

A World Called Crimson

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A WORLD CALLED CRIMSON ***

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There was a boy and a girl and a strange new planet; the planet was alive with hideous dangers. But the boy and girl were very young and all Robin wanted to know was: "Who stole my doll?"

**A
WORLD
CALLED
CRIMSON**

By
DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

When the starship Star of Fire collided with a meteor swarm six parsecs stellar north of the galactic hub in the year A.D. 2278, it lost its atmosphere within forty-five minutes. At first it was thought that every man, woman and child of the four thousand, one hundred and sixty-six aboard were lost, in this the greatest of all interstellar disasters. But as was discovered twenty years later in the Purcell exploration, this was not quite the case. (See PURCELL)

—from The ANNALS OF SPACE, Vol. 12

The Cyclops—not hungry at the moment—regarded Robin as a new toy.

IT WAS the nasty little boy from B Deck who had stolen her doll. She hated him. He was horrid. She slipped out of their stateroom while her Mom and Dad were dressing for dinner. She'd find that horrid little boy on B Deck. She'd scratch his eyes out.

Her name was Robin Sinclair and she was five years old and mad enough to throw the boy from B Deck out into space, only she didn't know how to go about that.

She went down the companionway to B Deck, where the people dressed differently. The colors weren't as bright, somehow, the cloth not so fine. It was a major distinction in the eyes of a five-year-old girl, especially one who loved to run her fingers over fine synthetics and who even had a favorite color. Her favorite color was crimson.

"Scuse me, mister. Didja see a little boy with a doll with a crimson dress on?"

A smile. But she was deadly serious. "Not me, young lady."

She walked for a while aimlessly on B Deck. She saw two little boys, but they weren't the right ones. Pouting now, almost in tears, she was on the verge of giving up. Mom and Dad could buy her a new doll. Mom and Dad were richer

than anybody, weren't they?

Then, all of a sudden, she saw him. He was just ducking out of sight up ahead. Under his arm was tucked the doll with the crimson dress, her favorite doll.

"Hey!" she cried. "Hey, wait for me!"

Her little feet pounding, she raced down the companionway. As she reached the iris door in the bulkhead, an electric eye opened it for her. She had never come this way before. It was not as bright and clean as the rest of the ship. She had not even seen the sign which said PASSENGERS NOT PERMITTED BEYOND THIS POINT. But then, she could barely read, anyway.

She caught a quick second glimpse of the boy, and started running as he rounded a turn in the corridor. Shouting for him to stop, she reached the turn and saw him up ahead. He looked back at her and stuck out his tongue and kept running.

It was then that the whole world shuddered, like it was trying to shake itself to pieces.

Alarm bells clanged everywhere. Whistles shrilled. Pretty soon uniformed men were running in all directions. Robin Sinclair was suddenly very frightened. She wanted to go back to A Deck, to her Mom and Dad, but she had followed the boy through so many twisting, turning corridors that she knew she would be lost if she tried. She looked ahead. The boy seemed confident as he made his way. She followed him. But she was really mad at him now. It was his fault she was so far from Mom and Dad when a thing like this happened.

Uniformed members of the crew continued rushing by. She heard snatches of conversation she didn't understand.

"Trying to patch it ..."

"The whole stern section of the ship. Losing air fast ..."

"The lifeboats. I was just down there. Every last one of 'em. Gone. The meteor took 'em right off into space."

"If the damage can't be repaired ..."

And one man, finally, with a face awful to behold: "Patches won't hold. We're losing air faster'n it can be replaced. Better tell the Captain."

A man in a lot of gold braid rushed into view. He was distinguished-looking, but old. Boy, he was old, Robin thought. He looked as old as her grandfather.

"Captain! We're losing too much air. It can't be replaced."

"Then prepare to abandon ship."

"But, sir, every lifeboat is gone!"

"No lifeboats? No lifeboats!"

The boy stuck his tongue out again. She ran after him, shaking her little fist. They were completely absorbed in their private enmity while the word went out that the situation was hopeless and almost five thousand people prepared to die.

"I've got you now!"

He had run up against a blank wall. She came toward him, holding her hands out for the doll with the crimson dress. He held it behind his back. She reached around to get it but he pushed her and she fell down.

"I'll fix you!" she threatened, getting up and rushing toward him again. Big arms came down, and big hands grabbed her.

"There now, little miss," a voice said. "Why aren't you with your folks? Time like this, you ought to be with your folks. What is it, B Deck?"

"A Deck," Robin said haughtily. "*He's* from B. Why is everybody running around so?"

He was a tall, slat-thin man with a kind-looking face. "Say, wait a minute!" he suddenly said, looking perplexed. "They all the time said I was nuts, building that damn thing. Well, I can't fit into it, but maybe these here kids can."

He scooped Robin up with one hand, got the boy with the other. "I want my doll!" Robin cried, but the boy held it away from her.

"Take it easy now," the man said. "Take it easy. We'll take care of you."

He ran with them to one of the repair bays of the great, doom-bound starship. In

one corner, beyond the now useless patching equipment, was a table. On the table stood a model of the *Star of Fire*. It was six feet long and perfect in every external detail. He hadn't got around to the inside yet. The inside was completely empty. It had rockets and everything. There was no reason why it wouldn't be perfectly space-worthy. Why, it would even hold an atmosphere ...

"In you go!" he said.

The little boy was suddenly scared. "I want my Mother," he said. "I want my Dad."

"In you go."

Robin felt herself lifted, and thrust inside something. It was dark in there. She moved around and bumped into something. She moved around some more and bumped against the little boy from B Deck.

"How do you get out of here?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said.

"I want my doll back," she said.

"Oh yeah?"

"You better give it to me."

He said nothing. There was a hissing sound, and a faint roar. Far away, something slid ponderously.

"Pleasant voyage, little ones!" a voice boomed.

Something sat on her chest all at once, squeezing all the air from her. It was a great weight holding her motionless, squeezing. She wanted to cry, but couldn't get the sound out. She wanted her Mom. Mom would know what to do.

She was crushed and flattened into a tunnel of blackness.

Thirty minutes later, the starship *Star of Fire*, outworld-bound from Sol to the starswarms beyond Ophiuchus, lost all its remaining air. It became an enormous coffin spinning end over end in space amid the blaze of starlight near the center of the galaxy.

One tiny spaceship, a small model of the huge liner, sped away. If it went two

days finding no planet, its two occupants would perish when the small oxygen supply gave out. If it found a planet it would circle and land automatically. The possibility of this was small, but not remote. For here at the center of the galaxy, stellar distances are more nearly planetary and most of the stars have attendant planets. But even then, it would have to be a world capable of supporting their lives ...

They sped on, in all innocence. She was five. He was six. His name was Charlie Fullerton. He had her doll. She hated him.

Two hours after the tiny model spaceship landed on a planet with three suns in the sky, Robin Sinclair awoke. She felt cramped and uncomfortable. It took her a while to orient herself. She had some kind of a dream. A dream was a funny thing. Mom said it wasn't real. But it sure was real to her.

She got up and pushed with her hands. A section of the tiny spaceship sprang away at her touch, admitting blinding light. She lay there with her eyes tightly shut, but after a while she could see. The boy was sleeping. She still hated him. He was sleeping with her doll in his arms. She took the doll and he moved his arms and woke up. She jumped out of the open spaceship with the doll and started running.

She ran along a beach. But the sand was green. The ocean hissed and roared and there was nobody else. "N'ya! N'ya! Y'can't catch me!" she bawled at the top of her voice. And fell down in the sand.

He caught up with her and fell on top of her and they wrestled for the doll. The surf thundered nearby. The tide, capricious in the grip of the three suns, rose suddenly, flooding them with chill water. Coughing and spluttering and choking, they retreated further up the beach.

Soon they quieted down.

"I'm soaking wet," she said.

"My name is Charlie," he said sullenly. "Let's go back now."

"How do we go back?" she wanted to know.

"That's a nice doll," Charlie said.

"You took it from me!" Accusingly.

"Aw, I only wanted to look at it."

"She has a crimson dress and everything."

"This is some world," Charlie said after a while.

"What's a world?"

"Oh, a world is—you know—everything."

"Oh."

"You think it has Indians?"

She said, "It ought to have Indians, anyhow."

"And pirates too?" he asked in a voice full of awe.

She nodded her head very seriously. "I like pirates," she said. "They're so scary."

Just then a ship came into view far away across the water. It had enormous sails and a black hull. On the fore-sail was painted a huge black skull.

"Let's get out of here!" Charlie cried in alarm. But beetling cliffs reared behind the beach and although they ran frantically along at the edge of the green sand, they could find no way to scale the cliffs. The pirate ship came closer and closer.

They got down whimpering at the base of the cliffs and remained very still. After a long time the pirate ship came close to shore. A longboat was dispatched and its oars flashed in the triple sunlight like giant legs on which the longboat walked across the waves toward the beach.

Then the pirates were ashore. The man who led them had only one leg, and a peg. He looked very mean.

"It's Blackbeard the Pirate!" said Charlie in a frightened whisper. His Dad had once read him a story about Blackbeard.

The pirate with the wooden leg suddenly had a black beard.

"The doll!" cried Robin.

"What's the matter?"

"We left her down there. Crimson." She called her doll Crimson because she had a crimson dress.

Now Blackbeard approached the model spaceship with his crew. They gathered around it, frowning. Robin watched, her face pale, her eyes wide. Crimson was there on the sand. They were going to see Crimson. Even as she was thinking these horrible thoughts, one of the pirates saw Crimson and picked her up. Blackbeard came over and took the doll and looked at her. At that moment there was a shout from above the cliffs and an arrow suddenly transfixed one of the pirates. He fell down writhing and Blackbeard and the rest of his men raced back to the longboat.

"Indians," Charlie whispered knowingly.

The Indians shouted and yelled.

"Are there any cowboys here?" Robin asked hopefully.

"No, sir. No cowboys," Charlie said very definitely.

"I'm hungry," Robin said. "I wish we had something."

With a little squeal of delight, she looked down at her feet. Two platters of fried chicken, with all the trimmings. Her favorite. They ate ravenously, not hearing the Indians any more. They watched the longboat return to the pirate ship. All this way, they could see little Crimson's dress as Blackbeard took her aboard. Robin finished her fried chicken and started to cry.

"Girls," said Charlie in disgust.

"I can't help it. Poor Crimson."

"Is she dead?"

"Blackbeard the pirate took her."

"Charles was my grandfather's name. My grandfather died and they named me Charles."

"I want Crimson!"

"Get down! The Indians will see you."

"The Indians went away. I want Crimson!"

"We could name this beach after Crimson."

"Aw, what do you know? It's only a beach."

"We could name the whole wide world." Charlie gestured expansively.

The green sand of the beach became crimson. The sky had a crimson glow.

"It sure is a funny world," Charlie said. Laughter loud as thunder echoed in the sky. "A world called Crimson," he added.

The tide came in. Spray and surf bounded off the rocks, wetting them. "We better go up the hill," Robin said. By hill she meant the perpendicular cliffs behind them.

The tide thundered in. They were sodden. They clung to the rocks.

"We need an elevator or something," Charlie said.

Golden cables flashed in the sunlight. The gilt elevator cage came down. They climbed in as a big wave came and battered the rocks. The elevator went up, up to the top of the cliff. They could see a long way across the water. They could watch the pirate ship sailing away, the skull black as night on its sail.

They got out of the elevator at the top of the cliff. They didn't see any Indians, but they saw the ashes of a campfire.

"Are there lions and tigers and everything?" Robin asked in wonder, gazing out over the beach and the sea and then turning around to see the green forest which began fifty yards beyond the edge of the cliff.

"Sure there are lions and tigers," Charlie said matter-of-factly.

Off somewhere in the woods, a big cat roared. Robin whimpered.

"I w-was only fooling," Charlie said, vaguely understanding that you could somehow make things happen on this world called Crimson.

But he learned a lesson that night. You could make things happen on Crimson, but you couldn't unmake them.

The tiger roared again. But they were downwind from it and it went elsewhere in search of prey. Huddled together near the embers of the Indian campfire, the two children slept fitfully through the cold night.

Then the three suns finally came up on three different sides of the horizon. Crimson was deadly, but beautiful....

Although credit for the discovery of Aladdin's Planet goes to the explorer Richard Purcell of Earth, two Earth children actually were shipwrecked there twenty years before Purcell's expedition. But instead of paving the way for Purcell, they actually made the exploration more difficult for him. In fact, it was positively fraught with peril. But since Aladdin's Planet had become the galaxy's arsenal of plenty, it was well worth Purcell's effort. As any schoolboy knows in this utopia of 24th century plenty, Aladdin's Planet, almost exactly at the heart of the galaxy, where matter is spontaneously created to sweep out in long cosmic trails across the galaxy, is the home not merely of spontaneous creation of matter, but spontaneous formed creation, with any human psyche capable of doing the handwork of God. A planet of great import ...

—from *The ANNALS OF SPACE*, Vol. 2

She stood poised for a glorious moment on the very edge of the rock, the bronze and pink of her glistening in the sun, the spray still clinging to her from her last dive. Then, grace in every line of her lithe body, she sprang from the rock in a perfectly executed swan dive.

Charlie helped her out, smiling. "That was pretty," he said.

"Well, you taught me how." Her figure was not yet that of a woman, but far more than that of a girl. She was very beautiful and Charlie knew this although he had no standards to judge by, except for the Indian women they occasionally saw or Blackbeard's slave girls when the pirate ship came in to trade.

Unselfconsciously, Robin climbed into her gold-mesh shorts. Charlie helped her fasten the gold-mesh halter. Long, long ago—it seemed an unreal dream, almost—he had been a very small boy and his mother had taken him to a show in

which everyone danced and sang and wore gold-mesh clothing. He had never forgotten it, and now all their clothing was gold-mesh.

Robin spun around and looked at him. Her tawny blonde hair fell almost to her waist, and he helped her comb it with a jewel-encrusted comb he had wished into being a few days before.

"I so like Crimson!" she cried impulsively.

Charlie smiled. "Why, that's a funny thing to say. Is there any other kind of a place?"

"You mean, but Crimson?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. It is funny. Sometimes I think—"

Charlie smiled at her, a little condescendingly. "Oh, it's the book again, is it?" he asked.

"All right. It's the book. Stop making fun of me."

Many years ago, when they'd been small children, they had returned to the ruined spaceship which had brought them to Crimson. It had been empty except for the book, as if the book had been placed there for them by whatever power had put them in the spaceship. Naturally, they had not been able to read, but they kept the book anyway. Then one day, years later, Robin had wished to be able to read and the next time she lifted the book and opened it, the magic of the words was miraculously revealed to her. The book was called A ONE VOLUME ENCYCLOPEDIA HISTORY and it told about just everything—except Crimson. There was no mention of Crimson at all. Robin read the book over and over again until she almost knew it by heart. Even Charlie had listened to it twice all the way through when she read it, but he had never wished for the ability to read himself.

Now Charlie asked: "Do you really believe the book? This is Crimson. This is real."

"I don't know. Sometimes I think this isn't as real as everything in the book. And sometimes I just don't know."

They walked in silence to their elevator and took it to the top of the highest cliff. They had wished for a house there, like one Robin had seen in the book. They had wished for many things to make their lives interesting, or pleasant. They had peopled Crimson with the fruit of their wishes, using the ONE VOLUME ENCYCLOPEDIA as a guide.

They lived a mile from the Indian Camp. They traded with the Indians who, strangely, did not know how to wish for things. Neither did the pirates, or anyone. Just Robin and Charlie. The pirates lived across the sea on an island. To the south along the shore were Phoenicians, Greeks, Mayas, Royal Navymen, Submariners, mermaids and Cyclopes. To the north along the shore were Polynesians, Maoris, Panamanians and Dutchmen. Inland were Cannibals, Lotus Eaters, a few settlements of cowboys to make life interesting for the Indians, farmers, Russians, Congressmen and Ministers. All had been created by Robin and Charlie, who visited them sometimes. They never believed for a minute that Robin and Charlie had really created them, although all were amazed by Robin and Charlie's ability to make things appear out of thin air.

Just as they reached their house, an Indian brave came running down the trail toward them.

"Skyship come!" he cried, gesturing wildly and excitedly.

"Skyship?" repeated Charlie, looking at Robin. "Have you created any spaceships?"

"No. You know it's a bargain between us. We don't create anything we don't think we understand."

The Indian was sweating. His name was Tashtu, which meant Wild Eagle, and he was their go-between with the tribe. "Skyship sweep across heavens," he said. "Not land. Go up in Wild Country."

Charlie's interest quickened. Wild Country. They had created it on impulse, about twenty miles from the Indian Camp, midway between the settlements of Congressmen inland and Cyclopes on the shore. It was a place of tortuous gorges and rocks and mountains, utterly lifeless. No one ever went there. Someday, he had always told Robin, they would explore Wild Country. If there really was a spaceship, and if it had gone there ...

"No," Robin said. "I know what you're thinking. But I'm perfectly happy here."

"You just now said you sometimes thought Crimson wasn't real and there were other, real worlds which—"

"That's different. I can dream, can't I?"

"But don't you see, if a spaceship's really come, maybe they can tell us."

She gripped his arm. "Charlie. Oh, Charlie, I don't know. I'm afraid. We've been happy here, haven't we? We really wouldn't want it to change ..."

"I'm going to Wild Country," Charlie said stubbornly.

Tashtu nodded his head. "It is good that you do. For the braves—"

"Don't tell me they went after the skyship?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, Lord. Skyship come low, ruin crops mile around. War dance follow. War party leave last sunrise."

"Six hours ago!" Charlie cried. "Can we overtake them?"

Tashtu shrugged. "Hurry, Lord."

"Don't you see," Charlie told Robin. "They're savages. They wouldn't understand anything like spaceships. They wouldn't want to. If they get the chance, they'll kill first and ask questions afterwards. We've got to go to the Wild Country now."

Big and brawny Tashtu was nodding his head earnestly, but Robin seemed unconvinced. "Why," she said, "there isn't even anything about Wild Country in the book."

"That's because we made it."

"And besides, the Congressmen are dangerous."

"Congressmen? Don't you mean the Cyclopes?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. The Cyclopes are dangerous."

She couldn't possibly have meant the Congressmen. It was never clear to either of them precisely what a Congressman did. But there were hundreds of them on

one side of Wild Country and they were forever making speeches and promises, little round bald men with great, rich voices and wonderful vocabularies. Charlie loved to hear them speak.

"We go, Lord?" Tashtu asked.

Charlie nodded and went inside swiftly for his rifle. It was modeled after the most powerful rifle in the encyclopedia and was called a Mannlicher Elephant Gun. Robin came with her own smaller Springfield repeater.

"Ready?" Charlie asked.

"Yes. We can think up food along the trail."

"Hurry, Lord," Tashtu urged.

Charlie could hardly contain his excitement. The Wild Country, at last. And a spaceship.

By the time they were ready to make planetfall on the unexplored world, Purcell knew his dislike of Glaudot bordered on actual hatred. Purcell, who was forty-five years old and a bachelor, liked his spacemen tough, yes: you had to be tough to land on, explore, and subdue a couple of dozen worlds, as Purcell himself had done. But he also liked his spacemen with humility: facing the unknown and sometimes the unknowable at every step of the way, you needed humility.

Glaudot, younger than Purcell by fifteen years, confident, arrogant, a lean hard man and handsome in a gaunt-cheeked, saturnine way, lacked humility. For one thing, he treated the crew like dirt and had treated them that way since blastoff from Earth almost five months before. For another, he seemed impatient with Purcell's orders, although Purcell was not a cautious man, and certainly not a timid one. What had been growing between them flared out into the open moments before planetfall.

"I can't get over it," Purcell said. "I've never seen a world anything like it." They had made telescopic observations from within the atmosphere. "Giants living in caves," Purcell went on. "Sailing ships flying the Jolly Roger. A town consisting of miniature replicas of the White House on Earth. Mermaids."

"Don't tell me you really thought you saw mermaids?" Glaudot asked a little condescendingly.

"All right, I'll admit I only caught a glimpse of them. I thought they were mermaids. But what about the Indians?"

"Yes," Glaudot admitted. "I saw the Indians."

Using their atmospheric rockets, they had flown over the Indian village at an altitude of only a few hundred feet, to see bronze-skinned men rush out of tents and stare up at them in awe. After that, Purcell had decided to find some desolate spot in which to land, in order not to risk a too-sudden encounter with any of the fantastically diversified natives.

Now Glaudot said: "You're taking what we saw too literally, Captain. Why, I remember on Harfonte we had all sorts of hallucinations until Captain Jamison discovered they were exactly that—we'd been hypnotized into seeing the things we most feared by powerless natives who really feared us."

"This isn't Harfonte," Purcell said, a little irritably.

"Yeah, but you weren't there."

"I know that, Glaudot. I'm only trying to point out that each world must be considered as unique. Each world presents its own problems, which—"

"I say this is like Harfonte all over again. I say if you'd had the guts to land right smack in the middle of that Indian village, you'd have seen for yourself. I say to play it close to the vest is ridiculous," Glaudot said, and then smiled deprecatingly. "Begging your pardon, of course, Captain. But don't you see, man, you've got to show the extraterrestrials, whatever form they take, that Earthmen aren't afraid of them."

"Caution and fear aren't the same thing," Purcell insisted. He didn't know why he bothered to explain this to Glaudot. Perhaps it was because Ensign Chandler, youngest man in the exploration party, was in the lounge listening to them. Chandler was a nice kid, clean-cut and right out of the finest tradition of Earth, but Chandler was, like all boys barely out of their teens, impressionable. He was particularly impressionable in these, his first months in space.

"When you're cautious it's as much to protect the natives as yourself," Purcell went on, and then put into simple words what Glaudot and Chandler should have learned at the Academy for Exploration, anyway.

When he finished, Glaudot shrugged and asked: "What do you think, Ensign

Chandler?"

Chandler blushed slowly. "I—I'd rather not say," he told them. "Captain Purcell is—the captain."

Glaudot smiled his triumph at Purcell. It was then, for the first time, that Purcell's dislike for the man became intense. Purcell wondered how long he'd been poisoning the youth's mind against the doctrines of the Academy.

Just then a light glowed in the bulkhead and a metallic voice intoned: "Prepare for landing. Prepare for landing at once."

Purcell, striding to his blast-hammock, told Glaudot, who was the expedition's exec, "I'll want the landing party ready to move half an hour after planetfall."

"Yes, sir," said Glaudot eagerly. At least there was something they agreed on.

"Men," Purcell told the small landing party as they assembled near the main airlock thirty-five minutes later, "we have an obligation to our civilization which I hope all of you understand. While here on this unknown world we must do nothing to bring discredit to the name of Earth and the galactic culture which Earth represents."

They had all seen the bleak moon-like landscape through the viewports. They were eager to get out there and plant the flag of Earth and determine what the new world was like. There were only eight of them in the first landing party: others would follow once the eight established a preliminary base of operations. The eight were wearing the new-style, light-weight spacesuits which all exploration parties used even though the temperature and atmosphere of the new world seemed close enough to Earth-norm. It had long ago been decided at the Academy that chances couldn't be taken with some unknown factor, possibly toxic, fatal and irreversible, in an unknown atmosphere. After a day or two of thorough laboratory analysis of the air they'd be able to chuck their spacesuits if all went well.

They filed through the airlock silently, Purcell first with the flag of Earth, then Glaudot, then the others. White faces watched from the viewport as they clomped across the convoluted terrain.

"Nobody here but us chickens!" Glaudot said, and he laughed, after they had walked some way across the desolate landscape. "But then, what did you expect?"

Captain took us clear of all the more promising places."

The man's only motive, Purcell decided, was his colossal ego. He made no reply: that would be descending to Glaudot's level.

After they walked almost entirely across the low-walled crater in which the exploration ship had come down, and after Purcell had planted the flag on the highest pinnacle within the low crater walls, Glaudot said:

"How's about taking a look-see over the top, Captain? At least that much."

Purcell wasn't in favor of the idea. It would mean leaving sight of the ship too soon. But the radio voices of most of the men indicated that they agreed with Glaudot, so Purcell shrugged and said a pair of volunteers could go, if they promised to rejoin the main party within two hours.

Glaudot immediately volunteered. That at least made sense. Glaudot had the courage of his convictions. Several others volunteered, but the first hand up had been Ensign Chandler's.

"I don't want to sound like a martinet," Purcell told them. "But you understand that by two hours I mean two hours. Not a minute more."

"Yes, sir," Chandler said.

"Glaudot?"

"Yes, sir," the Executive Officer replied.

"All right," Purcell said. He walked over to the first of the big magna-sleds piled high with equipment. "We'll be setting up the base camp over here. I know the men still in the ship will want to stretch their legs soon as possible. We don't want to have to go looking for you, Glaudot."

"Not me, Captain," Glaudot assured him, and walked off toward the crater rim with young Ensign Chandler.

"What the devil was that?" Chandler said forty-five minutes later.

"Stop jumping at every shadow you see. Relax."

"I thought I saw something moving behind that rock."

"So, go take a look."

"But—"

"Hell, boy, don't let that Purcell put the fear of the unknown into you on your very first trip out. Huh, what do you say?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Glaudot," Ensign Chandler replied.

"After all," Glaudot went on, "we have nothing to be afraid of. We're still within sight of the ship."

Chandler turned around. "I don't see it," he said.

"From the top of that rock you could."

"Think so?"

"Sure I do. Why don't you take a look if it will make you feel better?"

"All right," Chandler said, and smiled at his own temerity. But he knew vaguely that he'd been caught in a crossfire between the cautious Purcell and the bold, arrogant Glaudot. Sometimes he really thought that the Captain's caution made sense: on Wulcreston, he'd learned at the Academy, a whole Earth expedition had been slaughtered before contact because the natives mistook hand telescopes for weapons. And surely on any world a spacesuited man looked more like a monster than a man although he was vulnerable in a spacesuit, even more vulnerable than a naked man because he could only run awkwardly.

All this Chandler thought as he climbed the high rock rampart. He'd send a subspace letter back to the folks tonight, sure enough, he told himself. Not only had he been chosen for the preliminary exploration party, he'd made the first trip out of sight of the spaceship. It certainly was something to write home about, and Mom would be very proud ...

He was on top of the rock now. The vast tortuous landscape spread out below him like a relief map in a mapmaker's nightmare. Far to his left, beyond Glaudot's spacesuited figure, he could see the projectile-shaped spaceship resting on its tail fins. And to his right—

He stared. He gawked.

At the last moment he tried to get down from the rock, but his spaceboot caught

on an outcropping and his fatal mistake was standing upright in an attempt to free it.

Then all at once in a blinding burst of pain he was clutching at something in his chest but knew as his life ebbed rapidly from his young body that it would not matter if he was able to pull the cruel shaft out....

Glaudot went rushing up the side of the rock. He still couldn't believe his eyes. Ensign Chandler had been impaled by two long feathered shafts, two arrows. The force of the first one had spun Chandler around and he lay now with his back arched across the topmost ramparts of the rock, two arrows protruding from his chest and his life blood, starkly crimson against the white of the spacesuit, pouring out.

Reaching the top of the rock in an attempt to drag the dying boy down, Glaudot saw the Indians rushing up the other side of the crater wall. Indians, he thought incredulously. Indians, as in the American West hundreds of years ago. Indians ... But just what the hell were they doing here?

A muscular brave notched an arrow, his right hand drawing the feathered shaft back to his ear. Quickly Glaudot flung his arms skyward, hoping that the universal gesture of surrender would be understood. The brave stood statue-still. His lips opened. He was speaking to another of the half-dozen Indians in the raiding band, but Glaudot could not hear the words through his space helmet. He knew his life hung in the balance.

He watched, fascinated and helpless, as the Indian who had slain Ensign Chandler came toward him.

Tashtu said: "Two raiding bands, Lord. One go north. Other south. We follow?"

They had reached the advance Indian camp on the fringe of the Wild Country. So far they had seen nothing of the Cyclopes who lived in this part of the world. Of all their creations, Charlie and Robin feared and avoided only the Cyclopes, the enormous one-eyed giants which had so intrigued Robin in the encyclopedia that she'd had a compulsion to create them, and had done so.

"We can't follow both bands," Charlie said, looking troubled.

"Why can't we?" Robin asked. "You go north with some of the braves, Charlie. I'll go south. We ought to be able to overtake the raiding parties before anything happens."

"I can't let you go alone."

"All right. I'll take Tashtu with me. Don't you think Tashtu can take care of me as well as you can?"

"Well, I just don't like the idea—" Charlie began.

"That's silly. If we have to find them before there's trouble, we have to find them. Well, don't we?"

Charlie gave her an uncertain nod. He had grown up with her and had seen her every day of his life, but every time he took a good look at her, at the lovely face and the tawny, long-limbed form ill-concealed by the gold-mesh garments, it took his breath away. Although in a sense a whole world was his plaything, he had never seen anything so lovely. Finally he said, "I guess you're too logical for me. Take care of her, Tashtu."

"With my life, Lord," the Indian vowed as the group broke up. Robin ran to Charlie and hugged him, kissing his cheek half playfully, half in earnest.

"You be careful, too," she said, and went off with Tashtu and several of the braves.

Naturally she was excited. She knew more about spacemen than Charlie did. She had read the encyclopedia more carefully, hadn't she? She wondered what the spacemen would be like. She couldn't help wondering it because the only man she had ever known, except for those they had created, was Charlie. Of course, she hadn't told Charlie this in so many words, but she felt, had always felt, vaguely and now felt clearly, that before she could settle down contentedly with Charlie, she would have to know something of the world beyond Crimson. And there was a vast world—a multitude of worlds—beyond Crimson. She knew that. The encyclopedia mentioned all of them but did not mention Crimson at all.

They walked for several minutes through green forest, and then abruptly came to the edge of the Wild Country. Even the idea of the Wild Country brought an eagerness to Robin's limbs and made her walk more rapidly. The Wild Country was unknown, wasn't it? They had created it without knowing quite what they

were creating, and had never explored it.

She went ahead with Tashtu over the rocks and crushed pumice. No winds blew in Wild Country. The air was neither hot nor cold. The landscape seemed changeless and eternal, as if it had been that way since before the dawn of history, although actually Charlie and Robin had created it only a few years before.

They forged on for two hours, Tashtu following the easily read spoor in the pumice. They came at last to a low crater wall, where the spoor disappeared. At first Tashtu was confused, but then he pointed to the top, several hundred feet above their heads. Robin caught a glimpse of tawny skin and feathers and buckskin in the sunlight.

"Haloo!" Tashtu called, and some of the braves above them whirled, all speaking excitedly in the clumsy English which was the only tongue they knew.

"Huragpha slay monster," they said. "Capture other monster. But then see ..." the words drifted off into silence. Obviously, the Indians were perplexed. "You come, see. Monster, him bleed like man."

At Tashtu's side, Robin rushed up the steep rocky slope. When they reached the top, breathless and all but exhausted, Robin put her hand to her mouth with a little cry of horror.

There was a dead man stretched out on the rock there, two arrows transfixing his chest through the fabric of his spacesuit. The spacesuit had probably frightened the Indians, but he was a man all right. Had they been closer, even the Indians would have known that. That poor man.... Why, he was hardly more than a boy.

Spacemen!

And there was another, surrounded now by several of the Indians. "Him prisoner," said the Indian called Huragpha a little uncertainly.

Robin walked over to the man in the spacesuit. He was a big man, even bigger than Charlie. He looked very strong, but the spacesuit might have been deceptive. He looked frightened, but not terrified.

"Are you really a spaceman?" Robin asked.

Glaudot said: "Well, so one of you can speak more than a few grunts. That's something." He looked carefully at Robin. "Beautiful, too," he said. The way he said it was not a compliment. It was an objective statement of fact.

"I know it won't help to say I'm sorry about your friend. Words won't help, I guess. But—"

"Yeah," Glaudot said. "All right. He's dead. I can't bring him back and you can't bring him back, sister."

"I'm not your sister," Robin said.

Glaudot told her it was a way of speaking. He couldn't quite believe his ears. She spoke English as well as he did, which was incredible enough here on a world halfway across the galaxy. But he got the impression that she was almost fantastically naive. Yet the Indians—and, incredibly, they were Indians—seemed to be subservient to her, almost seemed to worship her.

Glaudot sat down on his space helmet, which he had taken off some minutes before, and said: "Are you the boss lady around here?"

"Boss lady? I don't understand."

"Are you in charge? Do you run things?"

Robin smiled and said: "I created them."

"I'm sorry. Now *I* don't get *you*."

"I said I created them. It's very simple. My friend and I decided a very long time ago it would be nice or interesting or I forget what, it was so long ago, if we had some Indians. So, we created Indians."

Glaudot threw his head back and laughed. "For a minute," he said, "you almost had me believing you." The girl was dressed like a savage, he told himself, like a beautiful savage, but at least she had a sense of humor. That was something.

"But what is so funny?" Robin asked.

"You just now said—"

"I know what I said. My friend and I created the Indians. Of course. Why? Can't you create anything you want? Just anything?"

"All right, sister," Glaudot said a little angrily. He did not like being made fun of, for he lacked the capacity to laugh at himself. "Just how much of a fool do you think I am?"

"Why, I don't know," Robin replied. "How much of a fool are you?"

Glaudot glared at her. Purcell was going to be one mad captain when he was told of Chandler's death, but men had died on expeditions before and it really wasn't Glaudot's fault. At any rate he had established contact with somebody of obvious importance among the natives, and Purcell would appreciate that.

"Never mind," Glaudot said.

"Tell me about being a spaceman. Do you really fly among the stars?"

"Well, yes," Glaudot said, "although it isn't really flying."

"And do you create new stars as you go along?"

There she went again with her talk of creation, as if creating things out of nothing was the commonest occurrence in the world. Glaudot stood up. "All right, sister. Show me."

"Why, show you what?"

"Create something."

"You mean," Robin said, disappointed, "you actually can't?"

"Just go ahead and create something."

Robin shrugged. "What would you like?"

Glaudot thought for a moment. "A piano!" he said suddenly. "How about a piano?" It was complicated enough, he thought. "And while you're at it, how about telling me how come everyone speaks English—or tries to speak English around here?"

Robin frowned. "Is there some other way of speaking?"

Glaudot also frowned. That line of thought wouldn't get him anywhere. "O.K.," he said. "One piano coming up?"

"All right," Robin said.

Glaudot blinked. The pretty girl hadn't moved. She hadn't even changed her facial expression. But a parlor grand piano stood on the rock before them.

"Well, I'll be damned," Glaudot said. "What else can you create?"

"We made all the natives here. We made the green and crimson. We made this whole Wild Country. We made some of the animals too."

"Like—the piano? Out of nothing?"

"Is there another way?"

Glaudot said, "You better come back to the ship with me. Captain'll like to see you."

Tashtu shook his head. "The Lady Robin awaits the Lord."

Glaudot looked at Robin. "Who's that?"

"Charlie. He's just my friend. I—I don't think I have to wait for him. I've always been more interested in reading about spacemen than he has. I'll go with you now if you want."

Tashtu looked unhappy. "Lord Charlie, he say—"

"Well, you wait right here, Tashtu, and tell Charlie where I've gone. What could be simpler? I'll be all right, don't worry about me."

"Lord Charlie, he say watch you."

"And I say I'm going with the spaceman to his spaceship."

Tashtu bowed. "The Lady has spoken," he said, and watched Robin descend the rocky rampart and walk back with Glaudot toward the far distant glint of metal which was this spaceship they were talking about.

"So you can create just anything," Glaudot said.

"I guess so."

A goddess, he thought. A beautiful goddess who ...

Suddenly he stared at her. Who could make him the most powerful man in the galaxy.

"This spaceship of yours—" she began.

"Wait. Wait a minute. If you can create anything, how's about re-creating Chandler?"

"Chand-ler? What is Chand-ler?"

"The boy back there. The one your braves killed."

Robin said: "If you wish," and Glaudot held his breath. The power over life and death, he thought....

He looked down and saw Chandler's spacesuited body there, the two arrows protruding from his chest. He shook his head. "Not dead," he said. "What good is he to anybody dead?"

Robin nodded. "I'm sorry," she said. "I just hadn't thought before of bringing people back to life. It ... why it seems ..."

"What's the matter?"

"I wouldn't really be bringing him back, you know. It would be a copy, just a copy."

"But a perfect copy?"

"I think so."

"Then if it's just a copy it shouldn't bother you at all, should it?"

"Well ..." Robin said doubtfully.

"Go ahead. Show me you can do it."

Glaudot gaped. Another figure sat alongside Chandler's corpse, Chandler's second corpse. The other figure got up. It was Chandler.

"Look out!" the new Chandler cried. "Look out—Indians!"

"Just take it easy," Glaudot told him. Glaudot's face was very white, his eyes big

and round and staring.

Chandler looked down at the body on the rocks. His knees buckled and Glaudot caught him, stopping him from falling. Chandler tried to say something, but the words wouldn't come. He stared with horrified fascination at the body, which was an exact copy of himself—or a copy of the dead man from whom the new living man was copied.

"May we go to your spaceship now?" Robin asked Glaudot politely. "I have always wished to see a spaceship."

Here was power, Glaudot thought. Incredible power. All the power to control worlds, to carve worlds from primordial slime, almost, for yourself. Here was far more power than any man in the galaxy had ever been offered. Was it his, Glaudot's?

It wouldn't be if he brought the beautiful girl to the spaceship and Purcell. For Captain Purcell, a devoted servant of the galactic civilization which he was attempting to spread to the outworlds, would think in terms of what good the discovery of this girl could bring to all humanity. But if Glaudot kept her to himself ...

And then another thought almost stunned him. Why merely the girl? She'd mentioned a friend, hadn't she? Perhaps it was something in the atmosphere of this strange world, in the very air you breathed. Perhaps anyone could do it, could create out of nothing—Glaudot included.

"You want to go to the spaceship?" he asked.

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"Then teach me the secret of creation."

"Of making things, you mean? Why, there isn't any secret. Should there be any secret? You merely—create."

"Show me," said Glaudot.

A table appeared, and savory dishes of food.

"Magician!" cried Chandler.

A great roan stallion, bridled but without a saddle, materialized. Robin swung up on its broad back and used her bare knees for balance and control. The stallion cantered off.

"Wait!" cried Glaudot. "Please wait."

The stallion cantered back and Robin alighted. The stallion began to graze on a patch of grass which suddenly appeared on the naked rock. The stallion seemed quite content.

"You mean," the new Chandler asked in an awed voice, "she just *made* these things? The food. The table. The horse ..."

"Yes," said Glaudot. He concentrated his will on creating a single flower in the new field of grass. He concentrated his whole being.

But nothing happened.

He glared almost angrily at Robin, as if it were her fault. "I don't have the power you have," he said.

She nodded. "Only Charlie and me." She looked at the roan stallion. "Beauty, isn't he? I'll present him to Charlie." She turned to Glaudot. "Now take me to the ship."

"We ought to get started back there, Mr. Glaudot," Chandler said.

"Yes? Why?"

"But—but I don't have to tell you why! This girl is one of the most important discoveries that has ever been made. The ability to create material things ... out of nothing...."

"Show me your planet," Glaudot told Robin, ignoring the younger man. "We can talk about the spaceship later. You see, I'm an explorer and it's my job to explore new worlds." He spoke slowly, simply, as he would speak to a child. Somehow, although the girl was not a child and was quite the most astonishingly beautiful girl he had ever seen, he thought that was the right approach.

"Now wait a minute, Mr. Glaudot," Chandler protested. "We both know it's our duty to bring her to Captain Purcell."

"Maybe you think it's your duty," Glaudot told the younger man. "I don't think

it's mine. And before you run off to the ship to tell that precious captain of yours, you ought to know that you'd be dead right now if it hadn't been for me."

"You?"

"Hell, yes. Those Indians or whatever they were killed you. I asked the girl to bring you back to life."

"To bring—" echoed Chandler his mouth falling open.

"Actually, she produced a perfect copy of you. A living copy. Do you see what she offers us, Chandler? Infinite wealth from creativity out of nothing—and eternal life by copying our bodies each time we die! What do you say about your precious captain now?"

Chandler seemed confused. He shook his head, staring first at Glaudot and then at Robin. "The ship," he said. "Our duty ... the captain ..."

Glaudot snorted and told Robin: "Kill him."

"Kill him?"

"Yes. You brought him into being. Now send him out of being."

"But I can't do that. I have no further control once I make something. And besides I—I wouldn't kill a human being, even if I could."

Fear was in Chandler's eyes. "Mr. Glaudot, listen ..." he began.

"Listen, hell," Glaudot said. "I brought you back to life. I offered you a share in the greatest power the worlds have ever known. You turned it down. I'm sorry, Chandler. I'm really sorry for you. But I can't let you return to the ship, you see. Not until I learn some more about this world, not until I understand exactly what the girl's power is, and consolidate my position."

Without waiting to hear more, Chandler began to run. In three great bounds he reached the grazing roan stallion and leaped on its back, digging his heels into its flanks. The stallion moved off at a quick trot as Glaudot drew his blaster and took dead aim at Chandler's retreating back.

When he had Chandler squarely in his sights, Glaudot began to squeeze the trigger. But suddenly the trigger-housing-unit of the blaster became encumbered

with tiny vines. There were hundreds of them writhing and crawling all over the weapon and getting in the sights too so Glaudot could no longer aim. By the time he tore the vines clear, cursing savagely, the roan stallion had taken Chandler out of sight on his retreat toward the spaceship.

Glaudot whirled on Robin. "You did this!" he accused her. "You did it. Why—why?"

"You were going to kill him. You shouldn't have."

"But now you've ruined everything. Not just for me. For us, don't you see? I could have laid the world at your feet. I could have—listen! Tell me this—is there any place we can hide? Some place they won't find us if they come looking, while we work on this power of yours and see exactly what it can do and what it can't do?"

"I want to see the spaceship, please," said Robin.

"Afterwards, I promise you," Glaudot said. "Why, we can make all the spaceships we want—out of nothing. Can't we?"

"Yes," said Robin. "I guess so. But even if we hide from your friends, my friend Charlie will find us. He'll be worried about me and he'll find us. Charlie can do everything I can do, you see."

Glaudot stared at her with anger in his eyes. Then something else replaced the anger. No, he thought, Charlie couldn't do everything she could do. She was beautiful. Her half-nude body summoned desire in him. Tentatively, ready to withdraw his hand at the first indication of protest, he touched her bare shoulder. She made no response. She merely stood there, waiting for some kind of an answer from him.

"Then we'll have to hide from Charlie too. Please believe me," Glaudot said. "I'm a spaceman and you know very little about spacemen. Do you want to learn?"

"Yes. Yes, I do."

"Then take me some place even Charlie will have difficulty finding us."

"But he'll know."

"What do you mean he'll know? Don't tell me you can read one another's minds?"

"Oh, goodness, no. Nothing like that. But when we were very little I once told Charlie if ever I got mad at him I would go to hide in the country of the Cyclopes and he would never be able to find me because the Cyclopes would eat him. That was after we read about the Cyclopes in the Ulysses story in our encyclopedia. You see?"

"Cyclopes, huh? You really mean one-eyed giants?"

"Yes. We made them but they don't obey us."

"Can the two of us hide in their land? Is it far?"

"No. Very close. But I don't know if I want—"

"I'm a spaceman, aren't I? And you want to learn all about spacemen and the worlds beyond this place, don't you? Then come with me!"

"But—"

"If you say no and I go back to the spaceship we'll blast off and you'll never see spacemen again the rest of your life," threatened Glaudot.

Robin did not answer. "Well?" Glaudot snapped, as if he was quite indifferent. "Would you want that to happen?"

"No," Robin admitted after a while.

"Then let's go." They had to hurry, Glaudot knew. Riding that stallion, that incredible conjured-out-of-nothing stallion, Chandler had probably reached the spaceship by now. A few words, a few hurried explanations, and Purcell would lead an armed party out after Glaudot.

Again Robin was silent. Glaudot stood stiffly in front of her, so close he could reach out and wrap his arms about her. But this wasn't the time, he told himself. Later ... later ...

"All right," Robin said at last, her eyes looking troubled. "I'll take you to the land of Cyclopes."

They began to walk, in silence. Half an hour later, the barren terrain of rocks gave way to a verdant jungle in which the trees were quite the biggest Glaudot

had ever seen and in which even the grass and the fragrant wild flowers grew over their heads. Glaudot had never felt so small.

"Wait a minute, Chandler," Captain Purcell said. "I listened in silence to what you said. All of it, as incredible as it sounded. But you don't expect me to believe —"

"Look at the horse. Where did I get the horse, sir?"

"So there are horses on this world. So what?"

"But I saw the girl create it out of thin air!"

"Really, Chandler."

"And I saw the corpse. My corpse, Captain. Mine!"

"But hell, man. Glaudot would have come back here with the girl. He knows his obligation to civilization. He—"

"Glaudot, sir? Does he?"

Purcell scowled and said finally: "Chandler, either you and Glaudot have made the most astonishing discovery since man first domesticated his environment and so became more than a reasonably clever animal, or you're the biggest liar that ever crossed deep space."

Chandler offered his captain a pale smile. "Why don't you find out which, sir?"

"By God," said Purcell, "I will. McCreedy!" he bawled over the intercom. "Smith! Wong! I want an armed expedition of twenty-five men ready to leave the ship in half an hour."

And, exactly half an hour later, the expedition set out with Captain Purcell and Chandler leading it. Chandler went astride the roan stallion.

When Charlie and his small Indian band learned that the action had taken place to the south, where Robin had gone, they set out quickly in that direction. The further they went, the more worried Charlie became. If Robin had met with any kind of success, if she had called off the war party and established some kind of peaceful relations with the spacemen, a runner would have been sent to tell

them. But the desolate rock-strewn terrain stretched out before them as devoid of life as the Paleozoic Earth.

Charlie urged his men on relentlessly. He was a tireless hiker and since the braves lived by hunting they could match almost any pace he set. Finally Charlie saw the second Indian band ahead of them. Slinging the Mannlicher Elephant Gun, he began to run.

"Tashtu!" he called. "Tashtu!"

The Indian sprinted to him. "Lord," he said breathlessly, "one sky critter, him die. Turn out man."

"What are you talking about?" Charlie asked.

Tashtu led him to the group of braves which still clustered about Ensign Chandler's body. "Why?" Charlie demanded, horror-struck. "Why?"

Tashtu told him all that had happened. How the braves had mistaken the spacesuited man for a monster. How arrows had been fired before they had learned otherwise. How Robin had come, and gone off with the spaceman.

"To their spaceship?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, Lord. That is what they spoke of." Tashtu pointed to the top of the rampart of rock. "From there, Lord, you can see it."

Charlie scrambled up the rock. From his giddy perch on top he could see the tiny silver gleam of the spaceship—and a band of men, led by a man on horseback, approaching them. Charlie hurried down the rock, half climbing, half sliding. "They are coming," he said. "Maybe Robin's with them." He remembered what had happened last time and said: "The rest of you return to your homes. Tashtu and I will go on ahead."

"But Lord—" Tashtu began.

"Well?"

"I did not like the man. I did not trust him."

"Then why did you let Robin go?"

"Let her, Lord? But surely Robin, the Lady Robin, does not obey a mere—"

"All right, all right," Charlie said. "But all the more reason for the rest of the braves to return to their homes. We can handle this, Tashtu, you and I. I don't want any more killing."

"Yes, Lord," said Tashtu.

The Indians formed a marching column and moved off. Charlie told Tashtu what he had seen from the top of the rampart. Then he added: "Let's go and meet them."

And Charlie and Tashtu set out across the tortuous Wild Country.

"Two men coming!" Chandler cried, reining up the roan stallion.

Captain Purcell signaled his twenty-five men to halt, and their orderly double file came up short behind him. Pretty soon the two figures could be seen by all, advancing toward them across the rocks. When they were close enough, Captain Purcell hailed: "We come in peace!"

"And in peace we come!" Charlie called. A moment later he was shaking hands gravely with Captain Purcell.

"Tell the captain about—about my corpse," Chandler told Tashtu.

Charlie looked at Chandler. He had seen the dead man. "Did Robin make you?" he asked in surprise. "We never brought the dead to life before."

"Can you really do it?" Purcell demanded.

"No, not really. But we can copy perfectly—and the copies live."

"You see?" Chandler demanded triumphantly.

Captain Purcell said: "Show me."

Charlie created a brother to the roan stallion. Captain Purcell gawked. The one example sufficed and he did not ask for more as Glaudot had done.

"Where's Robin?" Charlie asked. "At the ship?"

Chandler shook his head. "Glaudot went off with her."

"But I thought he was on the ship!"

"He deserted," Chandler said. "With the girl. He wants her. He wants her power for himself."

Charlie moved very quickly. He swung in front of Chandler and grabbed his tunic-front, bunching it, ripping it and all but dragging Chandler clear off his feet before a hand could be raised to stop him. "Where did they go?" he asked in a terrible voice. "Where are they? Take me to them."

"But I don't—don't know!" Chandler protested, trying without success to break free.

It was Captain Purcell who came forward and firmly took Charlie's arm, pulling him clear of Chandler. "Remember," he said. "In peace. In peace."

Charlie stood with his hands at his sides. His face was white and strained. "The girl," he said.

"We all want to find out where Glaudot took her," Captain Purcell said. "We're going to help you. Tell me: could the girl have gone willingly with Glaudot? To share his mad dream of power, perhaps?"

"Robin?" Charlie cried. "Never!"

"Please, lad," Captain Purcell said. "I want you to think. I want you to consider everything. You and this girl of yours may have almost godlike powers, but you've spent your lives on an uncivilized world and well—frankly—couldn't a sophisticated man like Glaudot turn the girl's head? Couldn't he confuse her into going off with him, at least temporarily? And, assuming, he did, he doesn't know this world. He's aware of that. He'd know we'd be coming after him. Perhaps the girl would tell him about you. Tell me, man—where would the girl go if she didn't want you to find her? Is there such a place? Before you answer, I want you to know that what we do here may be far graver than you think. It is not merely the safety of one girl we have to consider—but no, you wouldn't understand ..."

"You mean," Charlie asked, "if this man Glaudot somehow convinces Robin to use her power as he tells her, he might want to take over all of Crimson?"

"Do you mean this world? Is it called Crimson? Yes—and more than that. There's no telling how far a man like Glaudot could go with such power. And with the ability to create all the armament and all the deadly weapons he needed,

and all the missiles to carry those weapons, he might challenge the entire galaxy—and win!"

The words were strange to Charlie. He only understood them vaguely. Now Robin, she would understand, he thought. Robin was always more interested in things like that, Robin who almost knew their encyclopedia by heart, Robin ...

"Listen," he said. "Listen. We created all the life on this world. We made Greeks and Royal Navymen and Ministers and Russians and Congressmen and everything we knew or somehow had heard about or had read in our book. We get along fine with all of them, except ..."

"Yes," Captain Purcell prompted. "Go on, go on!"

"No, she'd never go there. She was always afraid of them."

"Where, man? Where?"

"No. Robin wouldn't. She just wouldn't."

It was not hot in Wild Country, but sweat trickled down Purcell's face while he waited for Charlie's answer.

"Show me!" cried Glaudot in rapture. "Show me! Show me! Show me!"

He stood with Robin in a little glade in the Land of the Cyclopes. About them were heaped all the treasures Glaudot had suddenly demanded. He did not quite know why. He felt his iron control slipping and permitted it to slip now, for once he got this wild desire from his system, he knew only his untroubled iron will would be left, and with it—and the girl—he might conquer the galaxy.

Heaped about them were jewels and precious metals and deadly weapons, all of which Robin had summoned into being at Glaudot's orders, while Glaudot smiled at her. It was almost a frightening smile. She was even a little sorry she had come away with him, but she could always go back, couldn't she? She wasn't shackled to this strange man from space, was she? And the way he looked at her, the desire she saw in his eyes, that was frightening too. She did not know how to cope with it. Oh, she could create a duplicate Charlie, for example. Charlie would know what to do. Charlie would help her. Charlie hadn't read the book as she had read it, but Charlie was more practical. Still, what would they do with the duplicate Charlie afterwards? You couldn't uncreate something ...

"A spaceship," Glaudot said suddenly. "Can you create a spaceship out of nothing?"

Robin nodded slowly. "I can. Yes, I can. It tells all about spaceships in the book. But I don't know if I want to."

Glaudot let it pass. There was no hurry. He was thinking about the future, though. If Purcell opposed him, as Purcell would, and managed to escape in the exploration ship, Glaudot would need a ship to leave this world ...

"Why not?" he asked, his voice quite calm now, the mania which had seized him under control now, and only his iron purpose motivating him.

"I—I don't know. You have one spaceship. I guess that's why. What do you need another one for?"

"It was just a thought," said Glaudot. "It doesn't matter." He kneeled near the heaps of sun-dazzled jewels. He let them trickle through his fingers. No, the desire wasn't gone yet. It was still fighting with his will. And, since he knew his will could win at any time, it pleased him to give his desire free rein.

He scooped up a handful of jewels. He found a necklace and came close to Robin and dropped it over her head. The pearls were very white against her sun-

tanned skin. The pearl pendant hung almost to the start of the dusky valley which cleaved her breasts delightfully and disappeared with the tanned swell of flesh on either side into the gold-mesh halter. Glaudot fingered the pendant. His fingers touched flesh. Abruptly he drew the surprised Robin to him and kissed her lips hungrily.

For a moment she remained passive. She neither returned his ardor nor fought it. But when his hands began to stroke her back she pulled away from him and stood there looking at him. She took the necklace off and threw it at his feet.

"I don't want that any more," she said. "Why did you do—what you did?"

He felt the fire in his veins. He willed it to subside. He needed his control now. All of it. But this girl, in the full flower of her youth ... No, she was not a girl, not to Glaudot. He must not think of her as a girl. She was power. Power. The power was his—if he didn't alienate the girl.

"We do such as that on my world," he said. "It is a kind of homage to loveliness. I hope you didn't mind."

"I—it was strange. With Charlie sometimes I hope—but with Charlie it is ... different. Please don't touch me again. Please promise me that."

Glaudot shrugged. "If you wish, my dear child, if you wish...."

The dual desire was gone now, truly gone. He knew that. For his will had been threatened, more by his own foolish desire than by this innocent girl. He had to think. Clearly. More clearly than he had ever thought before. He needed the girl as an ally. Not as a slave. She had to be willing. She had to co-operate. Give her a warped picture of the rest of the galaxy? Convince her its governments were evil, totalitarian, when in reality they were democratic? Convince her that he alone, given unlimited power, could right the wrongs of a thousand worlds? She was naive enough for that sort of approach, he thought. Besides, it would strike her as something like creation—moral creation, perhaps. And creation she would understand. Then, with her as his partner, he could quickly build a war machine which the combined might of the galaxy couldn't stand against. And that, he suddenly realized, would even include an unlimited number of soldiers for occupation and policing duties. This power would be unparalleled.

"I have something I want to tell you about," he said. "It will take a long time and

we must be undisturbed, which is why I asked you to bring me here."

"What is it you want to tell me?"

Before Glaufdot could answer, they heard a crashing, rending sound not too far off in the woods. It sounded to Glaufdot exactly as if trees were being uprooted, boulders strewn carelessly.

"Cyclopes!" Robin screamed in terror, and began to run.

Glaufdot ran after her, stumbling, picking himself up, hurtling in pursuit. He couldn't let her get away. He had to follow her ...

Nothing living, he told himself as he ran, could uproot those huge trees. Of course, there were the saplings, but even the saplings were the size of full-grown oaks and maples on far Earth.

Something roared behind him. The sound was pitched almost too low for human ears. He whirled. The earth shook, great clods of it flying. Bare tree roots suddenly appeared, and a young tree the size of a towering oak was lifted skyward.

Behind it, brandishing it and then hurling it away, was a naked man whose head towered impossibly a hundred and fifty feet into the air. Trembling, awestruck, Glaufdot looked up at the great savage face. Wild hair streaming, filthy beard matted with dirt and tree-branches, it was the most ferocious face Glaufdot had ever seen.

And it had only one eye, one enormous eye in the middle of its head. But an eye three feet across!

"A Cyclops!" Robin screamed again.

A moment later the creature stooped and with a scooping motion of its great right hand picked up the two tiny creatures on the forest floor beneath it. Then it ran, uprooting oak-sized saplings, back toward the rocky hillside where it dwelled, after the Cyclopes of old on which Robin and Charlie had naively patterned it, in a cave overlooking the sea.

"Where, man? Where?" Captain Purcell demanded.

"I don't know," Charlie said. "I really don't think she would. You see, she always

threatened she'd go there if we ever had a fight, but she was usually half-joking. She knows it's dangerous—"

"But where? Don't you know a drowning man has to grasp at straws? Haven't I gotten it across to you—the whole galaxy may be in danger!"

Charlie sighed. "I don't understand much of your galaxy. Robin knows the encyclopedia—she would understand. And I—I only want to know Robin is safe." He took a deep breath and said: "She always threatened to go to the Land of the Cyclopes."

"Then take us there at once," Captain Purcell said....

If he shouted and cried now, he would go insane. He knew that. He tried to hold his fear in check. He was being swung pendulum-like in an enormous hand as the one-eyed giant loped along. Robin shared the clenched-fist prison with him. Her hair streamed in the wind as the huge arm swung the huge hand in time with the giant's enormous strides.

"Does it eat people?" he managed to ask Robin. He had to shout because the wind created by the creature's movement was considerable. The ground spun giddily far, far below them, whirling patches of green, of yellow, of brown.

"We made them to eat people. Like in the book. We were just children. It seemed—it seemed so thrilling."

The Cyclops loped along, uprooting saplings. After a while it began to climb a rocky slope and from the heights Glaudot could see the shores of an unknown sea. Then the Cyclops reached a cave entrance and rolled aside a huge boulder and took his prisoners within.

Glaudot heard the bleating of sheep.

"Why, it's a fortune in jewels!" Captain Purcell exclaimed. They had found the glade in the forest, where Robin had created a king's ransom for Glaudot. The men gathered around, many of them struck dumb by the sight of all this wealth.

Charlie said: "Captain, look."

Purcell went over to him and saw the wide swathe cut through the forest and

curving out of sight. "What went through there?" he gasped.

"A Cyclops," Charlie said grimly. "A Cyclops has them. Captain, we've got to hurry. Listen, there are two horses now. I could create horses for all of us, but all these men coming up would probably be seen by the Cyclops. You come on foot with your men. Let one of them come with me on the stallions." As he spoke Charlie unslung the Mannlicher and put it down.

"Oh, you want our more modern weapons?" Purcell asked.

Charlie shook his head. "For fun, Robin and I made the Cyclopes invulnerable to any kind of attack except the kind mentioned in the encyclopedia—putting out their single eye with a stake. To protect all the other people we created, we made the Cyclopes so they'd never want to leave their homeland. So if we can get Robin and your man Glaudot free, they'll be safe. Now, who's the volunteer?"

"I'm already on horseback," Chandler said. Charlie nodded and mounted the second roan stallion.

"My men will be coming as fast as they can march," Captain Purcell said.

Charlie nodded. He did not bother to tell the captain that a Cyclops could cover in a few minutes ground a marching party could not hope to cover in as many hours. He set off at a swift gallop with Chandler.

"Will he eat us now?" said Glaudot. Strangely, he was not afraid. The unexpected nature of their impending demise he almost found amusing.

Robin shook her head. "I don't think so. He'll probably drink himself to sleep. We made the Cyclopes great drunkards."

The Cyclops, his tree-trunk sized walking stick leaning against the wall, was reclining and drinking from a huge bowl of wine. The cave was torchlit. Seventy or eighty sheep milled about, settling for the night after three of their number had supplied a meal for the giant, who had eaten them raw.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" demanded Glaudot, whose dreams of galactic conquest were fading before the spectre of being eaten alive.

"Reserve your strength until he sleeps," Robin said. "Of course there's something we can do."

"Yes? What?"

"His walking stick. You see the end comes almost to a point? We harden it in the fire—and put his eye out. Then, in the morning, when he unrolls the stone from the cave-entrance and blindly leads his flock out, we hide among the sheep and make our escape. At least that's how it happens in the encyclopedia."

Glaudot swallowed hard. He had never had a great deal of physical courage....

Just then they heard a great fluttering, groaning sound. Robin said: "You see, he's asleep. He's snoring."

"I—I don't think I could possibly—"

"He's liable to want us for breakfast. Come on."

They got up swiftly and silently, and crept to the walking stick. It was the size of a young tree. It would be heavy, perhaps too heavy for them to handle.

"Easy now," Robin said. She nimbly climbed the ledges on the cave-wall and tipped the great walking stick, then leaped down and grabbed the front end as Glaudot got a grip on the rear of the big pole.

"Heavy," Glaudot said.

"But not too heavy, I—I think."

"Try to lift it," said Glaudot.

They tried. Together they could barely get it overhead.

"Try to poke it at something," Glaudot said.

They could not. Robin sighed. They put it down slowly, quietly. It would take more than the two of them. It would take them and two or three more men to do the job.

"We wait," Glaudot said bleakly.

Robin stared up in frustration at the smoke hole, through which smoke from the Cyclops's fire poured out into the gathering night. It was hopelessly over their head, although help could reach them through it from the outside. But how could they possibly expect help to come...?

"We wait," Glaudot said again, hopelessly.

"For breakfast," Robin said.

Glaudot broke suddenly. "I don't want to die!" he cried. "I don't want to die ..."

The feeblest of Crimson's three suns came over the horizon, lighting the landscape with the illumination of three or four full moons on Earth.

"I told you I smelled smoke!" Charlie cried, pointing triumphantly at the thin tendril of smoke that rose through the cooling air against the weak sunlight.

"Is it a campfire?" Chandler asked.

"Chimney hole, probably. Come on."

They left the two stallions grazing at the base of the rocky escarpment. They began to climb. Once Chandler stumbled and went sliding down the rocky slope, but Charlie caught his arm, all but wrenching it from the socket. Charlie thought: we have to hurry. Their lives may depend on it. Already we may be too late....

The smoke from the chimney hole was acrid. It was very strong now. Suddenly Charlie could feel the slightly increased slope of the rocks. The slope was precipitous now, almost perpendicular.

"I can't—can't go much further!" Chandler groaned.

"We've got to, man. We've got to."

"He's waking," said Robin.

Glaudot had broken completely. The confident would-be conqueror was reduced to trembling and whining now. "M-maybe he's hungry. Oh, God, maybe he's hungry ..."

But the Cyclops only turned over in its sleep and began to snore again. The fire had burned low. The sheep were resting. Robin thought of Charlie, probably many miles away. There would be a late moonrise tonight, she thought. They often spoke of the feeblest of Crimson's three suns as the moon, although it really wasn't. Then dawn would come. If the Cyclops were hungry and wanted a change in diet ...

"But you'll choke to death going down there," Chandler protested.

"It's only a chimney hole. Nobody's going to choke to death."

"Can you see down it?"

"No. Too much smoke."

"Then how do you know how far we'll have to fall?"

"I don't. I'll have to take the chance. You don't have to, though."

"I'll go where you go. That's what I volunteered for."

"Good. It's almost morning, so the fire's probably almost burned down from now. If you land in the embers, jump aside quickly. You understand?"

"Yes," Chandler said.

Without another word, Charlie suddenly lowered himself into the smoke and let go.

Dim fiery light lit the cave. He alighted in embers and quickly jumped clear. Embers flew. A ram bleated. Charlie saw the enormous sleeping bulk of the Cyclops against one wall of the cave. He heard something behind him, and whirled. It was Chandler. More sparks flew. The sheep bleated again, louder this time.

Robin and a spaceman who was probably Glaudot came toward them. There was amazement on Robin's face. Glaudot looked like a child in the grip of terror he couldn't quite understand.

Charlie held Robin close for a moment. "Quiet," he whispered. "Listen."

The slight disturbance had bothered the Cyclops. He was half awake. He made noises with his lips. One great arm lifted and fell. It could have crushed the four of them.

"There's a stake," Robin said. "Just like in the book."

They got it and took it to the embers of the fire between them. Glaudot, who brought up the rear, dragged his end, the wood scraping on the rocky floor.

"Lift it up," Charlie said.

Glaudot giggled and then began to cry. He was hysterical. "The three of us?" Charlie asked.

"I don't know," Robin said.

Glaudot laughed hysterically. The Cyclops stirred. That made up Charlie's mind. He placed his end of the stake carefully on the floor and went back to Glaudot. He struck Glaudot neatly and precisely on the point of the jaw and Glaudot collapsed in his arms.

Then they returned with the stake to the fire. Charlie scraped and pushed the embers together with a charcoal log. They began to toast the point of the stake.

"We've got to hurry," Robin said.

"The skin of his eyelid is like armor plate," Charlie told her. "We've got to make sure it doesn't turn the point aside."

The flock stirred and began to grow more lively. It was now dawn outside. The Cyclops yawned in his sleep and stretched out an arm the size of an oak tree.

"Hurry!" Robin said urgently.

The Cyclops rolled over, its face to the wall.

"The eye!" Charlie groaned. "We'll never be able to reach the eye now."

They kept at their work, though. There was nothing else they could do. The surface wood of the big stake was taking on a dull cherry-red color. Finally Charlie said: "That's enough, I guess."

The Cyclops rolled over again. They were in luck, Charlie thought, but changed his mind immediately. The Cyclops sat up, its eye blinking sleepily. It yawned and stretched mightily, then stared stupidly for a few moments at the flock of sheep. Charlie and the others stood frozen, not daring to move. The Cyclops brushed at the sheep with its hand, and two of them crashed with bone-crushing thuds and death-rattle bleats against the wall. The Cyclops glared stupidly about, its one great eye squinting. Clearly, it was looking for something else to eat. Not sheep. People ...

It got down on hands and knees and groped on the floor. The arm swept out. The

hand flashed ponderously by, missing Robin by only a few feet. The Cyclops advanced on its knees, searching, its mouth slavering now. It was hungry and soon it would eat ...

The hand swept by again, caught a sheep. The hand lifted, the sheep bleated, the jaws crunched once and the sheep disappeared. The Cyclops wiped a trace of blood from its lips. The hand came down again, closer ...

"The stake!" Charlie whispered fiercely.

They brought it up horizontally. Charlie stood just behind the point, Robin behind him, Chandler in the rear. They jabbed with the stake as the Cyclops's hand swept along the floor again. The Cyclops roared with pain and rage and beat both mighty hands on the rocky floor, attempting to crush its tormentors.

Just then Glaudot regained consciousness and stood up groggily. "Don't move!" Charlie warned, taking the chance of revealing their own position in an attempt to save Glaudot's life.

But Glaudot, seeing the huge creature so close, began to run. It was like running on a treadmill. He ran and he ran and after a while the Cyclops reached down and plucked him off the floor. He screamed thinly. There was the same crunching as before—and no Glaudot ...

Now the Cyclops, its appetite whetted, searched the floor in a frenzy of earnest on hands and knees. The great head swung low, close to the floor, the single eye stared myopically. Once the huge hand clubbed the rock so close to them that Charlie could feel the floor shaking. They retreated slowly toward the far wall of the cave, the monster following relentlessly. They still held the heavy stake between them but had not yet gathered either the strength or the courage for their one try. If they failed—

They had backed up as far as they could. The wall was behind them. The monster came on, its head low, its nose practically scraping the ground. It swept the floor with a giant hand, a fingertip barely touching Charlie and almost knocking him senseless. He shook his head and took deep breaths until his strength returned.

"Now," he said, as the hand began its swinging arc again.

They ran forward toward the creature's single eye with the stake.

Charlie barely remembered the contact, or the bath of eye-fluid and blood which followed, or the wild roaring of the brute creature, or its frantic charging back and forth, blinded, across the cave, while the flock bleated and stampeded. After a while the crazed Cyclops ran to the cave entrance and shouldered the great door-rock aside, rushing out into the day.

It went tearing down the slope and did not stop until, battered and bleeding, it reached the sea. It stood on the narrow strand of beach for a moment, scooping great handfuls of water for its stricken eye. Then it plunged into the surf.

They went outside and watched it. They made their way down the slope while it advanced into the sea. Finally only the great head remained above the waves.

They reached the shore.

The Cyclops was gone.

Moments later, Captain Purcell and the others joined them.

"Then you mean you won't come back to Earth with us?" Purcell asked later, in the spaceship.

"Not if all you say about this world is true," Charlie said. "We're needed here."

"Yes," Purcell agreed. "With your help, the galaxy could be made into a universe of plenty for everyone."

"Besides," said Robin. "We'll have to think of training children to take over after we're gone." She looked at Charlie. She blushed. "Such as our own," she said, very quickly, and added: "You can marry us, can't you, Captain?"

Purcell beamed, and nodded, and did so.

Later, Charlie said: "It isn't only that we're needed here, is it, darling?"

Robin shook her head. "We like it here," she said.

THE END

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