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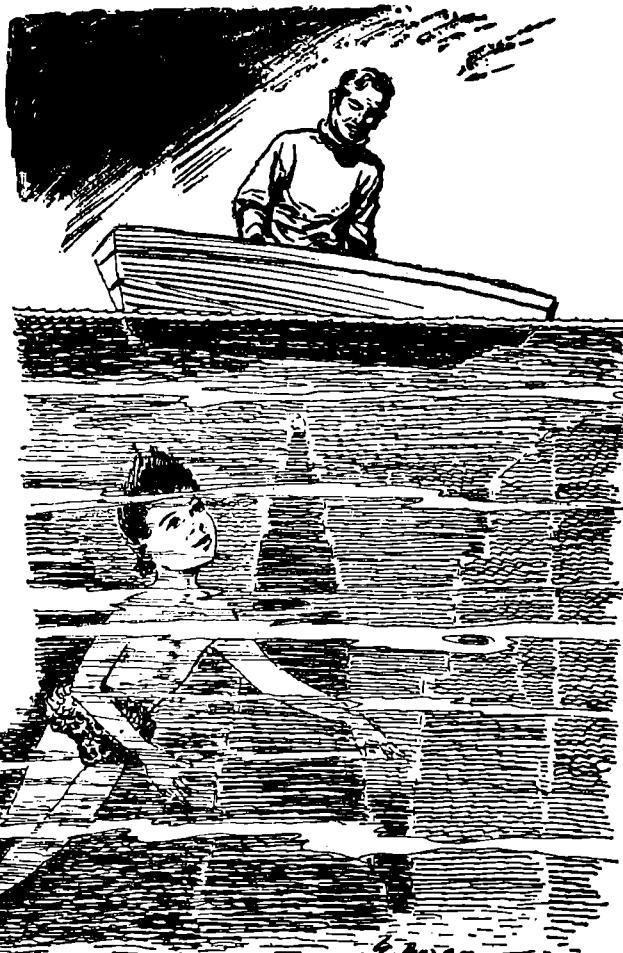
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The Forsaken Earthman

Stephen Kavanaugh was quite sure at first that life on Mars was the red-planet equivalent of paradise. He didn't change his mind, exactly. But devotion to duty can have a tragic outcome. Anyway, a monument is usually a sincere tribute.



**A COMPLETE NOVELET OF
MARTIAN ADVENTURE**



by WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

IN THE YEARS THAT HAVE passed since Stephen Kavanaugh jumped ship on Mars, much has been written about this tragically misunderstood and controversial man. I feel that it is time to publish the truth, or as much of it as we can derive from the following correspondence.

I was "Champ"—chaplain-morale officer-psychologist—of the *Morningstar* on the historic flight which established the first experimental station on Mars. Steve Kavanaugh, as most of the world knows, was a jetman, second grade. He jumped ship during the construction of the base installation, later returned of his own accord, was court-martialed, and convicted of fraternization with the humanoid inhabitants of another planet. He was dishonorably discharged from the service and refused repatriation to Earth. Steve spent the rest of his life on Mars, married a Martian woman and had two children by her.

As his Champ I knew Steve better than anyone else. He was a big, sandy-haired lad who had been on his university's swimming team and had edited

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the year book before his enlistment in the Space Force.

Whether or not the test battery of the psychological division slipped up in determining emotional instability in his case or not, Steve had an unsuspected side to his nature. Part of him was the complete jetman. The other was explorer through and through—and should never have been allowed on board the *Morningstar* with her single mission of building the station. The challenge of that vast labyrinthine world which is Mars was too much for the explorer's heart.

His marriage to the Martian girl, Ephendra, drew down on his head a torrent of denunciation which today is hard to understand, but Steve's marriage was inevitable. Ephendra was Mars incarnate, alternately passionate and cold.

I saw her first at the court-martial, her red-gold hair strangely luminous against the copper tone of her bare shoulders. Her father, who accompanied her, was *emphala* of the canal and it was quite apparent from his attitude at the trial that he considered Earth and all of its works a subject for amusement.

His strangely pale son-in-law he seemed to view as an engaging whim of his daughter's—not her first, certainly, but one of her most original. What his attitude was toward the children which resulted from this odd mating I have no idea, for Steve never mentioned it.

After the trial I saw Steve only once. This was on my return to Mars on the second voyage I made, when I brought him the equipment he requested.

Stephen Kavanaugh was one of those hardy souls who have left their mark—and often their bones—on the wild places of the universe. Out of his tragedy came a great triumph. It was his wish that all his letters and notes be published, for he wanted, above all else, to communicate with his own people. Now that I have received clearance on the letters I hope that this presentation of them, only slightly edited, will fulfil his last wish.

Booker W. Anderson, CHAMP
Terran Space Force

II

DEAR CHAMP:

It's hard for me to make the trip topside but if I don't get some word to you I feel that I will really flip the old wig. By a lot of persuading I managed to borrow a suit of topside armor and leave this note outside the base. I hope the boys will get it through to you back on the old green planet I can see flashing above the pre-fabs of the camp. I hope you will answer it. The old gang will leave a message with the lock guards and they will pass it along to me, I hope.

Ephendra is well, in fact marvelous, and she wants me to tell the "sad-looking brown earthman"—that's you, Champ, as she remembers you at the trial—that you should wangle yourself aboard another ship and desert when it gets here. She promises to find a girl for you!

The thing which made me stop exploring around and write to you is this: Ephendra is due to have offspring, no doubt about it now. I can't quite be-

lieve it but she assures me it is true. There will be two of them, if all goes well. The question is—will they be able to live since their parents are so differently built? I mean, will their gill clusters function well enough for them to live under the surface? I don't want them to have to live like their daddy, on the ledges and in nooks and crannies.

I suppose I ought to feel guilty about getting sacked but I couldn't tell a lie to you, Champ. I only wish I could have got my discharge and settled down here without such a rumpus. But I was lost the first night I ever stayed in the canal.

A crowd of Martians came up to the airlock and greeted us with showers of those luminous little critters they call *ecrassi*. They are something like flowers and something like sea anemones but they glisten and sparkle and change color as you watch them. The Martian people wear them like jewelry, in their hair or fastened to their clothes.

The little fellows stick gently, you see, wherever they are put. Many of the younger Martians wear nothing but bunches of *ecrassi*. It was hard for the Martians to realize that we couldn't swim down below the surface and stay there and Ephendra came up to me and stroked my ears, marveling that I had no clusters of gill-globes below them. Her own looked like ruby grapes and at first I thought they were some sort of ornament. It gave me a little shock to realize that these were organs for taking oxygen out of the water.

Why Ephendra fell for me I shall never know but there was something I did—they couldn't understand a word of what we said, of course. At long last I found out what it was. As they crowded around us, Ephendra slipped on the wet surface of the ledge. I grabbed her arm to keep her from falling. It was something any Earthman would have done but on Mars such attention from a male is a proposal: "I wish to fish for you, fight for you and if necessary die for you." I had proposed without knowing it!

Can't say I'm sorry, Champ. I just can't feel that what I've done is wrong—not with this terrific world of the canals to be seen for the first time. If only I had one of those old style frogman outfits here I could really explore this place. It's maddening, taking a paddle down the miles of the canal in a canoe I've made of membranes, seeing below the surface on the canal walls the endless murals worked in mosaic of different colored shells, telling stories out of Martian mythology, or so I gather.

What I wouldn't give to get down a hundred feet! I can float for hours at night, gazing down over the edge of my improvised craft and see the ceremonial lights weaving in their long lines past the temples. Ephendra says that the ritual is only a thing like dancing, that it can't really bring *Edrussu* to take visible form and loom gigantic through the misty water to take the ceremonial food laid out for him. Ephendra thinks *Edrussu* is so old he has forgotten man and Mars.

You would have a tough time here, Champ, if you decided to run a mission. These folks have an answer to everything and mostly they just laugh. They will listen to any new idea with absorption and then run it past their memories, which are

terrific, and come up with the fact that there were once people in Mars who believed such a thing but it was long ago.

I haven't much more plastifilm to write on so will have to make this short. But get this, Champ—these people have hold of more biological know-how than we ever dreamed possible, even when we saw those living gaskets that seal off the airlocks that first time we forced our way below. Even these giant lenses that focus sunlight through the roof of the canal are not alive, exactly, but they can be stimulated to repair themselves quickly if a leak or a crack develops.

You see, Champ, down home we've been monkeying around with the force of the atom. Up here they simply made use of another natural force, just as explosive but slower—the growth of protoplasm in every conceivable shape and form. They can do anything with living organism. You remember those outfits they wore when they came over to the base during the court martial. You remember that Ephendra and her father and his staff all wore a sort of armor that had foggily transparent helmets.

Well, these folks never come topside if they can help it but there are whole companies of men and girls working topside, inspecting the lenses and the locks. Those outfits that look like Japanese samurai armor are really highly adapted living creatures, locked together. They are molluscs or would be molluscs back home, and they have a thermal system that is a dilly. They keep a steady temperature inside themselves of about 70°. You could boil one in a pot without hurting it—inside it would still be 70°.

Well, this ends the plastifilm, Champ. God bless you and all on Earth.

STEVE

III

Months passed before I heard from Steve again. He had found a substance on which to write and had managed to wangle his way into one of the topside suits and leave the message on the doorsill of the base communications hut.

Dear Champ:

Well, I am successfully a Martian papa. The kids—boy and girl, names Elida (gal) and Elusu (guy)—are growing fast and swim like fish. They can't walk yet but they wriggle about on the ledge and can't understand why their daddy can't come under the surface for more than a minute at a time to play with them. I was afraid that the gill structure of the globes wouldn't be inherited but it was, all right. Full size. So they won't be bound topside like their pop.

Ephendra nursed them for the first few months and then weaned them on something like coconut milk only it grows underwater, naturally. That's all the more reason why I want one of those skin diving outfits. If anything happened to Ephendra I could gather the milk pods myself. You see, they grow too far down for me to make it without extra air. I tried and nearly didn't make it back. And one of these days Ephendra may get

to playing with some of her friends and forget to come back for a couple of days.

Martians are like that. It would never occur to her that I would have trouble feeding the kids until they were really in bad shape. When she came back she would be all remorse and would play with them night and day—too much probably. When she's home—that is, in the little partitioned structure I built out of gasket critters on the ledge by the airlock nearest the Earth station—when she's home, as I say, she is busy teaching them to talk.

I am really learning Martian from my own kids. I could never get the hang of it from Ephendra—just enough for us to get by. She never had the patience to teach me very much.

It seems that when Martian kids are young their families live close to the surface to give them plenty of air-breathing practice. If they stay below too much they will really develop into water breathers, in which case they miss the value of the sun on the ledges and what is more important to Martians—music. They do have under-water music but it is mostly bell stuff, like chimes or slow-tempo xylophone. It's beautiful, once you get used to it.

So it's not too great a hardship for Ephendra to live on the ledge most of the time with me.

Ephendra's gang of friends is one of the rowdy bunches of Martian youth, I gather. Certainly I know she has many run-ins with her father about what the gang has been up to. I can't follow Martian when it spatters that fast but I gather that Ephendra is one of the leaders in a movement for subtly making fun of the ancient ways. She really went whole-hog in marrying me.

Here's something important, Champ. Maybe you can pass it along through the right channels and it may be important in interplanetary relations or something. These people are a lot more like earth people than we realized at first. Just to show you—Ephendra has a friend named Elina, a dazzling pretty girl who is a great flirt.

One day Elina contrived to be alone on the ledge with me and as much as offered herself to me. I wasn't having any and told her so as tactfully as I could. But Ephendra came in and caught us and she and Elina had a real battle, both enjoying it to the hilt.

These women really fight—they poke with their fingers extended straight. After they had torn each other's clothes off Ephendra finally made Elina sob and that ended the fracas. They kissed and made up. But that sob was what they were fighting for. On her way out Elina gave me a long glance that I couldn't mistake. It said, (a) You still interest me or at least I'm curious about you and (b) if you're not afraid of Ephendra what's stopping you? (c) You're a fool not to.

Somehow, Champ, it is impossible not to think that these people and the fish folks of Venus and Earthmen are all sprung from the same basic stock, a long, long time ago. If we could ever really make contact with the Venusians they might not prove so deadly. It's the impossibility of really staying under water, I'm sure, that cuts us off from them.

And we mustn't think that these folks here, because they use biological techniques, haven't gone

through the mechanical phase. That was probably long before they took to the canals and sealed themselves in. But even down here there are ancient structures which seem like hydro-electric plants. They are ruins, made of something which may be metal but is so overgrown with algae and shellfish as to be just massive walls and columns.

Another thing—the Martians have some metal implements. They apparently know where to get pieces of metal and they work it by some sort of corrosion. They have creatures that secrete a corrosive acid and they work the metal into shape by planting colonies of these organisms on the metal and just letting them eat it away.

If I could get a skin diving rig I could figure out a way to repair it if it broke—or one of the local lads could.

There are two of them who come to visit me and talk about Earth ways. It is just idle curiosity apparently, for they never feel that Earth has anything to teach them. They know all they need to know. When they found out that I wanted material to write on they got me this membrane and a sharp shell to use for a stylus. I will get some of the topside detail to leave this message at the base. Maybe the boys will put it on the transmitter for me.

Champ, if I could only get down a hundred feet or so below the canal surface! It's maddening. I tried to make myself some sort of swimming bladder but no soap. I need a pressure tank and a mask. Swim fins I can improvise from stuff here. The mask and the tank and a manually operated pump to refill the tank would do the trick.

I know eventually the Earth expedition will explore the deeps of the canals but I want to have a crack at them now. I might not live long enough to wait for official channels to send an expedition. I've got to explore those deeps, Champ.

Take care of yourself, anyhow.

STEVE

IV

KAVANAUGH GOT HIS DIVING EQUIPMENT and I cannot see that it will do any harm at this date to reveal that on the voyage which carried it to Mars every man aboard gave up his allowance of private gear which in those days was limited to a few ounces per man. Even so it would have been impossible had not Space Force regulations been stretched . . .

For the second time, then, I stood on the brick red desert of Mars, carrying the plastic cases which contained a mask, swim fins, a double air tank and a small hand-operated compressor. We approached the canal in the early morning, our shadows stretching out far ahead of us on the sand and before us, horizon to horizon, stretched the walls of the canal above the surface of the plain, their oddly-spaced lenses winking back the sunlight in a blinding series of flashes.

The air lock itself was a structure of stone, roughly worked, and cemented with the living tissue resembling a fungus, a smooth purple with a ripple design on it due to some change of the surface rather than an actual pattern of different

color. The outer door was of thin material rather like an oyster shell. The Earthmen had equipped it with an electric bell by which the Martian lock guards could be summoned.

We rang, waited ten minutes and rang again. After nearly an hour the door was opened by a Martian guard wearing the surface armor Steve had so accurately described. He allowed us to enter the lock, then shut the door behind us. I could hear through my helmet the loud sucking noise with which it seemed to seal itself.

No attempt had been made to adorn the outer surface of the canal roof and the airlock itself was unfinished within but on opening the second door there was a rush of air—or the mixture of oxygen and other gases which serves the Martians for an atmosphere. Then we stepped into the wonders of the inhabited world of Mars.

Earthmen are too familiar now with the coral-branch style which is Martian architecture for me to describe it here. But on my first glimpse of "Below" I felt that I had suddenly stepped out on a giant coral reef from which the sea had been excluded.

Then, for the first time, I felt the true tug of the unseen, the vast, titanic wonders just out of reach, when I gazed out across that sheet of brilliantly green water, illuminated by shafts of light from the great lenses overhead which were already at work focussing the sun's beams on stone pillars which stored heat, rising from the startling green gardens of oxygen-producing weed.

We stepped out on a terrace of coral-like stone along which was a railing of intricate design, created by the ancients of Mars by directing the growth of organisms in their slow life. This was the famous ledge. I knew that across the canal—a quarter of a mile away—was a similar ledge, perhaps fifty yards wide.

Far down the tunnel through which the shafts of sunlight alternated with shadow, I could barely make out some mammoth structure rising from the canal, perhaps one of the ruins Steve had described as ancient power stations.

A detail of lock guards assisted us off with our suits and I was surprised at the heady quality of the atmosphere. Its oxygen content was obviously greater than Earth's.

These guards were young men with great tilted eyes and mobile mouths. Their features were not unlike the stylized portraits of ancient Egyptians; their skin tone was coppery, their hair a uniformly reddish gold. Below their ears hung the scarlet grape clusters of their water-breathing apparatus.

The temperature within the canal was, to me, unpleasantly warm, even though I was now wearing only shorts. The Martians wore tiny garments not much more than g-strings and the first impression one received of these men was their gaiety—a bubbling, heady, oxygenated good spirits.

Lieutenant Hardin, our liaison officer, spoke the Martian language adequately enough to let them know we wanted to see Steve Kavanaugh and they greeted this with hilarious laughter, pointing along the ledge and taking us by the hand as older children take younger ones to see a batch of kittens.

About half a mile from the lock was a coral pen

without a roof but otherwise resembling an old-fashioned earth pergola. Within this, surrounded by a wall of purple gasket-fungus, was an enclosed area for all the world like an Eskimo igloo. And from it there issued what must surely have been one of the strangest sounds in the universe—the high-pitched, true tones of pan pipes.

They were playing the ancient Earth tune of "Stardust" with many embellishments. The Martians hurried ahead of us, waited until the music stopped and then shouted, "E-teeen!" Then out stepped Steve Kavanaugh.

He was naked except for a sort of apron of jewels which winked with their own light—the *ecrassi* clusters he had described in his letters. His beard had grown full and he had trimmed it straight across. His hair was chopped short. Among the coppery Martians he seemed like a giant cut out of marble.

When he saw me he was struck dumb for a moment and then he rushed over and grabbed me in a bear hug.

When I could speak I said, "Well, Steve—I brought it."

I opened the cases and handed him his swimming gear. Then the microfilm books in a sealed case with their viewer.

At that moment there was a splash from within the hut—I surmised an outlet to the canal and this proved correct—and two children burst out twittering and hopping like birds. They had the auxiliary breathing organs of true Martians but there the resemblance stopped, for their skins were almost as pale as Steve's and they were strong-boned and muscular.

They quieted down and stood at attention to be introduced but without a trace of shyness. Lieutenant Hardin, unsure of what his attitude should be to a deserter when met socially, was now on firm ground and asked the boy warmly, "What do you intend to be when you grow up?"

The lad answered, "That will depend on what I do best and with the greatest joy."

The girl chimed in, "But we want to see Earth."

Her brother poked her, reminding her apparently that they had been coached not to mention this to Earthmen but it did no good.

"That's right," she said, staving off her brother with one sturdy arm, "Elusu wants to go into the topside service but I want to study *echingochisusu*. . . ."

Steve explained, "That is an art form we don't have on Earth. It consists of liberating colored fluids in clusters from special containers, usually done as a visual accompaniment to music under water. There's a lot more to it than this but you get the idea. I've never seen a performance except at a great distance from the surface but I've watchd Elina practice in the shallows and she's pretty good.

"She could never be an *echingrana* of course—that is what we could call an underwater ballerina. She's too chunky—takes after her dad. But say—you fellows will have time to stay for the feast, won't you? Martian etiquette and all that."

"That's quite true," Hardin whispered to me. "We'll have to stay long enough to break bread

with them or whatever it is they do. But I doubt the advisability of attending the banquet with all hands."

I could see a petty officer named Maddox grinning over his shoulder. I knew that rumors at the base were lurid in accounts of Martian women and their notions of hospitality.

Since I have published elsewhere an account of this banquet, I shall describe here only my first view of Steven Kavanaugh's wife in her native element.

We were sitting on low shelves in the Kavanaugh "house" when the children called something from the terrace and Steve stood up and beckoned us outside.

"Ephendra is making her entrance," he said.

Standing by the rail of the terrace I gazed down into the luminous green water. First I made out something flashing and then a group of animals which bore an uncanny resemblance to a school of porpoises on Earth came into view, swimming over and around each other, surfacing in delight and plunging back into the green depths. They bore around their necks collars ornately formed of bands of shells.

After them came the Martian swimmers, rising through the warmth of the canal waters toward us, carrying in their hands long streamers of golden weed which they formed into patterns, weaving together and parting again as they swam. Then came a cluster of Martian children swimming in groups of two and three. There were splashes from beside us and the two half-Earth children plunged below in a cloud of bubbles to join their friends, racing over and around them.

Then, with a vague alarm, I saw taking shape out of the mists of the deep three creatures which resembled nothing I had ever seen before—the fabulous *ecrainas* of Mars, like lithe salamanders, their heads streaming with lacy membranes, their great soft eyes seeming to reflect intelligence, their webbed feet working in unison, as they drew behind them a sort of chariot of shell-work, rainbow-hued, in which knelt the Martian woman, Ephendra.

As I had seen her briefly once before, encased in her topside armor, she had resembled an Egyptian queen disguised as a samurai. Now I could only think of Amphitrite rising from the waves in her chariot drawn by sea horses.

Her reddish gold hair streaming behind her, Ephendra rose with a mighty blowing of shell trumpets at the lips of a host of Martian youths who surfaced along the stretch of water beside the ledge.

Behind her came a group of Martian girls wearing clusters of *ecrassi* in place of clothes. When Ephendra stepped out on the steps leading up to the ledge and ascended them with artfully flowing rhythm, Lieutenant Hardin stepped forward as the leader of our party.

Instead, Ephendra ignored him and came directly to me, taking both of my hands in hers and saying musically, "You are Champ. You are the sad-faced Earthman. I love you. Because you love E-teeen. He has told me much. Why do you not come to live with us?"

Then she greeted Hardin formally and the rest of the men down the line. I could understand now why Steve had jumped ship. I had begun to feel the unholy tug of this wonder world of the planet which had died on its surface only to live beneath it the aquarium-life of Mars.

It was late before I managed to talk to Steve alone. The others had returned to the base but I stayed below. The couches in Steve's house were like giant bracket fungi, soft and yielding with a not unpleasant spicy fragrance.

Ephendra had left in state, taking the children with her. By the light of an *echofu* lamp—a clear, transparent shell inhabited by a multitude of brightly glowing creatures like shrimp—Steve Kavanaugh and I talked away the hours.

"The Martians seem to take everything in their stride," he explained, holding the twin tanks of his aqua-lung as a child holds a long-desired toy on Christmas night. "They have charge of the airline to the base. All our guys have to do is make sure it doesn't leak around the installations. But as long as Earthmen want to live on Mars the home guard here will play ball."

"They seem defenseless against any form of attack," I commented.

Steve nodded. "They seem so. When I first . . . settled down here, Ephendra's dad asked me a number of questions. He knew all about war—claims they used to have it on Mars, according to the histories. But even after I had told him all I knew about how destructive Earth weapons are he didn't seem impressed.

"It seems they can seal off the whole canal system in sections, don't ask me how. But talk about germ warfare—these boys really have it, if they need it. That and, I suspect, lots more. They can make this planet deadly topside if the Earthmen start anything. If you try to scare them with what Earth can do they just laugh at you and tell you all that stuff has been tried before. No, I'm not worried about any military moves from outside. The thing that really worries me is the kids . . ."

Ephendra had taken them with her to leave us alone to talk, she said. Actually, as Steve pointed out, she had them as hostages. "Just in case I should be tempted to go over to Earth's side. But my kids aren't Martians, Champ. They are really amphibious Earthmen. You notice how tough and chunky they are by Martian standards—well, they're tough mentally too. Much tougher than Martians. They're dying to go topside and take a look at the desert and the Earth installation.

"No Martian kid would care about topside. I'm afraid they've got the same virus that has always plagued their old man—the explorer's itch. They want to see. They want to see Earth and Venus and everywhere a human can go. The Martians are static in a sort of euphoric self-content. Their work, their play, their art forms are enough.

"Just as an example—one of the traditional subjects for poetry is the sight of dawn—that is, the first rays of sun reflected through the lenses into the water, on the day when you have fallen in love the night before. The description of the lover seen for the first time by morning light.

They've been writing these dawn-love poems now for thousands of years probably and never get tired of them. There are whole libraries full of them. And they all sound identically alike to me.

"These are subtle people, Champ. But my kids aren't that way—they take after their pop too much. They're smarter than I am even now—that's the Martian in them. Right now they're just about on an intellectual level with me and they are wonderful companions. In a few years—months even—they'll leave me way behind. But they'll never fit into Martian life any more than I really do.

"Yes, I know what you're thinking. It's been worth it. And now that I've got these . . ." he patted the air tanks, "I'll really see something. I'll let you know what just as soon as I can get it down in words."

V

Steve kept his promise but it was almost a year before I heard from him.

Dear Champ:

In spite of all the swell plastifilm you left with me I haven't written before because, believe it or not, I've not had a spare minute. Or when I had I was too down in the dumps to write.

To get the bad news off my chest first: Ephendra has been spending more and more time away from our shelf and she claims the kids can't get a proper education hugging the ledge. She's right, of course. But I just couldn't bring myself to give them up, Martian style, to education. I wouldn't be able to see them for a year at a time. But there's nothing to keep her from just taking the kids and vanishing. I could never follow her, even with the diving kit.

Champ, you'll never know how much the old aqua-lung has meant to me. It has brought me nearer to the kids, of course, and they have shown me all their favorite haunts up to a few fathoms down. The Lord only knows how deep these canals are in spots. I've had the kids take a lamp of *echofu* and swim down and down with it—there's no nitrogen in this atmosphere to cause any trouble with decompressing.

Champ, I watched that speck of light go straight down until I couldn't follow it. And then I watched it appear again as the kids brought it up to where I was hanging at about twenty fathoms. But one thing the kids have shown me and which I have been able to see with the lung are the murals—mile on mile of them. It seems that the Martians retreated to the canals before they ever roofed them over and some of these wall-epics go all the way back to the ages before the canals were tunnels.

The people now date time from the retreat to the canals, when the atmosphere and moisture began to give out. It just goes to show, Champ, that Man can figure his way out of any sort of a tight squeak if he's given a decent break. And one break these lads had—time. They had time to dig in for a winter that would last always.

There's one section of murals which seems to de-

pict endless debate ending in some sort of mysterious violence in which the opponents were hurling mental thunderbolts at each other. I can't pretend to follow it, but the feud seems to have been over the concentration on biology rather than mechanics and electronics. The biologists won, of course. And a good thing too. They were the boys who were betting on good old protoplasm as against gimmicks.

Of course, I've tried to find out what the Martian folks believe about their origin and I can only learn that they are colonists, planted here so long ago that the details are forgotten. But they know there are inhabitants on other planets—other colonists from the same parent culture, it seems. Which means us, too. Or you. I'm neither one any more.

I've covered about a hundred miles of the canal in each direction and I could write a dozen books, just putting down what I've seen. Take for instance the dance festivals in the spring. The water is so clear that you can see a hundred yards in any direction and the sight of those legions of young fellows and girls, weaving in and out through that ritual underwater dance is indescribable. Or at least it is by a jetman, second grade.

I could write a dozen books already just from memory if I could only have the feeling of security about the kids that it would take for any continued project. If it were not for the kids I would petition for a pardon and try to get some sort of grant to write my own experiences and observations.

Some day the double-domes from Earth are really going to do a job on this world, with cameras and interpreters and stuff. I suppose the canals are still off limits for Earth personnel. It must be tantalizing, at that, to be grubbing away topside with all the rumors of the underground paradise flying around.

But I can tell you something right now, Champ. The Earth guys who are really going to do a job of understanding canal life and Martian ways are going to be guys like men who become a part of it. And I know there will be other deserters—just as soon as the station is big enough to hold a large number of men.

That petty officer, Maddox, got in here a while back and was found by the planet patrol and escorted out. It's just as well, for a friend of Ephendra's—I told you about her, Elina—she was making eyes at Maddox and if the patrol hadn't scooped him up she'd have had him, too.

There's a lot goes on here that I wouldn't be able to write you about, Champ. But some psychologist and physiologist would have a picnic. These people have art forms Earthmen couldn't conceive in a million years, preserved by various love cults and semi-secret cabals. If Maddox or any other Earthman ever get the full treatment he won't stand any more chance of breaking loose than I did. Only—if he'll take warning from me he'll just fade away into the canals. I wish some of our guys topside would go over the hill. There's nothing like earth talk and I get starved for it. Maybe this sentence will be censored out before this letter is transmitted. It should be, of course.

Wish you could get up here again.
STEVE

V

The next I heard from Kavanaugh his tone was really despondent...

Dear Champ:

Well, Ephendra has done it at last. She swam away with the kids one day about six months ago. I can't find out where they are. I rigged up a water bell—a musical shell just below the surface—and I used to hammer on it to call them home from play when it was time to eat or sleep or when I got so lonesome for them that I had to see them for half an hour.

Well, I've hammered on that bell a hundred times a day, every day. They must be a good long distance away, wherever they are. I've tried to keep up my courage by working away on a book but it goes slowly. I seem to see the kids' faces looking up at me from the surface of the membrane I'm trying to write on. Then I go to work beating the bell again just for something to do to let off steam.

They have a kind of joy juice in the canal called *ephre*—it's a weed juice worked on by some strain of bacteria producing a drug that gives you a feeling of floating, then a feeling of well-being and fellowship with the universe, then an intense appreciation of beauty, then tears, then sleep, then the awfulest fit of depression anybody ever had.

I'm afraid I've been hitting the *ephre* pretty heavy but this little grotto of mine is like a tomb now. When the kids were little I used to chase them when I was trying to write because their noise and splashing was such a nuisance. What I wouldn't give for a little of that rumpus now.

Well, for the bright side of things: I have at last explored the great ruins of Evendropo and if I never do another thing in my life, I must write a real description of it for you. I'll copy out some of what I have already written for the book so you can see what sort of stuff the book will contain.

Evendropo is a gigantic ruin which dates from early times, apparently before the roofing of the canals. It is situated about forty miles north of the first Earth Station on the canal and it occupies a bay about two miles wide. Naturally, the canal roof cuts into it a few yards up but through the lenses you get the impression of immense height of the pillars and walls.

Whether this was a university-city, a center of the arts and sciences, or a museum is hard to determine but it contains one monument to the past which is still venerated. This is a child, embedded in some clear substance harder than alabaster, looking as if he is asleep. His gill-clusters are about half the length of a modern Martian child's and he may be the first, or at least an early result of the deliberate breeding of an amphibious man."

. . . You can see, Champ, what a job it is for a jetman to try to record this stuff.

I don't know the real importance of the station topside or what it means to Mother Earth or why it is so vital that the work on it be rushed as it has been rushed during the years I have spent down

here in the tunnels. But I haven't been idling.

If you could only get down here again, Champ. Maybe you could bring a tape recorder and just let me babble in it. There's so much stuff I can't write down in any logical order. But I don't know if a recorder would work down here for long. The dampness of the canals is pretty bad.

I have been troubled by a cough and the Martians have had some of their medicoes look me over but they don't know what it is since they have nothing like it. I wish I could lose it, for it keeps me from using the aqua-lung.

Just heard the news—Maddox came down, met Elina and they've run off together. The Planet Patrol has been trying to find them. I don't know where they are and they don't trust me. They figure that I want out and would do anything to get on the good side of Earth.

(Later) Champ, could you possibly wangle another assignment to Mars? You can't talk Earth talk to a Martian—the young people are too full of sport-courtship to take anything seriously and the grown folks are just too brainy for me. My kids are nearly grown by this time I suppose. I had no idea growth on Mars is so fast. Ephendra is quite a matron now and I would probably seem like a child to her.

Please try to get here, Champ.

STEVE

VII

The last note I had from Steve was one of despair.

Champ:

Nobody who has never been in space can know the relationship that exists between a spaceman and the Champ of his first voyage. I still remember the ventriloquism stuff you used to do, drawing a face on your fist and wagging your thumb for the lower jaw. The old prophetic stories about space always forgot that men need to be amused as well as consoled and psyched. They never got around to extrapolating a reverend who was also a psychologist and a master of ceremonies rolled into one. Champ, I need you.

This *ephre* is bad business for an Irishman. The Martians take it by drops but you know Kavanaugh—never anything by halves. It's not only that I am just pulling out of the worst *ephre* hang-over in Martian history, but it's the kids.

Ephendra sends me word that they are well and adjusting to education but that's not enough. If I can't have them I might at least have the sun . . . not these Klieghlight beams from the lenses but the good old sun. Champ, have you ever stretched out on the beach at Santa Monica? Or gone swimming in a little rocky river in Vermont? Champ, I'm sick for a sight of the sun, the real sun that rises in a blue sky.

Maddox and Elina finally got wise that I wouldn't blow the whistle on them. They are with me now and Elina is expecting. Maddox has a different approach from me. He's interested in the Martian language. He can just sit and gab to Elina all day. Whereas I have covered hundreds of miles of this

canal and big as it is and as many wonders as there are yet unseen, I want out.

Maybe this cough of mine is just psychosomatic—a rebellion against something I want changed. I haven't cried 'uncle' yet but now I will. Champ, try to see what you can do about a pardon and repatriation. I've got tons of stuff I can't begin to write down that our folks will want to know some day. I can save the first canal expeditions a lot of time. But without the kids this place, for all its marvels, is just a prison.

Maddox is a big help. We talk Earth a lot but he is still under the spell of his first year here. We talk about other guys coming down. It's inevitable, the way I see it. You can't get a guy acclimated to Mars, so he can really work topside in a few days. When you've got a good man you can't expect him to catch it for years. And you can't expect Earth women to come along to help man the station and start having kids up here.

There's only one way I can see—the Earth colony has got to come to terms with canal life. Let the guys marry Martian girls and form a colony of their own. I know the Martian elders would string along with this idea. Then the men could work the station by day and off shift could have a real home to come to and plenty of warm water to swim in, not to mention the fishing.

See what you can do for me, Champ. And if you can get here, try to have the boys topside use their influence to locate my kids. I would like the kids to know you. I suppose it's too much to expect that they will ever be allowed to visit Earth but they are real amphibian humans and there ought to be plenty of work they could do—there or here. The kids want to go everywhere—or they did, when I last saw them. And that seems like a lifetime ago.

I've been leaning harder and harder on that little microfilm library you brought me. Particularly the anthologies of poetry. There's one about a Forsaken Merman that always used to get me when I was a kid but on reading it over the old pull at the emotions is gone from it. What the hell, that guy had his kids with him anyhow. And if the Earth gal ran back to her own folks it was too bad but he still had the kids. That's the way it looks to me now.

They have a little animal here called an *ezazeph*, something like a seal. I've got one—just a pup and he's a friendly little cuss, always darting under and chasing fish, though he's too young to catch many. He brings me a few, though, when he succeeds. I've named him Champ. Hope you don't mind.

It's been months now since I've been able to use the diving gear because of the cough. Martian friends bring me food and *ephre* and have really been swell. They don't agree that Ephendra should have left entirely and the kids with her. Apparently there's as much difference in personalities and behavior here as there is back home. I only hope Ephendra grows up enough to see things my way about the kids and letting me see them once in a while. The cough is pretty bad, Champ.

STEVE

P. S. Pray for me.

IX

AT THE RECENT UNVEILING of the monument to Stephen Kavanaugh on Earth the Governor General of the Earth Colony on Venus, Robert Emmett Suzuki, delivered the following tribute:

"Devotion to duty is a noble virtue but there is sometimes a higher devotion—to the search for truth. Stephen Kavanaugh was of that great breed of the explorers, the men who want to see what lies beyond the horizon. Braving the censure of his countrymen he was the first Terran to penetrate the canal life of Mars. He disobeyed orders to do it. He was discharged from the Space Force for it. He never lived to see the publication of his notes—the first record of Martian civilization ever made public to readers of other planets. Yet Stephen Kavanaugh served his planet in a way he could not have foreseen.

"The Kavanaugh children, combining the stamina and pioneering spirit of Earth with the amphibian structure of Mars were the first to establish peaceful contact with the inhabitants of Venus and made possible the great inter-planetary organization which exists today. Kavanaugh died in the ca-

nals of a lung mould, convinced that he was a failure. His tragedy was an illustration of a fact now accepted everywhere throughout the solar system—that when two species capable and desirous of mating are thrown together by circumstance, it is criminal to keep them apart by law, by force, by censure or by ridicule. Through the mating of similar species new species are developed which have their contribution to make in the ever-upward spiral of life in the galaxy and eventually beyond."

It was a nice tribute. The monument, with a statue of Steve holding his aqua-lung gear on one arm, is heroic and stylized. But he has a greater monument.

On one of the submarine explorations trips made by a party of Earth archaeologists in the canal a few years ago their vessel with its clear plastic observation bell in the bow was nosing among the pillars of a great submarine city when it discovered, far deeper than it was thought a skin diver could ever go, a wall covered with a deep blue sheet of rock algae. Scratched on that wall, faint but still decipherable, in Earth script are the words: *...Kavanaugh and kids were here.*
