

# AREGINA

a story by Frederic Brown

Carson opened his eyes. It was hot, and he was lying on sand. He sat up.

The sand was bright blue! And there was no such thing as bright blue sand on Earth or on any other planet!

"I'm crazy," he told himself. "Crazy or dead."

He looked up and saw a large, blue dome. It curved overhead and down to the sand all around him. Where was he?

He remembered that he had been in a one-man spaceship. It was a scouting ship. He was part of the Earth Fleet sent to fight the Outsiders.

No one knew where the Outsiders came from, or what they looked like. They had been attacking Earth and her colony planets. Earth had won some battles with them. But no Outsider had ever been captured.

Earth had gotten ready for a serious war. Then scouts in outer space reported that thousands of Outsider ships were headed toward Earth. And thousands of Earth ships went out to stop them.

Carson was alone when he saw the Outsider ship coming his way. In seconds, it would be all over. His ship or the other would be blown to bits.

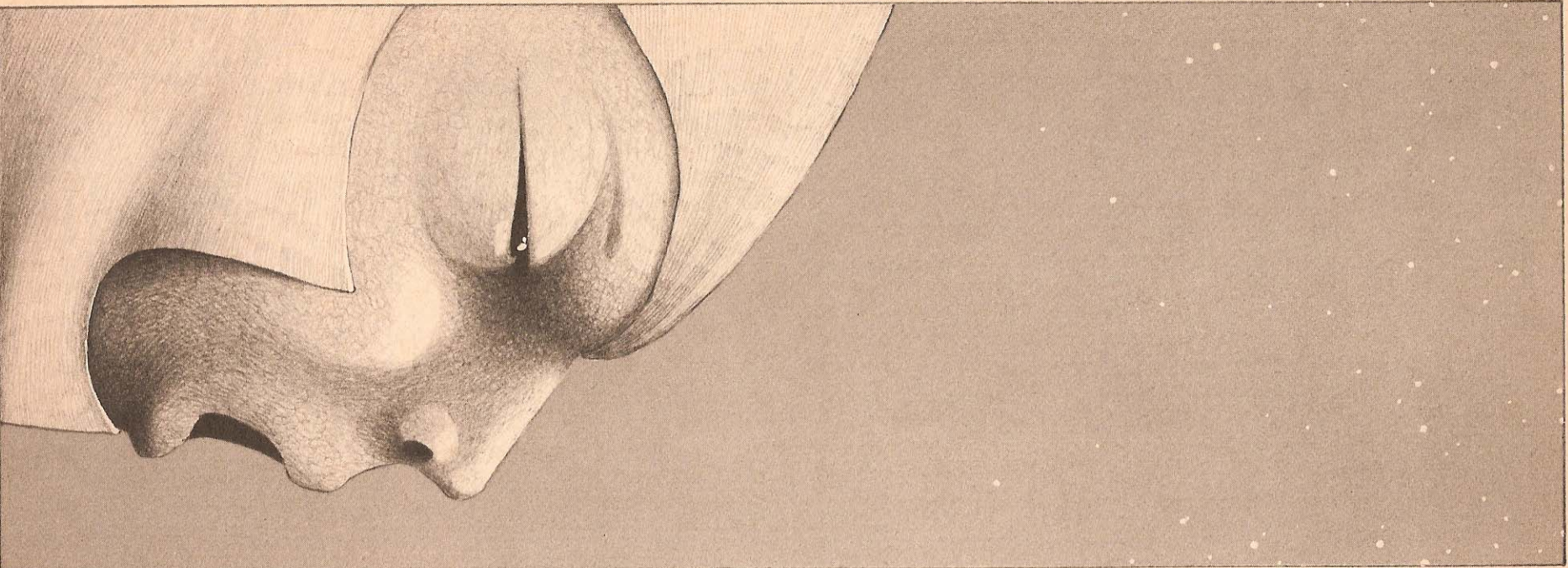
He was about to fire at the other ship. But, suddenly, his ship was diving toward the ground. So was the Outsider ship.

The ground? Impossible! The nearest planet was three billion miles away. But his ship was diving toward something. And then he blacked out....

Now he was sitting on hot, blue sand. He stood up and looked around. He saw some bushes here and there. They were blue, too. A blue lizard crawled out from under a bush. It saw him and ran back again.

Carson saw that he was almost under the center of the dome. It was about 100 yards to the nearest blue wall. Everything was blue—except one thing. Near a far wall, there was something red and round. It was about three feet tall.

Carson wiped sweat from his face. Was this a bad dream? Was he dead?



## THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE

Then he heard a voice inside his head. "Two races of creatures are about to fight a war. If the war is fought, both races will be destroyed. This must not happen."

"Who — what are you?" Carson whispered.

"You would not understand," the voice said inside his head. "I can stop this war. But another war would start. The race you call the Outsiders would come back. Or your race would go after them. And you would destroy each other. So I have stopped the war. And I will destroy one race. Then the other race can survive."

Carson wanted to ask, "Which will survive?" But the voice went on.

"You and an enemy are here to fight it out. Neither of you is armed. There is no time limit, because time has stopped. The one who wins will save his race. The other race will be destroyed. This battle will not be won by physical strength. It will be won by brain power and courage."

"But our spaceships are fighting," Carson said. "They will destroy each other."

"No," the voice said. "As long as you are here, time stands still."

Then the voice was gone. Carson saw the red thing moving. He knew now that it was an Outsider.

It was rolling toward him. It had no arms or legs that he could see. It rolled across the blue sand very fast.

Carson picked up a blue rock. He got ready for an attack. The thing was moving faster than he could run.

Then it stopped — and bounced backwards. It seemed to have run into an invisible wall. A wall neither of them could see.

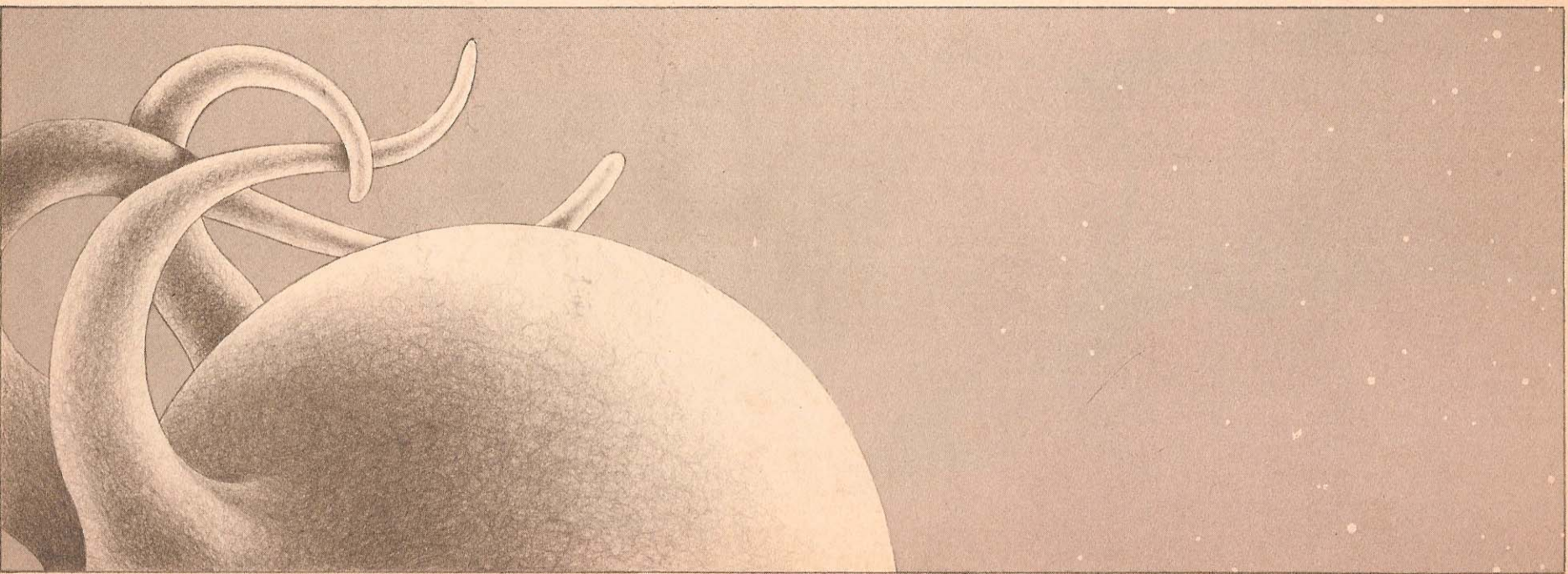
It rolled forward again, slowly. It stopped at the same place. It tried again, a few yards to one side.

Now it was rolling sideways, looking for an opening in the wall. Carson dropped his rock and stepped forward. He pushed against the see-through wall. It felt like a sheet of rubber backed up by steel.

The Roller was coming back. It had not found an opening at one end. Now it began looking for an opening at the other end.

Carson reached up as high as he could. There did not seem to be a way over the wall. He dug several feet down into the sand. The wall was down there, too.

The Roller was back again. It had not found an opening anywhere. But, Carson figured, there must be a way through. Otherwise, how would they be able to fight?



### CARSON STUDIES THE ENEMY

He sat down and watched his enemy. The Roller was looking at some bushes. A thin arm came out of its round body. The arm was like a snake. It picked up a little blue lizard. Then other arms came out. They began pulling the legs off the lizard.

The lizard struggled and squealed. Carson felt sick. But he made himself watch. Anything he could learn about his enemy might be useful.

With its legs gone, the lizard stopped moving. The Roller threw it away. It landed next to Carson.

Carson jumped up. The wall must be gone! He grabbed a rock and ran toward the Roller. But the wall *wasn't* gone. He ran into it, bounced backwards, and fell.

A rock hit his leg. He jumped and saw the Roller throwing another rock. The rock sailed through the air. Carson moved out of its way.

The Roller could throw straight. But it could not throw very hard. And it could not throw far.

Now Carson threw a rock — much harder than the Roller could throw. It hit the Roller with a thump. The Roller moved quickly away. It was now too far away for Carson to hit.

Carson smiled. He had won the first round. He stopped smiling when he looked at his leg. The rock had made a deep cut. If it didn't stop bleeding, he would be in trouble.

He felt good about one thing, though. He had learned something about the invisible wall. Rocks went through it. The dead lizard did, too. But he couldn't, and neither could the Roller.

He found a live lizard and picked it up. He threw it gently toward the wall. It bounced off. That gave him the answer. Only *living* things could not go through the wall.

Carson looked at his leg again. It was bleeding less. But he should clean the cut with water.

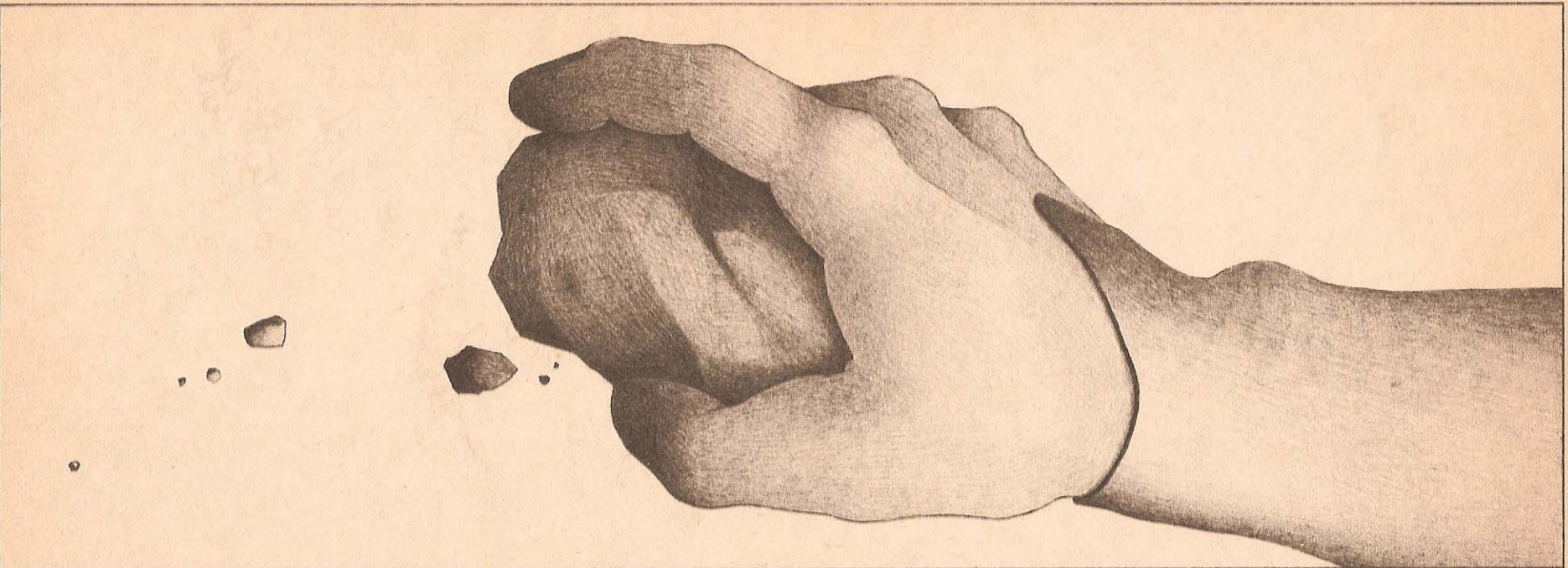
The thought of water made him realize how thirsty he was. He limped all around his side of the arena. No sign of water.

### CARSON MAKES A WEAPON

Carson was worried. He must soon find a way to kill his enemy. If he didn't, he would die of thirst.

He pulled some leaves from a bush and cleaned his cut with them. He tore some vines from the same bush. He used them to tie fresh leaves over the cut.

The vines were strong. A bunch of them tied together would make a good rope. Maybe a rope would be useful.



First, he'd make himself a weapon. He found a long, thin stone. He sharpened it on a rock. Now he had a knife.

He looked over at the Roller. It was staying far from the invisible wall. It was moving around. But Carson couldn't tell what it was doing.

Carson began making piles of rocks. He could use them if the Roller got close enough.

His throat burned. It was hard for him to think about anything except water. But he *had* to think about getting through that wall. About killing that red thing before he died of heat and thirst.

He saw a blue lizard come near him and stop. He remembered an old story about the early settlers on Mars. Part of it went:

"You get so lonely, you start talking to the lizards. Soon after that, the lizards start talking back to you."

Carson smiled and said to the lizard, "Hello."

"Hello," the lizard said.

Carson laughed. Why not? Why shouldn't the Being who thought this place up have a sense of humor? The whole thing was crazy. So why not talking lizards?

He said to the lizard, "Come on over." But it ran away.

Carson looked to see what the Roller was doing. It had made something out of wood and vines from the bushes. The thing was square. Two bars stuck out in back. Carson realized it was a rock-throwing machine.

### THE ROLLER'S WEAPON

The Roller pulled the machine a bit nearer to the invisible wall. It put a big rock on the lower bar. It pulled the upper bar down. The lower bar shot up, throwing the rock up and forward.

The rock landed behind Carson. He knew he couldn't throw a rock that big half as far.

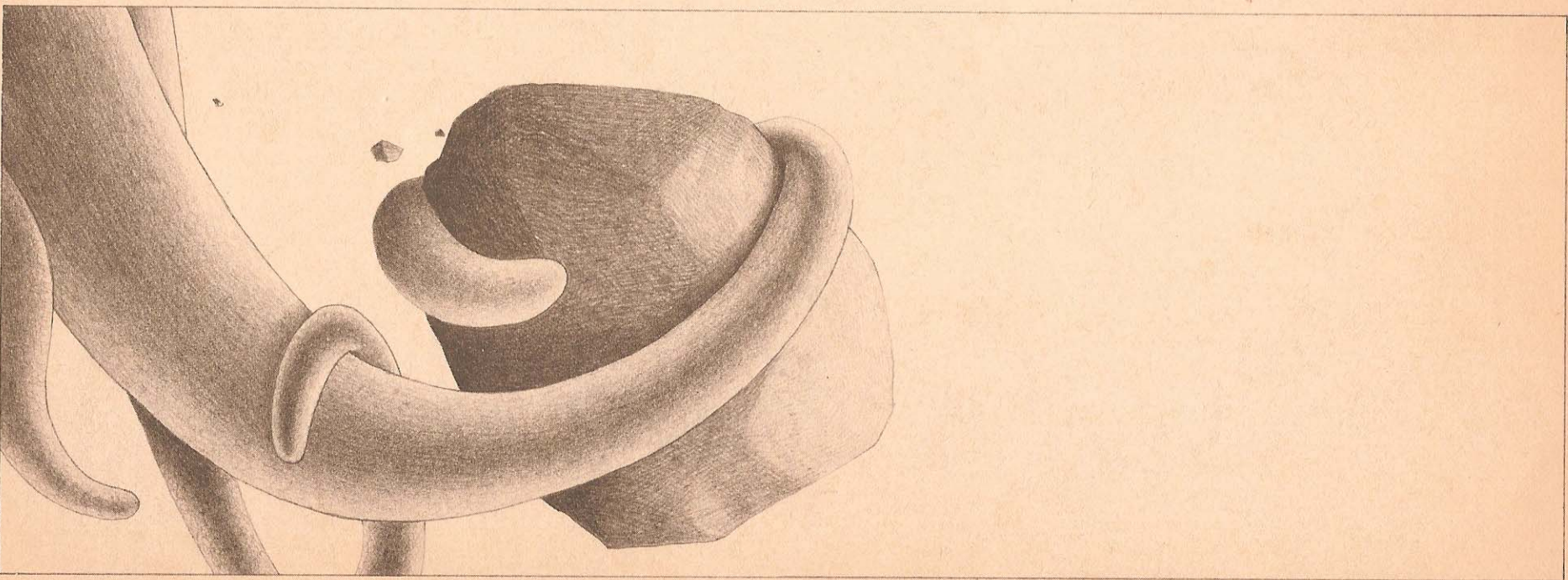
He threw several light rocks at the machine. They did no damage. He was weak from losing blood. But he had to do something about that machine.

Then he had an idea. He took two stones over to a bush. He hit one stone against the other. Finally, a spark touched the wood of the bush. The wood caught fire.

He added more wood to the fire. Then he tied some twigs around a small stone. He tied a long vine to the twigs. Holding the vine, he swung the bunch of twigs over his head. He had a "fire bomb."

He made six fire bombs before lighting the first one. He threw it at the machine. The Roller began pulling the machine away.

Carson threw the bombs, one at a time. The



fourth one landed on the machine. The machine burned up in seconds.

The Roller went back to the far side of its area. Carson's leg hurt. His thirst was getting worse. And his whole body was tired. He must think of a new weapon.

Maybe a spear. He wouldn't be able to throw it very far. But he could use it if the Roller came close. He would also make a rope and tie it to the spear. Then he could pull the spear back after he threw it.

He took his stone knife. With another stone, he shaped it into a spearhead. With vines, he tied it to a strong stick. He made a 20-foot rope with more vines. He tied one end of it to the spear. He tied the other end around his wrist.

When he was finished, he was very tired. He had to get some rest. He started crawling away from the invisible wall. Before he got far, he fell asleep.

### IS IT HOPELESS?

He was awakened by the sound of a rock landing nearby. The Roller had seen him sleeping. It had rolled up to the wall to throw rocks. But when Carson woke up, it rolled away.

Carson took the leaves off his leg. It was infected. And there wasn't a thing he could do about it. Not without drugs or water. The poison would spread through his body. And he would die.

It was hopeless. He had lost. And that meant the whole human race had lost. Earth would become the home of red, rolling Outsiders. Creatures that picked lizards apart for the fun of it.

This thought gave Carson the courage to keep trying. In great pain, he started crawling toward the invisible wall.

Maybe he'd be strong enough to throw his spear just once. Maybe the Roller would come close enough for him to kill it. Maybe.

He finally reached the wall. But the Roller was staying far away. Carson beat his fists against the wall in anger. Then he stopped because he was so tired.

"Hello," a small voice said.  
He turned and saw the lizard. "Go away," he said.

"Hurt," said the lizard. "Kill. Follow." It ran off a short way and came back. It did this several times.

It kept saying, "Hurt. Kill. Follow." It kept

running off and back again. It wanted Carson to follow it.

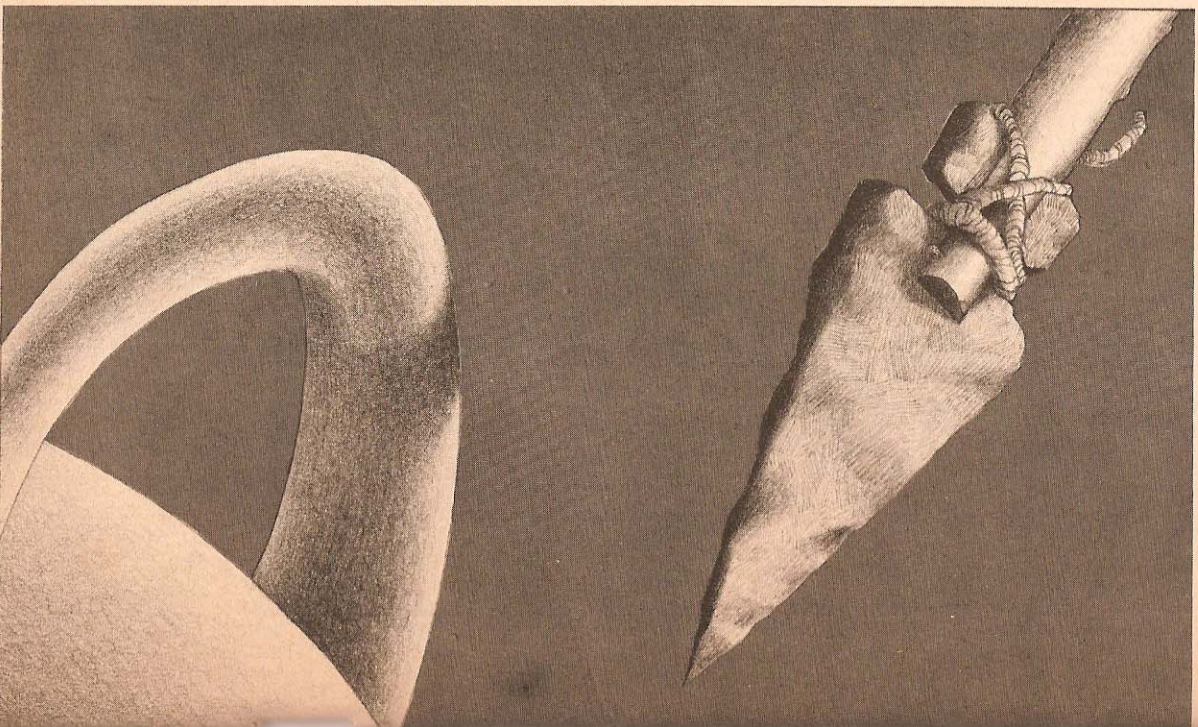
Carson groaned. The voice would go on and on, unless he followed the lizard. So he crawled after it.

Then he heard another sound. Something blue was lying on the sand, squealing. It was the lizard whose legs the Roller had pulled off. But it wasn't dead.

"Hurt," said the other lizard. "Kill. Hurt. Kill."

Carson understood. He killed the poor creature with his spear. Then the other lizard ran off.

Carson was almost crazy with pain and thirst.



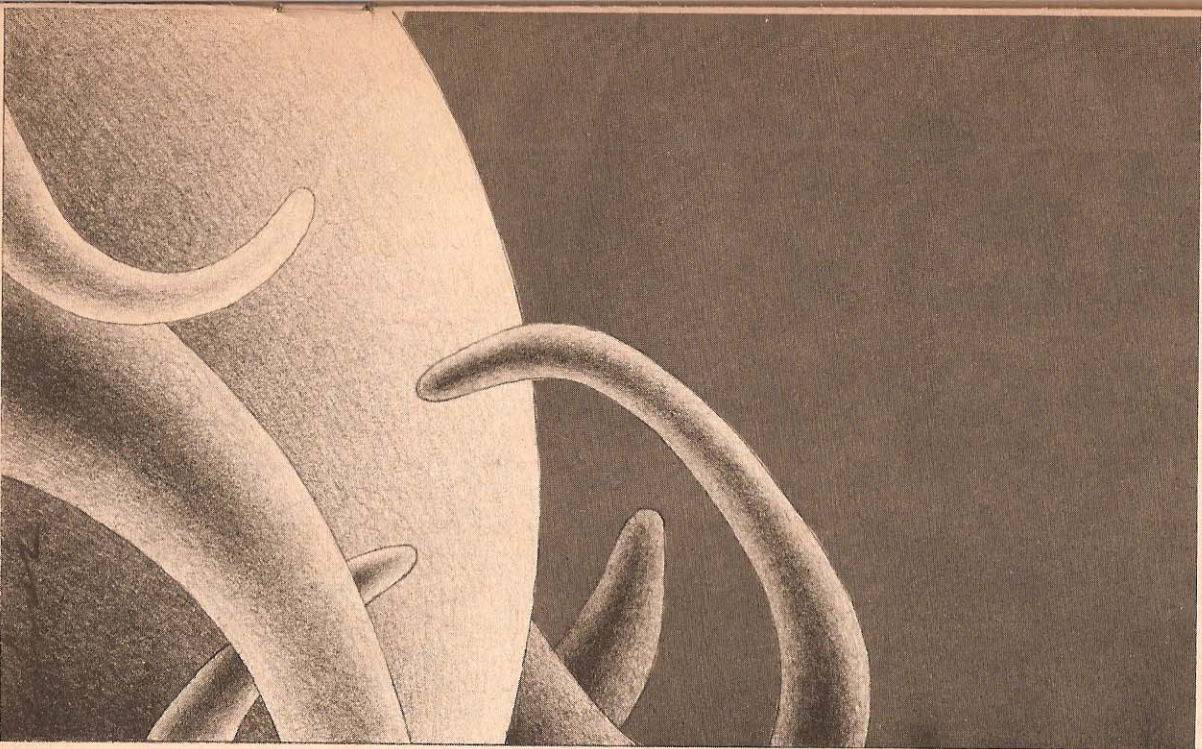
He wished he were dead. He didn't want to suffer any more.

#### A RISKY PLAN

Suddenly, he realized what had happened. The lizard had gone through the wall while *alive*. It had been *unconscious*, not dead.

Now Carson had the answer. If he were unconscious, he could get through the wall. He would try it. It would be a big risk, but he would try it.

He crawled to the wall. He picked up a rock. Then he stood up and leaned against the wall. If he became unconscious, he would fall into the Roller's area.



He held his spear and rope in one hand. The rope was still tied around his wrist. He held the rock in his other hand. He would use it to knock himself on the head.

Luck would have to be with him. He would have to hit himself hard enough to knock himself out. But not hard enough to keep him unconscious for long.

He knew the Roller was watching him. It would see him fall through the wall. Then it would attack.

He hit himself with the rock....

Pain brought him back to consciousness. A sharp pain in his hip. The Roller was throwing rocks, testing to see if he could move. He stayed still.

The Roller came closer. Carson barely breathed. He waited until it was a few feet away. Then he sat up and threw the spear as hard as he could. It went into the Roller.

The Roller moved away. When it reached the end of the rope, Carson was pulled after it.

Finally, it stopped. It shuddered. Then, at last, it was still....

#### AFTERWARDS

A bell was ringing. Carson looked around. He was in his scouting ship.

"Command ship to Carson," he heard.

"Come on in. The fight is over. We've won!" Carson headed back toward the command ship. Had it really happened? He felt fine. He wasn't very thirsty. His leg didn't hurt.

He looked at his leg. There was a scar. It hadn't been there before. So it *had* happened.

His scouting ship went into the hatch of the command ship. A few minutes later, he was talking to Brander, his chief.

"You really missed something," Brander said.

"What happened, sir?"

"I don't know exactly. We fired once — and their whole fleet blew up. Whatever it was jumped from ship to ship in a flash. And not one of our ships was scratched! It's too bad you missed the excitement."

Carson felt a little sick. It would take him a while to get over what he had been through. Common sense told him not to try to explain what had happened. If he did, he'd be known as the worst liar in all of space.

"Yes, sir," he said. "It's too bad I missed the excitement."