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Madness from Mars

Clifford D. Simak

The Hello Mars IV was coming home, back from the outward reaches of space, the first ship ever to reach the Red Planet and return. Telescopes located in the Crater of Copernicus Observatory on the Moon had picked it up and flashed the word to Earth, giving its position. Hours later, Earth telescopes had found the tiny mote that flashed in the outer void.

Two years before, those same telescopes had watched the ship's outward voyage, far out until its silvery hull had dwindled into nothingness. From that day onward there had been no word or sign of Hello Mars IV - nothing until the lunar telescopes, picking up again that minute speck in space, advised Earth of its homecoming.

Communication with the ship by Earth had been impossible. On the Moon, powerful radio stations were capable of hurling ultra-short wave messages across the quarter million miles to Earth. But man as yet had found no means of communicating over fifty million miles of space. So Hello Mars IV had arrowed out into the silence, leaving the Moon and the Earth to speculate and wonder over its fate.

Now, with Mars once again swinging into conjunction, the ship was coming back - a tiny gnat of steel pushing itself along with twinkling blasts of flaming rocket-fuel. Heading Earthward out of that region of silent mystery, spurning space-miles beneath its steel-shod heels. Triumphant, with the red dust of Mars still clinging to its plates - a mote of light in the telescopic lenses.

Aboard it were five brave men - Thomas Delvaney, the expedition's leader; Jerry Cooper, the red-thatched navigator; Andy Smith, the world's ace cameraman, and two space-hands, Jimmy Watson and Elmer Paine, grim old veterans of the Earth-Moon run.

There had been three other Hello Mars ships - three other ships that had never come back - three other flights that had collided with a meteor a million miles out from the Moon. The second had flared briefly, deep in space, a red splash of flame in the telescopes through which the flight was watched - the fuel tanks had exploded. The third had simply disappeared. On and on it had gone, boring outward until lost from sight. That had been six years ago, but men still wondered what had happened.

Four years later - two years ago - the Hello Mars IV had taken off. Today it was returning, a gleaming thing far out in space, a shining symbol of man's conquest of the planets. It had reached Mars - and it was coming back. There would be others, now - and still others. Some would flare against the black and be lost forever. But others would win through, and man, blindly groping, always outward, to break his earthly bonds, at last would be on the pathway to the stars.

Jack Woods, Express reporter, lit a cigarette and asked:

'What do you figure they found out there, Doc?'

Dr. Stephen Gilmer, director of the Interplanetary Communications Research Commission, puffed clouds of smoke from his black cigar and answered irritably:

'How in blue hell would I know what they found? I hope they found something. This trip cost us a million bucks.'

'But can't you give me some idea of what they might have found?' persisted Woods. 'Some idea of what Mars is like. Any new ideas.'

Dr. Gilmer wrangled the cigar viciously.

'And have you spread it all over the front page,' he said. 'Spin something out of my own head just because you chaps are too impatient to wait for the actual data. Not by a damn sight. You reporters get my goat sometimes.'

'Ah, Doc, give us something,' pleaded Gary Henderson, staff man for the Star.

'Sure,' said Don Buckley, of the Spaceways. 'What do you care? You can always say we misquoted you. It wouldn't be the first time.'

Gilmer gestured toward the official welcoming committee that stood a short distance away.

'Why don't you get the mayor to say something, boys?' he suggested. 'The mayor is always ready to say something.'

'Sure,' said Gary, 'but it never adds up to anything. We've had the mayor's face on the front page so much lately that he thinks he owns the paper.'

'Have you any idea why they haven't radioed us?' asked

Woods. 'They've been in sending distance for several hours now.'

Gilmer rolled the cigar from east to west. 'Maybe they broke the radio,' he said.

Nevertheless there were little lines of worry on his face. The fact that there had been no messages from the Hello Mars IV troubled him. If the radio had been broken it could have been repaired.

Six hours ago the Hello Mars IV had entered atmosphere. Even now it was circling the Earth in a strenuous effort to lose speed. Word that the ship was nearing Earth had brought spectators to the field in ever-increasing throngs. Highways and streets were jammed for miles around.

Perspiring police cordons struggled endlessly to keep the field clear for a landing. The day was hot, and soft drink stands were doing a rushing business. Women fainted in the crowd and some men were knocked down and trampled. Ambulance sirens sounded.

'Humph,' Woods grunted. 'We can send space-ships to Mars, but we don't know how to handle crowds.'

He stared expectantly into the bright blue bowl of the sky.

'Ought to be getting in pretty soon,' he said.

His words were blotted out by a mounting roar of sound. The ear-splitting explosions of roaring rocket tubes. The thunderous drumming of the ship shooting over the horizon.

The bellow from the crowd competed with the roaring of the tubes as the Hello Mars IV shimmered like a streak of silver light over the field. Then fading in the distance, it glowed redly as its forward tubes shot flame.

'Cooper sure is giving her everything he has,' Woods said in awe. 'He'll melt her down, using the tubes like that.'

He stared into the west, where the ship had vanished. His cigarette forgotten, burned down and scorched his fingers.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw Jimmy Andrews, the Express photographer.

'Did you get a picture?' Woods roared at him.

'Picture, hell,' Andrews shouted back. 'I can't shoot greased lightning.'

The ship was coming back again, its speed slowed, but still traveling at a terrific pace. For a moment it hung over the horizon and then nosed down toward the field.

'He can't land at that speed,' Woods yelled. 'It'll crack wide open!'

'Look out,' roared a dozen voices and then the ship was down, its nose plowing into the ground, leaving in its wake a smoking furrow of raw earth, its tail tilting high in the air, threatening to nose over on its back.

The crowd at the far end of the field broke and stampeded, trampling, clawing, pushing, shoving, suddenly engulfed in a hysteria of fear at the sight of the ship plowing toward them.

But the Hello Mars IV stopped just short of the police cordon, still right side up. A pitted, battered ship - finally home from space - the first ship to reach Mars and return.

The newspapermen and photographers were rushing forward. The crowd was shrieking. Automobile horns and sirens blasted the air. From the distant rim of the city rose the shrilling of whistles and the far-away roll of clamoring bells.

As Woods ran a thought hammered in his head. A thought that had an edge of apprehension. There was something wrong. If Jerry Cooper had been at the controls, he never would have landed the ship at such speed. It had been a madman's stunt to land a ship that way. Jerry was a skilled navigator, averse to taking chances. Jack had watched him in the Moon Derby five years before and the way Jerry could handle a ship was beautiful to see.

The valve port in the ship's control cabin swung slowly open, clanged back against the metal side. A man stepped out - a man who staggered jerkily forward and then stumbled and fell in a heap.

Dr. Gilmer rushed to him, lifted him in his arms.

Woods caught a glimpse of the man's face as his head lolled in Gilmer's arms. It was Jerry Cooper's face - but a face that was twisted and changed almost beyond recognition, a face that burned itself into Jack Wood's brain, indelibly etched there, something to be remembered with a shudder through the years. A haggard face with deeply sunken eyes, with hollow cheeks, with drooling lips that slobbered sounds that were not words.

A hand pushed at Woods.

'Get out of my way,' shrilled Andrews~ 'How do you expect me to take a picture?'

The newsman heard the camera whirr softly, heard the click of changing plates.

'Where are the others?' Gilmer was shouting at Cooper. The man looked up at him vacantly, his face twisting itself into a grimace of pain and fear.

'Where are the others?' Gilmer shouted again, his voice ringing over the suddenly hushed stillness of the crowd.

Cooper jerked his head toward the ship.

'In there,' he whispered and the whisper cut like a sharp-edged knife.

He mumbled drooling words, words that meant nothing. Then with an effort he answered.

'Dead,' he said.

And in the silence that followed, he said again:

'All dead!'

They found the others in the living quarters back of the locked control room. All four of them were dead - had been dead for days. Andy Smith's skull had been crushed by a mighty blow.

Jimmy Watson had been strangled, with the blue raised welts of blunt fingers still upon his throat. Elmer Paine's body was huddled in a corner, but upon him there were no marks of violence, although his face was contorted into a visage of revulsion, a mask of pain and fear and suffering. Thomas Delvaney's body sprawled beside a table. His throat had been opened with an old fashioned straight-edge razor. The razor, stained with blackened blood, was tightly clutched in the death grip of his right hand.

In one corner of the room stood a large wooden packing box. Across the smooth white boards of the box someone had written shakily, with black crayon, the single word 'Animal'. Plainly there had been an attempt to write something else - strange wandering crayon marks below the single word. Marks that scrawled and stopped and made no sense.

That night Jerry Cooper died, a raving maniac.

A banquet, planned by the city to welcome home the conquering heroes, was cancelled. There were no heroes left to welcome back.

What was in the packing box?

'It's an animal,' Dr. Gilmer declared, 'and that's about as far as I would care to go. It seems to be alive, but that is hard to tell. Even when moving fast - fast, that is, for it - it probably would make a sloth look like chain lightning in comparison.'

Jack Woods stared down through the heavy glass walls that caged the thing Dr. Gilmer had found in the packing box marked 'Animal'.

It looked like a round ball of fur.

'It's all curled up, sleeping,' he said.

'Curled up, hell,' said Gilmer. 'That's the shape of the beast. It's spherical and it's covered with fur. Fur-Ball would be a good name for it, if you were looking for something descriptive. A fur coat of that stuff would keep you comfortable in the worst kind of weather the North Pole could offer. It's thick and it's warm. Mars, you must remember, is damned cold.'

'Maybe we'll have fur-trappers and fur-trading posts up on Mars,' Woods suggested. 'Big fur shipments to Earth and Martian wraps selling at fabulous prices.'

'They'd kill them off in a hurry if it ever came to that,' declared Gilmer. 'A foot a day would be top speed for that baby, if it can move at all. Oxygen would be scarce on Mars. Energy would be something mighty hard to come by and this boy couldn't afford to waste it by running around. He'd just have to sit tight and not let anything distract him from the mere business of just living.'

'It doesn't seem to have eyes or ears or anything you'd expect an animal to have,' Woods said, straining his eyes the better to see the furry ball through the glass.

'He probably has sense-perceptions we would never recognize,' declared Gilmer. 'You must remember, Jack, that he is a product of an entirely different environment - perhaps he rose from an entirely different order of life than we know here on Earth. There's no reason why we must believe that parallel evolution would occur on any two worlds so remotely separated as Earth and Mars.'

'From what little we know of Mars,' he went on, rolling the black cigar between his lips, 'it's just about the kind of animal we'd expect to find there. Mars has little water - by Earth standards, practically none at all. A dehydrated world. There's oxygen there, but the air is so thin we'd call it a vacuum on Earth. A Martian animal would have to get on very little water, very little oxygen.'

'And, when he got it, he'd want to keep it. The spherical shape gives him a minimum surface-per-volume ratio.'

'This makes it easier for him to conserve water and oxygen. He probably is mostly lungs. The fur protects him from the cold. Mars must be devilish cold at times. Cold enough at night to free carbon dioxide. That's what they had him packed in on the ship.'

'No kidding,' said Woods.

'Sure,' said Gilmer. 'Inside the wooden box was a steel receptacle and that fellow was inside of that. They had pumped out quite a bit of the air, made it a partial vacuum, and packed frozen carbon dioxide around the receptacle. Outside of that, between the box and the ice, was paper and felt to slow up melting. They must have been forced to repack him and change air several times during the trip back.'

'Apparently he hadn't had much attention the last few days before they got here, for the oxygen was getting pretty thin, even for him, and the ice was almost gone. I don't imagine he felt any too good. Probably was just a bit sick. Too much carbon dioxide and the temperature uncomfortably warm.'

Woods gestured at the glass cage.

'I suppose you got him all fixed up now,' he said. 'Air conditioned and everything.'

Gilmer chuckled.

'Must seem just like home to him,' he replied. 'In there the atmosphere is thinned down to about one-thousandth Earth standard, with considerable ozone. Don't know whether he needs that, but a good deal of the oxygen on Mars must be in the form of ozone. Surface conditions there are suitable for its production. The temperature is 20 degrees below zero Centigrade. I had to guess at that, because I have no way of knowing from what part of Mars this animal of ours was taken. That would make a difference.'

He wrangled the cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

'A little private Mars all his own,' he stated.

'You found no records at all on the ship?' asked Woods. 'Nothing telling anything at all about him?'

Gilmer shook his head and clamped a vicious jaw on the cigar.

'We found the log book,' he said, 'but it had been deliberately destroyed. Someone soaked it in acid. No chance of getting anything out of it.'

The reporter perched on a desk top and drummed his fingers idly on the wood.

'Now just why in hell would they want to do that?' he asked.

'Why in hell did they do a lot of things they did?' Gilmer snarled. 'Why did somebody, probably Delvaney, kill Paine and Watson? Why did Delvaney, after he did that, kill himself? What happened to Smith? Why did Cooper die insane, screaming and shrieking as if something had him by the throat? Who scrawled that single word on the box and tried to write more, but couldn't? What stopped him writing more?'

Woods nodded his head toward the glass cage.

'I wonder how much our little friend had to do with it,' he speculated.

'You're crazier than a space-bug,' Gilmer snapped. 'What m blue hell could he have had to do with it? He's just an animal and probably of a pretty low order of intelligence. The way things are on Mars he'd be kept too damn busy just keeping alive to build much brain. Of course, I haven't had much chance to study it yet. Dr. Winters, of Washington, and Dr. Lathrop, of London, will be here next week. We'll try to find out something then.'

Woods walked to the window in the laboratory and looked out.

The building stood on top of a hill, with a green lawn sweeping down to a park-like area with fenced off paddock, moat-protected cliff-cages and monkey-islands - the Metropolitan Zoo.

Gilmer took a fresh and fearsome grip on his cigar.

'It proves there's life on Mars,' he contradicted. 'It doesn't prove a damn thing else.'

'You should use a little imagination,' chided Woods.

'If I did,' snarled Gilmer, 'I'd be a newspaperman. I wouldn't be fit for any other job.'

Along toward noon, down in the zoo, Pop Anderson, head-keeper of the lionhouse, shook his head dolefully and scratched his chin.

'Them cats have been actin' mighty uneasy,' he declared. 'Like there was something on their minds. They don't hardly sleep at all. Just prowl around.'

Eddie Riggs, reporter for the Express, clucked sympathetically.

'Maybe they aren't getting the right vitamins, Pop,' he suggested.

Pop disagreed.

'It ain't that,' he said. 'They're gettin' the same feed we always give 'em. Plenty raw meat. But they're restless as all git-out. A cat is a lazy critter. Sleeps hours at a stretch and always takin' naps. But they don't do that no more. Cranky. Fightin' among themselves. I had to give Nero a good whoppin' the other day when he tried to beat up Percy. And when I did he made a pass at me - me, who's took care of him since he was a cub.'

From across the water-moat Nero snarled menacingly at Pop.

'He's still got it in for me,' Pop said. 'If he don't quiet down, I'll give him a raw-hidin' he'll remember. There ain't no lion can get gay with me.'

He glanced apprehensively at the lion-run.

'I sure hope they calm down,' he said. 'This is Saturday and there'll be a big crowd this afternoon. Always makes them nervous, a crowd does, and the way they are now there'll be no holdin' 'em.'

'Anything else you heard of going on?' Riggs asked. Pop scratched his chin.

'Susan died this morning,' he declared.

Susan was a giraffe.

'Didn't know Susan was sick,' said Riggs.

'She wasn't,' Pop told him. 'Just keeled over.'

Riggs turned his eyes back to the lion caves. Nero, a big black-maned brute, was balancing himself on the edge of the water ditch, almost as if he were about to leap into the water. Percy and another lion were tusseling, not too good-naturedly.

'Looks like Nero might be thinking of coming over here after you,' the reporter suggested.

'Shucks,' snorted Pop. 'he wouldn't do that. Not Nero. Nor no other lion. Why, them cats hate water worse'n poison.'

From the elephant paddock, a mile or more away, came the sudden angry trumpeting of the pachyderms. Then a shrill squeal of elephantine rage.

'Sounds like them elephants was actin' up, too,' Pop declared calmly.

Pounding feet thundered around the corner of the walk that circled the cat-cages. A man who had lost his hat, whose eyes were wild with terror, pounded past them. As he ran on he cried:

'An elephant has gone mad! It's coming this way!'

Nero roared. A mountain lion screamed.

A great gray shape, moving swiftly despite its lumbering gait, rounded a clump of bushes and moved out on the smooth green sward of the park. It was the elephant. With trunk reared high, emitting screams of rage, with huge ears flapping, the beast headed for the cat-cages.

Riggs turned and pounded madly toward the administration building. Behind him Pop puffed and panted.

Shrill screams rent the air as early visitors at the zoo scampered for safety.

Animal voices added to the uproar.

The elephant, turning from his original direction, charged through the two acre paddock in which three pairs of wolves were kept, taking fence, trees and brush in his stride.

On the steps of the administration building. Riggs looked back.

Nero, the lion, was dripping water! The water that theoretically should have kept him penned in his cage as securely as steel bars!

A keeper, armed with a rifle, rushed up to Riggs.

'All hell's broken loose,' he shouted.

The polar bears had staged a bloody battle, with two of them dead, two dying and the rest so badly mauled that there was little hope they would live. Two buck deer, with locked horns, were fighting to the death. Monkey Island was in an uproar, with half of the little creatures mysteriously dead - dead, the keepers said, of too much excitement. A nervous condition.

'It ain't natural,' protested Pop, when they were inside. 'Animals don't fight like that.'

Riggs was yelling into a telephone.

Outside a rifle roared.

Pop flinched.

'Maybe that's Nero.' he groaned. 'Nero, that I raised from a cub. Bottle-fed him, I did.'

There were traces of tears in the old man's eyes.

It was Nero. But Nero, before he died, had reached out for the man who held the rifle and had

killed him with a single vicious blow that crushed his skull.

Later that day, in his office, Doctor Gilmer smote the newspaper that lay open on his desk.

'You see that?' he asked Jack Woods.

The reporter nodded grimly. 'I see it. I wrote it. I worked on it all afternoon. Wild animals turned loose in the city. Ravening animals. Mad with the lust to kill. Hospitals full of dying people. Morgues with ripped humanity. I saw an elephant trample a man into the earth before the police shot the beast. The whole zoo gone mad. Like a jungle nightmare.'

He wiped his forehead with his coat sleeve and lit a cigarette with shaking fingers.

'I can stand most anything,' he said, 'but this was the acme of something or other. It was pretty horrible, Doc. I felt sorry for the animals, too,' he said. 'Poor devils. They weren't themselves. It was a pity to have to kill so many of them.'

Doc leaned across the table. 'Why did you come here?' he asked.

Woods nodded toward the glass cage that held the Martian animal. 'I got to thinking,' he said. 'The shambles down there today reminded me of something else -'

He paused and looked squarely at Gilmer.

'It reminded me of what we found in the _Hello Mars IV_.'

'Why?' snapped Gilmer.

'The men on board the ship were insane,' declared Woods. 'Only insane men would do the things they did. And Cooper died a maniac. How he held onto his reason long enough to bring the ship to a landing is more than I know.'

Gilmer took the mangled cigar out of his mouth and concentrated on picking off the worst of the frayed edge. He tucked it carefully back into the corner of his jaw.

'You figured those animals were insane today?'

Woods nodded.

'And for no reason,' he added.

'So you up and suspicioned the Martian animal,' said Gilmer. 'Just how in blue hell do you think that defenseless little Fur-Ball over there could make men and animals go insane?'

'Listen,' said Woods, 'don't act that way, Doc. You're on the trail of something. You broke a poker date tonight to stay here at the laboratory. You had two tanks of carbon monoxide sent up. You were shut in here all afternoon. You borrowed some stuff from Appleman down in the sound laboratory. It all adds up to something. Better tell me.'

'Damn you,' said Gilmer, 'you'd find out anyway even if I kept mum.'

He sat down and put his feet on the desk. He threw the wrecked and battered cigar into the waste-paper basket, took a fresh one out of a box, gave it a few preliminary chews and lit it.

'Tonight,' said Gilmer, 'I am going to stage an execution. I feel badly about it, but probably it is an act of mercy.'

'You mean,' gasped Jack, 'that you are going to kill Fur-Ball over there?'

Gilmer nodded. 'That's what the carbon monoxide is for. Introduce it into the cage. He'll never know what happened. Get drowsy, go to sleep, never wake up. Humane way to kill the thing.'

'But why?'

'Listen to me,' said Gilmer. 'You've heard of ultrasonics, haven't you?'

'Sounds pitched too high for the human ear to hear,' said Woods. 'We use them for lots of things. For underwater signaling and surveying. To keep check on high-speed machines, warn of incipient breakdowns,'

'Man has gone a long way with ultrasonics,' said Gilmer. 'Makes sound do all sorts of tricks. Creates ultrasonics up to as high as 20 million vibrations per second. One million cycle stuff kills germs. Some insects talk to one another with 32,000 cycle vibration. Twenty thousand is about as high as the human ear can detect. But man hasn't started yet. Because little Fur-Ball over there talks with ultrasonics that approximate thirty million cycles.'

The cigar traveled east to west.

'High frequency sound can be directed in narrow beams, reflected like light, controlled. Most of our control has been in liquids. We know that a dense medium is necessary for the best control of ultrasonics. Get high frequency sound in a medium like air and it breaks down fast, dissipates. That is, up to twenty million cycles, as far as we have gone.

'But thirty million cycles, apparently, can be controlled in air, in a medium less dense than our atmosphere. Just what the difference is I can't imagine, although there must be an explanation. Something like that would be needed for audible communication on a place like Mars, where the atmosphere must be close to a vacuum.'

'Fur-Ball used thirty million cycle stuff to talk with,' said Jack, 'That much is clear. What's the connection?'

'This.' said Gilmer. 'Although sound reaching that frequency can't be heard in the sense that your auditory nerves will pick it up and relay it to your brain, it apparently can make direct impact on the brain. When it does that it must do something to the brain. It must disarrange the brain, give it a murderous complex, drive the entity of the brain insane.'

Jack leaned forward breathlessly.

'Then that was what happened on the _Hello Mars IV_. That is what happened down in the park today.'

Gilmer nodded, slowly, sadly.

'It wasn't malicious,' he said. 'I am sure of that. Fur-Ball didn't want to hurt anything. He was just lonesome and a little frightened. He was trying to contact some intelligence. Trying to talk with something. He was asleep or at least physiologically dormant when I took him from the ship. Probably he fell into his sleep just in time to save Cooper from the full effects of the ultrasonics. Maybe he would sleep a lot. Good way to conserve energy.

'He woke up sometime yesterday, but it seemed to take some time for him to get fully awake. I detected slight vibrations from him all day yesterday. This morning the vibrations became stronger. I had put several different assortments of food in the cage, hoping he would choose one or more to eat, give me some clue to his diet. But he didn't do any eating, although he moved around a little bit. Pretty slow, although I imagine it was fast for him. The vibrations kept getting stronger. That was when the real hell broke out in the zoo. He seems to be dozing off again now and things have quieted down.'

Gilmer picked up a box-like instrument to which was attached a set of headphones.

'Borrowed these from Appleman down in the sound laboratory,' he said. 'The vibrations had me stumped at first. Couldn't determine their nature. Then I hit on sound. These things are a toy of Appleman's. Only half-developed yet. They let you 'hear' ultrasonics. Not actual hearing, of course, but an impression of tonal quality, a sort of psychological study of ultrasonics,

translation of ultrasonics into what they would be like if you could hear them.'

He handed the head-set to Woods and carried the box to the glass cage. He set it on the cage and moved it slowly back and forth, trying to intercept the ultrasonics emanating from the little Martian animal.

Woods slipped on the phones, sat waiting breathlessly.

He had expected to hear a high, thin sound, but no sound came. Instead a dreadful sense of loneliness crept over him, a sense of bafflement, lack of understanding, frustration. Steadily the feeling mounted in his brain, a voiceless wail of terrible loneliness and misery - a heart-wrenching cry of home-sickness.

He knew he was listening to the wailing of the little Martian animal, was 'hearing' its cries, like the whimperings of a lost puppy on a storm-swept street.

His hands went up and swept the phones from his head.

He stared at Gilmer, half in horror.

'It's lonesome,' he said. 'Crying for Mars. Like a lost baby.'

Gilmer nodded.

'It's not trying to talk to anyone now,' he said. 'Just lying there, crying its heart out. Not dangerous now. Never intentionally dangerous, but dangerous just the same.'

'But,' cried Woods, 'you were here all afternoon. It didn't bother you. You didn't go insane.'

Gilmer shook his head.

'No,' he said, 'I didn't go insane. Just the animals. And they would become immune after a while with this one certain animal. Because Fur-Ball is intelligent. His frantic attempts to communicate with some living things touched my brain time and time again... but it didn't stay. It swept on. It ignored me.'

'You see, back in the ship it found that the human brain couldn't communicate with it. It recognized it as an alien being. So it didn't waste any more time with the human brain. But it tried the brains of monkeys and elephants and lions, hoping madly that it would find some intelligence to which it could talk, some intelligence that could explain what had happened, tell it where it was, reassure it that it wasn't marooned from Mars forever.'

'I am convinced it has no visual sense, very little else except this ultrasonic voice to acquaint itself with its surroundings and its conditions. Maybe back on Mars it could talk to its own kind and to other things as well. It didn't move around much. It probably didn't have many enemies. It didn't need so many senses.'

'It's intelligent,' said Woods. 'Intelligent to a point where you can hardly think of it as an animal.'

Gilmer nodded.

'You're right,' he said. 'Maybe it is just as human as we are. Maybe it represents the degeneration of a great race that once ruled Mars...'

He jerked the cigar out of his mouth and flung it savagely on the floor.

'Hell,' he said, 'what's the use of speculation? Probably you and I will never know. Probably the human race will never know.'

He reached out and grasped the tank of carbon monoxide, started to wheel it toward the glass cage.

'Do you have to kill it, Doc?' Woods whispered. 'Do you really have to kill it?'

Gilmer wheeled on him savagely.

'Of course I have to kill it,' he roared. 'What if the story ever got out that Fur-Ball killed the boys in the ship and all those animals today? What if he drove others insane? There'd be no more trips to Mars for years to come. Public opinion would make that impossible. And when another one does go out they'll have instructions not to bring back any Fur-Balls - and they'll have to be prepared for the effects of ultrasonics.'

He turned back to the tank and then wheeled back again.

'Woods,' he said, 'you and I have been friends for a long time. We've had many a beer together. You aren't going to publish this, are you, Jack?'

He spread his feet.

'I'd kill you if you did,' he roared.

'No,' said Jack, 'just a simple little story. Fur-Ball is dead. Couldn't take it, here on Earth.'

'There's another thing,' said Gilmer. 'You know and I know that ultrasonics of the thirty million order can turn men into insane beasts. We know it can be controlled in atmosphere, probably over long distances. Think of what the war-makers of the world could do with that weapon! Probably they'll find out in time - but not from us!'

'Hurry up,' Woods said bitterly. 'Hurry up, will you. Don't let Fur-Ball suffer any longer. You heard him. Man got him into this - there's only one way man can get him out of it. He'd thank you for death if he only knew.'

Gilmer laid hands on the tank again.

Woods reached for a telephone. He dialed the Express number.

In his mind he could hear that puppyish whimper, that terrible, soundless cry of loneliness, that home-sick wail of misery. A poor huddled little animal snatched fifty million miles from home, among strangers, a hurt little animal crying for attention that no one could offer.

'Daily Express,' said the voice of Bill Carson, night editor. 'This is Jack,' the reporter said. 'Thought maybe you'd want something for the morning edition. Fur-Ball just died - yeah, Fur-Ball, the animal the Hello Mars IV brought in - Sure, the little rascal couldn't take it.'

Behind him he heard the hiss of gas as Gilmer opened the valve.

'Bill,' he said, 'I just thought of an angle. You might say the little cuss died of loneliness... yeah, that's the idea, grieving for Mars... Sure, it ought to give the boys a real sob story to write...'