

The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

WONDER Stories

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ON THE COVER THIS MONTH

from Clark Ashton Smith's exciting "Master of the Asteroid," we see the curious worshippers on the lonely asteroid paying homage to the imprisoned terrestrial in the space ship. Though the man is helpless and facing certain death, ironically he will be knelt to as a god by these curious beings.

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"The Venus Germ"

by R. F. STARZL

Mr. Starzl returns to our pages with this powerful and gripping story of an interplanetary intrigue, with the fate of worlds as pawns.

Just as today powerful interests use nations as pawns for their lust for power, so in the future their ambitions will extend to a wide sphere. Suppose for example that it were necessary for the life and happiness of all the people of the earth, that a few powerful interests give up their domination of other worlds. Would they be philanthropic and do it; or would there be a merry battle before right and justice had its way?

Mr. Starzl answers in this unusual story of two worlds.

"The Lake of Life"

by ARTHUR G. STANGLAND

One of the unexplored mysteries of the world is central Australia. From what we know of that vast, baking continent, the forces of evolution have played queer tricks, and have produced veritable monsters of animal life.

We must be prepared then to accept what Mr. Stangland tells us in this story, as a real possibility. That forms of life might develop in that untamed desert, different from anything we know, is a possibility. This exciting story shows what might happen when men meet creatures of a bizarre world.

"The Death of Iron"

by S. S. HELD

Slowly we have been watching in this story the decay of a world. Man's civilization, built up painfully over many millennia seems about to vanish. We must expect then that the minds and emotions of men will turn to queer thoughts and queer activities. When men and women are faced by death they no longer operate under the same restraints as when they expect a long life. In this installment we will see further how life slowly ebbs from the 20th century world.

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(Illustration by Paul)

Apprehensively the small-men moved back. The disc flamed in a sudden orange burst. Instantly the whole beam came crashing down.

OUTCASTS FROM MARS

By ARTHUR G. STANGLAND

• **ANTARCTICA!** Vast, rugged, untamed. An eternal wilderness of white, steeped in the long, brooding night of an ageless hinterland. A shunned continent of lonely, jagged crags and illimitable plateaus, swept by screaming blizzards, and wracked by frightful cold.

It is a majestic region of savage element and sparkling merciless ice that has drawn many dauntless men to its weird yet gorgeous realm, and kept some for the price of its primeval, terrible beauty. From lonely peaks wild winds unfurl banners of hard, powdery snow; and down their bristling, iron-clad slopes solid rivers of ice grind slowly but inexorably.

Odd, grotesque shapes bulge up in the gloom from its white seas along rugged granite coasts, and always on the still night air floats the strange music of ceaselessly shifting ice floes. Overhead in a spangled glory of luminosity flame the Magellan Clouds, and lower in the sky gleams the Great Southern Cross, scintillating like an iridescent regal diadem. And over all hangs a bleak, terrifying desolateness from the Bay of Whales in the ice-bound Ross Sea south across the Pole to the Weddell Sea in the east. Such is the land "down under."

One degree from the Pole and fifty miles closer to it than Mt. Olsen on the southern tip of the Queen Maud Range squatted the thick-walled edifice of the Interplanetary Radiophone station. It was almost in the midst of the vast polar plateau that thrusts itself upward 10,000 feet and called by an ancient Viking explorer, Roald Amundsen, King Haakon VII Plateau, after his king.

The windowless grey walls of the structure were lighted brilliantly by floodlights in contrast to the deep gloom of the surrounding Antarctic night, to guide infrequent planes that made the dangerous polar journey from the Horn to Tasmania. Dominating the massive building atop a solid tripod was a large parabolic cage of fine platinum mesh, in the focus of which glowed a helical coil. All through the Antarctic night the radio "eye" was trained on the red disc of Mars, following it around the heavens against the diurnal motion of Earth.

Arching high over the distant northern horizon of the plateau came a purplish-violet haze to fuse with a dull glowing coil on one of the supporting arms of the tripod—a power-beam that stretched over an empire of ice and snow. It went across the Ross Shelf and out over the Southern Ocean to Invercargill on the southernmost point of the South Island of New Zealand. Electrical power hurled through space on a violet beam.

Inside the great temple of communication and working under temperate climatic conditions were a score of men continually on duty in relays. They connected London,

• **Necessity is a great rebel against ethics.** Germany perhaps meant to maintain Belgium's neutrality; but in face of extinction by her enemies she was forced to her action. Japan might want to respect China's independence, but in face of her crowded population she feels that she has no other course than that which she now pursues.

Such grim necessity might possibly operate among inhabitants of a planet like Mars, where conditions of existence would be precarious. Pitiless struggles might take place between factions of the population, and the losers exiled. Suppose that occurred and the exiles were doomed to extinction on earth. Would they submit tamely or would they assert their right to live?

Mr. Stangland answers this question in his exciting intrigue of two worlds.

New York, Melbourne, Peiping and other planetary cities with the ten Martian multiplex radiophone circuits as well as the ship-to-planet voice channels for space liners *en route*. A vast network spread out over the planet with its focus at the nether pole.

Excitement was running high in the "Igloo,"—a name taken from a famous explorer's pet dog. A great passenger liner was lost in space. Switchboards were jammed with frantic calls from all over the world. What news of the *Martian Princess*? Had it been found yet? Many lives lost?

And in the midst of it all developed a shortage of power. Radcliffe, the portly director of the station, stormed by the trunk switchboards in a fury.

"Jones!—Benecke!—and you, Harlan!—tell Capetown, Rio and Launceston we can't take any more personal calls from international cities asking about the *Martian Princess*! It's slowing up your work. Take over personal supervision of all calls coming in from Mt. Wilson and Hamilton and Yerkes—and any other observatories wanting ship-to-planet service. They're cooperating with searching ships. But for Heaven's sake, ignore those other confounded calls cluttering up the panels! We've got a power shortage somewhere and if the searching ships go any farther from Earth—they're getting fainter all the time—we won't be able to reach them!"

He hustled back to his office where a young man waited before a chart spread out over a desk.

"All right, Rosson, go on again—what did you say you think is the trouble?" he prompted, breathing audibly from his hurried sortie.

Rosson, a slender, wiry man, extended a brown hand, pointing his forefinger to the map where a red band drawn straight from a point on the 140th meridian near the Pole to Invercargill crossed a region called the "Devil's Ballroom."

"George and I took a modified Murray-Loop test on the powerbeam," he spoke rapidly, "and that's where the leak apparently is—only one hundred and fifty miles away. Probably near Mt. Helland Hansen where the first of the insulators is located as she starts to jump the Queen Maud Range."

"I see," answered the rotund Radcliffe slowly, leaning over the chart from his chair, and inspecting the culpable region minutely. "Maybe grounding to the magnetic ores along in there some place—a strongly magnetic locality."

"That's what we suspect, Clif," returned the electrical engineer, "so George and I are going to hop over there with a couple of buffers and 'scopes, and locate the trouble. If it's a new insulator we need, we'll give you a call, and you can send the crew."

Radcliffe looked up and gazed into the other's intense brown eyes with a serious wag of his grey head.

"I don't like this business of you two going out alone, Rosson," he protested, "a blizzard might blow up while you're out there. Dangerous, you know! If it weren't so imperative just now, I wouldn't countenance it."

"We'll be all right, Clif," the younger man humored him, "if a blizzard does blow up we'll ride it out in the plane."

"Yes, I know you youngsters—always confident," mused Radcliffe. Then he got up, raising his voice: "Anyway, for God's sake call us if anything should happen!"

● In the base of the massive building a large door slid back and into the glare of the floodlights taxied a gleaming plane, quite large and yet sleek enough to spear the air at 400 miles an hour.

"Everything ready, George?" asked Rosson, turning from his controls to glance at George Danville his good-natured, freckle-faced assistant at the station.

"Ready!" Danville returned quickly, pulling on thick furry gloves and making sure navigation instruments were fast beside him.

Rapidly they rose on whirring blades that clipped the frigid atmosphere smartly. At a 300-foot elevation above the violet beam Rosson turned on the great four-bladed propellers that were soon hurling the ship ahead at its speed limit. Silently, the two men watched the faintly luminous path below them as mile after mile ticked off on the panel log. Overhead danced a weird, folded curtain of light shimmering uncertainly with sudden opalescent dashes of color. Aurora halos. And through the witchery of the polar night hurtled the plane, passing with but a faint hiss through the dead, crystallizing atmosphere. Rosson squinted hard through a side window at a line of mountains some thirty miles distant to the east and outlined in fantastic colors against the blue-black horizon from the pulsing electrical "rainbow" overhead.

"That's Mt. Ronne over there—a little over halfway," he observed. Not long afterwards, he spoke again. "Mt. Hjelmar Johansen and Mt. Beck on our east there. The

Range is drawing closer to us. Won't be long before we're entering the 'Devil's Ballroom.'"

"What a sinister name for such a place!" muttered George deep in his furs.

"And what a perfect hell of a region in a blizzard!" returned Rosson, snapping on landing lights, that sparkled on the snow field below as if on an expanse of flashing diamonds. He cut his motors, and gently turned over faintly throbbing helicopters, letting the ship down as lightly as a vagrant snow flake. "Think we'll take a test here, Danville, and see if we can detect any dielectric leakage."

Together they brought out a large heavy instrument much like an electrostatic with a fine mesh screen spread fanwise on top and mounted on a light sled. Some distance from the plane and almost under the power-beam they stopped. Taking a long rod connected by wire to the instrument, Rosson drove it down far into the snow.

"Hardly think we'll get anything here with the dielectroscope, but we might as well make sure," he said, setting a lever with his thick, gloved hands and watching the delicately balanced needle of the dial. Nothing happened.

"Didn't think we'd find any leakage here," murmured Danville, rising from a stooped position.

"Well, we're satisfied there's not the slightest drop here," concluded Rosson, getting up and leaving their trail light on the snow. "Disconnect the ground rod while I get the Murray-Loop. We'll work from here on."

When Rosson came back from the plane he was pulling a duralumin sled upon which rested a compact mechanism. From the center of it rose a shiny rod ten feet high and topped by a gleaming ball electrode.

"Crank her while I adjust the grounding wire and take readings."

"You know, Ross, I never did like this damned machine," muttered Danville, looking askance at the instrument, "you're sure the blessed thing is safe?"

"Sure, go ahead. With a perfectly conductor like that above us you don't have to be scared."

"Well, as long as it doesn't use my head for a ground—" Danville left the sentence unfinished.

"George," said Rosson aside, as the recording dials swung free with Danville's efforts at the generator, "I sometimes think your head would make an excellent conductor!"

Before Danville could return an acrid retort, Rosson flipped a switch. Immediately, from thousands of feet overhead a tiny invisible stream of energy spouted from the big surging beam, and flashed groundward momentarily to dance in a crackling display on the surface of the bright electrode. Rosson worked furiously, jotting down figures from several dials, while Danville turned the high-gear generator swiftly. Weird blue light sputtered above the engineers. Like strange gods from Olympus they looked, tampering with Thor's hammer.

"Good work!" announced Rosson, cutting the generator. "All through."

● Instantly, the thin stream of electrical power dancing over the electrode vanished in the air, and the great beam above hummed on softly as before.

"Now let's get this stuff back to the plane where we can figure in comfort." Together they towed the cumbersome machinery back to the big plane.

After several minutes of computation they checked ex-

actly upon comparison of data and figures. "So, we're still twenty miles from the leak," observed Rosson, regarding the answer, and putting on his thick gloves again. He started the electric motors and lifted the ship neatly. "Exactly where does that put us on the map, Danville?"

"Just about in the middle of the Devil's Ballroom," returned the other, examining a chart.

"That's not far from Mt. Helland Hansen—just as we figured it out at the Igloo. Checks pretty good, doesn't it?"

But Danville didn't answer. He had flashed on a panel light, and was looking closely at an open face dial. "Say! First time I knew the barometer was dropping! Doesn't look healthy to me, Ross."

Rosson frowned slightly. "Dropping, eh?" He looked in the southwest. In the dim polar light he made out a dark line of clouds rolling over the peaks of the Queen Alexandra Mountains. A blizzard blowing up! They would have to work fast to get their work done before it came. To their right miles away loomed the chill, lonely crests of the Queen Maud Range heavily blanketed with snow, like gloomy hunchbacked men.

Twenty miles, and time to land. Deftly, Rosson brought the plane down in the Devil's Ballroom through which the first of intrepid aerial explorers, Admiral Byrd, had roared on his way to the Pole after fighting his way up the Axel Heiberg Glacier a hundred miles beyond. Again they get out the di-electroscope and set it up in the snow. Queer, bulbous hummocks of drifted snow loomed up around them. Unreal, eerie shapes that took on an unearthly illusion of the fantastic in the uncertain half-twilight. Already a bitter cutting wind was blowing from out of the south-west, forming zastrugi in the snow, and sweeping the crystalline dust before it like sparkling rhinestones in the men's flood-lamps.

"That's funny—doesn't kick over at all!" muttered Rosson deep in his hood. He looked high over his head. The power-beam still glowed there dully on its straight course. He gazed, perplexed, at the delicate needle again. "This is the exact spot we calculated."

"Perhaps the leak has stopped," offered Danville in explanation.

"We'll soon find out!" exclaimed Rosson hurrying for the plane. He came back dragging the detector. Quickly, they had the generator spinning rapidly enough to draw a sputtering stream of energy from out of the sky.

In a moment they had gathered their necessary data, and started to mush back to the plane. Inside, Rosson figured intensely for a moment. He looked up in sudden surprise. "We're on the exact spot. Danville, what do you make of it? The 'scope is all right—I tested it in the ship."

"Rather a strange thing when one instrument says there's a leak, and the other says no. One of 'em must be lying," returned the freckle-faced assistant. He looked out from a southwest window of the cabin. "This is getting worse, Rosson. If it wasn't for devils out in space

on that liner, I'd say let's go home! Looks like a bad blow coming our way. But we've got to find that leak."

"That's a certainty. And here's what we'll do: I'll leave the ship headed in the wind with a searchlight on our back path, and then we'll start testing from here right on up to the Mt. Helland Hansen insulator. We can take turns at towing the 'scope and reading." Rosson, quick to put any plan into action once decided upon, turned the plane nose to in the rising gale.

CHAPTER II

Men of Mars

• Quickly, they brought out the di-electroscope on its little sled again, and gauging their direction by the beam overhead, mushed on through the icy blast, stopping every hundred feet to shove the ground rod into the snow and take a reading. Around them the rising wind howled like a potentous voice of the Antarctic spirit. Rosson cursed it, recalling with an unpleasant shudder the eerie death howl of a wolf he had once heard. The sky had clouded over and snow began falling like fine diamond dust, cutting at exposed portions of the face.

"I was hoping we were wrong in our calculations, George, and that we'd find something up along here," announced Rosson at last. "I can't understand it at all."

"We'd better get back to the ship and ride out this blizzard, before it's too late," warned Danville. "We can't reach that insulator now. My feet and hands are ready to snap off like icicles."

"Yes, so are mine. These storms blow up suddenly and just as suddenly die away. We'll go back to the ship and call Cliff for a check on the power-beam again. Maybe we're off a little." They turned around, and headed into the icy blast, wiping their glasses frequently so that they could follow the searchlight on their plane now becoming dim in the tremendous downfall of snow. By now the gale had increased to an alarming intensity. The snow-laden wind, coming down off the polar plateau like a racing river of crystals, bore down upon them mercilessly, to go howling through the bottle-necked Devil's Ballroom and on to the Axel Heiberg Glacier like rampant legions of bedlamites.

"We let it go a little too long I'm afraid!" Rosson yelled in Danville's ear, as they struggled desperately against the bitter gale.

"It's beginning to look that way!" the other returned in a concerned voice, nodding his hooded head.

It was just as they were nearing the plane that it happened. Tremendous gusts of wind began coming full in their faces, and when they dropped the tow line on their sled to mush frantically on to the plane, a particularly vicious blast lifted the ship up at a grotesque angle on her tail runner. The powerful searchlight swung around, stabbing the night sky in a single flash like an air beacon. One instant it was there. And then the plane flopped on



ARTHUR G. STANGLAND

her back in a welter of white dust, the light blinking out suddenly. Both men ran to the stricken monster of the polar skies, cursing roundly. Rosson poked a light inside, looking over the interior. He came out in profane disgust.

"A fine fix we're in now! The power batteries were jerked loose in the fall and the damned acid is eating up everything inside—including our food rations."

"And we can't even call Radcliffe now!" added Danville glumly.

In the lee of the plane Rosson played his light out in the snow crystals skimming by in white streaks. "And with nothing to eat we won't last long in this storm. I'm plenty cold and hungry now."

"About all we can do is wait here till the storm is over," suggested Danville.

"What a couple of fools we were to go so far away," lamented Rosson, swinging his arms to warm himself. After several moments of listening to the furious night, he spoke. "I don't think we'd better trust ourselves here—might go to sleep, George. Let's head for those mountains we saw when we landed. We might possibly find some shelter from this damnable wind in a little protected ravine."

"It must be nearly 50 below, Ross!" protested Danville, "think we can make it in this wind?"

"Say, inside of a half hour we'll be 'stiffs,' if we stay around here—too much temptation to sit down! Let's get moving!"

And though the assistant grumbled at the idea some more, the two men set out by compass for the mountains in the east. The wind coming from their right tore at them hungrily with icy fingers. And just as grimly fighting off the needle sharp blast, they mushed on over the uneven zastrugi in the snow, occasionally throwing their searchlight beam before them. Rosson had confidence that they could reach the protection of the mountains, but it was not until Danville began to have a fit of coughing that he sensed a sinister presence. The howling of the wind might have been the echo of a wolf.

"What's the matter!" yelled Rosson above the storm. Could it be that he was—? "Hold up your head here, and let me look at you!"

He flashed the light in the assistant's face, pulling his furred half mask down. Blood was on his lips. "Frozen lungs!"

For a moment Rosson was stunned. How long could the man last in this frigid blast with bitten lungs? There was nothing to do but carry on—get out of this freezing hell, rightly named the Devil's Ballroom!

"Think—think I can make it?" gasped Danville between spasms.

"You bet you will!" exclaimed Rosson determinedly, as if to match the derisive whine of the polar night. And he put an arm under the assistant's shoulder to help him along. Together they started on again, blundering over the hummocks, sometimes stumbling to their knees, only to rise grimly and fight on.

Suddenly, in the gloom ahead of him Rosson made out a dancing pinpoint of light, white light that barely shone through the storm. As he became conscious of its jogging gyrations against the velvet darkness at the base of the mountains, an uncanny sensation passed over him.

Was he beginning to see "spots"? But they only appear to men going snowblind in the continual glare of the sun on vast fields of ice and snow? This was different. There could be no doubt of it now; the light was growing stronger as it approached them. Perhaps someone from a plane. It meant something warm to drink; maybe, even food! They were saved!

"Someone's coming!" he blurted to the nearly exhausted Danville. He swung their lamp up and down as a signal.

"Yeah?" And in the next moment, the weakened man collapsed sagging to the frozen ground.

● The light was almost upon them now. Rosson waited, kneeling before Danville to protect him from the swift fury of the blizzard, and setting their lamp down beside him to guide the unknown rescuers. But he was not prepared for the surprise that came when the ~~big-electric~~ sled approached them down a small slope. It stopped nearby. A small figure hopped out of a steel door in front. Another followed. The bright beam of a flashlight stabbed through the night to pick out the indistinct forms of the men on the snow.

"Aksa!" It was a strange deep voice, unlike an Earthman's.

Rosson got up from the snow. "Help him, will you? I'm all right." He indicated the prone figure of his assistant on the ground.

In the glow of his own light as he picked it up, Rosson caught his first glimpse of their rescuers. Good Lord! The low caste Martian "small-men" he had heard about! Immigrants that high caste Martians, the Mogals, had forced the Terrestrial Government to exile on inhospitable Antarctica. Wondering, he helped the little men carry Danville's heavy body into the warm interior of the sled. Inside, they slipped back their hoods, as they started to work over the exhausted man, and he got a better look at them. Nothing grotesque looking about them, contrary to what the Imperial Martian Government had intimated. In fact, he decided, they were very human looking, being only smaller than the ordinary person. The sympathetic concerned look on their smooth oval faces as they helped Danville, won a friendly answering feeling from him.

"What happen?" asked one, called "Aksa" by the other Mars-man.

"Our plane turned over," Rosson explained, "and we had to keep moving, so we just struck out for these mountains beyond us."

Aksa pointed down at the prostrate engineer. "He veree sick Earthman! Froz' lungs. We take you our colony now—food, rest, warmth!" And the Mars-man smiled appreciatively, as Rosson's eyes lighted up at the mention of food.

"How far away?" asked Rosson.

"Over big mountain you call 'Helland Hansen.' Better rest now—furs keep warm," the small-man returned, suggesting he lie down to sleep. Aksa turned to the steering controls of the motor sled, and soon they were rolling rapidly along over the white field of sparkling crystals.

But Rosson didn't lie down. The journey ahead was too interesting. Through the thick windshield in front he watched the swirling flakes in the brilliant beams of the headlight, and felt a tremendous satisfaction being inside out of the hellish polar fury. Soon they were entering the foothills surrounding Helland Hansen, round topped fluffy

masses of snow that they skirted, ever ascending. In and around wind-swept black rocks the sled crawled, feeling its way along the tortuous path. Up on the side of the mountain the caterpillar tread clung desperately to narrow icy stretches of the trail.

Rosson, grim of face, stared ahead in a tense silence, listening to the storm. Lonely stark ledges and perilous slopes, falling away into deep gloom below. Savage gusts of crystalline choked wind, and frightful weird noises from the blast charging down upon the rugged peaks. More than ever he was sensing the real menace of the Antarctic—the still untamed. Never before had he been caught out in a polar blizzard such as this.

Ahead of them the trail straightened out suddenly in a lull of the storm, and Rosson could see they were at the summit of their trail—a narrow pass between two towering peaks lost in swirling clouds of snow. On the other side they jolted and bumped along over a rough ledge. Somehow, before he noticed the change, they were riding down a big glacier. Thick jagged chunks of ice loomed up around them, and in between yawned cavernous crevasses. Rosson wondered at the genius of the Mars-men in picking their path through such a dangerous field of pitfalls. Apparently, after awhile, the glacier lost itself in a broad expanse of snow, lying between surrounding mountains. It was then that he got his first glimpse of the colony lights in the white fog-like air ahead.

"Is this your colony?" he asked Aksa at last.

"Yesss," came the sibilant answer, "we call—Lonar."

Rosson looked critically at one of the outlying buildings as they approached the settlement. So, this was a little of transplanted Mars—octagonal structures of metal, with rounded roof, repulsing stubbornly the vicious onslaught of the pitiless Antarctic. The electric sled stopped before a large imposing structure seemingly in the center of the colony. A shrill blast from a klaxon siren on the sled rent the furious night. A moment only, and then the blank space in the wall before them slid back out of sight, revealing a bright interior into which the sled eased silently. Several small-men appeared from nowhere. The door closed behind the sled and when Rosson looked out he saw several more electric sleds parked away to the side. Their garage, probably.

By this time Danville had aroused from his deep sleep at the sound of the shrill blast. He looked up at the engineer as Rosson helped the Martians carry him out of the low entrance to the sled.

"Where are we, Rosson?" he asked in a faint voice, staring nonplussed at the little men holding him.

"We're all right now, George," answered Rosson reassuringly, "these Martians came along just in time to pick us up!"

"Small-men?" But Danville was too weak to inquire further.

"You rest now; stay quiet," Aksa admonished him, "vereer sick Earthman!"

• The other Martians stared curiously at the terrestrials, and then put the ice-crusted sled in a corner. Danville was taken into a warm comfortable room, and laid on a bed covered with thick fine furs. Wonderingly, Rosson watched Martians slip in and out of the room quietly in obedience to Aksa's orders, bringing in smoking liquids and silver-white containers of strange smelling foods.

Deftly, yet gently, the diminutive Martian administered healing, soothing compounds to the frozen lungs of the half-conscious Danville, compounds that boiled and gave off medicinal gases. The fear in Rosson lessened as he recognized the skilled physician in Aksa. Danville was in good care.

Suddenly it struck him that it was time he reported in to Radcliffe. Probably worrying about them by now. Quietly he questioned the small-man. "Aksa, you have a radiophone here somewhere?"

The Martian nodded. "You go with Rokol, he show you," indicating the second Martian that had been with him.

Rosson followed the small-man out of the room and down a short corridor. It was just as he was passing a closed door leading into the center of the large building that Rosson hesitated in his stride at the sound of a deep buzzing beyond the door. He stopped to listen. The unmistakable hum of a power-beam transformer! Strange. He hadn't thought to ask where they got their power. But a power-beam? He opened the door to look in. Massed in the center of the room, were the familiar three transformers and on a platform above them the intricate mechanism for generating out the three waves of the beam carrying the electrical power. Radio power! Where did they get it?

"You go there not—dangerous!" commanded Rokol, coming back to him, and scowling slightly.

"Oh, that's not dangerous to me—I handle that stuff all the time down at the transmitter! I'm an engineer." And Rosson started into the room, followed by the protesting Martian.

With a professional eye the engineer examined the shining glass enclosed transformers, and traced the wiring from the center of the ceiling where the power wires entered down through the bank of big tubes and transformers. At the control panel he glanced casually over the dials. Rokol was watching him intently from a distance, answering his questions curtly.

"First time I knew there was another power-beam entering Antarctica. Where do you get it—South America?"

"Uh—yesss."

Rosson whirled suddenly. "You're lying, Rokol! You know as well as I do that you're stealing this power from my company's beam crossing Mt. Helland Hansen above you! Your kilowatt meter gives you away. We've been tracing a leakage of 50 kilowatts in our powerbeam near here—that's just what you're recording on the panel now! No wonder we couldn't detect it with our dielectroscope—it wasn't going to ground at all!"

The little Martian became greatly agitated, his thin lips compressed into the slender line of a pallid scar.

"Inquisitive fool!" he cried angrily. Stepping to the door, he called someone in his native tongue. Running feet pattered on the outside. More followed. A sizable crowd were soon gathered behind Rokol at the door. Aksa came in more leisurely, pushing his way through the men.

"What wrong?" he questioned his companion.

"This Earthman from transmitter near Pole!"

Rosson gazed back at them belligerently. "I'm demanding that you stop this power plant—stop robbing us of vital energy!"

Aksa was silent for a moment, a quizzical expression on his face. "If we do, we all die. This our only source

of heat. Your government put us here; promise heat and power from black rock you call coal. Coal in mines all gone—government men advised by our Martian enemies, Mogals, to exile us here. Mogals knew coal would disappear. You would kill us all?" There was no anger in his voice. Merely a calm dispassionate mien.

Mogals. Rosson knew them. The ruling caste on Mars. They were all over the Earth. Did they really lie to the terrestrial government and influence it to assign these people to the polar continent because they were ancient enemies on Mars? Plausible, but he thought of the big space liner with frantic passengers on board.

"I can't help it, Aksa, we've got some chance down here on my planet, but out there in space the *Martian Princess* is depending on our station to get messages through to save her from the sun, and you're endangering it."

A murmuring went through the crowd. Aksa came forward.

"Rosson, your friend—Danville, he die with us too," he said quietly, reminding him of the debt they owed for saving their lives.

Suddenly, Rokol spoke sharply to Aksa in Martian. Reluctantly, he turned from Rosson and went back to the others. A loud unintelligible argument ensued, with Rokol apparently against Aksa. Rosson eyed the Martians at a distance. He didn't like the tone of the voices. There was going to be a fight on his hands he felt sure. Rokol was a bit harder than Aksa, and seemed to be leading the others against the latter. Suddenly, he thought of a plan to avert the impending trouble.

"Rokol, will you cut off the transformers until this search in space is over. I'm willing to stay here with you and help you devise some other way to heat the colony temporarily, and then I'll do what I can to get the Director of the transmitter to present your plight to the terrestrial government. But right now we've got to have this power you're using!"

CHAPTER III

The Invasion

• The group of Martians quieted down, looking to Rokol as their spokesman. Aksa started to say something in approval, but was silenced by the others. Rokol's little eyes shone with a new hard gleam as he turned to answer the Earthman.

"No, Rosson," he began in his characteristic deep voice, "this one great chance for revenge on Mogals. Now we force them give us new home on Earth!"

"What are you going to do?" The Earthman was perturbed by this unexpected turn.

"We go immediately South Pole transmitter—take possession, stop communication. Maybe then Mogals tell government give us new place!" Rokol's smile was triumphant.

Rosson stared back in amazement. In this day and age they would use violence to attain their ends! Endangering the lives of innocent Martian people millions of miles out in space away from help. It was unthinkable! And yet he felt a certain pity for these small-men, that self-preservation in such a frightful land should drive them to taking advantage of the present emergency. Yet all of them did not approve such extreme measures. But Rokol

led the military faction in the colony and consequently overrode any opposition to measures proposed by his wing.

"You witless little fools!" he burst out, "that barbaric act will bring a thousand planes of the international police down here on your heads!"

"Maybe. But not soon enough—we control delicate situation. We force terrestrial government listen!"

There was no turning him aside from his plans. Rosson stood silent for a moment. If only he could get near a radio to warn Radcliffe! Rokol was already giving orders to his followers, who immediately departed from the room on their secret missions. Perhaps if he bolted through the door into the next room which he had learned was the radiophone station he would have time enough to warn the men.

"And you, Rosson, we hold hostage," announced Rokol as he turned from his men. Aksa had gone, declaring he would be no part of the scheme.

"Yeah?" returned Rosson negligently, covertly watching the door. Only a few men left now. A foolhardy thing to try. They would get him soon, but if he could only reach—

With a mighty leap he cleared the short distance to the small-men at the door, thrusting them in all directions with his arms. Five of them, and he handled them easily. The suddenness of his attack had taken them unawares. Now for the door. A quick jiggle of the latch—at least it wasn't locked! With a desperate shove he pushed the door in, taking in the room at a glance. Empty. And the radio instruments were close at hand. Hurriedly, he locked the door—the Martian small-men close behind. Nervously he fumbled over the connections of the voice panel.

Then a cold chill chased up his back, as he stood there. The men probably wouldn't answer his call because of Radcliffe's orders! And it would have to go through the switchboard. A heavy pounding started at the door. Hastily, he set the dial combination for the polar station, and pressed the buzzer for the call. The loud crashes against the door reverberated in the room. Tensely, he waited with the phone to his ear. He was beginning to despair of an answering call, expecting the door to break in at any moment. Something broke with a snap! A hinge, probably. Against the din of the hullabaloo sounded the voice of Rokol exhorting his men to—

"Hello, Interplanetary Station, Burns speaking."

Electrified by the answering voice of the operator, Rosson immediately poured forth his warning.

"Burns—this is Rosson talking! I'm a prisoner of the small-men; they're breaking in on me now. There's going to be a raid on the Igloo—they're the ones taking all the—"

The door gave in under the thunderous blow. Rosson turned in time to see Rokol hurling a tiny sphere of glass. It shattered on the desk before him, expanding in a great puff of white gas. Ill-smelling stuff. God, it burned! Things were turning around and around. The phone clattered to the floor, and he swooned, his last conscious sensation being of the oncoming little feet of the invaders.

• A wild whistling of wind reached Rosson as he opened his eyes. Something familiar about it struck him. Propellers—four-bladed ones, were making the sound. He

sat up, breathing deeply of the air. His lungs felt constricted with pain. Knockout gas, evidently, paralyzing the victim temporarily. A small-man at the forward end of the compartment turned in time to see him rising.

"Earthman awake!" he barked out to someone.

Rosson looked out from a back window of the cabin. They were in the air, heading into the teeth of the blizzard. The air-stream was filled with snow, and the flashing propellers were biting into the charged atmosphere greedily. He must have been out for some little time. Rokol came toward him from the front.

"Sorry, Rosson," commented the Martian, making a deprecating gesture. "You act very quick."

"Yeah, but not quick enough!" the other answered, gazing down at the diminutive small-man speculatively. ~~Rokol must have read some suddenly forming plans in the engineer's eyes.~~ "Act not quickly now," he admonished, bringing to light a little gun, "very dangerous."

Rosson relaxed, sitting down on his couch. From behind a partition he heard the voices of other small-men. He cast an inquiring look at the Martian. "We're on our way to the station now?"

"Yesss—fifty armed small-men and three planes."

Rosson glanced out of the window toward the ground. A short distance below them was the soft dull radiance of the power-beam glowing dimly in the saturated air. No chance of them getting lost in this blinding blizzard. The tremendous air thrust of the powerful blades seemed more than a match for the tornado of wind. Like a counter blast they were tearing through the upper levels down toward the Pole. The Martians apparently were confident or else fearless.

"And what are you going to do when you get there?" the engineer asked.

"Stop all communication. Then we call Geneva, and make demands. They must accede!"

It was useless now to swerve them aside from their goal, being thus far launched upon their scheme.

"When will we be there?" asked Rosson.

"Very soon. These planes very swifter than yours," Rokol answered, permitting himself a little gentle boasting, even if ungrammatically.

The sharp voices of the Martian pilots up ahead caught Rokol's ear. He turned on Rosson swiftly. "You stay here—make no trouble, else . . . ?" and he looked significantly along his weapon. Quickly, he made his way forward.

Rosson turned to the window, and looked into the darkness. They were beginning now to deviate from the path of the beam, and veer off to the left of it. He saw two more planes immediately behind them, maneuvering in the same manner. And now he saw it, a ~~series~~ of brilliant light on the vast plain below in the ~~south~~ the transmitter! Above it loomed the huge parabolic projector, the hub of inter-world communication.

Adroitly, the three planes wheeled off at a tangent to come into the wind upon landing. A clumping of many feet sounded close to him, and the door opened in the wall of the corridor. Out they came, small-men, heavily furred and carrying small arms for the quick sortie upon the station. Apprehensively, Rosson gazed out of the window toward the station as they crowded forward, and then smiled, reassured at something in the snow-filled world outside. Radcliffe was prepared.

Rokol was coming back along the corridor, giving orders

to the men in Martian: "Assemble outside in front of the planes!" Then he confronted the Earthman.

"And you go with me," he commanded much like a child with a toy gun. It suddenly struck Rosson as highly comical being ordered around by a dwarf, and perhaps something else prompted him to laughter also, something invisible yet as impenetrable as the solid core of a planet. Already the men were muttering when Rosson stepped from the ship, followed by the diminutive Rokol.

He took a quick glance at the imposing edifice. A peculiar, mystifying phenomenon was happening right in front of their eyes. No snow was falling or drifting around the building, and yet it was whirling away at a tangent in white sheets, as if from the surface of a revolving hemisphere, covering the entire station. And yet for a distance of a hundred feet around it all was as calm as if on a still night. No wind stirred the dry crystalline surface and no snow sifted down. A crystal dome encasing the entire station including the big radio eye high over head would have had the same effect. After a puzzled examination at close quarters, and finding he could not approach any farther, Rokol came back to Rosson.

"What?" he asked naively.

"Something you'll never get through. It's a dyonic screen, electrically-dynamic. Keeps out Antarctic storms."

"You say much but think little," the small-man returned curtly. "Sometimes spoken word open locked door." A cryptic smile crossed his cherubic face, and he turned to several of his men motioning them to follow him. They took Rosson with them to the big plane.

The engineer watched Rokol at the radio panel, adjusting the transmitter for voice channel and vision. A vague misgiving disturbed Rosson, as he wondered at the confident, self-assured smile on the Martian's face. What did he mean? A familiar face appeared on the visual screen.

"Earthman," spoke Rokol blandly, "I want Director Radcliffe."

Rosson immediately recognized the white, excited face of Johnson who disappeared from view without a word. A moment later Radcliffe's fat, round countenance came on the mirror.

"Who are you, and what's the meaning of taking my chief engineer and his assistant prisoners?" growled the big Director.

"You talk with Rokol from Lonar. Unfortunate we do this, but demand you withdraw dyonic screen."

"No, I won't, and I'm warning you right now that a detachment of international police planes are on the way from Melbourne. Why, such an outrage as this has never been heard of before!"

"Small-men have no quarrel with Earthmen," explained Rokol, "only with Mogals. Sorry must involve Station, but method of gaining small-men rights inevitable."

At an order from the leader, several small-men brought out a stubby looking weapon of short tubes fastened around the outside of a thick cylinder. Rosson noticed a smaller flat cylinder at the breech of the machine. At a signal one of the men twirled the little drum, and it started backward again with a clicking sound. Swiftly, one after another the little tubes spouted a stream of fire, a torrential display of brilliant protonic spheres. Harmlessly, the vortices of blazing light struck the whirling dyonic screen, and shot out at a tangent in bright streaks

like sparks from a grind stone. The men outside in the snow looked back into the plane helplessly at Rokol.

"You see, it's impossible to blast your way in here!" exclaimed Radcliffe from the screen.

Rokol turned a triumphant smile on the Director. "Yesss, I witness first failure. But locked door will open now." And the little Martian drew Rosson to the mirror. "Your hostage!"

"Rosson!" blurted Radcliffe, starting in surprise, "what's behind all this?"

Rokol stood to one side, looking up at Rosson from his little height, and apparently enjoying the Earthmen's conversation immensely.

"For the sake of all those innocent lives on the *Martian Princess*, Clif, don't let these small-men inside, no matter what develops!" Rosson burst out, grabbing the sides of the circular screen. "They want to hold up communication, and then deal with Geneva about a new region to live in. It's a terrible situation to take advantage of, but that's what they're doing!"

Rokol stepped up to the screen again. "Deadly cold out here, Director Radcliffe," he began, "and bare human flesh shrivel. You open or Rosson go naked in blizzard!"

"But—" Radcliffe stammered aghast, and then stopped. The Martian had played his hand carefully. The Director's face paled as the real import of the ultimatum struck home. Hundreds of lives in space depending on his efficiency, and down here Rosson's very life in his hands. In either direction he stepped, death was almost certain to dog his footsteps.

"Don't give in, Clif, no matter what happens to me!" Rosson cried out sharply, even though his own face blanched. "Think of all those women, and children too, out there depending on you. One life is nothing compared to all of them!"

"Good God, Rosson, why should I be made to sacrifice even one valuable human life to save those hundreds in space?" implored Radcliffe in a shaking voice. "Isn't there some other way out of this?"

"Damn it, man, you won't weaken!" And Rosson smashed his fist into the mirror, shattering it completely, before the others around him could stop the act.

Several of the Martians seized his arms roughly, and started to drag him outside. "Yes, better hurry or be caught red-handed by the detachment when they arrive!" he exclaimed ironically, sneering at the angered Rokol.

The expression on the little Martian's face suddenly changed. He came forward at a hurried waddle. "Wait!" he cried out. The men stopped in surprise, looking at the commander for an explanation. He poured forth a torrent of Martian words none of which Rosson understood. One of the men, apparently a lieutenant of Rokol's, set out in the blizzard to the waiting small-men. Wonderingly, Rosson saw them going back to their planes and the contingent from his plane mushing through the snow toward the door. "We have other use for you!" Rokol answered the questioning look in his eyes.

As soon as the men had entered the ship the door was shut tight, and Rosson, taken back to his own section, saw no more of what was happening. But his acute ear heard the labored attempt of starting motors out on the wings, twisting loose from oil-congealed bearings, the quick, crisp orders of Rokol spoken into the squadron phone. What did the little Martian have in mind?

Rosson had a feeling that Rokol was not balked yet.

That calculating glint that came into his eyes when Rosson mentioned the coming police held something that was ominous. The captive engineer felt the plane rise strongly into the raging blast of the night, tilt slightly as the horizontal screws took up the easy task of biting into a tail wind, and then accelerate rapidly to a terrific speed. No one came near him during the short duration of the flight. A strange, portentous silence was kept throughout the whole ship once the return flight was begun, as if all aboard anticipated in tense nervousness some dreadful event.

A short time in the air, and then the wind took up its shrill screaming again through landing gear and exposed struts. The ship wheeled into the face of the blizzard, its helicopters roaring in the air wash of the forward blades straining to keep even with the gale. They were descending slowly, carefully, and Rosson could only marvel at the expert handling of the plane, as the pilot kept an even rudder, tipping the wings but little in a dangerous descent. Footsteps sounded along the corridor. It was Rokol.

"Come," he ordered, and he stepped back to let Rosson precede him down the corridor. In the forward compartment of the plane he pointed out of a side window. "We now on top Mt. Helland Hansen near big insulator," he explained, looking up at the engineer. "How high power-beam over mountain here?"

CHAPTER IV

Playing With Lightning

• Mystified by the little Martian, Rosson answered: "About a thousand feet over the insulator. Why?"

"Find out soon!" At this moment the plane contacted ground, and Rosson could see in the brilliant glare of the landing floodlights that the wind although decreasing in strength, was whipping the dry snow up in clouds and whirling it off into space over the side of the mountain. The armed men from the rear compartment came forward at a command from Rokol, and filed out of the ship into the bitter night, bending to the wind. Rosson and his captor followed.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the engineer, conscious of the small-man's weapon directed at him.

"Nothing. You never questions." Rokol looked off at the insulator a bit higher up a slope near the tip of the peak, almost a thousand feet away. "What disc on pyramid insulator for?" he asked, indicating the disc fully ten feet wide that spread out above the insulator on a ring of thick bolts.

"That's connected to the primary elements of the demagnetizer below," Rosson explained caustically, "you're an engineer—you ought to know that!"

"And if element broken, then beam come down?" Rokol quizzed.

In a sudden flash Rosson divined the small-man's motive. "You fool, if you tamper with that insulator, you'll have all this magnetic ore around here drawing that beam down on your heads. Thousands of kilowatts!"

"Oh, different ways of doing that!" exclaimed Rokol, taking a powerful-looking gun from a man at his side. He glanced up into the snow-filled atmosphere. Rosson

followed his gaze, and with an unpleasant thrill saw the beam vibrating dimly up there in the storm. A vast stream of power surging in mid-space. And Rokol was going to accomplish his fiendish scheme of holding up communication by grounding it down here! There was a bright stab of light against the night sky, and Rosson jerked his head down in time to see the top of the insulator outlined in brilliant flashes of purple.

Horrified, he shot a quick glance upward again. It was still there—but for how long? A sudden tension in the atmosphere sent frightful, uncontrollable shivers over Rosson. Terrific lines of force were up there tightening in a fierce struggle to bridge empty space. A sinister battle in the invisible world of ether, wholly unaffected by snow and wind. Pulling, pulling inexorably groundward. ~~An oppressive, maddening hum filled his ears. The dielectric was breaking down!~~ At any instant now it would happen. Instinctively, Rosson flinched.

Suddenly, a luminous stream of energy detached itself from the beam, and started to pour earthward. It struck the disc of the demagnetizer, and wavered in air like a slender nimbus. Then it grew and strengthened rapidly. The top of the insulator glowed brightly as the electrical cataract fused it. There was a loud snap.

Apprehensively, the small-men began to move back from the bright display. The disc flamed in a sudden orange-burst, and then flowed to the ground over the porcelain pyramid. Instantly, the whole beam came crashing down in one continuous, blinding bolt of man-made lightning accompanied by a tremendous thunder clap. A river of liquid fire pouring out of the bottom of the skies.

Violently, a crooked web flashed out from the main stream to ground, sputtering over the snow, and throwing it up in little puffs and melting the ice below it. Then the rest of the beam followed the jagged feeler, blasting the snow off the rocks in sudden explosive clouds. It was beginning to follow the veins of magnetic ore. The bluish light reflected weirdly on the surrounding peaks.

Helplessly, Rosson looked on. The deed was done. Now, hundreds of lives would probably be snuffed out in space. And then the engineer stumbled backward in fear. The beam was starting over the side of the mountain, blasting rocks and thick-ribbed ice out of its path. A small avalanche rumbled down the steep slope ahead of it. It was then he sensed the horrible, impending catastrophe.

"Look!" he shouted at Rokol, pointing at the beam, "it's going to reach that glacier—blast it loose and send it down the side of the mountain upon your colony!"

Even as Rokol looked, the beam surged downward toward the head of the glacier. A startled expression of fear and misgiving flitted across his baby face, as he saw for himself.

"Aileida! The beam, Rosson—what we do?" he cried, abandoning his role of aggressor in sudden terror. The men stood behind him in stunned helplessness.

In one revealing flash Rosson saw in his mind's eye a possible plan of action. Whirling, he started off for the plane. "Follow me!" he yelled lustily over his shoulder. Danville . . . down there in the mountain-locked valley—helpless, along with the Martian women and children. It made a terrifying, vivid picture.

At the ship Rokol entered after him, wheezing and

coughing, looking to the engineer for leadership now that the vast stream of power was out of control.

"Take me down there on the plateau, Rokol—quick as you can!" Rosson ordered, "we must find my ship. I need the magnetic buffers."

• Wonderingly, the little Martian commanded his pilot to lift ship. Desperately, the plane fought its own way into the blizzard, and then dived rapidly for the plain below. A landing floodlight snapped on, a moving bright spot on the white earth that traveled rapidly with the ship. Sweeping the ground below with the beam, Rosson quickly picked out his capsized plane.

The descent was a haphazard one with the engineer unnerving the pilot with his pleas for greater haste, and that caution be damned as a silly virtue with lives at stake. Instinctively taking command, Rosson took several small-men with him to his plane when they landed. High on Helland Hansen a lurid, lacy flame was spewing itself upon the mountain. He'd have to hurry.

In the jumble of the cabin he found the buffers—compact, heavy instruments four feet high with concave discs on top. They were the hand operated insulators, the electrical mechanisms of similar polarity to the power-beam that accumulated a tremendous repulsive charge on the concave discs buffeting the beam back into the sky on its course. A wonderful tool. And one requiring courageous handling with such vast power to manipulate. After a cursory examination Rosson found them intact.

It took the three of them to carry one of the two buffers out to the waiting ship whose great propellers were whirling madly to match the wind. As soon as they had brought out the second one and placed it in the ship, the pilot sent the plane into a perilous ascent, wheeling with the storm. Rosson braced himself on the slanting floor, and began explaining the operation of the buffers to Rokol.

"The way we'll operate this is place the other instrument in a second plane, and work together side by side," he explained, breathing audibly from his exertions. "We'll start back at the next insulator, and fly under the beam about 500 feet apart with these concaves pointed at the beam. In that manner, Rokol, we'll gradually lift or force the power-beam into the air again on its course."

"But what of permanent insulator?" objected Rokol.

"After we've got the beam up we'll land on the site of the old one, and have Radcliffe send a crew of men with a new one—but, here we are!"

Rosson indicated the great curving stream of visible power arching over the mountains that could be seen as the plane turned into the teeth of the blizzard again, preparing to land. "Now, have you got that all straight, Rokol? Because we've got to start immediately. I'll take another plane and you take this one—the buffer is rightly placed. I'll communicate by radiophone with you to direct your movements."

"I understand," was Rokol's laconic reply. He looked up at the beam a little timidly.

A badly frightened crew of small-men obediently helped Rosson transfer the second buffer to another plane. For several valuable moments he worked over the machine adjusting it in place. Then, stationing himself at the phone, he snapped out the order to ascend, automatically trans-

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OUTCASTS FROM MARS

(Continued from page 415)

mitting it to Rokol. Like clumsy albatrosses they took off into the gale with precious little regard to finesse, and fled with the tail wind of the storm.

Black chasms yawned below—jagged, steep-walled gashes gouged out between saw-tooth crags and long dikes. And in the bottoms of deep canyons lay ancient glaciers, sleeping under many seasons of snow. Rosson thought little of the primordial landscape, as he stood at the window looking down. Just one thing he was searching for with his brilliant landing light—the second insulator. A lofty peak loomed massively below. A small dot appeared near the summit like a lump of coal on a pile of salt.

"Hold it!" he cried.

The plane wheeled into the blast under the expert pilot's control waiting for the second ship. Five hundred feet away at right angles to the beam, and some hundred feet below it, Rokol took up his position.

"Here we go, Rokol. All set?"

"Yesss, ready."

"Watch that beam theodolite angle and keep 500 feet distant."

• Slowly, the two planes moved forward, fighting a cross-wind, and maintaining position with the greatest of difficulty. Anxiously, Rosson bobbed up and down between the concave buffer to the window to watch Rokol. With the passing moments his nerves tautened as the ship's helicopters strained mightily to lift the beam from its inexorable, downward parabola. In a nervous sweat he felt the floor trembling, as if in the very center of two mighty opposing forces. Yet gradually, they were shoving the beam to the right and upward away from the glacier. At last Lonar was safe!

But as they neared the peak of Helland Hansen the tension became terrific. Here the beam dropped more rapidly.

"Climb higher!" bawled the engineer, sweating freely from his thick furs as much as from high tension.

Winds shrieked through struts and wires. Helicopters tore into the horizontal air-stream with a shrill whine. The ships crawled ahead doggedly to the rhythmic whistling of forward props. Rosson was a human dynamo of energy, bellowing orders above the pandemonium, and dashing to the window to glance hurriedly upward only to dart immediately to the buffer. Little by little it was going up. A thousand feet. Maybe less. Anyway they were making progress. But it was like handling a massive, taut cable, one end of which curved down abruptly. It seemed immovably fused with the black ground it had cleared for itself.

"Rokol, here's where we've got to take a chance," Rosson shouted into the transmitter. "We've stopped her from going any farther down the slope, but haven't been

able to lift her clear. Now, when I give the signal shoot all the juice you've got to the for'ard props. It may force us down as we approach the ground end of the beam, but it's the only way we can bust her loose. Ready?"

"Ready, Earthman!" came Rokol's quick reply.

"Then give it to her!"

Suddenly, the plane picked up momentum. The shrill whistling up ahead rose in a quick tempo to a screeching wail. Horizontal blades let out a wild scream in the terrific air wash. The planes were descending, forced down by the stubborn repulsing beam. Rosson, white of face, stared ahead where the power-beam was spewing itself upon the solid bare face of the mountain. A thousand feet away it was. Still they lost altitude. The Martian pilot turned a haggard face on the engineer.

"Earthman—!"

"Keep on—you can't stop now!" he barked fiercely. His knuckles were white where he gripped a hand rail.

Not a whimper from Rokol. They might have been going to their death in that electrical cyclone where millions of volts fused the rock in a blinding arc. Several hundred feet more now.

Suddenly, the whole beam trembled in a violent column of blazing light. A thunderous crackling and sputtering followed. Then a deafening clap. The beam snapped up into the sky like a rigid coiled spring and then steadied. It was done! And they were safe!

Rosson landed at the old insulator, gazing at the pilot with a wan smile. A close call. But he looked even worse than the Martian—and his face would scare a ghost!

Immediately, he called the Interplanetary Station. There was no time to lose.

Radcliffe fumed in a profane fit, wanting to know what had been happening. Tensely, Rosson gave his account. Rokol came into the cabin as he was talking. "But tell me, Clif, were we in time to save the *Martian Princess*?"

"No. The passengers took to their life ships. There was one life ship that was lost though—guess it fell into the sun—a complement of Martian small-men we didn't have on the passenger list. Serves those Lunar devils right, it wouldn't have—!"

"That's all right, Clif, these people have had their lesson," admonished Rosson, gazing pityingly at Rokol's tragic face. "Rokol, here, almost gave his life with mine to get the beam back in place. And Clif, you're going to help me get a transfer for these people to Argentina!"

Radcliffe stuttered a moment. "Well—if you say so. But it will take a lot of tall talking to cover up this incident."

"You can do it—if anybody can; you've got the power!"

Radcliffe nodded understandingly.