

THE CURSED EXPEDITION

"Well," said Jimmy Keller, looking across to the gantry to where the rocket rested in the middle of the desert. A lonely wind blew across the desert, and Hugh Bullford said, "Yeah. It's about time to leave for Venus. Why? Why do we want to go to Venus?"

"I don't know," Keller said. "I just don't know."

The rocket ship touched down on Venus. Bullford checked the air and said in amazed tones, "Why, it's good old type Earth air! Perfectly breathable."

They went out, and it was Keller's turn for amazement. "Why, it's just like spring on earth! Everything's lush and green and beautiful. Why ... it's Paradise!"

They ran out. The fruits were exotic and delicious, the temperature perfect. When night fell, they slept outside.

"I'm going to call it the Garden of Eden," said Keller enthusiastically.

Bullford stared into the fire. "I don't like this place, Jimmy.' It feels all wrong. There's something ... evil about it."

"You're space happy." Keller scoffed. "Sleep it off."

The next morning James Keller was dead.

There was a look of horror on his face that Bullford never hoped to see again.

After the burial, Bullford called Earth. He got no reply. The radio was dead. Bullford took it apart and put it together. There was nothing wrong with it, but the fact remained: it didn't work.

Bullford's worry doubled itself. He ran outside. The landscape was the same pleasant and happy. But Bullford could see the evil in it.

"You killed him!" he cried. "I know it!"

Suddenly the ground opened up and it slithered toward him. In near panic, he ran back to the ship. But not before he got a piece of soil. .

He analyzed the soil and then panic took him. Venus was alive.

Suddenly the space ship tilted and went over. Bullford screamed. But the soil closed over it and almost seemed to lick its lips.

Then it reset itself, waiting for the next victim...