

# WARLORDS of MARS



"Your Majesty," said the delegate, "Our gift to the Princess Wimpolo!"



**BY FESTUS  
PRAGNELL**

**Don Hargreaves didn't want to fight the warlords of Mars, but he couldn't ignore a Princess' promise**

**D**ON HARGREAVES shook his head as he sat beside Professor Winterton. "They are like children," he said. "Always picking fights. Just look at King Usulor now. He's bristling like a game-cock."

Professor Winterton nodded, looking all around the great palace reception hall. "I don't like it at all, Don. Things are pretty upset in Mars. There might even be a war."

Hargreaves gripped Professor Winterton's arm. "Look," he whispered.

"The Princess Wimpolo is coming in." He pointed to the ornate entrance to the palace.

Accompanied by a retinue of servants, the newly arrived princess walked toward her position in the reception hall. By earthly standards she certainly wasn't beautiful. Like all Martians, she was over ten feet tall, and her body was correspondingly proportioned. She was sinuous and graceful, in spite of her size, which on Earth would have made her so heavy she

would have been unable to walk. Here she moved gracefully and easily, with a certain exotic charm notwithstanding her unlovely features.

A rather horrifying touch was the huge snake coiled about her shoulders. It was her favorite pet.

She had barely seated herself when King Usulor began shouting into his television transmitter. In nearly every home in the underground world of Mars he could be both seen and heard.

"I, Usulor, ruler of the mightiest nation in Mars,\* greet you all. By the wise rule of the aristocrats, of whom I am the greatest, peace and order has been preserved in our sunless world for a hundred thousand years. And once every year I, as leader of the aristocrats of Mars, require that every lesser king shall send a token of his esteem and of his loyalty to me, his overlord. That day is the birthday of my daughter Wimpolo, she who has been chosen by the judges as the most aristocratic lady in all Mars.

"In honor of her birthday I have received beautiful presents from all the other kings. All, that is, but one. The party sent by that king is, I suppose, delayed by some untoward event; maybe a fall of stones from a cavern roof, an outburst of lava, or an attack by snakes.

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\* Within Mars are many nations, each with its king, its nobles, its middle classes, and its working masses. The kings themselves are graded in an exact scale, up to Usulor at the very top. This system had kept Mars rigid for a hundred thousand years. In a world where there was no day, where it was always night, where there was no summer or winter, nothing ever changed. Everything remained the same, century after century.

In all that time the only event of real importance had been the arrival of a few men from distant Earth to scratch the abandoned surface of Mars for rare metals. A few of these, among them Don Hargreaves and Professor Winterton, had found their way down into the deep tunnels where lived the inhabitants of a planet thought to be void of life. (See "Ghost of Mars" in the December, 1938 AMAZING STORIES.)—Ed.

"For his own sake I hope there is some such reason for his lapse. After a hundred thousand years of peace it would be unfortunate if I had to destroy the little kingdom of Ossalandoc. Let Ossalandoc take care. King Sommalu of Ossalandoc! I am calling you. Why has your party not arrived?"

In the sphere of vision King Sommalu appeared in answer garishly decorated. From the point of view of the few earthmen who watched there was little to choose between the two glaring, frosty-eyed giants. One was as bad as the other.

"Does the mighty Usulor need gifts from the little kingdom of Ossalandoc?" Sommalu asked sneeringly.

Don Hargreaves gasped. This was dangerous insolence.

Usulor shouted no more. His voice was cold as steel.

"So you defy me, Sommalu?" he asked.

"No," came the mocking voice. "I am benevolent. I give alms to the needy. Rouse yourself and open your bleary eyes. Your present has already arrived."

Usulor and all his court wheeled round. A party of five men were just entering the courtroom of the overlord of Mars.

AS the glittering throng looked at the small party a startled hush fell upon them. For the representatives of King Sommalu were dressed entirely in dark green. Green is the color of death, of mildew, verdigris, and decay, in the damp, sunless caves of Mars. Upon their heads were the helmets that Martians wear to protect themselves from the stones that are continually falling from cavern roofs. To wear helmets here was an insult to King Usulor, suggesting that his palace roof was unsafe. Upon the ambassador's tunic was

painted a white Martian bird, something like an owl. A Martian owl is the symbol of old age and barrenness. It meant much the same as though the cover of the huge present being wheeled in had borne the words: *For the Old Hag*.

There was a sound as of the clashing of knives. Usulor and his daughter were gnashing their huge teeth.

To the platform where Wimpolo sat among the statues, flowers and pictures that had come from the other kings of Mars the party made its way.

"Power to Usulor!" said the ambassador, formally.

"How did you get in unannounced?" Usulor demanded.

"There were no guards."

"What?" roared Usulor. A thousand soldiers were permanently stationed at his gates. What had happened to them? Was the palace undefended? He rapped out orders to an attendant. The attendant began to televise on the palace private system calling officers and officials.

Meanwhile the ambassador whipped aside the green cover. Sommalu's present to Princess Wimpolo and his token of loyalty to Usulor was revealed. The place rang with screams.

For what was revealed was a shrub growing out of a barrel. Its bright yellow fruit were deadly poison, and its leaves and flowers gave forth a vile odor. Thousands of blue bugs with a horrible habit of laying eggs under human skins and causing huge maggoty ulcers began to crawl over the floor among the guests.

Usulor leaped to his feet.

"Clear the hall! Everybody get out of the room until the poison plant and the ulcer-bugs have been destroyed. Mobilize the army! Get ready to attack Ossalandoc! Throw these men," he pointed to the ambassador and his

retinue, "into jail."

Nobles rushed out. Armed attendants advanced upon the little party from the offending kingdom. The visitors stood stolid and defiant. The ambassador pulled a small flute from his belt and placed it casually to his lips.

"Stay!" said Princess Wimpolo, to her father. "You are hasty. These men only obeyed orders. Let them go."

King Usulor considered a moment.

"As you desire," he decided. "They may go. I am just."

The ambassador put his flute away.

"Power to the Princess," he said. "You have been wise, and you have been very lucky."

Gusts of mocking laughter swept through the palace room. With the place almost empty, they sounded very loud. From the television sphere they came. It was Sommalu, roaring with laughter.

"Power to Usulor," he laughed. "Bugs to Usulor. Ha! That was funny."

"Laugh while you can, Sommalu," growled Usulor. "Tomorrow you will have no kingdom."

Sommalu's laughter faded. His voice rose to a scream. His eyes took on the fixed stare of a fanatic.

"Do not attack me, Usulor. I warn you, do not attack me. If you do it will be the end of your kingdom, the end of your overlordship, the end of the present order in Mars.

"I am prepared. Too long we independent kings of Mars have submitted to your tyranny. You have oppressed us, you and your aristocratic caste. You have kept the poor in servitude. You have admitted the earthmen to Mars, letting in terrible dangers. I say your rule must end. It *will* end.

"Where are your guards, Usulor, the guards who should be surrounding and protecting your palace? Note their

condition when you find them. As they are so will all your army be, if you attack me. Your power and your oppression are over—"

Usulor shut off the television.

**D**ON HARGREAVES and Professor Winterton went back to the home provided for him and other Earthlings at the back of Usulor's palace.

"What did you think of it?" he asked Professor Winterton.

"I don't like it," said the grey-haired Professor. "These Martians have lived in peace for so long that they must almost have forgotten how to fight. Their weapons must be rusting with disuse. And Sommalu sounded pretty confident. He must be well prepared."

"And we thought Mars to be a world of peace!"

"Yes. Seems we left Earth in too big a hurry, Don." \*

A light glowed on a instrument panel. A gigantic Martian attendant threw a key. Sibilant Martian words whistled out of the speaker. Their speed \*\* beat Don, but Winterton got the meaning.

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\* Earthmen who went to Mars and remained too long in the Krypton-laden atmosphere became forced exiles because of a change in their blood which made return impossible. This condition is similar to the "bends" which divers get if they come up out of the water too quickly. Nitrogen is dissolved into the blood under pressure, and when the pressure is removed suddenly it is given up again, forming bubbles. The Krypton on Mars behaves in the same way. Krypton is a gaseous element (also found in Earth's atmosphere, in a minute proportion of one part in twenty million) and appears to be very similar to argon, helium, etc. Its molecules are made up of single atoms, and its atomic weight is 82.9. Krypton samples have been liquefied and even solidified. The solid melted at  $-169^{\circ}$  C. and the liquid boiled at  $-152^{\circ}$  C. Its critical temperature (i.e., the highest temperature at which it can be liquefied) is  $-62.5^{\circ}$  C.—Ed.

\*\* Due no doubt to the different structure of their brains from ours, Martians can talk and listen to each other at the same time. They do not speak, wait for a reply and then speak again. They go straight on with amazing rapidity, two or three or even four of them at the same time keeping up a continuous stream of sound.—Ed.

"My hat! Princess Wimpolo is asking for you, Don. She wants to see you at once in her apartment."

Don Hargreaves made his way with thumping heart to the Princess' apartment. He wondered if the summons had anything to do with the threatened war, but could not see how it fitted in. He hoped she didn't want to adopt him as a pet. Martian ladies often did this. The tiny bodies and beautiful faces of Earthlings made them in much demand for this purpose. Don thought it humiliating.

Princess Wimpolo lay languidly on a couch.

There were no windows to the apartment. Pale blue light came from the walls, and fresh air, carefully purified, through gratings in the floor. Her favorite snake was coiled around her body. She fondled it as she spoke. Upon its head was a natural searchlight which it could turn on and off by an effort of will.

Don watched the snake uneasily. He never quite trusted these enormous reptiles, with their habit of yawning with two-foot jaws and inward-curving teeth.

Beside the couch was a zekolo, a creature equally huge and fearsome from Don's point of view. Its body was covered by a huge bivalve-shell, like an oyster, and between the edges of the twin shells stuck out long octopus-like arms with pincers at the ends. Those pincers could easily have cut Don in halves.

"Power to Princess Wimpolo," said Don formally.

"You needn't salute me," said Wimpolo. "I detest being saluted. On state occasions I must put up with it, but in my own rooms— Come close to me. Look into my eyes."

Don did as he was told. Her eyes, large as they were by Earth standards, were warm and full of understanding.

"You come from Earth, where men live on the surface, and where there are many wars?"

"I do."

"I'd love to visit your world. But it is impossible. The krypton in my blood would dissolve out in bubbles and kill me if I attempted it."

"You wouldn't like my Earth," he said. "You would find the strong gravity a crushing strain. The light of the sun would be blinding to you. You would have to wear dark glasses. But the greatest strain of all would be our variable weather, the heat of our summers and the cold of our winters."

"Yet you love your world, little Earthling. You would like to be back there."

"I would. I miss the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the green grass, dancing waves, cows, rabbits oh, a million things."

She looked at him strangely. "You have been told that I am very reserved and haughty, Earthling."

"Yes."

"It is only because I feel that terrible dangers are hanging over our world. I have no time for foolish revels and ceremonies. One day I shall be queen of all Mars, unless Sommalu wins. Then I shall, perhaps, choose an Earthling as my king."

"But I fear Sommalu. He has been preparing this. He has been conducting forbidden research. He has ground the poor of his country down to poverty to build up armaments. He broadcasts lying propaganda to his people, telling of the supposed oppressions of my father and the aristocrats. He is dangerous. Listen to this."

The giant Princess threw a switch. Curious throbbing music began to pour into the room from a hidden source. It had a curious effect of Don's nerves, filling him with a strange elation.

"How does that affect you?"

"It is exciting. I feel adventurous. I want to do dangerous things."

"Exactly. Its influence is still stronger upon Martians, for it is scientifically designed to match the natural vibrations of their brain-cells. That is Sommalu's broadcast. His secret science has mastered the art of controlling the feelings of men by music, vibrating their brain-cells so that they respond to the urge to do as he wishes. A little increase in the strength of those notes, and he could set his whole population howling for war."

"Can music do that?" Don gasped.

"Do not your Earth armies march to music? Our electric musical instruments have an infinitely greater range of notes, tones and overtones than your wind and string instruments on Earth. Whole populations can be enslaved by this means. I can even control the feelings of reptiles and insects."

"Another thing, too. Always we aristocrats have set ourselves to breed men who would be of placid temperament. It is a matter of the adrenal glands,\* which rest on the tops of the kidneys. I have learned that Sommalu has bred large numbers of men with large adrenals."

"Last of all, he has developed some secret weapon. Somehow he can blast the intelligence from the brains of men, leaving them helpless imbeciles, scarcely able to speak. "That is what happened to all my father's court guards today. They were found wan-

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\* What Princess Wimpolo says is perfectly true. Persons with large adrenal glands find their energy comes in spasms. They hate steady work, but love fighting. They are lazy and quarrelsome. Those with large thyroid glands and small adrenals work hard and patiently, but when danger comes they succumb to fear. The most ferocious of all, the tiger, has enormous adrenal glands. Cows, on the other hand, have small adrenals. A cow injected with hormones from adrenal glands, would attack as fiercely as a tiger.—Ed.

dering like men dazed. They did not understand when they were spoken to, seemed not to know their own names. They are as helpless as babies.

"People who were nearby say that notes were heard on a flute, and two blasts on a whistle. After the second blast the soldiers began to drop their weapons and to behave strangely."

Don Hargreaves looked puzzled. "Why do you tell me all these things?"

"Listen, little Earthling. I sent for you because I know you are a very brave man. Single-handed, you fought the mutineers in the mines on the surface.\* Your adrenals are larger than any in my father's kingdom. You can fight without fear. Will you perform a dangerous mission for me?"

He stammered, embarrassed.

"I am not so brave as you think."

"But if the reward was—myself? To be king of all Mars one day?"

"You promise *that*, to *me*?" He was incredulous.

"I do."

Strange feelings beat in his breast. Her outsize Martian features were not beautiful, but he felt now that she was a lonely spirit, an exile among her own people. He could sympathize with that.

"I will do whatever you ask," he said.

"Promise?"

"I promise."

"Very well then. I am going into Ossalandoc, into Sommalu's country. I am going to find out what his new weapon is, how he turned those soldiers into imbeciles. I shall travel as an ordinary wealthy woman, with no com-

pany but my snake and zekolo, and you. I shall take you because I can trust you better than I can trust any Martian, and because you are brave. And also because you can slip through places where a Martian would be stopped. If I am in danger I shall send you back with a message to my father."

"But this is dangerous. It is reckless," he said.

"You promised."

"If your father knew he would blame me for not informing him."

She stood up, proudly.

"You scorn my reward!"

He looked at her. "I will come," he said.

## CHAPTER II

### In Sommalu's Country

THEY set out in one of the fifteen-foot transparent spherical autos of Mars, running through the green metal-lined tunnels that serve as one-way traffic lanes throughout Mars.

Wimpolo took her snake and her zekolo. There was nothing unusual about this, any more than if an Earth lady took with her a pair of lapdogs. Dangerous as they looked, they were perfectly docile unless ordered to fight. And they gave protection against the wild snakes and other monsters that swarmed in the smaller caverns. And Don himself was only another sort of lapdog.

Don was not easy in his mind about the business. The Princess was being very silly to go spying in the land of her father's enemy. Spies are very liable to come to a sticky end. Still, perhaps it was easier on Mars.

In any case, was the quarrel between lesser King Sommalu and greater King Usulor any of his business as an Earthling? Ought he not to be neutral? If Earthlings fought against Sommalu and

\* In the "Ghost of Mars", December, 1938 AMAZING STORIES, Don Hargreaves put down a rebellion of the miners from Earth, who had occupied the surface of Mars unaware that far beneath them lay a Martian civilization. It was due to the ingratitude of the mine owners for this feat that Don Hargreaves descended into Mars to live with the Martians, where he felt he would be more appreciated.—Ed.

Sommalu won, it might be bad for other Earthlings besides those who went fighting. Sommalu was known to be already hostile to Earthlings.

However, he couldn't forget what Wimpolo had promised him. That one day he would be king of Mars. She seemed to have forgotten that now, sitting in the square apartment that hung from the axle of the transparent sphere, taking no notice of Don, but fondling her reptiles.

When they came at last into the open on the shore of the smooth, tideless, waveless ocean of inner Mars, the sphere jarred to a sharp halt.

"Go no further!" warned a blue-clothed official. "King Sommalu has sent an invading army into our country, and his outposts are only a little way ahead."

Wimpolo looked indignant and went on.

Soon they were stopped. Don recognized the badge of Sommalu, the four-headed snake, on the tunics of the men who surrounded them. All wore cavern helmets and carried black boxes. These black boxes produced the penetrative rays that halt the chemical processes of nerves, bringing thought and the consciousness of brains to a standstill either temporarily or for all time.

"Let me pass!" Wimpolo ordered. "I am a high-born lady."

The soldiers grinned, showing great pointed teeth.

"She's a high-born lady!"

"Ray her!"

"Cut her ears off!"

Princess Wimpolo was roughly dragged out of the sphere. Don saw her frightened face. The adventure she had sought was too real for her liking.

"Dump her with the other prisoners," ordered the leader.

Wimpolo was hustled away, the soldiers twisting her arms and laughing

at her cries. Large adrenals seemed to produce a very different kind of Martian from the amiable giants that Don had known up to now.

At sight of Don the soldiers gave a great shout.

"It's one of those little men from Earth!"

"Queer little creature!"

"Look at his little nose!"

"Look at his tiny ears!"

"How can he breathe?"

"Don't Earthlings grow any bigger than you are?"

Despite the strangling grip on his throat, Don managed to gasp out, "A little."

"It talks!" they shouted in delight.

"They tell me," one said, "that you can throw one of those things as high as you like in the air, and they never get hurt. Always land on their feet."

At once, they decided to try it. The biggest of them seized Don by one arm and swung him. Don clung on desperately. A great box on the ears from the Martian nearly knocked him out.

Slowly, so slowly, in the light gravity, he sailed up and up until the Martian soldiers were far below. Then, still in the most leisurely manner, he drifted down again.

At last he landed, luckily on his feet, let his knees bend and rolled over. He was jarred and bruised by sharp rocks but not badly hurt.

The soldiers roared with delight.

"Throw him higher! Make him spin. See if he can still land on his feet!"

Don ran for life.

"Come back, Earthling!"

"We want a lot more fun out of you yet!"

But Don was away. Each step carried him ten feet. The slow, lumbering feet of the Martians could get nowhere near him. They lost him in the darkness, swinging their searchlights



and deathrays into action too late.

Don reached a cave and sat down. Wimpolo's spying had ended, at the very beginning, in disaster. He could not fight all Sommalu's giants to free her. Neither could he go back to Usulor. The father's anger might be terrible.

For a long while he sat still, trying to think. Suddenly, from quite close, a small yellow searchlight shone full on him. Thinking himself captured, he froze with fear. Then he realized that this light was not carried by human hands. It was one of the small natural lights carried on the heads of the carnivorous snakes that lurk in the small, unexplored caverns.

Now he was hopelessly doomed. The giant reptile's elastic jaws would stretch and stretch until it swallowed him whole. The only hope was to keep absolutely still, in the faint hope that it would not be hungry.

Cold scales slithered over the rocks, brushed against his legs, slid around his body. A reptilian face rubbed against his. A long tongue licked his nose. A tiny foreleg tickled him under the chin.

He heard a rattle of a zekolo's pincers on the rocks. Hope rose. The chief business of the life of these crustaceans was to fight the snakes, whom they cut in pieces with their pincers. But the zekolo only rubbed itself against his legs, and against the snake.

At last he understood. They were Wimpolo's pets, and they had followed him, smelling out his tracks as a dog does.

DON came out of the cave and prowled around. Away from the lights it was difficult to pick his way, except when the snake turned on its natural searchlight. Prowling around, watching, he saw Wimpolo and a num-

ber of other well-born prisoners from the captured territory shut in large spheres and carried away. He wished he had a raybox, but he was unarmed. He could do nothing.

A peasant woman gave him food. The little he ate was but a mouthful to her, and he knew which of the Martian food was good for an Earth stomach and which not. Grantan, capital city of Ossalandoc, he found was about thirty miles away by Earth reckoning. That was not a long journey in the Martian conditions. Wimpolo, he reasoned, was most likely to be there. Don set out for Grantan, the snake and the zekolo following.

Nearer to Grantan it was more difficult to make his way without being seen. Lights were everywhere.

He saw Grantan, an ugly city built where the cavern roof was low and mighty pillars could protect the houses from falls of rock. The houses extended right to the roof, one solid block. A massive, brutal-looking city.

He was stopped by a soldier.

"Who are you, Earthling? Where are you going?"

He began to fear that he might be thrown into the air again.

"I'm lost," he said.

"Where's your mistress?"

"She was captured in the invasion and carried away."

In the rapid, efficient Martian way, the man raised his arm and telephoned his superiors, speaking into the tiny instrument attached to his wrist.

"My officer says there should be no Earthlings in Ossalandoc," he said presently. "The King does not like them. You are to be taken to the palace."

Don was picked up by the scruff of his neck and carried to a waiting sphere. A Martian got in and the sphere began to move. The snake and the zekolo were left behind.

## CHAPTER III

## In Sommalu's Palace

THE sphere entered the city via a tunnel that served as a street. Inside there was nothing to be seen but signs and side tunnels. They stopped, and a Martian in a blue uniform looked in, saw Don and lifted him out by the scruff of his neck.

He was carried into a room where a number of Martian men and women were noisily enjoying themselves. Sommalu himself lay on a couch. He was a lean, pale Martian with a wild, staring look in his bleary eyes.

"Here is the Earthling from Usulor's court!" bellowed the Martian who carried Don.

"I know you, Donald Hargreaves," growled Sommalu. "I have watched you in the television and I have reports from my spies in Usulor's country. You brought Wimpolo here to spy on me. You cursed Earthlings are the only factor in the situation I have not got under control. You are the only people I am afraid of, because I do not understand you. I shall destroy every one of you, like this!"

Don found himself seized by the neck with one huge hand and around the face with the other. Sommalu began to twist and pull as one might wring the neck of a chicken.

Somebody said to Sommalu, "Let's have some fun with him first."

Pressure on Don's neck relaxed just as cartilages and blood-vessels were about to snap.

"How?" growled Sommalu.

"We saw the soldiers play with him when Wimpolo was captured. These Earthlings are remarkably agile. They can be made to do tricks."

"Is it safe to let him live?" growled Sommalu. "He was a friend of Wim-

polo's and a favorite at Usulor's court. For that alone I hate him. How do I know that the poisons of my new fighting flies will affect Earthlings with their different constitutions from ours? They might produce unknown weapons from Earth. They might cause Earth to send an invading army to conquer Mars on the plea of helping Usulor against my revolt. I do not know their possibilities, therefore the only safe way is to destroy them."

A Martian tried to pacify him.

"Nothing can stop the mighty Sommalu. The genius that raised a factory worker to be master of a mighty nation will make him master of all Mars. The secret of your fighting flies has been well kept. Already five men turned thousands of picked soldiers into helpless imbeciles in a few seconds. Princess Wimpolo is imprisoned without food. What have you to fear?"

"You are right," snapped Sommalu. "Make him do tricks."

Courtiers seized Don. Don, under the lash of whips, was made to run and jump.

Because of the light Martian gravity he could perform feats that were remarkable to the massive Martians. He could jump high over their heads, turning somersaults as he did so. To escape the lash, he did his best to amuse them. He did cartwheels, handsprings backwards over their heads. He balanced himself on one hand on a Martian's shoulder.

"Climb that wall!" ordered Sommalu, pointing.

It looked impossible, but by the aid of curtains, furniture and carvings he reached the ceiling. He swung by one hand from the grating that let the used air out of the room. He misjudged the strength of the grating. It broke away in a shower of stones and plaster.

"Put that grating back!" roared

Sommalu, furiously.

Don tried to climb, carrying the heavy grating. He could not. A Martian got a rope, tied one end around his waist and the other to the grating. Don climbed up, got into the hole and began to haul up the grating. Around him the ventilation space between two floors made a dark, dusty gap through which he might crawl on hands and knees like a rat in an Earth home.

It was the only way to get away. He dropped the grating and began to crawl.

**A** LONG way he went in the darkness. Behind him the shouts of Sommalu's courtiers faded away. Short of pulling down a whole section of the palace, he did not see how they could find him.

The only light came from gratings where air was admitted into or out of other rooms. There were water pipes and insulated wires around him. The ventilation spaces were a labyrinth of passages. He found a loose grating under a larder, got out, helped himself to food and darted back under the floor as a Martian maidservant came in.

"Now I really am a rat," he thought.

For hours he wandered about these inter-floor spaces, listening to chance conversations and wondering what to do. It was a very long time indeed before he got what he wanted, a clue as to where Wimpolo was held captive.

"How are the prisoners?" he heard somebody ask.

"Quite safe," said a blue-clad guard.

"And the Princess?"

"Being kept without food until she agrees to the master's orders. She is in the next room, still proud and haughty. She has not spoken since she was brought here."

Don found the room where she was, and called to her through the floor grating. She lay listlessly on a couch, look-

ing depressed and weak. At his voice she stirred and looked around.

"It is I, Don, your Earthling. I am in the space under the floor," he called.

Wedging a chair leg between the bars, she pulled up the grating and Don's dusty figure came through.

He told his story.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"I'm starving," she said weakly.

"Get me food."

"Certainly." He went back under the floor, found the larder, raided it and brought the food to her.

"That's better," she said presently. "Being small helps you. You can get through these grating holes. I cannot."

Suddenly she screamed. The head of a huge snake showed out of the grating hole. The reptile slithered in. It was her own pet snake. Following Don by smell, and perhaps by some uncanny Martian reptilian sense, it had trailed him here. Its long thin tongue licked its mistress's face affectionately. A rattling under the floor told them that the shell-backed zekolo was here also.

Suddenly a step outside the door told them that somebody was coming in.

Don dived under the Princess's couch. He did not see where the snake got to, but it vanished. The door opened. Sommalu, in resplendent uniform, came in, looking pleased with himself.

"I heard voices," he said, looking around. "What was it?"

"I may have been talking to myself," said Wimpolo.

"So you found your tongue at last?" His eyes fell on the fragments of food. "What is this?" he roared. "Who has brought food here?"

He shouted at somebody outside. Two frightened guards appeared. They denied the charge, looking bewildered at the sight of the crumbs, bones and fruit skins on the floor.

"You lie!" bellowed the angry ruler, calling soldiers. "Take them away! Show them what it means to defy the mighty Sommalu!"

The terrified guards were dragged away. Sommalu folded his arms and glowered at the Martian girl.

"If you saw what will happen to them you would not be so stiff-necked, Princess. You cannot wheedle me with your charms as you wheedled those fellows, to their own misfortune." He turned again to the door. "Bring in the long-distance televiewer."

The machine was a ten-foot globe of mirror glass set upon a stand. Two blue-clad guards wheeled it in.

"Your father has sent his army against me," Sommalu said. "In a few minutes it will come within sight of my defense guard. When you see how that great force will melt away before my men you will be more ready to agree to my suggestions. Be my queen, secure me a standing among the aristocrats, and you can have again all the luxury you once knew."

"And you tell your people you are going to rid Mars of the aristocrats," she sneered.

"I am going to rule all Mars," he said. "Nothing can stop me."

He sat beside her on the couch, his arm round her waist in mock affection as she sat, rigid and defiant. A wave of his hand signaled for the televiewer to be switched on.

Now, looking into the five-foot sphere, they seemed to be looking through a hole into an enormous cavern that stretched for many miles before them. In the distance a number of huge spheres, hundreds of feet in height, were rolling forward. Above them flew many huge airships. In the foreground lay Sommalu's soldiers awaiting the attack.

"You must be mad," said Wimpolo.

"Those spheres of my father are of a metal, the atomic adhesion of which is so strong that no force, however great, can damage it. No ray can penetrate it from outside. Yet deathrays from inside are not obstructed. They will not need to fight your little force. The spheres will simply roll over them and crush them."

"We shall see," said Sommalu, laughing confidently.

Steadily the mighty army rolled and flew down upon the few helpless-looking men who awaited it. From their clothes shone a bright blue light. They were not even trying to hide.

Abruptly, there came the notes of many flutes. Don blinked in surprise as millions upon millions of tiny flies streamed into the air. Up toward the cavern roof they swarmed out of sight. A pale light, visible to the television only, followed them. Usulor's force took no notice of them, interested only in the men on the ground.

To the notes of whistles the flies flew on. Reaching Usulor airships, some were caught in the rushing wind of the ships' progress, landed upon them and sought out tiny holes, crawled in through them.

Slowly a horrible transformation came over the faces of the airmen. Eyes that had been staring intently, judging distances and aiming, became blank and stupid. Firm jaws sagged listlessly. Men rose from their seats and lurched around, wondering and questioning in their faces, while their ships crashed down to ruin and death.

Meanwhile, other flies reached the battle-spheres. In through tiny holes in the sides they crawled, air-inlets or any other hole. Men ignored them until they were bitten, then slowly all semblance of intelligence faded from their faces.

Spheres stopped, or wandered aim-

lessly. Many collided and were destroyed. Crews got out and staggered about, making uncouth noises as though the means of speech had been taken from them and they were back at the baby stage again.

Sommalu's men, with shouts of glee, jumped up and rushed at them with daggers. The bodies of the helpless soldiers of Usulor they ripped open with their daggers. Usulor's men, not understanding, stared with hanging jaws while their comrades were cut open and the knives advanced upon them.

The butchery went on. Not one of the victims tried to fight or even to hide or turn away from the blade. They stood and stared and fell. In death their eyes were full of a great wonder.

"You see," gloated Sommalu. "My fighting flies inject into men's veins a poison that destroys all memory. Those men forgot who they were fighting for and whom against. They forgot even that they were fighting at all. Now are you convinced that I must soon be master of all Mars? Will you be sensible? Or must I bring your father before you, helpless and stupid as those soldiers were before they were killed?"

Livid with rage, Wimpolo howled a Martian insult at him, not at all aristocratic, and struck him on the mouth.

Furious in his turn, he seized her wrist and began to twist. All at once she went limp.

A commotion under Sommalu's feet made him look down in surprise. Don Hargreaves was coming out of his hiding place.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### Broadcasting Station

**D**ON HARGREAVES had been very nervous, under the couch, for fear of discovery, but now his adrenal

glands had taken charge of him. The merciless slaughter of Usulor's army and the painful wrenching of the arm of Wimpolo who, though a giant, was still a girl, roused him to fury. His adrenal glands poured their hormones into his blood. He no longer felt afraid, but was full of a cold, fighting energy.

Leaping high, he lashed out with his foot. The kick caught Sommalu full on the mouth. The force of his own kick sent Don tumbling to the floor again.

The two guards rushed at him with outstretched hands. He jumped right over their heads. Then, pivoting on his heel, jumped again and kicked one of them heavily in the back of the head before he could turn.

Again they rushed. Again he jumped over them and gave one a heavy kick on the back of the head. Small as he was to them, his kicks must have done them no good. The enormous Martians were bewildered at his speed and agility. They picked up the backless stools they had been sitting on, and advanced.

Now he knew he was trapped. He could not jump high enough to clear their arms with the added reach the stools gave them. He was forced into a corner.

"Stand back! Let me ray him!" roared Sommalu, aiming the deadly black box. His mouth was bleeding.

Something flashed through the air. Wimpolo's snake had come out of its hiding. Sommalu was tossed aside, his raybox smashed. The two guards did not stay to fight the snake: they ran out of the door and shouted for help.

Under the floor the zekolo was heaving mightily in an effort to break its way out and join the fight. Don saw a way of escape. Locking the door, he managed to get the snake to understand that the Princess must be pulled under the floor, through the enlarged hole the crustacean had made. She was a ter-

rific weight to pull through, even in the Martian gravity. The ceiling of the room underneath, already strained by the efforts of the zekolo, could not stand it. It broke. Don and Wimpolo fell in a shower of building materials, into the room below.

Don landed on a table, sending food flying in all directions. Wimpolo landed awkwardly and painfully on a Martian's head, knocking him backward. To the dim intelligence of the reptiles above it appeared that she was being attacked again. Snake and zekolo swarmed down to her defense. Two of the unfortunate palace servants were killed by the rib-crushing embrace of the snake and three had arms or legs cut off by the pincers of the zekolo before they got away. The peaceful kitchen was turned into a slaughterhouse.

Don and Wimpolo, who had fortunately recovered her senses, fled down a passage. At the end was a guard. Wimpolo whispered to the snake. So stealthily did the snake glide that it seemed to disappear. Something flashed round the distant guard's head. The snake wrapped itself round his mouth and throat, then, lifting him in its coils, banged his head sharply against the wall.

Don picked up the unconscious man's raybox as they ran by. Ahead was a room full of machinery.

"Sommalu's broadcasting plant," Wimpolo whispered. "This is a lucky break."

The captured raybox, operated at half strength, stretched guards, engineers and musicians unconscious even before they knew they were attacked. Don posted himself at the door of the studio, ready to deal with interruptions, while Wimpolo inside proceeded to broadcast according to her own ideas.

And those were curious ideas, it

seemed to Don. A series of thin, reedy notes like the scratching of slate-pencils, was all he heard. How they could have any effect on human feelings, let alone neutralize the effects of Sommalu's own broadcasts and make his dupes turn on him, Don could not understand.

He was busy, too. The interruption of the program had sent many people to inquire the cause, and while he could ray the first-comers and stretch them in sleep, those behind saw them fall and gave the alarm.

He expected an attack by a swarm of fighting flies. A cloud of millions of them, all over the broadcasting station, would keep him very busy swishing his ray about to keep them off. Especially if they put the lights out, relying on the power of the insects to see in the dark.

But what came were soldiers clad from head to foot in armor, armor exactly like that once worn by King Arthur's knights, but made of glass. He knew at once that it was a special, ray-proof glass.

Wimpolo was now broadcasting notes obviously suitable for human ears, and calling on Sommalu's subjects to rise against the tyrant. That stopped. He watched the advance of the glass-armored giants in silence. He was ready to die because he knew he would.

**S**UDDENLY, Don was snatched off his feet. So startled was he that he dropped the raybox. The snake had whisked him up in the air, to the top of the banks of machinery. Wimpolo was there too, riding on the shell on the back of the zekolo.

They crawled along the tops of the instrument banks. In the ceiling was a very large grating. It occurred to Don that Wimpolo and the zekolo could get through it, and that perhaps, seeing how solidly the place was built here, find hiding large enough for all of them in

the space between the two floors.

The snake went first, vanishing, in its stealthy way, out of sight. The zekolo followed, Wimpolo followed, and Don came last. The Princess was very cramped, but otherwise there was room for all. However, it would have been dangerous for her or the zekolo to move about much.

Don and the snake went on an exploring trip. A little way along they found themselves under a richly furnished bedroom. So well furnished was it that he decided it must be the bedroom of Sommalu himself. The snake seemed to smell out its enemy, who had twisted the arm of its mistress, and it heaved up the grating to glide to the top of the four-poster bed, waiting, out of sight. Don climbed up too, and hid.

Sommalu came in. A pet snake followed him. Instantly he began to work the televue.

In the small sphere showed the face of an officer of the army. He looked haggard and worn.

"Our flies have turned on our own men. Some strange music made them do it. Our army is wiped out!"

"What is the situation in the city?" asked the King, in a weary voice.

"Usulor's second army is advancing rapidly. We have no force now to send against it. A revolutionary mob is advancing from our rear."

Sommalu was a tired and hopeless, but vindictive man. "Do nothing until I give the order, and then let the big rayguns wipe them all out together. At least I'll finish them, if I can't do much about Usulor. Is it quite certain that we have got his daughter in an air-tight trap under the floor?"

"Quite certain. We can see her and the shell-back in the penetrating view-ray."

"Then tell the officer in charge of the gas-plant to start pumping in the poi-

son gas. At least Usulor shall have something to remember me by."

The face faded out.

Sommalu looked round to see what his pet snake was hissing at. This creature, even larger than Wimpolo's, had spotted the other reptile on the top of the bed. The two snakes hissed at each other with a hatred equal to that of the men in charge of them.

Sommalu barked an order. His snake raced up the end of the bed to do battle. Two giant reptiles were at once locked together, each trying to crush the other in its great coils. Their movements jerked aside the curtains. Don found himself staring straight into the eyes of the amazed Sommalu.

"You!" said Sommalu, slowly.

HE reached for his raybox on the table. Don gave a great spring. On no account must the angry monarch be allowed to reach that deadly box. He landed on the table, not quickly enough to pick up the box himself but in time to kick it across the room and still avoid the giant's reaching hands.

But on the wall was a huge pair of crossed swords, a pair of daggers beneath. Sommalu drew a sword. It was heavy and curved.

"See if you can dodge this," he snarled.

Don leaped over the bed. He ducked under the table, round a chair. Sommalu, breathing heavily, realized that he stood no chance of catching the agile Earthling while the room was full of furniture. He began pushing everything against the wall with his feet, menacing Don with the sword meanwhile. The bed was too heavy for him, but he solved that problem by chopping it down with the sword.

The battling snakes crashed to the floor. Don saw that Wimpolo's snake

had glassy eyes from the pressure of the greater reptile, but its jaws, stretching incredibly, had half engulfed the head of the other.

"Now see if you can escape me," Sommalu growled.

Don managed to draw one of the two daggers out of its sheath. To him it was a fairly respectable sword. But he could not leap over Sommalu's head without being impaled on the way.

Sommalu lunged. Don slipped to one side. Sommalu tried a series of rapid stabs, but still Don was too quick for him.

Quickly changing his tactics, he slashed at Don with the edge. Don jumped, leaping over the sweeping blade. A turn of the wrist, and back came the sword, aimed at the neck. Don ducked. Then the sword swept backward and forward with all the speed the giant could muster and all the sudden swerves and changes of aim that he could invent. Don ducked and leaped. He couldn't keep this up for long without being struck.

Don tried to slip around the giant. A great coil of the struggling snakes was in his way, and he tripped over it. He saw the broadsword, point first, plunging at him to take advantage while he was off his balance. Sommalu shouted in triumph. His eyes were wide with an insane joy.

Don shut his eyes, expecting to feel the blade, but instead the blade stuck in the timber of the broken bed.

Perhaps two, perhaps three seconds Sommalu required to pull out the embedded sword, but that was enough. Don, hurling himself forward, struck. The dagger bit deep into Sommalu's vitals.

The Martian King fell with a crash. At the same time, Don, knocked aside by an instinctive flick of his free right arm, crashed into the wall unconscious.

When he came to the rebels were in charge of the palace. They soon rescued Wimpolo, once Don had told them where she was. She was unharmed. Her snake showed no pleasure at her return. In fact, it took no interest in anything. It had made a gigantic meal, swallowing whole a snake much larger than itself, and it was in great pain.

USULOR installed himself in Sommalu's palace. An autopsy on the dead King showed that he had an enormous pair of adrenal glands. They had given him an incurably fierce fighting disposition. As a result he had, by violence and treachery, risen from a lowly position to be master of a nation, using the poisonous flies he had developed.

"Unregulated glandular abnormalities always cause trouble," a Martian scientist said, gazing sadly at Don. Don felt uncomfortable. He was thinking of the unregulated glands of Earthmen, and the prophecy of a disastrous war between Earth and Mars.

King Usulor asked: "But how did my second army win so easily?"

The chief surviving general coughed. "We have, of course, spread the usual propaganda about our invincible army, but really we cannot understand it. Seeing what happened to the first army, we took with us flocks of trained birds to eat the flies, but even so, enough flies were bound to get through to cause havoc. Or so we thought. As a matter of fact, we lost not a ship, not a sphere, not a man. We found Sommalu's entire army lying dead with no wounds, nothing to show what they died of."

"They were stung by their own flies," said Wimpolo.

"What?"

"I have a very good ear for music," explained the Princess. "When Sommalu forced me to watch the television

*(Concluded on page 146)*



## WARLORDS OF MARS

(Concluded from page 63)

view of the rout of Usulor's first army, I noted the cadences of the flutes and whistles used to command the flies. As a result, when I got into the broadcasting station I was able to broadcast notes that vibrated the tiny brains of the flies. I gave them feelings of intolerable suffering and of rage. In fury, the flies poured out of the holes and stung to death the nearest men. In nearly every case they were Sommalu's soldiers."

"And how did you escape the gas?"

"There was no gas. The soldiers to whom Sommalu sent the order to release the gas were dead, poisoned by their own flies."

"Ah!" said the general, with a sigh of satisfaction. "Now all that remains is the cleaning up. We must make sure that no more incipient Sommalus are growing up in this disorderly country."

"Yes," said the scientist, as they went out together, "we must institute a universal register, catalog and examine—"

That left Don and Wimpolo alone. The giantess was not looking at him. She was lying languidly on a couch, affectionately tickling the ears of her snake, which, too overfed to coil itself up, lay stretched out straight and gazed at her in mute suffering.

An odd doubt came to Don. Was the part that he, the Earthling, had played in the suppression of the revolt properly appreciated? Wimpolo had promised him that one day he would be her consort and King of all Marš. Now she seemed to have forgotten.

He decided it was best not to remind her. Otherwise, hearing that he had such ambitions, the scientists of Mars might start inquiring into the size of his adrenal glands, and perhaps remove one of the pair to make him properly docile and safe. He certainly didn't want that, for how would he have got on against Sommalu if he *had* been docile and peaceloving?

Shaking his head in puzzlement, Don Hargreaves went out from the presence of the heir to the throne of Mars.

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