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UNDER THE MOONS OF MARS by Norman Bean

RELATIVE to Captain Carter's strange story a few words, concerning this remarkable personality, are not out of place.

At the time of his demise, John Carter was a man of uncertain age and vast experience, honorable and abounding with true fellowship. He stood a good two inches over six feet, was broad of shoulder and narrow of hip, with the carriage of the trained fighting man. His features were regular and clear-cut, his eyes steel gray, reflecting a strong and loyal character. He was a Southerner of the highest type. He had enlisted at the outbreak of the War, fought through the four years and had been honorably discharged. Then for more than a decade he was gone from the sight of his fellows. When he returned he had changed, there was a kind of wistful longing and hopeless misery in his eyes, and he would sit for hours at night, staring up into the starlit heavens.

His death occurred upon a winter's night. He was discovered by the watchman of his little place on the Hudson, full length in the snow, his arms outstretched above his head toward the edge of the bluff. Death had come to him upon the spot where curious villagers had so often, on other nights, seen him standing rigid—his arms raised in supplication to the skies.

—*Editor's Note.*

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CHAPTER I.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

I AM a very old man; how old I do not know. Possibly I am a hundred, possibly more; but I cannot tell because I have never aged as other men, nor do I remember any childhood. So far as I can recollect I have always been a man, a man of about thirty. I appear today as I did forty years and more ago, and yet I feel that I cannot go on living forever; that some day I shall die the real death from which there is no return.

I do not know why I should fear death, I who have died twice and am still alive; but yet I have the same horror of it as you who have never died, and it is because of this terror of death, I believe, that I am so convinced of my mortality.

I have never told this story, nor shall mortal man see this manuscript until after I have passed over for eternity.

I know that the average mind will not believe what it cannot grasp, and I do not purpose being pilloried by the public, the pulpit, and the press, and held up as a liar, when I am but telling the simple truths which some day science will substantiate.

My name is John Carter.

At the close of the Civil War I found myself possessed of several hundred thousand dollars, Confederate, and a captain's commission in the cavalry arm of an army which no longer existed; the servant of a cause which had vanished.

Masterless, penniless, and with my only means of livelihood—fighting—gone, I determined to work my way to the southwest and attempt to retrieve my fallen fortunes in a search for gold.

I spent nearly a year prospecting in company with another Confederate officer, Captain James K. Powell, of Richmond. We were extremely fortunate, as, late in the winter of 1865-1866, after many hardships and privations, we located the most remarkable gold-bearing quartz vein that our wildest dreams had ever pictured.

Our equipment being crude, we decided that one of us must return to civilization, purchase the necessary machinery, and return with a sufficient force of men properly to work the mine.

Powell was familiar with the country, as well as with the mechanical requirements of mining, and we determined that he should make the trip, while I held down our claim against its being jumped by some wandering prospector.

On March 3, 1866, Powell and I packed his provisions on two of our burros, and, bidding me good-by, he mounted his horse and started down the mountainside toward the valley, across which led the first stage of his journey.

The morning, like nearly all Arizona mornings, was clear and beautiful. I could see him and his little pack animals picking their way down toward the valley, and for hours I would catch occasional glimpses of them as they topped a "hog-back" or came out upon a level plateau.

My last sight of them was

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about three in the afternoon as they entered the shadows of the range on the opposite side of the valley.

Some half hour later I happened to glance casually across the valley, and was much surprised to note three little dots in about the same place I had last seen my Powell and his two pack animals.

I am not given to needless worrying, but the more I tried to convince myself that all was well with Powell, and that the dots I had seen on his trail were antelope or wild horses, the less I was able to assure myself.

Since we had entered the territory we had not seen a hostile Indian, and we had, therefore, become careless and were wont to ridicule the stories of the great numbers of these vicious marauders that haunted the trails, taking their toll in lives and torture of every white party which fell into their merciless clutches.

Finally, however, I could no longer endure the suspense, and, arming myself with my two revolvers and a carbine, I strapped two belts of cartridges about me, and catching my horse, started down the trail.

I followed rapidly until, darkness shutting down, I was forced to await the rising of the moon, and given an opportunity to speculate on the question of the wisdom of my chase.

About nine o'clock the moon was sufficiently bright for me to proceed, and I had no difficulty in following the trail until, about midnight, I reached the water hole where Powell had expected to camp. I came upon the spot unexpectedly, finding it entirely deserted, with no

signs of having been recently occupied.

I noted that the tracks of the pursuing horsemen, for such I was now convinced they must be, continued after Powell with only a brief stop at the hole for water; and always at the same rate of speed as his.

I was positive now that the trailers were Apaches and that they wished to capture Powell alive for the fiendish pleasure of the torture, so I urged my horse onward, hoping against hope that I would catch up with the red rascals before they attacked him.

Further speculation was suddenly cut short by the faint report of two shots far ahead of me. I knew that Powell would need me now, if ever, and I spurred my horse to his utmost speed up the narrow trail.

I had forged ahead for perhaps a mile or more without hearing further sounds, when the trail suddenly debouched onto a small, open plateau near the summit of the pass.

I had passed through a narrow, overhanging gorge just before entering suddenly upon this table-land, and the sight which met my eyes filled me with consternation and dismay.

The little stretch of level land was white with Indian tepees, and there were probably half a thousand red warriors clustered round some object near the center of the camp. Their attention was so wholly riveted to this point of interest that they did not notice me.

I was, of course, positive that Powell was the center of attraction,

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and within an instant from the moment the scene broke upon my view, I had whipped out my revolvers and was charging down upon the entire army of warriors, shooting and whooping at the top of my lungs.

Single-handed, I could not have pursued better tactics, for the red men, convinced by sudden surprise that not less than a regiment of regulars was upon them, turned and fled in every direction for their bows, arrows, and rifles.

Under the clear rays of the Arizona moon lay Powell, his body fairly bristling with the hostile arrows of the braves.

He was already dead surely; yet I would have saved his body from mutilation at the hands of the Apaches as quickly as I would have saved the man himself from death.

Riding close to him I reached from the saddle, and grasping his cartridge-belt, drew him up across the withers of my mount.

To return by the way I had come would have been more hazardous than to continue across the plateau, so, putting spurs to my poor beast, I made a dash for the opening to the pass, which I could distinguish on the far side of the table-land.

The Indians had by this time discovered the puny numerical strength of the rescuing regiment, and I was being showered with imprecations, arrows, and rifle-balls.

The fact that it is difficult to aim anything but imprecations accurately by moonlight, that they were upset by the sudden and

unexpected manner of my advent, and that I was a rather rapidly moving target saved me from the various deadly projectiles of the enemy, and permitted me to reach the shadows of the surrounding peaks before an orderly pursuit could be organized.

My horse was traveling practically unguided, as I knew that I had probably less knowledge of the exact location of the trail to the pass than he, and thus it happened that he entered a defile which led to the summit of the range and not to the pass which I had hoped would carry me to the valley and to safety.

My first knowledge that I was on the wrong trail came when I heard the yells of the pursuing savages suddenly grow fainter and fainter far off to my left. I knew then that they had passed to the left of the jagged rock formation at the edge of the plateau, to the right of which my horse had borne me and the body of Powell.

I drew rein on a little level promontory overlooking the trail below and to my left, and saw my pursuers disappearing round the point of a neighboring peak.

I knew the Indians would soon discover that they were on the wrong trail and that the search for me would be renewed in the right direction as soon as they located my tracks.

I pushed ahead, however, for perhaps a hundred yards, when a sharp turn to the right brought me to the mouth of a large cave. The opening was about four feet in height and three to four feet wide, and at this opening the trail ended.

It was now morning, and, with

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the customary lack of dawn—which is a startling characteristic of Arizona—it had become daylight almost without warning.

Dismounting, I laid Powell upon the ground; but the most painstaking examination failed to reveal the faintest spark of life. I forced water from my canteen between his cold lips, bathed his face and rubbed his hands, working over him continuously for the better part of an hour in the face of the fact that I knew him to be dead.

I was very fond of Powell; he was a thorough man in every respect; a polished gentleman; a stanch and true friend; and it was with deepest grief that I finally gave up.

Leaving the body where it lay on the ledge, I crept into the cave to reconnoiter.

I found a large chamber, possibly a hundred feet in diameter and thirty or forty feet in height; a smooth and well-worn floor, and many other evidences that the cave had at some remote period been inhabited. The back of the cave was so lost in dense shadow that I could not distinguish whether there were openings into other apartments or not.

As I was continuing my examination I commenced to feel a pleasant drowsiness creeping over me, which I attributed to the fatigue of my long and strenuous ride and the reaction from the excitement of the fight and the pursuit.

I felt comparatively safe in my present location, as I knew that one man could defend the trail to the cave against an army.

I soon became so drowsy that

I could scarcely resist the strong desire to throw myself on the floor of the cave for a few moments' rest, but I knew that this would never do, as it would mean certain death at the hands of my red friends, who might be upon me at any moment.

With an effort I started toward the opening of the cave, only to reel drunkenly against a side wall, and from there slip prone upon the floor.

CHAPTER II.

ACROSS THE VOID.

A SENSE of delicious dreaminess overcame me, my muscles relaxed, and I was on the point of giving away to my desire to sleep when the sound of approaching horses reached my ears.

I attempted to spring to my feet, but was horrified to discover that my muscles refused to respond to my will. I was now thoroughly awake, as though turned to stone.

It was then, for the first time, that I noticed a slight vapor filling the cave. It was extremely tenuous and only noticeable against the opening, which led to daylight. There also came to my nostrils a faintly pungent odor, and I could only assume that I had been overcome by some poisonous gas, but why I should retain my mental faculties and yet be unable to move I could not fathom.

I lay facing the opening of the cave, and where I could see the short stretch of trail which lay between the cave and the turn of the cliff. The noise of the approaching horses had ceased, and I judged the Indians were creeping stealthily

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upon me along the little ledge which led to my living tomb.

I remember that I hoped they would make short work of me, as I did not particularly relish the thought of the innumerable things they might do to me if the spirit prompted them.

I had not long to wait before a stealthy sound apprised me of their nearness, and then a war-bonneted, paint-streaked face was thrust cautiously around the shoulder of the cliff, and savage eyes looked into mine.

The fellow, instead of approaching, merely stood and stared; his eyes bulged and his jaw dropped. And then another savage face appeared, and a third, and fourth, and fifth, craning their necks over the shoulders of their fellows whom they could not pass upon the narrow ledge. Each face was the picture of awe and fear.

Suddenly a low but distinct moaning sound issued from the recesses of the cave behind me, and as it reached the ears of the Indians, they turned and fled in terror.

The sound which had frightened them was not repeated, but it had been sufficient as it was to start me speculating on the thing that lurked in the shadows at my back.

Fear is a relative term, and so I can only measure my feelings at that time by what I had experienced in previous positions of danger and by those that I have passed through since; but I can say without shame that if the sensations I endured during the next few minutes were fear, then may Heaven help the coward, for cowardice is of a surety

its own punishment.

To be held paralyzed, with one's back toward a horrible, unknown danger from which the ferocious Apache warriors turned in wild stampede!

Several times I thought I heard faint sounds behind me as of somebody moving cautiously, but eventually even these ceased, and I was left to the contemplation of my position. I could but vaguely conjecture the cause of my paralysis, and my only hope lay in that it might pass off as suddenly as it had fallen upon me.

Late in the afternoon my horse, which had been standing with dragging rein before the cave, started slowly down the trail, evidently in search of food and water, and I was left alone with my mysterious unknown companion and the dead body of my friend, which lay just within my range of vision upon the ledge where I had placed it in the early morning.

From then until possibly midnight all was silence, the silence of the dead.

Then suddenly the awful moan of the morning broke upon my startled ears, and there came again from the black shadows the sound of a moving thing and a faint rustling as of dead leaves. The shock to my already overstrained nervous system was terrible in the extreme, and with a superhuman effort I strove to break my awful bonds.

It was an effort of the mind, of the will, of the nerves; not muscular, for I could not move even so much as my little finger, but none the less mighty for all that.

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Something gave—there was a momentary feeling of nausea, a sharp click as of the snapping of a steel wire, and I stood with my back against the wall of the cave facing my unknown foe.

The moonlight flooded the cave—and there before me lay my own body as it had been lying all those hours, with the eyes staring toward the open ledge and the hands resting limply upon the ground.

I looked first at my lifeless clay there upon the floor of the cave, and then down at myself in utter bewilderment; for there I lay clothed, and yet here I stood, but naked as at the minute of my birth.

The transition had been so sudden and so unexpected that it left me for a moment forgetful of aught else than my strange metamorphosis.

My first thought was: Is this then death? Have I, indeed, passed over forever into that other life?

But I could not well believe this, as I could feel my heart pounding against my ribs from the exertion of my efforts to release myself from the anesthesia which had held me. My breath was coming in quick, short gasps; cold sweat stood out from every pore of my body, and the ancient experiment of pinching revealed the fact that I was anything other than a wraith.

Again was I suddenly recalled to my immediate surroundings by a repetition of the weird moan from the depths of the cave.

Naked and unarmed as I was, I had no desire to face the unseen thing which menaced me.

My revolvers were strapped to

my lifeless body which, for some unfathomable reason, I could not bring myself to touch. My carbine was in its boot, strapped to my saddle, and as my horse had wandered off I was left without means of defense.

My only alternative seemed to lie in flight, and my decision was crystallized by a recurrence of the rustling sound from the thing which now seemed, in the darkness of the cave and to my distorted imagination, to be creeping stealthily upon me.

Unable longer to resist the temptation to escape this horrible place, I leaped quickly through the opening into the starlight of a clear Arizona night.

The crisp, fresh mountain air outside the cave acted as an immediate tonic, and I felt new life and new courage coursing through me. Pausing upon the brink of the ledge, I upbraided myself for what now seemed to me wholly unwarranted apprehension.

I reasoned with myself that I had lain helpless for many hours within the cave, yet nothing had molested me, and my better judgment, when permitted the direction of clear and logical reasoning, convinced me that the noises I had heard must have resulted from purely natural and harmless causes; probably the conformation of the cave was such that a slight breeze had caused the sounds I heard.

I decided to investigate, but first I lifted my head to fill my lungs with the pure, invigorating night air of the mountains.

As I did so I saw stretching far

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below me the beautiful vista of rocky gorge and level, cactus-studded flat, wrought by the moonlight into a miracle of soft splendor.

Nothing is more inspiring than the beauties of an Arizona moonlit landscape; the silvered mountains in the distance, the strange lights and shadows upon "hog back" and *arroyo*.

As I stood thus, meditating, I turned my gaze from the landscape to the heavens where the myriad stars formed a gorgeous and fitting canopy for the wonders of the earthly scene.

My attention was quickly riveted by a large red star close to the distant horizon. As I gazed upon it I felt a spell of overpowering fascination.

It was Mars, the god of war; and for me, the fighting-man, it had always held the power of irresistible enchantment.

As I gazed at it on that far-gone night it seemed to call across the unthinkable void; to lure me to it; to draw me as the lodestone attracts a particle of iron.

My longing was beyond the power of opposition.

I closed my eyes, stretched out my arms toward the god of my vocation, and felt myself drawn with the suddenness of thought through the trackless immensity of space.

There was an instant of extreme cold and utter darkness, and then I opened my eyes upon a strange and weird landscape..

CHAPTER III.

ON A STRANGE PLANET.

I KNEW that I was on Mars; not once did I question either my sanity or my wakefulness. I was not asleep, no need for pinching here; my inner consciousness told me as plainly that I was upon Mars as your conscious mind tells you that you are upon earth. You do not question the fact; neither did I.

I found myself lying prone upon a bed of yellowish, mosslike vegetation which stretched round me in all directions for interminable miles. I seemed to be lying in a deep circular basin, along the outer verge of which I could distinguish the irregularities of low hills.

It was midday, the sun was shining full upon me, and the heat of it was rather intense upon my body, yet no greater than would have been true under similar conditions on an Arizona desert.

Here and there were slight outcroppings of quartz-bearing rock which glistened in the sunlight; and a little to my left, perhaps a hundred yards, appeared a low, walled enclosure about four feet in height.

No water, and no other vegetation than the moss was in evidence; and as I was suffering slightly from thirsty I determined to do a little exploring.

Springing to my feet, I received my first Martian surprise, for the effort, which on earth would have brought me standing upright, carried me into the Martian air to the height of about three yards. I alighted softly upon the ground, however, without appreciable shock or jar.

Now commenced a series of evolutions which even then seemed ludicrous in the extreme. I found

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that I must learn to walk all over again, as the muscular exertion which carried me easily and safely upon earth played strange antics with me upon Mars.

Instead of progressing in a sane and dignified manner, my attempts to walk resulted in a variety of hops which took me clear of the ground a couple of feet at each step and landed me sprawling upon my face or back at the end of each second or third hop.

My muscles, perfectly attuned and accustomed to the force of gravity on earth, played the mischief with me in attempting for the first time to cope with the lesser gravitation and lower air pressure on Mars.

I was determined, however, to explore the low structure, which was the only evidence of habitation in sight, and so I hit upon the unique plan of reverting to first principles in locomotion, creeping. I did fairly well at this, and in a few moments had reached the low, encircling wall of the enclosure.

There appeared to be no doors or windows upon the side nearest me; but, as the wall was but about four feet high, I cautiously gained my feet and peered over the top upon the strangest sight it had ever been given me to see.

The roof of the enclosure was of solid glass about four or five inches in thickness, and beneath this were several hundred large eggs, perfectly round and snowy white. They were nearly uniform in size, being about two and one-half feet in diameter.

Five or six had already hatched, and the grotesque

caricatures which sat blinking in the sunlight were enough to cause me to doubt my sanity.

They seemed mostly head, with little scrawny bodies, long necks and six legs, or, as I afterward learned, two legs and two arms, with an intermediary pair of limbs which could be used at will either as arms or legs.

Their eyes were set at the extreme sides of their heads, a trifle above the center, and protruded in such a manner that they could be directed either forward or back, and also independently of each other, thus permitting this queer animal to look in any direction, or in two directions at once, without the necessity of turning the head.

The ears, which were slightly above the eyes, and closer together, were small, cup-shaped antennae, protruding not more than an inch on these young specimens.

Their noses were but longitudinal slits in the center of their faces, midway between their mouths and ears.

There was no hair on their bodies, which were of a very light yellowish-green color. In the adults, as I was to learn quite soon, this color deepens to an olive green, and is darker in the male than in the female. Further, the heads of the adults are not so out of proportion to their bodies as is true with the young.

The iris of the eyes is blood-red, as in albinos, while the pupil is dark. The eyeball itself is very white, as are the teeth.

These latter add a most ferocious appearance to an otherwise fearsome and terrible

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countenance, as the lower tusks curve upward to sharp points which end about where the eyes of earthly human beings are located. The whiteness of the teeth is not that of ivory, but of the snowiest and most gleaming of china.

Against the dark background of their olive skins their tusks stand out in a most striking manner, making these weapons present a singularly formidable appearance.

Most of these details I noted later, for I was given but little time to speculate on the wonders of my new discovery.

I had seen that the eggs were in the process of hatching, and as I stood watching the hideous little monsters break from their shells I failed to note the approach of a score of full-grown Martians from behind me.

Coming, as they did, over the soft and soundless moss, which covers practically the entire surface of Mars with the exception of the frozen areas at the poles and the scattered cultivated districts, they might have captured me easily, but their intentions were far more sinister.

It was the rattling of the accouterments of the foremost warrior which warned me.

On such a little thing my life hung that I often marvel that I escaped so easily. Had not the rifle of the leader of that rescue party swung from its fastenings beside his saddle in such a way as to strike against the butt of his great metal-shod spear, I should have been snuffed out without ever knowing that death was near me.

But the little sound caused

me to turn, and there, upon me, not ten feet from my breast, was the point of that huge spear, a spear forty feet long, tipped with gleaming metal, and held low at the side of a mounted replica of the little fiends I had been watching.

But how puny and harmless they now looked beside this huge and terrific incarnation of hate, of vengeance and of death. The man himself, for such I may call him, was fully fifteen feet in height, and, on earth, would have weighed some four hundred pounds.

He sat his mount as we sit a horse, grasping the animal's barrel with his lower limbs, while the hands of his two right arms held his immense spear low at the side of his mount; his two left arms were outstretched laterally to help preserve his balance, the thing he rode having neither bridle or reins of any description for guidance.

And his mount! How can earthly words describe it!

It towered ten feet at the shoulder, had four legs on either side, a broad flat tail, larger at the tip than at the root, and which it held straight out behind while running; a gaping mouth, which split its head from its snout to its long, massive neck.

Like its master, it was entirely devoid of hair, but was of a dark slate color, and exceeding smooth and glossy. Its belly was white, and its legs shaded from the slate of its shoulders and hips to a vivid yellow at the feet.

The feet themselves were heavily padded and nailless, which fact had also contributed to the noiselessness of their approach,

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and, in common with a multiplicity of legs, is a characteristic feature of the fauna of Mars. The highest type of man and one other animal, the only animal existing on Mars, alone have well formed nails, and there are absolutely no hoofed animals in existence there.

Behind this first charging demon trailed nineteen others, similar in all respects, but, as I learned later, bearing individual characteristics peculiar to themselves, precisely as no two of us are identical, although we are all cast in a similar mold.

This picture, or rather materialized nightmare, which I have described at length, made but one terrible and swift impression on me as I turned to meet it.

Unarmed and naked as I was, the first law of nature manifested itself in the only possible solution of my immediate problem, and that was to get out of the vicinity of the point of the charging spear.

Consequently I gave a very earthly and at the same time superhuman leap to reach the top of the Martian incubator, for such I had determined it must be.

My effort was crowned with a success which appalled me no less than it seemed to surprise the Martian warriors, for it carried me fully thirty feet into the air and landed me a hundred feet from my pursuers, and on the opposite side of the enclosure.

I alighted upon the soft moss easily and without mishap, and turning saw my enemies lined up along the further wall.

Some were surveying me with expressions which I afterward

discovered marked extreme astonishment, and the others were evidently satisfying themselves that I had not molested their young.

They were conversing together in low tones, and gesticulating and pointing toward me.

Their discovery that I had not harmed the little Martians and that I was unarmed must have caused them to look upon me with less ferocity, but, as I was to learn later, the thing which weighed most in my favor was my exhibition of hurdling.

While the Martians are immense, their bones are very large and they are muscled only in proportion to the gravitation which they must overcome.

The result is that they are infinitely less agile and less powerful, in proportion to their weight, than an Earth man, and I doubt that, were one of them suddenly to be transported to Earth, he could lift his own weight from the ground; in fact I am sure that he could not do so.

My feat, then, was as marvelous upon Mars as it would have been upon Earth, and from desiring to annihilate me they suddenly looked upon me as a wonderful discovery, to be captured and exhibited among their fellows.

The respite my unexpected agility had given me permitted me to formulate plans for the immediate future, and to note more closely the appearance of the warriors, for I could not disassociate these people in my mind from those other warriors who, only the day before, had been pursuing me.

I noted that each was armed with several other weapons in

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addition to the huge spear which I have described.

The weapon which caused me to decide against an attempt at escape by flight was what was evidently a rifle of some description, and which, I felt, for some reason, they were peculiarly efficient in handling.

These rifles were of a white metal stocked with wood, which I learned later was a very light and intensely hard growth much prized on Mars, and entirely unknown to us denizens of Earth.

The metal of the barrel is an alloy composed principally of aluminum and steel, which they have learned to temper to a hardness far exceeding that of the steel with which we are familiar.

The weight of these rifles is comparatively little, and with the small caliber, explosive radium projectiles which they use, and the great length of the barrel, they are deadly in the extreme, and at ranges which would be unthinkable on Earth.

The theoretic effective radius of this rifle is three hundred miles, but the best they can do in actual service, when equipped with their wireless finders and sighters, is but a trifle over two hundred miles.

This is quite far enough to imbue me with great respect for the Martian firearm, and some telepathic force must have warned me against an attempt to escape in broad daylight from under the muzzles of twenty of these death-dealing machines.

The Martians, after conversing for a short time, turned and rode away in the direction from which

they had come, leaving one of their number alone by the enclosure.

When they had covered perhaps two hundred yards, they halted, and turning their mounts toward us, sat watching the warrior by the enclosure.

He was the one whose spear had so nearly transfixed me, and was evidently the leader of the band, as I had noted that they seemed to have moved to their present position at his direction.

When his force had come to a halt he dismounted, threw down his spear and small arms, and came round the end of the incubator toward me, entirely unarmed and unclothed as I, except for the ornaments strapped upon his head, limbs and breast.

When he was within about fifty feet of me he unclasped an enormous metal armlet, and, holding it toward me in the open palm of his hand, addressed me in a clear, resonant voice, but in a language, it is needless to say, I could not understand.

He then stopped, as though waiting for my reply, pricking up his antennaelike ears and cocking his strange-looking eyes still further toward me.

As the silence became painful, I concluded to hazard a little conversation on my own part, as I had guessed that he was making overtures of peace. The throwing down of his weapons, and the withdrawing of his troop before his advance toward me, would have signified a peaceful mission anywhere on Earth; so why not, then, on Mars?

Placing my hand over my

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heart I bowed low to the Martian, and explained to him that, while I did not understand his language, his actions spoke for the peace and friendship that at the present moment were most dear to my heart.

Of course, I might have been a babbling brook, for all the intelligence my speech carried to him; but he understood the action with which I immediately followed my words.

Stretching my hand toward him, I advanced and took the armet from his open palm, clasping it about my arm above the elbow, smiled at him, and stood waiting. His wide mouth spread into an answering smile, and locking one of his intermediary arms in mine, we turned and walked back toward his mount.

At the same time he motioned his followers to advance. They started toward us on a wild run, but were checked by a signal from him. Evidently he feared that were I to be really frightened again, I might jump entirely out of the landscape.

He exchanged a few words with his men, motioned to me that I would ride behind one of them, and then mounted his own animal.

The fellow designated reached down two or three hands, and lifted me up behind him on the glossy back of his mount, where I hung on as best I could by the belts and straps which held the Martian's weapons and ornaments.

The entire cavalcade then turned and galloped away toward the range of hills in the distance.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE STRONGHOLD.

WE had gone perhaps ten miles when the ground began to rise very rapidly.

We were, as I was later to learn, nearing the edge of one of Mars's long dead seas, in the bottom of which my encounter with the Martians had taken place.

In a short time we gained the foot of the mountains, and after traversing a narrow gorge came to an open valley, at the far extremity of which was a low tableland upon which I beheld an enormous city.

Toward this we galloped, entering it by what appeared to be a ruined roadway leading out from the city, but only to the edge of the tableland, where it ended abruptly in a flight of broad steps.

Upon closer observation I saw, as we passed them, that the buildings were deserted, and while not greatly decayed had the appearance of not having been tenanted for years, possibly for ages.

Toward the center of the city was a large plaza, and upon this, and in the buildings immediately surrounding it, were camped some nine or ten hundred creatures of the same breed as my captors, for such I now considered them, despite the suave manner in which I had been trapped.

The women varied in appearance but little from the men, except that their tusks were much larger in proportion to their height, in some instances curving nearly to their high-set ears.

Their bodies were smaller and lighter in color, and their fingers

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and toes bore the rudiments of nails, which were entirely lacking among the males. The adult females ranged in height from ten to twelve feet.

The children were light in color, even lighter than the women, and all looked precisely alike to me, except that some were taller than others; older, I presumed.

I saw no signs of extreme age among them, nor was there any appreciable difference in their appearance from the age of maturity, about forty, until, at about the age of one thousand years, they go voluntarily upon their last strange pilgrimage down the river Iss, which leads no living Martian knows whither, and from whose bosom no Martian has ever returned, or would be allowed to live did he return after once embarking upon its cold, dark waters.

Only about one Martian in a thousand dies of sickness or disease, and possibly about twenty take the voluntary pilgrimage.

The other nine hundred and seventy-nine die violent deaths in duels, in hunting, in aviation and in war; but perhaps by far the greatest death loss comes during the age of childhood, when vast numbers of the little Martians fall victims to the great white apes of Mars.

The average life expectancy of a Martian after the age of maturity is about three hundred years, but would be nearer the one thousand mark were it not for the various means leading to violent death.

Owing to the waning resources of the planet it evidently became necessary to counteract the increasing longevity which their

remarkable skill in therapeutics and surgery produced, and so human life has come to be considered but lightly on Mars, as is evidenced by their dangerous sports and the almost continual warfare between the various communities.

As we neared the plaza, and my presence was discovered, we were immediately surrounded by hundreds of the creatures, who seemed anxious to pluck me from my seat behind my guard.

A word from the leader of the party stilled their clamor, and we proceeded at a trot across the plaza to the entrance of as magnificent an edifice as mortal eye has rested upon.

The building was low, but covered an enormous area.

It was constructed of gleaming white marble inlaid with gold and brilliant stones which sparkled and scintillated in the sunlight. The main entrance was some hundred feet in width and projected from the building proper to form a huge canopy above the entrance hall. There was no stairway, but a gentle incline to the first floor of the building opened into an enormous chamber encircled by galleries.

On the floor of this chamber, which was dotted with highly carved wooden desks and chairs, were assembled about forty or fifty male Martians around the steps of a rostrum.

On the platform proper squatted an enormous warrior loaded with metal ornaments, gay-colored feathers, and beautifully wrought leather trappings ingeniously set with precious stones. From his shoulders

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depended a short cape of white fur, lined with brilliant scarlet silk.

What struck me as most remarkable about this assemblage and the hall in which they were congregated was the fact that the creatures were entirely out of proportion to the desks, chairs, and other furnishings, these being of a size adapted to human beings such as I, whereas the great bulks of the Martians could scarcely have squeezed into the chairs, nor was there room beneath the desks for their long legs.

Evidently, then, there were other denizens on Mars than the wild and grotesque creatures into whose hands I had fallen, but the evidences of extreme antiquity which showed all around me indicated that these buildings might have belonged to some long extinct and forgotten race in the dim antiquity of Mars.

Our party had halted at the entrance to the building, and at a sign from the leader I had been lowered to the ground.

Again locking his arm in mine, we had proceeded into the audience chamber. There were few formalities observed in approaching the Martian chieftain.

My captor merely strode up to the rostrum, the others making way for him as he advanced. The chieftain rose to his feet and uttered the name of my escort, who, in turn, halted and repeated the name of the ruler, followed by his title.

At the time this ceremony and the words they uttered meant nothing to me, but later I came to know that this was the customary greeting between green Martians.

Had the men been strangers, and therefore unable to exchange names, they would have silently exchanged ornaments, had their missions been peaceful; otherwise they would have exchanged shots, or have fought out their introduction with some other of their various weapons.

My captor, whose name was Tars Tarkas, was virtually the vice-chieftain of the community, and a man of great ability as a statesman and warrior. He evidently explained briefly the incidents connected with his expedition, including my capture, and when he had concluded the chieftain addressed me at some length.

I replied in our good old English tongue merely to convince him that neither of us could understand the other; but I noticed that when I smiled slightly on concluding, he did likewise.

This fact, and the similar occurrence during my first talk with Tars Tarkas, convinced me that we had at least something in common; the ability to smile, therefore to laugh; denoting a sense of humor. But I was to learn that the Martian smile is merely perfunctory, and that the Martian laugh is a thing to cause strong men to blanch in horror.

The ideas of humor among the green men of Mars are widely at variance with our conceptions of incitants to merriment.

The death agonies of a fellow being are, to these strange creatures, provocative of the wildest hilarity, while their chief form of commonest amusement is to inflict death on their prisoners of war in

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various ingenious and horrible ways.

The assembled warriors and chieftains examined me closely, feeling my muscles and the texture of my skin. The principal chieftain then evidently signified a desire to see me perform, and, motioning me to follow, he started with Tars Tarkas for the open plaza.

Now, I had made no attempt to walk since my first signal failure, except while tightly grasping Tars Tarkas's arm, and so now I went skipping and flitting about among the desks and chairs like some monstrous grasshopper.

After bruising myself severely, much to the amusement of the Martians, I again had recourse to creeping, but this did not suit them and I was roughly jerked to my feet by a towering fellow who had laughed most heartily at my misfortunes.

As he banged me down upon my feet his face was bent close to mine and I did the only thing a gentleman might do under the circumstances of brutality, boorishness and lack of consideration for a stranger's rights; I swung my fist squarely to his jaw and he went down like a felled ox.

As he sank to the floor I wheeled around with my back toward the nearest desk, expecting to be overwhelmed by the vengeance of his fellows, but determined to give them as good a battle as the unequal odds would permit before I gave up my life.

My fears were groundless, however, as the other Martians, at first struck dumb with wonderment, finally broke into wild peals of

laughter and applause.

I did not recognize the applause as such, but later, when I had become acquainted with their customs, I learned that I had won what they seldom accord, a manifestation of approbation.

The fellow whom I had struck lay where he had fallen, nor did any of his mates approach him.

Tars Tarkas advanced toward me, holding out one of his arms, and we thus proceeded to the plaza without further mishap. I did not, of course, know the reason for which we had come to the open, but I was not long in being enlightened.

They first repeated the word "*sak*" a number of times, and then Tars Tarkas made several jumps, repeating the same word before each leap; then, turning to me, he said, "*sak!*"

I saw what they were after, and gathering myself together, I "*sakked*" with such marvelous success that I cleared a good hundred and fifty feet; nor did I, this time, lose my equilibrium, but landed squarely upon my feet without falling. I then returned by easy jumps of twenty-five or thirty feet to the little group of warriors.

My exhibition had been witnessed by several hundred lesser Martians, and they immediately broke into demands for a repetition, which the chieftain then ordered me to make; but I was both hungry and thirsty, and determined on the spot that my only method of salvation was to demand the consideration from these creatures which they evidently would not voluntarily accord.

I therefore ignored the

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repeated commands to "*sak*," and each time they were made I motioned to my mouth and rubbed my stomach.

Tars Tarkas and the chief exchanged a few words, and the former, calling to a young female among the throng, gave her some instructions and motioned me to accompany her.

I grasped her proffered arm and together we crossed the plaza toward a large building on the far side.

My fair companion was about eight feet tall, having just arrived at maturity, but not yet to her full height.

She was of a light olive green color, with a smooth, glossy hide. Her name, as I afterward learned, was Sola, and she belonged to the retinue of Tars Tarkas. She conducted me to a spacious chamber in one of the buildings fronting on the plaza, and which, from the litter of silks and furs upon the floor, I took to be the sleeping quarters of several of the natives.

The room was well lighted by a number of large windows and was beautifully decorated with mural paintings and mosaics, but upon all there seemed to rest that indefinable touch of the finger of antiquity which convinced me that the architects and builders of these wondrous creations had nothing in common with the crude half-brutes which now occupied them.

Sola motioned me to be seated upon a pile of silks near the center of the room, and, turning, made a peculiar hissing sound, as though signaling to someone in an adjoining room.

In response to her call, I obtained my first sight of a new Martian wonder.

It waddled in on its ten short legs, and squatted down before the girl like an obedient puppy.

The thing was about the size of a Shetland pony, but its head bore a slight resemblance to that of a frog, except that the jaws were equipped with three rows of long, sharp tusks.

CHAPTER V.

A MARTIAN WATCH-DOG.

SOLA stared into the brute's wicked-looking eyes, muttered a word or two of command, pointed to me, and left the chamber.

I could not but wonder what this ferocious looking monstrosity might do when left alone in close proximity to such a relatively tender morsel of meat; but my fears were groundless, as the beast, after surveying me intently for a moment, crossed the room to the only exit which led to the street and lay down full length across the threshold.

This was my first experience with a Martian watch-dog, but it was destined not to be my last, for this fellow guarded me carefully during the time I remained a captive among these green men; twice saving my life, and never voluntarily being away from me a moment.

While Sola was away I took occasion to examine more minutely the room in which I found myself captive.

The mural painting depicted scenes of rare and wonderful beauty; mountains, rivers, lake,

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ocean, meadow; trees and flowers; winding roadways, sun-kissed gardens; scenes which might have portrayed earthly views but for the different colorings of the vegetation.

The work had evidently been wrought by a master hand, so subtle the atmosphere, so perfect the technique; yet nowhere was there a representation of a living animal, either human or brute, by which I could guess at the likeness of these other and perhaps extinct denizens of Mars.

While I was allowing my fancy to run riot in wild conjecture on the possible explanation of the strange anomalies which I had so far met with on Mars, Sola returned bearing both food and drink. These she placed on the floor beside me, and seating herself a short ways off regarded me intently.

The food consisted of about a pound of some solid substance of the consistency of cheese and almost tasteless, while the liquid was apparently milk from some animal.

It was not unpleasant to the taste, though slightly acid, and I learned in a short time to prize it very highly.

It came, as I later discovered, not from an animal, as there is only one animal on Mars and that one very rare indeed, but from a large plant which grows practically without water, but seems to distil its plentiful supply of milk from the products of the soil, the moisture of the air, and the rays of the sun. A single plant of this species will give eight or ten quarts of milk per day.

After I had eaten I was greatly invigorated, but feeling the need of

rest I stretched out upon the silks and was soon asleep. I must have slept several hours, as it was dark when I awoke, and I was very cold.

I noticed that someone had thrown a fur over me, but it had become partially dislodged and in the darkness I could not see to replace it. Suddenly a hand reached out and pulled the fur over me, shortly afterwards adding another to my covering.

I presumed that my watchful guardian was Sola, nor was I wrong. This girl alone, among all the green Martians with whom I came in contact, disclosed characteristics of sympathy, kindness, and affection; her ministrations to my bodily wants were unfailing, and her solicitous care saved me from much suffering and many hardships.

As I was to learn, the Martian nights are extremely cold, and, as there is practically no twilight or dawn, the changes in temperature are sudden and most uncomfortable, as are the transitions from brilliant daylight to darkness.

The nights are either brilliantly illumined or very dark, for if neither of Mars's two moons happen to be in the sky almost total darkness results, since the lack of atmosphere, or, rather, the very thin atmosphere fails to diffuse the starlight to any great extent; on the other hand, if both of the moons are in the heavens at night the surface of the ground is brightly illuminated.

Both of Mars's moons are vastly nearer her than is our moon to Earth; the nearer moon being but about five thousand miles distant, while the further is but little more

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than fourteen thousand miles away, against the nearly one-quarter million miles which separate us from our moon.

The nearer moon of Mars makes a complete revolution around the planet in a little over seven and one-half hours, so that she may be seen hurtling through the sky like some huge meteor two or three times each night, revealing all her phases during each transit of the heavens.

The further moon revolves about Mars in something over thirty and one-quarter hours, and, with her sister satellite, makes a nocturnal Martian scene one of splendid and weird grandeur.

After Sola had replenished my coverings I again slept, nor did I awaken until daylight.

The other occupants of the room, five in number, were all females, and they were still sleeping, piled high with a motley array of silks and furs.

Across the threshold lay stretched the sleepless guardian brute, just as I had last seen him on the preceding day; apparently he had not moved a muscle; his eyes were fairly glued upon me, and I fell to wondering just what might befall me should I endeavor to escape.

I have ever been prone to seek adventure, and to investigate and experiment where wiser men would have left well enough alone.

It therefore, now occurred to me that the surest way of learning the exact attitude of this beast toward me would be to attempt to leave the room.

I felt fairly secure in my belief that I could escape him should he

pursue me once I was outside the building, for I had begun to take great pride in my ability as a jumper.

Furthermore, I could see from the shortness of his legs, that the brute himself was no jumper, and, probably no runner.

Slowly and carefully, therefore, I gained my feet, only to see that my watcher did the same; cautiously I advanced toward him, finding that by moving with a shuffling gate I could retain my balance, as well as make reasonably rapid progress.

As I neared the brute, he backed warily away from me, and when I had reached the open, he moved to one side to let me pass. He then fell in behind me and followed about ten paces in my rear as I made my way along the deserted street.

Evidently his mission was to protect me only, I thought, but when we reached the edge of the city he suddenly sprang before me, uttering strange sounds and baring his ugly and ferocious tusks.

Thinking to have some amusement at his expense, I rushed toward him, and when almost upon him, sprang into the air, alighting far beyond him and away from the city.

He wheeled instantly and charged me with the most appalling speed I had ever beheld.

I had thought his short legs a bar to swiftness, but had he been coursing with greyhounds, the latter would have appeared as though asleep on a door-mat.

As I was to learn, this is the fleetest animal on Mars, and owing

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to its intelligence, loyalty, and ferocity, is used in hunting, in war, and as the protector of the Martian man.

I quickly saw that I would have difficulty in escaping the fangs of the beast on a straightaway course, and so I met his charge by doubling in my tracks and leaping over him as he was almost upon me.

This maneuver gave me a considerable advantage and I was able to reach the city quite a bit ahead of him, and as he came tearing after me I jumped for a window about thirty feet from the ground in the face of one of the buildings overlooking the valley.

Grasping the sill, I pulled myself up to a sitting posture without looking into the building and gazed down at the baffled animal beneath me.

My exultation was short-lived.

Scarcely had I gained a secure seat upon the sill, than a huge hand grasped me by the neck from behind, and dragged me violently into the room.

I was thrown upon my back, and beheld standing over me a colossal apelike creature, white and hairless, except for an enormous shock of bristly hair upon its head.

(To be continued.)