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TARNISHED UTOPIA

by

MALCOLM JAMESON

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CHAPTER I

The Road to Tomorrow

He did not know what had happened, or how, or when. He only knew he was falling. Instinctively he began counting. Somewhere above him the ship was falling, too. Down below, still a long way off, he could see a bed of search lights, its rays probing the clouds—looking for him, no doubt.

At the count of six he pulled the cord. Then he felt the jerk on his harness as the 'chute bellied out. His head ached fearfully

and he realized for the first time he was wounded. He did not know when he struck the earth or how far he was dragged across the fields.

The hospital ward was not so bad a place, considering it was in a prison camp. Only there was never food enough. It was later, though, that he felt the pinch of real hunger. That was after he had been pronounced fit for duty and sent out daily with the other war prisoners, to repair the holes made nightly by Britain's bombers along the main railway line.

"Serves me right, I guess," Allan Winchester muttered to himself as he shouldered his pick and shovel and stumbled along after the rest. "I had no business mixing in another fellow's war."

But the guttural curse of a burly guard and the threat of the ever-ready gunbutt made him change his mind. He ducked the blow and hastened his stride, but red rage surged within him.

"No," he added, in an inaudible growl, "*it is* my war! It is everybody's war who hates cruelty and oppression. I'll see it through. Ruthless tyrants shall not rule the earth!"

For a moment Winchester's thoughts had gone back to the good job and cozy home he had given up in the States to fight these dictators. He had been a consulting engineer. Moreover, his bachelor bungalow in the suburbs had been the gathering place for others like him who shared his devoted hobby.

In Winchester's rare garden a few amateur enthusiasts carried on the work begun by Burbank—the creation of new and interesting plant hybrids. All that the American engineer had

surrendered in a glow of indignation over the treatment of the helpless little countries of Europe. One day he had flown to Canada and joined her air force.

"And here I am," he muttered again, ruefully, "shot down in my very first big show."

"Ssh-h-h, Yank!" came a cautious hiss from the man next to him. They had been detailed to fill in a new-made bomb crater. The guard had gone on forty yards beyond.

"D'ya want to join the gang?" whispered his mate. "We've tunneled under the barbed-wire fence. Tonight's the night. Ten are going, but they say there's a hiding place outside for one or two more. Friends, you know. Working undercover."

"Count me in," answered Winchester in a low voice. He sank his pick into the soft shoulder of the crater. The guard had wheeled and was looking their way.

"I'll tell you more at mess-time," said the other man softly, as he flung a shovelful of damp earth down the slope.

Allan Winchester, the American, was the last man through the hole. Wriggling along like an earthworm, he thought the tunnel interminable, especially since the passage of the others had caused several cave-ins, which had to be dug out with the hands and pushed backward with the feet. By the time he emerged into the dark night outside the barricades, the others had gone. Winchester brushed the loose dirt from him and groped his way forward. They had told him what to do if they became separated.

It was then that the hoarse-voiced whistle on the prisoners' steam-laundry building broke the night air with its raucous blast. A flare burst overhead and floodlights came on. Rifle shots rang out. Off to the left a machine gun began to chatter. Winchester heard men shouting in the fields ahead of him, and the sudden scream of a stricken man. He dropped panting into a little ditch and crawled into some shrubbery.

For hours he lay there in a cold sweat. Heavily booted men crashed through the brush repeatedly, prodding with bayonets.

"*Zehn*," one said. "Ten we got, already. The *Kommandant* says there should be one more."

Dawn came, but they did not find the American. He stayed there all day without moving, though his thirst became painful. For far and near sounds told him the search was still on. Somehow the news must have leaked out. The prison break had turned into failure. What was to have been escape ended in a death trap.

Winchester lay still another night and day, except for chewing some lush grass for the moisture that was in it. Then on the third night he stole forth and crossed the pasture beyond. It was at Munich, those prisoners from Dunquerque had told him, that he would find friends and shelter—if he could only get to it. The address he had long since memorized.

It took Winchester four nights, walking always in the fields and skirting villages and highways. He drank occasionally from brooks and once succeeded in stealing a hatful of vegetables from a farm garden. But in time he reached the outskirts of

Munich and knew that for once he was in luck. A vigorous British air raid was going on.

He made his way to the heart of the town unchallenged. Troopers and firemen were everywhere, but they had their hands full snatching at dazzling fire-bombs or dodging crashing masonry. Winchester hurried on, searching for the small alley three blocks west of the Schutzenplatz. He had little trouble finding his way, despite the pandemonium of flame and destruction going on about him, for Munich was a city fairly familiar to him. He had lived there for months when he was a student before the war.

It was during a lull in the aerial attack that Winchester reached the neighborhood. The street was perfectly dark, except for the dull red glare of reflected fires. The blackness in the alley was as pitch. The American stole into it, feeling with a cautious toe for stumbling-blocks among the cobbles.

He had hardly gone four steps when he froze motionless against a wall. Overhead a brilliant magnesium flare suddenly blazed, lighting the place up like noon. Winchester waited, tense, while it burned out and slowly drifted away. Then, as the dark returned, he took a step forward.

"No!" A soft hand clutched his sleeve. "This way. Say nothing, but—oh, please—hurry!"

The voice was low and vibrant, the voice of a woman. Winchester could barely make out her outline in the darkness, but he judged her to be young. Her hand found his and tugged. He followed her blindly. She had spoken to him in English!

She must be one of the friends his fellow prisoners had told him of. But to his surprise, instead of taking him deeper into the alley, she darted out into the broad street from which he had just come.

"Where to?" he asked huskily.

"Anywhere," she answered in an agonized voice. "Anywhere but *there!* I have just learned we were betrayed. Two of our members are Gestapo men and they are waiting there for us now. Come!"

They ran blindly in the dark, down one street and up another. Bombs were bursting steadily to the westward, and the barking of the ack-acks was almost continuous. A sudden flare lit the street up once more. Dead ahead of them were two gendarmes. One raised his arm and shouted a challenge, then charged forward. The girl jerked Winchester into a doorway.

"Try this door," she moaned. Her voice was urgent.

The door was locked, but Winchester drew back a yard and launched himself bodily against it. There was a rending of splintering wood and the portal crashed open, hurling the American twice his length into a dark hall. He picked himself up dazedly, only to find the girl was once more at his side. Heavy footfalls were heard running by the door. The police paused, hesitated and turned back.

"Here is a stairway going down," the girl whispered in the dark.

They tumbled down it. It was a spiral staircase and of stone.

They had reached the first stage below when they heard the upper door burst open and the yells of their pursuers. Almost in the same instant there was a deafening crash and a blinding flash of light. They were flung into a far corner, and cowered there while they heard the building above them come crashing down. A bomb from the sky had miraculously covered their retreat.

Winchester lay quietly, holding the trembling form of his rescuer in his arms, until the last of the reverberations died away and until the dust which filled the air settled a little. If the policemen above had died, they had died instantly, for they made no sound. At length, assured of comparative safety, Winchester moved the girl a little way and fished out his box of treasured matches. He struck one.

They were in what appeared to be a medieval vault, of heavy stone construction. The stairs down which they had come were choked with fallen debris from above. There was the smell of smoke in the air. Beyond the circle of the flickering light the stairs curved on down into blackness.

"We had better go lower," Winchester said, lifting the girl. "The sub-cellar is the best place until this raid is over."

He did not say so, but what he feared now was fire. It was obvious they had escaped one fate only to be trapped to await another.

Before a huge nail-studded oaken door the stairs ended. The American lifted the heavy wrought-iron latch and swung it open. Inside were rows of glistening white tables, and in brackets on the walls Winchester was delighted to see wax candles. He lit

one and closed the door behind.

"How incongruous!" the girl murmured, looking about. She still trembled a little, but her air was as unafraid as though she were at a party. "Look, a modern diet kitchen located in this gruesome old dungeon."

"The guy that did it knew a good air-raid shelter when he saw one," explained Winchester, casting an appraising eye over the groined stone arches overhead. "They can blast the whole town down and we'll still be all right."

But something more than the security of the chamber had taken his eye. At one end of the room was an immense electric refrigerator. The girl already had its door open, looking over its contents. People in blockaded countries soon learn to scout for food at every opportunity. Winchester himself was famished.

Now that there was light, he could see the pinch of hunger in the girl's pale face. He wondered how beautiful she would really be, with color in her cheeks and the sunken spots rounded out once more. For despite his preoccupation with food and safety, the American could not miss observing that she was the kind of girl a man meets but once in a lifetime.

"Smells all right—smells good," she pronounced, dragging out a glass bowl filled with an amber-colored gelatine. She poked a finger into the quivering stuff and tasted it. "It *is* good!"

They both laughed. The girl set the bowl on the shelf while she crossed the vault to the tables on the other side, where plates and cutlery were stacked. Meanwhile Winchester studied the room, trying to figure out what the layout meant.

One side was lined with shelves on which stood rows of jars containing vari-colored pellets. The label on one read: "Vitamin B Concentrate." The contents of the others were similar, though Winchester had never dreamed before there could be so many vitamins. "L₂ & P₁, P₅ Complex" said the ticket on another jar. Another table had standard foods, such as dried beans, sugar and other staples.

"Everything but meat," commented Winchester, thinking how nice it would be to sink his teeth into a juicy porterhouse once more.

"There's meat, too," the girl told him, handing him a plate of clear amber jelly, "but I imagine this is better for you on an empty stomach. You poor fellow, you must be nearly starved."

"You don't look overfed yourself," Winchester smiled back.

Then he looked at the cupboard she had indicated when she said there was meat. She had thrown the doors open to reveal a row of small cages containing cats, dogs and rabbits—all sound asleep.

To Winchester's notion, only the rabbits were legitimate meat. He wondered, though, why they slept so soundly. The crash overhead should have wakened anything but the dead. Yet he could see their ribs rise and fall slowly as they breathed. Perhaps they had been doped for some dietetic experiment.

"Another helping?" the girl asked, reaching for the American's empty plate. Unconsciously they had eaten ravenously.

"Yeah," he yawned, lazily stretching his arms, "think I will."

She brought more food. Drowsily they ate it. Neither one knew when the candle burned out.

CHAPTER II

The Long Dawn

Winchester opened his eyes to the darkness and raised his hand to his face. To his absolute and utter astonishment, he found it entangled in a heavy growth of hair. His hand trembled as he verified a discovery that bordered on the incredible. He was bearded like a patriarch, and the hair of his head overflowed his shoulders.

He sat up gasping, struck a match and staggered to his feet. The candle of last night was no more than a blackened stump of wick. He lit another and another. The light brought fresh astonishment.

The room looked incredibly old and moldy, and stalactites the American had not noticed the night before hung dripping from the arched stones above. The stones, he observed now, were covered with heavy green moss and ferns. And, to pile surprise on surprise, so was the floor!

Winchester rubbed his forehead dazedly. He glanced at the cages of animals. Where sleek, well-fed sleeping cats and dogs

had been, there were now only skeletons, or emaciated, half-mummified carcasses. Mushrooms grew on one of the tables beside the ranks of stoppered glass jars. This cavern had the look of immeasurable antiquity, and the air had the smell of cave-trapped gases that had never known the warming rays of the sun.

The American knelt beside the girl. She sprawled where she had fallen, and under her outflung arm lay the empty plate from which she had been eating the gelatine of the night before. She was alive. There was no doubt about that, but her garments had the flimsy, rotten look of wrappings from an Egyptian ancient tomb.

Nor was that all.

The oak door that gave onto the staircase was gone, except for a few soggy boards that still clung to the ancient wrought-iron hardware. Hard-packed rubble blocked the stairs. Small wonder their place of hiding had begun to look like a tomb—their burial was complete!

Only a narrow flue brought down fresh air. Winchester could make out a glimmer of green-tinged light at the top of it, but the flue was too small to admit his body.

He went back into the room and prowled among the food containers. He started to make breakfast on the gelatine stuff. But as he was about to taste it, he noticed for the first time a withered and yellowish ticket on the bowl.

Winchester took the card to the nearest light and read the dim scribble. "Lot 3133, ledger page 104." He turned the card over.

On the back of it was the single word "*Nein!*" and a crude skull-and-crossbones. The American frowned. That was what they had eaten!

He pocketed the card and hunted for the ledger. He handled the gossamer pages gently, for fear they would fall apart under his fingers. To his delight the notes had been kept in English. On Page 104 he came upon this:

Eureka! The perfect food concentrate at last! But, alas, it is too perfect. A single grain will furnish subsistence for a large cat or a medium-sized dog for many weeks, but unfortunately the animal devotes its whole efforts to digestion. It lies stupefied as if drugged until the food has been absorbed. I must think of some way to dilute it. I have calculated that half a pound of it will sustain an adult human many centuries—perhaps five, perhaps more. What a food!

Winchester shuddered. He looked down at the girl and a fresh horror smote him. He himself was awake now—whether after months or years or centuries, he could not tell. Had they eaten the same amount? Was their rate of metabolism similar? Might the girl not sleep on for years and years to come, or whatever term it was?

He threw himself down beside her and tried to bring her to. But though he chafed and shook and even slapped her, she only stirred lightly and smiled dreamily, like a child in its cradle. At length he desisted.

He had better shave, he thought. The beard made him feel unclean. He found a pair of shears, an oft-whetted butcher knife and the scoured bottom of an aluminum pan. It was tedious and painful, but he accomplished the shave.

Digging his way up to air was a slower job. It took weeks, during which Winchester had to work mostly in the dark to conserve the few remaining candles. It was more than twenty days when finally he broke through the surface into a bright starlit night.

He hauled himself out onto the turf and drew his first breath of outside air. If the interior of the vault had been amazing, the world outside was no less so. Instead of emerging into an air-besieged German city, the American had emerged into virgin woods. It was a country of little hills, heavily grassed, and tall trees stood all about.

Winchester made a short tour of exploration close by, but saw no lights or sign of human habitation whatever. When he returned to the cavern, he sat for a long time looking at the sky.

Until the Moon rose, it looked much as it had always done. But when the Moon emerged from behind a towering oak-top, Winchester had to gasp in unstinted admiration. Whereas the Moon he had always known had been a pallid disk, featured only by craters in monochrome, this Moon was a thing of scintillating color.

It was as if it had been studded with jewels.

One crater gave off a many-faceted ruby light, another purest emerald green. Another was of the color of a prime sapphire,

while over the whole surface of the globe were patches of a vague iridescence, such as is seen in fire-opals and choice moonstones. Winchester gazed and marveled.

At length he tired, and decided to go below. Tomorrow he must get up early and explore the country about him.

It was clear that the war had destroyed Munich and that it had ceased to exist as a city, but surely somewhere nearby the Germans had rebuilt its successor.

But by a happy coincidence, when Winchester went below the girl stirred slightly of her own accord and opened a lazy eye. He stood above her, holding the stump of their last candle.

She sat up, blinking.

"I think I must have fallen asleep," she said apologetically.

"I think you must have," he said. It had been three weeks since he himself had awakened.

All that time the girl had slept without moving.

"Did you rest well?" he asked.

"Oh, quite," she said, stifling a small yawn. "Do you think the raid is over?"

"Yes," Allan Winchester said, very soberly. "The raid is over."

For some reason he found it very hard to tell the girl what had

happened.

Or rather, what he thought had happened. For he was not too sure that it was not all part of a not altogether unpleasant dream. Yet despite her merry peals of incredulous laughter, as if he was trying to amuse her, the aspects of the room and, above all, the gaunt carcasses of the trapped animals at last convinced her.

"So we're years and years in the future—is that it?" she asked cheerfully. "Like Wells and the others used to write about?"

"Sort of," Winchester admitted. "Only what you've read is no help. It's all woods outside, and no people that I can see. Maybe the war washed the whole world up and we're all that's left."

"Another Adam and Eve, you mean?" she asked archly.

The American blushed.

"W-well, no," he stammered. "That's not what I meant, exactly." He ruffled his hair and stared at the floor.

He felt a little out of his depth. He groped for an appropriate come-back, since she seemed to be in a light mood despite the momentous news he had given her.

"I do think, though," he managed, with a gulp, "that it is about time I knew your name. Since it is a decade or so—or maybe a century—that we've been living in this cave."

"Nonsense!" the girl retorted. "Do you call this living? But since you want to know, my name is Cynthia Schnachelbauer. My father was German. German-American."

"Oh," Winchester said, repeating the name slowly. "Sounds rather cumbersome, the last half."

"Do you want to make something of it?" Cynthia challenged, planting her hands on her hips and jutting a small jaw at him.

"I may, at that," he said thoughtfully.

CHAPTER III

Prince Lohan

Cynthia made clothes for them. The ones they had were falling apart from rot. She worked from a roll of chamois skins she found in the kitchen-laboratory. In the meantime, Winchester gathered together a pack of selected provisions. When the two of them were quite ready for their expedition, they crawled up the steps to the outside vent and stepped into the woods above. After Winchester had sealed their cave with a flat stone, they started on their journey.

Of Munich there was nothing left, or hardly a trace. The frosts of unnumbered winters and the encroachment of vegetation had thrown apart what bits of masonry were left intact after the bombers had gone. Now it was virgin forest. But beyond, where once there had been fields, the adventurers came upon an endless lawn, on which tame deer grazed and peacocks strutted.

It was mid-afternoon before they encountered any evidence of

the existence of man. Rounding the spur of a low hill, they came upon a valley where the grass had every appearance of just having been mowed. Winchester stooped to examine it, for his bewilderment had been growing at seeing so many thousand acres of carefully tended lawn. As he did, his eye caught a moving object.

The thing resembled a huge tortoise, and was racing down the valley at a great clip. It had a metallic, reddish sheen, as if plated with burnished copper. It approached rapidly, and as it came, Winchester noted that the color of the grass in its wake was not quite the same as that to its right. It was a mowing machine!

It halted abruptly some fifty feet away. A gaunt fellow, clad in a simple gray blouse and kilts of a coarse and cheap-looking material, popped out of a hatch that opened at its top. He leaped to the ground and at once prostrated himself, oriental style. In the same movement, he snatched open the back of his blouse, revealing his naked shoulders and the upper half of his back.

Since the fellow persisted in remaining in the position into which he had thrown himself, kneeling and with his face buried in the grass, Winchester and Cynthia approached him slowly. As they neared, they saw that there were symbols and numbers branded or tattooed on his back.

Winchester stared at them with a frown. What troubled him was that the figures were placed so as to be read upside down! The creature was identifying himself, and to do so he had to perform the kow-tow!

"Get up, man!" called Winchester sharply, seeing the fellow continued to grovel. "Tell us where is the nearest town."

"Ay, milord, whip me if you will, but do not mock me by calling me a 'man'," whined the operator of the mowing machine. "I am but your miserable slave. They did not tell me you were abroad today, or I would not have been so bold—"

"Nonsense!" snorted Winchester, stooping and shaking the fellow by the shoulder. "Stand up and talk face to face."

He stepped back, astonished that what he supposed to be a German peasant should speak English so instinctively. Not that it was English exactly, but a peculiar Anglo-Saxon dialect.

The man stood up, and the visitors saw he was trembling. But the moment he looked into Winchester's face, his attitude changed with startling abruptness. He dropped his whining, abject servility. In its place he registered a curious blend of rage and fright. With a bound he sprang back into his machine, screaming at the same time.

"Away! Masterless slaves, away! I have not seen you—I have not spoken to you—I do not know you!" His utterances trailed off into a wail. "Ah, why did they have to come here? Now they will punish us all!"

He slammed the hatch cover down. The machine darted forward and in a moment was no more than a dwindling speck on the distant lawn.

"That's the payoff," said Winchester softly.

Cynthia looked at him, puzzled.

"Here's a plain laborer of Middle Europe, who speaks English as a matter of course, indicating that at some time in the past the English-speaking peoples dominated this country. Yet he has the psychology of a whipped slave."

"I still don't understand," Cynthia said.

"Because we were walking boldly across what I take to be forbidden grounds, our slave at once assumed that we were of the existing master class. So he behaved accordingly."

"They must be nice people," observed Cynthia sarcastically.

"Quite," Winchester agreed grimly. "But when he stood up at my command and looked at us, he knew at once we were phonies. We are untamed slaves of his own race, not of his masters. They must be of another type altogether."

"I wonder what has happened to the world," Cynthia mused. And this time, apprehension was in her voice.

Their education was soon to begin. Unnoticed while they had been talking with the slave, a dark object had been circling in the sky above. Now it swooped, to descend at a steep angle and in a tight spiral. It was a plane of sorts, painted brilliant scarlet, but it was noiseless and apparently propelled by some invisible internal force. It made a jarless landing a dozen yards away.

Two men sprang out. They were obviously police, for they wore trim blue uniforms glittering with gold lace and buttons. Queerly shaped weapons hung from hooks on their belts, and

each wore a round leather loop dangling from shoulder to shoulder. Winchester took these to be aiguillettes of some description, but he was as instantly disabused.

As the men strode toward them, they unslipped the small ends of the tapered leather straps from one shoulder, and jerked the thick ends from sockets at the other. The straps were whips!

"Down, slaves!" one yelled harshly, swinging the whip above his head.

The other already had his unlimbered, and took a vicious slash at Cynthia. The singing tip missed her face by a scant inch.

"Take it easy, you!" snarled Winchester, lunging forward.

In his sudden white rage the American cared nothing for the mysterious gadgets dangling from these men's belts. His fist caught the second trooper squarely on the jaw and the fellow flopped backward, out cold.

But the crack of knuckles against jawbone was accompanied by a soft *spat!* While still unbalanced from the delivery of the blow. Winchester plunged forward onto the grass, frozen into his attitude of the moment. All his muscles and bones were filled with excruciating pain, yet he was so paralyzed by the unseen, swift force unleashed by the trooper that he could not make the slightest twitch.

He felt the lash of the whip a dozen times or more; heard Cynthia's screams. Then he fainted dead away under the accumulation of pain.

He could not have been out long, but when he resumed consciousness he had normal possession of his muscles again—all except those of his arms, which dangled helplessly at his sides. He was sitting in the doorway of their captors' plane. The trooper who had knocked him out had revived his fellow officer, and the two of them were engaged in an examination of Cynthia.

"It's a good thing you didn't mark the girl," growled the leading trooper to his aide. "Prince Lohan would have busted you to a mine guard. As it is, there'll be a thousand merits to split between us for this job. She's the finest specimen I ever saw. Look! How pink and tender."

The policeman pinched Cynthia's upper arm, and was rewarded with a prompt and resounding slap in the face. But he merely laughed and held her away from him with his long arms.

Winchester looked on with burning eyes. There was cold murder in his heart, but without the use of his arms he could not rise. He had a glimmering now, though, of what the ruling race was like. These troopers were big men and blond, yet with the flat faces and almond eyes of Mongols. Somehow they combined the salient features of both Scandinavians and Tibetans.

"But unbranded Nordics?" queried the man Winchester had hit. "There's a reward for them, too, isn't there?"

Winchester noticed now that both his and Cynthia's chamois garments had been torn away, to reveal their unmarred shoulder blades.

"Sure," said the first. "They used to turn up often in the old days, but I haven't heard of one being found in years. We're in luck."

Other red planes commenced raining down. Soon the field was covered with them, as policeman after policeman came up to inspect the find. Apparently the original discoverers had broadcast the news. But no one molested Cynthia or Winchester further. It was evident they were awaiting the arrival of some higher-up.

He was not long in coming. A cigar-shaped vessel with stubby wings made its appearance in the skies. It was banded like a hornet, with alternate rings of black and gold. It made a smooth landing as had the others, and in the very midst of them.

A tall handsome man of the same Mongol-Nordic hybrid type stepped out, accompanied by another. The first was dressed elegantly in yellow silk robes ornamented with a profusion of dark jewels. The other wore yellow silk, too, but it was striped with red.

"Prince Lohan!" shouted the senior police officer, and all fell on their faces.

The kow-tow, evidently, was required of everyone. The exceptions in this case were Winchester, who could not, and Cynthia, who would not. She stood glaring defiantly at the prince who had come to look at her.

"Ah," said he presently, after inspecting her as coolly as if she had been some rare and costly species of newfound animal. "Send her to the School of Arts and Graces. Have her brought

before me again at the next annual Palace competition. Dispense with her examination. I would not have her marred. We will find out what we want from the man."

His gorgeously robed companion bowed deeply.

"As for him, take him to the nearest magistrate—that will be in New Vienna. After the quiz, carry out the usual sentence for those striking one of my officers. Take care to keep him alive, though. I am curious to know where these masterless slaves come from."

Again the aide nodded. Then he made a suggestion on his own.

"And the usual roundup of your Excellency's own slaves to find out who has been harboring this pair?"

"Of course," snapped Prince Lohan.

He strode back to his ship and disappeared within. It rose at once and was out of sight in a few seconds. The motionless police kneeling on the ground rose at a signal given by the attendant whom Lohan had left behind. Winchester noticed now that not all of them were of the Mongoloid type. Many seemed normal Westerners of his own background. Perhaps not all of them were destined to be slaves.

The prince's adjutant hurled out orders. The police went into action. One drew a stumpy, conical instrument and leveled it at Cynthia. There was the faintest hint of a swift, rose-colored spark, and the girl wilted and fell unconscious. Two of the police picked her up and carried her to one of the ships.

Two others lifted Winchester and flung him into a seat, where they fastened him with a strap to keep him from falling out. In another moment the entire flotilla took the air.

CHAPTER IV

Moonward Bound

New Vienna was but a village. Winchester could see it plainly as the flying machine slid down from the heights. There was a cluster of a score or more small houses nestling beside the Danube, and in their midst was one large masonry building. Before it was an empty square, and behind it another on which a few of the planes were already alighting.

Winchester's captors unloosed the paralysis that held him sufficiently for him to clamber out of the plane and walk with them from the parking lot to the front entrance of the edifice. As he rounded a corner his eye lit on the polished granite cornerstone.

The inscription read:

DEDICATED 3012 A.D.

He and Cynthia had slept a thousand years! And more, for the building was anything but new.

He was given no opportunity to speculate further as to the exact year they had awakened in. He was already up the steps and passing through the grim portals into the audience chamber of the magistrate. His examination was about to begin.

With swift efficiency the police stripped him of his chamois garment. Then, naked as he was, they strapped him into a high-backed straight chair. One trooper plunged a needle into his arm, another fastened a small aromatic capsule to his upper lip and secured it there with a sort of glue. The Mongoloid magistrate looked on with a savage scowl.

A surge of warmth pervaded Winchester's body. He felt a sudden inexplicable yearning to tell these people everything he knew. They had only to ask. But as if to make assurance doubly certain, another trooper stepped up and touched his neck with a slender silver instrument.

At once the courtroom seemed to burst into a million blobs of fiery light. An unbearable agony racked Winchester's whole being. Despite his efforts to suppress it, he screamed wildly, wishing only for sudden death.

The policeman withdrew the glittering point and the pain ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He stepped around before his prisoner and scrutinized his eyeballs. Then he turned to the magistrate.

"Ready, Excellency. The anti-inhibition serum has taken hold, and he absorbs the sensory stimulant well. His magnification of pain is enormous, and he can stand any amount of it without fainting. Will your Excellency please to proceed?"

"Where was your last hiding place, slave," asked the judge harshly, "and how long were you in it?"

"A cellar under the ruins of Munich," answered Winchester in a dull monotone, "since the year Nineteen forty-one."

"Rebellious fool and liar," snarled the judge. "How dare you address the court with such flippancy? There is no such place as Munich. It is now eighteen hundred and seventy-nine years since the birth of our glorious hero-conqueror—the Great Khan Ghengiz, our god and founder!"

At a motion from the magistrate the policeman gestured with his silvery instrument. He touched it lightly to Winchester's left shoulder, then drew a line straight down to the wrist. The sensation was exactly that of having a red-hot knife plunged into the deltoid muscle and then drawn along the bones, splitting the arm downward. Yet the point left no mark, and the excruciating pain vanished as soon as it was withdrawn.

Winchester tried desperately to concentrate on mental arithmetic. He remembered vaguely that Genghis Khan had flourished about the year 1200. That and eighteen hundred seventy-nine brought the total to somewhere above three thousand. It confirmed the date he had seen on the cornerstone. His sleep had been for more than a thousand years!

But his mind could not blank out the agony of the fiendish torture now being inflicted upon him. Cold sweat stood out on his taut muscles. The magistrate kept up his merciless questioning while the trooper drew quick, searing lines across the hapless prisoner's torso. Yet, despite his anguish, which

drove him to attempt any answer that might be pleasing to the judge, Winchester could only stick to his story. The truth-compelling serum was too much for him.

"Bah!" snorted the magistrate at last. "He is a hard one. It is too bad we cannot give him the second degree, but Prince Lohan has ordered he be kept alive. Take him to the Moon. We'll let him cull meteors for a year or two. Perhaps by then he'll talk. Next!"

The next was a miserable group of slaves, similar to the one who had operated the lawn-mower. In fact, the unhappy wreck of a man was one of them. But there was one slave who did not fawn and cringe. He was a tall, bald old man with a piercing eye and a patriarchal beard. He bore himself with an air of authority and dignity in striking contrast to the cheap slave's garb he wore. He stepped without hesitation before the magistrate.

"Excellency," he said, tapping his forehead with a finger, "my grandson is one of the weak-minded. It is for that reason that I have kept him hidden since babyhood—and his sister. It would have brought shame upon my household."

"Ha!" exclaimed the judge. "Shame on a slave's household—how droll!"

The old man stared back at him in patient dignity.

"These other men of my community, of which his lordship was kind enough to give me the sub-mayorship, have known nothing of my deception. They are innocent of wrong-doing. The fault is mine and mine alone."

"It matters not," cried the judge harshly. "The law of the Khan is just. The law of the Khan must be obeyed! The rule is that wherever an unbranded slave is found, the headman of the village and every tenth man in it shall be doomed to hard-labor on the Moon. Your effort at evasion is of no avail. Officer! Take them away."

Never would Allan Winchester forget his cruel examination. Nor could he rid from his mind the sentence he must now serve.

The forehold of the prison ship was a dreary place. The twelve condemned ordinary slaves of the Lohan estate sat on hard benches and stared stupidly at the floor.

Presently the aged patriarch spoke to Winchester.

"You wonder at my seeming sacrifice, my son? I did it, not for you, but for these poor villagers of mine. I preferred to lie while there was yet time."

"I see," said Winchester. "I'm sorry I brought this on you. I did not know."

"It does not matter," said the old man with resignation. "I have lived enough. Too long. Of all these I am the only one who knows and remembers the wonderful days before *They* came."

"They?"

"Yes. The rulers, these men from the plateaus of Central Asia, who wormed themselves into places of power and then betrayed their trust. Until then we had enjoyed ten centuries of peace and civilization; we had evolved a veritable Utopia. There was no

strife or ambition, except for the better good of all. There was enough for everybody and to spare, while each man did what he was best suited for and received what he needed for his health and happiness.

"We perfected interplanetary travel and colonized and developed the distant bodies. We moved all our machinery and heavy industry to the Moon, where people worked a short term each year, then returned to Earth to enjoy their leisure period. The Earth then, as now, was a garden, except that it was for the use of all, not a small, self-chosen few."

Winchester's face was puzzled.

"But why," he demanded, "did so many yield to the few?"

"Because," replied the old man sadly, "we did not know how to defend ourselves. There were no weapons. For many generations the doctrine of brute force had been held to be abhorrent. Consequently, when this new breed of conquerors arose, we were caught by surprise. They were a small group, never quite assimilated to the single race that is now a blend of all those that existed before."

"But again, why?" insisted Winchester. "If conditions were so perfect, why should anybody rebel?"

The patriarch's eyes became sad and dispirited.

"There was a Mongoloid by the name of Hanu Sho-Tang, who had an overweening ambition and an imperious will. He was an able man, and had advanced to be the commander of a large spaceship, but the Regents of Transportation judged him to be

unfit for further advancement—he was too dictatorial and harsh to his subordinates to fit our system.

"So he sulked and schemed and sowed discontent among those of similar disposition whom he knew. Above all he read. There were history books then—it was not until he became the Khan that he had them burned."

The patriarch pronounced the title almost in a whisper, and glanced anxiously about him. But none of the other slaves were attentive. They merely sat in stupid despair. He went on.

"He came upon the old histories of the distant past, when there were separate nations and men fought bloody, useless and inconclusive wars. He found the biography of a cruel conqueror named Genghis Khan, and the life-stories of other would-be conquerors—such ineffectual imitators as Napoleon and a creature called Hitler. From your testimony in court, that man must have been about your time."

Winchester nodded with a gleam in his eyes.

"The Mongoloid absorbed the philosophies of those men. He declared himself to be the direct descendant of the original Great Khan, and began to spread his doctrines. His own kind accepted them eagerly, and I am ashamed to say, so did many of our own race. It was easy after that for them to seize the supreme power."

He stopped talking and stared out the port.

"There is no hope," mumbled the old man brokenly.

"There is always hope!" said Winchester fiercely. His eyes lit up with the fire of resolution.

He felt a gnarled hand seize him, and was surprised at the warmth and vigor of its grip.

"Ah," said the old man. "If I were only young again!"

"Be young in spirit, then," Winchester challenged. "We shall have work to do!"

He thought of Cynthia then—Cynthia, a slave girl. The blood rushed angrily to his face, and he had to clench his fists to keep them quiet.

CHAPTER V

Break for Liberty

The area below was vast, and at first sight featureless. It was one of the tracts of the Moon known in the old days as "seas." But as the spaceship prison van approached nearer, Allan Winchester saw that the plain was pimpled over with small hemispherical mounds. Each was ringed with a faint aura of greenish light and connected with neighboring mounds by other slender beams of the same pale rays.

For awhile the ship approached no closer, but spiraled about the Moon as she lost velocity. The convex line of the horizon

rolled slowly toward them, as if the Moon was a gigantic ball turning ponderously over. A string of immense craters came into view, and their slopes were studded with hundreds of minor ones.

Winchester saw that many were domed. He understood then why it was that when he had first seen them from the mouth of his cave in Munich, the satellite had appeared set with sparkling jewels. For the domes were of all shapes and colors, some spherical, some ellipsoidal and others polyhedral, showing many glistening facets.

"That is Tycho," pointed the old man to one larger than the rest, crested with a translucent dome that shimmered like polished mother-of-pearl. "In it is the great city of Cosmopolis, the largest in the System. There are the dormitories of the industrial slaves, the textile mills and many machine shops.

"The variegated colors show where the foreign quarters are, where the Martians and the Venusians live, and so on, each under his own planetary conditions. Beyond it, on that pinnacle, is the Great Observatory, one of the five located on the Moon."

"How do you know these things?" queried Winchester.

"I served here for thirty years," sighed the patriarch. "When my strength and skill failed, they reduced me to a domestic slave and sent me back to Earth to be headman of Prince Lohan's cattle herd."

The ship headed down into a vast, undomed crater. There were many spaceships of various size squatting here and there on its bottom. Ungainly, high-wheeled vehicles were to be seen

crawling to and from them. What appeared to be row upon row of iridescent soap bubbles, clinging to the base of the ten-thousand-foot cliffs that ringed the landing field, proved on closer approach as many small domes.

"Grand Central Station," explained the aged headman. "The huge interplanetary liners take off and arrive here—the gravity is so much less than on Earth. Passengers from Earth come over on small ferries like this one. Freighters have a port of their own, near the mining and smelter craters, and the Space Fleet uses the Military Base in Proclus, where the Academy and the Grand Arsenal are."

His words were cut short as they were hurled against the glassine visiport by the sudden increment of deceleration. For a moment Winchester was too dazed to see anything clearly. When he looked again, the prison van was gliding to a smooth stop not far from a grim, gray dome. At once, one of the awkward, high-wheeled buggies slid out of a portal in the dome's side and rolled toward them.

"A ground tender," grunted the old man. "Saves putting everybody in space-suits. There's no air out there."

In a moment two guards came in, ray-guns drawn and in hand.

"Fall in, slaves," one cried. "About face! March."

In double rank the condemned slaves shambled ahead into a corridor, turned a corner and went through the ship's lateral spacelock. Coupled to it was a bridge leading to the wheeled tenders. Winchester and the aged patriarch brought up the rear, doors clanged behind them. The tender lurched and rumbled off,

its wheels bumping grittily over the irregular crater bottom.

Winchester cast a look about the chamber he was now in. It was cubical, all steel. There was no opening whatever, except the now closed outer door by which they had come in, though there were small lenses set in the plating of the polished wall opposite. These were probably peepholes through which the prisoners could be watched or counted. There could be no escape.

The van jolted on, then stopped jerkily. The clang of interlocking metal broke the silence. Then the door slid back again, revealing a short, arched corridor, lined with guards.

"Single file, swine," bawled the nearest trooper. "When you come to the sacred mark in the pavement kneel and show your marks."

The leading peasant shuffled forward, his shoulders stooped and his dull gaze fixed on the pavement a yard ahead of him, as was required of slaves. The rest of the poor wrecks followed. As they reached the place where a golden sunburst was embedded in the concrete floor, each paused and made a kow-tow, while a policeman noted the symbols on his back and checked them against his list.

"Hey!" yelled the recorder, on examining the third one. "Whoever put this guy's marks on did a sloppy job. Touch 'em up—make the figures more distinct."

The entire line was halted while the wretch was dragged out and strapped, moaning, to a crosslike structure of steel in a niche. He faced the wall while the guards brought up a machine

mounted on a rolling tripod. The policeman consulted the record, set certain knobs, and focused. He tripped a switch and lavender fire flashed out of the brander, retracing the faded distinguishing numerals.

The man screamed once, then dangled helplessly in his bonds. Winchester saw and sickened. He had no brand as yet. If he was to escape, it was now or never.

He waited until it came his turn to kneel and bump his face to the sunburst set in the floor. Until that instant he had imitated the slovenly, hopeless shamble of the beaten slaves ahead of him. But out of the corner of his eye he had stolen glimpses of the guards about him. They were lolling contemptuously against the wall, serene in the belief that these trapped creatures were so spineless that they could be trusted to follow the routine like blind sheep.

Allan Winchester went into action like a springing leopard. He jerked up his head, saw at one swift glance that he was on the threshold of a vast circular open space on the order of an ancient coliseum. Groups of gray-clad slaves huddled in spots on the sands of its floor. Many doors led off it, and only a few were visibly guarded.

Winchester sprang sideward, snatching the weapon from the surprised hand of the guard that stood nearest to him. With a bound he leaped past and into the arena, then turned sharply and ran along one of its curving walls.

Shouts rose behind him, as the startled guards comprehended that a slave had been so audacious as to break out of line, snatch

a gun and run away. Winchester heard the faint spitting of deadly rays. Violet streaks of light hurtled past him and ricocheted from the stones ahead, leaving mushy-looking incandescent spots wherever they hit.

He ducked low and dodged into the first door he came to. An astonished guard, who had been sitting on a stool just inside the arch, half rose, only to be butted sprawling as Winchester, still charging head down, collided full force with him.

Winchester staggered five strides beyond, then recovered his balance and sprinted on. He barely made the turn ahead, when once more the hissing streams of electronic fire came lashing after him. Before him lay a maze of twisting passages, along which were closed doors. He dared not stop to test any, but dodged onward, ever turning just ahead of the hot fire of his pursuers.

Gongs began to ring and sirens wail. A new guard jumped out into the passage dead ahead of him and leveled a weapon.

Winchester checked his headlong flight and slid to a stop, jerking to one side, just as the guard pulled his trigger. A flash, much like that of a single bolt of lightning, flared through the spot he had just side-stepped, spent itself against the wall at the far end of the corridor with a spatter of blinding light and an ear-splitting crash. Fervently hoping that pressure on the trigger was all he needed, Winchester lifted his own weapon and pointed it at his adversary. He squeezed.

Involuntarily he closed his eyes, for the effect was blinding, almost stunning. He blinked them open. There was nothing

ahead of him, except a wreath of acrid smoke and the charred stumps of two shins sticking up out of a pair of boots. The rest of the guard had disintegrated!

Winchester shuddered and ran on, clinging lovingly to his weapon. It gave him an assurance he had not had before. He turned more corners but though the gongs kept on clanging, no one else appeared to halt him. Finally, winded and panting, he stopped to take stock. He realized suddenly that for some seconds now there had been no avenging pursuers behind him. That realization, instead of being cheering, somehow seemed ominous.

The gongs that had been ringing abruptly ceased. A new set of a different tone clanged twice, then went silent. Down the corridor a red lamp in a socket blazed up, winked twice and went out. Winchester did not know what these new signals signified, but he took the first turn and began to run again.

Then violent and numbing pain seized him. He gasped out one strangled moan and fell. Then he knew he was lying there rigid, struck down by the same sort of force that had laid him low when he met the first policeman. He was paralyzed. Helpless. He listened, expecting to hear onrushing guards. But to his ears there came no sound.

He was down, frozen, pinned no doubt by an ambush ray. Perhaps no one would ever come. Why should they? What worse could they do to him?

CHAPTER VI

The Meteor-Cullers

When Allan Winchester came to his full senses again, he was sitting in a relatively small room on a bench. Other men were there with him, but for awhile he was too sick and dazed to notice them.

It had been a fiendishly cruel twenty hours or so since they found him and bore him off to the torture chamber. First they had spreadeagled him face down and applied his distinguishing numerals, which in itself had been an ordeal of the first magnitude.

After that they had submitted him to the same torture given in the courtroom at his first hearing. When they had tired of that, they subjected him to yet others—all different, and all unbearable.

Now he sat waiting dazedly for whatever was to follow next. Presently he was able to take more notice of those about him. They were men like himself, non-Mongoloids, or of the slave class. But they were quite different from the spiritless creatures who had been his companions on the trip from New Vienna to the Moon.

These men swaggered and boasted and gloated over their "crimes." They, evidently, were high-spirited men and unbreakable short of death itself. Indeed, Winchester later came to know their designation, as well as his own. They formed the

fast-dwindling rearguard of individualism. They were known as the Incurrigibles.

One came over and examined Winchester's raw back. It was easy to do, for none wore more clothes than a simple canvas girdle.

"Aha, fellows!" he shouted. "A new member for our club. See, he's been awarded the Red Star, and his number is higher even than Teddy's."

To show Winchester what he meant, he turned his own back and displayed his markings. Surcharged over the faint bluish script that made up his personal designation was a glaring crimson star and beneath it a numeral, also in red.

"Super-criminal, that means," the fellow grinned, turning back. "My name's Heim—ex-chief chemist of North American Plastics. I had a good job for a while in the labs in Copernicus, but they jugged me time after time for minor nonconformity. Finally I burned down an AFPA man and they hung the Red Star on me.

"But what the devil! Let 'em do their worst. I'd rather have it that way than go to their confounded Crater of Dreams and work for them for the next half century!"

"Sh-h-h, you fool!" hissed another. "Don't you know they are listening? Or do you really want to go to the Crater of Dreams?"

"Maybe I do," said Heim mockingly, "and maybe that's my play. Let's see if they are clever enough to work it out." He winked at Winchester.

Winchester grinned back. He liked the fellow, though he had little idea of what he was talking about. The man stood before him, cheerful and unsubdued, notwithstanding the hard lines on his face that told all too plainly that he had suffered fiendishly contrived tortures.

"You're way ahead of me, boys," Winchester managed painfully.

He suddenly discovered that his jaws were nearly locked as the aftermath of a certain treatment called by the guards the "Q-27." In the kaleidoscope of torture, he had forgot the one which seared the tongue and made every tooth ache abominably.

"But," he went on, "I'm one of you. Where do we go from here?"

Heim shrugged.

"You never know. They like to play with you cat-and-mouse style. But I can tell you one thing. Making a break like you did the other day won't buy you anything. They always get you in the end. Every few feet along these corridor walls is a concealed paralysis-ray projector, worked by distant control.

"Guards and trusties are warned by signal lights and gongs. They step clear and wait, while we poor devils rush right into the rays. After that, it is easy to pick you up and give you the works."

"I see," said Winchester, realizing how futile his break had been. At the same time he drew a grim satisfaction in recalling that he had cut one of the scoundrels down.

Presently guards swarmed in, alert and vigilant, for they knew the desperate type of men they had to deal with.

"Okay, you hard guys," said the leader, "on your toes. We'll give you a chance to work off some steam. Fall in, single file."

They went to the meteor fields in the airtight buggies used to convey air-breathers across the undomed areas. There were many stops as they came to the barriers formed by the pale green horizontal rays. At making certain code signals, the ray disappeared long enough to permit the cart to proceed and then showed up again behind it.

"Force walls," whispered Heim into Winchester's ear. "They are impenetrable and burn like fire. The whole plain is crisscrossed with them and each slave hut is surrounded by them. It is their control system and unbeatable."

Winchester looked out glumly, but with deep interest. He counted the barriers they crossed and noted there were more than twenty. In between lay wastes of cracked and shattered granite bedrock, strewn with gravel and metallic boulders. He saw many lines of rails with small flat-cars standing on sidings, and once he noticed a group of slaves laboriously pushing one that was piled high with meteoric matter.

At length they came to a heavily armored dome in the midst of the field. There the cargo of fresh human victims was unloaded. In the grueling days that followed, Winchester came to learn the system well.

Each dome held dormitories and kitchens for the slaves, and guard rooms for their supervisors. In the center of each was a

huge hopper into which the flat-cars were dumped. Winchester was given to understand that the hopper fed the loads to a subway freight system, connecting all the domes and the smelters beyond the field. The domes themselves were surrounded by rings of force, which were only broken to let the cullers in and out.

As for the cullers, the rule was simplicity itself. They were sent out in groups, unguarded, clad in armored suits containing water and air enough for twenty hours' operation. If, within twenty hours, they brought back as many tons of ore, they were admitted to the dome and given food and rest, then sent out again. If not, they stayed outside to die of asphyxiation or thirst.

When the sun was shining, the plain was blindingly bright and searingly hot. When the sun was on the far side, all was bleak and biting cold. And unceasingly the cullers were subjected to the hazard of pelting meteors, which fell with terrific velocity and usually burst into a thousand hurtling fragments on impact.

"You see," explained Heim one day, "the whole set-up of these fields is to protect the domed craters. There are towers set at strategic points, which set up magnetic strains in the void overhead, attracting all the loose stuff to these chosen areas. The meteor falls are so heavy and so constant, these areas would soon be buried deep unless the fragments were continually picked up and carted away.

"Our rulers combine the need of doing that with punishment of criminals, so they send us. The mortality is terrific, but who cares? There are plenty of us. Besides, they get quite a lot of valuable by-products, such as platinum, iridium and diamonds."

Winchester gritted his teeth and hung on.

One night, after a quota haul done in less than ten hours, he and Heim and others were gathered around the mess table, singing. A former spaceship hand had made a guitar of sorts out of scraps of wood and bits of wire, and it was he who strummed the accompaniment.

The gaiety was forced, because all were dead tired, but they acted their parts vigorously, knowing that it irritated the guards to see any reaction but cowed misery.

Heim would lead off, and all would join in the refrain, thumping merrily on the table.

Oh, have you seen my Martian love,
The one that is so sweet?
She's feathered like a turtle-dove
With pseudopoda for feet.
Oh, she's grand, she's tops, she's neat,
She's a monster, sure—but awfully sweet!
Oh, have you seen my Martian girl,
The one that is so fair,
And note how quaintly her antennae curl,
How wondrous green her hair?
Oh, have you seen my Martian maid,
The one I love so well?
Her snout plates are of purest jade,
To match her tummy scale.

They all jumped up and did a snake dance around the room,

bellowing out the refrain while amazed guards looked on. A petty officer quietly sneaked from the room, a worried look on his face. The next stanza was led off by Winchester.

Oh, have you seen that Martian lass,
The one who drives me wild?
Her breath is purest methane gas
and leaves me quite beguiled.
Oh, have you seen my Martian belle,
The one with the lidless eyes?
It's true she cannot kiss so well,
But—golly, boy!—she tries!
Oh, she's grand, she's tops, she's swell,
She's a monster—

Suddenly the clamor of a gong drowned the song. A door slid open and a fully armed captain of the guards stood on the threshold.

"We have been watching you men," announced the guard captain, after an ominous pause, "and it appears we have been too easy on you. I have reported the matter to the Commandant and he agrees that other duty is in order. The van is at the portal. Fall in—and stand at attention! As your numbers are called, step forward."

CHAPTER VII

Transplanted Planet

No inmate of the ferrous industry's big No. 4 plant ever saw the massive dome that covered it. All one could see, looking upward from the grimy crater floor, were rolling clouds of sulfurous smoke lit by the glare of blast furnaces, or the riotous shower of sparks as some ingot mold overflowed.

Gigantic rollers flattened out the white-hot billets fed to them, or squeezed them into strange shapes. The place had a strong flavor of the Inferno of the ancients, and the illusion was completed by the occasional glimpse of half-naked, sweating men tending the hot machines.

These were the condemned, and perched in elevated nests about the place were the demons—the ever-present slave guards.

Winchester had a place in it. Stripped to his loin cloth, he tended a huge stamp that pounded and roared, crushing the endless stream of iron-oxide brought to it by a conveyor. From the stamp the rusty fragments flowed over sorting screens, and then fell into squat gondolas crawling along on the tracks beneath.

From time to time a ponderous, atomic-powered locomotive would come and drag away the loaded cars. For days Winchester watched the spectacle in dull wonder. Iron-rust deliberately produced in oxygen furnaces and exported by the millions of cubic yards! And this in a place where virgin metallic iron could be had for the picking up, and oxygen

literally worth its weight in diamonds!

Something nudged Winchester, and he heard a shout in his ear.

"Let that go!" yelled a guard, cupping his hands to make himself heard above the din. "Get down on the floor—a new detail for you!"

Winchester nodded and dropped the wrench he had in his hand. He had learned the folly of resisting every little order. He must save his fight for the really big issue that was sure to come. That is, if he could only stick it out long enough.

He clambered down the rickety ladders to the cinder-strewn floor. A three-hundred-car train of loaded cars blocked any further movement except along the track. Another guard jerked a thumb and Winchester turned in that direction.

Hundreds of feet along, he came to another group of guards standing beside what proved to be the last car of the train. They motioned for him to climb its steps and enter. He did, and noted with mild surprise that its doors were fitted with gaskets and holding-down dogs, and that the car windows were similarly equipped. In fact, the caboose had more the appearance of a ship's compartment than of a railroad coach.

Winchester settled himself without a word on one of the longitudinal benches. There were other convicts with him—red star men, all—but none he knew. They were big huskies and apparently inured to hard labor. Bundles of short-handled scoops tied with wire filled the rear corner of the car.

Presently a guard came in and closed and sealed the doors

and ports. The train slowly started off. It proceeded a little way, then stopped. After that it went on, but in utter darkness, until after a time it emerged into the brilliant light of the sun-flooded Lunar plain.

"A life-size airlock, that," commented one of the prisoners.

"Yeah," agreed the man next to him. "Smack through the crater rim. Wonder what's up?"

"Dunno. Heard something about their building a new Martian Embassy over in Sevinus. His nibs, the ambassador, gets homesick for his deserts. That's what all this rust is for, I think. It costs plenty, but what of it? He's got it. Married a sister of that slant-eyed Prince Lohan, I hear—"

"Pipe down, you two," snarled a guard, and the conversation stopped.

The train skirted the plain, which was evidently one of the meteor-bombarded areas, then crawled through foothills of small craters. It came in due course to a steep mountain and entered a deep tunnel. Again there was darkness and a long stop. The guards undogged the ports and threw them open. Winchester took a deep breath of the new air and found it mildly exhilarating. It was thin and dry and also cool.

An ex-spaceman sniffed knowingly.

"Yep. It's Mars, all right."

When the train came out into the crater itself, Winchester's surprised eyes were treated to a sight he had often dreamed of in

his earlier existence, but never thought he would live to see.

The dome-workers had done their job and gone. Overhead was what looked to be a dusty, dirty-greenish sky; and through some trick of refraction, the oversized Sun of Luna had been reduced to the hazy, dimmer spot of light it seems to be from Mars.

The crater floor was already covered for miles with leveled iron-rust. It shimmered with the ruddy, characteristic color of the fourth planet.

Further on they came to mounds and dumps of rust which had not yet been spread. Slave-operated tractors were at work, dragging it away with giant scrapers, and supervisors carrying photographs were showing them where and how to shape it into the mounds and hummocks that abound in the Martian desert.

The work-train pulled on beyond a little way and then began to dump its load. Off toward the center of the crater, Winchester could see a group of pyramidal stone buildings crawling with workmen. That, he presumed, was to be the new Martian Embassy.

"Don't need any more spreaders," said a guard, coming up. "Take these guys over to the West Portal and put 'em to work there. A shipment of stuff is due from the Botanical Gardens and is gotta be planted around. Tricky things, them Martian plants—you always wind up with less men than you started with. So be sure you put your tough eggs on the job, men you won't mind losing."

"I gotcha," said the train guard, grinning. "Well, they can have

this whole lot and never squeeze a tear out of my eye." He turned to his charges. "Come on, you bozos. Pick up those shovels and march. We're legging it across to the other side."

Hours later the dusty convicts were brought to a weary halt beside a string of flat-cars.

"Here you go," said a man, coming out from behind the cars.

He was tall and thin, wore horn-rimmed glasses and looked more like a college professor than conductor of a work-train. He was not a Mongoloid, but he bore himself with authority.

"Thirty choice Martian phygrices here. They go into those holes. Handle 'em with care, they're man-eating. But whatever you do, don't burn one down. Those are strict orders from the Director himself. They're very valuable and rare specimens."

He poked a receipt for the plants at the convict guard.

"Sign this and I'll go on back to the Botanical Gardens and send up some moss. In an hour or so you'll get a train of desert goats. Feed them to these plants after they're bedded in. Two goats to a phygrix is about right. S'long."

He pocketed the signed receipt for the cargo and swung himself up into the cab of the waiting locomotive. Winchester looked from him to the boxed plants with interest. Each plant bore a sign.

Martian pitcher-plant.
Dangerous!
Handle with caution.

"What's dangerous about 'em?" asked a convict.

"How do I know?" replied the guard. "Watch your step, that's all. Grab a couple of loose rails over there and let's skid 'em onto the ground and have a look at them."

Winchester examined one of the plants after it was on the ground and unboxed, but he failed to see anything hazardous-looking about it. The thing had a fat, bulbous root some ten feet in diameter that was covered with a leathery skin. Its upper part consisted of a number of fleshy leaves of from six to eight feet in length, temporarily bound together with turns of wire rope.

The gang slid them one by one across the gravelly waste, and lowered them into their holes. By quitting time the entire thirty had been transplanted and the backfill done. Winchester and another man began taking the ropes off the bound leaves. "Hold on," he warned, as he loosened the last knot. "Let's get out of reach before we unwind them."

He jumped back a good ten feet, holding the stray end of the line in his hand. For being so close, he could not miss the fetid breath of the thing, knew without doubt that the plant was carnivorous. But at the same time, Winchester thought he understood its method of attack.

Each of the fleshy leaves terminated in what was the caricature of a human hand. A tough, horny palm divided on one side into three muscular fingers. Growing out of the other side was an opposed thumb.

As the bonds were loosened, the fingers and thumbs kept opening and closing spasmodically, and tremors could be felt running up the leafy arms.

From the safe distance where he stood, Winchester began hauling the slack line to him and making it up into a coil. Meanwhile, the released leaves began to weave about and thresh the air, as if warming up after their long confinement.

"I'd hate to have that thing grab me," remarked his fellow convict.

"Yeah," agreed Winchester, looking dubiously at the menacing clump of leaves.

He was wondering how a plant that smelled so vilely could induce any living thing to come within its reach. An ambush as obvious as that of the phygrix seemed to him to be a poor one. He would have thought nature did things better.

Winchester retrieved and coiled all the line and turned to walk away. Down the track, he noticed that most of the other plants had been untied and the convicts were moving back toward the train. Apparently all had seen the danger as quickly as he had, for there was none of the excitement that would have been attendant on the struggle of one of them with a clutching phygrix.

Something whizzed by the American's head, narrowly missing his ear. Then another, and another. A heavy stone struck him sharply between the shoulder blades and he stumbled and fell.

At the same time, a veritable hail of gravel and small rocks

began pelting the ground all about him.

He scrambled to his feet, saw that his companion was down and unconscious, bleeding from a deep cut in the head. He picked him up and staggered on a few paces, then went down himself, struck from behind again.

Winchester was unconscious but a moment. He blinked and pulled himself up to a sitting posture. For the first time, he saw the source of the barrage of missiles. The pitcher-plants had gone into action! Their hand-tipped leaves were wildly swooping and grasping the small stones that lay near them. They hurled the stones with deadly accuracy at everything in the vicinity that moved.

From the inner recesses of the plant cluster, slender, slimy antennae snaked out. These were long—sixty feet or longer—and while some retrieved and brought back the hurled stones for further casting, others groped the ground for unconscious victims.

Winchester was appalled to see one of the feelers wrap itself around the form of a convict off to his left. He turned his head quickly, just in time to see another of the antennae slithering toward him.

Dizzy and bleeding though he was, he managed to stagger to his feet, with his companion's body thrown across his shoulder. He must have made another ten feet of retreat good when one last well-aimed stone brought him down. Things in his vision swirled madly a moment and then went black.

CHAPTER VIII

An Old Enemy

The clickety-clack of wheels on rail joints was the first sound Winchester recognized. Then he knew he was lying on his back on one of the benches in the caboose. He heard the low voices of grumbling convicts.

"The dirty heels!" one was saying. "They wouldn't pull a trigger to fry one of those plants, but they'd burn us down as soon as look at us. 'Valuable plants,' the rat said, 'strict orders not to hurt 'em.' Huh!"

"How many guys did they get?"

"Six. And there woulda been two more if this fellow didn't have what it takes."

Winchester opened his eyes. The bruises and cuts smarted, but he sat up. Someone had put crude bandages on him, after dragging him out of the reach of the pitcher-plant.

"Where to now?" he asked.

"Central Receiving—same place you landed when you first came out. It's close by and a handier place to lock us for the rest period than to put up camps in the desert. Oh, we'll be back. There's more funny stuff to be planted in that crater before his nibs, the Martian ambassador, thinks it looks like Home, Sweet

Home. Not only plants but animals. Like neuriverons, for example."

"Neuriverons?"

"Yeah—Martian thrill-suckers. A kind of mosquito. It's what they call 'anaelectric.' That's the opposite of electric. Instead of giving off current, they live on it. They're tough on exposed wiring, and can drill anything but armored cable. They like human currents, too—that's why they call 'em neuriverons.

"A cloud of 'em will pester you, buzzing and stinging, until you get fighting mad. Then they close up and sink their drills into you—into nerves, if they can find 'em. Ten or twelve will drive a man into fits. Some people go stark crazy. A comfy place, Mars is!"

But Winchester learned no more about Mars that day. The train was slowing for the airlock. In a few minutes he would be back at the place where he first started as a branded criminal.

A gate guard checked off each man as he entered, and another handed each his ration for the day—a greasy black pellet compounded of just the food elements needed, and no more. This and an occasional swig of synthetic water was all the nourishment a convict rated. In the hydroponic gardens of Hipparchus, they said, vegetables of every sort grew profusely. But these were for the masters.

The detail filed on into the circular open space under the main dome and threw themselves down on the sand. They could sleep or rest so many hours, then their trick would go on again. Winchester was glad to notice his friend Heim, squatting in

another group not ten yards away.

"How ya doing?" grinned Heim, looking at the American's bandages.

Heim held out his own hands for exhibition. They were stained to the elbows a brilliant, bilious green. Winchester took a look around, saw no guards were watching, so he rolled across the intervening space and joined his former gang-mate. For an hour they chatted, comparing notes.

Heim was working at the quarantine station. For a week he had been dipping Uranian trabblenuts in a strongly antiseptic fluid, so as to rid them of the dangerous mold spores originating in that far-off planet. Due to some peculiarity of the trabblenut's shell, it was a job that had to be done by hand. An interplanetary fruiter had just brought in ten thousand tons of them.

As they talked on about various topics, Winchester learned more details of the warped civilization into which he had blundered. All his race, for one thing, were not slaves or convicts by any means. There were many classes and gradations.

In Cosmopolis, the industrial center, nearly all the key posts were held by Westerners. They lived on a decent scale, and the more important of them were even allowed a domestic slave or so. From the so-called "free labor" class, up to the superintendents, men were holding the same jobs they would have held before the Mongoloids took over.

"The difference is," explained Heim, "that our fathers worked only a tenth as hard and got more for it. But in those days, they

produced the necessities and common luxuries, not the useless expensive things these present-day rulers want. Imagine having an embroidered carpet a mile square made for use at a single garden party, to be burned afterwards because it is soiled with spilled wine and food!"

Winchester growled softly.

"Of course," Heim went on, "there is still plenty of useful work done. For that even the Mongoloids need technicians, so they let people of that class pretty much alone. That goes for scientists and a lot of other specialists. The rule is that if you are useful to them, you get by. You could get out of here in twenty-four hours if you would play their game."

"Like what?"

"Turn stool, if you can't do anything else. A lot of these guards got their start that way."

"When I sell my soul," said Winchester, "it will be for a better price than any you've mentioned."

Just then there was a commotion at the outer door. After a moment's delay, a strange-looking group of men was brought in and led across the arena. They were accompanied by guards, but it was plain to see that they were not slaves; nor did they have the hard, strained look of convicts.

Moreover, most of them were richly dressed. Their costumes were of gay-colored silks and satins, in many cases embroidered with gold lace. They staggered as they walked, as if slightly tipsy, and here and there a solicitous guard offered a

helping hand.

"There is still another class," whispered Heim, pointing. "These are artists. That fellow in the white velvet is a great composer. The guy directly behind him is a poet. The rest are sculptors, dramatists, novelists and such. For one reason or another, they are washed up and through with conscious life.

"They are on their way now to the Crater of Dreams. They will never work again, but from now on will live in a golden haze created by their own imagination—maybe for years and years."

Winchester looked puzzled.

"It's the dope-pit they're going to, to put it another way," Heim explained. "A place filled with wild Venusian Lotus. Lotus fruit will keep a man alive indefinitely, but its fumes are maddening. Once a man has been exposed to it, he becomes an incurable addict. After that he only lives to dream.

"Look!" Heim exclaimed a moment later.

Now the intellectuals were retracing their steps to the port by which they had entered. But whereas they were bareheaded when they first came, now each wore a gleaming helmet. The metal covered only the top and back of the skull. A metallic chin-strap held it on, leaving the features uncovered and free.

"There's the answer. Those helmets are locked on. They are telepath-transmitters, and each has its own special wavelength. The overlord who owns an artist is given the corresponding receiver. He can listen in at will on his subject's dreams, enjoy

the exhilaration of a high-grade mind under the stimulus of the universe's most potent drug—yet suffer none of the bad physical effects.

"Suppose you loved music. Imagine what gorgeous symphonies that fellow in white will think of when he is hopped up with Lotus!"

"Yes," muttered Winchester darkly. "But think of the things some other men think when they are drugged."

"Exactly. They use this type, too. The last chief executioner was retired and sent there. I understand he inspires his successor. These Mongoloids employ an incredible number of ways to put a man to death. Then there are other varieties of dreams. They have hooked up some so they can be broadcast. They do that at their annual feasts."

Winchester bit his lip to conceal his intense disgust.

Ten work periods came and went and the Martian Embassy neared completion. By dint of hard work and implicit obedience, Winchester had made himself a sort of unofficial strawboss. Guards ceased to prod him, often gave him a handful of men to manage, and left him alone to do what was assigned.

It was one morning, just as the gang had been lined up for the march to the train, when strident trumpet calls rent the air. Gongs sounded and the loud-speaker system bellowed.

"Down, slaves! Down all. Remain at kow-tow until the order to rise. Guards below the rank of captain will do the same. Attention! The great prince approaches."

The prisoners sullenly bared their shoulders and dropped to their knees. Then they pillowed their faces in the sand, in the absurdly grotesque humiliation of the kow-tow. Winchester risked a peek and saw the lesser guards follow suit. There was a moment of tense silence, then the abased throng could hear the rustle of silks and soft laughter and light conversation.

The high-ranking guests appeared to be entering through the portal leading from the Earth-ferry landing. They would proceed through the dome to the railroad station. Winchester stole another look, but all he saw were several pairs of twinkling, sandaled feet and a glimpse of the imperial yellow affected by the highest lords.

Trumpets blared again. At "Up," the groveling convicts rose and sheepishly brushed the sand from their faces.

"Slant-eyed is inspecting our job today," hissed the one nearest Winchester. "God help us if we've done anything wrong! Lohan never forgets and never forgives."

"Prince Lohan, huh?" said Allan Winchester.

His eyes went as hard as chilled steel.

CHAPTER IX

Dangerous Encounter

That day Winchester was transplanting moss. It was the notorious Martian migratory moss, a creeping, leafy slime that ceaselessly seeks the sun. Winchester had learned its trait the first time he had handled it, and now he turned it to account.

He had swung his boatswain's chair from a hook high up the crater cliff. To an adjacent hook he had rigged a pulley, by which he hauled the reeking stuff up in a basket from the flatcar two hundred feet below. It was easy to plant acres of the stuff that way. For the spot Winchester chose was just within the shadow made by the crater's brink. Since from the Moon the Sun moves slowly, he rarely had to change his position.

He plastered half a basket of the slippery plant against the flat granite of the cliff, then waited while it crawled away toward the nearby area. Then he picked up his trowel and dipped it into the basket again. When the basket was empty, he sent it down to the car below.

Presently Winchester felt the tug that told him the basket was full again. By the time the basketful had been spread upon the cliff, the situation behind him had changed. A train had come up and was stopped a short distance away. It consisted of a locomotive and single car, but such a locomotive and car as Winchester could never have imagined.

Both were plated with gold and studded with insets of what must have been massed jewels; for no single stones could have been so large.

Gaily liveried flunkies were unloading from the front compartment what appeared to be wheeled chairs. In a moment

Winchester understood that was exactly what they were—super-rickshas, quite as rich and elegant in their way as the train was in its. As soon as the rickshas were ready and ranged beside the coach, the princely party stepped out.

Winchester recognized Prince Lohan by his height and yellow robe. He judged the squat, swarthy man beside him in rich red to be the Martian envoy. Their conveyances rolled off first, leaving the women of the party to follow as they chose.

Winchester turned back to his work. It was not until he had emptied another basketload of moss that he looked again. The party had gone far out into the desert and was circling to the north. Winchester started when he observed a single parked ricksha standing in the brush not a great distance away, between him and the private train.

A daintily dressed woman strolled near it, idly looking over the plants. Evidently she had not cared for the longer trip out into the desert, and had quit the party early. But the thing that alarmed Winchester was that she was but a few hundred yards away from a thick growth of the deadly phygrix!

Without stopping to think of the possible consequences, Winchester slipped out of the boatswain's chair and sprang onto the moss-basket. He gave a quick series of jerks on the hauling-down line. It mattered not to him that it was considered sacrilege and punishable by death for an ordinary slave, let alone a convict, to approach directly any member of the royal household, whatever the emergency.

He hit the ground and snatched up a coil of light rope meant

for hoisting service. Then he dashed off through the brush in the direction he had last seen the woman. When he broke cover on the opposite side, he saw at once he was too late. The phygrices had gone to work. Already the many-handed clusters of green were scooping up stones and gravel and flinging them at the woman.

She stood still amidst a dozen clumps, clasping her hands and screaming. There was one giant cactus near her, but it offered no shelter against the pelting missiles and was far too spiny to be climbed, even had she the strength and agility. A stone struck her behind the ear, and with a little moan she sank to the ground.

Her two guards and the ricksha pullers, who had been dawdling in the vicinity of the conveyance, started forward, shouting at the tops of their voices. The guards drew their flamers, but hardly had the hot rays spouted forth than both fell, struck fairly in the face with pitched rocks.

The ricksha slaves, seeing how hopeless it was, turned to run, but they were too late. The barrage of gravel brought them down, too. In the same instant, the ominous retriever tentacles began to rise from the heart of the plants and reach out for their newest victims.

Winchester took it all in at a glance. Without a moment's hesitation he dropped the rope he was carrying and dashed back into the brush. He remembered in a flash that he had seen the refrigerator men's repair car parked on a short siding. It was an open car, and therefore might contain the one thing he needed.

He found it, and sprang aboard, heedless of the

expostulations of the "freemen" who had been left in charge. Yes, there were the heavy helmets and the quilted coats men wear when traversing the open spaces of the Moon. He grabbed up a set and sprinted back to where the girl had been, not neglecting to pick up a small hand-ax as he went.

By the time he returned, the sensory plumes by which the pitcher-plants were informed had done their work. The barrage of stones had subsided, except for a few nervous leaves, which kept on tossing missiles at random as if unable to stop. One guard was being dragged into the very heart of a plant, while feelers from two neighboring clumps were engaging in a tug of war over the body of the other.

A ricksha man had disappeared entirely. The other was almost invisible in his wrappings of coiled antennae. In another minute he would be gone as well.

But the girl! So far she had been untouched, except for the missiles. Several tentacles were creeping toward her, casting about in their blind way, but the nearest had more than a yard to go before it found her. Winchester slapped on his helmet and donned the coat. He hooked the ax to his belt, picked up his rope again, and boldly stepped out.

As he expected, he had not gone more than a dozen paces when the sensitive fronds of the killer plants gave their warning. Winchester ducked his head to take the first volley of stones that instantly followed. The rocks clinked against his head-covering or thudded against his body, but although the blows were felt, they were sufficiently muffled not to be fatal.

Winchester ran steadily, taking care to give the girl's prone form a wide berth, so as to draw the fire well away from her. He paused only long enough to hack at two of the feelers that spread across his path. That rid the girl of half her attackers. He might yet have time to deal with the pair coming up from the other side.

He stopped beside the cactus tree. By then he had slipped a knot in the end of his rope and had a noose flowing. He moved away just far enough for a free swing and swung his lariat. It was an art he had almost forgotten, but what is learned in childhood has remarkable staying powers. He let fly the noose and was overjoyed to see it settle squarely on the nearest phygrix.

Winchester drew it tight with a sudden jerk of his arm and a heave of his body. Then he secured the line fast to the trunk of the cactus and cut it free from the remainder of the coil. One set of pitching arms was drawn tight and immobile. Swiftly he fashioned another noose. After a couple of tries, he had another phygrix lassoed and lashed down.

He attacked a third and a fourth. And then he saw that his line was exhausted. The stray piece he held in his hand was a scant ten feet long.

But he had silenced four of the enemies. There were but two others in range of him. He set his jaw. Well, he would have to take a little more pelting, but he could shield the girl from that with his body. Until then he had not dared approach her too closely, even to defend her from the antennae. The hail of pitched rocks would have killed her as surely as the mouths of

the plants themselves.

Winchester ran back to where the girl lay. One of the feelers had located her and was taking a turn around her waist. He chopped it in two with a single stroke of the ax, yanked the disgusting tip from about the girl's waist and flung it from him.

Disregarding the other feeler altogether, he picked the girl up bodily and started away, dreading each step, lest the pounding he was receiving on the back of the head and shoulder blades should cause him to stumble and fall at any moment.

Winchester and his burden were almost clear when he heard a great shouting. There followed the sound of thunder-guns, spitting out the bolts of artificial lightning to which the American had treated the guard in the corridor of Central Receiving Station.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw soldiers running and the flame of the guns. And he also saw the greasy clouds of smoke that spurted up when a phygrix went into extinction. His blood curdled at the unexpected shrieks those hideous plants uttered in the moment of their death.

Panting from exhaustion and weary to the point of fainting, Winchester paused and shifted his burden. He eased the position of her drooping head in the hollow of his arm. The girl opened her eyes dreamily and looked up at him. She was as oriental as Scheherezade or the infamous Tse Hsi!

Guards and officers appeared all around. There was a swish of yellow and Prince Lohan stepped forward extending his arms. Without a word Winchester yielded up his burden. Then,

silently and slowly, he stripped himself of his padded coat and cast aside the heavy helmet.

He stood there facing the dreaded Lohan, face to face and eye to eye. A captain of the guard stepped back, a look of horror on his face. Here was disgrace piled on danger! A princess of the royal blood had been *touched* by a miserable convict!

CHAPTER X

Ray of Hope

"Stay!" cried Prince Lohan, with an imperious wave of his hand.

The captain of the guard, who had just rushed up with additional men dragging the bouncing rickshas behind them, lowered the muzzle of the gun with which he had been on the point of blasting down the insolent slave.

"I know this man of old," Prince Lohan said, "and would speak privately with him. Here, take the woman back to the car and have the maidservants dress her wounds. Go."

The officer bowed submissively and turned to do as he was told. He flicked a finger, and the other soldiers present backed away to a distance beyond earshot. Prince Lohan waited with impatience until the things he had ordered had been done.

"You were he," he said presently, looking intently into Winchester's eyes, "who was found wandering, unbranded, on the north lawn of my Alpine estate."

Winchester acknowledged it by a flicker of the eyelid and an almost imperceptible nod. Now that a second interview with his tormentor had come about, he was resolved to display no weakness or uncertainty. He would not kneel or bow or beg servile favors.

"Ah," said Lohan quietly, as if reading his mood at a glance. "So be it."

He paused for a moment, studying the man before him. Then, as if speaking of the most matter-of-fact things, he went on. If he noticed the slight start of surprise caused by his first few words, he gave no sign.

"It was said to you only this morning, I believe, that Slant-eye never forgets nor forgives. That is a true saying. I do neither. Though you have on several occasions assaulted my men, and killed at least one of them, today you have rendered me a service that will not be forgotten.

"You may be surprised that I have followed your career so closely. But I assure you there is little you have said or done which has not been recorded and duly reported to me. That is because I am much interested in your case.

"It is a rare one. Your tale was so incredible that the judge who examined you chose to believe the villagers instead, though they obviously lied. Upon reviewing the findings, I demoted him for his error and decapitated them for theirs. The severity of

your own punishment has been diminished."

Winchester's face muscles throbbed.

"The reason I am able to accept your strange story is that, being a wearer of the royal yellow, I had access to the secret library in the Khanate. When his Potent Highness the Khan, son and successor to the Sacred Ghengiz, burned all the books in the world, he saved some of those dealing with history for his own enlightenment and pleasure.

"I find in some of them that there was such a place as Munich, and that such a war as you spoke of was fought. Furthermore, from the few bits of information we could glean from the mate you brought with you—"

For all his rigid determination, Winchester could not repress a second twitch at these words. Mate? What had Cynthia told them? What had they done with her? The momentary knitting of his brows did not go unremarked.

"Ah," said the prince, "you wonder about her. I keep forgetting that in the barbarous age in which you lived, not only was the impractical doctrine of democracy still alive, but the far sillier one of chivalry."

"Today you have benefited from it," said Winchester stiffly.

Prince Lohan gasped. It was the first time in his life he had been interrupted. His hand instinctively stole to his belt, where as a growing boy he had worn a whip to chastise the insolent. But he seemed suddenly to make allowances for the ancient age from which the man facing him had come.

"Let it pass," said Lohan coldly. "Suffice it that the woman who came with you is well and unharmed, though—let us say, not as comfortable as she might be. Her eventual disposition will depend to some extent on you."

"On me!" cried Winchester, with a short, bitter laugh. "What have *I* to do with it?"

Prince Lohan's eyes flared again. This convict emigrant from the far past was trying his patience to the uttermost, and patience was a virtue no Mongoloid had ever had need to cultivate. Yet he must have remembered that it was wily patience and persistent guile that had placed his kind in control. Once more he swallowed his rising anger.

"You have much to do with it. There is a place for you in this world, if you choose to occupy it. In spite of your antiquated notions, you have something in common with us. You fight for what you want; you do not submit tamely, as these other rabbits do. That is quite just and proper, for all good things rightly belong to the strong.

"But heretofore you have made the error of fighting those who are stronger. If you would combine discretion with your determination and resourcefulness, you will go far."

"Meaning," said Winchester slowly, "that if I play along, I can expect a few crumbs from the table?"

"You put it crudely," said Prince Lohan haughtily, "but that is the essence of it. The rewards, however, may be larger than you think."

Winchester was silent. It was a tempting proposition. Though Lohan had not troubled to conceal the hand of steel beneath the offered glove, his words had been vague and non-committal. He had not asked him to be a traitor to his own; only to cease resisting the lords and their minions.

"I'll try," said Winchester finally. "I'll try anything once."

"Good," said Lohan. He turned abruptly and stalked away.

Winchester stooped to pick up the discarded helmet and cloak. But the ring of soldiers in the distance closed in with angry shouts.

"Drop them!" screamed an officer, running up with drawn flame-gun. He bathed the objects in dazzling fire. The fabric went up in a single puff; the metal parts spewed green fire and subsided into shapeless blobs of blue scale.

"Know, slave," said the officer loftily, "that what has touched Her Highness is never suffered to be employed in less honorable work. It is due only to the extraordinary grace and clemency of his Excellency that you escape the same treatment. Go."

Winchester surveyed him coolly from head to foot.

"Why, you pompous little monkey!" he said, and spat with pointed emphasis.

With great deliberation he picked up the small ax, which of all the equipment he had brought to the scene was the only remaining bit. Then he walked away, leaving the dumbfounded

guard officer blinking.

As he passed the motorcar, he tossed the ax upon it, and went on by. He expected a roar of protest and a demand for explanations from the knot of refrigeration men gathered about, but they backed away and said nothing. When he reached his own place of operations, he observed the same phenomenon.

The convicts averted their faces and pretended not to see him, while the guards looked at him with expressions akin to awe. All were uneasy and uncertain what to do.

"Well?" growled Winchester, slightly disconcerted himself. There was something uncanny about the abrupt change of attitude.

"We did not know, O Excellency," cried the head guard, breaking down and falling to his knees. "We watched from afar, not daring to go to help unless called—"

"Bosh!" snorted Winchester. "So now you think I'm a little tin god!"

He leaped to the deck of the moss-laden flat-car, anxious to hide his inner turmoil.

"Okay, men, bear a hand. Hoist me again and send up a basket of moss. We've lost a good hour with this disturbance."

Mouths gaping, the guards stood about like dummies.

The gang rode home that night in stolid silence. Winchester took his usual place in line and went through the routine of being

counted. At last the mustered convicts shuffled on, eager for the comparative liberty of the vast arena, where there was at least the illusion of privacy. Winchester shuffled along with them. No one had told him otherwise. Lohan's machinery would move in due time and in its own way.

It moved sooner than he expected.

A guard plucked him by the sleeve. Winchester stepped out of line.

"This way, you," said the guard, and pushed him along a wing passage.

They went down it until it turned into another. At that corner Winchester noticed the stonework had been nicked where a fiery blast had cut through. Below the splintery face of the stone, hardened slag hung.

Winchester recognized the spot and smiled ironically to himself. The last time he had traversed this passage, a guard had fired that bolt at him—and missed! Was it an omen?

They stopped before a bronze door. The guard flashed something held in the palm of his hand against an invisible watchman. Somewhere there was a click, and the door began to swing inward slowly.

"In there, you!" and the guard gave his prisoner a vicious shove.

CHAPTER XI

Universe in a Thimble

The man seated behind the desk might easily have been taken for an American businessman of the Twentieth Century, except that he wore a gold-edged toga of deep green. Winchester checked the headlong plunge imparted to him by his guide's farewell push, and managed to keep from sprawling across the desk.

"Sit down, won't you?" said the man pleasantly, as the great bronze door clicked shut. "Sorry about the entrance, but that was staged for the benefit of the scanners at each end of the hall. We have to efface the unfortunate impression made this afternoon."

He glanced at a jeweled chronometer.

"By now all the witnesses to the incident have been executed, so we may expect no trouble hereafter on that score."

Winchester sat down limply, almost overcome by the horror of what he had just heard. That horror was heightened immeasurably by the cool indifference with which the words were uttered. All the witnesses!

"All who enter our service," the man went on smoothly, "must serve an apprenticeship. It is necessary at times to act a part. To do that effectively, you must first know the part, and what is expected of it. Upon how well you do it will depend the importance of your succeeding assignment.

"I need not tell you that great prudence and restraint is required of everyone. The penalties for failure in that respect are—well, uh—rather drastic."

He smiled at Winchester. Winchester's nails bit into his palms, and his jaw muscles were as iron, but he managed to relax them enough to mumble, "I understand."

The man in green picked up a thick folder and slid it across the desk-top toward his visitor.

"This is the dossier that will precede you to your next place of employment. So far as the chiefs there know, it is the complete picture of your life since birth. I need not remind you that it has nothing whatever to do with the real record we keep of you here."

Winchester picked up the mass of documents with numb fingers and sat looking blankly at the cover. There were a mass of code numbers and file references which meant nothing to him; but his name was there.

"You will take this dossier into the next room and study it until you know it by heart, as you will never see it again. The pages on green paper are supposed to be confidential. That is, they are things which the authorities know about you which you presumably do not know about yourself. It is important that you read these, too, as it rounds out the character you will have to assume.

"You may throw away those food pellets you brought in with you. In the room you will find better food, and a place to sleep whenever you feel the need of rest. When you feel that you are

quite ready to proceed to the next step, ring the call bell on the table."

The man in green smiled again, and bowed slightly in dismissal. He indicated which of the three inner doors led to the room mentioned. Winchester got up awkwardly, hugging the false story of his life. He managed to get out of the room without stumbling, though everything he saw, he saw through a bloody haze.

He had felt anger before, but never the cold urge to kill that he had fought to suppress all through the interview. The AFPA chief, if that was what he was, inspired in him an almost overpowering hatred.

The more Winchester read, the greater grew his astonishment at the system's diabolical cunning. How the basic data had been obtained, he could not guess, unless it had been taken from him during one of his periods of semi-consciousness during torture. But there were his fingerprints, a multitude of photographs from every angle, the arterial and venous designs on his eyeballs, his blood type, and a myriad of other unfakable details.

His parentage—individual numbers given—was recorded in full, as was the mythical place of his birth. In an attached appendix were photographs of his imaginary father and mother, other relatives, the street map of his home village and photographs of it in summer and winter.

In the appendix also was an account of his early apprenticeship to the trade of gardener, and full information as to what the garden contained, as well as a treatise on what he

was supposed to know about horticulture.

On, on the voluminous book went. He had been stationed in Mars, it appeared, at a much later date, and there achieved distinction as a botanical expert. In fact, he had a letter from the director of the Martian Experimental Farm praising his work highly. He had been elevated to the rank of Scientist, third grade, and later promoted to first.

That rank, a parenthetical note informed Winchester, had really been awarded to his false personality to allow him to evade the rules concerning kow-tow. First class scientists had to kow-tow only to the wearers of the yellow.

He came to the end of his life-story with something akin to admiration. It was grim, and grudgingly given, but he could not deny they had overlooked nothing. Indeed, it frightened him. If they saw his character so clearly part of the way, what was to prevent them seeing it all the way?

Could he deceive his employers as well as those about him?

Winchester learned that he was to go to the great Interplanetary Natural History Museum, a place where living plants and animals of the planets, satellites and asteroids were kept. He was to be the Vice-Curator—one of many—but expected to know little except the plant life of Mars.

Actually, he was to be under instruction for some special work, to be assigned later by the Inner Council of Controlling Scientists. What that body was, he was not told.

But when he came to the envelope marked "Secret

Instructions," he was startled at their brevity, so in contrast with the elaborate preparations of his personality. There was but a single sentence.

Be alert to discover disloyal subjects; report daily.

He slammed the folder shut. It was a thing that would require much study. It had required many hours to read through it once, and he marveled that it could have been compiled in so short a time. The only explanation could be that they had many such dossiers, prepared in blank.

Winchester reported to his chief at last that he was ready. He wore the maroon robe a guard had brought him. It was the symbol of his rank and branch of work.

The man in green looked up at him as if it had been less than an hour since he stepped out of the room. Actually, it had been a full week, Earth time.

"You will leave by a secret subway to Grand Central, and there you will be mixed with the incoming passengers from a Moon-Mars express coming in shortly. Your baggage is on board. Flunkies from the museum will meet you and take you to your destination.

"It is arranged that you will be assigned laboratory H-three in

the Botanical Building. In one corner of it is a writing desk, and beside it a small incinerator. Each night you will sit there and write your report of the day.

"Head each sheet Eight-RYF, sign each sheet Three-eleven-RYF. The latter is your personal number. Upon completing a sheet, feed it at once to the incinerator, and begin the next. When your report is finished, operate the small mill at the base of the incinerator.

"That will reduce the paper ashes to powder. Dissolve the powder in the liquid marked 'K', which you will find at hand. Pour the solution down the drain. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

The chief tapped a bell. A special guard appeared.

"Mars—incoming—twenty-two: thirty-four today. Take him away."

Winchester followed the guard through an intricate maze of secret panels and hatches. They eventually came to a tunnel of small bore, which had rails laid at one hundred and twenty-degree intervals about its perimeter. The guard pressed a spot in the wall, and in a moment a small car slid to a stop before them. They got in.

A reverse process brought them to the end of a blind passage. The guard put his eye to a small lens set in the wall.

"The Martian passengers have just disembarked," he said in a low voice. "As soon as the last of them has passed, step out and follow them. People will meet you below."

There was a nudge, and the false wall slid sideward. Winchester eased himself through the slit afforded and found himself on a steep ramp. He could hear the tramp of feet below, as of a considerable crowd going down. He turned at once and descended after them.

At the bottom of the ramp he saw other passengers being greeted. He noted their behavior and looked about him. He had not been told how he was to recognize the museum flunkies. Then he observed three slaves in the domestic gray, but with maroon hems on their kilts. They were on their chests and knees, bumping their faces on the pavement toward him. He strode over to them.

"Arise, slaves, and do your duty."

It hurt him to use the words, but that was the formula used by those who had preceded him, and he thought best not to depart from it. The three servants rose, and two disappeared into the crowd. Winchester supposed they were going after his baggage.

"This way, master," the third said.

The passage to the museum was made in a small rocket-car, operated by technicians. They did not perform the kow-tow, but bowed deeply as Winchester appeared.

"There it is, Worthy," said the pilot, causing the machine to hover over a huge crystal dome on the anti-Earth side.

The "Worthy" came as a little shock, too, though the book had told Winchester scientists of rank rated it.

"The big dome covers all," the pilot explained. "Beneath are many small craters, each with its own dome. One for Venus, one for Mars, and so on. It's the universe in a thimble, as we call it."

"Thanks," said Winchester, looking down.

Suddenly he felt oppressed by the magnitude of the task he had undertaken. He knew so little. There was so much to do. And danger lurked everywhere. He had already seen how one impulsive, unconsidered act had cost the lives of dozens. What was ahead?

"Land, please," he ordered. "I am anxious to see it."

CHAPTER XII

New Beginnings

The establishment beneath the iridescent dome was amazing indeed. It was, as the pilot had said, a universe in a thimble, though the thimble was a sizable one—fifty miles across and several deep.

Colorful villas nestled at the foot of the cliffs among groves of terrestrial trees, while a grassy plain, criss-crossed with roads, formed the crater bottom. A score or more of lesser

cones stuck their heads up into the Earthly atmosphere, but it could be seen that they were covered with domes of their own and had entrance portals cut into their flanks.

Despite the genial artificial climate of the museum as a whole, some of the small craters were perpetually covered with frost and patches of ice, indicating they were severely refrigerated within. Those were the ones holding the exhibits from dim Uranus and Neptune.

A staff car took Winchester to a long low building near the Crater of Venus. There he presented his passport, his orders and other credentials to a gimlet-eyed police official. After answering a few perfunctory questions, he was sent into an adjoining office to meet his new superior, the Curator-in-Chief. He was a sad-visaged, weary-looking man of about sixty, and very gaunt.

"Your work," he said, "will be adapting other planet life-forms to Earthly conditions. Some can be made to live, some not. It is a matter of chemistry and temperature, largely—sometimes glands. You will learn about this as you go along. You will be quartered in the Botanical Section, where they will tell you more."

The chief dismissed Winchester with a nod of his head.

The suite to which the American was assigned was H-3, as had been foretold him. It contained not only a small, well-equipped laboratory, but living rooms. The comfort and seeming privacy of the apartment astonished Winchester, for his experience until then had been that all of the conquered race

were treated like dogs. He was to learn in the next few days that there were many exceptions, particularly among the scientist class.

Presently the instructor to whom Winchester was assigned took him to a large greenhouse, situated just outside one of the smaller craters.

"Take it easy in here," he was advised. "The air is thin, and contains much less oxygen than you are used to. We are trying to wean some Ionian Harps for transplantation to the Khan's villa in America."

The instructor led the way to a row of purplish plants that resembled kettledrums. As they appeared, Winchester observed that they gave off a sweet, doleful, humming sound through the vibration of a number of tightly stretched fibers just above the drumhead. He thought he could detect a definite tune and rhythm in the quaint music, but he was so distracted by the swarm of insects that kept annoying him that he could not be certain.

"This is an amusing plant," explained the tutor. "It grows wild on Io. You see, it has a resonant diaphragm over which is a natural harp. Each string of the harp has its own pitch. Furthermore, each string exudes a perfume of its own, different from that of any other string.

"The perfumes attract these insects flying about, and they dash themselves against the fibers, causing them to vibrate, producing music. That, in turn, attracts small birds, which are caught and eaten by the plant."

"Neat, but elaborate," commented Winchester dryly.

Shortly afterwards they climbed into a lunabile and struck out along one of the roads. A few minutes later they heard a series of dull booms ahead, as if blasting was in progress. They came to a stretch of road shielded on one side by metallic plates, in which observation slits had been cut every few hundred feet. The bombardment on the other side continued intermittently.

"Floribombs," explained the tutor tersely, in response to Winchester's inquiring look.

He pulled the scooter to the side of the road near a peeping slot and got out. Winchester cautiously put an eye to the hole. A field of liverish-colored soil stretched out before him, dotted here and there with bushes. As he looked, a clump of them blew up with a boom that shook the ground.

When the dust cleared away, there were only ragged holes where the plants had been.

"That is a Mercurian plant—in a double sense," said the tutor. "It comes from Mercury, and it feeds on mercury, as well as nitrogen and water. Now is its seeding-time. The soil you see is a mixture of cinnabar, ordinary earth and some selected nitrate fertilizers. The plant synthesizes some of these elements into fulminate of mercury, which gathers in its seed pods just as the seeds begin to ripen.

"When the accumulation is complete, the least jar will set it off, throwing the seeds for hundreds of yards around. A faint breeze is all that is needed, which makes the plants rather dangerous to have around. We hope to put them to industrial use, but so far no one has worked out a safe way to harvest them."

The instructor stopped talking as another of the plants disintegrated, then went back to the lunabile.

"They appropriate twenty Grade-P slaves a year for experimental use," he added glumly. "But so far, it has resulted only in simple massacres. I am glad they took me off that work." He coughed. "The Khan is great and wise."

"He is the All-Highest," murmured Winchester, shuddering.

They came to a turn in the road, and were passing a group of the gray-clad slaves of the lower grades. Some of them already had on crude suits of armor, while others were still dressing. Armed guards stood over them, urging speed, lest all the plants blow up before they could get out onto the field.

The lunabile drew up before another laboratory building five miles beyond.

"You'll need a gas mask here," warned the tutor, producing a pair of them from a compartment in the car. "This is the Lotusol distillery."

It was not a large building. Winchester found himself in the receiving room. Here several masked slaves were feeding fat, lush leaves to a set of rolls which squeezed the juice out of them. This was drained off into pans and piped into the next room, where there was a series of retorts set over low flames.

A single scientist watched the apparatus here. In the room beyond, glass piping of small bore carried the pale canary distillate to a machine that bottled it in small ampules. More slaves took the ampules away and packed them tenderly into

cotton-padded cases.

"Essence of Lotus juice," amplified the tutor, as they emerged. "This distillery runs only now and then. We furnish the police with fifty cases a year. No one else may have it."

"Lotus juice?" queried Winchester. "I thought that was the stuff that made addicts for the Crater of Dreams. Why should they allow it to the police?"

"The police do not take it themselves. They use it to dope the year's selected artists with. It makes them more tractable. Few intellectuals go voluntarily, you know. They cure that by spraying them with an atomizer.

"After a whiff or so, they want nothing else. I saw it done once—to a designer of ballet dances."

He stared meaningly at Winchester.

"It was not nice to see," he added softly. "He was my brother."

That time the instructor did not append the stock phrase of glorification to the Khan.

"The practise of botany is not what it used to be," commented Winchester, by way of reply.

"No," snapped the tutor.

In his eyes was a peculiar light.

That night Winchester made out his daily report in the exact fashion directed by the AFPA chieftain at Central. In doing so he took great care to exhibit no curiosity concerning the spot where he wrote. He knew that 8-RYF or one of his minions must be watching him through a cleverly concealed television scanner.

But he was equally confident that if such was the case, it would be so well hidden that no effort of his would find it. He assumed, too, that they did not want him to find out the method of transmission, or they would have told him about it before this.

He wrote sheet after sheet, steadily and without reserve. He put down the substance of the conversation he had had with his tutor. He characterized him as "not openly disloyal, but unenthusiastic." He was reluctant to do that, but he had a shrewd idea he was being tested. It was not unlikely that the tutor was also submitting a report.

Similarly, ten days later, after attending a clandestine meeting of six self-styled rebels—"freemen" all, loaned as assistant gardeners from the labor gangs of Cosmopolis—Winchester reported all that was said. They wanted, the gardeners told him, a certain vegetable oil derived from the flowers of the toxidal, a deadly poisonous vine of Ceres.

They had a fellow conspirator who was an assistant cook in the police barracks at Cosmopolis, and who promised to mix it in the food.

Winchester never knew what followed, as the working party finished its job and was withdrawn a few days later, but he had

the feeling he had done no innocent man wrong. His invitation to the meeting, while furtively offered, was too bold. Genuine rebels would not have been so frank with an untested stranger.

CHAPTER XIII

Crater of Dreams

Winchester's testing period stretched into months, and still no word came from the mysterious man in green in the citadel. The American continued to work at whatever tasks were assigned, and learned many startling facts about the weird creatures of other worlds. Not only did he work with plants, but on several occasions assisted in the Zoological Division, and there he had to deal with queer animals.

One of his jobs was to discover a substitute diet for the terrible Venusian sea-tigret, which dwelled on the cliffs above the artificial lakes in the Venus Crater. It was a mammal much on the lines of a seal, but spotted like a leopard and possessing the powerful teeth of a cat, as well as claws at the tips of its flippers.

Its habit was to lie in waiting along the brow of the cliff, then pounce on the prey it could spot in the clear waters beneath. The sea-tigret was fierce and voracious, and the curators found it impossible to keep the lake stocked with suitable fish.

Another troublesome animal was the *Ursa Saturnis*, or the

great bear of Saturn. It was a huge, rotund beast, covered with silky white feathers, on which a scarlet spiral stripe wound like the markings of a barber pole. It did not prey on large animals, but on tiny ones that lived in the crevices of rocks.

That problem Winchester helped solve by suggesting a thick glove that could be locked on, since the beast's claws grew so rapidly that clipping did no good.

Besides these activities and his occasional espionage work, Winchester found time for some research work in his little private laboratory. Some of its results he reported, some he kept to himself. Among the latter was a stimulant so powerful, he dreaded to think how it might be misused by wrong hands.

He found it by accident, seeking the ingredient which made the flittleberry wine of Ganymede so heady. By means of successive distillations, he found a fraction which he called ergogen, on account of the tremendous flood of energy it released in the human body.

It acted much as adrenalin does, only more promptly and with more pronounced results. It was small wonder that a man drunk on flittleberry wine was willing to fight his weight in wildcats.

Another subject of unfailing interest was the super-narcotic Lotusol. Winchester analyzed the oil carefully and read all the existing pamphlets on the symptoms arising from its use. In general, he found, it was similar to the opium of his own day. But it went far beyond opium in two ways. A few deep whiffs formed the habit, and the habit was incurable.

Winchester worked many weary hours of overtime on that

fascinating drug, memorizing his results and committing nothing to paper, except some proposals for minor improvements in the method of the oil's distillation. A little later, he abstracted some books on medicine and physiology, which he found in a locked case at headquarters, and studied them intensively.

Bit by bit he added to his store of scientific knowledge. He was thankful to the Mongoloid rulers that their book-burning had been confined to such fields as history and philosophy.

As he was about to conclude his study of Lotusol and its effects, an event happened to round out and complete his data. The alarm gongs sounded and the scientists at the station were informed that a casualty had just occurred in the Lotusol distillation plant. Winchester happened to be in the office of the Curator-in-Chief at the time, and hopped into his lunabile with him.

They found the young scientist in charge in the bottling room, but a single glance was all that was necessary to know that no information could be had from him. For he was groveling ecstatically on the floor, sniffing deliriously at a broken ampule. His helmet had been discarded and lay at one side, showing a ragged tear in the fabric about the neck.

"What happened?" demanded the chief of the cowering slaves.

"There was a big crash—a retort, I think. Then he came in here, tore off his helmet, and grabbed an ampule and broke it. That's the fourth one."

The chief curator plugged his helmet jack into the nearest

wall outlet. It connected him with the televisor control.

"Get me Welfare," he ordered. He turned to Winchester. "He's done, poor fellow. The still blew up and cut his suit. I'll see what I can do—"

"Yes?" rasped a voice.

The screen over the plug flickered and became light, showing a Mongoloid face.

"Scientist Frobheim, second class, stricken by Lotusol—line of duty. What is the disposition?"

"Wait," said the voice, and the face faded. It reappeared after a minute's delay. "Frobheim—record clean. Approved for Crater of Dreams as reward for faithful service."

"Helmeted?" queried the Chief.

"Hm-m, let's see. Intelligence Quotient only one hundred eight. Nope. Not interesting. No helmet. Get him over. We'll get out the bulletins right away."

The chief curator yanked out his plug.

"There you are," he said, with an air of great satisfaction. "If you do the right thing, you will be treated right. If he had been surly and non-cooperative, or a mere slave, we would have had to deprive him of the drug. Then he would die. As it is, we are allowed to take him over to the crater and let him loose inside. After that he will be happy."

"May I take him there? I would like to see that place," ventured Winchester.

"Why, yes," said the chief, in a mild surprise. "But be sure to wear a good strong suit and take a few guards with you. Some of the inmates there are apt to be violent at times."

By then the rocket-car was reported to be ready at the outer portal. Winchester set out with two guards, both outfitted like himself, and their prisoner-patient, who sat slumped in the back seat, happily inhaling the potent drug. At the portal, the gate guard handed them their written authorization to proceed, which had come through in the meantime by telescription.

The Crater of Dreams looked much like any other crater on the Moon as one approached from the outside. There was the same rugged incline, topped by cliffs which somewhere were cut to permit the installation of an airlock, which introduced the visitor to the tunnel that led to the inner bowl. The party left the ship parked outside and showed their pass to the airlock guard.

"An hour, no more," he growled, pocketing the paper.

They stepped into the lock, which in a moment filled with steam. Under the hot moisture the stiff fabric of their space-suits softened and sagged, until it clung to their bodies like wet silk. They seated themselves on a small hand-car and made off through the tunnel, until they came to the open lock on the inner side.

They emerged into raw, dripping, primeval jungle. Wisps of fog drifted through and clung to the dank vegetation. Underfoot was soft mud that yielded to the slightest pressure, yet held on to

the foot like quicksand. Brilliant plumaged birds flitted and squawked overhead, and every minute or so scalding drops of rain would come down in sudden showers that ceased almost as abruptly as they began. Here was a replica of Venus, faithful to the utmost detail.

A few paces farther on and Winchester and his party came to the first of the Lotus growths. They stood in thick clumps, each fat leaf growing out from the one beneath it, resembling in form the spineless cactus of Texas.

The flowers were tall, lily-like blooms, and the fruit a sort of melon. The first clump the group came to was untouched, but the one beyond showed signs of having been stripped recently of all its fruit and many leaves.

A little further they came to a clearing. Sand had been dumped here, and a number of marble slabs provided. Sprawled on the sand or reclining on the slabs lay a number of men. Most of them wore metal helmets that left their faces bare. At a sign from Winchester, the guards released their prisoner and stood back to see what he would do.

He sprang to the nearest Lotus plant and broke off a cluster of leaves. Then he sat down on the sand and began to eat them avidly. A few seconds later, he dropped the half-eaten leaves and flopped over on his back, wearing a look of utter contentment.

Winchester studied the faces of the stupefied men at his feet. All seemed at peace, and their expressions ranged from the blissful to the ecstatic. Few made any motion other than an

occasional twitch or a change in facial expression. All seemed to breathe easily, to be full-fleshed and well. It was a life free from need or worry.

Winchester remembered he had work to do, and the time was short. From his pocket he withdrew a stethoscope and listened briefly to the hearts and lungs of the sleepers about him. Then he pulled out a set of slides and a needle, with which he drew a number of small blood samples. For half an hour he examined the men of the Crater as elaborately as his equipment and his borrowed knowledge would permit. Then he signified he was ready to go. The time was nearly up.

That night the American's report to 8-RYF said merely that he had made the trip to the Crater and delivered a new inmate to it. He added that he had made a superficial examination of a few of the sleepers there, and found them to be in good shape. He reported in some detail the conditions of the plants and the climate, and recommended—from a botanist's point of view—that the mean temperature be cut down about four degrees. He had noticed several spots of wet-rust on a tree.

He did not mention the blood tests.

CHAPTER XIV

A Man and a Drug

"It's time for a showdown, brother," said Dominguez, rising

from his seat and leaning on the table.

His knuckles showed white under the pressure as he put his weight on them.

"You've talked regular. So far as we know you've been regular. But now that the zero hour is near, we've got to know if you are regular. None of our gang has been missing lately, but you claim to be an ex-convict. Things being what they are, we'd like to have proof of it."

Winchester eyed him back. It had taken him six weeks to get the confidence of this gang. He couldn't weaken now.

"I can prove that in just five seconds," he said steadily. "But since you are getting tough about things, there is one thing I want to know. After the revolution, what do we get out of it?"

Dominguez laughed, and it was a hard laugh.

"What do you think, you poor sap? We slap down the slant-eyes. Then we move into their palaces. What could be sweeter? The rest of these goofs will yelp a little, then take it. They're used to it; they don't know anything else. But what we want to know is—*who are you?*"

Winchester stared back at him a moment, then slowly rose. He stripped off the foreman's jacket he had been wearing, and after that he yanked away the undershirt. Then he turned his back and showed it to them. The seven arch-conspirators stared, and several gasped.

"Yes," lied Winchester, turning about with great deliberation.

"I'm a red-star convict—the only one I ever knew of escaping. It took me five years to build up to where I am now, and you ask me who I am! Well, if I'm not with you, nobody is. These sheep in Cosmopolis think they have grievances. Believe me, brothers, I *know* I have! The worst you can think of is mild to what I would like to do to those flat-faced—"

"Good enough," said Dominguez, slapping his hand on the table. "No man would or could forge that mark on himself. But who was your right-hand buddy there?"

"A guy named Heim," said Winchester with assurance.

He had suspected many, if not most of his recent associates of being stool pigeons, but not Heim. Heim rang true.

"Okay, pal. From, now on we don't pull punches. Here's the dope."

For half an hour Dominguez poured forth the details of the revolution to be. It was set for Lunar dawn—just forty hours to come. There was ample time to station all the details. The plants of Cosmopolis were to be taken over by the current shift, with the concurrent massacre of the guards.

Other disgruntled elements on the Moon were to be notified, so that they could synchronize their uprising with that of the inner group in the big city. After that they need only boycott the Earth. The slant-eyes would soon come to terms for lack of the necessities of life.

"Hold on," suggested Winchester. "Haven't you overlooked a bet? What about the Khan's personal army and his flotilla of

space cruisers that he keeps close to him at his palace? And don't forget that in the old days, Terra supported a population of five billion. If the Khan plowed his lawns under and reopened his mines, he would have more resources than all the rest of the System put together."

"Pooh!" replied Dominguez. "With slaves? Forget it, pal. Once we take Cosmopolis, the whole System will fold up like an accordion."

"Then?" asked Winchester.

"Then we take over. We divvy up. Hugo here gets Africa. Donyi, South Asia. You get South America and I get North. Giuseppi takes what he wants of Australia, and—"

"All right," agreed Winchester. "Let's go. My job is to turn out the steelworkers. I meet you here after we have cleaned out our own crater. Is that right?"

Dominguez nodded, and Winchester slipped out into the dark.

For the fourth time Winchester rode in the secret subway beneath the Citadel. The first had been when he left 8-RYF's office for the Botanical Gardens. The second had been two months before, when he obeyed a mysterious summons to appear in person before his chief; the third when he left for Cosmopolis. That time he had changed personality again, and was dressed as a foreman of the steel-fabricating trade. Now he was back with a report to make.

He made the required signals before the secret panel and waited for the faint click that was to come.

Number Eight did not look up when he first came in, but continued to study a sheaf of flimsies in his hand. When he did look up, it was with a cold scowl.

"When I gave you the means of reaching me here, I did not mean for you to abuse it," he said icily. "You should make your reports in the usual way, except in emergencies."

"There is an emergency," said Winchester quietly. "The gang you sent me to investigate have completed their plans and are about to strike. The word is being passed now. In thirty hours the massacre will commence."

"Strange," said Number Eight thoughtfully. He pressed a button, and when the answering buzz came he barked, "When did Fifty-eight report last?"

The answer was prompt.

"Yesterday. Says final meeting to be held tonight. Nothing since—"

Number Eight snapped the switch off, pressed another button.

"Cosmo-one? Trace this number at once." He gave it out.

"Got him right here," came back the answer, clear as a bell.

Winchester felt a small muscle in his neck twitch. He had seen the number before, and it was an easy one to memorize. It was the number worn by Donyi Dangar, timekeeper at the big smelter, one of the arch-conspirators!

But Cosmo-one had more to say.

"He was picked up ten minutes ago in Astarte Road. Throat slit from ear to ear and a dagger stuck in his back—"

"Okay," snapped 8-RYF. "Stand by for secret general alarm. It will be going out in about two seconds."

"Talk fast," said Number Eight to Winchester.

The chief began playing on buttons, and small pilot lights of many colors blinked on the board across the room.

Winchester told his story. It was the account of tonight's meeting, and the detailed plans for the insurrection. When it was over, Number Eight looked inquiringly past Winchester, who realized for the first time that while he had been talking, someone had come in behind him unheard.

"That's right," confirmed the unseen person.

Winchester knew the voice. It was that of Lorenz, chief of the pattern-makers, another member of the conspirators!

"You've got it all," snapped Number Eight into his transmitter. "Round up those men. Execute them the slow way. No trials, but learn the names of the next men under them in each industry. Send them to Central. Thirty lashes and a warning to any small fry you catch. Got it? Acknowledge!"

The colored lights blinked, one after another, and went out, as each local police captain signified he had heard and understood.

"Good work," said Number Eight to Winchester. "You have proved yourself not only trustworthy, but capable. I had several other men cover the job too, so I know. Now you had better get back to your laboratory and stay out of sight for a few weeks, until we have cleaned up in Cosmopolis. Stand by for a new detail at the end of that time."

"Yes, sir," said Winchester, his heart pumping with excitement, and headed for the secret door.

Back in laboratory H-3 he lay in his bunk and stared upward into the darkness, thinking over all he had seen and done.

The entire incident shook his self-confidence to the foundations. He had hoped by turning spy to be able to learn who and where the real revolutionaries were, then to shield them by turning in false reports. Later, when all was ripe, he would throw off the mask and join them.

But if he was checked up in every single act and utterance, as he had been so far, he could accomplish nothing. He would either have to become a better AFPA man to save his own skin, or else court almost certain exposure and the death by torture that would follow on its heels.

He could not sleep. He got up after a time and turned on the lights. Restlessly he paced his sleeping compartment, then enlarged his beat to include the tiny laboratory. He tried to quit thinking of that hidden room in the heart of Central, and the cold-eyed man who sat there and calmly ordered numberless deaths and floggings.

He turned his thoughts rather to the weird vegetation in the

craters about him, and the potent juices that ran through these plants. He had come to this place as an actor. Now that he was about to leave it for all time, he realized it would be as a genuine scientist and not as a faker.

The American thought suddenly of the experiments he had begun and never quite finished. Perhaps it would soothe his mind and give him a better perspective if he occupied himself with them once more. So, as he paced the floor, he retraced his findings, step by step, until he had freshened his memory. He stopped in his tracks, hit by an uninvited and unexpected thought. He frowned for an instant, then strode to the chemical cabinet.

Winchester took down a small vial of silvery oil, and a half-dozen standard solvents. He tried each until he found the combinations that would mix with the oil and not emulsify. He then jabbed his arm for blood, and experimented with it in combination with the Crater specimens. Last but not least, he brought forth from their hiding place a handful of little ampules—each containing a few C. C.'s of the insidious Lotusol. He put on a gas mask and strapped it tight.

At the end of an hour, five beakers stood on the table before him. The first was filled with a milky-white mess of curds; the second a thin, watery substance of bluish tinge, in which liverish hunks of matter floated.

The third and fourth showed chalky precipitates. It was only the fifth which came out clear. This had a deep rose color and a slightly oily texture. Winchester looked at them all, then carefully dumped them down the drain.

He turned on the air blower and let it run. Meantime he mixed up a fresh solution. That he poured into a container and hung it high on the wall. A small flexible tube with a valve led down from it. At the end of the tube was a sharp, hollow needle.

Winchester unstrapped his gas mask and stopped the blower. Once more the air was pure. He lay down on the table and bared his left arm. He reached with his right hand and grasped the dangling needle. It took but one swift jab, accurately placed, to insert it in a vein. Then he turned the small valve and let the solution flow.

He lay back on the table and reached for one more item. It was a small ampule filled with a pale, canary-colored liquid. He snapped its neck with a firm twist of the fingers. His nostrils were assailed with a sickly-sweet odor. He gasped violently, and thought he was going to die. For a long moment it seemed that a clamp was snapped upon his throat, choking, choking, choking.

Then came blissful relief. Golden vapors, gloriously illuminated, seemed to fill the room. As from far off mountain heights, the blended voices of untold multitudes of singing angels filled the ears with soothing melodies.

Pleasant odors crowded in, mingling into strange, fleeting combinations that succeeded one another in delightful variety.

A gratifying tingling suffused the skin. Winchester's mouth seemed to fill with the fragrant juices of exotic fruits.

He seemed to be aware of tender lips caressing his. All was well with the American. His lungs drew in breath after breath of

the delicious Lotus vapor. He relaxed and let the kaleidoscope of dreams unfold itself in endless and always wonderful panorama.

The scene shifted. Cynthia appeared to him, laughing gaily. He gathered her into his arms, soothed her for the hardships she had had to endure in trying to save him from the gendarmes of Munich.

That vision faded, too, to be replaced by a fantasy of victorious conquest. Winchester experienced the lust of battle to its fullest, the tremendous satisfaction of seeing a wicked enemy humbled, beaten, in the dust.

And after that came more.

CHAPTER XV

A Vision

Allan Winchester saw things with uncanny clarity. Never, in life, had every doubt and misgiving been swept away to be replaced by the clear, unchallengeable, lucid truth. But now it was so. All was revealed.

He saw himself the ruler of a mighty race, a race that governed not one planet but a hundred. He did not sit on a gilded throne, surrounded by sycophants and cringing servitors, but in a cool, quiet study, lined with books. Its windows gave

out onto a sun-specked terrace and a park, beyond whose trees he could glimpse the spires of the perfect city.

He ruled, yet he did not rule; for the laws were so just that they were never questioned or infringed. His people were contented; well-housed, well-fed and healthy. Each did, for the good of all, what he could; each received, according to his nature, his proper needs.

Industry, art and science were welded into one harmonious whole, vigorous and flourishing, not for its own purposes, but for the better service of mankind. There was no waste, there was no shortage. The workers were happy. They were following the bent shown early in their childhood.

Work that delighted the hand and eye was done by hand. Work that was distasteful was relegated to the machines.

Poverty, disease and crime were words which had dropped out of the vocabulary. Lies and mutual recriminations no longer were bandied. There was no need for them. They had gone the way of slander, envy, jealousy, gluttony, greed and the other major vices.

Winchester rolled over, blearily half conscious. His unthinking fingers groped for and found the half-drained ampule and crushed it. Again he inhaled the delicate aroma, and sank back into heavenly dreams.

For what seemed to be an eternity, history unrolled before him as on a mighty scroll. He saw a great conquerors, and would-be conquerors, from the Hittites onward; the petty tyrants of business and the household; gangsters, feeding on blackmail,

who once held cities in their clutches.

Last of all he saw those who aspired to rule by violence, but lacked the intelligence—the common criminals of the jails. He talked with the great philosophers, long dead—Plato, Aristotle, Maimonides, Spinoza. He talked with Friedrich Nietzsche, the German thinker, whose vision of a "superman" had so infected German thought.

He stirred uneasily. His dream was turning sour. Sleepily he reached for another ampule, but could not find it. He dropped back into unrestful slumber.

Other shades came to trouble him. He witnessed the execution of the martyrs—benevolent men, but lacking in the will to fight. He saw Galileo offer a boon to humanity, only to withdraw it after torture. In a later century he saw artists and scientists fleeing from Europe like rabbits from a forest fire, not knowing how to resist a tyrant who understood only brute force

Winchester shuddered and opened his eyes. The jar above him was half empty. A warm, rosy liquid dribbled from his punctured arm and made a small pool on the floor. He felt a sudden impulse to rise and smash things.

He bounded to his feet. With one sweep of the arm he demolished the container above him, saw it crash into a thousand fragments. Then he plunged into his bedroom, eager for action—but for what end, he did not know. He knew only that he had the urge to come alive again and do things, great things.

The sight of himself in the mirror halted him in his tracks. He

stared at the wild-eyed, desperate-looking apparition before him for a long, unbelieving minute. His nostrils quivered, and he trembled with a blind fury he did not understand.

But in a moment reaction set in, and he staggered shakily to his bunk and fell across it. He suffered intensely for an hour or more, and then grew calm. He knew that what he craved was more Lotusol, but wisely he had stolen only a limited quantity. There was no more.

At length he slept.

For the next few days Winchester went quietly about his routine work, but there was never an hour that his brain was not seething. The dreams he had lived stayed with him, as clear and vivid as reality. He could not shake off the feeling that the devastating insight into human nature he had experienced was a revelation from some higher inner intellect. It was something that had to be digested and interpreted. Then he could apply it to his work.

His work! How to proceed? Brute force must be fought with brute force, of course. There was nothing else tyrants understood. But he must be ever on guard against the misuse of even the forces he himself employed. What if another Dominguez should appear to help him, only to set himself up as another Khan?

History was full of such instances—of men fighting upward from the ranks but forgetting their old comrades once they attained power. Charlemagne and Peter the Great built empires, but under their successors the empires degenerated into

tyrannies.

No, he must use weapons to overthrow the Mongoloids. But once the fight was won, the ultimate control must be turned over to the wise and kind, and the weapons destroyed.

Winchester thought over all the men he had met in this new world. They fell roughly into two classes—the forceful and aggressive, and the industrious and retiring. The rulers, their police, the Dominguezes and a number of the industrial supervisors were among the first. The artists, scientists and engineers were among the second.

The first group was grasping and ambitious, the second productive. The latter sustained and supported the former, who rewarded them by ever demanding more. Yet they had only the choice of submission or extermination.

The furrow in Winchester's brow deepened. It began to look as if the only men who could defeat the men in power were men much like them. But his mind wandered farther down the social scale. Below the intellectuals were the lower classes—the laborers, the slaves and the criminals. Two generations of oppression had made them docile and useless—except the criminals.

"Ah, the criminals," Winchester thought. "'Criminals,' indeed! There is my tool."

He reflected on the old cynicism that there was no crime unless the misdeed was found out. But the "crimes" these men had committed were violations of a ruthlessly imposed criminal code. The code was at fault, not its victims.

Of course, there would be exceptions. There always were. But the corps of "criminals," in the main, would prove reliable.

"They have fight left in them," Winchester reflected. "Their greatest ambition is to escape a life of misery and live like human beings. When the revolt is over, the scientists and philosophers can take over.

"Not that I won't keep a judicious eye on them. Theory can be carried too far, too."

That night he wrote a strange request in his daily report.

"I request an audience with his Lordship, Prince Lohan, at the earliest possible date," he scribbled. "I have a plan which will interest him greatly."

A little later he slowly stirred the dissolving ashes in the liquid that devoured them, and then listened to the gurgling as the evidence of his message disappeared down the drain. His face was a mask, for he did not know whether it could be seen by the scanner.

But inwardly he was exultant. At last he had a plan—a definite plan. It was daring and dangerous, even desperate, but there was a chance that it would work. He must gain the full confidence of Prince Lohan. Once he had that, he might overthrow the empire, virtually alone and single-handed.

More than that, he could reorganize the lost Utopia afterward. It meant following a course of cunning ruthlessness for awhile, and the shedding of blood. But the prize was worth the cost.

That night he slept soundly. It was the first time since he had emerged from that clump of bushes growing upon the rubble that had been Munich.

It was a false assurance.

Winchester's message went unanswered, and he fretted. Time was passing, and the annual competitions were near. He did not know quite what that signified, but to him it meant danger to his Cynthia. Prince Lohan's cryptic remark had told him little, and that little he did not fully believe. She was well—but not too happy. Was she still in that school to which she had been sent, learning to sing and dance and practising the other antics that might render her pleasing in the eyes of men?

Or had she rebelled, as he had, and been sent to the female counterpart of his prison? It might well be the latter; for another hint Lohan had dropped was that her fate depended in the end on him. That suggested Cynthia was standing fast, cost what it might.

He ground his teeth and worked furiously on with his weird plant seedlings. The suspense was growing unbearable. It would be an empty victory if he should overthrow the tyrants in the end, yet be too late to save Cynthia. He wanted her alive and happy and well.

Then one day the summons came, by a mysterious messenger, as before. This time Winchester was to proceed to a change of station, ostensibly to the Ellis Island of this world—the immigration and quarantine station on the Moon, where returning Jovian and Martian settlers had to undergo

examination, and imported plants and animals be searched for alien spores and germs.

But Winchester was not to arrive there. Arrangements had been made—cleverly, as always—for him to disappear en route.

In due time he clicked the secret door, and once again he faced Number Eight.

"No answer means *no*," the chief said harshly. "One does not demand to see a prince of the Imperial blood, much less repeat the demand."

"It was a request, not a demand," said Winchester quietly.

"We won't quibble," said Number Eight shortly. "It was denied."

He studied Winchester a moment.

"What was your proposition?" he asked, as if indifferent to the answer, so casual was the tone of the question. Winchester eyed him unswervingly.

"Plans designed for Imperial princes' ears," he said haughtily, "are not to be revealed to underlings—"

"It is the prince's own order," interrupted Number Eight icily.

"I will believe that when I hear it from his own lips," said Winchester, with a frigidity that matched his superior's.

The AFPA section chief sprang to his feet, his face livid. Winchester's heart exulted. His shot in the dark had hit home. For the man before him had never shown emotion before, and now he was trembling with it.

Winchester knew that Number Eight could witness his flaying without the turn of a hair—if it had been ordered by higher authority. He knew likewise that vituperation and epithets would rebound from the man's brassy hide as drops of rain from a duck's back.

Yet by the mere intimation that the man was lying, Winchester had hit him in the raw. The fellow was trying to put something over him!

Number Eight glared at him for an instant. Then with a sudden impulsive gesture he smashed his palm against a nest of buttons on his desk. At once panels slid open and the room swarmed with guards.

"Ha!" snorted Winchester derisively, glancing at them. "So you're going to push your bluff further, eh? Did it ever occur to you, my dear superior, that you are watched as closely as I? But go ahead. You have called your guards. Now what?"

Number Eight's eyes wandered uneasily from Winchester to the guards, then back to his desk. He was pale, and his hands shook.

"Return to your posts," he said weakly. "It was an error—my hand fell on the wrong buttons."

The guards saluted, and with inscrutable expressions

wheeled and disappeared from the room as abruptly as they had entered. Winchester waited until the last secret door slid shut and the walls resumed their normal appearance of solid hewn stone. Then he folded his arms upon his breast and faced 8-RYF. There was a glint of satisfaction in his gaze, and the faintest suggestion of a smile on his straight-set lips.

"It's still your move," Winchester told him.

"Another test, that's all," said Number Eight nervously. "You stood it well. You understand, I hope, that I could not forward your request unless it was really important. Now that I am convinced, it will go forward without delay."

"Thanks," said Winchester, with grim irony. "Thank you so very much."

CHAPTER XVI

Mysterious Tryst

The American was assigned sleeping quarters in a guard-room. He ate his supper in silence and was about to prepare for his bunk, when the sound of clicking heels and the jingle of accouterments as men sprang to attention caused him to pause and look toward the door.

A heavy-set man of forbidding appearance was striding toward him. He was dressed in the green of an AFPA official,

but the profusion of gold emblems on his collar and sleeves told Winchester he was about to meet one of higher rank than he had heretofore seen.

To his astonishment, the officer halted a few paces before him and bowed deeply.

"Pardon, Excellency. A grievous error has been made. Will you be good enough to accompany me?"

Winchester returned the bow, but said nothing. He started to gather up his belongings, but a soldier already had them. There was nothing to do but follow the official out of the room, walking between the ranks of prison guards who stood stiffly at attention.

They traversed a number of corridors and went upwards some distance in a concealed elevator. The officer led the way into a sumptuous apartment and there bowed himself out.

"Prince Lohan has your message. In due time you will be given an audience."

Winchester examined his palatial suite with mingled awe and suspicion. His distrust of the police was profound, and he had been unable so far to fathom the motives of Lohan. He could only guess at what this latest move meant.

Obviously he had the protection of the prince, and that accounted for the deference of the police; but he was troubled over what might be the prince's motives. Gratitude might be one. But the sort of gratitude to be expected from princes is notorious, Winchester knew.

That alone would not explain. Nor Lohan's statement that his interest sprang from the fact his protege came from an ancient world. If his interest had been truly keen, he would have questioned Winchester long before.

Winchester bit his lip and frowned. He dismissed almost instantly the thought that perhaps he was valuable as a secret agent. That was ridiculous, for Lohan had thousands of them at his beck and call, any one of whom knew the game better and was more loyal. That left only Cynthia. She was in Lohan's custody and his interest in her was undisguised.

Was Winchester being kept alive and nursed along, so as to be used eventually as a weapon against the girl? Was the relatively good treatment being accorded him a sort of bribe to induce her to yield? For he felt that she was true and loyal, and therefore might be bullied by threats against his safety.

Lohan was probably shrewd enough to realize that with Winchester dead, she would only turn defiant.

It troubled the American; but if it was so, at least it gave him time. And time was sorely needed. But until he knew more, he could only play his cards as they were dealt him.

The inspection of the rooms revealed a comfortable bedchamber, a luxurious sunken bath, a reception room and a small guardroom where a gold-braided sentry stood. Winchester said nothing to the man, but the fellow had the appearance more of a guard of honor than of a custodian. He went on with his exploration of the rooms.

A narrow bronze door let him into a darkened closet lit only

by dim blue lights. He saw slits in the wall through which brighter light filtered. He put his eye to one, found he was looking down into the arena where the prisoners of the outside working parties were housed at nights. As before, they sat or slept on the sand in small groups.

Winchester found several observation slits fitted with telescopic sights, and several parabolic reflectors at the foci of which were microphones. He tried one of them. By pointing it correctly, he could pick up the slightest whisper on the floor. Using one in conjunction with a high-powered eye-piece, he swept the floor, seeking familiar faces.

At last he found Heim, squatting beside a fellow slave and talking softly with as little motion of the lips as possible, after the fashion of prisoners from time immemorial. The talk went on for minutes, mostly about the day's work and a particularly brutal guard they happened to have. Then it turned to a discussion of the latest addition to their ranks.

"Yeah," Heim was saying, "he looks okay, and that's too bad. The right guys never last long. I had a pal once—a fella named Winchester. Claimed to have slept a thousand years and woke up here. He was a little screwy, I guess, but I liked him. They took him off on a construction job and that was the end of him. Something happened that didn't suit Slant-eyes, so the whole gang got the works. That's the way it goes—"

Winchester listened longer, but his name was not mentioned again. After a bit, he clicked off the observation machines and quietly went to bed, taking another problem with him.

Why had Lohan assigned him this room? As a demonstration of how the all-seeing eye works? Or as a mark of special confidence? There was no answer.

Hours later Winchester fell asleep. He dreamed of being in a tangled net, woven with devilish cleverness out of intertwined question marks.

Nothing made any sense now.

The morning brought another interview with Number Eight. But it was a different Number Eight. He was of the same general type, but slightly older.

"You will deal with me hereafter," he said in a dry, brittle voice. "My predecessor is unfortunately—uh—indisposed. He will not be back."

He cleared his throat. He did not look too happy over stepping into the vacated job.

"Pending your coming audience, there is an important job to be done. As soon as you have completed that, His Highness will see you. Until then you will make no report. He will receive the report in person. Here is the story."

The section chief drew a portfolio of reports toward him.

"Lunar Mines is a private concession operated by the Li-Kiang family—distant cousins of the Lohans. They have their own intelligence service, but we find it expedient to exercise some supervision ourselves. Five of our operatives are already there in minor capacities. They were sent ahead to lay the

groundwork. They have already worked their way into positions of trust, and are ready to introduce you as an old friend and leader.

"You will at once take charge and unveil the whole conspiracy, of whatever nature it is and then arrange for yourself a natural 'disappearance'. Under no circumstances are you to take direct action. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

Winchester took the portfolio. He knew he was in for many hours of intensive study and nearly as many more in the hands of the make-up experts. Since the new Number Eight had no more to say, he withdrew to his elegant quarters.

He found, as in the two previous assignments, that the case had been carefully prepared to the tiniest detail. He would assume the character of a "freeman" foreman from the atomic fuel-depot, and was supposed to be an authority on explosives. He was known to be a leader among the rebel groups, and had run away from Cosmopolis to avoid persecution by the Lohan AFPA.

Pang Li-Kiang's mine superintendent was suspected of acquiring much of his labor in that fashion, and of harboring fugitives. The Grand Duke Li-Kiang had made an investigation and had found no disloyalty, or so he said. Prince Lohan wanted the truth. Hence this expedition.

Winchester studied the papers until he understood. Then he dressed the part and went to a certain spot in Cosmopolis, where he was joined by one of the operatives. Later they went

together to the mines.

Gleaning the information sought took surprisingly little time, thanks to the careful preliminary work. Winchester was immediately received into the rebel ranks and accorded top authority. In a few days he had met the superintendent, a Caucasian named Stallforth, a man with a bulldog face and iron will, but kindly in manner.

He was an excellent mine chief, and the condition of the workers was rather better than elsewhere on the Moon, despite the grueling nature of their jobs. For a few days Winchester was puzzled that there should be so much plotting and unrest there, as compared to other places, until he became friends with Stallforth and got at the facts.

When he knew them and had verified them through his other contacts, he was ready to report.

He arranged an explosion to cover his supposed demise. A confederate brought him several fingers and a severed foot from the execution chambers at Central. He planted these in his room, together with a small bomb which he placed on his work table. He left all his clothing, and escaped in a basket carried by one of the lesser agents.

Two hours later his room blew up. The associates he had left behind promptly identified the remains. That particular role was done with forever.

"I am ready now," Winchester told Number Eight when he reported back at Central.

"Good. So is Prince Lohan. You will take the Four-forty to Terra, Alpine Port. That will be tomorrow. In the meantime you must prepare a fresh character."

Winchester raised his eyebrows.

"It is awkward for His Highness to meet commoners in private audience. Your meeting will be informal. You are going in the capacity of a horticultural expert, as adviser to the head gardener of the Khan. En route you will stop at the Lohan estate and inspect the gardens there. The prince will contrive to meet you."

"I see," said Winchester.

It was a relief to know there would be no witnesses, for should the prince by any chance lose face, it meant the death of all who observed it. Winchester had never felt entirely guiltless over the wholesale slaughter that had followed his last interview with the yellow-robed tyrant.

"I will be ready," he said.

But inside him, his heart beat wildly. Things were coming his way at last.

Once more Allan Winchester walked the wide lawns of what had formerly been Germany. He had a better picture of them now, for he had observed the continent of Europe carefully as his space ship descended.

There were no more fields and few towns. All had been turned back to forest or park, studded with the palaces and

pavilions of the silk-wearers. By special order of Prince Lohan, Winchester was to be allowed to wander about freely, and for the duration of his inspection the field-slaves were kept in barracks and their soldier guards with them.

It was a deserted paradise, except for the gay parties going on in some of the lodges and pavilions. Winchester saw them from a distance, and walked on. At his own convenience the prince would meet him.

At last Winchester caught a glimpse of yellow in the underbrush, saw the shimmer and sheen of embroidered silk. But it was not the wide-skirted robe worn by the prince, but pantalets rising above dainty sandaled feet. A graceful figure slipped from behind the bushes and beckoned to him.

The gesture was not coy, but imperious and urgent—almost frantic, denoting haste was in order. It startled him, for it was the last thing he expected to see on his trip to Earth. But he collected himself and strode toward the woman, wondering what complication he had blundered into and how he should handle it.

The moment the woman had made her sign, she hid in the bushes again. Winchester started. This was the oriental princess he had snatched from the creeping tentacles of the Martian pitcher-plant.

But what was more amazing, Cynthia—Cynthia, the girl of his dreams—was right beside her!

CHAPTER XVII

Two Interviews

In another moment he and Cynthia were locked in each other's arms. He embraced her with all the ardor of intense longing. She clung to him passionately, desperately, whimpering like a frightened child that has at last found its protector.

"Oh, Allan," she whispered. "It has been so hard not to know. I thought you were dead—I could not believe them. And then when they convinced me—"

"How?" he asked.

"They let me look through a telescaner. It was the day you defied that horrid secret service man when he tried to intercept your message to the prince. I knew you were well, then, and more than well. For I had been so afraid they would break your spirit. I have seen so much of that here—men that cringe like whipped dogs at the sight of the tiniest bit of insignia."

"But you?" he demanded fiercely. "I can take care of myself. But you?"

"I can, too. Believe me, Allan. But it is like walking a tight-wire in a gale of wind. The prince loves me, you see. Only he is a proud man. He is strong enough to take me any time he chooses, but he will not have it that way.

"He has been courting me. He promises great things for you—"

if I will only give you up. That I will never do! But the time has not come when I have to tell him so. Oh, Allan, do something to end this horrible suspense! We can't go on this way."

She shuddered violently and he pressed her more tightly to him.

"I am doing something," he said, "but it will take time. Fight for time. It is the only thing that counts now. By the way—how did you arrange to be assigned to Prince Lohan's estate?"

He noticed now that she also wore the imperial yellow, though it was slashed with red. She looked over her shoulder to where the princess stood, a dozen yards away, looking on with approval but with some signs of apprehension.

"Chen Chin—that means Lustrous Pearl—chose me from the school to be her handmaiden. She was jealous of me then, and wanted me close so she could have me poisoned. It was just at that time that you saved her life. She learned more about us from the prince.

"Until she actually met you, she believed you to be a fictitious person, invented to deceive her. Now she is fighting for us, both out of gratitude to you and because she loves Prince Lohan and wants to hold him. She thinks that so long as you are alive—"

The princess uttered a little cry of alarm, and made fluttering gestures.

"It is time to go," whispered Cynthia. "We have taken great risks."

"Courage, sweet," said Winchester, crushing Cynthia in one last embrace. "Keep on believing in me, even if I do some strange things soon. It may take time, but if I succeed, not only will we be free but all humanity as well."

"I feel so helpless," the girl murmured. "What if Prince Lohan —"

Winchester felt within a secret pocket and drew forth a small object. He pressed it into her hand. It was an ampule of the canary-colored drug of dreams.

"Keep this hidden about you at all times. If Lohan presses you to the point of desperation, break it under his nose, but hold your own breath and run. Its fumes deal out a death-in-life, a gripping drug habit."

A sharp hiss came from the anxious princess. Their eyes blurred with tears. There was a tight squeeze of the hand. Before he knew it, Winchester was standing among silent bushes whose boughs stirred faintly in the wind. He waited a little bit and then walked on, pretending to examine the vegetation.

A day later he met Prince Lohan himself. He was strolling in the woods unattended. At the sight of Winchester he sat down on a knoll of grass and motioned to the American to come and sit beside him. His manner was impersonally expectant.

"Well?" he asked. "What is the situation at the Lunar Mines?"

Winchester pretended for a moment to have a reluctance that he did not feel. He was resolved to pull no punches, but here he was treading on dangerous ground.

"I am sorry to report, sir," he said, as if painfully picking his words, "that your noble kinsman is disloyal, and his entire establishment is with him."

"I know that," barked Lohan. "The details, please."

"He poses as a humane man, as bait to the workers. To bolster that pose, he feeds them a little better and allows them small liberties. It is a policy that has brought many of the better workers to his side. Slaves scheme to be sold to him. He has allowed it to leak downward to the multitude that when he becomes the Khan—"

"He will never become Khan," snapped Lohan.

"—he will abolish slavery and institute reforms. His man Stallforth is particularly dangerous because he is able, sincere and a courageous fighter. The rank and file are all steamed up. They plan to contaminate the other workers and eventually seize control of the Moon. The accession of Prince Li-Kiang would follow as a matter of course."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Lohan. "You put the thing in a nutshell. It is a true report and a concise one. I knew all of it long ago. I wanted confirmation from an enemy."

"An enemy, my lord?" asked Winchester.

"Aren't you?" countered Lohan. "And why not?"

"I am not a fool, like these others. In this world, the strong get what they want, and therefore I intend to be strong. And to be still stronger, I intended to ally myself with the strong. It is no

more than common sense."

"Well spoken. Now, what are your recommendations as to the mine situation?"

"All but the superintendent should be made convicts. That is simple. Merely make the mine crater another prison—the work will continue uninterrupted. Stallforth should be sent to the Crater of Dreams—"

"He shall die by torture," declared Lohan.

"No," said Winchester firmly. "He knows too much. He has a peculiar insight into the geologic structure of the Moon. It was he who discovered the veins they are now working. When those fail, he will discover more."

"From the Crater of Dreams—steeped in dope?" queried Lohan sarcastically.

"Yes. It is an intuitive matter. All we must do is put a helmet on him. Let his ideas and fantasies roam. Any slave could listen in on them, and if that slave could remember them truly, he would appear to be a great metallurgist. We will know where other deposits are likely to be found, and how to get at them. Stallforth will be helpless to act, but the activity of his brain is left to us."

"A novel idea," murmured Lohan. "We should have thought of that sooner. Are there other scientists that we could profit from in the same manner?"

"Many. Few of them are truly loyal. Most resent the present

regime. I would recommend dozens for the pit of dreams, including most of my former associates in botany and zoology. We need not put up with their sulky ways and obstinate behavior. All we have to do is give them a whiff of the gas and they have formed the habit.

"After that we need only listen in to reap the fruits of their uncontrolled thoughts. I assure you an era of unprecedented advance in the sciences will follow."

Winchester paused to gauge the effect he had made. It was profound. Lohan had taken the bait, hook, line and sinker.

"Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "You shall do it."

"I only know some of them," reminded Winchester. "I would have to have access to the secret files to know the real capacities of the rest and their attitude toward us."

"You shall have it," said Lohan. "But back to the mines. You failed to state your recommendation concerning the Prince Li-Kiang. What should be done with him?"

"That is for your Lordship to say. If I were in your place, I should have him beheaded."

"As good as done. The order will go forth tonight. What else?"

Winchester scratched his head, pretending a reluctance he did not feel. He stammered several beginnings, as if uncertain what to say, then laid his plan down plainly. Lohan listened attentively throughout, nodding from time to time as he agreed

with the several items.

There were too many AFPA men, Winchester told him. Many of them were corrupt, as shown by the recent exposure of the late Number Eight.

"He is dead," interrupted Lohan, "and his death was not a pleasant one."

"There are others," reminded Winchester, and went on with his bill of indictment.

The mass of workers, he asserted, were content with mere subsistence. A great deal of the current unrest was due to the system set up to suppress them unnecessarily. That could be done away with at one stroke. Modify the system so that it would not be so galling, round up and imprison the known agitators in one grand haul. After that there would be little trouble.

"You can do this?" asked Lohan, sold to the tip of his toes.

"I can—given the information you have on file and unlimited authority."

"You have it," said Lohan, rising.

The two men stood up and faced one another.

"You have proclaimed yourself a selfish man," said Prince Lohan, deliberately. "You expect a reward for this service. What is it?"

"Power, first," said Winchester. "Then a wife of my own choosing."

"The first has already been granted," said Lohan smoothly. "We will see how you handle it. As to the wife, that will follow. Deliver what you promise and you shall have the inspection and choice of a hundred thousand maidens. Select which, or as many, as you choose. We will not quarrel about such a trivial detail."

"My selection is already made," said Winchester with dignity, "and your Excellency knows what it is. The power I ask is to be employed for your benefit. The reward should be for me alone. It is a small thing to request from one who has the entire population of the Earth and planets on which to draw."

"We shall see. We shall see," said Prince Lohan testily. "It is a point that can be debated later."

Winchester's gaze bored into the half-averted face before him. He wanted to defy the man then and there; but there was too much at stake. Given the power he craved, he would not have to petition. He could demand and take. For once Winchester suppressed his primal instincts and pretended to accede.

"As your Lordship will have it," he said, but not too humbly. "We will postpone that discussion until you have seen the fruit of my work."

"So be it," said Lohan, gathering his skirts about him and rising.

It was a gesture of dismissal. Winchester took the hint,

bowed, and backed away. At the prescribed distance of twenty backward paces, he bowed again, turned and stalked off into the forest.

The first step of the task he had undertaken had been accomplished. He had been given power to dispose of the revolutionists, and many of the dreaded AFPA men. With luck, everything else in his secret plan would follow.

So far, Cynthia was well and safe. There was no more that he could insist upon at this time without jeopardizing all his gains.

That night he received orders, telling him the Khan had decided he needed no advice on how to cultivate his parks. The so-called expert from the Moon could return to his regular duties.

Winchester took the midnight ferry back to the Central Receiving Station. He entered the royal suite which had been assigned him and sat for a long time slumped in an easy chair, thinking over the events of the past few days.

Now he had the tools of the destruction and reconstruction of a government in his hands.

How well could he use them?

CHAPTER XVIII

Reign of Terror

When next Winchester sat at a desk in the great Central Station, it was in another capacity. He was robed in the green of the AFPA leaders, and resplendent in gold lace. His numerical designation had shrunk to the smallest of all—Number One.

He had all power and was answerable only to Prince Lohan himself. It was a mighty and terrifying responsibility. It weighed on him, for the task he had set for himself, and outlined frankly to Lohan, called for the execution of thousands of men, the imprisonment at hard labor of tens of thousands more.

Far worse than that, he planned to inoculate the brainiest and ablest men of the System with the dreaded Lotusol habit. What if in the end he failed?

It was a sobering thought, but Winchester stiffened himself to the task. He must not fail! He must follow through on his desperate gamble with all the callous ruthlessness of the Mongoloids. If the salvation of the world—and his own and Cynthia's salvation—required a baptism of blood and tears, it would be done. And by his own hand!

His office was in the innermost part of the citadel and impenetrably guarded. Five concentric rings of secret doors and high-ranking police officials hemmed him in. His contacts were few and selected. Next in rank was Number Two, the custodian of the central files, where all that was to be known about every living man in the System was recorded.

Number Three was inspector-general, and supervised the

work of Numbers Four to Fifteen, the twelve regional sub-chiefs. Number Two, Number Three and the prince were all who had voluntary access to Number One—Allan Winchester.

He proceeded cautiously with his program. There were many weeks needed for preparation for the numerous prisoners Winchester's huge dragnet would bring in. He sent an army of workmen to an immense and vacant crater, had it domed and filled with factories. This was to be his main disciplinary barracks.

The Lotusol works in the Botanical Gardens were quadrupled in size and put at once into capacity production. The American would need many gallons of the drug for the work in hand. Helmeted men under adequate protection invaded the Crater of Dreams, to provide more slabs and sand clearings for the accommodation of the horde of addicts that were soon to come.

Winchester reported the progress on these projects to Lohan as they were done, but there were many details he did not see fit to dwell upon. One of these had to do with the armament provided for the disciplinary barracks. Another was his transfer of ten thousand men to the Botanical Section, to act as special gardeners.

Pending the completion of the construction work, Winchester studied transcripts of the secret files. It was tedious and confining work, but the efficient police had done a superlative job in neatly summarizing each man's character in a short paragraph. Keying every individual with a code number made review of millions of cases possible.

Sorting machines did much of the work. Winchester soon knew just what men he wanted to put in each category, whether they had ever been in the hands of the police, whether they lived on Earth, on the Moon, or any one of the otherwise autonomous planets.

For although many of the planets and satellites were private grants to high-ranking princes, the long hand of the AFPA reached out to all.

In time Winchester's lists were completed and the zero hour came. The American steeled himself and called his fifteen sub-chiefs to him. He handed each of them voluminous sheafs of instructions.

"It is our intention," he told them, "to obliterate at one stroke all possibility of revolt, now or hereafter. Two days ago, you will remember, I ordered all political prisoners transferred to the new disciplinary barracks, leaving only thieves and robbers in the old prisons.

"Tomorrow you will sweep the entire System, according to the lists just furnished you. They include every working man and minor foreman disloyal to his Sacred Highness, the Great Khan. They include the known agitators. So far as we know, they include every man of subversive tendencies living who is below the grade of superintendent or scientist.

"The disgruntled elements will be dealt with by the special Poison Squad under the direction of Number Three in person. Carry on! Dismissed."

As the last of the green-garbed AFPA chieftains filed out,

Winchester drew a sharp breath. He found his heart pounding, for he had included in his lists the names of many men known to him to be rebels, but who had hitherto escaped the suspicion of the AFPA.

If his daring plan failed, it meant the doom for all time of civilization as he had known it. Not one man of good-will and energy had been left outside the purge—except those who enjoyed upper ratings. They were about to be exposed to a still more uncertain fate.

Winchester paced the floor anxiously, glancing at his chronometer from time to time. At last the bank of jewel-like monitor lights twinkled. The flood of reports was beginning to come in. His reign of terror had been launched!

He put on his audiohelmet and tuned in at random with his selective switch. There was a flickering of light and a mumble of disorganized sound.

The picture came in clearer.

Winchester viewed a street scene in Cosmopolis, through a scanner concealed under the window ledge of a building. Workers were streaming out from one of the great plastic plants and walking toward their barracks. Operatives of the AFPA were thick among the crowd.

Winchester saw two of them cruise up alongside a man and pin his arms. There was a whisper in his ear, and the man nodded. One of the operatives dropped astern and went after other prey. The other led the man around the next corner where a prison van was parked. The round-up was in progress.

The American flicked the switch. There was more blinking, and then he was looking into a room from the vantage point of its molding. This was the office of the Curator-in-Chief of the Botanical Gardens, Winchester's former superior. The door opened and three helmeted men walked in.

The old chief stood up in surprise. But as the leading operative suddenly snapped the neck of a small vial he carried in his hand, the scientist inhaled a deep breath. On the instant he sank back into his chair, with the expression of idiotic vacuity characteristic of the Lotus-eaters.

The invading operative had just opened an ampule of the compelling Lotusol!

The men moved swiftly then. One produced a shiny helmet and snapped it on the old man's head. Another brought forth a welding torch. At a stroke he welded the chin strap tight. Then the two hustled the botanist from the room.

Winchester turned to the next adjacent scanner. It was on the front of the building. Through it he could see them put the old scientist into a sealed van, where the atmosphere was pure vapor of Lotus. The wagon rolled away.

Winchester changed his tuning wave. Now he was on a special band, which emanated from telepathic transmitters incorporated in the helmets of the denizens of the Crater of Dreams. The new helmets Winchester had made were not like the ones formerly used.

Instead of being on a single private wave, accessible only to a favorite individual Mongoloid, these helmets had a common

denominator. The Master receiver Winchester wore could tune in on any of them at his discretion. Besides that, each sender had its automatic receiver, which kept a continuous record of all the thoughts that came in over it.

The American had natural reluctance to tune in on a man's private thoughts. But it was imperative that he know just how the drug hit a man of genuine intellectual capacity.

He soon found out. The subject was his former superior—the Curator-in-Chief at the Botanical Gardens.

At the moment the drug struck his nostrils, the curator must have been engaged in a brown study about the Venusian drip-fern. This was a plant of rather extraordinary medicinal qualities, inasmuch as its essential oil contained three of the vital hormones found within the human body.

Winchester gasped at the first revelation that came to him. His ex-chief, now that the workings of his mind were no longer inhibited by practical prohibitions, was speculating on the possibility of crossing the fern with the Titanian fungus!

It was no less than revolutionary.

The two plants were fundamentally different; the one living in humid, hot air, the other in the bleak near-vacuum of twilight Uranus, where even radon liquefies and lies in rosy pools!

Yet Winchester saw at once the value of the dream, if it could be made practicable. Until then the oils of both plants had been blended in the pharmaceutical laboratories, but at great expense, to make a product invaluable to man—a specific against five

different types of germs.

If the plants could be crossed successfully, it would mean that the hybrid would produce the ultimate oil by natural processes. Man would have only to tap the plant's veins.

Curious, the American tuned in on other scientists just inoculated by the Poison Squad. Not all were so productive. Many of their dreams were so wild and impracticable as to cause shudders to run down the spine. Yet here and there among them were ideas worth developing, so daring that men in their normal senses would never entertain them seriously for a moment. But once formulated, competent scientists could look these schemes over in cold calculation, separate the hopelessly fantastic from those that were soundly based.

Again the fear of failure gripped Winchester. What scientists would look them over? In a few hours there would be no more sober and sane scientists. His dragnet had them all. It was true that robot receivers were busily recording every thought sent out by the drug-maddened victims. But who was there left to review them, to decide which deserved development and which not?

"I must not fail," Winchester said.

A week saw the end of the first grand sweep. The new disciplinary barracks was crammed with prisoners and its mills hummed. Regiments of guards surrounded the inmates, armed with every weapon current in that day—heat and electron guns, and the dreaded paralyzers.

On the roof heavy lightning throwers defended the place against any conceivable effort to storm it and release the

imprisoned revolutionaries. It was an impregnable fortress.

The Crater of Dreams was packed to capacity. In it now reclined every scientist and engineer of note, as well as most of the former plant managers. They were slothful and indolent, dreaming day and night, sending out pulsations of thought that were appalling in their audacity.

Invariably the dreamers worked from the basis of their own memories and special capacities. But their illusions were embroidered with whimsical variations, inconceivable to a man of sane mind. Whatever course the destiny of mankind might take thereafter, these drugged intellectuals were helpless to aid or hinder.

There were no more rebels or dissenters. All had been accounted for. That is, all but Allan Winchester himself and Cynthia. And of these two, but one held the key that might with luck unlock the myriad of now helpless prisoners.

A silver gong sounded. It was the personal call of Prince Lohan himself.

"My lord?" said Winchester, answering promptly.

The full-length figure of the prince appeared upon the television screen.

"You have done well—better even than you promised. I did not know there were so many. But what of the double-crossers in my own organization?"

"That is the next step, my lord. You will be shocked at their

number, but my findings are unimpeachable. I should warn you—there are wearers of the yellow among them."

"I know," said the prince, and his face was hard as nails. "They will be treated as they deserve. Name them."

"The Prince Kow Foong, the Prince Ila-Ting, the woman known as Kuka San, favorite of the Khan—"

On he went, reciting the names of many of the great. On the list were five princes of the blood, twelve grand dukes and forty-seven minor aristocrats, including the governor of Callisto. All had conspired for accession to the throne or the assassination of Lohan and his consort.

"I will attend to them," said Lohan, and his voice was like a file biting into a resonant plateglass. "What of my agents?"

"I am sorry to inform your Highness that of my fifteen highest-ranking associates, only two are to be trusted. These are Number Six and Number Fourteen. The rest merit death."

"They shall die—and tonight," said Lohan with great finality. "The rest?"

"The rest I will deal with," said Winchester.

He watched Lohan's image fade. Then he brought out his lists. The first was a short one. It consisted of four hundred and three cell leaders—dangerous and cruel men, all. Next came a longer one, the roster of the regular AFPA operatives of the third and fourth grades. It numbered above ten thousand. There followed the names of five times as many more stool pigeons, and a

selection from the ranks of the more brutal prison guards.

Winchester called his fifteen subordinates. They were still unaware of their own impending fate.

"These men are to be executed within the hour. If you doubt authority, any one of you is at liberty to appeal to His Highness. That is all."

One by one they acknowledged, but with awe-struck eyes.

Again Winchester sat back, tense and on edge, until the glimmer of the monitor lights began bringing in the confirmation that his orders were being executed. This time he did not look on. For although he knew that every man marked for the purge richly deserved all that could be done to him, Winchester had no desire to witness his death agonies.

Yet the glint of supreme satisfaction was in his eyes. The iron of persecution had branded him deeply, to the very heart. Whether he failed or not, this night many a scoundrel would go to his just doom. The world would be rid of its crudest tormentors.

Then Winchester thought of Cynthia, restless and impatient in her precarious role as handmaiden to the royal princess. He stole toward the princely television set and examined it. A moment later he called an electrician.

"But it is death, horrible death, to do that," whispered the man in terror.

"It will be still more horrible if you do not," said Winchester

grimly.

The man began to work. His hand trembled violently.

"Now you can do it, Excellency," he said, but his face was ghastly pale. "There is two-way transmission."

"Thank you," said Winchester.

His ray-gun was in his hand. Without a moment's hesitation he blasted the man out of existence. The fellow was high up on his list of proscription, for his crimes were many. He was the best wire-tapper on the Moon. Now he had done his last job.

Winchester sniffed the acrid smoke of what had a moment before been a man. He had only advanced the man's ordered death by a few hours. It was a detail he must not worry over.

With considerable trepidation he approached the controls. In a moment he would be listening in on Prince Lohan's private palace, in its beautiful location in Southern Germany.

Slowly he tuned in and was rewarded by the return glow as the screen warmed. From his point of vantage he was looking over the shoulder of Princess Chen Chin. Directly facing him was Cynthia. And her eyes were full of horror!

CHAPTER XIX

Catastrophe

The princess was sobbing and wringing her hands.

"Oh, oh, my dear," she was crying, "if only we could save him! But we cannot. Lohan is so clever. He left me only a moment ago. He has achieved what he set out to do—extinguish at one stroke all seeds of rebellion, and at the same time purge his own ranks.

"Now that he has done that he will throw your man in with the rest. He just boasted of it and taunted me with it! He says that now that your Winchester has served his purpose, he has sent his red-striped hellions to assassinate him. They will leave shortly and land on the Moon within four hours.

"Your man is done for!" the princess said brokenly. "After that, Lohan promises, you will succumb to his advances. I can tell you, child, that man can be vile when he chooses. He has methods you would never dream of—"

"It can't be," moaned Cynthia, "it can't be! I won't—I won't, I don't care what he does! But if only we could warn Allan—that is all that matters now—"

Allan Winchester shut the machine off. He had had his warning and there was no time to spare. His own fate and that of Cynthia's hung in the balance. All was lost unless he acted quickly.

He cast anxious eyes about him. He knew already that the ranks of his outer guards were thinning, for many of them had

been marked for the purge. It took but the work of a moment to order the inner sentries to reinforce the recently depleted outer guards.

In a few seconds Winchester was free from the supervision that necessarily accompanies a man of great rank. The men who watched over his inner office were on their way to cubicles down corridors many hundreds of feet away.

He ran into the great file room where the basic records of millions of men were kept. For once he was thankful for the mysterious way in which the data for them had been submitted. Those damning reports had come in via television and were recorded as they came. Their source was lost. They could not be reconstructed except from the memories of men, most of whom were now dead or in the act of dying.

If the photo-recorded files were destroyed, the work of half a century of AFPA activity would be lost. No one could know what any number signified, nor the detailed record of any man.

Winchester surveyed swiftly the precautions previously made to preserve the priceless records. He also noted their inflammable nature, engraved as they were on reels of magnesium wire. He had only to seize a wrench and wreck beyond repair the valves leading to the sprinkler system.

Then he built a fire and shut the steel doors, to which only he and the now defunct Number Two had keys. In a few minutes the central files would be an inferno of flames, and the ashes would yield nothing.

All the carefully gleaned confidential information as to each

citizen in the System would go up in smoke. Even the identity of the numbered slaves and convicts would be lost. No one could know who was in for what, or for how long.

Winchester hastily stripped. He shifted to one of the many disguises available—that of a common workman of Cosmopolis. Then he lifted his transmitter and called Number Fourteen down the corridor.

"Number One speaking," he said, in as cold and casual a voice as he could muster. "I have just been interviewing a most valuable witness and have let him go, thinking he was immune from arrest. He is tall and dressed in brown, and is walking down 'D' passage. He is a dangerous man, but I want him kept for further questioning.

"Grab him and send him at once to the Primary Barracks, but take care not to harm him in any way. His record will follow."

"I understand," said the faithful Number Fourteen.

Winchester hung up and glanced down at his brown garments. A distinct change, these poor clothes, from his robes of authority. He took one backward glance at the door to the file room, which was already reddening and beginning to bulge.

He had taken the precaution to sever the wires to the general alarm system, but a fire of that heat could not be concealed long. Within a few minutes the castle would be swarming with fire-fighters. He must be clear of the building before then.

Winchester crawled under his desk and raised a hidden hatch. In another moment he was sliding down the spiral way, until he

came up against a door four floors below. By the use of special keys and an intricate knowledge of the place, he soon was out in an empty corridor and hurrying along it. He dreaded the details of his capture, but it was a thing that had to be.

It was not long in coming. He rounded another corner and then heard the harsh order.

"Halt!"

He quickened his stride, only to be confronted by another of the fast-thinning guards. There was a spurt of light, and Winchester found himself writhing on the floor, paralyzed and in agony. He looked at the man who had brought him down. It was Severs, one of the men on his list for destruction. Apparently they had not gotten to him yet.

Other soldiers rushed up, and Winchester was seized and hurried along toward the exit. He saw only, as he left, that two of the newly arrived guards had pulled Severs to one side.

"Good work, buddy," he thought he heard one of them say. "Step this way, will you? The boss wants to see you."

At least the AFPA purge of its most effective agents was being carried out, with all the thoroughness and fidelity to orders for which that body was notorious.

It was, thought Winchester, a type of murderous efficiency which successfully destroyed itself.

His entry into the disciplinary barracks was inconspicuous enough. His two captors simply turned him over to the gate

guard. They noted his serial number and the red star emblazoned on his back. Then they shot him on into the herd of prisoners.

Winchester lost no time in seeking out his old friend Heim. He was somewhere there, he knew, for he himself had committed him. He had ransacked the Heim file and examined the man's record from childhood on. The fellow was reliable. He was a true patriot and idealist, brave to the point of recklessness, and utterly dependable.

It took Winchester hours, among those cluttered thousands, but at last he came upon the man, seated in the midst of a group of other red star convicts.

"As I live and breathe!" ejaculated Heim. "My old sidekick—Rip Van Winkle! I thought they had done you in."

"Not me," grinned Winchester, and he squatted beside them. "Not yet."

"S-sh-h," he warned a moment later. "I've got to talk with you. Big things are coming up."

"You're telling me?" said Heim, with a hard laugh. "A round-up like this isn't done for nothing. Look! They've got every one of us—all the men that I know, and hundreds more I never heard about. But so far as I know, not a stool pigeon in the lot. Somehow, after you've been a con awhile, you learn to smell 'em out."

"Right," said Winchester. "Every stool pigeon died, not an hour ago. I know. I had the list, and I ordered their execution."

Heim never batted an eyelash.

"Poor kid," he said commiseratingly, looking sharply at his old friend. "So stir's got you at last, too? I thought you could take it."

"I could. I did," said Winchester grimly. "And I'm not nuts. Listen!"

For an hour he talked into the other man's ear. Now he need not fear lip-reading or eavesdropping stool pigeons about, nor did he care a hang about the concealed telemicrophones and scanners adroitly placed about the walls. Their leads were blind now. Their impressions would be carried only to burned and charred instruments, in the ruins of what had been the central files. The precautions he had taken had been thorough.

"You!" exclaimed Heim, drawing back in the traditional fear born of years of dealing with masked agents.

"Yes, I!" Winchester was vehement. "I was the AFPA chief. I ordered these things. Given another three days, we would have had the world in our hands, to take as we liked. I would have moved the remnants of the AFPA from here and substituted puppet guards.

"We could have had access to the vast stores of weapons in the prison arsenal. But I was not allowed to finish the job. Lohan beat me to the punch."

"Then we're sunk," said Heim desperately, and with a touch of reproach. "What if you did have thousands of guards and agents and spies killed? They will find others. You have

imprisoned us all and disabled our brains. There is no one left outside to help, or care.

"They will kill us off by degrees—work, work, work, poor food, the lash, torture. It would have been better if you had never come."

"No," Winchester said resolutely. "All is not lost. We are stronger than ever. We are here—tens of thousands of us—with but one thought and one idea—freedom! There is not a man under this dome not in uniform that you cannot trust with your life. The spies have died miserably, the cruelest of the guards have gone the same way.

"For once we have a chance to organize. Let's get at it! We must strike before Lohan brings up his red-striped palace guards and his aristocratic cruiser force. We must—"

"Ha!" snorted Heim. "We would not last a day. They will hunt you down like a snake, and the other ringleaders as well. Your purge, as you call it, will appear as child's play beside what the Mongoloids will do. Their memories are long and they are vicious and vindictive."

"Their memories are no longer than their records," retorted Winchester. "The records have been destroyed, as well as the men who made them. The agents who knew me by sight are dead now, every last one of them. Only Lohan himself could pick me out from this mob—and he dare not try.

"The instant I destroyed the files, the numbers on our backs became meaningless. There is no way for them to know whether you or I or any other man is more dangerous than some poor

fellow, let us say, who was sent here simply because he failed to perform the kow-tow quickly."

Heim remained gloomily unconvinced.

"I meant to put the weapons in your hands. I was forestalled," Winchester went on in eager earnestness. "There, and there only, I failed. There is only one thing to do. We must make our weapons. We can still prevail!"

Heim laughed outright, and held out his open hands.

"What weapons?" he asked hollowly. "They have paralyzers, ray and electron guns that kill instantly and at a distance. And we are expected to attack them with sticks! Behind these guards we see stands the army—the picked force kept on Earth to protect the Khan.

"If by some miracle we could overcome the guards, they would send in the army. No. Empty-handed we can do nothing, except offer the same sullen resistance we have always presented."

"No alert man has to go empty-handed long," asserted Winchester, trying to bolster the man with his own assurance. "Long before the invention of such weapons as the paralyzer and the electron gun, men fought wars and killed each other. The history books were burned before your time, but not before mine. What weapons we need, we can make or improvise."

"Like what?" Heim demanded.

"I will show you," said Winchester quietly, and he began to

make marks upon the floor.

CHAPTER XX

Final Challenge

Winchester had a little time, he knew. He grinned in triumph as he imagined the consternation reigning among the surviving AFPA men, now that they had learned how they had been tricked.

He had a vivid mental picture of their chagrin, as they poked among the ashes of the records, only to find that the work of two generations had gone up in smoke.

But the grimmest satisfaction of all was to be had from picturing Lohan's fury, as soon as the prince should come and learn the truth. It was easy to predict that in his mad rage, Lohan would have all the surviving guards at Central Station summarily executed.

Yes, the resourceful American had time—a few hours, at least.

He and Heim worked frantically to make the most of them. For the nucleus of the revolt, they chose but a hundred of their closest friends at first. These were sent scurrying about the machinery in the dome, gathering up the material Winchester had asked for.

In half an hour, piles of metal parts lay about, and men were plying their tools feverishly to fashion wooden stocks their leader had sketched out for them.

"Now, look, men," said Winchester, seeing everything needed was at hand. "In the old days before death rays were invented, men fought by hurling missiles. In my time, this was done by firing lumps of steel out of steel tubes by means of a powerful explosive. But long before the invention of the rifle and cannon, men had developed other ways.

"The one I am about to show you was among the most deadly. It is silent and makes no flash, yet will kill surely and efficiently at a considerable distance."

He picked up one of the hardwood stocks. A skilled workman handed him a slightly curved blade of metal. It was a leaf from a spring made for one of the small ore cars used on the Moon, but modified for its new purpose. Winchester fastened it to the small end of the stock.

Next he added a ratchet and a pawl and rigged them to the side of the stock, together with an operating lever. He inserted a trigger mechanism, last of all strung a short length of high-tensile wire from one end of the spring to the other.

"This is a crossbow," explained Winchester, "and I energize it thus."

He engaged the wire of the bow on the trigger, and began jacking it backward by turning the ratchet.

"The spring is now under great tension. I place an iron bolt in

this groove and aim so..."

Winchester looked about him. Perched in a swinging gondola above them was one of the ever-present guards. At the moment he was not alert, since the conspirators had worked so quietly that no suspicion had been aroused. Winchester drew a careful bead on him, allowing for the curve of the trajectory. He squeezed the trigger.

There was a sharp, low twang—inaudible above the roar of the busy shop—and the bent spring sprang back to straightness with a jerk. The whizzing bolt had sped away, propelled by the powerful kinetic force released. The convicts followed its flight with eager eyes.

They saw a red blotch appear behind the guard's ear, saw him slump without a whimper to the floor of his hanging lookout.

They started, listening; but there was no other sound to follow. The general alarm did not ring. The stricken guard had had no time to give it, and no one else had heard or seen.

The prisoners needed no further demonstration. Each grabbed a set of parts laid out before him and began hastily assembling his own weapon. In a few minutes Heim was among them, whispering to each where he was to go, and passing out ammunition.

"Two of you will account for each guard," Winchester instructed them carefully.

"Just in case one misses. If we are lucky, we can knock them all off before they can muster their reserves. Then, as the relief

shift comes on, we'll go at them while they are on their way to their posts."

The men nodded and slipped away in pairs.

Not all the guards were killed at the first shot, or even hit. Some heard the clang of the bolt against their armored niches and stood up to peer down at the throng below. The second or third bolt usually did its work. In no case did a sentry realize his danger in time to jab the button that would set the sirens howling.

Winchester's men swiftly climbed to the lookout perches and robbed the dead guardsmen of their weapons. A half hour later they lay in half a hundred separate ambushes. They brought down the new guard as it came in to relieve the old.

"We have a hundred paralyzers now," Winchester exulted, "and as many lightning guns. The next step will be to turn in the alarm. It should come from a distant building, while we wait here near the sally-port of the guardhouse. I have sent a man already;—he should be at his post at any moment."

Gongs began to clang and the sirens wail. Winchester ran, leading his resolute gang to an outside corner of the guardhouse. They arrived just as the gates swung open and the riot squad burst forth. The convict fire caught the guardsmen on the flank and unawares, since they were bent on getting to the building whence the false alarm had come.

The surprised soldiers went down in windrows under the hail of lightning bolts and paralytic rays.

"Never mind them—they're washed up!" yelled Winchester. "Into the guardhouse, quick, before the door is closed!"

The inner guards were quickly disposed of. But by that time the great triple-warning signal was being blasted out by a gigantic, deep-throated whistle. The steel doors cutting the soldiers' barracks and the arsenal into many minute compartments closed automatically. The room where the reserves and riot squad had been idling was effectively cut off from the rest of the building.

"Not that way," Winchester shouted to a prisoner who was blasting away with a flame-thrower. "Save your fire until Heim comes up with our reserves."

He stooped over and rifled the pockets of the dead Officer of the Day.

Heim came pounding up with two hundred more selected convicts, some of whom had armed themselves from the corpses of the defunct riot squad.

"It pays to have been a policeman here," Winchester said grimly, as he fingered the small mechanism he had taken from the man who lay at his feet.

"I know how those locks work. They are magnetic. You don't use keys, but set this gadget and wave it before a certain spot. Follow me closely with your men—and blast down every guard you see. Behind the third door we go through, there's enough equipment for an army."

They met with little opposition. Winchester's purge of

"disloyal" police had been drastic indeed. Wholesale execution had left every post on the Moon short-handed. The two sets of sentries plus the riot squad must have represented most of the garrison. The few rebels they met in the passages went out of existence with a flicker of blue fire. It took but two minutes to reach the armory door.

"Pass out arms to everyone," ordered Winchester. "Mop up the remainder of the guards, then man the defenses of the dome and the outer walls. It won't be long before the Khan's cruisers will be coming. One of these guards must surely have sent for them.

"And," he added significantly, "if they didn't, I will!"

The convicts ran by the thousands to their stations, shouting and leaping for joy and waving their weapons in elation. At last, after years of unutterable misery and harsh treatment, they had been given a chance to win their freedom.

Throughout the dome loud speakers were bawling now as Winchester unfolded his strategy.

"We hold this fort," he told them, "and we are armed. The enemy you feared the most are now few. There are not many police left alive—and no spies! You can fight back to back and feel safe. Your neighbor will not betray you.

"The foes coming to meet us are soldiers. We can deal with them. Once they and their flat-faced overlords are out of the way, the entire Solar System is ours. We can then go to Cosmopolis and the Earth, and release our friends and kinsmen from bondage."

The rebels heard and thrilled. Some fingered their ray-guns. Others, assigned to the great siege projectors, stationed on the outer walls, manipulated the intricate mechanisms with skilled fingers.

"Stand by!" warned Winchester. "Here they come!"

Six silvery shapes had soared into the void from the distant Lunar Base. The formation split into three pairs and maneuvered for the attack. Winchester watched them tensely, his hands guiding the master control of one of the huge projectors. Heim was at another, and men as steady at the rest.

"Wait for the blink as they open their shutters to fire—then let them have it! We'll be hit, but if we fire first it will give them warning. They do not know such big guns have been mounted here."

"What a surprise they're in for!" murmured a helper nearby, patting his range dial affectionately.

Two blasts flared out almost simultaneously. Winchester saw the pair of cruisers nearest him dip, caught the flicker as they unmasked their projectors. He pressed his button.

For a long moment he sat with tightly shut eyes, unable to open them, because of the intolerable brilliance of the fierce electronic exchange.

He felt the crater rim under him shiver, heard the tumbling of thousands of tons of liquid, as portions of the wall disintegrated and fell away in glowing lava.

There were no screams of the injured. In that electric holocaust men simply ceased to exist. But Winchester could still feel and breathe, and therefore knew he was untouched.

He opened his eyes. Then he stared incredulously about him. Everything had changed. He was seated on a pinnacle of tottering masonry. For three thousand yards to the north, the outer wall was gone. To the south it was badly battered.

All the mighty projectors on that side were out of action—melted and fused. The great cables that fed them had been turned to greenish vapor by the blast. Winchester must have lost many of his best men. The cruisers had hit, and hit hard.

He turned his eyes upward and swept the sky. His scowl changed slowly to gratified amazement, and then his face spread into a smile. Overhead were two blobs of thin vapor, rapidly dissipating. To the north and south were the other four cruisers—disintegrating!

The Great Khan's main fleet was no more!

CHAPTER XXI

Force Meets Force

Again Winchester stuck his periscope up through the cleft in the glazed wreckage of the east wall. He could see the advancing Mongoloid hordes distinctly now, looking more like

an army of goblins than of men. They were feeling their way across the bare Lunar plane, and dragging with them huge portable projectors.

It required hundreds of straining tractors to haul the mighty engines of destruction and their cumbersome generators. But in time the Mongoloids would reach the weakest point of the rebels' defenses—the shattered east wall.

"It won't be long now," Winchester warned over the loudspeaker system. "Be ready on the right and left, but do not open up until I order."

He settled to his vigil. The massed enemy was not yet in range. But their army already was deploying under the partial cover of several thick clumps of Lunar brush.

Winchester had been given a long breathing spell since the first battle. It had enabled him to patch up his defenses. Immediately after the destruction of the Khan's fleet, he had found a couple of televisions still working. This enabled him to do some scouting inside the Mongoloid strongholds, before they discovered his prying eye and demolished the scanners wherever they were.

The flashes Winchester had of conditions in Lunar Base, in the gutted Central Station, in Cosmopolis and elsewhere were comforting. The enemy was badly rattled, and uncertain what to do.

Since their air power was gone, except for a few small units beyond the orbit of Mars, and their police virtually nonexistent, they could not attack from above nor within. They must make a

frontal assault. To do that, they had drawn to Lunar Base every soldier on the Moon, and the reserves from Earth. Now that attack was coming, but it had taken them a week to prepare.

Winchester had not been idle. He had sent scores of men as propaganda agents to all the centers of the Moon abandoned by the police. Their job was to inform the docile workers of what was taking place, prepare them for the overturn that was soon to come.

Thousands of other men had been dispatched to the now deserted Botanical Gardens, to bring up certain materials Winchester planned to use in his defense strategy. They took with them many tractor locomotives and long strings of trailers, and were escorted by a heavy body of armed men.

Heim took charge of the local repairs. He had managed to dismount some of the undamaged projectors from the west wall. They had been reset in pits in front of the ruined eastern barrier.

The last of the work was finished and the stage cleared. Winchester made a minor adjustment to his focus and looked at the enemy again. Now he saw what he had been expecting for some time. It was the black and gold-banded space yacht of Prince Lohan, gliding down out of the void above. It circled, just out of range, and settled on a spiny knob to the south of the battlefield.

Lohan had come to direct the assault in person. Winchester grunted in contentment. Let it be so. This was the final duel. It would be but a matter of minutes until they would know who was the stronger.

Winchester stiffened with new alertness. The Mongoloid columns were coming ahead again. In a moment they would enter the bushes. A half mile this side they would advance into the range of his concealed projectors.

But doom struck many of them long before that. A ripple of flashes ran along the plain from the northern to the southern horizons. The vanguard had marched boldly into the thicket of transplanted floribombs, and the explosive plants were detonating in chain-style.

Fragments of men and parts of tractors flew skyward in a hail of flung gravel. Where regiments had been an instant before, there was now a string of ragged craters into which the oncoming projectors plunged and overturned.

"That worked!" called Heim, over their private line.

"And how," exulted Winchester.

But the ambush was not the lucky accident it seemed. It had been planned that way. Winchester knew his plants; knew, too, that the floribombs were due soon to come to maturity. His experts had selected them with care, had had them transplanted by the trainload. Results of years of experimentation had furnished the plants' rate of development, almost by the hour.

Their growth could be expedited or retarded by the administration of certain chemicals to the soil. An hour ago Winchester had pulled his gardeners in and they had reported the trap set. In five or ten hours the plants would begin going off spontaneously.

In the meantime, the slightest touch would detonate them. Well—the Mongoloids had "touched" them!

The explosions threw the Mongol army into confusion for some time. Their leaders managed finally to extricate some of the offensive projectors and reform. Shortly they were on the march again.

The Sun dazzled Winchester's eyes, but he did not mind. The Sun was an ally. It was half-heaven high in front of him and shining on the enemy's back. He dropped his glasses to scan the intervening terrain. Close to the attackers now was that wide band of discoloration that marked the plain.

Those tons of Martian migratory moss had first been dumped at the very foot of the ruined eastern wall. But following its instinct to creep toward the light, the moss had spread itself out and begun its slimy trek to the east.

Winchester watched the first enemy tractor hit it. The juggernaut was grotesquely helpless as it slithered and skidded sideward. The front ranks of the Mongol fighters clutched at emptiness and fell, like ungainly skaters on slick ice.

But the pressure of the rear ranks and the momentum of the rolling projectors brought the army on, until more and more were fighting for a precarious foothold. Not only that, but the slippery moss underfoot was advancing too, and in the opposite direction.

"It's pretty good now, isn't it?" queried Heim.

"Practically perfect," said Winchester, consulting his range.

"Let 'em have it!"

The masked batteries of giant projectors belched their lightning. It was a flawless enfilade, a crisscross of devastating fire. The gunners paused to see the damage, then shifted the angle of their barrage a trifle.

Once more the projectors let loose. The sudden holocaust of blue and green that answered from the plain told that men and machines had disintegrated into fiery atoms. Two more blasts and the battle was over.

"Up and at 'em!" yelled Winchester. "Mop up by hand! There are only a few left and they are running."

He swung his glass to cover Lohan's flagship. It sat strangely still, as if an animate thing stunned by the annihilation of its allies. Winchester ran from televisor to televisor, trying to find one that would work, but on none of them could he raise Lohan.

A sudden panic seized him. Were they all dead on board, and if so, how? He flew down a passage by bounds until he came to an elevator that was still in operation. A moment later he was in a lunabile, charging across the plain.

He took pains to skirt the mossy patch, though it meant a long detour. Eventually he came to the foot of the knob on which the yacht was grounded. From there he climbed, impatient at the space-suit he had to wear, for it impeded him when he wanted to all but fly. His victory would be incomplete until he had Lohan face to face, to inform him of his doom.

Winchester used his police magneto-key to open the outer

spacelock. He found it was a double one—for safety—and that within it was another. He opened it and slid the first door shut behind him.

In a corner lay a sobbing huddle of clothes—a woman. He sprang to her and drew her to her feet. In another instant he and Cynthia were in impassioned embrace.

"But what—why—" he stammered, tearing off his helmet and kissing her furiously.

"I did it, I did it," she moaned. "I had to. It was the end. I broke that little bottle and ran. You said its vapors were dangerous, so I held my breath as long as I could and ducked in here. I don't know what happened after I left. I am afraid to look. I was—"

"Smart girl," said Winchester, giving her a fond pat. "You get into that outer lock now and I'll go and see. I'll be all right in my helmet, so don't worry if I am gone awhile. It may take a little time to clear the air in there."

Inside he found what had come to be a familiar sight. Prince Lohan sat grinning stupidly, a helpless imbecile. In another compartment several of his red-slashed personal guards wallowed, murmuring sweet words, full of sound but devoid of meaning.

A pair of domestic slaves clung to one another, babbling incoherently. Princess Chen Chin lay with a beatific smile on her face, oblivious to the world. Lotusol had done its work, and well.

Winchester turned up the blowers and threw on the overboard vent. He waited the prescribed time, then cut them off and bled fresh air out of the compressor banks. He went out and brought Cynthia in. She shuddered at what she saw, but she finished her story.

"He said he was going to show us how to deal with rebels and traitors," she said. "He forced us both to come. When he saw that all was lost, he felled the princess at a blow and grabbed at me. He said the time for compromise and tricks had passed. If he could not get me one way, he would another. And so—I smashed the little bottle. Did I do wrong?"

"You did exactly right," Winchester assured her with a tender hug. "I had other plans for him, but perhaps this is better. Let them go out with their minds filled with grandiose dreams. It is the kinder way."

"But she?"

"She would not want to live without him, and he is too dangerous a man to let breathe. It may seem hard, but it is best."

Cynthia put on a space-suit and followed him out.

"The king is dead—long live the king," she said softly, putting her hand in his.

"There will be no more kings," he said, and his face was stern.

CHAPTER XXII

Back to Earth

"What I don't understand, darling," Cynthia said the next day, "is why you had to be so hard on the scientists. Lohan was surprised when he saw your list—he said he would not have slain or imprisoned more than a third of them. Yet you condemned all. It gave him confidence in you. But wasn't it a stiff price?"

"We will see," Allan Winchester said darkly. He was troubled about the scientists, engineers and industrial managers. "Let's go over to the quarantine station."

They arrived and were received with great ceremony by the staff. Winchester led Cynthia into a long ward. Rows of beds lined the walls and sleeping men reclined upon them, many with childlike smiles on their faces. Attendants wandered among them bearing syringes, and stopped occasionally to puncture an arm and inject a shot of rosy serum.

In the next ward the patients tossed uneasily and unsmiling. One sat up, blinking.

"Where am I?" he demanded. "How did I get to this place?"

Another man was struggling with two nurses, as if anxious to fight. Winchester strode on through and into a solarium where others sat, pale and wan, but awake and sane. They were distinguished-looking men, most of them, all highly intelligent.

"It is working," he said, with an air of profound relief. "It was the most daring part of my gamble."

Cynthia looked at him inquiringly.

"You see," he explained, "more than half of these men are of pronounced liberal views. Had there been a prolonged civil war, all of them would have been killed. It was not because I wanted to impress Lohan with my zeal, but to save these men, that I placed them in the quiet backwater of the Crater of Dreams.

"I had experimented on myself and had found there was an antidote for the Lotus habit. I was hopeful it would work on others, but I could not be sure, especially in cases of long standing.

"By blending the powerful stimulant ergogen with Lotusol and injecting it, we give an almost negative dose. Gradually, by reducing the drug and increasing the stimulant, the patient is brought out of the habit without shock.

"You have seen the three main stages. Most of the patients will come back. If they do not, my revolution was fought in vain.

"Cynthia, you spoke of kings. Civilization would lapse into barbaric chaos without men like these. They are the true kings of tomorrow—a Congress of Kings!"

"You are strong. You have saved civilization. Why don't you run it?" Cynthia asked heatedly, out of her blind loyalty.

"Because," he answered bluntly. "I don't know enough. No

single man is good enough to play god. It is all very well to say that a benevolent despotism is the happiest form of government. But who is to succeed the despot when he dies?

"Who is to slap him down if he gets swell-headed and begins to believe what his yes-men tell him? It is too much of a load to throw on any one human being. History is full of men who started out well, but the sequel is invariably ugly. Too much power is not good for even the greatest man."

Winchester chose his words slowly.

"Civilization is an intricate mechanism today—a human mechanism. The despot, the dictator is a back number. Today we need scientists—chemists, physicists and the like.

"We need artists of every kind—not impractical dreamers, but men and women who can make the world a better place in which to live, because of the talent God has given them.

"We need economists and administrators to manage our industrial and agricultural system. We need architects to plan, engineers to build, physicians to keep our bodies healthy. We need a form of government which serves as an arbiter for all classes, so that no one group may have undue advantage over the other."

There was puzzlement in the girl's eyes.

"But—but it took a man of your stature, Allan, to overthrow the old regime, so that all these things may be possible!"

Winchester kissed her for that.

"Right you are, darling. But I was only the instrument of man's conscience, nothing more. I have done my job. Now I shall turn my power over to democratically constituted authority. Things do not always work smoothly in a democracy, I'll grant you that.

"But it does have one paramount advantage. It's flexible. No one man can ever seize dictatorial power. Mistakes may be made, and are. But in the long run, things work out for the best."

He took Cynthia in his arms then, held her for a long fervent embrace. He released her and walked back through the wards. He wanted to be alone now. He wanted to savor his great triumph in the privacy of his own soul.

He wanted to plan for the morrow when the Solar System would be once more the master of its destiny.

Allan Winchester was at peace with himself, at last.

In the days that followed, he disbanded his army. He had needed brute force to overcome brute force, since that was the only language the enemy understood. Hereafter there would be no need of it.

Heim took over the management of Lunar Tramways, and his other followers similarly fell into their proper places in the restored Utopia. Each went back to his former place, with head held high and confidence in the future. Hereafter they would be working for themselves and their fellows, not under the lash of slave-drivers.

The culminating moment came when Winchester addressed the assembled scientists and technicians at the new

Constitutional Convention.

"It's all yours now," he told them. "Take care only that what you have endured will not have to be endured again."

The Earth ferry that day had two eager passengers, who pressed their noses against the forward lookout port, who exclaimed in wonder as the glories of the mother planet unfolded themselves before them.

"It's good to get back to Earth again," Cynthia said.

"Yes," agreed Winchester. "I was not born to be a leader of men. I like my own little job better."

"And what are you—we—going to do," she ventured, "now that you have resigned?"

"We are going to a warm, moist place. Louisiana, I think, will be best. And there I mean to establish an experimental farm. There are many of those exotic plants that interest me, and there are a number that can be adapted to Earthly use."

"Oh, those horrid things!" she exclaimed, remembering the blood-curdling story Princess Chen Chin had told her of the rock-throwing Martian pitcher-plants.

She had memories, too, of men and equipment blown apart by the ferocious floribombs, and the slimy creeping of the Martian migrant moss.

"They are not all horrid." Winchester smiled. "There is one I think you are going to like—and need."

"Need? I can't imagine."

"It comes from Venus. They call it the Marionettal."

"A nettle! Ugh!"

"No, no. Not nettle," he corrected, slipping an arm around her. "Marionettal. It is a fat little plant and smells good. But best of all, its fruit is peculiarly interesting. It resembles human puppets—comical, grotesque figures. When you dry them, they make perfect dolls."

"So," she said, "you save the human race. Then you get wacky over the idea of having a couple of doll-bearing trees in the yard —"

"You are beautiful, angel, but dumb," he said, taking up a couple of notches in his grip. "If I'm any judge of the future—and I've been around in it quite a lot—in a couple of years you're going to find those trees pretty darned handy."

"Oh, Allan," she said, when he let her breathe again, "you are *so* practical!"

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TARNISHED UTOPIA

by

Malcolm Jameson

A fascinating fast-moving adventure of a man and a beautiful girl of the present, who find themselves in a strange cruel land of the future. Transferred to a vicious world, ruled over by the cruelest of dictators, he falls in love with Cynthia (the girl from the present), but finds her cold to his attentions. The man, Winchester, is made a slave, racked with pain in the torture chambers of this strange and hideous land, this brave American plots a terrible death for the tyrannical dictator. This is the type of light-reading, fast-moving adventure you won't want to put down until finished.

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[The end of *Tarnished Utopia* by Malcolm Jameson]