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A Novelet of Hollywood on the Moon

The Star Parade

Henry Kuttner

Author of "Doom World," "Hollywood on the Moon," etc.

First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, December 1938.

Illustrations by Alex A. Schomburg (May 10, 1905-April 7, 1998) are not yet in the public domain in Canada, and have been omitted.

Many a Man's Plans to Film the Great Martian Inferno Had Gone Up in Smoke—But When Tony Quade Had to Shoot It, There Were Fireworks!

CHAPTER I

Quick Montage: Trouble on the Moon

Von Zorn was about to make a speech. The chief of Nine Planets Films, Inc., sat rigidly at his semi-circular glass desk, staring at the televisior eye a few feet away. In a moment his small, simian face would be reproduced on receiver-screens all over the System—for this was an interplanetary hook-up. Once each week Nine Planets took the air, but, though stars and singers and comedians performed often, it was seldom indeed that the chief condescended to speak.

Anthony Quade, camera expert, had arranged his large body comfortably in a nearby chair, and was sketching a libelous caricature of Von Zorn on a convenient pad. He was wondering why the chief had sent for him. Something had gone wrong, of course.

He didn't know what, but when anything went haywire in the gigantic organization of Nine Planets, Von Zorn was apt to send hastily for Quade. The movie expert blinked sleepily and added a toothbrush mustache to his employer's portrait.

One of the televisior operators said, "Two minutes now." He flicked over a switch. Soft music welled out from an unseen transmitter. It died away, and a mellow voice observed.

"Greetings to the System, from Hollywood on the Moon and Nine Planets Films. Tonight our program is dedicated to New York. We're right over you, Manhattan—can you see us? Over more than two hundred thousand miles of space we send greetings to you, New York, and to the whole System. We're pretty far away, but during this hour we bring you, via televisior, the life of the most glamorous and romantic city in the Universe—Hollywood on the Moon!"

Tony Quade abstractedly attached a skinny monkey's body to Von Zorn's pictured head.

"Nestling in the hollow of the Great Rim," the announcer went on, "on the half of the Moon perpetually turned away from the Earth, rises this incredible metropolis. A garden city, and a place where science reaches out to new frontiers, where artificial gravity-fields and the most healthful atmosphere in the System combine to make Hollywood on the Moon a wonderland."

Quade drew a tall silk hat atop his chief's head, and, struck by a sudden

thought, carefully outlined a furry arm so that it seemed the Von Zorn-faced monkey was scratching himself.

“And now we bring you the head of Nine Planets Films, perhaps the greatest figure in the motion picture industry today—Mr. Ludwig Von Zorn, who has a personal message for you.”

An unseen orchestra trumpeted. The televisor operator touched a button and nodded at the chief, who hastily snatched up his script and glared into the eye. As the music faded into silence Von Zorn took the ether.

“I—uh—I wish every person who is listening now could visit Hollywood on the Moon,” he began. “I wish you could spend an evening at the Silver Spacesuit, watch the stars strolling along Lunar Boulevard, and stroll through the studios of Nine Planets. I know, if you could do that, just what you’d say. You’d say, ‘What’s all this activity about? Why is everyone so busy?’”

“Wonder who wrote that speech for him?” Quade said inaudibly. He carefully tore up the caricature of Von Zorn and placed the fragments in his pocket as the speaker continued.

“I’ll tell you why everybody is so busy here. We’re working on a new picture, one of the greatest ever to be put on the screen. The biggest stars of Nine Planets will be in it—Clint Padrick, Edith Rudeen, Ailyn Van, and our latest discovery, Kathleen Gregg—and more, many more. I’m speaking of *The Star Parade*, the most spectacular interplanetary picture ever filmed. Watch for it—the release date isn’t far off!”

Sweating, Von Zorn relaxed. Hastily he fumbled in a drawer and brought out a bottle, from which he drank long and thirstily, while the televisor operators dismantled their apparatus and departed. Quade got up and stood waiting.

“Oh, Lord,” Von Zorn moaned. “What an ordeal. If the public only knew—Quade, we’re in trouble. *The Star Parade*’s jinxed. We’ve blurbed it up all over the System, and it’s six weeks behind schedule now. Trouble right from the start.”

“Yeah,” Quade said. “I heard a few things. Lots of temperament, eh?”

“Five stars! You know what that means. Ailyn Van raises Cain on an average of once an hour; Clint Padrick and Edith Rudeen—they’re married, you know—are fighting all the time; Floyd Stover can’t stay sober—”

“What about Kathleen?” Quade asked. He had been responsible for Kathleen Gregg’s entry into pictures, and had appointed himself her guardian angel—a role the girl sometimes resented.

“Oh, she’s okay,” Von Zorn admitted. “By the way, you gave her an engagement ring last month. Take a look at her contract before you marry her.”

“I did,” Quade said sadly. “It was a dirty trick, Chief. She can’t get married till her contract runs out.’”

Von Zorn laughed falsely.

“Oh, you can wait a little while. We don’t want a prospective star marrying and losing half her publicity value, you know.”

“If you ever need a blood transfusion, they’ll have to pump ammonia into your veins,” Quade growled. “You coldblooded—”

“Hold on. I was just going to assign you to *The Star Parade*, so you could be with Kathleen. I know how you feel, Tony. I’ve got a heart, you know.”

“Try defrosting it some time,” Quade suggested. “I know darn well why you’re assigning me to that jinx flicker. Nobody else wants the job.”

“Have it your own way,” Von Zorn said. “Fowler’s in the hospital. Ran into trouble on the Mars location—something bit him, and infection set in. Now the troupe’s without a director. And there’s been so much trouble I don’t want to let anybody but you handle the job, Quade. Especially since there’s been a set-back in filming the *Inferno*.”

Quade’s eyebrows quirked up.

“I told you the *Inferno* couldn’t be filmed,” he said grimly. “It’s impossible.”

“Uh—I don’t think so. The labs have turned out some protective armor that seems to be okay. At least—”

“Protective armor!” Quade snorted. “What can armor do against the *Inferno*? There’s enough sub-atomic energy in that Martian hellhole to blast Hollywood on the Moon to bits. It can’t be filmed!”

“It was—once,” Von Zorn said softly, his gaze cool and sharp.

Yes—the *Inferno* had once been filmed. Ever since the discovery of that fantastic cavern on Mars scientists and explorers had tried to do the impossible. A trader named Logan had first found it, decades ago, when he had traced down the Martian tribes’ legend of an underground city near Elysium that had been destroyed by the gods.

At one time, before interplanetary flight had existed, a race of Martians had made their home in the caverns of an extinct volcano, and had built a metropolis there. But the red planet is old, and earthquakes rack it as the crust contracts, bringing more and more pressure to bear on the molten exterior.

Scientists had theorized on what had caused the catastrophe. A passage had opened connecting the cavern city with the heart of Mars, and through this passage poured, not lava, but—energy! The tremendous unleashed power from the center of

the planet, blasting up with inconceivable force, carried undreamed-of energy waves from the smashed atoms far below.

Quade remembered this now.

“There’s been quite a few people who tried to film the Inferno,” he stated. “You’re right, one man did succeed. Ten years ago he crawled down into it with a rope around his waist, a suit of protective armor, and a pocket camera with specially treated film. When his friends pulled him out he was dead. His brain had been burned out by the rays down there. Good Lord, Von Zorn, those waves are stronger than radioactivity! Gamma rays can get through centimeters of lead, but the radiations of the Inferno—well, they’re a lot stronger than that. Don’t forget they’re created by pressure that knocks the stuffing out of the atom.”

The movie executive interrupted. “You said one man succeeded.”

“Yeah—he got a picture, pretty hazy and vague. And it killed him.”

“Science has gone forward in ten years,” Von Zorn persisted. “Listen, Quade, we’ve blurred *The Star Parade* all over the System as the picture that’ll have authentic shots of the Inferno. All we need are the backgrounds; we’ll use double exposure to get the actors in the scenes. We can’t fake the Inferno itself—not after our advertising build-up.”

“Why the devil did you let yourself in for it in the first place?” Quade demanded.

“Gerry Carlyle,” Von Zorn said between clenched teeth. “The catch-’em-alive dame. We’ve faked so much interplanetary stuff that the public won’t pay to see our pics any more, when Carlyle brings back the real thing for the London Zoo. Audiences are tired of our robots. But the Inferno—that’s something Gerry Carlyle can’t put in her damn zoo!”

Quade considered. Both he and Von Zorn knew how difficult was the task before the man who directed *The Star Parade*. A film that starts out with a jinx is hoodooed all the way through. Moreover, the Martian location was an outpost that might prove dangerous—certainly the Inferno was! Against these considerations Quade weighed others.

This picture was Kathleen Gregg’s big chance. She couldn’t afford to fall down now, for the ways of a studio are devious, and many a star has dropped from the limelight for no fault of her own. Also, Quade knew Fowler. The director had for years wanted to direct just such a picture as *The Star Parade* would be, and he had worked himself to the verge of a nervous breakdown trying to handle every detail himself. Quade realized what the film meant to Fowler.

So he said, “Can do, Chief. On one condition.”

Von Zorn looked alarmed. “Yes?”

“I want *carte blanche* in handling your five stars. What I say goes. I know Ailyn Van and her temperament—and the others. If I don’t make ’em jump through hoops they’ll be making me jump off the Rim.”

“I suppose you’re right. But I don’t want any trouble.”

“There won’t be any.” Quade turned to the door, grinning. “Of course, I may have to spank Ailyn a bit and sock Clint Padrick in the jaw. They’re all hams to me.”

Quade found an elevator and was hurtled to street level, eighty floors, in the time it took him to kindle a stubby, well-caked pipe. He inhaled a whiff of the green, aromatic tobacco grown on the Moon, and stepped out on the yielding composition of the sidewalk, figured in colorful mosaic.

A blaze of lights made the street brilliant, so brilliant that it was difficult to tell whether the sky was blue or star-studded black. It was night, though, Quade knew. The solar orb was blazing on the other side of the Moon, and Earthlight never touched the film metropolis.

Quade hailed a taxi and was whisked across the city to the hospital, a huge spherical building of crystal in the center of which an artificial sun was built, sending its ultra-violet rays throughout the entire translucent structure. The lift took Quade to Fowler’s room. The director, a thin-faced, tired looking youngster, was lying silently in his bed, lips tight, eyes worried.

Quade did not attempt false heartiness.

“Tough luck, old man,” he greeted him. “Von Zorn told me to take over.”

Fowler nodded.

“I thought he would. Glad it’s you, Tony. I know you’ll finish the flicker.”

“I’ll do my damndest. And, incidentally, you’re going to get screen credit. I’ll see to that. Now—” He waved down the director’s protest. “Now I want some dope on *The Star Parade*. How do things line up?”

“Things went haywire all of a sudden,” Fowler said, grimacing. “That Mars location did the business. It’s the craziest place. Something there bit me.”

“I know. What was it?”

“You’ll think I’m crazy, but—well, a claw bit me.”

Quade blinked.

“Claw? A land-crab?”

“I said a claw. Nothing else. I’d shot a snake of some kind, and was just about to pick it up, when this claw—a big green thing—popped out of nowhere, bit me, and ran off with the snake. I told you it sounded screwy.”

“Dunno. There’re lots of queer animals on the planets. I’ll keep an eye out for your claw, anyway. Had you got far with the Mars stuff?”

“Not very. The stars—all five of ’em—came back to Hollywood on the Moon with me. They wouldn’t work with the assistant director. At least, Kathleen Gregg would have, but the others overruled her. The rest of the crew are on Mars, waiting. You’ll have to round up the five stars.”

“What about the Inferno?” Quade asked.

Fowler shook his head, frowning.

“Haven’t had a chance to put it in the can yet. Too much trouble. Those new armored suits may do the trick—certainly Von Zorn’s radioactive-resistant film will work, but—”

“I’ve a hunch the suits are corny,” Quade said. “Those rays can get through almost any kind of shield. But we can probably dope out something.” Inwardly, though, he wasn’t so sure. The rays were deadly to brain tissue, and Von Zorn would willingly slaughter all his staff to get a hit picture. Not for the first time Quade cursed his chief.

Fowler moved uneasily.

“Don’t take any risks, Tony. I don’t—oh Lord! What’s that?”

The door had opened, and something popped into the room with the agility of a jack-rabbit. It gave a tremendous hop, sailed entirely over the bed, and crashed down on the remains of Fowler’s dinner. Plates tinkled, and the table on which the tray stood tilted ominously.

“I picked him up on Ganymede,” Quade said, after a startled pause. “It’s called a Bouncer. Native of the asteroid—”

The Bouncer jiggled with excitement, and the table swayed, while spilled cocoa dripped gently to the floor. The creature was about a foot and a half high, and resembled a tailless kangaroo. Short, stubby forearms and tiny, human-looking paws were folded over a bulging little paunch.

On a head shaped like a turnip were (a) two saucerlike eyes, (b) a button of a nose, and (c) down under a remarkably long upper lip, a small, sadly drooping mouth. It was entirely covered with white fur, now decorated with orange marmalade.

The Bouncer opened its puckered mouth and said quietly, “What are you doing here?”

Fowler moaned.

“It’s no use your pretending to see it too,” he told Quade. “I’m having

hallucinations. I just heard it talk.”

“Sure,” Quade chuckled. “It reads thoughts. Read my thought just now. It picks up the strong vibrations broadcast by a brain, and repeats ’em. Listen, I’ll show you.”

He became silent, while the Bouncer, suddenly conscious of the marmalade on his rotund body, began to lick it off. Then he straightened, nodding energetically.

“I’m a native of Ganymede,” he declared squeakily. “My name’s Bill. Pleased to know you, Mr. Fowler.” He hesitated, then went on, “Mr. Quade, you’re getting uglier every day. How long has it been since you combed your hair?”

Quade’s eyebrows lifted. Then, smiling wryly, he sprang for the door and wrenched it open. A small girl, standing in the corridor, was doing her best not to laugh.

“Oh, it’s you, Kathleen,” he said. “I knew I didn’t broadcast that last crack. Come on in.”

Kathleen Gregg had a stubborn chin, pleasantly warm brown eyes, and a temper. She showed it now.

“So you’re taking over *The Star Parade*, eh?” she observed. “Well, that’s lucky. I was just going out to collect our four stars, and I had my brass knuckles ready. That’ll be your job now, Tony.”

“I’m ready for it. I was just getting the dope from Fowler.”

“Good. I just came from your apartment. They said you’d gone to see Von Zorn, so I phoned him and figured out where you were. Bill begged to come along, so—”

“Don’t believe it, Tony,” the Bouncer broke in, blinking owlishly. “She enticed me out. Offered me candy. And she didn’t give it to me yet, either.”

“Oh, that’s too bad,” Quade said reprovingly to Kathleen. “You ought to keep your word, you know. Give him the candy, Kate.”

It was almost impossible for Fowler to realize that the small Ganymedean was merely broadcasting Quade’s thoughts. However, for the moment he thrust thought of the Bouncer aside.

“Tony,” he said. “About *The Star Parade*—”

Quade sobered.

“Yeah. Well, Kate, can you round up Ailyn Van and Edith Rudeen? I’ll get Clint Padrick and Stover. I want to start for Mars in three hours.”

Without a word Kathleen nodded and went to the door.

“See you at the spaceport,” Quade called, as the Bouncer leaped from the table and hopped hastily after the girl.

CHAPTER II

Follow Shot: Moon to Mars

Quade found Floyd Stover floating in his swimming pool, red-eyed and depressed. Nine Planets greatest character star had a hangover. Feebly rubbing his great mop of white hair, he climbed up the ladder and agreed to be at the spaceport as soon as he could dress and pack.

There was no trouble. Stover was an actor to the core. But he loved to go on a binge. Now that he'd got that out of his system he'd be okay for a while.

"Know where Clint Padrick is?" Quade asked the star.

Stover's bushy eyebrows came down. His voice was a husky roar.

"Aboard the *Meteor*, I think," he said. "He had a scrap with Edith and headed for—"

That was all Quade needed to know. He nodded and headed for the street, where a taxi whisked him to the spaceport. His two-man cruiser, a speedy, powerful ship with the usual transparent nose of camera-craft, was ready for him, and in half an hour he was hurtling up from Hollywood on the Moon, siren screaming to warn aircraft away, gravity plates set.

The *Meteor* was a luxury liner, a gambling space ship that hung in the void a hundred miles or so above the surface of the Moon. The elite of filmdom went there for a thrill.

A blaze of searchlights stabbed out. The *Meteor's* outside gravity plates kept an atmosphere around its huge hull, otherwise the flare of the vari-colored lights would have been invisible in the vacuum. However, radio beams guided ships to it, for the great arc-lamps were useless in direct sunlight.

Funnels of metal mesh protruded from various points on the *Meteor*. Quade guided his cruiser within one of these and shut off the power as powerful magnetic fields took hold, sliding the little ship smoothly into an air-lock.

Within the *Meteor* was a blaze of color. Fountains spurted, rainbow-hued; precious tapestries lined the walls; *objets d'art* from all the planets were here. An orchestra provided dance music, but the attention of most of the patrons was riveted on the various gambling devices. The most popular was a variation of the ancient pinball game, in which the operator tried to direct a miniature rocket ship into a small target on the board.

Quade nodded to an attendant, resplendent in white satin.

“Clint Padrick here?” he asked.

“In the roulette room, I think,” the other told him, pointing. Quade went into the roulette room.

In a great sunken pit in the center of the floor was a wheel, rising to a cone in the middle, and rimmed with small compartments, each numbered. The croupier was just calling, “All bets in!”

Quade stared down for a moment at the gleaming space ship, not a foot in diameter, that suddenly popped into view on the wheel. It was studded with rocket ports, and from one of them blasted a fiery explosion. The spherical little ship drove against the side of the pit, and rolled down into one of the numbered compartments. Again a rocket banged, and the craft whisked out of its resting place, presently dropping into another.

Looking around, Quade saw Clint Padrick. A lock of dark hair was plastered wetly to the star’s tanned forehead, and the somewhat sullen lips were drawn into a hard line. Padrick was handsome, no doubt of that; good-looking as the devil, and with the devil’s temper. He turned quickly as Quade touched his arm.

“Oh, it’s you, eh? Well, what d’you want?”

Quade told him.

“Yeah. You go on to Mars. I’ll be along directly.”

“That won’t do,” Quade said. “The deadline on *The Star Parade’s* in four weeks. You—”

Padrick ignored him. He turned to watch the rocket-roulette, and cursed under his breath as the croupier shouted a number. Quade hesitated, shrugged, and found an attendant. He slipped him a bill, and presently the waiter returned with a glass of blue-green liquor. Exchanging a wink with Quade, he went to Padrick’s side. The drink was doped, of course. The staff of the *Meteor* kept a supply of soporifics for just such a purpose, keeping the good-will of the studios by cooperating with them whenever a star got out of hand.

Padrick suspected nothing when the waiter offered him the glass, with the murmur, “Your order, sir.” He drank, and after a moment his eyes dulled. Quade took his arm and guided him to the port where the cruiser waited.

The drug was effective. Padrick’s will was in complete abeyance, as the hypnotic—a harmless derivative of hyoscyamine—went into action as a cerebral depressant. When the star recovered consciousness, he would be on Mars, with no memory of the intervening hours.

Some of Quade’s regular crew, headed by Wolfe, a thin-faced, capable

youngster, were waiting at the spaceport. He knew them all—dependable men, who had worked with him for years. Stover was aboard, with an ice-bag on his bushy head; Quade guided Padrick to a stateroom where the star's wife, Edith Rudeen, sat reading. She was a pretty little blonde whose Dresden china appearance was aided by her curiously tender blue eyes. But when she saw Padrick she got up and called him a tramp.

"Get out of here, you half-witted atom," she said furiously, and then paused, staring. The anger went out of her eyes. "Tony—what's happened to Clint?"

"Nothing. I had to dope him a bit to get him aboard. He'll be okay pretty soon. Can you take care of him?"

The girl didn't answer, but the look on her face as she guided Padrick to a chair was answer enough. Grinning, Quade went out. He sobered as he remembered the temperamental Ailyn Van. Where was she?

A loud scream told him the answer. Ailyn Van came striding along the corridor. Quade repressed a shudder as he met the blaze of her platinum eyes. Centuries before gold and platinum had been used to treat weakened eyes, but only lately had the iris-tattooing vogue come into fashion. Ailyn's face, for all its streamlined boniness, was strikingly attractive, as movie audiences had testified. She was, however, temperamental as a *murri*.

"Where's Kathleen Gregg?" Ailyn demanded, her platinum-coated nails twitching convulsively. "She said she was coming here! She's got Picasso—kidnaped him!"

Hastily, Quade disclaimed all knowledge of the missing Picasso, wondering what Ailyn was talking about. The star flung away, vituperating Kathleen Gregg, and presently Kathleen herself emerged from a stateroom, her brown hair disheveled.

"Let's go, Tony," she said softly. "Everybody's on board."

Quade nodded, called an order into a diaphragm set in the wall. The siren screamed. Though there was no sense of movement, Quade knew that the giant camera-ship was racing up through the atmosphere.

"How did you do it?" he asked. "What's Picasso, anyway?"

"Her pet," Kathleen chuckled. "She loves it like a husband. She wouldn't come, so I snatched Picasso and ran for my taxi. I knew she'd trail me. This is Picasso." She pointed at her shoulder.

Quade blinked. As far as he could see, the girl was indicating her black dress. Kathleen fumbled at her shoulder, lifted something and extended it to Quade. It looked like a plastic heap of clay that suddenly turned from black to flesh-color. She

put the thing on Quade's gray leather tunic, and it hastily turned gray.

"It's an—an animal, I think. They've just made a few in the bio labs. It's about six inches tall, and it—what was it Ailyn told me?—it's got muscles like a squid. What did she mean?"

"Oh," Quade said. "I remember hearing something about 'em. Chromatic camouflage. *Loligo*'s a cephalopod—"

"Come again?"

"Squid, cuttle-fish, octopus, and so on. They've got chromatophores."

"Good for them," Kathleen said grimly. "Stop showing off and tell me what you're talking about."

"Single cells, pigmented in different colors, just under the epidermis. Usually they're hidden, but they can expand as the muscles around 'em contract, so the color of the squid's skin is changed. It's just camouflage."

He touched Picasso with an exploring finger, and the animal folded itself around his hand, turning pale. "If it's on a red surface, the red chromatic cells are pushed up on the surface. On a blue surface, the blue cells get their inning. *Sabe?*"

Kathleen nodded.

"Yeah. Well—" She glanced aside as the sound of hasty footsteps came to them. "Give Picasso to Ailyn. I think that's our star coming now. If she asks for me, tell her I'm dead." And the girl promptly disappeared into a stateroom.

The camera-ship landed about fifty miles west of Elysium, on the equator of Mars. The planet became less habitable as one moved toward the poles, until eventually spacesuits were necessary for outdoor work. But on the equator the direct rays of the sun, penetrating through the rarefied atmosphere, made the climate pleasantly warm.

Moreover, it was spring, and the thawing of the ice-caps had released an unusual amount of water vapor into the air, compensating to some extent for its usual dryness.

As the ship slanted down past Deimos the surface features of Mars were distinctly visible, veiled in a few places by tenuous clouds. The camp, Quade had learned, was in a forest clearing, a jungle surrounded on three sides by one of the great saline deserts. He took over the controls, and made an easy landing a hundred feet from the group of metal-mesh tents. Now the hard work would begin.

Four weeks to complete *The Star Parade*—and the most difficult batch of stars on Nine Planets' payroll! Padrick and Edith were fighting viciously; and Ailyn Van had relapsed into a state of sullen rage, augmented by the fact that her pet, Picasso,

had conceived a deep-rooted affection for the Bouncer, who was aboard.

The chromatic animal spent most of his time clinging affectionately to the Bouncer's plump body, taking on the white hue of Bill's fur.

"Bill," Quade said to Kathleen as he helped her unpack, "is having a hard time of it. He picks up thought-vibrations, you know. And Ailyn's feeble-minded pet keeps hanging on him, broadcasting affection. That's what I figure, anyway. Look at that."

The Bouncer hopped dispiritedly into the room, peering down at his stomach. He never was sure when Picasso was clinging to him, since the little animal's camouflage was so perfect, and his weight so small, especially on Mars. He said feebly, "Nice and . . . warm. Nice . . . nice."

Kathleen looked at Quade inquiringly. The film expert shrugged.

"Bill's pretty intelligent, you know. I imagine he gets Picasso's thoughts and translates them into English. Naturally that super-chameleon hasn't much of a brain, so its thoughts aren't very coherent. I gather it thinks Bill's nice and warm."

The Bouncer came to Kathleen's side and hugged her leg, squeaking unhappily. She bent and fumbled in the fur until she had dislodged Picasso, who hastily turned a warm tan. She carried it to the door and shut it out.

"If I knew what the thing looked like, I might stand it better," Kathleen observed. "But its camouflage is always so perfect it blends completely with its surroundings." She glanced out of a porthole. "Are we going to sleep in those tents, Tony?"

"Suit yourself. There isn't room for everybody on the ship. The tents are comfortable enough."

Kathleen shuddered. "But—it gets cold here at night, doesn't it? We'll freeze to death."

"Far from it! Those tents have got high-frequency coils in them. The electricity warms you up by inducing currents in your conducting tissue. But you have to wear special lounging-suits, ones without any metal in 'em. Otherwise you might have holes burned in your hide."

"Live and learn," the girl murmured. She leaned her elbows on the porthole, her gaze dwelling on the blue-green jungle all around. Save for the bluish tint and the extraordinary size of the leaves, it might have been a terrestrial forest.

All Martian vegetation had unusually large leaf-surface, of course, in order to gather the necessary amount of radiation from the Sun, which was between thirty-five and sixty-three million miles further away than on Earth. This variation was caused by the eccentricity of its orbit—0.0933, greater than that of any other major

planet except Mercury.

A wry smile twisted the girl's lips as she saw the white-haired Stover following unsteadily in the trail of Clint Padrick and Edith Rudeen, who were quarreling loudly. There was trouble ahead, she foresaw.

Actually there was far more trouble to come than Kathleen guessed—for a certain inhabitant of the Martian forest was becoming increasingly curious about these strange visitors. . . .

CHAPTER III

Close-up: Jigsaw

Shooting a picture presupposes close cooperation. Quade got it from the technical crew—photographers, sound mixers, set dressers and builders, color engineers—and he got it from most of the actors. The stars were another matter.

Kathleen Gregg, of course, was all right. But Stover always wanted to go off on a bender. Where he'd hidden the Venusian drink he habitually imbibed, Quade did not know, although he'd made a hasty search of the ship. Picasso wasn't thriving on Mars, for some reason—insufficient oxygen, perhaps—and that made more friction with Ailyn Van. Half the time Clint Padrick and Edith Rudeen refused to work together. Quade tore his hair, swore, argued, pleaded, and eventually got about half of the picture shot. It took all of three weeks.

Moreover, a curious air of unrest hung over the camp. Many had the disquieting feeling of being watched. They would glance over their shoulders quickly, without reason. There was furtive movement in the jungle all around them. And, too, inexplicable noises began to be heard—deep-throated roaring bellows from far away. Naturally this caused trouble for the sound recorders.

Quade was the first to discover the claw—the green thing of which Fowler had spoken in the Lunar hospital. He was examining the Inferno, with Kathleen, standing near the edge of the great crater that sloped steeply down to incredible depths. Nearly a mile in diameter, the pit's sides were so jagged and precipitous that its descent would be a feat of mountaineering. Quade, peering through his binoculars, was frowning.

“Von Zorn's crazy,” he said. “The Inferno can't be filmed. We've made tests with those armor-plated suits of his, and they don't hold up. They worked all right in the labs, but the rays down there are stronger than anything a scientist can build up.”

“Why not use robots?” Kathleen asked.

“We thought of that. But a robot has to be guided, and the crater's too steep and dangerous for that, and the Inferno's way down out of sight; we'd have to work blind. Anyway, the rays would upset the radio control. We've an automatic camera, one that works on powerful springs, because electricity would go haywire down there.”

“What's so wonderful about the place, anyway?”

“For one thing, it's never been filmed before,” Quade told her. “Except for one

hazy snapshot. There's a city down there, and the energy storms make an effect as spectacular as a Solar eruption. It'll make the picture big box-office—if we can film it. Don't get too close. Even at this distance it isn't any too safe.”

A strange something scampered into view, running rapidly up the slope behind them. Quade suddenly chuckled. “Kate,” he said softly, “Look at that.” He picked up a stone and hurled it, kicking up dust near the object, which sat down.

“For heaven's sake!” the girl gasped. “What is it?”

“It's a Teapot,” Quade said. “See?”

The Teapot wasn't a bird, though it looked rather like one, but was actually a reptile, covered with hard, chitinous scales. On stiltlike legs was supported a rotund body, with a little spike of a tail at one end and a long, boneless neck at the other.

It had a head like a tortoise's, and now, as the pebble Quade had thrown thudded near it, the creature hastily folded up its legs and collapsed. Its neck curved, writhing, and abruptly the head seemed to vanish into the reptile's body.

“Pouch on his stomach, like a kangaroo has,” Quade explained. “See the reason for its name?”

Indeed, the fat creature resembled nothing more than an ordinary teapot, with its spiked tail and its long neck, now curved so that it resembled a handle. Quade went on, smiling,

“Nothing can hurt it now, Kate. Its only vulnerable part is its head. A chisel can't cut through that armor-plate. Look.” He stepped forward, bent to pick up the Teapot by its “handle.” Then he paused, staring.

Something scuttled out of the bushes and snatched at the Teapot. It was a claw. Nothing else. Just a big green claw a foot long.

The Teapot, sensing danger, unsheathed its head, sprang erect, and ran away. It ran into the crater, the claw in pursuit.

Quade looked amazed. “It looks like a claw,” he said dazedly.

“It—is!” The girl swallowed nervously.

“And it had a lot of little legs under it—I noticed that. But it's impossible. I've seen plenty of queer things on the planets, but even the Ganymedeian leeches had more to them than that. I—”

He broke off, his words dying in a startled gulp. An eye was looking at him. With a cold, fishy stare it was gazing searchingly up from the top of a small boulder, a round eyeball covered, except for the pupil, with a horny shell. Quade made a tentative motion toward it, and the eye arose on a dozen spidery legs. With deceptive speed it glided down the rock and ran into the crater after the Teapot and

the green claw.

The Martian reptile was having trouble. Quade lifted the binoculars.

“It’s got within range of the rays,” he said. “Its brain-tissue is burning out—”

Far down the precipitous slope the Teapot slowed, stopped, and fell over, kicking. In a last desperate gesture it thrust its head into the protective stomach-pouch. The green claw grabbed it and quickly retraced its steps, the eye keeping pace with it. Presently the unusual group passed over the crater’s edge some distance from the two humans, and was lost in the forest.

“Let’s get back to camp,” Quade said. “I don’t get this at all.”

There was trouble at the ship. One of the cameramen had been bitten. A green claw had attacked him, he said; and already his leg was purple and swollen. The doctor was attending him, as well as taking care of a script girl who had encountered “a snake with legs—with suckers all over it.” Quade thought it sounded like a tentacle, but he knew that tentacles don’t wander around by themselves. What fantastic forms of life had they encountered in this Martian outpost?

One good thing resulted. Floyd Stover, his leonine mane flying, staggered into the camera-ship with horror written all over him. He called Quade into a space-lock.

“Eyes,” he groaned, shuddering. “Eyes that chased me through the forest. Quade, I’ve tasted every brew in the System, but I’ve never yet found one that made me see eyes. It’s a judgment. I’m going on the wagon—you’re my witness!”

He turned to a spacesuit and fumbled with the oxygen tank. Abruptly a stream of amber liquid gushed out. “I hid the stuff here—but I won’t take another drop.” He tilted the suit until the tank was empty. “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” the star recited, reverting to his days as a Shakespearian actor.

And he pulled a tube of white pills from his pocket and gulped several.

“High-powered benzedrine,” Stover explained shakily. “Stimulant. Best thing in the world to sober up.”

“Well, don’t take too much of it or you won’t sleep for a week—look out!”

Quade’s warning came too late. The tube dropped from Stover’s trembling hand and spilled its contents on the floor. The Bouncer popped out from somewhere and snatched up one of the pills, devouring it greedily. Quade retrieved the rest of the benzedrine before Bill could eat any more.

He handed the container back to the actor. Stover would keep away from the brew now, Quade knew. One problem was solved. But a new one had arisen. What the devil were these fantastic creatures that emerged from the jungle piecemeal? And why hadn’t they ever been discovered before.

Quade knew the answer to that. This was an unproductive, lonely outpost, avoided even by the nomadic Martian tribes. The few explorers who had come to study the Inferno hadn't stayed long. Almost anything could exist undiscovered in this strange forest.

A quick movement on the part of the Bouncer caught Quade's attention. Bill was up in a chair, a curious glazed expression in his eyes. Picasso was crawling rapidly toward the floor, a perambulatory bump of blue-white on the chair's blue-white steel. He reached the carpet, scuttled toward the door. Kathleen was there.

Quade lifted a cautioning finger, glancing, puzzled, from Bill to Picasso. The latter climbed Kathleen, fell in her pocket, and hastily emerged carrying a piece of candy. She always had some chocolate for the Bouncer, who loved it.

Picasso reached the floor, returned to Bill's chair, and went up its leg. He paused beside the Bouncer, who snatched the candy and ate it with intense satisfaction.

"Well, well!" Quade said. "Know what happened?"

"Picasso's smarter than we thought," Kathleen said.

Quade answered sharply.

"No, he isn't. Bill's the smart one. Funny I never thought of that—that the telepathic function might work both ways. Bill can read thoughts—we always knew that—but he can also send 'em out! At least he can when his brain's pepped up with benzedrine, and when he's got a half-witted subject like Picasso to work on. He sent out a mental command to Picasso and made him steal the candy in your pocket—I'll lay money on it!"

"Well, he deserves another piece for that," Kathleen said, and acted on her words. And, smiling to himself, Quade went to the galley and secured sandwiches and coffee from the cook.

An hour later he had decided on a plan. He had been pondering the mystery of the green claw, and had arrived at a possible solution. It seemed incredible, but—

Quade called young Wolfe.

"Get some weapons, kid. We're going hunting. Get an electroscope while you're at it—I've a hunch." Remembering the Bouncer's mind-reading abilities, he set out to find Bill, after ordering everyone aboard the ship.

Wolfe brought several electroscopes, with lead shields for them.

"You're thinking the same thing I am, eh?" Quade grunted as they started out from the lock. "Well, I won't believe it until I see it. It's incredible."

Wolfe shrugged.

"What about the robot animals we use in pics? They're radio-controlled."

“Yeah, but—a living organism! Let’s go this way. The claw headed north.”

They plunged into the depths of the forest. It was not difficult going, despite the size of the vegetation. Most of the trees’ vigor was concentrated in the broad, flat leaves that made a ceiling far overhead to catch the Sun’s rays. It was a green, dim twilight through which they moved, resembling the vague depths of the hydrosphere.

Above the jungle, Quade knew, it was pleasantly warm, but at ground level an icy breeze chilled him. Some of the trees, he noticed, were thickly coated with a furry kind of moss, which apparently served to keep the cold from penetrating through the bark—a striking form of true symbiosis, mutual aid between parasite and host.

The Bouncer hopped along quietly, subdued and a little frightened. His huge eyes, capable of seeing into the infra-red and ultra-violet, found the gloom no handicap, but more than once the two humans were forced to use light-tubes. They came out into a little clearing, and paused as a thunderous roar boomed out.

“Wait a minute,” Quade said. “Come here, Bill.” The Bouncer huddled close to Quade’s legs, shivering. Reading Wolfe’s thoughts, he said faintly,

“What’s this coming? It’s a—a Teapot.”

Sure enough one of the reptilian Teapots was trotting slowly into the clearing. It paused as the booming died, and fell to work cropping a growth of succulent moss. An incredible thing scampered into view from the gloom.

It looked like a balloon, stretched tightly over a pale, circular disc. About as large as a man’s head, it ran rapidly on several boneless legs until it was a dozen feet from the Teapot. Then the balloon swelled; the disc vibrated suddenly. A tremendous booming sounded.

With a start the Teapot lifted its flat head and swiftly departed. The balloon ran after it. Wolfe mopped his forehead.

“It was a lung,” he said to Quade. “If I know my physiology, it was a lung. And a diaphragm. The air pressure made the diaphragm vibrate and caused that sound.”

“Right. Can you guess why? Ever see the way Gerry Carlyle’s men do jungle-hunting on Earth? They form a semi-circle, close in around their prey, and raise a racket with drums and gongs to frighten the animals toward them. I’ll bet that’s what our balloon was doing. Driving the Teapot toward—”

He stopped, eyebrows lifted.

“Give me an electroscope.”

Carefully, Quade withdrew the instrument from its lead sheath. But the gold leaf remained stiff, unwilted. He shook his head.

“Not yet. Let’s get going.”

Unenthusiastically, the Bouncer hopped after the two men. He liked this journey even less when several bodiless eyes flitted down from trees to vanish in the shadows, and when a ten-foot tentacle, equipped with suckers, writhed across their path. It came straight for Quade, and he blasted it out of existence with a well-placed explosive bullet. He examined the carcass.

“No trace of brain, is there? Those whitish threads—nerve tissue.” He tried the electroscope again, and this time the gold leaf wilted.

The jungle had thinned as they climbed a steep slope. It straggled out into rank grass; then to a bare expanse of rock resembling quartz. The two men topped a little ridge, the Bouncer beside them. And they stood silent, staring down into a shallow crater.

Somehow, Quade was reminded of a group of machines, working steadily, inexorably, efficiently. Yet he knew that in the organisms below him was something more than created energy. Life dwelt in them.

In the center of the pit was a pool, in which a small gray object bobbed. A dozen feet away, ringing the basin, were five huge gray sacks, pulsing slowly. From them occasionally long tubes would uncoil, to reach out to the thing in the pool and remain fastened to it for a time.

Beyond the gray sacks, in another circle, were—the thought hit Quade suddenly—jaws! Roughly spherical, they each possessed a gaping orifice that spasmodically opened and closed. From them larger tubes connected directly to the grayish bags.

“Jumping Jupiter!” Wolfe said softly. “It’s alive!”

Past the two men scuttled a tentacle, carrying the writhing, kicking body of a Teapot. It ran to one of the huge jaws and thrust the reptile within. The mandibles closed with a cracking sound; when they opened the Teapot was mashed into fragments.

“What leverage!” Wolfe said. “It’d take a diamond drill to crack a Teapot!”

Quade nodded slowly.

“I think I get the set-up. Those jaws smash the food into bits and then push it through those tubes—see that peristalsis?” Little ripples were shaking the hose that connected the jaw they had been watching to one of the gray bags. “Push it to the stomachs. Those gray things are the stomachs—they’ve got the necessary digestive glands in ’em, naturally. And—see those humps on top? Lungs, I’ll bet. In the stomachs the necessary fats, carbohydrates and so on are given to the blood, which is aerated through the lungs. Then the blood is given to that thing in the pool every so

often.”

“The thing in the pool—”

“It’s the brain, of course,” Quade answered Wolfe’s amazed question. “Remember the electroscope? That’s the answer.”

“I don’t quite see.”

“You know what nerves are, don’t you? Electrical impulses are sent along ’em to the muscles from the brain. There’s a gap the nerve-impulses have to jump—the synapse, where the tissue doesn’t quite connect. Well, if the electric potential can jump a tiny gap—why not a larger one, if it’s given more power? Why can’t it jump an inch—or a foot? And if it can jump a foot—why not miles?”

“You mean all those claws and eyes and tentacles are really part of this thing?”

“Sure. It’s a logical evolution. The great terrestrial dinosaurs died because they couldn’t move fast enough to get sufficient food. But in an organism more highly evolved, why couldn’t perambulatory attachments develop? Extensions of the parent creature, which could wander around to get food?

“There isn’t much game on Mars, and a big animal couldn’t exist. It’d be a destructive circle. It couldn’t get food enough to create enough energy to travel enough to get enough food. Sounds crazy, but that’s the answer.”

Quade glanced down at the brain in the pool.

“That thing sends out electrical impulses that order its various extensions around. It sees with the mobile eyes. It’s like a—a—”

“Like a jigsaw puzzle,” Wolfe said, gulping. “Good name for it. Jigsaw! Think it’s intelligent?”

“Lord knows,” Quade grunted. “I don’t think it knows we’re here. None of its eyes is around.”

He was soon to find himself wrong. The Bouncer, who had been jiggling frantically, clutched Quade’s leg.

“Hunger,” he said. “Tired. More—food. What? Danger? One—one—one movings. Hurt me?”

Quade’s jaw dropped.

“Wolfe, did you think that?” he snapped.

The youngster shook his head. “It must be—”

“Yeah! Bill’s getting thought-impulses from the brain down there. Translating them into English, as well as he can. Come on, Bill. Spill some more.”

The Bouncer became violently excited.

“Food, food, food. Many . . . much. Grow. One, one, one—here. Away—

one, one, one, one, one—”

He continued to count, while Quade frowned.

“Not so easy. I gather that brain knows we’re here. ‘One, one, one’—that’s the three of us. But the other part—I know! He means the rest of the crew, back in the ship. Thinks we’re good to eat.”

Wolfe got out a gun. Quade shook his head.

“Wait a minute. Maybe we can communicate with this thing.” He turned, staring down into the crater. “Hey, there!” he shouted, cupping his hands around his mouth. “Can you hear me?”

No response. Wolfe said, “Tony, I know a bit about metals. I’m not sure that thing’s flesh and blood.”

“Eh? It uses blood—we saw that.”

“That gray stuff that covers it isn’t flesh. It’s some sort of metal. If I had a spectroscope I’d be certain. But it’s metal, Tony, I’m sure of that. Maybe flesh inside. Some combination of metallic ions with our own kind. There’s metal in your body, you know that.”

“Damn little of it,” Quade said. “Iron’s in everybody—but in very small proportions.”

“I think that brain’s covered with metal of some kind. Maybe no metal we know. Maybe in little plates, so the blood-tubes can get in to the brain arteries. There’s radioactivity, I’m pretty sure; that would give you the power to jump a mile-long synapse. The electroscope—look out!”

A claw was edging tentatively toward them, flanked by an eye and a voice-bladder. The latter bellowed at them deafeningly. The eyes watched coldly, while the claw ran in and tried to bite Wolfe. He blew it to bits with a bullet.

A low buzz came from Quade’s pocket. He drew out a flat box, touched a lever. It was a pocket radio, often necessary in interplanetary work, though its small size precluded use over long distances, and prevented installation of a television screen.

Kathleen’s voice said urgently, “Tony? There’s trouble on the ship. A lot of claws and things are attacking us.”

Wolfe shot a tentacle and aimed another accurate bullet at the eye, which failed to dodge it.

“They can’t get in, can they?” Quade asked. “Lift the ship.”

“They dissolved the porthole-glass with something—some acid. The beryllium-steel keeps them out, but they got in the engine-room first of all. Some of the men got panicky and tried to shoot ’em. One of the engines is damaged. And they’re all—well, a lot of ’em are in there, and the rest are busy with the portholes.”

“Shoot them,” Quade said. “Deal out the guns.”

“We’ve done that. We can’t use guns in the engine room—it may cause more trouble. Have to use axes. We’re trying to get the things out, so the engine can be repaired. Are you all right?”

“Sure,” Quade lied, shooting at an advancing claw.

“Hold on,” the girl’s voice said. “Be back in a minute.”

“Not so good, eh?” Wolfe said. “Let’s try for the brain. Though I don’t think—” He fired down at the gray object in the pool. The bullet ricocheted. He tried another at one of the sacklike stomachs, with equal results. Then at one of the grinding, huge jaws. All seemed to be covered with the same curious metallic substance.

“See what a triple-charge will do,” Quade said, stuffing a bullet into the chamber of his gun. All it did was to knock Quade down with the recoil. The brain bobbed slowly, undisturbed.

“They bite,” the Bouncer said. “Eat them.”

“I don’t like the way that thing’s thinking,” Wolfe said with a flash of grim humor. Quade grunted.

“Maybe high explosive would worry it, but I doubt it, somehow. Hope we don’t run out of ammunition too soon.”

Claws, tentacles, eyes, and voice-bladders suddenly materialized from the forest. They converged on the two men.

“Good. One, one, one. Eat soon,” the Bouncer said contentedly.

CHAPTER IV

Angle Shot: End of Jigsaw

A board the camera-ship Kathleen was having a tough time. The vessel was surrounded by an avid horde of piecemeal monsters, intent upon capturing the occupants and dragging them into Jigsaw's various jaws. Each man had been equipped with guns, plenty of ammunition, and an ax, and cautioned not to use the triple-charge cartridges within the ship.

Kathleen retired to the engine room, after seeing that each porthole had a guard. The tentacles could climb effortlessly all over the ship. They were giving ground somewhat now, and presently the last one was chopped into bits as he fled under a rheostat.

The men took their places at the ports of the engine room, while others set to work repairing the wrecked machine. Luckily, there were plenty of spare parts, and soon the motors were humming gently. Kathleen spoke to Quade via radio.

"Lots of 'em hanging on the hull, eh?" he said. "Well, turn on the gravity plates full speed. Circle around low—the atmospheric friction will cook 'em. Then come after us pronto." He didn't mention that he and Wolfe, fighting furiously, had been forced back unpleasantly close to one of the grinding jaws. The Bouncer was far from encouraging. Whenever he spoke, it was merely to relay the brain's avid anticipation of more food.

How much ammunition have you got left?" Wolfe asked. "I'm down to my last clip."

"Two more," Quade groaned. "Look out!" He fired two shots in quick succession. "Almost got Bill that time." The Bouncer, with a horrified glance at the jaw, not a dozen feet away, squeaked shrilly and took a strangle hold on Quade's leg.

"God bless Von Zorn," Quade said under his breath. "Wait until I see that fat-headed baboon again—if I ever do. I'll—"

With a scream of displaced air the camera-ship flashed down from the sky. It hovered as Quade spoke urgently into the transmitter. A moment later a rope ladder was dropped, and Quade said, "Get it, Wolfe! I'll guard you—your ammunition's gone."

After a second's hesitation Wolfe obeyed. Quade emptied his gun, threw the

useless weapon at an advancing claw, and went up the ladder like a cat, with the Bouncer hanging to his leg with a grip like a steel-trap.

“All gone,” the creature said sadly as he was drawn through the porthole. “No food. Too bad.”

That, apparently, was Jigsaw’s reaction, broadcast to Bill’s receptive mind.

The huge platform in the ship’s transparent nose was crowded. All were staring down at the fantastic brain in the pool, and the organs that surrounded it. Kathleen hurried up.

“Are you hurt, Tony?”

“Nope. Are you? . . . Good. Looks like we came off okay—or did we?”

“Four of the men were bitten, but the doctor says they’ll be okay. He’s got an anti-toxin—says the bites injected a poison similar to formic acid.”

“Yeah,” Quade said thoughtfully. “We’re up a tree now, though. We’ve got less than a week to finish *The Star Parade*—”

“Can’t we do it somewhere else on Mars?”

“No. The sets are all built, and it took a month to put them up. We’ve got to finish shooting back at camp. But those animals—there must be thousands of them. We can’t shoot ’em one by one as they appear. I wouldn’t ask the crew to work out in the open under such conditions.”

Ailyn Van came up hastily, her platinum eyes wide. She caught sight of the Bouncer, who was peering dispiritedly at his furry stomach.

“Nice and warm,” he said miserably.

Ailyn gasped and made a dive for Bill. She fumbled in his coat and brought up an object that suddenly turned a shell-pink to match her hands. It was Picasso, who had been a stowaway on the Bouncer since he had left camp.

“You naughty, naughty little Picasso,” Ailyn crooned tenderly. “I thought I’d lost you. Why, you might have been killed.” She turned to Quade. “Tony, you saved his life!”

Before Quade could answer Wolfe put in hurriedly, “I’ll say he did! One of the claws was dragging Picasso right into a jaw when Tony killed it. Risked his own life doing it, too.”

Ailyn turned glowing platinum eyes on Quade.

“I can’t thank you enough. Tony—” She came closer, looking somewhat ashamed of herself. “I’ve been pretty nasty, haven’t I?”

“Darn right you have,” Kathleen said, but Quade shushed her with a warning gesture. “Yeah,” he said. “But after all you’re an artist. I guess I haven’t been easy to

get along with.”

“Oh, it wasn’t that. It was me. I’m sorry, Tony. I—it’ll be different from now on.”

And she meant it, Quade knew. He sighed with relief. However, there still remained Jigsaw—and the Inferno! In the stress of events he had almost forgotten about filming the cavern of the energy-storms.

“Wolfe,” Quade said, “I think I’ve figured out our friend Jigsaw. He broadcasts thought-commands to his various organs—and he does it by way of radioactivity, that’s pretty sure. A thick coat of lead should stop that, eh?”

The lanky blond stared for a moment, and then grinned widely.

“You got it, Tony! That’ll keep him from jumping the synapse. Same as lead will shut off radium rays. Even the powerful gamma rays . . . but how’ll we do it? Electrolysis? We’d have to pump a lead nitrate solution into the pool first.”

“Electroplating’s too slow,” Quade said. “Molten lead will do the trick. We’ll use the metal spray guns.”

This was done. The giant guns, useful in constructing sets, took thick feed wires of lead into their mechanisms, melted the metal by acetylene blasts, and sprayed the molten stuff under powerful pressure from their muzzles.

A platform was rigged underneath the camera-ship, and the spray guns were lowered by long poles, easily manipulated by the men above. White-hot lead showered on Jigsaw. As it hardened a thick coat was formed, and presently the spherical brain was capsized by the weight. Immediately the crew began to spray the surface now exposed to view.

“Jigsaw’s in solitary confinement,” Quade said, peering down through the transparent hull. “His thought-impulses can’t get through the lead shield and reach his organs—the claws, eyes, and the rest. They haven’t any brains, you know. Just receiving nerve tissue.”

Something was certainly happening to Jigsaw’s mobile organs. They were gradually ceasing to move, while the bellows of the sound organs grew fainter and stopped entirely. In half an hour Quade recalled the men, convinced that Jigsaw was so thoroughly coated with lead that he was now harmless.

“Everything’s ship-shape,” he told Kathleen. “Maybe the lead will wear off Jigsaw in time, but we’ll be through *The Star Parade* by then—” Quade paused, frowning.

The girl nodded sympathetically.

“You mean the Inferno?”

Wolfe came up, the Bouncer hopping at his heels. “It simply can’t be filmed,

Tony. You'd better tell Von Zorn to fake it. The armor's no good. Nothing can live in the Inferno."

Quade looked at the Bouncer, and his eyes slowly widened. Bill blinked uneasily and took shelter behind Kathleen's ankles. "For Pete's sake!" Quade said at last, his voice unsteady. "What a sap I am! It'll work—sure it'll work! And I had the answer right in my lap all along!"

What?" Wolfe's tone was skeptical.

Quade turned to the girl.

"Kate, remember when we first saw a Teapot? On the rim of the Inferno? When one of Jigsaw's eyes and claws chased it down into the energy currents?"

"Yes. But—"

"The Teapot died—its brain was burned out. But the claw wasn't hurt, or the eye. Of course not! Neither of them had a brain. Just conducting nerve-tissue. Wolfe, maybe that's the explanation of Jigsaw's metallic body and his radioactivity."

"You mean—*oh!* Adaptation!"

"That's it," Quade said. "Living right near the Inferno, Jigsaw slowly adapted himself to the radiations. Built up resistance against it. A radio-controlled robot would go haywire in the crater, but not a creature controlled by thoughts—telepathy. I'll bet Jigsaw's mobile organs can go anywhere in the Inferno without being hurt."

"That doesn't necessarily follow," Wolfe said slowly. "The rays are more powerful the deeper you get."

"Yeah . . . but rays that would burn out a brain mightn't act on less specialized nerve-tissue. We've got to take the chance."

"All we have to do is send down a claw with a camera strapped to it," Kathleen said wryly. "A fat chance."

"That's right," Wolfe seconded her. "We can't control the mobile organs the way Jigsaw did. Our radio robot-controls won't work on living creatures."

"That," Quade said with satisfaction, "is where Bill comes in. The Bouncer has a highly developed telepathic function in his brain. He can broadcast thoughts as well as receive them. We found that out when he ate some of Stover's benzedrine. He controlled Picasso with his mind, and Picasso has a brain—more or less. Jigsaw's organs have just got specially adapted receptive nerve tissue, so that ought to be even easier for Bill."

CHAPTER V

Fade-Out: The Big Scene

An hour later the space ship lay grounded near the crater of the Inferno, while Bill was the center of a small group near the rim. He kept looking around in a worried manner, occasionally scratching his stomach. He was full of benzedrine.

"It's a very powerful stimulant," Quade had explained. "It was known a long time ago—benzedrine sulphate—but lately it's been improved considerably, so that it steps up the brain to a tremendous extent. It ought to pep up Bill's telepathic function a lot."

It did. The largest tentacle had been carried along, and an automatic, spring-powered camera was attached to it. Several of Jigsaw's eyes lay near by. Quade squatted before Bill, who looked up at Kathleen inquiringly.

"It's okay," she told him. "Tony won't hurt you. If he does I'll wring his neck."

"Look," Quade said. "You're pretty intelligent, Bill. We know that. So try to understand." He knew that his words were meaningless to the Bouncer, but the creature was receiving his thoughts and comprehending them. He explained to Bill what was wanted.

The Bouncer looked stupid. Quade went over the whole matter again, with no result. Eventually Bill murmured, "Candy?"

"I thought so," Kathleen said. "He understands you all right, Tony. The little crook is holding out on us." She fumbled in a pocket, brought out a piece of chocolate. The Bouncer ate it appreciatively and said "Candy?" in a hopeful way.

"Not now," the girl told him. "You'll get lots of candy after you do what Tony wants."

Bill hesitated and then turned toward the remnants of Jigsaw. He stood perfectly still for a moment—and one of Jigsaw's eyes moved.

It stood up on its tiny legs, wavered a minute, and fell over. But it got up again, and the other eyes, too, joined it.

"Now the tentacle," Kathleen prompted.

The Bouncer obeyed. The snake-like object squirmed slowly, and writhed toward the lip of the crater. Quade sprang after it.

"Hold on a minute!" he called, and pressed the switch that started the camera, strapped tightly to the tentacle, unreeling its spool of film.

He straightened, frowning.

“This isn’t going to be easy. Bill can control the tentacle and the eyes, and he can read my mind. He’ll be a relay station, forwarding my thought-commands to the organs. He can probably see through Jigsaw’s eyes, the same as Jigsaw could—but I can’t. Unless Bill helps a lot, I’ll be working blind. Anyway—here goes!”

Quade turned to the Bouncer, trying to marshal his thoughts into coherent orders. The tentacle writhed over the lip of the crater and started down, the eyes scampering after it.

No one spoke. All were watching Quade and the Bouncer. As long as the tentacle was visible the task wasn’t too difficult, but presently not even binoculars could penetrate the depths in which the camera-laden messenger had vanished.

Quade’s face was damp with perspiration. He was rapidly acquiring a severe headache. Bill’s round eyes, now slightly glazed, were intent on the man.

“Keep going,” Quade was thinking. “Down. Till you reach the Inferno. Keep going . . .”

It seemed years later when Quade had a queer, inexplicable conviction that the tentacle had found its goal. He stared at the Bouncer, who jiggled slightly. Had Bill projected the thought into his mind? Quade wondered.

“Keep moving around,” he commanded mentally. “All around. As many angles as possible . . .”

At last Wolfe touched Quade’s arm. He pointed to his watch. The can of film was nearly finished.

“Come back, now,” Quade said, unconscious that he was speaking along. “Make it quick. Hurry—”

The headache had increased to a blinding, agonizing throb within his skull. He fought against it, desperately trying to keep his thoughts coherent. He lost all comprehension of time, and when the tentacle writhed over the edge of the crater Quade stared at it for a while without realizing what this meant. Slowly understanding came to him.

The Inferno had been filmed—for the first time! If—and the thought chilled him—if the pictures developed okay. Quade swayed dizzily, felt the mouth of a flask thrust against his teeth. He gulped, felt the revivifying sting of brandy on his palate.

Wolfe was carefully removing the camera from the tentacle. He said absently, “The eyes didn’t come back. The radiations probably did for ’em. There’s considerable brain tissue in the retina, anyway—”

The Bouncer hugged Kathleen’s leg. “Candy?” he questioned greedily. “Candy?”

That night, on the space ship, the developed shots of the Inferno were run off. They were amazingly clear. The specially treated film, and the filter-lenses of the camera, had taken care of that.

Everything was there—the descent down the crater into the cavern of the energy-storms, astounding shots of the long-ruined Martian city, ablaze with the thundering, flaming currents that roared up from the depths below, and the final ascent back to the surface. Quade was grinning happily as he sat in the projection room, Kathleen beside him.

“Those scenes would make a smash hit out of the corniest flicker ever made,” he observed. “They’ll dub in sound on the Moon, and get the actors in with double-exposure shots. Von Zorn will go crazy over this stuff.”

“That cleans up everything,” Kathleen said. “Especially as you won’t have any more trouble with Clint and Edith.”

“Eh?”

“The gal fainted when Jigsaw attacked the ship. I laid her out in my stateroom and fixed it up with the doctor to tell Clint she’d been bitten by a claw and was plenty sick. He nearly went crazy. And when she woke up and saw how he felt—all was forgiven. It’ll be a month before they start fighting again.”

Quade drew a deep breath of relief. *The Star Parade* would be completed on schedule.

Jigsaw, completely plated with lead, remained in his pool, doing his best to send out nerve-impulses and wondering why he wasn’t receiving any.

Clint Padrick and Edith Rudeen were in each other’s arms in Floyd Stover’s cabin, listening to the latter’s interpretation of *Macbeth*.

Wolfe was grinning from ear to ear as he worked on his beloved cameras.

Quade was contemplating kissing Kathleen, and she was wondering why he didn’t hurry up about it.

Ailyn Van was looking for Picasso.

And the Bouncer was trying to figure out whether or not Picasso was clinging to some portion of his anatomy.

Bill had been given an antidote that destroyed the effects of the benzedrine, so he couldn’t control the little creature with his thoughts. Exploringly he examined his rotund middle.

Apparently no stowaway.

Bill’s furry shoulders lifted in a deep breath of relief—and then sagged in utter misery as he found himself murmuring,

“Nice and warm. Nice and . . . warm.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Star Parade* by Henry Kuttner]