

SCIENCE FICTION



THE GOD THAT SCIENCE MADE

by

LLOYD ARTHUR
ESHBACH

also

ED EARL REPP
RAYMOND Z. GALLUN
EDMOND HAMILTON

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AN INVAD- ING SUN

the
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A BLUE RIBBON
MAGAZINE

PAUL

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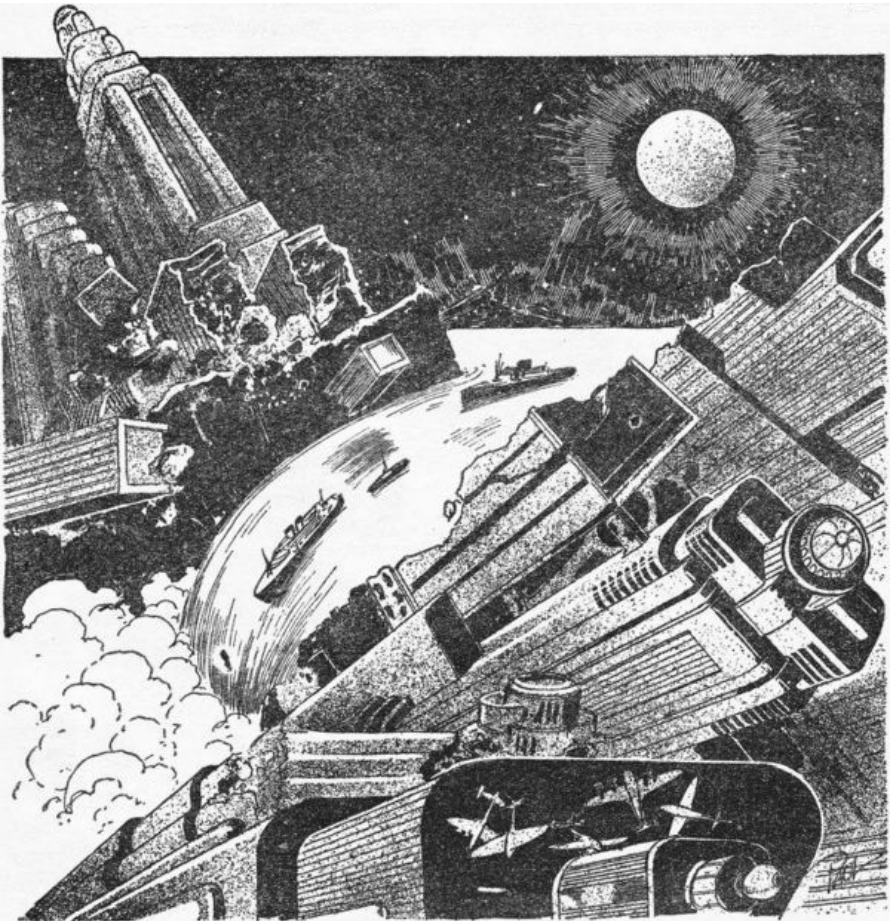
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The American continent was rocked from end to end. Lake Michigan poured into the city of Chicago.

The Jewels From the Moon

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Ephriam Winiki.

First published *Science Fiction*, August 1939.

The huge fortune in gems that Bull Cassell finds on Luna undergoes a strange transformation in the atmosphere of Earth—a change that unlocks the past and brings forth a threatening horde that should have perished ages ago!

CHAPTER I

THE GEMS THAT MELTED

Bulton—"Bull"—Cassell, exile from Earth, stared out grimly into the gulf of space through the observation window of his lone flyer. For ten weary years he had wandered this hell-fired cosmos, driven to it by an extradition order—sent into space as a wanderer for a crime he had never committed. . . . Now at last he could return—and with good effect! Money could buy anything in the ultra-modern world of 2714—even vengeance for his frame-up. That was what he was counting on.

A faintly cynical smile twisted the corners of his big, powerful mouth at the thought; his ugly, ruggedly hewn face lighted with anticipation. Ahead lay the moon, source of the wealth which he alone knew about. Lunar caverns . . . Rare gems . . . His thoughts went back swiftly to that day ten years ago when an accident had forced him to land on the moon. That was when he had found them.

"Guess it won't be long now!" he murmured reflectively, and turning from the window, he sat before the controls and disconnected the robot steering mechanism.

His eyes fixed on the instruments, he drove the short, powerful little space-vessel downwards in a long arc, curving towards the moon's brilliantly argent surface. He needed no experience in the art of landing on the satellite; struggles with the varied gravities of Jupiter and Mercury had given him judgment of uncanny accuracy.

Ten minutes later, he landed five miles west of the lunar Apennines and sat for a while gazing out into the sun-drenched lunar surface, raging at a temperature of 212° Fahrenheit. In the main, his attention was directed towards the lofty peaks of the Apennines. In the base of one of them was the cleft leading downwards to the cavern he had so fortuitously discovered. At length, he beheld it and a broad grin widened his face.

"Money, huh?" He spat eloquently on the metal floor. "Guess those money-grubbin' swines of Earth'll get all the gems their safes can hold before I'm through with 'em! This is going to be my turn! I owe you plenty, John Masterson, and the account's goin' to be paid in full!"

A momentary bitterness crossed his face as he remembered the cold, ruthless engineer responsible for his frame-up—then with a shrug he turned aside and scrambled into his heavily armored space-suit.

Ten minutes later he was walking the ashy, scorching surface of the satellite, heading towards the range. Inside his suit the heat rose stiflingly and set the sweat pouring from his great, massively muscled body. He was thankful for the black, undiffused shadow of the cleft when at last he gained it.

For a while he stood motionless, accustoming his eyes to the ebon gloom after the blinding glare of the sun—then at length he looked down at the rocky defile leading inward to the moon's unexplored caverns—unexplored except by him. Luna was classed as a derelict by all spatial navigators.

With careful footsteps, judging as best he could against the sixth of earthly gravity, he traveled downwards, keen gray eyes studying every inch of the route. Presently he was forced

to use his helmet torch. Its brilliant beam shone on dusty white pumice-like rock, aridly brittle moon-stuff, the same in these lunar tunnels as on the alternately scorched and frozen surface.

Tunnel after tunnel he followed, searching for and finding the undisturbed directional marks he had scored over ten years before. They led him at last to an immense cavern nearly three hundred feet underground, an unexpected and natural bubble in the strange, riddled mass of the moon.

Through his helmet glass, his face was a study in blank awe as he gazed upon a solid wall of scintillating gems, their facets catching the glare of his helmet lamp. Vermilion, green, saffron, purest violet—colors beyond spectral comprehension—stabbed outward in bars of bewildering loveliness from the stones' lustrous depths.

He stepped forward, breathing hard, and stared closely at them. Even his ironically unsentimental heart was stirred for a moment by a sense of things transcendently beautiful. Then the conviction evaporated and he was ruggedly himself again.

"Stones that'll make diamonds look like shore shingle," he breathed. "Untold minions in value, and only I know about it! Will this knock their ears off back on Earth!"

He speculated briefly on how the gems had ever gotten into such a strange place, then finding no solution, he shrugged his massive shoulders and set to work with his flame pistol. Ten minutes of steady burning work blasted a clean track around a six-inch square block of the stones. The rest was easy. He pried the block out, found it comfortably heavy in the slight lunar gravitation, then looked at the wall that was left.

Just plain pumice rock. The jewels must be sticking to it like barnacles to a boat. Again brief wonderment touched him, then with another shrug, he thrust the gems under his arm and retraced his steps to the blinding surface. Thirty minutes later he was back in his machine.

Beyond another glance at the stones, he paid them no further attention. The possibility of them cracking or becoming defaced through warmth after the eternal cold of the moon's interior led him to put them in his storage refrigerator—then, satisfied that an incalculable fortune was within his grasp, he turned the bullet nose of his vessel towards the giant green globe hanging low over the ragged horizon. . . .

Night had fallen when he reached Earth. The stratosphere police let him through, and down on the space grounds outside Great New York, his papers were found to be in order. His exile time limit had expired. He was free to roam the gigantic straddling enormity that had taken the place of the plain New York he had once known.

Once through the inquiry barriers, he debated briefly. It was too late tonight to have the bulge under his leather coat valued. Only thing to do was to head for Rocket Ike's place over on the east side. He'd be able to drink and sleep safely for the night.

Immediately, he bent his steps in that direction, finding his way with some difficulty in the changed surroundings. Ten years ago Rocket Ike, the tough one-eyed ex-rocket man, had kept a questionable space-drifter's abode in the city's most squalid region—and, to Bull's delight, he found the place still there with Ike himself apparently not a day older.

Bull wasted no time and gave away no secrets. The small sum of money he possessed was sufficient to guarantee him a room for the night. Rocket Ike was affable enough in his coarse, uneffusive way—readily showed Bull to a shoddy little private bedroom at the rear of the place when he had at last made an end of his drinking.

Bull grinned twistedly as he found himself alone. Once he had securely locked the door and removed his deadly flame pistol from his waistbelt, he pulled out the uncomfortable bulge

from under his coat. The coarse quilt of the bed seemed a crudely worthless setting for the livid block of varicolored fire he tossed upon it.

“A few more hours and you’ll be a fortune, my beauty!” he chuckled, tossing his massive body down beside it and relaxing with a sigh of relief. “And woe betide the guy that tries to get in this room tonight!”

He clamped his hairy paw over his flame pistol and gave himself up to thought. The sounds of the harbor drifted to him through the slightly open window. He had no intention of sleeping—but before long, the sweet security of Earth, its absolute solidity, lulled him into slumber. . . .

The noisy sounds of the den below began to quiet; rocket men and space-drifters—Venusians, Martians and Earthlings—rabble of the solar frontiers, drifted out into the dark, miasmic shadows. The main flood-lights dimmed in the mighty metropolis, the solid bulk of raging power quieted into a brooding, beacon-studded monster awaiting the dawn. Great New York slept, and so did Bull Cassell.

Rocket Ike made no attempt to enter his guest’s room. He had reason to remember only too well that Bull had a deadly aim and a fierce temper . . . but he did wonder vaguely about that bulge under the leather coat. Still, it was none of his business. No use risking his reputation and perhaps his life to satisfy a curiosity.

Three o’clock came and Bull Cassell still lay like a log in the gloom, the light having automatically shut itself off at one a. m.

But beside him something strange was happening to the jewel block! Had he been awake, he would have stared in stupefied amazement.

Each jewel, and there were about forty in all, was undergoing an astounding metamorphosis, losing its vivid flaring coloring and becoming milky and opalescent, oddly curdled. The glory of the radiations had gone; instead it was clear that the gems, whatever their nature, were now infused with a mystic form of inner life.

For an hour, the strangeness went on—for two hours—and at the end of that time the whole jewel block had divided itself into forty distinct slushy segments, no longer gem-like, but doughy. There was another long pause, then with the faintest sogging sound, something emerged from one of the side jewels—a figure of incredible minuteness, no more than an inch long, but none the less flawlessly patterned in the style of an earthly man, wearing minute garments that covered him from head to foot!

He stood for a time in the gloom, apparently attuning his eyes to the light of the turning beacon atop one of the nearer edifices overlooking the harbor. As though satisfied with what he saw, he finally turned to the pasty mess beside him and became active, pulling the viscid substance with little hands until he had freed more living beings like himself.

One after another they emerged, some men, some women, making hardly any impression on the quilt and certainly not in the least disturbing the heavily sleeping man. When at last the forty of them had emerged from their incredible prison, they turned, scrambled down the bed leg, and made for the open window.

Without a sound, they passed to the sill outside and lowered themselves to a telegraph wire. Mysteriously, their purpose unknown, they divided up in parties and vanished in the night—microscopic, perfectly dressed men and women, the majority of them classically good-looking. . . . And Bull still slept. . . .

CHAPTER II

UNSEEN POWER

Bull Cassell became a raving maniac of fury when he awoke and found nothing left of his jewels except a sticky mess giving off an odor like rotten eggs. He jumped from the bed like an unwound spring, flame gun in hand, and charged to the saloon below. Rocket Ike was there, mopping the floor in readiness for opening.

"You blasted rocket-firing swab!" Bull roared furiously, seizing him by the shoulder. "You couldn't get the damned jewels so you turned a flame gun on 'em to stop me doing it, huh? I'll show you whether you'll get away with a cheap trick like that!"

Ike's one eye slitted viciously. "What in hell are you yammerin' about, Bull? I never knew you had any jewels, and even if I did—"

"Be damned to that for a tale!" Bull's tuft of short cut black hair seemed to stand up with the impotency of his fury. "You knew all the time! The door wasn't open, but the window was! Well, there was a fortune in them gems and I'm going to take pay for you melting 'em! Stand up and take what's comin' to you!"

His paw clamped down on his flame gun, but he wasn't quite quick enough in leveling it. With a vicious twirl, the powerful Ike twisted himself free and brought around his soaking-wet mop with terrific power. It struck Bull clean in the face and sent him reeling backwards with a string of oaths. His gun went off and the flame neatly bisected a row of liquor bottles and mirror behind the bar.

Before he could recover himself, the mop jabbed viciously again and again, struck him in the throat and made his head throb with pain—then fell to his stomach and winded him. He dropped his gun helplessly. Then before he could collect his wits, Ike clutched him by the collar and swung him across the saloon. With a slithering crash he collapsed helplessly in the dirty road outside.

"Come back if you dare!" Ike warned him ominously, the gun held ready in his hand. "Lucky I got my pay from you last night. Get outa here and don't come back!"

Bull got to his feet, searing expletives rolling from his lips; then gradually a certain sense of coolness took possession of his outraged senses. After all, no man would surely melt a fortune in gems when he could just as easily have stolen them! Besides, Rocket Ike had no grudges to square. The thing didn't make sense. That thought sobered Bull up a bit and sent him mooching along the harbor side, bullet head bent in thought.

And the more he thought, the more baffled he became. What in hell had gone wrong with the gems, anyway? Solid things like that could not melt, surely, unless . . . Unless leaving them lying in warm air, close also to his warm body, had done something? After all, they had come from the airless cold of the moon. He remembered his efforts to keep them cold on the journey to Earth.

"You blasted fool!" he said out loud, and more than one passing docker bristled at his truculence. "It must have been the warmth that did it! Like snow in the sun! Gems! Might as well bring home Jovian dirt and try and sell that!"

He scowled and marched on again, uncertain as to what to do. It rather queered his plans for vengeance. Of course, he could spend the time tracking down Masterson, or he could even go back to his ship and determine a new plan of action. But he needed some more Earth in his

void-weary bones—plenty more drink and maybe a few women. They were always ready for the space-men.

That new thought momentarily banished the gems from his mind. Carnal pleasures were easier, too, than plotting vengeance. He still had some money. He brightened at the thought and turned his steps in the direction of the nearest liquor house, open in this foul, reeking quarter of the giant city from dawn until midnight. In half an hour, he was in the riotous weed-chewing company of two white-skinned Venusians and a scaly Martian—good guys all of them, and could they park their liquor . . .!

And while Bull became more and more gloriously drunk through the perpetual sipping of Venusian vermint root extract, the products of his strange gems had disseminated to various parts of the city.

Unseen, inch-high, they moved unnoticed into the offices of some of the city's highest intellectuals. They invaded the chambers of three famous engineers and sat unseen concentrating upon them. They were present too in the private office of John Masterson, famous scientist—a gaunt, harsh-featured man malignantly crushing anything and everything that showed signs of blocking his path.

They were everywhere—in wall crevices, on picture rails, behind furniture, pursuing some inconceivable plan of their own, all the more potent by reason of its very unexpectedness.

The results were not immediate, but the tiny invaders were untiring. They seemed to possess the capacity for endless hours of profound concentration without the need for rest or food. It was the same with either the men or the women. And despite the smallness of their brains, judged from normal standards, they nonetheless issued a potent hypnotic effect that finally began to have real significance.

The engineers found themselves drawing plans which were quite at variance with normalcy, utterly unaware of the end to which they were working. John Masterson in particular found himself working out a problem in advanced electrical machinery—so profound, so intricate, that he was half frightened at the ease with which he did it. The conviction of unknown powers surged through his brain; he ascribed his new-found genius to an “inner force.” Had he raised his cold blue eyes from his notes he would perhaps have seen the “inner force” represented in four pairs of tiny eyes watching him unwaveringly over the top of the great walnut bookcase. But he did not. He went on working deliberately, long after nightfall. His office staff only received curt insults when they reminded him of the time.

None save those few selected ones were aware of anything unusual, and even they were so mentally controlled they did not detect the utter incongruity of the work they were doing. Where normally they would have finished the day's work and be at home, they were now working steadily, unmindful of food or drink, perpetually puzzled and yet half delighted by the incredible scientific ideas that sprang with easy facility to their brains.

Least of all to be concerned was Bull Cassell. By the time late evening had arrived, he was completely drunk, ready to fight the first man who crossed his path, ready to ray in twain any durned drifter from Mercury to Pluto. Yet deep in his mind was the soaked remembrance of his melted gems; every time they recurred to him, invective rolled freely from his vermint-stained lips.

He did not care what he did or where he went, once he left the saloon. Any alley would do. He moved arm in arm with a Venusian on one side—the second white-skin had got lost somewhere—and a Martian on the other. The three of them bellowed a raucous space shanty

at the top of their unlovely voices, the Martian's high-pitched falsetto blending wincingly with Bull's basso-profundo.

Then suddenly Bull saw it! He stopped dead and blinked, the bright electric arc high overhead casting his bleared face into a ponderous mass of shadows. But he was not mistaken; his piercingly keen eyes, trained through years to be accustomed to the slightest movements on other worlds, distinctly beheld an inch-high object struggling desperately to free itself from the drainage percolator at the side of the alley, the percolator being a flat metal sheet perforated with tiny holes, self-disinfecting.

Bull whispered an oath. "I've got 'em coming on!" he breathed shakily. "Must have! Do you see what I see? That way!" he wound up impatiently, as his Venusian comrade squinted vaguely overhead.

The white-skin failed to see anything—and certainly the Martian didn't. He was flat on his back, out to the world. . . .

Bull moved forward jerkily and dropped down with a bump that stung his knees. Blankly he stared at the minute thing struggling in the drain. Sudden soberness descended on him.

Thrusting out a blunt finger and thumb, he closed them around the waist of the tiny thing, gave a little jerk and lifted it. Blearily he gazed at it; his intoxication was returning. He could have sworn that the object he was holding was a girl—and passing pretty at that, with fair hair and two tiny spots of blue eyes. She seemed to be dressed in a little silk garment. In the electric arclight he faintly distinguished her terrified face. . . .

Then, quite convinced that the vermint had been stronger than usual, he put the object gently on the road and headed off wildly into the shadows, unmindful of the Venusian who still gazed vacuously around him.

But the inch-high girl picked herself up, climbed the bordering curb, and also fled at top speed into the squalid darkness.

Ceaselessly, week in and week out, while Bull Cassell roamed he cared not where in the city's cheapest quarters, returning only occasionally to his ship at the space grounds, the little people continued their activities.

Engineers and scientists, gifted with suddenly supernal powers, set about the construction of strange machinery which they themselves did not understand. Nobody in the outside world had any real facts to go upon—but information did leak out three months later that complicated machines had been transferred to the Azores. Why, nobody knew—but determined air pilots scouting the Azores returned with the amazing information that gigantic structures and machines were scattered all over the nine islands and that all forms of normal agricultural life had been obliterated.

That started a veritable fleet of news and television hounds traveling eastward across the ocean, but the airplanes and ships thus employed never got within reasonable distance of the islands before they were blasted to atoms by an unknown form of energy radiated from lofty towers.

Immediately, the old familiar cry of war and invasion flashed across the world, until it became gradually evident that the tenants of the Azores made no attempt to be hostile unless they were directly or indirectly spied upon. Nonetheless, the destruction of American—and some British—boats and airplanes demanded some sort of reprisal. But what? Only fast-moving space-fliers could conceivably defeat those deadly energy rays and both governments

were loath to risk such valuable machines when there was no real suggestion of impending war.

Finally, the various authorities went over the earlier photographs and studied in some perplexity the mechanical scenes they presented. From end to end, each of the nine islands was littered with fantastic machinery, together with numerous shed-like buildings and towers of gleaming metal. The study was followed up with an investigation of prominent people missing from New York. To their surprise, the police found that seven of the city's most famous scientists and engineers had last been seen sailing for the Azores in charge of strange equipment locally constructed, and had not been seen since. To be aware of this fact was one thing but to do anything about it was decidedly another. . . .

Then Bull Cassell heard about it. He was sipping vermint as usual in an east side liquor den when the news indirectly reached him through rocket-hand Johnson of the Earth-Mars line.

"It can't be other-world invasion, anyhow," Johnson averred reflectively, over the stained table top. "That sort of thing's done away with—but it might mean that earthly scientists are getting sore at being controlled too long by boards and committees that don't know what they're talking about. If there is something starting from the Azores, it means trouble. They've got mighty powerful weapons there—things we've never 'eard of. Anyhow, the white-livered boneheads in control of our country and England won't risk space-machines against 'em. That does mean power—mark my words."

"Huh . . ." Bull grunted noncommittally.

Johnson drained his glass, went on talking pensively. "There's some talk about those Azorians dredging off the coast of the southern island. Maybe it doesn't mean anything, but maybe it means a lot. You've heard about the scientists and engineers missing from the city, of course?"

Bull shook his head. "Nope. Seen no papers or television—heard no radio."

"I don't like John Masterson being among the missing," Johnson muttered depressingly. "He's too clever by far to be against us. Besides, now he's gone—"

He broke off, startled. Bull's glass had suddenly dropped from his fingers to splinter on the table top.

"Masterson!" he shouted fiercely. "Did you say Masterson?"

"Sure, but what—"

"That's the guy that framed me ten years ago!" Bull stood breathing hard, veins swelling angrily on his thick neck. He went on talking swiftly, half to himself. "If there's any menace around those Azores, he'll be in it, sure as fate. But by Heaven, what a chance to get him! I was trying to figure some way, and now—"

"You'll never reach the Azores," Johnson proclaimed drearily. "Look what's happened to airplanes—and they won't use space-ships for the same reason."

"No?" Bull laughed thickly. "We'll damn well see whether a space-ship Can get there or not. It won't be a lily skin at the controls; it'll be me—Bull Cassell!"

He spat the eloquence of his assertion, then with a grim nod of farewell, he strode amidst the groups of figures to the outer doors. . . .

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL FROM THE JEWEL

Life felt good again to Bull as he entered his space-machine at the grounds. He had a purpose once more—a motivating vengeance.

Quickly, he closed the air-lock and settled to the controls. The powerful rocket tubes roared and he went off in a streaking line of exhaust into the night sky, curved high atop the huge bulk of Great New York, then sped seaward with ever-mounting velocity. In using his space-machine, he had certain advantages—terrific speed and the opportunity to gain a height denied to ordinary aircraft, excepting the balloons of the stratosphere police. Thus it was that he zoomed upward to a ten-mile height before streaking like a silver bullet out across the heaving gray of the Atlantic.

It was impossible to see the Azores at such a height and in darkness, but his numerous instruments, infallible to a hair's breadth, told him exactly when he had covered the 2,000-mile stretch. Then he started to dip, exhaust throttled to minimum.

The air whined against the window sockets; he opened his large mouth and let forth a bellowing scream to ease the body tension created by his plummet-like drop—then he flattened the machine out, wiped a trickle of blood from between his lips with the back of his hairy hand. His keen eyes stared through the observation window.

There were lights on the Azores. He could see them distinctly as a haze of twisting dots . . . and he too had been seen! His vessel became abruptly hot as the edge of a powerful energy beam atop an invisible tower below scraped the bottom plates—then he was zigzagging with brilliant skill through the occasional clouds, moving at such a stupendous pace that he was an impossible target.

As he traveled, he caught glimpses of things he could not understand—of flood-lit machinery working busily on the south island, of immense globes resembling bathyspheres being hauled from the saline depths by cables depending from long-armed cranes. He dared not linger to watch, for fear of destruction. Accordingly, he swung around and shot downwards to the quietest portion of the island, dropped lightly on the shore.

With grim movements, he locked the controls, then patted his flame pistol.

"Now, John Masterson, this is where you get what's coming to you!" he murmured. "You'll come back with me to the authorities and give a full explanation for everything, including that frame-up. . . ."

He pulled open the vessel's air-lock and stepped to the exterior. The warm moist air clung like a wet blanket about him. To his right were innumerable metal huts of all shapes and sizes, brightly lit by an illumination that he could swear was cold light—still unfound by the scientists of 2714.

For a moment, he stood frowning, then glanced up at the lofty tower far above him. Evidently, his landing had not been seen. Chuckling to himself, he went slowly forward along the shore line, hiding behind occasional rocks, little by little gaining the vantage point of mechanical operations he had seen from the air.

He gazed in utter bewilderment. His first guess had not been wrong. The globes were bathyspheres, of immensely tough metal; with steady regularity, they descended into the

ocean, ascending again within a few minutes. There were other machines, too, resembling gigantic dredging machines, constantly plunging mighty scoops to unguessable depths which arose perpetually amidst boilings of muddy water.

In charge of the operations were four men, none of them recognizable by face, all of them remarkably well built and around middle age. They were attired in curious tight-fitting clothing and moved with a certain efficiency and purpose, controlling the operations of the machinery by a collection of flood-lit switchboards erected on metal pillars imbedded in solid rock.

Bull turned slowly to look around him. As far as he could see, both on this island and the others, there were evidences of industry and super-science beyond his comprehension—almost resembling, in efficiency at least, the highly intelligent work of Martian scientists. But then the Martians were ugly brutes, nor had they any desire or need for Earth conquest. It could not mean that.

“Damned if I—” he began muttering, then he stopped short and clamped his lips shut as something prodded him sharply in the small of his back.

“Keep your hands off your gun and stand up!” The voice was masculine, very clear and distinct.

Muttering under his breath, Bull obeyed, raising his hands—stood staring fiercely in the cold light at a massive man of uncertain age, almost god-like in his blonde handsomeness, attired in a tight one-piece garment of dark purple.

“Strangers are not welcome on these islands,” he announced coldly. “Unfortunately, we missed you with the energy disrupters, but the ultimate result will be similar.”

“Yeah?” Bull’s eyes narrowed; his powerful muscles quivered in the desire to act. “Who the blazes are you, anyway? Where are the engineers and scientists that came here? Masterson especially.”

A brief icy smile crossed the man’s face. “In common with the others, he was put to death,” he answered implacably. “We alone are in control here. Once the engineers and scientists finished their hypnotically produced tasks, we exterminated them. A new dynasty has arisen, my friend, to take up the old threads where we dropped them.”

“What old threads? What are you talking about?”

“That is not your concern. You will be imprisoned pending the pleasure of our leader. Forward!”

Bull hesitated and clenched his upraised fists, but he was wise enough to refrain from action. That complicated gun in his captor’s iron-steady hand was no weapon to trifle with; it was obviously far more deadly than any flame pistol. . . . He turned awkwardly and to the accompaniment of various proddings wound his way in and out between the lighted metal shelters, noting as he passed that they were stored with all manner of amazing machinery.

Some were veritable power houses utilizing the ocean for a continuous source of energy. Just glimpses, but they impressed on Bull’s mind that same conviction of science beyond his understanding.

Then, at a command from his captor, he stepped inside one of the buildings and found himself finally in the gloom of a great cage-like affair. Before he was allowed to turn around, his flame gun was whipped from his belt and the open end of the cage clanged shut.

“You will be studied from a distance by our ruler,” came his captor’s cold voice. “It will then be decided what shall be done with you.”

"I can hardly wait," Bull growled sourly, and he watched bitterly as the door of the building slammed, leaving him in total darkness.

Bull could not be sure how much time passed before his moody reflections inside the cage were finally interrupted. He sprang swiftly from his squatting position on the dusty floor as the shed door quietly opened and shut again. Followed the sound of light footfalls.

"Who's there?" he demanded sharply, tugging at the cage's tough bars. "Don't crawl around there! Show yourself! Give me what's comin' to me and get it over with, you lily-bellied—"

"Ssssh!" came an impatient injunction, and he noted in astonishment that it was a woman's tone. "Don't make such a noise!"

"Who—who are you?" he whispered, straining his eyes—and he descried a dim form moving in the gloom.

"I'm Lifania. Remember me?"

Bull puzzled. "Damned if I do; never met a dame of that name . . ."

He became silent, aware of her lithe body faintly visible by the cage door. In a moment the door was open. Gratified, he walked through the opening and her soft hand closed on his wrist.

"I'm releasing you for two reasons," she breathed softly. "Just listen—you fool!" she burst out in alarm as he unthinkingly flamed a match in his fingernails. Instantly she dashed it to the floor and stamped on it.

But in that instant, Bull had seen that she was vividly blonde and apparently young, attired in softly rustling blue silk, a golden band gleaming in the halo of her fair hair. These evidences stirred no remembrance in his memory—only an appreciation of her charm.

"Say, you're the goods!" he confided. "What about—"

"Will you keep quiet?" she pleaded earnestly. "I'm doing this because you once rescued me. I got trapped in a street drain when I was in miniature size. You pulled me out. I recognized your face tonight when my father had the infra-red screens tuned on you for the purpose of study. Remember me?"

"No; I guess you've been dreaming," he answered. "I pulled you out of a drain? When?"

"Some time ago. I was joining my people and I got into the drain by accident—I should have looked where I was going. . . . But I can't tell you more here. Any minute now my father will have you released, and that means your finish. We've got to get away from these islands while your space-ship is still handy. I made sure that it's still where you left it before coming here."

He chuckled grimly. "So it ought to be. I locked the controls."

"All the better. Come on. . . ."

Bull hesitated on the questions that naturally rose to his lips, but before he could utter them, the girl had practically pulled him to the flood-lit exterior. For a time, she crouched in the shadows cast by the shed, looking about her, then with a little nod of her fair head, she began to advance.

Little by little, sometimes dropping flat on their faces, they managed to circumvent the occasional men and women they encountered. Dodging around the buildings, slipping through jet-black shadows, they at last gained the shore and clambered swiftly into the space-machine. Once within, Bull quickly twisted the air-lock screws.

"Where to?" he asked briefly, swinging to the control board.

"Set your course for the moon," the girl instructed in a curiously resolute tone. "I'll tell you why later."

"The moon!" Bull stared at her beautiful face for a moment, then he shrugged.

"O. K., sister, if that's how you want it. . . ."

He unlocked the controls, clamped his hairy hands down on the main switches. With a terrific zooming rush of power, the vessel catapulted upwards into the night sky, cleaved the stratosphere and hurtled into the outer moon-ridden dark.

Only when his course was definitely set on the gleaming satellite did he set the robot steering in commission, then turned to the girl with questioning eyes.

She was seated now on the wall bunk, half smiling, half serious, swinging her shapely legs. She had the oddest Grecian appearance about her, as though she had been lifted bodily from the classics.

"Well, suppose you tell me a few things?" Bull questioned, setting the floor-gravitators to work. "Suppose you tell me what you and your playmates are doing on the Azores?—where you came from in the first place?"

"It's not a very difficult story," she answered quietly. "And to clear up one particular point, I might as well tell you that I learned English, in common with the others of my race, in a trifle under two weeks by the expedient of mind-reading. You see, my people and I—the forty of us at least who are at present on the Earth, came originally from a block of gems you brought from the moon."

"You—you what?" Bull yelled. "You don't mean that those gems which I found melted—"

"Exactly that. We were inside each gem in miniature form, like—like flies in amber. One night when you were intoxicated, you unwittingly saved me from death. Since you don't remember the incident, it doesn't matter—but it enabled me, on seeing your face in the screens, to remember you had a reliable nature. What matters is that your whole civilization is in danger, threatened with extinction by my people. That menace will grow to invincible proportions when the rest of my people come from the moon, and are enlarged."

Bull still stared. "After all, Lif, I'm only a plain man of space," he said ruefully. "I don't get your angle at all."

"You will soon," she said steadily. "Actually, my race is from the city your legends call Atlantis. We lived in that city thousands of years ago before a gigantic rupture in the Atlantean continent—which was then volcanic—produced tremendous changes. At that time we were the most scientific race on the Earth—the virtual masters of it. The coming of the disaster demanded that we must leave hurriedly. The nearest place of safety was the moon. Once inside the satellite, protected by artificial air and warmth, we could continue our lives until such time as the earthly tumults and earthquakes ceased. So we buried our most important treasures in Atlantis in sealed containers, incorrodible by sea water and able to stand terrific pressures. The metal also was semi-magnetic, detectable by special instruments no matter to what depth it sunk in the passage of time. Then we set out for the moon just before the city was overwhelmed. . . ."

"And then?" Bull questioned thoughtfully.

"Well, we domiciled ourselves in the core of the moon, erecting all manner of machinery within an enormous central cavern which must be standing even today exactly as we left it. But we were fighting a losing battle—one that led to no purpose. Another hundred years would see the end of our air supply. We debated whether it was better to spend that hundred

years trying to prevent the seepage of air into the void, passing through the metal of our central home and thereafter through the pumice rocks of the moon—or whether it would be better to call a halt until something new should happen. Study of Earth revealed it still in the throes of great changes, overrun by hordes of savages, survivors of the fine races overwhelmed in the cataclysm. No other planet was suitable for us, and so we came to our decision.

“We possessed machines to produce contraction by narrowing the electronic orbits of any organic or inorganic body. We had also a peculiar type of crystal found on the moon—identical in many ways to the crystals that form the rays and streaks of the main craters. These crystals resemble gems so long as they remain in an airless state, but after exposure to oxygen for a period of roughly ninety-six hours, they break down and melt, mingling with the oxygen and visibly melting into shapeless masses.

“It was decided that we would leave our laboratory sealed until such a time as it would be needed again, and pass into a state of suspended animation until some chance brought us to life to take up the threads. We placed ourselves in the hands of robots, who had full instructions as to what to do. We were all shortened to an inch in height, clothed just as we were; magnetic fields rendered us dead yet alive, emptied our bodies of all life substance, leaving enough chemical deposits only to start life going if we ever contacted normal atmosphere again. Our clothes, too, were similarly treated. The crystals were divided by fusion, their interiors hollowed out, and our bodies placed inside them and sealed up—gem-like coffins. Then, still carrying out their orders, the robots took the whole lot of gems and affixed them to the wall of an upper cavern by cohesive powers. Putting them there made it probable that some day they would be found; deep down in the moon, there was hardly a chance.

“You know the rest. After thousands of years, we were resurrected by you. We hypnotized several Earth people to make machines for us and domiciled ourselves on the Azores so as to be close to the site of Atlantis for dredging purposes in order to recover our treasures. You understand?”

Bull nodded slowly. “Yeah—ninety-six hours would be just about the time that passed between my finding the gems and them breaking open in my bedroom. But where does the menace come in?”

“From my father. He was among the jewels you brought to Earth and is now making his final plans. But he can’t put them into full effect without the remainder of the lunar jewels containing the rest of our people. I know what that means. My father is a ruthless and brilliant scientist; he will stop at nothing to bring about the return of Atlantean dominance. Our science is still far in excess of yours. I for one do not agree with my father and never have. I’ll go to any lengths to stop him. Our race has run its course and there is no excuse for the subjection of a happy thriving world. I saved you for one very good reason, besides gratitude. You have a space-ship, and only you could unlock the controls. Also you’ll have the strength to swing open a piece of wall existing in the moon jewel cavern. Single-handed, with so slight a gravity, I could not do it. To you it will be simple. I intend, briefly, to destroy the rest of my race and all the machines that are still buried in the moon. . . .”

Bull grimaced, glanced out of the window at the fast-receding Earth.

“Sounds ambitious! Pity is I haven’t my flame gun with me with which to do it.”

“You won’t need it,” she answered steadily. “The plan I have in mind is perfect. It will not only mean the destruction of all the moon contains, but it will cause the Azores to be wiped

off the face of the Earth.”

“Suppose your old man chases you into space?”

“He can’t. We haven’t built space-machines yet. . . .”

Bull gave it up. There was something almost frighteningly purposeful about this newly risen maid from an age long forgotten. Quietly he turned to the controls, took away the robot steerage, and settled himself to guide the flyer towards the enlarging moon.

CHAPTER IV

SACRIFICE

During the moonward journey, the strange girl spoke but little; she seemed entirely absorbed in her own grim speculations. It struck Bull as odd that she never once attempted to eat or sleep until she casually explained she and her people had overcome such primitive necessities ages before.

Bull himself slept at intervals and always woke to find her lost in thought—then as the pull of the moon became evident, she began to issue brisk directions.

Not that they were really needed. Bull brought his vessel down near the Appenines once more—clearly the jewel cavern was to be their first point of call.

He was right. He loaned the girl a spare space-suit and the pair of them headed across the blinding sun-drenched lava desert, gaining the jewel cavern fifteen minutes later. Once within its depths, the girl headed to its furthest wall and studied it for a while in the light of her helmet torch. Then her voice came through the phones.

“This is the movable portion just here—on a natural pivot—but it will take your strength to move it. . . .”

She moved to a portion slightly rougher than the rest and pressed her shoulder against it—without avail. Then Bull swaggered forward, but even he had to add his weight to the girl’s against the weak gravity before the barrier gave. Then an immense oval pivoted around and left beyond a tunnel leading into the honeycomb that comprised the moon’s interior.

Still governed by unflagging purpose, the girl led the way, head-lamp shining on the pumice walls. She and Bull moved rapidly against the light gravity, traversed tunnel after tunnel, sometimes allowing themselves to float hundreds of feet down seemingly bottomless shafts.

Once Bull found himself conjecturing on how they were going to get back, until it occurred to him that perhaps the girl had no intention of them ever getting back! He could not decide whether that prospect was alarming or not.

Then his speculations were finally cut short as he and the girl entered the last and lowest cavern, nearly at the core of the satellite. With clumsy gloved hands, she operated a complex mechanism set deep in the rocky wall. There was no sound in that airless emptiness, but at length a portion of the wall slid back to reveal beyond a thick metal valve.

Presently this, too, slid aside, enabling them to enter, by means of three air-locks, the incredible machine interior beyond—a mighty natural cavern shielded by a tremendous dome of absolutely incorrodible and pressure-resisting metal.

For a time, the girl fussed around, operating strange levers and valves—then, suddenly, light gushed forth from bowls in the lofty ceiling.

Her voice came through the phones. “We can take our space-suits off in here. Air pressure, warmth and light are all normal.”

She set the example, and once she was unencumbered, set in action machinery which slid a mighty wall of metal across the closed door valve.

Bull stared about him in utter bewilderment. That such machinery could exist in the core of a dead hulk like the moon was something he could hardly believe. Machines were

everywhere, from wall to wall of the great place, covering a floor area of some five acres. Much of the machinery he did not understand, nor did the girl attempt to explain it—until she led the way to two vast metal pillars supporting hooped magnets of truly enormous proportions, both of them connected by snaky wires to lensed devices resembling supertelevision projectors. Beyond these again, connected by further myriad wires, were machines which Bull recognized as transformers, armatures, dynamos, and electrical equipment transcending the scope of his limited knowledge.

“You’ve heard of cosmic rays, of course?” the girl asked suddenly.

“I’ve done more—I’ve felt ’em,” he answered laconically. “The damned things penetrate eighteen to thirty feet of lead out in space.”

“Quite right, which is one reason why on the moon here, even at this depth, they penetrate freely and are unimpeded by atmosphere. These two pillared magnets are cosmic wave attractors. They gather cosmic waves and pass them on to the transformers and other equipment. After that, they pass into the projectors and focus directly into the center of this globe through specially designed apertures.”

She indicated the enormous sphere that reposed between the two projectors, composed of some metal of almost unimaginable hardness.

“The effect of the cosmic rays is to produce terrific heat such as exists only in the core of the sun itself,” the girl went on. “It is produced by increasing the pace of electron change to the point of actual coincidence with the nucleus. Inside the globe is a matrix, designed to hold a small piece of metal. As the metal is increasingly heated, the globe also contracts by the passage of an electrical field through its oddly fashioned atoms. It continues to contract with inconceivable power, producing a pressure that easily withstands the actual utter annihilation of copper itself. . . . So far, my people have never really annihilated matter; they have only used the device for the fusing of very tough metals—such as the metal which gives this cavern its support. They refrained from absolute annihilation of matter because they knew it would bring about the very thing I’m hoping for.”

“What’s that?” Bull questioned—and she smiled vaguely; asked an odd question, yet somehow half expected.

“Are you afraid of death, Bull Cassell?”

“Me? Hell, no! I’ve been playing with it all my life. Why?”

“Because if you are, you’d better head back for the surface and leave me to work alone. After all, you’ve done your part of the work.”

Being human Bull was slightly afraid, but to admit it to a slim Atlantean girl with immeasurable scientific knowledge and courage? Lord, no! Besides, he mightn’t find his way back anyhow. . . .

“Better get started, sister,” he growled. “I’m not heading back.”

She said nothing, only smiled gratefully. Bull watched while she opened the giant globe and made adjustments to the complicated matrix within, fixing inside it a selected four-inch square cube of copper.

Satisfied, she clamped the sphere shut and for a time contemplated the foci of the projectors, made infinitely delicate adjustments—then at last threw in the massive bladed power switches. The peculiar transformers and dynamos hummed a mounting song of steady power, concentrating two faintly visible violet beams through the sphere’s special apertures, focusing identically on the cube within.

Bull watched interestedly, and after a while the view through the open inspection plate revealed the block as a blinding mass of flame.

“Two thousand degrees Centigrade,” she said briefly. “The pressure, as it increases, will achieve that of two million tons to the square inch. That and the heat will destroy the copper utterly, blast its matter right out of being. . . . Here, you’ll be needing these.” She handed him a pair of heavily smoked goggles.

In silence, they continued watching. Beating waves of tremendous heat began to enfold them. The huge machine cavern became intolerably hot as the temperature inside the contracting globe rose to terrific heights.

With startling speed, the temperature rose to 6000° Cent. The thing in the matrix was no longer safe to gaze upon, even through glasses.

Bull waited tensely, only glancing sideways ever and again at that searing, unimaginably hot piece of copper. Higher rose the temperature, switching over automatically to the tens of thousandths scale. The flaring energy that had been copper was forced to give up battering radiations of X-rays, and then gamma rays.

Bull turned and glanced at the girl’s face. She endeavored to speak, but her voice did not carry over the searing, crackling din of inconceivable heat and pressures.

The copper was being entirely annihilated. The nuclei of the very atoms themselves were collapsing—protons and electrons being forced conceivable heat and pressure.

The thousandths thermometer stopped at maximum, but the heat still rose—into the millions of degrees, building up into the inconceivably furious energy existing only in the cores of the hottest stars.

It must have ranged somewhere around 150 million degrees Centigrade when something abruptly happened. Bull only glimpsed it for a moment. At that identical point, the matter of the copper ceased to be, was changed absolutely into pure energy . . . but with it went the vast compression globe. Titanic shiftings of matter itself followed as a literal wedge of new energy was forced into the normal structure of matter gathered on every hand.

Instantly, following immutable laws, that matter partook also of the new energy—shifted and changed like the unstable presentations of a dream, stirred by new forces, newly released energies that ordered the things of existence to change.

Bull knew nothing of these things, but Lifania did. She had known this would happen and was smiling happily, peacefully . . . but before she could utter a word, the change was suddenly complete. The new energy abruptly assimilated itself with the basic electrons of the surroundings.

Bull felt his body snap backwards and then flow weirdly, form into fusion with suddenly slithering, crawling surroundings! Metals, rocks, lights—all of them were moving into a new union. The Atlantean girl, still smiling, was flowing too like golden honey, all shape and form and clothing one hideous plasma. . . .

And beyond was the darkness for her and Bull.

But the thing the girl had started went on. It changed the entire matter formation of the moon, forced it to conform to the new energy level.

Rocks, maria and mountain peaks sloughed and drifted into one another, changed the satellite into a globe 1000 miles less in diameter but of materials balancing exactly those of old in a smaller compass. But it did one thing—sealed and crushed forever all traces of any life, machinery or science.

On Earth, too, the girl had foreseen correctly. The wild changes of the moon during its metamorphosis wrought tidal havoc and earthquake in all directions. The American continent was rocked from end to end and thousands died in the smashing buildings—but the survivors far outnumbered the dead, as would certainly not have been the case had Atlantean science gained dominance. . . .

As for the Azores—when the upheavals subsided and air and sea traffic resumed, it was reported that the Azores had utterly disappeared into the Atlantic, taking with them all traces of those malignant scientists unwilling to admit that their age belonged to a past long dead. . . .

[The end of *The Jewels From the Moon* by John Russell Fearn (as Ephriam Winiki)]