

The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

WONDER Stories

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ON THE COVER THIS MONTH

taken from Arthur G. Stangland's "Fatal Equation" we see the mathematician Macmillan escaping from his accusers by stepping into the time vortex. Almost instantly he vanishes.

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(Illustration by Paul)

He stepped into the blazing sunlight. Hardly had the door closed when he extracted a box from his pocket and held it up in his gauntleted hand. The needle was motionless.

THE MOON MINES

By EANDO BINDER

● With a careless flip of his hand, Richard Harrington snapped the button of the visovox and aimlessly turned the central dial. Music, laughter, news items, and other entertainment were momentarily listened to, and then angrily forsaken. After much of such critical searching for something that suited him in his present mood, he finally brought forth from the ether the strains of a low viol, playing one of Victor Herbert's time-hallowed love songs.

His eyes lit up with pleasure and he snapped the button which controlled the visual circuit of the visovox. He could distinguish little on the screen till he turned out the lights in the room. Then, as distinctly as if he were present in person, the figure of the violinist appeared in the frame and played to soothe the moodiness of Richard. Well satisfied for the moment, the latter threw himself into a cushioned chair and settled himself comfortably. In five more minutes he had arisen, turned on the lights, snapped off the visovox petulantly, and stormed about the room.

"What in the name of the ten planets is the matter with me? I've got plenty of Credits*, am well fed, healthy, well established, have friends, and yet I can't seem to enjoy myself as other people. . . . I guess the L. W. tests** are right, all right. Restless nature, content only in times of danger, incapable of being geared into a clock-work life, possessed of a will of my own. . . .that's what they said about me. . . . I've got it! . . . I've got that urge again. . . something is pushing inside of me. . . . I need change, action, hazard. . . ."

Richard Harrington was, although shorter than the average man, a good deal stockier than most. His broad back was most fittingly coupled with slender hips. His legs were well formed and sturdy. To the stranger, the first glance at his face gives an impression of stupidity. A second and closer glance reveals the shrewdness that lurks beneath the mask of stupidity. Large blue eyes were set beneath a broad forehead. There was a certain slowness in his gait and general behavior that covered up a natural ability to move very fast and surely when occasion demanded. A remarkable physical and mental control made of the man a forceful, not easily subdued character.

Harrington was far from serene and calm as he paced the parlor of his suite of rooms. The L. W. tests had revealed him as the typical adventurer. The socialistic government had placed him in the paths most suited to his temperament. That was ten years before.

"Curse these S. I. S.*** officials," he grumbled to himself. "They can't find enough for me to do. I haven't been on a commission for all of . . . let me see . . . two weeks now!"

● This author introduces himself to the readers of *Wonder Stories* with a smoothly flowing, exciting, and yet surprising tale of adventure on the dead surface of the moon.

Mr. Binder has captured the essence of an interplanetary tale—that the action shall depend upon the peculiar conditions of the locale chosen. So many authors write interplanetary tales that could just as well have happened in New York, or Montana or Central America. Mr. Binder's tale is a moon story, par excellence.

Trickery must be met with trickery, shrewdness with shrewdness, in the desperate games men will play with life and death on other worlds. These elements make this story a series of thrilling surprises from beginning to end.

It was really hard to fit a man of this type in the systematic social world of his century. The socialistic doctrine demanded that every soul do his share for the common good of all. The ordinary run of people were easily slipped into place by the intelligent leaders in the central government. Each had a natural bent, revealed by the infallible L. W. tests, and his future life was governed by the revelations of those tests.

But with some few, of which Richard Harrington was a notable example, there was trouble in adapting them in any line of endeavor. A six-hour working day, and a four-day week was almost the ideal existence for most citizens of the United Socialistic Republic, but to this man it would have meant the extinction of the best in him. His temperament could not be bound by such monotonous routine. He had imagination to a certain degree, mental dexterity of high quality, personality to a high degree, but counter-balanced by a terrific dislike for restraint of any sort.

There is hardly any doubt that if he had lived many centuries before, when there was no Bureau of Employment, he would have become a pirate; or, living in a later age, a gentleman outlaw. As it was, they made him one of the highly-honored S. I. S., and thus directed his independence to safe and beneficent efforts for the common weal.

His last thought, about the commission of such ancient vintage as two weeks, brought before his mind some of the events in the execution of his duty.

"So the Ginzies**** thought they could short-weight us by their faked eighty-eight standards? Thought an earthman couldn't understand their system, although it is as complicated as those whirly-brained fur-faces can make it. I had a great old time there holding up a shipment for

* "Credits" . . . the paper money of the time.

** "L. W. tests" . . . Lifework Tests given at the age of twelve.

*** "S. I. S." . . . abbrev. for "Special Investigation Service."

**** "Ginzio" . . . nickname for a Martian, considered an affront if used to their face.

two days while half the Ginzies in the place looked ready to murder me!"

Harrington, usually emotionally stable, chuckled out loud as he remembered the frantic entreaties of the exporters to let the shipment of radium go through.

"But now here I am again. In one day I had heard all the news, in two visited all my friends, in three ready to die of ennui. . . ."

Harrington mentally reviled the restrictions under which he lived. Free to come and go over the face of the earth at will, something few other people ever hoped for, he chafed that he could not speed out into space in search of the new, the exciting. But an S. I. S. agent must be within beck and call of the government that managed things for the good of all, at the slight cost of the personal freedom of the individual.

Richard had often wished he lived three centuries before when space travel had first come into being and before the advent of the U. S. R.* In those days, he told himself, a man got up in the world by his own ambition, not by the learned help of the Bureau of Employment. Richard, as is common with most discontented men of any age, had an idealistic conception of the "good old days" when a man was his own master.

● But it was not often that he got himself into such an unhappy, dissatisfied mood as on this night. Ordinarily the Bureau of Adjustment of the U. S. R. kept him busy to the saturation point of even his active nature. By dint of his extraordinary powers of sagacity, diplomacy, and ingenuity, each of which he was blessed with to a great degree, he had become one of the Service's most trusted and demanded agents for those tasks of adjustment in the affairs between the three worlds which required careful investigation. His weekly income of credits, translated into the money system of an earlier age, would have meant hundreds of dollars.

Harrington, about driven to distraction for want of suitable employment, was suddenly galvanized to attention. A buzzing had interrupted his hand as he was about to try again the visovox for entertainment. In a trice he leaped to his private telephone.

"Harrington speaking."

"This is headquarters. Report to Chief Wilson within the hour."

"Righto!"

With a slight smile on his calm face, Harrington, suitably dressed for an audience with his chief, left his rooms and headed for the "tubes." At the central terminal he mingled with the crowd taking a through train to the central part of Chicago. His apartment hotel was located far along to the north on the shore of Lake Michigan. With hardly a sound, the express gathered speed and shot southward. Through towering building after building it sped, never getting closer to the ground than the fortieth story, beneath which the locals hummed. Swinging idly in his compensating seat, Richard conjectured as to what the call was for.

"Must be something important. Never had a call on such short notice before. . . . usually give me a day or so. Wonder what they'd have done if I had been someplace else than here in Chicago? . . . sent for me by special rocket service? . . . maybe."

● In fifteen minutes he stepped out of the "tube," almost bowled over a tall Martian, and raced for the elevator to take him to the ninetieth floor. In more minutes he stood before his chief. After a brief bow, which always made Harrington feel humiliated, returned by a nod of the chief's head, he seated himself opposite the desk.

Chief Wilson of the Special Investigation Service of the Bureau of Adjustments of the United Socialistic Republic, to give him his full title, received his orders direct from London, in other words he was a "big shot," London being the seat of the central government of the U. S. R. Tall and spare, he had the demeanor of a hawk. Beady, black eyes peered from a shrewd face. Quick in all his actions and words, he kept an alert mind on the responsible activity of his agents. The Chicago Branch (number 3) of the S. I. S. had a world-wide reputation, largely due to Wilson's masterful supervision and the faithful services of such men as Harrington and others like him.

"Glad to see you, Harrington," the chief opened the conversation. "Hope you enjoyed yourself in the last two weeks."

"Well. . . . call it enjoyment, Chief, but. . . ."

Chief Wilson smiled. He knew his men, the man before him in particular. He was young, a mere twenty-five, but invaluable in the Service.

"Richard, I've got a commission for you. . . . of course. It's a little different from most of them. No doubt you have heard of the Moon Mines?"

"I have, Chief, although my complete knowledge of them can be compressed into the words: there are mines on the moon."

The chief nodded his head. Very few people knew much of anything about them.

"You will soon be gathering first hand data on that, Harrington. It's this way. The metals on the moon are chiefly of the platinum and rhodium series, with some gold. Consequently, the mines are valuable holdings. To familiarize you with your task there, I think the best thing to do will be to start from the beginning."

The chief composed himself more comfortably in his chair, and cleared his throat.

"Although there has been space travel now for three centuries and over, our own satellite was almost untouched till within the last fifty years. The first people to see commercial possibilities in mining on the moon, strange to say, were the Martians. They established themselves there quite firmly despite the terrific handicaps of a lack of atmosphere and the train of hazards which are a result of that lack of air. Forty years ago, at the close of the Two-World War, the military forces of our world decided to drive them off our rightful property. The armistice was signed before this was accomplished, but by agreement with Mars, the moon became unattached territory, to be exploited at will by either world.

"Today we find both the M. M.** and the U. S. R. operating there. Various stations have been set up by both governments, from which their respective mining operations originate. By mutual written arbitration, a section of moon-land is considered free for the taking till it is 'claimed.' Claims are filed and accepted by the joint inter-world Moon Mines Council *only* upon submission of ore samples which prove the claimed territory to be valuable. The number and size of the claims are also limited. This,

* "U. S. R." . . . abbrev. for "United Socialistic Republic."

** "M. M." . . . abbrev. for Martian Monarchy.

as is easily seen, prevents either government from annexing territory indiscriminately.

"The filing of claim applications, without going into detail, involves the exploration of the chosen spot by a mineralogist, assay of the ore samples he brings back, and accurate mapping. After the claim is acknowledged by the Council here on earth, work is begun in the tedious, dangerous way that obtains on that dead satellite.

"Four days ago a mineralogist left Station No. 7 on the Mare Nubium and never came back! We got the report by radio this afternoon."

Harrington, keenly alert now that he was engaged in a commission that held much promise spoke as Wilson paused.

"If the moon is such a dangerous playground, why should the disappearance of one man cause any uproar?"

The chief squinted his eyes. "Harrington, you're going to the moon to investigate the death or disappearance of Harvey Wood, their best mineralogist. . . . mind you, their *best*. . . . and it may be possible that the Ginzies are mixed up in this."

Richard Harrington was no fool. He could tell in the chief's tone that he was sure the Ginzies were connected with it.

"Now, Harrington, in the last three months there were three claims filed by our men and in each case there was found to be a Martian claim applied for a few hours before, just enough to beat out the U. S. R. applications!"

"And I am to find out if that is merely coincidence or. . . . ?"

"Exactly. Now, Harrington, let me remind you that as matters stand today between Mars and Earth, any little entanglement is liable to result in bad feeling and perhaps. . . . WAR! That means you must do two things: rectify the claim-jumping, and. . . . keep out of trouble in this matter of rectifying."

The trusted agent reflected a moment before speaking.

"Apparently there must be some underhand work going on, chief, not only by the Ginzies, but also in Station No. 7. Am I right?"

"Yes, except that there is no lawful communication channel between the Martians and our men supposed to exist. That, too, will bear investigating."

"I am to go as far as my duty demands without straining the thin web of a weak relationship between our two worlds."

"Right again." Wilson was tapping on the desk with a nervous finger. "Harrington, if ever you used diplomacy before, be sure to handle it with gloves in this matter. The M. M. is still touchy about that Foreign Rights on Earth affair, and it would be a blot on the name of the S. I. S. forever if war came of this."

"Then the M. M. is prepared to back up its interests on the moon?"

"Yes, even as the U. S. R. is prepared to back us up, Harrington, up to a certain limit. . . ." The chief's tone was apologetic and Richard knew that the delicate state of affairs between the worlds was bothering Wilson in no small degree.

"Is the head man of the U. S. R. moon mines. . . . is he. . . . ah. . . . is there any possibility of his being connected in any way with the discrepancies?" Harrington hated to cast suspicion against a man he knew nothing about.

"Algaard Soderstrom, Overseer of Station No. 7, has

held his position for over three years. His record is as yet untarnished. His zealous work has been all that a son of socialism can do to show his faithfulness to our government. More I cannot tell you."

"O. K. chief," said Harrington suddenly after a period of silence. "When do I start?"

CHAPTER II Suspicious

● From the side port Harrington gazed with something akin to awe in his habitually placid features at the view he commanded of the luminary so much treated of in poetry and prose. Thirty hours before he had left earth with a song in his heart. His commission smacked of something he liked most. . . . danger. Once out in space, the space he loved so well for the promise of adventure it held, his boredom had dropped from him like a cloak, and the zest of life took its place. The sun's corona, the velvet-black sky, the unblinking stars; they were old friends of his. His tried and true ship carried him with unerring accuracy to his present goal. Thirty hours for a space trip is a short time, and Harrington was mildly surprised when he hove near the moon just as he had comfortably settled himself, so to speak.

After an admiring survey of the mottled surface he gazed upon for the first time in his life, at this distance, he backed away from the port and engaged in the important task of finding the location of Station No. 7. It was sometime before he managed to match the map spread before the engine panel with the topography visible to him, the while he kept a weather eye on the instruments to correct his deceleration at intervals. He easily located the Mare Nubium, once he oriented himself, and a half hour later found his ship just above the supposed location of Station No. 7. He landed his ship nearby the five-mile high precipice marked on the map as a landmark to that station.

He looked out of the ports on either side. To his left rose the precipice of which he could not see the top, its shiny surface dazzling in the brilliant sunlight. To his right the sands of an ancient sea stretched as far as the short horizon extended. To his right, but more toward the back, he could see the sharply-outlined peaks of a vast mountain range. Hardly an inviting scene thought the S. I. S. agent to himself as he carefully donned his vacuum suit.

He took one last look at the air gauges and heat indicator before he entered the little air lock next to the exit. As he opened the outer door, he heard the outrushing swish of the air, and then there was perfect silence. He jumped to the sand, careful to keep in the shade of his ship. He glanced at the air gauge embedded in the back of the gauntlet of his suit, adjusted the sun-shades before his eyes, then stepped away from his ship. Curiously he watched the thermometer which was next to the air gauge. From absolute zero it almost leaped up and up till it registered 375 degrees absolute.

The second lining of the vacuum suit radiated away the rest of the burning deluge of fiery rays from the unhampered sun; the inner lining, most peculiar of substances, "stepped up" the heat rays, which came to it, to unfelt rays on the borderline between those called "heat" and "radio" waves. Inside his insulating suit, the earthman could feel nothing of such terrific changes of temperature, although

he realized he was but a half inch away from frigid cold and burning rays and vacuum.

With a glance all about him, Harrington started to walk in the direction of the gigantic cliff near which he had landed. He knew that somewhere in the direction he was going, he would find the door leading to the caverns of Station No. 7. With more than half his weight lost* by reason of the lesser gravity, he moved rapidly across the sparkling gravel and sand of the dead moon, like a malformed gnome. He stopped once to adjust the air pressure which had become too high. There was nothing in the surrounding scenery to attract his attention, so he moved forward at a fast pace.

Finally he came upon signs of living things. Scattered here and there were various discarded mining implements, empty cans, piles of rocky ore-discards, and even rags and paper, all lying exactly as they had been placed or thrown, and doomed to lie thus till moved by human agency. Harrington was struck by the odd positions of some of the papers, unmolested as they were by winds of any sort. When he kicked them off the ground, they fell back like plummets and became again absolutely motionless. Richard shook his head. He had not experienced anything like this in his numerous sojourns on inhabited worlds. A short time later he saw the entrance to Station No. 7.

This entrance was cut into the perpendicular face of the precipice in a circular form. Indented from the rock was the steel door which sealed off the outer vacuum. As he approached the door, he looked for the handle his chief had informed him of. There it was to one side. He read the legend chiseled into the hard rock: "PULL THIS HANDLE FOR ENTRANCE. LOSE NO TIME IN ENTERING AS THE SEAL AUTOMATICALLY CLOSSES IN TEN SECONDS."

Harrington, feeling like a knight of old challenging a strange castle's inhabitant to come out and fight, pulled the handle. Almost as quick as thought, the eight-foot steel section rolled aside to reveal a black hole in the cliff. He stepped in and seconds later the door rolled back into position. He was about to snap on his breast lamp, when before his eyes a neon sign leaped out of the darkness.

"CAREFUL! DO NOT REMOVE YOUR HEADPIECE YET. WAIT FOR THE SIGNAL!"

Of a sudden there was a rushing sound and Harrington knew that air was flowing into the lock. The sign faded and was replaced by one which read:

"WHEN THE DOOR OPENS WALK INTO THE NEXT CHAMBER."

Again a door rolled aside and Richard stepped into a lighted room with a painted sign on the wall of black rock:

"REMOVE YOUR VACUUM SUIT AND HANG IT UP."

● Back of him the second seal had closed. Harrington hung his suit beside the many that hung on the one wall. He pressed the button which was marked for the attention of visitors to Station No. 7.

Several minutes later a door opened and a man entered the room.

"Sun shine upon you, sir," smiled the newcomer in the universal greeting of the time.

"Fortune favor you," answered Harrington with a short

bow. "I'm Richard Harrington. I presume Overseer Soderstrom is expecting me?"

"Yes, follow me, please."

They stepped out of the vestibule, as it may be called, into a long corridor cut from the living rock, as was all of Station No. 7. There was no other soul about. Some ways down the corridor, the man stopped before a doorway labeled "OVERSEER," pressed a button, and waited. When a little pilot light flashed above the door, he opened it.

The attendant announced him and then left the chamber by another door. The overseer of Station No. 7 arose from his desk and warmly greeted the visitor from earth. He was a large, jovial-faced man with a quiet voice. His almost obese body was clothed in a leathern outfit of fine quality and texture. His curly black hair fell over his forehead.

"Welcome to the moon, Mr. Harrington, but first of all let us proceed with the necessary ceremony of identification. You understand. . . . duty demands. . . ."

"Quite right, Mr. Soderstrom."

Harrington approached the overseer, bared the back of his left forearm, and gently blew his breath about midway between elbow and wrist. With startling clearness a blue seven-pointed star appeared on the skin, and Soderstrom turned away satisfied. Only the chemists of the S. I. S. possessed the formula of the ink which was colorless except under the influence of a person's breath. All S. I. S. agents carried this mark of identification on their left arms.

"And now have a seat, Mr. Harrington."

The other complied and glanced appraisingly about the small office. Except for the desk and several chairs, the place was devoid of furniture. However, it did not lack for pictures, drapes, and other beautifying articles arranged to suit the taste of the overseer. From the open door of the other room came the clacking of a typewriter.

"Cozy here. Especially in comparison to outside."

"Yes," laughed Soderstrom. "We are a very home-loving people, we miners on the moon, because there is so little to attract us out there."

"Quite so," murmured the visitor. "Don't you get a desire to go back to earth occasionally. . . . to see again a world of life and warmth, Mr. Soderstrom?"

The overseer's face became serious. "To tell you the truth, I do. I guess we humans are all alike; we like to be among our own. That urge has been getting stronger lately, and, in fact, I'm already forming plans to apply for permanent leave."

"This position pays, I imagine, quite highly?" Harrington knew as well as the other did just what it paid.

Soderstrom looked at him with guileless blue eyes. "Yes, very high paying position, but not out of reason to the amount of hazard and danger. The vacuum outside, you know, is like a ravenous beast, and now and then it takes its toll."

Harrington nodded. His expressionless face could not be taken as a gauge of the thoughts revolving in his mind. He turned to look squarely at the overseer.

"Mr. Soderstrom, if you were to get your permanent leave, who would take your place?"

Soderstrom hesitated only a moment. "Harvey Wood . . . the missing mineralogist."

Harrington had not taken his eyes off the face of the overseer. "Mr. Soderstrom, I think it about time to ge-

*The ratio of gravity between earth and moon is more like 5 to 1, but due to the weight of the suit, Harrington carried not quite half the weight of his body on earth.

down to business. You know who I am, Richard Harrington of the S. I. S., sent here to investigate the disappearance of Harvey Wood, your foremost mineralogist. You, of course, will help me all you can."

Soderstrom's face had become slightly clouded as his visitor spoke of his mission, but he hastened to assure him that he would do all in his power to aid in the work.

"Tell me first the details of Harvey Wood's departure from here and any other significant data." Harrington's tone was very compelling.

"Well. . . . Wood left Station No. 7 five days ago. We regulate our days exactly as on earth, you know. His exploration trip was to be to the southeast in the direction of the Rhiphaean Mountains. Mineralogists are a very independent sort and come and go almost as they please, except they are responsible to me. As I say, he left five days ago. . . . and never came back. I sent out several men to see if they could locate his body, but, of course, here on the moon with its countless craters, valleys, ravines, and such, its a thousand-to-one shot, and they reported not hair nor hide of him."

● The agent thought a moment. "Did he speak to you of his plans before he left?"

"No, not that I can remember."

"Does he have any means of communication with Station No. 7 while he is out on duty?"

"Yes, he carried a radio in his suit, as they all do."

Harrington was very deliberate with his questioning. He would slowly and carefully ask the question and then search the other's face closely and disconcertingly, while he made his answer.

"Did he radio back at all after he left?"

Soderstrom felt sudden resentment toward this calm, cool man as he plied him with questions, but he smothered it as the reflection came that he was one of the S. I. S., and that meant no tomfoolery or stubbornness. Their word was a law unto itself.

He hesitated before he answered. "Yes. . . . that is, he told us he had made a find and. . . ."

"Did he say what kind of a find? Good or bad?" Harrington shot this at him before he had a chance to finish.

"Why. . . . ah. . . .ah. . . . he said. . . . just another find. You know, the majority of claims are nothing out of the ordinary; we seldom hit those valuable claims that make this business a paying proposition to the U. S. R." The overseer finished up with an authoritative tone.

"I see," Harrington made the other drop his eyes with the intensity of his stare, and the overseer wondered what it was that he saw.

"And that was all the word you got from him?"

"Yes," answered the overseer, now somewhat on edge. He dropped his honest eyes again as those of the agent languidly fixed themselves on his face.

They sat for a full moment in silence, except for the noise of the typewriter in the other room. Harrington seemed to be on the verge of falling asleep, while the other found it hard to sit still and yet harder to break the strained silence.

"Ah. . . . Mr. Soderstrom." The overseer looked up with concern at the tone of voice to meet again those keen eyes. "Will you kindly get me a map of the Rhiphaean Mountains and surrounding region?"

With relief, the master of Station No. 7 rummaged in

his drawer and pulled forth the required map. He spread it on his desk.

Harrington lazily arose and sauntered over to the desk and bent over the paper. "Show me, Mr. Soderstrom, just where you think Harvey Wood went five days ago."

With a fat finger the overseer traced a course from Station No. 7 across the Mare Nubium to a plateau region of the Rhiphaean Mountains.

"He went somewhere in this circle of about five square miles. Just where, of course, it would be impossible to say."

Richard carefully scrutinized the map. It showed not only the "seas" and mountains and other surface markings, but also the positions of nearby stations, both of the U. S. R. and the M. M.

"What is this. . . . 'Kranto'?"

"The Martians have always given their stations names whereas we of earth use only numbers. 'Kranto' is simply the name by which that Martian station is known in all official records."

Harrington stretched his thumb and forefinger first between Station No. 7 and the place of Wood's disappearance, and then between the latter and Kranto. Kranto was much nearer! Soderstrom wondered what was coming next.

Harrington wandered away from the desk, hands in his pocket, eye to the ceiling of rock. "Mr. Soderstrom. . . . ah. . . . could Harvey Wood in any way. . . . mind you. . . . in any way. . . . come in contact with the Ginzies. . . . pardon me. . . . Martians?" It was always considered impolite to use the term "Ginzie" except in familiar company.

"Well. . . . by mutual agreement between the two governments, there is supposed to be a standing invitation to either side to visit any of the other's stations in cases of emergency or necessity."

"Which means. . . ?"

"Which means that if a Martian finds his air supply low, too low for him to make it back to his own station, he has the perfect right to drop in on any nearby station, be it Martian or Tellurian, and replenish his supply. Or if he has any other pressing reason. . . ."

"Enough," the S. I. S. man cut him off. "Now, if your Harvey Wood had decided to drop in on Kranto for any reason at all, no doubt he would radio you first. . . . right?"

"Perfectly," Soderstrom eagerly continued. "But he said no such thing. As far as I know, he had no intention of going to Kranto."

There followed a period of silence while Harrington idly walked about the room and eyed the pictures with seeming interest. He turned to the overseer.

"Who takes the radio calls from your mineralogists?"

Soderstrom started up angrily. "Now, look here, Harrington, this is going too far. . . . are you trying to implicate me in this unfortunate accident? The man died an unknown death out there in the vacuum. There's a dozen different hazards that make it a gamble to even walk around. About all you can do is go and look for the body yourself, instead of asking a lot of questions of me. I can't. . . ."

Soderstrom suddenly stopped. Realization of the rank and authority of the man to whom he was laying down the law came as a bucket of cold water.

"Well. . . . er. . . . pardon me, Mr. Harrington, I'm

not trying to tell you what to do . . . I . . . ah . . . I'm just a bit nervous, you know, it's . . . it's this life on this dead, inhuman world . . ."

Harrington had not changed countenance during the outburst of the irate overseer, had merely stared at him mildly, and now nodded and turned away as if he had forgotten about it. Soderstrom looked at that broad back and wondered if he were a fool or . . . one who keenly wormed out information by cunning conversation.

Harrington turned a blank face to the overseer after yawning behind his hand. "I'm due for a long sleep, Mr. Soderstrom. I can't seem to think anymore. Been on the go for thirty-five hours since I left the home planet. This is a puzzling business, I must admit, and maybe by tomorrow I'll plan some course of action. This part of the moon is just beginning a fifteen-day long moon-day, isn't it?"

"Yes, there will be about thirteen earthly days of sunlight in this latitude from today on."

Harrington looked at the clock on the wall. "I see it's eight o'clock in the evening and this is Monday . . . correct me if I'm wrong."

"No corrections necessary."

"Well . . . it's rather early to go to bed, but due to the lack of diversion, I guess that's the thing to do. Will you kindly conduct me to my sleeping quarters, Mr. Soderstrom?"

The methodical S. I. S. agent went right to bed, true to his word, and slept the sleep of the contented. He was satisfied; he foresaw a pleasant time of novel events in his present commission. He breathed a prayer of thanks to Wilson and the powers behind him, both material and super-material, for this balm to his adventurous soul.

CHAPTER III

Kranto

● The draft of cold air blowing across his face from the "awakener," one of the standard earth types, brought Harrington from dreamland to the problems of wakeful life. He called a lazy "come in" to the knock at the door as he finished shaving.

Soderstrom entered with a cheery morning salutation and a joyful smile on his guileless features.

"Hope you passed a restful night here in these poor quarters, however the best I can offer."

"Quite well, thank you," returned Harrington as he rubbed the talcum about his chin. "And you?"

"Very well, thank you." Soderstrom turned away petulantly as his guest closely studied his face. He wondered if the S. I. S. man could see the marks of an almost sleepless night.

"Mr. Soderstrom, could I presume on you to conduct me through Station No. 7? I feel I ought to see as much of it as I can; I may never have the opportunity again of being in one of the moon mines. It will be something to brag about back home."

The overseer offered his willing services and together they traversed the caves and corridors that composed Station No. 7. Harrington looked with wonder at the wells which were sunk to great depths to bring up the breathable air which had been imprisoned within the moon from long ages back. These pockets supplied the moderate needs of the small community of humans that labored in this rock-bound world. Then there were the versatile machines which performed the greater part

of the mining operations; the ponderous ore-carriers; the rock-crushers; the rocket-driven drillers; the scoops and scrapers; and so on down the line. He marvelled at the amount of ingenious engineering expended in the task of extracting ores on the surface of an airless world. It was astonishing in its scope. The storerooms of the graded and assayed ores were full of their respective products. Every five days a large space ship carried the valuable minerals to earth to be there refined, accompanied by a powerful-armed warship; there were pirates to contend with and sometimes . . . hostile governments.

Overseer Soderstrom was greeted on all sides by the men at work. Harrington could see that his generally jovial character made him popular with those he was master of. Although the working hours were longer here on the moon, the work was easier by virtue of the lesser gravity. They passed through the industrial section and came to the living quarters. Here Harrington saw some of the women, wives of the miners and mechanics and chemists, busily (sometimes not so busily) bustling about their apartments in true earthly fashion.

He wondered how well these women stood the colorless unexciting life of cooped-up inactivity. He was not surprised to hear from the overseer that the average period of a workman's willingness to stay on the moon was something less than a year. There were new recruits constantly coming back with the emptied ore-ship to replace those who had resigned and returned to earth. The U. S. R. was very sympathetic with these people and it was considered no breach of socialistic doctrine at all to ask for permanent leave.

Harrington, satisfied with what he had seen of the inner workings of a typical mine of the moon, made known his desire to return to the main office to the overseer.

After seating themselves, Richard quietly spoke.

"By the way, Mr. Soderstrom, you haven't answered a question of mine I asked yesterday."

The overseer flushed. "Didn't I? I can't recall . . ."

The other was relentless. "Who takes your radio calls from mineralogists?"

"Ordinarily my secretary does that, he's in the other room."

"Did he or you take the call from Harvey Wood?"

"Well . . . I did." Soderstrom looked up carelessly.

"I see," came from the S. I. S. agent as he watched the overseer. "Mr. Soderstrom, we S. I. S. men work a lot by hunches. I am going over to Kranto after dinner. How long does it take to walk there?"

Soderstrom had started slightly as Harrington announced his intentions. His voice had studied indifference as he answered.

"It takes about five hours of steady walking. But may I make a suggestion?" At the other's nod he continued, "No doubt you are acquainted with the . . . what shall I call it? . . . frigidity of the Martians to an earthman. Well, here on the moon, it is intensified to a greater degree by the rivalry in our aims, so it may be a useless and embarrassing visit."

"This," Harrington pointed to the invisible seven-pointed star on his forearm, "is all the security I want that I shall be favorably welcomed, if not in spirit, at least in actions."

Soderstrom shrugged his shoulders. "I will have your

oxygen tanks examined and filled and you can start any-time you please."

"Thank you. Expect me back within twelve hours." Harrington walked out of the office. Once the door was closed, he put his ear up against it and strained to hear what was going on inside. After a stretch of silence, when he was about to leave, he heard the overseer arise, and walk to some other part of the room. He seemed to hear a noise as of a hinged lid being raised, and then Soderstrom's voice, muffled and wholly unintelligible. Harrington walked away with a slight smile on his lips.

● Six hours later he saw before him the portal of Kranto, the Martian station nearest the spot where Harvey Wood was last known to be. The five-hour walk in the uncomfortable, hampering suit had about consumed the patience of the earthman, and he longed to take it off. The endless vista of towering cliffs, sharply relieved by the stationary sun with shadow and blinding sunlight, had somewhat taken the zest out of the walk. It compared so unfavorably with the warm, softened scenery of beloved earth, or even of more barren Mars, or even of humid Venus. Richard wondered how the moon-miners could even stand a year's worth of this blighting, harsh world, where not even a flower broke the monotony of rock and sand. The gibbous earth shone brightly in the black sky, her topography easily visible, even at this great distance.

"Good old earth," muttered Harrington, the same Harrington who had longed, not two days before, to leave her for a place of boredom and idleness. "But before I go back to you, I've got to solve the mystery of the Moon Mines, which has turned out to be a bigger thing than I realized from what Wilson told me. Soderstrom? . . . well . . . time will tell about him. The immediate thing is 'where is Harvey Wood?'"

The outside seal of the Martian station, unlike that of No. 7, swung open outwardly in two halves. The routine of getting to the aired room was essentially the same as at No. 7, except that the signs were all in Martian, which bothered Richard not in the least.

"Now for the damned Ginzies," he muttered as, his suit off, he pressed the attention button.

"Sun shine upon you," iterated the bony Martian who answered the bell.

"Fortune favor you," answered Harrington. "I come to see your overseer, Sul Minto Pruma."

The Martian looked suspiciously at him for a moment and then said, "Follow me."

In the overseer's office, Harrington was confronted by the master of Kranto. Sul Minto Pruma was a typical north country Martian; eight feet tall, bony, spindle-legged, fur-faced. His deep set eyes stared out at the visitor with the usual Martian haughtiness. In a glance the earthman knew that he was of the lower class of that world of cold, austere people. Judging that he probably knew little or nothing of Tellurian speech, Harrington opened the conversation in Martian, the gutturals and sticking consonants of which he had mastered to a degree of excellency little below that of a native of Mars.

"Sun shine upon you, Kruno Pruma. I am Richard Harrington of the U. S. F."

"Fortune favor you, Kruno Harrington." The formality of greeting over, the Martian changed his tone. "And what, may I ask, brings you here?"

Incensed at the unwelcome tone, Harrington said "cursed boorish Ginzie" under his breath, the while he answered, "I come in behalf of the U. S. R. to . . ."

"By what authority?" burst in the Martian with obvious scorn.

Harrington calmly pulled up his sleeve, breathed upon his arm, and held it out that the other might see the S. I. S. emblem.

Pruma grunted and offered his visitor a seat. An S. I. S. man was not to be trifled with, even the most proud Martians knew that.

"And now, Kruno Harrington . . .?"

"Kruno Pruma, I merely come to ask you a few questions which I am authorized to ask by virtue of the seven-pointed star." The Martian nodded slightly. "Kranto, this station, is very near the Rhiphaean Mountains. In the foothills of these mountains was sent an earthman to look for claimable territory. His name is Harvey Wood. He was last heard of there. Due to the nearness of Kranto, I have entertained the idea that he may have dropped in upon you. That was five earth days ago. Did you see this man?" Harrington's tone was mild and polite.

"Of course not!" exploded the Martian.

"If he did apply for entrance, this fact would come to your ears, no doubt?"

"Certainly. But I have told you once, he did not come."

"You will swear to that?"

"I will swear to nothing." Pruma arose in anger. "My word is all the security that you should need, and don't persist in throwing implications at me or . . ."

"Or what, Kruno Pruma?" Richard's voice was suave and low, like a flute compared to the hoarse bellow of the enraged Martian.

The overseer spluttered, bethought himself of the rank of the earthman before him, and took his seat begrudgingly.

"You have heard my answer. Do with it what you will."

"All right. I take your word for it as the integral word of a Martian, for, of course, no Martian would think of lying to an S. I. S. man who are of that breed that ferret out truth to the detriment of any teller of false tales." The Martian squirmed under the sugared threat. "Now, Kruno Pruma, do your mineralogists very often meet those of our people when exploring the open reaches of the moon in search of claims?"

"No, and the less, the better."

● Harrington passed by the obvious defiance. "It has come to my notice that in the past five moon days, three claims of considerable importance were filed by *both* the U. S. R. and the M. M., those of the M. M. having the priority by some few hours."

"Well . . .?" The whole demeanor of Pruma bespoke defiance.

"Doesn't it seem odd in the face of your statement that mineralogists of our two worlds meet very seldomly, that they filed the same claims within hours of each other?"

"Why . . . you . . ." With an effort the Martian controlled his fiery temper. His voice held a world of hatred. "Kruno Harrington, you are insolent and suspicious and hardly worthy of any hospitality from me. I must ask that you forbear asking questions of that sort."

Harrington was stumped. His authority, though calling

for a lot of respect and attention, was incapable of forcing a citizen of the M. M. to answer personal questions. Then there was his chief's warning ringing in his ears, "if ever you used diplomacy before, be sure to handle it with gloves in this matter." He could easily see that Sul Minto Pruma was not easily intimidated by the badge that he wore on his arm, and that things could be brought to the pass of open enmity by injudicious policy.

"If I only had something on him, some little thing, I could get past his guard," Harrington thought to himself. "As it is . . ."

"I beg your humble pardon, Kruno Pruma," he said aloud, "no doubt there is just the laws of coincidence to explain the filing of those disputed applications. In any case, that is said and done. I come primarily to find some trace of Harvey Wood. As long as you have assured me he has not been here, it must be that he died out in the vacuum."

"A very logical conclusion," agreed the Martian, somewhat mollified by the retreat of the earthman. "I lose certain of my men every moon day, and I go not to Kruno Soderstrom and ask him 'did so and so come here, on your word of honor?'"

Harrington, calm of face, inwardly raged at the choice sarcasm in the "damned Ginzie's" voice and words.

"Yes, this is a dangerous game you are playing," Harrington returned. As Pruma looked at him, anger clouding his face again, he continued, "Moon mining is about the most dangerous game of life, not so, Kruno Pruma?"

The Martian calmed himself although suspicion was written all over his face. "You are right, earthman, if it weren't for the big pay, it wouldn't be worth the risk."

"May I, as a matter of personal interest, look about your place?" Harrington's voice was as guileless as that of a child.

Pruma seemed to hover between uncertainty and suspicion. It being a personal request, he could refuse without violating the respect due to an S. I. S. agent on matters of business. But something decided the Martian to grant the whim of the earthman; perhaps it was in atonement for his ill-graced welcoming; but Richard could not for one minute acknowledge that. "Ginzie" and "trickery" were one and the same words to him.

"Yes . . . I'll have one of my men conduct you around."

An hour later, Harrington stepped into Overseer Pruma's office to say goodbye, thanked him for his courtesy, and went to the air lock. He hastily looked around the room, saw that no one was in it, and took his suit from its hook. Minutely he examined the fabric, inch by inch. Then he looked over the helmet. When he came to the oxygen tanks in back, he stopped short and whistled softly.

Just as he had suspected, the unit for breathing had been tampered with. One of the slender metal tubes which carried the precious oxygen to the helmet bore the marks of a pliers. It was hardly noticeable except at close range. The tube had been bent slightly out and then bent back again to its original position so that it was apparently untouched. But Harrington knew that even that slight bending had weakened the metal enough so that the terrific cold of the outside would snap it and end the wearer's life in an instant. Then Pruma was afraid of him! There must be something he feared would

be disclosed by the S. I. S. agent! Harrington exulted momentarily. He had something to go by!

But the needs of the moment chased all other thought from his mind. Looking up and down the rack of suits, he was surprised . . . very pleasantly . . . to see another suit of Tellurian make and size hanging there. Hastily he plucked it down, gave it a quick examination, and grinned satisfied. From his old suit he carefully unscrewed the damaged oxygen line from the helmet and the tank, and deposited it in a pocket of his uniform. Precious burden to him! In a few more minutes he had walked out of Kranto and headed for Station No. 7.

As he walked rapidly along the sands of the Mare which stretched between the stations, he wondered how it came that an earthman's suit hung in Kranto. He caught his breath as he thought of one possibility. It could be Harvey Wood's! Lucky thing for him to have found it because it saved him the necessity of walking back to Station No. 7 in a Martian suit, much too big, and distasteful to the delicacy of Harrington's regard for things Martian. He would have considered that a taint long to blot his conscience, for with his numerous contacts with the Martians, he had never found anything he liked about them. They were a tribe of "damned Ginzies" to him, from the highest down to the lowest, except for an occasional south country Martian who actually partook of some humanity in Richard's critical mind.

CHAPTER IV A Second Visit

● It was in the early hours of morning as reckoned by earth time, although on the moon the sun had hardly moved since Harrington had arrived, that the lone wanderer entered the air locks of Station No. 7 and betook himself straight to bed. He sauntered into Soderstrom's office sometime before the noon meal.

After the morning greetings, the overseer opened the conversation.

"I hope that in spite of my prejudices to the contrary, you had a pleasant visit at Kranto?"

"Quite pleasant," assured the S. I. S. agent and his voice betrayed to Soderstrom not the slightest hint of prevarication.

"Did you . . . find out anything?"

"Nothing much. Apparently Harvey Wood never entered Kranto. His body, I suppose, lies somewhere out in the vacuum."

Soderstrom nodded eagerly. "I was convinced of that from the first." He turned to the papers on his desk. "If you will pardon me for a while, Mr. Harrington, I have some imperative matters to attend to at present. You will have dinner with me?"

Harrington nodded acquiescence, thanked the overseer and left. It lacked yet two hours of noon, and he decided to pay his space ship a visit. He found it intact, air gauges registering, internal heat at the minimum it was maintained when unoccupied. Inside he took off the suit, rummaged around in his private belongings for some minutes, and again stepped out into the vacuum. He paused a moment to look fondly at his trim little cleaver of the ether. *Bertha* stood out in black lettering on either side. "Little *Bertha*" he affectionately called her, and indeed sometimes he drove her at lightning speed through space, when it pleased him to compare her to a cannon-

ball, although no cannonball had ever gone as fast as the ship.

He arrived back just in time for the noon meal, when everyone in Station No. 7 and, in fact, on the moon (excepting, of course, the Martians, who had different periods) was his own master for two hours.

The overseer and his guest had dinner in the former's private quarters. In three years' time, Soderstrom had managed to equip his rooms with those things which make earthly habitations dear to a human. He displayed a good deal of artistic taste in the variety and placement of the pictures, figurines, statuettes, and artificial flowers. The S. I. S. man gazed approvingly around and complimented the other on his cozy suite.

"One could easily forget he is on the moon in these rooms, Mr. Soderstrom."

The jovial face of the overseer broke into a genuine smile of pleasure. "Thank you . . . immensely . . . Mr. Harrington. I have tried to make my stay here as pleasant as I could so that I could be in the peaceful frame of mind necessary to good work, as the rulebook of the socialistic doctrine of lifework prescribes as essential."

Harrington's lips curled slightly at the reference to the rules of socialism. His natural love of freedom often prompted him to hold the strict bonds of socialism in slight contempt. His advanced thought, on the other hand, curbed this impatience at a government so exacting for he realized that it was far better than the old capitalistic system of cut-throat competition in a world of so many beings. Harrington had stored away in his active brain his idea of a perfect world, as near as it was possible to attain, as far above socialism as that system was above capitalism. Many and many a time he sighed as he realized that he would never live to see or find such a world where its citizens were as free as the air they breathed.

Harrington ate heartily of the well-laden table of foods, limited in variety, but unlimited in quantity. He was surprised to see fresh vegetables before him. Soderstrom proudly explained that they had the most perfect refrigerators right there on the moon. "We simply store the fresh vegetables and meats in a chamber connected to the outside vacuum and they are preserved indefinitely!" Richard nodded admiringly.

Their appetites appeased, the two men lounged on the luxurious divan and smoked the harmless cigars of that period, free from all injurious ingredients.

"Mr. Soderstrom, how many men are here in Station No. 7?"

"Of the men alone there are 146 at present, not counting you and Harvey Wood. Then there are 58 women." Soderstrom, in trivial conversation, was a perfect host; his voice was unaffectedly friendly and melodious.

"How many men go out in the vacuum each day to the different mines in those big sealed mobiles?"

"There is a force of about 50 men that spends all its time right here in Station No. 7. They are the assayers, ore-sorters, cooks, repair men, etc. The rest are the true miners and labor out in the vacuum."

Harrington seemed puzzled about something. "Would you mind describing in full the process of mining on the moon, from filing the application to shipping the ore?"

"Glad to," smiled the genial overseer, relieved that the S. I. S. man was in a mood for conversation not pertaining to his commission. "First of all, a mineralogist scouts

around quite haphazardly till he comes upon what to his experienced eye is likely-looking terrain, or rather, lurrain. He picks up, or chops up, samples, takes a careful measurement of the latitude and longitude by the sun or by the stars if it is night, and returns to his station. The samples are turned over to the assayer, who reports the assay to me.

"If the ore proves rich enough in metal of value, the official application is sent to the Moon Mines Council. When this comes back with the Council's seal, work is begun on the claim. Machinery is sent over there in due time, set up, and digging started.

"Once the set up is complete, two men can handle the work. At present Station No. 7 is working 45 claims within a radius of 200 miles. Station No. 26, on the other side of the moon just about, which, by the way, is no different than this side," Harrington smiled, "operates 122 claims, an all time record. The metal most exploited is platinum, with rhodium a close second."

● "Do you know that a short hundred or so years ago platinum was more valuable than gold?"

Harrington arched his eyebrows in surprise. Platinum, which was hardly as valuable as tin, pound for pound, was at one time more valuable than gold? How commodities changed!

"Several of the stations also have claims containing that wonderful beryllium." The latter metal at that time was just coming into its own as the most useful of all the metals. "The ores are brought to the station, then, and here the force of graders sort out the various types and kinds, label them, and pack them for shipment."

"Simple enough except that the vacuum outside asserts its independence once in a while and takes away a life, eh, Mr. Soderstrom?" Harrington was watching his face.

"Yes . . . that is an ever present danger. Despite our constant inspection of suits to see that they are in perfect condition, every once in a while a man is reported missing. Sometimes we find the body, frozen, puffed out, blotched with lumped blood; usually we don't." Soderstrom shuddered slightly in remembrance of such sights. "Once, four years ago, when I was assayer at Station No. 14, a ground mobile was found with seven dead men in it. A meteorite had pierced it."

The listener shook his head in sympathy. He ruminated for awhile.

"Where do the returning ore-carriers and those going out enter this station? As I come to think of it, I haven't yet seen any in motion."

"There is another lock to our left from here, the back door, it may be called, which is much larger than the one you came through. It easily accommodates the wide ground mobiles. A force of men working a claim usually stays out two weeks; they are fully stocked for longer than that period of time with oxygen and food and water. Our water, incidentally, comes from earth, there being none in this dried up rock called the moon. The men out mining constantly work in suits except at mealtimes and rest periods, when they enter the big mobiles, which are miniature apartment houses."

"Your machinery is all rocket-driven, isn't it?"

"Yes. Water power, wind power, steam power, gasoline power are things unknown, in fact, impossible on the moon."

"Have you heard of the new invention deriving its

energy from the heat rays of the sun, transforming them directly to electrical energy?"

"Rumors of it have reached me here," nodded the overseer eagerly. "Such a contrivance would be ideally suited to the moon where the rays of the sun beat down with undiminished intensity, as does not obtain on earth. I hope the day comes they will perfect the invention."

"Speaking of sun rays and such, what protection have you miners from the harmful cosmic rays which must be constantly deluging you here on the airless moon? You know, we space rovers take our 'cosmo-pills' regularly as soon as we leave earth to build up resistance to the rays."

"Why . . . we go you one better here, Mr. Harrington," chuckled the overseer. "Our food is always impregnated with the 'cosmo-powder' so that we need have no fear on that score."

Harrington nodded his head approvingly. Trust the intelligence of the Bureau of Mining back on earth to think of everything. The unflinching accuracy of the government of socialistic Telluria, however distasteful its master-ship was to Harrington, always elicited his earnest admiration. A glance at the clock brought him to his feet.

"Well, Mr. Soderstrom, duty intrudes in our little chat. I am going over to Harvey Wood's burial ground, if it is that, and look around there. I can't report back to my chief unless I can honestly say I am certain how he died . . . and where he died."

"As you choose," agreed the overseer resignedly, "But please be careful, as much for my sake as for your own, if you climb any hills or mountains. The slightest mark or dent may ultimately let the vacuum in. I don't want the whole S. I. S. here inquiring why a certain Richard Harrington died on the moon, as I've heard happens when one of your number meets an untimely death." He looked seriously at the other as he spoke. "That absolute cold and vacuum is like a crouching lion and his equally vicious mate, watching an unwary victim."

Harrington hastened to assure that he would use all precaution, reminding Soderstrom that it was never the policy or failing of the S. I. S. to be careless or rash.

In fifteen minutes Harrington stepped outside the last seal into the blazing sunlight. Hardly had the door closed when he extracted a small round box from his outer pocket with his gauntleted hand and held it up to his helmet as he walked back and forth at right angles to the path between Station No. 7 and Kranto. The needle was motionless. Harrington stuck it back into his pocket. Soderstrom was not connected with Sul Minto Pruma by low-wave radio, at least not at present. Richard hastened to the "burial ground of Harvey Wood," as he had told Soderstrom. But he didn't head in the direction of the Riphaean Mountains; he headed straight for Kranto.

A second time he entered the office of the Martian overseer. He was out at the moment and the attendant gruffly asked him to sit down and wait. Harrington complied, but as the door closed behind the Martian, he sprang up, jumped over to the desk, and hastily opened drawer after drawer, peering hurriedly at the contents of each. With a smothered cry of triumph, he pulled a pliers out of the last drawer, placed them in his coat pocket and sat down. He loosened his gun in its holster, while he kept an eye on the door, and then assumed an indolent pose.

When Pruma entered, he saw a languid earthman with a peaceful look on his face lolling in the chair.

"Sun shine upon you, Kruno Pruma," spoke the visitor as the Martian haughtily stood before him.

"Fortune favor you." He glowered at his guest. "You are back again. What suspicion brings you this time?"

"Your kind welcome to my previous visit whetted my appetite for more of Martian hospitality," answered Harrington biting-ly.

"Bah!" Pruma turned his back and seated himself at his desk. "You are pleased to be humorous . . . but your humor is as out of place as you are, Kruno Harrington."

"Kruno Pruma," Harrington's voice had lost its silky touch. It sparkled with flint and determination. "Harvey Wood is within Kranto, alive or dead! I have come to rescue him if alive, avenge him if dead!"

The Martian half arose in furious anger . . . and then sank back in his seat with jaw agape as he saw what Harrington held up in his hand. He saw a slender metal tube and a pair of pliers.

"You recognize these pliers. They are yours. You ought to recognize this tube, you bent it with the pliers. See . . .?" Harrington showed how the jaws of the pliers fitted into the corrugations on the tube. He turned a stern face on the Martian. "Pruma, you have made a mistake. You didn't expect to see me alive. You have attempted the life of an agent of the S. I. S. *Do you realize what that means?*"

The Martian's jaws worked spasmodically. "My government will uphold me . . . they'll believe me when I say you framed me with this tube and pliers you stole . . . they'll laugh at you . . ."

"Pruma," Harrington cut in on the ravings of the overseer, "The word of an S. I. S. agent is always accepted as truth, as well by the M. M. as the U. S. R. You stand accused of attempted murder . . . perhaps of actual murder . . . if Harvey Wood is dead."

"No . . . no!" This had been wrung out of the Martian involuntarily. "That is . . . I don't know anything about your man Harvey Wood."

"You lie, Pruma; Harvey Wood is alive here in Kranto. Listen to me, I will bargain with you. If you will lead me to that man and if he is alive, I will turn over to you this tube and pliers. What I shall learn from Wood may get you in trouble, but at least you won't have the accusation of attempted murder of an S. I. S. man against you."

The Martian overseer had again gained control of himself. He thought the proposition over the while Harrington toyed with the tube and pliers. He was in trouble already. His government would stand for many shady things, but . . . this was an S. I. S. man. That unbalanced the scale.

"Agreed, Kruno Harrington." He stretched out an eager hand for the evidence of his crime.

"No, no, Kruno Pruma, first you lead me to Harvey Wood."

With an almost inaudible grunt, the Martian stepped to the door, Harrington close behind. They walked through corridors and passageways till Harrington had his sense of direction completely disturbed. He looked with suspicion at the Martian. Was he leading him purposely in circles? He rested one hand on the butt of his pistol.

Finally Pruma stopped at a door, spoke softly the combination into the voice-operated lock, and stepped in as Harrington motioned that he should precede. A man

seated on a couch in an attitude of dejection, looked up. His face changed from disinterest to joy as he saw an earthman with the Martian.

Pruma turned to his enemy. "There is your Harvey Wood. Give me my property that I have bought at this price." Harrington handed over the two implements, thought better of it and pulled back his hand. But the overseer caught at the tube, snatched it away, and . . . Harrington found himself looking down the barrel of a pistol. The pliers had dropped to the floor.

As they stood thus for a moment, strained, on guard, the Martian slowly backed to the door, his pistol pointed straight for Harrington's head. With a sardonic grin, he spoke. "Pick up that pliers, Harrington, and throw them at my feet. Then throw your gun at my feet also."

With a shrug of resignation, Harrington complied. The overseer carefully stooped, picked up the objects the while he kept his wary eyes on the earthman, and then spoke rapidly with his head near the lock of the door. Harrington could not catch the combination. As the door swung open in obedience to the voice of the Martian, he backed out. "So now, Kruno Harrington, you will taste to the full my hospitality."

As the door automatically slid back in its groove, Harrington shouted enraged, "You are fooling with atomic power when you tamper with the S. I. S."

CHAPTER V

The Snare

● "S. I. S.?" echoed Harvey Wood who had silently witnessed the whole drama. "Are you one of them?"

"Yes . . . Richard Harrington of the Service. You are Harvey Wood of Station No. 7?"

The other nodded. "What's this all about?"

Harrington looked all about the room before he answered. "It looks as if we're two birds in a gilded cage." He turned to the mineralogist. "How long have you been here?"

"All eternity, it seems. Actually seven days."

"Then you came here to Kranto after you spotted a claim in the Riphæan Mountains?"

"Yes," Wood nodded eagerly, "I'll tell you why I'm here. That claim I discovered is the best find in years. Pruma is an unscrupulous, grasping, damned Ginzie, and Soderstrom is . . ." Wood stopped and looked at his companion.

"Go on, you are speaking to an S. I. S. agent. I can demand your statement."

"Well . . . I'm convinced Soderstrom is in with Pruma. It's a combine. Soderstrom gives away the claims, gets a handsome price, and Pruma gets the high commission that the M. M. gives its overseers for new claims."

"What proof have you of what you say?"

"Proof? . . . plenty. I made the last of three claims that were stolen by the Martians . . . not stolen either, given away . . . I should say. There was not a Martian around in all the time I picked up samples of ore and yet, when the application was sent in, the Council informed us there was a Martian claim ahead of ours by three hours!" Harvey Wood was storming mad. "And this last claim . . . I picked up samples in which I could see the metals sticking out . . . it was magnificent! Then I saw my air supply was low; I have an idea . . . I knew I could never make Station No. 7, so I hurried here

to Kranto. My oxygen just gave out as I got in the last seal. I pressed the button . . . you know, the one that brings the attendant . . . and then fainted from lack of air; I hadn't strength enough to unscrew my helmet. I woke up in this room. I know just what happened. Pruma was called when I was discovered. He took one of my samples, assayed it, saw it was the thing, probably called Soderstrom to find out who I was and then carried me unconscious to this blasted prison."

"Harvey Wood was a tall, frank-featured man with a nervous temperament. He spoke fluently and logically. He turned to his companion. "Beg pardon, Mr. Harrington, for my uncouth way of welcoming you."

"Quite all right, Mr. Wood. My business here on the moon is vitally bound up in anything you can say. The U. S. R. wants to know why Station No. 7 is afflicted with claim-jumping, and I'm here to find out."

"I'm certainly glad to hear they finally got the S. I. S. on the trail. Any help I can give you, Mr. Harrington, is yours for the asking, although it looks as if right now we're helpless." Wood waved a lax hand about the small prison.

"No worry about that," exclaimed Harrington. "There are a few points I want cleared up. First of all, how are claim applications filed at the station?"

"The mineralogist brings in his samples, turns them over to the assayer, and either writes the location down on a piece of paper to give to Soderstrom, or enters it in the books himself, depending on how busy the overseer is at the time."

"Who entered your last claim in the books?"

"Soderstrom."

"All you did was write the location down on paper?"

"Yes, I wrote it down and immediately left. Soderstrom, cheat and traitor that he is for all of his geniality, simply radioed the location to Pruma and then entered our application several hours later. That's the way I have it figured out."

"What makes you so positive that Soderstrom is guilty?"

"The laws of chance might explain one claim being found by two different people within hours of each other, but they can't explain three of them within such a short period of time."

"Outside of that you have no absolute proof of his implication?"

"Well . . . no, to tell the truth."

"That alone is insufficient. Laws of chance won't stand in court. We've got to get a confession out of Soderstrom. But we're going at this thing wrong end to. First of all we've got to win our liberty. Mr. Wood, what do you think is the next step that Pruma will take?" Harrington had ideas of his own but he recognized in Wood a keen mind. His ideas might be gold mines, just as his life work was discovering them, or similar mines.

"Here's my opinion about the whole thing, Mr. Harrington. Pruma is a heartless fiend of a Martian, and it would suit his purposes to give me to the vacuum, but I imagine Soderstrom had acted as a check to his high-handed ideas. The latter probably shows Pruma a more diplomatic way every time he wants to jump in over his head. The second day I was here, I got a visit from my overseer."

Harrington betrayed no emotion, but this statement started a new train of thought. "He seemed sorry that I was confined and assured me that he would smooth over

Pruma's fit of what he called 'distemper' at my exploring so near to Kranto. Then he became confidential. He said, 'Harvey, you give me the location of your new claim. I'll scoot back to the station and file our application. In the meantime I'll work for your release. I'll threaten Pruma with the wrath of the U. S. R. and he'll let you go, never fear.'

"Well, Mr. Harrington, I saw through that little plot like you see through your helmet visor. No sooner would Soderstrom get the location, he would give it to Pruma, get my release, and then file our claim, but . . . hours after Pruma had his in.

"I became stubborn. I told Soderstrom I would enter that claim myself when I got back to Station No. 7, and that neither he nor anyone else would hear about it before that was done. Then he changed. He became angry. 'Trying to tell your own overseer what to do? Man, I'm your master. I command you give to me that location!' I laughed right in his face. 'Go and command a flower to grow right out on the sands of the Mare Nubium,' I said. He saw it was useless and he left.

"They both know I'm dangerous; that I suspect too much; and the only reason I can figure out for my being alive and kicking today is that I have locked in my mind the location of the best find of many years. If you ask me, I think Pruma has sent out half his mineralogists to the Rhiphaean Mountains to try to spot that little claim. Failing in that, as he will, he will try to work it out of me; but now you're in the picture, I haven't quite figured out what he will do next."

Harrington was ruminative for a while. Much that Wood had told him dove-tailed into his own speculations. Suspicions were turning to assurances.

"Mr. Wood, I think I know what they will do next." He hesitated a moment before he spoke. Then his voice was cold and chilling. "Pruma is going to give us both to the vacuum. He knows I'm on to his game; Soderstrom is undecided as to how much I suspect; they both know that you are dangerous . . . so they are going to . . ."

"Yes, I know . . . going to put both of us out into the vacuum with a low supply of oxygen, or a split seam in our suits, and claim accidental death. They will plead and magnify the dangers of life on the moon to a government of ruthlessness on one hand . . ."

"And a government with hands tied behind its back, on the other hand," finished up the S. I. S. man vehemently. He saw now why Wilson had been so indefinite . . . so discouraging. This Moon Mine affair was a bottomless pit of intrigue of the M. M. Harrington was not pitted against Pruma alone and his dupe; he had to face the might and ruthlessness of the M. M. itself.

"Damned Ginzies!" murmured the man whose arm bore a blue star.

There was silence for a while, then "There is one thing I have left unsaid," Harrington spoke almost to himself, while Wood raised his head and peered at his calm face. "We men of the S. I. S. have a motto . . . 'Right makes Might.' It is adopted from an ancient proverb of pre-interplanetary times. Wood, you heard what I said to Pruma when he left . . . 'You are fooling with atomic power when you tamper with the S. I. S.' Maybe even his aborigine mind will absorb the fact that the loss of one man of the Service means the start of a relentless, irresistible investigation by his fellows . . . and I defy the M. M. to stop them once that happens."

Harvey Wood had heard of the S. I. S. . . . as who hadn't? . . . but knew little of their spirit. He digested this statement of his companion and shook his head as he thought of the consequences of this affair of claim-jumping to those guilty of the crime.

Harrington looked at the Martian overseer blankly as he returned an hour later after the imprisonment. With a bow Pruma handed Harrington his pistol, and Wood a leathern knapsack, his samples of the new claim.

"Kruno Harrington, I must beg your humble pardon for thus putting you to some restraint, but you see, I felt that you should realize that I resented the accusations you cast . . . and your manner of investigating. Accept this as the foolish action of an easily-angered Martian. I have nothing against you . . . and nothing to fear from you. As for this man Harvey Wood, he may have certain prejudices, but I am sure upon careful investigation, they will turn out to be incorrect. You are free to go . . . with my regards."

Harrington could see the ill-grace of the Martian in his very manner and voice. He was playing a part. This called for caution. He should be called for his high-handed actions, for attempted murder, for unlawful imprisonment . . . but then . . . Wilson had said to use diplomacy.

"I am glad to see you have chosen the best course, Kruno Pruma. You have won my good will. But . . . the S. I. S. always demands retribution for wrongs . . . life on the moon is dangerous . . . especially for . . . you, Sul Minto Pruma!"

Both Pruma and Harrington had pistols in their belts. The Martian had his back to the closed door, his eyes took in the lithe, easy grace of the earthman. Pruma was no fool; he knew Harrington was thrice as fast as he was; could draw that gun in the wink of an eye; could even leap at him should he try to draw his gun. Harrington had threatened him; could he carry out the threat?

The Martian's eyes shifted to the other earthman, then back to the S. I. S. agent. Deliberately he turned his back and voiced the combination.

"Come, Wood, let's get back to Station No. 7," said Harrington tersely as he followed the Martian closely through the door.

At the door of the first air lock, Pruma bowed low as he stood beside the entrance.

"Kruno Harrington is a wise man. He will find out that Pruma, although hasty at times, is incapable of doing anything to merit the wrath of the S. I. S."

Harrington, with seeming indifference, watched the tall form of the Martian overseer disappear around the corner of the corridor.

Once in the first air lock chamber, Harrington pulled down two of the Martian suits. "Can't take a chance on these suits," he said as he pointed to the two suits of earth make hanging by the door.

Two distorted and queer figures traversed the distance between Kranto and Station No. 7, their sharply outlined shadows trailing behind them. With a sigh of relief, they took off the misfitted suits in the air lock of the latter station. Harrington placed a restraining hand on Wood's arm as he was about to step forward toward the door.

"We were mistaken, Wood, about Pruma's intentions. He didn't tamper with those suits of ours. If he had, he

would have removed all the Martian suits, so that we'd be forced to take the two meant for us. He's decided to outwit us, he and Soderstrom. They think I'm stumped for lack of evidence. Well . . . I am."

Wood looked surprised. "Soderstrom can't explain away all these things to my satisfaction, Harrington."

"Of course he can't to you or to me; but to a court he can. You see, there must be either absolute evidence against the man, or there must be a confession. We haven't got the former . . ." The S. I. S. man paused and then resumed. "Wood, are the duties of an overseer complicated? Do they take special training or ability?"

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Harrington. It's just a matter of being invested with authority to run the station. Why, I could step right into his boots today and carry on the work."

"That's just what I wanted to know," Harrington exclaimed. He drew closer to the mineralogist. "Listen carefully to me. We are going to get a confession out of Soderstrom. Don't ask me how; I'll attend to that. Then because I don't believe he is really criminally-minded, but just a dupe of the overseer of Kranto, I'm going to offer him his written confession to destroy, after he has written out an official resignation. In other words, he will leave the moon honorably, even though he has proved a traitor; but . . . you will be in his place."

"You see, my chief back on earth told me that I was to rectify the matter of claim-jumping, but with diplomacy, because of the strained relationship between the two worlds. So in this way I will accomplish my purpose. I will be getting the source of the trouble out of the position in which he has sold claims, and I will be filling his place with a man I know can be trusted."

"Thank you for your unmerited praise, but are you sure I will be chosen to take his place?" Wood looked dubious about it.

"Yes, you will . . . Mr. Wood, because when I get back to earth, I'm going to recommend you and without boasting, I can say that the recommendation of one of the S. I. S. carries weight in the Bureau of Employment."

The eyes of Harvey Wood sparkled. To be head of Station No. 7 was all he could hope and wish for to satisfy him until such time as he should tire of life on the moon.

In a low voice Harrington then explained carefully how they were going to present themselves to the overseer, and what part each was to play. Wood nodded understandingly as he finished.

CHAPTER VI

Trickery

● Overseer Soderstrom jumped up and warmly shook hands with both of the men. "Why . . . Harrington . . . you amaze me . . . so you actually found Mr. Wood . . . this is indeed a surprise. Where was he? How did it all come about?"

Harrington looked full at the genial overseer as he answered.

"I can't claim much credit myself. I turned to good account some damning evidence I had that Overseer Pruma was bent on ending my career, bargained for information about Wood, and got it. Then with Pruma's pardons for his actions ringing in my ears, we left Kranto. Mr. Wood, here, seemed to have a few suspicions that you were connected with his retention at Kranto, but I

convinced him that you are above reproach, Mr. Soderstrom."

Soderstrom's face had momentarily changed color at the suspicions of Harvey Wood, but again cleared on hearing that Harrington had himself cleared his name of implication.

"And now I think Mr. Wood had better file application for the best find of many a year." Harrington nodded to the mineralogist as he spoke. It was done in a few moments.

It was still early morning, so Harrington and Wood betook themselves to welcome beds. Soderstrom paced up and down in his office, frowns and looks of fear chasing each other across his face.

The three of them had dinner together. The talk revolved about topics of mother earth; and the beings who trod her surface. Soderstrom again expressed a desire to resign his position as overseer and go back. Wood and Harrington exchanged guarded looks of grim mirth. The mineralogist described to Soderstrom the appearance of the ore samples of the new claim and intimated that it would probably prove to be one of the richest claims of all times. He had turned over the samples that Pruma had returned to him before they left Kranto to the assaying department and hoped to have a report sometime that afternoon. Harrington confided that now that Harvey Wood was safe and sound, and his mission over, he would leave the moon the next day after a good rest.

Dinner over, Soderstrom excused himself, pleading pressing work, leaving the other two alone. After a short conversation, they decided to have the show down an hour later in Soderstrom's office.

Harrington entered first by agreement. Soderstrom looked up in surprise. "Have a seat, Mr. Harrington, is there anything I can do for you?"

Harrington idly seated himself, straightened his coat, and then turned unblinking eyes upon the overseer.

"Mr. Soderstrom, I have a confession to make. The S. I. S. did not send me here to find Harvey Wood . . . alone . . . but also to investigate the Martian priority in claim application, a triple occurrence within the last five moon-days."

"As to that, Mr. Harrington, that has bothered me not a little, but I confess the Martian methods of procuring such priority are beyond my comprehension. All I know is that my filing of applications goes on without a hitch, and that any leakage of vital information must occur somewhere in the offices of the council on earth." Soderstrom attempted to stare right back at the S. I. S. man as he spoke, but found himself forced to drop his eyes to that searching, soul-revealing gaze.

"Soderstrom, someone in Station No. 7 is the responsible party and I've pretty well settled it in my mind who it is . . ." The overseer blanched and wet a pair of dry lips. "Wood . . . come in!" called the S. I. S. agent. Wood entered, he had been right outside the door, and took the seat offered by Harrington. He shot a scornful glance at the overseer as he sat down.

"Now . . ." Harrington was deliberate, "Soderstrom, when Wood called you the day he disappeared, did he not say he had found a valuable claim?"

"He did not." Soderstrom nervously spluttered those three words as Harvey Wood looked at him balefully.

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THE MOON MINES

(Continued from Page 871)

Harrington spoke again. "Did you not tamper with Wood's oxygen supply so that he would be forced to go to Kranto after his trip of exploration?"

"I did not," Overseer Soderstrom answered sullenly.

"Did you not get a call from Pruma by your special radio connection," Soderstrom looked up in shocked surprise, "that Wood was there and that Pruma wanted your advice as to how to get the location of the new claim out of him?"

"Certainly not. Look here, Harrington . . . this is maddening! What in the name of truth are you . . . ?"

Harrington cut off the quavering voice of the shaking overseer. "Soderstrom, you are to answer my questions. Explanations will come later." Harvey Wood had noticed that as Harrington asked each question, he looked at Soderstrom, but when the latter answered, he kept his gaze riveted on something in his hand.

Harrington now arose, walked over to Soderstrom's desk and placed thereon a small disk-shaped box with a round lens in the middle of it. Soderstrom stared with worry written all over his face. Harvey Wood watched the S. I. S. agent intently.

"Soderstrom, and you, too, Wood, listen to this, I have here one of the Service's most important inventions. It is merely a lens activated by a certain principle of which I myself know nothing. However, it is useful to me in this way: it is sensitive to a person's thoughts and is capable of indicating when that person's thoughts are at variance with his spoken thoughts. In other words, if the person before whom it is placed speaks words of one train of thought, and at the same time has other hidden thoughts which do not correspond with what he says, this instrument tells me so. See that single lens? . . . if the person lies . . . it flashes red . . . if he speaks truth it is unexcited and remains blank. *This is an infallible lie detector!*" Soderstrom, at first trembling with terror, suddenly straightened up with confidence. Harvey Wood stared open-mouthed at the innocent little article.

Harrington again spoke. "I will not tell you how your other answers turned out, Soderstrom, but I am going to ask ONE MORE QUESTION while my lie-detector is on this desk."

Harvey Wood was sitting on the edge of his chair. Harrington motioned to him. "Come here, Wood, so you can see this yourself." The mineralogist came over and stood on the other side of the desk from Harrington. The eyes of all three men were fastened on that little disk, its single lens glaring balefully like an all-seeing eye.

"Now for the test, gentlemen," Harrington broke the tense silence. Suddenly he shot out, "Mr. Wood, are you or are you not responsible for the loss of three claims to Station No. 7?" As Harvey Wood leaped back like a frightened deer, Harrington whirled upon him with his gun. "Wood, come back here and answer my question . . . while the lie-detector weighs you words . . ."

Under the threat of the gun, the mineralogist returned and stood there shaking like a leaf. "ANSWER," thundered Harrington.

With eyes staring fascinated at the lens, the mineralogist said slowly, "I am not."

The lens flared red instantaneously. With a groan Harvey Wood sank to the floor.

Harrington was again in Soderstrom's office. It was the next day. He was about to leave the moon. He had accomplished his mission. He had broken up the cleverest frame-up he had ever encountered in his numerous commissions. He had been on the moon five days.

"Yes, Soderstrom, that's the sad part of it. The bigger of the two criminals, Pruma, will get the least punishment. Poor Harvey Wood will be the goat. Believe me, I'm going to do all in my power and that means the power of the S. I. S., to see that Pruma gets something I promised out of it, although, no doubt, most of his guilt will be snowed under by the political forces of the M. M. Sad state of affairs when a damned Ginzie can get away with all that Pruma did, and yet know that his government will make his punishment light. However, I'm sure he'll have to resign his position as overseer of a moon mine. Well . . . after all, Mr. Soderstrom, the claim-jumping is circumvented, and that, you know, was my commission . . . with diplomacy . . ." Harrington mused as to how much he had done could come under the heading of "diplomacy."

Soderstrom, relieved of the worry of the past few days, was once again the jovial, pleasant host. The events of the past months had burst about him like bombshells. Unharmed by the pieces, he had felt the concussions. His mind was made up to go back to earth to be fitted by the Bureau of Employment as some other cog in the vast machinery of the socialistic world.

"There's one thing I would like to know, Mr. Harrington, how long did suspicion rest on me?"

"Don't think hardly of me, Mr. Soderstrom, but you weren't free from suspicion till my second visit to Kranto. All along I thought it was a fool's game you were playing, if you were the guilty one, because of the careless way of filing applications so close to those that had been applied for by the Martians. I couldn't imagine an overseer being a fool, so I decided that somebody was playing a strategic game to get you out of the way so the claim-selling could go on uninterruptedly. I did not really suspect Harvey Wood till I first heard him talk. Then I knew I had the culprit. He was so eager to implicate you, he pointed right at himself."

Soderstrom reviewed the events of that last tense scene in his office. "That lie detector of yours, Mr. Harrington, is a remarkable instrument."

"Soderstrom, I'm going to test you with it right now." Harrington pulled it out and held it in the palm of one hand. "Mr. Soderstrom, can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, certainly." *The lens flared red!*

The overseer's face turned redder than the lens. He looked up at the other in confusion, partly mixed with anger.

"Please, Mr. Soderstrom, don't be angry," laughed Harrington as the other arose hastily. "You see, I kept one hand in my pocket. In there I have another little instrument with a button on it. When I press the button, the lens flashes red!"

THE END