

# WONDER Stories

NEXT MONTH

## The Planet of Youth

by STANTON A. COBLENTZ

is a distinctly original story written in the realistic, satirical, and vivid style of that popular author. With the remembrance of the "Florida Boom" of 1925-26 fresh in our minds, we know how the human race swallows so easily the bait of perpetual health and great riches, thrown out by unscrupulous men. Suppose that a planet were discovered that yielded both of those sought-for things? What would happen on our poor little earth? The answer is given here with a surprising ending that will leave you breathless.

## Chicago, 2042 A. D.

by PAUL BOLTON

is this new author's answer to the challenge of the gangster. The author is a newspaper man and has been close to the rise of racketeering and what it signifies. What will happen if the racketeer remains unchallenged and digs his fingers deeper and deeper into our lives? If racketeering continues to grow and prosper WHAT WILL HAPPEN ONE HUNDRED YEARS HENCE? "Chicago, 2042 A.D." is the answer.

## Outcasts of Mars

by ARTHUR G. STANGLAND

carries on this versatile author's exciting stories of the far reaches of the solar system. Suppose a race of people were disinherited from their world and forced to seek refuge on another world? And suppose on that other world they were treated as outcasts and denied even a bare living? What would they do? Would they calmly accept it, or would an explosion occur that would reach across space to other worlds? Mr. Stangland's story gives one unusual possibility.

## The Death of Iron

by S. S. HELD

grows in power as we see the ravages of *siderosis* sweep across France. We have just begun to perceive what would occur to civilization should our metals fail us. Now M. Held with vivid strokes draws his pictures more and more and more finely. We see how the disease of metals effects all parts of the population, and the new civil wars that will arise for control of the decaying civilization. The story rises and rises in power as this installment sweeps along.

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### ON THE COVER THIS MONTH

we see another of Paul's scientific mysteries for our readers to puzzle out. Full directions for this contest, repeating that of the July issue, are found on Page 319. Again we offer a mental exercise and a test of imagination and scientific ingenuity to our readers with cash prizes as the reward.

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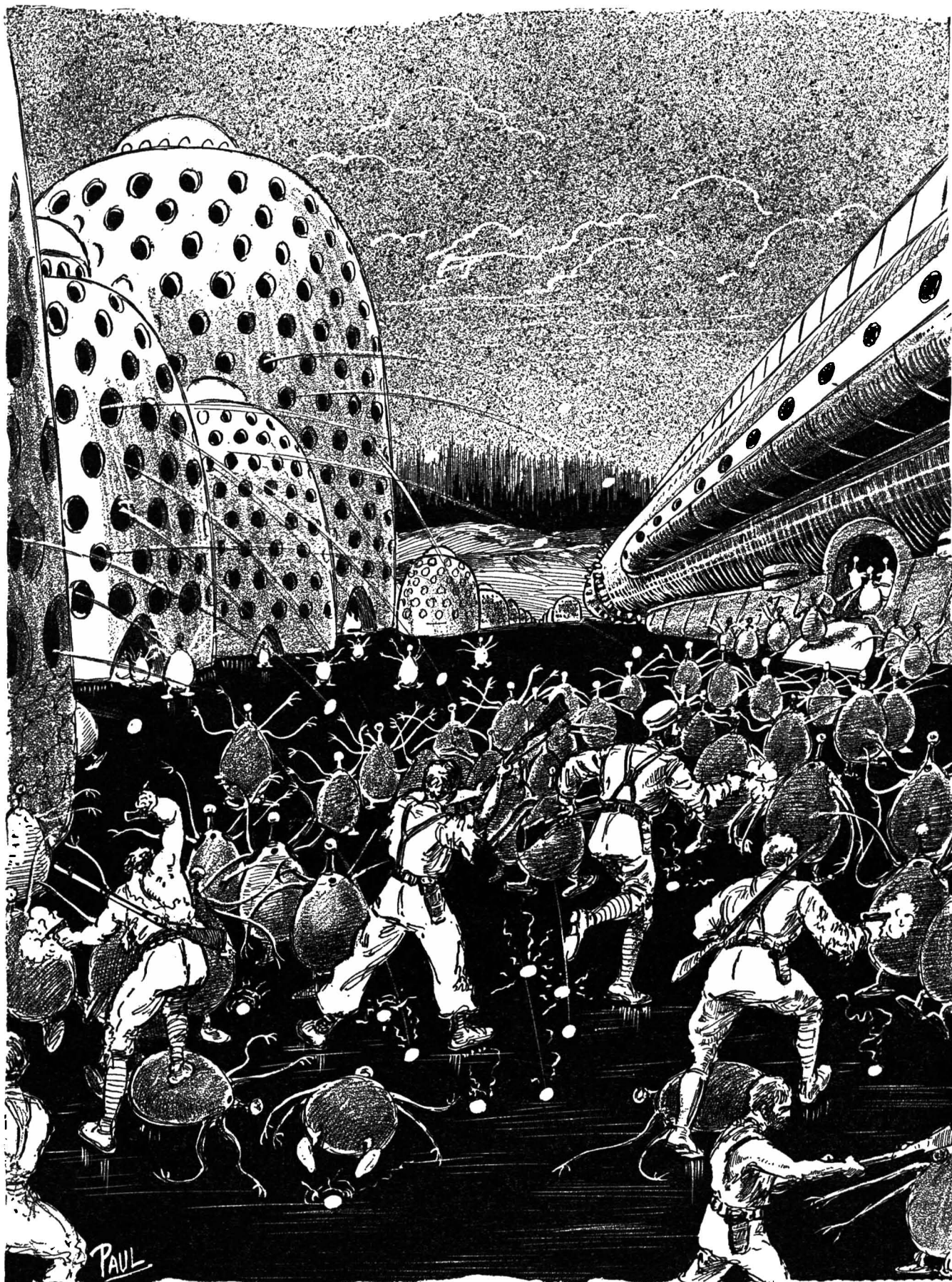
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(Illustration by Paul)

"Club your rifles," he yelled. Mechanically we unslung our rifles      But the green balls  
were surely overpowering us. Our arms were heavy

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# IN MARTIAN DEPTHS

By HENRIK DAHL JUVE

● Now that our troubles with the inhabitants of Mars have finally been settled and the events have at last taken a quiet, sketchy place in history; where the characters have become demi-gods of faultless marble, it might be safe to tell what really happened.

History lauds the man who first sent a rocket to the moon and mentions the excitement with which astronomers saw the flash of mixed magnesium and oxygen when the rocket struck. It devotes some space to "Slim" Dawson who made the first successful round trip to the moon. After that events occurred so fast that very little space was left for the man who made the first practical application of space travel.

It was strange and farsighted reasoning that prompted Dr. Matheson to undertake his fateful trip. The ship was almost completed when I came on the scene. I had fitted myself and worked for a number of years as a radio consulting engineer, so was detailed to design and install a compact radio set aboard the craft and to operate it during the flight. It was during the intimate consultations over designs and plans that I often talked with Matheson concerning the philosophy of what faced us.

"Nordstrom," he once said, "the world is disarmed now. We of the United States are faced with three eventualities. The course of evolution is a strange thing. Civilization travels toward the west. It seems inevitable. I often wonder why. Is there some psychic phenomenon akin to the tides as they are dragged along by the sun and moon or is it some tendency deeply rooted in the race subconscious? I don't know, but the fact remains that those in the west conquer those immediately to the east. Those in the west continue to advance while those left behind merely settle down and live.

"We have watched the crest-wave of civilization and pioneering travel along the Mediterranean from the Orient, through Greece, Italy, up through Spain, France, Portugal and England and the other European countries and then across the Atlantic. We have seen it slowly cross the United States from east to west and hesitate on the Pacific coast. Even as early as 1932 history began to center about the Pacific. What next? Will the crest of the wave leap across the Pacific to the Orient? Or will it pass into some new realm which we call the fourth dimension? Or will it pass into space and conquer the other planets?"

"But the nations are disarmed," I reminded him, little realizing the significance of his words. "Conquest is a thing of the past."

● According to Mr. Juve, civilization never stands still. It either advances to new conquests, or decays and perishes. The law of life is still one of eternal struggle.

From the conquest of the earth, man must by some law of nature, extend his activities to the other planets; and from them to interstellar space, to go—no one knows where.

To some people this view of life may be rather disheartening. They probably wish that at some time, the human race could settle back and live eternally in quiet, peace, and in calm enjoyment of our material and cultural possessions. But such people, Mr. Juve believes, will be left behind in the onward march of civilization.

You may not agree with Mr. Juve; you may not agree with the tactics of earthmen in that "onward march," but you will agree that here he has given us a "rattling good story."

---

Dr. Matheson, who by the way, was a mathematics professor in a little western college, looked at me with his intense blue eyes. They twinkled.

"You forget that all progress comes from struggle, or perhaps I should say, with struggle. When we were barbarians the force of arms was sufficient. But gradually this was supplanted by the force of economic struggle and we substituted money for guns. As we become less barbaric money will give way to something else. But there will always be struggle. The big question facing us now is, shall the white race sit back and let the supremacy go to the Orient, or shall we continue to move ahead and retain our advantage? We can be certain of only one thing; civilization will continue to move toward the west. If we don't move it will leave us behind. That is why we are visiting Mars. We are, as it were, going *beyond the earth* in an attempt to lead the crest of the wave of pioneering to interplanetary space and to other planets."

That, in short, was Dr. Matheson's reason for the trip. It seemed far-fetched at the time. To me he was just another professor; a perky, wiry little one at that. But subsequent events have shown me that he was right, and that the question he raised was worthy of the most serious consideration.

● Of the actual flight I need say but little. Present day interplanetary travel is matter-of-fact for business or pleasure and almost everyone has experienced it. It has become part of race habit. But when we roared away

from the earth on that hot night in July, 1982 we were trusting our lives to a thousand and one unknowns.

I'll never forget the terror of that moment when Matheson gave the signal. We had been so busy on construction that we had given little thought to our actual flight. Now, that the airlocks were closed and we were penned up in that hundred-foot cylinder of gleaming metal I felt such fear as I never experienced before or since. I stood beside the porthole in the radio room where the mixture of gasoline and liquid oxygen was pumped into the rocket tubes.

Suddenly the little ship was enveloped in a savage furnace of flame. Even through the double hull the roar was deafening. The craft shook violently under the terrific blasts of the stern rockets. All of my faculties were swept away in that awful holocaust. I stood rooted to the deck, the sickening fear of the unknown welling up within me and paralyzing my mind.

I saw the earth fall away and our tail blasts straighten out into long streamers but I did not see the marvelous beauty of it nor feel the thrill of accomplishment. Fear clutched at my throat and I breathed in tremulous gasps. I tried to turn from the porthole but I was unable to move. I felt as if a great weight filled my torso. I was afraid to move!

Gradually we became accustomed to our flight and moved about at our duties, although we walked slowly and carefully as if on eggs. Our nerves were on edge. When the roar from the stern blasts changed its tempo slightly we crouched, new terror welling up within us. The first time Matheson touched a button and one of the little steering rockets burst into a high-pitched scream one of the men screeched and fell into a dead faint. After that Matheson always warned us when there was to be a change in the course or speed.

Word went around that Matheson was not sure of the rocket motors. It was whispered that they might burst at any moment and tear the whole stern from the ship. Other rumors of possible tragedy kept us in a constant state of terror. The whole trip was one long nightmare with horror staring at us with bottomless, soulless orbs. We lived in our imaginations.

The worst came when we arrived at the point where the rocket motors were shut off. We had been terrified by the vibration and noise and flame, but now we feared the silence. We flashed through space at incredible speed. All about us was silence; a curtain of black velvet, sparkling with points of silver. Now as I look back I realize that it was *change* that terrified us. So long as a condition remained and became monotonous we became accustomed to it, but the moment there was a change new terror gripped us.

It was when the propeller tubes were silenced that the cook went stark mad. We were still gripped by the unutterable silence and were struggling to accustom ourselves to it when a terrible scream echoed and reechoed through the ship. It began as an eerie wail that rose to a shrill scream and then broke down into demoniac laughter. We stood rooted in horror. It was worse since it expressed exactly what the rest of us felt like doing at times.

We rushed into the engine room where the cook was brandishing a meat cleaver, scattering the crew before him. His eyes were wild and staring and drool slavered from

his drawn lips. He screamed that he was going to destroy the machinery—anything to make a noise. He said that the silence was the work of the Devil and that he was out to wreck it.

We tried desperately to disarm him but it was impossible to get near him. Gradually he drove us back, clearing a lane toward the delicately adjusted machinery at the stern of the ship. We despaired, a new fear tearing at us. I felt an insane impulse to rush in despite the flashing cleaver although I knew that would be madness, for the lack of gravity made footwork impossible. The best we could do was to drag ourselves about by means of the hand rails.

For a minute we were madmen at bay; all except Matheson. Perhaps it was his indomitable will or perhaps the sense of responsibility that kept him cool and collected during the entire trip. Now he very quietly came up behind the madman with a chair he had slipped from its deck anchor. He brought this down on the head of the cook. The madman's eyes rolled upward. He relaxed completely and his cleaver floated slowly toward the end of the room where one of the engineers caught it. The cook was driven down upon the deck from which he bounced slightly and floated toward the ceiling, his arms and legs grotesquely outflung. We quickly dragged him down and trussed him with wire to one of the deck anchors.

When we finally brought him to, we found that our cook had become an automaton. It was probably the shock of the blow that quieted him. We found that we could trust him, although we had to tell him exactly what to do, what and how much to cook and when. When he was not carrying out orders he slumped in the corner of the galley, staring with unseeing eyes and muttering to himself.

● We were nearing Mars now. It had grown to a huge disc in the sky; a disc that held for us a strange promise and foreboding of tragedy. We went about silently, wishing that we might not have to land. We wished that we could now sail aimlessly through space forever. All except Matheson. He seemed elated and I believe he really was. Even the second in command, young Dr. Drummond, was pale and hollow-eyed.

I'll have to tell you more about this Dr. Drummond. If there is a fate in operation, surely it was fate that placed him second in command of the expedition. He was a round faced, blue-eyed man of medium build, wilful and moody. Sometimes he was jolly and witty and the next moment taciturn and abstract. He could never decide what he wanted to be.

Perhaps that was because of his wide interests and long string of letters after his name. Along scientific lines he was a genius. But more, he was a poet and philosopher. Sometimes he thought that he would like to become a mathematician and astronomer, sometimes he longed to be a poet, at other times an explorer or a financier. Usually, however, his philosophy rode on a laconic track and he considered the ideal existence would be that of plain bum. What irony of fate brought him among us I never learned. However it happened, it was his hand that was to tip the scales and unbalance the destiny, not of empires, but of planets.

The planet Mars grew until it was a vast wall in our



path. Matheson and Drummond worked constantly, taking observations and computing positions and distances. When we were near the tiny chart-house we spoke in hushed whispers, knowing that our lives depended upon their figures and the readings on the slide rules.

Suddenly the steering rockets on one side burst into flame and noise and the ship rotated until the stern was toward the planet. Then the propeller tubes roared into action and we again had to accustom ourselves to the vibration and din. The ship was completely enveloped in flame as the jets from the rockets flared out and expanded in airless space.

Our nerves were like knives set on edge. We were backing toward the planet, flying blind, for we had no instruments such as used on modern ships. For hours the roaring blasts slackened our speed and worked against the pull of Mars. At last the ship came to a rest and then began to draw away from the planet as the recoil of the rockets forced her upward. We crowded about the portholes for a glimpse of the land, having been warned that the jets were to be extinguished for a moment to get bearings. Suddenly we were enveloped in a profound and awesome silence.

For only a moment we hung motionless, less than a mile above the surface of Mars. We had a glimpse of the sun sparkling on the canals. To the south and west and east the reddish green forest of giant trees stretched away beyond the horizon. To the north the forest thinned to sparse vegetation that stopped abruptly against the edge of a vast field of red plants. Before we could see more we were again enveloped by lurid flame and thunderous roar.

Drummond came out of the chart-house, his face white as chalk. He stood for ten minutes, clinging weakly to the railing and then went back. It was later that we learned that they had calculated to stop the ship for bearings at least a hundred miles from the planet. But the rush of gases through the rocket tubes had worn them and impaired their efficiency. When Drummond saw that they had stopped just in time to avoid a crash it unnerved him completely.

The tubes had been roaring under reduced pressure. Suddenly the white flame that surrounded us was tinged with lurid red streaks and black smoke. The tubes increased their roar slightly and then we settled down on end and canted sharply. The tubes were silenced. We tried to see through the portholes but they were blackened with smoke. The external thermometer told us that we had started a forest fire. It was five hours before the temperature came down to normal and a test of the air was made. It was breathable.

## CHAPTER II

### Mars

When we opened the air lock and stepped upon the land of Mars we stared about us in wonder. We had decided

to land near that intersection of canals which our astronomers have named the *Lacus Solis*, or the Lake of the Sun, thinking that this intersection of waterways form the most natural location for dense population if indeed we should find the planet inhabited.

Now we saw our mistake. The wild vegetation grew along the canal banks, extending for about thirty miles on each side and then dwindling to nothing in the arid wasteland. At this intersection there was no break in the vegetation between canals and we found ourselves in a vast forest of mammoth trees.

The flame of our rockets had seared a great hole through interlaced foliage of the trees. The noon-day sun glared down upon us through this hole. Fallen trees smoldered here and there over the two or three acres of fire-swept underbrush. The nose of our ship rested in the crotch of a monster tree, tilted at a thirty degree angle.

We examined the trees, some of which were a hundred feet in diameter and perhaps several hundred feet high. We were particularly interested in the bark, which was smooth as glass and of the translucence and color of amber. It looked more like celluloid than anything I could think of.

This, however, did not hold us for long. We had been cooped up in the throbbing ship for so long that at first we were numb and unsteady, but now we became conscious of a dull rumble that shook the ground. We could hear a faint roar far to the south.

Matheson now took charge and organized a systematic exploring plan. We were to circle about the ship, ever widening the radius of our circle in the hope of finding something interesting. We armed ourselves, agreeing upon pistol shot signals should we stray too far to be within hailing distance of each other. Martin, the young man in flannels and high top boots, was left at the ship to guard and to take moving pictures, for he was the official photographer of the expedition. The cook remained in the corner of the galley muttering to himself.

I was delighted when I was ordered to go in a southerly direction. That ramble intrigued me. I had gone but a few hundred feet when a clatter of wings startled me. A huge beetle some three feet long, with a set of wings fore and aft, rattled away up into the foliage of the jungle. During our stay we saw many of these, some of them as long as five feet.

Several times I was amazed to see flying worms. These ranged in length from one to seven feet. A row of many tiny wings along each side of their slender bodies sang a high-pitched note as they squirmed and undulated through the air. Strange little furry animals with six legs bounded from before me and disappeared in the underbrush. Other animals were covered with bright, translucent shells. We had expected to find that evolution had produced different species and forms than those of the earth, but these were startling and fascinating.

I had gone what I estimated to be about a quarter of a mile from the ship when I came upon a wide, well-beaten game trail. I examined the tracks in the dust. Some



Henrik Dahl Juve

monster of the jungle with padded feet about eighteen inches long had churned up the dust of the trail. I examined them more carefully. The foot was divided into three parts, each part terminating in an immense claw that dug deep into the ground.

I listened intently, not wishing to meet one of these monsters, but no sound save the drone and clatter of insects and the distant roar disturbed the warm air. The roar seemed no louder than it had from the ship so I reasoned that it must be a great way off and very loud. I was feeling sorry for myself and keenly disappointed when suddenly I stiffened to attention.

Faintly in the distance toward the spot where the ship landed three shots cracked in rapid succession. It was our distress signal. Before I was fairly on my way three more shots rang out from the same direction. I heard others answer from distant parts of the forest.

I ran crashing through the underbrush, guided by the occasional shot from the ship. I scared up myriads of strange insects and animals, stranger than any I had seen on the trip out, but there was no time to investigate them. A monster butterfly, startled and evidently confused, flew into my face and knocked me down in a smothering cloud of silver and gold dust. At last I crashed into the burned-over clearing, panting and gasping for breath.

Five of the men had already arrived when I got there, and stood gazing upward through the hole we had burned in the foliage. I joined the group and gasped. Far above us, glistening in the slanting rays of the setting sun hung four silent, motionless planes. They were gracefully streamlined, large in front and tapering to slender tails in the rear. They were built of a light green substance that had a metallic sheen. There was no sign of wings.

They seemed to be debating something and then as if they had come to a decision, one of them dropped like a plummet straight for the opening we had burned. We scattered among the trees, fearing that the thing might crash. But just above the trees it came to a stop and a package dropped from a little trapdoor in the bottom of the hull. We saw it strike the ground and when we looked up again all four ships had vanished.

● We clustered about the object while Matheson examined it. He untied a thin metal ribbon and unrolled a sheet of very thin green metal. It was like a scroll. He looked at it a moment and then handed it to me with a puzzled expression.

"It's for you to decipher," he said.

"But I'm no good at riddles," I objected.

However, I glanced at the scroll and then looked closer in interest. Only a glance was sufficient to tell me that it was good old Continental Morse code. Evidently they had used a stylus to indent the dots and dashes in the thin metal. I recall that I was shaking a little with excitement and wonder as I rummaged through my pockets and found a pencil and an old letter. On the back of the letter I quickly interpreted the message.

"What does it say?" all the other ten demanded at once.

"Wait till I check it."

I hastily checked it, for I was not accustomed to reading printed code. I read the message aloud so that all could hear:

"MEN OF EARTH, WARNING. GO BACK TO EARTH. WE KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR CIVILIZATION AND DO NOT WISH IT BROUGHT TO OUR PLANET TO CONTAMINATE OUR LIVES. WE HAVE COPIED YOUR RADIO TALK FOR MANY YEARS AND AT LAST HAVE DISCOVERED YOUR LANGUAGES. WE HAVE STUDIED YOUR CIVILIZATION AND ARE APPALLED BY YOUR MODE OF PROGRESS AND YOUR BRUTAL NATURES. WE HAVE ALL THE ANIMALS WE WISH WITH US. WE DEMAND THAT YOU RETURN TO EARTH AND THAT YOU PROMISE THAT NEVER AGAIN SHALL A MAN OF EARTH COME TO MARS. IF YOU STAY YOU SHALL SUFFER. ANSWER ON YOUR RADIO IN CODE. WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOUR SPOKEN WORDS."

The message was signed with a queer scroll that looked like a cartoonist's depiction of smoke coming out of a chimney and then explained by "Earth Languages Expert."

We stared at each other while Matheson reread the warning. The full import did not impress us until Matheson gave us his impressions. He looked up from the message, his intense eyes snapping.

"We came here," he said, "expecting to find life. We have found almost super-human intelligence. A group of minds which can copy the dots and dashes sent by another planet and decipher the language and meaning is something to take seriously. Any pioneer and explorer must expect to meet opposition and hostility. Progress comes from struggle. But I am convinced that our opposition is something that we may not be able to cope with. As leader of this expedition, I do not wish to assume the full responsibility of answering this warning. Suppose that we think it over during the night and in the morning put it to a vote? The question is, shall we go back or shall we defy them?"

The next morning, while the cook was preparing breakfast, we again assembled in the burned clearing. Because of the angle at which the rocket stood we had made our beds on the decks in the angles formed by the bulkheads and decks. Wedged into the angles, we had not slept well and were a grouchy lot. Added to this was the fact that the sun was rising, uncomfortably hot. I mention these things because they aroused within us a feeling of resentment and were the chief factors that influenced our vote. Now as I look back, I have a suspicion that Matheson anticipated something of the sort. I am sure that he wanted to defy the inhabitants of Mars and he knew that twilight was not the psychological time to decide the question.

"Now," said Matheson, stretching the kinks out of his arms and legs, "we should decide what our answer is to be. What is your vote?"

O'Malley spoke first. He was a hot-tempered little Irishman who had shipped as one of the engineers. His eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep and he limped slightly from a cramped leg.

"Tell the blankety-blank scorpions to go to Hell where they belong. The spawn could have invited us to their city with true hospitality instead of making us spend the night out here like wild animals. The love of the Virgin ain't in 'em."

Others agreed with O'Malley. There was no question about the answer.

"And besides," said Hanson, the big Swede, "we can't promise that no one else will ever come here from the Earth. We all know better than to promise that."

"We could promise that if it would do any good for us now," said Macey. "But I vote we tell them we're here as long as we please."

"Thanks," said Matheson. "I am pleased with your unfaltering loyalty and your answer."

And I know that he was pleased—more pleased than he cared to express. As for myself, I voted to stay. But I have a confession to make. I had lain awake almost all night thinking about it. I tried to imagine myself on the earth copying dots and dashes from another planet and then having the intelligence and mental power to figure out what the totally unknown language meant.

As I began to realize the full significance of this I tried to turn it to our account. Frankly, there lurked in me the fear of the return trip. I almost hoped that they would destroy the rocket ship so that we couldn't return. It was that strange mental inertia at work again, for now we were located in a sense. I tried to make everything argue in favor of remaining.

Then I thought of what we on the earth might do if some unwelcome invader came with ideas and methods which we regarded with abhorrence, as the Martians evidently regarded ours. But I thrust these thoughts from my mind for they hinted that we had better return while we could. I was more afraid of the return trip than I was of all the intelligence and threats of the Martians. I feathered my ideas with soft thoughts, trying to convince myself that beings of so high an order of intelligence would not stoop to violence. Fairy tales and blind hope are the meat of explorers.

But back to our meeting. We discussed the situation further. It was Drummond, the second in command, who was speaking.

"I move that we tell them that we want a few days to consider the matter. That will give us a respite. We might learn more about them and possibly institute some form of defence."

"I believe that it might be to our advantage," said Matheson. "An excellent plan."

We agreed to this diplomacy. All, that is, except O'Malley. He was still fuming. He slowly clinched his huge red-haired fists.

"Why wait? I'd like to break one of 'em in two with my bare hands and spill the fire and brimstone out of his rotten carcass."

"I know that you are spoiling for a fight," said Matheson, "but you are overruled."

He turned to me, while O'Malley grumbled to himself. "You will please send this message: 'WE WISH A DAY OR TWO IN WHICH TO CONSIDER YOUR WARNING. EXPECT A DEFINITE ANSWER LATER.' Tell them that in as many different ways as you can think of so that they will be sure to understand. And better take a reading of the direction finder."

I went to the ship and dragged myself up its steep decks to the radio shack. After lighting the tubes in the transmitter I hammered out a call to the Martians. I turned the tuning dial of the receiver slowly and then came the answer on the exact wave I had used in sending the call.

"GO AHEAD" flashed back at me in high-pitched, staccato dots and dashes. I sent the message, repeating it in different words and then signed off. "WAIT" the mysterious operator flashed back. Wait I did. For fifteen minutes I sat there with the 'phones clamped to my ears. Suddenly dots and dashes shrieked in my ears. I copied the answer:

**"WE KNOW THAT YOU CAN NOT MAKE UP YOUR MINDS OR CONCEIVE IDEAS QUICKLY. THE COUNCIL VOTES THAT YOU BE GIVEN TIME TO CONSIDER. WARNING: STAY WHERE YOU ARE.**

(Signed with a chatter that was probably that cartoonist's smoke and then:)

**EARTH LANGUAGES EXPERT"**

I had twirled the loop and reflector of the receiver and found that the messages were coming from the north.

I slid down the decks and ran out to Matheson to whom I gave the message. He read it and then handed it around to the others.

"And the direction?" he asked.

"About two degrees west of north," I said.

"The station is located about two degrees west of north," Matheson addressed the group. "Remember that. And now we have our comforts to consider. We should build a shelter. We can't very well live in the rocket, tilted as it is."

We fell to work as soon as breakfast was over. Some distance from the ship we found two trees with conveniently located crotches. In these we rested a log for ridgepole. For walls we cut logs and stood them on the ground and rested the upper ends over the ridgepole. It looked more like a tent than a log cabin, but it was quickly built. While we worked at this, Von Holtz, the heavy-featured German chemist, found a large spring close by and after analyzing the water pronounced it fit for use. Although the water was milky white as it emerged from the ground, due, Von Holtz said, to a large carbon dioxide content, it cleared after standing a short time.

With the ring of the axe and saw our spirits rose. We were doing what contented us—bending nature to our needs. O'Malley bubbled over with "Annie Laurie" in a pleasing tenor voice and others joined in. Matheson was a bundle of energy. Like a bird, he was everywhere. At times he seemed to us to be fussy, but really it was his indomitable spirit tempered with a powerful mind that anticipated and provided for everything. It was only later that we realized this, together with some measure of the true and unselfish spirit of the man. He was a giant in a wiry little body.

By sunset we had provided our heavy tent with a crude fireplace and had moved some of our stores from the ship. I had strung a pair of wires from the ship's little lighting generator and hung a single two-hundred watt lamp in the center of the room. By the time the chill of night settled upon us a merry fire was burning on the hearth and the cook was mumbling over a pot of stew. After supper Matheson opened the conversation.

"We should explore tomorrow," he said. "There seems to be little danger of any kind of attack, so we can feel free. That rumbling to the south interests me. Suppose we go in that direction and find the source of the sound?"

That sound had been the topic of conversation and remarks many times during the day and we were all eager

to learn its origin. After discussing and planning we decided that we should all go. We even decided what each should do and carry, and settled other details before we rolled into our blankets for the night.

### CHAPTER III

#### Tragedy!

● I waked next morning to find Matheson and the cook and the sun already up. Breakfast was ready when we rolled out of our blankets. In an amazingly short time after eating, each had selected what he was to carry and we were on our way. I recall that I carried several tins of film for the moving picture camera, a rifle and pistol, and two tins of butter for our lunch.

We plunged into the thickets, following the route I had gone the first day. We crossed the game trail and plunged deeper and deeper into the jungle. The trees became larger and taller as we advanced and the underbrush became less and less troublesome. That was probably because the monster trees cut off the sunlight from the shrubs. Now we could hear that the roar was perceptibly louder and nearer. We crossed two more game trails. Once we heard a distant crashing as if some heavy body were tearing through the brush but the sound was receding so we continued on our journey.

We scared up myriads of strange insects, small animals and weird birds as we penetrated deeper into the forest. Jones, the stocky naturalist, wanted to stop and study these new forms of life, but we overruled him and continued.

The roar was becoming so loud now that we were forced to shout to each other. The ground trembled. It became damper and in some places we encountered swamps. A fine mist hung in the air.

Abruptly and without warning we came upon the bank of a great stream. We instantly guessed that it was a canal for it was perfectly straight as if it had been surveyed. The water was running swiftly. Over its surface buzzed thousands of huge insects, some like the ones we had seen and others that were strange to us. Occasionally the water was broken by a splash as some strange fish leaped up and caught an insect or flying worm.

Downstream the air was heavy with mist. A slight breeze blew wisps of fine vapor into our faces. We followed the stream down until we came to the edge of the cataract. The mighty canal plunged some three hundred feet down into a huge basin. Through the banks of mist we could see another cataract emptying into the same basin. Evidently this was the junction of two canals. Half a mile downstream, in the bottom of the basin we could see the remains of a building.

"We should explore that building," Matheson shouted above the roar.

Speech was next to impossible, so in silence we skirted the rim of the basin until we came to a fault in the cliffs and descended into the bowl. At the bottom Matheson brushed against a small plant that looked something like a cactus except that it was red. He tried to pull away but was held fast. I examined his leg and the plant. The spines bristling from the pads were viciously sharp and barbed. Three of them had sunk into the mathematician's knee.

Being an electrician, I had acquired the habit of carrying a pair of side-cutting pliers in a little holster on my belt. Carefully avoiding the sharp pines, I cut through the tough, horny needles and freed Matheson. While he writhed with pain I grasped the stubs in his leg and jerked them out. The barbs tore away some flesh and skin when they finally let go.

We waited until the pain subsided somewhat and then continued toward the building, the stocky naturalist half supporting Matheson. As we neared the structure we saw that it was constructed of huge blocks of brown stone carefully matched and put together. It was dry here for we were beyond the range of the mist. Weeds and brush grew up against the stones and we had to force our way through these to get through one of the doors. Evidently the Martians were small in stature for we were forced to stoop to get inside.

Two rows of massive stone columns supported the vaulted ceiling. Between these was a battery of strange machines which claimed my attention. While Martin loaded his movie camera, and Jones, the naturalist, after one glance went outside, the rest of us roamed about the building. There were twenty of these machines. The main part of each consisted of a sphere about thirty feet in diameter. There was no evidence of wiring so I concluded that if they were electrical generators they sent the current out direct by radio. As we know now, this guess was correct. But these machines had been abandoned. Much of the machinery was covered with rust. Other parts were bright and polished as if they had just been made.

I kicked at the rust on what had once been a massive frame. The rust came off in thick flakes, revealing a small bar of bright metal in the center. I called Matheson.

"See," I said, "the rust is four or five inches thick. They haven't used this plant for centuries."

"They evidently have some other source of power," said Matheson. "It makes me wonder."

I was going to ask him what he wondered about when we were interrupted by a shout from O'Malley who burst into the room. He had evidently wandered outside while we were inspecting the plant.

"Mother of God!" he shouted, his eyes round with excitement. "Come and see!"

● We shouted questions at him but he was gone. The others ran out while I helped Matheson, who still limped painfully. We found the crew gathered about the naturalist down on the rock strewn shore. They were talking excitedly. When they saw us they clustered about us.

"Gold," said Jones quietly, holding out a small nugget. "The stream bed is yellow with it."

Jones seemed not particularly interested and wandered off while we examined the nugget and cut shavings from it with our pocket knives. We went to the edge of the water. Indeed, two or three days of panning would have netted a king's ransom. I thought of the soft, thin metal scroll and the green ships and wondered if gold, since it was plentiful here, was not used for a variety of things.

"Mother!" breathed O'Malley. "Now we can be rich! Now I can buy the old lady all the fine rags she wants. When we got married all I could afford was a plain gold wedding ring. I always wanted to get her a real wedding



ring set with diamonds. Now I can get her a real platinum one with diamonds as big as grapes. It'll make the old lady happy."

Jones, who had been wading and probing about a short distance from shore now joined us again. In his hand he held two spheres the size of peas. They were a beautiful opalescent green in color and of a soft satin finish.

"Pearls," he said shortly and returned to his exploring while we admired the little globules.

The others spread out along the shore, picking up little nuggets. I examined Matheson's knee.

"It is done," Matheson said. There was something in his voice that startled me and I looked up at him. I thought that he referred to the ugly blue swelling that was setting in about the cactus wounds, but his eyes were staring as if at something in space.

"Just what do you mean?"

He jerked back from his reverie. "Don't you understand? The wealth. It will finance and stimulate trade and exploration. Interplanetary travel has become a reality. Explorers and pioneers will come. A new area in the march of civilization is here."

But I was more interested in the condition of his leg than in areas of civilization. "I think that we better get back to the ship and treat this leg. Hey, Jones," I called. "Come here."

Jones, who had begun his schooling with medicine in view before he was sidetracked by his interest in nature, served the office of physician as well as naturalist. He came up questioningly.

"What do you think of that leg?" I asked.

He examined it and shook his head. "I think that we better get back to the medicine chest."

"Let the men pick up some more gold," said Matheson. "The more they bring back the better it will be for the future."

"But we can come back later," Jones objected. "It is more important to treat that leg now."

It was difficult to pry the others from their treasure hunting but at last we were loaded and on our way. We climbed out of the bowl and struck off through the forest, using our compasses, which we had discovered pointed about northeast. As we progressed Matheson limped more and more and his face became twisted with pain. When he had covered half the distance he collapsed and could walk no farther.

We found that his leg had swollen so badly that we were forced to slit his trouser leg to relieve the pressure. We constructed a rude stretcher by slipping two poles through the sleeves of all the coats we could gather from the crowd. With two men carrying Matheson, we again struck off through the forest.

The sun was setting when we came up the last game trail. We advanced along this until we came to the stone marker we had set up when we first struck the trail. Again we forged through the underbrush. At last we sighted the burned and blackened foliage of our clearing and were soon in our rude shelter.

We made Matheson as comfortable as possible and Jones washed the wounds with antiseptic and applied a poultice. Utterly weary, despite the lesser gravity of Mars, we rolled into our blankets immediately after supper and regular breathing told me that the others fell asleep almost immediately.

But I could not sleep soundly. I tossed about, sleeping

and waking fitfully. I was worried about Matheson, or perhaps I should say, worried about what would happen to us if he should die. I dozed for what seemed but a few minutes and waked with a start. The light was turned on. I glanced at my wrist-watch. It was midnight. Matheson was lying propped up with coats and pillows busily writing in his notebook. His face was drawn and creased with pain.

I lay thinking for a time and then a thought struck me sharply. Quickly I slid out of my blankets, dressed and went over to Matheson.

"How do you feel?" I whispered.

● He looked at me for a moment and his eyes softened. "Thanks for thinking of me. My leg is quite painful and the pain seems to be spreading. But there is nothing that you can do for me so I think that you better go back to bed."

"I have an idea," I said. "Why shouldn't I radio the Martians. They seem to be listening in at all times. I'll describe the plant as best I can and ask them what to do for the wounds. I know that it sounds foolish, but they seem to be a rather decent lot."

Matheson's tense eyes brightened with new hope. "Do that, Nordstrom! It can do no harm." He sank back wearily. "And perhaps no good."

I hurried out into the night, lighting my way with a flashlight. It was the first time that I had been out in the Martian night. But buzzing and chattering of the jungle day had given way to strange croakings and sinister rustling of the night. Giant fireflies streaked through the air, some with their lights turned on continuously, other smaller ones flashing intermittently. Two and three-foot worms emitting pale green light crawled along the ground.

I hurried through the vibrant night to the ship and turned on the lights. I dragged myself up its canted decks to the radio shack and turned on the current to the transmitter. When the meters settled to normal I pounded out a call to the Martians. Almost instantly came the answer out of the mysterious night. I described the plant and asked what could be done. The word "WAIT" cut sharply through the murmur and crackle of static.

I lighted my pipe and settled down to wait, listening to the strange sounds that came over the set. There was something eerie about the Martian night. As I listened more intently, the background of noise in the 'phones seemed to come up out of darkness. I could distinguish strange buzzing and crackling. I thought that I distinguished a voice but it must have been my imagination. I wondered where those sounds came from. Probably from electrical disturbances originating in Martian atmosphere or even cities. Some may have come from remote places; perhaps even the earth. Home, thirty-seven million miles away. But a bright speck among other bright specks in the sky.

I began to lose myself in this new world of sound as I often did when I was listening to nothing in particular, when I was startled out of my abstraction by the sharp whistle of the Martian transmitter. Instantly the mysterious sounds of the ether snapped back into the darkness and I copied the bright, staccato jabs of sound. When he was through I reread the message:

"THERE IS NOTHING TO DO FOR THE  
STING OF THAT PLANT. DEATH ALWAYS

COMES IN SIX TO EIGHT DAYS.

WE MUST HAVE YOUR ANSWER BY SUN-DOWN TOMORROW. WILL YOU LEAVE OUR PLANET AND PROMISE THAT NO EARTH MAN SHALL EVER COME HERE AGAIN OR SHALL YOU SUFFER? IF YOU DO NOT ANSWER BY THAT TIME WE SHALL KNOW THAT YOU DEFY US.

EARTH LANGUAGES EXPERT."

Mechanically I turned off the current and laid aside my 'phones. I sat staring at the message without seeing it. Death was creeping upon us. We would be left alone in a strange jungle—alone in limitless space. I left the ship and stood in the darkness. The sounds of the jungle night had changed to a hushed death chant. The fireflies and stars were like candles before a bier, flickering in a chill gust of nameless wind. I tiptoed to our cabin and gently pushed the door open. Matheson was still writing.

I had an impulse to hide the message without showing it to him. But no, Matheson was no baby. He must know—probably knew already. I handed him the paper without a word. He read it and smiled at me. There was a strange look of resigned triumph in his eyes.

"I knew this before we were back this afternoon," he said. "That is why I am bringing my notes up to date. Will you promise to care for the notes and, if you get back to earth, have them published?"

I nodded. I could say nothing.

"And there is another thing," he added. "Say nothing to the others about this. Don't let them suspect. Except Drummond. He should know. Will you wake him, please."

I tiptoed among the sleepers and shook Drummond gently. He opened his eyes and stared at me. I put my finger to my lips and nodded my head toward Matheson. He understood. He crept silently out of his blankets and came over to the bed. Matheson handed him the message. Drummond read it with an alarmed and puzzled frown.

"Nordstrom radioed the Martians about the plane and asked them if anything could be done for the poison," Matheson explained. "But what shall we do about the warning? We voted."

Drummond nodded. "We voted. But now it is different."

I saw Matheson's face grow haggard with disappointment. I suspected that he had set his soul upon defying the Martians. Just why, I did not know at the time.

"We voted," I said. "It seems to me that it is all settled."

"We're here to learn what we can," said Drummond. "I feel that we should go ahead as we originally planned."

Matheson's eyes glowed. "Then that is settled."

"Yes, that is settled. I'd suggest, Nordstrom, that you slip into your shack and radio our answer some time tomorrow. We are here and we propose to stay just as long as we wish."

"Good," said Matheson. "Now, if you gentlemen will go back to bed I think that I'll be able to sleep a little. You better burn that message."

I tossed the paper onto the glowing coals in the fireplace, turned off the light and crawled into my blankets.

## CHAPTER IV

### More Tragedy!

● When I waked next morning the sun was shining through the cracks between the logs. Several of the others were up. They tiptoed about, speaking in hushed whispers. Matheson was sleeping fitfully, groaning occasionally. But there was a smile on his lips. After breakfast we all went outside where we would not disturb him.

The day dragged itself along. At eleven Matheson again resumed his writing after drinking some broth. He was weaker now and often stopped to close his eyes and rest. In the afternoon Drummond nodded to me and I slipped away to the radio room in the ship. I flashed my message and waited for their reply. Nothing came but that mysterious, haunting background of sounds. Evidently they would deliver their answer in some other way.

For a long time I sat before my instruments wondering what might happen. I wondered what we of the earth might do in a similar case. That was plain, but I could not imagine myself in the place of a Martian for I had never seen one. I went back to the log hut to wait. There was nothing to do but wait. Matheson was dying. We had but to wait like vultures. The air seemed charged with Martian dynamite.

Nothing happened during the day. We stationed a guard during the night but nothing happened. Matheson groaned in his sleep. At three o'clock Von Holtz shook me gently and I relieved him as guard. I went out into the night and stood before the door of our hut, listening to the melody of the jungle. New sounds seemed to come up only to drop back into the general chorus. Fireflies streaked their pale phosphorescent glow among the trees. Far in the distance I heard a crashing of underbrush. Slowly it faded away in the distance.

Suddenly there was a hush in the sounds about me. I slipped the safety catch on the rifle and listened. My flesh puckered with a vague feeling that someone was near and was staring at me. I listened intently, yet no sound broke the stillness. I tried to probe the darkness but could see nothing. Even the fireflies had turned off their lights.

For minutes that seemed like hours I stood as a statue, my rifle ready. Some animal started chirping. Others resumed their song and the chorus of the jungle swung into full volume. The fireflies turned on their lights.

Slowly the eastern sky was flushed by the dawn. As it became lighter the eerie songsters of the night grew silent and the busy, chattering tempo of the day began. When I could see in the dim light, I began to explore, looking for signs of visitors. I circled the hut but found nothing. As I approached the burned clearing, however, I stopped short. I rubbed my eyes. I must have uttered an involuntary shout for in a moment I was surrounded by the rest of the crew.

Our ship was gone!

We stood there without speaking, soaking in the full measure of the tragedy. It trickled through us, stimulating our imaginations. I pictured us remaining here and slowly dying off. I wondered who would be the last to die. Slowly we recovered our wits and began to search for some sign of the invaders. No one spoke. I felt

guilty, for I had been the one on watch when the ship was stolen. I wished that some one would accuse me so that I could have explained that there had been no sounds. But no one accused me. A hot argument would have suited me. Anything but this stunned silence.

We circled the spot, seeking vainly for signs of visitors. It was evident that the ship had been picked up by one of their silent ships and carried bodily away. We filed back to our cabin like a funeral procession. Drummond told Matheson briefly what had happened. He did not mention the fact that I had been doing guard duty when the rocket was stolen. The news did not dismay our leader.

"Who was on guard?" he asked.

"I was," I said. "From three until daylight."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing. There was a lull in the sounds of the jungle just before daylight. I suppose that that is the time they came."

"Probably. You saw nothing of the ship?"

"No. If I had been close to the rocket I probably could have seen it against the stars, but you know, we can't look up through the hole from here. And I expected that they would attack us."

"Surely. Perfectly natural to think that. I fancy that the other guards kept close to the cabin to protect us too. Is that not so?"

"That was my thought," said Von Holtz. "It was in my mind to protect the sleepers. It might have happened while I was standing guard as well as during Nordstrom's watch."

● Perhaps I was feeling alone and guilty and a little sentimental. At any rate, something warm surged through me at these words. I determined that from now on this German chemist should get the best of everything, at least so far as I was concerned.

"Well, there is no use wasting time like this," said Matheson. "We shall have to face the facts. And we will."

We had faced the situation in a vague and stunned fashion, but Matheson did not mince words.

"We have stores for only two days. If we ration we might make it last four at most. If we remain here we are lost. In a case like this the most logical remedy is to carry the fight against the enemy to his very door.

"We know that there is a city or some center of population almost due north. All of our negotiations were carried on through a radio station located there, at least. It is reasonable to suppose that the authority for these demands and the answers to our questions came from some person or body close to the station.

"But we don't know how far we shall have to go. So we have food to consider. We noticed fruits of various kinds hanging from the trees and shrubs. Von Holtz, are there enough chemicals left to analyze them? We'll have to determine whether or not there are any fit for food."

"Most of our chemicals are on board the rocket," said Von Holtz. "There happens to be some left after I analyzed the water. Enough for only a rough test."

"Then I suggest that we spend this day preparing for our war. You gentlemen gather all the species of fruits that you can find and then Von Holtz can check them.

We'll make ready today and in the morning begin our trip. When we get there we'll try to negotiate with them peacefully. If that fails, well, we must get back to the earth."

When we came back from finding the rocket missing that morning I thought that I should never care to eat again. But breakfast was something to be enjoyed now. We all felt enthusiasm and ate heartily. There was action in sight. We were invading nature again.

After breakfast Jones dressed Matheson's leg. The swelling had subsided somewhat, leaving his leg an ugly blue, streaked with scarlet. I said that the swelling had subsided. In reality it had shifted upward and now his thigh and hip was so swollen that the skin was tight and shiny. The flesh about his knee seemed to have softened and looked as if it might drop from the bone.

"We'll have to make a good stretcher too," O'Malley was saying. "We can use a blanket and make it comfortable."

"We can make that tonight," said Matheson. "The main thing now is to find out how much we can depend upon the jungle for a living."

"And when I get my two hands on one of 'em—" O'Malley rumbled. "Let's get under way."

We were filing out when Matheson called me back to him.

"Would you help me to a more comfortable position?"

I helped him move to one side. He closed his eyes in pain but smiled his thanks.

"I have completed my notes," he said. "Here they are. I want you to take care of them as you promised. Make it your responsibility. If I try to carry them with me on the stretcher they might be lost. I'll keep this tablet and pencil in case I should think of something else while you are out foraging."

"Is there anything else that I can do for you?" I asked. "Perhaps one of us had better stay with you."

"No thanks. If I need anything else I can call the cook. He is a very good nurse if I tell him exactly what to do."

I hurried and overtook the others. For hours we worked, gathering specimens. We concluded that the ripe fruits were the soft ones and selected a perfect sample of each. By noon we had about thirty specimens.

We were working our way back toward the cabin, somewhat scattered. Occasionally we shouted to each other. When we were close to our camp we were startled by the smothered report of a gun. We drew our pistols and crashed through the brush. We approached the cabin cautiously. There was no evidence of invasion. Guns in hand we crept up to the door and peered in. The cook was crouched by the fireplace muttering as usual. Matheson lay limp upon his crude bed. One hand hung over the edge and on the ground under his hand lay an automatic.

We filed into the room to his bedside. From a powder smudge on his temple trickled a little stream of blood. On his chest was a note and the pencil. On his lips was a smile.

Drummond took the note and read it silently. We stood waiting. He stood staring at the paper, his shoulders slowly stiffening. Without a word he handed the note to the next man and stood like a statue. We handed the paper around. My hands trembled when it was passed to me, and I read:

"Gentlemen:

"I am grateful to you for your friendship and courage and loyalty. But now has come the time to part. You have work to do. Mine is done. In our position the dying cannot burden the living. Bury me and forget me; we have no time for sentiment. Turn your faces to the future and carry on. And good judgment to you. Good-bye. Matheson."

● I felt sadness. But more. I felt a strange thrill. It was as if Matheson had seized a burning brand from the fires of civilization and charged into the darkness beyond the light of knowledge. His wiry little body had become a flaming beacon to light the way for oncoming hordes. He had marched forward with indomitable will. To forget persons and go forward relentlessly. To die that others might still go forward.

Drummond, being of a poetic and sensitive nature, must have felt this too. I'm sure that he did. There was a new light in his eyes and a new set to his jaw. He shouldered Matheson's burden with all its original fire. But there was a difference. Matheson had kept his feelings under the leash of a powerful intellect and tempered it with kindness and human sympathy. But Drummond let go. Like Matheson he became indomitable. Unlike Matheson, he became relentless and cruel.

We scooped out a shallow grave in the center of our cabin. We wrapped the body in a blanket and gently lowered it.

"We should say a word," said O'Malley, crossing himself.

Drummond turned on him fiercely. "Say a word! Fool! Scum like we are can think of nothing worth saying over a man like Matheson! His actions speak more than we know. Cover him up."

O'Malley lost all his fighting instinct before those flaming eyes. He grumbled something about devils and fell to work with the rest of us. We filled the grave and covered it with flat stones. We put the note in a bottle and corked it tightly and placed it in the monument. We are ready to go on.

The rest of the day we busied ourselves making packs while Von Holtz tested the fruits. The food was divided equally among us. Besides food, each man was to carry half enough blankets and double up in bed at night. All other equipment was to be left except an axe and a nest of pots which the cook was to carry. Martin wanted to take his movie camera but he was overruled. He tried to satisfy himself with a pocket camera and several rolls of film. By dark we were so organized that each knew exactly what he was responsible for.

Von Holtz had completed his check of the fruit. There were ten or twelve varieties which he pronounced as probably edible. After supper each of us selected a fruit and cut it in two. We ate one half and kept the other for identification. It was the final test. Mine was a rough, red fruit about the size of a cocoanut. The rind was tough and hard but the inside was sweet and juicy. I tasted the blood red pulp gingerly at first. It tasted like a most delicately flavored muskmelon.

Dawn was lighting the eastern sky when we crept out of our blankets next morning. After ordering the cook to make breakfast we compared notes on how our various

fruits had agreed with us during the night. There were no ill effects except in the case of Macey, one of the engineers, a rocket and explosive expert. He said that he had spent a long night of delightful dreams. Ordinarily he was a silent, moody fellow, morally unfit for pioneering, but now he burst into occasional song. As we sat about Matheson's grave and ate breakfast Macey amazed us by cracking jokes. His spirits were soaring.

We discarded from our menu the little black seed pod he had sampled. It contained a habit forming alkaloid which later made a fortune for Macey before the Earth government put a ban on its importation. It was the drug that furnished synthetic courage to men like Macey during the terrible struggle that preceded the fall of Mars.

Each gathered up the pack he was responsible for and after a last glance at the lonely grave in the center of the cabin, we filed out and began our march. For two days we struggled through underbrush, sometimes in the cool damp shade of the great trees, sometimes under the blistering heat of the sun when we crossed barren knolls of rock and gravel, always cold and freezing during the night. O'Malley grumbled and threatened and grumbled some more. If he could have had a good fight he would have felt better, but fortunately, none of us hazarded a bout with him.

Macey became morose and silent, now that the effect of the drug had worn off. We were looking for a camp for the second night when I saw Macey pick one of the black seed pods and eat a part. In a few minutes his step became lighter and he began to sing heartily. O'Malley quit grumbling and cursing and joined in. They slid into a lively march tune that seemed to pick our feet up by the rhythm.

## CHAPTER V

### The Curse of Mars

● We came across one of the game trails and stopped to rest on the cleared ground. While we were wiping the perspiration from our faces Macey sat nearby in laconic good humor.

"Isn't life perfect!" He stretched out in the sheer ecstasy of his alkaloid heaven.

"That Devil's brew put you in hell and you don't know it," said O'Malley, shaking his fringed head.

Macey burst into happy laughter. "'Heaven and Hell are within.' Don't you know that? And I'm happy so I'm in Heaven."

O'Malley glared at him. "And now I know it. You talking sacrilege. It's talk that smells of fire and brimstone, I'm telling you."

Macey snapped his fingers airily. "You're the one squirming in Hell, you big bruiser. Fancy people in Heaven spending all their time cursing and spoiling for a fight! Now look at me. All the world is a song and I'm directing it."

"Anyway, we don't need that Devil's brew to keep up our fight," O'Malley returned. "It 'ud been better for the soul of you if we'd left you home."

Evidently the thrust hurt for Macey's hand twitched over his holster. Von Holtz, evidently sensing, as did the rest of us, that the argument was slipping out on thin ice, began to sing "Annie Laurie" in his fine bass voice.

It was too much for O'Malley and his tenor switched from argument to song.

The others joined, relieved at the turn. All except me. I couldn't sing a note, and being one of those rare fortunate ones who knows himself to that extent at least, I lighted my pipe and settled down to enjoy the chorus. Indeed, had we all been musical mutes at that time we might have avoided tragedy in one form if not in the other.

I thought that I heard something to the east, but the song had gained in volume. They were letting off the steam of taut nerves. Macey especially. He led with all his might. Again I thought that I heard a crackling and looked down the trail just in time to see a monster choking the wide game run and coming toward us. For a moment I froze solid. Now as I look back I realize that it was the same paralysis one feels while standing on the track in front of an approaching locomotive.

I shouted, or perhaps I screamed. The music stopped abruptly and we leaped into the brush beside the trail. Over my shoulder I had a glimpse of the monster as it thundered by. It was like a gigantic lizard of some antediluvian period. When I saw that it continued without slackening its speed or looking to right or left, I stopped and swung up my rifle. Now I realized fully the size of the monster and decided not to shoot.

The others had stopped now and we stood, waiting until those pounding feet and that lashing tail had grown faint in the distance. I picked up my pipe where it had fallen when I decided not to shoot and struggled to relight it, willing the trembling match to stay over the pipe bowl. There was no strength in my knees. Yet I felt a little triumphant when I finally got my pipe going nonchalantly and looked up at the others. They were white and trembling. Macey alone was unaffected. He chuckled.

"Isn't he the affectionate pet? Now if we could roam the carefree—say, where's the cook?"

There was no evidence of the cook. We listened but could not hear his muttering. It was with foreboding that we went back to the game run. At the edge of the trail we stopped in silence. Even Macey was sober for a moment. We went over to where the cook had been sitting. He was flattened and battered into the dust and dirt of the trail. He had been carrying the cooking utensils and the only axe we had taken along. We salvaged two pots that had not been battered flat and the two blankets. We spread one blanket and rolled the body onto it and gathered up the corners.

"Here's the axe," said Jones. "Fortunate for us that he leaned it up against a tree out of the way."

We carried the cook some distance from the trail to an outcropping of gravel where we laid him gently down. There was no shovel with which to dig a grave so we decided to pile rocks on the body.

"He died twice," said O'Malley reverently.

Affectionately Macey patted one of the cook's cheeks that happened to be intact, and chuckled. "You're a good boy, cook. We understand each other now, don't we. The others think that life is serious and that progress is something to bow down to. But we know better, don't we old boy? We know that their precious progress is nothing but an avenue of graves. We know the secret, don't we?"

"You'll be talking that way, you spawn of Hell!" O'Malley threatened, his hairy fists bunched into sledges.

"Stop!" Drummond snapped. "I'm getting tired of you two yapping at each other. If you continue to disrupt our march I'll shoot one of you. We are on our way and we're going through. Now stop fussing and cover him up. We're only wasting time."

● In silence we covered the body with rocks. I don't know what the others thought about, but I wondered how long it would be before I filled one of Macey's "avenues of graves." Avenue of graves. The phrase stuck in my mind. After all, what difference whether I filled one sooner or later? It would surely happen somewhere along the road. There was something about this Martian jungle that made me see things from a different, a hard-boiled, point of view. I tossed the last rock on the grave.

A spring bubbled out of the rocks a short distance away and since it was almost dusk we decided to camp for the night. As soon as we were settled and supper over, Macey took from his pocket what was left of that black seed pod. Before he could eat it, however, Drummond seized it and threw it far out into the jungle.

"Fool!" he snapped. "You don't know where that is leading you."

But the cheer from the last dose had not worn off. Macey smiled cheerfully. "Ah, my dear Drummond, you don't know how pleasant it is to laugh and sing on the brink of the grave." He looked at O'Malley with a tantalizing smile. "Especially when we die out here so far away from Heaven."

"You spawn!" O'Malley roared, bouncing to his feet. "I—"

"Shut up!" Drummond hissed. His eyes were blazing dangerously and his automatic was half out of its holster. "Now listen, you two. We're in a desperate situation. But, by God, we're going through! Get that! We're going through! If either of you blocks our way I'll shoot him down like a dog. We'll stop at nothing. Get that! If anyone gets in the way we'll grind him into the dust and go on. Now shut up."

O'Malley subsided with a curse while Macey shut his mouth into a laconic grin. We who had been listeners to this warning realized that Drummond meant every word of it. I crawled into my blankets and thought it over. We had been singing and cursing and sweating and freezing as we advanced. Our immediate discomforts had deadened our minds to our situation. Now I realized fully what we were up against. Behind us was Drummond, relentless, and ready to drive us at the point of a gun. Before us—I thrust it from my mind. Madness is always near.

Strangely, I thought of the "Millstones of the Gods." We were between millstones. Slowly they were grinding us to desperation or to death. Perhaps the others thought of something like that. Whatever they thought, we were all very silent. Jones and I had doubled up our beds. Now he crawled in without a word. It was a long time before his regular breathing told me that he was finally asleep. I lay away long into the night watching the huge fireflies and listening to the sounds of the jungle.

I saw something more. I looked beyond the fire and there was Macey creeping silently away into the jungle. I knew that he was after his precious weed but I said nothing. It was none of my business and I did not



wish to mix into the quarrel. I fell asleep before he returned.

We were on the march at dawn next morning. We had spent a miserable night on the hard ground and in the cold. Now the intense heat of the day burned our skins and left us still cold inside. Macey, however, had evidently dreamed well. He hopped along, reciting poetry and singing. Occasionally he made us laugh with stories that needed laundering. But his high spirits were contagious and helped to relieve our misery.

Thus we struggled on for another day. The trees were becoming larger and the underbrush thinner. Traveling was easier. The next morning we came upon another canal which flowed from east to west across our path. It was, we judged, five miles across. The current was swift and oily.

"There is nothing to do but make a raft," said Drummond. "Make camp and get to work."

We had been supplanting our store of food with fruit, but we were running low. Every minute counted now. We fell to work. Drummond delegated O'Malley as axeman. The Irishman had swung an axe before. Jones selected a species of tree that was very light and easy to cut and the powerful O'Malley began to cut sixteen-foot logs from twelve-inch trunks. As fast as he cut them we skidded them to the edge of the water and bound them together with tough vines, gradually pushing the growing raft into the water. We made sweeps from long poles and tied them with vine ropes across the top of a low railing on each side of the raft. Now we could stand along each side and operate the sweeps.

O'Malley was getting out the last log when we heard him yell. There was fear in his voice. With drawn guns we ran to where he stood. He was pulling at something and then he lurched backward when it let go. We surrounded him, all questioning him at once. His face was white beneath the reddish tan. He pointed to the ground.

It was another of those wicked cactus like plants with the savagely barbed spines.

"I—I must have stepped on it," he gasped. Then his lips parted in a white grin. "But you didn't have to cut me loose anyway."

We examined the leg. A dozen spines had entered his flesh. When he pulled himself free some of these had torn out, leaving ragged wounds. Others had broken off short.

"And so far from Heaven," sighed Macey.

"You spawn," growled O'Malley savagely, forgetting his plight. "I'll kill you with my bare hands!"

"I don't know what to do about it," said Jones quietly.

"Do!" roared O'Malley with a triumphant glare at Macey. "Shoot me, somebody. We can't pack carrion with us."

● Whether O'Malley meant it or not we never knew. A pistol shot roared sharply in our ears and slapped viciously against the surrounding trees. O'Malley slumped and his knees gave way. For an instant his eyes were round with surprise and then they went dead. He fell like a sack of meal over Jones who was still examining his leg. Jones tipped him off and stood up. Drummond was holstering his gun.

We were stunned, more by the suddenness of the sound than by the deed. We realized that it was the best thing

to do, for O'Malley would only have suffered intense agony and died anyway. Our desperation had dulled our sense of pity. We did not pity O'Malley now. And Drummond's sudden action dulled it still more for we felt more acutely than ever that we were between millstones. It was with a sense of relief, after visioning ourselves carrying him, that we prepared to bury him.

"O'Malley," said Macey affectionately, "you were a good scout after all. A man after our own hearts. I loved you all the time we were having our little fun. But don't worry old man, we'll lower you gently into our avenue of graves. So long and good luck."

We emptied O'Malley's pockets. He still carried the nuggets he had picked up at the power plant. Perhaps two hundred dollars worth. For his "old lady." I put them into my pocket. I wondered if I would live to give them to his "old lady." I would tell her that O'Malley had intended to buy a new wedding ring for her. A ring set with diamonds. To make her happy.

"Wedding rings and avenues," Macey chuckled.

After piling rocks on O'Malley we finished our raft. Thanks to O'Malley's strong arms we completed our raft sooner than we had hoped. As the sun was still high we loaded our raft and shoved off. Drummond stood at the prow with a rifle while Jones covered the rear. We were not sure what sort of monster might rise from the swirling water and attack us. When we got out into the current it felt as if an unseen hand seized us and swirled us downstream. We pulled heavily at the sweeps and made headway toward the opposite bank, but we made more headway with the current.

A swirl of water caught us and twisted us around end for end like a feather. Instead of turning the craft around again we merely pulled the other way. We were in the middle of the canal when another accident occurred.

Hanson, a husky, tow-headed young Swede, was rowing at the extreme forward end of the raft. His sweep bent rhythmically under his powerful strokes. The vines binding his oar to the railing were chafing and now they snapped under the strain. He staggered, tried to regain his balance but was too near the end of the raft. He went overboard with a splash. We stopped rowing and waited for him to come up. Seconds we waited. Still he did not show up. A full minute we waited although it seemed much longer to me. I caught myself holding my breath as if I were the one under water.

"I suppose we might as well go on," said Drummond.

"The lucky boy," said Macey cheerfully.

It gave me a strangely helpless and desperate feeling, waiting breathlessly while one of our party struggled with unknown terrors in the unknown depths.

"I'm going after him," said Von Holtz, moving toward the end of the raft.

"Not a man moves," shouted Drummond. "One man lost is enough." He drew his gun.

There was a shout two hundred feet behind us. Hanson had bobbed up, his face red. He was puffing and swimming toward us. We operated the sweeps and drew toward him. We were close together when we all yelled at once. Hanson saw it too. On each side of his feet rose an ugly jaw. Hanson drew up his feet and curled into a ball just as rows of gleaming teeth snapped together. The ugly head rose into the air and then arched into the water. A long slimy body followed, the entire length

arching out of the water like a monster eel being dragged over a timber. Drummond had retrieved Hanson's sweep and now he reached far out. Hanson seized the end and we hastily dragged him aboard.

I think that we on board were more shaken than Hanson. He grinned rather sheepishly. Macey, supremely happy in his heaven of dope passed through everything without a ruffle.

"You deprived that cute thing of a tasty meal, Hanson," he said.

"Oh, I don't mind," Hanson grinned. "He'll have to find something else. It was the water that got my goat."

"What was the idea of staying under so long?" asked Macey. "We were just ready to leave you."

"That canal is alive with currents. It felt as if I had traveled for miles under there. I was so turned around I didn't know which end my head was on. Let's stay on the raft from now on."

## CHAPTER VI

### The Promised Land

● We did not stop to refasten Hanson's sweep. He relieved the rest of us, taking a turn at first one sweep and then another. At last we pulled up on shore at least ten miles downstream from our starting point. We unloaded the raft and Macey pushed it out into the stream. He saluted it.

"The last great masterpiece of O'Malley. Farewell."

We were on the lookout for a camping place as the sun was setting. Single file we threaded our way among the trees, climbing up hill and down. We came upon a shallow gully in which bubbled a tiny spring. Fortunately for us, the country abounded in springs.

"We might as well camp here," said Drummond.

Von Holtz smelled of the water as he always did before drinking it. He shook his head. He touched his tongue to the water and spat it out.

"No," he said, "we shouldn't drink this. It smells like something in the laboratory but I can't think what it is. And it tastes bad."

We continued our march until we came upon a spring which Von Holtz pronounced fit to drink. Our supper that night consisted mainly of fruit. Only three tins of our original store were left and we finished them. The next morning, after a breakfast of nothing but fruit, we plunged again into the jungle. Toward evening the trees became smaller in size and noticeably stunted. The foliage was thinner and the sunshine that came through stimulated the growth of brush. Traveling became more and more difficult.

The next day real difficulty faced us. As we progressed the scattered trees became stunted and dwarfed. Even the underbrush became more wiry and thin-stemmed. And along with the disappearing forest went the fruit that we had been living upon. Many of the bushes were loaded with berries but we dared not eat them. Again it was Von Holtz who came to our rescue. He indicated a stalk which looked like field corn except that the stalk and leaves were of a brilliant scarlet. It was topped out with a tassel of bright lavender berries. I recalled that we had passed several of the plants on our way.

"These berries are very good to eat," said Von Holtz.

He stripped the berries from the top and passed them around, eating some himself. We found them sweet and juicy and nutritious. I wondered how he knew that they were edible, but I knew better than to ask him. Since the night our rocket was stolen and he had defended me I had felt drawn toward him. I had tried to make conversation with him, but he seemed to have something on his mind. He was a man of few words.

These scarlet plants, however, were scarce. We spread out over a wide front so as to find as many as possible. Each find was a signal for us to cluster about the finder and divide the spoils. As we progressed another plant intrigued us. It was a dwarf shrub on which grew a seed pod similar to that of the bean. We longed for something to cook but were afraid to try them. We discussed the possibilities, however, and were tempted to try them.

We camped early that night around a little puddle of water that oozed from the ground. Springs were becoming few and far between. This one was so small that we were forced to dig a little sump in which to catch the water. After drinking we sat around the fire, a silent, dejected group. Even Macey was silent for his supply of dope had run out and there was none growing on the fringe of the jungle. Von Holtz wandered off alone and the rest of us curled up in our blankets before the fire. It was our first night without supper.

We were half asleep when Von Holtz staggered into camp. He collapsed before the fire. We leaped up and surrounded him. Perspiration stood out on his forehead. His face was tinged with a green cast. In his hand he held some of the bean-shaped pods.

"Poisonous," he gasped. He tried to say more but he curled up with pain and muscular cramps. "My—partner—tell him—" We listened for his gasping words but no more came. A green foam gathered in his mouth and flecked his lips. His eyes rolled back in his head. His body quivered as it curled up tighter with the cramps. Perspiration oozed from his face and dripped to the ground. The muscles of his neck and jaws stood out like whipcords. A convulsive shudder trembled his body and he lay still. Jones examined him.

"Dead."

● We tried to straighten out the body but the queer poison had drawn up the muscles and now even in death they were convulsed and rigid as steel. We heaped rocks on him as he was. I had been carrying a bottle of quinine capsules which we seemed not to need. I emptied the capsules out into my shirt pocket and corked a little note telling about Von Holtz into the bottle. I put this among the stones of the grave and then curled up in my blankets.

I lay for a long time thinking about Von Holtz. Men like this should glorify the pages of history. Men like this, who die quietly that others might live. He probably saved all of our lives, as I learned next day. But there would be no room for him in history. A resentment welled up within me and I cursed bitterly. Even now as I write this I mutter things that are not fit for print.

No, history must drip with the blood spattered by military butchers. It must reek with the smoke of burning cities and be made glorious with the flames of insane destruction. How much nobler a Napoleon, laying waste to the countryside with fire and disease and death than

one of these humble scientists laboring unknown and unrewarded to make the world a more interesting, safer and healthier place in which to live. No, there must be no room for Von Holtz in history when our expedition is mentioned. His grave in the avenue of graves must not be marked.

I was hungry and bitter but I fell asleep.

Next morning we filled our two canteens and resumed our march without breakfast. The pangs of hunger gnawed deeper as the forenoon advanced. Sometimes when one of us found a scarlet stalk he was tempted to say nothing and reserve its berries for himself. Perhaps some of them did. I have a suspicion that that is why Macey did not report a single find.

We eyed the green pods, which were plentiful, with hungry looks of horror. Had not Von Holtz warned us, I am sure that we would have stopped and cooked a huge pot of them. I shuddered when I imagined what would have happened. Famished as we were, we would all have eaten hungrily, without thought of consequences. There would have been no one to make the graves.

We struggled through the day, sweating and cursing. Macey, now that he had no dope, developed a nasty temper. He had lived nonchalantly on top of the world and now resented his dethronement. Scraggly brush tore our clothing. Our shirts were nothing but ribbons. Our boots were wearing out. As we progressed we were cheered somewhat by the fact that the scarlet stalks became a little more plentiful. But water was becoming scarce. We kept the canteens filled. At noon we filled them for the last time. In the afternoon we found but one spring. We dared not drink its water for the ground along the edges was crusted with a pale blue crystalline deposit.

We struggled along until dusk and started a camp fire without thought of looking for water. There was none to look for. We did not taste what was in the canteens. We rolled into our blankets too hungry and tired to care.

I was awakened by a commotion during the night and looked up in time to see Drummond knock Macey flat. Macey lay on the ground moaning. Drummond ordered him to bed and emphasized his order with a kick. "Steal water, will you. Next time you try that, Macey, I'll kill you."

The next day we struggled on again under the blazing sun. Drummond doled the water out to us but the canteens were small. By mid-afternoon one of them was empty and he threw it into the brush. We found a few of the red stalks with lavender berries but not enough to satisfy our hunger. That night we went to bed both hungry and thirsty. The next day was worse. Our remaining canteen was empty by noon. The brush had given way to a few scattered twigs that struggled between the baked reddish-brown soil and the scorching sun. There were no more of the red stalks. We were too miserable to curse.

We plodded through the afternoon. The sun glared down upon us from a dusty sky. The red soil was baked and cracked. It burned our feet. Our lips dried and cracked and our tongues became so swollen that there was scarcely room for them in our mouths. I spied a pool of sparkling water and I staggered to it with a glad gurgle. I fell down at the water's edge to bury my head in its cool depths. The crystal water faded and there

was nothing but red heat. I lay choked with disappointment.

Slowly I dragged myself to my feet and plodded on. We went on and on. I did not see the country. I was living in another world. I was back on the earth most of the time. Sometimes I wandered off in queer directions and Drummond woke me up with harsh commands. We plodded on.

We camped that night without a fire. There was nothing to burn. There was nothing to burn it for. It became cold and we shivered. My arms and legs cramped with the cold. I did not sleep. I became unconscious. In the morning we climbed out of the cold into the heat of the day. We welcome the sun only to curse it after an hour. It burned down through my scalp and set my brain on fire. I lived in a pink haze. I stumbled and fell. I did not bother to get up. There was nothing to get up for.

● I felt a sharp pain in my ribs that was different from the other pains. I rolled over on my back and focused my burning eyes upward. Drummond was standing over me. His cheeks were hollow. His lips were dark and cracked. But his eyes burned with strange fire.

"Get up," I heard him croak. He kicked me again. The voice and pain seemed far away but they commanded. I drew myself to my feet and staggered on. I heard him curse and kick others. I began to hate him. I blamed him for all our discomforts. I blamed him and cursed him for not letting me lie in peace. I cursed him because he seemed to think that he was going somewhere.

I think that I walked with my eyes closed. Sometimes I felt cool and happy. Sometimes I felt as if I were burning in hell.

I stumbled against something. It felt like brush. I leaned against it and struggled on. It gave before me but walking was almost impossible. Dimly I heard Drummond's voice. "Halt, Food." I tried to focus my eyes upon my surroundings. They burned from the glaring sun. Slowly I made out my surroundings. Dimly I could see red stalks. They were larger than any we had seen. I felt along one of the stalks. I found the tassel of lavender berries at the top. I sank to the ground, dragging the stalk with me. I ate one of the berries. As the rich juice trickled down my throat it seemed to go directly into my blood. I could feel new strength coursing through my veins. I ate more. My body came back to me. New aches and pains came back with it.

I could see better now. The berries were three times as large as any we had found in the outskirts of the jungle. And they were more luscious and juicy and sweet. I stripped the tassel and lay for a time with my eyes closed while the waves of strength revived me. My side was bruised and sore where Drummond had kicked me.

I was glad that he had kicked me. I felt a wave of affection for him for having forced us onward to this feast. I wondered where we were. Curiosity overcame my languid feeling and I opened my eyes. I stared about. We were in a jungle of nothing but red stalks. They grew in rows. Slowly it dawned upon me that it was a field and that they had been planted in rows. I was lying in a ditch between two of the rows. The bottom was caked and cracked into mosaic designs. I began to realize that

water had flowed recently in that ditch. It was an irrigating ditch.

I dragged another stalk down and ate some more berries. The sun was in the west and it was not quite so hot. I closed my eyes in weary contentment. I must have slept for when I opened my eyes again it was almost dark. I thought of the others. I staggered to my feet and searched about the field. I found them scattered about, sleeping in grotesque positions. I found Drummond sitting nearby. He looked at me and smiled as much as his cracked lips would permit.

"How do you feel, Nordstrom? Sorry I had to kick you but there was nothing else to do."

"Thanks for kicking me," I said. "If you hadn't I'd still have been out there. But how did you keep on, and how did you hold to your course?"

"I've been trying to figure that out. I couldn't keep Matheson out of my mind. When things got dim I'd recall how he shot himself so that we could go on and that would bring me back. Then I would feel as if nothing could stop us and I would be all right for a time until things grew dim again."

"And O'Malley and Von Holtz," I added.

"We're lucky we didn't lose more," said Drummond.

"We may as well camp here and rest. Help me arouse the others."

The next morning we felt revived. Our lips had even begun to heal. It was easy walking between the rows of stalks. When we became thirsty we stopped and ate berries. Toward noon, however, they began to sicken us and we preferred to go on without moisture. But we did not suffer so much for there was moisture on every hand should we wish it.

The field lay on a gentle slope. From what we could see, we were approaching the crest of a rise in the ground. We were near the top when we stopped to rest at noon. We were sitting and lying about discussing our next move when Jones shouted and pointed toward the north. Between the rows we had glimpses of one of the Martian ships flashing through the sky. It seemed to have risen from just beyond the knoll and sailed higher as it winged toward the west. In a few seconds it dwindled to a speck and then faded high in the western sky.

"Come on," said Drummond. "Let's see where that ship came from."

A half hour later we reached the crest of the slope and came upon a ditch of water flowing rapidly along the ridge toward the east. We forgot about Martians and the ships as we stripped and plunged into the cool water. Although we dared not drink it, we lolled about, absorbing the moisture through our skins. Our sunken cheeks seemed to fill out and our eyes became less dull. After an hour of this luxury we bundled our clothes and luggage and carried them across and dressed.

● The top of the ridge was almost flat but in a short distance it sloped away toward the north. Here we stopped in amazement. At the base of the gentle slope two or three miles away the field ended and a great city began. The edge of a jungle bounded it to the west and stretched toward the east as far as we could see. It appeared to be about a mile wide. We couldn't have missed it in our wandering for it formed a wall across our path.

The buildings were made of what appeared to be stone.

Here and there gilded spires that looked like onions strung on slender needles gleamed with strange lonesomeness in the slanting rays of the sun. Breaking the rows of houses were great patches that looked like bottomless holes in the ground. As we now know, these were slabs of material which completely absorbed and stored the heat and light from the sun and furnished power to replace the obsolete power plants along the canals.

In silence we contemplated the scene before us. It was with mingled awe and fear that I looked out over the golden splendor of the vast metropolis. And little wonder, for we were gazing upon the capitol city which the Martians called *Theemell*, the beautiful city which was later almost completely destroyed by earth invaders. We were gazing out upon Matheson's promised land which lay west of the earth, to which the crest wave of earth civilization was soon to leap.

"Look!" cried Hanson suddenly. "Our rocket!"

We strained our eyes in the direction he pointed. Now we could see it! It lay on the north edge of the city, its polished shape gleaming against the red earth. We saw tiny shapes moving about its silvery hull. We withdrew from sight among the stalks of the field and sat down for a council of war.

"It would be ridiculous to attack the city," said Drummond. "We have no idea of the nature of our enemies. Are there any suggestions?"

There were none.

"My idea is to wait until dark and then try to slip through the city to our ship."

"How about going around the end of the city next to the jungle?" asked Martin.

"I thought of that too but it would take two days and there is no food or water out there. Two more days without food or water does not appeal to me. And another thing, there is no cover out there, especially on the north side of the city. They'd see us immediately. No, there seems to be no alternative except to steal through after dark."

## CHAPTER VII

### The Martians

● While we waited for darkness we took our automatics and rifles apart and cleaned them with strips torn from our shirts. We even cleaned and polished the cartridges struck in the loops in our belts, to make sure that there should be no trouble with jammed guns.

As dusk fell upon the city it began to glow with a halo of misty radiance. It was the energy of stored up sunlight being released. Small lights twinkled in the nebulous cloud of light that enfolded the city. Hour after hour we waited but there was no change.

"We might as well go now," said Drummond. "No use to wait longer. Remember now, no noise. And keep close together."

As we approached the city the light grew brighter until, when we were still half a mile away, we could have read a newspaper easily. After we left the field there was no shelter so we moved boldly toward the city. We stopped at the edge and gazed about us in wonder. The buildings were grouped in blocks but instead of being square the blocks were round. The streets were wide.

I thought of cookies cut from dough with the built-up portion of the city being the cookies and the dough that was left being the streets. The streets were paved with a rubbery substance on which our boots made not the slightest sound. The pavement was perfectly flat. Evidently they had no rainfall to make the crowning of their streets for drainage necessary. There were no sidewalks.

As we advanced between the little buildings of massive stone and saw no movement we breathed easier. We had gone about half the distance without seeing a sign of life when we heard a sound from one of the buildings to our left. We increased our pace. There was no dark place in which to hide. A window ahead of us opened and something popped out and fell to the pavement where it rolled a short distance and stopped.

We circled the object warily, fearing that it might be a bomb. Yet it did not explode.

I looked at the object carefully. It was green, as I could plainly see in the soft glow that lighted the street. It was round and about the size of a baseball. From the way it landed and rolled I imagined that it was very light—probably hollow. There was something fascinating about it. Now I could smell it. It permeated the air with an exotic odor that seemed to combine everything that we of earth long for.

Had I been an animal I am sure that I should have tried to eat it. As it was, I longed to possess it. It filled me with an unholy longing to possess it and cherish it and keep it with me always. It drew me toward it as if some strange force were taking control of my body. Step by step it drew me toward it. I heard Drummond's sharp voice but it was dim and far away. He slapped me a resounding blow on the cheek and I dragged my eyes away from that object. Now that I looked away from it a sense of narrowly averted disaster chilled my spine. I thought of the thing as a sinister reptile that had ensnared my will and had been drawing me into bondage.

We broke into a run now, knowing that we had been discovered. We had gone only a block when suddenly large numbers of the balls were hurled into the street. Drummond tried to lead us down a side street and shouted "This way!" but before we could turn we were under the awful power of the things. Yet now that we were under their influence we did not realize their deadliness.

Slowly and relentlessly we were drawn toward the innocent-looking green ball. As we came closer that exotic odor overpowered us and impelled us irresistably. Our minds and wills ceased to function and the motions of our bodies passed from our control. As we drew nearer a darkness began to enfold us. We fought against it but it was relentless. We could feel our legs carrying us forward yet could not stop them.

We did not try to stop them. But we fought the darkness for we did not wish to miss any of that enticing odor. We forgot our surroundings, our rocket; everything except these eggs and their hypnotic odor. The darkness became blacker. I recall dimly that now, under its strange influence, I felt no fear. Only a gradual enfoldment of darkness against which I no longer struggled.

As if far away, I was dimly conscious of movement of my legs carrying me away. It was as if I were sitting on a horse in total darkness and half asleep while the horse carried me along, I cared not where. I'll never forget the feeling.

● When we came to, it was with a suddenness that left us staggered and bewildered. We were confused as if we had been dead and had suddenly come to life in a strange place. We gathered our scattered wits and began to notice our surroundings. We were in a long hall. Massive columns supported the vaulted ceiling. It reminded me of the power-house down at the falls of the canal, except that the material used in this hall was a beautifully polished cream marble instead of smoothly hewn brownstone. And now for the first time we actually saw the Martians.

We had speculated as to what they looked like but they were beyond our wildest guesses. The first thing we noticed was naturally the most conspicuous and startling. Protruding from the top of each egg-shaped body was a short spike on which perched a brilliant compound eye. Through some queer organic twist the Martian was able to see in every direction at once instead of seeing only one small area at a time as we do.

Further, he did not move his eye as ours shift from point to point. The spherical eye had an almost mechanical fixity that was confusing and hypnotic. Their torsos were egg-shaped which is due, as we know, to the fact that their spine was located along the axis of their bodies and the internal organs suspended about this central spine like a bunch of grapes. These, surrounded by a protective shell of tough gristle and skin, gave them a circular cross section. They had no heads. Their mouths opened at the upper ends of their bodies.

Each had four pairs of arms terminating in hands consisting of a thumb and two fingers. I thought of the six-legged, three-toed animals we had seen in the jungle. Their legs were thin and short. They wore tight fitting suits of mesh that had a metallic sheen.

Evidently we were facing a council of some sort. One of the strange little men (they were only four feet tall) advanced and held a sheet of that thin green metal out to us. Drummond took it and after glancing at it passed it to me. More code. I translated it on a blank page from Matheson's notebook and transposed it.

"Men of Earth," it read, "why do you come to our city? Since the jungle did not get you it will be necessary for us to kill you. You refused to obey our orders. Are you mad?" It was signed with that strange scrawl under which was added, "Earth Languages Expert." Drummond read it and frowned.

"Tell them that we have changed our minds. That we are going back and will never again visit Mars," he ordered. "That no one shall ever again come to Mars from the earth."

"But," I objected, "we can't very well promise that when we know that others will come soon."

"What else can we tell them under the circumstances?" snapped Drummond. "We're going regardless of what we have to tell them. Tell them what I said and don't argue. We'll see how they take it."

I wrote the dots and dashes on the page of paper and added, "bring your radio for quicker communication."

My note was handed to one of the council who read it and communicated it in a sing-song voice to the others. There was some discussion and then one of them touched a button. He spoke a few more words and presently a little cabinet on wheels was pushed into the hall by two of the rotund little Martians. The one who had translated



my message made some adjustments and then touched a knob on the cabinet. A disc of metal on the side vibrated in a high pitched squeal. He motioned to me to try it.

Gingerly I touched the knob, not knowing whether or not it might jolt me, for it was of metal and did not move. Evidently the contact of the finger actuated some sort of circuit. But there was no shock. Only the squeal of the diaphragm. I tapped out "very good." He echoed my verdict and thus began one of the strangest conversations on record—two races who could not understand each other's spoken language yet meeting on the common ground of dots and dashes.

After some sing-song discussion the Martian tapped out, "The men of earth defied us and our warning yet now they decide to return to earth and never return. We do not understand this. When a thing is done it is done."

Drummond, who read this over my shoulder, thought a moment and then said, "Tell them that the man who ordered us to defy them is now dead. That we who are here wished to heed the Martians, but that the leader who is now dead, refused."

As I tapped this out I pondered the strange words of the Martians. It was the first intimation I had of one of their mental peculiarities, yet the full significance of it and the effect of Drummond's lies was left for history to reveal.

After some discussion came the answer in the form of a question. "Then there is one among you who is a greater will and mind than the rest and who answers for all?"

"Yes."

"And who is the greater mind, now that the other is dead?"

● I indicated Drummond. They pointed at him and sang among themselves. Then came the next question.

"Now that he is the greater mind, the rest of you are really not the same body that you were before?"

It was another peculiar twist of their logic. Drummond said, "No, we are a different body now that our former great mind is dead," and I tapped it out.

"Then if this new body agrees to return to earth and says that no one shall ever again come from Earth to Mars, it will be so and has nothing to do with the first refusal under the other great mind who is now dead?"

"Yes."

I recall that I hated to tap out deliberate lies but there was nothing else to do, for Drummond dictated and he would be stopped by nothing. There was considerable palaver over this answer. Finally came the answer to our first question.

"Then you may return if the great mind promises that no one shall ever again come from Earth to Mars."

"He promises," Drummond dictated.

"Then you may go in three days. Our engineers and great minds are examining your strange ship. Shall we keep you in captivity or do you wish to roam about the city?"

To us that last question was ridiculous, although as we know now, it was perfectly logical to the Martian. It was akin to our asking an honorable prisoner who is not a criminal whether or not he wished to be paroled on his honor. It might happen with us rarely in the case of officers who are prisoners of war or in rare cases where

the integrity of the prisoner is beyond question. But among the Martians it was not a matter of courtesy. It was a routine proposition placed before all their prisoners, and another of their characteristics due to their peculiar mental habits and evolution.

"We wish to roam the city instead of being held captive," Drummond dictated.

"Then the great mind signifies that he and his council promise to do as the Martians do and will not try to exhibit any of the brutal methods of Earth."

"He promises and understands."

That broke up the meeting. Nothing more was said and we simply walked out of the hall and into the street. There were many Martians about, who seemed not to even see us. It was because of those confounded eyes of theirs. They looked in all directions without seeming to look anywhere.

"Suppose that they change their minds before the three days are up?" said Jones. "It sounds queer to me."

"The whole negotiation sounds queer to me," said Drummond. "It was all too easy to be true. Recall what they said about killing us. I've been thinking that they are afraid of what they call our brutal methods and intend to get us from ambush. I've sworn that we're going through and we are."

"Here's my plan: We'll wander over toward our ship and if anyone tries to stop us we shoot our way through. We've no alternative than to get out of here. Matheson died for that purpose and we can do no more."

"I believe that they mean just what they say," said Hanson. "I move that we behave and wait three days."

"You're nothing but a dumb Swede," Macey sneered. "They're up to some trick. There's nothing to do but beat them to it."

"That's enough from both of you," snapped Drummond. "No quarreling. Macey, you'll have to keep that nasty tongue quiet."

As we wandered closer and closer to our ship, I wondered about these people with the glassy eyes and queer mentalities. There was something significant about their answers and questions that haunted me. Added to this was the fact that none of our possessions had been disturbed. Our rifles were in their holsters just as they had been when we entered the city. Apparently we had not been searched or even touched during our period of semi-consciousness.

I began to think that Hanson was right but I said nothing. There was no use trying to argue with Drummond: When he made up his mind he was like an earthquake—he acted regardless of seismographs. I wished that Matheson could have been with us now. His deeper understanding and tempered ardor would have been comforting.

We came to the northern edge of the city. Now that we were beyond the buildings we could see, less than a mile away, the gleaming hull of our rocket. We went back to the streets and wandered casually in the direction of the ship. We pretended nonchalance although I thought it unnecessary and it made me feel rather foolish. When we came to the ship we found great activity. Martians were swarming about, some measuring and others writing on sheets of green metal. Others were examining the rocket tubes. Still others swarmed in and out through the open air-lock.

We stopped to size up the situation. The Martians appeared not to notice us, but that feeling was due to their expressionless all-seeing eyes. Now as I watched them I did not feel guilty of deceit. I suppose that had they had eyes like ours and had focused them upon me I should have squirmed.

● "We'll form a wedge," said Drummond. "I'll take the point. I'll shoot straight ahead; those on the left wing shoot to the front and left while the right wing will shoot front and right. The main thing is to clear a lane to the air-lock."

There were nine of us left. Drummond assigned each of us to his position in the wedge. We rehearsed until we were sure that there would be no confusion when he gave the word. There was something incongruous about rehearsing our battle formation within a stone's throw of the enemy, taking our time as if we were rehearsing for a play on the stage. We went carefully into other details.

As soon as we were within the ship the others were to clear the ship while Jones and I manned the machine gun which was kept strapped in the hull in the engine room beside the inner door of the lock. I was to unstrap the gun while Jones was to get out the ammunition. Together we were to drag the gun into position and keep the lock clear while the others cleared the ship of the enemy. We went over our plans carefully until we were sure that we could go through the routine like clockwork.

We fretted nervously while Drummond studied the position of the rocket where it lay upon the ground. Macey, who was one of our chief rocket and explosive experts, discussed the situation with him and now for the first time we realized the difficulty. The rocket was not designed for taking off from a horizontal position. They discussed the rise in the ground ahead of the ship and the strength of the steering rockets and the possibility of lifting the nose of the ship with the steering rockets. They talked about skidding the ship up the hill and taking off over the crest of the rise.

"Jones and Nordstrom," said Drummond when they were through with technicalities, "as soon as the ship is cleared of the enemy, you are to close the air-locks and then report to me. I'll be in the control room. I'll watch through the ports and do what is necessary with the rockets. As soon as the lock doors are closed everyone is to go to the stern to keep the weight away from the prow. All clear? Are there any more suggestions?"

"What are we going to do if they throw a basketful of those sweet little balls?" asked Jones.

"That is the chance we'll have to take," said Drummond.

We edged closer to the air-lock door until we were as close as we could get without exciting suspicion. There was only half a block to go. Drummond waited. The Martians hurried about busily. It was this waiting that told on my nerves. I had time to wonder what would happen when we charged. They had spoken casually about having to kill us. I recalled that constantly. The longer we waited the longer I had time to think about our plans and the less brilliant the scheme looked to me. I couldn't rid myself of the memory of that haunting, exotic odor and hypnotic fascination surrounding those little balls of green.

In their bustling about the Martians at last left a space comparatively clear before the air-lock. It was the moment Drummond had been waiting for. "For-

ward!" he shouted, and started ahead at a run. We drew our pistols and fell into place in the wedge just as we had rehearsed. There was no confusion. Something of the spirit of Drummond surged back along the lines. It was that feeling visioned at the death of Matheson. We felt like a relentless machine which nothing could stop.

We covered half the distance without firing a shot. We passed several Martians but paid no attention to them. "Fire!" Drummond yelled as his pistol cracked sharply. We opened fire and swept our path with a hail of vicious lead. Several Martians sagged to the ground and we trampled over them without swerving. We sent volley after volley of hissing lead into their bodies. Some of them ran out of our way. Suddenly one of the little green balls sailed over the heads of the Martians and landed in our path. I felt the strange influence of it.

Whether Drummond felt it or not, he gave no sign. He kicked the thing viciously out of the way and we swept on. As we passed the spot I could smell that haunting odor. The fighting impulse drained from my body and the strange fascination took its place. I heard Drummond's commanding voice order us on. There was something in it that recalled us to the present and we opened fire again, blasting a clearing before the air-lock. When we were close to the door a veritable hail of green balls dropped around us. The fascination was horrible.

Drummond ran around to the rear of the wedge. "Club your rifles!" he yelled. Mechanically we unslung our rifles and mechanically we swung them, knocking the eyes off the Martians who stood between us and the lock. But the green balls were surely overpowering us. Our arms became heavy. Our surroundings were growing dim, as if a half light had settled about us. Faintly we heard Drummond.

"Into the air-lock," he yelled above the uproar and through the settling darkness. "Remember Matheson! I'll kill the first man to let go!"

● The fiery will of the man was amazing. How he could retain his senses in the face of that hypnotic smell is more than I could understand. We swung our clubbed rifles like mechanical furies and surged through the lock into the ship. Now it was the carefully laid plans that saved us. Dimly, as if following hypnotic orders, I unstrapped the machine gun while Jones got out the drums of ammunition. The odor was not so strong within the ship yet strong enough to make us act mechanically.

As in a dream we opened with the chattering gun. It swept a wide clearing before the door but could not reach the Martians close beside the door and those on top of the ship. More balls rained down and the stronger odor assailed us. The drum ran out and I could not reload the weapon. Darkness again crept down upon us. As the darkness thickened I was aware of Jones creeping out of the ship like a sleepwalker. My legs began to raise me from where I crouched behind the gun and I would also have walked out had not Drummond again saved the fight. Dimly I heard the roar of the propeller tubes. The ship skidded some distance from the scene of the fight and again stopped. We were away from that pile of balls and the air cleared and so did my mind. Martians came running toward us from the city, but I could act again.

Quickly I reloaded the gun and swept the space before the door with short bursts, keeping the Martians so far back that they could not throw their missiles close to the

lock. They drew back before the hail of lead but others began to circle the ship. I heard scattered shots within the ship but paid no attention to them. The others dragged several dead Martians to the door and threw them outside. I kept the gun chattering in bursts, keeping the front clear while the other mopped up.

I leaned from the door and looked around. The Martians who were circling the ship were almost within throwing distance. I dared not risk another encounter with those exotic balls, so I slammed the outer door of the lock and screwed it up against its rubber gaskets. Quickly I dragged the gun out of the way and closed the inner door. I ran to the control cabin where Drummond stood waiting.

"Ready!" I yelled. "Lock doors sealed. They got Jones."

"Have to leave him," said Drummond.

He punched a button on the control board. The propeller tubes burst into thunder and the ship began to skid. He touched three more buttons and steering rockets shrieked. The fiercely expanding gases from the steering rockets seemed to cushion the rocket on the ground. It skidded faster and began to float as if cushioned. At the top of the rise in the ground the ship left the planet and swooped skyward in a great arc.

I often wondered what the Martians thought when they saw that roaring demon of flame and smoke slide along the ground and then thunder into the heavens and disappear.

Of our return trip there is nothing to say except that it was worse. We had little confidence in Drummond, but he landed us safely on a mountainside in the interior of California. Because of our hasty departure, we brought back with us five dead and two live Martians.

The rest is history. How the Martians had really been sincere in their promises and had had no other thought than that we too were sincere. They had never thought or heard of such a thing as deception. But the lies and treachery of Drummond taught them an entirely new thing—deceit. After our foul play in fighting them, they

recovered from their surprise and found that a new element had entered their logic and reasoning.

They studied deceit as a science. When Drummond led his second historic expedition, easily financed by the tales of wealth on Mars, the Martians were ready. When the twenty rockets landed, the Martians showered the three hundred men with balls thrown from one of their silent green ships. They succumbed to the odor, but instead of passing into darkness, each man of the expedition was deceived with the hallucination that all the rest of his fellows were enemies. They killed each other to the last man.

How Macey, financed by lawless elements, somehow got in with the Martians and became one of them, teaching them how to fight Earthmen, at the same time piling up a fortune from the black drug that scattered drug-frenzied moral wreckage through the pages of history.

How at last a scientist discovered that the green balls were made of an extract of that black seed pod and were anaesthetic and narcotic in nature. It dulled the will and mind of the victim and he passed easily into the hypnotic state under the powerful wills and minds of the Martians. The scientists devised a remedy, and the conquest and downfall of Mars passed into history.

Now as I see the results I recall the words of Matheson. "Progress comes of struggle." How true they were. Those who braved the horrors of the Martian level in that respect and then advanced beyond. In their struggles they seemed to absorb the Martian mind and will power even as they conquered them. It always happens when the crest of civilization advances. Now these conquerors are the giants who rule the two planets, while a few, like Macey, are the master criminals of the new era.

And we who are left behind (I had not the courage to return). Ah, we are like white ants crawling over what is left, slowly trying to digest the mental droppings of those who have gone beyond to greater heights. We gaze in envy at those who dared to carry the beacon of Matheson to victory and to their reward, yet we curse them. For we have not the courage to go nor the grace to accept the inevitable in the relentless onward surge of the crest wave of civilization as it sweeps ever westward.

THE END