

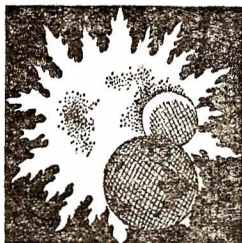
# STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 19, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

July, 1949

## A Complete Novel



## FIRE IN THE HEAVENS

By **GEORGE O. SMITH**

*Outside the world of science, Jeff Benson was a man of no importance—until the day he stumbled on the mistake in the law of conservation of energy!* 9

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# Hollywood on the Moon

## CHAPTER I

*Camera: Ether Eddy*

**M**ARE IMBRIUM is the most desolate spot on the Moon. It is a bleak fantastic inferno of jagged rocks and volcanic ash, airless and frigid.

The monotony of the scene is broken only by craters of varying sizes, ominous reminders of the meteors that plunge like bullets through the void, a deadly, ever-present menace to the Earthman hardy enough to venture there. Yet in this lunar no-man's-land two figures in bulky spacesuits were racing desperately toward a high outcropping of stone.

Though apparently nothing pursued them there was stark horror in the glances they

threw over their shoulders. One was a girl, her dark hair a cloudy mass within the transparent helmet. The other was a man whose face was curiously expressionless, and whose movements somehow failed to match the animation of the girl's.

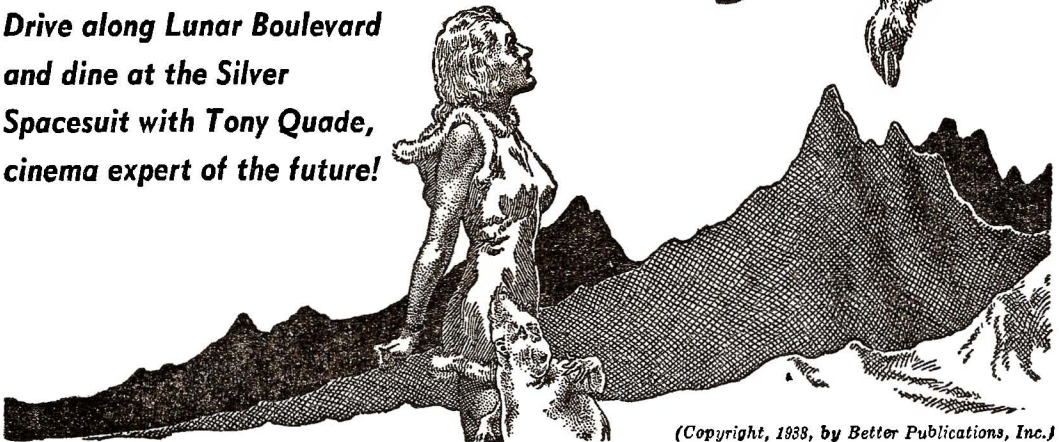
Yet when she stumbled and fell he paused and helped her to her feet. About to resume her flight the girl's mouth gaped in an open square of terror. She flung up a pointing glove.

The shining thing had sprung into existence without warning. Its brilliance eclipsed the dim globe of the Earth, low on the horizon, and the white splendor of the stars.

It seemed to be a gigantic shell of flame, spinning madly in a blaze of glaring colors, the poles of its axis elongated into two thin

## A Hall of Fame Novelet by **HENRY KUTTNER**

*Drive along Lunar Boulevard  
and dine at the Silver  
Spacesuit with Tony Quade,  
cinema expert of the future!*



*(Copyright, 1938, by Better Publications, Inc.)*

Quade had no time to draw his gun before a treelike arm scooped him up



conds of light that trailed into nothingness. It hesitated, hovering, then dipped as though in mocking salute. It swept down toward the two.

From its flaming core streamers of light flared out. Abruptly the man in the space-suit was lifted as though by giant, invisible hands. Writhing and twisting he was pulled closer to the shining thing. The girl made a frantic clutch at her belt and drew a slender tube but before she could use it the inexplicable power had dragged her feet clear of the ground. She hung for a moment, motionless.

From above a beam of light fingered out but the girl did not glance up. She was staring, horror-stricken, at her companion.

His eyes were distended hideously. All over the spacesuit a dim lambent radiance seemed to play. Then, abruptly, fire spouted from the neckband of his suit. A flower of flame blossomed where his helmet had been. Instinct with a weird and terrible beauty, it flamed up into a tapering spire—elongated and stretched until a lambent thread stretched out toward the spinning thing of light.

And from every joint in the spacesuit—wrists and feet and waist—streamers blazed out, gleaming traceries that united and stretched avid fingers toward the whirling blaze.

From the tube in the girl's gloved hand a thin bluish beam sprang. Already her suit was glowing ominously as she was drawn inexorably closer. Her face was drained of blood, contorted in an agony of fear.

**A**NTHONY QUADE spoke sleepily. "Ho, hum. Take it over, Peters. The chief's buzzing me."

Tony Quade, turning from a camera in the transparent nose of the space-ship, cast a last glance at the scene below, vividly distinct in the searchlight's beam. Valyne Ross was a good stunt girl. There wasn't a star on the payroll of Nine Planets Films, Inc., who would risk her skin on this side of the Moon.

But the job had to be done and Quade knew Valyne would do it. Quade had a trick of knowing such things. That was why, when Nine Planets wanted special effects that entailed plenty of risk, they hired Quade for the job.

*Space Bandit* needed Quade. It was the biggest picture on Nine Planets' schedule this year and they had already expended a

fantastic sum on its production. Van Zorn, the chief, would get it back, of course, provided Quade did his job well.

*Space Bandit* would be big box-office on its special effects—and Tony Quade, with his picked band of film experts, was the only man able enough and courageous enough to tackle the assignment. On a contingent basis at that.

Gaunt hollow-cheeked, Peters slipped into Quade's seat before the telephoto-lensed camera and began to manipulate the keyboard, occasionally pausing to peer through a finder. On other levels various members of the crew were busy operating lights and cameras.

Tony Quade went through a door, stooping slightly to avoid bumping his head, and arranged his big-boned body in a chair before the televisor. For a second he contemplatively eyed the peroxidized blonde who was gazing out at him and murmuring, "Mr. Quade, plee-uz . . . Mr. Quade, plee-uz!" He flipped over a switch.

Immediately a gigantic eye appeared on the screen and a hoarse voice was heard growling curses.

"Hello, Chief," Quade said tentatively. Apparently Von Zorn was in a bad humor.

The eye withdrew and gave place to a small, simian face with a tooth-brush mustache and a crop of bristling hair. Snapping black eyes regarded Quade menacingly.

"The deadline on your special effects for *Space Bandit* is November ninth. You haven't by any chance forgotten that, Quade?" Von Zorn inquired with feigned politeness.

"Oh, for Pete's sake!" Quade said, relieved. "I'll have the stuff for you by then. There's plenty of time. You're not worrying already, are you?"

"You'll be the one to do the worrying," Von Zorn observed. "Unless you turn in a satisfactory film you don't get paid. I don't give a hoot in Mercury about that. But unfortunately we've advertised *Space Bandit* so big that unless you deliver the goods it won't draw flies."

"Okay," Quade nodded. "I'm shooting the last of the Mare Imbrium sequence now and it's coming along fine. The work on Eros will be finished pretty soon and we can blow a hole in that asteroid big enough to give you a super-colossal spectacle."

"Gregg did your calculations, didn't he? Well, he made a big mistake somewhere. You can't use Eros!"

Quade's eyes changed. He leaned forward.

"What the heck! I've rented the asteroid for a month—my claim's perfectly good. There's no intelligent life there above the eighth level. In fact, there's no life at—"

"I know," Von Zorn said unpleasantly. "I've read the law. All matter in the Solar System is the property of the Earth Government and can be rented or purchased from it unless already inhabited by life above the eighth level of the intelligence—which is about that of Gregg. Lord knows how it happened. He should have checked and double-checked his figures."

Quade restrained himself with an effort.

"Would you mind telling me just why I can't use Eros?" he inquired.

"Because it's heading into an ether eddy. And you know what that means. Extinction. Blotto. Your polar city isn't half built and it'll take ten days to complete it. The ether eddy will reach Eros orbit in a week."

"Thanks for telling me," Quade said and shut off the televisior. He sat silent, regarding his large capable hands. He had built up a fortune with them and now, at one stroke, he was losing it. For he had staked almost everything he owned on this enterprise.

Quade looked up as Peters came in. "The shooting's done, Tony," the gaunt man said. "We're taking Valyne and the robot aboard now. It looks pretty good."

"Okay," Quade grunted. "No more shots today. Tell the pilot to head for Hollywood on the Moon. Muy pronto!"

**F**ROWNING, Quade went into the ship's transparent nose. He stood there silent, watching the silvery-gray surface of Mare Imbrium race past below. As the ship's speed increased the Apennines became visible, towering against the star-speckled sky to the north, but the gigantic range was soon left behind. They fled over the crater of Herodotus and sped on while the Earth sank lower and lower and at last dropped beneath the horizon.

The Moon is egg-shaped. The larger part is turned perpetually toward the Earth but the smaller end is scooped out into a vast crater, whence volcanic activity in some long past eon had blown a fragment as large as the asteroid Vesta. Within this great hollow are an atmosphere, life, great buildings and studios—Hollywood on the Moon!"



**S**OME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "Hollywood on the Moon," by Henry Kuttner, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFUNCTION'S HALL

OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time as selected by our readers.

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A little thrill shook Quade as the ship sped over the Great Rim and he saw beneath him the film capital. He could never become quite used to this tremendous city, rising from an arid and inhospitable world.

And, because films were the breath of life to Quade, he felt oddly cold at the thought of going broke and dropping out of the life of the picture metropolis. For in Hollywood on the Moon is no place for the weakling. It is run through a combination of power, graft and efficiency—but there is no room for incompetents.

The city of terraces and towers and wide streets was the most healthful in the Solar System because of the artificial atmosphere, germ-free and automatically purified, kept on the Moon by an electro-magnetic gravity field created by gigantic machines in the caverns beneath the surface.

The air-blanket shields Hollywood on the Moon from the blazing rays of the Sun, protects it from the chill of frigid space, aided by huge plates that broadcast radiant heat. It is the dream of every girl's life to drive along Lunar Boulevard and dance at the Silver Spacesuit. A dream one girl in a hundred thousand ever realizes.

Quade called Peters. The gaunt-faced camera expert came into the ship's nose, scratching a gray-stubbed cheek. He cast a quick glance down at the sunlit city.

"Nice to be back but—there's trouble, Tony, isn't there? What's happened?"

Swiftly Quade told him. Peters whistled.

"Well, what can we do?"

"Use Ganymede."

"Jupiter's moon? It's too far."

"No, you sap, the asteroid Ganymede. It'll be at perihelion in a few days and that'll bring it within the orbit of Mars, close enough for us. We can't use Eros. After the ether eddy hits it there won't be any Eros. We'll have to put up a set at Ganymede's pole and film the explosion from there. It'll be a rush job but we can make it before the deadline."

"What about property rights?" Peters asked.

"I want you to attend to that. I'm going to get my own cruiser refueled and head for Ganymede to look things over. You rent Ganymede for a month and—yeah, better get an option, too. If we kick it out of its orbit we can just take up the option and we'll be safe—it'll be our own property then.

"Order the Eros crew over to Ganymede right away and tell 'em to get started building the set. You finish the Mare Imbrium scenes, then follow. We'll need all the help we can get."

"Oke," Peters assented, as the ship grounded with a jar. "Where are you off to now?"

"I," said Quade grimly, "am going to find Gregg."

Gregg was (at the Silver Spacesuit, his round fat face ludicrously disconsolate beneath his glistening bald dome. When he saw Quade he looked as though he were going to cry.

"Oh, don't take it so hard," Quade growled, sliding into a cushioned chair at Gregg's side. "I'm not going to fire you though you know darn well you deserve it. What happened?"

"It was my fault, Tony," Gregg said in a choked voice. "You don't know how sorry I am. I know what it means to you. I've been nearly crazy for the last few weeks."

"Eh?" Quade stared, and then glanced up as a waitress glided up in her tiny gilded autocar. "I'm not hungry, thanks. Wait a minute. Yes, I am. I've got a long ride ahead. Double order of ham and eggs."

**T**HE girl looked shocked and made a feeble attempt to suggest Moontruffle salad instead but Quade waved her away and turned back to Gregg.

"Now what is this all about?"

"It's my daughter," Gregg said, scrubbing at his plump cheeks. "I know it's nothing to you but it's the reason I made such an

awful mistake and overlooked that other eddy. I've been worrying about my daughter, been half crazy. She's movie-struck, Tony—you know."

Quade nodded. "What'd she do? Stow away on a Moon ship?"

Gregg nodded miserably.

"Her mother wrote me that she'd left a note and was coming to Hollywood on the Moon to get in pictures. You know what that means!"

Quade knew. He'd never approved of the law that the film magnates had had passed. Yet he could understand their attitude. In the early days the glamour of Hollywood on the Moon had called girls from all over the world—Europe, Asia, America, Australia—and a veritable flood of eager applicants had poured in, smothering Moon City until regular work had been impossible.

In ancient times, when Hollywood had been a tiny town on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, it had been easy for disappointed would-be stars to return home or find jobs.

But the Moon is 239,000 miles away from the Earth and it had cost the studios a fortune when in desperation they had herded the movie-struck girls together and shipped them home.

They couldn't be allowed to stay. There wasn't room. And now the penalty for Moon-stowaways was a fine of fifteen thousand dollars or fifteen years' imprisonment.

"I haven't got the money, of course," Gregg said. "And, worse, I can't find Kathleen. She's afraid of the police, I'll bet, and hasn't dared get in touch with me. Or something may have happened to her."

"For Pete's sake," Quade said. "Why didn't you tell me this weeks ago? I'd have paid the fine and you could have sent the kid back home with a good spanking."

"You were on location. I didn't have a chance. Besides, I couldn't let you pay, Tony."

"Rats! I'll—uh—I guess I can't pay anyway, Gregg! I've got all my dough tied up in this job and if it flops I won't have a split penny left." Quade's face fell. "No use trying to pull any wires, either. I'm *persona non grata* on the Moon unless I bring home the bacon."

"And it's my fault. Blast it, Tony, I feel like jumping off the Rim."

"Shut up," Quade said affectionately. "You lop-eared idiot! Everybody makes mistakes, and you couldn't help it anyway. I'm

heading for Ganymede and we'll have everything sewed up in a week. If you find your kid, keep her under cover until I get back.

"Okay," Gregg said, getting up. "That's why I came here. I thought she might have got a job as waitress somehow. But I guess not. Well—good luck."

Quade grinned reassuringly at him and attacked his ham and eggs. Presently the lights were dimmed and a crimson spot outlined the shimmering silver-clad figure of a girl who hung apparently suspended in empty air in the center of the dining room. Warm throbbing music pulsed out and the girl's throaty languorous voice began to sing:

"Give me a ship to roam the lone star-ways,

Out around Venus I'll follow the far ways,

But my heart will turn home . . ."

"Hello, sap!"

Quade looked up. It was Sandra Steele. He grimaced and returned to his meal.

Sandra Steele was the ultimate product of Hollywood on the Moon.

Her skin was a lifeless white, almost luminous, and her eyes, originally brown, had been tattooed a startling shade of violet. Her hair was a silvery web that floated unbound about her shoulders.

"On your way, pig," Quade grunted. "I don't want your autograph."

No screen star likes to be called a pig—a synonym for chorus girl. Sandra's blue-nailed slender fingers twitched visibly but she restrained herself.

"You filthy little swine," she observed softly. "Just watch how fast I'll break you now I'm in with Von Zorn. I've had enough of your impudence."

Quade drank some water and blinked sleepily. However, he knew Sandra was a dangerous enemy. If it hadn't meant losing all self-respect he'd have made a different answer when she had first invited him to become what amounted to her gigolo. He had said no and had told her a few unpleasant truths, hoping they'd be good for her soul.

Now she was playing up to Von Zorn, the chief—and that meant power.

"Listen, Tony," she said, bending to look directly into his eyes. "Why not be nice? Von Zorn's mad as a hornet about this Eros trouble but I can take care of him. How about it?"

"Go chase a meteor," Quade said, and left her.

## CHAPTER II

### *Cut to: Space Cruiser*

QUADE hailed a taxi and was hurtled along Lunar Boulevard to the spaceport, where his ship waited, refueled and ready. It was a two-man cruiser with the usual transparent camera-ship nose, speedy and powerful.

Nodding to the mechanic, Quade glanced at the setting sun and climbed aboard. Quade entered the forward compartment and touched the siren that warned aircraft a spaceship was taking off. He set the gravity plates and went back into the rear room.

A man was asleep in the hammock with Quade's best fur robe pulled over him. Quade emitted a startled oath and fled back to the instrument board to reverse the gravity. The ship, which had been lifting, settled.

With hasty strides Quade returned to his passenger and planted the toe of his boot firmly where he thought it would do the most good. The next moment he was staggering back with his ears buzzing and the imprint of a hand red on his tanned cheek.

"Jupiter!" he exclaimed incredulously. "A girl! For Pete's sake—you can't be Gregg's kid!"

The girl looked like an indignant rabbit with a furry white helmet drawn tightly about her oval face, a stubborn little chin and snapping brown eyes. She bounced out of the hammock and Quade retreated hastily.

A buzzing drone came from the other compartment. With a bewildered look on his face Quade stepped back into the nose of the ship and met the gaze of Von Zorn.

"Lord!" he moaned to himself. "What have I done to deserve this?" But he shut the door quickly behind him and smiled in what he hoped was a disarming fashion.

At close range Von Zorn more than ever resembled an ape. He knew it and was enormously sensitive about his appearance. Only a week ago he had fired an ace director who had made some wisecrack about the chief's simian appearance.

"What are you grinning about?" he asked, eyeing Quade with distaste. "How about my picture?"

"Space Bandit?" Quade put his back against the door. "Simple. I'm switching

the location to Ganymede. Going there now, in fact. My Eros crew has already landed, I guess."

Von Zorn took out a cigar, made from the aromatic, greenish tobacco grown on the Moon and cut it carefully. "I've trouble enough without you making it worse," he growled. "Our last Venusian picture is flopping and we invested over a million in it. That blasted Carlyle woman's blown it sky-high."

"Gerry Carlyle?"

"Yeah, The catch-'em-alive dame. We pay out half a million to the biological labs to create duplicates of Venusian animals and now there aren't any audiences because Gerry Carlyle's brought back the real thing." He lapsed into a stream of fluent profanity.

"I had another picture ready for you, Quade—a super-special, *The Star Parade*—but it doesn't look as if you'll get the assignment. Sandra Steel's featured in it and she won't work with you."

"That's nice of her," Quade said, gently edging Von Zorn toward the door and hoping the girl would keep quiet. "I'll see you later, Chief. I've got to hurry."

Von Zorn became reflective. "You know, I've half a mind to go with you," he said. He paused and Quade stopped breathing. "But I've got a date with Sandra tonight. So you'll have to get along without me."

"That'll be tough," Quade responded hoarsely and shut the door behind the chief. He was at the instrument board in a single leap and had sent the spaceship rocketing up almost before Von Zorn had had time to get clear. Quickly he set the course.

"Where the heck are you taking me?" an angry voice asked behind him. Quade got up slowly, mopping his forehead.

"Listen," he said very gently. "I've been through a lot today. You may not know it but you've caused enough trouble to throw Jupiter out of its orbit. And unless you're careful, young lady, you're going to get the spanking I told your father you deserved."

**S**HE had pulled off her white helmet but still wore a close-fitting worker's uniform of brown leather. Her chin went up.

"I don't care if my father does work for you. You can't talk to me that way, mister. I came here because I thought you'd help me out, the way Dad's cracked you up in his letters—but I guess he was wrong. So just take me back to the spaceport."

Quade grinned maliciously. "You're not going to have your own way this time," he told her. "In fact, I think you're going to get more than you bargained for. Our first stop is Ganymede!"

Several hours later Quade said didactically, "Ganymede is a small asteroid which has an atmosphere because its mass is so great. It's very heavy. Understand?"

Kathleen nodded. She was sitting at Quade's feet, looking out through the ship's nose at the blazing vastness of interplanetary space.

"I didn't think it was big enough to have any air. Is it breathable, Tony?"

"Sure. There isn't quite enough oxygen, though, so it isn't very comfortable. But it's tremendously heavy for such a tiny world. We'll land there pretty soon."

The televisor buzzed shrilly. Quade reached out a long leg and clicked over the switch. On the screen a man's face sprang out in sharp detail.

He had good-looking, bony features with shaggy eyebrows and a jutting jaw, under a harsh mouth like a steel trap.

"Tony?" he said sharply. "There's trouble! We left Eros when we got your message. We've been on Ganymede four hours now and the work's been started. But a herd of Hyclops cleaned out the camp!"

Quade sucked in his breath.

"Yeah? What happened?"

"They drove the crew away, the ones they didn't kidnap. I'm in the ship and they can't get at me but I can't handle it alone. Ghiorso just wigwagged a message from outside. The Hyclops are chasing him and he says he'll go south along the Bore. Are you armed?"

"Sure. But I'd better come right to the camp, Perrin."

The Hyclops will kill Ghiorso and the others if you do. Better do as he says, Tony, and head this way afterward."

Quade hesitated. "All right. Hold on, kid. I'll be along."

He snapped off the televisor and let his fingers dance over the keyboard. The ship leaped forward at an acceleration that would have killed the occupants if it had not been for the neutralizing gravity field.

"Can I help?" the girl asked.

"Yeah. Keep quiet . . . sorry. Wait until we hit Ganymede. Then you can help, all right."

Far ahead, spinning like a tiny ball



through space, the asteroid came into view. Stretching across the face of the globe was a thin black line—the Bore, a broad channel that held practically all the water on Ganymede. Gripped by the mass of the asteroid it nevertheless moved in a tremendous tide along the Bore whenever Ganymede came close to another body whose gravitation had appreciable influence.

It was some time before they reached the Bore and cruised swiftly northward, keeping a sharp watch for refugees. Kathleen first saw the man. He was staggering along the rocky bank, tripping occasionally on the grayish moss. Quade grounded the ship almost beside him.

The refugee stumbled to his knees, clawing at the ground. Quade flung open the door and sprang out, Kathleen beside him. He lifted the other.

“Perrin!”

The steel-trap mouth of the televisior operator gaped.

“Yeah—they got in the ship. I had to run for it. Get Ghiorso, Tony.”

“Sure.” Quade lifted the other easily and turned to the cruiser but Perrin struggled feebly. “He’s just—up the Bore a little ways. Behind that rock. Couldn’t come any further.”

**G**ENTLY Quade put Perrin down. “Wait here,” he said to the girl and sprinted along the Bore. The rock was some distance away and he found himself breathing heavily in the alien atmosphere, with its deficiency of oxygen. He reached the boulder—and saw that there was no one behind it.

Then he heard Kathleen’s cry.

He swung about. Despite the mass of Ganymede, the gravity was less than terrestrial and he made a great bound that brought him almost above the asteroid’s close-lying air blanket. He held his breath, feeling an icy chill strike him. Looking down he saw Perrin and the girl struggling. Kathleen went down, clutching at the man’s legs, but he kicked free viciously, leaped within the space ship. The door thudded shut.

Quade sprinted the rest of the way, though he knew he’d be too late. The space cruiser lifted and drove up and in a moment was lost beyond the sharp curve of the horizon. He stopped beside Kathleen. She was rubbing a bruise on her forehead.

“No,” she said, answering Quade’s ques-

tion. “Not hurt a bit except my head. But I could stop him. He just hit me and started to get in the ship.”

“Swell,” Quade grunted. “What is that rat up to? I wonder.” He shrugged and turned to stare northward. “Well, unless we want to stay here and starve we’d better head for the pole. It can’t be far. Can you walk?”

“Sure,” she said, eyeing him. “You’re a cold-blooded person aren’t you? Haven’t you any idea why he stole our ship?”

“My ship, you mean.” Quade corrected pointedly. “No. But I can probably find out at camp, so let’s get started. You’ll slow me down enough as it is.”

Kathleen compressed her lips on some retort and fell in behind Quade as he started along the bank of the Bore. There was no water in the channel. It was probably on the other side of the planetoid, drawn by the gravitational influence of Mars. The landscape was bleak and barren—rocks and a rubbery grayish kind of moss. The curve of the horizon was startling.

Quade turned to the girl suddenly.

“See that?” he asked, pointing.

Something was bounding toward them in a series of short leaps. At first a scarcely visible dot, it grew rapidly in size until it plopped down directly in front of them and stood staring. It was about a foot and a half high.

Quade, watching Kathleen’s face, chuckled. “Never seen anything like that before, have you?” he asked.

She shook her head wondering.

“What is it, Tony?”

“I don’t know the Latin name but—you noticed the way it travels? It’s vulgarly known as a bouncer. Stanhope called ’em that when he first landed on Ganymede and the name’s stuck. But there isn’t much known about them, as this asteroid is rather an outpost. Nothing to bring people here.”

The Bouncer eyed the two curiously. It had a turnip-shaped head with two huge staring eyes, between which a button of a snout was set. Beneath a fantastically long upper lip was a puckered sad-looking mouth. Underneath a fuzzy growth of soft white hair its flesh was pink.

Its body was shaped like that of a kangaroo, save that it had no tail. A round, bulging paunch made it resemble a grotesque little gnome. The short forearms and paws were curiously anthropoid in contour,

"Notice its eyes," Quade said. "It's got a unique range of vision. Sees the infra-red and ultra-violet rays. There's another funny thing about it too. Listen."

**T**HE puckered mouth opened. The bouncer nodded its turnip-shaped head a few times and suddenly announced, "Your face is dirty, Kate."

Kathleen gave a soft little scream and started violently while Quade roared with laughter. The bouncer jiggled up and down, nodding as though pleased with itself, and observed, "It talked. It actually talked."

"You're not hearing things," Quade chuckled. "I told you bouncers are funny animals. Besides seeing ultra-violet and infra-red light they can read thoughts!"

Kathleen swallowed with an effort.

"Really, Tony? I—I still don't believe it."

"Why not? Our thoughts are a combination of words and images and bouncers can pick up strong vibrations broadcast by a brain. Try it. Think something—hard."

Kathleen looked at him questioningly, then glanced down at the bouncer, who nodded and worked his puckered mouth swiftly. She squared her shoulders and her chin came up.

"Only a mannerless tramp would criticize a lady's personal appearance," the bouncer declared. "I guess that's telling him. Oh, for heaven's sake, how do I turn it off? I can't stop—"

The small voice died into silence as Quade grinned.

"See? It picks up strong thought-impulses—and that's probably why it never became popular as a pet. Too dangerous. I don't believe more than a couple were ever exported from Ganymede."

Kathleen dropped to her knees beside the little animal and it pawed the air violently with its tiny hands. She scratched the pointed head gently. It jiggled with delight and said, "Her hair's awfully pretty. If she weren't such a spoiled kid—"

"Come on!" Quade said loudly and hastily started up the bank, his face flaming. Smiling maliciously, Kathleen followed and after a brief hesitation the bouncer made the party a trio. The girl quickly struck up a firm friendship with the agile little creature and, after asking Quade for an opinion which he refused to give, decided to call him Bill.

"For Bill's no worse than any other name," she told the Bouncer, to which he replied, "Especially if Tony doesn't like

it." After that Bill became silent while both Kathleen and Quade tried desperately to suppress the strength of their thoughts.

The scenery changed little as they advanced. It was a tumbled wilderness of rocks, the eternal soft gray moss and the dry Bore at their right. At last, without warning, they found Ghiorso.

Quade should have guessed what was wrong. Certainly the man's body didn't look normal with its bloated torso and withered shrunken limbs, as it lay crumpled on the moss, a skull-face turned up blindly to the purple sky. As it was, he paused a dozen feet from the corpse and gripped Kathleen's arm.

"Wait a minute," he murmured. "I'm trying to remember something. I think—"

Bill made his mistake, one that was almost fatal. Bounding about the two like an India-rubber ball he caught sight of Ghiorso's body and immediately hopped toward it. He was scarcely two feet away when the corpse seemed to split down the center and a sinuous blood-red thing flowed out on the moss.

The bouncer gave a terrified squeak, hopped entirely over Ghiorso's body and continued on without pausing until he vanished behind a cluster of rocks. But the scarlet thing had stopped and, with one end lifted waving about slowly in the air, seemed to be listening or watching.

Kathleen caught sight of Quade's white face as he stepped in front of her. He took a stubby dangerous-looking pistol from his pocket.

## CHAPTER III

### *Close Shot: Ganymede*

**T**HE red thing was moving closer, very very slowly. It looked something like a centipede but its glistening body was plump and cylindrical and seemed distended. Moreover all over it grew wiry pliant cilia or tubes and these propelled it over the moss. It hesitated, and coiled up suddenly like a great spring.

Quade's breath hissed between his teeth. A bolt of white flame leaped from the muzzle of the pistol and simultaneously the monster flashed into the air toward them, disintegrating as it sprang. Quade, his arm about

Kathleen, propelled her away with a wary backward glance. At a safe distance he paused.

"Look yourself over," he said urgently. "Those little feelers can burrow into your body even if they're only an inch long. He examined his clothing carefully and the girl did likewise.

"What was it, Tony?" she asked at last. "I don't think I've got any on me."

"If you had, you'd know it by now," he told her. "Those are the red leeches. The nastiest things on nine planets." He holstered the gun and started along the Bore, the girl keeping pace with him.

"We'll have to keep our eyes open now," Quade said. "I'd really forgotten about the leeches. If you hear me yell or see anything coming at your face put your hands over your nose and mouth and keep 'em there, no matter what happens."

Kathleen looked frightened.

"What do they do?"

"You saw what this did to Ghiorso. If I hadn't killed that leech every one of those little tubes on its body would have dropped off eventually and become new individuals. They're hardly as long as your little finger then and they coil up on the ground until some animal—or man—comes along.

"Then they spring for his mouth or nose and burrow down inside his lungs or stomach, feeding as they go. They're enormously elastic and simply eat until only the skin of their host is left. And then they wait until the next course comes by."

The girl shuddered and increased her pace. The bouncer suddenly popped up behind a boulder and hopped toward the two. Quade made a threatening gesture.

"Beat it," he warned. "Go chase a meteor. D' you want me to wring your neck?"

"Oh, leave him alone, Tony," Kathleen said. "He's—company."

"He got that leech started after us," Quade grunted. "Company, eh?"

The bouncer jiggled up and down excitedly.

"More company than you are, you cold-blooded fish," he told Quade, who promptly reached for a stone. Bill squeaked shrilly and fled to Kathleen, to whose leg he clung fearfully, casting quick glances over his furry shoulders.

"Stop it, Tony," Kathleen said, trying not to laugh. "It isn't his fault. He just broadcasts thoughts. You said so yourself."

"Movie-struck spoiled brat," Bill declared and Kathleen's chin went up. Without another glance at Quade she marched along the bank of the Bore.

Mars rose above the horizon, a pale reddish globe larger than the Sun but far less bright. Quade kept looking up the channel, listening intently. At last he hesitated.

"Do you hear something? Listen."

Kathleen was still annoyed, but she cupped her ear with a small hand.

"Yes. I think so. A roaring, very low—"

"That's it! Come on, quick!" Quade caught her arm and hurried her toward a cairn of rocks some distance from the bank. "It's the Bore. The tide. Mars is dragging it around the planet and we want to be high and dry when it gets here. Step it up, can't you?"

"I—I'm hurrying—as fast as I can!" Kathleen gasped, a sharp pain in her chest. The atmosphere, lacking sufficient oxygen, had told on the two and they were exhausted by the time they reached the summit of the mound. There they lay panting for breath and looking north along the Bore.

**A** GREAT wave came sweeping up the channel. Thirty feet high, overflowing the banks and spreading out over the surrounding ground, it came rushing southward and involuntarily Kathleen huddled close to Quade. The tidal wave smashed against the base of the cairn and spray showered the two on its top.

Bill, cowering in the hollow of Kathleen's arm, squeaked faintly and crouched down, hiding his head in ineffectual paws. The girl followed his example and as the rocking thunder of mighty waters shook the ground she shut her eyes and burrowed her face into Quade's shoulder. Grinning, he put his arm around her.

The tide drove on south. In its wake came floating huge creatures like turtles, with tall webbed fins standing up like sails on their backs. Flat, reptilian heads lifted, peering around curiously as the things tacked and veered in the winds the Bore lifted in its wake.

Kathleen had wriggled free.

"What are those?" she wanted to know.

Quade shrugged. "We don't know half the forms of life that exist on the planets, much less the asteroids. Anyway, I don't much care what they are. We'll be at camp soon—and I can find out what Perrin was

up to. Shall we get started, Kate?"

She nodded and they picked their way down the mound. The rocks and moss were damp but the flood had passed, though the channel was almost filled with a swiftly-racing stream.

The sun went down and with its going Mars seemed to spring out in startling crimson radiance. Deimos and Phobos, the two satellites, were visible as tiny spots of light near the red planet. The air was colder now and there was an ache in Kathleen's chest that gnawed painfully though she did not mention it to Quade.

She was watching her path carefully to avoid stumbling in the eerie reddish twilight, and so was Quade. The bouncer seemed pleased at the semi-darkness, which was no hindrance to his strange eyes. He made frequent hopping excursions among the rocks and at last returned with great haste and clung to Kathleen's leg, making her stumble. She looked up.

Bill hid his face and shivered, declaring, "What's this? There's something coming!"

Quade stopped, peering into the gloom. Something certainly was coming—a great white giant that lurched toward them with startling speed. One moment it was a half-seen formlessness emerging from the shadows. The next it was towering above them, an eidolon of shaggy white fur from which two insanely grinning faces glared down at them from a height of thirty feet.

So sudden was its arrival that Quade scarcely had time to draw his gun before a treelike arm swooped down and scooped him up. He was smashed against a hairy, barrel-like chest with an impact that made him go weak and dizzy. He struggled feebly—and realized that his right hand was empty. A metallic thud sounded from below.

"Kate!" he called desperately. "Beat it! Quick! I've dropped my gun. Get to camp and—"

His breath was squeezed out as his gigantic captor whirled and bent. Abruptly he found Kathleen beside him, both of them cradled in the hollow of a great arm.

She was white-faced and shaking and her stubborn little chin was trembling despite herself. Her breath was warm on Quade's cheek.

"Tony!" she gasped. "Wha—"

"Hold it, kid!" he told her sharply. "No hysterics. We're safe enough. I know what these things are."

He tried to look down but could see only a vague rocky landscape jolting rapidly past as the giant lurched on into the red gloom.

"It's a Hyclops," Quade went on, trying to wriggle free and finding it impossible. The furry arm of the creature, thickly padded with rolls of fat, held him as firmly as though he had been squeezed between two mattresses. "Not dangerous. But its cubs are. We're okay until we reach its den."

Kathleen's teeth were chattering.

"What'll happen then, Tony? Is it—bad?"

**Q**UADE forced a laugh he hoped didn't sound artificial. "Not as bad as all that. Buck up!" He fell silent as a mass of matted fur was thrust into his open mouth and, coughing and choking, he spat it out. "Ugh! Kate—look up, will you?"

She obeyed. "Yes? What—oh! It's got two heads! I noticed that before but I thought I was just seeing things."

Above the grotesque apelike body sprouted double heads, each with its own neck, joined at the shoulders. The skulls were naked, covered with rolls of fat that sagged loosely beneath pied, yellowish skin.

Each face reminded Kathleen of that of a microcephalic idiot, though more bestial in contour. A single luminous eye set in a pit of fat peered down from each head. An elongated muzzle protruded above a clownish, grinning mouth, filled with unpleasant-looking teeth.

"It looks like a lunatic" Kathleen gasped. "I mean—they do. Tony, are they one or two?"

"Bi-sexual," he told her. "Single body and two heads. In one of them the male element predominates, the female in the other. Like an earthworm, you know. Hyclops, from Hydra—two or more heads—and Cyclops—one eye in the center of the forehead. I wish I had my gun." At the note of despair in his voice Kathleen twisted around to stare at him.

"I thought you said—Tony, something's going to happen, isn't it? Something pretty bad?"

He hesitated for a moment, then shrugged or tried to.

"I guess so. The Hyclops cubs are the nastiest hungriest little beasts on Ganymede. They're born with the tempers of savages and as soon as their eyes open they start killing and eating each other.

"Then this—thing—is taking us to its

den for food for its cubs?"

"Oh, no. Not intentionally at any rate. It's a funny thing"—Quade was trying to distract Kathleen's attention so she would not see what was coming into view ahead—"usually only one Hyclops cub survives, the strongest one. As it gets older it entirely loses its savagery. The adult Hyclops has the most highly developed maternal instinct of any animal. It's also one of the dumbest.

"It sits around watching its cubs kill and eat one another without making a move to prevent it and then can't figure out what's happened to the little beasts. So it goes out and kidnaps some other animal—and adopts it. The way a mother cat will adopt puppies, sometimes.

"Unfortunately the poor beasts the Hyclops brings home get eaten by the cubs, so it's a case of being killed with kindness. This two-headed gorilla that's carrying us loves us both—don't make any mistake about that. But the cubs—that's different!"

Kathleen was looking down, her eyes wide and frightened. The Hyclops was descending the side of a steep hollow, at the bottom of which a couple of gleaming white forms moved sluggishly.

"Here it comes!" Quade whispered. "If I only had my gun!"

The Hyclops reached the floor of the pit and deposited its two captives gently on the ground. Then it simply squatted on its haunches, folding its furry arms across its stomach, and watched them.

Looking up at that incredible monster, with its two bloated, inanely grinning heads nodding high above in the red twilight, Kathleen felt a little wave of hysteria sweep over her. Desperately she fought it back.

Quade gripped her shoulder.

"We'll have to dodge the things," he said curtly. "They can't move fast on smooth ground but if we tried to climb out of this pit they'd have us like a shot. Come on!"

There were only two cubs, each about seven feet all, miniature replicas of their parent. But these were lean and rangy rather than fat and their naked yellow faces wore vicious snarls rather than imbecile grins. They came loping purposefully forward.

Quade seized Kathleen's hand and fled. It was an insane flight over cracking, gnawed bones that sprinkled the pit's floor under the brainlessly grinning gaze of the two-headed colossus! Mars was sinking toward the rim of the crater, and when it was gone, Quade

knew, they could no longer escape from the night-seeing cubs.

The monsters made no sound as they followed the two human beings. An agonizing pain was burning into Kathleen's chest and she would have fallen if it had not been for Quad's arm about here. She turned up a white perspiring face to him. Her lips parted.

But before she could speak a voice came from the shadows above.

"I can't go on," it said dispassionately. "I can't, Tony. They'll get us anyway."

Quade looked around quickly, and saw a furry white object bound up, silhouetted against Mars. Something arched through the air toward him and made a metallic clashing at his feet. He scooped it up, whirling swiftly.

The cold metal of the gun was familiar against his palm. Almost upon him was the bulk of the nearer cub, its monstrous heads nodding, its paws clutching out toward him. Quade squeezed the trigger.

The creature exploded in his face. Fur and flesh and whitish, curiously aromatic blood splattered. Without pausing Quade fired another bullet at the other cub, which was racing forward.

His aim was good. There was only the parent Hyclops left now. Quade hastily dug another bullet out of his belt and clipped it into the pistol.

"Triple charge," he said, dragging Kathleen after him up the side of the pit. "I don't want to use it unless—"

Grinning, the Hyclops arose. It paid no heed to the shambles at its feet but lumbered forward, intent on recapturing Quade and Kathleen. Quade steadied himself and shot the monster.

The recoil slammed him back against the girl, knocking them both down. Where the thirty-foot Hyclops had been were two furry legs, still twitching with reflex action.

**G**ROANING, Quade got up rubbing his shoulder, which had almost been dislocated. Kathleen scrambled up, averting her eyes from the ruined remnants of the Hyclops.

The bouncer hopped into view and clung to Kathleen's leg, squeaking gently. She bent to caress its head.

"You saved us that time," Bill declared, with an entire lack of modesty. "Tony, I think you owe him an apology. He brought you your gun."

Quade, still examining his shoulder, lifted an eyebrow.

"He got the Hyclops after us in the first place," the bouncer said inconsistently. "No apology necessary."

A light sprang up, illuminating the scene in vivid detail. Quade whirled, involuntarily lifting his pistol.

"Hold it!" a voice hailed. "It's Wolfe, Tony. Are you okay?"

With a sigh of relief Quade holstered the weapon. "We're safe now," he said in a swift aside to Kathleen. "Sure, Wolfe. Glad you're here. Did you hear the shots?"

A row-boned, lanky figure, carrying a flashlight, hurried forward and gripped Quade's hand. A mass of yellow hair tumbled over a thin, eager face and sharp blue eyes. Behind Wolfe was Peters, gaunt and hollow-cheeked, frowning anxiously.

"Camp's just over the ridge," Peters said. "There's trouble and lots of it. Who's this?"

"It's a mechanic," Quade said quickly. "Let's have your helmet, Peters." He handed it to Kathleen, who slipped it over her brown curls. "Keep this quiet, boys. She's a stow-away and you know what that means."

The others nodded. "Right," Wolfe said. "Come along, Tony. We'll talk as we go. I thought I had bad news but Peters just got here and he's got worse."

Kathleen was hard put to it to match the long strides of the men.

"What about Perrin and Ghiorso?" Quade asked. Quickly he explained what had happened.

Wolfe whistled. "It's Perrin's fault, the dirty swine. We landed on Ganymede and started to build the set *muuy pronto* and when we'd scooped out a pit for the amphitheatre we hit radium! Lots of it—the biggest find since Callisto. Way I figure it out Perrin sent you the message and then disabled our ship and our radio, so we were stuck. Then he hiked with Ghiorso."

"What for! Quade growled. "What was his game?"

Peters broke in. "He got back to the Moon in your cruiser and sold his information to Sobelin. The financier, you know—the boss of Star Mines Company. And Sobelin pulled some wires and got your option canceled. He's bought Ganymede lock, stock and barrel."

Quade ruffed his hair with both hands. "Lord, oh Lord! Did they—"

"We've been ordered off Ganymede. Von

Zorn got wind of the affair and he's nearly crazy. Started a lawsuit against Sobelin in your name. You were working for the chief when the radium was found and you had an option on the asteroid, so—"

"That means trouble," Quade said. "Remember the old Sobelin-Transport scrap over Ceres? It was a regular war between the two companies and they nearly wrecked Ceres before they'd finished. Nearly a thousand men killed on both sides before the government stepped in."

"There's nothing Washington can do here," Peters declared. "It's dirty politics, but legal enough. What'll *we* do, Tony? That's what I'm worrying about."

Quade hesitated, snapped his fingers. "We'll have to gamble. We'll go back to Eros. It's still my property for a few weeks. Is your ship repaired, Wolfe?"

The lanky blond nodded.

"Yeah. I got the parts I needed from Peters."

"Swell. We're heading for Eros then—all of us! We'll beat Sobelin, Perrin and the whole System if necessary. The set's half set up—well, we'll just have to rush and finish the job and take the pix before the ether eddy hits Eros. Come on!"

## CHAPTER IV

*Dissolve to: Hollywood on the Moon.*

**I**N THE next few days Kathleen came to know a new Tony Quade. He seemed like a machine, fired with inexhaustible energy. He had no need to drive the men, for they worked like demons, but he drove himself without pause.

The job had to be done! The polar city—the Eros set—had to be completed! The sequence had to be filmed before the ether eddy wiped out the asteroid!

Blast out the lakes and canals—whittle down the peaks and mounds with atomic blasters—file them into the shape of gigantic buildings, towering to the sky—faster, faster, faster!

Inexorably the ether eddy swept in from space, a black blot of nothingness. Quade had to cancel some of his plans. The central palace was left incomplete. Many of the lakes were dry. The node would be reached

sooner than anyone had expected.

The deadline was close—too close. The two great ships and Quade's little cruiser hung out in space at last, cameras grinding, while Eros revolved slowly beneath them. Quade kept casting worried glances at a little starless hole that was moving slowly across space toward the asteroid.

He was in the cruiser, with Kathleen beside him, the bouncer squatting in a corner watching them with curious eyes. The girl had insisted on helping. She had mastered enough technique to learn how to operate one of the three-dimensional cameras.

The revolving double-shutter provided the necessary stereopticon effect, and her main job was to keep the polar city within the range of the finder. Quade's camera possessed a telephoto lens, which would bring the set into a magnified close-up view.

"It's too late," Bill said, hopping to Kathleen's side and embracing her leg. "We waited too long."

She turned worried eyes to Quade.

"Do you think so, Tony? Everything's ready, you know."

He pointed.

"Look at the ether eddy. I cut the line too close, Kate. The explosion's due now."

The blot of shadow swept closer. The artificial polar city shone in the sunlight far below on the surface of the asteroid—and without warning it happened. A little jet of smoke shot up, the forerunner of the explosion that would blast the city into space. Quade bent over his keyboard—

Eros was blotted out! It vanished—puffed out into nothingness! There was nothing spectacular about it. One moment it was there, spinning whitely among the stars—then it was gone as the eddy enveloped it. Quade cursed.

"My luck," Quade said bitterly. "Once in a thousand years the System gets an ether eddy. And it just has to do this." He shut off the camera, stood up. "Well, it's all over, Kate. I'd land you on Earth but I haven't enough fuel. And I couldn't buy an ounce, now. You're looking at the worst flop in the Galaxy."

The bouncer was cowering in a corner, scrubbing at his eyes with frantic paws. Kathleen glanced at it and turned a level gaze on Quade.

"Buck up, Tony. You've said that to me often enough. You're not licked yet, are you?"

"Yeah," he grunted. "You're darn right I'm licked. I don't mind for myself so much, but there's my crew—they've stuck with me for years. And you, too, kid—thought I could help you out, But—"

Bill was behaving strangely. The bouncer scurried to the nose of the ship; pressing his face against the transparent portion, then hopped back to cower in a corner. Kathleen eyed him.

"Tony," she said suddenly, "do me a favor. Develop the film, will you?"

Quade stared.

"What's the use? It'll just be blackness. Von Zorn can't use that."

"I've an idea. Please, Tony. The process takes only a minute."

He shrugged.

"All right. Tell the gang to head for the Moon. He unhooked a can of film and went into the rear compartment, while Kathleen turned to the televisor. Presently Quade called her.

"All set. Come in, Kate."

**B**ILL at her heels, she went through the door. The developed reel of film was on the projector, and Quade started it unrolling as she entered. On the screen Eros sprang out in sharp detail.

"Long shot. Here's where the telephoto lens comes in."

A city leaped into visibility in natural colors, a little blurred.

"I'll speed it up a bit," Quade said. "The two pictures have to be transposed so you see one with each eye. That gives the three-dimensional effect."

A puff of dust appeared—and the screen went black. Simultaneously the bouncer became violently excited. He leaped up, almost hitting the ceiling, and squeaked frantically.

Quade said. "That's funny. I wonder—"

Bill declared. "It's his eyes. He sees more than us."

"Think so?" Quade's face wore an incredulous expression. "D'you really think that's it, Kate? Maybe—I'll try the infrared."

He manipulated the projector, but no change came on the screen. "Well then, the ultra-violet." He flicked lenses into place.

The bouncer quieted, staring around in an absent fashion. He hopped to Kathleen's side and tugged at her hand. But she paid

no attention. She was staring, open-mouthed, at the amazing spectacle on the screen, brought into sharp visibility by the ultra-violet filter.

"By the nine moons of Saturn!" Quade gasped hoarsely. "Do you see it? Kate—am I crazy? Do you see it too?"

"Yeah," she managed to whisper. "But I don't believe it."

His voice was hushed.

"Do you know what we're looking at? *The fourth dimension!*"

A planet was visible on the screen, growing rapidly in size as it revolved. A planet that was unlike any other in three dimensional space. For it was not a sphere. It was a dozen spheres—a thousand! Kathleen blinked in amazement.

"I—Tony I can see inside of it! And all around it!"

"We're looking into fourth dimensional space," Quade gloated. "So that's the explanation of the ether eddy. It marks the orbit of a body in another continuum—a fourth dimensional continuum. It's a hole in space, a hole created by a planet in another Universe. Look at that!"

The amazing world or group of worlds drew closer. Fantastic, unbelievable colors shocked Kathleen's eyes. The surface of this planet was covered with incredible things.

"Animal, vegetable or mineral?" Quade asked gleefully. "Lord knows! It doesn't matter. Whew, what a break! And I've got two-dozen reels of that thing, taken from different angles. Kate, do you know what Van Zorn will pay for this?" He didn't wait for her answer.

"He wants a super-colossal picture—well, this is super-galactic! There's never been anything like it in the System. A fourth-dimensional flicker! Oh, sweet Saturn!"

"He scooped up the startled bouncer and planted a kiss on the creature's astonished face. "You'll get a diamond-studded collar for this. And Kate—I'll see Von Zorn gives you the fattest rôle he's got."

"Will Von Zorn pay through the nose for this!" Bill declared, struggling to escape from Quade's grip. "And will Sandra be mad?"

"Who," Kathleen asked, "is Sandra?"

The bouncer plopped to the floor, remarking, "I wonder if she's jealous?" At which Kathleen turned fiery red and hastily went into the other compartment, leaving

the chortling Quade to watch the amazing film.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hollywood on the Moon was in a furore. Von Zorn had seen the fourth-dimensional films and had promptly called for his check-book. His apish face was wreathed in smiles as he ordered a screen-test for Kathleen and fed the bouncer sweetmeats.

He was fascinated by the little creature's mind-reading abilities but Quade carried Bill off quickly and handed him over to the Psychology Bureau after enlisting a government agent's aid. Quade had an idea. He had been worrying about the impending Sobelin-Nine Planets battle, especially as Von Zorn showed no inclination to retreat.

"It doesn't matter what you want," the chief had told him firmly. "There's a fortune in radium on Ganymede and my lawyers tell me I've as much right to it as Sobelin. More, because you were working for me when you took out the option."

**L**ATER Quade returned to Von Zorn's office with Kathleen, Bill and the government agent. The chief was grinning fatuously as he talked with Sandra Steele, who was turning on him fifty thousand watts and the full battery of her violet eyes.

Von Zorn glanced up and a curious look came into his face.

"Ah," he said, fingering his scrubby mustache. "Miss Gregg. I have rather bad news for you, I'm afraid."

Kathleen looked startled. "Didn't the test come out all right? The cameraman said—"

"Uh—it was fine. Yes. But circumstances have arisen—" He glanced sideward at Sandra. "We will be unable to use you in pictures. Your passage back to Earth will be paid, of course. I'm sorry."

Quade took a step forward, glaring at Sandra.

"You chiseling little pig," he told her angrily. "This is your doing, isn't it?"

Sandra smiled as Von Zorn stood up.

"Don't talk that way to Miss Steele," he snapped. "You were well paid for your pictures. I'm grateful—sure. But that doesn't give you any license to run Nine Planets or to insult Sandra."

"I see," Quade said. "Okay. I'm sorry, Kate," he said to the girl, whose eyes were



wet despite the stubborn firmness of her chin. "You deserve a better break."

She turned blindly to the door and went out. The government agent came forward, digging into a pocket of his black uniform.

"Here's something for you," he said, handing Von Zorn a paper. "And believe me, I'm glad to give it to you, mister." He winked at Quade.

The chief stared at the document.

"What the devil! Quade—what *is* this? A restraining order—Washington can't *do* this! I've as much right to Ganymede as Sobelin! You can't freeze me out this way!"

"Sobelin's getting one too," Quade said with satisfaction. "Neither of you has any

"Oh, boy! Bill said, although it wasn't plain whose thoughts he was broadcasting.

Suddenly Von Zorn grinned.

"Okay—as long as Sobelin is out too. I don't care so much about the radium. We'll clean up on *Space Bandit* anyway—but I wasn't going to see that crook put anything over on me. Congratulations, Bill!" And he deposited a sweetmeat in the bouncer's open mouth.

"I'm glad you're taking it like that," Quade said. "You haven't changed your mind about Kate, though?"

Von Zorn hesitated and glanced at Sandra. At the look in her violet eyes he compressed his lips.

right to Ganymede. Remember the old property law—the right of eminent domain?"

"But—but—Ganymede isn't inhabited by intelligent life! Not over the eighth level, anyway."

"Sure it is," the agent interrupted. "This little fellow here is probably smarter than you are." He indicated the bouncer. "He doesn't look it, but he's just over the eighth level. Mr. Quade called me in and wanted an intelligence test made. And it turned out he was right.

"Ganymede is already inhabited by these jiggers—which are over the eighth level of intelligence—so the asteroid belongs to them and Washington says so. And I'll bet neither you nor Sobelin wants to buck the Government."

Von Zorn gulped.

"Uh—no, of course not. You say Sobelin won't get anything?"

"He hasn't a claim. Washington will establish a colony on Ganymede, mine the radium and use it for the benefit of the inhabitants—exterminate the dangerous animals and give these little fellows the break they deserve."

"I'm sorry, Quade. I can't use her. But you've a good assignment on *The Star Parade* and—"

**W**ITHOUT another word Quade went out. He found Kathleen at the turn of the corridor, dabbing at her eyes with a futile bit of lace.

"Buck up!" he said, putting his arm around her. "Here use this," And he applied a large handkerchief to her face.

"Don't—don't rub my nose off!" she gasped. "Oh, Tony, I'd like to scratch that woman's eyes out. She makes me sick."

"I don't see how Von Zorn managed to fall for her," Quade admitted ruefully. "But he did. Eats out of her hand."

The door of the chief's office banged open suddenly. Furious voices were raised in bitter argument. Abruptly the bouncer emerged and hopped frantically along the corridor. Behind him Sandra Steel raced purposefully, anger plain on her face. Bill squeaked with fear and took shelter behind Kathleen's ankles.

Sandra made a snatch for Bill.

"Give me that—that thing!" she gritted.

"I'm going to wring its head off."

"You're not!" Kathleen told her sharply. "Leave him alone. Tony—"

But before Quade could move Sandra had whipped out a vicious hand and slapped Kathleen smartly.

Kathleen's chin came up. She brought around a capable hand, clenched into a hard little fist, and punched Sandra Steel in the nose. With an incredulous scream of pain the screen star staggered back and came violently in contact with the wall. She slid down to a sitting position, spitting like a cat.

"Had enough?" Kathleen asked belligerently, stepping forward. "You leave Bill alone!"

It seemed Sandra had had enough. She scrambled to her feet and made off, trailing a string of vituperation that made Quade's ears burn. Abruptly he became conscious that Von Zorn was standing nearby, regarding Kathleen.

"Jupiter!" he gasped. "That's torn it!"

But he thrust himself between Von Zorn and the girl, fists clenched.

The chief waved him aside, his lips twitching strangely. "Ah—Miss Gregg," he said in a muffled voice. "I—uh—fear Miss Steele will be unable to appear in *The Star Parade*. Inasmuch as your test turned out so well I'd like to offer you the role." He coughed violently. "You're a very capable person," he told the astounded Kathleen and hurried away.

Quade stared at him in amazement, then turned to eye Kathleen's delighted face. "I guess I'm hearing things," he murmured. "You sock Sandra—and get her part. For

Pete's sake!" He looked up as a new voice spoke.

"For Bill's sake, you mean. I'm commencing to think that little gadget is smarter than any of us." The Government agent was standing before them, amusedly eyeing the bouncer, who was clinging to Kathleen's leg and squeaking with apparent delight.

"You can't tell me he isn't laughing," the agent chuckled. "And he's got a right to. Know what happened?"

"What?" Quade asked. "It must have been plenty."

"It was. After you went out this dame Sandra Steele started making up to Von Zorn and he pulled her on his lap and asked her for a kiss. And just then Bill bounced up to the desk and said, 'If you think I'm going to kiss that repulsive monkey face of yours, you're crazy!'"

The agent spluttered with delight.

"What a scrap! Von Zorn dropped the dame like a hot potato and they lit into each other hot and heavy. 'So that's what you think of me,' he yells. 'A monkey-face, eh? Been making a sap out of me, have you?' And then she started after Bill, and Von Zorn after her—"

"This is the life!" The bouncer interrupted, jiggling excitedly. "How about a kiss?"

The agent hastily turned away. "I know I didn't think that," he observed over his shoulder. "So—"

Neither Quade nor Kathleen was paying any attention to him. Bill, however, bounced up to the ceiling and declared triumphantly. "She loves me! She loves me! She loves me!"

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