



CURTIS
SCIENCE FICTION \$1
JULY #24

UNKNOWN WORLDS OF **SCIENCE FICTION**™

WHAT WAS THE DEADLY SECRET OF THE
LOST CITY OF MARS?

AN ILLUSTRATED
TALE OF WONDER BY

**A.E.
VAN VOGT**



ALL-NEW!

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

**PLUS A NEBULA-WINNING
SF SHOCKER BY**

ROBERT SILVERBERG

THE BEGINNING

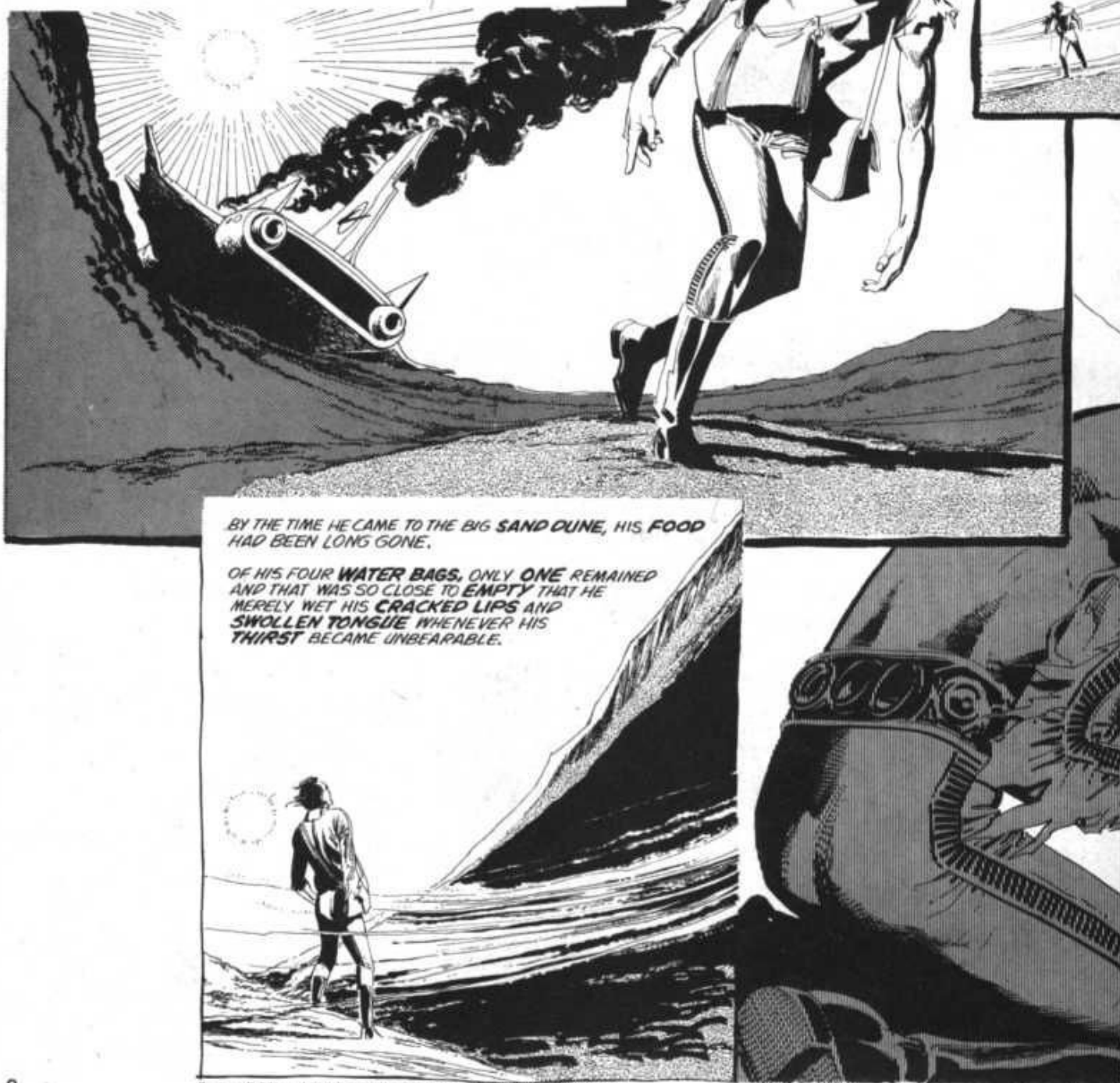
"EXPLORERS OF A NEW FRONTIER," THEY HAD BEEN CALLED BEFORE THEY LEFT FOR MARS.

FOR A WHILE AFTER THE SHIP CRASHED INTO A MARTIAN DESERT, KILLING ALL ON BOARD EXCEPT BILL TENNER, HE SPAT THOSE GRANDIOSE WORDS INTO THE CONSTANT, SAND-LADEN WIND.

HE DESPISED HIMSELF FOR THE PRIDE HE HAD FELT WHEN HE FIRST HEARD THEM.

BY THE TIME HE CAME TO THE BIG SAND DUNE, HIS FOOD HAD BEEN LONG GONE.

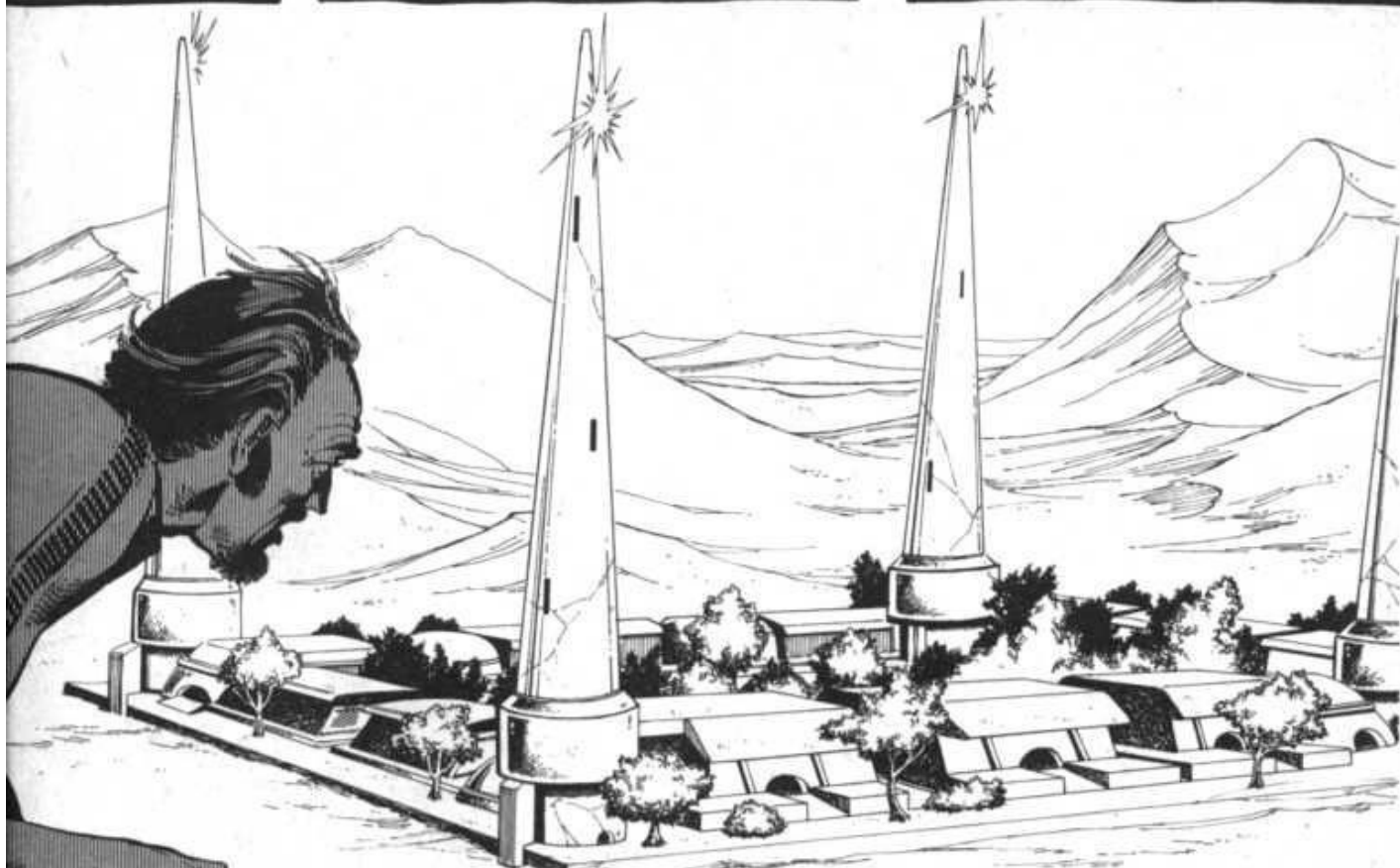
OF HIS FOUR WATER BAGS, ONLY ONE REMAINED AND THAT WAS SO CLOSE TO EMPTY THAT HE MERELY WET HIS CRACKED LIPS AND SWOLLEN TONGUE WHENEVER HIS THIRST BECAME UNBEARABLE.



HIS FURY FADED WITH EACH MILE HE WALKED, AND HIS BLACK GRIEF FOR HIS FRIENDS BECAME A GREY ACHE. HE HAD GUESSED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO WALK 300 MILES TO REACH THE SHALLOW POLAR SEA HE HAD SEEN FROM SPACE: BUT HE NOW REALIZED THAT THE SHIP MUST HAVE CRASHED MUCH FURTHER FROM HIS GOAL.

THE DAYS STRETCHED BEHIND HIM, SEEMINGLY AS NUMBERLESS AS THE GRAINS OF HOT, RED, ALIEN SAND THAT SCORCHED THROUGH HIS TATTERED CLOTHES. A HUGE SCARECROW OF A MAN, HE KEPT MOVING ACROSS THE ENDLESS, ARID WASTE.

HE WOULD NOT GIVE UP.



WHEN JENNER REACHED THE TOP OF THE DUNE HE SAW THAT BELOW HIM WAS A DEPRESSION SURROUNDED BY HILLS AS HIGH AS, OR HIGHER THAN, THE ONE ON WHICH HE STOOD. NESTLED IN THE VALLEY WAS...

THE ENCHANTED VILLAGE

Adapted from the story by A. E. VAN VOGT

HE COULD SEE TREES AND THE MARBLE FLOOR OF A COURTYARD, TWENTY BUILDINGS CLUSTERED AROUND A CENTRAL SQUARE. THEY WERE MOSTLY LOW-CONSTRUCTED--BUT THERE WERE FOUR TOWERS POINTING GRACEFULLY INTO THE SKY. THEY SHONE IN THE SUNLIGHT LIKE MARBLE.

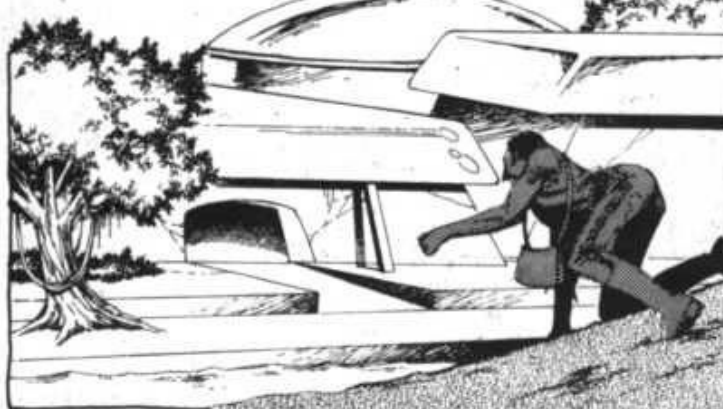


HE COULD HEAR A THIN HIGH-PITCHED WHISTLING SOUND. THE NOISE WAS UNPLEASANT AND GATED ON HIS EARS, EERIE AND UNNATURAL.

HE RAN DOWN THE HILL, SLIPPING ON LOOSE SAND--FELL AND ROLLED HALFWAY DOWN INTO THE VALLEY.



THE BUILDINGS STILL LOOKED NEW AND BRIGHT WHEN HE GOT NEAR THEM. ON EVERY SIDE WAS REDDISH-GREEN SHRUBBERY AND YELLOW-GREEN TREES LADEN WITH PURPLE AND RED FRUIT.



RAVENOUSLY, JENNER TORE A PLUMP AND JUICY LARGE RED FRUIT FROM THE DRY AND BRITTLE TREE. DESPITE HIS HUNGER AND THIRST, HE REMEMBERED THE DANGER OF EATING ALIEN FOOD, AND TOOK A GINGERLY BITE.



IT WAS BITTER AND HE SPAT IT OUT QUICKLY. SOME OF THE JUICE THAT REMAINED IN HIS MOUTH SEARED HIS GUMS.



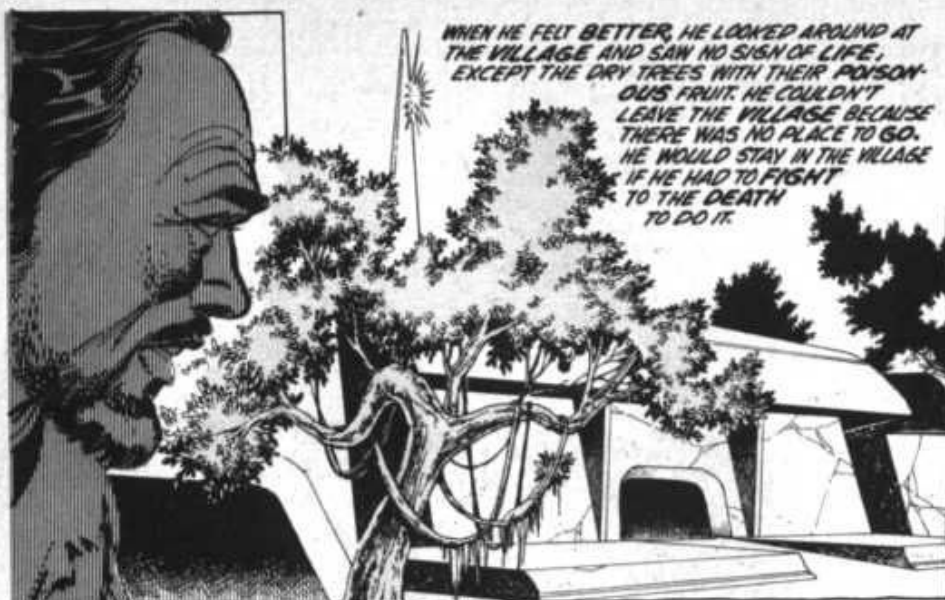
HE FELT THE FIRE IN HIS MOUTH AND REELED FROM NAUSEA.



HIS MUSCLES BEGAN TO JERK, AND HE LAY DOWN ON THE MARBLE TO KEEP FROM FALLING.

IT SEEMED LIKE HOURS BEFORE THE AWFUL TREMBLING FINALLY WENT OUT OF HIS BODY.





WHEN HE FELT BETTER, HE LOOKED AROUND AT THE VILLAGE AND SAW NO SIGN OF LIFE, EXCEPT THE DRY TREES WITH THEIR POISONOUS FRUIT. HE COULDN'T LEAVE THE VILLAGE BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PLACE TO GO. HE WOULD STAY IN THE VILLAGE IF HE HAD TO FIGHT TO THE DEATH TO DO IT.

HE STARTED EXPLORING WITH ONE OF THE FOUR TOWER BUILDINGS.

I'LL HAVE TO STOOP LOW TO GET INSIDE. THESE BUILDINGS WERE DESIGNED FOR A LIFE FORM A LOT DIFFERENT FROM HUMAN BEINGS.

I WISH I HADN'T LOST MY GUN, BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING TO SHOOT, ANYWAY.



THE FIRST ROOM HAD NO FURNITURE, BUT THERE WERE LOW MARBLE FENCES PROTECTING FROM ONE WALL.

THEY FORMED FOUR LOW, WIDE STALLS, EACH WITH AN OPEN TROUGH CARVED OUT OF THE FLOOR.



AFTER A FEW MINUTES THOUGHT, HE DECIDED, THIS MUST BE...

A DINING ROOM! THE TROUGHS MUST BE FOR FOOD!

THOSE LOW-SLUNG MARTIANS MUST NOT HAVE HAD ANY USE FOR TABLES!

ANOTHER ROOM CONTAINED FOUR MARBLE RAMPS EACH LEADING UP TO A MARBLE SLAB.

BY NOW, HE WAS ABLE TO FIGURE OUT MARTIAN FURNITURE MORE QUICKLY.



IT'S--A BEDROOM! WITH FOUR NICE SOFT MARBLE BEDS!

I'M STARTING TO FEEL LIKE GOLDLOCKS AND THE FOUR MARTIANS.

THERE WERE NO STAIRS--THE LOW-BUILT MARTIANS HAD OBVIOUSLY PREFERRED RAMPS. HE FOLLOWED ONE TO A SMALL TOWER ROOM WITH A SINGLE STALL. WEARY FROM THE CLIMB, JENNER LAY DOWN AND INSTANTLY FELL ASLEEP.

A FINE SPRAY OF LIQUID WAS STARTING TO DESCEND ON HIM.

HE SCRAMBLED OUT OF THE ROOM, COUGHING--TEARS IN HIS EYES, HIS FACE BURNING FROM THE CHEMICALS.



HE WAS AWAKENED BY THE DISCORDANT WHISTLING SOUND AND BY A HISsing FROM THE CEILING OF THE STALL.



IT HAD A STRONG ODOOR AND HE TOOK A WHIFF--



THE LIQUID WAS SOME SORT OF POISON GAS!

WHEN THE BURNING STOPPED, HE RETURNED TO THE MARTIAN SHOWER AND TENTATIVELY EASED HIMSELF INTO THE STALL AGAIN--

--THEN JUMPED OUT OF THE WAY WHEN THE SPRAY STARTED AGAIN.

GREAT!

THE SHOWER AUTOMATICALLY TURNS ITSELF ON WHEN SOMETHING STEPS INTO IT.

IF THERE CAN BE ONE AUTOMATIC PROCESS, THERE MAY BE OTHERS!

THE MARTIANS LIKED TO TAKE A NICE MORNING SHOWER OF POISON GAS! THIS PLACE JUST ISN'T SUITED TO CREATURES LIKE ME. BUT--

BREATHING HEAVILY WITH EXCITEMENT, HE RACED INTO THE OUTER ROOM. CAREFULLY, HE SHOVED HIS LEGS INTO ONE OF THE STALLS.

THE MOMENT HIS HIPS WERE IN, A STEAMING GRUEL FILLED THE TROUGH BESIDE THE WALL.

UGH! GREASY-LOOKING STUFF, BUT IT IS FOOD -- AND DRINK!

STILL, REMEMBER THE POISON FRUIT, JENNYER, OLD BOY, AND TAKE IT SLOW!

IT TASTED FLAT AND PULPY, LIKE BOILED WOOD FIBERS AS IT TRICKLED INTO HIS THROAT HIS EYES BEGAN TO WATER AND HIS LIPS DREW BACK CONVULSIVELY.

HE REALIZED HE WAS GOING TO BE SICK AND RAN FOR THE OUTER DOOR.

HE DIPPED A FINGER INTO THE HOT, NET STUFF AND BROUGHT IT DRIPPING TO HIS MOUTH--

HE DIDN'T QUITE MAKE IT THROUGH THE DOOR.

AFTER THE WORST OF THE NAUSEA PASSED, HE CLIMBED THE DUNE AGAIN...

...TO GET AWAY FROM THE SHRILL, RASPING SOUND THAT FILLED THE AIR AND SEEMED TO COME FROM ALL OVER THE VILLAGE.

HE NOW REALIZED THAT THE MIND-SHATTERING NOISE WAS MUSIC TO THE LONG-GONE MARTIANS.

HE WAS GETTING A PICTURE OF THE CREATURES THE VILLAGE HAD BEEN DESIGNED FOR. A REMNANT OF MARTIAN CIVILIZATION HAD SURVIVED HERE.

THE INHABITANTS HAD DIED, BUT THE VILLAGE LIVED ON, ABLE TO PROVIDE REFUGE FOR ANY MARTIAN WHO MIGHT COME ALONG.

BUT THERE WERE NO MARTIANS.

THERE WAS ONLY BILL JENNER OF EARTH, AND THE FOOD AND DRINK THAT WOULD SUSTAIN MARTIANS WAS DEADLY TO HIM.

HE HAD TO MAKE THE VILLAGE TURN OUT FOOD AND DRINK THAT HE COULD USE; AND, WITH HIS WATER NEARLY GONE, HE ESTIMATED HE COULD LAST NO MORE THAN THREE DAYS.

IN THAT TIME HE HAD TO CONQUER THE VILLAGE!

HE RETURNED TO THE VILLAGE AND PULLED UP A SHRUB EXPECTING IT TO COME THROUGH A HOLE IN THE MARBLE-- BUT THE SLAB OF MARBLE CAME WITH IT! THE SHRUB HAD NO ROOTS, IT WAS MERELY STUCK TO THE MARBLE, PART OF IT, AND UNDERNEATH THE SLAB WAS ONLY SAND.

HE DROPPED TO HIS KNEES AND PLUNGED HIS FINGERTIPS DEEP INTO THE SAND, FORCING HIS AND ARM DOWN THROUGH THE LOOSE --

SAND!
NOTHING BUT SAND!

JENNER RUSHED TO A FRUIT TREE AND SNOVED IT OVER --

HE KNELT BY ONE OF THE HOLES FROM WHICH HE HAD TORN A SLAB, AND TOUCHED THE BRIGHT ORANGE-YELLOW EDGE OF THE MARBLE.

YOW!

--AND THERE WAS NOTHING BUT SAND THERE.

SAND! THE VILLAGE WAS BUILT ON NOTHING BUT SAND!

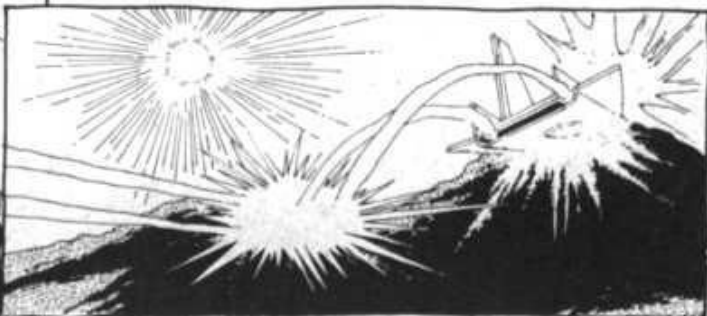
EVERYTHING THE VILLAGE SUPPLIED WAS MADE FROM THE ATOMS OF THE MARTIAN SAND.

IT WAS AS IF HE HAD DIAPED HIS FINGERS INTO SEARING ACID!

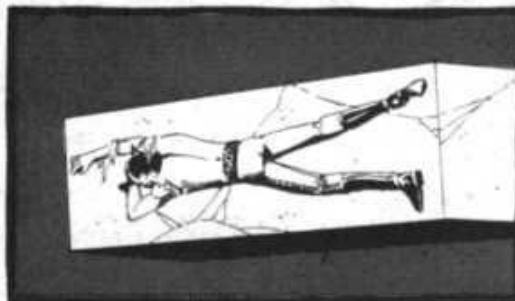
THE VILLAGE WAS ALIVE!
A GREAT MASS OF LIVING SUBSTANCE GROWING INTO THE SHAPE
OF BUILDINGS, ADJUSTING ITSELF TO SUIT ANOTHER LIFE FORM.

HE RECALLED HOW HARD IT HAD BEEN TO ROUSE
INTEREST IN THE TRIP AND TO RAISE THE MONEY
FOR IT. COLOSSAL PROBLEMS HAD TO BE SOLVED IN
BUILDING THE SPACESHIP--AND SOME OF THE MEN
WHO HAD SOLVED THEM WERE BURIED IN THE
MARTIAN DESERT.
IT MIGHT BE 20 YEARS BEFORE ANOTHER SHIP FROM
EARTH WOULD TRY TO REACH MARS.

IF IT WOULD SERVE MARTIANS,
WHY NOT HUMAN BEINGS?
JENNER HAD HOPE NOW. HE TOOK
THE HOPE TO BED WITH HIM, UPON
ONE OF THE MARTIAN MARBLE SLABS,
ALONG WITH HIS WORRIES AND THE PAIN
OF HIS BURNED FINGERS.



DURING THOSE YEARS, THOSE UNCOUNTABLE DAYS AND
NIGHTS, HE WOULD BE HERE ALONE --IF HE LIVED.



HOW COULD HE MAKE THE VILLAGE KNOW
THAT ITS NEW TENANT NEEDED FOOD IN A
DIFFERENT CHEMICAL COMBINATION
THAN IT HAD SERVED IN THE PAST--THAT
HE LIKED MUSIC ON A DIFFERENT SCALE
SYSTEM? AND THAT HIS MORNING SHOWER
SHOULD BE WATER, NOT POISON GAS?

TWICE HE WAKENED, HIS LIPS ON
FIRE, HIS EYES BURNING, HIS
BODY BATHED IN PERSPIRATION.
SEVERAL TIMES HE WAS STARTLED
INTO CONSCIOUSNESS BY HIS OWN
HARSH VOICE CRYING OUT IN
ANGER AND FEAR.



HE GUESSED,
THEN,
THAT HE WAS
DYING.

JENNER THOUGHT--ABOUT MUTATIONS, LIFE FORMS
ADAPTING TO NEW ENVIRONMENTS. THERE'D
BEEN LECTURES ON THAT BEFORE THE
SHIP LEFT EARTH. THE IMPORTANT
PRINCIPLE WAS QUITE SIMPLE--



HE TOSSED ALL NIGHT,
BEFUZZLED BY WAVES
OF HEAT. WHEN MORNING
CAME, HE DISCOVERED
THAT THE HEAT CAME
FROM THE BED--ITS
TEMPERATURE WAS ABOUT
130°! HE WAS SHAKEN BY
HIS STUPIDITY.

I MUST HAVE
SWEATED AT
LEAST
TWO QUARTS OUT
OF MYSELF ON THAT
FURNACE! THE
MARTIANS
LIKED IT HOT!

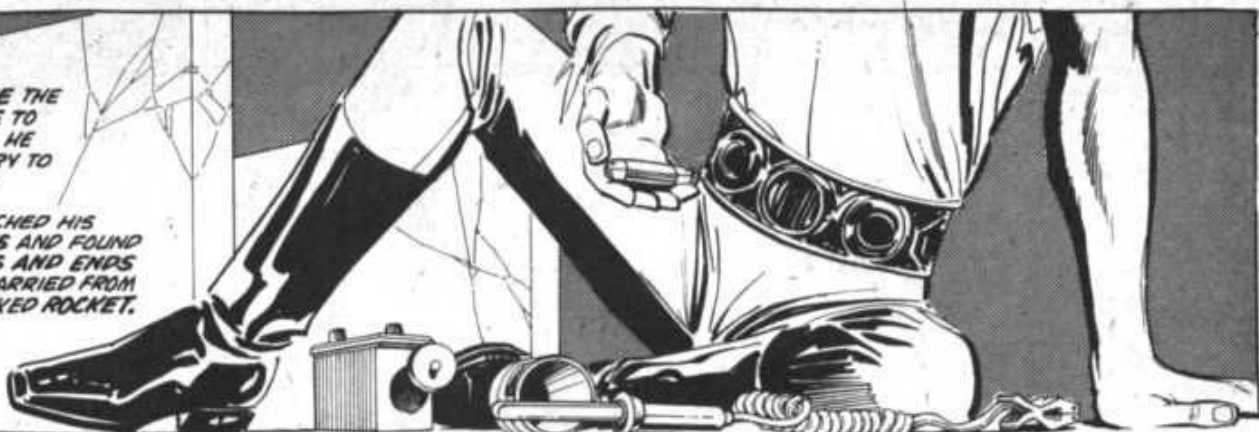
I CAN'T GO
ON THIS WAY!
I'VE GOT TO
THINK--



THE VILLAGE
HAD TO ADJUST
TO HIM!

TO FORCE THE VILLAGE TO ADJUST, HE HAD TO TRY TO HURT IT.

HE SEARCHED HIS POCKETS AND FOUND THE ODDS AND ENDS HE HAD CARRIED FROM THE WRECKED ROCKET.



A JACK-KNIFE, A FOLDING METAL CUP, A TINY SUPER-BATTERY THAT COULD BE CHARGED BY SPINNING AN ATTACHED WHEEL -- AND A POWERFUL ELECTRIC FIRE LIGHTER.

JENNER PLUGGED THE LIGHTER INTO THE BATTERY, AND DELIBERATELY SCRAPED THE RED-HOT END ALONG THE "MARBLE" FLOOR.



THEN HE ACTIVATED THE NEAREST STALL TROUGH. THERE WAS A DELAY. WHEN THE FOOD FLOWED INTO THE TROUGH, IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE VILLAGE KNEW WHY HE HAD HURT IT.



THE FOOD WAS DIFFERENT-- A PALE CREAMY COLOR. THE VILLAGE WAS TRYING TO ADJUST!

JENNER PUT HIS FINGER INTO THE FOOD-- AND WITHDREW IT WITH A YELL...



BETTER TRY IT AGAIN...



THE NEXT TRY WAS A SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT. IT DIDN'T BURN JENNER'S FINGER--

-- BUT IT TASTED LIKE SOUP MADE FROM CLAY AND GASOLINE.



IT'S TRYING TO FIND SOMETHING I CAN EAT!

I'M GOING TO MAKE IT-- IF I CAN SURVIVE THE TASTING!

HE WAS THIRSTY AND ALSO NEEDED TO CLEAN THE UNPLEASANT TASTE FROM HIS MOUTH...



HE RUSHED OUTSIDE--



--AND TORE OPEN THE EMPTY WATERBAG, SEEKING THE WETNESS INSIDE.



IN HIS EAGERNESS HE SPILLED A FEW PRECIOUS DROPS ONTO THE COURTYARD.



DOWN HE WENT ON HIS FACE AND LICKED THEM UP.

--HALF A MINUTE LATER, HE WAS STILL LICKING-- AND THERE WAS STILL WATER! IT WAS SQUEEZING UP, DROP BY TINY DROP, FROM THE "MARBLE" OF THE COURTYARD!



THE VILLAGE WAS CREATING WATER FOR HIM!



HE SUCKED UP THE DROPS FOR A LONG TIME AND HAD DRUNK ABOUT AN OUNCE OF WATER-- WHEN THE SURFACE FROM WHICH HE HAD BEEN DRINKING COLLAPSED!

IT MUST HAVE GIVEN ME ALL THE WATER IT HAD--THEN DISINTEGRATED!



IT JUST CRUMBLED.



IT'S TRYING TO HELP ME BUT...

BUT IF IT HAS TO DESTROY PART OF ITSELF TO GIVE ME A DRINK, NEITHER ONE OF US IS GOING TO LAST LONG!

BUT IF IT CAN GIVE ME WATER FROM A SAMPLE, MAYBE IT CAN GIVE ME FOOD!



I MUST HAVE SAMPLES OF FOOD SOMEWHERE, CRUMBS IN MY POCKETS WHERE I CARRIED MY PROVISIONS!

HE TORE HIS POCKET SEAMS APART, SEARCHING FOR THE TINIEST CRUMBS, PARTICLES OF MEAT AND BREAD, LITTLE BITS OF GREASE AND OTHER UNIDENTIFIABLE, SUBSTANCES.

HE PUT THE PITIFUL APINGS IN THE TROUGH AND WAITED FOR THE VILLAGE TO STUDY THEM--



--TO TRY TO FIND A CLUE IN THE CHEMICAL NATURE OF THE FOOD HE COULD EAT.

THE NEXT TIME HE ACTIVATED A TROUGH, HE GOT ABOUT A PINT OF THICK, CREAMY STUFF. IT TASTED AWFUL-- MUSTY AND SHARP-- AND IT SMELLED STALE.



IT WAS ALMOST AS DRY AS FLOUR BUT HE ATE IT--AND IT STAYED DOWN.

FROM ANOTHER TROUGH, HE GOT A FEW DROPS OF WATER. IT WAS THE BEST MEAL HE HAD EATEN IN DAYS.

JENNER CLIMBED THE RAMP TO THE UPPER FLOOR OF ONE OF THE TOWERS AND LOOKED AROUND TOWARD THE HORIZON. THE VIEW WAS DESOLATE. AS FAR AS HE COULD SEE WAS AN ARID WASTE, AND EVERY HORIZON WAS HIDDEN IN A MIST OF WIND-BLOWN SAND. IF THERE WAS A MARTIAN SEA OUT THERE SOMEWHERE, IT WAS BEYOND HIS REACH.

HE CLENCHED HIS HANDS IN ANGER AGAINST HIS FATE, WHICH SEEMED INEVITABLE NOW. HE HAD HOPED HE WAS IN A MOUNTAINOUS REGION WITH WATER. HE SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT THERE WERE VERY FEW MOUNTAINS AND EVEN LESS WATER ON MARS. THERE WAS JUST THE HILLY DESERT AND THE ENDLESS RED SAND.

THE FOOD THE VILLAGE GAVE HIM STAYED DOWN, BUT IT MADE HIM WEAK AND DIZZY. THE VILLAGE WAS DOING WHAT IT COULD, BUT HE COULD NOT EVEN ADJUST TO AN APPROXIMATION OF EARTH FOOD. AFTER TWO DAYS OF PAIN, HE MADE UP HIS MIND.

IF I CAN GET ON ONE OF THE BEDS, THE HEAT WILL KILL ME AND THE VILLAGE WILL GET BACK ITS LOST WATER BY ABSORBING MY BODY.



HE SPENT AT LEAST AN HOUR CRAWLING LABORIOUSLY UP THE RAMP OF THE NEAREST BED AND, WHEN HE FINALLY MADE IT, HE LAY AS ONE ALREADY DEAD. HIS LAST WAKING THOUGHT WAS--

BELOVED FRIENDS, I'M COMING TO JOIN YOU!



WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF, JENNER SANK INTO A DREAMLESS SLEEP.

HE WOKE TO THE SOUND OF SAD-SWEET MUSIC THAT TOLD OF THE RISE AND THE FALL OF A RACE LONG DEAD. JENNER LISTENED FOR A WHILE AND THEN, WITH ABRUPT EXCITEMENT, HE REALIZED THE TRUTH. THIS WAS A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE WHISTLING!

THE VILLAGE HAD ADJUSTED ITS MUSIC TO HIM!

OTHER SENSORY PHENOMENA STOLE IN UPON HIM. THE BED FELT COMFORTABLY WARM, NOT HOT AT ALL.

HE HAD A FEELING OF WONDERFUL PHYSICAL WELL-BEING.

HE SCRAMBLED TO THE NEAREST FOOD STALL, CRAWLING, HIS NOSE CLOSE TO THE FLOOR. THE FOOD TROUGH FILLED WITH A STEAMY MIXTURE WITH AN ODOR SO RICH AND PLEASANT THAT HE PLUNGED HIS FACE INTO IT AND SLOPPED IT UP GREEDILY. IT HAD THE FLAVOR OF THICK, MEATY SOUP AND WAS WARM AND SOOTHING TO HIS LIPS AND MOUTH.

WHEN HE HAD EATEN IT ALL, FOR THE FIRST TIME HE DID NOT NEED A DRINK OF WATER.

HE HAD WON!

THE VILLAGE HAD FOUND A WAY!

AFTER A WHILE HE REMEMBERED SOMETHING AND CRAWLED TO THE BATHROOM. CAUTIOUSLY WATCHING THE CEILING, HE EASED HIMSELF INTO THE SHOWER STALL.

THE YELLOWISH SPRAY CAME DOWN COOL AND DELIGHTFUL.

ECSTATICALLY, JENNER WRIGGLED HIS FOUR-FOOT TAIL AND LIFTED HIS LONG SNOOT TO LET THE THIN STREAMS OF LIQUID WASH AWAY THE FOOD IMPURITIES THAT CLUNG TO HIS SHARP TEETH.

SOON HE WOULD WADDLE OUT TO BASK IN THE SUN--

--AND LISTEN TO THE TIMELESS MUSIC.