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STARTLING STORIES

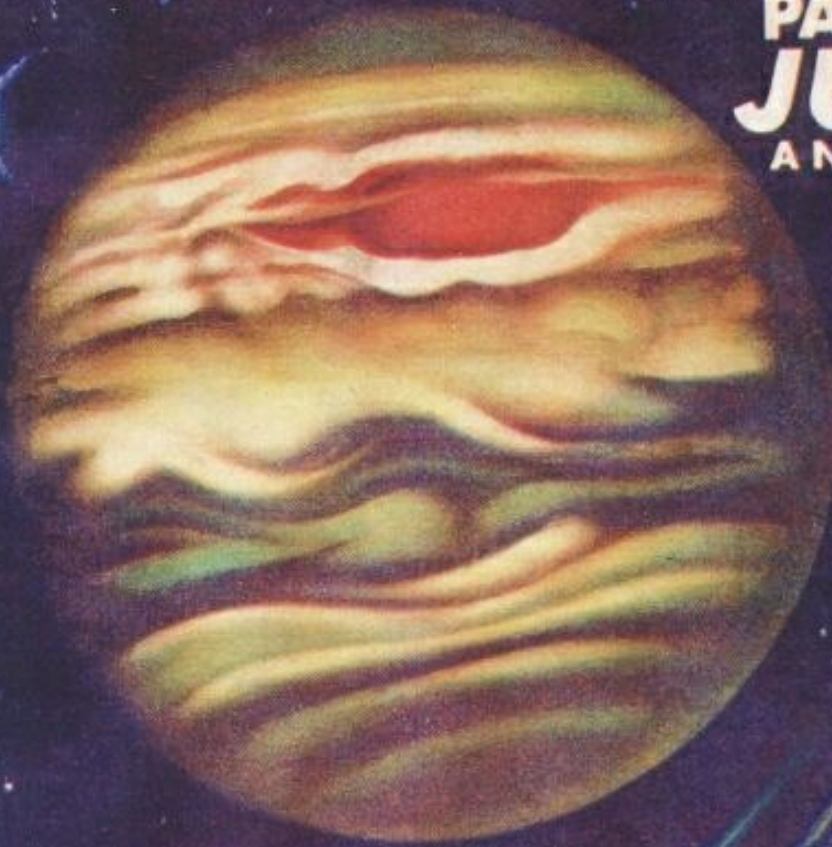
FEATURING

PASSPORT TO JUPITER

A Novel of Tomorrow

by

RAYMOND Z.
GALLUN



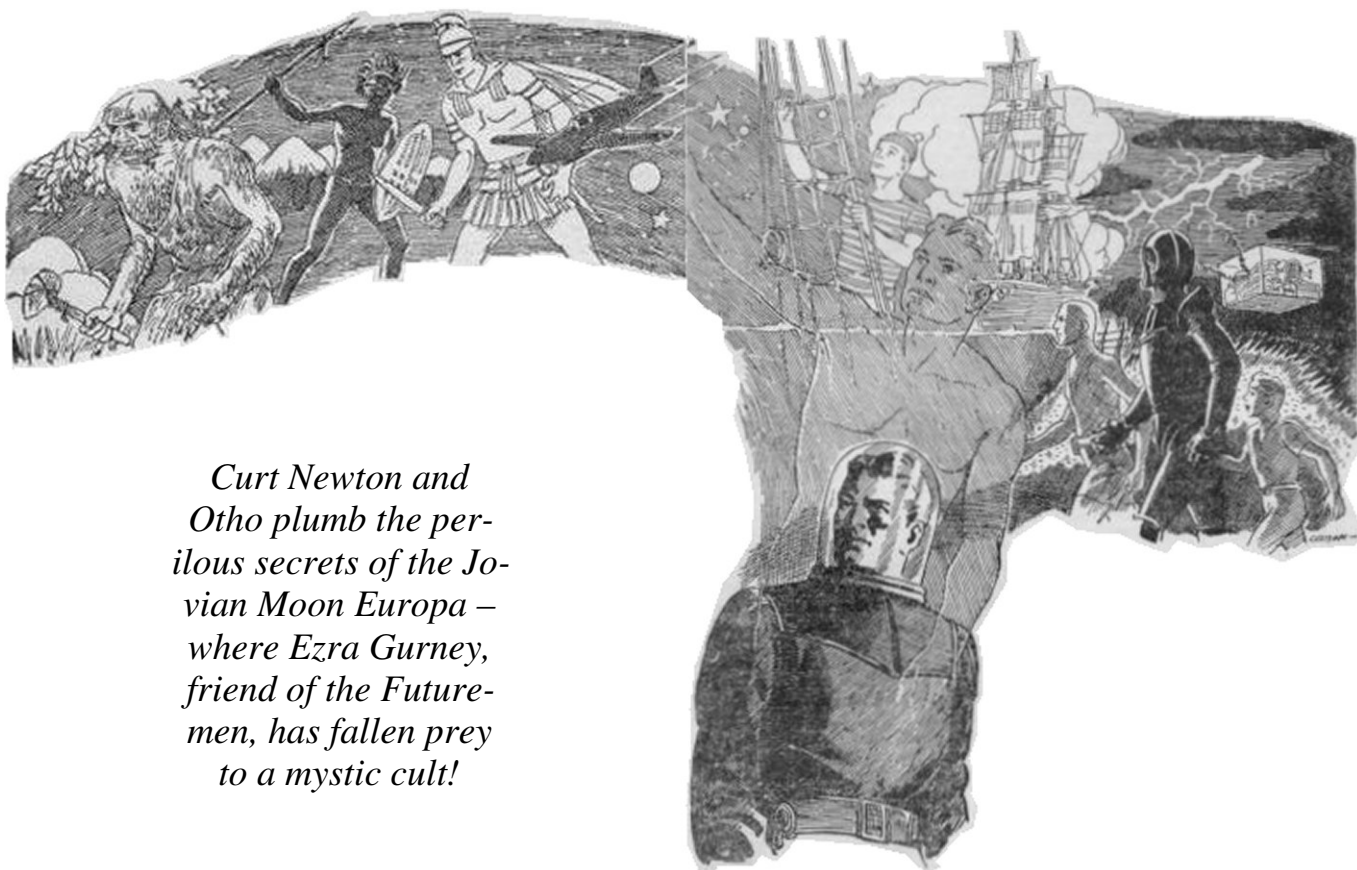
A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

MOON OF THE UNFORGOTTEN

A Captain Future Novelet by EDMOND HAMILTON

MOON OF THE UNFORGOTTEN

by Edmond Hamilton



Curt Newton and Otho plumb the perilous secrets of the Jovian Moon Europa – where Ezra Gurney, friend of the Futuremen, has fallen prey to a mystic cult!

CHAPTER I

The Second Life

THE machines hummed and whispered and a man's life changed. He was an old man, with an old man's burden of weariness and sorrow. But now that burden dropped from him and his years dropped from him and he was young again.

He felt the hot blood burst along his veins and the singing excitement in his nerves, the pulse and throb of long-forgotten youth. For youth was his once more and once more a whole universe of adventure lured and beckoned, far-off worlds calling and calling to him.

And Ezra Gurney, he who had been old, shouted a glad young cry that was answer to that call.

* * * * *

A message went to Earth's Moon, flashing across the millions of empty miles. It went by a secret wave-frequency that only a half-dozen people knew.

Back across the empty leagues of the void, in reply

to that urgent summons, came a ship, driving hard for Europa, moon of Jupiter. There was a man in the small ship and one who had been a man and two who were manlike but who were not truly human.

The ship came down toward the dark side of Europa with the rush of a shooting star and landed in the rigidly restricted Patrol area of Europolis spaceport. The four came out of it and looked around in the magnificent glow of Jupiter. Then they heard the light running steps and the urgent voice.

"Curt!" And again, with a desperate gladness, "Curt, I knew you'd hurry!"

Curt Newton took the girl's tense outstretched hands in his own. He thought for a moment she was going to weep and he spoke to her with an affectionate roughness, not giving her time to be emotional. "What's all this nonsense about Ezra? If anyone but you had sent that message ..."

"It's true, Curt. He's gone. I think – I think he won't ever come back."

Newton shook her. "Come on, Joan! *Ezra?* Why, he's been up and down the System since before you and I were born, first in the old space-frontier days of the

Patrol and now with your Section Three. He wouldn't get himself into any jam."

"He has," said Joan Randall flatly. "And if you'll stop being comforting I have all the data ready to show you – what there is of it."

SHE led the way toward the low buildings of Patrol headquarters. The four followed her, the tall red-haired man whom the System called Captain Future and his three companions, his lifelong friends, the three who were closer to him even than this girl and the missing Ezra Gurney – Grag, the metal giant, Otho, the lithe keen-eyed android, and Simon Wright, who had once been a human scientist but who for half a lifetime now had been divorced from human form.

It was the latter who spoke to Joan. His voice was metallic and expressionless, issuing from the artificial resonator set in one side of his "body". That "body" was a hovering square metal case that contained all that was human of Simon Wright – his brilliant deathless brain.

"You say," said Simon, "that Ezra is gone. Where precisely did he go?"

Joan glanced at Simon, who was watching her intently with his lens-like eyes as he glided silently along on the pale traction beams that were his equivalent of limbs.

"If I knew where I wouldn't hide it from you," she said with an undertone of irritation.

In the next breath she said contritely, "I'm sorry. Waiting here has got me down. There's something about Europa – it's so old and cruel and somehow patient ..."

Otho said wryly, "You need a double hooker of something strong and cheering." His green slightly-tilted eyes were compassionate beneath their habitual irony.

Grag, the towering manlike giant who bore in his metal frame the strength of an army and an artificial intelligence equal to the human, rumbled a question in his deep booming voice. But Curt Newton only vaguely heard him. His gaze had followed Joan's out into the alien night.

This was not his first visit to Europa. And he was surprised to find that Joan had put into words exactly what he had always felt about the silent moon, the old old moon that was scarred so deep by time.

Here, on one side, were the modern glare and thunder of the spaceport, busy with freighters and one or two sleek liners. Beyond the spaceport was Europolis, a glow of light behind a barren ridge. But on the other side, before him and behind him, was a sadness of ancient rock and distant hills, of brooding forest hung with shadow, of great plains empty in the red glow of Jupiter, dusty wastes where no herds had grazed and no armies fought for a hundred thousand years.

The woods and plains were scattered with the time-gnawed bones of cities, dead and forsaken even before the last descendants of their builders had sunk into final barbarism. A thin old wind wandered aimlessly among the ruins, whimpering as though it remembered other days and wept.

Newton could not suppress a slight shiver. The death of any great culture is a mournful thing and the culture that had built the shining cities of Europa was the greatest ever known – the proud Old Empire that once had held two galaxies. To Curt Newton, who had followed the shadow of that glory far back toward its source, the very stones of these ruins spoke of cosmic tragedy, of the age-long night that succeeded the blazing highest noon of human splendor.

The functional gleaming Patrol building brought his mind back to the present. Joan took them into a small office. From a locked file she drew a neat folder of papers and placed it on the desk.

"Ezra and I," she said, "were called into this case some time ago. The Planet Police had been handling it as a routine matter until some peculiar angles turned up that required the attention of Section Three.

"People had been disappearing. Not only people from Earth but other planets as well – *and nearly all of them older people*. In each case when they vanished, they took most of their wealth with them.

"Planet Police discovered that all these missing persons without exception had come to Europa. And here in Europolis their trails ended."

Simon Wright asked in his toneless voice, "Did they leave no clue as to why they came to this particular moo?"

"A few of them did," answered Joan. "A few of them before they left talked a little of something called the Second Life. That was all – just the name. But they seemed so eager and excited about it that it was remembered."

She continued, "Since they were nearly all aging people it seems obvious that the Second Life they were hoping for was some form of rejuvenation. A form of rejuvenation that must be illegal in nature or it wouldn't be carried on secretly."

Curt nodded. "That sounds reasonable enough. 'The Second Life' – the term is a new one to me. However, Jupiter and its moons retained the civilization and science of the Old Empire long after the other planets had relapsed into barbarism. To this day odd scraps of that ancient wisdom keep rising to plague us."

"Quite," said Simon dryly. "You will recall the case of Kenneth Lester, also that of the Martian, UI Quorn. Europa in particular has always had a reputation in the System as a repository of knowledge that has been lost elsewhere. It's an interesting problem. It occurs to me –"

JOAN cut him short, genuinely angry now. "Are you and Curt going to start on that archaeological obsession of yours at a time like this? Ezra may be dead or dying!"

Captain Future said, "Steady on, Joan – you haven't yet told us exactly what happened to Ezra."

Joan caught a deep breath and went on more calmly.

"When we came here to investigate we found that the missing people who had arrived here had simply dropped out of sight. The Europeans themselves refused to talk to us. But Ezra wouldn't give up and finally got a lead. He found that the missing folk had hired native mounts at an inn called the Three Red Moons and had ridden out of the city.

"Ezra planned to follow that lead out into the hills. He made me wait here – he said he had to have a contact here. I waited many days before Ezra got in touch with me through our micro-wave audio. He spoke briefly to me and switched off – and I've never heard from him since."

"His message " asked Curt tensely.

Joan took out a slip of paper. "I wrote it down word for word."

Curt read aloud. "Listen carefully, Joan! I'm all right – safe, well and happy. But I'm not coming back, not for a while. Now this is an order, Joan – drop the investigation, and go back to Earth. I'll follow you later!"

That was all.

Otho said sharply, "He was forced to make that call!"

"No." Joan shook her head. "We have a secret code. He could have said the same words and yet could have let me know that he spoke under duress merely by a certain inflection. No, Ezra was talking of his own free will."

"Maybe he fell for this rejuvenation process, whatever it is?" suggested Grag.

"No," said Simon decisively. "Ezra would not do anything so foolish."

Curt nodded agreement. "Ezra has had plenty of tragedy in his life that few people know anything about. It's why he's always a little grim. He wouldn't want to live a second life."

"Second Life?" murmured Otho. "The name tells nothing. Yet there must be a clue in it."

Captain Future stood up. "This isn't a case for cleverness or subtlety. Ezra may be in danger and we're going to work fast. We'll go into Europolis and make those who know something talk."

Otho, his eyes sparkling, sprang to his feet. Grag took a clanking step toward the door.

"Wait, Curt." Joan's face was worried. "You know the Patrol can't legally arrest European citizens on their own world –"

He smiled without much mirth. "We're not Patrol.

We'll take the consequences if any."

"It's not that," she cried. "I have a feeling that since Ezra's vanishing you Futuremen have been expected – *and prepared for.*"

Curt Newton nodded gravely. "Very likely. However, we're not exactly unprepared ourselves." He turned to the others. "Simon, will you stay here and go over Joan's data on the case till we return? And you, Grag – you'll remain to guard them both."

Grag looked and sounded as upset as his physical structure would permit. "But there's no telling what kind of trouble you'll run into! You'll need me with you!"

"Joan needs you worse. She's in every bit as much danger as we are."

That was partly true. It was also true that Grag's seven-foot-high clanking bulk was somewhat too conspicuous for what Curt Newton had in mind. Otho started to say so and Curt stopped him by saying, "Let's go."

He went out and Otho followed him, chuckling.

"Save your humor," said Curt dryly. "We may wish we had old Bone-crusher with us before we're through."

They walked swiftly toward the slope of the low ridge beyond which lay the city. The thin dust blew beneath their feet and the old wind sang of danger out of its long long memories of blood and death.

CHAPTER II

The Inn of the Three Red Moons

THE city lay in a shallow bowl between two spurs of a range so worn by the scuffing ages that it was now little more than a line of hills. Under the red glow of Jupiter the lordly towers slept in a sanguine mist that softened the scars of the broken stone. The cool light filled the roofless colonnades, the grand and empty avenues, and touched with a casual pity the faceless monuments that had long outlasted their forgotten victories.

Curt Newton stood in a still and shadowy street and listened to the silence.

On the near side of the ridge he could see the out-world settlement near the spaceport – infinitely farther away in time than it was in distance. There were the brilliant lights, the steel and plastic buildings of today, crowned by the white facade of the resort hotel. They had a curiously impermanent look. He took three steps along the winding way and they were gone.

The paving stones were hollow under his feet, rutted by the tread of a myriad generations. The walls of the buildings rose on either side, some mere shells with the coppery planet-light shining through their graceful arches, others still tolerably whole with window-places like peering eyes, showing here and there a gleam of

light.

Otho, moving catlike at Curt's side, lifted his shoulders uneasily. "My back itches," he said.

Curt nodded. "We're being watched."

There was nothing to show that this was so but he knew it as Otho did, without needing to see.

They came out into a wide square, from which many streets led off. In the center was a winged monument, so effaced by millenniums of wind and dust that it had the look of a grotesque skeleton, its eroded pinions stark against the sky. Curt and Otho paused beneath it, tiny figures beside that hundred-foot bulk of greenish marble.

Nothing stirred in the square. The deserted avenues stretched away, edged with clotted shadow. The fallen palaces and shattered temples reared to unknown gods stood still and brooding, remembering the banners and the glory, the incense and the crimson robes.

One or two of the streets showed life, where flaring light marked the wine-shops and the inns.

"Down there," said Captain Future and they went on, their boots ringing on the paving blocks.

They entered the street that Curt had chosen. And as they walked a little crowd began to gather, softly, unobtrusively, the dark-faced men in dusty cloaks coming without sound from the doorways, from the mouths of alleys, from nowhere and everywhere.

They were not the young men, the hot-handed fighters. Most of them were grey and some were bent and even the youngest of them had an indefinable look of age, a thing of the spirit rather than the flesh. They did not speak. They watched the tall Earthman and the lithe one beside him that seemed to be a man. Their dark eyes glistened and they followed the strangers, borne with them like a ring of tattered shadows shifting, flowing, thickening.

There was a coldness on Curt Newton's flesh. It was an effort to keep his hand away from the butt of his weapon.

"There it is ahead," said Otho quietly. "The sign of the Three Red Moons."

The soft-footed multitude around them swirled and coalesced into a silent barrier across the windy street.

Curt stopped. He did not seem to be afraid or even angry – merely curious. He regarded the wall of men with a patience equal to their own.

An old white-bearded man stepped forward. He was shorter by a head than the Earthman but he stood erect and there was an ancient beauty in his high-boned face, a deep grand sorrowful pride. His cloak was as old as he, dun-colored with the sifting dust but he carried it as splendidly as though it had been fashioned of the purple cloth of kings.

He said with an odd sort of courtesy, "There is no passage here for strangers."

Captain Future smiled. "Come now, father – surely a

thirsty man may refresh himself with wine."

The old man shook his head. "You do not come for wine. Return to your own kind – there is nothing for you here but sorrow."

"It has been told to me," said Curt slowly, "that others have come here seeking joy."

"Does not all mankind seek for joy? That is why I tell you – return to your own!"

CURT looked over the heads of the old man and the other men who were old and the men who should have been young but were not. He looked at the sign of the Three Red Moons and he said quite softly, "Will you stop me, father?"

The old man's eyes were very sad. "No," he said, "I will not stop you. I will only tell you this, that no man nor woman has yet been harmed nor will be harmed – but that he who comes in search of death shall surely find it."

"I shall remember," Curt said and began again to walk forward against the crowd, with Otho close beside him.

The ranks held unbroken, the rows of silent hostile faces, until he was almost touching them. Then the old man raised his hand and let it fall again in a gesture of finality. The crowd broke and the way was open. Curt passed on and behind him the men vanished one by one into the shadows again, like old leaves caught by the wind and whirled away.

Curt and Otho entered the Inn of the Three Red Moons.

The common room was large, with a vaulted roof of stone, black as though carved from jet. Lights flared in the corners and a score of men sat around antique massive metal tables. They glanced at the two strangers, then ignored them.

Curt and Otho sat down in an empty place and presently a dark girl came and brought them wine and slipped away again.

They sipped the strong spicy brown liquid. They might have been no more than two spacemen off from the port for a night's pleasure in old Europolis. And yet they knew that eyes watched them, that the inn was too quiet. Captain Future's muscles quivered with anticipation and Otho's gaze was very bright.

Presently Otho said in a language not likely to be understood, "That young chap at the next table hasn't taken his eyes off us since we came in."

"I know." The dark fierce young face and hungry glance were only too obviously turned toward the strangers. Curt thought that if anything happened it would be men like this they would have to deal with, men still free of the withering taint of age that seemed to overtake the Europeans in their prime.

He beckoned to the girl again. "We're minded to

take a ride into the hills," he said. "Can we hire mounts here?"

The girl's face was expressionless. "That is Shargo's province."

"And where may we find Shargo?"

"Through that passageway. The paddocks are behind the inn."

Curt laid a coin on the table and rose. "Come on, Otho, it's getting late."

They crossed the common-room and entered the passage. Without seeming to notice Curt saw that the young man who had watched them left swiftly by the front door and that the others bent together in a sudden murmur of guarded talk.

The girl glanced after them. Her face held bitter resentment.

The passage was long and shadowy. They traversed it swiftly, hearing nothing to warn them of any danger. At its end it opened into a court containing ruined out-buildings and a stone-walled paddock in good repair. The wall was high, for the European beasts are good jumpers, and the gate was of iron bars.

A man came toward them from one of the ruined sheds. He was old and not nimble. He wore the leather tunic of a hostler and it was not even clean. But still there was about him the same look that Curt had seen before, the look of pride and inward vision, as though he saw the flaunt of silken banners in the wind and heard the trumpets sounding far away.

Captain Future repeated his request for two mounts.

He had expected refusals, at the least arguments and evasions. There were none. The old man shrugged and answered. "You will have to bridle them yourselves. In the day there is a young man here to hold the brutes and rein them – but the fools who wish to ride at night must catch their own."

"Very well," said Curt. "Give us the halters."

The old man produced two arrangements of leather straps, bitted with iron. "Get them by the combs," he grunted, "and watch their forefeet."

He led the way to the paddock gate.

Curt looked around. The court was empty. It was very still. Otho whispered, "What are they waiting for?"

"Perhaps they want us clear of the city," Curt answered. Another disappearance in the shadowy hills would be preferable from the Europeans' viewpoint.

Otho nodded. "The trap could be at the other end. These beasts have been there before. They must know the way without being guided."

"One thing sure," said Captain Future, "they'll have to stop us somewhere."

The old man lifted the heavy bar of the gate.

The paddock was not too large for the herd of twenty or so European mounts that it contained. They were huddled together, drowsing in the Jupiter-light – serpentine scaly creatures with powerful legs and tails like

wire lashes. Their narrow heads were crowned with fleshy yellow combs. They blinked and peered at the men with shining wicked eyes as red as coals.

"Take your choice," said the old European, standing by the gate.

Curt and Otho went forward with the bridles.

At their approach the beasts hissed softly and backed away. Their padded feet made a nervous thumping on the ground. Curt spoke softly but the herd began to shift.

"I don't think they like the smell of us," said Otho.

Curt reached out swiftly and caught one golden comb. The creature plunged and whistled as he fitted the rude bridle. Then suddenly from behind them there came the clang of the gate-bar dropping and he knew that there would be no waiting for the silence of the dark hills, that this, here and now, was the trap – and that they were in it.

Otho had spun around, holding his bridled mount. He was cursing the old man. Curt kept his grip on his unwilling mount, turning with it to keep clear of the clawed forefeet. The paddock walls were high, worn smooth as glass by the rubbing of many flanks. There was no escape that way.

The herd was stirring uneasily, moving with a hiss and flickering of scaly tails, a quivering of muscles. Curt cried out a warning to Otho but it was already too late.

A makeshift torch of flaming rags whirled in over the gate, leaving a trail of oily smoke. Curt heard the old man's voice lifted in a cracked *Hai-hai*, urgent, shrill. A second wad of burning cloth shot in, dropping in the middle of the herd with a burst of sparks. Instantly there was brute panic, pent up and turned upon itself by the paddock walls.

Plunging, trampling, screaming, the penned beasts tried to flee the smoke and the stinging fire. Curt's mount reared and dragged him and he clung to its comb with the grip of a man who knows he is lost if he lets go. He dug his heels into the dusty ground, twisted the brute's head until its neckbones cracked and leaped up, clamping his legs around the slender belly.

Dimly through the dust and turmoil he saw Otho. An ordinary man would have been trampled to death in those first seconds. But Otho was not a man. Swift, sure-footed, incredibly strong, the android had imitated Curt's example and had swung himself to the back of his plunging mount, getting an iron grip on its comb.

It was only temporary escape. The maddened beasts had turned to fighting among themselves. Curt knew it was only a matter of time and not much of it before his creature would fall or be thrown. The paddock was a swirling madness of leaping bodies and tearing jaws and dust and noise. Nothing could stand for long in that.

The old European remained beyond the gate. He held another of the makeshift torches in his hands, waving it slowly back and forth so that all the beasts shied away from the opening.

A solemn proud fine-cut old man. Later he would be very sorry for this tragic accident. He would know nothing more than that two spacemen had drunk wine in the tavern and had then gone staggering in among the beasts and frightened them and been most regrettably slain.

Even in that moment of fury Curt found time to wonder what strange madness drove these men – the madness of the mysterious Second Life that urged them to any length.

He was trying to reach the gate when his mount stumbled over another that was down and kicking its life out in the dust and blood. He heard a wild yell from Otho and a commotion by the gate. The straining body under him staggered and fell. Desperately he pulled the creature's head back, forcing it up, forcing it on its feet again, and suddenly there was a rush past him of slaty backs and outstretched necks, a squealing stampede outward and the gate

was open.

He fought his mount to keep it back. Over the wall, Otho was riding a frantic demon, twisting its comb until it shrieked. In a matter of seconds they were alone in the paddock and the herd was stamping through the courtyard, scattering away down the dark alleys.

The old man was gone, presumably to cover in one of the sheds.

"The young one," Otho panted. "Stand still, you son of a worm's egg! The young one that watched us inside the inn – he drove the old man off. He opened the gate."

The court was clear now. From the shelter of a broken wall a figure leaped and ran.

"Get him!" Curt yelled. "*Get him!*"

He sank his heels in the scaly flanks and the creature hissed and went hard after the running shadow.

CHAPTER III

The House of Returning

THEY caught him. They rode him down in a narrow alley, the dark young man with the fierce eyes, and he fought them but he did not draw any weapon.

Curt had no time for pleasantries. He leaned over and struck the young man hard on the side of the jaw, and pulled the limp body up before him.

"Out of the city," he said to Otho. "This way, toward the hills. After that we can talk."

They found their way out of the maze of alleys into

a broad avenue spanned by massive arches, broken now, their heroic carvings shattered by the slow hammers of time. Curt and Otho sped beneath their shadows, alone with the wind and the blowing dust.

Beyond the arches there were no more buildings but only the straight road that ran into the hills between two rows of ancient stelae, stark and rigid under the glow of the great planet. Beyond the stelae there was nothing, only the gaunt slopes and the sighing in the stiff dry grass.

There had been no alarm behind them and there was no pursuit. The warning night was blank and still. Captain Future led the way at random until he found a place that suited him. Then he stopped and motioned Otho to dismount.

The young man was conscious. Curt thought he had been conscious for some time but he had made no move. He was breathless now from the jolting of the beast. He crouched where Curt had set him, shaking his head, gasping.

Presently Curt asked, "Why did you open the paddock gate?"

The young man answered, "Because I did not wish for you to die."

"Do you know why we were supposed to die?"

"I know." He looked at them and his eyes were hot and angry. "Yes, I know!"

"Ah," said Curt Newton. "Then you do not worship the Second Life."

Otho laughed. "He doesn't need rejuvenation."

"It is not rejuvenation," said the young man bitterly. "It is death, the death of my world and my people. Almost before our beards are grown the Second Life take hold of us and we forget the first life that we have not yet lived. Our walls fall about us stone by stone and we have not cloth to wrap our bodies in and the great change in other worlds does not touch us – but all that is nothing so long as we live the glorious life, the Second Life!"

He sprang up, glaring at Curt and Otho as though he hated them, but it was not their faces he saw. It was the sere and sterile faces of men grown old before their time, dead men on a dying moon.

"You of the other worlds are not like us. Life goes forward for you. Men learn and grow and the fields are rich and the cities are bright and tall. Even your oldest worlds have young minds – is that not so?"

Captain Future nodded. "It is so."

"Yes. But on Europa what is there for a young man? Dust and dreams! There is a wall against us and after a while we learn that we cannot break it down. Then we too grow old."

He turned away. "Go back to your own world. You have life. Keep it."

Curt caught him by the arms. "What is the Second Life?"

"Death," said the young man, "to those who live it – and to those who would destroy it. We know. We have tried."

A sharp light came suddenly into Curt Newton's eyes. "Then there are others in the city who feel as you do?"

"Oh, yes – all of us who are still young." He laughed. It was not pleasant laughter. "We banded together once. We went up to the valley, angry, full of hate – we were going to make our world free. And they shot us down in the pass – the old men shot us down!"

He shook himself free of the Earthman's grasp. "I have told you. Go back to your own while you still live."

"No," said Captain Future softly. "We are going to the valley. And you will guide us."

The eyes of the young man widened. He stepped back and Otho caught him from behind, holding him helpless. He turned his head from side to side and cried out, "Three men, where a hundred of us failed? You don't know Konnur, the Guardian of the Second Life. You don't know the punishment. I am a proscribed man! I am forbidden the valley!"

"Proscription, punishment!" Curt Newton's voice was heavy with contempt. "You don't deserve your youth. Your bones are already crumbling." He reached out and slapped the young man's face, lightly, deliberately, one cheek and then the other.

"You will guide us to the valley. After that, you're free to tuck your tail and run. We can end the Second Life without such help as yours."

Captain Future saw the flame of anger leap in the young man's eyes, the dark flush in his cheeks. He strained against the android's grip and Curt laughed.

"So there's still a bit of pride left if a man can find it! Set him up here, Otho." He swung up onto the scaly back of his mount and received the European between his arms, where Otho lifted him as though he had been a child.

"Now," said Curt, "which way?"

The young man pointed.

They rode on through the dark hills, and after awhile the dawn came and found them before the shadowy throat of a pass – the dawn of pale far Sun that was only a little lighter than the night.

Curt dismounted and stood holding the bridle. He said to the European. "Go back to the spaceport, to the Patrol base. Tell those who wait there for us where we are."

A gleam that was almost a light of hope began to show in the young man's eyes. "And you?" he asked.

Curt nodded toward the blind notch of the pass. "We are going in."

"Perhaps," whispered the young man softly, "perhaps it is true that you can end the Second Life – you and those who wait for you. We know of you even here,

where we know so little. I will go. And after I have said your message I will go into the city to gather those who fought once and who can fight again!"

CAPTAIN FUTURE let go the rein. The young man wheeled the squealing beast around and sent it flying back toward the city. Otho's mount ran with it.

"Let us hope," said the android dryly, "that our boy doesn't come to grief along the way."

He turned and walked with Curt up into the darkness of the pass.

"If the Second Life isn't rejuvenation, what is it?" Otho asked. "Some kind of pleasure-dream by artificial sensory stimuli? No, Ezra wouldn't stoop to that."

"No, it isn't that," Curt said. "I'm beginning to think that it's something more pitiful and terrible than that."

It was quiet in the pass. The screeches of broken rock rose up on either side, with here and there a stunted tree. An army might have hidden there and been unseen but even Curt's keen ears could detect no sound of life.

And yet he was not surprised when, as they reached the end of the pass, he looked back and saw men closing in behind them.

He waited for them. They were youngish men and strong but in their eyes already was the shadow of decay. He could see why the young European had called these "the old men" too.

"I have come to speak to Konnur," Captain Future said to them.

The one who seemed to be the leader nodded. "He is waiting for you. You will give us your weapons, please."

They had weapons of their own and there was not much point in arguing. Curt and Otho handed them over. Then they walked on and the men with the old eyes came close behind them.

The valley was deep and there were forests in it and a thin stream. Not far from the pass was a massive house of stone, very long and wide, that looked as though it might have been a place of learning in the days when the moon was young.

"There," said the leader, and pointed to a gateway of which the valves were fine-worked gold, bright as the day they were hung there. Captain Future passed between them with Otho at his side.

Inside there was the soft gloom of vaulted chambers, cool and dim, with old flagged floors that rang hollow under their striding boots. The great house was only a shell of stone, stripped of all but its enduring bones. It was empty and very still.

They waited and presently a man came walking toward them down a long passage, a tall man, erect and very proud. An aging man but not dusty, not decayed. His eyes were bright and clear, the eyes of a fanatic or a saint.

Looking at him, Curt knew that he was faced with the most dangerous kind of an enemy – a man with a belief.

"You are Konnur?" he asked.

"I am. And you are Curt Newton and – ah, yes, the one who is called Otho." Konnur made a slight inclination of his head. "I have expected you. The man Gurney was afraid the girl would send for you in spite of his message."

"And where is Gurney?"

"I will take you to him," said Konnur. "Come."

He led the way down the long dim corridor and Curt and Otho followed. Behind them still came the grim-faced men.

Konnur paused beside a massive door of some tarnished metal and pushed it open.

"Enter," he said.

Captain Future stepped through into a long low hall that might have held a regiment. And he stopped with a queer chill shiver running through him. Beside him he heard Otho catch his breath.

There was a stillness on that place. Above it and below it and through it was a sound, a deep and gentle humming that only made the silence greater.

Spaced along the hall were many slabs of marble, mortuary couches hollowed deep by the pressure of uncounted bodies. Above each slab there stood a cowed machine as ancient as the marble, of a manufacture utterly foreign to any prosaic mechanism of Earth. They had been kept bright with loving care but even so a number of them seemed worn out and useless. It was the machines that made the humming, the whirring song of sleep.

Men and women lay upon the slabs. Curt lost count of their numbers in the uncertain shadows. They lay as though in slumber, their limbs relaxed, their faces peaceful. Around each sleeper's head was bound a strap of some unfamiliar metal, having round electrodes fitted to the temples. The electrodes were connected, not by wires but by tendrils of glowing force, to the hooded mechanism above, from which a somber light poured down.

Otho whispered, "There they are – all the old ones who have disappeared from other worlds."

Old men, old women – the sad, the burdened, the careworn. They slept here on the ancient slabs and Curt saw that in their faces there was more than peace. There was happiness, the joy of young days when the sun was bright and the body strong and tomorrow was only a vague mist on the horizon.

There were many Europeans also and they too had found happiness under the humming machines. But in their faces was reflected a different joy – a lofty pride as though behind their closed eyelids passed visions of magnificence and strength.

KONNUR beckoned. "Here your friend lies sleeping."

Curt stood beside the slab, looking down into the face of Ezra Gurney. The familiar face that to Curt was almost that of a father – and yet it was not the bleak face he remembered. The grimness was gone, the scars of time and pain had softened. The mouth smiled and it was the smile of a young man, a boy who has not yet lost the laughter from his heart.

"Waken him!" cried Curt.

And Konnur said, "Not yet."

Otho asked, "But – is it all illusion? Is he drugged or dreaming?"

"No," said Konnur. "He is remembering – returning – *reliving*. Everyone has times within his life that he would like to live again. The man Gurney has recaptured the period of his youth. He is young. He walks and speaks and feels, reliving every action as he lived it then. That is what we call the Second Life."

"But how?" said Curt. "*How?*"

"These instruments of the ancients," said Konnur, "enable man to remember – not just as a vague flitting vision but to recall with every one of his senses so that he completely relives the remembered experience."

Curt began to understand. Each experience left a new neural path in the synaptic labyrinth of the brain and the brief retraveling of that path roused a partial passing re-experience that was called "memory."

The Twentieth Century psychologists had speculated long ago that what they called "reintegration" might seize upon one single remembered impression and evoke from it all the many sensory impressions of which it had formed a part. The subtle probing rays of these machines accomplished "reintegration" in the fullest sense.

"And the memories of the fathers lie buried in the brains of the sons," Konnur was continuing. "Those parts of the brain formerly thought purposeless are a great storehouse of ancestral memories, inherited through some unimaginably subtle change in the chromosomes that even the ancients could not understand."

"So that you can reach back through those layers of buried inherited memory?" exclaimed Curt. "How far back?"

"Far and far," Konnur replied. "Back to the days of our world's glory, indeed – and is it wonderful that we prefer to live in the great past of Europa and not in its sad present?"

Captain Future said soberly, "But that is a rejection of the only real life. It is a retreat, a dying."

"Yet it is glory and triumph and joy," said Konnur.

His hand reached out to touch the humming mechanism. There was something reverent in the gesture.

"We do not understand these machines that give us the Second Life. The ancients had the knowledge and it is lost. But we can duplicate them bit by bit. You will

see that many of them are worn out, beyond repair. We needed rare metals, the radioactive substances that are the core of the machine.

"They are found no longer on Europa and so we needed money to buy from other worlds, to build new machines. That is why we brought these people here." He nodded to the aging folk of Earth and the other planets who had come to Europa to live the past again.

Captain Future faced Konnur. He spoke almost in the words of the young Europan.

"This is not life but death! Your cities are crumbling, your people are wasting away. This poison of the Second Life is destroying your world and must be stopped!"

"And," asked Konnur softly, "will you stop it?"

"Yes! I have sent for the other Futuremen and behind them are the Patrol – and some hundreds of your own people, Konnur, the young men who prefer to live one life rather than to die in two."

"It may be so," said Konnur. "And yet who knows? The man Gurney came here to stop it. He changed his mind. Perhaps you will change yours!"

Curt gave him a look of contempt. "You can't bribe me with memories of my youth. They're too close behind me – and most of them were not pleasant."

Konnur nodded. "I would not attempt anything so childish. There are other memories. The whole System knows of your long struggle to delve into the ancient past, the lost cosmic history of mankind. *You, yourself, can live in that past. Through ancestral memory, you can live again in the days of the Old Empire – perhaps even before it.*"

He smiled and added slowly, "You have a thirst for knowledge. And there are no limits to the learning you might acquire in the Second Life!"

Curt stood silent and there was a strange look in his eyes.

Otho laughed, a peculiarly jarring sound. "There is nothing in this for me, Konnur. I had no ancestors!"

"I know. The guards will care for you." Konnur turned to Newton. "Well?"

"No," said Curt, with a curious harshness. "No! I won't have anything to do with it."

He turned and there was a solid phalanx of men against him, barring his way. Konnur's voice came to him softly.

"I'm afraid you have no choice."

Irresolute, with a whiteness around his mouth, Curt Newton looked from Konnur to the guards and back again and a tremor ran through his muscles that was more of excitement than fear.

Otho sighed.

The guards moved forward one short step. Curt shrugged. He lifted his head and glanced at Konnur, challenging him, and Konnur pointed to an empty slab.

Captain Future lay down, in the hollowed place. The

marble was cold beneath him.

Another man had come, an old man in a threadbare gown who stood ready at the controls of the machine. Konnur set the metal band on the Earthman's head, fitting the chill plates of metal over his temples. He smiled and raised his hand.

The machine came humming into life. A somber glow illumined Curt's face and then two shining tendrils of force sprang out and spun themselves swiftly downward.

They touched the twin electrodes. Curt Newton felt a flash of fire inside his skull and then there was the darkness.

CHAPTER IV

The Unforgotten

ONE by one disjointed far-separated slices of his past suddenly came real and living again to Curt Newton. Each one was farther back in the past. And he did not just remember them. He *lived* each one with every one of his five senses, with almost all his conscious being.

Almost all – but not quite. Some inner corner of his mind remained aloof from this overpoweringly vivid playback of memory, and watched.

He was striding with Otho and Grag and the gliding Simon upon a night-shrouded world. In the heavens flamed the vast stunning star-stream of Andromeda galaxy and out of the darkness ahead of them loomed the mighty Hall of Ninety Suns ...

He was in the bridge of the *Red Hope*, Bork King's ship. That towering Martian pirate stood beside him and the brake-rockets were crashing frantically as they came in fast, fast, toward the red sullen sphere of Outlaw World ...

He was running, running toward the ships. The whole world beneath him was rocking and shaking, the sky wreathed in lightnings and great winds moaning. He was back on Katakain, that lost world of time that was rocking now toward its final cataclysmic doom ...

"*Back farther – farther –*" whispered the faraway voice, and the humming note of the machines seemed to deepen.

"You will do as I say, Curtis!"

Curt stood, rebelliously facing the implacable gaze of Simon Wright, in the corridor of the Moon-laboratory under Tycho. He was only a fourteen-year-old boy and he felt all a boy's resentment of restrictions, of fancied injustice.

"All I've ever seen is this place and you and Otho and Grag," he muttered. "I want to go to Earth and Mars and all the other worlds."

"You will someday," said Simon. "But not until you

are ready. Grag and Otho and I have reared you here, in preparation for what is to come. And when the time arrives you will go ..."

He could not see very clearly nor could he understand. He had only an infant's eyes and an infant's mind.

It was the big main room of the Moon-laboratory. A man and woman lay sprawled on the floor and other men with weapons stood over them.

Simon Wright, his lens-eyes facing those men, was saying tonelessly, "You will pay for this very quickly. Death is coming now."

There was a rush of feet. Grag and Otho burst into the room. A terrible booming cry came from the metal giant and he leaped forward.

To Curt's infant eyes it was a whirl of staggering figures, a spurt and flash of light – and then Grag standing with Otho over the broken bodies of the men.

The scene darkened – but the aloof untouched corner of Curt's adult mind knew that he had seen the death of his own parents and their avenging by the Futuremen ...

"Back beyond his own memories!" whispered the voice. *"His father's and his father's father's ..."*

He was in an ancient 20th Century airplane. Curt felt – *felt*, even though he knew it was a 20th Century ancestor who had really felt it – the pressure as he swung the plane around to dive toward its target ...

He was on the sun-parched deck of an old sailing-ship, becalmed, its sails hanging limp and dead. He started toward the stern ...

He was one of many men, men clad in bronze and leather, carrying long spears. They were running into a rude village of huts and somewhere there was a shrieking ...

Under a somber sky on a sere brown hillside he stood as a skin-garmented savage. The chill wind ruffled the dead grass but he saw the movement down on the slope that was not of the wind and he raised his heavy stone axe more alertly ...

"Farther –"

Thunder shook the night sky and reverberated across the city of glittering pylons in the nearer distance as one by one the great liners came swinging majestically down.

Curt Newton – or the faraway ancestor whose memories he now relived – spoke with casual interest to the grave robed man who was walking with him toward the starport terminal.

"We'll see what kind of officials Deneb is sending us this time! I must admit these bored sophisticates from the capital, with their patronizing attitude toward our Earth and its System, get on my nerves!"

"But after all we're only a tiny part of the Empire," the other reminded. "Administrators who have to think of worlds across the whole galaxy can't consider our little System as too important."

"It is important! Even though it has only nine little worlds it's as important as any part of the Empire!"

"Perhaps it will be someday. The Empire will last forever and someday –"

EVEN as the scene changed the watching corner of Curt's mind knew that for a moment he had actually *lived* in the legendary Old Empire ...

"Back farther still – farther –"

He could hear them singing the song through all the ship. The old song that was like a banner streaming, the song that they had sung for generations in the mighty ships that went on and on through the intergalactic void.

"How many, many centuries since the last of the First Born died – the First Born who raised us from the dust! How many centuries since we men went forth!"

He heard and he looked ahead through the port and there was nothing but the same eternal scene – the vast maw of oceanic deep space with the hosts of the far-flung galaxies mere drowned points of light.

All except the one galaxy ahead, the mighty wheel-shaped continent of stars that slowly, slowly, kept growing into a universe of fire and splendor.

"By the arts that the First Born taught us, by the sacred behest that they laid upon us, we go forth to create the cosmic dream they dreamed!"

The blinding revelation came only to that little part of his mind that was still Curt Newton – the revelation of that first epic coming of men to found the Empire of old, to fulfill the command of the mysterious First Born.

If he could hear that song a little longer, that marching-song of the elder human race as it followed its destiny from far beginnings! If he could hear but a little more –

"Now!" spoke the voice and light crashed destroyingly upon the whole scene – and he was Curt Newton wholly and lying upon a cold slab and waking – waking ...

It was cruel, that awakening, unendurably cruel – to have gone so far and yet not far enough! He heard himself cry out, an incoherent fury of demand for the machine to hum again, to send his memories plunging back along the endless track of time.

Then his sight cleared and he saw Otho watching him, his green eyes calculating and ironic. He saw Konnur, smiling.

Curt stripped off the metal band and stood erect. His hands were unsteady and somehow he could not meet Otho's gaze. He tried to speak but the words did not come and in his mind, already fading, was still the burden of that song and the blinding light of galaxies untouched and new, ready for the conqueror.

He shivered and Konnur said as though he knew quite well what was passing in the Earthman's thoughts,

"Remain here then. You can order the others away and remain here and follow your own dream. There are no limits to the memory of man."

"Yes," said Curt to himself and not to Konnur. "One limit – the beginning, the time before ever there were men, before the First Born. Who – and where and how?"

"Learn," said the quiet voice of Konnur. "Send the others away when they come and remain and learn."

From a great distance then there came to Curt the sudden sound of fighting in the pass.

For a moment he stood motionless, caught between that song of lost eons and the pitiless present. Then, savagely, like a creature driven against his will, he moved. He tore the metal band from Ezra Gurney's head and shook him and shouted, "Wake up, Ezra! Wake!"

The guards had started forward. Otho said sharply, "Wait! If you touch him now, it will only mean complete destruction for you all."

Konnur listened to the sound of fighting in the valley. He sighed and motioned the guards to halt.

"Yes," said Konnur, "let us wait. There is always time to die."

Ezra Gurney was looking up at Curt, his eyes bewildered and full of uncomprehending pain.

Captain Future turned away. He said heavily, "Konnur, go and tell your people to lay down their weapons. There is no need for bloodshed."

"Perhaps," said Konnur, "it would be better for us to die fighting for the Second Life."

Curt shook his head. "The Second Life must be ended for Europa. By bringing in these folk from other worlds you have give the Planet Police and the Government power to act and they will act very swiftly. But ..."

Konnur's eyes blazed. "But?"

"It need not be destroyed. Go now and speak to your people."

Konnur hesitated. His gaze was fixed on Curt's. Then, abruptly, he turned and went away. Curt took Ezra Gurney's hand. He said gently, "Get up, Ezra. It's time to go."

The old man got slowly to his feet and then sank back, sitting on the edge of the slab, his face between his hands.

PRESENTLY he said, "I couldn't help it, Curt. It was a chance to go back to the time when I was young, to the time when we were together and all that had not yet happened ..."

Curt did not need to ask whom he meant by "we". He was one of the few who knew Ezra's tragedy, the loved brother whom he had long ago been forced to slay as an outlaw in space.

He took hold of Ezra's shoulder. "Sure," he said.

"Sure, I understand."

Ezra looked up at him. "Yes," he muttered. "I think you do. Well ..." He stood up, groping for something to say, something normal and expected. "Well, I guess there's nothing else to do but go and face Joan. Is she angry?"

"Not now," said Otho, grinning, "but she will be."

Ezra smiled back gratefully but his heart was not in it.

They went out of the place of the sleepers, down the long passage to the outer chambers. The noise of strife had ceased. They heard a tumult of many voices shouting and then Grag came striding mightily through the tall gates.

He bellowed, "Are you all right, Curt? I knew Otho would get you into a jam!"

Simon Wright glided beside him and behind them a press of eager dusty young Europeans crowding like wolves.

"Shall we destroy them now?" they shouted. "Shall we break the machines?"

"No!" Curt told them. "Hold your tempers! And listen. Konnur! Where is Konnur?"

They thrust him inward through the crowd. They had handled him roughly but even so he had not lost his dignity nor his pride. He stood waiting.

Curt Newton spoke slowly, so that everyone should hear and understand. "This, is my proposal. There are many of the old ones who have lived so long in the Second Life of memory that without it they would die – and the secret itself is too valuable to be lost.

"Therefore I offer this solution – that the machines shall be removed to one of the small uninhabited moons of this system and that those who wish to shall go with them. It would be a sort of quarantine, under the authority of the Planet Police, and the Second Life would be gone forever from Europa. Does that meet with your approval?"

He looked at Konnur, who had no choice and knew it, but who did not care as long as his beloved dream was safe.

"It is well," he said. "Better than I had hoped."

"And you," demanded Curt of the young Europeans, "what is your word?"

"They had many words among themselves. They shook their fists and argued, hungry for destruction, but at the last the young man who had come with Curt and Otho from the city stepped forward and said, "As long as the Second Life goes forever from this world we will not oppose you." He paused, then added, "We owe you that much. If it had not been for you we would never have broken free."

Curt felt a great relief, greater than he should have had for the mere saving of a bit of antique science. Again he avoided Otho's gaze and even more the cold penetrating glance of Simon Wright's lens-eyes.

He said to Konnur, "It is done then. Waken the sleepers and let them have time to think and choose. I will see that the arrangements are made to trans-ship and settle all those who wish to go."

He took Ezra by the arm, shaking him from the reverie into which he had sunk again. "Come on," he said. "We're finished here for good."

* * * * *

They were walking across the spaceport, the six of them, the Futuremen and Joan and Ezra, heading for the ships under the red glow of Jupiter. And Simon Wright said something that had been on his mind to say these days during which Curt had labored to finish the removal of willing exiles to a remote and barren moon.

"Was it out of pity for them, Curtis – or did you wish to live the Second Life again yourself some day?"

Curt answered slowly.

"I'm not sure. It's too dangerous a thing to meddle

with overmuch and yet – much knowledge could be gained that way. If a man could be sure of himself, of his own mind ..."

He shook his head and Simon said dryly, "The last thing a man is ever sure of is the strength of his own mind."

Otho looked up at Grag.

"But you really ought to try it some time, Grag."

"The Second Life?" rumbled Grag. "Why, now, come to think of it maybe I should."

"Certainly," Otho told him. "It would be a fascinating experience to learn how your ancestral pig-iron felt in the forge."

Grag turned on him. "Listen, android –"

Curt's voice cut them short and their step quickened as they went on toward the ships.

But Ezra walked last, slowly, the shadow still on his lined old face as he looked back – back to the remembered past, the bright lost days, the forever unforgotten.