

PLANET STORIES



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Spring Issue
Dec.-Feb.
1947-1948



Vol. III, No. 10
20c per copy



PLANET STORIES: Published quarterly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1947, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. Entered as second-class matter, October 2, 1944, at the Post Office, at New York 1, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. All rights reserved. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. Yearly subscription rate 80¢ in advance. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.



The shocked Martie stumbled back.

Design For Doomsday

By Bryce Walton

Slogging through Venus' reeking muck and groping horrors toward the forbidding dome of Solar Science City—treasure-vault of the best brains in the Sytem—Guardsmen Venard remembered the frightened whispers: "An evil god rules there!"

THE TONE OF THE SLURRED, emotionless voice was cold and deadly, as were the tones of all Martians who had taken to their grotesque hearts the mystic, dictatorial disease of

Zharkonism. It droned an implacable death song from the audio. It echoed horribly down the shadow-eaten labyrinth of that sprawling death-mart which was officially labeled Terro Concentration Camp Seven.

. . . Another exalted warrior of the Occupational Armies of Zharkon, the Undying—Zharkon, the ever-just and divine director of the Solar System—Zharkon, the voice of the Gods—has been brutally slain by terran underground subversives. In retaliation, five hundred Terran inferiors will go to the experimental wards by decree of our divine Martian Zharkon—Zharkon, our illustrious solar father . . .

The audio droned on. But none of the tier on tier of doomed men imprisoned in the rehabilitated ruins of Washington's subterranean levels listened any more. They were ragged, skeletal shapes crouched like frightened animals in the filthy shadows. Feverishly bright eyes stared with a fanatic's hunger for death, the release from hopeless, mind-shattering pain and indignity. Those who would not wilfully sign away their futures to colonial slavery under the Martian dictatorship were killed in devious and ghastly ways. The death toll was high.

In each of the little prison cubicles two figures waited, helpless behind cold metal. It would seem impossible to find even one face which did not wear the terrible scar of resignation which marks the souls of the hopeless. Yet in one of these prison cubicles there were two such. Two Terran Guardsmen.

The great Terran Guards, what few remained of the once colorful and renowned Solar Patrol, semantically trained, objective yet warmly human, knew there was no resignation. That was death if carried to its obvious conclusion. While one lived, one moved, acted, and was acted upon. While one lived there was conflict, and there was always hope.

Although perhaps only the few remnants of the Guards and the small Underground which flourished dangerously somewhere in the ruins of the Earth retained this pre-Solar War attitude. Perhaps this stubborn minority totaled one percent. Perhaps. No one knew.

The tall, gaunt figure gripped the prison bars in two big hands. Karl Venard, Ex-Lieutenant, strained hawk-like features outward, his thin lips twisted. He turned suddenly to snarl, "This is it, Louie. We're the only two Guardsmen left in this sad

hole. We'll be among this draft. Start praying."

Louie Larson, the little man who still, somehow, managed to be overweight in spite of being half-starved, shivered.

"The least you can do is die like a man," snarled Venard. "You're a disgrace to the Guards."

The fat little man grabbed Venard's ragged sleeves.

"Remember what the grapevine said last night, Karl? It said that the Underground on Mars had managed to blow up the Zharkon's throne room and him in it. It said the Zharkon had been injured, maybe killed, that his double-brain was on the blink. Maybe that's right, Karl. Maybe it might really have happened! Gad, Karl. If they've done that, I don't care about dying. Knowin' that, death would be a pleasure, almost. Tell me you think it's so, Karl. I'll not be scared any more, if you'll say you believe it's true."

"How the devil should I know," murmured Venard. "I doubt it. Maybe there is an Underground operating on Mars as efficiently as the one here on Earth, but I doubt it. The Marties fell for that Zharkonism mania like a degravitated dwarf star. And even if they do have a working Underground organization there how could they ever get into the Zharkon's throne room? That's carrying wishful thinking a little too far, Kewpie Doll. Forget it."

"Listen," sputtered the little man desperately, "how about them Martians who went to the Academy with us? They'd never fall for Zharkonism. They was semantically trained, too. They're too smart for all this myth and legend stuff. I'll bet every solar credit I might have had that Jhongan could have gotten into that throne room."

Venard's harsh features softened for an instant. Jhongan, the Martian, had studied in the Academy during the golden days of the Solar Democratic Federation. Yes, Martians like Jhongan would never have become Zharkonites. But there were too few of them. His hardened mouth curled cynically.

"Start praying, Kewpie Doll. If semantics can turn out an anachronism like you it can even manufacture incipient Zhar-

konites. Why, you can't even speak good old Terro-English."

Louis Larson looked as though he were going to cry. "We gotta do something, Karl. It only takes a few minutes after one of them announcements for them heathen Marties to start playin' human grab bag. We gotta do something!"

"What do you want to do, Kewpie Doll, live forever?" grinned Venard. "Besides, there is a way out for us. We don't have to go to the experimental wards. Have you forgotten this little memento from my long lost love?"

WITH infinite caution, Venard disclosed the memory-crystal, taking it with a kind of dignified stealth from beneath the rags that had once been a shirt. Dreamily he studied the small, delicate translucence of the sphere. He had managed to retain that from the pawing Marties' greedy scanners. Looking back into Venard's eyes from the shifting beauty of the sphere, the three-dimensional, almost frighteningly life-like figure of Vale who had once loved Venard, preened and sighed provocatively. The figure moved, danced in lithe grace through shifting clouds. A strange, heart-aching vision of reality and dream.

Louie Larson's beady black eyes bulged, sweat popped out of his pallid skin and trickled down through the bristles of his dirt-caked beard. "You—you're gonna use *that*?"

"Suicide, that's better than the experimental ward, isn't it? Kewpie Doll, sometimes you leave the experimental wards alive, but no one would ever guess you had once been human. They work on the genes, son. And they're devilishly clever." He gripped the memory-crystal. "This is a quick and easy way. There's enough of that amazing explosive developed by the Venusian Sea People in this crystal to blow everything for fifty yards around us to hell. Oh, I'll use it, Kewpie Doll."

"Sure, I'd prefer it to the wards," moaned Larson softly, "but this—this suicide, it's so final."

"There's something pretty nice about finality, Kewpie Doll. If you can really find it."

They waited. Larson picked at his beard, lips twitching. Venard looked

dreamily into the cloudy depths of the memory-crystal. Next to them in a stinking cell, a man began to cry, a series of burbling choking cries of fear and hopeless hate. From somewhere far down the corridor, a woman was singing an ancient hymn.

Venard was extremely fortunate to have retained the memory-crystal. A few prisoners had been able to do likewise. Because of the unique physiogenic quality of the little spheres, ordinary scanners failed to detect their presence. They were small and could be concealed under one's clothing, and passed from one prisoner to another to escape discovery. Others had used their suicidal capacity for a final escape from unspeakable pain and horror.

Because of the difficulty in finding them, the memory-spheres constituted a constant threat to the Martian guards. Many a Martie had developed violent neurosis from knowing that the prisoners they guarded might be hiding a memory-crystal, and might also at any moment, merely by pressing a small release within the spheres, set off the mutually antagonistic elements and blow up guards, prisoners and things surrounding them to bloody ruin.

The incredibly beautiful and life-like face floating inside the crystal laughed mockingly up at Venard through opaque, silvery mists. No horror there. The little, diaphanous, three-dimensional figure dancing through the shifting vapors of the memory sphere floated in a never-ending dream of things as they might have been. Vale, lovely and enchanting Vale, the way she had looked and danced when she had loved him in those carefree happy days before the Solar War. Nostalgia, bitterly sweet, of lost and unrecoverable nights, dream-lost beauty of Luna nights the blood-drenched holocaust. Vale, before she had went away to Venus and to that hungry maw that ate up *the* best minds of the Solar System, Solar Science City.

Venard swore softly to himself. How silly he was to feed on memory, like a parasite gnawing on itself and growing hungrier with each futile bite.

The little man's eyes stared through the bars into the dreary shadows of the cell block. "Gods, Karl!" he moaned suddenly. "Karl! I hear 'em comin' down the line! Dirty heathens."

Ex-lieutenant K. Venard looked down curiously at the bald head. No one would guess the existence there of steel nerves, iron will, somehow strangely integrated with a golden heart.

"I hear 'em," Larson whispered hoarsely. "Swissshhh — swissshhh — swissshhh. I hear their slimy feet squeegyin' along. I hear their body juices sloshin' around inside their cold bellies like walkin' quarts of *stihn*. Karl—if I only had a quart of *stihn*!" Abruptly he sank down in a sad, dejected heap.

"Yeah," growled the ex-lieutenant. "Keep crying, Kewpie Doll. If something happens to our memory-crystal here, we'll be drinking vat-acid tonight."

"Oh, don't talk that way, Karl!" moaned Larson. "Things is bad enough. Things is simply terrible. Either we blow ourselves to tendons or get pried and peered into by these furriners. We're gonna have those probosci dinnin' into our innards. We're gonna—"

"Shut up!" yelled Venard. Maybe the little man really was cracking up. No man is infallible. Maybe he, Karl Venard, would crack up too. He and Larson had been through a lot. But never anything like this. This was definite, inescapable. Maybe a little rationalizing, and wishful thinking, would be a good idea. Maybe he could even talk himself into believing that grapevine story about the Zharkon.

"What do we care, Kewpie Doll," he said, grabbed Larson and lifted him onto his feet. "I been thinkin' it over, and I think maybe that story about the Zharkon getting his double-brain injured might have some basis in fact. The way I figure it, that story is too fantastic to be handed out with any expectation of having it believed if it weren't true. Or at least we can assume it has some basis in reality."

Larson's round, staring face altered with sudden violence. His hands clutched Venard's sleeves. His eyes brightened. "Say it again. Keep on sayin' it."

Venard said it again. It was working. He really was beginning to believe it himself. "Sure it's very, very possible that the old semantically-trained Martians like Jhongan got into that throne room some-way and conked out the Zharkon's double-brain, and that's a lot of conking. And do

you know what that means? It means the whole Zharkonistic set-up will be thrown off center, maybe disintegrate entirely. Remember, the Marties have regressed in a social sense. They're primitives now. They worship the old gods — Styx, Amphoor, Aalghor. Their leader, the Zharkon, is the mouthpiece of the gods. If he goes, the gods and the whole militaristic mythology could very possibly crumble overnight."

It sounded magnificent. And it was possible, if one was sufficiently desperate.

"But it ain't true, an' you know it, Karl," moaned Larson.

"Oh, the devil with you," yelled Venard. "You're a negativistic melancholic, among other unmentionable things. As an example of the semantically trained mind, you speak oddly for the world of null-A."

"The awful disgrace of it, Karl. The whole Solar System taken over by barbaric sponges with legs. Who'd ever thought they had it in 'em?"

Venard gripped the cell bars in his big hands and pressed his forehead tightly against the cool hardness. "Yeah," he muttered. "Damnation, Kewpie Doll! I wish we could've escaped to the Underground. If the Martian Underground have really managed to injure Zharkon, that means maybe the Martian Terro-Colonial Armies of Occupation might disorganize, fall apart. And if we could only contact the Underground here—"

Venard shook his head; sweat speckled the metal wall. Fools. There was nothing to the rumor, because such a thing was impossible. There was no escape. Only the memory-crystal, a quick, self-administered destruction. Blackout.

Larson's voice was a faint, far-away whisper. "They're comin' for us. Look at them furriners—"

METAL doors had been clanging open. Venard was suddenly aware of the shuffling of feet and the lifeless stirring and phlegmatic voices of those whose minds had surrendered. Venard leaned against the wall of the cubicle. He wouldn't stand at attention now. Not again. He had once to avoid being beaten. But they couldn't do anything more to a man than kill him. And he would take care of that now, his own way. A much quicker and less complicated

way than was to be found in the experimental wards.

The women were the first of the pathetic line of chained humans who staggered into sight around a turn in the dark corridor. Their cells were on the west half of Concentration Camp No. 7 and they were always first in the hostage lines. Bony human wrecks in drab and ragged sack-like garments. Grey faces behind dry strings of unhealthy, scaly hair.

"The Marties, they ain't got any intelligence at all," whispered Larson, "to make beautiful females look that way. They're fiends. I remember when maybe them very ladies used to dance to a Ganymedian orchestra in the Lunaville escapee. That first one, now, she might be Glora Karstedt. Glora was the most beautiful woman in the System. Hey, Glora! Remember me, Kewpie Doll Larson?"

The pathetic skin-and-bone shape didn't even smile. Dull eyes stared straight ahead, pallid, blood-streaked face that was a blank mask of frozen horror. Venard gripped the bars. His knuckles shone whitely, his whole body a tense, helpless arc of mental torture. "If they could only die as Earthmen," he said softly. "And not as slaves."

Two Marties paused, one pressed a button.

"It's us all right," said Venard tensely. The cell door ground open. Boneless lengths of purple-veined arms, muscled like serpents, reached in and dragged the little man out first. Others reached for Venard. Animate sacks of liquid intelligence. Four sliding and contracting feet like snails. Filamented arms of great strength guided by highly emotional intelligence. Judged by human standards, these were horrors. Yet intelligence can hide behind any kind of facade. A mind adjusted to Solar concepts is influenced by intelligence and behavior alone, not by exterior physical aspects. These Martians had been good Solar citizens once, responsible and progressive. But they had been seduced by delusions of grandeur. The old Martian Royalists who had been overthrown a hundred years ago had returned. And returning, they had conquered democratic progressive thought, returned Mars to the old gods of carnage and dark evil, had plunged the Solar System into an orgy of primitive blood-lust, barbarism and hate.

Venard swore, threw off a heavy, plopping arm. Somehow, the heavy bulging body sacks had always resembled punching bags. He had longed to test this visual impression with tactile experimentation. A squeeshing smack belched out from beneath his fist. The shocked Martie stumbled back against the line of apathetic prisoners. Articulation on the tips of its appendages writhed after the butt of its sheathed H-gun.

But it didn't kill. Sadists in the experimental wards wanted every organism for their grisly research.

"Oh, Karl, you shouldn't ought to have done that," groaned Larson as he lifted the chain another Martie was trying to lower around his thick neck. Larson wrapped it around the Martian's purple-veined head instead, and with considerable force. Then a heavy arm slashed like a huge whip, thudded across Larson's flat nose. Blood spattered as the little man slumped, groaning, to his knees.

Venard was struggling in blind, hating helplessness with a number of arms that had encircled him like cable coils. And after that, as the line shuffled along, the chains were cold as space around his neck. And the thudding of the leathery arms flailing his back burned deeper than any Martie knew.

But against his side, in a little plastic pouch, the memory-crystal nestled. It was a comfortable feeling, the memory-crystal gave him. A comfortable chilling sensation, both warm and cold. Like an acrostic sonnet to death.

II

THEY WERE CHAINED TO A wall like dumb, dangerous beasts, though such a precaution appeared pitifully unnecessary. At frequent intervals, a contingent of Martian sycophants entered the narrow but high corridor and took a varied number of human slaves through a huge oval door. A door that had once been a gateway of learning into worlds devoted to peace and progressive research. This great structure, now in ruins from the Solar War between Mars and the rest of the System (except the world of the enigmatic Jovians who had remained neutral) had once been known as World Tech.

Now it was a huge torture chamber made more hideous because of its modern scientific equipment used for such savage, barbaric research.

There was a terrible kind of silence between these episodes of the opening of the door, except for the half-crazed breathing of resigned humans. But when the oval door opened, screams came out. There were dim, quick impressions of steam and odors. And of shadows that seemed only partly human now, writhing on a wall.

Blobs of sweat rolled down the little man's red face. A thick two-week's beard itched. Venard brooded over the three-dim memory-sphere of Vale, when no Guards were close enough to detect his furtive actions.

"About two more trips and we're going to be taken in there," choked Larson. "Karl! Look at me an' listen now." His voice lowered, trembled. "It's against my religious principles to take my own life. I'd rather get mine fighting fair. If we fight, maybe we can make 'em blast us with them H-guns."

"We've tried often enough," said Venard. "They're too handy with those whips they call arms."

Venard looked sardonically into the three-dim photo-crystal at the beautiful blond figure floating in it, shifting among multi-colored clouds. Red lips smiled, and deep, impassioned eyes shone up at Venard from the incredibly realistic opening that might almost have been a doorway into another world.

"Karl," moaned Larson, wringing his hands like a frightened girl. "Don't waste the last mortal seconds of your life moonin' over that faithless female."

The oval door opened. A long cry fluttered out. It bounded down the hall and through dark shadows and hollows. It was like a long nerve of cloth torn in two. It was a tattered, terrible sound. Larson shook, his jowls quivered, his eyes bulged. "Gods, Karl! What do they do to people in there? It's like hell, ain't it? Just like Dante's hell!"

"Beautiful," answered Venard softly. "Lovely as freedom. Soft as a night in Theophilus Crater."

"Huh? Oh, you mean her? She did you dirt. Why can't you forget her? She walked out on you. She wanted to be a sci-

entist, not Mrs. K. Venard. Forget her! Listen, I'm gonna make 'em blast me with their H's. You with me, Karl? Hey, she ain't worth a man's last thoughts."

The woman's face shifted, seemed to wink at Venard. His big, dirty hand carressed the cloudy dream stuff of the image. His ragged fingernail looked grotesque beside the cloudy loveliness.

"Ironic, isn't it, Kewpie Doll? She still lives, free and immune, I guess. Only traitors live and know freedom. But she loved me anyway, Kewpie Doll, even if she was only a passing fantasy. She was okay, just too intelligent for love. An I. Q. of 200. That's a lot of quotient. I said to her that night under the rim of Theophilus, 'Vale—this is it. Take your choice. Either me or your internship in Solar Science City. You either go into that science convent on Venus to wither away the rest of your unnatural life, or you and I take a honeymoon right here.' And, Kewpie Doll, you know what she said to me then?"

"How could I know?" slobbered Larson, eyes bugging at the oval door. It was opening again. "I heard it only eleven hundred and fifty-eight and one half times. Karl! I think they'll get us this trip. They—"

VENARD continued softly, as if unaware of the approaching Martie guards. "She said, Karl, darling. I love science and what it means to the System. All Venus is a wilderness, except for the odd under-sea civilization of the Sea People, and the great domed University called Solar Science City. Something's terribly wrong there—I don't know what, but there's something. Solar Science City was established by the best mentalities and resources of the entire System, for the good of the System. But for almost a hundred years Solar Science City has been an isolated, mysterious, incommunicative shell hiding something dark and evil. Because of my I.Q. I've been given the privilege of going there, if I desire. And I've decided to go. I'm going to find out why S. C. has retreated into its own shell, and no longer serves mankind. I'm going to find out what happens to all the great mentalities that go there. When I find out, I'll be back, Karl. Back to you."

"A nice speech that, Kewpie Doll. But

she never came back. No one ever comes back if they go into S.S.C. as either a faculty or student-member. If the war hadn't come along I was going to S.S.C. and find out the score. I wonder what the mystery is, and what happened to Vale. Two years, and not a word from her. She probably never even knew the Martians attacked the System. Or, if she did, I'll bet she never cared."

"Why worry now!" howled Larson, mopping at his head. "What can it matter now?"

"It does matter, in a way," said Venard. "Because S.S.C. could have saved the System. On our side, S.C.C. could have enabled us to defeat the Martians. The fact that they never even considered helping us proves that they are, themselves, somehow allied to decadence and evil. And they're safe. Even the Marties don't have weapons strong enough to break into S.S.C. And S.S.C. has weapons of science perfected in its super laboratories that could have defeated the Martian warlords in a few days. Wonder what is the secret of S.C.C.? The barbaric Martian desert tribes say that it is now ruled by an alien god. Anyway, dear Vale knows. But she won't tell."

"Alien god! Prepare," admonished Larson, "to meet your own."

"I'm ready." Venard clutched the memory-crystal tightly in his hand.

DIM fluorescents high in the plastic ceiling of the lofty corridor shed faint cold night. The purplish hue of the Martian's body sacks reflected the light like radioactive matter. Stocked eyes wavered, yellowish pale, iridescent horrors.

Venard turned. His chain rattled gently, without malice. He looked with studied insolence at the writhing-eyed Martian Guard who was coming toward him. Now it was removing the chain from the galling iron band about his waist. Another was doing the same with Larson. Guards stood at a slight distance with H-guns waiting to be drawn. Beneath his sour-smelling clothes, Venard grasped the memory crystal.

The tale behind the crystals flashed quickly through his mind; because it was rather a sorrowfully lovely tale, and the moment could use a touch of alien beauty.

In the pre-Solar Federation era, colorful sea-women of Venus, members of that semi-human and empirically intelligent race, were said to have carried the crystals while love remained true, but always ready to utilize the destructive power of the crystal for suicide when the lover whose face was captured in the cumulus depths of the sphere proved faithless.

Long before the Solar War the Venusians, with the ancient custom only legend had made the memory-crystals and sold them to a few hardy tourists for stupendous amounts of Solar credits. It had even been said that much of the vital life stuff of the one portrayed was imprisoned in the crystalline gadget. But horrified by the slaughter and barbarisms of the approaching war, the opaque Venusians had retreated to their under-sea cities and had remained hidden, far removed from war's madness. Venard didn't blame them in a way, any more than he blamed the Jovians who had remained neutral. The Venusian Seapeople were a timid, shy, highly aesthetic species, with a strange kind of non-physical, non-mechanical science—more of a philosophical, empirical mental science such as was embodied in the evolving of the memory-crystals.

The explosive power of the spheres wasn't anything tremendous; but this one could certainly wreck this particular part of Concentration Camp 7.

Venard watched the chains sliding through the Marto-alloy bands. He saw the ragged, hunched shapes of broken men and women sagging in horror and weakness as they were herded toward the oval door. And the door was opening again, maybe for the last time. A red, roaring flame was visible in there; a long quavering cry ripped through.

Venard stood back against the cold wall, raised the memory-crystal. He thought fleetingly that the figure in the sphere was so life-like that to destroy it was like murder. But Venard didn't care about murdering now. Not even murdering Vale's memory. Even memories were born to die.

"Earthmen!" he yelled suddenly, his voice cracking sharply against dulled minds like a whip-lash. Glazed eyes shifted. Bowed backs moved apathetically. A few bony hands pawed the air. "We'll die like

men!" yelled Venard. He flourished the memory crystal.

The Marties fell away. Their eye stalks writhed in abysmal fear. The dejected mass of filthy human wrecks lifted sunken faces, stared. It seemed that their minds were too dulled by shock and fear to even comprehend the meaning of a quick, clean death.

"Earthmen!" Venard's voice lashed out again. How long would it take the fanatical Marties to plunge at him in suicidal fervor? Not long. "Let's sing," he said it suddenly, on a mad impulse. These creatures must die as men. "The Terran Anthem hasn't been sung for a long time. Sing!"

There was magnetic driving power in his words. The Marties were trembling with indecision. Appendages were creeping toward H-guns. Venard made a threatening gesture with the memory-crystal. And the appendages stopped creeping—a little while.

"The Terran Anthem!" yelled Venard again. There was a reckless, sardonic smile on his face that Larson had never expected to see again. "We'll sing ourselves to sleep. These Martie scum think our courage is gone, our spirits broken. SING!"

It was a magnificent miracle. Dull eyes slowly rose up through many levels of fear and defeat and shock. Bent bodies straightened beneath dirt-caked rags. Bearded faces of men and haggard faces of women glowed with surging inner fires, newly kindled. Hands and arms raised. Voices joined in the Terran Anthem. The song the Martians hated with all the power of their cold minds to hate. Bony arms raised, quivering with weakness, but not anymore with fear. And cracked voices that grew stronger with each surging note, joined in a last outburst of defiance.

*Earth, Earth is mine.
No Gods destroy its soft green wine
Of verdant hills and sun-warmed summertime.
Earthmen we! Soldiers of the azure sea!*

Pioneers had sung it when colonization of bitter worlds was only beginning. In the unending swamps of Venus, its turbulent strains had shattered the dreary mo-

notony of loneliness. Over the deserts of Mars and the iceflows of Saturn the song had spelled unity of purpose, defiance of seemingly insurmountable barriers. Many an Earthman had died in the alien vapors of far places with its blood-stirring rhythm on his lips.

Unashamed tears cut the grime of Larson's face as he stood there on wide spread, stubby legs. But Venard laughed with animal joy and flourished the memory sphere. A beautiful woman still laughed from its crystalline depths, smiled without care as though she were again meeting Venard in the synthetic spring gardens of Theophilus Crater.

THE Martians shivered with indecision. They were fanatical, though; only a few more seconds would be needed to send them in an exulting suicidal charge. But louder the slaves sang.

*Earth! Earth we know.
Immortal world where Solar dreamers go
To sleep among ice-peaks and sunlit snow.
Earthman I! Wanderer of space and sky.*

The chorus was a swelling, deafening thunder of defiance in the towering expanse of corridor. Alarms clanged confusion in the background. Doors opened on the many tiers above Venard and Larson. Glaring lights swept frantically in sporadic circles. Marties appeared in hundreds of openings with H-guns poised, nervously, uncertainly; anxiety mucous flowed from pulsing pores.

"Sing!" laughed Venard wildly. He didn't feel quite sane, and he didn't care. "Earth isn't dead. Not while you can still sing, you're not dead, and your song will live forever!"

His wild laughter rang carelessly and madly up the towering heights of the partly-repaired corridor, down the lengths of it both ways, through the open oval door beyond which torture flames still glittered and shadowed, dehumanized bodies curled.

A thunderous moan spread up and outward. Chains clanged as awakened hope and honor and returning sense of dignity burned again in withered hearts. Then a number of H-guns burst suddenly into spontaneous, nervous slaughter.

"Sing!" Venard heard his voice echo-

ing for the last time. He drew back the arm which held the memory-crystal. A beam of crackling power burned his side. Seared flesh was nausea in his face. He dodged, dancing in his gauntness and flapping rags like a grotesque clown.

On Earth, of Earth we die!

Her sweet, enchanted winds our requiem cry.

For our lost love her gentle south winds sigh.

Earthmen we—

Suddenly, Larson leaped at the nearest Martian. He whipped to one side as an H-gun hurtled to the plastic mesh of the floor. He dived for it. But power rays cracked around him, glanced off walls and smoked through trembling layers of human flesh.

Larson sank slowly to his knees. His lips, thick with awed pain, mumbled heavily, "Give me time to pray." He was looking in startled surprise and horror at the blackened stub where his left hand had been. It happened so fast. A second ago he had a left hand. Now he had no left hand. But that would be so unimportant in a little while. The H-gun lay untouched. Screams rose from writhing forms.

"Throw the damned bomb," yelled Larson weakly. "And let me finish a prayer."

Venard twisted, a slim and gyrating target for thirsting rays. The entire corridor was a carnal room. A streak of flame seared his chest. He cried out, "No time for prayers now. Go on down to hell, Kewpie Doll. At least it's better than the one the Marties had planned for us."

Then he murmured, "Goodby, Vale, you served a good purpose after all." He hurled the coruscating sphere squarely against the wall beside the oval door. With the same movement his body fell sidewise in a dive to the floor where he was squeezing himself instinctively up against the wall as the concussion shook his brain into smothering dusty grayness.

III

HE DECIDED THAT HE WAS DYING and that as he died he dreamed. He felt no pain. Only triumphant gladness. They had died like men. What did it matter that the story of the Zharkon's

double-brain injury was only a glorious dream? What was the difference if the Martians continued to rule the system for a million years?

It made no difference. The song these ragged, filthy slaves had sung in a Concentration camp would be a symphonic background for the final chaotic death-pangs of the Martian culture. The songs of Earth, somehow, had always possessed a kind of deathless quality.

But what an odd dream for a dying mind! He was floating down a dark, dripping hall. Strange lights glowed. Something moved under him, something very solid and real for a dream or for death.

A far away voice said very softly against his ear, "Sleep, my friend. Rest. Sleep deeply and build up your strength. Get ready for a desperate journey."

And then, dropping into a velvet abyss, he really did sleep. Sometime later, Karl Venard awoke. And really knew he still suffered among the living when he heard a familiarly whining voice shouting: "I been cheated! I prayed—but them stalagmites look awful suspicious to me. You ain't foolin' me, La Crue! I'm in hell!" Larson was evidently very much alive.

Another familiar, but almost forgotten voice answered, "You're raising plenty of it, that's certain."

Venard could hardly believe it. La Crue, alive! The name snapped Venard's consciousness on full like a sudden bright flame. He sat up on a narrow bed. He was in a dry, comfortable spot surrounded by the mores of civilization, though in a chaotic rapidly constructed state. But some distance along a rough, natural underground cavern of vaulted proportions, calcareous water dripped monotonously. From the phosphorescent rock strata he realized he was deeply underground. A deeply buried natural cavern with damp recesses that justified Larson's violent waking reaction.

And La Crue, alive. La Crue had been the physician aboard the war ship *Valeron*, an old friend from pre-war Academy days. How many others of the Terran Guards were alive who, logically, should be dead? Venard raised up onto his elbows, watched La Crue leave Larson's side and come toward him. He looked ghost-like. Pallid from months spent

underground. But his lean body was healthy and vital enough otherwise. His square jaw was smoothly shaven. He grinned broadly at Venard.

"How you feeling, Karl?" He sat down on a flat rock. Below them, Venard could hear an underground river churning. He answered, "La Crue — you're — all three of us are supposed to be dead."

La Crue smiled wryly. "Not every Guardsman who fought that last battle over the Polar Palaces of Mars was killed. I'd say about a thousand escaped to the Martian Underground. Some of them, including myself, were transferred here by Underground space ships."

"That many?" Venard sat up, shutting his eyes a moment against dizziness. "Must have a bigger Underground than I thought."

"Comparatively few, but it allows us greater freedom of movement, greater capacity for cooperative effort. Most of the Martian commoners fell for the Zharkonistic program though." La Crue, who had been a psycho-medic in the guards, knew what he was talking about. "They were ripe for a crackpot philosophy like Zharkon provided. Too much specialization and not enough varied interests for individuals. Resultant mass hysteria. The old Zharkonian Royalists were just waiting in exile for such a break to move in. They've always resented the Martian revolution which established representative government on Mars. Anyway, there's another strong subversive Underground right here on Earth now, as well as on Mars and several other planets. We have cooked up a rather mad plan, or rather an old friend of yours has cooked it up. He won't even trust me with the details. He says only you and Kewpie Doll can carry it through."

"Let's get to that later," said Venard impatiently. "I want to know how Larson and I got out of that Concentration Camp explosion alive? Or did we?"

"The explosion itself wasn't sufficiently powerful to kill everyone, though it did a lot of damage. Partly luck, of course, that you survived. You would have been crushed when the structure crumbled after the explosion, if it hadn't been for this old friend of yours who dragged you two not only to safety, but to an escape tunnel

and here to the Underground; with help of course. There were some of us there to meet him."

"Who is this old friend?" said Venard dutifully.

"This old friend, Karl, was one of the Martie Guards. He didn't know you had the memory-crystal and you darn near blew him to pieces, too."

"One of the Martie Guards!" exclaimed Venard. "That's madness. You mean—?"

"That's right, Karl. You see this Underground of ours—this particular post, that is—is located pretty close to Concentration Camp 7. We've been digging an escape tunnel into Camp 7. This Martie was supposed to work with us. At a specified time, he was supposed to lead as many of the hostages as possible into this escape tunnel. But you beat us to it with the memory-sphere. The chaos helped the escape."

"But this old friend," persisted Venard. "Are you sure he's my old friend?"

"Yeah," grinned La Crue, "this old friend claims you're the only man living, Karl, who ever beat him ten consecutive games of sun-spot draw and—"

"Jhongan!" cried Venard. "Jhongan, that leathery monstrosity. That animated sponge. That — *he* was one of those lousy guards? Why—"

VENARD turned, and there was the Martian, his skin iridescent in the cold light. "Hello, you old space-eater," he said in that peculiar, slurred accent.

An entanglement of arms and tentacles to which Larson added his own scrawny arms. For a moment of joyous reunion it might have been the good old days when Jhongan and other Marties had been attending Terran Academy of Interplanetary Law. That had been a cultural policy, to exchange students in the various world academies.

"You were one of those Guards, and you got us out of that torture chamber?"

The Martie inclined his body sac in a nod. Few could converse with a Martie; it required a special skill. "I was planning it differently, as La Crue said. But it worked out just as well. La Crue has kept your consciousness submerged for three days. To build up strength. La Crue has also mentioned a plan. Not because I know you love flattery, I tell you that you

and Larson are the only ones for this job." Jhongan leaned forward and added: "It is possible, Karl, almost overnight, to save the Solar System and return to a peaceful, progressive Federation."

VENARD stared and Larson's little eyes became bright beads. Then Venard decided to take it easy, get the whole thing gradually. He was still in an unstable physical condition and too much of Jhongan's abruptness all at once might tip the scale back.

He rubbed his jaw. His eyes went again round the depressing reaches of the big Underground living quarters, or that particular part of it. Two women and a small ragged boy entered carrying crude cooking equipment. They smiled, and went through a small opening.

Larson mumbled, "I'd swear that girl was Glora Karstedt who just went through there." He hobbled across the shadowed cavern and disappeared after the woman, yelling "Hey! Hey, Glora. It's me, Kewpie Doll Larson. Remember—"

Jhongan said, "Not even a Solar War could change that guy."

La Crue shook his head slowly. "Wish all neurotics in the Undergrounds were as rational as old Kewpie Doll. We're having lots of psycho troubles down here in our Underground."

Jhongan let his heavy torso sink down between his four legs so that he now resembled a huge crab, while La Crue went on. He could wait. He was patient. He only hoped they would accept it when he presented the seemingly insane plan. La Crue explained, "Too much pressure down here. It's too unnatural an environment. No real hope either, so far, to relieve it. The complete abnormality of never getting a glimpse of the green hills of Earth, you know. They're developing what I call subterranean psychosis. A strange combination of claustro- and taphobia."

The psycho-medic looked pointedly at Jhongan. "And we've even had several outbreaks of planetary prejudice. Jhongan here looks just like any other Martie to an unintegrated mind. He's been physically attacked several times and almost killed since coming here from Mars a week ago. Special Underground passenger lines have been set up."

Venard stood up, stretched. "Trivia," he said finally. "That's what is driving all the Underground dwellers mad. False hope. Why not preach resignation?"

"After that speech you gave which stirred those people to sing the Terran Anthem, that is an obviously unrealistic statement on your part," said La Crue.

"We do have a chance," said Jhongan. "More than just a chance. I'll explain whenever you two pedantics get ready to listen."

"Where there's life, there's hope, eh?" said Venard sardonically. "That could also apply to a paramecium."

"There's more to this hope than you can ever guess," said Jhongan. "Listen, old friend. The rumor's true."

Venard stared, sagged. "You mean about Zharkon?"

"Yes," La Crue's black eyes shone. "Zharkon the Third's corto-brain half has been irreparably injured. The greatest conquering army in Solar History is temporarily leaderless."

Venard almost fell, caught himself by grasping La Crue's shoulder. "Shhhhh," he whispered. "Let me sleep."

"It's no dream," assured La Crue, while Jhongan gloated. "And Jhongan has a plan concerning the Zharkon. He won't tell me, or anyone else."

"I'll not even tell you, Venard," said Jhongan, "why you are to do what you are to do. If you are taken prisoner, they might put a thought recorder on you and find out the truth. That must not happen at any cost. The Solar System's future is at stake."

"If the Zharkon's brain is really injured, irreparably, why worry any more?" asked Venard.

"Because a new double-brain is developing in the breeding vats, and will soon be able to take office. Listen, old friend. The rumor's true because I was one of the subversives who planted the electron pellet beneath the Zharkon's throne. My five years of exemplary service to the Zharkonites was repaid. If the Zharkon dies, there may be temporary disorganization of the Zharkonistic government machine. During that brief upheaval, we might just possibly be able to organize resistance against the Martian hordes, although I don't know where we could find sufficient

weapons, ships, or even capable fighting men. Do you?"

"No," said Venard. "No."

"In the Zharkonian breeding room a new double-brain is being carefully incubated. The High Priests of Zharkon can easily transfer present worship from the dying old Zharkon to the new and very embryonic Zharkon even though it is under age. But the High Priests aren't sure that during that period of transition, the Allied Worlds of Earth, Ganymede, Callisto, Mercury, Neptune and the Asterites, may not be able to manage some kind of devastating revolt. Though that's too much of a gamble for us. You see, if my plan succeeds, it's absolutely certain that practically overnight Mars will become a lover of peace, and the System will return to a Democratic Federation."

"What is the plan?" said Venard impatiently. "Don't tell me you've found a magic wand somewhere?"

"It isn't really my plan," said Jhongan. "It's *their* plan—the High Priests of Zharkon. They're going to Venus. They're going to attempt an invasion of Solar Science City."

VENARD felt a little lost. His brain spun chaotically. "The Martians can't invade S.S.C. Even their science isn't big enough to crack open those force fields around S.S.C. That's the greatest fortress ever built in the System. And according to the original laws concerning S.S.C., no member or members of an aggressor planet can gain legal entry into S.S.C. for any reason. So what's the matter with the High Priests?"

"Nothing, Karl. They're going to try, and maybe they do have some secret method worked out. Whatever benefits to the System are available in S.S.C., those Martians are absolutely not entitled to them. The High Priests of Zharkon will have to force their way into S.S.C."

"Okay," shrugged Venard, "they can't. That settles that. Why do they want to get into—" He straightened, his eyes narrowed. "I get it. They want into the hetero-transplant wards. They want to replace the brain of the injured Zharkon with the one that's preserved in the body bank in S.S.C. Then no one will ever know that their Zharkon was ever injured. That's

clever—but they can't do it. Don't they know that?"

"They're desperate," said Jhongan.

"That Zharkon double-brain in the S.S.C. body bank has been there for three hundred years. It's perfectly preserved and has never been injured. It was granted to S.S.C. by the Martian Democratic Presidium for research purposes."

"Then you want Larson and me to prevent them from getting the brain, or warn S.S.C. that the Martians are going to try to get it?"

"No," said Jhongan softly. "I hope you believe me. You see, your assignment is to help the High Priests get that brain out of S.C.C. Whatever the cost, that brain transplantation must be a success."

Venard said nothing. Through his stunned brain suspicion was creeping like a cloying disgusting fog. Maybe Jhongan was a counter-spy. And yet, he knew that couldn't be.

"I wish I could explain why," said Jhongan. "But, as I've said, if the Martians capture you and clamp a thought recorder on you, they'll know the truth and will not make the transplantation." Jhongan paused. His stalked eyes snaked down, probed deeply into Venard's. "Believe me, old friend," he said with a terrible passion. "This is the great test of the mutual trust our worlds held with each other before the war. Believe me, old friend. Say you believe me and will do this thing?"

Venard hesitated only an instant, then said slowly. "I believe you, Jhongan. We'll do it. But how?"

Jhongan's body sac sunk inward with a sigh of intense relief. "You and Larson have an advantage. Earth isn't an aggressor nation and therefore has legal right to enter S.S.C.—if there is some personal reason for doing so. Larson has that reason. If any person has missing body parts, he has the privilege of requesting entry into S.S.C. to replace that missing part."

"You mean, Larson," said Venard. "His missing left hand would give him entry not only into S.C.C. but directly into the hetero-transplant wards."

Jhongan bobbed his body sac. "He can probably get into S.C.C. if that sorrowful institution has retained even that much of its original purpose. After that, his duty will be to get the double-brain somehow,

and get it outside S.S.C. The High Priests of Zharkon will be outside trying to get in, if Larson times it right. He can give them the brain. Whether they'll let him live or not as a reward, I don't know. The sacrifice will be worth it, to a Guardsman. The High Priests will take that brain to Mars and transfer it to the dying Zharkon's brain case. If that is done, I assure you, peace throughout the Solar System will be only a matter of hours. But you and Larson will have to move fast. I know that the High Priests are probably heading for Venus right now."

"Sounds incredible," said Venard. "But, Jhongan, I believe you. We'll do it, of course. But I wish I knew why."

Jhongan said, "This is a point to regard—the reason is quite simple. You could figure it out, Venard, if you tried hard enough. Therefore, don't even try to evolve an answer. If you're captured by the Martians, you must know nothing."

"But if that's the case," said Venard suddenly, "then you—"

THE Martian trembled violently. A loud commotion suddenly spilled through the cave opening. Two men and a woman were leaping toward them. One wore a tattered Guardsman's uniform. The other man and woman were dressed in drab civvies.

"They're psychos who've escaped from the sanitarium," yelled La Crue. "They're Martophobes; they're after Jhongan! Stop 'em."

The mad Guardsman had a long alloy knife which Guardsmen formerly carried more for uniform decoration than for utilitarian purposes. He raised it as he leaped at Jhongan. The screaming woman and shouting man were also headed for Jhongan with clutching hands. The man's eyes gleamed insanely. The woman screeched, "Martie dog! Dirty, filthy Martie devil!"

Before either Venard or La Crue could intercept the man with the knife, he had thrown himself upon Jhongan's unresisting body. With screaming nerves, Venard saw the knife rise and fall again and again, savagely. He saw the green life juices spurt like a monstrous fountain. He heard himself swearing madly as he pulled the death-drenched Guardsman off Jhongan's twitching body, felt his fists crunch and

saw the psycho topple away, his face crushed in.

Venard and La Crue were leaning over Jhongan's punctured body sack. "He's dying," said La Crue hoarsely. "They die fast in Earth atmosphere. There's nothing anyone can do."

A tentacle reached up slowly, wrapped itself around Venard's hand. Venard heard the funny slurred tones of the Martie say in a dying whisper, "You promised. Don't fail. Promise you won't fail, Karl, old friend?"

"Yes," Venard gripped the tentacle. It went lax, plopped lifelessly down onto the cold damp stone.

"That's his answer," said Venard as he straightened wearily but with a stony resolution of face.

"Answer?" said La Crue. "To what?"

"I was going to ask him what would happen if he were captured by Martians. He knows the reason for this plan of helping transplant the Zharkon's brain. He answered that." He looked down at Jhongan. "He could have gotten away. He let the psycho kill him. Perhaps it was better that way. It saved him from having to kill himself."

La Crue, after a long silent moment, said, "How could anyone have planetary prejudice when a Martie is capable of such magnificent heroism for all civilized species?"

"They won't, someday," assured Venard, his jaw tense. "Someday, every species in the system will be judged only by their individual worth rather than by their physical appearance—thanks to the complete unselfishness of men like Jhongan."

"Anyway," said La Crue, "we know now that Jhongan's plan must be sound, if he believed in it so completely."

"Yes," said Venard, "we know now" He saw Larson stagger a little as he emerged from a tunnel mouth into the cavern with a half-emptied plastic bottle of *stihn* in one hand. Hanging on the little man's other arm was a rather shapely girl. She was looking at Larson with curiosity more than interest.

When Larson saw Jhongan, dead, the bottle of *stihn* bounced on the stone floor. The girl whirled away from him, uttering a sharp cry of protest that died as she saw Larson's violent reaction.

Then he came up close to Venard, cold sober now, and waited. He was ready now, ready for anything.

Abruptly, Venard said, "We're going to Venus. Tonight. Come on!"

"Okay, just a minute while I—what? Venus? Why?" Larson stared. His little eyes shifted to Jhongan. "About that plan of his, huh? I'm ready. Let's go."

Venard told him everything he knew, with intermittent injections from La Crue.

"It's about as clear as that Venusian mud's gonna be," said Larson.

"You need a left hand. That'll get us inside S.S.C. or rather get you inside. We hope. A few have taken advantage of their body bank facilities; but S.S.C. doesn't encourage it. There are stories horror coming out of S.S.C. And you know the one I was telling you about the concept of an alien God."

"Yeah," breathed Larson. "That alien god. I don't like that."

La Crue cut in, "A small Scouter's ready to blast off from a subterranean cradle near here. The Underground has several of them cradled at strategic points for emergencies."

"Let's go, Kewpie Doll," snapped Venard. "And don't try to guess why. Although in your case, I can't see the danger."

"Goodby," said La Crue as a Guard appeared to lead them through secret tunnels to their wating Scouter. "And good luck . . ."

IV

THERE ARE NO ADVENTURES in space. Either a space-flight is safe monotony, or quick death. But as the two Guardsmen approached the vast mysterious dome of S.S.C. somewhere in the Mesozoic nightmare, the vaporous, steaming, endlessly stretching rain-forest of Venus, they stumbled with wracking weariness. Reptile-infested swamps and steaming seas, foul-smelling, rotten—it was an incredibly perilous planet.

For five hours they had burned their way through giant flora and fauna and sweat, H-guns hot with almost steady usage. And then Venard finally parted some phosphorescent, glowing lichen and there the gigantic dome rose up and up and

lost itself in thick mist. But between them and their goal was a hellish nightmare barrier, spilling stinking muck into a placidly steaming sea.

Larson mopped at mud and sweat-slimed face, stared in fearful awe. Venard swore. They were blocked by a moat, a green, oozing mud-river, flowing oilily. From out of it, projected huge spines, ribs, and warts covering towering, brilliant, multi-colored mounds—that *moved!* Scaly mountains of shifting, radioactive lime. "Giant mollusc bed!" gasped Venard. Low tide now, but during high tide the sea on their right would back up this far. But high tide was hours distant.

There were thousands of the molluscs, every size, shape and color. Venard's head went quickly to either side. "It goes out of sight both ways, Kewpie Doll. Into the sea and into the swamp. Trapped!"

Larson squirmed, muttering, "Them bivalves are flesh-eaters. Look!"

A *gruoon*, a flying reptile, had started a dive across the thick air toward the fungus-covered dome of S.S.C. A giant bivalve, at least fifty meters wide, snapped open. Its lifting shell-half dripped an avalanche of tendrils and muddy slime. A pliable snout whipped upwards. On its end, a formless pliant mouth full of row after row of rasp-like teeth, closed on the *gruoon*, sucked it into the pallid grey pulsating interior of the bivalve. Its shells closed with slow certainty on the writhing, screaming *gruoon*.

"We can't make that trek on foot, Kewpie Doll. Got to get back to the ship. We landed on the wrong side. Got to rush things though, and get the Zharkon's brain before the Marties try illegal entry and ruin everything. Come on. I'll get you inside S.S.C., don't worry."

"I'll worry either way—hey, listen!" He froze. His eyes rolled up and followed the sound droning invisibly above the impenetrable envelope of mist—the long *hissshouwww* of a decelerating Martian war-ship.

"That's the boys," growled Venard darkly. His jaw knotted. "Not time to go back to the ship. Probably five hours—if we made it at all." His eyes studied the hundred meter-wide barrier of quivering, snapping, hungry molluscs. "I wonder," he murmured, "if we could do it?"

But Larson, moaning and trembling, was already waist-deep in the iridescent slime. Venard grinned and followed jerkily. "We'll try to crawl from one to the other," he managed to say. "So keep your remaining hand free. Don't draw your blaster unless you have to."

Followed by Larson, now behind him, Venard started climbing gingerly up the jagged, weirdly-glowing mollusc. Larson puffed painfully, swearing. They were half way across the shell before it shifted. They crouched down, hanging on desperately. Around them, shells snapped open and shut hungrily. Mouthed probosci were snaking about, dragging things out of the air.

"If we can stay on these things," gasped Venard. "Haven't seen any of them interested in each other. This baby has a keen sense of taste and smell; not much sense of touch, though."

Their shell suddenly rocked violently. The two Guardsmen squeezed themselves between two roughly porous spines for support, drew their blasters. The top half of the bivalve was slowly lifting.

They clung precariously by friction alone while the shell shook, rose higher and higher. It shifted, and fell so that its hinge was uppermost. Larson yelped, slipped, almost fell within reach of the pulsing pink-tissued maw. His face was dead white.

The gigantic pinkish foot of the mollusc was oozing out and out, away from them toward the opposite embankment. It stopped almost across the bed; and when it withdrew toward them, in short contracting jerks, it left behind, cemented against the shell of another mollusc, a long strand of fleshy cable as big around as Larson's arm.

The mussel's foot contained a narrow groove ending at a gland which exuded a sticky substance, much like liquid glue. This hardened almost instantly when exposed to air. Their shell had placed this foot against the other mollusc, and the sticky material was forced along the groove, touched the other mollusc, adhered and hardened. Then by slowly drawing back the foot, their own shell had, with astounding speed, spun a strong cable almost across the moat.

"An anchor," shuddered Larson. "It's

put out an anchor just like a ship."

"That cable's more than just an anchor, Kewpie Doll. Evolution's given him such a weak foot compared to its body weight; it has to throw out a cable and drag itself from one place to another."

The cable was tightening. The pitted shell to which they miraculously clung began to shift slightly as the cable stretched taut. "This is too lucky a break," groaned Larson. "Getting a free ride across like this. There's a catch to it, somewhere. Venus ain't operatin' no free ferry service."

"And that's the catch!" Venard pointed. "We fastened to that other mollusc. Instead of us moving, we're pulling that other oyster out of its bed!"

Their living anchor base lifted upward slowly with a long sucking sound. Their own mollusc wasn't making enough headway even to pull himself up over other shells. Its anchor base was too weak. But not passive. It reacted violently.

"Watch out!" screamed Larson, shrinking.

The mollusc to which the cable was fastened suddenly opened its giant shells, snapped them shut with a thunderous crack. The effect was to send its great weight in a flying jump to the right about fifteen meters. The cable parted with a sighing whine, whipped out, round and back in a deadly arc. Larson screamed again. Only once. The cable swept him away into the mud. Multicolored, squid-like faces sprouting thousands of powerful filaments, writhed hungrily toward him as he struggled briefly.

A choking, helpless horror went through Venard as he saw the bivalve snap open, and then, a snaking proboscis with the filamented mouth whip out and close on Larson's twisting body to jerk him down with lightning swiftness into that pulsating abyss of hungry flesh.

It had happened awfully fast to the toughest little guy in the System.

TOO FAST for Venard even to try against invincible odds to avert his death. Eaten alive by a clam. He tried to think of things that would compensate as the mollusc spun another cable. He concentrated his eyes and thought on the taut flesh cable the bivalve had spun, the



one remaining link with S.S.C. and the fulfillment of Jhongan's unknown plan. First Jhogan, then the Kewpie Doll . . . He had to keep on to make their sacrifice seem worth while. Theirs and billions of others throughout the System.

The mollusc had reached the end of the cable. Its unpredictable nerve centers had decided, however, to settle down right there. Its migration was over, maybe for years. And Venard was still about fifty feet from the other side of the moat.

Acting on impulse, Venard hooked his arms over the cable and leaped toward the bank. He slid wildly, with little friction, along the new slickness of the cable strands, plopped into the mud. He crawled frantically up onto the thick vegetation just as a univalvular mouth missed him by inches, tried again. He burned it and the charred snout curled away.

He was across, lying against the mossy slimy uprising shell of S.S.C. But so what? He had two hands. Larson, their entry ticket, was gone. He steeled himself, didn't let himself think about it anymore. He brought the H-gun on down in a quick savage gesture across his left wrist. . .

He didn't lose consciousness. It was just a quick, jabbing, burning agony. He looked at the charred stub—and then quickly swallowed five para-pills. They calmed him, enabled him to climb to his feet and follow the elevated ramp until he came to the ingress to the scanning chamber.

He stood inside, before the wall, his legality being checked. The chromoplex room was barren except for the telescreen and the opening of the tubecar that would plunge him through the magnetized vacuum tube into the heart of S.S.C.—and to what?

Tendrils of a vague fear oozed insidiously into his mind. He couldn't shake free from a superstitious sensing of evil hidden danger. He heard the faint murmuring of concealed photo-electric mechanisms and relays. He was being thoroughly scanned.

A milky opalescence filled the screen, and coalesced; a misty outline solidified, looked stoically at Venard. Recognition shocked the Guardsman. It was Bronlen, greatest Solar physicist Terra had ever produced. Bronlen had been summoned to

S.S.C. ten years ago to become its Director. Consequently, like all who came here, he had dropped out of all sight and sound. But how he had changed! Only a few among the allied worlds had ever come to S.S.C. for a long time now, even for such a vitally needed thing as a body part transplantation. S.S.C. had become a place of mystery and strange fear. A place shunned and hated.

The austere, smoothly-aged face seemed, somehow, not human. Unalive, a dull conscienceless face that shouldn't be Bronlen at all. The bloodless lips parted.

"You may enter, barbarian. You are entitled to have your left hand replaced, thought it's too bad you decided to annoy us, and didn't resign yourself to your barbaric fate of one-handedness like most other barbarians of the System have wisely decided to do. However, upon completion of the transplantation, you will be transported immediately and directly back out of S.S.C. Now the tubecar will take you directly to the hetero-transplant ward."

The screen faded and Venard, boiling with inner rage and hatred, entered the tubecar. Then, desperate helplessness as he felt the tingling numbness settling over his brain. Concealed hypnotic frequencies. They were blanking him out!

V

SOMETIME LATER HE WAS violently awakened by hands shaking him. "Karl! . . . Karl!" There was a terrible urgency in the low, rich voice. But this was mad dreaming! He'd never really expected to hear this voice again. Subconsciously, buried deep down, he had perhaps entertained the idea that he might see her again, but—

"Karl, hurry and wake up, for the love of Heaven! They're coming back. I've got to explain before they get here!"

Venard opened his eyes, sat bolt upright on a kind of operating table. It was her all right. Vale. She was bending over him. Strangely, she didn't seem to have changed much. She appeared older, a little, with some of the blue fire gone from her eyes. "Hello, Vale," he finally managed to say rather thickly. He didn't want to sound that way. He wanted to sound cynical, tough. He didn't at all.

In her drab grey interne's robe and cap she stood trembling above him, eyes wild with fear. She shoved his H-gun at him. "I don't know why you came here, but take this gun. You'll need it. I know you didn't come here just for another hand."

Wordlessly, he took the gun, hid it under his tunic. He flexed his—yes, they had transplanted the hand. He clenched his new fist on the H-gun. The whole transplantation process probably hadn't taken more than an hour. Incredibly advanced healing acceleration—amazing biochemical and surgical science. Just an example of the knowledge held imprisoned inside S.S.C. Knowledge that should have been given out to the Fédération.

"Vale. You don't seem the same. Why didn't you come back? You promised."

Her eyes shone wetly, and her full lips quivered. "Oh, how I wanted to come back. I tried. But it completely ended my free agency of will and mind." Then her voice became harsh and urgent.

He swung around as she said tautly, "No time for reminiscence. I know you. You're here for some desperate, mad reason or other. But it won't go here, Karl. S.S.C. is completely under its power. You haven't a chance, nothing human has a chance against it. That's why I never even tried to get word to you at first, while I still had a chance. I knew that if you came here to help me, it would only get you too. None of us here can do anything now, or ever. We're all mindless slaves."

"Except you," commented Venard sarcastically. "I.Q. Saunders. But then, you always did have a mind of your own."

Her eyes darted wildly down toward the paneled door of the operating room. "That puzzles me, Karl. My full mental faculties returned to me seven days ago, Earth time. It was a flash of white flame. And it's hold over me dropped away. But it's influence is coming back, creeping in again. Oh, it's horrible, horrible! Karl, you've got to—"

Venard felt a chill of alien cold. Seven days ago, Earth time. "The memory-crystal," he whispered. "That's the night I smashed the Venusian memory-crystal."

"Don't talk mystical nonsense," she said frenziedly. "When they come to send you out of S.S.C., don't try any mad scheme.

Just go, and please say or do nothing. Just leave S.S.C. without question. Please Karl."

He liked to hear that kind of talk, especially from Vale. He stood up; he was a little weak. "I came here to get that preserved Zharkonian brain from the body banks. I'm going to give it to the Martians and they're going to replace the present Zharkonian ruler's injured brain with it. You can believe anything, even that I'm a spy working for the Marties, if you want to. Jhongan said—"

Vale interrupted. "That's the brain we have preserved here. That of the first Zharkon. An experiment in bio-chemistry. They actually succeeded in developing a synthetic brain." Her lips twisted thoughtfully. "Yes, I can see Jhongan's reasons. Ingenious, and it probably would work, but—listen!"

She gripped his shoulders. The touch did things to Venard's nervous system. Forgotten things. "But it's useless," she said, "for you to try such a scheme here, Karl. The Martians, for all their military might, are just insignificant pawns."

Venard exclaimed, "Martians—just pawns! You haven't been around lately. Those babies have taken over everything, and they intend to keep it. This other menace . . . don't be so mysteriously evasive, Vale. Who, or what, is this *it*? Don't tell me the Martie desert tribes' rumors about an alien god controlling S.S.C. is authentic!"

She tried to answer, but she swayed, shut her eyes, and clenched small white fists. Her body twitched violently, blood drained from her face. He shot an arm about her waist, but she was stiff, cold and unyielding. And this was too abnormal. Her head fell back over his arm. Then she opened her eyes slowly. They were glazing, dulling, as though being seared by a minute but-horrific flame. Her lips moved stiffly. "It—back—jo—jo—"

He was holding her that way when the door slid noiselessly open and they filed through.

HE HATED THEM thoroughly—the weird polyglot of selfish recluses, without purposes here in their rotten, sequestered borough. Greatest minds of the System withholding their marvels of science.

The Martie surgeon, the Mercurian medic, the Ganymedian and Saturnian, slippery, metallic and spidery. And weirdest of all, the Jovian liquescent brain in its square, black cubicle body . . . a faceless, eyeless, limbless parasite. An incredibly specialized thinking formulae sentiently bubbling in the arms of the Martian medic.

On its own world, there were special mechanisms designed to carry these Jovians around. But here in S.S.C. it evidently utilized personnel for transportation. No Jovian had ever visited another world in the System, and vice versa. They were neutrals with a strict mutual code of hands off with all other planets.

They were the sociopaths of the System. They had never entered the Federation, even on paper. Isolationists who—

THEN he knew. Without that clue from poor Vale, he might never have found out the truth until it was too late. If it wasn't already much too late.

"*Jo—Jo—*" just what she had been trying to tell him. The menace to the Solar System that made even the Martians only insignificant pawns were the unknown completely ignored Jovians!

The Martians pawns of these little—impossible. No, not impossible. The Jovians were mysteriously uncatalogued. They possessed telepathic power by which they communicated with each other. But no being of any other planet had ever been able to communicate with a Jovian—as far as anyone knew. It was said that it demanded some time for a Jovian to familiarise itself with highly individualized brain-wave patterns.

But when they did, they were supposed to be able to control that mind—

Venard shivered, uncontrollably. The horrible implication, the tremendous scope of possibility flooded open, poured fear in Venard's desperate, groping brain. Having never entered in Solar politics, having always been withdrawn, unobtrusive, and silent on their dim dark world, they had been theoretically harmless. But what if they secretly controlled key figures in the System? Here, in S.S.C., they could have enslaved the greatest weapons and knowledges of science of the entire Solar System, and from there—

Vale had stiffened in his arms, fell

away from him. She was standing there coldly watching him with no warmth and no feeling, suddenly an alien antagonistic being. The others ringed him, silently waiting and watching.

Venard's semantically-trained mind reacted quickly and efficiently. The Jovian needed a certain unspecified time to solve the intricacies of Venard's highly individualized brain patterns. In that uncertain interim, he had to get the brain of Zharkon I out of S.S.C. to the waiting Martians. If they were waiting. And, if this Jovian mentality in a cube controlled S.S.C., there was only one possible action. Capture the Jovian. With the dark world being in his power, he could control S.S.C.—that is, until the Jovian familiarized itself with his brain waves, and all the complex inter-relations of the incredibly intricate switch-board of his cerebrum.

Nothing could comprehend all the circuits in its entire complexity. The Jovian power lay in its specialized ability to probe into key centers and control them. If Venard did control the Jovian, it would be only until it grasped his individualized peculiarities of rhythm and circuits. It had taken quite long, seven days, to renew its control of Vale's big I. Q. even when it had already controlled it once. But his—how long? Maybe days, hours. Maybe only minutes. He was no complex cerebral organism.

Anyway, his H-gun suddenly in his hand, he leaped for the Martian who held the Jovian. Venard had gambled often.

A wave of evil and rather horrid thought struck him along with a snarl of material resistance from the polyglot of beings who opposed him. The Jovian knew his purpose; its sycophants were resisting him madly. Sycophants—the greatest mentalities of the System, pawns of a six-inch cube!

Venard, too late, tried to avoid the Martian's appendage raking at his H-gun; but it struck savagely downward and the H-gun fell away under the whip-like force, clattered across the plastic floor. He buried a fist in the body sac, and the Martian toppled away. Venard drove after it, clutching at the Jovian in its tentacles; and he felt it against his hands. He pulled, strained, swore. The little metallic Mercurian whined thinly and swirled its fila-

ments at Venard. He pulled the Jovian under one arm, hugged it against his side, shivering; and then he grabbed a shocking electrifying handful of the Mercurian and wrenched savagely. A hot, leadish fluid boiled from the gaping hole as the Mercurian slumped.

Venard fell away from the Martian, holding the Jovian frantically, crawled dizzily along the floor as he scabbled for the H-gun. Two other figures were diving for it. Vale, and the Neptunian spiderman. It wasn't really Vale now. It was just a segment of the Jovian's mind, but it wasn't easy to swing a short solid blow that connected scientifically with her small delicate jaw so that she slumped soundless. His hand went on around, gripped the grey furred neck of the spiderman, twisted it. Mandibles jerked apart, and a poisonous green juice streamed outward, missed Venard's face by inches.

Then he had the H-gun in his hand; he pressed it against the black faceless cube. He sent out quick stabbing thought messages and commands at random. He didn't know whether the H-gun's electri-power unit would effect the Jovian's shell or not. But he soon found the potentiality. "Call them off, or I'll destroy you," he kept thinking frantically.

OTHERS had been summoned; a number of weird beings jammed the door into the operating room. But it was plain that the Jovian was vulnerable to the H-gun. Its one weapon was thought control. It had no others at all. Until it could solve the enigmatic intricacies of Venard's neuro-cerebral circuits, it was helpless. Until then, Venard controlled S.S.C. Until—then?

The minions of the Jovian were frozen in tense silent waiting; motivated by a single thought command, they stood taut, watching him dully.

Already he sensed the dark hate and growing frenzy of the Jovian rising. Evidently it was figuring out its problem.

Holding the Jovian tightly, the H-gun trained directly on it, Venard ran out the door while the knot of Solar beings parted before him in a jerky weaving enslavement. He shuddered. These were super-

minds—these wolfish, silently waiting ghoul. Every conceivable size and form that crawled, hopped, floated and wobbled, every type of Solar intellect from ingenious plant life to pure energy entities pulsing whitely in mid-air. All equally helpless to act until the Jovian could act.

The Martian medic had recovered and was tottering blearily on its four contracting legs. "You," Venard gestured at the Martian, at the same time jiggling the Jovian suggestively. "Lead me to the body bank section. I'm after the brain half of Zharkon I. Quick, on the double! Or I blast your Jovian dictator in a million pieces."

The Martie started down the vaulted hall, with Venard close behind him. And the rustling progress of all the others followed expectantly. A sharp, jolting shock rocketed between his temples; the Jovian had connected with a sneak punch. How long would the Jovian need? It would be easier to work against time if he knew how much time he had.

They passed massive walls lined with huge, sealed and refrigerated sterile banks containing spare body parts of every intellectual type of being among all the Solar Worlds. Bank after bank filled with fantastic arrays of alien body parts. One bank contained, for example, every variety of articulation; among these were every kind of human hand. Doubtless his hand had come from here. Then his reluctant Martie medic guide paused before one bank especially reserved for the synthetically developed mass of convoluted tissue known as the double brain of Zharkon I, three times larger than a human brain. It boasted two completely separated brain sections, the thalamic and the cortical. The lack of ability to integrate these two seats of pure primitive emotion and pure reason resulted in the variable, unpredictable, unstable actions of most humans or other intellects. The Zharkon could turn on either and create desired levels of reaction—almost an ultimate free agency, or free will set-up. This was one of the first developed Zharkon double brains. A thousand years old.

The Martie opened the bank at Venard's command, lifted it out in its sealed, self-containing unit. The Martie adjusted temperature and self-feeding gauges that

would keep the brain preserved in transit for an unspecified length of time.

Venard staggered then, and grabbed for support where there was none. A thick slimy blackness closed in. The damn Jovian! He could feel the dark, vast depths of its alien mind opening, then merging with his own. A vaulted abyss of mental perils loomed that were thought-shattering. He felt himself falling, falling through mental parsecs. White-hot knives slashed deep into his flashing brain, wrenching, stabbing. He sobbed for air, staggered through a veiled mist in some strange and hideous mental land.

There were moaning forces of evil screaming through tortured nerves. And somehow, he was crawling through this thick, swirling evil mental land. A red roaring throbbed in his ears. His heart pumped desperately as he crawled toward something that fought him with all the strength of fear, black hate, and a massive, evil will. Huge, surrealistic, he saw his hand before his burning eyes; they were like disembodied parts of himself. Far out ahead of him, digging, clawing futilely toward some goal he had to attain. He couldn't remember what it was.

His hands gripped white-hot metal, but he couldn't let go or he would fall back away from the thing he must reach. Stench of burning flesh clouded his eyes. Pain rocketed back into his face. He couldn't fight it! He was losing, failing, sinking back and down. Then his hands were beating empty space, and he was toppling into a black well with a bottom of—there was no bottom. With a hopeless, despairing cry, he writhed frantically, found a jagged edge and hung on, straining, every nerve screaming, at a scaly wall that shivered, heavily alive.

BUT his hands were slipping; he knew he would fall into the well. And once he fell into that blackness, he was gone forever. He was in a world of thought, and in that world he had no defenses, not against such a highly specialized entity of thought as the Jovian. Yes—that was the goal—he was trying to reach the Jovian. That was the symbol. But he could never reach it. The pain was too great. Pain could kill. Shock could stop his brain and heart.

"Vale!"

His voice was harsh, despairing. Had he called? Had he sent that wild cry ringing out toward someone, anyone—?

"Vale!"

But she could not help him now! She was even further down in this black hell of the Jovian's. She was already lost . . .

"Vale . . ."

The voice was weak, now, weak as is the voice of one dying. Black horror rose about him—

Then, in an abrupt flooding surge of joyous change, the blackness was blotted out by light.

VI

A SOFT, DISTANT SHIMMERING GLOW pierced through in arrows of jeweled brilliance. A swirling mist swam toward and around him. It was a beautiful, soft enchantment. A green world of gently swaying fronds and phosphorescent bubbles climbing and bursting in clouds of multi-colored flame.

It was an underwater city, a delicate coraled Babylon of some alien beauty, with avenues of high dainty ferns swaying to the urgings of invisible currents. Enmeshed in this strange ensorcelled dream of jeweled, glimmering, glittering wonder, Venard's mind sped through emerald halls . . .

And suddenly, by his side, there was Vale—her presence mistily improbable, and yet somehow definite. He could not see, he could not feel, but he could know—

He and Vale were being summoned, called by frantically urging minds.

They floated into a room that was nebulous, quivering now into plainer sight, now withdrawing into indefiniteness. Then Venard saw a brilliant flame that grew, hardened, crystallized, shone brighter and more brilliantly strange. Mists of argent light, then floating shadowy shapes of incredible delicacy swam into view. He knew it now.

The Undersea City of the Venusian Sea People.

Small, round, quasi-human faces looked with deep concern into his. Not his face, but into his mind, his roving, battling mind. Opaque arms, delicate and slender

as flower stems, motioned with desperate urgency.

The reality of the apparent fantasy hit Venard like a projectile from space with a shockingly familiar voice, a mental voice from the dead:

"Hey, Karl! It's me, Kewpie Doll Larson. We gotta move fast, see? It's me and the Venusian Sea people. It's us! We're helping you fight the Jovian."

Venard thought frantically, "How? You're—you're supposed to be dead!"

"No, Karl. That was just a gag. I burned loose the muscle hinges that holds them clams together, but I still couldn't get out. Then, when the tide came and backed up into that moat, the Venusians swam up and rescued me. They knew what had happened; they used their thought-crystals. Listen, it ain't fantastic at all. Them memory spheres are mental power synthesizers, just like dynamos. The Sea People have been working on these things secretly to fight the Jovians with. Listen, Karl. You're the instrument, see? We all concentrate on our crystals and you can blast that infernal black box to Kingdom Come. I'll be in there with you in two shakes of a three-tailed *ghroat*. I'm just outside S.S.C. now! Give him hell, Karl!"

"But—how?" his mind almost gasped.

Then he heard Vale's laugh—and it was a joyous thing. "Too many people have told you too little," her message came through. "Come—we haven't much time now. You must trust these people. They will show you how . . ."

Arm in arm, then, they soared up into green translucence. Curiously, as they rose, the green grew deeper, darker, and choking terror tore once again at Venard's throat—a terror cunningly without reason.

He suddenly felt the dark box nestling against his ribs. Had he been carrying the Jovian even down among the Sea-people?

And where was Vale? The warming sense of her presence was withdrawn. Fear stabbed into him again. Fear—and those tendrils of white-hot anguish.

He was back in the body bank . . . alone . . . with the Jovian. Black fury burst once more against his reeling mind, but through it rose the faintest of echoes: "Give him hell, Karl!"

Energy, strength, courage, power flooded through him. Still, there was no reality, no visible enemy, no material hall with body banks and mosaic walls and solid plastic floors. Out of a black sea bobbed a cloudy sphere of coruscating evil hate. Venard leaped, his body bending through an arc of torture. He had the sphere in his dripping hands, holding it high. He must hurl it from him, smash it, but it clung to him, seemed a part of him. Blindness thickened his sight; then, as it thinned, he blinked. The Jovian cubicle body was smashing against the high, up-curving wall of the buried body bank hall in S.S.C.

A dazzling greenish glare exploded in a bright crackling flame that flung him full length. In his mind burst an ultimate unhuman cry of raw agony from the Jovian. It climbed beyond his auditory range so high that a stark-shock wrenched his spine and shook his brain in his skull. And the Jovian spewed out in a pulsating, semi-liquid mass, ran down the smoothly polished mosaic.

Venard rubbed his burning eyes, as he sat there wearily trying to grasp some general understanding. His body was terribly tired. The Martian medic helped him to his feet, but he couldn't stand alone. While he swayed dizzily, the Martie's body sac nodded gently. "Thank you, Lieutenant Venard. S.S.C. is free at long last. We had abandoned all hope. A burial place of knowledge is always a final graveyard of hope."

VENARD was leaning wearily against the wall and the Martian medic was lifting the first Zharkon's brain-sac into the refrigerated bank when Larson and Vale came running down the hall. Larson was a spectacle for sore eyes. His uniform was waving tatters, his skin a splotched mass from digestive acids of the carnivorous clam. Vale wrapped unforgotten arms around Venard's neck and for a while he forgot Larson, the Zharkon's brain. He forgot almost everything.

"You defeated it," she breathed proudly, eyes shining. "You defeated it! We couldn't help here in S.S.C. We were powerless. But, for that few days when I was free, you would never have known about it."

"He defeated it?" howled Larson from a raw, flaming face. "I defeated it. Me and the Sea People did, that is. But we ain't got any time to argue about who gets the medals. The Martians are outside with a couple of Battlewagons. They're setting up electro-cannons, vibratory beams, oxo-hydro guns, and God alone knows what they got in secret. They're gonna break in here or bust."

The Martian medic said, "They can't, of course. The force fields and—"

Larson bawled out an ungentlemanly, "Don't be so smug! Comin' all the way here I bet they've got some secret weapon."

Venard said curtly, "Contact them! I suggest we tell them we'll give them their Zharkon the First's blasted brain. I'm beginning to get brains on the brain!"

They hurried to a nearby room containing an inner-SSC communication set. The Martian medic nervously switched threw to S.S.C. control study. "This is Yhongar in the Transplant Wards," he said. "Lieutenant Venard of the Guards and an—er—Mr. Lawson have defeated the Jovian, as you probably know. Director Bronlen, are you all right, sir?"

Director Bronlen's austere face swam into view, changed now. It was the face of a man who has learned the ultimate meanings of slavery and freedom of thought. It smiled with new hope, and with gentle, but firm strength. "Everything is all right now, Yhongar. However, two Martian warships have been reported just outside S.S.C."

"Yes, Director Bronlen," said the Martian. "They intend to attack S.S.C. in an attempt to obtain the brain of Zharkon I. Lieutenant Venard says we should give them the brain. Lieutenant Venard, could you explain to S.S.C. Director H. Bronlen the reason for this proposed action?"

Venard hesitated, flushed weakly. "I—really don't know, exactly, that is. A Martian subversive, Jhongan, working with the Allies, said to give the Martian High Priests every possible assistance in obtaining the Brain. He said that if the replacement in the present Zharkon is accomplished, complete peace would return to the System."

Bronlen's face remained puzzled, groping. "There must be some explanation.

We owe you and Sergeant Larson an infinite debt of gratitude, but unless some logical reason is given for this unorthodox procedure, I'm afraid—"

Vale stepped forward. "I think I can explain Jhongan's purpose in wanting this transplantation to succeed."

"I.Q. Saunders," smiled Venard wryly.

"Speak," said Bronlen. "But hurry. The Martians are preparing to attack. For all we know, they may have developed some kind of atomic-penetrator."

"Well," began Vale, "the fanatical Zharkonian Royalists thought they had all authentic Martian historical documents destroyed and forgotten. But they didn't. Their own interpretation of history is based on primitive myth, legends of race and ancestor worship—the old war gods of slaughter and conflict, the hero-worship of victorious armies and of individuals killed in battle. Greatly similar to the old Nazi and Norse ideologies. So, naturally, they didn't want the newly conditioned masses acquainted with *true* Martian history which is just the opposite, being one of steady progress and peaceful aims designed for the betterment of all peoples. But Jhongan's underground faithfuls on Mars made it a point to preserve key historical Martian documents, evidently, so that they have known all the time the exact nature of the thousand-year-old brain of Zharkon I."

She paused, while Venard lit up a para-ette to steady his shaky nerves. He grinned at her thinly. "I bet you could quote the whole Solar Encyclopedia," he snapped.

She smiled at him and continued. "The amazing part is that the Zharkonian leaders forgot real history themselves. Fell for their own propaganda, which is so often the case. They believe in the myths and legends they've resurrected—in part. It's obvious they've forgotten or they certainly wouldn't be attempting this transplantation. You see, we've studied that incredible double-brain thoroughly in connection with socio-economic history of Zharkon the First's era. It was one of the first double-brain experiments and wasn't entirely successful. There was an uncontrollable influence of the thalamic half over the cortex half. You see, Zharkon I was beneficently pathological as a ruler."

"Pathological," exclaimed Director Bronlen.

"Yes. A fanatical pacifist, who went into daily trances and preached the sacred brotherhood of all races, creeds and colors. But the methods he used were impractical and revealed unintegration of his brain sections. So you can see what will happen if that kind of cortex gets in control of the present militaristic Martian government."

"A pacifist! Fanatical—pathological—" Venard grinned broadly. Larson laughed hoarsely. The Martian swelled his body sac with pride and renewed hope. Bronlen's face appeared to glow with admiration for Vale's analysis, sharpened to sudden decision. "I am going to contact the Martians immediately," he said. "I'll inform them that rather than have conflict here within the cloistered halls of science, we'll give them the brain of Zharkon I—without question. This will probably inflate their paranoic egos considerably."

The teleaudio faded and almost immediately, several attendants of as many planetary types in interne's gowns came down the long hall and took the huge Martian double brain away to the arrogantly and triumphantly waiting Martian Priests. Their warships blasted off without delay, atomic-interplanetary drives at full acceleration, to transplant the brain into the body of their incapacitated war leader—to transform him into an incurable, pathological, fanatical lover of peace at any cost—a mind that regarded war for any cause at any time more terrible than a cosmic plague.

Meanwhile, the Solar Federation was made acquainted with the real and far more terrifying threat existing on the obscure, dark and mysterious world of the Jovians. Panic swept over these worlds, realizing as they did that there was no way to combat the pure thought power of the Jovians.

However, the Venusian Sea People had found out via S.S.C. about the thralldom of that citadel by the Jovian there, and, realizing the tremendous threat to the System, they retreated into their strange, deep laboratories to manufacture the memory crystals by the thousands. The mystic little globes would enable other than Jovian minds to achieve a unity of mental strength.

In the hands of millions of Solarians, they would mean inevitable defeat for the outnumbered Jovians.

AT AN unspecified date after the Jovian defeat on Luna, in the synthetic wonderland of Escapeasies and pleasure palaces, terraced gardens and the magnificent space-view translucent dome of the resort in Theophilus Crater, three figures stood on the crater's colossal rim.

Venard's arm was around Vale's shoulders as they stared with unshakable awe into the huge vault of the sky enclosing them in a black and gigantic hollow, sprinkled with the white dust of the stars. Nearby, seated on a pneumatic couch with a bottle of *stihn* in one hand and a memory-crystal in the other, Louie Larson was realizing an ultimate kind of hedonistic satisfaction with life.

It was the middle of the Lunar night, and the terrific cold crept in, even through the laced seams of the dome.

"Go ahead, kiss," said Larson in a bored fashion. "Don't mind me. You two don't know what love really means, either of you." He was looking into the memory crystal from which he never took his eyes. A willowy, flowery, translucent green body undulated in its misty depths.

Vale smiled boldly up at Venard. Venard managed to shoot a quick grin at Larson. "I suppose you're going to say that Venusian Sea Woman who fell for you looks something like Glora Karstedt?"

"Don't joke about pure, cosmic love such as mine," warned Larson dreamily. "It's a love of pure thought, a spiritual delight. There never was any Glora Karstedt. I guess you'd call Glora a symbol, a dream woman. An' I've found the ideal at last, friends. Her name is Ulolalahr. Her thoughts alone in my mind are pure ecstasy."

Larson arose slowly and austerely and walked to the panel. "This physical kind of thing is positively disgustin'," he said.

"I don't agree with him at all," said Vale, closing her eyes and puckering up her lips.

A few seconds later, Venard breathed a long, "Wheeeooooow. What an I.Q.! Ideally Qualified."
