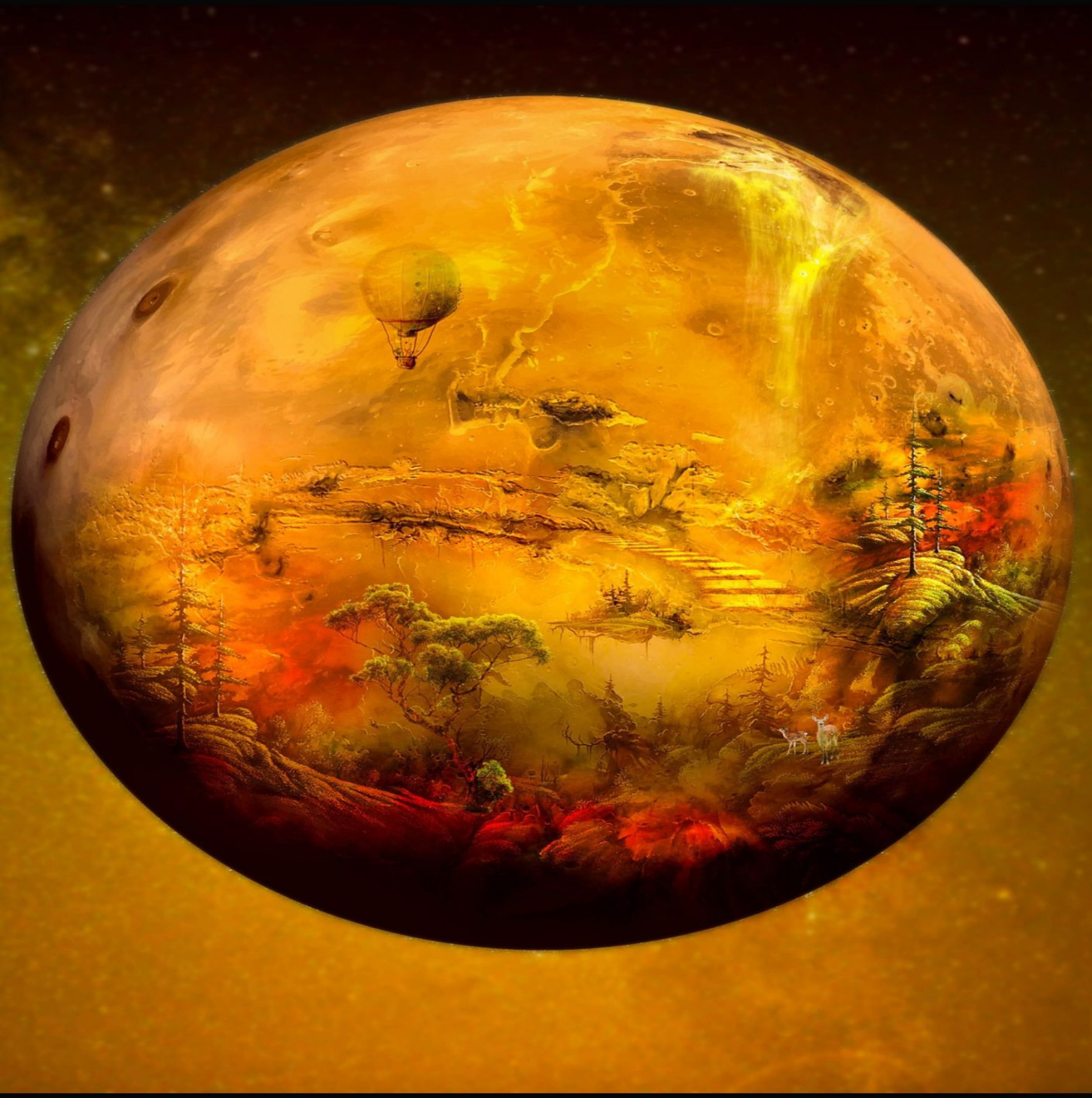
PIRATES OF VENUS



Edgar Rice Burroughs

Pirates of Venus

Chapter 1 - Carson Napier

IF A female figure in a white shroud enters your bedchamber at midnight on the thirteenth day of this month, answer this letter otherwise, do not."

Having read this far in the letter, I was about to consign it to the wastebasket, where all my crank letters go; but for some reason I read on, "If she speaks to you, please remember her words and repeat them to me when you write." I might have read on to the end; but at this juncture the telephone bell rang, and I dropped the letter into one of the baskets on my desk. It chanced to be the "out" basket; and had events followed their ordinary course, this would have been the last of the letter and the incident in so far as I was concerned, for from the "out" basket the letter went to the files.

It was Jason Gridley on the telephone. He seemed excited and asked me to come to his laboratory at once. As Jason is seldom excited about anything, I hastened to accede to his request and satisfy my curiosity. Jumping into my roadster, I soon covered the few blocks that separate us, to learn that Jason had good grounds for excitement He had just received a radio message from the inner world, from Pellucidar.

On the eve of the departure of the great dirigible, O-220, from the earth's core, following the successful termination of that historic expedition, Jason had determined to remain and search for von Horst, the only missing member of the party; but Tarzan, David Innes, and Captain Zuppner had persuaded him of the folly of such an undertaking, inasmuch as David had promised to dispatch an expedition of his own native Pellucidarian warriors to locate the young German lieutenant if he still lived and it were possible to discover any clue to his whereabouts.

Notwithstanding this, and though he had returned to the outer world with the ship, Jason had always been harassed by a sense of responsibility for the fate of von Horst, a young man who had been most popular with all the members of the expedition; and had insisted time and time again that he regretted having left Pellucidar until he had exhausted every means within his power of rescuing von Horst or learned definitely that he was dead.

Jason waved me to a chair and offered me a cigarette. "I've just had a message from Abner Perry," he announced, "the first for months."

"It must have been interesting," I commented, "to excite *you*."

"It was," he admitted. "A rumor has reached Sari that von Horst has been found."

Now as this pertains to a subject entirely foreign to the present volume, I might mention that I have alluded to it only for the purpose of explaining two facts which, while not vital, have some slight bearing on the remarkable sequence of events which followed. First, it caused me to forget the letter I just mentioned, and, second, it fixed the date in my mind—the tenth.

My principal reason for mentioning the first fact is to stress the thought that the matter of the letter, so quickly and absolutely forgotten, had no opportunity to impress itself upon my mind and therefore could not, at least objectively, influence my consideration of ensuing events. The letter was gone from my mind within five minutes of its reading as completely as though it had never been received.

The next three days were exceedingly busy ones for me, and when I retired on the night of the thirteenth my mind was so filled with the annoying details of a real estate transaction that was going wrong, that it was some time before I could sleep. I can truthfully affirm that my last thoughts were of trust deeds, receivers in equity, and deficiency judgments.

What awoke me, I do not know. I sat up with a start just in time to see a female figure, swathed in what appeared to be a white winding sheet, enter my room through the door. You will note that I say door rather than doorway, for such was the fact; the door was closed. It was a clear, moonlit night; the various homely objects in my room were plainly discernible, especially the ghostly figure now hovering near the foot of my bed.

I am not subject to hallucinations, I had never seen a ghost, I had never wished to, and I was totally ignorant of the ethics governing such a situation. Even had the lady not been so obviously supernatural, I should yet have been at a loss as to how to receive her at this hour in the intimacy of my bedchamber, for no strange lady had ever before invaded its privacy, and I am of Puritan stock.

"It is midnight of the thirteenth," she said, in a low, musical voice.

"So it is," I agreed, and then I recalled the letter that I had received on the tenth.

"He left Guadalupe today," she continued; "he will wait in Guaymas for your letter."

That was all. She crossed the room and passed out of it, not through the window which was quite convenient, but through the solid wall. I sat there for a full minute, staring at the spot where I had last seen her and endeavoring to convince myself that I was dreaming, but I was not dreaming; I was wide awake. In fact I was so wide awake that it was fully an hour before I had successfully wooed Morpheus, as the Victorian writers so neatly expressed it, ignoring the fact that his sex must have made it rather embarrassing for gentlemen writers.

I reached my office a little earlier than usual the following morning, and it is needless to say that the first thing that I did was to search for that letter which I had received on the tenth. I could recall neither the name of the writer nor the point of origin of the letter, but my secretary recalled

the latter, the letter having been sufficiently out of the ordinary to attract his attention.

"It was from somewhere in Mexico," he said, and as letters of this nature are filed by states and countries, there was now no difficulty in locating it.

You may rest assured that this time I read the letter carefully. It was dated the third and post marked Guaymas. Guaymas is a seaport in Sonora, on the Gulf of California. Here is the letter:

> My dear Sir:
>
> Being engaged in a venture of great scientific importance, I find it necessary to solicit the assistance (not financial) of some one psychologically harmonious, who is at the same time of sufficient intelligence and culture to appreciate the vast possibilities of my project.
>
> Why I have addressed you I shall be glad to explain in the happy event that a personal interview seems desirable. This can only be ascertained by a test which I shall now explain.
>
> If a female figure in a white shroud enters your bedchamber at midnight on the thirteenth day of this month, answer this letter; otherwise, do not. If she speaks to you, please remember her words and repeat them to me when you write.
>
> Assuring you of my appreciation of your earnest consideration of this letter, which I realize is rather unusual, and begging that you hold its contents in strictest confidence until future events shall have warranted its publication, I am, Sir,
>
> Very respectfully yours,
>
> CARSON NAPIER.

"It looks to me like another nut," commented Rothmund.

"So it did to me on the tenth," I agreed; "but today is the fourteenth, and now it looks like another story."
"What has the fourteenth got to do with it?" he demanded.
"Yesterday was the thirteenth," I reminded him.
"You don't mean to tell me—" he started, skeptically.
"That is just what I do mean to tell you," I interrupted. "The lady came, I saw, she conquered."
Ralph looked worried. "Don't forget what your nurse told you after your last operation," he reminded me.
"Which nurse? I had nine, and no two of them told me the same things."
"Jerry. She said that narcotics often affected a patient's mind for months afterward." His tone was solicitous.
"Well, at least Jerry admitted that I had a mind, which some of the others didn't. Anyway, it didn't affect my eyesight; I saw what I saw. Please take a letter to Mr. Napier." A few days later I received a telegram from Napier dated Guaymas.
"LETTER RECEIVED STOP THANKS STOP SHALL CALL ON YOU TOMORROW," it read.
"He must be flying," I commented.
"Or coming in a white shroud," suggested Ralph. "I think I'll phone Captain Hodson to send a squad car around here; sometimes these nuts are dangerous." He was still skeptical.
I must admit that we both awaited the arrival of Carson Napier with equal interest. I think Ralph expected to see a wild-eyed maniac. I could not visualize the man at all.
About eleven o'clock the following morning Ralph came into my study. "Mr. Napier is here," he said.
"Does his hair grow straight out from his scalp, and do the whites of his eyes show all around the irises?" I inquired, smiling.
"No," replied Ralph, returning the smile; "he is a very fine looking man, but," he added, "I still think he's a nut."

"Ask him to come in," and a moment later Ralph ushered in an exceptionally handsome man whom I judged to be somewhere between twenty-five and thirty years old, though he might have been even younger.
He came forward with extended hand as I rose to greet him, a smile lighting his face; and after the usual exchange of banalities he came directly to the point of his visit.
"To get the whole picture clearly before you," We commenced, "I shall have to tell you something about myself. My father was a British army officer, my mother an American girl from Virginia. I was born in India while my father was stationed there, and brought up under the tutorage of an old Hindu who was much attached to my father and mother. This Chand Kabi was something of a mystic, and he taught me many things that are not in the curriculums of schools for boys under ten. Among them was telepathy, which he had cultivated to such a degree that he could converse with one in psychological harmony with himself quite as easily at great distances as when face to face. Not only that, but he could project mental images to great distances, so that the recipient of his thought waves could see what Chand Kabi was seeing, or whatever else Chand Kabi wished him to see. These things he taught me."
"And it was thus you caused me to see my midnight visitor on the thirteenth ?" I inquired.
He nodded. "That test was necessary in order to ascertain if we were in psychological harmony. Your letter, quoting the exact words that I had caused the apparition to appear to speak, convinced me that I had at last found the person for whom I have been searching for some time.
"But to get on with my story. I hope I am not boring you, but I feel that it is absolutely necessary that you should have full knowledge of my antecedents and background in order that you may decide.whether I am worthy of your confidence and assistance or not." I assured him that I was far from being bored, and he proceeded.

"I was not quite eleven when my father died and my mother brought me to America. We went to Virginia first and lived there for three years with my mother's grandfather, Judge John Carson, with whose name and reputation you are doubtless familiar, as who is not?

"After the grand old man died, mother and I came to California, where I attended public schools and later entered a small college at Claremont, which is noted for its high scholastic standing and the superior personnel of both its faculty and student body.

"Shortly after my graduation the third and greatest tragedy of my life occurred—my mother died. I was absolutely stunned by this blow. Life seemed to hold no further interest for me. I did not care to live, yet I would not take my own life. As an alternative I embarked upon a life of recklessness. With a certain goal in mind, I learned to fly. I changed my name and became a stunt man in pictures.

"I did not have to work. Through my mother I had inherited a considerable fortune from my great-grandfather, John Carson; so great a fortune that only a spendthrift could squander the income. I mention this only because the venture I am undertaking requires considerable capital, and I wish you to know that I am amply able to finance it without help.

"Not only did life in Hollywood bore me, but here in Southern California were too many reminders of the loved one I had lost. I determined to travel, and I did. I flew all over the world. In Germany I became interested in rocket cars and financed several. Here my idea was born. There was nothing original about it except that I intended to carry it to a definite conclusion. I would travel by rocket to another planet.

"My studies had convinced me that of all the planets Mars alone offered presumptive evidence of habitability for creatures similar to ourselves. I was at the same time convinced that if I succeeded in reaching Mars the

probability of my being able to return to earth was remote. Feeling that I must have some reason for embarking upon such a venture, other than selfishness, I determined to seek out some one with whom I could communicate in the event that I succeeded. Subsequently it occurred to me that this might also afford the means for launching a second expedition, equipped to make the return journey, for I had no doubt but that there would be many adventurous spirits ready to undertake such an excursion once I had proved it feasible.

"For over a year I have been engaged in the construction of a gigantic rocket on Guadalupe Island, off the west coast of Lower California. The Mexican government has given me every assistance, and today everything is complete to the last detail. I am ready to start at any moment."

As he ceased speaking, he suddenly faded from view. The chair in which he had been sitting was empty. There was no one in the room but myself. I was stunned, almost terrified. I recalled what Rothmund had said about the effect of the narcotics upon my mentality. I also recalled that insane people seldom realize that they are insane. Was *I* insane? Cold sweat broke out upon my forehead and the backs of my hands. I reached toward the buzzer to summon Ralph. There is no question but that Ralph is sane. If he had seen Carson Napier and shown him into my study—what a relief that would be!

But before my finger touched the button Ralph entered the room. There was a puzzled expression on his face. "Mr. Napier is back again," he said, and then he added, "I didn't know he had left. I just heard him talking to you."

I breathed a sigh of relief as I wiped the perspiration from my face and hands; if I was crazy, so was Ralph. "Bring him in," I said, "and this time you stay here."

When Napier entered there was a questioning look in his eyes. "Do you fully grasp the situation as far as I have

explained it?" he asked, as though he had not been out of the room at all.
"Yes, but—" I started.
"Wait, please," he requested. "I know what you are going to say, but let me apologize first and explain. I have not been here before. That was my final test. If you are confident that you saw me and talked to me and can recall what I said to you as I sat outside in my car, then you and I can communicate just as freely and easily when I am on Mars."
"But," interjected Rothmund, "you *were* here. Didn't I shake hands with you when you came in, and talk to you?"
"You thought you did," replied Napier.
"Who's loony now?" I inquired inelegantly, but to this day Rothmund insists that we played a trick on him.
"How do you know he's here now, then?" he asked.
"I don't," I admitted.
"I am, this time," laughed Napier. "Let's see; how far had I gotten?"
"You were saying that you were all ready to start, had your rocket set up on Gaudalupe Island," I reminded him.
"Right! I see you got it all. Now, as briefly as possible, I'll outline what I hope you will find it possible to do for me. I have come to you for several reasons, the more important of which are your interest in Mars, your profession (the results of my experiment must be recorded by an experienced writer), and your reputation for integrity—I have taken the liberty of investigating you most thoroughly. I wish you to record and publish the messages you receive from me and to administer my estate during my absence."
"I shall be glad to do the former, but I hesitate to accept the responsibility of the latter assignment," I demurred.
"I have already arranged a trust that will give you ample protection," he replied in a manner that precluded further argument. I saw that he was a young man who brooked no obstacles; in fact I think he never admitted the existence of

an obstacle. "As for your remuneration," he continued, "you may name your own figure."
I waved a deprecatory hand. "It will be a pleasure," I assured him.
"It may take a great deal of your time," interjected Ralph, "and your time is valuable."
"Precisely," agreed Napier. "Mr. Rothmund and I will, with your permission, arrange the financial details later."
"That suits me perfectly," I said, for I detest business and everything connected with it.
"Now, to get back to the more important and far more interesting phases of our discussion; what is your reaction to the plan as a whole?"
"Mars is a long way from earth," I suggested; "Venus is nine or ten million miles closer, and a million miles are a million miles."
"Yes, and I would prefer going to Venus," he replied. "Enveloped in clouds, its surface forever invisible to man, it presents a mystery that intrigues the imagination; but recent astronomical research suggests conditions there inimical to the support of any such life as we know on earth. It has been thought by some that, held in the grip of the Sun since the era of her pristine fluidity, she always presents the same face to him, as does the Moon to earth. If such is the case, the extreme heat of one hemisphere and the extreme cold of the other would preclude life.
"Even if the suggestion of Sir James Jeans is borne out by fact, each of her days and nights is several times as long as ours on earth, these long nights having a temperature of thirteen degrees below zero, Fahrenheit, and the long days a correspondingly high temperature."
"Yet even so, life might have adapted itself to such conditions," I contended; "man exists in equatorial heat and arctic cold."
"But not without oxygen," said Napier. "St. John has estimated that the amount of oxygen above the cloud

envelope that surrounds Venus is less than one tenth of one per cent of the terrestrial amount. After all, we have to bow to the superior judgment of such men as Sir James Jeans, who says, 'The evidence, for what it is worth, goes to suggest that Venus, the only planet in the solar system outside Mars and the earth on which life could possibly exist, possesses no vegetation and no oxygen for higher forms of life to breathe,' which definitely limits my planetary exploration to Mars."

We discussed his plans during the remainder of the day and well into the night, and early the following morning he left for Guadalupe Island in his Sikorsky amphibian. I have not seen him since, at least in person, yet, through the marvellous medium of telepathy, I have communicated with him continually and seen him amid strange, unearthly surroundings that have been graphically photographed upon the retina of my mind's eye. Thus I am the medium through which the remarkable adventures of Carson Napier are being recorded on earth; but I am only that, like a typewriter or a dictaphone—the story that follows is his.

Chapter 2 - Off For Mars

AS I set my ship down in the sheltered cove along the shore of desolate Gaudalupe a trifle over four hours after I left Tarzana, the little Mexican steamer I had chartered to transport my men, materials, and supplies from the mainland rode peacefully at anchor in the tiny harbor, while on the shore, waiting to welcome me, were grouped the laborers, mechanics, and assistants who had worked with such whole-hearted loyalty for long months in preparation for this day. Towering head and shoulders above the others loomed Jimmy Welsh, the only American among them.

I taxied in close to shore and moored the ship to a buoy, while the men launched a dory and rowed out to get me. I had been absent less than a week, most of which had been spent in Guaymas awaiting the expected letter from Tarzana, but so exuberantly did they greet me, one might have thought me a long-lost brother returned from the dead, so dreary and desolate and isolated is Guadalupe to those who must remain upon her lonely shores for even a brief interval between contacts with the mainland.

Perhaps the warmth of their greeting may have been enhanced by a desire to conceal their true feelings. We had been together constantly for months, warm friendships had sprung up between us, and tonight we were to separate with little likelihood that they and I should ever meet again. This was to be my last day on earth; after today I should be as dead to them as though three feet of earth covered my inanimate corpse.

It is possible that my own sentiments colored my interpretation of theirs, for I am frank to confess that I had been apprehending this last moment as the most difficult of the whole adventure. I have come in contact with the peoples of many countries, but I recall none with more

lovable qualities than Mexicans who have not been contaminated by too close contact with the intolerance and commercialism of Americans. And then there was Jimmy Welsh. It was going to be like parting with a brother when I said good-bye to him. For months he had been begging to go with me; and I knew that he would continue to beg up to the last minute, but I could not risk a single life unnecessarily.

We all piled into the trucks that we had used to transport supplies and materials from the shore to the camp, which lay inland a few miles, and bumped over our makeshift road to the little table-land where the giant torpedo lay upon its mile long track.

"Everything is ready," said Jimmy. "We polished off the last details this morning. Every roller on the track has been inspected by at least a dozen men, we towed the old crate back and forth over the full length of the track three times with the truck, and then repacked all the rollers with grease. Three of us have checked over every item of equipment and supplies individually; we've done about everything but fire the rockets; and now we're ready to go —you *are* going to take me along, aren't you, Car?"

I shook my head. "Please don't, Jimmy," I begged; "I have a perfect right to gamble with my own life, but not with yours; so forget it. But I am going to do something for you," I added, "just as a token of my appreciation of the help you've given me and all that sort of rot. I'm going to give you my ship to remember me by."

He was grateful, of course, but still he could not hide his disappointment in not being allowed to accompany me, which was evidenced by an invidious comparison he drew between the ceiling of the Sikorsky and that of the old crate, as he had affectionately dubbed the great torpedolike rocket that was to bear me out into space in a few hours.

"A thirty-five million mile ceiling," he mourned dolefully; "think of it! Mars for a ceiling!"
"And may I hit the ceiling!" I exclaimed, fervently.
The laying of the track upon which the torpedo was to take off had been the subject of a year of calculation and consultation. The day of departure had been planned far ahead and the exact point at which Mars would rise above the eastern horizon on that night calculated, as well as the time; then it was necessary to make allowances for the rotation of the earth and the attraction of the nearer heavenly bodies. The track was then laid in accordance with these calculations. It was constructed with a very slight drop in the first three quarters of a mile and then rose gradually at an angle of two and one half degrees from horizontal.
A speed of four and one half miles per second at the take-off would be sufficient to neutralize gravity; to overcome it, I must attain a speed of 6.93 miles per second. To allow a sufficient factor of safety I had powered the torpedo to attain a speed of seven miles per second at the end of the runway, which I purposed stepping up to ten miles per second while passing through the earth's atmosphere. What my speed would be through space was problematical, but I based all my calculations on the theory that it would not deviate much from the speed at which I left the earth's atmosphere, until I came within the influence of the gravitational pull of Mars.
The exact instant at which to make the start had also caused me considerable anxiety. I had calculated it again and again, but there were so many factors to be taken into consideration that I had found it expedient to have my figures checked and rechecked by a well-known physicist and an equally prominent astronomer. Their deductions tallied perfectly with mine— the torpedo must start upon its journey toward Mars some time before the red planet rose above the eastern horizon. The trajectory would be

along a constantly flattening arc, influenced considerably at first by the earth's gravitational pull, which would decrease inversely as the square of the distance attained. As the torpedo left the earth's surface on a curved tangent, its departure must be so nicely timed that when it eventually escaped the pull of the earth its nose would be directed toward Mars.

On paper, these figures appeared most convincing; but, as the moment approached for my departure, I must confess to a sudden realization that they were based wholly upon theory, and I was struck with the utter folly of my mad venture.

For a moment I was aghast. The enormous torpedo, with its sixty tons, Iying there at the end of its mile long track, loomed above me, the semblance of a gargantuan coffin—my coffin, in which I was presently to be dashed to earth, or to the bottom of the Pacific, or cast out into space to wander there to the end of time. I was afraid. I admit it, but it was not so much the fear of death as the effect of the sudden realization of the stupendousness of the cosmic forces against which I had pitted my puny powers that temporarily unnerved me.

Then Jimmy spoke to me. "Let's have a last look at things inside the old crate before you shove off," he suggested, and my nervousness and my apprehensions vanished beneath the spell of his quiet tones and his matter-of-fact manner. I was myself again.

Together we inspected the cabin, where are located the controls, a wide and comfortable berth, a table, a chair, writing materials, and a well-stocked bookshelf. Behind the cabin is a small galley and just behind the galley a storeroom containing canned and dehydrated foods sufficient to last me a year. Back of this is a small battery room containing storage batteries for lighting, heating, and cooking, a dynamo, and a gas engine. The extreme stern compartment is filled with rockets and the intricate

mechanical device by which they are fed to the firing chambers by means of the controls in the cabin. Forward of the main cabin is a large compartment in which are located the water and oxygen tanks, as well as a quantity of odds and ends necessary either to my safety or comfort.

Everything, it is needless to say, is fastened securely against the sudden and terrific stress that must accompany the take-off. Once out in space, I anticipate no sense of motion, but the start is going to be rather jarring. To absorb, as much as possible, the shock of the take-off, the rocket consists of two torpedoes, a smaller torpedo within a larger one, the former considerably shorter than the latter and consisting of several sections, each one comprising one of the compartments I have described. Between the inner and outer shells and between each two compartments is installed a system of ingenious hydraulic shock absorbers designed to more or less gradually overcome the inertia of the inner torpedo during the take-off. I trust that it functions properly.

In addition to these precautions against disaster at the start, the chair in which I shall sit before the controls is not only heavily overstuffed but is secured to a track or framework that is equipped with shock absorbers. Furthermore, there are means whereby I may strap myself securely into the chair before taking off.

I have neglected nothing essential to my safety, upon which depends the success of my project.

Following our final inspection of the interior, Jimmy and I clambered to the top of the torpedo for a last inspection of the parachutes, which I hope will sufficiently retard the speed of the rocket after it enters the atmosphere of Mars to permit me to bail out with my own parachute in time to make a safe landing. The main parachutes are in a series of compartments running the full length of the top of the torpedo. To explain them more clearly, I may say that they are a continuous series of batteries of parachutes, each