

"SURVIVAL" COMPLETE 50,000 WORD NOVEL OF PROPHETIC SCIENCE FICTION BY ARTHUR J. BURKS

# MARVEL

15¢

AUGUST

## SCIENCE STORIES

2 COMPLETE NOVELS  
plus  
SHORT STORIES



AVENGEERS of  
SPACE  
thrilling science novel

HENRY KUTTNER

**\* 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 contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

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:* Avengers of Space

*Date of first publication:* 1938

*Author:* Henry Kuttner (1914-1958)

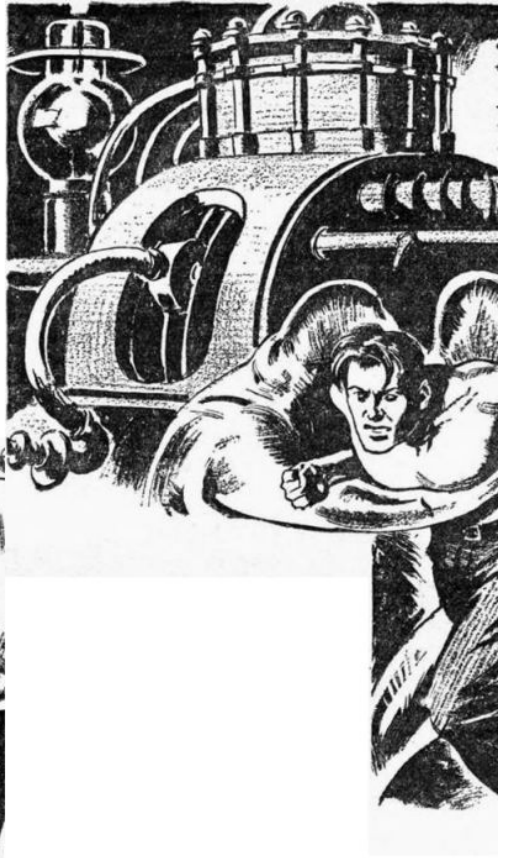
*Date first posted:* June 25, 2022

*Date last updated:* June 25, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220635

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive/American Libraries.



The pseudopods that gripped Shawn's arms tightened. He had to watch while the ruler brought the needle down.

# AVENGERS OF SPACE

by  
HENRY KUTTNER

First published *Marvel Science Stories*, August 1938.

*Terry Shawn and his Eagle crew raged through the interstellar spaces bent on avenging Earth's destruction by spaceships of another planet—and faced the strangest destiny ever encountered by man!*

## CHAPTER I INTO THE VOID

Terry Shawn was worried. The reporter should have been here hours ago. According to long-made plans, the *Eagle* would make its first flight from this lonely Arizona valley at six o'clock—and it was long past that time now. Shawn's lean, tanned face was angry in the cold glare of arc lights as he stamped up and down, swinging his arms to keep warm.

Abruptly he stiffened, stepped into the darkness and shaded his eyes. Far in the distance he could see the headlights of an automobile—no, several of them—racing over the valley road. Grunting, Shawn went to a huge shed that towered not far away. He kicked open a door and yelled:

“Get ready, boys! He's on the way.”

Within the great barn was a shimmering sphere of metal, the *Eagle*, first spaceship ever to be built on Earth. Months of careful planning and construction had gone into it, the culmination of years of atomic experimentation by Shawn. From a porthole dangled a rope ladder, and down this scrambled a man, wizened and agile as a monkey. He was chewing a blackened briar, puffing out noxious clouds of smoke. He was Sam Heffley, a noted physicist from whom Shawn had learned the fundamentals of science.

“'Bout time,” the little man snarled, ambling toward the door. “Imagine holding up the start for a lousy reporter.”

“We had to keep our end of the bargain,” Shawn said sourly. “Lord knows we needed the money the *Tribune* advanced. It took plenty of dough to build the *Eagle*. I spent weeks trying to convince the publisher it'd be worth his while to back us.”

Heffley came to peer out into the night. “Well, he's made a good investment. Drove a hard bargain, too. Fifteen per cent of the profits.”

“I'd laugh if there weren't any profits,” Shawn chuckled.

“Oh, there will be. The Moon's virgin territory, a whole new world, with minerals waiting to be dug up. We'll get gold, all right, and silver—and precious stones, I'll bet. Blast this pipe!” Heffley found a match and lit his dead tobacco.

---

Shawn said, “Wait a minute!” He listened. The faint crackle of gunfire came to their ears.

Swiftly, Shawn moved. He leaped to a switchboard behind the door, flung down levers. The bright glare of the arc lamps died. Now the headlights of the approaching cars were clearly visible—and so were the occasional flashes of exploding weapons.

“What the devil!” Heffley snapped. “They're—”

“International Power men, I'll bet.” Shawn's lean face was set in a hard grin. The tall, muscular fighting-machine of his body swung into action.

“Pete!” he yelled, “Hooker!” He sprang toward a gun-rack near by, lifted out a rifle and a heavy, snub-nosed automatic.

In the *Eagle's* open porthole two faces showed—Hooker Flynn, ex-prizefighter, a huge dull-faced gorilla of a man; Pete Trost, astronomer, with a keen dark face handsome as a movie idol's and a brain as cold and accurate as polished beryllium-steel.

“What's up, Terry?” Hooker Flynn rumbled.

“Trouble,” Shawn shouted. “Start the engines. We may have to take off in a hurry. Don’t know how many guys are coming—”

The two heads vanished; Shawn retreated to the door. At his side was Heffley, armed, puffing frantically on his pipe.

The rattle of gunfire grew louder. The bellow of straining engines shrieked through the night. A beam of light from a car’s headlight, coldly revealing, flashed briefly across the two men’s figures. Then, suddenly, a black sedan thundered out of darkness, brakes screaming. It whirled in a crazy skid and toppled over sideways. Tinkle of breaking glass sounded.

“Stay here,” Shawn commanded, and ran forward. He halted as a shot hissed past his head. Another automobile appeared, with men crouching on the running boards, guns in their hands.

Shawn flung up his gun in a quick snap shot. One of the killers screamed, lost his hold, and went hurtling through the air, a dark figure that rolled over and over in the dust to lay still at last. The car made a quick swerve, circled back into the gloom. Shawn ran to the overturned auto as he saw a white hand groping through the broken window.

He peered down, saw a pale face staring up at him, blue eyes fear-filled. “Wait a minute,” he said, and whipped off his coat, wrapping it around his fist. He started to break off the sharp edges of glass that rimmed the window-frame. But a cry from Heffley made him change his mind.

“Hurry up, Terry! They’re coming—”

Shots crashed. Shawn swiftly put his coat inside the window-frame, grabbed the arms that reached up to him. He pulled the occupant of the car out, realizing with a sudden shock that it was a girl, red hair flying in mad disarray.

The glass that remained played havoc with the girl’s dress, ripping it nearly off her slim body. For a second Shawn felt the warm firmness of her half-bared bosom hot against his cheek. Even at that moment the blood pounded dizzily in his temples at the girl’s alluring nearness, at the musky perfume that was strong in his nostrils. Shawn’s throat felt dry. His pulses beat faster at the touch of his hands upon her rounded, vibrant body. All he seemed able to think of was that this girl was beautiful, and that he had never before felt as he did now.

She slid down, staring around with frightened eyes, and Shawn stopped to hold his breath. The night breeze was icy on his perspiration-wet face. Then he looked down and whispered an oath.

There was another body left in the car. Shawn made a motion toward it, but the girl caught his arm.

“Mac’s dead. They shot him—through the head. I’ve been driving—”

“Terry!” Hysteria edged Heffley’s voice. “*Terry!*”

Dark figures were converging toward Shawn, grim purpose in their swift advance. Some of them were between him and the barn. Shawn’s lips tightened in a crooked grin. The attackers were holding their fire—depending on numbers. Well, that was their mistake.

Shawn said under his breath, “Keep behind me. Come on!”

---

He charged forward in purposeful silence, hearing the quick patter of the girl’s footsteps. Then, suddenly, he was in the midst of a tangle of cursing, snarling men, too nonplussed by Shawn’s unexpected action to move in accord. A gun clubbed down at Shawn’s head. He jerked aside, felt numbing pain lance through his shoulder. His fists were smashing out in driving, sledgehammer blows, his big body moving forward relentlessly through the circle of his attackers.

Abruptly all lights went out. In the dim starlight it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe. But Shawn managed to make out the smaller shadow that was the girl; he lunged toward her, knocking a man aside.

“Shoot!” somebody yelled. “Don’t let him get away! Shoot, damn it!”

But they couldn’t shoot without a mark. Shawn felt soft, warm flesh under his hand. The girl cried out, and instantly shadows closed in on her. But Shawn had already picked up her slim body, flung her over his shoulder like a bag of meal, and, head down, run for the barn. He could see a tiny spot of red light, glowing like a coal. Heffley, after switching off the lights, was using his pipe-embers to signal the position of the doorway.

Shawn cannoned into a slight figure, heard Heffley’s reedy voice whispering urgent commands. He jumped inside the barn.

“Shut the door!”

Heffley obeyed, moved to the light-switch, turned it on. Radiance flooded the barn. Hooker Flynn was halfway down the rope-ladder that dangled from the *Eagle’s* porthole. He was gripping a blackjack in a huge, hairy hand.

“You okay, Chief?” he rumbled.

“I told you to start the motors!” Shawn snapped. The girl wriggled free, stood gasping, an ivory statue half clothed by the tatters of her dress. Heffley was barring the door. Already the men outside were kicking at the barrier.

“We started ’em,” Flynn said. “Who’re those mugs, huh?”

A gun barked outside; splinters flew from the door. Shawn said sharply, “We’ll have to get in the ship. Up you go, sister!” He boosted the girl up the ladder, and she went up swiftly, with a flash of silk-clad legs and ivory, softly rounded thighs. “You too, Sam.”

Heffley obeyed, and Shawn followed his example as a bellow of gunfire sounded. The door slammed open. Men yelled oaths, threats. Shawn saw Heffley’s legs disappear through the porthole and hurled himself upward desperately. Bullets sizzled around him, pinged on the spaceship’s hull.

But Shawn made it, dived into the *Eagle* and heard the port click behind him. The noise of the attackers gave place to a silence that was unbroken save for the deep, throbbing whisper of motors.

Heffley was barring the port. The two men were in a tiny chamber, barely large enough to stand upright—the space lock. Another door in the wall stood ajar, and Shawn scrambled through it, Heffley behind him.

They were in the *Eagle’s* control room, a maze of intricate instruments, walls and floor and ceiling made, apparently, of frosted glass, which in reality comprised a visual screen by which Shawn could see through the walls of the craft. He touched a lever. The frosted glass brightened, and it seemed as though they looked directly out into the barn, through transparent panes. The attackers had surrounded the ship, were standing indecisively in puzzled groups, at least a dozen of them.

Shawn glanced aside as the girl, huddled in a chair, called his name.

“Mr. Shawn! They followed us for eight miles—shooting at us. I—”

“You’re from the *Tribune*?” Shawn stared at the girl, feeling once more that curious excitement that had overwhelmed him when he had held her close during the battle. Then she had been a half-seen shadow in the dimness. Now the electric glare of the light revealed her face and figure clearly—and she was beautiful indeed, Shawn realized. Firm, pale cones



pouted out beneath a lacy brassiere—the only garment she wore above the waist, for her dress had been ripped to tatters, and milky thighs gleamed whitely through the remaining strips.

---

Again Shawn found that his throat was dry. His heart was pounding like a trip-hammer. The girl's body was a pale flame—all madness and all delight . . .

Involuntarily she shrank a little in her chair, lifted her hands in a protective gesture, a warm flush creeping over the oval face. Shawn forced himself to look away. "You're from the *Tribune*?" he repeated.

"Yes," the girl said softly. "Mac was to go with you—I was driving him out here. Then these men—who were they, do you know?"

"Easy to guess that," Heffley said, polishing his pipe on a wrinkled cheek. "International Power sent 'em. International's been trying to get our anti-gravity formula for months. First they tried to buy it, but we wouldn't sell. They're the most unscrupulous, crooked money-grabbers in America today."

"Yeah," Shawn said. "They've attacked us before. But I hired armed guards. Just paid 'em off tonight. If you hadn't been late—well, we won't squabble about that."

"We broke an axle," the girl said. "Had to hire another car. My name's Lorna Rand, by the way. Of the *Tribune*."

"Glad to know you," Shawn grunted. "Say—I've got a hunch what those thugs were trying to do. They probably planned to get you and your friend out of the way, and then send one of their own men here, masquerading as a *Tribune* reporter. That way they could get a spy aboard the *Eagle*, and he'd watch his chance to find out what International Power wants to know."

"Five to one you're right," Heffley said. "But we'd better not stick around. Those thugs have got dynamite!"

Shawn eyed the transparent walls. The men outside were busy pulling little cylinders under the spaceship's hull, carrying rocks and dirt into the shed to bury the explosive.

"The *Eagle* may stand dynamite, but I'm not sure," Shawn observed. "We'll take off." He picked up a transmitter, called a question. A faint voice answered.

Shawn glanced at Lorna Rand. "We'll land you near the city, and your paper can send out another reporter. Now—"

"Hurry up!" Heffley warned.

Shawn's fingers flickered over the instrument panel. Instantly the interior of the shed, the men working busily outside the ship—vanished!

An intolerable oppression ground down on Shawn; he heard Heffley shout, "Too much power! Reverse it, Terry—quick!"

Shawn was trying to hold himself upright against the control board, fighting a tremendous weight that dragged him down. Heffley was on his hands and knees, white face upturned; the girl had slid down from her chair to the floor. The transparent walls were one white burst of raving flame.

They grew brighter, a blazing whirlpool before Shawn's swimming eyes. He battled desperately against the inexorable drag, realizing that something had gone wrong with the compensating gravity field within the ship, designed to avoid the serious danger of acceleration. His brain seemed to be swelling, pressing against his skull with frightful force. He slipped down, fighting to reach a control lever with his fingers, succeeding in touching the cold bakelite—

Pushing the lever over with the last remnant of his strength—



And sliding down into a black deadly abyss, unconscious, as the *Eagle* thundered unguided through interplanetary space, flashing through the airless gulfs between the worlds, to the strangest destiny man had ever encountered!

## CHAPTER II

### LOST PLANET

Shawn awoke with a throbbing ache in his head, and for a moment lay staring up dazedly at a black ceiling, sprinkled with brilliant star points. Gravity was again normal. Weakly he sat up, hearing a groan from Heffley and a gasp from Lorna.

The little physicist propped himself up, blinking, as Shawn arose painfully and went to the controls. He made a few hasty adjustments.

“Terry,” Heffley whispered, “We’re in space. The compensator—”

“We didn’t allow for initial acceleration. Or, rather—we didn’t allow enough, Sam. It won’t happen after this.”

“Ye gods, what power we’ve got in those motors,” Heffley said. “Look at that!” He pointed down.

On the vision screen on which they stood, far behind them, two spheres loomed, turning slowly in space, glowing with pale radiance. Earth and Moon, left far behind by the driving thrust of anti-gravity.

“Do you know how far we’ve come?” Shawn asked, incredulity in his voice. “I don’t know how long we’ve been unconscious—but we’ve traveled more than three hundred and fifty thousand miles! We’re way outside the Moon’s orbit.”

Hooker Flynn and Pete Trost came in, looking pale and sick. Shawn explained what had happened. Flynn’s heavy face was dully uncomprehending.

“Jeez, what now, chief?” he rumbled.

“Back to the Moon, huh?”

“That’s the best plan, I suppose,” Shawn said, and Trost, the astronomer, seconded him.

“Yes. We’ll have to make a curve—a swing through space—to get back. I’d better make some adjustments on the compensators first.” He pulled a pair of horn-rimmed glasses from his pocket, adjusted them over his eyes, blinking nearsightedly. “Who’s the girl, Terry?”

Shawn made the necessary introductions, “We can’t ask you to go to the Moon with us,” he told Lorna. “Too dangerous. It’s back to Earth now, to land you—”

A cry from Heffley halted him. The little man was staring down, pointing, eyes wide. Shawn stopped in mid-sentence, a cold tendril of fear twining about him. On the vision screen at their feet was—the incredible!

Earth was growing smaller! The luminous blueness had given place to a chill blaze of green fire, and half-clouded by the emerald glow, Earth seemed to be shrinking, dwindling. And keeping pace with it shrank the Moon.

“We’re going faster—” Heffley said.

“No!” Shawn glanced at the instruments. “No—we’re almost stationary. It’s Earth that’s moving!”

He looked down again. There was something incredibly strange about the planet’s shrinking. Oddly, it seemed to be racing incredibly fast, and at the same time Shawn had the inexplicable feeling that Earth was not moving in space, but was simply growing smaller, washed in the eerie green fires.

Smaller it grew, tiny as an orange, the Moon a pinpoint beside it. And abruptly Shawn felt a warning tingle course through him; a frightful shock made the spaceship reel and shudder,

its frame creaking, grinding with strain. Gravitation was destroyed for an amazing second; Shawn felt himself flung through the air, felt the suction of some force that seemed to be dragging the *Eagle* down into a cosmic whirlpool. For a brief second of eternity the control room was a maelstrom of writhing, twisting bodies. Lorna screamed; Flynn bellowed an oath. Every atom of Shawn's body was tingling with strange, unearthly strain—

It passed. The force that had gripped them was gone. They staggered to their feet, gasping. It was Lorna who first made the discovery.

She pointed down, cried out wordlessly. Heffley followed her glance. He gasped.  
“The Earth! Terry—look—”

---

Amazement lanced through Shawn. Beneath him was the brilliant star-studded darkness of space, but where Earth and Moon should have hung was nothing. The planet and its satellite had vanished without trace.

No—not without trace. Shawn strained his eyes. He swung about, whispering an oath.  
“Telescope, Sam!”

He swung the great lens, Heffley helping him, until it was focused on the spot in space where the Earth had been. Instantly on the vision screen a cloud leaped into view. A golden cloud—

“Spaceships!” Hooker Flynn rumbled. “Like the *Eagle*—huh?”

He was right. A mighty fleet of interplanetary vessels hung where Earth had once swung in its orbit, Sun-golden, torpedo-shaped, racing away and away into the outer darkness. Alien craft, sprung from the void.

Trost said coldly, adjusting his glasses, “It seems that the Earth and Moon have been destroyed. Apparently by this fleet.” His keen eyes were a smouldering blaze.

“It's impossible!” Heffley whispered. “A planet—annihilated! Nothing left—”

“We saw it,” Trost said with finality. “Terry, what're you doing?”

Shawn was wrenching at the controls. “We're going after those ships,” he said, an angry grin on his dark face. “You're right, Pete. Earth has been destroyed. We've no weapon capable of such a thing, but races on other planets—well, they might have developed atomic control to a point where this could be done. Some sort of ultra-ionization, perhaps.”

The *Eagle* flashed back in its course. On the vision screen the golden fleet grew smaller. Shawn increased the speed.

But it was useless. He was soon outdistanced. Not till the alien spaceships had vanished from the telescopic screen, lost in the immensity of space, did Shawn turn from the controls, scowling. He shrugged silently.

Not until then did the five fully realize the significance of what had happened. A thousand things flooded into their minds—memories of their lives on Earth, people they had known and loved, hopes and plans and ideals, now vanished utterly, gone as the planet had gone. Heffley said,

“We should have been destroyed with the Earth.” His meagre face was twisted.

“God, it—it's impossible.”

“The man without a country had nothing on us,” said Trost, smiling sourly.

“Look—you mean the whole Earth's gone?” Flynn inquired, gripping Shawn's arm with a steeltrap grip. “Frisco too? You don't mean—”

“Frisco, New York, Timbuctoo—the whole planet, Hooker,” Shawn said. He glanced at the girl, who was dabbing futilely at her eyes with a lacy wisp of linen. “The question is—”

what now?"

It was Trost who voiced the thought in the minds of all. Polishing his glasses, he said precisely, "There are five of us. The sole representatives of Earth's civilization. We might, of course, run and hide, perhaps find some planet that would shelter us. And there would always be the chance that this golden fleet would seek us out and kill us, too. No, many people I knew and loved have died with the Earth. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord—but I vote we have a cut at a little vengeance ourselves." His flippant words were belied by the bitter rage in his cold eyes.

"He's right!" Flynn snarled. "By God, we've got our guns! And we can use 'em."

Heffley said nothing, but he nodded in agreement. Shawn said, "I suppose you all know this is suicide. We may destroy a few of the golden ships, but—"

"At least we'll have done that," Trost murmured, and Heffley added,

"Whoever those aliens are, the fact that they have power doesn't necessarily mean that they're a great deal more intelligent than we are. We've a heritage behind us, Terry—the heritage of thousands of years of civilization. We may be more successful than you think."

---

Shawn turned to the girl. "What's your vote, Lorna?"

She stood up, a slim, vibrant figure, her alabaster body scarcely veiled by her tattered clothing. "We'll fight! If we can find those golden ships—"

"I doubt if they came from beyond the System," Trost hazarded. "Even their speed wouldn't bridge the interstellar distances. It's my guess, judging from their direction, that they're headed for Mars, or else Saturn. Jupiter's on the other side of the Sun; so are the other great planets, except Pluto."

"We'll head for Mars, then," Shawn said. "But we don't want to land unprepared. Check over the arsenal, Pete. There's no telling what kind of mortals we may encounter. Maybe they'll be peaceable and maybe they won't."

Trost nodded and went out, Flynn lumbering at his heels. Shawn relinquished the controls to Heffley. He glanced at the girl.

"Maybe I can find some clothes," he grunted. "Not much left of yours. Come along."

In a locker he discovered a khaki shirt and trousers and handed them to Lorna. But at the door he turned, involuntarily, at a rustle of movement. The girl had slipped off the tattered remnant of her dress and was nude save for filmy underthings. The pale cones of her breasts swayed as she bent over, slipping a slim foot into the trousers.

Shawn was trembling a little, his muscles weak as water. The girl was a vision of loveliness, rousing all the passion in him. He stared fascinated at her supple form, took a half-step forward, as she drew the trousers up over the luscious swell of her hips. Then, compressing his lips, Shawn drew back, his palms moist with sweat. Silently he turned and went out, rejoining Heffley in the control room. There Lorna rejoined them presently, a boyishly slender figure in the masculine garments, auburn hair cascading about her shoulders.

The *Eagle* flashed on, driving relentlessly toward the red star that was Mars. Shawn's face was grim as he stood beside Heffley, one hand unconsciously gripping the cold butt of his automatic. Nevertheless, he could not keep his thoughts on the destruction of Earth; the girl beside him compelled a quickening beat of his pulse, and more than once Shawn's eyes rested on the soft curve of her cheek, veiled by the auburn curls. . . .

Steadily, surely, with a swiftness which its occupants could understand only through their sight, the ship hurtled through space.

### CHAPTER III

#### RED WORLD OF FEAR

A city of domes and towers and minarets lay in the midst of a sandy plain of angry scarlet, and the *Eagle* sped through the thin air envelope of Mars toward it. Shawn, however, was cautious. He grounded his spaceship several miles from the metropolis, safely hidden behind a low ridge.

Heffley was testing the air. "It's okay," he said. "No harmful gases. A little short on oxygen, but we can breathe it."

"What's the plan?" Lorna asked. Shawn shook his head.

"We'll make it as we go along. If the golden fleet came from Mars, we've reached our destination. If not—" He pointed up. "We'll search further. Pete, come along with me. We'll scout around. The rest of you, stay in the ship."

Trost, heavily armed, opened the space lock. Shawn followed him out, pausing to say, "We'll be back before sunset."

"What if you're not?" Lorna asked him.

He touched his automatic, grinning wryly. "We will. Don't worry."

With a nod he passed through the lock and clambered down the rope ladder after Trost. The astronomer's precise, handsome face, with the familiar horn-rimmed glasses, seemed incongruous above the garments of rough khaki, against the alien background of an unfamiliar, desolate world. Without speaking the two men started in the direction of the city they had seen from the air.

The desert was not all sand. Grotesque rock formations, eroded by eons of wind, ground and chiseled by sand-grains, were all around them. Water apparently had played little part in shaping Mars—at least, not for many centuries. The air was curiously dry, and more than once the two drank from the canteens they had brought along.

They were crossing a barren, reddish waste when abruptly Shawn gripped Trost's arm, halted him.

"Hold on, Pete. There's something—"

"Eh?" Trost peered through his glasses. "Good Lord!"

To their ears came a harsh, very loud scratching sound, like coarse sandpaper being rubbed together, and it seemed to come from underground. The sands heaved in turmoil, and thrusting up from the depths came a bristling, rounded surface.

At first Shawn scarcely realized the incredible size of the thing. It was huge as an elephant, rising inexorably out of the ground, and in a moment he saw the entire frightful shape. Only an alien age on a rotting world could have spawned such a horror.

For it was a worm-thing, a monster with a coiling, sinuous body as thick and round as a barrel, dirty gray in color, and covered with thick bristling bunches of coarse black hair. The head was heavily furred, and it had no features, save for a gaping round aperture with a sharp, horny rim, large enough to swallow a man at a gulp.

Shawn's throat was dry; he stood unmoving as the monster glided forward. Trost croaked something, and the sound broke the spell that held Shawn. He flung up his rifle—a powerful magazine repeater—and squeezed the trigger, bracing himself against the recoil.

The bullet crashed into the monster's hide, opening a gaping, hideous wound from which a burst of yellowish ichor poured. But the worm-thing only came forward more swiftly, in silence save for the harsh rasping.

Shawn leaped aside, trying to see the creature's eyes. Apparently it had none, hunting by scent or by vibration. A wall of pulsing, bristle-haired flesh went past him, not a foot distant from the muzzle of his gun as he thrust it forward and fired again. The sound of a shot told Shawn that Trost was also trying to kill the horror.

---

It coiled and turned swiftly, came pouring over the sands with incredible speed. The gaping, horn-rimmed beak bore down on Shawn. Sick fear dragged at his stomach. He fired point-blank down the creature's throat and sprang away just in time, feeling a sidelong blow against his leg that sent him sprawling. Frantically he rolled over and over, leaping erect to face the worm.

But the monster was writhing in thrashing agony, all its hideous body knotting and twisting, a shrill knife-edged hiss blasting from its beak. Trost was beckoning near by, and Shawn hastily ran toward the astronomer.

"Come on, Terry! We'd better scram!" Trost blinked through the dirt that smeared his glasses, still perched precariously on his nose.

Shawn nodded, and together they circled the valley that the thrashings of the monster had hollowed out.

"Did you hear a shot a while ago, while we were shooting at that thing?" Trost asked. "I had a hunch it came from the *Eagle*, but it might have come from your gun."

"I heard a shot," Shawn said. "I thought you fired it."

"No. My rifle jammed. Do you suppose—"

They stared at each other. Shawn said, "It may have meant nothing."

"Maybe. But we'd better get back to the *Eagle*. It won't pay to take any chances."

Shawn nodded. They began to retrace their steps, giving the place of the worm-thing a wide berth. The dry air of Mars parched their throats, made the baked, hot landscape swing dizzily about them. They dared not travel too fast; the lack of sufficient oxygen would have been a serious, perhaps a deadly, handicap. So it was some time before they reached the spaceship.

The rope ladder still dangled from the open port. Shawn shouted as they came to it.

"Sam! Hello, there!"

Dead silence answered. Shawn glanced around, stiffened as he saw footmarks on the dry ground. Silently he pointed them out to Trost.

The astronomer nodded, glanced up inquiringly at the porthole. "What d'you think, Terry?"

"Stay down here. Keep me covered," Shawn whispered, and went up the rope ladder, an automatic in his hand. He reached the space lock, peered in. Nothing. With a wave at Trost he climbed aboard and opened the inner door.

Simultaneously a flash of steel gleamed; something raced toward his throat, a corkscrew-twisted swordblade, wielded by a half-naked, brawny giant whose face, Shawn saw with a shock of surprise, was a white, passionless skull. Instinct saved Shawn—that, and the fact that he had been expecting an attack. He flung himself aside, felt his shirt rip as the point tore through it. Pain stung his side.

Before his attacker could recover, Shawn fired. With a harsh scream of agony the man stumbled and went down, clawing at his chest where a red stream spouted forth. Shawn had no time for him; a gnarled, broad-shouldered warrior, with the same hideous skull face, was swinging his sword. He flung it with deadly accuracy.

Shawn ducked, heard the steel clash against the wall. Before he could fire the man was upon him, great hands digging into the Earthman's throat.

The impetus of his body sent Shawn crashing back. His head slammed against metal, and suddenly he went sick and dizzy. Choking for breath, clawing vainly at the frightful face looming above him, he realized that he had dropped his automatic.

His muscles felt weak as water. He tried to thrust at the killer's eyes, but the man rolled his head aside, shouting laughter. A black pit was opening beneath Shawn; the skull-face of the Martian was dwindling, growing smaller and smaller. . . .

A gun bellowed; the grinding fingers in Shawn's throat relaxed. The warm stickiness of blood was hot on his cheek. Fighting back his dizziness, he staggered up, freeing himself from the Martian's dying grip.

---

Trost stood nearby, smiling coldly, an automatic smoking in his hand. "Any more of 'em, d'you think, Terry?" he asked.

Breathing in great gasps, Shawn shook his head. "Dunno. Maybe—"

"No!"

Trost whirled, his gun thrusting forward. The Martian Shawn had shot through the chest was propped half upright against the inner door of the space-lock. The skull-face stared blindly.

"No—more of us!" the man gasped. "Droom curse you! We captured the others—so easily—we thought—"

Shawn bent over the dying man. "Where are they?"

"In Kathor—by now."

"The city near here?"

The Martian nodded, thrust up a clawing hand at Shawn—and died. His body tumbled limply forward.

"Terry," Trost said. "He wasn't speaking English, was he?"

The glances of the two men locked. Shawn nodded slowly. "You had the same idea, eh? We didn't really hear that guy. It sounded inside my brain, somehow—"

"Thought transference," Trost finished. "That may help—our being able to understand them."

"Probably they can understand us, too." Shawn bent, fumbled at the pale skull of one of the dead Martians. It came away in his hand. "Mask. I thought so. That'll help. Pete, we'll change clothes with 'em. If we can get into the city without exciting suspicion, we may be able to find out what's happened to Heffley and the others."

Trost was already stripping, and Shawn followed his example. They donned flexible greenish kirtles of some leathery hide, adjusted the strange corkscrew-bladed swords at their sides.

"I think I'll carry my mask for a while," Trost said, eying with distaste the blood that smeared it. He wiped it away as well as he could.

"Wonder if we dare take a gun," Shawn ruminated. "No place to put it, though. Damn!" He compromised by strapping an automatic to his thigh beneath the skirt-like garment, and



Trost did the same.

“Now for the city. What did he call it—Kathor? Come on, Pete.”

Not even the angry light of a wan, reddish sun could brighten the ebon gloom of Kathor’s towers and minarets, rising sheer from the pathless wilderness. Shawn expected trouble at the gate he could see ahead, but there was surprisingly little difficulty about entering the city. He could not help wondering whether it might not be much harder to get out.

Soldiers guarded the portal, but after a brief glance at the skull-masks of the two Earthmen they lowered their swords. As they went on Shawn whispered, “I’ve a hunch only big shots are permitted to wear these things. Priests, maybe.”

“Do you notice how *human* they all look?” Trost whispered back. “It confirms the Arrhenius spore theory—that the spores of life float from planet to planet. Probably the Martians evolved from the same original stock we did.”

Men and women, scantily garbed, hurried through the streets; occasionally armed men, manifestly soldiers, lounged past. Once Shawn saw a man with a skull-mask hurrying swiftly into a doorway. He touched Trost’s arm.

“Come along. That guy may know something.”

They followed the priest—for, as Shawn learned later, that was the status of those who wore the skull-mask—and found themselves in what seemed to be a tavern, filled with the stench of oil and liquors. A few stools were scattered about, and a dozen men stood here and there, drinking from wooden cups. The priest was nowhere in sight.

---

Shawn found a seat in a corner, and Trost sank down beside him. Presently a fat, moon-faced man appeared and thrust wooden cups into their hands, hurrying away without a word. The jaws of the mask were hinged, Shawn found, and he sipped the liquor.

It was bitterly potent, unpleasant in taste. He held it to his lips for a moment, and then lowered the cup, his eyes searching for the priest who had entered the tavern. A curtained doorway in the far wall indicated a possible exit.

Abruptly he stiffened. From the street something was shambling in—a gross, furry caricature of mankind, a thing neither beast nor human, but partaking of the features of each. Large as a man, its brutal, apish face held a gleam of intelligence far above that of a brute. Its naked body was covered with white hair. Yellow fangs gleamed in a gaping mouth, and reddish little eyes searched the room, malevolent inquiry in their depths.

“Look out, Terry,” Trost said softly. “I don’t—”

The beast-man shuffled forward, lowering white-furred brows over its small eyes. A deep growl rose in its throat.

Through the room a breath of fear whispered. Men paused, frozen, silently eying the monster. Now Shawn saw that in the doorway stood a skull-faced priest, and behind him a dozen armed guards. His hand crept down to the automatic strapped to his thigh.

Without warning the beast-man sprang, bellowing rage. The foul stench of its breath was blown into Shawn’s face. Its long arms stretched out toward him, the taloned, anthropoid fingers flexing.

Even at that moment Shawn realized that to use his gun would mean betrayal. Garbed as a Martian, he might bluff this out—but he dared not shoot the creature. He touched his sword hilt.

The beast-man’s head swung from Shawn toward the group at the door, slowly, with meaning. The priest’s thoughts were clear as though he had spoken.

“Those are the men, Valang! Take them!”

The leader of the soldiers followed the beast-man to the table. Cold black eyes looked at Shawn from a bearded, seamed face.

“Give me your blade!”

Shawn concentrated his thoughts, threw a mental question at the Martian.

“Why? What have I done?”

“You—” The soldier’s hand shot out; he ripped the mask from Shawn’s face. That was enough. The Earthman whipped out his automatic. He fired it as the guardsman lunged forward.

The man’s features exploded in red ruin. The priest at the door screamed orders. And the soldiers came forward roaring like a wolf-pack.

In those close quarters Shawn and Trost had no chance; they were hopelessly outnumbered. They went down firing vainly, overwhelmed by an avalanche of muscular flesh. Shawn felt the gun torn from his hand; he smashed out viciously, desperately, feeling flesh and bone grind beneath his fists. Then, suddenly, something crashed down on his head, and blackness took him.

## CHAPTER IV

### BLACK GOD OF KATHOR

Shawn awoke with a splitting headache, and lay quietly for a while gathering his strength. Light beat through his closed eyelids. He opened them a mere slit.

He lay flat on his back in a small room roofed with stone. There were paintings on the ceiling, depictions of men and women struggling in the grip of fantastic torture-devices, Satanic instruments of which the Inquisition had never dreamed. Shawn turned his head.

A guard sat by the door, sword across his knees, eyeing him. Shawn catalogued the man mentally—brawny, slow, stupid. Against the further wall lay a slender figure, Lorna Rand, her rounded breasts and the lithe curves of her young body revealed in utter nudity! She was apparently unconscious, her closed eyes veiled by the auburn tangle of her hair.

The guard was less stupid than Shawn had thought. He chuckled deep in his bull throat. “You needn’t sham. I can see you’re awake.”

“Yeah?” Shawn said, getting painfully to his feet. He was getting used to the fantastic thought-language. “Then tell me why I’m here.”

“Presently you’ll be sacrificed to Droom.” The guard made a queer quick gesture with his hand.

Shawn limped forward, staggered and almost fell. The soldier watched sharply as he supported himself against the wall. Shawn whispered, “I don’t—”

Then he sprang.

He almost caught the guard unawares—but not quite. The man sprang erect, sword lifted. Shawn’s blow glanced from a barrel chest, and the guard smashed the hilt of his sword on the Earthman’s unprotected head.

It was stark, blazing agony. Shawn fought dimly, frantically, against the flood of weakness that surged up within him. Vaguely he was conscious of his desperate blows falling lightly on hard flesh . . . and flashes of light began to dance before his eyes. . . .

The soldier grunted in surprise. The sword-hilt ceased to pound Shawn’s head, and the latter dropped to his knees, weak and dizzy. Snarling curses came to his ears. He looked up.

Lorna was on the guard’s back, bare arms locked about the bull throat. The soldier had almost dislodged her when Shawn tore the sword from the huge hands and sent its point tearing into flesh. Blood spouted.

The guard’s breath left his lungs in an explosive groan. He looked at Shawn uncomprehendingly. And he fell, as a tree falls, stiffly, heavily.

The girl was flung against the wall to collapse in a limp huddle. Shawn dropped the sword, bent beside the girl, lifting her easily in his arms. She was unconscious.

“Lorna!” Shawn’s voice was unsteady. His gaze ran the length of her nude body, searching for wounds, but the girl was apparently unharmed. Then Lorna’s eyelids fluttered and opened; she stared at Shawn blankly. Fear sprang into her eyes, and was gone as swiftly.

“Terry! Oh, Terry—” White arms went around the man’s neck; he felt the warm firmness of Lorna’s breasts flattened against his chest. Abruptly Shawn’s heart was hammering. The smooth skin of the girl’s back was hot against his palms. He could feel her breath fluttering in his ear, and suddenly his blood was a roaring, pounding tumult in his veins.

Shawn bent his head, found Lorna's soft red lips. They were like white fires, burning away all sanity and all caution. And the girl responded, crushing herself against him, trembling a little. She gave a soft, low cry.

Shawn caught sight of the corpse on the floor. He forced himself to calm. "We've got to get out of here, Lorna!"

---

She wriggled free, a warm flush mantling her face and bosom as she glanced down at her nudity. Quickly Shawn stripped the kirtle from the dead guard and gave it to her. Lorna donned it swiftly.

"Where are the others?"

"I don't know," the girl said, her eyes wide. "Those men came—after you left. To the *Eagle*. They pretended to be friendly, and then jumped us. Hooker managed to fire a shot before they knocked him out. They brought us here—brought me down to this cell, took my clothes away—" Lorna crossed her arms on her bosom, flushing again. Shawn found it difficult to look away, but nevertheless he went to the door, peered through the barred grill.

It was locked, but he caught sight of a rod set in slots to make the door fast. Carefully Shawn lowered the guard's sword hilt-first through the bars. After a few abortive attempts he succeeded in opening the prison.

With Lorna at his side Shawn went out into a dimly-lit corridor cut out of solid rock. "Pleasant place," he grunted. "One way's as good as another. Both lead down."

"They brought me here blindfolded," Lorna said. "But I managed to understand a little of what they said. There's something—they're all afraid of. Something they call Droom."

"Yeah?" Shawn chose a direction at random. As they walked Lorna went on.

"I had an idea it was their god, though they seemed to regard it as something living, right here in their temple. They talked about Droom, and about the Houses."

"What are they?"

"I'm not sure. I've an idea the Houses are bodies the god is supposed to enter."

The passage branched before them. One, the left fork, led down steeply into darkness. The other widened, after a few yards, into a high-roofed room, beyond which it ran on, angling upward. Shawn heard the girl catch her breath. The cavern-chamber had—a tenant!

It was not human. It was a teratological baroque that had been spawned by no sane world, a wrinkled, leathery gigantic horror that made the hair rise on Shawn's neck. It lay prostrate, unmoving, dead.

Seven feet tall, it had the general form of a man, though the torso was unnaturally broad. There were three short, stumpy legs, ending in clawed hoofs, and a bifurcated appendage hung down like a tail from the back. Some monstrous power had wrought ghastly chaos in the thing's features; one of the heads was the size of a large melon, with an elongated muzzle and tusches that protruded like those of a boar. The other head was worse. It seemed boneless. Shawn made out a flaccid, hideous snout, a single glazed eye, fringed by pinkish hairs, and a wrinkled patch of fungus-like stuff crowning the skull.

He fought down nausea. "Come on. If this is one of those Houses, we haven't much to fear. It can't hurt us. It's dead, Droom or not."

He stepped forward, Lorna at his heels. And, suddenly—stopped.

The vault had a curious echo. Muttering, whispering, the name of the god was flung back and forth by the dark walls.

"Droom . . . Droom . . ."

Lorna caught her breath. “Terry! We’ve—”

Was the chamber darker? It seemed as though shadows were filtering down through the air, dropping thickly and more thickly upon the loathsome body that lay prostrate. The flaming torchlight from flambeaux set in the walls seemed less distinct. Lorna’s face seemed hidden behind a shadowy veil.

The name of Kathor’s god whispered thinly through the steadily increasing darkness.

“*Droom . . . Droom . . .*”

Shawn drew back against the wall, his palms sweating, wishing for his gun. He gripped the sword tightly. He felt the girl’s half-nude body pressed against him.

---

And the shadows were thick—thick! They clustered about the monstrous thing on the stones, hiding it beneath a dark blanket. Suddenly Shawn shuddered, conscious of an abnormal chill in the air.

“Ye gods!” he whispered—and his flesh went cold with dread. For this was no Earthly menace of flesh and blood that he faced. It was something beyond humanity—something so alien that the breath of its presence was like a wind blowing chill from the gulfs beyond the world.

And the shadows sank down, whispering. They seemed to merge with the body of the abnormality on the stones, to mingle with its flesh and to disappear within it. Somehow Shawn knew, with a dreadful certainty, that where there had been only two in the vault, there were now—*three*. And the third was not human.

Shawn lifted the sword tentatively, staring around. “Come on,” he muttered. “We’ve wasted too much time. I’m not going to try steel against that thing if I can help it.”

Hastily he turned to the passage, propelling Lorna with an arm about her waist. Behind them the shadows whispered ominously, the shifting darkness rustling down through the dank air.

But Shawn did not wait. As he entered the passage he shot a quick glance behind him, and saw something that lent speed to his flight. The horror on the stones was no longer still and dead. Life had come to it, in a fashion hideous beyond all imagination, and it was writhing and struggling in the pangs of frightful birth. The mouths gaped; the malformed limbs shuddered and clawed out hungrily; light shone in the single glazed eye. In dreadful silence it dragged itself upright.

“Come on!” Shawn whispered urgently, and fled with Lorna along the passage. Luckily it was straight, and even in the darkness where no torches burned he encountered no obstacles. The warm fragrance of Lorna was close to him; occasionally her bare shoulder brushed his arm. Her breath came in little gasps.

And now there came the sound which Shawn had been dreading—the noise of pursuit. A slow, ominous thudding, machine-like, that spoke of a thing that pursued inexorably, with muscles that Shawn knew would never tire. He gripped the hilt of his sword tighter.

Light began to filter into the passage from ahead. They came to a flight of spiral steps that wound up in dim gray twilight. Behind them the noise of the approaching monster was louder.

The girl’s steps lagged.

“Come along,” Shawn grunted, half carrying her up the interminable stairway. Granite walls gave place to black marble, shot with sparkling veins of crimson fire. They came out suddenly on a balcony, unrailed, and empty space dropped sheer beneath them. It was a cul-de-sac.

They were perched high up on the wall of a great cavern, above which a black dome arched like an iron cope. In its center a crimson globe hung, glowing with angry scarlet fires, sending its sullen radiance into every corner of the huge temple. For this, Shawn knew somehow, was the Holy of Holies—the temple of Droom. On the stone flags far below him was mystery—and horror.

The marble floor was inlaid with a pattern of colors, blue and green and dull yellow, twisting and curving into an arabesque design which was oddly unpleasing to the eye. Rugs and cushions and tapestries, ornaments that might grace the palace of an emperor were scattered carelessly about the huge room. Wandering leisurely about were dozens of the hairy beast-men; and in the very center of the floor was the altar.

An altar of glass! A globe of transparent crystal, shot with a shimmering veil of color. There were flaming lights drifting about within the altar, and intricately twisted tubes and levers, and there was a gray and pulsating monstrosity whose wrinkled surface sent a little throb of recognition into Shawn's mind. A brain—but not a human brain.

No human skull had ever contained that swollen, malformed thing whose slow, rhythmic movement made Shawn feel a little sick. Lorna went white, gripped her companion's arm to steady herself.

There was no time for more; a scuffle came from behind them. The monster came charging up the stairs. The House of Droom was indeed alive—and ravening for its dark pleasure!

## CHAPTER V

### THE BRAIN

Hungry fangs gleamed redly in the dim light. The two heads bobbed unsteadily on their single neck, but the single eye watched Shawn unwinkingly. He swung his sword in a short arc, chopping at a claw-like talon that swept out at his throat.

And he missed. With uncanny speed the claw dodged and ripped the skin of Shawn's chest; the Earthman countered desperately. His lashing back-stroke almost severed the monster's arm.

Abruptly he knew what to do. His blade drove out in a straight line, directly for the single eye that watched him with cold, inhuman intelligence. The pulpy head jerked aside, but not far enough. The sword-point sank into gristly flesh. As the creature reared back Shawn twisted the weapon viciously, mangling the single eye into a blood mess. Now it was blind.

It leaped forward in deadly silence, limbs flailing, jaws agape. Before Shawn could spring aside it was upon him. He shuddered at the touch of chill, unclean flesh that seemed to writhe and twist beneath his grappling fingers. He felt himself flung back—

Faintly he heard Lorna cry out. She seized his arm, but too late. The monster went charging blindly over the brink of the platform and dragged both Shawn and the girl with it as it fell.

Red light flashed out blindingly. From the globe of the altar a crimson ray blazed up, a narrow beam of radiance that gripped Lorna and the man, held them unsupported in empty air. Unbelievably Shawn stared down at the mosaic floor far below, seeing it rising toward him very slowly, while a bloody blotch upon the stones told the fate of the monster. Swiftly understanding came to him. He himself had invented anti-gravity—and this was similar. Scientifically logical—but strange beyond imagination!

The two drifted down toward the crystal altar-globe. The lights danced more quickly within it, red and blue and flaming orange.

The beast-men were returning, clustering close, watching with their malignant little eyes. Shawn felt cold stone beneath him. He found himself on the ground, Lorna beside him. The weird force which had gripped them had snapped out with the red ray and vanished.

He shot a quick glance around. Brazen doors, ajar, were set in the further wall. Not far away was the crushed, bloody body of the two-headed monster, the sword still protruding from its eye-socket.

The beast-men sprang forward, their hairy arms twisting about his body. He fought furiously, battering at the grinning devil-masks so close to his face. The creatures made no attempt to hurt him—they merely closed in, gripping his arms and legs till he stood motionless, helpless.

Lorna was also held captive, though it took only one beast-man to subdue her. Her ivory slimness gleamed in strange contrast to the dirty coat of the creature.

Beside them, in the hollow altar, the wrinkled gray thing pulsed more quickly, the little lights winking and dancing and drifting in a fantastically beautiful pattern, unearthly, and somehow horribly alluring. Into Shawn's mind came a thought message, cold and distinct.

"You are not of Kathor. Why do you come here?"



Carefully, measuring each word, Shawn answered, “We come from Earth—the third planet. Our world has been destroyed—”

“World? There are no others than this. You say blasphemy!”

Shawn hesitated. “Who are you?”

---

The thought-message was confused, jumbled. It became clear suddenly. “I am a god. Ages ago the scientists of this world took the brain of a beast-man, evolved it by long and painful experiments. It became superhuman. I am that brain. I rule Kathor.”

The lights whirled in the globe. “You doubt my power. Then watch!”

A chorus of growls from the beast-men. They drew back, revealing the broken body of the monster. And, suddenly, a shiver shook it.

Icy horror lanced through Shawn. Lorna cried out unbelievably. The thing was rising, shambling forward, a crushed, frightful thing all spattered and dank with fresh blood. One of its heads was a smashed ruin; the other lolled drunkenly on a broken neck.

It came forward to where Lorna stood in the grip of the beast-man. Its talons seized the girl, dragged her away. Shrieking hysterically, she was cradled in the monster’s embrace.

“Taste of my power!” Droom’s thought came. “The intelligence is not bound to the body. I have many bodies, and my life can enter any of them.”

Cursing, Shawn strained against the paws that held him. The monster’s talons ripped blindly at Lorna’s body, tearing the kirtle away in rags. The girl fought frantically, vainly. The milky curves of her bosom, sweeping lines of white beauty, were splotted with blood from her captor’s crushed flesh.

The beast-men surged forward, their eyes red with lust, intent on the girl’s nakedness. A hoarse roar went up from them.

“So?” Droom’s thought seemed malicious. “My children are displeased. They demand their usual sacrifice. Well—they shall have the girl.”

As though at a command, the undead monster dropped limp and unmoving. The beast-men tore Lorna away, dragged her, with Shawn, through the bronze doors. Hot, angry light blazed into their eyes.

A scarlet, blazing globe hanging from the high ceiling illuminated the room in merciless detail. It was an amphitheatre, tiers of seats rising from a flat, sunken pit in the center. Below the seats, in the walls of the pit, were barred doors, and behind them men and women, captive, staring out with hopeless fear. Bars were set in sockets so that they could not be reached by the prisoners.

In one cell Shawn saw his companions—Heffley, Flynn, and Trost, ragged and disheveled. Somehow Trost had managed to retain his horn-rimmed glasses, incongruous on his pale, haggard face. He saw Shawn, shouted.

But the Earthman could not answer. The beast-men dragged him up into the tiers, held him tightly. Others were busy in the pit, dragging forward a curious machine.

It was a globe, set on pivoted wheels, with chains and manacles dangling from it. Lorna was pulled forward, and a metal collar clamped about her neck. The beast-men retreated swiftly into the gallery.

And slowly the globe began to move. It rolled forward slowly, pulling the girl with it. A shock of horror raced through Shawn as he saw little heat-waves shuddering up from the sphere; the device was becoming hotter.

The girl stumbled, almost fell. The sphere wheeled, came at her, and she dodged just in time. Wavering unsteadily on its pivoted base, the thing swung and rolled more swiftly toward the wall. It struck with a crash, bounced back. Shawn saw the metal side of the pit glow briefly red.

---

Good God! If the machine touched Lorna—it would fry the flesh from her bones! Cursing, Shawn fought uselessly against the hairy arms that prisoned him. Below him the nude girl fled and dodged, her breath coming in great gasps, her moulded bosom rising and falling.

The watchers thundered maniac glee. They leaned forward, red eyes blazing, yellow tusks bared.

Lorna went down, rolled away just as the globe rushed past her, painting her pale skin with crimson radiance. She was pulled forward, her breath cut off by the metal collar. Somehow she managed to get to her feet, dodged and ran once more, sobbing, with the fiery juggernaut pursuing inexorably.

She was weakening steadily, Shawn realized. He stared around, searching for some weapon. Abruptly his eyes narrowed.

He had caught sight of a familiar object strapped to the barrel chest of a beast-man—an automatic! The creature might have been the one who had attacked them in the tavern, who had managed to capture one of the guns, treasuring it with the unintelligent greed of an ape. The beast-man was intent on the sadistic spectacle before him, and the others, too, were glaring down at the fleeing, nude girl. Shawn's captors had relaxed their vigilance.

That was a mistake on their part. Shawn measured the distance to the creature who had the gun. A desperate plan came to him—and he acted.

He kicked up viciously at the groin of the beast-man on his right, and as the monster doubled out, screaming, he whirled to face his other captor. Fangs bared, the creature thrust its hideous head forward, its talons digging agonizingly into Shawn's arms. But the Earthman had already put all his strength into a sledgehammer blow that crashed against the beast-man's jaw with a grinding crack of breaking bones.

The thing shrieked, let go of Shawn. The slow minds of the others had not yet reacted. They were turning to face him, staring. Shawn sprang forward.

He reached the creature who had the gun. The beast-man moved forward, huge arms outstretched. Shawn dived forward, let himself be gathered into a rib-cracking embrace. The breath shot out of his lungs. A nauseous mass of fur choked him.

Blindly he fumbled for the gun, felt its cold metal against his palm. He yanked it free, thrust the muzzle against the monster's side, squeezed the trigger. The automatic bellowed.

Simultaneously the great binding arms contracted, sending frightful pain lancing through Shawn's back. Then—they relaxed! They fell away, limp and flaccid, and the beast-man roared his death-cry, blood spouting from his throat.

Shawn tore free. In the pit he could see Lorna stumbling, dodging, as the red-hot machine rolled in eccentric pursuit. But he dared not pause to rescue her. Not yet.

He raced toward the bronze doors. The beast-men had not expected this; they were massing at the other side of the amphitheatre, before a closed gateway. A few of them barred Shawn's path, but he managed to dodge their lumbering attack.

Then he was in the temple, empty save for the altar and its dreadful tenant. As Shawn raced forward he felt a blast of power rush out to meet him, the mighty thoughts of Droom tearing at his brain. Blazing agony blinded him.

A thousand fingers of steel seemed to be plucking, tearing, wrenching at his head, pulling it apart bit by bit. The flames within the altar were blinding.

Staggering, he kept on, hearing the bellowing of the beast-men growing louder behind him. The sphere was a dozen feet away—

A taloned paw gripped his shoulder. He hurled himself forward, sick and blind with agony, felt himself crash down on the stones. A heavy body fell atop him.

Shawn thrust the gun forward, squeezed the trigger again and again. Something shattered; tinkling bells rang in a sudden outburst, and drowning them out was a high, sickening shrilling that faded and died. . . .

A bestial roar sounded in Shawn's ears. The beast-man pinning him down sprang up, shouting. Throughout the temple the cries died into a horrified, deadly silence.

Shawn dragged himself up. The altar was a jagged wreck; the flaming lights were gone; sticky pale fluid ran trickling across the floor. The brain that was Droom was a mangled, butchered thing, no longer pulsing, no longer—alive!

## CHAPTER VI

### TITAN

For a moment the paralyzed hush held; then it broke and the beast-men stampeded in mad fear, pouring in a great rush back into the amphitheatre, through it, and out between metal gates now flung ajar. Hastily Shawn followed in their track.

The blazing machine to which Lorna was chained was no longer moving; its motive power seemed to have died with Droom. The girl lay unconscious on the stones. Shawn freed her from the collar, and then released his companions from their cell.

He had foreseen difficulty in escaping from the city, but a revolution was in progress, they discovered on leaving the temple. The priests had apparently held the people in a grip of fear, under the rule of Droom, and now the people had revolted. Even the soldiers joined in mercilessly slaughtering priests and beast-men. Carrying Lorna, the Earthmen picked their way furtively by alleyways, dimly lit by Phobos and Deimos, the two moons, till at last they passed safely through the gate and saw the desolate, reddish wastes before them.

Trost had learned some important facts during his captivity. The golden fleet had not, apparently, come from Mars. In fact, he said, the priests had been discussing the destruction of several of their cities by yellow spaceships that dropped down from the void to bring death and ruin to Mars.

“That means we’ll have to look further,” Shawn grunted as they clambered aboard the *Eagle*. “You said Saturn and Mars were the logical places, didn’t you, Sam?”

“Yeah,” Heffley nodded. “One of Saturn’s moons, I imagine. Titan’s the best bet, though it’ll take quite a while.”

“Not so long. We can’t equal the speed of the golden ships, but there’s plenty of power in anti-gravity. And now that the compensators are adjusted we won’t have to worry about acceleration.”

But the distance they had to travel was nearly seven hundred and fifty million miles. Despite the incredible velocity of the *Eagle*, it was a week before the ringed splendor of immense Saturn loomed before them—Saturn, with its nine moons. Shawn agreed with Heffley that Titan was the obvious choice, and so he sent the spaceship hurtling through the atmosphere, dropping lower and lower over a densely-forested region.

“Funny how white the forest is,” Trost commented, polishing his glasses. “Distance from the sun, I suppose. Lack of solar radiation—no chlorophyll to make the leaves green. No signs of life.”

“Of human life,” Shawn amended. “Wait a minute! I think—”

He brought the *Eagle* curving down in a spiral. On a broad, rocky expanse something artificial was certainly constructed, a towering cube of stone forty feet high. Shawn dropped the spaceship gently near it.

“Looks like a house,” he commented. “It may be empty, though. I don’t see anything alive.”

“I doubt if the golden fleet came from here,” Heffley said.

“We might pick up a clue. There may be some way of finding out what we want to know. If there’s intelligent life in that stone block.”

Lorna, trim and boyish in shirt and slacks, said, “Find out if the air’s okay. I’m sick of this artificial stuff.”

“It’s breathable,” Trost told her. “The plant-life takes care of that.”

Leaving Trost and Heffley to man the *Eagle*, Shawn and Hooker Flynn descended the rope ladder. Before they had gone a hundred yards Lorna joined them.

“Wanted to stretch my legs,” she chuckled in answer to Shawn’s disapproving look.

The air was very cold, the Sun a dim red star in a purple, star-speckled sky. The heat emitted by the immense globe of Saturn was small. Warily the three went toward the stone block, noticing holes—apparently doorways—at its base.

---

It was strangely silent. No one spoke until Lorna touched Shawn’s arm, said quickly, “Wait a minute. I hear something—”

They paused. For a long moment there was no sound; then a faint stir of movement came from far away. Simultaneously a shout sounded from the *Eagle*.

“Terry! Look out!”

Trost’s voice! Shawn whirled, saw a horde of fantastic creatures pouring from the forest, racing forward swiftly. Dinosaurs, he thought—but curiously different from the great reptiles that had once existed in Earth’s Mesozoic swamps. These were small, half as tall as a man, with blunt muzzles, long-fingered hands that seemed almost human, and tails that were atrophied and vestigial. They ran instead of hopping. Their skins were pale, whitish like the forest.

There were hundreds of them. Shawn said, “Back to the ship. Quick!” He drew his automatic, hurried forward, his companions beside him.

But he was too late. The dinosaurs closed in, barring them from the ship. They surged up like a wave.

The Earthmen had no chance. They emptied their guns, killing many, but within minutes they were overwhelmed. The dinosaurs’ cold hands gripped them, lifted them. The three were carried toward the stone block.

As they reached it there was an interruption. A staccato burst of gunfire stammered out. Trost and Heffley had sallied from the ship, armed with sub-machine guns, and they were blasting their way through the hordes of dinosaurs, shouting reassurance to their companions.

The group carrying Shawn were in the lead, and they increased their pace, scurrying into one of the black holes in the stone cube. Flynn, a few feet behind him, was galvanized into activity. His fists flailed; he kicked and writhed furiously.

The butchery of the sub-machine guns momentarily daunted the dinosaurs. They gave way, fear sweeping them. Hooker Flynn tore free, rushed toward Trost and Heffley. And Lorna, too, managed to tear herself away from her captors.

Then the dinosaurs rallied. They surged forward like a great wave, and the three Earthmen were buried beneath a mound of reptilian flesh. Lorna was unharmed; she stood hesitating, and then turned toward the ship as several of the dinosaurs ran toward her. But her path was blocked. Dozens of the creatures were advancing now, closing in in a semicircle.

Blinded she turned and fled, her flesh shrinking with cold fear of the monsters. And, hissing shrilly, they leaped forward on her trail, striving to intercept her. But she reached the forest before them.

It was icy there, the ground carpeted with dead, rotting vegetation, the interlacing leaves forming a dim, whitish ceiling high above. She ran in a clear, shadowless gloom, hearing

behind her the rapid padding footsteps of the dinosaurs.

She tried to double on her tracks, but dared not continue, for several of the creatures, guessing her intention, angled across to intercept her. The girl was already gasping for breath, her clothing soaked with perspiration. But the dinosaurs ran without effort, coursing her like wolves.

The thought stirred a chord of memory in Lorna's mind, recalling a trick she had once read. Would it work with these creatures—or were they too intelligent to be duped? Her heart pounded furiously; her throat was one raw blaze of fire. Snatching a quick glance behind her, she saw the leader of the dinosaurs terrifyingly close, cold eyes intent upon her, jaws agape.

---

Swiftly the girl ripped open her shirt, slipped it off, still running, let it fall to the ground. She dared a quick look, and exultation flamed within her. The monsters were pausing to sniff at the discarded garment, fingering it with their anthropoid hands. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Lorna swerved in a curve that would take her back to the *Eagle*.

But the dinosaurs came after her again, hissing. Lorna slipped out of her slacks, let them fall from rounded hips, down the slim length of her legs. Another few yards gained while the dinosaurs examined the garment—

Lorna's shoes were already gone; save for a lacy brassiere and step-ins she was nude. She was fumbling blindly at the fastenings of her remaining garments when something sprang out from behind a tree; she cannoned into it, felt cold flesh against her body. She was flung back, sent sprawling to the ground. For the first time she saw the nature of this being.

A man, short, naked save for a breech-cloth, with his body oddly mottled with darker patches. His grayish skin had a curiously leathery texture. His head was—not human!

The flattened skull, the broad, loose-lipped mouth, the shallow, dull eyes, all combined to send a ripple of fear down Lorna's spine. For the man had the taint of the serpent unmistakably upon him.

The dinosaurs came in view, only five of them now, and they paused and circled, wary and alert. The snake-man snarled, and Lorna saw two gleaming, needle-like fangs bared. One of the dinosaurs leaped forward.

The snake-man sprang; the two bodies collided in midair. Shining white fangs dug into the dinosaur's flesh. And, hissing, the creature flung up its hideous head, dropped instantly to writhe and twist in convulsions upon the rotting vegetation.

As though at a signal the other reptiles raced away.

The snake-man turned to Lorna. Fear and amazement had held her motionless, but now she sprang to her feet, throat tight with dread. Before she had covered a dozen paces the snake-man caught her.

She fought against his grip, but a cold, deadly repulsion weakened her. The being laughed down at her, and, as the girl's blows hammered against his chest, he suddenly snarled, lowering his fangs menacingly. Lorna paused, her eyes wide—and once more the snake-man laughed.

Swinging her lightly under his arm, he hurried into the depths of the dark forest.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SERPENT WORLD

When Shawn was carried into the cube of the dinosaurs he was unconscious, or nearly so. He had felt a biting pain in his shoulder, and directly afterward he fell into a light coma, paralyzed, only vaguely comprehending what was happening. So he was able to make no resistance as he was dragged underground, down a slanting corridor scarcely four feet high, in which he could not have stood erect but where the dinosaurs moved with ease.

For a long time, Shawn thought, he was carried thus. Gradually the power of the drug was wearing off, but he held himself motionless, waiting till he had regained his strength. After a long time they came to a blank wall; one of the dinosaurs fumbled with a slender hand at the stones. They slid away, revealing a brightly-lit expanse beyond.

Shawn had the impression that the dinosaurs were afraid. They shrilled softly, peering forward, and at last continued very slowly, carrying the Earthman into a passage, twenty feet high and nearly as wide, lit with cold radiance that came from a tube set in the roof and running the length of the corridor. Shawn stared up. It wasn't a tube; it seemed to be a bar of metal, glowing with a bright, chill light. The passage stretched to right and left, curving gently, and directly across was another tunnel mouth at right angles to the one where the dinosaurs were huddled about him. The gap in the wall had closed, he saw; there was no trace of it.

The air was no longer cold; it was stuffy and humid. Abruptly a flicker of movement appeared far down the corridor.

Instantly the dinosaurs were in turmoil. They dropped Shawn and scurried about purposelessly, hissing. Then, in a group, they sprang back to the wall. Again the opening appeared in it. They fled through, and once more the smooth stone surface appeared unbroken.

Shawn's paralysis had worn off, he realized. Quickly he got to his feet, hurried into the tunnel mouth a few feet away. Crouching in its shadow, he waited as the thing that had frightened the dinosaurs approached.

It came swiftly—and horrified unbelief struck through Shawn. It was a snake—but a snake incredibly huge, its thick body as large as a barrel, and, he guessed, almost fifty feet long! Nor was that all.

There were certain curious features about its head, hastily glimpsed as it raced past. In the flashing glimpse Shawn caught he saw that the thing's head was an irregular spheroid, instead of being flat and wedge-shaped, and in its contour there was a nauseating resemblance to a human face. The mouth was small and scarcely visible, but from the great eyes shone a light of unmistakable intelligence. Girdling the reptile's neck was a fringe of pulpy, dead-white tentacles, writhing as though with a sentient life of their own.

The snake raced past and was gone in a flash, leaving Shawn trembling. The reptile was—tainted!—with humanity! Its head had been distinctly anthropoid in outline.

The clanging, discordant note of a gong sounded in the distance. It rang out three times and died away into silence, and the hot, stagnant air seemed to press closer in the dead stillness. Frowning, Shawn went into the corridor along which the reptile had passed and peered after it. Nothing stirred, and after a moment he set out in the direction from which the snake had come.



The corridor was level and straight, and occasionally Shawn passed the mouths of other brightly lit tunnels. He quickened his pace. The clanging came again, but this time it sounded five times before it died away. As it faded Shawn saw a movement far ahead of him in the corridor, and paused, hesitating. Peering under his hand, he made out two great snakes gliding rapidly toward him, slithering.

He looked around quickly.

---

Suddenly he remembered passing the mouth of a side tunnel a hundred yards back. He spun about and went racing along the corridor, flinging himself into its sanctuary. Some premonition of danger made him hurry along the passage instead of remaining near its entrance.

That precaution saved him. Behind him came a harsh rustling, rapidly growing louder. The reptiles had entered this passage.

Shawn fled, sweating. If they had not glimpsed him before, his sudden movement attracted their attention, for he heard a curious whistling cry from behind him, and saw a needle-thin pencil of light dart past his head. There was an angry crackle as it fell on the rock wall, and as he raced past Shawn saw that the rock was beginning to glow redly, and a wave of heat billowed out at him. His mouth stretched in a wry grin, Shawn redoubled his efforts; there was a sharp pain in his chest but he dared not slacken his pace.

Momentarily he expected to feel burning agony in his back, but the attack did not come. He risked a backward glance. The white ray was no longer visible, but the snakes were still coming purposefully behind him, their great heads erect and watchful.

There was a sharp turn in the passage, and Shawn flung himself around it. He was in a cavern—a *roofless* cavern.

If there was a roof, it was too high for Shawn to discover. It was like standing at the bottom of a deep shaft, staring up at a haze of dim light overhead.

A sound behind him spurred him to action. He sprang over a foot-wide gulf that blocked his path, running to left and right girdling the cavern, and made for a huge structure that stood in the center of the floor. It was a machine of some nature, but more complicated than any Shawn had ever seen before. Pistons, geared wheels, enigmatic tubes and cables and great transformers made the thing a giant metal monster, crowned with a silvery sphere which illuminated the cavern. But within the recesses and shadows of the machine was room for a dozen men to hide.

Shawn darted behind a great block of crystal and burrowed his way into the interior of the construction. He found a dusty hiding-place between two thick supporting posts.

Peering out through a screen of cables, he made out the forms of his pursuers emerging from the passage. As he watched they came rippling across the cavern floor toward him, and he shrank back, his hand going instinctively toward a gun that was not in its holster. But they had not seen him.

They paused and coiled a few yards from the machine, so that Shawn could examine them closely. Staring from his vantage point, he was struck again with their terrifying likeness to mankind.

Their shapes were those of reptiles, but their heads were irregular spheres, with magnificent brain-cases. From a side view their heads were not greatly dissimilar to man's, save for the absence of the nose. Shawn soon discovered the purpose of the rope-like appendages fringing the necks of the creatures, for a tentacle of the nearest was coiled about a

silvery sphere as large as a coconut. The globe was raised in the direction of the machine, and a crimson, pencil-thin ray shot from it.

Involuntarily Shawn flinched, but the ray was not directed at him. He heard a soft clicking, and above him a great cogged wheel began to revolve swiftly; with a multitude of gentle whisperings and clickings the machine began to operate.

Shawn felt a momentary fear that he would be crushed by the plunging, revolving parts; but his hiding-place had been well chosen. He was safe, as long as he did not venture within reach of a rod as thick as his body which rose and sank a foot away.

Assured of his temporary safety, Shawn peered out again. The walls of the cavern were sinking from view, and the floor on which he crouched was rising up into the great shaft. He was being lifted swiftly toward the cryptic glow overhead, for apparently this platform, the entire floor of the shaft, was nothing more than a huge elevator.

---

As the platform rose the white-lit mouths of caverns were briefly visible, as they dropped into view and fell from sight beneath the floor level. Within these half-glimpsed eaves Shawn caught glimpses of strange and monstrous creations of an alien world.

In one cave, as though on the stage of some vast theatre, he saw long tiers of metallic racks stretching into the distance, racks which held flattened gray ovoids that were like greatly magnified snake eggs. In another cave he saw a mass of unfamiliar machinery, great throbbing engines of glowing crystal and shining metal. The speed of the platform accelerated as it swept upward, so that presently Shawn caught no more than flashing glances of inexplicable things—a shapeless black mound crowned by a glowing blue flame; a gray lit cavern where dozens of the great snakes swarmed about a huge, red-dripping carcass, larger than the largest elephant; a cavern in which there stood what Shawn thought to be the image of a golden snake, fifty feet high from its lowest coils to its erect, watchful head. Then, without warning, the platform slowed its swift rise and came to a silent stop.

An empty passageway opened in the wall of the shaft. Shawn, watching, saw the two snakes uncoil and glide swiftly across the floor to the mouth of the eave. They entered it, and rippled from sight around a bend.

Shawn frowned. He dared not try to extricate himself yet, for the shining piston still rose and sank dangerously near his head, and all about him the machine was throbbing and moving. And suddenly the platform began to rise again.

It went up smoothly for perhaps two hundred feet and then stopped. The machinery slowed down; the piston fell once or twice and then came to a halt. Shawn stared out at what lay before him.

Freedom! Through a narrow slit in the wall Shawn saw the pale glow of Saturn, and caught a glimpse of whitish vegetation. Through the gap came a little breeze, cold and refreshing. Shawn began to edge past the motionless piston.

He extricated himself from the machine at last and hurried across to the opening. The possibility of the platform's moving again made him quicken his pace—and Shawn's leg went down into the foot-wide gulf where the flooring ended. He fell forward on hands and knees; but the sudden fall saved his life.

White-hot agony lanced along the Earthman's back. Shawn saw from the corner of his eye a white ray of light that vanished abruptly; then the platform was sinking beneath him back into the depths—faster, ever more swiftly!

He flung himself forward, scrambled frantically for footing, half his body hanging above emptiness. But Shawn's whipcord muscles served him now, and presently he lay on the floor of the corridor, his heart throbbing. As a muffled clanging floated up from the shaft behind him, he scrambled up and ran toward the open air.

Across the mouth of the passage was a shimmering play of colors, half invisible in the light of Saturn. Shawn extended a tentative hand, and, as nothing happened, stepped through the rainbow veil, felt the soft warmth of soil beneath his feet. He stared around.

He had emerged from a low, grayish hut of metal, its color blending with the ground to make an excellent camouflage. The forest mounted before him, a great wall hemming him in.

Where was the *Eagle*? Shawn didn't know; at random he chose a direction and started into the forest. He searched his pockets, hoping to find a compass, though he knew it was no use. Cigarettes, matches, some food tablets—but nothing that would aid him now.

---

A rustle in the dead leaves caught his attention. Three figures came from the gloom—strange, fantastic figures. Serpent-men! Similar to the one Lorna had encountered, gray skinned, snake-headed, hideous. Repugnance shook Shawn, and he remained unmoving only with an effort.

As they approached the Earthman held up his hand palm forward in the ancient peace-gesture. Startled by the sudden movement, two of the creatures sprang back and darted aside, swift as ferrets, into the forest. The remaining one stared wordlessly.

"Hello," Shawn said, wondering how he could make himself understood. The snake-man gabbled a few hissing words.

Shawn nodded, pointed at the sky. The other hesitated, and then abruptly turned, beckoning. He looked back to see whether Shawn was following.

"Might as well," the Earthman shrugged. "He knows where he's going, and I don't." A glance around showed that the other snake-men had closed in behind him. This was not reassuring, but Shawn fought down his uneasiness.

Once a dinosaur ran into view, but after a sharp glance it fled hastily. The walk was not a long one—scarcely more than a mile—and at last Shawn came into a great clearing. A cluster of huts, built and thatched with dry leaves, huddled in the center. Around it were cultivated fields, ashy-grey in color, studded with whitish, straw-like vegetation.

Dozens of the snake-people were grouped together, and Shawn was conducted toward them.

Something made Shawn look up. His eyes widened as he saw a shining sphere moving, far away, above the rampart of the pale forest—the *Eagle*! Apparently Heffley and the others had beaten back the dinosaurs, were searching for their companions. Shawn looked around, trying to discover a means of signaling his friends.

Rough hands shoved him into the midst of the group. A crudely built wooden chariot, built on runners like a sled, supported one of the snake-men, taller than the others, wearing a string of bright stones strung together in a necklace, his loincloth also sewed with the gems. Harnessed to the chariot was a curious beast, resembling one of the dinosaurs, but somewhat larger, and covered with gleaming scales.

On the ground, huddled in a frightened heap, was Lorna! Her undergarments had been brutally ripped away, and the avid eyes of the snake-men were intent on the naked beauty of her body. Above her stood one of the creatures, snarling and gesturing angrily.

The girl was his! His, by right of possession! But the snake-man in the chariot—apparently the ruler of the tribe, the chieftain—would not agree. He roared a peremptory command.

The other hesitated, drew back. Then he launched himself suddenly up, hands clawing, fangs bared, at the throat of his chief!

But the charioteer was ready. The two men grappled, swayed and stumbled to their knees. The steed, frightened, reared, uttering loud, coughing cries. It sprang away with a great leap, and the rotten harness that held it snapped. Shouts went up from the mob; some tried to recapture the beast, but it evaded them, went stampeding to the forest, where it vanished.

Shawn's eyes went back to the chariot. The chieftain was rising from the body of his attacker, and the latter was twitching and jerking convulsively, blood dripping from a wound in the shoulder. The charioteer dismounted, made a quick gesture. Others swiftly picked up the body of the dying snake-man and bore it away.

And now the chieftain turned toward Shawn. Cold, glittering eyes appraised the Earthman with passionless speculation. He looked at Shawn's captor, asked a question.

The other's answer seemed to satisfy him. He glanced down at the torn harness of the chariot, looked at the prostrate girl. At his command cold, strong hands gripped Lorna's arms, pulled her erect. She was dragged forward.

And Shawn, too, felt himself prisoned by the snake-men, pulled to the chariot.

Soon he found himself standing, arms bound behind him, feet hobbled by a foot-long cord. Beside him stood Lorna. Fibre ropes cut into their shoulders and chests, ropes that were attached to the chariot.

Slaves of the snake-men!

## CHAPTER VIII

### FANGS OF DEATH

Lorna made a futile attempt to hide her slim nudity; she crouched down, trembling, in a huddled heap, the cords digging painfully into her flesh. One of the snake-men leaped forward, dragged the girl erect. His icy hand touched her naked breast in a lascivious caress. Lorna screamed, shrinking back toward Shawn.

The man's fist drove out viciously, but the snake-man dodged nimbly. From the chieftain came an angry roar. A whip tore a red furrow in Shawn's back.

Snarling a curse, he whirled, fists clenched. The demon-mask of the chieftain leered at him from the chariot. The whip swung again, and a cry came from Lorna.

The sound brought sanity to Shawn. Battle against this horde would mean death, he knew—and he could not leave Lorna unprotected here. He had a plan, but it could not be carried out yet. Better to pretend obedience—

He turned, leaned forward, pulling at the ropes that bound him. They cut into his shoulders and chest, but the chariot moved forward slowly on its runners.

"Don't try to pull," Shawn told the girl. "Just keep step with me."

But the chieftain saw through the subterfuge. Each time Lorna lagged the whip slashed down on her back, and the girl's naked body was soon streaming with perspiration as she pulled at her harness. Shawn cursed, but he dared not retaliate. Not yet—not till he saw the *Eagle*.

Across the clearing and back again they pulled the chariot, gasping and sweating with exertion. Apparently this was some religious ceremony, perhaps connected with the planting of crops, for in their wake the snake-men followed, turning the soil with shovels and scattering seeds.

Again the two strained at the harness. Shawn had made a decision; he would attempt escape, before both he and Lorna had been driven to pain-racked exhaustion. His bound hands were behind his back, but, straining, he managed to twist them around until his fingers could be inserted in his trousers pocket. The matches were there.

From the chieftain came a cry. Hastily Shawn flipped open the folder, awkwardly tore out a match and scratched it alight. He threw it as far as he could.

The matted, dry stubble caught fire, as he had foreseen. A tongue of flame licked up hungrily. Whether the snake-people were familiar with fire Shawn didn't know, but judging from their appearance now they were not—or, at least, were very much afraid of it.

A chorus of gobbling, croaking cries went up as the blaze spread. The group hesitated—and whirled, racing toward their village of huts. The chieftain sprang down from his chariot, followed them, but more slowly.

Shawn lit another match, tried to burn the cord that bound his wrists. The material was highly inflammable. He felt a sharp surge of pain—and his hands were free. Quickly he ripped away the harness, tore the hobbles from his legs.

The fire was dangerously close, sweeping across the dry grasses swiftly. Shawn freed the girl. They looked around, searching for escape.

"This fire—it may bring the *Eagle*," Shawn said. "A signal—"

Lorna nodded. "But we'd better get out of here. Quick!"

There was a gap in the wall of flame, and they raced toward it. Behind them came an angry shout. Glancing back, Shawn saw the chieftain in pursuit.

Lorna stumbled, went to her knees. The gap in the blaze was narrowing; Shawn caught her up, half lifted her forward. Gasping, choking with smoke, they rushed through the opening, the red hell of fire sweeping toward them.

“The forest!” Lorna choked. “It—the trees won’t burn!”

From the village an outburst of shrieks came. The huts were afire, and the snake-people, trapped within them, were being roasted alive. Shawn could feel no pity for the monstrous beings.

---

The two reached the forest’s edge, sank down. But they were given no respite. A blackened, roaring thing broke through the flames, came at them, eyes ablaze. The chieftain—“Look out, Terry!” The girl’s voice was frightened. “If he bites you—”

Shawn knew too well the deadly venom of the snake-man’s fangs. He pushed Lorna behind a pale tree-bole, braced himself, awaiting the onslaught.

The creature hesitated, eyeing him. Taking advantage of the respite, Shawn looked around for a weapon. A dozen feet away a curiously regular arrangement of leaves and branches on the ground drew his gaze. He made a quick spring, caught up a thick, heavy limb.

The ground crumbled beneath his feet. He threw himself back, realizing that he had almost fallen into a pit, dug, perhaps, by the snake-people to trap game. Shawn went down flat on his back, and saw the chieftain charging forward, fangs bared.

The Earthman still gripped the branch, and he swung it up—and felt his fingers sink into powdery pulp. The limb was a mere shell, rotten, useless. The dust sifted into his eyes, almost blinding him. Through a haze he saw the snake-man leaping at his throat.

Without conscious thought Shawn acted. He drew his legs up and back, kicked out with all his strength in a piston drive that smashed into the creature’s middle. The snake-man was hurled back, sent flying against the bole of a tree. But he was up again immediately.

So was Shawn. From the corner of his eye the Earthman caught sight of a gleaming, huge sphere dropping toward the clearing—the *Eagle*, summoned by the signal flames. He didn’t wait for the snake-man’s charge this time. Instead, he stepped forward, left shoulder lifted, right hand low.

As the creature came at him again Shawn swung a fast, hard punch that cracked against cold flesh with a gratifying sound. The snake-man wasn’t used to this sort of battling. He depended on his poison fangs—they failed him now.

For his neck was broken, snapped clearly under the force of Shawn’s mule-kick punch. He went back again to collapse in a writhing, kicking huddle on the ground, and this time he did not rise. Gradually his squirmings ceased.

Shawn looked for Lorna. She stood near by, a heavy rock in her hand, her nude body an ivory statue in the shadowless light.

Swiftly she ran to the man.

Her arms went about his neck. “Terry!” she whispered, her breath soft on his cheek. “I was afraid—”

She clung closer, her breasts flattened against his chest. Breathing hoarsely, Shawn held the girl, his mouth avid on hers. Beneath his hands he could feel the satiny smoothness of her skin, the lyric curve of her hips. His throat felt dust-filled; his heart was hammering against his ribs.

“Lorna—”

Shawn’s arms tightened spasmodically about her supple form. Between her open lips he could feel the moist, hot inferno of her breath. The girl’s hands strayed to Shawn’s hair, drawing him closer . . .

She drew back at last, smiling shakily. As Shawn moved forward Lorna stopped him with a gesture.

“The *Eagle*. It’s landed.”

The great, spaceship had grounded in the clearing, and running toward the two were Trost, Heffley, and Hooker Flynn, their faces unshaved and anxious.

“Terry!” Heffley hailed. “You okay? Lorna?”

“We’re safe,” Shawn shouted and moved forward, the girl at his side. Then he stopped, frozen. His hand went out in a quick gesture.

“*Look out!* Get back—”

---

From the cloudless purple sky raced a torpedo-shaped ship, Sun-golden, the atmosphere screaming in its wake. Scarcely slackening its speed, it dropped down toward the clearing. A few feet above the ground it jerked to a halt, dropped again with cushioned steadiness.

A porthole gaped in its side. From the golden ship poured—monsters! Things that bore no slightest resemblance to mankind—creatures whose appearance sent a shudder through Shawn.

The craft had grounded between the two and their friends, so Shawn could not see what was happening on the other side of the golden ship. He gripped Lorna’s arm, spun her around.

“We’re unarmed—we’ll have to hide. Heffley and the others may get back to the *Eagle*. Come on!”

They turned, sped back to the forest. Shawn was seeing in his mind’s eye the things that had emerged from the golden ship.

Mounds of flesh, shapeless, transparent, sliding like jellyfish over the ground. He knew that many of them were racing after him, and the thought made him increase his speed. So he did not see the pit till it was too late.

His foot went down into emptiness. Clutching at thin air, Shawn toppled forward, went hurtling down, hearing above him the girl’s scream. He struck with a sickening impact that knocked the breath from his body, and went spinning down into the deeper abyss of blind unconsciousness.

## CHAPTER IX

### STRANGE SUMMONS

A foul, acrid odor brought Shawn to full realization of his surroundings. How long he had been out he did not know, but as he stumbled erect, fighting a dull ache in his head, he realized that he had fallen into the trap the snake-men had dug. Around him were chunks of putrefying flesh, vaguely luminous in the gloom. Saturn had fallen beneath the horizon, Shawn guessed, and this part of Titan was veiled by night.

The sides of the pit were not steep, and he managed to scramble up them. Once he dislodged a stone and froze unmoving until the echoes of its fall had died away. No sound came from above.

At last he clambered over the edge. The forest was very dark, but a few feet away the clearing lay in dim starlit gloom. Two small moons high above gave some light, but not much. Some distance away a great black shadow told of the *Eagle's* whereabouts. The golden ship had gone.

Warily Shawn crossed the clearing till he stood beneath the spaceship. The rope ladder still dangled from the open port, and he climbed it slowly, alert for danger. But he entered the space lock and the control room safely.

There he paused, staring. Huddled in a shapeless mound in the center of the floor was a creature, five feet tall, that he recognized as one of the ameba-like beings from the golden ship. One of the Aliens who had destroyed Earth!

Hot flame of anger mounted within Shawn, sending blood pounding to his temples. He made an involuntary step forward, fists clenched—and the Alien awoke.

It rose up into a tall spire, half seen in the dim bulb that lighted the control room, and Shawn saw within it a blackish, spherical blob from which tendrils coiled out in slender spider-webs through all that boneless, monstrous body. In deadly silence the thing swept forward.

Shawn gripped the first weapon that came to his hand—one of the swords they had captured on Mars. He lifted it from a stack of paraphernalia that littered a desk beside him and swung it aloft.

The Alien did not pause. Tentacles oozed out from its body, stretching toward Shawn as it advanced. The Earthman, even as he slashed down with the blade, wondered whether the monster was vulnerable—whether steel could damage its inhuman flesh.

The sword sank deep! It sliced into rubbery, transparent stuff, and a sudden retractive movement of the Alien almost wrenched the weapon from Shawn's hand. He wrenched the blade free just as the creature closed with him, rushing up and enfolding him like quicksand—living quicksand.

It was like being engulfed in concrete. Shawn could scarcely move; he felt icy, dank skin against his face, and abruptly his breath was cut off. He could not breathe. Choking, staggering as he braced himself, legs wide apart, the Earthman wrenched free his sword-hand, sent the sharp blade tearing, rending, ripping at the flesh of the Alien.

The black blob seemed to explode like a bladder. Instantly the thing's grip relaxed; it fell away, dropped to the floor and huddled into a sphere. From the nucleus an inky cloud spread



swiftly, turning all that glistening transparent body jet-black. It lay motionless—conquered, dead.

---

Shawn let the sword fall, and dropped into a chair, breathing deeply. After a while he took a flask of brandy from a cupboard and gulped the hot, fiery liquor. Then, strengthened, he rolled the Alien—for the creature was too heavy to lift—through the space lock and porthole to drop to the ground.

He armed himself, and, sword in hand, searched the *Eagle*. It was empty, save for himself. Apparently the beings that had come in the golden ship had left only one of their number behind, perhaps to guard the *Eagle*, or to discover its mode of operation.

Where was Lorna and the others?

A heavy feeling of oppression settled down on him. He drank more brandy, shut the port hole and space lock, sat before the instrument board, pondering.

As he sat, an odd, inexplicable feeling began subtly to overwhelm him. He had been idly eyeing the bottle before him, and it seemed to be receding, sliding back. For a second Shawn had the fantastic impression that he stood outside his body, watching it impersonally. . . .

He fought it down. But when he tried to rise, his muscles refused to obey. The Earthman sat, paralyzed and silent, at the controls of the *Eagle*. . . .

Within his brain sounded a whisper. Thin, wordless, it came, very much like the telepathy of the Martians, Shawn thought. But the whisper evoked no images in his mind. Only it grew louder, peremptory—

Summoning!

Unmistakably—calling! Demanding. Demanding—what?

Shawn's hand moved. As though of its own volition, it went out to the instrument panel, touched a key. Yet Shawn knew that his own brain had willed it.

His brain, yes. But not his mind, not his—self! Something, strange beyond all imagination, seemed to dwell within the Earthman's brain, an alien tenant that moved Shawn's body at its own enigmatic will. Dimly Shawn was conscious that the *Eagle* was thundering up through Titan's atmosphere, plunging into the depths of space, while his own hands moved swiftly over the controls, guiding the spaceship to its unknown destination!

Very slowly Shawn slipped into unconsciousness. He did not awake till once more the peremptory, wordless whisper shuddered through him. Then his eyes sprang open.

He was still seated in the pilot's chair, and on the vision screen before him was an oddly smooth, regular expanse of dark plain. The curve of the horizon was plainly visible. The *Eagle* had landed on some small planet, an asteroid, perhaps.

How long the journey had taken he did not know. The Sun was a far, small disc, blindingly brilliant despite its distance. This little world had no atmosphere, he realized.

Once more the command came to his brain. Without volition Shawn rose, opened the outer space lock by manipulating a lever in the wall. After a moment he closed it.

Then he swung wide the inner door. On the floor of the lock lay a stone—a jewel, sapphire-red, large as his fist, blazing with angry fires. Shawn stepped forward, picked it up.

And instantly the strange power that had gripped his brain vanished. He stood wide-eyed with amazement, staring down at the jewel in his hand.

---

Thoughts poured in his mind. Intelligent thoughts, clear and lucid as crystal, understandable as a small, cold voice murmuring to him. He knew that the message came

from the gem he held.

“Man of Earth, we have a little time now. Yet I must explain to you something of what has happened, so that we may together go toward our goal. You can understand me plainly?”

The red flames swelled within the jewel. Shawn knew before he spoke that the being read his thought.

“Yes, I hear you. But I don’t understand—”

“Listen, then. We are on a small, airless world in the Asteroid Belt, between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. I am one of many like myself who dwell here. We are alive, as you are, but our life is not based on carbon, as is yours. Our bodies are silica—but we are intelligent, far more so than any other race in this System, the great serpents of Titan or the gaseous beings of Callisto. We dwell here, wanting nothing, spending our almost eternal lives in pure thought. We have no need to move about—we neither eat nor reproduce. We have evolved far beyond those things.”

Shawn said, “There are many like you here?”

“Very many. And when first these invaders—whom you call the Aliens—burst into this System with their golden fleet, we knew whence they had come, and why. You imagined they sprang from one of our own planets—Mars, or the moons of Saturn. No—they come from another Universe—another plane of space!”

Amazement widened Shawn’s eyes, but he said nothing as the thoughts of the living jewel raced on.

“You Earthmen have guessed that, there are many dimensions, many space-time continua, impinging on one another.

“A hundred Universes, occupying the same space, yet separated by a barrier—the structure of the atoms themselves, which are different in this continua than in any other. Each Universe has its own pattern, and until recently it has been impossible for the barrier between them to be broken.

“And the Aliens dwell in a dimension impinging on ours, but separated from it by this wall of atomic dissimilarity. Their Universe is old. One by one their stars have vanished, and their Galaxies have expanded into great clouds of radiation, as our own Galaxy is expanding. The Aliens are the last inhabitants of a dead, cold, almost lightless infinity.

“Facing destruction, they sought escape. This we know, for we can read thoughts over vast distances, and we have read the minds of the Aliens. They wished to reach our dimension. In order to do that, they found it necessary to break the barrier between the continua.”

The gem was a blinding dazzle in Shawn’s hand. Trying to comprehend the cosmic import of the being’s message, the Earthman whispered, “Go on—”

“A piece of iron may be drawn through a membrane by an electromagnet, thus tearing a hole in that membrane. You could not understand the mechanics of the Aliens’ experiment, but I can put it thus: the Earth was drawn through the space-time membrane, opening a gap in the barrier through which the Aliens came into this Universe.”

“This hole in space,” Shawn said. “Is it still there?”

“No; it closed. But it can be opened again. So I have brought you here with the power of my will. You must take me to the ruler of the Aliens, and I will be able—perhaps—to destroy them and bring Earth back.”

“Bring back the Earth!” Shawn’s voice was incredulous. “It wasn’t destroyed? Life on it —”

“The space-time laws of this alien Universe is different from ours. Earth is in a state of stasis, frozen, each atom and electron in it standing still. If the planet can be drawn back through the barrier, once more, life will resume again, just as before.”

---

Exultation flooded Shawn. He snapped, “Good! Let’s start! I’m ready now.”

“Let me rule your brain for a minute,” the message whispered. “I can set the course—”

Shawn flung open the barriers of his mind, felt the strange power of the living jewel creeping in. Briefly he was unconscious.

He awoke to find himself in the pilot’s seat, with the *Eagle* rushing again through space.

On the panel lay the gem, pulsing with red fire.

Its thought was distinct.

“Your companions—a girl and three men—were taken to the ship of the Aliens’ ruler, which hangs now near Earth’s former orbit. They had not known that space flight was possible in this System, and they wish to investigate—to discover if they are in any danger. When they find there is none, they will continue to destroy all life and vegetation on the planets, in readiness for colonization and expansion.”

The ship flashed on Sunwards. And carefully, unhurriedly, the living jewel explained to Shawn what he must do, if the Aliens were to be conquered and Earth brought back from the lightless, timeless void of another Universe.

## CHAPTER X

### THE LAST BATTLE

A golden spaceship hung motionless against the icy background of the stars, gigantic, terrifying in its huge immobility. The *Eagle*, driving toward it, seemed a midge hovering above a long cigar, so vast was the shining craft of the invader.

From the giant a ray shot out, lancing whitely toward the *Eagle*, catching it like the hand of a colossus. A ray of force, incredibly powerful, that drew the smaller ship toward the larger as though by a contracting elastic band. Shawn grunted, glanced at the automatics in his belt, and absently patted his breast pocket where the living jewel rested. He stood up, went to the space lock.

The stars about the *Eagle* were blotted out by golden walls that closed in relentlessly. Shawn waited till the ship was motionless, and then opened the ports, lowered the rope ladder. He was in a mighty domed chamber, quite empty save for a dozen of the monstrous Aliens who were advancing swiftly toward him.

Shawn went down the ladder, stood quietly, waiting. He could not help wincing as dank, icy tentacles gripped his arm, and fought down an impulse to draw his guns. He let the Aliens tug him forward.

From the life-jewel a message whispered. "Go with them. Make no resistance. . . ."

A door opened in the wall; Shawn was conducted through a vast room where Cyclopean machines hummed and throbbed. Into another room, a small one, they went, and the Earthman went to his knees as the floor drove up suddenly.

He was in an elevator.

The Aliens tugged him erect with cold pseudopods. He examined them closely, noticing that each transparent, shapeless body had within it the same dark nucleus, the same filmy tracery of webs.

The elevator paused; Shawn was dragged into another room—a laboratory, he realized. Huge, high-roofed, lit with amber brilliance, the light glistened on equipment whose purposes he could not guess. A deep, broad vat stood near by, steaming faintly, and heaped carelessly beside it were bodies.

Bodies of snake-men, of the Martians—and here, too, were Shawn's companions! For a dreadful second he thought they were dead, and then realized his fears were unfounded. Tightly bound, Trost and Flynn and Heffley lay quiet and motionless, though their eyes widened as they saw Shawn.

"Terry!" Heffley cried. "They've got you—"

"Pay no attention," came the thought command of the life-jewel. Shawn forced away his gaze, stared before him.

A Martian was bound tightly to a little table, and above his naked body hovered four of the Aliens. One of them, Shawn saw, was much larger than the others. The nucleus within his transparent body was huge.

"He is their ruler," whispered the gem.

Shawn turned sick as he saw what the Aliens were doing. Ignoring the screams of the Martian, they were probing the man's face and head with long needles, from the ends of which wires ran to an enigmatic machine a few feet away. Into the agonized wretch's eyes and mouth

and throat the steel points probed, and the needles alternately brightened and grew dull, while from the machine near by a low humming rose and sank.

“They seek to read his mind,” came the thought-message of the life-jewel. “Not as we do so, or as the Martians can. But with machines . . . first they torture their victim, so that he will be too far gone in pain to lie to them, even in his thoughts . . .”

---

The Martian’s shrieks had died to a wordless sobbing. The largest Alien plunged one of the needles directly into the top of the man’s head.

The machine burst forth into a throbbing roar. Almost immediately it faded and died, while the Martian went limp.

“They drained his brain of knowledge. The shock killed him . . .”

The Aliens went toward the machine, clustered about it. After a moment they returned, and their ruler turned to Shawn and his captors.

How the creatures communicated the Earthman never understood—by vibration, perhaps. That they could see, Shawn realized, yet they seemed to have no eyes or organs of vision. The ruler seemed to pause, to consider the new captive.

An Alien slithered up, freed the Martian’s body from the table, carried it to the vat and hurled it in. Almost immediately the corpse began to dissolve, while a rank, nauseating stench arose.

The Earthman tensed as he saw the new victim being bound in the Martian’s place.

Lorna!

She was unconscious, her white body stark naked, red hair tumbled in ringlets about her bare shoulders. The cords tightened cruelly about her rounded breasts, the soft curves of her thighs—and the ruler of the Aliens turned, went to her side, lifted one of the needles in a transparent tentacle.

Almost Shawn forgot the commands of the life-jewel, for he was sick and faint with the realization of what must come. The message lanced warningly through his brain.

“Wait! Not yet! It is not yet time!”

The pseudopods that gripped Shawn’s arms tightened. He stood silently, watching as the ruler brought a needle down until it pricked the rounded curve of Lorna’s bare breast—pressed it deep!

The girl awoke. She screamed, her eyelids fluttering open, and her form tensed vainly against the imprisoning cords. The Alien withdrew his needle, sank it again in the warm, tender flesh.

The gasping, low sob that came from Lorna’s lips drove all thought of caution from Shawn’s mind. With a snarling oath he wrenched one arm free, dived for his automatic. He fired it point-blank at the nucleus of the Alien beside him, swung the weapon toward the ruler.

The gun was torn from his hand. He was engulfed in icy, slimy flesh. A tide of horror was creeping up his body, three of the Aliens, gripping his legs and left arm in living steel, sliding up inexorably to overwhelm him.

He heard the thought of the life-jewel.

“Quick! This is your only chance! Do as I commanded—now!”

Shawn remembered. Sanity returned, and he clawed at his breast pocket, ripped it open. The gem seemed to leap into his hand.

“Now! Now!”

A writhing tentacle caught Shawn's arm; he tore it free. With a quick gesture he flung the jewel directly at the ruler of the Aliens—saw the stone drive through the transparent flesh directly into the nucleus of the being—disappear within it!

Shawn felt the cold grip that held him motionless relax. The Aliens fell away, huddled motionless on the floor. Their ruler still stood in a mound beside Lorna, frozen into immobility. Within him the nucleus brightened, was shot with rose-light of angry crimson.

The jewel's message came to Shawn. "Free your friends. Return to your ship. I will guide you. Quickly! My will is stronger than this being's, but I cannot maintain my supremacy too long."

---

The Aliens made no move as Shawn sprang forward, unbound Lorna, and with her aid freed Trost, Heffley, and Flynn from their bounds. They eyed Shawn uncomprehendingly.

"Terry," Trost gasped. "That red stone—what was it?"

"How did you—"

"No time for talk," Shawn snapped. "Come on!" He led them to the door. Whispering in his brain were the thoughts of the life-jewel, guiding him through the heart of the golden ship.

They passed many of the Aliens, but none moved to molest them. They were frozen into immobility. Shawn could scarcely comprehend the power of a will so vast that it could capture the minds of every Alien in this huge ship. He knew, somehow, that the life-jewel had accomplished that.

They reached the *Eagle* safely. As they locked the ports the brilliant ray blazed out around them, driving the craft into space with giddy impetus. Shawn set the controls before he turned to the others. Swiftly he explained something of what had happened.

"It's incredible!" Trost said, and Heffley seconded him. Hooker Flynn merely grunted, his jaw hanging.

"Not half as incredible as what's going to happen, if things come off as planned," Shawn said. He turned to Lorna, who had wrapped herself in an overcoat she had found in a locker. "How are you?"

"All right, I guess." But she was shivering with reaction. Shawn gave her some brandy and passed the bottle.

"I'm going to look over my motors," Trost said, taking from his pocket the horn-rimmed glasses, which had miraculously remained unbroken. "Come along, Hooker." The two departed, and Heffley rose to follow them.

"I'm going to catch a nap. I'm worn out. Call me when anything happens."

Shawn nodded, and the little man went out. "How about you, Lorna? Tired?"

But the girl was shaking violently. Swiftly Shawn went to her, drew her close, calming her hysteria. "It's okay now, kid," he said gently. "Buck up. It's all over."

"I—oh, Terry—" Lorna's arms went around Shawn's neck, and, seeing her lips so close, he did the logical thing. He kissed her.

"You know, I think I'm in love with you," Shawn said shakily.

The girl's eyes were very tender. The overcoat gaped open, revealing the curves of her tilted breasts, and Shawn felt their warmth cushion against his chest as he pulled Lorna close, seeking her lips.

An hour later a cry from Shawn brought the others racing into the control room, to follow his gesture toward the vision screen at their feet.

"The golden fleet," Heffley said. "It's coming back."

“At the command of their ruler,” Shawn told him. “Actually at the command of the life-jewel that rules his mind. I’ve learned that the Aliens worship their king as a god—they’ll obey him blindly, unquestioningly. If he commands them to restore the Earth—”

The golden fleet was a cloud in space, massed about the great ship of their leader. Abruptly from the craft a mighty blaze of light burst, a million rays pouring from the vast assemblage of the golden ships.

“Look!” Heffley’s voice was edged with amazement. “Good Lord—*look!*”

---

Something swam into view where the rays concentrated. A tiny point of light, growing larger and larger, seemingly rushing forward with incredible speed. It was large as a grape—a plum—

Two spheres, racing back from the alien dimension, drawn from another Universe by the power of the golden fleet!

Earth and Moon!

Washed in coldly green fires they came, till suddenly the emerald mists dissipated and were gone. The rays flicked out.

Once more Earth swung in its orbit, attended by its satellite!

Shawn’s knuckles were white. “No one killed—no life destroyed on the planet,” he whispered. “The life-jewel promised that—”

He stiffened. The golden fleet was moving. With the ship of the leader guiding them, they were flashing forward with steadily increasing speed.

Flashing—Sunward!

Racing into a molten holocaust that would destroy them before they had passed through the chromosphere, plunging headlong in suicidal flight!

“Why?” Trost asked softly. “Terry, why are they killing themselves.”

“They’re not,” Shawn said with a queer certainty. “They’re being killed. The life-jewel has captured the minds of every being in the golden fleet. It can’t keep them under control for long—but before its power weakens the ships will be within the Sun. They can go very fast, Pete.”

And Shawn was right. As the *Eagle* entered the atmosphere of Earth the destruction of the Aliens was seen on the telescopic vision screen. Trost and Heffley and Flynn watched it, seeing a little burst of fire lick up from the Sun as the golden fleet was ripped apart into atoms by the unthinkable solar storm.

But Shawn and Lorna were in another room, the girl busily scribbling a shorthand report.

“What an exclusive!” she told Shawn, who stood at her side, grinning. “The *Tribune* will have it in headlines a foot high!”

“If the editor believes it. Remember, he’ll have no consciousness of being thrown into another continuum. He was in a state of stasis, together with the rest of the world, all the time.”

“Well—” The girl’s face was puzzled.

“Why don’t you give up your job with the *Tribune!*” Shawn suggested. “Listen, Lorna—if the *Eagle*’s going to make any more trips, I’ll need a first mate.”

She didn’t answer. She couldn’t, with Shawn’s lips tight against her own.