



The Prince of Mars Returns

Nowlan, Philip Francis

Published: 1940

Type(s): Short Fiction, Science Fiction

Source: <http://gutenberg.net.au>

About Nowlan:

Philip Francis Nowlan (born 1888 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, died February 1, 1940 in Philadelphia) was an American science fiction author. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania he worked as a newspaper columnist. He married, moved to the Philadelphia suburb of Bala Cynwyd and created and wrote the Buck Rogers comic strip, illustrated by Dick Calkins. The character Buck Rogers first appeared in Nowlan's 1928 novella *Armageddon 2419 A.D.* as Anthony Rogers. The comic strip ran for over forty years and spun off a radio series, a 1939 movie serial, and two television series. Nowlan also wrote several other novellas for the science fiction magazines as well as the posthumously published mystery, *The Girl from Nowhere*. Philip Francis Nowlan was married to Theresa Junker Nowlan. They had ten children including Philip, Mary, Helen, Louise, Theresa, Mike, Larry, Pat, John, and Joe. Source: Wikipedia

Also available on Feedbooks for Nowlan:

- *Armageddon 2419 AD* (1928)
- *The Airlords of Han* (1928)

Copyright: This work is available for countries where copyright is Life+50.

Note: This book is brought to you by Feedbooks.

<http://www.feedbooks.com>

Strictly for personal use, do not use this file for commercial purposes.

Chapter 1

To Mars

I, Captain Daniel J. Hanley, chief meteorologist of the General Rocket Corporation, had no intention of going to Mars when I stepped into the new space car and pressed gently but with finality on the gravity-screen lever.

I was conscious only of a great urge to get as far away as possible from a certain young woman who had—but why go into details about that? It is enough that I didn't fully realize what I was doing.

And as a result, here I was, the first man ever to pass beyond the stratosphere of Earth, actually hovering a scant mile above a Martian landscape, trembling with suppressed excitement and giving not a thought to the girl who had driven me to my mad, premature plunge into space.

I faced infinity with reckless abandon, and found that I liked it. What did it matter if the end came in a day, week, or month? Why, there were no days, weeks, or months in interplanetary space! Only eternal, blazing noon on one side of my tiny craft and everlasting midnight on the other, while countless galaxies gleamed upon me in new glory from all sides.

That I landed on Mars, instead of some other planet, was due solely to chance. In hurling my tiny craft madly, blindly away from Earth I happened to set it on an orbit that brought it closer to Mars than to any other heavenly body. As I drew nearer, the planet grew in size and in interest, until it entirely filled the great lens of my wide-angle scope. Its mountain ranges and peculiar canals became plainly visible.

I manipulated my rocket blasts a bit and swung closer. There was no indication that the canals were man-made. Rather they seemed furrows caused by glancing blows of meteors. And there were many craters which, though small like those of the moon, appeared to be the result of head-on meteoric impact.

As the planet grew still larger, I could see that there were no oceans and continents in the sense that we know them on Earth. Nevertheless,

the divisions between the ice caps, polar seas, solid vegetation belts, canal-irrigated sections, and finally the vast and eternally dry, red equatorial belt, were clear and sharp. The northern and southern hemispheres, widely divided by this belt, seemed duplicates.

"Why not inspect the planet at close range?" I asked myself.

So here I was, easing down over a countryside such as no man of Earth had ever seen.

Through the forward port I gazed upon a country of scrubby, dwarfed, cactus-like trees and shrubs, stretching away drably to where a ribbon of water—one of these much discussed "canals" sparkled. To my left, toward the equatorial belt, the vegetation became more dwarfed and sparse, until its pale, yellow-green blended into the deeper, reddish tint of the arid desert.

To my right, a rolling plain swelled into distant hills heavily covered with the yellow-green foliage. On the horizon, a range of gaunt, jagged mountains flashed and shimmered like crystal in the pale, cool sunlight.

"Quartz!" I muttered. "They must be pure quartz!"

I brought my craft gently down on the bank of the little river that meandered along the "canal" or valley. With trembling fingers I opened the valve of one of the test chambers and watched the pressure gauge.

I had feared an uncomfortably rare air, but the gauge registered a pressure no less than that of mountainous regions at home. There was more carbon dioxide and more hydrogen, but the oxygen content was about the same as on Earth! I could leave my little metal shell and walk around on a new planet!

Excited, I threw back the hatch at the top of my little hemispherical craft and leaped out joyously. I landed, not where I expected—but fifteen or twenty feet beyond. I had forgotten that I would weigh only about a third as much as on Earth.

But with a little practice, I found I could gauge my muscular effort instinctively to the desired distance. It was a delightful amusement, leaping twenty-five or thirty feet with the effort of an eight or ten foot jump. But finally I gave some consideration to my position.

"And now," I told myself, "here I am on an utterly strange planet. I have no idea what dangers I may have to face. I don't know whether intelligent beings live here or, if they do, what their attitude toward me might be. It might be just as well to have an ace in the hole. I'll hide my

ship, mark the spot well, and then if by any chance things should get too hot for me, I'll have the means in reserve to do a fade-out."

I studied the banks of the stream. Obviously the little river was at high-water mark. That was good. There would be no more powerful current than this to wash my ship away then, for it was my intention to sink her in the middle of the stream.

Again I climbed aboard, closed the hatch. Letting my space car drift a few feet above the water, I maneuvered over the center of the stream and then submerged. The ship went about ten feet below the surface. I had previously unloaded the equipment I meant to use, so nothing remained but to put everything in order, enter the airlock, adjust the pressure, and dive down and out through the port.

I realized, as I donned my woolen shirt, leather breeches and puttees, that the sun did not shed as much warmth on Mars as on Earth. It seemed scarcely more than half the size to which I was accustomed. As I rolled up my blankets, I had little doubt I would need them after nightfall.

As yet I had seen no sign of animal life. But there were many spots on Earth where a visitor would find none for miles. So that proved nothing. I strapped a heavy automatic to my thigh, clasped on a cartridge belt. As an extra precaution, I slipped a smaller automatic in a shoulder holster which I put on under my shirt. For the rest, I thought, my hunting knife and short-handled axe might prove serviceable.

Marking the position of my submerged spacecraft by carefully sighting the distant mountain peaks on crossed lines, I shouldered my light pack and hiked toward the gleaming, flashing mountain range.

It was glorious to weigh no more than about sixty pounds, and yet have muscles that had been accustomed to carrying one hundred seventy. Walking did not give them the exercise they demanded after the long period cooped up in the little space ship, so I ran with exhilarating lightness, practicing long and high leaps as I went and shouting, at times, from sheer, unrestrained joy.

I had gone about five miles when I first saw her.

The scrubby undergrowth had given way to another cactus-like type of vegetation, the trees of Mars, slim and tall with stubby, blunt branches. They bore no leaves. Rather, both trunks and branches seemed to be leaves in themselves, pale yellow-green and semi-transparent. A thin syrupy sap ran freely from one, which I scored with my axe.

The sudden flash of a movement somewhere ahead of me arrested my eye. Abruptly I halted, standing motionless, alert. I saw nothing but the yellow-green trees. I shifted my axe to my left hand. Quietly my right fist rested on the butt of my automatic. I advanced, poised for instant action.

From somewhere ahead came a metallic twang. I ducked. A heavy missile thudded into the trunk of a tree directly behind me. Then a girl stepped confidently forth, about twenty feet away.

Evidently she thought she had hit me, for her first reaction was to start back at the sight of me standing there. Hastily she dropped the four-foot tube she held in her hand, and in something like a panic, tugged at a kind of quiver or a sheath slung across her shoulder until she held another tube pointed straight at me. For some moments we stood motionless, gazing at each other in amazement.

I had rather expected to find life of some sort on Mars, and was even hoping to find intelligent creatures of some sort. But to find a pretty, golden-haired Amazon, in green kilts, soft leather leggings and loose, sleeveless blouse that did not by any means conceal her slender form—well, that took my breath away!

Chapter 2

Lil-rin of the Ta n'Ur

At last the significance of that tube, pointed at my chest unhesitatingly, broke through my stunned thoughts. I dropped my axe, held out my empty hands in a gesture of friendliness.

"Can't we be friends?" I smiled, knowing full well my language would not be understood, but hoping that my tone might.

Her reply, uttered in a soft, euphonious tongue, was obviously a question. And feeling a bit foolish, I tried to indicate by gestures that I could not understand her.

For a moment she watched me. A quizzical look crept into her green-blue eyes. Then she laughed and lowered the tube a bit, but quickly covered me again as I stepped forward. She was taking no chances, it seemed, for again her eyes flashed a warning as I sought to recover my axe.

She motioned me back. As I complied, she walked over and picked up the axe herself, never taking her eyes off me. Next she motioned toward my knife. I tossed it at her feet, and she picked this up also. The automatic strapped to my leg meant nothing to her, seemingly. She did not demand it.

Feeling safer now, she stood back and surveyed me speculatively. At length she motioned me to precede her in the direction of the distant mountains. This I did willingly enough, for I felt that with my two guns I could always command the situation, even if her people did not prove as friendly in their attitude as I hoped.

I had been eyeing those tubes she carried in the quiver, and had come to the conclusion, both from their appearance and their peculiar, twanging, metallic quality, that they hurled their bullets by the force of a coiled spring.

As I marched on, occasionally turning to look at my fair captor, the vegetation became thicker, and the hills and ravines more pronounced.

Coming to the top of one of these ridges she called out, and by gestures commanded me to turn sharply to the right. A bit later she paused and gave a peculiar whistling signal. This was replied to from some point ahead, and we went on.

I hardly know what I expected to see. It certainly was not the type of structure we finally came upon.

Sheer walls of a glassy, translucent, solid material rose to a height of fifty feet or more. At least I judged them to be solid. I could see no joints or crevices.

There was a triangular opening. Through this peculiarly shaped gateway I strode on a pavement of material similar to the wall, which was worn smoothly and deeply as though by centuries of countless feet.

The space inside the wall was diamond-shaped, about a thousand feet long and probably three-quarters that distance at its greatest width. The entire space was paved with a solid sheet of the glassy material, in which smooth troughs or channels had been worn.

In contrast with the solid and permanent nature of the walled space, which gave evidence of high engineering skill, there was no shelter inside except some two or three dozen tents, not unlike Indian tepees, of pale green leather over metal framework.

There were a score of men and women about, all garbed exactly like my captor: golden-haired, blue-eyed people of somewhat slighter build than the average on Earth, but otherwise remarkable only for the uniform perfection of their physique.

Men and women were of about the same height, none of them coming within several inches of my six feet. The men were only slightly sturdier than the women, and all seemed in perfect physical condition, like trained athletes. I did not see a fat nor a flabby individual among them.

Our appearance caused no great excitement, though a number gathered around us and my captor was questioned with mild curiosity. But they made way for us readily enough at her explanation.

Quite at ease now, she walked beside me, having sheathed her "gun," touching my arm occasionally to direct me toward a tent in the center, somewhat larger than the others. It was about thirty feet across, of a high, conical shape. A large translucent disc, set in the top of the metal framework, let in a soft light.

I don't know what she said to the blond-bearded man who sat at the carved, light metal table, but from her tone and the little gesture with which she called his attention to me, it must have been something like:

"Look what I found in the forest, Father!"

There ensued some rapid conversation in that peculiarly mellow tongue. Then, to my considerable embarrassment, they began to examine my apparel and myself with a critical scrutiny, finally motioning me outside where there was more light.

That they were both of them greatly puzzled was quite clear. At length, the man who seemed to be the head of the little community, endeavored to talk with me by signs. He placed a finger on my chest and looked questioningly at me. I guess I looked foolish, for I did not get him at first. So he pointed to himself.

"Ur Mornya," he said. Then he pointed at the girl and said, "Ur Lil-rin."

"Oh!" I nodded. "You mean those are your names." Then I pointed to myself and bowed.

"Dan, Dan Hanley, Captain Daniel J. Hanley, U.S. Army Reserve Corps, at your service."

"Danan-lih" said the girl softly, as though the name was somehow both familiar and amazing.

Then Ur Mornya waved his hand, generally, toward the people scattered about the enclosure.

"Ta n'Ur," he said. From which I surmised that the "Ur" part of their name was a clan or community designation. I smiled and put my finger on his chest. "Mornya," I said. "Ur Mornya."

He seemed a bit taken aback at the freedom of my gesture, but smiled his assent, if a bit wryly.

Then, I turned to the girl, and suddenly curious to see what would happen, placed my hand boldly on her shoulder as I spoke her name.

For an instant Mornya was about to lash out at me in fury. Lil-rin's eyes blazed in indignant resentment. Then suddenly she blushed and tried to act as though I had done nothing she thought unusual, while with a struggle her father strove to assume the same air.

Here was no race of barbarians, nor of slaves; but people of high spirit, independence, culture, and quick intelligence. I sensed that I had committed a grievous offense, which was forgiven me instantly in view of my "ignorance." I sensed, too, that they must regard me somewhat in the

light of a guest. Some imp of perversity led me to puzzle them still further when, after a bit, they motioned me within the tent again, where a meal was laid out on the table.

I looked curiously at the unfamiliar viands of fruits and vegetables, most of which I had never seen. There was meat, and a fowl of peculiar shape. All of the tableware was of metal, a pale alloy that looked like gold, but was not. The platters were inlaid with iridescent stones, and there were spoons, but no knives. My hosts used the blades which they took from the sheaths at their belts.

I made an apologetic gesture and went to my little pack, which had been laid in a corner. From it I took my silver knife and fork, and returned to the table.

They strove to conceal their curiosity, but stared frankly. It was on the fork that their interest centered. Not only its shape seemed unfamiliar to them, but the sterling silver itself. The girl watched my use of it with a kind of fascination, then actually blushed and giggled when I handed it to her.

Her father frowned and made another serious effort to question me by gestures. At last I gathered his meaning. He wanted to know whence I had come.

I pointed upward, toward the sky. His frown increased, and he shook his head. My explanation wasn't at all satisfactory, it seemed. Nor did I wonder at this. And the thought came to me then that it would be just as well not to try to explain. I wouldn't be believed. Who on Earth, say, would be believed if he claimed to be a Martian? True, I might exhibit my little spacecraft in substantiation of my story. But, I did not know that sooner or later my life might depend on keeping its existence and its hiding place a secret. So I shrugged and let it go at that.

Chapter 3

The Birrok

Night came. A new tent was erected for my use. And when at last I tired of the glory of the two Martian moons which swung low and swiftly across the scintillating heavens, and Lil-rin had given me a curiously, speculative smile of adieu. I went inside and threw myself on the pile of soft skins and silks that evidently was intended as my couch. Almost at once, I slept.

The days passed swiftly. Little by little I learned their language. It was hard pulling it off at first, but I had always had a certain facility with strange tongues—I learned something, too, of Martian life and history.

Mornya, Lil-rin's father, was Myar-Lur, supreme chief of the Ur, a clan of a race which, like the Cossacks on Earth, was somewhat nomadic in its inclinations, and jealously guarded its tribal traditions. Mornya with his seven Myars, or sub-chiefs, was at present in the service of the Northern Cities.

For five successive years the clan had contracted with the Northern Cities to guard the Desert Gap in the Quartz Mountains and the approaches to it.

The work of the clan had consisted chiefly in keeping the territory south of the Gap clear of the "dulyals," or yellow apes, beasts of almost human intelligence. These dulyals, I gathered, possessed a higher order of mentality than any of their counterparts on Earth.

They were tailless, walked erect, but had prehensile feet. They were covered with a golden brown fur, and though larger and more muscular than Martian men, were more human than apelike in build. They were omnivorous, hunted in packs, had a rudimentary language, and fashioned crude clubs and spears.

Yet, they were distinctly not human, Lil-rin informed me.

"After two or three generations of captivity," she said, "they make excellent slaves. Unless they taste blood, they can be trusted invariably to

be loyal to their masters. They bring higher prices in the slave markets because they are stronger and more docile, than men that is, the domesticated ones are more docile. About two-thirds of the city populations are dulyal slaves.

"You know," Lil-rin looked up at me slyly, "the reason I tried to shoot you that day in the forest was because I thought you were a dulyal!"

We were sitting on an outcropping of rock, a great scintillating quartz boulder, gazing down a gentle slope toward the "canal". There was speculation, and it seemed to me, a bit of suspicion in Lil-rin's steady gaze.

"Why do you look at me that way, Lil-rin?" I asked. "Because I have dark hair, unlike your people?"

I thought perhaps she had not heard me, for she did not answer at once. For several moments she mused.

"Danan-lih, you are like no living man on this world!" she finally blurted out. Then, just as suddenly, she was all solicitude.

"I am sorry, I had no right to say such a thing. The ancient custom forbids anything that would make a guest feel uncomfortable. My offense is unpardonable."

That was my cue. "No it isn't, Lil-rin," I protested. "You and your people have been so kind to me that explanation is the least—"

"No, no!" she cried, jumping up and putting her hands over her ears. "I won't listen. You mustn't tell me anything. It wouldn't—"

A weird, shrill, wailing cry somewhere down the slope in front of us interrupted her. I'm not easily startled, but for an instant I felt a chill shoot up my spine. Lil-rin stood in an instant, rigid, motionless, staring pale and wide-eyed in the direction whence the sound had come.

"It's a birrok," she gasped, tugging at the quiver in which she carried her bolt-hurting tubes. "Run, Danan-lih, run! You can't fight it without bolts, and even then, you have to get it with the first shot, or—"

Then I saw the thing. It was a gigantic yellow-green spider. Its legs were fully twelve feet long. Suddenly, it straightened them and the furry body, which had been resting close to the ground, rose as though on stilts. Clearly, the thing sensed our presence and was looking for us.

Instantly, those legs began to move with amazing rapidity. The body seemed to swoop down and glide swiftly toward us with an easy, undulating swing. It would be upon us in a moment. Instinctively, I drew my automatic.

"Quick, Danan-lih! Run!" said Lil-rin, sharply, and stepped between me and the poisonous monster, her tube leveled.

There was a whir and a clang. The bolt shot true toward its mark. But, with unbelievable agility, the great spider leaped forward. Lil-rin uttered a little cry of despair, and threw herself in front of me. I squeezed the trigger of my gun. The shots blended into a roar as a succession of stabbing flashes leaped from the muzzle, for I emptied the whole magazine at the thing. As before, the beast leaped sharply to one side, but not quickly enough. The long legs crumpled up, and after one or two convulsive movements the thing lay still. At that, I believe it had dodged all but the first bullet.

Chapter 4

I Wed Lil-rin

Lil-rin recovered before I could make up my mind to leave her long enough to go down to the stream for water.

"Wh—what was it, Danan-lih—that terrible noise? And you really killed the birrok? Impossible! H—how did you do it?"

I showed her the automatic, at which she gazed, fascinated, as I re-filled the magazine. Then she looked up at me with her big blue-green eyes.

"You could have killed me just like that the day I shot at you," she said. "And I didn't have sense enough to take that machine-thing away from you!"

"Why, yes," I laughed. "Of course I could have, but I wouldn't—"

I broke off, for Lil-rin did not join in my laughter. Instead there was a look of almost tragic solemnity in her eyes.

"You not only spared my life when I treated you as an enemy, but saved it as well from the terrible birrok. My life no longer belongs to me, but to you—to do with as you see fit, Danan-lih."

She stood there, straight and slim and brave, her little jaws clenched in the effort to hold back the tears that would not be denied. Then, she whirled away from me and broke into uncontrollable sobs.

I wanted to comfort her, but I was badly flustered. I knew nothing of Martian customs at all. This girl was as much of a soldier as the men of her clan. Did she mean that I had a right to command her military service, or were her words to be taken literally? Lord, was I expected to claim her as my wife!

"Lil-rin," I said at last, and she swung around toward me with a pathetic little air of submission. "Come here and sit down again. You must listen and bear with me while I tell you who I am."

She nodded acquiescence, dabbing a bit at her eyes. She would not look at me. And that made it hard to begin. But somehow I managed it.

"If I only had half a dozen extra arms or legs, or something," I concluded, "there'd be some excuse for your believing my story that I just dropped down here from another planet. But here we are, with not as much difference between us as there might be between a man and a girl of two different races on Earth or on Mars, I imagine.

"It's a wild story. But it's the truth, although I can hardly expect you to believe it."

"But I do believe it," she said gently. "I've seen your space ship. I went back and found it the day after I took you to our camp. I was curious about you. I found your footsteps coming from the edge of the water, and I swam out. I saw something under the water, and I dived. I did not know what it was, of course, but I knew it must contain the secret of where you came from and I was worried. But I didn't tell anybody."

"And I know what's worrying you now," she said, finally looking up at me with grave, serious eyes. "It's ... it's me." She blushed frankly. "But we can't help it, Danan-lih, whether we like it or not. The law is:

"To him who has saved a life, belongs that life and the service thereof," she quoted.

She breathed almost with a sigh. "It has been that way among the Tan'Ur for untold ages, since the days when fire rained down from the skies, gouging great scars across the face of our world, drying up the ancient oceans and destroying the Old Civilization."

"But Lil-rin," I protested, "I would not dream of embarrassing you, much less of making any claim upon you for what I did. I was saving my own life as well as yours. Besides, you might have killed the birrok with one of your own bolts."

"You can't get out of it that way," she said with a wan little smile. "It's the law. You saved my life. I belong to you. 'Ifs' and 'maybes' and 'perhapses' don't count here on Mars."

"Well," I said, "I can do with my property what I want, can't I? There's no reason why I can't give you back to yourself."

"Yes, there is. Because under the law, in a case like ours, it ... means ... it means—"

"Means what?" I had to ask, knowing the answer in advance.

"Marriage."

"But ... but—" I objected. "Suppose I were already married?"

"Then I would become your wife's slave," she explained unhappily, "and if I were already married, both my husband and I would become your slaves."

I didn't think much of that law. It seemed to have too many disadvantages.

"Do you mean to say," I demanded, "that if I were to save the life of your father, for instance, that he—the chief of your clan—would become my slave?"

"Oh, yes! That is, unless it were in battle, when all lives already belong to him anyway as commander-in-chief. In that event, you could establish no claim on him. But, if you were to save my father's life as you saved mine just now, he—Myar-Lur of the Ta n'Ur—could never submit to the indignity of becoming a slave."

"But how could he help it? You say it is the law, and—"

"He would kill himself," she said simply.

"Oh."

For a long time we sat without speaking. I was trying to get a mental grasp on this strange Martian custom and the problem it involved. Lil-rin sat dejectedly, gazing down the slope toward the undergrowth, in which the dead birrok lay.

Then there came to me a thought in which it seemed there might be a gleam of hope. I put it up to Lil-rin.

"I'm no Ur. Therefore the laws of the Ta n'Ur shouldn't apply to me," I argued.

This would be true if Captain Hanley were on Earth. Travelers in a foreign country, while subject to the civil and criminal regulations in that country, are still citizens of their own state. As such, visitors cannot be forced into any kind of contract-marriage if such is to their rights in their own nation. Foreign governments having diplomatic relations with other states all subscribe to "international law" or a set of customs which guarantees equal rights in commerce and the security of visiting citizens of another state.

"Yes, they do," she insisted. "We're within the treaty boundaries of the Ta n'Ur. And even though you are not one of us, you are subject to our laws."

"Well," I said in a clumsy attempt to comfort her, "I guess you do things differently on Mars. Anyway, we'll find some way out of it, Lil-rin. So—"

"What's the matter?" she asked in sudden anxiety, for my startled expression must have revealed something of the sudden fear that assailed me.

"You wouldn't think of getting out of it by—"

"By killing myself?" She smiled sadly. "No. I don't want to kill myself. I want to live. I ... oh—"

Without warning, she burst into tears and then began to laugh hysterically. She jumped up and started to run back to the camp, then paused and returned slowly.

"You wouldn't run away, would you?" She was pleading with me. "Because if you did, they'd cast me out as a deserted wife."

Then she was gone, her slender little figure flashing in and out among the pale green stems of the forest as she ran back toward the camp.

It was a crazy situation all right. But, no crazier than the fact that I was on Mars. I pinched myself hard and winced. No, this was all real enough. I gazed around at the pale yellow-green vegetation, with its strange, unfamiliar forms. Low over the horizon hovered the sun, not half the size it should be to earthly eyes.

Overhead, the strange tiny moons of Mars, moons only a few thousand miles distant and quite visible though it was broad daylight, hurled themselves across a cloudless sky with a speed that was visibly tremendous. Scarcely a thing on which my eye rested had any aspect of familiarity to me. Yet, everything was vividly real.

As to the girl, well, I didn't see what I could do about that. I sighed, and bent my steps slowly back toward the camp of the Ta n'Ur.

By the time I got there, the entire clan was drawn up in military array. Lil-rin, pathetically courageous, stood with her father several paces in front of the line. When she saw me, she said something to Mornya and stepped forward to meet me.

"We have to go through with it, Danan-lih," she murmured. "Don't hate me too much."

"Don't worry, little one," I whispered. "They make you my slave, or wife, whichever it is. But they can't make me treat you like a menial. You

shall always be as free as you are now," and I gave her a little squeeze to reassure her.

"Your kindness makes me more your slave ever," she whispered in reply. "Now come."

She led me before her father. He read some formula rapidly from an inscription on a metal plate—it looked like gold—which he took from a leather case slung over his shoulder. He spoke rapidly in some other tongue than that used normally by Ta n'Ur, so I could not follow him at all.

Then Lil-rin bowed her head, and he placed my hand on her fair hair. Were there tears in her eyes? I wasn't sure. She kept her head averted from me.

The simple ceremony was over in a few moments. The clansmen took it all very solemnly. They gathered in little groups as they walked away, and there were many curious glances thrown over shoulders at us.

Mornya held out his hand to me, and I grasped it, Earth fashion. But I could sense that there was no excess of warmth in him at the idea of Lil-rin's marriage to me, an unknown and mysterious Outlander—for Mornya, of course, did not know my full story. Lil-rin had not dared tell him, nor in all probability would he have believed it.

He looked at me searchingly with troubled eyes. I stammered some promise to him that I would always consider Lil-rin free, but I don't think his mind was on my words. He muttered a perfunctory benediction of some sort. Then he too turned and walked rapidly away, leaving us alone together in the center of the big square.

Chapter 5

Honeymoon And Disaster

There were no festivities. Nobody seemed to be happy. Certainly Lil-rin and I were not. We had gone through a meaningless formula, one that was acceptable to none of us. Yet, there seemed to be nothing that could be done about it. Lil-rin timidly interrupted my musing. "I shall get our supplies, Danan-lih, if it pleases you. And—"

"Supplies?" I interrupted. "What for?"

"We must leave the clan for three days," she explained. "Our wedding trip, you know."

"But look here, Lil-rin," I objected. "That isn't going to mean a thing to us. I don't see why. We don't actually *have* to go, do we?"

She nodded her head. "It is the custom. We won't need so very much. I'll be back with our supplies presently."

I stood there frowning. The clansmen avoided me. I saw too that they avoided Lil-rin. The newly wedded bride and groom were to be ignored, cast out, avoided for an arbitrary period of three days, it would I appear.

Lil-rin returned presently, laden with bags of food and weapons. Uncomfortably I remembered the birrok. Strapped to her back was one of those light metal tent-frames, and rolled and thrown across her shoulder was the tent itself. She staggered a bit under the burden. I hastened to her side, but she motioned me away.

"No, no, Danan-lih!" she said. "It is I who am the slave-mate, not you. It is I who must carry the burden."

"Nonsense!" I began with some heat.

"It is the law," she said simply. "It is I who will suffer if you do not let me obey it."

I glanced quickly around. The clansmen were watching us intently. So I had to give it up. I shrugged my shoulders helplessly. Feeling meaner than I had ever felt in my life before, I followed Lil-rin as she staggered

through the triangular gate, away from the gleaming walls of the fortress-like edifice, off into the yellow-green forest.

But once beyond sight, a single bound carried me to her side. Heedless of her protests, I took all of the burdens from her. To my Earth muscles, the load was trifling.

"And now," I laughed, "where do we go from here? And why didn't you bring two tents?"

"Anywhere you say," she rejoined with the nearest thing to a smile since I killed the birrok. "And I shall sleep outside, if you want me to."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I muttered. "I will."

There were low hills a few miles beyond the canal, and we turned our steps in that direction. Lil-rin had regained a bit of her gaiety, but was clearly ill at ease. We chatted in more or less desultory fashion as we went along.

At a point somewhat higher up than that at which I had concealed my little space ship, we prepared to cross the river. I thought with a little pang of my spacecraft. Perhaps Lil-rin would like a ride in it. Why-why, I might even take her back to Earth with me!

But, no. It wouldn't be as though we were really in love with each other—had really ever been married. So I left my thoughts to myself.

We paused at the bank of the stream. All of a sudden, Lil-rin gave a shriek of alarm. I looked at her quickly. I had a fleeting impression of her startled glance at something behind me, of a twanging noise from that direction. Something hit me with a tremendous blow on the back of the head, and I knew no more.

I don't know how long it was before I revived.

The pain in my head was terrific. Only by the most desperate effort of my will did I avoid slipping off into unconsciousness again. Little by little, I struggled to my knees and looked around me, fighting the nausea in my stomach.

Lil-rin was gone. So was all our baggage. There were marks in the soil as though a struggle had taken place. I staggered to my feet. My gun was gone from my thigh holster. But I still had the little automatic inside my shirt.

It was not hard to tell what had taken place. An abduction! I had been shot down from behind. Lil-rin had struggled, but had been overcome and carried away. So hasty had been her kidnappers that they had not

searched me thoroughly, which was certainly a break from my viewpoint.

It stood to reason, of course, that Lil-rin's abductors had not been members of her own clan. Who, then, were they? Members of a similar clan of nomads? Or men of another race, from north of the barrier?

Well, what to do? After a little of my strength came back, I got into action. My space ship was under the water where I had left it. But the marauders apparently had found it, for one of the hatches—and not that of the airlock—had been opened. The sphere was filled with water. It would have to be dragged ashore and rolled over to be emptied.

For a moment, I hesitated whether to return to the encampment and arouse the Ta n'Ur or not. But it would mean further loss of precious time.

So I didn't give that angle a second thought. And a moment later, my helplessness gave way to sudden excitement. For my desperately seeking eyes had caught marks on the bank of the stream—boat marks, as though a water craft of some sort had been run up there. It was easy to see that the stream did not flow much farther in that direction. The presence of those boat marks indicated flight in the opposite direction! Away I went upstream along the canal-valley in prodigious leaps of fifteen feet and more.

On Mars, Captain Hanley's weight would be one-third of normal. But the difference in gravity would not affect his muscular strength. Hence, on Mars he would be three times as strong as on Earth.

I was confident that my superiority over the Martians in speed, in strength, and in the weapon I still cuddled beneath my arm would enable me to overcome great odds. Time was the important element right now.

At length, I came to the gap in the great quartz barrier, where at some far-distant age in the past the meteor, which had plowed this canal-scar in the face of the planet had cut through. As yet, I had caught no glimpse of a water craft.

A faint hail reached me from the glittering rocks above, and a figure stood forth, arm upraised.

I recognized him as one of the Ta n'Ur. I was up in the face of the jagged cliff and at his side in a few moments. It was a young man named Uldor, on guard duty at the Gap.

A "wheel-boat," he told me, had gone downstream and returned. But he had seen no one in it except four Northerners, with a crew of dulyals at the wheels.

"Still," he added, "the forward deck was covered. Many people might have lain bound and gagged beneath that cover.

"It's not part of the Ta n'Ur's duty," he went on, "to interfere with the Northerners themselves in their very rare passages back and forth through the Gap. Our obligation under our treaty with them is simply to prevent migrations of the wild dulyals."

As I dropped back to the canal gap and leaped away toward the North, I saw Uldor racing madly back toward the encampment to pass on my alarm.

North of the barrier the character of the country changed somewhat. It was wild, but the vegetation was more prolific, and there were evidences here and there of ancient irrigation ditches laid out in regular rows. The canal itself was a shallow valley gouged across the face of a level plain. In its center the stream had cut a deeper and less regular course.

Several miles north of the barrier I came upon the first evidence of habitation. It was a small structure, but built of that same iridescent material of which the fortress occupied by the Ta n'Ur had been constructed. And like that mysterious edifice, it was a monolith, very old and worn.

I redoubled my efforts and was passing the spot in mid-leap when a figure rose suddenly to contest my way.

It was my first glimpse of a Northerner. In the split second that elapsed before I hit him, my eye photographically registered a figure in flexible armor of yellow, overlapping metal plates. There was a conical helmet that guarded the nose, ears, and neck as well as the head. Curved plates fitted over the shoulders; armpieces cleverly overlapped at the elbows. Completing the outfit were a skirt or kilt on which more overlapping plates were fastened, and what might be described as metal boots, hinged at the ankles. The fellow, in a panic of frantic haste, was trying to bring one of those long bolt-throwing tubes up at me.

Evidently, my great leaps and speed completely upset his judgment of distance. My heavily shod foot came down on the tube, and we went crashing to the ground with a great clangor of metal.

I was on my feet in an instant, but the Martian did not rise. There was a grotesque twist to his head. He had fallen, clumsily, and his neck was broken.

His armor, I thought, might be useful to me as a disguise, and for an instant I considered appropriating it. But on second thought, I decided not to do so. It would be too awkward.

I turned away and was about to leap on up the canal-valley, which was becoming wider now, when I started back in surprise and alarm. Directly in my path was a mounted Martian. But it was the character of his steed that startled me.

It was not a horse at all, but the only thing I could call it in any tongue of Earth would be a "dog." It was as large as a small horse and distinctly canine in appearance and in the intelligence of its eyes, as it stood there, softly poised, watching me as intently, as was its rider. The Martian was clad entirely in soft yellow leather, richly embroidered with sparkling beads. But his garb was not like that of the Ta n'Ur. Instead of a loose sleeveless shirt, he wore a sort of collarless fitted jacket with long sleeves and a sash of scarlet leather. In place of the kilts, he wore tight-fitting leggings which covered his limbs entirely.

He sat well forward on the back of his strange mount, with his toes hooked into peculiar stirrups just back of and under the animal's forelegs. The saddle was, in reality, a combination saddle and collar with a metal handle on the top of the latter part. There was no bridle. The rider evidently guided his mount by voiced commands, or possibly by pressure on the collar handle, though I judged the handle more to aid him in keeping his seat.

Chapter 6

Intrigues of Gakko

For a moment we confronted each other, and in that brief spell I was conscious of a liking for the handsome young face before me. In it was nothing of fear, though this Martian knight had no weapon that I could see. But, he sat watching me with a shrewd and alert interest.

Then he raised his arms and held them wide, palms forward, in the Martian gesture of friendship. I glanced, uneasily, at the body of the dead guard. He noted it, too.

"It is nothing," he said. "An accident. I saw it all. The fellow exceeded his duty in trying to stop you without first challenging."

He paused a moment. "You are the 'mysterious guest' of the Ta n'Ur that Mornya was telling me about. I have never seen hair as dark as yours. What are you doing here?"

"Are you Mornya's friend?" I asked softly, my hand slipping inside my shirt until it closed over the butt of the little automatic. I thought his eyes narrowed a bit at that. But he showed no alarm.

"I am Mornya's friend," he declared flatly. "It was I who negotiated the treaty for the Ta n'Ur for the Council of Alarin, the Greater Lords of the Polar Cities."

I was quite sure then that this lad had had no part in the abduction of Lil-rin, and determined to take a chance on him. After all, I would need help of some sort in rescuing the girl. So I told him how I had been struck down, and of the "wheel-boat," as Uldor called it. His astonishment and indignation were obviously genuine.

"And just what were you about to do when we met?" he asked, giving me a curious look.

"Follow that wheel-boat and rescue Lil-rin."

He shook his head slowly in negative judgment. "You would not have had a chance," he said. "In the first place, you could not have overtaken

it. I saw the speed at which you were leaping. I also saw the boat. In the second place, either Gakko, Alar of Ga-kalu, or one of his Epsin-Lesser Lords was in charge of it. Then there were the dulyals at the wheels. They can fight, you know; and when handled by clever commanders, they are terrible adversaries.

"Oh I know of the bolt-thrower inside your garment, which your hand now rests on. I heard of that also from the Ta n'Ur. But there were fifty dulyals in that boat, and I don't think you have that many bolts in your weapon."

Discouragement must have shown in my face, for he laughed.

"But it's not so hopeless as all that. A plan is taking shape in my mind. Gakko is no friend of mine, nor of Layani, the Alar-Lur, Supreme Lord of the Cities. This abduction is surely Gakko's work. It is rumored that he has stolen girls from the Southern clans before, that he has several of them among his wives."

He smiled reassuringly. "Come with me. We must talk this over. We have, I think, a great opportunity to outwit Gakko."

"But what of Lil-rin in the meantime?" I objected.

"She will be all right. Gakko would not dare harm her until he had her safe within his power at home, in Gakalu. Besides, he must hasten to attend a council of the Alarin to be held on the Island in two days."

I consented. There didn't seem to be much else for me to do. The young Martian, who informed me his name was Banur, and that he was one of the Lesser Lords of Borlan, the land adjacent to Gakalu on the Polar Sea, made me mount his dog-steed behind him. At his command the animal set off, leaping and scurrying up one of the ancient irrigation ditches away from the canal-valley.

Across a cultivated plain we scurried, between fields of melon-like plants, toward a range of low, verdure-clad hills. It took some skill to cling to the great dog's back, but so fast did he run that it was a matter of minutes only before we had plunged into the vegetation on the slope of the hills. The animal was now scrambling upward to where, in a clearing, stood one of those great iridescent monolithic fortresses such as that occupied by the Ta n'Ur.

In through a triangular gate we flashed, and as the great dog came to a slithering stop, uttering a thunderous bark, a number of dulyals ran forward to take charge of him. It was the first chance I had had of seeing these near-human apes who served the Northerners as slaves.

Very manlike they were in build and carriage, and covered from head to foot with yellow fur. But their eyes, so it seemed to me, did not shine with even as great intelligence as those of the dog-steed.

I mentioned this to Banur.

"They are not as intelligent," he replied. "But they are more dependable, when through several generations of captivity they have been trained to their tasks. But they have their limitations. These fellows, for instance, are of use only in the steed kennels. Those over there have been trained to till the fields. They are good for nothing else.

"These," pointing to several who were patrolling the walls, armed with spears "are good soldiers, although quite incapable of acting on their own initiative. They can comprehend only a single military command at a time."

"I see very few humans," I remarked.

"No," he replied. "There are only a handful here, a few Ildin—that is to say, Freemen—and a dozen or so slaves. You see, this is merely an agricultural outpost. But its supervision comprises part of my duties, and I have to make periodic visits here."

Banur insisted that I change from my Earth clothes and put on a Martian suit, which he found for me among his stores. After that we tarried at the post only long enough for refreshments. While we drank "lilquok," that invigorating beverage the Martians make from one of their varieties of giant melons, Banur explained to me something of the law which held together the Northern Cities.

Seven lands bordered on the Polar Sea, ruled by seven Alarin. One of these, Layani, Alar of Hok-lan, was by election Alar-Lur, or Supreme Lord of the Council of Alarin.

Theoretically the Alarin were as subject to the law as the Epsin, or Lesser Lords, and the Ildin, or Freemen. But as a matter of fact, they enjoyed absolute power; for accusations could be brought against a Martian of the Polar Cities only by one of equal or superior rank.

There were few of the Alarin who would not welcome the retirement of Gakko from among them, but none who would risk the precipitation of a general war. Gakalu, the land ruled over by Gakko, was one of the richest and most powerful of the confederation, with strong natural barriers, a larger population of Ildin and slaves than any other land, and by far the greatest force of fighting-trained dullyals.

Likewise, no other Alar was anxious to give Gakko any cause for offense that could be avoided.

"But," Banur suggested thoughtfully, "I think that the man with a just complaint against this tyrant, and the courage to slay or strip him of his power, would not be regarded as an enemy. Not, at least, by the Alar-Lur, the Supreme Lord, who fears Gakko's growing influence. Nor the rulers of Borlan, Tuskidon and Ilmo.

"The Alarin of Trilu and Yonodlu, the lands beyond Gakko's on the other side of the Sea, are definitely his supporters. But I do not know that even they would necessarily feel injured by his elimination.

"Certainly it would be their best policy to cultivate the favor of the other Alarin, in the event that Gakko were deposed or slain."

Politics, it would seem, is the same on any planet with an intelligent population. It is not beyond the bounds of reason to suppose that the present crisis now facing Earth may not at some time have been duplicated in a remote planet.

Banur paused uncomfortably. "Now ... er ... I don't know whether you would resent being made use of in this way. You see, I am being perfectly frank with you. But you appear to be determined to fight Gakko single-handed anyhow, and—"

"Well, I thought it might not be displeasing to you to know that you can count on a certain amount of secret help since your decision has already been made. Of course, if you fall into Gakko's hands you must realize that no Alar could go very far in giving you protection. The whole situation is rather delicate. I'm sure you can understand our position," he added hastily.

I grew thoughtful at this. I did not like the idea of plunging into the midst of the political turmoil in a world with which I was virtually unfamiliar, of being made a cat's paw by certain of its rulers. I had not leaped all this distance from the encampment of the Ta n'Ur to become an assassin of Martian kings. I merely wanted to rescue Lil-rin and punish the villains who had abducted her.

"Of course, you are under no obligation to accept any aid at all," Banur put in shrewdly. "My only thought was that you want to rescue the girl and—"

"I'll do it!" I said, jumping to my feet.

"Good!" echoed Banur exuberantly. "Come."

I Trail Gakko's Villains

A few moments later found me galloping with Banur at the head of a band of mounted dulyals, Banur had supplied me with a great, powerful brute of a dog to ride. The beast looked understandingly at both of us when Banur turned him over to me. Wagging his immense tail, he accepted *me* from that moment as his master.

Both the dulyals and the dogs on which they were mounted accorded *me* the same understanding, at a word from Banur. The young Martian then drilled me in the words and methods of command necessary for their control.

The most remarkable affection existed between the dulyals and their mounts. There seemed to be a perfect understanding of commands and coordination of action. The dogs were more intelligent than the great dulyal apes, but of course lacked much of their physical prowess. Both, Banur explained, were terrible in battle, although quite docile to the commands of their master, whoever was the leader selected by the Northerners for a particular task.

To me, it was also comforting to learn that the dulyals were trained to the use of the spear and a short, broad-bladed sword almost like a cleaver, and that they carried these weapons with them.

"We're taking an overland short-cut toward a little seaport at the boundary of Borlan and Gakalu," Banur said. "It is there, undoubtedly, that Gakko has taken Lil-rin. For once out on the Sea, she will be in Gakalun waters, and he will have a run down the coast of only some seven hundred miles to Gakko's own city."

"Will we catch them there, do you think?"

"Not *we*," he said frankly. "Possibly *you*. But if you can't overtake them before they reach their own territory, I should advise you not to try it, but to journey on leisurely along the coast of the Polar Sea until you arrive at the city of Gakalu.

"Establish yourself there as—let me see, now ... as the son of a rich merchant of Ilmo, for that is the land farthest away from Gakalu across the Pole, and you would be less likely to meet Ilmonions in Gakalu."

For the rest of our journey, as our great dogs tore along with us at amazing speed and the cavalcade of dullyals raced after us, Banur supplied me with much information as to the customs of the Martians.

At length he motioned me to give the order to halt for the dullyals and dogs now looked to me only as their master, as Banur himself had previously commanded them. He pointed toward a silvery sheen on the horizon beyond a growth of short ferns.

"It is the sea," he said. "Your way lies straight ahead. You will see the village after a little bit. Luck be with you, and may you return safe from this daring adventure, for there are many things I would like to discuss with you. Things which I feel I cannot talk over with you at this time. Besides, there has been so much information to give you."

"On what points are you curious?" I asked, having a pretty good idea of what was on his mind from the surreptitious glances he had been casting my way.

"Well, for one thing, your coloring is like that of no man I have ever seen," he stammered, and his face grew red. "Indeed, throughout all history, even back through the legendary period of the great Rain of Fire, there is no mention of men with brown hair and deep blue eyes. You appeared suddenly—from nowhere it seemed—among the Ta n'Ur. At least, so Mornya told me.

"Among the Southern Clans, it is considered bad manners to pry into the affairs of strangers and guests." He smiled deprecatingly. "You see, our own customs are somewhat different."

"Does history or legend shed any light on the lands below the equatorial desert?" I asked him.

"None," he admitted. "It is a great subject for speculation among the wise men as to what may be on the Southern half of the globe. We know, of course, that we do live on a globe and not, as it might seem, on a great, flat circular world. But somehow I do not believe you crossed that desert. Neither do the Ta n'Ur."

I laughed. "What *do* you think, then?" I asked.

"My thought is so wild that I hesitate to take it seriously." He was looking at me keenly. "Have you ever watched the skies at night, and gazed on the Green Planet?"

By Green Planet, Banur meant of course Earth, for that is how Earth would look to the Martians.

"Often," I had to admit. "I've often seen it from a distance." Well, considering the many space voyages I'd made, that was true enough.

"Have you ever wondered whether it was a habitable world?"

"No, I never had to wonder about it."

The look of disappointment on his face was eloquent. He had been shrewd, but he had been frank, too. I could but reply in kind.

After a pause I added: "I *know* that it is."

"What?" Banur shouted. "Then you really—"

"Yes. That is where I came from. Earth, we call it."

Banur acted like one suddenly bereft of his senses. He shouted and laughed, waving his arms madly. Then as quickly he turned and was gone, his great dog racing and bounding across the plain away from me, back in the direction from which we had come.

Amazed and puzzled, I could only gaze helplessly after him. And by the time I thought of calling out to him, he was beyond hearing.

Then came the thought of little Lil-rin. Well, that was my job, wasn't it? So, with considerable misgivings, I turned toward the distant Polar Sea. I shouted "Hep!" and pointed forward. In an instant, followed by the dullyals and the dogs, I was bounding along, frequently grabbing at the saddle-handle to steady myself, and muttering the while a silent prayer that at least I had had experience riding horses.

To my earthly eyes the village was indeed strange. I was astonished to find that most of the "buildings" were underground. In this they were quite unlike the only other Martian structures I had seen the ancient, iridescent monoliths.

The modern Martians, as I was to learn, dug their cities and villages deep underground, with thick-walled superstructures. Soil and rock were mixed with a red cement, made into large slabs or bricks. The superstructures were little more than entrances and anterooms to the quarters beneath.

Remembering what Banur had told me that the "gasto," or inn, would be located on the outskirts of the villager held up my hand. The great dogs behind me slithered to a sudden stop, as did my mount.

I looked around for a shaft of stone or cement bearing a picture or a carving of a dog's head. A metal rod projected from a hole in the ground

beside it. This I lifted and let drop again. Somewhere down in the ground there was the sound of a gong, and the metal door in the wall before me was opened.

I Rescue Lil-rin

There, standing before me, stretching his arms wide and bowing with some difficulty, the first fat man I had seen on Mars.

On the far side of the building I found were cage-like structures for the dogs and the dulyals. After ordering my animals to remain in them until I called, I followed the innkeeper back around the building to the metal door.

From here, a circular ramp led down to the lower levels. I stopped at the first level to pay my board and lodging with the heavy little red beads (rubies, I think they were) that the Martians use for money, since gold is far too plentiful.

I drew a puzzled glance from mine Martian host when I laughed because the little cage at which I paid was so much like a cashiers corner in innumerable little restaurants on a planet millions of miles away.

My room proved to be on the third level down.

I was shown from my room to the "moccor," which I suppose would be translated in English variously as "lobby," "barroom" or "restaurant." It was on the first level below ground. Here, gathered about the great solid, carved blocks of quartz that served as tables were seated some score or more of Martians, all of the Ildin class, or Freemen. This, I gathered from the green sashes they wore like my own with which Banur had outfitted me.

In a far corner of the room was a little party of four, obviously strangers to the village, for like myself they seemed to be interested in their surroundings. They surveyed their neighbors with some curiosity. Two of them were Epsin-Lesser Lords. They wore the red sash distinctive of their class. The other pair were Ildin.

A couple of slaves, obviously members of the party and not inn attendants, garbed in the black that denoted their position in life, hovered in the background with big bowls and jugs.

There was a vacant table near the group, and I moved toward them, as unconcernedly as I could. They seemed to take no notice of me.

Almost immediately the name "Gakko," although uttered in a hushed tone, caught my ear. I strained to hear more, but without much success for awhile, for one of the inn's servants was placing my food before me.

Later I heard the city of Gakalu mentioned a few times, and there was something said about the seaworthiness of a certain wheel-boat, and the necessity of guarding someone well under pain of Gakko's violent displeasure.

I had no doubt it was Lil-rin to whom they referred, and that this was the party I was after. Certainly there was something furtive about their manner, something sly that argued there was no good in the business that had brought them here.

I felt for the little automatic under my shirt, and casually unfastened the garment a bit at the neck that I might reach it quickly. None of those in the room had taken particular notice of me as yet, and I was thankful for the rather dull light thrown by the crystal bowls placed in recesses along the walls, in which wicks floated.

I was thankful, too, for the Martian custom that did not require men to uncover indoors, although women were supposed to—a curious reversal of the practice on Earth.

I was trying to decide upon my next step when fate took the initiative.

There was a sudden commotion near a triangular door that gave access to one of the lower level ramps. A slender girl in the black garb of a slave dodged frantically among the tables toward the group I was watching. Her progress was marked by growls and resentful glances.

One or two Ildin half rose in their places, then sank back again quickly enough when they saw the red sashes of the Epsin, who had risen in some alarm as the slave girl fought her way toward them.

But, once she had made her breathless report, the four men, followed by the girl and the two slaves, dashed for the ramp.

In the excitement, I followed.

A turn in the ramp muffled the commotion behind us, and I heard the patter of the conspirators' running feet as they circled downward. I leaped after them, closing the gap quickly, and stopped barely in time to avoid turning another corner and crashing full into them. They paused at the fourth level down and threw aside the leather curtain that concealed a triangular door. With a rush they were through.

In addition to the two Epsin, there were four or five Ildin in the room, and several slaves of both sexes. They had spread out and were cautiously closing in on a far corner of the room where a slim girlish figure, almost denuded of clothing and bleeding from an ugly gash on the arm, stood at bay.

In one hand she had a spring-gun, with which she kept threatening her enemies, as one or another of them took a chance and tried to advance a step. In her other hand she held my large automatic.

Here then was Lil-rin of the Ta n'Ur, the golden-haired, blue-eyed Amazon of the Southern clan whom I had sworn to rescue. Lil-rin, gloriously waging the battle of her life against a band of Martian vultures, who leered evilly at her gleaming body, yet respected the deadliness of her weapons. Lil-rin—my wife! Her clear sweet voice rang out now with scorn as she taunted and defied them. And they howled back like a pack of wolves.

"Stop this folly! Throw down that weapon!" roared one of the Epsin, who seemed to be the leader, as he pushed his way forward to face the girl.

"Be careful, Uallo," cautioned the other noble at his elbow. "She means it. She'll do what she says. I know these clansmen of the South. And the Ta n'Ur are the most desperate warriors of them all." The other hesitated. "But this is ridiculous. She is only a girl, and—"

"The daughter of their leader, their Myar-Lur," interpolated the cautious one. "It is best to take matters slowly."

It was the psychological moment. I acted.

Stepping inside the door, I raised my little automatic and fired a shot into the ceiling. The reverberation in that heavily walled room was terrific. It seemed to stun the Martians. Demoralization was in their faces as they swung about and saw me there like a statue, my gun half raised and a tiny wisp of smoke curling up from it. They shrank from me.

"Come, Lil-rin," I said. "We must get out of here. You go first and clear the way. Use my gun if you have to, but I think there are none above who have an interest in stopping us. I'll hold this scum back."

Lil-rin looked at me like one who sees a happy vision and doubts its reality. I never saw her look more beautiful than at that moment, disheveled as she was and bleeding from the rather ugly gash in her arm. But there was no indecision in the girl.

With her little shoulders thrown back, her chin high and an expression of regal contempt for Uallo and all his followers, she stepped briskly to my side. For just an instant she paused and looked at me, an inscrutable something in her clear blue eyes. Then, she slipped through the curtained door and was gone.

Her disappearance seemed to break the spell.

"Stop them! At any cost!" Uallo roared, and threw himself recklessly at me.

Instinctively the rest leaped with him. Three or four times my automatic roared; four of the enemy pitched headlong. But the distance between us had not been great, and even those who had stopped my bullets plunged into me as I went under from the combined rush, pulling the leather curtain on top of me as I fell outward through the door.

As fast as I could press the muzzle of my gun against a new mark I pulled the trigger, but my head was entangled in the curtain and so many Martians had fallen on top of me that I could not at once wriggle free.

It was then that I heard the heavier roar of Lil-rin's gun. Five times, at evenly spaced intervals, she fired, evidently aiming with calm deliberation. Then all was quiet, save for the groans of the Martians around me and the curtain was lifted from my head. I struggled to my feet, to meet Lil-rin's anxious and inquiring gaze.

"Are you hurt, Danan-lih?" she exclaimed. "I was afraid they had gotten you. Now what shall we do?"

In a few breathless sentences I explained to her how Banur had helped me, told her of my dulya cavalcade as we raced up the ramp. We found the moccoor, the inn's public room, deserted. Nor did anyone appear to halt us before I blew a shrill call on the whistle Banur had given me. The great dogs and the yellow apes came racing to us around the corner of the building.

I made two of the dulyals ride double, and Lil-rin leaped on the back of the spare dog after I had bound her injured arm with a strip torn from her garment. And then we were racing away from the village, through the yellow-green ferns and back across the plain toward Bartur's post.

Chapter 9

I Become a Legend

"You've canceled the debt of life forfeiture, Lil-rin," I said to her.

She gave an odd, quick look and laughed. "No, that didn't count. I told you, the slave is obligated to protect the master in battle. And besides, that is the second time you have saved my life. I'm doubly forfeited now, Danan-lih, whether you like it or not."

"I don't—I mean, I do like it—that is—what I mean—I'm not accustomed to enslaving girls," I stammered. "Besides—"

Lil-rin sighed. "Then you must be awfully good at things you really are accustomed to," she said, and looked abruptly away over the yellow-green prairie as our strange cavalcade thudded madly on.

For an instant my heart pounded. Did she mean ... But, no, that couldn't be. Certainly Lil-rin did not want to be a slave. She, daughter of the chieftain of a warrior clan. Slave! Why, the girl was technically and officially my wife!

There was no pursuit. Lil-rin and I between us had accounted for nearly all of Uallo's party. It was my impression that none had escaped, except perhaps a couple of the slaves.

Presently the girl's eyes caught my own. "Before three suns have passed, the Ta n'Ur and our allies among the clans will be in arms against some or all of the Polar Cities," she said simply.

Then, suddenly, Lil-rin was all emotion, "Well, let it be!" she cried fiercely, clenching her little fists. "It had to come! The legend must be fulfilled!"

"Legend? What legend do you mean, Lil-rin?"

But that was all that she would say...

In due course we neared the agricultural post from which Banur and I had set forth such a short time before. Not twelve hours had elapsed.

Captain Hanley's watch was of great convenience. He had found that the Martian day was almost the same as that on Earth.

As we drew nearer an Ildin, or Freeman, rode forth on a dog to meet us. But he paused suddenly some two or three hundred yards away, gazed intently at us, then turned and raced madly for the post, waving his arms and shouting something. But he was too far ahead of us for me to hear what it was.

I thought no further about the Ildin. But when we arrived, I was amazed to see no less than a hundred and fifty spearmen, in full armor, drawn up in military formation. And at their head, in golden armor, a vermilion cloak over one shoulder, stood Banur of the Gap. In the rear stood rank after rank of dullyals, minus armor, but armed with those terrible, short, broad-bladed swords. I halted in surprise.

As if he had been waiting for this signal, Banur tossed his spear into the air.

"Hail to the Hero of the Legend!" he shouted. "To the Alar of the Green Star!"

In amazement I turned to Lil-rin, and to my still greater astonishment found her not surprised at all.

"I knew it," she was saying softly. "From the beginning I feared it!" And there was something of both tragedy and pride in the tear-dimmed eyes she turned to mine.

"You heard him say it," she continued. "The Legend of the Green Star! And you, Danan-lih, are the Hero of the Legend. And the Legend shall be fulfilled!"

And then this little golden Amazon with the green-blue eyes did the last thing I had ever expected to see her do. She fainted and tumbled headlong from her saddle.

In an instant I had leaped from my own mount and picked her up in tender arms. Poor kid! She must have gone through a lot while in the hands of Uallo and his villains.

Banur, too, came running to us and offered to carry her into the little fortress.

But Lil-rin on Earth would have weighed no more than a hundred and fifteen or twenty pounds. To my sturdier Earth muscles, she seemed no more than thirty-five or forty pounds. I lifted her like a child and carried her into the building.

Chapter 10

Danan of the Atl Antin

That night, while the bright little moons of Mars sped swiftly across the starry sky and Lil-rin slept, Banur told me of the Legend of the Green Star.

"It is a strange mixture," he said, "of historic fantasy and more definite tradition. It has a great hold on the popular imagination, not only among us of the Polar Cities, but among the people of the Southern clans as well.

It is said that once, untold ages ago (Banur went on), no men lived in this world of Mars, which was inhabited by great beasts and by the progenitors of the dullyals, who were supposed to have stooped a bit as they walked, and to have had tails by which they could hang from trees. A quaint idea, that. To think of an animal using its tail in that fashion!

But there was another world, where the vegetation was of a much darker green, and where there were great seas and oceans, yet too much land for this world was larger. And, another quaint conceit, there were men of many different colors living on this world: black men, brown men, red men, white men with yellow hair, and white men with black hair.

And among all these different kinds of men there was one race superior to the rest, for they were far advanced in intelligence, in the arts and sciences, and were able to make war with lightning and thunder.

Indeed, they had machines which would run themselves and accomplish in trifling time the work of many slaves laboring over a long period. And over these men—the men with yellow hair and green-blue eyes—there ruled a chief whose name was Danan, Alar of the Antin, or Island Men, as these yellow-haired ones were known.

For although their land was large, it was surrounded entirely by an ocean, and thus separated from all other lands.

Now it happened in the course of time (Banur continued) that from out of the void of space, there came rushing a little world or planet that had nothing to do with the sun. Danan's wise men, after making many careful observations and calculations, told him that this planet seemed certain to hit the Green World on which they all lived.

That, in particular, this little planet would probably strike the Atl or island, on which they had their dwelling places. Danan's wise men even went so far as to say that the roving planet would most certainly destroy the Atl, probably the whole world, so that all men would be killed.

It was then that Danan put other wise men to work, constructing a great ship which would fly through the void of space, just as many of the ships of the Atl Antinat that time were able to do. Together with many thousands of his people, Danan set forth, fleeing through space from the doomed world in the hope of finding another which would be habitable.

In time they are supposed to have landed here on Mars, and after centuries of struggle, to have slain all the great beasts and domesticated the dullyals.

But in the meantime, through the great lenses which they used to magnify sight, they saw the little world hit the big one from which they had fled and then bounce off again, taking with it much of the material of the big world. This became a moon, only much farther away than our two moons, and much larger.

But only portions of the big world appeared to have been destroyed. It seemed to the wise men who watched the collision, that the big world had not been hit where they thought it would be, but on the other side.

Now (said Banur) there had been many more thousands of the Atl Antin who had refused to risk the voyage away from the Green World with Danan, their Alar. Danan wondered if these people might not have escaped annihilation, after all. So he had his great space-traveling ship repaired, and left on a visit back to the Green World, promising to return to his people here.

That, according to the legend, was the last ever seen of the Alar, Danan.

But belief or fancy, or whatever you choose to call it, has persisted through the thousands of years since then that one day, in fulfillment of his promise, Danan would return.

Great interest, too, has centered around the romantic side of the legend, of which there are many versions of widely variant nature. The

oldest and simplest form of the legend has it that Danan had no wives, and that when his people were reluctant to let him venture the journey back to the Green Star, he left behind him the girl of noble blood who was betrothed to him, and whom he loved dearly, as a pledge of his return." (Banur concluded.)

To say that I listened to all this in astonishment would be putting it mildly. Banur's description of the catastrophe to the "Green World," his reference to the "Atl Antin" left me gasping. Do we not have our own legends of the lost land of Atlantis, which was supposed to have existed somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean?

Do not other legends maintain that it is from the immensity of the Pacific that the material forming the moon was thrown off? And have not many scientists in recent years receded further and further from the position that the history of man is as simple as that of an evolutionary rise from animalism and savagery?

Have these learned men not inclined more favorably to the theory that innumerable prehistoric civilizations, of which no traces are left, may have preceded our own?

"And now," Banur said solemnly, "we come to the final links in the chain of events. Your name is Dan Hanley—he pronounced it "Danan-lih"—while the hero of the Legend is Danan, Lil-rin is of the Ta n'Ur daughter of the clan's chieftain. It is one of the cherished legends of the Ta n'Ur that their entire clan is of prehistoric kingly blood, and you have joined her in marriage."

Heavens above, was I doomed by fate, to live my life as a legend old beyond time itself?

"I will confess," Banur admitted, "that when Gakko's villains abducted Lil-rin, the Legend seen to be shattered. For the Alar Danan could not be conceived of as allowing another to take from him his mate. But the promptness and daring of your rescue only adds color to the story."

"It was nothing," I protested quickly. "I had superior weapons—" "Of lightning and thunder," Banur murmured.

Me, Daniel J. Hanley, a legend!

"My strength is naturally greater, since gravity is denser on Earth than here on Mars," I almost shouted.

"As befits the Hero of the Legend," he insisted calmly.

"And besides, Lil-rin fought as well as I did, and actually saved me when I went down under the rush of Uallo and his followers—"

"Which is only to be expected in a warrior princess of the Ta n'Ur-and the espoused of Danan," Banur concluded triumphantly.

It was useless to argue with him, so I took another angle.

"Well, Banur," I said rising, "it is certainly an astounding coincidence. But, to get down to cases. My next step must be to get Lil-rin back to her own people."

"No," Banur told me, also rising and bowing low with arms wide, in the Martian gesture of respect for superiors.

"The Ta n'Ur," he announced, "will be here by morning, fully equipped for a long campaign as the bodyguard of Danan-lih and Lil-rin the Alar-Lur and Alara-Lur of Mars."

"Wha—what are you talking about?" I gasped. "Have you gone insane?"

"If I have, Danan-lih, so has my lord Almun, Alar of Borlan, who has learned of you and your fulfillment of the Legend. He personally instructed me to lay his tribute at your feet and to inform you of the irrevocable decision of all the Alarin, except Gakko and possibly his two satellites, in naming you Alar-Lur, Supreme Lord of the Council. Layani, the present Alar-Lur, is retiring, to continue only as Alar of Hoklan."

"But ... but ... if I protested—" suddenly drained of further strength and expostulation.

"They would not dare do otherwise, in view of the popular devotion to the legend. Besides, the situation is the most opportune that has ever arisen to deal with Gakko. For Gakko, with the support of Mui and Donar, Alarin of Trilu and Yonodlu, has determined to stop at nothing to make himself the Supreme Lord.

"The army of Borlan already is on the march to the Gakalun border. The forces of Hoklan follow. Around the other shore of the Polar Sea, eastern, the Tuski-donin will threaten Yonodlu and Trilu, endeavoring to hold them neutral, but attacking if they are unsuccessful.

"Alar Udaró and his Ilmonin will take to the sea, skirt both sides of the Polar Ice Cap, and attack the Gakalun coast, centering their operations on the city of Gakalu. And you, Danan-lih, will be our Leader."

Chapter 11

In the Desert

The morning brought news by dog-post. There had been desperate fighting at all the passes in the mountains dividing Gakalu and Borlan, but neither side had gained advantage. The Ilmonin had set forth in their fleet.

Layani, ex-Alar-Lur, with his Hoklanin shock troops, was one-third of the way across Borland in his march to reinforce the Borlanin in the mountains. Before night he would arrive with his bodyguard to make personal obeisance to me and Lil-rin.

And the Ta n'Ur had arrived. They greeted us with a great shout and much tossing of spears as Lil-rin and I stepped forth, clad from head to foot in the blue of royalty. Every young man and woman of the clan was there, fully armed, to the number of nearly a thousand.

Lil-rin, taking direct command, spent the day explaining and demonstrating to me their battle tactics, mounted and unmounted. Before Layani and his Hoklanin arrived, I had a pretty good idea of what the Ta n'Ur could do and how to handle them.

In the late afternoon Layani and his troops arrived. I should have known better, I suppose, after all Banur had told me about the use of dulyals in warfare. But it was a shock to me to find that only the skeleton organization of Layani's force was human.

The men were known as "rintarin," and acted as leaders of dulyal squads of five. The squad normally took the formation of three abreast, two ranks deep and in the "rintar's" position was in the middle of the rear rank. Thus, as he went into battle, he was perfectly shielded by his five dulyals, and devoted himself almost entirely to directing their actions.

The rintarin were heavily armored, but the dulyals wore nothing but the belts and shoulder straps that held their gear and weapons. All were

mounted on dog-steeds of enormous size, of a breed somewhat different from the animals I had seen so far. They were like giant mastiffs.

Layani came to where Lil-rin and I stood and laid his sword at our feet. For a moment he remained bending over it, arms stretched wide and palms down. Then he picked up his weapon and, straightening up, appeared to forget that there was supposed to be any difference in rank between us. Not, of course, that I minded. In fact, I should have been very much annoyed if his attitude had been servile, I never could stand "yes-men."

"Yes-men" remain the curse of modern military machines. There seems to be considerable doubt as to whether army general staffs, under the domination of dictatorial political leaders, will produce that initiative required in successful strategy against the enemy. The Martians, apparently, though well-disciplined, were democratically organized. Hence they would fight with their hearts as well as their bodies.

For some time, Layani discussed with us the problems of the coming campaign. Lil-rin, I noticed, could barely restrain evidences of scorn for Layani's forces. "Do the Ta n'Ur never use these great apes for fighting?" I asked her.

She tilted her little nose up a bit and sniffed. "May the day never come when they do! When People of Ancient Royalty can no longer do their own fighting, it will be best for them to die."

Not only that, but Lil-rin announced her intention of personally leading the clan.

"Is that fitting?" I protested, afraid for her. "How can you be Alara-Lur and at the same time perform the duties of a member of your own bodyguard?"

She laughed softly. "Alara-Lur or not, I am first of all slave-mate of the Alar-Lur. Besides—"

"Nonsense!" I protested. "Then I'll be co-leader of our bodyguard with you, or your second in command." And at that we both laughed.

But Lil-rin didn't like the idea of dulyal warfare any more than I did.

From all we could learn, there would be approximately the same number on either side. Any way we looked at it, it seemed certain as though we were in for a long-drawn-out deadlock. And this would never do.

"It comes to this, Lil-rin," I said. "Get Gakko and we end the war, avert the necessity of butchering thousands of these poor animals, and save at least many hundreds of human lives."

She nodded slowly. "Yes, but how?"

"Your people are a desert clan," I pointed out. "Why could we not lead them westward, around in a great circle below the line of habitation, until we are directly south of Gakalu, then strike straight north in a piercing raid, take Gakalu and capture Gakko himself?"

"He might not be in Gakalu," Lil-rin objected.

I disagreed. "I think he will. The Borlanin and the Hoklanin won't get far in their attacks through the mountain gaps. Gakko's real danger will lie in the attack of the fleet from Ilmo, which will be centered on Gakalu. He will be there to direct the defense of his city from the attack by sea. He won't suspect a raid directly from the south."

Lil-rin's little face was grave. "I believe you are right," she said. "And below the gap, quite a distance out in the desert beyond the spot where we found each other, the Ta n'Ur have a big dog farm.

"For several years, in secret, we have been breeding a race of desert dogs. They are lithe, speedy animals, requiring little water, and capable of withstanding the heat and dust. With them I believe we could reach Gakalu almost as quickly as the fleet will."

"Then let's do it," I decided, and my blood began to run faster with the knowledge of impending battle.

We took only Banur into our confidence. We left it up to him to spread some story that we had gone into seclusion to await the outcome of the war. Quietly, we slipped away with five hundred picked clansmen. It took us a full day to reach the breeding grounds.

The dogs were indeed marvelous specimens. Like all other of the Martian breed, they were as large as horses; But in build they reminded me much of greyhounds, only they were much sturdier.

Morning saw us on our way, the clansmen scorning the weight of armor, but all carrying several spring-guns in addition to spears and swords.

I had given Lil-rin my smaller automatic, and all the ammunition I had left for it. She had discarded the more cumbersome clothing of the north and all marks of her new rank, to appear in the light garb she wore when I first saw her. I too adopted the dress of the Ta n'Ur, with no distinguishing mark of rank.

It was near noon of the second day when we approached a ridge that looked like the rim of a great circle, toward which the dusty floor of the desert swept up gradually. We halted and looked down.

The ridge curved away from us to the north and south until it was lost on the horizon. Ahead of us was a gigantic depression, the other side of which was barely visible on the western horizon. It was an immense crater, at least four miles deep, I judged, the ground sloping down sharply from our feet at an angle of forty-five degrees or more.

We dismounted to gaze upon a sight which, despite its drab monotony and the ugly shade of the dust, had by its very size the element of grandeur.

There was a small piece of quartz near my foot. I picked it up and threw it far out. It flashed in the sun as it fell, disappeared completely in a little fountain of dust when it hit. And a moment later the whole side of the crater between that spot and where we stood seemed to be in motion.

"Back! Back!" Lil-rin cried, and blew a shrill blast on her whistle.

We threw ourselves, men and dogs together, backward just in time to escape slipping over the edge and down into that vast cavity, from which great clouds of impalpable dust were now billowing up like vaporized blood.

"It's my fault," said Lil-rin. "I should have remembered that it was there."

"And my bad mistake in throwing the stone," I admitted. "I seem to have started a landslide that has spread for miles."

Chapter 12

Attacked!

At any rate, it was clear that we could not cross the divide. We had to go around. And the question arose as to whether we should risk going farther out into the desert, or cut around it on the north.

We decided ultimately on the latter course. So, keeping well away from the edge, we circled northward. We had traveled some miles further on when we ran into one of those rarest of phenomena on Mars—a breeze. A wind of this nature always presages a hurricane; and in the desert section, the most terrible of dust storms.

We noticed it first when the great red, billowing cloud on our left, over the crater, began to drift across our path.

Quickly we dismounted and formed a number of circles, the great dogs crouching and whimpering in deep growls while their riders wrapped their charges' heads in cloths, and then attended to themselves. We barely had time ourselves to huddle thus and protect our own heads when the dust swept down on us.

Day became night. The howling wind tore at our garments, and our skin blistered under the oceans of dust and sand that were hurled over us. To take one's head out of the cloth meant almost instant suffocation.

Then my heart stood still. For some reason, the cloak that should have been at Lil-rin's saddle was missing. She had just wrapped her dog's head in one that a clansman tossed to her, and thought of herself only when the first blast of stinging dust swept by. Half blinded and in a sudden panic of fear, she began to run, crying out hysterically.

A single leap took me to her side, although the shrieking wind nearly tore my own cloak from my grasp. I drew her down beside me, under its shelter, and put a protecting arm around her trembling form. She nestled close, still quivering. And I thrilled to my feet, her arm encircling me.

I don't know how long that storm lasted, but it must have been a matter of hours. When at last it was over and we had struggled to our feet,

casting aside the dust-laden cloak, Lil-rin did not release my hand at once. And then, suddenly conscious of this, she gently pulled her hand away and blushed.

All around us now the clansmen were emerging. Mound after mound of red dust heaved upward. Dogs and men rose to their feet once more, and there billowed up more clouds of red dust as they shook and brushed themselves off.

We resumed our way. Through the rest of the day and the following night we raced on, the dogs settling down tirelessly to that long, easy, loping pace that ate up the distance so rapidly. Dawn found us with our water almost exhausted, rounding the southernmost end of a great range of mountains.

At this point the range emerged into a line of low, rolling hills, and beyond these hills we came upon another stretch of red dust. Downward toward a band of vegetation it sloped, through the center of which trickled a tiny stream.

Here we rested to refill our waterskins and refresh ourselves, after having first thrown forward a number of scouts. For we were now in enemy territory and might at any moment contact a Gakalun patrol. We were most anxious to avoid discovery, or at least to annihilate any force we might meet so that word of our raid might not be carried in advance of our arrival at Gakalu.

The canal-valley, however, ran at about right angles to our route to Gakalu, and soon we were again racing on over arid land, which little by little revealed sparse and then more prolific vegetation as we advanced toward the fertile zone.

But early in the afternoon we halted in the protection afforded by a little depression between two hills, where a fairly thick growth of the yellow-green trees with their strange, pale branches gave additional safety.

"From here on, Danan-lih, we should travel only at top speed, but only by night," Lil-rin said. "If there are any Gakalun patrols in the neighborhood, they will be only perfunctory in their scouting. It is hard to keep the dullyals at work in the dark, and there is little chance that we would encounter them after nightfall.

"By day we will keep under cover, rest, and maintain a strict watch, that no messenger from the regions through which we have passed shall get through to spread the alarm."

The plan seemed most sensible and I gave it my hearty approval. But Lil-rin and I had no opportunity to further develop the understanding that was growing between us. We were weary almost to exhaustion. At least all the Martians were, too. So I took command of the first watch.

It was just as well that I did so, for so weary were the sentries that only by making my rounds constantly was I able to keep them awake.

I was making my way cautiously toward one of our advanced posts, located in a clump of trees whose club-like branches were weirdly outlined against one of the moons, when I thought I heard a sound from somewhere beyond.

Sound travels somewhat differently on Mars than on Earth, probably because of some quality of the atmosphere. Moreover, there is no crackling of twigs such as in an Earth woodland. The branches of Martian trees, when they die, become very dry and powdery. Consequently, difference in atmosphere and trees considered, when twigs are crunched underfoot, the resulting sound is very strange, almost indefinable to an Earth-trained ear.

My first instinct was one of suspicion. Yet I was not sure. Nevertheless I hastened forward, walking as lightly as I could.

Then I saw them, a group of struggling figures in silhouette, visible at a spot where there was a little opening among the trees, outlined by the gleam of moonlight. Our sentry was in their midst, fighting desperately and, true to the traditions of the Ta n'Ur, silently as well. So occupied was he in avoiding the vicious rushes of the foemen who circled about him, that apparently he forgot to shout the alarm.

Suddenly they all closed in on him at once. It was too late now to use the automatic held ready in my hand. So I gave a great shout of warning and leaped for the struggling mass, under which our man had now gone down beneath a heap of sprawling figures.

There was a sudden sharp command from one of the raiders, who stood a bit aside; a rintar, I judged, by the outlines of his armor. The rest scrambled to their feet and began to run. I took them at first for dulyals, but as they scurried out into the moonlight beyond the copse, I caught the gleam of white skins.

The rintar, still half obscured in the shadows of the trees, turned to meet me. I heard the clang of a spring-gun, and a bolt whistled past my ear. Then I fired.

By the stabbing flame of my gun, I saw the look of amazement and terror on the fellow's face; for his armor, which would stop a bolt from any but the heaviest of the Martian spring-guns, offered little resistance to my steel-jacketed bullet. He went down with a resounding crash of shattered metal.

As our sentry staggered dazedly to his feet, I called out to him to guard the rintar. With mighty leaps then I flashed on out into the moonlight after the fleeing ghostly figures.

I did not fire again, for I was rapidly overtaking them, and my ammunition was precious. As they glanced in terror over their shoulders and saw the great leaps with which I was overtaking them, a mad panic seized them and they scattered pell-mell, running frantically.

Several of them I overtook and struck down. Naked men they were, save for short kilts and sword belts, but they were so terrified by what must have appeared to them as a supernatural pursuer, that none made more than a clumsy defense.

As they were fleeing in all directions, and since the ground on several sides offered promise of protection, I had no other recourse than to use my automatic, after my command to halt and my promise of their lives were disregarded. So, one by one, I had to shoot them down.

Chapter 13

The Tables Are Turned

By this time, of course, our entire camp was aroused, and the Ta n'Ur, spring-guns and swords ready, came dashing up, Lil-rin in the lead. She was breathing hard, one little hand at her swelling breast as though to quell the beating of her heart as she stood before me.

"Oh, I didn't know—I—I couldn't think—I was so afraid that something had happened to you!"

"It was nothing to worry about, Little One," I said gently. "Except that a party of Gakalunin, in command of a rintar—whom you'll find over there with a bullet in him—surprised our sentry."

The girl's eyes widened. Disdainfully she touched one of the corpses with a cautious toe.

"Are you sure you got them all, Danan-lih? Because if you didn't, the warning may precede us to Gakalu."

I had had no time to count the fellows. "I don't know," I admitted. "I think I got them all, but I'm not sure. I only know that I plugged every one in sight."

Lil-rin was thoughtful for a moment. "The best thing for us to do is to dash on ahead at full speed. If any of those Gakalunin did escape, we ought to overtake them. We should be starting now, anyhow."

So we leaped for our saddles, and in a matter of moments were again galloping over the countryside in the weird Martian moonlight. But gallop as we might, we overtook no one.

As we raced on a thought struck me. "Lil-rin!" I called to her. "We should be able to trail the fugitives, if there were any, by the dogs. Let's give them the scent!"

She gave me a puzzled look. "Scent? Why, what do you mean, Danan-lih?"

"Let them smell something belonging to the enemy, and then trail them by the scent," I explained.

"What an odd thought!" Lil-rin exclaimed. "Can dogs on Earth do that? I never heard of a dog being able to smell."

So, the dogs of Mars differed from those of Earth in more than size! And my bright suggestion was something of a dud.

We had now reached very flat country in the region of fertile, cultivated plains, and the problem of concealment during the following day was a big one. If we were successful, one more dash through the night would bring us to Gakalu in the bleak silence just before dawn.

At this hour dulyals would be torpid with sleep, and we could count on meeting little opposition except from their masters. A headlong attack, pushed home silently at that hour, as the Ta n'Ur knew well how to do it, would probably put Gakko safely in our hands.

But the risk was great, particularly in the matter of concealment for the day. Finally, just before the eastern sky began to lighten, our scouts found an irrigation ditch, an artificial branch of a canal, along both sides of which melon patches stretched for miles.

The ditch was of no great depth, and it was filled with water. At this point then we decided to conceal ourselves. Fortunately, the banks of the ditch were sloping. So men and dogs lay down quietly, their heads pillowed on the shallow banks. If now and then a Ta n'Ur head might be seen from a distance, it would be of about the same size as a melon, and probably would attract no attention.

Lil-rin and I worked our way upstream about a quarter of a mile, to a spot where the ditch made an angled turn, raising our heads cautiously from time to time to gaze across the level ground. Two or three times we saw dulyals laboring in the distance under the lash of an overseer, but there was no sign that our presence in the district was suspected.

Closer we approached to the turn. Again we raised our heads cautiously, Lil-rin covering hers with her cloak, that her golden hair might not catch the glint of the sun. Yet, all seemed peaceful. No living creature was in sight, save in the distance. So we went on.

We had not gone twenty feet further before we were trapped. Here, on both sides of the ditch, the melon vines were unusually thick. And from them suddenly there sprang some dozen dulyals, launching themselves at us low and hard, smothering us under the water before we had even a chance to reach for our guns.

Coughing and spluttering we were dragged along rapidly, animal hands choking back our attempted outcries, while ropes of twisted vines bound our arms to our sides. Further struggle on our part at this time was useless.

Upstream a few hundred feet a Martian in the armor of a rintar crawled from the vines beside the ditch and whistled to the dulyals. They brought us to the spot where he waited, and then with a sudden rush swept us off our feet and dragged us up the bank.

At the same instant a number of large dogs bounded up from where they had been crouching low, and in a trice we were each tied to a dog saddle. The rintar and his dulyals leaped on the backs of the other animals. In a twinkling we were being raced across the plain.

I let out a lusty shout, for no dulyal paws were gagging me now, and twisted my head in the direction of the camp. But our capture had not yet been noticed. And my shout evidently did not carry that far; or so I thought.

As a matter of fact, the Ta n'Ur had seen our capture, had even heard my shout, but by this time they had also observed another thing that had escaped Lil-rin and myself.

The fields on either side of the ditch, but at some distance back, were thick with dulyals, some fifteen hundred or two thousand of them, whereas the Ta n'Ur numbered only some hundred odd.

Uldor, who had assumed command at once, saw that to go forward meant certain destruction without any hope of rescuing us. Without the encumbrance of false pride, he withdrew the clansmen swiftly and silently downstream, until they were far enough out of the trap to mount their dogs and race back southward in a well-simulated panic and at a pace which out-distanced pursuit.

But Lil-rin and I knew nothing of this at the time.

In no time at all we reached a road, the first I had seen on Mars, which ran beside another artificial irrigation ditch. River, perhaps would be a better word, for it was fully half a mile wide and, I gathered, quite deep.

At intervals of two or three miles were spaced little villages, similar to the one in which I had rescued Lil-rin from Gakko's followers. Villages or rather, groups of entrances to underground dwellings. And little gatherings of slaves and Ildin stood aside to watch us race past, eyeing with casual curiosity the slim figure of the golden-haired girl and the sturdy build of the man with strangely dark hair.

At length we came to a bridge, or more properly a causeway, for it was really more in the nature of a dam with many sluice-gates than a bridge.

Here we were met by a detachment of fifteen Ildin in command of an Eps, a Lesser Lord. And when Lil-rin saw them her face fell.

"For," she whispered to me, "they are in the uniforms of Gakko's bodyguards. Galdro would dignify no prisoners except those he thought of the utmost importance by an escort of this sort.

"While we were in the hands of a mere rintar and his dullyals, it looked as though our capture had been an accident. But now I am afraid Gakko knew of our coming all along. Someone ... someone has betrayed us, Danan-lih!"

Chapter 14

We Reach Gakalu

We were allowed no time to rest. Our arms were freed; but then we were tied to the saddles of fresh dogs. Away we went, at breakneck speed, over the causeway and up the road toward the sea.

The Ildin who raced at our sides kept strict military order and maintained a wary watch. But at length the Eps, a handsome though evil-faced young fellow, drew up beside us and ordered the others to follow.

He glanced at me with arrogant curiosity and then at Lil-rin, whose scanty desert garb concealed but little of her youthful curves. The expression in his eyes was not good to see.

"And so," he drawled at length, "Danan-lih, the 'God' from the Green Star, comes to Gakalu! Is your name really Danan-lih?"

"It is Dan Hanley," I replied.

He scowled. "It sounds much the same. And did you really come from the Green Star?"

"What do you think?" I snapped. And at this he laughed mockingly.

"It is a good story, anyhow," he said, "and one that the people love to swallow. With what, pray, did you darken your hair?"

"That is its natural color," Lil-rin cut in.

The Eps turned to gaze appraisingly at her again with that expression that made my blood boil.

"Do that again," I gritted, "and I'll find the strength to break these bonds and tear you apart!"

He glanced at me in pretended surprise, as though he did not understand, but underneath was that air of arrogant mockery.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Danan-lih," he said after a bit. "Gakko knows of your coming, but not of the girl's. These men are mine. Their

loyalty to me is above even their loyalty to Gakko. Turn the girl over to me, and say nothing to Gakko about her.

"After I have delivered you at the Council Hall and am no longer technically responsible for you, I will contrive your escape. For Gakko surely intends to have your life," he added smugly to give weight to his evil argument.

The Lesser Lord's eagerness to double-cross Gakko, his commander-in-chief, is not to be wondered at. Throughout history, tyrants like Gakko, who depend on unscrupulous underlings to maintain their power have been stabbed in the back when they least expected. Indeed, from this history-proven fact may come the original thought behind the saying that "They who live by the sword, shall die by the sword."

I saw Lil-rin stiffen in her saddle and turn scarlet. The Eps, misinterpreting my own silence, went on in the conceit that his proposal would be received as reasonable.

"The girl appeals to my fancy. To have a warrior lass of the Ta n'Ur among my wives would be most interesting and undoubtedly amusing—"

He never finished that sentence. Although my legs were tied under the dog saddle, my arms were free. At that moment his mount brought him within reach.

I swayed toward the Lesser Lord and grasped his collar with one hand. With a wrench, I jerked him clear of his mount and planted a crashing blow in his face with my other fist.

"Now, Lil-rin, *now!*" I yelled. "Make a break for it, straight ahead!"

But the attempt was useless. The dogs on which we were mounted would not obey us, and in a moment we were borne helplessly to the ground by the avalanche of Ildin who leaped at us from behind.

When the pile was unscrambled I still held onto the Eps, choking and gasping from the twisting of his collar. I managed to drive my fist once more into his face before his minions pried me loose and my dog scrambled to his feet.

The Lesser Lord stood there spluttering and cursing, wiping the blood from his face. After a flood of invectives, he thrust his battered features forward into mine, for his men were holding me so that I could hardly move.

His voice rasped with bitter malevolence. "Were it not for Gakko, I would—and by the seven Alarin, I believe I will in spite of him! When he does see you, I can tell him you were hurt in resisting capture—"

"And," I interrupted him sharply, "I shall tell Gakko of your treason to him! Perhaps Gakko knows enough of your reputation even now to credit the infamous proposal you just made."

He grew suddenly pale, in strange contrast to the blood on his face. His manner changed just as abruptly.

"Enough!" he said. "It was my mistake. I did not understand your, ah, viewpoint, or I should not have asked you to do anything, er, dishonorable in your own eyes. But I will offer you another bargain."

Ah, so I had won the upper hand, prisoner and all!

"Say nothing of this to Gakko, and I will agree that you and the girl shall have every possible courtesy and comfort as long as you are in my hands. Is it agreed?" he demanded anxiously.

"Agreed," I said; and at this, the fear went out of his eyes, though there was much of worry left in his expression. Enough worry, I thought, to make him keep his promise. Or was it?

Through all this the Ildin had sat with wooden faces, though once or twice I caught the suspicion of a fleeting smile here and there among them. The Eps' followers may have been loyal, but evidently they were not personally displeased at his discomfiture. Lil-rin too was smiling a bit, but pretending she had noticed nothing.

So we went on, by easier stages now. Nor were our legs bound so tightly, and frequently the Eps had water offered to us and several times food. Once we stopped for a rest, which was most welcome. But I knew that every time my back was to him, the Lesser Lord's eyes were boring into me with baffled hatred.

Finally we reached our destination. Gakalu looked more like a great park or flower garden than the teeming city it was. For miles in every direction the gardens lay, diamond-patterned, between diagonal rows of streets paved in dull red, but with scarcely a building above ground. That is, if the little ornate structures constituting the entrances to the underground city were excepted.

Just below ground another system of streets was laid out in squares, at an angle of forty-five degrees to the paths above. The main arteries of this underground system emerged at strategic traffic points beyond the

city. The ground level, in other words, was in reality the "roof" of the city.

The gardens, each surrounded by a low wall made from fragments of the iridescent stone, were places of recreation, rest and amusement. Here an open air cafe, with tables of intricate golden metal or carved stone, where refreshments were being served among gorgeous varicolored blooms; there, a recreation center, with crowds watching some game or performance.

Gakko's palace, castle, or Council Hall, whatever one chose to call it, for it served all three purposes was an edifice of such transcendent beauty as I had never seen before. In general lines it resembled somewhat the modified pyramidal motif that became so general on Earth in the second quarter of the Twentieth Century.

The structure stood at the very edge of the Polar Sea. In fact, abortive little waves of that windless expanse of water lapped and broke against one face of it, and reached halfway down the two sides.

As we approached down one of the diagonal streets, my heart leaped with satisfaction. There before us lay anchored the Ilmon fleet, our allies, about two hundred yards offshore: great raft-like, flat-bottomed craft on which huge spring-guns were mounted. Every few moments one of these would hurl a half ton of rock at the castle which would shatter quite futilely against the iridescent monolith, leaving its surface, as far as I could see, unmarred.

I cursed silently under my breath. It was quite obvious that the Ilmon attack was nothing but a gesture. Gakko had more "men" than the Ilmon could possibly crowd on their ships. Besides, the ruler of Gakalu had the advantage of mobility.

No matter what spot the Ilmon fleet might select for a landing, the defenders could concentrate a superior force there before the maneuver could be made effective. So Lil-rin and I had no hope of rescue from the ships.

Chapter 15

Condemned by Gakko

Immediately on our arrival, we were hustled through the triangular gate in the base of the castle, on into a tunnel of the same shape, the walls coming together at an angle above to form the room.

The passage inclined upward, curving about until it emerged between bastioned walls of the castle proper on top of the base. Our party was halted here by a shrill order from the commander of a unit of several sturdy young Amazons of Gakko's personal guard.

With some little military ceremony, and a malevolent glance at me, the Eps handed us over to the girl guard, and with his followers turned back down the ramp.

We were immediately seized and shackled. Noting the fetters that were in readiness, Lil-rin threw me a meaning glance. I knew what she meant. This was but another evidence that our arrival was expected.

The girl in command surveyed us with interest, but gave me most of her attention. Evidently with my greater height and more muscular build than the average Martian, I was more of a novelty even than a girl warrior of the Ta n'Ur.

These young Amazons were clad in armor, and little else. Each wore upper and forearm guards on the right arm with a large round shield protecting the left. A curiously fashioned corselet or shot cuirass, held up by broad straps, protected the shoulders. Underneath was a broad girdle of heavy leather and metal plates, from which hung thigh guards and a kind of *braconniere*, a kilt of chain mail.

Shin guards and sandals completed the equipment, except for the short, curved, heavy-bladed swords they carried.

"Come!" commanded their leader shortly. She led the way briskly through a smaller triangular gate into the castle, and there was much resonant clashing of metal in the guard's armor as we followed.

Lil-rin spoke in low tones to the girl who marched beside her.

"I didn't know there were any girl warriors in the Northern Cities. I thought that only we of the Ta n'Ur, and the other clans of the desert ring—"

"We are the War Wives of Gakko," the girl explained shortly.

"How many wives has he?" I broke in.

The women, God bless 'em! Ask them for a little confidential information and they'll spill the beans every time.

"Thirty-one," she replied, her whole manner becoming more friendly.

"That is, thirty-one War-Wives. The rest don't matter. They are merely slaves, playthings. We rank as Epsin and have all the privileges of men."

Then, after a pause, "Most of us War-Wives are from the clans south of Gakalu, on the other side of the desert ring from the Ta n'Ur. Gakko will probably make you one of us."

Lil-rin bent her head quickly to mine, "He will not!" she whispered tensely.

"You're telling me!" I whispered back reassuringly.

"Are you really Danan-lih?" the girl on the other side of us now asked me.

"I am Dan Hanley," I replied. "Sorry to have to meet you under such, er, disadvantageous circumstances." When I want to turn on the charm, it really gushes.

Warrior or no warrior, the girl was pleased. "Yes, that is what they call you Danan-lih. And there are lots, too, who believe in you, and think Gakko should not oppose your becoming Alar-Lur."

And she gave me a look that meant plenty!

Further conversation, however, was interrupted by a curt command from the leader as we approached a grille. Through this we could glimpse a great hall decorated with luxurious and colorful hangings, magnificent carvings and statuary, and a riot of immense, brilliant Martian flowers.

There came to us the murmur of many voices, with the occasional shouts of men and the shrieks of women drunk with lilquok.

We were motioned to stay where we were. The girl in command approached a section of the grille and pressed on it with her hand. A cleverly concealed little triangular gate opened. She went in, leaving it ajar.

Through this opening we caught a better view of the great tables, of the men and women lounging or sprawling about on the benches and couches. The girl beside me sniffed contemptuously.

"It's like this every day, since Gakko first hinted at his plan to be Alar-Lur," she said. Lil-rin looked at her sharply and then nudged me. I managed to get in a knowing wink in reply.

In a moment the leader of our captors returned, followed by an impressive figure of a man. The girl leader of the guard waved her hand toward us imperiously.

"Here they are, Gakko. They were just brought in."

Gakko, though neither as tall nor as heavy as I, was nonetheless a commanding individual among Martians. He was possessed of somewhat more than their normal height and breadth of shoulder. I judged him to be a man of about forty.

His face, though showing the signs of his dissipated, licentious life, nevertheless indicated both intellect and strength of will. He folded his arms casually and surveyed us with a kind of detached interest.

"So this," he mused, "is the famous Danan-lih, who threatens the peace and security of a whole world because of a silly ancient tradition."

I started to make a reply, but the girl leader shrieked a sudden command to "be silent in the presence of the Alar" and struck me sharply on the mouth. So I had to keep silent, especially since Gakko, for all his assumed carelessness of manner, took care to keep several of the girls between himself and us. But for an instant I was on the point of whipping out my concealed automatic and ending the matter then and there.

Gakko continued to gaze cynically at me as his glance swept me insolently from head to foot. For an instant a gleam lightened the lazy arrogance of his eyes. Presently he permitted himself to pronounce upon my fate.

"The man is to be placed in a cell, just as he is, with food to eat and water to drink. But give him no other clothing, and do not let him bathe."

Suddenly conscious of my somewhat tattered garb, with the desert's red grime still upon me, I glanced down, puzzled as to the meaning of this strange order. For the life of me I couldn't tell what he was driving at.

Then for the first time Gakko turned and gazed directly at Lil-rin.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, an expression of evil anticipation breaking over his face. "Another recruit, eh, girls?"

He laughed carelessly at the unfriendly glances the jealous young War-Wives threw at Lil-rin.

"Let her have every comfort," Gakko commanded. "And bring her to me in the morning at the Council in bridal garb, for I shall wed her and then ... but, we shall see about that later. And, oh yes, bring the man to me at the same time."

And turning casually, he sauntered back through the grille, which closed with a little click behind him.

There was an agony of pleading in Lil-rin's eyes as she turned to me. The young warrior girls seemed puzzled and uncertain. They glanced at Lil-rin uneasily. Clearly they saw in her a rival for Gakko's favors, and probably a successful one at that. They were at once jealous and fearful of her possible future position.

As the girl guards marched us along another corridor, Lil-rin spoke in low tones to the leader. The girl shook her head in emphatic refusal at first; but Lil-rin pleaded, and at last the leader relented. The party halted. Half of the girls dropped back a little distance at their leader's command and the rest went on a few paces, leaving Lil-rin and me alone together.

Lil-rin stood very close to me. "I asked her for just a moment, to say farewell. This is the end, Danan-lih. Do you realize it?"

There were tears in the green-blue eyes that looked up at me so forlornly from a white, drawn little face.

Paralyzed by a sudden rush of feeling, I stood motionless, half dazed, in the first true realization of my very real love for this girl.

Chapter 16

The Crash of Doom

Lil-rin must have misunderstood my silence, for she dropped her gaze and went on in a pathetically breathless way.

"Oh, I understand, Danan-lih, that I have been just an accident to you. That it was just the fulfillment of the ancient legend. But that isn't what I wanted to say, Danan-lih!

"I mean, Gakko has condemned you to death, or he will in the morning. And I, who am your lawful bride, even if only in name, must die, too, if you do. But before I wed a Northern beast like Gakko, here, Danan-lih, take this gun! They'd only take it away from me anyhow when they dress me in the bridal garments. Please—" So, carefully, I transferred the automatic to my own person. Lil-rin could say no more at the moment, for by then I had folded her in my arms, clasping her supple young form close to mine in the glorious realization, at last, of what she meant to me.

"I love you, Lil-rin, I love you!" I whispered fiercely.

She relaxed against me like one exhausted, and the tears were now streaming from beneath her lowered lids.

"Now I shall die happy," she murmured. "Now I shall have no regrets."

"We're not going to die, now!" I replied. I glanced at the warrior girls standing attentively along the corridor. They were regarding us with unconcealed curiosity, but seemed in no hurry to end our rather desperate communion.

"Tell me quickly, dear," I whispered. "How many of Gakko's people do you think believe in the Legend?"

"Oh, perhaps the great majority," she said, without any great interest in the subject, but with a wondrous look in her eyes as she gazed up from where her head nestled against my shoulder.

"Then my plan may work! For I believe I know now why Gakko gave *me* that strange order that I was to be brought before him in Council tomorrow just as I am now, dirty and disheveled."

Quickly I outlined the plan for her. As I talked the glow of hope and exuberance came back again into her eyes.

"Good!" Lil-rin exclaimed when I had finished. "And even if it does not work, my Danan-lih, we shall meet death side-by-side, fighting to the last!"

She drew herself up proudly and motioned to the leader of the girl warriors.

"We are ready," she said.

So, with many curious glances and whispered comments, for obviously the girl guards were puzzled by the sudden change in our bearing, perhaps even awed a bit at the jubilant manner in which I was going forth to meet a certain death, they conducted us to the next turn in the corridor. Here, after a hasty embrace, Lil-rin and I were parted.

They took me to a cell in the tower, about halfway up, from which I had a good view of the westward side of the city and the shore. After bringing me food and a little water, they left me to my meditations and plans for the morrow.

First, I carefully inspected the two automatics, as soon as I was sure I was not under observation. I spent some time in practicing, until I could draw those guns from their concealed holsters with my old-time skill.

Then, detail by detail, endeavoring to prepare for every possible contingency, I went over my plans again and again, until last I dropped off to sleep.

In the morning, four of the warrior girls came to conduct me to the Council Hall. They led me to a grilled door; and while I awaited the signal that would bring me before Gakko, I had plenty of time to study the great room and the throng within it.

Gakko was giving the crowd a harangue that would have been a credit to an Earthly politician. A master of dramatic art, he was cleverly painting a picture of himself as the popular leader, while holding his cohorts in suspense as to some great revelation he was about to make. He contrived to put across the impression that this matter would be one of great amusement to them, as well as to himself.

"And now," he shouted, "behold the fair barbarian of the desert allies, Ur Lil-rin of the Ta n'Ur. Is she fair enough, I ask you, to be the bride of an Alar-Lur?" And he put into this last phrase a subtle suggestion.

My heart pounded as I saw Lil-rin step forth with stately grace. Two of Gakko's warrior girls, weapons drawn, were at her side, and two more behind. Gakko, with dramatic dignity, stepped back a pace as with a sweeping gesture he centered the attention of the throng upon her.

There was a sibilant intake of breath all through the hall as Lil-rin stepped forward; a murmur of surprise, and then a roar of approval. Her costume was so gorgeous, I could not have blamed the War-Wives for any pangs of jealousy.

Unnoticed for the moment by the crowd, Gakko glanced at the door.

Hastily my guards swung it open. Before I had time to guess their purpose, they seized me roughly. Pulling and jerking me this way and that, they hustled me out on the platform in such a way as to make it appear that I was cravenly resisting, and had to be dragged along.

From my appearance in such grimy and tattered garments, and from the manner in which the warrior girls were roughing me I must truly have presented a ridiculous contrast to Lil-rin.

A roar of laughter echoed through the great hall.

Now Gakko was shouting. "Can this be the great Danan-lih of the Legend, the Hero of the Green Star—the Alar-Lur of Mars?"

"No! No!" roared the crowd between gusts of laughter.

"I leave the decision to you, my people!" Gakko shouted, holding up his hand for silence. "Shall this fair barbarian be the bride of Gakko-Alar-Lur or of this false hero of the Legend who now cringes at my feet?"

Gakko pointed dramatically at the spot where he expected me to be. For with this last speech of his as their cue, the girls who were guarding me began again to jerk me this way and that. I sensed their purpose was to trip and hurl me headlong to the floor before him.

Well, I would have to disappoint them. In fact, what with my Earth strength and all, that was precisely what I did. To their utter astonishment, it was the four of them, and not I, who went sprawling when they attempted to hurl me at Gakko's feet.

In a single bound I covered the space that separated me from Gakko. When I felt the floor under my feet again I lashed out with all the

momentum of my leap and every ounce of strength in my body. There was a sharp *crack!* as my fist landed on Gakko's jaw.

The blow literally lifted him from his feet and hurled him headlong from the platform and down the steps, where he lay an inert and lifeless mass among his own lesser lords.

For a moment, breathless silence pervaded the hall. Not a Martian moved. Slowly, ominously, I stepped forward to the edge of the platform facing Gakko's minions, a gun in each hand.

Chapter 17

Alar-Lur of Mars

Proudly, calmly, as though on parade, Lil-rin stepped to my side and stood quietly alert.

A murmur arose in the back of the hall. There was the clang of a spring-gun and the thud of its bolt somewhere behind me. But I had caught a glimpse of the gun, and I fired.

The roar of the automatic stunned the Martians, and there was silence again as the faint fumes of gunpowder floated hazily about me. Then the rintar in the back of the hall who had my bullet in his arm began to shriek. And pandemonium broke loose.

The Ildin-Gakko's Freeman were milling about and struggling among themselves. Half of them were panic-stricken, fighting to get out of the room. The others fought because they were attacked, or because of they knew not what.

It was in the pit of the Epsin, just beneath our feet, that our danger lay, and in the warrior girls who had been guarding Lil-rin and me. I was conscious that several of the latter were now circling in behind us on the platform.

Diversion came just in time to save me the necessity of turning to face the Warrior-Wives. Several of the Epsin made a rush at us up the steps. Raising both guns, I hurled fire and lead at them. One after another they threw up their arms and tumbled backward or plunged sprawling on their faces.

Behind me I heard the warrior girls squealing in fright and scrambling down the steps.

"Thunder! Lightning!" one of them screamed. "It is Danan-lih, in truth, according to the Legend!"

I glowered at the crowd. Wherever my glance fell, men shrank back, fear and wonder upon their faces.

I stepped forward a pace then and held up my hand for silence. The turmoil hushed. I pointed to where the lifeless form of Gakko lay grotesquely sprawled.

"There lies Gakko," I said. Then, tapping my chest, "Here stands Danan-lih of the Thunder and Lightning! Danan-lih of the Great Strength Danan-lih of the Green Star! Are ye Gakko's men or Danan-lih's men, or is there perhaps among ye, one who cares to contest the claim of Danan-lih as Alar-Lur?"

I do not know how the thing would have come out in the end. I was in reality preparing to make a dash for safety with Lil-rin, in case my bluff did not work.

But at this moment I heard the soft swish of many feet, marching in unhurried military precision, coming through the grilled doors behind us.

"The Ta n'Ur!" Lil-rin whispered jubilantly, but without turning her head. "They have gained entrance to the castle somehow. Uldor did not."

I don't know how long we stood there, not daring to show our own happy surprise, and not wanting to destroy the dramatic picture by abandoning our pose. But, at last, we knew that the clansmen had all filed on to the platform to stand behind us in formidable array.

Then, furtively at first, and finally with a mad rush, the Epsin and Ild-in clogged the exits, until at last Lil-rin, I and the Ta n'Ur were left alone in the hall.

Lil-rin threw herself into my arms, and so ecstatic was our embrace that Uldor barked a sharp command to the clansmen to about-face, that we, or they, might not be embarrassed. It must have been the latter, because Lilrih and I did not even know they were there for a long time...

"It was a simple enough matter," Uldor explained later, when we questioned him as to how the Ta n'Ur had gained the castle. "When we found you had been captured, we knew a trap had been set. So we pretended to abandon you and flee."

"We sped back to the border of the desert, and our dogs were so fast we knew no pursuit could have kept up with us. So, instead of returning toward Borlan, we cut deeper into the desert below Gakalu.

"Then, following the Great Gakalun Canal, we dashed straight north, and flashed through the city itself to the very walls of the castle before any opposition developed.

"There was commotion inside. The walls were unguarded. We scaled them by shooting a line over a parapet with a spring-gun, and then hauling up a stouter rope. We heard the roar of Danan-lih's guns. The few Gakalunin we met were fleeing in terror. We ran through the corridors toward the sound of the guns. The rest you know."

At this juncture, a slave entered and bowed low.

"Master," he said "there is a great crowd shouting acclaim to Danan-lih and Ur Lil-rin. They have sent emissaries to beg that you will appear before them."

Lil-rin looked at me shrewdly. "You can't show yourself this time in these tatters, Danan-lih," she protested, "or they'll expect you to look that way always. Whatever shall we do?"

"There's undoubtedly a store of clothing here somewhere," I suggested, "but it might take us hours to find."

Then I got an inspiration. "Hey, wait a moment! I've got myself a swell idea. Danan-lih first appeared on this planet among the Ta n'Ur. Right? His bride is a Myara of the Ta n'Ur. It is fitting that the garb of the Ta n'Ur shall be the official dress at the court of the new Alar-Lur-and the Alara-Lur-of Mars!"

It was nothing but a flash thought, suggesting itself to me as a quick solution of a bothersome problem. But Lil-rin gave me a startled look, as did Uldor.

"The Ta n'Ur—Descendants of Kings," she murmured in a tone of awe. "And so, my Danan-lih, you have fulfilled yet another prophecy. *For their garb shall be the garb of Kings.*' It is a phrase in the Ancient Tradition, over the interpretation of which our wise men have puzzled for many generations. But come! We have no time to waste! Quick, Uldor, give us clothing!"

And so a few moments later, garbed exactly alike in the simple costume of the clansmen, Lil-rin and I stepped forth from the great triangular gate in the base of the castle, to be greeted by a mighty roar of acclaim from the united populace of Gakalu and the men of the Ilmon fleet, which now was tied up at the quay.

"Hail to Danan-lih and Lil-rin, Alar-Lur and Alara-Lur of the Northern Cities!" roared the crowd. "Alar and Alara of Gakalu! Myar-Lur and Myra-Lur of the Ta n'Ur!"

And then, in front of them all, Lil-rin kissed me.

So, much as I would like to return to my native planet, I feel that my duty lies here. No Martian, I am sure, could lead anything but a miserable existence on Earth, where gravity is so much greater, and Lil-rin says she wouldn't let me go without her.

Besides, she points out shrewdly, the tradition says nothing at all about the "Second Danan" flying off in the void of space on a foolish trip to the Green Star, and besides the people wouldn't stand for it.

As for that Martian who had betrayed Lil-rin and me to the overlord of Gakalu-well, one must realize that spies are ever to be found when conditions of war obtain. Perhaps, on the other hand, it had been a clansman of the Ta n'Ur, jealous of my position and determined to bring me down, by means fair or foul, from a pedestal not of my own making. But whoever that informer may be, I shall seek him out.

Some day, I hope during my lifetime, someone will rediscover the secrets that died with old Doctor Bran-disch, who built the first successful space ship and then promptly went insane when I flashed off to Mars in it.

Some day I shall find time to study the mechanism of that ship and transmit the specifications to Earth by radio, so that, perhaps, a delegation from "the old home planet" may visit us here and see what Lil-rin and I have accomplished as the rulers of half a world.

I wish I knew what the other half, below the great equatorial desert, is like. In fact, if I can ever convince Lil-rin that I am not secretly planning a return to Earth (for, being a woman, she doesn't like the way the first Danan skipped out and left his bride,) I'm going to have the water pumped out of the old space ship and whisk across the desert in it to have a look at that other hemisphere.

Loved this book ?

Similar users also downloaded:

- "*The Airlords of Han*", Philip Francis Nowlan
- "*Armageddon 2419 AD*", Philip Francis Nowlan
- "*The Cosmic Express*", Jack Williamson
- "*Vandals of the Void*", James Morgan Walsh
- "*The Hill Of Dreams*", Arthur Machen
- "*Hail to the Chief*", Randall Garrett
- "*A Choice of Miracles*", James A. Cox
- "*Valley of the Croen*", Lee Tarbell
- "*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", Thomas Hardy
- "*The Memory of Mars*", Raymond Fisher Jones



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind