

# Warriors of Zantos

*by William Russell Moore*

LIKE the scintillating jewels from a Martian treasure house, set upon a black velvet carpet from some Venerian jungle castle, the whole broad panorama of the universe spread out before the two earthlings in the space car. So silently did the perfect mechanism of the car work, that no sound was heard, save the excited breathing of the two fine-featured men in the observatory compartment. They were drifting toward the planet system of a mighty sun; were about to land their silvery ship upon the alien surface of a planet in a sun-system far from their own familiar Solar System.

"Let us land upon the fourth planet from the star," said Kama, the man at the controls. "It is more suitable to our bodies. Later, perhaps, when we return with more equipment, we may explore the others."

The man at the telescope showed excitement as they drew near the planet. "In all my life," he exclaimed, "I have never seen a more peculiar city! No, not in two thousands years of travel back and forth across the Universe, have I beheld anything so strange."

"What do you make of it, Knir?" inquired the man at the controls, "What type of intelligence dwells on the planet?"

"That is impossible to tell," said Knir. "But upon one half of the planet's surface I see a great city. Built at the pole, it seems to cover millions of square miles. At the other pole, I now see another great city, as large as the first. But they are of such different types of architecture that they could not have been built by the same

intelligence. One city is built entirely of cone-shaped structures. The other is of sphere-shaped buildings. Between the two, reaching apparently around the globe, is a broad band of some metallic substance—perhaps a barrier between the two intelligences. But we are drawing near enough for you to discern with your own eyes, the strangeness of it."

The silver space car drifted above the surface of the planet, a globe somewhat in size as the earth of their childhood. The two hardy adventurers peered out through the portholes at a strange scene. A world that lacked oceans, but which was dotted with gem-like lakes many miles across.

"Let us descend to five thousand feet," said Knir, and the man at the controls set the ship in motion, dropping them swiftly down into the atmosphere, where they cruised along above the broad strip of metal that Knir had seen from out in space.

WHEN near the surface, they could see that it was a broad ring of broken pieces of machinery, like some gigantic junk yard, spread out in a ring ten miles wide, around the equatorial part of the planet. The huge cities, reaching ten thousand feet into the air, were visible from the ship, far in the distance to either side. "There seems to be no sign of life," said Kama.

"Indeed, it is more eerie than the ruins of Mars when men first set foot upon the desert planet," sighed Knir. "I regret it greatly, for I had hoped to commune with the strange intelligence which built those extraordinary cities."

“Look, Knir!” said Kama excitedly. “A battle is in progress!”

Ahead of them, on the strip of wreckage, or rather amidst the wreckage, a battle was indeed in progress. As the ship drew nearer, the men could see that over a hundred great creatures were locked in deadly embrace. Half of them were red in color, the others were silver-colored, but in form, both were identical.

Towering over fifty feet in height, they were supported by four flexible legs and four long feelers with mighty knives on the ends, for cutting and slashing.

The pilot switched on the listening device, and the sound of battle came plainly to their ears, increased by the amplifier. There was a continual roar of metal upon metal, crashing and grinding, but no outcries were heard. It was a gigantic hand-to-hand conflict, and as the two earthlings watched, one of the red bodies succeeding in over-throwing one of his silver-colored foe-men, and immediately he rent him to pieces.

“Why—they’re just—machines!” gasped Knir.

“Machines—with intelligence,” said Kama. “Surely they could not be operated by remote control! Let us descend to within a thousand feet of them, where we can see them more plainly.”

A thousand feet from the surface, the noise of the battle could be heard without the aid of the amplifiers. The machine that had succeeded in destroying its opponent, now raced to the aid of another, which was about to overcome a silver man. That fight was brief for the silver man. Outnumbered, he was quickly destroyed and scattered upon the field.

“Look, Knir,” said Kama, “the entire band of wreckage around this planet is made up of these shattered machines!

They have fought a battle that reached all around the planet!”

“YES, Now the red men are gaining an advantage. For every silver man that falls, two red men attack another silver man. Look, the silver men are outnumbered almost two to one!” said Kama.

“I dislike to see the red men win,” said Knir. “I propose that we aid the silver men. The disintegrator will even the numbers.”

“Bring it into play then,” said Kama. “We will aid the silver men.”

The bright red flame of the ray played upon the field of battle, narrowed to a pencil-like streak. As it touched the red men, they became shattered bits of dust, and at last the red men were less in number than the silver men.

“They have not even noticed us,” said Kama.

“But look!” cried Knir. “The silver men are overpowering the red men now. They seem to be equal in strength until one is destroyed. Two to one, the small side has no chance!”

“There goes the last red man,” said Kama at length. “Perhaps we should have aided the red men after all,” he added thoughtfully.

“At any rate, let us descend and question these strange creatures,” said Knir. “Made of metal, though they are, it may be that some intelligent entity sits within their metal bodies and directs them—else they may be reasoning machines, who knows? Machines have been produced upon the second moon of Saturn which rival men in reasoning ability.”

“Hold!” cried Kama. “The silver men have turned and are attacking one another!”

“Even so,” observed Knir. “What

strange fancy causes this?"

"Machines created to fight," said Kama, "will turn upon themselves, when the object of their hate is destroyed. "Let us observe them closely.

For another hour, the battle raged, and the men in the space car scarcely breathed, so intent were they upon the circus of destruction below them. Finally, only one battered machine remained.

Like a man befuddled by the intoxication ray, the great machine stood there, looking about the battle field. Seeing one long metal tentacle waving in the air, it ran quickly to it and wrested it from the socket of the metal body, whirled it high into the air and snapped it into two pieces. Then, as though in great anger, it turned and ran toward a towering rocky cliff, twenty miles from the battle field.

"We will follow," said Kama.

THE space car sped along behind the racing monster, checked its speed as the cliff drew near, to see what the monster might do. As though devoid of sight, the monster never slackened its pace, but ran straight to the rock and hurled itself against the stone.

Shattered metal burst into fragments and flew about over the ground, and soon, the last waving tentacle subsided into a coil and all was silent.

The astonished men in the space car looked at the wreckage for a few moments, when they turned the car and went back to the battle-field. No sign of life was visible anywhere, and they quickly straightened their course to travel around the planet, along the band of wreckage. Nowhere along the whole battle-front, could they find a single moving thing.

At last they went to the city of the cones and landed at the base of the center tower, the tallest cone of the city.

No sign of life was to be seen in the place and they disembarked to enter the building. The great doorway seemed made to admit the mighty machines that they had seen in their last desperate struggle out there upon the plain, and they gripped their weapons tightly, fearing that they might meet one of them inside the massive structure.

The city, however, was deserted, as was the building in which they were, and they were about to go, after examining the mysterious sculpturing about the walls, when Knir found a small square of metal, covered with tiny heliographs.

Taking the metal tablet back to the ship with them, they left the cone city and flew to the city of the spheres.

Like the cone city, this one was deserted, and built to gigantic proportions, to accommodate the huge forms of life that had inhabited it. Once more they discovered a small metal tablet with peculiar heliographs engraved upon it, and taking it, they returned to their ship.

In a few days they had refueled their ship, renewed their supply of air and water, and were once more out in space. Controls set for the solar system, they began poring over the tablets which they had found.

The messages, when interpreted, read the same, excepting that the names were reversed.

"WE, the vanishing race of Zamins, have been fighting with the blasphemous race of Xons for many centuries. All Zantos is reduced to a complete and deadly war-machine. But we, the Zamins, are vanishing from the face of Zantos, so we have produced a fighting machine in our own likeness, a machine which will not stop until it has destroyed every Xon in sight. Many millions of these machines are

we building, and they will spread around the equator of Zantos, to carry on our fight, for shortly, our race will be completely destroyed by the deadly disease which has attacked us. We believe this disease to be the work of the Xons, and to keep them from destroying our great city, and building their own hated sphere dwellings, we will cause these machines to fight for the true architecture.”

“Each race then, did the same thing at the same time,” said Knir. “The disease evidently attacked both at once. Each thought it the work of the other. Such strange psychology of mind! What peculiar twist of their brains led each to attempt a different type of architecture, and finally to

war over it?”

“No one knows,” said Kama. “Great Jupiter!” he exclaimed later. “We witnessed the end of a fight which may have been going on since before men of the earth began to explore the universe!”

“Beyond a doubt,” said Knir. “And it might have gone on another few thousand years, were it not for what we did. As it was, we saw the end!”

“The end of a battle between two races of beings dead for aeons,” said Kama with a shake of his head. “Tomorrow we descend upon the outskirts of the solar system.”

“Peace, Kama.”

“Peace to you, Knir,” returned Kama.