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Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES
COVER BY EMSH

MARIE A. PARK, Asso. Ed.

DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.

Illustrations by Emsh, Freas, and Orban

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PURSUIT

by Ron Smith

Wallach was the lean, rough and tough kind of spaceman. Only he didn't feel either rough or tough now, with this creature after him!

HE SHOT a quick glance over his shoulder, and his eyes widened in terror. The Frejul was

still there, now closer against the horizon, its green shape looming over the red sand of Mars.

The man pushed himself to even greater speed. As he ran, he brushed a hand across his sweating brow, noticing, in that second, that he had lost his glove. He didn't care; he ignored it, his mind rushing as fast as his feet.

His name was Shil Wallach, a spaceman of lean, rough appearance. Only now he didn't feel so lean—as a prospective meal for the Frejul—nor so rough.

Before him loomed the Pink Mountains red now in the glow of the small sun low on the western horizon. They were about ten miles away; he quickly cancelled them out in his mind as a possible means of escape.

He looked behind him again. It was still there.

If only it would trip, fall in a gopher hole perhaps, so he could gain time—time to think out a way of escape. But he shook his head grimly, as he ran, tiring now. "No," he said to himself.

He knew there were no gopher holes on Mars.

THEN HE thought of the Bentele Mounds—about a mile ahead, a little to his left. There, he thought triumphantly, was sanctuary. If he could reach them, those strange, deserted underground dwellings of a race long since

passed into extinction, he be safe.

If I can make it, Wallach thought sourly.

Behind him the Frejul was moving closer; not more than a hundred yards separated them now. He could see the luminous eyes, large yellow eyes the size of floodlights, glaring at him balefully. It was over fifteen feet high, a bilious green in color, with speckles of red, its skin a slick, slimy smoothness.

As he ran, furiously, the image appeared mockingly before his vision, a sight he could not banish from his mind. *What will it do to me?* he wondered, sickening at the thought.

He did not know. No spaceman had ever encountered one before except from a distance, unobserved; and certainly no man had been pursued by a Frejul before. He did not know why he should be singled out for the first. Since the Mars colony was young, and exploration and investigation therefore limited, no one knew much about them. Except that they were intelligent (how intelligent was unknown) and that the females were apparently dominant sexually—their culture, if they had one, was undetermined.

He thought of these things as he ran, but they gave him no answer—no answer as to why he was being pursued, no solution to his predicament.

If I can just reach the Ben-tle Mounds, he thought.

AND THEN Wallach screamed. He screamed because he had tripped—not in a gopher hole, but in a Clentel-Beast hole.

His hands clawed at the ground convulsively as he tried to regain his feet. He slipped in the sand, his legs flailing, his face contorted in unbelievable horror.

He turned and saw that the Frejul was upon him. He threw his hands to his face, his body trembling uncontrollably.

He fell to the earth and buried his face in the sand, clenching his bare palm between his teeth, his mind quaking in horror at the thought of the monster rending his flesh.

He waited. But nothing happened; nothing moved. There was no sound.

Slowly, Wallach raised his head from the sand, slowly peered out from between his fingers.

The monster was there, standing above him, motionless. He started to scream again, then caught himself.

The Frejul held out one of its tentacles; it made sounds which he couldn't understand.

But Wallach knew what the green hulk was saying. He looked at the outstretched tentacle, in which there was an object—his glove.