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The
**GREAT
SECRET**

GALAXY
PRESENTS

THE GREAT SECRET

SWEEPING clouds shadowed the tawny plain, and far off in the east the plumes of night spread gently, mournfully, burying the corpse of the Livian day. Fanner Marston, a tattered speck upon a ridge, looked eastward, looked to the glory he sought and beheld it.

Throat and tongue swollen with thirst, green eyes blazing now with new ecstasy, he knew he had it. He would gain it, would realize that heady height upon which he had elected to stand. Before him lay the Great Secret! The Secret which had made a dead race rule the Universe! And that Secret would be his, Fanner Marston's, and Fanner Marston would be the ruler, the new ruler, the arbiter of destiny for all the Universe!

All through these weeks he had stumbled over the gutted plains toward these blue mountains beneath the scorching double sun. He had suffered agonies but he had won!

There, glittering in the yellow sunlight was Parva, dead, beautiful city of the ancients, city of the blessed, city of knowledge and power.

Fanner laughed. He was strong; he was lean; but he was not handsome; and of all the things about him this laugh, distorted by thirst-ravaged lips, was the least pleasant. His eyes, which had of late grown so very dull, flamed greenly with the ecstasy which came with that vision.



*There, glittering in the yellow sunlight was Parva, dead,
beautiful city of the ancients, city of the blessed,
city of knowledge and power.*

He had won. They had told him that he could not; the legends said it was not possible for any mortal man to win. But the spell of the ancients was broken, their books were open, their riches lay for the taking. Parva was there! Parva was his!

It mattered nothing to Fanner that nearly twenty miles of gashed and forbidding terrain still lay between him and his goal. It mattered not that his canteens were empty; nor did it matter that, behind the ridge on which he stood, his motorcycle, last vehicle of his caravan, was a ruined wreck.

He was glad now that his companions were dead—of thirst, of quarrels, of disease. He would not have to murder the last of them now and so preserve to himself this incalculable thing which awaited him. Fate was shaping everything for him!

He could do these twenty miles by noon of the next day, do them the hard way, on foot and without water, for there was something to sustain him now; he knew that the city was real, had truly existed through all these ages, was just as the history books had said it was. And if this much was true, then all was true. And he had seen the silver river!

Fanner's boots were scuffed relics but he set forth down the rocky slope and so great was his ecstasy that he did not feel the sharp bites of the rocks, nor did he feel the fingers of thirst which were throttling him. He was hard; he could outlive forty men and had done it; he would succeed, for he was Fanner Marston!

He had fought these deserts and mountains and he had whipped them—almost. He would live through to the end,

and see the Great Secret which awaited him emblazon his name throughout space!

Fanner Marston would bring a new era, a day when spaceships no longer had to land in seas to save themselves from being shattered, when men would be hampered no longer in combating the atmospheres of many now uninhabitable planets. The wealth of the Universe would be his for the taking; the entire race of mankind would bow to his command like vassals. For there, glittering in the sunset, was Parva—Parva, the city of the Great Secret.

Darkness caught him, and he groped his stumbling way among a great forest of black boulders. He did not mind the shocks of falling, the cuts inflicted upon him, the gouges of the unkind earth; nor did he mind the constantly increasing size of his tongue. Distance he had mastered; mere thirst would not stop him now. And besides, he had seen it, just like in the legends. The silver river. What cared he for thirst when that mighty stream awaited him?

Fanner Marston, master of the Universe: it was a pleasant title to resound through his brain.

Black-mouthed with thirst, stumbling with fatigue, lightheaded with his dream of power, he struggled on through the night.

Fanner Marston had always considered himself some favorite child of fate; he knew now that that must be so. How otherwise could he win through where so many had failed? How otherwise could he alone of forty men come to his goal? Fate meant this to happen to him; the devils who were his guardians strongly

bore him to his victory. He alone would reach Parva; he alone would *know*.

He had forgotten where first he had heard the legends of this city he now approached, for he had not immediately grasped their truth and significance. As a child he had been too hardly driven as a slavey in a pirate camp to dream much on the mastery of the Universe. As a young man petty thievery in the large cities of the Universe had occupied his skills. Not until he had become master of his own craft and crew, not until he realized that there was destiny awaiting him, did he turn his mind in earnest upon Parva.

There, men said, lay the most advanced science of the Universe, sealed up in a strangely constructed city, covered with the dust of eons. It had been seen from afar by this one; it had been reported by a man gone mad with thirst; it had crept down the centuries in the literature of space. One and all agreed that Parva and Parva alone contained the sum total of knowledge gathered by a vanished race, one which had been so far advanced that ethereal communication with the planets had been possible, that its spaceships could land on ground. That civilization had used atomic power, not radioactive fuel. Its men had been able to clothe themselves against the rigors of the many uninhabitable planets. And then Parva alone remained of all that great culture and Parva itself had died. But within it there must be the Great Secret.

Of the Great Secret, men understood very little save that which had been expressed in a short formula. But with that formula a man might master *all*.