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Title: A world to die for

Creator: Sam Carson

Release date: January 1, 1 [eBook #73354]

Most recently updated: April 22, 2024

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A WORLD TO
DIE FOR ***

A world to die for

By Sam Carson

**Titans respect men who create,
and add to the betterment of
others. Surely it is brave to be
a Titan and muchly in love.**

*Another new name for these pages.
Here's Sam Carson, veteran writer,
TV and Radio editor, former roving
newspaperman, and a father who is
now "going through an involuntary
course in nuclear physics" as he
keeps up with his son, a chemical
engineer and physicist at the
University of Tennessee. And when
Sam Carson sets foot on an alien
planet the hills and valleys as well as
the people seem to pulse with light
and vitality. It's truly rarely that a*

*writer seated behind his desk can
summon such travel magic.*

**[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Fantastic Universe July 1954.
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]**

They cut the Markab out of hyper space three parsecs from Deneb, on the North Galactic Polar course. Three men were aboard the space yacht. The alien ship they expected to find was a thousand times greater. By standards of the Galactic Service, the Markab was on a suicide mission.

Rik Guelf, the Markab's pilot, conned sync parallax tapes, the robot master controls and set the screen charts. In came Captain Rodolph, stout and weary from twenty years of patrol service. Behind was Pere Danold, thin and lithe, with feral eyes and tight lips.

"I'm tossing out telar screens. If they're breaking out of hyper, as the outposts charted, we won't wait long."

"You hope," Danold's sardonic voice jeered. "Your phantom ship paralyzes five ships of the line beyond Altair, so they send for us to blast it."

Captain Rodolph looked the younger man over thoughtfully. "You volunteered back at Fleet Base Eighty."

Danold settled to a bench, legs outstretched. "Why not? When the brass installs the newest trinogen gun in this dinky yacht," he laughed mirthlessly, "one that can blast the ears off a cruiser at a thousand miles—well, I wanted a crack. Trouble was," he added, "I thought we were after a Vegan, making a sneak attack."

"You were told it was a mission beyond the call of duty," Rodolph said sternly. "None of the ships meeting the alien had a trinogen battery. We can't carry but one. We've got the fast drive. They figure we can get in one shot and duck."

"I still say it would make sense to arm a fleet with trinogens," Danold grumbled. "If that alien has a transparent ship five miles long, which I gravely doubt on both counts."

Rik Guelf or Captain Rodolph could have pointed out that fully two hundred Galactic Service crewmen had seen the ship, that beams passed through it and only telar caught its outlines. And there was no doubt of the

alien's fire power. It had paralyzed electronic systems for hours, leaving the fleet marooned while it moved majestically onward.

The Markab was Guelf's, the gift of his mother's family. They had influence and power, enough to provide as fleet a small space craft as the Galaxy could boast, and to borrow Captain Rodolph from patrol service.

There was a reason for all this. Eiler Guelf, Rik's father, ranked foremost among explorers, had been lost with his ship, the Perseid, five years before. That was in the Rigel sector. And a half dozen outposts had caught the strange message Eiler Guelf sent before he vanished.

"... *Met crystal woman ... alien ship ... am—*"

Telar screens reached out by means of meshed beams. Streaks showed the path of meteors, leaving ghostly streaks. Once a freighter broke out of hyper, vanished after making a period check.

"*Met crystal woman ...*" Well, out of reports by the Galactic Service ships crippled by the great alien visitor, there were two which were responsible for the Markab's presence here, attempting to intercept. Two observers had seen—or thought they had—the titan-like outlines of a woman aboard the ship.

Was *she* the crystal woman? Captain Rodolph thought so. Danold wasn't consulted. He was the gift of Galactic Service, and that organization was curious to know if a trinogen gun could stand up against the strange but powerful blue beams the alien possessed.

Rik Guelf had to know if his father was alive. And there was a chance....

For centuries, since Earthmen had left their own solar system and penetrated the galaxy with hyper space drive, there had been rumors of a giant race, the Titans.

The strange, cold intelligent life-forms of the Rigellian cluster had their version of Titans, but they seemed afraid, or at least uninterested, in passing information to Galactic Service. Rigellians abhorred Earthmen. They traded, kept diplomatic contacts. Beyond that, they refused all contact.

It was in territory of the Rigel federation that the elder Guelf had traveled, nearing the end of a five year charting voyage. And he had said in his last

report that bits of information gained along his route bore out reports of a giant ship crossing the galaxy. The Perseid had tried to intercept the visitor.

Rik Guelf was acting more on a hunch than on logic. He believed the Perseid was captured, that the aliens—Titans or not—came into the galaxy hunting specimens.

Maybe it was logical after all. Captain Rodolph was inclined to accept Rik's theory, with reservations. He had agreed to let Rik try his hand at making contact should they meet the alien. But he also told Danold to be ready.

Danold was ready. He believed the trinogen gun, with an area of destruction so great that at extreme range error of one hundred miles was negligible, was master of space warships. And he was eager to try out his belief.

On the third day, the robot scanners idling, alarm bells rang suddenly. Rik was in his bunk. He collided with Danold in the corridor, racing to the scanning room.

Captain Rodolph came in slowly, breathing hard. He stared, as did Rik and Danold, at the incredible sight. On all screens a ship showed, oval in shape, tremendous in length. Its substance could not be determined for skeleton girders, even machines, showed vaguely. And moving slowly on the screen, strode a woman in white robes!

"By the grace of Polaris," Captain Rodolph whispered, "it's five miles long, if it's a meter."

Danold recovered first. "She's inside fifty miles. Let's blast." He whirled, headed for the gunnery room. "Danold," Rodolph shouted. "Hold it!"

For a moment Danold seemed about to defy orders. Then discipline told. "May I remind you, sir," he snapped, "that surprise is the element, the factor if we're attacking."

Rodolph didn't answer. He nodded to Rik. "Use all frequencies. Challenge in service code."

Rik called. The huge ship, moving slowly, disdained to answer. The woman was dimly visible, staring their way. Rik drew in a long breath. "Whoever you are," he said, "please acknowledge."

Danold slammed the door of the gunnery room. Even then Captain Rodolph wasn't prepared for his insubordinate act. Too late he felt the shudder, the roar of the trinogen gun.

"The fool!" Rodolph cried. He reached for a switch which cut off power to the gunnery room. But he was too late. As his hand touched the button a series of crimson patches splashed along the alien ship's hull.

For a moment Guelf believed that the trinogen gun had made a hit. Then the splashes faded into nothingness and there stood the ship, hull as semi-transparent as ever.

"We're in for it now!" Rodolph shouted. "The fool didn't touch her!"

The woman stood rigid, her figure was clearer now. Slowly she moved an arm and a column of intense brilliant blue, shot toward the Markab.... And darkness enveloped them....

Gravity fled the Markab. Tumbling, Guelf caromed into Rodolph. They were moving, but Rik Guelf never knew even that for his head crashed against the wall and he blacked out....

When he came to, lights were on again. Guelf felt a heaviness as he lifted his body. He saw Captain Rodolph standing, gazing at a row of machines that were gliding into the control room from the passage-way.

The machines were small, like canisters on struts, with tiny casters beneath them. And each canister had four tentacles. They emitted intense, bluish light.

Captain Rodolph looked down at Guelf. "Take it easy," he said. "We've been captured. And these things"—he pointed to the machines—"are It."

Guelf's head ached. He staggered to his feet. "Danold?" he gasped.

"They took him away right after opening our lock. I don't know why—or why they didn't take us, too."

A voice, low and compelling, spoke in Rik Guelf's brain. *"You and Captain Rodolph will quit your ship. I advise you not to resist."*

Rodolph jumped and Guelf knew he had received the order too. The robots wheeled aside, let them pass. "We're in her ship," Rodolph said. "She hooked us—lassoed us is a better word. Here we are."

The compartment was awe-inspiring in size. A blue vaulted ceiling rose a thousand feet overhead. From wall to wall was the same distance. The floor beneath them was metallic, not translucent. It appeared as solid as any Earth metal.

Huge conduits ran to machines that the squat robots were tending. The equipment rose a hundred feet high.

Then they saw Danold. He was walking slowly toward a moving runway. Robots stepped on and off the runway as they went about what seemed to be routine matters. And the same calm voice which had spoken soundlessly into their minds, now bade them step on the runway.

They did so, traveled toward a screen and through it into a long, dim corridor.

And at the end of the corridor stood the Crystal Woman.

She was a giantess—a Titan—. She sat in a chair, white robe trailing from her shoulders and fully a hundred feet beyond her sandaled feet. And the three men stood like midgets before her, stared, rendered silent with awe as the runway slowed to a full stop.

They waited, Danold with legs outspread, defiant, hands on blasters which he carried in holsters. Rodolph and Guelf were unarmed. Rodolph folded his arms and tried to give the look of a man unafraid.

Guelf wasn't thinking of the woman's size, nor of what she represented. "Beautiful!" raced through his mind. "With a beauty which hurts like a sharp, twisting blade."

The woman's dark eyes stopped on Guelf. "Thank you," she said pleasantly. A shiver ran through Guelf, and he had no time to wonder at her knowledge of his own tongue.

Now the woman looked at Danold. She rested an elbow on a knee, cupping her chin. "Little man?" she asked softly, "why did you try to destroy the *Avol*—my ship?"

"You are my enemy," Danold answered. "You fired on Galactic Service ships. You destroyed the *Perseid* and its crew. It was my duty to try and down you."

"Your Galactic Service attacked first. When I fled to hyper space they followed. When I emerged, they were on all sides. I had no quarrel with them."

"What do you want?" Danold said harshly. "This is *our* Galaxy. It—"

"Little men from one planet? And you claim a Galaxy?"

Danold nodded, looked stubborn. "You've got us," he admitted. "But somehow, some time, we'll destroy you. Unless," he added, "you recognize our authority and confess your trespassing."

The woman regarded Danold and there was a look of sadness in her beautiful eyes. "In your minds you call me a Titan," she mused. "Perhaps I am. But I am not a race, such as you assume. I am not disputing space with any life-form. The *Avol* is mine and I have a mission, little men. If your Galactic Service forbids my traveling where I choose, I am sorry. But nothing your race can do shall stop me."

Danold reached for his guns. Rodolph and Guelf acted as one to stop him. But Danold fired straight at the heart of the woman before they could reach him.

Nothing happened. That is, nothing happened to the woman—but Danold vanished!

"And you," the woman addressed Captain Rodolph, "*you* had a different reason for intercepting me."

"I am a soldier," Rodolph answered. "I think you know my reason—I was on no mission of destruction."

"Only if your trinogen gun could have matched my weapons," she said drily. "But you withheld your 'destruction' until you were sure. Your Markab is undamaged, Captain Rodolph. It will carry you back to your home port. And you will find your impetuous gunner in his quarters."

"Tell your Galactic Service superiors that I am called Shellon," she added. "When I have completed my mission I shall probably never revisit your Galaxy.... You may go, Captain Rodolph."

Rodolph turned and strode to the runway. "Come on Rik," he called.

"Rik Guelf stays," the woman said.

Rodolph turned, said, "He's not like Danold. He—"

"I mean no harm to your friend, Captain. I merely wish to talk with him alone." She smiled slightly.

From nowhere a row of squat robots materialized. Gently they thrust Rodolph onto the runway. "Rik," he called, "I won't leave till she turns you loose. They'll have to kill me to make me go without you...."

Rik somehow had no fear at all, but this emotional display from Rodolph was warming.

"Thanks, Rodolph," he said. "But I am not afraid. I feel sure no harm will come to me." He turned back to the fascinating creature on the throne-like chair.

Rigellians were life-forms, no larger than Earthmen. Vegans were smaller. But this Titan—she was amazing.

Rik Guelf waited. He felt no anger, no sense of antagonism. Rather, he had a sense of relief now that he faced her.

The riddle of Space beyond the perimeter of the Galaxy was beyond his comprehension. But somehow Rik Guelf knew he stood before a Being, not an Enemy.

"I know the question in your mind," the woman who called herself Shellon said softly. "You wish news of Eiler Guelf, your father."

Rik Guelf nodded, feeling excited, trying not to show his feelings.

"He is well, and with his command. His *Perseid* I had to destroy. But I built your father another ship." She smiled. "He is placed with his new craft and his new assignment."

He stared at her, amazement filling him now.

"Where is he? And what is his new assignment? Why did he desert Galactic?"

Shellon considered his questions. There was a faraway look in her eyes. Finally she said, "He is so far away that your hyper space drive cannot reach him. He is beyond the reach of Galactic Service."

Anger gripped Rik suddenly. "He took the oath to serve Galactic unto death. And my father is no deserter."

Shellon regarded him thoughtfully. "Your mind tells me that Eiler Guelf was your hero, and after your mother died both of you were lonely. Would it hurt if I told you he has mated with a woman of my race, that he is now a Titan?"

Rik gasped. It was incredible. Yet Eiler Guelf had believed in such a race as the Titans. Wherever spacemen met, sooner or later talk of a giant race would crop up. But until the crystal ship had appeared, there had been no real evidence of such a race. Unless they were Vegans, Rigellians. "How could my father become a Titan?" he said.

"Between your world and ours there stands a barrier," she explained. "Where the Markab is docked there is a barrier which is within my touch, but is your dimension. This side of the barrier, where I am sitting is our dimension—what you call 'Titan' world.

"Eiler Guelf," she added, "decided to come through that barrier. It was his own choice."

Rik felt like sitting down. He felt confused. Why should the woman alter the truth? "Why—what do you want of men like my father? Of Earthmen?"

She rose to her feet deliberately. The white robe, gossamer despite its tremendous width and length, fell from her shoulders. As the mass of sheen dropped to the floor the woman let her hair down, a golden, shimmering screen about her white body. And as Rik Guelf watched, a great trembling seized him and he sank weakly to the floor....

A dream is without substance, incoherent in pattern. Rik Guelf knew this was no dream, but he felt as helpless now as he would have been in a dream as there came to him a vision....

A great city, stretching to infinity, grew from the space behind the woman. There were towers of many hues, all connected by runways. There were peaks in the distance, and on either side of a vast plain. He saw a stretch of green water. And above it the sky was also green.

From a copper disk above the city came light. It was a mammoth sun but without the hot intensity of Rik's home sun. This was the home of the

Titans....

There were ships on the water, air vehicles, land machines, people in loose, thin clothing. There was verdure, trees, flowers in gardens surrounding the entire city....

And the woman was talking to him, through the vision. It was her home, this city. It had the same name as her ship—*Avol*. And *Avol* was the center of Titan culture, with schools, technical institutes, great temples of learning....

And no military organization of any kind.

There was no war here for struggle between the life forms was not necessary. Only from the archives did they know of war.

The Titans interfered with no one. When they traveled outside their galaxy, they were prepared to defend themselves, but they did not desire conflict. And only space police kept the vigil....

Shellon was telling him this mentally and Rik understood....

For a thousand years there had been a pattern of slowing up in the Titans' Time-stream. The women remained unchanged. But in comparisons-of-ability charts which were kept for every individual, the near retrogression of males was discovered.

Titan males were healthy and amiable—but with less and less driving force. And as the male drive lessened drastically, a picked group of women left *Avol* in search of males with the forceful characteristics Titans must regain to stop their drift backwards. Shellon was one of those women....

She had left her dimension to seek such a male, but after a century of fruitless search—for the life-form to which Titan and Earthmen belonged, was rare, as Rik's galaxy already had learned—she was returning to Titan when they had met the *Perseid*.

"Six men," Shellon said to Rik Guelf, "were aboard the *Perseid*. My friend, Berna, was with me when we found her helpless, her piles miniature suns. And of the six aboard, only Eiler Guelf was alive."

Rik felt a sudden release from the force which had rendered him so weak. Now he stood erect again. And Shellon was seated again, the robe drawn

over her shoulders once more. "The atomic piles of the *Perseid's* drive had overheated. There was no chance to jettison them before the life-boats fused to their compartments. We had great difficulty in rescuing your father. He was seriously injured.

"When we knew that we should not be able to treat your father there, we turned our ship back to Avol." She paused. "Here we had to change him to our dimension to treat him. When he recovered, he chose to stay a Titan."

Shellon smiled. "It could be that Berna was the influence that caused him to make that decision. But aside from that, Eiler Guelf is doing many things he had longed to do in your Galaxy but was never able to do. Creative things. Titans respect men who create, who add to the betterment of others. Such creativeness is encouraged here.

"We live in peace on Titan and Titans do not have any urge to ruthlessness of any sort. And our span of life is ten thousand years."

Now she paused. Rik Guelf was trembling.

"If I become a Titan ..." raced through his mind. Then he thought of Galactic Service and his years with it, of the years spent preparing for the service, of men who had spent their lives serving it.

He had never seen Earth, but many of the men he had served with had been demoted at the whim of some sector director or other political bigwig down there on Earth. There was outlawry aplenty there, they knew. And the Galaxy Service had the job of fighting Earth's battles—some of them battles against organized outlaws. And the outlaws were renegade Earthmen.

Space men talked of the good old days, when their forefathers met other life-forms in the Galaxy. There was the showdown with Vegans, which lasted five centuries. Galactic Service had to have sporadic conflicts, skirmishes if not battles, in order to expand. Always the service was expanding. The trinogen gun was developed for colonizing expeditions in hundreds of sectors where life-forms had outgunned Galactic Service in the past.

"I should like to live the sort of life my father chose," Rik said abruptly. "Is it possible for me to become a Titan, too?"

Shellon smiled. "You must first tell your Captain Rodolph of your decision." She was studying him, her eyes bright now. "After that," she added, "I shall be waiting for you at the barrier—here."

"You know why I want to be a Titan?" Rik asked slowly.

"Hurry," she said softly, "and tell Rodolph." Her cheeks were flushed, her face alive. "Yes, I know. I know, darling—"

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