



Giants on the Earth

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Sterner St. Paul Meek (April 8, 1894, Chicago, Illinois - June 10, 1972) was a US military chemist, early science fiction author, and children's author. He published much of his work first as Capt. S.P. Meek, then, briefly, as Major S.P. Meek and, after 1933, as Col. S. P. Meek. He also published one story as Sterner St. Paul.

Meek received his Associate degree from University of Chicago in 1914 and his Bachelor's degree in Metallurgical Engineering from University of Alabama in 1915. He continued his education at University of Wisconsin-Madison (1916) and MIT (1921-1923). He married in 1927 and had one son.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Meek joined the military as a chemist and ordnance expert. He served as Chief, Small Arms Ammunition Research, in 1923-1926, and Chief Publications Officer, Ordnance Dept., in 1941-1945. He retired a colonel in 1947, at which point he became a full time writer.

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Chapter 1

The Jovian Tyrant

Glavour, Jovian Viceroy of the Earth, looked arrogantly about as he lay at ease on the cushions of the ornate chariot which bore him through the streets of his capital city. Like all the Jovians, he was cast in a heroic mold compared to his Earth-born subjects. Even for a Jovian, Glavour was large. He measured a good eight feet from the soles of his huge splayed feet to the crown of his enormous head, crested with stiff black hair which even the best efforts of Tonsome, the court barber, failed to make lie in order. His keen black eyes glittered as they swept over the scene before him. Where only a few years before had been only tangled tropical jungle on the narrow neck of land separating the two great oceans, now rose row after row of stately buildings. Suddenly Glavour's attention was attracted by a girlish form in a passing chariot.

"Stop!" he cried.

Obedient to the driver's touch on a lever, the tiny radium motor of the chariot ceased to revolve and the equipage stopped its forward motion. Glavour turned to an equerry at his side.

"Havener," he exclaimed, "did you note that maiden who passed us?"

"I did, Your Excellency."

"Bring her before me."

The equerry sprang lightly to the ground and called out in a stentorian voice. At the sound every vehicle on the street ceased its movement until the will of the Viceroy, the ruler of the Sons of God, should be made known. In a few steps, his powerful Jovian muscles carrying his huge body forward at a rate impossible to persons born of Earthly parentage who had not inherited the power needed to overcome the enormous gravity of Jupiter, Havener reached the equipage containing the girl. He gave a curt order and the girl's driver turned his vehicle and brought it alongside the Viceroy's.

Glavour's eyes rested on the slim lithesome figure of the Earth-girl. She was just emerging from the grace of girlhood into the full dignity of young womanhood and the soft clinging garb she wore accentuated rather than concealed the curves of her body. As Glavour's gaze fell on her, she cast down her eyes and a flush crept slowly over her pretty face to the mass of coppery gold hair which crowned her head. An expression of brutal lust came into the Viceroy's eyes.

"Daughter of Man," he said slowly, "how are you named and what is your family?"

"My name is Lura, Your Excellency," she faltered, "and I am the daughter of Turgan, the Kildare of this province."

"You please me, girl," said the Viceroy. "Dismiss your chariot and join me in mine. There is room in my seraglio for you."

Lura stared with horror at the huge Jovian and shrank back from his sensual gaze. Glavour gazed at her in astonishment and a deep scowl spread over his face.

"The prospect does not seem to please you, Daughter of Man," he said slowly. "Perhaps the company of the Viceroy of Tubain, Ruler of the Universe, is too lowly to please you and you desire more exalted company. Be careful that I do not have you stripped and given to the palace guards for their sport. Join me in my chariot."

He half rose and leaned forward to clasp her. Lura gave a cry of horror and sprang from her chariot to the ground on the side farthest from the vehicle of the Viceroy. Glavour leaped to his feet with a roar of rage and lunged after her. Before he had left his chariot, the hand of his equerry fell restrainingly on his shoulder. The Viceroy turned a rage-maddened face toward his minion.

"Seize that maiden, Havenner!" he cried. "As I live, she shall be sacrificed at the next games."

The equerry made no move to obey his superior's orders and Glavour's face grew purple with rage.

"Obey my orders or you shall join her as a sacrifice!" he roared.

The equerry's face paled slightly and grew grim at the Viceroy's words but no trace of fear appeared on his heavy countenance.

"Save your breath, Glavour," he said shortly, but in so quiet a voice that no one but the Viceroy heard him. "You may be head of the Sons of

God on this planet but your power does not extend to life and death over me, who am of the same blood that you are. I have the right to appeal to Tubain from such a sentence. Before you strive to haul that girl away to your already crowded seraglio against her will, listen to me. Do you realize who she is?"

The Viceroy's face was a study. For a moment rage predominated and he raised a mighty fist to strike Havenner down, but the equerry looked him fearlessly in the eye. Slowly the hot rage faded and a deadly ferocity took its place.

"You try me far, Havenner," he said in a quiet voice, yet with a hint of steel in his tones, "yet your loyalty is above suspicion. Heard you not the girl say she was the daughter of the Kildare of this province?"

"I heard, Your Excellency," replied the equerry, "but beyond that, she is someone else. She is the affianced bride of Damis, the son of Hortan, who was Viceroy before you."

"A Neptholim!" exclaimed the Viceroy scornfully. "What matters that? Are the desires of a half-breed bastard to stand above the wishes of the ruler of the planet?"

"It is true that the mother of Damis was a Daughter of Man," said the equerry quietly, "yet Hortan married her in honor. Damis is a man of great influence and it would be well to reflect before you rob him of his chosen bride. There is wide discontent with our rule which needs only a leader to flare up. Remember that we are few and Jupiter is far away."

"Havenner, you talk like a frightened woman," sneered the Viceroy. "Let him join the ranks of the malcontents. For my part, I hope they revolt. They need to be taught a lesson. Stand aside while I seize the maiden."

The equerry stood aside with a shrug of his shoulders and the Viceroy sprang to the ground. The girl had run as rapidly as her clinging robes would allow toward one of the beautiful buildings which lined the thoroughfare. She had almost reached the doorway before Glavour reached the ground and raced after her. His Jovian muscles carried his body forward at a pace which no Terrestrial could equal. It was evident to the watchers that he would seize Lura before she could reach the sanctuary she sought.

A mingled chorus of cries of rage and hisses came from the Earthmen who witnessed the scene. The Jovian guards strove to suppress the

outcries until a word from Havenner made them cease their efforts and close in around the Viceregal chariot. The cries rose to a tumult but as yet none of the Earthmen dared to raise a hand against the person of the representative of Tubain, the far-off Jovian whom they had been forced to acknowledge as God, and whom many of the ignorant believed *was* God.

The Viceroy rapidly overtook his victim and his hand was outstretched to grasp her when there came an interruption. From the doorway which the girl had been striving to reach, a man burst forth and leaped between her and her pursuer. Glavour stopped and glowered at the new obstacle in the path of his sensuality.

The newcomer stood five inches over six feet in his flat sandals but it was only in his unusual height and his enormous strength that he showed the blood of his Jovian father. His feet were small and shapely with a high-arched instep and his whole form was graceful and symmetrical. Crisply curling yellow hair surmounted a head which Praxiteles would have reveled in as a model for his youthful Hermes. As he faced the Viceroy, his usual pleasant smile was gone and his face was set in grim lines, his clear blue eyes as cold as the ice brought from the polar regions to cool the Viceroy's drink.

The two stood and stared at one another, the black eyes of the Jovian burning like fire in strange contrast to the cold glare of the blue ones. Then tension in the street grew taut. The Earthmen gradually closed in about them. At a word from Havenner, the Jovian guards closed up and drew from their garments long black tubes. Presently Glavour broke the silence.

"Make way, son of Hortan, for the Viceroy of God," he rumbled in his deep-toned voice.

Damis made no reply, nor did he move a muscle. The rage deepened on the Viceroy's face and he strode forward, his hand raised to strike down this puny assailant who had interposed his slight form between the massive limbs of the Jovian and the object of his desires. With a cry of rage he brought down his huge hand and then Damis moved. So swiftly that the eye could hardly follow his movements, he leaped to one side and his own hand shot up. Fingers of steel circled the hairy wrist of the Viceroy and stopped his hand in mid-air. For a moment Glavour was too astonished at the idea of physical resistance to move. Damis, with an almost contemptuous air, tossed aside the hand he held and made as if to turn his back. With an inarticulate roar of rage, the Jovian charged.

Again Damis sprang to one side and his hand moved. In a long arc his clenched fist shot up and caught Glavour on the chin and rocked the four hundred pounds of bone and muscle that made up the Viceroy. For a moment Glavour staggered and then his hand fell on Damis' shoulder. Exerting all of his huge strength, he pulled his opponent toward him and threw his massive arms about him. Damis made no attempt to wriggle out of the bone-crushing grip, but, instead, threw his arms about the Jovian and matched muscle against muscle. The Jovian guards, who had witnessed the feats of strength which were the Viceroy's boast, expected only one outcome, but to Havenner, who recalled that Hortan, the father of Damis, had been one of the mightiest men of Jupiter, the issue was not a foregone conclusion. Stealthily as a cat he crept forward, a long black tube clenched in his hand.

Mightily the two strove. The face of the Jovian grew dark red and then almost purple as he put forth his last ounce of strength to crush the opponent whom he topped a good eighteen inches. For all of his effort, not an inch did Damis yield. His face grew as pale as the Jovian's grew red and his breath came whistling through his lips, but the strength he had inherited from his mighty sire stood him in good stead. Inch by inch he bent the huge form of his opponent backward. With a sudden effort, the Jovian raised one of his huge misshapen feet and strove to bring his mighty thighs to aid him in thrusting away his enemy. Damis' knee came up and the Jovian dropped his foot with a howl of pain. His breath came in gasps and he stared into the implacable blue eyes before him with a sudden spasm of fear. At last Glavour had met his match.

He opened his lips to call to his guards for help but shame held back the cry. Once he admitted defeat, the fear in which the Earthmen held him would be shaken. With an effort he bent forward his head and buried his huge fangs in Damis' shoulder. There was a cry from the watching Earthmen as they surged forward. The Jovian guards ran to their ruler's assistance but they were too far away. Havenner was close and he sprang forward, thrusting the black tube which he carried, toward Damis.

A cry advised Damis of his danger. With a herculean effort he lifted the huge Jovian from his feet and swung him around until the massive body was between him and the threatening weapon of the equerry. As swiftly as striking snakes his arms uncoiled from around Glavour's body and grasped him by the shoulders. With one mighty heave he tore the

Jovian's mouth from his shoulder although the flesh was torn and lacerated by the action. One arm went under Glavour's arm and back around until the hand rested on the back of his neck. The other arm caught the Viceroy's arm and twisted it behind his back. Glavour gave a cry of pain as the punishing hold was applied. Holding his captive before him, Damis turned to the equerry.

"Put up your tube," he said. "One hostile move and your ruler dies."

"Disintegrate him, Havenner!" gasped the Viceroy.

The equerry hesitated a moment but aid was at hand. The Jovian guards had come up to the scene of the struggle and surrounded the pair, black tubes in their hands. The sight of reinforcements roused the Viceroy's lagging courage.

"Capture him alive!" he gasped. "He will be sacrificed at the next games!"

With a roar the guards closed in on the struggling pair. As hairy hands grasped his shoulders, Damis lunged back with all his strength. There was the crack of a breaking bone and the Viceroy's arm hung dangling and useless. Damis whirled on the guards, shaking himself loose for a moment from their grasp, and his fists flew out. Two of the giants went down before well-aimed blows but no one man, no matter what his might, could fight against a score of the huge Jovians and Damis was borne to the ground. Even as he fell, a roar went up from the watching Terrestrials and with one accord they closed in to attack.

The Jovian guards who were nearest whirled about and raised the black tubes threateningly. For a moment the Earthmen hesitated and then came on with a rush. From the tubes came rays of intensely violet light. As they fell on the front ranks of the charging Terrestrials, the form, on which the rays impinged grew suddenly tenuous. The sunlight penetrated through the bodies for a moment and then there was nothing but a group of dancing motes of light to mark where they had stood.

Undaunted by the fate of their leaders, the balance of the mob surged forward uttering cries of hate and rage. From all the doorways, fresh hordes of Earthmen came rushing to join the fray. Again and again the terrible rays of the Jovian guards blasted scores of their assailants into nothingness but more came. Presently the tubes of the Jovians began to lose their power and the violet light became lighter in shade. With a roar

the Earthmen swept forward and the huge guards went down under the onrushing waves of humanity. Half a dozen of them were dragged down and hurled back into the milling crowd where they were torn limb from limb. The balance of the guards, guided by Havenner's stentorian shouts, closed in around Glavour and the prisoner and battered their way by sheer brute force toward the Viceregal chariot. They had reached in and climbed in when a feminine shout pierced the din of conflict.

"Damis! They have Damis prisoner! Rescue him!"

With a roar, the mob charged again. Mightily the Jovians strove but they were outnumbered by hundreds to one. One after another was torn from the chariot until Damis freed himself by a mighty effort and leaped to the ground. As he did so, the driver's hand found the controlling lever and the chariot shot forward, crushing under its wheels several luckless Earthmen who stood in its path. A roar of triumph rose from the crowd and Damis was hastily lifted to their shoulders. He looked down on his rescuers with an anguished face.

"Lura!" he gasped. "Is she safe?"

One of the Terrestrials shouted something unintelligible and pointed up. Damis' gaze followed the direction in which he pointed. From an upper window of the building into which she had fled, Lura's face, wreathed with smiles, looked down on him. He smiled and waved in triumph to her. There was a stir on the outskirts of the crowd and an elderly man, tall for an Earthman and with dignity and authority written large on his countenance, made his way through the crowd. At a word from him, Damis was lowered to his feet to face the newcomer.

"Damis," said the elderly man, "I never thought to grasp the hand of a Nepthalim or of anyone with Jovian blood in his veins in friendship, yet I can do no less than offer my hand. It is the thanks of a father to the saviour of his daughter."

Damis met the outstretched hand with a grip that made the elderly man wince.

"It is an honor and a pleasure to grasp in friendship the hand of Turgan, the Kildare of this province," he said, "the hand of one who was born to be ruler in fact, instead of an underling under a Jovian master."

"It is true that my father was king of this country before the Jovians came, forty years ago," said Turgan gravely, "yet now there is no honor or merit in it. Even the rank of Kildare, which is but that of a slave ruling

other more unfortunate slaves, could not have prevented my only daughter from being dragged away to the seraglio of that monster. To such a pass has one been brought whose birth made him the peer of any. But now we must plan and plan swiftly, else are we undone. Glavour will return with his minions. Safety will be found only in flight, for mere numbers cannot oppose the weapons they will turn against us. Damis, so far you have been one with our Jovian masters, as have all of the Nephthalim. Now it is war to the death between them and us. On which side do you stand?"

Damis hesitated as the Kildare's keen gray eyes bored into his own.

"My father was Viceroy of the Earth in the days gone by," he said slowly, "and he planned that I should take his place. His dream was a peaceful union of the strength and science of Jupiter with the beauty and humanity of the Earth. True to his dream, I have cleaved to his people and striven to bring it about, but I can see now the folly of his ambition. In stature and mental power he was a Jovian, in all else he was a Terrestrial. Since his death I have seen you stripped bit by bit of what he left you until now you are lower than the slaves on Jupiter, who can appeal to Tubain against a cruel master. Even I, a Nephthalim, the son of a Viceroy, am forced to revolt to save the maiden I love. Henceforth, I give up my father's dream of peace and do what my heart tells me is right. It is war to the death between the Sons of God and the Sons of Man, and I, who am descended from a Son of God and a Daughter of Man, cleave to my mother's people."

A shout of joy came from all who heard his ringing voice announce his new allegiance. Damis had ever a reputation as a humane man and he was guilty of none of the brutalities which made the Jovians so detested and which were bettered by those of the Nephthalim who had the power. It was only the influence which Damis had wielded with the Earthmen which had prevented many an outbreak which would have been ruthlessly crushed by the Jovian overlords. To know that the son of a Viceroy, reputed one of the most brilliant as well as one of the strongest of Jovian blood, was one with them, made them hope that they might make some headway against their oppressors and wring from them some small measure of liberty. Turgan's face was wreathed with smiles.

"Again I offer you my hand, Damis," he said. "Before it was as a father thanking you for the rescue of his daughter. Now it is a father welcoming the son he has always longed for and whom he feared he would

never have. My consent to your union with Lura which was grudgingly given only to save her from the dishonor of being dragged a slave to Glavour's seraglio, is withdrawn, and in its place I give you a happy father's joyous consent to the marriage."

There were tears in the old Kildare's eyes as he grasped the hand of the young blond giant. For a moment they stood with clasped hands, two strong men taking the measure of one another and each found the other good. The Kildare dropped Damis' hand and turned to the crowd.

"To your homes!" he cried sharply. "The Sons of God will return with new weapons and it is my wish that none be found to oppose them. All within sound of my voice who are members of the inner council will join me in the palace. Damis, come with me."

Followed by Damis and a score of Earthmen, the Kildare led the way into a building. As they entered, Damis cast a swift glance around and looked questioningly at Turgan.

"Lura—?" he asked hesitantly.

"Will join us in the council room," said Turgan with a smile.

Chapter 2

Turgan's Plan

Content with the Kildare's answer, Damis followed him down a corridor and into a large room set around with benches. The Kildare did not pause but moved to the far end of the room and manipulated a hidden switch. A portion of the paneled wall swung inward and through the doorway thus opened, Turgan led the way. The corridor in which they found themselves was dimly lighted by radium bulbs which Damis shrewdly suspected had been stolen from the palace of the Viceroy by Earthmen employed there. It sloped steeply downward and Damis estimated that they were fifty feet below the level of the ground before another door opened to Turgan's manipulation of hidden catches and admitted them to a large room equipped with tables and chairs and well lighted by other radium bulbs. Damis turned to the Kildare.

"For years there have been rumors among the Sons of God of the existence of this place," he exclaimed, "yet every effort to find it has been futile. Glavour and his council have at last decided that it is merely a myth and that the underground council chamber does not exist. You have kept your secret well, for never has a breath of suspicion reached him that Turgan was one of the conspirators who plotted to overthrow the reign of the Sons of God."

"Let that, Damis, be a sample of the earnestness and loyalty of your new brethren," said the Kildare. "There are hundreds of Earthmen who know where this place is and what secrets it holds, yet none has ever betrayed it. Scores have gone to torture and to the sacrifice of the games without unsealing their lips. Would a Jovian have done likewise?"

"To give them due credit, I think they would have," replied Damis thoughtfully, "yet their motive would not have been loyalty, but stubbornness and a refusal to subordinate their will to another's. I thought you said that Lura would join us here?"

As Damis spoke a door on the far side of the chamber opened and a half dozen women entered. Lura was among them and with a cry of joy, she ran lightly forward and threw herself into Damis' outstretched arms. Turgan smiled paternally at them for a moment and then touched his daughter lightly on the shoulder.

"I have freely and gladly given my blessing to your union with Damis," he said. "He is now one with us. His presence makes victory possible and enables us to act at once instead of planning for years. Damis, you can operate a space flyer, can you not?"

"Certainly. That is knowledge which all Nephthalim possess."

A suppressed cheer greeted his words and the Earthmen crowded around him, vibrant with excitement.

"The time is at hand!" cried a stern-faced man in the crimson robe which marked him an Akildare, an under-officer of the Earthmen.

"Before I can operate a space flyer, I will have to have one to operate," objected Damis.

"That will be supplied," cried a dozen voices. Turgan's voice rose above the hubbub of sound.

"Let us proceed in orderly fashion," he cried.

The noise died down to silence and at a gesture from their ruler, the Earthmen took seats. Turgan stood beside Damis.

"For the enlightenment of our new-found brother, I will recite what has happened and what we have done, although most of you know it and many of you have done your part in bringing it about.

"Forty years ago, the Earth was prosperous, peopled with free men, and happy. While we knew little of science and lived in mere huts, yet we worshipped beauty and Him who ruled all and loved his children. It was to such a world that the Jovians came.

"When the first space flyer with a load of these inhuman monsters arrived on the earth, we foolishly took them for the angels whom we had been taught to believe spent eternity in glorifying Him. We welcomed them with our best and humbly obeyed when they spoke. This illusion was fostered by the name the Jovians gave themselves, the 'Sons of God.' Hortan, their leader and the father of our new brother, was a just and kindly man and he ruled the earth wisely and well. We learned from them and they learned from us. That was the golden age. And the Sons

of God saw that the Daughters of Man were fair, and they took of them wives, such as they chose. And sons were born to them, the Nephthalim, the mighty men of the Earth.

"In time other flyers came from the heavens above and brought more of the Sons of God to rule over us. Then Hortan, the Viceroy, died, and Damis, know you how he died? You were a babe at the time and you know nothing. Your father and your mother, who was my distant kinswoman, died under the knives of assassins. It was given out that they had gone to Jupiter, yet there were some who knew the truth. You, the killers sought, but one of the Earthmen whose heart bled for your dead mother, spirited you away. When you had grown to boyhood, he announced your name and lineage, although his life paid for his indiscretion. The same hand which struck down your father and your mother struck at him and struck not unavailingly. You, since all knew your name and lineage, he dared not strike, lest those who love him not, would appeal to Tubain. Know you the name of the monster, the traitor to his ruler and the murderer of your parents?"

Damis' face had paled during the recital and when the old Kildare turned to him, he silently shook his head.

"It was the monster who now rules over us as Viceroy and who profanes the name of God by conferring it on his master and who would, if he dared, assume the name for himself. It was Glavour, Viceroy of the Earth."

The blood surged back into Damis' face and he raised a hand in a dramatic gesture.

"Now I vow that I will never rest until he lies low in death and this be the hand that brings him there!"

A murmur of applause greeted Damis' announcement and Turgan went on with his tale.

"With the kind and just Hortan dead, Glavour assumed the throne of power, for none dared oppose him. Once secure, he gave way to every brutal lust and vice. Your mother was Hortan's only wife and he honored her as such, and meant that the Nephthalim should in time rule the Earth, but Glavour had no such ideas. To him, the Daughters of Man were playthings to satisfy his brutal lusts. By dozens and by scores he swept the fairest of them into his seraglio, heeding not the bonds of

matrimony nor the wishes of his victims. Only the fact that my daughter has been kept from his sight until to-day has spared her.

"The Earthmen who had been content to live under Hortan's rule, rebelled against Glavour but the rebellion was crushed in blood. Time and again they rose, but each time the mighty weapons of the Jovians stamped out resistance. At last we realized that craft and not force must win the battle. This chamber had been built when Hortan erected his new capital and none of the Jovians knew of its location, so it was chosen as our meeting place. To-day, Damis, I have twenty thousand men sworn to do my bidding and to rise when I give the word. Many thousands more will rise when they see others in arms and know that again the Sons of Man stand in arms against the Sons of God."

"There are less than a thousand Jovians and perhaps twice that number of Neptholim on the Earth, yet that handful would stand victorious against all the Earthmen living," said Damis thoughtfully. "Even I, and I am a Neptholim, do not know the secret weapons in the arsenal of Glavour, but I know that they are more powerful than anything we have ever seen. Forget not, too, that a radio message to Jupiter will bring down ships with hundreds, nay, thousands, of her fighting men with weapons to overwhelm all opposition."

"Such was the case but it is so no longer since we number you among us," replied the Kildare. "Earthmen are employed in the communications net which the Jovians have thrown around the Earth and it is but a step from those machines to the huge one with which they talk to their mother planet. My spies have been busy for years and our plans are all laid. There is one planet which all the forces of Jupiter have never been able to conquer; from which their ships have ever retreated in defeat."

"Mars!" exclaimed Damis.

"Exactly," replied Turgan. "The Martians are a peaceful and justice-loving people, yet they know that peace is given only to those who are ready and able to fight for it. Ages ago they perfected weapons before which the Jovians fly, if they are not destroyed. I have communicated with the Grand Mognac of Mars and laid our plight before him. He has pledged his aid and has promised us enough of his weapons to not only destroy the Jovians and the Neptholim on the Earth, but also to prevent other Jovian ships from ever landing. The only problem has been how to get them here. The Martians, not desiring conquest and content with their own planet, have never perfected space flyers. They have promised

us the weapons, but we must go to Mars and bring them here. Enough can be transported on one of the Jovian ships."

"How will we get a ship?" asked Damis.

"That also has been solved. There are two Jovian ships kept on the Earth, ready for instant flight to Jupiter. They are loosely guarded for the Sons of God believe that we have no idea of how to operate them. We can capture one of them whenever we desire, but so far such action would have been useless. Little by little we have gathered bits of information about the flyers, but we had expected to wait for years before our venture would have a chance of success. We dared not try prematurely, for one attempt will be all that we will ever get. Now we are ready to strike. You can fly the ship to Mars and back and with the Martian weapons, we can sweep the Jovians from the Earth."

Damis' eyes lighted as Turgan spoke.

"Your plans are good," he cried, "and I will fly the ship for you. In return I ask but one thing: let mine be the hand which strikes Glavour down."

"If it can be so done, yours shall be the hand, oh Nepthalim!" cried the Akildare who had first spoken of the ship. Turgan bowed his head and a murmur of assent came from the assembled council.

"And now for action!" cried Turgan. "There is no need to talk longer. Years ago our plans were perfected for the capture of the space ship and each knows the part assigned to him. Toness, the Akildare, will rule during my absence, for I will command the ship, under Damis. Twelve of our men who know all that we have been able to learn will make up the crew. None of them will take any part in the capture of the ship for many lives may be lost in that venture and we will need the instructed men to operate the ship after we capture it. Damis, have you any addition to make to our plans?"

"Only one, Turgan. Glavour will ransack the Earth rather than be cheated of one he has marked for his prey. Lura will be safe nowhere on Earth. Her capture by the Sons of God will discourage the timid who will say that if Turgan cannot protect his own daughter, how can he free the Earth? She must go with us."

"Your point is well taken, Damis," replied the Kildare. "She shall go. Now to action! Monail, are your men ready?"

"They will assemble at my signal, oh, Kildare."

"Give the signal, for nothing will be gained by delay. We will follow behind while you capture the ship."

Monaill bowed before the Kildare and hastened from the council room. In a few words Turgan gave to Toness the final orders for the conduct of the conspiracy during his absence. Followed by Lura, Damis and three of the council, he made his way to a hidden doorway. Along an underground passage they made their way for a quarter of a mile. A group of figures was seen dimly ahead of them and nine men joined the party. Turgan identified them to Damis as the balance of the crew.

"Has Monaill passed this way?" he asked.

"He passed with his band a few moments ago, oh, Kildare," replied one of the men. "See, there is the light which summons us to follow."

He pointed to a tiny light which had suddenly flashed into brilliance. Turgan nodded and led the way forward. At another doorway which opened to Turgan's touch on a hidden lever, the party paused. An instant later there came from a few hundred yards ahead of them a hoarse cry of alarm followed by the roar of a huge whistle.

"The battle has joined!" cried Turgan. The others crouched, tense and motionless. From ahead came the sound of battle. Violet light showed in short intense flashes. It was evident that the Jovian guard of the space ship was fighting valiantly to protect it. Shaking aside Turgan's restraining hand, Damis crept slowly forward.

Two hundred yards from the spot where he left Turgan he came to a bend in the passage. The sound of battle came from just ahead. He crept forward and peered around the corner. The passage emerged from the ground and gave way to a huge open space which he recognized as part of the grounds of the Viceregal palace. Standing on a launching platform was a Jovian space ship around which a battle raged.

Five of the huge Jovians were battling furiously with a score of Earthmen. Three dead Jovians and a dozen crushed forms of Terrestrials testified to the bitterness of the fight. The terrible black tubes of the Jovians were exhausted and the battle was now being waged hand to hand, Jovian ax against Earthly sword. The Terrestrials were being gradually pressed back.

A shout came from the distance and Damis could see a dozen Jovian guards hastening toward the scene of the fight, brandishing in their hands the terrible black tubes. He turned back and shouted to Turgan.

"Hasten!" he cried. "In a moment, Monaill and his men will be overthrown!"

With a shout the crouching group of Terrestrials rushed toward him, but Damis did not wait. The oncoming Jovians were several hundred yards away when he threw himself into the fray. At his appearance, a cry of dismay went up from the Earthmen which was changed to one of mingled wonder and triumph as Damis seized the nearest Jovian and bore the fellow down despite his struggles. It was a matter of seconds for him to break the bull neck of the huge guard and he turned to grasp another. The four remaining Jovians backed away but Damis was not to be denied. He rushed in and grasped another about the waist, avoiding the swing of the forty-pound ax, and dragged him back. The swords of the Terrestrials pierced the struggling guard from the rear and Damis rushed toward the three survivors.

Heartened by his aid, the remnants of Monaill's band charged with him. Two of the Jovians fell before the swords of the Earthmen and the third went down before a blow of Damis' fist. As he turned back to the ship, Turgan, followed by the crew of the ship, dashed up.

"Into the ship!" cried Damis. A glance showed that the Jovian guards were less than two hundred yards away and were coming on in huge leaps. The door of the space ship was open and the band of Terrestrials clambered in.

"Quick, Damis!" came Lura's voice.

The Nepthalim turned to enter but his gaze fell on the six survivors of Monaill's band.

"In with you!" he cried sharply.

The Terrestrials hesitated but Damis grasped the nearest of them by the belt and threw him bodily into the ship. The others hesitated no longer but clambered in. The Jovians were less than fifty yards away and already deep violet flashes began to come from the tubes they carried. Damis stooped and grasped one of the dead Jovians. With an effort possible to only two men on Earth, himself and Glavour, he raised the body above his head and hurled it straight at the oncoming Jovians. His aim was true and three of them were swept from their feet. With a mighty

bound, Damis sprang through the door of the space ship and the airlock clanged shut behind him.

The crew of the ship were already in place, awaiting orders. There was no time for instruction and Damis leaped to the control board. He pulled a lever far down and in an instant the entire crew was flat on the floor as though an enormous weight had pressed them down. With a superhuman effort, Damis raised himself enough to cut off the power. The ship shot on through the rapidly thinning air, its sides glowing a dull red. The heat inside the ship was almost intolerable.

As the pressure of the enormous acceleration ceased, the bruised Terrestrials struggled to their feet. Damis turned to another lever and a breath of icy air swept through the ship.

"This will help for an instant," he gasped, "and the cold of space will soon cool us down. I had to give the ship a tremendous start or the tubes of the Sons of God would have reduced us to elemental atoms. Keep away from the walls and don't exert yourselves. I can handle the ship alone for the present."

For half an hour the ship charged on through space. Damis presently pulled the control lever down and placed the ship under power. The walls changed from dull red to black and the temperature in the ship grew noticeably lower. Damis made his way to one of the walls and tested it with a moistened finger.

"It's cool enough to touch," he announced. "Fortunately the insulating vacuum between the inner and the outer skins was at its maximum, otherwise we would have been roasted alive. The external wall was almost at the fusing point. We can move around now."

He posted lookouts at the observing instruments with which the ship was equipped and instructed them in their duties and the manipulation of the instruments. He placed one man at the control lever of the stern rocket-motors. As he turned away from the control board he saw Lura standing quietly in a corner. He opened his arms and she ran to them with a cry of joy.

"Oh, Damis, I was so afraid for you," she gasped, "and I wanted to hug you when you jumped in and Father closed the lock behind you but I knew that you had to take care of the ship. Were you hurt at all?"

"Not a bit, darling," he assured her, "but it was touch and go for a moment. I didn't know whether the guards would dare to disintegrate the

ship without orders from Glavour. In any event, the blasts of the stern motors must have hurled them half a mile. No strength could stand the blast of gas to which they were subjected. Are you all right?"

"Perfectly," she replied; "I never was in any danger. I was the first one in the ship and the only chance I had to be hurt was to have you overcome and the ship recaptured. In that case, I had this."

She displayed a small dagger which she drew from the bosom of her robe. Damis shuddered and took the weapon from her.

"Poisoned," he exclaimed as he glanced at its tip. "You had better let me take care of it. You might fall and prick yourself with it."

She surrendered the weapon to him with a smile and Damis placed it in a cabinet built against the wall of the flyer.

"Now go in and lie down," he told her. "I've got to start plotting a course to Mars and teaching my crew how to operate the ship."

"Can't I learn, too?" she objected. "If anything should happen, it might be quite a useful bit of knowledge. Besides, I already understand celestial geography quite well and I may be able to help in the navigation."

Damis looked at her in surprise.

"You a celestial geographer?" he asked in astonishment. "Where did you learn it?"

"From my father. He was a famous heaven-master before the Jovians came and he taught me."

"That's excellent!" cried Damis. "I didn't realize we had so much knowledge at our command. Turgan, will you take charge of the navigating after I plot a course? Lura can assist you. Now, the rest of you attend to my words and I'll teach you how to operate the rocket motors."

The Jovian ship was built along very simple lines. Batteries of rocket motors at the bow and stern and on each of the sides furnished both motive and steering power. The Terrestrials were all chosen men and in three hours Damis announced himself as satisfied with their ability to operate the ship under any normal conditions. With Turgan and Lura watching and checking his calculations, he plotted a course which would intercept Mars on its orbit.

"Luckily, Mars is approaching us now," he said, "and we won't have a stern chase, which is always a long one. We will be able to reach Mars, spend several days on it and return to Earth before ships can reach the

Earth from Jupiter, even if they are already on the way, which is highly probable. I'll turn the ship a little."

Under his direction, the crew turned the ship in its course until it was headed for the point in space where Damis planned to intercept the red planet. With the course set to his satisfaction, he gave orders for the stern motors to be operated at such a power as to give the highest acceleration consistent with comfort for the crew. There were no windows in the ship but two observers seated at instruments kept the entire heavens under constant observation. Damis motioned one of them to stand aside and told Lura to take his place. She sat down before a box in which were set two lenses, eye-distance apart. She looked through the lenses and gave a cry of astonishment. Before her appeared the heavens in miniature with the entire galaxy of stars displayed to her gaze. In the center of the screen was a large disk thickly marked with pocks.

"The moon," explained Damis. "We are headed directly toward it now but we'll shift and go around it. We'll pass only a few hundred miles from its surface, but unfortunately it will be between us and the sun and you'll be able to see nothing. Look in the other observer."

Lura turned to the second instrument. A large part of the hemisphere was blotted out by the Earth which was still only a few thousand miles away. The sun showed to one side of the Earth, but a movable disk was arranged in the instrument by means of which it could be shut off from the gaze of the observer. Despite the presence of the sun, the stars shone brilliantly in the intense black of space.

"How fast are we traveling?" asked Lura.

"It is impossible to tell exactly," he replied. "I can approximate our speed by a study of the power consumed in our stern motors and again I can approximate it by a series of celestial observations, provided we do not have to change our course while I am doing so."

"Isn't there some sort of an instrument which will tell you how fast we are going?" she asked in astonishment.

"Unfortunately not. We are traveling through no medium which is dense enough to register on an instrument. Our course is not straight, but is necessarily an erratic one as we are subject to the gravimetric pull of all of the celestial bodies. Just now the Earth supplies most of the pull on us but as soon as we approach the moon, we will tend to fall on it and frequent sideblasts will be needed to keep us away from it. Once we get

up some speed that is comparable with light, we can measure by direct comparison, but our speed is too low for that now."

"I saw you lay out your course, but how are we steering?"

"The observer who works on the front instrument keeps a cross hair on a fixed star. When the curving of the ship deviates us more than five degrees from our course, a side motor is turned on until we straighten out again. It is quite a simple matter and I'll take the ship myself when we near Mars. There is no need to be frightened."

"I'm not frightened," said Lura quickly; "I was just curious. Is there any danger of hitting a wandering body?"

"Not much in this zone and at this speed. When our speed picks up there will be a slight danger because the higher our rate of speed, the more crowded space becomes. If we were going to Jupiter we would have to use much more caution. The asteroid belt lying between Mars and Jupiter is really crowded with small bodies but comparatively few are in the zone between Earth and Mars. That is one thing I figured on when I said that we would have plenty of time to go to Mars and back before ships could come from Jupiter. Ships from Jupiter would be able to develop a much higher speed than we will attain were it not for the asteroid belt. They will have to travel quite slowly through it, in portions, not over a few thousand miles per minute, while we are not held down that way. Now that we are really started, it will be best to set regular watches. I will assign you as navigator for one watch if you wish."

"I certainly do want to do my share."

"All right, we'll let it go that way. Turgan and I will take the other two watches until we get there."

"How soon will that be?"

"About seventeen days. Mars happens to be only about forty million miles away just now. Now I'll set the watches and divide the crew."

A short examination showed Damis that his crew were intelligent and that his instruction had been good. Every member knew his duties. Instead of the two twelve-hour watches which were usual on space flyers, the additional members of the crew who had been part of Monail's band enabled Damis to set only eight-hour shifts. Each member of the crew was taught to operate the offensive ray projectors with which the flyer was equipped.

Things soon settled down to routine. No wandering celestial bodies came close enough to cause them any real alarm. Once the novelty of hurtling through space had passed away, the trip became monotonous. The Earth, which had at first filled the field of one of the observers, dwindled until it became merely a brilliant green star. The red speck which was Mars grew constantly more prominent as the hours went by and Damis gave the word to turn on the bow motors and retard the speed of the flyer. Several of the crew had worked in the communications net which Glavour had thrown around the Earth and under orders from Turgan, they began to call the red planet on the ship's communicator.

"It is well to let them know who we are," he said to Damis when he gave the order. "We are flying a Jovian ship and since we have come so far successfully, I have no desire to be blasted out of space by their powerful weapons of defense."

Damis agreed heartily, and for twelve hours continual attempts were made to communicate with their destination. At last their signals were answered. Despite the differences in language, they had no trouble in understanding the messages. A system of communication based not on words or sound forms, but on thought forms, had been introduced to the Earth by the Jovians and both Damis and Turgan were quite familiar with it. The Martians informed them that the approaching ship had been sighted and carefully watched for several days. As soon as he learned who the occupants were, the Grand Mognac of Mars sent a message of welcome and instructed them on what part of the planet to land. He promised that a deputation would meet them with transportation to his capital city where he would welcome them in person and supply them with the weapons they sought.

Chapter 3

The Doom on Mars

Two days later Damis dropped the ship gently to the ground in a wide and deep depression which had been designated as their landing place. The Grand Mognac had assured them that the depression held enough atmosphere to enable them to breathe with comfort. There was no one in sight when they landed and after a short consultation, Damis and Turgan entered the airlock. In a few moments they stood on the surface of Mars.

They had landed in a desert without even a trace of the most rudimentary vegetation. Barren slate-colored mountains shut off their view at a distance of a few miles. When they strove to move they found that the conditions which had confronted the Jovians in their first landing on the Earth were duplicated. The lesser gravity of the smaller planet made their strength too great for easy control and the slightest effort sent them yards into the air. This condition had been anticipated and at a word from Damis, lead weights, made to clamp on the soles of their sandals were passed out from the space ship. Although this enabled them to keep their footing when moving over the dry surface of Mars, the slightest exertion in the thin air caused them acute distress.

"We had better save our strength until the messengers of the Grand Mognac arrive," said Damis at length. "We may have quite a trip before us."

Turgan agreed and they sat down by the side of the ship where its shadow would shield them from the fierce solar rays which beat down on them. The sun looked curiously small, yet its rays penetrated the thin air with a heat and fierceness strange to them. Lura and a half dozen of the crew were passed through the airlock and joined them.

"I am surprised that the Martians have not arrived," said Damis presently. "I am interested to see what their appearance is."

Hardly had he spoken than the air before them seemed to thicken in a curious fashion. Lura gave a cry of alarm and pressed close to Damis. The sun's rays penetrated with difficulty through a patch of air directly before them. Gradually the mistiness began to assume a nebulous uncertain outline and separated itself into four distinct patches. The thickening air took on a silvery metallic gleam and four metallic cylinders made their appearance. Two of them were about eight feet in height and three feet in diameter. The other two were fully thirty feet in length and about the same diameter. On the top of each one was a projecting cap shaped like a mushroom and from it long tenuous streamers of metal ran the full length of each cylinder. From the ether came a thought wave which registered on the brains of all the Terrestrials.

"The Grand Mognac of Mars sends his greeting and a welcome to the visitors from Earth," the message ran. "Before his envoys make their appearance before you, we wish to warn you to be prepared for a severe shock for their physical appearance is not that of the life with which you are familiar. I would suggest that you turn your heads while we emerge from our transporters."

Obediently the Earthmen turned their gaze toward their ship until another thought wave ordered them to turn. Lura gave a cry of horror and Damis instinctively raised one of the Jovian ray tubes. Before them were huge figures which seemed to have stepped out of a nightmare, so grotesque were their forms.

The Martians had long slug-like bodies, twenty-five feet in length, from which projected a multiplicity of short legs. The legs on the rear portions of the bodies terminated in sucker-like disks on which they stood on the surface of the planet. The upper part of the body was raised from the ground and the legs terminated in forked appendages like hands. Stiff, coarse hair, brown in color, protruded from between brilliant green scales, edged with crimson. The heads were huge and misshapen and consisted mostly of eyes with a multitude of facets and huge jaws which worked incessantly as though the slugs were continually chewing on something. Nothing that the Earth could show resembled those monstrosities, although it flashed across Damis' mind that a hugely enlarged caricature of an intelligent caterpillar would bear some resemblance to the Martians. Another thought wave impinged on the consciousness of the Terrestrials.

"Mars is much older than your planet and evolution has gone much farther here than it has on the Earth. At one time there were forms of life similar to yours which ruled this planet, but as air and water became scarce, these forms gave way to others which were better suited to conditions as they existed. I would be pleased to explain further, but the Grand Mognac anxiously awaits his guests. His orders are that two of you shall visit him in his city. The two whom he desires to come are Turgan, the leader of the expedition and Damis, the Neptholim. Fear nothing, you are among friends."

Damis hesitated and cast a glance at Lura.

"By all means, Damis, do as the Grand Mognac bids you," she exclaimed. "I will stay here with the ship until you return. I am not at all frightened, for the whole crew will be here with me."

Damis kissed her and after a word with Turgan, he announced their readiness to proceed. He inquired the direction in which they should travel, but another thought wave interrupted him.

"We have brought transportation for you," it said. "Each of you will enter one of the smaller transporters which were especially prepared for your use. When you enter them, seal them tightly and place your feet in the stirrups you will find in them. Grasp the handles which will be before you firmly in your hands. In an instant you will be dissolved into elemental atoms and carried on a beam of force to the receiving focus where you will again be materialized. There is no danger and no pain. It is our usual means of transportation."

With a final word of farewell to Lura and the crew, Turgan and Damis unfastened and entered the two smaller cylinders. Before the astonished eyes of the Terrestrials the cylinders grew thin and vanished like a puff of smoke dissipating in a wind. Lura turned to Kastner whom Turgan had left in command.

"What were my father's orders?" she asked.

"Merely that we wait here until his return," he replied. "Since we are among friends, there is no need to keep the ray projectors manned and I am anxious to let all of the crew have the experience of setting foot on a new planet."

"I am a little tired," said Lura. "I will return to the ship and rest while you let the crew try their footing on Mars."

She entered the airlock and in a few moments was again inside the ship. At a word from Kastner the balance of the crew passed through the lock and began to amuse themselves by trying to keep their footing on the surface of Mars.

Damis and Turgan, having entered the transporters, slipped their feet in place as the Martians had directed. They grasped firmly the handles which projected from the inside of the cylinders. There was a momentary sensation of slight nausea and then a thought wave reached them.

"You have arrived. Unfasten your cylinders and emerge."

They stepped out of the transporters and rubbed their eyes in astonishment. Two of the huge slugs had been amazing, but the effect of half a hundred grouped about them was more than the mind could, for a moment, grasp. They were in a huge room composed apparently of the same silvery material of which the transporters were made. It rose above them in a huge dome with no signs of windows or openings. It was lighted by a soft glow which seemed to emanate from the material of the dome itself, for it cast no shadows. On a raised platform before them rested one of the huge slugs, a broad band of silvery metal set with flashing coruscating jewels clasped about its body. From the ornament and the exalted position, they judged that they were before the Grand Mognac of Mars. With a muttered word to Turgan to follow him, Damis advanced to the foot of the platform and bowed deeply.

"I thank you for that mark of respect, Neptholim," came a thought wave from the Grand Mognac, "but such forms are obsolete on Mars. Here all living intelligences are equal. Only the accident of superior mental power is allowed to differentiate between us and this added power brings only added and more arduous duties. You came here to get weapons which will free you from the dominance of the Jovians who rule you, did you not?"

"We did, oh Grand Mognac," replied Damis.

"Your prayers shall be answered if you are found worthy. Relate to me now all that has passed since the Jovians first landed on your planet. If you can form thoughts without speaking, you may save the effort of speech. The air has become so thin on Mars that sound will not carry over large portions of it. As a result, we have no organs of hearing, for they have been atrophied from ages of disuse. We use thought as our only means of communication."

Rapidly, Damis marshaled his thoughts in order. Slowly and carefully he pictured in his mind the landing of the Jovians as he had heard it described and then the event leading up to their trip. The Grand Mognac frequently interrupted him and caused him to amplify in detail some of the mental pictures and at times turned to Turgan and requested him to picture the same events. When Damis had finished the Grand Mognac was motionless for ten minutes.

"Pardon me for sealing my thoughts from you," he said at length, "but my consultation with my councillors was not a matter for those from another planet to know, no matter how friendly they may be. My council have agreed with me that your tale is a true one and has been fairly pictured. We have no interest in the fate of your planet except that we desire to help the form best adapted to bring about the day we all await with anxiety when all of the planets will be united in bonds of love and justice. We believe that the form which developed on the Earth is better adapted to this than the form which developed on Jupiter and we will give you weapons which will enable you to free yourselves and to protect your planet against future invasions. My scientists are now busy preparing for you weapons which we will deliver to your ship. Meanwhile, you are our honored guests. You will be interested in seeing life as it exists here and Attomanis, one of my council, will be your guide and will answer your questions."

The Grand Mognac dropped the upper portion of his body to the dais as a sign that the interview was ended. Damis and Turgan hurriedly tried to form appropriate expressions of gratitude in their minds but a powerful thought wave took possession of their minds.

"Follow me," it said.

One of the caterpillars crawled forward and beckoned to them. With a backward glance at the Grand Mognac who seemed unaware of their existence, Damis and Turgan followed their guide. He led the way to a platform upon which he slowly crawled. In answer to a thought command, Turgan and Damis climbed upon it and in an instant they were skimming at high speed over the ground. The platform came to a stop near the outer edge of the huge dome. They followed their guide from the platform to a box-like contrivance built against the dome. It had lenses similar in appearance to the observers on the Jovian space ship but built on a larger scale. Attomanis removed the lenses from the

instrument and substituted two smaller pairs through which he motioned Turgan and Damis to look.

Before them lay a huge plain across which ran a belt of green foliage. The vegetation forms were like nothing the earth could show. There were no true leaves but huge pulpy branches ran up into the air a hundred feet and divided and subdivided until they became no larger around than hairs. At places on the plants were huge crimson, mauve and blue flowers, ten feet across. As they watched a monstrous form flitted into view. It was that of a butterfly, but such a butterfly as they had never imagined.

The spread of the huge wings was fully a hundred feet across and its swollen body was larger by far than the huge slug which stood beside them. The butterfly waved its thirty-foot tentacles and approached one of the blue flowers. A long curled sucker, fifty feet in length, unrolled and was plunged down into the heart of the trumpet-shaped flower. Gradually the blue color faded to mauve and then to a brilliant crimson. The butterfly abandoned it when the change of color was completed and flitted away to another of the blue blooms.

"What manner of thing is that?" demanded Damis.

"That was a member of the council," replied Attomanis. "She was chosen to be one of those to perpetuate our race. Evolution has gone further with us than on your planet but it will show you what in time you may expect.

"Life started with an amoeba on Mars as it did on Earth and the slow process of evolution followed similar lines. At one time forms like yours were the ruling and guiding intelligences of Mars. They were, however, a highly specialized form. As conditions changed, the form changed. The head and chest grew larger as the air grew thinner until the enfeebled trunk and limbs could no longer support their weight. Gradually the form died out and was replaced by others.

"The forms which you call insects on your Earth were more primitive and hardier forms and more readily adaptable. They increased in size and in intelligence until they were ready to supplant all other forms. The last vestiges of the bipeds were carefully nurtured and guarded by our forefathers until the vanishing atmosphere made their survival impossible. The insect form became supreme.

"We multiplied with extreme rapidity and would have overcrowded the planet had we not learned several things. Our present form of life is immature in many ways. For example, we are totally unable to reproduce our kind. That is the function of the next phase. In this form, however, the intelligence reaches its maximum. As a result, all living creatures, except selected ones, have their growth arrested at the larval stage and pass their entire life in this form. Certain ones at long intervals of time as the population diminishes, are allowed to spin cocoons and hatch out in the form you have witnessed. This form is almost brainless, the securing of nourishment from flowers and reproducing their kind being the limits of their intelligence. The eggs are maturing in the body of the one you saw. Soon she will lay many thousands of them and then, her life mission accomplished, she will die. We will gather these eggs and tend them until they hatch. All defective ones will be destroyed and the balance will be instructed until they are ready to take their place in the community and carry on the work of the planet."

"That is extremely interesting," exclaimed Damis. "Will our Earth in time support the same forms of life as does Mars now?"

"I can see no reason why evolution should follow a different path there than it has here," replied Attomanis, "but millions of years will pass before you lose your atmosphere to such an extent as we have. All of our water is gathered at the polar icecaps, from whence we lead it as it melts through underground pipes hundreds of miles to the spot where we desire vegetation to grow. There we deliver it directly to the roots of the plants so there is no waste. Great bands of cultivated areas crisscross the planet where the soil is of unusual fertility. A certain number of plants are allowed to flower and to bear fruit for the sustenance of the reproductive form of life and to replace themselves. The others we devour while they are young and tender."

"Do you always live in these sealed cities?"

"Always. There are hundreds of them scattered over the planet. As you have noticed, they are composed of damazonium, the same substance as is used in making the transporters. The whole city is but a large transporter. When we desire to feed, the city is disintegrated and materialized over a patch of vegetation which we eat. When the supply is for a time exhausted, the city is moved. This is one way in which we conserve the small supply of atmosphere which is left."

Attomanis suddenly paused and held up one hand for silence. In a moment the thought waves again beat in on the consciousness of Damis and Turgan.

"The weapons which were promised you are ready," he said. "We will return to the throne of the Grand Mognac and you will receive instructions in their use."

He again mounted the platform and Damis and Turgan took their places beside him. Rapidly they were borne over the ground until they came to a stop before the dais on which the Grand Mognac rested. Beside the four cylinders in which they and the Grand Mognac's messengers had traveled from the space ship to the city, another of huge proportions stood before the platform. Beside it were two instruments. From a mass of coils and tubes a long rod projected up. It was pivoted so that it could be directed toward any point. The rod on one of the instruments was blue while the other was a fiery scarlet.

"These are the weapons which will enable you to destroy your oppressors and prevent more from ever landing," said the Grand Mognac. "I must caution you, however, regarding their use. They generate a ray of almost infinite frequency, much higher than the disintegrating ray the Jovians use. Instead of resolving materials into light and energy, these devices will absolutely destroy the ether, that imponderable substance which permeates and fills all space.

"Heat and light travel in waves through the ether. When it is destroyed, only blackness and entire absence of heat remain. Nothing can bear the cold of interstellar space and yet it is warm compared to the absolute cold which the absence of ether produces. When you direct one of these rays toward a Jovian ship, the ether in the ship is destroyed. No insulation against the cold of space will interfere for the ether penetrates and permeates all substance. The cold of absolute nothingness will destroy all life in the twinkling of an eye and the ship will be reduced to a puff of powder. At such a temperature, even stellanium has less strength than the most brittle substance.

"There are two of these devices, set to different powers. The one with the blue rod is for use against space ships either before or after they enter the atmosphere envelope. Beware of using it except when it points in a direction almost normal to the surface of your planet. These devices tap and use the enormous force of gravity itself and when they are locked to

your planet, they are anchored to the center of gravity of the planet. Unless it were normal to the planet's surface, its reactive force is so great that it would disrupt the balance which holds the planet in place were the beam sent off on a tangential line.

"The other, whose projecting rod is painted red, can be used at any angle as its force is only a minute fraction of that of the other. It also must be locked to the center of gravity of the earth before it is used by means of the switch on the front. This instrument will give you power to annihilate your oppressors on earth, for while it has not the terrible force of the other, it will penetrate any protective screen which the science of Jupiter can erect. Use it only against the Jovians and when you have finished with it, destroy it that it may not fall into the hands of those who would misuse it. The other may be left intact to repel other Jovian attacks but I think you need fear none. Once they learn you have it, they will be content with their conquests of Venus and Mercury and give you a wide berth. The Jovians have had a taste of it already and they leave Mars alone. Each instrument is set in action by closing the switch on top, after closing the gravity anchor switch. To stop them, open the top switch."

Under the direction of the Grand Mognac, the Martians placed the terrible weapons in the transporter prepared for them. Turgan and Damis strove to thank the Grand Mognac for his gift but he interrupted them promptly.

"No thanks are due us," he said. "We have done that which we believe is the best for the orderly development of this galaxy of planets and there is no reason why we should be thanked. Now enter the transporters and you will be returned to your space ship. Destroy your oppressors and work for the day when Mars and Earth will march in peace toward the final goal of all life."

Accompanied by two Martian envoys, Damis and Turgan entered the cylinders and fastened them closely. They set their feet in place and grasped the handles before them. Again came the feeling of nausea and then a thought ordered them to emerge from the transporters. They emerged almost at the same instant. Before them lay the space ship with its airlock wide open. Not a living soul was in sight. Damis leaped toward the ship, but his foot struck an obstruction which sent him sprawling. He glanced down and a hoarse cry of alarm broke from his lips. He had stumbled over the body of Kastner. The body had been horribly mutilated by some heavy instrument, one arm hanging to the torso by a

mere shred of flesh. Scattered around on the ground lay other mutilated bodies.

With a shout of anguish, Turgan sped toward the open space ship. Damis, with a pale face, hastily examined the dead bodies. Eighteen of the Terrestrials lay stiff in death while the bodies of two huge Jovians in the uniform of Glavour's personal guard told the cause of their death. Damis struck by a sudden apprehension, ran from one body to the next, and in a little while he straightened up with a momentary breath of relief. Lura's body was not among them. He turned to the space ship in time to see Turgan appear in the door of the airlock, his face distorted by grief and his tall body swaying. Damis hurriedly ran to him.

"Is Lura—dead?"

He brought out the last word with an effort. Turgan's face worked for a moment before he could reply. Through the thin air of Mars came his choking voice.

"Worse," he muttered: "she is gone!"

Chapter 4

Damis' Decision

Damis stared at Turgan for a moment as though unable to comprehend the old man's words.

"Gone?" he repeated stupidly. "She has slain herself?"

"No," replied the Kildare, his face still working in grief; "she is gone from us. She has been captured by Glavour's minions."

"Her dagger—?" asked Damis hesitatingly.

"Is gone with her," replied Turgan.

The Nepthalim started toward the space ship but a thought wave from one of the Martian envoys stopped him in mid-stride.

"Wait, Man of Earth," came the message. "The heavens are eternally watched by our people and none can enter or leave the vicinity of Mars unknown to us. My comrade is now inquiring of each of the observers whence came the Jovians and where they have gone."

Turgan and Damis waited impatiently. Presently the second Martian sent a thought wave to their minds.

"The Jovian ship approached Mars using Phobus, one of our moons, as a screen to its movements. It was close to the planet before it was seen. When challenged, the ship sent a message saying that it was captained by Toness, an Akildare of Earth and an enemy of the Jovians. The Grand Mognac was engaged and the matter was referred to the Mozar of Chinamonot, the nearest city. Thinking they were your followers, he directed them to land here. The Grand Mognac is enraged beyond measure that, after so many ages of failure, the Jovians have made a successful raid on our planet. The Mozar will pay for his indiscretion with his life."

A groan burst from Turgan's lips. Damis stood for a moment stricken with grief, and then sprang in giant leaps toward the space flyer.

"Come, Turgan!" he cried. "We may overtake them yet. At least we can avenge if we cannot save."

The Kildare followed him more slowly.

"Where, oh, Neptholim," he asked, "will we find them in the trackless wastes of space?"

Damis paused at the words.

"Why, between here and Earth," he replied. As he did so a thought crossed his mind which was revealed by the sudden expression of dismay which clouded his features. "Earth, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Jupiter—all are under the rule of the Sons of God," he cried.

"And to any of them, Glavour's ship may have fled," replied the Kildare. "Before we start in pursuit, it is best to find, if we can, in what direction the ship went."

Frantically, Damis strove to muster his thoughts and hurl a question at the two Martians who stood beside the transporter cylinders. Before the thought had been fully formed, an answer reached him.

"I have been inquiring, Neptholim, why, when our observers saw that the ship contained Jovians, they were not destroyed. One of the observers who watched them tells me that their ship landed between your ship and the only instruments of destruction which could be brought to bear on them. The Jovians poured out and attacked your crew who were all out of the ship. They were so mingled that it would have been impossible to destroy them without encompassing the destruction of your men as well and we could not blast their ship into nothingness without also destroying yours. When they rose again they carried one of your crew a prisoner and so they were not blasted out of the heavens. They took a course which carried them behind Phobus where they were shielded. When next seen, they were headed away from your planet."

"If Glavour came to Mars, Lura is dead by now," said Turgan sorrowfully, tears coursing down his cheeks. "Glavour is not one to await the fulfillment of his desires and Lura had her dagger. Her soul is now with Him whom we are taught to glorify. His will be done!"

"If it be His will," replied Damis. "Don't give up, Turgan, we may save her yet." He turned to the Martians and formed a thought message in his mind.

"Has your science any way of telling us who was in command of the Jovian ship?" he asked.

"Were your men who lie dead familiar with the features of the Jovian Viceroy?"

"Yes, all of them."

"Then we will search the brains of the dead. The pictures that are in the living brain fade rapidly when death comes, but the last impression of these men was a powerful one of fighting and hatred and some traces may remain. I will search."

The huge slug crawled over the ground to the body of the nearest dead Terrestrial. In one of his many hands he carried a shiny metal tube from which crimson rays flickered and played over the head of the dead man. The skull disintegrated under the influence of the strange instrument until the brain lay naked and exposed to the fierce glare of the Martian sun. The Martian delicately connected two wires terminating in metal plates to the tissue of the brain and attached the other ends of the wires to a metal circlet which he clamped about his middle. For some moments he remained motionless and then crawled to the body of the second dead Earthman. One after another he examined each of the eighteen dead bodies. When he had completed he crawled over to Damis and Turgan.

"Put these bands about your brows," he commanded in thought language as he handed to each of them a metallic band similar to the one clasped about him. The two Earthmen quickly adjusted the bands. "Let your minds remain a blank and in them will be reproduced the impressions I have gathered from the brains of your dead followers."

Damis sprang suddenly upward and smote with all of his force at the air. Out of nothingness had materialized the form of a huge Jovian clad in the uniform of Glavour's guards. His blow went harmless through the thin air and the Jovian swung a massive ax. Just before the blow landed the Jovian disappeared and a thought wave from the Martian impinged on Damis' brain.

"Spare your energies, Nepthalim," the message said. "What you saw was not a Jovian but was the last impression stored in the brain of the man who met his death under a blow of the ax which seemed to be striking at you. I am merely reproducing in you the emotions and experiences that man felt. Had I allowed the phantom blow to land, you would now be cold in death, so great was the strength of the impression. Now make your mind again a blank and I will reveal to you what was in the mind of another at the instant that his death came upon him."

Before the Nephtalim's startled gaze, another Jovian appeared.

"Havenner!" he cried as he recognized the principal officer of Glavour. The equerry came forward slowly, blood dripping from a wound in his leg. He swung his ax but it went wide of the mark. Again he struck, but two Terrestrials attacked him from the rear and he whirled. For a moment, Damis had a chance to watch the conflict which was raging about him. Nine of the huge Jovians were engaged in deadly combat with a dozen of the Terrestrials who still remained on their feet. In the door of the space ship stood Lura, watching the conflict with frightened eyes. One after another of the Earthmen were stricken down. Suddenly a Jovian rushed at Damis but the scene went blank before the raised ax could strike him down.

"Have you seen enough or shall I show you the scenes in the brains of the others?" asked the Martian.

"I have seen and recognized nine of the Jovians," replied Damis, "yet among them was not the one I feared. Let me see into the brains of the others that I may be sure that Glavour was not among them."

Another scene materialized before him. It was merely a variation of those he had already seen. In the brain of one of the Terrestrials he saw the landing of the Jovian ship and the sudden outrush of the Sons of God, armed only with the forty-pound axes they used at close quarters. In none of the scenes did he see the huge form of Glavour. He removed the band with a sigh of relief.

"I broke Glavour's arms a few days back," he said to Turgan, "and it is probable that that prevented him from following us, even if he felt that he could leave the Earth in the turmoil which Toness had undoubtedly raised. It means that Lura is safe for the present, for Havenner would not dare to do other than to bring her to the Viceroy. We must follow them and endeavor to rescue her. I will ask our friends if they can plot her course for us."

"I have inquired as to that," replied the Martian to Damis' unspoken question, "and find we cannot. Soon after the ship left the surface of Mars, our observers sighted a Jovian fleet of a hundred flyers in the asteroid belt between here and Jupiter. They are nearly through the belt now and are headed toward your planet. Their path will bring them within a few thousand miles of Mars and every instrument on the planet is trained on them. While the Grand Mognac believes that Earth is their destination, never before have the Jovians approached us in such force

and it may be that Tubain will try to avenge his former defeats by an attack in force. We have no instruments to spare to keep track of a lone flyer unless it changes its course and approaches us. There is one more source of information. I will examine the brains of the dead Jovians. Perhaps they know their leader's plans."

From the first Jovian the Martian turned away with an expression of disappointment.

"There is nothing in his brain but a scene of the fight with your followers, yet it may cheer you to know that at the last he felt fear, the emotion the Jovians boast is foreign to them," said the Martian. "I will examine the other."

With his crimson ray he removed the covering from the brain of the second Jovian and connected his wires. For a few moments he was motionless and then he removed the wires and crawled rapidly toward Damis.

"Neptholim, here is what you wish," came his thoughts, jumbled in a chaotic state of excitement. "This man had a wonderful brain and the impressions of the last month are clear and distinct. Attend carefully and leave your mind a blank."

On the Martian plain buildings suddenly materialized before the Neptholim's gaze. With a cry of astonishment he saw himself facing Glavour in defiance. Lura, who had been crouching behind him, ran into one of the buildings. Act by act, Damis saw the fight between himself and the Jovian Viceroy repeated. The Viceroy, one arm dangling uselessly, was whisked away in his chariot. The scene faded and another took its place. The Viceregal palace was beleaguered by thousands and scores of thousands of shouting Terrestrials. The Jovians sought with rays and with atomic bombs to disperse them, but where a score were blasted into nothingness or torn into fragments, a hundred fresh men took their place. Suddenly the Jovian rays began to fail. The Earthmen had found the secret source of power which supplied the palace and had cut it.

Again the scene faded and he was on a space ship with Havenner talking to him. The words he could not hear for the Martian could not comprehend a record of a sound. The pictures conjured up by the words were easy of comprehension and in picture forms the Martian conveyed to him the sense of the conversation. Havenner was telling him of their destination. First came a scene which he recognized as a Martian

landscape. The Jovians swarmed from their space ship and struck down the Earthmen without exertion. Three were made captives: himself, Turgan, and Lura. The Jovians reentered the ship and sped away into space. Damis wondered what this last picture signified.

Another scene materialized and they were on another planet. It was not Mars and it was not Earth. For a moment he was puzzled. The sun, when it shone, was larger and fiercer than he had ever seen it, but it shone only for an instant. Blankets of cloud and fog hid it from view. Rain fell incessantly. Lush, rank vegetation covered the ground and rose in a tangle far overhead. The Jovians emerged from the space ship, the prisoners in their midst. A huge lizard, a hundred feet long, rushed at them but a flash of the disintegrating tubes dissolved it into dancing motes of light. The Jovians made their way through the steaming jungle until a huge city, roofed with a crystal dome which covered it and arched high into the air, appeared before them. Toward this city the Jovians marched.

"The crystal cities of Venus!" cried Turgan. Damis nodded in assent.

Again the scene changed and the Martian plain was before them. From the space ship the Jovians emerged, but instead of the easy victory they had had in the earlier scene, they found the task a difficult one. From all sides the Terrestrials charged at them and Damis found himself fighting against his compatriots. A sword flashed before his eyes and the scene was gone.

"Have you learned that which you sought?" came a Martian thought inquiry.

Damis hastily formed his thoughts into an affirmative message of thanks and turned to Turgan.

"We know now where to go," he cried exultingly. "Lura is safe until they land on Venus and enter the crystal cities, for Havenner would not dare to do otherwise than carry out the orders of Glavour. The Martian weapons which we have will insure us an easy victory. Come, let us hasten."

A thought message from the Martians stopped him.

"Those weapons on which you are planning, Neptholim, were given to you by our Grand Mognac for the purpose of ridding your planet of your oppressors and of defending your planet against further Jovian

attacks, not for the purpose of invading another planet with which we have no quarrel. If you will use them for the purpose for which they were given you, you may depart with them in peace. If you plan to go to Venus, the weapons will remain on Mars."

"We will go to the Earth and rid her of her oppressors," replied Damis, "but first we must go to Venus and rescue Lura."

"Venus lies beyond the sun," was the Martian answer, "while your planet and Mars are on the same side. It will take you five times as long to go to Venus as to go to the Earth. Meanwhile the Jovian fleet will have landed and your efforts will be in vain to dislodge them. Even now you must fly at your best speed to reach your planet before them."

"But we cannot abandon Lura. She is the only daughter of my comrade and she is my affianced bride. She means more to us than does the fate of our planet."

"Then go to Venus after her, Neptholim, but go without Martian aid. Only to save you from your oppressors will we help you. Never has Mars attempted conquest of another celestial body, although not even Jupiter could stand against our might if we chose to attack it."

"You cannot understand her relationship to us, Martian."

"No, I cannot. We are sexless and sex exists on Mars only for the purpose for which it was intended, the perpetuation of our species. It may be that we have been mistaken. If the fate of one member of your species means more to you than the rescue of your whole race, it is perhaps well that you be eliminated by the Jovians. In any event, our decision is final. Make your choice of whether you depart with the weapons or as you came."

"Then I will go to Venus," cried Damis. "If necessary, I will fight the Jovians with bare hands, but I will rescue Lura or die in the attempt."

"And what of the Earthmen who trusted you, Neptholim?" asked Turgan. "Dozens gave their lives gladly to capture the space ship in which we came here and thousands have gone cheerfully to annihilation to keep the Sons of God beleaguered in the Viceregal palace until we return with the weapons which will bring them victory. Think you that they would choose the destruction or enslavement of the whole race to the possible chance of rescuing one person from the grasp of Glavour's minions?"

"Turgan, you are mad!" cried Damis. "Have you forgotten that Lura is your only child?"

"Since the days of Hortan, Glavour has sought information as to the secret assembly room. Hundreds of men have gone to torture and death with their lips sealed when they could have bought life and freedom by speaking."

"Were it my own life, Turgan, I would not hesitate."

"Think you that never before has an Earthman been faced with the choice of betraying his countrymen or seeing his wife or daughter violated and sacrificed in the games? All have been true to the last and yet they could have done little harm had they spoken. *You* have the fate of the Earth in your hand, yet you hesitate. I am Lura's father and I know her better, it seems, than do you. If you abandon her countrymen, she will despise you for a coward. It is better that one or that many be lost than that all be lost."

Damis bowed his head in silence. Raised by the Jovians whose only ideal of life was their own selfish pleasure, the thought that the fate of thousands whom he did not know and in whom he felt little interest could be of more importance than the fate of the one whose safety meant more than life to him was a novel one. The lifelong training he had received from the Sons of God struggled, and struggled in vain, against the ideals he had inherited from his Earthly mother and his loved sire. With a face drawn with anguish, he raised his head.

"We will take your weapons, Martian, and with them go to Earth. If it be His will that Lura be safe, safe shall she be although the whole force of Jupiter threaten her. If not, His will be done. One promise I exact of you, Turgan. When we have reached Earth and I have taught your followers to use the Martian weapons, you will give me a crew and let me depart to Venus to find her."

"Gladly will I promise, and if I be spared, I will go with you, Damis," said Turgan. "Do not think that Lura is not dear to me; she is dearer than all else in the Universe save only the keeping bright the ideal of loyalty that has been the guiding light of the Terrestrials for untold ages."

"Your decision is well made, Neptholim," said the Martian, "and word of it shall be given to the Grand Mognac that he may know that he made no mistake when he entrusted you with the weapons of Mars. Now for your course. When you rise, direct your ship toward Deiphos. The Jovian

fleet is now at an ascension of forty-two degrees and at an angle of one hundred and sixty degrees from the sun. Deiphos will hide you from their instruments. Once you reach it, our observers will plot your course and send you a bearing which will take you as far from the Jovian fleet as possible. They are now passing Ceres and will soon be out of the asteroid belt. They are larger and more powerful than the ship you are flying and they will make better speed. However, if you use your maximum power, you will easily arrive on your planet before them. Have you fuel enough for your trip at full speed?"

Damis hastily inspected the fuel supply of the ship and made some rapid calculations.

"We have enough to carry us at maximum speed to Earth and to retard us to a safe landing, but very little to spare. Can you give us some?"

"There is no tantalum on Mars except a little scattered through tons of rock. It would take us days to extract enough to do you any good. It is well that you did not plan to fly to Venus for you could have made little speed and the Jovian flyer would have reached there long before you did. Now go, and may our best wishes aid you in your flight."

Damis turned and instinctively held out his hand. A trace of expression flickered over the face of the nearest Martian slug and he bent forward and clasped the proffered hand in one of the many hands with which he was provided. No further message came to Damis from the Martians and he entered the airlock with Turgan following him. As the lock clanged shut, he turned to his companion.

"Open the reserve air tanks and restore the atmosphere gradually to the pressure of Earth," he directed. "Unless you do that, we will be unable to function efficiently."

While Turgan opened the valve which allowed the reserve supply of compressed air to gradually enter the ship, Damis pulled down the starting lever of the ship. With a terrific lurch the flyer left the surface of Mars and shot up into the trackless realms of space. Abandoning his controls for an instant, Damis looked into one of the observers. The plain below them was empty of Martians, but in the distance he could dimly see two of the silvery domes which marked their cities. He made some short calculations and turned on a side motor for a moment. The ship swerved and headed for the Martian satellite to which he had been directed.

In an hour he was holding the ship less than a thousand miles from Deiphos while he received a message from the Grand Mognac as to the location of the Jovian fleet, their speed and course, and the course which he should fly to reach the Earth ahead of them. He noted down the directions and set the cross hairs of his forward observer on Alpha Centauri. His hand sought the controlling lever and the ship rapidly gathered momentum for the trip to Earth.

Chapter 5

A Desperate Plan

Flying the space ship with a crew of two men instead of the normal nine threw a heavy strain on Damis. Turgan proved to be almost tireless, but while he could act as an observer, Damis devoutly hoped that no wandering celestial body would approach within the danger zone while he was alone on duty. Nothing of the sort happened. The days passed with monotonous slowness, yet daily and, indeed, hourly, the planet Mars faded to a red star and the green point of light which marked their destination grew larger. Damis cast many a longing glance at Venus, but he remained steadfast to the faith which Turgan had engendered in him. During the long hours Turgan had opportunity to tell the Nephthalim of some of the sacrifices made by Terrestrials for the cause of liberty. They filled Damis with amazement and moved him to awe to think of the loyalty and bravery displayed by those whom he had been taught from childhood to regard as a race of slaves, created solely to minister to their overlords.

Damis pushed the ship to the greatest acceleration which he dared to use, and, as they approached the Earth, he cast many an anxious glance at the diminishing fuel supply. For thirteen days he drove at high speed until the Earth seemed almost at hand. Using almost the full power of his bow motors, he checked its speed. For a time he thought he had overestimated the power of his motors and that it would be necessary to avoid the atmosphere belt, run past the Earth and return. At the middle of the fifteenth day, with the Earth less than a thousand miles away, he threw in his last notch of power.

The deceleration pressed them so tightly to the nose of the ship that they could hardly breathe. Damis lay with his hand on a side motor to throw them out of danger. Gradually the forward motion of the ship ceased and at last Damis rose with an effort and shut off the bow motors.

"We are falling under the influence of terrestrial gravity," he announced. "In another three hours, we will land."

He was as good as his word. Three hours later he dropped the space ship to a landing at a spot half a dozen miles distant from the beleaguered capital of the Sons of God. As he landed, the sun was just peeping over the eastern horizon.

Their approach had been seen and the ship was surrounded by hundreds of Terrestrial swordsmen. As the airlock opened and Damis and Turgan appeared there was silence for a moment and then a thunderous shout of joy rose to the heavens. From the forefront of the crowd, a crimson-robed man ran toward the ship.

"Turgan, my lord," he cried as fell on his knees and strove to kiss the Kildare's hand. "You are spared to us who had given you up for lost. Our spies reported that the Sons of God had followed you to Mars and had slain you all. Havenner reported to Glavour that you had made such a resistance that it was impossible to follow his orders and bring you back alive."

"Havenner!" cried Damis. "Havenner is on Venus with Lura."

"The ship of the Sons of God returned last night," replied the Akildare, "with a loss of two men of its crew and with the Princess Lura a prisoner."

Tears of joy sprang into Damis' eyes and ran unrestrained down his face.

"And she is safe?" he cried.

"One of our spies saw her and reports that she is well although in poor spirits. She is confined in the palace and will not be harmed. A Jovian fleet of a hundred ships is expected hourly with Tubain himself in command. A message to Glavour has ordered that Lura be held for Tubain's arrival, when he will dispose of her."

"What is the situation here, Toness?" interrupted Turgan. "I rejoice with Damis that my daughter is safe, yet, unless we are victorious, her present safety will avail her little."

"Things have gone neither well nor ill since your departure, Kildare," replied Toness. "I have followed out the great conspiracy as it was planned many years ago. Although we have lost thousands of our bravest men, we have the Sons of God besieged in the Viceregal palace and we have tapped and cut the secret source of power which Timour, the Akildare, found years ago. They have no weapons save some hand

tubes that are not yet exhausted and their axes. Their most powerful weapons of offense are crippled, yet we cannot storm the palace in the face of the defenses they have left. Have you brought us any hope from Mars?"

"We have brought weapons against which all the power and science of the Sons of God are as helpless as is our feeble strength against their might," replied Turgan. "Send me men to transport these weapons, and in two hours not a Jovian will remain on the planet."

A wild cheer of joy from the assembled Terrestrials answered the words of the Kildare. A score of men ran forward and entered the space ship on the heels of Turgan. They reappeared in a few minutes carrying with the greatest of care the two terrible weapons which were the gift of the Grand Mognac. Damis suddenly looked up from a reverie in which he had been plunged.

"I have just figured it out," he exclaimed. "Despite his report to Glavour, Havenner knew that Turgan and I lived. He started away from Mars toward Venus, a destination which he had already informed his crew that they would make for. He feared the Martian weapons and he strove to draw us away toward Venus so that he would be safe. Once the Martian instruments had ceased to watch him, he altered his course and made for Earth. With his greater supply of fuel and more powerful ship, he was able to make a higher speed and, despite the additional million or two of miles, he was able to land before us. The thing that puzzles me is why we were not seen by the Jovians as we approached."

"You came from a different direction than Havenner, oh Nephtalim," replied Toness. "All of their instruments were either watching Havenner or the Jovian fleet. But for an accident, your approach would not have been noted by us. I am confident that the Sons of God have no idea that you have returned, especially since Havenner reported that he had slain you. We will take them by surprise. Where shall we take the weapons?"

"Take the one with the blue rod to the top of the mountain which overlooks the palace and set it so that the rod points in the direction from which Tubain's fleet is approaching. That hill is less than two miles from the palace, so you had better take them both there. Point the red rod toward the palace."

At a word from Toness, the Terrestrials started off with the weapons for the point indicated by Damis. The Nephtalim and Turgan followed them, relating their adventure on the red planet as they walked along.

The shutting off of the Jovian source of power had effectually crippled all of the power-driven chariots which certain of the higher officials among the Earthmen had been allowed to maintain.

On the top of the hill overlooking the palace grounds the two Martian weapons were placed on the ground, side by side. Damis carefully aligned the red rod on the Viceregal palace. When he had it set, with a word of warning, he closed the gravity anchor switch. The instrument settled a trifle on the solid rock on which it was bedded and then was motionless. At a word from Damis, as many of the Terrestrials as could find a hand-rest pushed against it. It was as though they were pressing against the mountain itself. Damis sighted along the rod and adjusted it until it pointed at the center of the building.

"So much for that one," he said. "It is the less powerful of the two, but it will be enough to destroy the Sons of God and the Neptholim who are in the palace. The few who are scattered over the Earth, we can dispose of at our leisure. If the Jovian fleet approaches the Earth from directly above us, we will be able to destroy it easily. In any event, this weapon is to be used only when it is approximately normal to the surface of the Earth. We must have it almost under the point from which the Jovians are approaching. That may be on the opposite side of the Earth."

"I think not, Neptholim," said Toness. "We know that Glavour and Tubain have been in constant communication since the Jovian fleet passed Mars and he expects them to land here. There would be no object in their taking a circuitous route, so they will probably drop directly down in the palace grounds."

"Let us hope so, Toness. In any event, we might as well anchor the weapon here as elsewhere."

He set the weapon with the blue rod on another patch of bare rock and tested the rod to make sure that it revolved freely and could be made to cover the entire heavens from horizon to horizon. He closed the gravity anchor switch and again the efforts of a dozen Terrestrials were futile to move it.

"Now we are ready for their attack," he said to Turgan. "You are as familiar with these weapons as I am, but I will instruct a dozen of your followers in using them. It is possible that we may not be able to operate the weapons ourselves."

"I can operate one weapon while you manipulate the other, Damis," replied the Kildare. "However, no harm will be done in instructing others."

"I may not be here," said Damis briefly.

Without replying to the questions of Turgan and Toness, he proceeded to instruct a dozen of the Earthmen in the use of the terrible Martian weapons. When he was certain that he had a half dozen men capable of attending to each of the weapons, he turned to Turgan.

"I may not be here when the weapons are used," he said. "When I thought that Lura had gone to Venus, I gave her up and sacrificed both her and my heart on the altar of our cause, for it is what she would have chosen. Now I have accomplished the sacrifice and returned with the Martian weapons to find that she is a captive in the Viceroy's palace. We can turn on the rays and reduce the building and all in it to a pinch of dust in a few seconds, but Lura would be immolated with the Sons of God. The weapons are here; our men know how to use them, and my usefulness is at an end. Now I stand here with no more responsibility for our success than the humblest swordsman. Since I am no longer needed, I will leave the fate of the Earth to you and follow out my private designs."

"Where are you going, Nepthalim?" cried Toness. The question was echoed by all within the sound of his voice. Only Turgan smiled as though he knew Damis' answer.

"Where could I go, Akildare, but to one place?" replied the Nepthalim. "I go to Glavour's palace. I have two errands there. One is to rescue Lura and the other is to mete out to Glavour the death which I swore that I would accomplish. The rays can be turned on and the palace demolished at any time, but I ask that you wait until I return with Lura or until you know that we are dead."

"But if the Jovian fleet arrives before that time, Nepthalim?" demanded Toness.

"Then give the word for the use of the weapons, Akildare, and Lura's soul and mine will join the thousands of others whose lives are but a part of the price the race of Earthmen have had to pay to rid their planet of the Sons of God."

"It grieves me, Damis, to see you go to certain death," said Turgan sadly to the blond giant, "yet I will say nothing to stop you. Were it not

that my presence would hinder you in your attempt, I would accompany you."

"Your place, Kildare, is at the head of your men, whom you were born to rule. I can hope to succeed only by stealth, else a thousand men would come with me. Now call from the ranks one who is a barber that he may change the color of my hair and alter my face that I shall not be known."

At the Kildare's word, three men stepped forward from the ranks of swordsmen and announced themselves adepts in the art of disguise. Swift runners were sent to bring supplies and the three labored over Damsis. When they had finished their ministrations, only a close observer would have known him under the bushy black beard which covered his face.

Chapter 6

In the Seraglio

With a parting word to Turgan and his followers, Damis made his way alone down the hill and into the thick tropical jungle which grew up almost to the gates of the Viceregal palace. He was well acquainted with a secret entrance into the building. It was a matter of minutes for him to locate the outer end and open it.

For half a mile he made his way underground until a huge stone door barred his way. He felt for the hidden catches and the slab of rock rose before him. As he turned toward the doorway he found himself looking into the muzzle of a black ray tube in the hands of a gigantic Jovian in the uniform of the Viceroy's guards.

"Whence came you, Neptholim?" demanded the guard, a cold note of suspicion in his voice.

"From far Torna," replied Damis readily. "I am Durmino, Komar of the province of Capries. The slaves rose on us and all were slain except me. I have had to travel by night and hide by day to reach here. I knew not whether the slaves had conquered or not, but when I found them lying by thousands about Glavour's palace, I knew that the reign of the Sons of God was safe. What news from Tubain?"

The face of the Jovian guard cleared as Damis spoke. Durmino, a son of Glavour by one of his Terrestrial concubines, was Komar of Capries, a fact well known to Damis. There was nothing in the newcomer's story to excite suspicion.

"The fleet of the Ruler of the Universe is approaching," the guard replied. "In two hours it will be hovering above us. We would have needed no aid had not the dogs of Earthmen found our source of power and managed to destroy it with stolen ray tubes. We have been cooped up here like rats waiting for Tubain to arrive. When he comes our vengeance will be heavy."

"The heavier the better," growled Damis with an oath. "The dogs have been getting surly for a generation. I hope that Tubain will teach them a lesson that will not be forgotten for ages to come."

"He will, never fear," laughed the guard. "Already Glavour has made his plans. I am not a member of the council, yet I have heard enough to realize why Glavour is our ruler. My brain could not conceive of such a stupendous plan."

"I will go to my father now," said Damis. "What is the word for passing the inner gate? I wish to surprise my sire for he doubtless mourns me as dead."

"He thinks you are dead," replied the guard, "yet I never heard of Glavour mourning for any loss which did not affect his pleasures. He has plenty of bastards to take your place. The word is "Tubain."

"I thank you, Son of God," said Damis, "and I will inform my sire of the great respect and high regard which you have for him. Fear not, your words shall be truthfully reported to him."

Leaving the Jovian guard hastily reviewing the conversation with the supposed Durmino, Damis made his way toward the palace. Since he knew that he would not reach another door until after several of the underground passages with which the foundations of the palace were honeycombed had joined, he had little doubt of his ability to make his way unsuspected into the citadel. He debated for a moment on the advisability of killing the Jovian guard and taking his weapons, but caution prevailed, and empty-handed, save for a dagger concealed under his robes, he strode forward.

His knowledge of the password enabled him to pass the various guards he met without difficulty. There were many of the Neptholim who held subordinate positions in the outlying provinces and who were seldom at court, and the Jovian guards, who in their hearts regarded the Neptholim as little better than the Terrestrials, paid small attention to him. He passed several guarded points before the path rose steeply and he passed through the final gate into the palace itself. A Neptholim passed him hurriedly and Damis plucked at his robe.

"I am just from outpost," he said. "What news of Tubain?"

"The fleet has entered the atmosphere belt a thousand miles east of here," replied the Neptholim. "They are dropping to an altitude of five

miles and will then approach. They should arrive in an hour. It is well that they hurry."

"What rush is there?" asked Damis in surprise. "We may not be able to leave here, but, at the same time, all the forces the slaves can muster would never force an entrance."

"You have not heard then?" exclaimed the other in surprise. "No—certainly not, if you have been on outpost—for I just learned it myself. There is a rumor that Havenner lied when he said that he killed Turgan, the Kildare and Damis, the renegade—the curse of Tubain rest on him—on Mars. It is said that they not only escaped death but have returned to Earth armed with the weapons of the red planet. Havenner is with Glavour now and no one knows what the outcome will be. Since Tubain is at hand, doubtless nothing will be done until he arrives. That is the reason why Tubain altered his course and came down so far away instead of directly overhead. He hopes thus to elude the Martian weapons if the Earthmen really have them."

"Surely that is a lie!" cried Damis.

"We hope that it is, yet Havenner would have been slain without mercy had he admitted that he left Mars without slaying or capturing Turgan and Damis. Many believe that it is true."

"Is Glavour in the council room?" asked Damis. "I have a message."

"It would be better for you to defer the message if it be ill news until Tubain arrives, brother, for Glavour is enraged beyond measure at all of us. He threatens to sacrifice us at the next games and he may do so unless Tubain alters the decree. He has not loved us since Damis broke his arm a month ago."

"Nevertheless, I will deliver my message," replied Damis. "While it may not please him, it is essential that he get it before Tubain arrives."

"Good luck go with you, brother," replied the Nepthalim with a shrug of his shoulders. "The temper of the Viceroy of God is an uncertain quality at best. He is in his seraglio."

Damis saluted the messenger and made his way toward the inner portion of the palace where the women whom the lustful Viceroy had dragged into his harem were kept. He had no plausible excuse for passing the guards into this forbidden portion of the palace, but that was a matter which caused him small worry. There were few of the secrets of

the palace which were not well known to Damis, who had at one time been major domo of the building. There were some well known to him, the existence of which was not even suspected by the majority of the Sons of God.

As he neared the seraglio, he turned off to his right and passed through a maze of little-used passages until he halted before what was apparently a blank wall. Casting a rapid glance around to ensure himself that there was no one in sight, he touched a hidden catch and a portion of the wall swung inward, opening a way before him. He entered a passage built in the thickness of the wall and lighted with radium bulbs. The door closed softly behind him. He removed his sandals lest even their quiet tread should betray him and on bare feet crept forward.

The passage bent and twisted as it followed the walls until Damis knew that he was in one of the walls of the seraglio. Praying that it would work noiselessly, he slid open a panel of stone and found himself looking through a semi-transparent hanging into the sacred precincts of the seraglio itself. Glavour stood facing him, his heavy face drawn up in a scowl of rage. Damis noted with satisfaction that one of the Viceroy's arms was supported by a silk scarf and that he made no attempt to use it. With a pale face, Havenner stood before his ruler.

"The word has been brought to me from a source which I trust as much as I do your own word, Havenner," Glavour was saying. "I tell you, I do not believe your story. If Damis and Turgan were dead, the Terrestrials would not see them alive again on Earth. Neither would they have weapons of which we know nothing. One of our observers admits that he saw a space ship land a few hours ago, coming from the direction of Mars. You failed in your mission, Havenner, and on you I pronounce the doom. I sentence you to the twilight of the gods."

"I appeal to Tubain from that sentence!" cried the equerry with dry lips.

"Your appeal shall be noted and laid before him at the proper time," replied the Viceroy savagely; "yet, by the time he arrives, it will be too late. Ho, Guards! Take him away."

Havenner turned as though to resist, but six of the huge Jovians answered the Viceroy's call. Two of them grasped him by the arms and started to lead him from the room.

"I appeal!" cried Havenner again. "I brought back the maiden whom I was sent to fetch, and for that reason I made no failure. To bring her was the principal item of my orders."

Glavour's face grew purple with rage.

"And who sent the message to Tubain which resulted in the orders which he sent me?" he demanded savagely. "It was sent by one of your henchmen and by your orders. You slew the sender before I could question him, but I know whose orders he obeyed. Take him away!"

The guards started to drag the luckless equerry from the presence of the Viceroy, but Havenner made a final appeal for his life.

"I will confess, Viceroy of God," he cried. "No message was sent to Tubain. I dared not send such a message lest such orders would be returned as I caused to be given to you. I coveted the maiden for myself and I took this means of getting her. I had a false message delivered to you which would prevent you from taking her before Tubain arrived. In reward for my services as spy on you, I planned to ask that she be given to me. I surrender all claims to her, Glavour. Spare my life and you may have her."

For a moment Glavour could not speak for rage.

"So you have been the spy who has reported my every doing and my every secret council to Tubain!" he gasped. "But for you, I would long ago have conquered Venus and Mercury and declared myself independent of the Jovian overlord. In time I might have even overthrown him, but every move was known to him before I made it. Not once, but a dozen times, would you go through the twilight were Tubain not at hand. Niton, it is my order that the twilight be as slow as our instruments will allow. Give him time to learn to suffer and to pray for the blessing of death at my hand. Take him away!"

The struggling Havenner was removed by the guards despite his efforts at resistance and his cries for mercy. Glavour stared after him for a moment and an evil gleam came into his eyes.

"Sonom!" he called sharply.

A guard entered the room and saluted.

"Sonom, bring me the Daughter of Man, Lura!" cried the Viceroy. "When you have brought her here, post guards at all doors and see that no one is admitted under any circumstances until Tubain himself arrives and demands admittance."

The guard hesitated.

"Your Excellency," he faltered, "the orders from Tubain were—"

"False rumors given out by the traitor, Havenner, who has now gone to the twilight of the gods," interrupted the Viceroy. "By the crown of Tubain, do I need to repeat my orders? I am Viceroy of the Earth and am supreme until Tubain revokes my rank. Obey my orders!"

The guard saluted and withdrew. Glavour licked his thick lips in anticipation and strode restlessly back and forth across the room. Inside the hangings, Damis' face hardened and he drew his dagger from under his robe. The door opened and Sonom returned, dragging Lura after him. The face of the Earth-girl was pale and drawn, yet, when she saw Glavour, her head rose in an expression of defiance. Sonom saluted the Viceroy and left the room, the massive door clanging shut behind him. Glavour stared at the girl with an evil leer on his heavy countenance.

"I have learned, Daughter of Man," he said slowly, "of how you seduced one of my servants from his duty to me and caused him to forge an order from the great Tubain in order that he might keep you for his own pleasure. For a time the stratagem succeeded, but now my eyes are open. When I first looked upon your face and form I swore to myself that you should be the solace of my leisure hours. Now the time is come. I was minded once to honor you as Hortan once honored a Terrestrial and let you amuse yourself by sitting on a throne, but your treachery has changed my intention. Not even as an accepted concubine shall you rank, but only as a slave to be used as a toy and tossed to one of my guards when I am tired of you. Come hither!"

Lura made no move to obey the order, and Glavour with an oath stepped toward her, his one good arm outstretched in a grasping gesture. Lura did not move until his hand almost closed on her arm and then she sprang back. Her hand sought the bosom of her robe and the Viceroy recoiled as a glittering dagger flashed in the air.

"Back, Jovian!" cried Lura in ringing tones. "Think you that the daughter of a king of men is to be a toy for your base Jovian passions? The point of this dagger is poisoned so that one touch through your skin will mean death. One step nearer and I will strike!"

The Viceroy hesitated for a moment and then drew from his robe a short thick tube. Lura correctly interpreted the gesture.

"Raise that tube and I will bury the blade in my own body!" she cried. "I know that you have the power to clasp me in your arms, but it will be a corpse which you clasp."

She lowered the knife until the point rested against the skin of her throat. The slightest pressure would cause it to penetrate her skin and bring about her almost instant death. Glavour watched her like a cat, the tube ready in his hand. With a grim laugh he threw the tube from him and walked a few steps away. Lura lowered the knife. As she did so, Glavour turned with a movement so swift that the eye could hardly follow it. His eyes caught Lura's and she straightened back her head, powerless against his will, caught as she was, momentarily off her guard.

"Throw down your knife," said Glavour's voice slowly. Lura struggled to raise the weapon against herself, but she could not. Slowly her fingers relaxed and the weapon clattered on the floor. Still holding her eyes with his own, Glavour stepped forward until his huge splayed foot rested on the weapon. He averted his gaze and swiftly picked it up. Lura gave a scream of horror and strove to fly, but the heavy door was barred against her. Glavour placed the weapon in a cabinet on the wall which he locked and then turned to her, an expression of triumph on his face.

"It is useless, Daughter of Man, to struggle against the will of the Sons of God," he said mockingly. "What we desire is ours. Come to me."

Lura's face showed an expression of loathing as she looked at the huge misshapen monstrosity before her. The Viceroy forgot the momentary satisfaction of his triumph in his rage at her attitude. With a growl of anger he grasped at her. Lura avoided his rush and ran along the side of the room, Glavour in pursuit. He cornered her at last and she stopped with her back to the tapestry with which the room was hung. Glowering in his triumph, Glavour approached and reached out his hand to seize her. His huge paw descended, but before it touched her shoulder a hand with fingers of steel reached through the hangings and grasped his wrist.

When Sonom had dragged Lura into the room, Damis inserted the point of his dagger into the tapestry and started to cut a slit through which he could enter the room. The keen-edged knife cut for a few inches readily enough and then stopped. Damis withdrew the blade and examined the stuff before him. An expression of dismay crossed his face, for the material was crisscrossed with stellanum wires, set six inches apart. Each juncture was braised together and the whole made a web

through which he could not force his way. Cautiously he exerted his strength. The keen blade hewed through the first of the stellanium strands, but Damis held his breath as the wire parted. It seemed impossible that the ting of parting metal which sounded like a thunderclap in his ears would not be heard by the Viceroy. He knew that there must be an entrance into the room through the hangings and he made his way cautiously forward, testing the draperies from time to time with his knife.

When Lura laid her dagger against her breast and threatened to end her life, it took all of Damis' self-control to keep from crying out and striving to force his way into the room by sheer strength. He knew the toughness of stellanium well enough to realize the impossibility of even his enormous strength tearing apart a webbing of it. The certainty that Glavour would not push matters far enough to rob himself of his prey aided him to restrain his ardor and to pursue his systematic search.

He came at last to a corner where his knife met with no resistance as it made its way through the silken stuff on the walls. Swiftly he cut a slit through which he could rush. As he parted the material, Lura rushed past him and stood with her back to the wall to await the oncoming Viceroy. Damis raised his hand and stood ready. As Glavour's huge paw descended on Lura's shoulder Damis' hand shot out. Still holding the wrist of the Viceroy in a grip of steel, he emerged from his hiding place, tearing off the black wig and beard which disguised him.

"Damis!" cried Lura in wonder and delight as she saw him.

Glavour stared with unbelieving eyes for a moment and then a hoarse cry of alarm burst from his lips. Desperately he strove to release his wrist from the Neptholim's grip, but to no avail. He disengaged his crippled arm from the scarf which supported it and groped under his robe for a weapon. Lura cried out in warning, but Damis had anticipated such a move. With a quick effort he whirled about and drew the Viceroy's arm over his shoulder. He bent forward and exerted his full strength. The huge bulk of Glavour rose in the air and pitched forward over Damis' shoulder. There was a crash as he landed on the marble floor. Quick as a cat, Damis sprang on him and pinioned down his arms.

"Take his weapons, Lura!" he cried.

Lura bent over the prostrate form of the Jovian to take from his belt the tubes which he habitually carried there. As she stooped, Glavour raised one of his huge feet and struck her with all the force of his mighty thighs

behind the blow. With a cry of pain, Lura flew halfway across the room. Damis leaped to her assistance, forgetting for a moment the potentialities for destruction which the Viceroy bore on his person. A sudden sound made him whirl about. He bent over Lura and picked her from the floor. With her in his arms he leaped to one side just as a flash of violet light stabbed through the air. It missed them by inches. He dropped Lura on a rug and turned to face Glavour.

On the Jovian's face was an expression of fiendish triumph. In his hand was a short black tube which he aimed with deliberate slowness at the crouching Neptholim. Damis shifted his gaze from the Viceroy's eyes and concentrated it on the muscles of his wrist. Glavour's grip tightened and Damis leaped to one side as the violet light again stabbed the air. With an oath, Glavour swung the deadly ray in an arc trying to reach the Neptholim, but Damis moved like a cat. Once, as the ray almost touched him, he sprang high in the air and let it sweep by under him. With each movement he came nearer to the Viceroy. Slowly the violet began to lose its intensity of color. Glavour dropped it and reached for a second tube. Before he could draw one, Damis was on him.

Chapter 7

The Deluge

Few of the Sons of God and none of the Neptholim, save Damis, could match the brute strength of the Viceroy. As Damis rushed, Glavour sidestepped and caught the Neptholim's arm in a bone-crushing grasp. Damis made no effort to break the grip, but with his free hand he gripped the wrist of Glavour's crippled arm. With a quick effort he twisted it and the Viceroy gave a shriek of pain as the newly knit bone gave way and his arm fell, dangling and useless. Damis caught his sound arm in a powerful grip and twisted slowly on his wrist. Gradually Glavour's fingers relaxed and Damis' arm was free. His hands shot up and gripped Glavour about the throat just in time to shut off the cry for help which was forming on his thick lips. The two giants strove silently for mastery in the struggle which meant life for the victor and death for the vanquished. The expression in Damis' eyes was one of confident mastery, but the face of the Jovian showed something that was strangely akin to fear. Even when he was whole, Glavour had found that his strength was no match for the power that lay in Damis' graceful limbs. With one of the Viceroy's arms useless, the issue was a foregone conclusion.

Glavour's face gradually grew purple and his eyes started out of their sockets. His tongue protruded horribly from his opened jaws. He grew weaker until it was only Damis' grip which kept him from falling to the ground. Then Damis broke his silence and spoke slowly and distinctly into the dying Viceroy's ears.

"I was loyal to you, Glavour," he said, "despite your brutality and sensuality which sickened me, until you strove to add to your already crowded seraglio the maiden whom I had chosen. As a Neptholim, you thought I had no right which you need respect and I would tamely submit to whatever you chose to do. You forgot that in my veins run the best blood of Earth and the proudest blood of Jupiter. Hortan was a Mildash of Jupiter, a rank to which you could never aspire. I restricted your

efforts and proved to you a thing which I long have known, that, man to man, I am your superior.

"Even then you might have won back my loyalty had I not learned how my father and my mother came to their death. It has always been given out that they went to Jupiter on a summons from Tubain, but I know the truth. They died under the knife of a cowardly assassin, under your knife, Glavour. Then it was that I swore that it would be my hand that would strike you down. When you raised your hand against me, you were Viceroy of the Earth and your power was secure, for the conspiracy against you had no hope of success. What is the situation now? You are beleaguered in your palace, holding only the ground your few feeble weapons cover. Even this ground you hold only on the sufferance of the Earthmen. Listen to what I say, for I wish your last moments to be bitter ones. On the hill east of the city sit two weapons of a type and a power unknown to both Earth and Jupiter. They are the deadly black ray weapons of Mars. Ah, you tremble! You have good cause. One of them is trained on this palace while the other searches the heavens, ready to blast into powder the fleet of Tubain when it appears. And who, think you, brought this about, Glavour? It was I, Damis, the Nephthalim, the 'half-breed bastard' whom you despised. My only regret is that I cannot send you to the twilight of the gods as you sent that other arch-traitor, Havenner. Are your last moments pleasant, Glavour? I am increasing the pressure slowly so that you will have time to think, to think of the Earthmen you have given to sacrifice and torture, to think of your ruler, Hortan, dying under your knife, to think of the doom which is about to overcome your race. Think, Glavour, for your time for thought is short."

As he finished, Damis thrust back on the Viceroy's chin with a sudden effort. There was a dull crack as Glavour's neck broke and Damis gently lowered the inert bulk to the floor. He felt a touch on his arm as he straightened up. He whirled like a cat and Lura shrank back with a frightened gesture. Damis opened his arms and in an instant the Earth-girl was folded in them.

"Is my father safe?" was her first question.

"Safer by far than we are," exclaimed Damis with a sudden pang of anxiety. He glanced at the time-recording device on the wall. Three-quarters of an hour had passed since he had first entered the Viceregal palace. If the estimates of Tubain's arrival which he had heard were correct, the Jovian fleet should be almost most overhead. "Come," he cried

to Lura, "we have no time to lose if we escape before the palace and all in it are destroyed. Where did Havenner land his ship?"

"In the yard west of the palace," she replied.

"Pray that it is still there," said Damis. "We can reach it through the path by which I entered this room. Come quickly."

With Lura at his heels, he passed through the rent in the tapestry and entered the secret passage through the walls. The way twisted and turned interminably, but finally he paused before a door. Before opening it he slid back a panel which opened a peep-hole and looked out.

"The ship is there," he whispered in a voice of relief. "There is only one guard over it that I can see. Why didn't I think to bring Glavour's weapons? I'll have to try to catch him by surprise. When I open the door, run straight for the space ship as though you were trying to escape from me. Don't try to dodge the guard, keep right on for the ship. As soon as I overpower the guard, get in the ship and hold your hand on the starting lever. When I get on board, throw in the power at a low rate. We don't want to rise rapidly enough to get out of easy control. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Damis," she whispered.

He watched until a sudden shout drew the attention of the sentry momentarily away from the ship he was guarding. A confused sound of cheering came from the palace and the sentry looked toward the western heavens. A moment of gazing and he raised his voice in a raucous shout of joy. Instantly Damis swung open the door.

Lura sped out like a frightened deer with Damis in close pursuit. The attention of the sentry was fixed on some distant object in the sky and he did not see the oncoming pair until Lura was only a few yards from him. The sound of her footsteps attracted his attention and he glanced down at her. An expression of surprise came over his heavy features and he reached for a weapon. His gesture was never finished, for Damis' fist caught him under the ear and he dropped in his tracks. Damis looked in the direction in which the sentry had been staring and a cry broke from his lips.

"The fleet of Tubain!" he cried.

A thousand yards in the air and a scant five miles to the west was a clump of half a dozen Jovian space flyers. Massed behind them were a hundred more. They were approaching with tremendous velocity.

Damis gave a mighty bound and leaped through the airlock of the ship. Hardly had he cleared the door than Lura pulled down the starting lever. The ship flew up from the ground. Hardly had it left its ways than a momentary flash came from the hill east of the palace. The air grew black around them and a cold as of interstellar space penetrated their very bones. In an instant the ship had flashed up into the sun above the zone of influence of the Martian weapon. The shouting from the palace was suddenly stilled. Damis looked down, but nothing could be seen save a pall of intense blackness over the ground where the building stood.

"The port motor, Lura!" cried Damis. The Jovian fleet was approaching so rapidly that a collision with the nearest flyer seemed inevitable. There was a roar from the air as Lura threw in the port blast with its maximum power. Damis was hurled against the side of the ship.

From the hill where the Martian weapons had been placed came a second flash of light and a beam of jetty blackness shot through the air. An edge of it brushed the ship for an instant and Lura stiffened. A terrible cold bit through the flyer and the side where the Martian ray had touched crumpled into powder. The ship sped on, and the friction of the air and the bright rays of the sun dissipated the extreme cold. Through the terrific storm which was raging, the black ray stabbed again and again. Back and forth it played and ship after ship of the Jovians was momentarily caught in the beam. When the beam passed on there was nothing left of the ship save a cloud of dust which the terrific wind dissipated in all directions.

Damis glanced at the Earth below him. It seemed to be flying past the ship at a velocity which he could hardly comprehend. He made his way against the pressure of the movement to the control levers and strove to check the speed. As the Earth ceased to revolve beneath them, the wind rose to a terrible force.

"What has happened, Damis?" shrieked Lura in his ear.

"I don't know," he shouted in reply. "I am trying to keep away from the neighborhood of the palace for a while until the Jovian fleet is destroyed. Toness and your father might not be able to tell us from one of Tubain's ships and they might turn the ray on us."

He bent over the control levers of the ship, but they refused to obey his touch. The stern motor still roared with enough force to keep them three thousand feet above the ground, but none of the side motors responded to the controls. The ship was helpless and was tossed about, a plaything of the terrific wind which howled through the heavens. Damis watched the ground below them.

"Look, Lura!" he cried.

They swept over the site of the palace. The black ray was no longer playing on it, but the whole palace glistened like crystal.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Frost!" he shouted. "The Martian weapon did its work well. Everything in that palace is frozen. In the name of Tubain!"

The Jovian ejaculation had burst from his lips, unbidden, at the sight which met his gaze. Racing over the land was a solid wall of water, hundreds of feet high and moving with enormous speed. On toward the palace it swept. Below they could see the Earthmen on the hill striving to fly, but there was no place of safety. The oncoming wall of water was higher by a hundred feet than the top of the hill and it was the highest bit of land for many miles.

Nearer and nearer came the water until with a roar and a crash which they could plainly hear in the crippled space ship, it swept over the hill and the palace, burying them under a hundred feet of brine.

"Father!" cried Lura in anguish.

Damis made his way across the ship and folded her in his arms.

"He was chosen as one of the lives needed to buy the freedom of the Earth," he murmured to her. "It is hard, for I loved him as a father; but it was the end which he would have chosen. He died at the head of his followers battling for freedom."

"What happened, Damis?" asked Lura an hour later as she looked down on the seething tumult of water under them.

"As nearly as I can figure out, the Jovian fleet approached the palace from the west at a low elevation. In order to destroy them, we could not use the Martian weapon normal to the Earth's surface as they commanded us, but were forced to use it tangentially. The enormous counter reaction to the stream of force of almost incredible intensity which was shot at Tubain's flyers, had to be absorbed in some way. The weapon

could not take it up as it was anchored to the center of gravity of the earth. As a result, the force was translated into one of increased rotation. The Earth must be spinning on its axis at fully twice its former rate. Both the air and the water had too much inertia to follow the accelerated motion of the land, so the wind blew a gale and the oceans left their beds and swept over the land. Everything must have been swept to destruction before this flood."

"And all our labor and sacrifice has been useless," cried Lura. "We have freed a world at the cost of the lives of its inhabitants."

"The world is not lost, sweetheart," he cried as he clasped her to him. "The floods will not have overwhelmed the mountains and some men and animals will have escaped. The waters will subside in a few weeks as they take up the new rotation of the Earth. By His will, we are spared for the labor of building a new world. As soon as the land again appears above the waters, we will land and assemble those who have been spared. The fleet of Jupiter has been destroyed and we need fear no fresh attack for ages, perhaps never. Unhampered, we will build a new world and try to avoid the mistakes of the old one."

"Look, Damis!" exclaimed Lura in a hushed tone.

From the spray and mist below them leaped a living bridge of colored light. Above the sun it arced its way into the heavens in the direction in which they knew Mars lay.

"It is His promise," whispered Damis reverently, "that henceforth the planets will live in peace and amity and that nevermore will the Jovians be allowed to invade us."

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