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# THOUGHTS THAT KILL

by  
JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

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*Kilran, super-scientist of the dim future, finds that the destruction of life on Venus is essential to the continuance of the human race—it seems a simple accomplishment for this great master, until the hordes of Venus hurl forth a death on the wings of thought!*

The enormous telescopic reflector, balanced on heavily lubricated universal bearings and motivated by softly humming engines, reared in a five hundred foot tower of rare and gleaming metal through the roof of the great observatory.

At the base of the amazing structure lay the reflecting mirror, polished and ground with a flawless care that immediately evidenced the high intelligence of these, the last men of Earth—numbering five hundred, only survivors of a once-mighty race.

Kilran, master of the five hundred, stood in silence as he gazed into the reflector. Like his fellows, he was a small man, pinched and under-developed, seeming almost top-heavy by reason of his immense and highly-developed head poised on skinny neck and shoulders. His entire cranium was hairless and tight-skinned, overshadowing a face that was a pinched, set mask, expressionless and inflexibly cold. Centuries of science, a heritage of supreme achievement, had stamped from him all traces of natural sentiment and humanity.

He was purely a pitiless intellect, always probing, always searching for new fields wherein to pursue the still unsolved problems tabulated and cross-indexed in the recesses of his ultra-developed mind.

His scarcely blinking black eyes, large and hypnotic, gazed with smoldering steadiness into the reflector and studied the young and lovely planet it depicted—Venus!—no longer the cloud-sheathed world of olden times, but a thriving world covered on its sunward side with dazzling blue oceans and bright green foliage. Here and there a cloud drifted in the dense atmosphere, casting a spot of shadow on the landscape over which it moved . . .

The sunward side of Venus was an intolerably hot land, but none the less a possible habitation, a place whereon to continue progressive existence.

The gaze of the master-scientist shifted and took in the details of the curiously designed cities that showed here and there in the clearer portions of the forests, low built and straggling edifices of stone, without order or symmetry, product of Venus' lowly life forms—queer life, semi-plasmic, utterly unlike Earth's and obviously little higher in intelligence than Man himself had been in the earliest times . . .

At a sudden sound beside him, Kilran looked up from his scrutiny.

Ajikon, astronomer in chief, had paused beside him. Behind him, their big eyes on the mirror, were the remainder of the five hundred—leathery, big-headed monstrosities revoltingly unlike the ancestors that had once fought and vanquished and died.

“Well, Kilran?”

Ajikon did not speak. Vocal organs had long since ceased to exist. His highly sensitive brain merely hurled the thought into Kilran's brain pan.

“A fair world indeed, Ajikon,” the Master impacted slowly. “The more I study it, the more it appeals to me—a world of similar dimensions to our own, habitable on the sunward side and, according to our spectroscopes, possessing air only slightly denser than that of this world when it was at its apogee. It has life, of course, but then . . .” His scarlike lips tightened bitterly.

“Life!” he went on grimly. “Low in form! Ugly! Plasmic! It can be—will be—destroyed. It is the inevitable law of the cosmos that the fittest must survive. We shall do that, with our highly trained telepathic brains, our thought responses, our vast knowledge. . . . As for those lowly forms!” He gestured with contempt to the mirror.

“Everything is prepared,” Ajikon’s thoughts went on smoothly. “The last details of the space-machine are finished. We only await your command before transferring into it the last heritages of this exhausted world.”

“Then proceed at once,” Kilran ordered briefly. “I am satisfied by now that Venus shall be our future home. Dismantle all machinery. At sundown, every man will be in the vessel at his appointed post.”

Ajikon bowed his great head, turned, and quietly departed.

The ruler stood on, lost in speculations—planning, devising, and scheming with all the power of his super-sensitive mind. There would be vast new accomplishments—total elimination of all Venusian life. Earth brains must and would go on! The infra-intellect of Venus could not possibly stand against them.

Kilran nodded slowly at last, removed his leathery, warped hand from the reflector rail and turned to watch the rapid disassembling of the laboratory machinery about him.

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The reddish-gold glare of the sun was flooding the gaunt spires of the mountain range when the enormous space-vessel finally swept upwards from the last habitat of Mankind. Within moments, the city had been left below in the valley, a crumbling, shining mass of metal, last legacy to the intelligence of a race seeking newer, fresher fields.

Within the space-ship there was a gentle stir of activity, efficient but unhurried. Kilran and Ajikon stood together at the major observation window, both of them gazing in silence at the blackness of the void, the eternal stars, the still-but-little dimmed sun with its leaping prominence arms—and, far away in the chaotic darkness, Venus—world of the future, to be mastered by superhuman intelligence. Kilran smiled bleakly as he thought of that. Little life! Infra-intellect! If he had any emotions at all, they were those of profound contempt for the lesser and ineffectual. . . .

In various quarters of the enormous vessel, the other Earthlings were at their varied tasks, some tending the powerful atomic engines by which the ship was driven, others assiduously watching air-conditioning plants; still others were examining and testing the mammoth destructive machinery with which to blast all traces of Venusian life from the face of that planet. Ofttimes in the past, Earth had been subjected to the merciless fury of raiders from outer space in search of new lands; now it was the Earthlings’ turn to invade, conquer and progress!

Presently, Kilran turned from his phlegmatic survey of the outer dark and moved silently across the vast control room to the observational section. From a rack, his mummy-like hand extracted a series of metal light-prints. Meditatively, he studied them. Each one was carefully marked with queer symbols, giving both chemical and mathematical meanings to the weird photographs.

His black eyes noted in silence the queer whitish-yellow substance depicted on the plates—Venusian life, queer, almost revolting, yet manifestly intelligent enough to build its own strange cities.

“Strange life indeed, Kilran,” came Ajikon’s mental impulses, as his powerful brain read every reaction of the ruler’s thoughts. “In a fashion, it is protoplasmic, and yet intelligent.”

“That I know already.” Kilran’s thoughts were without emotion. “I merely seek to refresh my memory—and the more I see of this lowly life, the more easy does our victory appear. Strange indeed that we have on Venus a life that has never built itself up into recognizable form, but has remained quasi-plasmic, semi-fluid, obtaining its energy by oxidation and feeding by incorporating within itself the organic matter so abundant in the Venusian oceans on the sunward side. Later, presumably, it will obtain its food by the simpler constituents of carbon dioxide, water, and inorganic salts—granting, that is, that it survives!”

He turned and replaced the prints in the rack. “Obviously a form wherein the intelligence has moved faster than bodily development,” he went on. “Yet, in another sense, it certainly must be an advantage to separate or flow together as occasion demands. Such a state, I imagine, would mean a unity or separation of intelligence at will. Peculiar life indeed!”

He became silent for a while, then returned to the main observation window. Already, Venus was larger in the firmament. The ship was moving with slowly mounting velocity, timed to produce an exact replica of Earthly gravitation. Before many hours were passed, it would reach the planet, and then—

Kilran’s black eyes burned a trifle brighter as he stood in silent, brooding malignance.

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As the time passed and the distance to Venus correspondingly decreased, the instruments of the Earthlings became active. This, the first journey of any extent into space, meant also the rechecking of data upon Venus formerly obtained at a considerable distance and mainly through Earth’s disturbing atmospheric veil.

Now all the profound science of their astronomy came into being—complicated spectroscopes, reflectors, highly efficient calculators, humidity detectors—a hundred and one bright and shining devices that operated with smooth accuracy.

The great laboratory control room became animated with the busily moving figures, dominated by the brooding form of Kilran himself, taking stock of everything, evolving his plan of attack.

The new data checked almost identically with that already obtained. Venus, on her sun side, was a distinctly promising world for future progress, possessing only a slightly higher oxygen content than Earth. Gravity was identical; surface temperature was extremely high—nearly 115 degrees F. in the shade and never any night. It would mean insulated buildings able to shut out the glare at will.

The reflectors, trained across the narrowing gap, revealed a peculiar state of perturbation existing now amongst the Venusian people—if such they were. In all directions in the open spaces around their strange cities they were moving inwards towards a rapidly swelling central unit, converging and assimilating with it in the fashion of true protoplasm. From being composed of thousands of individual units that had stretched forth protoplasmic limbs at will, they were now swelling into one solid sea in the approximate center of their major city, overflowing to its boundaries.

Kilran’s immense brow furrowed in vague puzzlement as he watched them in the mirror.

“It seems fairly evident that they have seen our ship approaching,” commented Ajikon, standing by his side. “Maybe they have crude telescopic devices. Considering the immense size of our ship, it could possibly be seen. Evidently, by flowing together in that fashion they are seeking safety.”

Kilran nodded slowly. “Yes, and by that very act they have simplified matters for us. We have nothing to do but to strike at the one unit. . .” He turned aside and directed his thought waves to the experts congregated around the weapons of destruction. “Be ready to release on full fire when I give the order,” he commanded briefly. “We have not much time to go.”

## THE ALIEN THOUGHTS

It was during the next hour that a strange change became revealed amongst the master-scientists. At first, they scarcely noticed it, their attention was entirely trained on the rapidly increasing globe ahead of them. They hovered around their machinery and observational centers ready to rain destruction and death on the now completely massed strange life-form covering a good portion of Venus' land surface.

Then there crept into the smooth working efficiency of the space-machine a note of error. The principal control pilots, immovable at their posts, both made simultaneous mistakes in their tasks, and just as quickly recovered themselves—but the slips were noticed by the keen brain of Kilran as he mentally tabulated every beat, every rhythm, of the lesser minds around him. He turned from his survey of the enlarging planet and regarded the two men with his cold black eyes.

“What is the matter?” His thoughts had the icy venom of intolerance, biting contempt for the slightest flaw. “For an instant you both lost control of your minds. What is the meaning of such a retrogressive act?”

The men were silent, half from shame, half from bafflement.

“It must not happen again!” Kilran turned back to the window.

Hardly had he done so, however, than the effect came again—this time with more force. A wave of mental power, so low, so gross in conception that it pained, moved through the ship and passed on. The inmates gasped slightly at the sudden wrench on their sensitive brains, then fought their way back to balance.

“You felt that, Ajikon?” Kilran questioned, face slightly bewildered.

The astronomer nodded. His lean hand was tenderly stroking his immense brain case.

The slightest disturbance was sufficient to upset those extraordinary convolutions, nurtured as they had been through centuries of evolution in compact machines of pure efficiency. To meet up with a coarse mental element was equivalent to pouring crude oil in a priceless mechanism.

Kilran's tiny mouth and chin tightened into a vicious line as he stared down on the fast-approaching bulk of Venus. It was only a few thousand miles away now. The great white mass of the unified Venusians was distinctly visible to the naked eye.

“Can it be possible that such lowly forms . . .” his thoughts began, appreciable to everybody in the laboratory; then he shook his great head impatiently. “No, the thing is absurd! They are a low, unintelligent form of matter—cannot possibly do anything against minds like ours. We probably crossed a mentality warp from an unknown source. It is not uncommon in outer space—”

He broke off suddenly and began to issue swift instructions for the guidance of the vessel as the planet loomed perilously close.

The engineers obeyed, lean hands gripping their switches, great heads shining in the light of the softly flooding lamps. But before they could execute the orders to the full, a truly devastating wave of mentality engulfed them. Their brains rocked under its force; their hands, jerking up in reflex movements under the sudden pain, caused the great vessel to jerk around in a wild half-circle that flung several of the intellectuals off their feet.

Kilran spun around, just in time to see the two engineers go reeling from their chairs to the floor, hands clasped wildly to their heads. The mad beatings and surgings of their tortured brains hammered into his own; frantically, his own cells tried to form a coherency out of their impulses. They were in the grip of a searing mental power; it was slowly oppressing all traces of their normal intelligence.

“Control yourselves!” thundered his own hammering thought waves, charged with fierce command. “Control, you fools! Control!”

He moved forward quickly, Ajikon by his side, but before either of them could reach the raving, helpless pair, they were themselves stricken with the same awful, overwhelming force.

It hurled Ajikon to the floor, left him writhing in exquisite torture as the waves beat into his highly sensitive cells. Kilran still stood erect, gazed through blurred eyes at the extraordinary sight of his followers reeling and toppling in all directions, some of them even retrogressing far enough to find the old ridiculous emotion of hysteria. The vast control room began to ring with the sound of wild, insane laughter.

With a certain fierce desperation, Kilran fought for control, stood with little hands clasped at his sides, great brow wrinkled in a tremendous effort to offset the supreme tortures raging through his brain. To his mystification, they were not thoughts of menace or deliberate mental attack—that he could have understood; they were instead chaotic, jumbled impulses, incredibly low in meaning, the products of beings but dimly evolved and certainly not in possession of the art of pure thought-transference.

As he stood struggling to master his brain, he felt the ship sweeping through a great uncontrolled circle, traveling madly around in the great void of space.

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He likened the hammering thoughts, increasing now in intensity, to the beating of a myriad of mighty bells in discord, each carrying a certain impression, and each impression was, to his advanced state, extremely revolting in the scale of knowledge. The Venusians were only intelligent slime, able to fuse or divide at will. They were puzzled by his ship, half afraid. . . . That much he could grasp amidst the beating insanity.

Then he dropped to his knees, holding his head in both tiny hands. Sheer and absolute mental defeat was biting through him in a million shafts.

“Ajikon!” he vibrated desperately. “Ajikon! Listen—if you can!”

By an enormous effort, he held his concentration on the astronomer as he stirred dully and looked up.

“What?” His thoughts were feeble, chaotic. He was like what an ancient would have been in the grip of a lethal gas.

“I believe I understand!” Kilran dropped flat as his anguished brain vibrated with growing feebleness. His thoughts were those of a being on the verge of death from mental torture. “We—we are too clever, Ajikon! We have overlooked one thing! Our brains, evolved through generations to receive and transmit thoughts also receive the thoughts of other beings—the Venusians. So far—” He broke off and mastered extinction by a supreme effort. “So far we have only communicated amongst ourselves, but here, from Venus, we receive the low, terrible thoughts of the Venusians, creatures far below us in intellect. Their thoughts are veritable poison to our mentalities. They have converged into one unit purely for safety, but in so doing, all their thoughts are merged in one and we receive the full impact of a myriad primitive minds. . . . You—you understand?”



The astronomer nodded weakly. “Yes, and—and to a brain there is no relief!” His thoughts were anguished. “Light you can shut out with your eyes, sound you can stop with your ears—but thought is eternally there! We can never cease to think; there is no known insulation against it! Beating—hammering! Our brains are too sensitive to stand it!”

His huge head sagged and fell backwards. With a low exhalation of breath, he relaxed and became still. . . .

Kilran moved slowly, concentration blurred by the raging tumult within him. He gazed down the long laboratory at the strewn figures of those who had already died.

With a sudden return of fierce endeavor, he fought to gain the control board—anything to drive the ship out of this mad chaos. But in that desire he had met his physical master too.

Specialization, centuries of brain usage at the expense of the body, had deprived him of almost all power of muscular effort. His little bony limbs sagged weakly under the pressure he strove to give to them. Brain, muscles, and nerves were no longer working in intelligent coordination. With the weakest of groans, he sank flat on the floor. . . .

Thoughts, memories, bitter regrets, wildly intermingled with the confusions of Venusian minds, surged through the turmoil. The future, the idea of progress, the intended ruthless destruction of these low life-forms. . . . How futile! How impossible! The end of the mighty Earth race was to be this—mental destruction at the hands of creatures thousands of generations behind in intelligence!

Irony! Cold, merciless irony! The vaguest suggestion of a bitter smile crossed Kilran’s little face as he sank for the last time—

The space-machine whirled on, still following its self-made orbit around Venus. It had provided that world with a satellite.

For generations, it would continue to circle, until Venusians finally found a way to cross space and examine it. Until then—and perhaps not even then—they would never know how they had defeated a ruthless menace, how the very quality of their thoughts had driven the last mighty brains of Earth to their ultimate extinction!

[The end of *Thoughts That Kill* by John Russell Fearn]