



Jetta of the Lowlands

Ray Cummings

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Fantastic and sinister are the Lowlands into which Philip Grant descends on his dangerous assignment.

Excerpt

I was twenty-five years of age that May evening of 2020 when they sent me south into the Lowlands. I had been in the National Detective Service Bureau, and then was transferred to the Customs Department, Atlantic Lowlands Branch. I went alone; it was best, my commander thought. An assignment needing diplomacy rather than a show of force.

It was 9 P. M. when I catapulted from the little stage of Long Island airport. A fair, moonlit evening—a moon just beyond the full, rising to pale the eastern stars. I climbed about a thousand feet, swung over the headlands of the Hook, and, keeping in the thousand-foot local lane, took my course.

My destination lay some thirteen hundred miles southeast of Great New York. I could do a good normal three-ninety in this fleet little Wasp, especially if I kept in the rarer air-pressures over the zero-height. The thousand-foot lane had a southward drift, this night. I was making now well over four hundred; I would reach Nareda soon after midnight.

The Continental Shelf slid beneath me, dropping away as my course took me further from the Highland borders. The Lowlands lay patched with inky shadows and splashes of moonlight. Domes with upstanding, rounded heads; plateaus of naked black rock, ten thousand feet below the zero-height; trenches, like valleys, ridged and pitted, naked in places like a pockmarked lunar landscape. Or again, a pall of black mist would shroud it all, dark curtain of sluggish cloud with moonlight tinging its edges pallid green.

To my left, eastward toward the great basin of the mid-Atlantic Lowlands, there was always a steady downward slope. To the right, it came up over the continental shelf to the Highlands of the United States. There was often water to be seen in these Lowlands. A spring-fed lake far down in a caldron pit, spilling into a trench; low-lying, land-locked little seas; cañons, some of them dry, others filled with tumultuous flowing water. Or great gashes with water sluggishly flowing, or standing with a heavy slime, and a pall of uprising vapor in the heat of the night.

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