

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SCIENCE FICTION

JUNE
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THUNDERING DEATH

A Complete Novel
by LEE PRIESTLEY

WHO
RULES
SPACE

by LESTER DEL REY

SHAPES IN THE SKY by CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE



Virgil
Finlay

MIRAGE

THE LANDING WAS EASY—deceptively easy. She settled down, soft and light, in the valley Lassiter had seen in the B-screen earlier. The air—the cold snow-capped mountains surrounding the valley—the very ground itself, reminded him of a lonely valley in Tibet he'd once crash-landed in, very much a part of Earth and still a million years away from the Earth that the men of Lassiter's generation knew. It'd been the loneliness that had been so frightening to the man who had been on his way to the bustling trading centre that 21st century Lhasa had become; there had been a feeling that time had forgotten the bare brown hills and the trackless snowclad mountains surrounding him. When the rescue ship came, he'd run towards it with a shout of joy at the sight of another human, at the sight of something *alive*.

Hours after he had landed there in the valley on Deimos he had the same feeling. Nothing except the faint throb of his own engines could be heard. The air was wonderful, cold and bracing like—he realized suddenly—the air had been in that lonely Tibetan valley. For one blind moment he wanted to flee from there. There was something menacing in the very silence around him once he'd come some distance from the ship. The silence seemed to grasp at him, to draw him to itself; *did* silence have a personality?

He heard himself start to talk—to protest wildly—and stopped, appalled. This was the route to madness. There was no one there to talk to. There couldn't be. This was Deimos, millions of miles from nowhere, millions of miles from everyone whose voices he suddenly wished he could hear.

Millions of miles away from lovely, delicate, mocking Claire.

He thought for a moment that he heard Temple Bells in the distance, but this was ridiculous. There could be no Temple Bells on Deimos. There was no life on Deimos as far as the Survey people had been able to determine. It was a cold and barren little planet, with air that Man could breathe, and snow-capped mountains that reminded you of Tibet, and bare brown hills that looked as if Time had passed them by.

But still there were those bells!

He clapped gloved hands to his ears to shut out their sound, and still he heard them—softly, ever so softly, like the bells had sounded in the clear, cold mountain air, a million miles and years ago. . . .

Somehow it was natural that Claire should suddenly be there; lovely, fragile Claire, looking very much like that first time he had seen her, something soft and shimmery thrown over her, that Grecian urn in her hand, her hair shining brightly with the brightness of the snow-covered mountains.

He began to stagger towards her—the bells louder in the clear mountain air.

It was wonderful that she was there. How and why was unimportant. Her being there was all that mattered. . . .

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Virgil Finlay
Cover Design

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