

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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H. L. Herbert
President

Leo Margulies
Publisher

Beatrice Jones
Editor

Joe Richards
Cover Design

never
on
mars

by . . . John Wyndham

Jeremy got to Mars, all right, but nobody else came back. And so people would not believe he had actually been there at all.

THE ODDS are that they won't actually put Jeremy Chambet in jail. After all, a jury has to be satisfied beyond all doubt that any fraud was committed, much less by criminal intent. And I don't see how, in spite of the newspapers and the radio and all the talk, some of the panel can fail to have a doubt or two.

All the evidence is circumstantial—or expert. Juries feel a bit uneasy when it's entirely circumstantial. Nor are they very fond of expert witnesses. They're impressed in a way, but antagonistic too. In the course of their lives they have all at some time or other had expert advice that turned out to be wrong.

All the same, Jeremy Chambet is in a spot. Public fickleness must be hell. First they put you on top of the world—then, given a whiff of righteous motive for an excuse, the whole lot will turn right round and jump on your neck with a jealous sadistic satisfaction. Nearly everybody is delighted to find himself holier than a hero in some way.

Jeremy's story hasn't sounded too good. Still, even Truth isn't dressed non-crushably—and after

Mr. Wyndham, the man who put that poisonous alien vegetable called the triffid into the science fiction salad bowl, here tackles a subject a bit more human, also perhaps a bit more deadly. Which is the insistence among men and women of science of belief — even though such belief be demanded of theories which empirical experience proves teetotally false.

she has been mauled around awhile she doesn't look quite flavor-sealed-in, either.

When Jeremy told me the story in his own way soon after he got back it sounded fantastic, of course—any story told by the first man back from Mars was bound to sound fantastic—but that isn't to say that it sounded untrue. Not necessarily anyway. It wasn't till the prosecution took to pounding away at it that it began to look like hash.

Just to refresh your memory. . .

Not even the defense claims that Jeremy was the first man to reach Mars. Their contention is that he's the first one to come back—and the source of his trouble is that so far he's the *only* one to come back.

There were, you will remember, a crew of three aboard General Rockets' ship, *Uniac 5*. Christopher Deeley was Captain—an excellent navigator with wide experience in rocketry, theoretical and practical, fine physique, dependable personality, altogether a first-class choice for the job.

There was Jeremy Chambet, a physicist of considerable reputation, no laboratory hermit, going along to observe and record technical data.

And Peter Quorridge who, after a roving career chasing up troubles in all corners of the Earth as a special correspondent, had won the job of representing the eyes and ears of the world on the trip.

The take-off was noted but not played up in the Press. It was about the tenth or twelfth shot—or maybe it would have had a still higher number if the Russians didn't regard secrecy and misinformation as the prime national virtues.

Since nothing had been heard of the others after they passed the radio-reflecting layers, news value and expectations had dwindled. Moreover Jeremy's statement on what they expected to find could only have made the ordinary reader wonder why anyone was fool enough even to start. Those who did read it just wrote off another expensive ship and three more nuts.

But, this time they were wrong. Several months later *Uniac 5's* automatic radio signals were picked up. Then came Jeremy's voice calling. He was circling and reducing speed, he said. He was alone. He had no hope of landing the ship safely, so he proposed to drop her in the sea. His intention was to slow to a stop, check fall, shut off power and bale out before velocity mounted again. He'd leave the automatic going for stations to keep a fix on him.

The last wasn't entirely necessary. The *Uniac 5* not only assaulted the ears of the inhabitants of San Salvador Island in the Bahamas by thundering round their sky but treated them to unusual glimpses of a celestial fire-cracker gone crazy.

Jeremy explained afterwards that he could not get the balance of the thing right to keep it sitting on its jets. Every time he used the lateral stabilizers they over-corrected, first one way and then the other, until the thing swung over and whizzed off at an angle, so then he'd have to fight for height in order to have another try.

The wonder of it was, considering he had never tried to handle a rocket before, that he didn't destroy it and himself at the first attempt. Finally, however, this cavorting had to come to an end because his fuel ran out, so then he had to jump for it anyway.

The *Uniac 5* came down at high speed and blew up like a geyser—maybe she didn't have any fuel but his haywire antics up there had run her tubes mighty hot. Jeremy himself dropped into the drink twenty miles away and floated around, firing smoke signals at intervals, until a helicopter came and dangled a ladder for him.

Well, it's not likely you've forgotten the hoopla that followed. The contracts for advertising, radio, movies and the rest of it came raining in. Jeremy was sitting pretty with mountains of dollars growing up on all sides. But Jeremy isn't a mean man.

As far as we know no close relative of Peter Quorridge exists. But Chris Deeley had left a widow, Monica, and two children. Jeremy made over to them one

half of the receipts. It was generous. When his friends pointed out, "It was *you* that took the risk. One third is fair enough, for her," he replied. "Well, it was Chris who got us there—and landed us safely."

The prize-money was what began the trouble. The New York *Epoch* had offered the largest—one million dollars to the first crew to make the two-way journey—but there were a number of others, not negligible by any means.

The *Epoch* is not one of the ornaments of journalism. Maybe it gambled that there would never be a call for the cash. When the call came the *Epoch* thought it over and then informed Jeremy that since only one third of the crew had made the double journey it had decided to award only one third of the prize. That seemed a good idea to one or two other offerers, unexpectedly facing the results of their prodigal gestures.

Jeremy didn't worry. More dollars than he had ever thought of were rolling towards him anyway, more than he knew how to use. But Monica Deeley was a tougher proposition. "Enough" was a word that she kept shut up in the dictionary. The moment she got the sharing agreement with Jeremy signed up she put in a claim against the *Epoch* and its similar-minded friends for payment in full.

The sympathy was all with her and Jeremy Chambet to begin

with, but then rumors got going—from a guessable source. After all, there was only Jeremy's word for what had happened on the expedition. The *Uniac 5*, with such records as might exist, lay scattered at the bottom of the sea.

It occurred to someone to turn Jeremy's own generosity against him—after all he had no need to give Monica Deeley more than a third share, no compulsion to do even that. So was there something behind it? Conscience money . . . ?

A very distant relative of Quorridge showed up and put in a claim on the ground of Peter's intestacy and as good as accused Jeremy of murdering both of his companions for the sake of the prize-money. A few newspapers remained staunch but a number of the more sensational moved over to the side of the *Epoch*, which by this time had the characters of both Jeremy and Monica in shreds.

The *Epoch* lost its case and appealed. In addition, the libel writs had begun to fly. In the middle of it all Monica Deeley sprang a mine by going to the police and alleging that Jeremy had confessed to murdering her husband in order that he could marry her.

It was by no means a likely story but a lot of people pounced on it as an explanation of his generosity—that he intended to have the lot in the end, even if

he had to marry Monica to get it. And once the charge had been made the authorities were unable to ignore it.

Monica Deeley is a fool—a dangerous fool. If she had let the whole thing alone and just sat back, taking the dollars as they came along, they'd both have had all they could ever want. Whoever it was that suggested to her that if Jeremy were put out of the way she would rake it all in has a lot to answer for. Now she stands to lose badly whatever happens. For the charge failed to hold water, of course.

However, Jeremy still has to sit there in court and hear himself shredded. They have gleefully tripped him in a memory slip or two such as anyone's memory might make—but he has made no contradictions of his main story and he is sticking to it. The trouble is not many people believe him any more. Jeremy is becoming a second Dr. Cook, of North Pole infamy.

By this time we have all become so confused with the comments of the newspapers, and those of learned counsel, that what Jeremy actually said in the first place is becoming obscure. So let me give you the story as he told it to me soon after he had come back, well before the row began and all this forensic talent pitched into him . . .

THE NEXT TIME they send anyone to Mars (said Jeremy Cham-

bet) they might let a competent psychologist in on the selection of the crew. Technical qualifications come first, of course, but the people who have them are going to have to live together at very close quarters and with no privacy whatever for a number of weeks. By far the most troublesome thing to control, when you're shut into a small metal shell out there in Space, is yourself.

Your sense of proportion goes all to pieces. Piddling little things you would never even notice anywhere else can drive you to distraction when they are thrust under your nose day after day and you can't get away from them.

Small habits, mannerisms, tricks of speech—they can get on your nerves in a way that would seem fantastic in ordinary life. Each man has to watch himself all the time to keep from showing how intolerable he finds another man's way of clearing his throat, hesitating for a word, eating his food, and that becomes quite a strain by itself.

Roughly speaking, we were the man of action, the reasoner and the observer. We had been chosen *because* we had been trained to think in different patterns. It may be good coverage but it doesn't make for easy association.

I am a scientist—that is to say that when I have assembled all the proved facts I draw a deduction which includes them *all* as

logically as human frailty permits.

Chris Deeley was the man of action, but as a modern, educated man of action he was also considerable of a technician. This gave us at least some ground in common.

But Peter Quorridge! Well, frankly, I don't understand the type. Maybe I could find it amusing for an hour or so in a bar—but the *Uniac 5* was no bar and it was a matter of solid weeks.

It's all right being revolutionary and skeptical about everything at twenty—most of the best are. But you expect a man to outgrow it. Maybe it was having to make a newspaper sensation out of everything that did it with Peter.

The way he watched you when you were speaking—you could almost see his mind picking out bits here and there and building up conclusions which left out all the rest. When, in exasperation, I said that it was more than ordinary perversity in him, something more like downright anti-rationality, he grinned.

"And you're not even constructive," I added.

He shrugged. "Construction's your job—not mine. And, my word, what you fellows do construct!"

"You'd rather be a demolition expert?"

He put his head on one side, and considered. "I'd not call myself that," he said. "As I see my

job I'm more like the Standards Bureau. I test. If the breaking strain is low the thing gives. And when I think of all the ethers, elements and crackpot theories you fellows have put up in your time I reckon I represent a pretty necessary safety device."

That should give you some idea of his angle. He'd challenge pretty nearly every theory ever made, and quite a little of that was enough to be intensely exasperating. After all, if you don't have some axioms how do you start going any place at all?

To begin with it wasn't too bad. Once we had got over the start, which is a physically distressing business, we settled down. We arranged a rotation for meals and sleeping based on Earth-time. It's the best you can do—it'd be a lot better if one could sleep most of the twenty-four hours instead of a smaller proportion than usual from lack of exercise. There's a good opening there for a non-habit-forming hypnotic, by the way.

When things began to pall Peter was better off than we were. Chris's periodical course-checks and my observations left us with a lot of unoccupied time but Peter had brought along a stack of notes that he was in the process of working up into a book. We got more bored with reading than he did with writing.

To help pass the time Chris taught me something of Space-navigation. I found it fascinating

—it also turned out to be useful. Without it I'd not be here now. But that didn't take up all our time. Among other things, we discussed what we were likely to find on Mars—if we made it.

My own expectations were far from sensational. From all I knew I envisaged an almost arid planet. There would be little if any atmosphere. Rigorous cold by night, a day temperature of anything from thirty to eighty degrees at the equator, depending on the season. Polar caps of frozen methane or carbon-dioxide. Possibly, just possibly, a little vegetation of a primitive kind still surviving.

Perhaps the thing that I looked forward to most was clearing up once and for all the matter of those markings to which the astronomer, Schiaparelli, had given the name, in my opinion then so unfortunate, of *canali*.

Chris, of course hoped for more. I could see that though he did not press it he had been affected as most people have by the views of the irresponsible Lowell and others who have taken what seemed to the informed a childishly geomorphic view of the planets. It was while I was pointing out to him what a quantity of romantic mischief had originated in Flagstaff, Arizona, that I became aware Peter had stopped writing and was listening with his eyebrows slightly raised.

"You honestly believe that's

all we're going to find—Just red deserts?" he put in.

"Orange deserts—there's a refractional effect," I told him.

"All right, orange deserts then, split up by natural cleavages and with an odd patch of lichen here and there?"

"Yes—that's about it," I agreed.

"Then what in heck are we doing here?"

"Well, for one thing we're verifying theory—adding to knowledge."

Peter put away his pen.

"What are you expecting? Mr. Burrough's Barsoom?" I suggested.

"My idea is to find out. If I knew I wouldn't be here. You see, not being a scientist I don't make my approach stuffed with prejudices."

That was the perverse kind of remark I had learned to expect from him. This time I did not rise to it. "You must have some views," I said, mildly.

"Well, I certainly have a number of questions. I want to know, for instance, why your despised *canali* markings take, unlike anything else in nature, the shortest path between two points. Also why the junctions are situated, as a rule, just where you might expect an engineer to put them. Why some astronomers speak of obscuration by clouds when others say there's no atmosphere. Oh, there are a whole lot of things I *want* to know—and intend to know. Only, not being a scientist,

I don't explain them to everyone before I *do* know."

"That," I said, "is not only frivolous, it's a contradiction in terms. The word scientist by its very derivation means one who knows."

"In practice," Peter replied gently, "a scientist will often hotly defend a theory, with scientific proofs to show that it is a fact. Now, how can a fact need defense? It just *is*. So what the scientist is really trying to do is to prove his own beliefs—which puts him along with the rest of us, though on a slightly less intelligible level."

What are you to do with a man who talks that way?

"At least," I said to him another time, "science builds theories. If your attitude of mind were general nothing would ever get built at all."

"True," he admitted. "But let's just think where we'd be if there weren't people like me to challenge your scientific theories—and proofs. Offhand I can recall it was proved on paper that iron ships would not float. Then, when they did, disconcertingly for the experts, it was steel ships that wouldn't be seaworthy."

"It was shown with figures that a steamship could not carry enough coal to get her across the Atlantic. Evidence was adduced that the human constitution could not withstand a speed of sixty miles per hour. At the number of times that it was proved that

heavier-than-aircraft could never fly imagination positively boggles.

"In nineteen twenty-seven the father of a friend of mine gave up an aircraft designing job because it was proved to him that the limit of size of land-based planes had been reached. It was shown that the idea of the internal combustion turbine was comparable on visionary grounds with that of perpetual motion.

"You will yourself remember a lot of the things that were said authoritatively about nuclear fission. As for the possibility of rocket flight . . . And dozens more. But luckily there is always a class of people who don't believe the scientists' conclusions.

"But does that prevent scientists from continuing to prove the next thing is just as impossible? Not a bit of it."

I'm afraid I used to get more than a little heated with him after a time, so that Chris felt it necessary to intervene tactfully. But people ought to have some respect for the opinions of experts in fields where they themselves know nothing. Peter Quorridge seemed to have none. You can't argue unless you have common ground. I told him quite flatly that he was nothing better than an ignoramus in my subjects. He took it quite cheerfully.

"An African witch-doctor told me almost the selfsame thing once—and a Voodoo priest too. It must be a professional tenet," he said.

How would you like to have to put up with week after week of close association with a man who talked such stuff? You see what I mean when I said he was anti-rational? He would, for instance, address me as 'Father.' When I objected he raised his eyebrows.

"My dear fellow, would you deny your calling? You are a priest of this century's mystique. The educated accept you as an authority on the mysteries of nature, the uneducated think you're crazy but a bit dangerous, so they respect you superficially too.

"You can't explain your mysteries to the laity—yes, you often use the actual word—and you call anyone who attempts to do so a vulgarizer. It's a cult, old man. All the characteristics of a priesthood—including profound faith in your own words."

"What a lot of nonsense you do put over," I told him. "You know as well as I do that the difference between the scientific method and the religious is that we deduce from proved facts."

"That's what amazes me. I can remember as a kid coming across a series of diagrams in an old magazine. They showed the build-up of resistance and thus proved scientifically that no airplane could fly faster than the speed of sound. How come—on your showing?"

"Faulty reasoning, of course."

"I see. Nothing wrong with the system. Only the incompetent servant. Just the same way that

that unfortunate woman, Joan of Arc, happened to get burnt."

"If you can't see—oh, go to hell!" I told him.

But Peter just grinned.

Added to the close-quarters living, lack of exercise and sheer boredom was the uncertainty. You forget that afterwards but at the time it tells. Then you don't *know* you are going to make it. The chances are very much against you, and what you *do* know is that all the others who tried before you did *not* make it.

You're very much aware, too, that you don't know why they failed, so you can't take any precautions against whatever it was that made them fail. It's not at all good. While you lie there, trying to sleep, some pretty nasty pictures get into your mind—rockets floating on through Space forever with just a load of human bones aboard—rockets sliced wide open by wandering asteroids—a rocket which has turned into just a patch of metal fragments in the Martian desert.

Things like that are difficult to fence out of your mind. The crew of the *Santa Maria's* chief worry was whether they would sail over the edge—on the *Uniac 5* we had a lot more possibilities. Maybe death, seeing that it catches up with everyone, isn't so important as we like to think—but it can come in a hell of a lot of nasty ways. And you kind of get to thinking about them . . .

Nearer the end of the trip, when it began to look as if we might really make it, our mood changed. It's the long-term waiting that gets you down. For a definite operation such as a landing you can brace yourself up. And we did. The thing depended on Chris Deeley now and we had a high level of trust in him. Peter Quorridge and I tacitly agreed to forget that we had not been speaking for a couple of weeks and dropped our armed neutrality.

We began to spend more and more time at the telescopes or bending over the projection table. We were fascinated out of our previous boredom. In spite of myself I began to be converted to the belief that the *canali* were artifacts of some kind, that possibly they had even been real canals at one time.

As they became clearer there seemed to be no other explanation. Over dark patches such as *Syrtis Major* and others to which the romanticists have definitely given the title of *sea*, I was still puzzled. So much water was highly unlikely and there was an indefinite quality about the edges. I found myself siding with those who claimed them to be areas of vegetation.

It had been for me to decide the position of our landing, subject to Chris's practical considerations, and I had for some time made up my mind that it should be in the area of the *Ismenius Lacus*. At this great junction of *canali* we

would be able to settle the question for good and all and here, if anywhere, we would be able to find traces of civilization.

I'm not going to be technical. I'll just say that Chris did set us down in a perfect landing somewhere in the northwest quadrant. Around the *Ismenius Lacus* itself the ground was dark and broken for many miles and, in Chris's opinion, likely to be swamp—so he took us some distance to the west along the line of the large channel called the *Duteronilus*.

The first thing I saw when we got the cover off a port was that the sand was orange red. I mention that now because in that, if nothing else, my predictions were right. You'll be able to read all the details in my book when it comes out, so now I'll keep as much as possible to what happened.

To my amazement the atmosphere showed sufficient oxygen content to sustain us—rarefied, of course, so that it might have caused us a little distress on Earth, but on Mars it required little output of energy to move our bodies. So, with the temperature showing at over forty, we risked going out without space-suits.

Peter Quorridge took a deep breath and looked round. "H'm. No bug-eyed monsters anyway—yet," he remarked.

I regret that such a frivolous remark should be the first recorded utterance of a human being

upon Mars but I am merely reporting.

Chris insisted that our first task should be to set the rocket up in the starting position. "Just a matter of making it possible to leave in a hurry if we should want to," he explained.

The contingency seemed improbable but we helped him drive an anchor post and fix the trim. The little engine chugged, with its air-intake wide open, and through a fantastic reduction gear got on with the job of pulling her up onto her tail fins.

There wasn't a lot to see, but to me most of it was improbable. The sandy rockset plain I had expected—but not the scrawny bushes that dotted it. They were poor gnarled things with just a few coppery leaves. To the south they grew closer together, to the north they became rapidly fewer. In all directions the land was flat, save to the southeast, where a tumulus of rocks broke the monotony.

Once the rocket was up and the living compartment high in the air we had an extended view. It was Peter who took the first look through the south-facing port. He picked up his glasses, then he grunted and handed them to me. "Lowell winning on points," he said.

Beyond the bushes which thickened into a dark band I saw a gleam.

"Well?" asked Peter. "Now tell me it could be a saltpan."

"It *could*," I agreed, "but maybe it is water."

We went there the next day. It was a canal, all right—and well filled at that. The edges were fringed with plants not unlike small terrestrial rushes, and where the water began there was plentiful submarine vegetation. Our position gave us a close watery horizon and we could not tell what the width of the canal might be.

To either side of us the bank ran away in a geometrically straight line—so straight in fact that I was surprised. One would have thought that even light wind erosion, which was probably all the wear it ever got, would have indented the edges here and there in time.

We withdrew through the fringe of more sturdy bushes which would have made walking along the actual bank a tiresome business and took an eastward course parallel with the canal, headed in the direction of the rocky pile. The nearer we got, the greater became our interest.

The stones which formed it lay in a jumble upon one another but while we were still some distance away we lost all idea that unaided nature had produced them. The sharp edges of the stones had been worn smooth but the blocks themselves had been squared. We had no doubt that they were the ruins—of something.

But even when we reached them we could make tantalizingly

little of them. It seemed tolerably clear that they could not lie as they did by a process of mere collapse. We all agreed that some immensely destructive force must at some time have hurled them about.

Another thing struck us. You would have expected any building or group of buildings close to the canal to front right upon it but this pile stood some three hundred yards back from the bank. On the bank side it was chopped off short in a reasonably straight line.

It looked at first as if the canal must have been narrowed at some time and the line represented the original waterfrontage. But Chris, climbing up on to one of the stones, disposed of that idea. He called to us to follow him and when we did we were able to see that the bare space between the pile and the canal showed traces of foundations in several places.

"Somebody, sometime, has been doing a bit of clearance work around here," said Peter. "By the look of it they took the stones and shipped them down the canal—but quite a while ago."

Chris hesitated over that. He pointed to some of the lower stones in the straight face of the pile. Their edges, unlike those above, were sharp.

"These haven't been exposed anything like as long as the rest," he said.

"Only a few hundred thousand years, maybe," said Peter. "Or are we on Barsoom after all? Be-

ware of the bug-eyes and all that?"

"So far," I pointed out, "we've not seen the smallest vestige of animal life of any kind."

"Maybe that's what makes it feel the way it does—even a few desert rats would give it a homey touch," Peter murmured.

We spent the rest of the day taking photographs and collecting specimens. When we got back to the rocket Peter said. "Well, maybe you weren't quite right in the details, Father, but your general slant was okay. If there's anything duller than a worn-out planet I don't want to hear about it."

I spent the first part of the following day labeling specimens and writing up notes. Chris had insinuated himself into the non-habitable part of the ship and was inspecting things there. Peter, after hanging about pensively, went off somewhere on his own. He came back just as we were finishing our midday meal.

He didn't say anything until he had eaten his share and lit a cigarette. Then, "I've found out where the stones went to," he told us.

"Where?" asked Chris.

Peter grinned. "Into the canal," he said.

We both looked at him. You never knew with Peter.

"Who'd want to lug them into the canal?" Chris asked.

"Exactly," Peter agreed. "But that's where they are."

I knew enough of him by now to be sure that he had not finished. "How do you know that?" I said.

"I've seen 'em. During the night I seemed to remember that the bank there isn't quite straight like the rest. It's been worn into a bit of a bow. At first I thought it could have been worn away by the ships or barges or whatever they were using. Then it occurred to me that the stones themselves would have gradually worn away the edge if they'd been pushed into the water."

"That's possible," I agreed. "If anyone had any reason for doing it."

"That's what I wanted to find out. So I took along one of the inflatable mattresses, and floated out a bit on it. It gets deep fairly rapidly but sixty yards or so out you can still see the bottom clearly. And that's where the stones are."

"But that's crazy. Or—you mean the bottom of the canal is paved with them?"

Peter drew on his cigarette. "No I don't. You see, what they apparently were wanted for was—building."

Somewhere in the middle of the following night the rocket fell over—and an exceedingly lucky thing it was for all of us that our couches were free in their gimbals. Since one of their main purposes was to take up shock, none of us suffered more than an abrupt awakening. Chris sat up and

turned on the light. A few loose articles had been thrown into a heap but no damage was done inside.

Peter's voice said comatosely, "Let the damn thing stay put. It can't fall any further."

It seemed sound advice. If the ship were damaged, it would still be just as damaged when daylight came. But that wasn't Chris' way. He wanted to be reassured at once. He got out and sorted his clothes from the heap into which they had all been flung.

It was unfortunate for him that he happened to be balanced on one leg in the act of negotiating his pants when the rocket started to roll. He took several staggering hops before he managed to clutch his couch and haul himself aboard, half clad. At that moment the ship came down with a thud and we bounced on our springs.

"What the devil goes on?" Chris demanded as the ship continued to roll.

It was very odd indeed. The *Uniac 5* wasn't a perfect cylinder as you know. The three atmospheric stabilizing fins projected somewhat beyond her greatest girth. They should have made it quite impossible for her to roll. But they didn't. She rose slightly as she turned, then *thud* again as we bounced once more. There was a secondary thump as the one port cover that was free dumped down on to its gasket on the turn.

Peter lit a cigarette. "There are

two possible explanations," he observed. "Either the damn planet's got tilted up somehow or something's shoving. *Hell!*" he added, as we thudded over again.

Chris glared at him. "Put that thing out. We might fracture a fuel line or something any minute."

Peter obliged and lay back. We swung in the gimbals while the place turned round us and thudded over again.

"And something with a mighty powerful shove too," he added.

Chris was reaching for a locker door. By the time he had got it open we had turned further so that the entire contents of the cupboard fell out on him—but he succeeded in grabbing the thing he wanted, a flashlight. When the port cover swung free he turned the beam on the port itself.

It was quite useless. The fused-quartz surface just reflected the light, making the darkness outside seem yet denser. Chris cursed. We continued to turn with regular thuds. The port cover looked like buckling its hinges. The next time it thudded shut he jumped down to secure it and managed to get back just before we went over again. He sat there considering for some moments.

Then, choosing his time carefully, he climbed to the pilot-seat and set it free to swing in its gimbals. He considered the instrument board thoughtfully for a minute, then depressed one key

and held it down. He waited until we had thudded again, then he gave a light touch on another key. A tremor ran through the ship and the turning stopped.

"Fine," said Peter. "Rout of bug-eyed monster."

I was irritated. "That kind of fooling doesn't help. This may be serious," I said.

He turned an amused eye upon me. "You've got a scientific theory," he said. "But me, I take things as they come—not as I think they ought to come."

At that moment we began to turn again and thudded down onto the next fin. Chris played his piece on the lateral firing keys once more. We stopped again.

"I was premature," said Peter, in the following pause. "The bug-eye has patience, and imperviousness to heat—*hey!* Here we go again!"

We did. It was not until Chris had repeated his treatment five or six times that the pause lengthened so that we began to feel it was permanent.

"That would seem to have fixed them," he said with satisfaction.

"If it is 'them,'" Peter said. "We might take a look if we didn't happen to be lying on the entrance-port side."

Next morning, after Chris had rolled us with a lateral blast, we went out to inspect. We now rested somewhat over a hundred yards to the south of our original position. The sand over which

the ship had traveled showed not only the indentations made by the fins, but a number of shallow furrows—the kind of track that might be left by a full sack being dragged along. We could make nothing of them. They extended all round the ship as she now lay and stretched away on the other side in a broad trail to the south.

Chris inspected the vessel with increasing relief. "Okay, I think," he said at length. "We have the local gravity to thank for that. Those fins would never have stood it with her Earth-weight."

He debated whether to set her up again or not, then decided against it until we knew more about what was moving her. It would not do her any good to be toppled over once more.

We decided to follow the trail to the south and see what we could find.

"There's only one place that can lead," said Peter and he went into the ship, to emerge shortly carrying a deflated mattress.

He was right. The marks kept on approximately in a straight line. The bushes along the way had been flattened as though by a heavy weight. At the canal the trail ended. We examined the bank carefully for signs that a craft had been moored. There weren't any.

"There's one answer," Peter said, looking at me with raised eyebrows.

When we had inflated the mattress we took turns floating a little

way out and looking down into the water. I went second, after Chris.

I don't mind saying that I had doubted Peter. It wasn't that I thought he was putting up a spoof but I half expected to see something fortuitous though maybe bearing a close resemblance to what he fancied. I was wrong. Hanging my head over the edge of the mattress and shielding off reflections as best I could with my hands, I found myself looking down on no jumble of stones but an orderly collection of buildings.

Their design was, of course, strange, yet with an effort of the imagination one could almost fancy himself looking down from the air upon an alien city. One was built on a hillside and sloped away until it dimmed out of sight in the depths. I stared down at it long and incredulously.

It presented so many degrees of improbability beyond the plain fact that it was there at all that I was utterly bewildered. But there was no hallucination about it. I could quite clearly see individual buildings with flat roofs and lane-like streets between them.

I strained my eyes to catch some sign of life or movement down there but saw none save a few small fish-like creatures idling along or nosing inquisitively into crevices. Then I noticed something more. In one or two of the upper buildings that I could see most clearly roof-slabs had fallen in and had not been replaced.

And on considering a 'street' which lay directly beneath me I observed that it was carpeted with weed which stirred as if in a slight current. Its untouched appearance in conjunction with the rest made me feel that I was looking down upon a deserted place.

After a lengthy inspection which told me no more, I paddled back to the others on the bank. Peter looked inquisitive without speaking.

"I don't understand it. I don't understand it at all," I admitted. "They can't be houses that have been submerged. Yet they are simply a dry-land type under water. If we grant for a moment the possibility of an intelligent swimming creature—then we must admit that this is simply not the kind of structure it would build.

"The design just wouldn't suit its nature or its needs. To assume that a creature able to move up and down as easily as sideways would adopt the same general forms we find convenient is arrant nonsense."

Peter nodded. "For once we agree. And that leaves us with a choice of two possibilities, doesn't it? Either the places *were* built by some approximately human types and later submerged—which, as you say, doesn't look likely. Or whatever built them does not swim."

"Some bottom-dwelling form—like a crab, for instance," Chris suggested.

"Maybe—or maybe something

not a bit like a crab. Somehow I don't see any crustacean evolving a high I.Q.," Peter replied.

"If there is anything there now," I said, "it seems to have abandoned the shallower parts for the deeps."

"Of course there's something there," Peter put in. "Our rocket didn't roll by itself."

We paused, contemplating the possibilities for a moment.

"Well, there's one way of finding out—and that's to go down and have a look," Chris said.

The rest of the day he spent tinkering with one of our hitherto unused space-suits.

"I don't see why it shouldn't make a perfectly good diving-suit," he explained. "I know the pressure will be inverted but it won't be great here even if the depth is considerable—which doesn't seem likely. The trouble will be to keep down. Everything weighs so damned little."

That night I was awakened from a dream of touring Mars along the bottoms of endless canals by a familiar bump.

"Good old bug-eyes back again," muttered Peter.

Chris grunted and swung himself into his chair. He repeated his counter measures but this time they were less effective in dealing with whatever was outside. Sometimes the motion was checked briefly, sometimes not at all. With a gesture of irritation he changed his tactics and let off a

blast on the other side. The ship suddenly reversed her roll, and thudded back. That seemed more effective.

Half an hour passed. But then we began to tilt again. Chris held his hand until we were on top-center of the supporting fin and then let the foreside laterals have it again. We dropped back. Then a kind of seesaw contest went on for awhile. He began to look a little worried, reflecting, I believe, my own expression.

"We've got a good fuel margin," he said. "All the same we won't be able to keep this up indefinitely."

However the same appeared to apply to whatever was doing the pushing. After a bit more back and forth it—or they—apparently decided to call it off for the night.

By daylight we saw that the night's work had been poorer from their point of view. Nevertheless the rocket now lay some thirty yards further in the direction of the canal.

Chris climbed into the space-suit on the bank. Before he closed the helmet he strapped on a belt hung with such weighty and portable objects as he could find and we fixed a spare air-bottle in place on his back.

It had been arranged that Peter should float above him and observe for as long as he was able while I watched from the bank. I would have liked a running commentary on Chris's discoveries but the built-in radio was not

practicable for under-water use.

Chris closed the helmet and tested, then waved his hand to me and began to walk carefully into the water. Peter, lying face down on the mattress, paddled it out slowly with his hands. After little more than a dozen paces Chris's head disappeared beneath the surface. I sat down and lit a cigarette, watching Peter paddling gently out, pausing now and then and all the time looking steadily down into the water.

About an hour passed. I had got cold sitting there and was walking up and down the bank for exercise. Peter was a hundred and fifty yards or more away. I could see him cupping his hands round his eyes as he peered down.

Suddenly he jerked up his head, rocking the mattress violently. His voice came to me in a shout. A moment later there was a splash near him and Chris shot up, rising more than half out of the water. He struck out for the mattress at once. Peter was reaching out a hand to help him aboard.

Then out of the water close behind him something rose, dripping. I can't say what it was, a sort of grab perhaps—or a kind of claw. It moved too quickly. It swung over and fell upon Chris and Peter with a mighty splash...

When the spray dropped there was nothing there.

I stood frozen while the ripples spread out and came lapping to my feet. Then I fancy I ran back

and forth along the water's edge, crazily wringing my hands. I can't be sure—I was half out of my mind.

You see, there was something worse than losing my friends, worse than horror of whatever dwelt in the canal. I was suddenly alone, utterly alone, alone as a man has never been alone before. And all at once I was terribly afraid—afraid of the unbroken silence all round me—deadly afraid of fear itself.

You know how fear can tread close on your heels when you are alone on a dark night? This was something worse than that. Far, far worse—and in full sunlight. I was a mote, a tiny speck of life, the only thing that moved on the face of all that dreadful land—the only human soul in millions of miles of Space.

I felt that I must burrow. I was a frightened shellless creature that must dig itself in somewhere and hide. Agoraphobia they call that—it's so easy to pin a long name on what you have never felt.

There was only one place I could hide. How I forced myself along that journey back to the rocket I don't know. But once I was inside I slammed the port behind me and screwed it shut. I was shaking like a man with a fever. The sweat and tears ran down my face together. I don't understand it. I'm not a lot afraid of death—if I were I'd never have been there. I guess fear's a lot

more frightening than death somehow . . .

By the time night fell I had recovered a bit. Safe in a hiding hole I had been able to calm off gradually. I even made myself eat. But sleep of course was out of the question. I sat there in the silence, straining my ears for some sound to tell me that the creatures from the canal were coming again. I didn't hear it but they came all right . . .

Sitting in Chris' seat I felt the ship begin to roll. I did my best to imitate the movements he had made, but my knowledge of the controls was picked up from watching him and I hadn't his touch. I wasn't clear what I was supposed to be doing and I made a mess of it. Once or twice, by luck, I did something which gave the creature—or creatures—outside reason to pause and I did jerk the ship around a bit. But mostly it was ineffective. And they kept right on moving the ship.

Then, remembering Chris' concern, I got into a panic at the thought of the good fuel I was wasting. It was a choice of evils but at least the thing outside was making pretty slow work of it. I made myself climb over to my berth and kept myself swinging there while the place continued to turn round me in jerks—*thud—thud—thud* . . .

The early light showed me that the night's stint had shifted me a full three hundred yards nearer the canal. Two more nights at

that rate would see the *Uniac* 5 pretty close to the water's edge. The choice was clear enough—either she and I went down into the canal together or I risked trying to take her off. Well, you could scarcely call that a choice—it was just a chance and a poor one, I thought.

It took all my resolution to get me outside again but I did it. And I had the luck to find an outcrop of rock to which I could hitch the raising gear and save myself the labor of driving an anchor. While the engine was bringing her up slowly I studied Chris' tables.

Take-off time there worked out just an hour or so after sunset. That was plain easy figuring—but I wasn't risking it. I put the time forward a couple of hours and worked out the allowances—not such plain figuring but well worth the trouble.

I had my heart in my mouth when I did start. But it turns out there's not a lot to shooting them off—any fool can do it with the tables, especially against Mars-gravity. It's bringing them down that takes skill—and I didn't have any . . .

Well, that's the way Jeremy told it to me. And when he had finished I said, "But these things in the canal—you must have some idea what they were like?"

"No," he said. "I never saw them."

That's just one of the questions

a lot of people have asked him since then.

The prosecution, having obtained a ruling that a ship in Space beyond the limits of Earth's atmosphere should be considered a part of that territory wherein it was registered, has set out to prove that in fact Mars has not been reached. If this can be established, all claims to prizes will, of course, be conveniently invalidated.

For this purpose they have been calling a great deal of expert talent to the witness stand. Men with famous names have stood there to give scientific proof that Jeremy Chambet is lying. They have shown on scientific grounds that Mars cannot have a breathable atmosphere, that the *canali* are not canals, that whatever they are there cannot be any appreciable quantity of water in them.

Also that the chances against any form of life familiar to us—and certainly any intelligence of the human type—having ever developed there are so great as to make the whole idea sheer moonshine, that Jeremy cannot describe his creatures from the canals because there could not be any such. Nor could any form his imagination might create make their existence credible even to his own reason. That, in fact, every word of his story is a fabrication and a fraud.

Bitterest of all, they bring up

against him his own scientifically deduced opinions of the conditions that must logically prevail on Mars written, some of them, years before the *Uniac 5* took off on its long journey.

Maybe the shade of Peter Quorridge is having a quiet laugh some place.

"But you yourself advanced this as scientific finding," they say to Jeremy.

"I know," he admits miserably. "But I was wrong."

"Colleagues of yours have checked the deductions and support them."

"I know," he says again. "But they are wrong."

"You deny the validity of scientific findings then?"

"I . . ." He raises his eyes. He gazes helplessly round the courtroom meeting the looks of men whose scientific integrity he has always revered, men of his own circle. He looks down at the floor. "I don't know—now," he murmurs.

And there he sits, looking a little more shrunken and gray each day as the logic of scientific conclusion piles up against him. A very bewildered man, for how can the findings of science be wrong?

And, you know, when he told his story to me I didn't feel that he was inventing any of it. So I can't believe they'll actually pillory him—at least, I hope not.