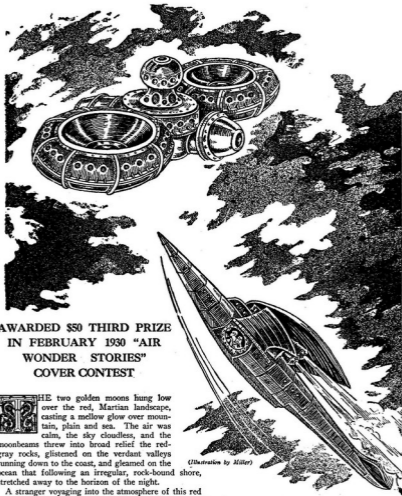


A RESCUE IN SPACE

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AWARDED \$50 THIRD PRIZE
IN FEBRUARY 1930 "AIR
WONDER STORIES"
COVER CONTEST

THE two golden moons hung low over the red, Martian landscape, casting a mellow glow over mountain, plain and sea. The air was calm, the sky cloudless, and the moonbeams threw into broad relief the red-gray rocks, glistened on the verdant valleys running down to the coast, and gleamed on the ocean that following an irregular, rock-bound shore, stretched away to the horizon of the night.

A stranger voyaging into the atmosphere of this red world and from the cabin of his space-flyer gazing down at the rock-strewn plains, might have imagined himself viewing a dead world. League upon league the rugged, torn, uplung mountains—grim reminders

Then she turned upward and rushed with full speed straight as an arrow toward one of the green eyes

A RESCUE IN SPACE

of the volcanic action that had ejected them from a fiery womb—lay silent and dumb in the ghostly light. Here and there only remnants of a vegetable life survived in the forests of the valleys terminating at the coast. But sailing on above forests and green fields he would have seen such animal life as horses and cattle and others which have become the servants of man on earth. Then as he neared the sea he would have been startled and impressed by finding the works of man.

These structures of man's hands—great conical-shaped citadels of red—were built upon the rocks of the waste places in order to conserve the arable lands. The buildings, gigantic and formidable, loomed high above rock and tree. There was a circular opening in

the center of each dome, and near the base, which was buttressed with rough-hewn rocks, were large, hooded port-holes commanding every point of the compass. As far as the eye could reach over forest and plain and out over the ocean itself, no other evidences of man's handiwork could be seen. The great citadels themselves displayed no lights and showed no signs of life. Sombre, majestic and silent they reared their grim forms toward the sky, mysterious sentinels on the outposts of life.

For life there was beneath those great, red domes—



the hectic, feverish, surging life of man. Deep down under rock and ground and sea, the Martians had burrowed and excavated their way, had built great cities of steel and stone and glass with wide streets flanked by beautiful buildings. It was all electrically equipped and controlled by the latest inventions of a super-scientific civilization. Here the industrial, governmental and domestic life of Mars had its being.

Many considerations had constituted the Martians' reason for life underground. Theirs was a dying world. For thousands of years the fertile lands had dwindled; the lakes and seas had shrunk and the reservoirs which fed the irrigation canals had either frozen or been burned up in the scorching rays of the sun. Fertile soil was too precious to be encumbered by the cities of man, and the rocky wastes were desolate and cold.

For generations also other worlds had made war on Mars, for the planet was rich in minerals and precious stones. Its armies had been beaten in the field, air fleet after air fleet destroyed and cities razed until the people, despite their great civilization and intelligence and marvelous inventions, had been obliged to seek a subterranean home. Here far beyond the power of bomb or ray to harm them, they lived in comparative security, emerging through their electric forts only to carry on their agricultural work or to repel a foe. For even here they were sometimes forced to fight an enemy who came to them across the cold, dark gulf of space.

President Wando Calls a Conference

NOW for months the Martians had been carrying on a delicate and important correspondence with a neighbor of the solar system, a neighbor who sought the rich minerals of the red planet. The enemy's arrogant demands had been refused, though his name made the Martians tremble in terror. And again *The Spectacles* was knocking at their door.

The night on which our story opens marked a grave crisis in the affairs of the Martians. For weeks relations with Venus had been strained to the breaking point, and then without warning Venus had suddenly broken off negotiations. For two weeks no word had come from that planet. For two weeks the people of Mars had been unable to gather any intimation of her intentions. And now the suspense having become unbearable, President Wando had summoned his councilors in extraordinary session.

The great council chamber was ablaze with light and color. Rock crystals glittered on ceiling and walls. Suspended from the arched and lofty ceiling were many

flashing lights whose brilliance rivaled that of the noon-day sun. Flags fluttered in the artificial breeze. Tapestries of the richest fabrics and coloring depicting battle scenes of the long ago; portraits of the Martian great, and paintings of pastoral scenes of when the world was young looked down from the walls.

The orchestra was filling the chamber with melody, and the hum of subdued conversation moaned through the place, when suddenly a solemn hush fell over all. The orchestra hushed with startling suddenness, and all eyes were turned toward the curtain-draped portal through which President Wando came surrounded by his cabinet.

On a large, canopy-topped chair resembling a throne, the President sat down. After which the cabinet members seated themselves in a semi-circle about him. President Wando was a small man with a massive head set on narrow shoulders. His eyes were large, luminous and set wide apart. His forehead was high, his chin long and pointed, and his mouth was but a mere slit beneath a small, aquiline nose.

The nearby radio was silent, and the large television screen near the President's chair showed only blank emptiness.

"Now for the reports," said the President brusquely.

Just then there was a stir near the portal, and an officer in the rich scarlet uniform of a knight of the air entered and came rapidly up the aisle. Resting his small hands on the arms of his chair the President half rose to meet him as he came up the steps of the platform. Then he settled back staring with troubled eyes.

"Mr. President," said the officer, saluting gravely, "I regret to re-

port another failure. All the scout cruisers have been called in as you directed, and they have returned with me."

The President looked off at the shining walls, but he saw nothing but a mist of tears. For a moment his thin lips quivered as he fought to master himself. Two weeks before one who was dearer to him than life itself, through the accident of an unlocked port had been precipitated into the great ocean of space.

"I feared as much," he said at last. "But I must try to endure my loss like a true Martian. Under present conditions we can not further endanger our fleet in those cold, waste places of outer space. The danger is far too great, and doubtless before this the spark of life which we loved so well has fled to its Maker."

The President paused and looked down over the animated faces of the listening thousands, then slowly over the wan, care-worn faces of his advisors. Finally his eyes came to rest on the blank television screen.

"To-night we must plan a new battle of defense,"

MR. MORROW is probably well-known to the former readers of *AIR WONDER STORIES* as a writer of stirring fiction. In awarding the third prize, we looked more to the fictional elements of the stories than to their scientific completeness. This does not mean that the present story is inaccurate, for it is not that. But its excellence is particularly in the story, and as a story it was picked as a winner to be read and enjoyed.

As our readers can perceive, we have picked for the prize winners of the February 1930 *AIR WONDER STORIES* Cover Contest not only stories that were excellent, but also those which represented different types. The first prize winner was chiefly the story of a race attempting to save itself from extinction; the second dealt with an interplanetary catastrophe and the third with an interplanetary war and added to that a romance of space. The fourth prize winner to be presented next month is in many respects the most unusual of all.

he resumed. "It is evident that Venus has rejected our last overtures of peace—rejected them with contemptuous silence. This can mean only war, war to the—"

The President paused, his staring eyes riveted on the screen, his body rigid and tense with excitement. For on the screen appeared a yellow blur which broadened and developed as it swept into the field of vision until it assumed the contour of a giant space flyer standing clear-cut against the black sky of space.

The Spectacles Arrives

"**THE SPECTACLES!**" exclaimed the President in a hoarse whisper, and his councilors, staring with popping eyes at the onrushing ship, bent forward breathlessly. For a tense moment the hush of death was on the chamber. Then with a murmur the great audience got to their feet and gazed with starting eyes as the great space-flyer took form on the screen. Then the dire words—*The Spectacles*, passed from lip to lip, passed from the chamber and was taken up by thousands on the outside until it echoed and re-echoed in a frenzied shout of despair. For many were the vague but terrible stories that had come to the Martians relative to this awful monster of the air. The people of both Uranus and Neptune had been slaughtered almost to a man, and the earth threatened, yet not a soul on Mars knew anything of its mechanism or method of attack.

But in a few moments the President was on his feet. He held up his hand and the people resumed their seats.

"My fellow citizens, I fear that war with Venus has come at last," said the President with icy calmness. "But let not your hearts be filled with fear, though this unknown beast now rushes upon us. The warriors of Mars have never been entirely vanquished. We must not tremble before the unknown power of this new foe. I am satisfied that our valiant aerial soldiers are well able to take care of him, without even the help of our fleet which is manned and waiting to defend our beloved planet. Therefore, I order that the first battalion of air guards be assembled at once and made ready for service." President Wando turned to an officer by his side. "General Mitho, you will proceed to carry out this order."

The general bowed and hastened away, while a sigh of relief and applause came up from the people. But all eyes were still staring at the screen. Although still thousands of miles distant in space the great golden air craft was nearing them at tremendous speed, and all realized that within a few hours the terrible thing would be circling above them and showering them with death.

Near the inner bases of two round forts near the sea all was bustle and excitement. But there was no confusion, no misunderstanding of orders as the air soldiers prepared for their task. Each man was snapped into a heavy metal armor of red which bulged large at the

shoulders and the waist to accommodate and protect the delicate electric apparatus within.

A heavily ribbed static condenser and amplifier ran down the back of this armor connecting the gravity nullifier and aerial projector with the ray machine and its lenses by means of a broad belt of shining metal. The helmet, whose face and back were made of heavy, non-breakable glass, was equipped with horn-like feelers, or vibrators, which served to keep the equilibrium of the soldier, illuminate his way, and in case of emergency by throwing off powerful static currents prove a strong defensive weapon. Each soldier was furnished with both food and air enough to last him ten days under ordinary fighting conditions. The golden ray, swift and terrible in execution, was his main weapon of defense, and his red armor was built to withstand a pressure of one hundred pounds to the square inch.

As each soldier was made ready he was placed on a magnetized belt which ran to and around the openings in the red domes.

At last all was in readiness to give the unwelcome visitor a warm reception. Anxiously the officers gazed at the television screens which were located at each divisional headquarters. By this time the approaching monster could be observed in detail. The center of its round prow glowed and gleamed like a great green eye, but the lights in its ports showed dully on their background of gold. Truly it had been rightly named *The Spectacles*, for it much resembled those valuable aids of vision. In the center where the nose-piece should have been rose a tower which swelled into a rounded top pierced by a row of ports, and in its crown shone another green eye. In the base of the tower were several large openings each covered with glass. And this, as the watchers on Mars rightly

guessed, was the control room of the craft.

Another hour passed and then the Martians were terrified to see the great, shining ship directly over them and nearing the ground with frightful speed. But when within fifteen hundred feet of the forts it stopped suddenly and hung motionless in the still air. As the awe-struck Martians stared upward it seemed that the great, golden bulk of the enemy filled the whole sky. It emitted a pale glow that spread far and near, illuminating both the planet and the heavens above and eclipsing the pin-points of the stars. It was a terrifying spectacle to behold.

It was fully three hundred yards from side to side and half that in breadth, and in the center of each rounded end—which would represent the bows and the lens of the spectacles—was a gigantic concave eye of green which swirled and eddied and flashed with green fire so swiftly that it appeared like the green waters of a whirlpool. And these two great eyes seemed to the Martians to be gazing down on them with a leer of devilish triumph.

Down below, President Wando, gazing at a television



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screen, saw that the fateful moment had arrived. He gave an order. Instantly the long rows of red-armored soldiers began to move two abreast on the belts toward the domes of the forts. There the belts turned them swiftly in a spiral. As they neared the top of the dome each man set his gravity nullifier and his projector in motion, and then was shot through the opening into the air.

CHAPTER II

The Attack of the Aerial Soldiers

SOON both forts near the sea were vomiting solid streams of red-clad men, who with vibrating horns erect rose rapidly toward the silent, mysterious craft of Venus. Each man was a unit unto himself, yet an important factor in the whole Martian scheme of war. Each fully realized the gravity of his mission, the probability that a speedy death awaited him above. But not a man faltered. Turning on full power, each shot toward that gold-hued, green-eyed beast and made ready to launch his deadly ray.

To their amazement the soldiers were allowed to reach a close point of vantage without molestation. No sign of life whatever could they see aboard *The Spectacles*. Silent and as unmoving as a statue, the spaceship waited grimly as though conscious of its power it disdained to notice the puny advance of the soldiers. Only its great, green eyes showed life. Finally a couple of dozen men paused in air facing the glowing enemy less than a hundred yards away. With supreme confidence they shot forth their terrible yellow rays, and one man, bolder than his fellows, cast his ray right into the green eye in the nose. But nothing happened. The rays were seen to waver and stop, within a few feet of the monster and disappear into thin air. Rays that had been known to melt the hardest armor known to Martian science were impotent even to touch this hideous craft which had come across the cold of space to destroy them. They realized that the enemy was surrounded by invisible waves of some substance that nothing could penetrate.

Then suddenly the attackers were forced gently back through the air. Each man's ray energizer died, his gravity nullifier grew weak. Against his will and despite his most strenuous efforts he was faced about and thrust back by some invisible power. And as he began to fall his courage fled, panic seized him, and with madly thumping heart he sought to accelerate his progress back into the shelter of the forts. It seemed as if an icy hand had suddenly clutched his heart and chilled his life-blood. This was the fate of every soldier in the air. Bravely he went to the attack, and was thrown back beaten and puzzled by a power he could not see or understand.

So the silent, one-sided attack went on for an hour. Thousands of Mars' most able and fearless ray fighters surrounded the enemy and discharged their rays hoping to find a weak point in the armor of the foe only to be forced down in defeat.

At last President Wando, amazed, humiliated and distracted, ordered the attack to cease. All this time

the ship of Venus had maintained its silent, inactive poise in the sky. No human life had been seen about it. No projectile had been fired, no bomb dropped or ray sent on its deadly mission. Not even a message had been received from it. Most amazing of all—although decisively beaten, not a soldier of Mars had been lost or even injured.

President Wando called a council of war. Some officers advocated that a message be sent to the master of *The Spectacles*—whoever he might be—to learn his intentions. But the majority advised that the air fleet be called from its subterranean rendezvous and sent against the enemy. The President favored this plan, for he knew that already the Martians had gone too far to retreat, no matter what the strange visitor's intentions might be. So the cream of the air armada of Mars, fully manned and eager for battle, was ordered to proceed against the enemy hoping to cut him down by weight of superior numbers. The mammoth rock doors covering the underground hangars of the airships were flung upward, and then in a great red wave one hundred giant ships shot into the air with rocket speed.

Still, *The Spectacles* gave no heed; showed no disposition to either repel or attack this new foe. Silent and motionless it hung there in the eerie light of the moons and the spectral glow of its own radiation. The thing was uncanny, beyond the scope of reason.

In a few minutes the red fleet had arranged itself in a circle two miles in diameter around its foe. Like monster globules of blood the vessels gleamed in the moonbeams.

President Wando, surrounded by his advisors, watched the maneuver with satisfaction, for it seemed that nothing could withstand the combined attack of these huge craft. It appeared that at last *The Spectacles* was doomed. The red fleet was to have the credit for destroying the mightiest menace to civilization that had ever terrorized the planetary system. The ships of Mars were gigantic, terrifying to behold, and were equipped with the latest engines of scientific destruction.

When all was ready, President Wando gave the signal for attack; and then like a giant python contracting on its prey the red circle narrowed, writhed forward and rushed upon its foe. To the watchers below it seemed that *The Spectacles* must be crushed by the power of this advancing coil. But the ship from Venus made no move. Like a great golden island of the air, conscious of its own superiority and the pathetic impotency of its adversaries, it calmly awaited the attack.

The ships of Mars in regular and beautiful order had narrowed the gulf separating them from *The Spectacles* to an eighth of a mile when suddenly every craft burst into flame. In a twinkling the attacking fleet became a cordon of dazzling fire which blazed fiercely for a few minutes, then died quickly leaving nothing but empty air where the red ships had been but a few moment before. Not a vestige of them remained. Not even a fleck of ashes floated in the air. The fleet had been entirely consumed. And there had been no movement on the part of *The Spectacles*—not even a flash had come from its sides. Serene and unharmed it rode there in the sky.

Terror stricken and stupefied by the sudden loss of the fleet, which had perished without striking a blow,

President Wando gazed at his lieutenants helplessly. An amazing and incredible thing had happened before their eyes. In a surge of hopelessness each saw that such a foe was unconquerable. There was no hope for the proud race of Mars. President Wando believed this—yet as the chosen head of his people he must fight their battles to the last. He must obtain the best possible concessions. He would parley with the enemy.

To the President's amazement and consternation the answer to this polite but militant message came from Luban himself, emperor of Venus. It was the first voice that had come from the grim beast above.

"We demand the immediate and unconditional surrender of Mars," came the thundering voice over the radio. "We do not desire to slay your people. We spared the lives of your aerial soldiers, and would have spared your ships had you appealed to us. But unless our demands are granted we shall destroy your people and take possession of this planet."

Again panic seized the council chamber of the Martians. The startling demands of the conquerors radiated around the globe brought an immediate deluge of frantic requests that they be met. There seemed to be no other recourse. Horrified and impotent in the face of the monster the terror-stricken people implored their government not to further jeopardize their lives by resisting the foe. Only the President and his brave fighters still clung to hope.

"We beg a few days to consider your remarkable proposition," radioed the President at last.

After an anxious half hour interval the answer came in the gruff tones of the emperor.

"We will give you four days," he said. "And remember that is the absolute limit."

CHAPTER III

The Advent of Melvin Blue

AT this time, millions of miles distant, Melvin Blue's space-flyer, *Sky Queen*, was rushing toward Mars. After years of patient effort and failure, the powers of the earth, headed by America, had given their consent to his daring plan. He would establish friendly relations and commercial intercourse with the Martians. Mars, although superior to the earth in science and civilization, had always looked askance at the world of the Earthling, fearing the commercial spirit of that money-mad tribe. Mars had been in radio communication with the earth for hundreds of years, but no Martian space-flyer had ever visited it, and the few that had left the earth Mars bound had been lost somewhere in the great ocean of space.

But the sailors of space have no landmarks and no proved charts to guide them across the yawning gulf of nothingness. No friendly beacons send their beams across the sky. No pilot boats venture across the reef to guide them into port.

Anxiously Melvin Blue and his navigator bent over a large solar map in the chart room of the *Sky Queen*. They were not exactly sure of their position. In the great void of space their craft might pursue an endless course to the port of eternity. Many worlds, great and

small, had swirled past them, and fiery meteor trains—those hurtling fragments of worlds which they could not assign their proper place in the heavens because unaccountably their communication with the earth had ceased.

"I reckon we'll have to turn back, Mr. Blue," finally said the navigator straightening up and looking at his employer with an expression of despair. "But I'll be hanged if I like to do it."

"Nor I," said Melvin Blue. "Now let's—"

"There is a queer speck just off the port bow, sir," suddenly announced the lookout in the control room.

Melvin Blue stared at the transmitter.

"A meteor, isn't it?" he called back.

"No sir. The thing is a bright red with a bright silver stripe about the middle, and it is hanging motionless."

Followed by his navigator, Melvin Blue rushed to the control room, glanced at the television screen and then glued his eyes to the bow binoculars. Although many miles distant, the powerful glasses quickly defined the object. It was indeed, an odd looking bundle to be found aloft in space. A round, barrel-like body of red tapering down to a round, purple-colored end. And midway about the body was a bright metal band which shimmered and flashed in the sun's rays.

"Throttle down," ordered Melvin Blue. "We will investigate."

The *Sky Queen's* terrific speed was checked almost instantly, the retarding motors working smoothly and silently. But so great was the momentum that she was carried past the object a score of miles before she could be checked sufficiently to turn back under the full force of the retarders. But finally she was brought to a stand beside the isolated speck in space.

A port was opened quickly by compressed air, a grapple swung out and in the fraction of a minute the metal-cased object was swung aboard. Then the nose of the great, slender craft was again put upon her course, the motors started and the *Sky Queen* roared upon her way.

"Good God, it's a woman!" gasped Blue, staring through the thick glass of the helmet. "Quick, we must remove this armor!"

Hastily the armor was removed and the woman lifted out.

A dark-haired girl with finely chiseled features and a plump form reclined inert and limp in the arms of Melvin Blue. At first he thought her dead, for there was neither respiration nor pulse, but placing his ear close to her breast he detected a faint flutter of the heart.

"She lives," he exclaimed breathlessly.

She was placed on a couch, the electric resuscitator and other restoratives applied by the ship's doctor, and in a few minutes Melvin Blue was glad to see her eyelids flutter, then open. She looked around in a stare of wonder, then whispered something in an unknown tongue. When they stared at her without comprehending she attempted to rise, but sank back with a moan. The doctor gave her a sedative and in a few minutes she sighed and fell asleep.

For two days she slept soundly while the space-flyer roared on, and Melvin Blue, sleepless and filled with

wonderment, hardly allowed his eyes to wander away from her. The odd armor that had encased her when found, her discovery alone in the cold of outer space, millions of miles from any known world and her rare beauty and form that spoke of a high state of culture and refinement, formed a hopeless puzzle. And he watched the returning glow of life in her cheeks with sighs of gratitude. Already he felt that this girl's life was more precious to him than his own. Never before had love of woman appealed to him. He had been too busy with his inventions to think of the fair sex. And now the *Sky Queen* embodied the essence of all his talent. He had evolved a super vessel which, should the test be successful, he would present to his government, confident that she could master any space-flyer extant.

The Girl Explains

ON the third day the girl awoke. The dullness had left her eyes and she smiled at those bending above her couch. Again she spoke in that odd, unintelligible tongue.

Again they stared and shook their heads.

"Forgive me. I should have known better than to address you in the language of my people," she continued in the interplanetary speech that had been evolved by radio connections with different worlds.

"Who are you?" asked Melvin Blue.

"I am Zola, only child of President Wando of Mars."

They all stared in amazement.

"Why are we on our way to Mars," finally said Melvin Blue. "At least we think we are," he added doubtfully. "This morning I 'shot' the sun, but we are not sure of our reckoning, and consider turning back unless we can find ourselves soon."

"May I see your chart?" asked the girl.

A chart was brought to her. She studied it carefully for a few minutes, comparing it with the navigator's figures. Then she took the pencil which Melvin Blue tendered her, and after a few minutes' figuring announced:

"Allowing for the probable ether drift and the deflection from your course in picking me up I figure you are off but a point."

The course was changed to conform to her calculations—for Melvin Blue clearly recognized her ability as a space navigator without knowing why. Then he asked:

"Pray tell me how you came to be in such a predicament?"

"Carelessness," she answered with a wry smile. "Every man and woman of Mars is a trained aerial soldier. He is taught to wear our red armor and fight by its aid. Two weeks ago I was a member of a peace ship sent out to meet a like vessel from Venus to negotiate a treaty between Mars and that planet—which by the way covets our great stores of minerals. But owing to some miscalculation we missed each other."

"After scouting about for the day we set out for home. An improvement to the gravity nullifier of our armor had just been perfected by our commander. I had donned the suit to test out the controlling mechanism, and he had left me for a moment to secure some article.

I was leaning against a closed port. Suddenly and without warning it swung open and precipitated me into space. As I swung away from the side of the rapidly moving ship I realized that some one had carelessly left the port unlocked, and that I was floating alone in the awful depths of space. A great swarm of Leonids were passing between us and the sun, so the blackness of night was about me. In a twinkling I saw the lights of the fast receding ship vanish in the darkness, but I did not give myself up for lost.

"Doubtless they would return to look for me; but I was swirled away in an unknown direction, probably influenced by the swirling rush of the Leonids. I was not prepared for a long voyage, having no directional finder with me, but as every suit of armor is constantly kept supplied with ten days' rations of food, air and water and is insulated against the intense cold I was able to keep alive. But when the night wore on and day broke again with no sign of my companions' ship I gave myself up for lost. Two days ago I consumed the last of the food and water and nearly all my air. You, sir, found me just in time. You have saved my life."

"I am only too happy that it is so," said Melvin Blue gallantly. "I shall be honored and happy to take you home."

"Thank you. I feel that I can never repay your kindness," she said with emotion. "But you may be too late. Perhaps I have no home. I fear that already we are at war with Venus; that already my people are crushed by the power of *The Spectacles*."

"*The Spectacles*!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, the most horrid and most powerful aerial beast in the universe. It is said to be invincible and led by the powers of darkness. Perhaps you should not take me home," she added fearfully. "It might cost you your life, the destruction of this noble ship. I cannot ask you to sacrifice so much for me. Please, turn back before it is too late." And the girl shuddered as she pressed her hands tightly over her eyes.

"My dear young lady," encouraged Melvin Blue.

"Now I remember having heard of *The Spectacles*. Once that redoubtable craft came near the atmosphere of the earth and sent us an insolent message. However, we ignored it. Put your trust in the *Sky Queen*. I do not fear *The Spectacles*. And, besides, I have set out to take you home."

The girl's eyes glowed with admiration as she noted his firm lips and the grim set of his fighting jaw.

"I beg to report, sir, that we have just sighted a space-flyer," said an officer entering hurriedly. "She is about to cross our bows and I fancy by her actions that she wishes to speak to us."

"Reduce the speed in half," commanded Blue, following his aid from the room.

The television screen in the control cabin showed a large liner of peculiar construction speeding obliquely toward them. Again their speed was cut in half as they observed the stranger to do likewise.

"What ship is that?" suddenly came the challenge over the radio in the interplanetary tongue.

"*Sky Queen* of Boston on the earth," returned Melvin Blue.

"Where bound and for what purpose?"

"To Mars to establish commercial relations with the earth. May I ask what ship is yours?"

"The *Rounder* from Venus. We are friends of earth and would come aboard," said the man from Venus.

"Permission is granted," said Melvin Blue crisply as he returned to Zola.

The ship from Venus cut a great circle and soon was sailing close above the *Sky Queen* at exactly the same speed. Lower she dropped until only a few yards separated the two space-flyers. Then a small ladder was dropped from a port in the *Rounder's* bottom, and a heavily set man came down it rapidly. A door in the *Sky Queen's* top opened to receive him, then closed quickly as he entered. An officer conducted him to Melvin Blue.

The fat, round face of the man from Venus beamed as his pale eyes fell on the girl.

"The television screen showed us this lovely maiden," he said in oily accents, "but it did not reveal half the beauty." He bowed low, making a comical figure in his tight uniform of gray. "May I ask an introduction?"

"I am Zola from Mars," said the girl proudly, rising and confronting the officer. She swayed, but Melvin Blue stepped quickly forward and supported her.

"Ah, yes," said the officer. "I regret to inform you that my people and yours are at war."

"Then it has come at last," she gasped. "And is—that terrible air monster there over my beloved home?"

"To be sure, my dear Miss. I am glad to state that *The Spectacles* has the situation well in hand. There has been a battle and of course your people have been worsted."

The girl trembled in Melvin Blue's arms.

"And now, sir, you must turn back to the earth," went on the man from Venus, turning to the owner of the *Sky Queen*. "Our patrol forms a ring around Mars beyond which none may pass. As a friend I warn you, sir, to turn back at once. If you proceed you will only invite a sudden and terrible death. It will be my pleasure to take charge of this young lady and convey her safely to her people."

"What is your pleasure?" asked the owner of the *Sky Queen*, looking into the eyes of the girl. For answer she shrank closer in his arms.

"You go to hell," said Melvin Blue with true Yankee vigor as he turned fiercely on his visitor.

The officer stared blankly. Melvin Blue nodded to a grinning aid standing by the door. With a firm grip he seized the man by the shoulder and conducted him from the room. And then when he was safely aboard his own craft the space-flyers drew apart and the *Sky Queen* resumed her course toward Mars.

However, she was not to proceed unmolested. Suddenly the golden-hued ship of Venus began to sparkle and flame with white fire as she fell in behind the *Sky Queen*. Melvin Blue, gazing at the television, only smiled as he ordered the electric armor to surround his ship which began to lead the way at a tremendous speed. But the following craft was not to be outdone so easily. She, too, put on more power and pressed closely after the *Sky Queen* as she noted the futility of her rays.

On and on through they raced with no appreciable advantage on either side. Then the *Sky Queen*, gradually at first, then by leaps and bounds, began to draw away from her pursuer, until it was left far behind.

The scout patrol ship of Venus was seen no more during the remaining two days that it took to complete the voyage to Mars.

CHAPTER IV

A Warning

SUNSET of the third day found them spiraling slowly downward above the red planet. Side by side Zola and Melvin Blue watched plain and mountain and sea take form beneath them, and then suddenly from behind a mountain ridge they saw the huge yellow bulk of *The Spectacles* poised motionless, silent and grim above the forts.

"Stop!" exclaimed the girl. "Allow me to glide down in my armor. Likely I shall not be molested, for I think there is a truce. But I see no signs of warfare. I ask you not to risk a battle with that terrible, yellow monster."

"I am neither seeking trouble nor running away from it," smiled Melvin Blue. "And I have set out to take you home. You say that the landing field nearest that round, central fort will best suit your convenience. That's where we land."

"Thank you," murmured the girl.

No more was said until they had gently come to rest near the fort.

"Remember, I have your promise to visit us," she said as he helped her from the ship. "I want to present you to my father that he may thank you for your great service to me."

"It is nothing, and the honor is all mine," he said simply. "I shall be glad to avail myself of your kind invitation."

She pressed his hand, then turned and ran up one of the rock battresses of the fort. She took a few steps along the gray walk beneath the hooded ports, then stopped before one. Turning she waved her hand at her rescuer, then disappeared within.

Immediately the *Sky Queen* soared into the air, while Melvin Blue carefully scanned *The Spectacles* for signs of life, particularly did his searching eyes linger on the great, green orbs that glared down balefully. All this time the mysterious craft had remained stationary. So calm and lifeless did it appear that it seemed more like a model carved from a gigantic block of gold than an engine of war.

Melvin Blue was amazed. He could not conjecture why he had not been attacked. All about was the silence of the tomb. There were no signs of strife or preparation for war. Sedate and calm, like an angel monarch guarding the destinies of worlds, *The Spectacles* maintained its position. Only its great eyes flashed with greenish fire as the *Sky Queen* rose majestically into the sky.

Suddenly the call letters of the interplanetary code bellowed from the radio.

"Earth being, take your craft and depart at once if

you would live," came the startling order as Melvin Blue stared. "Luban, Emperor of Venus, orders."

As the *Sky Queen* soared high above *The Spectacles* Melvin Blue gazed down at the green eyes speculatively. Now he had seen them both from above and below. On both sides they were concave, sloping sharply to a thin center, and as he watched the swirling green fire he concluded that they formed the heart and the soul of the ship, and that she was sustained, driven and armored with cosmic rays. Immense as the eyes were—being fully two hundred feet in diameter—he believed them to be composed of a fine net-work of antenna and frail mirrors which had the power of absorbing, amplifying and directing the cosmic rays. That she carried some powerful ray machine he did not doubt, but as she drove edgewise through the air, he conjectured that the rays were projected only horizontally. As they passed on a grim smile wrinkled his bronzed face.

Luban was not feared by Melvin Blue. So but a mile away at an altitude of only two miles the *Sky Queen* came to rest. She was not a formidable looking craft, appearing like a slender, elongated cigar set against the blue. Her long, needle-like nose was heavily cased with *solene*—the hardest, lightest, toughest metal known to man—and the same shining metal sheathed her from end to end. With closed ports she presented an exterior smooth as glass, almost as hard as the diamond and, like the diamond, capable of passing trial by fire. Propelled solely by electricity, which her motors gathered from the air and the ether as she drove on, she was capable of tremendous speed.

"Who are you, and what is your purpose here?" again came the coarse voice of Luban. Melvin Blue smiled.

"I am Melvin Blue of the United States on earth, at your service, sir," he shot back. "Who wants to know?"

"I am Luban, the Great, Emperor of all Venus," came the proud answer. "We are on a mission of war—Mars lies supine and helpless at our feet—and at this time we tolerate the presence of neither friend nor foe. But as we are at peace with the earth, I do not wish to harm you. Therefore you will kindly leave at once."

"You are very kind," said Melvin Blue sarcastically. "But having not as yet discharged my mission I would tarry yet a while. If—"

He stopped abruptly.

"Will the captain of the *Sky Queen* honor me with his presence?" interrupted a pleasant voice. "President Wando, speaking."

"I shall be delighted," returned Melvin Blue.

A Terrible Bargain

IT was the work of but a few minutes to again land the *Sky Queen*. A guard came out of one of the hooded ports and conducted her master to the council chamber where sat President Wando beside his daughter.

"How can we ever repay your great kindness?" said the President, extending his hand. "My daughter has told me all. Although now at war and in poor state to extend our hospitality, I assure you that all Mars is at your command."

"You flatter me," said Melvin Blue. "The service

was nothing, and I am only too glad—"

He checked and turned toward the portal following the President's intense stare. A newcomer resplendent in gold lace and flashing medals, unaccompanied by even an aid, was striding proudly up the aisle. He was a portly man short of stature, with a moon-like face and great, protruding eyes.

"I am Emperor Luban of Venus," he declared pompously, stopping in front of the President and regarding him with a leer of insolence.

"You honor us, though you come uninvited," said the President graciously, motioning the Emperor to a chair.

"It is not meet for me to sit before the great," he said mockingly as his saucer-like eyes fell on Zola and set there in a warm stare of admiration. "May I have the honor of an introduction?" he added, casting a baleful glance at Melvin Blue.

"My daughter, Zola," said the President stiffly.

The Emperor extended a fat hand which Zola scarcely touched as she shrank back involuntarily and stepped closer to her rescuer.

"The time of the truce has nearly expired," said the Emperor without taking his eyes from the girl. "I trust you people are ready to agree to our demands."

"We are not ready," said President Wando firmly. "We crave more time to ponder such a momentous question."

"I will give you no more time," said the Emperor harshly. "Unless you agree to my terms by noon tomorrow *The Spectacles* will lay waste your planet and reduce your people to slavery."

Although Zola had stepped aside and was earnestly talking to Melvin Blue the master of Venus followed her every movement with his eyes—eyes that glowed with a gloating, evil light.

President Wando made no answer. He just sat gazing at the repulsive face of his enemy.

"I object to the presence of this—Earthling," continued the Emperor, frowning at the owner of the *Sky Queen*. "He has no business to witness our affairs of state. I have ordered him to begone, and shall attend to him shortly."

Melvin Blue's face went white with anger, then he mastered himself and came up to President Wando.

"Pardon me, Mr. President," he said, "but as our interview has been rudely interrupted I shall withdraw. However, I shall be happy to call again at a more opportune time."

"There will be no other time," cut in the Emperor meaningly.

Pretending not to hear the insolent remark Melvin Blue bowed to the President and his daughter and withdrew. But as he went he whispered to the girl that he would come again.

"Would you free your people from the serfdom that now threatens?" went on the Emperor. "Would you have me withdraw *The Spectacles* and leave your world in peace?" The President stared. "Your daughter is fair to look upon," continued the Emperor. "I would have her for my queen."

Zola shrank back with a gasping cry, while the President stared in amazement.

"I will leave you now to consider my proposition,"

said the tyrant. "But at nine o'clock to-morrow forenoon I must have my answer."

Without further words the Emperor turned away and stalked haughtily from the chamber, went to his plane and flew back to the deck of *The Spectacles*.

"You heard what he said, my daughter," finally said the President in a hollow voice.

"The hideous monster!" she cried. "I would sooner die a thousand times than to become his queen."

"Yet you would sacrifice all for your country," he reminded gently, "even to life itself. Emperor Luban is mighty. He offers us either life or death, freedom or slavery. He will keep his word, and despite reports to the contrary, he may not be so bad, after all."

"Father!" she choked. "How can you think of such a thing! I could never love such a horrid being. I could never—"

"But think of Mars, my child," he interposed hurriedly. "Think of the welfare of millions of your countrymen now in your keeping. I do not ask you to accept Luban's proposition off hand, I only ask that you give it serious thought. There seems to be no other way to free us of the despotic yoke of Venus," he added bitterly.

Zola turned away and sought her room. Well she knew her father's wish. He would not willingly sacrifice her, but above all the welfare of this people lay close to his heart.

SLEEPLESS and miserable she wrangled with the problem throughout the night, and always she knew that those terrible green eyes were glaring down at her beloved land. But as the red sun rose over the bleak hills she took the situation in hand. She would appeal to Melvin Blue.

In her soldier armor she rose to the long, silver ship that glistened like a jewel in the rays of the sun. Its master saw her coming and let her in as he stared at her in wonder. Briefly she made known her dilemma. But scarcely had she ceased speaking when the loud, raucous voice of Luban crackled from the radio.

"The young man from the earth," he rapped out, "will kindly permit the maiden, Zola, to return to her father at once, or I shall let loose the awful power of *The Spectacles*. And after the young lady has departed you will at once turn the nose of your ship toward the far off earth."

"And if I refuse?" asked Melvin Blue.

"Then I shall send you down with the terrible rays of *The Spectacles*—gently, of course, for the maiden's sake. But after she has departed from your craft it shall be consumed like a wisp of steam in a furnace."

"Miss Zola is my guest and I shall protect her as such," said Melvin Blue. "I refuse to obey your orders."

"Then prepare to feel my power," rasped Luban.

In the television screen they saw that his fat face was purple with rage. He gave rapid orders to his officers clustering about him. Then *The Spectacles* began to rise at a tremendous speed straight into the air.

Zola looked at her rescuer with terror-stricken eyes.

"You must not sacrifice yourself and men for me,"

she said. "Let me into the air and I will go home," she went on, gazing at the great, golden monster. "See, they are coming up to our level, then they will rush forward and smite us with the awful fire that snuffed out the brave ships of Mars."

"Luban is coming up to our level, all right," said Melvin Blue calmly. "But when he strikes I fancy we will be like the Irishman's flea."

"Like the Irishman's flea!" she exclaimed.

"Yes—we will be somewhere else."

It took *The Spectacles* but a few moments to reach the three mile level where rode the *Sky Queen*.

Melvin Blue gave a few sharp orders, then the *Sky Queen* dove straight down, but owing to the gyroscopic mountings each compartment of the ship maintained its normal level. Down, down at terrific speed she plunged like a streak of silver in the bright sunshine. It seemed that they must crash on the sharp rocks rising so swiftly to meet them. Zola was clinging in terror to the *Sky Queen's* master when the craft suddenly straightened out and shot to a position directly beneath *The Spectacles*. Then she turned upward and rushed with full speed, straight as an arrow toward the center of one of the green eyes.

Melvin Blue was taking a desperate chance, but he felt that circumstances justified it. He would cripple and destroy his antagonist by striking at his heart. All ports of the *Sky Queen* were closed, and like a great, silver needle she shot to the mark. There was a grinding hiss, a thunderous roar, and then in a moment it was over. Looking down, they beheld, in place of the glowing, green eye, a fire-rimmed, smoking hole.

For a moment the great ship of Venus wobbled crazily, then she was righted but began to spin around and around like a giant top.

Smiling grimly Melvin Blue checked the upward flight of the *Sky Queen*, then he turned her over end for end, and straight as a plummet she dove down toward the remaining eye of *The Spectacles*. A moment later she had emerged below and the pride of Venus, broken and sightless, was staggering like a drunken man. Then in a moment she began to careen and fall in a zig zag line toward the rocks. As they watched breathlessly she struck amidship on a sharp peak and broke in two.

The *Sky Queen* came to rest near the sea as the awe-struck, but grateful Martians poured from the forts and stared at the funeral pyre of their enemy. Slender tongues of flame shot high in the air and great clouds of white smoke rose from the golden sides.

At last President Wando managed to wedge himself through the crowd to where Zola and Melvin Blue stood beside his ship. Unable to speak for a moment he could only grasp his savior's hand.

"You have saved our world," he managed to say at last. The scourge of the skies is no more and Mars is forever free. My dear sir, to you we owe a debt of gratitude that we can never repay."

"I consider myself more than repaid already," said Melvin Blue as Zola pressed closer to his side.

For a moment President Wando stared, then his eyes

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A Rescue in Space

(Continued from page 355)

widened with joy.

"I understand, my children, and you have my blessing," he said simply. "Now according to Martian law the marriage must take place at once. By virtue of my high office I will perform the ceremony."

And when a moment later the assembled thousands became aware of what was going on, a great shout of

thanksgiving and exultation arose—high above the roar of the burning monster it rose, gathered in volume and reverberated over land and sea.

As *The Spectacles* fell apart and rolled down the steep rocks, a mass of blackened, tangled wreckage, the marriage was performed.

Thus travel between Mars and the earth began.

THE END.

"FUTURE FLYING FICTION"

In the February 1930 issue of *AIR WONDER STORIES* we announced an unusual contest — \$100.00 in gold was to be given for the best slogan that would describe *AIR WONDER STORIES* and its contents.

The contest closed at noon on May 1, 1930, and at that time by official count we had received 3,860 entries, together with accompanying letters giving the reason for the choice of the slogan.

Naturally the classifying of all these entries, the arranging of them into grades so that the winners might be picked was a monumental job, particularly because so many of them were so good.

Then came a series of editorial conferences in which the editors and the publisher gradually weeded out the better ones, in order to finally pick the winner.

The job was not easy; but in the end an almost unanimous agreement was obtained on the selection of the slogan, "*Future Flying Fiction*," submitted by J. Harris, of 9 Tavistock Square, London, W. C. 1, England. Naturally as *AIR WONDER STORIES* has been merged into *Wonder Stories* and the slogan "*The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction*" has already been chosen for *Wonder Stories* the *AIR WONDER STORIES* slogan will not be used. However, we gladly offer

the prize to Mr. Harris in conformity with the terms of the contest. The letter of Mr. Harris follows:

Editor, Slogan Contest, AIR WONDER STORIES:

My reasons for choosing the attached slogan are the following: The three words make it short, sharp and distinctive. It says no more than it

means, but that it says clearly. It can be used either on the cover or as a subtitle on the contents page and it is not too long to appear as a secondary title on a small poster.

It is self-explanatory and should catch the eye of persons who are looking for a magazine of that kind.

The three F's also have an alliterative value in themselves.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN B. HARRIS,

9 Tavistock Square,
London, W. C. 1, England.

Among the honorable mentions are the following:

"Aero Fact in Fiction," submitted by Charles B. Davis, 812 Grainger Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

"Fact—Fiction—Future Flying," submitted by James M. Cox, Cleveland, Ohio.

"Flights of Fact and Fancy," submitted by John A. Savage, 3rd, 73 West 130th Street, New York.

"Thrilling Stories of Future Aviation," submitted by Peter Cook, Little Falls, N. J.

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"*Future Flying Fiction*"