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# ASTOUNDING STORIES

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# Fruit of the MOON-WEED

*He was tired of being penned up in  
the space ship!*

by J. Harvey Haggard

**W**OW!" exclaimed Bru Wycoll. as the blue-javelined object cut through the violet atmosphere, narrowly missing his head, and stuck quivering in the protruding patch of rocky soil beyond—soil that was tinted purple by the strange illumination. "That's what I call asexual reproduction!"

"Skip it, you spiral head!" I snorted angrily. "I told you we ought to have got back to the space ship. Confound it, maybe this'll teach you something. Those javelin trees are shooting off their sprays, and every spore is sheathed in a streamlined, horny glider. If one of those fish-hooked seed thorns catches in human flesh—too bad! Look out!"

Bru's face, usually impetuous and eager, turned white, then green and yellow in the shifting illumination. He stood knee-deep in a lush creeper grass. Beyond him the forest of javelin trees, huge twenty-foot shapes like monstrous pineapples, with yard-long spore bristles spiking off to give an outlined resemblance of the back of an enraged porcupine, were changing colors too. Their season for flinging off the dart-shaped spores, from which they took their name, had arrived.

With a clinking impact, another javelin spore was flung across the thick, currentless atmosphere, with a speed that would have impaled our bodies on

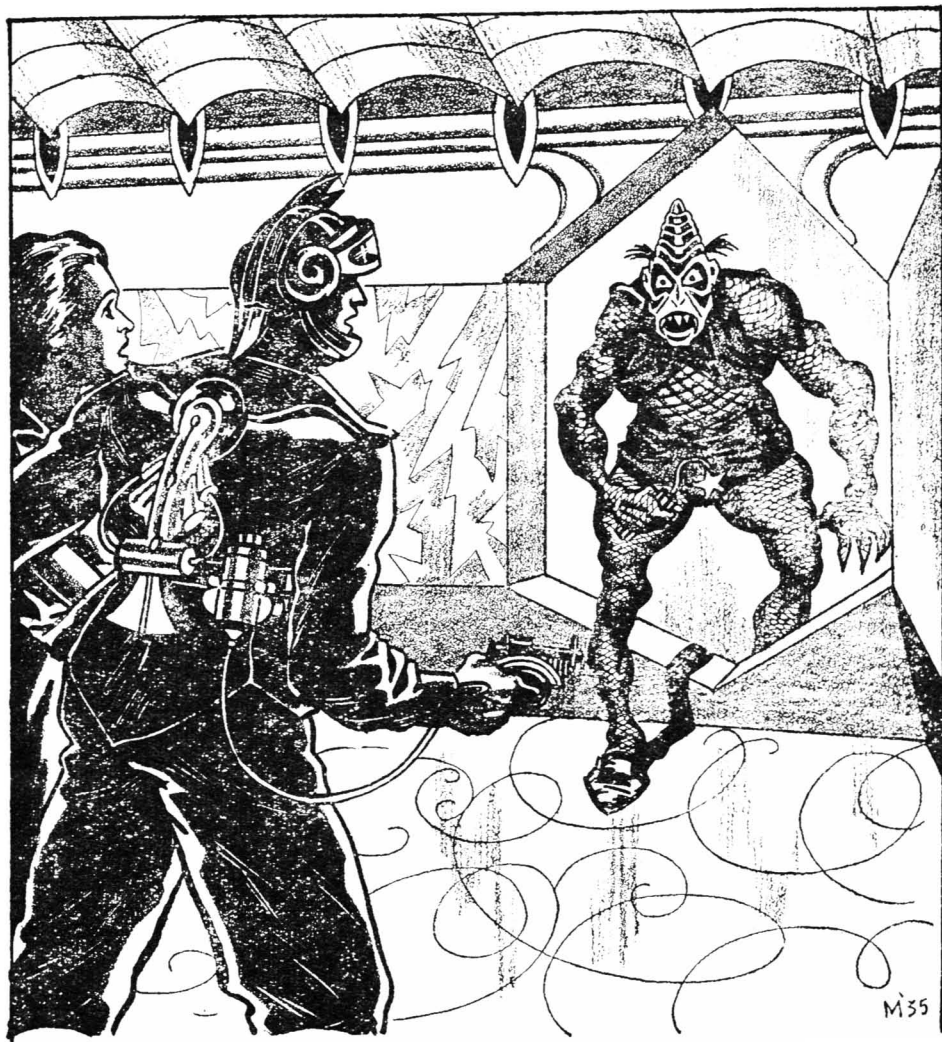
cruel barbs, after the manner of pins sticking through specimen flies—but it went far from us. It traveled with a sinister whirring sound as the barbs ground in and hooked into the wood of a neighboring jungle giant.

There was no wind current on this little planetary body, which was really a satellite of a dead star. Therefore nature had taken this peculiar means of perpetuating reproduction of her plant creations, adapting their growth to the unusual circumstances. The javelin spores could be hurled through the still air for as far as two or three hundred yards, impelled by the dried husk which contracted suddenly, loosening the spore seeds and imparting propulsion energy to the severed dart.

"Gosh, ladies' man!" ejaculated Bru, and his teeth were chattering; yet it was plain that the man sensed his fault, but stubbornly resented my crude accusation. "I didn't intend to get you in a spot when I asked you along——"

"Watch out!" I shouted, and kicked him roughly into the creeper grass, as another javelin spore zizzed past the spot he had just vacated. "If you stand in the way I can't be responsible." We should have stayed with Krapelli, watching the moon-weeds. I can't save your life every time, you know."

He knew I'd saved his life then, kicking him from the path of the oncoming



*Through the pit, a monstrous, black demon was staking, yellow glazed eyes set upon us.*

missile, but it made him angry. Bru Wycoll had often boasted tacitly that he could take care of himself. This didn't look like it. He scrambled to his feet, reaching for the hilt of his dissembler blast gun, swinging in a holster at his hip.

"Damn you, Murston!" he cried savagely. "You may be a ladies' man on the planets, but they ain't none here, and by Heaven, I ain't a female to be

kicked around!" As an additional sign that he was furious he had reverted to slang.

"Don't be a fool!" I retorted angrily, stifling the impulse to leap for his throat in answer to his challenge. We had been crossing each other for days. "Look around once—then run like the devil was after you. Krapelli's lucky—watching for the moon-weeds to bloom!"

He still ignored the surrounding

danger. Javelin spores began to click, sounding like corn starting to pop after lying in the hot sun. "You've been pussy-footing around about that legend of the moon-weed," he accused, "ever since we came for the fruit. That fool myth says the fruit of the moon-weed is born of the soul of a dying man! Don't be a sap."

"Shut up! It's not the moon-weeds I'm worrying about. It's these other plants—the javelin trees—and if you want to wait to be impaled on the poisonous barbs of one of them, good-by."

TURNING, I left him fuming, and ran as rapidly as possible in the direction of the space ship. He was not long to follow. Yes, he was right; I had been apprehensive, ever since we came to this odd little moon of a dead star—a dead star which formed one of a cluster of six.

We were running now, stumbling over the creeper weeds, avoiding the bulking javelin trees, whose spores were shooting out like random arrows, grasping at the dissembler blast guns in our swinging holsters. Maybe we could blast a spore dart out of the air, if it came straight and we couldn't dodge. If one impaled our bodies, or as much as pricked the skin with its deadly poison; well, we could turn the blast weapons on ourselves before the deadly putrefaction crept along our blood veins, rotting away streamers of living flesh. Bru was up with me now. His spade-shaped face shifted from a yellowish color to a dark blue, with greenish hair falling awry over his forehead. His body was brown.

It's hard to realize something so alien to Earth, conveyed by mere word pictures; hard to comprehend because you've got to compare it with objects and sights on the terrestrial globe. That makes descriptive words limited. Inadequate words are merely similarities, and not detailed conveyance of thought. When you try to imagine shades and

hues you've never seen, the imagination stops blank. Few of those tints and shadows were similar to the common ones we see on Earth.

We were running like startled deer, bouncing across a ragged marble turf which was changing colors as though the solid ground were shifting beneath us, our hearts pumping like pistons. Yes, I was frightened. I hadn't wanted to come this far from our space ship, which was landed in the valley of the moon-weeds, awaiting the plant fruition that we might carry the priceless seeds back to civilization.

Krapelli, the third member of our astral expedition to this barbarous satellite, was taking his shift at watching the moon-weeds, waiting for the large twelve-inch buds to open into flowers. Bru Wycoll had wanted a little jaunt by way of diversion. He was tired of being penned up in the space ship, of breathing synthetic air, of pacing the tiny decks, each inch of which he knew so well. The extraordinary little moon body excited his adventurous blood. Our gravity here was little less than on Earth, for Nircon, the moon, was of greater density.

Sweat poured from my discolored brow. The atmosphere moved in sluggish currents stirred by our bodies, as if resentful of being moved after eons of extremely lethargic characteristics. The atmosphere was tepid and smelled of cloves.

Overhead, as we ran, were three bright stars, forming the illumination radiating down from the violet heavens. One star was red, one was green, and one blue, combining their light rays often to form the customary white of intermingled colors; however, the fluctuations of the triad of stars as regards to prismic coloring were so irregular that often parts of the familiar colors were absent, which gave temporary hues of every rainbow shade to the illumination cast on the satellite.

Obviously, the inner combustions of the three blazing stars were changing continuously, as would have been revealed by spectroscopic lines, emanating from the exploding gases. The result, as witnessed on the moon, Nircon, was a marble effect of shifting shades, gyrating crazily about the horizon, tinting the objects with new puzzling colors with each passing moment. As Wycoll had remarked carelessly on our first landing, "it looked as pretty as a Fraunhofer Line color graph!"

Vivid-red swaths came after yellow streaks, to be chased over the horizon by white splotches, with green and blue stripes running irregularly, sometimes in opposite directions, along the ground, like color-tinged cloud shadows before an intangible wind.

Since the color of an object depends on the wave length reflected, the soil, together with the vegetative growths, as well as our own bodies, were constantly undergoing chromatic changes. For instance, if an object, such as the javelin tree, fairly bristling with long, needle-sharp spines, reflected but two colors—green and orange—the shading of the plant would be black in the temporary absence of these colors from the luminosity spectrum.

Their intermittent appearance would tint the plant either one color in the absence of the other, or blend the hues in varying intensity as both colors appeared simultaneously. Since the surroundings were made up of an intricate pattern of objects, of differing qualities as regards to color absorption and reflection, the shifting of colors from the three flickering stars caused an incessant but brilliant "aurora borealis" metamorphosis of colors.

THE WAY was rough going. We scrambled over the boulder-strewn expanse, shifting with lambent colors. Once Bru stumbled on a round rock and came near falling. I slanted close in

my stride to hold him up, but he gave me a vindictive look and ran on up the slope. Maybe I had been too severe with Bru, in speaking so frankly of his foolhardy insistence on exploration.

We had always been pretty good friends before and many were the planets we had crossed as companions, but his indefatigable curiosity had been riding my nerves for some time. Just now, I had an idea we were through with each other. He was infuriated to think he owed his life to me.

Now a knife-edged cliff loomed, crowned with a small green-splotted range. We slid down through a rocky crevice, a V-cleft between seemingly impassable forests of the javelin trees, and our path began to descend toward a canyon rift that would lead presently to the moored space ship. Overhead, the violet skies were splintered through with the flying spore darts, which were being ejected profusely now.

I cut my hand on a sharp rock, hooking it back into a hole for a finger hold on a sudden precipitous descent. We weren't afraid of snakes. There weren't any snakes on Nircon—nor any other animal life.

On our own Earth, the plant and animal life formed a balance. Animal life absorbed oxygen from the air and gave off carbon dioxide; the plant life absorbed carbon dioxide and restored oxygen to the air. It was a perfect cycle. Here it wasn't so. The carbon dioxide given in to the plants seeped from fissures in the broken surface of Nircon.

Animal life had never developed. There were no birds, no insects. Any one versed in the perpetuation of plant life would realize instinctively that the absence of insects, which are so consistently associated with cross pollination of plant life, would make a tremendous difference in the plant evolution of Nircon. And it had. Here the plants we had observed either divided

by fission, or cell division, as in the smaller plant life, or by zoöspores such as the javelin trees utilized—throwing of asexual spores.

It was a much despised and dreaded world, this little moon of a dead star, illuminated on all sides by five live stars of the cluster—two of which were at the time hidden by the horizon. There were no dark periods and light periods, no night and day. The light was consistently bright, or consistently spasmodic as one might say, over the entire circumference.

There were no heated spots to stir up wind by convection. No oceans existed on Nircon; consequently, there were no tidal effects to stir up barometric pressure. The stiffest breezes on Nircon were but gentle zephyrs to the Earth-born men. It was a silent world, colored by intangible shades which sped at erratic speeds. There was something maddening in the fleet bizarre hues of the everchanging light.

Bru had laughed when the black, horn-faced natives who overran Tartarin, the dead star about which Nircon circled, had made superstitious signs and ran to cover their elongated faces when it was learned that the three terrestrial adventurers sought the fabled Nirconian moon-weed, whose very inaccessibility had made the mythical plant a thing of value.

No one had ever possessed a Nirconian moon-weed. Only one of the three terrestrials had ever seen the fruit of the moon-weed and that was Krapelli, who had once nibbled at a seed. Krapelli was a stout, heavy-jowled man, who was always preoccupied with his own thoughts; it was not the thought of accumulated wealth that brought him irresistibly to Nircon. It was some impelling urge he could not have explained.

The clove-scented air was thick in my laboring lungs. My feet ached with the exertion derived from leaping along the

rugged canyon floor, dodging boulders, going around the spores of the javelin trees which stuck up in the ground like set pikes, some of them waist high. The odd coloring made the scene unreal in its vividness.

I DON'T KNOW what premonition caused me to pause, just before breasting the rise which would give a view into the amphitheater that held our space ship in its natural hollow, with the patch of Nirconian moon-weeds growing in one side of the gigantic cup-shaped depression.

A mountain range loomed craggily here. Jagged crevices licked up toward the commingled haze beneath the three glimmering stars. Sharp points jumped skyward, were limned with darker shadows, accentuated with occasional javelin trees. But for some reason, I sensed something unusual in the air. Perhaps I instinctively felt an intimation of danger.

I stumbled to the rise. But Bru breasted it before me. He cursed, his eyes widening. Below us lay the small rocky valley. There lay our space ship, an ovoid pearl-colored vehicle now, shimmering iridescently under the heavenly play of light. Across from it, at the farther end of the valley, was the patch of moon-weeds, each of which was no higher than a man.

A change had taken place. Great gaping corollas spread out from the foliage. What natural colors suffused those flowers I know not, for the demoniacal rhythm of shades was flashing across, disguising them with unnatural lighting. The corollas were almost indiscernible against the glaring hues of the vegetative undergrowth. I noticed one of the moon-weeds especially, where a single, dried, withered flower hung, half torn from the stalk; in its stead a swelling fruit pod, larger than a man's fist, was forming.

"Look!" shouted Bru delightedly. "It

is their season, too. One of the moon-weeds has a fruit!"

I stared, but not at the fruit. It was a crumpled patch in the field of crazy color that captured my attention, a sagging sack of flesh, lying before the discular outer valve of the space ship. Though the man had slumped down there, his hands stretched rigidly toward the interior of the ship, as if he had fallen in attempting to gain the security of its belleranium walls.

"That's Krapelli!" I shouted in consternation, and leaped down the slope. "Krapelli! It's he, all right!" My mind was a chaos; all I could think of was that the old wives' tale had come true. A fruit of the moon-weed had appeared; a man had died.

He was sprawled on his back, his features swollen and mottled in death by gruesome colors that seethed incessantly. They seemed angry, those dancing colors. The hands of the man were outstretched, clenched rigidly. His mouth lolled open, thick with syrupy saliva.

I can see the scene now. It was branded on my memory—that natural amphitheater, cupped in by the cutting jag-notched edges of shelving precipices. The ovoid space ship, with its round valve ports easily discernible, as was the bulging conning cowl, headed by its masking sheath of transparent glassite.

Beyond the glassite were the control mechanisms and the antigravon sheathings, which controlled exterior gravity and flung the ship through interstellar space. How well I recall the horror of it: the man, lying there in hideous contortion; Bru, in his metal-mesh togs, his leathern boots, his face, despite the changing coloring, expressing a chilled, inner fear through the eyes; and the moon-weed—

Especially do I remember the moon-weed; I can recall the thick convolutions of each lower leaf, of the delicate new-formed fruit, of other monstrous corollas, uplifted like hoods. And over all,

those ephemeral colors were chasing with maddening inconstancy, creeping into each corner and niche, finding every depression. I think it was that which made everything so ghastly.

"Something killed Krapelli!" I snarled viciously. "Something did. Kill him. There's other life, other animal life, here, somewhere."

Bru was leering, his spade-shaped features hanging like an unhealthy mask. Yet the lip quivered; I knew he was afraid, horribly afraid, as I was.

"You know that's a lie!" he retorted in a cold, strained voice. "You know there's no animal life, not a bird or even a damned fly, here!"

I wasn't looking at him. My scrutiny swept the crumbling ledgeways leading across to the moon-weeds. Somehow those hooded flowers were sinister now. I could see the slender stamens shooting out from either side, like multitudinous tongues laden with light-colored pollen, and the central button-shaped pistil protruding up from the center.

A heady smell permeated the still air. It cut my nostrils at first with its acrid scent, but it was not unpleasant. I disregarded it. I was kneeling by Krapelli, for we had made sure that he was quite dead. I wasn't seeing him. My eyes had caught a flutter of motion back of the moon-weeds.

"Let's drag him into the space ship," said Bru Wycoll, wiping perspiration from his brow.

"Be quiet!" I whispered tensely, drawing my blast gun. I gripped the triangular hilt so hard the metal bit into my palms. "I thought I saw some one then. It looked—like a woman!"

Maybe it was nerves; Bru laughed hysterically.

"A woman!" he snorted incredulously. "Wake up, ladies' man!"

"You fool!" I cried vexedly. "I'm serious! I knew there was other life here. I'm going to find who killed Krapelli. If I don't, I'll go mad!"

BEFORE he could do more than protest, I gained my feet and sprang up the path toward the moon-weeds. I had seen the elusive womanish shape a moment before, going back into dark shadows. The large delicate flowers of the moon-weed leered close, but I disregarded the open maws, slipped beyond. Presently, the leafy vegetation hid the space ship from view. I thrust back a clump of vegetation and peered in upon a monstrous, concealed cavern, from which a phosphorescent inner lighting glowed. The trio of stars were shut from view by the ceiling of solid rock. Back in the depths, a figure ran.

"I knew it!" I soliloquized. "Stop there, or I fire!"

I drew my weapon, leveled it, and sprang in frantic pursuit. I suddenly feared to let it get away from me. I was afraid of the cavern walls, afraid of the primitive moon beyond the aperture of the cave. She seemed ever to elude me, and as fast as I ran, just so much more rapidly did she go. Finally I drew up desperately, resolved to give my fugitive one last chance.

"I'll blast you into the next dimension," I yelled, "if you don't stop."

I didn't think the creature recognized the portent of my voice, but it stopped, turned around, with arms widespread, and I peered—

Yes, it was a woman—I don't think I really was sure of it until that moment. She might have been carved from some beautiful stone. Her brief garment was scant, as gossamer as the finest woven silk. A greenish cape was flung around her throat, somewhat resembling the calyx of a flower. I came closer to her. There was something heady in her perfection of beauty.

"You're a strange thing, running wild here," I remarked, and my voice was thick. She stood looking at me through heavy fringes of blue lashes. The phosphorescent quality of the cavern's walls was steady and restful in contrast to the

coruscating quality of the outer light. Her flesh was of roseate hue and her eyes were blue. The cavern's walls, now that I noticed them, were smoothly carved, as though by human chisel, and were tinged with frozen colors of mother-of-pearl.

Inasmuch as I want to get across my thoughts to you, I'll admit that Bru wasn't altogether aiming at nothing when he taunted me with the invective "ladies' man." I have seen girls on one planet and another. I had never before, in all my wandering, seen a girl who was shaped similarly enough to terrestrial man to even approach earthly girls in beauty and appeal until—

There's a first for everything. There are beautiful girls who seem cold and frozen, who are glittering but unattractive. Then there are other, not so scintillant, who may reach out and touch you with their finger tips, and set you blazing with inner fires. I make no excuses or subterfuges. She was like that, this girl of the caverns of Nircon.

"I knew there was life here," I went on, trying to hide my inner emotion. My admiration must have been apparent. "I've thought there had to be some animals, to balance off the plants."

It was inane, of course. She couldn't understand. I was born on a planet light years away across space. She was afraid of me. Some women possess a fright that is alluring. She stood trembling, her long slim hands raised in abject surrender.

"Don't be frightened," I cautioned, hoping to soothe her with my voice. "I wouldn't harm you."

She did not speak a word. She undid a metallic chain from her throat, thrust it toward me, motioning to herself and toward the chain. In the links of the chain were curious snail-shaped jewels, resembling blood-red rubies. I was shocked. I knew what she meant by her expression. She was a captive. She was surrendering to me. It was re-



vealed in every line of her delectable features.

Everything I considered superlative in female pulchritude stood before me. Perhaps the very perfection of her features should have warned me. Later I was to understand. She was tall, willowy. Her hair was of the prettiest copper shade I had ever seen. She was barefooted, if one could take exception to tiny metalline sandals on her feet, which seemed transparent.

AFTER ALL, I am only a man. As she came toward me, thrusting her symbol of slavery, I seized her wrist, drew her swiftly toward me. Her curving, full-fleshed lips came up, not reluctantly.

I stood rigid, clasping her closely, drinking in such a sweet nectar of blissful emotions that I could scarcely move. Her eyes were as if in the throes of ecstasy. My mouth burned with nectarine excitation that spread down my throat. I will not deny that every atom of my being was affected in that abrupt meeting.

It was shattered by a sound. There came a harsh, strident squealing. I started, loosed the girl, stared back toward a turn in the cavern. A hexagonal opening in the cavern wall had opened. Through the black pit, a monstrous black demon was stalking, her yellowish glazed eyes set upon the woman I clutched loosely in my arms, who was now cringing.

This black demon, clothed but in a black leathern apron substance, was not of the same race as the fair creature I held in my arms. Her exposed limbs were black, and scaly like a reptile's. Her forehead was conical and ridged. Undershot lips flapped between jutting canine teeth. Her arms were long, muscled, like those of a man.

Again she shrieked in her garbled tongue. She raised her hand, in which was a peculiar star-shaped implement. The slave girl cringed away, whimper-

ing. That was the first sound she had made. It cut me to the core. "Don't fear," I told her. "I'll protect you, if it's humanly possible."

She seemed to have forgotten me, even though I knew she had been shaken in every fiber by our fierce insolation. Her terror held the upper hand. As she sprang away, the demon monster raised a hand, one of the points of the star-shaped object glinted with a green light, and the girl halted, motionless, her features constricted with paralysis.

It was a female demon, spawned from black limbo; of that I was sure. The blazing, three-cornered eyes looked me over, and I shuddered. No sound was made, but I can read expressions. There was a hungry look on the slaving lips. They trembled, drooled with greenish saliva. The monster had envied our kiss. She held out her arms, anticipating some action on my part. She seemed confident.

"You devil!" I blasphemed. "You incarnate fiend. I'll send you rightly to the eternal pits!" I jerked up my dissembler weapon, but in mid-air, a greenish glint came from the star thing in the ebony, clawlike hand. She must have been of the captor race, dominating this beautiful girl into subjection. I was determined to free the slave girl.

Fire bit into my nerves, slid along the tendons. I was helpless to move, clutched in the evanescent play of greenish-cold flame. No, I was moving, moving for the she-monster, opening arms that were without self-motivation, to embrace the scaly body. Though I was horrified, my body moved of other volition than my own. Each step was a torture, each moment an agonized eon. I had dropped my weapon.

The flaring nostrils stank in my own. Her bony arms reached out, plucked me close. Oh, Lord—

I can never forget the soul-racking sensation of loose lips pressed moistly

to my own, nor the knowledge of the rough, corrugated flesh, brushing lightly upon me. My consciousness itself swayed over the edge of nothingness. The outlines of the cavern swam mistily. Long arms held me securely, although I was struggling with weak futility against her.

I think that I lay for hours in a comatose condition. Only vaguely I realized that Bru had found me. I could recall something hazily, as of him carrying me back to the space ship. For a long time I wanted to speak to him, but couldn't. Finally I got out of, the swinging cot. My weight was light beneath me—artificial gravity!

"Bru, are we aspace?"

He nodded.

"But I can't go!" I ejaculated. "That girl, Bru—— She mustn't stay here. Not if——"

Bru looked down with a good-natured grin.

"Dreaming again, girl friend?" he inquired. "What girl are you talking about?"

"The girl in the cave," I stammered weakly. "Back behind the cliffs, where you found me."

"Take a nip of this," said Bru, handing me a liquid stimulant. "Now rest easy. There wasn't any girl. There wasn't anything. Nothing but the moon-weed, but that was some weed! You've had a pipe dream, whatever it is. Do you know where I found you, man? Wallowing around with your head stuck in one of those moon-weed flowers like a punch-drunk bumblebee!"

I SANK to the couch. A glance from a transparent port window revealed the truth. Up forward, I could see the control mechanisms set on our trajectory of flight. We were cutting across space, and the star cluster wherein revolved the moon, Nircon, about a dead star, lay astern, glittering against space like a far-flung chain of colored gems.

"You mean that I was doped?" I queried dumfoundedly.

"I guess you're right, kid," said Bru Wycoll. "Maybe I was pretty sore. But I couldn't help seeing you go off your head. Of course, you know that opium is extracted from the poppy on Earth, and that it induces extravagant dreams. So this wasn't so impossible.

"The flower is an organ evolved in adaptation to the advantage of the coöperation of two parent plants in the production of offspring. Now the moon-weed evolved on a planet where animal life must have been extremely rare, though it probably existed in the past. There were no bees, no insects to carry the pollen from the stamen of one plant to the pistil of another. Cross-pollination is the carrying or transference of the male germ to the female plant cell, where the fruit is germinated and formed.

"I saw you running around, like a chicken with its head off. Then you rammed your head in a huge flower, and began sucking the nectar. I caught a glimpse of your face, and it expressed nothing but rapture! I got a quick hunch then, for the odor was almost stifling. Maybe I was thoughtful because I was pretty mad just then. But I wasn't plunging headlong into anything. Then I noticed Krapelli, whose mouth was full of the nectar. So you see what happened?

"This flower attracts animals by dopping them, by inducing hypnotic dreams. It is highly narcotic in effect. But do you realize the many traps the flower has devised on Earth toward the end of cross-fertilization? There are all sorts of beautiful colors in terrestrial flowers, to attract insects. They have nectar or pollen, which the insects and bugs love to eat. In other words, it is a complex organism designed to promote the cross-pollination of two flowers.

"But these plant blossoms had to work toward different ends on Nircon. In a

land of brilliant colors, their hues were of poor contrast. There were no insects, no birds. Perhaps there once was a race of highly developed beings, but I don't think they could have lasted long. Or maybe there are a very few of them left, enough to cross one of the moon-weeds every few generations. The moon-weed attracts creatures by drugging, by giving brilliant dreams, in which the victim is appealed to in every physical and mental sense, as, unknowingly, he accomplishes their fertilization."

I stirred. It was restful to get back to ordinary white light, even if cooped up within the confines of a space ship.

"I might have known that girl was too pretty to be real," I admitted. "I thought I was kissing her. That was when I was looking so rapturous. What a fool!"

"I wouldn't say that!" demurred Bru. "Remember, it would have appealed to the most vulnerable spot in the imaginative armor. If it had been I, the dream might have been different, but I would have been drawn inexorably, to drink of the fatal nectar cups. I investigated Krapelli!" He paused and glanced at me queerly. "Then I dragged him in and laid him on the bed. Krapelli's not dead. He's down tending to the photon rotors in low deck now. His heart had

stopped beating. Without immediate aid he would have perished from an overdosage of narcotics.

"I was wise enough to get an oxygen respirator tank attachment and strap it over my face and shoulders. Then I came for you. You had gone to the second flower and your countenance showed your repulsion. I had to knock you over the head to drag you away. And you've been sleeping for forty-eight hours, dead to the world. The effect has gradually worn off, however."

"What about the moon-weed, Bru?" I asked, at last.

"When we left Nircon," he replied with a tight-lipped smile, "there were two fruits on the moon-weeds. I left them there. It's a universal blessing that the fruit is not scattered over the universe."

That had been decent of Bru. Encumbered by my drugged body, and that of Krapelli, he had managed to maneuver our space craft away from Nircon. But then, we had always been friends. Those little spats came occasionally, but we dismissed them for the trivial things they are, between tried friends.

"If you keep going, Bru," I declaimed exhaustedly, from a more comfortable position on the couch, "you'll show signs of intelligence yet. When I feel better, I'm going down to see Krapelli."

