

*The Beast-
Jewel of Mars*



Leigh Brackett

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Chapter I

Burk Winters remained in the passenger section while the Starflight made her landing at Kahora Port. He did not think that he could bear to see another man, not even one he liked as much as he did Johnny Niles, handle the controls of the ship that had been his for so long.

He did not wish even to say goodbye to Johnny, but there was no avoiding it. The young officer was waiting for him as he came down the ramp, and the deep concern he felt was not hidden in the least by his casually hearty grin.

Johnny held out his hand. "So long, Burk. You've earned this leave. Have fun with it."

Burk Winters looked out over the vast tarmac that spread for miles across the ochre desert. An orderly, roaring confusion of trucks and flatcars and men and ships—ore ships, freighters, tramps, sleek liners like the Starflight, bearing the colors of three planets and a dozen colonies, but still arrogantly and predominantly Terran.

Johnny followed his gaze and said softly, "It always gives you a thrill, doesn't it?"

Winters did not answer. Miles away, safe from the thundering rocket blasts, the glassite dome of Kahora, Trade City for Mars, rose jewel-like out of the red sand. The little sun stared wearily down and the ancient hills considered it, and the old, old wandering wind passed over it, and it seemed as though the planet bore Kahora and its spaceport with patience, as though it were a small local infection that would soon be gone.

He had forgotten Johnny Niles. He had forgotten everything but his own dark thoughts. The young

officer studied him with covert pity, and he did not know it.

Burk Winters was a big man, and a tough man, tempered by years of deep-space flying. The same glare of naked light that had burned his skin so dark had bleached his hair until it was almost white, and just in the last few months his gray eyes seemed to have caught and held a spark of that pitiless radiance. The easy good nature was gone out of them, and the lines that laughter had shaped around his mouth had deepened now into bitter scars.

A big man, a hard man, but a man who was no longer in control of himself. All during the voyage out from Earth he had chain-smoked the little Venusian cigarettes that have a sedative effect. He was smoking one now, and even so he could not keep his hands steady nor stop the everlasting tic in his right cheek.

"Burk." Johnny's voice came to him from a great distance; "Burk, it's none of my business, but . . ." He hesitated, then blurted out, "Do you think Mars is good for you, now?"

Quite abruptly, Winters said, "Take good care of the Starflight, Johnny. Goodbye."

He went away, down the ramp. The pilot stared after him.

The Second Officer came up to Johnny. "That guy has sure gone to pieces," he said.

Johnny nodded. He was angry, because he had come up under Winters and he loved him.

"The damn fool." he said. "He shouldn't have come here." He looked out over the mocking immensity of Mars and added, "His girl was lost out there, somewhere. They never found her body."

* * *

A spaceport taxi took Burk Winters into Kahora, and Mars vanished. He was back in the world of the Trade Cities, which belong to all planets, and none.

Vhia on Venus, N'York on Earth, Sun City in Mercury's Twilight Belt, the glassite refuges of the Outer Worlds, they were all alike. They were dedicated to the coddling of wealth and greed, little paradises where millions were made and lost in comfort, where men and women from all over the Solar System could expend their feverish energies without regard for such annoyances as weather and gravitation.

Other things than the making of money were done in the Trade Cities. The lovely plastic buildings, the terraces and gardens and the glowing web of moving walks that spun them together, offered every pleasure and civilized vice of the known worlds.

Winters hated the Trade Cities. He was used to the elemental honesty of space. Here the speech, the dress, even the air one breathed, were artificial.

And he had a deeper reason than that for his hatred.

Yet he had left N'York in feverish haste to reach Kahora, and now that he was here he felt that he could not endure even the delay caused by the necessity of crossing the city. He sat tensely on the edge of the seat, and his nervous twitching grew worse by the minute.

When finally he reached his destination, he could not hold the money for his fare. He dropped the plastic tokens on the floor and left the driver to scramble for them.

He stood for a moment, looking up at the ivory facade before him. It was perfectly plain, the epitome of expensive unpretentiousness. Above the door, in small letters of greenish silver, was the one Martian word: Shanga.

"The return," he translated. "The going-back." A strange and rather terrible smile crossed his face, very briefly. Then he opened the door and went inside.

Subdued lighting, comfortable lounges, soft music, the perfect waiting room. There were half a dozen men and women there, all Terrans. They wore the fashionably simple white tunic of the Trade Cities, which set off the magnificent blaze of their jewelry and the exotic styles in which they dressed their hair.

Their faces were pallid and effeminate, scored with the haggard marks of life lived under the driving tension of a super-modern age.

A Martian woman sat in an alcove, behind a glassite desk. She was dark, sophisticatedly lovely. Her costume was the artfully adapted short robe of ancient Mars, and she wore no ornament. Her slanting topaz eyes regarded Burk Winters with professional pleasantness, but deep in them he could see the scorn and the pride of a race so old that the Terran exquisites of the Trade Cities were only crude children beside it.

"Captain Winters," she said. "How nice to see you again."

He was in no mood for conventional pleasantries. "I want to see Kor Hal," he said. "Now."

"I'm afraid . . ." she began. Then she took another look at Winters' face and turned to the intercom. Presently she said, "You may go in."

He pushed open the door that led into the interior of the building, which consisted almost entirely of huge solarium. Glassite walls enclosed it. Around the sides were many small cells, containing only a padded table. The roofs of the cells were quartz, and acted as mammoth lenses.

Skirting the solarium on the way to Kor Hal's office, Winters' mouth twisted with contempt as he looked through the transparent wall.

An exotic forest blossomed there. Trees, ferns, brilliant flowers, soft green sward, a myriad of birds. And through this mock-primitive playground wandered the men and women who were devotees of Shanga.

They lay first on the padded tables and let the radiation play with them. Winters knew. Neuro-psychi therapy, the doctors called it. Heritage of the lost wisdom of old Mars. Specific for the jangled nerve and overwrought emotions of modern man, who lived too fast in too complex an environment.

You lie there and the radiation tingles through you. Your glandular balance tips a little. Your brain slows down. All sorts of strange and pleasant things happen inside of you, while the radiation tinkers with nerves and reflexes and metabolism. And pretty soon you're a child again, in an evolutionary sort of way.

Shanga, the going-back. Mentally, and just a tiny bit physically, back to the primitive, until the effects wore off and the normal balance restored itself. And even then, for a while, you felt better and happier because you'd had one hell of a rest, from everything.

Their pampered white bodies incongruously clad in skins and bits of colored cloth, the Earthlings of Kahora played and fought among the trees, and their worries were simple ones concerning food and love and strings of gaudy beads.

Hidden away out of sight were watchful men with shock guns. Sometimes someone went a little bit too far down the road. Winters knew. He had been knocked cold himself, on his last visit here. He remembered that he had tried to kill a man.

Or rather, he had been told that he had tried to kill a man. One did not remember much of the interludes of Shanga. That was one reason people liked it. One was free of inhibitions.

Fashionable vice, made respectable by the cloak of science. It was a new kind of excitement, a new kind of escape from the glittering complexities of life. The Terrans were mad for it.

But only the Terrans. The barbaric Venusians were still too close to the savage to have any need for it and the Martians were too old and wise in sin to use it. Besides, thought Winters, they made Shanga. They know.

A deep shudder ran through him as he thrust his way into the office of Kor Hal, the director.

Kor Hal was lean and dark and of no particular age. His national origin was lost in the anonymity of the conventional white tunic. He was Martian, and his courtesy was only a velvet sheath over chilled steel, but beyond that he was quantity X.

"Captain Winters," he said. "Please sit down."

Winters sat.

Kor Hal studied him. "You're nervous, Captain Winters. But I am afraid to treat you anymore. Atavism lies too close to the surface in you." He shrugged. "You remember the last time."

Winters nodded. "The same thing happened in N'York." He leaned forward. "I don't want you to treat me anymore. What you have here isn't enough now. Sar Kree told me that, in N'York. He told me to come to Mars."

Kor Hal said quietly, "He communicated with me."

"Then you will . . ." Winters broke off, because there were no words with which to finish his question.

Kor Hal did not answer. He reclined at ease against the cushions of his lounge chair, handsome, unconcerned. Only his eyes, which were green and feral, held a buried spark of amusement. The cruel amusement of a cat which has a crippled mouse under its paw.

"Are you sure," he asked finally, "that you know what you're doing?"

"Yes."

"People differ, Captain Winters. Those mannikins out there"—he indicated the solarium—"have neither blood nor heart. They are artificial products of an artificial environment. But men like you, Winters, are playing with fire when they play with Shanga."

"Listen," said Winters. "The girl I was going to marry took her flier out over the desert one day and never came back. God only knows what happened to her. You know better than I do the things that can happen to people in the dead sea bottoms. I hunted for her. I found her flier, where it had crashed. I never found her. After that nothing mattered much to me. Nothing but forgetting."

Kor Hal inclined his dark, narrow head. "I remember. A tragedy, Captain Winters. I knew Miss Leland, a lovely young woman. She used to come here."

"I know," said Winters. "She wasn't Trade City, really, but she had too much money and too much time. Anyway, I'm not worried about playing with your fire, Kor Hal. I've been burned too deep with already. Like you say, people differ. Those lily-whites in their toy jungle, they have no desire to go back any farther. They haven't the guts or the passions to want to. I have."

Winters' eyes blazed with a peculiarly animal light. "I want to go back, Kor Hal. Back as far as Shangha will take me."

"Sometimes," said the Martian, "that's a long way."

"I don't care."

Kor Hal gave him an intent look. "For some, there is no return."

"I have nothing to return to."

"It is not easy, Winters. Shanga—the real Shanga, of which these solariums and quartz lenses are only a weak copy, was forbidden centuries ago by the City-States of Mars. There are risks, and discomfort which means that the process is expensive."

"I have money." Winters leaped up suddenly, his control breaking. "Be damned to your arguments! They're all hypocrisy, anyway. You know perfectly well which ones are going to take to Shanga. You keep them coming until they're addicts, half crazy to feel the real thing, and you know damn well you're going to give them what they want as soon as they cross your dirty palm with silver."

He tossed a checkbook on Kor Hal's desk. The top one was blank, but signed.

"There," he said. "Anything up to a hundred-thousand Universal Credits."

"I would prefer," said Kor Hal, "that you draw your own check, to cash." He handed the checkbook back to Winters. "The full amount, in advance."

Burk Winters said one word. "When?"

"Tonight, if you wish. Where are you staying?"

"The Tri-Planet."

"Have dinner there as usual. Then remain in the bar. Sometime during the evening your guide will join you."

"I'll be waiting," Winters said, and went out.

Kor Hal smiled. His teeth were very white, very sharp. They had the hungry look of fangs.

Chapter II

Burk Winters got his bearings finally when Phobos rose, and he could guess where they were heading.

They had slipped quietly out of Kahora, he and the slender young Martian who had joined him unobtrusively in the Tri-Planet bar. A flier waited for them on a private field. Kor Hal waited also. They took off, with a fourth man, who looked to be one of the big barbarians from the northern hills of Kesh. Kor Hal took the controls.

Winters was sure now that they were bound for the Low Canals, the ancient waterways and the ancient wicked towns—Jekkara, Valkis, Barrakesh—outside the laws of the scattered City-States. Thieves' market, slave market, vice market of a world. Earthmen were warned to keep away from them.

Miles reeled behind them. The utter desolation of the landscape below got on Winters' nerves. The silence in the flier became unendurable. There was something menacing about it. Kor Hal and the big Keshi and the slim young man seemed to be nursing some common inner thought that gave them a peculiarly vicious pleasure. Its shadow showed on their faces.

Winters spoke finally, "Are your headquarters out here?"

No answer.

Winters said rather petulantly, "There's no need to be so secretive. After all, I'm one of you now."

The slim young man said sharply, "Do the beasts lie down with the masters?"

Winters started to bristle, and the barbarian put his hand on the wicked little sap he carried at his belt. Then Kor Hal spoke coolly.

"You wished to practice Shanga in its true form, Captain Winters. That is what you have paid for. This is what you will receive. All else is irrelevant."

Winters shrugged sulkily. He sat smoking his sedative tobacco, and he did not speak again.

After a long, long time the seemingly endless desert began to change. Low ridges rose naked from the sand and grew into a mountain range, of which nothing was left now but the barren rock.

Beyond the mountains lay a dead sea bottom. It stretched away under the moonlight, dropping, always dropping, until at last it became only a vast pit of darkness. Ribs of chalk and coral gleamed here and there, pushing through the lichens like bones through the dried skin of a man long dead.

Winters saw that there was a city between the foothills and the sea.

It had followed the receding water down the slopes. From this height, Winters could see the outlines of five harbors, abandoned one by one as the sea drew back, the great stone docks still standing. Houses had been built to fill their emptiness, and then abandoned in their turn for a lower level.

Now the straggling town had coalesced along the bank of the canal that drew what feeble life was left from the buried springs of the bottom. There was something infinitely sad about that thin dark line—all that was left of a blue and rolling ocean.

The flier circled and came down. The Keshi said something rapidly in his own dialect, from which Winters caught the one word, Valkis. Kor Hal answered him. Then he turned to Winters and said:

"We have not far to go. Stay close by me."

The four men left the flier. Winters knew that he was under guard, and felt that it was not entirely for the sake of protecting him.

The wind blew thin and dry. Dust rose in clouds around their feet. Valkis lay ahead, a stony darkness sprawling upward toward the cliffs, cold in the eerie light of the twin moons. Winters saw, high up on the crest, the broken towers of a palace.

They walked beside still black water, on paving stones worn hollow by the sandaled feet of countless generations. Even at this late hour, Valkis did not sleep. Torches burned yellow against the night. Somewhere a double-banked harp made strange music. The streets, the alley mouths, the doorways and the flat roofs of the houses rustled with life.

Lithe lean men and catlike women watched the strangers, hot-eyed and silent. And over all, Winters heard the particular sound of the Low Canal towns—the whispering and chiming of the wanton little bells that the women wear, braided into their dark hair, hanging from their ears, chained around their ankles.

Evil, that town. Ancient, and very evil, but not tired. Winters could feel the pulse of life that beat there, strong and hot. He was afraid. His own civilian garb and the white tunics of his companions were terribly conspicuous in this place of bare breasts and bright kilts and jeweled girdles.

No one molested them. Kor Hal led the way into a large house and shut the door of beaten bronze behind them, and Winters felt a great relief. He turned to Kor Hal.

"How soon?" he asked, and tried to conceal the trembling of his hands.

"Everything is ready, Winters. Halk, show him the way."

The Keshi nodded and went off, with Winters at his heels.

This was very different from the Hall of Shanga in Kahora. Within these walls of quarried stone, men and women had lived and loved and died in violence. The blood and tears of centuries had dried in the cracks between the flags. The rugs, the tapestries, and the furnishings were worth a fortune as antiques. Their beauty was worn, but still bright.

At the end of a corridor was a bronze door, pierced by a narrow grille.

Halk stopped. He said to Winters, "Strip."

Winters hesitated. He carried a gun, and he did not like to leave it behind. "Why out here? I'd rather have my clothes with me."

Halk said, "Strip here. It is the rule."

Winters obeyed.

He walked naked into the narrow cell. There was no comfortable table here, only a few skins thrown on the bare floor. A barred opening showed darkly in the opposite wall.

The bronze door rang shut behind him and he heard the great bar drop into place. It was completely dark. He was really afraid, now. Terribly afraid. But it was too late for that. It had been too late, for a long time.

Ever since Jill Leland was lost.

He lay down on the hides. High above, in the vault of the roof, he could make out a faint, vague shimmering. It grew brighter. Presently he saw that it was a prism set into the stone, rather large and cut from a crystalline substance that was the color of fire.

Kor Hal's voice reached him through the grille. "Earthman!"

"Yes?"

"That prism is one of the Jewels of Shanga. The wise men of Caer Dhu carved them half a million years ago. Only they knew the secret of the substance, and the shaping of the facets. There are only three of the jewels left."

Sparks that were more energy than light flickered on the stone walls of the cell. Gold and orange and greenish blue. Little flames, the fire of Shanga, to burn the heart.

Because he was afraid, Winters said, "But the radiation, the ray that comes through the prism. Is it the same as that in Kahora?"

"Yes. The secret of the projectors was lost also with Caer Dhu. Presumably they use cosmic rays. By substituting ordinary quartz for the prisms, we could make the radiation weak enough for our purposes in the Trade Cities."

"Who is 'we,' Kor Hal?"

Laughter, soft and wicked. "Earthman—we are Mars!"

Dancing fire, growing, growing, glinting on his flesh, darting through his blood, his brain. It was not like this in the solariums, with their pretty trees. It was pleasure there, tantalizing, heady pleasure. It was exciting, and strange. But this . . .

His body began to move, to arch itself into strong writhing curves. He thought he could not endure this lovely, lovely pain.

Kor Hal's voice boomed down some huge fateful distance. "The wise men of Caer Dhu were not so wise. They found the secret of Shanga, and they escaped their wars and their troubles by fleeing backward along the path of evolution. Do you know what happened to them? They perished, Earthman! In one generation, Caer Dhu vanished from the face of Mars." It was getting hard to answer, hard to think. Winters said hoarsely, "Did it matter? They were happy, while they lived."

"Are you happy, Earthman?"

"Yes!" he panted. "Yes!"

The words were only half articulate. Twisting, rolling on the hide rugs, in the grip of such magnificent, unholy sensation as he had never dreamed of before, Burk Winters was happy. The fire Shanga blazed down upon him like a melting away, and there was nothing left but joy.

Again, Kor Hal laughed.

* * *

After that, Winters was not sure of anything. His mind rocked, and there were periods of darkness. When he was conscious, he knew only a feeling of strangeness. But he carried one memory with him, at least part way down that eerie road.

During a lucid period, a space of only a minute or two, he thought that one of the stones had rolled back to reveal a quartzite screen, and that through the screen a face looked at him, watching as he bathed naked in the beautiful flame.

A woman's face. Martian, highbred, with strong delicate bones and arrogant brows, and a red mouth that would be like a bittersweet fruit to kiss. Her eyes were golden as the fire, and as hot, and proud, and scornful.

There must have been a microphone in the wall, for she spoke and he heard her voice, full of a sweet cruel magic. ~~She called his name. He could not rise, but he managed to crawl toward her, and to his reeling brain she was part of the unearthly force that played with him. A destruction and a fascination as irresistible as death.~~

To his alien eyes, she was not as lovely as Jill. But there was a power in her. And her red mouth taunted him, and the curve of her bare shoulders drove him to madness.

"You're strong," she said. "You will live, until the end. And that is well, Burk Winters."

He tried to speak, but he could no longer form the words.

She smiled. "You have challenged me, Earthman. I know. You've challenged Shanga. You're brave, and I like brave men. You're also a fool, and I like fools, because they give me sport. I'm looking forward, Earthman, to the moment when you reach the end of your search!"

He tried again to speak, and failed, and then the night and the silence came to stay. He took the sound of her mocking laughter with him into the dark.

* * *

He did not think of himself now as Captain Burk Winters, but only by the short personal name of Burk. The stones upon which he lay were cold and hard. It was pitch-dark, but his eyes and ears were very keen. He could tell by the sound of his breathing that he was in a closed space, and he did not like it.

A low growl rumbled in his throat. The hairs stiffened at the back of his neck. He tried to remember how he had come here. Something had happened, something to do with fire, but he did not know what or why.

Only one thing he knew. He was searching for something. It was gone, and he wanted it back. The

wanting was a pain in him. He could not remember what the object was that he wanted, but the need for it was greater than any obstacle short of death.

He rose and began to explore his prison.

Almost at once he found an opening. Cautious testing told him that there was a passage beyond. He could see nothing, but the air that blew in to him was very heavy with strange smells. Instinct told him that it was a trap. He crouched resolute, his hands opening and closing in desire for a weapon. There was no weapon. Presently he went into the passage, moving without sound.

He went a long way, his shoulders brushing stone on either side. Then he saw light ahead, red and flickering, and the air brought him the taint of smoke, and the smell of man.

Very, very slowly, the creature called Burk padded toward the light.

He came close to the end of the tunnel, and suddenly a barred gate dropped behind him with a ringing clash. He could not go back.

He did not wish to go back. Enemies were in front of him, and he wished to fight. He knew now that he could not come upon them secretly. Flexing his great chest, he leaped out boldly from the tunnel mouth.

The tossing glare of torches dazzled his eyes, and a wild mob howl deafened him. He stood alone on a great block—the old slave block of Valkis, though he did not know that. They stared up, jeering at the Earthman who had tasted the forbidden fruit that even the soulless men of the Low Canals would not touch.

The creature called Burk was still a man, but a man already shadowed by the ape. During the hours he had bathed in the light of Shanga, he had changed physically. Bone and flesh had altered under the accelerated urging of glands and increased metabolism.

Already a big, powerful man, he had thickened and coarsened along the lines of brutish strength. His jaw and brow ridges jutted. Thick hair covered his chest and limbs and extended in a rudimentary mane down the back of his neck. His deep-set eyes had a hard and cunning gleam of intelligence, but was the intelligence of the primitive mind that had learned to speak and make fire and weapons, and no more than that.

Half crouching, he glared down at the crowd. He did not know who these men were; he hated them. They were of another tribe, and their very smell was alien. They hated him, too. The air bristled with their enmity.

His gaze fell on a man who stepped out lightly and proudly into the empty space. He did not remember that this man's name was Kor Hal. He did not notice that Kor Hal had shed the white tunic of the Trade Cities for the kilt and girdle of the Low Canals, nor that he wore in his ears the pierced gold rings of Barrakesh, and was now honestly himself—a bandit, born and bred among a race of bandits who had been civilized for so long that they could afford to forget it.

Burk knew only that this man was his particular enemy.

"Captain Burk Winters," said Kor Hal. "Man of the tribe of Terra—Lords of the spaceways, builders of the Trade Cities, masters of greed and rapine."

His voice carried over the packed square, though he did not shout. Burk watched him, his eyes like blinking red sparks in the torchlight, weaving slightly on his feet, his hands swinging loose and hungry. He did not understand the words, but they were threat and insult.

"Look at him, Oh men of Valkis!" cried Kor Hal. "He is our master now. His government kings it over the City-States of Mars. Our pride is stripped, our wealth is gone. What have we left, oh children of a dying world?"

The answer that rang the walls of Valkis was soft and wordless, the opening chord of a hymn written in hell.

Someone threw a stone.

Burk came down off the slave block in a great effortless sprig and sped across the square, straight for Kor Hal's throat.

A laugh went up, mirth that was half a cat-scream of sheer savagery. Like one supple creature, the crowd moved. Torchlight flashed from knife-blade and jewels and eyes of glittering green and topaz, and the small chiming bells, and the points of the deadly spiked knuckle-dusters. Long black tongues of whips licked out with a hiss and a crack.

Kor Hal waited until Burk almost reached him. Then he bent and pivoted in the graceful Martian savate. His foot caught Burk under the chin and sent him sprawling.

As he rolled half stunned, Kor Hal caught a whip from a man's hand.

"That's it, Earthman!" he cried out. "Grovel! Belly down, and lick the stones that were here before the apes of Earth had learned to walk!"

The long lash sang and bit, lacing the hairy body with red weals, and the harsh mob scream went up—Drive him! Drive the beast of Shanga, as the invading beasts of old were driven by our forefathers!

And they drove him, with whip and knife and spike, through the streets of Valkis under the racing moons. Jeering they drove him.

He fought them. Mad with fury, he fought them, but he could not come to grips with them. When he lunged they melted before him, and each way he turned he was met by the lash and the blade and the crippling lick. Blood ran, but it was all his own, and the high shrill laughter of women pursued him as he went.

At last there was only fear and the desire to escape.

They let him run. Along the crumbling ways of Valkis, up and down the twisting alleys that reeked of ancient crime, they let him run. But not too far. They blocked him off from the canal and the freedom of the sea bottom beyond. Again and again they headed the panting, shambling creature that had been Burk Winters, captain of the Starflight, and drove it higher up the slope.

Burk moved slowly now. He snarled and his head wove blindly from side to side in a pathetic attempt at defiance. His blood dripped hot on the stones. And always the insolent stinging lashes drove him on

Up and up. Past the great looming docks, with the bollards and the scars of moored ships still on them and the dust of their own decay lapping dry around their feet. Four levels above the canal. Four harbors, four cities, four epochs written in fading characters of stone. Even the dawn-man Burk was oppressed and frightened.

There was no life here. There been no life for a long time, even in the lowest level. The wind had scoured and polished the empty houses, smoothing the corners to roundness, hollowing the doors and windows, until the work of man was almost erased. Only strange things were left, that looked as though the wind had made them by itself out of little mountain tops.

The people of Valkis were silent now. They drove the beast, and their hate had not abated, but was intensified.

They walked here upon the very bones of their world. Earth was a green star, young and rich. Here the Martians passed the marble pier where the Kings of Valkis had moored their galleys, and the very marble was shattered under the heel of time.

High on the ridge above the oldest city the palace of the kings looked down at the scourging of the interloper. And in all of Valkis now there was no sound but the whispering of little bells that was like the sigh of wind on another world, where the women ran on their small bare feet, ankle deep in dust.

Burk climbed apelike up the history of Mars. His belly was cold with a terror of these dark places that smelled of nothing, not even of death.

He passed a place where houses had been built within the curve of a coral reef. He clambered over the

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