# Reunion on Ganymede

# Clifford Simak

I

By cracky,” shouted Gramp Parker, “you’re tryin’ to mess up all my plans. You’re tryin’ to keep me from goin’ to this reunion.”

“You know that isn’t true, pa,” protested his daughter, Celia. “But I declare, you are a caution. I’ll worry every minute you are gone.”

“Who ever heard of a soldier goin’ any place without his side arms?” stormed Gramp. “If I can’t wear those side arms I’m not goin’. All the other boys will have ’em.”

His daughter argued. “You know what happened when you tried to show Harry how that old flame pistol worked,” she reminded him. “It’s a wonder both of you weren’t killed.”

“I ain’t goin’ to do no shootin’ with ’em,” declared Gramp. “I just want to wear ’em with my uniform.

Don’t feel dressed without ’em.”

His daughter gave up. She knew the argument might go on all day. “All right, pa,” she said, “but you be careful.”

She got up and went into the house. Gramp stretched his old bones in the sun. It was pleasant here of a June morning on a bench in front of the house.

Little Harry came around the corner and headed for the old man. “What you doing, grandpa?” he demanded. “Nothin’,” Gramp told him.

The boy climbed onto the bench. Tell me about the war,” he begged.

“You go on and play,” Gramp told him.

“Aw, grandpa, tell me about that big battle you was in!”

“The battle of Ganymede?” asked Gramp.

Harry nodded. “Uh‑huh, that’s the one.”

“Well,” said Gramp, “I can remember it just as if it was yesterday. And it was forty years ago, forty years ago the middle of next month. The Marshies were gettin’ their big fleet together out there on Ganymede, figurin’ to sneak up on us when we wasn’t expectin’ ’em around‑”

“Who was the Marshies?” asked the boy.

“The Marshies?” said Gramp. “Why that’s what we called the Martians. Kind of a nickname for ’em.”

“You was fighting them?”

Gramp chuckled. “You’re dog‑gone right we fit ’em. We fit ’em to a stand‑still and then we licked ’em, right there at Ganymede. After that the peace was signed and there hasn’t been any war since then.”

“And that’s where you are going?” demanded the boy.

“Sure, they’re havin’ a big reunion out on Ganymede. First one. Maybe they’ll have one every year or two from now on.”

“And will the Martian soldiers that you whipped be there, too?”

Gramp scowled fiercely. “They been asked to come,” he said. I don’t know why. They ain’t got no right to be there. We licked ’em and they ain’t got no right to come.”

“Harry!” came the voice of the boy’s mother.

The boy hoped off the bench and trotted toward the house.

“What have you been doing?” asked his mother.

“Grandpa’s been telling me about the war.”

“You come right in here,” his mother shouted. “If your grandpa don’t know better than to tell you about the war, you should know better than to listen. Haven’t I told you not to ask him to tell you about it?”

Gramp writhed on the bench.

“Dog‑gone,” he said. “A hero don’t get no honor any more at all.”

“You don’t need to worry,” Garth Mitchell, salesman for Robots, Inc., assured Pete Dale, secretary for the Ganymede Chamber of Commerce. “We make robots that are damn near alive. We can fill the bill exactly. If you want us to manufacture you a set of beasts that are just naturally so ornery they will chew one another up on sight, we can do it. We’ll ship you the most bloodthirsty pack of nightmares you ever clapped your eyes on.”

Pete leveled a pencil at the salesman.

“I want to be sure,” he said. “I’m using this big sham battle we are planning for big promotion. I want it to live up to what we promise. We want to make it the biggest show in the whole damn system. When we turn those robots of yours out in the arena, I want to be sure they will go for one another like a couple of wildcats on top of a red‑hot stove. And I don’t want them to quit until they’re just hunks of broken‑down machinery. We want to give the reunion crowd a fight that will put the real Battle of Ganymede in the shade.”

“Listen,” declared Mitchell, “we’ll make them robots so mean they’ll hate themselves. It’s a secret process we got and we aren’t letting anyone in on it. We use a radium brain in each one of the robots and we know how to give them personality. Most of our orders are for gentle ones or hard workers, but if you want them mean, we’ll make them mean for you.”

“Fine,” said Pete. “Now that that’s settled, I want to be sure you understand exactly what we want.

We want robots representing every type of ferocious beast in the whole system. I got a list here.”

He spread out a sheet of paper.

“They’re from Mars and Earth and Venus and a few from Titan out by Saturn. If you can think of any others, throw them in. We want them to represent the real beasts just as closely as possible and I want them ornery mean. We’re advertising this as the greatest free‑for‑all, catch‑as‑catch‑can wild animal fight in history. The idea is from the Roman arenas way back in Earth history when they used to turn elephants and lions and tigers and men all into the same arena and watch what they did to one another. Only here we are using robots instead of the real article, and if your robots are as good as you say they are, they’d ought to put on a better show.”

Mitchell grinned and strapped up his brief case.

“Just forget about it, Mr. Dale,” he counseled. “We’ll make them in our factory on Mars and get them to you in plenty of time. There’s still six weeks left before the reunion and that will give us time to do a fancy job.”

The two shook hands and Mitchell left.

Pete leaned back in his chair and looked out through the yard‑thick quartz of the dome which enclosed Satellite City, Ganymede’s only place of habitation. That is, if one didn’t consider Ganymede prison, which, technically speaking, probably was a place of habitation. Other than for the dome which enclosed Satellite City and the one which enclosed the prison, however, there was no sign of life on the entire moon, a worthless, lifeless globe only slightly smaller than the planet Mars.

He could see the top of the prison dome, just rising above the western horizon. To that Alcatraz of Space were sent only the most desperate of the Solar System’s criminals. The toughest prison in the entire system, its proud tradition was that not a single prisoner had escaped since its establishment twenty years before. Why risk escape, when only misery and death lurked outside the dome?

The Chamber of Commerce offices were located in the peak of the city’s dome and from his outer office, against the quartz, Pete had a clear view of the preparations going forward for the reunion which was to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Battle of Ganymede.

Far below, at the foot of the magnetically anchored dome, work was progressing on the vast outdoor arena, which would be enclosed in a separate dome, with heat and atmosphere pumped from the larger dome.

On one of the higher snow‑swept hills, a short distance from the arena, reared a massive block of marble, swarming with space‑armored sculptors. That was the Battle Monument, to be dedicated in the opening ceremonies.

Drift snow, driven by the feeble winds which always stirred restlessly over the surface of this satellite from which the atmosphere was nearly gone, swept over the brown, rolling hills and eddied around the dome. It was cold out there. Pete shivered involuntarily. Down close to 180 degrees below, Fahrenheit.

The snow was frozen carbon dioxide.

An inhospitable place to live, but Satellite City was one of the greatest resorts in the entire System.

To it, each year, came thousands of celebrities, tens of thousands of common tourists. The guest lists of the better hotels read like the social register and every show house and cafe, every night club, every concession, every dive was making money.

And now the Ganymede reunion!

That had been a clever idea. It had taken some string‑pulling back in London to get the Solar Congress to pass the resolution calling the reunion and to appropriate the necessary money. But that had not been too hard to do. Just a little ballyhoo about cementing Earth‑Mars friendship for all eternity. Just a little clever work out in the lobbies.

This year Satellite City would pack them in, would get System‑wide publicity, would become a household word on every planet.

He tilted farther back in his chair and stared at the sky. The greatest sight in the entire Solar System!

Tourists came millions of miles to gaze in wonder at that sky.

Jupiter rode there against the black of space, a giant disk of orange and red, flattened at the poles, bulging at the equator. To the right of Jupiter was the sun, a small globe of white, its searing light and tremendous heat enfeebled by almost 500 million miles of space. Neither lo nor Europa were in sight, but against the velvet curtain of space glittered the brilliant, cold pin‑points of distant stars.

Pete rocked back and forth in his chair, rubbing his hands gleefully.

“We’ll put Ganymede on the map this year,” he exulted.

II

“But I don’t want to go to Ganymede,” protested Senator Sherman Brown. “I hate space travel.

Always get sick.”

Izzy Newman almost strangled in exasperation.

“Listen, senator,” he pleaded, “don’t be a damn fool all your life. We’re running you for president two years from now and you need them Martian votes. You can pick up plenty of them by going out to Ganymede and dedicating this battle monument. You can say some nice things about the Martians and then, quick, before the Earth boys get mad at you, you can say something nice about the Earth. And then you can praise the bravery of the men who fought in the battle and then, just to quiet down the pacifists, praise the forty years of peace we’ve had. And if you do that you’ll make everybody happy and everyone will think you are on their side. You’ll get a lot of votes.”

“But I don’t want to go,” protested the senator. “I won’t go. You can’t bulldoze me.”

Izzy spread his hands.

“Listen, senator,” he said. “I’m your manager, ain’t I? Have I ever done anything but good for you?

Didn’t I take you out of a one‑horse county seat and make you one of the biggest men of your day?”

“Well,” said the senator, “I have done well by myself, if I do say so. And part of the credit goes to you. I hate to go to Ganymede. But if you think I should make — ”

“Fine,” said Izzy, rubbing his hands together. I’ll fix it all up for you. I’ll give the newspaper boys some interviews. I’ll have the best ghost writer fix you up a speech. We’ll get a half million votes out of this trip.”

He eyed Senator Brown sternly.

“There’s just two things you’ve got to do,” he warned.

“What’s that?”

“Learn your speech. I don’t want you forgetting it like you did the time you dedicated the communications building on the moon. And leave that damn candid camera at home.”

Senator Brown looked unhappy.

Ganymede was plunging into Jupiter’s shadow. For a time ’night’ would fall upon the satellite. Part of the time Europa would be in the sky, but Europa’s light would do little more than make the shadows of the surface deeper and darker.

“Spike’ Cardy waited for Ganymede to swing into the shadow. For Spike was going to do something that no man had ever done before He was going to escape from Ganymede prison, from this proud Alcatraz of Space, whose warden boasted that no man had ever left its dome alive until his time was served.

But Spike was leaving before his time was served. He was going to walk out the northwest port and disappear into the Ganymedean night as completely as if he had been wiped out of existence. It was all planned. The planning had been careful and had taken a long time. Spike had waited until he was sure there was no chance for slip‑up.

The plan had cost money, had called for pressure being exerted in the right spots, had called for outside assistance that was hard to get. But what others had failed to do, Spike Cardy had done. For was he not the old Spike Cardy of space‑racket fame? Had he not for years levied toll upon the interplanetary lines? Were not his men still levying toll on the ships of space? Spike Cardy was tops in gangdom and even now his word was law to many men.

Spike waited until the guard paced past his cell. Then he moved swiftly to his bunk, mounted it and grasped the almost invisible wire of thin spun glass which was tied to one of the ventilator grids. Swiftly, but carefully, he hauled in the wire, taking care to make no noise. At the end of the wire, where it had hung down the ventilator pipe, was a flame pistol.

Like a cat stalking for a kill, Spike moved to the heavily barred cell door. He thrust the pistol inside his shirt and slumped against the bars. He heard the guard returning on his beat.

Spike whimpered softly, as if he were in great pain. The guard heard the sound, his footsteps quickened.

“What’s the matter, Cardy? You sick?” asked the guard.

The gangster chief reached a feeble hand through the bars, clutching wildly at the guard’s shoulder.

The guard leaned nearer. Cardy’s left hand moved like a striking snake, the steel fingers closing around the man’s throat. At the same instant the flame pistol, its charge screwed down to low power and a pencil point in diameter, flashed across the space between Cardy’s shirt and the guard’s heart. Just one little burst of white‑hot flame, expertly aimed. Just one little chuckle out of the heat gun, like a man might chuckle at a joke. That was all.

The guard slumped closer against the bars. The death‑clutch on his throat had throttled down his outcry. Anyone looking at the scene would have thought he was talking to the prisoner.

Cardy worked swiftly. It was all planned out. He knew just what to do.

His right hand tore the ring of keys from the dead man’s belt. His fingers found the correct key, inserted it in the lock. The cell door swung open.

Now was the one dangerous point in the whole plan. But Cardy did not falter.

Swiftly he swung the door open and dragged the guard inside. He would have to take the chance no one would see.

Working deftly, he stripped the dead man’s trousers off, slipped them on; ripped the coat from his back and donned it. The cap next and the guard’s flame pistol.

Cardy stepped outside, closed and locked his cell door, walked along the cell‑block cat‑walk. His heart sang with exultation. The hard part was over. But his lips were set in grim, hard lines; his eyes were squinted, alert for danger, ready for action.

Only by stern iron will did he keep his pace to a walk. The guard in the next block saw him, looked at him for a moment and then whirled about and started his march back along the block again.

Only when the guard was out of sight did Spike quicken his pace. Down the flight of stairs to the ground floor, across the floor and out of the cell sections into the exercise yard and to the northwest port.

A dim light burned in the guard house at the port.

Cardy rapped on the door.

The guard opened the door.

“A space suit,” said Cardy. “ I’m going out.”

“Where’s your pass?” asked the guard.

“Here,” said Cardy, leveling a flame gun.

The guard’s hand darted toward the holster at his side, but he didn’t have a chance. Spike’s gun flared briefly and the guard slumped.

Scarcely glancing at the body, Spike lifted a space suit from its hanger, donned it, and stepped out to the port. Inside the port, he closed the inner lock behind him, spun the outer lock. It swung open and Spike stepped outside.

In great, soaring leaps, thankful for the lesser gravity, he hurried away. To the east he saw the shining dome of Satellite City. To the northwest loomed the dark, shadow‑blackened hills.

Spike disappeared toward the hills.

III

Senator Sherman Brown was happy. Also slightly drunk.

He had eluded Izzy Newman and now here he was, squatting on the floor in the Jupiter Lantern, one of the noisiest night clubs in all of Satellite City, taking pictures of two old veterans engaged in an argument over the Battle of Ganymede.

A crowd had gathered to take in the argument. It was one that stirred imagination and there was always a chance it might develop into a fight.

Senator Brown plastered the view‑finder of his candid camera against his eye and worked joyfully.

Here was a series of pictures that would do justice to his albums.

Gramp Parker pounded the table with his fist.

“We fit you and we licked you,” he yelled, “and I don’t give a ’tarnal dang how we come to do it. If your generals had been so all‑fired smart, how come we licked the stuffin’ out of you?”

Jurg Tec, a doddering old Martian, pounded the table back at Gramp.

“You Earthians won that battle by pure luck,” he squeaked and his squeak was full of honest rage.

“You had no right to win. By all the rules of warfare you were beaten from the start. Your strategy was wrong. Your space division was wrong, your timing was wrong. Alexander, when he brought his cruisers down to attack our camp, should have been wiped out.”

“But he wasn’t,” Gramp yelped.

“Just luck,” Jurg Tec squeaked back. “Fight that battle over again and the Martians would win.

Something went wrong. Something that historians can’t explain. Work it out on paper and Mars wins every time.”

Gramp pounded the table with both fists. His beard twitched belligerently.

“But dang your ornery hide,” he screamed, “battles ain’t fit on paper. They’re fit with men and ships and guns. And men count most. The men with guts are the ones who win. And battles ain’t fit over, neither. There ain’t no second chance in war. You either win or lose and there ain’t no rain checks handed out.”

The Martian seemed to be choking with rage. He sputtered in an attempt to find his voice.

Gramp gloated like a cat that has just polished off a canary.

“Same as I was tellin’ you,” he asserted. “One good Earthman can lick ten Marshies any time of day or night.”

Jurg Tec sputtered in helpless anger.

Gramp improved upon his boast. “Any time of day or night,” he said, “blindfolded and with one hand tied behind him.”

Jurg Tec’s fist lashed out without warning and caught Gramp square on the beard. Gramp staggered and then let out a bellowing howl and made for the Martian. The crowd yelled encouragement.

Jurg Tec, retreating before Gramp’s flailing fists, staggered over the kneeling Senator Brown. Gramp leaped at him at the same instant and the three were tangled on the floor in a flurry of lashing arms and legs.

“Take that,” yelled Gramp.

“Hey, look out for my camera,” shrieked the senator.

The Martian said nothing, but he hung a beauty on the senator’s left eye. He had aimed it at Gramp.

A table toppled with a crash. The crowd hooted in utter delight.

The senator glimpsed his camera on the floor, reached out and grabbed it. Someone stepped on his hand and he yelled. Jurg Tec grabbed Gramp by the beard.

“Cut it out,” boomed a voice and two policemen came charging through the crowd. They jerked Gramp and Jurg Tec to their feet. The senator got up by himself.

“What you fellows fighting about?” asked the big policeman.

“He’s dog‑gone Marshy,” yelled Gramp.

“He said one Earthy could lick ten Martians,” squeaked Jurg Tec.

The big policeman eyed the senator.

“What have you got to say for yourself?” he asked.

The senator was suddenly at a loss for words. “Why, nothing, officer, nothing at all,” he stammered.

“I don’t suppose you were down there rolling around with them?” snarled the policeman.

“Why, you see, it was this way, officer,” the senator explained. “I tried to separate them. Tried to make them quit fighting. And one of them hit me.”

The policeman chuckled. “Peacemaker, eh?” he said.

The senator nodded, miserably.

The officer turned his attention toward Gramp and Jurg Tec. “Fighting the war over again,” he said.

“Can’t you fellows forget it? The war was over forty years ago.”

“He insulted me,” Jurg Tec squeaked.

“Sure, I know,” said the officer, “and you were insulted pretty easy.”

“Listen, here, officer,” said the senator. “If I take these two boys and promise you they won’t make any more disturbance, will you just forget about this?”

The big policeman looked at the little policeman.

“Who are you?” the little policeman asked.

“Why, I’m‑I’m Jack Smith. I know these two boys. I was sitting talking with them before this happened.”

The two policemen looked at one another again.

Then they both looked at the senator.

“Why, I guess it would be all right,” agreed the little policeman. “But you see they keep peaceable or we’ll throw all three of you in the jug.”

They eyed him sternly. The senator shifted uneasily. Then he stepped forward and took Gramp and Jurg Tec by the arm.

“Come on, boys, let’s have a drink,” he suggested.

“I still say,” protested Gramp, “that one Earthman can lick ten Marshies — ”

“Here, here,” warned the senator, “you pipe down. I promised the police you two would be friends.”

“Friends with him?” asked Gramp.

“Why not?” asked the senator. “After all, this reunion is for the purpose of demonstrating the peace and friendship which exists between Mars and Earth. Out of the dust and roar of battle rises a newer and clearer understanding. An understanding which will lead to an everlasting peace‑”

“Say,” said Gramp, “danged if you don’t sound like you was makin’ a speech.”

“Huh,” said the senator.

“Like you was makin’ a speech,” said Gramp. “Like you was one of them political spellbinders that are out gettin’ votes.”

“Well,” said the senator, “maybe I am.”

“With that eye of yourn,” Gramp pointed out, “you ain’t in no shape to make any speech.”

Senator Brown strangled on his drink. He set down his glass and coughed.

“What’s the matter with you?” asked Jurg Tec.

“I forgot something,” the senator explained. “Something very important.”

“It can wait,” Jurg Tec said. “I’ll buy the next round.”

“Sure,” agreed Gramp, “ain’t nothin’ so important you can’t have another drink.”

“You know,” said the senator, “I was going to make a speech.”

The two old soldiers stared at him in disbelief.

“It’s a fact,” the senator told them, “but I can’t with this eye. And will I catch hell for not making that speech! That’s what I get for sneaking out with my camera.”

“Maybe we can help you out,” suggested Gramp. “Maybe we could square things for you.”

“Maybe we could,” squeaked the Martian.

“Listen, boys,” said the senator, “if I were to go out in a ship for a tour of the surface and if the ship broke down and I couldn’t get back in time to make my speech, nobody would blame me for that, would they?”

“You’re dang right they wouldn’t,” said Gramp.

“How about the eye?” asked Jurg Tec.

“Shucks,” said Gramp, “we could say he run into somethin’.”

“Would you boys like to come along with me?” asked the senator.

“Bet your life,” said Gramp.

Jurg Tec nodded.

“There’s some old battle hulls out there I’d like to see,” he said. “Ships that were shot down during the battle and just left there. Shot up too bad to salvage. The pilot probably would land and let us look at one or two of them.”

“Better take along your camera,” suggested Gramp. “You’d ought to get some crackin’ good pictures on one of ’em old tubs.”

IV

The navigator tore open the door of the control room, slammed it behind him and leaned against it.

His coat was ripped and blood dripped from an ugly gash across his forehead.

The pilot started from his controls.

“The robots!” screamed the navigator. “The robots are loose!”

The pilot blanched. “Loose!” he screamed back.

The navigator nodded, panting.

In the little silence they could hear the scraping and clashing of steel claws throughout the ship.

“They got the crew,” the navigator panted. “Tore them apart, back in the engine room.”

The pilot looked through the glass. The surface of Ganymede was just below. He had been leveling off with short, expert rocket blasts, for an easy coast into Satellite City.

“Get a gun!” he shouted. “Hold them off! Maybe we can make it.”

The navigator leaped for the rack where the heavy flame rifles hung. But he was too late.

The door buckled beneath a crushing weight. Savage steel claws caught it and ripped it asunder.

The pilot, glancing over his shoulder, saw a nightmare of mad monsters clawing into the control room.

Monsters manufactured at the Robots. Inc., plant on Mars, enroute to Satellite City for the show at the Ganymede Battle reunion.

The flame rifle flared, fusing the hideous head of one monster, but the tentacles of another whipped out, snared the pilot with uncanny ease. The pilot screamed, once‑a scream chopped short by choking bands of steel.

Then the ship spun crazily, out of control, toward the surface.

“An old cruiser hull is right over that ridge,” the pilot told the senator. “It’s in pretty good condition, but the nose was driven into the ground by the impact of its fall, wedged tight into the rock, so that all hell and high water couldn’t move it.”

“Earthian or Marshy?” asked Gramp.

The pilot shook his head. Tm not sure,” he said. “Earth, I think.”

The senator was struggling into his space suit.

“You remember the deal we made?” he asked the pilot. “You’re to say your ship broke down. You’ll know how to explain it. So you couldn’t get me back in time to make the speech.”

The pilot grinned. “Sure do, senator,” he said.

Gramp paused with his helmet poised above his head. “Senator!” he shouted.

He looked at the senator.

“Just who in tarnation are you?” he asked.

“I’m Senator Sherman Brown,” the senator told him. “Supposed to dedicate the battle monument.”

“Well, I’ll be a freckled frog!” said Gramp.

Jurg Tec chuckled.

Gramp whirled on him. “No wisecracks, Marshy,” he warned.

“Here, here,” shouted the senator. “You fellows quiet down. No more fighting.”

Space‑armored, the four of them left the ship and tramped up the hill toward the ridge top.

Faintly in his helmet‑phones, Gramp heard the crunch of carbon dioxide snow beneath their feet, its hiss against the space suits.

Jupiter was setting, a huge red and orange ball with a massive scallop gnawed from its top half.

Against this darkened, unseen segment of the primary rode the quarter moon of tiny To, while just above, against the black of space, hung the shining sickle of Europa. The sun had set many hours before.

“Pretty as a Christmas tree,” Gramp said.

“Them tourists go nutty over it,” the pilot declared. That taxi of mine has been worked to death ever since the season started. There’s something about old Jupiter that gets them.”

“I remember,” Jurg Tec said, “that it was just like this before the battle. My pal and I walked out of camp to look at it.”

“I didn’t know you Marshies ever got to be pals,” said Gramp. “Figured you were too danged mean.”

“My pal,” said Jurg Tec, “was killed the next day.”

“Oh,” said Gramp.

They walked in silence for a moment.

“I’m right sorry about your pal,” Gramp told the Martian then.

They topped the ridge.

There she is,” said the pilot, pointing.

Below them lay the dark shape of a huge space ship, resting crazily on the surface, with the stern tilted at a grotesque angle, the nose buried in the rock‑hard soil.

“Earth, all right,” said Gramp.

They walked down the hillside toward the ship.

In the derelict’s side was a great hole, blasted by a shot of long ago, a shot that echoed in dim memory of that battle forty years before.

“Let’s go in,” said the senator. “I want to take some pictures. Brought some night equipment along.

Take pictures in pitch black.”

Something moved inside the ship, something that glinted and shone redly in the light of setting Jupiter.

Astonished, the four fell back a step.

A space‑armored man stood just inside the ship, half in shadow, half in light. He held two flame pistols in his hands and they were leveled at Gramp and the other three.

“All right,” said the man, and his voice was savage, vicious, with just a touch of madness in it, I got you covered. Just hoist out your guns and let them drop.”

They did not move, astounded, scarcely believing what they saw.

“Didn’t you hear me!” bellowed the man. “Drop your guns onto the ground.”

The pilot went for his flame pistol, in a swift blur of motion that almost tricked the eye.

But the gun was only half out of its holster when one of the guns in the hands of the man inside the ship blasted with a lurid jet of flame. The charge struck the pilot’s space suit, split it open with the fury of its energy. The pilot crumpled and rolled, with arms flapping weirdly, down the hill, to come to rest against the old space derelict. His suit glowed cherry‑red.

“Maybe now you know I ain’t fooling,” said the man.

Gramp, with one finger, carefully lifted his pistol from its holster and let it drop to the ground. Jurg Tec and the senator did likewise. There was no use being foolish. Not when a killer had you covered with two guns.

The man stepped carefully out of the ship and waved them back. He bolstered one of his guns, stooped and scooped up the three weapons on the ground.

“What’s the meaning of this?” demanded the senator.

The man chuckled.

“I’m Spike Cardy,” he said. “Maybe you heard of me. Only man to escape from Ganymede prison.

Said nobody could break that crib. But Spike Cardy did.”

“What are you going to do with us?” asked the senator.

“Leave you here,” said Spike. “I’m going to take your ship and leave you here.”

“But that’s murder,” shouted the senator. “We’ll die. We only have about four hours’ air.”

Spike chuckled again. “Now,” he said, “ain’t that just too damn bad.”

Jurg Tec spoke.

“But you lived here somehow. It’s been three weeks since you escaped. You haven’t been in a space suit all that time. You haven’t had enough air tanks to hold out that long.”

“What are you getting at?” asked Spike.

“Why,” said Jurg Tec, “just this. Why don’t you give us a chance to live? Why don’t you tell us how you did it? We might be able to do the same, keep alive until somebody found us. After all, you are taking our ship. It won’t serve any purpose to kill us. We haven’t done anything against you.”

“Now,” said Spike, “there’s some reason to that. And I’ll tell you. Friends of mine fixed up a part of this old ship, walled it off and installed a lock and a small atmosphere generator. Atmosphere condenser, rather. “Cause there’s air enough here, only it ain’t thick enough. When I made my getaway I came out here and waited for a ship that was supposed to pick me up. But the ship didn’t come. Something went wrong and it didn’t come. So I’m taking yours.”

“That’s sporting of you.” said the senator. “Would you mind telling us whereabouts in the ship you’ve got this hideaway?”

“Why, no,” said Spike. “Glad to. Anything to help you out.”

But there was something about the way he said it, the ugly twist to his mouth, the mockery in his words, that Gramp didn’t like.

“Just go down into the nose of the ship,” said Spike. “You can’t miss it.’, An evil smile tugged at Spike’s mouth.

“Only,” he said, “it won’t do you a damn bit of good. Because the condenser broke down about half an hour ago. It can’t be fixed. I tried. I was getting ready to try to make it back to Satellite City and take my chances there when you showed up.”

“It can’t be fixed?” asked the senator.

Spike shook his head inside his space suit.

“Nope,” he said, cheerfully, “there’s a couple of parts broke. I tried to weld them with my flame gun, but it didn’t work. I ruined them entirely.”

V

Spike backed away, toward the top of the ridge.

“Stay back,” he warned, with his gun still leveled. “Don’t try to follow. I’ll let you have it if you do.”

“But,” shrieked the senator, “you don’t mean to leave us here, do you? We’ll die!”

The bandit waved his pistol toward the southeast.

“Satellite City is over that way. You can make it on four hours of air. I did.”

His laugh boomed in their helmets.

“But you won’t. Not creaking old scarecrows like you.”

Then he was gone over the ridge.

Gramp, suddenly galvanized into action, leaped toward the lifeless body of the pilot. He tugged the space‑suited figure over and his hand reached out and jerked the flame pistol free.

One swift glance told him it was undamaged.

“You can’t do that!” Jurg Tec yelled at him.

“Get outta my way, Marshy,” yelped Gramp. “I’m goin’ after him.”

Gramp started up the hill.

Topping the ridge, he saw Spike halfway to the ship.

“Come back and fight,” Gramp howled, waving his gun. “Come back and fight, you ornery excuse for a polecat.”

Spike swung about, snapped a wild burst of flame along his backtrail and then fled, in ludicrous hops, toward the space ship.

Gramp halted, aimed the flame pistol carefully and fired. Spike turned a somersault in mid‑air and sprawled on the ground. Gramp saw the guns Spike had taken from them flash redly in the Jupiter‑light as the flame struck home.

“He dropped the guns!” Gramp yelled.

But Spike was up again and running, although his left arm hung limply from the shoulder, swinging freely as he hopped over the surface.

Too far away,” grunted Jurg Tec, overtaking Gramp.

“I had ’im dead center,” Gramped yelled, “but it was a mite long range.”

Spike reached the ship and leaped into the port.

Cursing, Gramp laid down a blast of flame against the ship as the bandit swung in the outer lock.

“Dang it,” shrieked Gramp, “he got away.”

Dejectedly the two old veterans stood and stared at the ship.

“I guess this ends it for us,” said Jurg Tec.

“Not by a dang sight,” declared Gramp. “We’ll make it back to Satellite City easy.”

But he didn’t believe it. He knew they wouldn’t.

He heard the sound of footsteps coming down the hill and turned. The senator was hurrying toward them.

“What happened to you?” demanded Jurg Tec.

“I fell and twisted my ankle,” the senator explained.

“Sure,” said Gramp, “it’s plumb easy for a feller to sprain his ankle. Especially at a time like this.”

The ground shuddered under their feet as the ship leaped out into space with rockets blasting.

Gramp plodded doggedly along. He heard the hissing of the snow against his space suit. Heard it crunching underfoot. Heard the stumbling footsteps of the other two behind him.

Jupiter was lower in the sky. lo had moved away from its position against the darkened segment of the primary, was swinging free in space.

Before him Gramp saw the bitter hills, covered with drift snow, tinted a ghastly red by the flood of Jupiter‑light.

One foot forward and now another. That was the way to do it. Keep plugging away.

But he knew it wasn’t any use. He knew that he would die on Ganymede.

“Forty years ago I fit here and came through without a scratch,” he told himself. “And now I come back to die here.”

He remembered that day of forty years before. Remembered how the sky was laced with fiery flame‑ribbons and stabbing ray‑beams. How ships, their guns silenced, rammed enemy craft and took them with them to the surface.

“We’ll never make it,” moaned the senator.

Gramp swung on him savagely; a steel‑sheathed fist lifted menacingly.

“You stop your bawlin’,” he shouted. “You sound like a sick calf. I’ll smack you down if I hear one more peep out of you.”

“But what’s the use of fooling ourselves?” the senator cried. “Our air is nearly gone. We don’t even know if we’re going in the right direction.”

Gramp roared at him.

“Buck up, you spineless jackass. You’re a big man. A senator. Remember that. You gotta get back.

Who’d they get to make all ’em speeches if you didn’t get back?”

Jurg Tec’s voice hissed in Gramp’s helmet. “Listen!”

Gramp stood still and listened.

But there was nothing to hear. Just the hiss of the snow against his suit.

“I don’t hear nothin’,” Gramp said.

And then he heard it‑a weird thunder that seemed to carry with it an indefinable threat of danger. A thunder like the stamping of many feet, like the measured march of hoofs.

“Ever hear anything like that, Earthy?” asked the Martian.

“It isn’t anything,” shrieked the senator. “Nothing at all. We just imagine it. We all are going cra/y.”

The thunder sounded nearer and nearer‑clearer and clearer.

“There ain’t supposed to be a livin’ thing on Ganymede,” said Gramp. “But there’s somethin’ out there.

Somethin’ alive.”

He felt prickles of fear run up his spine and ruffle the hair at the base of his skull.

A long line of things moved out of the horizon haze and into indistinct vision‑a nightmare line of things that shone and glittered in the rays of Jupiter.

“My Lord,” said Gramp, “what are they?”

He glanced around.

To their left was a deep cut‑bank, where erosion of long past ages had scooped out a deep, but narrow depression in the hillside.

“This way,” Gramp yelled and leaped away, heading for the cut bank.

The line of charging horrors was nearer when they reached the natural fortress.

Gramp looked at Jurg Tec.

“Marshy,” he croaked, “if you never fit before, get ready for it now.”

Jurg Tec nodded grimly, his flame pistol in his fist.

The senator whimpered.

Gramp swung on him, drew back his fist and let drive a blow that caught the senator in the center of his breast‑plate and sent him sprawling.

Gramp snarled at him.

“Get out your gun, dang you,” he shrieked, “and pretend you are a man.”

The bunched monsters were closing in‑a leaping, frightful mass of beasts that gleamed weirdly in the moon‑ and primary light. Massive jaws and cruel, taloned claw and whipping tentacles.

Gramp leveled his flame gun.

“Now,” he shouted, “let ’em have it.”

From the jaws of the cut‑bank leaped a blast of withering fire that swept the monsters as they charged and seemed to melt them down. But those behind climbed over and charged through the ones the flame had stopped and came on, straight toward the men who crouched in the shadow of the hill.

Gramp’s gun was getting hot. He knew that in a moment it would be a warped and useless thing. That it might even explode in his hand and kill all three of them. For the flame gun is not built to stand continuous fire.

And still the things came on.

Before the cut‑bank lay a pile of bodies that glowed metal‑red where the pistol flames had raked them.

Gramp dropped his gun and backed away toward the wall of the cut bank.

Jurg Tec still crouched and worked his pistol with short, sharp, raking jabs, trying to keep it from over‑heating.

In a smaller recess crouched the whimpering senator, his gun still in its holster.

Cursing him, Gramp leaped at him, hauled out the flame gun and shoved the senator to one side.

“Let your gun cool, Marshy,” Gramp yelled.

He aimed the new weapon at a shambling thing that crawled over the barricade of bodies. Calmly he blasted it straight between the eyes.

“We’ll need your gun later,” Gramp yelled at Jurg Tec.

A shadowy something, with spines around its face and with a cruel beak just below its eyes, charged over the barricade and Gramp blasted it with one short burst.

The attack was thinning out.

Gramp held his pistol ready and waited for more. But no more came.

“What are ’em dog‑gone things?” asked Gramp, jerking his pistol toward the pile of bodies.

“Don’t know,” said the Martian. There aren’t supposed to be any beasts on Ganymede.”

They acted dog‑gone funny,” Gramp declared. “Not exactly like animals. Like something you would up and put down on the floor. Like toys. Like the toy animals I got my grandson for Christmas year or two ago. You wound ’em up and the little rascals run around in circles.”

Jurg Tec stepped outside the cut‑bank, nearer to the pile of bodies.

“You be careful, Marshy,” Gramp called out.

“Look here, Earthy,” yelled the Martian.

Gramp strode forward and looked. And what he saw — instead of flesh and bone, instead of any animal structure — were metal plates and molten wire and cogs of many shapes and sizes.

“Robots,” he said. I’ll be a bowlegged Marshy if that ain’t what they are. Nothin’ but dog‑gone robot animals.”

The two old soldiers looked at one another.

“It was a tight squeeze at that,” said Jurg Tec.

“We sure licked hell out of ’em,” Gramp exulted.

“Say,” said Jurg Tec, “they were supposed to have a robot‑animal fight at Satellite City. You don’t suppose these things were the robots? Got loose some way?”

“By cracky,” said Gramp, “maybe that explains it.”

He straightened from his examination of the heap of twisted, flame‑scarred metal and looked at the sky. Jupiter was almost gone.

“We better get goin’,” Gramp decided.

VI

“That must be them,” said the pilot.

He pointed downward and Izzy Newman looked where he pointed.

He saw two figures.

One of them was erect, but staggering as it marched along. Beside it limped another, with its arm thrown across the shoulders of the first to keep from falling.

“But there’s only two,” said Izzy.

“No, there’s three,” declared the pilot. “That one fellow is holding the second one up and he’s dragging the third fellow along by his arm. Look at him. Just skidding along the ground like a sled.”

The pilot dove the plane, struck the ground and taxied close.

Gramp, seeing the plane, halted. He let go of the senator’s arm and eased Jurg Tec to the ground.

Then, tottering on his feet, gasping for what little air remained within his oxygen tank, he waited.

Two men came out of the plane. Gramp staggered to meet them.

They helped him in and brought in the other two.

Gramp tore off his helmet and breathed deeply. He helped Jurg Tec to remove his helmet. The senator, he saw, was coming around.

“Dog‑gone,” said Gramp, I did somethin’ today I swore I’d never do.”

“What’s that?” asked Jurg Tec.

“I swore,” said Gramp, “that if I ever had a chance to help a Marshy, I wouldn’t lift a finger. I’d just stand by and watch him kick the bucket.”

Jurg Tec smiled.

“You must have forgot yourself,” he said.

“Dog‑gone,” said Gramp, “I ain’t got no will power left, that’s what’s the matter with me.”

The reunion was drawing to a close. Meeting in extraordinary convention, the veterans had voted to form an Earth‑Mars Veterans’ Association. All that remained was to elect the officers.

Jurg Tec had the floor.

“Mr. Chairman,” he said, “I won’t make a speech. I’m just going to move a nomination for commander. No speech is necessary.”

He paused dramatically and the hall was silent.

“I nominate,” said Jurg Tec, “Captain Johnny Parker, better known as Gramp.”

The hall exploded in an uproar. The chairman pounded for order, but the thumping of his gavel was scarcely a whisper in the waves of riotous sound that swept and reverberated in the room.

“Gramp!” howled ten thousand throats. “We want Gramp.”

Hands lifted a protesting Gramp and bore him to the platform.

“Cut it out, dog‑gone you,” yelled Gramp, but they only pounded him on the back and yelled at him and left him standing there, all alone beside the chairman’s table.

Before him the convention hall rocketed and weaved in uproar. Bands played and their music did no more than form a background for the boisterous cheering. Newsmen popped up and down, taking pictures. The man beside the microphone crooked a finger at the old man and Gramp, hardly knowing why he did it, stumbled forward, to stand before the mike.

He couldn’t see the crowd so well. There was something the matter with his eyes. Sort of misted up.

Funny way for them to act. And his heart was pounding. Too much excitement. Bad for the heart.

“Speech!” roared the ten thousand down below. “Speech! Speech!”

They wanted him to make a speech! They wanted old Gramp Parker to talk into the mike so they could hear what he had to say. He’d never made a speech before in all his life. He didn’t know how to make a speech and he was scared.

Gramp wondered, dimly, what Celia would think of all these goings‑on. Hoppin’ mad, probably. And little Harry. But Harry would think his grandpa was a hero. And the bunch down at Grocer White’s store.

“Speech,” thundered the convention hall.

Out of the mist of faces Gramp picked one face‑one he could see as plain as day. Jurg Tec, smiling at him, smiling that crooked way the Martians smile. Jurg Tec, his friend. A dog‑gone Marshy. A Marshy who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him out on the surface. A Marshy who had stood with him against the metal beasts. A Marshy who had slogged those bitter miles beside him.

There was a word for it. Gramp knew there was a word. He groped madly in his brain for the single word that would tell the story.

And then he had it. It was a funny word. Gramp whispered it. It didn’t sound right. Not the kind of word he’d say. Not what anyone would expect old Gramp Parker to say. A word that would fit better in the mouth of Senator Sherman Brown.

Maybe they’d laugh at him for saying it. Maybe they’d think he was just a damn old fool.

He moved closer to the mike and the uproar quieted, waiting.

“Comrades — ’ Gramp began and then he stopped.

That was the word. They were comrades now. Marshies and Earthies. They’d fought in bitter hatred, each for what he thought was right. Maybe they had to fight. Maybe that war was something that was needed. But it was forty years ago and all its violence was a whisper in the wind‑a dim, old memory blowing from a battlefield where hatred and violence had burned itself out in one lurid blast of strength.

But they were waiting. And they hadn’t laughed.