

FUTURE

NOV.

combined with **SCIENCE FICTION** stories

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EXPERIMENT IN GENIUS

by William F. Temple

ISMAIL, THE OUTWORLDER

by Manly Wade
Wellman

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Robert W.
Lowndes,
Editor

Volume 2

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Number 4

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The Masked Marvel was thrown against the ropes...

ISMAIL, THE OUTWORLDER

Ismail, the Outworlder, found that his reputation was a very convenient thing for lesser-known thieves...

NOVELET OF THE FUTURE

By Manly Wade Wellman



During the year 2867, recurrent arguments about the relative merits of the Terrestrial and Venusian science of self-defense brought about a contest of champions. Naturally, this was staged before sport-lovers of the High-tower Level of Pulambar...

—ARBITER (Pseud.), *High-tower Chronicles of the 29th Century*.

NATURALLY. For Pulambar is, as all the universe knows, the Martian City of Pleasure, unique throughout the habitable worlds with its two-mile spires and pinnacles atop, and its canals, cross-

Various critics have noted that a number of science-fiction stories are little more than adventure, detective, etc., stories in futuristic settings. Now this is true, to a certain extent, and it is also true that this present story could be re-written and set in a contemporary background. But what some of the critics overlook is that, in many instances, this type of story's background has a peculiar interest and fascination of its own. Such, we think is the case with Mr. Wellman's 29th Century stories, with their flower-headed Martians, frog-like Venusians, and Earthmen not dissimilar from those we know. So, reader, settle back and enjoy yourself.

way pools and gondola-motorboats below. The luxurious Hightower Level is expensive, and much of the Waterbrink district is creepy and even lawless. The Great Grapple, as the promoters called it, would be staged before telecast cameras boosting photosynthetic images to viewscreens clear to Earth, Venus and even the thriving colonies on the Jovian moons. But the contest itself took place before select, high-paying spectators at the Zaarr.

Zaarr, in slurring Martian, means "unattached". It was a dome-shaped chamber of silvery alloy, floating bubble-like among four tall towers in the sky above Pulambar. Each tower flashed a gravity-lock beam like an invisible girder to moore the Zaarr solidly in place. Inside, tables and stage had been cleared away to make room for a central roped arena and banks of seats. Those seats were crowded by Hightower sparks, brought by helicopter, short-shot rocket, sky taxi; admission by dear-purchased invitation. Terrestrials dominated, clad in rich silk-metal and glasscloud cloth and jewel net. There were almost as many froglike Venusians. Martians—petal-faced, with corseted bladder-torsos and metal-braced tentacle legs, simply but richly robed—were comparatively few, for Martians are not sports fanatics. One Martian, in a ringside seat, purred through his artificial larnyx to his Terrestrial companion.

She was slim but active-looking and healthy. At first glance a man of her own race might not think her strong jaw, straight nose and wide blue eyes lovely; at second glance he might find it hard to see or think of anything else. Despite her costly gaiety dress, she did not seem to belong to the sybaritic Hightower set. She looked thoughtful, efficient, like a technician or the chief of some government office.

"Look at them, my dearr Troy," purred the Martian. "Ssoft, luxurious—do they darre even watch violent constesstss?"

"That's what is wrong with sports today, Yaxul," replied Troy Fairdean. "Too few practise them, and too many watch and yawn."

"We arre not herre for pleasure," reminded the artificial voice. "Rreportt from undercoverr iss that Issmail—Starrwick Issmail—will be herre tonight. The League orrderrss hiss arrresst."

"I know. Ismail, whoever he is, seems poison to the Martio-Terrestrial League police. Why, Yaxul?"

"He iss too much forr Pulambarr'ss law detail—"

"Because he fools and swindles the rich idlers and their police can't find him?" said Troy Fairdean. "Somebody with drag wants... Well, if he's here, we'll get him. But everybody in the audience was double-visoed and identified. Ditto every employee. Here come the contestants."

The watchers howled—most of them were intoxicated, by joy-lamp ray or Jovian *guil* or Venusian *samas* or *vana*. The Venusian champion slithered through the ropes, booming-ly applauded by his fellows. His frog-body, banded black and green, was stripped naked, and torso and limbs writhed. Then a storm of Terrestrial whoops and yells as a figure bounded into the ring from the other side and cast off its robes—a sinewy body in trunks, all lean except in the shoulders and fists, its face and head shrouded in a sacklike mask of black silk-metal.

"They call him the Masked Marvel," said Troy Fairdean; "they've called Terrestrial fist-and-foot champions things like that for ages."

"We know him, of courrsse," nodded Yaxul. "Coke Paylon—to the League therre arre no masskss. I had expected a burrlier sspecimen—"

INTRODUCTIONS by loudspeaker were finished, and at a wave from the officials the contest began. The Venusian advanced, cautious and deadly as a big lizard. Mockingly he exposed his pale chest and abdomen, trained in gymnasiums so that they

were muscled-sheathed and almost as impervious to blows as the armor-plated rest of him. His wide mouth grinned, showing jagged teeth. One flappy hand darted at the masked Earthman, who sidestepped, jabbed with his left and missed. The audience yelled for action, and the two grappled.



"Hi!" chorussed the Venusians as they went down—the Masked Marvel undermost. But, before he touched the mat, he contrived to twist so that both fell together. At once the Venusian flowed over him, snaky arms and legs twining, tugging. There was a sudden pallor in the Masked Marvel's pinkness; he seemed to go slack—another trick. In what seemed the victory moment, the Venusian relaxed for a trice, and the trice was enough; his victim writhed free and rose.

"No Marrtian would have been duped," said Yaxul, conveniently forgetting the frailty of his people in hand-to-hand combats. "We rread the mind—even some of the Terrres-trial mind—we ssee deceptions—"

"The Masked Marvel's hurt," interrupted Troy Fairdean.

The fellow backed away, limping. He stooped and chafed a knee with both hands. The Venusian, pursuing, gurgled in triumph and reached low with both hands—

And the Masked Marvel's own hand darted, flattened like an axe-head. Its edge chopped toward the unguarded delicate throat beneath the shallow jaw, struck home; the Venusian's gurgle broke off in a choking cry, and the Terrestrial had him.

A flurry of legs and arms, green-striped and pink and a fall that with a greater than Martian gravity might have meant broken bones. Terrestrial hands were on the Venusian throat,

throttling. Up shot two helpless green paws, clasped high in supplicating surrender.

Howls and protests; the Venusians deafened the room with cries that it was a trick—unfair—the Masked Marvel had simulated an injury; the Terrestrials yelled back that it was a trick indeed, clever and admirable. There might have been an impromptu group-fight on the floor, but for the jangle-note of the voice-magnifier in the ring. The vanquished fighter was being carried out, still in agony from his mauled throat, and the man in the mask stood straight and motionless and victorious.

Prralla, the proprietor of the Zaarr, was paying the Masked Marvel the victory-purse, a great sheaf of value-vouchers, and motioning him to the microphone. The hooded head spoke. "I'm entrusted with a message," said a muffled voice. "Greeting from Mr. Starwick Ismail!"

And the Masked Marvel caught up his robe. With a smoothness that did not seem hurried he vaulted the ropes and vanished toward the dressing rooms.

"Follow," breathed Yaxul to Troy. "If he had worrd frrom Issmail, he must be arressted and made to tell—"

The two of them weaved their way through the throng, found a closed door and a robot porter with a determination to keep them away; but Prralla himself hurried across, bent over the stamped bit of metal in Yaxul's tentacle-tip, recognized the authority it conferred, and ordered the robot back.

Beyond was a metal-walled corridor. They passed the portal of the beaten fighter's dressing room. A doctor had come, and the fellow's bruised throat was recovered enough, at least, to let him howl his pain and disappointment. Then they came to another room, and the beginning of the riddle's answer.

INSIDE were attendants and a burly, angry man draped in a

robe. He had just the sort of ineffectual moon-face that an athlete ought to hide—Coke Paylon, known professionally as the Masked Marvel.

"The door was locked, and he didn't open it," Paylon was snarling out. "He just stepped through, like a clown through a paper hoop."

Yaxul and Troy turned toward each other. To walk through solid substances meant the jealously guarded secret of the atom-shift ray, of which one—only one—had vanished, stolen, from the League laboratories. It had taken a master thief to get hold of that atom-shift; Starwick Ismail, naturally.

"Did he ray you?" Troy asked Paylon.

Paylon shook his head. "No. Said it would be too much of a nauseating, sickening experience for someone he hadn't any wish to make uncomfortable. I reached for him, and he took hold of my arm somehow—" Paylon grimaced. "He must have known that judo stuff the ancients had. Good job it isn't generally known today. I was helpless, paralyzed. And he tied me and gagged me, and here I lay while he put on my trunks and mask and robe and went out—then returned and was kind enough to ungag me so I could yell for somebody!"

"Who?" demanded Yaxul, a tentacle-tip on Paylon's big wrist. "Who was he?"

"Who but Starwick Ismail?" blubbered Paylon.

Prralla had joined them. He was a-quiver with dismayed apologies. "I should have been morre vigilant. I myself handed him the prrize—now it iss gone—"

"Look," bade Troy, pointing.

On a sofa lay a scatter of value-vouchers, their rectangular surfaces built into capital letters: *GOOD LUCK STARWICK ISMAIL*

There was a quick counting. About half the sum of the prize had been built into those letters. Yaxul wagged his flowery cranium.

"We must follow him," he said.

"He cannot have gone morre than a few ssecondss—"

"Yaxul," said Troy as they went out, "I've just had a flash-order." She lifted her wrist, with its bracelet-radio, tuned to a single and secret beam. "I'm afraid those few seconds were enough. There's been a robbery, some rich idler named Harvison. The League wants us on the case, because the evidence points to—"

"What was sstolen?" demanded Yaxul.

"That's what is special. A book, that they say is rare and old and unique."

"Book," repeated Yaxul. "Harvison. Of course—and who elsse would ssteal it but Issmail himsself? Come on!"



STARWICK ISMAIL, The Outworlder—the man who considered the laws of every habitable spot in the System, and ignored or defied those laws that did not suit him—was already at the Waterbrink.

Hastening into the well-cut but unobtrusive clothes he had left in Paylon's room, he had strolled to a taxiport, hailed a cruising autogiro and gone to a nearby tower-top. From there by elevator he went down to a song-salon, passed through it and descended by another elevator. It was in all less than a three-minute retreat. At ground level he walked along a side-alley, lest some shabby reveller see and recognize him and claim the various public and private rewards offered for his betrayal.

But in the alley he quickly spread an oily dark pigment on his face, swept his longish hair into a new arrangement and doused it with another preparation that changed it from buff-color to ginger-color. The rest of his disguise was ten times more artful, and consisted in changing his walk and manner. He was tall-

er than average, but now carried himself in a way to seem middle-sized and unimpressive. He slackened his normally strong features, that if left alone might have been even handsome. Contact-lenses might have altered his deep-set gray eyes, but he was satisfied simply to squint them into a new shape and shadow. Emerging from the other end of the alley, at the curb above a canal, he would not look like Ismail to the very few persons in the System who knew him well enough to recognize him.

A gondola hummed by, full of goggling tourists in the bright, many-colored overlights. Across the water giggled a throng of Terrestrial men and women—they had come out of a joy-lamp room, had absorbed more of the exciting light vibrations than were good for them. A taxi-flier dropped down and let out a passenger, a giant for height and breadth, his clumsy body dressed in silk-metal and his head muffled in a hoodlike cape, something like what the Masked Marvel wore. The giant paused a moment, as if thinking; then turned in the direction of Ismail.

"Drrink, ssirr?" spoke a Martian tout from an opened door-panel behind him. "Insside therre iss *gnail, vana*—yess, and Terresstrial whis-key, verry sselect—"

"No thanks, Martian brother," said Ismail, watching the giant, who took a step toward him.

"Gamble?" suggested the Martian. "Play carrdss—indemnity, big sstakess tonight—"

"I'm fresh out of vouchers," demurred the outworlder, without any attempt at truth.

"Sshow? Magic—thought-transs-ferr exhibition—or you like prretty girrlls? Blonde, brunette—"

The giant was stumping purposefully closer, with a sort of deliberate rhythmic stride that was swift without being graceful. Ismail did not mistrust his own disguise-attitude, but he turned to the door.

"All right, Martian brother. Inside, quick."

He entered, and the Martian closed the door, the automatic lock snapped.

INSIDE was everything Ismail had been promised, in most unpromising array. A stage held a stage psychiatrist, Earth-born but Mars-educated, who drew gales of laughter from a knot of spectators by reading in one mind, then another, most embarrassing secret thoughts. There were girls, too, not one of them ugly and not one of them inviting. Overhead one of the joy-lamps that were almost standard equipment in Pulambar shed its rays—now golden, now angry red, now sickly blue, now green, now golden again—at mild but nerve-tickling intensity. And to one side were the gaming-tables. One or two faces lifted and stared as Ismail came to join the gamblers. They were Terrestrial faces, pale and puffy, men who had slackened off against the lesser gravity of Mars, men who had enjoyed themselves so long that enjoyment was beginning to be a bore.

Indemnity was the game at the table where Ismail gently elbowed in, a simple card game that interested chiefly because of sums quickly won and lost. Each player could take or refuse a card at each deal. Only those whose cards were of the same color stayed in. When all refused the dealer's offer, unretired players showed the total values of their cards, and high man took stakes and next deal. Ismail dropped some value-units and got into the game.

He lost his money the first hand, and the second; but on the third he drew good cards. He had trouble keeping those gray eyes hooded and squinted as he urged larger and larger wagers with each deal, and finally spread out his cards.

"Eighty-eight," he announced, "and nobody else need show his hand, because I know I'm high man." He gathered in the sheaf of vouchers, straightened them and put them away.

"You're a clumsy lot," he went on, gazing around at his startled play-partners. "Every one of you cheating, thumb-handedly and incessantly. All of you cheated at least twice, some of you four or five times. But I," and he turned away, speaking over his shoulder, "didn't have to cheat but once. I waited until I knew you deserved it. Luck, you fumbling fools."

"Wait," said someone. And, almost cordially, Ismail paused and waited. There was a little silence all around him, and the sensation of eyes watching—curious eyes of casual tourists, hostile eyes of enemies.

The man who had told him to wait was a heavy-bodied Terrestrial in what looked like space-flying clothes, the tailored coverall and imitation heavy magnetic boots and instrument belt that some persons wore as a fashion wrinkle. The man walked toward him, and behind the man lined up two others—a pinch-faced, slouching type who probably had left the Jovian colonies by specific and un-gainsayable request of the colonial government, and a robed, silent Martian, undoubtedly the one who had been touting.

"I run this place," said the heavy-bodied one; "I don't like your talk, Mister."

"And I don't like your place, proprietor," replied Ismail. He stood easy, his hands low and slack. The three who approached all had weapons somewhere in their clothes, and hands or tentacles upon those weapons. "I never thought that crooked gambling would be wiped out," went on Ismail, "but I did think that crooked gamblers could take a look at a stranger and decide whether or not he'd fall for it, or stand for it if he did fall."

"Come into my office." The proprietor was close enough to mutter, and his muttering was harsh and baleful. "Don't give me any trouble, or we'll have to take you in there."

"You mean, so that you can hook back my winnings and flip me around out of sight and hearing of the

visitors?" smiled Ismail. "No, and don't try to draw—"

All three tried to draw, but Ismail outdrew them all. He had the pistol-form atom-shift ray thrower with which he had gained entrance to the dressing room of Coke Paylon, and he hopped back and turned it on the trio.

Around them fell a soft, buttery radiance, and at once they stood tightly motionless, turning frosty-gray and dim, like a faintly developed group photograph. Next instant Ismail turned off the atom-shift, and the three reeled and staggered, back to normal density and complexion, but sickened by the brief but unstringing shock to the atoms of their beings. He laughed, and jumped at the door. It was locked, of course, and the Martian would have the solver-device to open it; but he flashed the atom-shift against the solid panel. The substance paled, looked like melted wax, and Ismail stepped through into the open, letting it harden again behind him.

He drew in his breath for another chuckle, but a clutch fell upon his wrist and another upon his shoulder, heavy and crushing as snapped-down jaws of mighty traps.



ROLAND HARVISON was as richly dressed as any Hightower spark, but his dried, high-craniumed face was a wise one and a worried one. "All I can say," he told the pair who had come into his luxurious living quarters, "is that the book was taken, and that I knew someone at League Police sub-head-quarters who said he'd put you two on it. There was evidence that Ismail had taken it—a dropped chronometer with serial numbers that traced to him." He glanced at Yaxul appraisingly. "You didn't know about that clue, I take it. The Pulambar police carried the chronometer away with



them."

"No," Yaxul assured him gravely. "We did not know about the chronometer until you told us."

"You're going to catch Ismail, though?" demanded Harvison. "The book he stole—if I were permitted to tell you what it contains—"

"We know that," Yaxul said. "Recovered from an ancient laboratory, was it not? With the lost formulae for weather control, begun in the Twentieth Century when they started dry-ice experiments? And shelved, and mislaid during the Terrestrial War of 1988?"

"Oh, you know," growled Harvison, disapproving. "I suppose you League operatives have dossiers on everybody and what he does—even me. I was hoping to do something for the Martian government—conservation of water vapor, betterment of weather conditions, reclaiming of desert areas. Well," and the scientist's voice grew sharp, "why do you stay here? Why aren't you after this Ismail?"

"Oh," said Troy Fairdean, from where she sat apart in an armchair, "we are after him."

Harvison gazed. From her belt-bag she had taken two mechanical devices, small but intricate and unclassifiable, and connected them. Wires ran from them to a goggle-like apparatus, which she had clamped over her eyes. Sparks whispered, a faint, chorded rhythm began.

"We don't need the clue you mentioned," she informed Harvison. "We had another clue, even before your case was reported to us. As for Ismail, a—Bloodhound is closing in on him."

"Bloodhound?" Harvison grinned

expectantly, as if it were some sort of joke. "I see. The ancients used that figure of speech for a police detective. A human bloodhound, eh?"

"No," said Troy enigmatically, "not a human bloodhound, just a Bloodhound. When it finds Ismail, he's ours."

Her fingers touched a small keyboard, like the controls of a space-cruiser in miniature. She attached an earphone to her goggle harness. "Ah," she said, more to herself than to her companions, "maybe it's found him already."

AS SOON as that double clamp-grip fell upon Ismail outside the door of the gambling den, he knew it was too strong for him to break. He stood motionless, slack, seemingly helpless. "May I inquire," he said quietly, "what this is about?"

"You're under arrest," said a gentle, musical voice out of the hood that leaned above him.

"Why?" asked Ismail. "On what charge? Who are you?"

"Who you are is more to the point," rejoined the gentle voice. "Mr. Starwick Ismail, the Outworlder. You stole an atom-shift ray; you impersonated a professional athlete up among the Hightowers; you stole a valuable scientific secret from an accredited public servant named Toland Harvison."

"Guilty on the first two counts," admitted Ismail readily, almost lounging in that prisoning clutch. "Not guilty on the third. I know who Harvison is—who doesn't, who pays attention to the science telecasts? But I didn't steal his secret, or anything else that was his."

"Then why is it gone, and why did you drop your chronometer in his headquarters?"

"My chronometer?" repeated Ismail. "I didn't; I have it here." He moved his free left hand toward his belt-pouch.

The grips tightened on his shoulder

and right wrist, almost stunning him with their painful pressure. "Don't move," warned the voice, and its music had changed from violin-tone to stern trumpet-tone. "I'll crush your bones to putty."

"Ease off," pleaded Ismail, obediently relaxing. "Well, you've got me; where do we go together?"

"League police headquarters." The giant turned on those huge, shovel-shaped feet, as a monster searchlight turns on its swivel. The hands pulled Ismail around effortlessly, like a trailing banner fastened on the searchlight. At the waterside hovered the taxi-flier, as if waiting for them. "Bring along that atom-shift ray; be careful with it."

Into Ismail's mind, troubled but cool, instantly popped inspiration. He opened his fingers, and the atom-shift clinked on the plastic pavement-slab. His giant captor exclaimed angrily and let go of his wrist to scoop with one paw for the fallen treasure. In stooping, the other grip shifted on his shoulder, relaxed a micrometric trifle; that was enough.

A patch of silk-metal ripped from his arm as he wrenched, but he freed himself. With a great bound he crossed the pavement-slab, a twenty-foot jump with earth muscles overcoming Martian gravity, and dived.

The waters of the canal started right and left from his headlong impact. As he slid into their wet chill he swam strongly downward. Swimming was a skill fallen in decay in the Twenty-Ninth Century, but Ismail knew it, as well as many other outmoded things. He strove forward, then sidewise, then back in the direction whence he had come. Floating up, he bumped his head. He had risen under the shelf of the promenade. Turning over, he thrust his nose into the half-inch or so of air underneath the plastic slab, as air is contained under the ice of a frozen pool. Cautiously he breathed in a lungful, then paddled away on his back.

Monstrous, weighty feet clumped above him—the giant was trying to

search for him. Again he swam down and away, then returned to idle under the slab, draw another breath, cock an ear out of the water to listen. The ton-heavy footfalls still sounded, but more distantly. He was going to escape. Once more he dived, and swam out to where light filtered down through open water. He could look up and see a dimly black silhouette crawling above him—the hull of a motor gondola.

He swam two powerful strokes and rose with the vessel between himself and the promenade from which he had leaped. A quick, clawing grab with one hand fastened on an ornament, studded with imitation jewels, that projected from the hull. As the gondola churned along, he let himself be dragged with it, just free of the blast-propellor that spun in the water dangerously close to his trailing feet. He lay low until the vessel reached a cross-canal and changed direction. Then he let himself rise and look and listen.

THE GONDOLA was full of music radioed from somewhere, and chattering laughter from its passengers. "Ahoy," panted Ismail.

Faces peered down at him. Terrestrials, naturally; Earth sent most of the tourists who thronged Pulambar. There was a pudgy young man with an incredible curled moustache, and two young women, artfully-rouged, groomed and coiffured. They squealed at him, but not in dismay.

"Come aboard, whoever you are," granted one of the women, and Ismail heaved himself up and in. The three passengers laughed, and the man offered a glassite container in which *guil* glowed with its peculiar phosphorescence.

"Drinks first," he invited, and Ismail took a swig. "Then introductions and explanations."

"Call me Ismail."

Another giggle from the nearest woman. She was plainly conscious and proud of her full, handsome figure, draped for revelation rather than

concealment, and her waves of hair were artificially tinted in alternate bands of dark and pallor. "Ismail's the name of a famous criminal," she protested.

"I like it," he pretended to fall in with the silly mood. "As for explanations—well, I left a place in a hurry. Someone insisted pressingly on explanations there, too." He sat on a bench, grinning and dripping. "I hope I don't have to take another bath."

"Probably you fought over a girl," suggested the other woman, and Ismail did not deny it. "You must be cold after that dip."



Ismail took another drink of *guil*, all he needed, and handed the container back. "Thanks, I'm warming up. Where away?"

"Oh, we've killed most of the night," said the woman with the banded hair. "At home—St. Louis—it would be two or three o'clock in the morning. We danced, gamed, went joy-lamping. We missed the telecast of that Great Grapple thing at the Zaarr, between the Venusian and Terrestrial champions." She studied Ismail, seeming to find him attractive. "Did you hear who won?"

"The Terrestrial," he informed her.

"Bravo for our side," chimed in the pudgy man, caressing his moustache. "Were you in the audience, perhaps?"

"No," said Ismail. "Not in the audience."

"Anyway," went on the band-haired woman, "we're going to Martio-Terrestrial League Headquarters. We have introductions—want to visit their police office. Maybe we ought to tell them we've captured Ismail, the notorious Outworlder." She simpered, "I've heard he's a charming, dynamic sort of adventurer."

"Not guilty, then," said Ismail.

"Look, we're approaching the League entry—it's in that building yonder." As the gondola drew up, he stepped on to the promenade. His silk-metal had almost dried itself. "Thanks for the transportation and the company."

"You tore your tunic," said the band-haired woman, following him on to the slab. "Let me fix it."

FROM HER decorated belt-bag she took a vibra-weaver, such as any housewife would prize if only any housewife could pay for it. Touching studs and levers, she matched the dull color of the tunic, then rapidly filled in the torn gap. "There," she smiled, "isn't that better?"

"First-rate," praised Ismail. "You're very kind—or are you?"

"Why don't you find out later?" she cooed. "I'm lodging at—"

"Thanks for everything," he said quickly, and walked rapidly away from his befrienders.

He had seen a pair of Martian policemen sauntering out of the League entry. Long ago he had learned the trick of thinking behind a mental bulkhead to defy the thought-reading skill of Martians; but the very problem of such a defense might rouse their curiosity, might even cause them to detain and investigate him—

He jumped aside as though stung. In his hurry to get away from the Martians he had almost bumped into a towering, thick-bodied figure that clumped along with its head in a hood. There could not be two such shapes, even in thronged Pulambar. This was the giant who had seized him once, who would seize him again. He tried not to cower. And next moment the giant had strode past him, toward League headquarters.

Thankfully Ismail dodged around a group of revellers, gestured away an invitation to enter a hall where something new in intoxication—souped-up joy-lamp plus dream-dust in *vana*—was being offered, and out of sight of the giant and the Martian police and League entry.

"That big operative," he mused.

"When we first crossed trails, he seemed to know all about me. A credit to his training and superiors, in spite of his sweet, gentle voice. But now—he brushes by and lets me go. What kind of a brain does he have? Is it only good part of the time?"

Ismail touched his damp hair. It seemed to give him an answer to the riddle; the dive into the water had washed the pigment from hair and face, made him seem different. Then Ismail pondered other mysteries.

"I can understand the atom-shift being traced to me; after all, I used it up in the Zaarr; but how did he trace *me* after tracing *it*? And that bluff about my chronometer being dropped at Harvison's—"

He now had time to explore his belt-pouch. His hand groped in it, then came away empty; but no emptier than his puzzled expression.

"By heaven, it's gone!" he exclaimed aloud. "I did drop it somewhere—but where? Not at Toland Harvison's, unless Pulambar intoxicants have got to me and I'm moving around in dreams!"



AT LEAGUE Police headquarters, two of the Pulambar detail were grumblingly doing what their chiefs had told them to do. Into Yaxul's tentacle-tip they gave the chronometer whose serial numbers showed it to be the property of Starwick Ismail.

"Just how it'll give you his trail I don't see," said one. "I think you owe it to us to explain this Bloodhound talk."

"In good time, sirr," temporized Yaxul. "The Bloodhound iss experimental ass yet. Laterr we will have interessting informmation forr yourr forrce, and perrhapss valuable aid. But now—will you parrdon uss?"

The two left, and Yaxul carried the chronometer to the inner office, where

Troy Fairdean sat before a bench where her double device, with goggles and earphones, was busily in operation.

"If Ismail had only tried to keep the atom-shift, we could close in again," she mourned, and turned off the power. "What's that, the chronometer? It'll be a trifle of help, but not as much as if Ismail himself was carrying it. How about the old book Harvison lost?"

Yaxul shook his petal-froned head. "Issmail will not carry it with him. It iss hidden—well hidden, and not anywherre ourr rradio-finderrrs can locate eassily. But trry thiss."

He carried the chronometer to the other end of the bench. There were numerous chemical supplies and gadgets. Yaxul tested with rays, acids, vibration-finders. As Troy joined him, he clucked in satisfaction.

"Ssomething individual herre." He showed her the end of a platinum chain, fastened to the stem of the chronometer and broken as if by a sharp pull. "Can we tune in on that?"

Troy bent to study, her wise face growing wiser. "We can," she said at once, "or the Bloodhound can. Let's get things started. And this time," she added as she gathered up her paraphernalia, "we'll stay close behind, and appear at the right moment, eh?"

"If Issmail sstill hass the brooken end of the chain, he iss doomed," purred Yaxul. "Not two times can even he sslip away from the Bloodhound."

They were ready to leave, when a buzzer sounded. Troy picked up an earphone and listened.

"Harvison again," she reported. "He thinks he can give us another lead to Ismail."

"Ignore him," urged Yaxul. "Come, thiss iss a ssurrerr rtrail."

AFTER the League police operatives had left him, Toland Harvison scolded himself for losing so

much of his scientific calm; but self-scolding did not help. He was chagrined and worried.

His whole life of study and experiment had pointed toward aiding in the fight for the sort of weather needed on thirsty, desert-spread Mars. Harvison truly wanted to live and die in the service of a parched planet, to leave as his own monument a corrected season of rains and fertility each year. And to him had been entrusted the priceless, unique volume of lost Twentieth-Century lore that might help him make his labors a success until—

He poured himself a drink of Irish whiskey, his favorite comfort since the days he had crammed for college examinations. There was a click-warning, someone wanted to get in. He pressed a lever by a speaker-diaphragm. "What's your business?" he demanded.

"Starwick Ismail business," came back a voice, and Harvison touched another lever to open the door. In came someone in drab silk-metal, with tossed buff-colored hair.

"Well, so you people got him?" demanded Harvison expectantly. "Here, have a drink." He poured whiskey into another glass. "Where's the book?"

"What book?" asked his visitor, accepting the liquor.

"The recovered information on weather control," snapped Harvison. "The book Ismail stole and you recovered. Didn't you say you were here on business about him?"

"Oh, that book," said the other, sipping. "It is really in existence? I always thought it was a myth, like the gold-making process, until someone discovered it. But you actually had the information—and it was taken?"

"By Ismail," Harvison said angrily. "What kind of a fool are you to be in the League police?"

"I'm not a League policeman. I'm Starwick Ismail."

"You—"

"I came to get to the bottom of this charge against me. I never

robbed you, and I'm going to find out who did and put the blame on me."

Harvison listened, and opened his mouth wide and soundlessly. Either this stranger was crazy—and Pulambar brought craziness to some Terrestrials—or he was sane and truthful, actually Ismail the Outworlder. Harvison fell back a step, his finger reaching for a buzzer-button. But the visitor came to him quickly and shoved him away. "No warnings," he said roughly. "I'm Ismail, all right. I got away from one League operative, and I don't want others complicating this. What about this theft? Speak up, Harvison, or I'll make you."

"You know about the theft," stammered Harvison. "I had the book in a—a safe hiding place. You got it; your chronometer was found there."

"Apparently it was, but I didn't leave it there. I lost it, or it was whisked out of my belt-pouch, and the real thief left it—clumsy false evidence. Where is your safe hiding place?"

"Don't you know, Ismail?" mocked Harvison. He was aware of danger, alone with the Outworlder, but not of fear.

"Know? Not just yet, but—" Ismail suddenly put out his hands to Harvison's shoulders. "Please don't resist, or it'll really hurt." He pressed nerve centers. Harvison yelped in pain, and his arms hung slack.

"You'll recover from that in a few minutes. Meanwhile, you won't act foolish, trying to grapple me or summon help. Now, as to your hiding place, let's see." He looked slowly around, but the tail of his eye was on Harvison. When the scientist flinched, Ismail stopped his turning. "In this direction? Come along."

HE TOOK Harvison by the back of the neck, not roughly or even contemptuously. His touch was more like that of a doctor helping a convalescent patient to walk. Urging Harvison with him, he walked toward the wall opposite, paused and studied its

surface. His hand on Harvison's neck detected another flinch, almost too slight to feel.

"Right about here, is it?" He strained his eyes. "I see something like a discoloration—a scorch. I understand—your hiding place opens when light rays are directed upon it." From his belt-pouch he produced a radio-flash and turned its beam on the place. The light glowed, and then a section of the wall, so cunningly joined in that its edges were not visible, dropped slowly down and out, revealing a dark recess. "There you are. Where you kept the book, Harvison."

"You've just proved you stole it," insisted Harvison. "Nobody knew that location but myself, not until I informed the League operatives just a few minutes ago."

"Nobody? You haven't any servants?"

"I have a robot all-purpose helper. And I did have a secretary—Martian-born Terrestrial named Saph Bendigo."

"Did have?" echoed Ismail. "Not any more? You fired him?"

Harvison shook his head. "He left. Had a better place, he said. I offered him more pay, but—look here, you aren't suggesting he robbed me?"

"He could. He knew your quarters; he must have guessed your possession of the book."

"Even if so, he didn't know where I kept it. He never saw me take it out to study. And he was a Terrestrial—"

"Martian-born," reminded Ismail. "Terrestrials can pick up some tricks of intercepting thought-waves from Martians. I think he's worth looking into. Your secretary, science-minded, aware of what the weather-information might mean. Where did he go?"

"How do I know?" sputtered Harvison. "And how could he make any profit out of the thing? If there'd been any logic to what you suggest, I'd have suggested it myself, to the League police."

"I'll find out," said Ismail, almost

comfortingly. "His name is Saph Bendigo, you say? Good-night, Mr. Harvison."

He departed, as quietly and abruptly as he had come. And Harvison, feeling the temporary paralysis leave his nerves, hurried to put in a call for Yaxul of the Martio-Terrestrial League Police.

But Ismail, out on the landing stage, stepped into the waiting flier with new purpose and even satisfaction. He had not betrayed the fact in his exchange with Harvison, but now he knew something, and the something was definite. "Down to the Halfways," he told his pilot. "Building X-88-Trreeve." They whirled away, and he put his thoughts together.

Ismail had recognized the name of Saph Bendigo, at once; it was Bendigo who had shared in his substitution-adventure at the Zaarr, for payment, in advance, of a sum approximating a quarter of the winner's prize in the Great Grapple. Not much beside the name and the willingness to help had Ismail found out; purposely he had chosen a casual, greedy acquaintance from a Waterbrink gambling hall instead of some closer comrade who might be impelled to betray him. So Bendigo had been Harvison's secretary, leaving the job for something more profitable. That involved the stolen book of weather-formula. But the chronometer; Ismail had carried that into Coke Paylon's dressing room, had indeed checked the time just before using the atom-shift to enter. How then... He was going to find out.

COKE PAYLON'S living quarters were in the Halfways, the tall, blocky buildings that rose high above the Waterbrinks and underlay the sky-stabbing Hightowers. Ismail got off at a high promenade, paid his fare, and went along two corridors and down one elevator. For a moment his heart skipped—far down another corridor he thought he saw a looming,

tramping figure in a hood, and he did not wait to make sure. He hurried to Paylon's door. He touched the buzz-warners.

"Yes?" came a diaphragm-borne query recognizable as the athlete's.

"Let me in," murmured Ismail against the microphone. "It's private—about Saph Bendigo."

The door opened, and Ismail stepped inside. A last glance showed that, if indeed that uncouth giant had been in the corridor, he was not in sight, could hardly trace Ismail here. Inside was a room, not rich or large, but comfortable, and Paylon rising to face his visitor. Paylon's was the type of muscular body that looks coarser and softer in clothes than out of them. His moon-face looked almost cunning as he recognized Ismail.

"Well, it's you," said Paylon; "this is luck."

"You mean, you want to scuffle with me?" demanded Ismail. "Don't try it. I'll handle you roughly this time. As for talking, I'll do all of that."

"All of it?" Paylon sneered.

"I atom-shifted my way into your dressing room earlier tonight. I went out the same way. My clothes were in there with you, and you were tied. You were helpless—I know, because I did the tying. Your door was fastened, except to the keys of trusted employees of the Zaarr. But somebody was in there with you, and took a chronometer from my belt-bag. Right?"

"Who could it have been, now?"

"It could have been Saph Bendigo," and as he said the words Ismail saw Paylon's startled expression—it was the truth. "After all, he was the only one who knew I'd be there. He was a habitue of the Zaarr. He made me a plan of the side entrance and the way to your dressing room. And he hid in there before I came." Ismail made a direct statement of it. "He knew I was coming, and he got you to help him steal from me."

"You're whining because you were robbed, when you—"

"The reason I substituted for you," interrupted Ismail, "was that I knew I could beat that Venusian, and I doubted if you could. I divided the purse with you, fairly evenly, to pay you for your trouble of lounging in bonds while I did the work. Meanwhile, you were into the job of building false evidence against me, with Bendigo."

"That's true, Ismail." Paylon drew up his thick shoulders. "Do you think that I'd have been so easy for you to handle otherwise? Why, in anything like a fair contest—"

Ismail jumped in like a striking snake. Paylon threw up an arm, and next moment Ismail had clamped it in a vicious twisting hold. Paylon went down on his knee, his face contorted in agony.

"Does that convince you?" said Ismail. "All right, get up again, but stop trying to scare me. Anyway, Bendigo was hidden in your dressing room. When I left, he took my chronometer and walked out, leaving you tied, and the door locked itself behind him. Why did he want my chronometer?"

"You seem to know already," said Paylon, back on his feet and cherishing his twisted arm. "He planted it for a clue against you. Now he wants something else of yours; as a matter of fact, I was wondering how to find you when you walked in."

"He was with you all the time—"

"Correct," broke in another voice, "and I'm with him now."

From the rear room walked Saph Bendigo.



BENDIGO had a round, soft face rather like Paylon's, but planets and milleniums more intelligent; and that face rose on a spindle neck out of a gaunt body that could not be made powerful-looking

for all the padded shoulders and pneumatic muscles inside the modish suit of flame-colored jewel-cloth. Bendigo's black hair was combed back from a broad, slanting brow and cut square behind, with a terminal curl that was probably artificial. One of his delicate, manicured hands held an electro-automatic pistol, its muzzle directed steadily at Ismail's solar plexus, and Bendigo's slender, pointed forefinger quivered almost yearningly on the trigger-switch.

"So glad you came, Ismail," grinned Bendigo, showing fine, even teeth, "and that's not sarcasm."

"What's the thing you want from me besides my chronometer?" asked Ismail evenly.

"Haven't you guessed? The atom-shift thrower. I never thought you had it until you stepped in and out of the wall of the dressing room. I need an atom-shift in my new, fast-growing business."

"Isn't weather control enough for you?"

Ismail glared, but Bendigo chuckled and shook his head. His long, carefully swept hair stirred with the motion. "Clever of you to reason all that out, Ismail. I've always thought you were a police operative gone wrong, in temperament, anyway. Yes, I have the book, all the old researches plus Harvison's notes on blank leaves at the back—machinery can be set up from it promptly and cheaply."

Ismail did not look at the pointed pistol. "You're going to hold it for ransom, I suppose."

Again the head-shake. "No. I'm going to take it out of Martio-Terrestrial League jurisdiction—"

"To Venus, then?"

"To Venus," agreed Bendigo. "Swampy-sloppy worlds will pay anything for weather control, just like desert-dry worlds. I'll be a sort of weather king on Venus. Of course, there are interesting and energetic types on Venus—laws aren't easily enforced there—and I may have volunteer partners or partakers in my fortune. That's why I want a little

arsenal of weapons nobody can argue against, such as that atom-shift you appropriated."

"I haven't got the atom-shift," replied Ismail.

Both Paylon and Bendigo laughed. "He's lying," said Paylon. "He walked in and out through those solid metal walls like a ghost."

"I had it but I lost it," said Ismail.

"Not very convincing," said Paylon, lifting the muzzle of his weapon a trifle. "Naturally you don't carry it with you. You have it hidden in a safe place, as I have the weather-formula book. That book," he went on, plainly loving to talk of his triumph, "is in my luggage stowed aboard the space-liner at the sky port, and when that space-liner clears at dawn tomorrow I clear with it—complete with the book and your space-shift. If you don't have it here, where is it?"

"The League police got it back from me," Ismail told him.

"Nonsense, man. Are you going to tell me, or am I going to put a pellet in your toes? They'll singe right off, and the attendants will have a messy cleanup job after Coke and I leave."

Ismail glanced at the athlete. "He's going with you?"

"Naturally," said Coke. "I'll make my fortune on Venus. Since you won over their champion at fist-and-foot they'll have a long list of new champions and big purses to put against me."

"And I," contributed Bendigo, "can act a convincing part for, say, a Terrestrial year—Harvison's ex-secretary trying to do his own experiments, becoming successful. Weather to order on Venus, clearing clouds and cutting rainfalls. The scientists here, despairing over the mystery of what happened to the old formulas, will come to me for guidance and advice—well paid, of course, in value-vouchers and prestige. You ought to be complimented, Ismail, because I've let you help me this close to such a career."

Ismail had seized at one word in Bendigo's recital. "Mystery," he

repeated. "You say there's a mystery for them to worry over in what happened to the book; but they think I took it."

"Certainly they do." Bendigo's free hand twiddled the loose end of a chain at his belt. "I fastened your chronometer to this chain, and broke it as if it had caught on something. Made it look like a clumsy loss instead of a clumsy framing of evidence. They think it's you, all right—I've tuned in on some police calls."

"I'm filling in the rest," said Ismail. "I'm to die, right? They'll have a corpse that can't talk, while you buzz away to Venus and grow fat on your thefts." Ismail grinned. "Since I know that, why do you think I'd give up the atom-shift even if I had it?"

"You have it," said Bendigo, his voice growing grim, "and you'll give it up. You can guess about more than one way to die, Ismail. Some ways are easy, some are hard."

Ismail took a step sidewise, making it seem careless. He hooked his thumbs in his belt. "You don't offer me much inducement," he temporized.

"No? Consider yourself in your last hour, Ismail. You can die quick and clean—a pellet in your chest, scorching out your life in an instant. Or," and Bendigo's smile was back, "a lot of pellets. One to scorch off your hand, a second to scorch off your foot, a third to scorch off your other hand. I'm a good shot—look."

Bendigo shifted his pistol-muzzle sidewise and slapped a pellet into a light-fixture on the wall. The released thermal power of the tiny projectile blazed the metal away like tinder. In the moment that the weapon was out of line with him, Ismail spun around and leaped upon Coke Paylon.

Catching the bigger man, Ismail swung the heavy body across himself. Bendigo, cursing, aimed again, but hesitated for a tiny tick of time and Ismail, lifting Paylon like a sack of grain, pitched him bodily. The lesser gravity of Mars was on Ismail's side. Paylon's flying form struck Bendigo

and mowed him down, and Ismail dived after him.

His grip was on Bendigo's wrist. Another electro-automatic pellet buzzed past Ismail's ear and made a brief burning glow as it splashed on the ceiling. Then Ismail applied his knowing fingertip pressure, and with a howl of pain Bendigo dropped the weapon. Hauling him to his feet, Ismail struck the pudgy chin with the heel of his other hand and Bendigo went groggily down, stunned. Ismail and Paylon both scrambled for the fallen pistol, and Ismail got there first.

At that moment the buzzer sounded. Ismail, weapon in hand, froze still. So did Paylon, on one knee. Recovering, Bendigo began to get up. "Quiet, everyone," he whispered. "That must be—"

Again the buzzer, imperiously demanding admittance. When none of the three moved, there was a rending crash of breakage, and the stout metal-joined door seemed to disintegrate in its frame.

TWO BIG flapperlike paws cleared the broken shards away, a hooded head ducked below the lintel, and in moved the giant operative Ismail knew.

Ismail faced that mighty form, the gun in his hand, but he did not level it. "I refuse to be taken in on that charge of stealing from Harvison," he began desperately. "As a matter of fact, I've just been finding out—"

The giant did not hesitate. It took a stride to him, then past him. A mighty elbow, big and hard as the limb of a great bronze statue, nudged him out of the way. A broad hand took Bendigo by the collar of his gaudy jewel-cloth tunic and hoisted him to his feet.

"I arrest you," came the sweet musical voice from the hood, "on a charge of stealing scientific secrets from Toland Harvison."

In through the wrecked door trotted a robed Martian, and behind him

a Terrestrial girl, slim and active, with wide blue eyes.

"I am Yaxul," declared the Martian. "League operative. Thiss iss my colleague, Miss Fairrdean. We werre tuned in forr minutes on yourr intrigring converrssation—though we did not need it. The bit of chain you wear," and his tentacle pointed to Bendigo's belt, "wass enough. Ourr Bloodhound led uss to the man who carried it."

Bendigo tried to break the powerful grip upon him. His collar tore and he plunged at the doorway, but Ismail headed him off. There was a brief scuffle. Ismail caught his belt pouch, which also tore away, then fastened to his throat.

"Let this oversized operative make good on a real clue once," he said, and shoved Bendigo back into the big paws. As the giant seized the prisoner again, the hood fell away from the head, which was not really a head.

It was a great round knob of dull metal, set with a gleaming central light and turning on a neck of jointed housings.

"A robot," said Ismail, staring. "I should have known."

The girl with the Martian was fingering the controls of a small, intricate mechanism. "Yes," she said musically. "He's our first experimental Bloodhound. Works by remote control, and follows whatever vibrations we tune him to. Metal is especially good—the atom-ray shift you had, then the scrap of chain on your chronometer."

Yaxul was tethering Paylon's wrist to Bendigo's, with a supple band of metal that bore a cylindrical housing. "Do not try to rrun," he warned, "orr that bbracelet will begin rray action to paralyze and injurre you." He turned back toward the great Bloodhound robot, now standing like a statue. "This rreporrt will interr-essst the laborratorry—how faithfully it followed a wrroing ttrail to the man we ssought, then a rright trail to the man we did not ssuspect."

"It spoke with your voice," said Ismail, gazing at Troy Fairdean.

"By radio pickup," she agreed. "Ismail, you have some questions to answer. You took an atom-shift ray and it almost fell into worse hands. And speaking of hands—" She smiled at him, and he smiled back at her, quite pleasantly. "Suppose I put this bracelet on one of them."

She held out a metal band like the one that confined Paylon and Bendigo. Ismail stepped back, shaking his head.

"Sorry, no," he said, and suddenly darted out through the broken door.

He sprinted down a side corridor, swiftly but not nervously. Yaxul and Troy Fairdean must stay with their two prisoners, and the Bloodhound robot could not take his trail without some article on which to tune it.

Quickly he entered an elevator. On the way down, he looked at Bendigo's belt-bag, still in his hand. He rummaged through it. From a sheaf of papers he selected two, smiling over them and sliding them into his own pouch. Then, emerging on ground level, he headed outdoors, to the Waterbrink, and tossed the torn bag with the rest of its papers into the canal.

"If the Bloodhound tunes in on them, it can dive for them," he said to himself. Then he moved toward what was, by comparison, Pulambar's quiet section.

DAWN. THE Venus space-liner stirred in its port housing. It was an immense metal egg, set in a pit like an immense eggcup, with heavy line to contain the powerful takeoff blast of the rockets. Many flames gushed, roared and sang, and the vessel rose deliberately, then gathered speed and soared away above the metal-plated expanse of the port, above the buildings, hangars, above Pulambar's battlements, spires, into the sky and into space.

From their surface-car, Yaxul and Troy Fairdean studied with satisfaction the recovered weather formula

book. It had taken considerable stern insistence to force the liner captain to bring out Bendigo's luggage and open it, but they had succeeded.

"Now Harvison can continue his rain experiments," said Troy.

"Were the superrintendentss harrsh about Issmail's esscape?" asked Yaxul.

"Medium. I've been on hotter carpets—so has every operative worth the price of a League badge. I kept telling myself that without Ismail we wouldn't have caught Bendigo and recovered this book. Ismail may not have planned working on the side of the law, but he wound up doing it." She smiled reminiscently. "I wonder if he's embarrassed, wherever he is."

"Prrobably rrelied," suggested Yaxul. "We cannot follow."

"Can't follow? Why?"

"The liner." Yaxul's tentacles sought the car's controls. "It cleared with a full lisst of passengerrrs."

"Most liners do, these days."

"But it sshould have cleared one

shorrt—Bendigo. Paysson would follow later, but Bendigo wass going today."

Troy stared at the Martian. "You're right! And instead Bendigo is waiting for trial. But then who—"

"Yess, who?" purred Yaxul. "Remember when ourr Bloodhound drredged Bendigo'ss belt-pouch from the canal? Full of paperrss—but no ttravel-permit, no farre-voucherr for Venuss."

Troy gazed after the vanished liner in the sky.

"He's escaped!" she cried, and again she smiled. "Well, I've had my scolding, and I can't help but be happy we're not pursuing him. He'll succeed famously on Venus—as Bendigo said, the laws there are sketchy. Did you know he was aboard, Yaxul?"

Yaxul did not reply, but started the car humming back to their offices.



"Don't you see, you idiots? We're in section 80-epicenter-57. That little light right there happens to be Sol!"

But they shouldn't have been back home! They should have been in M-32 in Andromeda!

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