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THE RED HELL OF JUPITER
A Thrilling Interplanetary Novella
By PAUL ERNST

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At this the titanic thing went wholly, colossally mad.
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The Red Hell of Jupiter

A Complete Novelette

By Paul Ernst

CHAPTER I

The Red Spot

C

ommander Stone, grizzled chief of the Planetary Exploration Forces, acknowledged Captain Brand Bowen's salute and beckoned him to take a seat.

What is the mystery centered in Jupiter's famous "Red Spot"? Two fighting Earthmen, caught by the "Pipe-men" like their vanished comrades, soon find out.

Brand, youngest officer of the division to wear the triple-V for distinguished service, sat down and stared curiously at his superior. He hadn't the remotest idea why he had been recalled from leave: but that it was on a matter of some importance he was sure. He hunched his big shoulders and awaited orders.

"Captain Bowen," said Stone. "I want you to go to Jupiter as soon as you can arrange to do so, fly low over the red area in the southern hemisphere, and come back here with some sort of report as to what's wrong with that infernal death spot."

He tapped his radio stylus thoughtfully against the edge of his desk.

"As you perhaps know, I detailed a ship to explore the red spot about a year ago. It never came back. I sent another ship, with two good men in it, to check up on the disappearance of the first. That ship, too, never came back. Almost with the second of its arrival at the edge of the red area all radio communication with it was cut off. It was never heard from again. Two weeks ago I sent Journeyman there. Now *he* has been swallowed up in a mysterious silence."

An exclamation burst from Brand's lips. Sub-Commander Journeyman! Senior officer under Stone, ablest man in the expeditionary forces, and Brand's oldest friend!

Stone nodded comprehension of the stricken look on Brand's face. "I know how friendly you two were," he said soberly. "That's why I chose you to go and find out, if you can, what happened to him and the other two ships."

Brand's chin sank to rest on the stiff high collar of his uniform.

"Journeyman!" he mused. "Why, he was like an older brother to me. And now ... he's gone."

T

here was silence in Commander Stone's sanctum for a time. Then Brand raised his head.

"Did you have any radio reports at all from any of the three ships concerning the nature of the red spot?" he inquired.

"None that gave definite information," replied Stone. "From each of the three ships we received reports right up to the instant when the red area was approached. From each of the three came a vague description of the peculiarity of the ground ahead of them: it seems to glitter with a queer metallic sheen. Then, from each of the three, as they passed over the boundary—nothing! All radio communication ceased as abruptly as though they'd been stricken dead."

He stared at Brand. "That's all I can tell you, little enough, God knows. Something ominous and strange is contained in that red spot: but what its nature may be, we cannot even guess. I want you to go there and find out."

Brand's determined jaw jutted out, and his lips thinned to a purposeful line. He stood to attention.

"I'll be leaving to-night, sir. Or sooner if you like. I could go this afternoon: in an hour—"

"To-night is soon enough," said Stone with a smile. "Now, who do you want to accompany you?"

Brand thought a moment. On so long a journey as a trip to Jupiter there was only room in a space ship—what with supplies and all—for one other man. It behooved him to pick his companion carefully.

"I'd like Dex Harlow," he said at last. "He's been to Jupiter before, working with me in plotting the northern hemisphere. He's a good man."

"He is," agreed Stone, nodding approval of Brand's choice. "I'll have him report to you at once."

He rose and held out his hand. "I'm relying on you, Captain Bowen," he said. "I won't give any direct orders: use your own discretion. But I would advise you not to try to land in the red area. Simply fly low over it, and see what you can discern from the air. Good-by, and good luck."

Brand saluted, and went out, to go to his own quarters and make the few preparations necessary for his sudden emergency flight.

T

he work of exploring the planets that swung with Earth around the sun was still a new branch of the service. Less than ten years ago, it had been, when Ansen devised his first crude atomic motor.

At once, with the introduction of this tremendous new motive power, men had begun to build space ships and explore the sky. And, as so often happens with a new invention, the thing had grown rather beyond itself.

Everywhere amateur space flyers launched forth into the heavens to try their new celestial wings. Everywhere young and old enthusiasts set Ansen motors into clumsily insulated shells and started for Mars or the moon or Venus.

The resultant loss of life, as might have been foreseen, was appalling. Eager but inexperienced explorers edged over onto the wrong side of Mercury and were burned to cinders. They set forth in ships that were badly insulated, and froze in the absolute zero of space. They learned the atomic motor

controls too hastily, ran out of supplies or lost their courses, and wandered far out into space—stiff corpses in coffins that were to be buried only in time's infinity.

To stop the foolish waste of life, the Earth Government stepped in. It was decreed that no space ship might be owned or built privately. It was further decreed that those who felt an urge to explore must join the regular service and do so under efficient supervision. And there was created the Government bureau designated as the Planetary Exploration Control Board, which was headed by Commander Stone.

U

nder this Board the exploration of the planets was undertaken methodically and efficiently, with a minimum of lives sacrificed.

Mercury was charted, tested for essential minerals, and found to be a valueless rock heap too near the sun to support life.

Venus was visited and explored segment by segment; and friendly relations were established with the rather stupid but peaceable people found there.

Mars was mapped. Here the explorers had lingered a long time: and all over this planet's surface were found remnants of a vast and intricate civilization—from the canals that laced its surface, to great cities with mighty buildings still standing. But of life there was none. The atmosphere was too rare to support it; and the theory was that it had constantly thinned through thousands of years till the last Martian had gasped and died in air too attenuated to support life even in creatures that must have grown greater and greater chested in eons of adaptation.

Then Jupiter had been reached: and here the methodical planet by planet work promised to be checked for a long time to come. Jupiter, with its mighty surface area, was going to take some exploring! It would be years before it could be plotted even superficially.

B

rand had been to Jupiter on four different trips; and, as he walked toward his quarters from Stone's office, he reviewed what he had learned on those trips.

Jupiter, as he knew it, was a vast globe of vague horror and sharp contrasts.

Distant from the sun as it was, it received little solar heat. But, with so great a mass, it had cooled off much more slowly than any of the other planets known, and had immense internal heat. This meant that the air—which closely approximated Earth's air in density—was cool a few hundred yards up from the surface of the planet, and dankly hot close to the ground. The result, as the cold air constantly sank into the warm, was a thick steamy blanket of fog that covered everything perpetually.

Because of the recent cooling, life was not far advanced on Jupiter. Too short a time ago the sphere had been but a blazing mass. Tropical marshes prevailed, crisscrossed by mighty rivers at warmer than blood heat. Giant, hideous fernlike growths crowded one another in an everlasting jungle. And among the distorted trees, from the blanket of soft white fog that hid all from sight, could be heard constantly an ear-splitting chorus of screams and bellows and whistling snarls. It made the blood run cold just to listen—and to speculate on what gigantic but tiny-brained monsters made them.

Now and then, when Brand had been flying dangerously low over the surface, a wind had risen strong enough to dispel the fog banks for an instant; and he had caught a flash of Jovian life. Just a flash, for example, of a monstrous lizard-like thing too great to support its own bulk: or a creature all neck and tail, with ridges of scale on its armored hide and a small serpentine head weaving back and forth among the jungle growths.

O

ccasionally he had landed—always staying close to the space ship, for Jupiter's gravity made movement a slow and laborious process, and he didn't want to be caught too far from security. At such times he might hear a

crashing and splashing and see a reptilian head loom gigantically at him through the fog. Then he would discharge the deadly explosive gun which was Earth's latest weapon, and the creature would crash to the ground. The chorus of hissings and bellowings would increase as he hastened slowly and laboriously back to the ship, indicating that other unseen monsters of the steamy jungle had flocked to tear the dead giant to pieces and bolt it down.

Oh, Jupiter was a nice planet! mused Brand. A sweet place—if one happened to be a two-hundred-foot snake or something!

He had always thought the entire globe was in that new, raw, marshy state. But he had worked only in one comparatively small area of the northern hemisphere; had never been within thirty thousand miles of the red spot. What might lie in that ominous crimson patch, he could not even guess. However, he reflected, he was soon to find out, though he might never live to tell about it.

Shrugging his shoulders, he turned into the fifty story building in which was his modest apartment. There he found, written by the automatic stylus on his radio pad, the message: "Be with you at seven o'clock. Best regards, and I hope you strangle. Dex Harlow."

D

ex Harlow was a six-foot Senior Lieutenant who had been on many an out-of-the-way exploratory trip. Like Brand he was just under thirty and perpetually thirsting for the bizarre in life. He was a walking document of planetary activity. He was still baked a brick red from a trip to Mercury a year before: he had a scar on his forehead, the result of jumping forty feet one day on the moon when he'd meant to jump only twenty; he was minus a finger which had been irreparably frost-bitten on Mars; and he had a crumpled nose that was the outcome of a brush with a ten-foot bandit on Venus who'd tried to kill him for his explosive gun and supply of glass, dyite-containing cartridges.

He clutched Brand's fingers in a bone-mangling grip, and threw his hat into a far corner.

"You're a fine friend!" he growled cheerfully. "Here I'm having a first rate time for myself, swimming and planing along the Riviera, with two more weeks leave ahead of me—and I get a call from the Old Man to report to you. What excuse have you for your crime?"

"A junket to Jupiter," said Brand. "Would you call that a good excuse?"

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Dex. "Wouldn't you know it? Of course you'd have to pick a spot four hundred million miles away from all that grand swimming I was having!"

"Would you like to go back on leave, and have me choose someone else?" inquired Brand solemnly.

"Well, no," said Dex hastily. "Now that I'm here, I suppose I might as well go through with it."

Brand laughed. "Try and get you out of it! I know your attitude toward a real jaunt. And it's a real jaunt we've got ahead of us, too, old boy. We're going to the red spot. Immediately."

D

ex's sandy eyebrows shot up. "The red spot! That's where Coblenz and Heiroy were lost!"

"And Journeyman," added Brand. "He's the latest victim of whatever's in the hell-hole."

Dex whistled. "Journeyman too! Well, all I've got to say is that whatever's there must be strong medicine. Journeyman was a damn fine man, and as brave as they come. Have you any idea what it's all about?"

"Not an idea. Nobody has. We're to go and find out—if we can. Are you all ready?"

"All ready," said Dex.

"So am I. We'll start at eleven o'clock in one of the Old Man's best cruisers. Meanwhile, we might as well go and hunt up a dinner somewhere, to fortify us against the synthetic pork chops and bread we'll be swallowing for the next fortnight."

They went out; and at ten minutes of eleven reported at the great space ship hangars north of New York, with their luggage, a conspicuous item of which was a chess board to help while away the long, long days of spacial travel. Brand then paused a little while for a final check-up on directions.

They clambered into the tiny control room and shut the hermetically sealed trap-door. Brand threw the control switch and precisely at eleven o'clock the conical shell of metal shot heavenward, gathering such speed that it was soon invisible to human eyes. He set their course toward the blazing speck that was Jupiter, four hundred million miles away; and then reported their start by radio to Commander Stone's night operator.

The investigatory expedition to the ominous red spot of the giant of the solar system was on.

CHAPTER II

The Pipe-like Men

B

Brand began to slacken speed on the morning of the thirteenth day (morning, of course, being a technical term: there are no horizons in space for the sun to rise over). Jupiter was still an immense distance off; but it took a great while to slow the momentum of the space ship, which, in the frictionless emptiness of space, had been traveling faster and faster for nearly three hundred hours.

Behind them was the distant ball of sun, so far off that it looked no larger than a red-hot penny. Before them was the gigantic disk of Jupiter, given a white tinge by the perpetual fog blankets, its outlines softened by its thick layer of atmosphere and cloud banks. Two of its nine satellites were in sight at the moment, with a third edging over the western rim.

"Makes you think you're drunk and seeing triple, doesn't it?" commented Dex, who was staring out the thick glass panel beside Brand. "Nine moons! Almost enough for one planet!"

Brand nodded abstractly, and concentrated on the control board. Rapidly the ship rocketed down toward the surface. The disk became a whirling, gigantic plate; and then an endless plain, with cloud formations beginning to take on definite outline.

"About to enter Jupiter's atmosphere." Brand spoke into the radio transmitter. Over the invisible thread of radio connection between the space ship and Earth, four hundred million miles behind, flashed the message.

"All right. For God's sake, be careful," came the answer, minutes later. "Say something at least every half hour, to let us know communication is unbroken. We will sound at ten second intervals."

The sounding began: *peep*, a shrill little piping noise like the fiddle of a cricket. Ten seconds later it came again: *peep*. Thereafter, intermittently, it

keened through the control room—a homely, comforting sound to let them know that there was a distant thread between them and Earth.

L

ower the shell rocketed. The endless plain slowly ceased its rushing underneath them as they entered the planet's atmosphere and began to be pulled around with it in its revolution. Far to the west a faint red glow illuminated the sky.

The two men looked at each other, grimly, soberly.

"We're here," said Dex, flexing the muscles of his powerful arms.

"We are," said Brand, patting the gun in his holster.

The rapid dusk of the giant planet began to close in on them. The thin sunlight darkened; and with its lowering, the red spot of Jupiter glared more luridly ahead of them. Silently the two men gazed at it, and wondered what it held.

They shot the space ship toward it, and halted a few hundred miles away. Watery white light from the satellites, "that jitter around in the sky like a bunch of damned waterbugs," as Dex put it, was now the sole illumination.

They hung motionless in their space shell, to wait through the five-hour Jovian night for the succeeding five hours of daylight to illumine a slow cruise over the red area that, in less than a year, had swallowed up three of Earth's space ships. And ever as they waited, dozing a little, speculating as to the nature of the danger they faced, the peep, peep of the radio shrilled in their ears to tell them that there was still a connection—though a very tenuous one—with their mother planet.

R

ed spot ten miles away," said Brand in the transmitter. "We're approaching it slowly."

The tiny sun had leaped up over Jupiter's horizon; and with its appearance they had sent the ship planing toward their mysterious destination. Beneath them the fog banks were thinning, and ahead of them were no clouds. For some reason there was a clarity unusual to Jupiter's atmosphere in the air above the red section.

"Red spot one mile ahead, altitude forty thousand feet," reported Brand.

He and Dex peered intently through the port glass panel. Ahead and far below, their eyes caught an odd metallic sheen. It was as though the ground there were carpeted with polished steel that reflected red firelight.

Tense, filled with an excitement that set their pulses pounding wildly, they angled slowly down, nearer to the edge of the vast crimson area, closer to the ground. The radio keened its monotonous signal.

Brand crawled to the transmitter, laboriously, for his body tipped the scales here at nearly four hundred pounds.

"We can see the metallic glitter that Journeyman spoke of," he said. "No sign of life of any kind, though. The red glow seems to flicker a little."

Closer the ship floated. Closer. To right and left of them for vast distances stretched the red area. Ahead of them for hundreds of miles they knew it extended.

"We're right on it now," called Brand. "Right on it—we're going over the edge—we're—"

Next instant he was sprawling on the floor, with Dex rolling helplessly on top of him, while the space ship bounced up twenty thousand feet as though propelled by a giant sling.

he peep, peep of the radio signalling stopped. The space ship rolled helplessly for a moment, then resumed an even keel. Brand and Dex gazed at each other.

"What the hell?" said Dex.

He started to get to his feet, put all his strength into the task of moving his Jupiter-weighted body, and crashed against the top of the control room.

"Say!" he sputtered, rubbing his head. "Say, what *is* this?"

Brand, profiting by his mistake, rose more cautiously, shut off the atomic motor, and approached a glass panel again. "God knows what it is," he said with a shrug. "Somehow, with our passing into the red area, the pull of gravity has been reduced by about ten, that's all."

"Oh, so that's all, is it? Well, what's happened to old Jupe's gravity?"

Again Brand shrugged. "I haven't any idea. Your guess is as good as mine."

He peered down through the panel, and stiffened in surprise.

"Dex!" he cried. "We're moving! And the motor is shut off!"

"We're drawing down closer to the ground, too," announced Dex, pointing to their altimeter. "Our altitude has been reduced five thousand feet in the last two minutes."

Quickly Brand turned on the motor in reverse. The space ship, as the rushing, reddish ground beneath indicated, continued to glide forward as though pulled by an invisible rope. He turned on full power. The ship's progress was checked a little. A very little! And the metallic red surface under them grew nearer as they steadily lost altitude.

"Something seems to have got us by the nose," said Dex. "We're on our way to the center of the red spot, I guess—to find whatever it was that Journeyman found. And the radio communication has been broken somehow...."

Wordlessly, they stared out the panel, while the shell, quivering with the strain of the atomic motor's fight against whatever unseen force it was that

relentlessly drew them forward, bore them swiftly toward the heart of the vast crimson area.

L

ook!" cried Brand.

For over an hour the ship had been propelled swiftly, irresistibly toward the center of the red spot. It had been up about forty thousand feet. Now, with a jerk that sent both men reeling, it had been drawn down to within fifteen thousand feet of the surface; and the sight that was now becoming more and more visible was incredible.

Beneath was a vast, orderly checkerboard. Every alternate square was covered by what seemed a jointless metal plate. The open squares, plainly land under cultivation, were surrounded by gleaming fences that hooked each metal square with every other one of its kind as batteries are wired in series. Over these open squares progressed tiny, two legged figures, for the most part following gigantic shapeless animals like figures out of a dream. Ahead suddenly appeared the spires and towers of an enormous city!

Metropolis and cultivated land! It was as unbelievable, on that raw new planet, as such a sight would have been could a traveler in time have observed it in the midst of a dim Pleistocene panorama of young Earth.

It was instantly apparent that the city was their destination. Rapidly the little ship was rushed toward it; and, realizing at last the futility of its laboring, Brand cut off the atomic motor and let the shell drift.

Over a group of squat square buildings their ship passed, decreasing speed and drifting lower with every moment. The lofty structures that were the nucleus of the strange city loomed closer. Now they were soaring slowly down a wide thoroughfare; and now, at last, they hovered above a great open square that was thronged with figures.

Lower they dropped. Lower. And then they settled with a slight jar on a surface made of reddish metal; and the figures rushed to surround them.

L

Looking out the glass panel at these figures, both Brand and Dex exclaimed aloud and covered their eyes for a moment to shut out the hideous sight of them. Now they examined them closely.

Manlike they were: and yet like no human being conceivable to an Earth mind. They were tremendously tall—twelve feet at least—but as thin as so many animated poles. Their two legs were scarce four inches through, taper-less, boneless, like lengths of pipe; and like two flexible pipes they were joined to a slightly larger pipe of a torso that could not have been more than a foot in diameter. There were four arms, a pair on each side of the cylindrical body, that weaved feebly about like lengths of rubber hose.

Set directly on the pipe-like body, as a pumpkin might be balanced on a pole, was a perfectly round cranium in which were glassy, staring eyes, with dull pupils like those of a sick dog. The nose was but a tab of flesh. The mouth was a minute, circular thing, soft and flabby looking, which opened and shut regularly with the creature's breathing. It resembled the snout-like mouth of a fish, of the sucker variety; and fish-like, too, was the smooth and slimy skin that covered the beanpole body.

H

Hundreds of the repulsive things, there were. And all of them shoved and crowded, as a disorderly mob on Earth might do, to get close to the Earthmen's ship. Their big dull eyes peered in through the glass panels, and their hands—mere round blobs of gristle in the palms of which were set single sucker disks—pattered against the metal hull of the shell.

"God!" said Brand with a shudder. "Fancy these things feeling over your body...."

"They're hostile, whatever they are," said Dex. "Look out: that one's pointing something at you!"

One of the slender, tottering creatures had raised an arm and leveled at Brand something that looked rather like an elongated, old-fashioned flashlight. Brand involuntarily ducked. The clear glass panel between them and the mob outside gave him a queasy feeling of being exposed to whatever missile might lurk in the thing's tube.

"What do we do now?" demanded Dex with a shaky laugh. "You're chief of this expedition. I'm waiting for orders."

"We wait right here," replied Brand. "We're safe in the shell till we're starved out. At least they can't get in to attack us."

But it developed that, while the slimy looking things might not be able to get in, they had ways of reaching the Earthmen just the same!

T

he creature with the gun-like tube extended it somewhat further toward Brand.

Brand felt a sharp, unpleasant tingle shoot through his body, as though he had received an electric shock. He winced, and cried out at the sudden pain of it.

"What's the matter—" Dex began. But hardly had the words left his mouth when he, too, felt the shock. A couple of good, hearty Earth oaths exploded from his lips.

The repulsive creature outside made an authoritative gesture. He seemed to be beckoning to them, his huge dull eyes glaring threateningly at the same moment.

"Our beanpole friend is suggesting that we get out of the shell and stay awhile," said Dex with grim humor. "They seem anxious to entertain us—*ouch!*"

As the two men made no move to obey the beckoning gesture, the creature had raised the tube again; and again the sharp, unpleasant shock shot

through them.

"What the devil are we going to do?" exclaimed Brand. "If we go out in that mob of nightmare things—it's going to be messy. As long as we stay in the shell we have some measure of protection."

"Not much protection when they can sting us through metal and glass at will," growled Dex. "Do you suppose they can turn the juice on harder? Or is that bee-sting their best effort?"

As though in direct answer to his words, the blob-like face of the being who seemed in authority convulsed with anger and he raised the tube again. This time the shock that came from it was sufficient to throw the two men to the floor.

"Well, we can't stay in the ship, that's certain," said Brand. "I guess there's only one thing to do."

Dex nodded. "Climb out of here and take as many of these skinny horrors with us into hell as we can," he agreed.

Once more the shock stung them, as a reminder not to keep their captors waiting. With their shoulders bunched for abrupt action, and their guns in hand, the two men walked to the trap-door of the ship. They threw the heavy bolts, drew a deep breath—and flung open the door to charge unexpectedly toward the thickest mass of creatures that surrounded the ship!

I

In a measure their charge was successful. Its very suddenness caught some of the tall monstrosities off guard. Half a dozen of them stopped the fragile glass bullets to writhe in horrible death on the red metal paving of the square. But that didn't last long.

In less than a minute, thin, clammy arms were winding around the Earthmen's wrists, and their guns were wrenched from them. And then

started a hand-to-hand encounter that was all the more hideous for being so unlike any fighting that might have occurred on Earth.

With a furious growl Dex charged the nearest creature, whose huge round head swayed on its stalk of a body fully six feet above his own head. He gathered the long thin legs in a football grip, and sent the thing crashing full length on its back. The great head thumped resoundingly against the metal paving, and the creature lay motionless.

For an instant Dex could only stare at the thing. It had been so easy, like overcoming a child. But even as that thought crossed his mind, two of the tall thin figures closed in behind him. Four pairs of arms wound around him, feebly but tenaciously, like wet seaweed.

They began to constrict and wind tighter around him. He tore at them, dislodged all but two. His sturdy Earth leg went back to sweep the stalk-like legs of his attackers from under them. One of the things went down, to twist weakly in a laborious attempt to rise again. But the other, by sheer force of height and reach, began to bear Dex down.

Savagely he laced out with his fists, battering the pulpy face that was pressing down close to his. The big eyes blinked shut, but the four hose-like arms did not relax their clasp. Dex's hands sought fiercely for the thing's throat. But it had no throat: the head, set directly on the thin shoulders, defied all throttling attempts.

T

hen, just as Dex was feeling that the end had come, he felt the creature wrench from him, and saw it slide in a tangle of arms and legs over the smooth metal pavement. He got shakily to his feet, to see Brand standing over him and flailing out with his fists at an ever tightening circle of towering figures.

"Thanks," panted Dex. And he began again, tripping the twelve-foot things in order to get them down within reach, battering at the great pulpy heads, fighting blindly in that expressed craving to take as many of the creatures

into hell with him as he could manage. Beside him fought Brand, steadily, coolly, grim of jaw and unblinking of eye.

Already the struggle had gone on far longer than they had dreamed it might. For some reason the grotesque creatures delayed killing them. That they could do so any time they pleased, was certain: if the monsters could reach them with their shock-tubes through the double insulated hull of the space ship, they could certainly kill them out in the open.

Yet they made no move to do so. The deadly tubes were not used. The screeching gargoyles, instead, devoted all their efforts to merely hurling their attenuated bodies on the two men as though they wished to capture them alive.

Finally, however, the nature of the battle changed. The tallest of the attackers opened his tiny mouth and piped a signal. The ring of weaving tall bodies surrounding the two opened and became a U. The creatures in the curve of the U raised their shock-tubes and, with none of their own kind behind the victims to share in its discharge, released whatever power it was that lurked in them.

The shock was terrific. Without the glass and metal of the ship to protect them, out in the open and defenceless, Brand and Dex got some indication of its real power.

Writhing and twitching, feeling as though pierced by millions of red hot needles, they went down. A swarm of pipe-like bodies smothered them, and the fight was over.

CHAPTER III

The Coming of Greca

T

he numbing shock from the tubes left the Earthmen's bodies almost paralyzed for a time; but their brains were unfogged enough for them to observe only too clearly all that went on from the point of their capture.

They were bound hand and foot. At a piping cry from the leader, several of the gangling figures picked them up in reedy arms and began to walk across the square, away from the ship. Brand noticed that his bearers' arms trembled with his weight: and sensed the flabbiness of the substance that took the place in them of good solid muscle. Physically these things were soft and ineffectual indeed. They had only the ominous tubes with which to fight.

The eery procession, with the bound Earthmen carried in the lead, wound toward a great building fringing the square. In through the high arched entrance of this building they went, and up a sloping incline to its tower-top. Here, in a huge bare room, the two were unceremoniously dumped to the floor.

While three of the things stood guard with the mysterious tubes, another unbound them. A whole shower of high pitched, piping syllables was hurled at them, speech which sounded threatening and contemptuous but was otherwise, of course, entirely unintelligible, and then the creatures withdrew. The heavy metal door was slammed shut, and they were alone.

Brand drew a long breath, and began to feel himself all over for broken bones. He found none; he was still nerve-wracked from that last terrific shock, but otherwise whole and well.

"Are you hurt, Dex?" he asked solicitously.

"I guess not," replied Dex, getting uncertainly to his feet. "And I'm wondering why. It seems to me the brutes were uncommonly considerate of us—and I'm betting the reason is one we won't like!"

Brand shrugged. "I guess we'll find out their intentions soon enough. Let's see what our surroundings look like."

They walked to the nearest window-aperture, and gazed out on a startling and marvelous scene.

B

eneath their high tower window, extending as far as the eye could reach, lay the city, lit by the reddish glare of the peculiar metal with which its streets were paved. For the most part the metropolis consisted of perfectly square buildings pierced by many windows to indicate that each housed a large number of inmates. But here and there grotesque turrets lanced the sky, and symbolic domes arched above the surrounding flat metal roofs.

One building in particular they noticed. This was an enormous structure in the shape of a half-globe that reared its spherical height less than an eighth of a mile from the building they were in. It was situated off to their right at the foot of a vast, high-walled enclosure whose near end seemed to be formed by the right wall of their prison. They could only see it by leaning far out of the window; and it would not have come to their attention at all had they not heard it first—or, rather, heard the sound of something within it: for from it came a curious whining hum that never varied in intensity, something like the hum of a gigantic dynamo, only greater and of a more penetrating pitch.

"Sounds as though it might be some sort of central power station," said Brand. "But what could it supply power for?"

"Give it up," said Dex. "For their damned shock-tubes, perhaps, among other things—"

He broke off abruptly as a sound of sliding bolts came from the doorway. The two men whirled around to face the door, their fists doubling instinctively against whatever new danger might threaten them.

T

he door was opened and two of their ugly, towering enemies came in, their tubes held conspicuously before them. Behind came another figure; and at sight of this one, so plainly not of the race of Jupiter, the Earthmen gasped with wonder.

They saw a girl who might have come from Earth, save that she was taller than most Earth women—of a regal height that reached only an inch or two below Brand's own six foot one. She was beautifully formed, and had wavy dark hair and clear light blue eyes. A sort of sandal covered each small bare foot; and a gauzy tunic, reaching from above the knee to the shoulder, only half shielded her lovely figure.

She was bearing a metal container in which was a mess of stuff evidently intended as food. The guards halted and stepped aside to let her pass into the room. Then they backed out, constantly keeping Dex and Brand covered with the tubes, and closed and barred the door.

The girl smiled graciously at the admiration in the eyes of both the men—a message needing no inter-planetary interpretation. She advanced, and held the metal container toward them.

"Eat," she said softly. "It is good food, and life giving."

F

or an instant Brand was dumbfounded. For here was language he could understand—which was incredible on this far-flung globe. Then he suddenly comprehended why her sentences were so intelligible.

She was versed in mental telepathy. And versed to a high degree! He'd had some experience with telepathy on Venus; but theirs was a crude thought-speech compared to the fluency possessed by the beautiful girl before him.

"Who are you?" he asked wonderingly.

"I am Greca"—it was very hard to grasp names or abstract terms—"of the fourth satellite."

"Then you are not of these monsters of Jupiter?"

"Oh, no! I am their captive, as are all my people. We are but slaves of the tall ones."

Brand glanced at Dex. "Here's a chance to get some information, perhaps," he murmured.

Dex nodded; but meanwhile the girl had caught his thought. She smiled—a tragic, wistful smile.

"I shall be happy to tell you anything in my power to tell," she informed him. "But you must be quick. I can only remain with you a little while."

She sat down on the floor with them—the few bench-like things obviously used by the tall creatures as chairs were too high for them—and with the informality of adversity the three captives began to talk. Swiftly Brand got a little knowledge of Greca's position on Jupiter, and of the racial history that led up to it.

F

Four of the nine satellites of Jupiter were now the home of living beings. But two only, at the dawn of history as Greca knew it, had been originally inhabited. These were the fourth and the second.

On the fourth there dwelt a race, "like me," as Greca put it—a kindly, gentle people content to live and let live.

On the second had been a race of immensely tall, but attenuated and physically feeble things with great heads and huge dull eyes and characters distinguished mainly for cold-blooded savagery.

The inhabitants of the fourth satellite had remained in ignorance of the monsters on the second till one day "many, many ages ago," a fleet of

clumsy ships appeared on the fourth satellite. From the ships had poured thousands of pipe-like creatures, armed with horrible rods of metal that killed instantly and without a sound. The things, it seemed, had crowded over the limits of their own globe, and had been forced to find more territory.

They had made captive the entire population of the satellite. Then—for like all dangerous vermin they multiplied rapidly—they had overflowed to the first and fifth satellites—the others were uninhabitable—and finally to the dangerous surface of Jupiter itself. Everywhere they had gone, they had taken droves of Greca's people to be their slaves, "and the source of their food," added Greca, with a shudder; a statement that was at the moment unintelligible to the two men.

B

Brand stared sympathetically at her. "They treat them very badly?" he asked gently.

"Terribly! Terribly!" said Greca, shuddering again.

"But you seem quite privileged," he could not help saying.

She shook her dainty head pathetically. "I am of high rank among my people. I am a priestess of our religion, which is the religion of The Great White One who rules all the sky everywhere. The Rogans" (it was the best translation Brand could make of her mental term for the slimy tall things that held them captive) "—the Rogans hold my fate over the heads of my race. Should they rebel, I would be thrown to the monster in the pen. Of course the Rogans could crush any revolt with their terrible tubes, but they do not want to kill their slaves if they can help it. They find it more effective to hold their priestesses in hostage."

Brand turned from personal history to more vital subjects.

"Why," he asked Greca, "are the shining red squares of metal laid everywhere over this empire of the Rogans?"

"To make things light," was the reply. "When the Rogans first came to this mighty sphere, they could hardly move. Things are so heavy here, somehow. So their first thought was to drive my enslaved people to the casting and laying of the metal squares and the metal beams that connect them, in order to make things weigh less."

"But how do the plates function?"

G

Greca did not know this, save vaguely. She tried to express her little knowledge of the scientific achievements of the savage Rogans. After some moments Brand turned to Dex and said:

"As near as I can get it, the Rogans, by this peculiar red metal alloy, manage to trap and divert the permanent lines of force, the magnetic field, of Jupiter itself. So the whole red spot is highly magnetized, which somehow upsets natural gravitational attraction. I suppose it is responsible for the discoloration of the ground, too."

He turned to question the girl further about this, but she had got nervously to her feet already.

"I'll be taken away soon," she said. "I was brought in here only to urge you to eat the food. I must be interpreter, since the Rogans speak not with the mind, and I know their hateful tongue."

"Why are they so anxious for us to eat?" demanded Dex with an uneasy frown.

"So you will be strong, and endure for a long time the—the ordeal they have in store for you," faltered the girl at last. "They intend to force from you the secret of the power that drove your ship here, so they too may have command of space."

"But I don't understand," frowned Brand. "They must already have a means of space navigation. They came here to Jupiter from the satellites."

"Their vessels are crude, clumsy things. The journey from the nearest satellite is the limit of their flying range. They have nothing like your wonderful little ships, and they want to know how to build and power them."

S

he gazed sorrowfully at them and went on: "You see, yours is the fourth space ship to visit their kingdom; and that makes them fearful because it shows they are vulnerable to invasion. They want to stop that by invading your planet first. Besides their fear, there is their greed. Their looking-tubes reveal that yours is a fruitful and lovely sphere, and they are insatiable in their lust for new territories. Thus they plan to go to your planet as soon as

they are able, and kill or enslave all the people there as they have killed and enslaved my race."

"They'll have a job on their hands trying to do that!" declared Dex stoutly.

But Brand paled. "They can do it!" he snapped. "Look at those death-tubes of theirs. We have no arms to compete with that." He turned to Greca. "So the Rogans plan to force the secret of our motors from us by torture?"

She nodded, and caught his hand in hers.

"Yes. They will do with you as they did with the six who came before you—and who died before surrendering the secret."

"So! We know now what happened to Journeyman and the others!" burst out Dex. "I'll see 'em in hell before I'll talk!"

"And me," nodded Brand. "But that doesn't cure the situation. As long as ships disappear in this red inferno, so long will the Old Man keep sending others to find out what's wrong. The Rogans will capture them as easily as they captured us. And eventually someone will happen along who'll weaken under torture. Then—"

H

e stopped. A dread vision filled his mind of Earth depopulated by the feebly ferocious Rogans, of rank on rank of Earth's vast armies falling in stricken rows at the shock of the Rogans' tubes.

Greca caught the vision. She nodded. "Yes, that is what would happen if they found ways of reaching your globe."

"But, God, Brand, we can't allow that!" cried Dex. "We've got to find a way to spike the guns of these walking gas-pipes, somehow!"

Brand sighed heavily. "We are two against hundreds of thousands. We are bare-handed, and the Rogans have those damned tubes. Anyway, we are on

the verge of death at this very moment. What under heaven can we do to spike their guns?"

He was silent a moment: and in the silence the steady hum from the domed building outside came to his ears.

"What's in that big, round topped building, Greca?" he asked quietly.

"I do not know, exactly," replied the girl. "There is some sort of machinery in it, and to it go connecting beams from all the square metal plates everywhere. That is all I know."

Brand started to question her further, but her time was up. The two guards poked their loathsome pumpkin heads in the doorway and contemptuously beckoned her out. She answered resignedly, in the piping Rogan tongue, and went with them. But she turned to wave shyly, commiseratingly at the two men; and the expression in her clear blue eyes as they rested on Brand made his heart contract and then leap on with a mighty bound.

"We have in ally in her," murmured Brand. "Though God only knows if that will mean anything to us...."

CHAPTER IV

In the Tower

W

hat I can't figure out," said Dex, striding up and down the big bare room, "is why we're needed to tell them about the atomic motor. They've got our ship, and three others besides. I should think they could learn about the motor just by taking it apart and studying it."

Brand grinned mirthlessly, recalling the three years of intensive study it had taken him to learn the refinements of atomic motive power. "If you'd ever qualified as a space navigator, Dex, you'd know better. The Rogans are an advanced race; their control of polar magnetism and the marvelously high-powered telescopes Greca mentions prove that; but I doubt if they could ever analyze that atomic motor with no hint as to how it works."

Silence descended on them again, in which each was lost in his own thoughts.

How many hours had passed, the Earthmen did not know. They had spent the time in fruitless planning to escape from their tower room and go back to the ship again. Though how they could get away in the ship when the Rogans seemed able to propel it where-ever they wished against the utmost power of their motor, they did not attempt to consider.

One of Jupiter's short nights had passed, however—a night weirdly made as light as day by red glares from the plates, which seemed to store up sunlight, among their other functions—and the tiny sun had risen to slant into their window at a sharp angle.

Suddenly they heard the familiar drawing of the great bolts outside their door. It was opened, and a dozen or more of the Rogans came in, with Greca cowering piteously in their midst and attempting to communicate her distress to Brand.

A

t the head of the little band of Rogans was one the prisoners had not seen before. He was of great height, fully two feet taller than the others; and he carried himself with an air that proclaimed his importance.

The tall one turned to Greca and addressed a few high-pitched, squeaky words to her. She shook her head; whereupon, at a hissed command, two of the Rogans caught her by the wrists and dragged her forward.

"They have come to question you," Greca lamented to Brand. "And they want to do it through me. But I will not! I will not!"

Brand smiled at her though his lips were pale.

"You are powerless to struggle," he said. "Do as they ask. You cannot help us by refusing, and, in any case, I can promise that they won't learn anything from us."

The tall Rogan teetered up to the prisoners on his gangling legs, and stared icily at them. Crouched beside him, her lovely body all one mute appeal to the Earthmen to forgive her for the part she was forced to play, was Greca.

At length the Rogan leader spoke. He addressed his sibilant words to Greca, though his stony eyes were kept intently on the Earthmen.

"He says," exclaimed Greca telepathically, "to inform you first that he is head of all the Rogan race on this globe, and that all on this globe must do as he commands."

Brand nodded to show he understood the message.

"He says he is going to ask you a few questions, and that you are to answer truthfully if you value your lives:"

"First, he wants to know what the people of your world are like. Are they all the same as you?"

D

ex started to reply to that; but Brand flung him a warning look. "Tell him we are the least of the Earth people," he answered steadily. "Tell him we are of an inferior race. Most of those on Earth are giants five times as large as we are, and many times more powerful."

Greca relayed the message in the whistling, piping Rogan tongue. The tall one stared, then hissed another sentence to the beautiful interpreter.

"He wants to know," said Greca, "if there are cities on your globe as large and complete as this one."

"There are cities on Earth that make this look like a—a—" Brand cast about for understandable similes—"like a collection of animal burrows."

"He says to describe your planet's war weapons," was the next interpretation. And here Brand let himself go.

With flights of fancy he hadn't known he was capable of, he described great airships, steered automatically and bristling with guns that discharged explosives powerful enough to kill everything within a range of a thousand miles. He told of billions of thirty-foot giants sheathed in an alloy that would make them invulnerable to any feeble rays the Rogans might have developed. He touched on the certain wholesale death that must overtake any hostile force that tried to invade the planet.

"The Rogan shock-tubes are toys compared with the ray-weapons of Earth," he concluded. "We have arms that can nullify the effects of yours and kill at the same instant. We have—"

But here the Rogan leader turned impatiently away. Greca had been translating sentence by sentence. Now the tall one barked out a few syllables in a squeaky voice.

"He says he knows you are lying," sighed Greca. "For if you on Earth have tubes more effective than theirs why weren't you equipped with them on your expedition here to the red kingdom?"

Brand bit his lips. "Check," he muttered. "The brute has a brain in that ugly head."

T

he Rogan leader spoke for a long time then; and at each singsong word, Greca quivered as though lashed by a whip. At length she turned to Brand.

"He has been telling what his hordes can do, answering your boasts with boasts of his own. His words are awful! I won't tell you all he said. I will only say that he is convinced his shock-tubes are superior to any Earth arms, and that he states he will now illustrate their power to you to quell your insolence. I don't know what he means by that...."

But she and the Earthmen were soon to find out.

The Rogan leader stepped to the window and arrogantly beckoned Brand and Dex to join him there. They did; and the leader gazed out and down as though searching for something.

He pointed. The two Earthmen followed his leveled arm with their eyes and saw, a hundred yards or so away, a bent and dreary figure trudging down the metal paving of the street. It was a figure like those to be seen on Earth, which placed it as belonging to Greca's race.

The tall leader drew forth one of the shock-tubes. Seen near at hand, it was observed to be bafflingly simple in appearance. It seemed devoid of all mechanism—simply a tube of reddish metal with a sort of handle formed of a coil of heavy wire.

The Rogan pointed the tube at the distant figure.

Greca screamed, and screamed again. Coincident with her cry, as though the sound of it had felled him, the distant slave dropped to the pavement.

T

hat was all. The tube had merely been pointed: as far as Brand could see, the Rogan's "hand" had not moved on the barrel of the tube, nor even

constricted about the coil of wire that formed its handle. Yet that distant figure had dropped. Furthermore, fumes of greasy black smoke now began to arise from the huddled body; and in less than thirty seconds there was left no trace of it on the gleaming metal pavement.

"So that's what those things are like at full power!" breathed Dex. "My God!"

The Rogan leader spoke a few words. Greca, huddled despairingly on the floor, crushed by this brutal annihilation of one of her country-men before her very eyes, did not translate. But translation was unnecessary. The Rogan's icy, triumphant eyes, the very posture of his grotesque body, spoke for him.

"That," he was certainly saying, "is what will happen to any on your helpless planet who dare oppose the Rogan will!"

He whipped out a command to the terror-stricken girl. She rose from her crouching position on the floor; and at length formulated the Rogan's last order:

"You will explain the working of the engine that drove your space ship here."

Dex laughed. It was a short bark of sound, totally devoid of humor, but very full of defiance. Brand thrust his hands into the pockets of his tunic, spread his legs apart, and began to whistle.

A

quiver that might have been of anger touched the Rogan leader's repulsive little mouth. He glared balefully at the uncowed Earthmen and spoke again, evidently repeating his command. The two turned their backs to him to indicate their refusal to obey.

At that, the tall leader pointed to Dex. In an instant three of the guards had wound their double pairs of arms around his struggling body. Brand sprang

to help him, but a touch of the mysterious discharge from the leader's tube sent him writhing to the floor.

"It's no use, Brand," said Dex steadily. He too had stopped struggling, and now stood quietly in the slimy coils of his captors' arms. "I might as well go along with them and get it over with. I probably won't see you again. Good luck!"

He was borne out of the room. The Rogan leader turned to Brand and spoke.

"He says that if your comrade does not tell him what he wants to know, your turn will come next," sobbed Greca. "Oh! Why does not The Great White One strike these monsters to the dust!"

She ran to Brand and pressed her satiny cheek to his. Then she was dragged roughly away.

The great door clanged shut. The heavy outer fastenings clicked into place. Dex had gone to experience whatever it was that Journeyman and the rest had experienced in this red hell. And Brand was left behind to reflect on what dread torments this might comprise; and to pray desperately that no matter what might be done to his shrinking body he would be strong enough to refuse to betray his planet.

CHAPTER V

The Torture Chamber

S

wiftly Dex was carried down the long ramp to the ground floor, the arms of his captors gripping him with painful tightness. Heading the procession was the immensely tall, gangling Rogan leader, clutching Greca by the wrist and dragging her indifferently along to be his mouthpiece.

They did not stop at the street level; they continued on down another ramp, around a bend, descending an even steeper incline toward the bowels of Jupiter. Their descent ended at last before a huge metal barrier which, at a signal from the leader, drew smoothly up into the ceiling to disclose a gigantic, red-lit chamber underlying the foundations of the building.

In fear and awe, Dex gazed around that huge room.

It resembled in part a nightmare rearrangement of such a laboratory as might be found on Earth; and in part a torture chamber such as the most ferocious of savages might have devised had they been scientifically equipped to add contrivances of supercivilization to the furthering of their primitive lust for cruelty.

There were great benches—head-high to the Earthman—to accommodate the height of the Rogan workmen. There were numberless metal instruments, and glass coils, and enormous retorts; and in one corner an orange colored flame burnt steadily on a naked metal plate, seeming to have no fuel or other source of being.

There was a long rack of cruelly pointed and twisted instruments. Under this was a row of long, delicate pincers, with coils on the handles to indicate that they might be heated to fiendish precision of temperatures. There were gleaming metal racks with calibrated slide-rods and spring dials to denote just what pull was being exerted on whatever unhappy creature might be stretched taut on them. There were tiny cones of metal whose warped, baked appearance testified that they were little portable furnaces that could

be placed on any desired portion of the anatomy, to slowly bake the selected disk of flesh beneath them.

D

ex shuddered; and a low moan came from Greca, whose clear blue eyes had rested on the contents of this vast room before in her capacity as hostage and interpreter for the inhuman Rogans.

And now another sense of Dex's began to register perception on his brain.

A peculiar odor came to his nostrils. It was a musky, fetid odor, like that to be smelled in an animal cage; but it was sharper, more acrid than anything he had ever smelled on Earth. It smelled—ah, he had it!—*reptilian*. As though somewhere nearby a dozen titanic serpents were coiled ready to spring!

Looking about, Dex saw a six-foot square door of bars in one wall of the laboratory—like the barred entrance to a prison cell. It was from the interstices of this door that the odor seemed to emanate; but he had no chance to make sure, for now the Rogan leader approached him.

"I will first show you," he said, through his mouthpiece, Greca, "what happens to those who oppose our orders. We have a slave who tried to run away into the surrounding jungles three suns ago...."

A man was dragged into the chamber. He was slightly taller and more stockily muscled than an Earthman might be; but otherwise, in facial conformation and general appearance, he might have come here straight from New York City. Dex felt a great pang of sympathy for him. He was so plainly one of humankind, despite the fact that he had been born on a sphere four hundred million miles from Dex's.

The fellow was paralyzed with horror. His eyes, wide and glazed, darted about the torture room like those of a trapped animal. And yet he made no move to break away from the clutch of the two Rogans who held him. He knew he was helpless, that wild-eyed glance told Dex. Knew it so

thoroughly that not even his wildest terror could inspire him to try to make a break for freedom, or strike back at the implacable Rogan will.

A

t a nod from the leader, the man was stripped to the waist. Here Dex started in amazement. The man's broad chest was seamed and crisscrossed by literally hundreds of tiny lateral scars, some long healed, and some fresh incisions.

He was dragged to a metal plate set upright in the wall, and secured to it by straps of metal. Evidently the miserable being knew what this portended, for he began to scream—a monotonous, high-pitched shriek that didn't stop till he was out of breath.

The Rogan leader stared at him icily, then depressed a small lever set in the wall beside him. The plate against which the captive was bound began to shine softly with a blue light. The slave twisted in his bonds, screaming again. Rhythmic shudders jerked at his limbs. His lips turned greenish white. The shudders grew more pronounced till it seemed as though he were afflicted with a sort of horrible St. Vitus dance. Then the tall Rogan pulled back the lever. The slave hung away from his supporting shackles, limp and unconscious.

Dex moistened his lips. An electric shock? No, it was something more terrible than that. Some other manifestation of the magnetic power the Rogans had harnessed—a current, perhaps, that depolarized partly the atoms of the body structure? He could only guess. But the convulsed face of the unfortunate victim showed that the torment, whatever it was, was devilish to the last degree!

"That will be the next to the last fate reserved for you," the Rogan informed Dex, through Greca. "Death follows soon after that—but not too soon for you to see and feel what waits for you behind the barred door!" And he nodded toward the cage-entrance affair, from which came the musky, reptilian stench.

"Now that you have seen something of what will happen to you if you refuse to tell us what we want to know, we shall proceed," said the leader.

H

e pointed toward one of the gargantuan work benches, and two of the Rogans slid down from it a contrivance that looked familiar to Dex. An instant's scrutiny showed him why it was familiar: it was a partly dismantled atomic motor.

In spite of the ordeal that faced him, Dex felt a thrill of elation as he looked at the motor. In its scattered state, it told a mute story: a story of long and intensive study by the Rogans, which had yielded them no results! Only too obviously, the intricate secret of atomic power had not let itself be solved.

On the heels of the elation that filled his heart, came a sickening realization of his dilemma. He could not have told the Rogans what they wanted to know even if he had wished to! He himself didn't know the principles of the atomic engine. As Brand had remarked, he was no space navigator; he was simply a prosaic lieutenant, competent only at fighting, not at all versed in science.

He knew, though, that it would do no good to assert his ignorance to the Rogans. They simply wouldn't believe him.

"You will rebuild this engine for us," ordered the tall leader, "showing us the purpose of each part, and how the power is extracted from the fuel. After that you will set it running for us, and instruct us in its control."

Dex braced himself. His final moment had come.

By way of indicating his refusal he looked away from the dismantled motor and said nothing. The Rogan repeated his command. Dex made no move. Then the leader acted.

He said something to the Rogan guards who had been standing by all this while, alert against an outbreak from their prisoner. Dex was caught up,

carried to one of the metal racks, and thrown down on its calibrated bed. Loops of metal, like handcuffs, were snapped around his wrists and ankles; and a metal hoop was clamped over his throat, pinning him to the torture rack. Resistance would have been useless, and Dex submitted quietly.

T

he contrivance, with him on it, was wheeled toward the barred door. It was halted at a spot marked on the floor, about thirty feet from the bars. The Rogan leader stepped alongside the rack, with Greca trembling beside him.

Dex closed his eyes for a moment, grimly marshaling strength of will to go through the trial that was just beginning.

The Rogan leader depressed another lever in the rock wall. The barred door slid slowly up, to reveal the receding darkneses of some great cave, or room, that adjoined the laboratory. Dex rolled his eyes so that he could watch the doorway; and, in a cold perspiration, waited for whatever might appear.

It was not long in coming!

The reptilian smell suddenly grew stronger. There was a booming hiss, a savage bellowing. A clattering of vast scales rattled out as some body weighing many tons was dragged over rock flooring. Then, before Dex's staring eyes appeared a huge, wedge-shaped head, at sight of which he bit his lips to keep from crying aloud.

Often enough he had seen one of those terrific heads looming in the fog of the northern hemisphere of Jupiter. He did not know the genus of the vast monster that bore it, but he did know it for the fiercest of the lizard giants that roamed the Jovian jungles. A creature larger than a terrestrial whale, with great long neck and heavy long tail dragging yards behind it, it would find the puny bulk of a man nothing but a morsel in its jaws!

Again the gigantic thing hissed and bellowed. And then its huge head came through the six-foot door and its neck uncoiled to send the gaping jaws

within a foot of Dex. There it struggled to reach him, prevented by the small doorway that restrained the bulk of its enormous body, its head only inches away from the cleverly measured spot to which the metal rack had been wheeled.

D

ex stared, hypnotized, into the dull, stony eyes of the beast, gasping for breath in the stench of its exhalations. The jaws snapped shut, fanning his cheek. He fought for self-control. Steady! Steady! The slimy Rogans had no intention of feeding him to the thing yet. Not till they had made more determined efforts to wring from him the secret of the motor. They were just prefacing actual physical torture with hellish mental torture, that was all.

That he was right in his guess was proved in a few moments. He heard a louder hiss from the great lizard so near him. Opening his eyes, he saw the Rogan leader in the process of forcing the serpentine neck to withdraw foot by foot back into the doorway, using his shock-tube as a sort of distant prod.

The monster swayed its ugly flat head back and forth, hissing deafeningly at the sting of the tube, now and again lunging with its vast unseen body at the too narrow entrance that kept it from entering the laboratory. Dex could hear the foundation walls of the building creak at the onslaught of that tremendous weight.

If it would only break through! he thought savagely. But it wasn't going to. In a short while it was cowed by the deadly tube, and withdrew its head awkwardly from the chamber. The barred door slid down into place: and the Rogan leader once more turned his attention to his prisoner.

"You will be wheeled within reach of the creature as the last step of your fate," Dex was informed. "Meanwhile, we shall start with something less deadly...."

A cogged wheel beside him was turning a notch. Dex felt the sliding bed of the rack crawl slightly under him. Intolerable tension was suddenly placed on his arms and legs. The leader stared at a spring dial; and moved the wheel another notch. The rack expanded again, stretching Dex's body till his joints cracked.

"You will tell us what we want to know," said the Rogan, glaring coldly down at him.

Dex compressed his lips stubbornly. He couldn't tell them if he wanted to, and, by God, he wouldn't if he could.

Another notch, the wheel was turned; and in spite of himself a groan escaped Dex's lips. One more notch, while the metal slide-rods beneath him lengthened a fraction of an inch....

CHAPTER VI

The Inquisition

B

blind, animal fear caught Dex and shook him in its grip. Then rage filled his heart, driving out the fear as a gale dissipates fog. With pain-dimmed eyes he glared at the gangling, hateful figure that gazed down on him with icy eyes. If he could only blast that monstrous, physically feeble but mentally ferocious thing to bits! Annihilate it! Blow it to the four corners of Jupiter! And all the other Rogans with it!

And with this thought he suddenly saw, through the red mists of rage, the shock-tube that was dangling indifferently from the Rogan leader's hand.

Instantly the red mists began to clear away. Another change took place in the tortured lieutenant's mind. The blind hot rage faded into more deadly, cold wrath. A plan began to bud into thought. It was a futile plan, really. It could not possibly accomplish anything vital. But it *might* give him a chance for a little revenge before his life was snuffed out—might give him a chance to strike a blow for the dead Journeyman and the other gallant explorers who had perished here in this chamber before him.

He closed his eyes to hide the hate and calculation in them. The tall Rogan leaned lower over the rack.

"You are ready to do as I command?" he demanded.

"Yes," whispered Dex. "Yes."

In the beautiful Greca's eyes, as she translated his assent, was horror. But then, faintly, her mind caught the thought that lay beneath the Earthman's apparent surrender. She veiled her own eyes with long lashes, lest they betray the captive's plan to the alert Rogan. Her lips moved silently; perhaps she was praying to her Great White One.

R

elease him," the Rogan ordered, triumph in his bird-like, shrill voice. The metal hoops were unfastened. Dex stretched his outraged body, wincing with the pain of movement; then felt life and strength returning to him.

"Come with us to the motor," commanded the Rogan, his dull eyes glinting in anticipation of learning the coveted secret that should add one more planet to the Rogan's tyranny.

Dex walked to the dismantled atomic engine with him. He walked slowly, pretending more stiffness and weakness than he really owned to. No use in letting his captors know that his resilient muscles were so quickly throwing off the torment of the rack.

As he walked he kept his gaze covertly on that shock-tube that dangled in the leader's grasp. The rest of the guard had none; they had laid their weapons down on a far bench on their entrance to the chamber, depending on the one with which their leader was armed.

Eagerly the Rogans crowded around Dex and the motor that had thus far baffled them. They bent down from their twelve-foot heights to bring their staring goggle-eyes closer to the lesson in atomic motive power, till Dex was in a sort of small dome of Rogans, with their long, pipe-like legs forming the wall around him, and their thin torsos inclining forward to make a curved ceiling over him.

The Rogan leader drew Greca within the circle to interpret the Earthman's explanations.

Dex moved a trifle, to bring himself nearer the tall leader. Again he glanced covertly at the shock-tube.

"The first thing to tell about our motor," said Dex, stalling for time, "is that it utilizes the breaking up of the atom as its source of power."

H

e edged closer to the Rogan leader.

"You see those electrodes?" he said, pointing to two copper castings in a chamber between the fuel tank and the small but enormously powerful turbine that whirled with the released atomic energy. The Rogan leader blinked assent. His small, horrible mouth was pursed with his concentration of thought.

"The electrodes partially break down the atoms of fuel passing from the tank," explained Dex, desperately attempting scientific phraseology for a matter as far over his head as the remote stars. He raised his hand a trifle, bringing it nearer the Rogan's tube....

"Is that the outlet from the tank?" inquired the Rogan, pointing with the tube, and so raising it out of Dex's reach.

"Yes," mumbled Dex, sick with disappointment: he'd been on the point of leaping for the weapon. He sidled close again. Greca bit her lips lest she cry out with suspense.

"The partially disintegrated atoms pass into the turbine chamber," he went on, "and are there completely broken down by heat, which has been generated by the explosive energy of the atoms passing in before them."

"I warn you to speak true," said the leader, suddenly removing his gaze from the specimen motor and staring icily down at Dex. Dex's hand dropped abruptly from its place near the tube. Again his fingers had come within a foot of it.

W

e will get ahead faster," piped the Rogan, an edge of suspicion sounding in his shrill voice, "if I conduct the explanation. I will ask questions for you to answer. What is the fuel used?"

"Powdered zinc," Dex answered promptly. No harm in admitting that. The Rogans must already know it; zinc was common to Jupiter, as Earth

spectroscopes had showed long since; and they had no doubt analyzed it by now. The chances were that the leader was merely testing him, to see if he were sincere in his ostensible surrender.

That his guess was right, he read in the fishy, dull eyes. The Rogan leader nodded at his answer, and some of the lurking suspicion in his gaze died down.

"How is it prepared?"

Now this marked the beginning of the end, Dex knew. The preparation of the powdered metal was half the secret of atomic power—and Dex hadn't the faintest idea what it was! This questions-and-answers affair was going to pin him down in short order!

"How is it prepared?" repeated the Rogan leader inexorably. "Tell us, or—"

But at that instant Dex attained his objective.

Once more his hand had crawled slowly toward the tube—till, once more, it was within reach. Then, more bold as his position grew more desperate, he straightened up—and, with a lightning move, had wrenched it from the sucker-disk that held it!

He shouted his triumph. He had it! *Now* let the devils put him back on the torture bed if they could! *Now* let them try to make him betray his planet!

T

here was an alarmed squeak from the Rogan leader, and in an instant the huge laboratory was in an uproar. The Rogan guards whipped their hose-like arms toward the Earthman. Dex, with a sweep of his hands, knocked the pipe-stem legs of two of the guards from under them, leaped over their bodies, and stood at bay in a corner—guarding the bench on which the guards had laid their tubes when they filed into the laboratory.

The air resounded with the shrill calls of the excited Rogans. Then they began to close in on him, all the while eyeing the tube in his hand with

terror written large on their hideous faces.

Dex's eyes blazed with the light of vengeful exultation. For the death of Journeyman and the rest, for the coming inevitable death of himself and Brand, he was going to pay—at least in part—with the captured tube of death in his hand! It was a lovely thought, and for a few seconds he delayed acting in order to savor it.

Then, with a smile of pure happiness, he leveled the tube at the nearest Rogan in order to shrivel him to nothingness as he had seen the slave shrivelled in the street.

The Rogan did not fall! Full in the face of the death tube he teetered forward, his arms reaching savagely toward the Earthman.

Dex stared incredulously. Cold fear crept into his heart. He pointed the tube more accurately, and squeezed harder on the coil handle. Still nothing happened. The Rogans warily drew closer.

P

erspiration began to trickle down Dex's cheeks. In God's name, why didn't the tube work? He had thought all he had to do was point it and squeeze down on the handle. But evidently there was more to the trick than that!

He groaned. He had staged all this elaborate play for a weapon as useless to his untrained mind as one of Earth's explosive guns, with the safety-lock clamped on, would have been to an abysmal Venusian savage!

By now the nearest Rogan was within reaching distance of him. One of its two pairs of slimy arms uncoiled toward him. The other pair strained to reach around him and get to the weapons on the bench by his side.

With a cry, Dex dashed the useless shock-tube down on the reaching arms. As long as he didn't know how to work it anyway, he might as well use it as a club.

The Rogan squeaked with pain; the arms recoiled. Dex jerked the tube back over his shoulder for another blow....

There was a shriek from the doomed wretch fastened to the metal plate. The slave that had been tortured before Dex's eyes as an object lesson! He had been returned to consciousness a short time since, and had been writhing and shuddering against the plate.

Dex flashed a glance at him over his shoulder, as he shrieked, and cried aloud himself at what he saw.

T

he tortured slave was rapidly disappearing! Another shriek left his lips, to be broken off halfway. In an instant nothing was left of the struggling body but a wisp of greasy black smoke!

Dex stared stupidly at the tube in his hand. Then, as a squeak of agony sounded from a Rogan in front of him, his mind grasped what had happened. Somehow its mechanism had been jarred into functioning when he dashed it against the groping arm. In some way its death dealing power had been unleashed. With a cry of exultation, Dex began to use it!

The Rogan in front of him, squealing, collapsed on the floor, dwindling swiftly into nothingness. Dex turned the mysterious death against another teetering creature. It too went up in oleaginous smoke.

The Rogan leader came next. Dex whirled the tube in his direction, and saw him go down. Then he sprang to annihilate still another grotesque monster who had almost reached the bench on which were the other tubes. He shouted and raved as this fourth Rogan crumbled. Torture him, would they! Plan to capture Earth, would they! He'd kill off the whole damned population with this tube!

The Rogan survivors, squeaking in panic, gave over their attempts to retrieve the tubes. They dove for various hiding places—under benches, behind retorts, anywhere to get away from the terror running amuck in their

midst. And after them sprang Dex, mad with his sudden miraculous success, to ferret them out one by one and blow them into hell with their own horrible death-engine.

I

n his ecstasy of rage, Dex overlooked the Rogan leader. He had seen that attenuated monstrosity go down, and had assumed he was dead. But such was not the case. In the corner Dex had vacated when he sprang after the fleeing guard, the tall leader twisted feebly and sat up.

One of his four arms was missing, a smoking stump showing where the annihilating ray from the tube had blasted it off at the shoulder. But he was far from being dead. With cold purpose in his great staring eyes, he moved snakily toward the bench Dex had now left unguarded.

The Earthman got another Rogan; whirled to track down still another. Promptly the leader sank motionless to the floor. The Rogan leader continued his crawling. He reached the bench, fumbled up and along its surface for the nearest tube.

Dex, unconscious of the sure fate gathering behind him to strike him down, dashed past a great glass tank behind which Greca was huddling in mortal fear, and charged down on two more of the squeaking guards.

Then, suddenly, some sixth sense warned him that something was wrong. He whirled toward the corner he had left.

The Rogan leader, two of his surviving arms propping feebly against the bench, was pointing a shock-tube squarely at him!

D

ex fell to the floor to escape the first discharge of the tube, and leveled his own. He felt the thing grow hot in his hand, saw a blinding blue-white fire leap into being in the space between them as the rays from the two tubes met and absorbed each other. He shifted, to get out of the line and blast the creature he had too hastily reckoned as dead. But he was not quick enough. A fraction before him, the Rogan leader shifted.

Dex felt a terrible burning sensation all over his body, as the ray from his tube met the conflicting ray less squarely, and allowed a little of it to reach him. He shrieked as the slave had shrieked when he felt the annihilating current from the plate sweeping through his body.

A black fog seemed to close in around the Earthman's senses. He crashed to the floor, with a glimpse of the leering triumph on the Rogan's face as the last picture to stamp itself in his failing consciousness.

The tall Rogan, obviously in great agony from his blasted arm, squeaked a faint command. The four guards who were left issued fearfully from their hiding places and came to him.

He pointed his tube at Dex Harlow, lying unconscious on the floor. There he hesitated an instant, his soft little mouth slobbering in his rage and pain. Then he let the tube sink slowly off its line.

He gave another command. The four guards picked the Earthman up and carried him to the metal torture-plate on which the slave had met his death. The tall leader's eyes gleamed with vicious hatred as the limp body was fastened to the metal.

Mouthing and squealing with the pain of his seared arm-stump, he wobbled toward the lever, a mere turn of which would readily convert the plate into a bed of agony.

CHAPTER VII

In the Power-House

A

lone in the prison room, after Dex had been dragged away to be subjected to the Rogan inquisition, Brand gnawed at his fingers and paced distractedly up and down the stone flooring. For a while he had no coherent thought at all; only the realization that his turn came next, and that the Rogans would leave no refinement of torment untried in their effort to wring from him the secret of the atomic engine.

He went to the window, and absent-mindedly stared out. The whining hum from the great domed building off to the right, like the high-pitched droning of a swarm of gargantuan bees, came to his ears. He listened more intently, and leaned out of the window to look at the building.

Under that dome, it came to him again, was, in all probability, the mainspring of the Rogan mechanical power. If only he could get in there and look around! He might do some important damage; he might be able to harass the enemy materially before the time came for him to die.

He leaned farther out of the window, and examined the hundred feet or so of sheer wall beneath him. He saw, scrutinizing it intently, that the stone blocks that composed it were not smooth cut, but rough hewn, with the marks of the cutters' chisels plainly in evidence. Also there was a considerable ridge between each layer of blocks where the Rogans' mortar had squeezed out in the process of laying the wall.

Never in sanity would a man have thought of the thing Brand considered then. To attempt to clamber down that blank wall, with only the slight roughness of the protruding layers of mortar to hang on to, was palpable suicide!

B

rand shrugged. He observed that to a man already condemned to death, the facing of probable suicide shouldn't mean much.

With scarcely an increase in the beating of his heart, he swung one leg out over the broad sill. If he fell, he escaped an infinitely worse death; if he didn't fall, he might somehow win his way into that domed building whence the hum came.

Cautiously, clutching at the rough stone with finger tips that in a moment or two became raw and bleeding masses, he began his slow descent. As he worked his way down, he slanted to the right, toward the near wall of the retaining yard whose end was formed by the round structure that was his goal.

Beneath him and to the left the broad street swarmed with figures: the tall ones of the Rogans and the shorter, sturdier ones of slaves. Any one of those dozens of grotesque pedestrians might glance up, see him, and pick him off with the deadly tubes. Under his fingers the mortar crumbled and left him hanging, more than once, by one hand. For fully five minutes his life hung by a thread apt to be severed at any time. But—he made it. Helped by the decreased gravity of the red spot, and released from inhibiting fear by the fact that he was already, figuratively, a dead man, he performed the incredible.

With a last slithering step downward, he landed lightly on the near wall of the enclosure, and started along its broad top toward his objective.

Now he was in plain sight of any one who might be looking out the windows of the tower building or from the dome ahead of him; but this was a chance he had to take, and at least he was concealed from the swarms in the street. Making no effort to hide himself by crawling along the top of the wall, he straightened up and began to run toward the giant dome.

H

ardly had he gone a dozen steps when he suddenly understood the meaning of the high-walled enclosure to his right!

Off in a far corner rose a slate colored mound that at first glance he had taken for a great heap of inanimate dirt. The mound began to move toward

him—and metamorphosed into an animal, a thing that made Brand blink his eyes to see if he were dreaming, and then stop, appalled, to look at it.

He saw a body that dwarfed the high retaining walls to comparative insignificance. It had a tree-like tail that dragged behind it; and a thirty-foot, serpentine neck at the end of which was a head like a sugar barrel that split into cavernous jaws lined with backward-pointing teeth. Two eyes were set wide apart in the enormous head, eyes that were dead and cold and dull, yet glinting with senseless ferocity. It was the sort of thing one sees in delirium.

With increasing energy the creature made for him, till finally it was approaching his sector of the wall at a lumbering run that was rapid for all its ungainliness.

It was apparent at a glance that the snaky neck, perched atop the lofty shoulder structure, would raise the head with its gaping jaws to his level on the wall! Brand ran. And after him thudded the gigantic lizard, its neck arching up and along the wall to reach him.

A scant five yards ahead of the snapping jaws, Brand reached his goal, the dome, and clambered over its curved, metal roof away from the monster's maw.

He stopped to pant for breath and wipe the sweat from his streaming face. "Thank God it didn't get me," he breathed, looking back at the bellowing terror that had pursued him. "Wonder why it's there? It's too ferocious to be tamed and used in any way: it must be kept as a threat to hold the slaves in hand. It certainly looks well fed...."

He shuddered; then he began to explore the dome of the building for a means of entrance.

T

here was no opening in the roof. A solid sheet of reddish metal, like a titanic half-eggshell, it glittered under him in an unbroken piece.

He crept down its increasingly precipitous edge till he reached a sort of cornice that formed a jutting circle of stone around it. There he leaned far over and saw, about ten feet below him, a round opening like a big port-hole. From it were streaming waves of warm, foul air, from which he judged it to be a ventilator outlet.

He scrambled over the edge of the cornice, hung at arm's length, and swung himself down into the opening. And there, perched high up under the roof, he looked down at an enigmatic, eery scene.

That the structure was indeed a strange sort of power-house was instantly made evident. But what curious, mysterious, and yet bewilderingly simple machinery it held!

In the center was a titanic coil of reddish metal formed by a single cable nearly a yard through. Around this, at the four corners of the compass, were set coils that were identical in structure but a trifle smaller. From the smaller coils to the larger streamed, unceasingly, blue waves of light like lightning bolts.

Along a large arc of the wall was a stone slab set with an endless array of switches and insulated control-buttons. Gauges and indicators of all kinds, whose purpose could not even be guessed at, were lined above and below, all throbbing rhythmically to the leap of the electric-blue rays between the monster coils.

A

Almost under Brand's perch a great square beam of metal came through the building wall from outside, to be split into multitudinous smaller beams that were hooked up with the bases of the coils. Across from him, disappearing out through the opposite wall, was an identical beam.

"The terminals for the metal plate system that extends over the whole red spot," murmured Brand. "This building *is* important. But what can I do to throw sand in the gears before I'm caught and killed...?"

He surveyed the great round room below him more thoroughly. Now he saw, right in the center of the huge control board, a solitary lever, that seemed a sort of parent to all the other levers and switches. It was flanked by a perfect army of gauges and indicators; and was covered by a glass bell which was securely bolted to the rock slab.

"That looks interesting," Brand told himself. "I'd like to see that closer, if I can climb down from here without being observed.... Why"—he broke off—"where is everybody!"

For the first time, in the excitement and concentration of his purpose, the emptiness of the place struck him. There was no sign of light in the great building—no workmen or slaves anywhere. There was just the great coils, with the streamers of blue light bridging them and emitting the high-pitched, monotonous hum audible outside the dome, and the complicated control board with its quivering indicator needles and mysterious levers. That was all.

"Must be out to lunch," muttered Brand, his eyes going fascinatedly toward that solitary, parent lever under its glass bell. "Well, it gives me a chance to try some experiments, anyway."

I

It was about fifty feet from his perch to the floor; but a few feet to one side was a metal beam that extended up to help support the trussed weight of the roof. He jumped for this, and quickly slid down it.

He started on a run for the control board; but almost immediately he stopped warily to listen: it seemed to him that he had caught, faintly, the squeaking, high tones of Rogan conversation.

Miraculously, the sound seemed to come from a blank wall to his left. He crept forward to investigate....

The mystery was solved before he had gone very far. There was an opening in the wall leading off to an annex of some kind outside the dome building.

The opening was concealed by a set-back, so that at first glance it had seemed part of the wall itself. From this opening drifted the chatter of Rogans.

Brand stole closer, finally venturing to peer into the room beyond from an angle where he himself could not be seen. And he found that his whimsical reference to "lunch" had contained a ghastly element of fact!

In that annex were several dozen of the teetering, attenuated Rogans, and an equal number of slaves. And the relation of the slaves and the Rogans was one that made Brand's skin crawl.

Each Rogan had stripped the tunic from the chest of his slave. Now, as Brand watched, each drew a keen blade from his belt, and made a shallow gash in the shrinking flesh. There were a few stifled screams—some of the slaves were women—but for the most part the slashing was endured in stoical silence. When red drops began to ooze forth, the Rogans stooped and applied their horrible little mouths to the incisions....

"The slimy devils!" Brand whispered hoarsely, at sight of that dreadful feeding. "The inhuman, monstrous vermin!"

But now one or two of the Rogans had begun to utter squeaks of satiation; and Brand hastened away from there and toward the control board again. He hadn't an idea of what he might accomplish when he reached it; he didn't know but that a touch of the significant looking parent-lever might blast him to bits; but he did know that he was going to raise absolute hell with something, somewhere, if he possibly could.

S

wiftly he approached the great master-lever, protected by its bell of glass. (At least it looked like glass, for it was crystal clear and reflected gleamingly the blue light from the nearby coils). He tapped it experimentally with his knuckles....

At once pandemonium reigned in the great vaulted building. There was a siren-like screaming from a device he noticed for the first time attached under the domed roof. A clanging alarm split the air from half a dozen gongs set around the upper walls.

Squealing shouts sounded behind Brand. He whirled, and saw the Rogans, interrupted in their terrible meal, pouring in from the annex and racing toward him. Rage and fear distorted their hideous faces as they pointed first to the big lever and then at the escaped Earthman. They redoubled their efforts to get at him, their long unsteady legs covering the distance in great bounds.

Brand swore. Was he to be caught again before he had accomplished a certain thing? When he had already managed to win clear to his objective?

He hammered at the glass bell with his fists, but realized with the first blow that he was only wasting time trying to crack it bare-handed. He glanced quickly about and saw a metal bar propped up against the control board near him.

H

He sprang for it, grasped it as a club, and returned to the glass bell. Raising his arms high, he brought the thick metal bar down on the glass with all his strength.

With a force that almost wrenched his arms from their sockets, the bar rebounded from the glass bell, leaving it uncracked.

"Unbreakable!" groaned Brand.

Desperately he tried again, whirling the bar high over his head and bringing it smashing down. The result was the same as before as far as breaking the bell was concerned. But—a little trickle of crushed rock came from around the bolts in the slab to which the bell was fastened.

A third time he brought the bar down. The glass bell sagged a bit sway from the slab....

He had no chance for more assaults on it. The nearest Rogans had leaped for him. Slimy arms were coiling around him, while the loathsome sucker-disks tore at his unprotected face and throat.

Savagely Brand lashed out with the bar. It caved in a pair of the long, skinny legs, bringing a bloated round head down within reach. He smashed it with the bar, exulting grimly as the blow crumpled bone and flesh almost down to the little mouth which was yet carmine from its recent feeding.

The process seemed a sound one to Brand, unable as he was to reach the Rogans' heads that towered six feet above his own. Methodically, swinging the bar with the weight of his body behind it, he repeated the example. First a crash of the bar against a pair of legs, then the crushing in of the Rogan's head when he toppled with agonized squeals to the floor.

Again and again he crushed the life out of a Rogan with his one-two swing of the deadly bar. They were thinning down, now. They were wavering in their charges against the comparatively insignificant being from another planet who was defending himself so fiercely.

F

inally one of their number turned and ran toward an exit, waving his four arms and adding his high-pitched alarms to the incessant ringing of the gongs and shrieks of the warning siren up under the roof. The rest rushed the Earthman in a body.

Steadily, almost joyfully, Brand fought on. He had expected to be annihilated by one of the Rogan shock-tubes long before now; but as yet there was no sign of any. Either these Rogan workmen were not privileged to carry the terrible things, or they were too occupied to think of going and getting them; anyhow, Brand was left free to wield his bar and continue crushing out the lives of the two-legged vermin that attacked him.

With almost a shock of surprise, he saw finally that he had battered their number down to three. At that he took the offensive himself. He rammed the bluntly pointed end of the bar almost through one writhing torso, broke the back of a second with a whistling blow, and tripped and exterminated the third almost in as many seconds. The creatures, without their death-tubes, were as helpless as crippled rats!

Panting, he turned again toward the loosened glass bell, and battered at it with the precious bar. Gradually the bolts that held it to the stone slab were wrenched out, till only one supported it. But at this point, from half a dozen set-back doorways, streams of infuriated Rogans began pouring into the building and toward him.

The one that had fled had come back with help.

CHAPTER VIII

Tremendous Odds

L

ike living spokes of a half-wheel, with the Earthman as the hub, the Rogans converged toward Brand, a howling roar outside indicating that there were hundreds more waiting to jam into the dome as soon as they were able. There were still no shock-tubes in evidence: evidently the worker who had gone for help had gathered the first Rogan citizens he had encountered on the streets. But the very numbers of the mob spelled defeat for Brand.

However, there was still the great lever behind him to yank away from its switch-socket. The glass bell was almost off now. With a last mad blow, he knocked loose the remaining bolt that held it. The bell clattered to the floor.

A concerted shriek came from the crowding Rogans as they saw the Earthman's hand close on the lever. Whatever effect the throwing of that master-switch could have, there was no doubt that they were extremely anxious to prevent it!

And now, in the rear of the crowding columns, appeared Rogans taller than the others, with an authoritative air, who waved before them, eager to unleash their power, batteries of the death-tubes.

Resigning himself to annihilation in the next instant, Brand pulled down hard on the lever.

T

he effect wrought by the throwing of that great switch was almost indescribable.

In a flash, as though all had been struck at once by a giant's hand, every Rogan in the mob shot toward the floor, long thin legs caving under him as

if turned to water. Writhing feebly, they endeavored to get up, but could not; and, still weakly ferocious, began to creep toward the Earthman like huge-headed worms.

Brand himself had been thrown to the floor with the falling of that switch. He had felt as though an invisible ocean had been poured on him, weighting him down intolerably. To move arms or legs required enormous effort; and to get up on his feet again was like rising under a two-hundred-pound pack.

The movement of the switch, he saw, had cut off the gravity reducing apparatus of the Rogans—whatever that might consist of. They were now, abruptly, subjected to the full force of gravity exerted by Jupiter's great mass. They could no more stand erect on their tottering, lofty legs than they could fly.

But, though greatly handicapped by the gravity pull, they were still not entirely helpless. Like huge, long insects they continued to worm their way toward Brand, using their four arms and their boneless legs to help urge them over the flooring. And in their rear the Rogan guards struggled to lift their tubes and level them at the escaped prisoner.

Prompt to avoid that, Brand went down on his hands and knees. Thus he was shielded by the foremost crawling Rogans: the ones in the rear, with the tubes, could not raise themselves high enough to bore down over their fellows' heads at the Earthman.

Squatting on his knees, Brand awaited the first resolute crawlers. And, on his knees, whirling the now thrice weighty bar at heads that were conveniently low enough to be accessible, he began his last stand.

O

n the Rogans came, evidently determined, at any sacrifice of life, to get the Earthman away from that vital control board. And to right and left, crouching low to escape the tubes of the guards slowly crawling forward from the rear, Brand laid about him with the bar.

He got a little sick at the havoc he was wreaking on these slow-moving, gravity-crippled things: but remembrance of their grisly feeding habits, and the torture they must by now have inflicted on Dex, kept him flailing down on soft heads with undiminished effort.

With the gravity pull what it was, the Earthman was immeasurably stronger than any individual Rogan. For a time the contest was all in his favor. It was like killing slugs in a rose garden!

Nevertheless, these slugs were, after all, twelve feet long and possessed of intelligence, besides being hundreds in number. After a while the tide of battle began to turn in their favor.

Brand began to feel his arms ache burningly with the sustained effort of wielding a weapon that now weighed about twenty-five pounds. He knew he couldn't keep up the terrific strain much longer. And, in addition, he could see that the armed Rogans in the rear were steadily forging ahead among the unarmed attackers, till they soon must be in a position to blast him with their weapons.

Brand brought down his bar, with failing force but still deadly effect, on the loathsome face of the nearest Rogan, grunting with satisfaction as he saw it crumple into a shapeless mass. He thrust it, spear-like, into another face, and another.

Then, abruptly, he found himself weaponless.

Raising it high to bring it down on an attacker who was almost about to seize him, he felt the metal bar turn white hot, and dropped it with a cry as it seared the skin from the palms of his hands. Some Rogan guard in the rear had managed to train his tube on the bar; and in the instant of its rising had almost melted it.

W

Weaponless and helpless, Brand crawled slowly back before the tortuously advancing mob, keeping close enough to them to be shielded from the tubes

of the rear guards. Without his club he knew the end was a matter of seconds.

He had an impulse to leap full into the mass of repulsive, crawling bodies and die fighting as his fists battered at the gruesome faces. But a second impulse, and a stronger one, was the blind instinct to preserve his life as long as possible.

Hesitantly, almost reluctantly, acting on the primitive instinct of self-preservation, he continued to back away from the advancing horde; away from the switch and toward the rear of the dome.

With the instant of his withdrawal, a Rogan turned toward the lever to push it back up into contact and release the red kingdom from the burden of Jupiter's unendurable gravity. And now ensued a curious struggle. The lever, placed for the convenience of creatures twelve feet or more tall, was about five feet from the floor. And the Rogan couldn't reach it!

S

tubbornly he heaved and writhed in an effort to raise his inordinately heavy body from the floor to a point where one of the weaving arms could reach the switch. But the pipe-stem legs would not bear its weight. Each time it nearly reached the lever, only to fall feebly back again in a snarl of tangled limbs.

Meanwhile, Brand had flashed a quick look back over his shoulder to see, in the wall behind him, a metal door he hadn't noticed before. He found time for a flashing instant to wonder why there were no Rogans entering from that doorway, too; but it was a vain wonder, and it faded from his mind as the ever advancing, groping monsters before him kept crowding him back.

Instinctively he changed his course a trifle, to edge toward the metal door. Perhaps, behind it, there was sanctuary for a few moments. Perhaps he could force it open, spring out, and bar it again in the faces of the pursuing

mob. It sounded improbable, but at least it offered him a slim chance where before no chance had seemed possible.

He reached the door at last, fumbled behind him and felt, high over his head, a massive sliding bolt.

I

In the spot Brand had left, the struggle to throw the gravity-lever back into closed contact position went on. The Rogan who was fruitlessly trying to reach up to it paused and said something to one near him. That one halted, and began to crawl toward him.

The two of them tried to reach it, one bracing the other and helping him pry his body up from the implacable pull of Jupiter's uninsulated mass. The top Rogan reached a little higher. The flesh sucker-disk that served as a hand almost grasped the lever, but failed by only a few inches.

A third Rogan crawled up. And now, with two arching their backs to help the other, the thing was done. The hose-like, groping arm went up and pushed the lever back into place.

The blue streamer began to hum and crackle from coil to coil again. The invisible weight that pressed down was released as once more the giant planet's gravity was nullified. The Rogans got eagerly to their feet and began to race toward Brand in their normal long bounds.

Brand, just cautiously rising, when the power went back on, found himself leaping five feet into the air with the excess of his muscular effort. And in that leap he saw the Rogans in the rear straighten up and point their tubes. However, also in that leap, his fumbling hand shot back the bolt that securely shut the metal door.

With a shout of defiance he jumped out of the door and slammed it shut after him, feeling it grow searing hot an instant later under the impact of the rays from the tubes that had been trained on him.

A stinging shock reached him through the metal, flinging him to the ground. He rolled out of its range and leaped to his feet to race away from there. Then, with a gasp, he flattened his body back against the wall of the dome building.

He was in the enclosure that held the gigantic, lizard-like thing that had nearly got him on his escape from the tower room.

He wheeled frantically to go back and face the Rogan death-tubes. Anything rather than wait while that mammoth heap of tiny-brained ferocity ran him down and tore him to shreds! But even as he turned, he heard the bolt shoot home on the inside of the door; heard vengeful squeals of triumph from his pursuers.

A

t the other end of the enclosure, near the foot of the tower building, the great lizard eyed him unblinkingly, its tremendous jaws gaping to reveal a cavernous mouth that was hideously lined with bright orange colored membrane. Then, squatting lower with every step it took, like a mountainous cat about to spring on its prey, it began to stalk on its tree-like legs toward the tiny creature that had leaped into its yard with it.

Brand whirled this way and that, mechanically seeking a way out. There was none. The walls of the great enclosure were not like the wall of the tower. Here were no rough hewn stones, with protruding ridges of mortar set between. These walls were as smooth as glass, and just as smooth was the curved wall of the dome building behind him.

The monstrous beast stalked nearer, almost on its belly now. As it advanced, the great tail stirred up a cloud of reddish dust, and left behind it a round deep depression in a surface already crisscrossed with a multitude of similar depressions. A bellowing hiss came from its gaping mouth, and it increased its pace to a thunderous, waddling rush.

CHAPTER IX

Into the Enclosure

I

n the torture chamber Dex wavered slowly back to consciousness to get the growing impression that he was being immersed in a bath of liquid fire. Burning, intolerable pain assailed him with increasing intensity as his senses clarified.

At last he groaned and opened his eyes, for the moment not knowing where he was nor how he had come to be there. He saw strange torture instruments and tall monstrosities with pumpkin-shaped heads surrounding him closely in a semicircle, and staring at him out of great, dull eyes.

Remembrance came back with a rush, and he gathered his muscles to spring at the hateful figures. But he could not move. At waist and throat, at wrists and ankles, were hoops of metal. He closed his eyes again while the burning waves of invisible fire shot through him recurrently from head to foot.

Dully he wondered that he was still alive. His last recollection had been of the Rogan leader pointing his shock-tube full at him, his shapeless countenance working with murderous fury. However, alive he was; and most unenviably so!

His hands, circumscribed to a few inches of movement by the bonds on his wrists, felt the smooth substance at his back. And with a thrill of horror he realized his position: he was crucified against the metal slab on which the slave had writhed in agony a short half hour ago.

Again he strained and tugged, vainly, to get free. Off to one side, pressed back against a huge glass experimental tank, he saw the beautiful Greca, her eyes wide with horror; and caught her frantic pleading message to her "Great White One."

T

he Rogan leader, squealing and grimacing, advanced toward the victim on the metal plate. One of the long arms went out and a sucker-disk was pressed to Dex's cheek. Dex quivered at the loathsome contact of that soft and slimy substance; then set his jaws to keep from groaning as the disk was jerked away, to carry with it a fragment of skin and flesh.

Gingerly, the tall leader felt the twitching, blackened stump of his blasted arm. Dex grinned mirthlessly at that: he'd struck one or two blows in his own defense, anyhow!

At sight of the Earthman's grin, an expression of defiance and grim joy that needed no interpreting to be understandable, the Rogan leader fairly danced with rage. His long arm went out to the switch beside the plate, and pulled it down another notch—just a little, not nearly to the current that had torn at the slave.

At the increased torment resulting from that slight movement of the regulating lever, Dex yelled aloud in spite of all his will power. It seemed as though his whole body were about to burst into self-generated flame. Every cell and fiber of him seemed on the verge of flying apart. He could feel his eyes start from his head, could feel every hair on his scalp stand up as though discharging electric sparks.

A minute or two of that and he would go mad! He cried out again, and twisted helplessly in his bonds. And then the terrible torture stopped.

The Rogan had not touched the switch—yet whatever sort of current it was that charged the plate was abruptly clicked off, as though someone at a distance had cut a wire or thrown a master-switch.

S

imultaneously with its ceasing, an invisible, crushing sea seemed to envelope everything. Dex felt his body sag against his metal bonds as if it had been changed to lead.

Before him the Rogans, who had been crowding closer to watch gloatingly each grimace he made, shot doorward as though their pipe-stem legs had been swept from under them. The leader fell on the stump of his seared arm and, a deafening squeal of rage and pain came from his little mouth. His tube fell from his grasp and rolled over the floor half a dozen yards away from him.

Amazed, observing the stricken creatures only dimly through a haze of pain, Dex saw them struggle vainly to get up again, and heard them chattering excitedly to themselves. For the moment, in the face of this queer phenomenon, the prisoner seemed to be forgotten. And Dex was quick to seize the momentary advantage.

"Greca!" he called. "The tube! There—on the floor!"

The girl raised her head quickly, and followed his imploring gaze. Laboriously she started for the tube. At the same instant the Rogan leader began to feel around him for his lost weapon. Not finding it, he raised his head and glanced about for it. He saw the girl making her way toward it and, with a squeak of terror, began to crawl toward it himself.

H

e was not quick enough. The girl, though not nearly as active under the increased pull of gravity as a person of Earth might be, was yet more agile than the Rogans. And she was the faster mover in this tortuous, snail-like race. While the Rogan leader was still several feet away, she retrieved the shock-tube.

"Kill him!" begged Dex. "And all the rest of the filthy creatures!"

With feminine horror of the thing that faced her, Greca hesitated an instant—a hesitation almost long enough to be fatal. Then, just as the Rogan leader was reaching savagely out for her, she leveled the tube at him and turned it to its full power.

One last thin squeal came from the Rogan's mouth, a squeal that cracked abruptly at its height. What had been its gangling body drifted up in inky smoke.

"The others!" called Dex. "Quick! Before they get their weapons—"

Greca swept the death-tube in a short arc in front of her, over the bodies of the remaining Rogans, as if spraying plants with a hose. One after another, toppling in swift succession like grotesque falling dominoes, the creatures sagged to the floor and melted away. That one small part of Jupiter's red spot, at least, was cleared of Rogan population.

L

ong shudders racked Greca's body, and her lips were a bloodless line in her pallid face. But she did not go into womanly hysterics or swoon at the slaughter it had been her lot to inflict. Moving as quickly as she could, she went to the metal slab and began, with shaking fingers, to undo the fastenings that held Dex prisoner.

"Good girl," said Dex, patting her satiny bare shoulder as he stood free again. "You're a sport and a gentleman. You don't understand the terms? They're Earth words, Greca, that carry the highest praise a man can give a woman. But let's get out of here before another gang comes and takes us again. Where can we hide?"

"I don't know any hiding places," confessed Greca despairingly. "The Rogans swarm everywhere. We will be seen the moment we try to leave here."

"Well, we'll hunt for a hole, anyway," said Dex. He essayed to walk. What with the tendency of his muscles to jerk and collapse with the aftermath of the torture he had endured, and the sudden and inexplicable increase in gravity that bore him down, he made heavy going of it. "First we'll go up and get Brand."

"Yes, yes," said Greca, a soft glow in her clear blue eyes. "Let us go quickly."

She started toward the door, panting with the effort of moving. But Dex halted an instant, to stoop and pick up another of the tubes.

"We might as well have one of these apiece," he said. "You've proved you have the grit to use one; and maybe the dirty rats will think twice about rushing us if we each have a load of death in our hands."

T

hey made their way out of the torture laboratory, and up the incline to the street level. And it was just as they reached this that the burden of gravity under which they staggered was lifted from their shoulders as quickly as it had descended on them.

Dex raised his arms just in time to fend his body from a collision with the wall in front of him. "Now what!" he exclaimed.

Greca lifted her hand for silence, inclined her head, and listened intently. As she did so, Dex heard the same noise her quick ears had caught an instant before his: a distant pandemonium of ringing gongs and siren shrieks, and squealing cries of a multitude of agitated Rogans.

"What the devil—" began Dex. But again Greca raised her hand to silence him, and listened once more. As she listened, her sea-blue eyes grew wider and wider with horror. Then, frantically, she began to race down a long corridor away from the street door.

Dex hastened to follow her. "What is it?" he demanded, when he had caught up to her flying little feet. "This is not the way up to the room where Brand —"

"Your friend is not there," she interrupted. She explained swiftly, distractedly: "From the shouts of the Rogans I learn that he got into the great dome building, somehow, and then was driven into the pen of the...."

Dex could not get the next term she used. But her telepathic message of the peril she mentioned formed in his mind clearly enough.

He got a flashing brain picture of a great, high-walled yard with a monster in it of the kind he had caught a close-range glimpse a short while before. Also, he saw a blurred, tiny figure, running from wall to wall, that was Greca's imagining of Brand and his efforts to escape the enormous beast.

"Good heavens!" groaned Dex. "Penned in with one of the things they showed me while I was stretched on the rack! Are you sure, Greca?"

She nodded, and tried to run faster. "This way," she gasped, turning down a passage to the left that ended in a massive metal door. "This leads to the enclosure. Oh, if only we can be in time!"

Her slim fingers tore at a massive bolt that secured the door. "Here," said Dex, wrenching it open for her. And they stepped out into thin sunlight, onto a hard surface of reddish ground that was crisscrossed with innumerable rounded furrows like the tracks old-fashioned, fifty-passenger airplane wheels used to make on soft landing fields.

G

reca shrieked, and pointed to the far end of the enclosure. Down there, flattened against the wall of the dome building, was Brand. And waddling toward him with a tread that caused the ground to quiver, was a mate to the hideous creature the Rogans had used to terrify Dex in the torture chamber.

Dex leveled the tube he was carrying, swore, hit it frenziedly against his hand. "How do you work this damned thing, Greca—Oh! Like that! There—see if *that* puts a sting in your hide!"

The distant monster stopped its advance toward Brand. A raw white spot as big as a dinner plate leaped into being on one of its enormous hind legs. It whirled with an ear-splitting hiss, to see what thing was causing such pain in its rear. The frightful head whipped back at the end of the long neck, to nuzzle at the seared spot. Then the giant lizard turned toward Brand again.

A second time Dex pressed the central coil that formed the handle of the tube, as Greca had showed him how to do. A second time the ray shot down the field to flick a chunk of flesh weighing many pounds from the monster's flank. And this time it definitely abandoned the quarry behind it. With a scream like the keening of a dozen steam whistles, it charged back over its tracks toward the distant pigmies that were inflicting such exasperating punishment on it.

Dex swept the tube before him in a short half-circle. A smoking gash appeared suddenly in the vast fore-quarters of the monster. It stopped abruptly, its clawed feet plowing along the ground with the force of its momentum. An instant it stood there. Then, with its head swinging from side to side and lowered so that its looped neck dragged on the reddish, dusty ground, it began to back away from the source of its hurt, bellowing and hissing its rage and bewilderment.

"Brand!" shouted Dex. "This end! Run, while I hold the thing off!"

Brand began to race down the long enclosure, ten feet to a leap. The great lizard darted after him, like a cat after an escaping mouse; but a flick of the tube sent it bellowing and screaming back to its corner.

"Dex!" gasped Brand. "Thank God!"

For a moment he leaned, white and shaken, against the wall. Then Greca caught his hand in both of hers, and Dex put his arm supportingly around his shoulder. They retreated back through the doorway behind them, and slid the bolt across the metal door.

CHAPTER X

The "Tank Scheme"

T

hank God you came when you did," repeated Brand. Then, with a moment in which, figuratively, to get his feet back on earth, the wonder of Dex's appearance struck him.

"How did you manage to get away?" he asked. "I was sure—I thought—when they dragged you out of the tower room I wouldn't see you again—"

Rapidly Dex gave an account of his ordeal in the torture chamber, telling Brand in a few words how he had attempted to win free of the Rogans, how he had almost succeeded, only to be caught again and clamped to the death-plate on the wall.

"But just as the big fellow was about to cook me for good and all," he concluded, "something happened to the current, and to the gravity at the same time—"

"That was when I pulled the lever in the dome building!" exclaimed Brand.

He told of what had befallen him in the Rogan power-house. "That lever, Dex!" he said swiftly. "It's the keynote of the whole business. It absolutely controls the pull of gravity, and Lord knows what else besides. If we could only get at it again! Perhaps we could not only shut it off so that Jupiter's pull would function again, but also reverse the process so its gravity would be *increased*! Think what that would mean! Every Rogan in the red empire stretched out and immovable, possibly crushed in by his own weight!"

"It's a wonderful thought," sighed Dex; while Greca's eyes glowed with a sudden hope for her enslaved race, "but I don't see how we could ever—"

He stopped; and glanced in alarm down the passage behind them. Greca and Brand, hearing the same soft noise, whirled to look, too.

F

ar down the passage, just sneaking around the bend, was a group of Rogan guards, each armed with a death-tube.

"Back to the pen!" cried Brand.

He slid the bolt, and jerked the door open. They rushed into the walled enclosure again, the slamming of the door behind them cutting off the enraged squeals of the Rogans.

"This isn't going to mean anything but a short delay, I'm afraid," said Brand, clenching his fists in an agony of futility. "They'll be in here in a minute, and get us like trapped rats."

"Not before we get a lot of them," said Dex grimly.

"But that isn't enough, man! We don't want to die, no matter how decently we do it. We've won free, and stayed free this long; now, somehow, we've got to reach our ship and get back to Earth to warn them of the danger that hides here for our planet!"

He strode tensely up and down, smacking his fist into his palm. "The lever!" he exclaimed. "That lever! It's our only answer! If we could get to it.... But how can we? We couldn't break into the dome, now the Rogans are on the watch for us, with anything less than a charge of explosives. Or a tank. God, how I'd like to have an old-fashioned, fifty-ton army tank here now!"

Greca exclaimed aloud as Brand's fleeting mental picture of one of Earth's unwieldy, long-discarded war tanks registered on her brain.

"There is the great beast there," she said hesitantly, pointing a slim forefinger at the huge lizard that had backed into a far corner and was regarding them out of dull, savage eyes. Then she shook her head. "But that is impossible. Impossible!"

T

he men stared at her, with dawning realization in their minds. Then they gazed at each other.

"Of course," said Brand. "Of course! Greca, you're marvelous! Wish we had a tank? Why, we've got one! A four-legged mountain of meat that ought to be able to plow through the side of that dome like a battering ram through cardboard!"

"But it's not possible," replied Greca, her head dropping dejectedly. "My people, as driven slaves, till the fields with great animals that were trapped in the surrounding jungles. They harness other great animals to haul burdens. But none of the beasts are like *this* one. This kind cannot be tamed or harnessed. It is too ferocious. It is used only as a scourge of fear, to crush us into complete submission."

"Can't be tamed?" Brand said. "We'll see about that! Come on, Dex."

"Just a minute," said Dex. He flattened against the wall, motioning them to do the same. Then he leveled his tube at the door.

Slowly, cautiously, the door began to swing back; and the Rogan that Dex had heard fumbling with the bolt stuck his huge head out to locate the escaped prisoners.

Dex pressed the release coil of his tube. Without a sound, the Rogan slumped to the ground, a smoking cavity in its shoulders at the spot where its head had been set. In an instant the body, too, disappeared; an upward coiling wisp of black smoke marking its vanishing.

Another Rogan, tiptoeing out, met the same fate; and another. And then the door was banged shut again, and the bolt ground into place on the inside.

"That'll teach 'em to be careful how they try to rush us from *that* door," said Dex, through set teeth. "Now let's see if that tank scheme of ours can be worked."

H

e picked up a tube dropped by one of the Rogans, and handed it to Brand; showing him which coil to press to get full force, as Greca had in turn informed him.

"Down the field," commanded Brand. "We'll go about thirty yards apart, and try to herd this brute back through the walls of the dome building. Once it's inside, we'll try to rush to the lever before the Rogans can down us, and jam the thing past its terminal peg and into reverse action. I don't know that there *is* a reverse to it—but we can try.

"Greca dear,"—the girl started at the warmth of his thought, and a faint pink rose to her pale cheeks—"you'd better stay by my side. Your place as hostage-priestess of your people wouldn't save you if those devils catch you now. Besides, you can keep your tube leveled at the doorway as we go, and discourage any Rogans who might pluck up courage to try coming out again."

They started down the field toward the nightmare thing that snarled and hissed in its corner. On one side of the big enclosure walked Brand, with Greca close beside him, glancing continuously over her shoulder at the rear door, and holding her tube in readiness to check any charge the Rogans might attempt to make from the tower building. On the other side, keeping an equal pace, advanced Dex.

With tubes of death as whips, and with death for themselves set as the stake for which they gambled, they went about their attempt to drive the brainless monster before them through the solid wall of the dome building. And there followed what was probably the strangest animal act the universe has ever witnessed.

T

he first thing to do was to rout the enormous lizard out of the corner where sullen fear had sent it squatting. Dex contrived to do that by standing next to the wall at its side, and sending a searing ray that just touched the scaly,

tremendously thick hide. The monster bellowed deafeningly, and, with a spot smoking on its flank, waddled sideways to the center of the field. Its head and swaying long neck faced the Earthmen and its back was against the wall of the dome building. To that extent, at least, they had the creature placed; but they soon found that the struggle had only just begun.

Brand got far enough around to focus his tube on the tip of the huge tail, in an effort to swing the gigantic thing about. There was an unearthly shriek from the colossal beast, and a foot and a half of its tail disappeared.

"Careful," called Dex, his jaw set and grim as the monster lashed out in its wrath. "If you bore in too long with that tube there'll be nothing left of our tank but a cloud of smoke."

Brand nodded, wordlessly, walking on the balls of his feet like a boxer, holding himself ready to swerve the thing should it charge them. Which—next instant—it did!

With a whistling bellow it gathered its tons of weight and thundered with incredible quickness at the gnats that were stinging its flanks and tail.

Desperately Brand played the tube across the vast chest, scoring a smouldering gash in the scale-covered flesh just above the gash Dex had seared a few moments before.

"Sorry, old fellow," Brand muttered to the screaming beast. "We hate to bait you like this, but it has to be done. Come on, now, through that wall behind you, and give us a chance at the lever."

B

ut through the wall behind it the vast creature, not unnaturally, refused to go! It darted from side to side. Backward and forward. Up to the wall, only to back bewilderedly away from it. And constantly the tubes flicked their blistering, maddening rays along its monstrous sides and tail, as the Earthmen tried to guide it into the wall.

"Hope there's enough left of it to do the trick," said Brand, white-lipped. The monster was smoking in a dozen spots now, and several of the hump-like scales on its back had been burned away till the vast spine looked like a giant saw that was missing a third of its teeth. "God, I'm thinking we'll kill it before we can drive it through that wall!"

Greca nodded soberly, keeping her eyes on the distant door to their rear. Twice that door had been opened, and twice she had directed the death rays into its opening to mow down the gangling figures behind it. But she had said nothing of this to her man. He was busy enough with his own task!

"The door to the dome—" Dex shouted suddenly.

But Brand merely nodded, even as a discharge from his tube annihilated the Rogan that had appeared in the doorway before them. He had seen that door stealthily opening even before Dex had.

"It had better be soon, Dex!" he called. "Rogans in front of us—Rogans behind us—and—look out! On your side of the fence, there!"

Dex whirled in time to pick off a grotesque, pipe-like figure that had suddenly appeared on the broad wall of the enclosure. Then he turned to the frenzied problem of driving the monster through the building wall.

"The thing's going mad, Brand!" he cried, his voice high-pitched and brittle. "Watch out!"

I

It was only too evident that his statement was true. The baited monster, harried blindly this way and that, hounded against the blank wall behind it by something that bit chunks of living flesh out of its legs and sides, was losing whatever instinctive mental balance it had ever had. Its dimly functioning brain, probably no larger than a walnut in that gigantic skull, ceased more and more to guide it.

With a rasping scream that set the Earthmen's teeth on edge, it charged for the wall on Dex's side. Dex just managed to swerve it with a blast from the tube so prolonged that half its great lower jaw fell away.

At this the titanic thing went wholly, colossally mad! It whirled toward Brand, jerking around again as a searing on that side jarred its dull sensory nerves, then headed at last straight toward the stone wall of the dome building.

With the rays from both tubes flicking it like monstrous spurs, it charged insanely toward the bulge of the circular wall. With all its tons and tons of weight it crashed against the stonework. There was a thunderous crackling noise, and the wall sagged in perceptibly, while the metal roof bent to accommodate the new curvature of its supporting beams.

The monstrous lizard, jerked off its huge legs by the impact, staggered up and retreated toward the two men. But again the maddening pain in its hindquarters sent it careening toward the building wall. This time it raised high up on its hind legs in a blind effort to climb over it. "God, it must be five stories tall!" ejaculated Brand. Thunderingly its forelegs came down on the edge of the roof.

T

here was another deafening crash of stone and shrieking of torn metal. Just under the cornice, the wall sagged away from the roof and the top rows of heavy stone blocks slithered inward.

"Again!" shouted Brand.

His tube was pointing almost continuously now at the metal door leading from the dome building. The Rogans inside, at the shocks that were battering down a section of their great building, were all trying to get out to the yard at once. In a stream they rushed for the doorway. And in loathsome heaps they fell at the impact of the ray and shriveled to nothingness on the bombarded threshold.

"Once more—" Brand repeated, his voice hoarse and tense.

And as though the monster heard and understood, it rushed again with all its vast weight and force against the wall in a mad effort to escape the things that were blasting the living flesh from its colossal framework.

This charge was the last. With a roaring crash a section of the building thirty yards across went back and down, leaving the massive roof to sag threateningly on its battered truss-work.

I

It was as though the side of an ant-heap had been ripped away. Inside the domed building hundreds of Rogans ran this way and that on their elongated legs, squealing in their staccato, high-pitched tongue.

With blind fury the mad monster charged in through the gaping hole it had battered for itself. In all directions the Rogans scattered. Then an authoritative tall figure with a tube in each of its four sucker-disks, whipped out a command and pointed to the great coils which lay immediately in the berserk monster's path.

The command restored some sort of order. Losing their fear of the beast in their greater fear of the damage it might do, the Rogans massed to stop it before it could demolish the Rogan heart of power.

At this point Brand saw an opening of the kind he had been praying for. The Rogans had retreated before the terrific charge of the monster in such a way that the space between its vast bulk and the control board was clear.

"After me!" he shouted to Dex. "One of us has got to reach that lever while the creature's still there to shield us!"

The two Earthmen dashed through the jagged hole in the wall and raced to the control board just as the huge lizard, a smoking mass, sank to the floor. Brand gazed almost fearfully at the lever-slot.

Was there a reverse to the gravity-control action? There was room in the slot for the lever to be pulled down below the neutral point, if that meant anything....

B

Behind them the great bulk of the dead lizard was disappearing with incredible quickness under the rays of the tubes directed on it. Now the pumpkin-shaped heads on the opposite side were visible through a fleeting glimpse of a skeleton that was like the framework of a skyscraper. And now the colossal bones themselves were melting, while over everything hung a pall of greasy black smoke.

"Hurry, for God's sake!" gasped Dex.

Brand threw down the lever till it stuck. At once that invisible ocean poured crushingly over them, throwing them to their knees and sweeping the Rogans flat on their hideous faces just as half a hundred tubes were flashing down to point at the Earthmen.

"More—if you can!" grated Dex, whirling this way and that and spraying the massed Rogans with his death-dealing tube. Dozens went up in smoke under that discharge; but other dozens remained to raise themselves laboriously and slowly level their suddenly ponderous weapons at the Earthmen.

Brand set his jaw and threw all his weight on the lever. It bent a little, caught at the neutral point—and then jammed down an appreciable distance beyond it.

I

Instantly the blue streamers, that had stopped their humming progress from coil to coil with the movement of the switch to neutral, started again in

reversed direction. And instantly the invisible ocean pressed down with appalling, devastating force.

Greca and Brand and Dex were flattened to the floor as if by blankets of lead. And the scattered Rogans about them ceased all movement whatever.

"Oh," sobbed Greca, fighting for breath. "Oh!"

"We can't stand this," panted Dex. "We've fixed the Rogans, all right. But we've fixed ourselves, too! That lever has to go up a bit."

Brand nodded, finding his head almost too heavy for his neck to move. Sweat beaded his forehead—sweat that trickled heavily off his face like drops of liquid metal.

With a tremendous struggle he got to his knees beneath the master-switch. There he found it impossible to raise his arms; but, leaning back against the control board and so getting a little support, he contrived to lift his body up enough to touch the down-slanting lever with his head and move it back along its slot a fraction of an inch. The giant coils hummed a note lower; and some of the smashing weight was relieved.

"That does it, I think," Brand panted, his voice husky with exhaustion and triumph.

He began to crawl laboriously toward the nearest street exit. "On our way!" he said vibrantly. "To the space ship! We leave for Earth at once!"

S

lowly, fighting the sagging weight of their bodies, the two Earthmen inched their way to the street, helping Greca as they went. Among the sprawled forms of the Rogans they crept, with great dull eyes rolling helplessly to observe their progress, and with feeble squeals of rage and fear and malediction following their slow path.

On the street a strange and terrible sight met their eyes.

Strewn over the metal paving like wheat stalks crushed flat by a hurricane, were thousands of Rogans. Not a muscle of their pipe-like arms or legs could they move. But the gravity that crushed them rigidly to the ground did not quite hold motionless the shorter and more sturdily built slaves.

Among the thousands of squealing, panting Rogans that lay as though paralyzed on the metal paving, crawled equal thousands of Greca's enslaved people. Their eyes flamed with fanatic hate. And methodically—not knowing what had caused their loathed masters to be stricken helpless, and not caring as long as they *were* helpless—the slaves were seeking out the shock-tubes that here and there had fallen from the clutch of Rogan guards. Already many had found them; and everywhere gangling, slimy bodies were melting in oily black smoke that almost instantly vanished in thin air.

As it was in these streets and in the great square in the center of which rested the Earthmen's ship, just so, they knew, was it being repeated all over the red empire. Slowly crawling, fiercely exulting slaves were exterminating the tyrannous things that had held them so long in dreadful bondage! Before the sun should set on another flashing Jovian day there would be no Rogan left in the red spot.

A

nd so it ends," said Brand with a great sigh. He moved over beside Greca, and touched her lovely bare shoulders. They were shaking convulsively, those shoulders; and she had buried her face in her hands to keep from gazing at the ghastly carnage.

Brand pressed her to him. "It's terrible—yes. But think what it means! The knell of all the Rogans been sounded to-day. As soon as the secret of these death-tubes has been analyzed by our science and provided against, my friend and I will return from Earth with a force that shall clear the universe of the slimy devils. Meanwhile, your people are safe here; with the gravity what it is, no Rogan attacking hordes can land."

They crawled tortuously over the square to the space ship. Brand turned again to Greca; and now in his eyes was a look that needed no language of mind or tongue for its complete expression.

"Will you come to Earth with me, Greca, and stay by my side till we return to set your people in power again?"

Greca shook her head, slowly, reluctantly. "My people need leaders now. I must stay and help direct them in their new freedom. But you—you'll come back with the others from Earth?"

"Try and stop him!" grinned Dex. "And try and stop me, too! From what I know now of the way they grow 'em on your satellite"—his eyes rested on Greca's beauty with an admiration that turned her to rosy confusion—"I'd say I'd found the ideal spot to settle down in!"

Brand laughed. "He's answered for me too. And now, a salute that is used on Earth to express a promise...." He kissed her—to her utter astonishment and perplexity, but to her dawning pleasure. "Good-by for a little while."

The two Earthmen hoisted themselves heavily over the sill of the control room of their ship, and crawled inside.

They secured the trap-door, and turned on the air-rectifiers. Brand moved to the controls, waved to Greca, who was smiling at him through the glass panel, and pointed the ship on its triumphant, four hundred million mile journey home.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RED HELL
OF JUPITER ***

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