

SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

25¢
THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 5

SEPTEMBER, 1949

No. 4

THREE UNFORGETTABLE NOVELS

- MINION OF CHAOS** John D. MacDonald 8
Wisdom was his destiny—learn and conquer his creed . . . until in an atom-scarred universe there was but one thing left to overcome—Man;
- MINUS DANGER!** George O. Smith 66
From tiny nonexistence, Man's brightest highest attainment grew to an enormous nothing—a nothing vast enough to engulf not only him—but his universe!
- THE METAL MOON** Neil R. Jones 102
In the wandering heart of an exploded moon, the metal men found a peril greater than they had ever faced—the eight-armed Arnolascos of Dwom, who made gods of strangers—and destroyed their gods!

SHORT STORIES

- BRIDE OF ETERNITY** Margaret St. Clair 36
She had waited eons for her subjects—until the dark day she awoke to a world too cruel to love her, yet too fond to let her die!
- THE MINIATURE** Peter Reed 46
In the vault, he knew nothing of his long journey between birth and death. . . . But what dreams disturbed the sleep of this man, whose body was more precious than diamonds?
- WORLD OF NO RETURN** Bryce Walton 56
Under the twin moons of Mars, Cliff, the Earthman, could not live . . . and Della, poor misguided Della, could not die!
- STAR-BROTHER** Stanley Mullen 88
Dying Earthman and deathless Venusian, they joined in the strangest comradeship the stars had seen . . . to build, from its mind wrenching horror, a barrier that would forever preserve their planets!

DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES

- POPULAR FILMS** Ted Palmer
- FANDOM'S CORNER** Conducted by James V. Taurasi 7
- LAWRENCE PORTFOLIO** 55
- THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER** .. Conducted by Frederick Pohl 100
- MISSIVES AND MISSILES** The Readers 122
- Illustrations by Lawrence, Finlay, Van Dongen, Paul and Leydenfrost
Cover by Lawrence

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

Super Science is published bi-monthly by Fictioneers Inc., a subsidiary of Popular Publications, Inc., at 123 18th Street, New Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Authorized by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada as Second Class Matter. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and the American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form. Annual subscription \$1.50. When submitting manuscripts enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. Publishers will exercise care in handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. September 1949. Volume 1, No. 4. Printed in Canada.

STAR-BROTHER

Dying Earthman and deathless Venusian, they joined in the strangest comradeship the stars had seen . . . to build, from its mind-wrenching horror, a barrier that would forever preserve their planets !

By
**Stanley
Mullen**

HE ROUSED from his stupor, stared numbly at the visiport. Venus lay dead ahead. A blinding crescent of reflected light edged the great bulging disk. Kelland smiled grimly. Dead or alive, he was going to be the first man to land on Venus. One by one the others had died, some quickly from what seemed only superficial burns, others slowly in frightful agonies as the radiation seared flesh from bone. Kelland had hung on, and he felt a half-humorous contempt for his late companions whose bodies he had callously stacked in a heap at the rear of the control room.

Kelland was tough. He prided himself on the fact. You have to be tough to live very long in space exploration, and Kelland was older than most veterans of the Martian and Lunar expeditions.

Before losing consciousness, he had even strapped himself into the control seat, hoping for a miracle.

A quick glance at the control panel, with its glittering rows of gauges, told him all he needed to know. Only minutes separated the crippled ship from that weirdly concave circle of darkness which showed in the visi-

plate. At thirty miles a second, the doomed Todalla was diving in at too acute an angle. A crash was inevitable. This was the end of that long, long orbit from Earth.

Casually, Kelland toyed with the switches activating the forward braking-tubes. No result. The mechanical parts had probably already begun the swift corrosion of radio-activity. Maybe the relays were jammed. Even if they were not, and the automatic mass-proximity relays worked the braking-jets, the distance was too short.

Kelland shrugged. He was dying anyhow. Why should he care? Even if he survived the crash, he could not live long. His bulky, heavily-insulated space garments were allowing unbelievable heat to seep through. The control cabin must be like a furnace. Some of the controls felt almost spongy to his faltering touch. Already the radiation burns were tingling

● He felt a dread of the alien species who had created such a masterwork of Titan size and goblin coloring . . .



along his nerve ends. Inside, his bone marrow must be disintegrating, along with everything else on board.

Kelland could see nothing definite in the seas of opaque mist which swathed the planet. Fog? Or dust clouds? The experts had never agreed. Whatever it was, fifteen miles of it blanketed the surface like a deep ocean. Fifteen miles—half a second at the present speed. The flicker of an eyelash.

The disk expanded visibly, coming up at him with heart-gripping steadiness. Only faint blurs and fuzziness at the edges, evidenced any rotation. He blinkd, trying to clear his fogged vision. When he looked again, the disk had changed from concave to convex. The mass proximity switches were a last hope. Radar impulses were still going out, but feebly, and growing weaker as the power dwindled.

The globe of harshly outlined blackness rushed up at him, ceased to be a globe, flattened oddly.

Relays clicked, blazed electric blue sparks as the switches went home. Somewhere forward, there was eerie hissing as the tubes blasted off. Snowy flame bathed the dome-like bow. Then a series of numbing shocks before the jets leveled off. Deceleration built into agony, and trickles of blood thrust from the man's eye-corners. A hot stream burst from his nostrils, drenching him. The staggering pain of full deceleration struck him like a hammer blow. His brain dissolved in roaring darkness. . . .

The Todalla nosed into the barrier mists, with the lone surviving crewman unconscious. . . .

THE SPACESHIP lay on its side, like a broken beetle. Oddments of wreckage had been flung in a wide fan where a storage hatch had burst its

lugs. The hull was bent, scarred, strangely lopsided.

Kelland's first surprise was that he still lived. His helmet was dented and wedged firmly against the skull; reinforced breast armor had bent like soft cheese from the blow which hurled him so violently among the complex levers that he was lodged fast; his face plate of fused quartz was splintered by shock. Dazed and curiously sick, he still lived . . . and more, he breathed.

Gratefully he sucked in air, realizing suddenly how foul the atmosphere of the rocket had become after the rectifiers failed. . . .

Venus! This air should not be fit to breathe according to the briefing he'd had. Ammonia, methane. But here it was, and he was breathing it. The air had an odd taste and burned eerily after it got inside his lungs, but it was air . . . air, and a very similar mixture to the air he knew. No use bothering to test it now. It would do while he lasted.

Kelland got hold of the generator base and managed to pry himself loose from the wreckage of warped and battered controls.

Through the gap in the hull where the hatch-cover had ripped off, he looked out upon a deserted landscape. The Todalla seemed to have crashed among barren, rocky hills. Great cone-like crags of weathered stone shone with harsh brilliance. A curious expanse of grayness, luminous, not murky and dark as an overcast sky on Earth, extended endlessly to merge somewhere with a vague horizon. Nearby, a metal tower built like a series of rings, diminishing in size as they rose above the flattened surface, soared high toward the gray canopy. From a dark globe at the top, a single beam of incredibly bright light pointed

directly upward, penetrating the smooth seas of mist.

Unimaginative as he was, Kelland was impressed. There was an artificial look about the flattened area where the spaceship rested. Sparse grass grew here, but the jagged pinnacles of rock around him were nude.

As automatically as the robot pilots, Kelland scrambled out and began assembling and checking the scattered supplies. Some of the shielded containers were broken open, the food concentrates and other supplies already contaminated. Coolly, he estimated his chances. The air pressure was light, much lighter than Tibet, where he had trained and conditioned himself; but at any rate he was breathing. If the curious mist-barrier above served to screen out the deadly actinic rays—

He stopped.

His lips twisted in a bitter, scornful smile. How could he have forgotten? What meaning could survival reckonings have for him? He felt a tingling of his skin; hot rawness behind his eyes, in his lungs. Already the swiftly blighting decay of radio-activity must be working in him. . . .

"Twelve to forty-eight hours after exposure," the warnings had read.

The languid air stirred to his raucous laughter. Well, he had his ticket—he'd paid for it. Might as well play out the comedy. A lot of men would trade their lives to be in his spot: the first man on Venus.

Those long-haired technicians and speculators back on Earth talked pretty big about what was on Venus, what the atmosphere was, quoted spectrographic readings, thermocouple readings, calculated possible rates of rotation from the temperature of the visible layer. A lot they knew about it. He, Kelland, was there. He'd asked for it, and the gods of space had

shoved it down his throat. The guessers back home had warned him it might be a fiery hot desert with continual sandstorms; in the old days, people had imagined riotous jungles of steaming heat filled with weird monsters; perhaps boiling seas around the equator, impossibly long days and nights, or a perpetual light side and dark side. . . .

There was no limit to the speculations people could make, but it took someone like him, Kelland, to go there and find out. The rest of them could guess; he knew.

At least where he was, there was no jungle, no boiling oceans, no desert, no storms. It seemed bleak but not uncomfortable. So far he had seen no water, but if the grass could grow, even sparsely, there must be some moisture. The ground even looked as if it might yield to some kind of cultivation.

Kelland crawled back into the ship and got to the sending-room.

The helioflash was useless, of course, without sun-power—he suspected that too little sunlight penetrated that layer of dense clouds or whatever to power the sender. The radio might do it. He went over the equipment carefully and found it in working order. The transmitter was small but potent, and he was well aware that the major observatories on Earth were all waiting, tensely, hopefully, for some word from the Todalla. One thing more, and he'd be ready to send. If that outside face of the barrier were ionized, he was wasting his time; the radio waves would be reflected back to the surface. He got sensitive instruments from the case and went outside to turn them full into that glare of luminous gray. The needles jerked and held strong. No use; the stuff was carrying a heavy charge.

Disgruntled, Kelland kicked idly at the shattered radar-sender. Not much hope there.

Outside again, Kelland broke into a food container, got out a thermal can of coffee, and drank it down black and steaming. The canned food was not appealing, but he ate it.

Suddenly, he felt lonely and bored. Too restless for sleep, hounded by the feeling that his time was short, he decided to explore. There was nothing to keep him to the ship; he could carry enough grub and drinkables for the time remaining.

Besides, he was interested in that metallic tower. Curiosity and a longing for companionship, of any kind, deviled him. Packing a kit of supplies, he set off in the general direction of the tower.

AS He drew near the base of the structure, the sky cleared suddenly above him and a huge, richly red-purple sun shone through. The atmosphere was clear as crystal, without the faintest hint of haze; the sky palest yellow green with hints of vague orange-tint. Here and there swam clots of blurred violet, clouds perhaps, with a faint suggestion of sparkling luminosity. As the mist-barrier vanished, the beam of blindingly brilliant light died out from the globe atop the tower.

From its base, a hundred feet in diameter, the structure seemed to reach up to fantastic heights. In spite of a grace and delicacy of design, the tower was solidly built of metal, part of which was plated with a facing material like translucent pale-green porcelain. There were no wires nor cables, no doors or windows, and Kelland thought only of some electrical device, not of a dwelling, as he studied it.

Kelland stood now at the edge of the cleared and flattened area. Close at hand rose the forbidding hills and gaunt spires, surrounded by spills of broken rock. A narrow, tortuous gorge led among them, descending steeply to lower ground. Kelland followed it and came out finally into a broad valley, with low, smoothly rounded hills, through which moved a broad, placidly flowing river. Kelland stopped, gasping in amazement.

On the nearer bank, filling a tremendous bend in the river, was a city for Titans. Built of the pure, blazing colors of the rainbow, it rose in smoothly rounded curves, individual buildings blending indistinguishably into the mass, piling up into forests of slender, glittering spires. Nothing earthlike could compare with its eerie geometries; its solid forms seemed to flow together and fuse, its materials were pure translucent color as if light had solidified. It sprang gradually from a sea of what Kelland thought were flower gardens, having no exact beginning and end.

Color juxtapositions were curious, but blended tastefully, seeming a part of the very structure. Even the rioting gardens showed definite arrangement, and seemed to work a delicate counterpoint to the patterns of the city.

Dazzled, attracted yet oddly disquieted by the alien beauty of the place, Kelland stood long minutes staring, before nerving himself to plunge across the grassy hillocks and flatlands toward the city.

The scarred metal covering of his food-kit reminded him that he was hungry again. Time must have passed, though he had been but vaguely conscious of it. As he walked he ate, throwing aside the thermal containers like some casual picnicker.

The city, as he drew near it, seemed

less like a city than a single, vastly complex dwelling. There were no walls or gates, no visible doors or windows.

A long, exquisitely curved ramp led upward, disappearing as the walls curved in upon it. This must be the entrance, for no other opening marred the careless symmetries of the façade. For Kelland, there was now no turning back. Cautiously, he ascended, awed by the magnificence, the tremendous technical achievement of the place. A dread of encountering the alien species who had created such a masterwork of Titan size and goblin coloring broke through the crust of Kelland's confidence, and dry fear rose to clutch at his throat.

As the walls shut down around him, he experienced a sensation of being watched. There was still no sign of living inhabitants, nor evidence of any past habitation. Floor, walls and ceiling were apparently of one substance, some translucent metal fused into a single mass. Illumination came from deep within, giving a glareless, shadowless light. Cavern-like, the passage drove straight into the heart of the building, with no side openings, no niches, no furnishings of any kind. It was utterly unlike a place where anything lived.

No fleck of dust, no mark of passage marred the smoothness of the floor.

Worst of all was the silence which hung everywhere like a tangible presence.

Deeper and deeper Kelland penetrated the structure, his uneasiness growing subtly. Imperceptibly the walls drew back, the ceiling lifted. He found himself in a high, vaulted chamber. Here the light held curious distortions, a flickering seemed to move eerily about; colors shifted unpleasantly, transmuting forms and

running a gamut of shades while he watched.

Numberless apertures led from this chamber in all directions. These doorways, if such they were, puzzled Kelland. He studied them, watched while their sizes and shapes fluctuated, experimented with the distortions of light by moving about and looking at their arrangements from different directions. There was no order, no apparent pattern, no stability to them. It was almost as if they were part of a living organism.

Uncomfortable in the hugeness of the vaulted chamber, where his muted footsteps echoed and re-echoed sibilantly, Kelland chose an aperture at random and followed a steep, spiraling ramp which led upward. After a short ascent, he came to another junction chamber, turning aside from it to follow a rambling passage which led through a series of apartment-like nests of circular rooms. These apartments did not confine themselves to a single level but wandered aimlessly up, down and around.

The passage ended abruptly in a small, roughly circular cell, where a square block of metal protruded from the floor. Set into the walls were sheets of glass, apparently lenses or at least prismatic transparencies of some kind. As Kelland stared into them, his vision twisted agonizingly, turning back on itself. He saw his rough, homely face endlessly repeated, with cruel variations. A hard cramp got inside his eyes, writhed and remained.

Tired, badly frightened, Kelland sat down on the block, and fought the waves of dizziness which rose over him.

Soundlessly, the lights went out.

Kelland started upright, trying to peer into the blackness.

Out of the blank nothingness which surrounded him came a voice, a voice that spoke not in sound but in word images that burned within his brain.

"You cannot perceive us with your limited faculties. Do not try."

"Who are you? What are you?" Kelland screamed.

Waves of thought-force beat upon the inner core of his consciousness. First they came in word-images which glowed like fire upon the inner shell of his mind; then graphic symbols, like half-seen, half-understood abstractions; later in complex pictures. Seas of new, breath-taking knowledge flooded him — profundities which drowned out and swept away the feeble concepts of his culture; a sickening grasp at infinities beyond his understanding, beyond even the fiery wings of imagination. . . .

THEN it was gone. The presences he had sensed withdrew. A heavy silence oppressed the darkness.

Slowly Kelland sank back upon the bench. He understood now, vaguely, that it had been created for his comfort, a gesture of compromise to his anatomical structure.

The vastness, the unthinkable profundities of the revelation staggered him. Weak and ill with his tremendous effort of mind, he relaxed, groping at some kind of understanding.

Gradually the darkness lightened. A luminous grayness grew steadily in intensity. The pressure of silence lessened, and again Kelland was conscious of the presences.

It was distracting, being unable to face them. He felt that they were laughing at him, and words tumbled from his mouth in hopeless confusion. Even to him, they sounded strange, muffled, contorted, as if the images struggled for clarity in an unfamiliar

medium. Disturbed, the fear on him again, he fell silent.

The silence seemed to approve. Again the word-images came, beating at him, thrusting themselves into his mind.

"Do not waste your energy trying to imagine the nature of our being—who or what we are does not matter. A creature like you would be unable to understand so complicated a life-form as ours. It is better that you do not try."

Kelland writhed. There was no contempt in the message, no suggestion of disdain or hint that to them he was repulsive and inferior. But the knowledge of his limitations and the appalling vastness of the concepts he had so dimly grasped, made him conscious of his species as one of the lower orders. His soul cringed away from them, and he felt as nakedly hideous, undeveloped, incomplete as a dog must feel in the presence of man.

After a pause, the waves of mind-power swept over Kelland once more. This time there seemed a subtle difference, as if a more exact focus had been made; he felt confusion lessen, and the images became sharper.

"You are right," the images replied to his unspoken question. "There is a change. In order to relieve your confusions, I have separated myself from our group-consciousness, and will deal with you now as an individual. Also, since your inability to perceive me makes communication more difficult, I can offer you a focus for your attention."

A smear of glowing, molten color began to manifest itself upon the curtain of luminous mist. Without specific form, bodiless, like some three-dimensional projection of light, it hung motionless, yet seemed to flow

and fuse with endless mutations of color.

"Long, long have we known that our neighboring planet, which you name Earth, was inhabited. From our distance we have studied it carefully and in some detail. Naturally, there is much that we could never understand. It was thought at one time that we should make overtures to the most intelligent of your beings, but we were cautious. After certain unpleasant but enlightening experiences with other orders elsewhere, we had learned to think long before making contact with other life-forms.

"With some of the more highly civilized beings of other systems, we have held communications for many generations, yet they need nothing from us and have little to offer ourselves. Strange, that our nearest neighbors should be so ill-suited to exchange ideas and necessities with us. We have much to offer your kind, much knowledge that you need desperately, but we distrust the gifts you might bring in return.

"For a time we studied Earth and its brute folk most diligently, longing to reach across the gulf and raise some species to a higher state. Then we watched, startled, your swift mutation from the brute stage. So much accomplished in so short a time, and yet you have a long way still to follow to the ultimate goal of your development. With growing uneasiness we saw knowledge spring up among you, knowledge and the thirst for still greater conquests. Among your minds are a few which burn with the brightest flames of intellect, but no individual beings are greater than their group-mind.

"With us there is little individual entity; each of us is part of the whole, the group-unity; we do not function

apart as readily as we do as a group.

"It was decided by our group-council that we should make no effort to make contact with the people of Earth. Meddling with situations imperfectly understood could lead to untold damage. Not only that, but we feared for your safety should your kind gain knowledge more rapidly than the ability to use it. At first we thought it best to wait until you learned enough to seek us out; then to share freely with you all our hard-learned secrets. Later, as we observed your scientific skills and perceptions so rapidly outstripping, even engulfing, your slowly developing wisdom—we began to fear for ourselves. Too much of the brute nature still lingers in you; of kind-unity you have none. Centuries ago, when still your arts of learning were in their infancy, we decided to veil ourselves from you, to swathe our world in impenetrable mystery; hence the reflector-barrier. Tell me, do not your kind know more of the further stars than of our planet?"

Kelland sensed something like a tentacle of thought-force probe his mind. As he willed himself to answer, before ever words left his lips, he sensed that the answer was received and noted.

"Since that time," continued the alien thoughts, "we have ignored your planet. Your arrival was a complete surprise to us. Knowing the stage of your scientific development several of your centuries ago, it was difficult for us to realize that any interplanetary travel could be dreamed of so soon. We were not prepared for you. Tell me, what did you seek here that seemed worth the dreadful risks you took to cross the gulf of space?"

Again Kelland felt the knowledge sucked from his very brain as forces

probed deeply, sorting the required answers from his jumbled confusion of thought.

"Your unannounced arrival was a great surprise to all of us," said the alien thoughts. "Had we been better prepared, the incident would not have occurred. When your craft came through the barrier screens, it was necessary to create a protective area around you, or you would have died in a matter of seconds, from exposure to the true nature of our world, our customary environment. Time was short, but we did what was possible. The composition of an artificial atmosphere approximating that of your planet was most difficult, and not altogether successful. However, it served. And whatever you saw, or thought you saw, of our actual surface world on your way here bears little relation to the reality. We created a world for you to live in temporarily, until we could study you as an example of your species at close range.

"This was our first opportunity to study an actual example of an alien race. Our first step was to re-create both you and your ship in exact detail. Both were so badly damaged in the passage through the force-field and the actual crash as to be useless for our purposes. The duplication of the ship was elementary. Were you back now at the place where you made your landing, you would find a complete new vessel, exactly the same as the original in every way, standing close beside your own ship. Amid the shattered wreckage of the original, you would find your own shattered body. The re-creation of your physical entity was simple enough; the transference of memory, identity, and all the manifold patterns of thought-culture was much more difficult. Does the thought disturb you?"

KELLAND'S brain rioted at the suggestion. He squirmed and half-rose from the bench.

Something like a wave of laughter vibrated from the alien mind. "You do not accept the thought; that is curious. I have sensed a stubbornness in you, a denial of truth, illogical, one of your brute-patterns, no doubt. But it puzzles me. Why should I mislead you?"

Kelland stifled the angry words which boiled up in him, deliberately blanking out his mind.

"I fear we have reached the end of discussion," said the alien, with a hint of sorrow in the thought. It was the first recognizable emotion Kelland had sensed in the aliens. "While our group-consciousness debates your fate, it is necessary that I complete the examination. It will be unpleasant for you, but there is no choice. I must enter your consciousness, learn all that you know of your culture, your complete thought-patterns, even those of which you are unconscious. There will never be another such opportunity, for after this our screen will be so completely energized that any unwanted visitors will be utterly destroyed on contact. I must absorb your consciousness, your complete identity; when it has been recorded, I will return it to you . . . for whatever time remains to you."

"You're wasting your time, killing me," Kelland burst out. "I was dying when the ship hit."

"You are mistaken," the word-images corrected gently. "The new body is uncontaminated."

A wave of terrific mind-force struck Kelland. For a moment he reeled backward, then, furiously angry, he fought back. A wild impulse urged him to break free and run from the chamber. He got three long steps

toward the doorway when invisible bonds descended over him; he felt the cold prisoning of metallic clamps on wrists and ankles, knew that he was, being lifted and transported bodily. He remembered being placed gently but firmly on the block, spread-eagled, arms and legs pinioned tightly against it as if with invisible bonds.

Unable to move, he felt deadly pressure beat upon his mind. Sweat beaded his lips, stung his eyes, as he struggled vainly to combat the pressure. A vortex of darkness swirled about him.

"It is useless to strive against me," the voice within his brain murmured.

Slowly the images faded. Kelland fought; but memory clouded, identity itself gave way gradually. Something cold and alien crowded its way into his brain. His very thoughts seemed drawn from him in hideous mental vivisection. While consciousness remained, he struggled, hopelessly, in vague terror, in bitter anger at this violation of his last core of human dignity.

Before the darkness enveloped him, there was a moment of strange and terrible beauty. As the other being entered and absorbed his identity, the two merged. Kelland stared in bleak anguish into the furthest immensities of Alien Spirit, treading the star gulfs, experiencing odysseys of thought beyond the wildest dreams of man.

But the vortices of roaring blackness swirled with ever increasing tempo, sucking him down into abysses of fiery darkness. A flickering recognition of the battle lost . . . then blankness, horror unutterable. . . .

TIME extended beyond the limits of infinity. Eventually, a spot of colored flame rose and danced in his brain, and his subconscious mind

followed its eerie convolutions. In the painful awakening was realization of spiritual death and resurrection—Kelland lay gasping upon the metal block while the dancing flame exploded and sparks like splintered light drove through his brain and body.

With returning memory came recognition of his identity, and an awareness of being alone, blessedly alone again with himself.

Memory flowed through him, galling, and he concentrated his mind-power up the vivid stain of drifting light.

Response was instantaneous. The word-images formed themselves within his consciousness.

"It is as we thought. Worse. . . . Existence amid such chaos, such horror, must be unendurable." Even the word-images seemed to writhe and stir with repulsion. "That such a people—our nearest neighbors among the inhabited worlds—should be so incapable, so unworthy, of receiving our gifts! It would be a kindness to blot such miserable beings from existence."

Kelland found himself responding in kind to the telepathic communication. The images moved more easily now, as if some sort of rapport had been established. And something of his horror, his disgust, transmitted itself along with the images.

"Now that I've seen something of what you're really like, I can only pray for one thing . . . that our kinds should never meet. If I could get past your barrier screen and send a message, it would be to warn away all other expeditions from Venus."

After a prolonged pause, there came a beating vibration of reply, coldly, without emotion: "At the moment, shaken by my revulsion at your species, I could agree most heartily with

your desire. However, the decision of our council will doubtless be tempered by our greater horizons of evolution; fortunately for you and your species, our kind is the more tolerant race. Even such gulfs of difference as separate us are not impossible to bridge . . .

"Yet eons of development separate our states of being. Were the decision mine, I should release you with a warning. I should send back this message to your world. 'Develop according to your own patterns, people of Earth. Conquer your diseases of all kinds, of both mind and body; master first your physical environment, then most important of all, master yourselves. When you have done this, come again to us—for we have much to give you.'

"But, as I have said, the decision is not altogether mine to make. Not for generations has there been individual dissent from the group-decision of our kind.

"I must leave you now, to place the records of my study before our council. Do not let thoughts of escape in that accurately duplicated spaceship tempt your mind. Even though that message you long to send back to Earth is nearest our hearts, there are simpler and less dangerous ways. . . ."

"It would have been easier to let me die," Kelland burst out angrily. "Why don't you kill me and have done with it?"

"If necessary, that will be done . . . with infinite regret," came the reply.

Kelland sensed withdrawal of the alien personality, and the oppressive silence lay heavily about him.

His mind toyed automatically with thoughts of escape. In imagination, he was in the reconstructed spaceship, rising toward that curiously opaque mist-barrier, trailing streamers of

glory as the jets gave forth their fearful power. Then he was past the barrier, the message clicking out on the transmitter, a wave of relief flooding over him as the "Message received" came through. A terrible nostalgia for Earth and all it could mean to a space-wanderer tortured him, and he longed to be starting the long tangential orbit home, Venus and its mysteries dead astern, left swiftly behind as the rocket accelerated. . . .

With desperate savagery he wrenched at the invisible bonds—and flung himself to the metallic floor. The bonds were gone.

Instantly he was on his feet, running with hard purpose. Each stage of his journey into the alien city was deeply etched in his mind, and he retraced his steps with careful precision. He slowed to a rapid walk, lest he slip and fall on the porcelain-like floor. Down the exquisitely curved ramp he went, and through the circular rooms. The city was alive with whispering echoes. The muffled clink of his boots on the smoothly polished metal rang in his ears like the clangor of alarm bells.

Behind him rose a murmurous, excited buzzing as if swarms of excited bees sought viciously to repel an invader. In the sound was a note of anger and dismay, and from far behind came a flicker of oddly unsteady lights. Kelland took the last gallery at full speed, reckless of footing.

Outside, the sun still burned hotly in a sky of purest yellow-green.

The sounds of aroused pursuit lent wings to Kelland's feet. Without pausing to speculate on the reality of the world about him, he went through it hastily, trampling the seas of flower gardens, leaving a lengthening wake in the curious grasses, as he headed

directly for the cleft among the rock hills beyond which lay the ship.

Panting, breathless, he came through the tangle of rocky gorges. The glint of polished metal welcomed him to the flatland.

Beside the mangled wreckage of the Todalla was another ship, new and pristine, but an exact duplicate. Forewarned as he was, Kelland gasped in amazement. As he passed the broken, pitted hull of the Todalla, a twisted something caught in the wreckage drew his eye.

Clad in the tattered rags of space leather, the pitifully broken thing sickened him, and he tried not to look too closely at it. Identification would be impossible at this stage, but he feared what supported suspicion would do to his mind. How long had he remained in the forbidden city of the aliens?

There was a nightmarish unreality about the whole experience.

As if in a dream, he went up the gangplank leading to the ship's control room, slammed shut and sealed the hatch.

Sick with excitement, he tested the manual controls and fuel gauges, then knifed home the jet switches. Response was instant. Rocket tubes flared to sudden life; the hull throbbed with power. With skill born of long training, he blasted off. A series of shocks steadied to a smooth flow of power. Accelerating as rapidly as he dared, Kelland sent the ship roaring up.

Ahead in the visiplat, the sky clouded over, became an opaque canopy of gray, writhing clouds. Weirdly sparkling ghost-lights flickered through the mists. Was the barrier's ionized layer charged with deadly currents of force? Something vaguely remembered sent ugly chills through him.

He tore his attention from the visi-

plate, opened the throttle wide and braced himself as acceleration built upon itself.

Between him and the visiplat a curious pattern of vivid light stains took shape. Alien thought-images formed in his brain.

"Did you think, Earthman, that you could ever have escaped . . . had I willed you to stay? . . ."

"As I had anticipated, decision at the council went against you. It was felt necessary that you be destroyed. Sometimes ruthless destruction of another being is essential to the welfare of a race. But I, perhaps because my intimate contact with you has forever corrupted my judgment, could not concur in the verdict of death. I had given you the idea of escape, partly because I knew your kind so well and realized that you would mistrust any gift from me. To have kept you captive would have meant your death as surely as if we had slain you by your own weapons. And I would not have the stain of violence upon my people, however great the need. So I contrived your escape, watched over you and guided you in safety to the ship. Even the barrier has been de-energized to permit your safe passage.

"Now go, swiftly, and give no thought to your message of warning. It will not be needed. From our distance, we will see that no further thought of exploring Venus comes to your people. Until you, too, have become civilized, it is best that you have no knowledge of our existence.

"When you have passed the barrier, you will forget everything that has happened. . . ."

Like a thundering arrow of metal the rocket ship drove into the barrier, which parted to receive it.

And Kelland forgot. . . .