

Monster of the Moon MONSTER OF THE MOON  
by Ray Cummings

Betrothed to mortal, promised to the Moon Master, Cylvia Kane goes to her last dread rendezvous with the creature who had fled the world, crying--"I go--but I will come back to claim my bride!"

THE small bungalow which was Cylvia Kane's home stood dark and silent on the declivity of the Canadian hillside. Trees of the lonely neighborhood arched somberly over it. From his seat at the controls of the little air-roller, with Cylvia, his fiancée, beside him, young John Deering gazed down, puzzled. It was now past midnight--he and Cylvia had been to a theatrical performance in the nearby city--but despite the lateness of the hour there should have been lights in the house.

"Strange," he said. "Dark as a cellar switchtube, Cyl. Even if your servants have all gone to bed, wouldn't you think they'd have left a light for us?" Cylvia did not answer. She was a slim, exceedingly beautiful, dark-haired girl of twenty--boyish with her flaring bobbed hair, her snug white blouse open at her sleek rounded throat; and her black and white striped trousers snug down to her small, shiny black shoes. Mute with wonderment, she stared down at her home.

Deering expertly landed the roller on the stage-rack near the house. Queer. The door-slide at the back of the house was wide open. Cylvia gripped his arm. "What's that, John? Look!" A small, dark rectangular blob lay there on the rocky ground beside the path. It was a suitcase belonging to one of the servants. Partly burst open, it lay as though hastily discarded by someone in flight. Cylvia clung to the stalwart Deering as they entered the dark house. Strange, this unnatural silence, this darkness.

The girl switched on the lights.

"Well," Deering muttered, "looks as though they had decamped." The little house showed no signs of disorder, but Mr. and Mrs. Smithers, and their young daughter who was the serving maid, were gone. Had they been frightened away? There were signs of hasty packing of essential belongings--the belongings in the discarded suitcase.

"John! Oh John, come here! Read this!"

It was Cylvia's voice, calling from the living room. Deering joined her, where she was standing at the news ticker-tape. During their absence it had printed a few paragraphs--words strung on the narrow paper ribbon, printed by the teletype mechanism. The white ribbon trembled in Cylvia's hands as she held it spread out under the overhead tubelight.

"John, look! This news report--9:10 tonight."

Silently he scathed the long line of words:

Mt. Forrest Observatory . . . Strange object seen outside Earth's

stratosphere.

. . A tiny cylindrical object with a comet tail behind it was observed at 8:50

this evening through the new reflecting electro-telescope of the Mt. Forrest Observatory. A brief glimpse, obscured almost at once by intervening clouds. Distance possibly eight thousand miles. A descending object, dropping toward Eastern Canada. A vehicle arriving from Interplanetary Space? Mt. Forrest observer reports its aspects similar to rumored experimental ship of the missing

Ralph Goff, seven years ago...."

"WELL," Deering murmured. Blankly he gazed at Cylvia; her obvious terror was astonishing. "Cylvia, what the devil--"

"That Ralph Goff," she gapped. "You--you've heard of him, John?"

Deering had, of course. The thing had happened seven years ago, when Deering had

been a lad of seventeen. He had read, at that time, of Ralph Goff. A man of about forty; a crackpot, eccentric fellow who had gotten notoriety writing vitriolic assaults on mankind. He had been more or less a hermit, hating his fellow man--a misogynist, with weird ideas that he would like to start a hermit

cult of others like himself. Deering remembered how the press and newscasters had jibed at Goff. And Goff had retorted that of all living creatures on Earth,

the human race was the most villainous, the most murderous. His theory was that

animals were superior in morals, in all ethics of conduct; even in latent intelligence.

"Sure I remember him," Deering was murmuring. "But Cylvia--what's it to you?"

"Oh John, I knew him. I was only thirteen then. He came to see father--to get father's financial backing in some wild scheme to establish a colony of animals--to breed them, train them, to bring out their latent intelligence.

To

'give them a chance,' that's what he said. And then he said, 'Some day animals

win rule the world.'"

Blankly Deering stared at her. He recalled too, that there had been rumors that

Goff, who had been a scientist, was working to discover the secret of spaceflight; that he was building a little spacerocket cylinder. And mysteriously both Hoff and his apparatus had disappeared. If he had discovered

the secret of spaceflight, quite evidently he had used it to leave this Earth,

which he hated, rather than share his secret for the benefit of mankind. . .

"But Cylvia," Deering was murmuring, "you're thinking now, if this Goff has come

back--that he might look for you--come here--"

She nodded. "Oh John--I can remember the way he looked at me--my terror of him.

He was--he was so--"

The frightened words died in her throat. In the heat of the summer night, Deering had thrown open one of the window slides. The window here in the silent

living room was a pallid rectangle from the moonlight outside. Was there a weird

shadow there, for a second blotting out the moonlight? Deering thought so; thought he saw the moving blur of something monstrous . . . something unhuman--a

flat head with a great bird-like beak.

But in that second it was gone. Cylvia gasped in terror, with a sucking

intake  
of breath. "Oh John--something--something stalking us--"  
Certainly the stalwart, husky young Deering was no coward. But nevertheless,  
a  
sudden chilling shudder was stabbing at him. He was unarmed; no weapons were  
here in the lonely little bungalow.  
"Quiet!" he murmured. He reached, snapped out the light and the room sprang  
into  
darkness, with just the pallid sheen from the window. He stood with his arm  
around Cylvia as she shuddered against him. And then he heard it--they both  
heard, unmistakable, the sound of a weird croaking voice. And a queer  
flapping  
beat--like giant wings?  
At the window, Deering stared out into the pallid darkness. There was a small  
rocky area under the trees beyond the window, with a little thirty-foot cliff  
nearby. Something was on top of the cliff--a round blob perhaps the size of a  
man. Moonlight was on it--monstrous round thing, with a beak. Its eyes were  
staring down at the house. Then in that instant, it launched itself awkwardly  
out  
into the air. A giant bird? Its stubby wings flapped. But they couldn't  
support  
it, merely checked its awkward flopping fall so that in another second or two  
it  
landed with a plop on the rocks.  
Some weird monstrous bird? The thing leaped to its feet, for a second stared  
at  
the house. Horror was within the stricken, peering young Deering as he  
crouched  
with Cylvia at the window. The ghastly thing out there at the edge of the  
moonlight seemed to have a dark cloak partly enveloping it. And suddenly,  
with  
what seemed an arm and hand, it wrapped the cloak more closely around itself,  
and ran diagonally toward the house, ducking into a tree shadow, where it  
vanished.  
"My God!" Deering muttered. "Cylvia--we've got to get out of here."  
Out the widow, and run--try and reach their little air-roller.... Deering had  
some such instinctive idea. But too late! Dimly he was aware of a sound in  
the  
dark room behind them. Cylvia screamed. A monstrous figure was here in the  
dark  
living room! Another was behind it--ghastly stalking shapes which quite  
evidently had come in through the rear door of the house. Deering had no time  
to  
do more than jump to his feet. Something whizzed through the air, crashed on  
his  
head so that all the world seemed to burst into roaring white light. He  
seemed  
to hear Cylvia screaming as his senses faded....  
DEERING at last came to himself with the feeling that a long time had passed.  
He  
was lying on a mattress, in what seemed a small cubby room. Light came from a  
small bull's-eye window--strange, pallid light, mellow, yellow-red. Stars  
blazed  
out there in a firmament of black. He was on a spaceship! He could hear, and  
feel, the dim throb of its mechanisms; the sucking whirr of air-renewers and  
ventilators and the hiss of rocket-streams.  
Abruptly a door-slide behind him opened, and soundlessly slid closed as a  
figure  
came into the cubby. Deering, with his head still roaring, tried to get up on  
one elbow as he blankly peered. It was an upright thing some six feet high.

Man,  
beast or bird? He could not guess. The round blob of body supported by its  
two  
jointed legs was bluefeathered, with squat, powerful-looking wings, folded  
now  
under the dark cloak which loosely hung from its spindly neck. There was a  
face--a giant, rigid, beak, with little gleaming eyes above it.  
It came forward with little mincing, hopping steps. And then Deering saw that  
it  
had short, jointed arms dangling under the cloak. Breathless, tense with  
horror,  
Deering stared as the thing came and bent over him. Monstrous bird-face; but  
somehow there was a weird intelligence in the glowing eyes. Then the  
foot-long  
beak opened. A cawing voice said: "You--better now? You will not to die?"  
English! The travesty of human voice which a giant parrot might have! But  
there  
was certainly more intelligence behind those staring eyes!  
"You--you can talk?" Deering gasped. Then with a rush of horrified memory he  
thought of Cylvia. "There was a girl with me? Damn you--what did you do with  
her?"  
" She--all right. No you worry--no need." Was that indescribable face  
grinning?  
The pink skin crinkled under the little green, glowing eyes. The ghastly  
bill-mouth stayed open. "I am the Lunite, Lahgg." One of the jointed arms  
came  
up, with prehensile, parrot-like claws which tapped the feathered chest.  
"Lahgg--important one."  
"You take me to that girl, Cylvia," Deering said. "She is here on board?"  
"Yes. But cannot--take you--for you stay here. The Great Master-Man--he is on  
board--tells me, keep you here--"  
Deering's mind was racing. A Lunite? They were on their way, then, to the  
Moon?  
Through the bull's-eye window now, from his changed position, he could see,  
out  
in the black firmament, a great mellow crescent. The Earth! And a pallid,  
streaming light from the other direction, which doubtless was the approaching  
Moon. The Great Master-Man? Could that be the villainous Ralph Goff?  
" Sit down, " Deering offered. This thing--this Lunite, Lahgg--weird  
creature,  
but Deering could not miss its intelligence. The cawing, hideous voice--that  
was  
the physical limitations of its birdlike vocal apparatus; and the limping  
English--a language newly learned.  
LAHGG was willing to talk--grotesque feathered shape squatting beside  
Deering.  
And Deering listened, with an occasional question, piecing together the  
broken  
phrases and with his own imagination filling in the gaps. Upon the far side  
of  
the Moon--that side always unseen by Earthmen--in a giant, cauldron-like  
depression of the satellite, atmosphere was gathered. Like a great  
irregular-shaped sea, two hundred miles in length and width, and three or  
four  
miles deep. An area peopled by a single species--these weird Lunites. This  
Lahgg  
now described himself as one of the most intelligent of his kind. Perhaps it  
was  
a boast--or perhaps they were a moronic bird-people, living free as birds in  
the

trees of their forest, for with the slighter gravity of the Moon their squat wings enabled them to fly awkwardly.

And into this, a human from Earth had come, organizing them, teaching them, showing them better, more complex ways to live.

"We--bird-animals," Lahgg was saying proudly. "Much better than Earth human-men.

More smart. More--he say moral. Human-people bad--"

Surely it was the misogynist Ralph Goff--he who had hated his fellow man--who had taught Lahgg this. Deering stared at the weird, beaked face. The skin was crinkled into little folds under the eyes, the great bill was grotesquely parted. It was as though the creature were grinning--ironically grinning.

"Your Master brought you on this trip to Earth?" Deering prompted.

"Yes. Our world he rules--his little Empire, see? Him, one human. No enough--so

this trip--we get girl, you understand?" Abruptly Lahgg stood up, balancing on

his spindly brown legs. "I bring for you food."

"You take me to that girl," Deering insisted. He tried to stand up, but he was

still weak and dizzy and sank back.

Surely that was an ironic grin on Lahgg's monstrous face. "You do what Lahgg says," he commanded. "You only a human--kill you if bad. You third human for Lunite world. Master says--you slave. Very good for working--much work to do, building life like human-people."

Deering stared as the weird Lunite creature slid the door-panel and was gone. Unquestionably the beaked, grotesque face was stamped with irony--a ghastly, leering grin that stabbed Deering with a shudder....

The remainder of the brief spaceflight was a blur to John Deering. Perhaps he was being kept drugged by the villainous Goff; he never knew. He ate the strange

food which Lahgg brought; drank the liquids at intervals. Vaguely, once or twice

amid the throb and hiss of the space-ship mechanisms, he could hear other cackling, cawing voices; once also the gruff voice of a man. And once he thought

that he heard Cylvia....

Rounding the Moon . . . Deering, at last recovered, stood at his bull's-eye window gazing down at the gleaming pallid spread of Lunar surface now only a few

thousand miles beneath the rocket-ship. Great jagged spires with sunlight and Earthlight on them. . . Familiar surface at which now he was gazing aslant.

There was the giant circular Tycho; and Copernicus... .

Then, hours later, a new surface was spread down there. Still giant peaks, tipped with slanting sunlight. He could see that twilight and a crescent purple

area of night stretched ahead.... Then, in the twilight, as the little rocket-ship dropped lower, the tumbled spread of a turgid atmosphere, lying heavy in the vast moon-hollow, came in view; and presently they were into it. Then through it--down into a twilight region. Tense, Deering stared at the lush,

weird forest that presently was spread a thousand feet under the dropping, slanting ship. Gnarled, fantastic giant trees of seemingly porous vegetation were tangled into a jungle mass. Great blue and red vines interlaced them--vines

with monstrous air-pods and huge flowers of vivid hue.... Off in the distance there was a thread of pallid river. Then it seemed that Deering saw things bobbing in the trees, or scurrying on the ground; the strange, wild Lunites, staring up at the vehicle as it passed....

"You come now--I take you. We land. " Deering swung at the voice of Lahgg behind

him.

Arrival . . . Deering had been docile, while Lahgg bound his crossed wrists behind him. Whether the Lunite was armed or not he had never been able to determine; but it was obvious that any resistance would bring death--not only to

him, but to Cylvia. The little ship now seemed a bustle of activity. Deering saw

none of it. Lahgg herded him into a dim, tiny cross-corridor where stood an outer pressure slide. Then the ship landed. Through a bull's-eye beside him, Deering could see a dim vista of twilit forest. Weird scrambling blobs of creatures were out there. Then some other door of the ship had opened. For a second he caught a tense, anguished glimpse of Cylvia--a squat, cloak-enveloped

man walking beside her, leading her away, with half a dozen of the grotesque Lunites hopping after them.

"Now--we go," Lahgg said. "I take you to Master-Man's home."

WORLD of the Moon. Deering had only a brief sight of it.... A little winding path through the fantastic lacery of brush; spindly giant trees, heavy with pods

and monster flowers . . . Figures of peering Lunites crowded him and his guard;

blobs of the birdlike forms hopping in the brush for a better view. And they were also overhead, running on the rope-vines, hopping from one limb to another.

The forest was noisy with their cawing, jabbering cries in the weird, Lunite animal language. Staring up, Deering saw their dwellings--thatched mounds, woven

of dried vines and leaves, primitive as huge birds' nests....

Then presently the glade opened into a patch of undulating area of soil, with a

little thread of river beyond it and the sullen heavy clouds close overhead.

The

Master-Man's dwelling! It was a sprawled, patched one-story building, seemingly

of porous log-struts, walled with monstrous dried leaves bound with vines.

But

curiously it had a semblance of human habitation--a peaked roof; windows, each

shrouded with a huge dried leaf; a door, and a little front veranda set pathetically askew.

Goff, the Emperor! Hater of mankind--so that there was nothing here which had come from Earth. Yet strangely he seemed to have wanted that this dwelling should be in human fashion.... And a little beyond it there were two or three others, smaller, now only partially built. And Deering saw too where, at a little distance past the huddled buildings, there was a field of soil where human food was growing.

Flickering torchlight showed in the doorway for which Lahgg was heading, They went through it, into a torch-lit room of crude, Earth-style rustic furniture,

draped with the monster leaves.

"So, John Deering. Welcome to Lunaria." It was a heavy, guttural voice from a shadow of the room. Deering whirled. "I am Ralph Goff, once of Earth. Surely you

have heard of me?"

A madman? Mad scientific genius? Was he that? This fantastic little house, even

the man's ironic drawing of the word Lunaria, suggested it. Deering was stabbed

with a shudder as he stared at the strange figure before him. Ralph Goff. A man

of forty odd, with long, tangled, nutted black hair and a full black beard. He was heavy-set; wideshouldered, deep-chested; no more than five feet tall, with thick, dangling, gorilla-like arms. Monstrous gargoyle shape. One shoulder was higher than the other, with a lump behind it. Under the huge beard obviously his face was ugly. He wore no Earth-clothes--disdainful of them, so that now he was dressed in a robe of plaited dried vine-frabric [sic]. Like a toga it draped his misshapen form. A wide belt was around his waist, with flash-weapons clipped to it. Those weapons at least were from Earth. The symbol of his power here. "So?" he murmured again. "You stare, but you do not speak. Are you witless, John Deering?"

"What do you want of me?" Deering demanded. "Where is Cylvia Kane? I want--" "My slave who questions me--and I so quickly has wants? How amusing! Cylvia Kane is unharmed. Why should I harm her--she whom I have picked to share my little empire--my world?" His burning, deep-set eyes clung to Deering. Madman of course--but mad, like so many others, only with his dreams--his lust to rule. Queer, twisted mentality, this misogynist with his hatred of his fellow man--his contempt--his weird belief that animals, beasts and birds, are superior. Beliefs, and lust perhaps born of his own twisted little body--a complex of inferiority. Weird trick of fate that enabled him to leave Earth, and stumble here upon these Lunite creatures whom he could rule. "My little empire," he was saying. "You see its beginning, Deering? Myself and my Queen--the beginning of my little human dynasty. Interesting, isn't it? Who would ever suppose, back on Earth, that the despised Ralph Goff would rise to such heights as this? A world of his own to rule. Thousands of his loyal subjects, to be taught by him until they are superior to all the damnable Earthmen who ever lived! Queer, isn't it? But it was my destiny--" His hand was toying now with one of his jeweled little flash-guns. It made Deering's heart pound.... Was he about to be killed out of hand? THAT girl--Cylvia Kane," Deering began carefully. "If I could see her--" "But why not? She is here. In a few moments she will be given robes for the ceremony. You shall watch it, Deering--you who think you love her. Is that it?"

His deep-set eyes gleamed; his lips snarled back as he ripped out the words. And then his voice ironically again was drawling, "My presentation of their queen to the Lunites--Ralph Goff, their human emperor, and his human queen, You shall see the ceremony, Deering.... You Lahgg--you take him outside now, where he can watch. But guard him carefully, Lahgg."

"Yes, Master." On Lahgg's monstrous birdlike face again Deering saw that strange leering look of irony. Goff clapped his hands suddenly. "You, Meeta!" he called. "Come here!" There was no answer. At the windows, and at the door, other bird-figures were crowding now, cawing, jabbering. Goff stared at them. Then he called again: "Meeta, come herel"

A Lunite appeared. A female, doubtless, with puffed, smaller feathered body

and

a top-knot of feathers above the flat upper curve of the head. A sudden wild fury was upon Goff that he had been kept waiting. "The Human-Master calls and you do not come!" he rasped.

"But Master, I was--"

"Silence!" Goff's hand at his belt suddenly snapped out a length of steel whipcord. He lashed it through the air with a skilled stroke so that it caught

the creature, Meeta, across the face. Her cawing cry was a scream of pain.

Goff rasped, "Is my queen, the little human Cylvia, dressed and ready?"

"Yes, Master--almost."

"Then go back to her, and next time when you are called, come quickly."

The little Lunite retreated. At the windows the others were weirdly muttering;

but as Goff gazed at them they bopped back into the outer darkness.

Smouldering

rebellion.

"You, Lahgg," Goff rasped, "take our slave now so that he may see my triumph. You have an Earth-knife?"

"Yes, Master."

"If he gives you any trouble, I have taught you how the knife may be used to stab into his chest?"

"Yes, Master."

Shuddering, Deering had no recourse but to let himself be led from the house.

If

only he could get his hands free.... This Lahgg--all these weird Moon-creaturies--seemed flimsy, fragile. If he could get loose--perhaps get that

knife which Lahgg was now gripping.

Preparations for the ceremony; ., . The little forest glade now was springing into torchlight as the excited Lunites assembled. Several hundred of them on the

slope of the glade, strung in a crescent facing the house of the Master.

At a point in the lush forest glade some two hundred feet from Goff's dwelling,

Lahgg paused. "We wait here," he said. "You watch--very important--human queen

for us Lunites--"

Deering stood docile, but he was tense, alert. Another huge Lunite had quietly

come and was standing with him and Lahgg--another guard with a gleaming steel Earth-knife in his taloned hand. Then suddenly a great cawing chorus of cries welled out through the torch-lit forest. At the door of Goff's dwelling the Master had appeared, with Cylvia beside him. Deering stood with his heart seeming to pound in his throat as he stared. Cylvia, her slim, pink-white little

body garbed now in a brief drape of red-blue dried fibre. Beautiful little woodnymph. A garland of vivid flowers was set like a crown on her head. There was terror on her pallid face.

Beside Deering his Lunite guard stood close, watchful. But now Lahgg had vanished. Goff was leading Cylvia from the house, toward where a little rustic

platform had been erected for a throne-dais. The awed crowd was silent, watching. And then Deering saw Lahgg. He had appeared behind Goff and Cylvia--Lahgg stealthily moving toward them. The torchlight gleamed on his face,

weirdly contorted now with his little eyes blazing. And the torchlight gleamed

on the naked knife-blade in his hand. Murderous Lahgg! With a leap of horror, Deering realized it. Ghastly, ironic commentary on all living creatures--this



little Empire, with work introduced into it, so that the Lunites were smouldering with rebellion and resentment. And here was one of them, this Lahgg, taught by the human Goff so that Lahgg himself now was lusting to rule. Lahgg to be the Master here--to dominate his fellow creatures in the fashion of mankind!

THE terrible thing happened so quickly that Deering for a moment was stricken into confusion. Goff and Cylvia were mounting the dais. One of the Lunite females, awkwardly attending Cylvia, suddenly incurred Goff's anger. He struck at her, brought from her a cry of fear and pain. It was like a spark thrown into gunpowder. The crowding Lunites abruptly were cawing with anger; milling forward. One of them, with its great beak, pecked at Goff from behind. He whirled; his hand flicked to his belt, came back with a little flash-gun. Its bolt spat; the Lunite fell. A spark in gunpowder. Within a second the throng of bird-creatures was wildly milling forward with cackling, angry cries. Lahgg had jumped, but now Goff saw him--saw his stabbing blade. Goff's little gun spat again--stabbed through Lahgg who tumbled forward, sprawled at Goff's feet.... All within a few seconds. Then Deering was aware that the guard beside him had dropped his torch and fled. The spluttering, still-lighted torch lay here on the ground. Deering flung himself down, shifted backward. The torch flame burned into his hands and wrists--a moment of agonized burning flesh and then the dried vine-rope burned and came loose.

With giant leaps, here with the slight moon-gravity, Deering made for the platform. A wildly cawing group of Lunites got in front of him. He leaped over them--sailing, twenty foot bound--and landed beside Cylvia; caught her up in his arms.

"Oh--Oh John--thank God--"

"The spaceship!" he gasped. "If we can get to it--"

HE set her down, and she ran with him, giant sailing leaps, hand in hand. The little ship at the edge of the glade stood dark, momentarily deserted. At its opened door they turned to look back. Goff was still fighting. He had climbed to the summit of a small rock around which the angry creatures were milling, trying to leap up at him. And suddenly his last little flash-gun was exhausted. He flung it away; stood for a moment poised, with the torchlight painting him. And Deering saw his face. Amazement, disillusionment stamped his features as he faced the wreck of his little empire.... Everywhere the grotesque Lunites were running wild. They had fired Goff's flimsy dwelling; yellow-red flames were leaping from it. The other half-finished houses were burning.... Weird, milling throng of Lunite creatures--they had tried man's life, and now they were destroying it ... repudiating it.... Wreck of an empire. For that second Goff stared at it. Then, with a last despairing cry, he hurled himself down from the rock, and the raging creatures leaped upon him--like vultures, pecking, clawing, pulling him apart....

"Oh John, hurry! Here they come!"

A group of the Lunites surged now at the spaceship. Deering shoved Cylvia inside--barely in time as the weird creatures hurled themselves wildly at the closed spaceship door. Then with hissing rocket-streams, the small ship lifted, slanted upward. The little spaceship slanted higher. A pall of smoke was settling down there now in the glade--turgid, black shroud to hide the ghastly scene of tragedy and death.... And overhead, out beyond the Moon clouds, amid the stars, the huge Earth hovered. Silently Cylvia and Deering stared up at it--great mellow disk of Earth, like a soft gentle beacon calling them home.

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