The apartment was silent except for a radio on the floor above and Berry Gordon’s gaze flicked back to the table to assure he had made no error. The green envelope was still there, half expected; half dreaded, perhaps. It had not been there when he had gone into his bedroom five minutes earlier.

He strode to the balcony and looked down. Three floors below, at street level, a woman had just emerged from the building. She did not look back or up at him — did not, indeed, appear in any way unusual. He waited, but no one else left the building. From his knowledge of the way the people’s undercover movement operated he had not expected to discover his caller so easily and he took up the envelope. Its colour mocked. Green, he thought. Red would be better. Red for danger — to him. Undercover messages always came in green, but the danger was there still, both for him and others.

He wondered who the others would be, this time. For months he had sensed something big was in preparation. He had passed tests and training schedules demanding extremities of endurance, not knowing their purpose; had been worked on by hard-faced specialists he did not know; had fainted, once, from sheer fatigue. The people’s movement did not thus waste their time unless a purpose was to be served.

He slit the envelope. It contained a single sheet signed by the cryptogram always found on undercover directives, and one short phrase : Kill me Hartland Smith.

He read it twice, burned it, deposited the crushed ash in the chute, and felt the first numbing shock pass. Kill Hartland Smith. Three men had already tried. None had returned.

The door opened, closed. “ Is anything wrong, dear . . . ? ”

He composed his face. It must not show. “ No, Joan.” The transparent bag she carried showed she had been shopping. Well- built, twenty-two, dark, clear-eyed, she had the intelligence to reach conclusions for herself.

“You look worried,” she said.

Berry smiled. “ I may have to go away a few days — on business.”

Joan was not in the people’s movement, and he was glad. A man did not want his wife

mixed up in things that became so deadly earnest and dangerous. Part of his toughening course had taken him away for a month. That had been business, too, he had said. She slipped the things away and came to him.

“ Let me be with you this time — ”

He shook his head resolutely. “ Impossible. There’ll be travelling, long board meetings.” The lies came easily. Since the green envelope had arrived they were part of his job. “ You’d be worn out.”

She studied his face, a tiny frown between her clear eyes. He wished he could drop the deception. Instead, he pressed her arm.

“ It’ll soon be over ! ”

The outcome, unfortunately, was less certain, he thought as he sat down to the evening meal. To assassinate a dictator, shoot a king, or murder a prime-minister — each would have been easy, compared with the killing of Hartland Smith. Smith was all three, and more. His was a name to conjure with, to quell opposition. The law of three planets was upheld in the name of Hartland Smith. That that law was tyrannical and often unjust helped not at all.

Early next morning Berry rode through the awakening city to a huge cream building that never slept. A centre through which flowed at least half the news of Earth, Mars and Venus, it was twenty levels high. Beamed antennae sending and receiving information across millions of miles of space topped it. From lower levels a thousand communication channels carried away the news, facts and features later to be seen on video everywhere over the planet. News-centre of three worlds, it hummed around him as Berry rose to a corridor high near the roof and stepped out through fireproof steel gates. The door at the end of the corridor was marked simply “Sam Miller.”

Miller was running with practised rapidity through teletyped folios. He put them aside. His sandy brows rose.

“ Berry, this early ! ”

There was a question in his keen eyes. Berry closed the door. “ Sorry, Sam. Our week-end trip is off.”

Miller looked disappointed. He shuffled the papers on his desk. “ If the reason is personal, don’t tell me.”

“ It is.” Berry sat on the corner of the desk and let one long leg swing. At forty, Sam Miller had a mature common-sense which kept him from asking awkward questions.

More important, he knew a great deal about many people — including Hartland Smith. Berry looked at the third nail of his own right hand. One of the people's movement specialists had treated it for a full month. Hard as steel, it no longer grew. Shaped like a screwdriver . . . and only a very minor modification to his body, compared with some of the other changes . . .

His gaze settled on Miller's face. "Personal — and important," he said. " Maybe you'll know one day." But not if the result was failure. " Thought I'd tell you." He got up, turned to the door, hesitated as if in response to a sudden thought, and came back. " Incidentally, where is Hartland Smith these days? "

Miller's face had a peculiar expression. He pursed his lips. " So you came to ask about Hartland Smith — " He jerked his head to indicate his incoming line communicators. " Cancelled fishing trips don't make necessary personal calls, Berry. You're too busy a man to come half across the city for that."

Berry let his face show nothing. That was one of the things he had been taught. He could keep it expressionless when subjected to pain beyond the threshold of normal enduring.

" I'm off work to-day," he said evenly. " But about Hartland Smith — "

"News is that he took the last lunar rocket to catch the Bluespray II to Mars, where new governmental H.Q. buildings are to be opened."

Berry did not miss the tone. "You sound doubtful — "

Miller made an expressive gesture, though his face took on the bland vacuity known to a hundred million video viewers. "Why should I disbelieve? Or believe, for that matter? I've never seen Hartland Smith. Government reports come in and we use them. Hartland Smith is always news — big news. If a report says he's going to Mars, then that's that, far as we're concerned." He hesitated. " Penchard Lane is going to Mars — I saw him board the lunar ship myself. Where Smith is. Lane is also. So that fits."

" Thanks," Berry murmured. He would be on Hartland Smith's trail before the day was past. " Any other news about him? "

" Plenty," Miller tapped some of the folios. " But not such as would interest you. His big speech on video last night was a hit. Mankind is united, at peace — all that stuff — "

United, at peace, downtrodden, Berry thought. " I missed it," he said.

" The usual stuff." Miller's expression said it was not much to miss. "The usual views

of agricultural and industrial projects, instead of his face.” He turned over a leaf. “Here’s a bit — Mankind must and shall continue to enjoy its peace. Yet under my continued leadership I look with confidence to even greater prosperity. I am dedicated to you, my people — to you and your happiness — "

“ Thanks,” Berry interrupted. Hartland Smith could speak for an hour in that vein without repeating himself.

He turned to go, but Miller rose and came round the desk. For a second strong fingers were on Berry’s arm.

“Hartland Smith is dynamite. Only fools play with dynamite, Berry. He is the leader of three planets — self -elected, perhaps, but the leader. Better men than I have gone white-haired trying to interview him. If you had something similar in mind — keep away.”

Concern was in his eyes. Berry thought of his directive. Kill me Hartland Smith. There was no keeping away. It was Smith, or — Berry Gordon.

“Never was a man with so much power as Hartland Smith,” Miller stated.

Dry of mouth, Berry smiled. “ If I have any news of him, I’ll send it along! ”

Miller did not smile at the joke. “ Do, I’ll use it,” he said.

His tone was so deadly serious that the words remained even when Berry left the hum and clatter of the building far behind.

The great interplanetary rocket was visible from the exit lock of the lunar ferry ship, and seemed to overtop in immensity even the Lunar City dome. It was apt that a legendary figure like Hartland Smith should travel in her. Berry Gordon thought as he showed his clearance papers and ticket. Penchard Lane, too, was a name known on three worlds. Smith ordered; Lane carried through. Sometimes Lane was seen on video, clipped, brisk, efficient, commanding. Not the type to bear fools — or assassins — easily.

The Bluespray II was waiting for Mars to pass out of occultation by Earth, and her leaving time entered as an hour ahead. Berry decided much of that hour could be spent in investigation while other passengers thronged the upper ports that gave a skyscraper view of the moon.

The log list, always kept and radioed to Earth for identification of victims in case of accident, must come first. The clerk seemed bored with travel and his tiny and uncomfortable office.

“ Mind if I see if a friend is here? ” Berry asked.

“ Help yourself.” The man pushed the lists over.

“ Thanks.” Eyes apparently on a different column, Berry noted what he sought. There was no mistake. He put a coin on the papers. “No, suppose he changed his mind.”

The coin disappeared. “ Shall I let you know if he comes late, sir? ”

“Doesn’t matter.” It seemed safe to risk a question. “Anything notable this trip? ” That was indirect — but sufficient lead if the man wished to talk.

Some of the clerk’s sleepiness passed. “ We have two important passengers . . . one very important ...”

“ Yes? ”

“ Hartland Smith and Penchard Lane.” Awe was in the voice.

Berry let surprise and admiration show. “You’re lucky to have seen them — ”

“I haven’t, sir. That is, only Lane. Hartland Smith came aboard earlier, under escort, I was told.”

His regret was pathetic. “ Too bad,” Berry said. “Perhaps you’ll see him leave.”

Outside the office, he sprinted up the spiral stair provided against lift stoppages. Cabin numbers were listed against names. Smith’s cabin was locked. Berry looked both ways, then put a black button to the panel, and a receiver plug in one ear. Instantly footfalls, the whirr of busy machinery, and a thousand other sounds of the ship vibrated with almost intolerable loudness through his head. But there was no sound in the room, not even of breathing. He slid the microphone away and slipped an adjustable periscope slender as a needle through the keyhole, scanning the room in sections. It was empty, but three large cases marked “ Hartland Smith ” stood ready for opening. An inner cabin, it had no port. There was no other door.

Steps sounded. Berry straightened and put the instrument away. A dapper little man rounded the corner and passed him without a glance. Berry consciously let his tension relax. Tension was bad. It wasted energy; worse, those trained to observe would notice it, unless wholly concealed.

The ship’s sirens wailed, signal that it was five minutes to lifting time, and he made for his cabin. Flat on his thickly padded and sprung bed, he waited the tell-tail hooter and

abrupt upward thrust. When it came he experienced satisfaction — not even Hartland Smith himself could leave the ship until Mars . . .

When acceleration was down to the level of apparent Earth gravity he returned to the corridor, walking without seeming purpose to the cabin upon which his investigations must centre. For the first time he wondered whether its number — 13 — would prove significant for Smith or himself. The passage was empty and he listened. There was breathing within, and quiet movements. Berry tried the door, quickly yet with complete silence. It opened under his left hand while his right tensed upon a neat oblong object in his pocket. Designed and made by men unknown, that object could be lethal.

A man in neat grey was unpacking the cases. He turned, and eyes of the palest blue settled on Gordon.

“ You wished to see Mr. Hartland Smith? ” His tone betrayed no surprise.

Berry’s index finger released the firing stud, half depressed. Smith would have a valet. That was obvious — now. He eyed the room, showed surprise, looked at the door number, and withdrew.

“ I thought I was on the level above — ”

Back in the corridor, he strolled to the first corner, rounded it, and with instant rapidity saw that he was unobserved. He bent and put the end of the micro-periscope round the corner at floor level. The valet was looking from the cabin door and seemed about to follow. Berry rose, hastened a few steps, then settled down to his regular gait. Refusing to look back, he entered the stairway to the level above. It was apparent that any useful action would have to be preceded by careful planning.

By counting the doors he reached the cabin which occupied the same relative position as Smith’s. A footfall, just audible behind him, suggested it was worth risking that most travellers would be watching Earth and Luna slip away behind. The door opened under his touch and showed an empty room. A brown lounge suit was on the bed. The quiet footfall came again and he closed the door. The footfalls passed the door, returned, then ceased. He bent, applying the amplifier stethoscope mike to the floor. After a few moments muted sounds, almost killed by the vibrations transmitted through the fabric of the vessel, showed that the valet had indeed followed him and returned to cabin 13. Outside, Berry walked quickly to the corner. It would not be safe to use the cabin above Smith’s until he had established who occupied it and when it might be empty.

Within minutes a tall young man entered the cabin, emerging after some delay in the brown lounge suit. Berry followed him until he reached the observation dock, where at

least half the passengers were gathered, then returned quickly. The young man's cabin was locked but opened in moments to an adjustable key which Berry knew was a miracle of craftsmanship. He locked the door on the inside and listened, the microphone flat on the floor. Voices sounded, but so attenuated in overtones that the words were indistinguishable. After a time the door of the cabin below opened and closed, and the voices ceased. Complete silence suggested the room was empty.

Moving swiftly, Berry unpacked a metal box that fitted snugly in one pocket. The Undercover Kit J was one which had solved many a problem. Under the sprung bunk, he took a 1/64th inch hole straight down through the floor, stowed the electric drill away, and inserted the optical system of the micro-periscope. The interior of cabin 13 sprang into view, reduced to thumb-nail size. Simultaneously its door opened and an erect, well-built man of perhaps forty-five entered, moving quickly. He passed from the field of view and Berry decided against turning the periscope. The sound might attract attention. Almost at once the man returned, left the cabin, and closed the door. Berry rose. It was not safe to stay longer. The time was near when the cabin's legitimate occupant was likely to return.

Safely outside, Berry felt that he had done well. It was disappointing that he had seen Penchard Lane, recognised from his video appearances, but he must not expect too much in so short a time. It was a long way to Mars, with no intermediate stops . . .

He mingled with the passengers, outwardly bored but inwardly vividly alive to every face. Superficially, at least, they seemed an ordinary crowd of travellers and business men. He drifted to a port, watching the stars and reflections of the folk behind him

Earth was visible, a patchy dot. The moon was eclipsed behind the ship's hull.

" Not much to do when the novelty goes," a voice murmured.

It was the dapper little man who had passed when he was outside Smith's cabin. Berry turned, smiling slightly, but his nerves jangling to awareness of possible danger.

" Been this trip many times? " he asked.

" Often enough." The little man was wiry, probably making up in agility what he lacked in weight. He momentarily held Berry's arm, pointing. " Is that Mars? "

A signal ran to Berry's mind and was halted just in time to prevent the almost involuntary reaction. The little man's middle finger had pressed harder than the others — a people's movement recognition sign. But one he had been warned Hartland Smith's men might know. An undercover movement agent had talked. There were ways of loosening tied tongues, given time.

If the other was disappointed, he did not show it. “ I’ve been on Luna six months,” he said. “ Anything is better than that.”

Berry knew the words could have more than one significance. They could be idle conversation — or the reason why a genuine undercover man would use an obsolete sign. Or, again, a statement made by a man in Hartland Smith’s pay to initiate doubt in his mind. Hard-pressed, he might seek the little man’s help, chancing the sign was genuine . . .

When he left the other he did not look back to see if he was watched. The time had come for sleep, planning — action.

Berry awoke knowing there was someone else in the room. The light was out, the door shut; there was no movement, now, but breathing, quiet and controlled, at the foot of his bunk to the left, as if a man stood there. The intruder was watching, assuring he was still asleep, Berry guessed. Minutes passed and the sound of breathing became a trifle louder and more rapid, as of a man no longer feeling the need of extreme caution. There was a stealthy footfall, then a second, followed by silence except for the breathing, now nearer.

A catch in the rhythm, sixth-sense, perhaps, galvanised Berry’s limbs into the movements he had planned in the silence. Simultaneously, a momentary spot of light and a dull plop came from the bedside and something tore into the bunk within an inch of where his heart had lain. The sequence of movements carried him out of the bunk and upon his assassin, whose muscles were strong as wire. The other rolled backwards, straightened like a spring, and in swift silence opened the door. Berry jerked his head back, staring . . . but there was no silhouette. The corridor was dark, every bulb extinguished. The door closed.

Almost with the same movement Berry tore it open, head and shoulders at floor level. Three missiles spat by feet higher, where his chest should have been. He snapped back two shots with the weapon gathered from under his pillow as he leapt. The corridor walls rang, then silence came.

He dressed, replaced scattered clothing, and was just in time to open the door to a knock. A man in spaceways uniform looked in.

“ Had any trouble here, sir? ”

“ No.” Berry saw the corridor was lit. “ Anything happened? ”

“ Don’t know. Corridor lights were fused and someone said he heard shots.”

The other withdrew and Berry sat on the foot of his bunk. Apparently Hartland Smith

had his own means of avoiding danger; eliminate suspects before they could act. Effective — but worrying.

Half an hour had passed when there was a second knock, loud and official. Berry started, opened the door, and found himself meeting piercing eyes in a face devoid of human emotion.

“Come with me!” The words were a crisp, snapped order.

Two men of military bearing stood behind Penchard Lane, hands near belts.

Berry let his face show mild surprise. “ I don’t understand.”

“ You don’t need to,” Lane stated. He stepped aside; the two entered and halted each side of Berry. Lane’s gaze swept round the cabin. “ Probably a great deal of interest here,” he murmured. “ We’ll see later.”

Berry found himself conducted down the corridor, a guard close each side. No passenger was visible anywhere on that level, or in the lift. Their absence was significant. They strode into a cabin together and Lane closed the door.

“ Search him.”

Expert fingers flashed over Berry’s clothing, leaving no conceivable hiding place untouched. Wooden-faced, he stood motionless. As a last safeguard against forced confession there was always the escape into death implanted in a right upper molar. One hard bite, and not even Hartland Smith could make him talk.

“ I shall make a complaint on landing,” Berry said evenly.

They did not reply. Penchard Lane surveyed him across three feet of stillness. Then his gaze flicked to one of the guards.

“ Search his cabin and bring anything of interest here.”

The man withdrew and Berry waited. There were things in his baggage which no ordinary traveller would have.

“ It is reported you caused a disturbance,” Lane stated. “ That cannot be permitted.”

Berry was silent. That was the tale they would tell if anyone enquired. Minutes passed and the guard returned. Item after item was placed upon a narrow table. The J kit. Adjustable keys. Infra-red ray detector. A dozen clever gadgets worth a fortune. Lane turned one over.

“ Anything to say, Gordon — if your name is Gordon? ”

Berry was silent, hoping they would not kill him now. Lane pushed the equipment aside.

“You have planned burglary, sabotage, or assassination. Theft seems a small motive. Sabotage in space might mean self-destruction. So assassination remains. The ship carried our leader, Hartland Smith. Only one party desires his death — the people’s underground. Therefore you are their agent, sent to assassinate Hartland Smith.” He paused significantly. “Tell me, am I correct? ”

Berry met him eye to eye. “People’s underground? What is that? ”

Lane sighed. “ You do it well. Ability wasted. You know what happened to your companions? ”

Berry was silent because there was nothing to say. Refutation of the silent witness of the objects in his baggage was impossible.

Lane shrugged. “You’ll talk — later.”

Under crisp instruction the guards emptied Berry’s pockets, leaving only the clothing in which he stood. He was hustled to the adjoining cabin and locked in. It was empty as a box, devoid of even the usual bunk and fittings. He supposed further action on Lane’s part must wait until they reached Mars.

Walls, floor and ceiling were solid metal, the door a perfect fit. The only interruption to their smooth surface was at ceiling height where grilles large as his palm, pre-cast in the metal, formed part of the ship’s ventilation system. No hope lay there. Even if he could tear the grilles away the air conduits would scarcely take an arm.

He sat on the floor, waiting. As time passed a captor’s vigilance invariably decreased. Furthermore, any effort at escape must come when Mars was near because he could not remain at liberty in the ship. Ship turnover had not yet taken place, and he could judge from that.

No one came. He examined walls and floor minutely and was confident he was unobserved. An ear to the door met only silence, but that was not conclusive.

The warning warble of ship turnover came after he had emerged from light sleep. Five minutes later it came, occupying a minute. Taking advantage of the shifting apparent gravity, he checked both gratings and the ceiling. All were completely solid. Then apparent motion ceased. Apparent gravity returned, settling as the ship reached

steady deceleration, beginning the long drop to Mars on her jets. Standing in the middle of the cabin floor he studied the door. It had no keyhole on the inside. But there were other ways — danger kindled ingenuity, and the people's movement lacked experience of neither.

The turn-up of one trouser leg was insulated braided foil cable. He tore it off and ripped it from its fabric. One shoe sole unscrewed with his finger nail, disclosing a cavity hiding a cutting electrode and handle. Stretched to full height, he could just reach the disc of the ceiling lighting fitment. Six screws held it. Removed, a daylight bulb showed. He pulled it out and the white light ceased, forcing him to work by touch. The broken bulb could be used as a connector, and the foil cable should reach the door, he thought.

Within minutes the connections were complete and violet light played in the cabin as he struck an arc by the probable site of the door lock. The light changed slowly to green as the molecules of the tool began to disintegrate atomically under the induced heat. The door began to grow red hot, then white, then globules of metal fell. Squinting and perspiring, he watched the electrode creep smaller. Suddenly it was gone. The atomic arc ceased. He hooked the handle in the white hot metal and tugged. The door stuck, then opened. Sparks flashed from tool connector to floor as he dropped it, and the corridor lights went out. Simultaneously, the ship's warning system hooted. Touchdown was due.

He ran by memory, counting. A man on his feet when landing began usually had a score of broken bones . . . The spiral stairway and other corridors were lit and empty. Still counting, he flung himself along the passage to his cabin. There was a good chance it was not locked . . .

The door opened to his pressure and he gained his bunk as the first squeezing shock of the landing jets struck through the ship. Pinned there while moments fled, he saw that the least apparently dangerous items of his personal belongings remained untouched. A hard-covered pocketable volume entitled " Ancient Philosophy " lay where he had put it — and was a sham containing items that could speak with very different voice.

Instantly the last shock passed he was on his feet and running, the book in one hand. The stairs were long, but the lift unusable until released from its shock bumpers. He reached the exit lock just as it began to open, pushed through with a shout from behind ringing in his ears, and saw six feet away and below the rising boom of the descent gantry. He leapt, aware of the concrete a hundred feet below. A workman's service ladder topped the girder boom and within seconds he was out of sight of the ship's exit port, and descending.

Not until he was behind buildings did he cease to run. Men had shouted; two had tried to intercept him. Someone had cried, " Stowaway, catch him ! " But there was no

chase — at the moment. It would only begin when Penchard Lane descended from the ship, when Berry knew he would become hunted on the face of Mars.

He walked quickly. Away to his left was one of the thousands of huge manufacturing plants which poured atmospheric gases to the sullen sky and he turned that way. Undue haste would only attract attention — and the air of Mars was still rare as a mountain top so that prolonged running was impossible.

Within twenty minutes he knew that the locality of the landing point was being searched; within the hour the adjacent city was unsafe. Penchard Lane was not giving him time to change his appearance.

When Berry saw police arriving to encircle a building he had just left he decided the city was no refuge. A powerful car stood empty round the next corner and he took it. The road from the city which he chose at random proved as yet unguarded. Soon the stark buildings of man’s making disappeared behind. Half an hour later the green belt men had planted ended also and the road became a mere track of consolidated sand. Beyond was the desert — -and time to rest, sleep, and disguise himself as best he could.

He drove for two hours, saw his fuel was half gone, and hid the car in a dip behind rocks. A mile away was a rise from which both road and hiding place could be seen. He gained it on foot. Only after several days would it be safe to return to the city, he decided. Darkness was coming now, with an unusually stiff evening wind, and he lay down to sleep in a cleft.

He awoke to the sound of piping gusts and sand stinging his face. The sky was black, the night a howling fury of flying particles. Impossible to fight his way against the wind, or to find the saloon . . . He lay in the cleft, face and eyes masked in his clothing, only struggling up when the sand threatened again and again to bury him.

Hours passed and dawn was in the sky when the wind dropped. Choked and thirsty, he rose and gazed down at the rocks. Only their tops showed above a new plain of sand. Grim faced, he plodded down and went over the area a dozen times. Nothing showed where the vehicle lay. Even if located, he could never free it, he knew. He abandoned the search and stared over the dunes. There was nothing . . . only sand and occasional rock out- croppings. His driving speed had not been great over the poor surface, good as the car had been. Perhaps thirty miles an hour for two hours, he decided. Sixty miles was a long way to go on foot, unequipped. He searched the area for the last time, then began to march.

Hours passed. Sometimes he rested. He wondered what Joan would think if he never came back. Somehow, he had never expected to fail. But probably the others who had tried before him had felt that way too.

He rested when the sun was highest, dozed, and awoke to find a walnut-skinned Martian soberly studying him. He rose quickly, on the defensive. The Martian was his height, large-chested and immeasurably hardy. But his eyes were sad.

“ You will die, earthman,” he said.

Berry relaxed. There had been two races on Mars when man came — one simple, strong— -yet violent. One wise, hardy, yet kindly. The simple had died or learned to work for men. The wise had just — died . . . Yet that they were not wholly extinct the individual before him proved.

“ You are one of the Sapients — one of the Wise Ones,” he said.

The Martian inclined his head. “ So the first of your kind to come called us. That was in my father’s day.”

Berry felt elated. “You can give me water — can take me back to our city? ”

“ Why should I? ” It was a simple statement. Why should one of a dying race help an interloper . . . ?

“ Because I wish to kill Hartland Smith, who helped destroy you and destroys freedom itself,” Berry stated. “ It was he who rejected our plan to leave you free to live as you wish — he who wishes to make Earth rich with the wealth of Mars. Many of us do not love him. I was sent to kill him.”

“ To do murder? ”

“No — to avenge the innocent and save others — ”

They regarded each other seriously. The compassionate eyes were understanding.

“Tyrants must die? ”

“ Exactly ! ” Berry declared. “ He abuses his power.”

The Martian inclined his head. “I will help you. Come.” As they walked side by side he smiled with infinite sadness., “I help because I believe you intend good. We, the wise ones, do not love Earthmen, but Mars is big and our needs small. All could have lived together.” Momentary hope illuminated his face. “ Is it still too late? If this man were dead — ? ”

“ Who knows? ” Berry murmured.

Later, they rested and ate in a sandstone cave. “My people are simple,” the Martian stated. “We do not wish to labour all day to buy things for which we have no use. Many of the things you value are to us worthless. Great buildings constructed without worthwhile purpose mock their makers — ”

“ Mars will be a better place when Hartland Smith is dead,” Berry said.

They slept; went on; ate and slept again. Admiration for the Martian and his fellows grew stronger hourly. With it grew increased contempt and hatred for Hartland Smith and all his works. Smith was exploiting Mars, ruining it for future generations of men.

At the fringe of the green belt the Martian stopped. “We shall live hoping it is not too late,” he said. “ Mars can be kind to men who love her.”

Berry watched him go back over the sand. Here alone was reason for Smith to die. Mars, Earth and Venus would rejoice. And Smith knew it, he thought.

He entered the city when the streets were dim with evening. His face was browned, his hair made light with chemicals from his kit. The gun it contained, minute but deadly, lay in one hand. The few remaining items were in one pocket.

The government building was a large block containing offices and living accommodation. High officials stated they liked to live near their work so that they might better serve the people. Some believed. Others pointed out the arrangement meant no official need walk the streets unguarded at night . . .

An image-converter screen from his kit showed that infra-red beams guarded the top of the wall surrounding the new building. The wall had one entrance only, guarded by two men. He watched them a moment from the corner, then returned the way he had come. At the back of the building, quite near the wall on its out- side, an engineer’s gantry stood, its platform still raised. With luck, it should be possible to jump the wall from that platform, Berry decided. He climbed the ladder and found the platform two yards from the wall, and nearly level with its top, above which was the beam he must not interrupt. He leapt and landed heavily on concrete. No warning bell began to clang.

It was now apparent that the new building had no windows in its lower floor. Probably there was only one door, opposite the guarded gate and therefore unapproachable. The lowest windows were fifteen feet above.

One section of the suit with which he had been provided was of knitted plastic cord, and furnished a sixty-foot escape rope within moments. The hook for use with it was in the pocket and his third cast caught the sill above. He climbed up. The room was dark

and he decided to risk pushing in the glass. It fell with a tinkle. Inside, he saw that the building was not fully complete. Alarms, if any, would presumably be fitted later.

He began to search the building systematically and with extreme caution. Much of it was empty. The broadest corridors and most luxurious carpets all seemed to conduct in one direction, ending in magnificent spring doors. He stepped through. Beyond were two single doors, both lit. He listened. There was the sound of movement behind one, but no voices. The tiny gun in his palm, he stepped through and closed the door at his back.

Penchard Lane sat behind a desk. His head rose; his eyes opened wider; one hand moved . . .

“ If you give warning and anyone comes you’ll be dead before they enter! ” Berry snapped.

Lane’s hand halted. Berry stepped sideways until the solid wall was at his back. A bodyguard might shoot through the frosted glass.

“ Lift your hands and stand against the wall,” he ordered.

Lane hesitated, then rose and did so. “ You’ll never get out alive,” he stated. He chewed his lip, his big frame slightly crouched.

“We’ll see,” Berry said. “Meanwhile, don’t try anything. If I pull this trigger it will be doing millions a service.”

A little of the colour went from Lane’s face. Berry moved round the desk. As he had expected, two buttons were fitted to be operated by the toe. He could only hope that Lane had been taken too by surprise.

“ Where is Hartland Smith? ” he snapped.

For the first time a look of contempt, pity, and genuine amusement came to Lane’s face. “ Others have tried to kill Smith — -and failed, inevitably.”

Berry felt a shock. There was something in the tone . . . Triumph. Confidence. He drew in his lips suddenly.

“ You are Hartland Smith! ”

Lane laughed. The triumph and confidence were stronger. “ No.”

It was a simple statement of fact. Berry felt his own hope of victory crumbling. Smith

did not appear on video; had not been seen in the Blue spray II. Was a legend, a power always in the background . . .

“ You’ve guessed it,” Penchard Lane stated. “ There is no Smith. There never was. Therefore you cannot kill him.” He laughed. “ Do you think a government would let its power rest on such a fragile thing as the life of an individual? I and forty others work in the name of Hartland Smith. You cannot kill us all! ”

Abruptly Berry saw it all. A contrived legend indeed ! Hartland Smith. A ruthless dictator, a despot, a name to fear — but only a name! It was fiendish, clever. In one stroke it rendered useless all his efforts. Berry saw.

“ I — I didn’t know,” he breathed.

“ The secret is well kept. The advantage of having a leader no one can slay is obvious — ”

With the words Lane sprang with all the strength of his tensed muscles. Berry saw, half too late, and his finger worked once, twice. Startled surprise overspread Lane’s face. Momentum carried him to his desk. He lay there twisted on his back, face upwards, dead.

I and forty others, he had said. Berry gnawed his lower lip. This was something the undercover movement had never suspected, so carefully had the legend of Hartland Smith been built up and maintained.

The second office was empty, but luxuriously fitted. It would undoubtedly be “ Hartland Smith’s.” It would be mere bad luck that if anyone called of sufficient importance to be admitted Smith would be busy elsewhere . . .

Within thirty minutes Berry was out of the building and away. Eight days later, as Herbert Burke, he stepped from the Lunar shuttle to Earth. In under an hour he was in Sam Miller’s office. He stood by the window, looking down for a moment at the scene twenty levels below.

“ Hartland Smith and Penchard Lane are dead,” he stated.

Miller’s sandy brows twitched and intense interest lit his keen eyes. “Yes—”

“ Both were shot eight days ago at the new H.Q. building on Mars.”

Miller rose and stood by Berry. “ You testify to that? ”

“ I do — personally.”

Berry felt Miller's grip momentarily on his arm. There was a quick, light pressure of the second finger only — the sign, genuine and unmistakable.

" I didn't know — " he began.

Miller silenced him with a gesture. " I must hurry. I'll have such a story nothing short of the personal appearance of Smith and Lane themselves will refute it." He strode to the desk and sat down. "I suggest you hide for the moment, until Smith's regime is totally overthrown. That should not take long — now."

Berry paused, going out. " One thing — you might add that Smith's men are likely to try to conceal their leader's death by hiding the body ..."

He descended to the street. The creators of Hartland Smith had overlooked one vital fact — a myth built by words and lies could be destroyed by words and lies. There could be no personal refutation by Smith or Penchard Lane.

He let himself into his rooms quietly, wondering how he should break the news to Joan. She would not like leaving. It would be as well that they be on the move by the time the news first came over radio and video.

She was packed and ready; had obviously been hurrying. To his astonishment a green envelope lay opened on the table. "All successful. Both pack and leave. S.M."

" So you killed Smith, Berry," she murmured.

He held her a moment, thinking of that other green envelope. Kill me Hartland Smith.

" You are — ? " he said. How else explain her readiness?

" Of course, dear."

They left at once.