashouse session with the pee-lots and kiwis. The rest of you birds want to see it? Okay, look in **THE ETHER VIBRATES** Department.

FANTASY TIMES, 446 Jelliff Ave., Newark, N. J. Editor, Sam Moskowitz. Monthly. 5c per copy.

Formerly called *Fantasy Reporter*, this little number promises to be a monthly of the same general type as *Fantasy Fiction Field*. Looks pretty good, but is not a fanzine for the old Sarge. No pix. Good luck, Sam.

FELIX, 8722—252 St., Bellerose, N. Y. Editor, Russ Wilsey. First issue—to be published semi-sometimes. Price two for 5c.

This, so far, is a single-sheeter. Can't tell much about it save that it looks like FFF and FT in format. Maybe it will grow.

FUTURE FANDOM STORIES, and FUTURE LETTERS, 214 N. 20th, Newcastle, Ind. Editor, Helen Bradley. No price or publication schedule listed.

These two mags would do well to consolidate into one fanzine. Both single-spaced on foolscap or legal size sheets. Full of information, but not made up in magazine format. Need contents page and some artwork or good headings, anyway. The text stuff seems excellent and newswy. And am I tickled to run across a gal editor! Good luck, Helen.

MICROCOSM, 494 Carlton St., Buffalo 11, N. Y. Editors, Claude Held & Ken Krueger. Bi-monthly. 10c per copy; three for 25c.

Another sunburst as to colored pages, ten sheets of standard size with black typing. Neat contents page and headings. The format is good, but the artwork is too simple and blurry of outline. Pep this department up, boys, and you will be in the groove.

NOVA, 25 Poplar, Battle Creek, Mich. Editor, Al Ashley. Bi-monthly. 10c per copy.

Called "The Quality Fanzine" by its publishers, this mag is certainly that. Format is similar to *Chastiteer*, which comes out of same workshop, obviously. A good fanzine that looks Park Avenue. But, Al, what became of the fourth horseman of

the Apocalypse in the Clyne drawing on the back cover? Or maybe these represent the three dreams of Brother Scrooge. Anyway, very nice fanzine going.

NUZ FRUM HOME, 1443 4th Ave., South, Fargo, N. Dak. Editor, Walter Dunkelberger. Monthly. Free to Servicemen for a letter.

This is not strictly a scientificzine, but it is growing and going stronger than ever. Now includes fanzine departments, plus drawings, photos of servicemen, jokes, news, etc. An excellent set-up, and the old Sarge advises you to set a money price on the mag, Walter, and let civilian fans subscribe to it.

TOWARD TOMORROW, 628 S. Bixel, Los Angeles 14, Calif. Editor, James Kepner. Published sporadically. Price 10c per issue.

This new mag seems to be taking the place of the discontinued MIDGE. Another surburst of colored pages, standard size. Black ink. Splendid headings, good artwork. Fifty-two pages—counting the cover—and why don't you number your pages, James? Good contents page and good contents. This fanzine should be a winner.

VOM, Box 6475 Metro. Sta., Los Angeles 14, Calif. Publishers, Ackermorojo's Fubar Pubs. Bi-monthly. 15c per copy; 7 for \$1.00.

The usual legal size format, with a lot of dope in single-spaced type, and several smart drawings. This mag is getting back into the groove again, having been a bit shaken because of war and draft, etc. A good buy for Pacific Coast fans, especially. The old Sarge notes from the Horton drawing on page 13 that Joyce Kilmer was wrong. Ve-ry choice! This was the No. 30 issue.

VULCAN, Route 1, Ripley, Tenn. Editor, Lionel Innman. Bi-monthly. 10c per copy; three for 25c.

This fanzine is picking up. Pocket-size format of 48 pages, counting green cover. White paper with purple ink. Headings and artwork improving, although still has some distance to go. Cover is printed on regular press, no less. Lionel and his associates seem to mean business. Good luck to you, boys!

Before I quit off, I had better mention Vomaids Portfolio No. 3 which is not a fanzine but a selection of six fantanude drawings which sell for 35c. You can procure this fantasy art from Weaver Wright, Box 6475 Metro Station, Los Angeles 14, Calif.

And the fanzine group seems to have attracted the interest and attention of some midget producers. The old Sarge is receiving a flock of postcard-size fanlets from at least two sources. One is QX THE CARD-ZINE, run off by Joe Kennedy of 84 Baker Street, Dover, N. J. at the moderate cost of 7 for 10c or 18 for two bits (25c to those not conversant with the vernacular). The other is the FANEWSCARD WEEKLY, from Connor & Robinson, 6636 S. Sacramento, Chicago 29, Ill. This one vends for the sum of two cents each.

Both of these cards give you condensed news items about fans and zines and clubs.

Well, there you have this issue's dope on the fanzines. All the old Sarge has to add is that he is gratified and pleased at the sterling quality of the entire batch this month. Fandom is looking up, if these fanzines are any indication.

Now you little ogres start trading around for fanzines and find out what the old senior astrogator has been mumbling about. And happy spacings to all you little printer's devils!

—SERGEANT SATURN.

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Leigh Brackett Steps Up and Tells Us About Herself

THIS month, readers, it gives us a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction to present to you the author of the complete novel in this issue. As the years roll on



LEIGH BRACKETT

and science fiction grows up we are happy to note the constantly increasing number of women readers—and contributors—in this field.

This time the author of the featured novel is a woman—Miss Leigh Brackett, who lives in sunny California. Miss Brackett is making rapid strides forward in the scientific field. Let's read what she has to say.

I'm one of those rare birds, a native Californian, and since my birthday is now Pearl Harbor Day as well, I have no trouble remembering it. Authors, I believe, are supposed to have colorful lives, but depressingly little of interest has happened during my fairly brief span.

I was reasonably angelic, except for a fiendish temper, until the age of nine when I started school and made my teachers rue the day. I discovered a fine vein of independence, had a swell time, and I don't know to this day why I wasn't politely kicked out.

I lived at the beach during those years and am still an incurable beachcomber. I would rather swim and lie in the sun than anything else I know, and some day I'm going to have a good sturdy sea-going boat so I can loaf in style. Catalina's close, and they tell me the tarpon run big over there . . . Meanwhile, I play volley-ball, the sand-lot kind with only two on a side, and the way we do it you can get your head torn off.

By the time I entered high school I'd had a four-year break traveling around the country, I had reformed, and I had decided to become a writer because, forsooth, I could skate through Eng. Lit. on my ear and get top grades, and so writing would obviously be a snap for me. Also, by the time I was twelve, I had gone through the classics (suitable for children, of course) Edgar Rice Burroughs, Haggard, Conan Doyle, Jack London, and fifty or sixty others, and I didn't see what they could do that I couldn't do. I found out. Just one thing—write.

I went back to school, a different one this time, and disappeared almost immediately into the dramatic department. You behold in me a ham of the first curing.

The high spot of my career came when, during a highly dramatic performance, I scared two small members of the audience into screaming hysterics. I placed second for dramatic reading in the Festival of Arts and Sciences, and taught speech and drama for a year at another school. I wasn't cut out to be a teacher, except for swimming. I'm good at that. Never drowned one single pupil. Might have made a career of it, except that I still wanted to be a writer.

The more stubborn the editors got, the madder I got, and so it went until, with the aid of some pretty swell people, writers, coaches, and agents, I made my first sale.

That was about four years ago, and since then I've learned to laugh merrily at the movies wherein the protagonist, who has suffered over his or her literary career for all of a year or so and is ready to Forget It All, bursts into print in the best slick published and is immediately signed up to an exclusive ninety-nine-year contract at thousands per. And you know that he, or she, will never, never turn out a bad story or get stuck for a new idea. All that, and usually Brian Aherne, too. (Unless it's Roz Russell.)

I'm lazy. I like to eat and sleep, and sit around talking with people. I like people, the genuine kind. I like dogs, horses, cars, anything to do with ships and the sea, the theater, the movies, books, beer, and working hard at something I enjoy doing.

I enjoy writing, and even in the bad periods I wouldn't trade the job, except maybe for acting, and then not permanently. I hope, in about fifty years, to hold a three-way contract with some studio. Directing is my other passion. Meantime, I have a novel (out in February) and the fiction magazines, God bless 'em. So I'm happy, thanks to you who read and buy Brackett. Long may you wave. And I'll do my darnest to be so good you'll have to — Leigh Brackett.

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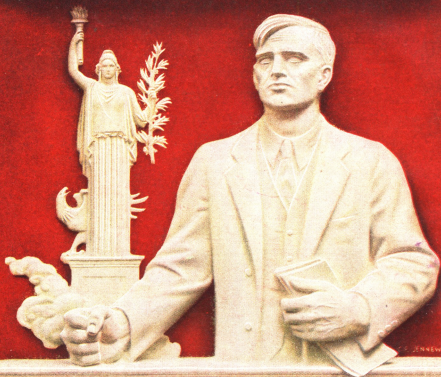
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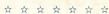
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