

STARTLING STORIES

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THE HISTORIAN

by

CARL JACOBI

*It was the year 12,000,
and Lak Dhrow
was completing his
monumental account of
the Solar System. . . .*



IT was the year 12,000 according to the System's calendar and Lak Dhrow sat at his desk in the royal library, writing. Outside spring had come once again to Mars; the canal trees were in bloom, and the air was filled with sweet scents and sounds. But Lak Dhrow continued with his work, unheeding.

His labor of thirty years was nearing completion. A few more details to add in the pre-space Earth period, a few more touches to the introduction and he could write finis to his history of the Solar System. It had been a herculean undertaking. Even now, though he alone had written and stylized every one of its millions of words and designed and charted each of its thousands of graphs and figures he could remember little beyond the chapter on Venus.

A chime sounded at the door, and the Oligarch entered, a tall patrician with youthful eyes and a brisk step. There was a look of anticipation on his face.

"Lak Dhrow," said the Oligarch, "I have heard your work is done."

The historian nodded and smiled. "I

had hoped to surprise you," he said. "Yes, it is all but finished. Twelve thousand years of the activities of intelligent life in the Solar System from the first papyrus of the Martian red desert to this month's development of the light-year probascope. Everything has been recorded."

The Oligarch wet his lips. "May I see it?" he said.

FOR answer Lak Dhrow touched a stud. A light flashed and an undersized native Venusian entered the room. He seemed to understand what was wanted of him at once. Together the two rolled a huge screen forward and removed its protective cover. The Oligarch took his position in a gilded settee.

"You must remember there are still some rough passages," Lak Dhrow said. "There are also one or two years of pre-space Earth that are still somewhat dark. To be exact, the period around the middle of the twentieth century. Ho Garth has declared that it was the time of first stage atomics, but then Ho Garth

is notoriously unreliable. This period . . ."

"No excuses," said the Oligarch, not unkindly. "Turn on the screen."

So for the next hour they sat watching the moving panorama of the past. The screen was three dimensional. In the foreground slowly unrolled the explanatory script, carefully styled in Upper Case Martian. Back of this were animated three-dimensional drawings in color, illustrating in authenticated costume, highlights of events described in the script. And finally, all of this was set against a background of maps and astronomical charts that were as perfect as the Martian Academy of Cosmography could make them.

They saw the first development of animal life on Pluto, the result of light transporting seed across space. Pre-space-travel history flowed by rapidly in a confusing array of tribal and national conflicts, wars and rebellions. They saw a likeness of the ill-fated *Colossus*, the first ship to reach Mars from Earth, and a reenactment of the Battle of the Canals. They saw Igor's legendary Death Brigade as it raced down Canal Grande, and the rise and fall of city-state Mars, feudal Venus, communal Io and Ganymede. Men and women crowded upon each other: Empress Carzia, "the man who made a satellite," "the Brotherhood of Space," Immortal Juxton Kabe who was finally destroyed in 4012, the first and second Councils of Nine, the Plutonian Wars. Life and developments, major and minor, the record of twelve thousand years of life in the Solar System, ending with the present outer-galactic expedition—which as yet was only in the formulative stage. The historical screen was a tremendous accomplishment for one man.

When he had finally seen enough, the Oligarch signaled that it be turned off and leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Lak Dhrow," he said, "you have done well. This history will be a lasting memorial for our people and our age. I—"

His words were interrupted as the doors slid back and two attaches entered.

Before each of them rolled an ato-cart piled high with documents.

"What is it?" demanded Lak Dhrow, annoyed at this interruption.

"The Director's compliments," one of the attaches said. "These documents were sent over by *Research*. The Director said they were middle-twentieth century Earthian, discovered only last week in the northwestern hemisphere. They were found in a sealed tomb along with various other artifacts and may reveal a great deal heretofore unknown about the period."

Lak Dhrow nodded.

"Put them there," he said, indicating a smaller alcove to the side. "I will inspect them later."

* * * * *

But Lak Dhrow had no opportunity to do more work on the historical screen. Exactly six days after his interview with the Oligarch, the historian went completely mad. So sudden and so all-encompassing was his madness that the Oligarch delayed for some time calling in the court psychiatrists. Eventually he received his report, but that report proved to be a series of contradictions. The Oligarch tore it up and sent for Lafcardio, the greatest authority on mental diseases on Mars.

That was on Greenday, the sixth of Canalber, according to the Martian calendar. For a week Lafcardio continued his consultations and finally quitted Lak Dhrow's chambers to report sadly that the historian's case was hopeless.

"But have you determined the cause of his madness?" asked the Oligarch. "Have you utilized the electro-hypnotic machine and the psychograph? Have you?"

"I have tried everything," replied Lafcardio, "and it is my opinion that it was the last collection of documents from Earth which was the sole cause of his derangement. Up to the time of their reception, his work of thirty years was a complete and well-ordered thing in which he could take pride of accomplishment. But those documents changed all that. They undermined everything

he had done, cast doubts on all his efforts of the past. All the facts he had collected and organized for his history, dates of inventions, names of planetary places and cities, events of the past, types of space ships—everything, which he had recorded—and especially the allocation of those details to their proper historical period, were wrong—entirely wrong!”

The Oligarch leaned back to frown reflectively.

“And these documents?” he said. “What were they?”

Lafcardio consulted a notebook. “They were of a peculiar type made in twentieth-century Earth with bright colored covers. They were known as magazines . . . *science-fiction magazines*.”