



# Triplanetary (Lensman Sagas)

*E. E. "Doc" Smith*

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excerpt from CHAPTER I: Pirates of Space Apparently motionless to her passengers and crew, the Interplanetary liner Hyperion bored serenely onward through space at normal acceleration. In the railed-off sanctum in one corner of the control room a bell tinkled, a smothered whirr was heard, and Captain Bradley frowned as he studied the brief message upon the tape of the recorder--a message flashed to his desk from the operator's panel. He beckoned, and the second officer, whose watch it now was, read aloud: "Reports of scout patrols still negative." "Still negative." The officer scowled in thought. "They've already searched beyond the widest possible location of the wreckage, too. Two unexplained disappearances inside a month--first the Dione, then the Rhea--and not a plate nor a lifeboat recovered. Looks bad, sir. One might be an accident; two might possibly be a coincidence...." His voice died away. What might that coincidence mean? "But at three it would get to be a habit," the captain finished the thought. "And whatever happened, happened quick. Neither of them had time to say a word--their location recorders simply went dead. But of course they didn't have our detector screens nor our armament. According to the observatories we're in clear ether, but I wouldn't trust them from Tellus to Luna. You have given the new orders, of course?" "Yes, sir. Detectors full out, all three courses of defensive screen on the trips, projectors manned, suits on the hooks. Every object detected in the outer space to be investigated immediately--if vessels, they are to be warned to stay beyond extreme range. Anything entering the fourth zone is to be rayed." "Right--we are going through!" "But no known type of vessel could have made away with them without detection," the second officer argued. "I wonder if there isn't something in those wild rumors we've been hearing lately?" "Bah! Of course not!" snorted the captain. "Pirates in ships faster than light--fifth order rays--nullification of gravity--mass without inertia--ridiculous! Proved impossible, over and over again. No, sir, if pirates are operating in space--and it looks very much like it--they won't get far against a good big battery full of kilowatt-hours behind three courses of heavy screen, and a good solid set of multiplex rays. Properly used, they're good enough for anybody. Pirates, Neptunians, angels, or devils--in ships or on sunbeams--if they tackle the Hyperion we'll burn them out of the ether!" Leaving the captain's desk, the watch officer resumed his tour of duty. The six great lookout plates into which the alert observers peered were blank, their far-flung ultra-sensitive detector screens encountering no obstacle--the ether was empty for thousands upon thousands of kilometers. The signal lamps upon the pilot's panel were dark, its warning bells were silent. A brilliant point of white in the center of the pilot's closely ruled micrometer grating, exactly upon the cross-hairs of his directors, showed that the immense vessel was precisely upon the calculated course, as laid down by the automatic integrating course-plotters. Everything was quiet and in order.

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