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54 **SUPER SCIENCE** **STORIES**



**WORLD
REBORN**
by **THORNTON AYRE**

**THE
LOTUS-ENGINE**
by **RAYMOND Z. GALLUN**
FEARN • VINCENT • F.B. LONG

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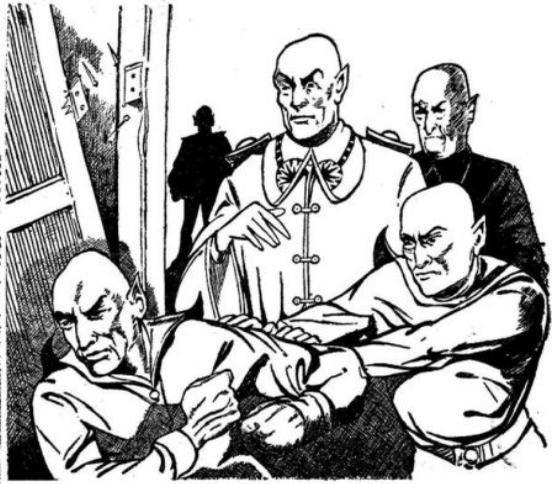
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WORLD REBORN

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre.

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A voice came over the loud-speaker in the stratosphere globe, singing a song that had no place on Earth. Was it a girl that was singing, or was it a siren, leading the men out into space to betray their world?

CHAPTER ONE

The Voice From Space

Stratosphere Control Globe No. 7 was at the limit of its 25-mile long anchor cable, hung like a monstrous floating orange bladder in the moonlight. Around this time, 10:00 P.M. activity was fierce and exacting within the globe's instrument-stacked and cushioned interior.

Steve Doyle, red-headed, square-shouldered weather reporter of the globe, squatted before his lighted map, poring over the electrically recorded movements of winds and air currents. From such recordings it was his essential task—in this part of the sky at least—to forecast the quality of the weather to the pilots of the countless stratosphere machines crowding the upper ways at this time of night.

In many ways Control Globe No. 7 was the master signal box of the air, demanding if possible even greater exactitude than had been the case with the old fashioned railway of forty years earlier. . . . This was 1980, with traffic almost entirely relegated to the atmosphere.

"Wind 15 mph in Upper Levels, increasing on lower air lanes. Ceiling—infinity. . . ." Steve's deep voice, mechanical in its intonation, repeated the reports constantly, varying them only as new formations appeared on the map.

Once or twice he glanced up to watch a stratosphere plane go shooting past in the viiplates. . . . Liners, freighters, little private buses, all relying on his judgment. Never once had he slipped up—But yes, just once. There was the memory of the X-46. But then that had not been his fault. . . . The liner had just vanished into thin air, had failed to pass this globe on time and had never been seen again. The mystery of the X-46 with three hundred men and women aboard had been relegated to the limbo of the unsolved. . . .

Midnight came at length, and the thick hordes of fliers were down to minimum. Steve relaxed and gave a wide yawn, swung round in his swivel chair to survey his solitary colleague, "Slats" Camberwell, the globe's engineer, upon whom devolved the responsibility of keeping the rocket engines in tip-top order. Upon them, and the system of lighter-than-air buoys on the globe's underside, rested the safety of the sphere's position and its motionless hovering.

Slats at the moment was slumped in the old canvas backed chair before the 24-inch telescope. His feet were thrust up on the table, his lazy blue eyes half closed. A thin wisp of strong smoke curled from the age-old briar he invariably sucked.

"Ever stop to think we might make something, Steve, if we could invent a fuel strong enough to drive a tub like this across space?"

Steve shrugged moodily. "Yeah, I've thought about it—but what's the use? *Ampovox* is the strongest fuel we can find. It gets us this high, anyway. I guess we'll have to wait for atomic force before we can climb into space itself. Anyway, when we do, we have the ships all mapped out. They'll be just like this tub—sealed, airtight, everything we want."

Slats nodded slowly, scratched his wiry black hair pensively.

"Sitting up here for a two weeks shift, day and night, makes me feel like a god," he grinned. "Y'know, staring down on that smudge o' light that's New York. Makes one feel sort of—exalted. Get it?"

"So what?" Steve growled. "If you're a god maybe you can get the Company to fix us a raise in salary. . . ."

Slats shrugged, leaned over and switched on the radio.

“At least we have free music,” he commented. “Nothing like hot rhythm to cheer up an old philosopher like me. . . .”

He sat back appreciatively, gazing at the instrument’s visiplat as an ash-white blonde with sinuous shoulders undulated gently to and fro, crooning a deep contralto.

Steve snorted. “Huh! Vera Rawley, from the Ambassador’s down in the city. She burns me up. . . . No sense of timing.”

He stood up and mooched to the window. The time for his special weather reports was over now. Only by special radio request would he be needed to broadcast. From now until the dawn things should be quiet again. In silence he looked up at the brazen stars so vividly clear in this rarefied height.

Slats leaned back and appreciatively watched Vera Rawley’s quite attractive face and figure—then he blinked a little. The screen was slowly becoming suffused with black bars that rippled up and down like visible heat waves. At the same time, too, the girl’s voice was being slightly edged by another transmission, reedy and tinny.

Steve swung round from the window, his brown eyes puzzled. “Say, what’s up with that thing, anyway?”

Grunting at being disturbed Slats leaned forward and fiddled with the knobs, but try as he would he could not separate the two stations—the one dim and nearly extinct, the other warped by the overlap. . . . Then, with a thousandth of a degree twist he suddenly had the unknown clear—thin and infinitely distant. It was the voice of another woman singer, entrancingly melodious.

Even Steve’s unmusical soul was stirred. “Boy, can she sling a lyric!” he whispered.

They both leaned towards the speaker with their heads on one side. Then with an impatient movement Slats tried to squeeze out more power, but failed. Either a fault had developed in the radio receiver, or else the strange broadcasting station’s power was abnormally low. Usually at this height broadcast reception was uncannily clear. . . .

At least the woman’s words were English. She was singing a song that ended with, “. . . when the red dust of the desert drifts by.”

“Nice work!” Slats murmured. “Wonder what she looks like? Guess she’ll do for me instead of Vera Rawley in future. . . .”

He altered the tuning dial of the television screen, but no image appeared! For a full five seconds he stared in blank amazement.

“But—but this is impossible!” he ejaculated, snatching his pipe from his teeth. “No station broadcasts these days without visual accompaniment.”

Steve reached aside and took down the heavy log book, glanced at the reading on the dials, then commenced a search. In a few minutes he lowered the book again with an astounded face.

“There ain’t no such animal!” he expostulated.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“I mean there’s no other station logged anywhere near that degree. Come to think of it, a superimposed wavelength is impossible these days. The Ether Association sorted out all wavebands way back in ’60 and left ample margin for everybody. And no experimenter would broadcast so close to a normal band. . . . Besides, where the Sam Hill would an experimenter find a dame with a voice like that?”

They stared at each other in perplexity. Faintly, but noticeably dimming, that voice floated out to them in the silence.

“. . . and somewhere, I know, you’ll be waiting for me, when the red dust of the desert drifts by. . . .”

The song stopped amidst a faint roar of applause. A deep voice spoke from far away. Tensely the two leaned forward, only caught snatches as it faded slowly out—

“. . . end of Elga Varon’s song . . . happy atmosphere of the Elfoni Cafe. And now. . . .” The words vanished entirely. Slats twisted the knobs frantically, but the communication had evaporated. Baffled, he left the set on a normal waveband and ignored the voice coming from the Commercial Convention in New York City.

“Who in blazes is Elga Varon?” Steve demanded. “Who would have a name like that, anyway? And the Elfoni Cafe! Ever heard of it?”

Slats did not answer. He was staring in front of him with a dumbfounded expression on his face.

“Um-tiddly-um. . . .” he hummed. “When the red dust of the desert—”

“It’s crazy! Whoever heard of a red desert, anyway?”

“I have—but it’s on Mars.”

“Mars!” Steve gave a yell of laughter. “Take it easy, feller; the altitude’s gone to your head. Mars! Of all the screwy ideas! Who on that dead world would sing love songs in English, and from a cafe at that? Oh, be yourself, Slats!”

Slats pondered in silence. He glanced over the radio instruments. Certainly there was nothing the matter with them. The voice of Senator Gordon boomed pedantically through the silence.

“. . . and I tell you, gentlemen that unless this world depression can be mastered by finding some outlet for our commerce we can only look ahead to a disastrous slump, to mounting figures of unemployment the world over. All buyers have more than they need; the alternative is a depression greater than we have ever known, unless, I say, we can find an outlet—”

Slats snapped off impatiently. “We all know there’s a depression putting thousands out of work,” he growled, “but I’ll be damned if I’ll have it crammed down my throat as well. . . .”

Steve moved slowly forward, cigarette between his lips.

“Listen, Slats, this Elga Varon dame is a bit of a mystery at that,” he said thoughtfully. “She meant all she said about red deserts, and whoever she was singing to accepted it as quite a natural business judging from the applause. Anywhere on earth a composer would get the raspberry for using such rotten local color. And she *did* sound the devil of a way off. . . .”

Slats scratched his head, then his eye caught sight of the 24-inch telescope. He got suddenly to his feet, swung it round so it was flush with the observation panel, then juggled it into the position of Mars.

“Soon settle it, anyway,” he grunted.

Steve saw him look once, rub his eyes, then look again. He made a dumb motion with his arm. Steve joined him and stared through the companion eyepiece, understood in a moment what had so dumbfounded his friend.

Mars had changed! It was no longer red—but green! And the *canali* and distinctive polar caps had vanished! Instead, though only dimly visible because of the telescope’s lack of power, there were the unmistakable outlines of continents and oceans. Even clouds were faintly distinguishable.

Dazed, Slats dragged his eyes away.

“*Is that Mars?*” he asked blankly.

“Checks up, anyway,” Steve said, staring at the sky. “Yeah; it’s Mars all right, but what’s up with it? Last night it was as red and lined as usual, but now—Say, this is a job for the Mount Palomar telescope. . . .”

He moved over to the radio, but at that identical moment the stratosphere globe rocked to and fro with sudden violence. He stumbled helplessly, then was thrown clean off his feet by a terrific upward surge.

“Hell!” Slats shrieked, clinging onto the window frame. “We’ve broken loose from our cable! Something’s fouled it, or else—”

Steve stumbled over to him and stared below on the piece of hawser trailing ways beneath them in the moonlight. The smudge of New York City was receding rapidly.

“Nothing fouled it,” he snapped. “Sky’s clear of traffic in all directions. Something *pulled* us, something strong enough to break that cable. . . .”

He glanced up with a set face. The abysmal black of space itself was right over them, and by some inexplicable means they were tumbling into it with ever mounting velocity, snatched from their mother world. And, right ahead, glowed the green planet that should have been red. . . .

Leaden weights seemed to press down on them as the globe’s upward speed increased. The terrific acceleration crushed the breath out of their lungs. Helpless, heads spinning, they collapsed their length on the floor. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

The Copy World

Steve had no idea afterwards how long he had been unconscious. His only memory was of getting dazedly to his feet, stumbling over to Slats and reviving him. The crushing, weighted drag of acceleration had gone now; instead the force was just sufficient to produce a natural gravity. The globe, obviously, was still traveling.

They both floundered over to the window and thereupon received a new shock. Mars was no longer a green dot: it filled all space in front of them. They stood looking at it helplessly, hardly able to absorb what they saw.

There were sprawling continents, parts of them lush with verdure, wherefrom came the green color; while other portions were dotted with the unmistakable signs of thickly populated, busy cities! Upon the oceans were ships. Aircraft, too, darted about over the cities.

Half the planet lay in sunshine, and the other half was a semicircle filled with softly twinkling lights. Everywhere, life! *Life!* On the world that had been deserts, thin air, and polar caps?

“Clouds too,” Steve muttered. “Look at ’em. Atmosphere down there must be pretty similar to Earth’s own. . . . Slats, just what have we gotten into? Space mirage, do you think?”

“Can’t be. Remember that singer. . . . No, Steve, it’s real enough, but how it happened overnight has me licked. I’d give a lot to know why we were snatched too. . . .”

They turned away at last, somewhat calmer. They were aware of hunger and thirst too after their obviously long spell of unconsciousness. Once they had refreshed themselves they found Mars looming even bigger. And now, in the heart of one of the principal cities, they could distinguish something of dazzling brightness resembling a mirror. It seemed as though it might have some connection with their globe, was perhaps even the source of the attraction pulling them.

“If it *is* magnetism it’s pretty clear why we were snatched,” Steve muttered. “Our globe floated at twenty-five miles altitude, remember—highest of the lot. The others were ten miles below and probably out of the influence.”

Slats only grunted. He was absorbed by the view. Steve joined him at the window and they settled themselves to wait. Everything else was forgotten to them as through the hours the planet grew ever larger and the cities more distinguishable. In particular did that bright spot become more distinct. . . .

And so at last they found their speed diminishing and the bright spot was a plain of dimming metal below them, a plain set in the heart of a white stone metropolis. Lower and lower, dropping with gentle care now. They caught a glimpse of the city around them: it resembled New York itself to a startling degree. Then there were colossal power houses that probably fed this magnetic plain.

They grounded.

“Definitely magnetism,” Steve said. “And definitely Mars. . . . Notice the lesser gravity?”

Slats nodded in silence. They stood for a moment staring over the metallic expanse at the city beyond, then they tensed suddenly at the sight of a small army of men racing towards them over the expanse. The nearer they came the more obvious it was that they were identical

to earth people in appearance. Nor was there any apparent hostility in their excited faces. From their one piece attire they were evidently mechanics.

Steve cocked his eye at Slats.

“Well, are we dreaming, or do we step outside and give ourselves up?”

For answer Slats patted his gun holster and moved with difficulty against the lesser attraction to the airlock. He opened it slowly and stood staring out on the gathered men.

“Well-er-hallo!” he said awkwardly at last, waving his arm.

“Hi ya!” nodded Steve, grim faced.

The people looked at one another for a moment, then a variety of shouts burst forth.

“They’re alive!”

“We’ve done it at last!”

“Is that something!”

Steve glanced at Slats in total bewilderment. This could not be Mars—the planet simply could not contain men who talked like everyday Americans. But the lesser gravity? The smaller sun at the zenith. . . ?

Then suddenly there was a skirmish on the outskirts of the crowd as a powerful car swept into view. From it leapt four men in immaculate suits, apparently diplomats, led by a square shouldered individual with a pointed gray beard. Instantly the crowd fell back before him and stood at attention, saluting as he passed. In the distance, around the car, mobile police swept into sight.

“My friends! My dear friends!” The man with the pointed beard came up at last and clutched Steve and Slats in each of his hands. “You arrived safely! For the first time a passage has been made across space without death as the reward! Oh, this is too wonderful!”

The two stood looking at him. He was good looking enough, even striking, with a hooked nose and piercing blue eyes. Only his mouth, shutting like a rat trap over his torpedo beard, gave a slight insight to his real nature. It was the mouth of a man governed by relentless passions and iron will. But all of a sudden he gave a broad smile of welcome, raised his soft hat in the air in greeting to reveal a high forehead and crisp iron gray hair.

“Naturally, all this puzzles you?” he asked calmly.

“What do you think?” Slats asked bluntly.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am President Vorjak, ruler of this city and planet. These three gentlemen constitute my inner cabinet—Secretary, Diplomatic Adviser, and Controlling Attache.”

The men inclined their heads gravely.

“You must understand, my friends, that you are honored guests,” Vorjak went on quickly. “You are the first living beings to cross space from the pattern world. We have tried endlessly to bring a living being and now—But come! The car is waiting and everything is prepared.”

Steve and Slats stepped down together and walked like somnambulists through the lines of people. The army of mechanics had been augmented now by countless men and women straining to see what was going on but held back by police. There was something uncanny about this, something that set the two Earth men’s brains turning somersaults when they tried to think it out.

Save for the lesser gravity, to which they were getting inured, they had little to convince them that they were not on Earth. The car, for instance, was earthly in design. It passed down streets behind a mobile police squad who cleared the way with shrieking sirens. On either side

of the streets reared enormous business edifices of white stone, the windows filled with men's and women's faces. Very earthly looking wastepaper baskets were emptied in a fluttering snow of welcome to the visitors.

"This conquering hero act has got me licked," Steve confessed in an aside to Slats, when they paused a moment in their bobbing acknowledgements to the lines of people. "What did we do anyway to rate this reception?"

"Came across space in one piece. Evidently that makes us tops. But I don't understand these people; they're as much like Martians as my Uncle Septimus— Say, will you look at that!" Slats finished in amazement, as they passed an open square. He pointed to a lofty colonnade of granite, perhaps as high as the Statue of Liberty. At the very summit of it reposed the battered remains of a stratosphere liner from Earth.

"The X-46! Enshrined!" Steve shouted, standing up. "Holy Cat, so that's where it went to! It was stolen, like we were—"

"Hardly stolen," President Vorjak broke in, from the other side of the car. "It happened to get caught in our attractor's influence and was drawn across space. We had hoped the people within it would be alive, but—it was useless. We buried their remains and enshrined the ship as being the first specimen to come across space practically intact. But now you have come it takes second place. In time, perhaps, your globe will replace it."

"Like hell it will!" Steve retorted, sitting down again. "We want our globe to go back home again."

"So?" Vorjak smiled amiably. "You will never go home, my friends—At least, not yet awhile."

"Now look here, Vorjak—"

He went on calmly, "You are here as models of the pattern world, my friends, and as such will shortly serve a useful purpose to us and to your own planet."

"What's this pattern world business?" Slats demanded.

"Pattern, my friend, in that Earth has been the model for our world. More than that you do not need to know as yet. Later, perhaps. . . ."

Steve relaxed at the President's inscrutable smile. Deep within him he was beginning to sense a deadly danger somewhere in this crazy lionizing.

Lost in thought he sat looking round him, observed that the car finally moved into the drive of a solitary sprawling white building standing away from the buzz and roar of the city itself.

Once inside it, there was something almost farcical in the fashion in which servants and officials raced up and down long marble corridors to attend to Steve and Slats' every want. They were bowed by the President himself into an enormous room replete with all earthly necessities. They were brought choice foods and wines, even earthly cigars and left alone.

Slats, full of wine and light gravity, lay back on the cushions of the divan and smoked blissfully.

"Boy, if this is Mars give me more of it!" he sighed. "In my present mood I don't care if hell freezes!"

"Oh, snap out of it!" Steve grunted, clearer headed. "Don't you see what we're up against, man? Vorjak's as good as told us we're on this cockeyed planet for keeps—and for all we know about getting home he's right. . . . Hell, if only I knew what it's all about! What's your angle on it?"

“Haven’t any. Either these folks are screwy or we’re dead. . . .”

“Swell help that is!” Steve got impatiently to his feet.

“Maybe you’ll talk sense when the wine’s gone down—and don’t blame *me* if you get a hangover. . . .”

“Nuts,” Slats returned sleepily, and closed his eyes. In another moment Steve had picked up the fallen cigar and listened to the heavy snores pervading the vast apartment.

Just for a moment he envied Slats’ calm acceptance of the inevitable, meditated that he too might as well sleep—then he looked up as the visiphone buzzer on the wall whirred urgently. He went over to it and switched on. The face of a woman with raven black hair and dark pools of eyes appeared before him on the screen.

“You—you are one of the travelers from the pattern world?” she asked quickly, and her soft voice was obviously anxious.

“Yeah—sure. Steve Doyle’s the name. . . .” Steve studied her regular, beautiful features earnestly. “Anything wrong?”

“Not yet—but there may be. This is just a warning from a friend. Be wary of President Vorjak. Accept all he says with good grace and do nothing drastic until you’ve seen me. I can probably help you, just as you can help me. Search me out when you have the time. You’ll do that?”

“You bet!” Steve grinned. “What’s the name? Where do I find you?”

“My name is Elga Varon. I’m a soloist at the Elfon Cafe in the west end of the town. You’ll find me all right. Good by.”

“Elga Var—” Steve yelped; but she had cut off. He stood staring at the instrument in blank wonder, scratched his red head.

“Of all the women on this cockeyed planet it had to be *her!*” he breathed at last. “How the Sam Hill. . . .?”

He gazed helplessly at the blank screen; then at last he gave it up and wandered to the great bed, threw himself upon it and gave himself up to meditation. But the remembrance of that perfect face, and even more perfect voice, made it imperative he seek out the Martian woman without delay. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

“Trade” Negotiations

President Vorjak presented himself early the next morning—just after the two had breakfasted and tidied themselves up. He said little, waved his arms to a uniformed escort, and then there began a triumphal march to another State building a mile away in the heart of the town.

Vaguely uneasy, though they did their best to conceal it, Steve and Slats finally took the places assigned to them in an enormous chamber of the edifice. They sat on a small dais, glancing round on the numberless men eyeing them steadily from tiers of seats.

At last the murmur died away and President Vorjak rose to his feet, stood with his hands holding his lapels.

“This meeting, my people, is momentous!” he boomed. “And, I might add, it is private. It will be neither relayed nor televised. We are gathered here to explain to our friends from the pattern world exactly what will be required of them, to reveal to them why they were taken from Earth.”

“Now we’re getting some place,” Slats mumbled, holding his aching head in his hands.

“Men of Earth,” Vorjak went on, and it was obvious he reveled in the sound of his voice, “you see around you a world patterned from a study of Earth, a people built up by a study of your radio broadcasts which are received quite clearly here. . . . Many of the things that puzzle you cannot, unhappily, be explained for diplomatic reasons. But what we desire more than anything else is communication between our planet and yours—space communication. That can only come by earthly engineers constructing a magnetic field identical to the one we have on this world, a magnet driven by solar power which reaches its attractive power over some seventy million miles to snatch from the high altitude of another world any flying object. We captured the X-46, and we captured you, because in both cases the airliner and your globe were free of earthly atmospheric pressure. A grounded machine is impossible to move. It was only with difficulty we tore you from your hawser.”

Vorjak paused and cleared his throat. He resumed:

“So far, it has not been possible for us to reach Earth with our radio signals, though Earth’s short wave system has easily reached us. Now, though, our scientists have perfected radio transmission so that it will equal Earth’s own, with the result that we should be able to send clear messages across the gulf. Do you understand me?”

Steve nodded slowly, but inwardly he was trying to figure out why he had heard Elga Varon’s voice across space if radio was not yet perfected. A glance assured him that Slats was thinking the same thing—but they both maintained silence.

Vorjak’s tone became conciliatory. “When we communicate with Earth and suggest to them a spacial magnet, we naturally want it to be convincing. That might not be so if we alone did it. Rightly, Earth people would think the thing a hoax because of English words being used. *But*, if two missing aeronauts, well known on Earth, were to speak *for* us, then belief would be immediate. Am I not right, my friends?”

“I guess so,” Steve acknowledged. “Slats and I are known by our voices all over America, especially by air officials and weather bureaus. And our disappearance must certainly be known by now.”

"It is known," Vorjak replied. "We have listened to Earth radio reports reporting your mysterious departure into space, together with numberless speculations regarding the change in Mars' face."

"Why *did* it change?" Slats asked bluntly. "We ought to be told."

"At present, as I have said, diplomatic reasons prevent me explaining that mystery, my friends. Later, perhaps. . . . All I ask now is that you will cooperate when the time is ready for communicating to your world?"

"Well . . . O.K.," Steve nodded, and for the life of him he could see no harm in the request. "How long are you going to be? You'd better cash in on our disappearance to make the most of the chance."

Vorjak demurred. "My scientists tell me that Mars and Earth will be in apposition in another two weeks. That means a distance of only 35,000,000 miles to cross. So in two weeks, my friends you will speak? I can take it as a foregone conclusion that your earthly people will be open to negotiation?"

"Considering Earth is being hit by a trade depression and this will give the opportunity for interplanetary exchange, there's no doubt of it," Steve answered quietly.

"Excellent. And remember that upon your own shoulders, when you give the speech, relies your chance of returning home. You obviously cannot unless earthly engineers build a magnet. For my part I shall use your globe as a pattern for other globes of our own to be put in work without delay. . . . And now there are other matters. . . ."

But they were not important to Slats or Steve. For an hour Vorjak held forth on the ideals and policy of his strange government, which seemed to be a mixture of both fascism and democracy, with the balance by no means clear on either side. It was pretty clear Vorjak did not intend to give anything away. Not one hint of Mars' strange transformation escaped him.

He came to the end of the speech by turning back to the two.

"And you, my friends, have all the liberty of the city. You may go wherever you wish, and use your present rooms in the Administrative Building as your abode. Only one request do I make—stay within the city in case the opportunity for communicating with Earth should arise sooner than I have anticipated."

Vorjak bowed and smiled, stepped down from the platform. The assembly began to break up. Steve and Slats glanced at each other at finding themselves left entirely alone. At length they strolled over to the main doors and stood looking out on the busy street.

At length Slats scratched his head. "Well anyway, there was nothing phony about Vorjak's request. That's certain."

"I wonder," Steve muttered. "Last night when you were sleeping it off I got a visiphone call from Elga Varon—"

"The—the singer?"

"In person. She warned me to do nothing drastic until I had seen her. . . . Now don't start asking why she rang, or anything about it, because I'm as puzzled as you are. What's got me worried is why we could hear her voice across space when Vorjak says they haven't perfected spacial radio so far. . . . Anyway, right now our job is to find the Elfon Cafe at the west end of this town. And remember, keep quiet about our being Earthlings. We can't be told from Martians anyway. . . . Now come on."

Frowning, Slats obeyed. They found their way across the town at last to the garish exterior of the Elfon Cafe, a creation of black agate and chromium fittings. As they entered the foyer a

fat manager came forward and eyed them suspiciously.

“Miss Varon is not here to strangers,” he snapped, when Steve had finished speaking. “And in any case she does not sing until the evening.”

“You can tell her it’s the fellow she spoke to last night on the visiphone,” Steve retorted. “We’ll wait. . . .”

The manager hesitated, then went off shrugging. In a few minutes he returned with the girl who was undoubtedly the one Steve had seen on the screen the previous night. The pale face, the big dark eyes and raven black hair. She held out a slim hand in welcome, then stood for a moment watching the manager’s receding back.

“You’re Steve Doyle, of course?” she asked quickly.

“Yes, and this is my pal, Slat Camberwell.”

“Glad to meet you,” he nodded briefly.

“I can’t tell you anything here,” the girl went on, buttoning up her coat. “You’ll have to come to my place. You were lucky to catch me here in a morning; I was doing a rehearsal. . . . Come with me.”

She led the way out into the street, walking after that through an infinity of side roads until they came to a less congested part of the city, and ultimately to a small house. She let herself in with a latchkey, made her way through a modestly comfortable, typically feminine home to a flight of steps leading downward into a cellar. A flood of light revealed a wealth of instruments that obviously had a connection with radio.

“My home,” she smiled, tugging off her hat and coat and waving her arm round the place. “We’re safe enough here. Make yourselves comfortable—we’ve a lot to talk about.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The Plot Against Earth

“Just how much did President Vorjak tell you?” the girl asked.

“He told nothing,” Steve growled. “All he did was ask me to broadcast a message to Earth with the idea of having a magnetic field built. For trade purposes. . . . Sounded like a good idea to me.”

Elga gave a bitter smile. “And suppose I were to tell you that if you do communicate you will sell your world to a devil? To a man who has waited for years for this chance to carry armaments across the gulf with the express intention of making war on Earth and taking the planet for his own!”

Steve looked up sharply. “But—it’s not possible! Vorjak may be a queer sort of guy, but I’ll swear he’s not that bad.”

“I know him better than you do, Steve Doyle. You’re walking into a trap, just as I suspected you would. . . . But all this is vague to you of course. I’d better start at the beginning . . . I am not really Elga Varon; that’s an assumed name. I am—or was—Princes Elfia, potential queen of this entire planet, until the scientific revolution came. Then I was ordered to be put to death. With the help of friends I escaped, altered my appearance as much as possible—I was formerly a blonde—and so became a singer. But with only one thought in my mind—revenge!” She looked round the laboratory with smoldering eyes.

“I suppose you know that this world of Mars was reported dead by Earth astronomers until recently?” Steve asked quietly.

“Yes, I know: radio broadcasts from Earth revealed that fact many a time—and President Vorjak did not explain the truth because it would have meant putting himself in an unfavorable light. I’ll tell you what happened. . . . Ages ago this planet was threatened by an armada from space. We—that is my ancestors of course—got wind of the approaching invasion in time and our scientists hit on the idea of covering the entire planet with an unbreakable shell of metal. Ultimately they managed it, and in consequence our planet floated in the center of a globe of metal, stopping there by the law of gravity. Outside, the magnetic quality of the metal attracted cosmic dust and iron ore. Escaping water and air residue through controlled vents produced a faint water vapor outside. Rust took place. The shell turned deep red. Then came the invasion, and under its onslaught the shell was cracked from end to end, but it did not altogether collapse.”

“Would those cracks be the *canali*?” Slats cried suddenly.

The girl nodded slowly. “That, I believe, was the earthly idea of it, just as our ejected sewage water, collected at the poles to finally form oceans, were mistaken for ice caps. . . . However, the enemy got inside our world. We were overpowered. Our civilization fell in ruins. . . . By force, the men of the invasion made Martian women mate with them—the children that came afterwards were half Martian and half invader, but with the physical characteristics of a Martian predominating. . . .

“By degrees, as the hard fight to regain power and security went on, it became impossible to tell which were genuine Martians and which were not. There was no ordered form of Government . . . Maybe for centuries an order of wandering barbarism lasted. Then came the time when my father became ruler of the planet, but he was at his wit’s end to know how to

reconstruct a sane order from the chaos. Finally, by sheer chance, the scientists discovered that they were getting radio waves from a neighbor planet—Earth. These constant broadcasts, in which the English language seemed to predominate, were relayed to the people. A mixture of Martian languages was molded into one—English. By common consent it was decided we would pattern our world after our neighbor. So by constant listening to radio speeches and descriptions, aided by X-ray telescopes which could pierce the metal globe surrounding us, we rebuilt. . . .”

“Clear so far,” Steve nodded. “Then?”

“Trouble came. Vorjak, a child of the original invasion, had his forbears’ spirit strongly developed. He was not content with listening to what he called a democracy, over the radio: he had listened to other languages as well and favored a scheme of dictatorship. He launched a revolution in which my father was killed and I was ordered to be put to death. As I told you, I escaped. . . .”

The girl gave a heavy sigh. “In the time I have been living as a singer I have watched Vorjak’s progress. He had our covering globe investigated, decided finally to have it removed. With schemes of earth conquest in his mind he had tried with magnetic fields to snatch living people from Earth. All he got was the remains of an airplane. The removal of the surrounding shield, he believed, would increase his power. At any rate, it was blown in pieces and has become a mass of dust floating with our planet in the sky. No harm came to us, of course. Our air remained the same, held down by Mars’ gravity, and we had the heavens open to us for the first time. . . .”

“Hmmm. . . .” Steve muttered. “Odd, isn’t it, that you Martians look so like us?”

“Why is it? Our air pressure is fourteen pounds to the square inch, the same as yours. Only our gravity is different, but not enough to produce drastic physical changes. And don’t forget that living like the people of the pattern world has, in a sense, molded us like them. My ancestors were not so earthly as I am, for instance.”

“Just what do you hope to achieve against Vorjak?” Slats asked slowly.

“One girl alone against him and his unholy crowd. . . .”

She turned and nodded to her instruments. “I have here a radio equipment on which I’ve been working ever since father was deposed and killed. It is based on the knowledge of the scientists who served my father. It is long distance shortwave radio, a branch of radio art as yet not perfected by Vorjak, though I know he is now experimenting on similar lines in order to contact Earth. I hope to have mine finished first. My idea, before I knew you two had arrived here alive, was to get in touch with Earth and warn them of Vorjak’s intentions, or else somehow enlist their aid in crushing him. . . . So far I have only experimented once—secretly. I connected this radio here to the equipment at the cafe, worked by remote control. I hoped that my voice would carry to Earth, and if so I’d be sure to know about it from radio broadcasts. Evidently I failed since no reports came through. It was a risk, of course: if Vorjak had heard the reports too he would have demanded to know the truth. But by that time I would have given my warning to Earth and forestalled him. If I had died in defeating him it would not have mattered.”

“But your broadcast *did* get through!” Steve cried. “Slats and I heard you distinctly. Of course, we were twenty-five miles up from Earth, and your song faded out. Something about red dust of the desert—”

“Yes—yes!” the girl cried, her eyes shining. “It’s the song of the moment. It’s about the breakup of the globe, around the planet. But—you heard me?”

“Sure. That’s why I was surprised when I heard your name over the visiphone last night. . . .”

“Ah, so. . . .” She pondered. “There was a power leak on the night I made the experiment. That would account for the fade out. But you *heard* me! That’s the point. Since you were twenty five miles up in your atmosphere it is pretty clear that I had not sufficient power, or else the wavelength was wrong, to penetrate through Earth’s atmosphere to the lower reaches. We can remedy that.”

“Say, if we could do that we could radio Earth and tell them to ignore the request for a magnetic field when you make it!” Slat’s put in eagerly. “Then Vorjak could never even land!”

“Yeah, and that would mean you and me stopping here for the rest of our lives,” Steve growled. “That won’t do. We need space travel if we can get it, but not for war purposes of course. We might warn Earth to stand by with an armada with which to wipe up Vorjak when he arrives.”

“It depends on the power of his attacking weapons,” Elga said anxiously. “I don’t know his resources. . . . But right now that isn’t the point. We’ve got to get this radio improved, and with your help it can be done inside a week. I suppose you can help me?”

“We’ll be here every minute,” Steve said earnestly. “At least, plenty of the time. And we’ll keep the thing quiet, don’t fret!”

She nodded. “All right, then. Until you’re accustomed to the city meet me at the Elfoni Cafe every night at ten thirty. My night’s singing is over then. O.K.?”

For answer Steve gripped her hand reassuringly.

CHAPTER FIVE

Radio to Earth

Even though they had been given absolute freedom of the city until they should be needed, Steve and Slats were inwardly astonished at the ease with which they met the girl every night and went along, unquestioned, to her workshop.

Steve's highly technical knowledge, added to the girl's own, began to have rapid effect on the radio instruments.

"More I work on this," Steve said, on the sixth night, "the more I see how simple it would be to convert any normal radio for spacial communication and range. All in the coils and tube cadences. I always figured it was something like that—"

"How long before we finish?" Elga broke in eagerly.

"So far as I can make out we ought to be able to start communicating tonight. What about those generators? Enough power in them, do you think?"

"Considering they're using solar power there ought to be."

Steve nodded silently, busy with the screwdriver.

"Another couple of hours, then we'll contact Grayson at the New York Stratosphere Bureau. And will his hair curl!"

"Curly already," Slats said artlessly; then went on with the work at the glare he received. For a long time after that there was silence, then Steve stood up and patted the apparatus affectionately.

"We made it!" he announced triumphantly. "O.K., Elga—the juice!"

Her slender hand reached out and closed the master switches controlling the generators. Power surged instantly through transmitter and receiver speaker alike. Even so, it would demand several minutes before the carrier wave hurdled the gulf to Earth, Steve sat rigid, hands on the controls, then at a final whistle from the speaker he gave a twist that brought a multitude of Earth stations blaring in.

Immediately he tuned to the wavelength of the New York Stratosphere Bureau, graded the transmitter to the same wavelength.

"Hallo there, Grayson!" he intoned into the microphone. "This is Steve Doyle calling from Mars . . . Will await reply."

There was a long pause then suddenly Grayson's astounded voice burst through the speaker.

"Steve Doyle! What is this? A joke? O.K.—waiting to hear your communication. . . ."

Steve nodded in delight and started to speak, then he stopped at a sudden rending crash from the laboratory door. It flew open under the impact of heavy shoulders. Three guards entered with leveled guns, and behind them came President Vorjak, set faced.

Elga's hand flashed to the master switches, cut out the power. In the dead silence that ensued both parties stared at each other. Then Vorjak smiled—that bland, inscrutable smile.

"How interesting," he commented lightly. "Naturally, my Earth friends, I have had your movements watched, even though you were given the freedom of the city. Your constant association every night with Elga Varon seemed suspicious. I decided on personal

investigation. Now I know the truth. I am so sorry, Princess, that you did not die after all. Maybe that can be remedied. . . .”

“Now wait a minute, Vorjak—” Steve began savagely, but he was waved aside.

“A clever attempt to communicate with Earth by radio, eh?” Vorjak went on, his eyes glittering. “And from what I heard from outside the door, you have even succeeded. Congratulations! But after all, you can forgive me not wishing you to give away *too* much, can’t you?”

“Well, what the hell are you going to do about it?” Slat demanded.

“Naturally I am going to use the opportunity,” Vorjak smiled. He moved to the switchboard and slammed in the switches once more. “What sense is there in waiting a week or two for my instruments to be finished when we have one here already? You have started to communicate. You may as well finish. . . .” He turned aside, took up a sheet of paper and started to write busily. By the time the communication with Earth had been re-established he had his message written.

“Repeat what is written, and try no tricks,” he said quietly, handing the paper to Steve. “Remember, guns are right behind you. Now. . . .” He snapped a switch and the microphone was alive again.

“Hallo there!” bawled Grayson’s insistent voice from the loud speaker. “Earth calling Steve Doyle! All lines are cleared. . . . Speak, Steve. . . . Over to you.”

Steve spoke in cold clipped tones, uttering every word that was written down for him. Their honeyed promises made him writhe. Trade, prosperity, friendship. . . . He could do nothing else but what he was told, sat hunched in silence at the delighted babblings of Grayson and the Bureau officials after he had finished.

“Tell them Martian engineers will instruct them how to build a magnetic plate,” Vorjak hissed.

Steve obeyed, sat glaring at the control panel.

“O.K., Steve,” came Grayson’s voice finally. “We get the idea and we’ll stand by night and day for the next communication. . . . Cutting off for now. . . .”

The radio became dead. Vorjak stood grimly smiling and rubbing his hands.

“Ready, my friend, you did excellently,” he chuckled. “I shall not need to bother you again. If I speak myself with the necessary scientific instructions it will be quite in order. I will be believed. In a few more days my own radio equipment will be ready, far more powerful than this one. This can be destroyed.”

“You can’t!” Elga shouted hoarsely. “It represents a lifetime of work and endeavor and—”

“It has enabled me to get the first seed sown sooner than I thought, and that is all that concerns me,” Vorjak snapped. “It cannot be left here, so—destroy it!” he commanded the nearest guard.

The man nodded, raised his gun and brought it down with savage impact on the transmitter. Instantly the invaluable instrument flew into pieces, its vital coils and wires dropping out onto the floor, its tubes in shards of broken glass.

“So sorry,” Vorjak murmured, seeing the dazed looks of the three as they glanced at each other.

They moved slowly together as the guards advanced—then for the briefest instant Steve leaned toward the girl.

“Faint!” he whispered. “Quick—*faint!*!”

She had too much sense to ask questions, puzzled though she was. Abruptly she allowed her knees to buckle under her, went her length on the floor and lay still.

“O.K., I’ll pick her up,” Steve growled, as Vorjak gazed down at her in surprise. He went down on his knees and gathered her up in his arms, but he did something else at the same time that passed unnoticed, and that was to scoop up two small coils that had been smashed from the set. In maneuvering the girl into his grip he also maneuvered the coils into his pocket.

“Well, what now?” he demanded bitterly.

“Prison!” Vorjak retorted. He wheeled to the guards. “Take them along, and send a guard to watch over this place. . . . Get moving!”

Steve remained quiet about his coils. In the sanctuary of the prison he had the chance to fasten them inside his shirt, and there they would remain until he had the chance to play the hunch that was at the back of his mind. Even Slats knew nothing about them. . . .

They were imprisoned for several weeks, Elga in the cell next to them, but they needed no imagination to guess that in the time Vorjak had been busy with his own radio, giving instructions to Earth how to make a magnetic field.

In fact, it was a foregone conclusion since, from their cell window, the three of them had occasional glimpses of heavy globes, designed identically after the earth stratosphere globe, being loaded with all manner of armaments and equipment for war.

“Say,” Slats whispered, one morning, “there must be nearly twenty globes finished by now—and it’s a cert that Earth has the magnetic plate ready. What do we do to defeat this Vorjak guy?”

“I dunno—yet. All depends whether we’re to be bumped off or given the chance to go with him. . . .”

A silence dropped between them after that, beyond occasional encouraging calls to Elga in the next cell. . . . Then towards noon President Vorjak himself arrived, a guard on either side of him. His irritating smile became immediately apparent.

“My friends, I have come to a decision,” he remarked, strolling into the cell. “All is ready for our flight to Earth—your people have built a magnetic plate and our space radio is in perfect form. I have decided that you shall accompany us to earth since your special knowledge of your own planet will be invaluable to us once we have conquered it. One cannot learn everything from a telescope, unfortunately.”

Steve’s eyes gleamed faintly, but his voice was quiet.

“I see. Are we to use our own original globe?”

Vorjak demurred, then shrugged. “I see no reason why not. It is identical with all the others. . . . In any case a guard will be mounted over you.”

“And Elga?” Steve asked quietly.

“She too will go on the voyage. I cannot leave her here while I am away with my advisers, and further, her knowledge of radio may be useful later on. I have decided she shall travel with you—and for a very good reason. If you decide on some heroic feat to destroy us and yourselves you will refrain for fear of taking her life as well. She is, shall I say, the white mouse?”

Steve said nothing to that. Vorjak shrugged slightly.

“We are ready to depart,” he said briefly. “Within the hour. The guard will take the three of you to your globe. . . .”

CHAPTER SIX

Back to Earth

They found the globe standing at the forefront of twenty others, fully loaded and manned. Without a word they permitted themselves to be escorted into the interior, then a massive guard with two guns followed behind them and stood with his back to the closed airlock, eyes alert for the first sign of mischief. . . .

But there was none. Steve lounged before the radio, Slats at the rocket controls, the girl by the window. Then presently the live radio came into action and Earth spoke.

“Hallo, Mars! We’re all set. Power has been applied to magnetic field. Rise to Martian stratosphere and our field will pull you over the gulf. Right. . . !”

“Contact!” barked Vorjak’s voice from the speaker, immediately afterwards.

Slats automatically thrust in the engine switches and the globe began to rise swiftly. Steve glanced back at the rest of the fleet rising up all around them. Quietly he turned to one side and wrote down a few apparently observational notes, handed them over to Slats. He nodded grimly at what he read—

“When I say ‘Go!’ knock this guy cold!”

For several minutes Steve moved idly in front of the radio instruments, then as the guard gave the briefest of yawns he snapped out the command. Immediately the guard found himself hurled off his feet, his guns whirling into space, his jaw stinging from the impact of Steve’s knuckles. Another terrific uppercut sent him plunging his length across the control room, to fall knocked out against the wall.

“Throw him in the locker,” Steve panted. “I’ve work to do. In this trip we have the last chance of wrecking Vorjak and saving Earth and ourselves. . . .”

He tore open his shirt and tugged out the coils fastened to the inner side.

“From your set, Elga,” he tossed out, seeing the girl’s look of surprise, “Grabbed them when you fainted. I believe that if I incorporate these coils inside this set here, and alter the setting of the tubes, I might be able to reach Earth from space here. The ordinary set wouldn’t do it, but these coils, specially designed, should fix it, just as they did back on Mars. I’ve just about enough juice to make it, too, since we use solar power as you did.”

“Yeah, but if Earth replies, Vorjak will hear them,” Slats objected.

Steve was already busy on the set. “I’ll use a cut-out band on my transmission which will stop him contacting it—and for reception I’ll give a different wavelength to be used. Vorjak, tuned in to the other wavelength, won’t hear a thing. Leave it to me. . . . Give me a hand, can’t you? Time’s precious!”

At that both Slats and the girl lent their aid, worked with an unceasing energy following out Steve’s directions.

“Darned good job there isn’t as much acceleration this time out,” Slats grunted presently. “We’d be laid out cold if there was. . . .”

Steve did not answer. Hastily he reassembled the parts of the set he had taken out, then snapped on the cut-out band, which stopped transmission to anywhere local but permitted it to take on power beyond a five-mile limit.

His hand closed down upon the main switches.

“Hallo there! Urgent call from Steve Doyle! Reply on special wavelength of 4798. *Not on usual band.* Note that, Earth. *Not on usual band!* Urgent! Steve Doyle calling! Clear all waves. . . .”

He waited tensely, eyes fixed on the speaker for the answer, the receiver exactly hairlined to 4798.

Suddenly Earth replied over the specified wave.

“Magnetic Field, Earth, answering. Give message, Steve Doyle. . . . Over to you.”

“It worked! The coils did it,” Steve whispered; then aloud. “Hallo! What are your instructions in regard to Magnetic Field power?”

Pause. Then, “To cut down gradually, by seventy five percent after ships are sighted in Mount Wilson reflector. Then to lower power gradually to zero as ships reach stratosphere.”

“Countermand those orders!” Steve rapped out. “Listen, Earth—this is a matter of life and death. It is not a friendly race which is coming, but an army of warmongers who will devastate our planet. I was tricked into giving those earlier messages: I’m staking everything now on a reversal of orders. Here are my orders. Leave the magnet on one hundred per cent efficiency and do not cut down a vestige of power until every Martian globe has crashed. Get everybody clear of the magnets for a distance of ten miles radius. Understand. . . .?”

Long pause. “You’ll crash yourself, Steve Doyle! You’ll be ground to powder!”

“That’s our worry. Slats Camberwell knows tricks with a strato globe that no Martian ever heard of. Flying one of these tubs is his specialty. Think you can make it, Slats?” Steve whirled round on him. “Pull free of the magnetism?”

“A cinch,” Slats said calmly.

“Well, what about it, Earth?” Steve demanded.

The extra long pause seemed to suggest consultation at the other end. Then the operator spoke again.

“O.K., Steve, we get the angle. But you’re taking a hell of a chance. . . .”

“I’ve got to! And don’t forget to evacuate the magnet area. . . .”

Steve switched off and whirled round, caught Slats by the arm.

“Slats, you’ve the hell of a job on board.”

He grinned. “Listen, juggling this football is a mug’s game. . . . But boy, I’m glad I’m not in one of those other globes! Have they got something coming to them. . . .!”

He sat down before the massive control board, started to check out his course of action. At intervals as the long journey persisted the three of them slept, ignoring the thumpings of the recovered guard in the locker. . . .

Then, after what must have been days, when all Earth filled the sky, the influence of the magnetic field—visible as a tiny glowing speck near New York—became noticeable. Slats sat motionless at the controls, Steve beside him. The girl lay full length on the wall bed anxiously watching.

Slats’ fingers twitched over the controls, waiting to feel the first pull of the atmosphere on the controlling fins, waiting to fire the blast tubes. His narrowed eyes watched the instruments for the first flicker of the needle that would reveal external air pressure—and at last it came!

Instantly he slammed home the blast tube switches. Spurts of fire shot out from beneath the globe. The sphere itself quivered in its breathtaking downward rush, strained mightily against the savage downward pull of the full strength magnetism and planetary gravity.

The people in the globe could feel the fluttering of their almost-streamlined vessel as it tore through the stratosphere. Like a bit of paper it was, every slight projection on its side caught and held by the almost-solid atmosphere it was passing through. And still it tore down to Earth, seeming certain to crash and destroy utterly everyone within it.

“More power, man!” Steve panted, sweat streaming down his face.

“Can’t!” Slats wheezed. “Be O.K. in a second. Want denser atmosphere for a grip. . . .”

Steve nodded desperately, watched with his whole being rigid as the globe creaked and groaned in its effort to pull sideways. Once he glanced through the windows. The other globes, not aware of what to expect, were continuing on a straight tumultuous course to earth.

Death seemed imminent. The Earth was coming closer with terrifying rapidity, the roaring rockets impotent against the titanic gravitational and magnetic pull. It seemed as though the walls of the globe were heating with the friction of their passage. And then there was a motion which was not caused by the rockets or by the air currents, a faint sidewise jerk.

“We’re moving!” Slats shrieked suddenly. “Going sideways—!”

To himself, Steve whispered a hope that their fuel would hold out. Nothing like this reckless expenditure of power had been thought of when the globe was designed. It was impossible that there could be much more—enough for another ten minutes, he estimated silently. He walked, straining under the pressure of the forces at work, over to where the girl lay and took her hand in his. Not saying a word, she pressed his hand.

Exhaust smoke started to curl up from the firing chambers of the rocket tubes. Savagely Steve went over to them and opened the emergency vents, cleared the air somewhat. . . . Inch by inch the globe moved diagonally, swept downwards with dizzying speed into a maw of dense cloud. Rocking and swaying, its rivets strained to bursting point, it tore suddenly free of the straight vertical tug of the magnetic field, raced on through the atmosphere as a free falling body.

“Made it!” Slats exulted, jerking in the brake fins. “Gosh, but it was close—!”

He climbed again for altitude, the globe under full control now. Then, sure of his bearings again, he began to drop slowly. They burst free of the clouds at last and for a moment stared at a two mile distant scene in amazement. . . . The other globes of the fleet, helpless in the magnetism, were slamming towards earth with incredible speed, still with the momentum they had achieved in outer space. Two of them caught fire with atmospheric friction; others tore in pieces under the terrific pressure. Still others made the full drop and finished with an impact that ended in a terrific explosion. Munitions aboard vomited to the skies. For miles round the Magnetic Field earth and sky met in a mad conglomeration.

Nothing alive could have remained so in the hole in the Earth that had once been Magnetic Field. Steve could scarcely believe that even the city of New York, twenty miles away, could still stand. It was holocaust that had happened.

“Thank God I warned them to evacuate,” Steve whispered, white faced. “Thank God. . . .”

In the hours of feting and lionizing that followed Steve and Slats both learned that the ruse had succeeded. President Vorjak and his advisers were but a memory of pounded metal. Their plans were atomic dust. Not one globe had escaped destruction. The only Martian to survive at all, excepting Elga, was the guard who had been locked up, and he was promptly handed to the authorities. . . .

New York had rocked to its depths at the impact of the Martian globes, but that did not stop New Yorkers from pouring out in their thousands to see the three mile crater where the

Magnetic Field had been.

Wreckage of buildings and other structures for miles around bore testimony to the potency of the Martians weapons. Had they been permitted to land. . . .

“But, ladies and gentlemen,” Steve said the following night, when he, Slats, and Elga attended the banquet in New York given in their honor, “the Magnetic Field will be built again. The journey we made to Mars was not in vain. Beside me is the Princess Elfia, who will now become the queen of the red planet. Vorjak and his rule is finished with. Elfia will, I know, only too readily agree to friendly relations between our two worlds. And we, for our part, can look forward to an outlet for our impeded trade. . . . Shortly, Elfia will send orders to Mars for the magnets to be switched on. I shall go back with her, to arrange the details attendant on her taking over the queenship. . . .

“In fact, I shall *have* to go with her,” Steve added, smiling at the audience and transmitters. “We are to be married on that other world. What better proof could you have of security for the future, than for the Queen of Mars to marry an Earthling? From now on, my friends, let history be rewritten—the history of Mars, a world reborn. . . .”

THE END

[The end of *World Reborn* by John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre)]