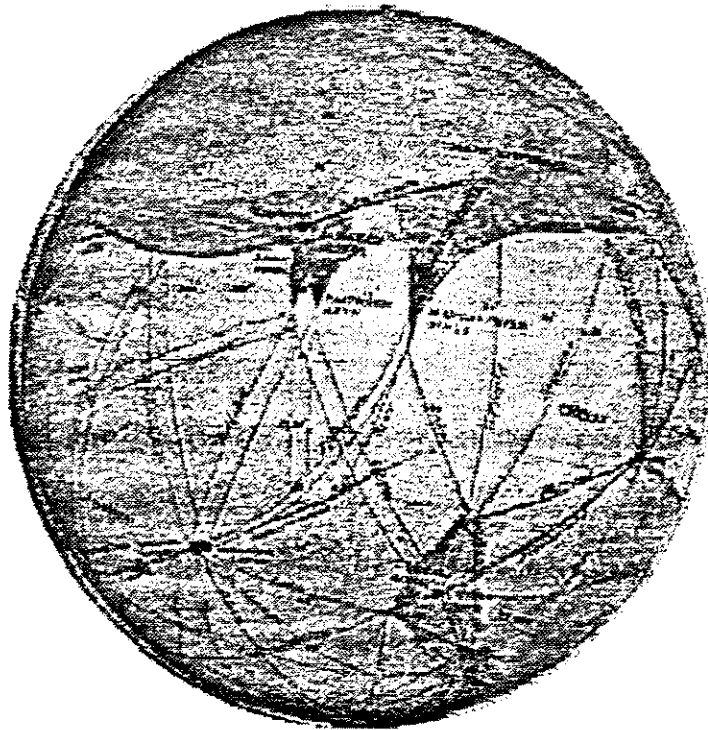


The Martian Agent



Written by
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Hanging like a reckless seraphim
On the reins of red-maned Mars

-- Kipling

FADE IN:

STARRY SKY

Amid a million million diamonds, one dark ruby.

EXT. LOUISIANA HIGHWAY (1876) - NIGHT

Starlight, swamp fire in the branches of the trees. CRICKETS and FROGS. The highway bends like a river. Galloping HOOVES in the distance, a maddened horse.

TITLE: BAYOU MOUFFETTE, BRITISH LOUISIANA, 1876

A pair of exhausted black horses careen past, dragging a rocking black coach. A trunk strapped to the top shakes loose, falls off. Bursts open. The horses' thunder fades.

In the trunk, a framed chromo: a cavalryman with long yellow hair. The caption reads, in florid type, "GENERAL CUSTER."

Crickets and frogs. Then a different thunder, of GEARS and PISTONS. A ROAR of steam.

A steamwagon lumbers by, black steel and smoke, Gatling in its turret, flying the Union Jack. Its wake blows the chromo away. A crisp voice issues from the bell of its megaphone.

BRITISH VOICE
Colonel Rider!

INT. COACH - NIGHT

An American family in ruins. COLONEL HARRY RIDER, 44, his young wife MARGARET, and their sons FRANKLIN and JEFFERSON. Rider's cavalry jacket is in tatters, MARGARET is weak with fever. They know they are about to be captured.

BRITISH VOICE (O.S.)
Colonel, the Ohio Mutiny is finished!
Custer has surrendered to the Crown!

Stunning news. Even Jefferson, 8, looks stricken.

COL. RIDER
It's a trick. Custer would never--

BRITISH VOICE (O.S.)
You will not be permitted to reach the
Texas border! Colonel, please do not
force us employ our Gatling!

The boys look at their father. Margaret pleads with her eyes. The fire goes out of Rider. He nods, raps his sword

hilt against the roof. The coach rattles to a halt. The wagon's brakes SQUEAL. Rider stands, opens the coach door.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

The door opens. Beyond the coach the giant steamwagon disgorges red-coated British troops. Jeff leaps down, and runs for the woods. Frank hesitates.

INT. COACH - NIGHT

Col. Rider hands Frank, 14, a big service revolver.

RIDER

Jeff has never met his Uncle Abe, Frank. See that you get him to San Antonio.

FRANK

Yes, sir, I will.

RIDER

All that is best in our laws and history, son, is the fruit of the love between brothers. Remember that.

FRANK

I will, sir.

They shake hands. Frank gives his mother a kiss, then leaps.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

Frank takes off after his brother into the trees.

EXT. TREES - NIGHT

The boys peer out from the shadows, watching the soldiers hustle their parents to the huffing steamwagon. Jeff yanks his brother's sleeve. Yanks it again.

JEFF

Shoot! Shoot the gun!

FRANK

Quiet!

JEFF

Let me shoot it, then!

Crying, kicking, he goes for the .38. Frank stuffs the gun into his pants, grabs Jeff, wraps him up in his long arms, covers his mouth with one hand. They watch in horror as:

The iron hatch of the wagon slams, sealing up their parents.

EXT. BAYOU - TREE - DAY

Morning mist. The boys doze in the limbs of a cypress. Distant British voices. Frank opens his eyes. Shakes Jeff awake, then starts to climb down from the tree.

JEFF

I thought you said we'd be safe up here.

FRANK

Safe from alligators, yes. Not redcoats.

Frank hits the ground, looks around for cover. Jeff lands beside him. VOICES get louder. Jeff sees something.

JEFF

You got your pen knife?

EXT. WATER'S EDGE - DAY

Frank cuts two reedy stalks, almost amused to be taking orders from Jeff, who watches intently.

JEFF

They did this in Ivanhoe.

Frank hands him a reed. He wades into the water.

FRANK

They didn't have alligators in medieval England.

Jeff eyes the water uneasily, wavering. Frank stops, wades back, takes the revolver from his back pocket. Tucks it in the hollow of a tree root. Jeff watches this too. Then they hold hands and together splash into the black water.

EXT. BAYOU - DAY

Two reeds poke up from the water. Ripples, bubbles. On the bank two dozen black boots and white gaiters tramp past.

Frank hovers underwater in the murk, breathing. Muffled BURSTS of gunfire. He thrashes to the surface and sees:

Jeff on the marshy bank, firing the revolver. Two men lie dead. A dozen more rush the little boy. He drops a third. Then he's overwhelmed. Disarmed, yanked off his feet.

FRANK

Jeff!

He runs through muck, onto the bank. Stumbles, goes sprawling. Redcoats surround him, drag him to his feet.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS (1876) - JAILYARD - DAY

Workmen drive the last nails into a gallows and a grandstand.

An oblong shadow falls across the jailyard. Drifts along narrow streets to a grim brick building. Falls across the building's turreted roof. Stops.

INT. SAINT CHARLES REFORMATORY - CORRIDOR - DAY

SIR THOMAS RIDER, 50, strides toward us, small, thick-set, with an air of command: explorer, inventor, a rich and powerful man. A bootlick WARDEN tries to keep up.

WARDEN

May I say, Sir Thomas, we were all most grateful for your and Lord Exham's safe return from East Africa.

(getting no reply)

We read that you gentlemen have discovered extraordinary things there.

(still no reply)

One hardly dares credit reports that the city you found was built by men from Mars--

Rider stops, puts a meaty hand over the Warden's mouth.

RIDER

Warden, my brother is to be hung today.

(a beat)

The children.

The Warden nods. Rider removes his hand.

INT. SAINT CHARLES' REFORMATORY - WARD - DAY

Tough boys stare at the brothers, who sit side by side in cheap suits on an iron bed. They look up as the Warden and Rider enter.

WARDEN

Franklin, Jefferson. Sir Thomas is here.

The brothers sit glumly. A long beat.

WARDEN

He has come all the way from England to fetch you. That is far more than either of you deserves.

(beat)

Well, have you nothing to say?

JEFF
God save the Ohio Rebellion!

Rider smiles a thin smile. Not pleased.

INT. REFORMATORY - STAIRWAY - DAY

The boys follow their uncle to the stairs. He starts up them. The boys exchange looks.

JEFF
Is your carriage on the roof?

RIDER
In a manner of speaking.

EXT. REFORMATORY - ROOF - DAY

A dirigible is moored to the flagpole, elegant, eccentric, a private sky yacht.

RIDER
My own design.

A basket is lowered from the gondola.

Rider prods Jeff. He climbs into the basket, uncertain, and is winched skyward.

INT. AIRSHIP GONDOLA - DAY

Rider and his nephews stand on the glass observation deck. The city falls away. Jeff is excited despite himself.

JEFF
Can this fly all the way to England?

Frank shoots him a dirty look: traitor.

RIDER
Yes, boy.
(beat, confidential)
Soon we shall be able to sail it to the Moon, if we choose. To Venus or Mars.

FRANK
Impossible. There is no atmosphere in interplanetary space.

RIDER
I perceive that you are both singularly ill-mannered children. You have been improperly reared. I will--

The boys are staring down at the city: at the gallows. A holiday crowd fills the jailyard. A riot of CHURCH BELLS. Rider roughly pulls Jeff to him, covering his eyes.

RIDER
Most improperly, indeed.

Jeff breaks free, presses against the glass.

EXT. AIRSHIP - DAY

Trailing a fluttering Union Jack, it sails for England. A small face haunts its rear observation window. CHURCH BELLS.

EXT. SUSSEX (1886) - "MARS HILL" CASTLE - COURTYARD - DAY

The hooves of a Shire horse RING and spark against cobbles.

A helmeted knight in chainmail charges, lance lowered.

A straw-filled target hangs from a yardarm. The knight hits it dead on. Raises his lance. Wheels around.

The man-shaped target swings by its rope, wildly.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS (1876) - DAY - FLASHBACK

The corpse of Col. Harry Rider swings from the gallows.

INT. AIRSHIP (1876) - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Jeff presses against the glass, face blank with horror.

EXT. SUSSEX (1886) - DAY

The "knight" pushes back the visor of his helmet. An open face, haunted with unaccustomed sadness. TRAIN WHISTLE.

TITLE: MARS HILL, SUSSEX, ENGLAND, 1886

He snaps out of it, turns, gallops out through the gates of the courtyard into the vast green beauty of Sussex beyond.

The lifeless scarecrow swings.

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

A BOY, with his MOTHER, presses his face against the window. Bored. Boisterous LAUGHTER from the next compartment. Mother frowns. Laughter CONTINUES OVER as we cut to:

INT. SECOND TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

Six young British officers, in uniform, sprawl in the compartment, passing a flask. Two play cards.

OFFICER
(raising flask)
Say, this gourd is three-fourths empty,
we've nearly arrived at your--

FRANK
(cold)
Uncle's.

OFFICER
--your Uncle's, and we still haven't
drunk a proper toast to our brave
comrade... Captain Frank Rider, V.C....
the "Hero of Sitka." To Frank.

He drinks and passes it to the next man, who echoes the toast. The others follow in turn.

SECOND OFFICER
Tell us, you gallant man, the secret of
your legendary bravery under fire.

THIRD OFFICER
Yes, was it Scotch whiskey, or Irish?

They laugh. Frank grins, deceptively languid. The Victoria Cross glints over his breast. He gives it a casual flick.

FRANK
Boys, I'll let you in on my secret.
My certainty that nothing is worth dying
for... is exceeded only by my fond belief
that nothing is worth living for.

They laugh, but uneasily. Laughter OVER as we cut to:

INT. FIRST TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

The boy watches the passing greenery. His eyes widen.

EXT. SUSSEX - DAY

The knight charges up a green meadow. He comes over a rise--

The train bursts into the frame. The knight spurs his screaming horse and races alongside it.

INT. SECOND TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

One of the officers points out the window.

OFFICER

Good God, a knight in armor! The man
must be a lunatic.

Frank sits up. Smiles.

FRANK

I'm afraid it runs in the family.

EXT. SUSSEX - DAY

The horseman races the train along an embankment toward a rural station. As the train slows the horse gains ground.

It's neck and neck, the horse pounding, the rider half-mad with speed. They approach a bridge over a culvert.

Just before the culvert the horseman cuts across the tracks, directly in the path of the train. It screams past him.

He throws back his visor and waves at the amazed officers.

INT. STATELY HOME - JEFF'S ROOM - DAY

A boy's room. Covered in militaria, mementos of British triumphs from Crecy to Waterloo to Buffalo. On a shelf, lead Fusiliers fight off an outlandish army of lead Martians.

Jeff undresses, taking off his chain mail. Frank knocks, comes in, wearing civilian clothes, carrying a leather bag.

FRANK

I brought you some trophies, Sir Galahad.

He flings himself on Jeff's bed. Jeff sets the bag down, opens it eagerly. He takes out an Eskimo carving.

FRANK

It's a walrus. Wretched tasting bastards, but plentiful.

(looking around)

When do you leave for Sandhurst, Cadet?

JEFF

Next Saturday.

Jeff takes out a Russian Imperial infantryman's fur hat.

FRANK

Do they know they've admitted a madman?

JEFF

It was probably a safe assumption,
considering your record there.

He takes out a scrap of colored cloth: white stars on a blue field, red and white stripes. Jeff pales. Frank watches him.

FRANK

I took that from a dead man after Second Archangelsk. They had a whole regiment of grizzled old limey-hating Yankees up there, fighting for the Tsar.

(beat)

S'pose the poor sod might even have known--?

Jeff throws the scrap back at Frank, turns to run out of the room, nearly crashes into Rider, walking now with a cane.

Rider watches him go, then looks at Frank, stern.

FRANK

I-- We were... reminiscing.

RIDER

He spends far too much time living in the past as it is. Last week he had the entire household staff reenacting the battle of Trafalgar on the trout pond. I shall frankly be glad to be rid of him.

FRANK

I'm certain the feeling must be mutual.

RIDER

Yes. Well. I came to inform you that your dissolute friends are already at their dice...

Frank stands up.

FRANK

Splendid, I shall go dissolve with them.

Rider holds out a still-powerful hand.

RIDER

...and to say--welcome home.

FRANK

(looks at the hand)

I have no home, Uncle, I'm American. And so are you, no matter how many titles and castles in England you buy yourself.

(civil but still cold)

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)

I would be obliged if you arranged a commission for me in this new Imperial Army of Mars of yours.

10.

Flushing deeply, Rider lowers his hand.

RIDER

No. We've reduced the "dead letter" rate to ten percent, but the crossing is still too dangerous. The oath I made your late mother on the day we were married--

Frank brushes past Rider.

FRANK

--was broken the day you let them hang her first husband. Your late brother.

RIDER

As you know, there was absolutely nothing I could have done. He was a traitor--

Frank turns on him.

FRANK

Those are both notions in which you must take great comfort in the dead of night.

(beat)

This ten percent of airships lost en route to Mars. They enter null space on this end, and never reemerge on the other. Like men who lose their way in the passages of an immense cavern system.

RIDER

Imprecisely, yes.

FRANK

Dead letters. No return address. No destination.

(beat)

I want to go to Mars, Uncle.

RIDER

Franklin, please... I beg you...

(getting nothing)

Oh, all right, damn you. Have it your way. It's a planet of fanatics. Perhaps we shall need men who believe in nothing.

(points)

What is that you're holding?

Frank looks down at the scrap. Momentary lapse into reverie.

FRANK

This?

(blows his nose)

Just an old nose-rag.

EXT. BARRIER FIELD - DAY

Exham drags the crate out of the collapsed sling. He floats it through the shallow water.

He tosses it in the fire grate. Brushes his past his uncle.
In the fire, the scrap of Old Glory burns.

EXT. MARS - DRALIAN HILLS - DAY

The battlements of an ancient hilltop fortress pierce the aquamarine sky. The fortress is on fire.

A silver airship, Phobos, floats over the crazy red peaks.

SUPER: MARS, DRALIAN HILLS, MAY 24, 1894.

Another airship emerges, an inch at a time, from empty sky, blazoned with the Union Jack, gondola trimmed with brass. Her giant gasbag shimmers with the luminous hoarfrost of null space. The Rider Nullifying Screw on her nose crackles.

INT. PHOBOS GONDOLA - OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

GENERAL SIR REDVERS BULLER, military governor of Mars, and his aide, CAPTAIN ALGY TROTTER, observe the Deimos's arrival.

TROTTER

The Deimos has made the hop, sir. The gentlemen of the press are here.

BULLER

(raises binoculars)

Their watches are evidently no more accurate than their pens.

POV BULLER - BINOCULARS - CANAL AND BATTLEFIELD

Scuttled Waheelat boats, docks, storehouses burn. Corpses everywhere, most in weird armor, some in the red-and-tan of the Army of Mars. Huffing steamwagons patrol, mopping up.

BULLER (O.S.)

So much for their "Terror of the Canals."

TROTTER (O.S.)

Sir, what's that one up to?

An armored woman with violet skin--a WAHEELAT AMAZON--runs between the twin shadows of the airships, whirling a boomerang sword. A wagon bears down on her from behind.

She lets fly the aerodynamic weapon. It sails skyward.

BULLER (O.S.)

It's headed for the Deimos! They must--

The weapon slices through the air. It pierces the soft skin of the Deimos's gasbag, sparks against an iron grommet and
POOM! A massive, roiling fireball of hydrogen gas.

INT. PHOBOS GONDOLA - DAY

Rocked by the explosion of the Deimos.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

The Waheelat grins up at her handiwork. Raises her fist.

WAHEELAT

Tappan Tal!

A BURST of Gatling fire. She's cut down by the wagon.

INT. GONDOLA - DAY

The officers recover their balance.

BULLER

Bloody sky-whales! Utterly useless for warfare!

(beat, grim smile)

Admirably suited, however, for atomizing newspaper correspondents.

TROTTER

We're over the stronghold, General.

The airship glides over the ramparts of the fort. A few last amazons hold out against the tide of red-and-tan.

EXT. PIRATE STRONGHOLD - INNER COURTYARD - DAY

The airship hovers, churning up dust. Elements of Hodson's Horse and the 3rd Highland Rifles pour into the courtyard.

Landing ropes snake down. Buller drops and alights. A CIVILIAN also alights--tall, clean-shaven, in a white suit, a walking stick under his arm. Calmly surveys the chaos.

A CAPTAIN of cavalry trots up, dismounts, salutes. Smoke-lacquered, bloodied. He grins.

CAPTAIN

General Buller, sir, I beg to present, as a birthday gift to the Queen, by general subscription of the men...

A commotion. GUARDS bring forward a Waheelat, in irons, her armor shattered. Dark purple skin, elaborate topknot. Beautiful, filthy, magnificent, ashamed. Unmistakably a leader.

CAPTAIN
 ...the so-called Pirate Queen of Mars...
 (shoving her forward)
 ...Miss Tappan Tal.

BULLER
 That should do quite nicely, Captain.

CAPTAIN
 We caught her on the canal, sir, running away with a gang of her purple girlfriends.

TAL
 I was not running away!

CAPTAIN
 (cuffs her)
 Shut up!

He takes from his pocket a small skin pouch on a thong.

CAPTAIN
 She was wearing this round her neck.

He starts to hand the pouch to Buller. The civilian deflects Buller's arm with his stick, and snatches the pouch.

The captain looks at Buller, who gives an unhappy shrug.

From the pouch the civilian pulls a shard of green metal, grooved, inscribed with odd markings. He takes another shard from his own pocket. Touched, the pieces bubble like drops of mercury, fuse, reform, harden into a small green disk. The markings now form a complete pattern. The civilian studies them, betraying excitement.

Tappan Tal watches hungrily--she wants that thing.

CIVILIAN
 (reading it, realizing)
 The Shadowglades!

Tal's eyes narrow at this information.

BULLER
 (noting her interest)
 None of this can be of any possible interest to you, Miss Tal. Not where you're going.

Nods to guards, who lead a struggling Tal away. The captain hands Buller a crazily long rifle.

CAPTAIN

Her diugir rifle, sir. Ripping good gunsmiths, the purple girls. Thing's accurate over a mile and half. Oh.

(looking solemn)

There's something else. We found it in the baggage of a filthy Russian trader they had with them, sir--

Sudden silence. The Captain hands over a square card.

The civilian reaches. This time Buller keeps it from him.

A worn TINTYPE of Frank and Jeff, officer and cadet. Arms linked, staring into the camera as into their bright futures.

The civilian peers at the picture over Buller's shoulder.

CIVILIAN

This would seem to confirm reports of Major Franklin Rider's demise among the Gladesmen.

Angrily Buller thrusts the photo at the civilian.

BULLER

It doesn't mean a bloody thing. My lord.

A loud huzzah goes up from the men. Buller stops, and looks up, moved. From the spire on the uppermost tower of the fortress, a bold fluttering Union Jack is hoisted high.

EXT. WHITEHALL (1894) - DUSK

A steamcycle, blazoned with a Union Jack, chugs into a gaslit street. A leather-clad COURIER pulls in amid horsecarts and dismounts, unstraps a mail pouch from the back of his cycle.

He salutes the guards and dashes up the steps of a vast, dark, building, turrets and gingerbread, here at the soot-blackened heart of the capital of the solar system.

TITLE: MARS HOUSE, LONDON, THE FOLLOWING DAY

THE COURIER goes through the immense doors, past a brass plaque that reads: IMPERIAL BRITISH MARS COMPANY.

INT. MARS HOUSE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Beside a glass case filled with Martian artifacts, the courier signs the pouch over to a waistcoated CLERK.

INT. MARS HOUSE - CORRIDORS - NIGHT

The clerk hurries through a labyrinth part gentleman's club, part spider's web. Arrives at a huge door, knocks. The door opens. ANOTHER CLERK takes the pouch, closes the door again.

INT. MARS HOUSE - BOARDROOM - NIGHT

The smoky, shadowy heart of the heart of the Empire. TWELVE MEN at a table strewn with charts, dossiers, and newspapers. A globe of Mars in an oak stand. In front of several men a little fire burns in a silver brazier. They drink from silver flagons, holding them to the fire before taking a sip.

The clerk bears the pouch toward Sir Thomas Rider, now confined to a wheelchair.

The banners on the newspapers read: PIRATE QUEEN IN IRONS! SPLENDID VICTORY OVER THE AMAZONS!, etc. A small-type headline on the Daily Telegraph reads: WHY HAVE THE GOVERNMENT ABANDONED MAJOR RIDER?

Rider undoes the pouch, slides out a crimson envelope, and slits it open. Reads silently.

RIDER

It's from Lord Edward, in Palion City. He's one step closer to the coil, gentlemen.

A murmur of approval from around the great table.

RIDER

Unfortunately, that step takes us, as I have feared from the beginning, inexorably toward the Shadowglades.

(beat, as they take this in)

We must encourage the government to annex the Great Martian Swamp.

Some shock, some assent around the table.

A COMPANY MAN

Yes! Now that the Russians have stolen the plans for the Nullifying Screw--we must have the coil. By all means, take the Glades.

ANOTHER COMPANY MAN

And put an end to that damn-fool canal monopoly in the bargain! Who controls the Glades controls the canals!

ANOTHER COMPANY MAN

Sir Thomas... the Gladesmen have been leading barbaric raids on our outstations

(MORE)

ANOTHER COMPANY MAN (cont'd)
for months, under the flag of this Faht
Palaht of theirs. The Army have been
talking themselves blue trying to
persuade the PM to move against them.

RIDER

I fear public sentiment, Mr. Dobbs, is a
force even mightier than our great army.

He takes another item from the pouch, and tosses it onto the
table. The tintype. It lands right beside the headline on
the Telegraph. The men crane forward to see it, then gasp.

RIDER

This was found on a Russian trader in
Tappan Tal's retinue.

(beat, not quite sincere)

Gentlemen, it is now two years since my
nephew set out, as an agent of this
company and of Her Majesty's government,
to chart the Shadowglades and make
pacific overtures to the Gladesmen, a
policy which, it is now obvious, was
sadly mistaken. The course of action is
clear. If alive, that gallant Christian
gentlemen must be found and rescued. If
dead, he must be avenged.

(beat)

Let those savages pay for their crime
with that beloved swamp of theirs.

(snaps, to secretary)

Get MacAndrews at the Telegraph.

EXT. WHITEHALL - DAY

A streaming crowd carries banners (HELP MAJ. RIDER, etc.)
past a news vendor who waves the latest Telegraph:

HEADLINE: ABANDONED! ENGLAND'S SHAME!!, beside the tintype.

EXT. DOWNING STREET - DAY

An IMPASSIONED CLERGYMAN addresses the roaring crowd.

CLERGYMAN (O.S.)

Is there a hero resolute enough to rescue
Major Rider, just enough to avenge him?
There is such a man, hero of the Battle
of Chicago, fresh from triumphs over the
Kickapoo. In his young career he has
proven himself capable of withstanding
all manner of foe and withering fire--

INT. BRACKETT HOUSE - PARLOR/MAIN HALL - NIGHT

A Dresden shepherdess smashes against a chintz-lined wall.

Capt. Rider, very dashing in a dress uniform of the 3rd New York Cavalry, is under attack. He ducks to avoid a flying vase.

JEFF

Charlotte--

CHARLOTTE BRACKETT, rich, pretty, 22, in tears, hurls another vase from her mother's fine collection. She advances, throwing things, as Jeff retreats into the hall.

JEFF

--my love for you is like a gentle--

A china cat explodes. Jeff backs toward the door.

JEFF

I would willingly ride into the jaws of hell for you, my bright, radiant--

A crystal ashtray hits him on the forehead.

JEFF

Ow!

(opens the door)

Look, you know as well as I that the prospects for advancement of a married junior officer are dim at best--

(ducks another vase)

not to say nonexistent--

EXT. BRACKETT HOUSE - FRONT STEPS - NIGHT

A fine townhouse on a fine street. Jeff backs out the door. ANOTHER OFFICER lounges against the bottom newel, trimming his nails. He doesn't look up.

JEFF

And to sit around in cooling my heels in a colonial capital--

CHARLOTTE

Go to the devil!

She slams the door. Jeff turns, bewildered, and walks down the steps. He moves, even in retreat, with grace and panache. Joins his comrade at the bottom step: LT. NED CHRISTMAS, a veteran, a black man, a New Yorker. He has come up through the ranks, and has ten years on his captain.

Ned puts away his pen-knife, claps Jeff on the shoulder. They start down the street, toward us. A beat.

NED

Was that a failure of strategy or tactics?

JEFF

I've never liked this town.

We SEE the entire street now, and the skyline above it, dominated by a familiar massive dome, floodlit, over a classical facade of columns and pediments.

SUPER: VICTORIA, D.C., AMERICAN CROWN COLONY, TWO DAYS LATER

Atop the House of Parliament stands the statue, not of slender liberty but of a stout old queen frowning a mighty frown.

EXT. VICTORIA, D.C. - DARK STREET - NIGHT

Ned and Jeff walk back to their barracks.

JEFF

I do love women. I love their fine pale hands, their tiny waists, their slim ankles. It's just--the ones I meet--are all so, well--dull.

NED

Maybe that's because they keep 'em locked up in some little pink room all day, sewing and pressing flowers and whatnot. You might not be so interesting yourself if you spent your whole life painting little Chinamen onto silk fans.

A military PATROL rides up.

SERGEANT

Captain Rider? You'd better get yourself back to barracks, sir. Colonel's been looking for you all night. Word is you're going to Palion City.

JEFF

Palion?

SERGEANT

Rumor has it you're to lead a special expeditious force into the Glades, sir.

NED

The Glades? That must mean we're going in to find--

JEFF

Frank.

He looks up at Mars, a drop of red gold hanging on the cheek of night. Then he looks back down at the officer,

JEFF

Am I to have sole command?

SERGEANT

I wouldn't know, sir.

JEFF

But I must! Your horse, sergeant. Ned, you're going back to Mars!

He drags the sergeant from the saddle, mounts. Rides off.

SERGEANT

What's his hurry?

NED

He'd ride that pony all the way to Mars if he thought his first command was waiting for him when he got there.

EXT. PALION CITY - DAY

Capital of British Mars. Buildings shaped like eggs, snails, witch-hats, around which a late-Victorian city has sprouted up, red brick, columns, tramwires. A sturdy new suspension bridge spans the green canal.

EXT. PALION CITY - PLANETARY DOCKS - DAY

Steel mooring masts and storehouses along the Palion canal.

The Khyber materializes, and steams toward a mast.

Martian porters run up the spiral stairs of the mast. A cantilevered gangway is rolled out to the open hatch of the gondola. Passengers shuffle out to the waiting lifts.

At the bottom of the mast, the lifts open, revealing the Khyber's passengers: soldiers, traders, families, emigrants from all over the Empire, among them Jeff and Ned. A THOMAS COOK'S AGENT greets them, speaking into a megaphone.

COOK'S MAN

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Martian Crown Colony! Please remember to adopt a shuffling gait. Your musculature will adjust in a matter of days.

The crowd shuffles forward. Jeff looks at them scornfully, then strides off the elevator. He soars five feet into the air, tumbles, and lands on his belly. Laughter.

Ned, with a practiced gait, hurries to help Jeff to his feet.

NED

It's a small planet. Don't walk so grand.

Jeff blushes, brushing himself off.

Martians from all over the Territories, violet, magenta, rose, cerise, and a nearly caucasian pink--swarm around the disembarking--porters, guides, beggars, sellers of Martian wine. They clamor in the fifty known languages of Mars.

Jeff is bewildered, thrilled. Ned takes a deep breath.

NED

Ah, the sweet stink of Mars!

JEFF

It smells like old storybooks.

TROTTER (O.S.)

Captain Rider? Lieutenant Christmas?

Trotter cuts through the crowd, hand extended to shake Jeff's and Ned's. The civilian from the sack of Waheel is beside him, in a dazzling white suit.

TROTTER

Welcome to Palion City. Hugh Trotter, Secretary to Governor General Sir Redvers. I trust the passage was smooth?

JEFF

The trip was quite uneventful. Still find it hard to believe we can fly fifty million miles in a balloon.

TROTTER

That's at least partly due to this gentleman. I believe you know...

JEFF

Lord Edward Exham.

EXHAM

Captain Jefferson Rider.

The two men shake hands, eyeing each other coldly.

TROTTER

Lieutenant, Lord Edward is not only a Chief Factor of the Company but also one of its leading scientific minds. He helped Sir Thomas develop the Rider Nullifying Screw.

EXHAM

All quite true. But I am here now simply in my capacity as an amateur areologist.

JEFF

Areologist? One who studies the breezes?

EXHAM

I have undertaken to study the ground you stand so stolidly stand upon, Captain. To study the planet Mars. Its breezes-- and its fauna and flora, tribes and cultures, mountains and canals.

TROTTER

Lord Edward is to accompany your expedition, Captain Rider. Mars House are certain you will find his expertise in matters of language and terrain quite invaluable.

EXHAM

Had I been at liberty to accompany your brother on his expedition, perhaps his fate would have been otherwise.

NED

Otherwise than what?

JEFF

I hope your expertise is a burden we shall all bear as lightly as you yourself, my lord.

A CLANGOR of iron, WHISTLING, SCREECHING. The crowd parts. A massive cargo steamwagon heaves onto the dock. It's so loud the next line is shouted.

TROTTER

Ah, here is our steamwagon to unload your supplies!

The steamwagon falls silent. Armed troops jump out and surround it.

JEFF

I understood the expedition would be provisioned through Palion City, Major. We brought very little with us--
(looks up at the Khyber)
What is that?

The cargo hold of the Khyber is open. A crane unloads an immense crate, stenciled FRAGILE and I.B.M.C. Armed SOLDIERS ride the crate as it swings out over the steamwagon.

JEFF

Major, I don't know what that is, but it certainly forms no part of our baggage--

TROTTER

(confused)

Are you certain? My orders--

EXHAM

It's a gift for the Alpir of the Fanfant.

NED

A gift for him?

JEFF

The only gift that scoundrel will get from us is the edge of my sword against the nape of his treacherous pink neck.

EXHAM

First of all, the Gladesmen are not pink, Captain. Their skins vary in hue from russet to auburn. Second, my understanding is that this is in no way to be a punitive mission. Have you been given to understand--

JEFF

I'm a soldier, my lord. My job has little to do with understanding.
(brushing past him)
Major, we're tired from the hop. I'd be grateful if you'd lead us to Fort Regina.

Jeff and Trotter walk to the 'wagon. Ned remains with Exham.

NED

So what's in the box, your lordship?

Exham glares at him, then turns and walks to the 'wagon.

NED

(continuing, to himself)

Sure, an entire platoon to guard a crate full of candied violets and silverplate.

INT. STEAMWAGON CABIN - DAY

Jeff, Ned, Trotter and Exham, with the armed escort, jostle in their rough leather seats. The DRIVER is a Martian sepoy, a brick-red Hax'xa. Jeff and Ned look out the portholes at:

A group of red children herded by black-clad missionaries. Memsahibs in sedan chairs carried by tusked Djee. Massive segmented Thylesian wormwagons drawn by many-legged bulvigs.

JEFF

What have you heard, Lord Edward, about this "great awakening" among the Martians? This "Faht Palaht." Some say we've got another Mahdi on our hands.

EXHAM

I have heard only the same dubious reports you have heard, Captain. I put no credence in them. The peoples of Mars so despise one another I fear they would not unite behind God himself.

Ned tugs on Jeff's sleeve, pointing to a small detachment of British troops laying waste to a whimsical pink building. They smash its mica windows while a steamwagon with a blade bulldozes it. The soldiers have rounded up some Martians. One, stripped to the waist, on his knees, is being whipped.

JEFF

Major, what is happening there?

TROTTER

No doubt they have been poaching ulik in the canal, or dealing in contraband teas.

JEFF

But a summary whipping, in the street? Surely that is not regulation procedure--

TROTTER

Oh, yes, all quite proper, I assure you.

EXHAM

You are at the cold extremity of the Empire, here, Captain. The farthest point from the heart. Strict precautions must be taken or the limb will be lost.

Jeff looks troubled by this.

TROTTER

Here we are, gentlemen. Fort Regina. Home of the High Kings of Palion for eight centuries.

Jeff's jaw drops as he looks out the opposite window.

POV JEFF - PALION CITADEL

At the edge of a desert seabed. Ten square miles of turrets and battlements, spires reaching a thousand feet into the air, topped by a bold streaming Union Jack.

EXT. "PALION GATES" OF CITADEL - DAY

Guards leap down to surround the 'wagon. Sioux Guardsmen in tan uniforms and puttee, eagle feathers in their hats, raise the portal cut into the immense gateway.

INT. STEAMWAGON CABIN - DAY

NED

I never understood how these savages managed to build somethin like this.

The driver stares out the windscreen, a million miles away.

EXHAM

They didn't. The Xan Palao built this citadel, two thousand centuries ago. On the shore of a mighty ocean.

POV MARTIAN DRIVER - THROUGH WINDSCREEN - WATERTIME

The late Victorian traffic shifts, wobbles, unravels, then reweaves itself. Giant men on alien steeds stream around the 'wagon as if it were not there. A faint, familiar MURMUR. To all of this the Terrans are oblivious.

TROTTER

Yes, you can't dig down half a foot round here without turning up some bit of batfish or saber-toothed prawn.

JEFF

The Xan Palao! And to think my uncle has never laid eyes on any of this. He knows the Xan Palao better than any of us.

EXHAM

(studying the Driver)
Perhaps not better than all of us.

POV DRIVER - WATERTIME

The murmur has become a roar of WAVES. The desert is a rippling sea filled with dragon ships. A thousand strange pennants stream from the gleaming new towers of the citadel.

EXHAM

Eh, Corporal Flarbittem?

The WAVES cease. The tapestry reweaves itself again. Corporal Flarbittem shakes himself, grins sheepishly.

CPL. FLARBITTEM
 T'at was all long time back, beb. Back
 in t'e Watertime, so t'ey say.

JEFF
 The Watertime?

A SIREN begins to moan. The men in the cabin freeze.

JEFF
 What is that? What's happening?

NED
 We're under attack!

TROTTER
 It's an aerial raid!

The soldiers in the cabin grab their rifles.

A SERGEANT
 Thompson, Figg, to the Gatling!

Thompson and Figg clamber through a hatch in the roof. The
 sergeant jumps down. The rest of the men pile out after him.

Exham, cool, methodical, pulls a wooden box from under his
 seat and unlatches its lid. He takes some odd components of
 steel and glass and begins to fit them together. His
 strange device assembled, he leaps out of the cabin.

Sirens WAIL, we hear GUNFIRE and shouts and loud WINGBEATS.

Jeff and Ned exchange looks, then grab rifles and leap out.

EXT. CITADEL - PALION GATES - DAY

Soldiers kneel and take aim at the sky. The guns on the
 battlements of the fort BOOM. Dust, smoke, running men.

Jeff and Ned alight from the cabin and look around, trying to
 make sense of things. They look up. Jeff points.

The sky is filled with a hundred living airships, reptilian
 gasbags the size of elephants, ridden by Waheelats.

JEFF
 Dragons!

NED
Tantagors. That's a Waheelat breed, you
 can tell by the earflaps.

JEFF
 But we're at peace with the Waheelat!

NED

I guess these girls don't know that.
Must be some of Tappan Tal's band, come
to break her out.

JEFF

(kneels, raises his rifle)
One might say, Lieutenant Christmas, that
they were making straight for us.

EXT. SKY OVER CITADEL - DAY

Half the tantagors--one riderless--peel off toward the
fortress. The others come at the 'wagon. They raise their
long diugir and FIRE.

EXT. PALION GATES - DAY

Soldiers to either side of Ned and Jeff sprawl backward.

NED

Awfully good shot, your purple girl.

He returns fire. Jeff joins him.

The squadron of Martian dragons swoops low over the
steamwagon. As they take hits, they begin to leak gas, sag,
crash to the ground. Some of them blow huge holes and go
pinwheeling away with loud rude EXPULSIONS of gas.

JEFF

Don't stand up well to bullets, do they?

NED

That wasn't a problem for the purple
girls when they were the only ones on
Mars with guns.

Pirates drop from the backs of the tantagors onto the ground.
They draw long swords and slash at the British troops. The
Sioux Guardsmen draw their own swords and leap into the fray.

Jeff and Ned fight, their backs to each other. Jeff is
agile, taking the offensive, striking for weak points. Ned
is more stolid, stronger, more calm. A Waheelat rushes him,
raising her double-bladed pike. He parries the blow.

NED

They seem very interested in our
steamwagon.

Jeff ducks to avoid an oncoming pirate, then hacks at her
backside as she flies past him.

JEFF
Or its cargo. Uh oh.

EXT. SKY OVER STEAMWAGON - DAY

More tantagors swoop in and hover. Tal leaps from the neck of her mount onto the top of the 'wagon, swinging a huge boomerang sword. She mows down half a dozen guardsmen.

Ned and Jeff watch, awestruck.

NED
Tappan Tal! They busted her out!

EXT. STEAMWAGON - DAY

Tal hurls the last British corpse from the top of the 'wagon. Six pirates alight and jam long poles into the cargo doors.

EXT. PALION GATES - DAY

Jeff and Ned rush the 'wagon, firing. The return fire is heavy. They drop behind the shrivelled carcass of a tantagor.

JEFF
I'll need some cover, Lieutenant.

NED
I won't bother asking you to be careful.

Head down, weaving, Jeff runs for the 'wagon.

Ned picks off two Waheelat. Then a bullet finds his shoulder. He is spun around, and falls.

EXT. STEAMWAGON - DAY

The Waheelat spring the doors. Some leap into the hold, trailing long ropes. Others toss the rope ends up to the tantagor riders, who lash them to their mounts' collars.

Jeff reaches the steamwagon and starts to scale it.

The ropes go taut.

Complaining, expanding, the tantagors rise, wings humming.

The crate lifts out of the cargo hold. Tal grins and gives it a slap. Then she and her sisters rush at Jeff.

SIZZLING. A BURSTING like flash powder. A braided wand of green and yellow light reaches toward the Waheelats.

A cloud of light dances around one about to bring her pike down on Jeff's head. She turns black, smokes, turns white. For one instant she's made of ash. Then she blows away. The light dies. The other amazons freeze for an instant, then leap to the ground, except for one: Tappan Tal.

Tal and Jeff look at each other, confused, then down at Exham.

EXT. PALION GATES - DAY

Exham, in goggles, is delighted. Steadying one hand with the other, he fires an insane-looking weapon, part cathode-ray tube, part French horn. It emits another braided beam.

EXT. STEAMWAGON ROOF - DAY

Jeff leaps forward and pushes Tal back.

JEFF

No!

He falls on top of her. The beam passes over them. A cloud of light envelops the ropes that hold the crate. They vanish. The crate drops with a THUD back into the hold.

EXT. PALION GATES - DAY

Exham is mad with success. He fires up into the sky.

EXT. SKY OVER STEAMWAGON - DAY

A tantagor hovering over the steamwagon EXPLODES. The burning gas splashes outward. The other tantagors scatter.

EXT. STEAMWAGON ROOF - DAY

Jeff's sleeve catches fire. He beats at it wildly. Tal leaps from the steamwagon.

EXT. PALION GATES - DAY

Exham's gun BUZZES, HUMS, blows a fuse, cracks a valve, COUGHS, dribbles, and dies. He looks at it, crushed.

Tantagors spiral out of control and smash, bags of leather and bones, to the ground.

Pirates lie dead on the ground. Others are rounded up and disarmed. Tal is put in irons, and led away.

She looks back over her shoulder at Jeff. He marvels at her. He walks, sleeve smoldering, up to Exham. Ned joins them, clutching his shoulder. Jeff looks at him, concerned.

NED

I'll live.

(to Exham)

What in the name of God is that thing?

Exham has opened a panel on the thing and is peering inside.

EXHAM

It hardly makes any difference, as it was the only one of its kind, and I've destroyed it. I overtaxed it.

(beat, to Jeff)

I should have gone directly for the tantagors.

JEFF

You set my bloody arm on fire!

The soldiers gather around to look at Exham's ruined gun.

EXHAM

Go about your duty. You saw nothing today. You shall say nothing about it.

The soldiers, turn. Jeff gives Exham a hard look.

JEFF

Lord Edward--what happened to that woman? What did that thing do to her?

EXHAM

That is a matter of some dispute.

JEFF

It's not a soldier's weapon.

EXHAM

Perhaps not. But it kills with remarkable tidiness.

Jeff is disgusted. He turns, clutching his arm, and walks with Ned through the carnage into the maw of Fort Regina.

EXT. CITADEL - A COURTYARD - DAY

Jeff, in dress uniform, arm in a clean sling, paces. Stops. A loud rolling THRUM. Shouts. CRACK of a whip. He turns corner, then another, following the sound along narrow alleys of the citadel until he comes to:

A long row of half-naked Martians, atop a giant, notched rolling drum--a vast treadmill. They march, endlessly. Guards stand on the ground, wielding huge bullwhips.

Jeff looks up, sees cables leading away from the treadmill.

He follows a cable, back down the alleys, along the walls, until it disappears into a hole.

INT. CITADEL - GOVERNOR'S QUARTERS - VERANDAH - DAY

A cord comes out of the wall, leading to a GRAMOPHONE playing Melba singing "COSTA DIVA." A spoon tinkles against the side of a teacup. A lavish tea-service, a white table on the broad veranda, overlooking an inner courtyard. Buller sits in a small but elaborate silver bathtub filled with a luminous green liquid. He sips his tea. Trotter sits to one side, reading a newspaper. Buller rings a little bell.

EXT. CITADEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Jeff crouches down where the cable enters the wall.

A pair of mirror-shiny black boots appear in the doorway beside him. He looks up.

BATMAN

The Governor General will see you now.

INT. CITADEL - GOVERNOR'S QUARTERS - DAY

Jeff bursts in from the outer hall. He strides across the quarters and out onto the verandah.

JEFF

At last, General!

BULLER

(blowing on his tea)

It is my custom, Captain, to bathe in Martian wine every afternoon at three, without regard for the blusterings of Waheelat pirates or the great hero of Chicago. This is a planet of ritual. Ritual, and tradition. The sooner you understand this, the happier you will be.

JEFF

Yes, sir. Sir, I've been down to the canal. Didn't you receive my dispatch of 7 May?

BULLER

I believe we did--something to do with boats...it was very long...

(to Trotter)

How long was that message from Captain Rider, Major Trotter?

TROTTER

Thirty-five pages, sir. With diagrams. Native boats, Captain? Why, one airship--

JEFF

--would be blown from the sky by a shock harpoon, sir, before it could fly thirty yards into the Glades. And there isn't a single airship dock within five hundred miles of the Glades. We must make our way by Martian steamer to the canal terminus, and thence by pandhal boats like those used by the Gladesmen themselves to the heart of the Glades. Which brings me to my second complaint.

BULLER AND TROTTER

Mr. Charlie.

JEFF

He's an imbecile! The man couldn't find a turd in a dungheap! I asked him if he... he knew...

He trails off, looking down into the courtyard.

A chain of amazons is being marched across it. Heads held high, they tower over their captors. Tallest and proudest is Tal. She looks at the balcony, makes eye contact with Jeff.

Jeff stares back aroused and repulsed by her 'unfemininity.'

BULLER

Stop them, Captain Trotter.

Trotter lifts a megaphone to his lips.

TROTTER

Sergeant, please stop where you are.

The procession stops. Tal continues to stare at Jeff.

BULLER

Have Miss Tappan brought over here.

Two Sioux Guardsmen prod Tal across the courtyard with the barrels of their rifles. She comes proudly, her elaborately tied and braided topknot bobbing as she walks.

BULLER
Do you find her handsome, Captain?

JEFF
I find her monstrous, sir.

BULLER
She is a pha. Do you know this term?

JEFF
A "waywitch." A kind of tracker, sir.

BULLER
It is more than that. You could set her down in the middle of the Syrtis Major, ten thousand miles from any feature of landscape she knows, and she would be able to find her way home. The entire planet is like an immense tapestry for her, one she has studied all her life...each pebble or shrub connected to some bit of old romance or myth or other... Lord Edward can explain this Watertime business far better than I...
(to Trotter)
Have her kneel down.

The guards push her to her knees. Her eyes are locked on Jeff's. He swallows, believing her about to die.

JEFF
General, I must protest. A woman with the ability you describe could be invaluable. Does she speak English?

BULLER
And French, I'm told, as well as the fifty known languages of Mars. She can learn a language in a matter of days. Part of being a pha--apparently all languages are maps, to her. Which implies that minds are territories, eh, purple girl? Planets to be conquered.
(beat)
Lower your gaze!

He nods to the guards. They draw their swords. She stares.

BULLER
You have escaped for the last time, Miss Tal. I'll have no more trouble from you.

He nods to Trotter, opens his mouth--

JEFF
But sir, she might lead me to my brother!

Tal's face goes taut with interest.

JEFF

She might be able to take us straight to the heart of the Glades.

BULLER

I assure you, Captain, you have a perfectly adequate guide in our Mr. Charlie. This woman, while I am certain she would be only too glad to betray the Gladesmen, is a sworn enemy of the Crown.
(to the Guardsmen)

Take her queue, Sergeant Black Horse.

Black Horse lifts her topknot. Tal tenses in every muscle, longing to struggle, willing to die to prevent it--she is about to lash out. In the end, something stops her.

The Indian's sword flashes. The topknot dangles free. A single tear courses down Tal's face. They push her back to the others. Her stride is broken now. Jeff looks away.

BULLER

It will grow back, Captain Rider.

Jeff looks at him, trying to veil his contempt.

JEFF

Sir, my orders are to find Colonel Franklin Rider, or die trying.

(beat)

I must have my pandhal boats.

Buller looks down into his sparkling green bath.

BULLER

Major, I believe we have some captured Gladesman craft in one or an other of the armories, have we not?

TROTTER

There may be a few, sir.

Jeff salutes. Then turns.

BULLER

But you will have to make do with Mr. Charlie. There is no alternative.

Jeff nods, salutes again, then walks out.

EXT. FORT REGINA - DAY

Dawn. Two moons in the sky. The ancient citadel looms.

INT. JEFF'S QUARTERS - DAY

Jeff stands uniformed, boots shining, hair wet. Ned, standing behind him, similarly attired, hands him his solar topee. Jeff puts it on. Checks his pocket watch.

JEFF
He's fifteen minutes late.

Snaps the watch shut.

INT. FORT REGINA - CORRIDOR

Four black boots thud along the worn stone floor. They arrive at a wooden door. Jeff pounds on it. No answer.

JEFF
Charlie, you miserable red dog-monkey!

He takes a step backward, then lowers his shoulder and charges the door. It bursts inward.

INT. MR. CHARLIE'S QUARTERS - DAY

They fall into the room. Mr. Charlie, a shabby Hax'xa, sprawls on a cot, tipping brown liquid from a white bowl.

MR. CHARLIE
T'ey gonna kill me, Captain-beb. T'em purple girl.

JEFF
(gently)
No, they won't, Mr. Charlie--
(yanks him out of the bed)
Because I shall have killed you first!
Get up, you sodden little homunculus!

Ned sniffs at the bowl, dips a pinky, tastes the liquid.

NED
Tea. Darjeeling, I think.

MR. CHARLIE
T'ey going kill me, Mr. Ned-beb.

He stumbles around the room, gathering his bags and an armful of elaborate-looking I.A.S surveys of Mars.

MR. CHARLIE
Have plenty maps, Captain-beb. Alla t'em. We get t'ere. Fine yuh brot'uh.

Jeff pushes him out the door. Mr. Charlie pushes back.

MR. CHARLIE

You pay me half t'e money. Up front.

Jeff, glowering, hands him a small leather pouch.

INT. FORT REGINA - CORRIDORS - DAY

Mr. Charlie hurries to keep up with Jeff and Ned. He's got one map unfolded and turns it over and over, stumbling along. Can't make head or tail of it. He drops a rolled map, stoops to pick it up. Steps clear through the open map, tearing it.

JEFF

Oh, hurry it up, Mr. Charlie!

MR. CHARLIE

You betcha, Captain-beb.

He drops his bag.

Jeff and Ned come around a corner, toward us. Mr. Charlie rounds the corner, struggling with his map. Two dark purple arms reach out and yank him back. He's gone without a peep.

Jeff stops. He looks at Ned. He turns and looks back.

JEFF

Mr. Charlie?

Ned looks back at the empty corridor. A silver pound spins drunkenly on its edge. Queen, eagle, queen, eagle, queen...

EXT. JAXERTES CANAL - PALION DOCKS - DAY

Jade water glints along embankments of stone and iron, spiderwebbed with red moss. Moored to the dock lies the sacred Martian steamer Ras Ralas.

Porters scramble across its deck, carrying on a cargo that includes cages of ugly pink animals. Stevedores hoist seven pandhal boats, big round rafts, onto the davits of the ship.

The MARTIAN PILOT, a navigator-priest of the seventh degree, stands amidships in a clashing outfit of holy robes and Imperial epaulettes, waiting to welcome his passengers.

Jeff, Ned, Exham, Trotter and Buller, with assorted NOTABLES AND OFFICERS and a few fine LADIES, stand on the dock. A brass band plays a stirring march.

NED

The sacred steamer Ras Ralas.

The Pilot and his FIRST MATE burn incense, shake the tiny silver bells on their uniforms, chant in ululating yips.

NED
Typical sailors.

TROTTER
Someday soon we'll break that fine monopoly of theirs.

BULLER
Nonsense, we could break it anytime we chose. We allow them to save face by keeping their monopoly on the canals and their quaint little steamboats.

EXHAM
Until such time as we have no reason to fear them at all.

Jeff looks down at the canal, troubled.

JEFF'S POV

The water is filthy, choked with beer bottles, scraps of paper, fishheads, cabbages, and random Victorian detritus.

A SOLDIER approaches Jeff.

JEFF
What? No sign of him?

He slaps his gloves against his palm. His face brightens
His men march past, forty hand-picked British troops, Terran and Martian irregulars in red-and-tan.

The pilot pulls a braided cord, releasing a cageful of hairless pink bats. They fill the sky. The soldiers cheer, then jog on board the ship, shouting.

JEFF
Splendid men! If we had a reliable guide I'd give us half a chance.

BULLER
I am certain Mr. Charlie will turn up, Captain. He's merely tucked away in some dark corner of the fort, sleeping it--

A DISTURBANCE to the rear. The brass band breaks off. Three soldiers run up, carrying the body of Mr. Charlie. The head has been severed and is nowhere in evidence. Ned runs over to examine the body.

BULLER

Oh, my God.

JEFF

Sir, I know I've been demanding, but I feel strongly our native guide ought to possess a working head.

(beat)

I must repeat my request that you allow me to take custody of the prisoner Tappan Tal. I propose we set a definite date for our return, say six months from today. For every day we're late, hang one of her sister pirates. If we return safely with my brother or definitive news of his--fate--then we set her free... by your authority of course.

EXHAM

Absurd! We don't need a native guide, as I've said many times. I am fully capable...

JEFF

Oh, really? How many leagues is it from the Bramble to the heart of the Glades? From Farna'a to Eellamit? When we reach the so-called living island of Patmu, if it's not a legend and assuming, in the event that it isn't, that it doesn't eat us, do we bear to the northwest or the north-northwest?

EXHAM

Well, there are many theories...I have heard accounts...

Jeff looks at Buller, rolling his eyes. Buller takes a deep breath. Lets it out. Nods. Gestures to Trotter, who signals to two GUARDS.

Ned sidles over to a beaming Jeff. Leans in close.

NED

The living island of Patmu?

JEFF

I said it was legendary.

(beat)

I got us our waywitch.

NED

I'm afraid you did.

He has more to add, but holds his tongue. Jeff notices.

JEFF

What is it, Lieutenant?

NED

Oh, nothing. I was just musin on the fact that you can always tell when a bastard's been deprived of his cranial apparatus by a purple girl.

Jeff looks at him. A SOLDIER runs up, carrying Mr. Charlie's head like a football under his arm. Holds it high.

EXT. RAS RALAS DECK - DAY

A Martian map table set up on the deck. Jeff and the Pilot lean across it, going over their course.

A shadow falls across them. They look up.

Tal stands in irons, a guard on either side of her. Buller and Trotter behind. Tal looks down at Jeff from her lofty plane, her expression hard to read. Maybe a little bit smug.

JEFF

Do you speak English?

She cocks her head to one side. Looks at him.

JEFF

You understand what I require of you? I need to penetrate to the heart of the Shadowglades--the uh, the Fanfantee.

TAL

Yes, sh'taz.

JEFF

And you understand the terms of our arrangement. Your fate and that of your comrades is in your hands. You will remain in irons the entire time you are in my custody.

TAL

Yes, sh'taz.

He walks to the edge of the deck, offers his hand as if she were a lady. She looks at it. Then tugs free of her captors, and leaps onto the deck. The hull rings like a churchbell. Jeff lowers his hand.

Tal goes to the watchman's pole, climbs the ladder to its high seat, settles back, atop the boat, like she owns it.

JEFF

What does she keep saying, 'sh'taz'?
What does that mean?

PILOT

It means 'earthman,' Captain-beb.

JEFF

I see. Very well. General.
(salutes, then to Pilot)
Let's be off.

The Pilot gestures. Martian sailors scramble to untie the lines. The ancient steam engine begins to beat like an iron heart. They drift free of the dock.

EXT. RAS RALAS - NIGHT

Evening. The sky pink and red, shot through with threads of green. Purplish crop fields stretch away ten miles on either side of the canal, crowded with small craft lit by lanterns.

Martian sailors gamble with strange dice on the Great Deck, British officers play whist and poker. Torchlight and pipesmoke. Martian night bugs WHISTLE sad tunes.

Tal sits on her perch, carving a hunk of wood, totally focused. Her glinting knife SCRAPES.

Jeff and Ned lean on the rail, collars turned up, smoking.

Exham sits at a table spread with bits of Martian pottery and stone. He picks up a stone, eyes it through a jeweler's loupe, sets it down. Makes a note in a journal.

JEFF

It's strange they possess steam power,
and rifles, and such things, and yet
remain so...

On her perch, Tal carves away with ritual intensity, humming.

JEFF

....backward.

NED

I once heard a man say the Marshy used to
be more up-to-date than he is at present.
Lucky for us.

EXHAM

That is not entirely false. Had we
arrived on Mars and found it still ruled
by the Xan Palao, our imperial experiment
would have ended quite differently.
Instead we found a decadent,
superstitious race, squatting in the
ruins of their greatness. The Canalman's
steam engine, the Waheelat's rifle, the
Qiqwit's ghost helmet, these are relics,

(MORE)

EXHAM (cont'd)
 occult secrets guarded from rivals the
 way our Celt forebears hid the true names
 of their gods.

Jeff lifts an eyebrow, Ned shrugs. Jeff takes a deep breath.

JEFF
 I'm getting used to that smell you love
 so much, Ned. I wonder what it is?

Exham lifts the mapstone, ponders it. The SCRAPING stops.

EXHAM
 Perhaps it's the smell of a dying world.

JEFF
 That's damned poetic of you, my lord.

A violet hand stabs out from the shadows and snatches the
 mapstone from Exham's grasp. Everyone freezes, surprised.

Tal drags her chains across the deck. A revolver is COCKED.

JEFF
 Turn around, miss.

Jeff takes aim. Tal keeps moving toward the rail.

EXHAM
 Don't lose our best map, Rider. Shoot
 her.

Jeff fires over her head. She stops. Turns around. It
 kills her to do it. Jeff goes over to her. Holds out his
 hand. Reluctantly, she drops the green shard into his palm.

JEFF
 I could never shoot a woman in the back.
 You should have kept running.

TAL
 You should have shot me in the back.

JEFF
 You're welcome.
 (to Ned)
 Bolt her to the deck.

They drag Tal off. Ned barks a command to a SAILOR.

Jeff looks down at the mapstone. He touches his finger to a
 raised symbol that looks something like: *.

EXHAM
 Well done, Captain.
 (grabs the shard)
 I shall have to be more careful.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

EXHAM (cont'd)
 Clever plan, bringing the pirate. Always
 helpful on a difficult mission to have a
 hostile amazon warrior along.

Jeff is about to retort when hammerblows RING. He looks.
 A SAILOR is hammering Tal's chains to the deck with a spike.

A SOLDIER
 Phosphor dogs!

Soldiers crowd the rail, peering over.

THE CANAL

streams with light, with the undulating bodies of ulik.

A luminescent net draws a momentary grid drawn on the night.
 It splashes into the canal and trails behind the steamship.

The Pilot calls out to SAILOR 1 in Havooli. Looks at Jeff.

PILOT
 You drink the gabh, beb?

JEFF
 Marshy wine? No, I don't care to.

SAILORS haul in the net, alive with ulik. One tosses a
 flopping ulik to the Pilot.

He catches it with aplomb. SAILOR 2 hands him a big Z-shaped
 knife and a metal tumbler.

The Pilot slits the struggling ulik. It squeals. A pearly
 liquid spills out, filling the tumbler. He offers the cup to
 Jeff, who hesitates. Exham watches with interest.

EXHAM
 That is raw gabh. Deadly poison to a
 Martian. The effect on us is...
 interesting. But probably harmless.

Jeff looks at Ned, who shrugs. Takes a big sip.

JEFF ON QABH

He's caught in the grip of a huge wave, turned end over end
 over end inside a million-gallon tunnel of radiant surf.
 Then he's back, on the deck, looking wild-eyed and queasy.

PILOT
 For this the English have conquered Mars.

EXHAM

A bioluminescent fluid secreted by the reproductive tract of the ulik, or phosphor dog. Properly refined, of course, it produces only a mild euphoria.

At once Jeff hands the cup to Pilot.

JEFF

I find my euphoria in battle.

He walks away. Exham smirks at Ned.

EXHAM

He has his father's unfortunate gift for rhetoric.

NED

Some people mean what they say.

EXT. RAS RALAS - FORT WELLINGTON - DAY

The steamer chugs past a large British outpost on the canal. Ned and Jeff, on the deck, watch it go by.

NED

Fort Wellington. Last Union Jack we'll see for a time. Shame we can't stop. The hunting hereabouts is damn--

JEFF

Good God, look at that.

A barge, towed by a crew of naked Martians, her deck mountainous with dead animals. Several skinners at work. An appalling sight. Two white hunters in khaki in the middle of it, under parasols, eating steaks. They wave as they pass.

Tal, on her perch, spits at them.

JEFF

(disgusted)
Bon appetit, my lords.

EXT. RAS RALAS - THE BRAMBLE - NORTH BANK - DAY

Dawn. Immense cathedrals of purple cacti. THUMP of reciprocating engines as the steamship glides past us.

A WATCHMAN on the ship grips his signal horn under his arm as he holds a match to a green Martian cigar.

A glob of silver WHIZZES in and bursts at his feet. A cloud of larvae wriggle out, making a CLICKING sound with their jaws. They squirm across the deck to a coil of rope.

The watchman raises the trumpet. A glob WHIZZES in, hits his chest, explodes. Bugs everywhere. He blows a desperate ALARM.

Bugs swarm the coil of rope. It dissolves.

For an instant a Martian skeleton grips a convoluted horn. Then bones scatter on the deck.

INT. RAS RALAS - JEFF'S CABIN - DAY

The alarm startles Jeff from sleep. RIFLE FIRE, shouts, screams. He leaps out of bed, pulls on his breeches and, carrying his boots, runs out of his cabin.

EXT. JEFF'S CABIN - RAIL OF SHIP - DAY

Two soldiers crouch, firing into the Bramble. Jeff gawks.

EXT. BRAMBLE - NORTH BANK - DAY

Twisted elaborate towers rise up from the purple spikes. Another glob bursts out of the trees.

EXT. JEFF'S CABIN - DAY

The glob flashes past Jeff's head. Explodes against the wall of his cabin. Out crawl the bugs.

JEFF

Good God!

He throws his boot at them. They swarm it, jaws CLACKING. A streaming arm of larvae reaches out across the deck toward Jeff. He backs up, and throws his other boot. They absorb it. Keep on coming. Inches from Jeff's clenched toes.

A big pink TOAD MONKEY leaps into the pool. Bugs swarm him, but he's impervious. He laps them up with his twelve-inch prehensile tongue. They're gone in three quick gulps.

NED (O.S.)

Save room for dessert, you bastard.

Jeff looks up, in wonder, at a grinning Ned, who holds an empty cage. Then something WHIZZES between them and lodges beside Jeff's ear. A foot-long shaft of metallic red. Ned crouches down at once, tries to pull Jeff after him. Another shaft flies in, lodging in a NEARBY SOLDIER. He falls dead.

Jeff looks at the dead man, then at the shaft beside his head. It unfolds a pair of wings and irritably buzzes, trying to free itself. Jeff yanks it loose. It has two big multifaceted blinking eyes. It spits at him, then flies away. Jeff kicks free of Ned's grasp, outraged.

JEFF

What kind of men kill with bugs? Give me your gun.

Ned sighs. Hands him up his Webley.

JEFF

And your girlfriend there.

Ned whistles. The toad monkey ambles over. Jeff extends his arm and the little fellow skips up onto his shoulder. The arrowbugs rain in. The toad monkey cowers behind Jeff's head. Jeff ignores the barrage and opens fire.

A globe hurtles toward Jeff. The long tongue lashes out, snags the globe in mid-flight, reels it in.

Ned, shaking his head, sits up. He grabs the dead man's Enfield, takes aim, FIRES.

EXT. BRAMBLE - NORTH BANK - DAY

The twisted towers rise from the Bramble. One keels over and falls. It's not a tower, it's a helmet, of elaborately hammered and painted leather. Now all the towers are moving.

Half a dozen fierce crimson Bramblemen of Mars emerge from the thorny forest. They carry huge oblong shields. One fits an arrowbug to his bow and lets fly. Another swings a bullroarer-bolo that spits wormfire balls.

EXT. RAS RALAS - DAY

The soldiers kneel behind the gunwhales, firing. Shafts fly in. Some lodge with a nasty TWANG in human flesh. Wormfire explodes. Toad monkeys clamber everywhere, eating.

Jeff looks up and is surprised to find Tal standing over him, heedless of the attack, her chain strained to the limit.

TAL

Please, Captain, you must listen to me. You must let me fight the Hartopee. They're my enemies. I must kill as many of them as I possibly can!

JEFF

That's a commendable attitude, Miss.

(beat)

Now, be a good amazon and sit down.

He resumes firing.

EXT. BRAMBLE - NORTH BANK - DAY

The Bramblen brandish their armored shields that shed British lead like umbrellas shedding rain. One doesn't raise his shield in time. He catches a bullet in the throat.

EXT. RAS RALAS - DAY

Exham tinkers with his Exham Ray Gun, turning a crank, spinning a dial.

A fuming Tal carves way at her block of wood, cursing. She looks up, despite herself, to watch Jeff.

Jeff stands, also heedless of incoming fire. Takes calm aim. Fires. Lowers his gun, disgusted.

JEFF
This is madness.

NED
(relieved)
I agree...

JEFF
Those men should all be dead by now!

TAL
A single Hartopee shield fetches seven husbands in the stud market at Waheel.

JEFF
Yes, well, be that as it may, why are they even firing at us? We have no quarrel with the Bramblen. I--

Something catches his eye (because he's the only one standing) on the opposite shore of the canal.

JEFF'S POV - BRAMBLE - SOUTH BANK

In the distance tantagors with cargo slings take flight.

Jeff pounds the rail.

JEFF
It's a diversion. Sergeant Burroughs!
(BURROUGHS looks up)
I'll need a dozen men.

NED

Jeff, what are you doin? Soon as we're past their little temple, or whatever it is, they'll leave us be.

Exham looks up from his spastically throbbing machine.

EXHAM

Yes, and in the meantime...

An arrowbug knifes in over his head. He ducks.

EXHAM

...the gift for the Gladesmen must be defended at all costs.

JEFF

I'm sure you and your remarkably tidy little killing machine can handle six Marshies in silly hats, my lord.

A rivulet of light leaks out a valve of the ray gun and stings Exham on the hand. He sucks his fingers, miffed.

JEFF

(to Ned)

Get my saber.

EXHAM

They've gone!

EXT. BRAMBLE - NORTH BANK - DAY

Dry wind stirs the massive cacti. No trace of the attackers.

EXT. RAS RALAS - DAY

Ned hands Jeff his swordbelt. Jeff, irritated at having been duped, hurries around to the far side of the ship, where Burroughs and the volunteers await. Ned follows.

BURROUGHS

Should I have them lower the boats, sir?

JEFF

On this little planet?

He climbs onto the rail and draws his saber.

JEFF

Follow me, men!

NED

Jeff...I wouldn't...It's been--

Heedless, Jeff leaps from the rail. The men watch with interest as he plunges straight into the waters of the canal.

NED
Lower the boats, Sergeant. And toss a life preserver to Jean Lafitte.

EXT. BRAMBLEMAN CAMP - DAY

A vast clearing in the Bramble. Flattened ground and ashpits. Jeff, dripping wet, sashes into the clearing with Burroughs, Ned, Exham, and the men, who fan out.

EXHAM
This is the spring camp of the northern Hartopee. An hour ago there were ten thousand men, women and children here.

JEFF
We must have stumbled onto them just as the last were leaving.

NED
Where were they in such a big goddamn hurry to get to?

EXHAM
And why did they wish to conceal their departure from us?

A SOLDIER
Captain!

Two SOLDIERS push a sullen Brambleman PRISONER before them. From his leather armor hangs a small carving--an animal, on a cross, dangling from a T-shaped bar. Jeff lifts it, curious.

Exham leans forward on his walking stick to examine it. Stands up. Looks troubled.

JEFF
Lord Edward, what is this thing?

EXHAM
It's...it's difficult to be certain...

NED
It looks like a Victoria Cross.

JEFF
(to prisoner)
What is this?

PRISONER

Faht Palaht, sh'taz.
 (tears it loose, raises it)
 FAHT PALAHT!!!

He breaks free of his captors, and runs headlong toward the nearest cactus. Hurls himself into the air. Lands with a sickening SQUISH on a two-foot quill.

JEFF

(to Exham)

Apparently the Hartopee and the Gladesmen
 have overcome their mutual distaste.

He goes to the impaled man, takes the brooch from his dead fingers. Frowns. Looks up at the dead Martian. Tosses the brooch in the air, catches it. Then he turns and walks out of the camp.

EXT. BRAMBLE CLEARING - DAY

Dusk. Jeff stands, head bent, beside three crooked crosses crowned with empty tan topees. Ned approaches, discreetly.

Mournful note of the boatman's HORN. They look to the canal.

NED

We don't want to get caught mopin around
 in the Bramble come dark.

(claps Jeff on the shoulder)

Don't worry, Captain, this time you were
 just the lucky one. Next time the
 arrowbug could lodge in your brainpan.

Ned puts an arm around him. They walk down to the levee and the Martian sunset.

JEFF

I wasn't mopin.

NED

You were mopin.

Something huge scuttles across their path. The biggest roach in the solar system. They cry out, then reflexively draw their pistols and fire at it.

The bullets scatter like rain off the beetle's back.

NED

Their shields!

JEFF

Some people spend altogether too much
 time thinking up clever uses for insects.

EXT. RAS RALAS - GREAT DECK - NIGHT

Sky full of stars. Jeff sits at the writing table, making his report. Tal sits nearby, carving.

TAL

Did you kill many of the Hartopee seedbags?

JEFF

Seedbags?

TAL

The males.

JEFF

Ah, yes, I see. Er, one or two. The others ran off into the deep Bramble.

TAL

If you'd let me fight, they would all be dead. And some of your men might not be.

JEFF

Yes, well... That isn't...the idea, killing them all.

TAL

Then what is the idea?

Jeff doesn't know what to say. What kind of woman is this?

EXT. RAS RALAS - EDGE OF SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Morning fog in an immense purple grassland. Shallow water, clumps of Giacometti trees. The HORN plays a fanfare.

Jeff takes the stairs up from belowdecks, two at a time. Burroughs waits at the top. Salutes.

JEFF

We've arrived at the Terminus?

(looking out)

Oh, my.

The Terminus of the Jaxartes Canal. Massive, ancient, baroque, part locks, part dam, part Arch of Triumph. It looms as the boat draws nearer, feeding steady streams of dark water into the canal. Great dikes lead off in both directions from it, walling in the wild Shadowglades.

JEFF

Unload the boats.

EXT. TERMINUS - EMBANKMENT - DAY

The pandhals lie on the slope. Their crews wait around them, loaded down with gear as Jeff looks them over.

Jeff goes to his boat, where Ned, Tal, Exham and five SOLDIERS wait. He stoops to grab a corner of the woven raft. The others follow. With grunts and curses they heave the pandhal high.

One after another the crews hoist their boats onto their shoulders. Like sections of a centipede they crawl up onto the slope of the Terminus, portaging.

EXT. TERMINUS - SUMMIT - DAY

Sweaty, amazed, they look out at eighty thousand square miles of wilderness, part river, part jungle--purple mangroves a hundred feet tall.

EXHAM

The Shadowglades. The beating heart of Mars. All that remains of the Watertime. Nine hundred miles long, two inches deep.

TAL

(points west)
Ashtalàn is there. Two days' journey.

EXHAM

I believe the Gladesmen's capital is actually located--
(points southwest)
--in that direction.

TAL

(emphatic, pointing)
It is there!

Jeff looks at Ned: we're in trouble.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Six pandhals splash into the shallow water. The men clamber aboard. Tal is loaded in. Two soldiers spike her chain to the boat. Exham has worked himself into a lather.

EXHAM

Captain, I have studied traveller's accounts and the relevant maps very closely. I am certain that the Gladesmen's city of Ashtalàn lies to the southwest of the Terminus. That you

(MORE)

EXHAM (cont'd)
 would trust the highly suspect
 recommendation of that pirate--

Jeff looks at Tal, who points stubbornly west, looking dazed.

TAL'S POV - WATERTIME

ROAR of the ocean. The world frays and is stitched up again into a luminous tapestry. Tal points across the waves toward a distant city of light, while overhead streak fantastic aircraft. Ghosts and angels lurk in the corners of the sky.

JEFF
 Miss Tal?

TAL
 (still pointing west)
 The miserable hovels of the filthy
 Gladesmen lie three hundred miles in the
 direction you call due west. I know
 this. I'm a pha. Trust me or don't.

JEFF
 I don't really trust either of you.
 (beat)
 Lord Edward, could you possibly show me
 on that old mapstone of yours?

Exham climbs into the pandhal, takes the mapstone from his pocket. Consults it. Turns it this way, that.

EXHAM
 It's difficult to correlate... a mapstone
 is highly metaphorical... but if we were
 to follow her, proceeding three hundred
 miles... due west... that would put
 us...mmm...

A shocked, queer look comes over his face, but he suppresses it. He looks up at Tal, suspicious, amazed.

JEFF
 What is it?

EXHAM
 It's...nothing.
 (puts mapstone away)
 I will defer to Miss Tal in this matter.

Jeff is puzzled, then shrugs. Points.

JEFF
 That channel, Sergeant. Due west.

BURROUGHS
 Yes, sir.

Exham, still staring at Tal, sits on a three-legged stool, takes out his notebook. Scribbles. Jeff takes up his pole.

JEFF
Let's push off.

Leans hard on the pole. The others join in. A SOLDIER hoists the Union Jack. It streams out, fluttering, from the makeshift yardarm of the pandhal.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - NIGHT

Sunset. The tiny procession of boats, a ribbon of color in the purple expanse. Night bugs whistle.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Dawn. Amazing HUBBUB of the Glades wildlife. Jeff, bare-chested, kneels at a makeshift washstand, shaving with a straight razor, singing a barracks ballad.

The swamp sounds stop. Jeff breaks off singing. The crews shift and finger their weapons.

JEFF
Look sharp, gentlemen...
(to Tal)
Are we still on course?

Tal nods, apprehensive. Jeff rinses his face quickly and picks up his gun. Listens. The silence deepens, changes.

Ahead, through a parting in the fog, a 'gunk island' emerges, low and scrubby. As we draw nearer, we SEE the remains of a British camp, a ragged Union Jack hanging limp from a pole.

Jeff stares, mouth open.

JEFF
Frank!

He staggers, knocks into the washstand. The bowl spills foamy water everywhere. Jeff stares at the ruined campsite. A distant RUSTLING of wings.

TAL
Tantagors!

Jeff snaps out of his horrified daze, trying to peer through the thick canopy overhead.

JEFF
Take cover! Burroughs!

We hear a whistling FUSILLADE.

BURROUGHS
I'm sorry, sir. I--

He grabs Jeff's arms, stiffens. Grimaces. Sinks to the deck. A feathered bolt in his back. The gunwhale behind Jeff is studded with bolts.

NED
Jeff!

Emerging from the tangle of trees come Fanfantee SWAMPRIDERS, Gladesmen astride the shoulders of huge, webfooted dilduks. The warriors level massive crossbows, draw back the strings.

JEFF
Get down!

They hit the deck. Another FUSILLADE. Jeff draws his pistol and returns fire. The soldiers follow suit.

A THUMP. A ceramic egg, cheerily painted, lands on the deck between Jeff and Ned. Wobbles cutely. They're baffled.

Tal grabs it tosses it overboard. It EXPLODES in mid-air, throwing her back. Jeff reaches out to help her up. Smiles.

JEFF
Thank you.

Through a break in the canopy, Gladesmen hover on purple tantagors, emptying sacks full of egg bombs.

NED
(to Jeff)
And you said we wouldn't need umbrellas.

The eggs fall THUD THUD THUD on the deck of the pandhal.

Ned and the others scramble to toss the eggs overboard. Some EXPLODE, blowing off hands and fingers, starting small fires.

JEFF
I've got to get to that island, Ned.

He goes to the side of the boat. Bolts WHIZ past. He ignores them. Turns to Tal, watching the battle like a cat watching a birdbath through a window. He checks to see that her chain is in place. She looks at him pleadingly. He shakes his head.

JEFF
I'm sorry.

He leaps overboard, into the water.

NED

Wait!
 (shakes his head)
 Ah, Christ.

He starts after Jeff, but a couple of Gladesmen, dismounted, clamber aboard and come after him. Ned draws his sword.

NED

(shouting around them to Jeff)
 I won't bother asking you to be careful.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Chaos. GUNFIRE, WHISTLING bolts, smoke.

A hit tantaqor corkscrews into the muck with huge SPLORP.

A dilduk breaks a soldier's back with one swipe of its paw.

Jeff slogs through the muck toward the gunk island.

EXT. PANDHAL - DAY

Tal crouches in a corner as the bolts fly. Glum.

A SOLDIER next to her takes a bolt in the eye. His rifle clatters from his hands.

Tal eyes it. Looks around--no one's watching. She grabs the rifle and takes a careful shot. A nearby swamprider screams, tumbles. Tal puts down the rifle. Pleased.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Close combat. "Tommies" slash with bayonet and saber. Gladesmen in treebark armor, gnarled and tough as mangroves, wield shock harpoons, long amber barbs on six-foot shafts.

A GLADESMAN jabs his hook at a SOLDIER'S chest. Blue lace of swampfire crackles from the barb, entangling the soldier. He screams, falls dead.

The streaked blade of a bayonet pokes from the center of the Gladesman's chest. He looks surprised, then sags, revealing:

Ned behind him, grim-faced.

EXT. PANDHAL - DAY

Tal takes up the rifle again. Peels off another secret shot. Emboldened she stands up and fires freely.

EXT. SKY OVER SHADOWGLADES - DAY

A tantagor hovers over a break in the canopy. Its BOMBARDIER shouts, taps the DRIVER. Points out Tal picking off Gladesmen all around. The driver nods.

EXT. PANDHAL - DAY

A RUSTLE of leather wings. Tal looks up.

The bombardier raises his harpoon, throws it.

It flies, absorbing a static charge from the air around it, towing an arc of colored line.

Tal leaps. The harpoon discharges against the boat as she catches onto its line.

The driver urges his straining mount up.

Tal hangs on. Her chain goes taut. The entire boat lifts into the air. The gunwhale rips away. Tal is carried aloft. Hand over hand she climbs the line.

EXT. TANTAGOR'S BACK - DAY

The driver yells to the bombardier, in Fanfantee subtitled.

DRIVER
Cut the line! Cut the line!

The bombardier eyes the line uneasily as it strains.

BOMBARDIER
It's my best harpoon! My grandfather
used it to burst the hearts of fifty
Purple Girls in the battle of Winj!

He raises his knife to cut the straining line but hesitates a fatal instant. Tal hoists herself onto the tantagor. Grabs at the bombardier, who punches her. She barely hangs on.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Jeff sloshes toward the island through waist-deep bracken. Two swampriders are bearing down on him, dilduks bellowing.

EXT. SKY OVER SHADOWGLADES

On a huge tantagor, a helmeted CHIEFTAIN surveys the scene.

CHIEFTAIN'S POV - "WINESIGHT"

Watery, tessellated. Jeff is about to be caught by his pursuers. He draws his sword, hacks at a rider's legs.

The Chieftain raises his arm. A cry goes from tantagor to tantagor. The beasts, in turn, wheel and flap away.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Jeff whirls, feints, then brings his saber down on the dilduk's leather helmet. It screams, and lashes out at Jeff, knocking him backward. Black water closes over him.

Bubbles. Blackness. Muffled SHOUTS, SHOTS, his own BREATH. Then a burst of light. Ned drags him up out of the water.

NED

We've got 'em on the run!

The DILDUKS shamble off into the swamp. Sharpshooters pick them off. Jeff, bleeding, looks up at the sky.

JEFF

Hold your fire! Let them go.

All is quiet. Exham appears, his white suit spotless.

EXHAM

Congratulations, Captain. You have won your first engagement with the Gladesmen.

Jeff SEES the smashed boats littered with dead soldiers, the survivors stamping out eggfires and their noxious pink smoke.

JEFF

I've done no such thing. They'll be back. They can take their time. Pick us off one by one, at their leisure. They outnumber us. They're more mobile.

NED (O.S.)

And they're goddamn zeelots, to boot.

They turn to see Ned. He's clutching the body of a fallen rider. He lifts the helmet to reveal a jowly walrus face.

EXHAM

A Sapellador!

NED

There's Qiqwits and Mantadigs too. I'll bet no more than half of 'em were Gladesmen. Yrrhians. Big ugly Djees.

(MORE)

NED (cont'd)
 Seems like everyone but the purple girls
 is gettin in on--
 (looks around)
 Hey--

He sees the broken gunwhale, Tal gone.

NED
 Jeff, the purple girl!

He turns. Jeff is nowhere to be seen.

NED
 Jeff?

EXT. GUNK ISLAND - CAMPSITE - DAY

Tattered tents, pots and pans, crates, empty tins, and skeletons in ragged red-and-tan uniforms. Jeff takes in the desolation, stonefaced. A twig SNAPS. Jeff whirls.

At the island's shadowy shore, a SWAMPRIDER wheels his mount. Further in, two more SWAMPRIDERS turn tail.

Jeff cries out, takes off after them.

He catches the lumbering dilduk. Grabs its stubby tail. It drags him along behind it. Branches and thorns tear at him.

The Swamprider twists around, fits a bolt to his crossbow.

Jeff climbs onto the beast's back. Buries his face in fur as the Swamprider lets fly. The bolt WHIZZES over Jeff's head. He rears up and hurls himself at the Swamprider. The Swamprider draws his long knife, kicks at Jeff. Jeff tumbles backward but catches at the streamers that trail from the Swamprider's cowl. The Swamprider is jerked backward.

Jeff pulls himself up the rider's body, his face against the rider's chestplate. Right under his nose, carved into the treebark armor, he sees the 'Faht Palaht' emblem.

In the stirrups, the rider's boots slip, revealing two inches of bare crimson leg. Slip again, to the red ankles.

Jeff reaches for the pommel of the saddle and kicks the Swamprider in the face, pitching him to the ground.

Jeff scrambles into the saddle. He kicks the shoulders of the dilduk. It GRUNTS, drops to all fours, and takes off splashing down the soggy shore of the island into the water.

Jeff sees the other Riders through a screen of branches. Beyond them, signs of another gunk island. The Riders see Jeff. They nod to each other. Then they break for the island, disappearing into into tall grass. Jeff follows.

EXT. SECOND GUNK ISLAND - LARGE CLEARING - DAY

The Riders burst from the bush with Jeff in hot pursuit. CREAK and CLICK of a hundred crossbows being cocked Startled, he jerks the reins of his dilduk. It rears back.

JEFF

Good God.

A hundred swampriders spread out around him until he is encircled. Varied faces of the Martian nations. All wear the carved cross-and-animal.

They part and the Chieftain comes forward, face masked by his ornate helmet. Jeff tries to wheel the dilduk around, but at a sign from the Chieftain it lies down like a dog. Jeff jumps off and starts to run for it.

CHIEFTAIN

Stop or you will die.

Jeff raises his arms, turns slowly.

A familiar RUSTLING overhead. A rogue tantagor careens in, buzzing several Gladesmen from their mounts. A wild-haired, wild-eyed Tal brings the beast in dangerously low.

Jeff runs along the ground, leaps up, grabs on to a stirrup. Tal banks steeply.

Gladesmen raise their harpoons, aiming at the sky. The helmeted man raises his arm. The others lower their weapons. The tantagor lurches away, inches above the twisted treetops. A Gladesman turns to the Chieftain.

GLADESMAN

(in Fanfantee subtitled)

My lord Faht Palaht! Let us kill them!

FAHT PALAHT

(in Fanfantee subtitled)

Be silent.

GLADESMAN

(in Fanfantee subtitled)

But my lord...

FAHT PALAHT

(in Fanfantee subtitled)

Be silent or I will eat your inner organs.

The Gladesman puts an involuntary hand to his belly.

EXT. TANTAGOR'S BACK - DAY

It bucks and complains, its wings a hummingbird blur.

JEFF
(yells)
What's the matter with this brute?

TAL
It has been bred to hate Waheelats!

JEFF
What?

TAL
I said, it has been--aak!

The tantagor dips low--too low! It bounce-bounce-bounces on the tops of the mangroves, then SPLATS into a dense thicket.

EXT. GLADESMAN PANDHAL - DAY

A mad tangle of branches mapped against the sky. PLASH of water. A moan.

Jeff lies on his back, bound, face bruised. Tal lies tied up beside him, asleep. Around them boatmen pole. Jeff tries to sit, struggling against the ropes. A Gladesman leans toward him holding a big white flower, half gardenia, half starfish.

The flower, smashed against Jeff's face, emits a purple mist. Jeff cries out, then goes slack. His head hits the deck.

EXT. GLADESMAN PANDHAL - DAY

Jeff lies unconscious. A slender foot prods his leg.

TAL
Wake up, sh'taz. Sh'taz.

Jeff shakes his head. Tal is propped up beside him.

JEFF
(tries to sit up)
What? Where are we?

TAL
I believe we are nearly there.

JEFF
Does your...talent...tell you this?

TAL
 (smiles)
 No, my eyes.

She points with her chin to the front of the boat. Jeff wriggles up until he can see. The boatmen have their backs to Jeff and Tal, poling with all their might toward:

A low city of islands, bridges, and canals, wood and golden brick. Tantagors swoop and soar above it like swallows.

JEFF
 Ashtalàn!

The line of pandhals, flying the red banner of United Mars, poles toward home. The waters around the city are filled with boats. A general impression of frenzied activity.

The gates of Ashtalàn part. Immense, ornate wooden doors, floating on immense pontoons. The CREAK of old machinery. Our friends pass through, into the Grand Canal.

EXT. ASHTALÀN - GRAND CANAL - DAY

Martians line the banks of the canals. Gladesmen, but also reedy Qiqwit, giant wormwagons filled with rowdy Thylesians, numerous representatives of most of the other nations.

JEFF
 We've underestimated the grip of this Faht Palaht. This looks like full-scale rebellion!

They float past a band of WAHEELATS, with their long diucirs.

JEFF
 And your people appear to have joined it.

TAL
 First they sign away our sacred freedom to your Queen. Then they fight with sh'taz against me. Now this. Next they will be taking dilduks into their beds.
 (stony)

Those are not my people. My people are the bivantal--the pirates, you call them. No true Waheelat would serve under a Fanfantee flag, or set foot in this flatulent swamp city without killing as many of its inhabitants as she could.

JEFF
 You don't hope to see us thrown off Mars?

TAL

Of course I do. But it will be I and my
"pirates" who throw you off.

(mysterious)

By our own methods.

EXT. ASHTALÀN - GRAND QUAY - DAY

GLADESMEN drag Jeff and Tal to their feet, cut their bonds. Both struggle. A guard dabs at them, one-two, with his crackling harpoon. They go slack. They are dragged out of the boat, toward the heart of Ashtalàn, the immense open plaza.

EXT. ASHTALÀN - GRAND PLAZA - DAY

Tantagors of all breeds jostle and preen. Girths are cinched, packs closed up, weapons strapped to saddles.

Leaders of a hundred tribes and thirteen nations stand before the Chieftain. They go down on one knee in unison. The Chieftain gestures. They rise. Everyone cheers.

They go to their various mounts and take to the skies, flying off in all their separate directions.

The Chieftain, flanked by his Yn Guardsmen, turns to Tal and Jeff. He has changed to ceremonial dress but still wears his helmet. It has no visible eyeslits. He raises his hand.

Tal and Jeff struggle against the guards who force them to their knees.

The Faht Palaht--it can be none other--barks a command.

The guards release Jeff, leaving him to stand. They force Tal to the ground. She writhes free and, with a growl, throws her giant self at the Faht Palaht. A thousand crossbows CLICK. Tal stops in her tracks. The guards drag her back. She is forced to her knees.

The Faht Palaht looks at them, Webley revolver at his hip, his helmet inclined as if in curiosity.

A bright Victoria Cross is pinned to his bandolier.

Jeff is horrorstruck.

JEFF

(barely controlled)

I see the Faht Palaht is not only a
murderer but a damned thief as well.
Where is Franklin Rider?

He looks at Tal. She translates into flawless Fanfantee. The Faht Palaht doesn't move, doesn't speak.

JEFF

I am Captain Jefferson Rider. As an officer in Her Majesty's Imperial Army of Mars, and as an Agent of the Imperial British Mars Company, I warn you that this second brutal attack on a mission of peace and discovery will not go unpunished. British vengeance is deliberate and terrible--

Jeff is cut off by the sound of loud laughter issuing from the Faht Palaht's helmet. Looking bemused, he presses on.

JEFF

Even as we speak, my soldiers are preparing an attack--

The laughter bursts forth anew. The Yn Guardsmen begin to laugh. Jeff is disconcerted. The Faht Palaht gestures.

The crowd around the plaza parts, and Gladesmen bring in, at harpoon-point, Exham, Ned, and a pair of SOLDIERS, bloodied and looking sheepish. Others carry the mysterious crate.

They push the Terrans over to Jeff and Tal, and force them onto their knees. Ned resists, and is buzzed with a harpoon.

The Faht Palaht shakes his head. Crosses to Jeff.

FAHT PALAHT

Bakatz pe felta zsid dilduk toppal.

JEFF

(to Tal)

What did he say?

TAL

(puzzled)

He said... that you are still full... completely full...of dilduk excrement.

The Faht Palaht starts to pull off one of his gloves.

The crowd recoils in awe, covering their eyes.

The glove comes off. The hand within it is pale. The Faht Palaht holds it out to Jeff, who looks shocked.

Another cry goes up from the crowd. Jeff looks up, into the naked face of the Faht Palaht, who has removed his helmet.

A handsome, weary face, the eyes somehow odd and unfocused.

JEFF

Is it you--?

FRANK

I don't quite know how to answer that.

A moment of shyness, wonder. Then they fall into each other's arms, laughing, clapping one another on the back.

Jeff pulls back. He hauls off and clocks Frank across the chin. Frank sprawls backward.

JEFF

You bastard!

The Yn Guards, chosen from all the nations, rush Jeff and start to cudgel him savagely with their harpoon shafts.

NED

Major Rider, for the love of God!

EXHAM

Can we be sure that is Franklin Rider?

Frank rolls over, his lip bleeding. He calls out to his men.

The guards step away from Jeff and he drops to one knee.

Frank walks over to his brother, rubbing his chin, holding out his hand again. This time Jeff takes it.

FRANK

Because I'm the one who taught him how to throw that right cross.

(pulls Jeff to his feet)

You know, Jeff, I had a dream they would send you. I--

Jeff grabs Frank by the arm, snatches the Webley and points it at his head. The entire city holds its breath, silent but for the lamentation of a tantagor. Jeff nods to Ned, who's already on his feet. The captives turn on their captors, snatching their shock harpoons.

JEFF

I don't know what's happened to you, Frank, but I'm taking you home. I take it these people will do whatever you say?

FRANK

I've had appallingly little success finding something they won't do.

JEFF

Then tell them to bring us tantagors. Three. Make it four.

FRANK

I'm afraid I can't do that, Jeff. You've come at a very awkward time.

Jeff hesitates a moment, then tightens his grip on Frank, brandishing his body to the Gladesmen guards.

JEFF

We will have four tantagors, or you people will have one dead Faht Palaht.
(to Tal)
Tell them.

Tal explains in Fanfantee. A YN GUARD calls to squadron of tantagor drivers. Four lead their mounts toward Jeff, like children pulling big balloons.

JEFF

(aside, to Frank)
What does "Faht Palaht" mean, anyway?

FRANK

"Remarkably Pale Fellow."

Jeff nods. Calls to his men.

JEFF

Ned-- Lewisham-- Parker!

The soldiers, with Exham, encircle the brothers. Tal stands, uncertain of her status.

JEFF

Miss Tal, you have my permission to arm yourself.

Tal goes to grab a harpoon from a Yn Guard. He resists. She slugs him and takes the weapon. Joins the others.

TAL

(to Jeff)
Thank you.

NED

Miss?
(takes her carving from his kit)
I think you might have lost this.

Tal is delighted. She licks Ned's cheek. He wipes at it, bemused. Tal goes to take one of the tantagor leashes.

JEFF

Let's get out of here.

EXHAM

I'm sorry, Captain.

He pokes Jeff with the shock harpoon. Jeff's hand goes slack and Exham snatches the revolver. He grabs Frank. Frank, hitherto mostly amused, starts to look a little worried.

JEFF

Exham, what are you doing?

EXHAM

I'm afraid I have shall have to continue our expedition alone.

JEFF

But we have to get back to Palion and tell them what's happening here. They're about to launch some kind of attack!

Exham thinks this over. For half a second.

EXHAM

My duty is to the Imperial British Mars Company, Captain, of which I am an officer and shareholder. And I cannot possibly be of any use to them here.

(beat)

Naturally I will send a rescue mission for you as soon as I can.

EXHAM

(to Yn Guards)

Pilpik na'tal...tantagor re--relago.

They're still in shock. They don't respond. Exham jams the barrel of the pistol against Frank's temple.

EXHAM

Tantagor relago!

EXT. ASHTALÀN - PLAZA - DAY

Guardsmen hoist the crate into a cargo sling. Exham drags Frank toward the nearest tantagor. With a slobbery hiss it deflates enough for Exham to mount it.

He lashes Frank to the saddle, then slaps the tantagor. The animals strain skyward.

A crowd, Jeff among them, runs to the quay, all looking up.

Frank wriggles free. He falls. The tantagors lurch upward.

Frank lands in the canal with a splash.

Jeff strips off his boots, and dives in. Dozens of Martians follow. Jeff swims to Frank, gets an arm around him, floundering. Martian soldiers help buoy them both up.

EXT. TEMPLE SQUARE - DAY

Yn Guards surround and disarm the Terrans. One takes a retaliatory poke at Tal with his harpoon. She collapses.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - DAY

Jeff kneels over his brother's body. Strokes his cheek.
Frank stirs. His eyes flutter.

P.O.V. FRANK - WINESIGHT

Blue waves of light broken by fluttering tiles of color. Dim jagged hint of a looming pale disk.

FRANK
(weak)
Jeff... I can't... I can't see...

HANJU, Frank's Gladesman manservant, hurries up, carrying an ornamental flask filled with a pearly liquid.

JEFF
What do you mean? Why not?

Hanju helps Frank sit up. Hands him the flask.

FRANK
(dryly)
Because I'm blind, old son.

He takes a long swig. Tosses the flask aside. A mixed crowd of Martians runs to it. They start to squabble over it.

FRANK
(to Guards)
Kahn'xalak hittegop.
(to Jeff and Ned)
You have to see my quarters, they're hideous.

Guards help him to his feet. Others surround the prisoners.

They troop past the worshippers, who have now come to blows. Jeff and Ned look dumbstruck. Frank notices, rolls his eyes.

FRANK
It was amusing for about a week.

INT. FRANK'S PALACE - APARTMENTS - DAY - WINESIGHT

Threads of color are woven and stitched into the wobbly, imperfect image of a lavish room.

Frank lies on a divan, with his flask, tended by Hanju. Three huge Guards keep Jeff, Ned and Tal to one side.

FRANK

It was just my luck I showed up right as the old Alpir was dying. Poor bastard had the same name as a king who'd been usurped by an albino, you see, an outlander named Esrit Feldippit, who was later crowned the first High King at Palion. Sort of the Charlemagne of Mars, last man to unify the nations, etcetera. Apparently his return had been foretold for quite some time. I happened along...

JEFF

But your eyes-- the blindness--?

FRANK

Oh, the Alpirs of Ashtalàn are always blind. It's in the rules, isn't it, Hanju? The constitution, I suppose. It was Hanju here that smeared my eyeballs with the blinding paste, when I was asleep one night. Hey, what's this?
(reaches to touch Jeff's bars)
What are these? Captain Rider, is it?

JEFF

Yes! But how--?

FRANK

(holds up flask)
Little thing I call winesight.

Jeff takes the flask from him, sniffs at it.

JEFF

But this is raw ulik milk! How can you--

Frank snatches the flask, takes another long swig--too eagerly, too hungrily. He drains the flask, wipes his mouth.

FRANK

It's an acquired taste.
(beat)
Ah, that's better.

POV FRANK - WINESIGHT

Jeff's face is perfectly clear, resolved, but the vision is still weird and somehow alien.

FRANK
I thought I might never see you again,
little brother.

They embrace. They have always had only each other.

Jeff looks over Frank's shoulder. His eyes narrow. He blinks. He sits back, still holding Frank, looking at him.

POV JEFF

He sees Frank through a rippling 'winesight' screen.

JEFF
My eyes-- Frank, what are you doing?

FRANK
I don't know.

Frank's eyes widen in surprise.

Tal watches intently, troubled.

POV JEFF AND FRANK - WINESIGHT

Fragmented but growing clearer, like a torn tapestry repairing itself. A brick courtyard. A black-suited crowd.

A gallows. A broken-necked form dangles from the ropes.

The hanged man, swaying.

The blackened face under the hood. It's Colonel Harry Rider.

JEFF AND FRANK
No!

Jeff throws himself onto Frank. For a moment they cling to each other, overwhelmed by the vision. Then Jeff, as if burnt, jumps up.

NED
What in the world?

FRANK
I don't honestly know.

JEFF
How much of that juice have you drunk?

FRANK
Nothing like that's-- I don't know where--

JEFF
Tal, do you know what's happening to him?

TAL
(shrugs, evasive)
He is drunk on fish semen.

FRANK
It isn't just... vision, you know.
Sometimes I hear things...waves.

JEFF
(looks at Tal)
The Watertime?

TAL
I...I have nothing to say.

Frank pushes himself up, recovering. Voice strong.

FRANK
Well, I have.
(beat)
There are two things you must know,
little brother. The first is that I am
the Faht Palaht, the White Gentleman the
the old Martian prophecies say will come
one day and unite all Jadis against her
greatest enemy.

Frank leans in close to Jeff.

FRANK
(continuing, stage whisper)
And even if I am not...I think I look
very convincing in the clothes.
(beat)
The second thing is that you are welcome,
indeed I beg you, to join us, and stay
here as my guest. But if you oppose me,
I will be forced to imprison you in the
deepest hole in Ashtalan.

JEFF
Frank...Frank, you're an officer in Her
Majesty's Army of Mars--

FRANK
No more. I am the unwilling savior of a
free people, and I have just launched a
planetary rebellion. I had no choice.
(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)
 These damned prophecies leave one
 precious little room to maneuver.

Jeff looks at Ned. Ned nods, once.

JEFF
 Throw me in your hole.

Frank sags. He doesn't want to do this. But he nods.

FRANK
 If that's how you want it.
 (calls out to GUARDS)
Ke'tal bex biddab'ut!
 (beat)
 I'm afraid it's a particularly nasty sort
 of hole.

EXT. THE DUNGEON OF ASHTALAN - DAY

An immense, irregular ARCH of some scaly material, studded with spikes. The prisoners are marched through, into the vast humped dome beyond. The corridor is dim and glows faintly pink in the light of sconces that line its walls.

The guards walk out. One gives the arch a firm slap and it collapses, surprisingly flexible. The spikes mesh to form a horrid grin. Two huge eyelids lift, revealing a pair of giant irritable eyes. A low, hungry GROWL. The eyes close.

INT. 'DUNGEON' - DAY

The interior structure of the beast, ridges and outcroppings of bone, affords natural berths and seats. Ned approaches one of the dozens of glowing sconces affixed to the 'wall.' He pokes it. It blinks, furiously, and wriggles a few inches out of his reach. It's a worm.

Gingerly Jeff touches a wall, pulls his hand away.

JEFF
 What kind of place--ack!

A viscous matter sticks to his hand, stretches, then SNAPS.

NED
 (sniffing the air)
 I think it's safe to say we know where
 the Gladesmen stockpile their dead fish.

TAL
 We are in the belly of a mamtal. In the first of its three stomachs. My people once used the mamtal as a prison, in the days when we, too, were cruel and savage.

NED

Miss, are you sayin we've been eaten?

TAL

In six months our bodies will reach the third stomach. In a year we'll be a pile of bones on the ground beneath its backside.

(pounds the 'wall')

I HATE the Gladesmen!

The great domed chamber SHUDDERS and RUMBLES. Everyone falls over, sloshing in digestive juices.

JEFF

Take it easy! Christ!

They hear a CHATTERING sound.

NED

What was that?

Jeff kneels down beside a small, sphincter-like passage at the back of the "room." CHATTERING. He pulls at the valve.

JEFF

It sounds like--ack!

A pale, nasty CREATURE, part jellyfish, part cockroach, scuttles out of the hole, clacking its fleshy white jaws.

Jeff cries out, starts kicking savagely at the thing, hurls it against the 'wall.' It sticks. Loud, delighted laughter.

JEFF

What is that thing--horrible--

Tal laughs so hard she can hardly speak.

TAL

That is a sh'taz.

NED

It reminds me of our boy Exham.

JEFF

(disgusted)

Exham! How could he abandon us? Where was he going? What did he mean by "continuing the expedition?"

NED

I don't know, but I do know he went without his little toy.

He pulls a component of the Exham Ray gun out of his trousers. Looks at the other soldiers.

NED
Lewisham--Parker--have you still got...

They each pull separate components from their breeches and hand them to Ned.

JEFF
Splendid! Ned, can you put that thing together?

Ned is already snapping the parts together.

NED
Sure, but I can't promise the thing's going to work--

Ned hands Jeff the assembled weapon. Tal jumps between them, and snatches it away.

TAL
Thank you.

She turns, sets the gun on her hip, and aims for the wall. Squeezes the trigger. It COUGHS, HUMS, WHINES, and then emits its wand of braided light.

SH-PLOF! A huge, gaping hole is blown in the side of the mamtal. It GROANS, and starts to roll. Tal scales its side and leaps through the hole. Jeff, without even stopping to think, follows.

JEFF
Come on, boys!

But the mamtal continues to roll, lifting the hole away from the ground until it is directly overhead.

EXT. THE MAMTAL - DAY

It shudders, dying. Jeff's stranded outside. Tries to climb the mamtal but can't get a purchase. He turns to see Tal disappearing down an alley. A WHIZZING volley of crossbow bolts lodges in the flesh of the mamtal.

JEFF
(yelling after Tal)
Wait!

INT. MAMTAL - DAY

Ned and the soldiers stand around, looking up at the torn hole overhead. Ned shakes his head.

NED
He goes off half-cocked, I get stuck
inside the dead worm.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Dawn. A pair of heavily-laden tantagors flap slowly west.

EXT. TANTAGOR'S BACK - DAY

Exham rides postilion, grim-faced, intent. He gives a careful tug. His eyes widen.

EXHAM
Dear Lord!

As the beasts turn, he sees, dead ahead, a vast shimmering waterfall of light and air, taking up the whole horizon. A barrier of energy, reflecting the land and sky.

The tantagors shy and complain. Exham gives his mount a slap. It snaps around to nip at him. He jerks the reins. The animals strain against their harness. The sling GROANS.

They lurch toward the barrier. It's flawed--gaps open and close. The mirrored sky gives way to glimpses of queer buildings and towers.

EXT. OUTSIDE STANIPAR - DAY

SPLORCH! Exham forces the animals down into the muck. They scramble onto their feet. With three quick slashes of their jaws they're free of the harness. They take to the skies.

Exham stands up, slips and falls. Stands up again, slips. Reaches into the muck, peels a wide frond of the thick, slick swamp plant known as slipweed from his boot. Stands again, shakes the mud from his ruined white suit. He looks up.

The 'wall' flows from a ring of monumental, African-Art Deco generator pods. Long gaps--'cracks'--streak across its surface, revealing the city within.

Exham grabs a stick. He climbs the rim of the HUMMING wall-generating ring. He touches the stick to its "surface." It sparks, bounces off. He touches it with his hand. Sparks.

EXT. BARRIER FIELD - DAY

Exham drags the crate out of the collapsed sling. He floats it through the shallow water.

He tears up long strands of slipweed.

He stands on the generator ring, with the crate beside him. He waits. A crack opens. He pushes the crate through it. The crack closes. He waits. Another crack opens. He leaps through, and the "wall" seals behind him. He's gone.

EXT. CITY OF STANIPAR - DAY

Exham stands on a shattered rampart, looking out at a broken city. A fantastic, monumental cityscape. Chipped, tumbled, overgrown, collapsed, ruined. Directly in front of him is a huge plaza shaped like an hourglass.

Exham takes out his notebook and starts to make a note, then drops his hands and just looks, awestruck.

He feels something amiss. He touches his coat pocket. Pulls out the mapstone. It HUMS. The * symbol has started to blink. Exham touches it.

The mapstone melts, bulges, reforms into a square. All new features. Exham traces it, arriving at a small shape like an hourglass. He looks up at the plaza before him. Traces the stone again until he comes to the familiar * symbol again.

He looks up and, right where it should be, sees a spiky, baroque structure. He smiles thinly.

He ties thick strips of slipweed around the crate.

He sets off across the ghost city, pushing his mysterious burden on its slippery runners.

EXT. ASHTALÀN - STREETS - DAY

Chaos. Soldiers. Bodies. Body parts. Body-shaped piles of ashes.

Tal runs, shock harpoon in one hand, death ray in the other. Firing wildly, hacking and jabbing at all who approach.

INT. GLADESMAN PALAZZO - SERAGLIO - DAY

A large hall, noisy with women. Singing, playing games, eating, quarrelling, tending babies. The LORD of this particular harem, kisses his favorite's upraised toes. He is in full armor.

FAVORITE

But the omens are very bad...Takis is retrograde...perhaps the Faht Palaht's plan...people say he has not been well...

LORD

Nonsense.

(turns to room)

I will cut a Terran throat for each of you!

Cheers. He departs.

EXT. ASHTALÀN STREET - OUTSIDE PALAZZO - DAY

In front of the palazzo. The plaza lies beyond, down a narrow passage. Tal heads for the passage.

Six Gladesmen appear, block her way. She turns. Six more behind her. She's cornered.

Bolts fly. Tal ducks into the entry of the palazzo. She squeezes the trigger of the ray gun. It spits a few pathetic globs of blue fire. Dies. She hurls the harpoon.

The harpoon takes out one man with a SIZZLING sound.

A crimson hand grabs Tal's shoulder. She turns. The Gladesman Lord stands with his two bodyguards. They have their harpoons lowered. She's surrounded.

She looks up. Directly overhead hangs a wooden verandah. She leaps up, grabs it, swings herself up and over, flips, lands neatly feet-first. The verandah doors are closed.

INT. GLADESMAN HAREM - DAY

Happy PANDEMONIUM. Then the veranda windows implode. The women scream and flee to the sides of the room. Tal stands there, breathing hard, seven feet tall. Dead silence.

Tal lopes down the center of the room. The women watch her pass, in horror and disapproval.

A GUARD with a wicked sword steps forward, challenges her. Tal feints, the guard swipes at her. She ducks. Lands a massive uppercut on the guard's jaw, knocking him back. She takes his sword and runs for the window. Before she leaps through it, she stops and turns.

TAL

(in Fanfantee subtitled)

You are a disgrace to the women of Mars!

(kicks out the window)!

She-dilduks!

She leaps through the window

EXT. ASHTALAN STREET - DAY

Jeff trots along in the wake of Tal's rampage. Awestruck. Picks up a shock harpoon from one dead man, a sword from another, a crossbow and quiver from a third.

He turns a corner, finds himself outside the palazzo. Ducks down and sees a dozen wives leaning from the verandah, shouting angrily at the cringing Lord and his guards. The other troops are gone.

GLADESWOMAN

(in Fanfantee, subtitled)

She called us she-dilduks!

Jeff creeps past, dashes into the narrow passage.

EXT. PLAZA - DAY

Tal runs across the plaza, toward a paddock of tantagors. Plaza is roiling with soldiers and materiel. A trumpet BLAST. She ducks behind a wormwagon and peers out.

Frank, helmeted and armored, takes to the sky. Wave after wave of tantagors follow after.

The tantagor wranglers by the paddock are watching the sky.

Tal starts toward the paddock.

A giant Gladesman steps into her path, brandishing the biggest harpoon on Mars. She lunges at him, he catches her arm and backhands her. She flies back and he's on her. He raises the harpoon, about to bring it down.

A crossbow bolt finds his throat. He's very surprised. He sinks to his knees, falls forward.

Jeff, holding a crossbow, grins.

Tal scrambles to her feet. She nods to Jeff, then runs for the tantagors. Jeff runs after. She climbs into the saddle of the nearest beast. Jeff starts to climb on behind her.

JEFF

Very good, Miss Tal. When we get back to Palion I will do everything I can to--

She lays her swordpoint on his throat. He draws his own but she knocks it from his hand. He slides back to the ground.

TAL

I'm sorry, sh't--Captain. If you interfere with my mission I'll kill you.

She slaps the tantagor's neck. It begins to inflate itself.

JEFF
Your mission?

The tantagor starts to rise, flapping daintily.

TAL
I'm grateful to you for saving my life.
I shall need it for a few more days.

JEFF
Your mission?

Jeff leaps into the air, catching onto the tail of the tantagor. It sinks, bellows, then rises again.

EXT. ASHTALÀN - GRAND PLAZA - DAY

A GLADESMAN cinches his tantagor's saddle. Others point at the sky. The Gladesman looks up to see:

A LONE TANTAGOR

flapping westward, with a man dangling wildly from its tail.

EXT. TANTAGOR'S BACK - DAY

Jeff drops in to the rear saddle, behind Tal. He throws his arms around her neck. She elbows him, sharply. He yanks upward, jerking her chin back. She lets go of the reins, twists, punches him. The tantagor dips, then rolls over.

They hang upside down three hundred feet over the Glades.

TAL
All right, all right, all right!

She gives up, grabs the reins, pulls them out of their roll. Jeff wipes his brow, straightens his clothes.

TAL
I will take you to Palion City...but
first I must make one stop.

JEFF
Why should I agree...

She lets go of the reins. The tantagor begins to roll once more. Tal holds tight with one hand, but Jeff falls out of the saddle. With her free hand Tal grabs Jeff's lapel. If she lets go he'll fall.

JEFF
Agreed. Agreed!

She takes the reins again, and rights them. Jeff looks around, looks behind them.

JEFF
They don't seem to be following.

TAL
They have other things on their minds.

JEFF
Where are we going?

TAL
I don't know.

JEFF
You don't... you're a pha!

TAL
The city is hidden from my inner sight.
Screened.

JEFF
What city?

TAL
The Xan Palao were adept at such
deceptions.

JEFF
What city?

TAL
Stanipar. A hundred and seven pha have
sought it over the generations. Peddis
Pex, the greatest pha who ever lived.
None returned.

JEFF
That's encouraging. Why should you fare
any better?

TAL
After the first seedbags came from Malis,
we noticed that in your wake you
sometimes left holes in the Watertime--
tunnels, marking the course of your
passage across our planet and our history--
-which to us are one and the same.
Sometimes these holes never closed.

JEFF
You mean-- Do I--?

TAL

You are destroying the Watertime. The
stuff and fabric of our past.

(beat)

Lord Edward more effectively than most.
He leaves a trail like a worm in fruit.

Tal takes a deep, mystic breath, closes her eyes.

The world grows textile, part topographic map, part tapestry.
A burning dark line cuts down the middle.

TAL

Your brother is the only Terran I've ever
met who leave no holes.

She give the tantagor a slap. It grunts and flaps onward.

EXT. STANIPAR - DAY

Exham pushes his crate down an immense broken boulevard.

He inches along a ledge, a hundred feet over a giant black
pit. Totters, almost falls.

He upends the crate over the rubble of a collapsed tower.

He floats on the crate, across a murky black pool.

EXT. STANIPAR - MYSTERIOUS BUILDING - DAY

Part cathedral, part oil refinery, part termite colony.
Exham consults the square mapstone.

The * symbol blinks. Exham presses it. The map transmutes
into a building plan. Exham's finger traces its perimeter,
stops at a symbol like ⊕. Exham and the crate set off.

They arrive at a large panel in the wall. Blank except for a
embossed ⊕ symbol at its center. Exham checks the mapstone
again. Puzzled. He steps up to the panel, fits the mapstone
to the symbol. It snaps into place. CLICK. KA-CHUNK. The
panel slides upward, revealing a long corridor. He leaves
the crate and takes a careful step into the corridor.

INT. FORGE OF THE XAN PALAO WEAPONEERS - DAY

A marvel of ancient Martian technology. Exham enters. Walks
over to a bizarre device built into the wall. A screen, some
knobs and dials: plainly a kind of television.

Exham approaches the device. Takes his notebook from his pocket. It has a hidden catch. He snaps it open, takes out an ivory card. Slides it into a slot in the device.

The screen flickers, blinks. Static. Exham pushes a button. A TONE. An image begins to resolve. Streaked, pitted, like a glimpse into another world, another time, there appears the face of Sir Thomas Rider. Smiling. His voice comes out distorted, slashed by static.

RIDER

It was thirty years ago last Wednesday that I pulled this transaetherial telepictor out of the ruins of Talma Asq in Tanganyika.

(beat)

That's a long time to wait for someone to ring.

EXT. SHADOWGLADES - OUTSIDE STANIPAR - DAY

Jeff and Tal's tantagor approaches the shimmering wall.

EXT. TANTAGOR BACK - DAY

Jeff looks past Tal at the distorted waterfall of light.

JEFF

Is that the screen you spoke of?
Does it also block out...tantagors?

TAL

I hope not. It's old--now that we're so close I can feel the cracks in it. Stanipar lies just beyond. I can see it.

JEFF

Cracks?
(squints)
I see. There are streaks--momentary--but you aren't going to--

Tal closes her eyes. Her vision is jittery, troubled by the shimmering "wall." The cracks open and close, revealing the city within, but as it was 100,000 years ago.

TAL

Trust me.

She slaps the tantagor. It speeds toward the immense barrier.

INT. FORGE - DAY

Exham talks to Rider's crackling image.

RIDER

--half an hour ago. A courier ship from Waddimin made the hop with reports of uprisings in all the Eastern Territories. Nibelatch. Laxxap. Yrrh.

EXHAM

I'm certain I saw troops from all over the Territories. If your nephew has truly been able to spark revolts...

RIDER

Franklin. Yes. I am disappointed, but hardly surprised. Or alarmed, for that matter. I know him too well. He is too incapable of belief to be dangerous.

EXHAM

The bomb doesn't care if the match believes in fire.

RIDER

Don't be ponderous, Edward. We've unleashed our new Iron Mammoths. And now we have found the forge of the Xan Palao weaponeers. In an hour's time we will have all we need to defeat the combined strength of every army on Mars.

EXT. STANIPAR - BARRIER FIELD - DAY

The tantagor approaches the barrier. A crack opens. The tantagor zips through. The crack closes on the last few inches of the tantagor's tail. Sparks fly.

A tear opens in the fabric of the barrier, spreads like a burning hole in celluloid. The ancient 'structure' is finally collapsing. It flickers a few times, then dies.

The wounded animal spirals into the city.

EXT. TANTAGOR - DAY

Tal, her eyes still closed, holds tight to the reins.

JEFF

Careful! Look out! Take us down!

TAL

I'm trying!

EXT. STANIPAR - DAY

Tal bounces them down into a plaza. They skitter along the ancient stones, then splash into the black pool.

The dead tantagor flattens. Jeff and Tal leap off it, swim for the edge of the pool. Tal gets there first, climbs out, helps Jeff. They watch the beast sink into the water.

JEFF

Great. Now how do I get to Palion--Tal?

She's running full-speed toward the industrial spires of the Arsenal. Jeff takes a deep breath, then sets off after her.

EXT. ARSENAL - DAY

Tal, followed by Jeff, runs up to the building. She makes for the doorway leading into the forge. It's open. Outside, on the ground, lies the opened crate, empty. Beside it stands a tiny one-seat flying machine. Finned, black metal decorated with elaborate gold vines, a painting of Queen Victoria, and gilt initials on the side: V-1.

Tal runs, sword drawn, through the doorway. Jeff lingers, looking at the empty crate, the trim little craft.

INT. FORGE - DAY

Exham pulls something luminous from a machine. The teleopictor shows the intent face of Rider.

Exham holds up the apergy recursion coil, beautiful, opalescent. Rider's image looks up, startled.

RIDER

Edward...

Exham looks up. Tal rushes in, sword drawn, followed by Jeff. Exham picks up his crossbow, aims it at Tal.

EXHAM

Don't come any closer.

RIDER

You're too late, my dear. We have it.

Jeff looks around, amazed, bewildered.

JEFF

Lord Edward!

(peering at screen)

Sir Thomas? How is it possible?

RIDER
Your prisoner seems to have slipped her
harness, Jefferson.

EXHAM
(to Tal)
Drop your sword.
(to Jeff)
Disarm her!

Jeff hesitates. Tal looks at him, her blade glinting.

RIDER
Jefferson, I hope you have not decided to
join your brother in claiming your
heritage of folly and disgrace.

Jeff wrestles with it. Then puts his sword to Tal's throat.

JEFF
I'm sorry. It's my duty.

After a long moment she nods. Drops the sword.

RIDER
Excellent. Now, Edward, proceed.

EXT. FORT WELLINGTON - DAY

Twilight. A dry streambed, filled with Gladesmen and
Hartopees, living and dead. The dead outnumber the living.
The fort looms in the distance, cannons booming.

A shell tears into the makeshift trench. Screams.

Frank huddles with his lieutenants. They're exhausted.
Shattered. The field before them is littered with dead men
and tantagors.

FRANK
(subtitled)
Prepare for one last charge.

The lieutenants stand. A distant RUMBLE. They look toward
the fort. Frank stands. The noise grows louder. A TOOT of
steam. Frank cocks his head, listening, eyes blind.

FRANK
What is it? What do you see?

A GLADESMAN
A machine!

ANOTHER GLADESMAN
A monster!

The noise an iron UPROAR. Gatling fire SPRAYS the trench. Many are hit. Frank crouches down, covering his head.

A nightmare glimpse of a massive black iron shape. Rivets, grinding GEARS, and the bright jets of Gatling fire in the twilight.

EXT. FORGE - DAY

Exham touches a panel on the wall. It lifts, revealing a teleopictor. Exham inserts the ivory card. Rider's image flickers to life. He looks out, impressed, moved.

RIDER

At long last I lay eyes on my planet.

TAL

It's not yours yet, sh'taz.

RIDER

I was speaking poetically, my dear.

EXHAM

I've placed the coil inside V-1, Thomas.

A small plate in the missile's side is open, revealing its works and the glowing coil, wired into a gyroscopic housing. Jeff stands to one side, holding Tal at swordpoint, watching.

JEFF

What is that thing? That coil?

EXHAM

It is an apergy recursion coil.

(pivoting the housing)

It baffles gravity. Warps it. Absorbs and reflects it. Or concentrates it into a ray. We tried to forge one ourselves, at Mars House, but it proved unreliable.

TAL

The light that turned my sisters to ash.

EXHAM

Otherwise, however, a great disappointment.

He slams the plate shut. Stands up.

RIDER

No matter, we have the genuine article now. A sail to catch the gravitational wind. If this test goes well, my boy, the ages of Steam and Gunpowder are dead. Airships and rifles will go the way of galleons and longbows.

Exham climbs into the seat of the V-1. Throws a brass lever. It wobbles, jerks, rises a few feet into the air. Then it skitters off, high into the sky, trailing a wake of disturbed gravitons. It picks up speed very quickly, and disappears.

RIDER

Where--where did he go?

JEFF

He's aloft! And flying faster than anything I've ever seen.

RIDER

Excellent. We can begin producing coils immediately. Properly provided with armor and ordnance they ought to be ready to drop bombs and generally put our misguided and poorly led native people in their places by Friday week.

(beat)

You hoped to restore your stature among your people by finding the legendary Xan Palao forge, Miss Tal? Perhaps even win the queenship you feel you were cheated out of? I am sorry. How foolish of you to think you could have made use of such a sophisticated piece of machinery.

TAL

All knowledge, all the information we require, exists in the Watertime--

RIDER

Yes, yes...

TAL

You see the past as something dead, something to be dug up and used. For us it is all around, living, present in our minds and bodies and the bones of the planet, determining everything we are.

Jeff listens intently to this. It strikes a chord.

TAL

Unless you can learn to live in the Watertime, you will never win triumph or glory on Mars.

RIDER

Yes, well, or we could simply erase the damned nuisance. They aren't teaching a great deal of Martian history in the factory schools of Palion City.

A BUZZING overhead. Jeff and Tal look up.

An airship materializes from null space.

JEFF

An airship--

RIDER

Ah, yes, that will be the Badger. I sent her as soon as I heard from Edward. They've come to collect you, Miss Tal.

The dirigible looms. The V-1 skitters up behind it, circles it, spirals madly around its length, toying with gravity, then arcs toward the ground.

It makes a hovering landing, a spider on a thread. Exham leaps out, leaving it idling a few inches in the air.

A ladder is lowered from the airship. Several TROOPS descend on raiding lines.

They hit the ground, swarm around Tal. They shackle her. Tal looks at Jeff. A line is tied around her ankles. She is hoisted, upside-down, to the airship's gondola.

A SERGEANT-MAJOR salutes Jeff smartly. Jeff seethes. Exham walks up, windblown and pleased. Jeff rushes at him. Throws him up against the teleopictor screen. Rider ducks.

JEFF

You bloody liar! You never gave a damn about finding Frank! Any of you!

He slams Exham against the screen.

RIDER

Jefferson!

JEFF

(slams Exham again)
Did you?

The screen winks out. Exham breaks Jeff's hold on him, throws him back. Lands a sharp right on Jeff's jaw. Jeff falls back on the ancient flagstones. Face bloodied. Exham stands over him, breathing hard, looking harder.

EXHAM

We are the Imperial British Mars Company, Captain. We don't give anything. Damns least of all.

Jeff, looking agitated, gazes up at:

THE ALBERT'S GONDOLA

Tal is winched up into it. The riveted hatch rolls shut.

Complex feelings, dark memories pass across Jeff's face.

EXHAM

When the first British ship arrived on Mars eleven years ago the Waheelat numbered approximately 15,000. War and the Spanish grippe have not been kind to them, as you know.

(beat)

When Tappan Tal is hung there will be perhaps fewer than a hundred of them.

As this sinks in, Jeff looks around at the grim faces of the British troops around him. Then his eye lights on the V-1.

EXHAM

(holding out his hand)

You have always been a most steadfast tin soldier, Captain. Now it's time to get back on that little inch of tin that holds you up.

Jeff, looking chastened, takes Exham's hand. He stands, slowly, then shoves Exham toward the nearby guards.

He breaks for the V-1, leaps into its cockpit. He is baffled by its fairly simple controls, pauses.

The guards raise draw their revolvers. Take aim. Fire.

EXHAM

No!

Jeff ducks. The bullets strike the apery field around the hovering V-1, hang an instant, then fly backward.

They catch several soldiers in the chest and head. One just misses Exham.

Jeff doesn't have time to marvel or study the controls. He throws the lever.

The V-1 leaps wildly, backward, into the air.

EXHAM

Let it go, we won't miss it. It's a mere canoe. And I doubt very much whether Captain Rider possesses a paddle.

EXT. MIDAIR - DAY

The V-1 stands on its nose, in the sky. Jeff throws a lever. it begins to rotate. He turns a crank. It spins faster and faster. Madly he cranks in the other direction, yanks the lever. It stops. He tries another lever.

The V-1 rights itself. Jeff smiles. He nudges a lever. Glides forward. Nudges it back. Glides backward. He grins.

An enormous transport airship materializes not ten feet from him. He cries out, throws the lever. Shoots forward. Another transport appears in front of him. Just before collision, he throws the lever backward, goes scooting in reverse. Another transport pops out of null space. Another. Then another. Jeff is lost, a minnow among whales.

A porthole in the nearest gondola swings open. A SKIPPER leans out and yells.

SKIPPER
It's Captain Rider, isn't it? What seems to be the problem? Can't you get down?

Jeff shrugs. A bit sheepish.

SKIPPER
Sit tight, sir, we'll soon fish you out!

JEFF
Afraid I can't do that!

SKIPPER
Why not?

JEFF
Because I... I think I've...
(horrified, thrilled)
I've mutinied!

SKIPPER
Oh. I see.
(confused)
Well. Then I suppose I shall be obliged to arrest you, sir.

He ducks inside, shuts the porthole. The airship swings around toward Jeff. The main side hatch opens. A pair of CREWMEN stand with long hooks. Others aim rifles. They come closer. Closer still.

Jeff looks around, completely hemmed in. Hesitates a moment longer, then throws the lever. Zips forward.

The crewmen raise their rifles, but are hesitant to fire.

SKIPPER
Wait until there's open sky behind him!

Jeff tries to maneuver through a gap between airships. Miscalculates, nearly crashes into one. For an instant he's silhouetted against open sky.

The riflemen FIRE.

Bullets catch in the apery field, then spray backward. One hurtles toward a nearby airship. Pierces its gasbag.

FOOM! A fireball blooms. Shockwaves scatter the airships.

Jeff rides the wave, hurtling toward a newly opened patch of sky. Suddenly a careening airship looms before him. He slams into reverse. Whirls the V-1 around. Another behind him. He's surrounded again.

SKIPPER

Captain Rider. As we apparently can't shoot you, and you apparently are incapable of steering your vehicle, may I suggest that you simply give yourself up.

JEFF

Steering is a luxury I can't afford.

He brings the V-1 around, aims himself toward another gap.

JEFF

Good thing Ned isn't here to see this.

He shoots forward. But the airship drifts and Jeff crashes right into the gasbag. He plunges into it.

FOOM! A huge fireball fills the screen. At its heart a wavery pool of black light. An evil black star blooms.

INT. ASHTALAN - FRANK'S APARTMENTS - DAY

A carnation of flame. At its heart a kernel of black. A matchhead.

PULL BACK to reveal Ned, sitting on the floor, lighting his pipe. His legs are bound with colored rope. Lewisham and Parker are sprawled asleep. Morning sunlight at the window. Hanju snoozes in a corner.

A mournful HORN sounds. Ned lurches to his feet and hobbles to a window. Sound of women's voices, wailing.

Lewisham and Parker stir. Hear the noise.

PARKER

What is it, Lieutenant?

NED

Looks like we mighta put Major Frank Rider out of the messiah business.

EXT. ASHTALAN - DAY

The sky blood red. The broken armies of Mars straggle in down the Grand Canal. A motley assortment of native boats.

An unwieldy Mantadiq canoe, filled with men, tips.

Pandhals choked with dead warriors are poled by the wounded.

Tantagors alight in the plaza, burdened with casualties.

On the lead pandhal, armor broken, bleeding, sits Frank, head hung, feet dangling in the water. He looks up, face haggard.

A Gladeswoman leans from her balcony, wailing.

EXT. LONDON - MARS HOUSE - NIGHT

Summer evening. A NEWSBOY wails out a headline.

NEWSBOY

"Martian Mutiny Put Down Decisively!"

Rider buys a paper, stuffs it under his arm.

INT. MARS HOUSE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Rider ignores the good wishes of functionaries as he is wheeled down the hall, nose buried in the paper.

INT. MARS HOUSE - BOARD ROOM - NIGHT

Rider is wheeled in. The members of the board have gathered by the door. They applaud. Rider happily waves them away.

A COMPANY MAN

Thirty thousand Bramblemen killed...

ANOTHER COMPANY MAN

The amazons have been reduced to a handful...

ANOTHER COMPANY MAN

Regrettable business about your nephew...

For a fraction of a second Rider looks pained.

RIDER

Regrettable. Yes. Well...

(recovering)

To a soldier such as Jeff, death was no doubt far preferable to moral confusion.

ANOTHER COMPANY MAN
Sir Thomas, we have a little surprise...

They part, making way for Exham and a strange device--a wheelchair without wheels, gliding on a cushion of disturbed gravitons. Applause. Sherry is handed around.

ANOTHER COMPANY MAN
To the Queen!

ALL
To the Queen!

Greedily Rider drains his glass.

INT. FORT REGINA - PRISON - DAY

A battered dipper splashes into a can of water.

A GUARD passes the trembling cup between bars of Martian iron.

Tappan Tal puts her lips to the cup and drinks. Falls back to the stone floor. Face sorrowful. A furry long-snouted six-legged pakou creeps across the wall.

A purple hand reaches between the bars from the next cell. It drops a small silver ball, intricately wrought.

At the jingle of it Tal opens her eyes. The ball rolls as if purposively right to her feet. She looks at it.

TAL
(Waheelat subtitled)
What is the meaning of this?

A WAHEELAT (O.S.)
The uprising has failed. Fellis Beb is dead. The orbicle of Jasp has rolled to you, as it was always meant to do.

Tal looks at the orbicle she once prized more than anything.

TAL
Over how many warriors would I now rule
as queen were I to grasp this?

A sad beat. The invisible Waheelat coughs wretchedly.

A WAHEELAT
Eleven, Majesty.

Tal smiles grimly. Flicks at the ball with a finger. It rolls away, CHIMING.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENTS - NIGHT

A JINGLING of spurs outside the door. Ned and the others scramble to their feet. The door opens. Frank stands silhouetted in torchlight from the corridor, slumped.

FRANK

Sorry to wake you, gentlemen.

Hanju hurries to his side in time to catch Frank as he sags. Helps Frank to a divan, brings a washbowl and undresses him. Frank's bleeding, grimy, eyes dead.

FRANK

You'll be happy to know that Fort Wellington remains safely in British hands tonight. As does every other British fort and cantonment on Mars. We still haven't heard from the Qiqwits but there's no reason to think their poor red skins were any more proof against Lee-Enfield repeating rifles than ours.

(beat)

They killed half of us while we were still a mile off. The rest were crushed by some new armored behemoth of Rider's. A sort of land ironclad, big as a barn. It was a god-damned rout, Lt. Christmas.

Ned eyes him curiously. Kneels down before Frank's empty gaze. Passes a hand back and forth. No response.

FRANK

Plus I ran out of ulik milk two days ago.

NED

So, you were fighting blind?

FRANK

(grim smile)

That's the trouble with being a messiah. Everything you do takes on those annoying extra meanings.

Abruptly he pushes the manservant away, sits upright.

FRANK

My brother! Has there been any-- have you-- no, of course not.

(to Hanju)

Hiddig pavlahgo nig paltis du?

HANJU

Ai, Faht Palaht...

He bursts into tears. Frank grabs him, shakes him. Then lets the servant go. Turns his blind face to the window.

FRANK

That sound--do you hear it?

NED

I don't hear anything.

FRANK

Some kind of engine. A machine.

A horn BLASTS the alarm. Ned, Lewisham, Parker, and the Servant rush to the balcony. They look out. Now we can HEAR it, deep, slow, rhythmic. Getting louder. Lewisham points.

LEWISHAM

Birds, sir! Whopping giant ones!

NED

Those aint birds, Corporal.

Frank limps out onto the balcony. The WHUMP-WHUMP of giant wings grows louder as we see:

The sky to the northeast, blackened with aircraft flying in formation, speeding closer and closer and closer until:

The men whirl to watch them streak overhead, far faster than any tantacor. Ornithopters, manned by shadowy pilots.

NED

My God.

FRANK

(clutching Ned)

Flying machines? Are they British?

NED

If they are then we been on this crazy planet too long.

FRANK

The Black Shaloodmen. It must be.

(subtitled)

Hanju, milk.

(giving Hanju a shove)

Now!

NED

The black who?

FRANK

Shaloodmen. There are traders' tales of a flying machine cult, a boiling black lake far beyond the Mare Acidalium. A people called the Shaloodmen.

The aircraft circle back around, in a wide arc.

NED

They're coming back, Major Rider.

They buzz overhead once more.

FRANK

Are they attacking? Are they dropping bombs? For God's sake, Christmas--

PARKER

(pointing)

Lieutenant, what the hell's that thing?

Something weaves its way in and out among the ornithopters, a sparrow among ravens. It's the V-1. It breaks away and circles over the plaza, then alights.

Six ornithopters touch down behind it.

A strange figure climbs out of the V-1. Skin black and glistening, black hair sculpted into a huge crustacean pompadour. Dressed in bones and alien leathers.

Similarly attired Martians climb out of the aviplanes and surround him. He spots Frank on the balcony. Starts toward them. Yn Guardsmen block his path, harpoons lowered. The boneman stops. Looks up at Frank inquiringly.

NED

Looks like he wants to talk to you, Major. Your guards are holding him back.

Hanju hurries out with a flagon of ulik milk. Frank downs it, wipes his mouth.

EXT. GRAND PLAZA - DAY

Frank, followed by Ned, Lewisham, Parker, and Hanju, cross from Frank's palace to meet the boneman.

FRANK

(to Ned)

Point me toward him, will you?

Ned turns him to face the boneman.

NED

Are you still the Faht Palaht, then?

FRANK

As I understand it, at the next solstice I'm to be strapped to five dilduks, pointed in the five directions of the Martian compass, and dismembered.

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)

(beat)

Until then, yes.

(starts off, arms wide)

Hope I'm up to this. Apparently my Canal
Martian leaves something to be desired.

POV FRANK - WINESIGHT

The shivery bits of his winesight assemble themselves out of
darkness. The boneman gestures to his guard to stay back.
He comes closer. An oddly familiar swagger to his walk.

FRANK

(subtitled)

Greetings, birdyman. Why have you and
your birdymen, er, disturbulated... the
skies over my big pretty houses?

BONEMAN

(subtitled)

To helping you, I for coming have...come.

FRANK

What?

(subtitled)

Forgive me...my tongue resembles an
ancient cheese.

The boneman grins.

BONEMAN

I'm here to save your remarkably pale ass.

FRANK

Jeff!

He's amazed, then laughs. They embrace. Frank comes away
with black stuff all over his face.

JEFF

Sorry about the warpaint... I've brought
you some splendid men, and some splendid
machines.

Ned looks him over skeptically. Then they embrace.

FRANK

But who are these-- how did you--

Jeff signals to his Shaloodmen, and they come forward.

JEFF

You can't fart on this planet without
fulfilling some crazy prophecy or other.
I'll tell you all about it. But we've
been aloft for thirty hours. Feed us.

INT. FRANK'S PALACE - DINING HALL - DAY

Two small Glades children, one clutching a jointed wooden doll of a Gladesman warrior, peer around a thick drapery.

The thickset, powerful, black-smearing Shaloodmen tear into roast dilduk joints, at a huge table with Frank at its head.

One of the Shaloodmen sees the children. Makes a scary face.

The children duck back behind the drape. Peer out again.

A Gladeswoman brings Jeff a heaped platter. Before she can hand it to him a Shaloodman grabs it from her and pushes her aside. Tastes the food. Then gives it Jeff.

NED

Suspicious bastards, aint they?

JEFF

They live in a valley with enemies in the mountains all around. They've learned to be wary. And extremely clever. They had some of the most ingenious machines-- things they had invented themselves, not just hand-me-downs from the old days. Everywhere you looked, this foul stuff--
(dabs at his face)
--was bubbling up out of the ground. Well, they don't just wear it, they've learned how to use it. Their engines are powered by it.

The children creep from behind the drape and approach the Shaloodman. He's not looking. They come very close. He turns. They don't move. He makes another scary face. They smile. He smiles, sort of hideously.

Frank passes Jeff another slab of dilduk haunch.

FRANK

But how did you end up in this tar pit?

JEFF

I can't explain it. By rights I should be dead, atomized. The next thing I knew I was on the other side of Mars.

FRANK

You said this apery coil of theirs acted like a shield? The force of the blast may have collapsed this gravity shield on you... perhaps you didn't travel across Mars at all--maybe you passed through it.

JEFF

I don't recommend that we try to repeat the experiment. And the main thing is that I am here. And I want to fight with you. When do we attack?

Frank looks at Ned. Ned raises an eyebrow, as if to say, This ought to be good.

FRANK

Yes, well, the fact of the matter is, we already did. Three days ago. Fourteen simultaneous strikes against the seat of British power in each Territory, a hundred thousand fierce Martian warriors acting more or less in concert to throw the oppressor's yoke from their necks.

JEFF

And? Well?

NED

They got their fierce Martian asses whupped.

FRANK

Everywhere except Qiqwis, we still haven't heard from them. We outnumbered them two to one, but it didn't matter. Not against their Enfield repeaters, when we had only a few hundred Waheelat riflewomen... Not against their mammoth land ironclads when we had only Gladesmen on dilduks and wormwagons full of Thylesians.

JEFF

You still haven't heard from the Qiqwit?

FRANK

Qiqwis is nearly as far as your valley of the Black Shalood.

JEFF

But haven't you got one of their ghost helmets? I thought those boys could send their voices halfway across the planet.

FRANK

You know how the Martians are, Jeff. The Canalmen have their steam engines, the purple girls their rifles...these are sacred things to them. They can't be touched by outsiders. I'm sure your friends feel the same way about their...birds.

JEFF

They're called skatai. But it isn't any one invention they worship. It's invention itself.

(beat)

Let me ask you something, Faht Palaht. You're the messiah to these people, is that right? Tell me, what do you preach? What is your religion?

FRANK

Live simply. Abstain from tea drinking. Oh, and uh, you know. Planetary unity.

NED

You've definitely had the language barrier workin in your favor here.

JEFF

Unity. Tell me, how does ordering fourteen separate attacks in fourteen separate places by people who won't even lend each other a comb, embody the principles of your creed?

Frank doesn't know what to say. He looks away.

The Shaloodman reaches into his jerkin, takes out a pouch.

Jeff leans forward, pointing with a greasy finger.

JEFF

At this moment, what is Buller doing?

FRANK

Preparing to strike the coup de grace.

JEFF

So we must hit them now, hard.

FRANK

We lost in the neighborhood of fifty thousand men last week. And women--the Waheelat are down to a mere handful...without Tappan Tal--

JEFF

They won't be without Tal. That's a promise.

FRANK

I see. And what do you propose?

JEFF

Order the Waheelat to let my Shaloodmen take apart one of their diugir rifles.

FRANK
Take apart...

JEFF
So they can replicate it.

The Shaloodman opens the pouch. A tiny skatai or ornithopter sits in the palm of his hand. It's a clever machine.

Jeff stands up now. He's rolling.

JEFF
To begin with they'll need a Thylesian wormwagon, and a Qiqwis ghost helmet, and some Hartopee shields. And the Canalmen must fork over one of their sacred bloody steam engines. Tell them it has been revealed to you, or threaten them with leprosy, or I don't know. You're the messiah, big brother. Act like one.

FRANK
But I don't--

JEFF
We can't fight them as Waheelats and Bramblemen and Hax'xas. We have to fight them as Martians. With Martian weapons.

The child with the doll hands it to the Shaloodman. He sits it in the toy skatai's cockpit. Touches a tiny lever. It takes off, flapping. The children run after it, laughing.

They run past Jeff, who sidesteps them. Frank is smiling.

FRANK
Jefferson Rider, Martian.

JEFF
Why not? You always say a Yankee has no home of his own.

FRANK
I can't do it, Jeff. I can't be what you need me to be. I'm not a messiah. I'm not even a hero.

He rips off the V.C., throws it down on the table.

JEFF
Frank...

FRANK
I'm a killer, Jeff. A hired assassin. That prophecy? I didn't fulfill it just by showing up and having white skin. I
(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)
 fulfilled it by murdering the old Alpir.
 (beat)
 Just as Thomas Rider ordered me to do.

This hits Jeff like a slap. He tries to recover.

JEFF
 Perhaps... well, perhaps that really is
 how things were meant to be.

FRANK
 No, Jeff. That's nonsense.

JEFF
 Well then, at least...at least don't miss
 this chance to--

FRANK
 To redeem myself? No. I... I'm tired,
 Jeff. I can't fight anymore.

JEFF
 You're tired. Fine.

He grabs the wineskin from Hanju and chucks it at Frank.

JEFF
 Have another glass of fish sperm.

Storms out. Ned runs after him. Frank sits, depressed.
 Hanju hands him the bottle of ulik juice. He looks at it.

POV FRANK - WINESIGHT/WATERTIME

The room unravels and reweaves itself, shimmering. The
 wineskin is a big service revolver. Colonel Harry Rider is
 handing it to him. A sound of water.

COL. RIDER
 All that is best in our laws and our
 history, son, is the fruit of the love
 between brothers. Remember that.

FRANK
 I will, sir.

The roar of waves grows louder. Then it fades.

HANJU
 (worried)
Faht Palaht beb? Tikka teu?

FRANK
 The Watertime.

He picks up the V.C., then stands and runs after Jeff.

The toy skatai buzzes Jeff and flaps right at us.

EXT. ASHTALAN - HARPOON SHOPS - DAY

A vast beamed workshop. Shaloodmen work alongside Gladesmen and others. The pace frenetic, spirits high.

Jeff enters, in Gladesman armor, followed by Ned, still in a tattered uniform. Jeff raises his fist. Silence. A thousand Martian eyes turn toward him. Jeff grins.

NED

Like that kettledrum head of yours wasn't already big enough.

Jeff punches the air in a salute.

JEFF

Faht Palaht!

ALL

FAHT PALAHT!

Frank enters, in full regalia, looking the part for the first time. A Shaloodman hurries up. Jeff nods to him.

A ROAR. A RUMBLE. The workmen stand aside to make room for:

A wormwagon plated with armor bugs, powered by a Shalood combustion engine, bristling with Waheel rifles. Fearsome, crazy-looking. The driver pops out, wearing a ghost helmet.

JEFF

Your Paleness, I give you the armored phrank. It can do twenty miles an hour on level ground and never lose touch with its companions. We force him onto the defensive, then hit him with these, hard and fast at the weak points in his line. The first division of phranks that breaks through will just keep on going to Palion City, while we pour infantry through the gap. At the same time Ned and I take forty of your worst reprobates right into Fort Regina and disrupt command.

FRANK

And how do we force him onto the defensive? He has 35,000 men massed at the Aelita Gap, with Iron Mammoths and coil ships. He is about to attack us!

JEFF

He won't get the chance. This is what I've been thinking: what's the most precious thing on Mars right now to him?

FRANK

The forge.

JEFF

And that's where we hit him first. In force. He won't know if it's a feint or if he should send troops to meet the attack. He may lose a week in arguing about it. Then he'll either dig in where he is, at that gap in the Bramble, or leave Palion exposed. Either way-- Ned?

Ned turns and walks out of the hall. Jeff runs after him.

EXT. ASHTALAN - STREET - DAY

Jeff grabs Ned's shoulder. Ned knocks it off. Turns.

NED

Jeff. Let's say you win this, and chase John Bull off of Mars. What next?

JEFF

Go back to old Malis and chase him out of America, too, I guess.

NED

And then what? Turn it into a free republic? Sort of like in Texas? You all gonna have slaves in this republic? Sort of like in Texas?

Jeff just looks at him. Doesn't know what to say.

NED

The first thing the British did when they won in 1814 was free the black man. I can't forget that. You're my best friend, Jeff, but I'm an officer in Her Majesty's Service. I can't forget that either.

Frank and three Guards come up to them.

NED

You got let me get back to my--to our regiment in Palion, or lock me up. Considerin I just heard your grand goddamn strategy for the tenth time in three days, I recommend you lock me up.

For once Jeff doesn't know what to say. Looks at Frank.

FRANK

You are free to rejoin your regiment, Lieutenant. I think you'll find them camped at the Aelita Gap.

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)
 (subtitled, to Guards)
 Escort him to the gate and give him a
 week's fresh water and a pandhal. One
 with a nice slow leak.

He walks away. Jeff looks at Ned.

NED
 Jeff. Forgive me, but I hafta say...none
 of this is gonna unhang your poor father.

JEFF
 Ned, I...Goodbye. Fight well.

They shake hands. They may never see each other again.
 Jeff turns and goes after Frank. The guards flank Ned.

NED
 I won't bother telling you to be careful.

EXT. THE SHADOWGLADES - DAY

Ned poles with one hand and bails with the other. In the
 distance strange Stanipar beckons.

EXT. STANIPAR - DAY

A cold dawn. Campfires flicker in the immemorial streets.

A sentry on the old shield wall. A Gatling crew dozes.

A familiar DRONE. The GUN CAPTAIN stirs. A THUD. A pretty
 little egg rolls up to his boots.

GUN CAPTAIN
 Oh, Jaysus.

EXT. STANIPAR - DAY

The sky is filled with skatai and tantagors. Puffs of
 artillery fire on the ground. Bombs going off.

Two skatai alight. Martians jump out and advance. They take
 heavy fire, but raise shields to parry it. Another skatai
 lands behind them. Another. The attacking force swells.

They can see the towers of the Forge in the distance.

A LAXXIP
 Faht Palaht!

He leads a screaming charge. The Tommies are overwhelmed.

INT. HEADQUARTERS - STANIPAR - DAY

A strange metallic room. Ned, bruised and weary, sits on a camp stool. Armed soldiers stand by as Exham circles.

EXHAM

..and so they let you escape. With full knowledge of their plans, which, purportedly, include an attack on this--

BOOM! BOOM-BOOM! A shout. A soldier runs in.

SOLDIER

My lord, we're under attack! By all kinds of Marshies, using everything they got. Including some kind of aeroplanes.

Exham looks pale. His lips disappear. BOOM!

EXHAM

A unified attack-- but--

NED

I ought to just sit here and let you get yourself purportedly killed.

(stands up)

Sergeant, what is our troop strength?

SOLDIER

Seven hundred and two, sir! Fourteen down with the Marshie heaves.

NED

Seven hundred and two! Goddamn it!

He runs out, stopping to take the soldier's Webley.

EXT. STANIPAR - DAY

Ned and Exham creep around a building. Eggs EXPLODE. Men stumble by drenched in wormfire. Toad-monkeys leap about.

EXHAM

Calm down, Lieutenant. You said yourself this attack was meant only as a feint.

NED

It aint a feint if it actually succeeds! They've sent five times what we have! In God's name where are all our men?

EXHAM

Er, South Africa, actually. There is some sort of scuffle with the Boers.

(MORE)

EXHAM (cont'd)
Rotten timing. Still, one never imagined
Rider would actually be able to...

NED
Where's the goddamn telegraph?

Exham points to a building opposite. They wait, then run
across the street, Ned firing at the sky. They make it:

INT. TELEGRAPH POST - DAY

Ned and Exham rush in.

NED
Wireman, get Palion HQ. Tell them by no
means to divert troops from Aelita Gap.

EXHAM
Belay that, wireman. Lieutenant
Christmas, we can't give up the forge. I
would rather lose all the territories and
see Palion City burned to the ground--

WIREMAN
I'm afraid it's a moot point, sirs. The
Marshies cut the wire five minutes ago.

EXHAM
(softly, to Ned)
Lieutenant, there is a gravity transport
loaded with finished coils...if it should
fall into their hands or be destroyed...

BOOM! Exham jumps.

NED
I can't think of a better excuse for you
to weasel out of this mess, my lord.
(pulls his gun)
But we're taking men with us, not any
goddamn coils.

Exham's lips vanish again.

EXT. STANIPAR - TOWER - DAY

A lanky pair of Putulors raise the red banner of Mars.
The gravity transport streaks overhead, wake sparkling.

EXT. FORT REGINA - BULLER'S QUARTER'S - NIGHT

A finger trails a wake in green liquid. Buller is in his
winebath, looking calm, dictating to Trotter by lamplight.

BULLER

"...all of which forces me to conclude, my lord, that the attack of which we received reports before losing contact with Stanipar station was merely a feint, and that the real attack will be made on the Army of Mars in its staging area on the edge of the Bramble. If the assurances Sir Thomas makes for his new coilplanes prove accurate, we shall be more than ready for this last blow of desperation when it falls."

A soft, distant BUZZ. Buller splashes upright.

BULLER

What's that?

The sound stops. Buller listens, then shrugs.

BULLER

(yawns)

I remain, yours etcetera..

EXT. NEAR PALION - SKY - NIGHT - SIMULTANEOUS

Phobos and Deimos watch as eight droning skatai flap west.

INT. JEFF'S SKATAI - NIGHT

Jeff peers through a Shalood oculus out his bird's viewslit.

POV JEFF

The ancient pinnacles of Palion loom in the double moonlight.

Jeff turns to his Djee pilot, who's wearing a song helmet.

JEFF

(Havooli subtitled)

Cut the engines.

The Djee repeats the command into his helmet. Hits the throttle.

INT. ANOTHER SKATAI - NIGHT

An Urfee pilot, in his helmet, hits his throttle. A motley squad of tough-looking Martians pass a skin of green wine.

INT. ANOTHER SKATAI - NIGHT

A Sapellador hits the throttle. Laxxaps clean their djuqirs.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

The birds flap, silent now, toward the beetling citadel.

EXT. AELITA GAP - EDGE OF BRAMBLE - NIGHT

Dawn. A mile wide gap in the mad purple tangle of the Bramble, dwindling in the distance to a whitish line. Empty and still. Murmurweed blows GRUMBLING across.

Facing the Gap, a jagged maze of British trenches. Dusty Tommies pile up sandbags, unroll razor wire, set up Gatlings.

A sergeant cracks the whip over a digging crew of Hax'xas.

Behind the trench line, an iron mile of Mammoths, gun turrets fixed on the Gap. Their crews sit atop them, smoking.

Behind the line of Mammoths, on low sandhills, gun emplacements, Maxims and converted Navy guns trained on the Gap. In the rear spreads the British camp, with gravity ships coming and going like an aerial railroad.

Atop one sandhill, a shiny weird Exham Ray cannon. This is the command post of Lieutenant General Lord METHUEN. He stands with his aides beside the Ex-Ray gun. Raises his binoculars, obviously impatient.

AIDE 1

Perhaps they lost their nerve.

AIDE 2

Or they put everything they had into their go at Stanipar.

AIDE 3

Here comes a gravity scout!

A little scoutcraft, all fins, rivets and gilt, streaks out of the Bramble and swoops past, flashing a Morse message.

AIDE 3

"Gap empty." Yes, we can see that.
"Ashtalan deserted."

AIDE 1

Then where are they?

AIDE 2

Maybe they're crawling all the way under
the Bramble on their bellies!

All but Methuen laugh. He raises his binoculars again.

AIDE 3

"D-U-S-T." Dust?

METHUEN

What the devil?

POV METHUEN - BINOCULARS

Rising up from the Bramble on either side of the Gap, two
immense dust clouds. A last 'ha' hangs stranded in the air.

EXT CITADEL - CENTRAL DONJON - ROOF - NIGHT

Sentries at the far corners of the massive tower.

A sentry leans on the rampart, looking down wistfully.

EXT. CITADEL - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Two big laughing Tommies dally with a tiny Hax'xa woman.

EXT. CITADEL - CENTRAL DONJON - ROOF - NIGHT

An arrowbug jabs through the sentry's forehead from behind,
buzzing irritably. He slumps forward, revealing a skatai
swooping in onto the roof. It alights. Another alights
behind it. Commandos clamber out, robed in black.

Jeff runs to the roof door, where another sentry lies dead,
an arrowbug buzzing in his throat. Jeff reaches down, snaps
it in half. He steps through the door, followed by his men.

EXT. CITADEL - NIGHT

The other skatai scatter and alight on surrounding rooftops
amid dead sentries. Commandos creep out.

INT. CITADEL - A CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A Queen's Martian Guardsman, a savage pink Djee in khaki and
puttee, stands by the door to the roof.

The door bursts open. Jeff and his men pile out. A Laxxap
grabs the Guardsman, throws a rusty arm around his mouth.

They look around. The corridor is deserted.

Jeff takes an egg bomb from a canvas sack. He pulls the waist of the Guardsman's breeches and drops the egg in.

JEFF

I'm afraid you now have a bomb in your trousers, Corporal.

A distant BOOM! The Guardsman jumps. Jeff grins.

JEFF

If you move slowly and predictably you ought to be all right. Do you know where the prisoner Tal is being kept?

The Guardsman nods. The Laxxap gives him a shove and they go. Somewhere an alarm bell starts to CLANG.

INT. CITADEL - ANOTHER CORRIDOR - NIGHT

They come to an intersection of six crooked corridors. At the far end a platoon of Guardsmen charge toward us.

The commandos drop and duck behind walls, firing at the Guardsmen who return intense fire.

Jeff cries out. Looks down.

His foot is bleeding. He ignores it. He grabs three of his men, and sends them down three different corridors with their bomb sacks. He grabs the Guardsman.

JEFF

Which way?

The Guardsman points to an empty corridor. Jeff puts a mean Urfee scimitar to his back and shoves him along, limping.

INT. CITADEL - DUNGEONS - TAL'S CELL

Two purple hands clasp each other through the bars. A soft distant BOOM. One hand twitches.

Tal tugs her hand free, and sits up.

TAL

Sister, did you hear that?
(lifts the dead hand)
Sister?

She lets it fall, then stands up. Grabs the bars.

TAL
I will kill one million Englishmen!

BOOM! The walls shake. A tiny JINGLE. Tal looks down.

The Orbicle of Jasp rolls across the cell. Stops a foot away. She looks at it.

INT. CITADEL - ANOTHER CORRIDOR

Smoke, panic, EXPLOSIONS. Jeff gaily hurling egg bombs into every doorway they pass.

He and the Guardsman surprise a tall, hefty HIGHLANDER who, seeing Jeff's long Urfee k'rip, draws both saber and pistol.

HIGHLANDER
I can kill ye with this...
(brandishes pistol)
...or I can kill ye with this...
(slices the air)
...but either way I'll kill ye.

Jeff eyes his k'rip longingly. A low WOBBLE.

BOOM. The Highlander is gone. Jeff turns to see the Native Guardsman with his fly buttoned, grinning.

GUARDSMAN
You no have t'e time, beb.
(grins)
Never before you dint see no mutineer?

JEFF
As a matter of fact, I have. Come on.

Jeff's limp is very bad. The Djee stops. He crouches down. Jeff climbs onto his broad back. They lumber off.

EXT. AELITA GAP - DAY - POV METHUEN - BINOCULARS

The dust cloud roils out of the Bramble. Suddenly the dust is torn to shreds. Black flapping shapes emerge.

AIDE 3
Birds!

METHUEN
Aeroplanes! They have aeroplanes!

EXT. AELITA GAP - TRENCHES - DAY

The Tommies look up as the skatai growl overhead, dropping bombs, strafing with rifle fire.

The wave of skatai breaks along the battlefield. They buzz the line of Mammoths, firing and dropping bombs.

A bomb rolls harmlessly off the steel flank of a Mammoth. Its turrets wheel wildly. Its Gatlings spit fire.

The bomb blasts a hole in the ground. The Mammoth lurches into it, tips, struggles to right itself. Still firing.

Holes blow in the fuselage of the skatai. Its pilot slumps. It flaps awkwardly, droning, then crumples and slams into another Mammoth. FA-TOOM! The Mammoth is unscratched.

EXT. AELITA GAP - COMMAND POST - DAY

The officers cheer, except for Methuen.

METHUEN

For God's sake, Colville, get that Ray Cannon aimed at the sky!

Aide 1 runs, waving, to the Exham Ray crew. They start to crank the weird cannon around.

Skatai sail overhead, raining eggs, firing. Swooping, diving, all across the battlefield.

Aide 2 is blown to bits. Aide 3 clutches his chest, falls.

METHUEN

I want coilboats to engage those things!

AIDE 4

Sir, the coilboats are equipped only with belly guns...we did not anticipate --sir?

Methuen is looking through his binoculars again.

METHUEN

Good God.

EXT. EDGE OF BRAMBLE - DAY

From the immense billows of dust on either side of the Gap emerge the phranks. They plow toward the line of trenches.

EXT. COMMAND POST - DAY

Methuen lowers his binoculars. Behind him the Ray Cannon is madly warming up, emitting sparks and hums.

METHUEN

They're turning our flank. I want the Gordons to extend left. I want the Devons to move right. Swing the guns wide, wide, there's no one in the blasted middle! And where the devil is my ray gun?

A huge SIZZLE, a SNAP, a series of loud POPS. Sparkling light dribbles out of mouth of the cannon, then stops.

AIDE 4

The Mammoths will stomp those wagons like Hartopee bloodroaches, sir.

AIDE 1

They shan't even make it over the trenches.

EXT. BRAMBLE - ARMORED PHRANK - DAY

A ROAR of engines. Frank rocks as the phrank comes barelling like a locomotive on mescaline through the Bramble and bursts onto the battlefield. He grins.

EXT. TRENCHES - DAY

Tommies cower, among the dead as the phranks roar up and over the lip of the trench, guns blazing, wheelfeet reaching... reaching... grinding... reaching.... And they're across.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - ARMORED FRANK - DAY

Frank lets out a whoop as his phrank spans the trench.

Two Mammoths lumber into his path, Gatlings firing.

Bullets spray harmlessly off the armorbug plating.

FRANK

(subtitled)

Aim for the gaps! We'll slip between their legs like Hartopee bloodroaches!

The driver relays the message through his helmet.

EXT. COMMAND POST - DAY

The Exham Ray cannon is warming up again.

METHUEN

I suppose actually hitting the target is too much to expect from the cream of British gunnery.

AIDE 1

Those things of theirs move deuced fast.

A pair of skatai streak overhead, firing. Methuen and Aides 1 and 4 duck. Only Methuen and Aide 1 stand up again.

METHUEN

Where are the coilboats?

POUF! A puff of smoke billows from the Exham Ray cannon.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - FRANK'S ARMORED PHRANK - DAY

A narrow and narrowing gap between the two nearest Mammoths.

The phranks are under the Gatlings now. Bullets rip across the top of the shield-rim. The men duck but Frank takes a draft of ulik milk and stays standing. His men stand up too.

Frank rips off his helmet. He looks giddy, blissful.

POV FRANK - THE WATERTIME

A paisley tapestry of battle. Frank looks down at himself. He wears golden mail, and rides an eight-legged charger. Beyond lies a stormy green sea.

Two mountainous paleodilduks loom ahead, converging on him. All around Martians in fabulous armor are charging.

FRANK

I...don't believe--

DRIVER

Believe, Faht Palaht. Believe.

The look of wonder in Frank's seen-it-all eyes.

The phranks roar through the gap. The Mammoths COLLIDE.

EXT. ARMORED FRANK - DAY

Frank turns and looks back.

FRANK
 (subtitled)
 We're through! Bring up the infantry!

EXT. BRAMBLE - DAY

Armored wormwagon transports emerge. Foot soldiers pour out of them, charging onto the battlefield under the red banner.

EXT. COMMAND POST

Methuen puts down his binoculars. Grim, a hint of fear.

METHUEN
 Signal the retreat, Lieutenant.
 Lieutenant? Lieutenant?

He's alone. The Ray Cannon fizzes, crackles, and EXPLODES.

INT. CITADEL - TELEGRAPH ROOM

Buller and Trotter and AIDES pace, smoking, anxious. Soldiers run in and out with reports. Distant BOOMS.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR
 The line to Aelita has gone dead.

BULLER
 (sipping Martian wine)
 Send in the Erebus.

TROTTER
 Sir, it hasn't been tested...

BULLER
 Send it in.
 (A big BOOM)
 And get these rats out of my house!

INT. CITADEL - DUNGEONS - TAL'S CELL

A pakou darts across the slimy wall. Tal stands, listening to the sounds of fighting. A huge BLAST nearby. A JINGLE.

The Orbicle of Jasp rolls right up to her feet, quivering.

She reaches down, and picks it up. Looks up and sees:

POV TAL - WATERTIME

A warrior, pursued by a cloud of wasplike demons, rides his eight-legged steed down an infinite stair.

Tal reaches out with a rich-robed arm.

TAL

Jeff.

INT. CITADEL - STAIRWAY

The Djee struggles down slimy steps with Jeff on his back. They hit bottom and come through a door into the dungeon.

INT. CITADEL - DUNGEONS

The Djee hesitates. Jeff, an odd look on his face, points.

JEFF

She's that way. To the left and down.

DJEE

How you can know t'at?

JEFF

I-- I have no idea.

INT. CITADEL - DUNGEONS - TAL'S CELL

Jeff and the Djee hurry up. Jeff climbs down and Tal and Jeff embrace through the bars. Tal growls at the exhausted Djee.

JEFF

He's with us.
(holds up an eggbomb)
Stand back.

Jeff lobs the egg against the bars. BOOM!

Tal rushes out. Jeff hands her a pistol and a sword.

JEFF

You didn't seem like the type for roses.

She licks his cheek. He squirms, then winces.

Tal kneels down to look at his shattered ankle.

TAL
 You'll lose the foot if I don't tend it.
 (crouches down)
 Climb on.

JEFF
 It's nothing.

TAL
 The last time an orbicled Queen of the
 Waheelat voluntarily knelt before a
 seedbag was 22,436 years ago. Get on.

JEFF
 Really, Miss Tal, I--

She stands, brandishing the sword.

TAL
 I will hack off your foot and harden the
 stump with hot coals. When agony renders
 you unconscious your seedbag pride will
 not interfere with your good sense.

She crouches down again. He hesitates, then climbs on.

EXT. CITADEL - COILYARD - DAY

A huge inner courtyard of the Citadel, converted to a temporary launch for coilplanes. Dominating all, the immense black Erebus, a heavily armored bomber bristling with guns.

In a corner of the yard, a door opens. Jeff, Tal, and the Djee creep out. They steal across the yard, headed toward a scout tethered nearby. They reach it. Tal sets Jeff down, climbs the tether to the bobbing scout.

The Djee picks Jeff up and starts to help him climb.

NED (O.S.)
 It's over, Captain Rider. Your Marshies
 are all dead or in irons.

Jeff and the Djee freeze, look around.

Ned and an INFANTRYMAN aim service .44s at Jeff.

NED
 Come on down from there, Jeff. Miss Tal.

The Infantryman jabs his gun in the Djee's ribs. FIRES. The Djee falls dead.

Jeff dangles by his hands from the tether. He looks down.

His blood drips onto the flagstones.

He climbs madly toward Tal. She reaches down to hoist him.

The infantryman raises his gun.

NED

No!

Ned jumps the infantryman. A SHOT. Ned falls, blood on his chest. Another SHOT. The infantryman falls.

Tal's revolver trails smoke. Jeff, safe aboard, reaches toward the ground, stricken.

Ned crawls over to unloop the tether. Looks up at Jeff.

NED

Please... try... to be careful.

He lets go of the tether, and then of the Tether.

Jeff settles in behind the controls, face grim.

EXT. MIDAIR - DAY

Dusk. The gravity scout streaks away from the Citadel.

It flies over an Iron Mammoth that's headed for the citadel

INT. GRAVITY SCOUT - DAY

Looking past Tal and Jeff to the terrain ahead. A slender line of shattered phranks and wormwagons can be seen, forming themselves into a ragged circle.

JEFF

They did it. All the way to the gates of Palion! Two hundred miles in a day.

TAL

There aren't very many of them.

EXT. PALION OUTSKIRTS - DAY

The gravity scout hovers in the background. Tal carries Jeff over to the rebels. Jeff and Frank touch foreheads.

EXT. CAMP - DAY

A company of perhaps two hundred exhausted rebels. Broken-down wormwagons roll up. Rebels unload captured materiel. Jeff lies by a fire. Tal tends to his wound.

TAL

We must press the attack while there is light in the sky.

JEFF

She's right. You can't stop half a league from victory. They're down now. As down as they may ever be again.

FRANK

Yes, but how? Look at us! We're fifty miles ahead of the rest of the army. Between casualties and vehicle breakdowns...

A ROAR, as of a cataract. They all look up.

The Erebus, a huge iron bat, hurtles over head, streaks away. It banks wide, maneuvering clumsily to circle back. A terrifying sight. The soldiers cower.

FRANK

Well, we clearly can't stay here. I think I can get us in.

JEFF

How?

Frank points toward the Citadel.

The Mammoth we glimpsed earlier is at the gates. It begins to rock, battering with all of its horsepower and tons of steel.

FRANK

The first time I saw one of those brutes, I wanted one of my own.

A distant WHAM-WHAM-WHAM as the Mammoth hammers away.

A ROAR. Erebus is back. Bombs fall from its underside.

'BOOM-BOOM-BOOM-BOOM. Dirt and men and machines go flying. Everyone hits the ground.

Riflemen, phrank gunners FIRE at the Erebus.

Bullets spray off its iron hull as it streaks away.

Tal, Jeff and Frank sit up, covered in dirt. Weird SCREAMS.

TAL
What is that awful sound?

JEFF
Horses!

FRANK
Yes...the men were planning to eat them.

Jeff scrambles to his feet. Tal is left with a handful of healing dust.

TAL
You aren't--where are you going?

JEFF
Into the Watertime.

EXT. CAMP - DAY

In the lengthening shadows Jeff, Tal, Frank and a hundred horses, saddled and healthy, are surrounded by rebels.

JEFF
(to Tal)
Translate for me, please.

The Erebus ROARS overhead. Drops another payload.

The men duck the BLASTS. A phrank BLOWS UP. All stand.

JEFF
(to the soldiers)
Men of Mars, er... no. Yes. These great beasts are called "horses", creatures sacred to the Faht Palaht's forefathers. Ridden properly they will bear us, one hopes, to a, er, to a decisive victory.
(to Tal)
Translate!

TAL
(rolls her eyes, subtitled)
We need volunteers to go spank the ignoble buttocks of the English dung-slugs before it gets dark.

All hands go up. Jeff is pleased. Starts to choose men.

EXT. CITADEL - GATE - DAY

Ten more minutes of light. The rogue Mammoth continues to work on the gate. WHAM--WHAM--CRACK! The gate shatters.

EXT. CITADEL - RAMPARTS - DAY

An Exham Ray cannon FIRES at the Mammoth.

EXT. CITADEL - GATE - DAY

The Mammoth vaporizes. Tommies in the breach CHEER. Then stop. A distant THUNDER of hooves, getting nearer fast.

A SOLDIER
It's a bloody cavalry charge!

EXT. OUTSKIRTS - DAY

A hundred wild riders against the bloody sky. Jeff and Tal lead the charge. He gives a ululating, pure American rebel yell. Tal grins, and does the same.

EXT. FORT REGINA - RAMPARTS - DAY

Artillery THUDS. The Ray cannon fires again.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Shells tear into the charging riders. The wand of light creates a huge hole in the ground. Riders plunge into it.

EXT. FORT REGINA - DAY

The Ray Cannon glows white, melts into a puddle that runs down the face of the citadel.

INT. CITADEL - TELEGRAPH ROOM

Buller stands with Exham and aides, as two Company technicians make final adjustments to new teleopictor. They turn a dial, and the grim image of Rider flickers to life.

RIDER
It costs me 2000 pounds a minute to operate this device, gentlemen. I refuse to pay so dearly for bad news.

An OFFICER runs up.

OFFICER
Sir, the Martians have launched another
attack--on horseback.

RIDER
Pathetic. Fire the Exham Ray cannons.

BULLER
We have done. They're worthless junk.

EXHAM
I believe that solar activity--sunspots--

BULLER
I placed my confidence in you and your
toys, Sir Thomas, though I knew they were
far from ready. If you weren't so bloody
keen to punish your bloody foster sons--

An EXPLOSION rocks the room. Sparks, falling masonry.

BULLER
(to an Aide)
Prepare the airships for evacuation.
Signal the Erebus to return to Earth.

EXHAM
Impossible--her supplies of oxygen, her
water condensers--she's unready for
another interplanetary flight.

BULLER
That is regrettable.
(to aide)
Signal the Erebus to scuttle herself.
(to teleopictor)
Good day, Sir Thomas. Assuming your
machines don't fail me again I will see
you in a few hours. In the PM's office.

He walks out with his aides. Rider fumes.

RIDER
Buller! Buller!
(to Exham)
Sunspots, Edward? Sunspots!

EXT. FORT REGINA - DAY

Martian horsemen urge their horses through the Gate.

The battered wormwagons roll up. Foot soldiers pour out.

The fighting is nasty, hand to hand, Martian steel against British.

Jeff, Frank and Tal wade into the melee, hacking around them.

TAL

Look!

She points.

The Erebus streaks through the sky, on a collision course with Mars itself. The sky filled with long red parachutes.

A huge EXPLOSION.

Martians cheer. The British line gives. Frank runs screaming into the gap, followed by a hundred Martians. Tommies throw up their hands in surrender.

INT. TELEGRAPH ROOM - NIGHT

Frank runs in to find it deserted, eerie. Telegraphs still clack and chatter. Rider himself is apoplectic with rage.

RIDER

Buller! Damn you! Buller! Buller!

FRANK

I'm afraid that General Sir Redvers has fallen into enemy hands.

RIDER

Franklin!

FRANK

Your army has surrendered. Mars is free.

RIDER

Your strategy was clever but it won't work twice. We'll be back. With even better machines...smaller...faster...

Frank smiles, calmly, and switches off the teleopictor.

FRANK

Not if we come to you first.

EXHAM (O.S.)

Satisfying, no doubt, but quite futile.

Frank turns to find Exham, holding him at gunpoint.

EXHAM

One of our scientists, Dr. Tesla, is on the verge of harnessing forces far more

(MORE)

EXHAM (cont'd)
powerful than any you have seen today.
You will not fare so well against weapons
of the future as you have today against
the weapons of someone else's past.

FRANK
Now that Mars is united--

EXHAM
A union that will last no longer than it
takes me to pull this trigger.

A SHOT. Blood seeps across the front Exham's white suit.
Jeff stands in the doorway. They watch Exham's body fall to
the floor.

FRANK
You know, I never liked that man.

Frank steps over the body. They walk out of the room and
down a long hall. Shouts and music come faintly at first,
then grow louder.

FRANK
I'd say our red friends have found the
Governor's cache of Earl Grey. I only
hope they haven't eaten the poor horses.

JEFF
Horses. All that chasing after coils and
lost cities and we kick their tails with
a hundred horses.

FRANK
Exham was wrong. People connected to
their history, armed with their own
legends, will always win over those who
have cut themselves off their past.

JEFF
You're talking about us and Father.

FRANK
Am I? I suppose I am.

EXT. CITADEL - INNER COURTYARD - NIGHT

Jeff and Frank walk out into pandemonium. Bonfires burn.
Drunken Martians sing, dance, play strange instruments.

JEFF
And Ned? He never forgot his history.

FRANK
He gave his life to save yours. Self-
sacrifice is not defeat.

Tal takes two corners of the Union Jack in each hand. Steps to the rim of the tower. Grins.

FRANK

I guess they just have to keep making more.

Tal leaps. The flag billows fat as a spinnaker. She floats down, easy and slow, dangling from her tricolored parachute.

EXT. PALION CITADEL - NIGHT

Jeff sits on a rampart. Below, fires burn. He looks up at the sky. A single green and blue droplet, very far away.

Tal pulls herself onto the tower's top, and walks over to Jeff, holding her strange carved object. Sits down beside him. They don't speak at first.

TAL

He was a worthy soldier, your friend.

Jeff takes her hand. She offers her gift roughly. A large, flattened sphere. He looks at it, unsure.

JEFF

Oh, your...thing. For me? Thank you.
What is it?

TAL

A q'it. A heart box.

JEFF

A heart-box? You mean...for your...
...for your lover?

She thrusts it at him, pulling its halves apart.

TAL

For your heart!

JEFF

For my...

TAL

When you are killed! It's aki wood.
It contains a natural preservative. One
year after a Waheelat dies in battle, her
family gather to eat her heart...

Jeff looks from the box to her breast, heaving picturesquely under her shift. Their eyes meet. Their mouths come together. Tal's tongue emerges, and she's about to lick Jeff's cheek. He takes her by the shoulders.

JEFF

Try it our way.

TAL

When you are killed! It's aki wood.
It contains a natural preservative. One
year after a Waheelat dies in battle, her
family gather to eat her heart...

Jeff looks from the box to her breast, heaving picturesquely
under her shift. Their eyes meet. Their mouths come
together. Tal's tongue emerges, and she's about to lick
Jeff's cheek. He takes her by the shoulders.

JEFF

Try it our way.

He guides her mouth to his, puts his arms around her. A nice
long soft Terran kiss. They part.

TAL

You know, the Xan Palao, when they came
to your planet...and built their city in
this place you call Africa...I wonder if
it ever occurred to you that they never
left, or died out. That you are their
descendent as much as anyone on Mars.

JEFF

Actually my uncle and Exham used to argue
about it quite a bit. They could never
come up with any evidence...

TAL

I think I can prove it right now.

Tal reaches into his trousers, feels around experimentally.
She grins. Jeff blushes, then takes her in his arms again.
They kiss. Jeff pulls away.

JEFF

Well?

TAL

The configuration is familiar.

She explores a moment longer, then he tries to tip her
backward. She pushes back, lifts herself onto him.

TAL

Try it our way.

She pushes him back. He stops her, looks at her strangely.

JEFF

You ladies don't by any chance...devour
your mates?

She puts her mouth to his throat. He falls backward, ready
to be devoured.

EXT. PALION CITADEL - DAY

Dawn. Tal and Jeff lie in each other's arms. Jeff sleeps but Tal is awake. She rolls away from Jeff, stands, dresses herself. Then pads silently away, carrying her sword.

INT. BULLER'S QUARTER'S - DAY

Buller sits on his bed, chained to it, in his long underwear. Drinking Martian wine. Pretty wasted.

BANG! Tal kicks the door open. Comes in.

TAL
Stand up, sh'taz. Stand up!

Buller rises, slowly. Tal walks over to him, sword raised. He trembles.

TAL
What your people did to mine can never be adequately avenged.

She slits open his union suit.

TAL
What you did to me, however...

She reaches down, out of the frame. Grabs ahold of what she finds there. His eyes widen in horror.

TAL
I have recently made a study of these organs of yours. I am told this little flap of skin here...
(gives a tug)
...serves no particular function. It is purely...ceremonial, if you will.
(another tug, smiles)
Much like my topknot.

She brings down the saber.

EXT. PALION CITY - CEMETERY - DAY

Jeff stands beside a fresh grave with a cross and the name NED CHRISTMAS, in a sea of fresh graves.

He turns and walk out of the cemetery.

Tal rides up on a roan mare, armed, saddlebags packed.

TAL

I have grown fond of these animals. They are more companionable than tantagors.

JEFF

You're welcome to that one. Shall we go for a ride? I've always wanted to see the caves of Yoh-Vombis...

Tal looks at him, steadily and sad.

JEFF

Oh. I see.

She swings up into the saddle.

TAL

As a girl I heard stories of a warrior sect of holy madwomen living in the Dralian hills. Perhaps they are there still. If they exist.

Jeff nods, trying to maintain a soldier's poise.

JEFF

I suppose I--had hoped that we--that you and I.... We fought well together....

TAL

We'll fight together again. In the next life. On the next planet. Someday.

At the same time their toughness gives way. Tal leans down from the saddle and they embrace again.

TAL

Jefferson Rider! I wish... I hope... I hope that when you return to Malis you kill many Englishmen.

She gives a kick and the horse starts away. Jeff watches for a moment, then runs after her. He reaches into his kit and pulls out the heart-box. He hands it up to her. She stops.

JEFF

If anyone wants to eat my heart, they'll have to come claim it from you.

She nods. She takes the box. He watches her ride out into the great red waste that once lay beneath the waves.

EXT. LONDON - MARS HOUSE - NIGHT

Sunset over Whitehall. The Union Jack droops as it is lowered from the Company's flagpole. A stoop-shoulder old clerk furls it and tucks into a velvet bag.

INT. LONDON - MARS HOUSE - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rider sits slumped at his desk, in a tiny pool of lamplight. A KNOCK at the door. He doesn't move. A CLERK enters, diffident, carrying a courier pouch.

RIDER

Please, no more dispatches tonight.

CLERK

Sir, I thought you might want to see this one. It's from Napier.

Rider takes the pouch, pulls out a bright yellow envelope, slits it, scans the report inside, printed on yellow paper. Smiles, chuckles evilly to himself. He stands up, puts his arm around the Clerk, his eyes alive, hungry.

RIDER

Come, Ashton, we'll dine at my club.

They walk out of the office, leaving the report lying in the pool of light. We can READ its cover:

"IMPERIAL BRITISH MARS COMPANY CONFIDENTIAL DISPATCH, FROM M.C. NAPIER, AGENT."

And its title: "VENUS: ESTABLISHING A COMPANY PRESENCE IN THE EMPIRE OF RAIN."

FADE OUT.

THE END