

IMAGINATION

SCIENCE FICTION

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LEGION OF LAZARUS

by Edmond Hamilton

IT ISN'T the dying itself. It's what comes before. The waiting, alone in a room without windows, trying not to think. The opening of the door, the voices of the men who are going with you but not all the way. The walk down the corridor to the airlock room, the faces of the men, closed and impersonal. They do not enjoy this. Neither do they shrink from it. It's their job.

This is the room. It is small and it has a window. Outside there is no friendly sky, no clouds. There is space, and there is the huge red circle of Mars filling the sky, looking down like an enormous eye upon this tiny moon. But you do not look up. You look out.

There are men out there. They are quite naked.

The one garment you have worn is taken from you and the lock door opens, and the fear that cannot possibly become greater does become greater, and then suddenly—

(Turn to page 4)



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Being expelled from an air lock into deep space was the legal method of execution. But it was also the only way a man could qualify for—The Legion Of Lazarus

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This is the room. It is small and it has a window. Outside there is no friendly sky, no clouds. There is space, and there is the huge red circle of Mars filling the sky, looking down like an enormous eye upon this tiny moon. But you do not look up. You look out.

There are men out there. They are quite naked. They sleep upon the barren plain, drowsing in a timeless ocean. Their bodies are white as ivory and their hair is loose across their faces. Some of them seem to smile. They lie, and sleep, and the great red eye looks at them forever as they are borne around it.

"It isn't so bad," says one of the men who are with you inside this ultimate room. "Fifty years from now, the rest of us will all be old, or dead."

It is small comfort.

The one garment you have worn is taken from you and the lock door opens, and the fear that cannot possibly become greater does become greater, and then suddenly that terrible crescendo is past. There is no longer any hope, and you learn that without hope there is little to be afraid of. You want now only to get it over with.

You step forward into the lock.

The door behind you shuts. You sense that the one before you is opening, but there is not much time. The burst of air carries you forward. Perhaps you scream, but you are now beyond sound, beyond sight, beyond everything. You do not even feel that it is cold.

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CHAPTER I

There is a time for sleep, and a time for waking. But Hyrst had slept heavily, and the waking was hard. He had slept long, and the waking was slow. *Fifty years*, said the dim voice of remembrance. But another part of his mind said, No, it is only tomorrow morning.

Another part of his mind. That was strange. There seemed to be more parts to his mind than he remembered having had before, but they were all confused and hidden behind a veil of mist. Perhaps they were not really there at all. Perhaps—

Fifty years. I have been dead, he thought, and now I live again. Half a century. Strange.

Hyrst lay on a narrow bed, in a place of subdued light and antiseptic-smelling air. There was no one else in the room. There was no sound.

Fifty years, he thought. *What is it like now, the house where I lived once, the country, the planet? Where are my children, where are my friends, my enemies, the people I loved, the people I hated?*

Where is Elena? Where is my wife?

A whisper out of nowhere, sad, remote. *Your wife is dead and your children are old. Forget them. Forget the friends and the enemies.*

But I can't forget! cried Hyrst silently in the spaces of his own mind. It was only yesterday—

Fifty years, said the whisper. *And you must forget.*

MacDonald, said Hyrst suddenly. *I didn't kill him. I was innocent. I can't forget that.*

Careful, said the whisper. *Watch out.*

I didn't kill MacDonald. Somebody did. Somebody let me pay for it. Who? Was it Landers? Was it Saul? We four were together out there on Titan, when

he died.

Careful, Hyrst. They're coming. Listen to me. You think this is your own mind speaking, question-and-answer. But it isn't.

Hyrst sprang upright on the narrow bed, his heart pounding, the sweat running cold on his skin. *Who are you? Where are you? How—*

They're here, said the whisper calmly. *Be quiet.*

Two men came into the ward. "I am Dr. Merridew," said the one in the white coverall, smiling at Hyrst with a brisk professional smile. "This is Warden Meister. We didn't mean to startle you. There are a few questions, before we release you—"

Merridew, said the whisper in Hyrst's mind, *is a psychiatrist. Let me handle this.*

Hyrst sat still, his hands lax between his knees, his eyes wide and fixed in astonishment. He heard the psychiatrist's questions, and he heard the answers he gave to them, but he was merely an instrument, with no conscious volition, it was the whisperer in his mind who was answering. Then the warden shuffled some papers he held in his hand and asked questions of his own.

"You underwent the Humane Penalty without admitting your guilt. For the record, now that the penalty has been paid, do you wish to change your final statements?"

The voice in Hyrst's mind, the secret voice, said swiftly to him. *Don't argue with them, don't get angry, or they'll keep you on and on here.*

"But—" thought Hyrst.

I know you're innocent, but they'll never believe it. They'll keep you on for further psychiatric tests. They might get near the truth, Hyrst—the truth about us.

Suddenly Hyrst began to understand, not all and not clearly, something of what had happened to him. The obscuring mists began to lift from the borders of his mind.

"What is the truth," he asked in that inner quiet, "about us?"

You've spent fifty years in the Valley of the Shadow. You're changed, Hyrst. You're not quite human any more. No one is, who goes through the freeze. But they don't know that.

"Then you too—"

Yes. And I too changed. And that is why our minds can speak, even though I am on Mars and you are on its moon. But they must not know that. So don't argue, don't show emotion!

The warden was waiting. Hyrst said aloud to him, slowly. "I have no statement to make."

The warden did not seem surprised. He went on, "According to your papers here you also denied knowing the location of the Titanite for which MacDonald was presumably murdered. Do you still deny that?"

Hyrst was honestly surprised. "But surely, by now—"

The warden shrugged. "According to this data, it never came to light."

"I never knew," said Hyrst, "where it was."

"Well," said the warden, "I've asked the question and that's as far as my responsibility goes. But there's a visitor who has permission to see you."

He and the doctor went out. Hyrst watched them go. He thought, So I'm not quite human. Not quite human any more. Does that make me more, or less, than a man?

Both, said the secret voice. *Their minds are still closed to you. Only our minds—we who have changed too—are open.*

"Who are you?" asked Hyrst.

My name is Shearing. Now listen. When you are released, they'll bring you down here to Mars. I'll be waiting for you. I'll help you.

"Why? What do you care about me, or a murder fifty years old?"

I'll tell you why later, said the whisper of Shearing. *But you must follow my guidance. There's danger for you, Hyrst, from the moment you're released! There are those who have been waiting for you.*

"Danger? But—"

The door opened, and Hyrst's visitor came in. He was a man something over sixty but the deep lines in his face made him look older. His face was gray and drawn and twitching, but it became perfectly rigid and white when he came to the foot of the bed and looked at Hyrst. There was rage in his eyes, a rage so old and weary that it brought tears to them.

"You should have stayed dead," he said to Hyrst. "Why couldn't they let you stay dead?"

Hyrst was shocked and startled. "Who are you? And why—"

The other man was not even listening. His eyelids had closed, and when they opened again they looked on naked agony. "It isn't right," he said. "A murderer should die, and stay dead. Not come back."

"I didn't murder MacDonald," Hyrst said, with the beginnings of anger. "And I don't know why you—"

He stopped. The white, aging face, the tear-filled, furious eyes, he did not quite know what there was about them but it was there, like an old remembered face peeping up through a blur of water for a moment, and then withdrawing again.

After a moment, Hyrst said hoarsely, "What's your name?"

"You wouldn't know it," said the other. "I changed it, long ago."

Hyrst felt a cold, and it seemed that he could not breathe. He said, "But you were only eleven—"

He could not go on. There was a terrible silence between them. He must break it, he could not let it go on. He must speak. But all he could say was to whisper, "I'm not a murderer. You must believe it. I'm going to prove it—"

"You murdered MacDonald. And you murdered my mother. I watched her age and die, spending every penny, spending every drop of her blood and ours, to get you back again. I pretended for fifty years that I too believed you were innocent, when all the time I knew."

Hyrst said, "I'm innocent." He tried to say a name, too, but he could not speak the word.

"No. You're lying, as you lied then. We found out. Mother hired detectives, experts. Over and over, for decades—and always they found the same thing.

Landers and Saul could not possibly have killed MacDonald, and you were the only other human being there. Proof? I can show you barrels of it. And all of it proof that my father was a murderer."

He leaned a little toward Hyrst, and the tears ran down his lined, careworn face. He said, "All right, you've come back. Alive, still young. But I'm warning you. If you try again to get that Titanite, if you shame us all again after all this time, if you even come near us, I'll kill you."

He went out. Hyrst sat, looking after him, and he thought that no man before him had ever felt what tore him now.

Inside his mind came Shearing's whisper, with a totally unexpected note of compassion. *But some of us have, Hyrst. Welcome to the brotherhood. Welcome to the Legion of Lazarus.*

CHAPTER II

Mars roared and glittered tonight. And how was a man to stand the faces and lights and sounds, when he had come back from the silence of eternity?

Hyrst walked through the flaring streets of Syrtis City with slow and dragging steps. It was like being back on Earth. For this city was not really part of the old dead planet, of the dark barrens that rolled away beneath the night. This was the place of the rocket-men, the miners, the schemers, the workers, who had come from another, younger world. Their bars and entertainment houses flung a sun-like brilliance. Their ships, lifting majestically skyward from the distant spaceport, wrote their flaming sign on the sky. Only here and there moved one of the hooded, robed humanoids who had once owned this world.

The next corner, said the whisper in Hyrst's mind. Turn there. No, not toward the spaceport. The other way.

Hyrst thought suddenly, "Shearing."

Yes?

"I am being followed."

His physical ears heard nothing but the voices and music. His physical eyes saw only the street crowd. Yet he knew. He knew it by a picture that kept coming into his mind, of a blurred shape moving always behind him.

Of course you're being followed, came Shearing's thought. I told you they've been waiting for you. This is the corner. Turn.

Hyrst turned. It was a darker street, running away from the lights through black warehouses and on the labyrinthine monolithic houses of the humanoids.

Now look back, Shearing commanded. No, not with your eyes! With your mind. Learn to use your talents.

Hyrst tried. The blurred image in his mind came clearer, and clearer still, and it was a young man with a vicious mouth and flat uncaring eyes. Hyrst shivered. "Who is he?"

He works for the men who have been waiting for you, Hyrst. Bring him this way.

"This—way?"

Look ahead. With your mind. Can't you learn?

Stung to sudden anger, Hyrst flung out a mental probe with a power he hadn't known he possessed. In a place of total darkness between two warehouses ahead, he saw a tall man lounging at his ease. Shearing laughed.

Yes, it's me. Just walk past me. Don't hurry.

Hyrst glanced backward, mentally at the man following him through the shadows. He was closer now, and quite silent. His face was tight and secret. Hyrst thought, How do I know this Shearing isn't in it with him, taking me into a place where they can both get at me—

He went past the two warehouses and he did not turn his head but his mind saw Shearing waiting in the darkness. Then there was a soft, shapeless sound, and he turned and saw Shearing bending over a huddled form.

"That was unkind of you," said Shearing, speaking aloud but not loudly.

Hyrst, still shaking, said, "But not exactly strange. I've never seen you before. And I still don't know what this is all about."

Shearing smiled, as he knelt beside the prone, unmoving body. Even here in the shadows, Hyrst could see him with these new eyes of the mind. Shearing was a big man. His hair was grizzled along the sides of his head, and his eyes were dark and very keen. He reached out one hand and turned the head of the prone young man, and they looked at the lax, loose face.

"He's not dead?" said Hyrst.

"Of course not. But it will be a while before he wakes."

"But who is he?"

Shearing stood up. "I never saw him before. But I know who he's working for."

Hyrst flung a sudden question at Shearing, and almost without thinking he followed it to surprise the answer in Shearing's mind. The question was, *Who are you working for?* And the answer was a woman, a tall and handsome woman with angry eyes, standing against a drift of stars. There was a ship, all lonely on a dark plain, and she was pointing to it, and somehow Hyrst knew that it was vitally important to her, and to Shearing, and perhaps even to himself. But before he could do more than register this fleeting vision on his own consciousness, Shearing's mind slammed shut with exactly the same violent effect as a door slammed in his face. He reeled back, throwing up his arms in a futile but instinctive gesture, and Shearing said angrily,

"You're getting too good. I'll give you a social hint—it's customary to knock before you enter."

Hyrst said, still holding the pieces of his head together, "All right—sorry. So who is she?"

"She's one of us. She wants what we want."

"I want only to find out who murdered MacDonald!"

"You want more than that, Hyrst, though you don't know it yet. But MacDonald's murderer is part of what we're after."

He took Hyrst's arm. "We don't have long. Thanks to my guidance, you slipped them all except this one. But they'll be hounding after our trail very quickly."

They went on along the shadowed street. The glare of the lights died back behind them, and they moved in darkness with only the keen stars to watch them, and the cold, gritty wind blowing in from the barrens, and the dark door-ways of the mastaba-like monolithic houses of the humanoids staring at them like sightless eyes. Hyrst looked up at the bright, tiny moon that crept amid the stars, and a deep shaking took him as he thought of men lying up there in the deathly sleep, of himself lying there year after year....

"In here," said Shearing. It was one of the frigid, musty tombs that the humanoids called home. It was dark and there was nothing in it at all. "We can't risk a light. We don't need it, anyway."

They sat down. Hyrst said desperately, "Listen, I want to know some things.