
Pirates of the Gorm

Nathan Schachner



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Pirates of the Gorm

By Nat Schachner

The trail of vanished space ships leads Grant Pemberton to a marvellous lake of fire.

up suddenly in his berth, every sense straining and alert. What was it that had awakened him in the space-flier? His right hand slid under the pillow and clutched the handle of his gun. Its firm coolness

iny scratching on the door as though someone was fumbling for the slide-switch. Very quietly he sat, sed against the trigger. Suddenly the scratching ceased, and the panel moved slowly open. A thin ed in the light of the corridor beyond. Grant tensed grimly.

around the slit—a hand that held a pencil-ray. Even in the dim illumination, Grant noted the queer anymedan! In the entire solar system only they had those strange appendages.

out of his berth like a flash. Not a moment too soon, either. A pale blue beam slithered across the upon the pillow where his head had lain only a moment before. The air-cushion disintegrated into it's weapon spat viciously. A hail of tiny bullets rattled against the panel, and exploded, each in a

eady the unknown enemy was running swiftly down the corridor, the sucking patter of his feet giving Ganymedan origin. Pemberton sprang to the door, thrust it open just in time to see a dark shape a bend in the corridor. There was no use of pursuit; the passageway ended in a spray of smaller ambush would be absurdly easy.

ound. The corridor was empty, silent in the dim, diffused light. The motley passengers were all sound een disturbed by the fracas. Earthmen, green-faced Martians, fish-scaled Venusians, spatulate eward-bound Callistans, all reposing through the sleep-period in anticipation of an early landing in

s, but one. That brought Pemberton back to the problem of his mysterious assailant. Why had this iff him out of existence? Grant frowned. No one on board knew of his mission, not even the captain. he was merely Dirk Halliday, an inconspicuous commercial traveler for Interspace Products. Yet ly penetrated his disguise and was eager to remove him from the path of whatever devilry was up.

rt, then swore softly. Of course! Why hadn't he thought of it before! The scene came back to him, ail, as though he were once more back on Earth, in the small, simply furnished office of the Service.

ce was glancing up at him keenly. Beside him was a tall, powerfully shouldered Ganymedan, Miro, le. Grant looked at him with a faint distaste as he sat there, drumming on the arm of his chair with is soft-suction padded hoofs curled queerly under the seat. There was something furtive, too, about it shifted with quick unwinking movements.

had small use for the entire tribe of Ganymedans. Damned pirates, that's all they were. It was not : they had been the scourge of the solar system, harrying spatial commerce with their swift piratical ring for the mere lust of it.

ada of Earth space-fliers had broken their power in one great battle. The stricken corsairs were their accumulations of plunder, give up all their fliers and armament, and above all, the import of them. For, strangely enough, none of the metallic elements was to be found on Ganymede. All their

s, were forged of metals from the other planets.

since Ganymede had been admitted once again to the Planetary League, after suitable declarations of prohibitions still held. And Grant placed small faith in the sincerity of the repentance.

g.

Miro and I," he said, in his usual swift, staccato manner, "because we've agreed that you are the best to handle the mission we have in mind."

dangerous affair," the Chief continued. "Five great space-fliers, traveling along regular traffic routes, in the space of a month—passengers, crews and all. Not a trace of them can be found."

"

us part of the whole business. Everyone of the fliers was equipped with apparatus that could have a system with a call for help, and yet not the tiniest whisper was heard."

paced the floor agitatedly. It was plain that this business was worrying him. Miro continued to sit silent. "It's uncanny, I tell you. Gone as though empty space had swallowed them up."

methods, of course," Grant ventured.

He waved it aside impatiently. "But we can't discover a thing. Battle fliers have patrolled the area since the last ship was literally snatched away right under the nose of a convoy. One minute it was in radio contact—the next—whiff—it was gone."

"Mention?" Already Pemberton's razor-edged brain was at work on the problem.

Five million miles from Jupiter. We've naturally considered placing an embargo upon that territory, but not cutting off all of the satellites from the rest of the system."

His slurred voice rolled out.

"Suffer, my friend. Alas, it has already suffered too much." He evoked a sigh from somewhere in the distance, and tried to cast up his small red eyes.

His faint disgust. Damn his eyes, what business had an erstwhile pirate, not too recently reformed, being

He continued unheeding, "that the Callistans know more about this than they admit. He has a theory now gathering up these ships to use in a surprise attack against his own planet, Ganymede. He says he'll lead them."

Grant said laconically.

He meditated into sudden life. "And what do you mean by that, my friend?"

He replied. "Simply that your people have harried and ravaged them for untold centuries. They were your enemies."

He set, his soft suction pads gripping the floor as though preparatory to a spring. Gone was the gentleness of his former behavior; the ruthless savage glared out of the red eyes, the flattened fingers were

" he cried in a voice choked with rage, "I'll—"

He smiled swiftly. "Here, none of that," he said sharply to Miro. "Don't say anything you'll regret later." Then he stood, still was steadily holding his ground: "There was no reason, Pemberton, to insult an inspector of the Service who has just self-reprimanded." But the edge of the rebuke was taken off by the slight twinkle in the Chief's eye.

He patched up. Grant was to ship as an ordinary passenger on the *Althea*, the great passenger liner that carried traffic between the Earth and the Moon. It was not his duty to prevent the disappearance of the vessel, the Chief insisted, but to investigate the cause. It was up to Grant then to escape, if he could, and to report to Miro on Ganymede the findings. Miro was leaving by his private Service flier at once for Ganymede, to await him. Grant caught a sardonic gleam in the Inspector's eyes at that, but paid no particular heed to it at the time.

in the corridor of the great space-flier, listening intently for further sounds from his hidden foe, it knew he was on board. It was a Ganymedan who had treacherously attacked him. The puzzle was together. But the major piece still eluded him. What would happen to the ship?

Back to his room, a ripping, tearing, grinding sound came to his startled ears. It was followed by a . Grant knew what that meant. A meteor had ripped into the vitals of the space-flier, and the precious ship the fissure into outer space. He whirled without an instant's hesitation and sprang down the long captain's quarters. If caught in time, the hole could be plugged.

was another grinding smash, then another, and another. Good Lord, they must have headed right into hatches were sliding open, and people, scantily attired, thrust startled heads out into the corridor. Grant did not heed or stop his headlong race. He must get to the control room at once.

The corridor was a sucking whirlpool that beat and eddied about him in its mad rush to escape. It sounded like silenced exploders. A meteor shower of unprecedented proportions! In the back of Grant's mind as he thought. Every swarm of meteors in the solar system was carefully plotted. The lanes of travel were there. There was no known shower in this particular area!

With a strange ungainly figure. In his desperate haste he did not give much heed, but tried to push his way through. He turned on him, and then Grant stopped short, an exclamation frozen to his lips. Red unwinking eyes from goggles set in a helmet. The body was completely inclosed in lusterless creatoid. It was a space-suit!

movement of the other toward an open side flap. He did not hesitate an instant. His fist shot out and he was flushed in the throat, while his left hand simultaneously seized the creatoid-covered arm that gripped his head. His head went back with a sickening thud. But the Ganymedan was a powerful brute. Even as he heaved the force of the blow, vainly trying to release the pencil-ray for action, his right foot jerked forward. The bodies were rolling on the floor, twisting and heaving in silent combat. Frightened passengers rushed down the corridor with terror, half carried along by the hurricane wind, clambering over the combatants in an insane way. Grant knew not; and still neither relaxed his grip, seeking a mortal hold.

Grant knew that his silent unknown foe held the clue to the mystery he was trying to fathom. He fought on, but the old creatoid fabric was slippery, but a sudden jerk of an arm, a certain quick twist that Grant was sure his enemy went limp. Grant's breath was coming in quick, labored gasps. There was very little air left in the room. He tugged at the fastenings on the helmet. He must see who his captive was, wrest from him the

of feet behind him, a sudden rush of space-suited figures that overwhelmed and passed over him with a force that was torn loose from his prey, rolled over and over, gasping for air. When he staggered to his feet and awoke, the corridor was swept clean of figures. His assailants had carried his opponent away with

himself swept through him. More Ganymedans, these rescuers, all accoutered for airless space. They had been waiting for this. Heedless of all else, he swayed groggily after them, intent only on joining battle once again. The light was dim now, the cries of fear that had rung through the ship were gone; only a deathly silence remained; the bodies were burning for want of air; even the whirlwind had died down for lack of fuel. But still he kept on, following the trail.

A slight figure, swaying like a reed, collided with him and would have fallen if he had not thrust out a hand; a girl. Even in the shadowy light he saw that she was beautiful. Her delicately molded features were deep, her pooled eyes were level in their gaze, unafraid.

He asked, finding utterance labored, "Are you hurt?"

She said, with a wan smile, "if only I had some air to breathe."

When she touched him. He forgot all about the escaped Ganymedans.

"Some other portion of the ship. Maybe some of the bulkheads are uninjured."

"I just saw the captain," she enunciated faintly. "Every bulkhead is riddled. Said—I—should get space-ship—though no use—doomed. Something wrong—wireless—not working...." Her voice trailed. She had

light form and lurched unsteadily into the nearest cabin. The blood was roaring in his ears now, his head aching, but he forced himself on. His eyes strained toward the compartment where the emergency equipment was compacted. Thank God. It was still there. The inmate had evidently rushed out at the first alarm to avoid the inevitable crush.

With feverish haste. Somehow he thrust the unconscious girl into the suit, tightened the helmet into place, and started the steady measured flow of life-giving oxygen. Then, with dark spots dancing before his eyes, he lay her gently on the floor, and managed to force himself in the now almost total darkness toward

He stumbled. The compartment was empty. Despairing, conscious only of a desire to lie down, to rest, he fell. The compartment was empty. He stumbled over sprawled bodies, fell, managed to get up again. Again he fumbled into the darkness. The heavy feel of the creatoid never was more welcome. His breath was coming in whistling gasps. It was a relief before the first cool rush of oxygen expanded his tortured lungs. For a full minute he stood motionless, waiting for the first breath. Then once more he was himself, his brain functioning with keen clarity.

He tried to reach for the medans and come to grips with them. There was no doubt in his mind that somehow they had been there. He was alone. Just how, he did not know, but he would find out.

He would not leave her. Duty and something else stirred into conflict. He hesitated. In the flap of the suit was a light. He was throwing the beam on the walls and flooring, he managed to retrace his steps to the cabin where he had hidden her. He found it inside, his heart gave a great bound. She was standing now.

He reached for the tiny transmitter that was part of the regulation equipment.

A voice spoke in his ear. "But I'm not thinking of myself. Are the others on board safe? What about the others?"

"Only ones alive," he told her gravely. "As to what happened, I can only guess. We seem to have hit an air shower that riddled us through and through, though—" He paused.

"The first thing we've got to do is find out where we are." His flash sought the window switch and he found it. He pressed it. A section of the beryllium-steel casing slid smoothly open, disclosing a thick flawless pane of glass. He looked out at the dark pattern of space. Long he gazed, then a stifled exclamation reached the girl.

He told her gravely, and made room for her.

She looked at the unwinking stars of space. Then her eyes shifted forward. Jupiter lay ahead, a vast cloud-girt disk. Somehow it gave the effect of rushing straight at her.

It seemed to her that she was floating, or floated, or seemed to float, a huge red oval—the Great Red Spot of Jupiter. She had heard of it. At her immediate attention was a tiny flare of intense illumination, right in the very heart of the Spot. It was tinged with yellow, dazzling even at this distance. She watched it eagerly. Then she gave a sudden gasp.

"His voice sounded quietly in her helmet.

"Yes!"

"The hull of the ship."

"The hull again. The steel-shod sides were bathed in an unearthly orange glow.

"The light from the orange spot down there."

"And more than that. They are power waves of a nature that we've known nothing of before. We are receiving that beam straight for Jupiter, straight for the source of that light!"

"There are intelligent beings on Jupiter."

ow that there's no life on Jupiter. It's a frozen waste swathed in impenetrable whirlwind clouds."

now?" Grant retorted. "Has anyone ever penetrated through those clouds?"

ough there have been plenty of expeditions that tried, and never came back."

t prove anything. Mind you," he added. "I didn't say there was native life existing on Jupiter. I merely meant beings operating that illumination."

"

we get down there."

his matter-of-fact statement brought her back abruptly to their precarious situation.

we'll smash and be killed. Can't we do something?"

nt said positively. "Though very likely we shall be killed. As for doing something, we can only wait and see the gentry who are hauling us in will only give us an opportunity. You know," he added with a fine don't even know your name."

len laughter. "Nona—Nona Gail. I was on my way to Callisto, to meet my father," she explained. "He's done some construction work for Interspace Products. But now that I've told you all, what and who may you

as now no need for concealment. "Grant Pemberton, an unimportant unit of the Interplanetary Secret

re trip would be dangerous," she challenged.

."

ween them. He turned to stare out of the quartz port-hole again. Jupiter was perceptibly nearer; and he felt that he was blotting out half the heavens. They were being drawn at a frightful velocity toward the point, now blinding in its brilliance.

Itaneously: a space-suited figure, far out in the depths of interstellar space, caught up in a sudden rotation. The strange figure seemed to whirl around, straighten up, and shoot at breakneck speed behind it, and in a direct line with the winking flame in the Great Spot, another space denizen glowed of the blackness beyond, whirled, and shot down the long invisible path.

;, tell me quickly, what are they; what is pulling them?"

re and more figures were blazoned in that orange ray, until a long file of beings were catapulting in a flash at the space-ship, outdistancing it until they became faint specks in the distance.

is upon her shoulder, his eyes literally blazing through the goggles, while his voice shouted in her ear. "We haven't a second to lose."

I haven't told me—"

ted, and, shoving her in front of him, he rushed her through corridor after corridor until they came to the end.

he groaned, and cursed himself for a bungling fool for not having surmised the maneuver earlier.

ed, the great lock was open. The ship was as silent as the grave. There was no air anywhere, only the vastness of space. Without pausing in his headlong rush, he pushed the bewildered girl through the doorway into the overwhelming, intangible blackness. Nona's smothered cry of fear came to him as the next instant he felt himself left the solid footing to float in sudden weightlessness in a vast sea of nothingness.

and caught his arm convulsively. Even through the fabric of their suits he could feel her trembling. He took good care to retain a hold on the edge of the open air-lock. The two swung unsteadily.

r this?" Grant sensed, rather than heard, the tremor in her voice. She was making a desperate effort
ll be lost—out here in space."

soothingly. "I'll explain in due course. In the meantime you'll have to trust me. Did you see where that
it illumined the last Ganymedan?"

oed in surprise. "What makes you think—"

you?" he insisted.

it was about over there." She indicated the spot with an outthrust arm. "About a hundred yards, I

"Well, young lady, our lives, and far more, depend upon our reaching that exact line in space

t are talking about, but even so, how can we make it? I'm not a rocket."

but we must. Now hold on tight to my arm, and press your feet firmly against the wall of the ship."

ee, shove off violently, and pray that we're going straight. Are you game?"

ry slowly, "All right; start counting."

. approvingly. "One—two—th-r-ee-ee!"

in perfect unison. And shoved off.

s of space they shot, lost to all sense of motion: yet the hull of the space-flier, dimly gleaming in the
sun, retreated from them with terrifying swiftness.

ace! It was an uncanny, a horribly helpless sensation. All about them was infinity, a vast void out of
the cold, unwinking stars. They were like swimmers in mid-ocean, without even the buoyant feel of
ort them.

arm was agonizing in its intensity.

ed.

ted; "but don't bother about me. I'm all right."

l upon to keep up her end, Grant thought admiringly.

l in the welter of space. And still there was no ray, nothing but unrelieved blackness. Pemberton was
ad the saving ray been quenched at the source? Were they too late? If so, they were doomed to a
all to the surface of the planet, or worse still, they were destined to swing endlessly in space. Already
out of their grasp, even had they desired to return.

r in quick gasps now. "Scared?" he once more asked the silent figure beside him.

on. We'll get there, wherever it is."

. strengthened him wonderfully. On and on they floated.

κ bulk of the girl caught the uncanny orange light. The next instant the creatoid fabric of his own suit

joyously. "It's still on. Just relax, Nona, the ray will take care of us now."

r at his body, he was whirled completely around, and then there was a steady pull. He was being
ay to the mysterious point of brilliance in the Great Red Spot. The girl was right beside him. The
l with a smooth rush, and soon receded to a dwindling speck.

1?" asked Nona impatiently, after she had caught her breath in sudden relief.

ously before he began.

hing for us now to do but wait until we get pulled down to Jupiter, and that'll take some time. I hope

ins."

our story!" she cried.

from the beginning and went right up to the time when he had so rudely thrust her out into space.

d. "I had put the puzzle together a bit, but there were still pieces missing. For instance, those chaps every space-liner is equipped with emergency space-suits. Why pull the ship down with live men on naturally mean a fight, and we have no mean weapons, what with disintegrator ray-projectors and ts." Then, again, for some reason, there were Ganymedans on board. They would very likely be ée. The ship might be destroyed also, and they evidently are very careful about getting the ship down r holes can easily be plugged up, and the liner made as good as new. At least that was my guess.

e it out, rather hopelessly," he continued, "when I saw the ray out in space pick up those floating ast little piece in the jigsaw.

lently had to leave the ship because, as it approaches the planet, something will be done to kill off are still alive, waiting their chance to fight the invisible enemy. Possibly a penetrating lethal gas that interior. So they evolved the ray to carry the Ganymedan passengers down gently, safely. And we are ded grimly.

ntly to the long recital.

lated, "was it necessary to have their own people on board? The meteors that riddled the ship were eir station on Jupiter. So was the attraction-ray that pulls the ship down."

d a sufficient force to disable the radio apparatus. All radio waves used on interplanetary liners are nce. It is impossible to blank them out. And with the radio intact, every battle flier in space would be z."

, and still they fell endlessly through space, unaware of their motion except that Jupiter was now a the universe. The grim face of the giant planet was enswathed in endless billowing clouds. No one o the real core. But what held their eager, straining attention was a vast blood red disk, cyclonic in eath them. The Great Red Spot! And immediately in the center of it was the tiny, blindingly brilliant nking up at them with quick, steady pulsations.

a wondered.

ower, evidently. But what interests me more just now is where the Ganymedans have their hangout in : they're doing with the ships they capture."

level stretch that reached on all sides as far as the eye could see. Grant felt a sudden sensation of h something was pressing with crushing force against his chest.

fall is being checked. They're making sure their friends come to no harm." And he laughed bitterly, id women lying with lungs ruptured, cold and stiff, in the interior of the *Althea*; of the possible few anaged to huddle into space-suits, ignorant of the deadly gas that was soon to search out their le habiliments.

ly, they fell. Thin wisps of reddish vapor rushed upward toward them, and then they were enveloped masses. They were within the Great Spot!

parted suddenly, revealing a deep hole, at the bottom of which flamed and flared the mysterious ce. Down the long shaft they fell, while all around its invisible walls dark red cyclones stirred and

they were doomed to fall headlong into the blaze, they were swerved violently into an opening that ain shaft. Down this branching shaft they continued to fall—interminably—when suddenly it widened, g through the interior of a great dome of which the arched roof was the swirling clouds they had just neath floated a flat island of smooth rock, supported and upheld by a shining sea of vapors.

urply, but Grant only nodded to himself with grim satisfaction. He had expected something like this. ed rows at the end of the island directly beneath them were sleek, stream-lined grayhounds of the anes, now resting immovably on the smooth gray stone—the missing space-liners!

d by a huge forbidding wall, over which, at their angle, Grant was unable to see.

bered too with clumps of intricate machinery, all of the same polished gray stone; Ganymedan stone, Pemberton recognized at once. Hundreds of figures were scurrying awkwardly around, clad in the Several were working desperately at a huge concave glass reflector. Others were pointing a stone of a pit, directly upward.

ddered and pressed closer to Grant.

her. "Just say nothing when we land. Let me do the talking."

l been floating gently downward toward what they now saw to be a miniature replica of the vaster he bottom of the main shaft from which they had been diverted. It was a pool of liquid fire, so intense their eyes were dazzled staring at it. It rose and fell in regular pulsations. They were not far above it n the strange island seemed to be aware of their coming.

; we're going to fall right into it!"

n at the small fiery pool with anxious eyes. Unless something happened, and that quickly, they would already the heat was uncomfortable, even through their suits. He tried to kick himself aside, but the oo powerful for him. Then he resolved on a desperate expedient.

. there," he cried in the smooth, slurred Ganymedan speech. "What are you trying to do, fry us? Hurry iding."

ere tense with the tenseness of imminent death. Were the Ganymedans equipped with communication se the strangeness of the accent? Nona was gripping his hand with a pressure that penetrated the ad brought them down closer and closer to the dread lake.

me in a shuddering sigh. For one of the figures glanced upward and saw them dropping. He shouted vs, and darted for a lever set in the stone next to the pool. He threw it over swiftly. Immediately what h slab of transparent glassite shot into position over the pulsating flame, not an instant too soon, r covered the flaming death when the Earthlings' feet were already touching it.

you two fools right if I had let you drop in," their savior grumbled disgustedly. "What in Jupiter took else arrived hours ago. Didn't know there were any more."

t help it," Grant responded carefully. "You see, we got mixed up in a scrap with some Earthmen who , just as we were diving out of the air-lock. We had the devil's own job of beating them off."

me down foaming at the mouth. Some dumb Earthman almost throttled him before he got away. He h out of space. He's that mad. But here, I've got no time to be talking to your fellows. I've got work to e Chief at once, and heaven help you. He's sure in a black rage at this minute."

ray, over to the gang of Ganymedans holding the stone nozzle and looking expectantly up at the large, l ceiling.

ant. "What are they doing with the queer affair?" She indicated the nozzle.

it only too soon," he answered grimly. "Look—" he broke off.

the great round orifice, darted a tremendous shape, pointed, glittering.

," Nona exclaimed.

n—all we can do is watch," Grant gritted between his teeth.

ing liner, pride of the fleet. The men at the mirror were swerving it on gimbals until a ray from it ed nose. As though it were a physical impact, the vessel slackened its tremendous speed and hung between the cloud concavity and the island.

le spurred into activity. A thin stream of fluid shot out of the orifice straight up for the captive liner. ing spray impinged on the hull—and Nona gasped her astonishment. For the liquid passed clean ough it were a porous network instead of four-inch thick beryllium-steel.

rant groaned. "Lethal gas that penetrates everything. Those poor people on board—for their own ained alive to hit this."

?" Nona asked desperately.

1. But plenty to prevent any more disasters like it." There was a hard ring to his voice. "Come on." He
arent slab onto the stone floor of the island.

1a, following.

that orange oval we saw from the *Althea*. That's the secret of all this. The pool of liquid fire here is
y."

3 of the floating island. The other side was hidden from them by the solid wall that stretched across

ere," Grant pointed out. "I'll miss my guess if what we're looking for is not on the other side."

3 wall, they saw the *Althea* brought slowly down to the rock, another captive to swell the motionless
rem long to reach the barrier. Some fifty feet high it was, of smooth polished Ganymedan stone, and
ts straight unbroken surface.

ugh?" Nona asked.

ghtfully.

en spring somewhere," he said.

long the wall, tapping it idly here and there. His quick probing fingers were searching.

stopped short. He bent over a moment; his fingers moved deftly. Then he straightened with a grunt of
of the seemingly solid, immovable stone was sliding silently open. He looked through.

is head back, heard his involuntary cry of horror. Then she heard another cry: an excited warning
ound in time to see a Ganymedan running toward them from behind. A deadly pencil-ray pointed
ion. Without a moment's hesitation she sprang at Grant, pushed him violently so that he staggered
eening to the other side. In so doing, she tripped over his body, and fell prone. That saved her life, for
lean through the stone, inches above her head.

d underneath. The electro-gun was somehow out of the side flap and now it spat its explosive hail.
into little puff balls of flame against the space-suit of the Ganymedan. A long howl of anguish came to
his hands and fell into a shapeless heap. But a moment later there were other cries, angry shouts.
feet again with the quickness of a cat. He pulled Nona up after him, thrust her to one side, behind
wall. His eyes were blazing now, aflame with the ardor of battle. Very carefully he leaned out and
he surging mob was caught in full flight. The electro-bullets spread fanwise, exploded into flaming
ans went down as though a huge scythe had swept through their ranks. The survivors scattered
selves headlong to the surface of the rock to escape further execution.

1 while," Grant laughed grimly.

urn around—both of you." A cold, smooth voice spoke in deadly menace directly behind them—a voice
sterious inner side of the wall.

3 gun ready to fire. A ray snapped out at him, a ray with a greenish tinge. The fingers of his gun hand
ss; the weapon dropped unresistingly from his paralyzed hand.

ered before him, unhidden by a space-suit. Evidently there was a layer of air in here. The red lidless
cold fury. Spatulate fingers tensed on the button of a pencil ray.

l to himself unbelievably. A great light burst upon him.

Service for Ganymede did not recognize him, swathed as Grant was in the depths of his space-suit,
ittle movement of surprise. He was too furiously angry. His words came tumbling out in a tremble of

els; have you gone mad? What do you mean by coming in here through the secret way? Don't you
nyone to pass the barrier? And what do you mean by shooting down your fellows with an Earth
a you, before I thrust you into the Gorm."

1 because she did not know what to say, and Grant because he knew his voice would be recognized by
cept his eyes fixed on the Ganymedan, waiting hawk-like for one false move, for the tiniest wavering
encil-ray was pointed squarely at his breast.

's voice was choked with passion. "Well, there are ways to make you." With one foot he kicked at the weapon commanded them unwaveringly. There was a smooth soundless rush. Grant knew that the wall was again. They were cut off on the secret side of the island, alone with Miro.

er of it. They were not alone. For Grant's first darting look inside when he had first opened the panel doors. Hundreds of them there were, men of all races and planets, a motley crew. And each man equally, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Their eyes were fixed and glassy; the skin of their faces, of their origin, was uniformly parched and gray. A cold sweat broke out on Grant's forehead. They were beings from whom life had been drained. He heard a little choked cry from Nona; she had seen

with his free hand a little pear-shaped mechanism punctured with innumerable holes. He blew into it, and with a high whining note. Instantly two of the strange lifeless men wheeled angularly, and with queer movements headed straight for them. A bloodless hand stretched out, grasped Nona. Grant heard her scream and fell in a loathsome grip.

and, forgetting the deadly ray in Miro's hands, he sprang to her rescue. The next instant he was in the grasp of a frail, dead-white naked arm, yet endowed with the strength of steel. Struggle as he might, dash his head against the unresisting blank face, he could not loose that grip. Miro watched his futile strugglings

er to the Gorm and let me look at their faces," he ordered.

and picked up in those emaciated, powerful arms as easily as though they were children, and they proceeded at a slow, awkward pace away from the hall, toward the outer edge of the island. From his vantage point, Pemberton noticed that they were passing clumps of intricate stone machinery. Dead-faced attendants, their captors, were tending the whirring machinery with ordered, stiff-legged movements.

Grant saw the edge of the island, against which beat and billowed in furious, gigantic heaves, the clouds of the Great Spot. Strangely enough, though they whirled and eddied, they could not seem to form a visible barrier. And then the lake of fire sprang into view—the mysterious place of flame they had seen which had led the hapless *Althea* out of its course down to destruction on Jupiter. This then was the Gorm!

was, of an unearthly yellow-orange brilliance. The midday sun was no more dazzling to the eye. Out of the island into the vapors of the Great Red Spot, only touching the stone rim of the island at one thin edge, were here waveless now, oily, yet there was something horrible, too, about its smooth quiescence.

and his guards dropped their burdens roughly and stood at attention. One was an Earthman, the other a Ganymedan. But the queer dead look of their eyes was exactly the same.

helmets, or shall I ask the Doora to assist you?" Miro's voice was silky.

Nothing else to do, Grant unscrewed his helmet and let it fall back on its hinge. Then he looked very much like the Inspector of the Service for Ganymede.

and Miro's eyes at the sight of his captive.

and a peculiarly horrible smile. "You are cleverer than I thought, my Earth friend. You should have been like the *Althea*, or made into one of—"

and the smile widened cruelly. "But it is not too late. No, it is not too late."

and cryptic phrases. He smiled, too, a contemptuous smile that cut like a lash.

and Miro of the Service, are only a lying, treacherous, butchering Ganymedan. Filthy scum of the Universe."

and with a roar, a dark flush of rage suffusing his green-tinged countenance. His blunt-edged finger pointed at him of the pencil-ray. Grant knew he was perilously on the verge of sudden death, yet his scornful

and unnoticed, her helmet removed, who darted upon the giant Ganymedan with small beating fists. Miro swung her sprawling away with one sweep of his free hand, while he covered Grant with the other.

and composure. Some secret merriment seemed to convulse him.

"Who is this little spitfire? By Jupiter, she is a tempting morsel." And his red eyes took in the flushed

girl speculatively.

dark spring.

"Miro barked. "One move and it will be your last." Gone was the smooth unctuous speech of former days, as cutting, deadly.

"You men have been crowing long enough," he said. "When Miro and Ganymede get through with you, the filthy planet will have been erased from the solar system." His voice rose higher. "You thought you had your space-battleships and your embargoes on metals. And we were meekly repentant. Oh yes, we were. Why, they even made me, Miro, Inspector of your rotten Service.

"Preparing against the day for years. Here on this island that we built we worked, hidden from the world, ready now. Our fleets will sail out, in your own ships, to smash the combined space navies of the solar system."

"Miro could not hide a sudden grin of relief. The man was mad, to think of pitting a few liners against the Gorm. Miro saw that grin.

"Don't you?" he gloated. "Just listen to this, then. We have found a substance that no ray, no electro-magnetism, every ship will be coated with it. And the Gorm here"—he pointed to the oily lake—"will draw your ships to destruction, or thrust them far out into the uncharted spaces, helpless, just as it pleases us. You see? Look! Now it attracts, and powerfully. But when I reverse the current passing through it like this"—he flipped a switch set in the rock right by the edge—"it repels everything. We'll just stand off in space and destroy your ships one by one, without a scratch to ourselves. See?" He fairly hissed the last word.

"A cold sweat burst out on his forehead. His brain raced desperately in a vain effort to find some way out, to escape this beast.

"No, no," he said in bored fashion, feigning indifference; "but it means nothing to me. The point is, what do you want of us?"

"Miro writhed. "Nothing at all to your pretty friend," he leered. "I have plans for her. But as for you—see you?"

"One of them. They are passengers and crews who had the misfortune to be alive when the captured planet was cut off our gas. It does not kill. Oh, no! It just numbs their faculties, paralyzes them. Then our surgeons come to remove the memory and reasoning areas of the brain and leave just machines, automata, to do the work. Don't they? When Earth is captured, I intend subjecting all your damned breed to the operation. They are the best, I've found. Two blasts on this toy"—he raised the whistle to his lips—"and an Earth-Doora comes out."

"No, no, Miro. Please do not touch Mr. Pemberton. I'll—I'll—"

Ganymedan's pig-eyes devoured her.

"In eternal horror, she sank into Miro's arms. The surprised look on Miro's face changed slowly to one of triumph. Miro came close to her with his great hairy arm.

"Miro saw red. Heedless of the unwavering weapon at his breast, he sprang. Miro snarled as he saw the ray pressed down. But at that instant the Earth girl struck out with all the power of her slender arm. It was a glancing blow, but it managed to jar the weapon aside. The blue flame leaped hissing through the air.

"Miro flung her yards away, to lie, an unmoving pathetic bundle. Then he swung his ray back into play.

"Miro came to use it. All the strength and fury of Grant's lithe, steel sinews and bone were behind the solid blow, which landed squarely on the Ganymedan's chin. He went down in a slump, completely out.

"Miro picked up the fallen pencil-ray, thrust it in the side flap, then hurried over to the limp figure of Nona.

"Nothing's happened to you, I'll—"

sat up.

was smiling weakly, but happily.

any times later as you'll want," he said, "but now that you're not hurt, we can't waste any time in trying

o, who was just coming to.

old the Ganymedan, who was rubbing his chin and groaning: "you do exactly as I say, if you know
he shook the pencil-ray significantly.

th it," Miro snarled, muttering a string of curses. There was baffled rage in his red pig-eyes.

ldly.

he snapped. "Get up." He reinforced his demand with a well-placed kick. The huge Ganymedan came

; the next order, "and open the trick door."

ge hate, Miro obeyed. Grant followed him with his pistol in readiness. The poor mindless creatures
was going on, but dully continued their appointed tasks.

behind the wall to one side. Nona did likewise, having picked up the electro-gun meanwhile. Only
opening.

at friends out there we want one of the liners brought directly over the Gorm, you understand. Not
at's still full of holes. And only one Ganymedan to guide her over the wall. Be very explicit, and not a
or it'll be your last."

hat two deadly weapons were pointing squarely at him, Miro shouted unwillingly the necessary
ordinates outside. Then Grant leaned over and kicked the slide shut.

moments of waiting. Would the workers beyond obey their leader? Had they become suspicious, and
g for a surprise attack? Grant had no means of telling.

the most welcome soft roar of muted rockets. A huge shape swept over the high wall, soared directly
stled down in little jets of flame until the stern rested on the solid rock, and the bow swung idly over

d on this bird," Grant told Nona swiftly. She nodded. The air-lock door on the ship was already sliding
pace-suited, was coming through. He saw them, tried to spring back into the shelter of the ship. But a
nd caught him in mid-flight. There was a spatter of dust, and the hapless creature disintegrated into

ut I couldn't afford to let him give the alarm. Now for the dirty work, Nona. You hustle this big bully
him covered. I'll be right along."

k of anxiety. "What do you intend doing?"

red her; "I won't get hurt."

n within the liner, he got to work. First he brought out from the ship coils of wiring and jumbles of
them over to the edge of the Gorm, to the place where he had seen Miro pull the switch, and for the
busy connecting wires, attaching batteries, putting his instruments in place. Then, when he was
ing was ready, he reversed the switch. The great space-ship, some fifty feet away, was already
.

to sprint for the slowly moving liner, he heard a smooth rushing noise. He whirled. The slide was
mob of Ganymedans were pouring through. They paused uncertainly a moment, then, as they spied
erted rush forward.

ready the space-ship was off the ground, soaring upward. He had not an instant to spare. He dove
lled, and raced forward to cut him off. His pencil-ray was useless—the distance was too great for its
1, that applied equally to the weapons of the Ganymedans.

d forward at him angrily, but fell short. The ship was moving faster now. It was already several feet s heavy space-suit impeded his progress. The charging Ganymedans were dangerously close now. ssed him by inches. The ship was gathering speed. He was five feet away from the open air-lock when sharp searing pain right across his shoulder. The creatoid material of his suit was cut away as with a ay exposed. The skin had been whiffed into nothingness.

ie was leaping off the ground with a mighty effort. The ship was going upward with a rush now. His ately at the edge of the air-lock. For one breathless instant he clung; then, to his horror, the smooth sed to hold. Slowly he slipped, in spite of every effort, as the surface of the hull refused purchase to n down he went with a thud.

from the onrushing Ganymedans as Grant scrambled to his feet, bruised and shaken. He cast a swift, ard. The huge liner was a hundred feet up now, gathering speed swiftly. To one side was the Gorm, a nace. The gloating enemy were almost upon him. Even the comfort of a weapon, the grim satisfaction es to death with him, was denied him.

n jarred out of his hand by the impact and had doubtless fallen into the Gorm.

come to the end of the rope. There was no tremor of fear in him, only regret that he had met the girl What would she do, out in space, alone with Miro? No time to think of that now, though. The foremost ere almost upon him. They intended taking him alive, did they? He braced himself for the attack, ing.

beat suddenly upon his dazzled mind. It was breath-taking, so simple, yet so desperate did it appear. win through. If not—but Grant dismissed that thought quickly; one form of death was no worse than

esitation, he whirled and jumped as high as he could—directly over the Gorm! There was a yell of e Ganymedans—one had already clutched at his intended victim—as they fell back in horror from the as mad to brave the terrors of the Gorm!

ng. He was instantly conscious of a searing, racking pain that penetrated his every fiber. He forced here but beneath him. Was his theory correct, or was he destined to drop into the fiery lake. For a ant, he suffered untold agonies.

d, and he felt an unmistakable push against him. He was moving upward, just as he had hoped. The n, even as it had the ship.

not up, chasing the liner. Would he catch up with it? He strained his eyes. Exultation flooded through t the distance was rapidly lessening between them. The added impetus of his leap over the Gorm had l extra fillip of speed. By now, rays were streaking by him.

underneath. For an instant he had a quick fear that he might overshoot his mark. But no—he was ir-lock. He threw himself sideways and caught at it. This time his fingers held.

vriggled into the lock, they were already careening into the orange tube through the red swirling longer any air. Choking, he managed with numbed fingers to screw his helmet on. Then, closing the o the ship.

er prisoner vigilantly. Miro sat there, sullen, defiant. Her glad, welcoming cry filled Grant with a new

u when the ship started and you didn't show up," she said, "but I didn't dare leave him alone." She

miringly. "We'll bind him now and then I want to show you something."

ter at the bow quartz port-hole. Down the long shaft through which they had risen they saw the orm. As they looked, its regular pulsations turned irregular: it leaped and splashed as though it was a en it gave one final mighty heave, and the universe seemed to shatter beneath them. The "walls" of out them and they were enswathed in a raging storm of red clouds.

"Now, will you explain?"

l boyishly. "I simply reversed the switch that changes the current of the Gorm. I knew that it would

t into space, as Miro was incautious enough to inform me.

' instead of direct current, an alternating flow could be induced, so as to attract and repel in quick a disturbance would be raised in that highly unstable mixture to start fireworks. So I rigged up an e circuit, timed it to permit us to get up enough speed from the repulsion to be safely on our way The circuit-breaker worked and the alternating current did the rest. That island is wiped out, and so is no further threat of danger to the solar system from that."

e going to do with him?"

Service. They'll take care of him. And now, young lady, if you have no further questions, shall I say it

enderly, answering:

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