

PLANET STORIES



VOL. 5, NO. 2 • A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE • SEPTEMBER, 1951

► *Novel of Interlocking Space*

THE INCUBI OF PARALLEL X *Theodore Sturgeon* 4

Gone were Earth's womankind. The Franx-blasted planet had been wrung of the young, the beautiful. Only Garth, son of Gesell the Great, knew the gateway to the prison-world—a world of 70-foot, man-stealing Giantesses.

► *A Startling Novelet*

LORD OF A THOUSAND SUNS *Poul Anderson* 84

A man without a planet, this 1,000,000-year-old Daryesh. Once Lord of a Thousand Suns, now condemned to rove the spaceways in alien form, searching for love, for life, for the great lost Vwyrdda.

► *Short Stories from all the Galaxies*

SANCTUARY, OH ULLA! *J. T. MacIntosh* 33

Shrewd Alganet paid off the war-bemused Ullans with back-firing images. His one wise mistake was to purchase a Ullan Woman.

THE INHABITED MEN *Margaret St. Clair* 44

Why was it, Gongo wondered, that the Earthman lying asleep in his space-freighter bunk whispered in so many alien voices?

THE STAR FOOL *Gordon Dickson* 50

The fate of star-colonies hung on blacked-out Tarn II and the only man within jet distance was ineffectual little Whaley.

LAST NIGHT OUT *Lee Gregor* 57

Tomorrow Ensign Grey and his hated, blue-furred space-mate, Canopus 43C, would go off to war—if tomorrow ever came.

TYDOR'S GIFT *Alfred Coppel* 67

Why should Tydore place such an inestimably valuable gift in the greed-hands of the Earthling whom he hated?

THE WATCHERS *Roger Dee* 71

It had taken him ten years to find them—to even convince himself that they existed. Now Manson was ready to kill.

VENGEANCE ON MARS *D. B. Lewis* 75

Should Hale give an ex-comrade to the torture-thirsty Hrai, or chance the massacre of Terrestrial thousands?

HOSPITALITY *J. W. Groves* 80

Eden could not have been half so good as this green jungle planet. Yet every Eden has its secret Serpent.

THE VIZIGRAPH Compliments and complaints from Planet's hardy readers 2 & 102

T. T. SCOTT, *President*

MALCOLM REISS, *General Manager*

PLANET STORIES Published bi-monthly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 130 W. 42 St., New York 18, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1951, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. Registered as second class matter August 15, 1950, at the Post Office at New York, 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. Price 25¢ per copy. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 130 W. 42 St., New York 18, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.

So unpredictable, these dead-world Tower Dwellers!

Take old Tydore who placed such an inestimably valuable gift in the greed-hands of one he hated.



"I made it for you . . ."

TYDORE'S GIFT

by ALFRED COPPEL

THE sun was a shrunken red disk against the starfields, a distant pale luminosity surrendering to the encroachment of the falling night. Hoarfrost crunched under Marley's feet as he walked by the still black waters of the canal, and then thin wind whispered over the sand and across the breasts of the ancient hills. Starlight gleamed in the dark water as

the day faded. Earth hung low in the sky, like an emerald pendant over the bosom of a sleeping woman.

Marley pulled his silks and furs closer about his shoulders. The air was sharp and cold. His breath froze wraithlike in the icy evening as he hurried down the path toward Tydore's tower.

The green planet shone like a beacon

in his eyes. Home. The thought brought impatience and a longing to walk again under a pale sky and a warm sun. He looked about him with faint distaste. This peace—this solitude of low red hills and blue-black nights—was alien to Marley. It was unreal. Mars was a dream. An ancient wasted slumbering dream.

Marley's lips compressed as he thought of Tydore and their last meeting. It seemed that Tydore laughed at him. Tydore withheld too much, and there was so little time left. There was an acrid core of decadence in the old Martian, Marley thought. A consciousness of too many millenia of civilization and decay. Devious was the word, perhaps, though it seemed a pallid one for the reality of the Martian's intricate mind. It was always impossible to know what he was thinking—how much he knew. About Marley being a spy. About the war on Earth. In spite of himself, Marley smiled. It sounded so melodramatic that way, but it was the way it really was. The Martians held the perfect weapon. Marley needed that weapon, and his nation had put forth a gigantic effort to get him to Mars so that he might steal it.

Tydore's tower loomed up before him in the fading light, a fey filligree of minarets and graceful flying buttresses too delicate for a grosser world than Mars. The tower's reflection shimmered in the still dark waters of the canal like an alter ego extending deep into the liquid depths.

Marley descended the steps of delicately wrought stone that led to the tower's underground entrance with care, for the drifted ferric sand made them treacherous. How like the Martians, he thought with some irritation, to make it necessary to travel down in order to enter a tower. Everything the long way, the hard and devious way.

The outer doorway was shaped like a fleur-de-lis and it opened from the top down, sliding into a recess of ancient, oily machinery. It would be far too simple to make a door that looked and worked like a door. Everything Marley had seen during his months on Mars served only to increase his sense of alienage. He had seen only Tydore, of course, of the living Mar-

tians. There were only a handful left and they lived in their isolated towers along the still canals surrounded by their tissue-thin manuscripts and ancient, reedlike music spools that filled the air of their retreats with skeins of weird and enharmonic melody.

The weapon was Tydore's. He had rebuilt it from plans drawn by some ensorcelled armorer dead over five thousand years. Rebuilt it in the paradoxical way that Martians seemed to do everything, for if there was one thing that no Martian needed it was a weapon. No strife had marred the planet's peace for millenia. But build it he had, and Marley's hands itched for the sleek deadliness of it—the smooth grained stock, the oddly wrought, ornate muzzle. There was a vicious, tangy violence frozen into every line of the weapon. And it was the only hand gun Marley had ever seen that chained the forces of the atom. With such weapons an army could be invincible.

TYDORE STOOD to greet him. With the elaborate courtesy of his kind, he performed the ritual gestures of welcome, his slender, finely veined hands tracing the ancient symbols in the air.

"The gods of sand and wind have brought you safely to my house, man of Earth. I give thanks and pray you find peace and wisdom within my walls."

The old Martian's chanting voice was like the fluting grace of a Scarlatti choral. It was one with the miniscule paintings that covered the walls, the finely wrought carvings on the antique flagstones under his feet. Marley was not at home in the fluid Martian tongue, but the very sound of the words conjured for him the serried ranks of spectral generations that had reached their culmination in this one robed ancient.

And yet, he thought with irritation, Tydore's words mean not at all what they said. Through the finely polished phrases of welcome ran a thread of hidden mockery—even hate—for Marley and everything he represented. Never once had Tydore, by word or deed, indicated that he felt anything but friendship for his visitor from the silvery ship out on the desert,

and yet there was no mistaking the nuance of contempt. Tydore despised Marley as an outworld savage. One with the despoilers of the holy places of Mars.

Not that the Martians had gods. They had lived too long for that, and their deities existed only in their beautifully turned phrases and their hyper-cultured ritual. But the first men from Earth had looted the libraries and shattered the soaring towers. It was a thing no Martian would ever forget—or forgive. It marked Earthmen for what they were. In Martian eyes—precocious barbarians. Targets for Martian subtlety.

"I give thanks for your welcome," Marley said slowly, his tongue clumsy on the singing syllables.

Tydore inclined his head slightly and indicated that Marley should follow him up the winding ramp that pierced the core of the tower. Each time Marley came, the ritual was the same, as unchanging as the still waters of the dark canals or the frozen loneliness of the red hills beyond. They would pass the first level, where the old engines supplied Tydore with what little heat and sustenance he needed. They would go on to the second level, where the music spools lay in ordered confusion amid the sonic transcribers that Tydore used to weave the sounds of the Martian night into atonal poems of melody. And then they would reach the level of the weapon.

It would still be in its crystal case, guarded by a lock of bronze. A lock to which there was one key, and that one key on a silver chain around Tydore's neck. They would pass the weapon by and seek the top level, a platform shielded against the frigid night by a crystal canopy. And there they would begin their nightly fencing with words and ideas under the guise of friendship.

Marley's heart was pounding suddenly as he drew near to the weapon. His patience was failing him at long last, he knew. He was sick of Mars, sick of Tydore. Sick of posing as a humble seeker after knowledge. If he could not trick the Martian into parting with the weapon soon, he knew that he must chance violence. He had not dared it before, because he could

never be sure that Tydore and his kind were as defenseless as they seemed. It was paradoxical that they should possess a weapon such as *the* weapon and yet be unwilling or unable to use it.

Still it seemed to Marley that such must be the case. He could only explain it to himself by saying that they had lived too long, amid too much deviousness and inverted purpose to be quite virile. They were—the word came readily to mind from the days of his training on Earth—decadent. And the meek did not inherit the earth or anything else, he told himself with satisfaction. Only the militant, the ruthless.

THE TIME HAD COME, Marley thought, for the calculated risk. Direct action. He could scarcely contain himself as they passed the weapon and climbed to the top level.

"You seem preoccupied tonight, Marley," Tydore said, pouring two tiny goblets of wine, "Can it be that you grow tired of Mars?"

Marley sipped the wine thoughtfully. To him it seemed completely insipid and without flavor. Subtlety again? He doubted it. "I mean to ask a favor of you, Tydore," he said, "And I but ponder how I should begin."

"My house is yours," the Martian replied softly, "And all that it contains."

Marley's eyes narrowed. Did he imagine the accent on the last phrase, or was it actually there? He decided to be very cautious. "I came here, as you know," he said, "To learn everything I might about your kind. As you know, we of Earth are a young race, still much in need of guidance and knowledge."

"You have learned much," Tydore said.

Marley's tone grew harder. "But not enough."

Tydore's eyebrows arched delicately. "So? You have read my books, listened to my music. You have tasted the wines and eaten the fruits of Mars. You have seen the stars and the sand, the waters and the lichens. Have you not known my world?"

"I want more," Marley said flatly.

Tydore smiled. In that smile Marley

saw a flash of more distilled venom and ancient hatred that he could have imagined existed. The utter virulence of it left him shaken and his illogical fear brought anger.

He got to his feet, the tiny goblet in his hand. It was old and delicate, a tiny gem of carved jade and ivory. To one such as Tydore—priceless. Brutally, Marley crushed it to shards in his hands and dropped it to the flagstones. The fragments tinkled as they fell.

"So it must always be," said Tydore in a soft voice.

"I have not come here to listen to music, Tydore," Marley said, "Nor to read your books or to know your world. You have one thing that I want. You will give it to me, or I will take it from you." He ground his heel onto the remains of the goblet with a grating sound.

"The weapon," the Martian said, "You want the weapon. You may have it. You need not have broken my goblet . . ."

Marley was almost sorry that he had won so easily. He suddenly wanted to crush the old Martian as he had crushed the goblet. In both there was a quality that eluded him, and it was maddening.

Tydore handed him the key. "Come, we will get it together."

Marley followed him cautiously, alert for any trickery. Presently they stood before the case and Marley unlocked it, reaching greedily for the polished stock. He cradled the gun in his arms lovingly, savoring triumph. With this in his hands, he could defy a world.

"There is no other like it, nor any but I to make one," Tydore said with a strange smile.

"Why did you make it?" asked Marley.

"I made it for you."

Marley laughed aloud. It was an alien sound in the thin, cold air of the tower. "You're a liar, Tydore. You built this weapon long before I ever left Earth and you know it."

"By you, I meant simply men like you," Tydore said. "When the first Earthmen came and befouled Mars with their presence, I knew that I must make the weapon." He smiled, showing even white teeth. "A small triumph, but things are

not to be measured by whether they are great or small. Rather by their flavor, their grace, and their neatness, Marley."

"You speak of triumph, old man," snorted Marley derisively, "while your precious weapon is in my hands."

Tydore shrugged. "As I knew it would be one day when I spread the tales of what the weapon would do. It drew you as a lodestone draws a sliver of iron."

Marley felt a pang of panic. "You mean this thing is a fake?"

Tydore shook his head. "No counterfeit. It will do what I said it would do. Kill. What more can one ask of a weapon?"

It was Marley's turn to smile. "Nothing. And there is only this one. And if you were to die . . ."

Tydore smiled a veiled smile. "It is as the gods of sand and wind decree."

Marley pointed the weapon at Tydore. He had only to kill the old Martian and return to his ship. The mission was over. Completed. He was done with Mars and with Tydore and his subtle scorn.

He cradled the weapon lovingly, laying his cheek to the carved stock. Old Tydore had built well. There was perfect balance in the feel of it. His finger curled around the trigger and he sighted carefully down the long barrel at the robed figure of the Martian. Tydore was smiling in the face of death, and Marley wanted to laugh out loud. This is the way the world ends, he was thinking. Not with a bang but a whimper. He squeezed the trigger . . .

The universe exploded in Marley's face. There was a streak of searing pain that carried away half his face, and as he fell he could hear a strange sound. For the first time, Tydore was laughing aloud. It was a hideous sound. A voice for the torment and hatred of a race that had lived too long, planned too much. Marley felt the tower pinwheel around him, the flagstones leapt up to meet him, greeting the searing agony of his face with the soundless laughter of a million intricate patterns of lonely death. And blackness welled up out of the stones to engulf him, but not before he knew—

Tydore had made the weapon with the muzzle resembling the stock. It was as simple as that.