

# MOON OF MYSTERY

By ALAN BROWNING, Jr.

## CHAPTER 6

The question was, where did the steps go and who put them there? Bob came to the rescue, and said he didn't know where they went but evidently they had been built by some long perished race, perhaps, or else just grew.

The steps leaned straight back into the rocks for about twenty-five feet and then circled and disappeared from view behind a stony abutment. We gathered in a group and after a short conference decided to ascend them and see if they led to the ancient homes of the perished moon dwellers.

As we started the ascent, Bob led the way, Pat followed, and I brought up the rear. Not that I was afraid to go front, but I wanted to have a clear road if anything should meet us. Too, I was considerate enough to think of my companions. If I was in front and we sighted something why I just naturally would trample my companions under foot when I decided to go away from there.

So we went up—twenty steps, thirty steps, and then the turn. As we clambered around the corner I think all of us stopped in pure astonishment and disbelief. For there, glaring us in the eye was a massive iron door which opened into the side of the virgin rock of the cliff side. Yet it wasn't this door which caused our gasps of astonishment, it was the sign above the door. In the purest of English it read: EMERGENCY ENTRANCE No. 10!

You could have knocked any of us down with a feather; in fact, I nearly fell down of my own accord. To think of coming a quarter of a million miles through space to a dead and airless world and finding an English sign staring you in the face over an iron door leading into a cliff side! It was preposterous, yet it was there.

Bob didn't know what to say, so he immediately made a speech. That's the way Bob was. Let him run out of anything to say, and he'd make a speech. I think there was a strain of political blood in his veins somewhere, but I don't hold that against him.

We stood there and stared while Bob finished his speech. I don't know what he said. I wasn't listening. I was wondering.

The next thing was to decide what to do about the door. I was for going back to the ship and taking a nap and then coming back and attempting to open it, but Pat and Bob wouldn't hear of any delay. Their curiosity was aroused. So at last it was agreed that we stay around a while and try and open it and force our way in. In where, we didn't know at the time, but we were sure the entrance led some place.

However, deciding to enter and then entering were horses of an entirely different complexion. It was easy enough to decide to open a massive iron door set in a wall of solid granite, but such things are not pried open with toothpicks. We did all we could with our clumsy hooks, which served us as hands, and pushed and pulled and grunted and worked up a sweat and got exasperated and cursed a little, too, but all for nothing. The door wouldn't budge an inch!

Then Bob had an idea and he was so proud of it that I feared he was going to burst into another speech. He did start talking, but as his remarks were quite sensible, they couldn't be classed as a lecture.

"It strikes me," he said, "that inasmuch as this door is an emergency entrance it was put here so that whoever was in a hurry to get inside wouldn't have to pry his way in with a crowbar or blast in with gunpowder. So somewhere there

must be a secret spring or something which would allow entry without loss of time. What do you fellows think?"

I agreed with him because it was easier to agree than argue, although secretly I didn't see why anyone on the barren and desolate moon should be scared of anything when we hadn't seen anything to be afraid of. Anyway, I started probing about the doorfacing, pushing every little rough place and knob like Bob and Pat were doing, but to no avail. The door stayed shut.

We worked at it for an hour or more, and then tired and disgusted, made up our minds to quit and retrace our way to the ship and rest, when an unholy yell from Pat froze us in our tracks! I was facing the door at the moment, but upon quickly facing around, I too let out a yell which put Pat to shame. For at the foot of the steps stood a monster so vile, so horrible, that I could well appreciate the sign: "Emergency Entrance!"

The creature which faced us from the steps was fully seven feet tall. In color, it was as black as ink, yet the sun glinted and shone upon its body like it might have been formed of polished black marble. Its head, which was small and ill-formed, possessing close-set eyes which shone savagely red, no nose, and a large cruel mouth, was perched upon massive shoulders fully three feet across. The torso tapered to narrow hips and was supported by short, knotty legs ending in feet which reminded me of the earthy gorilla. Swinging from the shoulders to the knees were two muscular arms that, looked fully capable of lifting tons, and the huge, long-fingered hands could have crushed our skulls as if they had been egg shells—and empty shells at that! We were trapped! To our backs was the massive, impenetrable iron door; to our sides were the rocky walls from which the steps had been fashioned, and to our front was the creature. I couldn't help but wish that I was safely aboard the space ship and under the bed!

The thing gazed at us for a moment as if it was thinking. If its face had been capable of registering expression I expect it would have laughed at the trap we were in. Then it started calmly up the steps!

We knew we were in dire peril. Even if the three of us grappled with the beast and managed to overcome it, we knew that we stood a good chance of having our space suits clawed to ribbons, and that in itself meant instant suffocation. Fools that we were not to have brought our automatics!

As the thing came calmly up the steps, its great arms outstretched in anticipation of the burdens they would crush, I saved the day! I always was good at saving things like that, but I didn't have time to call the fact to my friends' attention at the moment. For just as we were gathering our courage for a mass attack upon the creature, I happened to stumble over a small rock which was lying in the center of the top step. The minute my foot touched it the massive iron door seemed to shake its frame and then swung swiftly open!

I shouted to Bob and Pat, who had their backs to the door, and we ran swiftly in. Hardly had we gotten inside than the door swung silently shut—and directly in the face of our new moon friend. It was a close escape and I couldn't help but thank the genius who placed that stone upon the step and made it the secret catch. For all a person had to do, who knew the secret, was to rush up the steps, stump his toe upon the boulder, and fall headlong into the entrance and safety! Everyone knows how simple a matter it is to stump a toe.

Now that we were safe and our acquaintance was probably gnashing his teeth outside, we began to look about, by aid of our electric lanterns. We found ourselves in a narrow corridor which looked as if it might have been hewn through the living rock. Along the walls, as far as our lights let us see, were stone benches, and I couldn't help but think that they had been placed there so that someone fleeing from a cousin of that thing outside might have a convenient place to sit himself down and rest and get his nerve back.

Knowing our way to be blocked outside, we followed the corridor in hopes that we might encounter some of the inhabitants who built the tunnel and the door. For perhaps fifty feet the corridor led straight ahead and then veered sharply to the right. Rounding the corner we were again blocked by a massive iron door.

A close examination of this barrier disclosed a lock which was very much like the locks familiar upon earth, and in it was a key. Upon the door was printed in neat English: "Please Keep This Door Closed." There it was again, the English language, and I fully ex-

pected to run into a sign-painting Yankee at every step.

We opened the door and gasped in unison. If we had burst into a bunch of fabrics we could not have been more astonished. For there smote our view one of the most magnificent halls that I have as yet been privileged to see. In height it was about sixty feet, and large, transparent windows built into the ceiling, shed a soft light over the entire scene. I judged the hall to be 100 feet in length and possibly 80 feet in width. The roof was supported by massive marble pillars, exquisitely carved and ornamented, and the floor was paved with huge blocks of the same multicolored marble. Around the walls were hung beautiful tapestries done in glowing colors. The hall was furnished much in the manner of an earthly hotel lobby.

Of living persons there was but one. At least we thought he was living for he was leaning against one of the marble columns, but a closer view disclosed that if he was alive he was evidently asleep. Asleep! How I envied him! As we approached the man we noted that his eyes were closed and that his chin was sunk upon his chest. He appeared to be about 40 years of age, was of handsome appearance and of good physical build. As to nationality, he looked like an American.

The man was attired in trousers similar to the ones we wore under our space suits; had on a white shirt with broad, flowing collar and no tie, and about his waist was a broad red sash, the only touch of color in his attire.

I was for going up to him and waking him up, but something about his face and posture seemed to tell me that I was too late. He was dead. But if he had merely been sleeping the sight of three hobgoblins as we looked in our space suits would have probably scared him to death, anyway.

Yet if he was dead, what kept him on his feet? And how long had he been dead? What did he die of? No dust of centuries lay upon the floor or furniture and yet of air there was none and we knew (or at least had been told), that the moon has been without air for untold centuries. It was certainly puzzling.

A close inspection of the silent figure showed to us the fact that he was perfectly preserved, in fact, I could have sworn that I saw the flush of life upon his face. Yet life was impossible for anyone within that airless chamber who was not clad in a space suit!

Musing upon the strangeness of it all, we made our way to a door we saw upon our left. There were many doors leading from the room, but we chose this one because it was nearest. Wild with curiosity as to what might meet our eyes, we swung it open and entered—and then stood there in astoundment! For within a small but richly appointed chamber lay a human figure upon a massive, jewel incrustured couch! One look at the exquisite figure told us that it was a woman!

Dressed in a flowing robe of purest white from which twinkled numerous jewels, she lay there as if asleep. Upon the beautiful cheeks rested the faint flush of life, and I could have sworn, so life-like she appeared, that I saw her breast gently rise and fall as if she were breathing!

I wish that I were gifted in painting word pictures so that I could adequately describe the fairy creature. Her head was crowned with a glory of dark brown hair, and her eyes, although closed, I knew at once to be the darkest blue. A well shaped nose rested above full red lips of a mouth that was not too small, yet not too large. A firm, delicately moulded chin gave her face strength and character.

Into her hair was woven a chain of pearls, much in the manner of a crown, and within her small beautiful hands, which were clasped upon her rounded breasts, was a small package.

Bob was the first to recover his senses and I was afraid he was going to despoil the sacred burial chamber with a speech. But he didn't. "Boys," he said real solemn-like, "I've hit upon a solution. At one time or another an intelligent people lived in this, which evidently is an underground city, and somehow or another they perished—perhaps their air gave out. This little lady must have been a princess or maybe a queen. I can't say which, and due to the absence of air and its attendant moisture which breeds decay, her body has been preserved for no telling how many centuries—perhaps from the time when there was an atmosphere about the moon. If we explore the entire city I dare say we will find the bodies of every inhabitant just as they were when death overtook them so many years ago!

That sounded plausible, but what I couldn't understand was the English signs and apparent order of things. And besides, I was sleepy and didn't feel like trying to understand.

(Continued Next Week)

### Dry Officers To Asheville

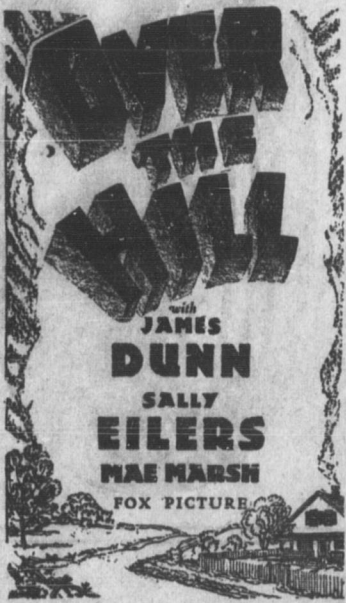
Prohibition administration in the 28 counties comprising the western district of the state are being transferred this week from Charlotte to Asheville. J. Ed Kanipe is deputy administrator in charge.

## PROGRAM AT THE LYRIC

ELKIN, N. C.

### THIS WEEK

Thursday-Friday—



**JAMES DUNN**  
**SALLY EILERS**  
The Sweethearts of  
**"BAD GIRL"**

Are Here Again, with  
**MAE MARSH**

IN  
**'OVER THE HILL'**

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think about it for days  
. . . for it is your life . . .  
no matter how young or  
old you are.

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Mickey Mouse  
Cartoon

Prices:  
Day-Night, 10-30c

Saturday—

Thrills! Action! Romance!—That's  
**"THE HOMICIDE SQUAD"**

ADDED—SERIAL AND COMEDY  
Day and Night—10c and 30c

### NEXT WEEK

Monday-Tuesday—

**GRETA GARBO** in  
**"MATAHARI"**

Garbo's Latest Picture  
ADDED—NEWS AND COMEDY

Day and Night—10c and 30c

Wednesday—

**"OKLAHOMA JIM"**

An All-Talking Western Drama

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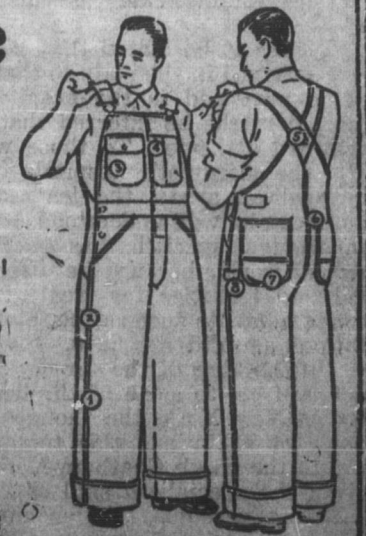
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4. Pencil and match pocket!
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Boys Sizes 59c



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