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A THRILLING
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Argyle sent bullet after bullet smashing into the white worm

NINE PLANETS FILMS, INC.

Presents

DOOM WORLD

A COMPLETE NOVELET

by **HENRY KUTTNER**

AUTHOR of 'HOLLYWOOD ON THE MOON' 'WHEN THE EARTH LIVED' ETC.

Featuring

ANTHONY QUADE



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August 1938.

Featuring
ANTHONY QUADE

Deep Within the Sub-Lunar Caverns of Hollywood on the Moon, the Most Glamorous City in the Solar System, a Horde of Radio-Controlled Robots Menace the Movie-Makers of an Ultra-Modern Era!

CHAPTER I

INTERIOR: The offices of Nine Planets Films, Inc., Hollywood on the Moon. Close shot—Day.

“You can’t film *Doom World*,” Tony Quade said emphatically. “It just isn’t possible. I’ve read the shooting script, and all I’ve got to say is that you made a big mistake in buying the movie rights, even if you are the president of Nine Planets Films, Inc.”

Von Zorn’s small, simian face was puckered with anxiety. He scratched his toothbrush mustache and murmured, “It was a best-seller, Tony. We paid the author plenty, but if we can screen the book we’ll clean up. Otherwise we’ll drop a lot—too much.”

Tony Quade settled his large, big-boned body more comfortably in the glass-and-leather chair and shrugged.

“My tears will mingle with yours, Chief.”

“But you *can* film *Doom World*! You got those Jupiter explosion shots last year, and the comet sequences for *Space Devils*. There isn’t a special effect in the System you can’t handle.”

“Exploration on Pluto, though,” Quade said, frowning. “Do you know how many expeditions have died there? You can’t live on a radioactive planet.”

“The characters in *Doom World* did.”

“Can I help it if the author’s vacuum-minded?” Quade’s voice grew ironic. “Some dizzy scientist exposed ’em to negative radio-magnetic rays, whatever they are, and neutralized the effect of the Pluto radiations. That may sound good on paper, and it help make the book a best-seller, but you know dam well it’s sheer fantasy. Pseudo-science—rats! It’s a fairy tale.”

“So you refuse the assignment, eh?” Von Zorn said suavely, his snappy black eyes glinting. “I’d certainly hate to blacklist you in the System.”

Quade smiled thinly.

“You couldn’t blacklist me for turning down an assignment like *Doom World*, and you know it. How could we possibly film the picture on Pluto?”

“You wouldn’t have to,” Von Zorn said. “That’s why we own some of the sub-lunar caverns. All you have to do is build a set in one of ’em duplicating the Pluto scene. There’s no danger from radioactivity, for there won’t be any.”

“And what about the livestock? The book’s full of Plutonian animals, and they can’t live without radioactivity. Do you want me to film *Doom World* without the beasts?”

“Robots,” Von Zorn urged. “We’ve used artificial monsters before. You can handle ’em by radio control.”

“It must be nice to sit at a desk all day and not know anything about picture making,” Quade said impolitely. “Do you realize how complex the neural and muscular structure of Plutonian animals is? An ordinary radio control unit couldn’t handle ’em. They’d look like animated papier-mâché.”

THAT, unfortunately, was quite true, even when less complex animals were used. However, the artificial monsters, radio controlled, could easily be created by the biological laboratories, and were much less dangerous to handle than the authentic life-forms.

Moreover, the expense involved in locating, transporting, and keeping alive such creatures as a Venusian “whip” or one of the double-headed, apelike Hyclops of Ganymede would have been prohibitive.

The public often shunned the films of *Nine Planets* because the life-forms used were so obviously artificial. Von Zorn was unfortunately reminded of this by Quade’s words. His face turned slightly green.

“And another thing,” he snapped. “I just got word that Gerry Carlyle’s coming back from Venus with a shipload of monsters in that blasted *Ark* of hers.”

Quade grinned.

“The catch-’em-alive dame?”

“Yeah. Right after we finished shooting *Venus Adventure*. Know what’ll happen now?”

“Sure,” Quade said, but Von Zorn kept on bitterly.

“The picture won’t draw flies! Because we used laboratory monsters, and now Gerry Carlyle’s brought back the real thing.”

“Why don’t you buy her cargo?” Quade asked.

A low, grating sound was heard as Von Zorn gritted his teeth. Eventually he found words.

“Do you think I haven’t tried? I offered her a fortune to forget her contract with the London Interplanetary Zoo and sell me the animals. Told her I could use ’em in films. Here’s her answer.” He thrust a crumpled sheet of blue paper at Quade, who smoothed it out and read it aloud with interest.

Dear Von Zorn:

Nuts.

Gerry Carlyle.

With an effort Quade kept his face sober as he handed back the message to Von Zorn.

“You don’t deserve this, Chief,” he said solicitously. “So that’s why you want *Doom World* filmed, eh? The most popular book in ten years, with the strangest life-forms in the System. Thought it’d draw better than Gerry’s animals?”

“Exactly! We can’t lose on this. You’ve got to take it on, Tony.”

“It’s too big a job,” Quade said seriously. “And it’s plenty dangerous. I hear some of your biggest stars have been offered the lead roles, and said no.”

Von Zorn grunted.

“Neal Baker’s got the romantic lead. The heroine—is Kathleen Gregg.”

Quade whistled under his breath.

“A star role for her, eh?”

“Thought you’d be interested. I had a sneaking hunch you’d like to see Kathleen get ahead, so I gave her the part.”

“I catch on,” Quade said. “If I turn down the job, what happens to Kathleen?”

VON ZORN tried to register regret, but succeeded only in looking like a monkey with the colic.

“Why, I’m afraid we’ll have to let her go. It’s the only part I’ve got for her just now, and if you won’t take on the picture, Kathleen’s—out!”

Quade knew what that would mean to Kathleen Gregg. She had come to Hollywood on the Moon as a stowaway, and had been fascinated by the lunar metropolis ever since. Just lately Von Zorn had given her a contract.

“I hope a meteor hits you,” Quade told his employer. “You’d blow the Earth to bits to get a hit picture. Okay, you win. I’ll film *Doom World* for you if it kills me—and it probably will.”

Von Zorn smirked. “Nothing pleases me as much as a spirit of willing cooperation,” he said smoothly, lighting a cigar made from greenish, aromatic lunar tobacco. “You will be well paid, Tony.”

“You’re darned right I will,” Quade observed from the door. “Wait’ll you get my expense account. I’ll put in everything from drinks to an engagement ring for Kathleen.”

“Always the joker,” Von Zorn chuckled. His grin widened as Quade, with a snort of disgust, slammed the door behind him.

The President of Nine Planets Films, Inc., pressed a button and spoke into a dictograph on his desk. Presently he said, “Thurman? *Doom World’s* going into immediate production. Tony Quade’s in charge. See that he gets full cooperation. He’ll need it!”

CHAPTER II

INTERIOR: The Silver Spacesuit—Quade and Kathleen seated at a table. Night, a month later.

When you first saw Kathleen Gregg you immediately noticed her chin, then her eyes. She had a pointed little chin and snapping brown eyes, not yet tattooed to the popular tint of violet. Despite the fact that the Silver Spacesuit was the swankiest nightclub-restaurant in Hollywood on the Moon, Kathleen was wearing stained jodhpurs and eating scrambled eggs.

“There’s egg on your nose,” Quade pointed out helpfully.

“Go chase a meteor,” Kathleen said, and made a hasty dab with her napkin. Chuckling, Quade turned to the window beside him.

The great lunar metropolis stretched for miles beneath their vantage point. It was a city of domes and towers and gardens, blazing with vari-colored brilliance beneath stars which were pale by comparison. Far to the north could be seen the Cyclopean rampart of the Great Rim, the walls of the crater that held Hollywood on the Moon. Aircraft drove past incessantly, and a low murmur of traffic trickled up from the streets far below.

“It’s a great little city,” Kathleen said softly. “We’ll be beneath it tomorrow, Tony.”

“Yeah. The set’s built, and we’re ready to start shooting. I’ve had a biologist helping me who’s a wizard—Kenilworth. He’s created Plutonian life-forms that’ll make your hair stand up. Somehow he’s managed to overcome stiffness.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, the radio control unit naturally can’t handle all the muscular and neural organization, and as a rule a robot animal’s body doesn’t work in coordination with itself. Too stiff, you know. But Kenilworth’s got something entirely new. Trouble is, he wouldn’t let me in on it. Said he’d be ready to show me the whole thing tomorrow. Some new invention—but Von Zorn ought to pay plenty for it.”

Kathleen touched the dial of the radio at their side, and a throaty voice began to croon:

Where the Martian moons ride over,
Where the flame-flowers blossom and burn,
Till the Sun grows cold, and the planets grow old,
I’ll be waiting for you to return;
You brought me—

Quade gave a low, muffled howl and turned it off. Kathleen’s chin lifted.

“What’s that for?”

“You—uh, you like it?”

“That was a Neal Baker recording!”

“It still smells.”

“Just because you don’t like it—”

“My dear friends,” said a pleasant, well-modulated voice, with a faint trace of some indefinable accent. “I’ve found you at last!”

“You lucky fellow,” Quade said. “Hello, Neal. Kathleen, I’m afraid you know Neal Baker already.”

She flashed him a deadly glance and moved over, offering Baker her seat and squeezing Quade uncomfortably against the window.

“Thanks,” Baker said, sitting down. He looked exactly like what he was—the handsomest and most popular crooner in pictures. He was always being featured in romantic adventure films, and possessed a daredevil, swashbuckling air that was infinitely impressive.

“Tomorrow—the great adventure,” he said, looking into Kathleen’s eyes. “I’ll be very glad to work with you—may I call you Kathleen?”

“By all means,” Quade broke in genially. “She also answers to the name of Fathead, a sort of affectionate nickname, you know. I hate to mention it, Miss Gregg, but if you push me again I’ll fall out the window.”

“I hope you do,” Kathleen said meaningly.

BAKER laughed politely, and Quade turned to face him.

“Neal,” Quade began, “I’ve been wanting to talk to you about this job. It isn’t an ordinary location flicker. I don’t know if you realize just how different it is.”

Baker raised an eyebrow.

“You’ve simply duplicated Plutonian conditions in a cave set. Eh?”

“Even fake Plutonian settings are bad stuff. And we’re not using regular robots. You’ll see what I mean tomorrow. Here’s the point: there’s danger in this job. Von Zorn put me in charge, and you’ll obey my orders. No publicity stunts. If you try anything like going off on a hunting trip, like you did last year on Phobos, there’s going to be trouble. These robots are *muy malo*.”

Baker smiled.

“I see. If there’s any publicity, you want it.”

Quade didn’t answer, but his lips tightened. Kathleen said, “Oh, don’t try to show your authority, Tony. Just because you don’t like Neal—”

“I see,” Quade grunted. “Might have expected this. They all do it, the minute they get a contract.”

Kathleen’s gaze was not pleasant. She said softly, “What?”

“Go Hollywood,” Quade told her, and got up to leave. The others made no move to restrain him. Going down in the elevator, he shoved his hands in his pockets and frowned into space. There was trouble ahead. He could sense it. Years of knocking about the System, grinding cameras from Mercury to the giant planets, had given Quade plenty of experience. He knew, somehow, that before *Doom World* was canned there would be complications.

Quade swore under his breath as he stepped out into the roaring, white-lit expanse of Lunar Boulevard. Far beneath him was the cavern where the Plutonian set had been erected. And, though he did not know it, his hunch was right. Kenilworth’s biological experiment was in the process of going haywire.

THE road cut through the jungle like the slash of a ray-gun’s beam. Over its surface raced the autocar, and on every side towered the fantastic scenery that duplicated the terrain of the System’s only radioactive planet. It was a glittering mirage of blinding color, gigantic vegetation, leafless, but covered with a glowing, many-hued coating of metallic scales.

Four men and a girl were in the car. Quade, Kathleen, Baker, and two others. One was thin-faced, a stooped oldster who peered near-sightedly through the hollow shells of optical glass that overlapped his eyeballs. That was Kenilworth, the biologist.

The face of the other man had, eight years before, been familiar to every youngster in the System. At that time Interplanetaries had held the place that, in the Twentieth century, Westerns had occupied. At every matinee the giant figure of Blaze Argyle had fought his way through hordes of inhuman beings, with gun, blade and fist. His jutting jaw and famous grin had provoked a storm of applause from youthful audiences at every appearance.

He was working in a hash joint when Quade found him. His hair was iron gray, and there were wrinkles in the tanned, strong face. That was the way in Hollywood on the Moon. A vogue passes quickly. There were many one-time stars who had been supplanted by younger men as the years rolled by.

But Quade had remembered the man who had once been his hero, his boyhood ideal of courage and strength. So, despite Von Zorn's objections, he had signed on Blaze Argyle in a supporting role in *Doom World*.

Somehow the wrinkles were fewer now on Argyle's scarred, weathered face. The old war-horse smelled again the smoke of battle. His role was that of a veteran pilot of a tramp space ship, and it was tailored to fit him. Neal Baker, who preferred to have the only heroic part himself, was not pleased.

Subdued crashings in the gleaming forest spoke of life. Quade turned to Kenilworth.

"I still don't see how you've done it," he said. "You say the radioactivity isn't dangerous?"

"Uh? No, no, of course not. Haven't you learned elemental physics? I didn't use a radium basis; I used an isotope of radium, one of the newly-discovered ones. Same charge, but different masses." Kenilworth's thin face wore a scowl. "I'm paid to work at biology, not to give lectures to jackasses."

Blaze Argyle chuckled deep in his throat. Abruptly his huge hand shot forward, closed over the control lever. The car jerked to a halt.

Immediately the reason for his action became clear. Something was charging along the road toward them, a creature that might have emerged from a nightmare.

"Plutonian devil," Kenilworth said, snatching up a small, portable instrument board from the floor. "Watch, now."

The thing had the grotesque, plated head of a sea-horse towering from a thick, serpentine body that flowed along effortlessly on a dozen stumpy legs. Its muzzle was tubular, surmounted by a single unwinking eye. It was about ten feet long, and thick as a man's torso.

ARGYLE'S hand flashed to his belt, but the gun he carried was loaded with blanks; he realized this and cursed softly. Kenilworth's fingers were dancing over the instrument board. The Plutonian devil stopped.

It stood quiescent a moment, and then slowly moved aside. The car slid forward, raced on.

"You want to watch out for the thing's spray," Kenilworth said. "It spouts a toxin that has rather peculiar effects."

"If you think I'm going to work with those things, you're crazy," Neal Baker said, his face very white.

"There's no danger," Kenilworth told him. "They're handled with the usual robot control."

"Never used robots in my day," Argyle observed. "When we went on location, we took guns and plenty of ammunition. I remember one time we ran into a whip on Venus—"

Baker interrupted sharply.

"Quade, it's up to you to take every precaution. Understand?"

"There's no danger, I tell you," Kenilworth snapped irritably. "The power generator's in my laboratory, and you'll have plenty of portable control units to handle the robots."

"Just how does that work?" Quade asked. "Haven't you built up a wider range than usual?"

"Yes, from forty meters down to seventy millionths of a centimeter. The robots are handled by remote control, of course, but I've got a key wave which is continually hitting the receiving apparatus in each robot. I've used that to make the receivers automatically compensating, so they'll adjust themselves to get any wave length I send out within the limits of my transmitter. For some reason there's a lot of interference down here and I don't want any trouble."

"What I can't understand," Kathleen said, "is how you've made the robots—*alive*. They —"

"They are alive. Those Plutonian creatures are so complex that if you used a straight robot system they'd look like walking dummies. I duplicated the physiology of the things all right, and created artificial brains, as any competent biologist can do today. Remember those specimens of Plutonian life we trapped?"

Quade nodded. A dozen space ships had hovered above the range of Pluto's deadly radiations, and had let down on cables gigantic traps, in which a number of curious life-forms had been captured.

"Well, I grafted the cerebrum—the part of the brain that handles the motor nerves—on to my artificial brains, as well as certain other important parts. The instinct-control, for instance, was necessary. I couldn't transplant the entire brains, because they'd die without radioactivity. But the creatures are impregnated with a radium isotope that has proved quite satisfactory." Kenilworth grinned and bobbed, while everybody except Quade looked slightly dazed. Blaze Argyle said, "I see," and scratched his head.

THEY came in sight of a hut. An electrified fence guarded it from marauding beasts. All around it stretched the glittering rainbow blaze of the forest. As the car halted Quade had an inexplicable feeling of danger and menace that lurked between the shining columns of the trees. Light beat down strongly from the gigantic arcs far above in the cavern roof. He had a momentary sense of actually being on a far, alien world, instead of in an artificial set only a mile beneath ultra-modern Hollywood on the Moon.

"I'm going back to the laboratory," the voice of Kenilworth said creakingly. "You'll find another car in the shed over there."

Quade nodded. The rest of the cast—a very small one—and the crew would be along soon, piloted by Kenilworth's assistant. They could begin shooting within an hour. Probably the picture would be safely in cans within a week, for the sequences which did not deal with Pluto had already been filmed.

The meager figure of the biologist dwindled; the car faded to a speck and vanished. From the shining forest some creature bellowed angrily.

Again Quade felt that queer sense of foreboding. But he could not know what was happening all about him, the slow growth of living tissue that was to have a cataclysmic effect on the wireless receivers buried deep within the brains of the Plutonian robots.

CHAPTER III

INTERIOR: Kenilworth's laboratory. One week later. Close shot.

Kathleen and Neal Baker strolled between tables of working equipment—microscopes, electrical stimulators, intricately twisted apparatus, masses of flesh in their glass containers. A heavy odor of formaldehyde, ozone, and less pleasant things made the girl use her scent bottle often. Behind the two Blaze Argyle wandered disconsolately.

The old-timer was unhappy. Films had changed since his day. Too much faking. Ten years ago a man had to have backbone to star in Interplanetaries. But now, with double exposures, montage, telephoto lenses and robots, any ham could be a hero.

But Argyle wasn't feeling sorry for himself. He sympathized with Quade, who had been having a hard time of it. Especially the way Kathleen and Baker had been treating him.

Characteristically, Argyle ignored the innumerable petty annoyances to which he had been subjected by Baker. The crooner never let Argyle forget that the oldster was playing a minor role, and that he, Neal Baker, was co-star of *Doom World*. The one-time headliner, used to the easy camaraderie of a bygone day, was hurt, but never showed it.

The worst of it was, Argyle thought savagely, the crooner was infecting Kathleen. The girl had gone Hollywood with a vengeance. A big star might get away with it, but not a youngster in her first flicker. When Kathleen had acquired a languid slouch, Quade had chewed his pipe in bitter silence. He swore under his breath for ten minutes the day she high-hatted a cameraman. Finally, when she made use of a studied drawl and became temperamental during a crucial shot, Quade exploded and made the air sizzle with pointed remarks. For a day Kathleen was subdued, but Neal Baker's fascination soon reestablished its sway.

There was only a day's shooting left, but this comprised only backgrounds which Quade handled himself, with one assistant. The others had gone back to Kenilworth's laboratory.

Not one of the three saw the door slowly open, nor did they know that slowly approaching them was a healthy, full-grown specimen of *Plutonis flagellum*—a "gliding lash." The thing was slate-gray in color, with no trace of sensory organs. Its conical, squidlike body was supported by a dozen very slender tentacles, serpentine and covered with saw-toothed, ridged scales. Between these appendages dangled a grayish, ragged membrane like a cape.

Kathleen saw it first, and instinctively she looked around for the robot's controlling operator. But neither Baker nor Argyle had a keyboard, and there was no one else in sight. The gliding lash tottered forward unsteadily on its slender, coiling legs.

"Somebody's playing a practical joke," Baker chuckled. "Probably our friend Quade's back. Pretend we don't see it."

Blaze Argyle was watching the creature which, half as tall as his body, was slowly coming closer. Now he could see a cluster of threadlike filaments waving above the conical "head" of the thing—sensory organs, ultra-sensitive to vibrations.

THE lash halted, crouched down, coiling its slender legs beneath it. Suddenly Argyle shouted, "Look out!" Simultaneously the creature sprang.

The uncoiling legs shot it up like a streamlined projectile until it hovered a dozen feet above the floor. Now the purpose of the filmy membrane became plain. The lash slowly

dropped down like a parachute, guiding its flight by manipulating the tentacles. It drifted, slipped sideward, and swept straight for Kathleen.

She heard Argyle's shout and leaped back in time. The creature seemed to pause in midair, then settled neatly over Neal Baker's head. His frantic yelp was smothered suddenly.

The slender tentacles swept into terrible action. They flailed viciously at Baker's torso in a blinding whirlwind of motion. The thing was well named, and in a moment the saw-toothed scales of the lashes had ripped Baker's coat into ribbons. Beneath it he wore a thin but very tough membraneous shirt, and this saved his life. The lashes could not reach the great arteries of his throat, but they swished down again and again at the man's body.

Kathleen cried out, made a frantic clutch at a tentacle. A crimson line sprang out on her bare arm. She was sent staggering by Blaze Argyle, who gripped a jagged fragment of glass he had salvaged from the wreckage of a retort.

One hand before his face, fingers spread, he threw himself into the battle. Baker went down under the impact, but the deadly whips flailed with unimpaired vigor. Argyle ripped the point of his weapon into the monster's pulpy, conical body.

Pale, whitish blood spurted. Argyle slashed at the thing viciously; the tentacles swung toward him. The tip of one brought blood from his hand as it ripped past his eyes. He aimed a desperate sweep at the threadlike filaments that made up the creature's sensory organs, and managed to slice them off. Immediately the lashes dropped to hang limp and flaccid.

Hastily Argyle pulled Baker free. His face was covered with a musky, thick slime, but save for a few minor cuts and bruises he was uninjured.

Kathleen was on her knees beside him, wiping the grease from his features. Baker spat, made a wry face, and scrambled to his feet, putting a table between him and the dead lash.

The door burst open. Mackay, one of Kenilworth's assistants, came hurrying toward him, his youthful face white under bristling red hair. In his hand was a gun. Relief sprang into his eyes as he saw the writhing body of the mutilated monster.

"Dead, eh?" he said. "Anybody hurt?"

Kathleen shook her head.

"What the devil are you trying to do?" Neal Baker gasped. "That thing nearly killed me!"

Mackay's mouth was a thin white line. "Not our fault, Mr. Baker. The robots have gone crazy. They—I can't stop now! One of 'em's wrecking the power generator."

He hurried away. After a moment the others accompanied him.

KENILWORTH'S laboratory was a great gray fortress near one side of the cavern. The power unit was housed in a barnlike structure of stone, and a gaping hole in the wall told of some monster that had crashed through it. From within came shouts, warning cries, and the creaking voice of Kenilworth yelling orders. The four paused at the gap in the wall, staring.

The thing that was lumbering about the power room looked like a whale. A small whale, but quite big enough to cause havoc. Its huge body was plated with dully-glistening shields, like the armor of a rhino. Four columnar, stumpy legs carried it slowly forward. A dozen transparent bubbles shimmered on its back, and within these spheres slender things like eels, each half as long as a man, were coiling and writhing angrily.

Already the monster had turned the room into a mass of wreckage. A dozen men, armed, scurried about purposelessly. The gaunt figure of the biologist was dancing near the monster,

gripping a large hypodermic syringe in one hand, occasionally leaping to one side to avoid the sweep of the reptile's tail.

"What's he trying to do?" Argyle asked. "He'll kill himself. What's wrong with the radio control?"

"It doesn't work," the red-haired assistant gulped. "Anyway, there's no power now. The Juggernaut's smashed the generator."

Argyle had faced Juggernauts before, during the filming of *Doom World*, but then the monsters had been under the power of the wireless units. He gripped Kenilworth's arm as the biologist raced by.

"You can't get close enough to use that hypo," he said. "A gun—"

"Can't risk it," Kenilworth snapped. "The thing would tear the place to pieces before it died."

"Hypodermic bullets?" Argyle suggested.

The biologist hesitated, nodded. He gave a harsh command, and in a moment Mackay had returned with a clumsy, long-barreled rifle. Argyle examined the weapon, lifted it.

"Aim for the eye," Kenilworth said softly. "The armor's too thick everywhere else."

The Juggernaut lifted its great head, staring, as Argyle shouted a warning to the men. A calloused finger squeezed the trigger. Suddenly one of the monster's eyes vanished. The reptile bellowed, slid down gently and lay motionless on the floor.

Before the armored tail had stopped its twitching Kenilworth was beside it, examining his wrecked machines. The others followed. Kathleen was staring at the strange, transparent bubbles on the Juggernaut's back, and the serpentine creatures that still coiled and writhed within them. With singular inappropriateness the red-headed Mackay, pale and shaken, began a lecture.

"L-like the Surinam toad," he informed Kathleen. "Develops its young in eggs on its back. Parasitic creatures, the embryos. They live on the parent's blood, and by the time they hatch the mother's a walking skeleton. She has to find four times as much food as usual to supply the eggs with nutriment. After the embryos hatch the parent Juggernaut usually dies—"

“YOU blasted fool!” Kenilworth snarled. “Get to work! Want me to serve tea while you chat? Look at that—it’ll take nearly a day to repair the damage, and there’ll be no power until that’s done.”

“Haven’t you any emergency power?” Kathleen asked. An unpleasant realization had come to her.

“That’s smashed, too. I’ll—”

Argyle put into words what had been worrying the girl.

“What about Quade?”

Kenilworth’s face was a twisted mask.

“Ha! He’s probably dead by now, even though the electrified fence around his camp’s charged by storage batteries. Those damned robots—they’re working on their brains now. He can’t handle them by the control units, for there’s no power. Besides, something’s wrong. Metabolism—tissue growth—I’m not sure, but I think the transplanted brains are getting too strong for the robot controls. For the last two weeks they’ve been growing, getting more and more in command of the neural systems of the creatures. Even after the generator’s fixed, I’m not sure it’ll work any more.”

“But—can’t we help—” Kathleen’s eyes were wide.

“How? I tell you, there’s no power! I’ve already sent a man to the surface, but it’ll take him hours to get there. Quade’s unarmed. If he can reach the laboratory in his car, he’ll be reasonably safe. If he had an airship—but you can’t bring a ship down here.”

“I’m going after Tony,” Argyle said determinedly. “He won’t realize there’s anything wrong until it’s too late. I can reach him in an autocar.”

The biologist nodded slowly.

“It’s suicide, Argyle. But all right. You’ll need weapons—and other things. Come along; I’ll fix you up.”

The two disappeared through the gaping hole in the wall. Kathleen and Baker were left to eye each other.

“I’m going, too, Neal,” the girl said.

“Don’t be a fool,” Baker advised. “It’s hopeless.”

“Will you come?” She persisted.

Baker gulped, and noticed that several of the biologist’s assistants were watching. Kathleen put her hand on his arm.

“Please, Neal!”

“Think of the publicity!” Mackay said ironically. “I’ll go with you, Miss Gregg.”

“Publicity has nothing to do with it,” Baker said with dignity, suppressing the expression that had come into his face at mention of the word. “You’re needed here. Of course, I’ll go.” He gulped again, and shot Kathleen a glance of utter loathing.

She was worshipping him with her eyes.

THE car flashed along the roadway, Blaze Argyle at the controls, two guns hanging ready at his thighs. His gray hair was bristling, and there was a happy grin on the scarred, weathered face. Perhaps he was thinking of other days, long past, when he had fought similar perils.

The poisonous splendor of the shining forest was all around them. Now the distant noises of life were louder, more menacing. Uncontrolled life, alien and—hungry.

Hope was beginning to grow within Kathleen when the catastrophe occurred. A serpentine body flowed into view from the jungle, and the equine head of a Plutonian devil towered above them. Argyle wrenched at the controls, sent the car whirling sideward in a desperate endeavor to pass the monster. But the backlash of the thing’s tail crashed against the side of the vehicle. The three were hurtled out of the car, sent rolling over and over along the road, bruised but unhurt. Neal Baker arose and departed hastily into the forest.

Argyle helped the girl to her feet, eyeing the Plutonian devil sharply. The creature was investigating the car, prodding it with its tubular muzzle. Abruptly it drew back, sent a spray of glistening liquid at the unfamiliar object. Argyle snatched up a knapsack that had fallen near by, and, gripping Kathleen’s arm, hurried after Baker.

“Car’s no good now,” he grunted. “Those damn toxins! Kenilworth told me he left out the poisons when he built the animated robots, but I guess they developed ’em themselves from their food. He told me nobody could analyze the toxic qualities, anyway—like snake venom.”

Breathless, Kathleen could not answer. A short distance away they came upon Baker standing at the edge of a small clearing, eyeing a tree uncertainly.

“Better not climb it,” Argyle told him, and the star jumped guiltily. “The devil can climb, too. If it comes after us we’ll just have to shoot our way out. See if your gun’s loaded.”

A low rustling told them that the monster had finished with the car and was in pursuit of more palatable food. Its horselike head was poked into view, and the single eye gleamed dully as it saw the three.

Argyle sent a bullet at it which glanced off the armorlike scales and tore down a tree.

“One way to kill it,” he said. “Kenilworth told me—keep dodging it, Kathleen. Once it charges, it has to complete the charge. Can’t swerve. Look out for the tail, though.”

There was no time for more. The stumpy legs sprang into action, and the ten-foot monster sprang forward.

Kathleen leaped aside, but Baker was apparently frozen with terror. Only Argyle’s push saved him from the devil. The creature flowed past, drew to a halt at the edge of the clearing, and turned slowly, its eye questing.

Argyle sent another useless bullet at it.

“If it stays still for a while, watch its eye,” he called. Kenilworth had told him the almost incredible habit that made the Plutonian devil so terrible, but Argyle had no time to tell the others what he knew. The monster charged again, and for a little time they were kept busy dodging, watching the deadly backlash of the creature’s armored tail.

LUCKILY the creature was not invulnerable, though none of Argyle’s dozen shots had pierced the scales, each of them nearly six inches in diameter. But there were charred spots on the armored hide, and presently the devil hesitated, paused, and glared at the three humans. A little shudder ran through its sinuous body, and it sank lower until all its length touched the ground.

“Watch it!” Argyle said. But he was not looking at the monster. His quick stare was covering all the clearing, looking for the disturbance of earth he knew was coming.

Yet he almost missed it. The devil charged again, and simultaneously, almost at Kathleen’s side, the ground heaved and split, and out of it came a white, wormlike, horrible thing that spat venom from its tubular muzzle.

The girl sprang back, was sent spinning by the sweep of the Plutonian devil’s tail. She hit a tree, folded up and lay there unmoving. Argyle got in front of her, sent bullet after bullet smashing into the white worm. It spouted poison at him, and the next minute disintegrated into a chaos of twitching, bleeding flesh.

The armor-plated creature, its charge spent, lay on the ground, spasmodically quivering. Curiously its belly seemed to be split open, and nothing was visible within.

Argyle caught up the girl and carried her staggering, to a safe distance. Baker came out from behind a tree, looking pale and sick.

“Is it—are they dead?” he asked.

Argyle collapsed on the ground beside the girl.

“My knapsack,” he said hoarsely. “Get it—quick!”

Baker found the pack and brought it to Argyle, who hastily dug out a syringe and injected a greenish solution into Kathleen’s arm. That done, he repeated the operation with himself and lay back, breathing harshly.

“What’s the matter? Can I—”

“Keep guard,” Argyle told Baker. “I’ll be all right in a minute. That damn poison—it breaks down the blood vessels, destroys the blood’s coagulability. Kenilworth gave me this—” He touched the syringe. “Formula based on calcium chloride. Builds up the blood cells with calcium—”

Apparently Kenilworth’s treatment was effective, for within five minutes the three were examining the dead monsters. The white creature looked like an undeveloped specimen of a Plutonian devil. The devil itself was now nothing but a skin.

“Sheds its skin, like a snake,” Argyle said. “When the hide’s badly damaged, it simply splits down the belly and digs into the ground. Every scale acts like a little shovel. Then it can come up behind its victim and kill it with the poison. The nerves in the skin automatically make it charge, though it dies right afterward. The devil itself—that white thing—gradually grows into its former shape.”

Argyle shouldered the knapsack.

“Feel okay now, Kathleen?”

The girl nodded. “We’re not far from the camp, are we? Good. Let’s get started.”

They turned back toward the road.

CHAPTER IV

EXTERIOR: Quade's camp in the Plutonian set. Long shot. Noon.

The creature sat on the ground and looked at them with interest. Quade and Peters, the gaunt, hollow-cheeked cameraman, returned the gaze.

"It's a frog," Peters said.

"Frogs don't sing," Quade objected.

"They come pretty near it."

"But—words!" Quade said. "Listen." He caroled untunefully, "Where the Martian moons ride over—" and completed the first verse.

No, it wasn't a frog. It looked like one, although it was covered with curly ringlets of silvery hair. Its forelimbs were curiously anthropoid, with tiny little hands at the end. Its face was a frog's, though its mouth was mobile for all its size. Under its throat a pouch swelled, and as Quade paused the creature clasped its hands, sat up on its hind legs, and started to sing.

Quade's voice came out of the thing's mouth. It sang like a phonograph record, exactly duplicating Quade's tones, even to the off-key quaver at the end of the third line. When it had finished, it deflated the pouch, bobbing a little, and sat watching. "It even bows," Peters said in amazement.

"It's a mutation," Quade said. "Maybe. Parrots can do it, but—I've a hunch this is a bit different. Looks like a conditioned reflex to me."

"That clears up everything."

"Well—look. Suppose this little jigger simply imitates the cries of animals. Maybe it eats—Plutonian snakes. It hears a Plutonian snake hissing, or whatever it is they do, and imitates the cry. The snake hears it, thinks he's listening to a rival, or maybe a girl friend, and comes in a hurry, right down Caruso's throat."

"Sounds plausible," Peters admitted. "Is his name Caruso, though?"

"Name it and you can have it," Quade said, chuckling. The froglike Caruso chuckled with him, but broke off to scratch among its curls with a limber hind leg.

"I think we'll take it back with us," Quade went on. "The film's finished." He patted a disc-shaped metal container on a nearby table. "Wonder what's wrong with the televisior, though? Those things don't usually get out of whack."

Peters didn't answer, but turned to gather together the equipment. In a few minutes they were ready, and the car, carrying the two men and Caruso, glided out on the road.

They stopped very soon because a large animal sat up in the middle of the road and glared at them. Quade and Peters started to laugh. The creature looked like a turtle, but its head was flat and snakelike. The appearance of ferocity was entirely spoiled by the fact that the thing's tongue stuck out for almost a foot.

"I can't help laughing at those Tanks," Quade grinned, reaching for a control keyboard, "I know they use their tongues as a sensory organ, but they look so darned silly!" Caruso joined in the laughter. The monster got up and aimed a blow at the car with one stumpy forefoot. Quade pressed a button.

NOTHING happened. Quade and Peters stopped laughing, but the inane chuckles of Caruso kept on. The creature's foot continued to descend.

N Quade and Peters got out of the car just in time. They took a keyboard and the precious can of film with them, and Caruso hopped after them, still giggling. The gigantic foot came down on the car and crushed it into a twisted wreck of metal.

"Oh, Lord!" Quade muttered, fingering the keyboard desperately. "What's wrong? Is—" A startling thought struck him. "Maybe Kenilworth's generator's stopped! That means—"

"It means we've got a comet by the tail," Peters said, looking sick. The Tank turned to them, very slowly, and its tongue quivered, picking up the vibrations that told it where its prey were. The snaky head moved down with slow deliberation.

"No danger," Quade said. "We can dodge it." He stepped back; the head continued its sweep until it bumped against a tree trunk. For several seconds the creature remained unmoving, apparently amazed at the disappearance of its lunch. Then the head lifted again, and once more began to descend.

"Let's get back to camp," Quade said. "We'll be safe there. The power's sure to come on pretty soon."

They departed, while the monster remained still staring at the spot where they had been. Some minutes later it realized that it was looking at nothing but trees, and vainly began to explore the air with its delicate tongue. But Quade and Peters, accompanied by Caruso, were already far away.

Muffled roars and crashings came from the forest. As they passed by a boulder half embedded in the ground Caruso paused to investigate. There was a hole in the rock, and just above it dangled a round, pinkish object that sent forth an enticing odor. The curly frog hopped closer, interested.

He put a tentative paw up toward the pink thing. It was apparently a fruit of some kind. It smelled good; probably it would taste better. Caruso licked his lips with an expectant tongue.

Quade turned around just in time to see the hole in the rock close with a vicious snap, while Caruso bounded back yelping in horror. The stone suddenly arose on six legs and pounced forward, but the woolly frog was already disappearing in the distance.

Quade and Peters watched alertly until the thing settled back and resumed the appearance of a boulder. Again the fruitlike object dangled temptingly.

"That's not new," Peters said. "The angler fish does it on Earth. Funny how much similarity there is on all the planets."

"Very," Quade agreed drily. "I'll feel safer at camp. Let's hurry."

Tragedy struck before they reached safety. A whiplike, slim form flashed down from a tree, struck at Peters, and darted away. The gaunt cameraman was left staring at a tiny puncture in his forearm.

"Just a scratch," he began—and suddenly collapsed. Quade caught him as he fell. Hastily he improvised a tourniquet, carried Peters the few remaining steps to camp, and found a suction pump. But his first-aid methods were useless.

THE form of Peters, prone on a cot, began to twitch and jerk. The man's eyes opened wide, blind and unseeing. A spasm of muscular contortion jerked him to the ground, and Quade tried in vain to save him.

Peters' head jerked and rolled grotesquely. He seemed to have lost all control of his neck muscles. There was a sudden ghastly contortion, a brittle cracking sound—and the man went limp. He was dead.

Quade's lips were tight as he looked down at his friend. He was remembering an experience in Honduras, on Earth, with *Crotalus durissus*—a rattlesnake whose poison, apparently, was similar in its effect to that of the creature which had attacked Peters. The venom is a neurotoxin, which possesses a selective quality that affects only the muscles of the neck. Sometimes, in the spasmodic contortions of the victim, the spinal column is snapped.

Not for the first time Quade cursed Von Zorn's ruthlessness. The Chief would risk dozens of lives if he saw a chance of getting a hit picture. Yet, somehow, few objected. Something of the old theatrical tradition, "the show must go on!" had survived in a queer, wry fashion in the film industry. Hollywood on the Moon laughed at duty—outwardly. But a subconscious traditional loyalty and pride made men go uncomplaining to almost certain death, because the Titan film industry is rooted in the great days of the theatre—the days of Booth and Drew and Barrymore—and such a heritage is not easily forgotten.

Knowing this, Quade smiled a little, but not happily. Peters had died with his boots on. And the audiences viewing *Doom World* would neither know nor care.

A cry came from the left. Quade glanced up, turned toward the gate in the electrified barrier. He flung it open and started to run in the direction from which Kathleen's voice had come.

CHAPTER V

EXTERIOR: The Plutonian set, near Quade's camp. Afternoon.

Caruso was pleased with himself. The singing frog sat in the middle of the road, the pouch in his throat pulsing rhythmically. He was eying Kathleen and Argyle and Baker. Here were more of these hideous but kind-hearted two-legged monsters. The other two-legged things had given him food and jabbered at him. Perhaps these new ones would do the same. True, they were *very* ugly—much too elongated and whitish, and bald in the wrong places—but they couldn't help that.

Caruso bowed, clasped his hands and sat up on his hind legs. Through some quirk of memory—perhaps the conditioned reflex Quade had suggested—he began to sing. Kathleen gave a soft little cry as the furry frog caroled cheerfully.

"Where the Martian moons ride over—"

Ignoring the girl's laughter and the chuckles of Argyle, Caruso continued on to the bitter end. Then he opened his mouth to its widest expanse and chuckled companionably.

"Somebody stealing your thunder," Argyle said to Baker, who was not pleased. "Wonder what it is?"

"Lord knows," Kathleen said for him. She knelt and gingerly stroked Caruso's head. He looked puzzled, nibbled at the girl's fingers, and giggled in an inane fashion. With great haste he began to wash Kathleen's hand with his mobile tongue.

"Likes the salt," Argyle said. "All animals do, even radioactive ones, I suppose. Let's get going, Kath. The sooner we reach Quade—"

She got up hastily, her face shadowed.

"Yes. Let's hurry!"

They kept on, trailed by Caruso, who occasionally made frantic leaps in an attempt to reach Kathleen's hand with his tongue. It was not long before they rounded a curve in the road and found themselves facing the gigantic snake-headed, turtlelike creature that Quade had encountered. It was still wondering what had happened to Quade, and pondering over the advisability of searching for him.

"Look out," Argyle said softly. "That's a Tank—dunno the Latin name, but it's bad medicine. Kenilworth told me it has—uh—variable metabolism."

Caruso gazed at the Tank with undisguised horror, and rapidly departed through the shining trees. Baker turned white and looked around quickly. Kathleen said, "Variable—*what?*"

The monster's dangling tongue lifted as the Tank tested the air for sensory vibrations. The snaky eyes focused on the three. It moved forward ponderously.

"Metabolism," Argyle told the girl. "I don't remember just what Kenilworth said, but it's like the terrestrial sloth—sometimes. Moves very slowly—low metabolism. But it isn't constant. Sometimes the metabolism gets speeded up for a while when one or two of its glands get into action. Same principle as the human adrenal glands—peps us up for a little while. Food stimulates the—"

E had been edging the girl from the road. “Kathleen,” he said quickly, with a side glance at the Tank. “See that hollow tree? It can’t reach you in there. If the thing comes to life, duck for that hole. I’ll lead it away.” He didn’t mention what Kenilworth had told him of the Tank’s phenomenal speed when its metabolism was increased by the secretions of certain of its glands.

Luckily, the exciting hormones that were pouring into the Tank’s blood stream automatically released chalones—a depressive internal secretion which had just the opposite effect. This made the monster look sillier than ever, but provided one of nature’s check-and-balance systems. Otherwise the Tank would have eaten up every other form of life on Pluto.

The snaky head suddenly moved faster. Without warning it flashed down for a few feet—and as abruptly stopped, to continue its slow descent toward the humans. The chalones were momentarily stronger than the hormones.

“In you go,” Argyle snapped, and pushed Kathleen toward the hollow tree. She was sent sprawling as Neal Baker, white-faced, shouldered her aside and made for the refuge. Argyle snarled, “Cut it out, Baker!” He tried to pull the film star back.

Baker turned, threw a vicious punch at Argyle’s chin. The old-timer wasn’t expecting that, and went down with a thud. Meanwhile the Tank was swinging into action; hormones flooded into its blood stream.

Kathleen shrank back against a tree, watching with wide eyes as Argyle got up, a grim smile on his scared face, and gripped Baker’s collar as the star tried to crawl into the hollow tree. Baker writhed, twisted free; sent another blow at his opponent’s face. But Argyle’s head jerked aside, and the punch slid past harmlessly.

The two men grappled. The Tank’s snaky head flashed down, dug up a fountain of dirt where the fighters had been a moment before. The monster remained unmoving for a space, though its eyes rolled sideward to examine its prey.

The knapsack on Argyle’s back handicapped him, and he was no longer a young man. But experience had toughened him, so the struggle was fairly even. Kathleen had no weapon. She hovered above the two men, waiting for an opportunity to snatch a gun from its holster.

The Tank turned; once more its gaping jaws moved down toward Argyle and Baker. Kathleen screamed warning just in time. They rolled aside, still fighting; the huge jaws ripped cloth from Argyle’s back. The monster froze, glaring. Its lolling tongue writhed grotesquely.

Just then Tony Quade came running along the road and saw what was happening. With an angry curse he tore the two men apart, snatched a gun from Baker’s belt. The familiar touch of the cold metal was heartening.

With two well-placed bullets he blew off the Tank’s head.

The monster did not seem discommoded. It stood quietly for a time, the bleeding, raw stump erect, and then turned to wander blindly off, knocking down trees as it proceeded. Luckily it headed in the opposite direction from the camp.

L OUD, hungry noises spoke of the approach of other creatures. Quade gripped Kathleen’s arm, snapped a curt command at the two men. Quickly they raced along the road. Not until they were safely within the electrified barrier did Quade speak again. Then it was only to swear at Kathleen.

“What the devil are you doing here? You ought to have more sense! These creatures—”

Ignoring his anger, Kathleen swiftly explained what had happened. Quade whistled.

“That’s nice! You say Kenilworth’s trying to fix the generator? Let’s—see!”

He hurried to the televisor, spun the dials experimentally. For a moment there was no sound. Then a low humming came, and a face, blurred and wavering, swam into view. They saw Kenilworth’s face, strained and smeared with dirt.

“Quade!” the biologist yelled. “For God’s sake! I’ve been trying to reach you for ten minutes! Are you okay?”

Kathleen broke in. “We just got here—Blaze and Neal and I. I told Tony what’s happened. Is the power on?”

“Yes. Try a keyboard. The power’s on full.”

Quade found a control board, pressed several keys. He said into the televisor, “It’d better work. Something’s coming this way—in a hurry!”

In fact, several things were coming. To be exact, there were two Plutonian devils, about a dozen of the vicious, tentacled flying lashes, and a number of the deadly snakes. They advanced to the electrified fence, hesitated, apparently sensing its menace—perhaps through some obscure vibration—and waited. Argyle got out his guns. Neal Baker rushed into the hut and remained there.

“What’s wrong?” On the televisor screen Kenilworth’s thin lips were white.

“As near as I can figure out,” Quade said slowly, “you’ve made the monsters too damn real. Their brains are in complete control. The receiving apparatus in the brains isn’t strong enough to overcome the creatures’ natural neural impulses. All it does is irritate them—and they’ve located the source of that irritation. They’re heading this way—lots of them.”

Loud bellows and crashings in the shining forest spoke of the advance of a horde. Several more monsters came toward the barrier and halted—waiting. They scattered, and from the trees marched a gigantic, headless thing that rolled forward brainlessly, insensitive alike to the electric shock of the fence and the bullets that Argyle sent at it. It was the Tank, full of hormones and rushing forward with insane purposelessness.

It smashed down the fence, crushed a lash under one stumpy foreleg, and hurried on, demolishing the hut as it passed. Almost torn to bits by Argyle’s bullets, it went through the other side of the fence and disappeared into the forest. Through the gap in the barrier surged a horde of monsters.

The snakes were deadliest. Argyle blasted them out of existence, but they poured from the forest in a never-ending stream. The lashes leaped and sprang to meet destruction. The huger monsters came forward to death, heedless of all but the irritation within their brains that drew them toward its source.

QUADE was frantically working on an instrument board.

“Kenilworth,” he said breathlessly, “haven’t you any more power? I can’t—”

“Wish I had a ray-gun,” Argyle flung over his shoulder. “I’d burn ’em to—”

Quade’s eyes widened. He sent a swift glance at the monsters, pouring through the gap in the fence to be blasted to nothingness by Argyle’s bullets. One of the guns clicked on an empty magazine, was flung aside.

“Kenilworth!” Quade cried. “What’s the range of your waves? You told me—”

“Forty meters to seventy millionths of a centimeter. I’m using ten meters—”

“Get it down!” Quade’s fingers were playing over the keyboard. “Down! Below three-hundredths of a centimeter. Heat waves, Kenilworth—*heat waves!*”

The television screen went blank. Nothing happened for a second. A lash got past Argyle, bounded toward Kathleen. Quade blew it to bits.

Then, quite suddenly, the monsters died. It was unspectacular. All of them hesitated, made a few brief, tentative motions of retreat—and died. The lashes collapsed in a wormy huddle of tentacles. The monstrous Plutonian devils simply lay down and stayed there. The serpents coiled and twisted and stopped moving.

All over the Plutonian forest set the bellow and roar of life died. Two minutes after the first lash had collapsed a great hush brooded over the cavern. The robots were dead.

“Whew!” Argyle exclaimed. “Are they—finished?” He was gasping for breath, blood-smearred.

“Yeah,” Quade said. “Heat did it. Kenilworth broadcast heat waves, the receivers simply got red-hot—and fried their brains to a crisp. Lucky the receivers were adjusted to a wide range!”

A muffled groan came from the wreckage of the hut. Neal Baker crawled out, unhurt but vociferous.

After a frantic glance around he suddenly realized that the monsters were no longer a menace. He listened while Quade spoke briefly on the television to Kenilworth.

“Send out a car right away,” Quade finished. “We’ll—”

Baker peered over his shoulder. “Send a photographer, too,” he suggested.

Then he found Argyle’s discarded gun and practiced various poses with the dead monsters until the car arrived. The others left him there, arguing with a cameraman who wanted a few pictures of the robots without Baker brandishing his pistol in the foreground. . . .

CHAPTER VI

INTERIOR: Froman's Mercurian Theatre. Night.

The System's greatest theatre was a blaze of vari-colored brilliance. *Doom World* was having its première, after several sneak previews from which the cast had been rigorously excluded. Neal Baker was there, resplendent and aloof in a box. Von Zorn was there, his toothbrush mustache carefully waxed.

Blaze Argyle and Kathleen and Quade were there, and on Kathleen's lap was Caruso, bright-eyed and interested. Apparently the singing frog had not been a robot; he had been a genuine mutation born to one of the monsters. So he had escaped the general holocaust in the Plutonian set, and Kathleen had discovered him the next day wandering forlornly about the cavern.

Somebody made a speech. Somebody else sang, and Caruso vigorously joined in the chorus with such gusto that an usher hastily removed him.

Blaze Argyle was rather happy. Since his decline in films he had never expected to see his own face on the screen again, and now a little thrill of expectation went through him. Of course he wouldn't get screen credit. Neal Baker had promised to see to that, for Argyle had made a lifelong enemy of the crooner.

It didn't matter. Naturally Baker was co-star, and his word was law, even though he ordered the cutting crew to slice out all Argyle's good scenes. That was the way it had been done in the old days. When Kathleen had learned what Baker intended, she had gone off to quarrel with Von Zorn, but she hadn't told Argyle the result of that interview. Well, he could guess.

Kathleen moved closer to Quade and squeezed his arm, and he returned the pressure.

"Hi, Fathead," he said.

She made a horrible face at him.

"Hi," she returned.

Quade quirked up one eyebrow.

"So you turned down an invitation from the great Neal Baker and came to the première with me instead, eh? Afraid you'd get your block knocked off if you hadn't?"

"Go chase a meteor," Kathleen said, and feeling somehow that the words were inadequate, she pinched her companion heartily. Quade merely chuckled. Kathleen was herself again.

VON ZORN twisted in his seat to stare at Argyle. Then he glanced up at Baker's box, and a malicious little smile dwelt on the film magnate's simian face. Baker saw the look and, misunderstanding, bowed and grinned genially.

With a fanfare of trumpets the curtains parted. The screen lit up with the credit title:

NINE PLANETS FILMS, INC.,

Presents

BLAZE ARGYLE

and

KATHLEEN GREGG

in
DOOM WORLD
with Neal Baker

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

M **IS-SPELLED** words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Doom World* by Henry Kuttner]