

# PLANET STORIES



T. T. SCOTT, Pres.

MALCOLM REISS, Gen. Mgr.

PAUL L. PAYNE, Ed.

## TWO EXCITING NOVELS

- THE BEAST-JEWEL OF MARS** . . . . . By Leigh Brackett 4  
Burk Winters was a panting, shambling ape, fleeing through dark and echoing pits of horror. Behind him hissed the lashes of the jeering mob, savagely exultant at having debauched still another proud Terran into something that slavered and crawled.
- THE LITTLE MONSTERS COME** . . . . . By Ray Cummings 84  
Desperately seeking escape from their own tortured chunk of hell, they needed a specimen from this great and gracious world they planned to steal. But swamp-roving, 'gator-fighting Allen Nixon wasn't the type to be cut up alive!

## TWO THRILLING NOVELETTES

- MUTINY ON VENUS** . . . . . By A. Bertram Chandler 38  
Boiling out of the slave-ship's stinking hold, the slimy, fever-maddened natives fought for freedom. What miracle could save the handful of sickened Earthmen on the bridge from the most terrible death in the System?
- THE DEATH FROM ORION** . . . . . By W. J. Matthews 66  
Tiny suns set in rare metals, crystals of fire that mocked Terra's diamonds and pearls as lusterless pebbles and pale glass, the ancient treasure left it behind the same time-worn trail of sudden blood and stiffening corpses!

## FIVE FASCINATING STORIES

- JINX SHIP TO THE RESCUE** . . . . . By Alfred Coppel, Jr. 27  
Stand by for T. R. S. Aphrodite, butt of the Space Navy. She's got something in her guts and only her ice-cold girl-engineer can coax it out of her!
- IN HIS IMAGE** . . . . . By Bryce Walton 34  
Towering and invulnerable, they stood on the hills, patiently awaiting their master. Meanwhile, they slew the vermin crawling below . . .
- ASLEEP IN ARMAGEDDON** . . . . . By Ray Bradbury 58  
Avoid Planetoid 787. Lush and sunny, with fine air and no dangerous beasts, it'll tempt you to curve in for some nice solid-ground sleep. DON'T!
- THE BURNT PLANET** . . . . . By William Brittain 80  
Mad with despair, they fought back from the ruins. Whoever these invaders were, they should not have a world which its defenders themselves had destroyed.
- TIME TRAP** . . . . . By Frank Belknap Long 109  
Somebody waited for old Charley Grimes, plodding across that dark-side Luna crater—somebody who couldn't exist!

## AND PLANET'S REGULAR FEATURE

- THE VIZIGRAPH** . . . . . By The Readers 116

Winter Issue 1948



Vol. IV, No. 1  
20c per copy

PLANET STORIES: Published quarterly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1948, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. Entered as second-class matter, October 2, 1944, at the Post Office, at New York 1, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. All rights reserved. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. Yearly subscription rate 80¢ in advance. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.

# THE LITTLE MONSTERS COME

By RAY CUMMINGS

**Desperately seeking escape from their own tortured chunk of hell, they needed a specimen from this great and gracious world they planned to steal. But swamp-roving, 'gator-fighting Allen Nixon wasn't the type to be cut up alive!**

**T**HERE WAS ABSOLUTELY nothing wrong or weird about the Florida Everglades at night. At least, not to Allen Nixon. He sat alone in the stern of a flat-bottomed rowboat paddling calmly, albeit soundlessly, with one small oar. The moon was down and the tall old pines were so many black ribs and tears in the star-studded gown of the sky. The stars themselves dropped their fiery pin-points in the glassy surface of the winding bayou. The tangled banks, where sometimes the cypress branches dipped heavy and sodden into the water, were shadowed blurs so that the bayou was a twisted ribbon between them.

Nothing strange. Nothing unusual. Certainly not to Allen Nixon. Twenty-four years ago he had been born here, only a score or so miles north at the fringes of the great swamp, where a little Seminole village stood beside a bayou just like this. There his white father had loved and married his Indian mother; there he had lived and gone to the Mission School and then, in his 'teens, to the High School up in Jacksonville. Now he and his younger brother Ralph, with their parents dead, were running a small farm their father had left them. It was back at the mouth of the bayou, where the Gulf lapped in the starlight on the sandspits, and the tangled wiregrass was alive at night with the croaking of the marsh-hens. Ralph had not wanted to come out tonight. He was tired, perhaps lazy. He said he would have the four 'gators skinned by the time Allen got back at midnight; and he'd help with whatever others Allen brought in. Perhaps he would, but more likely he wouldn't.

So Allen Nixon, with the moon down, was paddling up into the silent twistings of the bayou alone. He was a tall, lean fellow, lanky like his father, with muscles

hardened by a lifetime of the work of the backwoods. He was bareheaded; his sleek, straight, dead-black hair glistened in the starlight. His grey flannel shirt was open at a muscular throat. He sat erect, with his legs, clad in dark trousers and worn leather puttees, stretched out to the shotgun, knife and hatchet that lay in the bottom of the rowboat. The faint night-breeze fanned his rugged face, bronzed by the hot Florida sun and swarthy with the Seminole heritage.

Now he was rounding a sharp curve in the bayou, and the breeze was more squarely in his face than ever. That was good. No scent of him could blow forward to reach any 'gator that might have surfaced on the starlit stretch ahead. Two was all he hoped for tonight, and then he would head back. Quietly he shipped his oar and adjusted a small electric torch on a band around his forehead. Then with its pencilpoint of light sweeping the bayou ahead of him, again he started paddling. Even more silently, this time, so that there was no drip from the blade as he skillfully raised it, no least murmur of splash as he brought it forward and dipped it again. An alligator, lying quiet with only a tip of nose and eyes at the surface, is more alert, more ready to scurry away than a mouse.

There was in Nixon's mind nothing but intentness to see the two little pin-points of fire in the bayou surface, two among the many that were reflected stars, yet he would see the difference, the spacing, a little greener, more glowing fire which would mark them as the eyes of a drowsing 'gator. He was thinking only that he would get two as soon as he could and get back to Ralph. That would make ten altogether this moon—ten salted skins, enough to be worth a trip to the market in Pensacola.

*He wrenched up a tree and swung it.*



**W**HAT he did not know was that in the shadows of the bayou bank up ahead strange little shapes were cautiously

moving. Living things that did not belong here; that had never been here before.

The night sounds of the lush woods were blended into a voice which Nixon had heard all his life, so that now he was never aware that he was hearing it. A 'gator would hear it too—the slither of a rattler; the flip of a fish or a water moccasin; a marsh-hen croaking; or an owl's hoot—and the steady blend of the voices of a million million insects. And that was all that could be heard, for the strange dark little shapes, along the bank at the next bend, moved very cautiously, quite soundlessly—little things moving upright. They were only a few inches tall. Once they stood in a group as though communicating. One of them carried a tiny light, but its glow was less than a firefly's.

Now Nixon saw, out in the center of this stretch of the bayou, the two green dots that were a 'gator's eyes, and his face relaxed a little with the flicker of a smile of satisfaction. His light swept the water, reached the eyes and clung, so that the stupid 'gator just lay there and stared, with the light dazzling him. His brain, not much bigger than a pea buried in the pulpy mass within his big flat head, held no thought of danger.

The twin reptile-eyes were perhaps fifty yards away when Nixon first saw them. Now he paddled more slowly, with the rowboat gliding forward soundless as a floating leaf. The grip of his right hand down by the blade of the oar-paddle tightened.

The twin eyes there among the stars on the shining water, held motionless. Presently they were only fifteen or twenty feet away, just to the right now of the uptilted empty bow of the little rowboat. Nixon stopped paddling. Slowly he rested the oar in the bottom of the boat and picked up his shotgun.

At about eight feet, Nixon fired both barrels almost together with a great crashing roar. A hundred yards ahead of him, where the bayou made its bend, there was consternation and terror among the tiny upright shapes gathered there on the soggy bank—a terror that made them scurry with tiny cries; and then, when seemingly they were not hurt by the burst of light and the vast roar, made them stand peering in wonderment at this gigantic drama out there on the water.

Nixon knew nothing of that. He was intent only on the splash where his shot had gone; and he saw that this 'gator did not sink, but was lunging away, off to the right, toward the bank. A big one, he had seen that by the spacing of the eyes and now by the water slick and the splashing as it floundered toward shore. Then he was after it, paddling with all the power of his arms as he bent forward, until in the shallows near the bank, where the mortally wounded reptile was now aimlessly floundering, he came almost on top of it.

In an instant more he was over the rowboat's side, waist deep in the water. There was a thrill to this, the lunging of his hands to grip the writhing, slimy, brainless adversary by the foreleg, threshing ashore with it as skillfully he avoided the snapping jaws, and dangerous swishing tail. An eight foot 'gator. Good enough. Its head was an oozing mass of pulp where his shot had blown into it. Panting, he hauled it onto the soggy bank, darted back to the rowboat for his hatchet; then he had hacked into the base of the reptile's spine where the tail began, cutting into it so that the threshing stopped and the big green-black adversary lay only quivering.

Ralph would be pleased. Now if he could get another one as big as this, and then row back home—

NIXON'S thoughts suddenly went blank so that he stood over the dead 'gator with his jaw sagging in amazement. He had jerked off his headband with the light-torch when he jumped overboard from the rowboat, but there was enough starlight here for him to see the tiny upright thing. It was in a silvery patch beside a line of brush back from the water. A thing in the shape of a man. Hardly that; but it was upright, oblong with a head and a width of tiny shoulder. It stood divided at the bottom like two legs and there were two arms. A thing only a few inches high. The starlight showed it to be brown-black. Then suddenly Nixon's gasp of astonishment made him suck in his breath as he blankly stared. The tiny thing seemed to be wearing clothes...

To Nixon in those seconds, there was a blur of his mind when he wasn't thinking,

just staring as though this were something not to be explained, something which didn't have to be explained because it wasn't real, just a conjuring of his own imagination, a trick of his vision. His hand went with a puzzled gesture to brush his eyes. He blinked. One tiny, six-inch man-shape?

Abruptly he saw that the brush here seemed alive with them. They were moving now. They emitted tiny squeaks that could have been words; shouted commands to each other. But up here in the starlight of Nixon's six foot height, the sounds were like the voices of excited insects.

Adversaries? There was no such idea in Nixon's mind, those first blank seconds. Then suddenly, with a tiny hissing flash, a thread of violet light stabbed up at him. It struck one of his dangling hands with a hot little flash of tingle like the shock of a weak electric current. Then he saw where it came from—an edge of a patch of wire-grass. Three of the brown-black figures were dragging a tiny wheeled thing. A weapon. It was hardly bigger than Nixon's hand. Its nozzle slanted upward and spat another tiny violet flash. Then at his feet he felt something hit against the bottom of his leather puttee. One of the shapes was trying to climb up his leg. He could feel the weight of it on his shoe. A surprising weight, as though the six-inch thing were made of lead.

Nixon was stooping to reach down when a tiny projectile hit him in the face. It stung, with a scratching little stab of pain. Then others came. It was like a handful of peas being thrown at him. All in a few seconds while Nixon had stood blankly staring with incredulous amazement, what seemed hundreds of the tiny shapes were around him. Attacking him. With anything normal, Nixon could think quickly. A gator's jaws closing on his arm, simple enough to know what to do. But now suddenly his emotion at this weird attack was only one of puzzled anger. He stooped swiftly, seized the tiny figure that was at his ankle. It screamed as his hand closed over it, a thin, high-pitched squeaking cry. But it was blood-curdling—so nearly human in its frenzied, agonized sound. As he raised it up,

still it was screaming. A heavy little thing, heavy as though it were of metal. And it was solid, so solid that his squeezing fingers could have held a leaden figure.

For an instant Nixon held the screaming little thing up and stared at it; and the starlight showed him the contorted features of its tiny bluish face, its flailing arms. Then he flung it out over the bayou. There was a little splash. The screaming stopped as the figure sank like a stone. Now abruptly, the dazed incredulous astonishment of Nixon dropped from him, and a stab of fear came; fear and a surge of anger as he realized that this attack was reality. He staggered back from the rain of tiny missiles pelting him, and another flash of the tiny wheeled gun. The ground here was black now with the lunging, milling little shapes. His first backward step trod on two or three of them, mashed their solid, heavy little bodies into the soggy ground of the bayou bank.

As he staggered, there must have been a tree root that caught his heel. At the same instant, a pellet struck his eye; and as his arm flung up and he stumbled over the root, suddenly he fell backward to the soggy sand. It was enough for the alert little figures. Their cry of triumph sounded as they pounced upon him, swarming over him. A hundred? It could have been more. Scores of scrambling things. Perhaps, small though they were, each of them weighed a pound. A hundred pounds of treading steps and jabbing arms were in an instant upon the fallen Nixon. He felt himself really frightened now, a fear that he had never felt before, no matter what the antagonist, fear engendered by the strangeness of it, the unknown.

NIXON tried to get up, but the sheer weight of the swarming little adversaries seemed pinning him down. Now they were on his throat, on his face. Tiny things jabbed at his eyes, so that his hands flailed in a frenzy, plucking them away. But then there were others. He found himself rolling, mashing them. But he couldn't mash them, he could only shove them into the ground . . .

Damned persistent, wildly reckless little things. A sweep of his arm knock a dozen of them away. Some screamed. But al-

ways there were more . . . Why didn't he get to his feet? Get up now! Knock them off! Get up! He found himself partly up, with the scrambling shapes cascading off him; but he was dizzy, his vision blurred. Another stab of the tiny weapon came. It struck him on the forehead, a hot stinging, tingling flash. For an instant it clung, with a wave of dizziness from it flooding Nixon so that he fell back, kicking, writhing . . . They were tramping over his face now. Then he realized that one of them was pounding with something heavy at his temple, a rhythmic pounding . . . *Thump . . . Thump . . .* He tried to strike at it . . . But now he knew that he couldn't focus . . . The pounding stopped. Of course. He had knocked the damned thing off . . . *Thump . . . Thump . . .* Another had started it again, every little blow making Nixon's head shudder, his senses reel and fade, so that now a dull blurred blackness was coming . . . Those cursed, tiny little blows at his temple.

Suddenly, strange in Nixon's thoughts there was the vision of himself, a monstrous fallen, wounded giant. Bewildered, dazed, helpless, with a man standing on the great expanse of his face; a man who was pounding with a crowbar against the softness of the giant's temple . . . You could fight a 'gator. Sure. You could fight a man your own size. Or several of them maybe, with your fingers itching to get at their throats and strangle them . . . But there were these jabbing, swarming things by the hundreds . . .

There was in Nixon's fading mind at last only the damnable realization of those tiny rhythmic blows at his temple, each just that small concussion of his brain, another and another until his senses fully faded and he was swept off into the dark, empty, soundless abyss of unconsciousness . . .

## II

**I**T WAS LIKE THE ROARING OF a waterfall. You could lie near it on the grassy sward and maybe there would be a little last fading sunlight of the day to warm you. And your belly could be empty with a gnawing pain, but that was all right because there was the smell of food cooking and soon you would have it

full. A warrior returned from the hunt, had his women to cook for him . . .

The phantasmagoria of Nixon's returning consciousness as he listened to the roaring of the falling water seemed made up of queer things out of his Indian heritage. But another part of his brain told him that was absurd—told him that he was lying on something hard, with the feel of sweat bathing his skin, and pain that slowly was becoming apparent stabbing at him from scores of tiny wounds on his hands, his face, his neck.

Then suddenly Nixon knew that he had opened his eyes. He lay staring, puzzled, with a blurred scene resolving into outlines that he could distinguish, but not understand. He was lying on his back, gazing upward at what seemed a vaulted, shining metal ceiling close over his head. It was sharply curved, two or three feet above him, as though now he were lying in a shining, glowing vault. With returning strength he tried to sit up, but could not. And then he realized that he was shackled. He could see what looked like finely woven, white metallic ropes. They wrapped his arms and legs together.

The waterfall was partly the roaring of weakness in his head; but that seemed subsiding now and there was only a faintly throbbing hum somewhere near him. A hum like a dynamo, or at least some sort of mechanism. Turning his head, he saw that on one side of him the concave metal wall had a row of small bullseye windows. They were spaced about a foot apart, each the size of his fist. And in each of them there was the vision of a black abyss of sky, with white blazing stars.

Again he tried to sit up. He could bend a little at the waist, and he was able to get one elbow under him and his head up so that it was nearly to the ribbed ceiling. At once, from the other side of him, away from the bullseye windows, there was a faint, hurried scurrying of little footsteps.

A voice said, "Careful, giant!"

And another voice said, "Will he hear us, Tork?" It was a softer voice. Less harsh. English! But queerly slurred, carefully spoken. And the voices were tiny, strangely thin, of a pitch totally different from anything Nixon ever had heard.

"Tork, will he hear us? He is recovered now. Will he hear us? Oh, Tork, what will he try to do?" The English words drifted off into a language totally strange, unintelligible.

NIXON saw the two little figures. One was taller, wider than the other; the big one six inches, the other at least an inch less. They were standing on the white metal of the floor, down by his thigh. And now he realized that he was stretched out in the small interior of a metal cylinder, lying on a floor that crossed the middle of it, so that he was stretched the length of its top half. It was about a ten-foot length, and six feet wide. It left a space beside him. Little metal railings a few inches high ran along the floor, dividing it into tiny enclosures. A mechanism room; another where supplies seemed to be stored; another which had what seemed furniture in it. All in miniature. All peopled with tiny figures that had stopped their tasks, and were staring at him now in awe and fear.

"Speak, giant! Can you hear us?"

"I hear you," Nixon said. His voice rumbled, reverberating in the close confines of the curved metal walls. The sound startled the little figures down there at the floor. They peered up, tense, apprehensive. Two or three scurried away; and now Nixon saw that there were several holes along the floor where tiny ladder stairs led downward to some space beneath. Several of the frightened little figures started down the ladders and then stopped, peering up again.

"We can kill you," the figure called Tork said. He was still standing fairly close beside the great curve of Nixon's prone body, with the smaller figure beside him. Both of them were wary. Nixon could see it. They stood ready to dart away, not knowing what this trapped, bound monster might be able to do. "You do not wish that we should kill you?"

"No," Nixon said. "I sure don't." He said it wryly. He tried to smile. Kill him? These little creatures? Incredible, him lying here in this vaulted, tomb-like interior, with tiny things that could talk; things who had scientific weapons and intelligence to handle them.

"You did try to kill me," Nixon added

abruptly. "I remember it now. You—what shall I call you—Tork?"

"Tork, yes," the taller figure said. "And this with me here is Nona. We did not want to kill you—"

"Oh, you didn't?" Nixon's temper always sprang readily. He could feel his hands suddenly tingle. It was absurd that this tiny creature should speak so calmly of killing him. Why if he had his hands loose, he could seize the damned little thing, squeeze it until it screamed . . .

Unconsciously Nixon was straining at the metal ropes, with the muscles under his bronzed skin taut as he held his breath, pulling and straining. The metal posts bent inward a little with the pull; but the ropes held . . . It was a moment of horrible tenseness for his captors. He could see it as he slowly strained, exerting all his strength until the sweat poured out on his forehead and he was panting. A tense horrible moment, whole Tork and Nona stood with their tiny bluish faces turned upward, with glowing little eyes staring. Then Tork's face wrinkled into a grotesque smile as he saw Nixon's body relax. The crucial test had come and passed. They could hold this giant.

Tork said quietly, "There is a blood-tube in your throat. I could climb up there and plunge what you call a sword into it."

Nixon had heard of the jugular vein, of course. A sword, as Tork would wield it, would be only a needle. But, even so, it could have been stabbed into his jugular while he was unconscious and he might have bled to death. Or it could be stabbed into his eyes, blinding him . . .

"All right," Nixon said. "It's hard to realize—I reckon I'm beginning to understand now—"

"That we have an intelligence like your own," Tork finished. "What are you called? You have a name? Is it not so that all Earth people are named?"

"Nixon," he said. "Allen Nixon. Look here—what the devil is all this? Who are you? You've got me here in some sort of thing—"

"Our Spaceship," Tork said. "We came to Earth to get you."

"Get me? Came to Earth?"

But of course! These little creatures, so grotesquely in a sort of human mould,

couldn't belong on Earth. Nixon stared out again through the tiny bullseyes beside him at the starry abyss of the heavens. A spaceship, and he and his captors were no longer on Earth now, but hurtling out somewhere among the stars. Allen Nixon, Floridian backwoodsman, was far from a scientist. But he had read a great deal. Atomic bombs. Rockets to the Moon. That sort of thing was no longer a fantasy. Fantasy or not, he had to accept it now.

"You came to Earth—to get me?" he repeated.

"Well, not exactly you," Tork said. "We came for one of you Earth giants. We landed—a place where there would not be many of you. And then you came . . ."

**S**TRANGE FACTS, which now Nixon's tiny captors were telling him. They had come from a small world, in that belt of asteroids which lies beyond Mars. A world which in their language was called something that sounded like Orana. And they called themselves Orites—a little civilization of them huddled on a bleak, rocky world.

This Tork—his counterpart, in our human civilization, would be a man. And the smaller figure here with him, a woman. Two sexes. But among the Orites, they were in the minority, for most of the young born to them, were neuter. And these they called Gorts. Like a slave class, who grew to maturity trained for work, for servitude. Creatures of a much lower intelligence, each trained from the beginning to some simple, standardized task.

Nixon, as he listened, could identify the Gorts, here among the groups of tiny figures within the miniature railed enclosures on the spaceship floor. A hundred or more of them had come up from underneath now, reassured that the giant was helpless. There was one area down beyond Nixon's feet where a group of some thirty of them were bending over a long trough that was high as their knees. They seemed to be eating. They were about Tork's six-inch size, these Gorts. But broader, more squarely solid-looking. Their heads were round, shining like polished leaden balls, with grey-blue faces, square-cut in a grotesque human mould.

Their garments, some grey, others of a brownish-black, seemed stiff and jointed like a coat of mail.

"Well, you've got me," Nixon said. "You're taking me now to your world?"

"Yes, that is it," Tork agreed.

"Why? What for? And you talk English—how is that?"

It was only what to them could be called a few years ago, that the Orites had been able to build a spaceship. An expedition had come to Earth. It was a spaceship built for their own size—a cylindrical ship perhaps the size of Nixon's arm. A group of them, including this Tork, had come, landed and stayed for a time. So small, coming during Earth's night, remaining hidden, then moving to other places again during night, it had been easy for them to avoid discovery by the Earth giants.

"We found that your world, it is very beautiful," Tork was saying. "Much better than our own—that you shall see. And perhaps our mind is different from yours. You do not learn strange language by listening, and remembering?"

"Well, yes, but not exactly that," Nixon said. "Children do, I suppose. So you're taking me back to your world? You say you didn't want to kill me. Why should you? What do you want of me?"

He saw Tork turn and gaze at the smaller woman-creature beside him, as though Tork wasn't sure how he should answer that question. They were standing now so that as Nixon had relaxed, prone, with his face turned sidewise, they were only a foot or so away. He could see them more clearly than before. Their garments were of some flexible, metallic fabric—a sort of square-cut tunic and trousers on Tork; and on Nona more of a drape, belted tight at the waist.

Tork's head was round and shining, like a Gort; hers had a little growth of white and gleaming hair on it. And Nixon could see other differences now. The female was curved, broad at the hips, but every tiny line of the male figure was stiffly angular. It gave Tork, and the Gorts even more so, a mechanical look—the planes of the face were all tiny rectangles, as though hewn on metal . . .

"We need you," Tork said at last. "Our scientists need one of the Earth-giants."



"Need me? What for?" Nixon demanded.

"That you shall see," Tork said. He added evasively, "There is so much about your world that you can tell us."

"There will be no harm come to you," Nona said suddenly. "My father, he is leader of the Orites in all things of science. It was he who built our first spaceship."

"I am assistant to him," Tork put in.

"And then they built this giant ship, to bring a giant to our world," Nona added, "and my father, he is working now on something else—something that will be so good for all us Orites—"

"That we can explain later, not now," Tork said hastily.

Whatever it was, Nixon couldn't make them say any more about it. The trip now stretched on while around him, down on the floor, the miniature interior was busy with the routine of the voyage. Beneath him, he understood now, were the mechanism rooms, the air renewers, pressure equalizers, temperature controls, and the gravity engines—whatever they were. Perhaps, if he had been an Earth scientist, Tork would have tried to find the English words to explain them. But Tork did not, and Allen Nixon wasn't curious. To him it was enough that this strange thing was a fact.

His mind was busy with thoughts of how to escape from these weird little captors. Certainly he had no desire to be taken to this strange world. Tork's queer glance at Nona had seemed somehow to have a gruesome implication. If only he could get Tork within his fingers—

**A**FTER a time Nixon slept. He was hungry and thirsty when he awoke. Down on the floor the Gorts were busy with their routine tasks. They were getting used to the monstrous prisoner now. None seemed to notice that he had opened his eyes. Then he saw Tork, in the little enclosure beyond Nixon's feet, where the cylindrical interior narrowed. It seemed to be the bow of the spaceship. A bullseye port was there, with a vista of the stars. There was a foot-high bank like an instrument panel, with rows of tiny dials hardly bigger than his smallest fingernail. They glowed with faint streams of lights.

He saw Tork there, among the tiny controls.

"Tork!" he called.

Presently Tork came running along the floor and stood by Nixon's face.

"You awoken?" Tork said. "You giants sleep a very long time. We know that, of course. And you have slept even longer."

Nixon could well believe it. He was rested now. Far more clear-headed and alert, he realized, than he had been before, and the many tiny wounds on him didn't hurt so much now.

"I'm hungry and thirsty," he said. "I suppose you know that giants eat, don't you?"

Tork's weird slit of mouth widened and his bluish face knotted into a grotesque smile. "We had planned for that before we caught you," he said. "Water—your earth-water we have in tanks here. We have studied your food. In Orana our chemists studied it, and we have concentrated it for you. And perhaps some of our own things you will like."

Feeding this bound giant was quite a problem. The Gorts struggled now with a great ladder, resting it against Nixon's shoulder, carrying pails of water up to his chest, pouring them into his mouth, each not much more than a thimbleful. Then a long line of them came, each with a chunk of food, a mouthful for Nixon. But it was gratifying, if queer-tasting, and at last he had had enough.

The days slowly passed, while the tiny ship plunged on through the abyss of space. Days? There was here nothing but the same humming, glowing interior, and outside through the tiny bullseyes, the vast unchanging panorama of the stars. Nixon slept when he could; and when he was thirsty or hungry, he called for Tork to order the Gorts to their task. A hundred of them, whose only work was to feed him.

Nixon realized now that these little people slept very often. Watching them, it seemed that every two or three hours they needed sleep. A lifespan, probably much shorter than ours. Ten years from birth to old age, perhaps. This trip to Orana, as Tork once explained, to them was a very long, tedious voyage. To Nixon it would be while he slept perhaps twenty or twenty-five times.

"If you would let one of my hands loose," Nixon told Tork once, "you wouldn't have to carry the food and water up to me. Have the Gorts put it beside me, down there on the floor and that's enough."

He did his best to persuade Tork. After all, what could he do to escape, even if they turned him loose? A lunge, even an incautious movement, could wreck this little ship. Kill them all, but it would kill him too.

"You don't reckon I'm that foolish," Nixon said.

"No, I do not," Tork agreed.

"Then turn me loose. It's silly to keep me shackled like this. Causes you a lot of trouble."

But Tork only grinned his grotesque grin and shook his head.

"Why not?" Nixon argued. "What can I do?"

"You could reach and seize me," Tork said grimly. "You could hold me with your fingers. And to save my life, would I not order the Gorts to turn us back to Earth? That you could do. Have you not thought of it?"

Nixon had indeed. Something like that was what he had been planning. These tiny captors weren't so dumb.

But as the time passed and they told him that now the orbit of Mars was crossed and presently their world of Orana would lie ahead of them, Nixon had in some measure won the confidence of Nona. Sometimes when he called to her she would come and climb the long ladder at his shoulders and sit on his chest and talk to him. At first she was timid, but then as her confidence grew she got over it. Under her questions Nixon passed the long hours telling her about Earth.

"But you saw a good deal of it yourself, Nona. You made two trips there."

"Yes," she agreed. "But it is a world so gigantic, it did not look anything of the way you tell it to me."

"And I guess your world will look pretty different to me," he said, "from the way it does to you."

But she was queerly reticent about her world. He decided that Tork had warned her not to talk about it.

At another time it occurred to Nixon to ask how they had gotten his huge body

into their ship. She described how it had been dragged in with cables. A dozen little electronic engines, and the pulling of about five hundred Gorts who were here on board. But to get him out they had planned it differently. Even though shackled, he could perhaps hitch himself along, just a little at a time, out through the bow of the ship which was built so that the whole of it would spread apart.

"Of course I can," Nixon agreed. "I certainly don't want to make it hard, Nona. If you people got so you could trust me—"

"I think my father will trust you," she said suddenly. "Yes, that I think."

Then there came the time when Nona gestured toward the front port of the ship, down past Nixon's feet. "There is Orana," she said.

He saw it then, a great silvery crescent which had swung into view. During the hours it enlarged, until presently it was filling all that area of the sky. And a little later, Nona came climbing up the ladder to his chest.

"When you have slept the next time," she said, "we shall be there."

She seemed frightened. He could interpret more readily the expressions on her tiny, bluish face now.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

She said, "Tork has seen with the telescope that a storm may be there when we land."

"A storm on your world? Oh, I see. Well, we have storms. Wind and rain. And I told you about a snowstorm—"

But she burst out: "A storm on Orana—Oh, giant, if only you could help us! That is what my father thinks—that you will be able to help us live on our world!"

A storm on Orana . . . somehow it made him shudder, hearing the terror in her tiny voice.

### III

**H**E SLEPT AGAIN. AND WHEN he awoke the little interior of the Orite spaceship was busy with the activities of landing. Through one of the bulls-eye gorts beside him, Nixon started down at the strange new world. Beneath them now it was a great, darkly dim expanse of gaunt naked mountains. A place, by the

look of it, seemingly of monstrous desolation.

The spaceship settled lower. Now Nixon could see the huge, naked mountain peaks. They were like greenish polished spires of glass, towering up into a queer orange-tinted haze of the Orana night. Beneath the topping spires, the vast gaunt mountains spread out in serrated ranks. The sides of them were polished cliff-ramps, bleak, precipitous slopes dropping down into the great chasms of the valleys where the orange haze was thicker so that the bottoms were an empty blur.

He found Nona standing down on the floor, between him and the bulls-eye port.

"There—Orana," she said.

He was puzzled. "But Tork told me it was a very small asteroid," he said. "Those mountains, those canyons — so huge—"

A little world, but so monstrously contorted by some great cataclysm of nature in its birth, that everything on it was tremendous. As Nixon stared down, it seemed that there could be easily ten miles, as distance would be measured on Earth, between the tops of these towering spires and the ragged gashes of deeps between them. A vast world, vast with the hugeness of this amazing panorama of utter, bleak desolation. Somehow there was a majesty to it. A brooding landscape, awesome in its sweep of barren immensity. And it was sinister—the monstrous, brittle-looking cliff-faces, smooth and green, with the orange hazes whirling about them, and the shadows in the depths murky with purple mystery.

"It looks large to you?" Nolan said. "Then you can understand how much bigger it looks to us."

He could try to see it from their viewpoint. To them he was a seventy-foot giant—and so to them these immense slashed metal mountains must seem titanic. A harsh world, with nature cruel and relentless, so that on it these tiny creatures had struggled, were struggling, for a bare existence . . .

Now the little Spaceship had settled lower so that the swirling orange haze was like a veil around it. A thousand feet away, outside this porte, Nixon could see a dim blur of smooth almost vertical cliff-face sliding upward as they sank.

"Nona, come." It was Tork, here on the floor with Nona. A line of Gorts went past, dragging a wheeled apparatus. Nixon recognized it as the little electronic gun which had spat its flash at him, back there on the bank of the Florida bayou.

Tork called a command to the Gorts, and then he herded Nona away and stood looking up into Nixon's down-turned face. "You, giant," he said. "You will take orders from me now? You will do what I tell you?"

"Maybe," Nixon said slowly. He had come to dislike Tork's small arrogance. "Are you going to turn me loose?"

"That is impossible," Tork said shortly. "I want you to know, if you are helpful it will be for your good. Can you understand that?"

"You've said it enough so I reckon I should," Nixon retorted.

"When we land, I will direct you," Tork said. "The home—the place where we will keep you—to your size it will be quite close. I will direct you to it."

Then the turmoil of the landing drew Tork away. With the orange mists almost solid outside the little port, presently Nixon felt the spaceship rock and bump, and then settle quiescent. The interior was a babble of the excited, tiny voices of the Orites, and the throbbing grind of mechanisms as the ports were opened. The outer air came in with a swirling rush, heavy wisps of tinted vapour, spreading like a visible gas. Nixon's first breath of it was choking. It had a heavy, chemical smell. He coughed, but after a moment he found that, though it was dankly oppressive, making his lungs tingle and burn and his head feel unsteady, he could breathe it.

For a moment, Nona was here again. "The storm air," she said.

"The storm is coming?" he said. "Or is this the storm, outside there now?"

"No, no, but it is coming."

THE GRIND of the interior mechanisms had ceased, but then they began again. Nixon saw now that the vaulted ceiling of the little Spaceship was slowly being raised. It seemed hinged at about his waist and from the bow beyond his feet it was rising up. And then there past his feet, the bow-section spread apart. The orange mist, danker than ever, swirled in

around him. Beside him, lines of Gorts were hurriedly carrying things out of the ship. Presently all the tiny figures had disembarked. Nixon was lying in the narrow, vaulted little cylinder with its top and end down by his feet fully opened. Over him, from the waist down, there was the tossed, storm-filled murk of the new world—a blur with only a distant monstrous crag dimly visible. Silence was around him here, but outside there was the weird muttering voice of the oncoming storm.

For that moment a panic struck at Nixon. He was wrapped with metal ropes from head to foot, and still chained to the little lines of metal posts beside him. It was as though he were lying bound, here in a partly opened coffin. Had the Orites abandoned him, scurrying away in their terror of the storm?

"Ready," shouted Tork. And as Nixon shifted his head, he saw his captor standing at the foot of one of the posts that came up past Nixon's ear. Tork was loosening the cable, casting it off. Then he was at each of the others. Presently Nixon's bound body was free from its lashings.

"Careful now, giant!" Tork said. He cast off the last cable, down by Nixon's feet; and then he darted back, turned and ran hurriedly out of the opened bow. His shouted voice came in.

"Come out now," Tork called. "Be careful!"

Nixon could bend at the waist a little, and bend at the knees. His arms could move to get an elbow under him when he turned sideways. Grimly it occurred to him that he could roll over perhaps, or lunge and wreck this cursed little cylinder.

"Come now!" Tork called sharply. "And surely we will kill you if there is trouble."

Feet first, slowly, laboriously, Nixon inched his way along and out of the spread bow of the spaceship.

The world of Orana. A curious bristling sword was under him. Around him, the acrid orange air swirled and sucked. At first he could see nothing but an orange blur. Then off to one side, on a dim slope some twenty feet away, he saw that a terraced pyramid was standing—a pyramid with its top third sliced off. The Orite city. A community dwelling. It was

one of three here. Dimly Nixon could make out the outlines of the other two, further away up the slope. They were all three about of a size—some fifty feet square at the base and twenty feet high up their terraced sides to the flat roof. Tiny lights gleamed like window eyes along the terraces at different levels about a foot apart; and now Nixon could see the little Orite figures moving there on the ramparts, with their thin voices babbling, excited by the return of the Spaceship with its giant from Earth.

"Keep going," Tork was calling. He was off to one side, down by Nixon's feet. A crowd of Gorts stood further back, watching. And from the nearest pyramid, other Orites were coming. Some, the young, were only an inch or so high. Groups of them clustered timidly around a mother. A stiff formation of what seemed the slave Gorts was standing in a double line. Several hundred of them. The little wheeled guns were with them. The guns pointed at Nixon. Alert Gort commanders stood ready to attack the giant if it became necessary.

"Keep going," Tork called again.

HE stood cautiously to one side, ten feet from Nixon's lashed ankles. He moved along to keep there, as Nixon moved. Nixon had shifted three or four lengths of his body from the spaceship now. Suddenly, as for a moment he relaxed, panting from the effort, he found Nona walking here on the ground near his face. Of them all, she was the least afraid of him. She was so close now that a flip of his head could have knocked her down.

"Hurry," she urged. "There is a place for you—"

"How far away? What sort of place?" he demanded.

"It is, what you call a—" She suddenly checked herself. "Oh giant, you hear that? The storm—coming now!"

He heard it. The distant, rumbling storm voice had abruptly intensified — a rumble that now was separated into a fusillade of crackling explosions. The orange air was swirling crazily, swirling and crackling.

Then in the full intensity of its fury, the Orana storm burst upon them.

## IV

THE ORANGE RAIN CAME down in a pelting deluge, with a steady blast of the wind. Under the impact of it Nixon stopped his hitching movement along the ground and lay motionless. Overhead the clouds were turning green. Great masses of smoking, turgid vapour swung majestically like the slow-motion image of a cyclone.

In the orange-green murk Nixon could see the crowds of little figures running frantically for the shelter of the pyramid-cities. The nearer pyramid was dimly visible through the blur. Tiny lights were glowing there now, seemingly all over it. Not the lights of the windows. He could still see the little spaced rows of them at the foot-high levels. This was a purple glow — a sheen of light-fire. It seemed something to protect the city from the storm. Up at the flat-top roof, fifty feet above the ground, the purple light-fire stood up in little crossed beams.

The heavy orange rain increased. They were queerly solid raindrops. They stung Nixon's face like hail so that he tried to shield himself by twisting around. The cries of the running Orites were faint little screams in the roar. He saw a sucking whirl of wind knock a group of them down. Then they rose, struggled on, trying to get to the sheltering doorways of the city. The raindrops were like hail, of different sizes. He saw an Orite struck by one that to the little six-inch figure was monstrous. The Orite fell lay motionless.

Now the rain-water was coming in rills down the rocky slope. The rills were rivers to the fleeing Orites. A group of them were cut off. They milled around in panic, then they came running back toward Nixon. Suddenly as they neared him, he saw that Nona was among them. She was running, staggering. A blob of rain-drop barely missed felling her.

He called, "Nona! Nona!"

The voice of the giant. It rumbled with a roar, mingling with the roar of the storm. Through the swirling murk, with the haven of the purple-glowing pyramid blurred in the distance, Nixon could see that the slope was dotted by fallen figures. Some of them lay with the cascading rivulets of water tumbling over them; others

were being washed away down the slope. Half of the Orite crowd perhaps had reached the city. The others were caught out here, surging back in a panic toward the giant, momentarily more in terror of the storm than of him. And Nixon knew now what he could do to give them at least partial shelter.

"Nona!" he called. "Come over here by me! Tell them—all of them come here!"

Then they were coming, and Nixon lay on his side, with his back to the wind and rain. For them there was shelter, here against the giant figure so that in a moment a hundred or more of them were huddling here. He lay tensed, motionless. Down his length he could dimly see the mass of tiny figures crouched in the lee of his body, with the choking mists and the rain whirling high above them. Presently he could feel the rivulets of water backing up against him, as though he were a monstrous dam stretched here. He realized that his body was blocking the water, keeping it from surging like a flood upon the Orites he was sheltering.

He said, "You're all right now, Nona? Better now?"

She was crouching against his chest. He heard her answering call. "Yes. Oh yes, giant."

He lay through an interval. And now through the storm came a burst of lightning—a crackling burst with a roar like thunder. But it was very different lighting from anything Nixon had ever seen! It seemed to strike one of the distant cliffs. There was a sustained crackling for a second or two, then an orange-green burst of light. It was like a bomb striking the cliff-face, with masses of rock hurled into the blur of the air. A chunk, perhaps as big as Nixon's forearm, fell clattering across the slope. Now he saw the meaning of the purple light-fire like a barrage around and above the pyramid-city. It was a barrage of some strange electronic nature, to act like a lightning rod. Presently a crackling bolt hit it—a great burst, a blob of pyrotechnics in the air above the city roof. It crackled for a second and then harmlessly was swept away, dissipating into the murk.

An hour passed, with the storm raging while Nixon lay taut with the crowd of Orites huddled against him. Then it

seemed that the wind and rain were lessening. And presently a rift came in the wheeling orange clouds—a rift with a pallid opalescent light breaking through. The Orana moon. As the clouds at last wheeled and swung away, the firmament of stars was spread overhead—pin-points of fire in the Orana night-sky, with the moon a huge crescent of opalescent shimmer. It bathed the glistening wet slope, strewn with the tiny dead figures. It edged with pallid silver the frowning ramparts of the distant mountains . . .

**P**RESENTLY the daylight came. There was a swift, brightening twilight of flat, pale glow; and then all in a few minutes there was full daylight as the sun mounted above the cliffs. Out here beyond Mars, it was a sun small and pale. Nixon's first Orana day. The sunlight had warmth, a grateful warmth that soon was drying him. In it the bound Nixon lay quiet. Momentarily the giant was ignored. The wet slope was steaming in the sunlight. Nona and the Orites whom he had sheltered had fled into the city as soon as the storm abated. The barrage glow had gone from the pyramids. Gorts were carrying in the dead and wounded.

A queer ironic feeling of his helplessness was in Nixon as he lay waiting, wondering what these strange little captors would try to do to him next. This world of civilized humans all in miniature, so tiny, made it seem absurd that he should have to lie here, patiently waiting for what would happen to him. But every moment as he gazed around at the busy little Orite world, revealed by the daylight, his respect for it grew. Quite evidently these were a scientific people. A totally different science from anything on Earth, so that he could never grasp it. A science, compared to his own Earth-world, which in many ways was probably less advanced, yet in other ways more so.

Beyond the three pyramid cities he could see tilled fields in which tiny things were growing. Little furrows ridged them. Gorts were working there, with miniature machines that scurried like bugs along the ground. Now after the storm, Orites were trudging in from the hills, a rural population living out in the recesses of the cliffs, and in huts along the ground. A few of

their little dwellings were visible in the nearer distance, mounds about a foot high. Some of the people living out there came carrying those who had been hurt in the storm—for medical attention in the pyramid-cities, Nixon surmised. Others evidently came out of curiosity to see the giant from Earth. At a respectful distance which to Nixon was five or six feet away, a crowd of them was gathering. Men and women, and the young some of which were hardly more than an inch high, clinging to a mother as they stared at the prone giant. It was a jabbering, excited crowd, augmented now by Orites who streamed out from the cities.

The nearer cliff of the canyon-side, as Nixon saw it, was fairly close here. It rose sheer, shining green in the sunlight. There was another building over there against the cliff bottom—a building which looked like a small cairn of stones. It was about two or three feet high. Its tiny oval windows, even now in the daylight, had a violet light in them; and at a peak from the top of it, colored vapour was streaming up.

"We are ready to attend to you now, giant." The Orite voice near Nixon's head startled him. Then he saw that Tork had arrived, and that Nona was behind him. Other Orites had come from the nearest of the pyramids and were gathered around Tork. Quite evidently they were important here. Somehow the look of them suggested advanced age; men a little bent, shriveled of outline, with robes that were ornamented for the dignity of their rank. Their wrinkled, bluish faces were solemn with dignity. There were some twenty of them. They stood in tiny groups, gazing, whispering to each other.

"Attend to me?" Nixon said. "It's time you turned me loose, isn't it?"

If he could only persuade them to free him! From the beginning Nixon had pondered how he could escape and get back to Earth. Certainly this had been an extraordinary adventure, but already he had had enough of it. If the Orites would free him now, it would be simple enough to force them to take him back in the Space-ship. Or would it? Nixon felt a queer shuddering, like a premonition. Why had they brought him here? What were they planning to do with him?

"Turn you loose," Tork was saying, and Nixon thought he could detect something like sarcasm in that small voice.

"Or at least, thank me," Nixon said. He grinned. Among his own kind on Earth, his was an appealing grin. But the great ruddy expanse of his face with the black stubble of beard which now was growing on it, wrinkled by that grin, certainly had no reassuring appeal for these tiny Orites. And Nixon knew it.

Absurd that he should have to wheedle these little captors! Nixon always had a hot temper and it rose in him now as from the Orites there came only a staring, blank silence. Despite his bonds, he could roll and lunge and kill hundreds of them! But what would it get him? The Gorts would mass for battle and kill him. Or if they couldn't—if even he wrecked all this miniature civilization here, there would be nothing left for him to do but lie here on this strange little world and starve to death.

He mastered his anger. He would have to be docile, do what he was told, for now at least.

"I helped you in the storm, didn't I?" he added. "I saved maybe hundreds of you from being killed. The last thing I want is to hurt any of you."

"My father is coming," Nona put in. She had turned at the sound of a voice calling from the pyramid entrance where other Orites were emerging. "My father is called Frane," Nona added. "I have told him that you want to be our friend." She flung a glance at Tork as she said it; but Tork ignored her and turned away, whispering to some of the dignitaries.

**T**HEN Nona's father stood with her. Frane was obviously aged. His shoulders were square and thin, with an ornate robe draping them. He bore himself with the commanding dignity of his age and rank as leading scientist here.

"I thank you, giant, for what you have done." His voice was thin and high, his words slow, carefully intoned. "For myself, I would trust you. But these men who rule us—" His gaze went to the group with whom Tork was whispering as he added, "have decided against me."

Tork whirled around. "We do not dare

give our world into the keeping of this monster."

It brought a babble of agreement from the listening Orites, most of whom quite evidently understood the Earth language.

"Why did you bring me here?" Nixon demanded. "You certainly went to plenty of trouble."

"To be of help to us," Frane said. "There is no reason why I should not tell you."

Frane in his laboratory here, with Tork as his assistant, for years had been working on a momentous chemical discovery. Drugs to cause a size-change of the human body; to alter the size of every tiny cell, without changing its shape.

Frane gestured. "That is my laboratory, off there." He was indicating the cairn-like little building with the oval violet windows, at the base of the cliff.

A growth-drug. A generation ago they had done it with plants to some extent. "Perhaps you know," Frane was saying, "that natural growth is not steady. It comes in spurts, a rapid growth, a resting, then growth again."

And this new drug would greatly accelerate the growing periods—a vast and rapid acceleration into a size far beyond what nature ordinarily would have attained. Frane's growth-drug was now nearing success.

"To make us Orites perhaps as large as you," Frane was saying. "Then we could dominate our world more easily."

Nixon could understand the desire. This miniature civilization was like a colony of ants on Earth. He could imagine an ant-hill swept by an Earth-storm; a forest fire, with millions of insects scuttling before it, and millions of others consumed by it. This Orana storm, to Nixon, had been bad enough; but to many of the Orites it had been fatal.

"You brought me here," Nixon said, "and yet you hope to make yourselves as big as I am. Why did you need me?"

Tork had approached. His face bore a triumphant leer. "They say it is better to stop this talk with the giant now," he said to Frane.

Orders from Frane's superiors. It was obvious. "Later, giant," Frane said. His face was serious, and Tork's leer of triumph, somehow made Nixon shudder.

"I beg you, for your own good, cause no trouble," Frane added hastily. "You understand that, giant?"

"Yes," Nixon said.

"We have a home for you," Tork said suavely.

"A home? Where?"

"Not far." Tork gestured toward a butte-like rock that rose from the slope, over in the direction of the nearer cliff. To Nixon it was only some fifty feet away. "And you will be made quite comfortable," Tork added smilingly. "Our Gorts will feed you and take care of you."

Then slowly, feet first, the bound Nixon was hitching himself past the pyramid-city. A thousand little eyes watched him tensely. The rock was about twenty feet high. As his feet neared it, Nixon saw that Orites were up on the rock-ridges some ten feet above the ground. Tiny apparatus was up there. Nixon hardly noticed the crescent line of finger-size holes in the ground as he hitched over them. As his feet neared the bottom of the rock, he heard Tork calling,

"Enough, giant! Lie quiet!"

Tork gave a signal. From up on the tiny ledge of rock, the Orites answered it. The apparatus up there glowed, hummed. From the crescent line of holes in the rocky ground around Nixon, tiny purple beams of light, shot up vertically into the air—beams of radiance about six inches apart. They streamed up, sharp and clear for twenty or thirty feet and faded into the sunlit air. It was a crescent fence of light, from one end of the butte, out in a fifteen foot loop around the prone Nixon, bending until it touched the other end of the butte.

At the same moment Gorts rushed in, between the six-inch vertical light-bars. Nixon could feel them with tiny electro-torches burning at the knots of the ropes binding him. The ropes fell away. He was free. The Gorts scattered in a panic, running out between the upstanding purple rays.

Nixon's clothes were smouldering in several places from the tiny torches. The flesh of his wrists was burned. He beat out the smouldering fabric and staggered to his feet.

"Careful now, giant!" It was Tork's voice coming in to him from beyond the

radiance of the bars of purple light. Somehow Tork's sneering warning enraged Nixon. Was this a cage? A cage of light-fire in which these damnable little creatures thought they could hold the Earth-giant? He'd show them!

Nixon's rage blurred his reason or he would have been more wary. With an oath that was thunder to the Orites, he hurled himself against the purple bars. The Orites' apprehensive cries mingled with a crackling, hissing shower of sparks. It was as though Nixon had struck something solid. He was aware of a shock, a resisting thrust, a repulsion that galvanized all his body as it hurled him backward.

Enveloped by the spark-shower, with his clothes smouldering and his flesh burned, he fell writhing in the center of his purple cage.

**NIXON BARELY CLUNG TO HIS** senses. Then after a moment he knew that his head was clearing, that he was brushing his smouldering clothes frantically with his hands. Around him the radiance from the glowing purple bars was dazzling. But presently he could see between them, and see the crescent of blue sky overhead. Between two of the bars, in the six-inch vertical slit of space, an Orite figure appeared. It was Nona. She came carefully in and stood looking at him.

"You are not too badly hurt?" she said anxiously. "You should not have tried that."

"So they send you?" Nixon said bitterly. "What for? To get me ready for some new trickery?"

Then Nixon saw that her father was behind her. "We understand your feelings," Frane said. "I would trust you, but you see I have not enough power here. I am only a man of science; I have nothing to do with the government. Not many of the Gorts will take orders from me."

He seemed wholly sincere, so that Nixon smiled grimly. "All right. I think I am beginning to understand."

And Tork, who in rank was only Frane's assistant, seemed to have the confidence of those Government leaders.

"The Gorts will come and bring you food and water," Nona said.

"There will be five hundred Gorts just



to be trained for your needs," Frane offered. "If they come now, you will not harm them so that they have to attack and kill you?"

Whatever thoughts of wishful thinking Nixon had had that these little people could kill him, now certainly were dispelled. "Okay," Nixon agreed. "You have my promise. I won't hurt the Gorts."

"Thank you," Frane said gravely. He turned away . . .

## V

A DOZEN or more of the Orana days and nights went by. Nona often came to talk with the giant. Then she brought a young Orite with her named Loto. He seemed about her own age. He spoke English. He was, Nona said, studying to be a scientist. From him and Nona, Nixon now learned many details of the little asteroid world. The rotation of Orana on its axis gave an alternate daylight and darkness of about six hours each. There was about the same gravity as Earth, because the asteroid was so extremely dense. And the moon here was a smaller twin of Orana, one revolving around the other.

The days were mostly sunlit, sometimes with swirls of orange and purple clouds. There was no rain; the rain fell only during the infrequent storms. The nights were opalescent moonlight; then with a period when the moon-twin had moved into the hours of the day, and showed only as a dull crescent in the sunlight.

Through the glowing purple bars, Nixon could see the miniature Orite world busy with its routine of life. The cairn-mound of Frane's laboratory was only a few yards distant along the cliff. Day and night its tiny oval windows gleamed with the violet radiance.

Still Nixon had no idea of why he had been brought here. He had demanded it of Nona and Loto, but always they avoided it. Nona looked frightened, and the youthful Loto was gravely solemn. To say the least, their look was anything but reassuring. Then one day, they told him.

"You are a giant," Nona said. "Originally my father wanted to study the growth-factors of larger creatures. On our first visit to your Earth, several of

them were brought here. They were very young, not too terribly big then to be caught and brought here. But they grew so fast."

Again that queer look was on her face as she added, "They are all dead now, except one. It is, I think, what you call a panther. It is caged in a cave—" She gestured. "Out there in a nearby valley—a cave, with the purple barrage like this across the entrance."

"Studying the growth of larger creatures," Nixon echoed. "And now these animals are all dead but one! What you're trying to tell me—your father and Tork experimented on them. Is that it?"

"In the interest of science," Loto said hastily. "That is done on your Earth, isn't it?"

And then they had realized that, if the growth-drug Frane was after was to be effective on the human Orites, a human giant from Earth would be the best on which to experiment. So Tork had been sent to get one.

Nixon stared. "Keep me here, telling me I'll not be harmed until you're ready to vivisect me!"

"No! No—" the Orite girl cried vehemently. "Not that! Never! Father has promised it!"

"He has found that his work does not need it," Loto said earnestly. "Believe us, that is true. The panther has not yet been used. Perhaps it never will be. And Frane does not need you. He thought that he would. But now he's almost sure it isn't necessary."

"And Tork is still trying to persuade your leaders to have Frane—use me?" Nixon demanded.

"Yes," Loto admitted. "That is so. You see, the drugs are so terribly important to us—"

"But my father needs nothing more," Nona said. "Except perhaps, my giant, there will be blood samples—"

"And a little tissue to be studied with our microscopes." Loto put in. "And secretion, perhaps, from the pituitary gland—"

A grave little group of scientists, with Frane, came one day for specimens from the giant. Then they came again. Their tiny surgical instruments were like needles pricking and Nixon only laughed grimly.

But would Frane succeed with his experiments? It seemed now as though Nixon's life hung on that. Then there was a day when Nona said impulsively,

"My father is more sure than ever of success. But Tork refuses to believe it."

"Refuses?" Nixon echoed. "Look here, what you mean by that? I reckon there's still plenty you're not telling me, Nona."

There was indeed! There was so much going on out there in the busy little Orite world that the caged giant could not see. Nona and Loto tried to explain it.

"Tork is surely planning something," Loto said. "Something more than just working for the success of the drug."

There had been rumors of trouble. Talk of plans that were being made by secret meetings in the night. And Tork's followers seemed increasing. More and more the rumors involved him as a leader.

"Planning what?" Nixon demanded. "Is he aiming to seize your government?"

Perhaps it was that. Frane himself could not believe that Tork had any sinister plans; for so many years he had trusted Tork. And Frane was absorbed with his work. An impractical old man.

"So are most of our leaders," Loto said bitterly. "Too old. What you would call rusting on the job."

"One thing I'm sure," Nixon said. "Whatever that fellow Tork is up to, he'd mighty well like to tack my hide to his cabin door."

THE days passed. And Nixon saw himself like a monstrous dumb creature waiting to be slaughtered. There must be something that he could do to get out of here! He began planning it and as the plan evolved, the thing looked feasible, if only he could persuade Nona and the youthful Loto!

He put his plan to them one evening when they came to talk to him, as they now did quite often. In the glow of the purple bars he sat with the two small figures perched on his upraised knee.

"Look," Nixon said softly. "I'm not willing to go on like this. And you—you're just stalling around giving Tork and his men every chance to pull off what they're after."

Nixon felt desperate, and he knew he looked it—ragged and dirty, his clothes

tattered where the barrage had burned them, and his face with sunken cheeks covered by a ragged growth of black beard. And he knew he was ill. The lack of exercises perhaps, because always on Earth Allen Nixon had been used to great muscular activity. The food and water the Gorts brought him, lately had been distasteful. It was strange stuff, at best. And there was the apprehension of his fate—the damnable sitting and waiting.

"Whatever Tork is after," Nixon was saying, "it's something Frane would not want. Nor you—nor any of those who are like you. For your sake as well as mine, you've got to go into this with me."

He persuaded them at last. Loto had the youthful, reckless enthusiasm of youth. He was like Nixon himself, in that! And they both trusted the giant.

"Tonight will be best," Loto said. "Greev will be on duty—"

Greev was one of the Orite guards in charge of the barrage mechanism. His little post was back in a recess on a ledge of the butte. From where Nixon was sitting its cave-entrance was dimly visible off at the left end where the barrage ended at the rock-face. To Nixon it was about ten feet up; to the Orites it was a climb of about a hundred feet, up a steep winding rock-path from the other side of the butte. Greev was a rough fellow who had seemed much interested in Nona. Often he had urged her to come up there and sit with him through the long tedious hours of his duty.

"What time would be best?" Nixon demanded.

"I could go soon after the moon-rise," Nona said.

An hour from now. Nona would talk to the guard. She would contrive that just for a moment or two they would leave the little cave-entrance, walking along the ledge in the shimmer of the moon. And, unseen, Loto would be up there.

"It can be done," Nixon said. "You're sure you understand the mechanisms, Loto?"

"Oh yes, yes."

Perched on the seated giant's upraised knee, Loto and Nona suddenly clutched at the huge folds of his trousers to keep from falling as the knee jerked. And Nixon's hand had gone up to his forehead—

a sweep of wind that was like a little swirl of storm.

"What's the matter?" Loto demanded anxiously.

"I don't know," Nixon murmured. "I sure feel sick."

A wave of nausea and dizziness had swept him, convulsing his muscles. "This food I get here don't seem to agree with me," Nixon added. "Lately, I—"

He sucked in his breath as the inescapable thought came to him.

"Poison!" he gasped. "That's it! Poisoning me—those damned little—"

"Not so loud!" Loto murmured. "Your voice is a roar. It could be heard up there in the control room."

Poisoning the giant! His body was so tremendous that they could only give him enough to be slow-acting, making him gradually sick. Nona and Loto were aghast. More than ever now, this plan to free the giant and let him rule this world as Frane and the others would want it ruled, must succeed tonight.

"Maybe it isn't poison. It could be a sleeping drug," Loto said.

"Sure! To knock me out and vivisect me!" Nixon rasped grimly. "What difference?"

**F**OR a time longer they discussed the details of their plan, while Nixon sat fighting the weird feelings that were sweeping him. Then Nona and Loto quietly left, walking out between the up-standing purple bars. And Nixon was alone, waiting for moonrise . . . This cursed sickness! He fought with it. He was bathed in cold sweat now, with a shuddering chill creeping through him. But it was some hours since he had had anything to eat or drink. He'd certainly take nothing more.

The minutes slowly dragged, with an apprehension of tenseness in the waiting Nixon. Now doubts were assailing him. Would Greev be suspicious, with Nona coming up to visit him tonight when she had always refused before? Would Loto be able to get into the control room unseen? Sometimes Gorts were around up there. Would they oppose him?

And where was Tork tonight? At this time, almost always he was in his apartment in one of the pyramid-cities. Frane

now was in his laboratory; Tork would join him there later. But sometimes Tork vanished on one of his mysterious missions. And it occurred to Nixon that possibly tonight, with poison slowly overcoming the giant, Tork himself might be planning to do something . . .

Then Nixon suddenly was aware that out through the glowing purple bars, the stars were paling above the distant cliffs. The moon was rising. The time had come! Nixon still sat quiet, hunched against the face of the rock. Diagonally up over his head, the little entrance of the control room was visible. It glowed with radiance. Occasionally the tiny blob of Greev showed as he moved about. Was Loto already up there? He had said that there were places where he could climb up without using the path. And to a six-inch Orite the ledge up there outside the control room was broken and crag-strewn so that Loto easily could hide.

Now Nixon saw the figure of Nona, a pale little blob in the moonlight as she mounted the path. A moment more and she was in the glowing recess with Greev. No Gort had challenged her. Good enough! Another interval and then the guard and Nona came out on the ledge, stood a moment and then moved along it.

Loto's chance! Slowly Nixon stood up, stretching as though casually yawning. His head reeled. His ears were roaring. This accursed sickness! . . . But now he saw the blob of Loto in the control room! Nixon tensed.

A sudden humming and hissing of current sounded overhead. The barrage went down! The purple bars of light crackled for an instant and were gone!

The giant was free! Overhead he heard the shout of Greev. A spreading alarm, with the voice of Gorts up on the rock; and others out on the rocky slope. Nixon leaped. He was aware that it was a staggering step so that he almost fell. But he recovered himself, staggered on toward the rock-slope. Everywhere there was a turmoil of frightened little voices. This damnable dizziness! But it could be conquered. Nixon shook himself, trying to straighten and get his balance. Now he was aware that a line of Gorts was before him. Behind him the glow of the barrage sprang up again. Greev had evident-

ly rushed back to his post. But it was too late! The giant was out!

In that confused instant, with all the moonlit scene swaying before him, Nixon saw that the attacking Gorts were dragging up lines of wires mounted in foot-high frames. Grids of wire, with cables that led to little wheeled batteries. And Tork was with them. Nixon heard his voice and saw his little figure scurrying in the background. Perhaps Tork had planned this before the barrage went down, or perhaps he had just come, responding to the alarm . . . What matter? Nixon could scatter this strange little attack with a kicking, scrambling rush . . .

In that second Nixon knew that his thoughts were blurred by the roaring in his head. He knew that he was staggering ahead to scatter the Gorts. But there was no time. The grids of wires glowed and crackled. For just another moment it seemed that they were building up the electronic potential of a bolt. Then one of them reached it. A little puff of crackling violet leaped upward. It struck Nixon in the chest.

Nixon knew nothing except that he was staggering, falling . . .

## VI

**S**LOWLY NIXON REALIZED that he was coming back to consciousness. He felt that he was lying on the ground. He tried to move, but something was holding him. At first the roaring in his head was the only sound. Then he heard Orite voices; and now he could feel the tread of Orite feet upon his chest.

He opened his eyes to a swaying glare of light. A foot above his chest and neck a hooded light cast its lurid orange glare down on him. As his eyelids fluttered up, the Orite voices, speaking in their own language, sounded startled.

Nixon's gaze swung. There were other Orites on the ground, with a ladder leading up to his chest. And nearby, a crowd of Orites and Gorts stood watching with awe. Nixon saw that he was approximately where he thought he had fallen. The rock butte was some twenty feet away, with the barrage bars futilely standing before it. Again Nixon tried to move one of his legs, and then he realized that

he was chained, with chains and ropes that were pegged to the ground.

"You recovered too quickly, giant," Tork's voice said. "For your own good you should have been unconscious as we planned."

With a rush of horror, Nixon realized that these little figures up by his neck were Orite surgeons. Their paraphernalia was mounted there at the base of his throat. The orange light gleamed on their instruments. One who was goggled held a tiny circular blade. It whirled with a faint humming; a revolving knife, electronically heated. Nixon could feel its radiating heat on the skin of his throat as the surgeon held it poised.

Vivisection! Nona and Loto had been right. Tork at last had persuaded the Orite leaders to order this.

"Wait!" Nixon muttered. He was still dazed, bathed with the sweat of weakness. "Where is Frane? Get Frane!"

This damnable roaring in his head made everything seem so blurred and far away. Nixon's eyelids drooped, but he opened them, fighting the drowsiness. And it seemed that his head was clearing. The shock of the violet bolt had knocked him into temporary unconsciousness. But now the poison, or the drug, was wearing off. If he could stall this for a time—

It was a vague, formless thought that he knew was hopeless. "Frane," he said again. "Get Frane."

"He is not needed," Tork's suave voice said.

From the ground beside Nixon, Frane's voice sounded. He was talking in his own language, angrily expostulating. Then he called, in English, "I tell them this is not necessary."

"But your success with the drug is postponed too long," one of the Orite leaders said. "Tork says you are doing your best, but—"

"I will succeed within another night," Frane desperately promised. "One more experiment—" Surely the aged scientist was doing what he could to stall this. But they had lost confidence in him. He should have used the panther, and then this giant man long ago. Frane was a brilliant chemist, but he had no qualities of dominating leadership.

"Only this can help you," the leader



*He knelt down in amazement.*

said. His voice carried finality. He gestured, added a command in the Orite language to the surgeons.

Nixon could feel the figures on his neck moving to begin their gruesome work on the prone, half-conscious giant. But Nixon was more conscious, stronger now than they realized. He strained at the cables, but found that he could move far less than when he had been bound on the Spaceship. His head could shift a little so that he could glance sidewise, but that was all.

"Stop it!" he gasped suddenly. "You damn little butchers—" He'd frighten them with his voice. Roaring, bellowing and twisting his head. That was all he could think of to do . . . The end of Allen Nixon . . . A vision of the rippleless Florida bayou, his brother Ralph, their

cabin under the grey oaks and cedars came to him . . .

Then suddenly, out in the moonlit distance of the rock-slope between the pyramid-cities, cries were sounding. The surgeons on Nixon's neck stood tense, peering, listening. A turmoil of wild cries sounded off there. It spread to the cities. Cries, then Orites screaming. And in another moment a huge tawny shape came leaping from the shadows. The panther!

**N**IXON gasped. Then his roar held his mingled horror and a queer sort of triumph. "So now you've got something else to worry about!" he shouted. "There it is—mean and hungry. Take a look at that critter, you damn butchers, and see what you're going to do about it!"

The panther was loose, Nixon remem-

bered now, how Loto had said it was in a cave with a purple barrage barring the entrance. Loto and Nixon had never thought of it—that when Loto pulled the barrage-switch, for that moment the panther's barrage had blacked out the same as Nixon's!

Tork was stammering, "Why I—I sent men to verify that it was still there! The darkness of the cave—the barrage was only off for a moment—they must have thought—"

"Well, it isn't there, it's here!" Nixon roared. "Go ahead—carve me up, if that panther gives you time!"

It was the supreme catastrophe, that raging tawny beast loose among the scurrying, tiny human figures. The screams were horrible as it pounced on a group of them who were trying to reach the shelter of one of the pyramids. With sunken sides showing its ribs and madly lashing tail, the panther gobbled up the tiny figures. Orite humans, each of them hardly a mouth. Then with another leap, the great amber-eyed cat was pouncing again. A line of Gorts with suicidal willingness to attack, stood their ground as it came at them. A sweep of its huge paw knocked them away.

Around Nixon, for those few horrible seconds, the Orites stood stricken. "Go ahead," Nixon said. "Kill it. Why don't you folks kill it? If you don't it sure as shooting will kill you."

Now the beast seemed to see the giant figure lying here in the orange glare. It stood with bared fangs and red-rimmed eyes. Then a rush of Gorts distracted it, so that it turned and leaped over them. Down on the ground beside Nixon, the crowd of Orites were milling around in terror. The surgeons and their assistants were trying to get down the little ladder at his side.

"You can't kill it!" Nixon roared. "But I can. Turn me loose, you little fools!"

He strained at his bonds. Life or death now, for himself as well as hundreds of them. Nixon knew it. That panther would be here any minute, ripping him apart.

"You can kill it?" Frane gasped from the ground beside him.

"I'll damn sure try!"

Frane shouted at the panic-stricken Orite leaders. And suddenly in their

emergency they trusted him. Gorts came rushing, casting loose the chains so that in a moment Nixon was staggering up. The chains fell from him with a thin clatter. For a moment dizziness swept him, but then it passed. He was free. And to Nixon of the bayous freedom was strength.

Off across the moonlit slope, strewn with dead and dying Orites, the panther was crouching. Its purring snarl mingled with the lashing of its tail as it saw Nixon rise up. Then with a roar it leaped at him.

Nixon made no move to jump aside. He had ripped off his jacket and shirt, wound them around his left forearm. There was an instant when the moonlight gleamed on the beast's wild eyes and opened jaws as it leaped. Then Nixon thrust his padded, crooked arm outward and up as the jaws came at his throat. The impact of the huge tawny body knocked him backward. He felt the jaws closing on his arm as he fell with the beast on top of him. In a moment they were rolling, with Nixon desperately squirming and lunging, trying to get a grip on the great cat's throat. He could feel the claws ripping his clothing, his flesh, with his blood spurting and white streaks of hot pain shooting into him.

**N**IXON'S fingers gripped the loose skin of the panther's neck. But at once he knew it was no use. The beast's strength was too great. He felt the rippling muscles under the loose skin resisting his clutch. Then the great jerking body tore loose; the jaws relaxed their grip, dropped his arm, came again at his throat . . .

As the giant went down, a horror-stricken cry had gone up from the crowds of watching Orites. Now the great antagonists were rolling. In a moment they had crossed from the edge of the rock-slope almost to the sward where the Spaceship cylinder had landed. Nixon could feel the crackling sward under him. Hot blood in his eyes blurred everything. He managed to wipe it away, and thrust out his padded arm again for the brute's jaws to grip.

Then Nixon's right hand, brushing the bristling sward, came upon a jagged sliver

of rock in that very fragment blasted from the cliff by that first storm upon his arrival. Both heavy and sharp, it made a terrible weapon. With a whirling lunge he jammed that clumpy spear of rock into the panther's slaving jaws—on down into its hot and roaring gullet. In a moment the beast's snarls were choked with blood. With its human antagonist momentarily ignored, the puzzled, choking brute was staggering, flinging its head from side to side. Then it was rolling on the ground, with paws frantically fumbling at its mouth.

It was Nixon's chance now. He flung himself on the beast. His frantic fingers closed about its windpipe. The panther screamed and writhed, but Nixon's grip was inexorable. The screams died to slobbering gasps. At last the tawny shape was lying on its side. For a moment the paws convulsively jerked. Then it was motionless.

## VII

A DAY HAD PASSED SINCE the giant had been released, and night had come again. The Earth-giant now had become a hero to the awed Orite people. Or at least, whatever terror of him they had was submerged in their cheering when the monstrous panther was dead.

Nixon had found himself a cave-like recess off at the base of the green cliff a few hundred yards from Frane's laboratory. Soon he would fix it up to be comfortable. He brought himself food and water now. This morning he had explored the nearby valley which opened into this one through a mile-wide defile. Thousands of the Orites lived in the other valley; their mound-dwellings dotted the slopes at the base of the enclosing cliffs. A stream of orange water babbled along one side of the valley floor, and there were strips of vegetation near the water. Strangely shaped bluish trees about the height of Nixon bore fruits and pods of several kinds which were edible.

It was a day of exultation to Nixon, this freedom to roam around and do things for himself after his long imprisonment. Towering master of this miniature world. There was another valley where a hundred or so tiny factories glow-

ed and hummed. Everything stopped when the Earth-giant appeared, with the workers thronging the little doors and windows, peering up in awed silence at him . . . An exultation to it. And then suddenly Nixon had felt the sense of responsibility. There was so much that he would have to learn, and plan, and then put into action.

Last night, when the panther was dead and the panting, bleeding giant had stood with crowds of tiny figures cheering him, suddenly Nixon had found himself making a speech. It was halting, certainly, anything but fluent. Nixon was always a fellow sparse of words. He tried to tell them that just because he was so gigantic, no one need fear him. That now he would live among them for a time, and try to help them in every way he could. His naive, youthful grin accompanied his words. Then the Orite leaders had arranged to meet with him presently; and whatever now he needed for his comfort, he need only ask for it . . .

"The people all want you for our leader," Nona was saying enthusiastically. "Everyone talks of it. The Gorts look to you for commands."

It was mid-evening now as Nixon sat in the mouth of his cave, with Nona and Loto on his upraised knee. A leader. Fair enough, Nixon thought. No one can argue with a man seventy feet tall! But Frane's growth-drug soon would change everything. The Orites would be as big as Nixon. A whole new civilization to be built in the giant size.

"I'll do my best," Nixon said earnestly. He added suddenly, "Where is Tork?"

In the tumultuous events of the past night and day—the joy of his release—there had been no time to worry about Tork.

"Where is Tork?" Nixon demanded.

Loto and Nona did not know. "Maybe the panther chewed him some," Nixon said. "I wouldn't mourn none."

Nona shook her head. "He was with my father, there where you had been lying."

"Besides, I saw him an hour after that," Loto said.

Nixon's eyes flashed. "You can be sure of one thing," he said grimly. "As soon as I get my bearings around here,

we'll get to the bottom of Tork's monkey-shines."

Tork's followers, however many of them there might have been, now certainly seemed to have evaporated. Nixon knew that was natural enough. Whoever had listened to him, now would probably never admit it.

And Tork now had vanished. Perhaps he feared that he would be blamed for having so strongly urged the vivisection of the giant. "He's not at his job in the laboratory, working with your father?" Nixon suggested.

"No, father has not seen him," Nona said. "Father sent to his home, but Tork has not been there."

Frane had promised that his experiment with the growth-drug this evening would be the last, his triumph, the final success. It could come any moment now. And all the little Orite colony knew it, was waiting with excited expectancy for the waving shaft of violet light which Frane had said would show from the top of the laboratory building when the growth-drug was completed.

Down the length of the glass-like cliff-base, Nixon could see the little laboratory building about a hundred feet away. It was humming with activity.

"Well," Nixon said, "nothing to do but wait and see. I sure hope he gets it."

**T**ENSELY they waited; the giant hunched at the mouth of his cave with the two tiny figures perched on his bent knee. The hours passed. The moon rose. Then Nixon sucked in his breath, and Nona and Loto gave their little cries. From the top of the laboratory the little light-beam was waving. Success! Frane had accomplished it.

"He did it!" Nixon exulted.

"Yes, he did it," Nona echoed. "My father, I'm so proud of him."

"Let's go over there," Nixon said. "I'll carry you."

He raised them to his shoulder and they clung to the collar of his shirt. They were halfway there when a tiny scream sounded. Then another.

"That came from the laboratory!" Loto exclaimed.

Nixon started running. "Not so fast!" Nona gasped. "The wind up here—"

He went slower, stopped at the waist-high laboratory building. As he stooped to put Loto and Nona on the ground, a tiny figure came scurrying from a side door. Nixon had no chance to seize it. In an instant it had disappeared into the shadows.

"Run inside!" Nixon said. "See what happened."

There was a turmoil in the little building; tiny running footsteps and the horrified voices of the Orite chemists who had been working there. Then in a moment a group of them came out. They were carrying Frane. The sobbing Nona was with them; Loto came, solemn and grim. Silently the giant Nixon stepped back, then knelt, gazing down in awe at the miniature tragedy here at his feet.

Loto explained what had happened. Frane had taken the completed drug into his office. Tork evidently had been lurking, waiting for this moment. He had killed one of Frane's men who got in his way, darted in and stabbed the unsuspecting Frane . . .

"Then that was Tork I saw running out," Nixon said. He checked his impulse to jump up and rush away to seize the damned murderer. How could you find a tiny, scurrying, six-inch figure in this expanse of moonlit crags?

Frane was not dead, but he obviously was dying. They had laid him on the ground. He saw Nixon's face so high above him, and he called faintly.

"Come closer, giant. Tork was triumphant—he told me what he had planned. I was so stupid—I would never believe ill of him—"

Tork had planned to organize an expedition to go to Earth. With the growth-drug, they would go in their normal small size. Then on Earth, they would use the drugs and get large. There was no real limit to growth through Frane's drug. Frane had meant it to be governed by environmental needs but the more one took the larger he would grow. Giants on Earth! They could make themselves what on Earth would be men a hundred feet tall.

"Tork always said your Earth is so much better a world than Orana could ever be," Frane was saying. "With fighter-Gorts a hundred feet tall on Earth,



he felt surely that your world could be conquered."

And many of the Orites here, and the Gorts they controlled, had felt the lure of it. The Orite Government would oppose it. They would have no desire to embark upon the murderous conquest of a neighboring world. Then Tork and his followers would have seized the Government. And more of the Orites would have rallied around him, of course. It is instinct to follow a successful leader.

But with the Earth-giant dominating Orana now, Tork's fellow plotters had melted away.

"Well," Nixon murmured grimly, "what does he think he can do now?"

The answer came almost with Nixon's grim question. "Look!" Loto gasped. "Off there!"

Then Nixon saw it. In the notch between the towering rocks where the pass led into the broad adjoining valley, a figure had appeared, not a tiny six-inch figure but an upright man-shape that seemed about as high as Nixon's waist. It was Tork, and he was half as big as the Earth-giant now! Long since, Tork's clothes had burst with tiny shreds that had dropped away so that his bluish flesh glistened in the moonlight.

For an instant Nixon stood transfixed. And as he stared he saw that Tork was almost visibly growing! Already he seemed a little taller. The moonlight showed his face; he was leering with triumph. Another giant to challenge Nixon's mastery of the Orite world! Soon he would be as big as Nixon . . . then larger . . .

**W**ITH the shock of realization, Nixon tensed, bounded forward. Instantly Tork disappeared, ducking back into the pass. Almost at once Nixon stopped his pursuits. This could be a fatal error, chasing the growing Tork who might elude him long enough to become so large that he could kill Nixon easily!

"Get me some of the drug!" Nixon called. "Run in there, Loto—get it quick! He'll be larger than I am in a few minutes, by the look of him!"

"In my office," the dying Frane gasped faintly. "There were three cylinders."

Loto and several of the chemists ran in. It seemed an eternity of waiting, with

Nixon's mind picturing his enlarging adversary out there in the other valley. But it was only a moment before Loto and the chemists came back. The drug-cylinders were gone! Tork had made away with them all!

Nixon turned and ran for the pass. That damnable delay! He cursed himself for having waited to try and get the drug! Tork with now might already be too big to handle . . .

The broad valley beyond the pass lay shining in the moonlight. The lines of trees and the little orange river were off to the left. For a moment Nixon stood peering. Was Tork here? Evidently the Orites who lived here had seen him. Their tiny cries sounded. Nixon could see terrified groups of them running.

Then the figure of Tork suddenly rose up from a rock-cluster on the other side of the little river. He had been crouching behind a line of trees. Now with a cry of triumph he straightened, bounded over the river. He was about Nixon's size. He shouted,

"Not a giant any more, are you? Well, this is the end of you, Earthman!"

Tork was holding a dripping chunk of rock which he had seized from the river bank. He flung it, but Nixon ducked. The rock went thudding out across the valley. Then as Nixon held his ground, crouching, Tork's body struck him. The impact knocked Nixon backward, so that he fell with Tork on top of him. It startled him; he had not realized that Tork's body would be so solid, far heavier now than Nixon's.

Then they were rolling, locked together, jabbing, pummeling. In a rough and tumble, Nixon had always been very handy. He was exceedingly agile, and now the heavier Tork could not hold him. In a moment Nixon was up. He found himself at the edge of the babbling little stream. He seized a tree. It was thick, half as big as himself. Desperately he wrenched it up. The knob of heavy roots made it like a maul, a bludgeon. Tork was scrambling up. Nixon hit him with a swing of the tree-root. He staggered, went down, this time with Nixon on top of him.

But now Nixon realized that Tork was a full head taller. As they struggled, with Tork heaving up, trying to ward off Nix-

on's blows, Nixon could feel his antagonist's body expanding. It was gruesome. It shot a fear through Nixon. If he didn't kill Tork now in a moment or two, he never would! And Tork knew it. He was fighting on the defensive, just waiting until Nixon would be only a stripling in his grip.

Then they were rolling again on the ground. They were close beside the stream, with the brittle underbrush crackling under their plunging bodies. Several times Nixon had gotten a grip on Tork's throat, but always the strength of Tork's big hands had broken it. Now Nixon was desperately trying to roll Tork into the water. Evidently the Orite didn't realize it. He lunged, and as Nixon twisted and heaved, Tork went backward with his head and shoulders splashing. The stream was a foot or two deep here, babbling over stones. Tork's head went down; the water splashed over his face. And then again Nixon gripped him by the throat. In Nixon was the grim thought that this was the way one gripped 'gators under water. His hands pressed down; his body was sprawled, braced and taut to hold the lunging Tork.

The orange water was lashed into turgid green foam. Tork was coughing, choking. It was easier to hold his head down now. His hands tore at Nixon's wrists but could not break the hold. Then Nixon could feel the plucking hands and the lunges of Tork's huge body growing weaker. Through an interval Nixon clung, and then he released his grip and staggered panting to his feet. In the babbling stream the big body of Tork lay motionless; a horrible, goggling, staring face blue with the orange water lapping over it. . .

**A**N Orana year went by, a succession of brief days and nights while Nixon worked and planned to help the Orites build their little world into something safer, more comfortable than it had been before. Frane had died. The Orite doctors and surgeons could not save him. The growth-drug was gone. Tork had hidden the tiny cylinders somewhere, but they had never been found, and no more of the drug could be made. Certainly not now; Frane and Tork were the only ones who

knew the full details of the process. Nixon felt that was just as well. A thing diabolic. Like atomic fission, in evil hands it could wreck its world.

Now, with the year passed, it had been agreed that they were to take the giant back to Earth. Loto and Nona set out with Nixon along with a group of the Orite scientists and leaders and a few hundred of the Gorts, most of whom had been on the trip before.

It was the same little spaceship. Now the giant need not lie bound, he could crouch carefully on one elbow, or shift a little if he was wary of his movements. The trip seemed far quicker than before, with Loto and Nona to talk to and all his tiny friends here in the humming interior around him. Then through the bow-port the mellow, crescent Earth swung into view, a great cloud-mottled disc.

Then one Earth-night they were sliding down through the stratosphere, skimming an ocean and over the land . . . Florida. Nixon's heart pounded as he gazed down at it. The Florida moon was brilliant in the sky as the gleaming little cylinder slid silently into a patch of wire-grass and rested on the ground. Only a marsh-hen was disturbed, rising with its discordant cry and winging away.

The cylinder opened and Nixon rose up and out of it. The top closed again, and from a lower tiny doorway of the glistening ten-foot shape, a few of the little Orite figures came out, gazed upward. His friends.

"Goodbye, my giant," Nona called. They were all waving.

What was there to say?

"Goodbye," Nixon spoke softly. "I sure wish you well."

They turned, went back inside. The port closed. The sleek, tiny ship slid upward and away into the moonlight. It was a shining little streak for a moment; then a glistening dot, small as a firefly. Then it was gone.

For a moment Nixon stood with a strange sense of loss upon him. But here was Earth. Home. A light was burning in the cabin across the sandspit. The bayou glistened in the moonlight.

Silently Nixon turned and walked up the oyster shell beach toward his home.