

**HIVE, QUEEN AND COUNTRY
OR A
SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE SET AGAINST THE SAVAGE DEPREDATIONS OF
THE HIVE**

Introduction

Hive, Queen and Country

In 1891 the Sun never sets upon the British Empire. It is an empire that spans four worlds; an empire won by accident as much as by design, its expansion founded upon faith in the ideals of a nation. With the latest innovations of technology the British flag and imperial way of life have been established on all the continents of Earth, the craters of Luna, Canals of Mars and the seas and islands of Venus. Imperialism has been propelled forward (but also sometimes reined in) by the forceful personalities of powerful men and women. In scientific, social, and political thought, mercantile and technological achievement The Empire is the most advanced human organization in the solar system. In the spring of 1891 it is to meet another society, one that doesn't have the engineering skills of Babbage and Brunel, the writings of Tennyson or Byron or the social philosophies of Gladstone. The Hive has but one thing. The Hive has hunger.

The Focus of the Campaign

Hive Queen and Country Campaign sourcebook primarily centers on the military efforts of the First Hive War. The efforts of the Imperial forces to contain and then destroy the Hive, an alien race of terrible ferocity and hunger, take place between the early spring of 1891 and the late summer of 1892. The Hive is an alien super-organism, a group of creatures like a colony of ants or termites magnified uncounted millions of times. Introduced from off-world into Victorian England the Hive is genetically programmed to feed, eating any bio-mass it encounters, and use that bio-mass to breed more hive members. Each successive generation is better able to thrive in local conditions. The Hive will feast and grow until it becomes large enough to make additional hives, undergoing fission like a single celled. The process will begin all over. The aliens will cover the entire Earth unless they are stopped. The only remnant of earthly flora and fauna will be those species the invaders have chosen to raise in their gardens, like the fungi grown by leafcutter ants.

The desperate military actions of HM forces are set against the larger background of a Victorian Era in which space travel is far more common than it is in our current era. The Great Powers, which competed so stiffly against each other for rule of Earth have all the inner planets on which to shoulder the White Man's Burden. Before the rediscovery of Aerolyth, the contra-gravitational mineral, the Victorian era was one of rapid technological advances. Giving Victorian engineers the challenges of designing for vehicles first for aerial navigation and then space flight and the rigors of interplanetary

travel was like throwing rocket fuel on a bonfire. A period of amazing growth has pushed forward the limits of human knowledge and engineering ability at an unprecedented rate.

A note on female characters

Although the era is named after a female to our modern eyes the women of the 19th century are terribly oppressed. They can not vote and much of society is officially closed to them. To be certain there were less formal routes of power and influence for women of a certain drive and character. It was not said that behind every great man stands a great woman without a modicum of truth. That being said gaming in the historical Victorian Era would still severely handicap players wishing to run female characters. In this altered universe female characters will still be exceptional but not nearly so much as in our history. Ada Lovelace, Sonya Kovalevsky and the brave soldiers of the Amazonians have blazed the way forward for women. A female inventor will raise few eyebrows. A female soldier is still more than a rarity. Check with your game master before you create a female character to ensure that she will be allowed. In the section of Victorian era personalities there are a number of women listed; some of these vibrant characters were the foundation of the Empire, others shocked the society of their day and challenged its values to their very core, often they did both.

Worlds of Hive Queen and Country

The Victorian period is one of immense progress in all fields of human endeavor; strides were made in every science, the value of human life validated as never before. Entire regions of the planet were explored, mapped, and exploited. Yet for all that was done there was much that was nearly done or left unfinished. The tradition of speculative fiction, both hard science fiction and what we now call techno-thrillers began in the Victorian Era as people rode a wave of change that made them look even farther into the future. Hive, Queen and Country takes place in a world where many of those “might have beens” became everyday realities. Where not only do great ocean liners ply the seas and vast airships cruise the sky but huge astral liners the airless darkness between the planets. It is a world, or worlds, that have the bright stamp of a human race that is vigorous, powerful, and above all hopeful for the future. It also has ancient races that are steeped in darkness and filled with hatred and envy of the Earthmen and what they represent. It is this evil, this fear, and hatred that will challenge the British Empire as never before.

The worlds of Hive, Queen and Country diverges from our history in several places, firstly in 1830 when Babbage’s Difference Engine becomes a working reality and forever changes the way that mathematical data is developed, handled and stored. Next comes John Lubbock’s accidental rediscovery of Aerolyth in 1865 on the Salisbury Plain, which allowed conquest of the air ocean above the Earth’s surface.

These two events lead directly to the colonization of the solar system by the Great Powers. After reaching the limits of the atmosphere the great powers looked to the vast reaches of interplanetary space for new realms to conquer. They found them in Earth’s nearest celestial neighbors, Luna, Venus, and Mars. The rockets of Hale and Mendeleyev-Konstantino and then the Etheric Engines of Ewing-Stuart gave them the

tools they needed. By 1891 colonies of Earthmen stood on the Moon, Venus and Mars. Everywhere they went they found marvels and surprises.

The new worlds were jewels in the crown of empire, Mars a dazzling ruby, Venus a vast opal. The moon is a dull lump of coal, but no less valuable for its lack of beauty. The race for the new worlds had begun in earnest in 1873. By 1880 men and women were living, working, and dieing on all three of the other planets. Each had their own treasures, but each also had its own ways of killing.

Mars is by far the most ancient and darkest of the new frontiers. Members of their own race greeted the first Europeans to land, the Men of Mars. How they came to be there is a riddle that took years to solve. It is a mystery layered in darkness, at its center where the real masters of the Martian globe, the True Martians, an alien an ancient race. The True Martians were proud; their history is like a dark well, the depths filled with foul and murky water. They had reached their heights millennia ago. If in some ways they had reached far above where Mankind now stood they had fallen far below the Earths darkest dreams.

Venus, on the other hand is a young world, covered in water, and shrouded by clouds. The Victorians were stunned to find human beings living upon its islands and small continents. But it is a humankind strangely twisted by a harsh and exotic world. Around the Men of Venus life is strewn across throughout the shallow warm seas and jungle covered surface in abundance. Soon the breadbasket of Venus would feed Earth's masses. Hunters would stalk exotic game across her islands and small continents and her seas would prove to be a challenge to whaler, fisherman, mariner, and ship as well.

Earth's nearest neighbor is the moon, airless and lifeless she held resources beyond measure and more that her share of surprises.

EARTH

The Nations of Earth

In Hive, Queen, and Country the British Empire, made up of the British Isles and many overseas colonies and territories is the most advanced and powerful nation on Earth. Before 1865 her power rested upon the World spanning Royal Navy, which in turn rested upon the most vigorous economy in existence. After the discovery of Aerolyth that power has been increasingly manifest in the Royal Navy's Aerial Squadrons, as well as her battleships and cruisers. On the Earth alone 310 million souls call Queen Victoria their sovereign; the Union flag flies over 13,216,202 square miles. In terms of tons of iron or steel or coal no nation produces more than The Empire.

France

Once a greater power than it is now, France continues to smart from her humbling defeat by Prussia 20 years ago. Even after losing a war and two provinces to Prussia France is still the most respected Continental Nation. She views the 22 miles of English Channel as something that has thwarted her ambitions for over 100 years. The French government is chaotic, subject to change with little warning. This has not prevented France from acquiring an immense colonial empire of its own. On Earth the Tricolor flies above colonies in South American, Africa, and Asia. In space French expeditions have landed upon the Moon, Venus and Mars. They constantly seek new lands to exploit. Her ships ply the oceans of the Earth, the air above it, and the astral sea between the planets.

Imperial Russia

The Russian Bear has been a frightening specter for fifty years. The Czar commands a huge empire. Even though it stretches from the German border to the Pacific Ocean, from arctic wastes to the Hindu-Kush Mountains the Russians hunger for more land, especially for a warm water port. In a way no one would ever have imagined the Czar's dream came true in August of 1870. After the success of the Sputnik mission to the Moon no nation could call Russia backward, no power could afford to ignore the awakening bear any longer. Even though the Czar was forced to recant his claim to the entire lunar surface he was able to extract both terrestrial and celestial advantages from landing the first humans upon another world. The Russian navy is resurgent in the Black Sea, posing a serious threat to Turkey. Traders are opening the vast reaches of Russian Asia. Around the globe and on distant worlds as well the Russian Specter has never been so far reaching, dark and, foreboding.

German Reich

Germany is a new nation, being the product of the unification of a number of smaller states during the last thirty years. This process was directed by Otto von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor. A genius at foreign policy he provoked and won wars across the Continent that increased Prussia's influence both within (and sometimes over) the other German states and in Europe generally. In 1870 Prussia's rising power caused the French Second Empire to provoke the Franco-Prussian war, a conflict that proved disastrous for France and saw the fall of its Emperor, Napoleon III. Germany is not only a state with a powerful military but is also quickly developing vast industries and a comprehensive educational system. If the New German State is lacking in anything it would be overseas colonial possessions. To many this is the measure of greatness, and one who feels the need the most is Kaiser William II (b. 1859). A strange combination of bravado and naiveté the Kaiser has many characteristics that make him a poor monarch. The 1870 war that resulted in the annexation of two French provinces, Alsace and Lorraine. In addition the treaty that ended the Franco Prussian war imposed huge reparations upon France. It was Bismarck's hope that the debt would be so crushing that France would not be a threat for decades.

Austria-Hungarian Empire

The Hapsburgs control a vast and diverse empire, ranging from the shores of the Adriatic to the borders with Germany and Russia. Although still claiming the status of a first rate power they have little in the way of colonial holdings and have so far been unable to claim many off-world lodgments. The internal problems and political divisions between the Austrian and the Hungarian portions of the empire have proven to be economically ruinous. For every florin that is spent by the government in Austrian areas a like amount must go to Hungarian concerns. This would be less important if the disparity between the industrialization of the two internal regions wasn't so extreme. To some it seems that the illness afflicting the Sick Man of Europe is slowly moving westward and now the last Hapsburg Empire has contracted the disease.

The United States of America

The United States of America is a land of opportunity but so far is only marginally aware of the greater world around it. After surviving its bloody Civil War the reunited States embarked upon a program of continental expansion. In terms of surface area, population and industrial output the United States is a power of the first water. In military and naval terms it is a third rate nation. The shock of the War Between the States has left a lingering distaste for military matters and foreign complications. To many Americans it is enough to open the West for ranching and farming. The great commercial concerns of the East have seen the opening of the high frontier as a tremendous opportunity. Over Panama orbits a commercially owned space station, the only one of its kind. Below it thousands die attempting to connect the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans as American commercial rockets bring merchants and missionaries to Mars and Venus.

The Chinese Empire

Over a thousand years ago the Chinese Empire first experimented with rockets. It is a supreme irony that the Celestial Empire is too decadent and decayed to join the Great Powers as they claim vast territories on other worlds. The preoccupation of these powers with otherworldly prospects has given the Peacock Throne a much-needed breathing space. China, located far from the Equator is no longer as important as it once was. Certainly there are vast markets to be had in its teeming millions and uncounted souls for the missionaries to save, but compared to the wealth to be found off world the mysteries of China can not compete. It remains to be seen if the Chinese court can use this respite to recover their nation's former glory.

The Ottoman Empire

Rightly called "the sick man of Europe" the Ottoman Empire is a patchwork of races and religions, where sever ethnic strife can erupt at any time. The only non Christian nation in Europe Turkey is the bridge between Europe and the lands of the Middle East. The Sultan nominally controls much of the Balkans, Arabia, Anatolia, and North Africa but that control has been eroded by a series of wars of independence, actions by the Czar of Russia and the intrigues of other Great Powers, particularly the British seizure of control

of Egypt. With limited resources and plenty of troubles both on and within its borders the Ottoman Empire has been unable to participate in any extraterrestrial adventures. With its poor economic condition Ottoman Navy has been left with a limited amount of obsolete equipment and worse yet, a series of weak leaders have reduced what little effectiveness it might have to nothing. The Ottoman Empire's Army has an impressive paper strength and the courage and hardiness of the Turkish peasant soldiers is legendary. Just as legendary is the decadence of the Sultan's court in Istanbul.

Imperial Japan

Japan is unique on Earth. In the 1850s it was an isolated feudal nation, made up of warring principalities using long outdated technology. By 1890 it was a rapidly advancing state with a powerful central government. Unlike China, which is a victim of foreign intervention Japan has harnessed the Europeans to assist in its own advancement. The Royal Navy trains Japanese sailors and its warships are built in British German and French shipyards, to the most modern designs. Krupp howitzers and German military advisers are making the new national army one of the most powerful in the western pacific.

The Space Age Begins

On August 26, 1870 a letter was received in each European Embassy and each Royal or National observatory. It was from Czar of all the Russia. It was simple and to the point.

At exactly midnight Greenwich Mean Time focus your most powerful telescopes upon the surface of the Moon. The exact region is on the northernmost rim of the crater Copernicus. At that time the entire Earth will see the majesty and power of Mother Russia.

Most viewed this as a crank, but many instruments were pointed skyward on that new moon night. At exactly midnight, in exactly the appointed, place a brilliant flare erupted, and then burned outwards, across many miles of the lunar surface, forming the cross of St. Andrew. The Russians had conquered space first and landed upon another world!

To the other Great Powers, particularly Great Britain and France, this was unthinkable. Backward Russia had humbled the science and inventiveness of the greatest technological nations. For the French it was an omen of a year of humiliation, the Franco-Prussian war had started in July and by the end of September Paris would be under siege. The other Great Powers, Turkey and Austria-Hungary could only look at their giant neighbor with increased fear. In a night the balance of world power was completely changed. The next morning a second letter arrived at the embassies in St Petersburg.

Simply put the Russian Emperor had claimed an entire World as if it was just an uninhabited island in the arctic wastes. This placed Russia in an extremely precarious position, vis-à-vis the other Great Powers. Even while war raged in France diplomats from the European nations sat in Brussels. The agenda was simple: How to discredit Russia's claim to the Moon and what sorts of laws would be placed on Extra Terrestrial colonies to prevent such a claim from being made in the future. It was obvious that manned flight to other planets was now possible. It was simply a matter of time before the type of Colonial land grabs seen in Africa and Asia were played out on Mars and Venus.

The most pressing questions were how the Russians had accomplished such a feat. On September 1st 1870 they revealed to the World the intrepid pioneers that had "pierced the blue vale of Earth's sky". It was with rockets, just as Hale had thought it would be, but instead of compressed oxygen Demetri Ivanovich Mendeleev had a breakthrough. His liquid super oxygen greatly increasing the amount of reactions a single pound could support. Russian Army General Konstantine Konstantino designed vast rocket engines to use this new propellant combination. The Nikolayev works built them. With great secrecy, something easy in the vastness of Mother Russia three ships, called Sputniks, 'travelers' in English, were constructed. Their hulls were iron and the AeroLyth from the arctic wastes of northern Siberia. The ships lifted off from a primitive Siberian town, Zmeinogorsk, located deep within the steppes. When they reached the outer limits of the Earth's gravitational pull their motors were ignited, liquid super oxygen playing across the candle tallow. The thrust was enough to drive them completely out of the Earth's grasp and into that of the Moon.

Landing had been difficult, without an atmosphere to help slow the craft deceleration had to be much more precise. One of the vessels had been lost. The other two were able to use their rockets and bluestone panels to affect a soft touchdown. Wearing bulky vacuum resistant suits the Russian Cosmonauts or star travelers had lain out mile long lines of gunpowder. At the appointed time these were ignited. Even more than anything else the world was shocked by the masterful mind that conceived of the expedition, and who had shown it was possible a twenty year old woman Sonya Kovalevsky.

While the newspaper reading citizens of planet Earth marveled at the brilliance and audacity of this young Russian woman the diplomats of the Great Powers knew they could not let the Russian coup stand. It is uncertain whether Alexander II thought he would be able to keep his new world. As it was the Russian negotiators were able to trade the moon for other, more immediate needs. Russia left the table in Brussels with the Treaty of Paris annulled. She was free to build a fleet in the Black Sea again. The other Great Powers left the ornate halls with something else, full knowledge of what was required under international law to claim an off world colony. It was absurd that a dozen explorers could claim millions of square miles of territory. The Treaty of Brussels, signed in 1871, laid rest to such behavior.

For an Extra Terrestrial Colonial Claim to be enforceable the land would have to be surveyed. Boundaries would need to be placed, clearing marking the extent of the ground.

Earthmen would have to walk the land, and live on it, building permanent homes and farms, if not cities. Finally, regularly scheduled shipping from Earth or other planets would have to be run to the colony. The diplomats and their respective governments had wrangled long and hard. Each of the delegates knew what they had signed. Before the last clauses had been hammered out a landslide started, it was half arms race, half land rush. The power of that document would be felt across the entire solar system. On News Years Day 1871 it was like the World was holding its breath, the Great Powers were runners in the starting blocks. By the spring of that year the gun was raised and the shot fired. The race for the Solar System had begun.

Meendeleev's Fuel

Although it was Sonya Kovalevsky's theory and mathematics that drew the course, it was Meendeleev chemical breakthrough that made space travel a going proposition. The popular press misnamed the new material Meendeleev's Fuel; it is actually a super oxidizer. Oxygen is required for both the combustion of rocket fuel and the sustainment of human life. Meendeleev found a form of Oxygen that instead of the diatomic gas was a liquid with a made of molecular oxygen, formed of twenty atoms of oxygen. Using a few common chemical compounds as catalysts oxygen could be induced into the new form, which allowed over three hundred times as much of the material to be stored in that same volume as compressed oxygen. The super oxygen, the secret of which was soon discovered in and distributed from Manchester, Paris and Berlin as well as Russia, allowed stowage of enough of the life-giving element to support long spaceflights in the airless void.

From Launch to Orbit

The Treaty of Brussels shaped the Great Powers activity off world. It both defined the requirements for legitimate colonial claims and also how the space above a nation could be used. Orbital mechanics had been well known since the days of Kepler and Newton. What had once been intriguing but academic astronomical laws suddenly became intensely debated points of extremely practical international ones. It was now perfectly possible for one nation to launch a ship from its soil on Earth and for that ship to circle the globe many times in a day, passing over many other nations as it did so. Yes it would be miles above the surface, but with powerful telescopes there would be nothing that could remain hidden from such an observatory. The diplomats at Brussels hammered out a compromise between the Russian request for “Freedom of Space” and British and German demands security of their “orbital territories” from intruders. A vessel that was boosting from the surface to orbit or one that was de-orbiting had the right to make ten complete orbits without restrictions. If it violated some nation’s territory beyond that limit it would be charged a tariff.

Space stations on the other hand would have to be placed in geo-synchronous orbits, ones that stood in a single location above a fixed spot on the Earth’s surface. These fixed spots would either have to be above the launching nation’s territory or colonies or over the open ocean. This simple clause had a huge impact on how space travel was conducted. It also had considerable repercussions amongst the Great powers colonial territories. Equatorial colonies became in great demand, as it is much simpler to place a station in geosynchronous orbit above the Equator than at other latitudes. Additionally transit to orbit is most efficient from such locations. It takes considerably less fuel to reach orbit from a launch site near the equator than it does from ones closer to the poles. So if a station was built on the Equator it is also more easily reached from these launch ports. Additionally the “High Ports” as they became called were much more difficult to reach and build than such facilities would have been in lower orbits. Even with the use of Aerolyth ships it was extremely expensive to build such stations. England, the richest of the Great Powers had only two High Ports in service by 1891. One of these, Victoria Astral Station was above the military launch facility at Ascension Island, the other, Imperial Station, was over Singapore and the Great Far Eastern Low Port constructed there. Additionally France, Russia and commercial interests in the United States all had large stations. The other Great Powers; Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy all maintained national stations of lesser commercial and military value. That being said nearly 90% of interplanetary trade shipped through the five major ports, with greater than half of all trade going through the two British facilities.

Victorian Spacecraft

The dynamics of orbital flight are demanding and harsh. It requires a huge amount of velocity and hence energy to reach orbital speeds. Even with the ability of Aerolyth to push a vessel off of the Earth’s surface into orbital altitudes without sufficient velocity a vessel at such heights is like a circus aerialist precariously balanced on a tight rope. If they lose their balance for a moment they will be in the merciless grasp of gravity again. Early experimenters attempted to reach stable points above the Earth’s surface with

Aerolyth alone. Although they could reach heights hundreds of miles above the Earth's atmosphere they were forced to relinquish them as soon as their electrical systems ceased to produce enough voltage to supply the Aerolyth panels. There was very little left of a ship that fell one hundred leagues. These failures illustrated another of the hazards of space flight. "It was all well and good to be able to leave the cloying bonds of Earth, but how was one to return to her loving embrace after such a flirtation with the outer vacuum? Earth is a jealous lover and the heat of a scorned woman is as nothing compared to the fires of returning to Earth." Wrote Lord Kelvin. The ships that used Aerolyth alone and reach great heights had little to fear. Their velocities relative to Earth were small, so long as they maintained Aerolythic performance throughout their flights. It was once rockets were used to boost vessels into stable orbits that the terrors of a meteoric reentry became known. The vast energy supplied by the rockets to enable a vessel to reach orbit had to be dissipated if that vessel was to safely return to Earth.

These factors determined the shape of the barges and cutters that transferred passengers and cargo from the Earth-bound low ports to the orbital high ports. Similar vessels were needed in Martian and Venusian orbital space as well, to bring colonists, administrators and explorers, and their equipment the final leg of their long journeys.

The Royal Navy and Royal Mail Services maintain the most advanced craft for these tasks and it is best to examine their vessels and practices. For simplicity's sake these craft can be divided into two basic types, large orbital vessels used for routine transfer of passengers and freight and faster vessels used to bring smaller cargoes into orbit with greater alacrity. Generally speaking the former use both Aerolyth and rockets to achieve orbit the latter rockets alone.

The Distant Planets

The Inner Solar System was a well mapped, if poorly detailed place in 1871. The distance from Earth to her nearest neighbors had been measured, the orbits of the inner bodies are precisely known. It was easy to plot a course from Mankind's home-world to either Venus or Mars. It was constructing a vehicle that could carry frail life across the airless void that would be difficult. The first steps had already been taken; Aerolyth could easily lift a ship above the Earth's atmosphere. Vacuum proof hulls were harder to build than had first been assumed but built they were. Soon the Great Powers had glittering space stations hanging in geo-synchronous orbits above Earth. The British Empire had two; a commercial station hung above Singapore while HMOS (Her Majesty's Orbital Station) Victoria looked down upon the military port on Ascension Island. Over French North Africa La République was a giant torus. The Russian facility, Port Nicholas seemed to hang suspended over the Pacific Ocean. No where did the Russians have an equatorial colony, launches for her required considerably greater fuel expenditures and the small Cosmos station reflected that reality. American mercantile concerns had built Lincoln Station above Key West without official government support. The lesser powers made do with lesser stations, but stations they had, Italy, Germany, Austria-Hungary all had their orbital presence. All had entered the Great Race, a contest that made all of the previous colonial efforts pale by comparison. Rather than a single island, or nation, or even continent complete Worlds were at stake. It was obvious that whichever nation controlled the other planets would also control Earth itself.

The first prize would be Mars and the Opposition of 1877 was the deadline. Hundreds of years of progress were compressed into a decade. The lash of nationalism was plied freely in some nations; others used the lure of fame and fortune. Savants the world over rose to the challenge. Problems were solved, new materials developed. Still a better propellant than rockets was difficult to find. It was an easily computable mathematic equation to determine the size and speed of a rocket ship needed to reach Mars and return with a still living crew. It was entirely another thing in building a machine that would sustain its weak human crew through such a voyage.

Many attempts were made. The British alone were building seven ships, each to a different design, each team of shareholders hoping to be the ones with the winning ticket. The first of the ships left Earth orbit more than a year before the opposition. For these early ships the backers hoped that there would be no vast improvement in rocket motors or fuels. Other ships used different strategies. Some sought to slingshot around the moon and use its gravity to augment their speed. A French program attempted to sail on the wind from the Sun, using acres of silvered silk. Vast fortunes were sunk into the project. In producing a viable spacecraft it failed miserably in discovering a product with many other uses it was a tremendous success.

One of the strangest attempts was that of the Royal Society. Well funded and based on sound, if conservative principals of rocketry, the vessel, The Royal Albert, was huge. By August of 1875 she was nearly complete when suddenly all work on her ceased. Twenty-five days later crews were back in orbit working even more frantically than before. The

great engineer I. K. Brunel had been called upon to redesign her. All her particulars were secret. Parts were produced in widely separated factories under the tightest of security. Only a handful of men knew the totality of the design. The Royal Albert was soon cocooned in wraps, shut off from prying eyes. Work continued well after every other competitor had left Earth orbit for the long voyage. Stockholders were livid. Their funds continued to be spent even after there was absolutely no hope of the vessel reaching Mars in a timely fashion. The Royal Albert didn't leave her dock until six weeks before the fastest of the other vessels (the American Chinook) was due to arrive at distant Mars. When she did the World's ridicule was even greater. She was a spindly giant, far too large and frail for rockets to propel. That didn't matter, noted her more observant critics, since she seemed devoid of the huge rocket engines she would need for the long voyage to Mars and back. Several stockholders killed themselves when photos of The Royal White Elephant were printed in the dailies.

These actions were premature. If the original design had been of a pedestrian interplanetary rocket ship the final product was the most advanced vessel heretofore built by Mankind. Every feature about her was new and innovative. Her awkward looking open framed structure saved weight and owed nothing to seagoing vessels or even Aerolyths, but everything to the mind of man and the calculations derived from her environment. Huge mirrors provided her Ericson Solar boilers with heat, giving her massive electrical generating capacity. Her most revolutionary feature, the Ewing-Stuart Engines, used that capacity. Designed by James Alfred Ewing and James Stuart the drive used a charge passing through platinum rods to generate a tiny but sustained force. Unlike the already obsolete ships that were crawling towards their distant destination there would be no short lived roar of burning propellant and then many months of un-powered cruising. With not the tiniest vibration the thousand foot long giant left Earth orbit. In the next twenty-nine days she passed every other vessel, arriving at the Red Planet two weeks before Chinook.

It was the Royal Society's president, Joseph Dalton Hooker, C.B, that led the first expedition down to the surface of Mars. And it was he that first contacted the inhabitants of that distant world.

First Descent

The Royal Society's made first landing at local dawn (2:37 PM London time) on July 17th, 1877. There had been much speculation as to whether life existed on Mars, and if so what form it might have taken. The moment the lander broke through the high red clouds of the Martian sky and into the clear air beneath them that question was answered with an undeniable "yes". Vast green planes and what appeared to be forests spread across the lands of Mars. Would the species be similar to those of Earth or shudderingly alien? For all of the cartoons in Punch and all the posturing from pulpits worldwide few men of science were willing to believe that the form of Man, bipedal with five digits per hand and foot would be the basis for life off of the Earth. The Royal Society's landing party was shocked to be greeted by just such beings, they were somewhat taller but undeniably humans, Earth type Homo sapiens.

These were one of the few familiar sights that greeted the explorers. The reddish Martian sky teamed with strange beasts and even hydrogen filled plants. The purple tinted oceans swarmed with creatures, from the tiniest singled celled planktons to huge hard-shelled creatures, some of which feasted upon that plankton. Others feasted on the plankton eaters. On the land humans lived in compact and tidy cities that greatly resembled fabled Tibet. Spires rose from well maintained parks. Silent and efficient railways vibration free and far faster than those of the most advanced nations of Earth spoked off to other cities. For the first several days their hosts dazzled the Royal Society members. It was amazing to them to see the progress that their distant cousins had made.

In the next few weeks one by one the other ships arrived and made their own planetfalls. In some places they landed in vast empty wastelands devoid of human life, but often teaming with the strange mix of plants and animals that roamed across the Martian surface. In others they came face to face primitive humans living in nomadic tribes. For the most part these tribes were peaceful as well, but both the Royal Geographic's party and that of the French Society Extra Terran were forced to fire upon the savages for their own defense. The French were nearly overwhelmed and forced back into orbit. The tales of savagery that the French brought back with them were as bad as anything from the Sudan or Zululand. The city dwellers called these tribes the Wildmen of Mars. It was against them and only them that violence was allowed in city society. The cities, each and everyone visited by Earthmen, appeared to be waging constant wars of extermination against the Wildmen, killing them wherever they could be found. These wars turned the stomachs of even those warriors hardened by conflict on the bloody Northwest Frontier. When the city columns found the Wildmen they killed all of them, slaughtering women and children and even livestock. It was only the lack of effective weapons, for all their ancient technology and knowledge the Men of Mars fought with inefficient arms, that prevented the complete extermination of the Wildmen. For their part, even though they herded and hunted across vast parts of the Martian continents the Wildmen had no method of attacking the well defended cities and bring the battle to them. It was a standoff that had every appearance of having existed for many centuries.

It became apparent that even in the great Martian cities the Men of Mars were not what they first seemed. Their technology was vast but their knowledge quite limited. Much of what they did they did by rote, following instructions in ancient languages without truly understanding the steps. How had these men come by such knowledge and built such vast cities, and then forgotten so much?

And beneath it all was the most important question: how was it that Man lived on two Worlds separated by the void of space? Sir Richard Burton was quickly able to determine that the basis of the Martian tongue was obviously derived from the native language of Wales. When the first Earth ship landed on Venus the next year and found yet more humans the debate became even more heated. Had God's hand seeded each world with mankind? Had Humans once before possessed the secrets of spaceflight and somehow lost it, perhaps that was the true origin or the Biblical tales of the Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel. A third school of thought supposed that some other agency had, for

some purposed unguessed and perhaps unknowable, spread Homo sapiens across the Solar System, and perhaps even beyond.

When asked about the origins of their technology and of themselves they told their Earthly cousins that all Knowledge came from the “Ala Thanor”. The Cities Martians used this term with great reverence, the savages from the outlands spoke it as a curse. Was the Ala Thanor an ancient prophet or religious leader? Perhaps it was a great library of stored knowledge. Consultations with native welsh speakers seemed to indicate the closest translation of the term as “Builder of Gardens”. It fell to Sir Richard Burton to peel the rind from this mystery.

Meeting the Ala Thanor

Richard Burton was a most remarkable man, a polyglot able to speak many languages and capable of assuming the bearing of men from many cultures. This unique flexibility of character enabled him to win the trust of the Men of Mars. It was just days before his ship was due to lift for its return to earth that Burton was summoned to the local palace. The local leaders informed him that they had made arrangements for him to journey to the Ala Thanor, a trip that would take the better part of a day and begin the next morning.

At the appointed time Burton, taking with him only two other members of the party, boarded one of the incredible Martian trams and took a route deep into the Martian mountains. The train was an unbreakable bubble that road silently and without vibration upon a ribbon of dark material. For the better part of the short Martian day it carried them deep into the mountains. They passed large buildings of unknown purpose, although one of Burton’s companions, a scientist from the Royal Academy thought some of them might be vast manufactories. Their hosts were silent for the journey, seemingly transported into a state of contemplative ecstasy by the opportunity to visit their Ala Thanor.

Finally the train halted at a structure of immense proportions, appearing, correctly to have been an entire mountain made to serve a purpose. The smaller buildings around its base although large by Earthly standards were dwarfed in its shadow. Without sound or violence of motion the glassite egg slowed and stopped, coming to rest inside the cavernous hallway of one of the lesser buildings. Many Men of Mars, dressed like the City dwellers and speaking the same dialect of the worldwide language were waiting for them. Burton and his associates were struck by the disciplined silence of the crowd. What few words that were spoken were all said in a whisper. Yet it was not the frightening silence before an execution, more the expectant quite before a religious ceremony. The huge crowd waited: the Englishmen with calm befitting their race.

The interior of the building was practically filled with a complex lattice of pipes, smooth and metallic of some three-inch diameter. In places the pipes reached the floor, in others they soared to the distant ceiling. It was across these pathways of pipe that the Ala Thanor moved, coming from the deep recesses of the building like huge spiders. If the discovery of humans had been a surprise it had also lulled the English explorers into a false sense normalcy. Even Burton was taken aback by the nature of these aliens. His

surprise did not last long and as they came forward he moved to greet them, as he would have an earthly king or queen.

The beings that approached him were large creatures and if not unpleasant to the eyes of most Englishmen certainly unsettling: especially upon first meeting. The Ala Thanor have a rectangular body with four large limbs, one at each of the body's corners. Each limb can function as either a foot or a hand, as each is equipped with three mutually opposable digits. The head is wedge shaped and two huge eyes, black or a deep brown in color, are found on each side of it allowing nearly a 360-degree field of vision. Pair of smaller eyes is in the front of the face and provide binocular vision in the near distances. The bottom of the face has the mouth, which is surrounded by a number of sensory tendrils or tentacles. These serve as to provide the aliens with both the sense of taste and smell and also assist in placing food in the creature's mouth. There are no visible external ears or even openings for such but Ala Thanor are known to have very keen hearing. Located on the chest beneath the head a pair of small arms that are used of fine manipulation. A strong prehensile tail completes the appendages. Their skin is generally very dark in color with few light markings, and of the texture of smooth leather. The race breaths through a pair of elongated trunks that jut from their backs.

In terms of movement Burton found them hypnotically graceful as they moved through the forest of pipes, they proceeded not with the rapid and jerky movements of a monkey but more like a snake, apparently smoothly articulated and without joints in their limbs. Upon closer examination this proved to be untrue, but the amazing agility of these aliens has been much commented upon since that first encounter.

A group of fourteen of the aliens formed a circle around the three Englishmen, Burton, who had already picked up a basic facility with the Martian tongue began the introductions but was quickly cut off by one of the aliens, who spoke flawless English! He welcomed the Earthmen to Mars and asked many questions about their origins and voyage. Burton, who was an able ambassador, found himself to have been completely outperformed in the interview, revealing considerable information without gaining any insights into his hosts or their culture. After some several hours the Earthmen were dismissed and escorted back to the city. Relations between the men of Earth and the Ala Thanor have progressed in a like fashion ever since. Whatever these strange beings are and wherever they came from still remains a mystery. Answers have been impossible to extract from them. They have been very crafty in all their dealings with offworlders.

Since the first contact there have been more questions than answers. Where did the True Martians, as they have come to be known, originate? How is it that they so totally dominate the Men of Mars?

There has not been a sweeter feeling ever experienced than that we felt when Royal Albert passed the last of her rivals and swept onwards to the Red Planet. Our Ewing-Stuart drive functioned flawlessly the entire voyage, smoothly accelerating for half the flight and with equal aplomb slowing our mighty charger the second two weeks of the trip. It was amazing to journey many millions of times farther than man had ever gone before in less time than a sea voyage to India would have taken aboard the fastest steamer only fifteen years before.

Once we were in Martian orbit the expedition's scientists could begin their work in earnest. Powerful telescopes were focused upon the surface of the red world beneath us. The atmosphere appeared far more opaque to our vision than such a thin veil should; we could perceive little upon the surface, only the most vague outlines of topographical features. The reasons for this phenomenon were much debated amongst our astronomers. We joked good naturedly with them that we would have a far better view once the landers arrived on the surface.

Royal Albert carried four large orbital barges, as well as a smaller orbital cutter, to ferry savants and supplies down to the surface and specimens back to the ship. The expedition was no trifling venture. The Royal Society was at Mars to stay. It was with thirty-five souls aboard that the cutter, to be our first landing on this new world cast-off from our home of the last few weeks and headed down into the gravity well. I was honored to have been selected to pilot the first landing.

The atmosphere proved far thicker than anticipated, which made my piloting a bit more dicey than I would have like to admit. There seemed to be a very real edge to the atmosphere, something not encountered when returning to Earth. Luckily the cutter had been designed to survive a reentry into Earth's thick blanket of air. She behaved well once I used the powerful retarding rockets to slow our velocity. Her wings took to the air very well and the Aerolyth was just as effective in the Martian gravity as it was upon Earth. As expected that gravity proved to be about one third of that at home. The flyer performed flawlessly and we landed quite safely on the surface of Mars. We had selected a large beach area, near the shores of a large body of water. It was judged that if there was life on Mars it would probably nestle near water, just as earthly life does. It was further reasoned that if there was a civilization on the planet that it would likely also be near water. The savants were correct in both cases. As we came in to land I could see that not only did animal and plant life team across the Martian skies, seas and land, but that a highly advanced civilization was present as well. I could hear Bennett breath a prayer as we came out of the low nagging clouds and got Mankind's first view of the panorama of Mars.

Life on Mars

Meeting the “True Martians”

Our local guide informed us that we would be greatly privileged that day and we would be allowed an audience with one of the “Ala Thanor”. He used a word in his language we had heard before, but one that we had not yet really understood. We had thought he was a leader, as we had originally translated Ala Thanor. He laughed, it was such an English gesture that I could easily have mistook him for a man from Brighton or Swansea. He assured us that he was not an Ala Thanor, but that meeting one was the greatest honor he could bestow upon us. With tremendous ceremony we proceeded towards the low mountains to the west of the city. On our landing flight we had seen huge buildings, vast towers, seemingly deep shafts and arrays of pipe that served unknown purposes carpeting the foothills. The wide paved road led directly to a veritable artificial jungle of heavy piping. We wondered aloud if this was some sort of gigantic chemical manufactory. Our host didn’t reply, he seemed transported, as were all the other Men of Mars by the rituals they were performing as we made our stately progress. It was nearly dark before we had reached the site. Its very vastness made it seem much closer than it was. It was in the failing light of our distant sun that the first Englishmen, the First Modern Earthmen beheld the True Masters of Mars.

The real guiding force behind all that has occurred on Mars, and in many respects in the entire solar system are the True Martians. They are equally at home in their cities, the vast planes of Mars or its canals, lakes and oceans. Buildings used by the True Martians appear unfinished to Earthly eyes, as they have vast interior spaces crisscrossed by vertical and horizontal girders. The Martians can move with amazing speed along these aerial pathways rivaling the most agile monkey as they use their four major limbs and tail to gain purchase. In the water they can easily breathe through their trunks as they use their muscular tail as a paddle. Their initial ungainly appearance and methodical motions are belied when they spring across open ground. Taking full advantage of the low surface gravity the True Martians are lithe and graceful.

Their true forte is not physical but mental. Under most circumstances the Martians are exceptional practitioners of logic and even an experienced barrister would have a difficult time finding flaws with one of their deeply reasoned statements. In the larger True Martian enclaves facts move rapidly from one True Martian to others, and conclusions are generally reached quickly and acted upon. It appears that certain Martians have well defined roles in daily life. Some are storehouses of facts; others weight those facts and reach conclusions. These conclusions are then validated by entirely different individuals. If the conclusions are accepted then another entirely different group selects the resources required to implement any tasks that need to be completed and supply those resources to yet another group. This group manages those resources to complete the task. A final group follows up on the task and ensures that it was completed successfully reporting back to the individuals that originally decided upon the course of action.

In smaller Martian communities this isn’t always the case. It appears that there are often gaps in the types of individuals, and that these gaps can cause complete failure of the True Martian Society. Evidence of this are partially completed structures scattered across the Martian surface. At first Earthly archaeologists thought these huge complexes were

the ruins of ancient structures that had been abandoned long before. Excavations proved this was not the case. Huge investments of time and materials had been poured into vast projects in many locations across Mars only to see the sites abandoned before completion. This phenomenon seems to be closely linked to certain of the True Martian “nations”. Nations might be a misconception; perhaps families would better serve to explain the higher levels of Martian culture. The surface of Mars is divided into a number of areas, and each area is controlled by a single group of True Martians. Within each area the Martians define three types of land. That on which the Martians and their human servants live and which provides them with raw materials and sustenance. This is the least of any Martian holding, and the Martian word for this area translates roughly to “Necessary”. Then there is the area in which most of the enterprise of the Martian society is focused upon, called in Martian “The Becoming”. To earthly observers much of the activity there appears to be without use or function. The buildings are designed with doors too small for the True Martians, but interiors that are difficult for humans to traverse. Vast cities, and other more enigmatic structures writhe across the Martian landscape or into its canals and oceans. In some places tunnels burrow deep beneath the surface. There have been satisfactory explanations for these activities. The True Martians refuse to discuss them and the Men of Mars are state that these are the wishes of their masters and no other cause is needed for their efforts. The third areas are called in Martian “Cla Tollops” or Paradises. At first little was known of the paradises. All were previously The Becoming and at some point the True Martians decided that work within was completed. After such a judgement no True Martian or Man of Mars is allowed within. The region is left uninhabited. Never again will a True Martian so much as walk to the border and observe the Paradise.

This lack of observation has allowed these regions to be explored by Earthmen. Some of the Paradises live up to their title, being manicured gardens or exquisite if alien beauty. Others are nearly the complete opposite, regions where chaos and mayhem holds sway. Contrary to initial observations all Men of Mars are not the docile slaves of the True Martians. Over the millennia some men have thrown off the chains of Mars and escaped. The Paradises have provided havens from their oppressors. Since once an area is designated as a paradise no true Martian will ever set foot in it again the escaped slaves were completely safe from that threat. For these humans, called The Wild Men of Mars by XXXXXXXXXX there are more than enough other dangers in the vast Martian outback. The True Martians may be fooled into thinking that no problems can enter paradise but the Men of Mars are not. They war constantly against their wild cousins, always seeking to keep these conflicts from the notice of their masters. Raids and counter-raids are a constant feature of some of the borders of the Paradises. In others the Men of Mars are far less of a threat than the Wild Men themselves. As with other uncivilized barbarians slaving, warfare and other bestial habits have taken root in the deep outback of Mars. The constant struggles have taken their toll on the Wildmen of Mars. They eke out a precarious living in the Paradises of Mars, scavenging from the giant silent cities the True Martians have built. Cities that are built with technology that the Wildmen can no longer understand and for reasons they never could comprehend. They are constantly threatened by each other and the columns of Men of Mars, who hunt them down remorselessly, worse even than men hunt rats on Earth. If their human

enemies were not enough the exotic and dangerous creatures of the land, water and air of Mars can prove deadly as well.

The True face of Mars

The true Martians, unknown to the players are actually from outside the solar system and arrived about 25,000 years before. They are a created race, built by an advanced technology society to engineer planets for later colonization. Their ship was badly damaged by a celestial event and they accidentally made system fall at Sol. Mars barely met the requirements for the type of planet they were looking for. The huge ships systems were so badly damaged reaching any more appropriate planet was calculated to be highly unlikely. Orbit insertion was achieved and with the limited resources they had available they set out to do the job they were programmed for: complete restructuring of the Martian planetary environment to suit the needs of their creators. They function as a sort of biological computer; each Martian is a stand-alone but is part of a vast network. Their goal is to make Mars a world suitable for the "Makers" (Insert a better name here). When the Martians arrived they did a partial survey of the solar system, getting to Venus, Earth, Mercury, Mars and the Asteroid Belt. The additional probe resources had been destroyed in the accident, so the outer solar system is unknown to them.

Upon visiting Earth about 24,000 years ago they gathered up some humans to replace some of the bioengineered resources that were also destroyed, it was part of the back-up contingency plans in the programming. These are now known as The Men of Mars. These people venerate the true Martians and live in a very rigid society. Nothing is ever invented; all knowledge comes from the Martians. Science doesn't exist, as we know it. Learning is all by rote. If there is a problem ask a Martian Archivist.

The Martians are very strange looking creatures. They are larger than humans, but due to the lower gravity not very strong. On the corners of their rather rectangular bodies they have four limbs that can function as either feet or hands and each has both power and precision grips. They have large eyes on their wedge shaped heads allowing nearly 360-degree vision. Breathing tubes sprout from their backs and a prehensile tail rounds out their appendages. They can speak within human range and some have an amazing facility for human languages. They have a very effective sense of smell, using a number of tendrils that hang down in front of their "face". Their bodies are covered in a leathery skin and they secrete a wax like substance to protect themselves from the environment. They can swim well. Their buildings look like jungle gyms, as they have a total of five grasping limbs.

The Martians have a caste system. They have individual "jobs" that they are born into. Martians are born with all the knowledge they need to function. This is accomplished by the reproductive system of the Martians.

There are three sexual phases in Martians. Two supply genetic material in a way similar to males and females on Earth. They inject their material into the third type. This will inject RNA into the developing Martian, determining its caste.

The true Martians view the solar system very narrowly. Planets can be classed in one of four categories. The most prized are those that can be planafomed into a world habitable the masters. Next come worlds that have valuable resources in significant quantities, which can easily, exploited for planafoming other worlds. Then there are worlds that have no value in the efforts to build more homes for the Masters. These are of no consequence and are ignored. Finally there are worlds that harbor a risk to the Masters. Such planets might have indigenous life forms that might be capable of spaceflight. The world itself may have an unstable orbit and pose the risk of collision with a colony world. These threats must be dealt with early in the process of taming a solar system.

One of the first priorities of the True Martian's mission was to survey Earth's stellar system and take stock of its planets. Due to the damage that the ship had suffered a full system wide survey was not conducted. Those resources, which would have explored the outer solar system in an effective mission, had been so badly damaged that although launched they returned no data. Only the innermost four planets, Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars were effectively explored; and of these only Mars closely fit the needs of the Masters. Mars was a borderline category One world Mercury was an airless world, the bright side a sea of molten metal, the side in shadow cold and lifeless. It was judged category Three. Venus was a heavy gravity world with perpetual cloud cover. Surveys found deposits of valuable minerals and many useful organisms that if correctly genetically engineered would be very pleasing to the Masters. Venus was a fine category Two World. Earth was something of a quandary. Although another high gravity world it was also rich in minerals and life forms, perhaps too rich. On its surface lived a species of bipeds with and extremely adaptable physiology and even more troubling the beginnings of technology.

The high processor caste examined all the data. Several of them voted for eradication of this alien race. Other noted that their high gravity tolerance would be very useful in exploiting the resources of their home world and of Venus. An inventory of surviving resources indicated that the genetic material for gravity tolerant servants had been damaged beyond recall and there would be grave difficulty in exploiting the wealth either Venus or Earth if adaptable servants could not be obtained. The final piece of data that decided the issue came from an automated probe tasked with mapping the myriad objects orbiting this star and plotting their courses. That data indicated the Earth would be the victim of a colossal impact even in a few thousand years time. No higher life forms would survive and the potential for evolutionary advancement and concomitant misadventures with the earthlings would be avoided. The caste of High Processors decided. Earth would be a category Two world. Humans would be classes as usable servants, trainable to work in the great rebuilding of Mars for the Masters.

Venus

The nations of Earth had little time to digest the Wonders of Mars before another planet was opened to them, Venus. Whereas Mars had taunted man with vague surface features half glimpsed from telescopes, Venus kept her secrets well-hidden beneath demure veils of clouds. Even when the first of the Earth ships, Black Arrow arrived in orbit its crew could learn no more, the clouds still defeated them. No telescope could pierce them. It was only through a landing that Venus would be learned.

Landing on earth's Twin was extremely chancy. Would there be vastly high mountains to smash a de-orbiting ship like an unseen reef? The Venus landers carried extra rockets so they would decelerate to minimal velocities while still far above the planet's surface. Standing stable above the cloud layer, poised only on the lift of the AeroLyth panels the lander slowly sank into the clouds, disappearing from view and all communications with the Black Arrow. What would they find? Those that stayed aboard the orbital vessel could do nothing but wait and wonder. The duration of the mission was rigidly fixed. If the lander did not rise at precisely the correct time and in the right direct it would be unlikely to find its mothership. Would they lift on time? Would the gyroscope function properly? The days ticked away, measured with fanatical precision by the Babbage Chronometer.

As the appointed time drew near the orbital crew was very concerned. If the lander did not make its rendezvous there would be no way to find them. Venus had no magnetic field so even a compass was useless. The mechanics of orbits were well known and unforgiving. It was with vast relief and sincere prayers of thanks that the bright flare of the rocket was seen: first dimly through the thick clouds and then as a clear blue beacon when the lander blasted free.

With skill the pilot docked the lander and the hatch was unsealed. To everyone's delight the entire landing party was hole and well. Nearly as importantly they had filled the crafts hold with exciting specimens and exposed every photographic plate they carried. It was a mission that would live forever in the lore of exploration. The dark room aboard the ship worked all through the voyage home printing plate after plate. Specimens were cataloged, some dissected other kept alive. By the time Black Arrow arrived in Earth orbit and docked at Victoria Highport reports had been written and lectures prepared. The crew descended to the Homeworld as heroes. Like heroes they had stories to tell.

The lecture hall was packed as the Dr. Blandford and Captain Wilson entered with the other intrepid explorers. The crowd rose to its feet and cheered until they were hoarse. Once they had been quieted the lecture began, the kinetrope showing image after image. For the first time the surface of Venus could be viewed from Earth.

It is obvious that Venus is completely covered with clouds. As the lander descended the pilot kept a weather eye out for the planet's surface, the crew feared the sudden appearance of a mountain range. Slowly they moved through the clouds, guided by the

spinning gyroscope. It was with no little surprise and immense relief that the lander broke through the cloud layer and into a layer of clear air. Venus's surface lay a mile below. To the crew's amazement the land below them was arid and barren, only some scrub vegetation living precariously. The crew realized the lowland desert offered the best place to set the lander down. The sand was hard and well compacted, proving a stable base for the lander.

The desert was far from the rainforests so many scientists had expected. Only where the clouds met the mountains was the expected lush growth found. Like the high cloud forests of Argentina, Peru and Bolivia the forests were watered by the droplets in the clouds themselves. With the eternal mists of Venus the plants grew in rainforest like thickness. In the weeks the lander was on the surface no rain fell upon the low lands. They lay parched under millions of tons of water.

Life was harsh in the barren low lands, and the animals and plants well adapted for the dry conditions. Some of the species were familiar, similar or identical to ones found on Earth. Others resembled organisms long thought to be extinct on Earth. Still another group were totally unknown, comparison to samples brought back from Mars lead to immediate and uncomfortable comparisons. If life was rare across the deserts of Venus ruins were not, cyclopean ruins that were like nothing ever seen on Earth. Again they bore some vague resemblance to the Cities of the Men of Mars and even more the fastnesses of the True Martians. Little could be gleaned from the ruins, they appeared to have been long abandoned. As much as it pained the explorers they had to give the ruins but a cursory examination. Their trek was aimed at reaching the lush highlands, for every secret they could not probe on their march they hoped to find three more in the misty jungle.

The photographs and specimens proved that those hopes were far beneath what they found. The exotic species again were modern, ancient, and Martian as well. After several days camped in the damp forest the feeling of being watched could not be ignored. Finally a trap caught a young woman, a human being, undeniably a Homo Sapiens. To their immense surprise the explorers determined the captive spoke a language very much like Welsh. Communications began in earnest and the young woman took the party to meet her tribe. Living constantly within the clouds the Venusians had no conception of travelers from the skies. To the tribes the clouds were eternal, inviolable. Only the most horrible of demons came through the waters of the air. Legends said some of those demons had a terrible aspect, but other looked just like the forest people. The tribal shaman spoke, his voice raising in volume and pitch. Reminding his followers of ancient and half-forgotten myths he called on them to attack the Englishmen. It was only through quick action and the use of Webley revolvers that the party was able to escape.

The hike back to the camp was a frantic race against the enraged Venusians. It required all the cunning of Englishmen trained to the hunt to escape the pursuit. Foxes instead of hunters they used every trick to confuse their enemies and not lead them back to their camp.