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REVIEWS

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TOP PICKS

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COVER

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THE LAST MARTIAN

By **RAYMOND VAN HOUTEN**

The great pumps of Mars were grinding to a stop—
Unless the strange being from space-faring Earth
could get their sacred machinery going
the once-mighty planet would die.

PERTIN drew his cloak more firmly about his bony shoulders as the sun began to sink through the Martian sky and the wind thrashed a deeper note in the gathering darkness. He stood gazing silently as the falling light painted the sky in wistful colors, preparing to disappear for another night of screaming wind and penetrating sub-zero cold.

He waited until the twilight deepened to purple and then stalked laboriously into the wind, up the gentle slope toward the little hollow where he went each night.

He tall, unarticulated form waded across the dusty plain. By the time he had reached the foot of the bank the sky was totally black, except for the stars, and he could barely propel himself forward against the raging world-wide currents of atmosphere. The last few yards he crawled on his belly-plate. He tumbled into the crustal hollow and lay exhausted, his lungs weaking in and out.—

The cry of a Martian wailer would not be audible in human ears, but the wailing which emanated within an inch of Pertin's air-ventral nest paralyzing waves of terror washed to the tip of his spiny tail. He shivered in agony as inch-long teeth crunched savagely into his shoulder, and the wailer, startled, let go. Pertin's tentacles shot beneath the flapping folds of his cloak and the night-dark was shattered in a blinding flash of light. The headless corpse of the wailer doubled to the ground. Black reaction smote Pertin a blow somewhere inside, and the Martian lost consciousness.

It was after midnight that he awoke to the agonizing throb of his poisoned shoulder. His faculties returned somewhat, and he crawled painfully over to a little niche

in the rocks, where he kept his scant stores. Extracting a few pieces of twisted metal which had a slight medicinal quality, he plugged the holes left by the wailer's fangs. Then, under the auspicious influence of the whining wind, he dropped off into a feverish, agitated sleep.

The Martian awoke just before noon of the next day and found that the crude medicine he had applied to his wounds had been more effective than he had expected. The shoulder still hurt, but with the gentle ache of healing tissues rather than the savage bite of newly torn nerves. The effect of the wailer poison had worn off, and outside of a slight weakness and dizziness, Pertin felt nothing more in his interior. He slowly uncoiled from where he lay and stretched to his full height.

The body of the wailer lay where it had fallen the night before, headless and beginning to stiffen. The dominant race of Mars could use little of this slaughter waste and dangerous beast, namely the ears and eyeballs, and if the animal were not too old, the tail. This latter odd reproduce was entirely worthless therefore, and Pertin dragged it out into the desert and threw it into a pit. It could not be left lying near his hollow to draw other wailers to the spot.

He scoured down his wound and prepared for another day at his appointed duties.

The routine of caring for a Martian water-station is neither complicated nor arduous, being hardly more than a daily inspection tour. No Martian alive understood the methods or mechanisms which drew and pumped water from the massive ice-cap into the pool of the cistern; no one could alter the flow of liquid through the pipes,



or shut it off, for the valves had long ago corroded into their seats. Even the inspection was a mere gesture.

PERTN always started his rounds in the underground pump room, partly because most of the machinery was there, but mostly because of a subconscious certainty that there something was wrong. Somewhere, the conglomeration of spools, links, and shafts suggested things that shouldn't be. Day after day he had gone over the maze of pipes and cylinders, looking for a dreaded break, but always he found everything the way he had left it the night before. He couldn't know of oilless bearings heating slowly out during the contacts. The Martian architects had built for incredible durability in that long-gone age of Martian glory, but they had not anticipated the mining of the last drop of oil on the last flake of graphite, which had occurred millenniums before Pertn's time.

Once again he began to go over the machinery which he didn't rapidly understand. In the center of the floor squatted a huge, inscrutable mass of metal from which emanated the beginning of all the pipes. Pertn traced with his right organ the spidery lengths of lead, gray tubing to where they disappeared into the housings of the chugging pumps. It was the pumps which emitted the disturbing noise most of all. Pertn shook his head close and listened in the darkness in their throats. It sounded like tapping, like two rat bones being rubbed together under the flesh. He shook his head hard and let his telescopic filter blink lightly over the smooth metal. As long as they didn't stop—

He watched the four bulky pipes crawl along the floor and up the wall, where they peered through the ceiling into the valve-room above. He glanced over the gauges, meaningless to him, but still faithfully recording the surge of water passing through the pipes. It had lowered by about four-fifths since this station had been in operation, but nobody noticed the difference. Those that had seen the greater flow were less than dust three ages past.

He trudged back up the stairs, muttering from mechanically, and was in the water at again. The change from semi-darkness

to light brought his multiple eyelids winking shut, screening his sight. He squinted toward the southern horizon, seeing nothing but water.

What was that?

From the tail of his eye he thought he saw a flick of light far out toward the west, but although he gazed at the spot for several minutes, it did not repeat. Discounting it as a result of the glare, he stepped and entered the valve-room, which stood in the shadow of the towering reservoir.

He finished his useless routine, touching gently the same things and looking in the same places as every day, and came outside.

This time it was unavoidable. Something flashed in the twilight out in the desert in the west, a piece of polished metal or glass. Or a weapon. Somebody was on the desert!

He was immediately prompted to run atop the hull, whistle and wave his tentacles so that they would not miss him, but some primal instinct held him back until reason took hold of his chaotic mind.

Out there was either a friend or an enemy. If it were a friend, it could only be his child, and he wasn't due for another three years. Besides, he would be coming from the south. Therefore, it was an enemy. Some members of another colony coming to raid the water station!

Reeling low, he raced up the hill and threw himself into the central hollow, facing west. He drew them as tight as the flask gun, which had killed the cat, and crouded it beside him. His eyes strained on their stalks across the western wastes, ready for the first hint of suspicious movement.

Inter-planet war had again broken out on Mars! It disturbed Pertn to have the first responsibility fall on him, but reflecting the tales that the children used to tell him, he was a little proud too. The little band of water-station defenders had been known in these days of the past, not unless, forgotten moments. There had been a real and vital reason for their bitter existence in the north. Pertn's presence, up till now, had been a formality.

For a long time he lay sweeping the desert before him, waiting for another glimpse of his attackers, until suddenly he realized that another night was near. The sky had

already began to edge toward the dark end of the spectrum, and the light was becoming visible. Potts grew uneasy as the shadow of the bee-like creature left its course and began a sinister march to the lantern behind him. The rising nightwind soon cold rather-warm up and drove his spindly back, and although he knew that no living thing could stand on the open desert during a Martian night, the coming of darkness brought fear rather than a sense of security.

THE dusty sun touched the western plains, and the wind howled higher in anticipation of the darkness. Abruptly, from out of the dull glare in the west, a figure, small from distance, moved. Potts's limbs and tentacles trembled as he watched, and amazement riveted his gaze.

That small, chunky, hollowing figure was no Martian!

Carried onward by the wind, staggering weakly on its thick legs, the figure came on, swaying from side to side, blundering over the bare rock and hard-packed sand.

Potts made no move to lift the projector as the thing came within range. Possibly the sight of this apparition had driven all thought of it from his mind; or possibly his analytical subconscious had reasoned that all the moment of the unknown intruder had vanished, since this was obviously no sailing Martian from another colony.

Whatever it was, it seemed in no way intelligent. In fact, Potts guessed that the creature was in trouble, possibly dying. It made no effort to hold back against the driving wind, as he would have done, and the vain, course which it followed bespoke mental facilities.

The strange figure passed Potts's hill-cave hollow a few rods to the north and brought up with a thud against the sharp side of the reservoir, where it toppled largely over and lay still on the ground. Banks of sand began to accumulate against the windward sides of the humped legs and body.

Potts hesitated only long enough to jam the flash pistol back into its holster, where it would be safe from the blasting sand, before he scurried, bent double, toward the mysterious intruder's prostrate body. The

thought that it was a copper flaked through the Martian's mind, but the chance that a living being lay in travail decided him in favor of the risk.

He was down on his tentacles and knees when he reached the reservoir wall, and he burrowed down behind the inert form for a moment before attempting the more arduous task back with the dead weight dragging behind. He found to his surprise that it was covered by a case of metal!

Inch by inch, minute by minute, he disengaged the two-way feet back to the small safety of his hilltop. Keeping the lamp beam between himself and the wind, he strained against the uplift drag until finally he tipped the case and slid down into the familiar lair. Deep from exertion and gulping air and sand indiscriminately he relaxed on the tangle of oblation while the Martian wind howled in javan delirium.

Returning sight brought renewed interest in his prize of war, and he raised himself on his legs lower, peering tentatively into the transparent faceplate of the metal can. Nausea, awe, and amazement flooded his brain at the sight of the alien face which returned his stare with sightless open eyes. It was the face of a Martian nightmarer; square, with jutting chin-beak; straight long nose, pivoted under the lobes by wide skin; hollow blue eyes with single skin-like lids, and a mouth—a long, gaping crack rimmed with soft red flesh and filled with gleaming teeth, like a carnivorous bear's!

And that mouth breathed! It was not dead!

Potts's tentacles fumbled with the unfamiliar drawcatch of the creature's locked faceplate, and with a grating of sand crystals between metal, it slid out, and he lifted the glass off. A puff of evil-smelling vapor flew into the Martian's face, and he recoiled.

The oval face beneath withdrew, and a low groan from the pulpy lips made Potts's eye-tentacles pale in terror. He watched fascinated as the returning light of consciousness slowly dimpled the glass over the blank eyes. One metal-clad hand raised feebly to the open face-plate and then dropped like lead as if the owner had used the last bit of energy in his worn-beaten body for the effort. The moonstray lay panting for breath and making meaningless sounds. Potts bent

closer to life, submerging his resolution with reality.

"Water! Water!" it was saying over and over.

A wave of deep compassion engulfed Ferra's twin hearts as he looked into that twisted face beneath its coat of stiff bristly black fur. He realized instantly that this thing was suffering, probably from lack of the things which kept it alive. He closed the hatchway again to keep out the stinking mud and encouraged out the last of his stored meat and a small quantity of water, on the chance that his food might be suitable to the alien tastes of this being.

As acid light sparkled in the cloudy eyes as Ferra held the food and water close, and in a spasmodic burst of energy it grasped the metal container and splashed the precious fluid into its waiting mouth. Ferra covered his eyes with his hands, put painful sight. The steel coat was scratched from his hands and crumpled between the red lips with sucking sucking sounds and gaps of phosgen.

Strength seemed to flow back into the stinger, and he managed to sit up. He slumped into Ferra's supporting tentacles with a weak gasp and closed his eyes, dropping immediately into a deep sleep.

Ferra laid the inert figure back on the ground and gazed fascinated at the face, now relaxed in sleep. From whence had this danger come? How could never have appeared such a creature? This was a being from another world, maybe from Glend's world? Ferra thrilled at the thought as he lay down to a food-and-water-less bed.

LONG, long ago the scientists had predicted the death of Mars, the gradual wearing away of its ability to support life, until finally the last Martian would die. They pointed with eagerness and awe to their telescopes at the withered sphere of the third planet, picturing it as the Martian Eden, teeming with life-giving food and water.

Space ships were built. There was not nearly enough room for the entire population of Mars aboard, so it was agreed that they should act as ferries, shooting back and forth until Mars was evacuated.

The first contingent departed one day on

the long trek to another world, and the people left behind waited with renewed hope for their turn to go. Hope turned to uncertainty as a second fleet of ships sailed toward Paradise, many years after the first one should have returned. A third and fourth fleet followed at ever-lengthening intervals, and with ever-increasing numbers, but all vanished into obscurity with the same finality.

Widening civilization soon could no longer strain the necessary resources from the perishing planet to send another fleet; Glend, the last, life-drieked pleasure-lover Paradise, became a myth of the past, and then even the myth became dim and half-remembered.

Life was a sullen series of hungry days and frigid nights. The energies of earth individuals designed to give his colony one more day, one more hour of life. But, when it was allowed at all, was limited to the replacement of necessary personnel to stay on the food gathering of the community. All contact, outside of occasional meetings between scouts searching for new patches of sweet bushes, was lost between the colonies, which had settled on the dust-covered sites of the ancient cities because of the trickle of water which still issued from the massive pipes. Even the specific milk made on the water stations was abandoned, and as the danger of attack loomed, small and smaller numbers of guards were spaced from the duties of procuring food from the desert wastes, until finally only one made the food-and-water-less trip into the northern steppes of the polar region. Every fifth year another was sent to relieve him, but the oldest man in the colony could not remember when one had returned. What privation, what utter loneliness those marauder bands would never be known. What acts of heroism they might perform would go forever unseen.

Ferra had been very young when he had set out for the far north and five years of Martian hell at the water station, but the few years that had passed so far had left him a dull-bearded, middle-aged Martian. Wrinkles had appeared on his forehead, and his fur had become sparse and gray. His mind, too, had turned gray, had withered

from washing too many suits. He came to feel inside that he would never see his colony again, just like the others.

IN SPITE of his activity the day before, Peeta was up and about early the next morning and went into the desert for water. Before he left, however, he placed the metal container half-full of water beside the still-dripping spout in the metal suit. An intermittent hissing sound issuing from its mouth started him, and he opened the face-plate. The hissing sound stopped abruptly with a snort, and the stranger manifested a few snorts and splutters in his sleep. Peeta barely but softly closed the lid and embedded it into the sea of rock and sand.

When he returned, his visitor was standing shakily on his feet, watching him slide across the plain toward him. Peeta emptied his pockets of the succulent weed he had gathered and faced the stranger with a whistle of greeting, extending a friendly tentacle. It was grasped by the prehensile tip of the creature's queer tentacle and gently oscillated up and down. Peeta interpreted the gesture as meaning friendship and enthusiastically entered into the spirit of it, pumping the thick arm up and down until the being cried out. The Martian, noticing that his companion's eyes were fastened on the weed root which he had brought, snatched up one of the tubers and offered it to him.

They broke their fast in genial conversation, this desolate Martian and his earth-Martian visitor, so utterly dissimilar in form, so different in many ways, but each in the pressing of loneliness and bewilderment that all this was forgotten.

Peeta was about to leave on his daily inspection when a gentle hand restrained him. The stranger was making sounds at him, meaningless and unfamiliar, but it was apparent that he wanted Peeta to stay and listen. So the Martian stopped and listened intently, strange thoughts swirling through his head.

"I know you're not going to understand a word of this," his companion was saying. "But I'm going to tell it to you, anyway—just for luck. My name is Harrison Clark, late of San Francisco, U. S. A., Earth. I cracked up, like a damn fool, in the desert

rather to reach Mars about two hundred miles out there in the desert. My food and water gave out, and the air inside my ship was getting bad, so I crawled into my tent and started out, looking for God knows what! I was about done when you must have found me, for I don't remember anything for a long time back. You saved my life, and now I want to do something for you. Got any laws you want named, or honors I can have? I'll bet I'm quite a fright in those pants!" He grinned broadly.

Peeta listened gravely to this address, and when it was over, he extended a tentacle and shook hands.

"I get it, pal!" laughed Harry Clark. "You're friends no matter what I look like. You'd be a cylinder-under harness back on Earth, wouldn't you?"

Peeta disengaged his tentacle-tip and strode off down the slope to the subterranean entrance of the pump room. Clark hesitated a moment and then followed, more slowly because of his wadded strength. Peeta turned and waved for him at the head of the steps, and they entered the cavern together.

Clark could not see for a few minutes in the gloom, and he stood still, while Peeta, with his more adaptable night organs, moved about with ease in the familiar surroundings. The multiple noises which reverberated in the confined space beat through the Earthman's open face-plate, hurrying the sweat of the darkly looming masses.

"Machinery," he said softly.

Peeta went through his customary routine, conscious of the stranger's eyes watching his every move, and conscious also of a plying wonder in them. They quit the one-lamp room. Peeta gently tapping Clark away from the four gauges which measured the water-flow through the massive pipes, and entered the valve-house.

Peeta's tentacles traced the valve-leads and giant bearings reverently—and nervously—while the stranger once again watched with interest. Peeta was suddenly startled by a gurgly, explosive sound from the dial.

"What a hell of a mechanic you are!" laughed the Earthman. "I don't believe you know the first thing about all this, and yet you're obviously the caretaker around here. The pumps down there are in a bad way.

"Why don't you oil them?"

Foote stuck out his tentacles and they shook hands.

"Yeah, we're pals, but I still think you're a bust, look," he walked over to one of the valve wheels and grasped it by the rim. "Here's hardly a trickle going through the pipes. Why don't you open her up, like this—" The valve cracked protestingly and moved a fraction of an inch under the Earthman's effort. Gauges on the wall quivered slightly and advanced an imperceptible amount along their calibrated scales.

Foote went suddenly berserk. He looked out with his tentacles and caught Harrison Clark's staring figure about the valve, flaying him across the narrow room with a metallic clatter. He stood over the cowering figure, his tentacles poised threateningly. This creature was meddling with the machinery!

"Hey, wait a minute!" shouted the dithering Earthman, raising himself on an elbow and looking up into the inscrutable face of the Martian. "I'm not trying to hurt anything! Sorry, if I've done anything wrong. Here, shake hands!"

He extended his hand and reluctantly the Martian took it.

They went back to the little hollow, Clark lapping a bit from his fall. Foote enclosed himself in a shell of reflexion after the episode in the valve-house, and it was only by dint of hard labor that the Earthman was able to man him out of it.

THESE days went by, and undisturbed because there were the Martian nights with their savage fury. Slowly the two mismatched companions evolved a crude method of making themselves understood to each other, and a drawing comprehension of the incredible state of Martian life came to Harry Clark. He spent much time in wondering about the water station, and slowly he pieced together the puzzle. He knew that it was water which was contained in the pipes almost the first day he had been there. The intake pipes burrowed under the ground toward the north direction of the ice cap, while the outlets stretched away to the south to an unknown destination. This, then, must be some kind of intermediary, where the ice of the polar cap was trans-

ferred into water and then pumped south to someplace where it was needed. Examination of the huge machine in the center of the pump-crevice convinced him that this must be where the ice was turned into water. How the ice was transported over the five hundred miles from the polar cap he could not discover. Water came out, however, so ice must go in.

The pumps carried the water up into the high-sided reservoir, from where it started its journey south after passing through the main valves.

But something was missing. Where did the trickle of water go? Why was it so small? Why had the Martian gone off the deep end when he had tried to increase the volume of water flowing through the pipes? He made up his mind to warn the man on out of Foote at the first opportunity.

Foote's mind was in a turmoil as he grubbed in the desert sands at the base of the stately, tree-like plant. He mechanically pulled up the bulbous roots, tearing them loose, but always leaving enough of a stem so that a new one would grow back on, but his thoughts were upon what the stranger had made known to him by the diagram he had shown in the sand. This being was from Gamut! Gamut, the mythical being, the planet in which legend told all good Martians would go some day. Some day, it was said, the ghostly ships of space would return, and all Mars would be happy again. This manrocity claimed to have come from there. Could this be the time of resurrection which Mars was promised by the old myth? How could this thick-skinned, bulbous-headed being bring Mars back to its old lost glory?

Such were Foote's thoughts as he approached the water station with his pockets half full of mud. The now familiar figure of the being from Gamut stood atop the knoll beckoning to him.

They shook hands solemnly after Foote had dumped his load of food, and the stranger drew Foote over to a patch of clumped sand. Bending down, he drew with his finger a crude diagram of the water station, pointing to it, and then to the reservoir, pump-crevice, and the valve-house, indicating rich in the sand in turn. He then drew a line from the pump-crevice north-

ward, and connected it to a large wheel which Poets decided was supposed to represent the air-cap. He nodded his head in a gesture which he had learned from the Earthman, indicating that he understood, and that the diagram was right.

Clark then drew a line from the valve-house south. By means of much pointing and consistent signs, the Martian finally discovered that he wished to know where it led, and what was at the end.

Poets jock-knifed his gangly legs and cuffed to his knees. The tip of his nose was traced a picture in the sand. It looked like a series of small circles interrelated by little curved lines. Poets pointed to himself, then at the circles. Then he made eighty-two little dashes in the sand.

The Earthman understood immediately, so that was it! This water-plant supplied a colony of eighty-two Martians with drinking water, vital to their existence! They must live very far south near the equator, at the warmest zone of the planet, where food and heat were more abundant. Of course! And Beany was shipped up here as watchman. Clark looked with new respect at the Martian, thinking of the soil-drinking habitiveness he must have known. He certainly wasn't much good as a mechanic; why, he wouldn't even have known that the flow of water could be increased by opening those valves wider! Naturally, he had thought that Clark had tried to sabotage the plant when he had laid hands on the machinery. Those pumps—it was a wonder that they hadn't frozen still long before this.

Harrison Clark made up his mind.

Next morning when Poets arose, the man from Gardi was gone. So was a three-day supply of food and water.

IT WAS eight days later when the Martian emerged from the valve-house and saw the trap figure come scurrying out of the west. It was the alien, and behind him dragged a curious object, a black, cylinder-like thing trailing along on four wheels and pulled by a rope to the stranger's hands. Poets walked out to meet him and after they had shaken hands, he curled a few muscles about the rope and together they pulled the mysterious object into the water-plant. Poets walked with his curiosity aroused as

Clark heaved and grunted the thing down the thirty-foot steps into the underground pump-room, talking all the while.

"You know what this is, Beany, old boy?" he said. "It's oil—for the pumps. It'll take the sparks out of 'em for a while anyway. It won't last forever, but before it's gone, maybe you and I can figure out something else. Looky I had this barrel left on the trap. There!" He stood up and dived off his bonds. "If we can get those pumps to stop chattering, we can open up the valves and let a real head of water through to your pals. Be afraid to do it with the things in this condition."

He uncovered the cap and peered in, sniffing. He turned to the Martian with a broad grin.

"About three-quarters full," he announced, marking the level on the outside of the drum with his hand.

Poets, deciding that the mystery had progressed just about far enough for his Martian tastes, stilled over and inserted his tube-like proboscis into the hole left by the screw cap, and inhaled. He snatched up abruptly and whirled, tears dropping from his yellow, wax-like eyes.

Clark laughed excitedly. "That's oil, you Beany-pole! We're going to rebuild Mars with that drum! You poor gals must have had a hell of a time living in this hole," he continued, becoming serious and positive and indicating the desert with a wave of his hand. "It would take one of you a lifetime to find food enough to live that long. Your civilization has sunk right down to rock bottom, but I think we're going to change all that." He shook his head doubtfully. "It's according to how long we can make this oil last. Those machines which your ancestors made are the real McCoy, all right, but God knows how long they've been pounding away day in a hole. The oil might pour out of every crack as fast as we pour it in. Well," he finished, dragging his shoulder, "there's only one way of finding out."

Carefully, first he spilled a drop of the precious fluid, he filled a water container with the lubricant.

"Keep your tentacles crossed!" he shot at Poets, who looked down upon him from his superior height as the Earthman slowly poured the contents of his container into

the oil-cap on the main bearing of No. 3 pump. He allowed the drops to drain into the capacious pocket and bent with hands on knees, looking for signs of a leak below.

Pete followed his boss more timidly, wondering whether or not to force a halt to the tampering with the vital machines, but somehow he trusted his master from Ganai. He seemed to know what he was about, and there was a chance that what he was through the disarming noise in the machines would be gone. So he watched and waited, always on the alert to prevent any outright damage. He couldn't see, however, how passing some of that red-oozing stuff into those little caps would change anything.

And then suddenly, the song of the pumps changed! The clumping and creaking became to an almost imperceptible amount as a top ring of oil appeared around the periphery of the bearing. The pump rose to a new level of activity, the parts whirling and plunging at a greater speed. Pete shrank in surprise.

His interest increased ten-fold as Clark filled the caps on the other three pumps in turn. Each one's noise dropped from a shout to a whisper, and all changed with more vigor under the relaxing influence of the lubricating oil. Pete trembled all over as he noted that the protesting greases which had worried him so were gone. This was unbelievable! This miracle from Ganai was indeed a friend!

"Our work isn't done, Bossy," said Clark, as he dumped what was left of the oil back into the drum and wiped his hands in the sand. "The really important part is yet to come. This is just preparing; now we've got to knock those ugly valves loose from their eye-balls!"

He screwed the barrel-cap back into place and, followed by Pete whose attention was visibly increased over his usual lethargic, fanatical state, he trod the stairs into the open air.

The Earthman gave a preliminary tug or two at the valve-wheel, and then muttered under his breath. Pete scowled inwardly. It was not good, tampering with the machines. Then the Martian went all weak and flabby inside as the stranger picked up a short metal bar which had been lying in a

dirty corner and began banging on the tops of the machines! He was using Clark like a flask, and the tandem in the Earthman's arms cracked agonizingly as the Martian giant wrenched the bar away from him in mid-blow. Clark refused as the same action threatened to continue for a protracted length of time.

"Look, Bossy," he said pleadingly. "I'm only trying to get the rust loose inside. Give me back that thing and let me alone. I know what I'm doing."

The Martian, of course, didn't understand a word, and he went toying with the length of metal rod, his yellow eyes blank and inscrutable. Then with a sudden gesture, he handed it back to Clark and retreated a tentative.

"He trusts me!" gaped the Earthman as he jumped the fury into up and down enthusiastically.

Using the bar as a lever, he twisted the spotted wheel around several turns, watching the meters on the wall as the valve ground wider and wider. The indicator crept up and up, revealing the increased flow to Clark's anxious eyes. The noise from the pumps below drifting through the open airway thundered with new energy to catch up with the added drive on their pistons. Trembling with triumph, he disengaged the bar from the spokes and tossed the handle on the pedestal from which Pete drained their drinking water every morning. A stout stream as thick as his thumb splattered to the ground with a barely gurgling sound. Pete's knees must have given way at the sight, for he folded up and sat down on the floor opposite, his eyes glued to that stream of life which issued from the pipette.

SEVERAL weeks later, Harry Clark stood by with an amazed gaze on his face as Pete twiddled excitedly in the three Martians who had come sitting out of the south the evening before. The whistling of the Martians was less than glibberish to him, but he got the idea from the various tool-like whirring and yellow-eyed stares in his direction that Pete was giving them the dirt about himself.

"The monster is from Ganai, the Pete size of the old legend," he was whistling

"Many days ago the wind blew him into the water-station, sick and dying from lack of life essentials. He was clad in the strange metal suit which you still see upon him. He is a very strange and alien being. It seems inexplicable, but I believe that he understands more about them than we for whom they exist. Well, one day in the water-house, he laid tentacles on one of the machines, and I had to pull him bodily away from it. His interest did not carry him quite so far as that in succeeding days, but about a week later I arose in the morning to find him gone!"

"His return, which I didn't expect, was the queerest sight I ever saw. He came across the desert at about midday, from the direction he first came, dragging behind him a cylindrical object which I later found to be hollow and filled with a very amazing liquid. He took this container down into the cavern of the dragging machines and uncovered a small circular section in the top. I sniffed its contents; it smelled like the juice of the most plant when it was crushed, a very unpleasant odor.

"Well, he poured some of it into the dragging machines, and the noise which they had been making—stopped! It was the most amazing thing I have ever experienced. He seemed to wield some so-Martian control over them!

"Then he did a thing which makes me shudder to recount! He picked up a bar of metal half as long as my tentacle and began beholding the machines from which I had pulled him a few weeks before! Quickly I stopped him, but something, perhaps the mastery of how he had opened the dragging machines, told me that this being could be trusted, and that he knew what he was doing. I—I took an awful chance. I opened (and, when I think of what might have happened if my trust in this Canadian had been misplaced, I give him back the bar and allowed him to continue!

"We stopped hanging before he broke anything, and then he did a peculiar thing. He curved the outer edge of the round machines in three," Ferts indicated the water-house, "in that the whole top moved around itself. Then the miracle happened."

"Yes, go on," whispered the other one ev-

erently. "What did he do?"

Ferts paused for a moment to gather weight, and then proceeded solemnly. "He opened the little machine from which I drew my drinking water, and a stream shot forth as thick as my tentacle and spattered all about the room! He allowed himself to exaggerate. "An unbelievable quantity of water poured out in the short space of time that I watched it."

The newcomers seemed slightly disappointed at the tale Ferts told, expecting to hear about gigantic super-Martian operations by the stranger from Ganell, the Martian spirit world.

"Why that's just about what happened down at the colony, about the water, I mean," said one of them. "All of a sudden a flood came gushing out of the supply pipe and overflowed the pool and spreading out over the surrounding desert. A funny thing, too, was the way that the metal plants gave when the water had spread. When we left, our colony had a full fifteen days' stock, and all of it was gathered within a five-minute walk of the camp!"

Ferts had a faraway look in his usually unresponsive, yellow eyes. A quiver was noticeable in his whistle as he replied.

"Can this be the fulfillment of the old legend of Ganell?"

Harison Clark, for the first time since he had cradled on the Martian desert in the rocket, did not dream so longingly of Earth as he lay in the little hollow he had come to know as home. He had work to do here. A feeling of mingled exultation and discrimination had possessed him when Ferts had shown him the liquid which resulted from crushing water. It was a very heavy and shabby vegetable oil, quite capable of continuing the job of lubricating the machinery after the petroleum was gone. There could be no quarrel with it; the task was his.

A sense of warmth and friendship suffused him, in spite of the frigid wind which blew all around, as he thought of the Martian monsters which lay sleeping beside him. They were his people now! For when Ferts had stopped whispering to them, one by one they had slid past, and every damn one had shaken his head!