



Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Vampires of the Moon

By A. W. BERNAL



"What he saw gave him the greatest shock of his life. Bending over him was a Thing."

A sensational story of the Masters of the Moon and their mindless slaves—and a terrible threat against the inhabitants of Earth

"The strange and fearful story of the Moon City and its mind-vampires is one of the most astounding things recorded in the annals of the Trans-spatial Service Legion. . . ."

From Heidelich's *History of the Legion*.

Foreword

DEEP in the heart of one of the innumerable craters on the face of the moon is situated the row of tiny, lighted buildings that are the head-

quarters of the Moon Station of the Trans-spatial Service Legion. In these little artificially-temperated, air-proof structures men of the Legion toil from Period to Period, wresting from Earth's desolate satellite all her age-old ores and metals for our use here on the mother planet. Strange happenings are welcome incidents in a life of dreary monotony to the

men of the Legion, hidden away as they are in an ice-bound, airless crater thousands of miles from Earth on the furthestmost outpost of civilization.

Many dangerous and thrill-crowded events have taken place on the dead surface of the moon, but the Legion's encounter with the mind-vampires of the inner world is perhaps strangest of all.

1. *The Message from the Meteor IV*

CAPTAIN RICHARD STARR, A. M. P., captain in charge of moon headquarters, settled himself in his swivel-chair. He removed his cap, tossing it onto the top of his roomy desk, disclosing by this action a head of neatly combed black hair, threaded with a few tinges of gray at the temples.

Clenching his pipe between white, even teeth and narrowing his steel-gray eyes dreamily, he sat tranquilly motionless for a few moments. Then he sighed and prepared to work.

After unbuttoning his scarlet tunic, he removed the broad white girdle that was his weapon-belt, and reached for his report blanks. He had just finished making his third inspection of the Period and would be occupied for several hours with the making out of his papers.

Busily he set about dictating to his mechanical stenographer. The machine's whir and click seemed very loud in the tiny offices of the Moon station, but it was a rather cheery sound and one that Starr liked.

Suddenly Starr frowned. The corridor outside was echoing with the rapid thumpings of running footsteps. Starr glanced out of his doorway to see what was causing the commotion. The look of annoyance on his face vanished, to be replaced by one of surprize. Quickly he shut off the dictating-machine and tossed his notes into his desk. He was alert and

● You who like your science-fiction to be weird (and when we say weird we mean WEIRD) will find a feast of good reading in this novel by A. W. Bernal. The story is not only a gripping tale of pseudo-science and thrilling adventures, but is also essentially a weird tale, fascinating in its horror and blood-chilling in its uncanny realism. You can not afford to pass this story by.

ready for the news he was about to receive.

For down the hallway was racing a white-faced Jerry Smith, lieutenant in charge of communications. A second later he burst into the room. Dispensing with the formality of a salute he began shouting excited words to his commanding officer.

"Captain!" he yelled wildly. "Captain! Another of our ships has disappeared!"

Starr was on his feet in an instant.

"What!" he shrieked. Without stopping to grab his cap he dashed out of the room after his already fleeing junior officer.

Breathless, the pair arrived at the communications room, Smith gasping unintelligible phrases at his anxious superior.

"Never mind! Let's hear it from the tape," Starr commanded as he threw himself into a chair near a large speaker. Panting from his exertions, Smith turned to a complicated apparatus and brought forth from its interior a roll of heavy tape. On this coil was trapped every message that had come in during the past twenty-four hours, all messages thus being automatically preserved for future reference.

With the roll in his hand the lieutenant sprinted across to the speaker in front

of which sat the worried Starr. Setting the apparatus into motion, Smith flung himself down beside his captain to listen.

"*Meteor IV* calling—*Meteor IV* calling," rumbled the instrument, then after a pause, "Hello, Smith. Listen! Great news! But wait——" The voice stopped an instant, then continued in the formal Legion routine words, "*Meteor IV* Commander John Starr reporting 'all safe'——"

"My God!" Starr leapt to his feet. His face grew ashen white; the hand that brushed his forehead trembled.

"My brother," he muttered faintly, "my brother—on that ship!" He sank, groaning, into the chair and gripped its arm-rests with a vise-like clutch.

Lieutenant Smith shut off the speaker and laid a sympathetic hand on the quivering shoulder of his commanding officer. For a period of deathly stillness, bowed head between his hands, Starr sat motionless. At last, with a visible effort, he pulled himself together. He raised his pale face, jaw set determinedly.

"Let's hear the message," he choked.

WITHOUT a word Smith threw the switch and the two men listened in strained silence to the rumbling, mechanical voice of the tape.

"——ere, I've got that old formula off my chest. Now I can talk like a human being. Say, listen, Smitty, old boy. Here's something you won't believe. *There is a city here in the moon!* Think of it! But listen, here's the way it happened.

"Dick—beg pardon!—Captain Richard Starr told me to send out a ship to try to locate the *America VII*. He didn't say for me not to go, so I just took command of the good old *Meteor IV* here, got Rusty Steele, Hal Bradley, and half a dozen others to come with me and set out.

"Now, I decided that practically the

whole surface of the moon had already been searched to find the *America VII* and that other ship—the *Thunderbolt*, wasn't it?—you know, the one that vanished during the last Period. Well, as I say, although the surface had already been searched in vain efforts to locate these ships, no one had as yet cruised through any of the crater caverns. So that's where we went, and that's where we are now.

"We headed down that big crater just the other side of the Simonsburg group—the one we call the Punch Bowl—and nosed in and out among those giant bubble-like caves on its bottom.

"We found that one of the bubbles was an entrance to a regular honeycomb of natural passages and caves, leading right down toward the center of the moon. By Jupiter! it was intriguing to look out a forward port and see our guide-beam just sort of peter out without ever touching the end of the caves. It looked good to us, so down we cruised at half-speed, watching out for signs of either the *America VII* or the *Thunderbolt*.

"Venus, what caves! Rock and metal that—but you'll have to see for yourself. For an hour we cruised through that weird fairyland without ever once finding a cavern that led upward other than those behind us.

"Rusty got one of his crazy ideas and wanted to go outside without a suit. Said he read in a novel once where the hero walked around on the inside of the moon without a suit on account of the atmosphere growing denser toward the moon's center.

"We let him try it—a couple of fellows with oxygen-helmets stood by to grab him and pull him in just in case!—and blamed if there wasn't air out there! I know there's air up above where you are too, but this was real thick, breathable

air—cold as the void though! Rusty turned a funny blue all over and shivered so violently he could scarcely stand up. But in a minute he sort of recovered and, waving back his would-be rescuers, commenced running and jumping along the rocky cavern floor like a jack-rabbit. Once he slipped on a big lump of platinum—*platinum*, Smitty!—and when he cussed we could hear him inside the ship through an open port. The air was actually thick enough to carry sounds almost naturally.

"You can't realize how strange it seemed to find air outside the old boat. In five minutes the whole gang of us was cavorting about in that big, dark cavern miles under the surface of the moon. Smitty, you old half-lunged weaklings, you ought to get a whiff of that air. Cold and sharp and sweet as—as I don't know what. Man! You should have seen the red cheeks on us fellows when we climbed back into the bus.

"Eventually we got under way again—all ports opened wide—and headed down what seemed to be the last of the caves. We should have turned back then, only Rusty insisted there might be an opening behind a huge mound of rock at the far side of the place.

"Jupiter! What a thrill we got when we did turn our guide-beam on that pile of stone. Rusty, at the controls, opened his mouth so wide he almost cracked his jaw and his eyes bulged out like balloons. The darned idiot was so stupefied at what we saw that he ran the *Meteor IV* smack into the cavern wall. Luckily though, we were barely moving; so no damage was done to anything except Rusty himself, and that was done by us.

"Behind this forty-foot mound of debris was a huge black pit, dropping down, down, down. But that in itself was not so marvelous. It was the stair-

case. Yes, Smitty old robot, a *staircase!* Hewn out of the solid rock sides of this shaft was a gigantic flight of steps spiraling around and around, slanting ever downward into the blackness. It was like the threads of some Gargantuan piece of machinery: a comparatively tiny line circling down around the sides of this tremendous shaft.

"Imagine it, Smitty. Down here, eighty miles beneath the moon's surface, in a vast natural chain of caverns, is a giant staircase! Hewn out of the living rock by intelligent animals—human beings, I wonder?—ages ago. Yes, Smitty, this inconceivable staircase must be, judging roughly, some five thousand years old. You see, we—but I'll tell you later, Smitty. If I talk much longer I'm liable to fill up all your tape. I'll get on with the story.

"What had become of these people? Were some relics of this vanished race farther down in the shaft? The stairs must lead some place. We determined to find out where.

"**W**E DIDN'T lose any time dropping our boat down the shaft. The air, now surprizingly dense, fairly screamed as we shot down. Finally we had to slow down considerably because the shaft was beginning to incline from the vertical, gradually assuming a direction that was almost at right-angles with our initial descent.

"Then we sped down this horizontal passageway for a time; yet during all this period we had seen no trace of either our ships or vestiges of the ancient civilization. But when we cruised around an 'L' bend in the tunnel we immediately doused all our lights and proceeded at caution-speed; for not a hundred yards ahead the tunnel opened out into a monstrous cave—a cave whose every surface glowed

brightly with a strange phosphorescent radiance!

"After the inky blackness of the tunnel this mile upon mile of glowing land was dazzling. For a time we could not see clearly, because although we had been using our cabin-lights, their shaded softness was nothing like the light of the cave.

"While I stood there gazing at the endless glowing expanse of land ahead, Rusty suggested that we stop to eat a bite of lunch and to send a message back to headquarters before proceeding. This we decided to do; especially after Rusty said we'd get no coffee until we did stop, inasmuch as his attempts along this line while we were under way had resulted in a none too invigorating shower-bath, when the pot tipped over on him.

"While waiting for the eats I looked through the 'scope to see if I could find anything. Blazing rockets! I certainly did. Quite a way off and devilishly hard to distinguish in that hazy glow was a city! Yes, Smitty, a full-grown, wheel-shaped city. I'll bet you don't believe me; but, on my honor, I did see it.

"I strained my eyes, trying to make out the thing more clearly, but it was no use. It was too jumpy on account of that infernal glow. After awhile I gave up and started sending this message.

"That brings us up to date. Tell Dick—I mean Captain Starr—that I'm sorry we've been gone so long. We'll just take a peep at the city and then shoot back to the Station. I haven't told the gang about the city yet, because they'd be heading for it without waiting for lunch. Particularly Rusty. He'd argue that we'd be asked to dinner there anyway.

"Well, here comes my tray of sandwiches, so I'll sign off. I'll let you hear from me as soon as we get under way again. So long."

The rumbling voice of the loud-speaker died out.

"There is another message?" asked the dejected and miserable Captain Starr.

"Yes, sir; shall I run it through?"

Starr sat for a time as though he had not heard. Then the blood came back to his face. His jaw came forward with a jerk. His eyes blazed.

"Yes, Smith, let's hear the other message," he gritted between clenched teeth. The table shook as he pounded his fist upon it. "I'll find that city and those beasts who have my brother, if I have to crawl there on my hands and knees! And when I get there——" He stopped and took hold of himself.

"All right, Smith. The other message," he finished more quietly.

2. "Smash It, You Fool!"

SMITH obediently turned up the tape by twisting the dial, then, at the sharp clicking from the speaker that precedes a message, dropped silently down again beside Starr.

"Click . . . click . . . click . . . *Meteor IV* again, Smith. I'll dispense with the old formula because I've already given it once, and besides, this is an informal message.

"I've just told the boys, and were they excited! It was funny. Rusty had that fool helmet of his on. You know that thought-helmet he's always fooling around with, don't you? It's that metal thought-transference contraption that he's been trying to perfect and simplify. Up to now he's never been able to get it so that any one but himself can operate it, except on rare occasions. He claims that only certain people have the right type of mind for sending out strong thought impulses. If it could be made to work, that helmet would be a great invention, but as it is, it is merely a plaything.

"Anyway, he had it on when I told the bunch. He was half under the table, getting his control-box which he had dropped. When he heard the news he let out a whoop and straightened up. The result was that he cracked his skull on the heavy table-edge and jammed the helmet down tight on his head! Not only that, but now it's *wedged* there! He couldn't get it off to save his life, and until we let him get at the tool-room, which we're not going to do for awhile, he'll have to wear the thing. It took four of the gang to hold him down while I locked the tool-room door and hid the key. Smitty, you ought to see him, you'd die laughing. . . .

"We're under way once more. Rusty refused to take the controls, so Bradley is guiding the *Meteor IV* this time. Rusty's pouting in a corner now. Next time you see him"—Captain Starr groaned—"call him the 'Sulking Achilles.' He'll love it. . . .

"We're out of the tunnel now and over the glowing surface of the cave. It seems to be some sort of growth that has completely covered everything.

"The entire landscape is one solid mass of this plant. Our ship casts no shadow whatever, for the light comes from below as well as from the sides and above.

"I—feel . . . I feel rather—queer. . . . My head is throbbing strangely. . . . The rest seem to be affected too——" the voice subsided to a mere mumbling.

Captain Starr gripped his chair until his knuckles showed white. None of the other ships had sent in a message. If he listened closely he might learn something of the methods of the kidnappers. The mumbling ceased and the voice boomed forth loud, clear and metallic.

"Yes. . . . They've all got it. . . . Every one. . . . No—Rusty. . . . All but Rusty. . . . He's all right. . . . He's asking what's wrong. . . . But I—I can't

tell him. . . . No. . . . I can't say why, but I mustn't. . . . The ship is staggering . . . rocking as though Bradley . . . doesn't know how to run her. . . . The ship—our ship—is running smoothly toward the—our—city. . . . How distinct is the craft flying up there? . . . I can see her easily now. . . . The ship is very discernible against the glow. . . ."

The very short hair on Captain Starr's neck began to stiffen. He listened to the strange, scarcely intelligible message in a tense, stiff attitude. There was something horribly alien in the words that rumbled jerkily from the speaker.

"Wha—what was I saying? . . . I don't feel . . . I feel . . . ill. . . . That fool, Rusty. . . . He's shaking me. . . . I can't get to him. . . . I wonder. . . . Can it be that that thing he wears is . . . he's yelling at me now. . . . Stop him. . . . I must stop him. . . . He's taking the controls from Bradley! . . . No. . . . No! . . . Here, this will stop him. . . . No, no! . . . No! . . . Yes, that's it. . . . Harder! . . . Again! . . . Fine! . . . That helmet didn't save him from that blow with the wrench. . . . Ha! . . . Blood. . . . It is red. . . . Red, as ours used to be. . . . Primitive animals, these Outsiders. . . . I shall ask the Ten to allow me to take a few for my experiments. . . . But the Ten will not be through with them for nearly three weeks. . . . But after that—oh, Dick! *Dick! Dick!* . . . That monster. . . . I . . . Shut up, you fool! What are you saying? . . . There. . . . Now I've got him again. . . . He's got a brain, this one. . . ."

Starr was pacing back and forth in front of the speaker; beads of sweat glistened on his forehead and trickled down upon his face. His expression was one of intense agony. He seemed fairly to writhe when he heard the mechanical voice of the tape tell of Rusty being

struck down by his childhood companion, Jack Starr.

"Jack! Jack! What have you done?" he raved like a madman suddenly. "No, Jack! You didn't do it. *They* did it. They made you. They are responsible, not you. Who are they? What are they? Jack! Jack! Tell me, Jack! You must!"

But as the speaker resumed its unfeeling, guttural rumbling, Starr clenched his teeth, maintaining an attitude of forced calm.

". . . The city is very close now. . . . Our work is almost done. . . . What am I—that thing—doing? Talking, yes. But to whom? . . . Radio! . . . I must smash it. . . . No. . . . No. . . . Yes! . . . I must smash it. . . . How? . . . That wrench! . . . No. . . . Grasp it. . . . No. . . . Grasp it, you idiot! . . . No. . . . Now, lift it. . . . No. . . . Struggle—go on, struggle! . . . Higher. . . . *Higher*. . . . No. . . . Now. . . . Smash it. . . . No! . . . *Smash it!* . . . *No!* . . . *Smash it.* . . . *Smash it!* . . . SMASH IT. . . . SMA——"

Crash! The speaker fell silent. Captain Starr, his face sickly white, looked at Lieutenant Smith. "Jack is still alive," he hissed through clenched teeth. "He will be alive for three weeks. *But is he still human?*"

3. To the Rescue

THE next morning, after a sleepless night, Starr sat in his office thinking. His first wave of emotion was over now. He felt numbed, nerve-deadened. Except his brain. Like a tiny flame burning in ice it was. Plan after plan ran through his mind only to be torn to shreds and discarded.

Nothing mattered but to get to the Moon City where Jack was held prisoner. But how was he to get to the satellite's inner world? If he only had a ship!

The only other ship at the Moon Station at that time was the old hulk, *La Belle France*; and she was being patched up for transport use in the mines. The mines! He had it! Ore-carriers! One of them should be his ship. He sprang to his feet and dashed to the communications room.

Smith was just relieving his sergeant on "night" shift when Starr entered the room. At sight of his captain, the radio-man saluted, then stood stiffly at attention, awaiting orders.

"Get me the mines, quick!" roared Starr. "Any mine! So long as they have some sort of ore-carrier or——"

Smith was not listening. He was busy at the televisior, working a number. "Here you are, sir," he exclaimed as soon as a face appeared on the screen.

It took but a moment for Starr to order the fastest ore-car to be brought to headquarters immediately. As he plugged off the set, Smith, eyes bright with anticipation, said:

"Starr! Can I go?"

Captain Starr glanced witheringly at the lieutenant. "You are supposed to be working for the T. S. L.!" he barked.

"Yes, sir!"

Smith sprang up and saluted smartly. But he was grinning with joy. His captain was over his hopeless spell. He was now a fighting man again. Action was all he craved!

"Stop grinning, you idiot!" thundered Starr, but he was smiling himself. His arm shot out, clenched itself tightly on Smith's shoulder. "You bet you can go. And we'll bring Jack back with us, won't we?"

While the two waited for the arrival of the ore-car, Starr discussed with his lieutenant the feasibility of finding Jack and rescuing him. Captain Starr had now become convinced that the feat would not

be at all impossible, and warmed to the prospect of the probable thrills and adventures in store for them.

"Yes, Smith," Starr grinned, "as long as the message said that Jack would not be hurt for nearly three weeks, and I am in fear for Jack's life no longer, I can look forward to our little jaunt with pleasure. It will prove quite exciting, I think."

But before Starr was through with the moon-men, he wished fervently that the excitement and danger of his journey into the inner world had never materialized. However, he had no presentiments at this time; being, on the contrary, rather light-hearted.

"You know," he was saying, "this reminds me of the time when I was a junior officer on the exploring ship, *Mayflower*. I got into some fine scrapes, then. I was an adventurous lad in my younger days, all right," concluded Starr, wagging a finger at the youthful Smith.

"Your younger days? I don't see that you've got gray hair now," laughed the lieutenant, in return.

"Listen here," snapped Captain Starr, eyes ablaze. "I haven't *any* gray hair. And when you are addressing me, say 'sir'. You are supposed to be a soldier. Can you get that through your thick skull?"

"Yes, sir," meekly responded Lieutenant Smith, and if it hadn't been for the fact that the blaze in Captain Starr's eyes had been replaced by a twinkle, the young man would have felt considerably discomfited.

OUT of one of the many black openings in the sides of the crater which housed the Moon Station rose a lumbering, box-like structure.

Slowly the ore-conveyance nosed its way across the uneven surface of the

frozen crater. A high-pitched, doleful clanking of loose machinery echoed faintly from the dark crater-sides. Drawing abreast of a row of lighted buildings, the ore-car sank jerkily to the ice-covered ground. Its wheels squeaked thinly in the rarefied atmosphere as it rolled awkwardly toward the air-lock in one of the structures.

A man in a bulky space-suit struggled out of the air-tight control-booth of the car, and in a moment the tight-fitting air-lock door swung shut behind the waddling, swollen figure. While the hiss of incoming air made itself audible, the figure began divesting itself of its clumsy suit. Soon it appeared as a normally proportioned Earthman attired in the scarlet and white of the Legion. It was the lieutenant in charge of mines.

Captain Richard Starr turned disgustedly away from the frosted window out of which he had been peering.

"So, lieutenant," he said scathingly. "That wreck on wheels—that dilapidated, broken-down, disintegrating pile of junk is the best ore-carrier in your mines, is it? That"—he waved a hand in the direction of the window—"that is the pick of the T. S. L. ore-cars? When I was a lieutenant, I should have been ashamed to be seen within a light-year of such a decrepit, rust-eaten thing as that."

"But, captain," the exasperated, red-faced lieutenant replied. "You did not ask for my prettiest car, sir. You asked for my speediest. I thought——"

"When I was a lieutenant we let our captain do the thinking. That's what they are supposed to be for. Well—how speedy is that heap of rust out there?"

"Maximum speed is fifteen miles per hour, sir."

"*What?*"

The lieutenant made a hopeless gesture. "My cars are for transporting ore,

sir. They're not supposed to be rocket-racers."

"That will be enough sarcasm, lieutenant. If there is anything I hate, it is sarcasm; especially in a man," Captain Starr said caustically. "What are *you* grinning at, Smith?"

"So that is what we have to set out in, eh?" he remarked, returning to the point at issue after reprimanding Smith. "That mass of junk is to be our battleship. Well, lieutenant, take——" and Starr rambled off into technicalities concerning the transformation of the ore-car.

The next "morning" the ore-car was all in readiness. During the last twenty-four hours, it had been subjected to a thorough overhauling and cleaning; all superfluous weight removed, it was now nothing more than a skeleton structure with the airtight control-booth in front. A small but deadly flame-thrower—the most powerful of compact weapons at this period—had been fastened to the conveyance for armament.

HAVING slept but little, Starr spent most of his sleeping-period in attempting to formulate a plan of battle. But the gong that sounded a new "day" found him yet unprepared. The only thing he was sure of was the fact that he must get to the Moon City as rapidly as the ore-car would take him there.

"Well, as long as our cruiser is primed for battle," said Captain Starr to Lieutenant Smith, when the latter had brought news that the ore-car was in readiness, "we may as well get started. Are you ready?"

It did not take Starr long to instruct his second-in-command to take charge of the Moon Station during his absence. He did not say where he was going, but left a sealed envelope with the officer which was to be opened in case he, Starr, did not re-

turn within a week, and which would inform the authorities what had happened.

Then he buckled on his weapon-belt, and motioning for Smith to do the same, left the offices, making his way toward the air-lock.

In a very few minutes Starr and Smith were encased in space-suits, and were leaping grotesquely over the icy crater-bottom.

When Smith had sealed the door of the converted ore-car shut behind him, Starr started the heating and oxygen-generating appliances, and it was not long before the pair were wriggling out of their space-suits.

No trouble was experienced in finding the crater with the "bubbles" in its bottom, and down into these the rejuvenated ore-car dropped, forging along at about twenty miles an hour. Captain Richard Starr and Lieutenant Jerry Smith were off on their journey.

4. "We're Going to Crash!"

SINCE the probable speed of the *Meteor IV* was about three times that of the ore-car over the same ground, the impatient Starr was forced to lie back and pass the long hours away with idle conversation.

During this time Smith, who had but recently been graduated from the U. A. F. to the Legion and consequently did not know all its history, eagerly inquired into the story of the Legion and why traces of a lunar civilization had never before been discovered. Starr, glad of the opportunity to pass away the time, willingly complied with the request and related a brief sketch of lunar history.

"Not so very long ago the Trans-spatial Service Legion was non-existent," Captain Starr began. "It has been some eighty-seven years since the moon was claimed for the World Government by one Isaac

Simonsburg, one of the first men ever to reach this satellite.

"It was he who discovered the rich lunar deposits of iron, gold, silver, and all the other useful elements, including a liberal sprinkling of radium. He realized how invaluable this information was, due to the steady petering out of the mines back on Earth, and so spent all his time here in locating veins of ores suitable to be developed into mines, rather than searching for signs of a vanished race.

"As soon as Simonsburg returned to Earth the World Government gave him more money than he could spend in two lifetimes, and decided to organize a company to import the desired ores to the mother planet.

"The Trans-spatial Service Legion was the result of this decision. When the Council decided that the T. S. L. was to be created, they agreed that the best thing to do would be to cut down the United Aerial Forces—which is, as you know, the only thing in the line of armies or navies that Earth yet maintains—and to transfer these men to the new Legion. That is why we are strictly a military organization," and he pointed to his collar and shoulder insignia as an example.

"Private parties were forbidden to set foot on the moon without special permission from the Council. That prevented all further exploration on the part of the public. When people clamored for news of the strange, new world, the World Government allowed the televisor-reporters to investigate a few craters, take one or two quick trips to the other side of the moon, then shipped them home. And that is as far as the thing went. The only real investigating that has been done has been accomplished by men stationed at the Moon Station, and that only on the sly.

"It is certain that no one ever dreamed of finding a city *inside* the moon, and no

one even tried to get to the inner world. That is, no one did until last Period. Then the *Thunderbolt* was sent out to explore some far-away spot where a vast deposit of copper was reported to have been found. Whether or not the *Thunderbolt* was stolen by the moon-men is not certain, yet somehow she vanished, leaving no trace.

"Twenty hours after she disappeared, that Period was up. Our relief fleet was informed of the ship's disappearance and was left the task of locating her. The *America VII* was sent out to search the moon's surface, and promptly ceased radioing reports of her progress to us. I ordered out the *Meteor IV* immediately, for I was considerably worried. And now the moon-men have got her too!"

DURING this time Smith had been at the controls. Now Starr took over the guidance of the ore-car while the lieutenant manipulated the somewhat feeble searchlight. In all their cruising thus far, the pair had seen nothing singular outside the natural, fantastically shaped stalactites and stalagmites, around which they occasionally had to dodge. So far they had not even reached the spot where the shaft and its wonderful staircase were situated.

But now an excited cry broke from both men simultaneously.

"What is that, ahead there?" exclaimed Starr breathlessly. "It is the shaft! Yes, it is the shaft, at last!"

As they drew nearer to the huge mound of earth that was bathed in the probing finger of the searchlight, the two no longer had any doubt that it was the pile of debris mentioned by the younger Starr in his first message.

The scent was growing warm! In a little more than three hours now they should reach the cavern of light. Captain

Starr exulted at the thought. He could scarcely contain himself for eagerness.

"Here we are above the shaft," said the thrilled Starr to the no less enthusiastic Smith. "Shall we descend?"

"Righto, sir. Without delay."

There came a clicking as Starr punched the keyboard. With a wheeze, the ore-car stopped its horizontal flight, and after hovering a second, commenced very slowly to sink into the blackness of the pit.

Five minutes passed in utter silence.

"Blast it!" fumed the elder man at last. "What is the matter with this infernal trash-pile, anyway?" He leaned forward, glaring at the speed indicator. With a grunt of irritation, Captain Starr turned to his companion. "Is it all right with you, lieutenant, if I drop her nose down? We might eventually get to the bottom, that way."

"That's all right with me, sir. I'm strapped in."

"Good. Here we go!"

Immediately the odd-looking conveyance pivoted so that it hung nose downward. With a cough and a little spurt of flame, it suddenly shot down at terrific speed. The rush of air whistled past the plummeting ore-car; the two breathless occupants clung desperately to their seats.

Down they roared, at ever-increasing speed. The loosely pivoted searchlight swung wildly to and fro, lighting up first one side, then another of the roughly circular shaft.

"I think I see the bottom!" yelled Smith hoarsely. "Slow her down!"

Starr, frightened, reached for the control-board. The swinging searchlight played momentarily on a sharp outcropping of rock immediately below. Starr's horrified eyes saw it and he jabbed frantically at the keys with both hands. He shrieked:

"Look out! We're going to crash!"

5. In the Moon City

LIEUTENANT Samuel Haddon Steele—known to his intimates more simply as "Rusty" Steele—groaned and struck out feebly. Something was tugging at his head, evidently trying to pull it from his shoulders. At each pull, a searing pain shot through his brain, causing him great agony.

"Lemme 'lone," he muttered ferociously, if a bit thickly. He grabbed his tormenter by the arm. It did not then appear strange to him that the arm felt like nothing so much as a bundle of wire. His brain was too numbed to be astonished at anything.

At his touch the arm jerkily retreated. Finding the pain in his head diminishing to a mere throbbing ache, Steele managed to open his eyes. What he saw gave him the greatest shock of his life.

Bending over him was—a Thing. In spite of the fact that all Steele could see was the face, with its ancient, parchment skin drawn tightly as a drum over the skull, he shivered with nausea. Huge, yellowish eyes that held a vacant look gazed into his own from deep in sunken sockets, like a dead man's. The head was totally devoid of hair, and the veinless pate shone like a polished surface.

Nose there was none, unless a shrivelled flap of skin in the center of the grisly face could be flattered by the name. But it was the Thing's mouth that chilled Steele with horror. This was merely an ugly gash above the bony chin. The lips were drawn tightly back over the bloodless gums, disclosing a double row of rotten yellow fangs in the mirthless grin of a skeleton.

Steele shuddered and motioned for the Thing to go away. Like an automaton the ghastly monstrosity backed away a few feet and stood motionless.

"I hope this is a dream," breathed

Steele, sitting up. He placed a shaky hand to his throbbing head and was surprised to find his curiously rust-red, curly hair was still covered by his thought-helmet. It had been the Thing's endeavors to pry it loose that had awakened Steele to consciousness. His hand came away sticky with a creamy ointment.

In spite of himself the T. S. L. man's eyes turned themselves in a fascinated gaze toward the Thing. He noted with interest that the Thing was clothed in a garment of gleaming chain mail. Its knobby hand held a small can of the stuff that was on Steele's forehead.

"Sizzling suns!" remarked Steele to himself. "I've been nursed back to consciousness by a living mummy!"

Vainly striving to recall how he had come to be lying at the feet of the mummy-man, Steele cast about his surroundings for a clue. That he was in some sort of cell was easily apparent by reason of the stone walls of the room as well as by the sturdy metal door with its heavy complicated locks on its outside surface. Also the single tiny window, crisscrossed with a series of steel bars, gave a prison-like effect to the room.

Overcoming his repulsion, Steele addressed to the Thing this remark: "Say, Oswald, where are we and how did we happen to get together?"

The mummy-man stood vacantly staring at the flippant Earthman without a sound. Steele realized the absurdity of expecting this hideous denizen of the inner world to comprehend him. With knitted brow, the Legion man sought to clarify his befogged mind.

In a few seconds the whole thing came back to him. He remembered all the insane happenings aboard the *Meteor IV* which led up to his being struck down with a heavy wrench by his childhood comrade, Jack Starr. After that had come

darkness, until he had opened his eyes to find himself in this cell with his grotesque captor.

Yet he still did not know what had occurred to bring him inside this stone cell, and now he racked his brain to find a method of conversing with the mummy-man. Here at last was an ideal opportunity for using his thought-helmet.

Twisting the dial that tuned in on the various "thought-wave lengths"—which varied in different people—Steele concentrated hard. He continued to twirl the dial slowly, and finally got a result.

"If you hear this, raise your right hand," was his thought, and he was elated in the extreme when the mummy-man's hand came up with a jerk. Being careful to leave the tuning-dial untouched, Steele tried another thought.

"Concentrate on your name."

In the Earthman's brain there suddenly appeared a thought seemingly expressed just as though the mummy-man had spoken it in good, clear English.

"I have no name. I am numbered 798-BV-46. You need not waste your effort in thinking so hard. I can get your thought impulses quite plainly."

The joyful Steele demanded of the silent, weird being before him: "How did I get here? Was it you who drugged my friends and——"

Keen and cold as a cut from a knife the reply of the creature etched itself in Steele's mind before he had got his own thoughts into proper sending order.

"I am merely the temporary mouth-piece of the Ten," was the message. "If you wish an interview with the Ten, who will answer your questions if they so deign, follow me." And the gaunt monster stepped jerkily into the passageway outside the cell.

Realizing the communication was more of a command than an invitation, Steele

followed the mummy-man with alacrity, consumed with curiosity about the strange world he was about to view. As he emerged from his cell the Earthman noticed that two more of the dead-faced mummy-men had joined him and his guide. These too, he noted, wore tunics of chain-mail, and he decided that the garment was the common attire of the moon-beings.

THE journey from the tower—for in such a place had Steele been incarcerated—to the ground was a nightmare experience. The cold stone hallways were filled with the grotesque, machine-like moon-men, who went their various ways with dull, vacant faces, paying not the slightest heed to the newcomer.

Steele saw with a shiver of horror that not infrequently the mummy-men were minus a natural arm or leg and had a metal one in its stead. These unfortunates seemed unmindful of their artificial limb and used it as deftly as they did their natural ones. All of them seemed to be outfitted with metal feet joined to their ankles, on which they clattered noisily about their business.

Not once did Steele see two of the mummy-men engage in conversation. Except for the clatter of metal feet on stone floor, the workers were as silent as ghosts, uttering not the tiniest sound.

Nearly all the moon-men bore burdens of some sort, ranging everywhere from baskets of strangely colored powders for which Steele could conceive no possible use, to large slabs of shiny metal. The mazes of whirring machinery glimpsed through half-open doors gave the Earthman the impression that he was in a mighty factory. What was being manufactured he had not the slightest conception.

The little party had long since ceased

descending the wide, gently sloping ramps that connected the different floors, and finally a mighty door of heavy metal swung open before them, and the Earthman and his guides stepped upon a heavy carpet of spongy, rubber-like growth of luminous plants. A chill breeze swept refreshingly past the Earthman and was gone. They were outside the building.

6. *Traitor?*

STEELE looked about him with interest. The massive stone structure from which he had just emerged was part of a regular chain of like edifices stretching out in a gigantic circle. There were perhaps a hundred of the solid stone buildings enclosing Steele and his guards within a circular courtyard with a radius of approximately a mile, as near as Steele could judge.

The T. S. L. man turned his gaze toward the front, as the party started to march out over the carpet of phosphorescent weed toward the middle of the enclosure. In what appeared to be the mathematical center of it stood a group of glittering metal palaces. The reflection of light from the silvery spires and turrets almost blinded Steele after his sojourn in the semi-darkness of the outer stone city. The gleaming block of fairy-like castles seemed as unreal as a mirage. Steele blinked and looked again to see if they were still there.

A peculiar rhythmic sound broke into the Earthman's consciousness, and looking down, he beheld its cause. The brightly glowing moon plants were thick underfoot, and when each of the little party set down a foot a number of the bulbous brittle things were crushed. As each bulb went flat with a hollow pop, a tiny fat writhing thing slid away from the advancing feet with a gliding, snake-like motion.

In fascination Steele stopped to follow one of the living seeds on its course. The creamy-white object soon ceased its wriggling and, upending itself in a little hollow between two of the bulbs, became rigid. In two minutes the visible portion had swollen into a glowing ball fully half the size of the shining globes around it. The somewhat nauseated Steele imagined that if he waited for perhaps an hour the thing would become full-grown and burst, sending a new seed out to begin a new life-cycle.

Steele hurried forward, desiring to cross the patch of moon-plant as soon as possible. Was the ghastly thing animal or plant? He could not hazard a guess. His thought-cell to his guards remained unanswered. Not since they had left his cell had Steele been able to elicit a reply from any of them. And pondering over their reticence, the Earthman forgot about the slimy worm-things that came from the glowing bulbs.

In a few moments more the strange quartet had entered one of the metal castles, the Earthman discovering with some surprize that there were even some of the burden-laden workers there. Without pause the moon-men led the way up one of several metal ramps—everything was metal here, Steele noticed—toward the upper floors.

Steele suddenly bethought himself of his forehead and its ointment-covered cut. Reaching up a cautious finger he touched the place that was daubed with sticky stuff. To his utter astoundment the ugly gash was already partly healed! It was now no more than a slight cut, due to the magic of the moon-man's salve. Steele's estimation of the mummy-men rose a notch or two.

And then a strange thing happened.

Steele, with some difficulty, had finally managed to wriggle out of the battered

thought-helmet and was examining it to see if it had been injured in any way. Satisfied that it was in perfect working order, if somewhat dented, Steele was about to place the headpiece back where it belonged when he caught the staring eyes of one of his captors boring down into his mind, chillingly. For the barest fraction of a second the two gazed at each other; then Steele became aware of a sudden unaccountable impulse to toss away his helmet. The desire grew strong within him and he raised the glittering object preparatory to dashing it against the wall.

Then with an effort he managed to wrench loose his fascinated eyes from the yellow ones of the moon-thing. Quickly he jammed the helmet back on his head and fastened the chin-strap securely. The mummy-man's eyes were no longer hypnotic; they were only dull and vacant. Steele buttoned up his tunic, as he shivered with a chill. What was ailing him? Why should he desire to throw away his thought-helmet when it had proved so useful to him in this strange inner world of the moon?

The Earthman glanced sharply at his guards. All three were staring straight to the front, trudging up the ramp.

HE DID not have long to muse over his recent extraordinary behavior, for at that moment the Earthman was led off the ramp into a level passage where he saw something that made his heart leap.

At the far end of the straight corridor Steele glimpsed a scarlet and white uniform. It was Jack Starr!

"Jack!" Steele shouted and started off down the hall.

"Wait."

A thin but powerful arm reached out and clenched itself on the Earthman's wrist.

"It is not the wish of the Ten that you see your comrade now," said one of the mummy-men tonelessly, yet somehow conveying the impression of finality.

The fingers around Steele's wrist hurt. He flared into anger and wrenched his arm loose. Without a word he strode off toward the retreating Jack Starr, who appeared not to have heard his name called. Steele had not taken two steps before one of the moon-men grasped him roughly by the shoulder, spinning him around.

The resentful Earthman said nothing. Instead, he drew back his arm and let fly at his tormenter, then ran after his comrade. The mummy-man Steele had hit tumbled backward to the floor and did not rise; but the other guards were after the running Earthman instantly.

But they could not catch the fleet-footed Steele. Dodging in and out among the burden-laden workers, Steele swiftly drew close to his slowly walking friend before he met the least opposition. He was not three yards behind the unhearing Starr when some workers dropped their bundles and faced him menacingly.

"Turn back, Outsider. Turn back! The Ten order it!" one said, then collapsed as Steele plunged headlong into him like a football player.

A second later he stood at Starr's side.

"Jack! You're all right?" he exclaimed; then: "What's the matter? Don't you know me?"

The other had slowly set down a slab of shiny metal he had been carrying, turning to face Steele. Starr's clouded eyes, which gave Steele the impression that they were blind, held no light of recognition. Steele stood looking at his friend, dumfounded.

Without warning, Starr suddenly swung his fist full into his comrade's face. Steele dropped heavily to the floor, stunned by the blow.

"Hereafter see that you obey the Ten," said Starr in icy reprimand. Turning on his heel, he picked up his sheet of metal and disappeared around the corner with his burden.

The mummy-man Steele had struck dispassionately helped the dazed Earthman to his feet. "Come. Will you follow now?" was all he said.

Without further resistance, the bewildered Steele, rubbing his bruised jaw, accompanied the automaton-like guides down the hall until they stopped in front of a ponderous, thickly engraved metal door. Its surfacing was a solid mass of intricate, fantastic design; a shiny plaque in the center of the magnificent tracings bore a gem-inlaid series of hieroglyphics. Slowly, majestically, the massive portal swung noiselessly inward.

Steele had been vainly struggling to solve the mystery of Starr's actions, trying to substitute something for the dreadful solution that the lieutenant had turned traitor and was now in the employ of the moon-men; but now he put the puzzle aside in anticipation of what lay on the other side of the jewel-incrusted door.

He guessed instantly that in the immense room beyond was the spot where he was to have his interview with the Ten—the rulers of the Moon City. At the gesture of the moon-men the Earthman, drawing himself stiffly erect and presenting a striking picture in spite of his dirt-streaked uniform, strode forward with dignified grace into the ornate council room of the Moon City. He was the first interplanetary ambassador, and as fitting a specimen of Earth's finest as could be found anywhere.

The terrible plan of the Masters of the Moon to enslave the Earth and transform its inhabitants into mindless robots will be revealed in the sensational chapters of this story in next month's WEIRD TALES. Don't miss it.



Weird Tales

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Volume 23

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"In fascination the Earthman stared."



Vampires of the Moon

By A. W. BERNAL

A sensational story of the Masters of the Moon and their mindless slaves—and a terrible threat against the inhabitants of Earth

The Story Thus Far

WHEN Captain Richard Starr of the Trans-spatial Service Legion, stationed at Moon Headquarters, instructed his younger brother, Lieutenant John Starr, to go search for two missing Legion space-ships—the *Thunderbolt* and the *America VII*—he did not imagine what horrific events loomed just ahead.

Jack Starr, with his friends Lieutenant Hal Bradley and Rusty Steele, took the *Meteor IV* and, by chance, strayed down a chain of vast caverns in the pitted face of the moon where they stumbled upon a gigantic stone staircase evidently hewn ages ago by intelligent beings. The staircase apparently led to the satellite's interior. Upon following this strange path-

way, the trio from Earth discovered the Moon City situated in a cave lighted by a carpet of phosphorescent plant-growth. Tests showed that there was breathable air in this inner-world of the moon.

After unexplainable occurrences, during which all his comrades apparently went insane and Jack Starr smashed the ship's radio against his will, Steele was hit on the head with a heavy wrench wielded by the younger Starr. Steele awoke to find himself a captive in the Moon City with no knowledge of the whereabouts of his comrades or the spaceship *Meteor IV*.

By means of a helmet of his own devising, Steele was able to converse with his captors by thought-transference. When the Earthman asked questions, his jailer—a living mummy—simply commanded him to follow and led the way to the audience chamber of the Ten, the ruling council of the mummy-men.

On the way, Steele met his friend Jack Starr, who was working with a group of the half-alive moon-men. Jack ignored the greeting of his fellow Legionnaire and, acting as though in a dream, struck down the bewildered Steele. Ere the latter could find a reason for the attack, his captors had pushed him down a corridor and halted before a massive door.

Beyond this great portal Steele was to meet the all-powerful Ten and find a solution to the uncanny situation in which he found himself. The Earthman squared his shoulders and marched forward into the audience chamber.

Meanwhile Captain Richard Starr, after having received an ominously incoherent radio message, had understood that his brother's life was somehow in danger. With as much speed as possible he commandeered the only usable ship on the moon at the time, a decrepit ore-carrier, and was off to the rescue. Accompanying

him was Lieutenant Jerry Smith, eager for an encounter with the monstrosities of the Moon City.

In an endeavor to speed up the ore-carrier, Captain Starr dropped the ancient ship through the unfathomable blackness of a huge pit in the moon's interior. Before he realized it, the rocky bottom of the shaft loomed close beneath and Starr frantically jabbed at the control-studs screaming: "Look out! We're going to crash!"

7. Down the Tunnel Alone

WITH a splintering, rending shock the hurtling ore-car crashed upon the outcropping of rock in the shaft of the giant staircase. Amid the smashing of ports and the straining of metal, one whole side was completely shorn off the improvised battleship, spilling its stunned occupants down the steep, jagged side of the shaft. The remainder of the ore-car slid on down to the foot of the great stone staircase, to become a tangled mass of wreckage.

The bodies of Captain Richard Starr and Lieutenant Jerry Smith lay still upon a sort of platform near the bottom of the shaft. The slowly settling dust of centuries, that had been stirred up by the smash-up, sifted down upon the motionless forms in a thin, soft blanket. It was lucky that the pair had been thrown out of the ore-car at its first shock, for had they gone on down with it, their bodies would have become an unrecognizable pulp.

It was some time later when Jerry Smith awoke to consciousness with a groan. Dizzily he sat up. His first thoughts were of his right arm, which hung limply at his side; he tried to move it but could not.

"Broken," he muttered painfully, and

the whispered word echoed eerily back to him.

He sat awhile without getting up, trying to collect his thoughts. Finally, after a fit of sneezing, brought on by a swirl of dust, the T. S. L. man staggered unsteadily to his feet. The flying dust caused a cut on his cheek to smart. He glanced at his wrist chronometer to see how long he had lain unconscious, but found it smashed. Straining his eyes in the semi-darkness of the shaft, he looked about him.

Up to this time, no thought of his comrade had entered his mind; he seemed to have forgotten about him. But now his eyes fell upon the motionless form of Captain Starr, and with a few lurching steps the younger man was at the officer's side. For a long time Smith worked feverishly with his one good arm in an effort to resuscitate his superior. At last he desisted in his futile attempts to revive the captain.

Lieutenant Smith lay back, panting from his exertion. He remembered the first-aid kit that he had thrown in the ore-car at the last moment before the trip. As soon as he could catch his breath, he hurried down the great stone staircase in rapid leaps toward the wreckage at the bottom.

He found the kit without much trouble and, since it seemed to be in good condition, fastened it to his weapon-belt. Turning away from the smashed ore-car his eyes fell on the car's water tank. The container had split open at one end but it was still nearly half full. Since the tank was not large, and had less weight on account of the lesser gravity of the moon, it was without real effort that he managed to lug it up the steps after him.

As rapidly as he could with his uninjured arm, Smith bathed and bandaged Starr's wounds. It was rather a difficult job, for most of the gashes were on the

head and face, with a particularly long one cutting a rough semicircle above the left ear. But Smith no longer feared for the other's life, for he had noted the unconscious man to be breathing easily now.

After cleansing and bandaging his own wounds, he lay down to rest. He had done all he knew how to do to revive Starr; all he could do now was wait.

IT WAS some four hours later by Starr's chronometer — which had luckily escaped all damage except for a broken crystal—that the unconscious man opened his eyes.

He was rather weak and unsteady on his feet for awhile, due to his loss of blood, for his wounds had bled profusely. But before twenty-four hours had elapsed he was almost as good as well, even to the extent of helping Smith with the work of establishing some sort of a camp.

Starr was consumed with worry because the ore-car was disabled beyond all possible chance of repair. There were still many miles to be covered before their goal, the Moon City, was reached. Besides, of what use could they be to Jack now? He had only his hand weapons with which to fight, and as a combatant, Smith was certainly out. A man can't do battle when he has a broken arm and a crippled knee. And supposing they did rescue Jack, what then? How could they escape? To traverse all the miles between the inner world and the surface on foot was hopeless.

"I say, sir," remarked Jerry Smith, breaking in on the other's musings, "have you figured out a way to get out of here; whether it's to go back to the Station, or on to the Moon City?"

"No, I haven't," responded Starr slowly. He opened a tin of concentrated food biscuits and offered them to Smith before continuing. "But whatever we do will

have to be done without delay. You know we have less than three weeks in which to see Jack alive. If it takes us longer than that to get to the Moon City, we shall be too late to save him.

"Even though we must proceed on foot and rely upon finding a ship at the Moon City to escape with, I'm for going on. There is no sense in waiting here, and we can not go back to the Station. What could we use for protection against lack of oxygen? We could never breathe the air at the surface, could we?"

"No," Smith nodded, "we couldn't. I guess the only thing for you to do is to push on alone."

Starr gave his junior officer an incredulous look.

"I mean my leg, sir. I could not hope to make it to the Moon City on foot; not over such ground as that which lies ahead. But don't let that stop you, sir," Smith added quickly, as Starr's shoulders began to sink dejectedly.

"Why, I could not leave you here, Smith."

"Surely, sir. Why not? The boys will be down here after us in a week as soon as they open that letter you left them. I know that you won't rest until you are at Jack's side, sir. And if you can, you might steal a ship from the moon-men and get back to the shaft within a couple of days. At any rate, whether you get back in a week's time or not, we'll all be saved. That Petrovsky super-ship you radioed for must be well on her way to the moon by this time, and when the bunch read your letter telling where we are, they'll lose no time in shooting down the shaft after us. They can't fail to see this camp and pick me up. And it will help a lot to have you already at the Moon City, sir. Or at least, near it. You can be sizing up the situation and dope out

a plan of action while you're waiting for us to arrive. Don't you——"

"I'll do it!" exclaimed Starr suddenly. "That's a good idea."

Having made his decision, Captain Starr tarried only long enough to make up a packet of provisions, which consisted, for the most part, of water, then bade Lieutenant Smith good-bye, and set out upon his long journey.

THE way was difficult, since the floor of the great dark tunnel was extremely ragged and uneven. Starr, who was forced to go slowly because of his weakness from loss of blood, continually was forced to climb up and down over miniature mountains. Even aided as he was by the moon's lesser gravity, the Legion man made very little forward progress. It was like hiking over the gigantic peaked waves of a frozen ocean, and it seemed hours to the adventurer before he even got out of sight of Smith's little camp.

For long he trudged down the gloomy horizontal tunnel that had its origin at the foot of the great stone staircase. He was thankful that there was only the single passage to the cave of the Moon City, because it would have been only too easy to become lost through a side opening.

At first the Earthman had been awed at the magnificent rock formations he could but dimly discern in the half-light. Each new twist in the tunnel, and there were many, disclosed new vistas of wonder. But when Starr had marched on until his legs seemed dead and each step was torture, he had eyes only for the boulder-strewn ground ahead in order that he might seek out the easiest path.

Finally he could go no farther; he was dog-tired. The end of the tunnel was still out of sight and the Earthman could not guess how many more miles he had yet to travel. It seemed ages since he had

rest, and Starr decided that he could go no farther until he had some.

No sooner had he laid his weary body down upon the stony ground than he was fast asleep. For much longer than he would have desired, Starr lay in a dreamless slumber, his tired body recuperating from the merciless march he had forced himself through. The precious time he thought to have gained by his long tramp was more than lost by the period of heavy stupor in which he lay.

A blinding glare of light was what brought Captain Starr out of his deep sleep. The beam poured its white radiance in confusing intensity upon the startled Earthman. Utterly bewildered, Starr rolled over and tried to make out the cause of the fearful brilliance.

His light-blinded eyes could barely distinguish a huge, dark something behind the searchlight's source, but what he did make out brought him to his feet in a chill of horror. In sheer terror, he shot a dazzled look about him for a hiding-place. It was useless; he could not see even a small crevice.

That dim shape behind the searchlight was the blue-black hull of the *Meteor IV*!

Coming from the cave of light and heading for the surface, the dark-metaled, silent space-cruiser had rounded a bend in the tunnel and sent her guide-beam shooting straight at the sleeping Earthman. Bathed in the light of the guide-beam, the white and scarlet Earthman was perfectly visible to whoever was in the control room.

The *Meteor IV* was rapidly slowing to a stop. The door in the conning-tower clanged open. Starr, white-faced, clutched the butt of one of the pistols in his weapon-belt.

"The moon-men," he choked. "It is the moon-men! They are going to get me!" And he stood, blinded by the glare

of the guide-beams, with not even the tiniest crevice in the rock wall within reach to hide in.

8. Audience with the Tan

STEELE paced with military stiffness into the council room of the moon-men. To his astonishment, he saw, as he faced a wide dais at the end of the long room, that he was entirely alone. The room seemed empty; he was its only occupant.

Directly above the low platform, the Earthman saw a huge oval whose center was a gleaming, silver-flecked, azure field. The blue seemed to be rather a haze in the gold frame which surrounded it, than a solid substance. As the Earthman stood watching it, the cloud of delicate-hued blue and silver seemed to quiver and vibrate as does a film of soap-bubble in a gentle breeze.

Fascinated, Steele gaped in wonderment, rooted to the spot. Idly, his fingers strayed to the control-box of his thought-helmet and unthinkingly he twirled the dial thereon. Suddenly he was startled nearly out of his wits when, in the course of his tuning, a thought flashed into his mind with the abruptness and shock of a shouted word. Steele's mouth dropped open in amazement; then he winced as the words again formed in his brain. The force with which the words impinged on his mind was not alone the cause of Steele's astonishment; it was, in part, the sentence itself:

"Are you Samuel Haddon Steele?"

It seemed to echo in his brain over and over. Then he realized what was happening and as quickly as he could marshal his thoughts Steele replied.

"Yes. That is my name. Who and where are you?"

Clearly, almost too strongly, came the answer.

"This is the voice of the Ten. We are in our sending-chambers, which are scattered throughout the buildings of the Inner City. Our combined thought-impulses are coming to you there in the Council Hall from the Mouthpiece. You are looking at the Mouthpiece now; it is that gold-encircled oval of vibrations above the dais."

Steele, staring fascinatedly at the shimmering Mouthpiece, sent this sentence:

"What do you want with me and my comrades? Wh——"

Like a dash of icy water, the hostile, supercilious response of the Ten filled the Earthman's mind.

"Silence! It is not for you to ask aught of us. The captive does not question the captor, it is the other way about. But you will learn much about us presently, for it suits our purpose that you do so. But first, are you and the fellow Bradley and the one Starr the only members of your crew who know how to guide your ships?"

The surprized and puzzled Earthman answered in the positive. The crew of a Legion cruiser is not supposed to know much about the complicated method of button-control of the space-ship.

There followed a short pause during which the vibration of the Mouthpiece became almost nil, and the quivering, sensitive field of silver-splashed blue became a smooth, quiet surface. Then the gold oval again coruscated with the rapid color-vibrations of the Mouthpiece as the Ten thought-spoke to the awed Earthman.

"Listen well, Outsider," came the clear-cut, cold voice in Steele's brain. "Listen well to what we are about to tell you, as did your comrades. We are on the verge of a great project and we have need of you Outsiders; so listen to our history and think well of our vast determination and greater power. Listen, and

do not ask questions, for we shall tell you all that we wish you to know and nothing more."

Then as Steele sat motionless, watching the Mouthpiece, there unfolded inside his brain the story of the moon-men. For he knew not how long a time he sat in rapt receptive mood, hearing mentally the amazing tale of the vanished surface-people, the Haxomelians.

THOUSANDS of years before life, in the sense that it is known today, appeared on Earth, the Haxomelians—or surface-people—dwelt in wonderful cities on the face of the moon. Being more inclined to other more abstract phases of science, the Haxomelian scientists made very few attempts to bridge the gulf between their world and the mother planet, except by means of super-powered telescopes.

Thus it was that even had they had time to prepare for such a trip, the Haxomelians would probably never have thought of Earth as a refuge from the Great Catastrophe. But they had not the time, for the Great Catastrophe came with overpowering swiftness.

The Great Catastrophe was that most fearful, soul-warping cataclysm when the entire face of the moon seemed suddenly to become infected with monstrous volcanoes which spewed boiling rock and liquid metals down upon the defenseless people, in their crowded moon metropolises. The satellite writhed like a living thing under the hideous cosmic plague.

Virtually the whole surface of the dis rupting planet changed almost overnight from lush, life-filled valleys and hive-like, peaceful cities into a nightmare of ghastly sores—huge fiery cauldrons of foaming, seething death; jagged monstrosities stretching up into the high reaches of the sullen, murky atmosphere;

poisoned blisters that bubbled and burst, loosing a billowing inferno of flaming gases upon the doomed Haxomelians.

When at last the awful transformation had been wrought and the reeling world grew steady once again, the sun shone down upon a seared and airless rotten shell of a devastated world. The little planet's upper crust was utterly barren of any form of life.

But the Haxomelians were not totally destroyed.

When gigantic cracks swallowed up cities, meadows and oceans like the ravenous mouths of Titans, the great fissures also sucked down the moon's atmosphere in vast gulps, sealing it in huge chambers far down in the bowels of the planet. And these mighty, hideously mocking wounds of the anguishing world yawned and swallowed up a whole metropolis, transporting it, undemolished, far into the moon's interior, then cracked shut in an ugly scar while the world rocked under the agony of the shock.

The Haxomelians were brave. The remnant of them yet alive in the dark, sealed tomb miles below the planet's crust did not give up, but fought valiantly to keep the flame of life kindled.

Although the layer of their prison was a red-hot oven of lava-beds, the Haxomelians sensed a stratum of cooler caverns farther down. A continual rush of air tore screaming up from bottomless cracks in the floor of the black tomb. The tenacious Haxomelians resolved to save themselves from a sweetering, hideous death by forcing a path down through the still rumbling maw of the moon. So down into an abysmal rift the Haxomelians began their exodus.

It soon became apparent that although there were great stretches of inhabitable, lake-filled chambers farther down inside the inner world, there were many miles

of blistering ground to be traversed ere these havens of the interior could be reached. A stratum of witheringly hot ground lay like an impassable barrier barring the way of the courageous survivors of the fearsome holocaust. The great problem was now how to get across the searing band of volcano-beds into the inner world.

For all survivors to hew their way would be utter folly because, although the Haxomelians had solved the secret of perpetual life, they were not at all immune from pain. But the necessity for immediate action soon caused a plan to be formulated.

For centuries the Haxomelians had used thought-transference to converse with, and now they went a step further. A party of the Haxomelians united their thoughts and assumed control over a body of the survivors who volunteered their services; they usurped the very minds of the others, borrowed their bodies!

The Haxomelians relinquishing their personalities to the directive powers of the Xinthquils, or Controllers, then became merely efficient, unfeeling cogs of a great machine. As long as their own minds were banished from their bodies, the Yultats, or Workers, could feel no pain; they were as inanimate machines.

So it was that a mass of temporarily mindless Yultats worked superhumanly in blistering temperatures, forcing a way down to the cool inner world. The Xinthquils, seeing through the eyes of the sweating Yultats, quickly found a path of least resistance to the caves of the phosphorescent growths.

When the Xinthquils were ready for a hurried dash along the trail cleared by the slaving Yultats, they knew that before them lay a comparatively short, direct route to the moon's center, with even a

mighty spiralling staircase to help them at one stage of their journey.

And now it became the duty of the Yultats to reverse positions with the Xinthquuls: to become Controllers instead of Workers, in order that the Haxomelians at the world's crust could follow painlessly along the steaming, life-withering inferno between the two parties of refugees.

But those at the inner world, crafty, envious planners that they were, evolved a terrible scheme. They took over the wills of their fellows at the upper world, and after they had brought them, unscathed, down to the cave of light, *kept them mentally enslaved!*

The precious supply of the life-giving compound was limited now, since it was made from a plant that did not grow at the inner world; so the cruel, mind-vampirizing Xinthquuls hoarded the supply of the chemical, using it sparingly on their own bodies, but giving none to their hapless slaves. Consequently, the lifeless shells of the Yultats withered through the centuries into mere hideous, mummified entities, while the mind-sucking Controllers not only chemically supplied themselves with the bloom of youth, but also conserved their bodily energies by allowing the mindless Yultats to perform for them even the tiniest deed requiring physical action.

Thus it was that the Xinthquuls—of which the Ten were chosen representatives—had lived in the cave of light for thousands of years, spending their time in dreaming and thinking, while their strange city was kept going by a hoard of mindless, mummified husks of what had once been men and women.

9. Berserk

AND now," the icy voice of the Ten still poured itself into Steele's eager brain, "we come to the present, and to our

great project we are about to undertake.

"We have decided to migrate to your planet and make it our home, using your peoples for fresh, strong Yultats!"

Steele could not think. His mind swirled on the border of black chaos. The Ten continued without pause, as though their last words were simple, commonplace information.

"The reason we are going to take over your Earth is because we Xinthquuls desire to increase our race. Since we have been hidden away here in these depths of our planet, there has never been a child born to us that ever reached maturity. Without exception, the infants died long ere they could speak. For, banished from the light of the sun as we are, that primal source of life and health has never given up to us its powerful, vital rays of strength.

"Believing as we did, that the way to the upper crust of our world was sealed for ever, and knowing that were it open to us, the way would be airless, we despaired of ever getting the sun's warm, invisible rays of life to our offspring to keep them healthy and bring them safely to maturity.

"But when the first band of Outsiders stumbled into this cave of light, we saw our chance. After assuming mental control of these beings we learned of your huge, sun-bathed sphere, where long basking in the sun's healthful rays was a common thing, and determined at once to get your peoples out of the way and utilize this warm world for ourselves.

"A new race of Yultats, too, will be most welcome, as these we now use are about worn out."

Steele could not even protest against this horrible plan of the fiendish Xinthquuls; the calm, unemphasized manner in which the Ten thought-spoke of the ghastly conquest, as though they were

dealing with some sort of unintelligent insect-life, left the Earthman stunned.

"And now, here is where you enter into our plans," the Ten still pursued the topic so terrifying to Steele. "Our present Yultats—the swarms of Earth will make excellent ones, and we shall breed them for just that purpose—are busily engaged in turning out a fleet of space-ships similar to the ones you use and equipped with the same kind of weapons, only vastly improved. We have accurately copied each detail of your ships and are therefore confident of our cruisers.

"But that is where the difficulty lies. We have been told that it takes many long years to train men to fly your Legion ships properly. We, besides being ignorant of mechanical things, are utterly foreign to the method of control you use in your ships. Consequently, although we can steer the space-ships ourselves, it would be extremely difficult for one of us to put a cruiser through war maneuvers at rapid speed. That is where you can aid us."

Steele, weak and trembling, rose to his feet, shaking his fist at the Mouthpiece. "Never! Never will I help you!"

"Silence, idiot!" thundered the thoughts of the Ten inside the horror-stricken Earthman's head. "Do not give us an answer yet. Think well. We can make excellent use of your comrades, Bradley and Starr, also, but you, who are the only one of your race that can even resist our thoughts and escape being mentally enslaved, we need particularly. In a short time, by a method known to us, you will become very efficient in guiding space-ships through commanding Yultats from a sending-chamber.

"Yet understand us. Should you refuse, it will not be long before we can acquire a fairly proficient method of controlling our ships, ourselves. No matter what your decision is, we shall

eventually succeed in conquering your world; for, although one of your friends seems to have gotten a message through to your chief, your minions will not have time to prepare fully to resist us by the time we are ready, even should you refuse our request. Remember, *we can not fail!*"

Steele's eyes blazed defiantly. He snarled half aloud:

"You can enslave me, body and soul, until the end of time, but never will I accede to your request, and neither will any other Earthman."

"Wait! Remember that whether you help us or not, your world is doomed. Your helping us will only speed up matters a little, and for this small saving of time—for we are impatient now, having waited for this opportunity for thousands of years—we shall reward you very richly. For your services, we offer you eternal life, the rank of a Xinthquul, and a portion of the Earth for you to have for your own!"

STEELE knew in his heart that every word the Xinthquuls had said was true. Whether he decided to throw in his lot with them or not, he felt that the ghoulish mind-vampires could not fail in their hideous plan of conquest.

Then mockingly came the cold voice of the Ten once more.

"Should you refuse," it said, "you will be subjected to an operation that will transform you for eternity into a mindless Yultat. Now we shall send you to where Starr and Bradley are thinking over this same proposal. Think well and decide wisely. We shall call for your answer in an hour. Remember, *we can not fail!* Go. That is all."

Steele twirled the control-dial of his thought-helmet so that he could receive no thought-commands from the Ten. If

only he could get his hands on those inhuman monsters, he'd ruin their ghastly plan of conquest! Seething with rage, the Earthman shook his clenched fists at the Mouthpiece.

And then he went mad.

"If there is a God in heaven, may he blast your hideous souls!" he shrieked, and rushed toward the dais above which was the oval of gold.

He was berserk, desiring only to wreak havoc on anything that had to do with the fiendish monsters of the moon. Insanely, he strove to mount the broad steps of the dais to smash the Mouthpiece; it seemed to him to be a symbol of the Xinthquuls that, if smashed, would destroy at least some of their power.

As if by magic, as the Earthman dashed across the metal floor of the huge Council Hall, there sprang from a hundred concealed openings a horde of the living-dead slaves—the Yultats. The room echoed with the clatter of metal feet on metal floors as the half-alive creatures swarmed over the dais to cut off the berserk Earthman from the Mouthpiece.

Before he had even reached the foot of the dais, a solid mass of Yultats barred his way. Yet he did not stop. With a mighty leap, to which the moon's lesser gravitational pull added tremendous power, Steele lunged into the midst of the guardians of the Mouthpiece.

Fighting with the strength of a maniac, he punched, bit, kicked and yelled as he went down with the surging Yultats on top of him. He cared not for the imminence of a terrible death, so long as he died in the act of rending asunder and destroying the age-old slaves of the Xinthquuls.

He did not know it, but the Yultats were also without any form of weapon. Until the Earthmen had brought them, weapons were unheard of in the under-

ground city of the moon. They stopped Steele's frenzied onslaught by sheer weight of numbers. Vainly struggling, he was soon pinned to the floor by a score of the Yultats.

Even so, the Earthman fought to wriggle free, and so fierce were his struggles that he finally shook off his attackers and wrenched himself loose.

Wildly, he flailed about with his arms, scattering the mummy-men like leaves in a storm. Jerking one of them off his feet, Steele swung him around like a club.

He soon realized that it was a hopeless task for him to try to keep up his smashing tactics for ever; so, turning swiftly on his heel, he hurled the Yultat he had been using as a human club soaring through the air straight toward the gold oval of the Mouthpiece.

In the brief glimpse he had of the results of his act, before he was deluged under squirming, tugging Yultats, Steele saw the flying body of the mummy-man strike the oval of vibrations in a direct hit. There was a brief sizzling crackle, a puff of acrid smoke; then the ashes of the Yultat sifted free of the apparently unharmed film of silver-splashed blue vibrations.

Then he saw no more for awhile, for he was picked bodily up from the floor by twenty pairs of bony hands, and lugged helplessly off toward the exit from the Council Hall.

Just before he was carried through the opening, however, he managed to squirm enough to get a momentary look at the late scene of battle. There was no sign of blood whatever, except for a few tiny splotches which had come from his own scratched and clawed body. There were many heads, torsos, and limbs of the Yultats scattered about over the dais, Steele noted with some satisfaction. There were

even three or four legless or armless individuals staggering erratically away from the dais, evidently feeling no pain.

He did not know whither he was being borne, nor did he care. His tired, aching body was being lulled into a sort of numbed indifference as to its surroundings. In the stuporous state in which he now felt himself sinking, the over-tired Earthman cared little what was happening. He closed his weary eyes and tried hard to forget everything and just rest easily as he was carried to his unknown destination.

10. *The Earthmen Decide*

WHEN Steele opened his eyes again, he found himself confronted by the welcome forms of Lieutenants Starr and Bradley.

"Well, old robot," smiled Starr, helping Steele to his feet, "how do you feel after your little beauty nap?"

"Jupiter, but I feel stiff and sore!" yawned Steele.

"Your interview with the Ten must have been more soothing than ours. We didn't feel much like sleeping afterward." This from Bradley.

"The Ten!" Steele's smile had vanished with the rapidity of light; he was wide awake now. "The Ten! Did they tell you what they're going to do? We have to choose between aiding those ghouls, or becoming like those foul monstrosities, the Yultats!

"Jack! Brad!" he clutched at their arms in terror. "The Earth—doomed—don't you——"

Starr put a consoling arm around the white-faced Steele.

"Listen, Rusty, old man," he soothed. "We still have a chance. Come on, old chap, buck up!"

"But, Jack," choked the other, raising

his hopeless eyes to the younger, blonder counterpart of Captain Richard Starr, "Jack, I . . . I don't want to choose . . . it isn't fair! Oh, why don't they kill us and get it over with?"

"Rusty Steele, are you a coward?" ground out Jack Starr. "Aren't we going to stop them? Aren't we going to wipe out this nest of rotten mind-vampires? Brad and I are. Snap out of it! If you've got any courage at all, you'll help us fight!"

The thrust had its desired effect. Steele, white as chalk, leapt to his feet.

"I'm not a coward!" he shouted. "I'll fight! We'll all fight! And we'll lick those devils, too!"

Bradley and Starr drew deep sighs of relief, then grinned at their comrade whose mood had so suddenly changed.

"That's the way to talk, Rusty. I thought you'd get a grip on yourself," Starr said, hugging Steele tightly. "We felt beaten, too, after we first heard the Xinthquuls tell us of their terrible plans. But we decided that if we fought them like the soldiers our Earth supposes us to be, we might find some way to outwit those demons. Get the idea?"

"You bet!" Steele was glowing with enthusiasm. "We'll beat this scum of the moon yet. We've got to. We're the Earth's only hope."

Thereupon, the trio entered into a discussion of all possible methods of escape. They understood perfectly that in the short time allotted them, they must devise some means of getting at least one of their party back to the Station to give warning of the mind-stealers' horrible plan of conquest.

"But it won't be easy to get away from these crafty devils," remarked Starr, at one point in the discussion. "You've got a big advantage over us, Rusty, in that thought-helmet of yours. It looks like you're our chief bet. Those vampires

can't get you to do whatever they want you to, as they can us. Tell him what happened to you, Brad."

"Well," said Bradley, "it occurred when they were leading me to the Council Hall. We were going down a long, straight corridor that was deserted, except for me and my three guides, and I thought I saw a chance to escape. I knew we were on the second floor, because I had just glanced out a window as we passed it; and I figured that I could hop out and fall two stories in this light gravity without hurting myself.

"So I hauled off and banged two of my guards into the wall as hard as I could, and kicked the other one hard enough to send him sprawling on his face; then I scooted back down the hallway toward the window, prepared to dive out of it before they caught me.

"Well, I hadn't sprinted more than five paces before I found myself slowing down to a walk. I tried to lift my knees up, but they just wouldn't go. Then I tried to stop and find out what was up, but it was no go. I seemed to be sitting on somebody's head, watching his legs go without being able to control his steps. Soon I found myself turning around and hiking back to the Yultats. And blamed if I didn't stoop and help 'em get to their feet, all against my will! Well, after that, I gave up and stepped right along with the boys, quiet as could be. I saw right there that it was no use to do any hesitating."

"YES," laughed Starr, when the other had finished, "and that reminds me of something I'd better tell you about, Rusty, old robot. If the moon-men toss a little vial of brilliant green gas at you, hold your breath. When we tried to make a break just after we got out of the Council Hall, they sprang that one on us.

"We decided to fool the Xinthquuls by concentrating hard on not giving in to their wills, and bashed in the heads of our guides with our fists" — he held up a bruised and swollen hand — "so *they* couldn't receive any thought-impulses. Then, thinking hard all the while so the Xinthquuls couldn't take control, we darted down the passageway. It worked splendidly until a single Yultat appeared at the far end of the corridor and tossed a little capsule of green stuff at us.

"The thing burst just ahead of us, and immediately a cloud of brilliant vapor swirled all around us in a billowing gust. We took one whiff on our way through it, then dropped like logs to the metal floor. It was a gas of suspended animation!

"We lay there, vividly sensing everything that went on, but without the power of moving a muscle. When the Yultats from some other part of the building came and picked us up, I could see my chest, and it was positively not moving up and down as it would have been had I been breathing. The Yultats packed us to this little cell like sacks of meal. I could feel my arms and legs dragging and dangling like the limbs of a doll, without being able to even give so much as a feeble twitch with them. But it soon wore off once we got here, and so we were fully able to control our movements long before you arrived on the scene. In fact, the Xinthquuls made me do a bit of work for them after I had recovered from the effects of the green gas. I had to clear out this room for us, and I guess it was while I was under control at that time that I met you in the hall and slammed you on the ear. However, I didn't know I had ever seen you until you told me about it. I want you to accept my apologies——"

But Steele interrupted him, to urge a

continuance of the discussion of plans for escape. In the limited space of time the Earthmen had to evolve a plan, it was hard to find one that might work.

Finally the trio decided upon a ruse that, while the chance of escape it offered was extremely slim, gave them a slight hope. At any rate, it was the best they could think of in the short time left before the Yultats would come knocking at the door.

THE unlocking of their cell door brought the conversation to an abrupt termination.

"Remember, Rusty," whispered Starr to Steele, hoping that the Ten were not tuning in on their conversation, "remember, the fate of the whole world rests with you. They can steal our minds from us, turning us against our friends, as when they made me hit you when you accosted me in the hall, but they can't steal yours. Rusty, old robot, don't let them get mental control of you, whatever you do. Keep your fingers on your thought-helmet control-dial, and if you feel any suggestions coming in that you don't want to receive, why, just tune them out immediately. And now, good-bye, and good luck."

"Good-bye, Rusty," called Bradley, as the cell door closed behind Steele, and then a Yultat guided the Earthman back to the Council Hall.

Steele went alone because it was part of the trio's plan that he should do so. If all three of the T. S. L. men should appear to agree with the Ten's idea of Earth conquest, tangible results would be expected too soon to fit in with the Earthmen's ruse. If one should throw in his lot with the Xinthquuls, he could stall for time by begging time to persuade the others to do likewise. This, at any rate, was Steele's intention.

"Say, Oscar, old corpse," said Steele

aloud, jokingly, to his stiffly pacing guide, "why don't we call a sky-taxi? Or haven't you got any conveyances in this dump? I haven't seen one anywhere."

"What need is there here for a conveyance?" replied the Yultat, to Steele's surprise, for he had expected no response. "A Xinthquul has no desire and no need to stir from his cushioned chambers. The less he uses his body, the more youthful it will remain. And until we get established on Earth and are able to manufacture or grow more of our powder of life, we must be conserving of our present supply.

"As for Yultats, who cares how much they must walk to do our bidding? Why build machines for other machines to ride in?"

Steele shivered as he thought of the queer double personality of the Yultats. Yet it was not really a dual personality affair, he told himself. The personality—the thoughts, the impulses that controlled the Yultat's actions—was that of the controlling Xinthquul; the Yultat merely received the instructions sent to him via thought-waves, translating and transforming them until they suited his body.

Further musings were cut off by the approach of the two to the beautifully decorated door of the Council Hall. Soon the Earthman was again facing the Mouthpiece, from whose dais all traces of battle had been effaced, waiting for recognition from the Ten.

Although he had set his control-dial so that he might receive the thought impulses of the Ten, he still kept his fingers on it so that he could instantly tune them out. He had not long to wait before the voice of the Ten came throbbing through his head:

"Have you reached a decision, Outsider? Why are you alone?"

Steele recited his piece:

"I have reached my decision. My friends can not quite make up their minds. I have decided to help you in your conquest of my planet, if you promise to give me eternal life, and a portion of the Earth for my own, on completion of your plans."

"You have chosen wisely, Outsider," pulsed the clear bell-tones of the Ten deep inside Steele's brain. "You will not regret your choice. We have an old saying in our world that runs, 'He who would be wise listens not to the tongue of his emotions, but to the tongue of his mind.' That is what you have done, Outsider. But you are an Outsider no longer; we do now already consider you as a fellow Xinthquul and our equal. To complete your appropriation of a Xinthquul identity, you shall no longer be known by the name which means a metal, but shall be henceforth called Eolarroon, which, translated from the ancient spoken language of the Haxomelians, means 'Wise Man from the Stars.'

"But what of your friends? Must they become Yultats?"

"No, Xinthquuls who are the Ten," hastily replied the Earthman. "If you do not harm them, I am sure that I shall be able to win them over to your cause eventually."

"Our cause." Steele winced a little at the icy reminder.

"I meant — our cause. Wait until after *we*," he emphasized the word, "have completed plans for our conquest. Then if I can't get them on our side they can be made into Yultats. But first, can I try to persuade them to join us?"

A short, hesitant pause, then:

"Yes, you may have a try at talking to

them. But just to give them a taste of being a Yultat, we shall temporarily control these Outsiders, making them work for us. No! Do not speak against our words. We shall discuss the subject no further."

"Very well, Xinthquuls who are the Ten. Your word is law. Tell me, what are my duties?"

"Simply obey us. You are first to have a period of two nuljavpts—ten hours—in which to explore the city; then you will commence drilling a fleet of Yultats for rapid war maneuvering. You will constantly work at this drill until the Yultats respond to your suggestions as rapidly and as perfectly as do the muscles of your own body. It will not take long, since you already have a complete knowledge of steering Earth ships and these are of exactly the same pattern."

"I do not understand how I am to control these Yultats."

Thereupon, the Ten explained clearly and at great length just how, by a certain type of electrical impulse, the Earthman could so amplify and strengthen his thought commands that their power would rival that of the Ten themselves. Steele was given a complete outline of the construction of the "thought amplifier," but he was told that the Yultats would build it for him, since the Ten doubted his ability to turn out so delicate a machine.

Steele believed that the not so complicated mechanism could be made by himself easily, but since the time required for the unmechanical-minded Yultats to build it would give him a welcome ten-hour vacation in which to size up his chances for escape, he refrained from informing the Ten of this fact.

It seemed to the Earthman that the Xinthquuls were putting a dangerous weapon within his reach. They had for-

gotten that their lack of mechanical skill did not extend to the Earthman. But even so, he ruminated, he would probably never get near the necessary equipment which he must have to build an amplifier for his own use. And he doubted not that the one given to him by the Ten would be of the lowest power possible. Oh, if he could only get hold of such an instrument that would defy the thought-commands of the Xinthquuls!

Of course, all these thoughts had been masked behind the blankness of his thought-helmet; so to the Ten it appeared as if the man had suddenly become speechless, mentally speaking.

"Well, Eolarroon," Steele awoke from his reverie to find the Ten's cold voice stabbing at his mind when he turned the control of his helmet to tune in on that particular receiving wave-length. "Well, Eolarroon, why stand you there like a Yultat? The interview is concluded. Go!"

11. *The Crowning Horror*

FOR many hours Steele tramped through the various buildings of the inner and outer cities, amazed and awed at the incredible ways of the moon-men.

When hungry and thirsty—the Xinthquuls had offered him no food—Steele munched half-heartedly on a tasteless concentrated food biscuit and sipped cautiously from one of the many running streamlets in the corridors of the stone city.

He needed no guide through the astounding underground city, for one of the countless Yultats swarming in the strangely quiet corridors was always at hand to answer his questions or to forbid his entrance to some secret apartment of the Xinthquuls. The Earthman did not try to force his way into any of the tabooed places, but went unobtrusively on

his way. He was positive that the Xinthquuls did not let him out of their sight for an instant, watching him constantly through the vacant eyes of first one, then another, of their half-alive slaves. He knew that the Ten did not trust him fully.

All during his trip through the innumerable factories, mines, storehouses, and other less comprehensible chambers, the Earthman peered anxiously for implementations and ways to escape. Without seeming to be more than normally observant, he carefully stored away in his mind all information that might possibly be of use later on.

Once his horror-stricken eyes fell upon the gaunt forms of some of the crew of the *Thunderbolt* and of his own ship, slaving away beside dead-faced Yultats, and he was informed that these men, who knew nothing of controlling space-ships, were permanently the vassals of the Xinthquuls, having had their minds sucked out by the vampires.

And once he saw Jack Starr, vacant-eyed, toiling away at some incomprehensible task, but he was not allowed to approach him. The lieutenant was stationed at a strategic point in Steele's vaguely evolving plan of escape. There was a broad-surfaced stone causeway between the outer city and the city wall. This ran entirely around the city like a gigantic race-track. Starr was working directly opposite a heavily barred metal gateway in the wall that was just in line with the dark, ragged opening of the tunnel mouth across the cave, so easily discernible in the glow about it.

One other thing was there at this portion of the city that was of grave import to Steele. This was the crew of Yultats who were busily engaged in erecting a monster flame-gun in a balcony just above Starr's head.

Thoughtfully, Steele continued on his way, searching now for the place where the captured Legion ships were kept.

IT WAS an hour before he found his goal, and because of the awful thing that preceded his finding the sleek hulls of the cruisers, he did not at first realize that the objects of his search lay before him.

For Steele had witnessed a ghastly demonstration of a terrible weapon of the Xinthquuls — the horribly more efficient companion to the gas of suspended animation.

It was when he had passed through the laboratories underneath the metal city that he discovered the tank of blood-red gas. It was located in a cavern directly below the center of the metal Xinthquul city.

"What does this tank contain?" Steele had demanded of the empty air, after tuning his thoughts so that they could be read by the Ten. A Yultat suddenly appeared as if from nowhere to commune with him.

"This is a tank of instant death, Eolarroon," droned the toneless thoughts of the slave. "In there is a quantity of the most diabolical gas ever discovered by the ancient race of Haxomelians in all their thousands of years of experimenting. Its complete formula, which we have but lately rediscovered, Eolarroon, is so complex as to be unexplainable to you. It takes a long time to produce even a little of the gas, and all that we have is stored here in this tank. We are manufacturing it for use in case we have more difficulty in mentally enslaving the peoples of Earth than we have contemplated. Also, all surplus Outsiders, those that are old and physically unable to work, will be exposed to this gas. It does such a complete, clean job of ridding any place of undesirables!

"Yes, Eolarroon, if an Outsider could only find out how to release this gas from its tank," the Yultat interrupted himself to say, "he could cause instantaneous death to us and to himself as well. But there is only one possible way to open this sturdily constructed tank, and that is known only to a few of our scientists. Fortunate, isn't it? Would you care for a demonstration of the work of the gas? All right, watch."

The Yultat then strode to what appeared to be a glass bulb in the floor near the tank.

"This transparent, fragile-looking globe would be more difficult to crack than the rest of the tank," explained the Yultat. He was evidently bent upon crushing all hopes that might arise in the breast of the Earthman. The latter sensed that, had there been a vulnerable spot in the tank, he would never have been allowed into the cavern.

"And now, Eolarroon," the Yultat was saying, "you must turn your back for a moment. No one, not even though he be a Xinthquul, may learn how to open this tank. And after the conclusion of this demonstration, you must leave this cave, never to enter it again.

"Now in a minute, you will see the manner in which works our most dangerous weapon to be used against Earth. Turn your back!"

Steele obediently swung around. His eyes caught sight of a huge flame-gun of the type used by the Legion, but shiny with newness, mounted on a tiny ledge over the cavern entrance. It was manned by three Yultats and was pointed directly at him. Its sighting-beam cast its soft light in a circle on the block of stone on which Steele was standing. The Earthman imagined that, should he attempt to disobey the Yultat's instructions, death would not be far off. He knew then, too,

that the Xinthquuls did not trust him as much as their words would imply.

After a time, the Earthman hesitantly faced the bulb again. Inside it stood the now motionless Yultat. The material of which the almost invisible bulb was composed evidently cut off all further thought-communication.

In silence Steele looked at the statue-like Yultat for a moment; then a minute, scarcely discernible puff of brilliant blood-red gas appeared in the container beside the Xinthquuls' slave. In fascination, the Earthman stared.

What followed, occurred much faster than it takes to tell of it. The puff of vivid color quickly and entirely enveloped the Yultat in a thin film. So thin was it, in fact, that it but very slightly tinged the now writhing body with a faint pinkish radiance. Then, before Steele's horrified gaze, the twisting creature's flesh *began to melt!* Steele did not even have time to close his eyes against the grisly sight, so quickly did it happen.

SICKENED beyond measure, the Earthman reeled out of the cavern and up the ramp. Of the Yultat nothing was left but an extremely tiny pool of slimy corruption, bubbling hideously on the floor of the transparent bulb. Swift death was one thing, but to see his own kind turned into sickening blobs of rotting jelly was more than the nauseated Steele's imagination could stand; such a thing could not be real! Such a minute quantity of gas to cause such an awful effect, so immediate, so complete! And this, groaned the shaken Earthman, soundlessly, was the horror that was to be loosed upon the defenseless, teeming millions of Earth! Such a revolting death could not be, his mind told him; yet his senses shocked with the truth that it was so.

Blindly the Earthman then made his way upward to the levels of the stone pavement; he felt that he must get a breath of clean, fresh air, else his nauseated brain would give way. The first sight that met his eyes was the hulls of the stolen Legion cruisers lying partly dismantled, in full view, on the causeway.

When at last the realization that the missing *Thunderbolt* and the *America VII*, as well as the recently captured *Meteor IV*, lay in plain sight not twenty yards away had soaked into his horror-dulled mind, Steele saw escape dangling temptingly before his eyes.

The crowning horror of the blood-red gas had clinched Steele's determination to make an immediate escape; so now, throwing caution to the winds, the Earthman headed straight for the three Legion cruisers in swift, running leaps at his highest possible speed.

In spite of the fact that all three of the ships were surrounded by Yultats, Steele did not stop to make plans, nor to avoid detection, but instead flung himself at the nearest cruiser with a savage, challenging roar.

Bowling over half a dozen Yultats who barred his way and warned him to go back, Steele landed beside the *Thunderbolt* in two prodigious leaps. The majority of the Yultats still paid no heed to his movements, although the Earthman saw some of the nearer ones heading in his direction. Steele, laughing aloud in high glee as he thought how easy it was going to be to escape, bounded up the ladder leading to the *Thunderbolt's* conning-tower. He looked into the control room and his laugh died in his throat, intermingled with a groan of despair.

The control room was devoid of instruments; it had been dismantled!

Don't miss the concluding chapters of this story in next month's issue. They are full of thrills and surprises.



Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Vampires of the Moon

By A. W. BERNAL



"The finger of Death was pointing at the two escaping Earthmen."

*A sensational story of the Masters of the Moon and their mindless slaves
—and a terrible threat against the inhabitants of Earth*

The Story Thus Far

TWO space-ships of the Trans-spatial Service Legion—the *Thunderbolt* and the *America VII*—had vanished when Captain Richard Starr sent his younger brother, Lieutenant John Starr, and the latter's closest friends, Lieutenants Hall Bradley and Rusty Steele, to search for the missing vessels.

In the *Meteor IV* the trio of Earthmen left Moon Headquarters and strayed into the interior of the satellite, where they were captured under weird circumstances by the eery inhabitants of a city hidden away in a cavern of phosphorescent light. Fortunately there was a breathable atmosphere in this inner world.

Steele, separated from his companions,

This story began in **WEIRD TALES** for May.

was able to converse with his captors—living mummies—by means of a thought-transference helmet of his own invention. He was taken to see the Ten—the ruling council of the moon-men.

Meanwhile, Captain Starr had learned of the capture of his brother by a mystifying radio message. With Lieutenant Jerry Smith he had started out, in a converted ore-carrier—the only ship at hand—to rescue the imperiled trio.

In his reckless haste to reach the Moon City, Captain Starr cracked up at the bottom of a shaft that connected the moon's surface with its interior.

The ore-carrier was smashed beyond repair and Jerry Smith emerged from the wreck with a broken arm and a disabled knee.

But Captain Starr was able to carry on afoot. He had not left Smith far behind, however, before he was confronted with the *Meteor IV*, which was returning to the moon's face. Starr prepared to die, for he believed the stolen cruiser to be manned by moon-men.

In the meantime, Steele had learned that the half-alive mummies were Yultats, under mental control of the Xinthquuls—deathless brain giants. The Yultats had no minds of their own.

The Ten were bent on terrestrial conquest, and Steele was offered the choice of helping willingly or by force. He appeared to fall in with the moon-men, so as to have a chance to escape, intending to return armed to free his comrades.

When Steele came across the stolen cruisers, he bowled over intervening Yultats and sprang to the conning-tower of the nearest one, before the mummy-men could stop him. He stepped inside the control room, then froze in horror.

The control room was devoid of instruments; the ship had been dismantled.

12. Steele Escapes

STEELE, his face now set grimly, his lips a thin, hard line, turned slowly to face the Yultats. By this time every Yultat within sight had dropped his work and was hurrying toward the *Thunderbolt*. Steele's eyes swept around in a quick, wide circle. Not very far away lay the *America VII*, also probably dismantled, and beyond that, the *Meteor IV*. And Steele saw his chance.

How long he had been in the Moon City he could not tell, but he knew it could not have been long enough for the Yultats to denude the control room of the *Meteor IV*. If he could but reach her!

The pavement around the *Thunderbolt* now swarmed with Yultats; some had even reached the ship-ladder and were scaling it. Steele longed for even one of the four pistols in his vanished weapon-belt, but his desperate eyes, searching for some sort of weapon, could only find a bar of steel lying upon the floor of the control room. Yet the Yultats did not seem to possess even so primitive a weapon as that.

Steele snatched up the bar and jumped hard as he could, just as the first of the mummy-men reached the top of the ship-ladder. From the uppermost part of the *Thunderbolt's* hull the Earthman shot completely over the heads of the intervening Yultats and covered half the distance to the *America VII* ere he touched the ground. Scrambling to his feet in a flash, Steele was off toward his goal, jabbing, crushing, pounding a way through the ranks of the Yultats who tried to hinder him.

Swinging the bar in a rapid circle of death and destruction, he bore down upon his practically defenseless antagonists and rammed them asunder. But as he reached the side of the *America VII*, Steele perceived a thick mass of Yultats ahead

through which he could not possibly smash his way. A glance to the rear showed him another equally solid wave of running mummy-men. He was hemmed in, caught between the two mobs!

Then it was that his muscles, accustomed to Earth's greater gravity pull, stood him in good stead. Steele put all his strength into a great leap. As though he had been shot from a gun, the Earthman soared high above the advancing horde and landed squarely atop the rounded hull of the *America VII*.

As he hit the ship his feet shot out from under him on the sloping metal surface. He clutched at a projection to save himself from falling, and in doing so, let go the steel bar, which dropped, clanging, to the pavement below at the feet of a band of Yultats. For an instant Steele thought he was fated to follow his weapon, but he finally managed to drag himself to temporary safety near the ship's conning-tower.

A single brief look showed Steele that her control room was bare, and this time not even a convenient bar of steel disclosed itself. He was trapped securely; escape seemed out of the question.

Best to die fighting, though, he told himself, as he clung, panting, to the conning-tower. Far better to die swiftly than to become a Yultat, a dead-alive thing, for eternity. Steele aimed a kick at a repulsive head that was appearing above the top of the ship-ladder, then wheeled to face the *Meteor IV* now so near, yet so utterly beyond reach. With his last bit of strength, he sprang hopelessly toward his unattainable goal.

A horde of Yultats swarmed over the Earthman as he landed, preventing him by sheer weight of numbers from doing further harm. In a trice, a dozen pairs of arms had him in grips of steel, and he

was lifted and carried helplessly off in the direction of the inner city. He was captured.

FINDING he could not move his body a fraction of an inch, Steele lay quiet, racking his brain for a plan whereby he might accomplish a quick death. Funny the Xinthquuls didn't order their slaves to remove his thought-helmet, Steele mused, but then they were probably too busy controlling the mobs of Yultats to bother with details.

Thought-helmet! Control!

Why hadn't he thought of that before? What a fool he had been, for not trying this newly formulated plan before! Of course, it might not work, but if it did, the trick would snatch victory from defeat. Out of the corner of his eye Steele saw that he was being carried past the *Meteor IV*; he was at the ideal spot for the execution of his plan. So without further delay he set to work.

First he must get his hands free to work the dial of his thought-helmet, to set it so that he could commune with the Yultats. He was puzzled only for a moment as to how he was to do this; then a way suggested itself to him.

Lustily, with all the power his lungs could command, the Earthman began singing the latest tune of the day. To the Yultats—or, more strictly speaking, to their controllers, the Xinthquuls—music was an unknown thing. And it is to be doubted that, even though they had been acquainted with song, they would have recognized their captive's obstreperous, discordant bellowings as such.

But Steele's stentorian caterwauling had its desired effect. The Yultats stopped dead in their tracks, turning dull, lack-luster eyes upon the Earthman. Cautiously, carefully, they began lowering him to the ground, considerably loosen-

ing their grip. Yet Steele remained motionless, still singing his clamorous song.

Up to this time he had held himself rigid; now with one final outburst he climaxed his song by allowing his body to become suddenly limp. He sagged heavily and felt himself slowly slipping from the grasp of the Yultats. The Xinthquuls must have been utterly dumfounded at Steele's noisy bellow, followed as it was by the quick relaxing of previously tense muscles; certainly they must have been considerably puzzled.

Then with a whoop, Steele jerked himself erect, wrenching loose from the lax grip of the Yultats. With a bound, he was free of that group before they had recovered the power of motion. He was still a considerable distance away from the *Meteor IV*, though, and a now slowly turning mob of Yultats separated him from it.

But the spot where he stood was momentarily free of the half-alive creatures who had once been men, and this gave him the brief time needed to set the controlling-dial of his helmet. Then he concentrated hard.

It worked!

One of the Yultats that had been carrying him was about to pounce upon him as the Earthman sent out his concentrated thought impulses. The Yultat stopped short not two feet away from Steele, then wheeled and headed back to his fellows. As he met the advancing group of mummy-men, he swung heavily and sent one of his erstwhile helpers crashing to the ground. The others soon stopped also, and in a moment they were all inextricably mixed in a vicious brawl.

Steele laughed aloud at the success of his attempt to usurp the mental control of the Xinthquuls, and began running in the direction of the *Meteor IV*. As a magnet attracts iron, the Yultats were beginning

to close in on the Earthman. But as each group drew within a certain distance, Steele's thought-commands overcame those of the Xinthquuls, with the result that all around Steele's immediate vicinity the causeway was filled with madly fighting Yultats.

However, this could not keep up. The pace was too steep for Steele's mentality to cope with. He was soon compelled to walk very slowly to concentrate his energies further in warding off the Yultats. Sweat trickled down his face, while, as soon as he had passed, the Yultats ceased their fighting and joined the others of their kind in pursuit.

Soon the weary Earthman was held at bay, completely encircled by groups of battling Yultats; yet hundreds more were pressing forward, hemming him in. His powers of mental control were pitifully limited.

He was just about to give up, to admit he was beaten, when a brilliant idea came to him. Changing his mental command, Steele forced the near-by Yultats to stop fighting and rush to his side. Quickly they picked him up and dashed as fast as they could run toward the *Meteor IV*, whose blue-black hull loomed close at hand.

Without bothering at all about the distant Yultats out of his range, Steele made as many of those near him as his weakening powers of command would permit come rushing to him. Soon he was the middle of a multitude of Yultats, packed closely together, and running smoothly in triangular formation. The Earthman had made himself the center of a human wedge!

Try as they might, the Yultats under control of the Xinthquuls could not force their way through the ranks of Steele's protectors to lay hands upon him, but were turned ruthlessly aside or trampled

underfoot by the Earthman's efficient bodyguard. And it was in this strange manner that Steele at last obtained the goal he had been striving so vainly to reach, borne to his destination on the shoulders of the slaves of his enemies!

JUST as he was triumphantly scaling the ship-ladder of the *Meteor IV*, after having been carefully set down by his bearers, something occurred which nearly spelled disaster for the Earthman's brilliantly conceived and executed plan.

One of the Yultats some distance away had but recently emerged from the underground laboratories to join the chase. In his hand he carried a tiny container of the greenish gas of suspended animation. Waiting for the precise moment when Steele's protectors halted by the Legion cruiser, he had then hurled his vial at the ship. The creature's aim was good, and the little bottle smashed on the metal hull of the space-ship just above Steele's head at the moment he set foot on the lowest rung of the ladder leading to the conning-tower. The Earthman saw a cloud of shining mist spring suddenly into being directly above him, but he was not to be caught again at this last moment. He instantly recognized the gas Starr had warned him about; so, gulping down a deep breath of clear, cold air, Steel mounted the ladder in a single bound, and in a twinkling had dived into the control room, banging the door to behind him. He was safely enclosed in an absolutely air-tight chamber.

The Earthman breathed a prayer of thankfulness that came from the bottom of his heart. Outside of the fact that all the weapons that habitually ornamented the cruiser were missing, nothing in the conning-tower of the *Meteor IV* had been touched. He flung himself at the control-board.

With a lurch, the *Meteor IV* lifted off the stone pavement and soared high into the air, half-way to the cavern roof. Two or three Yultats who had grabbed at the rising ship and found hand-holds, soon let go to drop back upon the heads of their fellows far below.

The first thing Steele did was to shoot over to that part of the city where Lieutenant Starr was stationed. But when he hovered momentarily over the spot where he had last seen his fellow Earthman, he found that area devoid of life. The mummy-men had rushed Jack off to some inside hide-away, until Steele was taken care of.

But there was something left. A whine of constantly rising pitch denoted the presence of the flame-gun which was warming up, preparatory to going into action. Steele dived frantically at the controls as the ship's walls began to become red-hot, and like a streak of jagged light the cruiser swept in a zigzag course across the cave of light and entered the ragged black opening of the tunnel mouth ere the Yultats could again train their death-dealing weapons upon the escaping Earthman, inside his fleet ship.

From the other side of the city, a shiny new ship jerked erratically skyward, like a dying moth, then crashed heavily back upon the thick carpet of moon-weed below. The Earthman was free of pursuit; the moon-men were not yet fully able to control their own ships.

13. Betrayed

SIZZLING suns! Starr, don't shoot! It's Steele—Rusty Steele of the Legion!"

Captain Richard Starr stood aghast. Slowly, bewilderedly, he returned the pistols with which he had been covering the *Meteor IV* to their holsters.

"You, Lieutenant?" he cried hoarsely,

while a thrill of relief surged through him.

"Yes sir. I've just come from the Moon City. We've got to get back to the Station as fast as possible."

Starr scaled the ladder to the conning-tower in a flash and tumbled inside the control room. The two stood in silence for a time, eyeing each other. It would have been exceedingly difficult to tell which was the dirtiest. Their once splendid scarlet tunics and white trousers were scarcely more than tattered, besmeared masses of rags. Starr's head with its grotesque patch of blood-stained bandages was rivalled by that of Steele, whose sweat-matted hair, escaping from underneath the thought-helmet, was plastered against his still perspiring face.

"I'm mighty glad to see you, Steele," grinned Captain Starr, at last. "You are certainly a sight for sore eyes!"

"Well, if I may say so, sir," quoth Steele, grimacing back at the grimy apparition before him, "you're a sight yourself, although I'm not sure about the 'sore eyes' part!"

They both laughed a bit, then ceased guiltily, as each thought of the precious minutes he was wasting, instead of carrying on with his vital mission: the one to rescue his brother, the other to warn Earth of her impending doom.

"Let's get started, sir," said Steele, reaching for the controls. "It's a long way back and it's very urgent that I get to the Station at once. I'll tell you what's doing on the way up. I have a big job ahead of me, setting up a weapon, when we get back to Headquarters. I radioed the boys to get the parts ready for me, but——"

"Wait, Steele," Captain Starr interrupted. "Tell me about Jack. Is he all right? Tell me now, before you start the ship. I'm not going back with you!"

"But sir! You can't——"

"I told you I am not going back to the Station with you! I am not going to turn back now that I am so near to him. Hurry up and tell me all that is important about Jack and the moon-men, that has occurred since he sent his last message. Quickly!"

Seeing that his superior was not to be dissuaded from his mad attempt to continue on his way to the Moon City, Steele hastily related all the incredible events necessary to give Starr a full understanding of what had occurred down in the inner world, while he had been held captive there by the mind-vampires.

His recital finished, Steele paused for breath, looking quizzically at his captain.

"Sir," Steele began again, persistently, "hadn't you better return to the surface with me now, and later——"

"No!" Starr cut him off short. "I am all the more determined to get to Jack, now that I have learned that the moon-men are more hostile than I thought at first. With the unexpected turn events have taken, I can not be certain how long I have to save him. Quick, give me your helmet!"

Steele, with some difficulty on account of the way the thing was jammed on, removed his thought-helmet, and handed it doubtfully to Starr.

"Do you think you can use it, sir?" he asked dubiously.

"No. But it will prevent those vampires from stealing my mind. Hurry now, and get me a life-shell! Hurry!"

Without further parley, Steele opened a trap-door in the floor of the cabin and pulled a lever on the control-panel. In an instant a shiny life-shell—one of those slim metal space cylinders that every cruiser is supplied with for emergency use—slid into place under the floor-opening.

As Starr, after patting his weapon belt

to make sure all his pistols were in place, slipped down into the cramped quarters of the two-passenger life-preserver, the thought-helmet on his head seemed to glint reassuringly to the staring lieutenant.

"Pick up Lieutenant Smith on your way to the surface," Starr called, just his head appearing above the floor. "He's camping at the bottom of the big shaft. And now I am off. Good-bye."

With these succinct sentences, Starr drew his metal-enclosed head inside the life-shell and sealed himself within. The last he saw of Steele was a round, open-mouthed face surmounted by a tangle of rust-red curls.

In a flash, though, the lieutenant awoke to action. With a quick jab at the control studs, he caused the life-shell to be catapulted along its oiled groove and out from the hull of the mother ship. Starr, inside the slender craft, was busy at the controls and the tiny cylinder shot down the dark tunnel, quickly vanishing around a bend in the passage.

Without further loss of time, Steele nosed the *Meteor IV* swiftly up the tunnel toward the shaft and Headquarters. He had a big task ahead of him, and the sooner he was at work the better.

IT WAS not long before Starr in his speedy little life-shell was shooting out of the black tunnel-mouth into the cave of light. So quickly had he reached his destination, in fact, that he found himself drawing close to the high walls of the Moon City without even having had time to think of a plan of war. However, he was in no mood to tarry long on the outside of the wheel-shaped city and he decided to chance all in a single bold stroke.

Tremendous odds: one man against a city!

Having found that gate on the other side of which Steele had told him his

brother was working, Starr eased his craft to the spongy carpet of moon-weed just outside the city wall. Leaving the entrance port of the life-shell standing wide open, Starr leaped lightly to the ground and stood, ankle-deep in phosphorescence, before the mighty gate of metal.

The Earthman, having decided to resort to a rash plan of swift action, speedily flashed one of the four pistols from his weapon-belt and aimed it at the huge closed portal in front of him. The squat, ugly-looking pistol in his steady grip was his most powerful weapon—a blaster.

Without hesitation or pause, the man of the Legion squeezed the trigger of the blaster and held it firmly down, expending all its fearful energy at one shot. A livid, searing streak of jagged light leapt, crackling, from the weapon straight toward the heavy barrier in the wall. The blinding energy-beam, of terrific power, played for a long moment over the metal surface, snapping angrily all the while. Suddenly the high gate began to buckle; it seemed to writhe and twist under the awful impact of the blaster's beam. Several rills of molten metal appeared at the base of the portal. The whole gate shone white-hot for a few instants, then crumpled into a shrivelled mass of glowing metal, and dropping to the ground, lay sizzling amidst the moon-weed. So great was the heat of the metal now, at the climax of the charge from Starr's pistol, that soon naught was left of the gate but a fiery pool of liquid.

A single tremendous bound carried Starr through the white-hot aperture in the wall to the inside of the city. Having had his clothes scorched and his skin blistered during the brief time he had spent in the air in his leap through the now open stonework in the wall, Starr felt perfectly certain that should a Yuktat attempt to get to the life-shell within the

next ten minutes, his legs would be burned to cinders beneath him. But the Yultats apparently did not have any such intention. They stopped whatever they had been doing and stood stock-still as Starr strode unwaveringly straight ahead.

He cast anxiously about him for a sight of the scarlet and white uniform of his brother. At the same instant he discerned a man in the red tunic of the Legion, Starr saw out of the corner of his eye that a considerable mass of Yultats were surreptitiously edging toward the gate to cut off the Earthman's retreat.

Wheeling swiftly, Starr sent the last tremendous bolt of his blaster flickering savagely straight into the midst of the host of Yultats. A moment of lambent, crackling flame and smoke; then the air became filled with whirling ashes and rock chips. The acrid odor of burnt flesh came sickeningly to Starr's nostrils.

This took care of the majority of Yultats in the immediate vicinity. The area was a deserted one, as Starr gratefully observed. He carefully returned the empty blaster to its holster, since he had not the means of recharging it with him at the time, and drew his slug- and flame-pistols in its stead.

KEEPING up a desultory fire from first one then another of the guns, to keep the Yultats at a distance, Starr advanced to his brother's side. The younger Starr had been engaged in scooping up little measures of water from a running streamlet and mixing them into strangely tinted pastes which were continually passing him on an endless belt. Now, though, Jack raised dull eyes to his brother's face and rose jerkily to his feet. A slow smile grew upon his face.

"Jack!" cried Captain Starr joyously, but he was wary of the other's vacant eyes and mechanical smile.

Starr inserted his pistols each into its holster and stretched forth a welcoming hand. Yet he was alert for trouble. He was not quite sure whether or not the Xinthquuls were trying to trick him.

And lucky it was for Captain Starr that he had anticipated danger, for while his brother's eyes stared dully into his own and a thin smile played upon his lips, the younger Starr's fists were clenched and his biceps twitching.

"Jack!" moaned the captain aloud to his apparently unhearing brother. "Jack! Don't do that! You mustn't hit me! No! It's your brother, Jack—it's Dick! Dick! Don't you see? It's Dick! You——"

But at that instant Jack launched a bone-crushing blow aimed at his brother's face.

"Jack! Don't!" Again the captain pleaded as he sidestepped.

But Jack merely turned and shot out another fist.

"Jack, forgive me! I don't want to, but I've got to," cried Captain Starr, and ducked, at the same time ramming his shoulder into the other's midsection. He was using an old trick he had learned while a boy in training-school.

With an upward surge of his body, the elder Starr thrust his attacker heavily backward, throwing the latter off his balance. Then before the younger man could steady himself, Captain Starr snapped his lithe body sideways, bringing his arm up in a mighty swing with the same movement.

Captain Starr's hard fist caught his brother on the point of his upthrust jaw. With a painful grunt that seared the captain's heart like a red-hot knife, the younger man careened backward off his feet, landing on the stone causeway in a crumpled heap.

Gathering up the senseless Jack and slinging him over one shoulder, Captain

Starr pivoted and strode off in the direction of the gate. Since the Xinthquuls could not control an unconscious man's mind, he knew that Jack would offer no resistance for awhile. By the time Jack would come around, the captain hoped to be safely on his way back to the moon's crust, out of reach of the ghastly mind-vampires.

Continually peppering the crowd of Yultats with heavy slugs that nearly tore their heads off their bodies, Captain Starr managed to stave off an attack until he had nearly reached the still-glowing hole in the wall. Then an ominous grinding snarl caused him to stiffen to a figure of stone, while the hair on the back of his neck rose like the quills of a porcupine. His blood was chilled in his veins.

For that rapidly scaling whine behind him told the seasoned soldier that in one of the near-by buildings a huge flame-gun was warming up. At Captain Starr's faltering feet was a softly glowing circle of light, the sighting-beam of the monster death-machine. The finger of Death was pointing at the two escaping Earthmen now, and no mistake!

The flame-gun's rising whine would at any instant now be almost beyond pitch of the human ear, and when that moment came Captain Starr and his precious burden would be no more. Already a torturing tingling was twisting along his spine, Captain Starr realized, and went into action.

WITH every bit of speed he could muster, the captain bent low, threw himself aside out of the circle of death, and, allowing Jack to sink to the ground, drew two pistols from his weapon-belt. He squeezed both triggers.

Out of one a single slug whined harmlessly high into the air. From the other sang a tiny sphere of flame straight for

the crew of the monster gun on the balcony of one of the tall stone buildings. Thrusting the slug-pistol back into its holster in a single movement, Starr whipped out his last remaining pistol—a pow-pow.

The little globule of flame had touched the very tip of the Yultats' weapon and flared into a livid sheet of destruction. There was a sharp crack like that of breaking crystal, and the sighting-beam of the big machine, smoking strangely, went out. The crew of two Yultats standing around the flame-gun dropped from the balcony to the street below, two burnt and blackened corpses. More Yultats quickly filled their places.

Yet still that ominous whine from the squat weapon of the moon-men. But now Captain Starr, in spite of a numbing, agonizing shock which was coursing through his veins, took careful aim with his pow-pow and sent one of its shells at the flame-gun.

Pow!

A direct hit! The flame-gun sprang apart, exploded like a bursting bubble. A jagged piece of metal came hurtling past Captain Starr and through the open gateway to bury itself among the glowing weeds there. The only trace left of the machine on the balcony was a blackened, smoking area on the stone.

A second later Starr went diving out the aperture in the city wall. He and Jack were safe! There was not one of the Yultats whose muscles would allow him to jump across that broad area of terrifically heated stone. Jubilantly, Captain Starr piled his unconscious brother into the cramped space of the little two-man life-shell. Fortune had indeed smiled upon him, Captain Starr was thinking, and he was heartily congratulating himself on his good luck in escaping so easily, when a sudden popping of moon-weed

caused him to pause with one leg inside the life-shell and look back.

The Earthman's taste of sweet triumph turned to bitter ashes. There, ankle-deep in moon-weed, stood Lieutenant Bradley, two pistols in his hands. The cunning of the Xinthquuls had triumphed at the eleventh hour! They knew that while a true Yultat could not leap the lane of hot stone, a mentally controlled Earthman with his stronger muscles could.

And so it was that Bradley stood, guns in hand, eyes now glinting with the lust to kill, about to fire upon his own comrades!

14. *Crucifixion*

"UNBUCKLE your weapon-belt, Outsider, and throw it upon the ground at my feet," flatly intoned the menacing Bradley. "If you try any trickery, I shall not hesitate to fire both guns at you."

The commonplace phraseology of the command did not strike Captain Starr as interesting at the moment. His brain was working with lightning-like rapidity, seeking some way to ward off imminent death. He did not doubt in the least that the enslaved Bradley would, if necessity demanded, carry out his threat.

Starr would have unhesitatingly flung himself at the threatening lieutenant, but, half in and half out of the life-shell as he was, he could not do anything swiftly. Then, as he fumbled with the buckle of his weapon-belt, he thought he saw his chance. Cautiously he swung the pivoted searchlight of the shell until it pointed at Bradley, concealing the act under the movements his body went through as he wriggled out of the broad white weapon-girdle.

Captain Starr stood apparently motionless with the heavy belt in his hand for a moment, as if reluctant to drop it to the

ground. But, under cover of the side of the life-shell, his right foot was feeling for the guide-beam switch on the control-panel.

Suddenly the brilliant guide-beam flashed out from the searchlight, sending its dazzling light full into the face of Bradley. At the same instant, Starr swung the girdle in his hand in a sweeping arc and let it shoot out of his grasp.

As the rays of the guide-beam struck Bradley, his muscles reacted with such involuntary swiftness that the controlling Xinthquuls were taken by surprise. They were a fraction of a second too late in causing Bradley's fingers to press the triggers of his pistols. The man's arms had jerked up in front of his face to shield his eyes just before the guns went off. And then Starr's hurtling weapon-belt wrapped itself about Bradley's head and sent him sprawling backward to the ground.

One of the slugs from the enslaved Earthman's guns whistled high over Starr's head, but the other smacked into the searchlight. Instantly the beam went out amidst a jangle of smashing glass, while the searchlight's fragments whizzed in all directions. A chunk of metal tore past Starr's forehead and but for the protecting helmet would have ended his life then and there. As it was, he was blinded by a spurt of blood in his eyes from a cut on the forehead received as the metal bounced off. His left hand, which had been grasping the searchlight, was smashed and bleeding; the thumb was lacking from its upper joint.

In spite of the pulsing pain, Starr forced himself over the side of the shell and flung his arms around Bradley while the latter was yet entangled in the weapon-belt. The wounded Starr's good right hand encircled Bradley's throat and tightened like a contracting steel band.

In his fury, the captain would have choked out the life of the fallen man but for a sudden overpowering surge of weakness. He was losing blood and his strength was fast ebbing. He realized that even should he gain the safety of the shell, he would in all likelihood faint ere he could get out of the cave of light.

But he must save Jack; get him to the Station at all costs. Bradley and himself were not so important. But Jack must be saved.

The man beneath him wriggled to free himself. Starr shot him a look and felt his problem was solved. He ripped off the protective thought-helmet and quickly thrust it on Bradley's head. Instantly the latter ceased his struggles; he was full master of himself again.

"Listen, Bradley," Starr hissed in the dazed young man's ear before the Xinthquuls tore down his will and secured control over his mind. "Listen, Bradley! Get in that life-shell and get out of here as fast as you can. Lieutenant Starr is inside. He's hurt; get him up to the Station as fast as you can possibly make it. No questions now. You'll understand later; hurry and do as I say!"

Starr felt the insidious suggestions of the moon-men eating at his mind and steeled himself against them. But he knew he could not long hold out; soon he would, against his will, hurl himself at the throat of the young man before him. With difficulty he spoke.

"Did you hear my command? Get going, sir!"

Bradley's military training came to his rescue. Without the faintest conception of what the situation was, he found his blank mind being filled with but the one idea supplied to it by the Captain. Obediently he wheeled.

"Yes, sir!" he snapped and was in the life-shell in a trice. The hatch slammed

shut and the tiny two-passenger spaceship shot like a bolt across the cave of light and flashed out of view into the yawning tunnel-mouth.

At any rate, though he must pay for it with his own life, Jack and Bradley were safe. That was some consolation, Starr thought as he found himself involuntarily striding toward the wall of the Moon City. He strove to direct his movements, but to no avail; in a moment more his mind had been completely swallowed by the Xinthquuls.

DIMLY, although for the most part the next eight hours were a hideous, pain-filled blackness, Captain Starr felt his body being subjected to all sorts of tortures.

As soon as he had been brought to the inner city, the Xinthquuls caused him to be disrobed and placed in a peculiar metal cylinder. Then the hypnotized Earthman was treated with throbbing, pulsing rays and crackling electric currents. For a long time, flickering pencils of blue and purple sprang from queer machines to caress the body in the cylinder with eery tenderness. Strange tinglings and muscle-pulling twinges coursed through Starr's inert form. Then at last it was all over.

But Starr did not awake to consciousness. Instead, he walked like one in sleep from the room whose air was permeated with the acrid tang of ozone to a long metal hall upon the walls of which were shelf after shelf of scientific instruments of a surgical nature. Two dull-eyed mummy-men strapped his body securely to a sort of table. Then the veil was withdrawn from the Earthman's mind and he became again a person.

Starr found his body to be in splendid condition. He felt absolutely no pain or ache in any part of his anatomy. The cure he had been subjected to had been a

marvelous one indeed. However, he did not long muse over past events, for into his brain trickled, like a physical stream of icy water, the following thoughts:

"Outsider"—Starr's mind felt as though it were being exposed to the chill of space—"Outsider, listen to my thoughts. First let me assure you that it was not through a feeling of compassion that you were revitalized. It was because my own body met with an unfortunate accident. I was in the space-ship that crashed when we made an attempt to prevent the escape of one of your fellow beings.

"Although my body was completely smashed, my brain was unharmed. Since I am one of the Ten it is imperative that I be kept alive. Therefore my brain was removed and sealed in a brain-case while a hurried search was made for a body suitable for it. We were going to utilize the fellow Bradley's, but he had to be used to fight you and escaped. I was forced to take you and recharge your rather unlovely body. However, you will have to do until I can get a better one.

"Now, from my brain-case on this shelf at your left, I shall direct the delicate operation of removing your meager brain from your head and substituting for it my own. Do not attempt to struggle, for you are bound in such a way that you are powerless to move. I am about to begin now, and please do not lapse into unconsciousness from the pain until you have to, for it will be fascinating to study your mind's reactions to the various stages of the operation. Farewell, Outsider; your present life has about run its course, and you will soon be back into free Time!"

Although Starr manifested no outward sign of emotion, due to his constricting bonds, he was seething inwardly. The dull speech of doom had been delivered in a toneless, calm manner to the Earthman as though the usurpation of his mind

was a trifling occurrence. Under the goad of the pulsing thought-message of the Xinthquul, Starr's mind was in a turmoil, a fever of rage. The nearly demented Earthman must lie helpless while an automaton, a mindless Yultat, cut out his brain under the guidance of a moon-brain reposing in a gleaming metal tank on a shelf across the room; and though the pain of each cut of the pitiless surgeon's knife would surge through his dying brain to be read with cold, scientific delight by the Xinthquuls, the Earthman would be able only to cry out his agony on the rack.

The Yultat, bent low over the Earthman and with eyes dully expressionless as ever, was beginning to operate. The sweat-bedewed forehead of the tormented man had been bathed with some preparation of the moon-men and now the scalpel was being raised. Its keen-edged blade flashed menacingly in the white light of the room. The knife-point pierced Starr's skin and slowly began to cut its way across his forehead. The Earthman's torture-twisted brain could no longer withstand the probing, anguishing knife-point; the demon-wings of pain brushed Starr into the ocean of hideous nightmare, to be drowned in awful torment.

15. Doom

BY THE time Lieutenant Jack Starr had regained consciousness, Bradley was nosing the little life-shell into the airlock at the Station. They did not tarry long there. During a hasty meal, the two bewildered men listened to an excited, nervous Rusty Steele.

Steele was chafing at the very necessary delay forced upon him by the time required to erect his weapon and set it up inside the control room of the Petrovsky super-ship that had eventually arrived at Moon Headquarters. Amid the bustle

and confusion of the toiling men working on the Petrovsky, Steele found time to tell all the recent arrivals—both the two men who had escaped from the Moon City and the three officers sent from Earth on the emergency ship—of his plan for getting Starr safely out of the clutches of the mind-vampires.

Steele's mysterious weapon was at last ready and installed in the Petrovsky's conning-tower. The speed with which the deed was done would have astounded the anxious Earthman had he not been in so great a hurry to get down inside the satellite to the inner world.

At any rate, the Petrovsky shoved off from the Station a scant seven hours after it had arrived. But now aboard her was every available Legionnaire at the Station; her every cabin was crowded with men and weapons. If Steele's weapon failed, the Earthmen were prepared to make a battle of it anyway. By mutual consent, Steele himself took control of the ship, although aboard her was a Major Whitehead who officially should have been in command. Steele nosed the speedy craft down the black lunar tunnels with almost reckless speed. All knew only too well that if Captain Richard Starr were yet alive his life was far from secure.

Like a bullet the silent speed-ship tore down the pit of the giant staircase and down the black horizontal tunnel at its bottom. Although it was with almost unbelievable speed that the Petrovsky had been brought almost to the entrance to the cave of light, it seemed to the despairing comrades of the captured Richard Starr like eternity before Steele had cut off the guide-beam and begun to decelerate the slim cruiser. At last the ship rested on the uneven floor of the tunnel just within the shelter of the tunnel-mouth, with the cave of light and its wheel-shaped Moon City in full view.

Without a word, while the rest of the company of rescuers stared across the haze of the cave of light at the incredible Moon City, Steele set to work upon his strange-looking machine.

"Hadn't we better get a little closer, Rusty?" suggested Jack Starr anxiously.

"No. Here, look through this 'scope. See that gun on the wall there? It's aimed squarely at the mouth of this tunnel. We'd get no more than half-way into the cave before we'd be blasted out of existence. That gun is a new one; the one they used on me was farther back."

"I guess they haven't seen us, so far," put in Bradley. "But suppose they do find out in some way that we're here and try to get our minds. You know, one man running amuck in this craft could ruin us in no time. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes," replied Steele without looking up from the wiring he was working on. "Yes, I've taken care of that. Here, Bradley, you take this key and unlock that cabinet in the wall. It contains a bunch of improvised helmets that I think will alter all thought-impulses sent or received to such an extent that they will be rendered harmless. You see, I don't want any one here to send out waves that will conflict in any way with the ones I am sending. Here, Jack, hand me that coil, will you?"

"Now," Steele addressed the assemblage after all had donned the odd protective helmets taken from the locker, "this is the idea. Thought is merely a disturbance in the ether, set up by the brain. It differs from other etheric impulses only because of its peculiar wavelength. I have not time now to go into detail, but here before you is a machine which will amplify all thought-impulses sent out by my brain to a very high degree. I think I shall be able to control

my thoughts by sending them along a directional beam, but if you should feel queer things going on inside your heads in spite of those helmets I gave you, do not be alarmed. But no more delay, to battle! Wish me luck!"

THE stillness of interstellar space seemed to fill the crowded control room as the round-eyed officers watched the red-headed man before them don a peculiar set of what resembled ear-phones.

Steele's usually smooth forehead creased itself into many wrinkles and his eyes closed to mere slits with the force of his concentration. He was thinking hard on a mental command, and the magic of his instrument was wafting that thought out over the ether straight to the citadel of the mind-sucking Xinthquuls.

For a long instant he sat, taut as a stretched wire, fingers slowly pushing on a tiny nickeled lever on the control-board of the thought-amplifier. Through his nearly closed eyes the Earthman could just see the faint glow of his directional beam quivering out from the Petrovsky to the Moon City in a delicately probing finger.

The eyes of the hushed officers were fastened almost in awe upon the deeply lined, agonized face of Lieutenant Steele. The intense concentration of the young man seemed to crystallize about the spaceship like a solid thing.

Then the watchers saw a smile—an expression of triumph—appear on Steele's face; he relaxed with a long sigh. Yet he still was careful to keep the lever of the amplifier well down.

"Sizzling suns!" he yelped delightedly. "I'll bet I nearly blew those infernal moon-men's brains out! I was worrying about not being able to overcome the whole bunch at once, but after I got the Ten by the ears the rest was easy. I sent

out such a strong wave that I think I must have paralyzed them at first. But we're all right now. I can hold them for a long time yet. Happy days! I'll bet that the Ten are in a sweat now all right!"

"But Richard! Did you get Dick?" demanded the younger Starr impatiently.

"You bet! I had a couple of Yultats grab hold of him and chuck him in one of those shiny new space-ships of theirs and bring him out. I had 'em park their bus right alongside this one."

But Jack Starr had left before Steele had half finished. It took the lad but an instant to fling open the door of the Petrovsky and leap to the conning-tower of the moon ship. He soon had that door also wrenched open and was on his knees beside his brother's form on the floor in another swift movement.

"Dick! Dick! Speak to me!"

"What are you yelling so loud for, you young idiot? Do you want to have the whole gang of moon-men on us?" Captain Richard Starr's voice was weak, but it was as music to Jack's ears. The elder man struggled to a sitting position and placed a hand gingerly on his forehead.

"Dick, you're hurt!" Jack had seen the long thin red line that ran from temple to temple on the captain's forehead. "What were they doing to you?"

The captain rose unsteadily to his feet, waving aside the proffered arm of his brother.

"Let's get out of this, Jack. I'm not hurt badly. Something exceedingly strange must have happened just when that devil with the knife was getting well under way. What's up?"

"Tell you later, Dick. Here, hop inside this ship; the whole gang is here."

"By Jupiter!" thundered the old major upon seeing the scarred and mutilated Starr, "you'll get a promotion out of this as well as a medal and a year's leave; if

"I have to resign and give you my place!"

"Hey, everybody," bellowed Steele as soon as Starr had been doctored up a bit, "let's get started. I'm hungry."

But Bradley, who had been sitting quietly in a corner thinking, now looked up and spoke.

"What are we going to do about the moon-men? As soon as you leave that amplifier things will start to happen. The Xinthquuls will regain full mental control of themselves, and you know what they'll do then. They may not be able to fly their ships yet, but they'll learn. They'll find a way. And once they get out of this cave no power on Earth can stop them. It will be just as they said. They weren't lying when they said that their weapons are vastly superior to ours. And if even one ship of them gets away from the power of the amplifier—Earth is doomed! *Doomed!* Why, with all the armament we can muster, we'll be absolutely at their mercy, like insects before men! Suspended animation gases . . . rotting red gas! Why, if they once loose those upon Earth, our planet will become nothing but a tomb; our entire civilization will be turned into stinking pools of decaying jelly! What power have we——"

"Here, wait a minute," interrupted Steele. "I *had* forgotten all about that, hadn't I? Bradley's right. We've got to do something. Something big. Big enough to get rid of these vampiring fiends for ever. Just what . . . *I've got it!*"

Steele pushed his power-lever all the way down, and his forehead creased in thought. "Look out that port," he urged.

One of the officers was peering out across the hazy distance to the Moon City through a telescope. He saw the huge death-machine mounted on the city wall slowly pivot until it pointed directly at

the center of the citadel. The Earthman could imagine the crew of Yultats, under the powerful impulses of the amplifier, carefully aiming the weapon at the inner city of the Xinthquuls. Suddenly a livid streak of flame belched forth from the gun.

ONLY the man with the telescope could see what had happened up to this point, but now the entire assemblage saw a quick burst of scarlet billow up all about the fairy castles of the cruel moon-monsters. Like a living thing the red cloud spread, twisting and rolling over the entire Moon City. Tentacles of shimmering crimson developed from the central bubbling mass of raw color and writhed deep into all the cracks and crannies of the metal and stone edifices. At the same instant the main cloud seemed to swell and expand as if it were absorbing food into itself. A second more and the very highest spires of the doomed metropolis were hidden by a swirling, probing blanket of blood-red death. Steele laughed and threw down his head-gear. He mopped his perspiring face.

"That's the end of that. That gas will completely dissolve every single thing of organic nature in the city. Nothing in all creation could withstand such a great quantity of it. Look, it's all over now. See, the color of the gas is fading; that means that it's beginning to dissipate. I cut off the amplifier's power just as I caused the tank under the very heart of the city to be blown up. I wonder how the Ten felt when they saw that their own Yultats had sent them to destruction? I hope they knew who did it.

"Before I had ever heard of the mind vampires, I always thought wholesale killing was a crime. Now it's a pleasure! Those moon-men were worse than an insect plague back on Earth.

"We'll have to come back in a couple of days when the gas has all gone, if we want to examine the city at close range. Can't take chances with a gas like that.

"Well, what's the matter? What are you all standing there like gaping idiots for? Starr's safe. We're safe. The Moon City's ghastly inhabitants are destroyed. What are we waiting for? Let's get back to the Station as fast as this bus can go. Let's forget the excitement and get some food. I'm hungry!"

To Steele, the affair was at an end. All the breathless events of the past period were over and to be forgotten. That he, as well as Captain Starr, was due to receive a Shooting Star — the highest

award that could possibly be obtained by men of the Legion, given only to the bravest of the brave—did not even occur to him. The horrible doom that had menaced Earth with hideous obliteration had been thwarted; therefore why not forget it?

Forget it! The names of Jack and Richard Starr, of Bradley, and of Steele himself would go down in history as the saviors of their planet; as men who had faced and overcome danger the like of which had never before been imagined in the history of Earth. Why, their brave deeds would be the talk of the world. Forget it, indeed!

But Rusty Steele was like that.

[THE END]