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VOLUME 16
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AMAZING STORIES

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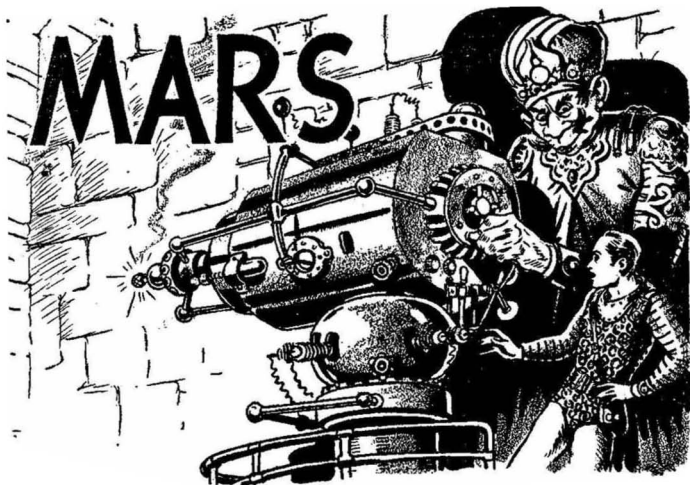
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Volume 16
Number 1



Three of the Martians became monsters under the evolution ray



by **FESTUS PRAGNELL**

Don Hargreaves didn't have anything to do with the epidemic, but he was outlawed. Then he found there was *another* Don Hargreaves!

THE Imperial Palace, Mars.

Dear Festus:

"So you're getting bombs chucked at you, huh? I thought Earth was a dull place, and all the excitement was in Mars. Seems I was wrong.

"Thanks for copy of **AMAZING STORIES** with an account of that affair of Sommalý in it, which I see you have given the ridiculous title of 'Warlords of Mars.' I've had trouble enough, keeping the mag out of sight of Princess Wimpolo. I mean to say, I know I said that Wimps was not beautiful, judged by the standards of Earth, but I didn't mean she was such a fright as the picture shows her.

"Tell dear old Rap from me that if he hears of a number of strangely dressed men, all ten feet tall, walking through the streets of Chicago with queer boxes in their hands, he must get down the fire-escape *pronto*. Because they will be Wimpolo's guards after him with rayguns.

"Thank the readers for me for the interest they take in us. Tell them that Wimpo is a jolly girl and the bravest I've ever known, even if she is a trifle outside. And, anyway, what other Earthling can boast nearly half a ton of wife, all in one piece? Because that is what I shall have, very soon. Another thing, too, why satisfy yourself

with these dull news agency reports of events in Mars? Why not hand them on as I tell them to you?

"You know what happened up to the time of my last letter. I came to Mars as a clerk in the employ of a mining company, but mutiny broke out among the miners. With Elsa Thorwaldsen, daughter of the manager, I ran away, and met one of the gigantic people of Mars, who live in caverns underground. The Martians gave me one of their deathray boxes, whose beams produce fields of force in which human nerves will not work. They also gave me a zekolo, a sort of Martian watchdog which looks like an octopus with the shell of an oyster and the pincers of a crab. Against death rays and zekolo the mutineers with their guns had no chance at all. Mutiny over, old man Thorwaldsen and his daughter turned nasty, and I went back to the Martians. Once in the deeper caverns of Mars there is no return, because of certain chemical changes that take place in one's blood.

"I found that the few Earthlings here, being small and agile among the gigantic, slow, lumbering Martians, were great favorites at the court of King Usulor, overlord of Mars; and Wimpolo, his daughter, soon adopted me as her special favorite. But I think the privileges accorded to Earthlings must have caused a lot of jealousy, because soon after that two nasty wars broke out, each one led by minor kings who wanted Usulor's position of overlord of the planet, Kings Sommalu and Bommelsmeth.

"Sommalu was easily dealt with, the chief trouble he caused being due to the recklessness of the Princess, who went spying in the enemy's country unattended. *What* a wiggling her father gave her! I shivered in my shoes for fear that I would cop it too for not

telling him of what she intended to do.

"Bommelsmeth did better. He had an army of ape-men, and actually succeeded in kidnaping Wimpolo out of the middle of her father's palace. But Wimpolo escaped with the help of Vans Holors, a Martian who is now wrestling champion of the planet. Bommelsmeth's own ape-men were turned against him, and Bommelsmeth's secret undersea hideout was flooded and wrecked.

"Immediately after that the princess made a public announcement. The scientists, she said, urged that to bring fresh virility to the Martian stock every Martian lady who could, should marry an Earthling. She, herself, set the example. And she had chosen for her husband me, Don Hargreaves. Everybody knows how brave I was and what I have done for Mars. That made me next in succession to the throne of Usulor, overlord of all Mars.

"So you see, Festus, even up to then I had not done so badly for excitement since I went spook-hunting with Elsa Thorwaldsen, in a Martian traffic tunnel that her father's men had accidentally broken into. I'll bet you, with nothing but a few bombs falling around your house and dog-fights taking place in the air over your head, are green with jealousy.

"**B**UT we hadn't finished with Bommelsmeth and that's what I wanted to tell you. When we flooded his undersea cavern we thought that was the end of him, but it is easy to see now that his submarines could still get out through the locks, and the big cavern probably communicated with others above sea-level. Even on Earth we have caverns that run under the sea, and in conditions of lesser gravity, rock formations amazing to us readily become possible.

"The trouble started when Princess Wimpolo caught a cold. You could not see anything remarkable in that, but in Mars it was incredible. The first lady in all Mars, receiving a daily dose of twenty-six different vitamins, was supposed to be completely protected against all sickness and ailments whatever, apart from the results of overeating. (And *can* she eat! But never mind that.)

"The sneezes of that half-ton lady, Festus, would nearly blow your house down. I was standing in front of her in one of her spasms, and it lifted me six feet in the air. That may seem a lot to you, but you must always remember that the gravity of Mars is much less than that of Earth. She sent for her doctor and she stormed at him. He had been on the job only a month, the former doctor having failed to cure a headache of hers (A-tishoo! I carefully kept beside her). And look at the results of his administrations! A-tishoo!"

* * *

WHILE she was talking I felt a tickling at the back of my own throat. I badly wanted to sneeze myself. But I controlled it. The eye of the new doctor was on me, very cold. I felt sure that he didn't like me.

The doctor was apologetic. All the resources of Martian science would be enlisted in service of the Princess, but he feared that a new germ was abroad in Mars. Other ladies besides the Princess were suffering from the same trouble, most of them ladies who had taken Earthlings into their households.

He glared at me as he said this, making sure that I did not miss it. I knew what he meant. He was suggesting that we Earthlings had brought a new disease to Mars.

"Possibly the Earth scientists may

be able to help us," he finished. Just then I sneezed myself. The Doctor leered triumphantly. Wimpolo looked at me thoughtfully.

"Run along now, Don," she said. "I'm not well. I'll send for you when I'm better."

I had been dismissed from the presence of the Princess. But if I really was infecting her it was better for me to leave her, for a time. However, I had only gone a little while when I was called for on the palace television system. This time it was old man Usulor himself, the big shot of Mars, who wanted me. As I went along I was wobbling at the knees pretty lively. Abrupt and frosty old King Usulor seldom took much notice of Earthlings. He put up with us because the Court ladies were so fond of us. He had never said whether or not he approved of my betrothal to the Princess. If I hadn't made myself useful in the troubles with Sommalu and Bommelsmeth I think he would have forbidden it.

As soon as I saw King Usulor I knew I was in for a stormy passage. Princess Wimpolo's new doctor was beside him, and old Usulor was glowering the way he does when he is all ready to explode.

"What's the meaning of this, Hargreaves?" he barked at me.

I nearly said, "What are your doctors doing if they can't tell you?" but what I said was,

"Does Your Majesty mean the Princess?"

"Who else?" he snarled. "You are hardly ever out of her sight."

Suddenly he sneezed. Then I knew why he was in such a bad temper. He had caught cold too. And I was being blamed for it.

"It's not my fault," I said.

"What?" he stormed. "The doctor here tells me it is your Earthly disease

of—of—”

“Influenza,” supplied the doctor.

“It’s no influenza,” I said.

“What?”

“It has come on too quickly to be influenza. An hour ago I was all right. Now I feel ill,” I said.

A strange weakness had come on me suddenly so that I could hardly stand up. The Martian doctor stepped forward.

“He is really ill. Your Majesty.”

“Take him,” growled Usulor. “Put him in quarantine. Don’t let him infect any more of my people.”

“And meanwhile,” added the doctor, “find out exactly what he is suffering from and how to cure it.”

I knew I was falling into a trap.

“I want to choose my own doctor,” I tried to say, “and I want Professor Winterton.”

NO notice was taken of me. A blanket soaked with antiseptics was thrown over me, and I was carried out on a stretcher. As I was jolted painfully down a long corridor, the doctor came behind us and I heard him chuckle, three or four times, as though at some rich joke.

We came to a room that was fitted out as a laboratory. There was a bed here, a bed surrounded by a glass screen. I was placed in the bed, and the doctor came and grinned at me.

“So,” he said. “The little man was going to marry the first lady in Mars and be ruler of our planet, was he? Ha, ha! And then he woke up.”

He stopped and picked up a tiny glass dart that seemed to be stuck in my side.

“Not bad, eh? The Paralyzing Drug gradually deprives the muscles of the power of movement. I shot it into you while you stood beside the Princess about an hour ago. Her sneezes

drowned the slight noise. And so rapidly did the drug paralyze the nerves around your wound that they had no time even to transmit the sensation of pain. You did not know you had been struck. And didn’t I judge it beautifully? I calculated your body-weight, the lapse of time, everything. The drug took effect while you actually stood in front of the King. Beautiful!”

I did not reply. The paralysis had taken hold of my tongue now. I could not speak.

“And my assistants among the doctors,” he went on, “have given many people drugs that stimulate the mucous membranes of their noses into discharging violently to give them headaches and to deprive their muscles of strength. Presently King Bommelsmeth will raise the cry, “Rid Mars of Earthlings and their Influenza! People will rally to him. It will mean the end of your friends inside and outside of Mars.”

Directly he mentioned Bommelsmeth I understood. So the rebel king was still alive, and plotting. I remembered now that he had boasted of having his spies in influential positions at the Court of Usulor, his enemy.

Soon the paralyzing drug had gripped all the motor nerves that carry impulses to the muscles, but the sensory nerves were still active, bringing me a sensation of sight and hearing. Involuntary muscles still kept my heart and lungs going, slowly. There was no intention that I should die, or that I should be saved from seeing or hearing anything that would cause me distress. But I could not blink an eyelid.

Four Martians were busy at some task I could not see, for my eyes were fixed on the distant ceiling. At each knock of the door they hastily covered their work.

Princess Wimpolo came. I heard

her enter, supported by two ladies in waiting. That pig of a doctor jumped up to meet her.

"Your Highness! This is not wise! You are ill."

"They tell me," Wimpolo said weakly, "that Don Hargreaves, my Earthling, is dead."

"Yes," she was told, "the science of Mars could not save him."

She wept as they helped her away.

Professor Winterton came, the Earthling who first persuaded me to live among the Martians, and Vans Holors, wrestling champion of Mars.

"Hard luck, boy," said Winterton, patting my shoulder.

"So you took the count, Don," said Vans. "But the end isn't yet. The championship isn't won yet."

They went out. I was alone with my enemies. I turned the words of Vans and the professor over and over in my mind. Dared I hope that they suspected the truth?

A messenger came.

"The King has ordered that a State Funeral and Cremation take place in two hours."

"But this is an unseemly rush," protested the sham doctor.

"The King has resolved on drastic measures to prevent the spread of infection," answered the messenger.

CHAPTER II

Troubles of a Corpse

MORE than once I have been congratulated on my ingenuity in finding my way out of awkward fixes. But this time I had no chance of using any ingenuity at all. I was stuck right where I was. Until the effects of the drug wore off or were neutralized, there I would remain.

The only part of me fully active was

my brain. If there was anything in telepathy, now was the time to use it. I tried. I tried hard. I concentrated first on Wimpolo, then on the Professor, and then on Vans Holors. But whether there is no such thing as telepathy, or whether I didn't know how to transmit or they how to receive, I achieved no result that I know of except to give myself a headache.

The five Martian workmen kept busy. A large machine lurched from the wall. It had two arms and branching feathery fingers. The fingers of one arm felt all over my face, head and neck.

"Making a statue of you, Hargreaves," I was told.

I understood. The robotlike affair was a Martian copying machine.*

I wanted to know what the object of making the statue was, but of course I could not ask.

"Usulor has not given us much time," one Martian grumbled.

"No, but we can do it."

Presently they were satisfied with their work.

"A perfect likeness."

"Can't tell them apart."

"Say, wouldn't it be easy to send the wrong one to be cooked? Roast the statue and keep the real Earthling as a statue."

"Yes, that is exactly what we are going to do," said the Martian in charge, briskly. "Now, quickly! Time is short. Lift the Earthling out and put him on one side. Put the statue in the bed. Now, into this box with the Earthling. Cover him up. Ah! Just in time."

A blanket was thrown over me just as

* While one "hand" explored the shape of the head the other was producing a duplicate of it in plastic material which would afterwards be colored with an equally exact imitation of the original. These Martian statues were often uncannily realistic.—Ed.

the door began to open. I heard the voices of Vans and of the Professor and of others. They had come to take me to my funeral.

The dummy was taken away. Then the six Martians came back. Still in darkness I was lifted, carried. I felt the smooth motion of a Martian rolling traffic sphere under me. I seemed to travel for many miles.

* * *

NOW, this is what happened at my "funeral." Princess Wimpolo was sitting, sadly watching the proceedings, when one of her ladies-in-waiting came to her and whispered.

"One of the Earthlings wishes to speak to you, your Highness."

Wimpolo stirred.

"After the funeral," she said.

"He says it is very urgent."

"Who is it?"

"The one they call Winterton."

"Don's friend," murmured the Princess. "Let him come."

The tiny form of the white-haired professor stood beside the giant princess.

"What is it?"

"It's about Don."

"In my opinion, Princess Wimpolo," said the Professor, "Don did not die. He was murdered."

Wimpolo sat still, thinking.

"What reason have you for saying this?" she asked, presently.

"Two reasons, Princess. In the first place Don's death was too sudden. Earthlings do not die of sickness as quickly as that. In the second place Don does not look ill. See those red lips and cheeks and the firm, rounded arms and legs? Even through the glass sides of the coffin you can see. That is the body of a man who died suddenly, while he was in perfect health. Martians may be deceived, but not an Earthling.

"You delayed in telling me this," said she. "Ten minutes more and he would have been cremated and his ashes thrown into the sea beneath us."

She beckoned a lady-in-waiting.

"Tell my father to stop the funeral."

The Martian woman looked amazed.

"Quick!" Wimpolo ordered. "Tell my father to stop the funeral."

The lady-in-waiting hurried away.

King Usulor started in his seat when the Martian woman approached him. He frowned impatiently across at his daughter, then gave the order to halt the ceremony. Slowly he came to where his daughter waited on her couch, while thousands of Martians wondered what had happened.

"What new foolishness is this, girl?" he demanded. "Haven't you caused me enough trouble with your wildness? Your Earthling, through no fault of his own, I suppose, has made you ill and me unwell. Let us get rid of the infection."

"Father, Don was murdered!"

"What?" Usulor thundered. "Have I not rid myself of all my enemies yet? Are they *still* around me?"

Turning to two guards he commanded, "Bring the coffin here!"

THE royal party was upon a sort of natural platform of rock, where all the assembled people could see them. On one side of the platform was a sheer drop to the sea. Down this precipice my ashes were to be shot into the water, after I had been cremated.

The glass coffin was brought and placed in front of King Usulor. What was supposed to be my body was clearly seen inside, such a perfect representation that even Winterton was deceived.

"Open the—" began Usulor, but got no further. His mouth fell open in amazement. A horrified startled cry came from all the people who were near

enough to see. Wimpolo and Winter-ton cried out in incredulous delight.

For the body in the coffin was moving. Its head turned. It looked first at Usulor, then at his daughter, then at the crowd. It lifted an arm and rapped three times on the side of its glass coffin.

It was, of course, an automaton, or robot, operated by distant control by means of television.

Guards and servants sprang to release me from my premature coffin. But the robot shaped in my likeness, or its distant operator, was too impatient to wait for them. The arm swung again strongly. The glass cover of the coffin splintered to fragments. The robot climbed stiffly out. As a dead man coming to life, its mechanical movements were grimly realistic.

The robot's head turned, and it looked about it woodenly. Its face was not shaped to express any feelings.

"I thank your Majesty," it said, suddenly and harshly, "for these preparations for me. But as you see I am not dead."

Wimpolo, first of all those present to recover her wits, moaned.

"That's not his proper voice. And that queer look on his face! He must be very ill. Attendants! Look to him."

A dozen Martians, men and women, jumped to obey. But the robot's attitude changed. A queer pistol was suddenly in its hand. It was one of Bommelsmeth's dissolving rays, the most dangerous weapon known to Mars.

"Stand back," came the harsh voice.

Wimpolo leaned back in her couch.

"It isn't Don!" she whispered to those about her. "See how my pet snake is hissing at him! That snake would never hiss at Don. It knows him too well."

"Listen to me," snarled the robot's radio voice. "I did not die of sickness.

I only went into a coma, from which I have now recovered. But all the Martians who take the sickness will die. It is too late to stop it. All you Martians, heed my words! Earth will destroy you all. We Earthlings need your planet, and we shall take it. If the sickness does not destroy you, our weapons will. As now I destroy your Princess!"

And the deadly ray came up to aim straight at Wimpolo's bosom.

HAD I been there I am sure I could have reached the metal monster in time to knock his arm up. The Princess' snake or her zekolo could have done it too, but they waited for the word of command before going into action. In all Mars there was probably only one native quick enough in thought and movement to save the Princess. That man was Vans Holors. Holors made a wild plunge. Even for him it looked impossible to cross the space without being shot down, but it took a small fraction of time for the distant operator to see what was happening and to move the controls accordingly.

Taking the only certain way, Vans made a flying leap at the animated dummy. His enormous weight caught the robot squarely. It was impossible for Vans to stop his rush in time to save himself. Vans and the little robot vanished over the edge of the precipice together, to plunge into and sink beneath the waves.

The crowd thought that Vans had given his life, that the deadly ray had caught him full in the chest; but as a matter of fact the discharge expended itself harmlessly on the rocks.

Bommelsmeth's devilish scheme had been, of course, that the robot should murder Princess Wimpolo and then dive into the sea and get away. I would, of course, get the blame for the crime, and

a nasty popular demand to rid Mars of all Earthlings would arise.

By the courage and promptitude of Holors, Wimpolo was saved. But the damage had been done, all the same. Plenty of it! The robot's words, threatening all Mars, had been heard by thousands of Martians. They had also seen the dummy's attempted assassination of Wimpolo. Everywhere where Earthlings were in Mars, they felt a change in the atmosphere. Their gigantic hosts were turning against them.

Meanwhile Usulor, purple with rage, was spouting orders as fast as he could get the necessary breath out of his lungs.

"Cancel the funeral! Arrest Don Hargreaves! Arrest the Princess' doctor for telling us that Hargreaves was dead! What are you waiting for? Hargreaves is in the sea? Well, dive in after him! Hunt him with snakes and zekolos. Find him, find him, I say! And arrest every Earthling in Mars. See that they do no more mischief."

He stopped to sneeze. The Earthlings were the cause of that too, he reflected.

"And to think," he said to himself. "If I had only fixed things for a few minutes earlier I'd have had him safely cremated before he came round."

CHAPTER III

Bommelsmeth Again

I KNEW nothing about the tumult caused by the funeral of my dummy. I supposed that the dummy had been duly cremated, and that the court and the Earth colony of Mars mourned me as dead. That I was being hunted as an assassin, while the Earthlings on Mars, thrown into prison, blamed me as the cause of their troubles, I had

no idea.

I felt the traffic tunnel that I was in going up and up. Suddenly I was taken out of my box and could look around once more. We were on the surface of Mars, in the full glare of the sunlight, which harmful to the Earthly eyes, was tinted grey to tone down the harsh light which, harmful to the Earthly eyes, was even more dangerous to the Martians.

We rolled across a wide, saucer-shaped plain that had once been an ocean-bed. Many miles on we came to a mountain range, and here the sphere plunged into a hole that proved to be the entrance to a system of minor caverns. Even out here the Martians could not get out of their habit of boring themselves tunnels and caves to live in.

We went in through air-locks. We passed armed sentries, heard shouted words of command. These were obviously the secret headquarters of an army. It was cunning. Of all places where Usulor, with his television, might search for a hideout of his enemy, the one place where he would not look was on the surface of the planet. For it was supposed that no Martian could live long on the surface owing to chemical changes that take place in their blood there.

Presently a Martian picked me up with one hand and carried me out of the sphere. I found myself before a lean, sardonic Martian with red, inflamed eyes. It was Bommelsmeth. The resplendent uniforms and the luxury with which he had formerly surrounded himself were gone. Now he had ordinary clothes and a single badge. The furniture was plain. He was thinner now. Before he had been overbearingly confident. Now he was desperately ferocious.

I was carried in, stiff as a poker, and dropped in front of him.

"What's this?" he growled.

"Don Hargreaves, Earthling, in a cataleptic state, but conscious, as you directed, chief."

The elaborate court etiquette that Bommelsmeth had once insisted on was gone. His men called him shortly, "Chief."

A slow smile of triumph came over the face of the former King.

"Ah yes, I remember. I have a memento from him." He pulled up his left trouser-leg. "See that?" It was a long scar. "You did that, with your sword, when we fought in the cabin of my submarine. Then, I was a great King. Now, I am a fugitive, with but a handful of followers. You did that too. I wanted to see you to thank you for all these favors."

He stirred me with his foot.

"Is he alive?"

"The drug produces the appearance of death very convincingly chief. He hears what you say and understands it."

"Then bring him round," directed Bommelsmeth, "but first chain him to a ring in the wall by his neck. I know him. He moves very fast. Once you let go of him you'll never get hold of him again."

"Bring him round and he will die, chief. The Krypton in the atmosphere."

"Ah, yes, I forgot. Not that it matters much. Give him the treatment I discovered to dissolve the krypton out of his blood safely."

A cloth soaked with some sweet smelling liquid was held to my nose. I felt strangely light-headed. Then the cloth was taken away. Somebody grunted to somebody else. The end of a tube was forced down my throat, and something warm squirted directly into my stomach.

SLOWLY, very slowly, my frozen body began to thaw out. I was

racked with pain, cramp, stiffness. My eyes were very sore, but I would not let Bommelsmeth see that I was hurt.

"You took a lot of trouble to rid yourself of one small Earthling, Bommelsmeth," I said.

"True," he said, considering the point carefully. "Possibly true. But still the process, or, should I say, the experiment? has been worth the trouble. I have got you here, and everybody thinks you dead. Next, I shall do the same with Wimpolo, then with Usulor, and then with all the officials and army generals of Usulor who are opposed to me."

He took a drink. I must have let him see that I was thirsty by the way my eyes followed his glass, for he called for another, and ordered that all his men present should drink. But none was offered to me.

"Now," he said in pretended affability, "let's get together. Let's understand each other. There are several points on which Usulor and I do not agree. The chief one is Earthlings. My slogan is, "Kill all Earthlings! That right, my men?"

The Martians roared their approval.

"Right! Kill all Earthlings!"

"You hear Hargreaves? But I've got a special treat first. Men! Wheel in the transformation box!"

My heart jumped painfully when I saw what was being wheeled in. It was Bommelsmeth's big invention, his evolution controlling ray.*

* Bommelsmeth, with fiendish genius, had discovered the natural radiation that, beating ever on Earth and Mars out of space, produces evolution. The men of Mars, living in their deep caverns, had been shielded from this radiation for long ages, and their evolution had stopped.

Bommelsmeth could produce evolution at will, or reverse it. The ray turned living men into apes, the apes into monkeys, the monkeys into reptiles, the reptiles into fish, the fish into marine worms and the worms finally into a primitive proto-plasmic slime that could not be seen.—E.

"Cheer up Hargreaves!" gloated Boramelsmeth. "You are going to take part in a great scientific experiment!"

* * *

WHEN Vans Holors, realizing more quickly than anybody else the danger to Princess Wimpolo, threw his own life instantly into the balance to save her, he had not realized that he was attacking a metal dummy. He understood that it was not me, but thought it was another Earthling who was my double. If it had been Vans would certainly have been cut down.

Now the dummy was about the same weight as myself, and Vans I would say at a guess to be about thirteen feet tall and well over a ton in weight. He swung his left arm to knock up the ray-pistol that menaced him and his right to the side of the dummy's head. The dummy's arm was stiff, not being on a universal joint like a human ball and socket shoulder-joint, which can move in any direction. Instead of knocking the dummy's arm up Vans knocked the dummy itself high up in the air, spinning like a fly wheel. The melting-ray was still in action, while the distant operator of the dummy vainly tried to guess from the amazing blur that reached him from the dummy's radio television eyes what in Mars had happened.

Fortunately, the ray whirled around too rapidly to do any damage. Vans' right arm, meeting no obstruction, threw him off his balance, and Vans, unable to stop himself, rushed headlong over the precipice into the water.

To the stoutest and strongest man in Mars that was nothing. Vans took no more notice of falling in the sea than a healthy Earthling does of being caught in a light shower or rain. Provided, that is, that he hit no rocks.

This was Funeral Rock. From it the ashes of thousands upon thousands

of Martian Kings, Queens, Princess and Princesses had been shot into the water after cremation. The spot had been chosen because of its clean drop into very deep water.

Vans came up, annoyed. The dummy's head was stuck up, nose under but eyes staring across the mirror-smooth surface. A leg-stroke brought Vans alongside.

"Make me get wet, would you?" he growled, giving the dummy a box on the ears.

The blow would have stunned any Martian or broken any Earthling's neck. Vans took a leisurely leg-stroke to where he judged that the body would come up again.

The dummy popped up, settled down, rose again and bobbed about until it was still. Its eyes were still open. It still looked alive, although one side of its head was dented like an empty can. Vans stared. No blood came from the wound, no flesh showed, only metal.

Vans shuddered. He brought his fist straight down on the top of the head of this horrible thing that could not be killed.

This time the dummy did not disappear. Its foot had become entangled in Vans' clothing.

Just then the distant operator, realizing that his dummy was getting damaged, threw a switch. A small motor began to hum, a small popeller began to buzz in the rear end of the dummy, and the dummy, towing Vans behind it, set out to sea at some sixty knots.

Thousands of Martians, watching, confidently, this struggle between their wrestling champion and the Earthling who had tried to assassinate their Princess, gasped amazedly as the Earthling began all at once to swim out to sea, going faster than any living creature had ever swam before and drag-

ging their helpless champ with him.

My reputation as an agile, swift and dangerous person increased a whole heap.

BUT Vans knew now that it was not a man but a machine that held him. The dummy was not using its limbs to swim with, but a hidden propeller. Vans felt the urge of the water. He understood why he had been unable to kill the creature.

Vans, however, had come close to killing the dummy. His blow on the top of the thing's head had put one television eye out of action and damaged the other. The operator was now getting only a partial and obstructed view in his television panel. He did not know that Vans was there still, being towed along. The machine's reduced speed he put down to the damage to the motor inside it.

Buffeted by the surge of water, Vans struggled to get a better grip on the machine and find some way of stopping it. The speed and the waves beat him. It was luck for Vans that he, like all Martians, was a powerful swimmer.

The machine took a sudden dive. Vans was dragged down, a light from the dummy's head showing the way dimly. Into a hole in the rock wall it dived. Vans saw he was in an underwater cavern.

The cavern opened out. He came up and was able to breathe. There was a sloping beach on his right about a quarter of a mile long. On it was a group of small houses. High up the beach about a hundred or so people sat with their backs to the high cliff. They were curiously still. There were men and women, both Earthlings and Martians.

Now or never, thought Vans, I must break loose from this thing. He now knew how the head of the robot was at-

tached to its body and tried to wrench it off.

The robot's body filled with water. With a gurgling of bubbles it sank. Vans disengaged himself, and swam cautiously for the shore.

More lights were being switched on on the beach. Vans could see now, with a queer jump of his heart, that the people who sat and leaned against the cliff had no faces; only blank spheres of metal. They were more robots like the one that had dragged him to their home. Not yet had they been given the semblances of human faces.

Two Martians came out of the nearest hut and walked to the edge of the unrippled water. Vans hid carefully behind a rock.

"Not a trace," said one.

"It sank, I reckon," said the other.

"I don't wonder. Did you see the smashes that wrestler fellow gave? Amazing that it got as far as this."

"Now see here, Torkwiss, never tell anybody about that."

"Why not?"

"Can't you see how mad the chief would be if he knew? Such a colossal mess of our first experiment with a robot. Nearly lost the dummy."

"If it had been cooked and thrown in the sea we'd have lost it then, all right."

That wouldn't have mattered. The robot would have gone and none of Usulor's people would have known there was a robot. But if that wrestler fellow had busted the machine and it had been captured, then the chief's plans would have been given away. Bad enough to have them coming to open the coffin and having to make the thing bust loose. Nearly killed the Princess dame first. Bad luck we didn't get her, but to have given away the secret of the robots would have made the chief foaming mad. He

might have ordered that we be kept here forever. You know that it is impossible to escape from here except by the help of a robot. No Martian could hold his breath long enough to get through the long tunnel that runs under the sea."

"What are we going to do then?"

"I am going to get another robot to fish out the Hargreaves dummy. Then we must patch it up quick. And say it was never injured. Get me?"

"I get you."

CHAPTER IV

Transformation

AS VAN HOLORS watched in the secret cavern, the two Martians went back to their hut. Presently came a low whine of machinery and two dummies with blank metal spheres for heads rose jerkily from their places and walked into the water. Presently they were in deep water, then they turned themselves over on their faces, their headlamps shining down while they searched the bed of the lagoon. That was unsuccessful. The dummies turned upsidedown, like ducks searching for food in a pond. Their legs, from the knees upward, stuck straight up out of the water. In slow, widening circles the legs roamed about the water.

Vans judged that it was time to attack. Keeping carefully in darkness, he walked toward the side of the huts. He tripped against an unseen wire. At once a brilliant light shone forth, and the two dummies rose to their feet and lurched toward him.

Vans ran for it. He gained the hiding of a rocky crevice without having the searchlight shine on him, but at the cost of making some noise.

Three more Martians came out of the

huts, walking toward where the two dummies were slowly revolving their blank heads and lights at the unseen wire.

"Nothing to be seen," said one.

"A snake, I reckon," said another.

"A snake would glide under the wire."

"Huh! What would *you* say it was, wise guy?"

"The lost dummy."

"You're crazy."

"I'm not. That dummy's motor was still running when the television control went wrong. It may be still walking about. The other two dummies can't find it."

"What'll happen to it?"

"It'll just keep walking until it smashes itself up. Remember that dummy that got out of control last week?"

"Or until it gets stuck in the mud," said another, looking at the trail of mud and weeds left by one of the dummies that had taken part in the unsuccessful search.

Another Martian came out of that hut.

"What are you three doing there? Haven't you anything better to do? That dummy's got to be found. Back to your controls. Get every dummy that's in working order on the search."

"Luce says the dummy is still walking around, boss."

"Rot, that wrestler fellow bashed it two heavy clouts on the head. I hope he broke his fingers. The dummy was just able to limp back before it broke down. A wonder that it got as far as it did."

They went back to their huts. One by one the dummies jerked to their feet and strode down to the water. Vans slipped into the water, too. He had an idea.

* * *

HERE, I regret to say I have to report an unpleasant piece of scandal. A Martian lady sat upon the lap of a Martian gentleman. No harm in that, but this particular lady was Olla, wife of Vans Holors.

"So the court decided that the big boob is dead, and you get his money?" the man said, with a grin.

"Yes, about time, too. The big grizzly bear. I still have the bruises from the great hug he gave me when he won the championship."

"He did save the Princess," remarked the man, feeling that there was something to be said in the dead champ's favor, after all.

"Yes, left me a widow just to save that cat! Shows how little he thought of me!"

"Never mind, duckie," he said, patting her. "Won't we have a good time on his money!"

"You bet we will!" she squealed with delight.

I fear that honest, simple Vans has one weakness. He can't handle women.

* * *

"**N**OW," explained Bommelsmeth, like a lecturer. "You know that my evolution reversing ray acts not only on the chromosomes of the germ-like cells, which carry inheritance, but are so intense that all the cells of the body are affected. All those cells, hair cells, skin cells, muscle cells, forget their highly evolved complicated processes, relapsing into simpler forms. As an athlete grows old and loses his speed and strength. But now I have speeded up my processes enormously. Processes that take nature millions of years to carry out I could accomplish in a few weeks. Now I take only a few minutes.

"And I can speed up evolution, as well as reverse it. So far, however, I

have had no useful results, only queer freaks. I think it's because I have used the ray on Martians only, up to now. I haven't tried it on an Earthling yet. Our natural evolution has stopped, and it can't be started again suddenly. Try to start it too abruptly and it loses direction. I'll show you. Bring in the prisoners."

The Martians were dragged in, their arms tied behind them. I saw that they were soldiers of Usulor's army. They glowered at Bommelsmeth. They were tied to the wall, and the evolution speeding-ray aimed fully at them.

At the sight of the hideous machine they cried out and tried to break loose. Bommelsmeth laughed, and switched on his ray.

Minutes passed, and only heavy breathing was to be heard as the four Martians tried to break their bonds. Soon their struggle stopped. Instead of rage and despair a blank amazement spread over their faces.

Slowly, yet not so slowly that they could not be watched, the most incredible changes were taking place. Hair was sprouting on smooth skin. Hair was changing to fur, into feathers, into scales, heads were changing in size and shape. Arms, legs, and bodies were getting longer or shorter.

Evolution, kicked violently into action after its sleep of ages, was running wild. It was producing incomprehensible, horrible changes in those four men.

The beam was a circle of pale yellow around them. The actual ray, I knew, was invisible, the yellow light being added for safety. Without it, Bommelsmeth's men or even Bommelsmeth himself might accidentally walk into the beam.

The clothing of the four Martians and their bonds crumbled into dust as the ray worked its will on cloth, leather,

fur and rubber. But no longer were there four men. Four strange creatures, one a great bird, one a sort of crocodile, one a sort of octopus, and one something like a kangaroo, stared at me.

Bommelsmeth flicked off the switch.

"You see," he said. "Four more failures. All right men, clear up the mess."

A sweeping deathray ended the horror, stretching the four monstrosities motionless. They were dragged away.

"Now," said Bommelsmeth, "we'll give the Earthling a dose." I was lifted and placed where the unfortunate Martians had stood, tied to the wall. Bommelsmeth flicked his switch. The pale yellow beam impinged around me.

CHAPTER V

Vans in Action

KING USULOR, overlord of all Mars, puffed great clouds of Martian tobacco. He was satisfied with himself. He had lopped off the head of the Princess' doctor. It amused him that all the other doctors whose clients had got the Earth sickness had bolted at once to a distant country. Good riddance! As a proof of the wisdom of Usulor all the colds had got better at once, his own, the Princess', and everybody else's. No more giant sneezes boomed through the palace, blowing down pictures and breaking crockery.

The only fly in the ointment, from Usulor's point of view, was the fact that Don Hargreaves had got away. The most thorough search with trained Zekolos failed to discover any trace of the treacherous Earthling's body. He had offered rewards for the finding of Don.

Usulor frowned as the door of his private room opened and somebody

came in unannounced. But his frown faded when he saw that it was Wimpolo, his daughter.

"Must you barge in on me like this," he protested. "Couldn't you call me on the television?"

"And you have switched the television off," she snapped.

"Well, I didn't want to be disturbed."

Wimpolo coughed.

"Dad," she said, sharply, "I wish you wouldn't smoke this vile tobacco!"

"Why not, Wimpolo? I like it. I gave an Earthling a mouthful of it once. Ha, ha! The tiny creature was unconscious for two hours."

"You're cruel," she snapped.

He stared at her.

"You know," he said, thoughtfully, "sometimes I think a good spanking would do you good."

"What?"

"You heard, I've spoiled you. I've let you do as you like. I let you bring these Earthlings right into Mars and into my court. I knew all along it was a risk. But you and the other ladies took a fancy to these tiny men and women who can jump nearly twice as high as our heads. You even announced that you were going to marry one of them, and the scientists backed you up. I said nothing, but I see now that I was foolish. The right sort of husband for you would be Vans Holors, the wrestling champion. He'd keep you in order. And he'd make a good king, too."

Wimpolo gave a most unladylike snort.

"The big boob! All brawn and no brains! Have you seen the way that cat, Olla, twists him round her little finger?"

"Yes, yes, that's right. All the same, Wimpolo, the big brainless boob saved your life when your darling Don tried to burn a hole through you."

"That wasn't Don," she barked, angrily.

"What!" shouted Usulor. "Am I mad? Is all my court mad? Are all my guards mad? Are thousands upon thousands of the Martian public mad? All those who were watching in their television sets, too? We all saw him. Who do you say it was? Some other Earthling, disguised? If so, it was the best disguise ever heard of. And in any case every other Earthling in Mars is ruled out. I checked on them, just to make sure. Every Earthling who was not actually present at the time has an unbreakable alibi."

"Some of the ladies who have charge of Earthlings would say anything to save their pets," Wimpolo said.

THE darling girl would have done anything to get the notice making me an outlaw withdrawn. And, as she said, some of the Martian ladies were very fond of their pet Earthlings, just as Earth ladies are fond of their pet pekes.

Usulor snorted.

"Do you think I accepted the word of the ladies? They speak as their feelings guide them. No. I asked the husbands of those ladies. Wimpolo, little one, you've got to face it, no matter how much it hurts. It was your Don who tried to murder you. I say he isn't safe. When I think you are in danger remember that I am still your father and still the ruler of Mars. I've got all the other Earthlings under lock and key, and as soon as Don is found, or his body, I shall start the trial. Of all of them. They will be charged with being a danger to Mars."

"With the verdict already decided against them," she stormed, "and a sentence of death awaiting them all."

"It is scientifically impossible to return them to Earth," he said. "Execu-

tion is therefore the only way."

"You are a brute and a bully," she screamed, and rushed out.

He stared after her.

"I *ought* to spank her," he muttered. "Can't think why I don't."

IN THE undersea cavern Vans Holors slipped into the water without a sound. Dozens of robots, or remote control dummies, were swimming about slowly. Their feet stuck up out of water, and the searchlights on their heads lit up the muddy, weedy bed of the lagoon most oddly. Once or twice a dummy hooted excitedly, but each time it proved to be only a fish, crustacean or snake on the ocean bed that had been taken for a metal man partly concealed by mud and weeds.

Vans was in no danger of being seen from the shore. But he was in danger of being seen by one of those pairs of television eyes. He paddled cautiously about.

Presently one of the dummies wandered away from the rest, searching in shallow water. Vans crept up to it. Seizing its heels he forced it down sharply. The head was buried in mud.

"Another dummy out of order," thought Vans.

He dived. Other dummies were coming up. In a few seconds he had pulled the body of the dummy away from the buried head. The body filled with water and sank. Vans pulled out the head and swam away with it to a hidden alcove.

Vans had got himself somewhat muddy, but that only helped his plans. He tore the machinery out of the metal head. It left a metal sphere that with some difficulty he managed to fix over his own head. The holes where the television eyes had been, enabled him to see out.

Slipping back into the water, he swam

around. Then, walking in a way as like the jerky, marching step of the dummies as he could manage, he went ashore. He didn't trouble to find the gap in the wire. He just walked through it, tearing it down. Luckily it was not barbed. Then he went on around the huts and round behind them.

He heard somebody shout, "Zolweis, your dummy is out of order walking round on its own."

"Where?" shouted Zolweis, running out.

"It's gone behind the huts."

Zolweis went after Vans with a large spanner. He lifted Vans' coat. Then he gasped when instead of a metal plate with nuts he saw white flesh. Before he recovered from his surprise Vans' fist broke his neck. The wrestling champ had a short way with people who tried to assassinate Princess Wimpolo.

"Now *you* are out of order," said Vans.

VANS picked up the spanner and went to the end hut. Three Martians at their machines looked up to see a dummy walk into their hut. One of them came up with a spanner. The dummy swung its own spanner, killing him, then with a rush was on the other two.

Vans looked round. He had accounted for four. How many more were there?

A Martian came running into the hut.

"What's the matter? Why are so many dummies out of order?"

"Four humans out of order," corrected Vans. "And you are the fifth."

He went out, jerkily, straight into the larger hut. The toughest, strongest man in Mars was not afraid of a dozen ordinary Martians. He saw eight. His spanner reduced that number to six before the others realized what was happening.

Fighting a mechanical man gone bay-wire was a problem. No use trying deathrays on it. Two of the surviving Martians began to fetch their own dummies out of the water to defend them. The other four rushed straight at Vans, trying to throw him on the floor by sheer weight. They did not know they were attacking the most dangerous man in Mars. When they did, if they ever did, it was too late.

In an instant more, Vans was on the other two. One man ran, but the hurled spanner struck him in the back of the head.

"Huh! grunted Vans, panting slightly, "how can you expect to keep your dummies working properly when you yourselves get out of order so easily?"

Just then two machine men came charging through the doorway. They were two dummies recalled from the water by the last two operators to survive.

The Martian who had fought and killed thirteen other Martians with a spanner had no fear of two machine men. The two were proper robots with a dim intelligence animating them. Their last orders had been to kill Vans Holors. They came on with the dogged persistence of machines.

Vans hit them so hard that they flew through the air. One smashed into a large machine from which a steady hissing sound had come, silencing it.

Vans went out. The rest of the dummies were going all ways, lacking direction from their operators. One by one they collided with one another or with rocks, broke, filled with water and sank.

"A clean up," said Vans, rubbing his hands together.

"Yes, it certainly was a clean-up," agreed a harsh voice.

Vans swung around.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Switch on the television and you will

see."

Vans did. The lean face of Bommelsmeth appeared on the screen.

"How do, Holors," he grated.

"How do, King Bommelsmeth," returned Vans grinning. "I have rather dented your dummies and their operators."

"Yes," said Bommelsmeth, nodding. "I agree that you have dented my dummies. Incidentally, in doing so you have closed yourself up in a living tomb from which you can never escape. I have seen, although by bad luck I did not turn on the television from my end in time to prevent your clean up, as you call it. Still, as you have cleaned yourself up as well, it's not so bad. I lose thirteen men and a lot of machinery, but at the same time I rid myself of one of my most dangerous enemies. Quite a bargain, from my point of view."

"What do you mean?" growled Vans.

"I mean that I have given orders for the tunnel leading out of that cavern to be sealed up with millions of tons of rock. The only other way out of that cavern is by water. And you can't swim it. It's too far. You'd drown if you tried. Only if you are towed by robots can it be done. And you've smashed all the robots! Ha, Ha! To make things even better, you've broken the air-purifying plant. The foul gases that come out of the water will kill you within a few days. Ha, ha, ha! Good-bye!"

Vans watched in fascination. As Bommelsmeth showed in the television screen, a little figure was creeping behind him. It was me, and Vans says I looked subtly changed. I was even smaller than before, with quick, darting eyes. I leaped through the air toward Bommelsmeth. Vans says I moved with the speed of a bullet out of a gun.

Then the television screen went blank.

CHAPTER VI

Paths of Evolution

BOMMELSMETH eagerly watched the effects of his evolution-hastening ray on me. With all his faults, he was a keen scientist.

"It's not working," one of the Martians growled disappointedly. Let me ray him. It's not safe to keep him alive."

"It is working," Bommelsmeth insisted. "I can see changes in him already, slow changes. It is exactly as I thought. Evolution in Earthlings is still proceeding, and my ray hastens the process naturally, not violently and disastrously. Now, what are the Earthlings evolving into? I wouldn't miss this opportunity for anything."

All I could say about Bommelsmeth's ray at the moment was that it was damn painful. It hurts a baby to draw its first breath and to cut its first tooth. It hurt me to evolve. Queer aches racked my whole body. I groaned and shuddered. I exaggerated these pains, groaning and shuddering much more violently than I need have done. I pretended to fall in a faint.

Bommelsmeth took no notice, except to adjust his machine so that I still got the full benefit of it as I lay in the stone floor of the rough cavern.

"He's getting smaller!" one of the Martians exclaimed, suddenly.

"Yes," said Bommelsmeth. "The tiny creature is getting smaller than ever. Yet I see no signs of his developing, as yet, an enlarged head with a bigger brain and no hair or teeth. The head, in fact, is diminishing in size along with the rest of the body. Now, what can be the reason for that? Does the tide of the evolution ebb and flow like the sea on the shore? Are Earthlings at the present time losing intelli-

gence instead of gaining? Or does that apply to this one Earthling only? Or will the developing small brain be more efficient than the old big one?"

"I think I can answer your questions," another Martian said, thoughtfully.

"Well do."

"The human race on earth is at present splitting into two separate branches. One branch will be very small and active, like this example. The other branch will grow big, with large brains, and will move about very slowly. In time, no doubt, they will lose the power of walking and be carried everywhere on machines run by smaller men of action. Both branches will be far more intelligent than the present race of Earthlings, but will be specialized. If we could get hold of, say, Professor Winterton, and ray him, we might get an example of the big, huge-brained Earthling, hardly capable of movement, who would be to this creature before us—"

"The natural counterpart," I think he was going to say, but he got no further.

I had certainly been getting smaller, and losing weight too.*

With my general reduction in size, my hands were also getting smaller, so that soon they were able to *slip out of the iron rings that held them*. Bommel-smeth hadn't thought of that.

*The height to which I could jump and the speed at which I could run have always been amazing to the slow, lumbering Martians. My running, climbing and jumping powers are miraculous. How I could open the eyes of my old friends at sport now! Whether my smaller brain is more intelligent than the old I cannot say. I have not noticed much difference. But it seems to work more quickly than the old one. Time is altered, for me. The hands of Winterton's watch, for instance, seem now to take far longer to go round than they did. All living creatures seem to me to have become much bigger and to move far more slowly than once they did.

—DON HARGRAVES.

I slipped out my hands, behind my back. Then, in one movement, I jumped to my feet and leaped.

WHAT a leap! I was not yet accustomed to my new powers. I could always jump high in the light gravity of Mars. Now I could clear thirty feet.

I seemed to fly like a bird. I went high over the ray machine with its trumpet that directed the ray at me, high over the heads of the giant Martians, while they still gaped at the spot where I had been. Their brains were too slow and their neck muscles were too slow for them to realize what had happened and turn their heads to follow my movements.

Slowly they turned. Swiftly I landed. I jumped again, not as high this time, but high enough to kick one of the Martians in the head with my metal heel. My back was turned to him as I kicked. I can kick very hard that way. To kick a Martian in the head in the ordinary way hurts my foot more than it does the Martian.

My kicks cannot put men weighing three-quarters of a ton out of action, but their speed and the metal of my shoes does make them painful. The man I had kicked sat down slowly with a groan, and reached for a death-ray.

Slow as he was, and slow as were the others, six of them were reaching for the nerve-stopping deathrays. I had to run for it.

I went through a door and along a dark cavern. The door swung open wide behind me. A beam of light shone into this second room, or cavern. Giants thundered after me.

The door of this cavern was closed. It was closed with one of those heavy Martian bolts that I cannot open. For an instant it looked as though I was trapped. I leaped into the air.

High on the smooth walls I found projections to which I could cling. I leaped to other projections, and to others.

The giants came in, shining their light beams around. It looked hopeless. But they shouted, "He's not in here!" and poured through the second door.

I waited until they had gone, then looked into the first room, where Bommelsmeth was. He had remained behind. He was bending over one of this beloved machines.

I jumped and hid myself on a shelf among the bottles and things. I saw that the machine Bommelsmeth was using was a television set.

"They'll never catch him," Bommelsmeth was saying to himself. "But I know how to get him. I'll get my dummies out of the secret cavern to track him down."

He twirled dials and knobs. Then an idea seemed to strike him suddenly.

"Suppose that Earthling doubled back here!" he said. Striding to the door he threw heavy metal bars across it.

Then back he came to the television machine.

I WAS right behind Bommelsmeth and I could see the screen almost as well as he could. The scene I saw amazed me as much as it did Bommelsmeth. In a smallish cavern an animated dummy with plain metal head marched mechanically around, spreading slaughter. Hurling its spanner, the dummy killed the last man, then took off its metal helmet. It was Vans Holors, disguised. Two other dummies attacked him, but these also Vans Holors destroyed.

I saw other dummies, uncontrolled, smash themselves up. I saw Bommelsmeth reveal himself to Vans. I heard

him, gloatingly tell Vans that he was now trapped forever in the little cavern.

Then I leaped at Bommelsmeth from behind. My foot struck the delicate machinery of the television as I went through the air, so Vans saw nothing of the fight.

Bommelsmeth half turned. I caught him a good bang over the right ear with my iron-studded heel. Giving him no time to recover, I leaped and kicked him over the right eye. A hand grabbed at me, but missed.

All this time he had been shouting for help with all the strength of his enormous lungs. I heard answering shouts.

"Come back, you fools," Bommelsmeth roared. "You have let the Earthling slip past you. He's in the control room, all over the place like a jumping cricket."*

I tried to stop him with kicks on the mouth, delivered with my back to him while I turned a somersault in the air. His hands beat the air trying to seize me, but they were very slow. To him, it must have been like fighting a wasp.

Soon a dozen giant Martians were hammering on the door. Bommelsmeth bellowed:

"It's barred! Get a melting ray pistol!"

A Bommelsmeth melting ray, which turns all known substances into gases, would soon cut the door open, I knew. I had to hammer Bommelsmeth unconscious before they got in. But a man who weighs fifteen hundredweight takes a lot of knocking out.

All at once Bommelsmeth fell backward. This unexpected victory took me by surprise. For an instant I could only gape. He had fallen right in the path of the beam from the trumpet of his evolution-hastening machine.

* Bommelsmeth did not, of course, refer to an Earthling cricket, but to a small rodent that is roughly its Martian equivalent.—Ed.

But Bommelsmeth's pretended collapse was only strategy, as I realized an instant later. By feigning unconsciousness, he checked my attack for a moment, and was able to reach a deathray box that rested on a seat.

As I leaped over his head to avoid the deadly ray, I secretly kicked the switch that set the evolution-speeding ray in motion. Yes, I let him have the chromosomes of his own body cells mucked about with, as he had mucked about with those of so many other people. So busy was he trying to get me with his ray that he did not even notice the yellow light, his own danger signal.

For a minute or so he flashed his ray about while I jumped. It was something like a man slashing at a gnat with a walking-stick. In the end, of course, he was bound to get me. But his strokes slowed up. The raybox fell from his hands.

Then I was able to look at him. Bommelsmeth was evolving fast. He was rushing down one of the queer side turnings that branch off the main path of evolutionary progress. His skin was growing a coat of smooth, shiny black fur, his hands and feet were changing into flippers.

But I had no time to watch the progress of Bommelsmeth. The melting-ray was in action. The metal bar had been cut through. Another second and the door would open.

CHAPTER VII

Return

TO silence Bommelsmeth, I switched his death-ray to half strength so that it would only produce unconsciousness, and let him have it. The half-developed creature fell in an ungainly attitude.

Then I looked for hiding. Time was

short. I snatched the trumpet-shaped funnel off the evolution-speeding machine. I turned it upside-down and hid under it. Like a candle under an old fashioned extinguisher. The evolution ray, no longer confined and directed by the funnel, filled the whole cavern. I, alone, was shielded from it.

The door crashed open. I heard many Martians come in. I heard their puzzled cries.

"The place is empty!"

"Where's the chief?"

"Where's the Earthling?"

"What's that black thing on the floor?"

Then someone shouting,

"The Earthling must be hiding somewhere. Shut the door so that he can't get out, and hunt till you find him."

I heard things being turned over. Presently came strange cries.

"What's the matter? What's happening?"

I took a cautious peep out. The Martian nearest the evolution machine had developed long ears, horns and a tail. And all the others were changing at a speed that was beyond all belief, into creatures more fantastic than any science-fiction artist ever dreamed of. Half cat, half fish, half horse, half crab, half spider, half bird. But I am no artist, and can never convey to you the incredible nightmare of shapes that resulted from evolution, after its sleep of ages, being suddenly kicked into action.

With one impulse all these queer creatures made for the door and rushed away; galloping, leaping, crawling, gliding, flying. I came out from under my extinguisher turned off the ray.

Bommelsmeth was still there unconscious. He had now changed completely into some amphibious creature that I can describe only by saying that it was something like a sea-lion.

Bommelsmeth, the mighty Bommel-

smeth, who once held all Mars in such terror as had never before been known on either of the twin worlds, turned into a sea-lion!

Suddenly I remembered Vans Holors. It took me only a few minutes to contact Vans. The television had already been adjusted to the correct spot by Bommelsmeth, otherwise I might have hunted forever without finding that one little cavern in the heart of a great rock.

VANS was sitting there looking pretty dejected, but brightened at the sight of me. I told my story hastily, and he told his.

"Don, boy," he said, "we've beaten Bommelsmeth, but we're both in a jam."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean I can't get out of here. You can't get out of there where you are."

"How come?"

"Can you find your way across the surface of Mars to the cavern you came out of?"

That was a new thought to me.

"No, I can't," I said presently, not feeling quite so bright.

"And another thing, Don," he went on. "There is a price on your head. You are an outlaw. I have been listening to the radio-television broadcast."

He explained how I had been accused of the attempted assassination of Princess Wimpolo.

"That is awkward, Vans," I said. "What am I to do?"

"Go back to Earth, Don," he said earnestly. "You can do it now. You have a hermetically-sealed travel-sphere. Your blood krypton has been removed by Bommelsmeth. You could soon find the mines of your old mining company where your Earth friends are. Go back to Earth, Don. Leave us Martians to solve our own problems."

I thought for a minute.

"No, Vans," I said. "I cannot leave Princess Wimpolo. I cannot leave you to die miserably in that cavern. I cannot leave all the Earthlings in Mars imprisoned at Usulor's orders. I've got to get you out, and I've got to prove my own innocence."

"But how, Don?"

"Be quiet, Vans. Let me think."

"Vans," I said presently, "to prove that I did not attempt the assassination of Wimpolo, we must produce the real culprit. We must produce the dummy made to represent me. Was it ever found?"

"No, it was never found," said Vans.

"That dummy was just about my old weight and strength," I mused. "What would I do if a lot of big dummies were hunting me? I would climb, Vans, look up. Is my dummy anywhere above you on the rocks?"

Vans turned a searchlight beam upwards, then gave a shout.

"Why, yes. It is sitting in a crevice in the rocks. It must have reached it when its stored power gave out."

"Good. Now, Vans, make a great pile of seaweed so that it falls without breaking itself. Get a melting ray and cut away the rocky ledge it sits on."

In a few minutes the dummy was down.

Bommelsmeth, or the sea-lion that had been Bommelsmeth, had opened his eyes and was staring at me mournfully. I had chained him to the wall, and also I held in my hand one of his own melting-ray pistols in case of accidents. He seemed still able to understand what Vans and I were talking about.

UNDER my directions Vans repaired the dummy, emptied out what water had not drained out, and got it wattertight.

"Capital!" I said. "Now you have a dummy that can haul you through the

watery caverns to safety."

"One moment," said Vans. "Not so fast! Who is going to sit at the switchboard here and direct the dummy while it is hauling me to safety?"

"Wuff! Wuff! Wuff!" barked the sea-lion. I'll swear it was laughing.

"Never mind, Vans," I said. "Get the dummy going. Send it out. Use it to tell our friends where we are!"

"Attaboy!" murmured Vans, getting busy.

Very soon I was sharing Vans' view of what the dummy saw relayed by its radio television eyes. In a few moments the thing was swimming ashore near Usulor's royal palace. People saw it, shouted, "Don, the outlaw!"

Nerve-stopping death-rays were aimed at it, but naturally the dummy was unharmed. It went on. Guards rushed at it, but it leaped over their heads and still went on. Up the wall of the palace it climbed as a squirrel runs up the trunk of a tree. It reached the Princess' apartment.

"Princess Wimpolo!" it called. "Princess Wimpolo! I can explain everything."

Wimpolo came through a doorway, just as the dummy got through the window.

"Don!" she cried. "Take care! My father—"

Just then a guard who had hidden himself behind some curtains jumped out and swung a heavy sword. Vans was a fraction of an instant too slow in seeing it. The sword, like a great ax, crashed through the head of the dummy, putting it out of action forever.

The guard thought he was saving the Princess from a second attempt at assassination.

"Seems we get no luck, Vans," I said gloomily.

"Wuff! Wuff!" barked the sea-lion.

"Be quiet," I said.

Vans was watching in the television.

"Don," he said, "your sea-lion wants to talk to you."

"Wuff! Wuff!" barked the sea-lion, nodding harder than ever. "Wuff! Wuff! Wuff! Wuff!"

"Don!" cried Vans, dancing with excitement. "It's answering you! It's telling you it can help! Oh, give it a trial!"

"Wuff!" said the sea-lion, pleadingly.

"All right, then," I said. "Come."

I didn't like the idea of trusting that creature. So I said to it, "Now, see, I'm taking your evolution ray machine with me. Rescue us, and I'll change you back into a man again. Fail us, and you stay a sea-lion forever. Get me?"

He nodded.

The sea-lion led the way to the airtight traffic sphere. In no time at all we had shot across the plain, sea-lion steering, and shot down into the other cavern. The sea-lion drove with sickening recklessness. In a few minutes we were beside the still sea. The sea-lion slithered over the rocks and dived, as such creatures do, like a stone.

A MINUTE passed, two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes. At last it returned with Vans in its mouth. Vans was almost unconscious despite his Martian swimming powers, but needed nothing but a rest to regain his full strength.

"Now," I said to the sea-lion, "I'll keep my promise. I'll turn you back into a man again."

Not that I felt too sure of myself. Bommelsmeth back again might be a problem. But I had promised. I put the indicator into reverse, set the machine going.

The sea-lion shuffled hastily out of

the way, wuffing. I turned the machine round. Again it shuffled out of the way.

"It doesn't want to be turned back," Vans cried.

Then I understood. There was no certainty that the changeback would be successful. Bommelsmeth knew what strong medicine his ray was, and the wild results it was likely to produce. Safer to remain a sea-lion.

"As you like it," I said. And he is still my pet sea-lion.

We drove to the palace. Vans got out. I remained inside, out of sight.

"Vans," shouted the guards in delight. "Enter! High honor awaits you for saving the Princess!"

"What is this?" asked Vans pointing to a notice offering the huge reward for my body, dead or alive.

"Oh, forget that!" said the Captain of the Guard. "That's cancelled. It wasn't Don that attacked the Princess. It was an animated dummy. That same dummy came back and had another try, but one of the guards caught it. The Princess thought she had seen Don killed before her eyes until all the wires and wheels and valves fell out. Don is pardoned, and all the Earthlings are free."

At that I jumped out of the sphere. A great shout went up. People poured out of the palace.

"Vans," I whispered, "take care of the evolution ray and get it well out of sight. It's not safe to leave it about and these people will keep me busy."

VANS picked up the box and went off. He raced for his own home. As he rushed into the front garden another figure might have been seen slipping out the back in a hurry.

Vans looked eagerly around. His eyes sought out the slim figure of Olla his wife.

"Olla," he roared, thundering toward her. "I've come back! Your Vans is back!"

Then he stopped short. She stood glaring up at him.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" she demanded furiously.

He gaped.

"You nearly left me a widow," she stormed, "just to save her. You think more of her than you do me!"

"But, Olla, love, I—"

A stinging slap on the cheek stopped him. She couldn't hurt the strongest man in Mars physically, but she did hurt his feelings.

"Olla!" he protested.

"Leave me," she ordered. Then he saw the big box he had been carrying. "What's that?" she demanded.

"I don't know," he said, "but you mustn't touch it. It's dangerous."

Olla snorted. The big bear trying to order her about! She went straight to the box and fiddled with the knobs.

"Olla! Don't! It's dangerous."

"Stuff," she said. "It's a new television set. Stop your squawks and tell me how to work it."

Vans was in distress. He couldn't manhandle Olla.

"Don," he called, rushing out. "Come! I need you."

When I got there a large red and yellow bird, something like a flamingo, stood full in the glare of the evolution ray, making strange noises and flapping its wings in puzzlement. All at once it flew up in the air clumsily and vanished in the distance.

"Olla!" moaned Vans.

He rushed off.

Five minutes later a small airplane roared over my head at a considerable speed. Vans Holors had gone to find his wife.

Up to the moment of writing he has not been heard from.—*Don Hargreaves.*