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MARTIANS, KEEP OUT!

A POWERFUL NOVELET

★ *by Fritz Leiber, Jr.* ★



It was one of the few shootings of Martian religious ceremonies that humans had been able to take.

Hatred of the Martians was being deliberately exploited, and Scatterday knew why. And the only way to fight the enslavement of humans, was to assist the Martians, even though it meant risking lynch-law!

illustration
by
Luros

AND AS IF that sign weren't enough, someone with a red spray pencil had added

THAT MEANS YOU, BUG!

The stiff, black-shelled form, impaled on a spike beside the traffic-way, with gummy beads of blue blood glistening in the sun, told the pretty little story much more graphically.

It hadn't been decapitated; Martians lack external heads.

Scat scanned the tableau, his scarred lean features impassive. "They didn't mention this," he commented. "Do we still go in?"

"You ask questions like that just for the sake of the record, don't you?" Click-Click replied, using his black pincers to produce code in a way that explained his nickname. Though headless, Martians didn't lack brains. Definitely.

Scat switched to the turbine for jetless surface-drive, and the utility car crawled into Bronsco.

A hick town, Scat decided. A couple of 100-story skylons, a mainstreet

of glastic commercial buildings, and rows of distressingly similar homes, all of them Paradise-37's or Eden-2's. But the skylons looked dead; the glastic was dingy, and the shrubbery drooped. A few cars were untidily parked by trafficway. Footpaths worn in the grass showed that the sidewalks hadn't been strategically placed, and not all of them seemed to be working.

Crummy.

But it was in burgs like this that the destiny of the Martians was being decided. In the big metropolis, intellectuals talked "Martian Question" all night. Here, things happened.

Click-Click sat up in plain view—not to see, but to be seen. Eyeless perception gave him as good a picture as Scat's of the town—less range, but a lot more three-dimensional.

His shiny black body and jointed arms brought some coldly unfavorable, lingering stares, but nothing more; broad daylight didn't lend itself to lynchings.

When they entered the offices of the *Bronsko Newsbeam*, old Donnolan acted as if he had been betrayed. His scraggly eyebrows gyrated contortedly above his pale, close-set eyes. "If I'd had any idea that I was selling the *Newsbeam* to a damn bug-lover...!" he finally howled impotently.

"Get off my property," said Scat in a low voice.

"Jonas Scatterday the Liberator!" Donnolan's eyes became crooked blue needles of bigotry. "Seems to me I recall you're a bug-smuggler, too. Mixed up in the Underground Skyway to Antarctica..."

"Get off my property," Scat repeated.

As Donnolan sidled out, he uttered those famous last words which are as old as wishful thinking—and blustering cowardice. "You can't do this to me!"

In the transmission room, Scat explained the changed situation to the *Newsbeam* employees, with Click-Click standing beside him. A griz-

zled old beam-doctor expressed their sentiments. "I guess we'll stick with you, Mister. I won't say we like it, but it's our jobs."

Scat nodded unenthusiastically. He knew the arrangement wouldn't last out the day, but as Click-Click had observed, there were a lot of things he did for the sake of the record.

TEN MINUTES later they had the Missionary sizzling on the beam, after a brief editorial statement of the new ownership and policy. Click-Click had fetched the master tapes from the car.

Anachronistically speaking, the Missionary was dynamite. Scat switched him in on the transmission room screen and sat down to listen, unmindful of the guardedly resentful looks he got from the staff. As he listened, his lanky frame relaxed and his stony features softened a little.

The Missionary wasn't blind, but he had the spiritual look some blind men get. He was cadaverous; his voice got under your ribs.

"Living machines! It is by virtue of that legal fiction that we have denied the Martians even the humanitarian treatment we grant to domestic animals, that we have revived an institution as vile as it is old in order to exploit them, that we have spurned all communion with their gentle minds. Living machines! The Earth's bad conscience is the best testimony to the falsity of that fiction, though even the most confirmed Martian-hater recognizes it. He says, succinctly, 'Bug'.

"But they're soulless, you claim. Inhuman. Without feelings. Well, fellow free-citizens of the World Confederation, I went to preach the Word to those living machines on their home planet. I had to fight Outer Spaceways to get permission to do it; I had to live in a cramped little pressure hut and wear a space-suit whenever I went among them; I had to shiver under their meager sun because fuel supplies were somehow always late in getting to me. But I was happy because I was going to

teach the Martians our religion.

"I soon found out, however, that it was they who ought to be teaching me!"

A scene of Martian religious ceremonies followed, one of the few shots that humans had been able to obtain. The speaker's voice continued.

"Lacking their perception and telepathy, it wasn't easy to get in contact with their minds, but we discovered ways. I found out how they live, what they believe in.

"I was going to teach them our Golden Rule." They taught me theirs—the Golden Rule of a telepathic race. *'Do unto others as others would have you do unto them.'*"

Not many people watching in at this hour, but the Missionary's words were being faithfully recorded in every home owning a *Bronasco Newsbeam* set. And during supper, when people switched on the news, there'd be a lot of Martian-owning or Martian-supported fathers and husbands who'd get indigestion and have to be restrained from busting up the set. They'd flash a protest to the *Newsbeam*; they'd record an indignant tape to the government.

More to the point, they'd squawk to Kemmerdygn. Which reminded Scat that he had business. "While I'm gone, you take orders from him," he told the staff, indicating Click-Click. "Any question you got, he'll write you an answer."

HE WALKED out without waiting for the reaction. A small boy was soaping *Bugs* on the glastic. *It begins*, thought Scat. He tossed an old news-spool at the boy and hopped in the car.

He passed up the skylon housing the front offices of *Kemmerdygn Mining Interests* and headed straight for Ten Mile. If they were going to give him the runaround, it might as well be on the spot.

Outside city limits, the trafficway skirted Bugtown. He parked to get pix. Some shots of those miserable burrows and those apathetic black forms—so spiritless in comparison

with a healthy, psychically sound, enlightened Martian like Click-Click—would fit nicely into an article he was doing for the *Free Martian Monthly*. And maybe something for the *Newsbeam Sunday Supplement*—if the new ownership lasted that long.

Why, there were only two refrigerators for the whole community, and the measly vacuum shack was inadequate even for mating purposes. But owners didn't worry about the interminable process of Martian gestation and maturation—not while Outer Spaceways was running the theoretically illegal Bug Trade wide open.

With an almost savage flirt of his fingers, he switched in the smell-getter. Might as well give the owners of sets with olfactory reception a whiff of sick Martian while he was at it.

A rangy, loose-jawed man slouched out of the bushes on the other side of the trafficway. A tarnished squirt gun was stuck conspicuously in the belt of his smock. "What might you be doing, Mister?" he drawled.

"Admiring the scenery," Scat replied harshly. "Bronasco should be proud!"

And he gave him his jets.

2

AT TEN MILE, his tape of introduction from World Mine Owners got Scat admitted to a manager's office pronto.

He explained, "I've been commissioned to do an article on how you keep the bugs happy in the world's deepest mine." He didn't say for what publication.

"Of course, we have our standard news releases...er, Mr. Martin," the manager began tentatively. He was frowning at Scat, trying to place him.

"They're a bit stodgy, I'm afraid," Scat replied. "We wanted something with more life to it—shots of the bugs working the radioactives in the ten-mile drifts, and so on. Pictures of the bugs playing games and go-

ing through their primitive ceremonies when Mars is in the sky. All specially posed and rehearsed, of course."

"I see. Yes, there's something to what you say, all right." The manager nodded wisely, pursing his little lips. "It could be made a lot more convincing that way. Of course, we'd have to get an okay from Mr. Kemmerdygn's secretarial offices, Mr. . . . er. . ."

The faraway look that came into his eyes told Scat that the whisper-transmitter behind his ear had gone into action. The manager's expression didn't change very much, but his plump little hand crept down out of sight and pressed something. Donnolan must have squawked loud and fast—and to the right people, Scat decided regretfully.

A couple of barrel-chested men with "bug-boss" written all over them ambled in. The manager came around the table and grabbed at Scat's right arm. Scat evaded the movement, caught his hand, and squeezed; the manager squealed. The bug-bosses moved forward, but Scat released him.

"Yes, the name's Scatterday," he said. "And duraplast's considerably harder than flesh."

Everybody knew that Jonas Scatterday had lost his right arm from squirt gun corrosive while standing off a raid on an eastern bugtown.

The manager nursed his hand. His puffy little white face was venomous. He said, "We could have you in court for using a bogus tape of introduction to try to sneak in and agitate among our bugs. But since you've so conveniently put yourself in our hands, I don't believe it will be necessary to call in the law."

Scat laughed. "Better check first with Kemmerdygn's secretarial offices. With the situation as it is, and all those government contracts that you're having to hump yourselves to fulfill, I don't think they'd want anything to happen that would raise a stink. If Jonas Scatterday should disappear at Ten Mile, I'm afraid the

government—regretfully of course—would have to take a hand."

As he walked out, the manager acted as if he were about to give the bug-bosses an order. But he didn't.

SCAT PARKED the utility car in front of the *Newsbeam*. A rock clunked against the duraplast of the tail; he didn't turn around. There were more signs soaped on the glastic, but a chunky little man with a great shock of red hair was erasing them. Scat called "Hi, Len," and walked in.

Donnolan was waiting for him with a couple of seedy-looking policemen. He jumped up and waved a spool under Scat's nose. "Put that on your pocket projector!" he chortled triumphantly. "It's an injunction restraining you from publishing the *Newsbeam*, because fraud was employed in its purchase."

Scat pushed past him, remarking casually, "The regional court has attested the legality of the sale and has set aside any and all injunctions against the present ownership of the *Newsbeam* based on those grounds. The whole world doesn't take orders from Kemmerdygn—quite!"

The light of triumph in Donnolan's watery blue eyes flickered. "The regional court can't set aside an injunction that hasn't even been issued yet," he protested; "it's not legal!"

Scat opened a drawer and tossed him a spool. "A stat of the regional court's decision," he explained. "For you to keep. Read it and amplify your knowledge of law."

As he walked into the transmission room, he added, "There's a projector on the desk."

"Well, how did you and the staff get along together?" he asked Click-Click. Audible speech wasn't strictly necessary. Martians being telepathic, but it was generally easier to say a question than to think it.

"Just fine," Click-Click coded back at him. "Some men are as bad as unenlightened Martians; they'd take orders from anything. But after a while the staff had callers and

walked out in a body. Seems they'd all been offered jobs with Kemmerdygn—and the promise that he'd eventually make them his pensioners.

"They walked out while the beam was hot," Click-Click ticked on, "but that didn't make any difference, because by that time Len and the boys had arrived with the truck and they took over."

"The next injunction," remarked Scat, a little dreamily, "will be on the grounds that we're employing Martians in semi-restricted jobs. But it's the one after that I'm worrying about."

Len came in smiling. "All clean for the night," he announced. "Except for one sign, which said, *Bugs inside*. I just changed it to *Martians* and left it."

After getting out the late news flashes, Click-Click and his three compatriots retired to the refrigerated vacuum tank which had been the truck's chief freight. Scat and Len were in the office having a last smoke before their cat-nap. The lights outside made oddly distorted patterns on the glastic, and the soaped sign Len had left was silhouetted blackly.

MARTIANS INSIDE

"Calling you. Calling you," came the sweetish feminine sing-song from the talk-see on the desk. The button blinked red but the screen didn't come on. Len pushed the lever, but the screen stayed black. Scat smiled thinly.

"Jonas Scatterday and Len Cutt," came a slow, deep whisper from the black screen. "This is the voice of the Mystic X. Bronsco will not tolerate bug-lovers. We are, however, giving you one chance; get out now and take your bugs with you, and you won't be harmed."

Len juggled the lever futilely. "Blacked out their end," he surmised. "Halloween stunts. I got a mind to put *The Ghoul Laughs* in the projector and play it back at them."

But he didn't look quite as amused as he sounded.

The button went black, and Len stood there, remembering things. "It was Mystic X who blew up the Martian Clinic the *Free Martian* started in Scarnston."

"Right," said Scat. "Let's get some sleep."

TOWARD morning he awoke with a start. He groped out and found the switch, but the lights didn't come on; the darkness was absolute. While he slept, the glastic had somehow been rendered opaque. As he lay there, he heard the unmistakable click of pinchers from the transmission room and the faint moan of the beam. He realized then what must have happened. Lighting power was local—in conformity with some Bronsco ordinance. So they'd been able to cut it off. But beam power was regional—and they weren't tampering with that yet. Click-Click had taken in the situation and had decided not to wake him or Len while he and his pals got out the morning edition. Human beings couldn't operate very effectively until the lighting system had been jury-rigged on beam power.

The busy clicking continued. Scat smiled. Martian perception was independent of light; Click-Click must be getting a kick out of this.

Still, he'd better get up. He'd dreamed some improvements in the editorial. Probably gone out already, but they could always back-tape and dub in the changes.

In the morning he and Len strolled out in front. Every square inch of glastic was covered with black paint, still sticky and glistening from the spray guns.

"Kinda like the new color," remarked Len, loudly for the benefit of some passers-by. "Black for Free Martia!"

Scat sent him out to try and buy some food and rent sleeping quarters in the Bronsco Recreational Center, which occupied the Number Two skylon. Just for the sake of the record. Len would discover that the

hostelry was full up and that, by some strange mischance, there didn't happen to be any food in Bronsco today.

A chalked sign—*Kill the Bugs*—came coasting by on the slidewalk. Scat put down his foot in front of it and let the slidewalk do the erasing.

Back in the transmission room he discovered that Click-Click's three companions had increased to five during the night.

"Passengers for the Underground Skyway?" asked Scat. And this time he just thought the question.

Click-Click coded an affirmative. "From Ten Mile. They guessed we must be in the neighborhood from the Martian Tape we're running in the *Newsbeam*. All the Martians out at Ten Mile are picking up the Tape—beam-perception or the good old telepathic grapevine. They're crazy about it; it's the first entertainment they've had in months."

The Martian Tape was one of the trickiest things that Scat handled. Any hint of agitation or even of attempted enlightenment among owned Martians was strictly forbidden—that was one point where the government would crack down fast. Hence the Martian Tape, adapted to beam-perception, had to be, and was, purely recreational—devoted to vastly complex brain-teasers in solid geometry and other mental sports dear to Martians.

Click-Click continued, "These two somehow managed to slip past the bug guard; they're begging me to send them to the Reservation."

3

THE Martian Reservation had been established in Antarctica by an administration noted for its uneasy and fluctuating liberalism—much like the present one. The Reservation had been a bone of contention ever since. On it, Martians were to all intents free from human supervision. Although conditions were none too good, and food supply was always a critical prob-

lem, it served as a beacon of hope to enslaved Martia. It was largely because of the existence of the Reservation that border patrols, ground and sky, local and regional, had been made almost fantastically heavy.

"You've told them the dangers?" asked Scat.

"They still want to go."

"Okay then; get the cans ready. And for cripes sake keep them in the icebox until!"

There were a half dozen pallid, flat-chested youths waiting in the outer office. They acted nervous, and whenever the slidewalk in front creaked with the weight of a passerby, they'd all look around quickly and then remember that you couldn't see through the glastic any more. When no footsteps came, they'd relax a little.

One of them hurried up. "Mr. Scatterday?"

"That's right."

Instantly the youth adopted a conspiratorial air. His companions crowded behind him, craning their necks but keeping an eye cocked on the door. "We're the Executive Council of the Young Freeworkers," he whispered hoarsely. "It's an undercover movement in the Bronsco Young Peoples' Organization. We want to thank you for your editorial *End-Product of Patronage—Feudalism!* It was just like listening to our own constitution—only better expressed."

"Thanks."

"Gee, Mr. Scatterday, we don't like being pensioners of Kemmerdygn," the youth continued, a little more human now that he had discharged his mission. "We don't want to spend our lives playing games and getting an endless third-rate education and being Kemmerdygn's cheering section. We're only pensioners because our fathers were. But what can we do? All the restricted jobs have a waiting list a light-year long, and we're too poor to buy the specialized education that's required for most of them. Kemmerdygn keeps cutting down the pension-allotments—just like you said."

"Sure," Scat agreed matter-of-factly. "He employs Martians and pays Earthmen. A very profitable arrangement, considering the greater efficiency of Martian labor and the reduction in operating expenses. If Kemmerdygn switched to human labor, he'd have to ventilate his mines, increase the size of the drifts, provide special protective garments and all sorts of safety devices. Even at that, it's doubtful if human beings could do the work. The situation's practically the same with regard to all other non-restricted jobs."

"That's right!" Another youth cut in—a dark browed, surly kid. "Nobody can expect us to compete with bugs! We want work—any sort, so we can feel we got a stake in the world. But everywhere we look, it's bugs, bugs, *Bugs!*"

"And who's to blame?" asked Scat softly. "You and me. Our fathers; our grandfathers. You know your history. Importation of Martians was permitted only on condition that for every 'living machine' employed on Earth, the owner would retire an Earthman on perpetual pension. That was the juicy, mouth-watering bait dangled in front of workers' eyes so they'd vote in an administration that would pass the Martian Importation Act. But what does it add up to now? You're living on charity; the Martians are enslaved. Under those circumstances it takes a little courage for either of you to stick up for your rights."

"We gotta get rid of the bugs!" asserted the surly kid. "That's what we gotta do. Run 'em off Earth!"

"Been listening to the Mystic X, Sonny?" Scat inquired. "Or is that just the line Kemmerdygn hands you?"

"Kemmerdygn's not so bad," the kid retorted hotly. "He wants to get rid of the bugs, but he can't on account of competition. After all, he's got us to support. As Kemmerdygn says, the fight now is to keep the bugs from grabbing off all the restricted jobs too. You know, give a bug a micron and he'll take a meter!"

CLICK-CLICK came in and walked over to Scat's desk. All the youths were obviously surprised when he didn't go down on all fours and take the most circuitous route possible. As he strolled blithely past, they automatically drew back to avoid any suspicion of contact. After that, their reactions diverged. The surly kid scowled and held his nose, but the spokesman looked ashamed; a flaming blush crept over his pale face. He chewed his lip, nerving himself.

"Mr. Scatterday," he began suddenly, "I don't know about the others." He looked around doubtfully, almost fearfully, at his companions. "But I personally haven't got anything against the...er..." He glanced self-consciously at Click-Click. "...Martians."

From where he was rummaging in the desk, Click-Click coded briskly to Scat, "Coming up in the world, us bugs."

"I don't believe all that Kemmerdygn tells us," the spokesman continued, nervously, but with less hesitation. "I think he's just trying to put pressure on us so we'll enlist in the Martian Patrol or his own private..." He looked apologetically at Click-Click. "...bug guard. Personally, I'd like to see the Martians get a square deal." At this point the surly kid gave a snort of disgust and walked out of the office along with one of the others. "I really would. But Kemmerdygn says that if he had to put in all the improvements the Liberators are agitating for, it would mean cutting down the pension-allotments to almost nothing, so whole families would actually starve." His next words were almost a plea. "Gee, you don't really believe that would happen, do you Mr. Scatterday?"

Scat smiled at him, a little sadly. "Look, boys," he said. "I only know one thing about your problems. This is it. You're going to be pensioners—maybe well fed, maybe starving—but pensioners until every Martian is free."

The youth gulped; when he answered, it was in a very small voice

and with a kind of sigh. "I guess that's what I believe, too," he said.

His three companions nodded.

"There was a Martian lynched here a couple of days ago," Scat continued gently. "Where were you?"

He hung his head. "Gee, Mr. Scat-ter-day, there's so few of us..."

"Yes," said Scat. "So few of us."

Their eyes met.

The slidewalk creaked and this time there were footsteps. Click-Click walked out with the tray of tapes he had been assembling. "By his looks, a bishop at least," he coded cryptically.

The door opened and there swept in a red-faced figure, colorfully august in the brown and gold robes of the Reformed and Reconciled Churches of the World. His stern, bloodshot eyes instantly fixed themselves on the remains of the Executive Council of the Young Freeworkers. They hastily excused themselves. They didn't exactly slink out, but they obviously had a hard time fighting the impulse.

The churchman wheeled on Scat. "I am the Reverend Arthur Alledyce Bassett, spiritual monitor of Bronsco," he announced in a booming voice. "I have come to voice religion's protest against a publication which seeks to pander to the vilest impulses in man and bug, to reduce a creature made in the Lord's image to equality with his machines, to besmirch human dignity and sully the purity of Earth's womanhood by advocacy of open commerce with the foulest and most pruriently prying minds in all creation!"

He paused for breath.

Scat figuratively rubbed his hands. This was something he could get his teeth into. He could hardly wait to bring up the Missionary.

Fifteen minutes later the Reverend Bassett stalked out spluttering threats; he'd done everything but mention the Mystic X by name.

SCAT'S SATISFIED grin evaporated fast. He paced restlessly. Twice he pounded his palm and his lips formed the syllables, "Kemmer-

dygn." He recorded at an editorial, had to keep back-taping, gave it up. Finally he sat down at his desk and flashed Ten Mile.

"I want to talk-see Mr. Kemmerdygn."

"I'll connect you with his secretarial offices."

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Kemmerdygn is in conference."

"He'll be interested," Scat told the pretty, efficient-looking girl. "Tell him I want to beam a story about how he's begun to install at Ten Mile the most up-to-date and humane Martian-protective devices of any mine in the world."

A brief wait.

"Mr. Kemmerdygn has no comment. Good day."

Click-Click came in. He extended his pinchers for Scat's inspection. "My new manicure," he explained. "I've been forging the pincher-ridge patterns of one of those Martians we're keeping for the Underground. That's the only identification that means anything to a human. Get the idea?"

Scat frowned. "Too risky. You might get into Ten Mile, but I don't think you'd get out; we need you here."

"They need me more. Out there in their holes, while I can hop into a vacuum tank every night..." Suddenly Click-Click's pinchers stiffened. "Len's outside," he coded tersely. "I think he wants you; looks like they've brought a finder."

"Finder!" Scat shot up. "Got the cans ready?"

"Yes. Shall we put them in?"

"Not yet. But be ready."

He hurried out. There was a utility car with the Kemmerdygn insignia parked in front. Two scowling bug guards were arguing with Len. Their hands were suggestively near their squirt guns. One of them had a dirty-smocked girl by the wrist. She had a silly, open mouthed grin that just seemed to stay there; she drooled.

"We were telling him you got Ten Mile bugs inside," the bug guard explained to Scat.

Scat looked at him steadily. "We employ Martians to run the beam. They've confused your finder."

The guard pulled the girl to him. "Look Piggie," he said, "these people got bugs of their own. Maybe it's those you been feeling?" She shook her head stubbornly, like a little child. "It's our Ten Mile bugs you feel then? You're sure?" Her head bobbed up and down.

Bug finders were human beings with an inborn sensitivity to Martian telepathy, usually mentally defective. They could not interpret the telepathy, but they had an uncanny knack for distinguishing the characteristic thought-waves of an individual Martian.

The guard looked up at Scat. "We're coming in, Mister; Piggie never misses." He put his hand on his squirt gun.

4

SCAT FELT very conscious of his artificial arm. There was a tremor in the stump he couldn't control. From the door behind him he heard the code for "Catch!" He half turned and picked a blaster out of the air with his good hand.

"Not on my property," he told the guard.

The guard hesitated. "Okay then. Make us do it the hard way," he said. They got in the car and drove off, Piggie making inarticulate sounds of protest and having to be dragged.

Scat's eyes followed them. "Get out the truck," he told Len. "You're going to Manford to buy groceries. Click-Click, can your visitors. Fast."

"Underground?" Len asked with a look. Scat nodded.

About the time Len was ready to roll, the bug guards came jetting back, accompanied by a policeman who looked and acted exactly like them, except for the uniform.

"Got a warrant to search your place for fugitive bugs," he told Scat. "Hold on there!" he called to Len, who was starting the truck.

"Let's have a look before you get away."

The bug guard led Piggie to the truck. She was making anxious, eager noises. Unexpectedly Click-Click came out from behind the truck, so that they almost collided. Piggie squealed and backed off, flapping her arms. The guard grabbed at his squirt gun, but Scat interposed.

"Your bug done that on purpose," the guard blustered threateningly. "He knows Piggie's no good for as much as ten minutes after she gets that close to a bug."

They searched the truck thoroughly. The body was empty except for some boxes of tape scrap and three medium sized cannisters conspicuously labeled in red:

CAUTION!
BEAM REFUSE GAS
Standard Container

Len's hand hovered over one of the cocks. "Want a sniff?" he asked pleasantly.

The guard gave him a sour look. Beam refuse gas was so deadly a poison that it could not safely be disposed of by any ordinary methods. It had to be shipped to a reconditioning plant in containers that were seamless—supposedly.

And these three cannisters actually contained beam refuse gas under standard pressure—they'd have to, in order to pass the minute inspection made at the regional border.

But the shell of a Martian is one of the most impermeable armors ever developed by organic evolution, and when quiescent he can go upwards for an hour without breathing. This is because he is built for an extremely rarified atmosphere—his physiology is typical of a depleted-planet economy. On Mars his inhalation/exhalation ratio is about 100/1. The chief problem in acclimitizing him to Earth is teaching him to inhale as infrequently as he exhales—otherwise oxygen-drowning occurs. A Martian's lungs are really oxygen accumulators. He has 100 per cent utilization of inhaled oxygen, and he exhales pure carbon di-

oxide freighted with other respiratory excretions—hence the “bad breath” so obnoxious to human beings.

WITH A JAUNTY wave of his hand, Len crawled off and the search moved inside the building. Scat stayed with them to make sure nothing was overlooked. But Piggie, recovered, maintained with sullen headshakes that she no longer felt the presence of Ten Mile bugs, and after that the guards lost interest. Scat could tell that they were puzzling as to how he’d smuggled out the bugs while they were getting the warrant—for undoubtedly there’d been Kemmerdygn spies watching the *Newsbeam* building to prevent just such a move.

Afterwards Scat said to Click-Click, “I was a little worried when they took your pincher-prints.”

“Anticipated,” the Martian coded laconically. “I removed the forgeries, but since I have the casts they can easily be replaced. At first I thought of letting the guards pick me up here, but that would be too suspicious.”

“It’s going to be suspicious wherever it happens,” said Scat, shaking his head. “In any case, you won’t be able to pass bug-finder identification. Don’t do it, Click-Click.”

“You told Len to drop in at the *Free Martian* offices and fetch a Martian to replace me?”

“You’re bound and determined then?”

“Yes.”

Scat sighed. “Okay, Click-Click. Yes, I told Len.”

Scat felt a black pincher lightly touch his shoulder. “Dont mope, Scat. I get a great kick out of going contrary to your orders; after all, it’s my badge of enlightenment. Most Martians are too obliging—it’s our great racial sin. Works all right when everybody’s telepathic—thought-pressure keeps the potential transgressor against social welfare in line. But when a telepathic race comes up against a non-telepathic one—ouch! Then the thought-pressure is all going one way. Our

Golden Rule worked on Mars, but it sure got us into trouble here.”

* * *

That evening, while Scat was having his last smoke, he wished that Len were there to chin with. He kept wondering, profitlessly, how long the regional court would hold out against the pressure Kemmerdygn was undoubtedly bringing to bear. Vacillating governments were the curse of eras like this—rather, the inevitable accompaniment. He wondered if there would be a civil war and to what degree he would be responsible for it. Tonight it was hard to dodge that question.

The talk-see button flashed, as he’d been expecting it to. This time the screen didn’t stay completely dark. A wavering “X” glowed there. Black paper painted with phosphorescence and clapped over the screen at their end, he judged.

“Jonas Scatterday, you have disregarded our advice,” came the whisper. “That is unwise. Your time-alotment is almost up. This is the last warning.”

Scat wondered if he ought to have the call traced. Fat chance, with all the talk-see operators locals. Still, for the sake of the record...but he felt tired.

SOMETIME THAT night Click-Click departed, but Len got back with the replacement in time for the morning edition. Afterwards he showed Scat a big ugly splotch on the tail of the truck where squirt gun corrosive was eating in.

“Tried to stop me on the way back just outside Bronsco,” he explained as he swabbed on the decontamination fluid. “Had a barricade up, but I gunned my jets and managed to jump it.”

He went on swabbing. “You know,” he said reflectively, “the only good sign I’ve noticed in this burg so far is that the kids aren’t bothering us so much. Maybe it’s because we’re running *Space Pals* and *In the Days of the Airplane*. Those’re a lot bet-

ter than the crummy comics Donno-
lan was feeding them."

Scat laughed mirthlessly. "And maybe it's just because they've stepped back to give their parents a chance."

Pessimism wasn't usually Scat's forte, but he'd just reached the mental conclusion that it would be three days before the regional court would weaken and give Kemmerdygn—and the Mystic X—what amounted to *carte blanche* to handle the *Newsbeam* situation any way they wanted to.

Actually, his guess was a day short. But that was no satisfaction; they were miserable days, all four of them. Days of feeling that there was no use beaming the news, because no one would watch it anyway. A steady stream of cancelled subscriptions—sets coming back for refund. Complaints. Threats from various sources. Attacks on their Martians. Nuisances, like putting stench gas in the ventilators while they were beaming an edition. No word from Click-Click, though Scat drove one of the Martians past Bugtown to try to pick up something on the grapevine. Fruitless conferences with the officers of the *Free Martian* and members of the Martian Lobby—they were moving heaven and earth to keep the regional court in line, but it showed signs of wavering.

Most of all, the feeling that a wall was being built around the *Newsbeam*, shutting it off from the rest of the world. You couldn't see that wall, but everywhere in Bronsco you could touch it.

* * *

Late afternoon the fourth day, while they were getting out the evening edition, the wall was completed. Beam power went.

Len tried to flash the repair offices. The talk-see was dead.

"Looks like this is it," he told Scat.

Scat nodded. "Now look here. Len..." he began.

A half hour later he was still trying to persuade Len to take the boys in the truck and make a run

for it, when the spokesman of the Young Freeworkers stumbled into the office.

"Ran the slidewalks to warn you, Mr. Scatterday," he panted. "Mystic X. They're planning to get you tonight. Everybody's whispering. There's a lot of cars in the air, and they got big guards on all the trafficways—some of 'em are blocked off."

"What'd I tell you?" crowed Len. "We couldn't have got out anyway."

This was it all right, thought Scat. The regional court had knuckled under; the *Newsbeam* was finished. Kemmerdygn's victory was so complete that they were being saved up as a kind of tidbit for the Mystic X.

Just like the Martian Clinic in Scarnston.

Of course, they'd known it was coming. The *Free Martian* would demand that the regional government send in troops to prevent violence. Failing there, they would ship some of their own people into Bronsco. If they could.

"Thanks for telling us, kid," said Scat. "You better beat it now. No objections! Push him out, Len."

SLOWLY THE night came down. It was like being in a fortress with the silence, and the pocket illuminators casting a ghostly light and every now and then one of the Martians clicking a terse report. Scat's stump bothered him.

Gradually a crowd gathered, outside the range of Martian telepathy, but inside perception.

"Mostly pensioners, but some bug guard," one of the Martians coded. "Donnolan's there, and..." He ticked off the names of a half dozen fairly prominent Bronsco figures. "Hold on; there's a new contingent moving in; they're wearing masks."

The talk-see began to work again. "Jonas Scatterday and Len Cutt, we're giving you one more chance. We want all of you outside. You two come out with your hands in the air, your bugs on all fours."

"We don't propose to die so quiet-

ly," Scat answered. "If you want us, come get us. I intend to defend my property. We're armed—all of us."

Arming bugs! If they'd had any chance, that action had queered it.

The minutes dragged. From somewhere a pellet gun opened up and began to rattle interminably against the glastic. Len began to swear in a low, steady voice. The Martians moved their guns around as if admiring the internal workmanship. Scat realized that he was tapping out "Come on, Come on," in Martian code over and over again with his duraplast fingers.

"There's a new bunch joined them," a Martian informed him finally. "They seem to be arguing. I don't know about what—too far. They're moving off!"

"Kemmerdygn Interests calling Mr. Scatterday."

They all started at that musical voice—even the Martians. Scat jumped for the desk and flipped on the screen. He recognized the secretary he had conferred with.

"Mr. Kemmerdygn hopes you haven't suffered any unpleasantness," she informed him smilingly. "He took steps as soon as he heard you were in trouble. He particularly desires you to resume publication of the evening edition of the *Newsbeam*. Oh, and about that article you were planning. He would like to confer on it at some later date. You will finish beaming the evening edition, won't you? Good evening."

As she flashed off, Len began to swear again, but in a different vein.

"There's more in this than..." Scat began. "...but we got tapes to beam. Get going!"

HHE DIDN'T return until after the *Newsbeam* had been put to bed. There was a black figure sitting at his desk.

"Click-Click!"

"Absolutely." The Martian waved his pinchers airily—a startlingly human gesture. "You probably guessed what happened, but I thought maybe you'd want a personal report. The Martians at Ten Mile struck—every last one of them. Almost unprecedented, but not quite."

And with those government contracts hanging over his head, Kemmerdygn couldn't afford to lose half a day, Scat appended mentally.

"I won't say that I didn't have anything to do with it," Click-Click continued. "I kept the old grapevine humming. But most of the credit goes to the Martian Tape. The Martians were wild when it wasn't published today—especially because it carried the answers to yesterday's puzzles. Even Kemmerdygn couldn't figure out that one. They're going back to work now, but I imagine they'll be a long time forgetting this initial lesson in self-assertion."

Scat looked down at Click-Click. He grabbed his pincher and squeezed it—hard. Click-Click squeezed back—harder. But since it was Scat's duraplast hand, it didn't matter.

THE END