

THE DOUBLE MINDS

I

PRISONERS ON GANYMEDE

"P'HOLKUUN'S coming back," Ted Penton sighed. "Maybe he meant it."

Rod Blake stirred restlessly on the bunk.

"Will you make your news reports more explicit? You have your mug against the only clear spot on the damn glass door. Which one of those animated beanpoles is P'hol-kuun?"

"How can I describe him? He's a Ganymedian jailer, to you. They all look alike. Since we are the first human beings ever to see Ganymedians-or Ganymede itself-there aren't any words in the language to describe him. He is seven feet three inches tall, weighs about one hundred and fifty-or he would on Earth. He has that attractive green hair they all have, and he is wearing a Shaloor guard's uniform. He is shooing away our other guard."

"I guess he is as good an orator as you were," Blake grunted. "In five minutes you learned their language, found his political opinions, and had him sold on you to start a revolution. Man, you are political dynamite!"

"Political atomic power," Penton replied sourly. "I got us kicked out of Earth first for experimenting with the stuff. Kick number one; we get in the soup on Mars. Head for home, and all Earth turns out a great welcome for us-twenty-one gun salutes. Only they forgot to take out the sixteen-inch shells. They still don't want us. It was easier here. Fholkuun's a member of the rebel party, and the mind-reading stunt I learned from the Martians helped me make friends with him,"

"Penton," suddenly whispered the thin, squeaky voice of the friendly jailer outside, "the Shaloor have investigated your spaceship again. They are afraid."

"They are wise," replied Penton grimly. "If they disturb the atomic balances I have established in the engines, they'll blow this whole satellite clear out of Jupiter's system. They haven't a glimmering of an idea what forces I use."

"They don't believe you. They say you are a liar." The jailer, a Lanoor, sounded doubtful himself.

"They wanted me to take them in it out into space," went on Penton. "If they know more about my machine than I do, why don't they build one like it, and go out in their own machine? You don't even have the words atomic power and electricity in your language." P'holkuun shook his head slowly.

"You do not understand. Ten years ago, the first Shaloor was made. He was a Lanoor, but he invented an operation, and tried it on a friend, then the friend did it to him. The brain is divided into two halves, only one of which ever works in thinking. If, however, a man is injured so the half he is using is destroyed, then the other half works. The Shaloor found out how to make both halves work at once. The brain is made up of thousands and thousands of individual cells, each one helping to think. When the Shaloor doubled the number of thinking cells that work, he became, not twice as brilliant, but over ten thousand times as keen-minded. With two factors, A and B, you can make only two combinations: AB and BA. With twice as many factors, you can make far more than twice as many combinations. In ten short years the Shaloor overthrew our rulers, developed a new civilization. They invented the shleath, and a thousand new vegetables and new animal foods. They will be able to learn your secret shortly. Some day our rebellion may succeed."

"The Shaloor are not omniscient. You are needlessly afraid of them." Penton snapped.

The Lanoor's big, broad face split in a slow grin.

"You are in jail, Urd-mahn, thanks to the Shaloor."

"They trapped us by treachery-"

"The Shaloor are always treacherous. It is intelligent they say."

"They will find it most unintelligent when my people come ten months from now with ships that can wipe out this city in a moment's time. We will so disturb the Shaloor that your waiting rebellion can succeed." Their jailer did not

know that they had been exiled from Earth.

"Their gas-their gas always stops us. And the shleath. No man can face that-" The guard's ruddy face went pale at the thought, and Penton cursed silently that his very fear made his mind unreadable, even to the ancient method the Martians had learned and recorded ten thousand years ago in the ancient museums he had recently plundered. He could only catch vague, formless jellies wavering in a cloudiness of fear as the mental image.

"We have an older knowledge," Penton said shortly. "But do as you will. We will be out in a day's time, if the Shaloor have not first released the frightful energies of our ship in their blunderings."

"I-I will talk with my comrades tonight," P'holkuun said, and moved down the corridor uneasily. Penton turned away from the little window in the frosted glass of the door. Though his Earth-bred strength was five times that of a Ganymedian, it was still far less than was needed to break down the thick, tough glass. Penton looked at it disgustedly.

"Damn," he complained mournfully.

"I take it he said, 'No.' " Blake looked morosely at the door. "Nice birds they have here. You greet 'em friendly, they wave and grin, and beckon from airplanes while you come down out of space. You step out-and plunko-they trap you with glass bombs of sleep-gas. Ah, well-I can't sleep, I can't smoke, and I can't move. I-"

"Oh, shut up. Here, I'll make you sleep. Hypnotism."

"Can you? Say-that's right, you learned a lot of dope from those Martian records. Go ahead." Blake lay back thankfully. Ten seconds later he realized his error. He was helplessly hypnotized, and already he recognized the flood of strange thoughts pouring into his mind, other-worldly ideas. Penton was giving him knowledge of the Lanoorian language by the technique the Martians had developed ten thousand years ago: hypnotic teaching.

Blake was about to acquire a complete understanding of Lanoor, in about five minutes. Also, all the headaches that he would normally have had learning a language would be equally concentrated into one great-granddaddy of all headaches. He struggled to free his will-The sun was shining in through the whole rear wall of the cell, which meant that it was day again, and he had slept for hours.

"No," said Penton's voice. But it was Lanoor he was speaking, and Blake moved his head gingerly and groaned audibly. Yes, the headache was there.

"No, I'll have to make the medicine myself. Tell them Blake is dying, that the air does not suit him. Hear him moan? Tell the Shaloor that I must have that stuf."

Blake saw a shadow, distorted by the uneven glass of the prison wall, move off. Penton turned toward him.

"Excellent, Rod, excellent. Nothing could have been better timed. I didn't know you were awake; and your help was really welcome."

"Help? Help, you cosmic blight! My head."

"I know. But we needed the stuff. Now he'll get it for us. You know their language now-we'll get the stuff I want." "I've got a headache. Go away and shut up. Oh-h-h."

He dozed, for when he opened his eyes again, his head pained less, and Penton was hard at work with some glass flasks, pungently odorous liquids, and various powders.

"Will you groan?" asked Penton pleasantly. "The guard is watching and listening."

Blake obliged. "Oh-h-h-what in double blazes-ah-h-h-h -are you stewing? It smells like fury!"

"I'm too busy trying to figure out something. Keep groaning, by the way. This is medicine for you. You're suffering because the atmosphere doesn't suit you. I can stand it, because I've had a dose of this atmospheric-cosmic-telluric acclimatizer."

"Groan? Great God, if it's anything you cooked up, I'm going to recover right here and now. You're no medicine man!"

"I am now. The stuff is now prepared. Hm-m-m-" he passed it under his nose. A mixture of pleasant, fruity smells, and peculiarly rank, acrid odors pervaded the room. From a bottle he measured out a number of gritty crystals, then from a second bottle of green glass, a few more. He sniffed the results, tasted it. "Try a bit." He grinned at last, and passed it over. "Guaranteed to make you lick tigers like lollypops."

Blake took it at arm's length, and sniffed. His eyes widened. He tasted it. His mouth widened in a grin.

"What stuff! Happy days will come again." A considerable portion of the potent brew went down. Blake relinquished it only under protest. "All right, but explain the ingredients."

Penton helped himself to a bit, and nodded.

"Citric acid-crystallized acid of lemon. Sucrose-commonly sold under the name of sugar. Ethanol-otherwise ethyl alcohol. Carbonic acid-in no way related to the one with an T in it-better liked as soda water. I thought the combine might strike you where you needed it, and anyway, I needed the rest of the brew."

Penton looked at, but did not handle, a large flask in which a watery liquid was stirring slowly about a white powder. Fully a gallon of the stuff was there already, and he cautiously added more from a large beaker, and more powder from a glass bottle. "And that?" asked Blake.

"The universal solvent. Anyway, it should get us out of here, I believe. I-" With a soft clank, the large glass block disintegrated, and its contents spewed out over the metal table, and down the glass wall of the cell. The table had been in a corner, and the adjacent walls and floor were liberally flooded with the deluge. An intense, suffocating odor sprang up at once. Blake pulled his feet off the floor hastily, and looked in dismay at Penton.

"I thought it would," Penton sighed. "It does that." "What?"

"Be patient and we'll see. You are supposed to be recovering from a fatal illness. I've got to tell the guard it's according to plan."

The guard was already unlocking the door, for he had seen the deluge. Penton waved his hands.

"Keep out-the vapors-Blake must breathe the vapors!" The unsuspecting guard had the door somewhat open, but getting the said vapors himself, he promptly decided that Blake was welcome to them and departed.

"Look, Rod, they have just turned on the corridor lights!" explained Penton. "Which reminds me to ask why you said even before we landed, that they didn't have electricity. Those may not be electric gas-glow tubes, but they're certainly one swell imitation."

Penton laughed. "Wrong, two out of two. I said they didn't have electricity before we landed because the instruments on the ship indicated no sign of electric or electromagnetic energy of any sort produced by man on the whole planet. As for the lamps, electric gas-glow tubes are a poor imitation of them. Those are biological lamps. They use some kind of a bacterial ferment, and they turn them on by letting air into them. Notice how dark it is already? Small world turning rapidly on its axis, with a thin atmosphere. It will be dark in another quarter hour. Better pack your belongings, because, m' lad, we are going out."

"How? Did P'holkuun finally decide to throw in with us?"

"No, not yet, anyway. I didn't think he would until we got out of here on our own legs. P'holkuun isn't going to ask help from somebody who is tied worse than he is. But-he'll help plenty once we get out of here."

"Yes-but how? Don't tell me we can go out through those solid walls!"

"Yes, through the walls. It's dark enough now, I suppose. Rod, will you wield that hefty hoof of yours against the wall in the neighborhood of that table, while I obscure the window in the door? I would have a chat with our jailer. Don't shake the building, though. You should go right through the wall. Easy." Blake moved the table. Penton's argument with the jailer was about something impossible, and very loud, but Blake paid little attention because of the way the wall was acting. The clear, hard glass was crumbling under his foot into

sand. It broke out in great chunks, and crumbled as though his foot were a pile-driver. In utter surprise he felt his boot sink into the stuff-and through it! In almost no time, Penton had so annoyed the jailer that the man walked down the corridor to avoid Penton's voice, and Penton walked with Blake through the wall of the prison.

"Jupiter will rise in about two hours. When he comes up you won't need to be told, but you will need to be hidden," said Penton. "We appear to the local populace as inconspicuous as a pair of orangutans walking down Fifth Avenue arm in arm. And slightly less harmless. To them our build is the quintessence of horrible, brute strength.

"So when Jupiter's great bulk comes over the horizon, the reflected light is going to make us conspicuous, and not a sight to calm the nerves of nice, old Lanoorian ladies. Further, thanks to P'holkuun's thoughts, I know that our ship is somewhere on the far side of the city. So come on. First we have to get away from this neighborhood."

n

THE DOUGHBALLS

TED PENTON SAILED over a twenty-foot wall surrounding the jail, and Blake found it easy to follow because of the satellite's low gravity.

"What"-he panted after a moment-"is the secret-of the wall-stop running-you fool-I'm winded."

"The air's too thin-to keep-it up," agreed Penton. In the darkness of a tiny alleyway they stopped. "The stuff I used was crotonaldehyde-an organic liquid-derivable from -alcohol. Works on the fact-that glass is not a true-solid."

Blake stared at him, panting.

"Yeah. Stone walls do-not a prison make-nor iron bars a cage. So what is it? That glass wall looked solid enough-it had me bluffed."

"Puffed, did you say? Glass is a liquid. Liquid got so cold it has turned stiff-past the gooey stage. Crotonaldehyde has the curious property of turning it solid. Long heating and cooling does it too, that's why kerosene lamp-chimneys used to get so fragile. Solid glass is extremely brittle and as strong as so much sand. When that stuff turned it solid it took all the strength out of it. We have to steal a car. Damn. No running or we will pant so loud they'll hear us a block away. They have cars. There ought to be one around here somewhere, and let us pray they haven't invented locks for 'em." They covered six blocks before they saw a rounded, bulky lump in the road that was evidently an automobile.

"You drive, Rod," Penton said softly. "You are a better driver than I, and a better mechanic. Can you figure it out?"

"Lord, help us, nol Is it electric? No. Steam? Compressed air? Gasoline? Diesel? How in blazes should I know? Where's the engine? Both ends look alike. I have never seen anybody drive one, and I don't even know which end is front. Is this one a steering lever, and-well, what's that other one back there? I-" the car jerked ahead suddenly.

"Oh," said Penton, "you do know how to start it."

Blake was too busy hanging on. He held the lever grimly in his hand, and pulled.

"What do I do to stop it?" He tried pushing the lever. The car showed capabilities of speed. He pressed in a different direction. The car stopped accelerating but by no means slowed down. The quite accidental fact that the road was straight helped. His foot felt feverishly for a brake pedal- and the car swerved aside into a pole.

"I think," said Penton, bending the door frame out of his way, "that they probably have a more comfortable, if no more effective means of stopping them. They can't have light poles everywhere. We had better hurry elsewhere. Someone will certainly investigate that crash. Anyway, the next car we try, you'll know they steer with their feet, and not try to jam on the brakes with the steering gear."

"The next one," said Blake clearly, "you will know they steer with their feet."

And I'm going to take time out to find out how in blazes they work. I just took hold of that handle -and away she went. No starter-nothing!"

Six blocks away they found another car, not exactly like the first, but similar, seven seats instead of five. Blake looked at Penton.

Penton hesitated, and looked about him. Surrounding warehouses loomed, dark masses against a star-studded sky. A tiny, bright moon rode high in the sky, and lower was another, even smaller. Giant worlds, as large as the planet they rode, but millions of miles distant in Jupiter's titanic gravity field. But their light was enough to show dim alleyways and fences made of wire and some woven, fibrous stuff.

"Right, Rod. Check the control system and let it go," Penton said softly.

Five seconds later Blake was in and after a few more moments of swift examination he started from the curb. The machine started with a swift, smooth rush, and the soft whirr of the blowers and pumps was the only sound from the engine. Rapidly Blake got the feel of the apparatus, the two steering pedals, the lever that controlled it's speed by increase or relaxation of pressure on the grip. Relaxed, it became a brake of fair power; squeezed, the car shot forward with amazing acceleration.

"All right. I have it now. We need lights, and I didn't figure them out. They must be in the dash control."

Penton worked swiftly over the dash with the aid of the hand flash he carried. Suddenly lights blazed on, and Blake sped on his way with more assurance.

Blake squeezed harder on the control, and the silent engine behind drove the car forward with a powerful, steady push. Rapidly, fully forty miles an hour, they cruised through the deserted district. The street that had led them straight toward their goal came to an end, and Blake hesitated at the curve, muttering at the inefficient brake system. Then he went right. Presently, on a more traveled street, he went left. More cars were about them.

As they headed toward the city, traffic became heavier, and Blake anxiously watched the system, trying to learn the rules of the road. They drove on the left, moving at a lively clip.

"They have traffic lights," said Penton quietly. "I just spotted the damn things. It's a block system, like New York's. See-way up ahead you can see that yellow light. That's stop. Red is go. We'll have to stop at this next block."

But traffic became heavier. Lights became confusing. And suddenly a bright flush crept over the sky, and almost immediately Jupiter loomed on the skyline. Five blocks later they were hopelessly caught in a traffic jam in the heart of the city. Drivers near them looked-and left. Beside them they had seen, driving a car, two monstrous, squat beings, with great ropes and bundles of inhuman muscles. To them they appeared like horrible animals incredibly become intelligent.

Blake opened his door.

"All off here. Transfer. Last stop. We can't drive through those stalled cars, and somehow I don't think the drivers are coming back." Penton got out the other side, and silently they walked up the line of traffic. Behind them doors opened hastily, and feet scuttled away. Blake crept up beside the leading car, a gleaming, seven-passenger sedan, and rose abruptly at the driver's window. He looked quietly at the occupant. A gray-haired Lanoor stared back, and slowly his eyes closed. He shook his head and opened them very wide, then beat it.

Penton climbed in first, and Blake took the late occupant's seat.

"The lights have changed," Penton said. They made nearly fifteen blocks. Then they changed cars again, taking the first car in line-and a dozen glass bubbles of sleep-gas crackled around them. Blake leapt upward, to the top of a car, and crashed through into the seat. He settled back in sleep before he could extricate himself.

Penton, who had started down the road in great leaps, looked back-and leaped faster. A two-foot thick, doughy mass was rolling of its own volition in his direction. He turned down a side street and increased his pace. He began to

jump from side to side but it caught up with him. It was soft, and squashy, but rubbery. It simply clung about his feet, and crept slowly up and over his legs, up his body, while he tore great holes in the doughiness that persistently grew together again. Desperately he drove his hand into his pocket while the Lanoor police ran toward him with their slow, exaggerated strides, gas bombs in hands. A glass bulb arched forward, but fell short of him.

Then his hand came free with the flashlight, as the crawling, doughy stuff crept about his other arm. An instant later the thing was bouncing and bounding down the street madly, from side to side, throwing itself in all directions, smashing

down the rapidly approaching Lanoor, and rebounding with evident terror. Somehow the flashlight had driven it away.

Penton loped easily into an alley, and after several blocks of leaping fences, circled back. A crowd of Lanoor guardsmen were carefully roping Blake. The Earthmen lay inert in the roadway with his head thrown back, heavy snores gurgling forth. Penton walked as near as he felt was reasonably safe, and looked. An empty car stood nearby. He headed for it. It was a light roadster, and after some calculations he started it in the direction of Blake. The Lanoor guardsmen peppered it with glass bubbles; two doughy things tried to mesh its powerful wheels and were torn up, only to reform accidentally as one large one. The guardsmen scattered as the car rolled quietly forward and coasted to a stop.

Blake had already begun to stir, and Penton stopped. Evidently his previous exposure to the gas seemed to confer a semi-immunity. Methodically he released his friend. "I think," said Penton, thoughtfully, "that it is time to seek lodging for the day. This looks like a pleasantly dilapidated section."

Ill

THE SHLEATH

PENTON LOOKED down the shabby street. His view was restricted somewhat, because even though it was the widest of numerous sad cracks in the even sadder wreck that had once been a house and now sheltered them, it was narrow. A Lanoor was walking down the far side, stumbling through a series of dreary mud puddles in a peculiarly automatonlike way. Abruptly he halted stock still in the center of an unusually well developed puddle and shook his head slowly. It weaved about dangerously on the pipe-stem neck, and the shabbily dressed giant looked dazedly about him. After a while he started on vaguely, a gradual deepening of purpose putting increasing firmness in his gangling walk. Penton sighed and turned away. He nodded to Blake and sat down.

"He's started. He did just what I ordered him to. Unless some Shaloor for some impossible reason picks that one man out of all the city to practice hypnotism on, those hypnotic orders I gave him are going to work, and he will bring P'holkuun here. It ought not to take more than an hour."

"But will he come? And will it do any good, if he does? He didn't help us before," protested Blake.

"He will for two reasons. The chances are the Shaloor won't know that trick about crotonaldehyde-I used something else, a catalyst that intensified the action-and they are going to be mighty mystified as to how in Nine Planets and Great Spaces we took the starch out of that wall. They'll be even more worried about the way that doughball they sicced on me backfired when I used the flashlight. He'll come, and he will probably help, now that we have shown him we can do something the Shaloor can't. I think we have an hour to wait."

They actually had less than an hour. A small roadster came slowly up the street, and stopped four or five doors away. The tall Lanoor got out. With some trepidation, evidently, he came over and cautiously opened the door.

"Come in, P'holkuun. You are a welcome sight."

"You've caused a great deal of trouble," the Lanoor greeted them. "The Shaloor have posted many guards about the palace; it has made any hope of a revolution useless for some time. They have taken the sleep-gas throwers away from the Lanoor guards, leaving them only swords. And the shleaih are all locked up."

"Is a shleaih," asked Penton thoughtfully, "a doughy thing without any legs, but possessed of a peculiarly unpleasant odor, and a miraculous slime?"

"No," the Lanoor sighed. "You have no idea of what shleath are. Those were grethlanth they turned on you last night. The shleath are fifty feet in diameter, but otherwise much like those things. The Shaloor are still very much puzzled by the way the grethlanth ran away from you. They are fearless, and never before have they run from a prisoner." Penton smiled, grimly.

"That, my friend, was electricity. It was one of the forces the Shaloor have not guessed. Here, moisten your two fingers like this, and touch this little metal piece." Penton illustrated the action, and the Lanoor hesitatingly touched the terminals of the flash. Instantly he jumped three feet backward and fell to the floor.

Slowly he sat up, shaking his head, while Penton and Blake looked at each other curiously.

"That-that is horrible! Put it away!" gasped the Lanoor. "It made all my muscles writhe into knots. It made my heart contract as though a giant had squeezed it. It is horrible!"

"It is electricity," said Penton slowly, "and you seem to be very sensitive to it, much more so than we are. Now, what did you say a shleath was?"

"It is a great mass of protoplasm jelly which obeys readily the will of its controller," replied P'holkuun, rubbing his arm, and eyeing the flash uneasily. "It cannot be killed, because if part is poisoned that part is split oif. If it is shot or cut, that does no harm. It is not affected by sleep-gas. It is immensely strong, and can assume any form. The Shaloor conquered the Lanoor rulers originally by sending shleath up a small drain pipe in the form of a thread of protoplasm, and having it assume the form of a roller in the barred and defended fortress where the Lanoor rulers were. The shleath digest anything the Shaloor want them to. They can dissolve even metal. Only glass is impervious to them. If there is even a ventilation hole, the shleath can seep through."

"How many are there?"

"Thousands. They use them as work animals when need be, because they can seep under a heavy stone, girder, or mass of metal, and gradually all come under it so that the mass is lifted. Or they can hang down as a sticky cable from a high place, wrap around the stone, and contract to lift it. If an ordinary shleath is not strong enough, four or a hundred devour each other and form one big one, and that does the work. In the last revolt, a thousand shleath made a ring around the whole Lanoor army, and contracted till they were just one large lump. The army was then part of the shleath."

Blake looked fixedly at Penton.

"I think," he said in English, "we'd best find the shortest route for another planet. I don't like the sound of these over-stuffed amoebas. But I'd love to stack them up against the Martian thushol. Couldn't that pair have a time?"

"We'll have to get to the ship, P'holkuun. Then we can use its power to defeat your enemies."

The Lanoor shifted his feet, and looked across the room.

"The ship," he said finally, "has been moved to the palace. Twenty shleath did that last night. The Shaloor knew that you would make for the ship, so they put it where they could make sure you didn't get it. They are all in the palace, and they have the ship in the inner courtyard. That is the place we call the court of the shleath. I do not know how you will get your ship. Maybe you could make magic on a Shaloor as you did with the strange man you sent to me. The Shaloor are working to make defenses, because they are afraid of you. They are even more afraid of the ship, so they have not touched it. If you can make a Shaloor do as the Lanoor you sent to me did, perhaps you can get the shleath out of the way. But no Lanoor can move them; they cannot be imprisoned; they never die."

"Can you feed them until they are groggy?"

"No, they just break up into more shleath, so there are twice as many and

twice as hungry."

Penton looked slowly at Blake. "If you don't like the shleath, maybe we better decide to stay here for a while," he sighed at length. "You are sure there were not any leftover thushol on the ship? One of those Martian beasts might seriously distract the Shaloor just now."

"When Greek meets Greek," sighed Blake. "I'd love to see what would happen if an angry shleath met a Martian thushol. Would the thushol turn into an indigestible rock, or would he imitate a bigger shleath and eat the one that had

attacked him? It is a beautiful, theosophical problem as to why the Lord ever let anything like that exist--"

"He didn't. The Shaloor invented the shleath and from what the Martians told us, the thushol invented themselves. You know, Ted, back on Mars old Loshtu told us all about "the thushol. Rearrange the letters in his name and they practically spell thushol! I'll bet he really was one of them, and was laughing up his sleeve at us all the while! But that's not the point. The idea is to get inside the ship without getting inside a shleath." He turned to the Ganymedian. "P'holkuun, can you start the rebellion?"

"Not until you can stop the shleath," answered the Lanoor firmly. "The rest of my people won't even talk rebellion until they are sure they won't be used for tidbits. You have never had a fifty-foot glob of jelly scrunch down on your best friend, and watched the expression of horror fade from his face because his face was dissolving out from under the expression."

"P'holkuun, sit down a minute. I want to think," said Pen-ton gustily, as he squatted cross-legged on the floor. "I have to find out what part of our science will beat your science. I know there is some item. Tell me things. Can you or your men get access to a metal-worker's shop? A place where there are all kinds of metals? And can you make there for me, many hundreds of small, metal machines? They will be simple, but I know a thing of science that will, I think, save you from further trouble with the shleath."

"We can get some metals. Not the yellow metal, or the heavy, kingly metals. Only Lanoor work in the metal shops, so we can make machines, if they are simple enough, and small enough to conceal."

"Good. Bring me, as soon as possible, a sample of all the different metals you can find. And--one of those doughy things--a grethlanth--faat the police set on me the other night. Can you do it?"

"Yes," said P'holkuun, somewhat doubtfully. "But can you do anything?"

Penton smiled. "Friend, when I get into that sacred court of theirs, the Shaloor are going to come out of the palace faster than they have ever before moved. I shall want only about a dozen courageous Lanoor; all the rest of the rebels will stay well outside the palace and catch the Shaloor as they come out. They will come out very rapidly. And I would not advise any of your people to remain within six blocks of the palace."

"They couldn't anyway. The Shaloor live all about the palace. If you are sure--"

Blake lay down gently in the corner after P'holkuun went. He was tired. The atmosphere of the little planet was enervating. Furthermore, he only half believed in Penton, and Penton became as communicative as the surrounding walls.

Blake slept. He slept quite peacefully until he was startled from his sleep by queer chirpings, cracklings, and loud bumpings. He sat up, only to be knocked flat by a massive, doughy affair that smacked into him, and swooshily dropped over his shoulder. Laboriously he struggled up again and looked at the dirty-gray mass that was cavorting crazily about the floor in the dim light of dusk.

Evidently P'holkuun had come and gone, and had supplied Blake with a grethlanth.

Penton was dashing madly about the floor picking up something, while the unspeakable dirty-whiteness was dashing about twice as madly--and abruptly dashed out of the window shrieking and gurgling unhappily.

"Well-maybe it's-all for the-best. That's hard work-here. Bending like that." "What in the name of the Nine Wavering Worlds got into that thing?" asked Blake. "It acted as though the floor were red hot, and every time it hit it jumped higher."

"Copper," said Penton, "and magnesium. I wondered what pH value their metabolism used. Evidently it's greater than seven rather than less. But zinc does well enough, and they can get that. Copper though is expensive."

*It may make sense, but I don't see it. Where's P'holkuun?"

"Coming back now. His men were stationed outside to catch that thing when it got loose. I-here he is."

P'holkuun stuck his great head in. He looked about the very dimly lighted room.

"It went out very quickly. I thought it might have broken away and succeeded in attacking you as we had ordered it. The men have chased it two blocks now, and it is still going very rapidly. It refuses to obey at all."

"That's fine." Penton smiled. "Did it attack anyone?"

"The first one who tried to stop it. It simply rolled over him, and hastened away. What is this weapon?"

"Make me as many hundreds of these machines as you possibly can, P'holkuun, and I will take the palace with a dozen Lanoor."

Penton held out a web of wiring, a pancake of interwoven coppery and silvery wires nearly eighteen inches across. The intricate hookup of wires led into a small, solid, egg-shaped mass at the heart of the network, an ovoid of black, plastic material.

"You can make a great many, I think. And remember to make that whole device exactly as I have, changing no slightest detail, particularly as to the constitution of the central mass. Is it understood?"

"I will." P'holkuun looked somewhat wide-eyed at the savage little device that had sent the utterly fearless, nerveless defender of the Lanoorian peace scuttling out the window in such terror that it absolutely refused to obey orders.

IV THE WHITE FLOWERS

P'HOLKUUN HALTED. Ahead, the narrow corridor cut through the solid rock turned, and beyond the turn it was a passageway lined with cut stone mortared in place.

"We enter the palace soon. No Lanoor is supposed to know of this corridor, as I say, and to prevent suspicion, the Shaloor station no Lanoor guards, and do not so much as guard it themselves. But they have men watching this night beyond that wall. They are suspicious-almost know that rebellion is starting. For four days now, you have been free, and they have not heard from you, have seen no sign of your existence. They believe you have obtained help, but they have received no word of a general uprising. And"- he looked at Penton from the corner of his eyes, rather doubtfully-"they know that no dozen men can take their palace, or menace them."

"Yes. They also know that no man can stand against a shleath, or any save a Shaloor order him. They know a great many things. A most surprising number of those things are all wrong. Is there a door ahead?"

"Yes. Locked, with a heavy steel bolt. But-you said you could open that."

Penton smiled and nodded to Blake. Blake shifted two dozen of the flat, woven webs he carried to the dozen or so Lanoor who had accompanied them, each man rearranging the webs he already carried to take on the extra. Then the Earthman went forward.

The door was a secret panel on the other side, but from here it was obvious enough. A panel of thick, dense wood, a dark green, no doubt polished beautifully on the other side that opened into the main hall of the palace. But from this side it was rough, and studded with locking mechanisms. Two heavy steel hinges supported it, and a series of three steel bars a half inch thick, operated by levers in the manner of a bank-vault lock, held it in place with all the rigidity of the surrounding wall. No careless hand could detect it from the far side.

Blake wrapped his fingers about the bars, braced his feet solidly, and pulled slowly, with greater and greater force. The mild steel gave under the strain, and slowly the bar backed out of the socket that held it.

Just before it was free, Blake transferred his attention to the second, and then to the third. The Lanoorians listened to his panting breath, and watched the writhing muscles in silent awe. The Earthman was to them as unnatural as a superintelligent gorilla would be to Earthmen.

Blake backed off and rested, till his heavy panting in the thin air of the little planet quieted. Finally he stood up again, and nodded.

"Ready, I guess. Now, once more, what will we have to look out for, P'holkuun?"

"They have guns, mostly air-powered guns. They are almost noiseless, there is no smoke, the source of the shot cannot be detected. But they will not shoot through heavy cloth. The explosion guns do. First they will try the sleep-gas, until they see that we are immune, thanks to your discovery that a series of five doses made a man safe. Then- the White Flowers."

"Just what are the 'White Flowers?' asked Penton.

P'holkuun shrugged his shoulders.

"They used it only once. They are afraid of it themselves, so they will be reluctant to try it. It is a mold that turns a healthy man into a moldering, putrescent corpse in thirty seconds. The flesh falls from his bones in white lumps. And anything that touches him, or passes near, within thirty hours-follows him! So, if you see a man turn white, and hear his scream-there is no need to help such a one. Leave him quickly. And we must go quickly now. I know the way we are to go, all my men here do. You must stay with us; if you cannot, seek the innermost court."

"Good. Go ahead, Blake," said Penton. "I'll take the lower half." Together, the two Earthmen approached the door, and took hold. The steel bars popped from their sockets with a vast droning clatter, to vibrate like plucked reeds. Immediately the two men jumped through the opened door, the Lanoorians behind them. The great central hall was bright with the glow-lights, and a half-dozen Shaloor were streaking across the room toward them, drawing their gas-guns as they came.

A shrill cry was spreading through the palace, echoing from room to room. Feet began running in unseen passages,

and somewhere women's shriller voices called out. Two Lanoor servants appeared momentarily, their eyes opening in surprise at the sight, then narrowing in sudden concentration as they vanished into familiar passages. Blake's arm flung back. A rounded, nicely weighted stone flew from it with the super Lanoorian force a Terrestrial could give it. An attacking Shaloor doubled with a howl of pain and an instant later another fell with a little groan, the side of his head crushed in. Gas bombs fell about them as P'holkuun led the way to a branching, wood-paneled corridor on the far side of the room.

"They will concentrate to defend the inner court, since it is known that you have come," P'holkuun called back. "Hurry."

A pair of Lanoorians had spread out behind them, and their swords were flashing in efficient butchery. The Shaloor were vanishing now, into the various rabbit-warren passages.

P'holkuun led them at a sharp run down the passage, past a dozen intersecting warrens and into a smaller passage.

"P'holkuun!" a strange low voice warned softly. "Not that way, the gates will close. Turn aside. The third-right." Feet vanished. P'holkuun halted in indecision.

"I wonder if that was a Shaloor?" he asked unhappily.

"It was my cousin!" exclaimed one of the Lanoor. "He is a secretary-"

They took the third to the right.

"But I am lost now," P'holkuun muttered. "I do not know this route. Why didn't he join us to help-"

From a room on one side a Lanoor stepped out.

"You'd probably have shot me by mistake. Come." The man had two of the air-guns, and a blood-stained sword. "They are gathered to defend the great inner court. They have closed all entrances with steel grills, save the one that they want you to take, the S'logth gate. That is open-open for the shleaih. What do you hope to do?"

"Lead us there." Penton smiled. "The sooner we reach the shleath, the better. What weapons have they?"

The Lanoor shifted his slight weight to his right foot.

"Some strange things they found on the ship of the strangers. A little thing, like a pistol, or sleep-gas thrower. But it throws nothing, only light, and not bright light at that. A Shaloor died handling it, and they made two Lanoor find out the secret. Now they have twenty. There is another thing they will use if they must, but they fear it, for none of us have been able to make it work without terrific explosions. But the explosions destroy what they hit, so they may use it even so."

"Damn," said Penton softly. "They can stop the shleath with the ultra-violet pistols. And the atomic bullet guns. They might go so far as to attack the ship with them. Not even the ship could stand one of those atomic bullets. Thank God they're still more afraid of them than we are. All we can do is try. They won't know just what they are doing, and we may still get away with it. "Lead the way, man."

Again they started, through more devious, involved passages than they had taken before. Through rooms where Lanoor servants looked, saw them, and looked blindly away, through rooms where startled Lanoor women rose angrily from sleep, and quieted with a grim smile as they saw who invaded their rooms. Down narrow corridors, through smoking kitchens. Down a long corridor-

"No, I tell you, no!" a Lanoor's voice shouted in exasperation. "They have not come this way. Why should they? They will go some other way if they have a particle of sense, and they will go entirely away if they know what I know." And then came the angry curses of a Shaloor. Abruptly they dived into a side lane, and P'holkuun grinned.

"The Shaloor cannot hear well. Nor see, for all of that. But the Lanoor hear us." *

"P'holkuun! Who-ah, it is you," the Lanoor's voice continued. "They are waiting for you at the gate now with three shleath in hiding. Go back. You must try at some other time. The city has heard, and it is roaring with rebellion. The Shaloor are preparing to bring out the shleath as the crowd grows outside the palace. But go back. They are ready for you, and they have a new weapon."

P'holkuun looked at the new Lanoor recruit uneasily.

"Did you hear that, Earthman?" he asked Penton.

"Did you hear of the new weapon, Lanoor?" returned Penton. "Do you think they will ever know less than they know now? Be less ready to meet you with strange weapons? Do you think you can ever have a better chance than with the men who invented the weapons you fear? And know more about them than all the Shaloor on the planet? If ever in time you have had a breath of hope, you have it now. Come on before that breath expires." Penton started on down the corridor. "And you don't have to worry about the shleath. They will be more worry to the Shaloor than to you."

"Then stop. That is the door that leads to the hall of the S'logth gate. If you open the door, the shleath will be in here at once."

"What is out there, then?" Blake demanded.

"There are, apparently, three shleath, and the Lord of Worlds only knows how many Shaloor, waiting to shoot, gas, bomb, and kill us in every other conceivable way,"

"Where are the Shaloor?"

"They will be in the high gallery. The S'logh gate goes up three stories, but we are on the first, since only thus can one enter the inner courtyard. They will be on the second and third galleries, and they will be watching for us. We cannot enter here until, somehow, the Shaloor are driven out."

"How do we get to the third floor gallery, then?"

P'holkuun looked to the Lanoor secretary who had joined them, Tathuol. The man shook his head.

"I can try. But it will do little good, since there we will be unable to reach and enter" the gate we should pass through, because we can't reach the floor. And the Shaloor may have the steel grills in the way."

"If I once get my hands on one of the weapons they Stole from our ship," said Blake grimly, "all the Shaloor on the planet, and all the shleath, steel grills, stone walls and assorted animals and plants won't stop me. Just get me near one of those Shaloor."

The way was a winding, climbing corridor, and it led them through back rooms and twisting flights of stairs. It led them up trap-doors in closets, and in impossible ways. Finally Tathuol halted.

"That is the door. There will be half a hundred Shaloor waiting for us out there."

"Don't disappoint them, then. Come on!" Penton yanked open the door, and jumped out, low. Fully the promised fifty Shaloor turned toward him, raising their guns. Instantly the walls were peppered with shot, and, with a queer hissing, droning hum, a beam of pale, deepest violet stabbed through the air. Not toward Penton, but across the great hallway to a hanging balcony on the far side! Someone howled in agony there, and together, Blake and Penton charged down the hundred foot length of the balcony.

It was only some twenty feet wide, and between them, with P'holkuun in effective action, the balcony was cleared in less than fifteen seconds. Cleared, for the Shaloor jerked and moved on the courtyard floor, eighty feet below.

Penton stared about him. Across the courtyard, four similar balconies hung at the same level, and four more below. On his right, on this same side, another balcony clung to the dark stone wall, and two more on the left. Four below him. The great ceiling arched low above his head, studded with hundreds of glowing lights. And in the great hall below, three monstrous things pulsed and staggered, three things like green, gold and purple amoebas fifty feet in diameter.

They were surging and wavering madly, and then suddenly they stopped and ran together. Horribly they merged into a single, frightful mass of pulsing, nauseous flesh. An oozing, angry mass of protoplasm, it charged for the wall, and miraculously sent a vast finger of jelly-stuff sprouting swiftly upward, past the balcony, toward them!

Abruptly, Penton heard the clanking sounds of dropped metal, soft moans of terror, and scampering feet. The Lanoor were leaving. Only P'holkuun and a half dozen others stood,

white-faced, beside the Earthmen. "The shleath[^]-coming -" said P'holkuun stiffly.

Penton crouched. The wall of the balcony, some four feet high, was carved with an intricate design of flowers and trees, and intricate spaces cut through the stone. There was an angry silence in the court. Only the soft, horrible shuffling, slobbering sounds of that vast monstrosity climbing the wall. It had dwindled to a twenty foot thing of green jelly with a purple, angry bruise-like knot in its middle, with golden thread shot through it. But up the stone wall, to within a few feet of the balcony, the questing mustard-green, pseudo-podal arm clung tenaciously to the minute grips it found. Penton crouched and waited, peering through the tiny holes.

"Pick up three of those webs, Blake," said Penton, softly. "And wait until that thing reaches up here."

Somehow P'holkuun made himself move. He handed Pen-ton a half-dozen of the flimsy, interwoven webs of silver and copper wires. They looked like metal spider webs with black, rubbery spiders clumped at their centers.

Then the vast arm reached up to the balcony. Thick fingers of slime reached through the openings of the balcony wall, and waved with a horrible suggestion

of individual, hateful life. The great, green wave curled smoothly over the wall, and sprouted thick tentacles that stabbed out toward the Earthman as he rose. In his hand the flash, with its projecting, copper terminals, blackened by the burning arc that had fused the lock, gleamed dimly.

He thrust his hand toward one of those jelly-ropes, and braced as the thing clamped viscerously about him. Then he pressed the button that shot fifty volts of powerful current into the vast mass of protoplasm.

Somehow it screamed. The city quieted to that ineffable shriek. An unspeakable hatred was in it, and an indescribable terror. The rope turned livid yellow, and contracted so swiftly that the mass on the floor jerked halfway up the wall to meet it, and fell with a liquid splashing plop. The mass heaved; it split into three separate pieces, then half a dozen, and they all howled. Accurately, Penton tossed one of the metal webs so that it fell onto the center of one of the pulsing, writhing things on the floor. The shleath shrieked with the same unspeakable, evil hatred, and the same awful terror, but somehow it whined; it begged. It scuttled into a corner and cowered there.

And another one of the blind, terror-stricken things touched the spider of black, and gold, and silver. It leaped five feet into the air, and splintered on the floor. The great shleath split into a hundred tiny things that rolled and scuttled and bounded with little evil squeaks of terror as they accidentally touched the black spider.

The larger ones were coming under control. Reluctantly, angrily they moved about, incorporating the smaller ones into their vast bulks. They joined again to two vast masses that charged for the wall. Penton dropped another of the webs. Then, in swift succession, two more.

There was point to their anger now. They howled, but they howled with directed anger. From the horribly stinging balcony they turned to the masters that drove them on. A wave of slime engulfed the lower balcony directly below the Earthmen. Penton watched the struggling Shaloor turn horribly red as their mouths gaped open in the thick, transparent jelly. They turned red, and stained the green about them, and struggled jerkily, then feebly; and through the clouding redness that grew in the green jelly, vague, shadowy things that might have been white bone here, or bared vital organs there, began to show. Penton turned away. The shleath was stretching out an arm toward the nearby balcony below, where milling Shaloor shot hissing pistols at it, and finally-something white blossomed in the greenness. The shleath seemed to suck in the whiteness and engulf it, but the white splotch grew, and spread with an awesome rapidity. The shleath writhed and spewed out the mass of white and green life stuff. Then the rope looped out again.

Softly violet, softly humming, the beam of one of the stolen pistols stabbed from the balcony. It struck the courtyard below, and wandered wildly, erratically about while the wave of green washed over the balcony. Again a white splotch blossomed, and again. Twice the thing spit them forth with masses of its own stuff. Then the white blossomed on an infected Shaloor, and he fell screaming, tearing at his leg, as the stuff whirled through his veins. He writhed over the edge of the balcony, and lay beside the white tufts of ejected tissue from the shleath, white as they, and growing soft and downy.

V BIFOCAL VISION

ABRUPTLY THE wildly wavering beam of the UV pistol snapped out. Tensely Penton watched as a pseudopod of the shleath lapped up a Shaloor. The one with the stolen weapon seemed to be concentrating, his brows wrinkled in fear-filled thought. With both hands, he held the pistol, and abruptly swept it around the shleath. It exploded into flare, and the shleath howled in agony again. Dense, nauseous smoke welled up from the flaring spot where the ultra-violet beam tore into it, bubbling horribly. The thing dropped from the balcony, splitting into a hundred parts as it fell.

Blake spoke softly.

"I've been usefully engaged. There are about fifty less Shaloor. They have

been too busy to watch, and these guns work. There was only one UV pistol here, and that went over the edge with one of the Shaloor."

"P'holkuun, you said they couldn't see?" Penton asked softly. "What do you mean?"

"They can see. But they don't point right. They never drive, they never fly planes. They seldom write, or do experiments themselves. We do not understand fully. But there is something the matter with their eyes."

"Thank God for that," said Penton. "I think I know what it is. They've joined the two halves of the brain, and are far more brilliant than any creature has a right to be, but they pay for it. Only one half the brain does all the thinking. That's true enough. But both halves see, and both halves hear. Both halves help with moving the body about. Somehow, when they cross those two halves of the brain for greater keenness, they see double. They probably hear double, too. They can't coordinate arm and eye well. They forced themselves to learn to move a bit, but they can't make themselves see straight.

"They are more intelligent, no doubt of that, for they have more UV guns than we made. They figured out that unknown system to that extent in one week's time. But they not only see double, but by some psychological trick, they see the wrong image best! They missed us when we appeared suddenly. That Shaloor that tried to kill the shleath with the UV gun shot up all the court but for the spot where the creature was. They can't move quickly, and they can't see straight. That gives us a far better chance, and changes my plans a bit. PTiolkuun, can we get somewhere where we can throw the webs into the inner court? Let's finish the job."

Tathuol nodded.

"Yes. Come." He led them back, through twisting corridors, through rooms where terrified Lanoor whispered and asked questions. They had heard the screams of the maddened shleath. The news was spreading. Then they reached a barred gate, a grillwork of locked bars that closed off the corridor. Beyond it they looked into a great courtyard a quarter of a mile across. The vast ramifications of the palace surrounded it on every side. And in it half a hundred of the giant shleath wavered and stirred uneasily, crowding down at the gate beyond which they had heard the strange shrieks of their fellows.

Somehow those giant masses of jelly had a brain and understanding. And they were restless. The glow-lamps cast only dim sparkles of light on hulking masses of greenish jelly. And, out in the middle of the court, silver metal on the Ion, the ship that had brought Penton and Blake to this world, glistened faintly.

"Oh, for the wings of an angel! How in blazes are we going to get there?"

Blake mourned.

Penton began tossing the black and silver and gold of the spiders methodically through the bars. One-five-a dozen. Some fell short, some long of their mark. It was hard to aim at an angle on a light world of unfamiliar gravity. Then two in quick succession landed.

"Back-back to the entranceway where we can get into the courtyard," Penton yelled over the shrieks of the two monsters. A giant began stamping. The whole palace shook to the thud of his tread. Then it stopped. Human feet began running somewhere, and the shouts of the Shaloor pierced the roaring that came from the inner court. Penton hesitated. Then he gathered all the spider webs, and threw them into the yard below, spinning them all over the court. Dozens of them skimmed into the night to fall with soft, clinking rustles. Three times he scored hits. But now restless, wandering shleath were accidentally touching the stinging electric traps.

The radiating copper and zinc wires reaching out from the rubber egg at the center were charged by the little battery protected in the black, elastic shell. The first electric batteries on this world! And these shleath, the mighty, indestructible shleath howled in malignant terror. They had no true skin, they were vast masses of naked, unprotected protoplasm. Each touch of those charged wires sent a minute electric current charging through their vast

masses-torturing, unbearable current.

It was happening there in the courtyard as Penton had known it would. The vast yard was boiling with the protoplasmic Titans, their weird, gold-shot bulks glistening in the dim lights, their weird, anguished cries shrilling in the night. Outside the palace a vast echo was rolling back, the vast angry roar of the aroused Lanoor rebels. Here below, as the elephantine bulks of the restlessly moving shleath touched one of the electrically charged webs, the shocking current made it writhe and heave. Frantically they sought escape, escape that was barred by the glass walls, by the special doors.

Shaloor were appearing at the lower gates, ordering them, directing them. Abruptly a mighty, shining bulk rolled down to the pompous midget, and whipped him into extinction with its glistening pseudopod. And the Thing howled. A shock-disc touched it. Every move of its sprawled bulk touched one of the scattered shock-discs. From other gratings about the great court Fholkuun's reinforcements were tossing in the webs now; the court was paved with them. The shleath found only one escape. They were dividing now, splitting and dwindling, splitting till their jellied bulks covered more, but smaller areas. Smaller, smaller they became as more and more of the webs fell. They could slip between them now, find some surcease from the unknown horror of electric currents whose tiniest trickle made them writhe in agony.

Penton watched in silence. The fifty, and seventy-five-foot Titans had dwindled, screaming. None was larger than a two-foot globe of jelly!

"Put on those boots," said Penton softly, "and come on." From his waist, he himself unstrapped the network of charged wires, and wrapped them about his legs. From his belt two sets of wires dangled, connecting the leggings to five tiny cells. "Now, PTiolkuun, where is the man with the rope? We can go down there now, if we can open this grill. No shleath will dare to touch us now. This grill is bolted in two places, and I think the atomic flash has still power enough to burn two."

The atomic flashlight was changed now; two heavy copper leads had been soldered to its terminals. As they touched the steel bolts, the hissing green flame of the copper arc shrilled into the metal, twice. The flash tube, its storage device of twisted atoms intended only for the light task of providing illumination, hummed and grew warm. The bolt sputtered suddenly and fell molten. The lurid green flare ate at another bar.

It glowed red, then white-and parted. Another-and Penton dropped the flash tube with a curse. It glowed for a moment, and died, its last dregs of energy exhausted. Together the Earthmen heaved at the weakened grill. The grating moved a fraction of an inch protestingly, and held. Again and again the two men heaved; finally all the Lanoor who could reach it added their strength.

Then, from a distant grating, a violet beam of death reached out, and crackled the stone twenty feet from them.

Penton ran. "Damn," he groaned. "They've spotted that grating, and they won't let us near it now. We've got to try some other way. I wonder-"

He started down the corridor, turned back to the next grating, and tried it. It was locked as solidly.

"Tathuol, can you lead me to a grating where there are some Shaloor posted, at least one of whom has one of our weapons?"

The Lanoor thought a moment. "I can lead you to the one from which they fired just a while ago."

"Good. P'hoUcuun, if you have a brave man, tell him to stay at that grate we left, and test it every few minutes until we give him the signal to stop. He has to keep out of the way of the beam, but he has to keep the man who is running it interested. Anybody want the job?" P'holkuun laughed mirthlessly. "I doubt it. Go ahead, I will take care of it. If my luck is bad, remember your promise to free my people."

"Right, my friend." Penton nodded slowly. "They will be, before the sun rises. But-be spry." Penton took the Lanoor's hand in a firm grasp for a moment, then

followed Tathuol. Through the rabbit-warren palace they dodged. Once they met a searching party of half a dozen Shaloor armed with the little yellow tubes that carried the deadly White Flower -and had kept out of sight. But Tathuol knew the maze-like routes of the building far better than did those lords by proxy, for their strange, crossed vision made walking difficult, and they hated it.

"Beyond that turn," the Lanoor said at last, "is the grating we saw the Shaloor fire from. I cannot guarantee that he is still there." "Let us just hope so, then. We-ah, he is." A brief, soft glare of violet shot out from the corridor's end. Noiselessly Penton rounded the corner, Blake close behind him. Four Shaloor stood watching, looking out across the courtyard to a distant gateway where metal bars shone dully red. Cracked, blistered stone told of the violence of the pistol they used. "He is trying to get us to melt that gate away," said one of the Shaloor uneasily.

"Much good may it do him. I'll get him the next time he shows, because I haven't changed the direction since the last shot. I-" Penton's powerful arms wrapped two of the bean-stalk giants while Blake caught the others. Instantly six of the Lanoor who had followed them descended and in the space of seconds, the Shaloor glared in anger from their bonds. Penton examined the gun he held.

"It's one of ours. Needs a new charge, too; not more than ten second's life left. This one is set for steel, too, and we haven't any. Well-" With a knife for a screwdriver, and two bits of metal in pinching fingers for a wrench, Penton opened the butt of the weapon, and pulled out the tiny reel that carried the iron-wire fuel. Then he adjusted four tiny screws and tore a strip of the copper wire from his protective leggings. With Blake's aid he stretched it cautiously. It was good copper, and it fined down several gauges before it broke. Then he inserted that into the reel, and clamped the gun together.

"Now, if my memory is good, and I have the right constants for the slow release of the copper's energy, we'll get out in fine style. And if it isn't-we'll go out in fine style," he added grimly. Penton aimed the gun at the grate, and pulled the trigger. Instantly the beam shot forth, a blazing inferno of light that volatilized the grating almost instantly, speared through to the courtyard below, and sent up bubbling smoke. The squealing anger of the shleath changed to a vast shrieking. Penton hurled the weapon to the floor. Slowly a glow built up in it, a glow that spread from the tip of the barrel to the breech, and the smoke of the wiring rose from it.

Blake and Penton were two hundred feet down the corridor when the incredible sharpness of the explosion wave hurled them along for twenty feet, like peas from a peashooter. The clatter of falling masonry grumbled behind them, and even the steady wail of the shleath quieted momentarily. Penton picked himself up gingerly.

"Not bad," he said judicially, "not perfect, but not bad. It might have been, to put it mildly, somewhat worse. We're lucky the town's still here." Over tumbled blocks of stone that made a perfect ladder, the two men scrambled down to the courtyard. Undamaged, the Ion lay some fifty feet from the end of the slide that had crumbled half one wall of the yard.

It was not a path of roses. The Shaloor were on the job, and only their incredibly confused eyesight made it possible. Consistently, half the beams and bullets tore into the enraged shleath behind them, and half spattered before them. None came near them.

Ten feet from the entrance Penton gasped, and fell. His unprotected hand was grabbed instantly by a shleath, before Blake could lift him to his feet again. The touch of Blake's boot drove it away as Penton spoke: "They have the range. Get in that ship, you fool-they got my leg with a bullet."

"Uh-huh," said Blake. "You talk funny. Hold on. Even on a light world you are heavy-"

From a height of some five hundred feet, Blake looked down. Then he turned on the spotlight, and looked at the courtyard below. He adjusted some controls, and when the spotlight exactly covered that yard, he pulled a small tumbler. The light turned violet, and the heaving, greenish floor turned brown and became quiescent. The light went out. Blake pulled the microphone near him, and spoke softly, words that roared from the loudspeaker in the outer skin of the ship.

"Fholkuun, if you will come up alone in a plane tomorrow at dawn, we'll meet you. I could take that palace apart, but most of the inhabitants seem to be your folk. In the meantime, I have to pull a bullet out of Penton's leg. Tomorrow at dawn, in a plane from the local port."