

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Blood of the Moon

Date of first publication: 1936

Author: Ray Cummings (1887?-1957)

Date first posted: Aug. 17, 2013

Date last updated: Aug. 17, 2013

Faded Page eBook #20130834

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Mary Meehan & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

**THRILLING
WONDER
STORIES**



The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

BLOOD of the MOON

By RAY CUMMINGS

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

VOL. 8, No. 1

AUGUST, 1936

The recent (June 15, 2536) scathing statement of Senator Rathe in the World Congress of London City to the effect that all Martians should be deported from our Moon Colony as undesirables, has stirred an enormous controversy. Fortunately the Government of the Martian Union has accepted Earth's official apology; but nevertheless, the Ilton newscasters of Mars have stirred up much public feeling against Earth people which cannot but be harmful to the friendliness outwardly existing between the two worlds.

Raiders from the Planet Mars
Wage a Pirate War Upon the
Moon-Dwellers

Senator Rathe's suggestion is impractical, of course. There is too much Martian capital invested in Lunite industry. And too much Martian blood is mingled in the veins of native-born, loyal Lunites. It is unjust also, for all Martians on the Moon are not trouble-makers. Yet it does seem that of recent years, the human blood which has been spilled upon the Moon has all been caused by Martian lawlessness. Blood of the Moon! The phrase seems destined to go down in history as the symbol of this decade. Humans killing each other on our small bleak satellite, when all the rest of the civilised Universe momentarily is at peace.

Out of this controversy one good undoubtedly will come. There is no question but that the Moon has been inadequately armed. So isolated a post, so rich with mineral treasure, it always inevitably has been a temptation and a target for lawlessness. This will be changed now, of course. In the recent disturbance, which cost the lives of many, and very nearly brought death to Governor Allen and his daughter, the Archimedes Radium Corporation stood to lose radium dust to the value of some 440 decimars, the equivalent of four million, four hundred thousand gold-dollars. The action of the company's young Moon Manager, Georg Frear, in protecting the governor by freely risking such a sum, has been justly applauded. And undoubtedly now, after such an experience, the Archimedes Company will see the wisdom of fortifying the Moon at its own expense, if our World Government does not do it.

In the brief but tumultuously tragic affair, there was one unsung hero—the little parentless Lunite boy miner named Lohlo Wills. Of Earth parents, he was born in the Archimedes foothills, at the border of the Mare Imbrium. He gazed with humble adoration on the face of a girl to whom never could he aspire. Gazed and loved. And that humble love urged him to heroism without which the whole affair would have had a very different ending; and the fiery Senator Rathe might now have public sentiment back of him which would plunge us into war with Mars.

I tell the story as young Georg Frear lived it. But really, it is the story of the little Lunite hero, Lohlo Wills.

CHAPTER I

Fall of Five Thousand Miles

He stood before Georg Frear's metal desk, with the blue Morral tube-light shining upon him. He was small and slender, pale as all Lunites, with ringlets of dark hair clustered on his forehead. He had just come through the pressure lock from the airless Moon surface; his air suit hung in deflated baggy folds; his helmet thrown back.

"I am registered here," he said timidly. "I have brought my dust for you to buy." He took from his belt-hooks two small bags of insulated themacoid and proffered them.

"What name?" asked Georg Frear.

"Lohlo Wills."

Georg found the record card. Parentless, under-age boy miner.

"Your age now? It isn't here."

"I am seventeen Earth-years."

"Do you live alone? No guardian?"

"I live alone. My Father, who is dead now, left me the little mine. It is legal? There is one-eighth decimar^[1] on deposit with you in my name? You will buy my dust and add it?"

His timid voice carried an anxious, frightened note. He stood shifting his weight from one foot to the other while Georg examined the records and tested his offering.

"All correct," Georg said, finally. "This values two hundred five and six-tenths gold dollars. Do you want the currency?"

The lad brightened. "Oh, thank you."

He was a romantic-looking young fellow, pinched of face from overwork alone in his tiny mine down on the plains of the Mare Imbrium; but his features were delicately moulded; his big dark eyes had lashes as long as a girl's.

Georg Frear, six-foot, blond young manager of the Archimedes Radium Corporation, had just come in from outside and was still wearing his air suit. By Lunar time-routine it was now just before the evening meal.

The Archimedes Mine, here midway up in the giant mountain crater, was shut down for the time of sleep. Strange little settlement clinging to the airless, waterless, naked crags of the precipitous mountainside! All under glassite domes, within which Earth's normal air pressure was maintained. There was a huge spread of glassite over the mine workings, with the electro-borers beneath domes of the mine shelters and refineries; and around them, on ledges above and below, hung the honeycomb domes of the workers and their families.

A cluster of government domes was here also, for this was the seat of the Colonial Moon Government. Two thousand mine workers, government officials, and police garrison were housed here, their dwellings all connected by low-lying little air galleries.

From the open door oval in the rear of Georg Frear's office came a shouting voice:

"Georg! You, Georg, come here! By the gods—the transport ship attacked—"

Georg leaped to his feet. He had not yet donned an indoor weighted belt or weighted shoes, and the incautious movement flung him perilously upward in the low-vaulted metal office cubby.^[2]

"What's that?" he called.

"The transport ship—come look!"

The small space-flyer of the Archimedes Company had left for Earth only a few hours ago. It carried semi-refined radium dust to the value of some forty decimars. And Governor Allen of the Moon was a passenger on it, making the trip

to confer with the President of the World Federation, in London City.

The corridor was only some fifty feet long. Georg, with Lohlo Wills after him, dashed through it, into the low-vaulted rectangle of one of the mine instrument rooms. The Morral lights were ultra dim. Around a small electro-telescope a group of officials was gathered. The telescopic image was magnified through a prism series, and was spread upon a little two-foot mirror grid so that in the gloom all might see it. The mirror with its moving image was a bright spot in the darkness; the figures of the dozen men and the one young girl were a blur, faintly lit by the blue tubes and by the earth-light and starlight which shafted slantingly in through the room's side bull's-eyes.

John Vane, governor in Allen's absence, had called Georg.

"Look! Rob Grant spotted it—audiphoned it from the Crater-peak Observatory," he said. "A Nomad ship—"

The silent drama of space had almost reached its climax. The little transport ship, *Queen of the Starways*, showed clearly etched against the starfield of the mirror grid image. And behind and above it was another shape—a long, black, queerly domed vehicle. A Nomad ship.

No lights were upon it save the faint radiance of its interior glow, visible through the transparency of the glassite double-peaked dome. No signal clusters gave it nationality. An outlaw.

Georg found himself in dimness beside the girl. Her hand reached and clutched him. They peered at the mirror, breathless, wordless. For more than a decade now no Nomad ship had dared to roam the starways. Yet here was one, coming mysteriously so that no telescopic warning of its nearness to the Moon had been given—mysteriously appearing and attacking the little Moon-to-Earth ore-transport.

The attack was already a reality. A bolt, with a rush of blue-green electrons, had already flashed and struck the Moon ship. And now came another, with the transport's short-range answering bolt crossing it like a puny sword dashing against a leaping cutlass in the sky.

The transport already was in distress. The telescopic image on the mirror grid steadily clung to it; but the starfield of the image was shifting, whirling; a limb of the yellow Earth-disc came into view, and passed with a swoop out of the field. The transport was rolling, out of control—falling—

The Nomad ship had vanished. Out of the narrow vista of the mirror grid. Then Vane swung the telescope barrel. The heavens swooped with a streak of light-points across the little mirror; stopped, and showed the poised black shape of the enemy vessel. Then Vane swung the image back.

The transport was visibly so much larger now! Closer. A rolling, swaying shape. Georg knew it had reached a scant five thousand miles of its Earthward journey. And now it was coming back. Falling for the Moon surface like a crashing meteor.

Vane gasped. "Its dome may be punctured. That first electronic bolt—air rushing out—all of them dead now—"

Georg felt the girl beside him trembling. "No, Aura—I don't think so," he murmured. "Blake will wait—conserve his power—use his repulsive ray later—at the end."

The minutes passed. Half an hour. Silent, rushing fall.

On the mirror, the tumbling little transport seemed poised, motionless, and only the background of stars was moving. But there was that horrible, constant enlargement of visual size. A thousand miles altitude now, as the stricken vessel rushed and tumbled downward. And details were showing up with its nearness. The dome did not seem to be punctured. Perhaps the air on board was still breathable. With clenched hands Georg sat staring, tense, waiting for the inevitable soundless crash. A fall of five thousand miles.

So close now that it was swaying on the mirror. A glow was upon it—enveloping it; and Georg knew that its velocity, even in the near-vacuum of space, was heating its dome and hull; that probably the temperature-equalizers were not working.

"But if he doesn't use emergency repulsion soon," someone said, "they'll be smashed to splintered molecules in the crash. The governor killed—"

It made the girl gasp. "Father—"

Blake quite evidently was trying emergency repulsion. A faint beam of radiance streamed downward, swayed drunkenly from the tumbling movement of the falling vessel. Then Blake seemed to catch the range. From the side bull's-eye of the room, Georg saw the direct, actual glow of the beam as it momentarily swung downward and struck the Moon surface. The transport must be almost over Archimedes; it would land somewhere close to them on the mountain probably.

Vane was saying something like that. A rescue party must be made ready. Men with air suits, to rush to the wreckage and try to save what survivors might still be alive in it.

"If only Blake can steady her," Georg murmured to Aura. "His gravity plates can't all be out of commission. Get her steadied, hull down. Check this fall—"

Georg became aware that beside him the little Lunite boy miner was crouching, peering wide-eyed, breathless like all of them. And plucking now at Georg's baggy sleeve with gloved fingers of his air suit.

"The governor of the Moon—is he on that ship? Is this—is this his daughter?"

"Yes. This is Aura Allen."

The lad murmured, "Oh."

He peered. But now it was not at the swooping, tragic image of the falling ship, but at the white, strained face of Aura Allen. A shaft of Earth-light came from a side window, tingeing her head and shoulders with its warming, mellowing, golden glow.

She was a tall, dark-haired girl of seventeen. Her figure was boyish with slim immaturity; her face pretty, but not unduly so. It was a strained, contorted face now; and upon it, through minutes of tense horrified silence, the Lunite boy miner gazed as though star-crossed by its beauty.

Fifty miles of altitude now. There was no change in the image of the falling *Queen of the Starways* save that it was gruesomely larger, and gruesomely falling end over end. But not falling free. Blake's radiance streamed downward, rhythmically with each rotation. But it would crash, of course. Crash somewhere here on the mountain of Archimedes.

The men in the room were on their feet now. "Get your air suits on!" Vane shouted. "A dozen of us. Toms! You, Toms, get one of the big volplane platforms ready! Quicker than going on foot."

The audiphone on the room wall was buzzing, but no one heeded it. In the confusion Georg became aware that Aura was gone from beside him; and across the room he saw the baggily-garbed figure of the Lunite boy darting into a door oval. Georg ran after him, awkwardly, with long flat leaps; and in the adjacent air corridor caught up with him.

"You—Lohlo Wills—what are you doing in here?"

The boy miner instantly stopped. "She—the daughter of the governor—she came this way." He gestured toward a descending narrow cross-passage. Georg hastened on.

The cross-passage led, he knew, to a small air-pressure lock—an exit to the outer mountainside. Behind him, Lohlo Wills was following. They came, within a hundred feet, upon Aura. She was donning an air suit.

On the rack of the corridor wall by the small air-lock entrance lay a ten-foot long volplane.^[3] Her personal vehicle. She had her suit on, with helmet dangling, and was hauling down the volplane when Georg dashed up.

"What are you doing?" he demanded. He seized her. "You're not going out alone—all in a rush like this."

She flung off his hold. Her luminous dark eyes were blazing. "Am I not? Cast me loose, Georg Frear."

Against the wall the Lunite boy stood gazing, breathless.

Georg said, "Well, you're not. You'll kill yourself. You're all in a panic. You'll crash."

"Will I?" She eluded him and shoved the light bulk of the volplane with a grinding slide over the threshold of the air-lock entrance; and, panting, swung to face him. "Will I? You know how skillful I am." Her voice turned to pleading. "That flyer falling—my Father in it—I—we can be there first. Before any of the others."

"But it may be a hundred miles from here. Suppose even a minor mishap—this tiny volplane—"

She made a gesture of violent impatience. "Let the others come after us. No one can volplane with a speed like mine." She seized him; shook him. "Georg, please! My Father, suppose—suppose he is lying suffocating—and you stand here keeping me away. At least I can share my air with him until the others come."

She spoke the truth in that, and Georg knew it. He shoved her into the air lock.

"All right, we'll go. Rig your suit. I'll switch on the pumps."

Again the little Lunite boy miner was with them; his gaze was still on Aura's face as though in all the Universe there was nothing else at which he could look. And he was humbly pleading:

"Oh, please let me go with you. I have handled my Father's volplane. And I know so well all the country of the Mare Imbrium."

Georg shoved at him; but he, like the girl, stubbornly resisted. "You let me go with you, please."

"Oh, well—" Georg said, and closed the air-lock of the inner door. The pumps hissed and throbbed, pumping the air out of the lock. The three hooked their helmets, and switched on their mechanisms.

The air bloated their suits grotesquely; the batteries and mechanisms—all the tiny equipment of air-generators, oxygen renewers, carbon dioxide absorbers, the circulatory system, and the Erentz pressure-equalizing current were lumped across the back and shoulders; the helmets were huge, with a round, single-eyed visor-pane.

Georg touched the metal tip of one of his bloated, gloved fingers to the metal plate on Aura's shoulder to give audiphone contact.

"All working correctly?"

"All correct, Georg."

And Lohlo answered the same. The air in the pressure lock was soon exhausted. Georg slid open the outer door. Together the three moved out into the airless, soundless darkness of the Lunar night, dragging the volplane after them. A dark, iron-railed ledge of rock was here. Beyond it, a precipice dropped off, with the tumbled rocky ramparts of the giant crater of Archimedes widening out down in the lower darkness, six thousand feet down to where the rippled, undulating, rocky expanse of the Mare Imbrium stretched off to the distant horizon. A dark area, dotted with the occasional light clusters of the scattered, privately owned Lunite mines. A few thousand people here—and all over the rest of the Moon, only bleak desolation.

Aura stood gazing upward, with Lohlo beside her. Georg slid the volplane to a small take-off platform, unrailed at the brink. Then he found Aura with him, her hand on his shoulder, her audiphoned voice microphonic in his ears.

"Georg! Look quickly—"

The falling *Queen of the Starways* was visible for just an instant, up against the starfield with the great yellow half-quadrant Earth-disc behind it; and to the side, the shaggy upper terraces of the circular narrowing mountain loomed another six thousand feet or more up to the giant crater lip of its summit.

Georg held his breath. The whirling, tumbling little blob which was the falling vessel came swooping down with a streak of radiance after it. Just for an instant, then it was lost behind a huge overhead rock projection nearby. Now must have come the crash. Soundless here. Soundless, even if it had been only a score of feet away.

Aura's voice quivered. "Oh, Georg, it did crash—" she gasped.

"Yes. Here on the mountain. A little lower down—I can guess about where."

They found Lohlo stretched waiting on the volplane and they crouched with him. Aura took the controls.

"You guide me, Georg. Where you think it struck. And then we—we'll probably see it."

The tiny volplane vibrated, lifted, moved from the ledge. They sailed in a crescent arc, outward and upward into the Lunar darkness.

CHAPTER II

The Pyroprint Message

Precarious business, this volplane riding; to Georg it had always seemed hazardous in the extreme, for he had never been skillful at it. He crouched now, close under the tiny forward hood, clinging to the handles of the foot-high side rails; and occasionally raising himself to peer forward and down at the shadowed expanses of rocks beneath.

As they circled, the huge mountain ramparts were always to the left; occasionally they barely skimmed upstanding crags, or again were a thousand feet or more above the mountain's lower slope where it widened into the reaches of the Mare Imbrium. Uninhabited mountain fastnesses, everywhere here. The grey-black, porous rocks were inky shadows in the hollows, and the ridges, spires, and peaks were tinged with white starlight and the soft yellow glow of the Earth-disc. All was very still.

Ten minutes or more passed. The platform was seldom level, for it was a frail, unstable little vehicle. To handle it was far more than mere management of the controls. Georg, at Aura's suggestion, crouched fairly motionless; but behind him he could feel Aura and Lohlo shifting their weight sideward, or forward and back, to make the draft lift or dip as the controls altered the gravity pull in its tiny plate sections.

Like a bird, wheeling, soaring, swooping. Presently, far ahead and down, on a broken ledge of rock with a precipice on one side and on the other a great broken ramp of steeply sloping mountain lay the wreck of the little transport.

The *Queen of the Starways* lay bow down, wedged into a cradle of rock. Georg went cold. The ship's back was broken on a ridge; a jagged spire, like a huge needle, had penetrated the stern-hull and dome; the bow-dome was shattered and gone, exposing the small forward deck triangle on which a litter of wreckage was strewn.

No lights were on the ship, no air save perhaps down in some small compartment cut off from the rest by safety air bulkheads, where a little fetid atmosphere might yet remain. A ship of death. There would be only the dead remaining here.

Georg, turning, saw through Aura's visor-pane, her white, strained face illumined by the tiny interior light within her helmet. She did not speak; but crouched alert, busy dropping the volplane to land beside the wreck. They landed with a soundless little thump. The broken hull loomed above them—a narrow, jagged rift was here near them, with the broken gravity plates dangling, and the interior darkness solid black inside.

Georg shoved his companion away; like a giant of strength with only the moon gravity holding him, he seized a broken, loose segment of metal, lifted and heaved it aside.

The interior of the wrecked vessel was black; Georg's tiny torch darted with an eerie beam. The silence and the deadly chill of death already were here in these dark, broken corridors and rooms. The three prowled like ghouls, their bloated air suits and goggling helmets monstrous travesties of the human form. Nothing but the dead here in this airless litter.

The *Queen of the Starways* was a scant sixty feet long. Georg knew that only eight men and Governor Allen had been on board. One by one he was finding the bodies, gruesomely diverse in attitude, each fighting for his life to the last.

"Aura, stay back! Lohlo, you hold her. Keep behind me."

"But, Georg, you—you haven't found Father yet?"

"No. Not yet."

They prowled to the steeply slanting upper deck. Another body here. Governor Allen? No. This one was Commander Blake. All eight were now accounted for; but Aura's father not found yet.

Through a dangling, shattered segment of the glassite dome a dark blob showed overhead against the starfield. Georg stared. A circling, swiftly moving blob, and Georg saw that it was the larger volplane bringing the others. The rescue party coming here from the mine. But why did it not come down? It passed in a semicircle. Then suddenly it rose higher and swiftly made off, and in a moment was lost behind a mountain crag.

Something very strange about all this. Governor Allen's body not here—

In a corner of the small central salon was a railed, barred enclosure. Commander Blake's office, containing the ship's small vault, within which Georg knew the forty decimars of semi-refined ore was kept. Upon impulse he cleared away the litter which now lay around the metal vault. The vault door stood dangling, melted by a heat-torch, its lock and hinges fused and broken. The Interior was empty, save for a few scattered papers. The insulated little box containing the forty decimars of dust was gone!

Robbery! But how? When? The Nomad ship!

In all that tense time of horror, watching the transport's long tragic fall, Georg had hardly thought of the attacking enemy vessel. The image of it had faded upward as the *Queen of the Starways* fell back to the Moon. Presumably the Nomad ship had made off into space. Georg and all the others had ignored it. But where did it go? Where was it now? If it had swooped down, unnoticed, it could have landed here on the Moon by now.

"We've got to get out of this!" Georg said. "No right to be here—like this!"

Vane and the rescue party on the larger volplane had suddenly decided not to come down to the wreck! Why? Georg shoved Aura toward the broken doorway of the salon. Then he saw the grotesque, bloated figure of Lohlo, stooping over Commander Blake's desk. Lohlo's arm gestured.

They all bent over the desk—over a little pyroprint, scrawled book-cylinder. Commander Blake's writing. His last notes, made while the vessel was falling.

Eight hundred miles of altitude. We will crash—these probably my last written words.

A fragment followed—Blake's good-by to his loved ones on earth. Georg read it hastily. Then came other brief entries, written obviously at hasty intervals as Blake saw inevitable death so, swiftly approaching.

The explanation of the robbery was there, the Nomad ship's attack, the disappearance of Governor Allen.

Nomad ship enveloped with darkness bombs, contacted and boarded us five thousand miles out. I surrendered at Gov. Allen's order, to avoid loss of life by futile resistance. Nomads appear to be Martian outlaws. They melted vault—took dust box. And took Gov. Allen unharmed with them for hostage-protection. Cast our vessel loose—then from nearby suddenly bombarded—wrecked us. Am trying repulsive emergency—seems useless—fear—Almost the end. You watch out—enemy vessel—

Blake had written no more. Georg's mind flung back. What they had seen on the telescopic mirror grid was the end, not the beginning, of the transport's encounter with the murderous Nomad.

"A warning to us!" Georg gasped. "We should not be here—"

They climbed hastily out of the wreckage; stood down on the ledge of rock, with the precipice beside them and the upper reaches of the giant mountain towering overhead. The starfield seemed empty. Then Georg made out the tiny moving black dot which was Vane's volplane. It seemed to be heading back toward the mine, out of sight behind the mountain's curving ramparts.

And as Georg stared, from an ink-shadowed mountain ledge no more than a mile away, a narrow curving bolt leaped up. It spat past the speeding volplane and missed. The Nomad ship had landed, and was firing now, at Vane's volplane, which was trying to maneuver out of danger!

Another curving flash. A hit! A puff of light showed briefly out there against the stars—gruesome light to mark the shriveling of the tiny sailing vehicle and its human occupants. A few fragments glowed briefly as they fell.

Then the enemy vessel turned its weapons on the mine. A stabbing searchlight shot out. Then a penetrating, revealing Zed-ray, which would disclose the interior of the dome-buildings. And at a few seconds' intervals the curve-bolt, and a wide, intensely violet beam, with a direct electron rush which, if it struck the mine dome and persisted for a minute or two without neutralizing interference, would melt through. Or derange the Erentz pressure-equalizers so that the mine

buildings would explode outward from their interior air pressure like an old-fashioned, bursting powder bomb.

The assault on the mine had begun! These Nomads, not satisfied with their forty decimars of loot, were trying to wreck the mine where, Georg knew, was housed some five hundred decimars of ore-dust in various stages of purification!



CHAPTER III

Attack of the Nomad

Georg and his companions stood beside their volplane, staring stricken at the distant, silent drama. And now the mine was answering—its bolts crossing those of the enemy, bursts of silent, lurid light, with showers of interference sparks—brilliant pyrotechnics against the stars, dimming them and painting all the jagged precipices of the mountain with brief electric glares. The glare disclosed the Nomad ship. It lay comfortably cradled on a broad ledge of rock with a precipice on one side and a vertical mountain wall on the other. Whatever artificial darkness had enshrouded its arrival was not being used now.

A bolt from the mine struck the Nomad full on, and for a moment clung. Georg held his breath. Under the shower of interference sparks the lights of the vessel went dim; but the dome held unscathed. The mine-bolt yielded; snapped off.

Georg suddenly was aware of Aura and Lohlo clutching him. And the Lunite boy miner's voice saying:

"But her father is on that enemy ship! Your men at the mine do not know it. If they fight like this her father will be killed."

True enough. Greggson and Smith were in charge of the government buildings and the mine, now with John Vane killed and Georg away. They would fight; and if they shattered the Nomad ship, it would kill Governor Allen. And they did not know he was there; they of course believed him dead in the wreck.

But Georg knew it—and he was standing here inactive! "We'll have to get back to the mine—" he gasped.

Their volplane started; they headed outward over the Mare Imbrium; but almost at once the speck of their volplane was discovered. A bolt leaped with a dazzling radiance past them. Then another—closer, horribly close for all that Aura hastily swung back toward the shadows of the mountain crags to avoid a horrible death.

"Land us! Too dangerous!"

They dropped wildly into a shadow; landed with a thump that bent the frail bow of the volplane and knocked the breath from them all even with the bloated protection of their air suits.

Again they crouched on the rocks. No bolts followed them. A search-ray tentatively swung, did not reveal them, and then, as though uninterested, turned away.

They were closer to the Nomad ship now, and from their new point of vantage they could see the mine, ten miles or so beyond the enemy. Dwarfed by distance, the cluster seemed a fantastic little model of human habitations—the main low government dome; the spread of glassite over the mine workings; the groups of workers' dwellings scattered at different levels on the mountain ledges; and the whole strung together with a snakelike tangle of air-conduits and corridors.

For a moment now there was a lull in the crossing electron streams.... Georg stood trying to determine what he should do. To move from here with the volplane was too utterly dangerous—they had just proven that ... The bleak rocky darkness of the scene ahead abruptly was rifted by a shaft of signal-light. It leaped from the Nomad vessel's bow-peak—a narrow white beam. For a moment it stood straight up, into the black void of star-strewn space. Then it began waving.

And Georg, staring, gasped back to Aura: "A signal! Inter-planetary open code! Look—it's in English!"

He read it:

Another flash from you, we will kill Governor Allen. He is here captive. Still to now he is unharmed. He commands John Vane and Georg Frear raise signal-lights of surrender.

Had the governor really said that, even to save his own life? Georg doubted it. What would Greggson and Smith reply? Georg and the silent Aura and Lohlo stared. Minutes passed; but from the dark inactivity of the mine no sign came. Then, out there, close over the government domes, it seemed to Georg that he could make out several tiny moving dots. Volplanes already issuing from the mine portes! Greggson and Smith taking the aggressive! They thought the signal was a bluffing lie!

A Zed-ray sprang and clung to the wheeling group of dots. Then a bolt leaped at them, seeming to miss and striking the main government dome with a shower of interference. The volplanes vanished.

The enemy signal spelled:

"Unless you raise surrender signals in five minutes, Governor Allen will die."

But Greggson and Smith wouldn't surrender. Georg knew it. If only he could signal them. It left him only one course of action. He had full authority to act for the Archimedes Company.

He whirled on Aura. "You and Lohlo stay here! Don't move—don't show yourselves! You'll be safe. I'll end this affair in an hour. Those pirates want only money."

She gasped; and he saw her strained white face behind her visor-pane. "What are you going to do?"

"Never mind. I'm going to try to save your father. You do what I tell you. Lohlo, you and she will keep the volplane. But don't use it! Stay hidden here."

Aura clung to him, but he flung her off; crouched, sprang upward, and, sailing with only the slight moon gravity to hold him, crossed a black, yawning gully and landed on a higher Earth-lit projection some thirty feet away.

The shadowed volplane with Lohlo and the girl was invisible from here. He waited a moment to make sure that they did not try to follow him. Then he leaped again. Another thirty feet. Swift, fantastic progress, these Moon-leaps! He headed for the Nomad ship, his heart pounding with the knowledge that every moment in the Earth-light might bring a bolt upon him.



Now he was far enough to give safety to Aura. On a crag-pinnacle he stood with the Earth-light revealing him, and the arms of his baggy suit raised above his head. Awaiting discovery, breathless with the fear that his attitude of surrender would be misunderstood.

For a moment there was no discovery, no bolt. His small hand search-torch hung at his belt. He held it over his head, waving its tiny beam; and in another moment the white glare of a searchlight swung from the Nomad ship and clung to him as he slowly moved forward—moved with flat, lazy bounds from one jagged pinnacle to another. The Nomad search-beam persistently clung to him; the Nomads were awaiting him, curious. Doubtless also, he was seen by the mine telescopes. The mine remained dark and inactive.

At last he reached the ledge upon which the enemy ship was cradled. It was a crag-strewn space, with the precipice on one hand, and on the other the wall of the mountain rising sheer for a hundred feet or so, smooth as polished grey-black marble. The Earth-light illumined the precipice brink; but Georg's final bound landed him between the ship and the wall—a forty-foot wide area of deep inky shadow. It was strewn with jagged, pitted boulders, among which Georg threaded his cautious advance.

A stern quarter of the ship was toward him now; the bulging black hull loomed up some thirty feet above him. The dimly illumined deck was up there, with the peaked dome of glassite bulging another thirty feet or more upwards. Georg now was in darkness; the bow searchlight could not reach him here; it had swung away and then snapped off.

He saw near the stern, at the bottom of the hull, a small bull's-eye pressure-port entrance; and there were a few observation bull's-eyes, all of them dark. He gathered himself for a bound to the pressure-port; but from the soundless blackness near at hand, a bloated helmet figure leaped upon him. An attack!

He recoiled from the contact, reaching for his knife; but the figure's gloved hand gripped his shoulder, and a voice said:

"Georg!" He whirled in amazement.

It was Aura! He gasped.

"You—but I told you—Where is Lohlo?"

She stood gripping him. "Georg, if you—if you're going to offer yourself as a hostage, I am better than you. You let me go in to Father—"

He could see that her face was white and grim; and there was upon it a faint ironic smile as he gasped again.

"But I told Lohlo—"

"Still, I am the daughter of the governor," she retorted. "No little Lunite boy miner can tell me what to do. I ran from him. You never once looked behind you, Georg!"

He protested with an agony of apprehension, "But I don't want you in this! It may work and it may not! You get away from here!"

Too late! From a porte beside one of the stern bull's-eyes a faint beam shot out and caught them. And persisted, clinging. Georg felt the tingle of it; felt his feet gripping the ground, fastened as though by a giant electro-magnet. The paralyzing ray. He saw Aura's figure waver from the shock; then stiffen, erect, as she stood immovable beside him. The physical effects almost instantly passed. Georg's whirling senses cleared as his body absorbed the current. And he and the girl beside him stood rooted.^[4]

For a moment they stood helpless. The grey Bolar beam snapped off; a white search-ray took its place. The pressure-port opened. A huge helmeted figure emerged with leveled weapon. The blob of another showed in the pressure-port doorway.

The figure seized Georg. He saw, behind the faintly illumined visor-pane, a broad, flat-nosed Martian face.

"We are friendly. I speak no Ilton,"^[5] Georg said instantly.

"English spik the ship—" the Nomad retorted.

The Bolar current effects were passing. Georg's feet came loose from the rocky ground.

Docilely he and Aura followed the towering form of their captor into the tiny pressure lock. The door slid closed. The ship's interior air hissed into the cubby; the interior door slid open. Georg and Aura were seized by a jabbering group of men, all of them huge.^[6]

With deflated suits and doffed helmets, they were shoved along a corridor, up an incline passage to the vessel's dome-covered deck. It was a confused, noisy scene of milling figures in a dim blue-tube radiance. A score of the Nomads were clustered here, evil-faced giants in a variety of tasseled, leather garments. One, who seemed to be the leader, shoved his way forward and confronted Georg. Along the deck at the dome portes, other figures stood aiming the projector weapons.

And nearby, against the superstructure wall, the grey-haired governor of the Moon stood staring with astonished horror at his daughter.

CHAPTER IV

On the Nomad Ship

The Nomads on the deck stood in a ring around their prisoners. They were all big men—apparently all Martians—dressed in leather jerkins and short leather breeches, with bare knees and flaring, tasseled boots. Swaggering fellows, with broad belts from which a variety of hand weapons dangled. Their faces were grey-white, heavy-joweled, flat-nosed, some with scraggling, unshaven beards. To him who seemed the leader, Georg said:

"I come friendly. You are Ilton, but you speak English?"

The fellow grinned. "You read my signals. I handle your language with much ease. Who are you? Why do you come here, risking your head with an enemy?"

His voice was heavy, harsh and guttural, like all Martians. But quite evidently he had had an Earth education, or at all events had mingled with Earth-people in Ferrok-Shahn.^[7] A dashing giant, handsome by Ilton standards.

His coarse hair, long to the base of his muscular grey throat, was almost solid black, shot only with occasional strands of white. A fellow of perhaps thirty Earth-years. His garments were fringed and tasseled. His hair was bound around his forehead with a red-hued thong. He wore an Ilton peaked cap, with a huge scarlet feather. He seized the cap now and swept it down with a courtly gesture. He added:

"And I have a lady come to me. So charming a lady—"

His darkly glowing gaze went to Aura.

"My name is Georg Frear. I am manager of the Archimedes Mine. I have full authority, and that is why your demands were not answered."

"So?" But his gaze was still on Aura. "The lady star-crosses me. Your daughter, Sir Governor?"

"My daughter," Allen said shortly.

"It is decimars, I want," the giant said. "Nothing else. You, Georg Frear—"

"I came to fix it for you," Georg said quickly. "My men at the mine do not know that you have the governor here—they think he's dead. And they have no authority to give you ore-dust."

The Nomad's face brightened, but still carried its ironical smile. "But you have the authority? What will you do?"

Georg briefly, vehemently told him; and the Nomad added, "Very well, I send the message."

They watched while from the little tripod portable sender erected near him he waved his signal lights.

"Allen, daughter, and Frear safe here. Frear commands prepare four hundred decimars ore-dust for ransom. He will send proof of authority."

And this time, from the mine Greggson and Smith answered:

"Will await proof. Send what you like."

The giant laughed. "We are progressing."

"You send us now with one of your men and we'll send back the ore-dust," Georg said.

The Nomad raised his heavy brows. "So? You joke with me. My man will take your pyroprint order. How is that? And when he returns safely with the treasure, then will I release my three prisoners. Write the order."

Georg's heart was pounding as he wrote it. If only he could get Aura and her father safely out of here.

"Here's your order. You hold me till you get the treasure. Send Governor Allen and his daughter now."

The Nomad took the pyroprint. "I thank you. Come, Governor, my man will take you."

He added a few swift words of Ilton, and four of the Nomads sprang to his command. Two of them seized Georg, two others gripped the governor. And the giant said shortly:

"The girl stays here as hostage with Frear."

Allen was suddenly struggling. "*Miserable swerol! Quitah Ko ilts wara swerol!*"^[8] You think I'll trust her with you?"

Georg futilely struggled—the huge powerful Martians held him. Allen was shoved, fighting and raging, across the deck and into the superstructure cabin where an air suit was forced upon him. Georg yielded; and found the pale Aura beside him. The Nomad leader had not moved, and still was smiling.

"You make a blazing star from a tiny meteorite. You and the girl came here very bravely; now you want to trick me into releasing all my hostages."

It quieted Georg. "The decimars will come," he said. "You will release us then?"

"But of course."

There was nothing else that could be done but to trust him. He ignored Aura now, and busied himself with sending one of his men to the mine with Governor Allen. Georg and Aura, still garbed in their deflated air suits, stood together at one of the deck bull's-eyes, gazing down thirty feet to the Earth-lit narrow strip of rocky ledge between the ship and the nearby precipice. From a lower porte the bloated figures of Allen and a Nomad came out, dragging a queerly shaped Martian volplane. And in a moment they had sailed away toward the mine, dwindling to a speck against the starfield.

The Nomad came now and stood beside his prisoners, waiting for the return of the treasure. He was in a high good humor; the thing was coming out better than he could have hoped. Half an hour passed. No signal came from the mine. No sign of activity showed out there. The governor must have arrived there before now. The ore-dust, at Georg's order, would come back, of course. The Nomad leader was volubly, jovially talking. A well educated Ilton, undoubtedly.

Georg said abruptly: "So you had information that forty decimars were leaving here for the Earth on the *Queen of the Starways*?"

The fellow shrugged. "That transport carries your ore-dust regularly. What I did not know was the presence of so great a personage as Governor Allen."

It had changed his plans. Without the governor as hostage he would not have dared come back to the Moon for additional loot. He was exceedingly pleased with himself, this Nomad.

"Very soon you shall have seen the last of me." His smile was ironic.

Georg's mind was on the coming of the treasure. The release of Aura. Would this outlaw release her? If not—the thought made Georg shudder. He had been stripped of his weapons and every moment he had been here, he was closely watched.

"I was Ilton-born, no use to deny that. But now I am Nomad—roaming the starways—"

"Until the patrol gets you," Georg said. "You fooled the *Queen's* commander with your darkness bombs—"

"And with my lights." The giant chuckled. "He thought me a patrol ship. I can go almost where I like. Official ships especially, are not too curious."

"You mean especially Martian patrols," Georg said. He stared through the dome-portes at the distant rocky cliffs. The Nomad volplane should be returning by now. He added: "Of what use, your treasure? You can't market it."

The Nomad leader smiled imperturbably. "Can I not? On Earth—no. But in Ferrok-Shahn they are not too curious. I have a way of landing secretly—and what Ilton company cares where radium dust came from, so that it is pure and will run their engines, and cure disease, and do the million other things of commerce? We have no radium on Mars, as you very well know. Your Moon here controls the market—and you do not sell to Mars very cheaply."

Aura suddenly spoke. "The volplane is coming. See it now?"

They saw it. A speck in the Earth-light, skimming close beside the mountain ramparts. The Nomad jumped to a small

electro-telescope, mounted in the ship's bow, with its finder here on the deck near at hand. Georg and Aura crowded after him. Now, Georg knew, he could seize one of the weapons from the giant's belt. But a fight here was unthinkable—a last desperate measure.

The two towering fellows who seemed to be detailed as guards, moved close after Georg; but their interest and attention were more on the arriving volplane than on their prisoner.

Georg took a quick gaze at the spiral ladder here on the deck. It led vertically upward some twenty feet into a turretlike peak of the dome. A little platform-grid was up there—an observation platform with a rack which seemed to hold a few instruments and weapons. Close above the platform was a small trapdoor giving access to the little turret which projected above the flatly rounded glassite dome-roof. Would there be a pressure exit up there?

The *Queen of the Starways* had a turret something like this; and it was equipped with an exit porte. Perhaps one was up there; the trapdoor was open, but the interior of the turret was dim—lighted only by Earth-light and starlight which filtered through its bull's-eyes. A man was on the underneath platform; he called something in Ilton now, and came down the incline, joining his fellows on the deck who were all regarding their leader expectantly.

Georg said, and he tried to hold his voice steady: "Your man, returning? I guess he has the treasure, hasn't he?"

The Nomad straightened from the telescope. "It does seem so. My volplane. A single figure, and a box."

The tiny vehicle came swiftly. Georg now could see its single crouching figure; and a three-foot oblong metal case lashed beside it. One of the mine's pure-dust caskets. The volplane circled, came down and landed on a strip of Earth-lit ledge between the ship and the precipice.

On the deck a tense silence fell. To these Nomads it was a crisis—the arrival of four million gold-dollars of loot—or some trickery from the mine? The leader issued swift commands. Several of the men went down into the hull to admit the messenger. Others stood here at the deck weapons, alert and ready for any hostile move that the distant occupants of the mine might make.

"I hope no trickery is tried," the Nomad leader said. "We will check the decimars—then quickly I will release you." He gave a tense laugh. "And quickly too, we will be gone. I hope Sir Governor does not try firing at us as we rise. You, out on the rocks, will be within my range and I shall destroy you if he does."

"He will not," Georg said. "He's not such a fool," Georg told him.

The men from below were coming up now. Their heavy tread sounded. They appeared, carrying the box. Relief flooded Georg. The messenger was here, with deflated air suit and doffed helmet.—He was smiling triumphantly.

They put the box on the deck. Georg showed them how to open it. The pyroprint on the interior of the lid stated: "Decimars 398 Purity average per centum 62.5."

"I told them four hundred," Georg said. "Evidently three ninety-eight is all there is on hand. You have stripped us."

"I am satisfied; have no fear," the Nomad laughed. "If the label does not lie."

It did not. There was no question of that. The forty small cylinders in the box were quickly counted.

"Correct," agreed the Nomad. He stood up. Georg's heart was pounding; he was tense and cold with apprehension. He and Aura stood in their deflated air suits, side by side. Georg saw the girl flash him a look.

"Correct," the Nomad repeated. A strange smile plucked at his wide thick-lipped mouth. "You have done your part, Frear. You may go. My men will lead you to the hull-porte, and turn you out. Good luck to you."

Georg's mouth and throat were suddenly dry. "Come, Aura."

And then all his premonitions leaped into reality. The Nomad's smile turned upon Aura.

"Not you. Your eyes have star-crossed me. You will stay."

"Why—why that's crazy—" it seemed that Georg's brain suddenly cleared, as though all his thoughts of the past half-hour had been preparing him for this, so that now he could think clearly—and act.

CHAPTER V

A Lunite's Heroism

Georg was futilely stammering—and the stammer and his confused, frightened expression made his action wholly unexpected as both his gloved hands shot out to the Nomad's belt. No fumbling. He knew what he reached for; and he seized them—two weapons—gripped them, snatched them all in a second from their clipped fastenings. A flash gun; and a glass bomb. He hurled a tiny fragile glass bomb to the deck-grid at his feet; darkness sprang like a shroud, through which Georg fired the flash gun with a succession of stabbing, unaimed bolts. There was a man's scream, and a wild confusion in the blackness.

Aura's hand had clutched at him; and now he dragged her forward. They stumbled; a man's groping hands gripped them but Georg shoved him violently away. A bolt from nearby stabbed and hissed against the dome-side; and the Nomad leader shouted a warning to his men not to chance it again.

The spiral to the dome-peak was only a few feet away. In a second or so, Georg found it, pushed Aura up it ahead of him. They mounted; the lightweight gas of the artificial darkness mounted with them. The turmoil of the deck now showed dimly down below. They reached the platform grid; but the dissipating gas had thinned so that they were discovered. A bolt stabbed up, missed and spat, with a shower of sparks upon the grid-bottom.

"Up, Aura! Hurry!"

They scrambled the few steps further, through the trap and into the turret. Men were mounting the spiral after them; Georg sent a hasty bolt downward, and then banged the trapdoor. But it had no fastenings. What matter? If no pressure exit was here then this was their death-cubby.

But the exit was at hand. They squeezed into the tiny recess and slid its panel. There were no air pumps. Georg paused only while he and Aura connected their helmets and bloated their air suits. He touched her.

"Correct, Aura!"

"Correct," she panted.

He swung for the outer door panel. The air in the tiny porte went out with a puff and they followed it.

The dome-top bulged with a whale-back rounded convex surface. Dimly Earth-lit—the Earth-disc and the stars were overhead; to one side were the jagged mountain ramparts; to the other was the precipice. The rock-ledge was thirty feet down from here. Earth-lit on the precipice side, but dark between the ship and the mountain wall.

Georg turned toward the darkness. "We'll have to leap. Thirty feet. Not too far for safety, if we're careful."

"Leap together? Hand in hand—it's better balance that way."

"Yes, I think so."

They advanced to where on the sloping dome-top they could go no further. A jump outward and downward. Far enough to clear the ship's bulging side; not too far or they would strike the wall of rock.

Only a few seconds had passed. The Nomads had gained the turret, but it had no firing portes. From the turret controls they had already slid closed the pressure door. There was another turret sternward, some forty feet along the dome-roof. Its interior light showed men crowding there. But none was attempting to come out. And now the vessel was quivering; its gravity current was on.

Georg realized it was preparing to rise. The Nomad leader had decided that he could not recapture Aura alive. He had his treasure and to linger would be too dangerous.

The ship trembled more violently; the bow gave a premonitory lift. Georg knew that in a brief time more he and Aura would be carried upward. Too late then to jump safely. They advanced a step or two further; hand in hand, they peered downward into the darkness. This ought not to be too difficult, so often they had practised tandem jumping.

Georg's fingers were ready to give the signal. Then out beyond the bulging dome and no more than ten feet down in the darkness, he saw a hovering, slowly moving blob. Familiar narrow oblong, with hooded bow. Aura's volplane; and the helmeted boy miner Lohlo Wills crouching upon it! Georg stared, then gasped.

Realization swept him. All that time Lohlo had been lying with his tiny vehicle, hidden in the blackness between the ship and the mountain wall! Lying waiting, watching for some chance to help!

His chance had come now. He poised the platform; and over a space of only a few feet Georg and Aura bounded and reached it. The platform rocked; almost overturned. Then it steadied as they stretched themselves prone.

Georg gripped the Lunate. "Good enough, Wills."

Lohlo clung to the controls.

"Keep us down by the rock shadows. The ship will rise in a few seconds. If they see us, they'll fire at us."

They dropped and poised low by the base of the wall. The ship was ready to lift; its bow went up. Relief swept Georg. The Nomads were too busy to bother with them. They were safe. He held Aura.

"Safe, Aura, dear," he murmured. His hand was on Lohlo's shoulder, pressing it reassuringly.

"Safe!" Aura whispered. "Oh, Georg, I love you so, and I thought it was the end for us. Safety—but you bought my life with four million gold-dollars—your employers' money—"

Georg abruptly felt the volplane wavering.

"Careful!" A crash—Lohlo gasped.

They fell suddenly to the rocks. But it was only a few feet. They were hardly shaken. And then Georg realized that Lohlo had purposely crashed them. The little boy miner was on his feet, bending his knees, straightening, hurtling upward with a sailing leap.

The ship's hull bulged almost over them here, and the vessel was slowly rising. Ten feet up; then twenty feet. But Lohlo's spring carried him up to it. Too late for Georg to stop him, or to leap after him. His hand caught a finlike projection of the hull-bottom. He clung. The horrified Georg and Aura gazed upward at the now swiftly rising vessel. The figure of Lohlo showed as he scrambled to the ledge. And a radiance showed. A stab of electric flame.

He had a miner's electronic heat-torch. He was melting the ship's lower gravity-plates. Being carried upward—clinging, persistently melting. The molten metal dripped now, with momentary puffs of falling radiance.

Another few seconds. The ship was almost vertically ascending. A hundred feet now above Georg and Aura, so that they could not see Lohlo, but only his spreading torch-radiance on the dark hull-bottom. Then the heat ate into the thickness of the hull-plate; reaching the gravity-plate current; short-circuited—

All in a second or two, electric fire leaped the whole length of the hull. Electric derangement instantly spreading, so that in a second more the ship was enveloped in spark-showers and a vivid glare. The gravity plates were all deranged. The vessel wavered; turned over and began falling. Slowly, then faster, with the free-electron radiance streaming upward from it. Then the derangement must have spread to the Erentz current. The pressure equalizers broke. Like a bursting bomb the interior air-pressure exploded the dome outward—

The figure of Lohlo had fallen from the hull and crashed hardly forty feet away from Georg and Aura. They bounded to where he lay motionless, his air suit gruesomely deflated. They bent—and found him still alive. The mechanisms within his suit were still working though the fabric itself was punctured. He would have strangled for lack of air; but Aura flung herself down, sharing her oxygen with him. He revived a little. His blurred, confused gaze stared through his visor and hers—stared at her face, and his pallid lips were smiling.

His audiphone still was working; she heard his faint, gasping words:

"I have—saved all those decimars—his employers' money as you said, they would have been very angry at you and him—"

The falling shattered Nomad vessel struck at a distant edge of the ledge. Soundless crash. It hung for a moment, bursting

with explosions; then it tipped over the precipice brink; fell and vanished into the abyss, with only its brilliant fiery glare coming upward.

Then it ceased altogether.

Decimar: Platinum standard—the approximate equivalent of ten thousand gold-dollars.

The Moon's gravity is approximately one-sixth that of Earth.

A Moon vehicle—a toboggan-shaped metal air sled, with low siderails equipped with gravity plates electronized in the fashion of a tiny space flyer. The vehicle is impractical, largely used for sport, the safe handling of it requiring extraordinary skill, the manipulator lying flat, working its controls, and maintaining balance largely by rapid shifting of the body from side to side.

The Bolar current, popularly misnamed the paralyzing ray, has no effect whatever of a physical paralysis. It merely generates a sudden gravitational force, transitory, but of extreme intensity so that the victim stands momentarily "rooted to the ground." The subject is highly technical of explanation. The affected, material object, does not gain an extreme weight, as in the case of an electronized gravity plate with full attractive force; the paralyzing beam acts more in the nature of magnetism—at the contact point of the affected object and the ground into which the Bolar current is discharged.

Ilton: The ruling race of Mars, and the language of the Martian Union.

The average stature of Iltons is around seven feet.

Ferrok-Shahn: The capital city of the Martian Union. The Iltons are an exceedingly intelligent advanced race. And even those of limited education learn languages with great facility.

Ilton phrase of extreme opprobrium, difficult to express In English. Swerol is an unclean Martian animal.

[The end of *Blood of the Moon* by Ray Cummings]