

An Interplanetary Outlaw Escapes the Death Block and  
Heads  
for the Grim Kappa Space—From Which  
There Is No Escape!

# PASSAGE TO SATURN

By JACK WILLIAMSON

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**F**ROM the first shocking glimpse of him, I knew that the man was dangerous. We were four hours and a million miles off the Moon, when an unfamiliar gruffness of the voice in my co-pilot's phone brought me un-easily aft from the little space shell's pilot cuddy of the *Swallow*. Awaiting me in the power turret, I found the stranger. A bright omeganode gun leaped in his lean hand to menace me.

"Steady, Kane!" The hard, level voice rasped from his motionless, red-bearded lips. "You've got a new co-pilot out to Saturn."

My own omega beam projector was clipped in its place on the bulkhead back in the pilot cuddy. The swift little "jeep" carried two men only, and I had already made five hops to Titan (for Jado station was upon that great satellite of Saturn) with loyal and trusted Victor Mohr.

"How—" I was stunned, breathless. "How did you—"

The stranger grinned at me, darkly. His deep-tanned face was haggard. A neglected stubble of wiry bronze beard gleamed on it, in odd contrast to the stiff blackness of his heavy eye-brows and unkempt hair. A black patch covered one eye. The other, bloodshot with fatigue or drugs, was narrowed and dark with a ruthless desperation.

"I simply walked aboard." His voice was calm and immensely deep. "While you were making your tear-ful farewell to old Doc Jollabard."

"Eh?" My eyes left the menace of his gun, to search among the tiered Pitcairn cells, the quick snaky black quadraxial cables, the crowded bulky transformers and massive humming rotors, for Mohr.

"Where's my co-pilot?" Alarm choked me. "What—have you done to Mohr?"

That deadly silver muzzle lifted carelessly.

"Forget your buddy, Kane," came the rumbling voice from that grim, rigid mask of a face. "He's all right—back in Tycho Station, behind a pier at the edge of the dome. He'll be coming safely out of the lethoid cone I tossed at him, by now."

**I** STARED at the well adjusted, quietly humming delta-field ro-tors, my respect for the stranger vast-ly increased.

"Yes, I'm qualified to take Mohr's place." The ominous lone dark eye had read my mind. "Or, for that mat-ter, Captain—yours!"

I was groping for his identity. Stel-lar Express was new. The great rocket liners had been plowing the void for two centuries. But it was just thir-teen years since Doc Jollabard had sent the first successful momentum-field jeep out to Jupiter.

Working from the tenet of quantum mechanics that the canceled wave fields of every electron pervade the entire Universe, Doc Jollabard was able, by inversion of electric magnetic fields to form his

delta-field, to create momentum and velocity through di-rection reaction of energy on the warp of space. Thus, the jeep, in a sense, lifted itself by its own bootstraps.

When it accelerated, energy was ex-pended by the rotors to build up the delta-field. In decelerating, the rotors absorbed the energy of the field as they damped it out, recharging the Pitcairn accumulators. Total power loss, from battery to momentum field, was about eight percent. Hence, the Jollabard space flier had an efficiency of twelve hundred percent, against the forty or fifty percent of the best rockets.

But not a hundred men had ever been trained to master, or even under-stand, the delicate controls of the Jollabard jeeps. Which, out of that small group, was this man?

I stared at the giant's black radia-tion-cloak, his black hair, the black eye-patch. Black ! My memory stirred, recalling a scrap of news that I had seen on the telescreen back at Tycho Dome.

Black Kell Killahin had escaped in a rocket sled! Notorious space pirate, he had lain four years in the death block of the prison of the Interplane-tary Commerce Commission, at Kenya City, Africa, while lawyers squabbled over division of his recaptured loot. In the rocket sled he had comman-deered, it was just possible that a man of Black Kell's metal could have flown from Africa to the Moon. He had been an earlier Jollabard man.

Involuntarily, my dry lips whis-pered, "Killahin!"

Sardonically, my captor bowed. "I'm going to Saturn. As co-pilot, or"—and his weapon made an omin-ous gesture—"pilot!"

Flinching from the menace in his tone, I tried to set my spinning brain in order. The *Swallow* had to get to Jado Station—for two very good rea-sons.

The first was Doctor Jollabard him-self, founder and still head of Stellar Express. Four hours ago at Tycho Dome he had gripped my hand nerv-ously.

"Kane," he had said, "you've got to get through safely with that shipment of serum for the Yellow Death which is striking down the miners of Jape-tus."

That was one reason. The other was more personal—Elida Lane.

**D**AUGHTER of Captain Derk Lane, the old space-rat who had been Jollabard's partner when they were radium-prospectors on Pluto, she had gone out with her father to keep him company when he became station master at the Titan depot. For three long years, ever since I took Jon Trevor's place on the Saturn hop, I had known Elida—and loved her hopelessly.

She had devastating red-gold hair, a willowy slender beauty that would have set the artists back on Earth to raving—and a blank shadow of trag-edly staring out of her wide blue eyes that put an ache in your throat to see.

Perhaps I fell for her because that agony made her so different from other women I had known. I had pro-posed to her a dozen times in three years, but the shadow had not gone out of her wounded eyes.

But we got to be good friends. Whenever I could get them past the inspectors, I took her seeds and bulbs for the hopeless little garden that she tried to grow in the thin frozen soil beside the station shed. And one day:

"Sorry, Reg," she told me. "You're a swell somebody, and you've been mighty good to me. But there is a promise that I must keep. I've got to wait here at Jado Station."

The dim blue-gray light, filtering through the luxaloid dome from the frozen moonscape, turned her red curls almost black. Pain grayed her face. Her voice was low and husky.

"You see, Reg," she finished, "I'm waiting for Jon Trevor."

There was nothing I could say to that. I couldn't tell her the bitter thing she already knew—that Jon Trevor, once the greatest pilot on Stellar Express, was a convicted murderer, lying in the death-block at Kenya City, awaiting his turn to die.

Nothing I could say. But still I could hope. This trip I had brought some hardy rose cuttings under the false bottom of my tiny kit, and I was hotly anxious for Elida Lane's grave-ly smiling thanks.

**B**ORN, 1908, at a mining camp in Arizona Territory. Carried mule-back, aged six weeks, to Rancho La Lobe, deep in Sonora's Sierra Madre. A wheelless land, of scorpions, mountain lions, and renegade Apaches — but it took revolution to send my parents back to the States.

Arrived in New Mexico by covered wagon. When drouth of '18 struck the Llano Estacado, drove chuck wagon for father's trail herd.

Now I write in a shack on the ranch, still find relaxation in the saddle.

Science fiction is the answer to why don't I write westerns. For nothing else has quite equalled the thrill of Merritt's Moon Pool. Ambition to write dates from age five, when informed that Mark Twain got a dollar a word—even, astonishingly, for easy words like if and is. (Family's skepticism not yet wholly overcome.)

Like travel; have knocked about a bit, mostly with Edmond Hamilton. But chief interest remains science fiction. Now working on second million words—and hope to make them better than the first.

For I believe that science fiction will come to fill a very important niche in a scientific age, that the possibilities in depicting the dramatic impacts of science and human beings have hardly been explored.

Putting those two reasons together:

"Very well," I told the big man waiting behind the menace of his omeganode gun, "I'll pilot you to Jado Station."

That promise, just now, was pretty obviously the price of my life. But my solemn oath, made before the ICC, to observe and enforce the laws of space, was certainly more binding than any unwilling word given this pirate.

Killahin evidently read what was passing in my mind. The one blood-shot dark eye glittered ominously.

"Look here, Kane," he rumbled swiftly. "We'll each have a hundred chances to kill the other—but the one that lives will have a mighty long watch to stand alone. Will you give me your hand on a truce till we make Jado Station?"

I put out my hand, but the act made Killahin none the less an outlaw. His dark face seamed to a handsome grin. His lean hand, scarred and dark and powerful, took mine in a crushing grip.

"Good, Captain Kane," he rumbled. "Now there is one thing more to be understood between us. And then I am at your command, till we touch Titan."

I searched the dark, bronze-bearded mask of his face.

"What's that?"

**H**IS hard lips were motionless; it was like a metal statue speaking:

"We are going through the Kappa Space."

*"Through—the Kappa—Space?"*

Idiotically, I parroted his words. I staggered back against the turret bulkhead. For, if there was anything that interplanetary voyagers struggled to avoid, in the century since its tragic discovery, that was the Kappa Space.

My voice was ragged with outraged protest:

"Not deliberately — into the Hole? That's suicide."

The Hole was what we called it, in the argot of the starways. For it was crudely pictured as a hole in space. A deadly phenomenon. Essentially a closed field of special space-time curvature, as the astro-physicists described it, a blind whirl-pool in the ether, its resistless vortices could trap anything from a photon to a planetoid.

The very planets, so a new theory of cosmogony held, were mere cores of extinct Kappa Spaces—aggregations of matter which had finally damped out the terrific etheric fields that had collected them.

Eventually—that theory maintained—after a billion years or so there would be a new planet in the gap that Bode's Law indicated, between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Most of the asteroids would have gone into the building of it. And, at the rate things were going, the wreckage of thousands of space ships and the bones of millions of men.

For men couldn't keep out of the Hole. Since it refused to follow the known laws of matter, the motion of the Kappa Space was not accurately predictable. Because the terrific forces of it prevented escape of light or even gravitational energy, it could not be observed from a distance. Only a new instrument, the Clauson sub-electronic detector, sometimes gave warning in time. Only one man was known to have escaped from the Hole with his jeep—Jon Trevor.

The Kappa Space was a colossal cosmic trap, ever-growing since some unguessed eddy in the ether had been its beginning; its web spread unpredictably, blind and deadly. And the danger was relatively greater for our jeeps, partly because their speed was twice that of the rockets, also because their momentum-field drive was al-most useless in the freakish ether fields of the Hole. Working on an electro-magnetic principle, the elec-tro-magnetic currents of the Kappa Space must have counteracted the drive field.

I began to suspect that I had a mad-man as well as a criminal for a pas-senger. I backed uneasily toward the passage. The dark face of Killahin set grimly, and his bright weapon made a significant gesture.

"Steady, Kane," he rumbled. "We're running through the Hole! And we'll make it!"

I raised my hands in protest.

"But you don't know the Kappa Space," I gasped. "A grinding, flam-ing hell of trapped energy and cosmic debris. A stellar storm, with deadly radiations for lightning, and nickel-iron boulders for hail. And we'll be helpless in it—the jeep could never pull out."

The man shook his shaggy black head.

"But I do, Kane," he said gravely. "I know all about the Hole. Jon Tre-vor told me."

**W**ONDERMENT took my breath again. I had never seen Trevor, for we had always been on different hops. But I knew that he had been the adopted son of Dr. Jollabard, the ranking pilot of Stellar Express and the favored of fair Elida Lane—until that fantastic tragedy in space.

"Oh!" Enlightenment came to me. "You knew him in prison?"

"I knew him three years in the death block," said Killahin defensively. "Jon's a friend of mine."

"Not of mine!" I said bitterly. "They should have blasted him three years ago. Doc Jollabard has been a fool to ruin himself fighting the case, when it is Trevor who whitened his hair and bent his shoulders and broke his heart. Trevor who killed the soul of the woman waiting for him at Jado Station!"

"Elida Lane?" The great voice had an eagerness that I did not like. "I've got a message for her. A message from Jon."

I knew, then, that I didn't want Black Kell Killahin to get to Jado Station. And the telescreen an-nouncer, I recalled, had mentioned a huge reward for the convict, dead or alive. It had better be dead, I deter-mined. My omeganode gun was still in the pilot cuddy. And one man, with the auto-pilot, could run the jeep to Titan.

"Well?" Killahin saluted me, grin-ning.

"The rotors are running well enough," I told him. "You can take Mohr's bunk. I'll call you for your watch in four hours."

"Aye, sir."

I went back to the cuddy, checked the instruments, reset the softly click-ing auto-pilot. But a jeep is a small and silent craft. Above the faint hum of the rotors, I caught the sounds that told me when my companion took a shower in the tiny bathroom, helped himself to a tin of space rations in the minute

galley, flung himself into Mohr's bunk. Presently, in the air from the ventilator, I scented a faint acrid sweetness.

The sweet smoke of the rogo-bean. I had smelled the narcotic vapor of that Martian weed often enough in the Jollybird Tavern at Tycho to know what it meant. Many space-men breathed the smoke of the burning waxy seeds; they said it soothed their nerves and yet sharpened all their senses. But I knew that at last they all lay in a senseless stupor. And I was very well pleased.

Two hours passed, and the Moon's yellow crescent became a dot beside the reddish crescent Earth. The sweet pungence was gone. And at last I heard what I was waiting for, a slow and stertorous breathing.

I locked the jollybar again upon the auto-pilot. Silently I slipped the thin silver tube of my omeganode gun from its clip on the bulkhead, noiselessly tested its fine deadly mechanism, went soundlessly down the passage, past the galley and the power turret, to the tiny cabin.

**A**BRUPT alarm caught my throat as I realized that the hoarse snoring had ceased!

The gun clutched hard in my sweat-ing hand, I jerked aside the curtain from the bunk that had been Victor Mohr's. The blankets were tumbled. Upon the pillow lay a thick-stuffed brown wallet, a leather pouch of rogo-beans, and the little metal pipe. But the bunk was empty!

Convulsively I spun, shuddering. Already I could feel the fiery jet of Killahin's omega beam burning into my back. I had been very neatly tricked—he must have been crouching in the galley when I passed.

But I lived to turn, and looked down the empty passage. Where was the pi-rate? Then I heard the sharp hiss of his ray from the cuddy, heard a muf-fled explosive *woosh*, and the tinkle of shattered crystal. And the air was suddenly sharp with the odor of burned insulation.

What was he up to?

I ran forward. The space pirate met me at the narrow entrance to the cuddy, his tube alertly leveled. His dark, one-eyed face surveyed me un-scrutably.

"What are you doing?" I demanded. His great shaggy head shook sol-enmly.

"Now, Kane, I think we can both put up our guns." The heavy rumble of his voice was oddly calm. "You see, I was afraid your sense of duty would lead to difficulty. So I destroyed the auto-pilot. With only the jollybar, neither of us would get to Titan alone —and I think neither of us wants to turn back."

I lowered my weapon. That was true. And I couldn't help an unwilling admiration for the outlaw's deliberate efficiency, a real gratitude for the fact that it was the robot-pilot he had de-destroyed, and not me.

"You win, Killahin," I told him. "And you did it very neatly."

"Thank you." His dark face was ex-pressionless. "And now, with your permission, Captain, I'll get some real sleep."

The space shell was already spin-ning off her course. I moved swiftly past him to snatch the loosely flapping jollybar and pull the green circle on the astrogator-dial back upon the red dot of our destination.

Standing wearily over the control board, quivering now with reaction, I kept the red dot centered. There would be four long weeks of that, out to Titan. And there could be no turn-ing back, even if I got the better of Killahin, because that little brown package of serum in the express hold must not be delayed.

The pirate answered my call four hours later with a booming readiness that made me doubt that he had been sleeping. Before I crawled into my own bunk, I took the liberty of search-ing his. I wanted to know what mes-sage Jon Trevor might be sending Elida Lane.

The thick wallet was gone. But un-der the pillow I did find a worn clip-ping of paper that must have slipped out of it. In my own bunk, I care-fully spread out its ragged folds. Nothing about Elida. But still I caught my breath as I read.

ONE MILLION DOLLARS' REWARD!

The Pan-Planetary Museum of *New York*, Earth, hereby announces the above sum to be paid for the living body of the entity known as "Susie-Q."

Allegedly, this astounding being was cre-ated through mutation of a life cell in a bulb of *Lilium tigrinum*, under the radiations of the Kappa Space. Known only through the evidence in the case of *The System vs. Trevor*, it is believed to manifest not only specific and phyletic but fundamental differences to any form of planetary life heretofore observed, and is therefore thought to be of unique scientific value.

This anomalous entity is believed to be aboard the derelict space shell *Kingbird*, last seen drifting in the suspected vicinity of the Kappa Space. All searchers are warned to exercise the utmost caution in any approach to it, for the nature and the evolving powers of it are beyond prediction.

(Signed) Alpheus Crayle, Curator.

I had seen that notice before, but I had never tried to find the thing known as Susie-Q. No sane space-man would willingly have entered the Hole, not for ten millions. And few who had followed Jon Trevor's trial would have touched the "entity" for even twice that.

Every fantastically amazing detail of the case had been repeated a thou-sand times, in the Jollybird Tavern.

**T**HREE years ago, to sum up the facts, Jon Trevor had taken off for Saturn with the *Kingbird*. His co-pilot was a thin sallow youth named Sydlow Hawl—a man obsessed, as it proved, with an overwhelming dread of the cold, dark, empty millions of miles between the planets. They never got to Jado Station.

A rocket captain found the wrecked jeep, drifting far inside Jupiter's or-bit. Trevor was insensible with the rogo-weed. Sydlow Hawl was sprawled in the cuddy, stabbed in the heart with a knife from the galley. And there was this thing, the incred-ible being born of a lily's cells—Su-sie-Q.

Abandoning their rosy thoughts of salvage, the terrified officers retreated with the corpse and Trevor. The nat-ural presumption was that the two had quarreled; that Trevor had stabbed Hawl and then attempted suicide. Anyhow, it was upon that charge of murder, preferred by the rocket cap-tain, that Trevor was tried.

It was the dead co-pilot's diary—a strange, horror-ridden document —that convicted Trevor. It left no doubt that they had quarreled.

Their first difficulty came over a potted tiger lily that Trevor had smuggled past the ICC inspectors. He meant it for a gift to the girl he loved, red-haired Elida Lane, out at Jado Station. Safely out in space, he un-wrapped it from his radiation-cloak, and set it under a lamp in the cuddy.

"I felt it my duty to protest," Hawl wrote in his diary. "I quoted to Cap-tain Trevor that section of the ICC Code which prohibits '*the unauthor-ized transportation, from any plane-tary body to any other, of any seed, seedling, plant, shrub, bulb, spore, fungus, bacterium, tissue culture, life germ, egg, animal, virus, or any other living or semi-living thing.*' He merely laughed. But I feel that no good can come of his disregard of law."

The next rift came when the *King-bird* passed across the edge of the Hole. Hawl describes the flaming eld-ritch radiations and the hurtling me-teoric matter of the Kappa Space, his nausea and terror as the jeep spun al-most helpless through it, his shaken relief when Trevor's skill brought them out of danger.

"Trevor is to blame for this disas-ter," he wrote. "In his haste to see his girl at Jado Station, he is driving the jeep too hard. He ignored the Clauson detector. His lack of caution will get us yet, I fear, into grave difficulty."

Their final quarrel, however, re-sulted from a series of almost incred-ible happenings—events that the court would certainly have refused to accept as fact, but for the combined testi-mony of the diary, the rescue rocket officers, and Jon Trevor himself.

A dozen entries record the amazing observations of the doomed co-pilot; his reactions of increasing wonder, in-credulity, and terror; and the ever-mounting tension of his conflict with Trevor.

"Captain Trevor's lily seems to be dead, since we escaped the Hole," he wrote. "The radiations burned it. The leaves died, and the bulb itself shriv-eled. But Trevor keeps it under the photon tube and now *it's* growing again—growing much too fast. And the pale new leaves are not those of a lily."

**A**GAIN, he wrote: "I have begged Trevor to de-stroy the thing that was a lily. Something happened to it, in the Kappa Space. It is alive—but like no living thing that ever was. The pale shining tendrils of it move! Today I saw them clinging caressingly to Trevor's hand when he watered the thing. They re-coiled from me when I tried to touch them. I feel that this monstrosity of life must be destroyed. But Trevor only laughs at me."

A subsequent entry:

"Today I noted a more serious inci-dent—one which heightens my convic-tion that Trevor's strange pet must be done away with before it kills us both. Trevor talks to it when he feeds it. He calls it Susie-Q. And its queer bright tendrils brush his hands, as if affectionately. But today I found them coiled around the lead wires of the photon tube. The tube was dim, and the meters showed that it was drawing two thousand watts, instead of twenty. The damned thing is suck-ing the power out of our batteries—that's how it grows and changes so fast! I begged Trevor to kill it. 'Bet-ter make friends with Susie-Q,' he told me. 'She knows you don't like her.' Is Trevor going mad? Or am I?"

And then the last entry:

"Trevor still hopes to preserve this fearful entity. He says he hopes to exhibit Susie-Q on Earth. He won't listen to me. But I know that his folly can lead only to death.

"Today I attempted to kill the thing myself. While Trevor was sleeping, I got a bottle of powerful antiseptic from the medicine cabinet. But the entity has already an uncanny senti-ence and a terrible strength. When I approached it, the glowing tentacles whipped the bottle out of my hand. It was shattered on the floor, the flesh on my fingers cut to the bone.

"Trevor is not yet awake. When my shaken nerves are calm enough, I am resolved to make another attempt. For the shining monster is swiftly ex-hausting the batteries. It must be de-stroyed, if we are to reach Titan. The fearful growth and change of it how-ever, I am afraid, has already—"

That incompleated entry was the last in the dead man's diary. The prose-cution held that Trevor, discovering his co-pilot's intention to make away with Susie-Q, had himself killed Hawl to preserve his eerie prize.

Trevor himself testified in his own defense that he had been sleeping, on that occasion, because Hawl had drugged him with an extract of the rogo-weed, to clear the way for his at-tack on Susie-Q. Therefore, he had not seen what happened.

"But only one thing could have hap-pened," he testified. "Susie-Q, to save her life, killed Hawl with his own blade."

That was a little too much for a jury of space-men to swallow. Murder by a lily ! In vain the defense attorneys, that Dr. Jollabard almost broke him-self to pay, argued that Susie-Q was no more a lily than man, because evo-lution had developed him from an amphibian, was a frog.

"From a study of the dead man's diary," Dr. Alpheus Crayle testified as an expert bio-physicist, "and from the testimony of Captain Trevor and the rocket officers who glimpsed this entity, I believe that it is something more than a common mutant. It undubitably developed from the reassort-ment of the genes in the chromosomes of a single surviving life-cell of the lily, under the unknown radiations of the Kappa Space. But the genes, this body of evidence convinces me, were not merely rearranged; they were given an infinite fluidity of structure. Susie-Q was thus tossed free into the channel of life, to undergo in one body the whole flux of evolution from the single primitive cell to whatever the goal of living beings may be. All our evidence agrees upon this amazing change. We can expect anything from this evolving entity. And I am com-pletely prepared to believe that it, in-deed, and in fact with perfect justifi-cation, killed Sydlow Hawl."

\* \* \* \* \*

**B**UT even such opinions as that failed to win acquittal for Jon Trevor.

Now, finding that my unwelcome passenger on the *Swallow* carried a copy of Crayle's offer of a million dol-lars for the evolving entity, I knew why Killahin wanted to cross the Kappa Space. He was mad enough to risk everything for the capture of Susie-Q.

I put the paper back in the outlaw's bunk, and resolved to keep us out of the Hole, and to make every effort to deliver Killahin, alive or dead, to the ICC authorities.

In the strained days that followed, I discovered that he was an actual user of the rogo-bean. He was often insen-sible, from the sweet narcotic smoke. Frequently in his delirious mutter-ings, I heard the name Susie-Q.

Sometimes I was left on watch for twenty hours at a stretch. But the pi-rate always came at last to take the jollybar — and always altered our course while I was sleeping, until I was convinced that he had private knowledge of the location of the Kappa Space!

Indeed, listening to his drugged mutterings, I had sometimes an uneasy feeling that he was *talking* with the weird being he sought. Experiment-ers in telepathy had claimed that the rogo-bean lowered the thresholds of the mind, heightening extra-sensory perception. And the mental powers of the thing Susie-Q were certainly an unknown quantity.

Anyhow, the dread moment came when the needle of the Clauson detec-tor flamed crimson and pointed to a spot almost dead ahead. There, an un-seen pit against the steady stars, was the Hole! I hauled back on the jolly-bar to swing away at right angles.

Killahin, with the stupor of the drug dark in his single blood-shot eye, came stalking at once into the cuddy.

"Cool your jets, Kane," his great voice croaked thickly. "Susie told me you were turning." White lightning flashed from the unsteady omeganode gun in his hand, and the Clauson de-tector exploded. "Get back to your bunk, Kane," he rumbled. "I'll take the jollybar."

I felt an impulse to snatch for my own weapon. But if I killed the out-law, I had certainly no chance to get through to Titan alone. And he had spared my life. I had come to have a kind of admiration for him, and I pitied him for his slavery to the drug.

There was still a good chance, I thought, that he would miss the Hole. I couldn't really believe that he had been in mental contact with that un-canny entity. And, now, with the de-tector gone, I knew no way to tell where the Hole was, or where it was not.

I went back to my bunk. After an hour, when nothing had happened, long fatigue overcame my fears. I was still sleeping when I heard the gongs. My heavy eyes blinked against the dizzy scarlet flicker of a danger light. And sick realization came with my dismayed shout:

"It's the Kappa Space!"

The bunk seemed to drop and spin beneath me. Reeling out into the cor-ridor, I dragged myself to the tiny bull's-eye of the galley port. When I saw beyond, it gripped me with sick fascination.

The constellations were flickering like some cosmic mirage. There were banners and arrows and spinning wheels of flame. I flinched and shud-dered from a ragged, glowing meteoric fragment that plunged within yards of the jeep.

**M**Y flesh was crawling, and I felt the sudden prickle of intense radiations. Darkened for a moment, by a queer whirling cloud, the port became a mirror in which I saw myself as a ghastly thing, eyeballs and teeth burning with weird fluorescence.

Blue brushes of electric flame were hissing and crackling from every metal point, as I slammed the metal shield and staggered toward the cuddy. Towering over the jollybar, I found my outlaw companion envel-oped in an eerie halo of bluish fire. Every black hair on his head stood out straight and alone, with an effect of exaggerated horror. His lean, red-bearded face however, remained grim-ly intent.

"Well, Killahin," I gasped hoarsely, "I hope you're satisfied."

He shot a look at me. The eerie blue illumination gave his red-bearded, eye-patched face a most



sinister ex-pression. But I couldn't help a tre-mendous admiration for this pilot whose strength and skill could defy the Kappa Space itself.

"Well, Kane?" His great voice held no hint of terror. "Will you take the jollybar? The *Kingbird* is just ahead. If you will hold the controls, I'll board the wreck, after Susie-Q."

Dust of dread choked my throat. With never a change on his iron-dark face, Killahin guided us around a plunging boulder. He pushed the jollybar into my hands, and his great arm pointed.

"The *Kingbird*!"

Battered almost beyond recognition, the tiny space shell might have been another hurtling splinter of stone, but for the half-obliterated *SE* on her side. It took all my skill to hold the *Swal-low* abreast it. Killahin stalked aft. Two minutes later, a magnetic grap-ple shot across to the wreck. And the outlaw, a giant in white metal ar-mor, swarmed across the line to van-ish through the gaping space port of the spinning wreck.

It happened while he was out sight. The stark disaster that all my being was flinching from. A rock larger than I had yet seen, a veritable plane-toid, came hurtling out of clotted darkness and weird blue fire. When I tried to drag the wreck out of its path, the momentum field met some freakish hole in the ether. The jeep sank, sluggishly, and the whine of the rotors became a tortured scream. I could have cut the magnetic grapple, and slid the jeep—at least for the mo-ment—out of harm. My hand was on the switch, but I didn't do it. Outlaw Black Kell Killahin might be, but I suddenly knew that I had to play square with him.

I kept the shrieking rotors at full power. The drive field slowly meshed, and the cable tightened. The derelict *Kingbird* followed the *Swallow*, and that iron projectile merely grazed us. The whole hull rang with the fright-ful clangor, and both ships spun mad-ly against the cable. And the scream of the over-laden rotors became sud-den-ly a harsh, shattering vibration. One of them, I knew, had burned out.

**C**OLD despair clutched my heart. So disabled, we could never leave the Hole. I'd never see red-haired Elida Lane again. . . . The se-rum wouldn't get through, to stop the Yellow Death in the mines of Jape-tus. . . .

Sunk in that last hopeless apathy, I was fighting as best I could to keep the jeep out of harm's reach with the feeble, unbalanced power of the re-maining motor when Killahin came back with Susie-Q, and swiftly re-moved his space-suit.

The strangeness of that unearthly being was burned forever into my dazed brain. The body of it was a gigantic diamond egg of wondrous light. Above that many-faceted splendor, like the leaves of a lily above the bulb—and yet as different from them as anything could be—were three ten-tacles of silver smoke, lit with little bright pulsating atoms.

Killahin held the diamond bulb in his hand. The tendrils of fiery vapor were coiling about his arm, brushing his body caressingly, kissing his dark, haggard face.

Stolidly the outlaw listened while I told him that the port rotor was burned up—that we were doomed. He didn't say a word. Still carrying the fantastic bright entity, he stalked away aft. In a moment the jeep was flooded with the sweetish, sickening smoke of the rogo-bean.

Alone in the cuddy, I tried with that one rotor to keep the ship alive. Eerie blue flame danced about me, and all my body began to seem on fire. And the hull rang again and again to shat-tering impacts I could not escape.

We might live an hour, or a dozen, but I knew we could never get out. Then, hearing Killahin's thick voice, I looked briefly aft.

Killahin was sitting in a corner of the power turret, talking in a hoarse voice to the crazy plant he had res-cued from the derelict, pausing to lis-ten as if the thing spoke back to him. Incredible? Yes, but subsequent pro-ceedings proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the two were *en rap-port*.

"I knew you'd help me, Susie," Killahin was saying. "Knew you'd be glad to square things up, if I could just get back to put the situation up to you . . . sure, we can make it, if you can take care of the Hole . . . of course I don't blame you for knifing Hawl; it was him or you . . . no, I don't regret the three

years in prison . . . so you do understand the physics of Kappa Space, and you can damp out the Hole ..."

Damp out the Hole! I simply hung onto the jollybar and stared. The scin-tillant diamond bulb was poised above the burnt-out rotor—only it wasn't a rotor any longer. With amazing strength those smoky tentacles were moving and changing and adjusting the parts, all but molding them into some electric mechanism such as I had never seen.

Then, all at once, a greenish-purple aura surrounded the device, there was a violent lurch of the *Swallow*, and I felt the jeep take hold like she had suddenly sprouted caterpillar treads on sandy soil. I glanced through the observation port and blinked in amaze-ment. The infernal maelstrom of the Hole was gone, blotted out just like that, and the *Swallow* was driving again through untroubled ether, the ringed globe of Saturn dead ahead against a background of serene and changeless stars in the void of night.

**K**ILLAHIN, with Susie-Q bal-anced on his shoulder, came for-ward to the pilot cuddy. His eye-patch was gone, and he was surveying me with two perfectly good orbs.

"Yes, Kane," he admitted easily, "I'm Jon Trevor. I knew Killahin in the death block at Kenya City. When Doc Jollabard recently got my sen-tence commuted to life imprisonment, Killahin traded identities with me and left for the prison colonies. I dyed my hair and put on a patch and proceeded with my already perfected plans to steal that rocket sled and escape to the Moon. I want you to meet Susie-Q."

I didn't flinch as the queer thing whipped out a tentacle and laid it gently across my cheek. The tingling sensation from the physical contact was lost in the mental shock I received. Susie-Q was a sentient entity with a profundity of knowledge and wisdom that staggered me. In the space of a couple of heartbeats I re-ceived information that I was several days sorting out and tabulating.

Briefly I understood the general conditions. Susie-Q was exactly what Alpheus Crayle had deducted, a new life force created by that first en-counter with the Kappa Space. Trevor was innocent. She had rebuilt the delta-field rotor, reversing its polarity to damp out the key warps of the Hole, absorbing enough energy in the process to recharge the accumulators of the *Swallow*, and simply canceling out the positive and negative fields of the Hole by using the *Swallow* some-what like a catalyst.

Susie-Q drew back her tendril from my face and caressed the cheek of Jon Trevor.

"We can't restrain Susie now," Tre-vor told me sadly. "She has evolved far beyond us. We must let her go. But she'll come back to help clear me if your testimony is not enough. Andman owes her plenty for obliterating the Hole."

We released Susie-Q through the valve, a free and unhampered voyager in space.

"Good-by, Susie," whispered Trevor softly. "But don't forget that man-kind, chained to these little worlds, will be struggling through painful generations to follow the path you are showing us."

A finger of fiery smoke touched his face, and the queer being was gone. As Trevor turned to help me nurse the limping *Swallow* on to our des-tination he held out his hand to me. I looked into his dark eyes and smiled wryly as I grasped his out-stretched hand. Elida was his—I couldn't do anything about that any more. I swallowed the lump in my throat and stared off into space. Straight ahead, a million miles away, was Jado station—and Elida. The present I was bringing her this time would be the greatest I'd ever given her.

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