

WORLD OF A THOUSAND MOONS *by* EDMOND HAMILTON

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STORIES



WARRIOR OF THE DAWN

By HOWARD BROWNE

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MONSOONS OF DEATH

By GERALD VANCE

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Dreadful weaving shapes slithered through the storm toward him

Ward Harrison got himself into a barrel of trouble when he accepted a job at the Martian Observation Station. There were fearful "things" on Mars....

The gleaming insignia stripes on Lieutenant Ward Harrison's broad shoulders were less than two days old when he received his first assignment.

"Lieutenant Harrison," his commanding officer said, glancing from the papers he held in his hands to the young man who stood at attention before his desk, "this will be your first touch of action since you were commissioned. A lot depends on how you handle yourself."

"Yes sir," Ward answered. He straightened his already poker-straight spine. His face was young and serious and intent. There was a blaze of zeal in his blue eyes and grimness in the tightness of his jaw. But a lock of blonde hair that fell over his forehead lent an incongruously boyish cast to his grimly set features.

His commander, a Planetary Colonel, with thirty years of void experience behind him, smiled slightly and looked down at the papers in his hands again.

"Your training record has been excellent, Harrison," he said, "and I am gratified to note that you apparently realize the seriousness of our work." He leaned back in his chair, looked up at the young Lieutenant. "It took science hundreds of years to lick the problem of crossing the void of space to the outer planets. Now, that that much has been accomplished, the task of exploring and possibly

developing and colonizing those planets is ahead of us. The most important part of that work is up to men like you, Lieutenant Harrison. You are attached to the meteorology department with the job of doing the preliminary analysis and exploration on the various planets whose raw materials are essential to Earth. Never for a minute underestimate the importance of that work."

Ward cleared his throat. "I won't sir."

"Good. There are other branches of the service that might seem more glamorous, but all of them are dependent on your research and findings. Without meteorological survey the entire network of space stations we have established would have been impossible. And the need today for accurate and thorough research on atmospheric conditions in the Universe is greater than ever before. Always keep that in mind."

"I will, sir," Ward answered.

"Good," the colonel said. He ran a heavy hand through his silver-dusted hair and then picked up again the sheaf of papers from his desk.

"Your first assignment is to one of our established observation stations on Mars," he said.



Ward kept his face woodenly expressionless; but it was hard to conceal his disappointment. He wanted adventure and danger. He wanted to prove his courage and loyalty on some perilous journey to an uncharted, unexplored area, and there was little hope for such action on an established base.

"The station to which you are being sent," the colonel went on, "was established three years ago by the man who is still in command there, a civilian by the name of Thomas Halliday. He is alone there, now. His assistant died about six months ago. You will act as Halliday's assistant in atmospheric experimentation and in the collection of meteorologic data. Despite the fact that he is a civilian you will take your orders from him. Is that much clear?"

"Yes," Ward said. He had to fight to keep the bitterness he was feeling from showing in his voice. He had been prepared for anything, but this was too much to accept cheerfully. Serving on a dull, one-man base, under the domination of a

civilian, who had probably been rejected by the regular service for timidity or incompetence, was a bitter pill to swallow. Ward found a real, though illogical, resentment welling in him. And the object of this resentment was Thomas Halliday.

"Thomas Halliday," the colonel said, "is a very careful, painstaking meteorologist. He is completely dependable and reliable. The information he has sent us to date is accurate and thorough. Moreover he is extremely cautious." The colonel paused and frowned and his thick strong fingers drummed irritably on the top of his desk.

"Damn it!" he said with sudden explosive impatience. "Sometimes I think the man is too cautious. He's been there three years now and he still hasn't sent us a complete report on conditions there. Caution and care are fine qualities but, like all things, they can be overdone. We're planning on erecting a large special base in his locality when we finally get all the information. But we can't make a move until Halliday comes through."

"Is there any reason why the research might have been delayed?" Ward asked.

The colonel shook his head.

"Not as far as we know. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not damning any man until I know all the facts. I'm not a pot-bellied, arm-chair admiral. I've been in the void myself long enough to realize that you can't pass judgment on a man's work until you've actually seen the situation he's up against. You can't get the complete picture from a three hundred word report. There may be other factors to consider that we here don't know about. But Halliday's data isn't coming in fast enough and I'm taking steps to get at the bottom of the trouble. I'm sending you there, Harrison, because your record indicates that you're a go-getter. Maybe what Halliday needs is a little more recklessness, a little more impulsiveness and a lot less caution. I'm hoping that you will act as a spur to Halliday. Think you're up to the job?"

Ward's eyes were flashing with excitement. His bitter disappointment had vanished.

"I'll do my absolute best, sir," he said. The colonel's words had crystallized his swiftly-formed animosity for this Thomas Halliday. The man was obviously a timid creature without sufficient guts to do a man's job. Ward felt an itching impatience to get started on this assignment. He wanted to meet Thomas

Halliday. He was very anxious to begin his new duties as a spur to the man.

"Halliday hasn't given us much information about what he's discovered on that section of Mars," the colonel said. "He's confined his reports exclusively to atmospheric data. In his first report he mentioned that the area was inhabited and I got the impression that he hadn't found the natives particularly friendly. But since he hasn't mentioned them since, I gather that he hasn't had any trouble with them...."

"I guess that's about all, Lieutenant. This is an important job. And if you find any reason for Halliday's delay in getting that job done, I want you to flash me a message immediately. I'm putting a lot of confidence in you, young man, but I don't think it's misplaced."

The colonel stood up and extended his hand.

"Good luck, son."

Ward took the older man's hand in a firm grip.

"Thank you, sir. I'll do everything I can to justify your confidence in me."

He saluted, right-about-faced smartly and strode toward the door. The colonel followed his straight young back with his eyes and there was a smile of pride on his face. Lieutenant Ward Harrison, in the opinion of the colonel, was definitely an excellent addition to the forces of Earth.

Lieutenant Ward Harrison thought so himself, but he would have suffered his tongue to be torn out before admitting it.



Three days later, at 24:40 inter-Stellar time, Ward Harrison arrived at the Earth observation base located in the uncharted, inaccessible area on the southern plane of the planet, Mars.

As he flashed into the atmosphere of the planet he cut the rear propulsion rockets of his slim single-seater and prepared to land. He sighted the base's small cluster of buildings and the mooring tower in his fore visi-screen and he made quick rapid adjustments on his instrument panel as his slender ship slanted toward them in a screaming dive....

When the nose of his ship made contact with a mooring socket, he set all instruments at zero. He climbed to his feet and stretched wearily. Then he walked to the sliding side door of the ship, released the air lock and stepped out onto the ramp that flanked the mooring tower.

From this position, some two hundred feet above the ground, he had his first look at the terrain of Mars. Great gray wastelands spread endlessly in all four directions and the only break in this monotony was a low ridge of hills on the far-distant eastern horizon.

Ward shivered slightly. He hadn't been prepared for anything this depressing. The small group of squat buildings beneath him looked like tiny objects adrift in a vast, terrible gray sea.

A man appeared at the door of the central building and Ward felt an idiotic sensation of relief at the sight of a human, moving figure in that dead, silent, gray terrain.

The man waved to Ward and walked from the doorway toward the base of the mooring tower.

Ward descended to the ground in the small cage of the tower elevator. He stepped out onto the soft, flaky soil of Mars as the man he had seen from above came up to the tower.

"Lieutenant Harrison reporting for duty, sir," he said. He saluted and noticed with a certain satisfaction the other's embarrassment at this military recognition which he didn't deserve.

"My name is Halliday," the man said, after a short awkward pause. He extended his hand. "I'm certainly glad to have you here, Lieutenant."

As Ward shook hands, he appraised the man carefully, and found nothing in his examination to change his previously acquired opinion.

Thomas Halliday was small and stooped, with sallow features and nervously shifting eyes, which looked startlingly large behind thick strong glasses. His hair was thin and faded brown in color. There was a peculiar tight look about his mouth and jaw, as if he were in a continual state of faint exasperation.

This, thought Ward, was the man who had been holding up the development of this area for three years. And, looking at him, it was easy to see why.

Ward had his bag in his hand. Halliday, noticing it, asked, "Did you bring any arms with you?"

Ward patted the raytube in the smart military holster at his hip.

"Just this," he said. He added drily, "Expecting trouble?"

"No," Halliday answered. His eyes shifted from Ward's and swept about in a long inspection of the vast, sprawling, deserted terrain that stretched away on all four sides like a boundless ocean.

"But," he added, "it's when you're not expecting trouble that you're most likely to run into it."



Ward smiled to himself as he followed Halliday's thin stooped figure to the main building, a squat solid structure of heavy *duralloy* steel, with only one door and no windows at all.

The man was obviously a neurotic mass of nerves, or else he was indulging in a bit of melodrama to impress his new assistant.

Halliday stepped aside at the door and Ward preceded him into the hot, sparsely furnished room. Halliday followed him, closing the door behind him and setting the mechanism of a powerful automatic lock before turning to Ward with an apologetic little smile.

"You'll find it rather cramped at first," he said. "I'll sleep out here and you can use the storeroom as a bedroom. That's all the living quarters we have, excepting the kitchen, but I'm sure we'll manage."

Ward set his grip down and glanced about at the chart-covered walls, the plain, badly scuffed furniture and he was not particularly enthused at the prospect of being cooped up in this hot little oven of a room with Halliday.

"What about the other buildings?" he asked. "Surely there'd be room there for me to bunk."

"We use those building for equipment," Halliday said. "And besides, this building is safer."

Ward glanced at the little man with a faint, ironic smile.

"Is there something here to be afraid of?" His tone was blandly polite, but he could not completely conceal an undercurrent of contempt.

"I don't mean to alarm you, Lieutenant," Halliday said, "but this area of Mars is not quite the safest place in the universe." He removed his thick glasses with a nervous little gesture and smiled uncertainly at Ward. "I really think it wiser for you to sleep here."

"Unless that's an order," Ward said, "I'd rather sleep in comfort in one of the other buildings and take my chances on your bogy-men catching me."

Halliday replaced his glasses. He was no longer smiling.

"I'm afraid, Lieutenant, you must consider it as an order."

He turned slowly and re-checked the huge gleaming lock on the door, then walked to a littered, dusty desk in one corner of the room and sat down. It was obvious that the discussion was ended.

Ward shrugged and carried his grip into a small windowless storeroom that was directly off the main room of the small structure. There were bales of supplies, a cot and a stool. A vague musty odor permeated the air. He tossed his grip onto the cot, stripped off his tunic and walked back into the room where Halliday was seated at his desk.

Halliday looked up with a smile and removed his glasses with a characteristic nervous movement of his thin hands.

"Not exactly the choicest accommodations, eh?" he said, in an attempt at heartiness, which struck Ward as being almost pathetic.

"I'll get by," Ward said. He loosened the collar of his shirt and glanced at the massive steel door, closed and tightly locked. "Any objection to letting in a little air?" he asked. "It's pretty close in here."



Halliday smiled and his eyes flicked to the closed door. He put his glasses on again and spent quite a time adjusting them to his thin nose.

"I'm afraid we'll have to put up with the closeness," he said.

Ward sighed and sat down in a chair facing Halliday.

"You're afraid of something," he said bluntly. "Supposing you tell me about it."

"As a matter of fact, I was meaning to," Halliday said. "You see, on this section we're pretty well isolated from the rest of the Earth stations on Mars. We receive all supplies and mail by a direct materialization unit. No space craft puts in here. We're here all alone and if anything happened to us all the data and work that has been compiled might be lost."

As Halliday removed his glasses again with a quick aimless gesture, Ward thought, "A lot you care about the records and data. It's your skin you want to save."

Halliday coughed and replaced his glasses.

"This area is inhabited by a species of creature which I do not believe has been classified. I do not know if they are human or if they possess intelligence. I do not even know if they are 'alive' in the sense that we speak of life. Possibly their energy is of electrical or carboniferous origin, or it could be even vegetable in nature. As you see I know little enough about these neighbors of ours, but I do know that they are dangerous. They resent the work that is being done here." Halliday frowned and twisted a pencil in his hands. "I'm not even sure of that. Possibly they are without rational motivation at all. It may be that they are merely moved to action by the sight of another object in motion. But whatever their reason, they have been very troublesome. That, really, is all I know about them. And that is the reason that I exercise such care. I have a small periscope installed on the roof and before I unlock the door I study the entire surrounding terrain to be sure there are no Raspers in sight."

"Why do you call them Raspers?" Ward asked.

"Because of a peculiar sound that seems to emanate from them," Halliday explained. "My former assistant and I had to call them something and Raspers seemed as logical as anything else."

"Have you ever seen one of these—er—Raspers?" Ward asked.

"I'm not sure," Halliday said thoughtfully. He removed his glasses again. "I've had two brushes with them, but I'm not sure that I saw them distinctly either

time. Possibly the picture that came to my mind, later, was supplied by my imagination. But I know that there is something very repellent and fearsome about them. I *felt* that much."

Ward crossed his legs and lit a cigarette casually.

"Can these things be killed?" he asked.

"I don't know," Halliday answered. "The two chances I had I was too scared to find out."

Ward felt a cold anger against this man growing in him. This man had been entrusted with the task of surveying the atmospheric conditions of this area—a vital, desperately necessary job—and he was dawdling along, timidly hugging the cover of this fortress because of a stupid, half-imaginary fear of the natives of the area. He felt his cheeks growing hot.

"We can't stay cooped up here indefinitely," he said. "How about the work we're supposed to be doing. Or does that bother you?"



Halliday looked at him queerly and then dropped his eyes. He fiddled nervously with his glasses.

Ward suddenly found the gesture maddening.

"For Pete's sake!" he exploded. "Leave 'em on, or leave 'em off, one or the other. That's apparently your only job here, taking those damn glasses off and putting them back on again."

"I'm sorry," Halliday said quickly, apologetically. "It's just a habit I guess. It's a little something to break the nervous tension of being here all alone, thinking...."

His voice trailed off and his hand moved nervously toward his glasses and then fell back limply in his lap.

"About the work here," he said in a mild, controlled voice, "we are forced to work on a definitely limited schedule. I have field apparatus located at points several miles distant from here. But we can't venture out to take the necessary readings until the weather is propitious."

"What's the weather got to do with our taking readings?" Ward demanded.

"Simply this: There are certain periods of intense precipitation on this area of Mars. These periods are accompanied by high velocity winds. The atmospheric disturbance reaches monsoon proportions. During such periods, for some reason, the Raspers are exceptionally active. Something in the nature of the monsoon reacts on them with very savage results. They seem to feed on the electric disturbances in the atmosphere. They go wild during these changes in the weather and search for any moving thing to destroy. In some manner they are able to cover enormous distances during the monsoon and they can travel with incredible speed. When a monsoon is threatening I never leave the station."

Ward listened in growing irritation to this explanation.

"How often do you have monsoons here?" he demanded.

"Unfortunately, quite often," Halliday answered. "All of my instruments indicate now that one is brewing. I haven't been able to do more than a few hours of work in the last two months. I've been waiting for the weather to break, but so far it hasn't."

"Do you mean to tell me," Ward said incredulously, "that you've been sitting here, twiddling your thumbs for the past two months because you're afraid to take a chance on a wind blowing up?"

"That is exactly what I mean," Halliday said. "But it isn't the wind I'm afraid of. It's the things that come with the wind that make any field work impossible. I've learned a few things about the Raspers in my three years and one is that it doesn't pay to give them a chance. That's all they need. That's all they're waiting for."

Ward stood up impatiently and jammed his fists into his pockets. It took all of his self control not to let his anger and contempt for the man explode in roaring fury.

"I can't understand your attitude," he said at last, through tight lips. "I'm green and new here. I don't know anything about the set-up except what you've told me. But I know from your own admission that you've never seen these things you're so mortally afraid of, you've never stood up to them and given them a taste of ray juice to think about, you don't really know anything about them, except that you're terrified of the very thought of them. That isn't a reasonable attitude. Only one kind of man thinks that way, and that's a man without a touch

of starch in his backbone, or a bit of honest-to-goodness guts in his make-up. If you want to hug this place like a scared school-girl that's all right, but I'll be double-damned if I'm going to let any superstitious nonsense keep me from doing the job I was sent here to do."

"That is a very brave speech, Lieutenant," Halliday said, "and I admire you for it. But you are going to do as I say in spite of your own opinions. We will stay here and take no unnecessary chances until our instruments indicate that the monsoon weather has passed. That is an order."



Ward choked back his wrath. He glared at Halliday for an instant, then wheeled and strode into the small storeroom that was to serve as his sleeping quarters. He banged the door shut and sat down on the edge of the cot, his fingers opening and closing nervously.

He wasn't sure just what he'd do, but he didn't intend to stand for Halliday's craven policy of hiding in a locked room, instead of doing the work his country expected him to do. Halliday was a psychopathic case; his mind was full of a hundred and one imagined horrors and they kept him from doing his job. There was little wonder that he had been three years attempting to compile the information that should have been gathered in three months.

The man was so terrified of imagined dangers that he was helpless to act. Ward felt a moment of pity for him, the pity the brave invariably feel for the weak and cowardly. But he also felt a cold and bitter contempt for the man who had allowed his own fear and timidity to hold up the important work of accumulating data on this section of the planet. If he wasn't man enough to do the job, he should have at least been man enough to admit it.

Ward decided that the next day he'd have the thing out. He undressed slowly and stretched out on the narrow cot, but sleep was a long time in coming.

When he stepped from his room the next day he saw that Halliday was standing in the doorway gazing out over the dull gray Martian landscape.

"Aren't you taking quite a chance?" he asked, with heavy sarcasm.

Halliday ignored the gibe. "No. I made a careful check before I released the door

lock and opened up. Did you sleep well?"

"Fair," Ward said. "How can you tell the days and nights here? Is there ever any change in the sky?"

Halliday shook his head. "Sometimes it gets a little darker, sometimes it's lighter. When you're tired you go to bed. That's the only standard we have." He shaded his eyes with his hand and stared for a long moment at the bleak, depressing horizon.

Looking over his shoulder, Ward noticed swirling humid mists drifting in the air and, above, huge massive clouds of dense blackness were gathering. He felt a peculiar electric tightness in the atmosphere.

Halliday closed and locked the door carefully.

"Might as well have breakfast," he said. "There's nothing else we can do today."

"Do we have to stay cooped up here all day?" Ward asked.

"I'm afraid so. This weather is ready to break any minute now, and when it does I intend to be behind a well-locked door."

Ward's lips curled slightly.

"Okay," he said quietly, "we'll wait for the monsoon to blow over. Then, Raspers or not, I'm going to work."



But four long days dragged by and there was no indication that the monsoon weather was prepared to break. Low dense clouds were massed overhead and the air was gusty with flurries of humid wind.

Halliday grew increasingly nervous. He spent every waking hour at the periscope in a constant study of the dark horizons and he said little to Ward.

Ward's impatience grew with every inactive moment.

"How much longer are we going to hide in here like scared rats?" he blazed finally. He paced furiously up and down the small room, glaring in rage at Halliday's stooped figure.

Halliday smiled nervously and removed his glasses. His fingers were trembling so violently that he almost dropped them to the floor.

"I can't even guess," he said shakily. "I was hoping that the monsoon would blow over, but I'm afraid we're in for it."

"You've been saying that ever since I arrived," Ward said bitterly.

Halliday was studying a *aerograph* on the wall. When he turned to Ward, his face was gray. His lips were more tightly clamped than ever.

"If anything should happen to our front door lock," he said, "there's an exit we can use in the kitchen. Possibly you've noticed the small door beside the refrigeration and oxygen unit. That leads to a small room that can be locked from the inside. There are supplies there to last a week. I didn't tell you this before because I was afraid it might alarm you."

"Thanks for sparing my feelings," Ward snapped. "But I don't think I'll be needing your cosy little refuge. I've stalled just about enough. I was sent here to do a job and by Heaven I'm going to try and finish it."

He jerked his tunic from the back of a chair and scooped up his raytube and belt. Halliday regarded him in silence as he buckled on the weapon.

"What do you think you're going to do?" he asked at last.

"First I'm going to flash a message to Earth, asking that I be placed in command here," Ward said. He buttoned his tunic swiftly, and his eyes were cold slits of anger as he looked at Halliday nervously fumbling with his glasses. "I was sent here with instructions to find out what the delay was in getting the work done. I've found out to my satisfaction. You've done about one day's work for every month you've spent cooped up in here, trembling every time the wind howled. When I come back I'll have an authorization from GHQ to take over here immediately. Then you and I are going to work and damn the weather. If you don't want to cooperate," Ward slapped the weapon at his hip, "I'll use what force is necessary to make you."

"Please listen to me," Halliday said desperately. "You're impulsive and reckless and I admire you for it. Sometimes I wish I were more like that. But I know the situation here better than you do. We'd be running a terrible risk trying to work right at this time."

"Sure," Ward said, "We'd be running a risk. That's apparently your entire philosophy. Sit tight, do nothing, because there might be a slight risk involved."

He turned and strode to the door.

"Wait," Halliday cried. "You can't go out now."

Ward disengaged the lock with a swift deft motion.

"Who's going to stop me?" he asked.

Halliday crossed to his side with quick, pattering strides. He grabbed him by the arm and pulled him around.

"Please listen to me," he said imploringly. "I know what I'm talking about. I—"

Ward shook the hand loose and stared coldly into Halliday's, white strained features.

"You're gutless, Halliday," he said in a low tense voice. "Now keep out of my way."

He turned to the door again, but Halliday grabbed him suddenly and pushed him back.

"You're not going to do it," he cried, his voice trembling. "I'm not going to let you."



Ward grabbed the man by his lapels and swung him away from the door. He stepped close to him and his right fist chopped down in a savage axe-like stroke. The short, powerful blow exploded under Halliday's chin. His knees buckled and he sprawled limply to the floor.

Ward stared down at the still form and he felt an instant of regret for striking a man fifty pounds lighter than himself, but he realized that it had been the only course open.

He drew his raytube, inspected it quickly to make sure that it was in perfect order, then swung open the door and stepped out into the gray murkiness of the Martian atmosphere.

The wind had increased to a wild mad scream. Flaky particles of soil stung his face like myriad needle-pricks as he braced himself against the buffeting force of the gale.

He couldn't see more than a few feet ahead of him, but he knew the general direction of the building which housed the materialization unit and he headed that way, bent almost double against the wind.

He heard and saw nothing but the wild wail of the monsoon and the gray swirling murk. There was an awesome feeling in staggering blindly on through a dead gray world of howling dust-laden wind.

He felt as if he were the only person left alive in the universe. But he plowed stubbornly forward. There was work to be done and he felt a grim exaltation in the knowledge that he had enough fortitude to let nothing stop him from doing his job.

Hell! What was a little wind? This thought came to him and he smiled grimly. He'd show Halliday! He'd show 'em all! Nothing was going to stop him!

There was a peculiar crackling sound in the air about him, as if bolts of unseen lightning were slashing through the turbulent atmosphere, but he forged ahead. He knew there was little danger of an electric bolt striking him as long as he was out in the open.

The distance to the goal was not a matter of a dozen yards or so, but it took him fully five minutes to cover the stretch. He had trouble breathing; each breath was snatched from his open mouth by the fury of the wind. And his eyes were rimmed with dust and streaming from the stinging bite of the flaky soil.

When he reached the wall of the building he was sobbing for breath and blind from the whiplash of the wind. He sagged against the comfortable bulk of the squat, solid structure and wiped at his eyes with a handkerchief, but the wind soon tore the flimsy cloth from his fingers.

There was nothing to do but find the door of the building as quickly as possible. Using his hands as groping feelers he staggered around two corners of the buildings until his fingers closed about a door knob.

The gale was increasing in intensity; the roaring lash of the wind was wild and explosive, as if the floodgates of Nature had swung open to unleash this maelstrom of fury and destruction.

The sputtering crackle of electric energy he had noticed seemed to be swelling in volume, rising steadily in pitch and fury. And then a new sound was added to the hideous cacophony. Ward heard it faintly at first and it failed to register on his consciousness.

The new sound was an unearthly rasping noise that roared about his head and crashed against his ear drums with terrifying impact. The sound seemed everywhere; it seemed to emanate from the unleashed forces of the storm itself; its marrow-chilling, rasping moan was a demoniacal cry, screaming a weird defiance into the teeth of the mighty monsoon.



Ward, hugging the building, heard the rasping sound, and he remembered what Halliday had told him. Crouched against the side of the structure, listening to that weird, desolate wail of unnamable horror, he felt his heart thudding with sudden fear against his ribs.

The door of the building was jammed. He slammed his shoulder against its solid unyielding surface again and again—without avail! The harrowing rasping undertone of the crushing gale was growing and swelling—it seemed to be converging on him from all sides, a creation of the gray whining murk of the monsoon.

Ward's hand tightened on the butt of his raytube. He wheeled about, pressing his back to the wall of the building. His eyes raked the swirling turbulence of the storm.

And through the raging, eddying mists of gray his wind-lashed eyes made out dreadful, weaving shapes, slithering through the fury of the storm—toward him!

An instinctive scream tore at the muscles of his throat, but the wind whipped the sound from his mouth and cast it into the gale before it could reach his ears.

He crouched and raised his gun.

The shapes were vague misty illusions to his straining eyes. Then a blanket of wind swept over him, buffeting him against the wall at his back, and in a momentary flick of visibility that followed the blast, he was able to see the *things* that were advancing toward him.

There was one nauseous, sense-stunning instant of incredible horror as his eyes focused on the nameless monstrosities that were revealed in the gray mists of the monsoon.

One instant of sheer numbing horror, an instinct a billion years old, buried beneath centuries' weight in his subconscious, suddenly writhed into life, as pulsing and compelling as the day it had been generated.

The lost forgotten instincts of man's mind that warn him of the horror and menace of the unknown, the nameless, the unclean, were clamoring wildly at his consciousness.

For these *things* were hideous and repellent in their very essence. Whether they were alive or not, his numbed, horror-stunned brain would never know. The dry, rustling rasping sound that emanated from them seemed to partake of the same nature as the electrical energy generated by the monsoon, but that was only a fleeting, terror-strained impression.

The raytube fell from his palsied hand; but he didn't notice. There was only one blind motivation governing his thoughts.

And that was flight!

The unreasoning terror of the hunted, of the helpless, gripped him with numbing force. There was no thought in his mind to fight, to face these things that emerged from the dead grayness of the monsoon, but only a hideously desperate desire to escape.



Without conscious thought or volition his legs suddenly churned beneath him and he lunged forward blindly, desperately, lurching through the buffeting force of the gale toward the sanctuary of the building where he had left Halliday.

The rasping, nerve-chilling sound roared about his head and the lashing screech of the monsoon was a banshee-wail in his ears as he stumbled and staggered on, driven by the wildest, most elemental fear he had ever known.

Suddenly the squat structure loomed directly ahead of him, only a yard away. The door was standing ajar, and, with a broken sob of relief, he lunged into the lighted interior of the room.

Halliday was crawling dazedly to his feet as Ward staggered blindly through the door, his breath coming in great choking sobs.

"My God—"

Halliday's voice broke and Ward saw that his eyes were staring in horror beyond him, to the still open door where the gray swirling fury of the monsoon was creeping in.

And other *things* were in the open doorway!

Ward knew that without turning to look. The horror mirrored in Halliday's face told him that more plainly than could his own eyes.

There was horror and fear in Halliday's face, but the tightness of his lips did not relax into the flaccid looseness of hysteria.

With superhuman control he was keeping a grip on himself.

"Don't move!" he snapped, through set jaws. "I'll try to get at the rifle."

Ward's heart was thundering a tattoo of terror. Halliday's words made no impression on the horror-stunned brain. He lunged wildly across the room, dimly he heard Halliday's sudden shouted warning.

Without a backward glance he lurched into the small room that served as a kitchen. Through the fog of terror that swirled about his mind, he remembered only one thing: Halliday's remark of a refuge built there for emergency purposes.

His fingers tore open the small door alongside the refrigerator unit. A black passage stretched ahead of him and he plunged into dark shelter, jerking the door shut after him.

A light snapped on when the door closed and he saw that he was in a small, stoutly reinforced storeroom, with bales of supplies and equipment packed against the walls.

He threw the heavy bolt that locked the door and sagged against a wall, his breath coming in deep shuddering gasps. There was no sound from outside. Gradually his labored breathing subsided and he stared with dull, unseeing eyes ahead of him.

And in that moment Ward Harrison came face-to-face with what he had done. In

a single gleaming flash of understanding, he realized that he had bought his life with his honor.

A shuddering sob passed through his body.

He remembered with scalding self-hatred the things he had said to Halliday—a man who had endured the horror of this isolated base for three years. He had called a man cowardly who had more courage in his smallest finger than Ward had in his entire body.

Halliday had stuck here, doing his job, making no complaints or excuses, always aware of the horrible, soul-numbing danger he was facing.



Ward cursed and buried his face in his trembling hands. With bitter shame he recalled his jeering remarks to Halliday about his nervous habit of removing his glasses.

God! Three years on this hellish base and the only sign a nervous habit of fiddling with his glasses. Stark raving madness would have been the effect on any other person Ward could imagine.

At that instant he despised himself more than he had ever despised any human being in his life.

And he knew that the worst punishment that would ever be meted to him, would be the mere act of living and being able to think—to remember.

With feverish eyes he glared about the room. A small leaden cask was set apart from the other equipment and it was marked with three xxx's, the indication of high explosive contents.

Ward dropped to his knees and pried open the lid of the small cask. It was filled with neat rows of U-235 pellets, hardly an inch in diameter. He picked up one in each hand and then stood up and walked to the door.

He was beyond thought or reason. He knew he was going to his death and he felt nothing but a numb sense of anticipation. He knew that in dying he would not expiate the crime of cowardice he had committed. Nothing would ever erase the stigma of that shame. A thousand deaths could not do that.

He did not actually think these things. His mind was wrapped in a fog of blind instinct. There was something he must do—do immediately. That was as far as his mind would go.

The kitchen and front room of the small building were empty and the door leading to the outside was open. The wild raging storm of the monsoon blew in the door, whipping papers into the air, resounding against the walls with a booming roar.

Ward strode across the room, bracing himself against the blast of the wind. He stepped through the doorway and the full force of the wind almost bent him backward, but he moved on, fighting his way forward.

After six feet, the building was lost in the grayness. He was again alone in a wild howling world of horror and death.

Then he heard the rasping noise of the *things* directly ahead of him, and an instant later he was able dimly to make out their weaving shapes in the swirling mists of the storm.

They were coming toward him.



With a grim exultation pounding in his temples, Ward hurled a pellet of U-235 directly into their midst. The thunderous reverberations of the explosion rocked the ground under his feet. A terrific blast of air that dwarfed the raging turbulence of the monsoon roared about his head.

He staggered back, almost falling.

When he could see again, he made out a great hole in the ranks of the *things* moving toward him.

His laugh was a wild cry in the fury of the night.

"Damn you!" he shouted.

His arm whipped back and the second pellet crashed into the serried ranks of the deadly rasping creatures.

Something grasped his ankle as the second pellet exploded. He fell backward,

striking the ground hard. A hand grabbed his and then, miraculously, incredibly, Halliday was pulling him to his feet, jerking him toward the building.

They stumbled through the door together. Ward fell to the floor as Halliday wheeled and slammed the door, throwing the automatic bolts with the same motion.

Halliday knelt beside Ward.

"Good work," he said huskily. "They were holding me. I don't know what they were planning. Those bombs blew them into little pieces. Luckily I got through the blast all right." He gripped Ward's arm suddenly. "You came through too, son."

"No," Ward said dully. "I didn't. I ran out on you. I'm a fool, a yellow fool."

"A coward wouldn't have come back," Halliday said quietly. "We're going to lick this job together, from now on. We've found a weapon to use against the Raspers. I never thought of high explosives."

He grinned suddenly and the tightness was leaving his mouth. "It doesn't seem so terrible when you've got something to fight back with."

Ward looked up at Halliday and a faint smile touched his own lips. "Someone to fight with, means a lot, too," he said. He suddenly grinned. "You've lost your glasses."

"I won't miss them," Halliday said. "I didn't need them. I wore them to give me something to do, that's all. But we're going to have plenty to do, now."

Ward swallowed with difficulty. He knew that in his wild, thoughtless act of heroism he hadn't redeemed himself. Redemption would come from a lifetime of playing the game the way men like Halliday did. But the chance was there for him, and he was glad that he could start immediately.

"Whatever you say," he said. He grinned, and added, "—boss."

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