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# AMAZING

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## STORIES



# LORD of the CRYSTAL BOW

BY DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

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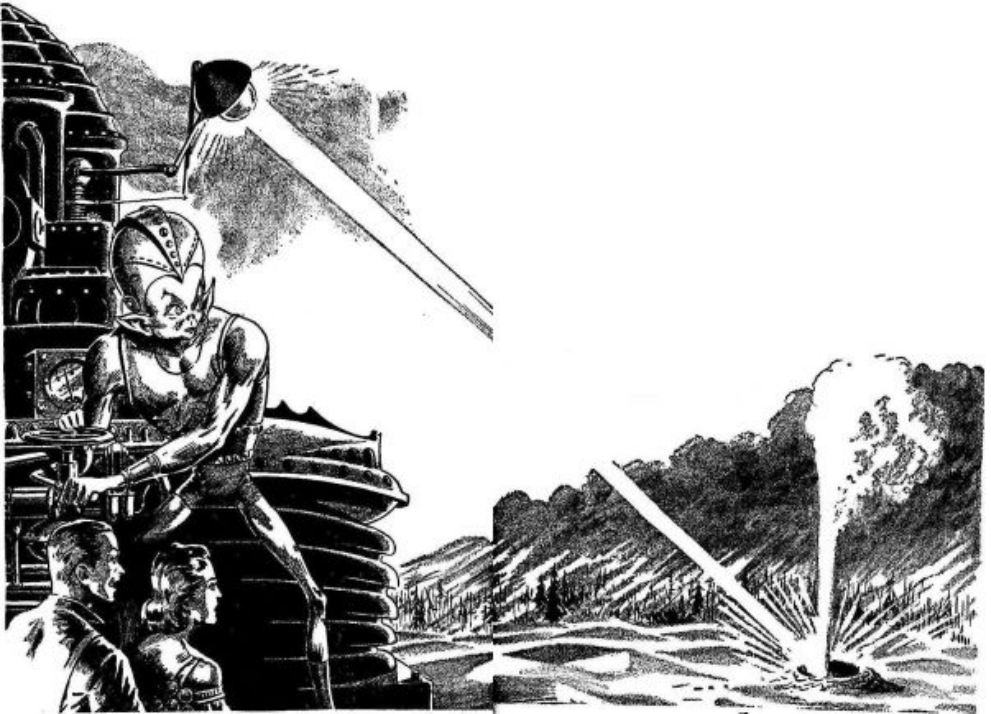
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# Martian Miniature

By JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

First published *Amazing Stories*, May 1942.

*Professor Thorp wanted to create Martian life, but he got Martian death instead*



*Under the Martian's control the beam lashed out and steam geysered skyward*

Calm, misty summer darkness enveloped the little motor boat chugging its way from the Manhattan shore toward Thorp Island.

"I don't like it," Grant Felby said for the twentieth time. "In fact I dislike it so much I can't be too thankful I came with you. A scientist who accepts your application to be his assistant on a synthetic island isn't safe—probably not even decent! The whole set up is wrong, if you ask me. . . ."

"Grant, please!" Joan Carlson's voice was weary. "Do stop complaining! I'm sure it's all right. Professor Thorp is one of the greatest living scientists of the age: the fact that he made Thorp Island proves that in itself."

"Humph!" Grant growled; then he gave up talking and concentrated on his job. Through the lowering night something dark was looming. Presently they could both dimly distinguish the hard rocks of the island which engineering had created—for a purpose so far unknown.

Grant began to look around for the sole inlet to the place, fully detailed in the letter and map Thorp had sent along when accepting the girl's application.

Grant still recalled the advertisement—*An assistant, either sex, well versed in astronomy, needed. Urgent. Write in first instance to Professor Allan Thorp, care of his New York headquarters.* Joan Carlson had done so, and first grader in astronomy that she was, had got the job. And now—

"Damnable!" Grant muttered under his breath; then he revved the motor up a bit and chugged round the rocky shore. He found the inlet at last under the girl's directions, nosed to the only strip of shingly beach and made the boat secure. He helped the girl to alight and they looked curiously about them. Here, some fifty miles from the Manhattan mainland they felt rather like a couple of castaways.

The center of the island itself was more or less surrounded by a ring of dense trees standing motionless in the night air. But there was a queer sound quivering from their direction, something quite apart from the ceaseless murmur of the sea. It was rather like the humming of a beehive on a summer afternoon.

"Sounds like a powerhouse," Grant muttered; then glancing at the girl, "Well what do we do now? Where's his hide-out?"

"His laboratory's in the island center according to the map, so we go through this wood-fringe. Come on."

---

Grant lifted her solitary traveling case from the boat, then with torch in hand led the way. They went through the dense wood for perhaps half a mile and came suddenly on the unexpected as the trees thinned away . . . They were ankle deep in loose red sand—*And the sand was humming!*

"What the—?" Grant stared around him, pop-eyed. "Whoever heard of musical sand before? And this color!"

He gazed at it, incredulous. It seemed impossible, but he could swear the stuff was actually moving—a great slow inward shifting that made the entire mass look as though it were forced along by a subterranean wind. That though was impossible since there wasn't the merest puff of a breeze.

Joan went forward a few paces—then she did a most extraordinary thing. She stumbled suddenly, went flying forward, turned a slow and helpless somersault and landed on her back. For a second Grant wanted to laugh; the thing was too damned silly. Then he dashed forward to help her, to perform nearly the same acrobatics and fall with feather-lightness. Dazed, but unhurt, they lay on the shifting sand and stared at each other in the starlight.

"Something's—wrong with the gravity," Joan made the statement haltingly, half disbelieving it herself. Then with intense caution she got to her feet again. Warily, Grant did likewise.

They turned, saw something their antics had prevented so far—the sight of a brightly lighted laboratory about half a mile away across the red sand.

"That must be his place," Grant nodded. "See what we can do to reach it."

It was harder than they had figured. The absurdity of the lessened gravity continued. There were other things too—a great tightness of breath as though the air had gone thin and a tingling of their exposed skin as though electricity were affecting it.

Suddenly Joan glanced up.

"Look!" she whispered.

Strangely enough the stars here, unlike those over the sea, were not hazed with summer warmth. They hung with crystal brightness. Most of them seemed to have lost their usual tremoring and instead blazed with a baleful steely fire.

“Something screwy about this place,” Grant admitted, a bit anxiously. “No wonder Thorp Island has always been a mystery to the outer world. Dammit, even the air’s haywire!”

He tried ineffectually to take a deep breath—but it was impossible. The girl’s next remark startled him.

“I should imagine it’s just like being on Mars.”

“Mars? Not having been there I can’t say. But I know one thing, this crazy guy Thorp’s got a lot to explain . . .”

---

They pressed on again toward the lighted laboratory, and after a wearying trip through the shifting, humming, ocher sand they crossed the threshold. In the doorway there seemed to be a hot mixture of drafts—but once beyond it and in the place itself the tightness went from their lungs suddenly and gravity became normal.

Breathing thankfully, shaken a little by their experience, they stared around them. The laboratory was one of the most well-equipped the girl in particular had ever seen; and she’d seen plenty during her studies. Most of its engines and instruments, however, were peculiar in design. There seemed too to be an endless variety of glowing tubes and writhing electrical streamers.

But that hum so prevalent outside was dimmed in here. Still present, yes, but less audible. Nor was it caused by the droning power plant. That had a different rhythm altogether. . . .

“Is there anybody home?” Grant cried at last, raising his voice.

At that a figure appeared suddenly from behind the banks of machinery. He was lanky, tow-haired, haggard—But it was Professor Allan Thorp. Newspapers had photographed him often enough.

“Why, Miss Carlson, of course!” He came forward with extended hand and worried frown, shook Grant’s hand too as he was introduced. Then almost without a pause he went on anxiously, “I’m very much afraid I brought you on a needless journey. Something has gone tragically wrong since I accepted you as my assistant—More than even tragic perhaps!” His distress was a very real thing.

“But—but what—?” Joan looked at him bewilderedly with her dark eyes.

“You heard that hum outside? But of course you would! It is Martian life—spawning—My work! Here—come and rest in here; it will be safer.”

Safer? There seemed to be nothing wrong in the laboratory: none the less they followed him into the comfortable living room adjoining. He motioned to chairs, but he did not sit down himself. He seemed to be perpetually on the edge of expecting something violent to happen.

“When I sent for you, Miss Carlson, it was to aid me in my researches into the possibilities of Martian life,” he said quickly. “But since then I’ve proved those possibilities to the hilt—and maybe to the detriment of the world—There! Hear it?”

They heard it—a snapping sound from the laboratory. Thorp skipped to the laboratory door and peered into the place. He came back with a vaguely relieved smile.

“Nothing serious—yet. Only a steel support given way. But that is the danger! The whole place may come down!”

---

He forced himself to be calm as he saw the curious looks the two directed at him. More quietly he went on:

"I created this island with government permission so I could work in peace in an effort to duplicate the conditions existing on Mars, and thereby gain valuable astronomical data for the days when space-travel is ushered in. This island is a sort of Martian miniature. I have studied Mars all my life and have become convinced there *is* life on it—but of an amazing type. Bacteria is about the nearest Earthly approach to it.

"The only way to find out for certain was to duplicate Martian conditions here on Earth and see what happened. You see, all planets from one particular sun must to a great extent be composed of the same basic minerals and elements of the parent star—or sun. The only difference in evolution lies in the existing conditions *upon* those basic chemicals—air, water vapor, gravity, amount of cosmic ray activity, and so on, each responsible for producing a different sort of life—but of the same *basic elements*—on the various planets of a system. Hence our life differs from Mars', Venus', or any of the others because of these external conditions; but in essence we all have the chemicals begotten of the parent sun. You understand me?"

"I do," Joan said. "It's fairly common knowledge."

Thorp nodded gratifiedly.

"I worked out to the last detail the conditions reigning on Mars—then I devised machinery over several years—electrical machinery—which would create those self-same conditions here on Earth. I found means to lower the air-pressure; electrical energies to counteract the normal gravity and make it conform to Martian standards; I even found a way by electromagnetism to thin the air over the center of the island here and so allow a greater flow of cosmic rays. In short, for half a mile round this laboratory it *is* Mars! The laboratory itself I kept normal. . . ."

He paused again, listening to that subdued hum that still obtruded over the buzz of his generators.

"Recently, after some months of continued Martian conditions, things began to happen," he resumed. "Just after I'd answered your application as a matter of fact. The very soil outside changed its color to red and became alive! It hummed incessantly with the very energy of that life. What looked like red sand came into being—but it is actually composed of quintillions of microscopic bodies, smaller even than the bacteria—the real life of Mars which exists on that world and covers the whole planet and which we have mistaken for desert!"

"But—the Martian polar caps—?" Joan asked, puzzling.

"I'm none too sure of those," Thorp admitted. "But I do extend the theory that Mars' real color is white—but at the poles of Mars electrical energy is gathered, of course, because of the planet's spin against the ether. It is possible the red life shuns the poles for that very reason. I have found already that it is sensitive to electrical energy, though not destroyed by it unfortunately. The Martian *canali* too is a puzzle, but it may represent portions of the planet where the red life cannot thrive—

"So much for Mars. It is the danger to Earth which is so immediate. I've created the stuff unwittingly by reproducing Martian conditions. Chemicals inherent in Earth and Mars have taken on the *Martian* conditions and come to life—which with normal Earth conditions could never have happened. And the stuff spawns at an incredible rate! What is more it eats or at any rate absorbs all things metallic—iron-ore deposits, oxides, even cast steel itself. It is so minute

it can pass through the interstices of the metal itself and consume its core—just as the white ant eats inside a beam and leaves the shell—

“So we see that if Mars ever contained anything metallic on its surface—cities maybe—the red life soon destroyed it. The danger to Earth is similar. My laboratory will go—is going—and every iron mineral on this island, in the sea, will be utterly consumed. Later . . .” Thorp stopped and gave a grim smile. “Later the stuff may find a way to link up with the Manhattan mainland, and let loose among our buildings. God knows what will occur!”

---

There was an uncomfortable silence for some time after he’d stopped talking; silence save for that omnipresent hum. Then Joan spoke.

“But surely, doctor, the stuff can never get beyond this island? Isn’t it a perfect safeguard?”

“Besides,” Grant put in, “the conditions on Earth will kill it once it gets beyond this specially prepared island.”

“Wishful thinking,” Thorp sighed. “I’ve tested some of the stuff under Earthly conditions, but it still keeps on living and spawning, impervious to change once created—just as bacteria can stand space cold and at times even the hottest furnace. No; I started it—but I’ll be damned if I can kill it! And it is so tiny it can lodge in specks of dust and be wafted over to New York. It can spread all over the world. . . .”

“I tell you I’m at my wit’s end!” he cried desperately, his fists clenched. “I’ve *got* to stop it somehow! Fool that I was to ever try such an experiment! . . .” He straightened up, self-recrimination over. “Now you know the facts. The best thing you can both do is leave immediately. I’ll make out a check for a month’s salary, Miss Carlson, in lieu of notice—”

“And suppose,” the girl asked quietly, as he turned to go, “some of these Martian ‘spores’ have by now gotten onto us, or been wafted to our motor boat? We’ll carry them back!”

His expression changed.

“Good God, I never thought of it!”

Joan got to her feet quickly, went over and caught his arm. She gave him a faint, brave smile.

“I’m afraid we’re prisoners,” she said seriously. “And you need help—not desertion. You’ve achieved a masterpiece of science and you’re not going to face an apparent disaster alone. I’m a scientist too, and you made me your assistant. I’m going to help!” she finished decisively, taking off her coat.

“But, Joan—” Grant started to say.

“I mean it, Grant! It’s all we *can* do . . .”

He nodded slowly, shrugged.

“Okay—I guess you’re right. Call on me if you want.”

Thorp gave them both a look of intense gratitude.

“That’s fine of you,” he said somberly; then he brightened. “I will get a meal prepared and we can discuss our plans. . . .”

---

After the meal Thorp led the way into the laboratory again. The deep humming of the deadly life was still evident.

“They’re in the steel—everywhere,” he said grimly. “I can’t guarantee a moment’s safety for any of us. A machine might fly apart or the roof come down over our heads—”

Joan asked a question.

“Just why do you keep these machines maintaining Martian conditions outside when prolonged normal Earthly conditions might conceivably kill the spores?”

“I figured that perhaps the Martian conditions might tempt them to limit their activity to this island—discourage them from trying to migrate. I’ve plenty of power available—underground water pressures born when this island was forced up. If I can only keep them here I might still find a way to act. That I’m getting doubtful about, though—so maybe we’d better use the machinery for other work. Incinerating for example. No harm in studying results.”

“Does the stuff harm humans?” Grant asked uneasily.

“No—only metallic substances. But come—we’ll convert the power to other sources.”

Thorp began to rattle off instructions, most of which the trained girl easily followed. Grant too threw himself into the job, though understanding little of what he did. As fast as they could, amidst a succession of ominous creaks and cracks from tortured metal, they made the necessary conversions.

The incinerator machines themselves, used mainly for metal smelting so Thorp explained, were already assembled—three of them—and only needed the power switching from his “Martian” power plant to their own particular generators.

In an hour they were ready, pushed the incinerators to each of the three open windows.

“Let ’em rip!” Thorp cried, and slammed in the switch that gave power to all three.

Thereafter they sent withering streams of fire into the red, heaving sand outside. Lines of charred incandescence plowed their way through the mass—but it reformed immediately the heat was shifted to another quarter. After twenty minutes of criss-crossing beams of white-heat Thorp gave a groan of despair.

“What’s the use? No better than my attempts to blast them with electricity. One might as well try and set fire to the Sahara! It is pretty clear it has the same immunity to destruction as the bacteria and exists even though Martian environment has been removed. That makes it a deadly menace—”

---

He turned with a sharp gasp of alarm as a cross-strut in the laboratory ceiling suddenly snapped with a resounding bang. A shower of metal came thumping down onto the metal floor.

“This is getting dangerous!” Grant muttered.

“Maybe we’d better get outside?”

“No, no, wait a minute!” Joan urged, thinking. “I’ve got an idea—not about us, but about this Martian stuff. Fire burns the stuff up—we’ve proved it; so how would it be if we set fire to the trees ringing the island? Make a veritable curtain of fire which would at least delay its action from beyond this area by creating a carpet of red hot ash. It would last for days—and we might think up something in that time.”

“It’s an idea,” Thorp acknowledged. “Can but try it.”

Again they switched on the incinerators, directing the blinding beams on the all-surrounding foliage. Almost immediately the summer-dry tindery branches flared up like so many torches. It spread with devastating speed, sending a leaping holocaust in a circle round the central clearing. It crept round the back of the laboratory . . . At length the night sky was livid red.

“Guess they’ll see this from New York and think it’s a new meteor,” Grant chuckled, looking round.



“Well maybe it’ll do some good,” Thorp muttered, switching off. “We’ll get busy with what time we’ve got and see if we can find a way to kill the things off completely. Let’s see—Here is my tube of isolated spores—”

He moved toward the rack containing the things, but at the same moment he gave a gasp as the floor beneath him suddenly cracked like ice with too much weight on it. He staggered, dropped to his knees in the buckled metal, his feet on the concrete foundations.

The wall of the place also fissured suddenly with ear-splitting noise, set everything quivering for a moment.

“It’s no use,” Thorp panted, as he was pulled free. “We dare not stop in here. The whole place is liable to give way . . . I know a spot where we can be fairly safe—at least until we collect our wits somewhat. Just a minute while I get some provisions.”

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This done, he led the way outside into the hot, smoke-filled air. Grant and the girl blundered after him across the red clearing to the one solitary spot where the twin semicircles of flaming trees had not yet united.

“Through here!” Thorp cried.

They followed him, knee-deep in the surging life, went swiftly through the unburned gap and so out onto the shingle of the island itself. The mad life of Mars had spread this far now and was spawning like red powder on the stones.

Thorp turned off the shingle at length toward the slanting rocks forming a low cliff-face. He vanished in a cave hole, Beryl and Grant right behind him.

“This should be safe enough,” Thorp panted, halting in the cave’s interior. “This island is full of them: they go right down into its depths of rocks . . . Even so,” he went on worriedly, “I still don’t see any way out of our dilemma. We’re just running away. The fire will slow the stuff down—but we’ve still to kill it.”

Joan looked round her in the torchlight; then at Thorp.

“You say there are caves below this one?”

“Surely. Some of them go right down to the water base. Why?”

“Just that I’ve got an idea; a rather crazy one, I guess. What if we could decoy this red stuff into the lowest caves and then trap it by melting the rocks with incinerators? It would surely die?”

“Mebbe,” Thorp reflected. “To decoy it would be difficult; and it can get through the interstices of most matter. However, we might do worse than prospect.”

He led the way to the back of the cave, through a wilderness of caves and passages, some natural and others artificial—but all the time clearly heading under the direct center of the island.

Then all of a sudden Thorp halted, hand raised for quiet.

“Did you hear something?” His voice was sharp.

“Such as?” Grant questioned.

“Sounded to me like a sort of groan—a queer sound— There! You hear it now?”

This time they did—a long drawn out sigh like somebody arousing from deepest slumber. All three looked at each other in uneasy wonder; then Thorp flashed his torch ahead.

They had just arrived at a point of the tunnel where it dropped a sheer fifty feet into a lower cavern. Cautiously edging his way forward Thorp looked over the rim of the tunnel floor. A gasp escaped him. Over his shoulder, Joan and Grant gave violent starts.

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“Holy cats! An animal!” Grant ejaculated. “No . . . Not an animal . . .” Thorp’s voice was incredulous.

The creature they were staring at was lying prone on the rocky floor. It had long spindly legs, a bulbous wasplike body, matchstalk arms, and the queerest head they had ever seen. It was egg-shaped, hairless, with a peculiarly pathetic elfin face below it. Obviously it was alive, though apparently injured, if its unavailing efforts to get to its feet were any guide.

“What is it?” Grant demanded finally. “Is it dangerous?”

“Unless I’m crazy,” Thorp said slowly, “it’s—”

“A Martian!” Joan finished for him, quietly.

“Right!” His eyes sought hers perplexedly. “We’d better take a closer look . . .”

They hurried down the rough slope into the cavern and gathered round the prone figure. He looked up at them with huge imploring eyes, deep purple in shade. Again he made that hopeless effort to get up. Finally, with Thorp’s assistance, he managed it; but even then he had to cling to the wall and his thin knees visibly shook. Standing up his immense height was revealed—quite eight feet; but he was so woefully thin he looked as if he’d snap in two.

“Who—who are you?” Thorp asked breathlessly.

The creature gestured, made sounds that had not the least sense. Finally Thorp used the only method he knew to convey his meaning. On the sandy part of the floor he drew a rough Solar System, pointing to the planets. The creature became suddenly excited when the fourth world from the sun was indicated. With an effort he started talking—apparently uttering single letters; but they still made no sense.

“He’s Martian anyway,” Joan said. “That talk of his may be his alphabet! Give him ours and see what he makes of it. . . .”

Thorp nodded and proceeded to draw the earthly A B C in the sand. Immediately the Martian, plainly a creature of high intelligence for all his odd appearance, grasped the idea and supplied his own sign equivalent. Little by little the exchange of alphabets went on. . . .

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Hours passed; hours that slid into days and nights as they still stayed underground. The Martian was supplied with provisions, which he accepted thankfully. Only rarely did he sleep. Most of the time he spent sweating over the two alphabets, until at last he was able to write fairly legible communications—though even yet the actual spoken word and pronunciation were beyond him.

Using Thorp’s notebook he penciled his first message, and the scientist, Beryl, and Grant read it eagerly. But it was a queer message for a first effort—

*“I have been born on the wrong planet! Why?”*

Thorp explained through laborious writing that this was Earth and that Mars was 40,000,000 miles distant. Then he wrote down the tedious details of his Martian experiment. The queer creature sat brooding for a long while afterwards, spent several more hours in polishing up his alphabet then attempted a message in detail. Taking it, Thorp read it out—

“‘As you say, every planet has the same basic chemicals as the parent sun, but environment molds the chemicals differently. You produced the Martian conditions and therefore the *two* forms of Martian life! One form exists on the surface and is destructive to basic metals—which I understand you know of already: and the other form is intelligent, like me, but below surface, where it has been for many ages, ever since the red life gained a foothold on the fast dying surface.’”

Thorp glanced at the others eagerly; went on quickly:

“Our scientists devised means of living underground. So you, in your experiments created not only surface life, but underground like—*me*. Our metabolism is rapid—two earthly weeks at the most. But I have no idea how I was born here: it just sort of happened, obviously under the influence of the Martian conditions you imposed on the surface which filtered down here. Like all Martians, I am sexless, born purely by the action of penetrative cosmic rays upon chemicals. Cosmic rays penetrating down here formed the chemicals and I was born. . . .

“But on the wrong world! The air pressure—the gravity—they crush me. . . .”

Thorp wrote a question:

*“But how do you know you belong to Mars? How do you know so much about it?”*

Again he read out the answer—

“We of Mars are bound by hereditary telepathy—a compensation perhaps for our sexless physiques and strange birth method. Not being born by reproduction we have instead a mental tie, which, wherever we may be, is never broken. That is how I know. Though born here, so far from my planet, I am constantly in contact with my own race—So very far away. . . .”

Thorp wrote—

*“Can you not travel space?”* But the Martian shook his huge head. Thorp looked uncomfortably at the others.

“Guess that experiment of mine went infinitely further than I intended! I produced Martian life all right—with a vengeance. Somehow I’m damned sorry for this chap—stranded.”

---

The Martian handed up another note. Again Thorp read it.

“Have you realized the danger of the surface Martian life you have created? Our surface became unbearable through the stuff absorbing all metallic deposits; hence we moved underground. Earth can just as easily be devastated. The fire you started would help insofar that it would burn up the dust motes in which the stuff can lodge—but far more than that is demanded to destroy it. . . .”

“But what?” Thorp demanded helplessly—then he had to write it down. The Martian gave back the reply.

*“I may be able to help, understanding the substance. You have a laboratory and apparently the right equipment for my purpose. Take me to it. . . .”*

But it was a slow job. The pulling grip of Earthly gravity and the greater air pressure were clearly deadly things for the lost, lonely being to fight. Ever and again on the journey out of the caves he would have to pause, gasping for breath. Then he’d nod his huge head and they’d go on again, until at last they came out onto the shingle.

The circle of trees had all gone now, but despite the days that had elapsed the fire was not entirely out. It smoked and smoldered in masses of white-hot ash. . . . It made their return to the still standing laboratory something of a hazard, but they managed it at the expense of burned shoes and feet.

To the surprise of the three—and their relief—most of the vital machinery was still unharmed; though the buzzing still went on and a lot of ceiling cross pieces had collapsed.

It was surprising to note the keen light of intelligence that came to the Martian’s purple eyes as he looked around him. He spent some thirty minutes examining the apparatus; then, a plan obviously formed in his mind, he went over to one of the electrical machines and calmly snapped off four of its precious copper electrodes!

Thorp winced visibly at the onslaught on his precious machine, but there was nothing he could do about it. With Beryl and Grant he watched curiously from the doorway as the Martian went outside with the four copper bars, finally staked one at each corner of the “sand” infested clearing. Then he came back and wrote one word—

“*Wire.*”

Thorp nodded and rolled forth a drum of it from a corner of the laboratory. For this job the Martian needed assistance, but it ended in each of the copper stakes being connected X-fashion with the wire, the final end trailing back into the laboratory. The Martian snapped it to the length he required, surveyed the main generating dynamo. Finally he turned and asked in writing to be shown the incinerators. This done he wrote—

“*We bore below—downwards!*”

Thorp’s notepad asked:

“But why? That might release some of the underground sea pressure which exists under this synthetic island. We might be flooded out!”

---

The Martian’s only response was to shrug; then motioning the trio he had the three incinerating machines wheeled to the doorway. Their nozzles were directed downward into the center of the red stuff, and when the power was switched on all three blinding heat beams converged on one another, blasting away the red life from that area, melting the rocks beneath, boring ever deeper—deeper.

“What in heck is he getting at?” Grant asked in a puzzled voice. “Driving the rays slantwards like that he’ll hit water in no time. We—we might get a geyser bigger than Old Faithful!”

“We will,” Thorp assured him grimly. “I can only hope he knows what he’s doing. Somehow, I think he does. . . .”

But far from explaining himself the Martian left the incinerators to do their work and began to write steadily. He wrote for a long time, tearing leaf after leaf from the notebook. He had only just come to the end of the job when there was a titanic roar from outside. It sounded like a thousand steam safety-valves.

“He’s done it!” Thorp gasped hoarsely. “Hit a water bed!”

He pointed outside to a vast column of water stabbing into the air, thickening with every moment. In a second or two it began to fall back in a shattering deluge, blotting out the smoldering remains of the forest in a haze of blinding steam. Hot wind slammed through the open doorway into the laboratory.

“This can sink the whole island,” Thorp panted. “Osmosis is one of the things that keeps it up. Release the pressure like this and it may drop to the ocean bed— The idiot! The damned fool!”

But the Martian was active now. He bundled his notes together and handed them to Thorp. Too worried to notice them he jammed them in his shirt pocket, eyes on the fast gathering flood. . . . The Martian jumped to the power unit and cut off the incinerators, tugged the wires free and replaced them with his single copper lead which traveled outside. The generator roared again, still powered by its underground-stream system.

Instantly vivid darts of lavender roared through the boiling waters. They bubbled, frothed, fumed with savage electrolysis, filled the air with pungent ozone.

The Martian pointed anxiously to the door.

“Out!” said his gestures.

“But—but you?” Thorp cried.

The Martian shook his bald head impatiently.

“We’d better go,” Beryl said quickly. “We can just make it down to the inlet before this electrolyzed flood gets really going. It hasn’t reached the left of the clearing yet. Come on!”

---

They raced outside, stumbling and falling in the red stuff as the flood rolled toward them with lavender-colored fingers. They ran desperately, here and there felt the trembling thrill of electricity surging through them. . . . Out of breath they floundered through the dead ashes of the forest, out of the shingle. The motor boat was still there. . . .

“In!” Grant panted, swinging the girl over to safety. “You next, Professor—” Then he leapt in after them and started the motor. They began to move away. . . .

And pursuing them, rolling and splashing, came that purple flood, cascading down into the sea. The very island itself was trembling now, shuddering to its depths. . . .

And suddenly the expected happened! It went down swiftly, plunging, sending rolling breakers out into the ocean which all but upset the three in the motor boat, fast though they strove to drive away from it.

Pitching and tossing, drenched in spume, they clung on—and at last the disturbance began to abate. They were safe, in the light of the newly risen moon.

“Guess this looks like the end of your experiment, Professor,” Grant sighed. “You— Of course, I’d forgotten!” he broke off, as he saw Thorp fishing in his shirt pocket for the bundle of notes the Martian had handed him.

Straining his eyes in the moonlight he read aloud that weird but intelligible scrawl. . . .

“‘Have no fear. By the time you read this the menace to your world will be destroyed. As you know, Mars’ surface is deficient in water. The red surface life does not like it—but it *can* exist in it if necessary. The water round your island, therefore, would serve to deter any efforts of the stuff to reach your mainland: but it would not isolate it. The fire too would help to check it. . . .

“‘But what the red life cannot survive is electrolysis in the water! We of Mars have electrolysis-channels from our polar caps. The poles themselves gather the power naturally from axial spin: this is then transmitted through the water channels which you call *canali*. The red life shuns these areas—and this is essential so that certain air valves on which our internal life depends may be untouched. These valves are all located for convenience in the channel areas.

“‘All I have done on your island is electrolyze the creatures in water, on the Martian principle. If you have received electric shock in making your escape all the better: all traces of red life will be blasted from you. The human body is seventy-eight per cent water and a good conductor of electricity. Be certain to abandon your boat before you actually touch the mainland. . . .

“‘And I? Do not worry, my friends. I was born forty million miles on the wrong side of the void. Death is inevitable from this planet’s dragging pressures. Better I die being of service than live a lonely freak. Perhaps somebody, reaching Mars one day, will tell of the little thing I have done for you. . . .’”

Thorp lowered the note, stared back in the uncertain moonlight where the island had been.

“A Martian,” he muttered; “but a man!”

Grant and Beryl were silent. They felt they had had an object lesson in service to one’s fellows. . . .

THE END

[The end of *Martian Miniature* by John Russell Fearn]