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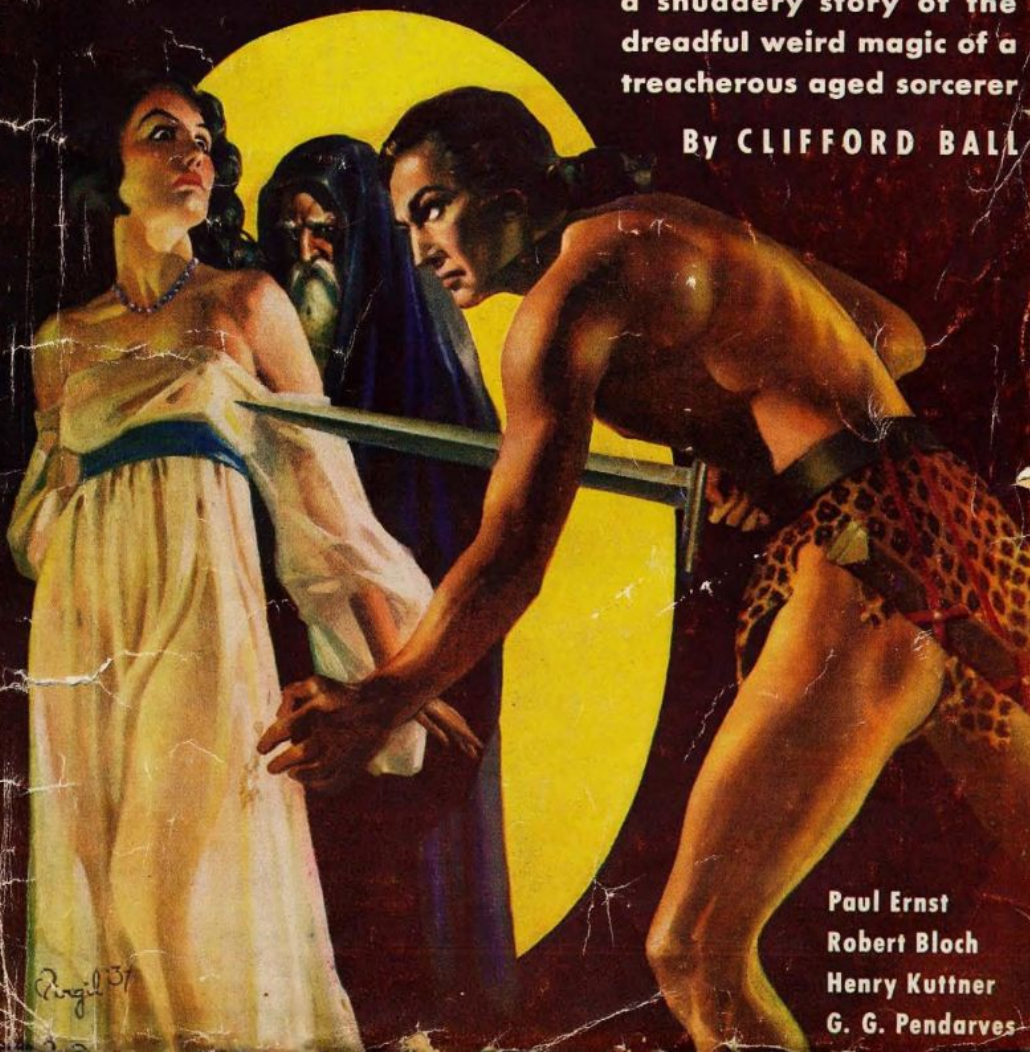
Weird Tales

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THE THIEF of FORTHE

a shuddery story of the
dreadful weird magic of a
treacherous aged sorcerer

By CLIFFORD BALL



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“Abruptly the Raider’s ship flashed away, came darting down at them.”

Raider of the Spaceways

By
HENRY KUTTNER

First published *Weird Tales*, July 1937.

A startling weird-scientific story, about the fantastic and horrible entity that lay like a cosmic vampire on the hideous Night Side of Venus

1. *The Raider Strikes*

Dal Kenworth was collecting the nectar from his elysia plants and swearing quietly as he worked. He was perspiring in spite of the rain, for it was the steady warm drizzle that falls constantly on the sunward side of Venus. Thank heaven, he would be free to return to earth when the collection ship came to pick up his elysia—but the ship was not due for a week. He bent the tiny dead-white cup of a bell-shaped elysia flower, and a single drop fell into the transparent tube he held ready to receive it.

Kenworth had scarcely a gill of the fluid to show for a year's toil on Venus, but it was a good yield, and would be worth seven work-units when placed on the market in N'yok—fifteen thousand dollars, by ancient reckoning. The almost magical properties of elysia as a super-nerve-tonic made it invaluable, for it could be grown only on the scattered islands of the Great Sea of Venus.

The televisor whistled shrilly from the dome-shaped building that was Kenworth's home. He screwed the top on the tube of elysia and went to the house, swung in through the door. He clicked the button that vacuum-sealed the room and released a welcome stream of pure, cold air. Then he touched the televisor switch.

On the screen a face sprang out in sharp detail—paper-white, streaked with crimson. The boyish features were twisted with pain, the dark eyes torture-filled.

"Dal!" a voice croaked from the receiver. "Dal—the Raider!"

Ice gripped Kenworth's heart as he recognized the boy—Jene Trenton, who, with his sister, farmed an elysia garden thirty miles away. The—Raider? Scourge of the spaceways, ruthless pirate of three planets and their moons—why was the Raider on Venus? What was Jene whispering into his transmitter?

"He—he's seized the collection ship! I—didn't know—gave him my elysia—then——" The boy coughed blood, clutched at his throat. He went on swiftly, weakly. "He saw Thona! Took her—he——"

The boy toppled. His face came rushing up at the screen, eyes blankly shut. Kenworth was suddenly aware that he was shouting into the transmitter, mouthing frantic questions. The boy's eyes opened, stared into Kenworth's.

"Save her—Ken——"

His eyes closed. Blood seeped from his mouth as his jaw fell.

Kenworth saw that he was dead.

A warning throb came from the televisor. Kenworth sprang to the door, flung it open. Against the gray clouds, dim in the rain, a black oval grew larger—the collection ship, swiftly descending. And within it—Thona Trenton and the Raider!

Kenworth found a gas-pistol—a stubby, flat weapon that was dangerously effective at close range—and a ray-tube, deadly, no longer than a pencil. He went back to the televisor and manipulated a dial. The screen went blank, was suddenly shot with a whirl of racing, blended colors.

He spoke quickly into the transmitter.

"Emergency ether-call! This is Dal Kenworth, son of President Kenworth of the Americas. The Raider is on Venus. He has seized the collection ship and is landing on my elysia farm. He has a hostage on board. Send fighting-ships at once. I'll try to hold him here."

Kenworth moved the dial, touched a switch. Immediately the screen lighted up, showing his own face. His voice came from the transmitter.

“Emergency ether-call! This is Dal Kenworth——”

Satisfied, Kenworth shut off the television receiver. That message would continue to be sent out into the ether until the sending apparatus was shut off or destroyed. And as soon as the ships of the Interplanetary Patrol received it——

He turned to the door. The collection ship, looking like a fat black cigar, was settling toward a cleared space beyond the elysia fields. As he watched it, a door in its side swung open, and a man appeared in the portal, beckoning. Kenworth hesitated. It would not do to cause suspicion—better to behave as though he suspected nothing. He moved toward the ship.

The warm, sticky rain was unpleasant after the brief respite of the air-cooled house. Anger was mounting within Kenworth. Jene—the poor kid—shot down without a chance! Well, the Raider would meet with a different reception here.

“Got your stuff?” the man in the portal hailed.

Kenworth nodded, scrutinizing him as he approached. He saw a clean-shaven face, strong-jawed, twinkling-eyed, burned almost black by the direct rays of sun in airless space where even polaroid glass was insufficient protection. The full lips, twisted in a smile, betrayed a certain sardonic amusement. But this was not the Raider, not the hawk-faced, cold-eyed man whose portrait was on the news-boards of a thousand space-ships.

Kenworth decided to play a bold hand. This man would be as anxious to avoid suspicion as was Kenworth. The pirate stood blocking the doorway with his huge bulk, his hand extended. His voice was low, deep.

“Let’s have it,” he said.

Kenworth took a small flask from his pocket, and then, hesitating, thrust it back. “Let’s get the other matter cleared up first,” he said.

The pirate’s cold eyes flickered.

Kenworth looked surprised. “Didn’t Lanna tell you?” he asked. “Isn’t Lanna here?”

“No. He—was called to N’yok on urgent business.”

Kenworth nodded. “I see. Well, it’s about that unreported elysia farm. I’ve located it.”

He saw the other hesitate, and pressed his advantage swiftly. “Let me come in—I’ll show you the spot on your chart. And you can give me the receipt for my elysia.”

Taking his host’s assent for granted, he moved forward. The other stepped aside. Kenworth knew that his gas-pistol was hidden from view beneath his jacket, but he took pains to let his hands swing in plain sight. He had been in the ship before, knew the way to the control room. He went there swiftly, conscious of sharp eyes on his back.

Seated at a desk was a slender man, his hair iron-gray, dressed in the conventional flexible black leather of the spaceways. He stood up quickly as Kenworth entered.

Kenworth held himself rigidly in check, knowing that he dared not give the Raider a hint of anything amiss. He stared at the other briefly, and then nodded.

“I’m Dal Kenworth,” he said, and tossed his elysia vial on the desk. “I can show you where that lost elysia farm is—I spoke to Lanna about it.”

The other did not answer. His eyes probed into Kenworth’s, black and cold as glacial ice. His face was austere handsome, tanned as black as his companion’s, and seamed with harsh lines. Kenworth had never seen a face so impassive, so capable of concealing all emotion.

At last he spoke. "Good. Lanna told me of it." His voice was flat, toneless, yet with a curious crispness. He clipped his words oddly.

Kenworth nodded, turned to the chart table. He ran his finger over it as though searching.

"You may have a fight on your hands," he said casually. "The chap's been trying to smuggle his elysia off Venus. Only two men this trip? I'll come along if you want."

He examined the chart, his heart in his mouth. Behind him came the flat, cold voice of the Raider.

"That's all—just two, Arn and I. But we can handle it. Gas him out if necessary, or use the ship's ray-tube. Thanks anyway."

About to answer, Kenworth felt something touch his leg. He glanced down—and jumped back, suppressing a cry. The Raider chuckled, and the other man echoed him with a gusty laugh.

"Never seen an octan before? Guess you've never been on Mars."

Kenworth grinned, although he felt a little thrill of repugnance go through him as he stared down at the octan—that strange hybrid of Mars, where so many originally submarine creatures had evolved to land-dwellers as the oceans shrank. Once, millions of years ago, the octan's ancestors had dwelt in the Martian seas. Emerging on land, they had eventually becoming dwarfed to the size of small terriers. The thing's round body was covered with a growth of short, reddish fur, and perched atop it was a globe of a head, with two unwinking, baleful eyes set above a parrot-like beak. Its limbs were tentacles—eight of them, furred, and lined with the atrophied remnants of suckers. Although Kenworth knew that the octan was tamed, not dangerous, he could not suppress an involuntary shudder.

The octan moved toward him, scuttling like a spider on its tentacle-limbs, and then paused, as though sensing his dislike. It gave a shrill whistling cry and ran back, climbing a leg of the desk and crouching atop it.

Kenworth saw that the two men were watching the octan. His chance, then, had come, and if the Raider had spoken the truth, there were only two on the ship—besides the girl, who no doubt was a captive. He snatched the ray-tube from his jacket, drew the gas-pistol with his other hand.

"Up!" His voice cracked like a whip-lash, preemptory, challenging.

The big man snarled a surprized oath, made a hasty gesture—and paused, lifting his hands. The Raider's hands were already in the air. Frightened, the octan leaped from the desk and scuttled from the room. A little feeling of apprehension went through Kenworth. But what harm could the repulsive creature do?

The larger man said, "What's this? You can't——"

The Raider interrupted him. "Don't bother, Arn. He knows who we are." Yet Kenworth sensed puzzlement in the Raider's eyes.

Kenworth said, "Where's the girl? Thona Trenton?"

The Raider smiled slightly. "She's safe, in a compartment aft. I took her because of Arn. He's a faithful lieutenant, and deserves some reward—and he said that he wanted her."

Kenworth felt rage rising within him, fought it down. He said coldly, "You'll take——"

The Raider interrupted. "You should not have let the octan go," he smiled, amusement in his eyes. "Ruthlessness and logic are the only laws by which one can live. And it was not logical to let the octan go—the creatures are more intelligent than most people think. Surely

you did not think I'd fall into your trap and tell you how many I had on this ship! Vakko—use half-strength only. There are things we must learn from our guest.”

And the Raider, his hands still held high, nodded, his eyes intent on some object beyond Kenworth!

2. Flight

Kenworth was in a quandary. He dared not turn, for the Raider might be waiting for just that opportunity. On the other hand, if there was an enemy behind him——

He pivoted very slowly, keeping his weapons aimed at Arn and the Raider. He caught a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye—and leaped back, swinging the ray-tube.

He was too late. A paralyzing shock went through him—the half-strength energy of the ray-tube—and the weapons dropped from his nerveless hands. He crumpled, fully conscious, but unable to co-ordinate his movements—suffering, actually, from a severe electric shock. Arn sprang forward, snatched up the gas-pistol and the tube.

The Raider chuckled. Another man came into view—a Martian, seven feet tall, huge-chested, with arms and legs thin as pipe-stems, his round face, with its tiny mouth and bulging eyes, like some ludicrous mask.

“Good!” the Raider said. “Good, Vakko. As for you, Arn—you would do well to learn from Vakko.”

The Martian giggled shrilly, apparently delighted. He piped something Kenworth could not understand, and at the Raider’s nod lifted Kenworth easily and laid him on a leather couch. There was surprising strength in those slender, brittle-seeming arms, with their thick growth of red fur.

The Raider gave a command, and Arn hurried away. Kenworth tried to move, but there was no feeling in his body. The effects of the ray, he knew, took some time to wear off. The Raider came close, staring down into Kenworth’s eyes.

He said slowly, “You should be thankful I told Vakko—half-strength!”

Arn returned, and at his side was a girl—gray-eyed, dark-haired, whose beauty was scarcely marred by the traces tears had left on her cheeks. As Kenworth recognized Thona Trenton he made an effort to speak, managed only an inarticulate croak. The girl flew to his side.

“Dal! What’s—are you——”

“A little ray treatment,” the Raider said gently.

Thona flashed a furious glance at him, looked down again at Kenworth. She said, choking back a sob: “They’ve killed Jene, Dal!”

Kenworth managed to nod. Too late he saw his mistake. The Raider’s eyes narrowed, and he exchanged a quick glance with Arn.

“How did you know that?” he asked quietly.

Then, realizing that Kenworth could not answer, he spoke to the Martian, who knelt by Kenworth and began to massage his body with his slender, powerful fingers. Life began to flow back into Kenworth’s veins, hastened by Vakko’s ministrations. After one or two attempts he found his voice.

“It’s all right, Thona,” he told the girl, with an assurance he did not feel. “There’s no danger.”

“And how does he know *that*?” the Raider asked, apparently of the bare wall.

He snapped his fingers suddenly, sprang to the televisor. As he clicked it on, Kenworth’s face appeared on the screen, and his voice rang through the room.

“—farm. He has a hostage on board. Send fighting-ships at once. I’ll try to hold him here.” There was a pause, in which the harsh breathing of Arn was plainly audible. Then the voice from the transmitter resumed. “Emergency ether-call! This is Dal Kenworth, son of President Kenworth of the Americas——”

The Raider waited for no more. He leaped for the control board, barking orders at Arn, who raced from the room. The ship quivered, lifted. The Raider fingered buttons, swung a lever. Abruptly the television screen went blank. Kenworth knew that the space pirate had rayed the house, destroying the television.

Thona was staring at Kenworth. “You’re—President Kenworth’s son?”

He nodded, flushing. “I—yes, Thona. I didn’t tell you—I thought it might—make a difference.”

“But—why? The son of President Kenworth on an elysia farm!” There was amazement in her eyes.

“As a matter of fact, it was a wager. A chap and I got into an argument—a commander of the Interplanetary Patrol, an old friend of my father’s—and he bet me that I was too soft to raise a crop of elysia. Lord knows it’s no easy job!” He lowered his voice. “I don’t think I could have stuck it out, Thona, if I hadn’t met you. Now don’t worry. The Raider won’t dare ——”

“I won’t dare?” The Raider stood over them, his eyes glittering in his mask-like face. “I won’t kill you—no. Neither of you. I’m tempted, I confess—but if worst comes to worst I can always bargain. And the son of President Kenworth——”

He paused, while Kenworth cursed himself for revealing his identity.

Arn came forward, frowning. He gestured to the controls, said something under his breath. The Raider nodded impatiently.

Arn said, amazement on his dark face, “You’re going to do it?”

“Yes. They’ll expect me to leave Venus to escape. We can’t take the chance of going back to our own ship—and I won’t go into space in this leaky boat. Nobody will expect us to go to the Night Side.”

Thona gasped, and her hands flew up to her cheeks. Even Kenworth paled.

Arn said unbelievably, “We’re going—to the Night Side?”

Kenworth understood his apprehension, shared it. Ships stayed on the sunward side of Venus. There was a mystery about the Night Side—the half of Venus turned perpetually away from the sun, blanketed by thick clouds and shunned by the wanderers of the spaceways. There had been a time, long ago, when expeditions had set out to explore the Night Side. They had never returned. They had gone into the enigmatic blackness armed with huge ray-tubes and gas-projectors—and had vanished.

Of the Night Side only one thing was known—no one had ever returned from it. And it was to this hidden land of eternal blackness that the Raider was guiding his ship!

Kenworth revised his opinion of the Raider as he saw Arn turn away without another word. The Martian, watching Kenworth with ray-tube in hand, said nothing. The octan scurried into the room and rubbed against Vakko’s legs, and he reached down absently to stroke it. It shrilled its pleasure. Kenworth felt Thona shudder against him.

“Keep an eye out for ships,” the Raider commanded, and Arn nodded, went to the control board.

Ignoring Kenworth, the Raider picked up the little vial of elysia from the desk. He unbuckled his leather jacket, fumbled with a thick, tubular belt he wore about his waist. It was transparent, filled with the pale elysia fluid, Kenworth saw. The Raider added Kenworth's gill of the liquid to his own stock.

"It's a fabulous fortune," he said pleasantly in his toneless voice, meeting Kenworth's gaze. "Curious that people are willing to pay so much for—emotion. That's what it is." He eyed the belt ruminatively. "Pure emotion. A scientist once explained its action to me, but I couldn't understand him, except that it seems to step up the emotions—the pleasurable sensations.

"Elysia!" he went on almost dreamily. "It's well named. Back in the Twentieth Century men used morphine and—what was it?—cocaine—to allay pain and excite pleasurable sensations. But they were drugs, and harmful. One drop of elysia will give a man days of almost unendurable ecstasy—and the feeling will last for years, wearing off only very gradually. And a larger dose will kill." He slapped the belt, chuckling. "It's lucky I'd collected from most of the farms before you intervened, Kenworth."

Arn said, "We're near the Twilight Zone now. The——" He broke off, snarled a lurid Martian oath. "*Th'gadda!* A ship—two miles off! Coming this way!"

Kenworth sat up hastily. The Martian moved closer, his ray-tube ready. The octan tried to climb up Vakko's leg, but he kicked it away impatiently.

The Raider went to the controls. He touched a button, and the televisor screen lit up, showing the outline of a ship, torpedo-shaped, bearing the insignia of the Interplanetary Patrol—three circles, intertwined.

"Interference!" the Raider said quietly. "Blanket their signals."

Arn growled assent. On the edges of the screen a flickering nimbus of pale light grew, darting and writhing inward, oddly reminiscent of the sun's corona. Kenworth knew that the Patrol ship could not now send a message for aid. He prayed that such a message had already been sent.

Thona touched his arm. He turned to her.

"I thought—hostages——" she whispered, her mouth close to his ear.

"Maybe later," he murmured in response. "Right now he wants to make his getaway. We're being kept only as a last resort. He must be pretty sure of himself."

The Raider's ears were preternaturally quick. Without turning, he said in his flat voice, "I am. Quite sure. Watch the screen, and learn how spacemen fight!"

3. *Battle—and Escape*

The conflict began. Strange air battle of the Twenty-third Century! Soundless struggle of deadly rays guided by trained, quick-thinking minds! As Kenworth watched the swift, deft movements of the Raider and his lieutenant, he began to understand the reasons for the space-pirate's reputation. For the Raider was playing with the Patrol ship, playing with it so deftly that the attacker did not realize its own impotence. And Kenworth knew that the ships of the Interplanetary Patrol were not manned by fools—no! To command a Patrol ship was a high honor—and one not easily gained. Yet the diabolical cunning of the Raider had the Patrol ship at his mercy.

The flickering rays still nimbused the screen, dimming and flashing out again as the clashing rays of the two ships flared—invisible rays of paralysis and death! The heavy armor that plated the ships could resist a certain amount of raying, but if a ship remained in the path of a beam for more than a few seconds, the ray would penetrate the armor and reduce the crew to a state of helpless paralysis. Kenworth saw that the Patrol ship was not using the death-rays, no doubt because the Patrol Commander knew or suspected the existence of the Raider's hostages. And the Raider, too, was using his rays at half-strength only. Kenworth, an expert at space piloting, cursed under his breath as he watched the Raider send his craft through a breath-taking series of whirls and dives. He realized that when the Raider decided to strike, he could almost instantly ray the Patrol ship out of existence.

But why was he delaying? What was he planning? There was no hint of his intentions on that gaunt, immobile face.

The mad spins and lurches of the ship did not discommode the passengers, due to the artificial gravity field existing within the craft. But, watching the madly flaring screen, Kenworth saw the Patrol ship slip aside and vanish, saw the jagged peaks of a mountain range come rushing up, dim in the grayness of the Twilight Zone. The ship was falling!

A voice boomed through the cabin. "Surrender, Raider! Kill your rays!"

A tight smile flickered over the Raider's face. He said in a swift aside, "Arn, keep the interference on."

Arn grunted, little beads of perspiration standing out like jewels on his space-blackened face. Kenworth felt Thona huddle against him. For a moment a thrill of fear went through him, but a glance at the screen was instantly reassuring. The mountains seemed to be stopping their mad march toward the ship, slowing down. The Patrol craft lurched into view. Abruptly it began to recede in a series of curious little jumps.

Kenworth knew that this was illusion. The Raider was fleeing, and the screen darkened steadily, with the pursuing Patrol ship a black silhouette against the pale gray sky. The titanic mountains of the Twilight Zone dimmed, faded to darkness. They were entering the Night Side.

The Raider clicked over a switch. The dead blackness of the screen lightened, showed the Patrol ship. But there was a curious lack of perspective, of color. It was a shadow-picture, two-dimensional and unreal. Ultra-violet rays were responsible. All space-ships were equipped with them, Kenworth knew. Invisible light, making a strange shadowland of the blackness!

And now Kenworth realized the Raider's plan. The nimbus of light still flickered on the screen, and the Patrol ship could not summon help, for the Raider's interference mechanism blanketed the other ship's signals. The Raider might have destroyed his attacker in the Twilight Zone—but that would have left the Patrol ship's wreck to attract attention, pointing a definite finger of suspicion toward the Night Side. Pretending to be crippled, the Raider was luring his enemy into the hidden blackness of Venus—and there he would strike!

Kenworth began to search the room with his eyes, methodically seeking several devices which he knew should be in the control chamber. A plan was forming in his mind—but he would have to act quickly. Luckily he had been in the collection ship before, and it was not long before he saw a rack of small tubes on the wall, tubes that resembled the paralysis-ray projectors, but which were in reality light-tubes. And light would be vitally necessary on the Night Side—if they could escape from the ship.

Kenworth located, too, a shelf on which a dozen small packages were piled—parachutes, made from the incredibly tough filaments spun by the Cave Spiders of Mars. He put his arm unobtrusively around Thona, drawing her close. She looked up inquiringly.

He prisoned one of her small hands in his big one. Then, his eyes on the Martian, he pressed his thumb against Thona's palm, released it. Vakko did not move. His bulging eyes stared emotionlessly at Kenworth. Using the Interplanetary Code—adapted from the archaic Morse—which every citizen had to learn, Kenworth began to give Thona a message. *Dot*—a brief pressure—*dash*—a longer one—

“When I give the word, get light-tubes and parachutes.” Swiftly he indicated where they were.

Thona's eyes did not flicker. The answering pressure of her warm fingers gave Kenworth the message, “I understand.”

Now they were far into the Night Side, racing through the blackness from the Patrol Ship. Another screen had been put into operation, for the Raider did not care to crash blindly upon an uncharted mountain peak. But at this height there was little danger of such an accident.

Kenworth watched the Raider, and took the opportunity to send another message to Thona.

“Now!” the Raider said, the word coldly metallic. He touched a lever, flung over a switch.

Arn growled, “Good! Then we can get out of this—darkness.”

The Raider said nothing. On the screen the Patrol ship grew larger. Rays leaped out—invisible, detectable only by the reactions of delicate indicating instruments. The Raider's face grew intent, like a mask cut out of black stone.

The Martian's eyes flickered toward the screen.

Kenworth moved. Like an uncoiling spring he shot toward Vakko, smashing against the Martian's pipe-stem legs. Vakko toppled. The ray-tube was jerked from his hand, went spinning across the room. He screamed in an oddly piercing, shrill voice.

Thona was running across the room. The Raider swung about, and as he moved a grinding crash rasped through the ship. The pirate wheeled, his fingers darting lightning-like over the controls. His momentary inattention had almost lost him the battle with the Patrol ship.

“Arn!” His command stopped the big lieutenant, brought him, too, back to the controls. “Get the Patrol ship!” he snapped. “*Quick!* Then—”

Kenworth had counted on this. In the crisis, the final battle between the two ships, the Raider would need both Arn and himself at the controls—would not dare turn to face a lesser peril, knowing that a moment's inattention would mean disaster. Already there was a warning

tingling shuddering through Kenworth's body—the first taste of the Patrol ship's paralyzing rays, lancing through the protecting armor!

He snapped a vicious blow at the Martian's pouchy chest, and Vakko shrieked his pain. But the deceptively slender arms did not relax, and, cursing, Kenworth drove blow after blow into the Martian's body. He heard a shrill piping, and felt something whip across his eyes. Tentacles wound about his head, and a vicious beak stabbed at his face. The octan!

He put all his strength into a sledge-hammer blow that smashed bones in the Martian's chest. The binding arms relaxed, and Kenworth leaped to his feet, tore away the octan's tentacles. The parrot-like beak snapped viciously at his hand, and the thing squealed in futile rage. He flung it from him, turned.

He had a flashing glimpse of a maelstrom of titanic forces racing across the televisor screen. The Raider was still at the control board, his fingers darting to and fro. Arn was on his feet, plunging toward him, gas-gun leveled.

Thona was gone. Kenworth spun, leaped for the doorway. Something popped near his head, and a cloud of greenish gas sprang into existence, writhing as though alive. He got through the door, holding his breath, and swung it shut. A precious moment was wasted while he searched for a bolt that was not there. Then he turned and went racing along the corridor.

"Dal!" It was Thona's voice. "Dal—here!"

She was standing by an open oval of emptiness through which a blast of racing wind screamed. She made a quick movement with her hand, threw something out of the ship. Light flared. It was a light-tube, hurtling downward, lighting the dead blackness of the Night Side.

Kenworth adjusted the parachute Thona handed him, saw the tumbled surface of land far below. He heard Arn shouting, and a gas-pellet burst against the wall. But the greenish vapor was instantly dissipated by the rushing blast. Kenworth seized Thona's hand and they leaped together out into space.

A warning tingling sent fear darting through Kenworth. Away from the protecting insulation of the ship, the paralyzing rays were bathing them. Realizing that this would happen, Kenworth had determined not to open the parachutes until they had fallen beneath the range of the rays. But would the fall be swift enough to save them? Would they become paralyzed—unable to open the parachutes?

The tingling ceased; in the white flare the ground rushed up at them. With a word to Thona, Kenworth touched the stud that opened his parachute. The two 'chutes blossomed together.

Above them the ships whirled and spun and dived in mad conflict. Abruptly the Raider's ship flashed away, came darting down at them. Kenworth could guess what was in the Raider's mind. His hostages were invaluable—he dared not lose them. But to land and recapture the two meant laying himself open to the Patrol ship's attack.

The Raider fled, was lost in the darkness. The other ship slanted down. Kenworth could guess, too, what lay in the mind of the Patrol ship's commander. Like the Raider, he wished to land, to pick up the two refugees. But he would realize that the moment his ship touched the soil of Venus, his defenses down, the Raider would come swooping out of the shadows, his rays working deadly havoc before the other ship could be lifted from the ground.

The landscape swayed, rocking as they drifted down. Now the light-tube was dying. Even the tempered metal of the tube had been unable to withstand the impact. But the light had served its purpose. It had revealed the landing-place.

Rock. Great plains of rock, fantastically colored, with here and there small patches of the dull gray soil of Venus. Over all lay a silvery sheen, the brilliant sparkle of frost. An icy chill struck through Kenworth. The Night Side, turned perpetually from the sun, would naturally be cold—but the wonder was that it was not colder than this. Then he realized the solution—the dense atmosphere that blanketed the Night Side from the utter chill of airless space.

They touched the ground, rolled over. Kenworth helped Thona up, brushing white frost from her garments. He hesitated, glancing around.

Thona, completely invisible as the last traces of the light died, groped closer.

“Dal!” she said, a curious note of fear in her voice. “Dal! Do you feel—something strange?”

4. *Spawn of Darkness*

Kenworth knew what she meant. Yet the sensation was utterly unreal, fantastic. It was like a queer sensation of movement within his brain—provoking some half-forgotten memory—now evading him, now swimming into view——

He had it! Once, in N'yok, he had attended a council of telepathists, that small group of scientists who had devoted their lives to experimenting with telepathy. And it was there that Kenworth had experienced a sensation similar to this inexplicable *motion* within his brain.

Remembering the theories of the telepathists, he threw his mind open, made it blank, receptive. But no message came. Only breaking in through the darkness came Thona's voice.

"Dal! Where are you?"

Shaking his head, he looked around, blinded by the darkness, realizing that he had unwittingly moved forward a few paces. As he answered, a little ray of light flickered on, and in its light he saw Thona near by, holding a light-tube in her hand. At his surprised glance she smiled, and said,

"I managed to get two of them." Then she sobered. "What is this—sensation? It feels as though something's pulling at my brain!"

Kenworth started. That had been his own sensation, exactly. And, indeed, under its guidance he had moved forward.

He told Thona of the telepathy theory. "The scientists have often conjectured on the possibility of a race existing without oral speech, speaking by thought-impulses alone. It's not as fantastic as it seems—indeed, they've proved the possibility of telepathy." He took the light-tube from Thona, adjusted it until only a faint glow shone out. "We'd better move, Thona. If the Raider destroys the Patrol ship—as I think he will—he'll be back. And he mustn't find us here."

A shadow fell on Thona's face. "But how can we get back? It's impossible, Dal—it may be thousands of miles even to the Twilight Zone!"

Kenworth smiled with an assurance he did not feel. "We can make it. It'll be quite a walk, but—have you your food tablets?" Every citizen was required by law to carry a packet of these concentrated food pellets, and Thona pulled a flat metal container from her pocket.

"What about water, though?" She answered her own question as the light gleamed on the frost-rime on the rocks. "The ice—of course. But what about direction?"

Kenworth glanced up, but the stars were hidden by the thick cloud-masses. He switched off the light, waited for his eyes to grow accustomed to the darkness. Then he touched the girl's arm.

"There, Thona. See?" Abruptly he realized that she could not see his pointing finger, and fumbled for her head, felt the soft curls beneath his fingers. He turned her head slowly. "Do you see that glow—very faint, though—far away on the horizon?"

"No . . . oh, yes. But it's scarcely visible."

"Doesn't matter." Kenworth hesitated. A little warning premonition went through him. The light was strangely blue-tinged to be the daylight of Venus. But what other explanation could there be to this light on the Night Side?

"Well, come on," Thona said. But after a few steps she paused, staring at Kenworth. He nodded.

“Funny. I felt it, too. That—queer feeling in my head is gone. I wonder——”

But it was useless to conjecture. Haste was necessary, and for a time the two hurried on in utter silence, climbing over jagged rocks, slipping more than once on the frost-rime that lay like a fantastic arabesque over everything. It was cold, but no colder than a N’yok winter, and the exercise of walking warmed them.

They had been walking for almost two hours, by Kenworth’s wrist chronometer, when they saw the strange white thing. It lay like a great pale pancake nearly two feet in diameter, on a flat surface of grayish soil. For a space about it there was no frost on the ground, and as the two approached they could feel a faint, gentle warmth radiating from the thing.

It had only one feature, a branch-like arm projecting vertically from the center, about a foot long. And the creature—whatever it was—was not immobile. It pulsed gently.

“Careful,” Kenworth said. “It’s a plant of some sort, I think.”

“It’s alive,” Thona commented.

Kenworth moved forward, touched the spongy, rubbery surface of the thing. The pulsations continued undisturbed.

“Curious,” he said. “But not much help. We need a guide, not a plant.”

He turned away, checked himself at Thona’s astonished exclamation.

“Look!” She was pointing at the plant. Kenworth stared.

The vertical branch projecting up from the white pancake was no longer vertical. Its tip was bent at a right angle.

“It’s—pointing,” Thona said.

“Impossible! How could a plant——”

The branch moved slowly until it was again upright. Then it bent down again—jerked for all the world like a pointing finger!

“It’s pointing, Dal.”

He was not convinced. “No . . . but flowers turn with the sun sometimes, don’t they? This may be something similar——”

From the gloom came a startling sound—a sharp, sudden bark, abruptly chopped off. Kenworth whirled. It came again—a hoarse shouting. And it repeated over and over the single word:

“Dal! Dal! Dal!”

The two stared at each other. As the voice paused Thona whispered. “The Raider?”

Kenworth shook his head, frowning, puzzled. He took a step in the direction of the voice, noticing that it was there that the plant-branch was pointing. Thona kept close to him.

About fifty feet away they came out into a little plain of gray soil, ringed with garishly colored rock. The place was quite warm, Kenworth realized with amazement. In the middle of this cleared space was another of the strange white plants—but far different from the original one.

This was huge. A dozen feet in diameter, dome-shaped, with a score of long branches shooting up from the thing’s center, it lay pulsating and throbbing with life. And as the two watched, the plant began to rotate like a great turntable. It turned very slowly, until on the surface facing Kenworth and Thona appeared a group of odd appurtenances—organs, apparently. A small puckered orifice reminded Kenworth of a mouth, although it remained immobile and silent. Ringed about it were six bulging white domes. The whiteness vanished

momentarily from one of them, and Kenworth saw a black shining surface. Then the pale skin covered it again.

Had the plant—*eyes?*

“What is it, Dal?” Thona asked shakily.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Plants have evolved considerably on Mars, I’ve heard, but never to this stage. I wonder if the thing can—understand us.”

The puckered orifice on the plant’s surface twitched convulsively, and opened. From it came an ear-shattering bellow that made Thona cry out, clapping her hands to her outraged ears. Kenworth took a step back, his eyes widening. And still the hoarse yelling kept on, rising and falling like the hooting of a siren. Abruptly Kenworth realized that there was a definite sequence in the shouting. The thing was yelling—words!

Kenworth stopped his ears with his fingers, and suddenly the yelling faded, became articulate, understandable.

“Can—un—der—stan’! Can—un—der—stan’!”

Thona touched his arm. “He—it—says he understands!”

Kenworth was not so sure. “I don’t know. Some automatic reflex of repetition, perhaps,” he said, shouting to make himself heard above the tumult. Suddenly the bellowing changed.

“No—rep—i—ti—shun! Can—un—der—stan’!”

“Ye gods!” Kenworth said. “The thing’s intelligent!”

And yet—why not? On Mars plants had evolved, under careful training had shown faint gleams of intelligence. And certainly there was a tremendous gulf between an ordinary plant and this incredibly developed plant-monster. Kenworth realized abruptly that he had seen no animal life on the Night Side. Free from the vegetable kingdom’s natural enemies—grazing animals, destroying mankind—why could not a plant develop through the eons into an intelligent creature, just as man had evolved through uncounted millenniums?

And the thing unquestionably was intelligent. The hooting died away, and in the silence Kenworth increased the brilliancy of his light-tube. Again came that thunderous bellowing.

“No—no—no—no!”

The lids protecting the thing’s eyes twitched. Strong lights, to this being of eternal night, was painful—naturally enough. Kenworth adjusted the light until it was a very faint glow. He said, “How is it you speak our language?”

Surprisingly, the thing shouted, “Telepathy!”

“What?” Kenworth could scarcely believe his ears. This amazing monster of an alien planet!

“Read words—in mind—Kenworth mind—Thona mind—pictures—words——”

Thona said to him, “But we don’t think in words, Dal. We think in pictures.”

“No, Thona. You’re wrong. Really our thoughts are a combination of words and images. This thing seems to be reading the words in our minds, and seeing our thought-images, seeing what the words stand for! It’s possible—indeed, the only way true thought-communication, can be established. Those N’yok scientists told me——”

The bellowing roared out again. “See word-sounds—pictures—yes. Understand.”

“See, Thona?” Kenworth said. “It’s fantastic—but scientifically logical.”

He turned to the plant-creature. “What are you? I mean—what sort——” He stumbled, paused, and the shouting interrupted him.

“Plant—no. Evolved plant—yes. Lived here always.”

Kenworth asked curiously, “Are there many of you? Do you mean you’ve lived—*always?*”

Arbitrary time-designations would mean little to the creature, he thought. But the plant caught his meaning.

“Not—like this. Not many—no. Grow—grow——” The thundering voice paused, apparently puzzled. Then it resumed. “Other plant—you saw. Me. Part of me. Born—born—rooted to me. I—die, yes. It lives, has—babies.”

Thona could not repress a giggle. Even Kenworth chuckled. Babies! Yet that was the thought the plant had read in the humans’ minds—babies, indeed!

Yet Kenworth realized what the creature meant. The first plant-thing they had seen was the offspring of the great plant—connected, apparently, by an underground root. In time the mother plant—if one could use that term of a sexless, or rather bi-sexual vegetable—would die, and the other would become independent, have “babies” of its own.

Thona said, “If it can read our minds, why does it have to talk to us—audibly?” She spoke directly to Kenworth, oddly averse to addressing the plant directly. But the thing bellowed an answer.

“No—your minds already—getting thoughts. Not from me. Cannot—me—cannot break in.”

Thona turned a white face to Kenworth. “Did you hear that? It says our minds are already _____”

Kenworth nodded, remembered the strange feeling he had had directly after the escape from the Raider. “I don’t get any thoughts, though,” he said slowly.

“Not—thoughts,” the plant bellowed. “Command—urge—pull. Drags you to—to—thought-giver.” A branch bent, pointing. “Light—yes, blue light—you go there.”

“Then it isn’t the daylight after all,” Kenworth said.

Thona’s lips were trembling. “We’ll keep away from there, Dal. If——”

The shouting broke in. “No keep away—cannot. Drags you there. Dragged everything on—on—Night Side there—long ago. Only me—plants like me—rooted——”

The branches growing from the plant-thing’s center twitched, stirred. They writhed apart, oddly like tentacles. One of the plant’s bulbous eyes flickered open momentarily.

And without warning the monster struck!

5. *Power of Thought*

The branches—no longer stiffly erect, but pliant, writhing—came racing down to Thona and Kenworth. They curled about the two, lifting them from their feet. Kenworth felt his ribs crack as the plant-tentacles tightened about him. Dimly he heard Thona scream.

He struck out at the binding branches as he was lifted, realized that he still gripped the light-tube in one hand. A sharp pain darted through his leg. He saw the tip of a tentacle boring into the flesh—saw the pallor of the plant change, become roseate, crimson. The thing was sucking blood from his veins.

Once Kenworth had seen a mouse caught by one of the giant pitcher-plants of earth. Now he realized what the mouse must have felt, helpless, drained dry of blood by the vampire plant. He struggled frantically—uselessly. Held high above the dome-shaped body of the creature, he was powerless to harm it—and the tentacles were tough as steel.

Light! The thing feared light! As the thought flashed into his brain he knew that the plant read his mind. A tentacle loosened, made a swift dart for the light-tube. But already Kenworth had made the adjustment that sent a flood of blinding brilliance glaring out from the cylinder.

Creature of the dark—to which light was a blinding agony! The thin membrane over the plant's eyes was little protection, and as the glaring radiance streamed out Kenworth felt the tentacles about him contract, twist in midair, and loosen. He slipped through them, fell, gripping the light-tube desperately. Rubbery flesh gave beneath his feet; for a moment he felt the pulsing body of the monster beneath him, and then he leaped aside.

“Thona!” he called.

A faint cry brought him to her side. She lay on the gray soil, where she had been thrown by the agonized plant. Kenworth picked her up and sprinted to safety.

But the plant was no longer a menace. Its tentacles lay like a mat of white vines over its eyes, protecting them from the glare. Beyond the reach of the monster Kenworth put Thona down, anxiously felt for her pulse.

She was unhurt. The soft soil had broken the force of her fall. In a moment she sat up, terror in her eyes.

“We’re safe, Thona,” Kenworth said, conscious of the bitter irony of the words. And, echoing him, came the sound of a flat, metallic laugh.

“Quite safe. And thanks for the light. I’d never have found you otherwise.”

Kenworth wheeled, just as the great bulk of the collection ship grounded near by. Framed in the open portal was the Raider, his dark face immobile. In his hand was a ray-tube.

“Don’t move,” he said quietly. “I can paralyze you in a moment.”

Thona whispered, “The Patrol ship——”

“I destroyed it. Come!”

Thona and Kenworth exchanged hopeless glances. Then, shrugging, Kenworth moved forward. Satisfaction gleamed in the Raider’s eyes.

There came a swift rustle of movement from behind him. He staggered, nearly fell. Racing out of the ship came the octan, shrilling its thin cry.

It scuttled past Kenworth and went flashing away. Kenworth clicked off his light-tube, and, thrusting it in his pocket, leaped for the Raider. He stumbled over the threshold of the ship’s portal. Light flared.

The Raider stood almost beside him, a light-tube in one hand, a ray-tube in the other. He jumped back, keeping the ray-tube leveled. Kenworth, tensed to spring, realized the futility of such an attempt.

“Get in the ship,” the Raider said coldly.

Vakko, the Martian, came to the portal. He fluted a question at the Raider, who gestured into the surrounding gloom, said something in his flat voice. The Martian hesitated—and turned his head slowly, listening. Then he, too, took a step forward, another step—and raced away in the track of the octan!

“Vakko!” The Raider’s voice was preemptory, menacing. He swung the ray-tube away from Kenworth, paused.

The Martian was lost in the shadows.

Arn came out of the ship. He paid no attention to the others, but simply walked off into the gloom, his pace steadily increasing.

Thona turned. She began to follow him.

The Raider was behaving oddly. He, too, stood in an attitude of listening. And throbbing within Kenworth’s brain came that curious sense of movement that he had already experienced. And this time it summoned.

It called—beckoned! He felt himself swaying toward the shadows where the others had vanished. He saw the Raider’s face, astonishment in the black eyes, saw light-tube and ray-tube drop from the pirate’s hands. What had the plant-thing said? “Thoughts . . . command . . . drags you to thought-giver.”

Like a great wave, blackness engulfed him!

Thud . . . thud . . . rhythmic thudding . . . of racing feet . . . slowly Kenworth fought back to consciousness. He saw bobbing figures outlined against a strangely blue glow before him, heard hoarse breathing. At his side was the Raider, gaunt face expressionless, running easily. But why were they running?

Realization struck home to him. The darkness that had shrouded his mind lifted. He saw his surroundings.

He was in a crater—vast, with distant jagged walls that marched like a great ramp. It was lighted by a bluish radiance that came from a mound in the crater’s center—a strange mound, glistening and heaving very slowly.

The bobbing figures ahead paused. Kenworth saw the elongated silhouette of the Martian, saw Arn’s bulky body, the slim form of Thona. He came up with them, stopped. The last traces of the fog lifted from his mind.

He caught Thona in his arms, fearful that she might race away again. The Martian pointed, and Arn growled an oath.

The racing form of the octan was still moving swiftly across the crater’s floor toward the glistening knoll. It raced onward, flung itself on the mound—and was engulfed! It disappeared in the shining, radiant surface. The blue glow brightened briefly, faded again.

Kenworth heard the Raider cursing in a dull, hopeless monotone.

Arn said, with a curious catch in his gruff voice, “What—is that thing?”

The Raider said, “Don’t you remember the Korla crater? On Mars?”

Arn paled beneath his space-burn. He said, “But this creature——”

“Is larger. Yes. A hundred times larger. But it’s the same kind of being.”

“What do you mean?” Kenworth broke in. “Do you know what that—creature—is?”

As the Raider glanced at him Kenworth realized that the man was an enemy, and stepped back involuntarily. But the other made no hostile move.

“I know,” the Raider said. “Yes. And I know we’ll all be dead very shortly.” He shrugged. “I saw one of these once in a Martian crater. It’s alive—but a life-form entirely alien to us. It’s unicellular. I had a scientist in my crew then, and he explained it to me. Said it might have come—on—or in—a meteorite, as the crater seemed to indicate. Or it might have evolved . . . it’s an ameba.”

Arn said slowly, “There wasn’t a living thing—nothing but plants and trees—for miles around the Korla crater.”

“And that thing was small—very small. Yet we felt its influence.”

“Telepathy!” Kenworth said. “It sent out thought-impulses to capture us . . . but an ameba?”

“Yes. It’s a unicellular creature—Janna told me—an alien life-form, developed along lines unfamiliar to us. It has no need to seek food—it draws food to it by means of its powerful thought-commands. Vakko!”

But the Martian was gone—racing across the crater floor toward the glistening mound. They watched, fascinated, as Vakko approached the creature—and was engulfed. A thin scream came to them. Then silence.

“What are we waiting for?” Kenworth snapped. “Come on!”

But he did not move. Astonishment showed on his face.

The Raider laughed grimly. “Because we can’t get away. I’ve been trying . . . the thing’s holding us with its thought-commands—dragging us to it, one by one!”

6. In the Crater

Desperately Kenworth struggled. He could move, he found, but only in one direction—toward the shining blue mound. He could almost feel the thought-commands pressing a blanket upon his brain, slowing his movements, pulling at him—like a snake holding a bird with its hypnotic glare, drawing it closer to the gleaming fangs!

He felt Thona move, struggle to escape from his arms. He said sharply, “Thona!”

A film seemed to be over her eyes. Abruptly this vanished, and she stared at him fearfully. He held her closer.

The Raider said, “Janna—the scientist—was quite enthusiastic—wanted to study the thing closely. He nearly did for us, too. Luckily I set the controls on the ship before I lost consciousness. When I recovered we were nearly past Phobos. And that was scarcely a tenth as large as this creature!”

Arn said, “The ray-tubes——”

“We tried them,” the Raider reminded him. “Don’t you remember? We couldn’t hurt it. Even the ship’s ray-tubes failed. Janna said the thing built up some sort of resistance that shunted off the rays. The powers of such a creature!” he cried, and for the first time Kenworth heard emotion in the Raider’s voice. “It’s destroyed all animal life on the Night Side!”

Arn moved forward swiftly. The Raider ran after him, seized his arm. For a moment the two moved together toward the crater’s center; then the Raider released Arn. Perspiration dewed his gaunt face as he turned back, but he could not retrace his steps. He stood facing Kenworth, his mouth a tight line. Abruptly he pointed.

Kenworth turned, saw a faint glow in the sky, far beyond the crater’s rim.

“There!” the Raider said. “My light-tube. I dropped it by the ship. If we could escape, we could find our way back by that——”

He turned, shrugging. Arn was quite close to the blue mound now. His arm was outstretched, and Kenworth caught a glance of light on metal. Arn was raying the monster.

Useless! A little sparkle showed that the tube had fallen from Arn’s hand. He sprang forward—and was engulfed!

The blue light brightened. Sparkling threads of radiance shot through the mound. It pulsed more swiftly.

The Raider looked over his shoulder. “Janna said it—eats—not so much for food as for—emotion. It can draw its food from the soil, like a plant, he said. He thought it gets some sort of unearthly pleasure from what it devours.”

Incredible . . . and yet—mankind’s development was both mental and emotional. Why could not this ameoid thing have developed its sense of emotion at the expense of intelligence? A mindless entity, sending out its thought-commands by instinct, as a pitcher-plant exudes its luring fluid to attract victims . . . it was possible, Kenworth knew. The blue light had flared brighter when Arn was engulfed than when the octan or the Martian had been—was that because Arn’s brain was more highly developed, had given the creature more pleasurable sensations?

The creature was as far removed from an ameba as man was. On earth the ameba had changed, evolved from a unicellular being to a creature of many cells.

But if the cell had *not* divided? Its evolution would have been far different! And an ameba had no intelligence, had but the urge of hunger. Might not a creature descended directly from a single-celled ameba be an entity living for sensation alone, its hunger urge taking the place of all other pleasurable sensations? Sex? The thing was sexless!

But that the monster could be accounted for scientifically did not lessen its deadly menace. For suddenly Thona tore herself from Kenworth's arms, went racing toward the blue mound.

For a moment Kenworth stared, unmoved. Then he sprinted after her, shouting her name. Could he catch her in time?

Not twenty feet from the mound he seized her, held her tightly. She fought him furiously, and he was forced to prison her arms to her sides. She kicked him, but his tough boots saved him from injury.

And now within Kenworth's mind the blackness began to grow again. The thought-command grew more powerful, usurping his brain. He fought frantically, but still the summoning call dragged at him. He began to move toward the blue mound, still clutching Thona to him.

One half of his mind seemed to hold aloof, watching, while the other part, obeying the thought-summons, dragged him forward. Helpless bird moving toward a hungry snake's fangs! His breathing was harsh in the dead stillness.

His foot struck something, the ray-tube Arn had dropped. Somehow he bent over, scooped it up. But Thona pulled free, moved toward the waiting mound. It was nearly twenty feet high, pulsating, shot with glowing veins. Kenworth managed to lift the tube, although he felt as though he was lifting an impossibly heavy weight.

But he could not ray the monster. Thona was in the path of the beam. Moreover, Arn had tried the ray's power, and had failed. The monster had dragged him forward inexorably.

The thought flashed into Kenworth's mind, and he acted swiftly. He touched the button on the tube that adjusted the ray to half-strength, sent that paralyzing beam darting out. The blue mound was not troubled; but Thona stopped, crumpled in a limp heap to the ground. Paralyzed—unable to obey the monster's thought-command!

Kenworth turned the tube, sent its beam tingling through his body. Ice gripped him. He fell.

There was a queer numbness in his head, and the sense of movement within his brain grew more pronounced. But he could not move. He was safe—until the effects of the ray wore off!

He looked for the ray-tube. It was beside him, and he knew that when the paralysis wore off he could seize it, send the ray through Thona and himself again. But eventually the tube would become exhausted. Death had not been avoided—it had merely been postponed.

Pacing into view came the Raider. Almost at Kenworth's side he stopped. Veins ridged his forehead with the tremendous effort he put forth. He remained like an image of stone, and Kenworth saw sweat running down his gaunt cheeks, dripping from his chin.

The terrible, silent battle went on. Still the Raider fought, glaring straight ahead at the blue mound.

It was a conflict that could have but one ending. Suddenly the Raider moved, made a hasty clutch for the ray-tube at his feet. But before he touched it he stiffened. His mask-like face turned toward the mound.

The Raider stood up.

He took a few slow steps—and rushed forward. A hoarse bellow of defiance roared out from his throat. He leaped upon the mound! The shining blue substance surged up around him in swift ameboid movement, engulfing him.

For a moment there was no change in the monster. Then, very suddenly, the blue light brightened. The sparkling veins gleamed coldly brilliant. The thing pulsed more swiftly.

The blue light shone brighter. The little veins were like white-hot threads of metal, and the pulsations became more rapid. The mound surged up! It rose into a great pillar of blazing blue light, and a core of intolerable brilliance began to shine within it. It throbbed and rocked with ecstasy! It shuddered with infinite pleasure!

And Kenworth remembered—*the elysia!*

A year's supply of the drug, gathered from hundreds of farms, had been in the tube-belt about the Raider's waist. A drop of the substance would last a man for months. What had the Raider called it? "Pure emotion . . . days of almost unendurable ecstasy."

And the belt had held a year's yield of elysia!

Throbbing, the mound rocked, blazing radiance poured from it. The core of light in the pillar was incandescent, flaming with cold fire. It streamed out blindingly.

And the light snapped out and vanished!

Utter darkness filled the crater. Flashing light images still played on Kenworth's eyes, but these faded swiftly. He blinked experimentally.

The paralysis was leaving him. The ray-tube must have been almost exhausted. Life flooded back into his veins. He fumbled in a pocket, found the light-tube he had thrust there just before the engulfing blackness had blotted out his senses. He heard Thona stirring.

"Dal!" Her voice was frightened. He clicked on the light, saw her on her feet. His eyes widened as he stared past her.

For there lay the blue mound—no longer blue, no longer—living! Pale and translucent it lay in a shapeless pile, and within it Kenworth saw the filaments—black threads now.

Thona said, unbelievably, "It's—dead!"

Kenworth echoed her. "Dead. The elysia did it—the Raider saved us, Thona, though he didn't know it. The creature lived on sensation—but there's a limit to everything. A dozen drops of elysia will kill a man; and that tremendous dose of the drug simply burned out the thing's life! It was like sending a billion volts of electric current through a copper wire—it burned out the nerve-tissues. It's dead, Thona!"

Her eyes were very bright as she looked up at him. He drew her close, flung out an arm toward the crater's rim where a pale glow shone in the sky.

"And there's the light-tube the Raider dropped. It'll guide us to the ship."

For a brief space they stood silent, two tiny figures lost in an immensity of blackness that pressed in from all sides—like the race of Man, on three little worlds lost in the vastness of infinity, staring out into the unknown. Then, together, they began to walk forward—symbol of man—unafraid—conquering!

[The end of *Raider of the Spaceways* by Henry Kuttner]