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THE
CASE OF

THE MAN WHO OWNED THE MOON

SUPER-DETECTIVE LIBRARY - No. 49 - THE CASE OF THE MAN WHO OWNED THE MOON



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The **MAN WHO** **OWNED** *the* **MOON**

FROM THE CASE BOOK OF RICK RANDOM

A LOT COULD HAPPEN IN A COUPLE OF YEARS....FOR TWO YEARS RICK RANDOM HAD BEEN BUSY ON A CASE WHICH HAD TAKEN HIM TO THE LIMITS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM....WHEN HE RETURNED HE WASN'T SURPRISED TO HEAR THAT FULL SCALE MINING ON THE MOON HAD STARTED UP WHILE HE WAS AWAY, BUT WHAT DID SURPRISE HIM WAS THE POSTAGE STAMP ON A LETTER THAT WAS WAITING FOR HIM.....

A POSTAGE STAMP BEARING A GREAT GARGOYLE OF A HEAD AND A CRESCENT MOON--AND THE WORDS, LEO: REX: IMP: LUNA....LEO, KING, EMPEROR OF THE MOON.

A KING?--WHO WAS THIS MAN WHO CALLED HIMSELF KING OF THE MOON WHEN THE EARTH AND THE SOLAR SYSTEM WAS BEING RUN BY THE WORLD FEDERATION OF POWERS?.....



RICK RANDOM EXPECTED NO MAIL WHEN HE ARRIVED BACK AT HIS OFFICE AT THE INTERPLANETARY BOARD.....A TWO WEEKS ABSENCE PILES ONE'S MAIL UP IN STACKS--A TWO YEARS ABSENCE DRIES IT UP ALTOGETHER.....IT WAS, THEREFORE, WITH GREAT INTEREST THAT RICK PICKED UP THE SOLITARY LETTER WHICH WAS WAITING FOR HIM ON HIS DESK---WHILE REGAN OF THE BOARD LOOKED ON.....



A LETTER FROM LUNA!

SO THE LUNA MAIL IS IN, EH? MUST GET OVER TO MY OWN OFFICE-- I'M EXPECTING A MINEROLOGIST'S REPORT ON THE NEW MINE WORKINGS--

REGAN CHUCKLED AS HE NOTED RICK'S AMAZEMENT.....

LUNA MAIL, EH? SO WHILE I'VE BEEN AWAY, YOU'VE GOT THAT GOING AGAIN--AS WELL AS MINING OPERATIONS? I WAS A BIT SURPRISED WHEN WE ABANDONED THE MOON AFTER CLOSING DOWN THE EARLY SPACE CREW TRAINING GROUNDS THERE--FOR I GUESSED THAT THERE WAS MORE TO THE MOON THAN JUST GREEN CHEESE-- --BUT-- BUT THE STAMP! WHO THE BLAZES IS LEO REX?



REGAN'S LAUGH WAS ALMOST CONTEMPTUOUS.....

OH, HIM? HE'S REALLY LEO II-- HIS FATHER WAS MERELY A LIKEABLE ROGUE WHOSE IMAGINATION DIDN'T RUN TO WEARING THE ROYAL PURPLE--- YOU'RE LOOKING, MY LAD, AT THE MAN WHO OWNS THE MOON-- AND NOT A BAD LIKENESS, EITHER?



IT WAS MORE THE ABSURDITY OF THE SITUATION THAN THE TITLE THAT STAGGERED RICK.....

ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME THAT THE BOARD IS ACTUALLY ALLOWING PRIVATE OWNERSHIP -- MONARCHIES AND ALL THAT SORT OF THING IN THE SYSTEM?



CERTAINLY NOT! ACTUALLY, LEO CLAYTON THE SECOND MERELY HAS DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS ON THE MOON-- INHERITED FROM HIS FATHER... NOW HE RUNS A PINT-SIZED COURT ON THE MOON, WITH ALL THE TRIMMINGS--INCLUDING HIS OWN POSTAGE STAMP! WELL, I'VE GOT OTHER THINGS TO DO SO I'LL BE OFF-- SEE YOU AT THE PLANETARY CLUB TONIGHT!

...AND REGAN LEFT FOR HIS OWN OFFICE... LEAVING RICK TO OPEN HIS LETTER.....

PARCHMENT TOO! ALL VERY REGAL! WHAT, I WONDER, CAN HIS MAJESTY WANT WITH ME?



HE TOOK OUT THE ENCLOSURE WITHOUT LOOKING AT IT AND READ THROUGH THE DOCUMENT.....

Sir, I am requested by His Majesty, Leo I, King of the Moon, to ask you to visit him at once, in order to solve a problem for him. So that you may arrive as soon as possible you will find a space-ship waiting at the Rocket Port now. I am enclosing a cheque for £20,000, to cover your expenses.

I have the honour to be,
Ricardo Clegg,
Court Secretary.

IT WAS FANTASTIC! ABSURD! IT WAS A JOKE OUT OF REASON! RICK EXAMINED THE DRAFT.....



HM! THIS LOOKS GENUINE ENOUGH-- BUT WE'LL SOON FIND OUT!

HE PICKED UP THE VISI-PHONE AND GOT THROUGH TO THE WORLD BANK.....



YES?
CAN I
HELP YOU?

I WANT TO
CHECK ON THE
AUTHENTICITY
OF A DRAFT--

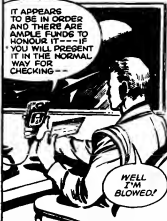
WITH A BRIEF 'ONE MOMENT, PLEASE' THE GIRL DISAPPEARED IN A HAZE FROM WHICH PRESENTLY EMERGED THE FACE OF A BANK OFFICIAL.....

I'M AFRAID I
MAY BE WASTING
YOUR TIME, BUT I'VE
GOT A BANK DRAFT
HERE FOR A LARGE
AMOUNT--I THINK IT
MAY BE SOME SORT
OF JOKE---IT'S
MERELY SIGNED
LEO I.



A VERY
PLEASANT JOKE
FOR YOU, SIR,
SURELY, MAY
I SEE IT?

RICK HELD THE SLIP OF PAPER BEFORE THE TELE-EYE..... THE MAN NODDED.....



IT APPEARS
TO BE IN ORDER
AND THERE ARE
AMPLE FUNDS TO
HONOUR IT---IF
YOU WILL PRESENT
IT IN THE NORMAL
WAY FOR
CHECKING---

WELL
I'M
BLOWED!

THE BANK CLERK FADED OUT... MECHANICALLY RICK PRESSED THE 'LINE CLEAR' BUTTON.....

THAT EVENING, IN THE PLANETARY CLUB, RICK TOLD REGAN WHAT THE LETTER HAD CONTAINED--AND WAITED FOR REGAN'S ROAR OF LAUGHTER.... IT WAS NOT FORTHCOMING.....

WELL, WHY DON'T YOU LAUGH? I STILL FEEL IT'S A JOKE SOMEHOW--EVEN THOUGH I RANG INTERPLANETARY CHARTERS. THEY CONFIRM THAT THEY HAVE A SPACE SHIP STANDING BY FOR ME ON INDEFINITE ORDERS. \$20,000. I COULD LAUGH MY HEAD OFF.



LAUGH AWAY,
THEN--BUT YOU'LL
ACCEPT THE
ASSIGNMENT, I
YOU'LL BE CRAZY
IF YOU DON'T!

I FEEL AS CRAZY AS A COOT EVEN BEFORE I DECIDE--I REALLY THOUGHT YOU WERE PULLING MY LEG ABOUT THAT LEO CLAYTON CHARACTER THIS MORNING--



THE MAN WHO OWNS THE MOON? IT'S COCK-EYED, REGAN? NO ONE MAN UNDER OUR SYSTEM CAN COME BY SUCH EXTENSIVE RIGHTS?



PLAN

OUR SYSTEM WASN'T ALWAYS PERFECT--WE MUST ALL ABIDE BY OUR MISTAKES, EVEN IF WE ARE THE BOARD ITSELF. SINCE YOU WILL, OF COURSE, ACCEPT THE ASSIGNMENT, IT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR YOU TO KNOW HOW LEO CLAYTON BECAME KING OF THE MOON..... IT HAPPENED LIKE THIS.....

REGAN'S EYES TWINKLED IN HIS SOLEMN FACE.....

CLAYTON'S NO LEG-PULL--NEITHER IS HIS MONEY? YOU SEE, THERE ARE HALF A DOZEN DIFFERENT EXPLOITATION COMPANIES MINING ON THE MOON, AS YOU KNOW, IT'S THE BOARD'S POLICY TO LEAVE THESE THINGS TO PRIVATE ENTERPRISE-- SINCE CLAYTON HOLDS THE CONCESSION RIGHTS, THEY ALL PAY HIM ROYALTIES, HE MUST BE ONE OF THE RICHEST MEN LIVING--AND IT'S ALL QUITE LEGAL. THAT'S ONE REASON WHY WE LET HIM PLAY KING OF THE MOON.



PICTURE A MAN CAPABLE OF SWINDLING YOU OUT OF YOUR LIFE SAVINGS ON ONE DAY--AND ON THE NEXT, BEING SO MOVED BY YOUR PLIGHT THAT HE WOULD GIVE YOU THE LOST MONEY BACK WITH HIS OWN LAST PENNY--AND ROAR WITH LAUGHTER AT THE JOKE.... SUCH A MAN WAS PROFESSOR LEO CLAYTON-- KING LEO'S FATHER--

BUT HE WAS NOT ALWAYS A PROFESSOR--HIS DEGREE WAS ACQUIRED AS A MEANS TO AN END--PART OF A WONDERFUL SCHEME....

AND SO REGAN TOLD RICK RANDOM THE STORY OF LEO CLAYTON THE FIRST... 5

'BACK IN THE 1970'S! WENT ON REGAN, 'WHEN THE LAST GREAT EARTH WAR ENDED. THE CLAYTONS WERE PRACTICALLY PENNILESS -- AS WERE MANY OTHER FAMILIES, DUE TO THE TERRIFIC RISE IN THE COST OF LIVING.



...THE GOVERNMENT HAS FALLEN AND THE MINISTERS HAVE FLED. IT IS WITH THE COMMON CONSENT OF ALL, THAT THE UNITED KINGDOM, LED BY THE OPPOSITION, HAS JOINED THE WORLD FEDERATION OF POWERS --

PHEW! HEAR THAT DAD?

COMMON CONSENT! WITH RIOTERS AT EVERY STREET CORNER! WE'LL BE HAVING MARTIAL LAW NEXT!

'IT WAS HARD', CONTINUED REGAN, 'FOR LEO CLAYTON TO FIND MONEY TO PAY HIS WAY IN THOSE POST WAR DAYS -- THOUGH HE HAD A JOB OF SORTS WHICH KEPT THE WOLF FROM THE DOOR. ... HE WAS A PROOF READER IN THE ADVERTISEMENT DEPARTMENT OF A DAILY PAPER.

...AND A STATE OF MARTIAL LAW NOW EXISTS. ALL NATIONAL CIVIL LAWS ARE HEREWITH SUSPENDED AND A NEW CODE OF INTERNATIONAL WORLD LAWS IS BEING DRAWN UP -- AND NOW FOR THE GENERAL NEWS -- FROM TOMORROW THE PRICE OF BREAD WILL BE INCREASED BY A FURTHER TWO SHILLINGS A LOAF.

THERE! I SUPPOSE I'D BETTER NOT CUT ANY MORE BREAD AT THAT PRICE! WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING SO PLEASED ABOUT?

NEW LAWS, KATIE! NEW LAWS MEAN LOOPHOLES -- LOOPHOLES MEAN OPPORTUNITIES -- OPPORTUNITIES TO GET RICH QUICK, MY DOVE. ... AND THEN, NO MORE CARDBOARD SOLES!

NOT ONE EXPERIENCED STATESMAN AMONG THE LOT! THEY'LL MAKE MISTAKES! MISTAKES TO THE ADVANTAGE OF ANYONE SMART ENOUGH TO SEE THE CHANCE --

SUCH AS WHAT, MR. CLAYTON?

DAILY ECHO
NEW WORLD FEDERATION PLANS BRAVE NEW WORLD FOR ALL

THE MORNING IN THE
OF A NEW
WORLD FEDERATION
AN TO A NEW

LEO CLAYTON LAID DOWN THE PAPER AND CAST A KNOWING GLANCE AT HIS ASSISTANT -- JOHN ADLER, A GULLIBLE, TIMID MAN

WELL, TAKE THIS CONCESSION BOARD BUSINESS --- ALL YOU'VE GOT TO DO IS PLANK DOWN A HUNDRED POUNDS AND YOU'LL GET A CONCESSION ON PRACTICALLY ANYTHING, SO LONG AS IT'S NEW AND HASN'T BEEN THOUGHT OF BEFORE --

YOU MEAN THE NEW COMPANIES WE'RE ADVERTISING, P. TO ME, THEY LOOK LIKE TRAPS TO CATCH MUGS --- ONE GOOD WAY FOR THE FEDERATION TO RAKE IN CAPITAL - GRANTING CONCESSIONS TO 'EM, I SUPPOSE!

JOHN ADLER SIGHED AND MOVED OVER TO THE WINDOW.

--AND MOST OF THESE MUG-CATCHING FIRMS PROFESS TO DEAL WITH SPACE TRAVEL -- JUST BECAUSE WE MANAGED TO MAKE A SATELLITE BETWEEN HERE AND THE MOON, FOLK HAVE GOT THE IDEA THAT MAN CAN DO ANYTHINGS --

DON'T FORGET THE WAR WAS WON BY COSMIC BOMBARDMENT FROM THAT MAN-MADE MOON -- IT IS THAT WHICH HAS TURNED THE SCALE!

COSMIC BOMBARDMENT FROM A MAN-MADE SATELLITE! AND IT ONLY SEEMS YESTERDAY THAT WE WERE ALL WONDERING WHAT FLYING SAUCERS WERE --- WHAT THE MOON WAS --

MOON, P. MOON, P.

'LEO CLAYTON GULPED...HE SEEMED ABOUT TO CHOKE...THEN HE LEAPT TO HIS FEET AND SEIZED JOHN'S HANDS.....

THAT'S THE ANSWER, JOHN, MY DEAR BOY, MY BEST FRIEND! HAVE YOU, BY ANY MIRACULOUS CHANCE IN THE WORLD, GOT ONE HUNDRED POUNDS?

YES--BUT-- BUT IT'S ALL I HAVE GOT-- MY LIFE SAVINGS--

JOHN ADLER SAID QUITE A LOT, BUT LEO CLAYTON GOT THE HUNDRED IN THE END...
NEXT DAY, THE CONCESSION BOUGHT, CLAYTON WENT HOME AND TOLD HIS FAMILY.....

YOU'LL PROBABLY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT I'VE BOUGHT THE MOON--

OH? THESE SOCKS OF YOURS ARE GETTING PAST MENDING--

DON'T TALK TO ME OF SOCKS WITH HOLES! SOON WE SHALL BE LIVING LIKE LORDS--OR KINGS!

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'THE CONCESSION WAS GRANTED TO CLAYTON ON ALL MINERAL RIGHTS ON THE MOON--OF WHICH JOHN ADLER WAS TO GET A QUARTER SHARE, AND AN AGREEMENT WAS DRAWN UP TO THIS EFFECT...
AND SO, WENT ON REGAN, 'LUNAR DEVELOPMENTS LTD. WAS LAUNCHED BY CLAYTON...
AND THEN CLAYTON DECIDED TO GET A DEGREE!
PROFESSOR LEO CLAYTON SOUNDED SO MUCH BETTER THAN JUST PLAIN LEO CLAYTON...
FOR A SMALL SUM OF MONEY HE WAS ABLE TO BUY AN HONORARY DEGREE AT A CORRESPONDENCE UNIVERSITY---
HE BECAME A PROFESSOR OF MINEROLOGY, (HON.) UNIVERSITY OF KALAGAREE, U.S.A.



'SHARES WERE SOLD AND THE MONEY POURED IN....EVEN THE FIRST SHAREHOLDERS' MEETING DIDN'T SHAKE PROFESSOR CLAYTON.....



--LOOK AT THE GATELLITE WHICH WAS BUILT FOR THE PURPOSE OF COSMIC BOMBARDMENT---THE BOMBARDMENT WHICH WON THE WAR! THERE IS YOUR GUARANTEE!..... AND THE FIRST OF THE HEAVENLY BODIES TO BE EXPLOITED WILL BE LUNA --THE MOON, ON WHICH THIS COMPANY WILL CONDUCT MINING OPERATIONS WITHOUT OPPOSITION!



AND SUPPOSE THEY FIND THAT THE THING'S NOTHING BUT A HUNK OF CHEESE, AFTER ALL?



"THIS STATEMENT," CONTINUED REGAN, "SENT THE SHAREHOLDERS AWAY HAPPY --- BUT ONE CHAP AT THE MEETING HAD BEEN TAKING NOTES --- HE HAPPENED TO REPRESENT THE WORLD FEDERATION SCIENTIFIC BOARD.....

--LOOKS BAD, MR. CLAYTON--HM?-- PROFESSOR CLAYTON--IT SAYS IN THE PAPER THAT THE WORLD FEDERATION SCIENTIFIC BOARD REPUDIATE THE EXISTENCE OF PYROCLANTHUM ON THE MOON OR ANYWHERE ELSE--SAYS THERE'S NO STUFF RESEMBLING IT, EITHER!



OH, THAT! NEVER MIND THAT NOW! GET ME SOME ARTISTS, MODEL MAKERS--AND A THEATRICAL EFFECTS MAN--HIRE ME A THEATRE--THE BIGGEST YOU CAN GET--FOR, LET'S SEE, THREE DAYS' TIME--

BUT--WE CAN'T DO THAT!



DON'T BE A FOOL--WE'RE NOT GOING TO!

--AND SEND A TELEGRAM, DILLIS, TO EVERY SHAREHOLDER, ANNOUNCING AN EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AT THE THEATRE--



THEY'LL LYNCH YOU!

THINK SO? WELL THEN, ADD THAT SHAREHOLDER'S SO OREGIRING IT WILL BE REPAID THEIR ORIGINAL INVESTMENT ON THE SPOT!

WHAT WAS UP LEO'S SLEEVE HE KEPT A SECRET, EVEN FROM DILLIS, HIS SECRETARY, CHUCKLED REGAN. WHEN, AT THE MEETING, HE CAME OUT FULL OF BOUNCE IN FRONT OF THE CURTAIN, NOBODY KNEW WHAT WAS COMING.....

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN --- I WON'T WASTE YOUR TIME WITH TRIVIAL FORMALITIES --- I WANT TO SAY NOW, THAT THE GENERAL VIEW, QUOTED IN THE PRESS, THAT PYROCLANTHUM IS NON-EXISTENT IS TRUE --- WORLD FEDERATION HAS BEEN INVESTIGATING THIS MATTER IN CO-OPERATION WITH THIS COMPANY --- NOT INDEPENDENTLY AS HAS BEEN SUPPOSED... IT IS DISAPPOINTING --- HOWEVER, THE COMPANY WILL BUY BACK YOUR SHARES, IF YOU SO WISH --- OR ---



'HERE,' SAID REGAN, 'THE CURTAINS SWUNG BACK.....'

'YOUR MONEY CAN BE INVESTED
IN OUR NEW COMPANY --
SATELIGHT LTD.
A SATELLITE ALREADY EXISTS ---
MY COMPANY WILL BUILD NEW
ONES. AS THIS SPECTACLE
WILL SHOW YOU, WE PROPOSE
TO LIGHT EACH ONE OF EARTH'S
GREAT CITIES AT NIGHT, BY
RAYS OF LIGHT THROWN
FROM REFLECTORS ON
THE NEW SATELLITES--'



THE WHOLE SET WAS IN MOTION--WONDERFUL TO BEHOLD...THE SHAREHOLDERS STOOD,
DUMBFOUNDED---AND THE PERSUASIVE TONGUE ROLLED ON...A LIMITED SHARE
ISSUE--THE SUBSCRIBERS WOULD BE MULTIMILLIONAIRES IN TEN YEARS' TIME, ETC. ETC.--
AND THE EXCHANGE WOULD COST A MERE \$20 PER SHARE.....

'SO SATELIGHT LTD. WAS FLOATED. AND LUNAR
DEVELOPMENTS LTD. WAS FINALLY WOUND UP...
LEO CLAYTON HAD TO PAY OFF A FEW INVESTORS
WHO HAD COME TO THEIR SENSES, BUT,' SAID
REGAN, 'HE WAS STILL WELL IN POCKET.....
ONE OF THE DOUBTERS WAS JOHN ADLER--
NOW A VERY SICK MAN.....'

I SUPPOSE THAT'S THE END OF THE
DREAM OF MINING ON THE MOON--
AND THE LAST I'LL SEE OF THE
\$100 I LENT YOU.'

NOT LENT, JOHN--INVESTED.
IN RETURN; REMEMBER, I GAVE YOU
ONE QUARTER RIGHTS OF THE MOON--
SO WE BOTH LOST, MY BOY! BUT MY
LOSS IS THREE TIMES GREATER THAN
YOURS!.....TELL YOU WHAT, THOUGH--
I'LL GIVE YOU TWO SHARES IN THE
NEW COMPANY IN EXCHANGE.'



'AND THEN,' SMILED REGAN, 'WITH
THE GENEROSITY WHICH WAS AS
TYPICAL OF LEO AS HIS
CROOKEDNESS.....'

SEND JOHN ADLER
A CHEQUE FOR
\$100 ---
NO, MAKE IT
\$50.'



BUT WHAT REGAN DID NOT
REALISE, AS HE TOLD RICK RANDOM
THE STORY, WAS THAT HERE WAS
THE HEART OF THE WHOLE BUSINESS
... JOHN ADLER WAS STILL LEGAL
OWNER OF ONE-QUARTER OF THE
RIGHTS TO THE MOON.
IN FACT, TO FIND JOHN ADLER, OR
HIS HEIRS, WAS THE REASON WHY
KING LEO WAS SENDING FOR RICK.

REGAN GLANCED AT HIS WATCH
AND ROSE TO HIS FEET.....

SO THERE'S THE STORY OF PROFESSOR
CLAYTON AND HOW YOUNG LEO, HIS SON,
EVENTUALLY, CAME TO INHERIT THE MOON.
--OF COURSE, GATELIGHT LTD. CAME TO
NOTHING! WHEN THE BOARD
SUPERSEDED THE OLD SET UP, THOSE
WILD CAT COMPANIES WERE WIPE OUT
AND FUTURE CONCESSIONS ONLY
GRANTED TO BONA FIDE
DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES---

THEN HOW COME
THAT CLAYTON RETAINED
HIS CONCESSION ON
THE MOON?

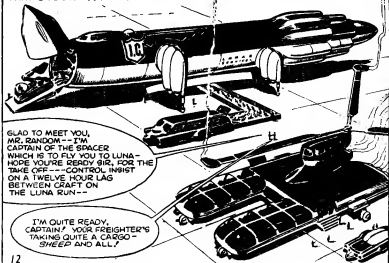


REGAN SMILED AS THEY MADE
THEIR WAY TO THE DOOR.....

JUST AN OVERSIGHT---WHEN LUNA
DEVELOPMENT LTD. WAS WOUND UP, THE
CONCESSION WAS NOT NULLIFIED---
PROFESSOR CLAYTON DIED---HIS SON
INHERITED HIS ESTATE--IF ANY!--AND
WITH IT, THE FORGOTTEN CONCESSION!



RICK COULD NOT GET ANY MORE OUT OF REGAN THAT NIGHT... AND NEXT DAY, REGAN
LEFT UNEXPECTEDLY ON AN INTERPLANETARY TRIP, LEAVING THE STORY INCOMPLETE.
RICK ACCEPTED THE ASSIGNMENT HOWEVER, AND DEPARTED BY HELIBUS FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN DESERT SPACE DROME, WHERE THE CHARTERED SPACER WAS
WAITING FOR HIM.....



GLAD TO MEET YOU,
MR. RANDOM--I'M
CAPTAIN OF THE SPACER
WHICH IS TO FLY YOU TO LUNA--
HOPE YOU'RE READY SIR, FOR THE
TAKE OFF--CONTROL INHIBIT
ON A TWELVE HOUR LAG
BETWEEN CRAFT ON
THE LUNA RUN--

I'M QUITE READY,
CAPTAIN! YOUR FREIGHTER'S
TAKING QUITE A CARGO--
SHEEP AND ALL!

SHE'S FERRYING NEW MINING EQUIPMENT OUT EVERY WEEK--BUT THE SHEEP ARE FOR KING LEO---HE'S GOT SOME NOTION OF BREEDING SHEEP AS BIG AS ELEPHANTS OUT THERE--LAST YEAR IT WAS CAULIFLOWER TREES!

QUITE A CARD, THIS KING LEO, EVIDENTLY! SOUNDS CRAZY TO ME!



THE CAPTAIN LAUGHED....

HE'S MAYBE CRAZY, HE'S MAYBE CUNNING--I WOULDN'T KNOW! BUT YOU HAVE A CHAT WITH NICHOLLS, OUR NAVIGATOR--HE CAN TELL YOU MORE ABOUT THE LUNA HOT HOUSES THAN I CAN!



NICHOLLS GRINNED....

THAT WAS BEFORE MY TIME--BUT I RECKON IT WAS THE SAME, GREAT PLASTIC BUBBLE OF A PLACE--

THERE WAS NO CHANCE TO TALK UNTIL THEY WERE OUT OF THE SATELLITE ZONE, THEN, AS THE MOST DISTANT OF THE MAN-MADE SPACE GLOBES FLOATED PAST, NICHOLLS JOINED RICK IN THE OBSERVER DOME....

I HEAR YOU'RE CURIOUS ABOUT THE LUNA HOT HOUSES, MR. RANDOM--DID YOU EVER SEE A PICTURE OF LUNAPORT AS IT ORIGINALLY WAS?

SEE A PICTURE! I GOT MY SPACE TRAINING OUT THERE AS A CADET, MY LAD!



WHEN I WAS OUT THERE, WE CALLED IT THE CRYSTAL PALACE--WITHOUT RIBS! AFTER AN EXHIBITION HALL IN LONDON WHICH WAS DESTROYED BEFORE EITHER OF US WAS BORN! LUNAPORT WAS QUITE A GOOD SPOT THEN--THE FELLOWS MADE THEMSELVES COMFORTABLE THERE--EVEN TOOK PETS!



AT THIS, NICHOLLS LAUGHED ALOUD.....

YES-AND ONE CHAP TOOK A BUOGERIGAR?
I HAPPEN TO KNOW! THOUGH MY
KNOWLEDGE OF LUNAPORT DATES TO TWO
YEARS AGO-AFTER WE HAD
ABANDONED THE PLACE
FOR CREW TRAINING..



NICHOLLS CONTINUED HIS STORY:

..I WAS NAVIGATOR OF A SPACE
RANGER, MAKING A TRIP TO MARS,
SAIO NICHOLLS. 'WE WERE IN THE
MOON'S ORBIT...WHEN WE WERE
HIT BY A METEOR



'RANGER E-21 WAS BADLY
HOLED...WE SEALED OFF
THE PUNCTURED
COMPARTMENTS, BUT
FOUND WE COULDN'T
MAKE EARTH.....

WE'LL NEVER
MAKE EARTH WITH
THE SPACER IN THIS
STATE--OUR ONLY
CHANCE IS TO LAND
ON THE MOON-IF
WE CAN GET
THERE--

OKAY--
TRY IT! WE CAN
RADIO EARTH FOR
ASSISTANCE
FROM THERE--



'WE MADE IT, ALL RIGHT,'
WENT ON NICHOLLS.
'WHAT'S MORE, WE MADE
LUNAPORT, WHICH WAS
STILL INTACT, IN SPITE
OF THE YEARS OF
NEGLECT.....
BUT--

CRUIKEY!
LOOK THERE --
IT'S NOTHING MORE
THAN A JUNGLE!

JUNGLE?
I RECKON LUNAPORT'S
BECOME A GIANT HOT
HOUSE! WE'LL GRAB SOME
AXES AND HACK OUR
WAY THROUGH!

'YES, THAT'S WHAT WE HAD TO DO --
HACK AND CHOP OUR WAY THROUGH
THE GIANT PLANTS WHICH HAD
GROWN SINCE EARTH HAD
ABANDONED THE TRAINING
GROUNDS.....

THESE
THINGS AREN'T
PLANTS -- THEY'RE
TREES! AND I'D
GIVE SOMETHING
TO KNOW JUST WHAT
KIND THEY ARE
TOO!

IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA
TO TAKE A CUTTING BACK TO
EARTH TO HAVE IT EXAMINED
WHEN WE ARE PICKED UP --
CERTAINLY I'VE NEVER SEEN
ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE --
MUST BE THE EFFECT OF
THIS OVERPOWERING
HEAT --

LOCK 7 IN

'BUT THOUGH IT WAS HOT IN THE LUNAPORT BUBBLE, IT WASN'T THE HEAT ALONE THAT HAD DONE THE TRICK ---- WE WERE PICKED UP EVENTUALLY, AND TOOK A CUTTING BACK,' SAID NICHOLLS, AND A BOTANICAL EXPERT GOT ON THE JOB ----

SAID, CHAPS --
WHAT D'YOU THINK?
YOU'LL SIMPLY
FOLD UP!

SPILL
IT!

THOSE TREES IN
LUNAPORT! THE
BOTANICAL JOHNNY'S
REPORT HAS JUST COME
IN -- THOSE TREES WERE
GROWN FROM BUDGERIGAR
SEED -- IT'S SOME SPECIAL
SUBSTANCE IN THE SOIL OUT
THERE WHICH CAUSED THEIR TERRIFIC GROWTH!

YES, MR. RANDOM -- THAT TRAINEE
WHO HAD A PET BUDGE HAD SPILT
SOME SEED, I SUPPOSE -- THEN
EVERYONE ABANDONED THE PLACE
---- AND THAT WAS THE RESULT!

WHAT
HAPPENED
THEN?

SOME SHIPLOADS OF MOON-SOIL WERE
BROUGHT OVER TO HELP THE FOLK GROW
BIGGER AND BETTER STUFF -- BUT IT DIDN'T
WORK ON EARTH -- THEN THE BOARD WENT
OVER TO INVESTIGATE THE SOIL THOROUGHLY
AND ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED TRITINEUM
ORE -- VALUABLE! -- HENCE ALL THE
MINING UP THERE!

AND LEO CLAYTON JUNIOR
SHOWED UP WITH HIS FATHER'S
CONCESSION -- BEGAN TO
GATHER IN THE ROYALTIES --
AND TO GET IDEAS ABOUT
CAULIFLOWERS AND SHEEP!
AND ALL THIS HAS
HAPPENED IN TWO
YEARS -- WHILE I
WAS AWAY!

LEFT ALONE ONCE MORE, RICK WENT TO THE CREW DECK AND STARED OUT AT THE GREAT WHITE ORB, ITS MOUNTAIN RANGES NOW CLEARLY RECOGNISABLE.

HIS NIBS KING LEO? I WONDER WHAT HE WANTS WITH ME. I'M NO MARKET GARDENER OR SHEEP FARMER!

COMING DOWN TO LAND AT LUNAPORT, RICK WATCHED THE APPROACHING SURFACE ON THE TELE-SCREEN SYSTEM USED FOR LANDING.

THIS MINING IS CERTAINLY GOING AHEAD! THOSE ENCLOSED ROADS CONNECT ONE MINE WITH ANOTHER -- AND EACH MINE WITH THE LANDING BASE. ALL VERY WELL WORKED OUT.

THE LANDING BASE WAS BUSY WHEN THEY TOUCHED DOWN...

THREE MORE FREIGHTERS BEING LOADED, MR. RANDOM! MORE MONEY FOR HIS NIBS! THOSE PIPELINES YOU CAN SEE CARRY THE SEMI-LIQUID ORE WHICH HAS BEEN BROKEN DOWN AT THE MINES --

THERE MUST BE A BIG MINING COMMUNITY HERE -- I'LL HAVE TO PAY THEIR LITTLE TOWNSHIP A VISIT BEFORE I LEAVE!

5 6

A SURFACE TRANSPORT CAME OUT TO THE SPACER
TO CONNECT WITH THE AIR LOCK.....

THAT TRANSPORT IS FOR YOU,
MR. RANDOM--OUR JOURNEY
ENDS HERE. YOU WILL BE
TAKEN OVERLAND TO KING
LEO'S COURT. WE HAVE
NO INSTRUCTIONS TO TAKE
YOU BACK-- BUT YOU CAN
ALWAYS HOP A HOME-
BOUND FREIGHTER
IF WE'VE BEEN
RECALLED TO
EARTH--



RICK GHOOK HANDS WITH THE
CAPTAIN AND NICHOLLS AND
WENT DOWN TO THE AIR LOCK
ALONE...
A MAN WAS WAITING FOR HIM--
IN A COSTUME SO REMARKABLE
THAT RICK, FOR A MOMENT,
COULD ONLY STARE.....

I'M
CLEGG!

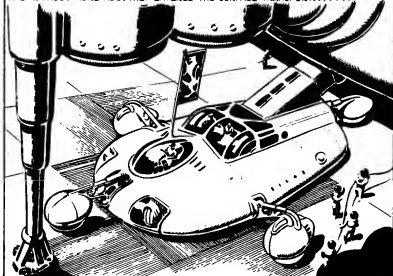


RICK TOOK THE COLD FISH OF A HAND--FEELING THAT
HE HAD STEPPED BACK INTO THE 15TH. CENTURY...

I'M PLEASSED TO
MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE
MR. CLEGG. TELL ME--
CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY
KING LEO WISHES
TO SEE ME?

EXPLANATIONS
ARE NOT FOR ME TO
MAKE--HIS MAJESTY
WILL TELL YOU ALL YOU
WISH TO KNOW--IF
YOU WILL COME NOW,
TO THE TRANSPORT--

AND WITHOUT MORE ADO, THEY ENTERED THE SURFACE TRANSPORT.....



AHEAD LAY WHAT WAS MORE OF A TRACK THAN A ROAD... THE CHAUFFEUR AIMED THE CAR ALONG IT AND THEY SHOT FORWARD AT TREMENDOUS SPEED.....

I WAS STATIONED HERE AT THE END OF THE LAST CENTURY WHEN LUNAPORT WAS A SPACE TRAINING SCHOOL--

YOU'LL FIND IT VERY CHANGED --IT IS THE ONLY INDEPENDENT CAPITAL IN THE WHOLE OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM ---WE HAVE OUR OWN LAWS TOO --MAY I SUGGEST THAT YOU WILL BE WISE TO OBSERVE THEM.P



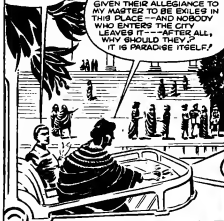
AND WITH RICK SO CAUTIONED, THEY
PASSED THROUGH THE PRESSURE
LOCK OF LUNAPORT.
AT HIS FIRST SIGHT OF THE NEW CITY
OF THE MOON, RICK GASPED ALOUD..
ENAMELLED DOMES SHONE WHITE AS
IVORY.. MINARETS OF JET GLITTERED
UNDER THE SPRAY OF NEARBY
FOUNTAINS--EACH BUILDING WAS
LOVELIER THAN THE LAST.....



FROM EVERYWHERE CAME MUSIC... AND ALONG THE WHITE, UNMUDDIED PAVEMENTS STROLLED THE PEOPLE.....

WHERE DO ALL THESE PEOPLE COME FROM?

THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED MEN AND THE LOVELIEST WOMEN HAVE WILLINGLY GIVEN THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO MY MASTER TO BE EXILES IN THIS PLACE --AND NOBODY WHO ENTERS THE CITY LEAVES IT---AFTER ALL, WHY SHOULD THEY? IT IS PARADISE ITSELF!



MOMENTARY ANXIETY BETRAYED ITSELF IN RICK'S FACE.....

I SHALL GO BACK, CLEGG -

OF COURSE! IT IS INTENDED THAT YOU SHALL RETURN-- BUT YOU WILL BE SURPRISED HOW INADEQUATELY YOU WILL REMEMBER ALL THIS!



THEY REACHED THE PALACE... THE VEHICLE STOPPED AND CLEGG LED THE WAY UP A WIDE SWEEP OF STEPS INTO THE PALACE.....

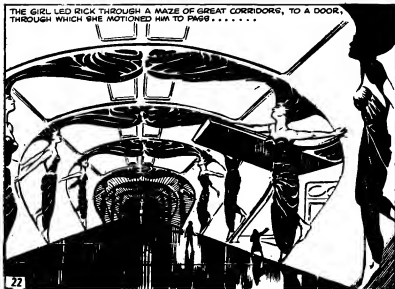


YOU WILL REST AND REFRESH YOURSELF--- THIS EVENING YOU WILL HAVE AUDIENCE WITH HIS MAJESTY!

IT SEEMED THAT I FO CLAYTON'S PRIVATE PARADISE WAS NOT WITHOUT ITS SLAVES...



THE GIRL LED RICK THROUGH A MAZE OF GREAT CORRIDORS, TO A DOOR, THROUGH WHICH SHE MOTIONED HIM TO PASS.....





GRATEFULLY ENOUGH, RICK STRIPPED AND WENT THROUGH TO THE PLUNGE... WHEN HE RETURNED TO THE OUTER ROOM, HE FOUND THAT HIS OWN CLOTHES WERE GONE AND COURT GARMENTS LAID OUT IN THEIR PLACE.....



TO HIS SURPRISE, HE DIDN'T FEEL AS
THOUGH HE WAS GETTING READY FOR
SOME FANCY DRESS BALL.....
DRESSED, HE TRIED THE DOOR.....



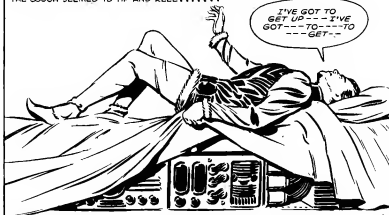
SHRUGGING SLIGHTLY, HE TRIED THE
WINDOW... THAT ALSO WAS LOCKED...
HE SAT DOWN, IN THOUGHT.....



THE COUCH WAS VERY COMFORTABLE.....SLOWLY RICK RELAXED.....



A STRANGE FEELING BEGAN TO COME OVER HIM.... A GIDDINESS ---
THE COUCH SEEMED TO TIP AND REEL.....



IN VAIN RICK TRIED TO RISE.... GROPING FOR THE FLOOR, HIS HAND
DISTURBED THE HANGING DRAPERY....
.... BUT THE EFFORT WAS TOO MUCH.... HE FELL BACK, ASLEEP ---
UNCONSCIOUS --- AND DID NOT SEE THE COMPLICATED MECHANISM UNDER THE COUCH ---

AND HIGH IN THE SPIRE SURMOUNTING THE PALACE, HELMAR VOKK, KING LEO'S
SCIENTIST, WATCHED HIS STRANGE INSTRUMENT FOR THE RESULTS HE EXPECTED...
WITH HIM WAS KING LEO HIMSELF....

CAN YOU CONTROL
HIS MIND, THAT'S THE
POINT, ? RANDOM
HAS A KEEN BRAIN ---

OF COURSE, KEEN OR NOT
HIS BRAIN WILL RESPOND TO THE
MECHANISM BENEATH THE COUCH,
HE IS UNCONSCIOUS, BUT RESTLESS ---
I WILL DEAL FURTHER --- WATCH!



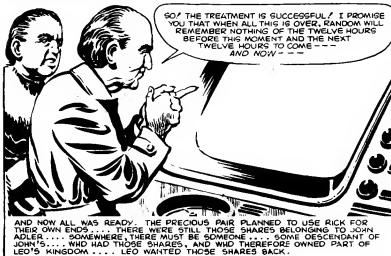
AS HE SPOKE, YOKK'S DEVILISHLY DELICATE HANDS REACHED FOR A CONTROL PANEL.....



WHAT'S
HAPPENING?
WHAT'S IT
MEAN?

YOU'RE LOOKING AT PART OF
A MAN'S BRAIN--RANDOM'S--
AT THE NEST OF CELLS WE CALL
MEMORY. ONE PART OF IT--
THE PAST FEW HOURS, THE PRESENT
AND THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, IS
BEING BURNT OUT--

YOKK MANIPULATED THE CONTROLS AGAIN...UNTIL THE SCREEN BECAME
UTTERLY LIFELESS AND BLANK.....



GO! THE TREATMENT IS SUCCESSFUL! I PROMISE
YOU THAT WHEN ALL THIS IS OVER, RANDOM WILL
REMEMBER NOTHING OF THE TWELVE HOURS
BEFORE THIS MOMENT AND THE NEXT
TWELVE HOURS TO COME--
AND NOW--

AND NOW ALL WAS READY. THE PRECIOUS PAIR PLANNED TO USE RICK FOR
THEIR OWN ENDS.... THERE WERE STILL THOSE SHARES BELONGING TO JOHN
ADLER.... SOMEWHERE, THERE MUST BE SOMEONE.... SOME DESCENDANT OF
JOHN'S.... WHO HAD THOSE SHARES, AND WHO THEREFORE OWNED PART OF
LEO'S KINGDOM.... LEO WANTED THOSE SHARES BACK.

TURNING, VOKK INDICATED A CHAIR.....

I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD HAVE USED A CLEVER MAN LIKE RANDOM FOR THIS BUSINESS.

IT'S THE ONLY WAY. RANDOM IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW PEOPLE WHO HAVE ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC RECORDS ON EARTH...WE HAVE MADE A PLACE VACANT IN A LIVING BRAIN--IN THAT PLACE WE WILL NOW PUT THE ORDERS--TO BE REMEMBERED MECHANICALLY BY RANDOM--AND AFTERWARDS FORGOTTEN JUST AS MECHANICALLY!



KING LEO NODDED, REASSURED...IT WAS PLAIN TO SEE THAT HE FEARED VOKK--OR VOKK'S KNOWLEDGE, --AND VOKK KNEW HE HELD THE KING ON A STRING.....

RICK WAKENED, FEELING FINE...CLEGG WAS IN THE ROOM.....

YOU FEEL REFRESHED,? YOUR OWN CLOTHES WILL BE RETURNED TO YOU WHEN YOU LEAVE --



SO I AM TO LEAVE ? THAT'S REASSURING NEWS,? FEEL MUCH BETTER FOR THE REST--WHAT HAPPENS NOW,?

I AM TO CONDUCT YOU TO HIS MAJESTY.

AND CLEGG TOOK RICK BACK
THROUGH THE CORRIDORS...
TILL AT LAST THEY CAME TO A
VAST ROOM, WHICH THEY ENTERED...



THEY WERE SHOWN INTO THE BANQUETING HALL... RICK CAUGHT HIS BREATH
WITH WONDER.....



28 IT WAS A SCENE WHICH BEGGARED THE ARABIAN NIGHTS' MOST EXTRAVAGANT TALES!..



LEO HELD OUT HIS HAND TO RICK IN RECOGNITION... THEN SAT DOWN... THE ASSEMBLAGE FOLLOWED SUIT... THE ENDS OF THE TABLE CLOSED, FORMING ANOTHER TABLE IN FRONT OF RICK AND THE KING, AND THE BANQUET BEGAN.....



THIS WAS THE LEVEL OF THE CONVERSATION.... CASUAL SMALL TALK-- THROUGH A BANQUET WHICH LASTED SEVERAL HOURS... THEN SUDDENLY, KING LEO ROSE.....

THE TIME HAS COME TO TALK!

ONCE MORE THE CENTRE SECTION OF THE TABLE MOVED BACK... AND LEO PASSED THROUGH, FOLLOWED BY RICK AND VOKK... THEY ASCENDED BY LIFT--TO VOKK'S LABORATORY.....

IT'S RATHER DIFFERENT UP HERE, ISN'T IT? IT NEEDS TO BE--FOR FROM HERE WE SHALL DEFEY YOUR PRECIOUS BOARD!

VOKK!

VOKK WAS INTERESTED IN RICK'S REACTION. HE KNEW THAT HE WAS PERFECTLY SAFE IN TELLING RICK THIS FOR HE WOULDN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ANYWAY....

YOU SEE, RANDOM, ONE PART OF YOUR MEMORY HAS ALREADY BEEN EXTRACTED--THE PART TO WHICH ALL THIS WILL BELONG WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE--

RICK NOW REALISED THAT HE WAS DEALING NOT WITH ONE MADMAN BUT WITH TWO..... CAUTIOUSLY HE LOOKED AROUND.....



I AM SO SURE YOU WILL NOT REMEMBER THAT I INVITE YOU TO INSPECT THE DISINTEGRATOR RAY GUNS--GUNS WITH ENOUGH POWER TO DESTROY ANY FLEET THAT MIGHT BE LAUNCHED AGAINST US--WHILST STILL IN SPACE!--IF EARTH SHOULD BE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO QUARREL WITH OUR WAY OF LIFE!

KING LEO SUDDENLY STAMPED WITH RAGE.....

I WON'T HAVE A WAR!
I WON'T! ALL I WANT IS MY
MOON! ALL MY MOON! NOT
JUST A SHARE IN IT---IT'S GOT
TO BE MINE, YOU SEE---
THEY CAN HAVE THEIR
TRITINEUM!



THUS KING LEO SHOWED HIS SECRET FEAR...
THAT THE BOARD WOULD INTERVENE AND HIS
MOON THEN BE LOST TO HIM FOREVER.....
RICK BEGAN TO FEAR FOR HIS OWN SAFETY...
LEO CLAYTON WAS A HARMLESS ENOUGH
FOOL-----BUT YOKK---?

BUT THE MOON
IS YOURS--
THE BOARD
RECOGNISES
THAT---

IT'S NOT!
THERE WAS A MAN--
JOHN ADLER! -- MY
FATHER GAVE HIM A
QUARTER! A QUARTER
SHARE OF MY MOON --
MY MOON! OF MY
INCOME FROM THE
TRITINEUM MINES--
OF MY LOVELY
CITY!



YOKK GRINNED
CONTEMPTUOUSLY.

JOHN ADLER DIED--BUT HE MAY
HAVE DESCENDANTS! I WAKE
UP DREAMING OF THEM--OF HOW
THEY CAN SPOIL IT ALL! THEY'VE
GOT TO BE TRACED AND
BOUGHT OUT---OR---



KING LEO'S HANDS DROPPED TO HIS SIDES.....HE BABBLER OUT HIS LOVE
OF PEACE AND BEAUTY---TO YOKK'S DISGUST.....



VOKK MOVED SUDDENLY WITH THE SWIFTHNESS OF A CAT... RICK SAW THE THIN HANDS REACH OUT TO A CONTROL PANEL-- BUT HE SAW TOO LATE.....

SO, MR. RICK RANDOM, HOW IS THAT, MY FRIEND?

IT SNAKED OUT TOWARDS HIM-- A THIN WHIPLASH OF LIGHT, WEAVING LIKE A LIVING THING-- LIKE A TUBE OF NEON LIGHT RUN WILD.....

...IT COILED ROUND HIS WRISTS-- THEN HIS ANKLES... AND ALTHOUGH IN ITSELF IT GAVE NO PAIN, ITS POWER WAS TREMENDOUS.....

HELP ME WITH HIM!

HELMAR VONK AND LEO CLAYTON LIFTED RICK BODILY AS IF HE WERE A MUMMY - AND CARRIED HIM TO THE HYPNOSIS CHAIR.....



...WHERE THEY SAT HIM DOWN...
HE WAS QUITE CONSCIOUS - BUT INCAPABLE OF
MOVEMENT... VONK PULLED DOWN THE HEADGEAR
AND RICK KNEW THAT IT WAS BEING ATTACHED TO
HIS SKULL...
THERE WAS THE WHINE OF
A GENERATOR.....

NOW WE'LL GIVE
HIM HIS
INSTRUCTIONS -



SEVERAL HOURS LATER RICK AWOKO -
IN HIS OWN ROOM IN THE SPACE SHIP...
HE WASHED, SHAVED, DRESSED AND
WENT DOWN TO BREAKFAST.....

WARNING
DO NOT RUN
IN THE DIRECTION
OF ROTATION

HELLO!
NICE TO SEE
YOU! HOW DO
YOU FEEL?

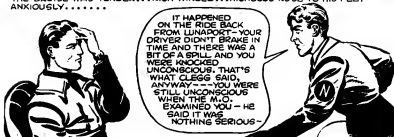
FINE, NICHOLS.
BIT OF A HEAD,
BUT OTHERWISE
FINE! WHEN DO WE
REACH THE MOON?



VOKK HAD BEEN RIGHT? RICK REMEMBERED NOTHING AT ALL OF HIS LUNAPORT VISIT. BUT NICHOLLS, OF COURSE, KNEW HE HAD LEFT FOR LUNAPORT IN THE TRANSPORT--HAD SEEN HIS RETURN TO THE SPACER--ACCOMPANIED BY CLEGG.....THEREFORE, NICHOLLS WAS ALARMED.....



THE BRUISE WAS TENDER...RICK WINCED...NICHOLLS ROSE TO HIS FEET ANXIOUSLY.....



NICHOLLS WENT ON TO DESCRIBE THE ACCIDENT IN DETAIL



RICK LOOKED AT HIM, PUZZLED...

IT'S NO GOOD - AND AS TO THIS CHAP CLEGG - I REMEMBER HE WROTE ME A LETTER - BUT I'VE NEVER MET HIM.

MEAN TO SAY YOU DON'T REMEMBER CLEGG?

THE LAST THING I REMEMBER - IS SITTING WITH YOU WHEN YOU WERE TELLING ME ABOUT KING LEO'S HOT HOUSES.

AT RICK'S REQUEST, THE CAPTAIN SENT A COSMOCODE SIGNAL BACK TO LUNAPORT, REPORTING RICK'S AMNESIA AND DILEMMA.....

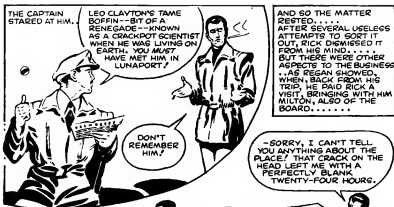
HERE'S THE REPLY, MR. RANDOM - 'REGRET RANDOM'S AMNESIA -- TELL HIM NOT TO WORRY -- IT WAS AGREED THAT HIS SERVICES WOULD BE UNAVAILABLE -- -YOKK-'

YOKK? WHO'S YOKK?

NICHOLLS WHISTLED SOFTLY....HE WENT OUT AND BROUGHT THE M.O.... CAREFULLY THEY TOLD RICK ALL THE DETAILS OF HIS VISIT TO LUNAPORT AS THEY KNEW IT, IN AN EFFORT TO GET RICK'S MEMORY OFF ON THE RIGHT TRAIL. BUT IT WAS USELESS!.....

I DON'T REMEMBER A THING! I WAS SENT FOR TO DO A JOB -- YOU TELL ME I ARRIVED IN LUNAPORT AND STAYED THERE FOR SOME HOURS -- DOUBTLESS I WAS GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS --

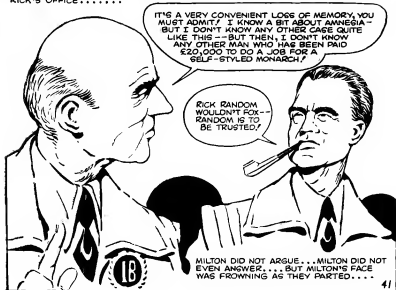
I DON'T REMEMBER THEM!



REGAN STARTED TO SAY SOMETHING, BUT MILTON GAVE HIM A QUICK, CAUTIONING LOOK.....



AND AFTERWARDS, WHEN REGAN AND MILTON WERE WELL OUT OF EARSHOT OF RICK'S OFFICE.....



IT WAS TWO DAYS LATER WHEN RICK FOUND HIMSELF OUTSIDE THE PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE.... WITHOUT CONSCIOUS DECISION HE SAUNTERED INSIDE.....

CAN WE HELP YOU, MR. RANDOM?

NO THANKS! JUST FEEL LIKE BROWSEING AROUND!

CTOR



RICK RANDOM'S POSITION GAVE HIM RIGHT OF ACCESS TO ALL PUBLIC RECORDS, SO HE WAS ABLE TO PASS THROUGH TO THE PERSONAL RECORDS DEPARTMENT WITHOUT CHALLENGE... AIMLESSLY, RICK TOOK THE SEARCH CHAIR... AND OPENED THE FIRST DRAWER MARKED 'A'.....

STRANGE HOW THE NAME 'ADLER' PERSISTS IN CROPPING UP IN MY MIND--



WITH A WHIMSICAL GRIN, RICK BEGAN SEARCHING THROUGH THE RECORD CARDS.... HE THOUGHT HE UNDERSTOOD WHY HE WAS THERE....



IDLE CURIOSITY ON MY PART, I SUPPOSE--- JUST FEEL LIKE KNOWING WHETHER ADLER HAD ANY CHILDREN? AH, HERE WE ARE!

JOHN ADLER HAD DIED, LEAVING A SON, RICHARD PETER... LOOKING UP THAT RICHARD PETER, RICK FOUND THAT HE AND HIS WIFE HAD ALSO DIED, LEAVING A DAUGHTER, BELLA.....

ADLER, BELLA
J92/36d985ip6.
TWENTY ONE YEARS
OF AGE, SCHOOL
TEACHER....
INTERPLANETARY
PASSPORT ISSUED
THREE YEARS AGO.
EMIGRATED TO
VENUS.



RICK SHRUGGED... REPLACED THE CARD AND PROMPTLY FORGOT ALL ABOUT IT... COMING OUT OF THE BUILDING, HE CAME FACE TO FACE WITH MILTON.....

WHY, HELLO! WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO IN THE MORGUE? TRAILING SOME POOR FELLOW DOWN?

JUST BROWSING-- NO PURPOSE!

MILTON CHECKED RICK'S STATEMENT AT THE PERSONAL RECORDS DEPARTMENT AND FOUND THAT RICK HAD NOT TOLD THE TRUTH.... HE TALKED IT OVER WITH REGAN.....

--THEY SAID HE HAD BEEN SEARCHING THROUGH THE FILES-- WHICH ONES, THEY COULDN'T SAY YET-- WISH YOU'D HAVE A WORD WITH RANDOM, REGAN-- YOU'RE A PERSONAL FRIEND-- THERE MUST BE SOMETHING BEHIND ALL THIS--

OH, WELL--- ALL RIGHT--- I'LL GIVE HIM A RING THIS AFTERNOON, THEN!

MILTON, SUSPICIOUS, PRESSED HIS QUESTIONING.....

DON'T TELL ME THAT'S YOUR IDEA OF FUN-- YOU MUST HAVE BEEN LOOKING SOMEONE OR SOMETHING UP--

I TELL YOU I WASN'T! I JUST WENT IN THERE-- JUST SAUNTERED ROUND AND CAME OUT-- DIDN'T LOOK ANYONE UP!

RICK WAS NOT IN HIS OFFICE WHEN REGAN PHONED-- NEITHER WAS HE AT HIS APARTMENT... ONLY THE PLANETARY CLUB COULD GIVE REGAN ANY INFORMATION.....

MR. RANDOM LEFT FOR AUSTRALIA THIS MORNING, MR. REGAN-- HE'S CATCHING THE VENUS SPACER. I UNDERSTAND--

THIS WAS PUZZLING NEWS... IT WAS USUAL FOR RICK TO MAKE AN ADVANCED REPORT TO THE BOARD ON HIS MOVEMENTS... REGAN 'PHONED THE AUSTRALIAN ROCKET STATION AND CAUGHT RICK BEFORE HE EMBARKED FOR VENUS..

YOU MUSTN'T MIND MY GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOU, RICK OLD BOY-- BUT WE'RE GETTING ANXIOUS ABOUT YOU HERE-- YOU'RE ACTING SO VERY MYSTERIOUSLY--

I DON'T QUITE KNOW HOW TO ANSWER YOU--THE FACT IS, THERE'S NO REASON FOR THIS TRIP TO VENUS-- JUST GOT A STRANGE IMPULSE TO GO THERE, THAT'S ALL?



REGAN TRIED TO PROBE, BUT THERE WAS NOTHING FURTHER TO BE DISCOVERED.... RICK DID NOT KNOW IT, BUT HE WAS FOLLOWING THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO HIM BY KING LEO WHILE IN THE HYPNOSIS CHAIR--AS VOKK HAD SAID HE WOULD.. RICK REMEMBERED THE INSTRUCTIONS UNCONSCIOUSLY AT THE RIGHT TIME, ACTED IN THE WAY REQUIRED BY VOKK - AND THEN IMMEDIATELY LOST ALL KNOWLEDGE OF HAVING SO ACTED? CERTAINLY, HE DID NOT CONNECT THIS TRIP TO VENUS WITH HIS RECENT VISIT TO THE MOON.

ARRIVING AT THE VENUS SPACEPORT, RICK TOOK A HELITAXI INTO THE CAPITAL, VENUSBURG... HE WALKED ACROSS TO THE COSMOPOLITAN HOTEL, WHERE HE WAS WELL KNOWN TO THE MANAGER.....

MR. RANDOM! THIS IS A WONDERFUL SURPRISE! WHAT BRINGS YOU BACK TO VENUS SO SOON?

OH, NOTHING PARTICULAR-- JUST GOING TO BROWSE AROUND.

THE NEXT DAY FOUND RICK IN THE VENUSBURG IMMIGRATION OFFICES, EXAMINING THE TRADE RECORDS OF IMMIGRANTS.....

A G

ADLER, BELLA
EARTH BORN - DATE 27 JUL
SCHOOL TEACHER - SCHOL
LUSIAN SECONDARY
TEACHER OF LITERATURE

HEIGHT: 5'7", BUILD: FIRM-FRAME,
HAIR: BRUNETT, EYES: BLUE
DISTINGUISHING MARKS: NONE.
MARRIED: YES
IMPT. SPEECH: CAN
WALK: NORM. PAIN: NO
NO. 1002/204502110

1002/204502110

RICK WENT TO THE LUSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL -- HE NEVER REMEMBERED WHY OR WHAT HAPPENED AFTER HIS ARRIVAL.....



THEY MET IN THE COOL, PRIVATE GARDEN BELONGING TO THE SCHOOL.. BELLA ADLER WAS PUZZLED.....



BELLA FROWNED... AND THEN BURST OUT LAUGHING.....

OH, YES -- I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN -- IT WAS A FAMILY JOKE FOR 60 MANY YEARS, I HADN'T THE HEART TO DESTROY IT! SOMETHING STUPID ABOUT THE MOON?



THERE'S NOTHING STUPID ABOUT A DOCUMENT WHICH WILL MAKE YOU PROBABLY THE RICHEST HEIRESS IN THE UNIVERSE!



AND THEN HE TOLD HER WHAT VOKK HAD TOLD HIM TO TELL HER... OF THE GIANT PLANTS OF THE MOON... OF THE DISCOVERY OF TRITINEUM AND OF THE BEAUTIFUL CITY OF LUNAPORT--EVEN OF VOKK'S LABORATORY... BUT NOT OF THE BRAIN MACHINE.

YOU THINK VENUSBURG IS LOVELY-- WAIT TILL YOU SEE YOUR CITY! FOR YOU MUST GO-- LEO CLAYTON HAS A VAST FORTUNE IN TRUST FOR YOU-- AND I AM AUTHORIZED TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOUR JOURNEY THERE--

I'D LIKE TO THINK ABOUT IT-- IT ISN'T QUITE REAL YET, I'LL PHONE YOU AT YOUR HOTEL IF I MAY?

VOKK'S SCHEME WAS WORKING TO PERFECTION. RICK WAS REMEMBERING ONLY WHAT THE MAD SCIENTIST WANTED HIM TO REMEMBER... AND NOTHING MORE.

THEREAFTER, RICK FORGOT ABOUT BELLA ADLER--UNTIL SHE 'PHONED HIM.... SHE WOULD GO, IF RICK WOULD PLEASE MAKE THE ARRANGEMENTS.... SHE CALLED TO SEE HIM ON THE MORNING OF HER DEPARTURE AND THEY LUNCHEDED TOGETHER.....

--AND THIS MAN, CLAYTON?

OH, YOU'LL LIKE HIM--HE'LL DO EVERYTHING TO MAKE YOU COMFORTABLE. YOU SHOULD BE HAPPY THERE LUNAPORT. REALLY IS A PARADISE! AND NOW, I'LL ESCORT YOU TO THE SPACESHIP--

SO RICK SAW BELLA OFF ON HER VOYAGE TO THE MOON.....

BON VOYAGE, BELLA -- GOOD LUCK!



AND AFTERWARDS, BACK IN HIS HOTEL..

WHO WAS THAT PRETTY GIRL YOU WERE LUNCHEDED WITH TODAY?

GIRL? I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!



VOKK HAD DONE HIS WORK WELL!



THE RADAR OPERATOR AGREED... BUT NEITHER HE NOR BELLA DREAMED OF THE EVENTS WHICH LAY AHEAD.....THOUGH, UP TO A CERTAIN POINT, WHAT LAY AHEAD HAD BEEN ACCURATELY DESCRIBED TO BELLA BY RICK.....

THE LONG DESCENT TO THE MOON.....



YES, RICK'S DESCRIPTION WAS ACCURATE -- RIGHT UP TO THE MOMENT WHEN SHE MET LEO CLAYTON... THEN, SHARPLY, SHE CAUGHT HER BREATH.... KING LEO CAUGHT HIS BREATH, TOO.....

WHY-- SHE IS LOVELY--

COME AND SIT BESIDE ME. YOU -- YOU'RE LOVELY--VERY LOVELY!

IN THAT MOMENT, BELLA KNEW IT HAD BEEN A MISTAKE TO COME TO LUNAPORT... PLEADING A HEADACHE, SHE ASKED TO BE TAKEN TO HER ROOM. AS SHE LEFT A NEW PLAN WAS BEING BORN IN LEO'S MIND.

WELL, IS SHE GOING TO SELL OUT HER SHARE LIKE A GOOD GIRL -- OR DO THE DROSERA HAVE TO PERSUADE HER?

NEITHER -- I'M GOING TO MARRY HER!

YOKK WAS AT FIRST INCREDULOUS... THEN HE ROARED WITH LAUGHTER AS AT SOME GROSS JOKE.....

WHAT?

WELL, WHY NOT? IT'S A LONELY BUSINESS BEING A KING -- AND SHE'S LOVELY! I'LL MAKE HER QUEEN OF THE MOON -- THEN THERE WON'T BE ANY QUESTION OF RIGHTS BETWEEN US!

VOKK GNEERED.....

LOOK AT YOURSELF, MAN! A MOUNTAIN
OF LARD--SOFT--FLABBY! A GIRL
LIKE THAT WOULD SOONER DIE
THAN MARRY A MAN LIKE YOU!



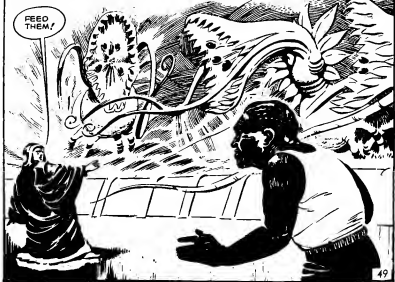
VOKK'S WORDS STRUCK HOME.....THAT
EVENING KING LEO DROVE UNACCOMPANIED
TO THOSE GLASS DOMES KNOWN AS THE
HOT HOUSES.....



THE DROSERA!
ONLY VOKK--AND I--KNOW
OF THESE TERRIBLE PLANTS
--AND WHAT TAKES PLACE
HERE FROM TIME TO TIME--
ONLY VOKK AND I--AND MY
DUMB AFRICAN SLAVES WHO
ATTEND THE FLOWERS!

CAREFULLY LEO STEPPED FORWARD...ELUDING THE GRASPING TENTACLES OF
THE DROSERA WHICH SOUGHT TO SNATCH HIM.....

FEED
THEM!



THE WHITES OF THE NEGRO'S EYES SHOWED FEARFULLY... HE SIDLED HIS WAY BACK TO A PARTITIONED SECTION OF THE HOT HOUSE BUT LEO DID NOT STAY TO SEE HIS PLANTS FED.....



VOKK SAID BELLA ADLER WOULD RATHER DIE --- WELL, PERHAPS SHE WILL, IF SHE WONT CONSENT TO MARRY ME.

WHEN THE PROPOSAL CAME, BELLA WAS PREPARED FOR IT... CLEGG HAD PREPARED HER - VOKK HAD PREPARED HER.....

"IF HIS MAJESTY SHOULD SHOW YOU A VERY GREAT HONOUR, IT WOULD BE WISE TO ACCEPT," VOKK HAD SAID, "HE'S GOING TO MARRY YOU - AND DON'T TELL HIM YOU'D SOONER DIE - FOR THAT HAPPENS TO BE THE ALTERNATIVE."

"NO ONE LEAVES LUNAPORT," THE WIFE OF A MINOR OFFICIAL HAD TOLD HER, "A FEW HAVE BEEN FOOLISH ENOUGH TO INSIST ON LEAVING - GO TRANSPORT WAS PROVIDED... THE TRANSPORT ALWAYS CALLED AT THE HOT HOUSES AND THE PEOPLE WERE NEVER SEEN AGAIN?... I CAN ASSURE YOU, THEY NEVER LEFT THE MOON!..."

BELLA HAD BEEN LIVING IN THE PALACE FOR A WEEK, WHEN FOR THE FIRST TIME, LEO TOOK HER HAND... AND HER FLESH CRAWLED AT HIS TOUCH..

YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU -- I'VE BUILT A PARADISE HERE, HAVEN'T I? AND YOU SHALL SHARE IT WITH ME -- BE MY QUEEN -- MARRY ME, BELLA --



WORDS STUCK IN HER THROAT... AFRAID TO ANSWER WITH A REFUGAL, SHE COULD NOT ANSWER AT ALL.....



I -- I --

YES, I KNOW - IT'S SUDDEN, YOU NEVER THOUGHT I'D OFFER SO MUCH --- IT'S TOO MUCH TO EXPECT THAT YOU COULD LOVE ME SO SOON - WHEN WE ARE MARRIED, THE LOVE WILL GROW, I WILL ANNOUNCE OUR NUPTIALS.

THAT NIGHT THERE WAS A BANQUET.....



IT WAS TIME FOR BELLA TO TAKE RISKS... RICK HAD TOLD HER OF YOKK'S LABORATORY--SHE MUST SOMEHOW FIND HER WAY UP THERE... HER CHANCE CAME THAT SAME NIGHT WHEN EVERYONE HAD RETIRED..... SHE DISMISSED THE GIRL WHOSE JOB IT WAS TO ATTEND HER.



THE PALACE CORRIDORS WERE QUIET AND DESERTED... BELLA FOUND HER WAY AT LAST TO YOKK'S LABORATORY..... SHE KNEW THAT YOKK HAD DRUNK HEAVILY AT THE BANQUET AND WOULD BE SLEEPING OFF THE EFFECTS.....

WHAT A FEARFUL PLACE -- I MUST FIND THE TRANSMITTING SET -- HE'S SURE TO HAVE ONE HERE --



SHE FOUND IT.....LUCKILY IT WAS OF SIMPLE ENOUGH DESIGN.....



SHE SET THE DIALS TO THE ULTRA SONIC WAVELENGTH WHICH SHE KNEW WOULD PENETRATE TO EARTH--THEN SHE BEGAN TO SPEAK SLOWLY IN A LOW, CLEAR VOICE.....

URGENT--PLEASE CONTACT RICK RANDOM--TELL HIM BELLA ADLER IN DANGER--URGENT
--PLEASE CONTACT RICK RANDOM--TELL HIM BELLA ADLER IN DANGER--



SHE HAD REPEATED THE MESSAGE FOUR TIMES, WHEN SUDDENLY.....

OH!
WHAT HAVE I DONE?



A VALVE GLOWED TO WHITE HEAT--AND AS SUDDENLY WENT BLACK--THE TRANSMITTER WAS DEAD--HAD HER SHORT MESSAGE BEEN RECEIVED?

BELLA FOUND HER WAY SAFELY BACK TO HER SUITE.....AND ABOUT THAT TIME, RICK RANDOM AT THE INTERPLANETARY BOARD, WAS JUST ABOUT TO LEAVE HIS OFFICE, WHEN THE PHONE RANG.....

DUTY OFFICER,
COSMOCODES HEADQUARTERS
HERE---WE HAVE JUST
PICKED UP A MESSAGE---
URGENT---PLEASE CONTACT
RICK RANDOM---TELL HIM
BELLA ADLER IN DANGER---
DOES IT MEAN ANYTHING
TO YOU, SIR?

I KNOW OF
A JOHN ADLER-BUT
HE'LL BE DEAD NOW-
NO---I'VE NEVER
HEARD THE NAME
BELLA ADLER
BEFORE.

NEVERTHELESS, THE MESSAGE
AND THE NAME STUCK IN RICK'S
MIND, AND THAT NIGHT, HE
MENTIONED IT TO REGAN.....

--YOU HONESTLY
MEAN TO TELL ME THAT
THE NAME BELLA
ADLER HAS NO
MEANING FOR YOU?

OF COURSE NOT---
WHY? DO YOU
KNOW IT?

WITHOUT ANSWERING,
REGAN SENT FOR MILTON
WHO WAS IN THE BAR
AND TOLD HIM OF
THE MESSAGE....

--AND RICK HERE
SAID HE HAS NO
KNOWLEDGE OF THE
NAME BELLA ADLER?

NO KNOWLEDGE AT ALL-
BUT YOU BOTH SEEM TO
THINK I SHOULD HAVE-
THERE'S SOME MYSTERY
HERE---I THINK IT'S
TIME I WAS TOLD!

SO THEY TOLD RICK HOW HE HAD TRACED BELLA ADLER, PRESUMABLY TO TELL HER OF HER QUARTER INTEREST IN THE MOON-OF HOW HE HAD ARRANGED FOR HER TO VISIT LUNAPORT--OF HOW RICK HAD SEEN HER OFF ON THE SPACER,

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!

IT IS TRUE! WHEN SOMEONE ASSOCIATED WITH THE BOARD PLAYS FOXY, IT'S MY BUSINESS TO FIND OUT WHAT GOES ON--AND I'VE KNOWN THIS FOR SOME TIME!



MILTON THEN INSISTED THAT RICK SHOULD GO WITH HIM TO SEE A MAN NAMED CHAMBERS, WHO HAD KNOWN VOKK YEARS AGO. . . . THEY HAD TO GET CHAMBERS OUT OF HIS BEG.

--AND THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED TO RANDOM, CHAMBERS---AND NOW THIS GIRL ADLER IS IN DANGER OUT THERE!

VOKK IS CERTAINLY BEHIND ALL THIS--I WORKED WITH HIM FOR YEARS ON EARTH. ALL THE TIME, HE WAS TRYING OUT SOME SCHEME FOR KILLING AN AREA OF MEMORY CELLS AND REPLACING THEM WITH INSTRUCTIONS WHICH WOULD BE OBEYED AUTOMATICALLY AND THEN FORGOTTEN? HE WAS THROWN OUT OF HIS JOB BECAUSE HE WAS UNRELIABLE---NOW HE TURNS UP ON THE MOON---HE'S UP TO NO GOOD!



MILTON NODDED GRIMLY.

YOU MEAN--MY MEMORY CELLS--?



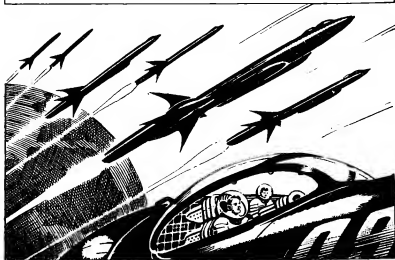
YES. VOKK IS ON THE MOON--YOUR LOSS OF MEMORY WAS NO ACCIDENT. IT WAS VOKK'S WORK--THEY WANTED YOU TO FIND BELLA ADLER AND SEND HER TO THEM--AND THEN FORGET THE WHOLE BUSINESS! AND YOU DID JUST THAT!



MILTON WENT ON, TELLING RICK ALL HE KNEW AND GRADUALLY THE WHOLE PLAN BECAME CLEAR. VOKK'S MACHINE MIGHT HAVE WIPED OUT MEMORIES FROM RICK'S BRAIN--BUT MILTON'S WORDS PUT THEM BACK.

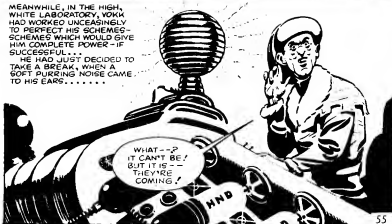
THOUGH BELLA WAS CERTAINLY IN DEADLY DANGER, HER MESSAGE HAD CLEARED MATTERS UP SOMEWHAT.... VOKK HAD LONG BEEN SUSPECTED OF ANTI-BOARD ACTIVITIES-- AND BECAUSE OF THIS AND RICK'S STRANGE BEHAVIOUR, THE BOARD HAD LAID PLANS FOR DEALING WITH ANY TROUBLE THAT MIGHT ARISE ON LUNA.... A FLEET OF SPACE RANGERS WAS STANDING BY AT THE AUSTRALIAN SPACEPORT-- AND NOW, VOKK'S TREACHERY TO THE BOARD EXPOSED, ACTION COULD BE TAKEN....

BY NOON OF THE NEXT DAY, RICK, MILTON AND CHAMBERS WERE SPACEBORNE IN THE FORMATION LEADER OF THE SPACER SQUADRON--- HEADING OUT TOWARDS THE MOON.....



MEANWHILE, IN THE HIGH, WHITE LABORATORY, VOKK HAD WORKED UNCEASINGLY TO PERFECT HIS SCHEMES-- SCHEMES WHICH WOULD GIVE HIM COMPLETE POWER-- IF SUCCESSFUL....

HE HAD JUST DECIDED TO TAKE A BREAK, WHEN A GOFT PURRING NOISE CAME TO HIS EARS.....



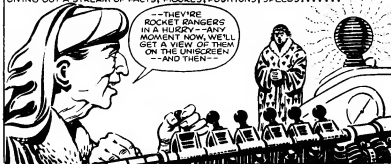
HIS EXPRESSION OF INCREDULITY CHANGED TO ONE OF SATISFACTION AS HE THOUGHT OF HIS DISINTEGRATOR GUNS WHICH COULD BLOW ANY SPACEBORNE SQUADRON TO PIECES.... IN A FERMENT OF EXCITEMENT, HE 'PHONED LEO CLAYTON...

THEY'RE COMING, MY FRIEND! A WAR FLEET, AND COMING FAST! YOU'D BETTER GET UP HERE TO WATCH THE FUN!



BY THE TIME CLAYTON JOINED YOKK, YOKK'S ROBOT ALARM SYSTEM WAS ALREADY GIVING OUT A STREAM OF FACTS, FIGURES, POSITIONS, SPEEDS.....

--THEY'RE ROCKET RANGERS IN A HURRY--ANY MOMENT NOW, WE'LL GET A VIEW OF THEM ON THE UNISCREEN--AND THEN--



ONCE MORE YOKK ADJUSTED HIS CONTROLS...AND THE WHOLE OF ONE WALL OF THE LABORATORY BEGAN TO GLOW SOFTLY....

WATCH THE CENTRE OF THE SCREEN--

I CAN SEE THEM--HUNDREDS OF THEM! BUT WHY SHOULD THEY COME AGAINST ME LIKE THIS?





ALMOST AS HE SPOKE, VOKK PULLED A HUGE LEVER....
THE WHOLE TOWER SEEMED TO TREMBLE--AND LEO REELED BACK IN HORROR
AT THE PICTURE ON THE SCREEN.....



VOKK TOUCHED A SWITCH AND THE
SCREEN FADED....

YES--MY GUNS
HAVE BLASTED
THEM INTO SPACE
--INTO SMALL
PIECES WHICH WILL
ORBIT AROUND US
FOR THE REST OF
TIME! AND NOW
TO FIND OUT WHY
EARTH DECIDED
TO ATTACK US--

WHAT--WHAT
ARE YOU GOING
TO DO?

VOKK MOVED OVER TO A
SMALL INSTRUMENT....

I FANCY THERE
HAS BEEN A MESSAGE
SENT FROM HERE --
IF SO, IT WOULD
AUTOMATICALLY BE
PRESERVED ON MY
RECORDER --
LISTEN!

URGENT--PLEASE
CONTACT RICK RANDOM
--TELL HIM BELLA
ADLER IN DANGER--

LEO'S FACE SUDDENLY LOOKED HEAVY--OLD....

WHY--?
SHE DIDN'T REFUSE
ME! BUT I CAN'T
FORGIVE HER FOR
THIS--CAN I, VOKK?

NO!
THE DROSERA
WILL DEAL WITH
HER SECRETLY
AND EFFECTIVELY!

AND LEO IN HIS HURT, IMMEDIATELY
PHONED CLEGG, ORDERING
TRANSPORT...AND REQUESTING
HIM TO ASK THAT MISS ADLER
SHOULD BE READY FOR A SHORT
DRIVE.....

SO BELLA ADLER TOOK THE TRIP TO THE HOT-HOUSES ACCOMPANIED BY LEO AND VOKK..... SHE HAD NO ACTUAL FEAR --UNTIL VOKK BEGAN TO EXPLAIN.....

YES, MISS ADLER-- WE KNOW IT ALL! WE KNOW YOU SENT A MESSAGE FOR HELP TO RICK RANDOM---AND WE KNOW WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW--THAT THERE WAS A RESPONSE TO YOUR APPEAL! EARTH SENT A SQUADRON OF SPACERS TO RESCUE YOU-- BUT MY WONDERFUL GUNS BLASTED THEM INTO SPACE BEFORE THEY COULD ARRIVE! AND NOW IT IS YOUR TURN TO BE LIQUIDATED-----

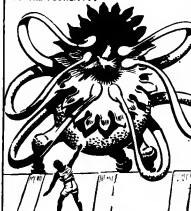


VOKK TURNED AND GNAPPED A COMMAND TO THE WAITING AFRICAN MUTE.....

FEED THE DROSER! LET HER SEE.



IT WAS A DEAD BIRD WHICH THEY FLUNG TO THE FLOWER...



THE PLANT GAPPED OPEN ITS BEAUTIFUL BUT SINGSTER PETALS -- AND THE BIRD WAS GONE ---- SWALLOWED BY THE MAN-EATING DROSER!

BELLA, HORRIFIED, KNEW NOW THAT THE FATE OF THE DEAD BEED WAS TO BE HER FATE, OBVIOUSLY!.....HER SENSES SWAM---AND THE AFRICAN MUTE MOVED STEALTHILY TOWARDS HER.....

OH--RICK! AND YOU DID GET MY MESSAGE! WHAT CAN I DO? IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO?



BUT THERE WAS NOTHING SHE COULD DO....AND THEN SHE KNEW IT WAS ALL OVER....THE BLACK ARM WHICH HELD HER WAS REPLACED BY A WRITHING TENTACLE....

OH NO--
NO--NO!



AND IN THAT INSTANT SHE HEARD HIS VOICE.....



RICK TOOK IN THE WHOLE SITUATION AT A GLANCE.... EVEN AS BELLA SCREAMED HE FIRED TWICE AT THE THING WHICH HELD HER.....



IN THEIR ANXIETY TO CAPTURE RICK, BOTH VOKK AND CLAYTON BECAME CARELESS



DODGING THE WAVING TENTACLES AND IGNORING THE AGONISED CRIES FROM KING LEO AND VOKK, RICK MOVED SWIFTLY TOWARDS BELLA. ONE MORE SHOT FROM RICK'S GUN AND THE FLOWER RELEASED HER.



...WHILE IN LUNAPORT
ITSELF, THE SQUADRON
WHICH RICK RANDOM HAD
LED WITH MILTON AND
CHAMBERS, HELPED BY
MEN FROM THE MINING
TOWN HAD POSSESSED
THE CITY WITHOUT
RESISTANCE.....

GUESS IT'S TIME THIS
PLACE WAS CLEANED UP-
CHAD'S JUST TOLD ME HIS
NIECE KEPT MAN-EATING
FLOWERS OUT THERE IN
HIS HOT-HOUSES -

THAT'S RIGHT!
JUST EGCGORTED
RICK RANDOM BACK
FROM ONE - WITH A GIRL..
BUT KING LEO AND THAT
FELLOW VOKK ARE
MISSING -- PRETTY
OBVIOUS WHAT'S
HAPPENED TO
THEM!

SPACEBORNE
6TH

LATER IN THE GARDEN AT THE
BACK OF THE PALACE.....

-CHAMBERS KNEW OF
VOKK'S INTEREST IN DISINTEGRATOR
GUNS AND WARNED THE BOARD - GO
THAT WE SENT A ROBOT FLEET OF
OBSOLETE ROCKET SHIPS AHEAD OF
US -- THAT WAS THE FLEET THE
GUNS DESTROYED. THEN, OF COURSE,
WE STEPPED IN AND
TOOK POSSESSION.

-AND YOU
SAVED MY LIFE,
RICK! WHAT
HAPPENS NOW?

RICK SMILED AT HER.....

THE BOARD WILL TAKE OVER--IN FACT, THEY HAVE DONE SO ALREADY. MILTON AND CHAMBERS ARE ALREADY EXAMINING VOKK'S LABORATORY--- YOU WILL BE RECOMPENSED VERY GENEROUSLY, BELLA--

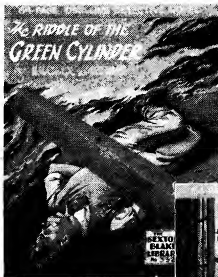
IT WILL BE NICE TO BE RICH!--- BUT YOU--? I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU, RICK-- AND THE ONLY WAY I CAN SHOW MY GRATITUDE IS THIS WAY--

... AND IMPULSIVELY BELLA LEANED OVER AND KISSED HIM.



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