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RACE AROUND THE MOON

A Complete Novel of
Lunar Conquest

By **OTIS
ADELBERT
KLINE**

**THE
WARNING
FROM
THE PAST**
A Novelet of
the Time Capsule
By **ROBERT
MOORE WILLIAMS**



**A THRILLING
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Race Around the Moon

A COMPLETE
SCIENTIFUNCTION
NOVEL

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Virgil Finlay

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay.
First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, August 1939.



Rita Gordon

*Undreamed marvels await the first space
farers to visit the nether side of earth's
vast and eternal satellite!*

CHAPTER I

The Race

Jerry Lee's gaze traveled appraisingly from one sleek, stream-lined rocket ship to another, then back to his own small ship. His was the gaze of an expert. Fifteen of his thirty years had been spent in tinkering with atomic motors, and rocket ships, and he had a right to feel that he knew something about them.

Turning with furrowed brow to "Speed" Eckers, his diminutive, bantam-weight co-pilot, he said:

"We're up against some pretty fast ships, Speed."

Eckers grinned up at his tall, red-headed superior.

"Skipper, when the *Streak* breaks through the stratosphere she'll make those scows look as if they're anchored."

"You're optimistic, I'm dubious," Lee replied. "The *Comet*, for instance, is quite a ship."

"A hippo in a mud hole."

"Wishful thinking, Speed. Morg Kendall, with enough money to buy and rebuild a stratosphere battle cruiser, would certainly not neglect to employ the best engineers to give her speed. He may be behind the moon before we're halfway there."

"If he ever gets off the ground at all," Eckers grunted. "The *Arrow*, that boat of Rita Gordon's, looks a lot more dangerous to me, even if it is smaller. Rich men's brats, both of them—Rita Gordon and Morgan Kendall. Spoiled. Pampered. Why did they have to get into this contest, anyway? They don't need the money."

Clang!

"There goes the bell, Speed. We'd better go in."

The contestants filed into the crowded central auditorium. Before a radiovisiphone stood Dr. Otto Bovardius of Vienna, white-haired presiding judge of the Associated Scientific Societies which were sponsoring the rocket-race.

As soon as they were seated the white haired Dr. Bovardius began:

"We are assembled here for what is to scientists and laymen alike a momentous event. It is a contest, yes; but it is more than that—it is an attempt at a beginning of man's conquest of the airless void of outer space. Yet more—such conquest is only a means to an end—the solving at last of the riddle of Earth's satellite. Yet more—the sequential exploration of the *other* members of the sun's family of planets, planetoids, and their various broods of satellites.

"Many theories have been advanced to account for the origin of our moon; not one has yet been proven. The latest theory, advanced by my friend and colleague, Professor O'Brien of Dublin, is one which has not yet been announced to the world. It would not be announced today, save for one thing—that is, that we hope to be able to prove it or disprove it through the efforts of these intrepid adventurers—these brave pioneers of space exploration—who are now seated before me.

"Professor O'Brien's belief is that the moon was once the nucleus of a comet which, entering the Solar System, was caught and imprisoned by the Earth. Gradually, he believes, the comet's lighter substances were dissipated by the sun. The nucleus, meanwhile, became solidified by gravity and enlarged by the collection of planetary matter and meteoroids which previously had been traveling undisturbed in their accustomed orbit.

“The immense craters on the moon, according to Professor O’Brien, do not resemble those Earthly craters caused by volcanic action, but they do exactly resemble a crater in Canyon Diablo, Arizona, which we know was caused by the impact of a large meteoric mass.

“Time does not permit me to go further into this interesting theory at this time, nor into the many other fascinating speculations regarding the moon. For instance, the possibility that it supports life of some sort, the reason that its axial rotation, although it is much smaller than the Earth, is only about one thirtieth as fast, causing it always to present the same face to us, and thereby making us immensely curious as to what is on the other side—the side which no man of Earth has ever seen.

“The purpose of this scientific expedition—for such this contest really is—is first to determine the cause of the immense lunar craters, and second, to photograph that part of the moon which no human eye has seen! The first rocket ship to return with this data and these photographs will be adjudged the winner, and her commander will be awarded the million dollar prize offered by the Associated Scientific Societies of the World.

“And now, my brave adventurers, pioneers of space exploration, I am sure it is unnecessary for me to impress upon you the tremendous scientific importance of your quest. You are more than adventurers—more than contestants engaged in a race—you are scientists in search of facts.

“I wish each and every one of you a safe and swift journey—and may the best ship and the best navigator win. Return, now, to your ships. You will draw lots for your starting time, as each ship will start alone. The difference in starting time will be taken into account when the race is ended and the prize is awarded. Good luck!”

The contestants went out, got into their cars and drove quickly back toward their ships. Lee and Eckers, much to their disgust, had drawn the last-place slip.

“I don’t care where the moon came from or if it’s made of green cheese,” Eckers said. “I want to get there first.”

Neither of the two noticed the car in front of them, which stopped short before a rocket ramp. Lee plunged his finger to the brake button too late. They struck into the rear end of the vehicle with a jarring impact.

A tall, blond youth, leaning out of the car and saying good-bye to a diminutive, black haired, brown-eyed girl in a silk jersey and jodhpurs which set off every seductive curve of her slender figure, was flung from the car. Instinctively, he clung to the hand of the girl and, describing a none-too-graceful arc over her head, landed on his back, dragging her to the ground with him.

“Morg Kendall and Rita Gordon!” exclaimed Eckers.

But he found that he was talking to himself. Lee had already sprung out of the car to the assistance of the fallen couple.

Soliculously he bent over the girl, picked her up.

“I hope you’re not—”

“Put me down, you clumsy oaf! Why couldn’t you look where you were going?”

Startled, Lee quickly deposited her on her feet.

Kendall had sprung up, and was brushing the dust from his natty white wool flying suit.

“I can’t say I appreciate your idea of a joke, Lee,” he snapped. “But if you want to play—”

Suddenly his ham-like fist shot out in a swift uppercut that caught Lee beneath the chin, lifted him off his feet, and laid him on his back in the dust. A voice from the aerial speakers suddenly boomed overhead.



Morg Kendall

“Every navigator in his place in five minutes! The first ship will leave in five minutes. Any man not in his place will be disqualified.”

“We’ll finish this later,” Kendall said, glaring at Lee, who was dusting himself off.

“Let’s forget it,” Lee grinned. “The score is even—a fall



Jerry Lee

apiece. And although mine wasn’t intentional—”

Kendall turned on his heel, sprang into his car and whirled away.

“Terribly sorry,” Lee said to Rita Gordon. “If there is anything—”

“Don’t mention it,” she answered curtly. She turned and ran up the ramp toward her rocket ship.

“Come on, skipper,” called Eckers. “Hurry, or we’ll be disqualified.”

“Coming, Speed.” Lee sprang in behind the wheel, and they hurtled away to the *Streak*. They were in their places two minutes before the signal sounded. They sat tensely. Two minutes later the first rocket ship roared off into space.

CHAPTER II

The Stowaway

"The *Shooting Star*," said Lee. "Traveling fast."

"The *Streak* will pass her before she's out an hour," Eckers said confidently.

The next ship to go, the *Galileo*, was off with the starter's signal, but something happened—no one knew exactly what—when she was less than a mile from the ground. She turned suddenly end over end, and shot straight toward the earth. It was all over—tragically over—in a few seconds. Driven at terrific speed, the huge projectile with its human cargo plunged its full length into the ground. There was an explosion. Dust and debris mushroomed up.

White-faced, the other contestants sat waiting. They knew there would be no postponement of the contest. One ship was already under way.

"The *Comet* is next," bawled the announcer. "The *Comet* will prepare to take off."

"Why couldn't it have been Kendall?" Eckers muttered.

Kendall got the *Comet* off with such terrific initial velocity that she vanished in half the time it had taken the *Shooting Star* to disappear, despite her immense bulk.

"There's our competition, Speed," Lee said quietly.

"The *Arrow* will take off next," called the announcer.

"She sure has nice lines," Eckers said.

"Are you referring to the ship or the pilot?"

"Make it both—there she goes—"

But the *Arrow* did not rise. Blasts from her propulsion tubes kicked up dust all around the craft, but she did not even move toward the top of the skids.

"That deals out another competitor, anyway," said Eckers.

The blasts from the *Arrow's* tubes ceased. Lee saw a slender figure run down the ramp and spring into a car. The car sped toward the *Streak*.

"Now what the—" began Lee.

"The *Streak* is next," called the announcer. "Stand by to take off, *Streak*."

"Every man to his post," shouted Lee, through his communication mike, as he strapped himself into his hydraulic seat before the control board. "Close the starboard airlock, Speed."

"Aye, aye, skipper."

Eckers plunged out of the control room, and ran along the narrow passageway which led to the starboard door. He pressed the button of the small atomotor which would close the circular outer door and screw it into the threads in the thick insulated hull. But before it could swing inward a small figure popped through.

"Hey!" he gasped, recognizing Rita Gordon. "We're taking off."

"My motors went haywire," she said, "but I'm not going to be left behind. I'll go along with you."

"Over my dead body!" said Eckers. "Get out."

He attempted to push her through the gradually closing door, but she laid a hand on his arm, and he felt a sudden numbness go through him, paralyzing his muscles, rendering him unable to move! Too late he saw the small contact pad held against her palm by a ring and connected to wires which ran up her sleeve. As the big door swung itself to and screwed itself into place, he sank to the floor, consciousness leaving him.

Swiftly the girl exchanged her immaculate white coat and shock helmet for his greasy ones. A moment more, and the ship must take off. She must be in the co-pilot's seat before this took place or the shock would crush her. Pressing the button which closed the inner door of the airlock she rushed into the control room, sprang into the co-pilot's seat, and strapped herself in.

"What took you so long, Speed?" asked Lee, too busy checking his gauges to look up.

She was about to attempt an imitation of Eckers' voice when the starting signal made it unnecessary. Lee opened the throttle of his six powerful rear atomotors.

The interior of the *Streak* was perfectly insulated against both temperature changes and sound from the outside, and so they did not hear the roar of the tubes. But the swift change from the daylight which filtered through the cabin windows because of the atmospheric diffusion of sunlight, to velvety star-gemmed blackness, told them they were already beyond the stratosphere and in the airless space between Earth and moon!

Lee's problem, as it was the problem of all the racers, was so to point and time the acceleration of his ship as to meet the moon in space. The orbital speed of the Earth, plus the speed of its axial rotation, imparted to the *Streak* a velocity relative to the sun of nearly 32,000 miles per hour. And since he knew the speed and rate of acceleration of the moon, the unknown quantity now entering his calculations was the rate of acceleration imparted to the craft by the rocket tubes.

Expressed more simply, his problem, assuming that he could remain in the plane of the ecliptic, resembled somewhat that of a man on an open plain in an automobile, attempting to overtake a tremendously swift express train traveling on a track that curved around his position and greatly increased its speed with each second of motion.

It involved intricate calculations, and the setting of numerous controls, but presently, when he had everything arranged to his satisfaction, Lee looked up at his companion.

"The little ship is sure traveling, Speed," he began, then stared in amazement at the dimpled face, with its big brown eyes fringed by curled lashes looking out at him from Eckers' shock helmet.

"Rita Gordon!" he exclaimed. "What in blazes are you doing here, and where the deuce is Speed?"

"Couldn't stand it to be left behind," she said, "so I decided to come with you. Speed is all right—sleeping in his bunk. He'll come around all right."

"Speed sleeping? Speed wouldn't be sleeping at a time like this!"

She opened her palm, revealing the small electrode it contained. "Speed got violent, and I had to protect myself. I carry this little gadget for that purpose."

"Everything that went aboard this ship," Lee said harshly, "was weighed. We cut the weight down to the last gram possible in order to win this race. You knew that. Yet—"

"I only weigh ninety-six pounds, clothes and all," she replied. "Besides you just said the little ship was a traveler."

"It would be traveling faster without your ninety-six pounds."

Eckers' voice sounded behind them. "Right! Better shove her out the airlock. Give me back my coat and helmet!"

"Take them, grease and all, and give me back mine!"

"Now what, skipper?" asked Eckers, when they had exchanged coats and helmets.

"I'm a trained pilot," Rita Gordon said. "Let me take my turn at the controls. We'll handle it in three shifts."

“You haven’t been trained to handle *this* ship,” Lee replied. “What else can you do? Your status is that of a stowaway—not an officer.”

“Thanks for reminding me,” she replied icily. “I’ll be glad to take any position, in order to work my passage.”

“Can you cook?”

“No.”

“You’ll learn. Take her to the galley, Speed, and tell Mike to put her to work.”

“Okay, skipper,” replied Eckers. “Come on, Useless.”

Brown eyes blazing, Rita followed him along the handrail.

CHAPTER III

Rescue in Space

Eckers came back and took his seat beside Lee. Lee suddenly stiffened. "Do you see what I see?" he snapped.

"What?"

"Two moving lights ahead. Looks as if they're circling each other."

Lee switched on the forward searchlight and reached for his binoculars. He focused them swiftly, then gasped in amazement. The lights were shining from the front and rear cabins of a long slim rocket-ship which was slowly turning end over end around its own center of gravity.

"It's the *Shooting Star*—disabled!" he cried. He put down his binoculars, and shouted into the control mike. "Safety belts, everybody. We're going to decelerate. Report when ready, and make it snappy."

Lee switched off the rear atomotors and turned on those in front. Hydraulic seats were flung forward as if the *Streak* had suddenly plunged into a huge net. They hurtled past the *Shooting Star*.

"Good lord, skipper! You're not going to lose the race on account of that outfit, are you?"

"There are thirty people aboard the *Shooting Star*! They are idling in space. Want to leave them there to die?"

"If we try to help them we may get disabled ourselves. Then we'll all die."

"That's a gamble we'll have to take," Lee snapped.

He cut the forward rocket tubes on the left, causing the *Streak* to turn to the right and circle. They sighted the *Shooting Star* once more, turning over and over like a huge propeller blade idling.

Lee set his radiovisiphone for the *Shooting Star's* wave-length.

"*Streak* calling *Shooting Star*—*Streak* calling *Shooting Star* . . ."

The worried face of the *Shooting Star* pilot, Frank Lawler, appeared in the disc.

"*Shooting Star* answering *Streak*. Hello, Lee. We're in a spot. Good of you to stop, but go on and win your race. You can't help us."

"What happened?"

"Something that wasn't on the schedule. Kendall passed us a while back. His initial velocity must have been terrific. But the *Comet* is a heavy ship; he couldn't accelerate as rapidly as we could, so in quick time we were right up on his tail. The scoundrel dropped a space mine. I saw it coming and tried to dodge, but it crippled us. Most of our propulsion tubes are smashed in, and we can't get enough pressure through them to stop this somersaulting caused by the explosion."

The enormity of Kendall's crime took away Lee's power of speech.

He nosed in close to the *Shooting Star* and turned on a rocket blast against the direction of her rotation, at the same time holding the *Streak* in position with his rear atomotors. Gradually, the rotation of the *Shooting Star* slowed down—then ceased altogether.

"Now what are you going to do?" A voice said behind Lee.

Lee turned, and saw Rita standing in the doorway, gripping the handrail.

"Get back out of the way," he snapped. "Take the controls, Speed, and hold her beside the *Shooting Star*. Instruct Randall, O'Hara, Anderson, and McPherson to break out space suits,

get into them, and come forward at once.”

Once more he addressed Lawler in the radiovisiphone.

“We can’t tow you behind on account of the rocket blasts, so we’ll make you fast beside us and try to get you to the moon, where you can land and make repairs.”

He gave Lawler no time to voice his thanks. Squeezing past Rita he hurried to his cabin where he swiftly donned his space suit.

As he stepped out into the hall once more, four men, similarly attired, came to meet him.

He switched on his headlight and the small radio beneath it. The men followed his example.

“We’re going to make the *Shooting Star* fast beside us,” he said. “We’ll use the mooring cables. I’ll go through the airlock first.”

He pressed the button for the small atomotor. The inner door of the airlock swung open. He went through. The door swung shut behind him. He pressed the button of the second atomotor, which opened the outer door. A moment more, and he stood in outer space on the starboard platform of the *Streak*—his first experience in the airless void of outer space.

It was breath-taking. The stars stood out like blazing jewels in exquisite shades of green, blue, yellow and red. Far over to his left, Jupiter swept its majestic way across the heavens, accompanied by its bevy of satellites, four of them easily visible to Lee in the clear airless void. At his left the sun blazed against the black sky.

Ahead of him was the moon, the goal of his ambition, now less than fifty thousand miles away. It was narrowing the distance, now, but soon it would pass them and widen the distance if they could not gain sufficient acceleration to head it off.

The hills, valleys, and immense craters of the illuminated side of the disc stood out so sharply, appeared so close with their contrast of blazing light and black shadow, that Lee felt almost as if he could reach out and touch them. The portion beyond the sunrise line was illuminated by Earthlight, which gave it a peculiar, ghostly appearance. Glancing back at the Earth, he saw it was in almost the same phase as the moon, save that its dark side, lighted by moonlight only, was larger and growing, while the dark area of the moon was smaller and shrinking.

Lawler, attired in a space suit, emerged from his own port airlock, to be followed a short time thereafter by a half dozen of his men.

Eckers skillfully held the *Streak* to her position beside the *Shooting Star*, and presently Lawler was able to catch the end of a cable which Lee tossed to him, making it fast to his rail. Another cable was made fast in the same manner, aft, and then the two ships were slowly drawn together.

Back in his cabin, Lee hurried out of his space suit. As he opened the cabin door he encountered Rita standing in the passageway. She held out a bottle of steaming coffee, and a plate topped by a huge sandwich.

“I thought you might want these after your labor outside,” she said.

“Thanks,” Lee replied. “Thoughtful of you, but I can’t stop now. I’ll be back in the galley, later, after I get the ship going.”

It was necessary to adjust the push of his rocket tubes to equalize the drag of the *Shooting Star* on his starboard side. And then he found it necessary to replot his course, since he could not possibly regain his former rate of acceleration, and much time had already been lost.

This done, he called Speed Eckers to take over, and went to the galley.

“Speed ate your sandwich, but I’ll fix you a fresh one in a jiffy,” Rita said.

The coffee tasted good, and he hadn't known he was hungry until he got his teeth into the juicy, roast beef sandwich.

"Good coffee, Mike," he said, "and you, fair lady, can compose a mean sandwich. If you could only cook—"

"I'm beginning to get interested in the culinary art. Perhaps I'll try," she said.

They were interrupted by the voice of Eckers from the communication speaker.

"Can you come forward, skipper? Don't like to interrupt you, but there's a strange light ahead of us. I think it's the *Comet*."

"Coming pronto," Lee replied, springing up and hurrying to the control room.

CHAPTER IV

The Space Mine

Lee peered through his binoculars at the speck of light ahead of them.

"It is the *Comet*," he said.

He called Lawler and asked him to show no lights, then gave the order for "lights out" over his own intercommunication system. He turned off the radiovisiphone.

Swiftly they crept up on the *Comet*, which was limping along heavily, evidently having atomotor trouble. Lee managed the controls while Eckers watched the craft ahead through his night glasses.

Suddenly the latter exclaimed sharply:

"Look out, skipper! I think they just laid an egg!"

Lee shifted his rocket pressure, gunned his rear atomotors to the limit. A few moments later there was a terrific explosion marked by a bright flash, above and behind them. The space mine had exploded. Had they kept their former course and velocity it would have been a direct hit.

"Kendall's a cold-blooded devil," Eckers said bitterly. "Is he trying to murder us all just to win a race?"

"They called his father the 'Wolf of Wall Street'," Lee said grimly.

A searchlight flashed out from the stern of the *Comet*, apparently for the purpose of observing the effect of the explosion on the target. The light revealed nothing but a few tiny fragments of the mine. Other lights were quickly turned on, sweeping the airless void in all directions—that is, all but one: straight down. And the *Streak* was by now directly beneath the *Comet*.

Presently all lights winked out, indicating that Kendall either believed his mine had completely destroyed the two ships, or that they had set off on another course.

Lee shot forward once more. It was not difficult for him to outdistance the limping *Comet*, the rocket blasts of which appeared to grow weaker and weaker as it moved forward.

"What do you suppose has gone wrong with Kendall's atomotors, skipper?" Eckers asked.

"Looks as if he's cutting down on his fuel," Lee replied. "Afraid he might not have enough to get back to Earth. As for us, we'll have to begin to hunt for a nice soft spot to land on."

"How about the crater of Plato?" asked Eckers. "It's certainly big enough so we can't miss it. And most of the crater floor looks pretty smooth."

"I was thinking of it," Lee said.

Despite the deceleration blasts from the forward tubes, they were still hurtling forward at a tremendous speed. Sooner than Lee had expected, the ship was caught in the gravitational pull of the moon—their position was tantamount to that of a power-diving aviator above the earth. Lee leveled out, deciding that he had better circle the moon at least once before attempting to land.

Still decelerating, they shot across the immense ring of Plato so swiftly that its details were blurred. Then, almost before they were aware of it, they had reached the other side of the moon—the side which had never before been seen by a native of the Earth!

Both Lee and Eckers exclaimed in astonishment at the sight spread before them. First, it seemed as if a huge section of the moon had been sliced off or disintegrated. Then they

realized that they were looking into an immense, bowl-like depression—that the moon was actually a huge bowl with its convex side always facing the Earth, its concave side always turned away. Three-fourths of the bowl was in shadow, but not a sharp, black shadow like those on the convex side. For the light which struck the farther rim was diffused like sunlight on the Earth. There was no sharp sunset line, but a gradually deepening twilight which was darkest on the side of the bowl nearest the sun.

Lee did not at once appreciate the tremendous significance of what he was seeing. When it struck him, he exclaimed in awe:

“Good lord! Here’s something the scientists never dreamed of! A sunken world *with an atmosphere!* That diffused light proves it. And look at those clouds below us, floating in the air. Water vapor. It’s raining down there! Can you beat it!”

They were over the center of the immense depression now, and Lee was delivering a running commentary on what he was seeing through his powerful binoculars.

“There’s a sea down there, right in the middle of the bowl, with rivers flowing into it from all directions. And vegetation. Green jungle areas, marshes and plains. Vegetable life indicates the presence of animal life too. There’s a big island in the center of the sea, and an immense *building* in the center of the island. A building. A building doesn’t happen; it’s built. Men inhabit, or have inhabited, this side of the moon. If not men, then creatures analogous to them.”

He called his photographer on the communication mike.

“Are you getting all this, Bill?”

“Yes, sir. Four cameras clicking.”

Eckers gave a sudden exclamation.

“Look, skipper! Did you notice those big volcanoes around the rim of the bowl. Or are they volcanoes? They’re all the same size, spaced the same distance apart, and there are sixteen of them.”

Lee turned his glasses on the nearest.

“Yes. They’re not like the craters on the other side of the moon. They don’t seem to have any bottoms. They’re just black holes. Look like big tubes with the soil or rock banked up around them. More evidence of human intelligence, or something that parallels it.

“What do you suppose they are? Chimneys?”

“Hardly. Each is at least a hundred miles in diameter. We’re going to find out.”

The ship hurtled over the farther rim of the moon, and into the moon’s shadow. Presently, far ahead of them, they sighted water of Copernicus, its tall rim catching the first rays of the rising sun. Beyond Copernicus other peaks and ring mountains glittered on the sunrise line. As they passed over the crater of Copernicus, Eckers shouted:

“Look, skipper! There’s the *Comet*. Right there near the western wall. They’re preparing to fire on us!”

CHAPTER V

Attacked on the Moon

Swiftly Lee killed three forward atomotors, and they banked sharply to the right. He switched them on again as a shell burst over at their left.

He banked to the left, spiraled, and banked once more to the left, eluding three more shells from the cruiser before the eastern rim of Copernicus hid it from sight.

“Close call,” he muttered.

Decelerating, they passed over Hipparchus. Beyond them the three ring mountains, Theophilus, Cyrillus and Catharina, joined together like Siamese triplets, hove into view.

“There’s our spot,” said Lee. “The cone in the center of Theophilus throws a good black shadow. We’ll land there.”

He spiraled downward. Soon they were circling the crater below the tops of its outer walls. Gradually, as they decelerated, Lee narrowed the circle. Twice they passed through the shadow of the central cone before he judged that it was safe to try a landing. They struck on their landing skids with the forward atomotors and levitor tubes gunned to the utmost—bounded in the air, and landed a thousand feet ahead. Then Lee let down his drag anchors and they came to a sliding stop in the exact center of the shadow.

“End of the line. All out,” shouted Eckers, hurrying to get his space suit. “We’ve done it,” he muttered to himself.

Lee hauled in his drag anchors, and hurried back to don his space suit. He found Rita Gordon struggling into one of Speed Eckers’ suits.

“Isn’t it thrilling?” she cried. “We’re on the moon!”

“But not the first to land,” Lee replied. “Morg Kendall beat us to it. I hope we’ll be able to beat him back.”

He dived into his cabin and quickly donned his space suit. Rita was ready to go through the air lock when he came out, so they went out together.

Captain Lawler and a score of his men were already outside, and helping Lee’s crew to loosen the cables. They had come through with only slight damage—a twisted railing and a bent platform, due to the stress of the cables between the two ships.

Once more Lawler thanked Lee profusely for bringing them through. Together, they inspected his damaged rocket tubes, which he declared his mechanics would have as good as new within twenty-four hours. In the meantime, Lee’s questing geologists returned with their hammers, picks, shovels and bags of samples, and went back through the airlock.

Lee ordered his crew back aboard the *Streak*. As Rita was not in sight, he decided that she must have already gone in. He had noticed her, a few minutes before, amusing herself by running and jumping. Because of the moon’s slight gravity pull, she had been able to make some prodigious leaps, much to the amusement of the crew.

Because of the moon’s lesser gravitational drag, Lee was able to take off in a fifth of the distance required on the Earth. He circled inside the crater twice to gain momentum, then shot up over the rim and away.

At five thousand feet, he leveled out, preparatory to rocketing back to the concave side of the moon which held so many fascinating mysteries. It was at this point that the *Streak* and the *Comet* simultaneously sighted each other.

Lee shot north, making a bee line for the Appenine Mountains. The *Comet* followed swiftly. Lee began zig-zagging.

The first shell burst close behind him, just as the *Streak* plunged in among the towering peaks of the Appenine Range. Here the smaller, lighter craft had a distinct advantage, since it was able to twist and turn much more quickly than the cruiser.

For some time, Lee followed the northwest curve of the Appenines, dodging in and out among the rugged peaks, and hurtling through narrow, tortuous canyons. Occasional shells burst behind them, but all were wide of the mark. Presently, on coming to an exceptionally large peak, he circled it, and turned back in the direction from which he had come.

The *Comet* was nowhere to be seen, so he judged that Kendall had done just what he had hoped he would do—plunged straight ahead on the assumption that Lee would continue his northwest flight.

He now turned straight north, hurtled across the Mare Imbrium between Timocharis and Archimedes, flew over the giant ring mountain, Plato, crossed the Mare Frigoris, passed over the north pole, and began his deceleration in the stratosphere of the huge lunar bowl.

With the *Streak* sufficiently decelerated to risk a plunge into the atmosphere, Lee circled downward.

“Have you decided where to land, skipper?” asked Eckers.

“First I want to investigate that island in the center of the sea, and the building on it.”

They circled lower, plunged through a stratum of gray clouds, and found themselves above the sparkling waters of the central sea. Over to their right was the island Lee had noticed—circular in shape, and surrounded by a wall about two hundred feet high and twenty-five feet thick.

Inside this barrier was what apparently had once been a park or garden laid out in geometric designs. Now, however, it was a luxurious riot of tangled vegetation which overlapped ramps of the yellow opaque substance, traces of which could still be seen through the greenery.

In the center of the walled jungle stood a circular building fully a mile high and a half mile in diameter at the base, but tapering up to a diameter of about a quarter of a mile at the top. There was not a sign of a window or opening of any kind on its smooth sides. Eight small towers, however, were perched at equidistant points around the walled rim of the flat roof. And in each of these was a circular opening facing outward.

“Doesn’t seem to be any place to land here, except on the roof of that building,” said Eckers.

“That’s where we’re landing, Speed.”

A moment later the *Streak* skimmed over the edge of the rampart, missing it by inches, and came down on its skids. Despite the terrific blasts from the forward atomotors, it slid nearly to the opposite side of the roof before coming to a stop.

Lee called his chemist on the mike.

“Have you tested your air samples?” he asked.

“All tested,” was the reply. “Same mixture as the Earth’s atmosphere, but with a little more carbon dioxide.”

“Enough to be dangerous?”

“No, I wouldn’t consider it dangerous. Tried it on three guinea pigs with no ill effects.”

“All right. I’ll be the next guinea pig and try it without a space suit.”

Lee was climbing down from his seat when the buzzer on his radiovisiphone suddenly signaled.

He switched it on, and to his amazement the face of Rita Gordon appeared in the disc!

“You!” exclaimed Lee. “Where are you? I thought you were in the galley with Mike.”

“I’m in the control room of the *Shooting Star*,” she replied. “I was underneath it when you took off. Morgan Kendall has just landed beside us—has his space guns trained on us. His men, armed with bomb guns, are swarming around the ship and have made all of Lawler’s men outside prisoners. Lawler was captured with them. They’re coming through the air lock now. I’ll have to sign off.”

The disc went blank.

“What are we going to do?” Eckers asked.

Lee’s jaws hardened. “Kendall and Rita are engaged. He won’t harm her. And he won’t dare harm the others so long as he knows we’re at large and can return to Earth to report. We’re tending to our business for the present. First I’m going out the airlock to test the atmosphere. Tell Doc Waters to put on his space suit and keep an eye on me in case I keel over. Tell Bill O’Hara to get his camera ready. Then, if the air is all right, you and I and Bill will have a look around without our space suits. From the looks of this park or garden around us the place hasn’t been inhabited for thousands of years—perhaps millions. So I don’t think we need worry about hostile Lunites. However, we’ll take a couple of bomb guns with us, just in case, and see if we can get into this building. For the present, tell the rest of the crew to remain in the *Streak* and turn her around to be ready to take off at a moment’s notice.”

Lee sniffed the air gingerly as he opened the outer door of the airlock. It was much like the air of any seaport city of Earth, but slightly more pungent. This, he judged, was due to the presence of the extra CO₂. He stepped outside—took a deep breath. The effect was actually exhilarating.

He signaled to the doctor, watching him from the control room. The doctor signaled Eckers. A moment later the latter emerged from the airlock, carrying two bomb guns and followed by the short, stocky O’Hara with his photographic equipment.

CHAPTER VI

The Lunites

Lee relieved Eckers of one of the bomb guns and led the way to the nearest tower. As they approached, he noticed a circular disc about eight feet high set in its base.

“A door maybe, but without knob or handle.”

He stepped up close, and was about to touch it with his hand when, to his amazement it swung back, swiftly and silently, revealing a brightly lighted interior. Startled, he leaped back. No sooner had he done so than the door closed once more.

“Looks as if we’re expected,” commented Eckers.

“Electric eye,” Lee said.

He stepped in close once more, and again the door swung open. This time he stepped through, followed by his two companions.

They were in a circular room about fifty feet in diameter. Its walls and floor were constructed from the same smooth, seamless material as the outer walls. But the entire ceiling was milk-white and luminous. There was no glare—just a gentle yet copious diffusion of light that permeated the entire room. An inclined ramp spiraled upward at one side. At the other, a second ramp led downward. There was a thin coating of fine gray dust over everything.

“If this place has been deserted for more than a thousand years the dust ought to be thicker than this,” said Eckers.

“Right,” Lee agreed. “Looks as if it had been cleaned not more than a month or two ago.”

O’Hara photographed the room, and Lee led the way up the spiral ramp. This took them to another room in which a large, circular window faced the ocean. In front of the window a huge globe was mounted on a pedestal. Lee examined it. Although the globe itself was made from the yellow, opaque material used elsewhere, he noticed a transparent disc like a lens in the side facing him. Beside the disc a knobbed handle projected. On the other side a rod with a cross-piece at the end protruded.

Lee found that by moving the knobbed handle he could rotate the globe in any direction, like a ball-and-socket joint. Then he looked into the lens. At first he saw only a blur. But after giving the rod with the cross-piece a few turns, he exclaimed in surprise.

“What is it?” Eckers asked. “What do you see?”

“This is a telescope, and a mighty powerful one. I can see the edge of the bowl with the sun shining on it as plainly as if it were only a hundred feet away.”

“Let’s have a look.”

Eckers, after adjusting the lenses to his own eyes, was equally amazed.

“We’re in a lookout tower,” Lee said. “From the eight towers around here the people who lived in this place were able to keep track of everything that went on in the bowl during the lunar day.”

“During the night, too,” said O’Hara, “judging from the looks of this gadget. If this isn’t a searchlight lens on the other side of the globe, I miss my guess.”

He pressed a small button, and instantly a powerful beam of white light shot out through the window.

“Shut that off!” Lee snapped.

O’Hara instantly turned it off. “Kendall?” he queried.

“Yes. If he spotted that flash, we’ll have to get out of here fast.”

“Well, why not?” asked Eckers. “We’ve got all the dope we need to win that prize. Why take any more chances?”

“We haven’t scratched the surface yet. I’m going down the other ramp. You two go back to the ship.”

“We’re sticking with you, skipper. And if you’re thinking of Rita Gordon, we’re thinking of her too.”

“Let’s go, then.”

There was a circular door at the other end of the room they had first entered. Lee walked up close to the door. It swung back noiselessly.

“Look out, skipper. This one might be a trap.”

“If it is, it must have been set some time before the stone age,” Lee replied. He stepped inside. Eckers and O’Hara followed him.

Suddenly the floor seemed to drop from beneath their feet.

“An elevator!” Eckers gasped.

“Right!”

Experimentally, Lee pulled down one of the levers near the top. Instantly, they braked to a smooth, silent stop—then started upward. Pushing this lever back into place, he pulled down the lowest lever. Once more they stopped, then started downward.

In less than half a minute, the lever automatically clicked back into place. The door opened.

The three stepped out, the door closed behind them. They found themselves in a runway about twenty feet wide, which evidently circled the entire base of the building.

“Basement,” said Eckers. “Now where do we go?”

Opposite the elevator shaft, there were doors set at intervals of about a hundred feet around the hall. Lee made for the nearest, and it opened automatically, revealing another long narrow hallway, lighted like the rest of the building, and unfurnished. He stepped through, followed by his two companions.

Suddenly he halted, and swung his bomb gun forward.

“What’s the matter, skipper? What do you see?” asked Eckers.

“Something moved—flashed out of that doorway on our right.”

They advanced cautiously. The door in question was closed, but swung open on their approach. Lee peered through into a large, triangular room. It appeared to be an experimental laboratory. There were many odd-shaped flasks, tubes, retorts, as well as other paraphernalia and equipment new and strange to the Earthmen. And scattered about through the huge laboratory were a number of monstrous, eight-legged creatures as large as Shetland ponies.

The three men paused in the doorway.

“They look like spiders,” Eckers whispered.

“Not spiders,” Lee replied, eyeing the strange motionless creatures keenly, “but something evolved from the arachnida, the family to which spiders, as well as scorpions, ticks, and other similar cephalothoracic creatures belong.”

“They look plenty dangerous to me,” said O’Hara. “Let’s get out of here.”

“I don’t think we need fear them,” Lee replied drily. “Look at the dust that has settled over them. They’ve probably been dead for ages.”

“But you saw something move in the doorway.”

“Must have been my imagination. Come on.”

He went in, prodded the nearest monster with his bomb gun. The thing had a hard, reddish-brown shell that gave off a hollow sound when tapped with the gun muzzle. Convinced beyond all doubt that it was dead, Lee moved closer to examine it. It was standing erect on four of its eight legs, before a tall table on which there was considerable paraphernalia. Two of the other four legs, which were armed with prehensile claws, were resting on the table, another held a large flask, and another a slender tube from which it had evidently been pouring a liquid, long since evaporated, into the flask, the bottom of which contained a thick, brown residue.

“I guess these are the Lunites, all right,” said Lee. “The creatures that built this building. Most of those in this room look as if they had died on the job. They were super-insects—probably with immense brains. And they evolved from a class of creatures admirably adapted to accommodate large brains. With a cephalothorax instead of a separate head and thorax, the brain had unlimited space in which to expand.”

“They may have been smart and civilized, but they give me the creeps,” said Eckers. “Look at those eyes popping out of their heads on stalks. And their mouths—four sucker beaks with a pair of forceps to hold whatever they sucked in for food.”

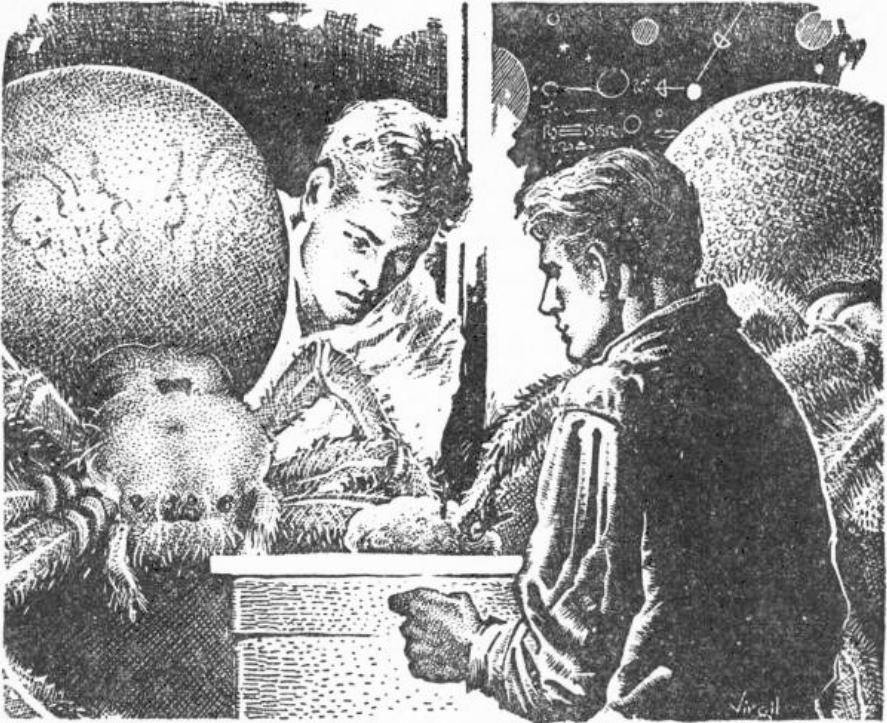
O’Hara, busily recording the scene with his camera, was photographing the sector behind them when he suddenly cried:

“Good Lord! Look! There *is* something alive in this room.”

CHAPTER VII

The Fungus Death

Lee and Eckers wheeled simultaneously. Both men instinctively brought up their bomb guns at sight of the thing confronting them. This was not an arachnid, and did not resemble the dead creatures scattered around the laboratory save for the fact that it was walking on eight legs, which supported its huge, disc-shaped body. The new creature was about six feet in diameter and three feet thick. The legs and body were the same color as the walls of the building, and apparently armored with the same yellow material. Around the circumference of the disc, numerous retractile segmented tentacles writhed. At the ends of these tentacles were small funnel-shaped devices, hollow in the center and edged with flexible bristles. The tentacles were sweeping the walls, floor and ceiling, and Lee noticed that where it had passed all surfaces were free of dust.



Lee's appraising glance took in the scene

“Don’t go into a panic,” snapped Lee. “I don’t believe this thing is alive. It’s a machine—an automaton—an automatic janitor. See for yourselves. It’s cleaning up the dust. That’s the reason there’s only a thin film of dust in the building. The rooms would be choked with dust otherwise.”

“But how could it keep on functioning if the creatures that made it have been dead for millenniums?” asked O’Hara.

“Maybe there are some still alive,” Lee said grimly.

He walked up to the thing, touched it with the muzzle of his rifle. It paid no attention to him at first. Presently one of the segmented tentacles brushed across his chest, evidently questing for dust—and finding none, passed on.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Eckers. “This place is getting me down.”

“There are probably still more interesting sights,” Lee replied. “Come on.”

The next room they visited was smaller but contained at least a hundred arachnida, clustered in groups around six individuals placed on pedestals about three feet high.

Lee’s appraising glance took in the scene.

“Dissecting room,” he said. “See the cutting instruments, clamps and hooks. They’ve laid open the cephalothorax of the one on the pedestal. Probably they were trying to determine the cause of the disease that was wiping them out.”

“The specimen they were dissecting is pretty thoroughly dehydrated, but it is easy to see they were checking the brain. Take a look. It has dried into a mass that doesn’t fill a tenth of the original cavity. And there’s also a small foreign body in it—shrunken and dried. Looks like a fungus of some sort.”

“There’s a diagram on the wall,” said O’Hara. “Maybe that will tell what it is all about.”

It told Lee plenty. An immobile arachnid had evidently met death while tracing the diagram. A small brush was still clutched in one claw, and there was a pot of dried pigment in another.

The three men gazed at the diagram for some time in silence.

“A strange story,” said Lee. “Over here on the left is a diagram of the Solar System. Further away is a diagram of some alien star system with its planets and their satellites. We have no way of telling what it is. But the line drawn from the two, with a half-sphere marked by various characters at intervals along its path, shows it traveling from that alien star system to the Solar System.

“This would seem to indicate that the moon was not originally a part of our system, but came in out of space in its present form.”

“But what caused it to travel from one system to another?” asked O’Hara.

“That isn’t revealed here. Obviously, however, these Lunites came with it. At any rate, it shows the moon entering the Solar System.”

“But how could the Lunites live in interstellar space, without the heat of their sun or ours? Their atmosphere would be frozen solid. All life would be destroyed.”

“I don’t know about the latter. They could live in this building and others like it. Evidently it is air-conditioned, since the temperature and moisture content seem uniform everywhere. And it is at least ten degrees cooler here than outside. Also, the air is much drier. And of course they could bring in specimens of any plants or animals they wanted to retain.”

“Suppose they did come from another system. That doesn’t tell us what killed them.”

Lee moved over to the right. His keen glance had already found the answer.

“Here we have a diagram that shows something about that. The moon approaches the Earth. As it draws near, a fine, intangible substance is seen emanating from our planet. Now, we have a diagram of the nervous system of a Lunite. Evidently that is what these individuals were checking when overtaken by death. This diagram shows tiny particles gaining entrance at the nerve ends and traveling toward the brain. It shows them growing in the brain. The obvious conclusion is that there is some fungus on the Earth, harmless to man, but possibly attacking certain types of arachnida. Its spores are so fine that they are wafted into the

stratosphere and thrown off into space. So the vicinity of the Earth for hundreds of thousands of miles contains them. They are scattered, or sown by the Earth, as it spins along in its orbit around the sun.

“Perhaps the moon, at this time, was captured by the gravitational force of the Earth. The Lunites had plunged into a danger zone that spelled doom for them, but they didn’t know it. Too late, they learned the nature of the menace. And apparently all died before they could escape or find a way to combat it. In fact, this one died recording it. These others died investigating. And possibly those in the laboratory were trying in vain to find a remedy.”

“The history of the extermination of a race,” said O’Hara.

“Maybe it’s a good thing they were exterminated,” said the practical Eckers. “They might have conquered the world—made slaves of men, or even bred them for food.”

“Possible,” Lee answered. “All arachnida are carnivorous. But we can’t stop to speculate now. We’ll have to finish our trip across this place and get back to the ship. If Kendall should discover the *Streak* it will be too bad for all of us.”

The three men, passing row upon row of dead Lunites, walked to the central tower and entered.

Expecting to find a simple tower room with a ramp leading upward as they had at the top of the building, Lee was astounded at the sight that greeted his eyes. The ramp was there, all right, but at first he did not see it. For, as the door closed behind them it seemed, for a moment, that they had stepped directly out into space.

Save for an illuminated disc about two feet in diameter, which stood on a pedestal in the center of the place, the entire room, walls, floor, ceiling, doors and ramp, appeared transparent, or rather, to lend to their eyes the quality of X-ray vision which rendered transparent everything around them, even the moon itself. They were looking out into the universe in all directions!

The stars and planets stood out with gem-like clarity against the black background of infinite space with the Milky Way forming a jewel-encrusted girdle. Nebulae which could not be seen through the Earth’s atmosphere with the unaided eye, formed cloudy wisps and spirals. The Earth seen through the floor, was nearing the end of its last quarter, the sunset line rapidly blotting out the last thin crescent of light. And the sun with its brilliant corona and undulating plumes of blazing hydrogen, was almost directly beneath them.

“And we thought our planetariums on Earth were wonderful!” exclaimed Eckers.

Lee walked across the floor to the central disc with the strange sensation that he was treading an invisible path in space. Bending over the disc, he saw that a single knob made from a transparent substance resembling quartz projected from the center, and sixteen smaller knobs of the same shape and substance were spaced equidistantly around the rim.

“Wonder what that contraption is for,” said Eckers. “There’s only one way to find out.”

He grasped one of the smaller knobs and tried to turn it, but could not. Then he pulled it. Instantly, the knob turned pink, and the floor shook beneath their feet as if from an earthquake.

“Push it back, quick!” exclaimed Lee.

Eckers obeyed, and the knob resumed its transparent color once more.

“Wha—what did it do?” he stammered.

“For one thing,” Lee told him, “it jolted the entire moon, causing a slight earthquake. Furthermore, it revealed something to me which I have been suspecting since we saw those sixteen chimneys around the rim of the moon. They are not chimneys—they are gigantic rocket tubes. They furnished the motive power that brought the moon from its original star

system to our own. Obviously, they were built by the Lunites for that very purpose. And we are standing now in their central control room. Each of these knobs, when pulled, guns a rocket tube. The central knob, undoubtedly, sets them all off simultaneously, or can be made to accelerate all simultaneously. I'd hate to risk pulling it clear back because the face of the moon is pointed directly at the Earth."

"I wouldn't if I were you."

Lee was startled at the sound of a voice behind him. Turning, he saw Morgan Kendall standing in the doorway, a bomb pistol in his hand, flanked by two of his men, each pointing a bomb gun. Simultaneously the other three doors to the room flew open, and in each doorway stood three men armed with bomb guns.

"Will you surrender peaceably?" asked Kendall, "or do we have to blast the three of you?"

"It looks as if you have the drop on us, Kendall," said Lee quietly.

"All right, pass out those two guns, breech first," Kendall ordered, "and don't try any tricks. That's the stuff. Turn around, all of you, and put your hands behind your backs."

They turned, and three pairs of handcuffs were snapped into place.

"How did you find us?" Lee asked.

Kendall laughed unpleasantly. "Simple. We spotted your ship and landed. Naturally, your crew couldn't resist. They'd have been blown to atoms. With a little persuasion, one of your men was kind enough to tell us which tower you had entered. After that we simply followed your tracks in the dust. We didn't know how to work the elevator, but luckily it landed us at the right floor the first crack."

"It would," Lee replied, "if you didn't lever for any other floor. This is the end of the line."

"It is for you," Kendall told him. "For me, it is a beginning. I started out to win a race. I could complete that and win, but now I have found something vastly bigger."

"You mean—"

Kendall's eyes were shining with a strange light.

"I mean that gadget you were just playing with. I was listening to you for some time before I called to you. Your conversation was very useful to me. I started out as the master of a rocket ship. I'm a good deal more than that now—I'm the master of the moon. It will be my rocket ship from now on. With it, Morgan Kendall becomes emperor of the world."

"Delusions of grandeur," said Lee. "I always thought there was a screw loose in your brain somewhere, Kendall."

"Then think again, and ask yourself if it isn't your brain that's deficient. Why, you haven't even begun to realize what I can do with the power to move the moon about as I please. What causes the tides on the Earth? What do you think would happen if the moon moved in a few thousand miles closer, and started circling faster?"

"Kendall, you wouldn't dare."

"No? Oh, I wouldn't destroy human life unless the fools defied me. But they won't. A few good-sized tidal waves, accompanied by some earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and storms on a scale say ten times as large as anything within the experience of the human race, will serve my purpose very well. The Earth will come to terms in short order."

Kendall's chest heaved. "But enough of this talk. We've work to do. For the present you'll go back to your ship under guard. If you are tractable I may permit you to live, for you could be very useful to me. If not, I will kill you with no more compunction than if you were an insect."

CHAPTER VIII

The Moon Master

As they emerged from the tower door, Lee saw the three rocket ships drawn up in a row. Rita Gordon, who had been standing with a group of Kendall's men, ran to meet them, seeming almost to fly with each step.

"Good work, Morg!" she cried. "You've got them all now. You can win the race without any trouble."

"I've already quit worrying about that," Kendall replied, placing an arm around her slender waist. "I've got great news for you. You're going to be mistress of the moon and empress of the world."

She looked up at him, a puzzled expression in her big brown eyes.

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Haven't time to explain, now. Too much work to do. Go into the cabin and I'll tell you about it later."

"All right. I'll have tea ready for you when you come."

Without a second glance at the prisoners, she obediently returned to the *Comet*.

Speed Eckers shook his head, and addressed Lee from the corner of his mouth.

"Quick change, eh?"

"So it seems," Lee agreed, trying to keep his tones from betraying the bitterness he felt. "What I can't understand is why she called us a while ago on the radiovisiphone."

"Probably spotting the ship for Kendall."

"All right, Lieutenant Carr," shouted Kendall. "Bring all of the prisoners over here."

Surrounded by their guards, the rest of the prisoners were brought over and herded around Lee, Eckers and O'Hara.

"First of all," said Kendall, "I want you prisoners to understand that your present status is that of slaves, and that you will be treated as such. You are witnessing the beginning of a new era in the history of the Earth and the moon.

"Although you begin this era as slaves, you will not all remain so. Faithful service will be rewarded with freedom and advancement. Disobedience or slothfulness will be suitably punished. And for those who attempt to revolt or escape, the penalty will be death.

"As you all know, we have no radiovisiphone sets on any of our rocket-ships strong enough to communicate with the Earth. However, I brought with me the necessary materials and supplies for constructing such a set. All along I realized it might not be possible to get back to Earth from the moon.

"The power is already here. Although we have not yet located the plant, we see the results of its operation in this building. Your first task, then, will be to assemble this new radio station, stringing the antennae between two of these towers, which will answer admirably for the purpose, and to hook it up with the plant that powers the electrical apparatus in this building.

"As I am in a hurry to put the plant in operation, you will work on this job until it is completed. After that you will sleep, and from then on, you will work in two twelve-hour shifts. Lawler, you will take charge of suspending the antennae and running the wires down to

the control room. You, Lee, will install the control room beside the lunar rocket tube control room, with which you are familiar, and hook up with the power plant. That's all. Get busy."

He turned and strode away with the arrogant strut of a man conscious of sudden tremendous power. There had been dictators like that on the Earth in the past.

The prisoners were marched to the rear of the *Comet* and were issued rations of stew, bread and coffee. Then they were set to work.

The radiovisiphone was to be installed at the bottom level. Lee was put in charge of its construction, under the watchful eyes of Kendall's guards.

After he had the construction well under way, he left Eckers in charge of the workers, and went to look for the power lines in order to be able to connect the lunar power plant with the radiovisiphone station. The officer in charge detailed two guards to accompany him, evidently acting on orders from Kendall to keep an especially close watch on this prisoner.

Lee made an exhaustive search of the immense lower floor, and eventually found a large trap door in the floor of one of the smaller rooms. This flew open when he pressed on a stud in the wall beside it, revealing a peculiar ladder leading straight downward. This ladder had three uprights, one in the center, and one on each side, and the cross pieces, instead of being straight, curved outward forming semicircles. It was surrounded by a maze of cables and conduits which evidently powered the rooms above.

Lee started down the ladder, but one of the guards clutched him by the shoulder.

"Wait," he said. "I'll go first."

He slung his bomb gun over his shoulder by its strap and started down. Lee followed, and the other guard brought up the rear.

As the last guard descended, the trap door closed behind him. As it did so, light flashed on around them. Lee noticed that there was in this room a row of tiny tubes projecting from the circle where wall and ceiling met. Also, he saw there was a door opposite the one they had just entered.

As soon as the door closed behind the second guard, the ceiling light suddenly went out, and there was a peculiar hissing sound like escaping steam. Instantly, the room was filled with a powerful, acrid odor something like that of phenol. Lee's eyes, nostrils and lungs smarted and burned, and he clapped a handkerchief over his nose to filter the air.

"It's a trap!" shrieked one of the guards. "This is a poison gas chamber!"

Lee heard him run to the door through which they had entered, and frantically pound on it with the butt of his bomb gun. But it evidently resisted his efforts, for the darkness persisted, the hissing sound continued, and the odor grew stronger.

Just as Lee was beginning to feel consciousness slipping from him, the door in the opposite wall flew open. The three men ran toward it, then halted in the doorway. They were confronted by a room exactly like the rocket control room above them, presenting the same view of the starry firmament, and with an identical control disc mounted on a pedestal in the center of the floor.

However, this disc was completely covered by a transparent dome, and over the disc bent an arachnid the same shape and size as those in the rooms above. This creature, however, was bright orange in color with mottled markings of black and white. And although it was quite motionless, Lee had the feeling that it was alive!

As he hesitated there in the doorway, Lee suddenly felt an impelling, irresistible impulse urging him forward. He could not tell whence this impulse had come, yet it seemed to

emanate from the hideous, mottled creature before him. Also, he found his own eyes focusing on the stalk-like eyes of the arachnid.

He heard the bomb guns of the two guards drop to the floor. Then the three men, treading like sleepwalkers, marched forward, and the door closed behind them. They halted just in front of the transparent dome, still staring vacantly into the eyes of the motionless Lunite.

Presently, Lee thought he heard a voice calling to him. The words were indistinct at first, and it was as if the sound came from within his brain instead of impinging on his eardrums.

Suddenly he understood. He was not hearing words but thoughts!

“At last you respond, creature of Earth,” said the voice. “I was beginning to doubt your ability to do so, but it is partly my fault. I have been in a state of suspended animation for a long time, and have lost some strength, but you have brought me the means to remedy that. You need not speak, for I can read your every thought and memory, save those you have a subjective urge to conceal from me.

“I see you are wondering whence this voice comes, and who I am. I am the creature confronting you, which you call an arachnid. I am the last living individual of my race. We are communicating by means of telepathy, the universal language of the subjective mind, which knows no physical barriers and requires no physical interpretation. It is the only means of communication ever used by my race, as we have always been without vocal organs.

“I went to sleep in this cell when the earliest ancestors of your race were single-celled animalculae, blindly feeling their way about in the primordial ooze of your planet. Yet, through the medium of your mind, I am able instantly to read the entire history of your people, and so, to realize that you have progressed far in the physical sciences, even though you have neglected the mental.

“I know all about the contest you entered, and what has happened since. We Lunites are not creatures of emotion, but we have a strongly developed sense of fair play, and are particularly opposed to those who would seek power for themselves, to the detriment of their kind. Also, I note that you have something which will be useful to me—something you yourself invented—insulite. I can read the formula in your mind, and could duplicate it if I had the materials. However, I do not dare to leave this cell—yet.

“So, because I believe in fair play, and because you are in a position to bring me something I want, I’ll make a bargain with you. Bring me enough insulite to make five of your space suits, and also bring one of your air manufacturing and conditioning plants. I have no small portable plant, and it will save time. Get this for me, and I will show you a way to defeat the plans of your rival and save your world from his domination. I will show him who is the real master of the moon. In the meantime, I will take nourishment. *As your two guards have been sterilized, I can use them without fear of the fungoid death.*”

During this entire time, the creature beneath the transparent dome had not moved, standing on each side of Lee, apparently in a state of deep hypnosis. Suddenly the dome tilted backward on a single large hinge attached to the rim opposite them. When its nearer rim had reached a height of six feet the two guards walked forward until they were beneath it. Then it closed once more, and they stood before the motionless arachnid.

The latter now moved to one side of the control disc, and reared backward on its two posterior pairs of legs. The third pair reached down to a cluster of spinnerets located near the center of the abdomen, and with lightning-like rapidity cast a series of silken loops around the nearest unresisting guard, until he was swathed like a mummy. The process was repeated with the second guard. Then the latter was dragged beneath the arachnid, which, after seizing him

with its forceps, plunged four curved tubular jaws through the wrappings into his chest. Lee saw the blood of the luckless guard welling upward through the four semi-transparent tubes, and felt impelled to attempt the rescue of the man, even though he was an enemy, since he was a fellow-being preyed upon by a creature of an alien race.

But the voice came to him once more.

“I see you are horrified because I have chosen to feed upon two of your enemies,” it said. “Your feeling results not from reason, but from one of the three basic impulses of your kind, which are the preservation of the individual, the propagation of the race, and the preservation of the race. The latter, however, is the latest to develop, and consequently the weakest. Also, there are many individuals in which it is quickly subordinated to personal needs and desires. Such an individual, for example, is your rival, Kendall. He is practically without this basic impulse—would feel no horror at the sight of two of his enemies being devoured. And, after all, why should he, or you, for that matter? Thousands of your race have been devoured by their own kind. Still greater numbers have been slain uselessly, and left to rot. And even in your modern civilization, you devour other animals whose right to live is as great as your own.

“I am not telling you this to justify what I am doing. With me, it is a matter of necessity—not choice. No other food is available at the moment, and I dare not leave this cell for the purpose of obtaining my natural food which, I assure you, is far more tasty than this. However, you will help me and help yourself more competently if you fully understand.

“Return now, by the way you came. You will tell the officer in charge of your construction crew that you have lost your guards, but have found a power line to which you can connect the radiovisiphone station. After you have slept, you will find a way to obtain the insulite for me. In the meantime, I will have finished feeding, and so will have regained my normal strength. You will then descend with the insulite, and the cable which is to be connected to the power line, and I will instruct you regarding your next move.”

CHAPTER IX

Earth Attacked

His mind a whirl of conflicting thoughts and emotions, Lee departed from the presence of the motionless arachnid, crouched above its prey, and returned to the central auditorium.

"Where are the two men I sent out with you?" the commander of the guards demanded.

"I lost them in one of the lower levels," Lee replied. "But I have found the cables which connect with the central power station."

"You lost them? How?"

"Perhaps you'd better ask them that. They were set to guard me, not I, them."

"None of your backtalk. You're a slave here."

"A slave, then, who is merely stating the facts."

"Very well. See that you keep your place. The master will check on your facts later."

Lee wondered what the commander would think if he knew there was a real moon master with a mind far more advanced than that of any human being, who was even now preparing to defeat this arrogant, self-styled master of the moon.

Lee and his men were conducted to what had obviously been an immense arachnidian dormitory. After their arms had been manacled, the slaves were ordered into their cells.

Lee had not realized how weary and sleepy he was until he lay down in his cell, where, despite the hardness of his bed and the cares which beset him, he soon fell into a deep sleep.

It seemed only a few seconds before he was awakened by someone shaking him. To his amazement, he saw Rita Gordon standing over him. She pressed something small and hard into his hand.

"A master key for the manacles," she said. "You will need it sooner or later, no doubt."

"Wha—how did you get down here?" he asked her. "And why did you come?"

"Morg is still sleeping," she said. "The guards obey me, believing I will someday be their Empress."

"And don't you want to be mistress of the moon and empress of the Earth?"

"I don't want to see the Earth dominated by any man."

With that she left him. Lee thrust the key into his pocket.

"Eckers was right," he thought. "You just can't figure a woman. I wonder what she'll do next."

Fatigue overwhelmed him once more and he slept again. He was awakened once more, but this time by a cuff on the side of the head that made his ears ring. The commander of the guards was standing over him.

"Come out of that," he growled, "and make it snappy. The master wants you to hook up that cable at once."

"I'll have to have a space suit and five gallons of liquid insulite," he told the commander as the latter unlocked his shackles. "There's poisonous gas below, and the connections will have to be insulated."

"All right. Just so you make a quick and thorough job of it and don't try any tricks."

When Lee arrived at the central audience chamber on the main floor, he found the nearly completed radiovisiphone station humming with activity, the prisoners working swiftly under the guns of their guards. Kendall himself was supervising the work.

“All right, Lee,” he said, when the latter came up. “Get that cable hooked onto the power line. We have it connected here, and are waiting for you.”

The cable, with one end attached to the base of the immense radiovisiphone set, was wound on a huge spool.

“I’m sending two extra guards with you this time,” Kendall warned. “And if they should happen to disappear it will be just too bad for you.”

Followed by the four guards, two of whom carried the insulite and space suit, Lee rolled the huge spool down the aisle between the rows of dead Lunites, to the door. Passing through this, and two other doors, which had to be left ajar to admit the passage of the cable, he came to the trapdoor which led to the lair of the moon master. They descended.

Once again Lee saw the authentic moon master crouching motionless over the control disc beneath his transparent dome in the duplicate control chamber. At his feet lay two shrunken bundles no longer recognizable as the web-swathed bodies of the two burly guards. And Lee noticed that the body of the moon master had taken on considerable weight and rotundity.

“What’s this?” gasped the corporal. “Another dead bug. But this one’s a different color. Somebody put it under a glass.”

The corporal had a kind of brute courage. He walked intrepidly into the chamber behind Lee, and the others followed. No slightest movement came from the creature beneath the transparent dome. But Lee noticed that his companions had stiffened as if suddenly turned to stone. Their eyes were fixed and staring, and their bodies were rigid.

Then the telepathic voice of the moon master came again to Lee, sending prickles of wonderment along his spine:

“For the present they see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing. When they leave they will have forgotten what I wish them to forget. Go, now, and connect your cable to the power line that is circled by blue stripes. Break the insulation, make your connection, and then coat it with insulite. When you have finished, bring me the rest of the insulite and the space suit.”

Lee hurried back through the sterilizing chamber, located the blue-striped power line, and swiftly made the connection. When he returned, carrying the liquid insulite and the space suit, he saw that the four guards stood like graven images where he had left them. He saw the transparent dome over the moon master rise, tilt back on its hinge, and rest there.

“Bring me the materials,” the moon master commanded gently.

Lee carried them forward and laid them before the arachnid.

The latter uncorked the liquid insulite. Then he tilted the bottle and, as the liquid ran out, began a rapid movement with four of his limbs. Lee found it almost impossible to follow the action. Then he saw that this living arachnid, the sole survivor of his race, was spinning the viscous insulite around him, drawing it out in fine threads and recombining it into a space suit which fitted his body and limbs. The moon master was evidently aware that insulite dried and solidified almost as soon as exposed to the air.

Presently he had spun a tough, transparent suit, completely enveloping his body save for a small space where the abdomen and cephalothorax joined. Then he swiftly recorked the remaining insulite, removed the air manufacturing and conditioning plant from the space suit, and placed it in the opening. Once more he uncorked the insulite, and spun until the plant was completely sealed in. Then he corked it once more.

“My breathing apparatus is in my abdomen,” he explained. “We arachnida do not breathe through our heads as you do. Now I can leave my cell without fear of the deadly spores that

slew all of my contemporaries so long ago. I will not need to take nourishment again for a long time—”

The thought message was interrupted by a terrific shock which flung Lee to the floor and bowled the four rigid guardsmen over like ninepins. It had no effect, however, on the moon master, braced on his eight powerful legs. He sprang instantly to the controls and pushed down a small lever in the side of the pedestal that supported the disc.

Lee scrambled to his feet.

“What happened?” he asked, forgetting in his excitement that it was not necessary for him to speak.

“Your enemy worked faster than I thought he would!” The soundless message flashed to Lee’s brain. “Evidently he made his demands upon the nations of your world as soon as you connected his radiovisiphone to the power line. Evidently also, those demands were refused. At any rate, he has just pulled the central rocket control knob, and the moon is now moving in toward the Earth.”

For an instant Lee was speechless before this calmly made announcement.

“Can’t you stop it?” he then cried, forgetting again that he had no need for speech.

“I’ve already shut off his control room,” the moon master replied. “The little lever at the side of the pedestal cuts it off completely when pushed down. Now I’ll get the moon back into its orbit. In the meantime, if you like, you may watch what is happening on Earth. Come here and look into the top of the disc.”

Lee went forward, his heart pounding, and looked into the disc. It was blank when he first looked, but the moon master gave the central knob a slight turn, and it was then as if he were looking through powerful spy glasses from a point only a few miles above the Earth.

He saw the coast of Brittany, toward which an immense tidal wave was advancing across the Atlantic! It broke on the shore, turned into a huge roller and swept over the beetling cliffs inundating the land beyond!

“Too late to save those people,” the moon master said without agitation, manipulating the dials. “But we’ll soon have the moon back in its orbit, and the disturbances on your world will gradually subside.”

Lee’s range of vision crossed Italy. He saw inundated land, and a dozen volcanoes belching smoke and fire. A terrific storm was roaring over the Mediterranean, and there were incessant flashes of lightning.

The moon master was manipulating the control knobs that operated the various rocket tubes. A row of these were gunned on one side, and the moon swung on its axis. The universe visible through the walls, floor and ceiling of the room, seemed now to swing around them.

“Your ambitious enemy has slain a great many of your fellowmen,” said the moon master. “No doubt he probably thinks now that something has gone wrong with his controls. It is a good time for you to return with your guards. In order to get rid of Kendall you will have to risk losing your rocket ship—perhaps your life as well. If you are willing to take these risks, and to cooperate with me, I will tell you of the best plan I can think of at the moment.”

The moon master paused in his thoughts, then went on:

“The moon is now back in its orbit, so you need not worry about that. Presently, after you have gone back to the audience chamber, you will go into the duplicate control room there, which is now dark. I will be in telepathic *rapport* with you. Kendall will want you to repair the controls. Ask to be left there alone, and I will then switch them back on.”

“But are you going to permit Kendall to kill more people on Earth?” Lee asked, this time without speech.

“Definitely not,” the moon master replied. “I only want him to think he has the power to do so. As for the rest of the plan, it will be as follows—”

CHAPTER X

Earth Surrenders

Accompanied by his four guards, who walked stiffly, like automatons, Lee passed through the sterilization chamber and out into the room where he had connected the cable to the power line. He carried what remained of the insulite. With the instructions of the moon master fixed indelibly in his mind, he bent over the connection, applying a bit of insulite as if he were just finishing the task. As he did so, the three guards snapped awake.

“Hurry up with that job!” growled the corporal. “The master will be furious!”

“It is finished,” Lee replied. “Let us go back upstairs.”

Not one of the four men appeared to miss the space suit they had taken down with them, or to remember a thing about what had happened in the sterilization room and the lair of the moon master.

When they reached the central audience chamber once more there was considerable excitement around the radiovisiphone set which Kendall himself was manipulating. He turned suddenly away from the disc and held up his hand for silence.

“I have won!” he shouted. “The Associated Governments of the World have agreed to my terms! It is a time for celebration! Tonight we will wine and dine! Tomorrow the *Shooting Star* will carry my chosen viceroys to the Earth, to rule and levy tribute. Something has gone wrong temporarily with the rocket controls, but the Associated Governments of the World know nothing about that. And we’ll find a way to repair them. We have enough men of science among us for that.”

His fanatical gaze flashed to Lee.

“Good work, Lee!” he said. “You did a good job on that connection. Continue to serve me as well and you will advance rapidly. I may even make you one of my viceroys.”

“Where are the other prisoners?” Lee asked.

“They are in their quarters, being fed,” Kendall replied. “This job is finished, and I’ll have no more work for them until tomorrow. Rita seems to have taken a sudden fancy to dietics, and is overseeing their feeding. Too bad. She was not here to witness my triumph. But she’ll know of it, soon.”

“Something go wrong with the rocket controls?” Lee asked casually.

“They went dead. If you can fix them you will be handsomely rewarded.”

“I can try,” Lee replied.

He walked to the nearest door in the base of the control tower, and it automatically opened as he drew near. Within all was darkness.

“I’ll send in a man with a light,” offered Kendall.

“Don’t bother,” Lee replied. “I’ll have the lights on inside in a moment.”

As soon as the door closed behind him the light flashed on in the central control disc, and once more the walls lost their opacity, clearly revealing the universe around him. He waited a few moments, then returned to the door, which again opened automatically.

“All right, Kendall,” he said. “Your controls are working once more.”

Kendall stared at him in amazement, his smile of approval suddenly changed to a glare of rage.

“You have made a very foolish mistake,” he said. “To you I am not ‘Kendall’ but ‘Your Imperial Majesty.’ I had intended to reward you with full liberty tonight, and a part in our victory feast. But now, I regret to say, you must be punished.” He called to the corporal who had conducted Lee to the cable room and back. “Shackle him, corporal,” he ordered, “and confine him with the rest of the prisoners.”

Lee held out his hands for the shackles. It was not yet time for him to strike. Then he accompanied his guard via the elevator to the dormitory. Here he found Rita in charge of the men who had brought the food.

She looked up in surprise as Lee approached with his arms in irons.

“Why the shackles, corporal?” she asked. “This prisoner has not yet been fed.”

“Master’s orders, mistress,” the corporal replied respectfully.

“Oh, well,” she said, “I suppose he can eat with his shackles on. You may go, corporal.”

Glad to be relieved of his charge, the guard hurried away.

“I’ll open your shackles for you,” she whispered.

“I could open them myself, thanks to you,” he whispered. “Listen, Rita. After the banquet tonight, don’t sleep aboard the *Comet*.”

CHAPTER XI

The Moon Master Acts

Despite his weary, aching muscles and heavy eyelids, Lee remained awake in his cell for six hours, during which time he heard only the monotonous pacing of the guard in the hall.

At last, noiselessly, he unlocked his fetters with the key Rita had given him. He waited until he knew the guard was at the end of his beat, then moved stealthily to the door. The guard was on his way back. At the right moment Lee sprang into the hallway and brought the heavy shackles down upon the head of the sentinel, who slumped into insensibility. He grabbed the man's bomb gun.

Swiftly then, he dragged the body inside and hid it behind the door. Then he sprinted over to the sleeping cells and unlocking the fetters that bound Eckers, shook him awake. His copilot sat up sleepily.

"What the—" he began.

"Take this key and start releasing the others," said Lee.

"In fifteen minutes take the elevator to the top of the tower. If the *Streak* and the *Comet* are gone, you can take charge of the *Shooting Star*, as there are not likely to be any of Kendall's men aboard her. With the *Shooting Star*, you will be able to return to Earth."

"But where are you going, skipper?" asked Eckers. "And what's going to happen to the *Streak* and the *Comet*?"

"Just be a good soldier, carry out orders, and don't ask questions," Lee told him. "You'll learn all of the details later, whether my plan works or not."

He hurried off to the elevator, and waited close to the door until it opened. He pressed the "up" lever for the top floor.

Arriving at the top floor, he stepped out. There was no one in sight. Silently, he went up the ramp that led to the tower. No one here. He walked close to the door, then caught and held it as it began to open automatically, and peered out. A guard was on duty here and at the moment his back was toward the door. He weaved unsteadily as he walked, and Lee suspected that he had been imbibing heavily at the banquet. The guard unexpectedly turned, and spied Lee peering out the door.

He stared unsteadily for a moment, unable to credit the evidence of his senses, then started to swing his bomb gun down from his shoulder.

But before he could get his gun in line, Lee had sprung in close, and swung his fist. The man dropped, his head struck the floor. He was out—permanently. Lee appropriated the bomb gun.

He left the tower. All the lights aboard the *Shooting Star* and *Streak* were out. The prow and stern lights of the *Comet* were lighted, and through her open airlocks came snatches of a maudlin ditty. Evidently, although the banquet had been over for some time, a few late celebrants were still able to raise their voices in song.

Crouching low and praying that he would not be seen, Lee sprinted across to the *Streak*, climbed the ladder that led to her port bridge, and plunged through the open airlock. He started the atomotors that closed the inner and outer doors, and then ran to the control room. Strapping himself in his seat, he examined the gauges and levers by the light that shone from

the control cabin of the *Comet*. Finding everything in order, he gunned the rear atomotors and the forward levitor tubes, and the *Streak* hurtled forward and upward.

In his luxurious cabin aboard the *Comet*, Morgan Kendall sat with his first lieutenant, Oscar Carr, and several other officers, finishing the last bottle of champagne.

“Gonna make you vish—viceroy of United Statesh, Carr,” Kendall proclaimed loudly. “Whadda ya think of that, eh? How do you like being empororsh’ favorite? You, Hewett, I’ll make vish-viceroy of Great Britain. Pretty nice, eh? We’ll have a drink on that one, and sing ‘Bashful King of England.’ I’ll pipe the tenor. You lead, Hewett. Come on, lesh—”

He was interrupted by a loud roar from outside.

“What the devil was that?” he asked, suddenly sobered.

The port airlock guard came running.

“It’s the *Streak*!” he cried. “The *Streak* is gone.”

“Must be that damn’ Lee,” said Kendall. “I should have had him shot tonight. But he can’t get far. Come on, Oscar. We’ll catch him and blast him to hell.”

Shocked into sobriety, Kendall hurried to the control cabin, followed by Carr. They strapped themselves in their seats and the captain of the *Comet* gunned her powerful atomotors and levitor tubes. As she roared off into the sky, he ordered Carr to rouse the gunners and have them stand by to man all of the space guns.

Scarcely had Carr left the cabin to carry out his orders when the buzzer on his radiovisiphone sounded, and Kendall switched it on.

The smiling face of Jerry Lee appeared in the disc.

“Hello, Kendall,” he said. “It looks as if the *Streak* is going to win this race after all. What do you think?”

“I think this is going to be your last flight,” Kendall replied between clenched teeth. “A few minutes more and we’ll be within range of your craft. Flying without lights won’t help you. I’ll run you down sooner or later.”

“That’s what *you* think,” Lee grinned. “As for flying without lights, I only did that to get out from under your guns. Here go my lights on, now, all of them.”

“Well, you are a damned fool, aren’t you,” said Kendall, as he saw the lights of the *Streak* far ahead of him.

An instant later his radiovisiphone disc went blank. Then the lights of the *Streak* flashed off. But they appeared a moment later, flying in another course. After that, as the two ships sped across the dark bowl of the moon, the lights of the *Streak* flashed on and off again and again, now in one direction, now another, as if a number of gigantic fireflies were flitting about ahead of the *Comet*.

With his powerful atomotors gunned to the utmost, Kendall was slowly gaining on the dodging, twisting *Streak*. He did not know that Lee was not using his full power, but he did know that his dodging would, in the end, shorten the distance between the two ships. And then he would bring his space guns into play.

Presently the *Streak* shot up out of the bowl, and across the rim of the moon, with all of its lights blazing. Lee was traveling in a straight line, now, and Kendall, following close behind him, saw that he was within range. He barked an order into his control mike:

“Begin firing from the forward turret.”

Meanwhile, deep in his lair beneath the tower, the moon master sat peering into the top of his control disc. He was watching the flight of two rocket ships, one small, the other much larger. The larger was pursuing the smaller, which dodged and twisted, flashing its lights on and off from time to time.

Presently the moon master saw the smaller ship rise and fly straight across the rim of the moon, with all lights blazing. Behind it hurtled the larger ship. Suddenly, just as the latter hung over the rim, its forward turret guns spat fire. And, at that instant, the claw of the moon master seized and pulled one of the small control knobs in the side of the disc. A terrific blast followed—a blast so powerful that although it was from a single tube, it started the moon turning on its axis.

But the moon master was not interested in that. What interested him was the fact that at the instant he had opened that lever, the pursuing rocket ship had been directly above the center of the gigantic rocket tube. Now that cruiser, turning end over end, was hurtling out into space with a velocity so swift that even the practiced eyes of the moon master, aided by his wonderful visiscope, could scarcely follow.

He pushed the lever back into place, shut off the visiscope, and abstractedly watched the universe slowly turning about him due to the moon's accelerated rotation on its axis. He computed that if he permitted the moon to continue at this same rate, its days and nights would be the same length as those on Earth. Perhaps if he left it that way, these Earthlings would like it better here, and he could induce some of them to stay. It was pretty lonesome with no living creatures left save the feral inhabitants of the lunar seas and jungles.

Watching through his rear-view periscope, Jerry Lee saw the flash of flame from the *Comet's* forward turret. Instantly, he went into a swift dive to avoid the projectiles, and watching through his keel periscope, he saw the terrific blast from the lunar rocket tube which sent Kendall's rocket cruiser hurtling end over end out into space. Kendall, he knew, would not be able to check the terrific momentum thus imparted to his heavy craft until he had traveled so far he would not have fuel enough to bring him back.

As he hurtled back across the rim of the bowl over which he had lured Kendall at the instigation of the moon master, Lee noticed that the moon's axial rotation had been speeded up as a result of the blast, and reflected that it would be a good thing if it were regulated to simulate Earth days.

He could scarcely wait until he got back to the central tower, to ascertain what had occurred there. Yet he did not dare accelerate too much, or it would be impossible to land.

Presently he saw the *Shooting Star* with all of her lights blazing, resting on top of the tower. And shortly thereafter, he skimmed over the wall, skidded across the top of the tower, and brought the *Streak* to rest beside the other rocket ship.

Impatiently he waited for the two airlock doors to open. Then, carrying his bomb gun, he leaped out on the bridge and ran down the ladder to the ground. Instantly, he saw that the gun would not be needed. A great crowd had swarmed out of the *Shooting Star* to greet him. There were Captain Lawler, and Speed Eckers, and Bill O'Hara, and many others, and it seemed that everybody was shaking his hand and slapping him on the back at once. But, best of all, there was Rita, who ran to him, flung her arms around his neck, and kissed him before everybody.

He held her close, and everyone shouted approbation.

"It looks as if you are not going to be mistress of the moon or empress of the Earth," he whispered. "But would you be willing to be assistant cook on the *Streak*?"

“I’d love it,” she answered.

Lawler, who had been stroking his pointed beard and grinning, now came forward.

“Let me be the first to congratulate you, Lee,” he said, “and to wish you joy, Miss Gordon. Incidentally, I want to say that the *Shooting Star* is not returning to the Earth at present, and of course, lays no claim to any part of the prize for the race. You may complete that at your leisure, and claim the prize. I wish to remain here to conduct further scientific investigations. Possibly I shall colonize the moon. I notice that last rocket blast which was set off so mysteriously, has started the moon rotating on her axis at the rate which our instruments indicate to be about twenty-four hours a day. If it continues that way, and I see no reason why it shouldn’t, unless further blasts are fired to stop it, it will make a very pleasant place to live—and an exceedingly interesting one.”

“Thanks, Lawler,” said Lee. “If you’re going to stay, we’ll be off. Good-bye, all of you *Shooting Star* men, and good luck.”

In his lair beneath the tower, the moon master was observing the scene through his visiscope. And, although he did not come of an emotional race, he felt strange emotions stirring in his arachnoid heart. He saw the airlock close behind the last member of Lee’s crew—saw the *Streak* vanish in space. Then he switched off his visiscope and resumed his brooding. For the moon master, the last living member of an ancient race, had much to think about—many plans to perfect for the future of the world which he and his long dead brethren had brought into the Solar System.

Meet the Author of This Novel

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE, the author of *RACE AROUND THE MOON*, was born in Chicago, July 1, 1891. Mr. Kline has long been recognized as one of the most important science fiction writers in the country, and his famous interplanetary novels have been published in the most prominent national magazines. Many of his novels have been published in book form, and several of them have been produced by the movies.

Outstanding science fiction novels by Otis Adelbert Kline include: "The Planet of Peril," "The Prince of Peril," "Maza of the Moon," "Jan of the Jungle," and "Tam, Son of the Tiger."

He likes fishing, hunting, hiking, swimming and boating. He speaks Arabic fluently, and gets a kick out of preparing exotic culinary dishes, with his own special recipes, of course. Of his own writings, his favorite character is Grandon, of Terra, and one of these days we may hear more about this chap in a long novel for our companion magazine, *STARTLING STORIES*.



Otis Adelbert Kline

[The end of *Race Around the Moon* by Otis Albert Kline]