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# A UNIVERSE of Stories



## Valley of Dreams

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by Stanley G. Weinbaum

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Sawmill Brewing Co.



Monday,  
June 10  
@ 6:30PM

Captain Harrison of the Ares expedition turned away from the little telescope in the bow of the rocket. "Two weeks more, at the most," he remarked. "Mars only retrogrades for seventy days in all, relative to the earth, and we've got to be homeward bound during that period, or wait a year and a half for old Mother Earth to go around the sun and catch up with us again. How'd you like to spend a winter here?"

Dick Jarvis, chemist of the party, shivered as he looked up from his notebook. "I'd just as soon spend it in a liquid air tank!" he averred. "These eighty-below zero summer nights are plenty for me."

"Well," mused the captain, "the first successful Martian expedition ought to be home long before then."

"Successful if we get home," corrected Jarvis. "I don't trust these cranky rockets—not since the auxiliary dumped me in the middle of Thyle last week. Walking back from a rocket ride is a new sensation to me."

"Which reminds me," returned Harrison, "that we've got to recover your films. They're important if we're to pull this trip out of the red. Remember how the public mobbed the first moon pictures? Our shots ought to pack 'em to the doors. And the broadcast rights, too; we might show a profit for the Academy."

"What interests me," countered Jarvis, "is a personal profit. A book, for instance; exploration books are always popular. Martian Deserts—how's that for a title?"

"Lousy!" grunted the captain. "Sounds like a cook-book for desserts. You'd have to call it 'Love Life of a Martian,' or something like that."

Jarvis chuckled. "Anyway," he said, "if we once get back home, I'm going to grab what profit there is, and never, never, get any farther from the earth than a good stratosphere plane'll take me. I've learned to appreciate the planet after plowing over this dried-up pill we're on now."

"I'll lay you odds you'll be back here year after next," grinned the Captain. "You'll want to visit your pal—that trick ostrich."

"Tweel?" The other's tone sobered. "I wish I hadn't lost him, at that. He was a good scout. I'd never have survived the dream-beast but for him. And that battle with the push-cart things—I never even had a chance to thank him."

"A pair of lunatics, you two," observed Harrison. He squinted through the port at the gray gloom of the Mare Cimmerium. "There comes the sun." He paused. "Listen, Dick—you and Leroy take the other auxiliary rocket and go out and salvage those films."

Jarvis stared. "Me and Leroy?" he echoed ungrammatically. "Why not me and Putz? An engineer would have some chance of getting us there and back if the rocket goes bad on us."

The captain nodded toward the stern, whence issued at that moment a medley of blows and guttural expletives. "Putz is going over the insides of the Ares," he announced. "He'll have his hands full until we leave, because I want every bolt inspected. It's too late for repairs once we cast off."

"And if Leroy and I crack up? That's our last auxiliary."

"Pick up another ostrich and walk back," suggested Harrison gruffly. Then he smiled. "If you have trouble, we'll hunt you out in the Ares," he finished. "Those films are important." He turned. "Leroy!"

The dapper little biologist appeared, his face questioning.

"You and Jarvis are off to salvage the auxiliary," the Captain said.

"Everything's ready and you'd better start now. Call back at half-hour intervals; I'll be listening."

Leroy's eyes glistened. "Perhaps we land for specimens—no?" he queried.

"Land if you want to. This golf ball seems safe enough."

"Except for the dream-beast," muttered Jarvis with a faint shudder. He frowned suddenly. "Say, as long as we're going that way, suppose I have a look for Tweel's home! He must live off there somewhere, and he's the most important thing we've seen on Mars."

Harrison hesitated. "If I thought you could keep out of trouble," he muttered. "All right," he decided. "Have a look. There's food and water aboard the auxiliary; you can take a couple of days. But keep in touch with me, you saps!"

Jarvis and Leroy went through the airlock out to the grey plain. The thin air, still scarcely warmed by the rising sun, bit flesh and lung like needles, and they gasped with a sense of suffocation. They dropped to a sitting posture, waiting for their bodies, trained by months in acclimatization chambers back on earth, to accommodate themselves to the tenuous air. Leroy's face, as always, turned a smothered blue, and Jarvis heard his own breath rasping and rattling in his throat. But in five minutes, the discomfort passed; they rose and entered the little auxiliary rocket that rested beside the black hull of the Ares.

The under-jets roared out their fiery atomic blast; dirt and bits of shattered biopods spun away in a cloud as the rocket rose. Harrison watched the projectile trail its flaming way into the south, then turned back to his work.

It was four days before he saw the rocket again. Just at evening, as the sun dropped behind the horizon with the suddenness of a candle falling into the sea, the auxiliary flashed out of the southern heavens, easing gently down on the flaming wings of the under-jets. Jarvis and Leroy emerged, passed through the swiftly gathering dusk, and faced him in the light of the Ares. He surveyed the two; Jarvis was tattered and scratched, but apparently in better condition than Leroy, whose dapperness was completely lost. The little biologist was pale as the nearer moon that glowed outside; one arm was bandaged in thermo-skin and his clothes hung in veritable rags. But it was his eyes that struck Harrison most strangely; to one who lived these many weary days with the diminutive Frenchman, there was something queer about them. They were frightened, plainly enough, and that was odd, since Leroy was no coward or he'd never have been one of the four chosen by the Academy for the first Martian expedition. But the fear in his eyes was more understandable than that other expression, that queer fixity of gaze like one in a trance, or like a person in an ecstasy. "Like a chap who's seen Heaven and Hell together," Harrison expressed it to himself. He was yet to discover how right he was.

He assumed a gruffness as the weary pair sat down. "You're a fine looking couple!" he growled. "I should've known better than to let you wander off alone." He paused. "Is your arm all right, Leroy? Need any treatment?"

Jarvis answered. "It's all right—just gashed. No danger of infection here, I guess; Leroy says there aren't any microbes on Mars."

"Well," exploded the Captain, "Let's hear it, then! Your radio reports sounded screwy. 'Escaped from Paradise!' Huh!"

"I didn't want to give details on the radio," said Jarvis soberly. "You'd have thought we'd gone loony."

"I think so, anyway."

"Moi aussi!" muttered Leroy. "I too!"

"Shall I begin at the beginning?" queried the chemist. "Our early reports were pretty nearly complete." He stared at Putz, who had come in silently, his face and hands blackened with carbon, and seated himself beside Harrison.

"At the beginning," the Captain decided.

"Well," began Jarvis, "we got started all right, and flew due south along the meridian of the Ares, same course I'd followed last week. I was getting used to this narrow horizon, so I didn't feel so much like being cooped under a big bowl, but one does keep overestimating distances. Something four miles away looks eight when you're used to terrestrial curvature, and that makes you guess its size just four times too large. A little hill looks like a mountain until you're almost over it."

"I know that," grunted Harrison.

"Yes, but Leroy didn't, and I spent our first couple of hours trying to explain it to him. By the time he understood (if he does yet) we were past Cimmerium and over that Xanthus desert, and then we crossed the canal with the mud city and the barrel-shaped citizens and the place where Tweel had shot the dream-beast. And nothing would do for Pierre here but that we put down so he could practice his biology on the remains. So we did.

"The thing was still there. No sign of decay; couldn't be, of course, without bacterial forms of life, and Leroy says that Mars is as sterile as an operating table."

"Comme le coeur d'une fileuse," corrected the little biologist, who was beginning to regain a trace of his usual energy. "Like an old maid's heart!"

"However," resumed Jarvis, "about a hundred of the little grey-green biopods had fastened onto the thing and were growing and branching. Leroy found a stick and knocked 'em off, and each branch broke away and became a biopod crawling around with the others. So he poked around at the creature, while I looked away from it; even dead, that rope-armed devil gave me the creeps. And then came the surprise; the thing was part plant!"

"C'est vrai!" confirmed the biologist. "It's true!"

"It was a big cousin of the biopods," continued Jarvis. "Leroy was quite excited; he figures that all Martian life is of that sort—neither plant nor animal. Life here never differentiated, he says; everything has both natures in it, even the barrel-creatures—even Tweel! I think he's right, especially when I recall how Tweel rested, sticking his beak in the ground and staying that way all night. I never saw him eat or drink, either; perhaps his beak was more in the nature of a root, and he got his nourishment that way."

"Sounds nutty to me," observed Harrison.

"Well," continued Jarvis, "we broke up a few of the other growths and they acted the same way—the pieces crawled around, only much slower than the biopods, and then stuck themselves in the ground. Then Leroy had to catch a sample of the walking grass, and we were ready to leave when a parade of the barrel-creatures rushed by with their push-carts. They hadn't forgotten me, either; they all drummed out, 'We are v-r-r-i-ends—ouch!' just as they had before. Leroy wanted to shoot one and cut it up, but I remembered the battle Tweel and I had had with them, and vetoed the idea. But he did hit on a possible explanation as to what they did with all the rubbish they gathered."

"Made mud-pies, I guess," grunted the captain.

"More or less," agreed Jarvis. "They use it for food, Leroy thinks. If they're part vegetable, you see, that's what they'd want—soil with organic remains in it to make it fertile. That's why they ground up sand and biopods and other growths all together. See?"

"Dimly," countered Harrison. "How about the suicides?"

"Leroy had a hunch there, too. The suicides jump into the grinder when the mixture has too much sand and gravel; they throw themselves in to adjust the proportions."

"Rats!" said Harrison disgustedly. "Why couldn't they bring in some extra branches from outside?"

"Because suicide is easier. You've got to remember that these creatures can't be judged by earthly standards; they probably don't feel pain, and they haven't got what we'd call individuality. Any intelligence they have is the property of the whole community—like an ant-heap. That's it! Ants are willing to die for their ant-hill; so are these creatures."

"So are men," observed the captain, "if it comes to that."

"Yes, but men aren't exactly eager. It takes some emotion like patriotism to work 'em to the point of dying for their country; these things do it all in the day's work." He paused.

"Well, we took some pictures of the dream-beast and the barrel-creatures, and then we started along. We sailed over Xanthus, keeping as close to the meridian of the Ares as we could, and pretty soon we crossed the trail of the pyramid-builder. So we circled back to let Leroy take a look at it, and when we found it, we landed. The thing had completed just two rows of bricks since Tweel and I left it, and there it was, breathing in silicon and breathing out bricks as if it had eternity to do it in—which it has. Leroy wanted to dissect it with a Boland explosive bullet, but I thought that anything that had lived for ten million years was entitled to the respect due old age, so I talked him out of it. He peeped into the hole on top of it and nearly got beamed by the arm coming up with a brick, and then he chipped off a few pieces of it, which didn't disturb the creature a bit. He found the place I'd chipped, tried to see if there was any sign of healing, and decided he could tell better in two or three thousand years. So we took a few shots of it and sailed on.

"Mid afternoon we located the wreck of my rocket. Not a thing disturbed; we picked up my films and tried to decide what next. I wanted to find Tweel if possible; I figured from the fact of his pointing south that he lived somewhere near Thyle. We plotted our route and judged that the desert we were in now was Thyle II; Thyle I should be east of us. So, on a hunch, we decided to have a look at Thyle I, and away we buzzed."

"Der motors?" queried Putz, breaking his long silence.

"For a wonder, we had no trouble, Karl. Your blast worked perfectly. So we hummed along, pretty high to get a wider view, I'd say about fifty thousand feet. Thyle II spread out like an orange carpet, and after a while we came to the grey branch of the Mare Chronium that bounded it. That was narrow; we crossed it in half an hour, and there was Thyle I—same orange-hued desert as its mate. We veered south, toward the Mare Australe, and followed the edge of the desert. And toward sunset we spotted it."

"Shpotted?" echoed Putz. "Vot vas shpotted?"

"The desert was spotted—with buildings! Not one of the mud cities of the canals, although a canal went through it. From the map we figured the canal was a continuation of the one Schiaparelli called Ascanius.

"We were probably too high to be visible to any inhabitants of the city, but also too high for a good look at it, even with the glasses. However, it was nearly sunset, anyway, so we didn't plan on dropping in. We circled the place; the canal went out into the Mare Australe, and there, glittering in the south, was

the melting polar ice-cap! The canal drained it; we could distinguish the sparkle of water in it. Off to the southeast, just at the edge of the Mare Australe, was a valley—the first irregularity I'd seen on Mars except the cliffs that bounded Xanthus and Thyle II. We flew over the valley—" Jarvis paused suddenly and shuddered; Leroy, whose color had begun to return, seemed to pale. The chemist resumed, "Well, the valley looked all right—then! Just a gray waste, probably full of crawlers like the others.

"We circled back over the city; say, I want to tell you that place was—well, gigantic! It was colossal; at first I thought the size was due to that illusion I spoke of—you know, the nearness of the horizon—but it wasn't that. We sailed right over it, and you've never seen anything like it!

"But the sun dropped out of sight right then. I knew we were pretty far south—latitude 60—but I didn't know just how much night we'd have."

Harrison glanced at a Schiaparelli chart. "About 60—eh?" he said. "Close to what corresponds to the Antarctic circle. You'd have about four hours of night at this season. Three months from now you'd have none at all."

"Three months!" echoed Jarvis, surprised. Then he grinned. "Right! I forget the seasons here are twice as long as ours. Well, we sailed out into the desert about twenty miles, which put the city below the horizon in case we overslept, and there we spent the night.

"You're right about the length of it. We had about four hours of darkness which left us fairly rested. We ate breakfast, called our location to you, and started over to have a look at the city.

"We sailed toward it from the east and it loomed up ahead of us like a range of mountains. Lord, what a city! Not that New York mightn't have higher buildings, or Chicago cover more ground, but for sheer mass, those structures were in a class by themselves. Gargantuan!

"There was a queer look about the place, though. You know how a terrestrial city sprawls out, a nimbus of suburbs, a ring of residential sections, factory districts, parks, highways. There was none of that here; the city rose out of the desert as abruptly as a cliff. Only a few little sand mounds marked the division, and then the walls of those gigantic structures.

"The architecture was strange, too. There were lots of devices that are impossible back home, such as set-backs in reverse, so that a building with a small base could spread out as it rose. That would be a valuable trick in New York, where land is almost priceless, but to do it, you'd have to transfer Martian gravitation there!

"Well, since you can't very well land a rocket in a city street, we put down right next to the canal side of the city, took our small cameras and revolvers, and started for a gap in the wall of masonry. We weren't ten feet from the rocket when we both saw the explanation for a lot of the queerness.

"The city was in ruin! Abandoned, deserted, dead as Babylon! Or at least, so it looked to us then, with its empty streets which, if they had been paved, were now deep under sand."

"A ruin, eh?" commented Harrison. "How old?"

"How could we tell?" countered Jarvis. "The next expedition to this golf ball ought to carry an archeologist—and a philologist, too, as we found out later. But it's a devil of a job to estimate the age of anything here; things weather so slowly that most of the buildings might have been put up yesterday. No rainfall, no earthquakes, no vegetation is here to spread cracks with its roots—nothing. The only aging factors here are the erosion of the wind—and that's negligible in this atmosphere—and the cracks caused by changing temperature. And one other agent—meteorites. They must crash down occasionally on the city, judging from the thinness of the air, and the fact that we've seen four strike ground right here near the Ares."

"Seven," corrected the captain. "Three dropped while you were gone."

"Well, damage by meteorites must be slow, anyway. Big ones would be as rare here as on earth, because big ones get through in spite of the atmosphere, and those buildings could sustain a lot of little ones. My guess at the city's age—and it may be wrong by a big percentage—would be fifteen thousand years. Even that's thousands of years older than any human civilization; fifteen thousand years ago was the Late Stone Age in the history of mankind.

"So Leroy and I crept up to those tremendous buildings feeling like pygmies, sort of awe-struck, and talking in whispers. I tell you, it was ghostly walking down that dead and deserted street, and every time we passed through a shadow, we shivered, and not just because shadows are cold on Mars. We felt like intruders, as if the great race that had built the place might resent our presence even across a hundred and fifty centuries. The place was as quiet as a grave, but we kept imagining things and peeping down the dark lanes between buildings and looking over our shoulders. Most of the structures were windowless, but when we did see an opening in those vast walls, we couldn't look away, expecting to see some horror peering out of it.

"Then we passed an edifice with an open arch; the doors were there, but blocked open by sand. I got up nerve enough to take a look inside, and then, of course, we discovered we'd forgotten to take our flashes. But we eased a few feet into the darkness and the passage debouched into a colossal hall. Far above us a little crack let in a pallid ray of daylight, not nearly enough to light the place; I couldn't even see if the hall rose clear to the distant roof. But I know the place was enormous; I said something to Leroy and a million thin echoes came slipping back to us out of the darkness. And after that, we began to hear other sounds—slithering rustling noises, and whispers, and sounds like suppressed breathing—and something black and silent passed between us and that far-away crevice of light.

"Then we saw three little greenish spots of luminosity in the dusk to our left. We stood staring at them, and suddenly they all shifted at once. Leroy yelled 'Ce sont des yeux!' and they were! They were eyes!

"Well, we stood frozen for a moment, while Leroy's yell reverberated back and forth between the distant walls, and the echoes repeated the words in queer, thin voices. There were mumblings and mutterings and whisperings and sounds like strange soft laughter, and then the three-eyed thing moved again. Then we broke for the door!

"We felt better out in the sunlight; we looked at each other sheepishly, but neither of us suggested another look at the buildings inside—though we did see the place later, and that was queer, too—but you'll hear about it when I come to it. We just loosened our revolvers and crept on along that ghostly street.

"The street curved and twisted and subdivided. I kept careful note of our directions, since we couldn't risk getting lost in that gigantic maze. Without our thermo-skin bags, night would finish us, even if what lurked in the ruins didn't. By and by, I noticed that we were veering back toward the canal, the buildings ended and there were only a few dozen ragged stone huts which looked as though they might have been built of debris from the city. I was just beginning to feel a bit disappointed at finding no trace of Tweel's people here when we rounded a corner and there he was!

"I yelled 'Tweel!' but he just stared, and then I realized that he wasn't Tweel, but another Martian of his sort. Tweel's feathery appendages were more orange hued and he stood several inches taller than this one. Leroy was sputtering in excitement, and the Martian kept his vicious beak directed at us, so I stepped forward as peace-maker. I said 'Tweel?' very questioningly, but there was no result. I tried it a dozen times, and we finally had to give it up; we couldn't connect.

"Leroy and I walked toward the huts, and the Martian followed us. Twice he was joined by others, and each time I tried yelling 'Tweel' at them but they just stared at us. So we ambled on with the three trailing us, and then it suddenly occurred to me that my Martian accent might be at fault. I faced the group and tried trilling it out the way Tweel himself did: 'T-r-r-rwee-r-rl!' Like that.

"And that worked! One of them spun his head around a full ninety degrees, and screeched 'T-r-r-rweee-r-ri!' and a moment later, like an arrow from a bow, Tweel came sailing over the nearer huts to land on his beak in front of me!

"Man, we were glad to see each other! Tweel set up a twittering and chirping like a farm in summer and went sailing up and coming down on his beak, and I would have grabbed his hands, only he wouldn't keep still long enough.

"The other Martians and Leroy just stared, and after a while, Tweel stopped bouncing, and there we were. We couldn't talk to each other any more than we could before, so after I'd said 'Tweel' a couple of times and he'd said 'Tick,' we were more or less helpless. However, it was only mid-morning, and it seemed important to learn all we could about Tweel and the city, so I suggested that he guide us around the place if he weren't busy. I put over the idea by pointing back at the buildings and then at him and us.

"Well, apparently he wasn't too busy, for he set off with us, leading the way with one of his hundred and fifty-foot nosedives that set Leroy gasping. When we caught up, he said something like 'one, one, two—two, two, four—no, no—yes, yes—rock—no breet!' That didn't seem to mean anything; perhaps he was just letting Leroy know that he could speak English, or perhaps he was merely running over his vocabulary to refresh his memory.

"Anyway, he showed us around. He had a light of sorts in his black pouch, good enough for small rooms, but simply lost in some of the colossal caverns we went through. Nine out of ten buildings meant absolutely nothing to us—just vast empty chambers, full of shadows and rustlings and echoes. I couldn't imagine their use; they didn't seem suitable for living quarters, or even for commercial purposes—trade and so forth; they might have been all right as power-houses, but what could have been the purpose of a whole city full? And where were the remains of the machinery?

"The place was a mystery. Sometimes Tweel would show us through a hall that would have housed an ocean-liner, and he'd seem to swell with pride—and we couldn't make a damn thing of it! As a display of architectural power, the city was colossal; as anything else it was just nutty!

"But we did see one thing that registered. We came to that same building Leroy and I had entered earlier—the one with the three eyes in it. Well, we were a little shaky about going in there, but Tweel twittered and trilled and kept saying, 'Yes, yes, yes!' so we followed him, staring nervously about for the thing that had watched us. However, that hall was just like the others, full of murmurs and slithering noises and shadowy things slipping away into corners. If the three-eyed creature were still there, it must have slunk away with the others.

"Tweel led us along the wall; his light showed a series of little alcoves, and in the first of these we ran into a puzzling thing—a very weird thing. As the light flashed into the alcove, I saw first just an empty space, and then, squatting on the floor, I saw—it! A little creature about as big as a large rat, it was, gray and huddled and evidently startled by our appearance. It had the queerest, most devilish little face!—pointed ears or horns and satanic eyes that seemed to sparkle with a sort of fiendish intelligence.

"Tweel saw it, too, and let out a screech of anger, and the creature rose on two pencil-thin legs and scuttled off with a half-terrified, half defiant squeak. It darted past us into the darkness too quickly even for Tweel, and as it ran, something waved on its body like the fluttering of a cape. Tweel screeched angrily at it and set up a shrill hullabaloo that sounded like genuine rage.

"But the thing was gone, and then I noticed the weirdest of imaginable details. Where it had squatted on the floor was—a book! It had been hunched over a book!

"I took a step forward; sure enough, there was some sort of inscription on the pages—wavy white lines like a seismograph record on black sheets like the material of Tweel's pouch. Tweel fumed and

whistled in wrath, picked up the volume and slammed it into place on a shelf full of others. Leroy and I stared dumbfounded at each other.

"Had the little thing with the fiendish face been reading? Or was it simply eating the pages, getting physical nourishment rather than mental? Or had the whole thing been accidental?"

"If the creature were some rat-like pest that destroyed books, Tweel's rage was understandable, but why should he try to prevent an intelligent being, even though of an alien race, from reading—if it was reading? I don't know; I did notice that the book was entirely undamaged, nor did I see a damaged book among any that we handled. But I have an odd hunch that if we knew the secret of the little cape-clothed imp, we'd know the mystery of the vast abandoned city and of the decay of Martian culture.

"Well, Tweel quieted down after a while and led us completely around that tremendous hall. It had been a library, I think; at least, there were thousands upon thousands of those queer black-paged volumes printed in wavy lines of white. There were pictures, too, in some; and some of these showed Tweel's people. That's a point, of course; it indicated that his race built the city and printed the books. I don't think the greatest philologist on earth will ever translate one line of those records; they were made by minds too different from ours.

"Tweel could read them, naturally. He twittered off a few lines, and then I took a few of the books, with his permission; he said 'no, no!' to some and 'yes, yes!' to others. Perhaps he kept back the ones his people needed, or perhaps he let me take the ones he thought we'd understand most easily. I don't know; the books are outside there in the rocket.

"Then he held that dim torch of his toward the walls, and they were pictured. Lord, what pictures! They stretched up and up into the blackness of the roof, mysterious and gigantic. I couldn't make much of the first wall; it seemed to be a portrayal of a great assembly of Tweel's people. Perhaps it was meant to symbolize Society or Government. But the next wall was more obvious; it showed creatures at work on a colossal machine of some sort, and that would be Industry or Science. The back wall had corroded away in part, from what we could see, I suspected the scene was meant to portray Art, but it was on the fourth wall that we got a shock that nearly dazed us.

"I think the symbol was Exploration or Discovery. This wall was a little plainer, because the moving beam of daylight from that crack lit up the higher surface and Tweel's torch illuminated the lower. We made out a giant seated figure, one of the beaked Martians like Tweel, but with every limb suggesting heaviness, weariness. The arms dropped inertly on the chair, the thin neck bent and the beak rested on the body, as if the creature could scarcely bear its own weight. And before it was a queer kneeling figure, and at sight of it, Leroy and I almost reeled against each other. It was, apparently, a man!"

"A man!" bellowed Harrison. "A man you say?"

"I said apparently," retorted Jarvis. "The artist had exaggerated the nose almost to the length of Tweel's beak, but the figure had black shoulder-length hair, and instead of the Martian four, there were five fingers on its outstretched hand! It was kneeling as if in worship of the Martian, and on the ground was what looked like a pottery bowl full of some food as an offering. Well! Leroy and I thought we'd gone screwy!"

"And Putz and I think so, too!" roared the captain.

"Maybe we all have," replied Jarvis, with a faint grin at the pale face of the little Frenchman, who returned it in silence. "Anyway," he continued, "Tweel was squeaking and pointing at the figure, and saying 'Tick! Tick!' so he recognized the resemblance—and never mind any cracks about my nose!" he warned the captain. "It was Leroy who made the important comment; he looked at the Martian and said 'Thoth! The god Thoth!'"

"Oui!" confirmed the biologist. "Comme l'Egypte!"

"Yeah," said Jarvis. "Like the Egyptian ibis-headed god—the one with the beak. Well, no sooner did Tweel hear the name Thoth than he set up a clamor of twittering and squeaking. He pointed at himself and said 'Thoth! Thoth!' and then waved his arm all around and repeated it. Of course he often did queer things, but we both thought we understood what he meant. He was trying to tell us that his race called themselves Thoth. Do you see what I'm getting at?"

"I see, all right," said Harrison. "You think the Martians paid a visit to the earth, and the Egyptians remembered it in their mythology. Well, you're off, then; there wasn't any Egyptian civilization fifteen thousand years ago."

"Wrong!" grinned Jarvis. "It's too bad we haven't an archeologist with us, but Leroy tells me that there was a stone-age culture in Egypt then, the pre-dynastic civilization."

"Well, even so, what of it?"

"Plenty! Everything in that picture proves my point. The attitude of the Martian, heavy and weary—that's the unnatural strain of terrestrial gravitation. The name Thoth; Leroy tells me Thoth was the Egyptian god of philosophy and the inventor of writing! Get that? They must have picked up the idea from watching the Martian take notes. It's too much for coincidence that Thoth should be beaked and ibis-headed, and that the beaked Martians call themselves Thoth."

"Well, I'll be hanged! But what about the nose on the Egyptian? Do you mean to tell me that stone-age Egyptians had longer noses than ordinary men?"

"Of course not! It's just that the Martians very naturally cast their paintings in Martianized form. Don't human beings tend to relate everything to themselves? That's why dugongs and manatees started the mermaid myths—sailors thought they saw human features on the beasts. So the Martian artist, drawing either from descriptions or imperfect photographs, naturally exaggerated the size of the human nose to a degree that looked normal to him. Or anyway, that's my theory."

"Well, it'll do as a theory," grunted Harrison. "What I want to hear is why you two got back here looking like a couple of year-before-last bird's nests."

Jarvis shuddered again, and cast another glance at Leroy. The little biologist was recovering some of his accustomed poise, but he returned the glance with an echo of the chemist's shudder.

"We'll get to that," resumed the latter. "Meanwhile I'll stick to Tweel and his people. We spent the better part of three days with them, as you know. I can't give every detail, but I'll summarize the important facts and give our conclusions, which may not be worth an inflated franc. It's hard to judge this dried-up world by earthly standards.

"We took pictures of everything possible; I even tried to photograph that gigantic mural in the library, but unless Tweel's lamp was unusually rich in actinic rays, I don't suppose it'll show. And that's a pity, since it's undoubtedly the most interesting object we've found on Mars, at least from a human viewpoint.

"Tweel was a very courteous host. He took us to all the points of interest—even the new water-works."

Putz's eyes brightened at the word. "Vater-vorks?" he echoed. "For vot?"

"For the canal, naturally. They have to build up a head of water to drive it through; that's obvious." He looked at the captain. "You told me yourself that to drive water from the polar caps of Mars to the equator was equivalent to forcing it up a twenty-mile hill, because Mars is flattened at the poles and bulges at the equator just like the earth."

"That's true," agreed Harrison.

"Well," resumed Jarvis, "this city was one of the relay stations to boost the flow. Their power plant was the only one of the giant buildings that seemed to serve any useful purpose, and that was worth seeing. I wish you'd seen it, Karl; you'll have to make what you can from our pictures. It's a sun-power plant!"

Harrison and Putz stared. "Sun-power!" grunted the captain. "That's primitive!" And the engineer added an emphatic "Ja!" of agreement.

"Not as primitive as all that," corrected Jarvis. "The sunlight focused on a queer cylinder in the center of a big concave mirror, and they drew an electric current from it. The juice worked the pumps."

"A t'ermocouple!" ejaculated Putz.

"That sounds reasonable; you can judge by the pictures. But the power-plant had some queer things about it. The queerest was that the machinery was tended, not by Tweel's people, but by some of the barrel-shaped creatures like the ones in Xanthus!" He gazed around at the faces of his auditors; there was no comment.

"Get it?" he resumed. At their silence, he proceeded, "I see you don't. Leroy figured it out, but whether rightly or wrongly, I don't know. He thinks that the barrels and Tweel's race have a reciprocal arrangement like—well, like bees and flowers on earth. The flowers give honey for the bees; the bees carry the pollen for the flowers. See? The barrels tend the works and Tweel's people build the canal system. The Xanthus city must have been a boosting station; that explains the mysterious machines I saw. And Leroy believes further that it isn't an intelligent arrangement—not on the part of the barrels, at least—but that it's been done for so many thousands of generations that it's become instinctive—a tropism—just like the actions of ants and bees. The creatures have been bred to it!"

"Nuts!" observed Harrison. "Let's hear you explain the reason for that big empty city, then."

"Sure. Tweel's civilization is decadent, that's the reason. It's a dying race, and out of all the millions that must once have lived there, Tweel's couple of hundred companions are the remnant. They're an outpost, left to tend the source of the water at the polar cap; probably there are still a few respectable cities left somewhere on the canal system, most likely near the tropics. It's the last gasp of a race—and a race that reached a higher peak of culture than Man!"

"Huh?" said Harrison. "Then why are they dying? Lack of water?"

"I don't think so," responded the chemist. "If my guess at the city's age is right, fifteen thousand years wouldn't make enough difference in the water supply—nor a hundred thousand, for that matter. It's something else, though the water's doubtless a factor."

"Das wasser," cut in Putz. "Vere goes dot?"

"Even a chemist knows that!" scoffed Jarvis. "At least on earth. Here I'm not so sure, but on earth, every time there's a lightning flash, it electrolyzes some water vapor into hydrogen and oxygen, and then the hydrogen escapes into space, because terrestrial gravitation won't hold it permanently. And every time there's an earthquake, some water is lost to the interior. Slow—but damned certain." He turned to Harrison. "Right, Cap?"

"Right," conceded the captain. "But here, of course—no earthquakes, no thunderstorms—the loss must be very slow. Then why is the race dying?"

"The sun-power plant answers that," countered Jarvis. "Lack of fuel! Lack of power! No oil left, no coal left—if Mars ever had a Carboniferous Age—and no water-power—just the dribblets of energy they can get from the sun. That's why they're dying."

"With the limitless energy of the atom?" exploded Harrison.

"They don't know about atomic energy. Probably never did. Must have used some other principle in their space-ship."

"Then," snapped the captain, "what makes you rate their intelligence above the human? We've finally cracked open the atom!"

"Sure we have. We had a clue, didn't we? Radium and uranium. Do you think we'd ever have learned how without those elements? We'd never even have suspected that atomic energy existed!"

"Well? Haven't they—?"

"No, they haven't. You've told me yourself that Mars has only 73 percent of the earth's density. Even a chemist can see that that means a lack of heavy metals—no osmium, no uranium, no radium. They didn't have the clue."

"Even so, that doesn't prove they're more advanced than we are. If they were more advanced, they'd have discovered it anyway."

"Maybe," conceded Jarvis. "I'm not claiming that we don't surpass them in some ways. But in others, they're far ahead of us."

"In what, for instance?"

"Well—socially, for one thing."

"Huh? How do you mean?"

Jarvis glanced in turn at each of the three that faced him. He hesitated. "I wonder how you chaps will take this," he muttered. "Naturally, everybody likes his own system best." He frowned. "Look here—on the earth we have three types of society, haven't we? And there's a member of each type right here. Putz lives under a dictatorship—an autocracy. Leroy's a citizen of the Sixth Commune in France. Harrison and I are Americans, members of a democracy. There you are—autocracy, democracy, communism—the three types of terrestrial societies. Tweel's people have a different system from any of us."

"Different? What is it?"

"The one no earthly nation has tried. Anarchy!"

"Anarchy!" the captain and Putz burst out together.

"That's right."

"But—" Harrison was sputtering. "What do you mean—they're ahead of us? Anarchy! Bah!"

"All right—bah!" retorted Jarvis. "I'm not saying it would work for us, or for any race of men. But it works for them."

"But—anarchy!" The captain was indignant.

"Well, when you come right down to it," argued Jarvis defensively, "anarchy is the ideal form of government, if it works. Emerson said that the best government was that which governs least, and so did Wendell Phillips, and I think George Washington. And you can't have any form of government which governs less than anarchy, which is no government at all!"

The captain was sputtering. "But—it's unnatural! Even savage tribes have their chiefs! Even a pack of wolves has its leader!"

"Well," retorted Jarvis defiantly, "that only proves that government is a primitive device, doesn't it? With a perfect race you wouldn't need it at all; government is a confession of weakness, isn't it? It's a confession that part of the people won't cooperate with the rest and that you need laws to restrain those individuals which a psychologist calls anti-social. If there were no anti-social persons—criminals and such—you wouldn't need laws or police, would you?"

"But government! You'd need government! How about public works—wars—taxes?"

"No wars on Mars, in spite of being named after the War God. No point in wars here; the population is too thin and too scattered, and besides, it takes the help of every single community to keep the canal system functioning. No taxes because, apparently, all individuals cooperate in building public works. No competition to cause trouble, because anybody can help himself to anything. As I said, with a perfect race government is entirely unnecessary."

"And do you consider the Martians a perfect race?" asked the captain grimly.

"Not at all! But they've existed so much longer than man that they're evolved, socially at least, to the point where they don't need government. They work together, that's all." Jarvis paused. "Queer, isn't it—as if Mother Nature were carrying on two experiments, one at home and one on Mars. On earth it's trial of an emotional, highly competitive race in a world of plenty; here it's the trial of a quiet, friendly race on a desert, unproductive, and inhospitable world. Everything here makes for cooperation. Why, there isn't even the factor that causes so much trouble at home—sex!"

"Huh?"

"Yeah: Tweel's people reproduce just like the barrels in the mud cities; two individuals grow a third one between them. Another proof of Leroy's theory that Martian life is neither animal nor vegetable. Besides, Tweel was a good enough host to let him poke down his beak and twiddle his feathers, and the examination convinced Leroy."

"Oui," confirmed the biologist. "It is true."

"But anarchy!" grumbled Harrison disgustedly. "It would show up on a dizzy, half-dead pill like Mars!"

"It'll be a good many centuries before you'll have to worry about it on earth," grinned Jarvis. He resumed his narrative.

"Well, we wandered through that sepulchral city, taking pictures of everything. And then—" Jarvis paused and shuddered—"then I took a notion to have a look at that valley we'd spotted from the rocket. I don't know why. But when we tried to steer Tweel in that direction, he set up such a squawking and screeching that I thought he'd gone batty."

"If possible!" jeered Harrison.

"So we started over there without him; he kept wailing and screaming, 'No-no-no! Tick!' but that made us the more curious. He sailed over our heads and stuck on his beak, and went through a dozen other antics, but we ploughed on, and finally he gave up and trudged disconsolately along with us.

"The valley wasn't more than a mile southeast of the city. Tweel could have covered the distance in twenty jumps, but he lagged and loitered and kept pointing back at the city and wailing 'No—no—no!' Then he'd sail up into the air and zip down on his beak directly in front of us, and we'd have to walk around him. I'd seen him do lots of crazy things before, of course; I was used to them, but it was as plain as print that he didn't want us to see that valley."

"Why?" queried Harrison.

"You asked why we came back like tramps," said Jarvis with a faint shudder. "You'll learn. We plugged along up a low rocky hill that bounded it, and as we neared the top, Tweel said, 'No breet', Tick! No breet!' Well, those were the words he used to describe the silicon monster; they were also the words he had used to tell me that the image of Fancy Long, the one that had almost lured me to the dream-beast, wasn't real. I remembered that, but it meant nothing to me—then!

"Right after that, Tweel said, 'You one-one-two, he one-one-two,' and then I began to see. That was the phrase he had used to explain the dream-beast to tell me that what I thought, the creature thought—to

tell me how the thing lured its victims by their own desires. So I warned Leroy; it seemed to me that even the dream-beast couldn't be dangerous if we were warned and expecting it. Well, I was wrong!

"As we reached the crest, Tweel spun his head completely around, so his feet were forward but his eyes looked backward, as if he feared to gaze into the valley. Leroy and I stared out over it, just a gray waste like this around us, with the gleam of the south polar cap far beyond its southern rim. That's what it was one second; the next it was—Paradise!"

"What?" exclaimed the captain.

Jarvis turned to Leroy. "Can you describe it?" he asked.

The biologist waved helpless hands, "C'est impossible!" he whispered. "Il me rend muet!"

"It strikes me dumb, too," muttered Jarvis. "I don't know how to tell it; I'm a chemist, not a poet. Paradise is as good a word as I can think of, and that's not at all right. It was Paradise and Hell in one!"

"Will you talk sense?" growled Harrison.

"As much of it as makes sense. I tell you, one moment we were looking at a grey valley covered with blobby plants, and the next—Lord! You can't imagine that next moment! How would you like to see all your dreams made real? Every desire you'd ever had gratified? Everything you'd ever wanted there for the taking?"

"I'd like it fine!" said the captain.

"You're welcome, then!—not only your noble desires, remember! Every good impulse, yes—but also every nasty little wish, every vicious thought, everything you'd ever desired, good or bad! The dream-beasts are marvelous salesmen, but they lack the moral sense!"

"The dream-beasts?"

"Yes. It was a valley of them. Hundreds, I suppose, maybe thousands. Enough, at any rate, to spread out a complete picture of your desires, even all the forgotten ones that must have been drawn out of the subconscious. A Paradise—of sorts! I saw a dozen Fancy Longs, in every costume I'd ever admired on her, and some I must have imagined. I saw every beautiful woman I've ever known, and all of them pleading for my attention. I saw every lovely place I'd ever wanted to be, all packed queerly into that little valley. And I saw—other things." He shook his head soberly. "It wasn't all exactly pretty. Lord! How much of the beast is left in us! I suppose if every man alive could have one look at that weird valley, and could see just once what nastiness is hidden in him—well, the world might gain by it. I thanked heaven afterwards that Leroy—and even Tweel—saw their own pictures and not mine!"

Jarvis paused again, then resumed, "I turned dizzy with a sort of ecstasy. I closed my eyes—and with eyes closed, I still saw the whole thing! That beautiful, evil, devilish panorama was in my mind, not my eyes. That's how those fiends work—through the mind. I knew it was the dream-beasts; I didn't need Tweel's wail of 'No breet! No breet!' But—I couldn't keep away! I knew it was death beckoning, but it was worth it for one moment with the vision."

"Which particular vision?" asked Harrison dryly.

Jarvis flushed. "No matter," he said. "But beside me I heard Leroy's cry of 'Yvonne! Yvonne!' and I knew he was trapped like myself. I fought for sanity; I kept telling myself to stop, and all the time I was rushing headlong into the snare!"

"Then something tripped me. Tweel! He had come leaping from behind; as I crashed down I saw him flash over me straight toward—toward what I'd been running to, with his vicious beak pointed right at her heart!"

"Oh!" nodded the captain. "Her heart!"

"Never mind that. When I scrambled up, that particular image was gone, and Tweel was in a twist of black ropey arms, just as when I first saw him. He'd missed a vital point in the beast's anatomy, but was jabbing away desperately with his beak.

"Somehow, the spell had lifted, or partially lifted. I wasn't five feet from Tweel, and it took a terrific struggle, but I managed to raise my revolver and put a Boland shell into the beast. Out came a spurt of horrible black corruption, drenching Tweel and me—and I guess the sickening smell of it helped to destroy the illusion of that valley of beauty. Anyway, we managed to get Leroy away from the devil that had him, and the three of us staggered to the ridge and over. I had presence of mind enough to raise my camera over the crest and take a shot of the valley, but I'll bet it shows nothing but gray waste and writhing horrors. What we saw was with our minds, not our eyes."

Jarvis paused and shuddered. "The brute half poisoned Leroy," he continued. "We dragged ourselves back to the auxiliary, called you, and did what we could to treat ourselves. Leroy took a long dose of the cognac that we had with us; we didn't dare try anything of Tweel's because his metabolism is so different from ours that what cured him might kill us. But the cognac seemed to work, and so, after I'd done one other thing I wanted to do, we came back here—and that's all."

"All, is it?" queried Harrison. "So you've solved all the mysteries of Mars, eh?"

"Not by a damned sight!" retorted Jarvis. "Plenty of unanswered questions are left."

"Ja!" snapped Putz. "Der evaporation—dot iss shtopped how?"

"In the canals? I wondered about that, too; in those thousands of miles, and against this low air-pressure, you'd think they'd lose a lot. But the answer's simple; they float a skin of oil on the water."

Putz nodded, but Harrison cut in. "Here's a puzzler. With only coal and oil—just combustion or electric power—where'd they get the energy to build a planet-wide canal system, thousands and thousands of miles of 'em? Think of the job we had cutting the Panama Canal to sea level, and then answer that!"

"Easy!" grinned Jarvis. "Martian gravity and Martian air—that's the answer. Figure it out: First, the dirt they dug only weighed a third its earth-weight. Second, a steam engine here expands against ten pounds per square inch less air pressure than on earth. Third, they could build the engine three times as large here with no greater internal weight. And fourth, the whole planet's nearly level. Right, Putz?"

The engineer nodded. "Ja! Der shteam—engine—it is sieben-und-zwanzig—twenty-seven times so effective here."

"Well, there does go the last mystery then," mused Harrison.

"Yeah?" queried Jarvis sardonically. "You answer these, then. What was the nature of that vast empty city? Why do the Martians need canals, since we never saw them eat or drink? Did they really visit the earth before the dawn of history, and, if not atomic energy, what powered their ship? Since Tweel's race seems to need little or no water, are they merely operating the canals for some higher creature that does? Are there other intelligences on Mars? If not, what was the demon-faced imp we saw with the book? There are a few mysteries for you!"

"I know one or two more!" growled Harrison, glaring suddenly at little Leroy. "You and your visions! 'Yvonne!' eh? Your wife's name is Marie, isn't it?"

The little biologist turned crimson. "Oui," he admitted unhappily. He turned pleading eyes on the captain. "Please," he said. "In Paris tout le monde—everybody he think differently of those things—no?" He twisted uncomfortably. "Please, you will not tell Marie, n'est-ce pas?"

Harrison chuckled. "None of my business," he said. "One more question, Jarvis. What was the one other thing you did before returning here?"

Jarvis looked diffident. "Oh—that." He hesitated. "Well I sort of felt we owed Tweel a lot, so after some trouble, we coaxed him into the rocket and sailed him out to the wreck of the first one, over on Thyle II. Then," he finished apologetically, "I showed him the atomic blast, got it working—and gave it to him!"

"You what?" roared the Captain. "You turned something as powerful as that over to an alien race—maybe some day as an enemy race?"

"Yes, I did," said Jarvis. "Look here," he argued defensively. "This lousy, dried-up pill of a desert called Mars'll never support much human population. The Sahara desert is just as good a field for imperialism, and a lot closer to home. So we'll never find Tweel's race enemies. The only value we'll find here is commercial trade with the Martians. Then why shouldn't I give Tweel a chance for survival? With atomic energy, they can run their canal system a hundred per cent instead of only one out of five, as Putz's observations showed. They can repopulate those ghostly cities; they can resume their arts and industries; they can trade with the nations of the earth—and I'll bet they can teach us a few things," he paused, "if they can figure out the atomic blast, and I'll lay odds they can. They're no fools, Tweel and his ostrich-faced Martians!"



# Flight on Titan

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<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks14/1401861h.html>

by Stanley G. Weinbaum

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The gale roared incessantly like all the tormented souls since creation's dawn, driving the two sliding and tumbling into the momentary shelter of a ridge of ice. A cloud of glittering ice needles swept by, rainbow-hued in the brilliant night, and the chill of eighty below zero bit through the sponge rubber of their suits.

The girl placed her visor close against the man's helmet and said steadily: "This is the end, isn't it, Tim? Because I'm glad I came with you, then. I'm glad it's both of us together."

The man groaned despairingly, and the blast tore the wood away. He turned aside, thinking regretfully of the past.

The year 2142, as most people recall, was a disastrous one in the financial world. It was the year of the collapse of the Planetary Trading Corporation and the year that ushered in the resultant depression.

Most of us remember the hysterical two years of speculation that preceded the crash. These followed the final development of the Hocken Rocket in 2030, the annexation of the arid and useless Moon by Russia, and the discovery by the international expeditions of a dead civilization on Mars and a primitive one on Venus. It was the Venus report that led to the formation of the P.T.C. and the debacle that followed.

No one knows now who was to blame. All the members of those intrepid expeditions have suffered under the cloud; two of them were murdered in Paris only a little more than a year ago, presumably by vengeful investors in Planetary. Gold will do such things to men; they will take mad risks with what they have, pursuing a vision of what they hope to have, and, when the crash comes, turn on any scapegoat that's luckless enough to be handy.

At any rate, regardless of responsibility, the rumor started that gold was as common on Venus as iron on Earth—and then the damage was done. No one stopped to reflect that the planet's density is less than the Earth's, and that gold, or any heavy metal, should be even rarer there, if not utterly absent, as on the Moon.

The rumors spread like an epidemic, and stories circulated that the expedition members had returned wealthy. All one had to do, it seemed, was to trade beads and jack-knives to the obliging Venusian natives for golden cups, golden axes, golden ornaments.

The shares of the quickly organized Planetary Trading Corporation skyrocketed from a par of fifty to a peak of thirteen hundred. Vast paper fortunes were made; the civilized world went into a frenzy of speculative fervor; prices of everything shot upward in anticipation of a flood of new gold—food, rent, clothing, machinery.

We all remember the outcome. Planetary's first two trading expeditions looked long and arduously for the gold. They found the natives; they found them eager enough for beads and jackknives, but they found them quite destitute of gold. They brought back neat little carvings and a quantity of silver, scientifically valuable records, and a handful of pearlike stones from Venusian seas—but no gold.

Nothing to pay dividends to the avid stockholders; nothing to support the rumor-puffed structure of prices, which crashed as quickly as the shares of Planetary, once the truth was out.

The collapse affected investors and noninvestors alike, and among them, Timothy Vick and his Canadian wife Diane. The spring of 2142 found them staring at each other in their New York apartment, all but penniless, and in the very depths of despair. Jobs were vanishing, and Tim's training as a salesman of 'vision sets was utterly useless in a world where nobody could afford to buy them. So they sat and stared hopelessly, and said very little.

Tim at last broke the gloomy silence. "Di," he said, "what'll we do when it's all gone?"

"Our money? Tim, something will come before then. It has to!"

"But if it doesn't?" At her silence, he continued: "I'm not going to sit and wait. I'm going to do something."

"What, Tim? What is there to do?"

"I know!" His voice dropped. "Di, do you remember that queer gem the government expedition brought back from Titan? The one Mrs. Advent paid half a million dollars for, just so she could wear it to the opera?"

"I remember the story, Tim. I never heard of Titan."

"One of Saturn's moons. United States possession; there's a confirmatory settlement on it. It's habitable."

"Oh!" she said, puzzled. "But—what about it?"

"Just this: Last year half a dozen traders went up there after more. One of 'em returned to-day with five of the things; I saw it on the news broadcast. He's rich, Di. Those things are almost priceless."

Diane began to see. "Tim!" she said huskily.

"Yes. That's the idea. I'm going to leave you all I can, except what money I must have, and go up there for a year. I've read up on Titan; I know what to take." He paused. "It's coming near Perigee now. There'll be a rocket leaving for Nivia—that's the settlement—in a week."

"Tim!" murmured Diane again. "Titan—oh, I did hear of it! That's—that's the cold one, isn't it?"

"Cold as Dante's hell," replied Tim. He saw her lips form a word of protest and his blue eyes went narrow and stubborn.

She changed her unspoken word. "I'm going with you," she said. Her brown eyes narrowed to meet his.

Diane had won. That was over now—the long hours of argument, the final submission, the months of insufferably stuffy air aboard the rocket, the laborious struggle to erect the tiny hemispherical metal-walled shack that served as living quarters. The rocket had dropped them, cargo and all, at a point determined after a long conference back on Earth with Simonds, the returned trader.

He had been an agreeable sort, but rather discouraging; his description of the Titan climate had sounded rather like a word picture of an Eskimo hell. He hadn't exaggerated, either; Tim realized that now and cursed the weakness that had made him yield to Diane's insistence.

Well, there they were. He was smoking his one permitted daily cigarette, and Diane was reading aloud from a history of the world, taken because it had some thousand pages and would last a long time. Outside was the unbelievable Titanian night with its usual hundred-mile gale screaming against the

curved walls, and the glitter of ice mountains showing green under the glare of Saturn wills its rings visible edgewise from the satellite since it revolved in the same plane.

Beyond the Mountains of the Damned—so named by Young, the discoverer—a hundred miles away, lay Nivia, the City of Snow. But they might as well have been on a planet of Van Maanen's star so far as human contacts went; surely no one could survive a cross-country journey here through nights that were generally eighty below zero, or even days that sometimes attained the balmy warmth of just above freezing. No; they were marooned here until the rocket returned next year.

Tim shivered as the grinding roar of a shifting mountain sounded above the scream of the wind. That was common enough here; they were always shifting under the enormous tidal pull of the giant Saturn and the thrust of that incredible wind. But it was disquieting, none the less; it was an ever-present danger to their little dwelling.

"Br-r-r!" he shuddered. "Listen to that!"

Diane looked up. "Not used to it yet, after three months?"

"And never will be!" he returned. "What a place!"

She smiled. "I know what'll cheer you," she said, rising.

From a tin box she poured a cascade of fire. "Look, Tim! Six of them. Six flame-orchids!"

He gazed at the glowing eggs of light. Like the flush of life itself, rainbow rings rolled in a hundred tints beneath their surfaces. Diane passed her hand above them, and they responded to its warmth with a flame of changing colors that swept the entire keyboard of the spectrum, reds merging into blues, violets, greens, and yellows, then orange and scarlet of blood.

"They're beautiful!" Tim whispered, staring fascinated. "No wonder rich women bleed themselves dry for them. Diane, we'll save one out—the prettiest—for you."

She laughed. "There are things I'd rather have, Tim."

A pounding sounded above the windy bellowing. They knew what it meant; Tim rose and peered through the reinforced window into the brilliant night, and, after a moment of blinking, made out the four-foot-long body of a native sprawled before his door, his coned claws hooked into the ice. On Titan, of course, no creature stood erect against those perpetual howling blasts, no creature, that is, save man, a recent arrival from a gentler world.

Tim opened the door, slipping it wider notch by notch on its retaining chain, since muscular power would have been inadequate to hold it. The wind bellowed gleefully in, sweeping the hanging utensils on the walls into a clanging chorus, spinning a loose garment into a mad dance, chilling the air to bitterness.

The native slithered through like a walrus, his streamlined body seallike and glistening with its two-inch protective layer of blubbery flesh. As Tim cranked the door shut, the creature raised the filmy underlids from its eyes, and they showed large, luminous, and doglike.

This was a Titanian native, not much more intelligent than a St. Bernard dog, perhaps, but peaceable and inoffensive, beautifully adapted to its forbidding environment, and the highest form of life yet known on Titan.

He reached into the pouch opening on his rubbery back. "Uh!" he said, displaying a white ovoid. As the comparatively warm air of the room struck it, the flame-orchid began to glow in exquisite colors.

Diane took it; against her palms the tints changed more quickly, deepened gloriously. It was a small one, no larger than a robin's egg, but perfect except where it had been attached to some frigid rock.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "What a beauty, Tim!"

He grinned. "That's no way to bargain."

He pulled out the black case that contained their trade goods, opening it to display the little mirrors, knives, beads, matches, and nondescript trinkets.

The coal-black eyes of the native glittered avidly; he glanced from one article to the next in an agony of longing indecision. He touched them with his clawed, three-fingered hands; he cooed huskily. His eyes wandered over the room.

"Huss!" he said abruptly, pointing. Diane burst into a sudden laugh. He was indicating an old and battered eight-day clock, quite useless to the pair since it lacked the adjustment to permit them to keep other than Earth time. The ticking must have attracted him.

"Oh, no!" She chuckled. "It's no good to you. Here!" She indicated a box of trinkets.

"Ugha! Huss!" The native was insistent.

"Here, then!"

She passed him the clock; he held it close to his skin-shielded ears and listened. He cooed.

Impulsively, Diane picked a pocketknife from the box. "Here," she said, "I won't cheat you. Take this, too."

The native gurgled. He pried open the glittering blade with his hooked claws, closed it and slipped it carefully into his back pouch, stuffing the clock after it. The pouch stood out like a miniature hump as he turned and scuttled toward the door.

"Uh!" he said.

Tim led him out, watching through the window as he slipped across the slope, his blunt nose pointed into the wind as he moved sideways.

Tim faced Diane. "Extravagance!" He grinned.

"Oh, a fifty-cent knife for this!" She fondled the gem.

"Fifty cents back home," he reminded her. "Just remember what we paid for freight, and you'll see what I mean. Why, look at Nivia; they mine gold there, pure, virgin gold right out of the rocks, and by the time the cost of shipping it back to Earth is deducted, and the insurance, it barely pays—just barely."

"Gold?"

"Yes. That's simple to understand. You know how little freight a rocket can carry when it has to be fueled and provisioned for a flight from the Earth to Titan, or vice versa. A mere jaunt of seven hundred and eighty million miles and plenty of chance for trouble on the way. I think the insurance on gold is thirty per cent of the value."

"Tim, shall we have to insure these? How shall we ever manage?"

"We won't. We won't insure these because we'll be going with 'em."

"But if they're lost?"

"If they're lost, Diane, insurance wouldn't help us, because, then, we'll be lost, too."

Three more months dragged by. Their little hoard of flame-orchids reached fifteen, then eighteen. They realized, of course, that the gem wouldn't command the fabulous price of that first one, but half that price, even a tenth of it, meant wealth, meant leisure and luxury. It was worth the year of sacrifice.

Titan swung endlessly about its primary. Nine-hour days succeeded nine-hour nights of unbelievable ferocity. The eternal wind howled and bit and tore, and the shifting ice mountains heaved and roared under Saturn's tidal drag.

Sometimes, during the day, the pair ventured into the open, fought the boisterous winds, dung precariously to frigid slopes. Once Diane was swept bodily away, saving herself miraculously on the verge of one of the deep and mysterious crevasses that bounded their mountain slope, and thereafter they were very cautious.

Once they dared to penetrate the grove of rubbery and elastic whiplash trees that grew in the shelter of the nearest cliff. The things lashed out at them with resounding strokes, not violent enough to fell them, but stinging sharply even through the inch-thick layer of sponge rubber that insulated their bodies from the cold.

And every seven and a half days the wind died to a strange and oddly silent calm, was still for half an hour or so, and then roared with renewed ferocity from the opposite direction. Thus it marked Titan's revolution.

At almost equal intervals, every eight days, the native appeared with the clock. The creature seemed unable to master the intricate problem of winding it and always presented it mournfully, brightening at once as Diane set it ticking again.

There was one impending event that worried Tim at times. Twice in its thirty-year period Saturn eclipses the Sun, and for four Titanian days, seventy-two hours, Titan is in utter darkness. The giant planet was nearing that point now and would reach it long before the rocket ship, speeding from the Earth at perigee, was due.

Human occupation dated back only six years; no one knew what four days of darkness might do to the little world of Titan.

The absolute zero of space? Probably not, because of the dense and xenon-rich atmosphere, but what storms, what titanic upheavals of ice, might accompany that night of eclipse? Glowing Saturn itself supplied a little heat, of course, about a third as much as the distant Sun.

Well, worry was futile. Tim glanced at Diane, mending a rip in the furry face-mask of her outdoor garment, and suggested a stroll. "A stroll in the sunlight," he phrased it sardonically. It was August back on Earth.

Diane agreed. She always agreed, cheerfully and readily. Without her this project would have been utterly unbearable, and he wondered amazedly how Simonds had stood it, how those others scattered around Titan's single little continent were standing it. He sighed, slipped into this thick garment, and opened the door into the roaring hell outside.

That was the time they came near disaster. They crawled, crept, and struggled their way into the lee of an ice hummock, and stood there panting and gasping for a moment's rest. Tim raised his head to peer over the crest and saw through his visor's protecting goggles something unique in his experience on

Titan. He frowned at it through the dense refractive air of the planet; it was hard to judge distances when the atmosphere made everything quiver like heat waves.

"Look, Di!" he exclaimed. "A bird!"

It did look like one, sailing on the wind toward them, wings outspread. It grew larger; it was as large as a pterodactyl, bearing down on them with the force of that hundred-mile wind behind it. Tim could make out a fierce, three-foot beak.

Diane screamed. The thing was headed for them; it was diving now at airplane speed. It was the girl who seized and flung a jagged piece of ice; the thing veered higher, swept like a cloud above them, and was gone. It could not fly upwind.

They looked it up in Young's book at the shack. That intrepid explorer had seen and named the creature; it was a knife-kite, the same sort of beast that had accounted for the death of one of his men. It wasn't a bird; it didn't really fly; it just sailed like a kite before the terrific blasts of Titan, and touched ground only during the weekly calm or when it had succeeded in stabbing some prey.

But life was scarce indeed on the icy little world. Except for the occasional natives, who came and went mysteriously as spirits, and that single knife-kite, and the whiplash trees near the cliff, they saw nothing living. Of course the crystal bubbles of the ice-ants marked the glacial surface of the hills, but these creatures never emerged, laboring incessantly beneath their little domes that grew like mushrooms as they melted within and received fresh deposits of ice crystals without. A lonely world, a wild, bizarre, forbidding, and unearthly little planet.

It never actually snowed on Titan. The chill air could absorb too little water vapor for condensation as snow, but there was a substitute. During the days, when the temperature often passed the melting point, shallow pools formed on the frozen oceans, augmented sometimes by mighty eruptions of frigid brine from below. The ferocious winds swept these pools into a spindrift that froze and went rushing as clouds of icy needles around the planet.

Often during the darkness Diane had watched from the window as one of these clouds loomed glittering in the cold-green Saturn-light, sweeping by with a scream and slithering of ice crystals on the walls, and seeming to her mind like a tall, sheeted ghost. At such times, despite the atom-generated warmth of the tiny dwelling, she was apt to shiver and draw her garment closer about her, though she was careful that Tim never observed it.

So time passed in the trading shack, slowly and dismally. The weather, of course, was uniformly, unvaryingly terrible, such weather as only Titan, nearly nine hundred million miles from the moderating Sun, can present. The little world, with its orbital period of fifteen days and twenty-three hours, has no perceptible seasons; only the recurrent shifting of the winds from east to west marks its swing about gigantic Saturn.

The season is always winter—fierce, bitter, unimaginable winter, to which the earthly storms of desolate Antarctica are as April on the Riviera. And little by little, Saturn edged closer to the Sun, until one day the western streak of its rings knifed a dark gash across the reddish disk. The eclipse was at hand.

That night saw the catastrophe. Tim was dozing on the bunk; Diane was dreaming idly of green fields and warm sunlight. Outside roared a gale more than usually vociferous, and a steady parade of ice ghosts streamed past the windows. Low and ominous came the roar of shifting glacial mountains; Saturn and the Sun, now nearly in a direct line, heaved at the planet with a redoubled tidal pull. And then suddenly came the clang of warning; a bell rang ominously.

Diane knew what it meant. Months before, Tim had driven a row of posts into the ice, extending toward the cliff that sheltered the whiplash grove. He had foreseen the danger; he had rigged up an alarm. The bell meant that the cliff had shifted, had rolled upon the first of the stakes. Danger!

Tim was springing frantically from the bunk. "Dress for outside!" he snapped. "Quickly!"

He seized her lunacy sponge-rubber parka and tossed it to her. He dragged on his own, cranked the door open to the pandemonium without, and a fierce and bitter blast swept in, upsetting a chair, spinning loose articles around the room.

"Close the emergency pack!" he yelled above the tumult. "I'll take a look."

Diane suppressed her upsurging fear as he vanished. She strapped the pack tightly, then poured the precious eighteen flame-orchids into a little leather pouch, and suspended this about her throat. She forced calmness upon herself; perhaps the ice cliff had stopped, or perhaps only the wind itself had snapped the warning post. She righted the chair and sat with her visor open despite the knife-sharp blasts from the door.

Tim was coming. She saw his gloved hand as he seized the doorframe, then his fur-masked face, eyes grim behind the non-frosting goggles.

"Outside!" he yelled, seizing the pack.

She rose and scrambled after him into the howling inferno just as the second bell clanged.

Barely in time! As the tornado sent her sprawling and clutching, she had a sharply etched glimpse of a mighty pinnacle of glittering ice looming high above the shack; there was a rumble and a roar deeper than the winds, and the shack was gone. One iron wall, caught by the gale, swept like a giant bat above her, and she heard it go clanging and clattering along the slope to the east.

Dazed and horribly frightened, she clawed her way after Tim into the shelter of a ridge, watching him while he wrestled the pack that struggled in the blast like something living. She was calm when at last he got it strapped to his shoulders.

"This is the end, isn't it, Tim?" she said, putting her visor close against his helmet, "Because I'm glad I came with you, then. I'm glad it's both of us together."

Tim groaned despairingly, and the blast tore the sound away. He turned suddenly, slipping his arms around her figure. "I'm sorry, Di," he said huskily.

He wanted to kiss her—an impossibility, of course, in a Titanian night. It would have been a kiss of death; they would have died with lips frozen together. He put away the thought that maybe that might be a pleasanter way, since death was inevitable now, anyway. Better, he decided, to die fighting. He pulled her down into the lee of the ridge and sat thinking.

They couldn't stay here; that was obvious. The rocket wasn't due for three months, and long before then they'd be frozen corpses, rolling away before the hurricane or buried in some crevasse. They couldn't build a habitable shelter without tools, and if they could, their atomic stove was somewhere under the shifting cliff. They couldn't attempt the journey to Nivia, a hundred miles away across the Mountains of the Damned—or could they? That was the only possible alternative.

"Di," Tim said tensely, "we're going to Nivia. Don't be startled. Listen. The wind's just shifted. It's behind us; we have almost eight Earth days before it changes. If we can make it—twelve, thirteen miles a day—if we can make it, we'll be safe. If we don't make it before the wind shifts—" He paused. "Well, it's no worse than dying here."

Diane was silent. Tim frowned thoughtfully behind his goggles. It was a possibility. Pack, parka, and all, he weighed less than Earth weight; not as much less as one would think, of course. Titan, although no larger than Mercury, is a dense little world, and, besides, weight depends not only on a planet's density, but also on distance from its center. But the wind might not hinder them so much, since they were traveling with it, not against it. Its terrible thrust, fiercer than even an equal Earth wind because the air contained thirty per cent of the heavy gas xenon, would be dangerous enough, but—Anyway, they had no choice.

"Come on, Di," Tim said, rising. They had to keep moving now; they could rest later, after sunrise, when the danger of a frozen sleep was less.

Another terrible thought struck Tim—there would be only three more sunrises. Then for four Titanian days, the little satellite would be in the mighty shadow of Saturn, and during that long eclipse, heaven alone knew what terrific forces might attack the harassed pair crawling painfully toward Nivia, the City of Snow.

But that had to be faced, too. There was no alternative. Tim lifted Diane to her feet, and they crept cautiously out of the shelter of the ridge, bowing as the cruel wind caught them and bruised them, even through their thick suits, by flying ice fragments.

It was a dark night for Titan; Saturn was on the other side of the little world, along with the Sun it was soon to eclipse, but the stars shone brilliant and twinkling through the shallow, but very dense and refractive, atmosphere. The Earth, which had so often lent a green spark of cheer to the lonely couple, was not among them; from the position of Titan, it was always near the Sun and showed only just before sunrise or just after sunset. Its absence now seemed a desolate omen.

They came to a long, smooth, wind-swept slope. They made the error of trying to cross it erect, trusting to their cleated shoes for secure footing. It was misjudgment; the wind thrust them suddenly into a run, pressed them faster and faster until it was impossible to stop, and they were staggering through the darkness toward unknown terrain ahead.

Tim flung himself recklessly against Diane; they fell in a heap and went sliding and rolling, to crash at last against a low wall of ice a hundred feet beyond.

They struggled up, and Diane moaned inaudibly from the pain of a bruised knee. They crept cautiously on; they ended a bottomless crevasse from the depths of which came strange roarings and shriekings; they slipped miserably past a glittering cliff that shook and shifted above them. And when at last the vast hulk of Saturn rose over the wild land before them, and the tiny reddish Sun followed like a ruby hung on a pendant, they were near exhaustion.

Tim supported Diane to a crevice facing the Sun. For many minutes they were silent, content to rest, and then he took a bar of chocolate from the pack and they ate, slipping the squares hastily through visors opened for each bite.

But under the combined radiance of Saturn and the Sun, the temperature rose rapidly more than a hundred degrees; when Tim glanced at his wrist thermometer it was already nearly thirty-eight, and pools of water were forming in the wind-sheltered spots. He scooped some up with a rubber cup, and they drank. Water at least was no problem.

Food might be, however, if they lived long enough to consume that in the pack. Humans couldn't eat Titanian life because of its arsenical metabolism; they had to exist on food laboriously transported from the Earth, or, as did the Nivian settlers, on Titanian creatures from whose substance the arsenic had first been chemically removed. The Nivians ate the ice-ants, the whiplash trees, and occasionally, it was sometimes whispered, the Titanian natives.

Diane had fallen asleep, lying huddled in a pool of icy water that flowed off into the open and then was whirled into sparkling spray by the wind. He shook her gently; they couldn't afford to lose time now, not with the shadow of the eclipse looming ominously so few hours away. But it tore his heart to see her eyes crinkle in a weary smile as she rose; he damned himself again for ever bringing her to this.

So they plodded on, haltered and trampled by the fierce and ruthless gale. He had no idea how far they had traveled during the night; from the crest of a high ridge he looked back, but the shifting hills of ice made localities hard to recognize, and he could not be sure that the grim escarpment far behind was actually the cliff that had crushed their shack.

He let Diane rest again from noon until sunset, nearly five hours. She regained much of the strength spent in the struggle of the night, but when the dropping sun set his wrist thermometer tumbling far toward the hundred-below-zero mark, it seemed to her as if she had not rested at all. Yet they survived another night of inferno, and the gray of dawn found them still staggering and stumbling before the incredible ferocity of that eternal wind.

During the morning a native appeared. They recognized him; in his clawed hands was the battered case of the eight-day clock. He sidled up to them, head toward the wind, and held out his short arms to display the mechanism; he whined plaintively and obviously thought himself cheated.

Tim felt an unreasoning hope at the sight of him, but it vanished immediately. The creature simply couldn't understand their predicament; Titan was the only world he knew, and he couldn't conceive of beings not adapted to its fierce environment. So the man stood silently as Diane wound the clock and responded dully to her smile as she returned it.

"This time, old fellow," she said to the native, "it's ticking away our lives. If we're not in Nivia by the time it stops again—" She patted the blunt head; the creature cooed and sidled away.

They rested and slept again during the afternoon, but it was a weary pair that faced the inferno of night. Diane was nearing exhaustion, not from lack of nourishment, but simply from the incessant battering she had received from the wind, and the terrific struggle that every step required. Tim was stronger, but his body ached, and the cold, striking somehow through the inch-thick parka had left him with a painfully frostbitten shoulder.

By two hours after sunset, he perceived hopelessly that Diane was not going to survive the night. She was struggling bravely, but she was unequal to the effort. She was weakening; the pitiless wind kept lashing her to her knees, and each time she rose more slowly, leaned more heavily on Tim's supporting arm. All too quickly came the moment he had foreseen with despairing heart, when she did not rise at all.

He crouched beside her; tears misted his goggles as he distinguished her words above the screaming of the blast.

"You go on, Tim," she murmured. She gestured toward the bag on her throat. "Take the flame-orchids and leave me."

Tim made no answer, but cradled her tired body in his arms, shielding her as best he could from the furious winds. He thought desperately. To remain here was quick death; at least he might carry Diane to some more sheltered spot, where they could sink more slowly into the fatal sleep of cold. To leave her was unthinkable; she knew that, too, but it had been a brave offer to make.

She clung weakly to him as he lifted her; he staggered a dozen steps before the wind toppled him, and the last struggle brought him to the lee of a low hillock. He dropped behind it and gathered the girl into his arms to wait for the cold to do its work.

He stared hopelessly ahead. The wild splendor of a Titanian night was before him, with the icy stars glittering on cold and glassy peaks. Just beyond their hillock stretched the smooth surface of a wind-swept glacier, and here and there were the crystalline bubbles of the ice-ants.

The ice-ants! Lucky little creatures! He remembered Young's description of them in the book at the shack. Within those domes it was warm; the temperature was above forty. He stared at them, fragile and yet resisting that colossal wind. He knew why; it was their ovoid shape, the same principle that enables an egg to resist the greatest pressure on its two ends. No one can break an egg by squeezing it endways.

Suddenly he started. A hope! He murmured a word to Diane, lifted her, and staggered out on the mirror-surface of the ice. There! There was a dome large enough—fully six feet across. He circled to the lee side and kicked a hole in the glittering roundness.

Diane crawled weakly through. He followed, crouching beside her in the dusk. Would it work? He gave a long cry of relief as he perceived the scurrying three-inch figures of the ice-ants, saw them patching the dome with crystal fragments.

Steam misted his nonfrosting goggles. He drew Diane against him and then opened his visor. Warm air! It was like balm after the bitter air without; it was musty, perhaps—but warm! He opened Diane's; she was sleeping in exhaustion and never stirred as he uncovered her pale, drawn features.

His eyes grew accustomed to the gloomy starlight that filtered through the dome. He could see the ice-ants, little three-legged ruddy balls that run about with a galloping motion. They weren't ants at all, of course, nor even insects in the terrestrial sense; Young had named them ants because they lived in antlike colonies.

Tim saw the two holes that pierced the saucerlike floor; through one, he knew, warm air came up from the mysterious hive below, and the other drained away the melting water of the dome. That dome would grow until it burst, but the ants didn't care; they'd sense the bursting point and have a new dome already started above the holes.

For a time he watched them; they paid no attention at all to the intruders, whose rubber suits offered nothing edible. They were semicivilized little creatures; he observed them curiously as they scraped a gray mold from the ice, loaded it on tiny sledges that he recognized as leaves of the whiplash tree, and tugged the load to one of the holes, dumping it in, presumably, to a handling crew below. And after a while he fell asleep, and precious time trickled away.

Hours later something awakened him to daylight. He sat up; he had been lying with his head pillowed on his arm to keep his face from the water, and he rubbed the half-paralyzed limb ruefully as he stared about. Diane was still sleeping, but her face was more peaceful, more rested. He smiled gently down on her, and suddenly a flicker of motion caught his eye and, at the same time, a flash of brilliance.

The first was only an ice-ant scurrying across the rubber of her parka. The flash was—he started violently—it was a flame-orchid rolling sluggishly in the stream of water to the vent, and there went another! The ants had cut and carried away for food the little leather bag, exposed on Diane's breast by the opening of her visor.

He snatched the rolling gem of flame from the trickling water and searched desperately for the others. No use. Of their eighteen precious ovoids, he had retrieved exactly one—the small but perfect one for which they had traded the clock. He gazed in utter despondency at the flaming little egg for which they had risked—and probably lost—everything.

Diane stirred, sat up. She saw at once the consternation in his face. "Tim!" she cried. "What's wrong now?"

He told her. "It's my fault," he concluded grimly. "I opened your suit. I should have foreseen this." He slipped the lone gem into his left gauntlet, where it nestled against his palm.

"It's nothing, Tim," said Diane softly. "What use would all eighteen be to us, or a hundred? We might as well die with one as with all of them."

He did not answer directly. He said: "Even one will be enough if we get back. Perhaps eighteen would have glutted the market; perhaps we'll get almost as much for one as we would have for all."

That was a lie, of course; other traders would be increasing the supply, but it served to distract her mind.

Tim noticed then that the ice-ants were busy around the two vents at the center; they were building an inner dome. The crystal egg above them, now eight feet through, was about to crack.

He saw it coming, and they closed their visors. There was a jagged streak of light on the west, and suddenly, with a glistening of fragments, the walls collapsed and went spinning away over the icy floor, and the wind howled down upon them, nearly flattening them to the glacier! It began to thrust them over the ice.

They slid and crawled their way to the jagged crags beyond. Diane was strong again; her young body recovered quickly. In a momentary shelter, he noticed something queer about the light and glanced up to see gigantic Saturn almost half obscuring the Sun. He remembered then. This was the last day; for seventy-two hours there would be night.

And night fell far too quickly. Sunset came with the red disk three quarters obscured, and the bitter cold swept out of the west with a horde of ice ghosts, whose sharp needles clogged the filters of their masks and forced them to shake them out time after time.

The temperature had never been higher than forty below all day, and the night air, coming after that cold day, dropped rapidly to a hundred below, and even the warming filters could not prevent that frigid air from burning in their lungs like searing flame.

Tim sought desperately for an ice-ant bubble. Those large enough were rare, and when at last he found one, it was already too large, and the ice-ants didn't trouble to repair the hole he kicked, but set at once to build a new dome. In half an hour the thing collapsed, and they were driven on.

Somehow, they survived the night, and dawn of the fourth day found them staggering all but helpless into the lee of a cliff. They stared hopelessly at that strange, sunless, Saturn-lighted dawn that brought so little warmth.

An hour after the rising of the eclipsed Sun, Tim glanced at his wrist thermometer to find the temperature risen only to seventy below. They ate some chocolate, but each bite was a burning pain for the moment that their visors were open, and the chocolate itself was numbing cold.

When numbness and drowsiness began to attack his limbs, Tim forced Diane to rise, and they struggled on. Day was no better than night now, except for the cold Saturn light. The wind battered them more fiercely than ever; it was scarcely mid-afternoon, when Diane, with a faintly audible moan, collapsed to her knees and could not rise.

Tim stared frantically about for an ice bubble. At last, far over to the right, he saw a small one, three feet through, perhaps, but big enough for Diane. He could not carry her; he took her shoulders and

dragged her painfully to it. She managed to creep wearily in and he warned her to sleep with her visor closed, lest the ants attack her face. A quarter of a mile downwind he found one for himself.

It was the collapse of the bubble that wakened him. It was night again, a horrible, shrieking, howling, blasting night when the temperature on his thermometer showed a hundred and forty below. Stark fear gripped him. If Diane's shelter had fallen! He fought his way madly against the wind to the spot and shouted in relief. The dome had grown, but still stood; he kicked his way in to find Diane trembling and pallid; she had feared him lost or dead. It was almost dawn before the shelter collapsed.

Strangely, that day was easier. It was bitterly cold, but they had reached the foothills of the Mountains of the Damned, and ice-covered crags offered shelter from the winds. Diane's strength held better; they made the best progress they had yet achieved.

But that meant little now, for there before them, white and glittering and cold, loomed the range of mountains, and Tim despaired when he looked at them. Just beyond, perhaps twenty-five miles away, lay Nivia and safety, but how were they ever to cross those needle peaks?

Diane was still on her feet at nightfall. Tim left her standing in the shelter of a bank of ice and set out to find an ant bubble. But this time he failed. He found only a few tiny six-inch domes; there was nothing that offered refuge from a night that promised to be fiercer than any he had seen. He returned at last in despair.

"We'll have to move farther," he told her.

Her grave, weary eyes frightened him.

"No matter," she said quietly. "We'll never cross the Mountains of the Damned, Tim. But I love you."

They moved on. The night dropped quickly to a hundred and forty below, and their limbs turned numb and slow to respond. Ice ghosts whirred past them; cliffs quaked and rumbled. In half an hour they were both nearing exhaustion, and no crystal shelter appeared.

In the lee of a ridge Diane paused, swaying against him, "No use, Tim," she murmured. "I'd rather die here than fight longer. I can't." She let herself sink to the ice, and that action saved their lives.

Tim bent over her, and as he did a black shadow and glistening beak cleaved the air where his head had been. A knife-kite! Its screech of anger drifted faintly back as it whirled away on that hundred-mile wind.

"You see," said the girl, "it's hopeless."

Tim gazed dully around, and it was then that he saw the funnel. Young had mentioned these curious caves in the ice, and sometimes in the rocks, of the Mountains of the Damned. Opening always north or south, he had thought them the homes of the natives, so placed and shaped to prevent their filling with ice needles. But the traders had learned that the natives have no homes.

"We're going in there!" Tim cried.

He helped Diane to her feet and they crept into the opening. The funnellike passage narrowed, then widened suddenly into a chamber, where steam condensed instantly on their goggles. That meant warmth; they opened their visors, and Tim pulled out his electric torch.

"Look!" gasped Diane. In the curious chamber, walled half by ice and half by rock of the mountain, lay what was unmistakably a fallen, carved column.

"Good Heaven!" Tim was startled momentarily from his worries. "This iceberg harbored a native culture once! I'd never have given those primitive devils credit for it."

"Perhaps the natives weren't responsible," said the girl. "Perhaps there was once some higher creature on Titan, hundreds of thousands of years ago, when Saturn was hot enough to warm it. Or perhaps there still is."

Her guess was disastrously right. A voice said, "Um, uzza, uzza," and they turned to stare at the creature emerging from a hole in the rock wall. A face—no, not a face, but a proboscis like the head end of a giant earthworm, that kept thrusting itself to a point, then contracting to a horrible, red, ringed disk.

At the point was the hollow fang or sucking tooth, and above it on a quivering stalk, the ice-green, hypnotic eye of a Titanian threadworm, the first ever to be faced by man. They gazed in horrified fascination as the tubular body slid into the chamber, its ropelike form diminishing at the end to the thickness of a hair.

"Uzza, uzza, uzza," it said, and strangely, their minds translated the sounds. The thing was saying "Sleep, sleep, sleep," over and over.

Tim snatched for his revolver—or intended to. The snatch turned into a gentle, almost imperceptible movement, and then died to immobility. He was held utterly helpless under the glare of the worm's eye.

"Uzza, uzza, uzza," thrummed the thing in a soothing, slumberous buzz. "Uzza, uzza, uzza." The sound drummed sleepily in his ears. He was sleepy anyway, worn to exhaustion by the hell without. "Una, uzza, uzza." Why not sleep?

It was the quick-witted Diane who saved them. Her voice snapped him to wakefulness. "We are sleeping," she said. "We're both asleep. This is the way we sleep. Don't you see? We're both fast asleep."

The thing said "Uzza, uzza," and paused as if perplexed.

"I tell you we're sleeping!" insisted Diane.

"Uzza!" buzzed the worm.

It was silent, stretching its terrible face toward Diane. Suddenly Tim's arm snapped in sharp continuation of his interrupted movement, the gun burned cold through his glove, and then spat blue flame.

A shriek answered. The worm, coiled like a spring, shot its bloody face toward the girl. Unthinking, Tim leaped upon it; his legs tangled in its ropy length and he crashed on his hands against the rocky wall. But the worm was fragile; it was dead and in several pieces when he rose.

"Oh!" gasped Diane, her face white. "How—how horrible! Let's get away—quickly!" she swayed and sat weakly on the floor. "It's death outside," said Tim grimly.

He gathered the ropy worm in his hands, stuffed it back into the hole whence it had emerged. Then, very cautiously, he flashed his beam into the opening, peered through. He drew back quickly.

"Ugh!" he said, shuddering.

"What, Tim? What's there?"

"A—a brood of 'em." He raised the broken end of the column in his arms; the shaft fitted the hole. "At least that will fall if another comes," he muttered. "We'll be warned. Di, we've got to rest here a while. Neither of us could last an hour out there."

She smiled wanly. "What's the difference, Tim? I'd rather die in clean cold than by—by those things." But in five minutes she was sleeping.

As soon as she slept, Tim slipped the glove from his left hand and stared gloomily at their lone flame-orchid. He had felt it shatter when he struck the wall, and there it lay, colorless, broken, worthless. They had nothing left now, nothing but life, and probably little more of that.

He cast the pieces to the rock-dusty floor and then seized a fragment of stone and viciously pounded the jewel into dull powder and tiny splinters. It vented his feelings.

Despite his determination, he must have dozed. He woke with a start, glanced fearfully at the plugged hole, and then noticed that dim green light filtered through the ice wall. Dawn. At least, as much dawn as they'd get during the eclipse. They'd have to leave at once, for to-day they must cross the peaks. They must, for to-night would see the shifting of the wind, and when that occurred, hope would vanish.

He woke Diane, who sat up so wearily that his eyes felt tears of pity. She made no comment when he suggested leaving, but there was no hope in her obedience. He rose to creep through the funnel, to be there to help her when the wind struck her.

"Tim!" she shrieked. "Tim! What's that?"

He spun around. She was pointing at the floor where he had slept and where now flashed a thousand changing colors like rainbow fire. Flame-orchids! Each splinter he had cracked from the ruined one was now a fiery gem; each tiny grain was sprouting from the rock dust of the floor.

Some were as large as the original, some were tiny flames no bigger than peas, but all glowed perfect and priceless. Fifty of them—a hundred, if one counted the tiny ones.

They gathered them. Tim told her of their origin, and carefully wrapped a few grains of the rock dust in tinfoil from their chocolate.

"Have it analyzed," he explained. "Perhaps we can raise 'em back on Earth."

"If we ever—" began Diane, and then was silent. Let Tim find what pleasure he could in the discovery.

She followed him through the passage into the howling inferno of Titanian eclipse weather.

That day gave both of them all the experience of souls condemned to hell. They struggled hour after hour up the ice-coated slopes of the Mountains of the Damned. The air thinned and turned so cold that the hundred and fifty below which was the minim on Tim's thermometer dial was insufficient and the needle rested full against the stop.

The wind kept flinging them flat against the slopes, and a dozen times the very mountains heaved beneath them. And this was day; what, he wondered fearfully, would night be like, here among the peaks of the Mountains of the Damned?

Diane drove herself to the limit, and even beyond. This was their last chance; at least they must surmount the crest before the wind shifted. Again and again she fell, but each time she rose and clambered on. And for a time, just before evening, it seemed that they might make it.

A mile from the summit the wind died to that weird, unnatural calm that marked, if you care to call it so, the half-hour Titanian summer season. They burst into a final effort; they rushed up the rugged slope

until their blood pounded in their ears. And a thousand feet short of the summit, while they hung helplessly to a steep icy incline, they heard far off the rising whine that meant failure.

Tim paused; effort was useless now. He cast one final glance over the wild magnificence of the Titanian landscape, then leaned close to Diane.

"Good-by, ever valiant," he murmured. "I think you loved me more than I deserved."

Then, with a bellow of triumph, the wind howled down from the peaks, sending them sliding along the crag into darkness.

It was night when Tim recovered. He was stiff, numb, battered, but living. Diane was close beside him; they had been caught in a cupped hollow full of ice crystals.

He bent over the girl. In that roaring wind he couldn't tell if she lived; at least her body was limp, not yet frozen or set in the rigor of death. He did the only thing possible to him; he clutched her wrist and started clawing his way against that impossible gale, dragging her behind him.

A quarter mile away showed the summit. He ascended a dozen feet; the wind hurled him back. He gained fifty feet; the wind smashed him back into the hollow. Yet, somehow, dazed, all but unconscious, he managed to drag, push, roll Diane's body along with him.

He never knew how long it took, but he made it. While the wind bellowed in colossal anger, somehow, by some miracle of doggedness, he thrust Diane across the ridge of the summit, dragged himself after, and gazed without comprehension on the valley beyond, where glowed the lights of Nivia, the City of Snow.

For a while he could only cling there, then some ghost of reason returned. Diane, loyal, courageous Diane, was here dying, perhaps dead. Doggedly, persistently, he pushed and rolled her down the slope against a wind that sometimes lifted her into mid-air and flung her back against his face. For a long time he remembered nothing at all, and then suddenly he was pounding on a metal door, and it was opening.

Tim couldn't sleep yet. He had to find out about Diane, so he followed the government man back through the sunken passage to the building that served Nivia as hospital. The flame-orchids were checked, safe; theft was impossible in Nivia, with only fifty inhabitants and no way for the thief to escape.

The doctor was bending over Diane; he had stripped off her parka and was flexing her arms, then her bared legs.

"Nothing broken," he said to Tim. "Just shock, exposure, exhaustion, half a dozen frostbites, and a terrific mauling from the wind. Oh, yes—and a minor concussion. And a hundred bruises, more or less."

"Is that all?" breathed Tim. "Are you sure that's all?"

"Isn't that enough?" snapped the doctor.

"But she'll—live?"

"She'll tell you so herself in half an hour." His tone changed to admiration. "I don't see how you did it! This'll be a legend, I tell you. And I hear you're rich, too," he added enviously. "Well, I've a feeling you deserve it."