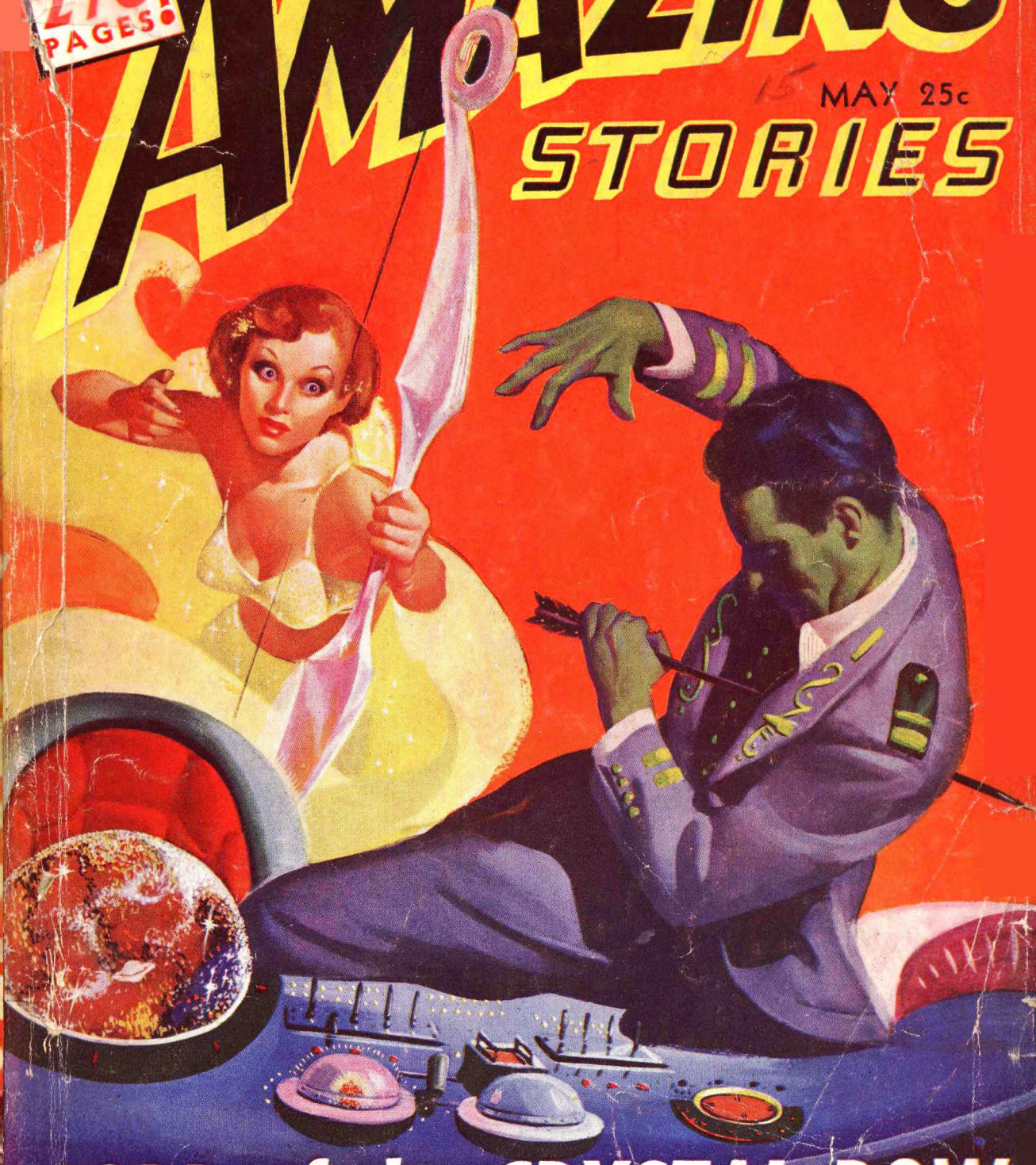
The RETURN of LANCELOT BIGGS by NELSON S. BOND

276! PAGES!

AMAZING STORIES

MAY 25c



LORD of the CRYSTAL BOW

BY DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

Look out for COLDS and SORE THROAT

Gargle LISTERINE—*QUICK!*

Listerine Antiseptic may head off a cold before it gets serious

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In clinical tests made during 10 years of research, regular twice-a-day Listerine Antiseptic users had fewer colds, milder colds, colds of shorter duration than non-users, and also fewer sore throats due to colds.

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The moment you gargle, it starts killing literally millions of "secondary invaders" on mouth and throat surfaces (see panel at right) . . . the very type of germs that so many authorities regard as responsible for so many of those mean, troublesome aspects of a cold. They breed in large numbers in the mouth and throat. When resistance is lowered by wet feet, drafts, fatigue—they may invade tissues and set up or aggravate infection.

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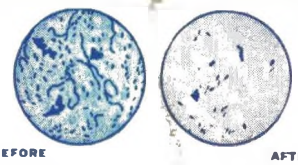

The two drawings illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted, and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

VOLUME 16
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1942

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Volume 16
Number 5

BEFORE we say anything else, this month, we want to thank all of you for your letters and your praise. To tell the truth, we expected many of you to write about our many added pages, but what especially pleases us is what you said about our stories.

If we had put out a 276 page book with stories that were below our usual standard, or even on a level with it, you could have come back at us and said: "Yeah, they give us a lot more pages, but look at the tripe!" *But you didn't say that.* You said instead: "The best stories *Amazing* has ever published!"

TO us, that means a lot. It means we have succeeded in doing what has been said as impossible; we have actually doubled the size of your magazine, and filled it with stories the like of which you have never seen before.

There's a secret behind all this, of course, and it's partly due to what you readers have been suggesting and hinting at for years. And due, say our authors, to your fine, intelligent letters in the past year, telling them exactly what you wanted in the way of fiction. When those writers began deluging us with our present grand material, we had only one recourse—give them to you. And that meant a big book.

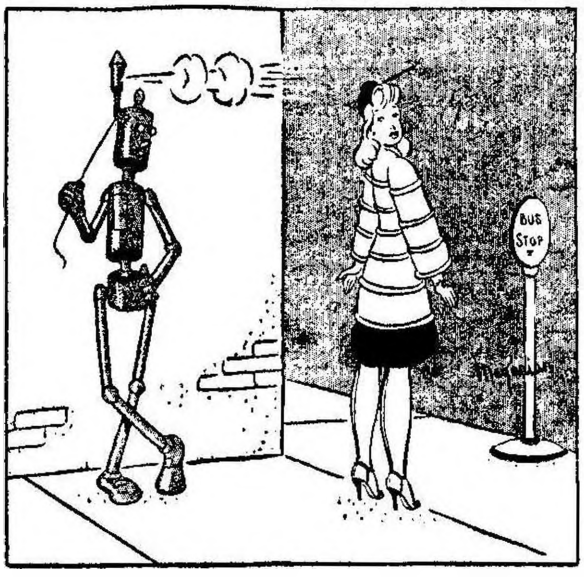
Again we say: thanks a million. You've made us feel pretty good. And we'll try our best to keep on shattering records.

AS the first example of that, we present thirteen complete stories in this issue. It's a lucky number, because among those thirteen are no less than eight old favorites. We'll try to list the returning old masters briefly so you can get down to the pleasant job of reading their new works.

THE special feature of this issue is a great new novel by Stanton A. Coblentz. This is a story which is a twin brother to his great "The Sunken World" which you all remember from *Amazing's* shining past.

It was Coblentz who produced a type of science fiction which was unique—the scientific satire. He wrote some of the most pointed stuff the old "aristocrat" ever published. You'll like him this time too.

England storms our citadel with three very famed names: Thornton Ayre, John Russell Fearn, and Polton Cross. All three in the same issue! As the movie moguls say, it's colossal!



THEN Nelson S. Bond brings back his famous characters, Horsesense Hank, and Lancelot Biggs. Again, both in the same issue!

AND special treat of special treats, is the return of A. R. McKenzie, with a new character who is destined to return again and again. Of course you remember McKenzie! You have asked for the author of "Luvium" and "Luvium Under the Sands" so often, we got dizzy trying to keep track.

Well, the real treat to come is a promise from this author of another "Luvium." McKenzie was in our office the other day (the first time we had ever met him) and he said presto, it would be so!

WHEN Robert Moore Williams sent us his "The Incredible Slingshot Bombs," he told us that this was his "once-a-year" story. He says that once a year he turns out a story that he believes to be tops on his effort-schedule. Now there's a modest man!

WILLY LEY, the well-known scientist, presents the second of his new series "Landscapes of Other Worlds" in this issue. He will carry you on a tour of all the planets before he's through, and give you a true picture of what the Earth's sisters look like.

NOW'S the time to go to your newsstand and get your copy of *Mammoth Detective*, our big new addition to the Ziff-Davis Fiction Group. It's ready and waiting for you—320 pages of the biggest bargain, the finest detective stories you've ever read. If you can imagine 174,000 words in one single magazine! Get it!

ON our front cover you see something that you've been asking for. If you read our companion magazine *Fantastic Adventures*, you know all about the Mac Girl, that famed beauty created by H. W. McCauley. Well, here she is, on *Amazing Stories*, illustrating a fine story by Duncan Farnsworth.

INCIDENTALLY, we introduce a new artist illustrating "Juggernaut Jones, Salesman." He is a fellow named Pemble, and his work (the first he has ever done in science fiction) showed so much promise that we promptly gave him another try, at "Sutton's Strange Voyage," also in this issue. Let us know how you like him.

THE amazing story of the war goes on, knocking our author's imaginations for a loop. Singapore, the impregnable spot of the Earth, falls in record time. The Japs, supposed to be halted by the natural hazards of the Malay jungle, waltz through it at twenty-five miles a day. The mightiest fortress in the world, outside of Gibralter, crumbles like sponge cake in the morning coffee.

How long will it take for us to realize that science fiction's voice has been too weak, too much blanketed beneath the scorn of the man in the street? Our writers have written stories which denounced the short-sighted defense policy—by showing how science can make any defense vulnerable. Imaginative old-wives tales, they scoff, when a writer has his army of the future storm an impregnable stronghold, and take it with "the greatest of ease" by some scientific gadget. "Lurid pulp fiction," they snort. "For kids—and not *my* kids!"

Take it from us, our readers weren't as surprised as the rest of the world was at what has happened. And we won't be surprised at what will happen. Because we know there's more to come.

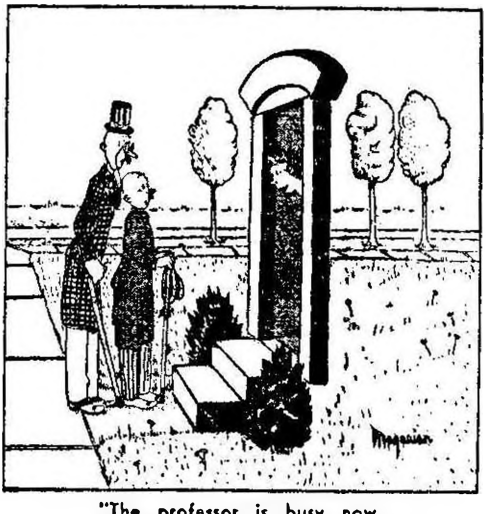
THE defense of Java is important, we realize now. We've been tossed on the flat of our backs, with our necks in the water. And these Jap "gadgets" threaten to duck us thoroughly before we begin to sputter and come to; and realize it's a scientific war, and there is no such thing as a "natural" obstacle.

TWO thousand miles of water separate us from Europe, they said; we are safe. But now those same people, who should have read *Amazing Stories* a bit more frequently and seriously, are saying "It is only six thousand miles to Tokyo—go there and give them hell." Oh yeah! Planes, you say? Tanks, you say? Battleships, you say? *Now* who's writing science fiction? *Now* who's telling old-wives tales? *Now* who's reading lurid pulp fiction?

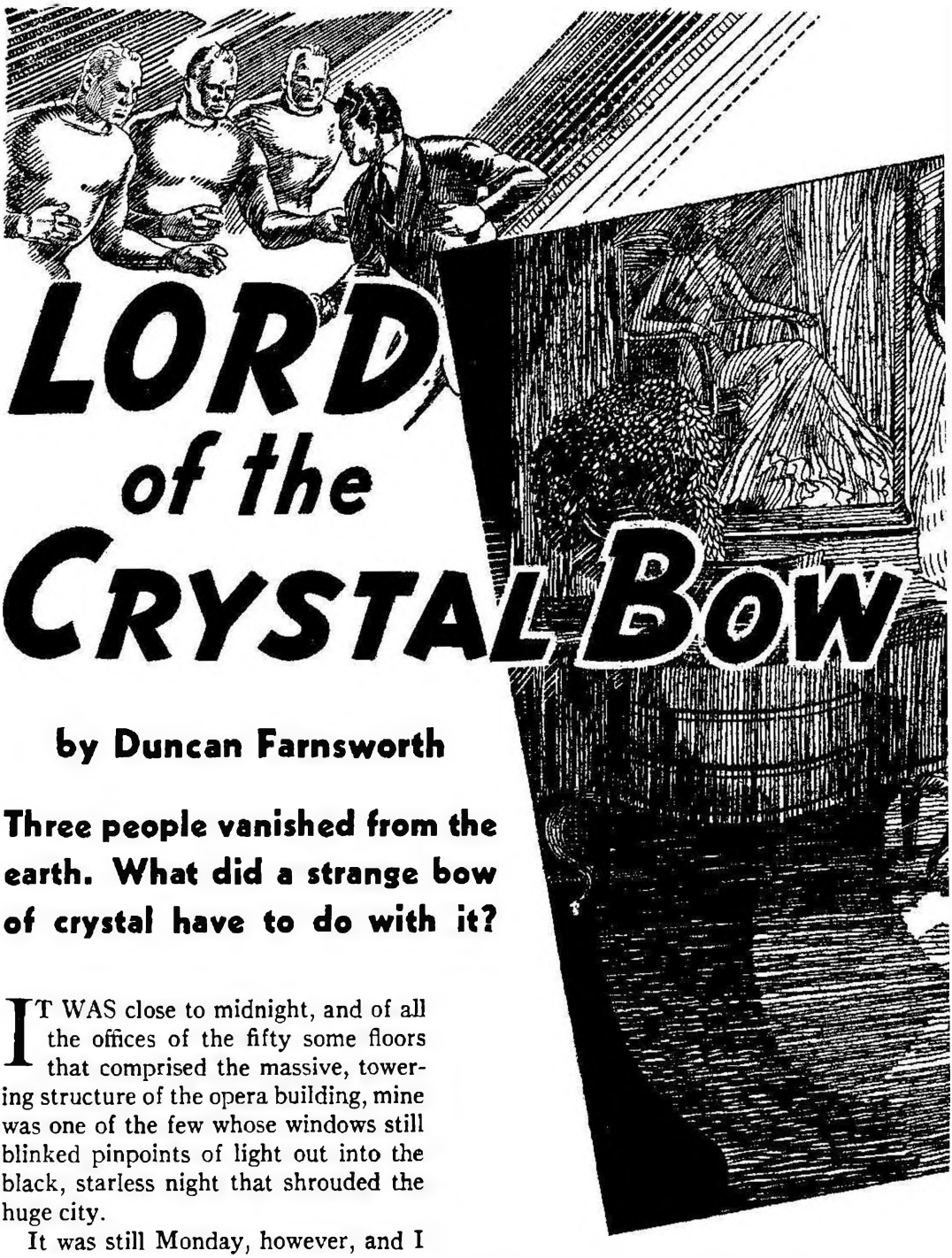
Come on, America (and the rest of the world) wake up! Get those gadgets off pulp paper and onto assembly lines. We've got a fight on our hands!

WHAT we wouldn't give for a fleet of those Martian rocket ships, or a couple of D-ships powered by atomic power, and bristling with disintegrator rays! Every time we read a new manuscript which is intended for our pages, we are tempted to say, "This is trite. There's a better story in the newspapers." Why? Because Earth science today is doing a better job than the Martians ever did on paper and in imagination. Earth gadgets are *fact* today, not fancy. But Earth people still cling to their outdated ideas, still refuse to believe that the gadget can easily lick hell out of them. What we need is more imagination. Let's have it!

(Concluded on page 129)



"The professor is busy now. Won't you step in and wait?"



LORD of the CRYSTAL BOW

by Duncan Farnsworth

Three people vanished from the earth. What did a strange bow of crystal have to do with it?

IT WAS close to midnight, and of all the offices of the fifty some floors that comprised the massive, towering structure of the opera building, mine was one of the few whose windows still blinked pinpoints of light out into the black, starless night that shrouded the huge city.

It was still Monday, however, and I had another hour before my copy was due in the offices of the *Chicago Blade,* where I held the titular position of Music and Dramatic Critic. It was generally this way after a Monday night opening. Frantic, last-minute efforts to knock out a review in time for the third metropolitan edition.

I crushed out another cigarette,

"Miss Madeline plucked the bow, and vanished right before my very eyes!"

stuffed my second page into the typewriter and picked up where I'd left off.

"And the scintillating brilliance of Madeline Trudeau's glorious voice was doubly heightened by her unequalled dramatic ability and her striking, dark-haired beauty."

Leaning back in my battered chair, I lighted another cigarette and deliberated for a minute. *Rigoletto* might have been performed with lovelier voices than Madeline Trudeau's singing the role of Gilda, but never had I seen such a dazzling combination of

voice, beauty, and emotional magnificence as tonight's performance by the raven-haired soprano. There was no exaggeration in the lines I'd just written. And my laudatory criticism was totally uninfluenced by the fact that I was very much in love with the little operatic star.

I got back to work. I was to meet Madeline at one o'clock. I didn't want to keep her waiting, even though I was supposed to pick her up at an after-the opera party on Lake Shore Drive. There would be far too many other eager escorts waiting to step into my place if they got the chance. Madeline's loveliness was never lacking thronged male admiration.

This thought alone was enough to speed my efforts as I went about finishing up my copy. And precisely twenty minutes sooner than I had hoped, I'd finished my review and was stepping out of the opera building and hailing a cab.

When I turned in my copy at the offices of the *Blade*, Hendrick, my city editor, looked up at me sharply.

"Get any late dope on the disappearance of Frederick Loche?'

I looked at Hendrick bewilderedly. Frederick Loche, veteran in musical and operatic fields, was a well-known composer and the ex-conductor of a symphony orchestra. He was also director of the opera company which had performed *Rigoletto* less than three hours ago.

"Loche?" I blinked. "Disappeared?" I shook my head. "I hadn't heard a damned thing about it, Hendrick. What's the story?"

HENDRICK threw up his hands.

"I'd certainly hate to run a newspaper that depended on news from you music critics," he snorted. "You mean to tell me that you were covering tonight's performance and never had an inkling of the story that broke right under your nose?"

"Look," I was getting a little sore at his attitude. "I cover the opera, the music, the voices. That's my job. If an usher happened to stab a contralto on the middle of the stage, I'd see it. But as for covering an opera like a police beat, that's not my line."

Hendrick shrugged.

"Well whether you know about it or not, your pal Fredrick Loche is gone—missing. He was last seen about the middle of the performance. People backstage saw him go out for a breath of air. He never eturned."

"Maybe he wasn't feeling too well. Perhaps he went home," I said. "Loche invariably has a case of jitters when it's opening night. He's not so young any more, you know."

"His apartment has been checked," Hendrick said, "and he didn't go there. He didn't even have his hat or coat with him when he left. They're still around."

I began to get a little worried.

"When did they realize he was gone too long?"

"When he didn't come back," Hendrick said with sarcastic patience.

"Perhaps he went right to his apartment, forgetting his hat and coat, picked up a coat there, and left again," I suggested.

"Don't ever," Hendrick said disgustedly, "try to get a job as a police reporter on this sheet, Lannister. you're too naïve. Everything was checked, including the fact that he didn't return to his apartment since he left for the opera tonight at seven."

"Anyone see him when he stepped outside for some air?"

Hendrick nodded affirmatively.

"One of the property men. He saw a uniformed messenger come up to

Loche when he was about ten yards away from the stage door and hand him a long package. He says Loche seemed surprised, and that the messenger beat it immediately."

"What happened then?" I asked.

"The property man had to get back in for a scene change. He didn't see anything after that."

I was worried more than before, now. But there was still the chance that Hendrick, ever seeking to blow up an incident into a five-hour headline, was making too much of this purported disappearance of Frederick Loche. But the old man was one of my closest friends. I owed him a lot. It was he who got me my first musical reporting job. And if there was anything to Hendrick's suspicions, I wanted to find out.

"Why don't you see what you can pick up on the story?" Hendrick asked. "You knew the old guy pretty well, didn't you?" He must have been reading my mind.

"That's just what I intend to do," I declared. I turned and started away.

"Give us a ring the minute you learn anything," Hendrick shouted after me. "Anything at all, understand?"

I CAUGHT a cab outside the office of the *Blade*. It was just a five-minute ride over to the Lakeshore Drive apartment where the after-opera party was being held, and where Madeline would be waiting for me, surrounded, I strongly suspected, by a convoy of admiring males.

I suppose I might have worried more about Fredrick Loche's supposed disappearance, if I hadn't been more than half-convinced that Hendrick, stuck for local news, was merely hoping to make a few columns to carry until the home editions came out. I had noticed that he hadn't played up the Loche disappearance in any of the first metropolitan editions as yet. He was too smart an editor to stick his neck out on the block unless it had been absolutely established that the old director had disappeared. Hendrick was just building a hunch around the circumstances which must have come to his attention by a semi-frantic tipoff from a reporter who'd been backstage when Loche turned missing.

But I knew Loche well enough to realize that a situation such as this, to him, was not particularly unusual. If he hadn't been the brilliant genius that he was, people would have tagged him as eccentric long ago. He really wasn't eccentric, however. His habits, like his great mind, differed vastly from the ordinary human pattern.

A butler let me into the twelve room suite on the Drive where a wealthy patron of the opera—I can't recall his name now—was entertaining for as varied a group of guests as you could imagine.

There was wealth there, much of it stuffy and dull, some of it clever. There was also talent, and charm, and intelligence gathered in that array. Champagne was being served by stripe-shirted caterers, and I'd no sooner removed my coat than I was taking a glass from a broad silver tray.

Several people had already nodded to me, smilingly calling my name, but I answered with the briefest of greetings, moving through the confusion of cigarette smoke, conversation, and laughter toward the largest drawing room of the place.

I caught sight of a group of black dinner jackets, formed in a circle almost two deep, and grinned to myself. Madeline was in the center of that circle, I wagered mentally.

She was. And it was several minutes before I could get her off by herself out onto the glass-enclosed terrace of the

swank apartment.

"Finally," I said at last, taking her tiny hands in mine, "I can talk to the great soprano alone."

Madeline laughed, and it was like tinkling music, beautiful music. She was wearing a silvered gown that set off her raven-haired five feet and one inch of incredible loveliness like a lustrous jewel.

"Did you like me tonight, Tommy?" she asked.

MADELINE'S question was what you could expect from any star to a critic, and yet there was something else in her ice. Something honest and open and sincere.

I grinned, shaking my head from side to side.

"You'd never believe me," I said. "Read my review tomorrow. But," I added, "I'll apologize here and now for suddenly finding myself woefully short of adjectives. I didn't use enough of them. Few critics could have."

Madeline took her hands from mine and squeezed my arm lightly.

"You say wonderful things sometimes, Tommy. Aren't you afraid they'll go to my head eventually?"

I shook my head.

"I have an antidote if they ever do."

"What's that?" Madeline demanded.

"I'll marry you," I grinned. "No woman could ever remain conceited with a lout like Tom Lannister for a husband."

"You aren't as bad as all that," Madeline protested in mock horror. Then, expression jokingly judicial, she stepped back a pace.

"You have nice eyes," Madeline decided, putting a finger to her chin and pursuing her lovely red lips contemplatively. "They're gray, and clean, and somehow a person knows that their owner will be decent and honest."

"Thank you," I made a half-bow, like a symphony conductor.

"You're rather short, however," she went on.

"Five feet eight inches," I broke in. "And what right have *you,* my celebrated sporano, to speak of lack of height?"

"But you're sturdy," Madeline resumed the game. "Your shoulders are wide, and your hands are strong, and you walk with the assurance of a trained athlete."

"How flattering," I laughed. "This is fine, go right on. My college coach would be pleased to know he made a man of me."

Madeline shook her head. She sighed.

"Ahhh," she added in mock despair, "but look what football did to your features."

"Quarterbacks," I sighed ruefully, "always get the worst of the beating. Go ahead, I can take it."

"Your brows," she said, "are just a trifle beetled, bumpy. It's a wonder all those kicks on the head didn't jar your brain."

I made a gibbering face.

"Sometimes I think they did, haw!"

"I agree with that diagnosis sometimes myself," she went on. "But I can't ignore your nose. Adonis would never have lasted a minute with a nose like that."

"Adonis," I reminded her, "never tried to bring down Nagurski in an open field."

"But it isn't so bad," Madeline decided. "Just a trifle flattened at the bridge. And anyway your smile is nice. It's so white and even I'm sure you see your dentist three times a year instead of two."

"And now that I've been taken apart and put back together again," I declared, "what about you?"

"I am a small girl with a big salary and black hair," Madeline said quickly, "plus a terrible craving at the moment for a glass of champagne. Anything else you might add would never be believed."

I sighed disappointedly.

"Very well, discourage me just because I'm not tall and handsome."

"I despise handsome men," Madeline said. "They're all so dull."

"That's something in my favor then," I said. "And just for those kind words, spoken generally, I'll take your hint about the thirst for champagne and scout up a couple of drinks."

Madeline made a mock curtsy.

"Mistah Lannister, suh, youah sooo gallaant!"

"Just call me Rhett," I answered. "You know, Rhett Butler. Then I'll be gone with the wind."

"Offfoo!" Madeline made a face of sharp pain. "That was quite terrible. If there's one thing worse than a pun, it's a bad pun. Run for those drinks before I throw something!"

AS much as I hated to leave Madeline for even an instant, I found myself threading my way through the crowded drawing room toward the bar a minute later. Of course it took a little time. Things always take time when you're in a hurry. People had things to chat about as I passed, and other people wanted to shake hands. And when I finally reached the bar, it was just in time to see Geno Marelli, the very temperamental and exceedingly famous tenor, staggering drunkenly away from it.

I don't think he recognized me. He was muttering thickly under his breath, and his heavy, almost purple marceled hair was tumbled down over his forehead. His handsome, swarthy features were a mask of rage.

I called for a couple of champagnes, and stood there watching Marelli's back disappear amid the groups in the drawing room. Vaguely, I wondered what was eating him. His performance that night in *Rigoletto* had been dashingly brilliant—a fact which I hadn't omitted in my review—and so superbly done that I suspected he was definitely trying to outdo Madeline's magnificent work. Certainly he couldn't have been disgruntled over anything concerned with his work.

One of the musicians in the opera orchestra tapped me on the shoulder. His name was Bostwick—a round, dumpy, bald little man—and I'd known him several years.

"You'd better watch it, Lannister," he grinned. "The World's Greatest Tenor is muttering about getting your scalp."

"Geno Marelli?" I blinked in surprise.

Bostwick nodded.

"No less. The Great Voice seemed jealous of the fact that you were out on the veranda with Madeline. And he was also mumbling something about 'having it out' with Frederick Loche."

This time I looked at Bostwick sharply.

"What about Loche?" I demanded. "Has anyone located him since he left the opera house tonight?"

"Not yet. He's probably down on the lower level of the Michigan Avenue bridge, looking at the Chicago river wend by. Tricks like that aren't unusual for the old man."

I frowned.

"I suppose you're right," I said. "I hope so."

"I think Marelli was headed for the veranda," Bostwick said. "Maybe you'd better get back to Madeline. When Geno is nasty, he's poisonous."

I picked up the glasses of champagne.

"You're right," I nodded. "Thanks."

IT DIDN'T bother me that a lot of the champagne spilled over the edges of the glasses as I hurried back through the crowded drawing room.

And when I stepped out onto the veranda it was deserted save for two people locked in furious embrace.

Those two people were Madeline Trudeau and Geno Marelli!

I dropped the glasses I held in either hand. Dropped the glasses and took three swift steps in their direction. Then I was yanking hard on Marelli's shoulder with my right hand, and swinging him around into a smashing hook delivered with my left. I put every last ounce of weight and sinew into that punch.

Marelli caught it flush on the chin.

I stood back, watching him drop like a newsreel run slow motion. He slid to his face on the veranda flagstones, directly between Madeline and me.

Madeline's face was white, terrified. Her mouth was half open as if she'd been trying to scream and no sounds came. The shoulder strap on her gown was half torn. And the marks of Marelli's paws on her white shoulders had left red marks.

She was breathing in quick gasps.

"You shouldn't have done that, Tommy," she said. "You should never have done that. He'll kill you for it. He's killed other men before, and now he'll kill you!"

I looked at her in astonishment. Her voice was low, husky, shaking with terror.

CHAPTER II

A Long Package

IT WAS noon when I woke up the following morning in my bachelor apartment at the club. I wouldn't have wakened if it hadn't been for the constant ringing of my telephone beside the bed.

When I picked the instrument out of the cradle my vision and senses were still blurred from sleep. But the voice on the other end of the wire snapped me out of my fog immediately.

"Lannister!" it barked. "What in the hell have you been doing, eating opium?"

It belonged to Hendrick, that voice. Hendrick, my city editor.

"What's up?" I growled. "I'm in no mood for wise cracks."

"I don't suppose you're seen the extra editions of the *Blade,*" he said. Hendrick would be lost without sarcasm.

"I went to bed at five. I never read the papers until I get up."

"Fredrick Loche has disappeared," Hendrick said. His voice underlined the "has."

"Are you certain?" I demanded. "Sometimes he roams for a day or so."

"I'm certain," Hendrick snapped. "So certain I want you to get right over to the apartment of Geno Marelli, the temperamental tenor, and accuse him of Loche's murder."

"My God," I gasped, sinking back weakly on the pillow. "*Now* who's been eating opium!" Then I said, "You're out of your mind. Have you found a body?"

"No," Hendrick began, "but—"

"Have the police found Loche's body?"

"Of course not," Hendrick snapped. "I'm playing a hunch. Loche has disappeared. I've reason to believe he's been murdered. He and Marelli had a terrific verbal tangle backstage before the curtain went up on the opera opening last night. Marelli threatened in front of five people to cut Loche's heart out. Now Loche can't be found."

"And so I'm supposed to trot over to Marelli's and accuse him of murdering Loche and doing away with the body, eh?"

Hendrick's voice came back excitedly.

"That's it. Good God, Lannister—don't you see what a helluva headline we'll have if we scoop everyone including the cops on that?"

"Sure," I said, "I can see the headline. Killer of director stabs music critic to death when confronted with guilt. Exclusive story in the *Blade*. Read all about it. Two cents a copy. Go to hell!"

I slammed down the receiver and lay back.

THE telephone was jangling again in another minute. I picked it up. The voice squawking on the other end might have been an enraged Donald Duck, or it might have been my city editor Hendrick. Reason led me to assume it was the latter.

"When you finish ranting," I said calmly, "I'll be able to understand you."

Hendrick became intelligible. Hang up on him, would I? I was a lousy, blank, blank so-and-so, and my ancestry was lurid and rife with scarlet shame. Who did I think was paying me more than I was worth every week? Did I forget that I wasn't just working for the managing editor, and that the city editor could also give me orders which I'd damned well better follow out—or else?

A job was a job.

"All right," I said, when Hendrick was running the length of the field again. "All right. I'll bare my throat to his damned stiletto. I'll call you back as soon as I've seen him. I'll give you his reactions. But if he pulls a knife, or a gun, or even bites me in the ankle, I get a two-hundred dollar bonus, understand?"

"Listen," Hendrick screeched. "I got a nephew just outta high school. He can play a piano and write fairly intelligible English. He'd love your job as music critic."

"All right," I said. "All right. You can skip the bonus if that's the way you feel about it." I paused. "But about this talented nephew of yours," I added, "if he wants my job there's one other qualification he'll have to have."

"What's that?" Hendrick demanded.

"He'll have to be able to take orders from a screwloose moron," I said. Then I hung up.

MOST of the opera celebrities were staying at the swankiest Loop hotels. But Geno Marelli preferred to live apart, and was quartered in a modest ten-room suite in the ritziest hotel on the north side of town.

I gave the cabbie the address of that hotel, when I caught a yellow just outside the door of my club. I'd picked up a copy of the *Blade* from the desk in the lobby on my way out, and now I settled back to scan Hendrick's lurid suppositions about the Fredrick Loche disappearance last night.

It yelped about a lot, with two-column cuts of Loche, Madeline, and other stars of the old man's opera company. It yelped about a lot, but it didn't say much. Hendrick had put out his neck, but not awfully far. He was no dummy, even if he did love to play hunches. The story made sensational reading, but when you put the paper down you couldn't remember exactly what it said. One of those yarns.

I gave my attention to the passing scenery on the Outer Drive. The morning was cold, but bright and sunny and brisk. An exhilarating morning, or I should say an exhilarating early after-

noon, for it was about a quarter to one by now.

We pulled up in front of the north side hotel at exactly one.

I got Marelli's room number at the desk, and three minutes later I was pressing the buzzer at the door to his apartment. After what must have been about thirty seconds, the door opened and a head peered out. A swarthy, Latin-looking head.

"Is Geno Marelli in?" I asked.

The brown eyes in the Latin head regarded me dubiously. Then the fat lips moved.

"I am sorry, sir. Senor Marelli seems to have left the suite in my absence. He was not here when I returned. Do you wish to leave your name?"

I shook my head.

"Never mind," I declared.

The door closed and I went back to the middle of the hall and pressed the elevator button. On the way down, since the elevator was deserted, I asked the boy a question.

"Did the opera singer, Geno Marelli, leave his apartment yet?" I don't know know what prompted me to ask that.

The elevator boy shook his head.

"Not by this elevator, sir."

There were three other elevators, and when I stepped out into the hotel lobby again, I waited around until each of them came down. None of the elevator boys had taken Marelli downstairs. His suite was on the fifteenth floor. It was unlikely that he'd walked. Marelli was a lazy lout and he'd sooner have jumped.

I stepped into another elevator and went back up to Marelli's apartment again. This time when I pressed the buzzer and the Latin head stuck itself out of the door again, I pushed hard against it and found myself standing inside Marelli's apartment, confronting a spluttering valet who was babbling excitedly and indignantly in Italian.

"Are you going to get your boss out of bed and tell him he has a visitor, or am I going to wake him?" I demanded loudly, flicking a hand at my coat lapel.

OF COURSE I had no badge under my lapel, but the gesture was so swift and significant that Marelli's valet seemed to get the idea I'd wanted him to.

"But Senor officer," he protested, "my master is not here—I swear it!"

I pushed past him, walking swiftly through the luxurious rooms. It took me four minutes to convince myself that the valet was telling the truth. Marelli wasn't around.

Then I went back to the living room. The valet had followed me, muttering bewilderedly in his native tongue. I turned on him.

"When you left, was he still here?"

The valet nodded excitedly.

"Yes, Senor officer. That was perhaps twenty, twenty-five minutes ago. I have been back only ten minutes."

"Then, at the most, you were only gone fifteen minutes, eh?"

The valet nodded.

"Yes, Senor."

I frowned.

"And he was here when you left?"

"Yes, Senor. He was sound asleep. He was feeling ill. He came in about four o'clock this morning. His eye was badly bruised and his jaw was swollen."

I hid a grin, rubbing the fist that had done that neat little job. Then the significance of what the valet had said hit me.

"You said he was asleep when you left?" I demanded.

"Yes, Senor. Soundly. It seemed strange to find him gone when I returned. He was never one to leave without breaking fast. In addition to

that, his morning toilet generally consumed half an hour while he selected the apparel he would wear that day."

That sounded like Geno Marelli, all right. And it made everything increasingly puzzling.

I went back to Marelli's bedroom. The valet was following.

"Look through his closets and see if any of his wardrobe has been removed."

This took the valet several minutes. Then he shook his head bewilderedly.

"No, Senor. Nothing has been removed."

"Then he walked out in his purple pajamas," I said. "How very interesting."

I WENT to the rear of the apartment, opened the kitchen door that led out into a back hallway. There was a freight elevator door in the middle of the hallway. I pressed the button on it. A janitor in blue coveralls opened the doors and looked out at me when the elevator came up to our floors.

"Taking something down?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"You been operating this elevator all morning?"

He nodded affirmatively.

"Take any passengers down in it from this floor?"

He thought a minute.

"One," he said.

"Who?"

He shook his head.

"How should I know. He was just a messenger. He brought a long package up to this floor, told me to wait, rang the back doorbell, and give the package to Mr. Marelli, the opera fella. Marelli closed the door and went back inside. I remember he was sleepy and cross and in his pajamas. He looked like he'd been in a fight somewhere the night before. The messenger got back in the elevator and left. That's all. Say," and his voice took on a high querulous, suspicion, "why do you wanta know?"

"I'm running a contest," I said. "Put what you just said in fifty words, send it in to us with the top of your elevator, and who knows but what you'll be the winner of a thousand dollars a year for the rest of your life."

I went back into Marelli's apartment. The valet was still trailing wonderingly behind me.

I stood there in the kitchen, thinking out loud.

"A long package," I said. "And now he disappeared. Gone right in broad daylight. Lovely." I was frowning.

The valet disappeared and returned a moment later.

"There is no trace of such a package in the apartment, Senor," he said.

I snapped my fingers. I had one of those flashes of inspiration that are usually pictured in newspaper comics by a light bulb bursting above a character's head.

"That's it," I muttered. "Of course that's it! Loche was seen taking a package—a long package—from a messenger. Then, in the middle of a city of four million people he disappears completely. Both disappearances are positively alike!"

The valet looked at me uncomprehendingly.

"Where's the telephone?" I asked him. "I got a call to make!"

CHAPTER III

Three Crystal Bows

HENDRICKS sat still in his editorial throne long enough to listen to the entire story. This time I told him everything I knew—not all of it for print—including the fact that I'd bopped Marelli in the face the previous

evening when I'd caught him making wild advances at Madeline.

"Well I'll be—" Hendricks exclaimed. "It's a cinch that those two disappearances are alike. Unless," and he slapped his palm down hard on the desk to emphasize his doubt, "Marelli really did away with Loche, and then got his own hide out of the way by faking this coincidental disappearance."

"I thought you said you'd checked Marelli's actions from seven o'clock until four a. m.," I said. "His time is accounted for straight through those hours, without a break. He couldn't have had the chance to remove Loche, let alone hide him."

"An accomplice, or two of them, couldda done the job for Marelli," Hendrick said. "That's easy enough. But even so, I've a new theory on this. And the new theory is that the two of them were spirited away and slain, or vice versa."

"Because they've disappeared," I said, "you got to make them dead." I shook my head despairingly. "You haven't a single fact to show that either one of them is dead. Take it easy on that angle. Let it go that they've disappeared until you're able to prove the rest of your theory."

"The trouble with you," Hendrick declared sympathetically, "is that you've got no imagination. You'll never be an honest-to-God newspaperman."

"Like you?" I asked.

"Like me."

"Thank God for that," I said. I left then, to get back to the club for a spot of lunch and perhaps a short nap. It was while I ate my lunch that I went over the scene that had occurred on the veranda of the Lakeshore Drive apartment the night before. In the light of Marelli's addition to this growing enigma, what happened there might have been important.

Hell, after those two disappearances, *anything* that happened might be important.

I recalled that after I'd slugged Marelli, he'd been unobtrusively removed from the scene to a bedroom where he came to and received treatment for his eye. At Madeline's request, I'd taken her home right after that.

My efforts to find out what she'd been so horribly afraid of when I'd knocked Marelli cold were unavailing. She wouldn't talk about it, and nothing I could say would persuade her to do so. She was stubborn, yet trying to give me to understand that she'd let me know whenever she felt it was safe to do so.

Even the warmth we'd shared during the brief period together on the veranda, seemed to have vanished in that cab ride to her apartment. I had the feeling that she was keeping me away from her mentally. Not as if she wanted to do so, but more as if she felt she had to—as funny as it sounds—for my sake.

And of course I recalled her words: *"He's killed other men before, and now he'll kill you!"*

THAT was incredibly strange. Aside from a more or less vague and mutual dislike for one another, Geno Marelli and I were scarcely more than acquaintances. Why should he want to kill me?

A punch in the jaw didn't seem to be motivation enough. His hot Latin blood, in a moment of drunken jealousy, might motivate him to knife a rival for Madeline's affections. But the cold light of reason would keep him from doing such a senseless thing once the rage flashed past him.

It was definitely a tough nut to crack. No matter how I went at it, there seemed to be no tip-of-the-fingers solution. I gave it up, then, resolving to get

in touch with Madeline before the second performance at the opera this evening.

This last thought made me realize, in a flash, that if Geno Marelli wasn't found before evening, there'd be another tenor in the leading role. I'd never thought of it that way before.

But thinking of it from that angle produced no more than any other approach. So I left the remains of my luncheon no further ahead in the snarl. I decided to go upstairs for a quick nap.

Which proved to be a good idea, for when I entered my apartment the telephone was ringing. Hendrick was on the other end of the wire.

"Look," he said when I picked up the receiver, "I'm calling you about this because you know more about the opera crowd, the singers and all, than any man on our staff—but not because I value your opinion."

"I wish you'd let a man sleep. Just because you don't value his opinion is no reason to drive him to insomnia," I snapped. "What's up now?"

"There's an old maid in Marelli's hotel," Hendrick said, "who occupies an apartment across from him. She used to watch through her window, since he's been in town, for glimpses of him moving around the apartment. She's got a case of hero worship for all singers, especially handsome ones, I guess. Anyway, one of our *smart* reporters got into Marelli's apartment, saw that it faced one other apartment in the entire hotel, and took a chance that someone in the other apartment had been looking in on Marelli about the time he disappeared, see?"

"It sounds terribly involved," I yawned.

"Our reporter talks to this old maid, and she admits that she was just glancing casually across at his window—undoubtedly she was actually peeking —when she saw him in his blue pajamas about the time he disappeared."

This got a little more interesting.

"Go on," I said.

"Evidently Marelli had just gotten outta bed. He was rubbing his eyes and swaying a little as he walked through the drawing room—that's the room the old maid can see—and headed for the kitchen."

"To answer the back bell," I broke in excitedly. "Go ahead."

"WELL," Hendrick's voice resumed, "that must have been it. For he came back into the drawing room carrying a long package. He was opening it, tearing the wrapping away, while the old maid across from his apartment looked on." Hendrick's voice poised dramatically. "Guess what he pulled out of the package."

"Three complimentary tickets to the Mudville Choir Practice?" I asked.

"Smart guy, huh?" Hendrick snorted. "He pulled out a long bow, sort of a crystal bow."

"A bow?"

"Yeah, like the Indians used to use," Hendrick said. "You know, bow-and-arrow."

"Arrows, too?"

"No, just a bow. This funny looking crystal-like bow," Hendrick said impatiently. "Now here's what I want to ask you, was Marelli interested in archery or anything like that?"

"No," I said.

"Did he collect strange weapons?"

"Not to my knowledge," I answered. "Unless you can call blondes weapons."

"That's what I thought," Hendrick's voice declared. "The old maid told our reporter that Marelli was looking at it in complete astonishment. Then he shrugged, puzzedly, sort of, and turned and walked back to the bedroom, slowly, turning the bow around in his

hands as if he was trying to figure out what he was supposed to do with the damned thing."

Hendrick's voice had stopped talking.

"And then what?" I asked.

"Then he was in his bedroom and she couldn't see him any more," Hendrick said.

"That's a helluva note," I exclaimed. "He must have disappeared minutes after that. A crystal bow, eh? Have you seen it yet?"

"Seen it?" Hendrick's voice was disgusted. "It wasn't around the apartment anywhere. You didn't see it around when you were there, did you?"

"No," I admitted. "No, I didn't."

"If those two long packages that Marelli and Loche both received were identical, then Loche probably got a bow too," Hendrick said.

"Yes," I said sarcastically, "the chances are very strong, especially if they were, as you say, identical."

"So he wasn't interested in archery?" Hendrick asked again.

"No," I told him once more.

"Was Loche?"

"I could say almost positively that Loche wasn't either," I answered.

"Then it was probably unexpected and unfamiliar to Loche, too," Hendrick said.

"If it was a crystal bow that he got, yes," I agreed. "But supposing it wasn't."

"It was a bow, all right," Hendrick said, "and probably a crystal one. I just got a hunch."

"Just so long as your hunches don't keep me awake," I said, "it's all right with me."

"I'll wake you up again if it's necessary," Hendrick snapped.

"You didn't wake me up," I said. "I'm just getting down to sleep. Now I lay me—" I began lazily.

Hendrick said a nasty word, almost knocking my eardrum loose with the noise he made hanging up. I put the receiver into the cradle and sat down on the edge of my bed.

SOMETHING new had been added—a crystal bow.

And instead of serving to clarify the mystery, it had only filled in as an additionally tangling knot. For five or ten minutes I sat there on the edge of my bed, trying to turn back through the pages of my mind in an effort to recall anything pertaining to a crystal bow.

If there was anything there I was too tired to think of it. Finally I realized that a fresh brain could tackle the problem a little bit more successfully. And a nap would freshen my brain. I sank back, and was putting my head to the pillow with deep and luxurious satisfaction.

Brrrrriiiinnnnggg!

It was the damned telephone again. I clenched my teeth and tried to shut out the sound with my pillow. To hell with it. Let it ring itself out.

Brrrrriiiinnnnggg!

Hendrick, no doubt, with something inane to ask me. Probably the next thing he'd be asking was what I knew about the Indian Rope Trick. Let him look in the encyclopedia.

Brrrrriiiinnnnggg!

It was no go. My nerves weren't strong enough to stand a battle with that telephone. And even if my nerves held out for a short spell, my curiosity was bound to win out.

I took the receiver off the cradle.

"Hello, Tommy," said the voice on the other end of the wire. "I didn't rouse you from a sound sleep, did I?"

I didn't have to ask who was speaking. Madeline Trudeau was the only girl I knew who spoke like silver, tinkling bells.

"Madeline!" I didn't try to hide the surprised elation in my voice.

"I just wanted to thank you for what you did last night, Tommy," she said. "I know I must have acted strangely to you, and I'm sorry I was such a chatter-knees. I don't know what ever made me say what I did when you pried Geno away from me."

This was daylight. What had happened was done. Madeline had time to think it over, and now she wanted me to forget it all, just like that. But the terror that had been in her eyes and voice hadn't been synthetic. It had been hard, real. Listening to the bells tinkle in her voice now, however, it was hard to keep that in mind. She was the Madeline I'd talked to on the veranda before I went for the champagne.

"That's all right," I said. "And about the rescue scene, don't mention it. Any of the Rover Boys could have come through as nobly in the pinch as I did."

Madeline laughed. Maybe it was only my imagination that led me to believe that laugh wasn't as natural, as genuine, as it might have been.

"Seen the papers yet, Madeline?"

THERE was a silence. She knew I meant the Fredrick Loche disappearance yarn in the *Blade*. Her voice was casual, too casual, when she answered.

"It's not true, is it, Tommy?"

"The suppositions, you mean?" I asked.

"Yes."

"No, I don't believe they're true. Hendrick, the city editor, draws heavily on his imagination in such stories. I'm pretty sure Loche is off somewhere, looking at paintings in an obscure gallery, or sunning himself conspicuously on the lawn of Lincoln Park. He's done things like that before."

"Yes, that's true. I'm glad to hear you think that, Tommy," Madeline said. She seemed vastly relieved, in spite of the casual reference to it at the start. Of course there were a lot of reasons why she might be vastly relieved. The first was that few people who were connected with music or opera didn't know and love old Fredrick Loche.

I was wondering if it would be smart to mention anything about the Marelli disappearance, or anything about the increasingly snarled mystery that was piling up.

"Just a moment, Tommy," Madeline said. "There's someone at the apartment door making an awful racket with the buzzer. The maid is out and I'll have to answer it." Her voice faded away.

I sat there waiting, still wondering if I should mention the Marelli mess. Perhaps a minute passed. Then her voice came through to me.

"Strange thing," she said conversationally. "That was a messenger delivering a long package addressed to me. I haven't opened it yet, but I'm terribly curious to see what's in it!"

CHAPTER IV

Madeline Vanishes

TIME hung motionless as the significance of Madeline's words hit me. Then a thousand wild premonitions raced crazily around in my mind. A long package. Loche and Marelli had both received packages of the same description before they'd mysteriously vanished. And now Madeline. This could be coincidence, of course, sheer coincidence. But there was an ominous hunch crawling along my spine. Too ominous.

"Madeline!" I barked. "For God's sake listen to me carefully, Madeline!"

I heard her gasp in surprise, start to say something. I cut in on her swiftly.

"That package you just received," I began.

There was a sudden *click* and a buzzing static in my ear. It was as if someone had cut in on the wire.

"Hello!" I shouted. "Madeline—do you hear me?"

A voice came lazily into my ear.

"So sorry, sir. I'm afraid I cut you off accidentally."

It was the voice of the switchboard operator in the lobby. I cursed steadily while I heard her fiddling with plugs and switches. Moments trickled by. Sweat stood out on my forehead. The switchboard operator's voice came in lazily once more. She spoke through a mouth full of chewing gum.

"What was the number you were calling, Mr. Lannister?"

I started to tell her. She cut me off again.

"That's right, sir. I almost forgot. The call was an incoming one. If you just hang up, I'm certain your party will call back in a minute or so."

I scorched the wires with my reply, concluding,

"And damn your vacant little blonde bean, get that number in a hurry!"

The operator's voice was pained.

"*Yes,* Mr. Lannister. After *all,* Mr. Lannister, mistakes—"

"Get that number!" I blazed.

I heard the connections being made again. Then there was a buzzing, loud, sharp, evenly spaced.

The operator's voice broke in again.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lannister. Your party seems to have a busy wire at the moment."

I slammed the telephone back into the cradle, cursing. In the interim between the time the fuzzy-headed, red-lipped, gum-chewing moron at the switchboard had messed up the connections in my talk with Madeline, someone else had probably called that apartment.

I stood up, lighting a cigarette. Madeline's apartment was about ten minutes by cab from the club. I had no idea of how long she'd be on the telephone with whoever had called her just now.

Grabbing my coat, I made for the door.

TWO minutes later the club doorman was hailing a cab for me. And when I jumped inside I barked Madeline's address to the driver. He threw the car into gear and I leaned forward anxiously shouting:

"Make it in five minutes and it'll be worth your while!"

The cabbie nodded, and immediately jammed hard on the accelerator. We whipped around a narrow corner and shot for Michigan Boulevard just in time to beat a red light. Madeline's apartment was on the south end of the Loop. And the cabbie handled his hack like a halfback swivel-hipping through a broken field toward a touchdown. He was in and out of traffic snarls like an elusive ghost. But we made time.

In exactly four minutes after we'd pulled away from the curb at my club, the taxi rolled in front of the Michigan Boluevard hotel at which Madeline was staying.

I threw the driver a five-dollar bill and rushed past the startled doorman into the lobby of the place. There was an elevator line at the other side of the lobby, and the operator was just about to shut the doors before going up.

My bellowed "Hold it!" must have startled the operator and all the sedate residents of the hostelry in the lobby out of many years growth. But he held it.

There were three floor stops made before Madeline's floor number was

reached. And during the interval it took to make those stops and discharge passengers—scant seconds though each one was—I died a million deaths of anxiety and frantic impatience. But at last I was out of the elevator and dashing down the twenty-fifth floor hallway toward Madeline's suite.

I pushed hard on the buzzer of her door with one hand and knocked loudly and insistently with the other.

The door was opened almost immediately. Opened by the fat person of Frieda, Madeline's South African, coffee-colored personal maid.

Her face, through all that coffee-color tan, was ghastly white. Her thick lips were twitching, and her usual cheerful smile of greeting was replaced by a grimace of sheer terror. Her big brown eyes were wide and filled with horror and unmistakable hysteria.

"Mister Lannister!" she gasped. "Mister Lannister, oh I am glad, so glad, you are here!"

"Frieda," I blurted, moving past her into the apartment, "where is Miss Madeline?"

I was in the drawing room by now, looking frantically around. And two things were immediately apparent. Madeline was not there, and on the center of the living room floor there lay, amid several sheets of brown wrapping paper, *a bow of curious crystal composition!*

"Madeline!" I shouted, fighting off the ominous terror that assailed me. "Madeline—where are you?"

FRIEDA came up behind me. Now she was sobbing uncontrollably. I wheeled to face her, placing my hand on her shoulder in a gesture that was meant to steady her.

"Frieda," I demanded. "Frieda, for the love of God, tell me where your mistress is!"

Frieda made choking noises that should have been words. She was trying desperately to say something, but she was reverting to a mixture of South African that was unintelligible.

"Frieda!" I shouted, "for God's sake, tell me what this is all about!"

Her eyes rolled, glazed, then closed. She toppled toward me in a dead faint. I caught her as she fell, lifting her in my arms and carrying her over to a chair, cursing as I did so.

I left Frieda propped there in the chair and swiftly started through the other rooms in the house. There was no sign of Madeline in any of them. In the bathroom I ransacked the medicine cabinets, got a bottle of ammonia, a cold towel, and returned quickly to the drawing room.

It took several minutes to bring Frieda back to consciousness, and another two minutes before she was able to say anything. Her eyes fell on the curious crystal bow still lying in the center of the room, and she shuddered involuntarily.

"Where is Miss Madeline?" I demanded again. "What has happened?"

"She is gone," Frieda said faintly. "I saw her go."

"Where?" I demanded. "Where has she gone?"

Frieda began to shudder again, and her eyes grew wider, fixing themselves in horrified fascination at the crystal bow lying on the thick red rug.

"Where, Frieda?" I repeated. "Where has she gone?"

"The Lord would know," she shuddered, "I do not."

"But you said you saw her go!" I insisted. "For God's sake, girl, speak up!"

Frieda suddenly seemed to go into a trance. She said nothing, merely continued to stare in hypnotic fascination at the crystal bow. I shook her shoulder

gently.

"Tell me what happened," I begged, "right from the beginning."

This seemed to be a better approach. It was as if she were able to talk of anything that was not immediately related to that crystal bow and whatever had happened to Madeline.

"I was out, Mr. Lannister," she whispered huskily. "I had just gone to make arrangements with her hairdresser. A matter of minutes, you understand, I was away."

She hesitated again for an instant.

"Go on," I demanded.

"When I was coming down the hallway, after just stepping from the elevator, I saw a messenger turning away from the door of the suite. I do not notice him as he passes me. I was just concerned that I was not there to receive whatever package he left."

Again a pause, and again the terrified glance at the crystal bow lying ominously on the rich red rug.

THIS time I didn't have to prompt her to go on, however, for she hesitated only a moment before resuming.

"When I was entering the apartment, coming through the drawing room, Madeline was just leaving the telephone. She smiled at me and asked for what time I have arranged her appointment with the hairdresser. She added that she had just been talking to you and that the connection was somehow interrupted. She said she expected that you will call back, Mr. Lannister, and would I please notify her when you do so."

Frieda paused again, this time keeping her eyes from the crystal bow. When she resumed, she seemed to be fighting for self control.

"Madeline then went into the drawing room where she had left the recently delivered package. I was in another room, and I could hear the sounds of paper wrappings being torn away as she opened it. My curiosity is strong, of course, Mr. Lannister, and I was about to enter the drawing room when the telephone rang. I went to answer it. The person on the other end of the wire said he was a reporter from a newspaper, that he had some questions he would like to ask Miss Madeline and would I call her to the telephone. I told him to wait, and put the telephone to the side while I went to the drawing room to inform my mistress that there was a call waiting."

The pause in the narrative of Frieda was longer now, and her fight against the impending terror in it was more difficult. There was nothing I could do but wait, while she closed her eyes and squeezed her nails hard into the flesh of her palms while her thick lips went flat against her white teeth.

"She was standing there in the drawing room," Frieda said huskily now. "The package she had already unwrapped. In her hands she had the, the bow of shining crystal—" She broke off, shaken by violent shudders. Then stumblingly she went on.

"She was holding it—so." Frieda made an illustrative gesture with her hands. "Holding it and gazing at it like, like, ohhh, how you say—a rabbit gazing at a snake!" Tears welled in Frieda's large brown eyes now. "There was a light shining from that damnable instrument, that weapon of crystal death. A light reflected in its shimmering string as the sunlight pouring through the window struck it. It was horrible!"

I looked swiftly at the crystal bow, then back at Frieda.

"Miss Madeline," she whispered huskily, "was staring at the bow as if she hadn't heard me come into the drawing room. And then something—I, I,

could never describe it to you, caused me to cry out sharply, in fear. Miss Madeline had been just in the act of plucking the string on the bow, in fact she did so just as I cried out."

"And then?" I blurted, leaning anxiously forward.

"The bowstring, it sang zeeeeeiiiing, so, its vibrations ringing through the room like the cry of a wild beast. My scream must have come at the same moment, for I recall Miss Madeline turning, open-mouthed in astonishment, toward me. The shock of my cry caused her to drop the bow to the floor, *as she vanished, disappeared completely, into thin air but a second later!*"

CHAPTER V

An Irresistible Command

FRIEDA had scarcely finished before she collapsed completely, sobbing wildly, shuddering brokenly, and all the while mumbling incoherently to herself in a combination of English and African dialect.

I was stunned, shocked, incredulous. The coffee-colored maid was out of her mind. She had to be. What she had described was more than humanly believable, more than humanly possible. There must have been something else, something that had brought about this temporary hallucination from which she suffered.

But no matter what the truth of the matter happened to be, one fact remained. Parts of her tale were indisputable; and other parts fitted into perfect coincidence with what had happened to Frederick Loche and Geno Marelli. The facts that fitted were two. Madeline *had* received the mysterious crystal bow. For it was lying before me on the rich red rug of the drawing room that very moment. Secondly, Madeline was gone.

I stood up, then, lifting Frieda in my arms like a child. I carried her over to the divan, placed her there, then went to a telephone and called the house physician of the hotel. The poor girl was more than merely distraught. She needed a doctor and a sedative badly. Then, perhaps, after she had rested, I would be able to obtain more coherent information from her.

When I returned from the telephone, Frieda was lying on the couch in a dazed, almost uncomprehending state. Her eyes stared dully almost glassily, at the ceiling. Her body was limp from utter nervous exhaustion. She was breathing heavily, like a person sleeping through an unpleasant dream. I didn't try to talk to her.

Then, for no reason I was sure of at the moment, I picked up the mysterious crystal bow and the wrappings that had covered it. I carried the bow and the wrappings to the kitchen where I disposed of the latter in the incinerator.

I stood there for several minutes, then, examining the crystal bow.

It was a strange, weirdly constructed weapon, fashioned—as I stated before—of a smooth, translucent, crystal substance that felt as soft as silk to the touch of my fingers. The center section of it was flanged slightly, yet rather narrow, while the sections on either end of the instrument were of wider flanges. If had about it the style of an ancient Mongol, or perhaps Persian, design. The bowstring, stretched tightly from end to end, was a thin strand of what seemed to be a solid silver thread.

I was turning the weapon around in my hands, examining it with more than curiosity, when the buzzer to the front door of the apartment sounded sharply several times.

There was a cupboard on my left, and I opened it hastily. The bow would

just fit in there—it was perhaps five feet long—I found as I hastily placed it on a shelf. I still wasn't certain what prompted me to conceal it, or what had prompted me to destroy the wrappings moments before.

WHEN I went to the door the house physician, carrying the ever present black bag, was standing there impatiently. He was a little man, old, with thinning gray hair and pince-nez glasses.

"In there," I said, pointing toward the divan where Frieda lay in the drawing room. "Miss Trudeau's maid has had a severe shock. I arrived here a few moments ago to find her practically incoherent. I think she'll need a sedative."

The doctor looked at me a moment curiously.

"Where is Miss Trudeau?" he asked.

"She's out," I said. "I expect her back shortly." Again I knew that I was concealing information, evidence of this mystery. And again I wasn't certain what prompted me to do so.

"And you are . . . ?" the doctor asked.

"I am Thomas Lannister," I said. "A friend of Miss Trudeau's. I'm waiting for her."

"Oh yes," the Doctor said. "Music critic chap from the *Blade*, eh?"

He went into the drawing room, then, and I went back into the kitchen, lighting a cigarette. For the next several minutes I paced back and forth, taking deep draughts from my cigarette and trying to find some way to pierce the cloud of mystery and foreboding terror that lurked around the strange circumstances of the past twenty hours.

My anxiety for the safety of Madeline was foremost in my thoughts, of course, and it was only the almost obvious connection between her disappearance and that of Loche and Marelli that kept me returning to the circumstances of those other two mysteries. I was vaguely aware that—whatever was behind all this—the three occurrences were definitely linked to one another.

But every idea I had met inevitably against a stone wall in the blind alley of deduction. And before I knew it the doctor appeared in the kitchen.

"I would like you to help me move Miss Trudeau's maid to her bedroom," he said crisply. "You were right in presuming that she's had a severe shock of some sort. I gave her a hypo. She should sleep for five or six hours. After that time I'll be in to see her again."

I nodded vaguely, and went with the little medico back to the drawing room. There we both lifted Frieda gently from the divan and carried her into her bedroom. I found a heavy quilt comforter and placed it over her, while the doctor arranged the pillow beneath her head.

"I'll be back about the time she should be waking," he said.

"Thank you," I told him. "If you should be needed sooner I'll have Miss Trudeau call you."

The doctor left, then, and I closed the door of Frieda's room behind me and started back to the kitchen.

IT was while I was moving through the small hallway leading to the kitchen that I passed the telephone table there. There was a loud, static buzzing issuing from the receiving end of the telephone, and I saw instantly that Frieda had left it out of the cradle when she'd gone to call Madeline in the drawing room. After what had happened then she had quite naturally forgotten all about it, and left it as it was.

I stopped to put the telephone back into the cradle, realizing as I did so that here was the explanation for Madeline's

line having been busy for so long. Obviously, right after my connection with her had been broken, the reporter from the newspaper Frieda'd mentioned had called. Frieda had then left the telephone momentarily to call Madeline and had never returned to it, thus leaving the line open and busy.

And quite suddenly another thought occurred to me. A reporter had been on the other end of the wire. And unless I was very much mistaken that reporter had probably been calling on Hendrick's advice from the offices of the *Blade*. With the wire open, and with the chap waiting for Madeline to answer him, he'd have been able to hear Frieda's sharp cry, or scream, and the ensuing commotion that followed when I arrived at the apartment.

Obviously, then, unless the staff of the *Blade* had lost its nose for news completely, a reporter would soon be over here to see what was going on. I hadn't figured on that. I hadn't figured on that any more than I'd figured on calling Hendrick to tip him off on this last disappearance. What the hell, newspaperman or not, this last occurrence was something for me and me alone to handle. And until I found out just what was what, Madeline's name wasn't going to be dragged across the front pages of Hendrick's *Blade*. Even if I hadn't been in love with the girl, I'd have thought too much of her for that.

I tried to calculate approximately how long it had been since the reporter from the *Blade* had called and gotten suspicious of his reception on the telephone. Fifteen minutes, perhaps. Maybe twenty. But at the outside, twenty minutes would just about give him time to be arriving here now.

Still debating mentally about the advisability of being on hand when the reporter from the *Blade* arrived, I went back into the kitchen. I took the crystal bow from the long cupboard in which I had concealed it, and again the very weirdness of its design, its appearance, reached out for my fascinated inspection.

There was an exit to a rear hallway from the kitchen. It would lead, I knew, to a freight elevator, and flights of fireproof stairs. If I wanted to leave, I'd better do so now, before Hendrick's snoop would arrive on the scene.

I thought for a moment of waiting him out, letting him sound the buzzer until his finger wore off. After all, aside from Fieda—who was now definitely "out" for the next few hours—I was the only one present. If I didn't let him in, he wouldn't get in.

False reasoning, of course, and I realized it an instant later. No answer from this apartment would only further arouse the newshawk's suspicions. He'd go to a bell captain, or a day manager, and under the guise of grave concern, get them to force an entry to the apartment.

And yet I couldn't walk out now, leaving Frieda holding the bag on the entire ghastly mystery. It wouldn't be fair, especially since she was on the verge of a complete breakdown. And then, if she had had wild hallucinations, Madeline might very well return to the apartment.

MY faith in the last presumption, however, was growing weaker with every passing moment. For something in the back of my subconscious was busily weaving an inner conviction that possibly Frieda's story of the disappearance into thin air was actual fact. My mind knew better, of course. That is, my active, thinking *conscious* mind knew better. But deep at the core of the soul of every man there lies a hidden, primitive, unrecognized factor that

psychologists call sixth sense and gamblers term a hunch. And that hidden factor that sorts all unknown factors and arrives at an unspoken conclusion was pushing my mind eerily toward the conviction that there was more than hallucination and hysteria to Frieda's terrified account of what had happened.

And if what she had described had actually occurred—

I lingered over the implications of this thought an instant, turning it around in my mind as I turned the strange crystal bow unthinkingly in my hands.

Madeline had been in the act of plucking the bowstring when Frieda—strangely set to terror by the very sight of the weapon and the consuming fascination of Madeline's regard for it—had cried forth. Simultaneously with Madeline's plucking of the bowstring, Frieda's cry had rent the air.

Obviously, it had been the cry of horror that had startled Madeline into releasing her grasp on the crystal bow. Perhaps, too, it was her reaction to the weird sound set up by the plucking of the bowstring.

I recalled that Geno Marelli, although he had been seen with the bow in his hands minutes before his disappearance, had not left it behind him when he vanished. As for Frederick Loche, I could assume that he too had been given the package containing the bow. And if he had left it behind him it hadn't been found.

Could this bow in my hands, this weird crystal weapon, be the same one that was delivered to Loche, Marelli, and Madeline in turn?

And was it an actual instrument involved in the disappearances of the three, or just a symbol, an indication of what was to happen to them?

Evidence pointed toward its being the former. And yet, aside from the somewhat unique design of the weapon, it appeared to have no potential power. The bowstring was silver. That in itself was, of course, exceedingly strange. The crysal substance of which the actual strangely shaped staff of the bow was made seemed to be nothing more than glass. Unusually well processed glass, of course, but still nothing more mysterious than glass. So the very elements from which the bow had been constructed were not in themselves unfamiliar.

And yet the strange combination of the silver and glass in a bow of such weird design could, purposely perhaps, be a catalyst that gave an entirely foreign result.

I HAD continued to turn the weapon around in my hands as I pondered these confusing mazes of speculation, and suddenly I was aware that my right hand seemed subconsciously itching toward the silver bowstring. I shifted the stock of the bow into my left hand, held it up half as an archer might, reaching out the fingers of my right hand to pluck the silver bowstring.

The impulse to follow through my gesture became at once almost unhumanly overpowering. And it was an instinct born of something stronger and deeper than natural reflex action. It was almost as if I had received a command from some mind stronger than my own. An almost irresistible command to place my fingers around that silver bowstring, draw it back, and release it.

My fingers reached forward, and I felt an inexplicable sensation of giddying weakness, chilling helplessness.

As if from a great distance, an evenly spaced ringing came to my ears. Vaguely, I was aware that it was the telephone in the hallway of the apartment.

The ringing continued, still as if from a distance, while I stood there posed like a futile archer without an arrow, my hand reaching for the silver bowstring.

I was conscious of that fact that every instinct seemed to tell me to answer that telephone. I was aware, also, that whoever was on that wire might have some connection with Madeline's disappearance.

It is impossible to describe the sensations that held me frozen in the same position while the telephone kept ringing. It was just as if—as I said before—some force, some power, some mind stronger than the resistance I could offer, was fighting back my natural reactions to break away from the overpowering command that urged me to pluck that bowstring.

I felt as if I were standing off at a distance, watching myself, witnessing my struggle to break the grip of that steel band of fascinating hypnosis. Watching the cold sweat on my forehead, the shaky uncertainty of my knees. Watching myself succumb to a terrifying power that was crushing my very instinct, my will itself in an ever closing fist of iron.

It was the sound of the telephone that gave me my last grasp on the straws of reality. It was something to cling to desperately, frantically, while I fought to keep from being drawn off into a wild, fearsome sea of black, unknown forces.

Then the telephone stopped! My grip was gone. My hand inched closer and closer to the bowstring. My fingers circled around it. My arm bent slightly, and I drew the bowstring back.

There was no stopping the irresistible compulsion to release the string. My fingers opened, my mind an agony of revulsion. The string twanged . . .

CHAPTER VI

The Strange Hall

I WAS conscious, instants later, that every last material fibre of my being seemed engulfed in an overwhelming explosion of blinding electrical force. Vaguely, in the chaos of sound and concussion that swept me into blackness, I could hear a strange, eerie *zziinnng* that I suspected dimly to be caused by the vibration of the bowstring I'd released.

The sound grew louder, louder, like circles spreading in a pool of water into which a pebble has been dropped. The blackness became a suffocating mantle which I was no longer able to thrust from my head and shoulders. The ringing of the explosion was still in my ears, shutting out further sensation as the blackness did the light. My right hand was clenched fast to the center of the crystal bow, fingers numb. And then I knew no more . . .

ETERNITY might have passed unnoticed in the interval before I opened my eyes again. I know that I had no sensation that time had passed. No realization, immediately, of what had happened.

I was clutching hard to an object, like a straw in a turbulent sea. Gradually the bright white lights all around me were coming into clearer focus. My head was aching badly, and my body tingled weirdly. I was sprawled on a hard, warm, smooth floor. The crystal bow was still clenched in my right hand —the straw in the sea of dizziness.

And quite suddenly, then, my consciousness returned fully. I had plucked the silver bowstring. I had been standing in Madeline's apartment, and then—

Dazedly, I raised myself on my fore-

arms. But this place in which I now found myself was—was certainly not Madeline's apartment! It was a huge, high domed room of tremendous proportions. It was fully a mile in length, a quarter of a mile high. It was white and crystalline, and utterly bare of anything save the walls and the floor and the vast ceiling!

And the source of strong white light that made me blink and peer dazedly at what I saw was nowhere visible.

Instinctively, my heart began to pound in the ominous excitement of the unknown. My mouth was suddenly dry, and I ran my tongue across my lips tentatively, climbing to my feet.

There was no sound in this vast room save the sound of my own labored breathing. There was no sign of life about me, anywhere. The floor, the walls, the incredibly distant ceiling—all these were signs of life if you like. Signs, at any rate, of human activity, human ingenuity and construction prowess, but not of human presence.

And now I realized that the bow was still in my hand. I gaped at it foolishly, as if I'd never seen it before.

I WAITED there, for what I don't know. Waited there, while the sound of my own breathing came softly to me as if in echo thrown down from that vast white ceiling. The excited beating of my heart refused to still. Some of the shakiness had left my limbs. The tingling in my body had stopped. My temples throbbed with aching monotony.

Something instinctive, some stray fragment of knowledge, had been at the back of my mind from the instant I'd opened my eyes in this incredible room. And now I realized what it was. Everything around me—the floor, the walls, the ceiling, was constructed of precisely the same crystal substances as the mysterious bow I held in my hand!

I was perhaps a dozen yards from the wall on my right, and I moved over to it, running my hand along the almost silky surface of it. There was about it the feeling of something akin to vibrancy. It seemed somehow alive to my touch. A ridiculous idea, of course. But nevertheless I took my hand from it swiftly.

My brain, all this time, had been working with increasing speed as I tried to sort the strange series of events that had led me to this weird room under such strange circumstances.

Knowledge as to precisely where I was, of course, was lacking. As far as I knew this could be Siam or Salt Lake. A week could have passed since I was in Madeline's apartment, or a month, or an hour. I had absolutely no idea of the time element.

How I had gotten here was something else as yet unfathomable. The forces that had brought me here were also beyond my ken. I recalled the swimming blackness that had engulfed me almost at the instant that I plucked the silver bowstring.

Apparently, shortly after my loss of consciousness, a person or persons had delivered me to where I now found myself. That much seemed evident—except for the fact that the person or persons seemed nowhere about.

This had happened to Madeline. I knew that much. She had then disappeared. Undoubtedly it had happened, too, to Marelli. Loche, also, had evidently undergone the same experience. The bow, the terrifying compulsion to draw the silver bowstring, the exploding blackness—and oblivion.

I wondered, suddenly, if they, too, had been brought to this vast and incomprehensible room of crystal and white light. And then I wondered *how*

they had vanished. Perhaps by now I was also on the list of those who had "vanished." I cursed the wave of darkness that had deadened my senses and thus prevented my forming the haziest notion of how I had been brought here.

If the pattern were not to be broken —that is the pattern as I had imagined it until now—I was undoubtedly standing in a room in which Loche, and Marelli, and Madeline had stood before me.

But there was no trace of others having been here before. And the maddening, vast silence of my surroundings seemed to mock my effort to pierce their mystery.

THERE was a small door at the far end of this room, and now I started for it. For some reason of which I was unaware at the moment, I still carried the crystal bow.

My footsteps, strangely enough, made no sound in the vast hall. And yet my breathing continued to echo softly back to my ears. As I moved on doggedly toward the door, a cold sweat suddenly beaded my forehead and at the same instant I had the sensation that eyes were watching me from some invisible vantage point.

Several times I stopped, looked to the right and left and behind me. But there was still no sign of human presence. I felt those eyes more strongly after each such instance.

The door was not far away now, perhaps several hundred yards, and I found myself moving faster, as if trying to evade some unseen forces following behind me in that naked hall.

I could make out the general structural detail of the door more clearly now. It, too, was of crystal substance. It seemed to have no knobs or grasping points, but otherwise resembled a standard door in size and appearance.

The distance left to the door was now less than a hundred yards. I was wondering, of course, what lay beyond it. Wondering, when it opened quite swiftly, unexpectedly.

I stopped, my fist tightening around the bow in my right hand. A man stood outlined in the door frame. He was of medium height, with unusually wide shoulders, unusually thick arms, extraordinarily stocky legs. These physical characteristics were easily discernible, since he was attired in a tight-fitting costume of a grayish leather tunic top, and ankle-length breeches of the same leather and tightness.

He was staring at me—not hostilely, not cordially. He had gray eyes that seemed utterly devoid of any capacity for emotion. His face was round, rugged, and struck me as being a remarkable composite of all the peasant stock features of all races. There was no flicker of intelligence in the muscles of that face. It was neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

He had paused there momentarily in the doorway, staring at me. Yet I swear there was not even a trace of appraisal in that stare. There was nothing in his look that could be classified as human or unhuman. Yet, physically, this person was undoubtedly human. And now he started toward me.

I had been frozen, rooted by the shock of his sudden, startling entrance. Now I found voice.

"Who are you?" I demanded shakily. "Who are you, and what is this place?"

THE man in the grayish leather tunic continued to advance toward me. His facial muscular reaction to my words were unchanged, unblinking. He continued toward me. Instinctively I stepped back, although there seemed

to be nothing you could interpret as menace in his advance.

"What is this all about?" I demanded hoarsely. This time there was a definite crack in my voice.

The creature in gray moved closer, less than five yards away now. His eyes were still fixed on mine, unwinkingly, unemotionally. I could read nothing in those impassive features.

But there was one positive indication in his advance that belied his outward lack of emotional display. The tight breeches he wore were snug enough to

I faced the disintegrator pistol while behind me came a sound . . .

reveal the fact that his thigh muscles were bunching into readiness for swift action. I saw this the instant my eyes flicked to his legs. An old backfield trick, that leg watching. With it I'd been able to elude numerous would-be tacklers on the college gridirons in my student days. The very stance of a man advancing on you betrays his intentions.

This time I backed no further. I stood there waiting, watching on the balls of my feet, catching my timing from the rhythm of this fellow's stride.

He was four feet from me when I

dove headlong at his muscular legs, pitching the crystal bow sideward as I did so.

I felt the solid *crunch* as my right shoulder drove into his thighs. Then my feet were stabbing the smooth floor, driving hard, picking up momentum as my arms wrapped around the back of his legs. It was close to a perfect tackle, and my adversary hadn't expected it.

We spilled to the floor an instant later as I jerked his legs up from under. I was on top, and my palm had come up against his forehead, slamming his head back onto the floor, but hard, as we hit. The solid *clack* of skull hitting floor surface was grimly, swiftly satisfying. Then his legs went limp. He was out cold.

I stood up quickly, untangling myself from the inert lump of emotionless humanity that lay at my feet.

Stood up to see the man I had just knocked unconscious coming through the door at me once more!

I stepped back in amazement, then looked again at the figure lying at my feet. No—the creature coming through the door was not the same chap who lay at my feet. Not the same chap at all—merely his twin!

The same medium height, the same unusually wide shoulder, unusually thick arms, incredibly stocky legs, and the same grayish leather tunic top and breeches of the same material. The facial similarity was also identical to the fellow lying at my feet. Even to the lack of emotion stamped on the newcomer!

If two people were ever stamped from the same mold, they were the man who lay at my feet and the other who was now advancing toward me from the door!

And the second chap seemed not to notice his counterpart lying unconscious at my feet. The gaze he had fixed on me was identical to the gaze the other had directed at me when he'd first entered. No curiosity, no hostility, no friendliness—absolutely no emotional reaction of any sort.

Except the same bunching, tightening, of the thigh muscles to indicate that he possessed the same intent as his predecessor.

THIS time I didn't wait. Perhaps I'd forgotten that timing was everything. Or perhaps my easy victory over his counterpart had made me too confident. I just drove in, bent low, head down, arms swinging like sledges at this second adversary. The mistake was mine. I knew it the instant my first punch had flattened my knuckles against the solid wall of granite-like muscle that should have been his solar plexus.

And then an open-handed swipe from a hard palm against the side of my head sent the world spinning and my knees buckling. I recall that I wondered foggily why my head hadn't parted company with the rest of my body after such a tremendous wallop. And I remember, too, that I kept throwing punches into the incredible muscle-armor of this new adversary. And then there was another solid, even more terrific open-palmed swipe, thrown down this time, down on the base of my skull. A sledge couldn't have done the job more neatly. I felt the floodgates of my will open wide as my knees turned to water and refused to support me any longer. A myriad of star-dust whirled giddily around against a rich purple backdrop of utter darkness.

I felt as if were falling through a million miles of space. Falling—while an incredible number of faces, all of them exactly alike, all of them

the same as my adversary's, peered unemotionally down at me from a million miles above . . .

CHAPTER VII

Graal

THERE was an immediate sense of luxurious comfort in my every muscle when I opened my eyes again. I felt as buoyant and refreshed as a man who has slept fifteen hours with an easy conscience. Under me there was a mattress of some sort of down which I suspected to have been gathered from the wings of angels. Covering my body were silken sheets, and beneath my head a silken pillow of the same angel-down.

There was no ache in my head, no uneasy sensations in my limbs or stomach. I had the sensation of never having felt better in years. My waking had been caused by nothing of which I was immediately conscious. And now there was no foggy, fuzzy aftermath of sleep to cloud my mind. The first thing I remembered distinctly, almost instantly, on waking was my recent unsuccessful struggle with the emotionless humans in the hall of crystal.

I felt the side and back of my head in instinctive wonder. It should have been throbbing horribly. But as I said before, physically I was utterly refurbished, completely atune. And now, sitting up in my luxurious bed, I turned my attention to my new and strange surroundings.

The room in which I found myself was also crystal. This time, however, I was in much smaller quarters. Quarters not much larger than a double bedroom. The bed in which I was lying was a huge affair, a dozen feet long and some six feet wide. On the crystal that was the floor of my strange room there were scattered rugs of richly woven silk, thick and shimmering in the indirect lighting that seemed to come from the crystal walls.

There were doors at either end of my chamber. Doors similar to the one I'd seen in the great hall. There were chairs, several thick tables of a rich, dark wood I couldn't recognize, and a lounge. And spread out carefully on the lounge was a complete set of clothing.

I realized, then, that I was wearing silken pajamas. I closed my eyes for a moment and tried to find an explanation for all this. It was no use. Moments, or hours, before I had been attacked by strange men in gray tunics. Vigorously, forcefully attacked. And yet I now lay comfortably in the midst of utterly strange but exceedingly comfortable surroundings.

There was no doubt that I was still in the precincts to which the experience with the silver bowstring had taken me. But where I was, or how I had arrived here, was still an enigma. And it was while I was still groping with this baffling maze of weird circumstances, that the music began.

IT WAS faint at first, so faint that only subtly did I begin to realize its presence. Strange music, coming apparently from nowhere. Music of perfect, utterly precise arrangement. Music that was undeniably mechanically exquisite. Every note, every bar, in mechanically gem-like sequence.

I sat on the edge of my strange bed and listened, frowning. As perfect as it was, as mechanically flawless, the music was utterly devoid of emotion. Just as lacking in emotion as the faces of the two assailants in the great crystal hall.

I shuddered involuntarily. The very iciness in the measured music that filled

the room was somehow terrible.

And then while I dressed, donning the clothes that had been left for me on the lounge, the music continued. The clothes that had been left for me were of a silken material, soft, rich. There was a coat that was cut as a tunic, trousers cut almost as my own had been. All of the apparel, however, was alien, strange, different to the most minute details from garments I had seen before. But they fitted as perfectly as if they had been tailored to my measure.

By the time I had finished dressing, the music had stopped. I stood there for a moment by the lounge, debating as to what should by my next move. Strangely enough, I had the feeling of comfortable unhurried assurance that a house guest in familiar surroundings might have had. Perhaps this was due to the fact that everything seemed to have been ready for my wakening, and that the room in which I found myself seemed to have been prepared especially for me.

I moved over to the door on the right of my room. It opened easily, soundlessly, to my pressure. I stepped out into a hallway. By now I wasn't surprised to find that the walls, ceiling, and flooring of the hallway was also made of the crystal substance.

Again I had the impression that hidden eyes were watching my movements. I looked to the right and left. The hallway was less than twenty yards long, and on either end were other doors. No one was visible.

I started toward the door at the right end of the hallway. Now I felt even more certain I was being watched.

When I reached this second door I hesitated an instant before pressing my hand against the crystal panel. And in that second, a voice from the other side of the door said:

"You will please enter, Lannister."

I WAS caught off guard. My jaw fell open. My eyes widened.

"You will please enter, Lannister," the words came again from the other side of the door. The voice that spoke them was deep, rich, and yet the words seemed totally without emotion.

I caught my breath, clamped my jaws hard, and pushed against the door. And as it opened, I had a split-second photographic glimpse of the speaker and the room in which he presided.

He was a rather tall man, black-haired and ruggedly handsome. He wore a tunic similar to mine, except for the fact that it seemed to have military designations on the coat. He was standing beside a wide desk in what appeared to be a combination study and laboratory. A small room, richly carpeted in thick silk, luxuriously furnished in every detail.

The desk beside which he stood faced a huge window which extended from the ceiling and from wall to wall. It was in itself an entire wall. Strong sunshine flooded its unsectioned surface, filling the room, outlining the figure of the man who stood beside the desk. The black-haired, tunicked fellow smiled briefly at my confusion.

"Do step in, Lannister," he said in his deep rich voice. "I see that you are, ah, more or less emotionally disturbed by all that has happened to you in the hours that passed."

Mechanically, my eyes still moving from object to object in the room, I obeyed.

"I am Grael," said the man beside the desk. He still stood there motionless, as if those three words were explanation sufficient in themselves.

"Whoever you are," I answered, "perhaps you can tell me where I am and what has happened." I didn't bother to keep the hostility from my voice.

The man called Grael smiled briefly.

"That in due time," he said. "It seems that it should be sufficient that you are safe and unharmed." There was no menace in his voice, for there was no emotional register to it.

"What about the others?" I demanded. "What about Loche, and the girl, and Marelli? Are they here?"

Grael nodded.

"You will see them presently, Lannister." He paused an instant. "They, too, are safe and unharmed."

I noticed his eyes, then. Pale eyes, a light gray green. They, too, showed no emotion.

"You slept well, I trust?" Grael asked.

"Too well," I snapped. My nerves were fraying. "What is this all about? Where in the hell am I? Where is Madeline Trudeau? What did you do to all of us?"

"You are very inquisitive," Grael observed. "It is odd to see emotion displayed to such a degree. Interesting. Like browsing through an ancient document."

I wasn't getting this. I wasn't getting any of it. I didn't like it. And there was something about the person who called himself Grael that I didn't like. Something other than the fact that he seemed to be the one with the key to this bewildering situation.

Now Grael half turned, waving briefly with his hand to the huge window behind his back.

"Step over here, Lannister. Step over here and satisfy your insatiable curiosity if you must."

I FOUND myself moving over to the window. Grael had stepped from the desk to move beside me. Stupidly, I stared down at the scene revealed beneath that window.

A city lay sprawled below us. An incredible city. A city that stretched on and on, as far as my eyes could see. Vast, unbelievably modern. A metropolis of towers and turrets, and roads that were layer on layer around the spiraling structures they circled. A city of magnificent design, of endless architectural perfection.

A city made entirely of crystal!

I stood there dumbly, staring in mute fascination at the marvels that spread beneath that window. I don't know how long it was before Grael broke the silence.

"Your reactions are the same as the others displayed," he said calmly. "And I do not wonder."

"But this—" I stammered, waving my hand at the scene below us.

"Is perfection," Grael finished. "Absolute perfection. The result of centuries of toil toward just this goal."

"But this is not—" I started to protest.

"Not possible?" Grael broke in again. "It has been accomplished, but it is not possible? Not in your world, Lannister. Not in your world, of course."

"My world?" I blurted. "You—"

Grael interrupted once more.

"Your world, Lannister. *The world you left in the past.*"

The words seemed to echo and reecho in my mind. I couldn't grasp their significance. They were impossible words, unbelievable words, and meant nothing that was real, nothing that was—

"You are not in your own world any longer, Lannister," Grael's deep rich voice was speaking again. "You have been taken through time, into what for you is a thousand years in the future."

I tore my eyes from the scene below us. I wheeled to face this person who called himself Grael. I started to speak.

"You are an intelligent man, Lannis-

ter," Grael said quietly. "You are more intelligent than the mass mind of your era. The others were more intelligent also. Think, Lannister. Consider my words. Gaze below you. Remember what has happened. You have no alternative but to believe what I have told you. Use your intelligence."

I stood there with my hand pressed to my face, as if trying to hide the incredible truth from the eyes of my mind.

Sanity screamed that I deny this. Reason, coldly, irrevocably made me know that somehow this was true. A thousand years—a thousand years beyond my own time era!

Finally then, I looked up at Grael.

"Why," I said huskily, "why in God's name did you bring us here?"

GRAEL moved away from the window, took a seat behind his desk. He waved me to another chair on the opposite side of it.

"The others, Loche, Marelli, and Madeline Trudeau," he said calmly, "were brought here. I wanted them."

"The bow," I said, "that crystal bow was the instrument that—"

Grael cut in.

"That served as the vibrational impetus to hurl them from their time era into this. Yes, that is true. That was the manner in which I summoned them. You, however, are here quite by chance, by accident, Lannister."

"That doesn't made a great deal of difference now," I said quietly. "How I got here is unimportant. Why did you want Loche and Marelli and the girl?"

Grael smiled briefly. As I expected, there was no emotion in the smile. It, too, was mechanical. Yet it was ominous.

"I don't see why I should trouble myself with an answer to that," Grael said. "I am merely stressing the point that your arrival here was somewhat unforseen, Lannister. I really don't know what I'm going to do with you. If Madeline Trudeau hadn't dropped the crystal bow, you never would have found it. You would not have been hurled through time after her."

"What do you want with her?" I demanded.

"You must remember that this civilization is utterly different than your own, Lannister," Grael said, apparently inconsequentially. "My world is foreign to you. My purposes are also beyond your comprehension at the moment." He paused. "Perhaps you recall the creatures, one of whom you knocked senseless, you encountered on your arrival here?"

I nodded.

"They typify the peoples of this civilization—with the exception of myself," Grael said. "Under the direction of a few such as I, this civilization was constructed by creatures such as those you have already seen. They were bred, scientifically of course, to labor, to build, to obey."

"But—" I began.

"It was inevitable," Grael went on musingly, ignoring my interruption, "that man should one day strive to reach the ultimate in mechanical perfection. Civilization, even the civilization which you understand, grew gradually out of bestial chaos into a machine-dominated world. It was the perfection of the machine that kept man advancing. It was the very basic imperfection of man, his emotional instability, that hindered that advance. That hindrance finally became the obvious factor that stood in the way of real progress.

"Science, in the form of a small group of unusually intelligent men, finally decided to conquer that factor, to eliminate it completely. The end they

sought demanded the mechanization of man himself, the standardization of human flesh and brain power, the elimination of human emotions as they were then known."

I THOUGHT of the faces of the pair I'd encountered in the great crystal hall. If they were examples of what that standarization had ultimately led to, it had been more than successful.

"Bit by bit, this standardization began," Grael went on. "It was fought, as all progress is fought by the stupid. A very bloody war became necessary. A war that almost ravaged the entire globe. It was a war of Science against the Human Element. Naturally, the imperfect failed to survive. Science, the victor, began to rebuild when it was over. Rebuild with men that were bred but to labor, to build, and to obey. Progress became infinitely more rapid. In less than two centuries the entire world was successfully mechanized."

Grael paused a moment, to turn slightly in his chair and fix his cold, emotionless eyes on me.

"But the small group of men who ruled, the men of science, began to diminish with alarming rapidity," he continued. "You see, they could not successfully fashion themselves into perfectly mechanized units of the system. They still were capable of emotion. The factor, now eliminated from the rest of the creatures of earth, seemed to concentrate itself in the men of science. They had fashioned creatures who would labor and build and obey. Now they found themselves faced with the realization that they would have to fashion, of their own numbers, creatures who could think, and direct, and command—but who were free from emotional shackles."

I sat there, spellbound by his words, stunned by their import. This was history—as it had happened in this world, his world—as it was going to happen in my world, a world a thousand years back in the past!

"The task was greater than the men of science had imagined," Grael went on, "for this time they were dealing with themselves. And until now they had been loathe to think that they were imperfect. But their very survival in the new world they had created demanded that they adapt themselves to the necessary pattern.

"And in increasingly great numbers, the few survivors among them died in their sacrifices of themselves to this objective. But the sacrifices were necessary, and costly though the experiments were, the goal had to be achieved.

"It was achieved," Grael concluded calmly. "Achieved in the last, the ultimate attempt. I am the result of that achievement. The others are gone. I alone am left to direct, and think, and rule. The world as you see it now is my world. The world of Grael, the Ruler!"

THE silence hung heavily for an instant.

"You will not survive forever," I said.

Grael smiled mechanically.

"Forever," he declared.

"But alone," I gasped, "with nothing but this, this flawless mechanical perfection everywhere around you. With none but humans no better than machines or animals for companionship!"

"The desire for companionship," Grael reminded me, "is an emotion. I am without emotions." His deep, rich voice was scornful.

"Then why are we here?" I demanded. "Why did you take Loche and Marelli and the girl from the past into this flawless hell?"

Grael smiled emotionlessly again. He

made a bridge of his strong slim fingers and placed his hands against his chest.

"This world, mechanically perfect though it be," he declared, "is not quite as I would like it. Certain elements of cultural perfection have not yet quite been attained. I will draw from the past, in other cases as well as those of Loche, Marelli and the girl, the elements needed to mechanically perfect our culture."

"And how can they aid you in this?" I asked. "Our, their world is far behind your own. Your developments along any such lines would be centuries ahead of anything that they, or I, can conceive of."

Thre was something in the flat lustre of Grael's eyes as he answered that sent a chill down my spine.

"Quite true," he agreed. "However, I am not in need of assistance in my task. All I seek is the material with which to work!"

Grael had not described his intentions. But his inference struck home the moment he had spoken. It was ominously plain. Much too ominously plain!

CHAPTER VIII

A Hideous Purpose

MY eyes must have showed my emotions. Or perhaps my fingers tightened whitely against the arms of my chair, for Grael rose suddenly, placing his finely-molded hands atop the surface of his desk, staring coldly at me.

"And I wouldn't advise you, Lannister, to object too strenuously to any experimentation I might have in mind. You are utterly helpless in this world. Never forget it. Consider yourself fortunate to be left alive while I debate your possible worth to me!"

I started to say something, for helpless rage had suddenly engulfed me. I started to say something at the same moment that I half-rose from my chair. My intention at that instant must have been instinctive, crystallizing all the ominous dislike I had held for this creature from the first moment I'd set eyes on him. Perhaps I had intended to throttle him, perhaps just to wallop him.

But my action was never completed.

Grael's hand darted swiftly into the middle drawer of his desk. When it came out again, I was staring into the face of an utterly astounding weapon. It was a small, crystal object, shaped like a cross between a pistol and a pear. Its muzzle was as round as a half dollar.

"I wouldn't advise any foolish daring, Lannister," Grael snapped. "This antiquated weapon I hold in my hand is an object over a century old. It is called a disintegrator pistol. It is in excellent working commission. It can split your body into a thousand atoms before your eyelash could flicker."

I sat back, swallowing my impulse to mayhem.

"You could eliminate me this minute," I admitted to Grael. "What induces you not to do so?"

Grael shrugged.

"I may find you valuable, Lannister. Although you came to me quite by chance, there might be some material in your being that would be of use to me. Waste is stupidity. Until I can decide what utility you might possess for me, or a lack of it, you will be fairly certain of staying alive."

I forced a mocking shrug.

"How very thoughtful of you," I said acidly.

Grael nodded contemplatively.

"But of course," he said. "This is a world that was thoughtfully constructed. It must be preserved in the same manner."

I watched him wonderingly as he dropped the disintegrator pistol contemptuously back into his drawer.

He saw my expression and grinned in cold mockery.

"The drawing of the gun was, of course, merely a gesture. It served to keep you in bounds more readily than some of my other methods. You would be more likely to understand such a gesture, than the mere waving of my hand. The waving of my hand, incidentally, would have thrown enough force around you to crush you like a thin sheet of paper."

I THOUGHT of the feeling I had had on two occasions since my arrival at this place. The sensation of being watched. I wondered if the wave of his hand he spoke of could be an agreed signal with invisible watchers. The idea was not reassuring.

"You might have been stupid, however, had I only raised my hand," Grael went on. "It might have resulted in your being crushed to death before you realized the futility of your attack. However, a method you were likely to comprehend, a drawn pistol, held you in check excellently and preserved your life for a while also."

Grael pressed a thick button on the shiny surface of his crystal desk. A panel beneath it glowed pink, then saffron. He stared down at it, thoughtfully, intensely. I had the impression that the glowing panel at which he was staring was nothing more nor less than a device from office-to-reception-room that is commonly used in present day business establishments. But I had the additional impression that if he were conversing, he was doing it mentally.

Finally Grael snapped off the switch and looked back up at me.

"In a moment you will be privileged to see the first of your number. I have already begun my experiments on the composer, Loche."

I had no time to say anything to this, for in the next instant, as if on a signal, the door to the room opened and Fredrick Loche, dazed, wild-eyed, and supported on either side by two of Grael's gray-tunicked, identical peasants, was led in!

"Loche!" The name escaped my lips in a gasp of horror.

The old man's eyes met mine, seemed to look through me, with no flicker of recognition in their bloodshot glaze. He was wearing a tunic costume, obviously supplied by Grael, and his once trim van dyke beard and gray moustache were weeded with gray stubble. Spittle showed at the corners of his sensitive mouth. His thin frame seemed utterly racked by weariness, and his feet dragged behind his body as he was helped along.

I wheeled on Grael.

"Damn you, you lousy roach-ridden swine!" I cursed. "What have you done to the old man?"

Grael favored me with a mechanical smile.

"I told you that Loche is the first of my experiments, Lannister. He is, unfortunately, older and more feeble than I had thought at first. In draining the necessary cultural material, the, ah, creative genius, I seem to have taxed his physical stores gravely. Too bad, perhaps. If he were to live longer I could obtain more from him."

I lunged at Grael, then, a red haze covering my mind, anger screaming for release in my muscles. I was dimly aware, as I drove in toward him, that he waved his hand.

SOMETHING seemed to crush in on me from all sides in the next instant. Crush in on me and hold me motionless. It was like the pressure of tre-

mendous air force. My ears rang, my chest seared with pain. I fought madly for breath, unable to move a muscle, unable to cry out. Blackness swam before my eyes.

And then the tremendous pressure was released, and I found my knees refusing to support me as I tumbled inertly to the floor. Every muscle in my body seemed paralyzed. The pain was still in my chest, in every nerve fibre. My arms and legs ached terribly in the minute while blood returned sluggishly to them.

I was climbing to my feet, then, weakly, gaspingly, shakily. Grael, watching me intently, was still smiling in that mechanical fashion of his.

"I warned you against that, Lannister," he said quietly. "I hope that will be lesson enough."

I looked at Loche, then, held between the gray-tunicked, thick-muscled workers of Grael's creation. His head had fallen forward, his chin sagging on his chest. His eyes had closed.

Grael waved lightly toward the door. Turning, the two guards dragged Loche out of the room once more. Dully, I watched them leave. I turned to Grael.

"For the love of God," I choked. "Why don't you put him out of his misery?"

"He has not been tapped fully as yet," Grael declared. "As soon as he is, just as soon as we have his musical genius transferred into units of material actuality, electrical force rays, I will dispose of him."

Until this moment I had never been fully aware of the horrible ghastliness of Grael's scheme. I had caught the implication carried in his talk of his "experiments", of course, but not until now was I fully awakened to their frightful significance.

Loche was being treated as a root from which a dye is sapped, an ore from which a precious metal is gleaned. What Grael wanted was not mere knowledge which had been ignored in this future civilization. In some hideous fashion, the man was able to transpose mental and spiritual cultural qualities, the very fluid of a human soul, into actual material forces. Forces that could be stored as serums are stored. Forces that could be administered to his slavish peoples as serums are administered!

And Loche, when his very soul fluid had been sapped from him, would be tossed aside as a useless bit of ore, or a dried husk, is thrown off!

THE expression on my face might have amused Grael had he been capable of even such a trivial emotion.

"I see you comprehend at last, eh Lannister?" he said.

My lips tried to form words. My mouth was dry and wadded with cotton. I felt a horrible nausea deep at the pit of my stomach.

"It is odd," Grael said musingly, "that after ignoring the cultural attributes of progress in favor of the mechanical perfections as we have done for so many centuries, this civilization should at last attempt to restore certain of the lacking culturable attributes that would complete the perfection."

"Culture," I spat, "innoculated into the unthinking swine of this world of yours—you're mad!"

"You forget, Lannister, that you are a barbarian from a thousand years back into the past. You know nothing of our civilization and the things it can accomplish. However, you will be soon enough aware of the last experiment, the one now being so successfully undertaken with Loche." He paused. "The girl will be soon subjected to it."

My blood froze, and for the briefest moment my heartbeat faltered.

Grael was looking at me narrowly.

"You overestimate the place you and your companions hold in this scheme, Lannister," he said slowly. "You are but the first. It was by chance that Loche, Marelli, and the girl happened to be the first in my experiments. I might have sought others before them. There will be others after them, thousands and thousands of beings from the past, each with something desirable to be drained from them. Artists, sculptors, musicians, poets—any and all who have something I deem necessary to my scheme, will be torn from the past and brought to me in the same manner that the rest of you were."

"Damn you, Grael," I said hoarsely, unconscious of what he'd been saying. "Damn you, what can you want with the girl?"

"There will be the beauty and artistry, the tonal perfection of her voice," Grael said musingly. "Those qualities should be of inestimable value."

I found myself thinking wildly that this was all some hellish nightmare. That I would wake, cold with sweat and grateful to have it done with. This couldn't be reality. This creature, this city, this world of the future—it was all impossible, all hallucination. I would wake and lift the telephone and talk to Madeline. I woud learn that she was safe, and that it had been nothing more than a ghastly dream, a hell created by nothing more than my imagination.

But Grael was standing there before me. And the walls of the room were close enough to touch, and the silken rug beneath my feet was real.

A feeling of helpless rage flooded me, leaving me weak and shaking. Grael's voice came to me, as if from a distance.

"You are emotionally disturbed, Lannister. Emotions are bad allies. They can destroy you. That is why you will find none in this world."

I MIGHT as well have been bound and gagged. My arms were free, my legs unshackled, my will undominated, but the mysterious force which had almost crushed the life from me as I'd rebelled at the sight of Loche, was too much to buck. There was only one thing to do for the present. One attitude to maintain if I were to help Madeline. Grael put this into words for me.

"You would be wise to keep your emotions under control," he declared, moving around from behind his desk. "Marelli and the girl, Madeline, know nothing of the ordeal Loche is undergoing. If you prize the life of the girl, and I'm certain that you do, give her no indication of what lies ahead or what has happened to Loche."

Grael had started toward the door now. He paused.

"You will be my dinner guests, the girl, yourself, and Marelli, very shortly. I'd advise you to return to the room assigned you. One of my people will call you shortly. Please remember that anything you try to do would only be futile, and disastrous to the girl."

I watched Grael leave the room, my lips working in rage, my fists clenched in impotent fury. And then I fought for calm. There were certain elements which I might muster to my advantage in regard to this creature Grael. Certain very interesting elements that were only now beginning to dawn on me.

And, too, I would very soon be close to Madeline again. . . .

CHAPTER IX

Strange Music

I RETURNED to my quarters after that. There was nothing else that I could do. And when two of Grael's peasant-like guards came to get me for the "dinner party", I was conscious of

feeling very much like the sheep being fattened before the slaughter.

They took me through a series of corridors, not too complicated for me to fix them in my memory, and finally left me in a fairly large crystal room, ornately established with all the accoutrements of a banquet hall.

I was left alone there, evidently the first to arrive, and I was pacing nervously back and forth when the door at the other end of the room opened and two peasant-like guards ushered in—Madeline!

Our cries must have sounded simultaneously.

Madeline's eyes widened, her mouth opened in almost hysterically happy amazement.

"Tommy! Oh, Tommy!" she gasped.

"Madeline!"

I was across the room, and she was in my arms, and I was talking wildly, insanely, joyously, just to have her safe and still unharmed. She was answering just as swiftly. And as I talked she pressed her lips close to my ear and whispered furtively:

"Keep this pretense, Tommy. I know what's happened to Loche. I know what waits for us. I had a chance to overhear a laboratory scene a little while ago—"

And then she was talking loudly again, emotionally, and I could feel that someone Madeline could see had entered behind me. The rest of her message would have to wait until we got another chance to be alone.

I continued talking also, for several more moments, and then I took my arms away from her and turned. I faced Marelli.

His face was white, almost ghastly white. He seemed not to notice the fact that Madeline and I had been in each other's arms.

Our eyes met, locked. He ran a trembling hand through his dark wavy hair. His swarthy, handsome features were twisted in fear.

"So, Lannister. You are with us, eh?" he said huskily.

I looked at him distastefully.

"As much as I hate to admit being in the same boat as you, I guess you're right, Marelli."

Madeline touched my arm with her hand lightly. I knew it for a signal that I should say nothing of her whispered half-message to me. Marelli's next words confirmed my interpretation of the gesture.

"Where is Loche?" he asked.

I forced myself to shrug.

"I haven't any idea."

"That, that Grael told me that Loche was also here," Marelli said fearfully. "Good God, do you suppose they've—"

"They've what?" I interrupted.

Marelli shuddered, shrugged.

"This damnable situation is more than I can endure much longer. There's something up that Grael's sleeve that—"

MARELLI saw Madeline's eyes go to the door behind him, and he stopped as I too looked in that direction.

Grael had just entered. He was smiling mechanically, as I had imagined he would be.

"So very fine to see you all could accept my invitation," Grael said. His words were mocking, but there was no mockery in their inflection, or his manner. He had changed to another military tunic.

"Shall we all be seated?" he asked.

The table in the center of the room had been set for four people. He indicated his wish that Madeline sit at the center of the table, to his right. I sat at the other end, directly opposite him, and Marelli was placed on Grael's left,

just across from Madeline.

There was a heavy, pregnant silence.

Grael looked from one to the other of us, his glance lingering a little longer on Madeline.

"You have no idea how you honor me," he said after a moment. "Lannister expressed horror at the fact that my world gave me nothing that was really close to human companionship. Now, for the first time in many years, I seem to have all of it I could desire."

Again his eyes flicked around the table in mocking scrutiny of our tense faces. And again, they lingered a little longer on Madeline.

"Documentary evidence in some of the musty archives in my library indicates that the peoples of your era engaged in much conversational interchange while dining," he resumed, his words still cutting with acid mockery. "It is strange that you are so silent."

"In a civilization much older than our outdated era," I said sarcastically, "a race called the Chinese had the philosophy that the best preparations for dining were silence and meditation."

Grael smiled automatically at this. But his eyes were unsmiling as they lanced appraisingly at mine.

"I see," he declared. "Perhaps meditation might be best. I only hope that our efforts, hasty though they are, to duplicate the fare of your own lost civilization are successful. I anticipate an unusual experience in tasting your dishes. You might not find them to your liking, since I was only able to direct that they be reproduced synthetically."

Marelli suddenly burst forth.

"When will you permit me to return?" he demanded hoarsely.

Grael smiled in that now monotonous mechanical manner.

"That is difficult to say," he declared.

Marelli stood up suddenly.

"I demand that you release me!" he shouted.

Grael looked silently at him.

"Nothing holds you back. Go where you will. You are at liberty to view all of my civilization you wish," he declared.

Marelli sat down. His face was flushed beneath the pallor of his skin.

The attendants came in then. The same, uniformly constructed features as before. The same alikeness in every detail of their body, bearing, and clothing. There were four of them, carrying trays of the synthetically prepared foods of our civilization.

IN SILENCE we turned our attention to the meal. During the half hour that followed none of us spoke save Grael, who confined his words to brief comments on the dishes as they came. Oddly enough I found myself eating almost ravenously. Madeline scarcely touched her food. Marelli ate moderately.

If the fare was synthetic I would have defied the best chefs of my acquaintance to detect it from the genuine. Clearly, there seemed to be nothing in the way of horrors or imitation cuisine that this super civilization could not accomplish.

During the course of the meal, however, I kept Grael under a close and secretive scrutiny, studying his every movement, every word. My first dawning apprehension of certain elements in his character was now becoming a certainty. And additional proof of the ever increasing strength of these elements was even more chilling and purposefully demonstrated in the additional attention Grael was turning to Madeline.

Occasionally, too, I had time to observe Marelli. The swarthy tenor was still obviously frightened, still white

and uncertain in his manner. But somehow I had the feeling that Marelli was touching up his own characterization, his own fear, with a bit of broad acting. I had the definite impression that he was not as frightened as he seemed to be. There was a watchful wariness about him that came to the surface only for the briefest of seconds when he felt he was unobserved.

Madeline was keeping a stiff upper lip, and doing a beautiful job of it. Her fright and discomfort at her surroundings was nicely registered, revealing just that and nothing more. I felt certain that Grael didn't imagine she knew what had happened to Loche.

And it was during the last course that the music began. Began in the same manner that the music in my bedroom earlier had begun, coming apparently from nowhere, faintly first, then more clearly.

It was music that differed from that I had heard before in my quarters. Different in melody, that is, though not in character. It was the same icy perfection, the same flawlessly scientific combination of bars and measures and notes.

Grael seemed strangely irritated by it, and his eyes went from mine to Marelli's to Madeline's, almost challengingly.

And now, quite suddenly, I was aware of the subtle changes that were beginning to manifest themselves in Grael's personality. *They were all changes that indicated a faint but growing emotional disturbance!*

His irritation was an undershading of emotion. I realized now that this was the first occasion on which I'd seen him display even so faint an undercurrent.

I was aware, too, that all Grael's commands to those who served us at table were directed mentally, through thought power. And it was only toward the end of the dinner that minor slips, errors, began to crop up in the carrying out of these orders. On several occasions the look-alike peasants who served us hesitated, floundered, did the wrong thing at the wrong time. Clearly, Grael's thought transference commands to them were not going as he wished them.

I had a feeling that Madeline knew this, or sensed it, as well as I did. And I had a feeling that she sensed something else, something I was just becoming aware of; Grael's increasing attention to her.

Quite suddenly, then, the music in the background changed.

IT was instantly apparent that the icy flawlessness of the previous music was gone completely. The perfection of note and measure vanished, to be replaced by low, half-ragged, half-guttural rumblings of sound that soon became a theme in itself.

I didn't recognize this new music at once, for though it was totally different from the previous melodies, it had a strangeness that was almost barbarically stirring.

Swiftly, I glanced at Grael. His expression seemed unchanged. He was looking at Madeline, apparently unnoticing the veer in the tempo and the style of the music. But I had noticed something in this change of melody. Something that just struck home as I watched Grael.

This barbaric music in the background was a part of a never presented and still uncompleted symphony of Fredrick Loche!

"There is Ravel there," Loche had said of this music that now filled my ears. "There is Ravel there, and a sense of his *Bolero,* but it is too crude, too basic, too barbaric. There is no

beauty to its stirring." And so Loche, some five years before, had never finished the symphonic composition.

And yet I listened to it at this moment, recognizing it for what it was, while a sudden chill touched my spine and I wondered how, and through what method of super-civilized deviltry it was now coming to us. There was one answer, an answer I didn't care to think of. An answer that involved the helpless old man and the musical genius that was stored within him. The genius that was being drained from him.

Grael suddenly rose, then. He looked first at me, and then at Madeline. He addressed her when he spoke.

"You will return to your quarters. I wish to speak with you later."

Madeline rose reluctantly. Her eyes caught mine for an instant, sending some signal I couldn't quite interpret. Then she turned from the table. Grael moved behind her, then accompanied her to the door at the far end of the room.

After a moment the door opened, and two of Grael's twin-like guards stood there. Then Madeline stepped out of the room, the door closing behind her, while Grael wheeled to face Marelli and me.

"I have decided to delay no longer," he announced suddenly. There was a feverishness in his eyes, now. "The two of you shall follow the old man Loche!"

CHAPTER X

GRAEL'S words cracked across the room like rifle fire.

Marelli and I were on our feet almost simultaneously. But it was Marelli who answered him. The swarthy tenor's face was contorted in terrified alarm.

"No!" he cried. "No, you cannot do that to me! I can be of value to you. Take the others, as you planned, as you agreed!"

I looked at Marelli trembling there. My first reaction was mingled amazement and revulsion. His words had told me something I'd never imagined. Marelli had, in his short confinement here, wasted no time. Obviously, he had volunteered to aid Grael in his madness, even at the sacrifice of Madeline, Loche, and myself. Aid him in the hope that he might save his own hide!

My movement was quick. In three steps I was beside Marelli. One second later my left chopped up in a vicious arc at his blue stubbled chin.

"You stinking scum!" I raged. "You yellow, stinking scum!"

Marelli slid slowly to the floor, his terrified expression doing a double-take, just before his eyes closed. I wheeled back to face Grael.

Grael seemed to be enjoying the swift tableau hugely. His automatic grin was wide. There was a hard, bright, glint in his eyes. Something new was in the deep rich calibre of his voice.

"This is so amusing," he laughed. "Mortal emotion running rampant. When he revives, and when you both are securely in custody in my laboratories, ask him why he was so pleased to see Loche dying; ask him why he would not have been anxious to return to his own time world if the old man had been still alive."

Every atom of instinct in my body prompted me to drive in on Grael. But the utter futility of any such attack had already been painfully revealed to me. And the memory of that lesson was still strong enough to hold me there, hesitating in helpless fury.

Grael laughed loudly, mockingly, reading my mind.

The music that had been still in the background, Loche's music, was grow-

ing mountingly stronger, wilder. I noticed suddenly that Grael's breathing was increased in tempo.

Behind me I felt the door opening. I could sense it, and could sense, too, the pair of stolid-faced, twin-like guards who were moving up behind me.

Something made me disregard them. Something made me start for Grael instead. Something similar to a wild, red, blot of rage that blanketed my brain.

I can recall the curious expression on his face as I drove in toward him—an expression of surprise, bewilderment. I remember that his hand flashed forth briefly, as it had done on the other occasion when the pressure of invisible force had almost crushed the life from me. And then I was aware that my fists were pounding hard into his solar plexus, and that I was a snarling, raging, frothing animal lusting to kill the creature before me.

HEAVY blows were being rained on my back, and then my face, and I was slipping down into a fog that grew grayer, thicker, with every instant. There was a split second of blackness. A split second of blackness that was shattered, then, by the rude awakening of a boot kicked against the side of my skull.

The room suddenly blazed with light again, and I was blinking my eyes weakly and trying to stagger to my feet to resume the battle. But arms as strong as cables were being wrapped around me, rough paws were dragging me helplessly to my feet. And I was too weak, too sick at my stomach from that crushing kick, to resist further.

Grael's face loomed before my own. Grael's face, bruised slightly, and scratched a bit, contorted with rage. His huge hand slapped me then, as I was held by one of his guards. And then his hand slapped me twice more, and the blood ran from my gums.

The guards dragged me from the room then, and I was vaguely aware that Marelli, white and shaken, and once more conscious, was also being dragged away with me.

They took us out into the corridor, and turned right, still with their cable-strength arms wrapped fast around us like unbreakable bonds of steel. There were doors we passed, and finally another door at the far end of the corridor. This door opened automatically when we were but four feet from it.

One of Grael's laboratories was revealed inside. A large room, crystal like the rest, filled with machines and instruments and complex equipment of unimaginable variety.

They pushed us into that room. Pushed us into the hands of two other guards who looked exactly like the rest of Grael's peoples, and left. And it was Marelli's hoarse scream that directed my attention to the far corner of this laboratory.

For Fredrick Loche was in the far corner of that room. Fredrick Loche as God had never ordained any man should be. Fredrick Loche, with but his head visible, face sweat streaked, van dyke and gray mustache smeared with brown and red blood flecks. Fredrick Loche with his eyes brimming with more screaming, burning, hideous pain than I have ever seen in the eyes of the most tortured of men or animals!

And those tortured, hell raked eyes were looking mutely at us. Looking mutely, but with positive recognition, and heart rending appeal!

LOCHE was confined in some sort of a machine. A huge, intricate, devilish device that covered all his body save his head. And from the

pulsing vibrations of the hellish mechanism of that machine you somehow got an immediate and horrible insight into what was being done to the rest of his frail body.

And suddenly I was aware that in this room also were the pounding strains of savage barbaric music, Loche's music. And then I saw the guards, who had moved stupidly forward to take us in hand. And in their stolid, emotionless eyes there burned a crazy spark of hatred.

Loche's feeble cry split the air as they drove toward us.

"Look out, Tommy! They're incensed to kill, to destroy!"

And then I had time only to realize that the mouth of the guard who bore down on me was twisted in slavering rage. His arms wrapped around me in the next instant, and his weight drove me hard back against the wall, crushing the breath from me.

I was down, then, and fighting for my life!

Vaguely I recall using every trick I'd ever learned, from Queensbury to Dead End, gouging, slugging, kicking, mauling, twisting all the while to get the heavy bulk of my adversary from my chest.

I was rolling away, then, and staggering to my feet, while the guard climbed upright also, and then he was coming in on me again. Coming in on me with his head lowered, his arms wide, like a wrestling gorilla. There was the same mixture of madness and rage in his expression, the same flaming hatred.

I was breathing raggedly, and I knew that at least one of my ribs had been splintered. My strength was momentarily spent, and the brief pause I'd need to regain it wasn't going to be offered to me by my adversary.

He continued to lunge in, head down, chin out.

Instinctively, I dropped my left foot back, took a half-step forward with it, and swung my right leg up hard, sharply, accurately, in the swinging arc that had once sent punts spiraling fifty and fifty-five yards down the gridiron.

But I wasn't swinging my foot into a football this time. I was swinging it, with every last atom of strength, into the lowered head and outthrust chin of the creature who bore in on me.

I had the sickening satisfaction of feeling teeth giving 'way in his mouth, of hearing his jaw *crunch* as it shattered under the terrific impact of my kick.

And then the creature was twisting to the floor, falling in an inert lump. I never knew if I'd broken his neck. But I do know he didn't move in the rest of the time I was in that room.

I TURNED away, then, to find the other guard coming at me.

At least for an instant I thought it was the other guard—but it wasn't. It was Marelli, wielding a nasty-looking club of crystal reinforced by a sort of steel covering. He'd been luckier than I. He'd gotten his hands on a weapon before his adversary attacked. And now his adversary lay on the floor beside my own attacker, beaten to a bloody mess.

And Marelli was coming in at *me,* attacking *me!*

My mental instinct was amazement. My physical instinct, fortunately enough, had been geared to survival but moments before and was still so geared.

I sidestepped the blow he'd aimed at my skull. Sidestepped as the force of his skull-splitting swing carried him through its momentum, past me. Sidestepped and stuck out my foot.

As Marelli sprawled headlong over my outstretched leg, I stepped back in

and shoved hard with my palm against his back, sending him crashing headforemost into the wall.

I didn't give him a chance to rise. There wasn't time or reason for that. I landed on top of him seconds after he crashed into the wall. The weapon he'd tried so cunningy to bash my brains out with had skewered off to one side. I fastened one arm around his neck and dragged him to his feet. Then I held him off at arm's length and let him have a right cross on the chops.

Just as he was slithering down the wall to the floor, I got him again with a left hook. He was out, obviously good for quite a snooze, before he hit the floor.

And then I was dashing toward Fredrick Loche, aware that the music flooding the room was growing to almost deafening proportions. I was at his side then, forcing myself to choke back the anguish I felt for the old man's plight.

"Tell me," I begged swiftly, "what I must do to free you from this damned thing!"

Loche shook his head negatively, slowly, as if every effort cost him hellish torment.

"It is no use, Tommy!" he whispered hoarsely. "The rest of me is—" he shuddered, "is no longer able to live outside of this machine of Grael's."

"But—" I choked.

Loche shook his head. "No, believe me, Tommy. This is the end for me."

Again I tried to speak, again a slight shake of his head cut me off.

"Get to Madeline, quickly, Tommy. The end nears for Grael, too. His civilization will all be as furiously insane as the guards in this room who attacked you. The music, my music, is destroying them . . . all of them."

HE closed his eyes for a moment, wetting his parched lips.

"They were fools to think they had eliminated emotion," Loche whispered again. "Grael was a madman to think it possible. Emotion is the soul force of humanity. Without it there can be no human being. They didn't destroy emotion as they had thought . . . They merely subjugated it, shackled it, put it to sleep . . . Emotion remained in all of them. Remained latent, waiting for the force that would rouse it again . . . The world in which they lived would never have roused it . . . But they brought us here, peoples from a different world of time . . . Our emotions hadn't been deadened . . . We held power over them there . . . Power Grael didn't realize we would have . . . My music demonstrated that power . . . stirred their dormant emotions . . . they weren't capable of meeting it . . . and but a little started their insanity."

Loche shut his eyes and clamped his jaws hard against a swift surge of pain.

"Go to Madeline, Tommy. You must save her. Marelli, leave him. Marelli killed to steal a symphonic composition from a starving friend of his. Marelli came to me later, tried to pass off the symphony as his own. I had heard it, suspected how he had obtained it. Madeline, too, had known the friend Marelli had murdered. We had no proof, we were waiting. Leave Marelli . . . it is better that he die here."

My mind was running a wild gamut of a million thoughts. And I took my eyes from the face of the anguished old man for but an instant. When I turned back again, Fredrick Loche was dead.

But the music, *his* music, was still surging through the room. Was still flooding through this flawless city of crystal. And his own vengeance was being wrought by those wildly pulsing strains.

I left Loche, then, and the laboratory.

There was but one thought in my mind. Madeline was somewhere. And wherever that was, I had to get to her side.

There were corridors again, the same ones I remembered being dragged down not so long ago. I tried every door along those corridors. Followed every turn. Minutes crawled into what seemed to be special eternities of anguish. And the music was still growing in crescendo. While outside the babble of voices was beginning to rise ferociously. Grael's slaves, rising in wrath against the man and machines who had stolen the birthright of their souls.

And still I searched, frantically, feverishly, sobbingly.

"Madeline!" I shouted. "Madeline!'

And my voice echoed back to me through those vast crystal halls like mocking death.

AND finally there was a door through which I could hear a voice coming —Grael's voice, thundering deeply, richly, madly.

"It is my world!" I could hear him declaring wildly. "The world of Grael —Grael the Ruler! But I cannot rule alone any longer. I knew that this night, do you understand? I knew that Grael needs one to rule beside him. One who is beautiful, intelligent. You will rule beside me, eh? You will share my domination. It is the world I offer you!"

"You're mad!" a voice answered him much more softly. It was Madeline's.

Unhesitating, I hurled my weight against that closed door. It gave slightly, but remained unshattered.

The music flooded the corridor, wild, unbridled, unchecked. Chords crashing one on another in a symphony of madness.

Again I hurled my weight against the door. It was impossible, now, to hear the conversation going on in there. Once more I slammed my shoulder hard into the crystal surface of the door, and this time it swung suddenly inward, released of whatever lock had held it. I was pitched headforemost into the room by my own tremendous momentum.

I heard Madeline's shrill scream as I sprawled to my face in the center of the room.

Quickly I scrambled to my feet. Scrambled to my feet and faced Grael. We were in the same room in which I had first encountered him, the thick-carpeted, luxuriously furnished study-laboratory. Madeline stood against the wall on my right, her face bleached in terror. Grael stood behind his desk, the desk that fronted the wall-length window.

His face was contorted in a mask of fury. His black hair was disarrayed, and his ruggedly handsome features were as hard as the granite glints in his insane eyes. In his hand he held the weapon he had taken from the center drawer of that desk before. The disintegrator pistol, still looking like a cross between a crystal pear and an automatic. Its round barrel was pointed at my stomach.

"You thought you would intrude, eh Lannister?" he grated.

"Put that thing away," I said sharply. "Your world is crashing around your shoulders, Grael. It's gone mad. You've gone mad. You and your emotionally starved slaves!"

"How did you get here?" Grael demanded.

I took half a step toward him.

"Tommy!" Madeline cried.

"Stand back!" Grael snarled.

"Why don't you wave your hand, Grael?" I asked him. "Why don't you wave your hand and have those invisible force fields crush in on me?"

HIS face grew more furious. The muscles in the corner of his mouth twitched. The music, Loche's music, was still rising in madness.

"You can't any longer, Grael," I said. "You can't control this flawless civilization that way any longer, for the basis on which it was constructed, lack of human emotion, has been shattered. It's over, Grael. Your slaves are in mad revolt. Your world of crystal will soon be torn apart by the very creatures who were bred to construct it!"

Grael's fingers tightened around the strange pistol in his hand.

"Look behind you, Grael," I said. "Look down on your world of perfection, and see what is happening to it!"

Grael backed away from his desk, backed toward the window behind him.

He turned his head slightly, looking down through that huge window. His face went white in horrified amazement. He wheeled back to face me. And in that split second in which he turned his head, I drove in at him.

I could hear the weapon in his hand sounding stacatto shots. I could see the fire that blazed from the muzzle of the pistol. And then the very shock of the weapon's fire—passing as close as it did—threw me violently down.

Grael was cursing then. Cursing because he'd spent the firing power in the weapon without bringing me down.

Madeline stood less than four feet from him. She must have come up on him from the side as he fired at me. She held a weapon in her hand. A weapon I could remember only too well —the crystal bow!

There was something different about it now, however. Something that carried the menace of death. There was a silver arrow shafted in its bowstring.

Grael started to move for Madeline. Started seconds too late, for in the next instant, she released the arrow, sending the silver shaft home into his chest!

GRAEL'S gurgling scream as he sprawled back against his desk was drowned, an instant later, by a wild, furious, singing vibration. The vibration of the bowstring. It grew louder, louder, wave on wave of singing vibration flooding the room.

Madeline had dropped the bow, now, standing back, looking whitely aghast at Grael. I was on my feet, and my arms were around her.

The vibrations continued to sing in ever widening circles of sound and force around us. The floor beneath our feet was rocked, shaken, by their very intensity. The walls, the room itself, were blurring, cracking into a jumbled maze of black and white that grew blacker and blacker . . .

I was still holding Madeline in my arms when consciousness returned. Holding her in my arms and blurting her name again and again.

We were in the drawing room of Madeline's apartment. We were back in our own time strata, our own world and civilization. The madness had passed, the holocaust of horror engulfing that future world was spared us.

Loche was gone, had sacrificed his life that we might live to return. Marelli, left there in the future, might now be torn asunder by the mobs of emotionally maddened slaves before that world became shattered.

And now Madeline had opened her eyes, and they were looking into mine bewilderedly, then widely, in amazement, as she realized we were back again, and that somehow, it was over.

"Tommy," she said. "Oh, Tommy!"

Her arms were tighter around me. I brought her closer. Unspoken was our realization that the madness had passed, and that the future, our future, waited to be faced—together. . . .

The RETURN of Lancelot BIGGS

By NELSON S. BOND

I GUESS it was about 7:58 Solar Constant Time — yes, it was exactly that, because I'd just received a clearance O.Q. for 8:00 from the Sun City portmaster—when the portal of my radio turret opened and in waddled Cap Hanson, skipper of our void-mangling freighter, the *Saturn*.

The Old Man's optics were dancing like a nudist

Biggs was yelling into the speaker while Gilchrist babbled in terror

Gilchrist had no fear of the sun's heat, Then Biggs gave him a new kind of hotfoot

in a hailstorm, and he wore a grin on his lips that stretched from ear to there.

"Guess what, Sparks?" he chortled. "I got a s'prise for you! Guess who just came aboard?"

I said gloomily, "If it's anybody like that sourpuss encyclopedia-on-legs who came aboard at Luna, you can have my resignation right now, if not sooner. I've been hectored and bulldozed and criticised so much lately that I'm beginning to feel like one large apology with corpuscles."

I wasn't joking, either. You know me—Bert Donovan—the easy-goingest bug-pounder who ever loused up the ether with Morse code. I don't get mad often, and my nerves are as steady as a forger's fingers, but this newest addition to the *Saturn's* personnel had me on the verge of babbling baby-talk.

His name was Horatio Gilchrist, his rank was "Major" and his title was "efficiency expert." To summarize briefly: Major Horatio Gilchrist was a rank efficiency expert—and I *do* mean rank! He had pale, green, watery, squinting eyes and a nose like a gimlet.

Said proboscis was always in everybody else's business. He snooped and sniffed and sidled about the *Saturn* like a pup in the Petrified Forest, and he had a habit of popping out where least expected, like a fat man in tights.

He was always making suggestions. He told me how to conserve juice by pre-heating the tubes before I transmitted. He advised Cap Hanson, who has been roving the spaceways, man and boy, for more than forty years, on astrogation practices. He quoted facts, figures and statistics at Dick Todd till our acting First Mate grew as haggard as a parson at a burleyque.

"I can't stand it, Sparks!" Todd moaned to me feebly after a session with Gilchrist. "He's driving me whacky with his confounded 'efficiency'! The hell of it is half the time he's right! There *are* ways to save time, money and materials while operating the *Saturn*. We all know that. But you can't run a spaceship like an adding-machine!"

But such complaints were as futile as a bathing-suit on Mars. Major Gilchrist ranked every officer on the *Saturn*, and his "suggestions" had to be obeyed—or else!

Cap Hanson said commiseratingly, "I know, Sparks. I hate his g—I mean, *I* don't like the gentleman much, either. But, listen! This is something swell! The guy who joined us at Sun City is none other than—"

But he never finished his sentence. At that moment, the chronometer tagged 8:00, the hypos whined, the stern-jets roared, and the *Saturn* lifted gravs from Venus as smoothly as hot butter sliding off a griddle. My eyes opened wide and my mouth dittoed. There was only one pilot in space whose touch on the controls was that deft, that gentle!

"Biggs!" I cried. "Good old Lancelot Biggs!"

I TURNED and banged hell-for-leather out of my room, down the ramp, and into the control cabin, with Hanson vainly trying to lumber along in the suction of my slipstream. As I had guessed, it was my old chum and erstwhile roommate, Lance Biggs, at the studs. Beside him stood the dark-haired beauty who had been Diane Hanson, and was now Mrs. L. Biggs.

I yelled, "Lance, you knobby old son-of-a-scarecrow! Where did you come from? Where've you been? How did you two get aboard—"

Biggs—*Lieutenant* Biggs to you, upstart!—swiveled and grinned at me. Marriage might have worked wonders on the inner man, I wouldn't know about that, but it had not changed his exterior in any way, shape or form. He was still the old lean and lanky, gawky and gangling caricature of humanity I'd always known. Tow-headed and wistful of eye and blessed with a nervous, oversized Adam's-apple that bobbled up and down in his throat like an undigested billiard ball.

"Hello, Sparks," he said mildly. "We came aboard at Sun City. We've been honeymooning. But my leave is up, now, and I've reported back for duty."

I said, "And, man! am I ever glad to see you! We've been one hop-skip-and-jump from the loony-bin on this trip—and I don't mean could be! We can use somebody who has a few brains—"

Biggs looked puzzled.

"Why? What seems to be the trouble?"

"Pig-headed bureaucracy, t h a t ' s what!" puffed Hanson irately. "Take it from me, son, the Major—"

Then suddenly his gaze, slipping past me, grew wary. His eyes veiled, and his arteries stopped hardening. Without a pause he continued in a milder tone:

"—major difficulty seems to be that

we need brushin' up on the latest space practices. We're a bit rusty, you know. So the Corporation has assigned a very capable officer to— Why, there he is now! Come in, Major Gilchrist!"

And in slithered the efficiency expert, glaring like a teetotaller in a taproom. As usual, he had a nasty comment for everybody. To me he said, "Sparks, you left your battery on! A sheer waste of valuable current, sir—*waste!* Be kind enough to go aloft and attend to it instantly!" Then, to the Old Man, "And you, Captain—surely you know the Company rule against allowing women in the control cabins of spacecraft?"

Biggs, having set the studs into lockposts, slipped from the bucket-shaped pilot's chair and walked to his wife's side. No, he didn't exactly walk, either. Biggs' locomotion can scarcely be dignified by that term. It is a stiff-legged sort of galumph, like an ostrich on ice-skates. But his tone held a proper degree of uxorious dignity.

"The *lady,* Major," he said, "is my wife."

But the old freezeroo didn't chill Gilchrist at all. He just sniffed down his long, sharp nose at Biggs.

"And who," he demanded, "might *you* be?"

IT WAS Cap Hanson who answered. The skipper's voice was warm with justifiable pride. "Permit me, Major. This is my son-in-law and First Officer, Lt. Lancelot Biggs. He just reported back for active duty. I'm sure you've heard of him. He invented the V-I unit and the uranium speech-trap—"*

"Oh!" said Gilchrist frigidly, and stared at my chum like a vegetarian at a hamburger. "So *you're* Biggs? This is too bad. I had just succeeded in training Lieutenant Todd to a point of efficiency. Now I suppose I must start over again and teach *you* how to manage a spaceship!"

Imagine it! That kind of crack to Mr. Biggs, one of the brainiest spacers who ever lifted gravs! Dick Todd was a good guy, but he wasn't Biggs' equal by ten decimals! I held my breath and waited for the explosion. Cap Hanson's mottled old cheeks began to glow like a neon sign, and Diane *whooshed* like an enraged Bunsen burner. But Biggs spoke up hurriedly.

"Yes, sir!" he said. "Very good, sir! I'll be most grateful for your instructions, sir!"

That was the kind of palaver Gilchrist liked. For a moment he looked half human as a tight little smile shuddered along his lips. He said, mollified, "That's very sensible of you, Lieutenant. We may get along, after all. For a while I feared your—er—lucky accomplishments in the past might—er—make you a bit difficult. Have you plotted our homeward course?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Biggs. He lifted a sheet of paper from the chart-desk, handed it to the Major. Gilchrist studied it briefly, lifted his gimlet eyes.

"Not bad, Lieutenant. Not bad at all. A little old-fashioned, perhaps—"

That was more than I could stand. If Biggs wouldn't take his own part, I had to. I burst out, "But, Major, Biggs just graduated from the Academy two years ago! How could his astrogation be 'old-fashioned'? There's not a better plotter in space. Lance has yanked us out of more troubles—"

"Sparks!" That was Biggs, warning me with his voice and with his eyes. "Didn't the Major tell you to go turn off your batteries? You'd better run along."

* For previous adventures of the Interplanetary Corporation's whackiest wisest young officer, see copies of *Fantastic Adventures* for 1939-40.—Ed.

"O.Q.," I snarled. "I'm on my way. Come up and see me in my turret some time, Lanse—where the air is fresher!" And I beat it before Major Gilchrist caught his breath.

SO THERE it was. A couple of hours later I was sitting in my cubby-hole, still fuming over how the Holy Bonds of Matrimony had changed a once vivid and daring spaceman into a vapid and scary yes-man, when there came a knock on the door.

"If you owe me money," I growled, "come in! If vice versa, there's nobody home but us amperes!"

The door eased open, and it was Biggs. His face was sober. He said, "Sparks, can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Why don't you ask Gilchrist?" I snorted. "He gives the orders around here."

He closed the door behind him, snapped the safety.

"It's about Gilchrist I wanted to talk—"

"Then do your talking," I advised him rudely, "somewhere else. If I never hear that skunk's name again, it will be too soon."

"Don't be hasty, Sparks. He's not a bad chap. Just a trifle headstrong, maybe—"

"Some people," I scorned, "like spiders. There's no accounting for tastes. Headstrong? You could use that skull of his to split granite. And *you*—" My indignation rose as I talked—"you're as bad as he is! Feeding him the good old soft-soap till it ran out of his ears!"

"It doesn't pay," said Biggs in that peculiar, soft, schoolmarm fashion he sometimes affects, "to antagonize folks you have to get along with. Whether we like it or not, Major Gilchrist has senior authority on this ship. But we can talk about that some other time, Sparks. This is what I wanted to show you—"

And he hauled a plot-chart from his pocket, gazed at me anxiously as I scanned it.

Well, you know how plot-charts are. Nothing but one solid mess of figures, figures, figures. Trajectory, flight-velocity, loft and acceleration computations—all that junk. They're about as easy to read as the shorthand scribblings of an illiterate Choctaw. I passed it back. I said:

"Looks O.Q. to me. Why the corrugated forehead?"

"Look again, Bert," demanded Biggs. "Look carefully at those trajectory coordinates. I may be wrong, and I don't want to influence your opinion by saying anything, but—"

This time I got it. The figures joined together and formed a picture in my mind, a picture that startled me worse than a surrealist drawing. I gasped: *"Sol!"*

BIGGS nodded.

"Mm-hmm. That's what I thought, too. The course he plotted skirts the Sun. Swings past it at a distance of only ten million miles!"

I'm a lot of things—but one of the things I am *not* is unresponsive to suggestion. I broke out in a hectic sweat and started for the door.

"Oh, no!" I yelped. "Maybe *he'd* like to play pussy-wants-a-corner with the prominences, but not *me!* The nearest I want to get to any corona is to smoke one! The guy's nuts! I'm going to tell him—"

But Biggs grabbed my arm.

"It's no use, Sparks. I've already told him."

"You—you have?"

"Yes. And he said—" Biggs' larynx performed some incredible involutions —"he said he knew perfectly well what

he was doing."

"And so do I!" I howled. "He's plowing us smack-dab into Sol's gravitational clutch! Well, I don't want some! I have no ambition to become part of a sunspot!"

"No-o-o," said Biggs thoughtfully, "that's one thing we don't have to fear. Gilchrist's mathematics are O.Q. Our velocity will be great enough to overcome Sol's gravitation."

"But what are we going to do," I stormed, "about the heat? 6000° Centigrade ain't exactly what I consider a cool, refreshing climate!"

"That's the trouble. I told him we'd be boiled like beans in a pot if we passed that near Sol, but he poohpoohed my warning. Said our refrigerating system would keep us cool and comfortable." Biggs shook his head helplessly. "I don't know what to do, Sparks. After all, his word *is* law."

I moaned. "And how long," I asked, "before we begin to french-fry in our own carcasses?"

"About five days, Sparks. Five or six days from the current—" He stopped suddenly. His pale eyes glowed. His larynx began leaping up and down like a Mexican jumping bean. *"Current!"* he repeated. "But of course! *That's it!"*

" 'Scuse, please?" I demanded, puzzled.

But Biggs shook me off with an evasion.

"Not now, Sparks I can't tell you now. There's no sense in both of us getting in trouble. But I think I know a way to convince Major Gilchrist we must change our course."

SO a couple of days skidded by, as days have a habit of doing. About the middle of the second day, Hanson came up to my turret looking as confused as a stork at the Old Maids' Home. He said, "Sparks, I been hearin' funny things—"

"Your digestion?" I asked. "Or have you been dosing your asthma with that 90-proof cough-medicine again? That'll make you hear things and *see* 'em too—"

"That's enough," interrupted the Old Man coldly, "of them kind o' comments! What I been hearin' is bad. They's a rumor floatin' around that we're on a dead trajectory for Sol due to Major Gilchrist's course plottin'."

"Oh, that?" I said. "Forget it, skipper. Mr. Biggs knows all about it. He's got ideas."

"Well," said the skipper, relieved, "in that case, I guess everything's O.Q." And he waddled happily away. Which gives you some idea who's the real Master Mind on the *Saturn.*

That very same night, Diane Biggs stopped me outside the Officers' Mess.

"Sparks, have you seen Lancelot anywhere? I haven't laid eyes on him all day, and I'm worried."

"You ought to know better than to fret wrinkles into your pretty brow over that one-man quiz program," I told her. "He's O.Q. Right now he's engaged in some mysterious project of his own devising. When last seen he was swiping generator supplies from the storeroom. Don't ask me why, because maybe I know the right answer, and I don't want to have to tell."

"He—he's not going to get in any trouble, is he?"

"Well, not exactly," I chuckled. "Though things *may* be a trifle hot for a while." For I had seen the stuff Biggs had snaggled from the supply room, and I had also watched him sneaking out through the airlock to the *Saturn's* hull. I had a pretty fair idea what was going to happen, but I figured it was his pigeon, and I didn't want to upset the Bostons.

So that was all till the next day. But the next day everything happened at once.

TO BEGIN with, when I tried to make my daily contact with the transmitting station on Luna I couldn't coax so much as a squeak out of my radio apparatus. It was as lifeless as a Venusian swamp-snake on Pluto. I sweated and swore and got under the banks to find the trouble, but everything seemed to be O.Q. Wiring, rheos, ampies, all were jake. But the radio wouldn't rade. It just hissed and spluttered and murmured as feebly as a college girl in a parked car. The trouble was, I finally discovered, it wasn't getting any juice. Nary a bit!

Meanwhile, Dick Tood audioed me from the bridge. He fumed, "Sparks, for Pete's sake tell Garrity to turn down the thermoes! It's getting hot up here!"

Which sentiment I could personally double in spades. Because it was getting hot in my turret, too. My shirt was a dishrag, and my forehead was leaking like a rented rowboat.

So I called Garrity, but the Chief Engineer spoke up before I could ease a word in edgewise.

"Is thot you, Sparrrks?" he bellowed angrily. "It's aboot time ye were gettin' in tooch wi' me! Whut the de'il's the motter oop therrre? Yon contrrrolturrret is michty nigh stewin' us in oor oon grrravy! Turrn off the heat!"

Well, I'm not dumb. Not too dumb, anyway. Two plus two equals Lancelot Biggs. That's why, when Capt. Hanson and Diane wilted into my turret a few minutes later, looking like a brace of parboiled lobsters, I just grinned at them.

Hanson's eyes were haggard with despair. He wailed, "Sparks—this awful heat! You know what's causin' it? It's because we're gettin' too close to the Sun, that's what! You told me Lancelot had everything under control. Where is he?"

"If I'm not mistaken," I assured him, "he's entering now by the portcullis gate."

And I was right. Hatless, jacketless, soaked to the belt with perspiration but grinning triumphantly, entered Mr. Biggs. He mopped his forehead and said amiably. "'Lo, folks! Hot, isn't it?"

Diane ran to his side fearfully. She cried, "Lancelot, you must *do* something! Daddy says this heat means we— we're going to plunge into the Sun! You mustn't let—"

Biggs smiled serenely.

"Now, honey, don't get excited. We're in no danger. This isn't solar radiation. *I* caused this heat."

Well, that didn't surprise me. I had guessed it all along. But Diane and her papa stared at him wildly. "What?" croaked the skipper. "You done this, son? But—but why?"

"Why, simply because—" began Biggs. But he didn't finish his explanation. For there came a savage interruption from the doorway. And in an angry, spiteful voice:

"Continue, Mr. Biggs!" snarled Major Gilchrist. *"Do* continue, please! I am most eager to learn why you performed this abominable act of sabotage!"

I SAID, "Oh-oh!" and looked for a hole I could crawl into and drag in after me. Mr. Biggs' grin faded. "H-hello, Major!" he faltered weakly.

"Mister Biggs!" raged the efficiency expert. "May I ask *why* you wound a dozen coils of uninsulated wire about the *Saturn's* hull and connected the electrical helix so formed to the power generators? Don't deny it, sir! I've

been outside and seen your handiwork!"

Biggs said faintly, "Why, I—I—er—"

"You needn't lie to me, Mr. Biggs! I understand too well. You deliberately established a hysteresis field around this ship in order to create a rise in temperature—was that it? You wished to make us believe the Sun's rays responsible for the heat—isn't that so?"

It's a long worm that has no turning. Biggs finally asserted himself. He raised his quiet but determined eyes to those of the Corporation official.

"Yes, sir!" he said. "That is exactly what I did."

"And why, sir?" demanded Gilchrist venomously.

"Because, sir, a close study of the course-chart has convinced me that we are in grave peril if we continue on our present trajectory."

"What! You question my astrogation, Lieutenant?"

"Excuse me, sir, but—I do!"

Major Gilchrist's gimlet beak quivered like a saucer of gelatin; his sallow cheeks flooded with color.

"Preposterous, young man! The *Saturn* will skirt Sol at a distance of twenty million miles!"

"The correct estimate, sir," disagreed Biggs gently, "is *ten*. I fear you neglected to take into consideration the space-warp created by Sol's tremendous mass. I have prepared alternative course instructions, sir. With your permiss—"

"Silence, Lieutenant!" Gilchrist was wild with fury now. He had no ears for logic. He wouldn't have listened to a first-run performance of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, with sound effects by the original cast. "I've heard enough! You are guilty of having deliberately conspired to disturb, alarm and distress your shipmates, of having maliciously essayed an act of sabotage against your ship, and of flagrantly disobeying the commands of a senior officer.

"Your rocket, sir! You will go below instantly, and confine yourself to quarters under arrest!"

Lancelot Biggs said nothing. His larynx leaped, but without a word he stripped from his breast pocket that prized golden symbol for which all true spacemen would die, and with steady fingers surrendered it to Gilchrist. Diane stifled an impetuous little cry. Cap Hanson, his beefy face a wreath of anxiety, said, "But, Major—"

"I advise you, Captain," rasped Gilchrist viciously, "against defending Mr. Biggs' piratical actions. One thing I will not tolerate is defiance of my orders.

"Donovan—" He turned to me—"you will remove the fruits of Mr. Biggs' labors from the *Saturn's* hull. The heat which now inconveniences us will vanish when we are no longer the core of an electro-magnet. But just to make sure that no further efforts are made to beguile us into terror created by non-existent dangers, henceforth *I* will assume responsibility for all electrical stores and equipment aboard. That is all! Get to work!"

Thus ended our gay little tea-party . . .

AND of course it was just as Gilchrist had said. As soon as Biggs' fantastic maze of coils and wiring was removed from the *Saturn's* hull, the thermometer crept back to normal. But friend Fahrenheit wasn't the only low thing on the *Saturn* that evening. My spirits were *beaucoup* slumpy when I slipped around to visit Mr. Biggs after dinner.

He was pathetically glad to see me, but apprehensive on my account. "You

—you won't get in any trouble, Sparks?"

I said, "You're under arrest, but the balloon-headed little slob didn't say anything about solitary confinement—probably because he didn't think of it. Lance, what the hell are we going to do? I just ran over our figures again, and I got gooseflesh looking at them. The *Saturn's* approaching the critical spot. If we don't do something—and damn soon—to make Gilchrist change his mind—"

"I've been thinking feverishly, Sparks. You know my motto: 'Get the theory first!' I thought that by heating the ship I might frighten Gilchrist into changing course. But he caught on to my little trick."

"And we can't try it again," I fumed, "because Major Nuisance has put all the electrical equipment under lock-and-key. In another twenty-four hours this freighter is going to be a bake-oven—"

"I know," mourned Biggs. "And Diane—" He stopped suddenly. "Eh? What was that? What did you say, Sparks?"

"Nothing," I told him glumly. "I was just moaning."

"Oven!" cried Biggs. "Bake-oven! Of course! Ovens aren't all electrical. Listen—you know where the main fuel valve lies?"

"Why—why, yes. But—"

"Then get down there—quick! And shove the release lever to *Emergency Discharge* position!"

"And—and dump all those good tons of crude oil off into space?" I gasped. "Lance, you've lost your mind!"

"Don't argue with me! Do what I say! Oh, something else—are you familiar with the refrigerating system?"

"I'd better be. We're going to need it soon—"

"Go to the condensation-valve and close it. Be sure it's tight, Sparks. Smash it if you have to!"

I stared at him stupidly. It didn't make sense, but then the brilliant plots of Lancelot Biggs seldom do. I said hopefully, "You—you think it'll work, Lance?"

"It has to!" he retored grimly. "Or—but hurry!"

SO I DID what he told me. I moved the release lever of the fuel oil emergency discharge to wide open position. I shed a salty tear as I did it. It almost broke my economical heart to watch those tons upon tons of thick, black goo flood from their storage tanks out through the for'rd vent into the empty reaches of space.

Then I found the condensation-valve and jammed it as Biggs had directed. Then, not knowing what else to do, I sat down and waited.

I didn't have to wait long. Results began resulting immediately, if not more so. I suddenly discovered that once again—as earlier in the day—I was sweating. I removed my coat. That didn't help. I took off my shirt. No use. If I hadn't been dead certain that within a short time there would be visitors to my turret, I'd have jettisoned my southernmost garments, too. But having no desire to embarrass Mrs. Biggs, I stood fast. And stuck fast, too, by the way!

So things started happening. The Chief audioed from the engine room. He hollered, "Sparrrks, thot domned heat is on again. Turrn it off, or bi-gawd, sirrr—"

Well, Biggs hadn't said anything about an allegiance with the crew, but it looked like a great opportunity to stir up a mild case of mutiny. So I said placidly, "Sorry, Chief, but I can't do anything about it. Take a gander through your *perilens*. You see that big

red thing blazing out in front of us? That's what's causing the heat.'

Garrity gasped. "Ye—ye mean the Sun, Donovan?"

"We're going to pass it," I told him, "at a distance of only ten million miles. Figure it out for yourself." And I hung up.

Then Doug Enderby called from the mess-hall. I gave him a dose of the same medicine. Then Harkness. He screamed like a stuck pig, and began demanding a change of trajectory. I told him, "Don't squawk to *me* about it; tell Gilchrist. He laid the course."

And I had just blanked the screen when in raced Gilchrist himself, followed by Cap Hanson, Diane, and Dick Todd.

"All right, Sparks!" bellowed the efficiency expert, "What are you up to *now?* I'll see that you get busted out of the service for this! Rank disobedience, conspiracy to break shipboard morale, plotting with an emprisoned officer, deliberate sabotage—"

Yeah—Biggs was right! Major Horatio Gilchrist was a nice guy, in a repulsive sort of way. I glared at him.

"Just a moment, Major!" I said boldly. "If you mean this heat, you'd better hunt yourself up another victim. You know perfectly well Lt. Biggs is in durance vile. And as for *my* having done anything, why—how could I? You assumed complete control of all electrical equipment."

Gilchrist raged, "But—but this *heat!* Somebody has made the ship unbearably hot again—"

"Some*body?*" I asked him shrewdly, "or some *thing?* I guess you've forgotten, Major, that our real peril—of which Mr. Briggs warned you—is our proximity to the Sun."

"Nonsense, sir! The Sun—"

"Is getting closer," I finished, "every minute. You have undoubtedly looked at the ship's hull to make sure there are no wires or coils on it?"

Some of Major Gilchrist's cockiness had oozed out of him. He said uncertainly, "Y-yes, I did. The entire hull is thickly coated with some glutinous substance—"

OH, GOLLY! That was one thing which hadn't occurred to me. I had just sort of taken it for granted that the fuel I had dumped would have whipped away into space. Silly logic on my part, for I've run the spaceways long enough to realize that nothing ever floats away in the void; anything you chuck from a spacevessel shares your velocity and hangs right along by your side. But I made the finest dramatic act of my life; gasped, and clutched at my forehead wildly.

"The oil! Migod, the oil-tanks have burst! Captain Hanson, we're doomed!"

And the skipper, too, came through nobly. He moaned and raced to the wall thermo, whirled from it frantically.

"A hundred an' two!" he bleated, "an gettin' hotter every minute! We'll be stewed like peas in a pot!"

Gilchrist's lips turned a sickly bistre. He ran his tongue over them and faltered, "But my computations—"

"Were wrong!" I told him. "Dead wrong! Take a look at these other figures. Lancelot Biggs' figures!"

And as I thrust the sheet of paper into his fingers, I reached out and elbowed the audio button that establishes a complete circuit of every chamber aboard ship. Instantly the babel of angry, frightened, complaining voices burst upon our ears. The cries of hot and terrified men demanding help from the bridge.

"—can't stand it a moment longer," came the cry of Enderby. "Change course, Skipper!" And from the en-

gine-room the roaring blast of Chief Garrity: "Ye've no richt t' drive us t' death like this, Captain. Change coorrse, sirrr, or by the saints, there'll be *moootiny!*"

And that did it! Major Gilchrist's nerve collapsed. His self-assurance slipped from him like a robe from a strip-teaser's torso, and all of a sudden he was no longer a tough, gimlet-eyed, hard-boiled efficiency expert, but a nervous and very frightened Earth-lubber caught in the grip of forces too strong for him.

"Into the Sun!" he babbled wildly. "The *Sun?* Oh, I mustn't die like this! Do something, somebody! Captain, you must change the course. Use the other set of coordinates. I was wrong—"

That was all I waited to hear. I shoved the new set of figures into Todd's hands, shoved him toward the door.

"Get going, Dick! There's no time to waste! We—"

But before I could even finish, there came an interruption that turned my spinal column to a slow trickle of icy water. The plates beneath my feet seemed to sag momentarily, then rise and hurl themselves forward. I slipped and fell to my hands and knees—and found it hard to rise again! A dull weight fastened itself upon me. Nor was I the only person so stricken. Diane had tumbled, too, and Cap Hanson was holding onto an upright stanchion for dear life. Gilchrist lay prone on his puss, his face a mask of terror. And the audio rasped with an ominous cry from the bridge.

"Captain Hanson! Captain Hanson, sir, come quickly! We've been caught by Sol's gravs!"

WELL, it was about that time my heart began pounding the hell out of my shoelaces. Up to now I had been disgusted and sore and fretful, but not in the least worried. In spite of Gilchrist's pork-patedness, I had felt a serene confidence that before danger actually threatened Lance Biggs would find some way to wangle us out of our difficulties. But now—

But now we were in a sorry mess indeed! Caught in a gravitational grip thousands of times greater than Jupiter's; a million times more deadly. Once, from afar, I had been the unwilling but horror-fascinated witness of the fate of a ship gripped by Sol's terrific attraction. A dark mote struggling futilely against the brazen magnet that beckoned . . . a moment's brief and hopeless essay to escape . . . then a tiny, ochre flame glinting wanly . . .

Such a vision must have been flashing, also, through the mind of Major Gilchrist. For from his prostrate vantagepoint he loosed a howl of sheer panic.

"Oh, no!" he screamed. "Oh, no! No! No! No!"

How long that monotonous denial would have continued there is no way of guessing. But Cap Hanson, who despite all his faults has little use for a fool and *no* use for a coward, put an abrupt end to it. Straining against the pressure that half-immobilized us, he lurched to Gilchrist's side, bent and silenced the efficiency expert's wailing with a sense-rousing slap across the cheek.

"Stop that, you damn fool!" he roared. "The audio's open! Do you want to panic every man aboard this ship?" And as Gilchrist relapsed into whimpering silence, he swiveled to me heavily. "Sparks, there's only one chance. The velocity-intensifier. Tell Garrity—"

The velocity-intensifier, or V-I unit to give it its more common name, was

that device invented by Biggs which enables a spaceship to increase its normal cruising speed to an incredible 186,000 mps—the speed of light! I could see the Old Man's idea. Attain that velocity and we might break free of Sol's hold. I said, "Aye, sir!" and was just about to cry the necessary orders to the engine-room when:

"No!" The familiar voice of Lt. Lancelot Biggs rang through the turret. "No, Sparks! Don't do that! It is sure death! As our speed increases, so does our mass! We'll only accelerate our fall into the Sun!"

I REMEMBERED, then, that every cabin was hooked into a round-robin circuit, *via* telaudio. So though it would have been humanly impossible for Lancelot Biggs to come up to this turret now, he was as truly with us as if he stood beside us. I cried back answer.

"But what *can* we do, Mr. Biggs?"

And—most stunning surprise of all! —my words were echoed by the grovelling goon on the floor! Major Gilchrist, his voice cracked and fearful, bleated, "What can we do? You must help me, Mr. Biggs! Save me—"

Maybe I was mistaken, but I thought I could detect a ghost of a chuckle in my gawky pal's voice. He said, "Major, according to Space Practice Law No. 3, section *viii*, 'A space officer convicted of malfeasance, or confined under suspicion thereof pending trial and conviction, may not offer, suggest, or cause to be given any orders, commands or directions which may affect his ship's course or trajectory—' "

"You're free, Mr. Biggs!" screamed Gilchrist. "Free to come and go as you please! I was wrong! You're not under arrest any longer! But save me! Save me—"

This time Biggs *did* chuckle. I heard him do it. So did every man, mouse and mess-boy aboard the *Saturn*. And—

"Very well, Major," he said. "Thank you! Todd, set the ship on the new trajectory."

Todd said, "H-huh?"

Cap. Hanson said, "W-what?"

And I croaked, "J-just . . . like . . . that . . . Lance?"

Biggs' tone wobbled as if he were nodding his head.

"Sure. Just like that. Make the necessary stud adjustments, fire the rockets designated in my alternative plot chart, and shift trajectory. That's all! And, oh, yes—you might send a couple of men outside, Skipper, with disrupters. Have them clear the hull of that caked fuel oil so it will be a little cooler in here.

"Honey—" He was talking to Diane now—"I'll meet you up there in a few minutes. Wait for me!"

Major Gilchrist's eyes looked like two poached eggs. As the full meaning of Biggs' words dawned upon him, he began roaring. But angrily. And loudly.

"A trick! A dirty, low, mean, contemptible trick by a renegade officer! Mr. Biggs! Mr. Biggs, sir, I am placing you under arrest again! Remain in your quarters, sir, or—"

But Todd had already sprung to his task, I had given the orders to Garrity's crew, and Cap Hanson handled this new threat. Again he hunched over Gilchrist's struggling-to-rise form, and his voice was a whiplash of scorn.

"I wouldn't, if I was you, Major!" he warned grimly. "You seem to've forgot that a minute ago forty-odd men aboard the *Saturn* heard you beggin' Lance Biggs to save your scrawny hide. One more crack outa you between now an' the day we hit Earth, an' this whole affair will be reported to the Company, so help me Hannah!"

"And in case you think we can't *prove* it," I assured him sweetly, "it might interest you to know that I plugged in the audio-recorder five minutes ago. We've got a nice little transcription of everything you've said since you entered the turret. Would you like to hear *that* played at the trial?"

SO THAT, boys and girls, was all. Except for a tiny conclave some time later in Cap Hanson's quarters. Biggs was there, and Diane, and the skipper, and of course yours truly. We were asking, and receiving, a once-over-lightly on what to all of us save Lancelot Biggs was still a deep, dark mystery. The Old Man said.

"So we really wasn't never in no danger at all, son? We never was going to run afoul of the Sun?"

"Well, yes," said Biggs, "and no. We would not have fallen into the Sun. But we *were* in danger. Our trajectory, as plotted by Major Gilchrist, within a few short hours would have carried us to a spot where Sol's blazing heat might have crisped every soul aboard to a cinder.

"It was necessary to convince Gilchrist of our peril before it was too late to avert disaster. Heating the *Saturn* artificially seemed the best way to do this. I tried to make him think Sol was burning us up yesterday, but he got wise to my little scheme for heating the ship electrically."

"And you," I said, "got jugged. And he gathered all the electrical equipment into his own paws. But, nevertheless, you did turn the *Saturn* into a stew-kettle. How?"

Biggs grinned amiably.

"Why, you ought to know, Sparks. You helped me."

"A mule," I admitted, "helps a man plow a field, but it don't know how or why. Not that I'm a jackass, but—"

"It was very simple, really. You turned the release valve, allowing the fuel oil to discharge from its tanks onto the outer hull. The hull became coated with a thick layer of oil. Now, think hard! Oil in a vacuum, heated by an outside source—"

I got it. I groaned. That's the trouble with Lance Biggs' logic. Once you hear it explained, it always looks so easy!

I said, "A convection oven!"

"Why, yes! It's a heating principle invented by Dr. Abbot 'way back in the Twentieth Century. A large, curved reflector—in this case the hull of the *Saturn*—concentrates the Sun's rays on a layer of black oil. A container, highly evacuated, retains all the heat thus formed, raising the temperature of the 'oven' to almost any desired height." Biggs grinned. "Our problem was not the heating of the ship. That was a cinch. Our only hard job was convincing Gilchrist that we must change our course before we got *too* hot."

Cap Hanson nodded sagely.

"An' your 'space-oven' worked fine, son," he acknowledge. "But they's still one thing I don't understand. The pressure. This ship's equipped with artificial gravs an' all them things. But I distinctly *felt* the Sun's gravs grab hold of us. That's when I got the willies."

Biggs said modestly, "You can thank Sparks for that, too. He did it when he jammed the condensation valves. Made the moisture-content of the ship's atmosphere rise. The grav plates, being electrical by nature, short-circuited. Thus we were all subjected to an extreme 'gravitational attraction' which was the direct result of a capacity overload—but which under the odd circumstances every one naturally attributed to the Sun's proximity." He smiled faintly. "You might say it wasn't the

heat—it was the humidity!"

WHICH sage—if time-worn—observation was the last comment our insanely sensible First Officer would offer on the case of Major Gilchrist *vs.* The-Rest-of-Us. And since the efficiency expert withdrew into his shell and stayed there for the rest of the trip, nothing more happened to disturb the peace and tranquillity of ye goode shippe *Saturn* that voyage.

So Biggs is back! A slightly older, slightly wiser, definitely more conventional Biggs, now that he's a married man with responsibilities. And after all the messes his crack-pot ideas have got us into in the past, I guess we all ought to be glad he *has* settled down.

But—I don't know. Married or not, Biggs is Biggs. And wherever his gangling frame intrudes itself, things have a way of happening. For instance, next month the *Saturn* is taking off for Uranus on a simple, ordinary cargo trip. On the face of it, it looks like smooth sailing. But Biggs is back on the bridge. And—

Well—anybody want to make any bets?

EARTH'S NOMADS

By WILLIS FRANKE

WHILE considered the sloppiest people in the world, the Gipsy people of the world are also among the most moral. When a Gipsy is accused of a crime he is presented with an oblong block of wood which is tantamount to a court summons commanding him to appear before a Gipsy court of masked judges who may sentence the luckless defendant to have an ear or his nose cut off.

A Gipsy woman may be sentenced to walk unclad among her people while any of her associates are privileged to whip her or spit on her. Usually the shame of her exposure is poignant enough punishment; Gipsies are that modest.

Gipsies enjoy the somewhat dubious pleasure of being the world's champion beggars, liars, thieves. Water to them has only one purpose — it's something you drink with meals and scrupulously avoid on all other occasions like, for instance, taking a bath. Their national costume is rags which are never laundered.

Gipsy hospitality is of the open door variety. Anyone who comes as a friend, is welcomed with open arms. A Gipsy will never ask his guest to go. He doesn't have to. A Chicago gangster of the reckless "alky" days is mute evidence of the Gipsies' pungent hospitality. Seeking refuge from gangdom's guns or the cops, the petty crook found what he thought was a "good thing" when he hooked up with a troupe of roving gipsies. After two days of their rather odorous company, he gave himself up so he could get a good night's sleep in a "nice clean jail."

Gipsies are somewhat the human counterpart of vultures; they live best on discarded material. Strangely, if they are forced to keep clean, such as when in prison, they soon lose their good health. They will eat incredibly ancient meat, but strangely enough, horseflesh is on the *verboten* list and the Gipsy who eats horsemeat will be thrown out of the clan forever.

The average Gipsy cannot read this article. He does not believe in education.

☆ Martian

Under the Martian's control the beam lashed out and steam geysered skyward

Miniature ☆

By JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

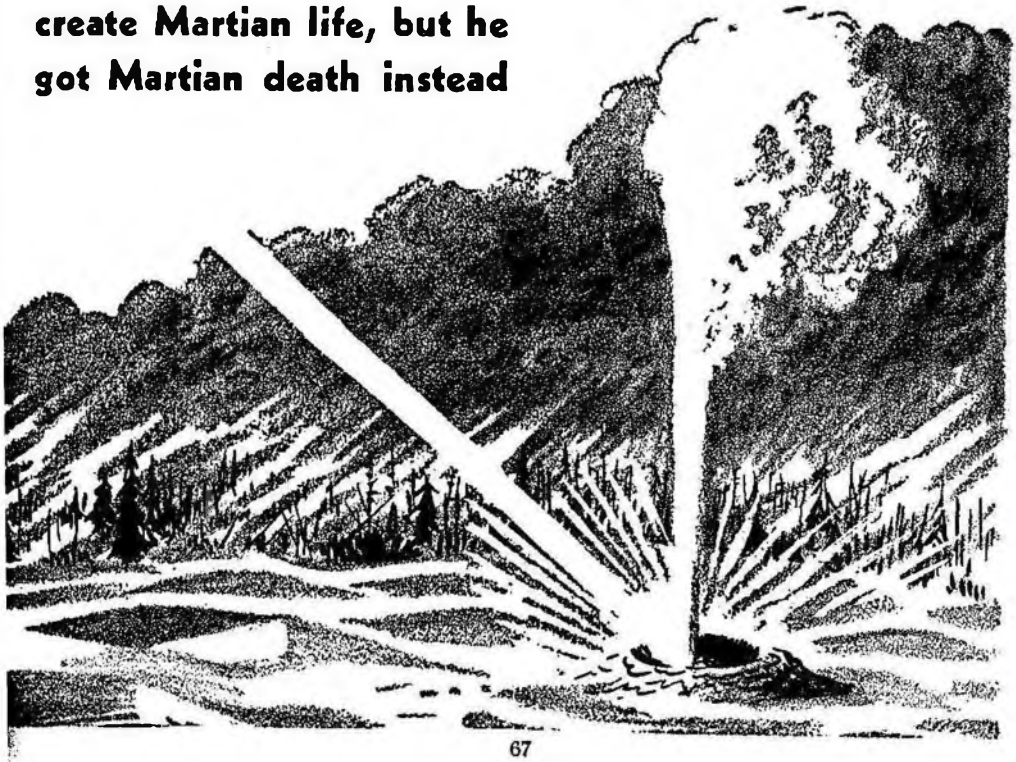
CALM, misty summer darkness enveloped the little motor boat chugging its way from the Manhattan shore toward Thorp Island.

"I don't like it," Grant Felby said for the twentieth time. "In fact I dislike it so much I can't be too thankful I came with you. A scientist who accepts your application to be his assistant on a synthetic island isn't safe—probably not even decent! The whole set up is wrong, if you ask me. . . ."

"Grant, please!" Joan Carlson's voice was weary. "Do stop complaining! I'm sure it's all right. Professor Thorp is one of the greatest living scientists of the age: the fact that he made Thorp Island proves that in itself."

"Humph!" Grant growled; then he gave up talking and concentrated on his job. Through the lowering night something dark was looming. Presently they could both dimly distinguish the hard rocks of the island which engineering had created—for a purpose so far unknown.

Professor Thorp wanted to create Martian life, but he got Martian death instead



Grant began to look around for the sole inlet to the place, fully detailed in the letter and map Thorp had sent along when accepting the girl's application.

Grant still recalled the advertisement —*An assistant, either sex, well versed in astronomy, needed. Urgent. Write in first instance to Professor Allan Thorp, care of his New York headquarters.* Joan Carlson had done so, and first grader in astronomy that she was, had got the job. And now—

"Damnable!" Grant muttered under his breath; then he revved the motor up a bit and chugged round the rocky shore. He found the inlet at last under the girl's directions, nosed to the only strip of shingly beach and made the boat secure. He helped the girl to alight and they looked curiously about them. Here, some fifty miles from the Manhattan mainland they felt rather like a couple of castaways.

The center of the island itself was more or less surrounded by a ring of dense trees standing motionless in the night air. But there was a queer sound quivering from their direction, something quite apart from the ceaseless murmur of the sea. It was rather like the humming of a beehive on a summer afternoon.

"Sounds like a powerhouse," Grant muttered; then glancing at the girl, "Well what do we do now? Where's his hide-out?"

"His laboratory's in the island center according to the map, so we go through this wood-fringe. Come on."

GRANT lifted her solitary traveling case from the boat, then with torch in hand led the way. They went through the dense wood for perhaps half a mile and came suddenly on the unexpected as the trees thinned away . . . They were ankle deep in loose red sand —*And the sand was humming!*

"What the—?" Grant stared around him, pop-eyed. "Whoever heard of musical sand before? And this color!"

He gazed at it, incredulous. It seemed impossible, but he could swear the stuff was actually moving—a great slow inward shifting that made the entire mass look as though it were forced along by a subterranean wind. That though was impossible since there wasn't the merest puff of a breeze.

Joan went forward a few paces—then she did a most extraordinary thing. She stumbled suddenly, went flying forward, turned a slow and helpless somersault and landed on her back. For a second Grant wanted to laugh; the thing was too damned silly. Then he dashed forward to help her, to perform nearly the same acrobatics and fall with feather-lightness. Dazed, but unhurt, they lay on the shifting sand and stared at each other in the starlight.

"Something's—wrong with the gravity," Joan made the statement haltingly, half disbelieving it herself. Then with intense caution she got to her feet again. Warily, Grant did likewise.

They turned, saw something their antics had prevented so far—the sight of a brightly lighted laboratory about half a mile away across the red sand.

"That must be his place," Grant nodded. "See what we can do to reach it."

It was harder than they had figured. The absurdity of the lessened gravity continued. There were other things too —a great tightness of breath as though the air had gone thin and a tingling of their exposed skin as though electricity were affecting it.

Suddenly Joan glanced up.

"Look!" she whispered.

Strangely enough the stars here, unlike those over the sea, were not hazed with summer warmth. They hung with crystal brightness. Most of them seemed to have lost their usual tremor-

ing and instead blazed with a baleful steely fire.

"Something screwy about this place," Grant admitted, a bit anxiously. "No wonder Thorp Island has always been a mystery to the outer world. Dammit, even the air's haywire!"

He tried ineffectually to take a deep breath—but it was impossible. The girl's next remark startled him.

"I should imagine it's just like being on Mars."

"Mars? Not having been there I can't say. But I know one thing, this crazy guy Thorp's got a lot to explain . . ."

THEY pressed on again toward the lighted laboratory, and after a wearying trip through the shifting, humming, ocher sand they crossed the threshold. In the doorway there seemed to be a hot mixture of drafts—but once beyond it and in the place itself the tightness went from their lungs suddenly and gravity became normal.

Breathing thankfully, shaken a little by their experience, they stared around them. The laboratory was one of the most well-equipped the girl in particular had ever seen; and she'd seen plenty during her studies. Most of its engines and instruments, however, were peculiar in design. There seemed too to be an endless variety of glowing tubes and writhing electrical streamers.

But that hum so prevalent outside was dimmed in here. Still present, yes, but less audible. Nor was it caused by the droning power plant. That had a different rhythm altogether. . . .

"Is there anybody home?" Grant cried at last, raising his voice.

At that a figure appeared suddenly from behind the banks of machinery. He was lanky, tow-haired, haggard—But it was Professor Allan Thorp. Newspapers had photographed him often enough.

"Why, Miss Carlson, of course!" He came forward with extended hand and worried frown, shook Grant's hand too as he was introduced. Then almost without a pause he went on anxiously, "I'm very much afraid I brought you on a needless journey. Something has gone tragically wrong since I accepted you as my assistant—More than even tragic perhaps!" His distress was a very real thing.

"But—but what—?" Joan looked at him bewilderedly with her dark eyes.

"You heard that hum outside? But of course you would! It is Martian life — spawning — My work! Here —come and rest in here; it will be safer."

Safer? There seemed to be nothing wrong in the laboratory: none the less they followed him into the comfortable living room adjoining. He motioned to chairs, but he did not sit down himself. He seemed to be perpetually on the edge of expecting something violent to happen.

"When I sent for you, Miss Carlson, it was to aid me in my researches into the possibilities of Martian life," he said quickly. "But since then I've proved those possibilities to the hilt—and maybe to the detriment of the world—There! Hear it?"

They heard it—a snapping sound from the laboratory. Thorp skipped to the laboratory door and peered into the place. He came back with a vaguely relieved smile.

"Nothing serious—yet. Only a steel support given way. But that is the danger! The whole place may come down!"

HE FORCED himself to be calm as he saw the curious looks the two directed at him. More quietly he went on:

"I created this island with government permission so I could work in peace in an effort to duplicate the conditions existing on Mars, and thereby gain valuable astronomical data for the days when space-travel is ushered in. This island is a sort of Martian miniature. I have studied Mars all my life and have become convinced there *is* life on it—but of an amazing type. Bacteria is about the nearest Earthly approach to it.

"The only way to find out for certain was to duplicate Martian conditions here on Earth and see what happened. You see, all planets from one particular sun must to a great extent be composed of the same basic minerals and elements of the parent star—or sun. The only difference in evolution lies in the existing conditions *upon* those basic chemicals—air, water vapor, gravity, amount of cosmic ray activity, and so on, each responsible for producing a different sort of life—but of the same *basic elements*—on the various planets of a system. Hence our life differs from Mars', Venus', or any of the others because of these external conditions; but in essence we all have the chemicals begotten of the parent sun. You understand me?"

"I do," Joan said. "It's fairly common knowledge."

Thorp nodded gratifiedly.

"I worked out to the last detail the conditions reigning on Mars—then I devised machinery over several years—electrical machinery—which would create those self-same conditions here on Earth. I found means to lower the air-pressure; electrical energies to counteract the normal gravity and make it conform to Martian standards; I even found a way by electromagnetism to thin the air over the center of the island here and so allow a greater flow of cosmic rays. In short, for half a mile round this laboratory it *is* Mars! The laboratory itself I kept normal. . . ."

He paused again, listening to that subdued hum that still obtruded over the buzz of his generators.

"Recently, after some months of continued Martian conditions, things began to happen," he resumed. "Just after I'd answered your application as a matter of fact. The very soil outside changed its color to red and became alive! It hummed incessantly with the very energy of that life. What looked like red sand came into being—but it is actually composed of quintillions of microscopic bodies, smaller even than the bacteria—the real life of Mars which exists on that world and covers the whole planet and which we have mistaken for desert!"

"But—the Martian polar caps—?" Joan asked, puzzling.

"I'm none too sure of those," Thorp admitted. "But I do extend the theory that Mars' real color is white—but at the poles of Mars electrical energy is gathered, of course, because of the planet's spin against the ether. It is possible the red life shuns the poles for that very reason. I have found already that it is sensitive to electrical energy, though not destroyed by it unfortunately. The Martian *canali* too is a puzzle, but it may represent portions of the planet where the red life cannot thrive—

"So much for Mars. It is the danger to Earth which is so immediate. I've created the stuff unwittingly by reproducing Martian conditions. Chemicals inherent in Earth and Mars have taken on the *Martian* conditions and come to life—which with normal Earth conditions could never have happened. And the stuff spawns at an incredible rate! What is more it eats or at any rate absorbs all things metallic—iron-ore deposits, oxides, even cast steel itself. It is so minute it can pass through the in-

terstices of the metal itself and consume its core—just as the white ant eats inside a beam and leaves the shell—

"So we see that if Mars ever contained anything metallic on its surface—cities maybe—the red life soon destroyed it. The danger to Earth is similar. My laboratory will go—is going—and every iron mineral on this island, in the sea, will be utterly consumed. Later . . ." Thorp stopped and gave a grim smile. "Later the stuff may find a way to link up with the Manhattan mainland, and let loose among our buildings God knows what will occur!"

THERE was an uncomfortable silence for some time after he'd stopped talking; silence save for that omnipresent hum. Then Joan spoke.

"But surely, doctor, the stuff can never get beyond this island? Isn't it a perfect safeguard?"

"Besides," Grant put in, "the conditions on Earth will kill it once it gets beyond this specially prepared island."

"Wishful thinking," Thorp sighed. "I've tested some of the stuff under Earthly conditions, but it still keeps on living and spawning, impervious to change once created—just as bacteria can stand space cold and at times even the hottest furnace. No; I started it—but I'll be damned if I can kill it! And it is so tiny it can lodge in specks of dust and be wafted over to New York. It can spread all over the world. . . .

"I tell you I'm at my wit's end!" he cried desperately, his fists clenched. "I've *got* to stop it somehow! Fool that I was to ever try such an experiment! . . ." He straightened up, self-recrimination over. "Now you know the facts. The best thing you can both do is leave immediately. I'll make out a check for a month's salary, Miss Carlson, in lieu of notice—"

"And suppose," the girl asked quietly, as he turned to go, "some of these Martian 'spores' have by now gotten onto us, or been wafted to our motor boat? We'll carry them back!"

His expression changed.

"Good God, I never thought of it!"

Joan got to her feet quickly, went over and caught his arm. She gave him a faint, brave smile.

"I'm afraid we're prisoners," she said seriously. "And you need help—not desertion. You've achieved a masterpiece of science and you're not going to face an apparent disaster alone. I'm a scientist too, and you made me your assistant. I'm going to help!" she finished decisively, taking off her coat.

"But, Joan—" Grant started to say.

"I mean it, Grant! It's all we *can* do . . ."

He nodded slowly, shrugged.

"Okay—I guess you're right. Call on me if you want."

Thorp gave them both a look of intense gratitude.

"That's fine of you," he said somberly; then he brightened. "I will get a meal prepared and we can discuss our plans. . . ."

AFTER the meal Thorp led the way into the laboratory again. The deep humming of the deadly life was still evident.

"They're in the steel—everywhere," he said grimly. "I can't guarantee a moment's safety for any of us. A machine might fly apart or the roof come down over our heads—"

Joan asked a question.

"Just why do you keep these machines maintaining Martian conditions outside when prolonged normal Earthly conditions might conceivably kill the spores?"

"I figured that perhaps the Martian conditions might tempt them to limit their activity to this island—discourage

them from trying to migrate. I've plenty of power available—underground water pressures born when this island was forced up. If I can only keep them here I might still find a way to act. That I'm getting doubtful about, though—so maybe we'd better use the machinery for other work. Incinerating for example. No harm in studying results."

"Does the stuff harm humans?" Grant asked uneasily.

"No—only metallic substances. But come—we'll convert the power to other sources."

Thorp began to rattle off instructions, most of which the trained girl easily followed. Grant too threw himself into the job, though understanding little of what he did. As fast as they could, amidst a succession of ominous creaks and cracks from tortured metal, they made the necessary conversions.

The incinerator machines themselves, used mainly for metal smelting so Thorp explained, were already assembled—three of them—and only needed the power switching from his "Martian" power plant to their own particular generators.

In an hour they were ready, pushed the incinerators to each of the three open windows.

"Let 'em rip!" Thorp cried, and slammed in the switch that gave power to all three.

Thereafter they sent withering streams of fire into the red, heaving sand outside. Lines of charred incandescence plowed their way through the mass—but it reformed immediately the heat was shifted to another quarter. After twenty minutes of criss-crossing beams of white-heat Thorp gave a groan of despair.

"What's the use? No better than my attempts to blast them with electricity. One might as well try and set fire to the Sahara! It is pretty clear it has the same immunity to destruction as the bacteria and exists even though Martian environment has been removed. That makes it a deadly menace—"

HE TURNED with a sharp gasp of alarm as a cross-strut in the laboratory ceiling suddenly snapped with a resounding bang. A shower of metal came thumping down onto the metal floor.

"This is getting dangerous!" Grant muttered.

"Maybe we'd better get outside?"

"No, no, wait a minute!" Joan urged, thinking. "I've got an idea—not about us, but about this Martian stuff. Fire burns the stuff up—we've proved it; so how would it be if we set fire to the trees ringing the island? Make a veritable curtain of fire which would at least delay its action from beyond this area by creating a carpet of red hot ash. It would last for days—and we might think up something in that time."

"It's an idea," Thorp acknowledged. "Can but try it."

Again they switched on the incinerators, directing the blinding beams on the all-surrounding foliage. Almost immediately the summer-dry tindery branches flared up like so many torches. It spread with devastating speed, sending a leaping holocaust in a circle round the central clearing. It crept round the back of the laboratory . . . At length the night sky was livid red.

"Guess they'll see this from New York and think it's a new meteor," Grant chuckled, looking round.

"Well maybe it'll do some good," Thorp muttered, switching off. "We'll get busy with what time we've got and see if we can find a way to kill the things off completely. Let's see— Here is my tube of isolated spores—"

He moved toward the rack containing

the things, but at the same moment he gave a gasp as the floor beneath him suddenly cracked like ice with too much weight on it. He staggered, dropped to his knees in the buckled metal, his feet on the concrete foundations.

The wall of the place also fissured suddenly with ear-splitting noise, set everything quivering for a moment.

"It's no use," Thorp panted, as he was pulled free. "We dare not stop in here. The whole place is liable to give way . . . I know a spot where we can be fairly safe—at least until we collect our wits somewhat. Just a minute while I get some provisions."

THIS done, he led the way outside into the hot, smoke-filled air. Grant and the girl blundered after him across the red clearing to the one solitary spot where the twin semicircles of flaming trees had not yet united.

"Through here!" Thorp cried.

They followed him, knee-deep in the surging life, went swiftly through the unburned gap and so out onto the shingle of the island itself. The mad life of Mars had spread this far now and was spawning like red powder on the stones.

Thorp turned off the shingle at length toward the slanting rocks forming a low cliff-face. He vanished in a cave hole, Beryl and Grant right behind him.

"This should be safe enough," Thorp panted, halting in the cave's interior. "This island is full of them: they go right down into its depths of rocks . . . Even so," he went on worriedly, "I still don't see any way out of our dilemma. We're just running away. The fire will slow the stuff down—but we've still to kill it."

Joan looked round her in the torchlight; then at Thorp.

"You say there are caves below this one?"

"Surely. Some of them go right down to the water base. Why?"

"Just that I've got an idea; a rather crazy one, I guess. What if we could decoy this red stuff into the lowest caves and then trap it by melting the rocks with incinerators? It would surely die?"

"Mebbe," Thorp reflected. "To decoy it would be difficult; and it can get through the interstices of most matter. However, we might do worse than prospect."

He led the way to the back of the cave, through a wilderness of caves and passages, some natural and others artificial—but all the time clearly heading under the direct center of the island.

Then all of a sudden Thorp halted, hand raised for quiet.

"Did you hear something?" His voice was sharp.

"Such as?" Grant questioned.

"Sounded to me like a sort of groan —a queer sound— There! You hear it now?"

This time they did—a long drawn out sigh like somebody arousing from deepest slumber. All three looked at each other in uneasy wonder; then Thorp flashed his torch ahead.

They had just arrived at a point of the tunnel where it dropped a sheer fifty feet into a lower cavern. Cautiously edging his way forward Thorp looked over the rim of the tunnel floor. A gasp escaped him. Over his shoulder, Joan and Grant gave violent starts.

"HOLY cats! An animal!" Grant ejaculated. "No . . . Not an animal . . ." Thorp's voice was incredulous.

The creature they were staring at was lying prone on the rocky floor. It had long spindly legs, a bulbous wasplike body, matchstalk arms, and the queerest head they had ever seen. It was

egg-shaped, hairless, with a peculiarly pathetic elfin face below it. Obviously it was alive, though apparently injured, if its unavailing efforts to get to its feet were any guide.

"What is it?" Grant demanded finally. "Is it dangerous?"

"Unless I'm crazy," Thorp said slowly, "it's—"

"A Martian!" Joan finished for him, quietly.

"Right!" His eyes sought hers perplexedly. "We'd better take a closer look . . ."

They hurried down the rough slope into the cavern and gathered round the prone figure. He looked up at them with huge imploring eyes, deep purple in shade. Again he made that hopeless effort to get up. Finally, with Thorp's assistance, he managed it; but even then he had to cling to the wall and his thin knees visibly shook. Standing up his immense height was revealed—quite eight feet; but he was so woefully thin he looked as if he'd snap in two.

"Who—who are you?" Thorp asked breathlessly.

The creature gestured, made sounds that had not the least sense. Finally Thorp used the only method he knew to convey his meaning. On the sandy part of the floor he drew a rough Solar System, pointing to the planets. The creature became suddenly excited when the fourth world from the sun was indicated. With an effort he started talking—apparently uttering single letters; but they still made no sense.

"He's Martian anyway," Joan said. "That talk of his may be his alphabet! Give him ours and see what he makes of it. . . ."

Thorp nodded and proceeded to draw the earthly A B C in the sand. Immediately the Martian, plainly a creature of high intelligence for all his odd appearance, grasped the idea and supplied his own sign equivalent. Little by little the exchange of alphabets went on. . . .

HOURS passed; hours that slid into days and nights as they still stayed underground. The Martian was supplied with provisions, which he accepted thankfully. Only rarely did he sleep. Most of the time he spent sweating over the two alphabets, until at last he was able to write fairly legible communications—though even yet the actual spoken word and pronunciation were beyond him.

Using Thorp's notebook he penciled his first message, and the scientist, Beryl, and Grant read it eagerly. But it was a queer message for a first effort—

"I have been born on the wrong planet! Why?"

Thorp explained through laborious writing that this was Earth and that Mars was 40,000,000 miles distant. Then he wrote down the tedious details of his Martian experiment. The queer creature sat brooding for a long while afterwards, spent several more hours in polishing up his alphabet then attempted a message in detail. Taking it, Thorp read it out—

" 'As you say, every planet has the same basic chemicals as the parent sun, but environment molds the chemicals differently. You produced the Martian conditions and therefore the *two* forms of Martian life! One form exists on the surface and is destructive to basic metals—which I understand you know of already: and the other form is intelligent, like me, but below surface, where it has been for many ages, ever since the red life gained a foothold on the fast dying surface.' "

Thorp glanced at the others eagerly; went on quickly:

" 'Our scientists devised means of living underground. So you, in your ex-

periments created not only surface life, but underground like—*me*. Our metabolism is rapid—two earthly weeks at the most. But I have no idea how I was born here: it just sort of happened, obviously under the influence of the Martian conditions you imposed on the surface which filtered down here. Like all Martians, I am sexless, born purely by the action of penetrative cosmic rays upon chemicals. Cosmic rays penetrating down here formed the chemicals and I was born. . . .

" 'But on the wrong world! The air pressure — the gravity — they crush me. . . .' "

Thorp wrote a question:

"But how do you know you belong to Mars? How do you know so much about it?"

Again he read out the answer—

" 'We of Mars are bound by hereditary telepathy—a compensation perhaps for our sexless physiques and strange birth method. Not being born by reproduction we have instead a mental tie, which, wherever we may be, is never broken. That is how I know. Though born here, so far from my planet, I am constantly in contact with my own race— So very far away. . . .' "

Thorp wrote—

"Can you not travel space?" But the Martian shook his huge head. Thorp looked uncomfortably at the others.

"Guess that experiment of mine went infinitely further than I intended! I produced Martian life all right—with a vengeance. Somehow I'm damned sorry for this chap—stranded."

THE Martian handed up another note. Again Thorp read it.

" 'Have you realized the danger of the surface Martian life you have created? Our surface became unbearable through the stuff absorbing all metallic deposits; hence we moved underground. Earth can just as easily be devastated. The fire you started would help insofar that it would burn up the dust motes in which the stuff can lodge—but far more than that is demanded to destroy it. . . .' "

"But what?" Thorp demanded helplessly—then he had to write it down. The Martian gave back the reply.

"I may be able to help, understanding the substance. You have a laboratory and apparently the right equipment for my purpose. Take me to it. . . ."

But it was a slow job. The pulling grip of Earthly gravity and the greater air pressure were clearly deadly things for the lost, lonely being to fight. Ever and again on the journey out of the caves he would have to pause, gasping for breath. Then he'd nod his huge head and they'd go on again, until at last they came out onto the shingle.

The circle of threes had all gone now, but despite the days that had elapsed the fire was not entirely out. It smoked and smoldered in masses of white-hot ash. . . . It made their return to the still standing laboratory something of a hazard, but they managed it at the expense of burned shoes and feet.

To the surprise of the three—and their relief—most of the vital machinery was still unharmed; though the buzzing still went on and a lot of ceiling cross pieces had collapsed.

It was surprising to note the keen light of intelligence that came to the Martian's purple eyes as he looked around him. He spent some thirty minutes examining the apparatus; then, a plan obviously formed in his mind, he went over to one of the electrical machines and calmly snapped off four of its precious copper electrodes!

Thorp winced visibly at the onslaught on his precious machine, but there was nothing he could do about it. With Beryl and Grant he watched curi-

ously from the doorway as the Martian went outside with the four copper bars, finally staked one at each corner of the "sand" infested clearing. Then he came back and wrote one word—

"Wire."

Thorp nodded and rolled forth a drum of it from a corner of the laboratory. For this job the Martian needed assistance, but it ended in each of the copper stakes being connected X-fashion with the wire, the final end trailing back into the laboratory. The Martian snapped it to the length he required, surveyed the main generating dynamo. Finally he turned and asked in writing to be shown the incinerators. This done he wrote—

"We bore below—downwards!"

Thorp's notepad asked:

"But why? That might release some of the underground sea pressure which exists under this synthetic island. We might be flooded out!"

THE Martian's only response was to shrug; then motioning the trio he had the three incinerating machines wheeled to the doorway. Their nozzles were directed downward into the center of the red stuff, and when the power was switched on all three blinding heat beams converged on one another, blasting away the red life from that area, melting the rocks beneath, boring ever deeper—deeper.

"What in heck is he getting at?" Grant asked in a puzzled voice. "Driving the rays slantwards like that he'll hit water in no time. We—we might get a geyser bigger than Old Faithful!"

"We will," Thorp assured him grimly. "I can only hope he knows what he's doing. Somehow, I think he does. . . ."

But far from explaining himself the Martian left the incinerators to do their work and began to write steadily. He wrote for a long time, tearing leaf after leaf from the notebook. He had only just come to the end of the job when there was a titanic roar from outside. It sounded like a thousand steam safety-valves.

"He's done it!" Thorp gasped hoarsely. "Hit a water bed!"

He pointed outside to a vast column of water stabbing into the air, thickening with every moment. In a second or two it began to fall back in a shattering deluge, blotting out the smoldering remains of the forest in a haze of blinding steam. Hot wind slammed through the open doorway into the laboratory.

"This can sink the whole island," Thorp panted. "Osmosis is one of the things that keeps it up. Release the pressure like this and it may drop to the ocean bed— The idiot! The damned fool!"

But the Martian was active now. He bundled his notes together and handed them to Torp. Too worried to notice them he jammed them in his shirt pocket, eyes on the fast gathering flood. . . . The Martian jumped to the power unit and cut off the incinerators, tugged the wires free and replaced them with his single copper lead which traveled outside. The generator roared again, still powered by its underground-stream system.

Instantly vivid darts of lavender roared through the boiling waters. They bubbled, frothed, fumed with savage electrolysis, filled the air with pungent ozone.

The Martian pointed anxiously to the door.

"Out!" said his gestures.

"But—but you?" Thorp cried.

The Martian shook his bald head impatiently.

"We'd better go," Beryl said quickly. "We can just make it down to the inlet before this electrolysized flood gets

really going. It hasn't reached the left of the clearing yet. Come on!"

THEY raced outside, stumbling and falling in the red stuff as the flood rolled toward them with lavender-colored fingers. They ran desperately, here and there felt the trembling thrill of electricity surging through them. . . . Out of breath they floundered through the dead ashes of the forest, out of the shingle. The motor boat was still there. . . .

"In!" Grant panted, swinging the girl over to safety. "You next, Professor—" Then he leapt in after them and started the motor. They began to move away. . . .

And pursuing them, rolling and splashing, came that purple flood, cascading down into the sea. The very island itself was trembling now, shuddering to its depths. . . .

And suddenly the expected happened! It went down swiftly, plunging, sending rolling breakers out into the ocean which all but upset the three in the motor boat, fast though they strove to drive away from it.

Pitching and tossing, drenched in spume, they clung on—and at last the disturbance began to abate. They were safe, in the light of the newly risen moon.

"Guess this looks like the end of your experiment, Professor," Grant sighed. "You— Of course, I'd forgotten!" he broke off, as he saw Thorp fishing in his shirt pocket for the bundle of notes the Martian had handed him.

Straining his eyes in the moonlight he read aloud that weird but intelligible scrawl. . . .

" 'Have no fear. By the time you read this the menace to your world will be destroyed. As you know, Mars' surface is deficient in water. The red surface life does not like it—but it *can* exist in it if necessary. The water round your island, therefore, would serve to deter any efforts of the stuff to reach your mainland: but it would not isolate it. The fire too would help to check it. . . .

" 'But what the red life cannot survive is electrolysis in the water! We of Mars have electrolysis-channels from our polar caps. The poles themselves gather the power naturally from axial spin: this is then transmitted through the water channels which you call *canali*. The red life shuns these areas —and this is essential so that certain air valves on which our internal life depends may be untouched. These valves are all located for convenience in the channel areas.

" 'All I have done on your island is electrolyze the creatures in water, on the Martian principle. If you have received electric shock in making your escape all the better: all traces of red life will be blasted from you. The human body is seventy-eight per cent water and a good conductor of electricity. Be certain to abandon your boat before you actually touch the mainland. . . .

" 'And I? Do not worry, my friends. I was born forty million miles on the wrong side of the void. Death is inevitable from this planet's dragging pressures. Better I die being of service than live a lonely freak. Perhaps somebody, reaching Mars one day, will tell of the little thing I have done for you. . . .' "

Thorp lowered the note, stared back in the uncertain moonlight where the island had been.

"A Martian," he muttered; "but a man!"

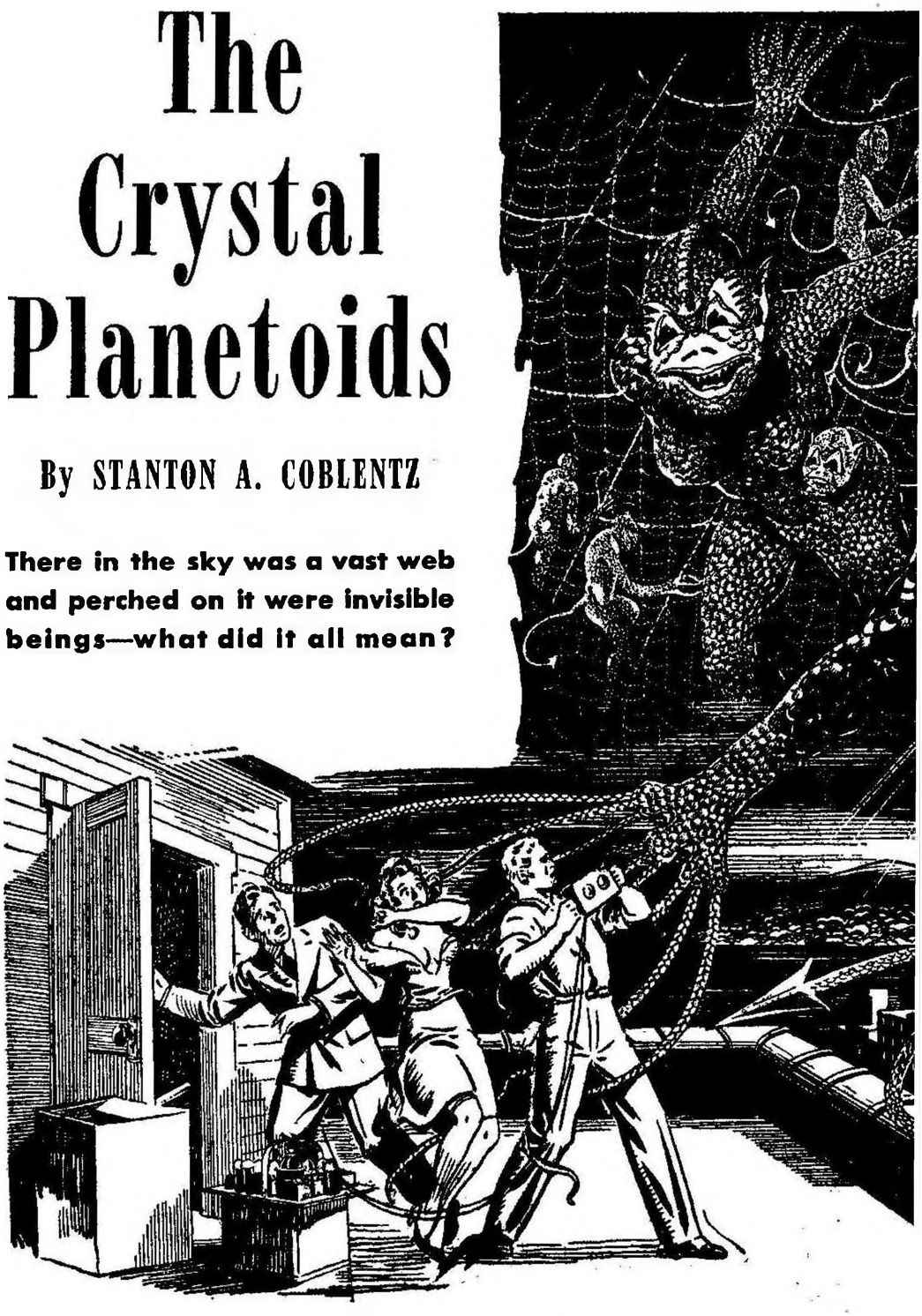
Grant and Beryl were silent. They felt they had had an object lesson in service to one's fellows. . . .

The End

The Crystal Planetoids

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

There in the sky was a vast web and perched on it were invisible beings—what did it all mean?



The girl's scream rang out as the tentacles reached down and enfolded them in steel mesh

PHILIP DUNBAR ran a lean exploratory hand through his touseled long black hair. There was a sardonic, faintly quizzical look in his dark, trimly moustached face, which acquaintances were inclined to describe as "handsome, but saturnine." His little jet-points of eyes, as he stared across at the next laboratory table, glittered enigmatically.

"Well, Ronny," he inquired, in a drawl that rasped, "found it at last?"

Ronald Gates peered up from amid a mass of lenses, batteries and wires. His frank, open face widened into a broad smile. His clear blue eyes sparkled.

"Yes, by heaven," he confessed, enthusiastically, "I think I've got that devil licked!"

Instantly Dunbar was at his side.

"Like hell you have!" he doubted.

At the same time, from the opposite end of the great laboratory, a feminine voice broke out,

"Oh, good, Ronald, I knew you'd do it!" And the tall form of Eleanor Firth, its youthful attractiveness scarcely dimmed by the stained rubber gloves and apron she was wearing, came gliding toward the men. Her big golden-brown eyes blazed with admiration as she turned them full upon Gates. "I knew it, Ronald—I knew you simply had to!"

To an onlooker, the relationship of the men and the girl would have been crystal-clear. Dunbar's manner, as he glared at Gates, was dagger-sharp; Gates had no eyes for Dunbar at all; while both men regarded the young lady with softening glances that were eloquent.

Why was it, Dunbar reflected, that they had all taken to staying in overtime here at their place of employment, the laboratory of the Merlin Research Institute? True, Gates was all worked up about that damnable invention of his! And Eleanor—wasn't it just like a woman to find an excuse to stay when she knew Gates would be there? As for himself—if he didn't want to be shoved out of the picture, he had no choice but to work on after hours!

"Yes, by glory! I think I've done the trick!" Gates was exclaiming. "If you folk'll just come with me to the roof, I'll demonstrate!"

He took up a black instrument resembling a pair of opera glasses, except that it was equipped with large red lenses, and was attached by wires to a cluster of minute batteries and radio-like tubes.

"What did you say you call the contraption?" asked Dunbar, as Gates started upstairs with his invention.

"The Infra-Red Eye."

"Why in blazes do you call it that?"

"Just wait a minute, and you'll see. You know as well as I do, Dunbar, photographs taken in infra-red light will reveal clear details through a mist. Why must the human eye be blind where the camera can see? It is all a question of securing the proper adaptation to etheric vibrations—which I have done by means of invisible rays produced by electrical action on certain iridium and osmium salts in these tubes."

DUNBAR grunted a half coherent reply, and threw open the roof-door. As they came out into the heavy mist-laden air of the late July afternoon, the humidity rolled from them visibly. There was a peculiar stagnation in the atmosphere, as though the very breath of heaven had been congealed. Featureless gray clouds hung wearily over the landscape; a dull, blank haze obscured everything beyond a few hundred yards. One might have said that the very elements had gone to sleep.

"Goodness, I do wish we could get some relief from this atrocious heat!" sighed Eleanor.

"The twenty-ninth continuous day of it, unless I've missed my count!" grumbled Dunbar, as he mopped his perspiring brow. "Doesn't it beat the devil? What's more, it's getting worse!"

"Yes, and the strangest thing of all is, it seems to affect the whole world!" returned the girl. "I just can't believe it's not something more than common weather!"

"Hate to tell you what I suspect it is!" returned Dunbar, ominously.

"Come, come, folks, what are you so cheerful about, all of a sudden?" Gates demanded, as he examined the adjustments of the wires. "Good heavens! I'm sick and tired of hearing there's something supernatural about a heat

spell, just because it happens to be unusually prolonged."

"Yes, but the other phenomena!" broke in Dunbar, his sharp eyes glinting with hostility. "The dust clouds—the checking of normal wind movements—the indefinable thickening in the atmosphere—the thunder storms of unprecedented violence—"

"Nothing has been definitely established," denied Gates. "Personally, I doubt if it's anything at all, aside from a cycle of exceptional sun-spot activity. But we're wasting our time. Ready now for the infra-red eye?"

"I'm all keyed up!" announced Eleanor, casting the young man one of her strangely kindled, animated glances.

"Here, you make the first test," he decided, thrusting the black instrument into her hands. "Just fit it to your eyes like binoculars. Turn that screw for the adjustment. Wait! I'll see to the current!"

He switched a lever, drew back a panel, and pressed a button. But, aside from a faint whirring sound, there was no apparent effect.

"Now focus the instrument!" he went on. "Point it anywhere. If you don't see through that haze as easily as a knife cuts butter, then set me down as a fraud and a liar!"

The girl screwed up her eyes. Faint wrinkles were visible on her broad, creamy white brow. A second passed in silence. Then an astonishing change overcame her coutenance.

All at once, her lips drew apart in an incredulous expression. A gasp came from between her lips. A pallor spread across her cheeks. For several seconds she remained as if glued to the instrument.

GRIMACING wrily, she snapped herself away from the eye-piece with a horrified

"Ugh!" Her eyes bulged. Her whole form was trembling.

"I—I—I guess I'm seeing things!" she explained, lamely.

Then, observing how strangely Dunbar was staring at her, she thrust the instrument at him.

"Here, you—you just look for yourself!"

Dunbar took up the apparatus, and peered through it steadily for perhaps half a minute. But he too, when he put it down, was visibly paler.

"God! Am I crazy?" he grunted. "Here, Ronny, better have a peep yourself—"

But Gates had already snatched up the instrument. And he too gasped as he adjusted the lenses. For he saw nothing that he had anticipated.

The only purpose of the Infra-Red Eye, as he himself had declared, had been to penetrate a haze. But how startlingly the results had exceeded expectations!

Spread far above the earth's surface, in the form of colossal cobwebs, were long tenuous strands, woven in a web many layers deep. The threads, colorless and almost transparent, were thin as though composed of some silken fabric; but were enormously long, and stretched in great curves from horizon to zenith. Over the entire firmament they seemed to be bent and twisted by the tens of thousands, forming intricate geometric patterns, and uncannily giving the impression of enclosing the earth in a great cage. Wavering slightly in the faint breezes of the upper spaces, they covered every section of the visible heavens, even spreading their dim crisscrossing bars across the moon.

As if this discovery in itself was not ghastly enough, a still more terrible sight presented itself. Scores of beings, vaguely human-shaped and each with

many limbs dangling octopus-like, swung agilely along the gigantic webs. Of prodigious size—seemingly not less than fifteen or twenty feet tall—the creatures were of a watery pallor that made only the bare outlines of their forms visible. Each, in the middle of an egg-shaped head, displayed two oddly three-cornered eyes that glowed with dull red flames; each possessed six or eight many-fingered hands with which it was adding new segments to the monstrous web.

With a groan, Gates put down the instrument; and, wiping his streaming brow, sagged against a wall for support. But the horror in his eyes matched that in the faces of his companions as the three stared at one another in open-mouthed amazement.

CHAPTER II

The Terror Strikes

IT WAS as Dunbar had remarked. For nearly a month, unexampled meteorological disturbances had been occurring throughout the earth. Not only in the northern hemisphere had a record heat blanketed every land; in regions far below the Equator, the accustomed mid-winter chill had disappeared; indeed, an almost tropical calm had been reported as far south as Cape Horn. Everywhere on the earth's surface, normal wind currents had been retarded or halted; everywhere dust and mist had accumulated; everywhere —even in the usually thunderless coastal regions of California—electrical storms of unparalleled violence had been of almost daily occurrence. But scientists, having no plausible explanation, had for the most part looked on in mute bewilderment.

There were, however, some who professed to believe that the shattered remnants of a comet had entered the earth's atmosphere; and supported their theory by pointing out that quantities of some gaseous foreign substance, which as yet they had been unable to analyze, had been detected in the stratosphere; while scores of high-flying airplanes had recently been slowed down or wrecked by unexplained impediments.

Few persons as yet saw any connection between the extraordinary weather and the reports of astronomers that dozens of minute bodies had been detected through telescopes, revolving as satellites about the earth just beyond its atmospheric limits. For lack of a better theory, it was assumed that they were asteroids or "minor planets" which had ventured too close to the earth and had been caught by its gravitational power; although no one could say why so many of them should have been discovered almost simultaneously. Besides, it was hard to account for the peculiar glassy appearance of these so-called Crystal Planetoids—an appearance which did not at all indicate the nickel or iron composition that might have been expected.

NOT all these facts were in the minds of the three observers on the roof as they made their disconcerting discovery. But there were certain things which they did realize clearly enough.

"By glory," exclaimed Gates, his big eyes as wide with surprise as though he had seen the dead. "By glory! I just can't believe those great spidery devils are real—"

"Real or not, I—I've got a feeling we shouldn't stay here," Eleanor muttered, her face still white, as she started toward the door. "I—I—something tells me it isn't safe!"

"What in tarnation do you think can happen to us here more than down be-

low?" demanded Gates. And then, with a shrug, "I'm going to take another peep through that glass!"

"Sure, go ahead! Might as well all wait, and die together!" Dunbar growled. "D'ye know, I've got an idea Eleanor's right. If we've a spark of sense left in our hides—"

Gates cast him a scornful glance, noting what an abject figure he seemed to be, as, with terror convulsing his lean, moustached face, he went slouching away.

"Hope I'll fall dead before I get so soft!" reflected the inventor.

Yet, despite himself, his pulses were throbbing as he returned to the Infra-Red Ray and observed the ominous, ruddy glow that, within the last minute, had come across the heavens. Was not the atmosphere thicker, hotter, heavier than ever? Why did it seem to bear down on him like a stony weight? Why within him that impulse which he sternly repressed—that impulse to race for shelter?

For a few seconds, after he had readjusted the instrument, he saw only what he had observed before: the prodigious spidery webs, with the huge octopus-limbed creatures swinging across them.

But almost immediately he made another observation. And, as he did so, a cry came to his lips. It was a cry of horror, issuing from some vast instinctive depth—a cry such as one might utter if one saw a man-eating tiger springing toward one with wide-open jaws. "For God's sake! Quick! Run —for your lives!"

Even as he uttered this plea, Gates dropped the instrument and started away. Dunbar was already in the doorway, into which he was disappearing with the violence of panic; while just behind him Eleanor was scampering like a frightened wild thing.

But they were just a second too late. There came a rushing as of a great wind. There came a moment as of immense shadows, sweeping down with lightning velocity. There came a glimpse of tenuous shapes in rapid motion, a little like the spokes of a furiously turning wheel. At the same time, in a nightmarish, unbelievable fashion, Gates saw Dunbar and Eleanor arrested in mid-flight. Something vague and gray, which looked like a gigantic claw, seemed to be woven about them both. But it all happened too quickly for him to be sure. In the same instant, he beheld them both jerked into air; then whirled skyward at rocket speed, while their cries rang in his ears.

At the same instant also, as he stared at his companions, stunned and gasping, he felt something soft but powerful seizing him about the middle—something wriggling, and snake-like, and icy chill of touch. He was never to know whether he screamed in the extremity of his terror; all that he was aware was that there came a mighty jerk, and that, helpless as a hare in an eagle's talons, he rose into air with a speed that almost beat out his breath; and saw the roofs of the city fading beneath him amid the reddish haze.

FOR several minutes, beneath the clubbing rapidity of the flight, the captive's senses deserted him. And when, feeling dazed and drugged, he revived, it was to find himself amid a universe of fog in which the earth had receded from sight. He had, however, the distinct sensation of still rising—rising at tremendous speed. And he noticed—and this, to his mind, was the most incredible thing of all—that he was surrounded by an egg-shaped jelly-like transparent envelope about fifteen feet long. Not until much later did he realize that this envelope enclosed oxy-

gen enough for him to breathe, and maintained it at a temperature and pressure without which life at his great elevation would have been impossible.

He had no way of knowing how much time went by in that night-marish flight. He did, however, feel sure that many minutes had passed before at length he found himself above the mists. Blanketed in vapor, the earth rolled beneath him, shadowy and featureless; while, in a crepuscular dimness, he saw the stars glittering from the purple-gray void. But what particularly held his attention was the sight of several monstrous creatures—long and spidery, and with dangling octopus limbs—which drifted ghost-like through the vagueness just outside the egg-shaped envelope, with malevolently glowing three-cornered reddish eyes.

As he still rose, past what might have been the upper limits of the stratosphere, he saw a silvery globe sparkling above him in the moonlight. At first he thought it to be a mere speck; but its disk rapidly widened, until it appeared as large as the sun, then as great as several suns, then seemed to fill the entire heavens with its pale glassy form, which shed a tintless cold light that made Gates shudder.

Actually, the sphere was not more than a few hundred yards across; but to the bewildered victim it seemed enormous as some prodigy of nature. His confusion was only increased by the fact that he saw the stars moving rapidly past it, with a westward drift, showing that it was swinging swiftly to the east on an orbit of its on. So dazed was the captive that it took him minutes to identify it as one of the Crystal Planetoids.

By this time, they had reached the surface of the sphere, which he could see to be composed of a jelly-like substance with the appearance of milky glass. As they drew near, their speed rapidly diminished, until they came to a halt almost in contact with the great globe. Then, as if at its own volition, part of the surface billowed back, like a paper flap blown by the wind; and Gates, with the sensation of one entering a prison in a strange land, found himself drifting inside the sphere.

As suddenly as if it had evaporated, the egg-shaped envelope had disappeared, and he caught a whiff of hot, heavy, foul-smelling air, reminding him of a breeze straight from a menagerie. He coughed and gasped, and, as he did so, became aware of an unimaginably horrifying scene.

HE STOOD inside the sphere at its lowest part, and gazed up into a circular space that, to his startled senses, seemed of stupendous magnitude. Woven about this vastness at all heights and angles was an intricacy of webs; webs built in concentric circles; webs composed of long parallel cables crisscrossed by shorter cables; webs ascending as sharply as the riggings of sailing vessels; and webs spun into hammock-like floating platforms. All the strands were thinner than a man's small finger, and shimmered strangely in the many-hued fluorescence of great light-patches on the ceiling; and somehow their iridescence, their shifting rainbow hues, their purples, ambers, aqua-marines, scarlets and turquoise blues, made them seem all the stranger and more sinister.

But most sinister of all were the great beings sprinting along the webs or dangling spider-like from a thread. Now for the first time Gates saw his captors clearly; for now—as he was later to learn—they had brushed off the powder that made them virtually invisible to human eyes, and stood forth in their full grotesqueness.

Their outlines were what he had already seen: gigantic, spidery, with octopus limbs ending in many tentacle-like curling fingers. He had not known, however, that the monsters were encased in a scaly armor, which glittered with every peacock hue in the unearthly light, changing chameleon-like from ruby to emerald, and from gold and violet to bronze, jade and sulphur-yellow. He had not known that they had wide pouting greenish-gray lips, from which at times a faint smoke issued. He had not realized that they were equipped with long whips of tails, each ending in a horny dart, with which they could strike an enemy with appalling effect. He had not anticipated that they would talk with a peculiar whirr, a little like the grating of a buzz-saw; nor had he expected to see the pouches beneath their lower ribs, in which some of them, kangaroo-fashion, carried their young.

Scarcely had Gates been deposited in the Planetoid when he made still another discovery.

"Great heavens, look at Ronald!" he heard a familiar feminine voice. And, wheeling about, he found himself staring at Dunbar and Eleanor, who gaped at him not half a dozen yards away.

Both were, literally, as white as ghosts—wide-eyed as persons who have looked on unmentionable horror. Gates noticed that Dunbar's hair, usually so sleekly glossed, straggled in wild disorder; that his tie was a rag, and his coat buttons torn off as if in a struggle; while Eleanor's clothes were in rumpled disorder. Yet he noted with relief that neither captive, apparently, had been hurt.

"Thank God!" the girl explained. "You're whole and sound!"

"Even if a little mussed up," Dunbar forced out, with a wry grimace. "Good Lord! Why, his shirt is in ribbons! And his collar—"

But he was not to finish the sentence. For Gates suddenly cried out, with a sensation as if a boa constrictor had seized him about the chest. One of the monsters, its red eyes glaring balefully, had reached down and grasped him in its tentacles; and, with the manner of a master reprimanding a disobedient puppy, had begun to carry him away.

CHAPTER III

Red-Hood

STRAIGHT up and up a swinging ladder the prisoner was borne for scores of yards; while, as he gazed into the abyss and thought of the result if his captor's hold should slacken, his head reeled with vertigo.

But his terror was not for himself alone. Even as he was hurtled high in air, he glanced down and saw an octopus' arm wrapping itself about a feminine form. And fury and alarm for Eleanor's sake drowned out all self-concern. In a flash, as his persecutor wound his way through the webbed void, he relived the history of his acquaintance with Eleanor. He saw again that day, little more than a year ago, when she, fresh from college, had come to the laboratory; and recalled the great leap his heart had given, and how he had gone away thinking only of her. But a natural timidity had delayed his advances; while Dunbar, the silent, morose Dunbar, whom nobody liked, had not been so restrained. Could she not see that the man, though clever enough, was as self-centered as a porcupine? How could she have fallen for this schemer? Not that she had fallen for him absolutely! Though they had been seen together frequently, was she not always gracious to Gates? Yet the rivalry of the two men was bubbling way beneath the surface like acid.

These thoughts, which passed through Gates' mind in much less time than it takes to repeat them, were interrupted by a peculiar squeal which his captor gave out as he reached one of the hammock-like floating platforms and released the victim. Clinging to this unsteady island high in air, an imminent peril of plunging into a two-hundred-foot gulf, the prisoner was not likely to attempt escape!

But even had there been anywhere to flee, he would have been held by the magnetism of a particularly large, sinister-looking pair of crimson eyes, which glowed from a monster who appeared, to Gates' startled gaze, to be at least twenty-five feet tall. A blood-red hood, placed upon the creature's many-hued mail, set him off from all his fellows; as did the air of autocratic command which, somehow, Gates sensed rather than observed directly.

While he stood gaping at this goblin, a sharp cry to his left caught his attention; and, wheeling about, he observed Eleanor and Dunbar being deposited at his side. Both were trembling, as well they might, after their journey up the web, but he thought he saw a glint of relief in the girl's eyes, as he gestured to her.

A long, portentous silence fell as the red-hooded brute glared at his victims. Gates had the sensation of standing before a judge about to pass sentence of execution.

Then there came a throaty rumbling, followed by a buzzing as of a multitude of bees; after which, to the hearers' incredulous amazement, these words rasped forth, in grossly accented yet quite recognizable English,

"Welcome, my guests! Welcome to our web!"

THE three humans stared at one another, their lips agape. Had they all gone crazy?

The red eyes of the beast gave a wicked twinkle. Somehow, with their triangular scarlet pupils, they seemed more diabolical than ever.

"Come, come, do you not return my greeting?" buzzed the creature; while a grating noise, which may have been laughter, came from his companions.

"How—how in thunder do you come to speak English?" sputtered Gates, feeling that he was but living through a nightmare from which he would soon awaken.

Again that grating noise, like harsh laughter.

"English—pooh! It is not hard to learn. It is not as if it were an advanced language," proceeded Red-Hood. "But you earthlings, with your minor-planetary minds, may not understand. Do you want me to explain?"

"Why not?" gasped Gates. But had he not steadied himself barely in time, he might have fallen off the platform.

"Well, it is all so very simple," went on the monster. "When arriving here, we covered ourselves with the powder Amvol-Amvol, which makes us invisible, or almost so. We then roamed your planet for many days, unseen by you, observing your habits, and listening to your conversations. Not being slow-witted like earth denizens, we were able to pick up the meaning of the words, which we held in our memories —memories that register everthing, and never forget. After all, it is not for nothing that we are gifted with Saturnian intellects."

"Saturnian?" demanded Dunbar.

"Yes, that is the word you would use, is it not? We come from the planet Olar-olargulu, the ringed one."

The hearers remained silent. After all, it had been evident from the first that the strangers had not been born on earth!

"This is our first experience with the inferior globules," continued the speaker, in a voice like a growl. "We have never before spoken with any of you Nignigs, or lesser peoples. But of late centuries we of Saturn have become too numerous, even for the great size of our native planet. So we have been looking for provinces to colonize. For various reasons, we have chosen the earth. As for Mars—it is too small to bother with. Jupiter, unfortunately, is too powerfully defended by its three-footed dwarfs. And Venus is too near the sun for comfort. So we are prepared to take over the earth."

"Take over—the earth?" demanded the three humans, in one voice.

"What else? After all, are we not entitled to it, by virtue of our superior intelligence?"

HIS hearers could merely stare in bewildered silence.

"Our method, you see, is simple. We have ferried these cars—which you call the Crystal Planetoids—all the way from Saturn, and placed them in positions to whirl about the earth as satellites, enabling us to drop down upon our future domains at leisure, while weaving our clogclotlas—"

"Your what?" demanded Gates.

"Pardon me," apologized Red-Hood, while a spout of smoke came from between his thick grayish-green lips, and his tail lashed out and shot its hornet dart to within half a dozen inches of the young man's face. "Pardon me—I had forgotten myself, and used a Saturnian term. Weaving our webs, I should have said. You see, it is necessary to spin these webs thoroughly through your entire atmosphere before choking out all the planet's native life."

The speaker had made this announcement in as quiet a manner as though he had merely foretold that tomorrow's weather would be rainy.

Hence his hearers were hardly able to take in his full dread meaning. They merely gaped at him as though he were perpetrating a ghastly joke.

"What! Do you doubt me?" rattled out the monster. "Beware lest I take offense! We Saturnians never lie to our inferiors."

This assertion was punctuated by another flick of the creature's tail, whose rapier-like barb barely missed Dunbar's nose.

"But you don't mean to say you would actually exterminate us—exterminate us all—" began Eleanor; then faltered, and halted in confusion.

"Why not? Would you earth-creatures hesitate to wipe out a hive of ants? Doubtless they too have minds, and even a civilization of a sort. But what is that to you? If they got in your way, would you not crush them?"

"So we are no more to you than ants?"

"Do not flatter yourselves. Why should we be sentimentalists, and spare you nignigs unless you can serve us?"

The puff of smoke that came from between the monster's lips, as he spat out these words, was so heavy that all three humans gasped, with the stench of sulphur in their nostrils.

"As I have said," he went on, "our clogclotlas, or webs, have been woven all through your atmosphere, checking the usual wind currents, and laying down a blanket that will enclose the planet's heat, until after a time every living creature will be baked or choked to death in one vast oven. Of course, like any other great engineering project, this will take time. We cannot expect to complete the good work in less than a year or two."

In Gates' disturbed fancy, it seemed that many-colored points of light, like little demons, danced malevolently upon

the huge expanse of his captor's armor.

Yet there was just a trace of incredulity in his tone, as he demanded,

"If this is all true, why do you trouble to tell us about it? We for our part do not warn the ants we intend to trample!"

"Nor do we!" Red-Hood's words came in a snort, and his tail flicked through the air in an angry crackling. "But whether we will spare you or sting you to death remains to be seen!"

THE beast took a sudden step forward, and Gates found himself almost projected off the platform as the monster shot out at him,

"Do you not think we brought you to the Planetoid for a purpose? For a long while, have we not been looking for suitable earth-captives? No, not at first members of the common pack! We wanted prisoners who knew something of your science, rudimentary as that is. When you went to the roof down there to use your ray machine—the Infra-Red Eye, as you call it—you set up etheric vibrations that instantly attracted our attention. Your ability to produce such vibrations told us that you were the folk we were seeking. So we lost no time about capturing you."

During the moment of silence that followed, Dunbar turned toward Gates with unveiled enmity in his snapping black eyes.

"So!" he snarled. "It was your damned invention that got us into this mess!"

Gates made no reply; but an answer came from an unexpected direction.

"You should thank him, earth-man, for getting you into this mess. Because of his invention, you three may live while all other earth-creatures perish!"

"What in God's name would life on such terms be worth?" Gates demanded. But a sob to his left caught his attention; and, wheeling about, he joined Dunbar in trying to console the weeping girl.

With a contemptuous glint in his triangular eyes, Red-Hood stood looking on; but it was several minutes before he resumed,

"Life is dear to all creatures—and you will find it not worthless on our terms!"

"What are your terms?"

It was Dunbar who asked this question, while Gates felt a silent resentment against the other man leap up within him.

"They are really most reasonable," the monster announced, sliding back and forth on the web, while his scales clanked ominously. "You see, even after all we have done, we find it hard to work on earth. The air is much too thin. After we have thickened the atmosphere with a complete network, things will be different; but as yet we labor under great disadvantages. What we need are tanks of compressed air to help our breathing. Such compressed air can be supplied only by you earth-creatures, since in our haste, unfortunately, we neglected to bring our automatic condensers from Saturn. That is why we have captured you. And that is why we promise you your lives—if you will do us a little service."

Gates glared back at Red-Hood in unconcealed fury. That this creature, who was threatening to wipe out the human race, should ask for his assistance—the idea was too preposterous, too heinous for consideration! And he was glad to note, from the revulsion in Eleanor's face, that she felt no less shocked than he.

But it was in unbelief, swiftly turning to anger, that he heard Dunbar's low, even voice, inquire,

"And what little service do you want of us?"

The gray-green lips of the Saturnian opened in a hideous grin.

"I knew from the first," he rasped, "that you earth-animals would be reasonable. Our proposition is simply this: we will release you all, on condition that, on your return to earth, you prepare great containers of compressed air, according to our directions. If you do this faithfully, we will see that your lives are spared even after the extinction of all other earth-creatures."

"And if we refuse?" demanded Gates.

Red-Hood took a menacing stride forward.

"You will not refuse!" he proclaimed, again with a puff of sulphur fumes. "For, in that case, you will suffer a fate a hundred times worse than death!"

With ominous rapidity, the monster's tail whipped out once more, flashing back and forth before all three captives. And Gates, edging again toward the webbed abyss, had a momentary idea of leaping over the brink. But even as this thought came to him, he felt an ice-cold arm lashing him in a firm grip. Harsh, loud and ironic, the monster's derision grated in his ears,

"Not yet, my friend, not yet! The road of escape will be long and spiky! The road of escape will be long and spiky for all who defy the will of Saturn!"

These words were emphasized by a peal of laughter, shrill, grating, diabolical, wherein all the onlooking monsters joined in one prolonged scream.

CHAPTER IV

"Cooperate—and Live!"

"EARTH-MEN, we are not impatient! We know your minds work like rusty hinges—but what else can be expected of the minor planets? So take a little time. Consult with one another. We will allow you half an hour. Then we will be back, and learn if you prefer to cooperate—or to die a thousand deaths!"

With an agile looping movement, Red-Hood started down one of the cable ladders, followed by all his retinue.

"One thing more!" he warned, noting how longingly Gates was staring into the abyss. "Take care not to fall off the platform! In that case, strong arms will be waiting to catch you—and your punishment will be heavy in proportion to the crime!"

"How heavy will that be?" defied Gates, wondering what they could do to him worse than they had already threatened.

Scarlet flashes shot from the monster's eyes. "One hundred of your kind," he snorted, "will be picked up from the streets of your cities, and crushed to death as hostages! Such is the vengeance of Saturn!"

As the creature left, with a low hissing as of escaping steam, Gates felt as never before that he was in contact with a force having nothing in common with humanity.

Silence ruled for a moment, while the three prisoners sat facing one another on their high swinging perch. But their horror-filled eyes were eloquent.

"God in heaven! I don't suppose there's much for us to decide!" mumbled Gates, grimly, while he stared as in a nightmare at the looping, criss-crossing intricacy of cables overhead.

"No, I'm sure not!" sighed Eleanor.

"Any idiot could see that!" Dunbar muttered. "Don't know what we need this half hour to think about!"

Another gloomy silence ensued.

"Well, at least I'm glad we're agreed," declared Gates, who, to tell the

truth, was a little surprised at Dunbar's sudden manifestation of decent feeling.

"Wouldn't we be imbeciles not to be," Dunbar drawled, running a lean, long-fingered hand reflectively across his jutting chin. "All comes down, I guess, to a question of saving our own hides. As for me—I never did exactly hanker to shine as a martyr."

"Martyr?" echoed Gates. And all at once he knew the full enormity of Dunbar's treason—yes, knew beyond all need for further questioning!

At the same time, he noticed Eleanor's nauseated look.

"Goddamn it, Ronny, mean to say I got you wrong? So you folks are not with me after all?" demanded Dunbar, incredulously. "Deuce take you! I never thought you were that crazy!"

"If you call it crazy not to betray your whole race—"

"I'd like to know what in hell my whole race has ever done for me!" retorted Dunbar. "Lot it'll help them if I let myself be ground to bits by those snaky dragons! No, sirree, you can play the saint if you want to—but I'll think you're both hell-blasted fools. As for me—I'll cooperate—and live!"

"I'd rather be a hell-blasted fool than live with the world's blood on my hands. Wouldn't you, Eleanor?"

"A thousand times over!" attested the girl. And in her animated eyes, as she nodded assent, there was a warmth Gates hadn't observed in them before.

"You're letting your feelings rule you, Ronny, not your mind!" swore Dunbar. "That's the trouble with you—too infernal much of a dreamer! Can't face reality! Why, haven't I seen it in you all along? You haven't got the guts of a jellyfish! That's why I've despised you!"

THERE it was out in the open again, their antagonism flaring white-hot. Somehow it seemed strange, ludicrous that the three of them should be perched here, on the rim of eternity as it were, and be doing nothing better than air their personal enmities. Yet, after all, did Gates not know that Dunbar had always loathed him?

It was Eleanor's voice that broke the brief, bristling silence. Struggling to gain control of herself, she cast a defiant glance at Dunbar. "You are badly mistaken, Philip!" she defended, crisply, "if you think Ronald hasn't got, as you say, the guts of a jellyfish. I guess it doesn't take so much guts to be a traitor, the way you're planning, Mr. Dunbar! And let us both die while you go pleasantly along your way!"

Tears were in the girl's eyes; she had to avert her face violently to prevent a telltale overflow.

Dunbar's answer was a low, gruff laugh.

"Good Lord! What makes you think I'm willing to let you both die? Ronny can do what he damn well wants to—guess the world will outlive his loss. But you, my girl—do you think I'll let you be massacred just because most of our good-for-nothing species is due to be wiped out? Believe me, if there's going to be one man survive the slaughter, there'll be one woman too—just to start the new world right! Do you get me?"

As he crept nearer to her along the web, his little black eyes widened in a leer.

A quarter of an hour later, the full implications of his words became clear. Red-Hood and the other Saturnians had returned; and, ringing their captives about in a glittering circle, had demanded their decision. And Eleanor and Gates had defied them with a resolute "No!", regardless of the thunderous rumblings and the spouts of smoke that came from their masters' lips.

But Dunbar took another track.

"Worthy visitors from Saturn," he said, with mincing gestures, "I am glad to co-operate with you. But, in return, I ask one small boon."

"What boon?"

"If I help you, O noble ones, I must do so without restraint. But this cannot be unless you grant me the favor I ask. You see, O Lords, we earth-men are so made that we cannot do our best work without a woman at our side. So I crave of you—spare the life of this female here; release her, so that she may labor with me!"

A snort from Red-Hood drowned out Eleanor's shocked protests.

"But this woman, O earthling, has refused to co-operate. She deserves the fate worse than death, which we have in store for her."

"Women, O Lords, are ever fickle and changeable of mind. If you will but spare her, I will see that she will co-operate."

The Saturnians held a brief conference among themselves, in tones like rapid gurglings. Then Red-Hood turned back toward Dunbar. "It is so, O Nignig! On our planet, too, the female of the species is fickle, and changes her mind like the lightning." And then, pointing scornfully at Gates, "Do you also ask us to spare your other companion?"

"Not so, O Lords! I ask the woman only!"

ELEANOR'S despairing cry was muffled amid the bellowing of the Saturnians, as they once more conferred, punctuating their debate with flashes of their many-colored armor, and with innumerable puffs of smoke . . . in a discussion that lasted for many minutes.

Finally, discharging sulphur fumes from little orifices at the ends of his long twining fingers, Red-Hood turned back to his Quisling.

"Let it be so!" he rattled out. "On one condition, we will release the woman. She will serve as a pledge for the faithful performance of your promise. If you fail us, by even the minutest fraction of a fraction of a degree, be sure she will not escape, but will perish along with you on the Barbs of Slow Agony!"

Eleanor gasped; and peering up into the relentless red eyes of her captors, knew that all protest would be futile.

"Zoltevi! Zoltevi! Quimboson!" she heard Red-Hood rasping, as one of his long tentacled arms motioned to two retainers. And after a brief interchange in their native tongue, the pair stepped forth, and she felt the octopus arms of one of the giants winding about her, while Dunbar was snatched up in the claws of the second.

"My followers will give you your instructions!" Red-Hood growled at his new servant; while Eleanor, with swimming head, felt herself being borne down the great swaying web.

"Have faith! Have faith! We will win out yet!" she thought she heard a familiar voice calling after her. Or was it that, in her bewilderment, she had only imagined? For her last glimpse at Gates showed him standing erect and defiant enough, but so feeble-looking, of such midget size beside the many-armed, tailed monsters that towered above him to the height of the great dinosaurs of vanished ages!

CHAPTER V

Paralyzed!

COMPARED with Gates as he stared up at his captors, Daniel in the lion's den may have considered himself almost among friends.

For a moment after the departure of the two other humans along with Zoltevi and Quimboson, no sound was audible except that of the threshing, sighing cables, and of the deep, throaty breathing of the monsters.

Then in silence—a silence more terrible than any spoken threat—Red-Hood advanced toward his victim. Gates, sensing his sinister intention, spontaneously pressed back. But Red-Hood drew nearer still, this time with a ten-foot stride. And Gates retreated to the extreme outer edge of the platform. Another inch, and he would have fallen!

But before he could plunge to a welcome deliverance, his persecutor's long tail shot out. With a rapid whirring motion, sounding a little like the warning buzz of a rattlesnake, it flicked by his left arm. And this time it did not miss. A glancing stroke touched him painlessly, leaving an abrasion hardly more noticeable than the prick of a pin.

But instantly something else occurred —something all too noticeable! Gates felt a numbness shoot along the arm, which took on the lifeless feeling of a jaw into which a dentist has pumped several charges of novocain. And from the arm the feeling spread to his left shoulder, then over to the right shoulder, then down toward his abdomen, and up his neck, and along the right arm, and through both legs to the toes.

It all happened in a matter of seconds. Almost before he had had time to grasp the full dread facts, he found himself paralyzed. Yes, paralyzed practically completely! Except for a slight wriggling movement in his feet and fingers, he was unable to stir! In his horror, he attempted to cry out; but his tongue would not obey the impulse; all that came forth was a whisper-thin gurgling. Meanwhile, no longer able to maintain an upright position, he had sagged to the floor of the web, where he lay like a bundle of rags.

Strangely enough, however, the higher nerve centers appeared unaffected; his mind had not lost any of its clarity. It was, in fact, as though his mental reactions had suddenly been heightened, now that his physical frame was as if dead.

After a minute of silent gloating, during which he stood leering down at the victim, Red-Hood drew wide his green-gray lips, and huskily inquired,

"How do you feel now, O earthling? That was what we call a tail-prick. Had the blow struck beneath the surface, you would have perished. But that would not have served our purpose. You can do more for us alive than dead."

SAVAGE and determined was the secret compact that Gates made with himself: he would perish in agony, a hundred times over, sooner than voluntarily help his captors by so much as the flick of one finger!

But Red-Hood, as if aware of his thoughts, twisted those great bag-like lips of his into a sardonic grin, and grumbled,

"It will not be up to you, my friend, whether you assist us or not. You see, there is nothing you can do against Lethemaz—the poison we apply with the tips of our tails. For a hundred thousand cycles our scientists have worked, until it has become the most efficient venom in the universe. A tenth of a drop—which is just what we used —will keep a mite like you paralyzed for days, unless we apply the proper antidote."

To Gates' horrified consciousness there had come the memory of certain wasps which injected a paralyzing fluid into their spider prey, keeping them alive but helpless for an indefinite pe-

riod, so that they might nourish the next wasp generation.

But the fate of the spiders seemed almost enviable beside his own. For they at least would at last know an end to their captivity!

As this thought shot through his mind, he heard Red-Hood conferring in undertones with two subordinates. And the latter, after a moment, approached him and produced long cables, which they began to twist and loop about his body. For what purpose? He could not even guess. Yet the wicked twinkles in their three-cornered red eyes told him that they were up to some new villainy. A minute later, when they began to carry him down the web, amid the shimmering many-hued strands, how fervently he wished that he had seized his opportunity before it was too late, and had fallen off the platform to his doom!

TWELVE hours had gone by. The Crystal Planetoid, whirling on its orbit about the earth, had swung back to the point at which the three humans had entered it. And a man and a girl, deposited by two invisible attendants, had found themselves back near the spot where their adventures had begun.

They had come down in a fog—which was not surprising, since fogs now hovered continually over the earth; and their exact point of descent was an isolated spot in a city park, a mile or two from the laboratory. Dunbar recognized the place with a satisfied grunt, as he identified a certain rustic bridge over a small stream. "Good! Just ideal for a little chat!"

It seemed as if a huge shadow drifted over them and away, and vaguely they were aware that the two Saturnians had departed.

"What is there to chat about, Mr. Dunbar?" she flung back haughtily.

There was a silken purr in the man's voice. But determination marked his manner as he imposed himself in the girl's path.

"Now listen here, young lady. There are several things you might as well understand. The first is that you must cooperate."

"Cooperate?" she tossed back, shrilly, and paused long enough for a contemptuous fling of laughter. "Why who wouldn't die sooner than cooperate with those beasts—those dev—"

He had come closer to her, and his voice was coaxing, almost caressing.

"Do you think it was for their sake, Eleanor? Why do you think I saved you, except for your own precious self? If you will only cooperate with me—with *me*—"

"I'd rather cooperate with a viper!"

She had recoiled as though he were indeed the creature she had mentioned; and he found it necessary to seize her arm in order to prevent her departure.

"Come, let's forget all this, Eleanor. I know what nervous stress you are under. When you return to yourself, you will realize all that I have done for you. If I hadn't said a word in your behalf—"

"In *my* behalf! Good heavens, man!" she retorted, bitterly. "Don't you think I could have saved my own life, if I had been willing to stoop to your kind of treason?"

"Treason or not, we shall see. We shall see. Meanwhile, I warn you, don't try to interfere when I fulfill my agreement—when I prepare those vats of compressed air—"

"And what if I report you to the authorities?"

"Report? By Christ! You wouldn't be that stupid? You wouldn't drive me to action against you, would you?"

His tone had become subtly menacing as he leaned over her, and whis-

pered, almost furtively,

"Besides, have you not as much at stake as I, my girl? Remember, you are a pledge for my success. If I fail—"

"If you fail, I will give thanks to heaven!"

With a determined effort, she had thrust herself forward; while he, following through the fog, pleaded and expostulated, in tones half like a lover, half like a taskmaster. At length, through the mist, there came a choked sobbing. And thin and faint, where two enormous creatures stood invisibly amid the vapors, there sounded an eerie squeak, like the muffled mockery of demons.

CHIEF OF POLICE JOE McCULLOUGH had settled back to a good fat cigar and the latest issue of the "Sports Digest." His long legs stretched lankily across a chair; his heavy red face wore an expression almost of contentment, except when now and then he mopped the sweat from his brow with a crimson-bordered handkerchief. "Damn this heat!" he finally muttered, glaring at the electric fan as if to accuse it of criminal conspiracy. And just then the door opened, and the sandy head of Sergeant Johannsen intruded.

"Sorry to butt in, Chief, but a dame out here wants to see you."

McCullough let out a low oath. "Didn't I tell you I don't want to be pestered? See her yourself, Johannsen. You're no slouch when it comes to dames." And, with a growl, he turned back to the "Sports Digest."

"But she swears she's gotta see you, Chief. Just can't do a thing with her. Something damned important, she says."

"Tell her to go to hell!"

Even as he spoke, a woman's face poked itself through the doorway. It was a face naturally comely, with clear blue eyes, and handsomely chiselled chin and brow; but just now she looked like the victim of a cyclone. Her clothes were rumpled; her disordered hair hung far down her forehead; there were tear-stains beneath her eyes, which blazed with a wild, impatient light.

"Chief McCullough?" she demanded.

Had she been a man, she would have been ejected without debate. As it was, the Chief merely gaped at her, abashed, while awkwardly withdrawing his feet from their comfortable perch. "Yes, Ma'am. What can I do for you?"

"Something nobody else can do, Mr. McCullough. I know of a plot, sir—the most fiendish plot ever imagined. You'll hardly believe it, but I've just come down—well, down from one of the Crystal Planetoids, where they've hatched a scheme to capture the earth."

McCULLOUGH gaped, and let the "Sports Digest" drop from his hands. He had had experience with crazy women before, but never with one who had dug out a scheme to capture the earth. The best thing to do with her kind was to let them rave on. If you tried to interrupt them, they were apt to get hysterical.

And so it was with a polite but skeptical smile that he listened to her story of invaders as tall as a two-story house, who had enormous stinging tails and were invisible in ordinary light. Midway in her recital, he scowled reproof at Sergeant Johannsen, who seemed about to break out in open laughter; and, when she had finished, he thoughtfully took up his cigar, which he had put down for the moment, and remarked, with an attempt at courtesy,

"Well, now that's all too bad, Sister. The thing I'd advise you to do is to go home and sleep it off. These are queer times, you know. Why, with all this

heat and tension, it's surprising we're not all seeing rattlesnakes and tigers. So you just have a good sleep, and tomorrow you'll feel better."

The girl stared at McCullough in dismay.

"But, my God, I'm not dreaming!" she insisted. "This is real—take my word for it, horribly real! There's a man—I can give you his name—who is working right now for the invaders, preparing tanks of compressed air. If you don't help—and immediately—"

She was interrupted by Johannsen, who, no longer able to contain himself, exploded in one mighty roar.

At the same time, she caught the amused glint in McCullough's eyes; and all at once she felt sick—sick to the very pit of her being. And, realizing the uselessness of further pleas, she turned without another word, and stumbled blindly toward the doorway.

CHAPTER VI

An Offering from the Clouds

AT almost any other time in modern history, the disappearance of a promising young scientist would have created a sensation. As it was, the newspapers were so preoccupied with other events that they merely noted incidentally that "Ronald Gates, a technician employed by the Merlin Research Institute, has dropped mysteriously out of sight. No clue to his whereabouts has been found either at his lodgings or his place of employment. Suspicions of suicide, and of kidnaping for ransom, have not been confirmed."

Yet hardly was this story printed when extraordinary rumors began to be heard. So wild, so fantastic were the tales that most hearers shook their heads skeptically; newspapers denied them space; and even the most credulous old wives found belief stretched to the breaking point. But there were many who swore to the authenticity of the accounts. Ronald Gates, they attested, had been seen again; had been seen dangling in air, like a fly in a spider's web! About him were thin shimmering strands, which vanished into a mist; while he himself swung not many feet above the earth, was both gagged and bound. Some declared that he was inert, and dead as a stone; but others averred that they had seen him making frantic movements with his feet, and with the tips of his fingers.

Among the few who listened seriously to these reports was Eleanor Firth. Rousing herself from the sick bed in which she had been confined for two days, suffering from what the doctor diagnosed as "nervous delusions," she set out toward the field at the outskirts of town, where, she had been told, the dangling apparition had been seen.

As she left the house, a skulking form slunk from behind a tree half a block away; and slithered to the nearest phone booth. She did not see the figure; but thought that it was by a queer coincidence that, after she had boarded a street car ten minutes later, she saw a taxicab just keeping pace with the trolley, and inside the vehicle recognized the slim dark shape of Dunbar.

At first she thought of turning back. But thinking that she might have made a mistake in identification, or that Dunbar might turn off in some other direction without seeing her, she continued on her way.

Twenty minutes later, when the car had reached its terminal, the taxicab was still a little behind.

But she could give little thought just then to the cab and its occupant. Through the mist she saw some vacant lots about a hundred yards away, where a crowd was assembled. And, with a

fluttering heart, she pressed forward, racing rather than walking toward the crowd in the field.

AT the outskirts of the throng she joined the others in staring vaguely upward into the hazes, although at first she saw nothing.

"Why, he just seems to come and go," she heard a neighbor remarking. "Dips down, and then pops up again like a jack-in-the-box. You'd think he was held on strings."

"There he is!" a child cried out, eagerly. "Oh, Mamma, look! He's upside down!"

Surely enough, a figure was drifting out of the dense ceiling of fog. It was a figure as stiff and lifeless-looking as a manikin, except for the spasmodic twitching of the feet and fingers. And it was, as the child had exclaimed, upside down! Nothing could be weirder or more unnatural-looking than the way in which it slowly approached, in a diver's posture, with its arms outspread beneath it, and its feet uppermost. Obviously, it was supported by unseen hands or cables; yet Eleanor, no matter how she strained her eyes, could catch no glimpse of those cobweb strands which, she knew, encompassed it in a thick web.

For a moment or two, as she stared in a ghastly fascination, recognition did not come to her. Then all at once she cried out in astonished, dreadful certainty. That frank, open face, with the aquiline nose and broad, high forehead; those masses of coffee-brown hair, lying dishevelled along the brow—how could she help recognize them, even though the tanned skin was covered with a dense stubble, and the once-mobile features looked inflexible as marble!

"Ronny! Ronny!" she exclaimed, sagging for support against a fat woman, who grumbled at her aberrations. And even as she spoke, she thought that she was answered by a glint in the eyes of the floating apparition. Yes, surely there was a responsive gleam! a vivid, deep fire which no paralysis could quench! She knew, she knew that Ronny had seen her, had recognized her!

But, at the same time, his eyes were kindled with such sorrow, such suffering that she thought of a martyr writhing at the stake.

Downward he floated, until he dangled but ten or twelve feet above her head. Only ten or twelve feet, she thought, yet what infinities between them! But almost immediately, he began to retreat. Jerked by the unseen cords, he slowly arose, was gradually pulled around to a horizontal position, and mounted until by degrees he was lost in the mist. And, all the while, from the watching crowd, came cries of wonder and amazement.

But just as the figure disappeared, Eleanor noticed something hardly less extraordinary. She could have sworn that, a moment before, a man had stood just to her right, had pressed almost elbow to elbow with her; and she knew that he had not strolled away. Yet suddenly she heard a groan from where he had been; then a swift swishing; and, turning, found that he was gone. Literally, he had vanished into thin air!

The next moment, when a frightened woman began crying, "John, John, where are you? For goodness' sake, where are you, John?" it seemed inevitable that there should be no response.

BUT her mind had no chance to dwell upon the incident. For she felt some one tapping her upon the shoulder; and, turning, stared into the dark, sardonically grinning face that she wished to see least of all faces on earth.

How she hated him for the triumphant leer with which he devoured her! How she detested the manner in which he spoke, bowing urbanely, and with an ironic purr in his voice! "Ah, Eleanor! Nice to meet you here!" Somehow, she had the feeling of a bird in the fowler's hands!

"What a piece of good luck for us both, meeting like this!" he murmured. "Better step over this way, Eleanor, there are some things to talk over."

"I can't imagine what!" she denied.

But she caught the warning glint in his eyes. "Be unreasonable, young lady, and I don't answer for the consequences!"

In any case, she reflected, she could not stand here arguing with him; could not make a public spectacle of herself. And so, choking down the voice of inner warning, she followed him toward the waiting taxicab.

As they started off, a cry rang from the crowd; and, looking up, she saw the dangling figure emerging again from the mist. Strangely, it was propelled—almost thrust—in her direction, until it floated a mere half a dozen feet overhead. The face, as before, was rigid as rock, but the eyes glared with anger—anger fierce, vehement, concentrated, which seemed to focus in two fierce fire-points of light. Eleanor noticed how Dunbar, after a single glance, winced and turned away—slunk away, it seemed to her, in the manner of a whipped hound.

Upon reaching the taxicab, the girl hesitated. That warning voice, stronger now and more insistent, bade her not to enter. But the man's tones, soft and coaxing, appealed, "There's something I must tell you—I *must*, Eleanor, if you want to save yourself and our friend up above."

The plea for herself alone would not have sufficed; but at the reference to Ronald she felt herself yielding.

"Come, let's drive around town a while—anywhere at all you say," he suggested, "before having you taken back home."

After all, she thought, what harm in driving around a bit? She was almost exhausted, and it would be so much easier not to have to go home by trolley! Besides, she was so faint that there was little power in her to resist Dunbar's will.

And so she found herself preceding him into the cab, although still that warning voice cautioned, "Don't! Don't! Don't!"

"Anywhere around the suburbs," Dunbar instructed the driver. And then the door slammed, and they were on their way. But, as the wheels whirred beneath her, she would have given her last penny to be safely on the ground again.

Subtly, insidiously, her companion's manner had changed. There was a menacing note beneath the silken purr as he turned to her, and demanded, "And now, young lady, maybe you will tell me why you have not been cooperating?"

SHE writhed; withdrew from him as far as possible; and made no answer. How idiotic of her to have let him lure her into the taxi!

"Maybe you will tell me," he went on, "why it was you went to the police to report me? No! don't say you didn't! I have informants!"

"That is to say, you've been shadowing me with spies, Mr. Dunbar?" she retorted, turning upon him with spirit.

"I don't care a damn what you call it!" he snarled. "Simple fact is I couldn't afford to take any chances. But I really didn't think you'd be imbecilic enough to report me—since we're both in the same boat. If the Saturnians

murder me, they murder you too! Remember that!"

"So that's what you decoyed me into the car to say, Mr. Dunbar?"

"I didn't decoy you. But I did want to warn you. If you give me your solemn promise, Eleanor, to keep a tight lock on your tongue, and not interfere with me any further, I'll let you go about your way. But not unless!"

"I don't propose to argue with you, Mr. Dunbar!" Her tones were slow, incisive, cutting. "Now if you'll have the kindness to give the driver my address—"

"Not so fast there, my girl! We've still got some things to thresh out. Just because you don't seem to care about your own life, it doesn't follow I'm going to let you throw mine away!"

At last the mask was falling off. He glared; his teeth bit into his lower lip; his manner was truculent. "Good Lord, Eleanor, don't you know those Saturnians are watching everything you do? How long do you think their patience will last? What do you suppose old Red-Hood will do when he finds you're all set to betray him?"

"Betray *him?*" Scornfully she laughed. "So that's the only betrayal you're thinking of? Now will you kindly give that driver my address?"

He made no move to obey.

"If you won't, then I will!" she decided, starting up.

But a powerful hand had seized her, and thrust her back. "I tell you, my girl, we've got to thresh this out!"

"I tell you, there's nothing to thresh out!"

Before her inner vision there flashed again a figure, with pain-tormented eyes, who dangled helplessly high in air. And she clenched her fists, and secretly swore a bitter oath.

"So then it's not peace, but a sword?" he flung out, as if reading her thoughts. "In that case, you force me to act in self-defense!"

Despite the quietness of his manner, she was becoming more and more frightened. His heart fluttered; she remembered again that voice of warning which she had not heeded; and felt suddenly too weak and helpless to make the attempt—the obviously futile attempt—to call out to the driver.

From an inner pocket he had pulled a little vial filled with a dark-brown fluid. And, from another pocket, he drew a hypodermic neede.

"Lucky for us both that, being a chemist, I can prepare my own formulas," he went on, with an oily drawl. "Now this won't do you any real harm, Eleanor, so I'd advise you not to struggle. That will only make it harder for you, and not help at all in the end."

"For God's sake," she screamed, "what are you going to do?"

Wildly she stared out of the taxicab, with some vague idea of yelling for help or jumping. But they were speeding along an almost houseless suburban road, with not a person in sight; and to attempt to jump, even if she should succeed, would be mere suicide.

Meanwhile he had dipped the needle in the brown fluid, and she saw its thin, sinister point approaching.

"Just hold out your arm," he advised. "It will be all over in a second."

She was to remember hazily that she attempted a shriek, which was muffled by his throttling hand. She was to remember that she struggled spasmodically; beat at her oppressor with blind, self-protective fury. But this was all that she did recollect . . . aside from the fact that there came a sharp stabbing sensation just above her wrist . . . followed by a shooting pain in her head, an overwhelming dizziness, a reeling and swaying, and, suddenly and mercifully, a black, dreamless unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VII

Prisoners' Progress

LETHEMAZ, the paralyzing drug of the Saturnians, had one quality for which Gates was sometimes thankful, and which sometimes he bitterly cursed. Despite the total incapacity of his body, his brain, as we have seen, was able to work with new keenness and clarity. Yet his increased mental awareness only added to his agony. For it made him see the horror, the helplessness of his plight in even more pitiful sharpness.

Eleanor had been right in supposing that his eyes had glowed with recognition as he dangled in air above her. She had been right in believing that he had glared at the sight of Dunbar. But she could not have known what torment seethed behind that rigid brow of his. She could not have known the tantalizing madness of one who, hour after hour, realizes that he is being used as a tool for the furies of destruction, yet is powerless to speak or act. Nor could she have guessed what dire new discoveries the captive had made.

From time to time Gates was carried back to the Crystal Planetoid, where a sting from one of the monsters' tails applied a deparalyzing fluid. Thus he found occasional relief—which, however, was not to be credited to any feeling of mercy on the part of the captors. No! for he could not be fed while paralyzed. And thanks to the way in which he was jolted around, he had to be given food every few days if he was not to perish.

As yet, it was not only the purpose of the invaders to keep him alive, but to obtain as many living humans as possible. Dozens of men and women, as he saw to his dismay, had been brought to the Planetoid and paralyzed. Like flies tangled in the webs of gigantic spiders, the victims lay scattered about the webs. And Gates realized that he was, in a sense, responsible. Yes, he had been the unwilling tool to trap them; it was as a bait that he had been dangled above the earth . . . so that, when the people congregated beneath, the Saturnians might take their pick and whisk the victims away while the crowd was too preoccupied to be aware what had happened.

But why did they desire so many humans? Gates had the boldness to put this question to Red-Hood during one of his de-paralyzed intervals; and, to his surprise, the monster immediately rasped out an answer:

"Nignig, surely you have not the brains of a gnat, else you would have guessed! We capture you earthlings so as to dangle you above the earth as a lure to capture other earthlings!"

"And why capture other earthlings?"

"Why?" The giant's red eyes twinkled with amusement, as at a child who persists in asking the ridiculous. "Naturally, we want specimens of all the human fauna, of every race and color, so that we may skin and dry them in the interest of science, and bring them back to Saturn as specimens for the Museum of Unnatural History."

Noting the horror with which Gates greeted this explanation, Red-Hood went on to state,

"After all, Nignig, you should be grateful to us for seeking to preserve some trace of your species, instead of obliterating it entirely. You earth-creatures have no sense of gratitude!"

Thanks to this information, Gates' mind was more busy than ever with the problem of circumventing the Saturnians. His first thought was to destroy his own value to them by means of a hunger strike. But the result was that his food, in liquid form, was forced

down his throat; while the Saturnians, apparently fearing that he would resort to other means to take his own life, vigilantly followed his every movement.

Nevertheless, after a time, an idea did come to him—an idea that at first appeared wild and impossible, and yet seemed to offer the only prospect, however remote, of regaining his freedom.

BUT before he could try out the scheme, matters on earth went from bad to worse.*

To say that the world was frantic would be to understate. Who of us that lived through those cataclysmic days will ever forget how men walked the streets with white, harried faces, their beards untended, their clothes in soiled disarray? Who will ever forget the sense of being at a world's end? Who will not shudder again as he recalls the appeals made to scientists by government officials—the desperate appeals headlined in the papers and blared through the radio: "As you value your lives, find the cause of the disturbance! Find the cause of this monstrous distortion of nature! Give us a remedy! Give us a remedy soon, soon—or it will be too late!"

But scientists labored hard and long—labored fifteen or eighteen hours a day, and found no remedy. Some, in fact, maintained that no remedy was possible. Who that is now of middle age cannot re-live the day when Dr. Arnold Woodrum, of the Cyclops Observatory, let it be known in an interview that he believed the Solar System to be passing through a region of space crossed by radio-active forces, which would gradually raise the temperature until all life was burned to a crisp? In the absence of any more definite knowledge, this view was widely accepted. And prayers and lamentations became universal.

It is a never-to-be-forgiven crime that the one man who, in these circumstances, could have poured out valuable information, was a man who kept his lips tight-shut.

IN A private laboratory improvised in his apartment, Philip Dunbar was hard at work. Motors buzzed about him; tubes and wires were woven intricately across the room; while dark hissing vapors and spouts of steam issued from numerous valves and retorts. Piled deep in one corner, were dozens of great torpedo-shaped steel tubes, some of them sealed, some of them ending in complicated coils of rubber tubing; and it was to these that the worker gave his chief attention.

After several hours, Dunbar paused; sighed; mopped his sweaty brow;

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* Daily the unexplained thickening of the atmosphere was growing more noticeable. Daily the air was becoming heavier, more sluggish, more humid, and hotter. Thunder storms of greater violence than ever had become of daily occurrence in widely scattered sections of the earth. Droughts in some regions, and floods in others, had scarred the surface of the planet. Temperatures running well into the hundreds were now common in districts where eighty had been considered hot. Some sections, indeed, had become uninhabitable.

By the first of August, the deaths ascribed to the heat in the great cities of the eastern United States had risen to a daily average of scores of thousands. Mass migrations were in progress from tropical and sub-tropical regions—by every obtainable device, by liner, freighter and tugboat, by private car, truck and airplane, the inhabitants of South and Central America were streaming toward the temperate and polar regions. In India, scores of millions were flocking into the Himalayas; in Africa, the population was perishing like ants, and no count of the mortality was even attempted; in the South Seas the customary trade winds did not blow, and the waters became too warm for bathing. For the first time in history the Antarctic Continent, its glaciers beginning to melt, offered promise of becoming habitable; while men of daring laid plans to establish winter homes in Labrador and Greenland. Meanwhile vast once-verdant sections of America, Asia and Europe had been seared to a leafless brown. —Ed.

turned a switch that sent the motors groaning to a halt; and, after unlocking the door, stepped into an adjoining room.

There he was confronted by a girl who, her hands joined behind her back and her teeth biting into her lower lip, had been pacing slowly back and forth.

She cast him a scornful glance, and continued ranging the floor.

"Listen, Eleanor!" he said. "You don't have to carry on like this. Don't act like a prisoner. Make yourself at home. In that case in the foyer, you'll find some mighty interesting books—"

There was fury in her manner as she turned upon him. "Well, what am I but a prisoner? Do you want me to bow down and thank you for keeping me locked here these last seven days?"

His tone was quiet, restrained, almost reproachful.

"But what do you expect, Eleanor? Surely, you understand the circumstances—"

Her blue eyes blazed. He had never before noticed how strong was the curve of her chin, how firm the set of her jaw. "Circumstances?" she derided. "All that I understand is that you drugged me—kidnapped me—brought me here forcibly, with the help of that hireling of yours, the taxi driver—"

"I've heard all about that before," he broke in, still without losing control of himself. "I know I've behaved rudely, Eleanor. But, after all, why not give me credit for some things? Haven't I treated you decently here? Have I so much as touched you with one finger, even though all the while I've been burning with love?"

She shuddered, and recoiled.

"Why do you act as if I were dirt beneath your feet?" he rushed on. "Haven't I done everything to make you comfortable? Haven't I fed you properly? My God, Eleanor!, don't you know I love you?"

He had pressed toward her, his eyes hot and desirous, while she had backed into the remotest corner of the room.

"And you expect *me* to love a traitor?" she shot at him. "Am I to sit by and adore you for playing Quisling to the whole Earth?"

"That isn't fair, Eleanor!" he protested. "Why, most girls would feel indebted to me for life for saving them. You will too, never fear! You're just a little hysterical now, that's the trouble. But come, come, a little kiss is what you need to soothe you!"

SHE saw the black-moustached face drawing closer. She saw the black eyes sparkling with predatory glee. She knew that in an instant the long twining fingers would be feeling their way about her. And she realized the futility, the folly of calling out for help. Nevertheless, a scream was upon her lips.

Then, when already she could feel his breath, hot and fetid as that of some beast of prey, relief came from an unexpected quarter.

A sharp sudden rattling and snapping sounded from the direction of the laboratory. And through the open door she could see how, miraculously, the laboratory window flew open as if in a violent gale, although not the slightest breeze was blowing.

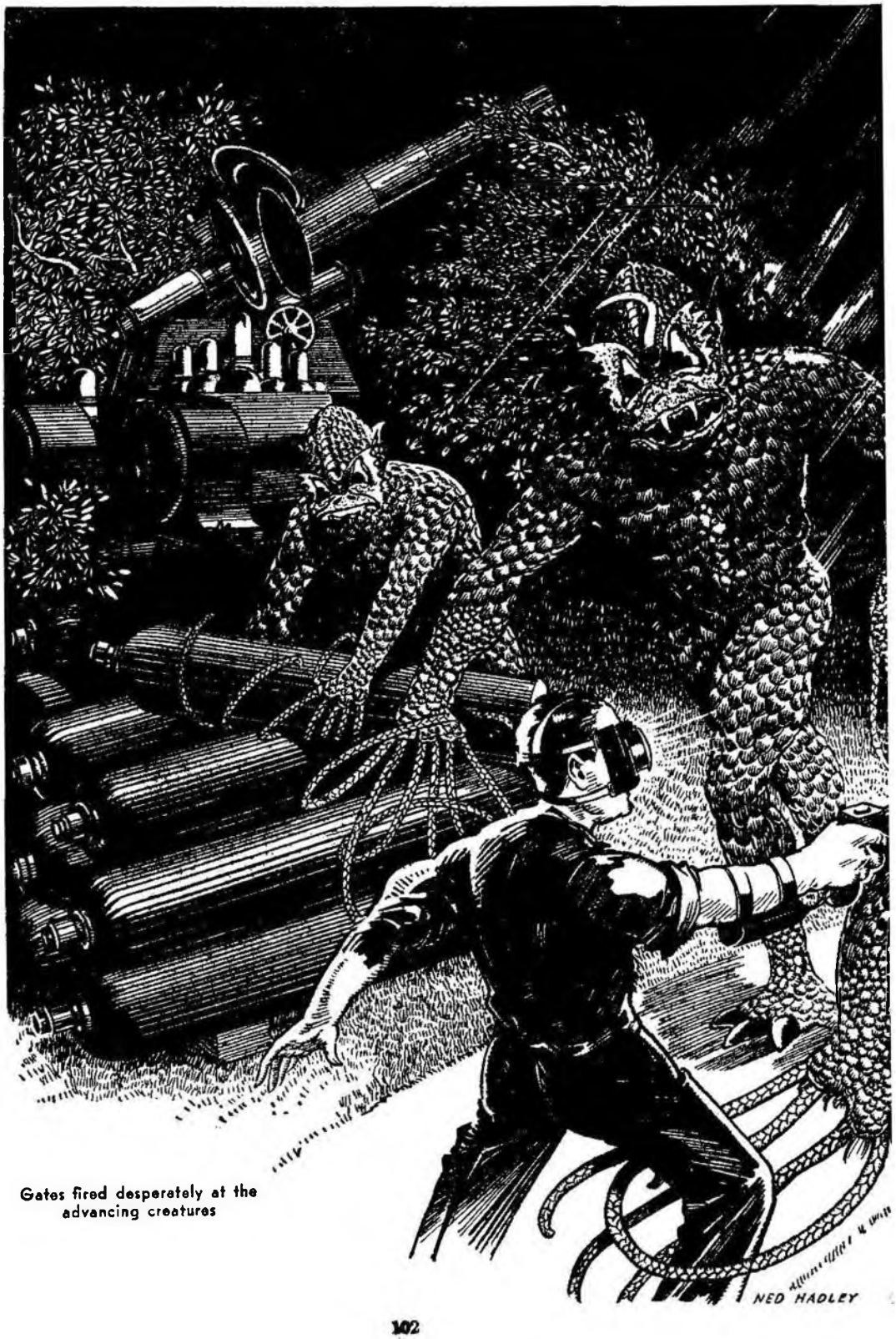
Dunbar, hearing the noise, wheeled about, and gasped.

"By Christopher, how'd that happen?"

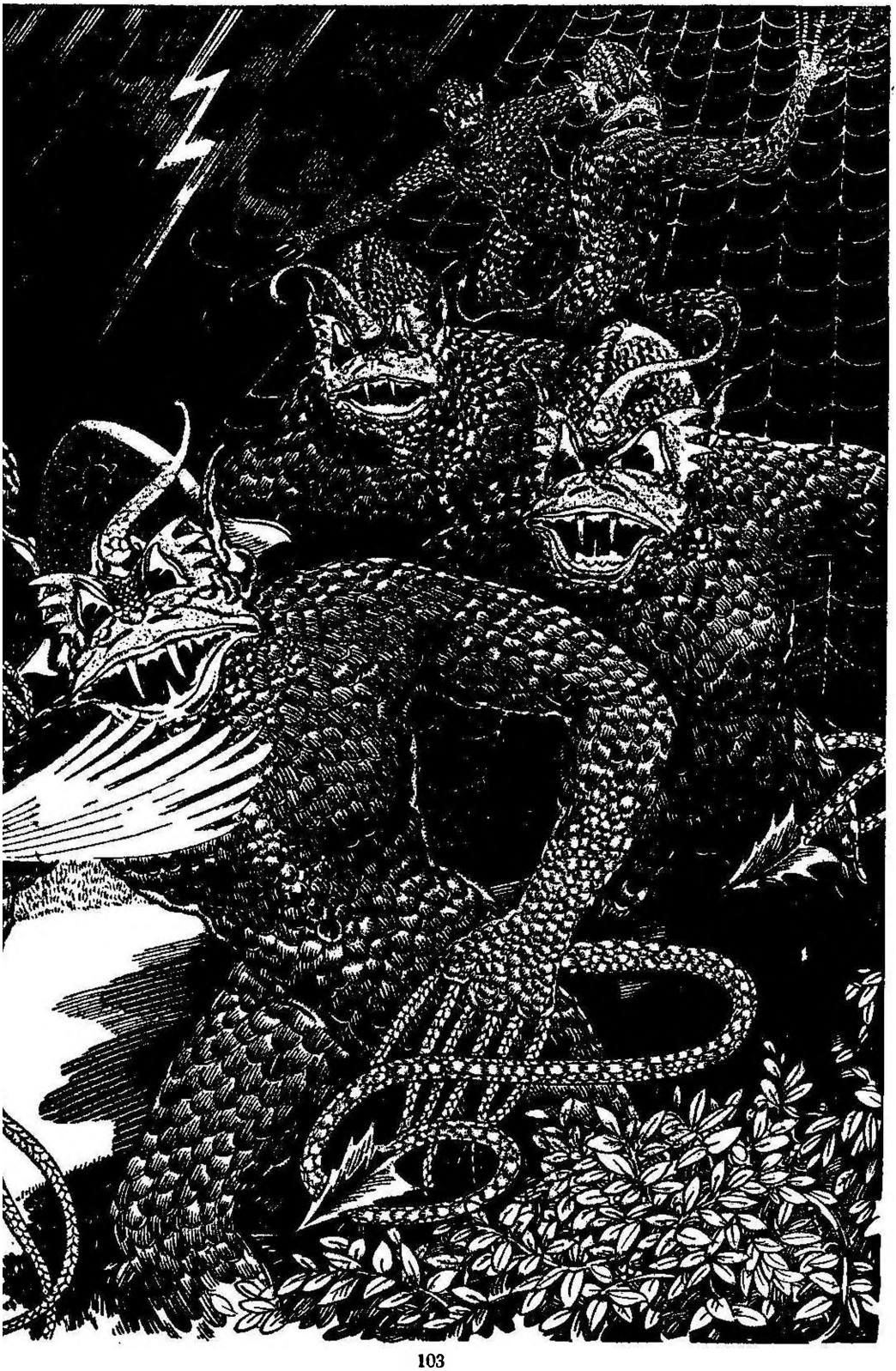
Then solemnly, after a moment, he added, "Why, I could swear I locked that window this morning!"

As if in answer, several thick steel rods on the laboratory table began to dance back and forth like dry leaves in the wind.

"Holy Jerusalem!" he ejaculated,



Gates fired desperately at the advancing creatures



backing away. "Am I going crazy?"

"No, nignig, you are no crazier than ever!" returned a rasping voice, seemingly from nowhere. "But we have been paying you a visit of inspection."

The two hearers stood with wide-open mouths, speechless.

"I am Quimboson, the servant of the Peerless Red One," went on the invisible. "I am perched outside your window now, on a web you cannot see. Finding the window closed, I pulled it open. One of my hands is in the room, shuffling these little objects on the table. I can reach in wherever I wish. Shall I prove it?"

Feeling the sudden pressure of a clammy paw against his brow, Dunbar was quite convinced.

Now all at once the tone of the invisible became harsher, more menacing.

"Earthling," he growled, "I am much displeased! The tail of the Peerless Red One will lash out in wrath when he hears my report. For instead of attending to your duties, we find you in dalliance with the female of your species!"

"But only for a moment!" pleaded Dunbar, in a cowed manner.

"A moment too much! I always thought it was a mistake to spare the female. When I tell the Peerless Red One, he will order her to be stung to death! Stung to death instantly! So I shall recommend, O earthling, and the Peerless Red One always takes my advice on these minor matters!"

Eleanor's gasp of horror was drowned out by Dunbar's appeal.

"But you've got to spare her, O Quimboson! Otherwise, how can I do my best work? On my oath! I shall waste no more time with her—"

"Your oath, O earthling, is as a sword of sand! But no more of this empty talk! I go now—I go!"

There came a whirring and a screeching, sounding oddly like mocking laughter; then the laboratory window banged to a close, and all became silent.

IT was several minutes before Eleanor, her face white, turned to Dunbar. "For God's sake, don't you see—don't you see, you *must* let me go! They'll be back here—they'll be back soon, and strike me dead—"

But Dunbar had returned to the laboratory, where he had switched on the motors.

"If I do let you go, they'll strike *me* dead!" he snapped back. "Lord! Haven't you gotten me into trouble enough already?"

So speaking, he slammed the door with a violent jerk.

ELEANOR, sinking into a chair, her head buried in her hands, was driven more sharply than ever against the same dreary problem that had baffled her during all these days of her captivity.

How to escape?

The single door to the apartment was locked and securely barred. The single accessible window gave upon a concrete court four stories beneath—and, lest she be tempted to leap out, her approach was impeded by a barbed wire barricade. Telephone connections had been cut—and there was no neighbor to whom she could call through the sound-proof walls. No! she was utterly balked!

Still, what matter that she might die a little ahead of the mass of mankind? After all, that was of no importance—but what might be vital was her chance to warn others of Dunbar's crime against humanity, if only she could escape! True, she had already tried to give warning, and had merely been laughed at; yet she had lately conceived a new idea, which might offer a dim hope if once she were free.

Half swooning with the heat, she heard through the laboratory door the whirring of motors; and her head ached dully, and she burst into tears, for the dead have as much chance of rising as she had of beating down the monstrous forces ranged against her.

CHAPTER VIII

The Revolt of Yellow-Claws

HOUR after hour Gates had been watching his captors. Hour after hour he had been scheming, observing, hoping. With the heightened mental quickness of his paralyzed state, he was searching for a weak spot in the armor of the foe. "Surely," he reflected, "there must be some flaw that makes them vulnerable." And it was this thought that put him on the track of the wild idea that appeared to offer his only prospect of freedom.

By carefully following everything the invaders said and did, he was able to grasp the meaning of many words and phrases in their language. Even with his remarkable new rapidity of apprehension, he learned no more than a four-year-old might learn of English—yet this little went far, particularly as the enemy did not suspect that any mere earthling could be so intelligent.

But it was his eyes and not his ears that enabled him to fathom the secret of the Saturnians' greatest power: their ability to make themselves invisible. Whenever one of the monsters wished to vanish from sight, he merely dusted himself with a pale-blue powder from a purple-veined container. Evidently the powder—acting somewhat like a catalyzing agent—had the effect of causing the rays of light to pass completely through any object, thereby rendering it invisible. But did it make things invisible also to Saturnian eyes? The answer was in the affirmative: a Saturnian dusted with Amvol-Amvol could not be seen by any of his fellows, nor could the webs and cables, when concealed beneath this substance, be observed by their makers.

This was, however, of little importance to Red-Hood and his followers; for they relied upon sight much less than did human beings. They were guided largely by what they called the Communication Sense: certain vibrations in the air, set up by their tails, were recorded by a bulging organ just under the left ear of each of the creatures; and thus they were able to learn of their whereabouts and doings of their kindred even when they could not be seen.

So, at least, Gates concluded after long and careful observation. And his scheme for escape was built upon this knowledge.

BUT for a long while the plan did not take definite shape. And meanwhile he came to realize more keenly than ever how dangerous it would be to provoke his masters needlessly.

For they had surpassingly quick and violent tempers; their rage was, literally, like a tornado. Many a time Gates, lying helpless in paralysis on a web in the Planetoid, was the terrified witness to one of their disputes. He was seldom able to decide just what the quarrel was about, the first that he ever knew of it was when a blast like a siren ripped a this eardrums. Then other siren blasts would follow; then spouts of smoke would leap through the air, and the acridness of sulphur would torment his nostrils; then, if he were in a favored position, he would see the adversaries facing one another, their tails lashing the atmosphere in long loops and spirals, their octopus arms threshing and writhing, while the screeching

and bellowing would rise to a crescendo as of battling fiends, and the eyes of the competitors would blaze with fiery red flashes.

There was one fight, in particular, which Gates would never forget. As usual, he had at first no idea of the cause; but the tumult this time was more diabolical than ever before. Paralyzed, he hung on a web several hundred feet above the floor of the Planetoid, in a grandstand position to view the affray. Among the lower meshes and cables, directly beneath him, Red-Hood stood amid steamy clouds of gas. And opposite him was an almost equally huge Saturnian, whose distinguishing features, as Gates saw it, was the clay-yellow coloration of his long tentacle-like claws.

For a tense minute the two creatures stood opposite one another, like bulls ready to charge. Then out shot Red-Hood's tail, striking with a crash against the rainbowed armor of the foe. And Yellow-Claws' breast was streaked with a golden-yellow spurt of blood; and crimson fires shot from his lips in curling tongues. Wrathfully his own tail lashed out, but missed his antagonist, who had leapt back with hair-trigger agility; while from Red-Hood's throat came such a howl that the very web trembled.

Gates was aware that a score of Saturnians stood watching intently below, at a safe distance, like spectators about a prize ring. He heard them whirring with excitement as the two opponents fended for positions. Then, to his astonishment, he saw Red-Hood springing forward, his octopus arms outspread, like some monster of a nightmare. Yellow-Claws was ready for the onslaught; and for a moment the two furies clashed, wrestling with hurricane vehemence . . . so that they seemed little more than a gigantic whirl of squirming, rotating, threshing arms, legs and tails.

But soon, with an unearthly cry, one of the creatures detached himself, and with cyclonic speed darted up the web. So swiftly did he travel that at first Gates was unable to determine that it was Yellow-Claws that fled, while Red-Hood pursued close behind. Up and down and sideways along the web, with all manner of athletic twists and wriggings, the embattled pair rushed, now scores of feet above the observer, now hundreds of feet beneath. Once Yellow-Claws lost his grip and fell, but, with gymnastic swiftness, clutched at a dangling cable, and saved himself barely in time. Once, slashed in the neck by Red-Hood's tail, he let out such a roar that Gates thought he had been slain. Once it was Red-Hood who, torn by his opponent's tail, yelled in agony. Several times the rivals were screened from one another amid smoke clouds.

Yet it was but a few minutes before the fight was over. Yellow-Claws, one of his arms almost half severed, waved his tail high in air, and uttered a shrill, "Wikyi! Wikyi! Wikyi!" (I give up! I give up!") And Red-Hood, with a contemptuous snort, lashed out at him for a final time; and then, acknowledging the conclusion of peace, screamed triumphantly, and majestically stalked away.

BUT for hours the defeated giant sat on a web just below Gates, tending his wounds. His armor had lost its iridescence; thick smears of golden-orange covered its gashed surface. Yet Yellow-Claws' three-cornered eyes blazed with unsubdued anger; and his greenish-gray lips were twisted into grimaces of hate. Vengefully he muttered to himself, ignoring the presence of an earthling in the web above; vengefully he muttered three words, "Zugavl!

Zugavl! Zug!"

Gates did not need to know the meaning of these expressions; from the manner in which they were uttered, he was sure that they boded no good for the Peerless Red One.

At about the same time, he made another important observation. Fighting was not the only bad habit of the Saturnians; they were subject to a far worse vice: that of inhaling Kishkash. This word, which was constantly on the monsters' lips, referred to the fumes from the burning of a certain dried leaf from Saturn. Nothing like it had ever been known on earth; a single whiff was enough to give Gates nausea; it had the foulest odor that had ever attacked his nostrils, being like the concentrated stench of putrefaction.

Yet to the Saturnians it was ambrosia. They never tired of sitting over little pots of the glowing substance, greedily drawing the smoke into their lungs, amid sighs and grunts of satisfaction. And the effect upon them was, to say the least, peculiar: after a time, they would fall into a stupor, and would lie on their backs on the floor, kicking their legs and lashing out with their arms and tails, evidently unable to control their own movements. Some of them, in fact, spent half their time in this state of delicious drunkenness.

It was from this fact that Gates hoped to profit. Eagerly he watched for his opportunity; and one day, when he was fortunately in a deparalyzed state, the chance arrived. It had been a time of celebration, in commemoration of a Saturnian holiday, honoring the great hero Dupepu, who, it seems, had wiped out seventeen nations; and Kishkash, which was considered indispensable on all festal occasions, had been burned with exceptional lavishness. As a result, every visible Saturnian lay on the floor of the Planetoid, kicking up his heels, while whirring and mumbling the delicious nonsense of intoxication.

Here, Gates instantly realized, was a heaven-sent opportunity. Left unguarded for the first time, he crawled down from the swinging platform where he had been placed for safekeeping; and, risking his life on a long rope-ladder, made his way to a portion of the web featured by several round dangling purple pouches. In these bags, he had observed, the natives kept their Amvol-Amvol, the powder of invisability. Once he had obtained this, his scheme would be already half consummated!

And what was to keep him from the Amvol-Amvol? Could he believe his senses?—believe that the precious substance was unwatched, and free for the taking? Yes! This seemed actually to be the case! Barring the remote possibility that one of the Saturnians would revive in time to interfere, there was nothing between him and his goal!

SO down and down he climbed, along the interwoven meshes of swaying, shimmering cables; down like a seaman descending the riggings of a vessel. At length he had reached the pouches. The nearest of them, as large as a watermelon, was within arm's grasp. The top, moreover, was wide open! And, inside, he could see the sky-blue powder that for days he had dreamt of obtaining!

Yet for just a second he hesitated. He could not guess what it was that chilled his hand; that restrained for a moment his desire for the magical substance. Was it some voice of hidden warning? He could not say. He only knew that he laughed silently at himself; then, with reviving eagerness, shot his hand into the pale-blue dust.

The substance was downy soft to the touch, yet was cold as stone, and caused

a tingling, faintly stinging sensation to creep along his skin. Hungrily his fingers closed over it; then, with a good handful in their clutch, began to withdraw.

But, as they did so, Gates was startled by a sudden grating noise, followed by a sharp click. And a violent pain shot through his wrist. Teeth of steel dug into his flesh; and, in horrible realization, he knew that he was caught!

Yes, caught like a wild beast snared in a wolf-trap! It is hard to say whether, in that first stunned instant, his pain or his alarm was the greater. Yet his mind at once took in the full dread import. The pouch was but a ruse; it was equipped with hidden jaws, which would close at the faintest touch, seizing the unwary intruder. Oh, why had he not had the brains to beware?

From the first, he saw that escape would be impossible. Those cruel jaws were so made that the more he struggled, the more tightly his arm would be wedged between them, and the more intense his agony—if he were not careful, his other wrist would be caught too! Knowing that he would be fettered here until his masters revived from their intoxication; and knowing also the terrible tempers of the tribe, he concluded that he would be better off dead.

It was as this thought bored at his brain that he heard a sound to his left. Low, stealthy, secretive, it yet had a vaguely familiar whirr. "Earthling, listen to me!"

His heart gave a convulsive leap. He felt that his last moment had come. So he had not been alone after all, had not been unguarded! One of his captors, garbed in invisability, had been watching him, following his every movement, gloating in his helplessness as a cat gloats in the sufferings of a mouse!

"Earthling, listen to me!"

The words had been repeated, in the same stealthy manner.

"For God's sake, who are you?" the prisoner found courage to gasp.

"Soon I shall say. First, let me free you from your misery."

THERE came a snapping sound; the steel jaws clattered apart; and Gates, to his astonishment, withdrew a bruised and bleeding wrist.

"The lower animals should not meddle with tools they do not understand!" mumbled the unseen. "By my home-world's outer ring! you did not pull down the safety clasp before sticking in your hand!"

"But who—who in blazes are you?" repeated the captive, becoming bolder, although he could not believe that he had been freed for any good purpose.

"Who am I?" The speaker paused long enough for a burst of low whirring laughter. "I am Misthrumb, though that means nothing to you. I am he who fought yesterday with the Peerless Red One, and was driven off, may the curse of the Nine Planets fall on his foul bosom!"

"Oh—you mean, Yellow-Claws?"

"Yellow-Claws? Well, you may call me that, for my hands are of the soil yellow of royalty! My blood too is yellow, golden-yellow! I am as high-born as the Peerless Red One. Was I not designated by the Grand Potentate, the Barbelcoppi, to share the leadership of this expedition? And has the Peerless One not denied me at every turn?—yes, may the demons of every vile disease prey on his liver!"

Not knowing what to reply, Gates said nothing. But hope, dead only a minute before, had revived within him.

"As if he had not already injured me enough," went on the invisible, "he ordered me to keep away from the great festival of Dupepu, whereat all my brothers make merry. Forbidden me to

enjoy the delectable, sacred fumes of Kishkash! For that he shall suffer!"

Yellow-Claws' tones, rasping and angry, indicated that the feud between the giants was far deeper than Gates has suspected. "And when I saw you creeping toward the Amvol-Amvol, O nignig, I knew that you would be the tool of my vengeance!"

"Me?" groaned the victim. Had he escaped the frying pan only to be plunged into the fire?

"Have no fear, earthling! My purpose matches your own. To be sure, there are perils—appalling perils! Not to master them is to die a horrible death. But to prevail is to escape from the Peerless Red One—and to repay him in full measure for his crimes against us both. Are you ready to take the risk, O earthling?"

"I am ready!"

"By the stars! That is more than I would have expected of one of your species! Then let us begin! We have but a little time before my brothers recover from the Kishkash."

Gates could not see the creature's yellow claws as they entered the pouch and drew out a pale blue powder. But he felt something soft, cool and tingling being sprinkled over his hands, his face, up his sleeves, and down his neck. And he had one of the strangest sensations of his life; for his body, even as he gazed at it, faded into a haze, and vanished. He could look through himself! could see the meshwork of shimmering cables as if there were nothing between!

"Come!" whispered his projector. "There is no time to lose!" And then angrily, beneath his breath, "Zugavl! Zugavl! Zug!"

Upheld and guided by Yellow-Claws —since his arms and legs, now that he could not see them, seemed oddly unreliable—Gates started once more down the web, above the spot where the intoxicated monsters, like huge overturned beetles, lay on their backs with furiously wriggling tentacles, legs and tails.

CHAPTER IX

Through the Barred Door

IF only she could get word to some one outside! If only some one could learn of her plight, she might be saved —might save the world! Such was the thought that kept pounding at Eleanor's brain as she sat stooped in her prison room, her head buried in her hands, while through the closed door came the buzzing and droning of motors.

Then by degrees an idea thrust itself upon her. As she moped alone in her dismal monotony, she had heard every evening the shuffling of some one ascending the steps just beyond the barred apartment door. The sound always came at the same time—at five minutes before six—and she could recognize the peculiar dreary noise as it approached. Might not the passer-by, whoever he was, become her deliverer? At first she thought of calling out to him; but realized that, even if he took heed, this would merely be to warn Dunbar, who would find ways to balk her plan.

No! she must communicate without being heard. But how? As if anticipating this very possibility, Dunbar had denied her all writing materials. She considered, indeed, the ancient device of a message written in her own blood, which she might scrawl on a fly-leaf torn from a book; but she feared that some chance blood-stain would furnish her captor with a fatal clue.

The thought of the books, however, gave her another idea. Leaping up with sudden alacrity, she went to the case Dunbar had mentioned, and eagerly selected a volume.

Passing through the room half an hour later, her oppressor paused with a grim smile to see her bent above "The Greycourt Murder Mystery."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he leaned over her shoulder for a glance at the title. "Didn't know you went in for that sort of stuff. Good idea, though. Takes your mind off your troubles. Literature of escape, they call it."

He did not notice the ironic glint in her eyes, nor the faint quivering of her voice as she replied,

"Yes, that's it—literature of escape."

Had his mind not been preoccupied, he would have seen how her hands fluttered, and how tremulously she averted his gaze.

"Oh, by the way, might just as well tell you," he confided. "I've been making fine progress. In another five days, if all goes well, I'll be able to set you free."

"Free?" she gasped, unbelievingly.

"Yes, I'll be done with my job by then—have all the compressed air tanks ready, in just another five days."

She started up as if she had been struck, allowing the book to slip to the floor unnoticed.

"Five days?" she repeated, blankly, realizing how little time remained for her to work in. "Five days!"

"God! but I'm getting fed up, slaving in this damnable heat!" he muttered; and then, passing out of the room, threw out at her, with a burst of sardonic laughter,

"Now, my girl, better get back to your—your literature of escape!"

Stunned, she reached for the book. Yet it was with fresh alertness, with a swift new eagerness, that she began racing through the pages. Only a few minutes later, she came to a passage that made her sit up with a start. Then hastily she reached for the little blue handbag she had carried at the time of her capture by Dunbar; and drew out a pair of nail scissors. Her eyes had a furtive look as she stared toward the doorway where Dunbar had disappeared; but her fingers worked swiftly and nimbly as they clipped away at the printed page.

SEVERAL hours later, Emanuel Knapp, a civil service employee, was on his way home to his top-floor apartment. As usual, he puffed and wheezed as he climbed the weary five flights in the old-fashioned "walk-up" building; and, as usual for many weeks past, he sweated in the deadly heat. Arriving at the fourth floor, he paused to regain his breath; and, as he did so, he became conscious of a low rustling, and saw a thin bit of paper being ejected beneath the door of Apartment "4 E."

"Well now, isn't that funny," he thought; and, though not naturally a curious man, reached automatically for the paper.

As he opened it, he saw to his surprise that it was part of the title page of a book, and his eyes fell upon the conspicuous printed word, MURDER.

"What the heck! Am I going crazy with the heat?" he mumbled to himself; and noticing several smaller specks of paper fluttering loose from the larger one, he reached down for them also.

"For heaven's sake, rescue me!" he read on the first of the slips, which was printed in large book type; while another slip bore, in the same type, an even more startling notation, "I'm caught in the toils of the slimiest devil God ever put on earth!"

Now Emanuel Knapp was not a man naturally quick of apprehension. Hence he was not certain that anything was really seriously amiss. "Most likely there's some crazy loon inside—or else it's just a practical joke," he reflected, as he scowled at the door of 4 E.

Having thus solved the mystery, he wiped his streaming red brow, and bleakly started up the final flights of stairs.

But, as he did so, he spied a third printed slip at the base of the steps. And wearily he reached down for it.

"Lord help us, sir, don't hesitate a minute!" he read. "Not one minute, or it will be too late!"

"By gum," he meditated, "wonder if there mightn't be something in it after all. Maybe I ought to notify the police. No harm, anyway, in letting 'em know."

But the thought of retreating down those four long flights of stairs was far from inviting. However, his interest being aroused, he pressed one ear against the door of 4 E. And, from within, he heard a low droning sound.

"By glory," he concluded, starting down the stairs, "maybe it's a counterfeiting gang!"

Fifteen minutes later, two officers of the law had marched in Knapp's company to the door of 4 E. And after prolonged rapping and violent bell-ringing, the door had opened, to reveal a man in a chemist's stained white robe, who greeted them blandly, and professed great surprise at their call.

"Looks like you've got the wrong apartment, Officers," he protested, suavely, when shown the clippings picked up by Knapp. "I've been busy all day with some experiments in the laboratory. There's no one else in the place."

"Well, damn it, the story did look phoney to me!" admitted Officer O'Madden, glaring reproachfully at Knapp. "What the hell! a regular cock-and-bull yarn! If the Chief hadn't ordered us to come—"

BUT Officer Frye was of a different turn of mind. "Perfectly sure you're the only person here, Mister?" he demanded of Dunbar.

"Hasn't been another soul around for weeks."

"Sure of that?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then what is that blue handbag doing over there on the settee?"

Dunbar could not quite control a startled gasp. His eyes flashed, and his lips twitched oddly. But he did not reply.

"Mind if I look at it?"

Dunbar, imposing himself in the way, started to protest. But the officer had already shoved himself into the room. In an instant he had snatched up the handbag and slipped open the clasp. And from within he had taken a small printed card, and read, "Miss Eleanor Firth."

"Firth? Eleanor Firth?" gasped O'Madden. "By crimps! ain't that the girl what disappeared the other day? Why, her folks set up a hell of a row—I was in the station when they popped in. Foul play, they called it."

A long weighted silence followed. Dunbar glanced furtively toward the door, as if looking for some easy way of escape. His eyes blazed with the fury of the trapped animal.

"Well, maybe it's just what you call a coincidence," drawled Officer Frye. "Anyway, guess we'd better take a look around."

Despite Dunbar's protestations, the officers proceeded to ransack the room —though without results. And while they were peering under tables, behind sofas and into closets, Knapp stood with his nose pressed suspiciously against a locked door.

"Say, Officer, there's a funny smell coming from over here," he reported.

"The whole place smells funny, if you ask me!" mumbled Frye. And then, turning to Dunbar, "Guess you'd better let us peep in there, Brother!"

The chemist stood with his back firmly pressed against the door. "I'll be damned if you will! That's my private laboratory. I'm in the midst of an experiment, which will be ruined if I let any light in!"

"To hell with your experiment! Stand aside, Brother!"

But not until two pairs of strong arms had flung him away did Dunbar forsake the door. And not until two strong pairs of shoulders had pressed themselves against the partition did the lock show signs of yielding. It was just when it began to crack that Dunbar made his dash toward the front entrance—to be thwarted by the lucky chance that Knapp blocked his way, giving Frye time to lay hands upon him, while O'Madden finished the little business of breaking down the door.

As the barrier gave way, an unpleasant odor, a little like ether, penetrated to the men's nostrils.

"Jumping crickets!" cried O'Madden. "What in tarnation is this!"

Stretched full-length on the floor in the electric light, with pale bloodless face and inert, apparently unbreathing form, was a disshevelled young woman, her unbared left arm displaying a long bloody streak.

IN THE first amazed instant of the discovery, Officer Frye almost lost his grip on Dunbar.

"The saints preserve us! Is she dead?" he gasped.

"Looks like it," concluded O'Madden. "First let's attend to this devil, then we'll investigate."

Out rattled a pair of handcuffs, which clapped themselves about Dunbar's wrists.

Bending down to the girl, Frye felt her forehead. "Why, she's still warm," he discovered. "Couldn't be dead very long."

"You blinking idiots!" raged the captive, struggling in O'Madden's bear-like grip. "What makes you think she's dead? Why, she'll recover soon enough. If you'll give me a chance, I'll bring her back right now. We were just performing a little experiment—"

"Experiment! Like hell!"

It was only then that Frye observed the hyperdermic needle on the floor a few feet from the unconscious girl.

"Guess you can tell them all about that down at the station house," he observed, caustically. "Meanwhile we'd better bring the lady down to the doc's office on the first floor. You just keep your grip on that thug, O'Madden!"

Six-foot giant that he was, Frye had gathered the girl into his arms as easily as if she had been a sofa pillow.

"By God, if you don't let me go," threatened Dunbar, his black eyes glittering like a crowd of devils dancing, "I swear you'll rue the day!"

Frye's answer was a hoarse burst of laughter.

But cutting through his laughter with the sharpness of an earthquake, there came a rattling and banging at the laboratory window. And while the two officers and Knapp stood as if transfixed, the window shade flew up and the window burst open, though there was nothing visible to account for the commotion. O'Madden afterwards asserted that a cold breeze blew by him, though the thermometer stood around 100; and Frye, whose courage no one had ever doubted, did not deny that the hair on his head prickled and a chill swept down his spine.

"If only it'd been something I could of seen, no matter what, I'd of stood up against it," he recited, as he told of the event between gulps of whisky. "What the devil! A man can only die once! But this thing that you couldn't see or put hands on—Christ, I'd rather fight a

herd of stampeding elephants!"

The fact was, as both officers testified, that the very walls of the room shook, as if rocked by some mighty force. Dunbar's handcuffs, though O'Madden swore that he had clasped them on firmly, fell to the floor as though they had been mere bands of paper. An eerie whirring voice, proceeding as if from nowhere, gave warning, "Harm him not, earthlings, or beware the consequences!" And, at the same time, Dunbar was jerked out of the astonished officer's grip!

Yes, jerked away completely, like a toy torn from a child's hands! From the expression on his face, it was evident that he was as bewildered as any one as he went gliding toward the window and out—out into the open air, where he disappeared in the fog! While, even as he vanished, the window shade snapped down and the window slammed shut.

"By glory, the place is haunted!" mumbled O'Madden, crossing himself. And as the three men, with the unconscious girl, emerged from the outer door of 4 E, their faces streamed with a sweat that did not come from the heat alone; and they knew that there was no force on earth powerful enough to induce them to set foot across that threshold again.

CHAPTER X

A Plunge in the Dark

BENEATH the great translucent milky-white envelope of the Planetoid, Gates stood in an egg-shaped jelly-like car about thirty feet tall. He was still invisible, even to himself; and could not see the gigantic companion who shared with him his curious vehicle. But through the gelatinous walls he could view the vast cloud-covered expanse of the earth as it rolled by far beneath.

"Now we must wait, nignig," his unseen companion was saying, "until we whirl around on our orbit to your own part of the globe. Fortunately, it is but a minute planet, and the journey will take scarcely another hour. The instruments will tell us when we arrive. But by my tail! may my brothers not revive before then!"

"What will we do, when we get to earth?" inquired Gates.

"Do? hissed Yellow-Claws. "What do you expect? Why, get vengeance, as I have told you, earthling!"

"But how get vengeance?"

"You shall see! May the blue lightnings blast me, if you do not see! I shall discredit the leadership of the Peerless Red One! I shall frustrate his schemes! I shall invalidate him, as we say on Saturn! Then he will go back home in disgrace, like the scum of the abyss that he is! He will commit Guhl-Guhli—which is to say, he will sting himself to death, and I will come into my own! Then, nignig, I will return and conquer this world as it should be conquered!"

Gates groaned. He began to see that at heart Yellow-Claws was no better than Red-Hood; all he would give the earth would be a momentary reprieve.

Yet was not even a momentary reprieve better than nothing?

So at any rate, Gates asked himself a little later in a spasm of alarm. Not quite an hour had gone by; and Yellow-Claws was just preparing to cut the egg-shaped car adrift. But suddenly, through the jelly-like shell of the Planetoid, huge spidery shapes were seen in shadowy movement. And Yellow-Claws whirred with excitement, "Quick, earthling, quick! or they'll be upon us!"

There came a ripping sound, though no cutting instrument was visible; and

the car began to plummet earthward.

But at the same time, through apertures in the walls of the Planetoid, a score of octopus-limbed creatures began to glide, their angry eyes glaring, like triangular rubies, their arms waving fantastically. Around the Planetoid and beneath it they darted, then, gradually becoming dimmer of outline, disappeared from sight.

But Gates was not to be deceived. He knew that they had but garbed themselves in invisibility. He knew that the vibrations given off by Yellow-Claws' body would guide them, although their foe could not be seen. And he was appallingly aware that the whole pack of them were in pursuit of his protector.

"By our planet's ten moons! they must not catch us!" rattled out Yellow-Claws. "If we are captured, we will suffer the penalty of deserters. We will be slain—yes, slain by the method of Multiple Agony, which torments every nerve of the body for many days before death brings relief."

DOWN, down, down they dashed. They rushed through the stratosphere, and the earth seemed to leap forward to meet them. But reaching the heavier layers of the atmosphere, they were checked by the resistance of the air—and were checked even more by the tangle of invisible Saturnian webs.

Almost at the same time, they were lost in a fog. Whether the earth were near or far they could not say; they bobbed around like a ship on a stormy sea. "Cursed be all the demons of outer space! Something's wrong with the direction gauge!" muttered Yellow-Claws.

Even as he spoke, there came a roar from somewhere near at hand. And a dull-red smoke-puff burst through the fog overhead.

"Fiery imps of Jupiter!" growled Yellow-Claws. "They've got the range!"

It was an extraordinary battle that followed. Both sides were invisible; both aimed frightening flashes in the other's direction. Grimly Gates reflected that earth-folk, watching the demonstration from below, would think an unusually severe thunder storm in progress. For, in truth, there were all the symptoms of a thunder storm. The sky rumbled with detonations as of gigantic artillery; red lightnings and blue and purple shot through the hazes in zigzag streaks; rain began to fall in howling torrents. How it was that they escaped destruction in that first moment of the encounter was more than Gates could explain; for he saw crimson bars and blue balls of fire playing along the outer surface of the jelly-like envelope.

Manifestly, the car was made of a strongly non-conducting substance; but, even so, he expected the whole fragile affair to collapse instantly.

But the speed of their descent, it soon appeared, was greater than they had imagined; in less than five minutes, they grew conscious of vague outlines just beneath. At almost the same moment, there came a violent threshing and bumping, and Gates, stunned and bruised, was aware of vague projections, which he recognized as the limbs of trees.

At the same time, he was startled by a loud popping, as of a suddenly deflated balloon.

"By the Eleventh Asteroid!" rasped Yellow-Claws. "We're being torn to shreds!"

Surely enough, the branches of the tree had slashed through the gelatinous envelope, which was hanging from the foliage in wispy, thinly palpitating

The sharp jaws of the thing closed on Gates' hand

bands and tatters. Their car—or, rather, all that was left of it—had lodged in the upper limbs of a huge oak, forty feet above ground!

Not that this distance meant anything, so far as Yellow-Claws was concerned. But his protective envelope had been destroyed; and though a red spout of smoke vomited from between his gray-green lips and lunged toward his foe in forked lightnings, he knew that the battle was lost.

"Stay where you are, earthling!" he muttered. "They must not find you! By my fifth arm! They will pay dearly for my life!"

BEFORE these words had died in his ears, Gates knew that Yellow-Claws had sprung down from the tree. The lightnings had become a little more remote, though hardly less terrible. Then a scream shrilled from the distance, and Gates rejoiced to know that one of the enemy had been struck. But almost immediately, closer at hand, there rose an unearthly shriek, followed by a groan as of some being in utmost anguish.

"Thur-glut-nu! Thur-glut-nu!" came terribly, in the Saturnian tongue. And then less fiercely, to Gates,

"May all the devils of the space-ways curse them! They've hit me! Hit me, earthling, in the middle nerve center!" —by which he referred to a spot beneath the left shoulder, which, Gates had learned, was a Saturnian's one really vunerable point.

Yellow-Claws' next words were rasping and horrible beyond description.

"Flee, nignig, flee! I invoke on them the curses of a thousand dead generations! the venom of all black planets! I—I—by my father's claws, I shall never see Saturn again!"

The cry trailed off into a confusion of words in the suffer's native tongue. There came another moan; then a series of terrifying snorts, snarls and bellowings, as of a wolf-pack closing in on its prey. And red and green lightnings flashed, and blue fireballs played among the treetops . . . while a pandemonium of thunder drowned out that fiendish chorus.*

Quivering, Gates clung to his perch high in the oak-tree. At any moment, he expected to be snatched up by an invisible arm. Yet time went by, the lightnings and thunders faded out, and at last he began to breathe more easily. He heard the threshing as of mighty forms moving past him. They brushed by the tree; they whisked through the woods to right and to left. But thanks to his invisibility; thanks also to the fact that, unlike Yellow-Claws, he set up no etheric vibration that his enemies could detect, he remained unmolested.

It seemed a long while before at last all became quiet. Then, as the immediate danger passed, the rescued man began to take stock of his position.

"By god," he reflected, with a wry grimace, "I'd better not start crowing just yet!" For had he escaped only in order to face a lingering, more cruel doom? Lost in some unknown corner of the woods, perhaps many miles from home; invisible, and without food, money, or other means of making his way, he was, to say the least, in a desperate pass. Would he be able, despite all handicaps, to make his way to civilization before Dunbar could carry out his Mephistophelean plots?

His teeth bit into his lower lip with a grimness of determination as, in the misty twilight, he felt his way down from the tree and began searching for an outlet from the wilderness.

* On Earth, fireballs can travel along a wire fence, but are grounded instantly they come to a wooden post, provided they are in direct contact. However, these unearthly fireballs seem to have a negative quality.—Ed.

CHAPTER XI

The Electronic Space Ray

THE story of Officers Frye and O'Madden was greeted at the station with incredulous smiles. Evidently these two doughty old members of the force had been drinking too heavily; or else, like so many thousands, had gone crazy with the heat. Nevertheless, thanks to their allegations, two of their brother officers were dispatched to investigate Philip Dunbar's apartment.

An hour later, they returned. Their uniforms were rumpled; their hair lay loose and dishevelled across their sweaty red brows; their eyes popped from their heads, and their hands shook and twitched with nervous palpitations. Their experience was thus reported to Captain Donnelley by Officer Halloran:

"We went up to that hell's nest, and worse luck to us! Got in without any trouble, didn't we, Jensen? Somebody pulled the door open, and said in the doggonest funniest voice you ever heard, 'Come in, earthlings, we want some sport!' We knew then there was bats in somebody's belfry, but went in anyway, and would you b'lieve it, there wasn't nobody near the door. We walked further inside, and saw a guy working over a lot of tubes and bottles; he said his name was Dunbar all right, and yelled at us, 'I warn you, get out, before it is too late!' . . . 'We've got a warrant for your arrest,' says I, 'so you'd better come nice and quiet.' At that he just laughed, didn't he, Jensen?"

"You'd of thought it was something funny, being arrested, by jiminy!" affirmed Officer Jensen.

"Well, nobody wouldn't ever believe it, but before I could get to the guy, the handcuffs was knocked right outer my hands," went on Halloran. "Not by that fellow Dunbar, neither, curse him! He was over on the other side of the room. Somebody hit me right through the air, with something I couldn't see. May I be boiled in tar if I lie!"

"You sure oughter be boiled in tar, if you expect me to believe that tommy-rot!" growled the Captain.

"Well, b'lieve it or not, that ain't nothing to what happened to me," Jensen took up the story. "I felt something grabbing me by the hair. Yes, so help me God! I reached up my hand, and felt something cold and hard, like a lobster's claw. But you still couldn't see a damned thing!"

"Ought of heard what a yell Jensen let out," Halloran continued. "Sure was fit to wake the dead!"

"Oh, gwan!" countered Jensen. "'Twasn't nothing to the way you hollered when you was pitched plumb across the room!"

"Well, who wouldn't holler if they was batted hard against the wall by some invisible devil? I ain't boasting when I say I'm a tough nut to crack, but when that thing, whatever it was, began tweaking my ears and nose and saying, 'This is the way we'll twist your necks, earthlings, if the likes of you ever come back here'—well then, what in thunder do you think I'd do? Stay to get my neck twisted?"

The Captain meanwhile was smiling cynically.

"You boys sure must think I like fish stories!" he remarked.

It may not be that any one took Jensen and Halloran quite seriously. Yet was it not hard to believe that four trusty old members of the force had all gone crazy? The fact is, in any case, that when the Captain considered sending two more men to the mysterious apartment, he could find no one who did not threaten to resign from the force sooner than accept the assignment.

ELEANOR meanwhile, as Dunbar had predicted, had regained consciousness. Yet she could give only a confused account of what had happened. "When the bell began ringing so furiously," she testified, "I thought I heard Dunbar stealing behind me, but paid no attention till suddenly I felt a sharp jab in one arm. By then it was too late even to cry out. Everything went black around me before I'd even had time to realize he'd stabbed me again with the hyperdermic."

Thanks to her entreaties and the testimony of the officers, she was granted a bodyguard of two detectives; for, as she asserted, "The minute I walk out by myself, that fiend will re-capture me. And I have work to do—very important work, if the world is to be saved!"

Every one smiled in half-veiled amusement. Yet no one could deny the deadly seriousness of the girls' manner.

No one could deny, either, that she was in danger from some mysterious source. On the day after her release, two men in a taxicab swerved suddenly around a street corner, and came within an inch of snatching her from under the noses of the detectives. The would-be abductors, though unsuccessful, made good their escape; and, later that same day, a still more ominous event occurred.

Eleanor was walking in a fog not far from one of the city's main intersections, when suddenly she felt something clutching her. She cried out in her terror; and the detectives, though seeing nothing, fired into the mist. Evidently it was a mere lucky shot that struck the unseen aggressor under the left shoulder, at his "middle nerve center," his most vulnerable spot. At any rate, an unearthly howl came from the invisible —and, more significant yet, a spout of something thick, sticky and golden-orange jutted to the pavement as if from nowhere. And the girl felt the claws of the invisible relaxing.

"Another damned attack of nerves," Police Captain Donnelley called it, when the incident was reported. Yet, being unable to account for the golden-yellow liquid, he consented to double the girl's bodyguard.

Knowing that the time was exceedingly short—in fact, to take Dunbar's word for it, but four days of grace remained—she worked with desperation. Her first idea was to obtain possession of Gates' infra-red eye, which might show the authorities the cobweb meshes that entangled the planet, and so perhaps rouse them to eleventh hour action. But how obtain this invaluable device? Neither a search of the laboratory, nor a ransacking of Gates' home, revealed any trace of the instrument. Eleanor remembered in despair how, on that memorable evening on the roof, the inventor dropped the device just as the Saturnians swooped down; and she concluded that it had either been broken, lost, or snatched up by the invaders.

THEREFORE she turned to her one other hope. For almost a year, during spare hours in the laboratory, she had been working on what she called the Electronic Space Ray—a beam designed to pierce and dissolve the upper cloud formations. This ray, a modification of the X-ray, engendered by an application of several hundred thousand volts of electricity, had the power of cutting like a knife through any mist, causing the vapors to disperse as though blown aside by a gale. Its range, apparently, was enormous; Eleanor believed it capable of bridging the gulf from the earth to the moon, and held that it would be highly effective at several hundred miles.

Therefore the question arose: if the rays could dissipate a cloud, could they

not penetrate the gelatinous envelopes of the Crystal Planetoids? Was it not conceivable that they could rip the Planetoids apart, as a balloon may be ripped by a bullet? She did not know, but the chance, however fantastic it seemed, was not to be ignored.

Surrounded by her four guards, she hastened to the laboratory of the Merlin Research Institute; and, requiring solitude for efficient work, busied herself from dawn to dusk and even through the early hours of daylight to perfect her invention. Formerly she had expected to be able to finish the contrivance at her leisure. But now with what feverish haste she labored, scarcely taking time to eat, to sleep, to think except of one thing only!

At first the fear haunted her that the Saturnians would break in, and steal her away despite her bodyguard. But was it that the one lucky shot, which had spilled the golden-orange blood of her attacker, had deterred the invaders? More probably, they did not think her worth bothering about—what could she, one poor feeble woman, do to avert the doom that had been so well plotted, and that was so soon to descend?

The heat, as she worked, had risen to furnace intenstiy. Temperatures below a hundred were now rarely found near sea level in the so-called temperate regions; all breezes, except those engendered by electric fans, were memories of the dear departed days; while so many areas were parched and browned, so many people were perishing on all sides, that bureaux of statistics no longer kept records. That the long-awaited Day of Judgment was at hand; that the destruction of the earth and all its inhabitants was a matter but of weeks or at most of months, was now the theme of preachers and laymen alike; millions, ceasing to hope, passed their days amid a long mumbling of lamentations and prayers.

MEANWHILE few knew or cared about the young woman who, with eyes red and strained, with fingers deft yet nervously hurried, with skin and apron mottled with chemicals, yet with a spirit that refused to give up, labored amid the motors and ray-spouting tubes, the flasks and crucibles of the steamy hot laboratory. Nearly five days had gone by before she had put her machine into working order—five days which, in view of the time lost under the spell of the hyperdermic drug, should bring her beyond the deadline set by Dunbar. Already, perhaps, he had turned over the containers of compressed air to the Saturnians! Already they were making their last deadly assault! Already it was too late—too late to save the earth!

Nevertheless, if but one chance in ten thousand remained, that chance must not be tossed aside.

Her machine, when ready, was a montrous-looking affair, somewhat resembling a siege-gun in appearance. The fifteen-foot steel snout, shooting upward like a spire from the central mass of lenses, prisms and radio-like tubes, was attached by wires to several huge dynamos. A telescope, fastened to the side of the main tube, connected with the range-finder; while the whole could be moved hither and thither on wheels, a little like a great gun on its carriage.

Three skilled mechanics, who had helped to construct the apparatus on Eleanor's instructions, shook their heads doubtfully over the completed instrument. "The lady must be crazy," they muttered in private, "if she thinks such a rigamagig can save the world!"

The skeptics were, it is true, just a little impressed by the first demonstration. The machine was wheeled into a

courtyard adjoining the Research Institute; and its mouth was pointed upward into the mists that precluded visibility above a hundred feet. At a signal, the power was turned on; there came a low whirring, accompanied by blue flashes; and almost instantly, as if some unseen fist had thrust its way through them, the vapors disappeared from a circle of sky about ten degrees across, and the azure of heaven appeared for the first time in many days.

Equally impressive was the next experiment. A number of open jars of gelatin were placed against the walls of the building, and the machine was pointed toward them. For half a dozen seconds they were bombarded by the rays; then, upon examination, the gelatin was found to have vanished—to have dissolved despite the intervening glass of the jars, which themselves had seemingly been unaffected!

A faint glow of hope came to the girl's mind as she witnessed these results. Could it be that, after all, not everything was lost? A machine that could work such miracles might also perform wonders against the Planetoids!

But even as this thought flashed over her, there came another realization—a numb, dull realization that struck her like a hand of lead. On one of the Planetoids, hundreds if not thousands of humans were held—at least, so she judged from the reports of the many that disappeared mysteriously after setting out to see Gates dangled from the web of the invaders. Worst of all! The man she loved was a prisoner! If she destroyed the Planetoids, she would destroy Ronald! And after that, though the world lived on, what meaning would life have for her?

But only for a moment did she hesitate. They had reached a point where the fate of individuals did not matter. The sacrifice of all the captives, lamentable as it would be—the sacrifice of her lover—the sacrifice of herself—what did all this count beside the future of the human race?

Gritting her teeth and clenching her fists, she turned back to the Electronic Space Ray. Her eyes were desolate but her manner was determined as she picked up the range finder and revolved the telescope through a newly cleared circle of blue sky.

CHAPTER XII

Prelude to Battle

THERE are some grave disadvantages in being invisible. So, at least, Gates concluded as he went groping through the woods in the effort to find his bearings. It is disconcerting, to say the least, to ask a passer-by the way, and to be greeted with a shriek, and watch the man turn and dash away frantically, as from a ghost. It is aggravating to reach an automobile road and find every car trying to drive full-tilt through one. Gates felt like a man returning from the dead as he picked his way out of the woods, and, reaching a village, began to make a few civil inquiries. . . . Inevitably, he found, his hearers would flee the vicinity of his voice; and the harder he tried to call them back the faster they would run.

He passed the night in an open field under a haystack—which, considering the heat, was not at all a hardship. In the morning, driven by hunger, he strolled into a farmhouse; and while the family stampeded like sheep from the sound of his footsteps, he calmly helped himself to some ham and biscuits from the kitchen table. Having thus satisfied his needs, he wandered away along a railroad track, and after about an hour's walk reached a junction, where a

sign on the station showed him that he was two hundred miles from home. "God! How'm I ever going to make the distance?" he wondered, reflecting that he had not a penny in his pockets.

Twenty minutes later, while he still stood there baffled, a train puffed into the station—one of the few still running in those disorganized days. Several people stepped aboard; and, without hesitation, he joined them, trusting to his invisibility to save him from the demands of the ticket-taker.

As there was no unoccupied seat, he stood in the vestibule, which caused not a little confusion, as people kept brushing against him as they went by, greatly to their consternation. Long before they had reached their destination, in fact, half the passengers were ready to swear that the train was haunted. This view was furthered by Buck Johnson, one of the colored waiters in the dining car, who testified that while his back was turned the better part of the contents of a tray disappeared—and that he turned about just in time to see a sausage go floating down the passageway, although nobody was in sight!

It was fortunate, Gates thought, that the train was air-conditioned; the cool, fresh atmosphere made it easier for him to think. And, certainly, he needed to think as never before. What would he do upon getting back home? Obviously, go as soon as possible to Dunbar's apartment, to check that traitor's vile designs, if there were still time! And to rescue Eleanor from his clutches! But was it not already too late? Gates gravely feared so. Besides, how prevail against Dunbar, protected as he was by the overweening power of the Saturnians?

"Well, at least," Gates reflected, "I can't be seen—that's one strategic advantage." But it would take more than his invisibility to win the battle. He must have weapons—weapons of unrivalled power. And where could such be found?

AT this thought he remembered a certain invention he had toyed with months before. This was a knife which he called the Electric Blade: a folding strip of metal, small and compact, and short enough to be carried in a man's hip pocket, yet capable of being extended to the length of one's forearm, when it would cut with the sharpness of a sword. To it was attached a minute but powerful storage battery which Gates had perfected: a battery that made it possible for the blade to slash back and forth with such swiftness that the eye could hardly follow its motions. The inventor had believed that the weapon might prove valuable for close combat work in warfare; but had lost interest in it temporarily while working on that still more important device, the Infra-Red Eye.

It was, however, with the greatest of enthusiasm that he thought now of the Electric Blade. Might this not be just what he needed in the conflict with Dunbar? Knowing something of the prowess of the Saturnians, he was far from sure; nevertheless, he swore a bitter oath, "I'll have a try at it, even if they hack me to mincemeat!"—which, he realized, they were only too likely to do.

The Electric Blade, he recalled, had been left in his locker at the Merlin Research Institute. Accordingly, it was to this spot that he must hasten immediately upon returning to the city.

It was night by the time he had reached the building; and the front door was locked. But seeing a light inside, he rapped. As no answer came, he rapped again, this time more loudly; and then rapped once more, still more loudly. It was only after the fourth or

fifth summons that he heard shuffling footsteps warily approaching. "What the devil!" he muttered to himself. "Do they think I want to steal the building?"

"Who's there?" a voice from within demanded, huskily.

"It's I! Ronald Gates! An employee of the Institute!"

There was a momentary hesitation. He heard two men conferring in whispers; then the door opened a few inches, and he stared into the muzzle of a revolver, behind which glowered the grim, determined face of a uniformed man.

"Don't be scared, Officer," he began, slightly amused. "I can establish my identity—"

Instantly there rang out a yell from the uniformed man. Savagely the door banged to a close. "By God! It's one of them devils from Saturn!"

Almost simultaneously, he heard another voice taking up the cry. "Run, Miss, run! Quick! Ain't no time to waste! One of them fiends is after you again!"

From within, he heard a woman's scream. "Out this way! This way!" And all other sounds were lost amid the scurrying of feet.

But had those tones not had a familiar ring? Could it be—or was his heated imagination only playing tricks?

HE lost no time, however, in useless questionings. Realizing that the fugitives must leave by the rear exit, on another street, he raced around the raced around the block, in such haste that he bowled over two pedestrians, who were never to know what had hit them. As he approached the rear door, he saw five figures hurriedly emerge, among them a young woman, the sight of whom caused his heart to pound furiously.

"Eleanor!" he shouted. "Eleanor!"

The girl glanced toward him, and shrieked. Even if she recognized his voice, she thought that it was merely one of the Saturnians imitating him.

"Eleanor! Eleanor!" he repeated. "It's I, Ronald! It's I!"

But it was doubtful if she even heard. Preceding the four policemen—pushed and shoved by them, for he had never seen men in more frantic haste—she was lost to view inside a black sedan. A moment later, the car had spurted from sight around the corner.

Greatly shaken, Gates returned to the Institute. It was much—very much—to know that Eleanor was alive, and apparently not in Dunbar's hands. But to have her flee him as though he were a plague-bearer; to be mistaken by her for one of the Saturnians—that was a new and totally unexpected experience. Now, as never before, he began to curse his invisibility.

But there was work to be done—work from which he must not be deterred even by the thought of Eleanor. And at this point, as if by way of compensation, his invisibility served him to excellent purpose. How, considering that the doors were all locked, could he get into the Institute? Contemplatively he strolled around the building, and saw that the one possible entry was by means of an open window facing the fire escape on the third floor. To hoist himself up to the fire escape was, to be sure, no great task for one of his agility; but as it gave upon a main street, where many people were passing, it would have been impossible for any ordinary man to accomplish the feat without detection. As it was, however, he managed the entry with ease.

Once within, he felt his way down to the locker room, where he switched on the lights, and turned to his own locker—the combination of which, fortunately, had not been altered. A moment

later, the door rattled open. He saw that the interior had been disturbed, as though somebody had entered during his absence and fumbled among the contents; but his pulses leapt with excitement when, safely hidden in a corner, he located a steel-sheathed apparatus of about the size of a large pistol.

"Thank heaven!" he muttered. "This little blade may hold the world's destiny!"

He placed the instrument carefully beneath his garments, so that it too became invisible; closed the locker; and started away, with the knowledge that he hastened to a battle that could end only in victory or death.

CHAPTER XIII

The Electric Blade Swings

STRIPPED to the waist, Philip Dunbar worked in the electric glare of the oven-hot laboratory. The throbbing of motors made a dull undertone in his ears as he examined the register connecting with the steel cylinders of compressed air. His dark face had become long and haggard; his eyes glittered with a wild, almost demoniacal light. But a grunt of satisfaction came from between those two thin cynic lips of his as he muttered,

"Thank the Lord! At last it's done!"

"Thank not the Lord, earthling! Thank us!" a whirring voice sounded from just outside the window. "For many days we have followed your labors. For many days we have assisted. Nevertheless, you are a day behind schedule. A whole day, earthling!"

"I have done my best!" sighed Dunbar. "Could I help it if I was sick with the heat for two days, and could hardly work?"

"We will forgive you this once, nig-nig, although on our planet we are not such weaklings as to get sick. After all, you have served us not badly. Tomorrow, with the compressed air to improve our efficiency, we will be lords of this world!"

"Tomorrow we will be lords of this world!" another voice, from an invisible source, weirdly repeated.

"Earthling, we have one more command," buzzed the first voice. "These casks of compressed air are hard for us to reach through your narrow window. See that they are placed outside on the ground. Have them put there early tomorrow, that we may gather them up with ease."

"I shall do so!" acceded Dunbar. And hastily he added, "Then you will not—will not forget your promise?"

"Never fear!" a voice of reassurance droned. "When all the rest of your race sleeps in the long Forever, you will be glad to be alive—you, the last man!"

"I will be glad to be alive," acknowledged Dunbar. But his voice had a tone of sadness; his long, lean, dark countenance drooped.

"One thing more! The female of my race—the girl I call Eleanor—have you not saved her as a reward for my services? Through the wiles of wicked connivers, she has escaped. Once more I ask you, can you not seize her and bring her back?"

"Once more I tell you, earthling, the Peerless Red One has changed his mind about the female of your species. In truth, we were not sorry when she got away; and made but little effort to recapture her, for she drew your mind from your work. The Peerless Red One has decided, if the female of the species is crafty enough to get away, might she not be crafty enough to cause us much trouble? No, earthling! Let her perish with the rest of her crawling species!"

Dunbar groaned, and sank disconso-

lately to the laboratory floor. Had he not learned that nothing was more futile than to argue with a Saturnian?

THE dreary gray of dawn was visible through the stagnant cloud-banks by the time Gates had started toward Dunbar's apartment.

One thing, in particular, had delayed him. Having secured the Electric Blade, he decided that he must also obtain the Infra-Red Eye as a precaution in case of conflict with the Saturnians. One of the instruments, he recalled to his regret, had been lost during that first encounter with the invaders from space. But there was another, which he had left for safekeeping in the home of his old friend Bill Denny. Here, however, was indeed a predicament! How could he got to Denny and ask for his property, now that he was invisible? After much thought, he concluded that only one course was open to him; hence, taking a flashilght from his locker at the Institute, he hurried to Bill's home, climbed in through a window, and began to ransack his friend's spare room, where he knew the Infra-Red Eye was kept.

It was this that gave rise to the panic in the Denny household; to Martha Denny's screams when she awakened long after midnight and saw a light proceeding as if on its own volition down the empty hallway. Bill Denny, who went to investigate, said that he heard the sound of racing footsteps, and caught a gleam, which he attributed to a burglar's flashlight; and this theory was borne out the following morning by the disordered state of the spare room. But what nobody could understand was that a bill-packed wallet, which stood in plain sight, had been untouched; while the only thing taken was the peculiar-looking contraption entrusted to Bill weeks ago by his missing friend, poor old Ronny Gates.

Meantime, with the Infra-Red Eye shielded from sight beneath his garments, Gates was approaching Dunbar's apartment house. As he drew near in the early dawn, he paused in an adjoining court; and a thrill of satisfaction shot through him to know that, after all, he was not too late. No! but he was barely in time! For two workmen, heaving and panting, were throwing a thick steel cylinder on top of a great heap.

Beside them stood Dunbar, looking hot and unhappy as he directed their movements with nervous haste. "Now you fellows, just one more!" he was ordering, with a growl. "Go up and get it, and I'll pay you off! Go on, quick! God! what are you such snails about?"

As the men slouched away, Gates let out an unconscious grunt; at which Dunbar turned toward him sharply, terror in his piercing black little eyes. "Good heavens!" he muttered to himself, as he hastily lit a cigarette. "I'm getting so I see things everywhere!"

A FEW minutes later, the last of the cylinders had been deposited on the heap; the workmen had been paid, and had gone shuffling off; and Dunbar, leaning against the pile, was awaiting the arrival of the Saturnians. Nor had he long to wait. The laborers had hardly passed out of sight around the corner, when one of the cylinders began to move as of its own will, and, with gradually accelerating velocity, shot into the air and out of sight.

Now if ever, Gates realized, was the time to act! With trembling speed, he drew the Infra-Red Eye from under his coat, so as to reveal the Saturnians who, he felt sure, were all about him. For a moment alarm possessed him; for the Eye, being visible, would betray him to the foe! But no! evidently some of the

Amvol-Amvol had been rubbed upon it in its contact with his clothes; it too was invisible!

Hastily he adjusted it, by means of tight bands running around his head; yet not so hastily as to make unnecessary noise. How fortunate, he thought, that the Saturnians' ears were less acute than some of their other senses! Yet what he saw, after he had turned the proper screws and levers, was nothing to reassure him. Not one Saturnian, nor even two, as he had expected! Nor even five or six! At least twelve of the great creatures, with their dangling octopus limbs, their long stinging tails, their red triangular eyes—at least twelve of them, all seeming of a watery pallor through the Infra-Red Eye! And among them, leading them as he strutted savagely back and forth among the compressed air containers, was the overtowering form of Red-Hood!

Pressed into a basement doorway for protection, Gates planned his action. His mind worked with spring-like rapidity; he knew that he had not a second to waste. Two advantages were his: the Electric Blade, and his ability to take his adversaries by surprise. But how slight these assets seemed by comparison with the number and prowess of his foes!

Yet not for an instant did he flinch. If he must die, then he must die! Out from beneath his coat came the Electric Blade, its sheath fortunately invisible; but after he had set the motors into operation, the whirring sound betrayed him.

"What's that?" came suspiciously from one of the Saturnians, in his native tongues, as the monster started toward the source of the sound.

Instantly Gates released the blade to its full length. But, as he did so, he received another shock. The metal, in its folded position, had evidently missed contact with the Amvol-Amvol! It could be seen just like any ordinary steel!

"Ah! What devil have we here?" dinned from the Saturnian, in a mighty roar. And he lunged in Gates' direction.

AS he did so, the blade began to swing with such speed that it made but a gray blur. Too swift for the Saturnians to follow its movements, the steel slashed at the assailant, whom Gates could clearly see through the Infra-Red Eye. The first blows made but minor dents in the creature's tough armor; but after a second or two Gates swung the weapon upward toward the enemy's left shoulder.

Horrible to hear was the monster's howl as the Middle Nerve Center was penetrated and fountains of golden-orange overflowed the pavement. Terrible beyond words was his death-yell as he sagged and sank, and, with all his limbs threshing violently, clutched blindly for his foe.

But Gates had leapt out of range. Vehemently he was darting hither and thither among the Saturnians, slashing in all directions with the furiously swinging blade. He could see the octopus limbs of half a score of the creatures writhing simultaneously toward him, interfering with one another in their conculsive movements. However, they aimed not at him but at the blade, and always they struck at the point where it had been just a fraction of a second before their blows descended. Thus, by a hair's breadth, Gates was able to elude them.

How long would he be able to keep up the unequal struggle? His strength was waning; his breath was coming hard and fast; its very sound would have betrayed him had it not been for the other noises of battle. Already he had

wounded several adversaries, though not mortally; their golden-yellow blood flowed, but they still fought on. Time after time he felt himself brushed by their sweeping arms; felt their deathly cold claws against his skin. Once, by less than a finger's breadth, he escaped a lashing envenomed tail.

Even as he lodged this peril, Gates recognized the huge gray-green lips of Red-Hood. He saw the malevolent red light in the eyes of his chief antagonist; and, like a matador fleeing a bull, he ducked and ran sideways. Then, with ferocious suddenness, he turned and swung the flashing blade upward.

A fraction of a second too soon or too late, and he would have been lost. A few inches too high, or a few inches too low, and he might as well not have fought at all. But Red-Hood, stooping low as he charged head forward, had exposed the vulnerable left shoulder. And straight through the susceptible spot burst the cleaving, electrically driven blade.

RED-HOOD'S roar of rage and agony, as he sank amid hideous convulsions, was all but drowned by the dismayed bellowings of his companions. One and all, as though they had hit a blank wall, halted in shrieking consternation at the sight of their smitten leader. And Gates, springing forward, profited from that instant of demoralization, to strike another of the creatures through the Middle Nerve Center.

As he leapt back, barely in time to avert the drive of the swinging tail, he made an amazing observation. The creatures were all in flight! From their terrorized cries, he knew that they thought they were fighting not one man, but an invisible army!

But the last of the monsters, as he turned to flee, swung back briefly. Crouched in a cranny against a coal-bin, was a cowering form, its eyes wide with terror. "You, nignig—you, you are the root of all our trouble!" rasped the Saturnian. "You have betrayed us! You shall be punished!"

Out swung the terrible tail; its barbed point, with the speed of an arrow, plunged into Dunbar's heart. And as the victim, gasping, collapsed in his own blood, his assailant went swinging away up a great cobweb.

Meanwhile Gates, sinking in exhaustion to the pavement, stared at the stones smeared with great streaks of golden-yellow; stared at the still untouched containers of compressed air, and solemnly mumbled a prayer of thanksgiving.

CHAPTER XIV

Deliverance

GATES' first thought, after recovering his breath, was to finish his half-completed task. What if the Saturnian retreat were but temporary? What if the foe should rally, and return with redoubled fury? What if, after all, they should seize the containers of compressed air, and so accomplish their original purpose and conquer the planet?

"By glory! not if I can prevent!" Gates swore a secret oath, as he staggered toward the great steel cylinders. To carry off even one of the heavy affairs would, obviously, be impossible—but was there no other way? After a swift examination, he noticed a little faucet-like spout at the end of one of the vessels, and took it to be a valve to relieve excessive pressure.

"Just five minutes' leeway," he thought, "and there won't be a whiff of compressed air left in the whole shooting match!"

At the same time, he gave the spigot

a swift turn in his fingers.

Instantly there came such a blast that he was stunned. A loud popping, as of an explosion, dinned in his ears. He reeled backward, knocked over as by a hurricane. For a second or two a great fury of escaping air blew by him.

Still a little dazed, he picked himself up a minute later, cursing his own stupidity. In his haste he had turned the vent on full force, so relieving far too much pressure—with results that might have been disastrous.

Worst of all! what if the commotion should summon the Saturnians back?

Even as this fear swept across him, he made a discovery which, for the moment, alarmed him even more. He could see himself again! His arms, his legs, and all of his body, were perfectly visible! The blast of air had been powerful enough to blow away all the Amvol-Amvol, the powder of invisibility!

Aware that he would be utterly at the Saturnians' mercy should they return, he worked quickly as possible to release the compressed air from the other containers. At any moment, he expected to be snatched up by a huge swooping claw, and borne away to his doom. But time went by, and the monsters did not re-appear. And at length the last of the compressed air cylinders was empty!

Then for the first time, as he started hastily away, a flash of joyous realization swept over him. What a relief to be visible again! Once more he could be received as a man!

EARLY in the morning, following the alarm from the supposed Saturnians, Eleanor insisted on resuming work at the Electronic Space Ray. Surrounded by a whole squad of policemen —since her four previous protectors had insisted that they were too few— she entered the courtyard adjoining the Research Institute, where her machine with its fifteen-foot cannon-like muzzle was pointed skyward. Now at last she was ready for the crucial work!

Reaching the courtyard, she adjusted the instrument; cleared an open circle of blue sky; and in so doing destroyed, she knew, an incalculable number of the invisible cobwebs that clogged the atmosphere. But she was out after bigger prey than cobwebs. By means of the telescope she located a tiny shining speck which she recognized as one of the Crystal Planetoids; and, with trembling hands, pointed her machine toward the section of the sky containing the Planetoid.

Then, for the barest fraction of a second, she hesitated. She knew it was but womanly weakness; she knew it was unworthy, inconsistent with her all-important scheme; yet the hot tears trickled down her cheeks, and something clutched at her throat. The next flick of her fingers might be the movement that destroyed scores of human beings, among them Ronny, her lover.

None the less, she held back only for an instant. Her fingers flashed against a lever; and a faint clicking came to her ears. With eyes glued to the telescope, she watched; and immediately, it seemed, she made out a puff of red fire where the Planetoid had been—a puff that swiftly gave way to long ruddy streamers, which almost as swiftly vanished.

Still struggling, she could not keep back her sobs. "Ronny would forgive me, if he knew!" she consoled herself. Nevertheless, several minutes had passed, before, with a great effort of will, she turned to the range finder, and prepared to look for another Planetoid.

Then it was, that all at once, there came a sound which she heard in mute, incredulous amazement. What was

that voice?—that familiar, that exultant voice arising suddenly behind her! "Eleanor!"

Wheeling about, she faced what she at first mistook for an apparition. Could this be Ronald? this dishevelled man with the face ghostly pale, although his eyes were agleam with joy?

But as he strode forward, and flung out his arms, she knew that he was indeed no phantom!

NO LESS surprising than the speed with which the Saturnians had overspread the earth was the rapidity with which the peril receded. Within a few weeks, while dozens of Electronic Space Rays swept the heavens to clear away the great cobwebs, the temperature of the planet returned to normal; the winds blew again as usual; the ferocious thunder storms, the floods and the droughts had dwindled to ghastly memories. If any of the monsters still ranged the earth, they had returned to remote, unpeopled regions; no trace of them was ever seen, except for some mysterious streaks of yellow-orange observed by mariners on an islet near Cape Horn, where the last of the invaders had been dashed to their doom.

As for the Planetoids—so mercilessly were they hunted by the Space Rays that, within a week, the most careful searching of the heavens failed to reveal even one of the great gelatinous balls. The watchers on Saturn, it was generally agreed, would not be encouraged by the results of their expedition! And if ever they should attempt another invasion, the weapons to repel them would be at hand.

Meantime, while paeans of thanksgiving resounded from all lands, the world's eyes were focused on two individuals. The nuptials of Eleanor Firth and Ronald Gates, which were celebrated a few weeks after the overthrow of the Menace, were the occasion for universal rejoicing, for nothing could have appeared more fitting than the union of these two.

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

(Continued from page 7)

WE'VE been reading so many stories about strange monsters in other dimensions, that a fact we recently discovered strikes home oddly.

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf; or the lion, or the tiger? Well, most of us—but who is the big game hunter of Africa afraid of? That wild, ferocious, awful monster, the ox! Yes, that's the truth. The boys with the big guns are scared stiff of the wild oxen.

These critters, cousins to Bossy who roams our pasture and gives us milk, grade-A, and whipping cream, are among the largest and most ferocious of all animals. They attack, battle, and often kill a lion. Capsizing an elephant is no hardship for them at all. Their powerful horns can skewer a tiger just like that! And then they trample all over him, a neat way of "rubbing it in."

WILD oxen, also called water buffalo and Indian buffalo, are plenty strong—and quicker than comfortable in their movements; if they happen to be moving your way. Fortunately, their main diet consists of the tall grasses of the fields, which also serves to hide them. For us, we'll do the hiding!

THAT'S the trouble with them! You can't trust 'em. Without a bit of reason, they'll charge fiercely—and once that headlong rush is started, even the U. S. Marines have no situation in hand. Mr. Hunter, with the elephant gun in trembling hand, has to shoot fast, and aim sure, so as to kill the beast "right now." Don't make the mistake of wounding him—you can't hurt his feelings; but if you do, he'll hurt yours! And so, we say, give us the monsters from Mars. They're much better playmates!

DID you ever stop to think that life on Earth might not originally have started here? Oh yes, silly of us to have mentioned it—we forgot you are science fiction readers. Well, now that we've brought it up, let's kill it.

When the earth first formulated, no living creature that science could conjecture could possibly have existed. There was no surface water, no atmosphere, and the temperature was whew! How then did our earth become peopled?

It's logical to believe that tiny living creatures may have come from another planet—even from a world far beyond old Sol's little family. When you stop to consider, says science, that seeds of plants, and germs, and spores of bacteria in a phase of dormant existence can live through long droughts, can live without oxygen, survive extreme temperatures, isn't it possible that as long as there is no molecular disintegration, life might be sustained for a considerable period, and then originate again when suitable conditions become available?

Perhaps the first space flight to Earth was those tiny ovules which appeared from the cosmos.

LIGHTNING (figuratively) struck at *Amazing Stories* this month. First, we received news that your favorite author, Don Wilcox, had been bundled off to the hospital to have his appendix removed. Then author William P. McGivern, in an encounter with a revolving door, which he justly suspected was "The Doorway of Vanishing Men" escaped an unknown fate, receiving only a badly cut hand, which prevented him from working on his latest masterpiece.

And only as we were writing this, did we learn that author David Wright O'Brien was down with the flu.

So if you discover that these boys are absent in a future issue, that's the reason.

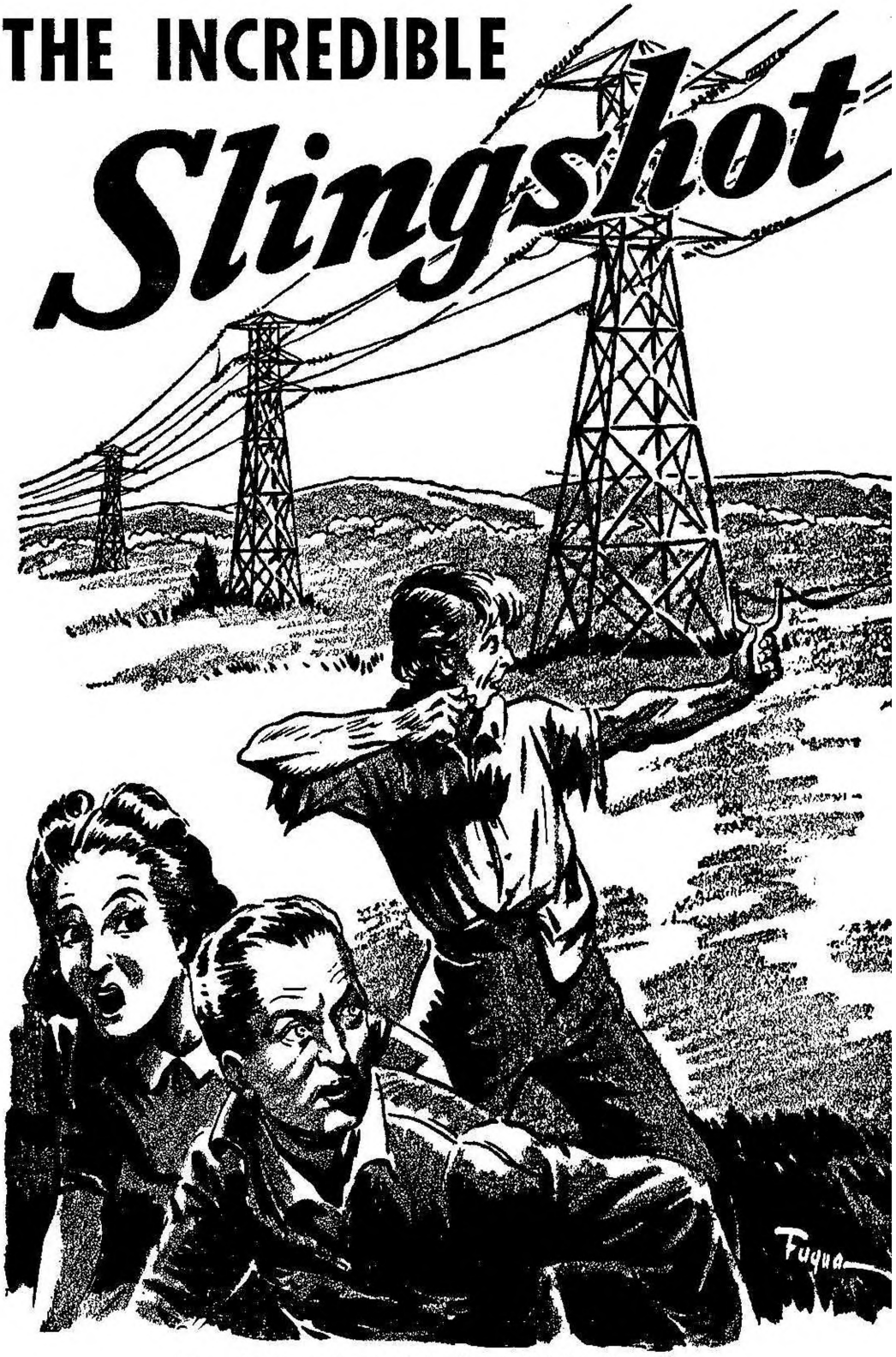
RETURNING next month, on our cover, is Malcolm Smith, this time with a future war scene, illustrating a scene in William P. McGivern's "The Avengers." It is a brilliant painting, and shows a concept of scientific imagination that bids fair for the future. We know you'll like this new cover.

ARTIST Krupa, we hear, is seeking to enlist in the U. S. Marines. We don't know whether this is good news or not, because maybe in the Marines, he'll find time to do a few illustrations for us! He has one in this issue.

Which brings us to the end once more. We'll have more observing to do, next month. And, we think, a brand new BIG book!—*Rap.*

"Hello, Professor Binski. I've just conducted a successful experiment on a wax store model!"

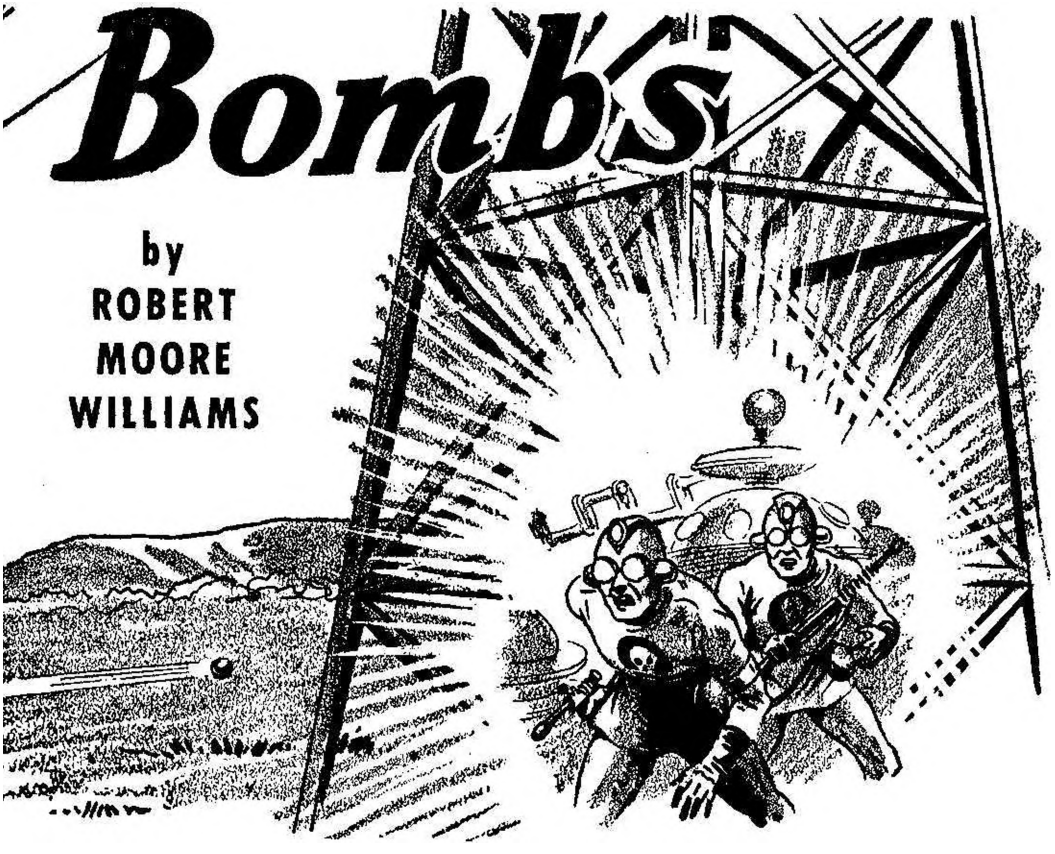
THE INCREDIBLE *Slingshot*



Tommy Sonofagun drew back the sling and let fly with a pellet

Bomb's

by
ROBERT
MOORE
WILLIAMS



It was only a slingshot, but it hurled more death than a thousand-pound bomb. Where did Tommy Sonofagun get those deadly pellets?

"YOU go over to the other ridge," the sheriff said to the two deputies. "If he tries to get out that way, stop him. But remember, we want him alive, *if we can get him that way.*"

I only half heard what the sheriff said. My attention was fully occupied by the dogs down in Ten Mile Valley below us. I couldn't see them but I could hear them bugling down there in the cedar thickets. Baying slowly and mournfully, they were searching for the lost trail. A creek ran down the middle of the valley. Probably Tommy Sonofagun had crossed the creek and thrown the bloodhounds off his trail. Tommy might be a moron but he had enough animal cunning to lose a pack of hounds that were after him.

His name wasn't really Tommy Sonofagun. It was Tommy Britten, but the loafers around Brock's Tavern had taught him to say that his name was Tommy Sonofagun. *They* thought this was funny.

The sheriff and I watched the two deputies tramp down into Ten Mile Valley, but we lost sight of them be-

fore they reached the farther ridge. The steel towers of an electric high-line ran along this ridge for a couple of miles, then dipped down and crossed the valley. The transmission line carried current from the big dam about twenty miles to the north. When the war first started, there was some fear that enemy agents might sabotage this high-line and the sheriff had spent most of his time out in the hills guarding it.

The sheriff was a big, raw-boned mountaineer by the name of Tim Hoskins. He wore store clothes like they were overalls, he was long and lank, and if you took one look at him, you had the instant impression he had just enough sense to come in out of the rain, and no more. If you took a second look and noticed the slow cautious way he talked and the slow but damned sure way he moved, and especially if you looked at his eyes, which never faltered from the gaze of any man, you would be likely to decide you were damned glad you lived in a country where they had sheriffs like this.

"What do you make of it, sheriff?" I asked.

He was carrying his left arm in a bloody sling. Before he answered he adjusted the sling so his arm hung a little easier. Then he shook his head. "I don't know, Ben. I just don't know."

I'm Ben Hopper, and for the past four years I've been owner and publisher of the Summit Press. I'm also editor of this paper, advertising manager, circulation manager, business manager, proof reader, and copy boy. The Press is strictly a one man country paper, but it prints the news, which was why I was out here in the hills. There was news out here. Maybe it was mighty big news, too.

I WAS going to ask some more questions but the clatter of an overworked motor interrupted me and I turned in time to see a car banging up the gravel road toward us. It was a gray Ford coupe and I needed only one glance to recognize it and to know who was driving it. Ellen Briscoe. Uncle Sam sent her out here to try to teach the people on the hill farms how to keep from starving to death. The Relief Lady, the mountaineers called her. She was coming up the hill road like she didn't know there was any such thing as tire rationing. Steam popped out of the radiator as the car reached us. She was out of it almost before it stopped rolling.

"Hello, Ben," she said to me.

"Ellen, you got no business being here," I protested.

She ignored me. She had business wherever she wanted to be, which was anywhere anybody was in trouble. "Sheriff, what's this all about?" she demanded.

Hoskins scraped a toe against the rocky ground. "I—I don't know for sure, Miss Ellen," he said.

"I heard about it in Summit," she said. "And I came right up here. They told me in Summit that you had organized a posse and gone after Tommy. Sheriff, what has Tommy done?"

Those were the words she used. The tone of her voice said more than the words.

The sheriff wore out a lot of shoe leather before he answered. "Sim Brock swore out a warrant," he said at last. "I don't have any choice about serving it."

"Sim Brock swore out a warrant, did he?" Fire flashed from her eyes. "Don't you know those loafers down at the roadhouse Brock runs are always teasing Tommy?"

"I know, Miss Ellen," the sheriff said uncomfortably.

"Were they teasing him and did he

strike at one of them? Is that why you've got this posse after Tommy?"

"No," the sheriff said. "They might have been teasing him before it happened but I don't know that they were. The warrant charged Tommy with blowing up Brock's barn."

"Blowing up his barn!"

"That was the way Brock swore out the warrant."

"And you believed Sim Brock?" Ellen demanded. "Don't you know he's a liar and a no-good scoundrel. Don't you know that nobody can believe anything Brock says?"

"Yes," the sheriff slowly said. "But the barn was blown up. I went to look. I didn't put any faith in what Brock said, but the warrant had been sworn out and I had to act. So I went looking for Tommy—"

"With a gun in your hand, I suppose?" she said sharply.

HE LOOKED at her then, just glanced up, but his gaze didn't falter. "You know better than that, Miss Ellen," he said.

She flushed. Her temper had been running away with her and she knew it. "I'm sorry," she said. "What happened?"

"I didn't have much trouble finding Tommy," the sheriff explained. "He was crossing a field when I spotted him. I stopped my car and walked toward him—*and he took a shot at me.*"

Down in this country you may do a little private feuding with your neighbors but there is one thing you don't do. You don't shoot at the sheriff.

"He shot at you!" Ellen gasped. "Where did he get a gun?"

"He didn't have a gun."

Ellen's face showed confusion. "Then how did he shoot at you?" she demanded.

"With that slingshot he always carries," the sheriff said.

Tommy's favorite weapon, in fact his only weapon, was a rubber slingshot. A pocket full of pebbles and a sling was all he needed to be happy.

"Sheriff," Ellen's voice was hot again. "Just because he shot at you with a sling is no reason why you should call out a posse and run him down like a mad dog?"

"No," the sheriff admitted. "Especially since he didn't hit me."

"He didn't hit you! And you—"

"He hit my car," the sheriff said.

Ellen's face blazed with anger. "So what? A few more nicks in that rattletrap of yours won't make any difference."

"No, Miss Ellen," the sheriff said, his voice dry and tense. "Not any more."

"Not any more! *What are you talking about?*"

"Not any car any more," the sheriff said. "It blew up."

"Blew up!" the girl gasped.

"Sky high," the sheriff said. "Chunks of the motor landed a quarter of a mile away. Piece of hot metal hit me—" He looked down at the bloody sling holding his arm. "That's where I got this."

I had already seen what was left of his car, which was mostly a hole in the ground. A case of dynamite wouldn't have blown it into smaller pieces.

"I got two reasons for wanting to catch Tommie," the sheriff continued. "First, I got a warrant that says I must arrest him. Second, I want to look at those pebbles he's shooting out of that slingshot."

YOU can damned well bet he wanted to look at those pebbles! So did I. If a pebble small enough to be shot out of a sling could blow up a car, it was a mighty powerful and mighty impor-

tant chunk of rock. Think how big an explosion a pebble as big as a baseball would make! Think how many baseballs could be carried in a bomber!

What was Tommy Sonofagun shooting in his sling?

"I just can't believe it," Ellen said, when she had recovered from her surprise. "Tommy didn't cause those explosions. Your car just happened to blow up at that moment. Tommy didn't do it. He couldn't have done it. It's —it's impossible."

The sheriff didn't argue with her and neither did I. We were both watching what was happening down in Ten Mile Valley. Those bloodhounds, after being baffled for a long time, had suddenly hit a hot trail.

Then Tommy appeared. He dashed across a glade in the cedar thickets, running half bent over like some ungainly animal. He was so far away he was just a little black dot but I saw him look back over his shoulder at the dogs.

They were right behind him. I heard them break into an excited bugling as they saw their prey and started running by sight instead of by scent.

Tommy frantically ran into the cedars.

The dogs raced across the glade after him. There were four of them, running in a bunch, and giving tongue as they ran.

They vanished in a puff of white light.

It happened almost too fast for the mind to grasp it. One second four bloodhounds were running across the glade, the next second there was an intense puff of light, the third second the whole glade seemed to take wings and fly up into the air, the fourth second—

Boom!

The sound of the explosion reached us. A ball of smoke leaped upward and the cedar trees bent over in a blast of air. In the silence that followed came the faint clatter of stones falling back to the ground. There wasn't another bark from those dogs. There weren't any dogs left to do any barking.

THE sheriff's face turned a pasty gray. I believe from the bottom of my heart that he is scared of nothing, that he doesn't know the meaning of fear, but when that explosion came his face turned gray. He glanced once at Ellen as if he was asking her if this confirmed the wisdom of his decision to send a posse after Tommy Sonofagun. So far as I was concerned, it did. Then he started walking away.

"Where are we going?" I called after him.

"Down there," he said, nodding toward the glade where the explosion had taken place. "I reckon maybe I better get Tommy, if I can."

Ellen and I stayed on top of the ridge and watched. Ellen hadn't spoken a word since the explosion but from the way she was holding on to my arm, I knew how scared she was. I could feel her tremble.

The sheriff vanished among the cedars down below but I knew he was down there somewhere stalking Tommy Sonofagun. I also knew that other deputies were moving up from below while still another group had probably cut across the valley up above. A grim trap was closing.

"What can it possibly mean?" Ellen whispered.

"It means you had better go home," I answered.

She wouldn't go. She was the Relief Lady and Tommy was somebody who might need help.

It was already late in the afternoon. We stayed there on top of the ridge while darkness fell and waited for—

anything. I shivered every time I thought of the explosion that had killed those four dogs. A hand grenade would not have caused so much destruction. There wasn't any chance of coincidence either. Those dogs had been after Tommy and he had destroyed them.

"Ben," said Ellen suddenly. "We've got to find Tommy."

"Huh?" Even the idea startled me.

"We've got to find him before the posse does. Those men are scared and they won't take any chances with him. Even the sheriff is scared. If they find Tommy and he tries to run—and that's what he will try to do—they'll shoot him. Ben, we've got to find him first, to save his life."

It took some time for this to sink in. And when it did sink in, I didn't like it. I tried to laugh it off. "A fine chance we have of finding him when this posse can't."

"I can find him. I know where he is."

"What?"

"He has a cave about a mile from here. Every time he gets in trouble he runs there and hides. That's where he was going when those dogs almost caught him, to his cave. If we go there, we're almost certain to find him."

"And get ourselves blown into mincemeat like those dogs!" I protested.

"He won't—do anything to me. He knows me. I'm his friend."

"Nuts, baby. We're not going."

"All right," she said defiantly. "I'll go alone." She started walking away.

"All right," I groaned. "I'll go with you. But you're taking an unfair advantage of me, and I know it."

THE cave was in a ravine that led off from Ten Mile Valley. By the time we reached the place the moon was up but there wasn't much light down in the bottom of the ravine. Clumps of cedars grew everywhere, making dark blotches behind which anything might be lurking. A darker blotch was the mouth of the cave.

"T—Tommy," Ellen called.

There was no answer. I stood there in the darkness and wished to hell I was back in my office setting this story in type. Ellen was clinging to me so hard she was about to pull my arm off.

A shadow seemed to move in the mouth of the cave.

"Tommy," Ellen said quickly. "Don't be afraid. We've brought you some candy, Tommy. Don't you want some candy?"

Silence. A wind went whispering through the cedars, setting my teeth to chattering.

"We have some candy, Tommy?"

There was a tiny creak, as of somebody shifting his weight. It came from the cave. I did not in the least doubt but that Tommy Sonofagun was standing there looking out at us, slingshot in hand, trying to make up his poor mind if we were after him. At this moment my memory choose to remind me of what had happened to those bloodhounds. They had been after him too. Anything that was after him he would shoot at.

Cold sweat was dripping from under my arms and running down my body.

"Why don't you come down and get the candy we brought you?" Ellen asked.

"Scared," a dull, choked voice said from the mouth of the cave.

Tommy was there all right. He was watching us. He wanted candy. But he was scared.

He wasn't a tenth as scared as I was! Dillinger with a pistol would not have been near as dangerous as this half man who lurked in the cave mouth. You could talk to Dillinger. He wouldn't shoot without a reason. You could talk

to Tommy but he wouldn't understand.

"You needn't be scared," Ellen said. "We won't hurt you. Don't you remember all the candy I've brought you? Don't you remember that new pair of overalls I brought you last month? Weren't they fine overalls, Tommy?"

"Uh-huh. Nice. Wearin' 'em now." He didn't sound quite so hostile.

"Come and get the candy," Ellen said, opening her purse.

IT took her five minutes to get him down out of that cave. Those were five minutes of hell for me. Ellen's voice showed no trace of concern, no fear, no worry. Listening to her, you would have thought she hadn't a care in the world. Only the way she was holding on to my arm showed me how scared she was.

"Here," she said, handing him a candy bar.

He ate it, paper cover, tin foil, and all. He didn't look at me. He saw me all right but he didn't trust me so he didn't glance in my direction.

"How did you make the big noises?" Ellen quietly asked.

"Huh? Big noises?"

He sounded scared again. I took a firm grip on a lungful of air and prepared to hold on to it.

"The big booms," Ellen said. "You know, like firecrackers, only lots louder. They sure were fine noises."

"You like 'em, huh? Want hear more big noises, huh? Fourth of July noises, huh?"

My eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and I saw him lift his arms and stretch his slingshot rubbers. "Want more noises, huh?" he asked proudly.

"Not now, Tommy," Ellen said quickly, a sudden catch in her voice. "Let me see one of the firecrackers that make the big noises."

"Huh?" He lowered his arms but he held the sling ready. His grunt was full of suspicion.

"I'll give you another candy bar for one of your firecrackers," Ellen said quickly. She opened her purse and I heard the rattle of waxed paper. "I'll trade you a candy bar for a firecracker. You want another candy bar, don't you, Tommy? Remember how good that last candy bar was?"

He remembered all right. His eyes never left the bar of chocolate she was holding toward him.

I went right on holding my breath.

"Okay," he said suddenly. "Trade." He took something out of the pocket of his sling, dropped it in Ellen's hand, grabbed the candy bar, and started eating.

"Flashlight," Ellen whispered to me. To Tommy she said, "We're going to turn on a flashlight so we can look at the firecracker. It's a good candy bar, isn't it, Tommy?"

My hands were shaking so badly I could barely hold the light. Ellen was holding the firecracker in the palm of her hand. I took one look at it, and I didn't believe my eyes.

It was about the size of a big pea. It wasn't as big as a grape. It looked like a small round pebble.

This was the bomb that had caused those terrific explosions!

"Is this what made the big noises?" Ellen asked.

"Sure," Tommy said, stopping eating long enough to talk. "Make big boom. Want more? Got plenty." He reached into a pocket of his overalls and brought out a handful. "Good shootin' rocks," he said.

I JUST didn't believe it. There are mental limits beyond which the mind refuses to function. It was impossible to think that such a tiny pellet could

cause so much destruction.

I took Tommy's sling, put the pellet in the pocket, stretched the rubbers as far as they would go, and released them. I had to see with my own eyes, I had to know, I had to be sure.

I damned well found out! Although the explosion took place at least seventy-five yards away, it blew me off my feet. A great bulge of flame leaped into the sky and the heavens roared with the thunder of the sound.

Tommy jumped up and down in excitement. "Big noise! Goody, goody! Want more booms?"

"N—nnn—no," I stuttered, picking myself up from the ground.

"Ben, you idiot!" Ellen snapped. "The sheriff will hear that. No, Tommy, no more booms right now. Where did you get those firecrackers, Tommy? Where did you get them?"

Firecrackers, hell! Those things were the mightiest explosive bombs for their weight ever used on earth! In violence they backed TNT right off the map. Nitroglycerin was not a tenth as powerful. If a pellet that weighed a fraction of an ounce could cause such an explosion, how big an explosion would a hundred-pound bomb make?

One bomber could sneak in out of the clouds and smash a city!

One bomb would do the job!

Where had Tommy Sonofagun gotten those round pebbles that exploded with such violence?

"Candy?" he said questioningly. "More candy?"

"I'll give you a barrel of candy if you will show us where you got these things!" I said. I was scared sick. I was remembering Pearl Harbor, the *Prince of Wales*, and the *Repulse*. Had bombs such as these sent those two gallant ships to the bottom?

If this had happened, how had similar bombs gotten here to the heart of America? Where were these round pebbles coming from? Obviously Tommy had found them somewhere, but *where?* Who had made them?

"A barrel of candy!" Tommy gasped. "G—gosh!"

GRABBING his slingshot from the ground where I had dropped it, he started off, motioning us to follow him. Stumbling, following him as best we could, he led us straight to one of the transmission line towers!

"It was attempted sabotage!" I gasped. "Somebody tried to blow up the high-line but their bombs didn't explode. Tommy found their explosives!"

This was a reasonable guess. If one of these big steel towers went down, a lot of defense industries that were dependent upon the juice flowing through the cables overhead, would have to shut down.

"Got 'em right here," Tommy said.

He shambled toward the legs of the tower, which formed an arch overhead. He was holding one of Ellen's hands and I was holding the other. We were strung out in a line. I could hear current singing in the transmission line as he went under the arch formed by the legs of the tower. It was a high, thin, wailing sound, and it meant that juice was leaking somewhere.

He stepped through the arch, and vanished.

Ellen, following a step behind him, vanished.

I took another step, which brought me under the arch, *and the tower vanished!*

One second it was there over my head, a steel lattice climbing skyward. The next second, no tower.

No sky, no stars, no moon. No hillside, no high-line, no night.

My tongue took a running jump and dived down into my throat to hide.

"Wh—wh—wh—what the hell—" I heard my own voice say.

I was in what looked like a big building. On one side was a lot of hooded machinery that was clicking softly to itself. I had the fleeting impression that this machinery was largely automatic in operation, that raw materials were being fed in from some source overhead and finished articles were rolling out into a large hopper. A soft blue light came from the walls of the building, which seemed to be windowless.

Ellen was standing right in front of me. The only movement about her was a flutter of her eye-lids. She seemed to be frozen stiff.

I was pretty well frozen myself. What the devil had happened to us? where were we?

MAD thoughts were bouncing up and down inside my brain. I had the impression I had gone insane.

Tommy wasn't scared. He didn't seem to mind what had happened. Something that would scare a man with sense to the verge of hysterics had no effect on him. He understood almost nothing about the world in which he lived and consequently anything was possible to him. There are times when being a moron has its advantages. This was one of those times. This building did not astonish Tommy, nor was he perturbed about the miraculous way in which we had entered it.

He ran over to the hopper in front of the big machine, thrust both hands into it, and came running back to us, his hands held out in front of him.

"Firecrackers!" he said exultantly.

He had a double handful of the round explosive pellets. The machine was manufacturing them. They were being made right here in this windowless building, in Ten Mile Valley.

This was where Tommy had got those incredible bombs. Somehow he had stumbled into this hidden place.

He looked expectantly up at me.

"Gimme bar'l of candy?" he said hopefully.

My tongue was still hiding down in my throat as if it was determined to have no part in the lies it knew I was going to tell. "S—sure," I stuttered. "I'll get the candy for you as soon as we get back to town. But Tommy, where are we?"

That was the question! Where were we?

"Huh?" said Tommy. Then he added, in explanation, "We're here!"

Hell, I knew that! What I wanted to know was where *here* was. I tried another tack. "Where did this building, all these machines, where did they come from?"

He shrugged. The question was over his head. "Find 'em here," he said. He looked hopefully at me. "Candy for Tommy Sonofagun?"

His little mind ran on one track. The building was here, the machines were here, facts to be accepted without question, just like the hills and the rain. He had found them here. That was all he knew about them.

"Let's get out of this place," I said to Ellen. There was a dazed, glazed expression in her eyes. Her mind had refused to accept the evidence of her eyes and she had stopped thinking.

In my mind was pure panic. Never in my life had I wanted to run so badly. The only thing that interested me was to get out of this place, fast! I was starting to do just that when a voice stopped me.

"Here's that thief again," the voice said. At least that was what I thought it said. The words were English but they weren't like the English I know. The accent was all wrong and they were run together in a sing-songy effect. I

turned to see who had spoken.

TWO men were standing in a door at the far end of the building. Apparently they had just entered. Dressed in glittering clothes, stern faced, they didn't look like any people I wanted to meet. I grabbed Ellen and started to run.

"Alt!" the command came.

I wasn't doing any halting. I was out of my mind from sheer fright. My sole interest lay in getting out of that place. I was so confused I didn't realize I didn't know how to get out and I did the only thing possible, which was to turn and run.

As it worked out, this was exactly the right thing to do. A split second after I started to run, the building vanished.

I was back at the high-line tower, not under it but beside it, with the night and the stars and the moon around me, and the high-pitched whine of leaking current in my ears. I was back where I had started from and no building full of automatic machinery was in sight.

"W—what's the matter?" Tommy gibbered beside me. He sensed how scared I was and this scared him.

Ellen had quietly fainted. I threw her over my shoulder.

"Run!" I shouted at Tommy.

With him at my heels, I started making tracks away from there.

"Alt!" came a high-pitched command from behind me.

A streak of light drove through the night, passed within a foot of my head. It seemed to set the darkness on fire. The two men had taken a shot at us.

This was all Tommy needed to convince him that something was really after him. He was already scared and when that streak of light went past us, he went crazy. Crouching and turning, he stretched the rubbers of that slingshot.

"Don't shoot!" I screamed at him.

It was too late. The rubbers burred as he released the sling.

Looking back I caught a glimpse of the two men. It was the same two all right. They were standing beside the tower. Looking completely bewildered, they were making no effort to stop us.

Then the pellet hit them.

Blooie!

THE blast hurled me forward but I managed to keep my feet and keep running. Fire spouted skyward, there was a crack of breaking steel.

The tower was falling. The explosion had knocked the legs out from under it and it was falling.

Somewhere over my head was a thrumming snap. I knew what it meant. The copper high-line cables, strained by the falling tower, were about to break. There were sixty-six thousand volts of electricity in those twanging cables.

With Ellen in my arms I dived into a ravine. As I hit and rolled the night was cataclysmic with bursting flame. Arcs like bright flashes of lightning leaped against the sky as the cables parted. The live ends hit the ground and writhed like giant snakes spewing fifteen-feet-long streams of molten fire. There was juice in those cables, plenty of juice, and it was running wild.

Somewhere, somebody screamed. Tommy! He was screaming. As if his scream was a signal, the whole earth seemed to gather itself together and hunch upward in one violent explosive blast. It knocked me cold. As I blacked out, I saw a great spout of flame leaping toward the stars and I remember thinking that the whole vault of heaven was on fire. Then something seemed to hit me on the head and I quit thinking.

WHEN I regained consciousness I was in a hospital and a nurse was bending over me. As soon as I opened my eyes, she went dashing out of the room, to return with a doctor. He poked and pried at me and finally said that he thought I would live. From the way I felt, this was more than I expected.

The doctor had no more than left until there was a violent argument at the door. The nurse was telling someone that I couldn't have company and somebody else was saying I was going to have company, or else. Then Ellen was bending over me. "Ben, are you badly hurt?"

I told her what the doctor had said and the relief that flooded her face almost made me feel romantic. She had a big patch of adhesive tape on her face and a lot of scratches and bruises but she was able to walk.

"Ben, what happened?" she asked. "Those two men, that building, those machines—"

"And those atomic bombs!" I said.

"What? Atomic bombs? I don't understand. What were those men doing, Ben?"

"Sabotage," I said firmly.

"But it couldn't have been sabotage," she protested. "If they had wanted to blow up the high-line, they could have done it without any trouble. And that building and the high-line tower existed in the same place. Ben, it couldn't have been attempted sabotage. There must be some other explanation. I've thought and I've thought and I don't see the answer."

"Just the same, it was sabotage," I said. "That's the way I am going to write the story."

"You will be lying, Ben," said a voice from the doorway. I looked up. It was the sheriff. He came walking into the room. His arm was still in a sling and his face looked grayer than ever.

"How did you get here?" I stuttered.

"I found you and brought you in," he said. "The two of you." He pulled up a chair and sat down in a manner that indicated he planned to stay a while. "Now tell me the truth, you two," he said. "Tell me just exactly what happened, the way it happened."

"You will call us liars," I protested.

"That may be," he admitted. "But I want to hear it just the same."

SO WE told him. He sat there and listened without a sign of expression on his face. For all the emotion he showed, he might have been made out of wood.

"What do you make of it, Ben," he said at last, when we had finished.

"Sabotage," I said.

"What do you really think, Ben?" he came back.

"Well," I said slowly. "There was a slight leakage of current down that particular tower. I think this leakage and the particular way in which it took place accidentally combined to make us the first time travelers in human history!"

Ellen gasped at that but the sheriff didn't blink an eye.

"Go on," he said.

"I think that building exists in the future," I said. "I think it will exist some day and that it exists now and if we could cross time we could see it. Those men spoke a strange kind of English. That points to the future. They were making atomic bombs. We don't know how to make atomic bombs now but we will know how to do it, in the future. I think that building we entered was an arsenal of the future that will be built in Ten Mile Valley in some coming century. You asked me what I think and I've told you," I defiantly finished. "If you don't like it,

you can think up your own explanation."

He didn't budge. "Tommy?" he said, his voice a question.

"Tommy accidentally blundered through the arch made by the legs of the tower. He found a machine making tiny atomic bombs. He didn't know they were bombs. He thought they were fine pebbles to shoot in his slingshot. And that's what he used them for. They exploded on contact. Maybe they were designed to be dropped from an airplane, hundreds at a time. Maybe they were to be used in interplanetary war. I don't know why they were being made. All I know is that an idiot found them, and thought they would be fine things to shoot in a sling. Incidentally, what happened to Tommy?"

I had forgotten all about Tommy Sonofagun.

"We found pieces of him," the sheriff sighed. "He had a pocketful of those pebbles when the falling cables hit him. They all exploded at once."

Poor Tommy Sonofagun. He would never get his barrel of candy.

Decisively the sheriff got to his feet. He stopped at the door and looked back. "You are right, Ben," he said. "It was attempted sabotage."

And that's the way it went down in the official records, that's the way I wrote the story for my paper. The public would be willing to believe in sabotage. But would they be willing to believe in time travel?

Not this century!

MAGIC VERSUS SCIENCE

by A. MORRIS

"THERE'S nothing new under the sun", and this applies to modern medical science. Doctors of today with their "up-to-the-minute" treatment of disease can still trace many of their methods to primitive philosophy.

Going back to the ancient peoples of Egypt and also not so far back to our own American Indians, we find that animals were worshipped reverently. They were considered sacred and believed to have certain qualities which might be absorbed into the bodies of humans.

After an animal died the flesh was sometimes eaten in the belief that a number of virtues would be sustained within the human body.

Because the fox was a long-winded animal, it was thought that by eating the lungs the strength would be preserved in the body of the person that had eaten them. Similarly, the fat of a bear, a hairy animal, was considered efficient in the treatment of baldness. Courage was produced by eating the heart of a lion. Other superstitious beliefs were that "goose grease" had value as an ointment for bronchitis and that rattlesnake or earhworm oil rubbed on the skin made for a limber ahtlete. Cod Liver Oil has been used for centuries, but has only come into recognition in the last few years since the important discovery of vitamins.

In ancient times, toads were boiled, as in the witches' cauldrons, and used for heart disease and dropsy. Today it has been learned that the skin of a toad contains a substance similar to digitalis, helpful in the treatment of heart disease.

The administration of calcium in infantile tetany could date back to the ancient Chinese who ground the bones of dinosaurs and tendered them to children with convulsions.

Physicians today administer iodine for goiter. The ancient witch doctor used burnt sponge for the same affliction.

Barbaric man ate the raw pancreas of a sacrificed goat believing the gods would bestow nothing but good luck, and doctors today inject insulin, a product extracted from the pancreas to relieve the diabetic condition.

Our great, great ancestors ate the organs of animals because of religious superstitions—the modern employment of such substances is scientific and sound.

Mystical value—sound fact. How far removed?

Sutton's Strange Voyage

by JAMES NORMAN

A LIGHT yellowish rain sifted over the city, fogging lights and sounds as the huge truck lumbered to a halt on the deserted street. The driver climbed down from the cab and looked around, stretching himself.

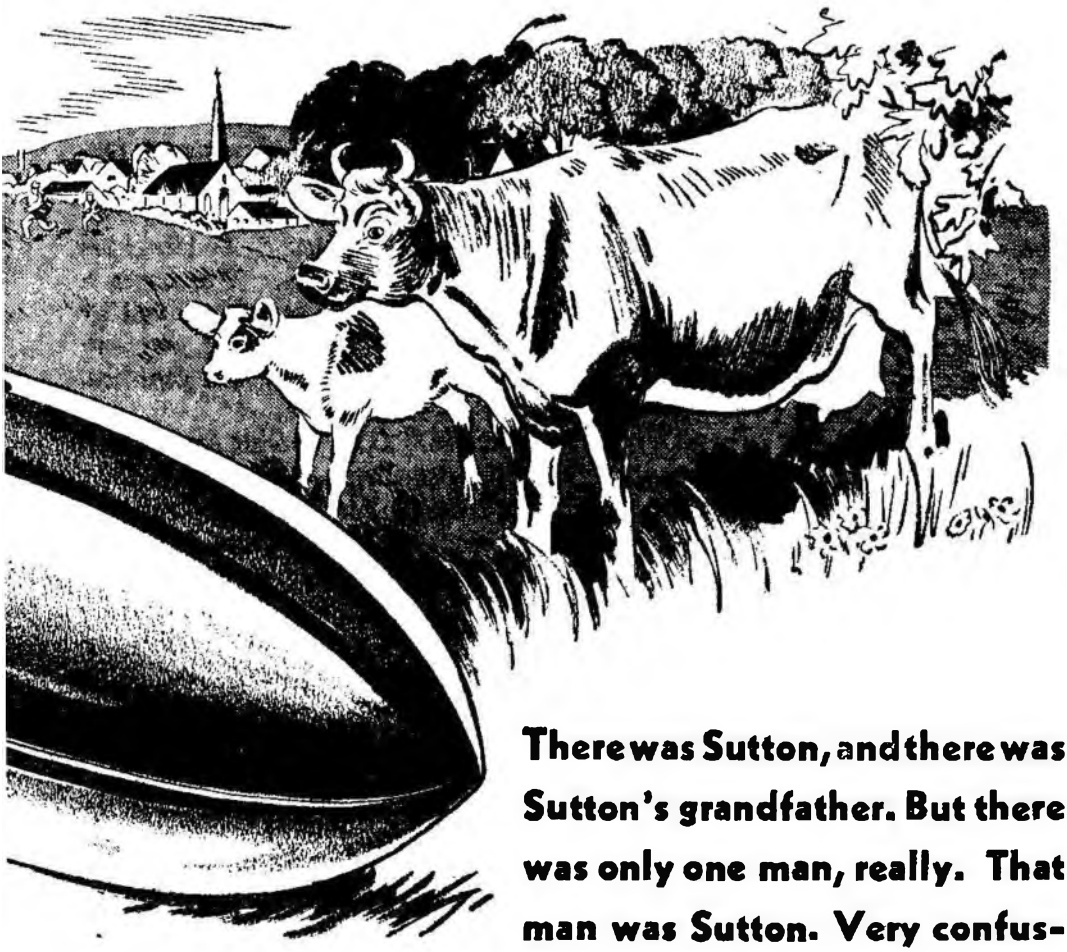
"Okay, guys," he said. "This is it."

Overhead, a white banner stretched across the street. It was a little drab in the rain. On it, in red letters was:

WELCOME TIME SCIENCE
CONVENTION
July 1944 Philadelphia

The wail of an orchestra, playing *Time On My Hands* came through the amber glass-brick front of the nightclub crowded between the dark, staid fronts of office buildings. The music was occasionally punctuated by hefty grunts from the truckmen in the street as they slowly guided a large black and silver egg down a ramp from their freighter and steered it toward the curb beneath the red-lettered banner.

Abruptly, the desolate night atmosphere cracked. The door of the night-



There was Sutton, and there was Sutton's grandfather. But there was only one man, really. That man was Sutton. Very confusing—one man being two men!

Sutton looked around in astonishment. He was in a peaceful rural setting . . .

club swung open, music rolled into the street and was mopped up by the yellow mist. Then a figure in a rumpled mess jacket stumbled out. It began shadow-boxing with a lamp post. A second figure raced out, levelled a camera and shouted,

"Hold it, Sutton!"

John Van Sutton, the third of the John Vans, grinned foolishly at Philadelphia's ace cameraman. He stopped sparring with the lamp post and weaved uncertainly toward the newsman.

"That's right," he observed fuzzily. "Gotta have news."

The newsman chuckled reminiscently as the young millionaire playboy wavered painstakingly toward the curb. The fortunes of Sutton made daily copy for the nation. With the wars won, people found time to listen to a little nonsense now and then.

"S'raining," Sutton murmured loudly.

His unsteady gaze wandered and gradually settled on the large black and

silver object on the opposite curb. Some men were busily stringing ropes around it and anchoring red lanterns at each end. Sutton raised his hand tentatively to scratch his sandy hair.

"Wheels are gone," he observed philosophically. "Gotta find them. Come on, help me."

He made his way to the ropes, followed by the cameraman, and waved good naturedly at the working men.

"S'okay, boys. I'll take her from here." He announced.

The truckmen stared at him.

"You nuts?" one of them grunted.

Sutton laughed and crawled on his hands and knees under the ropes.

"I c'n drive, lit or sober. Wanna bet? He reeled up to the machine, his hands grasping over the smooth surface. "Thieves!" he suddenly exploded. "They took the door handle too."

One of the truckmen grabbed his arm and swung him around. Van Sutton's eyes widened in genuine amazement.

"Let me alone," he protested. "It's my car. They stole the wheels."

JUST then the photographer hurried over. John Van Sutton didn't see him slip the truck driver a five, but he heard him say:

"I'll call a cab. But put him inside this business a minute, will you? I want a picture."

The truckman grumbled but gave way, doubt clouding his moist, slavic face. Van Sutton smiled expansively as the newsman fumbled with a silver button, pressed it and the door of the machine slid open.

"Thanks," said Sutton. He slid clumsily into the machine's compartment, then looked worried.

"Funny," he murmured, and glanced at his right hand and his key ring in it. Then he looked at the complicated dashboard—there was a key there also. "Duplicates," he finally reasoned and with that, he tossed his own keys over his shoulder. He reached forward and turned the key in the dash.

On the street, the blinding magnesium glare of a flashbulb cut into the rainy night. "Swell," said the cameraman. "Now, one more." Suddenly his jaw sagged idiotically. There was a grinding, unnatural sound followed by utter silence. The silver egg, and with it John Van Sutton 3rd, had vanished.

VAN SUTTON himself experienced the sickening sensation that comes from mixing bourbon with thermite. His senses spiralled downward at headlong speed and he was afraid that if he opened his eyes he might be violently sick. He kept them closed. Then, for a while, he had dreams about little white horses riding under the crack of a front door somewhere.

After the horses had gone, he found that his legs had gone to sleep and the slight movement that came with awakening started them tingling madly. The spiralling sensation had subsided and he opened his eyes cautiously. He was slightly shocked at not finding himself in bed. Most newspaper men in Philadelphia usually got him home before dawn. It was part of their assignment.

Slowly, he let his gaze wander about; but his mind was unable to absorb what his eyes saw.

"Hangover," he mumbled.

Looking sharply now, he found himself sprawled on a black leather seat in the midst of what resembled a scientist's nightmare. The small, windowless cubicle was eerily lit by phosphorescent discs set in a plastic instrument panel. The instruments were bewildering. They said nothing about gas, oil, miles-per-hour.

Still holding a snap judgment at bay,

he began searching for a door. He became a little frantic for there was none. The walls were uniformly smooth—black metallic panels.

He sat up, tight-lipped. His mind was thoroughly clear now.

"Easy there," he muttered. "If there's a way in, there's one out."

He examined the instrument panel, exploring gingerly. He associated the key there with the spiral sensation and pulled it out carefully, slipping it in his pocket. There was no point in going through that business again. Finally he touched a lever that seemed to produce results.

The glowing discs and dials in the cubicle suddenly faded and he was in utter darkness. A moment later he heard a click. Abruptly, the wall panel at his left slid open smoothly and a burst of sunlight flooded in, blinding him.

Van Sutton crawled through the door. A minute later he was breathing the pleasant meadow air and staring off in the distance at an old fashioned church spire silhouetted in the early sunlight. He felt somewhat uneasy: between night and morning there were a number of hours. A man could go a lot of places in that time, and do things, too. He turned, eying the vehicle he had come in. Several cows were grazing nearby, and one was curiously nuzzling the big metal machine.

VAN SUTTON circled the thing slowly; his eyes narrowed as he read the engraved metal placard welded at one smoothly curving end.

TIME SCIENCE CONVENTION—
EXHIBIT A
Torpedo Piston

This time piston transfers objects into the past by forcing a passage in past molecular fields, at the same time, keeping the established molecular arrangements in the time area from which the object has been transferred.

Piston A has been sent into the past by remote control. The first experiment with human passengers will be made at this convention.

Warning: Do not Enter!

His mind whirling, John Van Sutton desperately tried to recall what had happened before he had passed out. He couldn't remember a thing about getting into that machine. What kind of a gag was it, anyway? It was a gag. He was at least convinced of that.

Remembering the dials inside the machine, he went around and entered with some misgiving. He couldn't get the lights to work in the dial panel but, with the help of the sunlight, he was in a position to be still more puzzled. Most of the dials made pure nonsense. They squared the roots of figures and did other impossible things which only a comptometer has business thinking about. One particular dial was round and the rim was notched in units of ten, minus numbers on one side, plus on the other. The minus marker pointed to 70.

He began to worry about this being a gag. His friends had never pulled as elaborate a one as this on him before. He was bending forward in bewilderment when the barrel of a shotgun poked into his ribs.

He stiffened and sucked in his breath. Then he turned slowly. The man with the gun stepped back. He was old, his face lined and weather-beaten. He wore creaseless denim workpants, a faded cotton shirt and cracked dusty boots.

"What the hell is this?" Sutton demanded.

The farmer gagged, then spoke in a high, crackling voice. "Git outta here," he threatened. "This is my field. Y'ain't got no right here."

Van Sutton hesitated. He was sure

he had never seen this man before. Still, there was something strange about him. He edged out of the steel torpedo cautiously. Perhaps this was part of the gag. Or, maybe it wasn't. He didn't like the way that shotgun was being handled.

The old man spat on the meadow grass and glared at him sourly.

"What're y'doing in my pasture with that there thing?" He spat again at the torpedo.

"I don't know," said Sutton. "Maybe you know. It isn't mine. It's a gag, isn't it?"

The farmer squinted back with small suspicious eyes. He glanced at the machine, then looked John Van Sutton up and down with tremendous disdain.

"What's that?" he said. "Stole it, didja?" His suspicious gaze settled on Sutton's wrinkled mess jacket. "Hiding from the law too, huh?" His finger tightened on the shotgun trigger. Van Sutton began to move away.

Van caught his breath again as the gun muzzle poked unceremoniously into his stomach.

"Stand still," the old man commanded, then he leaned forward and sniffed. "Liquored up, too," he added cantankerously. "I'm taking you to jail."

JAIL was something that John Van Sutton had a passing knowledge of. He didn't like country jails. He stiffened a little and suddenly twisted clear of the gun. His fist clipped the farmer's temple and the man collapsed. It was a neat, swift blow with no real damage done.

It had happened so fast, even Sutton didn't know quite what instinct had prompted him. But he had a growing conviction that this wasn't all a gag. He grinned down at the unconscious farmer and said, "You'll be okay in a minute. Here's something for your trouble." He stuffed a couple of dollar bills in the man's shirt pocket.

Crossing the meadow in the direction of the church spire, he came to a rutted dirt road. The road soon turned into a cobbled street. He walked rapidly and soon found himself in the outskirts of a city. His blue eyes slowly took on a puzzled look as he passed the rows of brownstone houses, shoulder to shoulder; he became aware all at once that there was no electric wiring overhead and that the gaunt street lamps had gas jets.

Then things popped into his vision like a nightmare. Horse-drawn carriages passed on the street. Pedestrians appeared. Half the men wore mustaches and the women wore bustles. It was like a "gay 90's masked ball," without the masks—the long dresses, the men in frockcoats. They stared curiosity at Sutton and sometimes chuckled.

He was painfully aware of his own clothes and of the suspicion smoldering in his brain.

"Time machine," he murmured at length. "My God!" Now that he had said it, the thought shocked him.

He came to the middle of the city, feeling completely dazed. He hardly noticed the people busily running in and out of buildings and crowding the narrow cobbled sidewalks. At last he spotted a small boy hawking newspapers and he hailed him.

"Paper, sonny." He held out a nickel.

The boy looked at it curiously, then bit it.

"Guess it's all right, mister," he nodded.

Van grabbed the paper. It was a small, folded affair printed in very small type. The gothic-lettered masthead read—*Philadelphia Tribune.*

"The Tribune—" Sutton gulped un-

comfortably. The *Philadelphia Tribune* had ceased publication years ago. Then he glanced down at the date-line below: July 3, 1870. He stared unbelievingly.

It was true, then. And he had to believe it. He had come back in time. For a few seconds he shut his eyes as through trying to grasp the full significance of this. The realization was horribly unnerving. To lose track of fifteen minutes in a life time was bad enough; to get shuffled around in a half century was almost a catastrophe. For a brief instant he almost broke and ran back to the fantastic torpedo that had brought him this far. Then he got control of himself.

JOHN VAN SUTTON was rich enough to be at home anywhere. He also had a sense of humor and a sense of adventure. Certain aspects of being shoved back seventy years into early Philadelphia appealed to him. He opened his eyes again and saw the newsboy still staring at his clothes.

He caught the boy's arm.

"Where can I buy some clothes?" he asked.

The boy looked frightened but pointed down the street.

"In the next block, mister."

John Van Sutton went on, trying not to look too conspicuous in his twentieth century clothes. He also tried to get a bearing on the decade. The Civil War was over, of that he was sure. The first Philadelphia Centennial exposition wasn't due for another six years. Couldn't wait that long.

He came to the tailor shop. It proved to be a tiny one room place, smelling of steam and wool. The mild-mannered, bald tailor stared up in amazement as Van entered.

"Vous etez francais?" he asked in ill pronounced, uncertain French, as he shot a quick glance at Van's mess jacket.

"No, I'm not and never mind. I want to buy a suit," Van replied hastily.

The tailor pursed his lips.

"I'm very busy this week. Perhaps I can give you a fitting Friday?"

"I want one now. Ready made."

"Ready made?" the tailor looked disdainful.

"That's right."

"I have one that my customer died on." The tailor rummaged in a closet.

A few minutes later, John Van Sutton 3rd grinned at his own reflection in the mirror. He wore a dark brown frock-coat and vest, the collar was trimmed with velvet and the trouser legs hugged his shins.

"I feel like Errol Flynn," he muttered self-consciously.

The tailor watched and rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"You look very familiar, mister?" he said. "Are you, eh. . . ."

"Sutton," said Van quickly. He took his billfold from the pocket of his old clothes and counted out five twenty dollar bills.

"A hundred, wasn't it?" he asked. "You can keep these clothes for me. I'll be . . ."

Suddenly he noticed the strange expression on the tailor's face as he felt the bills. Then an angry, righteous outburst came from the man.

"Money!" he shouted. "You call this money, sir? What fraud is this?"

Van backed away cautiously.

"What do you mean?" he countered. "It's money."

The tailor panted with rage.

"What do I mean, you ask me? Look at it! Half the size of real money. What do you do—make it?"

"Listen," Van tried to explain. "They changed the size of the currency about ten years ago. Around 1930."

"I'm not to be joked with, sir!" the tailor exploded. "Give me back my suit."

VAN SUTTON wheeled toward the door. A few people had gathered out on the street and he didn't feel in any mood to explain the new sized money to the local police. He was having enough trouble keeping track of things himself. As he ran through the door, someone tried to grab him. He pulled loose and raced down the street.

The crowd chased after him. He could hear them shouting for the police, screaming the single word, "forger." Quickly, he realized the men of 1870 were generally in the pink of condition. They had to use their legs. The bicycle craze hadn't even started then. And they were quickly closing in on him.

He turned to the right at the first intersection and ran down the new street. His lungs burned from the unusual exercise and now and then a clod of mud whizzed past his head. At the next corner he swerved left. He realized, helplessly there wasn't much wind left in him.

It was then that he saw a shingle hanging over a doorway. The shingle did strange things to him. It read:—*John Van Sutton, lawyer.* Van blinked at it for a moment. Van Sutton . . . . lawyer . . . . Philadelphia . . . . it was a rare name. His grandfather, the first John Van Sutton had founded the Sutton Soft Coal fortune. He had been a lawyer too. How he had gotten into the coal business and had cornered half the mines in Pennsylvania had always been something of a family mystery.

Without weighing the complications that might arise upon facing a grandfather who had died before he, John Van Sutton 3rd, had been born, Van took refuge in the building. He ran breathlessly up a flight of stairs and plunged into the office bearing his grandfather's name.

He was decidedly relieved to find the place empty. The sound of pursuit drew closer, numerous footsteps on the stairway. Glancing around quickly, his eyes took in the old fashioned roll-top desk, a coatrack, then a closet door. He hid himself in the closet.

Cramped and slightly suffocated, he waited there in the closet until the sound of pursuit seemed to fade. Then, just as he was about to come out, new voices sounded within the office. He opened the door a fraction and abruptly suppressed a gasp of astonishment.

He saw an old woman there, and a man. It was the man who startled him. He was the splitting image of John Van Sutton 3rd. He was young, handsome, wore his frockcoat in a dashing manner —but there was an air of ruthlessness about him.

This man, Van realized, was his grandfather. It gave him a queer feeling to be actually looking at his sire.

"Good God, we're both the same age," he breathed.

IN THE room, John Van Sutton, the lawyer, was speaking to the old lady.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Beecher, I'm pledged to secrecy as to the name of the railway interested in purchasing your titles to the Harrisburg Gap land. I believe it's sufficient to realize they're interested in right-of-ways. They dickered with your husband up to the time of his death. The delay, of course, was costly. Now, if you'll simply sign these papers. You sign the Gap land to me. I turn it over to the railway."

"I'll have to get the deeds from the bank," said the old lady. Her voice seemed to tremble.

"That's right. Run down to the bank. I'll wait for you. You'll sign everything. Then you'll have your twenty

thousand dollars."

From his place in the closet, Van watched his grandfather escort the lady to the door. As he watched, suspicion suddenly awakened him. Harrisburg Gap, he thought. That was where the Van Sutton fortune had its beginning. There was coal there. It hadn't been discovered until 1871 . . . Next year.

"Twenty thousand dollars," he muttered. "The old lady is getting gypped. It's worth hundreds of thousands."

When the outside door closed, he came out of the closet to face his grandfather. His mouth was set grimly for he didn't like the idea that the money he had been spending all his life had been made in a fraud. No railway ever went through the Gap, except the spur that served the Sutton mines.

John Van Sutton, the lawyer, heard his footsteps and turned suddenly. For a second, an expression of doubt, then sheer amazement crossed his face. He glanced at his own body, then at his grandson. Finally he recovered enough to stutter,

"W-W-Who are you?"

"Your grandson," replied Van. He realized he was beginning to enjoy this.

"My what?" gasped the other. "I'm not even married!"

"That doesn't matter," Van repeated. "You're still in the family. And you're a crook."

"Crook?" John Van Sutton 1st let his eyes bulge. "What's the meaning of this?" he snapped.

Van crossed the room to where a map hung on the wall. He jabbed his finger at the location of the Harrisburg Gap.

"I don't know who the hell that old lady is," he spoke acidly, "but you're rooking her. There's not going to be any railway through the Gap. You're discovering coal there next year. Maybe you know that already. Maybe you're just keeping it quiet until you get the land, eh?"

Van's young grandfather grew livid. His mouth twisted in an angry protest.

"What business is it of yours?" he charged. "And who are you?"

"Your grandson—John Van Sutton 3rd."

THE first Van Sutton choked, losing his voice completely. He goggled at Van in an idiotic way. Then slowly, his amazement turned to anger; the anger of a beast surprised just before it is about to pounce on some defenseless prey.

"Get out of here!" he shouted. As though in a frenzy, he seized a long glass paper-knife from the desk and lunged at Van.

Van sidestepped the first lunge.

"Nice ancestors I've got," he muttered. For a split second he wondered if his grandfather actually could kill him. He hadn't been born yet. There was no use in experimenting, though. He quickly parried the next knife thrust, knocking the lawyer's arm aside. Instead of backing away, he did the foolhardy thing. He stepped in, blocked his grandfather's slashing knife hand with his left and drove his knee sharply into the man's stomach. He heard him gasp and watched him double in agony. Then his fist cut up. There was the flat, fleshy impact of knuckles on jaw.

John Van Sutton, the lawyer, straightened an instant, then fell heavily to the floor. For a moment, horror filled Van's eyes. In falling, the other man had dropped on the knife, impaling himself.

Van knelt. He felt a sense of trembling within himself as he turned his kin over. He searched for the man's pulse and found it stopped. *John Van Sutton 1st was dead.*

He stood up now and looked around

dazedly. It was impossible. How could he kill his grandfather and be alive himself, he asked himself. There was a contradiction somewhere. A mad, fantastic contradiction.

A light knock on the door suddenly jarred him to his senses. It was the old lady, Mrs. Beecher, returning. He shot his eyes around the office quickly and made up his mind. He had to pose as the first Van Sutton. He dragged his grandfather's body into the closet and threw a rug over the blood-stained spot where he had fallen, then went to the door.

Mrs. Beecher glanced at him curiously when she entered. Naturally she would, he had different clothes on. But otherwise, she seemed to accept him as the first John Van Sutton.

"Here are the deeds and the land transfer all signed," she explained. She had a very nice timid smile.

Van smiled back.

"I've changed my mind, Mrs. Beecher," he said. "I've just gone over a survey report and I don't think we should buy your land."

"Not going to buy?" the lady looked puzzled.

VAN took the deeds and transfer, glancing at them. He realized he needed time to think. It wasn't simply a matter of making good to the old lady. In the back of his mind he had an idea that he might return to that time torpedo and somehow manage to get back in his own century. But if he voided the contract with the lady the Sutton fortune just wouldn't get a chance to exist. He had to do something about that.

It was then that he thought of an out. He took a pen and quickly changed the wording in the transfer contract, then handed it to Mrs. Beecher.

"Here. I think this will be satisfactory all around," he explained. "Your land is much more valuable than I had first thought. It wouldn't be fair to buy it outright."

"I know it's good land," Mrs. Beecher smiled sadly, "But I needed the money."

Van urged her toward the door.

"It's all right," he said. "I think the new terms will be satisfactory. You retain the ownership. We'll rent it at twenty thousand a year. After the first ten years the contract will be open to new rental negotiations."

Alone again and satisfied that he had guaranteed his family's fortune, his thoughts anxiously turned to the problem of getting back to his own century. He looked in the closet once more, saw that his grandfather was still dead. That worried him. Who was going to be around to develop the rented Harrisburg Gap into the family fortune? He also wondered what was going to happen to him when he returned to the year 1944. With his grandfather dead, how would the Sutton family get its start? Would he still exist in 1944 if he went back?

He dug into his pocket, looking for the control key to the time torpedo. He'd have to chance it, that was all. But suddenly he froze. The key wasn't in his pocket. He searched frantically for another minute, finally remembering that he had left it in the mess jacket which he had given to the tailor.

"Good Lord!" he murmured as he sank to the stiff-backed chair and finally realized the full significance of the mess he was in. Somehow, he'd have to get rid of the first John Van Sutton's body, then pose as him until he could figure out a way of approaching the tailor without being caught as a forger.

Much as he disliked the prospects, he began work immediately. The body would be safe in the closet until night.

Meanwhile, he went through all the papers in the desk, acquainting himself thoroughly with John Van Sutton, the lawyer. Although no lawyer himself, Van saw that his grandfather hadn't favored the courts too often. It was a period when men dabbled in land and railroads, not law.

THAT night he gave his grandfather a decent, private burial along the Delaware. It was almost morning when he drove back to the city proper and returned the rented horse and carriage to the livery stable. His next job was the tailor. On his way there he bought a paper and glanced through it, wondering if the farmer who had stopped him yesterday had reported the Time Torpedo. What he read on the front page left him stunned:

Infernal Machine Brings Death

Yesterday at Marsh's Meadow an apparatus described as an infernal machine was discovered by a Schuylkill farmer who said he was struck down by the machine's mysterious owner. By late afternoon a large body of men had gathered to view the machine. Excited by the suspicion that it might have been put there for dangerous reasons the crowd became unruly before the proper authorities could make their appearance and destroyed the machine. As it was wrecked, strange blue flames and violent explosions came from the machine and two spectators were injured, one fatally. One of the injured persons, a woman named Beecher, was taken to the Schuylkill Hospital where she died three hours later.

Van let the paper slip from his fingers. He stood there a second, blinking in the early sunlight, utterly stunned. Almost unconsciously, he turned and walked back to his grandfather's office.

For the next hour his mind grasped weakly at the prospects facing him. He felt like a man stranded on some deserted island—but this was even more fantastic. He was stranded in another century and there was no way of getting back. Or was there? He began wondering if it wasn't all a dream. For an instant he began doubting that he was even John Van Sutton 3rd. Maybe he had been living in the nineteenth century all the time and imagined that he belonged in the next century.

No—that couldn't be. He still had a pocketbook full of the small sized dollar bills. That proved something. Actually, it made him feel that much more helpless. While in the midst of these thoughts, he heard a knock on the door.

He turned in time to see the door open and watch a pretty young woman enter and approach him. She looked vaguely familiar and that troubled him.

"Mr. Van Sutton?" the girl asked.

Van hesitated a moment.

"Yes, I think so," he replied. He noticed the girl had been crying and that she was dressed in black.

"I'm Amanda Beecher," the girl explained hesitantly, looking Van straight in the eyes. "My mother died last night . . . At the Schuylkill Hospital." —the girl seemed to struggle, holding back her emotions—"Before my mother died, she said she trusted you very much. She wanted me to ask you to handle our financial affiairs. You see, I'm the only one left . . ."

"Beecher . . . Amanda . . ." Van repeated the name and stared disconcertingly at the girl. The name rang familiarly in his ear. "Amanda—" he repeated. "Amanda Beecher, my grandmother's maiden name!"

With that he quietly keeled over in his chair, a strained, unbelieving expression on his face. She was his grandmother. Then his mouth dropped when he thought about himself. He, apparently, was his own grandfather!

CAVEMAN Meets BLONDE

by RUSSELL STORM

A prehistoric caveman ought to make a good wrestler—but can he handle the American blonde?

"He's a cinch!" said Steve Riggs. "He'll mop up in the grunt game!"

"WHY should such a thing ever happen to anybody?" Sam Yates wailed. "Of all the people on earth, why should it happen to me?"

He was walking back and forth across his office and the only reason he wasn't tearing his hair was because he didn't have any left to tear. He was about the unhappiest-looking little man I ever saw. And all because one of his boys, the Mad Cossack, had taken a nose dive the night before. Sam was a promoter. He handled a line of grunt and groan artists who were long on the grunt and groan and short on the artistry. In case you're not familiar with the lingo, grunt and groan boys are wrestlers. Sam was a wrestling promoter, and me, Steve Riggs, I'm a part time press agent. Part of the time I get paid.

"Sit down, Sam," I said crossly. "So the Mad Cossack takes a nose dive last night? So what? Is that any reason why you should wear out four dollars worth of shoe leather pacing the floor today?"

"You do not understand, Steve," he

wailed, not sitting down.

"Plenty of your boys have hit the canvas before," I pointed out.

"But this was different, Steve. I expected the Cossack to win. I was sure he was going to win. If I know human nature, he was the better man. He was in perfect condition. The guy he was wrestling was a bum, a strictly first class no-good. The Cossack should ought to have won."

"Um?" I said thoughtfully. "Are you trying to tell me, in a round-about way, that the fix was on the bout last night? Is that why the Cossack should have won?"

He gave me an injured look. "Steve, you know me better than that. All my matches are on the level."

To give the little guy credit, he was telling the truth. No matter what the other promoters in the game did—and they did plenty—Sam tried to play it straight.

"Then what are you wailing about?" I demanded. "What's so terrible?"

"The Cossack double-crossed me, Steve. He did not try to win. He laid down."

"Oh!" I said. "So his nose dive was deliberate, huh? Some of the bookies got to him? The dirty bum!" For a moment, I was outraged, but not greatly surprised. In this racket the double-cross is what you always expect and usually get. But so far as I could see, this was no skin off my nose. Then another thought struck me.

"Sam!" I gasped. "You don't mean to tell me you had *bet* on the Cossack to win!"

ONE look at his face told me the awful truth. "You idiot!" I raged. "You imbecile. Don't you know better than to ever, ever bet on a wrestling match?"

"I thought he was going to win," Sam wailed. "I thought he was sure to win. And he would have won, if he hadn't double-crossed me."

"And we'd all be living in the Garden of Eden if there weren't any snakes around! Sam, you double-drip, how much did you lose?"

"All I had!"

"In other words, you're clean?"

"Yes," he gulped, nodding. "And that's not all. . . ."

"Not all?" I shouted. "You're flat broke! What more could there be?"

Sam started to answer but the door opened and he seemed to forget that I existed. For the first time that morning, he sat down. Sunk down, rather, as if he no longer had the strength to stand. I turned to see who had opened the door. One look and I knew the worst.

A fellow by the name of Brugger was standing in the door. Brugger was a bookie, which doesn't mean that he wrote books, or sold books, or had even ever read a book, but that he accepted bets. He was tall and skinny and he looked like a buzzard about ready to flap from the limb of a tree down to the face of a dying man.

"I got you on my books for three grand, Sam," he said. "On account of you picked the wrong one last night. I came by for the lettuce."

I gulped. Three grand. Three thousand dollars! Men have been murdered in this town for a darned sight less than that.

Sam didn't say a word. He just sat there at his desk and tried to sink farther and farther into his chair.

"I said I came by for the lettuce," Brugger repeated.

"I—I ain't got it!" Sam choked.

The silence that fell was appalling. Little beads of sweat began to glisten on Sam's forehead and he looked as if a stroke of apoplexy was going to get

him any minute.

"I'll pay you when I get it," he faltered.

"Yeah?" said Brugger.

"I swear I'll pay you," Sam insisted.

"Maybe I'm supposed to sit around and grow a long gray beard waiting for you?" Brugger sneered. "You either pay up, or else!"

"Or else what?" I snapped. "This is a gambling debt and gambling debts are not legally collectable."

For the first time the bookie seemed to become aware of my existence. He turned his dead fish eyes on me and looked me over. But he didn't speak. Not to me, anyhow.

"Muggsy," he said.

"Did ja call, boss?" a voice said from behind him. Brugger stepped aside and Muggsy entered. He was not the biggest man I ever saw, but to me at that moment he looked like the descendent of a long-lost line of giants. He had a round, baby face, guileless blue eyes, he was wearing a tweed suit that looked as if it had been cut for an elephant, and he had the stub of a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth.

"These rats owe me money," Brugger said, nodding at us.

"Jeeze, boss, dat's too bad," Muggsy said. "Ja want me to give 'em the woiks, or just the foist degree?"

"The first degree," Brugger answered.

GRINNING like a gorilla about to pick a bunch of over-ripe bananas, Muggsy started across the room toward Sam.

You got to give Sam credit, he was fast. There wasn't a single wasted motion in the way he got out of his chair, picked it up, and slammed it straight at Muggsy. It was a heavy swivel chair of the executive type and the muscles of a badly scared man were behind it. It ought to have knocked the thug for a ground loop.

It didn't. The big ape caught it on the fly. While I held my breath, he sat it down like it was a basket of eggs. Then he leaned across the desk.

Sam was standing there growing whiter with each passing second. "Tch, tch, tch," Muggsy said, between his teeth. He brought his open hand down on top of Sam's head.

Sam hit the floor so fast I couldn't see him fall. He collapsed like a sack of sawdust with a big hole punched in it. Muggsy turned to me.

"Hey, you big gorilla, keep away from me," I yelled. "I don't owe your boss any money."

I didn't either. But that didn't make any difference.

"Dis is just in case you ever do owe him some," Muggsy said.

I never did see him hit me. My dazed impression was that the wall had taken a running jump and had slammed me in the back, but I guess the wall stood still and I did the moving. The next second the floor jumped up and slammed me, and a sudden, dark fog filled the office from ceiling to floor. Brugger's voice spoke out of that fog.

"This is the first degree," said Brugger. "If you ain't paid up, we will be around this time next week with the second degree. The week after that will be the third degree. . . ."

He paused and seemed to be trying to remember something. "I call to mind only one debtor who lived through the fourth degree," he said at last. "Generally they don't last that long. Generally the third degree gets them," he said, as he and Muggsy left.

I WAS still calling Sam seven different kinds of a damned fool when the next visitor entered. Unlike Brugger, this man knocked before he came in.

"Go away, bud," I said. "Whatever you're selling, we're not buying any of it."

He was tall and skinny and more than anything else he looked as if he was a fugitive from a cemetery. His clothes were black and shiny and if he hadn't slept in them, he had certainly been doing a lot of careless lying down. He didn't go away.

"I am looking for an individual known as Sam Yates," he said, in precise English. "Am I correct in assuming I am addressing him?"

"I'm him," Sam said wearily. "But I don't remember owing *you* anything."

"You don't owe me anything," the stranger said. "I am George Andrews. Professor George Andrews. I am looking for an honest wrestling promoter and after making various inquiries, I have been recommended to you. Sir, I have a wrestler I want you to handle."

Sam winced. "Go away," he said. "I don't want to ever hear of another wrestler again."

"But wait until you hear about *this* wrestler," Andrews said. "I think, without question, that I have a man who will be a world champion."

He sounded very sure of himself but to me this was strictly the old malarky. Everybody who has an over-developed boy on his hands thinks he has a world beater.

"Yeah?" I said. "What's his name?"

"Stinking Horse," Andrews answered.

"Huh?" I gulped. "Stinking— Say, what kind of a run around are you giving us?"

"I am not giving you what you call the run around," Andrews answered. "His name is Stinking Horse."

"Gwan," I derided. "What is he, a cave man?"

"Yes," said Andrews.

Sam blinked a couple of times at this and I sat there with my mouth open. "It's a gag," I thought. But I can go along with a gag too. "I suppose you hopped into your time machine and brought him here from the stone age!" I said. My voice may not have exactly dripped sarcasm but if it didn't, it wasn't my fault.

Andrews looked surprised. "How did you know?" he gasped.

WELL, it was a morning for surprises for certain. First Brugger and Muggsy had been a surprise, then this duck had come drifting in to tell us he had a live cave man in his possession. I thought we had caught a lunatic for sure. But, if you expected a glittering look in his eyes, which may have been strictly from hunger, he seemed to be sane. And he offered to produce the goods. Most of the time these wild and woolly inventors, who claim to have invented something worth maybe more millions than you can count, will back water when you tell them to put up or shut up. They will usually admit that one little detail of their invention is yet to be completed, that little detail being the invention itself. But Andrews didn't back water. He didn't hem and haw. He said he had a genuine cave man and if we didn't believe him, we could come and look for ourselves. The upshot was that we went to look.

We saw the damnest looking man I had ever set eyes on! First Andrews took us in his rattling jaloppy to a huge old house in what had once been an exclusive residential suburb. Entering, we passed through a room full of a collection of junk that would have made the eyes of an amateur Edison pop with envy. I didn't know what the instruments were and Andrews didn't bother to explain. He took us to the back and let us look through a grill of iron bars into a room that contained a cage.

The man was in there. He was sitting on a heavy bench and he looked as if he had been taking a nap and was mad because we had awakened him. He was a giant! His shoulders were three feet wide, he had a chest like a barrel, and long, powerfully muscled arms. Except for a pair of pants that were quite obviously home-made — you couldn't buy a pair of pants big enough to fit this bozo in any clothing store—he was naked. And talk about a hairy chest, he had one!*

"King-Kong in person!" I gasped.

"Stinking Horse," Andrews corrected.

"Where did you get that name for him?" I asked.

"If you had been here when he first arrived, you would not ask that question," the professor said. "He had been eating horse when I first brought him here. Also, he said his name was Stinking Horse."

"You mean he talks?"

"Sure me talk," said a bass voice so strong it seemed to rock the building on its foundation. "Why shouldn't me talk, huh, you little dried up tadpole?"

"English!" Sam said suspiciously. "He speaks English. How would a cave man know English?"

"I have taught him," Andrews answered. "Would you like to enter the room and look him over?"

"No thanks," I said hastily.

"He isn't dangerous."

"Then why have you got him locked behind iron bars?"

"He was rather wild when he first arrived," Andrews explained. "Naturally I had to make arrangements to restrain him until he could be tamed. He isn't dangerous now. See, the door isn't even locked." He pushed the grill and it swung aside. "Come on out, Stinky," he said. "The gentlemen wish to feel your muscles."

THE cave man got up from his bench and started toward us. To me, he looked like a walking mountain. After taking one look at him, I didn't have to tell my feet what to do. They just started taking me away from there. I wasn't exactly running but I was walking mighty fast.

I had taken maybe three steps when I felt something grab the seat of my pants. The next thing I knew I was dangling in mid air. The cave man had me. Holding me in one hand, he was muscling me out from his body like a weight lifter taking his exercise. That guy had muscles!

"Ho, tadpole," he said, grinning at me. "Try to run, huh? Try to take air, huh? Scared, huh? How you like it, huh?"

"I don't like it, uh huh! Let me down from here, you big gorilla."

Grinning, he set me on my feet. He

* Andrews, in bringing the cave man to the present, had not invented a time machine in which he went back to the stone age. Instead he had been making a series of experiments having to do with the flow of the time stream and had developed a method of probing the past by means of an exploratory beam that he called the Stedder effect, so named after its discoverer, R. J. Stedder, of Philadelphia. His exact explanation of the operation of this beam is too complex to be explained in the brief space available here. In essence, Andrews operated the beam much like a fisherman fishing in the dark in a pool of unknown depth, the fishing line being the beam. The pool could be said to contain an unknown variety of fish ranging in size from sun fish to sharks. And, the fisherman would never know what he was going to catch until he had caught it. He was fishing in the dark and he might catch a whale and he might catch a minnow. He couldn't see the pool and he couldn't tell where he was fishing. All he could tell was that he was fishing. In a similar manner, Andrews was fishing completely in the dark. He couldn't tell what he was going to catch or whether he was going to catch anything. All he could do was cast out the Stedder beam and see if it brought back anything. He had quite a collection of junk he had dredged up, including leaves, grass, pebbles, frogs, a stone axe, a rabbit. The cave man was his prize catch.—Ed.

hadn't been mad. He was just having a little fun.

"Holy jumping mackerel!" I gulped. "He's as strong as an elephant!"

"No get elephant," the cave man answered.

"An elephant is like a mastodon," Andrews explained. "He said you were as strong as a mastodon. You know what a mastodon is."

He understood what a mastodon was all right. Sticking his chest out a foot, he hit it with his fist.

"Stronger than mastodon," he said. "Me whip mastodon for breakfast. Before breakfast," he ended.

By this time Sam had a contract out of his pocket and was fumbling for a fountain pen. He knew a wrestler when he saw one. Andrews drove a shrewd bargain. "I need the money for my experiments," he said.

Stinking Horse put a big X on the contract for his mark, Andrews and I witnessed his signature, and the deed was done.

I was press agent for a cave man!

CHAPTER II

Brugger Collects His Interest

THE next night we slipped Stinking Horse into a warm-up bout at a tank-town show. I spent the intervening time down at the gym with him having the boys teach him a few of the holds of modern wrestling. Heck, those boys might be experienced wrestlers but they couldn't teach him anything. He knew all the holds already. He snorted with disgust at the men I got to work out with him.

"Bums, huh!" he said. "Tadpole, back where me came from, me wrestle bears!"

"Is that how you got all those scratches on your face?" I asked.

"Dese?" he said, pointing to a series of white lines on his cheeks that looked like claw marks. "Got dese wrestling blondes, not bears," he said, grinning. "Back where me came from, the blondes is worse than the bears."

"Tch, tch, tch," I said. I was beginning to like the big lug. He didn't have any education of any kind, he didn't know how to read or write, and the simplest mechanical devices that we take for granted were miracles to him, but he wasn't a dope. He might have a thick skull but he could learn.

His first match showed what was in him. He was matched against the Jersey Killer, who was strictly fourth class in the wrestling racket but was still a big boy and plenty tough for any amateur. The bout lasted thirty-eight seconds. At the end of this time the Jersey Killer was in the fourth row of seats, out cold, Stinking Horse was in complete and undisputed possession of the ring, and the crowd had gone crazy.

"Stevie," Sam exulted to me. "We got a wrestler!"

"When does fight start?" asked Stinking Horse, as we started him toward the dressing rooms. "Not warmed up yet."

The audience was cheering and gazing admiringly at him.

"Isn't he the most *marvelous* man you ever saw!" I heard some woman say.

The cave man stopped so quickly I bumped into him. "Move along," I said. We were in the aisle that led to the dressing room. "You got to get dressed. What are you stopping here for?"

"Blonde," he said, pointing at the woman who had spoken so admiringly of him. She was sitting in an aisle seat.

"So what?" I said. "Blondes are a dime a dozen."

"Not where me come from, dey ain't," said Stinking Horse. He leaned over and chucked the startled girl under the chin. "Hi yah, toots, huh?" he said. "How you like Stinking Horse, huh? How you like to come to my cave, huh?"

If there was one thing that was true of this cave man, it was that he always went straight to the point. One second he saw the girl for the first time, the next second he was asking her to come to his cave!

"Hey—" I yelled.

THE blonde that Stinky was chucking under the chin and asking to come off to his cave with him was escorted by a gent who also went straight to the point. No wrestler was going to make passes at his girl! He let go with a swing that started from the floor and kept rising until it hit, which it did flush on Stinky's nose.

The cave man let out a roar that shook the building. Sam and I both screamed at him but he didn't pay any attention. He was shouting cave man talk, so I don't know what he said, but his actions clearly indicated he was going to mop up the floor with the man who had hit him!

"Grab him!" Sam shouted.

He grabbed one arm and I grabbed the other. Stinky shook us off like flies. Pandemonium broke loose. The crowd surged to their feet. The cash customers had come to see wrestling matches but a good fight would suit them just as well. Police whistles began to shrill and the cops, swinging clubs, moved in.

I honestly believe Stinking Horse would have whipped that whole crowd, if he had had room in which to operate. As things were, he didn't have a chance. Somebody tripped him, he fell, and before he could get to his feet, he was snowed under. With two cops hanging on each arm, we led him to the dressing room.

"You damned fool!" I raged at him. "What the hell did you do that for?"

"Blonde woman, tadpole," he said, as if that explained everything. "Me like blonde womans. They great stuff."

There was no doubt about it, he was a cave man.

"We'll clean up with him," Sam said, beaming. "We'll get rich. All of us."

"We've got to do it before next week," I said.

"Why next week?"

"Brugger."

Sam beamed his broadest smile. "With a wrestler like this in my string, I can borrow the money to pay Brugger off. Yes, when Brugger calls next week, we will pay him off, with interest."

"What do you mean, with interest?" I asked.

The promoter grinned and explained what he had in mind.

SAM and I were in his office when Brugger called the second time. He didn't knock, but came barging in. Muggsy, grinning, was right behind him.

"Well," said Brugger.

Sam smiled, "Good morning," he said cheerfully. "Nice day, isn't it?"

"I didn't come here to talk about no weather," the bookie said. "I came to get my dough. You got it?"

"Ah—" Sam began.

"Don't 'Ah' me!" the bookie snapped. "I want the lettuce. And I'm not fixing to take no for an answer."

Brugger not only sounded tough, he *was* tough. Quite obviously he wasn't expecting to be paid, in which case Muggsy would let go with the second degree and Sam and I would let go with our back teeth. He didn't waste any time.

"Muggsy," he said.

The thug pushed his hat back on his head, took a firm tooth hold on his cigar, and started toward the desk where Sam was sitting.

The promoter didn't stop smiling. "Just a minute," he said. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a roll of bills, and flung them on the desk. "I always pay my debts, Brugger," he said. "Three thousand, wasn't it, I owed you? You will find the exact amount there."

The bookie gaped at him. "You—you mean you can pay off?"

"Certainly," Sam said firmly.

Brugger grabbed the money and hastily counted it. "Three grand," he said grudgingly. "The only thing that is short is the interest. I got a week's interest coming to me."

"Ah," said Sam. "The interest. Yes, indeed, the interest."

This was my cue. I got up and opened the door of the washroom.

"Get 'em, Stinky," I said. "Mop up the floor with 'em. Tear 'em to pieces."

We had carefully taught our cave man what he was to do and then we had hidden him in the washroom to wait until Brugger and Muggsy paid us their expected visit. With a roar like a charging bull ape, Stinking Horse leaped into the room.

Muggsy had stopped in front of Sam's desk when Sam produced the money. He was standing there with a cheated look on his face. Probably as a small boy he had found a great deal of clean fun in catching flies and pulling off their wings. While Sam didn't have any wings, Muggsy would have enjoyed pulling off an arm or a leg. He hated to be cheated out of his simple pleasures.

When Stinky came charging into the room, Muggsy's face turned chalk white. His mouth popped open.

"Who—who's that?" he stuttered.

"That," I said, "is Stinking Horse. He's going to pay you the interest you earned on your last visit."

Interest on the beating Muggsy had given Sam and me, interest on the first degree.

MUGGSY had thought he was going to cuff Sam around. The promoter weighed maybe a hundred and twenty-nine with his overcoat on. Muggsy had not bargained on meeting a man big enough to wrestle a mammoth. The thug took one look at the cave man and started to run.

Stinking Horse caught him by the seat of his pants. Muggsy was big, so he had to use both hands.

"Ho," he shouted, picking the thug up and swinging him around his head. "How you like it, huh? How you like meeting Stinking Horse?"

"Let me out of here!" Muggsy yelled.

"Sure mike!" the cave man answered. Muscles crawling in his back, he lifted the thug straight over his head and threw him through the glass panel in the office door. There was a crash of breaking glass, Muggsy thudded on the floor outside, and somewhere a startled woman screamed. Looking through the broken door, I saw Muggsy scramble to his feet and beat it down the hall at a dead run.

Brugger had been a fascinated witness to what had happened to his muscle man.

"We'll forget about the interest," he said hastily, as the pound of Muggsy's feet died away in the hall.

"Will we?" said Sam silkily. "I think not. I always try to pay my debts. *Stinky!*"

"Eeeyow!" Brugger screamed and the sound was music to my ears. The cave man was already in action. He used only one hand but Brugger went

sailing straight through the opening Muggsy had made. He hit the floor with a crash.

"You haven't heard the last of this," he yelped, getting to his feet and limping after his muscle man.

"More fight, huh?" said Stinking Horse happily. "More trouble?"

"Steve," said Sam, gazing fondly at the cave man. "We've really got a champion. And if I know human nature, this one will never double cross us."

CHAPTER III

Fight for the Championship

WE had a champion all right. I wrote reams of copy for the papers telling all about Stinking Horse, building him up as a bonafide cave man. I even went so far as to tell about Professor Andrews and how he had brought Stinky to the present. The public thought it was a publicity stunt and didn't believe a word of it, but because the idea of a cave man was somehow intriguing, the cash customers went to see him wrestle. Once they had seen him in the ring, they knew they had seen a man.

He was a demon in the ring. All his life he had been a fighter—in his world his life had depended on his fighting ability—and in the ring he was stronger, faster, quicker, than the grunt and groan artists who tried to stay with him. And, he loved to fight.

"When next fight, tadpole?" he was always asking me. He never called me anything but tadpole.

Several times at the matches which Sam was promoting to build him up to a crack against the champion, I saw Brugger and Muggsy. They always watched the matches with great interest but they never made any passes. Once I went up to Brugger and tried to bet on Stinky.

"Nothing doing," he said coldly.

"I thought you were a bookie," I taunted him.

"I ain't booking no bets on that gorilla," he said, turning away.

It was a good thing for him he didn't. Stinky won his match that night. He won them all.

Then things began to happen, one thing, rather. I found I was having more and more trouble keeping track of our cave man. Part of my duties were to act as his chaperone, to keep him from slugging taxi drivers and arguing with cops, etc. But he began to sneak away when I wasn't looking. We would be walking down the street, he would stop to tie his shoe, I would take two or three more steps, and when I looked back, he would be gone. A couple of hours later he would turn up. When I tried to find out where he had been, he wouldn't talk.

"No get, tadpole," he would say, grinning.

I TALKED to Sam about this. At first he was worried, then he got evasive. "I wouldn't worry too much, Steve," he said. "Probably he just likes to wander around and look at the sights."

I went out and talked to Andrews, finding him buried in a bunch of junk in his laboratory. He listened carefully to what I had to say. "Among other things, he's probably homesick," the professor said. "He's been out here two or three times to see me."

"You mean he wants to go back and live in a cave!" I said incredulously.

"How should I know what a cave man wants?" Andrews shrugged, and turned back to his work.

The night of the big fight was nearing. I watched Stinky like a hawk,

trying never to let him out of my sight. But in spite of all my vigilance, the big lug succeeded in slipping away. You would think a guy as big as he was wouldn't be able to hide from anybody, but he was a marvel at concealing himself. I never did learn where he was going.

Then the night of the big fight came.

Stinky was to go into the ring at nine o'clock, meeting the champ, Joe (Tiger) Wilson. The champ was no pushover for anybody, including a caveman. I was biting my nails from worry.

At four o'clock in the afternoon before the fight, Stinking Horse disappeared. I went into a phone booth to make a call and when I came out he had vanished! I hunted everywhere for the damned fool and couldn't find him.

At eight o'clock that night he was still missing!

Sam and I were in the dressing rooms waiting for him. I was having hemorrhages but Sam was perfectly calm.

"There is no point in worrying, Steve," he said. "Stinky will turn up."

"Listen," I demanded. "Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Then how do you know he will turn up?"

"Because I know human nature," Sam said.

"What the hell has human nature to do with this?"

Before he could answer, the door opened. I jumped to my feet expecting to see our missing cave man. It wasn't Stinky. It was Brugger. He smirked into the room, with Muggsy right behind him.

"Who in hell invited you here?" I said.

"No hard feelings, Steve," he said. "I just dropped in to say hello."

"Then say it and get out!"

"Why, Steve," Sam interrupted. "You will hurt Mr. Brugger's feelings, talking that way!"

THE bookie grinned. "I'm making a book on the main bout tonight," he announced. "Do you boys want to place a little bet on that punk of yours?"

"You're making a book!" I gasped. Now I knew something was wrong. If Brugger was accepting bets on our entry, bets that he would have to pay if Stinking Horse won, then as sure as shooting the fix was on! I could smell double-cross in the very air. "Hell, no!" I said.

"Not so long ago you wanted to bet on him," Brugger reminded me.

"And you wouldn't take my bet. Any time you come in and try to make a bet, I'm not having any."

I didn't have any idea how it had been worked or what had happened, but I was convinced of one thing: Brugger was certain our cave man didn't have a chance to win.

The bookie looked disappointed.

"I'll take five grand," Sam said.

I was too stunned to move. Sam Yates, who had been in the wrestling racket long enough to know better, was taking a bet offered by Brugger!

"Sam, you fool—" I choked out.

"On second thought, I'll make it ten grand," the promoter said, his voice grim.

That shut me up, that tied down the clapper in my warning bell. It was his money. If he wanted to throw it away, there was nothing I could do. If anybody besides Brugger had offered the bet, I would have grabbed a chunk of it myself, but to bet this guy was like trying to beat a slot machine.

Brugger booked Sam's bet. Grinning, he exited.

The door swung shut, and swung

open again. Stinking Horse entered.

"Where have you been?" I began.

He wouldn't look at me. He wouldn't look at Sam. "No time to talk," he said evasively. "Got to get ready for fight."

I turned to the promoter. "Are you going to let this bout go on, knowing you are certain to be double-crossed?"

"Certainly," he said. Steve, my boy, the trouble with you is that you have no confidence in human nature."

His voice sounded paternal and it made me feel like a small boy getting a fatherly pat on the head, which made me burn. The trainers barely had time to get Stinky dressed and out to the ring. My heart was down in my shoes but I went along.

"In this corner," the announcer bawled, "we have Tiger Wilson, the present champion. And in this corner we have Stinking Horse, the challenger. Two out of three falls will determine the winner."

The referee called the boys together for final instructions, the handlers jumped out of the ring, and the bout was on! Stinky was big, but if anything Tiger Wilson was bigger. And the Tiger was radiating confidence. There were no lines of worry on his brow. Why should he worry? He knew he was going to win.

THEY came together in the middle of the ring like a couple of grizzly bears, pawing, shoving, straining, every muscles showing. As they tugged at each other, you could hear Tiger Wilson grunt clear outside the building. Stinky was grunting just as loud.

For a second, when they first met, I had dared to hope. Then I began to hear all those grunts and groans and I knew what was going to happen. The grunting, the apparent straining, was all for the benefit of the cash customers. They weren't fighting, they weren't trying to fight. They were faking, putting on a show! I began to get sick at my stomach. Up until then I had dared to hope that Stinking Horse would play it square, that he wouldn't sell Sam out. I had liked the big lug, to me he had seemed fair and honest.

And here he was obviously preparing to throw a fight!

The first fall came in two minutes. Tiger Wilson grabbed the cave man around the middle, lifted him over his head, smashed him on the floor, and fell heavily on top of him, pinning his shoulders squarely.

I shut my eyes. I couldn't bear to watch any longer.

I opened them again when a woman screamed, just in time to see a girl with a seat two rows from the ring leap to her feet and dash down the aisle. She stuck her head under the ropes so that her face was within a foot of Stinking Horse where he was lying on the canvas.

"Stinky, you big bum!" she screamed. "Get up from there and fight!"

"Huh?" the cave man grunted, a startled look on his face. "Thought you want me to lose! Thought you told me to lose!"

The woman was a blonde!

I saw the picture then. Brugger had learned of the cave man's weakness and had sicked a blonde on him. That was where the big lug had been going when he slipped away. He had been sneaking out and meeting this blonde!

And she had talked him into throwing this fight.

"Thought you told me to lose," Stinking Horse repeated.

"I did!" the blonde screamed. "But I didn't mean it. Stinky, I didn't know what I was doing. Stinky, I love you! I didn't know I loved you until that

big brute fell on top of you. Stinky, *get up from there and fight!"*

A dazed, bewildered expression appeared on the cave man's face. He looked like a man who had just received news too good to be true.

"Whoops!" he yelled, leaping to his feet.

"Get him, Stinky!" the blonde yelled. "Tear him to pieces! Murder him!"

THE match was scheduled to go two out of three falls. Stinking Horse had lost the first fall. If he could win the next two, he would still be the winner.

The match didn't go beyond the second fall. The minute the blonde yelled at him to get in there and fight, Stinky came to his feet. As he came up he caught Tiger Wilson by the ankles and brought the startled champ up with him. Like a top gathering momentum, Stinky began to spin. When the Tiger was swinging in a great circle around him, Stinky let go of the champ's ankles.

It was an all-time record for the free throw. Tiger Wilson cleared eight rows of seats on the fly.

He hit with a thundering crash, scattering spectators and seats in every direction. After he hit, he didn't get up.

The dazed referee lifted Stinky's hand. "The winnah and new champion, Stinking Horse!"

The yell that came from the crowd almost lifted the roof off the building. The scream that came from Brugger's lips I will remember with joy forever.

For an instant the noise continued. Then it stopped. Dead silence fell as everybody in the house gawked at what was happening.

Stinking Horse had leaped out of the ring. He grabbed the blonde who had yelled encouragement at him, swung her over his shoulder, and started straight up the aisle toward the exit. At first I thought he was heading for the dressing rooms but he went straight out the exit that led to the street.

Fighting my way through the crowd, I got to the street just in time to see them get into a taxi.

"Hey, wait!" I yelled.

Stinky saw me. He stuck his head out of the window of the cab, grinned, and yelled, "Goodbye, tadpole." The cab moved off.

I had a sinking hunch that I knew what was going to happen next. Hopping into a taxi, I yelled at the driver to follow the other cab. As my hack swung away, the door was jerked open and somebody jumped in with me.

IT WAS Sam Yates. He was busy counting a roll of bills as big as my fist. "Brugger paid off," he said, grinning.

"So what?" I yelled. "So you won a bet? Don't you know you're about to lose your prize wrestler?"

"I know," said Sam, a little sadly. "That, too, I am afraid, is human nature."

"What do you mean, human nature? Did you know he was seeing that blonde all the time?"

"Sure," said Sam, smirking. "I knew she was supposed to talk him into throwing this match. I also knew she would never be able to go through with it."

"How did you know she wouldn't?"

"She would fall in love with him," Sam said smugly. "After that, she couldn't let him lose. She couldn't keep from falling in love with him. No woman could. All of them are instinctively longing for some cave man to come along and grab them. That's human nature, especially blonde human nature," he ended.

"Hurry up, driver," I yelled. What

Sam had said made sense. If the cave man couldn't resist a blonde, they in turn couldn't resist him.

The damned driver got caught in a traffic jam and we got to the laboratory too late. A dazed and bewildered professor was all we found.

"You sent them back?" I gulped.

"It was either send them back or whip a cave man," Andrews sighed. "What else could I do? Yes, I sent them back, both of them."

Stinking Horse had gone back to the world from which he came, to the tough dawn where he belonged. He had taken his blonde with him.

"It's better that way," said Sam, sighing. "He wasn't really happy here. He didn't fit in here."

"But what about that blonde?" I demanded. "She won't fit in back there."

"Don't worry about the blonde. If I know human nature, she will have hot and cold running water in their cave before six months are gone. Don't ever worry about a blonde," Sam said. "They will always do all right no matter where you put them."

YELLOW CUNNING

by

JOHN SEMRAU

MUCH of the present successes of the Japanese Army can be explained when we study the "science" tactics of war they employ.

In Malaya, the British encountered many cases of Jap soldiers, disguised as natives, floating down the sluggish Malayan rivers on logs, small rafts, and boats. When they were safely past the British outposts, they attacked from behind, swiftly and surely and then went on. Other soldiers, skillfully camouflaged, lodged themselves in the thick Malayan jungles to pick off the unsuspecting British, Anzac, and Indian soldiers.

If a Jap sniper can get only a very small amount of food and water from his surroundings, he can maintain himself in good fighting condition for a period ranging from two weeks to almost a month behind the enemy lines. Impossible you say! Well, let's take a look at the equipment each Japanese sniper carries.

For purpose of camouflage and protection, he carries a gas mask, a green combination mosquito net and camouflage hood to cover his helmet, head and shoulders. A green corded net is used to camouflage the rest of his body. A black wire eyescreen protects his eyes from sun glare as he perches in some tree. The average weight of the Japanese soldier is only about 130 pounds and so to prevent the "kick" of his rifle from dislodging him from his tree hideout, he carries a coil of rope with which he ties himself securely to the trunk and branches.

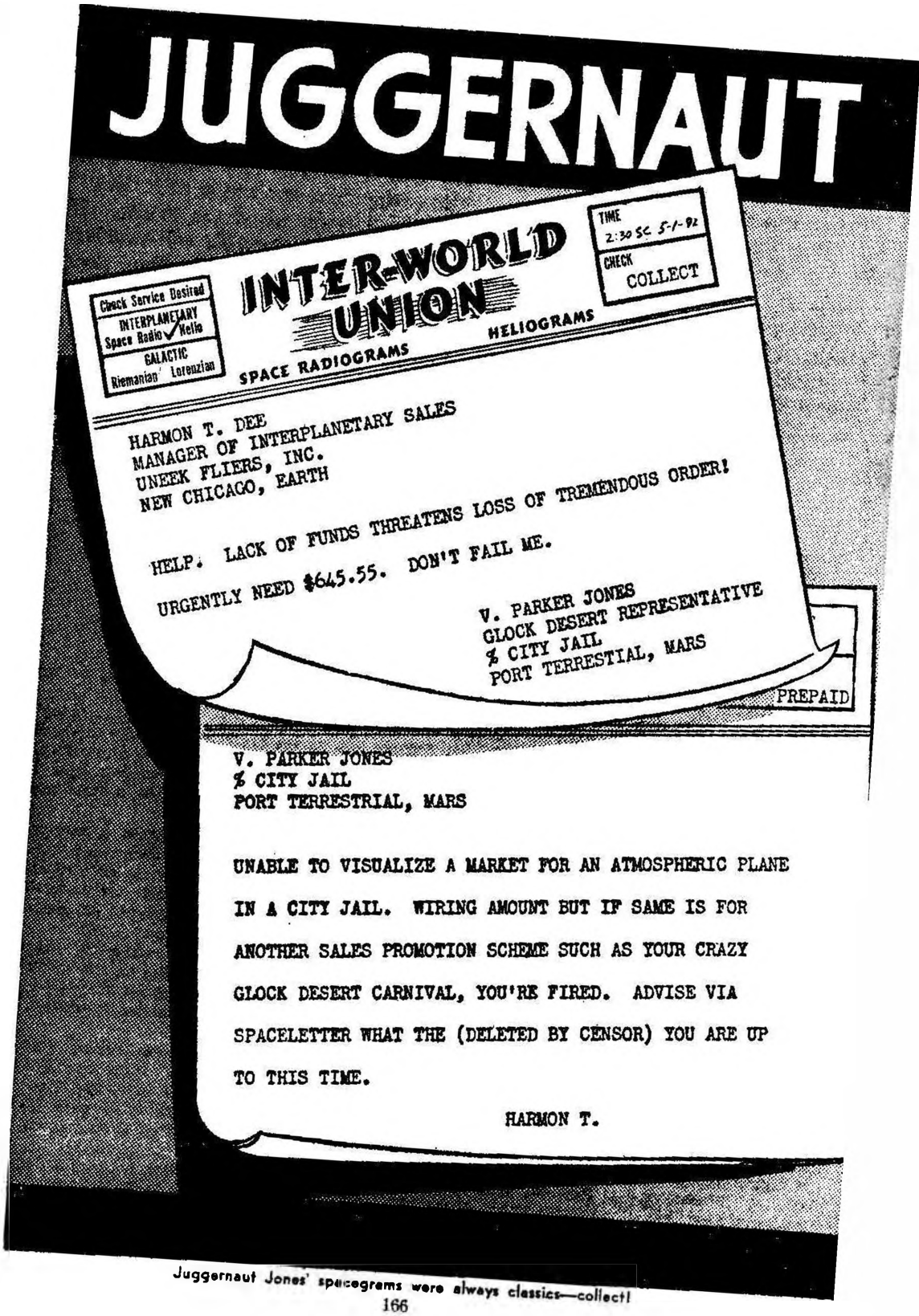
To provide himself with food when he cannot secure it from the countryside, the Jap carries a generous supply of rice, a small bag of hardtack, a half-pound of hard candy (even Japs have a sweet tooth), a can of field rations, a small can of coffee, and vitamin pills.

For his water supply, he carries a can of chlorine to purify the water he finds and a canteen. For his minor wounds and general medical protection, he is given an antidote for mustard gas, a supply of quinine, some stomach pills, gauze pads, roll and bandages, and a tooth brush.

The only spare clothing he carries are socks and gloves. To enable him to find his way about during the night and also for purposes of signaling, he carries a flashlight with rotating varicolored lenses.

An indication that these same snipers once served in the campaigns against Manchukuo and North China, is found in the half-dozen spare lenses he carries for the eyeholes of his mask for use in zero and sub-zero weather, as well as for the hot climate of Malaya.

Although the equipment covers an extensive list, the overall bulk of the entire pack is not great. Most of the equipment is very cheaply built which is a further evidence of Japan's limited supply of war materials.



Juggernaut Jones' spacegrams were always classics—collect!

JONES *Salesman*

by

A. R. McKENZIE

V. Parker Jones had more than a job of selling planes when he went to Quakerton Asteroid. He had to burn whole mountains!

V. Parker "Juggernaut" Jones

DEAR Harmon T.: Here's your spaceletter. I was in jail. A most humiliating experience but one incurred solely in the interests of the company I am proud to represent even though said company has, in the past, been reluctant to acknowledge its good fortune in having the exclusive services of the most resourceful salesman in the field of low-cost air travel.

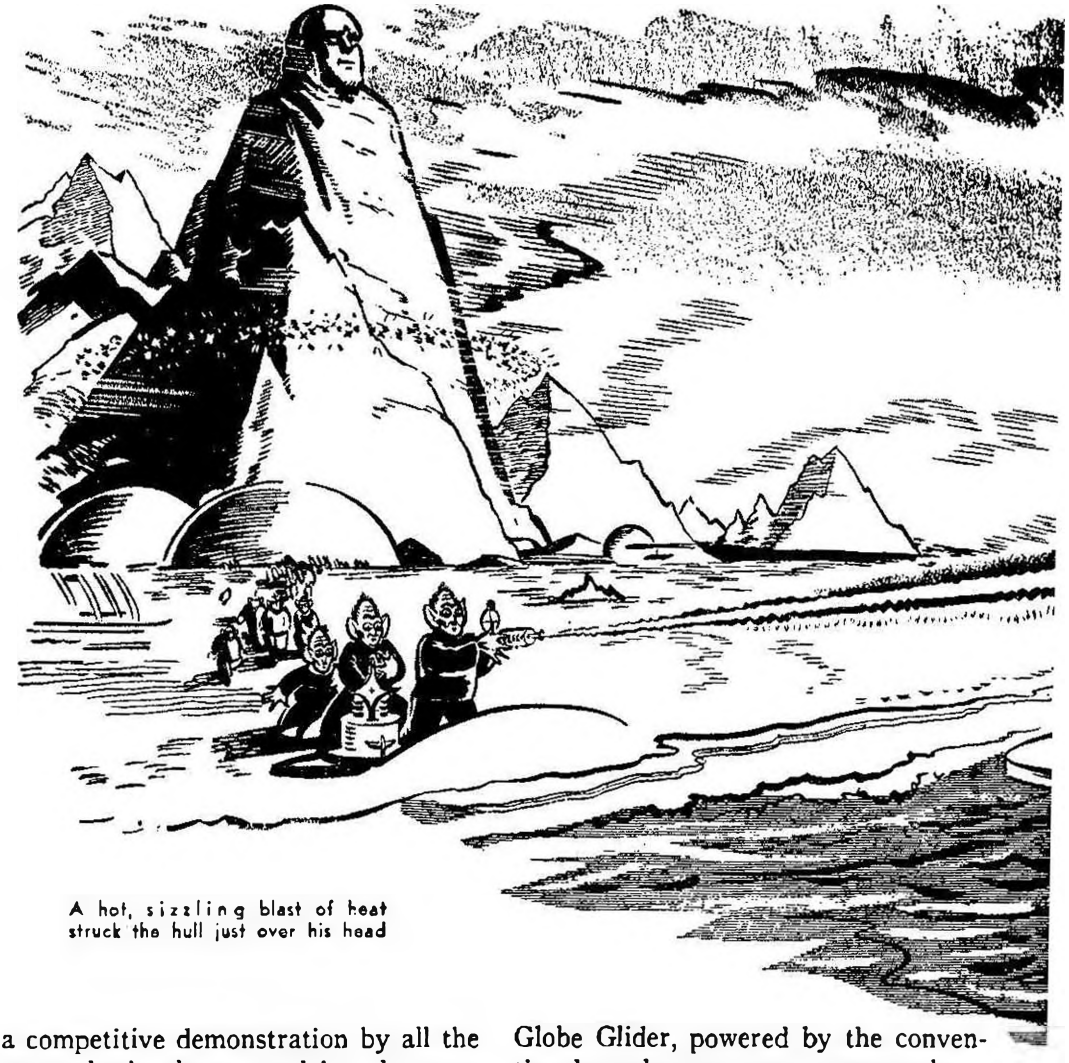
Which is me.

Funds received and expended as follows:

Fine	$ 25.00
Damages to Solar Emporium Nightclub	144.00
One-way Ticket: Port Terrestrial to Quakerton Asteroid (Via Freighter SPACE-QUEEN)	476.00
One cigar (Plantation Delight)	.25
Cash on hand	.30
	$645.55

I should be accustomed to your discouraging comments, such as those regarding the Glock Desert Carnival, yet I find myself, in this case, saddened no little, especially since I am about to deluge you with a veritable avalanche of orders. While said orders have yet to be written and, at the moment, I am faced by what to a less capable person might be called Unsurmountable Obstacles, imposed upon me by an unscrupulous Mr. Joe Karp who, you will recall, represents our bitterest rival, Globe Gliders, Inc., I am positive that with the diligent applications of my many talents, I will emerge, as usual, triumphant. That I very definitely promise you.

I still insist that the Glock Desert Carnival would have tripled our Martian sales but for (1) this same unscrupulous Mr. Karp and (2) your own bungling in shipping me a conventional 12-jet stock model sedan instead of the special, high-drive 20-jet speedster which I ordered. As you recall, I had arranged to conclude our carnival with



A hot, sizzling blast of heat struck the hull just over his head

a competitive demonstration by all the atmospheric planes servicing the area, thus establishing the indisputable fact that, while the Globe Glider, our closest rival, may undersell us slightly, our famous product, the Uneek Flier, is unexcelled in performance.

I was able, at a nominal cost, to influence the impartial judges to restrict all competitive tests to one of low-level speed, since, as I have repeatedly informed you, a plane such as ours which relies on the new hypomagnesium rocket blasts for motivation, is at an extreme disadvantage in rarified upper-level atmospheres without an adequate supercharger, whereas the Globe Glider, powered by the conventional repulser ray, can maneuver, howbeit sluggishly, at any altitude so long as it has a reasonable level solid beneath it on which to direct its repulsers.

AFTER restricting tests to speed, you can imagine my chagrin when the comparatively slow-moving 12-jet job arrived. I attempted to influence the impartial judges into postponing the trials but, unfortunately, the unscrupulous Mr. Karp who, I regret to say, is employed by a company much more liberal in the matter of operating expenses, had anticipated my move with a greater number of dollars.

I lost the race and my prearranged victory-banquet at the Solar Emporium, one of Port Terrestrial's liveliest nightclubs, might have been a dismal affair indeed had not the victorious Mr. Karp inadvertently put me in touch with a veritable unknown market which will, when properly serviced by me, infinitely offset the anticipated drop in Martian sales.

As you know, freighter crews, miners and others who have businesses out in the swirling maze of asteroids have come to make the Emporium a favorite meeting place, and, salesmen, like myself, frequently make lucrative contacts among the clientele. Mr. Karp, while a poor closer, is passably good on contacts so when, during a lull, I noticed him earnestly engaged with a rugged-looking freighter Captain, I immediately injected myself into the scene.

"This fat Buttinsky," says Mr. Karp,

unpleasantly, "is a Mr. Jones who has a reputation of being a very untrustworthy character. I would suggest, Captain Craver—"

"Delighted to know you, Captain," I beam and, my engaging personality being what it is, I quickly found myself receiving confidences which Mr. Karp, obviously, did not wish shared.

"Like I was saying," the Captain continues, "we'd run down this hunk of pure nickel and was towing it for Ceres when one of them blasted stellar storms smacks us. When we get clear, we're right under this funny little world called Quakerton. We go in to patch a couple seams and like I was telling Karp, the people we find there are—"

"Nickel?" Mr. Karp interrupts hastily, "and you lost it? A catastrophe."

"The people, Captain Craver?" I say firmly.

"Well, they speak a backwoodsy kind of English and, as near as I can figure, they got kicked off of Earth about the end of the 20th century. They're plenty tough and poison on liars. Tell 'em one little stretcher and—Skkk! off goes your head. Half of Quakerton is run by a dictator; the other half's still electing presidents. There's just one way through the whopping big mountain range what separates their two capital cities—a crooked, little pass—and they're forever attacking each other through it. With all this scrapping, they've forgot how to travel in space. In fact, they can't even figure out how to get the crazy winged airplanes they're trying to build off the ground."

"INTERESTING," I murmur, sipping from a drink which a similarly-thoughtful Mr. Karp has just poured. Obviously, our thoughts are practically identical. I was thinking of the furor—and the number of sales which would result—at the sight of a trim-bodied Uneek Flier zooming across the heavens of their rugged world with all jets flashing a brilliant white. Mr. Karp, undoubtedly, had his out-moded, ray-driven Glider in mind, and was pondering, as I, how to reach this Quakerton gold mine first. Naturally, I was toying only with sportsmanlike methods of incapacitating Mr. Karp but he, I promptly discovered, had decided to employ his usual unscrupulous tactics.

The room started to spin and I knew instantly that Mr. Karp, somehow, had slipped a Martian Nervo pill into my drink. As is customary, my muscular system promptly flew out of control and I found myself throwing punches at everything in range. Long before I was subdued, the craven Mr. Karp and his friend slipped away and I knew, even before I was able to contact you for bail money, square the damages and arrange passage on this freighter, for the Quakerton Asteroid, that Mr. Karp had once again beaten me to the field of operations.

As I have intimated, we have arrived at Quakerton. However, two landing attempts have brought such a barrage of antiquated explosive shells from Quakerton's two isolated cities, we have been forced to retreat to the stratosphere until I am able to spur my agile brain into devising a way out of our crisis.

The situation is obvious. Mr. Karp has landed and, no doubt, dispatched his Captain Craver back for a complete line of demonstrators. Mr. Karp has also turned the susceptible populus against me. However, my problem is merely to effect a landing with my 12-jet demonstrator, for, once I am in contact with my prospects, I am confident I will not only be able to offset the vicious propaganda Mr. Karp has spread and expose him as an unscrupu-

lous vender of a vastly inferior product, but will, as I have stated, be able to deluge you with orders.

Hastily yours,
V. Parker Jones,
Representative at Large.

P.S.: My finances being what they are, I am informed that Captain Smith of this freighter would welcome a spacegram from you to the effect that a cash guarantee of $2,000 was being deposited to his account at Port Terrestrial—this sum to make good on damages done to his ship by shrapnel and to assure myself and demonstrator return passage.

Your congratulatory messages may be sent me care of this freighter.

V. Parker.

SPACEGRAM (Prepaid)
From: Manager of Interplanetary Sales
Uneek Fliers, Inc.
New Chicago, Earth.
To: V. Parker Jones,
Care of Freighter SPACEQUEEN,
Asteroid Quakerton.

Action unauthorized. You're fired. Cost of three spacegrams, one spaceletter and amount of $645.55 has been deducted from salaries and commissions due you per end of fiscal year, leaving a balance you owe us of $536.17. Will expect remittance promptly. Also notice that one 12-jet sedan is being immediately returned to our Glock Desert Office. Suggest you contact nearest psychiatrist. You're nuts.

Harmon T. Dee.

SPACELETTER (Collect)
From: V. Parker Jones,
Care of Freighter SPACEQUEEN,
Neighborhood of Quakerton Asteroid.
Dear Harmon T.:

It isn't enough that I find myself confronted with the most crucial moment of my career but what I must have trouble with you, too. I believe this is the 21st time I have been discharged only to be hurriedly reinstated when my unusual sales technique unexpectedly produced lucrative results for everyone but myself.

However, things *are* at the crucial stage, if not perilously near a catastrophic ending. My problem, you recall, was to effect a landing for myself and demonstrator on the Quakerton Asteroid with the ultimate goal of selling the inhabitants on the idea that the Uneek Flier was the only plane for their mountainous world—this in spite of the fact that the unscrupulous Mr. Karp of Globe Gliders, Inc., had already conditioned the populus against me.

ONLY with difficulty was I able to persuade Captain Smith to drop his ship into maneuverable atmosphere but once there, I mounted my 12-jet job, cut loose and shot earthward. I had in mind a spectacular flight directly over one or both of the huge, aluminum-spired cities I had seen buried in equatorial mountains and separated by a particularly formidable and lengthy range, but because I had broken contact at too high an altitude—and may I repeat, the lack of an adequate supercharger is a constant source of annoyance to me—the hypo-magnesium charges fouled badly and the best I could do was a forced landing in a warm, shallow river adjacent to and eastward of the mighty, city-separating mountain range.

Reaching shore, I gazed in awe up the rugged slopes to a point on the highest peak where I perceived, to my astonishment, a giant face of a stern-eyed man, glistening silvery in the sunlight. It was, obviously, a bust of tremendous proportions and, judging by

the white metallic flakes which dotted the surrounding hills, it had been cast or ground only recently from some type of aluminum alloy. I confess its stern mien, as it looked sharply east out across the lesser hills towards one of Quakerton's two key cities, sent a shiver of apprehension up my spine.

Debating my next move, I removed my hat to mop my brow and promptly something struck the ground beside me, to explode with a violent puff of green smoke. The next I knew I was looking up into a pair of cold grey eyes with a goodly crowd of similarly hard-featured men glaring down upon me.

"Fattest man I ever see," one says. "And the dumbest. How could we miss a target like that with the sun burning off his bald head!"

"Probably been drinking," another grunts. "He looks the type: big stomach, flabby cheeks and red nose."

Now if anything annoys me, it is the mistake people constantly make regarding my physique, especially since one need only to press the sinews of my arm to realize that I am, actually an excellent specimen of hardy, howbeit heavy-set, manhood.

"Fat and drunk, am I!" I blurted out. "If I had the sour mugs you guys are wearing, I'd think twice before I criticized anybody else's looks."

A most fortunate speech. Because of my bluntness, my dull-witted captors concluded instantly I was a native Quakertonite from, of course, the dictator-governed city of Quakerville which lies west of the unscalable divide—a range broken only by a narrow, heavily-guarded pass cutting through the iron-impregnated mountains close to the giant, aluminum face.

I WAS apprehended as a native Quakertonite which was well since my captors were scouring the hills for a blood-thirsty alien named V. Parker Jones who, so the unscrupulous Mr. Karp had sworn, was not only a maniac but one bent on enslaving all of the asteroid.

I will not attempt to explain the queer psychological quirks of these backward people further than to say that they possess both a frankness and gullibility almost unbelievable considering they are about as advanced scientifically as their cousins of earth had been in the early 20th century.

Mr. Karp, I learned, was operating from their democratic city of Quakerburg. The giant face was, as I guess, cast from an aluminum alloy and was simply an honorable, howbeit expensive, gesture towards whomever was president at the moment. This gesture, naturally, entailed a tremendous task of grinding and reshaping the expansive features each time a presidential election was held. I was unfortunate in arriving shortly after one such election and aluminum powder from the feature-altering grinders not only lay several feet thick in recesses such as the mountain-piercing pass, but I was constantly finding aluminum particles in candy bars, cigarettes and other products which I later purchased in Quakerburg stores.

Enemy Quakerville, I learned, was believed about to launch an invasion attempt through the connecting pass which was currently held by the ill-prepared democracy of Quakerburg.

On being led to the city, I cannily informed the authorities I was overjoyed at being captured since, as I told them, even a fool learns to loath the dictatorial form of government, and, further, I firmly believed that all Quakervillers, implying myself, were mentally inferior to the democracies. Since, in the first instance, there was no means of proving I was lying, and since,

secondly, the belief *was* prevalent that Quakervillers were mentally inferior, I was promptly freed and given a job promoting breakfastfood sales.

I can readily understand why I was placed in the sales department but what I can't comprehend is why, after a series of exhaustive mental tests for aptitude, my questioners failed to uncover the obvious fact that I was actually, not an inferior but a vastly superior intellect.

Howbeit, I kept close watch on Mr. Karp who, naturally, was having a difficult time convincing his prospects that a Globe Glider was the machine best suited for their needs. As you know, while the repulser ray may work passably well above flat country, it is extremely unreliable over mountainous terrain. Since the repulser type operates by literally pressing on the ground beneath it, any variation of that ground produces a corresponding change in the flight of the plane above it. Although the Globe Glider *does* have a shock-absorbing quality amounting to approximately fifty feet of ground level change, some of the Quakerton canyons are upwards of a thousand feet in depth and you can easily visualize what happens when a Glider sails unexpectedly over same.

NEEDLESS to say, I planned to keep under cover until a satisfactory plan for presenting my product—which, I understood had been retrieved intact—entered my agile brain. The radio continued to speculate on my whereabouts and several times Mr. Karp took the microphone with ominous warnings concerning my homicidal character.

I was standing on a downtown street corner one afternoon, handing out breakfastfood samples, when someone burst through the throngs and seized me by the arm.

"It's him," a shrill voice screams. "It's V. Parker Jones. Police!"

Now Mr. Karp is a very frail man but, unfortunately, his terror at finding me gave him added strength and, struggle as I would, I could not break his retaining grip.

I can, of course, understand his fright. Imagine yourself, Harmon T., in his position—imagine a man of limited ability striving desperately, but, as yet, unsuccessfully, to sell an inferior product, then to have me, a man of unlimited resourcefulness, appear on the scene with a product vastly superior to yours in every way except in regards an adequate supercharger.

At the police station, Mr. Karp quickly regained his sanity.

"He's Jones, all right," he tells the sergeant.

"Is this true?" the sergeant scowls. "Are you crazy Jones? Are you fixing to murder everybody and then take over Quakerton?"

"If I were Jones," I say, facing the situation courageously, "and if I were the bloodthirsty maniac which Mr. Karp insists, don't you think I'd be trying to escape right now?"

"You tried to escape," the sergeant says suspiciously, "only you was so flabby fat this little runt had no trouble holding you."

I restrained my temper. The man, obviously, was mouthing lies about my physical being in hopes, in my wrath, I would implicate myself.

"There are only two possible conclusions at which you can arrive," I say carefully. "You see clearly I am not a maniac attempting to enslave a world."

The sergeant nodded reluctantly. "A buttertub like you couldn't enslave anybody."

"Granted," I say with amazing self control. "So these must be your con-

clusions: I am either *not* Mr. Jones, or I *am* Mr. Jones and Mr. Karp has been spreading lies about me for a reason which might concern the ghastly thing he calls a flying machine and which no man would think of buying once he realizes there exists on the market a superior article known as the Uneek Flier."

"The question is," the officer says. "Who are you?"

"I am," I say dramatically. "V. Parker Jones, and I demand an opportunity to prove that all Mr. Karp has said is pure fabrication."

MY FORESIGHT in never allowing myself to utter a direct factual remark proved my salvation. I had merely implied I was an enemy Quakerviller and because the glaring mistakes in my mental tests had not been corrected, I was allowed to embark upon my business of proving Mr. Karp a liar.

Naturally, the most practical way was to prove the superiority of my 12-jet, hypo-magnesium powered Uneek sedan over Mr. Karp's ray-driven speedster, thus saving my hide and landing that avalanche of orders I promised. The question of "how" I answered promptly—too promptly. Unfortunately, I was thinking only of the difficulties Mr. Karp would have in negotiating the many deep canyons, when I should have remembered that my own craft has yet to be fitted with an adequate supercharger—a fact which I believe I have mentioned before.

"The test," I say, "will be one of speed and endurance. We will race completely around the world. The winner will naturally, prove his product worthy of being adopted as standard equipment on Quakerton at, no doubt, a generous discount if a sufficient volume of orders is forthcoming."

The rest is briefly told. I have just returned from a test flight, held secretly at a point where the aluminum drifts, caused by the recent regrinding of the much-revered, sentinel face, no longer whitened the cricks and crannies—said point being, I judged, far enough removed from questioning eyes in case anything went wrong.

It is well I took that precaution. My test, to say the least, was discouraging. So much so that I am tempted to withdraw from the ridiculous race since it is almost a foregone conclusion that I not only will lose but that I will not even be able to finish.

This fact, unfortunately, has become known to Captain Smith of the Spacequeen. Since, thanks to you, he now believes I am his only chance to collect his rapidly mounting bill, he states flatly, "You either go through with it and win, or by (deleted) I'll beat every last cent from your fat hide."

Our course is to be away from Quakerburg and the towering, dividing mountain range, east clear around the world, past the city of the dictator-minded people and then over the aforementioned westerly guardian mountain and back to Quakerburg once more. However, my test flight has proven that I will not be able to lift my 12-jet job over that lofty divide for, as I have stated repeatedly, our hypo-magnesium flier lacks an adequate supercharger to allow satisfactory operation in rarified upper-level atmospheres. My ultimate ceiling on Quakerton reaches a point some 200 feet below the lowest spot I was able to find. Though I will be stopped, Mr. Karp will be able to negotiate the heights, howbeit slowly, for so long as he has a solid upon which to direct his repulser rays, he will maintain flight.

MY reason for pessimism is obvious, yet because of Captain Smith's

keen interest, I have decided to go forth seeped with the fighting spirit of a man who, till now, has never admitted the possibility of defeat. If I am shot down over enemy country, or drop to a horrible death upon the jagged rocks beyond the divide—as I surely must—my life insurance will be enough to cover the paltry indebtedness you mention in your cable.

So remember, Harmon T., as you lay my rugged body to rest, I gave my all for my company even though said company has been reluctant to acknowledge its good fortune in having had the services of the most resourceful salesman in the field of low-cost air travel.

Which was me.

Sorrowfully yours,
The late V. Parker Jones.

SPACEGRAM (Prepaid)
From: Manager of Interplanetary Sales
Uneek Fliers, Inc.
New Chicago, Earth
To: V. Parker Jones
Freighter SPACEQUEEN
Asteroid Quakerton

Call off race. Uneek Fliers refuses to accept responsibility for your death. Ordering your arrest for attempted destruction of company property. Advised your insurance policy has a "no suicide" clause.

Harmon T. Dee.

SPACELETTER (Collect)
From: V. Parker Jones
Second Cook—SPACEQUEEN
Enroute (No Immediate Port of Call)
Dear Harmon T.:

Am physically alive but all is lost. Am being shanghaied. Farewell.

Your cable arrived about the time I was zooming east from the starting line at the helm of my 12-jet, hypo-magnesium powered Uneek Flier, following closely the confident Mr. Karp who was driving his unwieldy, but speedier, repulser-driven Globe Glider. The thousands gathered did not cheer. Even the giant and costly presidential face, stationed on the highest peak of the range behind the city and adjacent to the divide-piercing pass, seemed to leer as I roared eastward with all jets flaming a blinding white.

Well it might leer for I knew that no power in the universe, save perhaps an adequate supercharger, could lift my ship over that terrible range when I finally reached it. Naturally, a great many schemes had occurred to me, such as engaging the Spacequeen as an elevator, but, since Mr. Karp had been pointedly informed that unapproachable judges had been stationed along our line of flight to thwart any trickery he might be planning, I discarded such schemes as poor sportsmanship.

I was able to keep close to Mr. Karp because he was constantly being forced to readjust his downward-pointing repulsers to conform with the ever-changing terrain.

WE passed safely over enemy country in spite of a terrific anti-aircraft barrage and found, beyond the dictator's smudgy city, a suprising number of camouflaged roads leading toward the great divide which now, since we had encircled the world, loomed ahead of us. Mr. Karp, seeking to profit by the level stretches discovered to his dismay they not only were well protected but were literally crawling with soldiers all heading the same direction as we.

Approaching the frightful barrier, I saw the rear of the priceless, presidential head, and, to its left, but much lower, the mouth of the tortuous pass. Likewise, I saw to my growing worry,

there were no Quakerburg guards in evidence. They had been withdrawn. I suddenly realized, to augment the democracy's meager homeguard. Mr. Karp had stated that his flier not only far surpassed mine but that I had come to this world with the intent of enslaving it. If I lost the race, thus proving —at least to the practical-minded Quakerburgers—that Mr. Karp was right in *all* his statements, the concentrated army would see I didn't live to carry out my plans.

The rest is quickly told. Mr. Karp reached the stupendous slope and started up, driving his repulsers against every available ridge. I rose likewise and, relying on my potent hypo-magnesium blasts, quickly outdistanced Mr. Karp only to reach my ceiling approximately level with the pass but still a good 200 feet below the summit. And there I hung, fighting my fouling rocket charges and cursing as the setting sun reflected blindingly from the huge, snow-like drifts of aluminum banked not only on the unsurmountable mountain before me but deep within the range-breaking pass below me. As I hung there, Mr. Karp went silently past. And it was his triumphant sneer which hurled my brain suddenly into high gear.

I saw the floor of the pass a scant 20 feet beneath me; I saw to the west the marching legions of the dictator nation of Quakerville—legions which shortly would dash through the unguarded avenue and fall upon the unprepared democracy of Quakerburg. Not, I am sorry to say, that I cared two whoops then. It was just that these legions would go through the pass. And if they could, so could I.

Without further thought, I hurled my gallant flier straight forward. With all jets spitting white, I zoomed into the pass, manuevered skillfully around the first sharp turn and the rest is history.

THE pass, as I have intimated, was literally choked with powdered aluminum which had fallen from the much-altered and almost-unreplaceable presidential bust far above. Even you, Harmon T., know the affect of a magnesium flare—especially a hypoed one —on powdered aluminum. Suffice to say, I started a conflagration there in the mountains, transcending anything but a nova; a heat which surely would have melted my bones had not the rush of warming air blown my ship straight up out of the pass, up past even the much-revered head and on across the divide clear beyond the waiting city of Quakerburg.

Righting my flier, I looked back and saw Mr. Karp being hurled far to the north off his course. I saw more vividly a veritable sea of flame, saw peaks of the iron-impregnated range actually melting away and pouring molten rivers into the already obliterated pass.

But more to the point, I saw the huge, expensive aluminum head start tipping slowly, and in a truly ghastly fashion, off-center. As more and more of its foundation turned into liquid under the unthinkable heat of the burning aluminum powder, the head tipped faster until, like a striken giant, it lunged suddenly backward and disappeared, literally staggering the world as it thundered unseen on down the slope and far out into enemy territory.

Needless to say, I made no attempt to check my flight. Instead, I raced madly on to the point where I had arranged to contact Captain Smith. I explained the situation tersely and a scant five minutes later, Asteroid Quakerton was dropping rapidly away from the Spacequeen's stern and I was in the

galley, undressing my first potato.

And so it is. I compute that I will work out my indebtedness to the Captain in a period of slightly more than 84 years. This, naturally, represents a sizeable bit of time before I will be able to attack the debt I owe Uneek Fliers, Inc., a company which I was once proud to represent.

However, an even greater length of time, perhaps approaching infinity, must necessarily pass before I, even at the wages I might have received as a Uneek Flier representative—which, I must confess, greatly exceed those of a second cook—will be able to make right the cost of the below listed items:

1. One head of aluminum alloy, size unknown but admittedly huge.
2. Expenses, likewise huge, incurred in mounting same on a suitable peak overlooking the city of Quakerburg.

Faithfully, but no longer yours,
V. Parker Jones

SPACEGRAM (Prepaid—Special)
From: Manager of Interplanetary Sales
Uneek Fliers, Inc.
New Chicago, Earth
To: B. Parker Jones
Frieghter SPACEQUEEN
Enroute

Disregard previous spacegrams. Advise your captain that full amount of your indebtedness, plus return fare, has been deposited to his account. Disregard loss of aluminum head. You not only won race by being blown across finish line but you stopped annihilating attack by enemy Quakervillers by closing pass. Falling head completed rout of marching legions. Quakerburgers wire congratulations. Claim you vindicated self. Are still attempting to apprehend Mr. Karp with intent to deal bodily harm. Uneek Fliers deluged with orders. Late models, being rushed to Quakerton, now equipped with adequate supercharger. Return at once. Office of Sales Manager, Martian Division, awaits you. Plus salary boost. You (deleted), I could kiss you.

Harmon T. Dee

"STUFF" AND NONSENSE

by DICK SELBY

WITH all the fuss and commotion going on last December 7th, nobody seems to have noticed that a very amazing thing happened on that day. On December 7th the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor. But on the same day, the Earth, our little clod of dirt spinning in space, shrunk to about one-quarter its original size!

Let's see now, that ought to make it about six thousand miles in circumference, you say? Mathematically, maybe you're right. We just don't go in for those complicated matters. Let's just settle for about two thousand miles straight through.

That brings New York only eight hundred miles from San Francisco. It brings Berlin to within six hundred miles of the Kremlin. It makes the distance we have to go to work each day down so we can walk it, and it looks as though we'll save bus fare.

It gives us an added life for the tires on our car of six more years. Heck, the war'll be over by then, and we can get new bouncers for baby—and a new baby!

But some other things worry us. We, on the surface of Earth, only one thousand miles from the center, find we're spinning a bit slower than usual. Our motion "cross-country" so to speak, is reduced to a sixteenth of our former speed. Instead of a thousand miles an hour, we are going a measly shade better than sixty-two. Looks like the date line will have to be revised. Every sixty-two miles we change time an hour. If we go for a cross-country jaunt, we'll have to use a stop watch, or just forget what time it is entirely.

All these changes, and December 7th is remembered only because of Pearl Harbor? Why hasn't somebody noticed it? The globe has shrunk! It's an amazing story come true!

What's that you say? Nonsense? Nosir! What we're telling you is the real "stuff." *You*, Mr. and Mrs. America, are giving us the nonsense. You've been saying the globe is too big for the Japs and Germans to attack us. But that's all changed now—so, ergo, the Earth *must* have shrunk! Nonsense, hey!

Horsesense Hank

Pearl Harbor got Horsesense Hank mad. Something ought to be done about it—and he was the man who was going to do it!

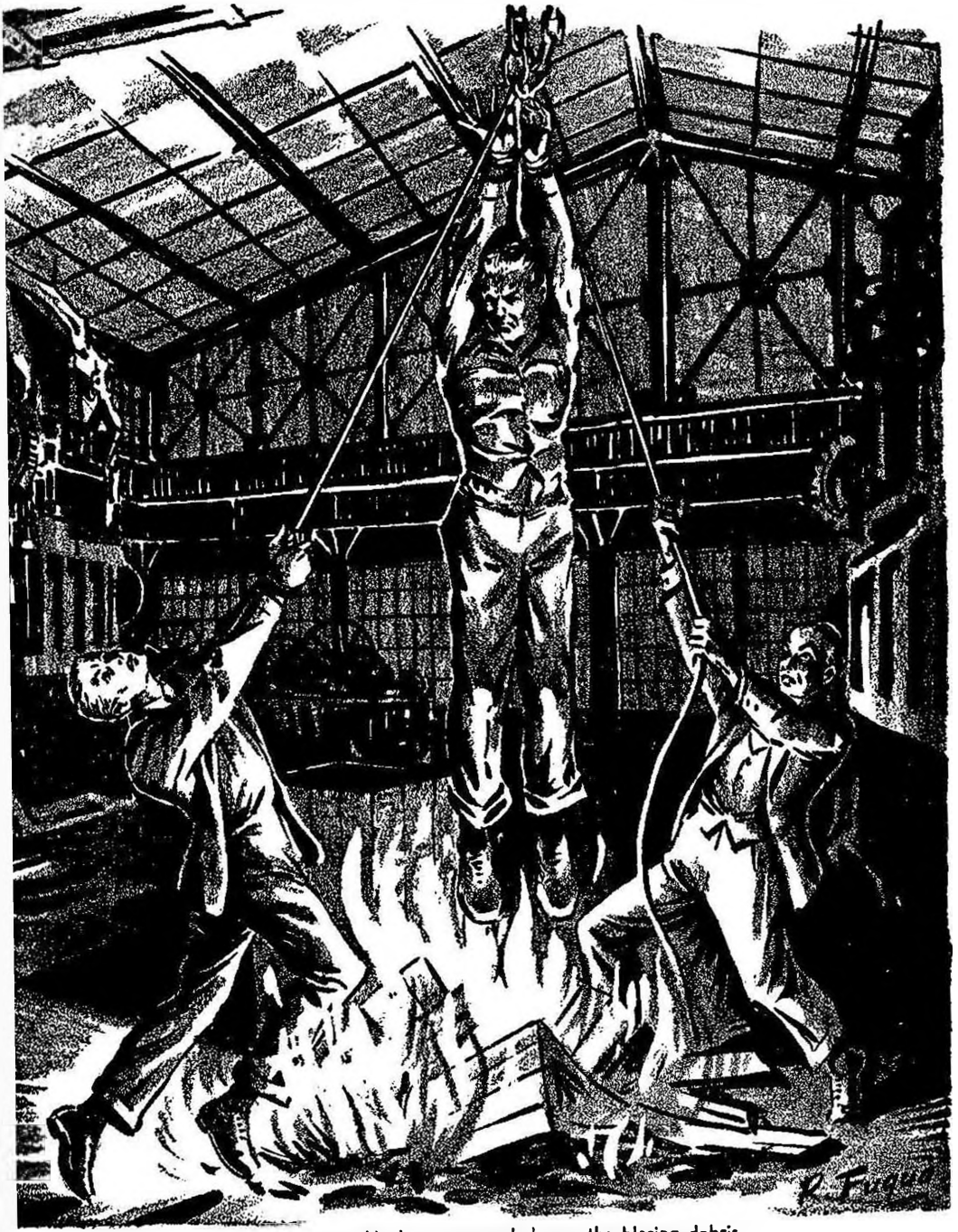
LIKE the rain-drenched angler said as he reeled in a fish, "Life is just one damp thing after another!" I thought I'd fixed everything all hunky-dory around the campus of dear old Midland U. when I finally got my friend "Horsesense Hank" Cleaver engaged to Helen MacDowell. Which just goes to prove that you shouldn't count your chickens until they're hitched. Because That Man stepped in and messed up everything.

You know the guy I mean. The chief germ in Germany. The little ex-housepainter with a scrap of old paintbrush on his upper lip. First he "protected" himself against the poor Austrians. Then the Czechs and the Poles. Then came Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg—it sounds like a geography lesson, doesn't it?—then France, the Balkans, Greece and Crete. And finally, as his armies, having come a cropper against the outraged Russian bear, stalled on the icy steppes of Moscow's doorway, he invoked the aid of his yellow-skinned and spined allies, the Japs.

While their envoys calmed Washington with soft words of peace, their air-arm bombed Pearl Harbor with grim weapons of war. It was then that Horsesense Hank came to me and said

Does His Bit . . .

by NELSON S. BOND



Horsesense Hank was suspended over the blazing debris

soberly, "Well, so long, Jim. I'll see you later."

I asked, "Where are you going? Down to Mike's for a hamburger? Wait a minute; I'll go with."

"I'm goin' further'n that, Jim," said Hank, "an' the chances are I'll be gone a mite longer. I—" He wriggled a bulldog-tipped shoe into the carpet embarrassedly—"I reckon I'm agonna sign up for the duration."

I gasped. "You mean the army?"

"Well, not eggsackly. I don't figger they'd want me in the fightin' forces, me bein' skinny like I am. But folks say I'm right quick with math'matics an' things like that, so if I c'n be of any help to my country—"

Hank was not exaggerating a bit. Almost everyone on the Midland campus, including sweet little me, had known more formal education than H. Cleaver. Eighty-five per cent of the faculty members dangled alphabets after their names till they looked like government projects, but Hank could give them all a running start and beat them silly on any question requiring the use of good, old-fashioned common sense.

A marveling commentator had awarded Hank the name of "Scientific Pioneer" for his uncanny ability to reach answers to problems intuitively, without knowing or understanding the so-called "natural laws" involved. Hank's aptitude at things mechanical, his infinitely accurate mathematical computations and homely approach to abstract ponderables, had promoted him from a rural turnip patch to the Chair of General Sciences at our (alleged) institute of higher learning.*

"It ain't," scowled Hank, "as if I was a hard man to git along with. Gosh knows I'm easy-goin' enough—"

THERE was no gainsaying that. Hank was as quiet and gentle as a Carnation cow. The fact that he had, despite his humble background, won the favor and affections of bilious old H. Logan MacDowell, president of Midland, proved his power to Win Friends. And the fact that he, handicapped by a rawboned homeliness that would have discouraged any scarecrow, had won the heart and hand of Prexy's daughter Helen, a lass ardently pursued by every male in four counties, proved beyond a doubt his ability to influence people.

"—but they jest ain't no gittin' along," continued Hank, "with that there Hitler guy. The more he gits the more he wants. An' now that him an' his Japanee pals is forced *us* into it, I'm agonna offer my services to whoever c'n use me."

"And where would that be, Hank?"

"Why, I was thinkin' o' one o' them plants that make war stuff," he said. "They got plenty o' problems, nowadays, tryin' to reorganize f'r defense work, changin' work methods, expandin' their facilities, an' so on. There's that Northern Bridge, Steel and Girder Comp'any, f'r instance—"

"But, Hank," I reminded him, "how about Helen?"

"I reckon Helen an' me'll jest have to wait a spell, Jim. After all, they's a job to be done. We got to pitch in an' do it, or they ain't gonna be no Helen or no Hank Cleaver, or mebbe even no U.S.A. f'r us to git married in."

So that was that. When Hank Cleaver gets those grim lines about the corners of his mouth, there's nothing you can do to stop him. I helped him pack his battered old suitcase, then we went to say goodbye to Helen. She reacted quite as I had expected. She listened in astonishment to Hank's awk-

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* *"The Scientific Pioneer,"* AMAZING STORIES, March, 1940.—Ed.

ward explanation. Then she epostulated loudly. Then she sniffled a little. Finally she wept for a minute, kissed Hank moistly and told him she was proud of him.

"Anyway," she said, "you'll come home every week-end to see me, won't you?" So Hank promised he would, and off we went. Yeah—that's right. We. I had decided to volunteer, too. That's me all over. Snoopy Jim Blackson; can't keep my nose out of anything.

THE Northern Bridge, Steel and Girder Co. was not so far from our town—only fifty miles—but it was like moving into a strange, new world to pass through the portals of that concern. Clatter and bang and hubbub . . . men roaring orders . . . staccato tattoo of rivets hammering home . . . the keen, metallic smell of molten metal . . . the bite of rasps and the *chuff-chuff* of panting locomotives . . . these were the symphonic diapason of our new headquarters.

About us, whistles blew, throngs of sweating workmen bustled about their fathomless tasks, racing to and fro in an endless stream. Beyond sturdy buildings black with age there ranged yellow rows of newer, flimsier structures.

The place had a strangely *jejeune* look. The look of an adolescent who has outgrown his knee-britches, but has not yet the bulk and substance to fill his new long pants. Still this was a husky youngster. He would grow. He would grow to fill his new trousers. We both felt that.

We found the office of the company owner. Its doors were guarded by a bevy of underlings who protested hopelessly that, "Mr. MacDonald was too busy to see anyone." We brushed them aside and found ourselves, at last, before the irascible president of the NBS&G.

He stared at us in amazement. He was a huge, brawny Scotsman with eyebrows like feather-dusters and a jutting jaw that might have been poured from one of his ingots. After he got his breath:

"And who," he demanded thunderously, "micht *you* be?"

"'Lo, Mr. MacDonald," said Hank amiably. "My name's Hank Cleaver."

"And who," roared the old man, "micht 'Hank Cleaver' be to coom abargin' into my office wi'oot inveetation? Speak oop, mon! Time is money!"

"'Pears to me," pointed out Hank reasonably, "as how if time's money, like you say, you'd stop wastin' time askin' foolish questions. It don't matter much *who* I am. The p'int is: whut did I come for. Ain't it?"

Old MacDonald's fiery face turned two shades redder.

"Why, ye impairtenant yoong scoundrel—" he roared; then he paused. He said thoughtfully, "Ye're richt. So what *did* ye coom for?"

"A job," said Hank.

"A jawb! Ye mean t' tell me ye fairced y'r way into *my* office to osk f'r a jawb? The employment office lies doon the hall, yoong mon, twa doors t' y'r richt—"

Hank fidgeted uncomfortably.

"Well, that ain't eggsackly the kind o' job I had in mind, Mr. MacDonald. Whut I mean is—"

I DECIDED to stick in my two cents. Bashful as Hank is, it would have taken him all day to explain. "Hank means, Mr. MacDonald, that he would like to offer his services in an executive capacity."

"Exec—!" This time MacDonald couldn't even finish the word. He pawed his graying thatch wildly. "Ye dinna

say so? Ond would the title o' preseedent sotisfy him, ye think? Or mayhop he'd ruther be Chairmon o' the Board o' Deerectors? Who are *you?*"

"I'm Jim Blakeson. I was the publicity man for Midland University," I explained, "but now I'm at your disposal. Where Hank goes, I go. I don't believe you quite realize who Mr. Cleaver is, sir. He is 'Horsesense Hank'."

"And I'm 'Horsesense Hector'!" snorted old MacDonald witheringly. "So what?" It was obvious that he was no newspaper reader, or he would have known Hank's reputation.

"Mr. Cleaver," I told him severely, "is a teacher of General Sciences at our school. He is well versed in a score of subjects germane to your business. Mathematics, civil and chemical engineering ballistics—"

"Motheematics," bellowed MacDonald, "be domned! The NBS&G needs no figgerer! I've gawt one o' the cleverest ones in the coontry wairkin' f'r me. My future son-in-law, Jawnny Day! *Jawnny!*" He strode to a doorway, flung it open, bawled his command. In the doorway appeared a nice looking kid with fine lips and eyes. "Jawnny, this mon claims to be a—"

But young Day had stepped forward eagerly, extending a hand to Hank.

"Mr. Cleaver! This is an unexpected pleasure!"

MacDonald's jaw played tag with his weskit buttons.

"Ye—ye know him, Jawnny?"

"Know him! Why, every mathematician in this country knows and envies the logic of Horsesense Hank. Are you going to work here with us, Mr. Cleaver?"

"Well," squirmed Hank embarrassedly, "that's f'r Mr. MacDonald to say. Seems sorta like he don't want me."

But MacDonald, the ozone spilled from his Genoa jib, now backed water like a duck in a whirlpool.

"Bide a wee!" he puffed hastily. "Dinna be in sooch a roosh, yoong mon. If Jawnny recommends ye, there's a place in this organeezation f'r ye. Ond f'r y'r friend, too. Now, let's talk ways and means—"

THUS it was that Hank Cleaver and I became employees of the Northern Bridge, Steel and Girder Company. The job to which Hank was finally assigned was that of Estimator. I was given a desk in the Advertising Department offices, though to tell the truth I was no great shakes as a ballyhoo artist for structural steel girders and forged braces, having previously boosted the merits of nothing more substantial than a 200-lb. line and a 175-lb. backfield.

But we got along all right. Until one day, after we had been working there for a couple of weeks, the boss called Hank into his private office. I tagged along. Old Mac had a visitor. A slim, prim man with a ramrod up his spinal column and *pince-nez* on a beak that would dull a razor.

"Cleaver," said Hector MacDonald, "I want you should meet Mr. Grimper. Mr. Grimper, shake honds wi' Hank Cleaver, my Chief Estimator." The Old Man, I saw was happy as a lark about something; happy and excited, too. "Mr. Grimper," said he, "is a Government mon, Hank. From the R. O.T.C.—"

"O.P.M.," corrected Grimper sourly. "At the moment, I also unofficially represent the O.E.M., the O.P.A., and the S.P.A.B.—"

"No motter," chuckled MacDonald joyfully. "'Tis all the same alphabet. Hank, laddy, we've been drofted! F'r the duration o' the war the auld mon in the top hat is takin' our plont over

f'r defense wairk. From now on we're not buildin' bridges and girrders; we're rollin' armament plate and makin' shells to bomb to the de'il-and-gane yon bloody scoundrel wi' the foony moostache! What d'ye think o' *that?"*

Hank said soberly, "Why—why, that's wonderful!"

"The United States Government," said Grimper tautly, "will assume all expenses necessary for the expansion of your facilities. When the war is over the plant, with all its improvements, will be turned back to you. Meanwhile, a reasonable profit will be allowed you on all defense materials produced."

"Gosh," gulped Hank enthusiastically, "that's swell! We won't let you down, Mr. Grimper. If you'll give me a sort of idea what kind of additional facilities you need, I'll git right to work on it. We mustn't waste no time—"

GRIMPER coughed peremptorily. "Er—that's just the point I was about to bring up, Mr. Cleaver. We must waste neither time nor money. This war effort is far too important to be disturbed by—ahem—other factors. That is why I asked Mr. MacDonald to call you. You see, our organization has its *own* Estimate staff, composed of men trained to do precisely the type of work that will be required here. Consequently, under the new set-up, you will be an unnecessary cog in an already perfect machine. I—er—I trust you understand, Mr. Cleaver?"

Hank stared at him, stricken.

"You—you mean you won't *want* me here any more?"

"To be more accurate," replied the government agent, "we won't *need* you. That is, in your present capacity. However, I have no doubt that a man like yourself, familiar with all angles of the steel industry, will find a niche—"

"But—but I ain't!" moaned Hank. "I wasn't in this business till a couple of weeks ago!"

"What?" Grimper stared at him, then at the owner of the company. "I don't understand, Mr. MacDonald. Isn't this man your Chief Estimator? He must have had *some* experience."

"Hank," confessed the Old Man, "was a puffessor."

"A—a what?"

"Teacher," said Hank miserably. "I taught stuff and things at Midland U. Algebra, a little, an' general science, an' a smatterin' o' this an' that."

"You mean that with such a background—"

"I know whut y'r thinkin'," interposed old MacDonald hastily, "and 'tisna so. Mr. Cleaver airned his job the hard way. The fairst day he set foot in here I ordered him oot—but he's made me swallow my wairds. Now I consider his sairvices invaleeable."

"Still," frowned Grimper, "Mr. Cleaver's talents are not sufficiently remarkable to justify his presence on such a project as that which we are about to embark on. We have our own engineers and mathematicians in Washington. Why, *I* am an efficiency expert, myself, trained to handle emergencies—"

At that moment the office door inched open. The Old Man glanced up worriedly. "Aye, Miss Cole? What is it?"

"Three of the shop foremen, sir. They say they must see you immediately."

"Ye'll excuse me, Mr. Grimper? Verra well. Let 'em in, Miss Cole." Then, as three grim and grimy men shouldered angrily into the room: "Well, what's the motter? Don't stond there glarin' at each ither! Time is money; speak oop!"

Gorman, foreman of the Maintenance

Department, spoke for the trio.

"Well, it's the new tools we ordered, Mr. MacDonald. The shipment just arrived—"

"Then what're ye blatherin' aboot? Ye've been howlin' blue murrder f'r weeks because they were delayed. Divide 'em oop and get to wairk!"

"That's just it," fumed Hendricks of Testing. "They couldn't send us our complete order, Mr. Mac. They sent only seventeen sets. And we can't divide 'em up. They don't come out even."

"Even?" repeated Grimper superciliously.

MULVANEY, the Construction foreman, complained, "I'm supposed to get one half of all materials ordered, sir, but I can't take a half of seventeen. Gorman's supposed to get one third, and Henny's supposed to get one ninth. Our problem is how are we going to divide them?"

Grimper said, "Er—aren't you gentlemen making much ado about nothing? The answer seems to be very simple. Just open the crates and distribute the tools in their proper proportions."

And he beamed at Old Mac triumphantly. But his grin was short-lived. Gorman's sniff was one of pure disdain.

"Didn't you hear Henny say them tools come in *sets?*" he snorted. "I'd look pretty, wouldn't I, Mister, screwin' a loose nut with one third of a screwdriver? And Henny'd go to town measurin' rivet-precision with one ninth of a caliper!"

Old MacDonald guffawed loudly.

"I'm afeared he's gawt ye there, Grimper. Hank, ha' ye any idee whut to do?"

Cleaver had been scratching his cranium; now he said thoughtfully, "We-e-ell, mebbe I have, Mr. Mac. Joe, c'n you borry another set o' them tools from Supplies?"

Gorman said swiftly, "I can, but I won't. I want my full share of the order, Hank. I don't want no debit against my department in Supplies—"

"There won't be. But let's suppose, f'r the moment, you *have* borryed a set. Now how many sets would you have?"

"Why—why, eighteen, of course."

"Sure. Now, Mike, you git half o' them sets. Nine, right? An' Joe, you git one third, or six; satisfied? Bill, your department gits one ninth o' the order—or two complete sets. Okay? Well, boys, there you are. Evabuddy happy?"

"Everybody but *me!*" stormed Joe Gorman. "I've got a set of tools charged against me in Supplies! That idea's all right for these lugs, maybe, but I got my rights! I—"

"Now, take it easy," soothed Hank. "Two an' six an' nine is oney *seventeen*, Joe. They's still one set left over. So now you can return that one to Supplies!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Mulvaney.

AND on that note of sincere (if profane) admiration, the department heads disappeared to divvy up the disputatious shipment. With an air of "I told you so!" Old Mac turned to a rather acid-looking Grimper.

"Y' see, Mr. Grimper? Indeespenseeable, that's whut he is! Ye maun do weel f'r to reconsider this motter—"

But there was a streak of mule six feet tall and two feet wide in the Federal man. He sniffed down his long, thin nostrils and studied Hank through his *pince-nez* with detached interest.

"Hrrumph!" he hrrumphed. "Very interesting, but not at all new, you know. Hardly mathematics at all, in fact. A numerical paradox based on

an old Arabian legend, if I am not mistaken—"

I did what Flatbushers would call a "slow berl." In other words, I was boined up. But while I was still striving for words, young Johnny Day, who had entered from his office, came charging to Hank's defense.

"Maybe it's not mathematics," he raged, "in the pure sense. But it's something more valuable — common sense! Any man who can pop up with a quick answer to a problem like that is a handy guy to have around. *You* are an efficiency expert, Mr. Grimper, but *you* had no solution to offer—"

Grimper's lean jaw tightened. His eyes grew as cold as a ditchdigger's ears in Siberia. Whatever slow beginnings of humanity might have been wakening in his bosom died now.

"I am sorry, gentleman," he said in a tone of finality which meant he wasn't at all, "but I am not convinced. I presume, Mr. MacDonald, you *do* want this Government order?"

"Notcherally," grudged Old Mac.

"Then—" Primly—"you must accept my decisions on questions of policy. Mr. Cleaver, you are hereby granted two weeks in which to clear up your affairs around this plant, at the end of which time your services will no longer be needed. I trust you will find suitable employment elsewhere . . ."

And he smiled, a mean, oily little smile. The heel!

So that, lads and lassies, was that. Hank was o-u-t on called strikes, but if you think he just quit trying to do his share because a fortnight's deadline was hanging over his head, you don't know old turnip-torturer Cleaver.

THE Northern Bridge, Steel and Etcetera still needed estimating, so Hank labored straight on through till the last day, lending his individual—if unwanted—talents. Thus it was that on the Saturday afternoon he drew his final paycheck he had still not cleared out his desk-drawers and lockers for the next incumbent.

He told me so at dinner. I asked, "Well, what's the program, Hankus? After we feed we grab a choo-choo?"

But he just stared at me. "*We*, Jim? But you wasn't laid off."

"Birds of a feather," I told him, "flop together. I go where you go."

He shook his head.

"Oh, no, Jim. Thanks a lot, but—you got to stick. This ain't no time f'r individjuls to fuss an' argue. We got a war to win, an' wherever a man's needed he's got to stay."

"But how about you, Hank?"

"I'll find somethin' else to do. When we're through eatin' I got to go back to the plant an' pick up whut belongs to me, then I'll mosey along."

I sighed.

"Well, all right, chum. If that's the way it is—"

That, he assured me, was the way it was. So we went back to the plant about 8:30 p.m. And that's where the final insult was added to injury. For after we had passed the gate a slim, forbidding figure stepped from the shadows to halt us with a challenge.

"Just a moment! Who goes there?"

I started, then I grinned impudently. It was friend Grimper, in person, and not an effigy. I said, "Just a brace of Nazi spies, pal. Don't shoot till you see the yellow down our backs."

The government man edged forward austerely.

"And what are you two doing back this time of night? Blakeson, you have no right to be here after six o'clock, and your friend has no right here at *any* hour!"

I said, "Why, you two-for-a-nickel

imitation of a G-man—"

But Hank, unruffled as ever, said calmly, "Easy does it, Jim. Why, Mr. Grimper, I jest come back to gather up the stuff in my locker an' desk. It won't take me long."

Grimper said sourly, "We-e-ell, all right. But I'll have to go along with you. We can't afford to give strangers the run of the mill nowadays. Constant vigilance is our only defense against saboteurs and espionage agents, and there are valuable military stores within these gates."

"Strangers!" I spat disgustedly. "You've got a hell of a nerve, Grimper. Hank Cleaver volunteered his talents to this concern before you ever knew it existed—"

"Services," said Grimper coldly, "which ended today. And I should not be surprised, Mr. Blakeson, if yours were to be terminated soon. Well, come along."

SO we entered the plant. And of course it was black as a whale's belly in there, but do you think Dopey Joe would let us turn on any lights? Oh, no! He had ideas about *that,* too. He was fuller of ideas than a Thanksgiving turkey is of chestnuts. He commanded, "You will use a flashlight, please. One never knows what prying eyes may be upon us."

"There are a couple of eyes," I glared, "I'd like to pry—with doubled pinkies. Hurry up, Hank. Get your things and let's scram out of here. There's a bad odor around here, and it's not oil fumes."

Hank emptied his desk drawers, and we picked our way down darkened corridors, through the machine-shop and turning room, toward the lockers. We had but one more room to cross: the drafting-room, wherein were stored all the blueprints and testing-models. We were halfway across this, our tiny flashlight beam a dim beacon before our stumbling feet, when—

Out of the gloom, suddenly, terrifyingly, a voice!

"Halten Sie sich! Not a move! Otto—get them!"

DON'T ever ask me about the next few minutes. I was there in body only. My mind was as blank as a Fourth of July cartridge. I remember seeing figures—two, three, or twenty—darting toward us; I remember yelling, ducking, and punching with one and the same motion; I remember hearing guttural voices snarling commands that ended mostly in "geworden sein" so it must have been German. I remember feeling, with satisfaction, a spurt of sticky warmth deluge my knuckles as I hit the jackpot on something spongy that howled.

I remember, too, hearing Hank gasp, "Judas priest—German spies!" just before his lanky length toppled under the impact of an accurately wielded blackjack. And I remember my last conscious thought: that when I got a chance I must offer an apology to sourpuss Grimper. Because that thin, hawk-nosed stencil of superiority-plus was—what-ever else his faults—a bang-up fighting man in a pinch! With a fury incredible in one his size and build, he was laying about him like a demon. One Heinie was peacefully slumbering at his ankles already, a second was bawling for assistance.

Then three, or four, or a thousand of them rushed me at the same time. I remember something playing "Heavy, heavy—what hangs over your head?" above my cranium—then that's all I do remember. A bomb exploded in my cerebrum and I went to beddy-bye.

I had a nice little dream, then. I dreamed I was in Spain during the In-

quisition, and a black-robed priest had me fastened to a windlass. As he murmured pious paternosters in my ears, he was gently screwing the instrument tighter, and I was gasping with pain as my arms slowly, grindingly, withdrew from their sockets.

I wriggled, emitting a muffled howl, and awakened to find the dream based on cold, brutal fact! My mouth was full of cotton waste—slightly the worse for wear—explaining my muffled tones. My arms were tied together with a short scrap of hemp; this length had been passed through the drawchain of a skylight, and thus, securely locked, I hung dangling like a pendulum with my toes barely scraping the floor.

Nor was I the only trussed duck in this tableau. My pal Hank was swinging from another skylight chain a few yards away, while Grimper made it three - on - a - ratch. The government agent was the luckiest of us all. He was out cold, and so he didn't have to listen—as did Cleaver and I—to the gleeful chucklings of the saboteurs.

And chuckling they were, like the hooded villains in a Victorian melleredrammer. Apparently one or two thousand of them had gone home, because there were now only a half dozen, but these six were the nastiest looking Nazis I ever hope not to see again. Beetle-browed thugs, fine examples of the pure Aryanism Herr Shickelgruber is always bragging on.

THEY had been rifling the plant as we happened in, I guess, because the floors were strewn with a litter of papers and blueprints, diagrams, schematics, formulae. As my bleary eyes opened, one of the foragers was complaining to the chief rascal:

"—nothing here, Schlegel. This has a search of no value been."

"And you," I piped up rather feebly, "a nest of rats are! What's the big idea? Untie us, or—"

The ringleader turned, grinning unpleasantly. "Or," he sneered, "what *schweinhund?* So, Karl, nothing we can use there is here? Very well; it matters not. When we leave, we shall the plant make useless to the *verdammt Amerikanisch.*"

He called to others of his cohorts, scattered around the room. "You are ready? When I give the word—ignite!"

Polecat No. 2 jerked a dirty thumb in our direction.

"And how about them, Schlegel?"

Schlegel's grin would have congealed hot toddy.

"We leave them here."

"Of course, but—" The other man fingered a blunt-nosed automatic hopefully—"would it not be safer to—?"

"Nein!" chuckled Schlegel boastfully. "We shall not make bulletholes in their carcasses. That the cleverest part of my plan is. That is why we tied them thus. The same fire that destroys them will devour the ropes around their wrists, dropping their bodies to the floor, leaving no evidence. The investigators will believe *they* started the fire, and so will not search further for *us.*"

He laughed coarsely and poked me in the ribs. "That amusing is, *nichts wahr, mein Freund?*"

"Yeah," I answered grimly. "It's a howl. Just like kidnapping Polish girls and executing innocent hostages. You filthy—" I wrestled savagely with my bonds, but my efforts just sent lancets of pain burning through my already groaning armpits. I glanced at Hank, but he was still hanging quietly from his chain, his eyes closed, his head lolled forward upon his chest. He, like Grimper, was blissfully unconscious.

Now came an end to the German's taunts. He swung to his aides, rapped

swift commands. Matches scratched, flared, were thrust instantly into heaps of piled rubble. Tongues of flame rose, wavering; strengthened; licked hungrily higher as the inflammable material ignited.

FOR the first time, a sense of real fear filled me. Up till this moment the whole affair had seemed so fantastic, so maddeningly unreal, that it had been a sort of wild dream. Now I realized belatedly, suddenly, completely, that this was really happening to *me*, here in the heart of the U.S.A. This was War! We had met the enemy in battle—and had lost!

I realized, too, that something more vital than just our three lives was in danger. This building—up the wooden walls of which angry rivulets of fire were now creeping—was an important cog in Uncle Sam's total war effort. Destroyed, it meant loss of precious matériel to the Allies, hundreds of eager hands restrained from putting into employment the tools which forged the weapons of Democracy, thousands of tanks and guns and aircraft withheld from fighters who needed them.

But we were helpless! The more so, now, because our captors were scurrying from the room like rats from a sinking ship. As the gloom lighted to ochre, they hurried to a door, slipped through it—and the *clank!* of metal upon metal meant they had dropped the lockbar into place behind them.

Trapped! Trapped to die like moths in a flame. But a moth had wings; we had none. Our hands were pinioned to an inaccessible pillory. I writhed again, a moan wrenching from my lips as my shoulder-muscles strained and tore. And then:

And then a calm, familiar voice speaking to me! The voice of Horsesense Hank.

"I wouldn't do that if I was you, Jim. 'Twon't help none, an' it may jest make matters wuss."

I gasped, "Hank! Thank the Lord you're alive. I was afraid maybe you—"

"I'm awright," said Cleaver gently. "Jest stunned a little. I come to a few minutes ago, but I figgered as how I mought as well keep my eyes an' mouth shut. No sense lettin' the enemy know you got y'r wits about you, I calc'late." His eyes studied the ever-fanning flame with incredibly detached interest. "Hmm! Thing's spreadin' fast, hey? Do you reckon the fire department'll be able to ketch it afore it ruins the whole plant?"

"I'd give a million bucks," I told him honestly, "to be here to find out."

" 'Pears to me," mused Hank, "like they will. That's green wood, you know. Don't burn as quick as seasoned timber would. Yep, I 'low as how them spies won't do as much damage as they planned on."

"That," I moaned, "will be a great consolation to us when they bury our ashes!"

"Our which?" Hank stared at me curiously. "Oh, you mean—Why, hell, Jim, we ain't dead yet!"

At this point another voice intruded itself into the conversation. The dry, resigned voice of Mr. Grimper.

"No, not yet, gentlemen. But I am afraid it is time to prepare for that fate. For we are hopelessly secured, the doors are locked and bolted upon us, and in a few minutes the room will be a furnace of flame!"

I SHUDDERED. Of course his prophecy was not news to me. But it made our peril more real to hear it thus spoken.

His words, however, completely failed to disturb the placidity of Horsesense Hank. Hank just said, "Why, 'lo, Mr.

Grimper! I was hopin' you'd snap out out of it purty soon. Die? Why, we ain't agonna die. Not sence them Nazies was too dumb to tie us up."

My heart gave a sudden leap; I had to swallow before I could choke, "Tie us—What do you mean, Hank? We *are* tied—and to something far above our heads. We can't even reach the bar we're chained to—"

"We don't have to, Jim. They give us a loophole almost within reach. You notice that there skylight chain is a right thin one. I can't get these rope loops off'n my wrists but I think I c'n squeeze the skylight chain through a loop."

He straightened his legs, and I realized suddenly he had purposely kept them *slightly* bent at the knees during the time our enemies had been in the room. Now his toes gave him a reasonable foothold on the floor. Using this, he leaped up and gripped the steel chain *above* his ropes . . . drew himself up hand-over-hand until he was swinging comfortably in the loop.

What he did then was weird and inexplicable to me—until, of course, a long time afterward. He pushed the steel chain through one of the rope loops about his wrist, pulled a wide, metal bight through this opening, stepped into the loop—and dropped lightly to the floor, *free!*

The only encumbrance on him was a length of hemp between his arms. Now that he was at liberty to approach us it was a matter of minutes for him to unloose our bonds and have us untie his!

GRIMPER's jaw had dropped to his bottom vest button. Slow comprehension dawned on his features. He gasped, "A—a problem in applied topography!* Astounding! I can hardly believe my eyes—but it's completely logical. Mr. Cleaver—I owe you an apology. Please allow me to—"

"Topogra-which?" asked Hank interestedly. "I didn't know it had no name, Mr. Grimper. Just 'peared to me like as if a circle's got an inside an' an outside, an' we was in the inside, so we wasn't tied up at all, rightly speakin'. Well, let's git out o' here!"

Well he might make the suggestion. For all this had taken time. As we labored to free each other we had heard an excited hubbub gathering outside, the wail of fire sirens had sounded, the yammer of voices raised in command, and a stream of water was already beginning to play upon one wall. But in the meantime, the fire had gained headway. The walls of this room were ruddy sheets of flame. The narrow circle of safety in which we stood was rapidly dwindling. And my skin was beginning to crack and blister with oven-fierce heat.

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* Hank's problem here was similar to those interesting ones presented by Messrs. Krasna and Newman in their fascinating volume, *Mathematics and the Imagination*: The captives were not truly bound so long as freedom of leg movement permitted them to convert their bonds into a simply-connected manifold.

By way of illustration (and for your own amusement) tie a 36" piece of string to each of your wrists. Tie a second piece of string to each of the wrists of a friend in such a fashion that the second piece loops the first. By experiment, you will discover it is quite possible to disengage yourself from your companion without breaking or cutting the string.

Another interesting example of topological freedom is that achieved in removing the vest without first removing the coat. Try it. The coat may be unbuttoned, but your arms must not slip out of the coat sleeves. —Ed.

I croaked despairingly, "But how, Hank? We're free, yes! But the doors are still locked, and the windows—"

"Why, the skylight, Jim!" drawled Hank. "That's our exit—Hey! Grab him!"

I whirled just in time to catch the falling frame of government agent Grimper. The thin man had come to an end of his endurance. His heart was stout and courageous out of all proportion to his physical makeup. With a stifled cry he had fainted dead away!

WELL, there you are! One moment we were on our road to a Happy Ending, and *bing!*—all of a sudden the Three Gray Ladies slap us in the puss with a damp mackerel! I stared at Hank fearfully, and moistened parched lips.

"Wh-what will we do with him, Hank? W-we can't just leave him here to die!"

Hank stroked a lean and thoughtful jaw.

"Sort o' complicates matters, don't it?" he queried. "Let's see—we couldn't h'ist him up, could we?"

I said bitterly, "*I* can't, Hank. I hate to admit it—but I'd be a damned liar if I pretended otherwise. I'm so weak, and my armpits so badly strained, that it will be all I can do to lift myself. Can—can you?"

Hank shook his head miserably.

"Nup. I didn't *jump* off'n that chain just now, Jim, I *fell* off. Hangin' up there like jerked meat wrenched somethin' in my back. I calc'late I c'n climb that chain myself, but I couldn't h'ist nobody else's weight.

"Wait a minute! *Weight!*" He repeated the word more loudly. A gleam brightened in his eye. Sure! Dead weight! That's the answer! Here—gimme a hand, Jim. We got to lash him to one strand o' this pulley-chain. Use them ropes. Got it? Okay—tie him tight, now."

"He—he's tied!" I puffed. The smoke was beginning to get me now. Tears were coursing down my cheeks. Time was getting perilously short. "W-what do we do next?"

"Git on the other end o' that chain," ordered Hank, an' *climb!*"

"W-what? And leave him dangling here below? But it only saves our lives, Hank! See, the flames are right on us. We won't have time to reach the skylight and haul him up—"

"*Do whut I tell you!*" roared Hank, "*An' hurry!*"

There was more vehemence in his voice than I'd heard at any previous time. It shocked, startled me into activity. I leaped for the side of the draw-chain opposite to that upon which Grimper was hanging limp; began climbing like a monkey, hand-over-hand. The dangling chain drew taut above me, and I saw that Hank, too, was climbing. I looked for Grimper—

And Grimper was *above* me! As Hank and I climbed one side of the chain, the agent's inert body was being hauled up the other. He reached the cool sanctuary of the skylight before we did, lifted to safety by our combined weights, before I remembered the old monkey-weight-and-pulley puzzle that one time caused a near-riot in a staid academy of savants!

SO all's well that ends well. It was an easy matter to unlash Grimper when we had reached the roof, an easier job yet to hurry him down a fire escape to the ground. And as my ever-logical friend had guessed, the fire-laddies put out the blaze before it spread to adjacent buildings; thus what might have proved a serious loss to America's *of-*

fense was held to a minimum. One building which could be easily replaced.

We didn't leave town that night. We were exhausted, for one thing; for another, Hank was in no condition to board a train. His suitcase had been destroyed in the fire, and as he ruefully confessed to me when I asked his reason for *backing* away from the wildly cheering mob that escorted us to our hotel, the fire had got in one last, farewell lick just as we escaped. Said caress had singed a neat, round hole in Hank's southern exposure.

And the next day there came a hurry-call from Johnny Day. They had caught the saboteurs, or thought they had, and would we please come and identify them?

So we did, and they were, and the Jerries were taken into custody by a detail of granite-eyed soldiers who gripped their Garands as if they hoped Hitler's hirelings *would* break for freedom. Which of course they didn't. No longer holding the whip-hand, they were the meekest, humblest looking skunks you ever saw.

It was then that Grimper, so trim and fresh that you would never know he'd almost been baked *Grimper au jus*, moved forward to shake Hank's hand.

"Last night, Mr. Cleaver," he said, "I apologized to you. This morning I want to repeat that apology and wish you all possible success when you leave here."

Hank just blushed and wriggled a bulldog-tipped shoe into the carpet. "Aw, that's all right, Mr. Grimper—"

But if he could take it like that, I couldn't. In a fury I stepped forward and shoved my nose into Grimper's pan.

"You may be an agent for Uncle Sam," I snarled, "and a joy to your loving mama—but you're a pain in the pants to me, Grimper! You've got one hell of a nerve. This man saved your life and MacDonald's plant after you fired him. And now you've got the almighty guts to wish him *bon voyage!* Well, I for one—"

But, surprisingly, it was Old Mac who stopped me.

"Now, take it easy, Blakeson," he said. " 'Tisna the time to gripe and growse. Mr. Grimper kens his dooties as an agent o' Oncle Som. There's a cairtain amount o' accuracy in whut he says. There *is* no fitting place here for Hank's peecoolyar talents—"

"If not here," I howled, "then where on earth—?"

"Now, Jim!" begged Hank mildly.

But the answer came from Mr. Grimper. A smile split the lips of the scrawny little fighting-cock.

"Why, in Washington, of course," he said. "Like all humans, I make mistakes, Mr. Blakeston. But when I discovered I erred, I try to rectify my hastiness. Therefore I have today wired Washington that Mr. Cleaver is on his way. He will act as personal and confidential adviser to—the President. Mr. Cleaver, do you think you'll like that?"

But he got no answer from Horsesense Hank. For that gentleman had fainted dead away on the floor. And me? Well, I slumbered blissfully beside him. Where Hank goes . . . I go . . .

THE END

A tiny English village lay there, in a fertile valley in the ice

ARCTIC GOD

by Frank Jones

How could an English village be here in the frozen north? And what was the arctic god they feared so much?

"SAY, ever hear of this range on maps or things?"

Jerry Marsden pulled off his helmet, rubbed his aching bearded face and drew a breath of the lung-cutting air.

Sid's face emerged from the furs too —bewhiskered, beefy. He gave a puzzled frown.

"Nope." Jerry looked round in the gloom: the weak Polar daylight was very near masked to twilight by the storm. "I've not the remotest idea where we are. And that's kind of funny, come to think of it! We started this Expedition to find and claim new territory, then we have to lose our Omnibus and find the new territory on foot!"

He looked again at the gaunt, rocky interior of the cave then toward the tunnel that loomed back of it. Sid caught his thought.

"We might as well see where it takes us. Can't do much on the outside until the storm blows itself out anyway. Come on."

They made their way carefully along the rocky vista. The further they went and left behind the polar hell the warmer the air seemed to get. Jerry's pedometer said they'd covered nearly two miles before the tunnel ended, and by this time the warmth was so oppressive they had to start pulling off their furs.

"Queer?" Sid looked his question, then stared at the barrier wall in the light of his torch.

"Volcanic activity probably," Jerry replied. "Right now I'd give my life—what it's worth!—to see what's beyond this wall. First we get an unknown mountain range, then a natural tunnel through it—But what's beyond that?"

"More tunnel and more storm I expect. We can try and find out."

Discarding their furs completely they set to work to pull away the mass of boulders and stones that blocked the passage. The more they worked the more evident it seemed that volcanic subsidence had created the barrier. But there was not a great deal of it. At the end of an hour's heavy manual labor Jerry pulled clear a block of pumice-rock that allowed a pure, clear ray of light to shine through.

"Say, it's daylight!" Sid looked amazed. "I thought the storm had blanked that completely!"

"Storm or no storm, it's still daylight," Jerry said briefly. "Anyway, we're on the other side of the range by now and the storm may not be raging here— Come on, give me a hand. This gets interesting."

They redoubled their efforts, clawing and pulling, at last managed to scramble through the gap they had made. Then they sank down to a sitting position, astounded at what they beheld. It was like looking down into a medieval paradise. . . .

THEY were high up on a completely encircling range of mountains. At the mountain summits frothed and fumed atmospheric vapors from the streaming cold of the Arctic: there was an incessant dull rumble of thunder as heat and cold locked in combat.

But down here in the cup made by the range was a great sweeping fertile valley, dazzling with flowers and pasture land. It reached right to the edges of a quaint town that looked like something lifted wholesale from the Middle Ages of England. There were thatched roofs, cobbled streets, overhanging gables, little mullioned windows—

Over it all a blue sky. The sun was hidden by its low angle and the further barrier of the mountains — otherwise the air was warm and springlike, the wind a gentle caress.

Sid said finally. "Maybe we're dead?"

"Dead nothing!" Jerry growled. "This valley is volcanic, hence the warmth. It's shut off from the Arctic waste—an immensely fertile stretch all by itself. But I'll be damned if I can figure out this little colony. Looks as though a chunk of England sideslipped in Time or something. . . . Better go see what they've got. Maybe quaff a measure of mead," he finished, grinning through his bearded lips.

They set off together down the mountain slope. It was a longer descent than they had expected. The flowers, when they reached them, turned out to be conventional daisies, buttercups, and dandelions . . . Far away in the distance were cattle — perfectly normal sheep and cows, even horses. Once they glimpsed a pair of oxen yoked together and led by a man in curiously old-fashioned costume.

"I still think we're dead," Sid muttered, as they went on knee-high through the grass. "Such peace and quiet as this can't exist in polar ice— Maybe it's Utopia!" His eyes gleamed at that. Then he pointed quickly. "Take a look! Men and women right out of 'Pilgrim's Progress'!"

Jerry grinned as he saw what he meant. Men and women were clearly in view now they had touched the outskirts of the town. They all wore the quaint Puritanlike garb of early England. The men wore billowy-sleeved shirts, jerkins, and tight breeches; the women tight-bodiced dresses with flowing skirts and, here and there, a conical hat. There were a few children—very few, Jerry noticed.

In some sort of market place, jammed with fruit stalls, oxen, shouting men and bargaining women, Jerry came to a halt with Sid right beside him. There was an instant flurry among the populace at the presence of two strangers—bearded, dirty, heavily armed. Some ran to shelter in the heavily gabled houses, which in spite of their design appeared to be composed of still comparatively new material. Others of the people stood their ground, waited doubtfully.

JERRY made a vague welcoming gesture with his arm.

"Hi ya, folks! Any idea where we are? What place is this, anyway?"

The people looked at each other. An

old man wagged his gray head doubtfully.

"Tis strangers thou art," he breathed. "Only by witchcraft couldst thou have come hither.'"

"Huh?" Jerry stared at Sid, then gave a grunt. "Witchcraft my foot! We walked it — pounding, pounding, through the snow-ways beyond this mountain range— Dammit, isn't anybody going to give us a welcome?" he went on impatiently. "We don't want to hurt you. All we ask is food, a chance to rest, and—and a shave."

At that a girl edged her way from the crowd and looked at Jerry critically; then at Sid. She was very slight, possibly twenty-two, dressed in the simple Puritan style. Her flaxen hair reached nearly to her waist. Her face was oval, delicately flushed; her eyes gray and bright with intelligence.

"Perchance I—I canst help thee," she said, coming forward and dropping a little curtsy. "I—er—"—she glanced nervously at her frowning fellow townsfolk—"I can help thee because my father is the town cryer. He knoweth much—"

She caught Jerry's hand in impulsive quickness. "Come quickly, I beg of thee!"

"Yeah—yeah sure," Jerry agreed, surprised; and with Sid beside him they all three pushed through the gawping people to a tavern further up the street.

It was an ale-house of the pure old fashioned sort, full of oaken cross beams, rough wood tables, brass ornaments, hide-backed chairs . . . The windows were cross-patterned in diamond-mullion.

"Please tarry," the girl smiled, waving to chairs, then she went hurrying off to other parts of the tavern.

"Where'd they get this 'thee' and thou stuff?" Sid demanded, sitting down and scratching his head. Looks like we sidetracked ourselves someplace and finished up in medieval England. If that's wrong how did this place *get* here?"

"Take a look," Jerry said in response, and jerked his head. The populace was peering through the windows now, muttering and talking. They were in the doorway too, tramping on each others' toes to get a better look—

Then suddenly the girl and a massive stomached man appeared—presumably her father. He took a look at the people, slammed the door in their faces and bolted it, clamped shutters across the window, then lit massive candles to relieve the gloom. He turned, red-faced, genial, massive armed, a huge apron round his immense middle.

"Marry, but thou art strangers indeed!" he exclaimed, staring at them. "And a comely crop of beard too—" He broke off as the girl nudged him, seemed to remember something. "I am Robert the Robust," he explained. "Town cryer to his most Excellent Majesty Ethelbert the Red — and in spare time, forsooth, keeper of this tavern. Here ist mine only one—Hesther. But—" he frowned—"whom wouldst thou be?"

JERRY hesitated. "We're polar explorers. Tell you what you do, Robert—bring us something to eat and drink and we'll tell you the whole story. There's plenty to it—both sides."

"So be it—but thou talkest in strange vein—"

"We've nothing on you, pal," Jerry said; then as the rotund one went off with a mystified look he added to the girl, "Look, Hesther, what goes on? We don't know anything about this setup, see? We're from the outer world —New York. Ever heard of it?"

She shook her flaxen head, watched as Jerry eased off his accoutrements.

"I knoweth only the England whence we came but a year or so ago."

"Year or so?" Jerry looked at her sharply.

She seated herself. "Of a truth. The storm brought us hither and we wert lost. We slept. Then the Great God of the Mountain gaveth us life, and peace, and brought us hence. . . . "

"But—but—" Jerry got a grip on himself. "Listen, you belong to an England that went phut some four centuries back at least— When did this valley come into being? Anyway, who's the Great God?"

"None knoweth." There was reverent awe in her gray eyes. "He giveth life as he willeth it. None hath seen him—but he liveth. Far up yonder mountain."

"Gold in them thar hills, pal," Sid grinned.

Jerry relaxed. "Your witness," he sighed.

"Repeating the question, when did this valley come into being?" Sid demanded.

"Three years ago perchance. We buildeth it ourselves when the Great God of the Mountain sent us hither—"

The landlord suddenly returned, planked down plates loaded with wholesome fare and two tankards of foaming ale.

"This on the house?" Jerry inquired briefly. "We've no money to pay for it see — unless you'll take American money."

"American money? What badinage is this? No money—"

"Father, it were better to let them tarry," the girl broke in urgently. "They are not of us. They cometh from the outer world — from one York—"

"*New* York!" Jerry growled, wiring into the food. "Deal of difference! We came through a tunnel into this valley and we want to know what it's all about. Listen, Robert, your daughter says you left England in a storm a year or so back. . . . "

"Tis true," the landlord acknowledged. "We calleth this valley 'Little England' after the country we left. We set out for unknown parts as settlers with many children and many a head of cattle. Storm struck us. We wert driven into Polar ice and went to sleep. About three years ago the Great God of the Mountain waketh us and gave to us this valley. We buildeth our homes . . . everything."

"A moment," Jerry said quickly. "What ship was it you sailed in? From England I mean?"

"T'was the good ship *Springflower* —"

"*Springflower!*" Jerry twirled. "Listen, Sid, that ship is on the official list of mysteriously vanished ships—ranking with the *Kobenhavn* and *Cyclops* for mystical disappearance . . . Lemme think! The *Springflower* sailed from England with a party of some thousand colonists aboard in June, 1542! Not sure of the month, but I know it was that year . . . Holy Cats, these must be the survivors!"

"Descendants, you mean." Sid snapped. "How do you figure they lived in the odd four centuries between?"

HESTHER caught the implication of the argument for she said,

"Nay, not descendants. We—a thousand strong—art the original people who left England . . ."

"This has got me licked," Jerry muttered. "Just what happened in the four centuries in between?"

"Mebbe the Old Man of the Mountain," Sid mused.

Jerry looked up again. "Nobody's seen this Mountain God of yours—

How do you know there *is* a God?"

"Tis there for all to see," the landlord shrugged. "At times yon mountain range bursts with fire and from it there steppeth but more numbers of our people from the *Springflower*. One by one the great God of the Mountain is returning to us all those who wert aboard that ship. In time, perchance, we shall be *all* here . . ."

"Something screwy somewhere all right," Jerry sighed, going on with his meal. Then presently, "When do the mountain fireworks start again? Any chance of seeing anything?"

"Of a truth!" Hesther broke in excitedly. "Even this day it ist time for yon mountain to bring us more people—"

"To *day?* How'd you reckon days with six months of continuous light this time of year?"

"We measureth by the candle," she smiled. "I canst show thee this mountain if thou art desirous—"

"It's a deal," Jerry nodded grimly. "And later, Robert the Robust, I'll borrow something to slice these whiskers."

Robert nodded, then asked,"Wouldst thou not care for an audience with Ethelbert the Red himself?"

"Can he tell us any more than you have?"

"Nay—"

"Oke, then we'll leave Ethelred the Bert to his crown of glory and look into this for ourselves. Listen, you folks ever heard of radio?"

"Radio?" Hesther repeated the word in unaccustomed wonder. "What ist?"

"Or electricity, or atoms?" Jerry persisted. "Or explosives, stars, the universe?"

"Daughter, he talketh of devil's tools," Robert breathed.

Jerry compressed his lips. "Just as I figured. You folks don't know the first rudiments of modern science. You never heard of movies or talking pictures or television, either?"

Father and daughter shook their heads mystifiedly. Jerry nodded, lifted up his portable radio and switched on the receiver portion.

"This may interest you," he said briefly. "Later, when we've looked into the puzzle of this place we'll call aid—Right now"—he tuned the dial—"you're listening to a short wave station from that New York I told you about. We call it twenty nine meter band."

Hesther jumped back nervously and caught her equally astounded father's arm as the radio burst into sudden life. The announcer spoke briefly. Swing music began to come over the air, entirely free of all static jamming or atmospherics.

"Witchcraft!" the landlord panted, eyes popping. "Devil's witchcraft!"

Hesther however, her first shock over, looked at the radio more closely, her keen gray eyes studying it intently.

"Listen to it and hear what goes on in the great big world outside here," Jerry smiled. "Call in the rest of the folks . . . Now, Robert the Robust, your razor— And afterwards, Sweet Nell of Old Drury, we'll be with you to take a look at the Old Man of the Mountain himself."

CHAPTER II

The Remarkable Captain

CLEANED up and shaved, fresh for the unexpected course their Polar expedition had taken, Jerry and Sid walked with the girl between them to a grassy knoll she chose facing the opposite side of the mountain range perhaps a couple of miles away.

She seated herself and waited solemnly, gray eyes fixed steadily on the

cliff face, hair blown back gently by the breeze.

"Anybody ever tell you you got looks?" Jerry murmured.

"Nay . . . Have I?" She even colored slightly.

"Plenty. Get you in New York in modern duds and you'd knock the socialities for a loop— We'll skip that for the moment though. Tell me, how'd you get the wood to build this town of yours? And the tools?"

"They wert here—awaiting us. The God attendeth to everything. As to the wood— There wert a forest here, waiting to be hewn."

"Hm-m. And everybody, you included, just sort of *came* here—? Just like that!" Jerry snapped his fingers.

"Yea." The girl looked reflective. "I remember falling asleep aboard the *Springflower.* There wast dreadful cold. Then—then I woke, here in this valley. My father wert with me, and one other whom we knew. So . . . we joined yonder community in the town."

"Somewhere," Jerry said, "it begins to look as though four centuries have skidaddled. The medieval world has gone, Hesther. Today, beyond here, it is a world of radio, flying machines, wars, chaos, economic revolutions— Machine Age gone mad. Understand?"

"Nay," she said, innocently. "But I believe thee— The radio, as you call it. Black magic indeed!"

"Yeah. Yeah, sure . . ." Jerry cocked a hopeless eye on Sid: then suddenly the girl caught each of their arms tightly, nodded her flaxen head. "Behold!" she cried.

Following her gaze they were just in time to see a sudden blaze of light in the distant mountain, for all the world like a giant flashlight. A cloud of white smoke puffed upwards and drifted away on the warm breeze. As it cleared, some four people merged into view, mere dots against the mountain. They were motionless for a while then began to move slowly down towards the town.

"Well I'll be twice damned!" Sid exploded. "It's as good as a stage illusion!"

"We're going to look into this," Jerry said curtly, jumping up. "It's no supernatural setup, I'll wager. Come on."

" 'Tis folly to question the God of the—" Hesther broke off as Jerry swung on her.

"You don't have to come, Hes, if you don't want. But we're going to take a look . . . It'd help if you'd show us the way, at least."

She hesitated, then that bright light of youthful intelligence came again to her gray eyes. Definitely she was a girl who loved something out of the ordinary.

"Sobeit," she said briefly. "Come."

SHE broke into a tripping run through the thick grass, Jerry and Sid close behind her. With long accustomedness she found a beaten trail through the flowers, went across a rubbly slope, turned into a direct path leading to the desired spot on the mountain side— Then suddenly she stumbled and fell headlong, hands outthrust to save herself. Her fingers struck a terrific blow against an upjutting chunk of rock.

"Hesther! Hes, are you hurt—?"

Horrified, expecting to see her right hand cut to the bone, Jerry dropped beside her with his handkerchief already out. He gathered her up, and she gave a faint smile.

"Nay, I am not hurt . . . See!" Her hand, as she stretched it out, was only slightly red from the impact but otherwise not even grazed. "I am never hurt," she went on, as Jerry helped to her feet. "None of us is ever hurt. Perchance that ist strange? Truly, when in England we wert often hurt—

But not here."

"Funny? It's incredible!" Jerry exploded. "Let me look again!"

Again he turned her hand over, then he felt the stone. It was as rough as a barnacle. The first presentiment of the incredible drove across his brain. He looked at the girl queerly.

"Have any of you folks ever died since appearing in this valley?"

"Nay."

"Ever been ill? Any of you cut or injured yourselves?"

"Nay— But I have said, it was not always thus. Before the sleep on the *Springflower—*"

"Yeah—you told me. Hm-m!" Jerry cocked a significant eye on Sid, then shrugged. "Okay, let's keep going."

They went on again with the girl to the front. Falling back a little way Jerry said briefly.

"This joint piles up mystery on mystery, Sid. First we get folks who come back to life after four hundred years—then we find out their flesh is so tough a blow can't even graze it. And a girl's at that!"

"A few of these folks would be an asset in a front line of infantry," Sid commented. "Maybe the Old Man again . . ."

They fell into puzzled silence, following the girl's slender form. She stopped at last on a narrow ledge and pointed to a smoke-blackened fissure on the sheer mountain wall.

"This ist the spot," she pronounced. "Listen! Thou canst hear the roar of the God himself!"

They stood still for a moment or two and quite distinctly to their ears came the sound of deep internal rumbling, rather like the roar of a tremendous wind. Jerry frowned, studied the fissure carefully. It was jagged, a rough oval which traced out a massive piece of rock.

"Naturally pivoted rock," he said slowly. "At intervals, I'd say, some inner pressure must swing it round and leave an opening—Like Old Faithful—always works dead to time. You are sure these folks of yours turn up at regular intervals, Hes?"

"Of a certainty!"

"Then I am right. Some bright guy on the other side of this range is playing games—and it seems to me we'd better see what he's up to—"

"Look here!" Sid exclaimed, on his knees. "Here's a black mass of discharged magnesium, and leading back from it two thin grooves in the soil—Looks to me as though a magnesium charge was fixed here and fired by electric wires. Then the wires were withdrawn. Happened a lot of times too to judge from the smoke-black on that rock. These valley folks know nothing of explosives, even less of magnesium, so it looks supernatural— We've got something, Jerry!"

JERRY nodded, then to the girl's alarm threw his weight against the jagged line of black that marked the pivoted rock's edge. He stood back with gleaming eyes as it budged slightly.

"We don't have to wait for volcanic force to shift it: we can do it ourselves—enough to get through anyway. Come on!"

"This ist madness!" Hesther cried in anguish. "To probe too far into the secrets of the God—"

"We know what we're about, Hes," Jerry said briefly, patting her arm affectionately. "Tell you what—skip off back home and we'll join you later. Right now we've got tough work ahead."

"But I—I—" It was clear her adventurous spirit was torn between superstitious fear and the desire to ex-

plore. Fear won. She held back nervously, sat down. "I wilt wait," she said seriously.

"Oke. Okay, Sid—push with all your power!"

They flung their united strength on the rock and it turned slowly, enough to give them ingress anyway. Jerry pulled out his torch and flashed the beam down the tunnel ahead. From walls and floor spurted puffs of steam.

"Volcanic is right," Jerry commented, moving along. "And some guy with a hundred percent brain knows how to turn it to account . . . Take it easy!" he finished suddenly, catching Sid's arm.

The tunnel had ended at a mighty pit in the depths of which they beheld a volcanic heart of fire. Heat of overpowering force beat up and around them, set their bodies streaming. Clinging to each other they edged their way along the ledge that overhung the hell-crater, only breathed freely again when they got to the tunnel's continuation beyond it.

"Obviously our unknown playmate figures that pit will keep the folks away," Sid remarked. "Guess he's not far wrong, either. But they must come *up* the tunnel in the first place to appear in the valley. Wonder how they got the nerve? There are old folks in the community too—"

He broke off. The tunnel had right-angled suddenly and brought them into daylight streaming through an open cave hole in the mountain side . . .

But they were not facing an Arctic waste but another valley, warm and temperate as the one they had left. A broad swift flowing river passed through its center, and along its nearer bank sprawled a long, roughly constructed wooden building not unlike a military barracks. The valley was rockier than its neighbor and possessed no flowers.

Then there was something else the two saw as they went down the mountain slope. Something was moored in the river alongside the wooden building . . . A submarine!

"Now I *know* we've got something!" Jerry snapped, lips tight.

THEIR journey down towards the riverside sheds took them past several newly made excavations on the way. Jerry halted and surveyed the first one as they passed it: it was full of metallic veins which spelt something to his eye immediately.

"Wow, take a look!" he whistled. "That's a gold vein of amazing richness unless I'm mistaken— That's silver higher up! Good God, this valley's an absolute crucible of wealth . . ."

They hurried on again, past further excavations which gave obvious yields of bitumen, bauxite, copper, zinc, lead . . . a veritable storehouse such as any nation would give its soul to own.

"No wonder some bright baby wants to keep this place bottled up," Sid commented finally. "We'll just see how much legal right he—or they—have to it."

For safety's sake they drew their guns as they neared the sheds. At close quarters it was revealed that there were not many sheds—but one exceptionally long one, a sectional building of the type common in the outer world . . .

From the center doorway as they approached it a tubby figure in soiled white ducks suddenly emerged, battered Panama-hat pushed on the back of his head of gray hair. He was a big man, his figure belied somewhat by his babyish face. It was weather beaten, dissolute of mouth. The eyes were blue and rather vague.

"This is really quite unexpected," he remarked, in perfect English. "Quite

unexpected. Strangers are rare in my little habitat." He straightened suddenly and saluted. "Captain Bilton at your service."

"What navy?" Jerry asked briefly.

"Navy? My dear sir, I belong to no Navy. I am a scientist . . . a very great scientist! I am the master of life and death!"

"Yeah?" Jerry looked unconvinced. "I'm Jeremy Marsden of the Marsden Arctic Expedition: this is my colleague Sid Calvert. Our traveling unit was lost and we're the sole survivors. We got into the adjoining valley by accident."

"Really? How unfortunate . . ." Bilton's expression did not change, but his eyes wandered to the leveled revolvers. Then he smiled. "Come inside, won't you? I am forgetting my manners."

They followed into a fairly large and sparsely furnished living room. The furniture comprised mainly steel tubing chairs and a metal portable table, obviously from the submarine. Oddly enough the table was already laid for three people. There were fruits, canned meat, bread, and a light wine. Also cutlery, again presumably from the submarine.

"Modest, but serviceable," Bilton shrugged. "Sit down, won't you? And I assure you, Mr. Marsden, there is no need for you to keep pointing that revolver at me. I am quite harmless—really."

"Apparently," Jerry said, thrusting his gun away and sitting down, "you knew we were coming? Table all laid."

THE Captain gave his babyish smile. "I saw you up on the valley side—through my telescope, so I decided to prepare a little welcome. Eat, my friends. The fruit is all from the woods atop this valley."

He picked up an apple, bit into it with schoolboyish delight, then leaned back lazily and champed his flabby jowls.

"I'll skip the eats and come to the point," Jerry said briefly. "You are in possession of an exceptionally rich valley here. How come? Did you get here by accident or what?"

"Decidedly an accident," Bilton said imperturbably. "I came originally to explore the Pole— The recent Bilton Expedition, if you recall? A trick of the current carried me under the mountain range into here. I stopped, to look around."

"I don't remember your Expedition or anything about it," Jerry said bluntly. "What happened to your crew? You can't drive a submarine singlehanded."

"The poor fellows died . . ." Bilton spat out a piece of apple skin casually. "Poor unhappy boys!" he sighed. "Little by little they found this lonely place getting too much for them and their reason snapped . . . One by one they went. I was the only one who kept sane, so naturally I did the merciful thing and shot them, also one by one. At last, only I was left."

"And being the only one left you then set about convincing the innocents in the next valley that you are a God, eh? Why?"

Bilton beamed. "Why not?" He got to his feet, still munching his apple. "Suppose I show you exactly? Come with me . . ."

CHAPTER III

Powerhouse of the Earth

JERRY and Sid followed their host from the living room through a doorway that led into a long, well stocked laboratory. So well stocked indeed

that Jerry found himself wondering how on earth Bilton had gotten all the stuff together, especially if he had come by *accident.*

Bilton's next words helped a little to clear the puzzle.

"As you'll know, for Polar exploration I needed a submarine fitted with all manner of apparatus. Most of it was machine-tool stuff which I have since utilized to make necessary instruments. The valley is rich in every conceivable element and raw material. The river works my turbogenerator: I have an electric blast furnace. In other words, a little scientific town all on my own . . . Quaint, isn't it?"

Jerry and Sid glanced at each other. Bilton went on with his apple languidly.

"I don't doubt you've seen some of my excavations," he said. "I intend to advise the proper quarter in America when I can get out of this damned landlocked valley. Until then, I shall continue to experiment . . . As to the people in the other valley, that is matter of biological science. Know anything of it?"

"Try us out," Jerry suggested briefly.

"Well, as I said I arrived here by accident—but as I was pushed through an underground stream in the outer ice I saw an ancient ship buried, virtually locked, in the ice. Possibly it had been there for centuries, overwhelmed, the people still on its decks, the cattle still in their pens—frozen, encompassed, solid . . . You know, it is a fact that life can be preserved in ice indefinitely—even for generations."

Jerry's eyes gleamed. "Yeah, I know. Go on."

"I thought little of the incident at the time, but as my men died and I became lonely I wanted company. One day I recalled the statement of Darwin that life itself probably began in the Arctic—that right here, in this very spot, might exist the catalytic elements necessary to beget life. I had already found the valley to be immensely fertile in its yield of raw material—but there were also other elements unclassified by civilized science. Suppose among these elements there existed in practical form the chemical reagents which Darwin had once theorized . . .? I found such an element."

BILTON nodded his straw-hatted head to a bottle on the shelf, half full of deep green liquid.

"I call it Biltonis," he said fatuously. "It exists in a mineral element and is Element 87, one of our missing numbers in the Periodic Table No wonder, since it has been here all the time . . . It can be ground down, pulverized, and made into a potent liquid. When absorbed into the human system—or any organic system for that matter—it has the effect of super-adrenalin. It stimulates the heart first, then as it sweeps on through the bloodstream it checks the normal effects of cell-breakdown—ketabolism—and instead builds up the epithelial cells to granite toughness. Life is not extended, but mortality *is* reduced by the comparative imperviousness to injury. Even bloodless amputation is possible because of the instant coagulation of blood at the severed points."

"Very interesting," Jerry said slowly, glancing at Sid's keen face. "What happened then?"

Bilton munched reflectively. "Well, as I tell you, I was lonely. I got around to figuring I might try and revive the people preserved in the ice. With Biltonis I might manage it . . . They had merely died from cold and the ice had built up around them, preserving them without harm. I recovered some of them, and the cattle, and injected the fluid into them, using also an artificial

respirator to start the heart action. They lived! And the cattle! For an hour after revival however the people were vacant—perfect hypnotic subjects. No doubt due to the shock. I realized I could keep my little secret from them if I sent them into the next Valley. I knew from their vacant droolings they still thought themselves in the Sixteenth Century. So, while they remained capable of being hypnotized I gave them orders in post-hypnotism, which would be obeyed the moment they came to. I told them how to build houses, roads, set themselves up. I even took the tools there myself in readiness for them . . .

"Then," Bilton chuckled, "I decided to preserve my little secret by building up a seemingly mystical power. After the first ones went to the next valley I sent others to the accompaniment of a magnesium flash. All hocus-pocus of course, but it looks Godlike to those poor innocents. A volcanic pressure opens the mountain and—"

"And hypnotism was the reason why none of those people feared to walk past that boiling crater in the tunnel leading between valleys?" Jerry asked briefly.

"Correct, Mr. Mardsen. The hypnotic subject is never aware of his danger."

"Hm-m! There are definitely no flies on you, Cap! And how many more have you got to revive yet?"

"No more. The last group went through not so long ago."

"And you pulled away the wires which fired the magnesium afterwards?" Jerry asked slowly.

"Of course . . ." Bilton threw away his apple-core. "All very simple, you see . . . And, I think, rather wonderful! Ultimately I plan to go and live among these people, spend the rest of my days in paradise, as their God. Happy sentiment, is it not?"

JERRY eyed him. "You seem dead sure there's no way out of here."

"Of course I am sure. You cannot get out, and neither can I— Oh you may try to leave by the way you entered, I know—but without a base camp you'd perish. And one cannot even radio for help because radio neither goes nor comes from this spot—Atmospheric disturbance, you understand."

Sid gave a start. "But we—"

"It boils down," Jerry interrupted him, "to the fact that you are playing God to a bunch of Puritans, captain?"

"I only desire to live in peace and be their benefactor. Have I not restored them to life, given them a valley, a town, even a king?"

Jerry gave a slow smile and a final glance round the lab. He shrugged.

"Well, it's been good meeting you," he said. "Maybe we can help you forget your loneliness now and again?"

"Maybe," Bilton acknowledged gravely.

"Well—we'll be getting along. We want to take a thorough look at that other valley—then we'll probably drop around and see you again. Inevitable I guess—since we're neighbors until death."

"You put it very aptly, my friend," Bilton smiled, then he accompanied them back to the living room door. They left him leaning against the doorway munching another apple, waving his hand now and again as they made their way back to the mountain tunnel.

"WELL, any ideas,"

Jerry put the question brusquely as they tramped along.

"Darned if I know. Seems to me that that guy's only one jump ahead of a strait-jacket. Nuts, obviously."

Jerry's face was grim. "He's not nuts, Sid. That's a pose: at least I

think so—to throw us off guard. He'd no doubt have killed us had it not meant that the people in this next valley would have come to look for us and make things awkward for him. No, he's not insane: he's damned clever, and scientific too. All that chatter about wanting to be a God was so much bunk to build up the insane angle . . . And besides, he's proven a liar. He said radio could neither come nor go from here. We know that's wrong from our own radio—and you, you mug, nearly let the cat out of the bag by telling him we have a radio. The less he knows of that the better."

"Hm-m," Sid said, pondering.

"Something else too," Jerry mused. "He said his submarine crew died of loneliness. What is more likely is that he happened on the place not by accident, but by design— He could have gotten the location of the place from some scientific treatise somewhere, like those approximate positions of Atlantis one often sees. It happened to be right. Once he knew that he still kept his crew beside him to return to civilization for tools and necessities. Then on the second return he killed them all off . . . Naturally there *is* a way out. I don't credit his story that there isn't. Probably under the ice . . ."

"And right here under his control is a wonder-mineral—a perfect medical miracle worth millions to civilized surgery," Sid muttered. "Cutting without bleeding, hardening of the skin, revival from death . . . But underneath the whole setup is a deeper meaning, which we've got to find!"

"You're telling me!" Jerry retorted. He looked back on the valley from the tunnel ledge. Bilton's figure had gone now . . .

They turned into the tunnel, made their perilous trip back past the volcanic crater and so to the other valley again. As they pushed the pivot-stone back in place Hesther came up eagerly through the grass.

"Then—then the God didst not destroy thee?" she asked in relief.

"I guess not, Hes." Jerry smiled faintly. "You been waiting for us all this time?"

"Truly! Prithee, what didst find—?"

Jerry took her arm affectionately. To his inner satisfaction she clung to him eagerly as they went down the valley side.

"We found enough to know, Hes, that you innocent folk in 'Little England' here aren't half so safe as you think. Your God is a man—same as Sid and me. What is more, he's a scientist."

"Scientist?" The girl looked up inquiringly. "What ist?"

"I—I mean he makes things—dangerous things, I guess." Jerry gestured vaguely. "Sid and I are going back later on to look at things more closely. Right now we're returning to the tavern for a rest."

ONCE they reached the tavern they found it jammed with the Puritan men and women listening in awe to a light orchestra from the same short wave station on which Jerry had left the radio. He gave a grin.

"Well, folks, how'd you like it?"

"Marry, 'tis witchcraft!" Hesther's father exclaimed, and a chorus of voices confirmed his assertion.

"No, it's just—" Jerry started to say, then he broke off and looked at the radio sharply as it crackled violently. It was the sharp crackled burr of electrical interference, repeated at two-second intervals.

"What ist?" asked Hesther in wonder. "Hast the wonder box broken down?"

"What do you make of it, Sid?"

Jerry snapped, eyes narrowing.

"No electricity in this town and no static, therefore—"

"Bilton!" Jerry snapped. "Some ultrapowerful electrical machine he's using. He figures we haven't got a radio otherwise he wouldn't be so careless. Damn good thing you didn't get the chance to spill it out there, Sid. We—"

"Bilton? He is whom?" asked the landlord.

"Your God, my friends! Your Old Man of the Mountain!" Jerry laughed shortly. "He isn't a God, and this is the Twentieth Century, which breeds scientists like flies. This man revived you by scientific means—witchcraft to you. But he isn't a spook, or a supernatural being. He's just a menace—and unless my pal and me do something about it he's liable to do something unpleasant to all of you in due course. So, best thing you do is trust us and not this God of yours . . . This radio shows he is up to something and once we've rested, my pal and I are off to see what it is . . .

"Come on, Sid, time we grabbed some sleep. I'm about all in."

THREE hours later, rested and prepared for anything this time, they took their leave of Hesther once more at the tunnel entrance. Once more the difficult trip past the volcanic crater, and so through to the adjoining valley. Remembering Bilton's telescope they wormed their way out on their stomachs from the tunnel entrance, used the rocks as shields.

Then suddenly Sid gripped Jerry's arm.

"Take a look!"

Jerry started at what he saw. Bilton was but half a mile from them, his arms full of various electrical gadgets. He came towards them, stumbling in the stones. They waited breathlessly, gave sighs of relief as he turned suddenly and vanished in one of the countless mountain caves.

"Something up in that cave obviously," Jerry muttered. "Must be working there—went down to his shack to get some equipment . . ."

He thought for a moment, eased himself up and fingered his gun.

"This is where we break forces, Sid. I'll follow him up while you go down to his hut place and ransack it. Find out whatever you can that might provide a clue. I'll keep him away from you somehow. Join you here later."

"Okay." Sid went off, keeping the rocks to one side of him.

Jerry got up and moved slowly along to the cave entrance, peered inside. Nothing happened. He crept into the gloom and presently saw ahead of him a flow of steady white light. It resolved itself finally into a string of high-wattage lamps across a cavern roof. Inside the cavern, to his amazement, were lathes, machine tools of every kind, carborundum wheels, grinding impliments, metal drills, wire-wound armatures. On one side were completed masses of machinery, bolted up.

In the midst of all this was Bilton himself, at the moment inspecting a furiously working turbine fed by a pounding stream of water volcanic in origin, transmitting its power to the whirling flywheels. He turned at last and went to work on an instrument that sent out flarings of electrical energy. Apparently it was a welder. At any rate it explained to Jerry the curious static behavior of the radio set.

Several times Bilton paused to study a plan—then he went on again. For perhaps half an hour Jerry stood watching, trying to make up his mind what it was all about. Even if he went for

Bilton with the revolver there was no guarantee the man would reveal the truth—and that was what really mattered.

The undoubted implication of scientific and electrical power worried Jerry not a little. More than ever he began to fear for those in "Little England"—Then he started violently at a touch on his arm. He swung, relaxed as he saw Sid, his face tense and grim as he looked into the cave.

"Nice setup," he muttered, then glancing at Jerry sharply, "And I think I know what it's all about . . . Come outside and I'll show you."

THEY retreated silently into the daylight again, ducked down behind the rocks.

"Well, what?" Jerry demanded.

"I had the free run of that place of his," Sid said quickly. "I found plenty, but nothing half as important as this plan in his lab. See what you think. I can get it back before he knows anything . . ."

He pulled a roll of parchment from his inside pocket and Jerry frowned as he gazed at it. It showed the Arctic Circle and the northern half of the world. From a spot which was presumably this hidden valley radiated straight lines. The significant thing was that the spot they occupied was dead in the center of the absolute North Pole.

"Say," he muttered, "these straight lines are given in terms of wavebands . . ."

"I know. That's the odd part. What else do you see?"

"Plenty," Jerry snapped. It seems obvious from this that the North Pole is not *all* ice. The exact North central pole is here, right where we are, and around it—as any scientist knows—are all the swarming currents of Earth itself. The Earth-spin alone draws them here. From this plan it seems obvious that our apple-eating friend intends to build up a massive power station, a simple enough proposition since the valley contains all the raw material to do it with—and his submarine brought all the necessary machine-tools. Seems clear he intends to settle himself here in a spot where nobody in the outer world would suspect anything could even live . . .

"Then," Jerry mused, "he seems to figure that by using the inexhaustible power of earth's magnetic energy through a specially designed power house he can use the world's etherlanes for a variety of purposes. For one thing he could cripple world radio and radio-telephone by terrific interference. He could cut out airplane motors by the same process. He could even produce electric storms at will anywhere he wanted . . . And none could stop him!"

Sid nodded grimly. "Seems fantastic—but it looks to me like the domination of the world's power from the Pole, by one man."

"That's just what it is!" Jerry retorted.* "That's just what Bilton is doing— But for such a colossal project he'd need more than himself and he's wiped out his submarine crew—"

Jerry stopped, snapped his fingers. "The people!" he ejaculated. "That's it! A thousand innocents right under his thumb! Labor! And they won't know a thing of what's doing"

"And right now he's building the machinery for the project in that cave!" Sid cried.

"Yes, I am," commented a grim

* It was H. N. Dickson, the geographer, who said in his book *The World's Climates and Resources*, that if one scientist could ever tap the vast electrical and mineral wealth of the North Pole he could rule the Earth.—Ed.

voice. "Get up, both of you!"

CHAPTER IV

Cataclysm

BILTON was standing right behind them, gun in hand. He was no longer innocent and inane looking. Indeed his eyes were blazing with unholy fire. He snatched the plan savagely from Jerry's grasp.

"I expected you would return, but hardly so soon!" he snapped. "I intended to block the tunnel the moment I had finished important work on my armatures . . . Well, you've been smart enough to piece together my plan—but it won't avail you anything. You've guessed my scheme—electrical domination of the world. Perfectly protected in this valley I can do exactly as I like, can know all that is going on through radio-television. I have agents in the outer world, and I can buy as many more as I need with the gold and silver at my disposal here. Those people I revived shall labor for me . . . By power of destruction I can blackmail the world into whatever I need— And two inquisitive polar explorers shall not stop it!"

Jerry snapped, "Kill us, Bilton, and you'll darned soon have the rest of the valley people coming in to find out why. Cut them off and you cut off your labor too—"

"I shall blow up the tunnel: it is already mined. Later I shall clear it." Bilton smiled faintly. "I have it all arranged, you see, and I—"

"Wait!" screamed a girl's voice suddenly.

It came so abruptly Bilton looked up in surprise, and in that second Jerry hurled out his fist and struck the portly scientist under the jaw, sent him reeling. He got up again immediately but Jerry had him covered.

Hesther came forward hurriedly, and behind her were her father and some of the other-valley people. They gazed wonderingly at Bilton.

"You came just in time, Hesther," Jerry panted. "How'd it happen?"

"We decided to see what really lay beyond the mountain—"

"Damn you, girl!" Bilton blazed, quivering with anger. "You few may have got through, but no more will—I'll watch it!"

Before the words were hardly out of his mouth he flung himself forward recklessly, arms flung wide. Catching Jerry and Sid violently round the necks he flung them both to earth. Jerry fired, missed: the bullet whanged rock. Stumbling forward Bilton raced for his cave. Jerry whirled round, aimed, fired—

Bilton halted in his tracks, red smearing into sight on his white coated back. He doubled up, stumbled into the cave, and vanished.

"Well, I guess that's that," Jerry snapped. "We stepped in and just managed—"

HE BROKE off, twirled with the others as there came a sudden titanic concussion from the tunnel leading to the next valley. Smoke and rocks came belting through the air. The whole mass of the mountain quivered.

Came another explosion—and another, rocking the valley with the reverberation.

"He must have lived long enough to blow the place up anyway," Sid panted. "Dammit, we took that shot too much for granted— Now he knows he's sunk he's blown the whole lot— Take a look!" he yelled.

Hesther clinging to him, scared by the explosions, Jerry stared as a mass of gray viscid substance began to push

its way from the blocked tunnel. It was followed by a core of red molten fire.

"That volcanic pit!" Sid shouted. "It's overflowed or something. Quick! We've gotta get out of here . . ."

Even as he spoke the mountain quaked again and dislodged huge boulders that rained thunderously to earth.

"He started a cataclysm," Jerry muttered, as they backed away. "It can happen easy enough when everything's made of porus volcanic rock. Shift one rock and the lot comes down. Looks like 'Little England' is doomed—and this valley will be a molten quagmire in no time . . . Come on!"

"The submarine?" Sid questioned, as they ran down the mountain slope.

"Yeah—the only chance. We've got a makeshift crew. If there's a way out we'll find it . . ."

As they raced along that rolling flood of molten stone and lava pursued them. They reached the shed by the river and for a moment Jerry stopped, dashed inside and came out again with the bottle of Biltonis in his arm.

"Might as well," he said briefly to Sid. "Probably duplicate it in the outer world— Come on, you folks!"

He caught Hesther to him and led the way to the flat deck of the submarine, clattered down into the control room.

"Fuel's all set," Sid said briefly, studying the gages. "But how much do you know about driving a sub?"

"Enough to get by," Jerry retorted, slamming and shutting the conning tower hatch. "Our job will be finding the way out—"

"We can do that all right!" Sid cried. "Look here! A map all laid out! Bilton had everything ready for a quick getaway if it was ever needed."

Jerry glanced at it, nodded, turned to the baffled Englanders. The wilderness of machinery was something they had never known. None the less they turned to the tasks Jerry assigned them and the engines started up . . .

The submarine stayed on surface until the barrier range was reached—then it submerged. From then on it was a matter of gentle nosing through walls of ice, through the narrowest channel imaginable. Foot by foot—perhaps for hours, perhaps for days . . .

None aboard knew how long it took —but there came a time at last, when the air was fetid and the engines overworked, that the craft rose willingly without obstruction. It bobbed to the surface of the sea.

"We made it!" Sid cried exultantly.

Instantly Jerry flung open the hatch, clambered out on the deck. He stood breathing in gulps of the salt wind.

"Somewhere about two hundred miles off Greenland, as I figure it," he said. He turned, Hesther clinging to his arm, her father and fellow Englanders staring round them incredulously.

"We're going to a new world, Hes," Jerry smiled. "And we've got a secret right here that's going to make us happy and secure . . . Maybe you don't even mind leaving that Polar prison behind?"

"Mind? Nay! It is as you say—Okay by me!"

"Okay it is!" Jerry grinned. He turned. "Sid, a ship hoving on the horizon— We head towards it. Come on!"

THE END

Screwball Inventions

by JACK WEST

ONE of the most worried inventors in all of North Carolina about three years ago was County Commissioner Thomas W. Haywood, of New Bern. It wasn't that the tall, alderman-like, politician had any objections to being called "the nuttiest inventor in all the Carolinas and other various and sundry states." As a matter of fact, Commissioner Haywood was downright proud of the distinction which singled him out as one of America's select screwball inventors. He had invented a self-kicking machine especially for the guy who's so gol-darned mad at himself that he'd like nothing better than a good swift kick in the pants from none other than himself. But the good commissioner seemed worried about a somewhat touchy angle involving his machine.

Harried by insistent reporters and determined townfolk, the otherwise good-natured Commissioner broke down one afternoon and told all. He knew his machine was just dandy for kicking guys in the seat of the pants; but women had come into the machine's life; and, alas, into the good Commissioner's too. Everything was okey-doke just as long as the dames wore a good thick skirt of substantial kick-resisting material; but "for God's sake they insist upon being kicked while they wear shorts," he moaned.

With an eye toward greater technological advancement in the realm of self-kicking machines, Commissioner Haywood profoundly declared, "I'm going to have some pads made that can be attached to the soles of the kicking shoes, so it won't hurt so much when women kick themselves." The Commissioner's invention consists of a series of articulated artificial legs attached a single hub, revolving about an axle, which, in turn, is driven by the kickee, who turns a crank for that express purpose. The faster the machine is operated the greater its "fire power."

Considering its cockeyed character, Haywood's invention enjoyed unusual popularity. Not long after his revolutionary device of self-chastisement had been announced, people began making the Commissioner's woodshed a mecca of sorts. Rich and poor alike came around to kick themselves for their follies and return home completely atoned for their sins. Haywood quickly realized that self-punishment might get out of hand and fall into the hands of wildcat operators; so he organized a "Self-Kicking Club of America." The club's slogan is "If we kick ourselves more, we will kick others less."

Others in the world of goofy-gadgets have done almost as well as Commissioner Haywood. Probably more utilitarian than Haywood's self-kicker is F. O. Singer's anti-long-winded-speaker device. His device consists of a series of three electric lights, an alarm clock, an automatic timing device, and, most important of all, a very, very healthy Bronx cheer. The demand for Singer's device has been almost as pressing as for the self-kicker. Singer, a Chicagoan, explains the workings of his machine by comparing it with an ordinary traffic light. "I give the speaker five minutes to complete his speech. First, the speechometer's green light is lit. After four and a half minutes, the yellow bulb comes on; thirty seconds later, the red light comes on. The speech still not finished ten seconds later, a loud raucous Bronx cheer bellows from the machine."

Psychologists in finding the self-kicker more popular than the anti-speech machine have come to the deadly conclusion that there are people in this world who would much rather kick themselves in the pants than kick a politician, or any other type of speaker, where he too should probably be kicked.

Granddaddy of all of that screwball society that invents things that "happen to be somewhat useful through no fault of ours," is "Professor" Russel E. Oakes. Oakes, a quiet, serious-looking wisp of a man from Waukesha, Wisconsin, has the most fertile of all goofy-gadget brains. He's by and large considered the Edison of all screwball inventors and his inventions are the envy of everyone connected with that select group. His genius has produced such super-useful items as an automatic pie crimper, a revolving spaghetti fork, an automatic doughnut dunker, and hundreds of other devices.

Among the Waukesha whiz's most cherished inventions are such choice items as a corn-on-the-cob dofunny that automatically rings a bell at the end of the cob and turns up two more rows of corn all ready for the next bite. Oakes' self-finding golf ball is destined to revolutionize all of golf if the Professional Golfer's Association ever adopts it. This ingenious device is not only easy to find but also hard to miss under any circumstances. It's as large as a basketball and when lost in the rough it finds itself by sending up a puff of smoke and blowing a whistle.

For the supercharged executive who wants to hear nothing but up-to-the-minute-news, Oakes has a special listening device that is guaranteed to keep even the busiest inventor well-informed. This gew-gaw consists of a bit of plain everyday dirt on a platter, which up and socks the busy executive in the ear everytime he presses a button. Besides giving the busy man all the dirt in one lump, Oakes insists that his device "will enable even the busiest of all men to keep his ear to the ground."

The CASE OF THE

The giant pteredactyls soared over New York

MESOZOIC MONSTERS

By THORNTON AYRE

Brutus Lloyd had never faced a more amazing mystery than the one that confronted him when he saw those incredible dinosaur footprints!

"LLOYD! Damned glad you could make it!"

Inspector Branson caught Brutus Lloyd by the arm as he stepped from the 3:10 and led him into the waiting room. The little scientific detective took off his Derby and held it to the fire.

"Either give a good reason for this rush-trip or write yourself off the New York police force," he growled in his bass voice. "Just what in hell did you mean over the phone by—*monsters?*"

"What I said! Monsters! Prehistoric things. . . . They belong definitely to science so I sent for you."

Lloyd's keen little eyes sharpened. "You don't mean the things mentioned in an obscure corner of this morning's papers? Creatures from the Mesozoic Era?"

"Just that," Branson acknowledged bluntly. "The sheriff here is all steamed over the business—right out of his depth. He sent for help from New York. Having nothing particular on hand I came over. Dinosaurs, Lloyd —that's what!"

Lloyd sighed. "Dammit man, dinosauria died out millions of years ago—and even supposing otherwise they'd sure have more sense than choose a

dump like Trenchley to park in! Anyway, let's have it—and be brief!"

"Better come with me in the car," Branson said, and led the way outside the station. Then as he drove along the wet roadway through the wildest of drizzling, lonely country to the village of Trenchley itself he spat out laconic statements, mainly embellishing the unimaginative newspaper reports.

"Seems a group of villagers, residents, saw two dinosaurs on the outskirts of the village last evening. I've questioned them all, and they all have the same story."

"*Deceptio visus*—optical illusion," Lloyd sneered, too wet and uncomfortable to be interested. "And anyway dinosaurs cover a whole range of animals—but that would be way above your head of course. . . . Village gossip, Branson!"

"I don't think it is!" the Inspector insisted. "They're sensible people, all of 'em. A young electrical engineer and his wife; a traveling salesman; a clergyman; one or two members of the local church, and—yes, another guy. A spiritualist."

"Huh?" Lloyd looked up sharply.

"A Dr. Phalnack—plays around with tamborines in the dark and puts the jitters in village folk o' nights. You know the type. Odd looking chap. He has an Indian servant I didn't like the looks of. Sort of dark, anarchistic guy with a towel round his head."

"Hmm." Lloyd fingered the J-shaped forelock poking under his uptilted Derby. Then he sneered, "I presume you looked for clues?"

"Sure—and I found 'em. Dinosaur's footmarks."

Lloyd rubbed his tiny hands together. "That's better! This begins to smell more like my meat."

Branson looked gratified; then he glanced ahead. "We're coming into the village now. I asked the folks—the principal ones anyway—to gather in the village hall to meet you. They ought to be there by now."

HE SWUNG the car off the main road into a gravelway, pulled up before a beetlelike tin-roofed shed. In a moment he and Lloyd were inside the place. Walking in slowly behind the burly Inspector the diminutive investigator glanced over, and appraised, the assembly.

There was a young man with an eager, intelligent face and a dark starry-eyed girl by his side. There was the vicar, calm and pale-faced; the waiting Sheriff, chewing thoughtfully; then a smallish man with immensely thick-lensed glasses, cape, and broad brimmed soft hat. Beside him, arms folded, was a Pathan, smoldering-eyed, high-joweled, turban wound flawlessly round his head. He was short, too—but lithe and muscular as a steel spring.

Branson rattled off the introductions, and the first one to come forward was the man with glasses and broad-brimmed hat.

"I'm so glad to know you, Dr. Lloyd!" His voice was soft, persuasive; and his handgrip crushing. "I've heard of you, of course."

"That's understandable!" Lloyd regarded him under insolently lowered eyelids. "Am I not the master of scientific mystery?"

"Quite—quite! I am Dr. Phalnack, a spiritualistic medium. Oh, this is my servant and confidant, Ranji. . . ."

The Indian gave a slight inclination of his head, but his eyes still glowered dangerously. Lloyd peered at him archly from under his upthrust hat brim; then he turned aside sharply as the young man and woman came forward. He was lanky, loose-jointed of movement.

"I'm Ted Hutton," he volunteered. "This is my wife Janice."

"Uh-huh," Lloyd acknowledged impatiently. "But suppose we get down to matters? This talk of monsters—"

"It ain't just talk," Sheriff Ingle snorted. "I saw the danged things meself. . . . We all did. And plenty more besides."

"True," agreed the vicar mildly. "I was calling on Mrs. Westbury concerning the needy children's charity when I saw two huge monsters against the sunset, just outside the village. They seemed to be coming towards me. I—ahem!—moved precipitately into Mrs. Westbury's and sought sanctuary—"

"Then?" Lloyd snapped.

"I—er— Well, I guess they'd gone when I came out some thirty minutes later."

Ted Hutton put in earnestly, "I saw them as I was coming back from an electrical survey just out of the village. I'm with the Government, you see—research engineer. And my wife saw the things too, didn't you, sweet?"

"Gigantic!" she declared earnestly. "Dinosaurs. . . . !"

The lean-faced man in the dripping mackintosh who called himself Murgatroyd came forward.

"Guess I saw them as I was driving into the village. I'm a salesman, putting up here for a few days."

LLOYD fondled his forelock and glanced at Dr. Phalnack. "And you, doctor?"

"Well, I didn't actually see them, I'm afraid—but I certainly knew through my psychic experiments that there was a foreign power close to us—something, if you understand me, otherworldly!"

"We don't!" Branson said, irritated. "Talk plain English!"

"I was aware of an unwanted dangerous element," Phalnack elaborated. "It disturbed my communion with Beyond. The nearest way I can describe the interruption is that it resembled a thin, irritating hum."

"What the heck!" Branson stared blankly.

"Imitate it," Lloyd ordered.

Phalnack shrugged and doubled for a wasp. Lloyd eyed him very gravely then glanced at the others. "Any of you hear that?"

"I was so surprised I don't remember," said the Sheriff.

"I can't be sure," Janice Hutton said. "I had the radio on, you see—at least I was trying to but something must have been wrong with the battery for there was bad static—"

"There was a wind so I wouldn't know," her husband interrupted her, shrugging. "But those monsters existed all right! Besides, there are the prints!"

"And when were they found?" Lloyd asked.

"Took me to find them," Branson said with pride. "I always begin a search at the beginning—"

"Wise of you," Lloyd grunted. Then, "Let's go take a look at 'em before it gets dark. All of you," he added. "I might want to ask some questions."

Branson led the way out into the main street, marched with determined strides to the soggy fields just beyond the village. Here, except for the village back of it, the landscape was sheer country, broken only by distant outcroppings of a fairly dense wood. . . .

"A monster or two might hide in those woods," Branson pointed out. "We can look later— What's the matter?"

Lloyd turned sharply. "Sorry—I was just admiring the village gaslights."

"Gaslights?" Branson puzzled; then shrugged. "Here are the prints."

Lloyd frowned down on a massive

four-toed print in the sloppy mud. There was no denying that a monster possessing such a foot must by proportion have measured at least twenty feet high.

"And here—and here," Branson indicated, moving further on—until altogether they had covered a mile.

"And leading back to the wood!" Dr. Phalnack observed. "That seems pretty conclusive, doesn't it?"

"*Non sequitur*—it does not follow," Lloyd replied sourly. "And I would point out I require no aid in this matter, Dr. Phalnack. I am Lloyd—therefore self-sufficient."

HE STOOPED and stared at one of the prints carefully, then from it he picked up bits of what seemed to be wood-shredding from the mud. Carefully he put them away in an envelope, then looked around him.

"Is it possible, Dr. Phalnack, that you heard a thin hum at such a distance as this? How far away is your home?"

"Over there." And Phalnack nodded across the gas-lighted village to a solitary rain-misted residence maybe a mile on the far side of the dwellings.

"Hmm," Lloyd said, scowling.

"The doctor sahib speaks truth," Ranji observed gravely. "It is not well to even question his word—"

"Speak when spoken to!" Lloyd retorted, glaring. "Do not dare to cross swords with me, or—"

"But honestly, Dr. Lloyd, I'm sure Professor Phalnack is right," Janice Hutton broke in earnestly. "He is too —too clever to need to tell falsehoods. His psychic demonstrations—they're amazing!"

"Phony!" Ted Hutton sniffed.

Phalnack's eyes seemed to gleam more brightly for a moment behind the thick lenses, but he said nothing.

"We might follow this trail to the wood anyway and see where it gets us," Lloyd shrugged. "Just time before dark."

They went forward swiftly, found the footmarks ever and again, leading finally into the wet, drizzling wood itself.

"Wait a minute," Branson said uneasily. "If we walk right into a pair of sleeping dinosaurs I don't fancy our chances! Better take it easy—"

Lloyd grinned faintly, then looking back at the others, "We'll split up and search around. See what we can find. . . ." Then as they went in various directions he added to Branson, "I still don't believe there are any monsters! Something happened to make these folks think so, that's all. . . ."

Branson looked his wonder, then turned to prowl along at Lloyd's side. They had hardly moved a dozen yards in the undergrowth before they were arrested by a gasping scream. It was followed by the unmistakable voice of Ted Hutton.

"Help, quick! Somebody—!"

INSTANTLY the various members of the party converged through the bushes upon the spot where Ted Hutton was standing white and shaken, glancing about him. His wife was holding his arm tightly.

"Ted dearest, whatever's the matter?"

"I—I don't know." He hesitated, looked around. "There's something awful in this place," he breathed. "An evil power—or something!"

"I understood we were searching for dinosaurs," Lloyd murmured.

"Yeah, sure we were— But there's something else, invisible! I was ahead of Janice when something I couldn't see got hold of me! I felt as though something were trying to drag me down then —then it went away."

"So," Phalnack murmured, ponder-

ing, "my own conclusions of an evil presence were not far wrong perhaps."

"Bunk!" observed Branson with healthy candor; but he went to search just the same. He came back shrugging.

"Anyway, the trail's lost in this undergrowth," he growled.

"You remark on an evil presence, doctor," Lloyd said, turning to him thoughtfully. "Could you, for instance, really detect an evil power if it were present?"

"Certainly—but I'd have to start a seance."

"Tonight?"

"Why yes, if you wish."

"Mainly because the monsters, if any, are likely to appear at night, and also because the forces of evil are more pungent at night," Lloyd embellished. "We'll get some tea, then come along to your home around seven-thirty. Right?"

"I'll be honored," Phalnack said.

"In fact," Lloyd added, glancing round, "it might help if we all went. . . ."

"I'm more than willing," Janice Hutton said eagerly. "I was so glad when the Government moved Ted up here because it meant I could attend Dr. Phalnack's seances. I first heard of him in the papers, you know, and—"

"You can count me out anyway," Ted growled. "This holding hands in the dark is a lot of hooey!"

"Ted!" Janice pleaded.

He sighed. "Oh, all right. I've been before, so I guess it won't hurt to go again—but you'll never convert me. I'll come this time if only to find out what attacked me. . . ." He broke off and regarded his watch. "Say, I've an electrical job to finish before evening! See you at home, Jan. 'By, folks."

He went hurrying off and Lloyd looked at the girl curiously.

"An electrical job in a village lighted by gas?" he asked in some surprise.

She smiled. "That's his way of putting it. The Government sent him here to study the layout for electrical supply to be given to the village."

"Ah," Lloyd nodded. "I get it."

"I'll come along too," Murgatroyd said. "But I must be getting back to my tea—"

"Come along with us," Lloyd suggested.

"Thanks all the same, but I don't stay in the village. See you all later."

He, too, went off, and the rest of the party broke up, finally left Lloyd and Branson alone in the gathering dark.

"Queer for a traveling salesman to put up *outside* a village," Lloyd reflected; then he shrugged. "Okay, let's get back and dig up some tea. . . ."

CHAPTER II

Seance Extraordinary

"YOU know, I don't get the angle on this," Branson growled, as they tramped back through the wood. "How does a seance help find a prehistoric monster or two?"

"That," Lloyd beamed, "is what *I* want to find out—"

He broke off, jumped, jerked himself backwards sharply as something whizzed dangerously close to his face. It landed with a thud in a nearby tree.

Astounded, he and Branson stared at it—then the Inspector leapt forward and using his handkerchief tugged forth a knife from the bark.

"Looks sort of . . . oriental," he said, ominously.

Lloyd didn't answer; he raised a hand for silence. There came the momentary cracking of undergrowth away to their left. Instantly Lloyd raced in the direction of the sound, flying like

a gnome over bushes, umbrella raised aloft. He left the cumbersome Branson far behind. But fast though he traveled he could not overtake the fleeing attacker.

He stopped at last, breathing hard. He had lost his quarry.

Branson came up, gulping. "I saw him," he gasped out. "Only for a second or two. It was that Indian guy. I saw his turban— Yes, I was right!" he cried, pointing. "Look there!"

Nearby was the outjutting branch of a tree, perhaps six feet from the ground. Caught against part of its rough bark was a small piece of white fabric.

"And footprints here!" Branson went on eagerly, pointing to the mud. "The Indian, sure as fate. It's as clear as day, Lloyd! He caught his turban on this branch and a piece ripped off—"

"Um," Lloyd said, pulling the fabric down and studying it. He reflected, then asked shortly, "How tall are you, Branson?"

"Six foot one. What's that got to do with it?"

"Plenty. You're not touching the branch. It's a bit higher than you. And that Indian isn't very tall—"

"Irrelevant!" Branson snorted. "Running makes a man go a lot higher than normal. If I had a turban on and were to run under this tree— What in hell are you grinning at?" he broke off sourly.

"Just picturing you in a turban! *Res est sacra miser,* Branson—a man in distress is a sacred object. . . . But skip it for the moment and let me have that knife."

Branson handed it over, looking disappointed. "Look, that was a deliberate effort to kill you. We ought to do things to that Ranji guy."

"At the seance tonight we probably will," Lloyd answered. "Right now I want my tea. Come!"

IN THE local apology for an hotel Lloyd spent a lot of time thinking after he had had his tea. Then finally he pulled out the oriental knife and studied it carefully. He nodded at length.

"Excellent fingerprints. Just what I need. A few more to tally will help. . . ."

Reverently he picked up his Derby hat and to Branson's amazement slipped a tight fitting rubber cover round the brim.

"What the heck?" Branson demanded, round his pipe.

"Rubber, coated with a special solution," Lloyd beamed. "The merest touch leaves fingerprints and rain cannot eliminate them. You gaze on a supreme scientist, Branson!"

"I've heard that before. If you're so supreme suppose you tell me how far you've gotten up to now? First we look for monsters, then we make an appointment to sit in the dark and hold hands. We're getting just a bit too old for that!"

"The monsters," Lloyd said, with his most arrogant glare, "do not exist. Only the feet exist—and they're made of wood!"

"What!"

Lloyd shook the wood shreddings from the footprint out of their envelope.

"Let us consider," he said slowly. "A —a flat board cut out to resemble a monster's foot would leave the right impression. B—but whoever did it forgot that the mud would cling to the board and drag off bits of the surface. Obviously rough wood was used. C—a monster, or even a human being, when running or moving swiftly, leaves a deeper imprint at the toe end than at the heel end. Yet those footprints were level both ends! D—a monster of the dinosaur genus would weigh in the neighborhood of twenty tons. Therefore in soggy soil like it is around here

a depression of an inch is absurd. It should be around four to six inches! Lastly—a dinosaur belongs to the saurian or alligator class, so why in heck should it want to choose *land?* It was a water beast mainly . . . The whole set-up smells!"

Branson ran his pipe-stem along his jaw. "Sounds logical . . . But everybody saw the monsters!"

"That," Lloyd admitted, "has me stymied at the moment. But a supreme brain is never balked. I hope to get it clearer after the seance tonight. Phalnack's 'evil presence' angle rather interests me. A curious sort of guy—and it's possible he may be *actually* psychic: we've no proof otherwise. Anyway, he's got to be fitted into the picture— And it's time we were going."

"And probably get our throats cut," Branson growled, buttoning up his coat. "After this afternoon I'm putting nothing past that Ranji anarchist."

MUFFLED to the ears they tramped through the gas-lighted village street to the psychicist's home, were admitted by Ranji in person. Lloyd handed over his hat with a gloved hand —then just as quickly snatched it back from Ranji's grasp.

"What am I thinking of!" Lloyd gasped. "That I should part with my Derby! Huh! Must be wool gathering."

"This way, gentlemen," the Indian invited, with steely calm—and glided to a curtained lounge. The rest of the party—the vicar, Ted and Janice Hutton, Murgatroyd, and the Sheriff—were already present, seated in a semicircle on hardwood chairs and gazing at the ornate table and falderals of the doctor's seat of operations.

Lloyd nodded to them and sat down —then Branson eyed him as he snapped off the rubber band from his hat brim and put it carefully away. He had just done it when Dr. Phalnack came in, attired now in a flowing gown with comets and stars embroidered all over it.

His odd eyes peered through the dense spectacle lenses. With his black brimmed hat off he seemed all head—and that as bald as an egg. Ranji took up a position to one side of him, folded his arms and surveyed the assembly dispassionately. The smell of incense began to fill the air.

"Lights!" Phalnack said softly, sitting down—and they went out. Then his face was thrown into relief by a rosy glow from a hidden globe in the table.

"You will hold hands," he requested, "so that the chain of mediumship will not be broken. Mr. Hutton, you will take my left hand; you, Murgatroyd, will take my right. That completes the circle. If there are evil presences around us—or indeed anywhere within five miles—they will be detected. Now, hold hands, please!"

The assembly obeyed, Branson clutching Lloyd's tiny palm and Lloyd himself holding onto the vicar. For a long time there was deathly quiet, except for the wind moaning behind the thick black draperies— Then there came a horrible strangulating gasp from where Phalnack sat. It ended in a sobbing, soul-freezing groan.

"What's he doing?—throwing a fit?" Branson whispered uneasily.

"Going into a trance!" Janice Hutton hissed. "Ssssh!"

"Quantum mutatus ab illo," Lloyd murmured. "How changed from what he was!"

But at last the howling anguish ceased and there came into the room a faint humming sound, so inaudible one felt rather than heard it. Branson felt Lloyd stiffen intently.

"Evil presence — show yourself!"

Phalnack droned.

SURPRISINGLY enough, things *did* show themselves—but not evil presences. There were tamborines and trumpets. They banged and they blew. Then they gave place to other things, moving diaphanous objects which swept with gossamer unreality through the heavy dark. Faces began to leer out of the void — unpleasant, rascally faces—

"No! No! I cannot go on!" Phalnack screamed suddenly. "Evil power is present! I cannot—"

Lloyd hurtled suddenly to his feet, flung himself at the nearest floating face to seize it. But instead he went flying —and the abrupt return of the lights found him bundled into a corner, rubbing his head where it had hit the wall.

"I apologize, doctor," he said gravely, getting up. "I thought those manifestations were phony— But they're not. No solidity in them."

"I am true psychic subject," Phalnack answered calmly. "It is a pity you should have ever doubted it."

"You actually mean these things we saw—tamborines, faces, and what-have-you—were not tricks?" Branson demanded.

"They were not solid anyway," Lloyd said; then he glanced round. "Hm—so you have electric lights in a gas-supplied village, doctor?"

"My own generators."

"Ah . . . " Lloyd pondered a moment, then, "I think I heard that thin waspy hum you mentioned during the seance."

Phalnack shook his bald head quickly. "That was not the evil influence I told you of: it was purely the normal establishment of psychic contact. But there *is* an evil presence here just the same! It balked my efforts."

"It's a pity it broke up the party," Lloyd sighed, putting on his Derby again. "Thanks all the same, Phalnack —it was good while it lasted." He turned to the Sheriff. "I've a few things to check up but I'll be back tomorrow. 'Night everybody."

OUT in the fresh air Branson gave his big form a violent shake.

"Uh! That place gave me the jitters!"

"And yet it was a valuable experience," Lloyd commented. "I got what I hoped to get—the first foundations of a solution. That Phalnack is an extremely clever man, Branson!"

"Struck me as an out and out phony!"

"But nobody, unless he were a scientist, could *prove* him a phony!" Lloyd said modestly. "Those manifestations of his were not done with the usual occult trickster's gadgets, such as wires and things. No, they were done by the *mind!* I'll prove it later, too. Right now we're getting back home."

They returned to the village hall and Branson's car, started out into the dark country road citywards. The rain had ceased now and the moon was shining through ragged clouds.

"A bit odd that a spiritualist of Phalnack's accomplishments should be content to do his stuff in so lonely a spot," Branson reflected. "You'd think he'd get busy in a city, frisking devotees of the upper classes."

"Unless this is his initial experiment and he'll move later," Lloyd replied; then suddenly he shook his head a little and jabbed a finger irritably in his ear.

"Do you hear something?" he demanded finally. "I thought I'd gotten bells in my ears. Now I'm not sure if—"

"Hey, will you look at that!" Branson yelled hoarsely, pointing ahead.

Lloyd jerked his head up—and simultaneously swung the steering wheel frantically out of Branson's grasp. He seemed too stunned to act—paralyzed.

For right ahead of them in the dim moonlight was the shape of a monstrous animal. They had time to notice a spined back—then it swung sideways to them as the car went bounding and bumping into a thickly plowed field. It halted with a jolt.

They scrambled out and raced back to the roadway. But by the time they had reached it the monster had disappeared. There was nothing visible—but there was a faint sound, a dull purring slowly receding into distance.

"Well, well?" Branson snapped impatiently, as Lloyd pondered.

"That noise . . ." he meditated. "A car's engine— Yes, here are its tracks! Unique sort of tread too— Notice it in the wet gravel here? Here's our track where we turned off."

HE stooped, pulled a white card from his pocket, and in the light of the moon made a pencil design of the tire tread.

"So what?" Branson snorted, glaring round the landscape. "I'm not interested in tire treads; I want that monster!"

"*Spero meliora*—I hope for better things," Lloyd sighed. "The monster doesn't exist, I tell you! But the tire tread does! And it is recent—so obviously it was a car following us. Look, *did* you hear a queer sound before the monster turned up?"

"Yeah—sure I did; like a wet finger squeegeeing glass." Branson had his imaginative moments. "But the sight of that thing put me right off answering you—"

"Clearly," Lloyd said, "the monster was intended to hurl us off the road and involve us in a nasty accident. Thanks to my everlasting coolness in taking the wheel we are still here. . . Hm, this gets more fascinating as it goes on. And if it was the same monster as seen by the villagers it was a diplodocus. That puts it out of court straight away since the diplodocus is a marsh and water dweller— Come on, back to the car. Sooner we get to my laboratory the better."

They went back through the field to the car.

Branson said, "Look, you mean that whoever followed in that car was deliberately trying to bump us off with a phony diplo—doplo— Whatever you called it?"

"Naturally," Lloyd growled impatiently.

They climbed back into the car, bumped back to the road, and in the glare of the headlamps followed the trail of the unknown car as far as the wet road carried it. Then they lost it on macadam. Lloyd grunted and relapsed into thought. Around midnight they were back in New York.

"What happens now?" Branson asked, as he followed the little scientist through his cozy home to the laboratory.

"Please yourself," Lloyd shrugged. "I'll be working for the rest of the night. Maybe you'd better give your brain a rest and come and see me in the morning."

"Okay!" Branson knew better than take offense, or stay on where he wasn't wanted. . . .

CHAPTER III

Monsters Over New York

BRANSON turned up again at eight the next morning, was admitted to the laboratory to find Lloyd wrapped in his oversize smock and huddled over coffee and toast. A bench was littered

with odds and ends, and scientific instruments, testifying to the kind of night he had spent.

"Brain refreshed?" he asked sardonically, glancing up; and added, "It'll need to be to absorb what I'm going to throw at it."

"You found something definite then?"

"I am Brutus Lloyd! Have some coffee. . . ."

And as Branson helped himself Lloyd went on, "The hatband fingerprints and those on the oriental knife don't tally. It was not the Indian who threw the knife at me in the wood. Not that that is any surprise to me. Remember the tree branch? The Indian is only shortish—he could not, despite your fanciful ideas of leaping into the air with a turban on, have hit his head on that branch. It was somebody taller, posing *as* him."

"Whom?"

"I don't know, you damn fool! Might be anybody we've met—even Phalnack himself, who though short is taller than Ranji. Or, it may be somebody we have not yet encountered. Once I've found who owns the prints on the knife I'll get some place— For the moment we can skip that. What really is of interest is the solution of the monsters."

"You've got it?" Branson cried eagerly, and was rewarded with a droop of insolent eyelids. Then Lloyd swung off his high stool and crossed to the complicated apparatus he'd assembled on his work bench. Now as Branson looked at it closely he decided it was rather like a camera, only it had dynamos attached to it.

Lloyd switched on the power, turned the instrument so it faced Branson. He looked uneasy for a moment but Lloyd grinned his fears away. A thin irritating hum began to pervade the air almost at once.

"Take a look!" Lloyd ordered suddenly—and instantly Branson dropped his coffee cup with a yell and dragged on his revolver. He backed to the wall hastily, fired desperately—three times at the form of a tiger slinking toward him!

THE bullets whanged right through it, however— Then, miraculously, the tiger was an ape; then a rabbit; finally a cat! Lloyd switched off and the manifestations vanished utterly.

"What the sweet, suffering hell . . ." Branson relaxed and mopped his sweating face; then glared at Lloyd as he gave a slow, impish smile. "What was it, man? Movie film?"

"No—I hypnotized you! A trifle when a brain like mine is pitted against a withered walnut like yours."

"Hypnotism?" Branson started. "Now wait a minute—"

"Joking apart," Lloyd said grimly, "this business is the most ingenious scientific trick I've struck! It is perfectly clear now—ignoring the monsters for the moment—that Dr. Phalnack has utilized the method used by Professor Cortell in Nineteen Thirty at the British University of Sound Research. In that year, Professor Cortell made a thorough research—mainly for discovering how to make cities quieter—into sound problems. He produced an array of decibels ranging from airplane motors to leaves on a windless day. . . .

"But he *also* went deeply into the higher researches of sound and discovered what he tentatively called the 'ultimate vibration.' He suggested it as a war weapon to the British authorities, but it was turned down or else pigeonholed.* That doesn't matter. But it is clear that Dr. Phalnack has used the

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system for his own psychic demonstrations. You see, Branson, Professor Cortell stated quite accurately that the highest audible sound to the human ear is twenty-five thousand vibrations a second. Anything outside and above it is in the ultrasonic range—"

"But we heard that hum!" Branson protested, trying to grasp the idea.

"No: we *felt* it! Just as certain aids for the deaf rely solely on an instrument contacting the maxillary bone. Vibration—*not* sound. Anyway, Professor Cortell's instrument generated a wave of twenty-five and a half thousand vibrations a second, and at that pitch it affects the brain-centers. Even as unheard noises—to us that is—can stampede the different hearing range of a herd of animals or flock of birds, so a wavelength of twenty-five and a half thousand vibrations can upset a human brain completely. There Professor Cortell ended his research—but obviously Dr. Phalnack had other ideas about the matter."

Lloyd pondered a moment before he went on. Then,

"By means of electrical amplification he is able to direct his thoughts into the minds of those who have been semi-paralyzed by that ultrasonic hum. Thereby, unconscious of the fact that their normal power of perception is haywire, they believe what *he* wills they shall believe. Mass hypnotism, Branson. And I know it is correct. Last night at the seance I had an inkling of the truth by the insistence of everybody on a thin hum accompanying their visions of the monsters. I felt ultrasonics might play a part somewheres.

"WHEN it became evident at Phalnack's and the spectral visions appeared simultaneously I dived for them to see if they were solid. When they were not, I suspected hypnotism on a scientific scale. Getting back here I looked up researches into ultrasonics and found Professor Cortell's theory in the files. I duplicated the method—a simple matter of vibrating flanges with air current between them—and produced the desired pitch. I turned it on you and at the same time thought *hard* of a tiger—and the rest of the animals. As I had hoped, a subsidiary electrical beam directed towards you amplified my thoughts to you. Easy enough, for a brain is only an electrical machine. Thought amplification is done any day at the National Physics Laboratory for that matter . . . But don't mix it with telepathy. That *would* be something! This is only plain, but clever, hypnotism."

"So that's it!" Branson gulped the rest of his coffee from another cup. "That phony occultist just makes his audience see things, huh? But why? As I said, what's the use of trying out such ideas on a lot of villagers? And anyway, what's the idea of the prehistoric monsters? You've made it clear that *anything* could be induced—so why monsters? What's the motive?"

"There," Lloyd sighed, fingering his forelock, "you've got me! But having found the method I don't doubt we'll find the rest—"

He broke off and picked up the phone as it rang sharply. He listened, then tossed it to Branson.

"What!" Branson yelped, after he'd listened for a moment or two; then with a startled, "Okay, I'll be right over!" he flung the instrument down and turned a dazed face.

"Pterodactyls—over New York!" he gulped. "Over *my* precinct!"

Lloyd stared blankly for an instant, genuinely astounded for once in his life. Then his little chin set firmly. He wheeled round and tore off his smock,

bundled into his coat.

"Come on—let's go!" he shouted to the half stunned Inspector; and with that he recovered and raced after Lloyd's hurrying form. Outside they each went to their own cars. Then with siren blaring noisily Branson led the way through the city streets into the precinct where he held sway—but on the outermost edges of it he began to slow down as he became aware again of that hum that was felt rather than heard.

LLOYD'S roadster drew alongside. Both he and Branson looked about them. People on the sidewalk were staring up into the morning sky, astounded—some of them frightened. Certainly there was a flock of birds circling up there—monstrous batlike objects flying in and out of the lofty buildings.

"Same stunt—more power," Lloyd summed up tensely. "That hum has got us, man. Force yourself against it—"

"But how? Unless I stop my ears—"

"No dam' good! It's inaudible sound. That's what is so smart about it. Got the people too from the look of 'em. Use your will power, man—what there is of it!"

"Yeah—I get it!" But Branson had an obvious struggle with himself to drive onwards. So for that matter had Lloyd himself though he'd never have admitted it.

Somehow they managed to keep going and by the time they'd gained the precinct headquarters the flying monsters had gone from the sky. People were moving again, talking excitedly to one another.

Confused, bewildered, Branson floundered after Lloyd into the private office.

"Get busy," Lloyd ordered curtly. "Have all traffic from this section of the city barred on its way out of the city. There's a chance the culprit we want will try and get out of New York —and we're going to stop him. Go on."

"But what's the use of—?"

"Get on that phone!" Lloyd yelled, slamming his umbrella on the desk emphatically. "Time's precious, you dope!"

Branson obeyed; then looked at Lloyd puzzledly. His little face was puckered.

"We can consider the facts," he mused, pushing up his Derby. "A—whoever's back of this knows you are on the job and knows your precinct, therefore the act was staged in your area. Maybe as an effort to convince you that the monsters are *real* by providing so many other witnesses of them. B—our unknown friend used pterodactyls no doubt so they'd be up in the air and beyond examination; and also to avoid having to leave traces for later study—as in the case of the wood-made footprints. C—a vast increase in the power of the mass-hypnotism is evidenced, for to get so many people under the influence for even a short time points to plenty of juice. And D—that car which followed us last night was obviously heading this way."

"Then," Branson said, "he must have come here for other reasons than to upset me. He no doubt figured he'd disposed of both of us!"

"Unless he came here to be certain of his work. . . ."

LLOYD began to pace up and down, clutching his forelock savagely. "Dammit, there must be a motive behind this monster business, but I can't figure what it is! *At spes non fracta* —but hope is not yet crushed! Right now our job is to find a car with the

particular tire tread of last night. Let's be off."

They hurried outside, Branson to his squad car and Lloyd to his roadster. In three minutes they were threading their way through the busy city traffic, Branson clearing a track with the siren. Presently speed cops moved up in front and assisted him.

Lloyd, a little way behind, sat thinking as he drove swiftly along—thinking so much he had to put the brakes on suddenly several times. Then he looked ahead of him uneasily as the road seemed to shift horribly before his vision. At the same moment an uneasy tickling sensation burned his throat. Blurred of eye, dazed, he could scarcely see where he was going.

He glanced down, alarmed now at the vision of curling vapor coming up through the car floorboards, enveloping him. He gave a strangled cry, fell back helplessly in his seat. Uncontrolled, his car slewed round in a wild half circle, slammed into a taxi, then rebounded and drove its gleaming radiator into a lamp standard. . . .

LLOYD returned to consciousness to find his shirt band open and collar gone while brandy was still searing his throat. He opened his eyes to a doctor's surgery, then beheld the doctor himself and a burly police officer.

"What the—?" He sat up with a jerk, winced at unexpected bruises. "What the devil happened?" he demanded aggressively.

The officer answered, "Guess somebody made an attempt on your life, Dr. Lloyd. You were lucky to get away with it! Some wise guy had fixed a small gas bomb under your brake pedal. When you put the brake on the bomb was crushed and the fumes escaped. The rush of wind stopped them doing serious injury to you, though—"

"And my car?" Lloyd got groggily to his feet, fumbled with the collar the doctor handed him.

"Smashed badly. It's in the Excel Garage—"

"Hic labor, hoc opus est," Lloyd growled in fury, scrambling back into his big overcoat and clutching at his Derby. "This is the labor, this is the toil! Where's Branson, anyway? How long have I been unconscious?"

"About an hour, sir. Inspector Branson is back at his headquarters if you—"

"Quick—drive me to him. It's urgent! Oh—and thanks, doctor. Send the bill in—Brutus Lloyd. All know me."

He whisked outside with the officer to the waiting car and inside a few minutes was back in Branson's precinct headquarters. The Inspector looked relieved when he saw him.

"Lloyd! Thank goodness you're okay. I was afraid—"

"Be damned to that! What are you doing here? I thought I told you to stop all traffic!"

"Sure—but that was over an hour ago. I couldn't hold things up indefinitely until you recovered so I—"

Lloyd slammed his gamp down savagely on the desk. "Did you find what we were looking for? That tire tread?"

"Well, searching the tires of some hundreds of cars isn't easy." Branson scratched his bullet head. "But I found one that might have been it: you had the pattern card so I couldn't be sure. It was a gray truck, inclosed, streamlined. Nothing we could pin on the driver, though. Clean license and so on— But I took a print of his tires for confirmation."

"Hm! What did he look like?"

"Middle aged apparently, mustached, cap, scarf—"

"And what happened to the truck?"

"We let it go with the rest of the traffic—but I had tabs kept on it. It was followed but did nothing suspicious. Went round some of the streets then retraced into New York and stopped finally outside the *Evening Clarion* offices."

"Then?" Lloyd insisted.

"What is this?" Branson asked irritably. "We couldn't keep on tagging it when it was harmlessly occupied. We let it go— But I took the license number."

BRANSON stopped at Lloyd's cold glare, then tossed down the tire tread impression card on the desk, together with the license number. Lloyd compared the former with his own card, took off his hat, then tore savagely at his J-forelock.

"And you let the car go!" he groaned. *"Hiatus valde deflendus!* A deficiency greatly to be deplored! Fool! Imbecile! It's the very truck we want! Don't you understand, man? He must have had portable ultrasonic equipment in that truck and produced those pterodactyls—and the monster we saw on the country road last night—by that method!"

"But the driver was a stranger!" Branson shouted hotly.

"Naturally," Lloyd sneered. "The guy we want was probably *inside* that truck—but that wouldn't occur to your clogged brain."

Branson looked uncomfortable. Lloyd drummed his fingers on the desk irritably for a time.

"The motive?" he reiterated. "Just what can be the sense of throwing a fright into people this way? It doesn't even— Did you say the *Evening Clarion?"* he broke off sharply. "Which department?"

"Classified advertisements."

"Hm . . ." Lloyd cooled off a little. "Maybe we'll find something when the paper comes out. In the meantime we have work to do. I have got to find the tallying fingerprints to those on the oriental knife; and since it was not the Indian we've to check on Phalnack himself. Guess we'll grab some lunch, then motor over to Trenchley and wait for nightfall. Soon be dark this time of year."

CHAPTER IV

Trail's End

LLOYD was right. The short fall day had closed into frosty night when they parked the squad car outside the village near Phalnack's isolated home. Silently they moved toward it in the gloom.

"I suppose you know you're figuring on burglary—anyway house-breaking?" Branson asked grimly. "Can't investigate without a warrant."

"But *I* can," Lloyd retorted. "And I'm going to! None can balk the will of Brutus Lloyd. You can arrest me afterwards for trespass if you like. Here we go. . . ."

They had come to the rear of the somber residence. With his penknife he opened a window and they slid silently into a gloomy, deserted library. The whole place was deathly quiet, apparently deserted.

They made their way out to the hall, then knowing the set-up from the previous night's visit headed towards the room where the seance had been held. Lloyd moved slowly across to the table from where the demonstration had been controlled by Phalnack. He pulled out a torch, dimmed the light with his fingers, and gave a low chuckle.

"Here we are, Branson! A small ultrasonic instrument. What a brain I've got! Amazing isn't it?"

"Incredible," Branson agreed, sourly.

Lloyd pulled some powder from his pocket and sprinkled it on the smooth arms of the chair. Instantly fingerprints came into view—

Then something else happened. A silk-clad arm came out of the shadows and closed under Lloyd's chin and round his neck. He gave a yelp and struggled violently, but the arm increased with steely tension, forcing him backwards— So he relaxed abruptly, then jerked forward, flinging up his hand. With a violent ju-jitsu movement he dislodged the hold and lashed out with his tiny fist. It made little effect—

BUT Branson was on the job now, lunging out with hamlike paws. Gasps and grunts came from the gloom, then as a knife flashed wickedly Branson yanked out his revolver.

"Drop it!" he barked. "Drop it, or I'll let you have it!"

The knife fell to the carpet. Panting Latin curses Lloyd stumbled to the wall and found the light switch. The glare revealed the sullen face of Ranji, his dark eyes flashing.

"I guessed as much," Branson growled. "What the hell did you think you were doing?"

"You have no right here!" the Indian shouted passionately. "They who seek to kill my honorable master must die! You have tried for too long to discredit him! He is a master-medium, en rapport with the unknown—"

"Yeah?" Branson eyed him suspiciously; then he looked up quickly as Dr. Phalnack himself came in, dressed in a lounge suit over which was a silk dressing gown. The napkin in his hand suggested he'd come from the dining room. He stared round him amazedly.

"Why, gentlemen, what is the meaning of this?"

Branson tried to think of a good lawful reason, but there was none. Lloyd simply went on comparing the chair fingerprints with those on the oriental knife he brought from his pocket. At last he straightened up and handed it over.

"This yours, doctor?" he asked quietly.

"Why—yes!" He took it, clearly surprised. "I lost it some time ago from this very room; from this table in fact. Where in the world did you discover it?"

"You should ask!" Branson said bitterly. "Somebody tried to kill Lloyd with it yesterday evening—"

"Silence!" Lloyd commanded; then he went on, "You'll have to forgive this impromptu entry into your home, doctor. Or if you prefer you can have me arrested. Branson here represents the law—I think. You see, I'd something to verify. These fingerprints on the chair are yours of course?"

"Certainly. Nobody else ever uses that chair."

"Uh-huh." Lloyd looked at the Indian, and the look was returned with slumbrous, vengeful eyes.

"I'm sure there is some mistake here," Phalnack said. "Ranji naturally is concerned for my safety but he wouldn't try to kill you!"

"You are wrong!" Ranji said hotly. "These accursed fools are trying to discredit you, doctor! I tried only this morning to be rid of this bumptious little Dr. Lloyd. I saw his car in town outside police headquarters when I went into the city to make your purchases, doctor. It saved me going to his home to settle accounts with him. I hoped I'd kill him—"

"With a gas bomb?" Lloyd asked sharply.

"Why not? I was going to throw it into your home; instead I found a

better way. But you still live."

"Shall I make out a warrant for—"

BRANSON stopped as Lloyd raised his hand. "No. Maybe Ranji was under the impression I was out to do Dr. Phalnack here an injury; his fanatical loyalty is rather touching—and illuminating in other ways."

"I never realized—" Phalnack started to say; but Lloyd cut him short with a question.

"Naturally you have heard of Dr. Cortell's interesting experiments in ultrasonics?"

"So you have tumbled to my psychic demonstrations?" Phalnack gave a slow, uneasy smile. "Yes I've heard of him—and elaborated his ideas. I rather feared a scientist like you would grasp the idea. But I am psychic too—to a degree."

Lloyd expanded at the flattery. "Tell me, why do you practice your—er—phony art in a lonely spot like this? Why not a city?"

"Later perhaps. To begin with I prefer to test the stunt on unsophisticated people. Ranji, of course, provides 'noises off.'"

Lloyd shrugged. "Well, what you choose to do with phony spiritualism is no direct concern of mine: the law will handle that. I'm looking for monsters—and I've got all I need here. If you think of pressing the trespass charge remember what this Indian of yours did to me. I'll lodge counter-charges. Good night!"

OUT in the dark roadway again heading to their car Branson gave a grunt of impatience. "You crazy, Lloyd? If that Indian tried to have you gassed he sure threw that knife also!"

"Humph!" was Lloyd's illuminating answer.

"Anyway," Branson said aggrievedly, "Phalnack must be crazy to admit his ultrasonics that easily."

"Either that or else he believes like many criminals that the best defense is admission of apparent guilt. As to the knife, it is his and he admits it. But the fingerprints were *not* his on the knife; nor were they Ranji's."

"Gloves!" Branson grunted.

"But the fingerprints belong to somebody, you dope . . ." Then Lloyd relapsed into silence, thinking, clambered back into the car at Branson's side. He turned the car round.

"Where to?"

"Home. I want an *Evening Clarion.*"

Once back in New York Lloyd got the first copy he came across and hurried with it into headquarters beside Branson. Together they went through the classified advertisements carefully, page after page of them. An hour passed; an hour and a half— Then Lloyd gave a yelp.

"*Flammo fumo est proxima!* Where there's smoke there's fire! A possible motive at last, Branson! Listen to this— 'Monsters! Why not insure yourself against possible attack? Small premiums. Absolute cover guaranteed. Write Box 42/2.'"

Branson scowled. "But what the heck? Who'd want to insure themselves against monsters on the strength of that stunt this morning?"

"Probably dozens of people! Think of the weird things which *are* insured! It's possible after this morning that hundreds of New Yorkers—more nervous ones anyway—may answer this ad., and be willing to pay for supposed safety. That's human nature—and damned clever psychology on the advertiser's part. Later it could build up into quite a racket, especially if monsters—or other terrifying things—reappear! Money for ultrasonics!"

"Lord!" Branson gasped. "You mean somebody — probably Phalnack — is having the face to create monsters just so he can insure against them? Make money out of premiums, knowing he will never have to pay out anyway?"

"Exactly—a streamlined version of an old insurance racket. Supply a demand: then make the supply. This is where we go to town. Ah, masterful mind that I have! *Ecce homo,* Branson—behold the man! But come—to the *Evening Clarion* offices."

They were soon there and Branson's official capacity opened Sesame to many things. In a few minutes they had the address of the advertiser—a remote spot in the country, but significantly it wasn't very far outside Trenchley.

"Whoever is the advertiser is our man," Lloyd said exultantly, as they came out on the sidewalk again.

"Phalnack for sure," Branson growled. "This spot is only about a mile from his place. Let's see—Hawthorn Filling Station, Trenchley Main Road. Damned funny spot to have an insurance office!"

"Not if it's worked on the mail order system. Nobody will question the address much as long as they get insurance. An insurance actuary doesn't always have a high class office."

BRANSON nodded thoughtfully, then got into the car. For the second time that evening they headed out of New York—and the place they sought demanded a good deal of wandering, of searching by headlamps; then at last they located it. It was a rather decrepit filling station well off the main highway to Trenchley and apparently deserted. Certainly no lights were on. How anybody could hope to keep the business flourishing in such a dead-alive hole was problematical.

"Stop here," Lloyd ordered finally; and with all the car lights switched off they halted a hundred yards from the garage. Then together they moved towards it. From one window they caught a glimpse of light through an imperfectly drawn shade.

"Here we go!" Lloyd murmured, and suddenly raising his bass voice he bawled, "Hey there, any gas? Give us some service!"

Instead of a response there were the sounds of shuffling from inside the building and the light snapped out.

"Go for 'em!" Lloyd snapped; and brought his umbrella down on the window with shattering force. Branson was just as quick, thrusting his revolver and torch through the smashed pane, tearing the shade down the center.

"Hold it!" he ordered, as two figures twirled in the torch beam; then as they slowly raised their hands he began to clamber through—

But the shade got in his way and finally fell on top of him. The two still unidentified men took instant advantage, dodged into the dark, and were gone. Cursing furiously Branson stumbled into the little badly furnished office with Lloyd behind him. They had hardly got themselves disentangled before the sound of a car's engine starting up assailed them.

"They're getting away!" Branson yelled. "Come on—after 'em—"

Lloyd swung round and bumped into the table. He stopped, seized Branson's torch.

"The evidence!" he ejaculated, and indicated a portable ultrasonic equipment on the table, not unlike the one he had himself devised. "Probably a small scale model of the one they've got in that truck of theirs . . . Okay, let's go. We've got Exhibit A anyway."

He whisked it up and they pelted outside to their own car. Lloyd sat

with the portable instrument on his knees as the car whisked out of the dark down the solitary road. For safety's sake the fleeing truck had to use its headlights, identifying itself instantly. Branson jammed down the accelerator and tore out onto the main road like a rocket, continued on whistling tires through the dark. His headlights began to show the truck up. It was dove-gray all right, inclosed, streamlined—

"That's it!" Branson snapped. "Same license number!"

THEN things began to happen. The road in front of them started to blur, seemed to shift in two directions. There were two gray trucks now and four sets of headlights! A thin hum was in the air—Branson shook his head confusedly, pinched his eyes momentarily.

"They're using that ultrasonic stuff to ditch us," Lloyd said quickly. "But maybe we've a trick left ourselves—!" He began fumbling with the apparatus on his knees, found a power lead and clamped it into the socket usually used for the car radio. Power of sorts surged into the instrument for it glowed. Scowling at it, directing the lens ahead, Lloyd concentrated.

In a moment or two he got results —surprising ones, for the truck went careening off the main road into a field, bounced, turned right over and finished on its side. Instantly they hopped from their own car and chased after it.

"What did you do?" Branson panted, as they ran.

"Same as he did to us! Concentrated on two roads. They didn't know I *had* apparatus to do the trick and took it as the real thing!"

They'd arrived at the truck now. A figure was crawling from the driving seat; yet another was making frantic efforts to get out of the back doors. Branson went to the front; Lloyd to the back. He paused as he was about to grasp the metal handle on the door and instead yanked a card and powder from his pocket. He gave a grim smile at what he found, then pulled the door open.

It was Ted Hutton who came staggering out, disheveled, a bruise on his head where he'd the instruments in the truck.

"Say!" Branson exclaimed, appearing with the other man, "this guy is Murgatroyd, the traveling salesman— He was disguised with a phony mustache and cap pulled down— Hutton!" he ejaculated, staring at him.

"Hutton," Lloyd acknowledged grimly. "And the fingerprints tally with those on the knife. Okay, Branson— the bracelets."

"TO SUM up," Lloyd said, towards midnight when he and Branson were at precinct headquarters after taking Hutton's full confession of an effort to launch a super-insurance racket; "A —I suspected Hutton when I suspected ultrasonics, because being an electrician he would probably know about them. B—his story of being present in the village for Government reasons—in a village with only gaslight—sounded phony. C—he cut his wife short when she said she had bad static on her radio on the night of the monsters. But I was quick enough to see static was impossible in a village devoid of electricity; therefore, the monsters were probably electrical in basic origin. D—his wife made a remark that she'd heard of Phalnack in a newspaper. Hutton knew that too; and as he has since confessed, moved in to Trenchley because he had heard Phalnack was an expert in ultrasonics. He figured, knowing his wife's weakness for spiritualism, that he might get ideas from Phalnack.

Which he did. . . .

"Then," Lloyd proceeded; "we come to Point E. Hutton decided on 'monsters' because their unusual and terrifying nature would be best calculated to scare people into insurance. F—his colleague owned the truck in which he put the equipment; and I suspected Murgatroyd because he lived outside the village. G—Hutton did his best to blacken Phalnack as much as possible, hence his early theft of the oriental knife owned by Phalnack—but in his urgency to throw it he did nothing to save *his* fingerprints getting onto the hilt as well as Phalnack's numerous ones from normal handling of the knife. Phalnack's were blurred and numerous: Hutton's new and distinct. Obviously he'd had plenty of chances to steal that knife at earlier seances. H—the appearance of the monsters in the village was, as Hutton has admitted, his first test. To his consternation it brought me on the job, and he tried to get rid of me by various clumsy expedients. He resorted to the knife, the turban disguise, a make-believe evil spirit in the wood, and running us off the road. Accidentally, his 'turban' caught the tree."

Lloyd sighed, gave a shrug. "Altogether, Branson, an ambitious young scientific adventurer who took the wrong turning . . . A last word: Phalnack probably *is* somewhat psychic, even, as he said. The evil presence at the seance was doubtless Hutton. . . ."

"By and large," Branson commented, "we cleaned everything up in fine style, eh?"

Lloyd's eyelids drooped. "*Veni, vedi, vici,*" he growled. "I came, I saw, I conquered— Now get the hell out of here and let me get on with my diatomic culture research!"

KNOW YOUR VITAMINS

by EDGAR RUTLEY

DURING the last few years every newspaper and magazine has featured articles on the necessity of vitamins in our daily diet. How many of us can name these vitamins?

For example, if your doctor told you to eat plenty of carrots, squash and yellow vegetables for failing eyesight, would you know what vitamin you were deficient in? If the thin lady next door tells you that she needs plenty of Vitamin B to build her up, could you tell her what to eat?

Vitamin A fights off disease started by the harmful bacteria infections. Without a regular supply of Vitamin A, loss of vitality results; and infections in the eyes, sinuses, glands of the mouth, ears, and sometimes the kidneys and bladder are promoted. Foods having a green or yellow color are rich in this vitamin.

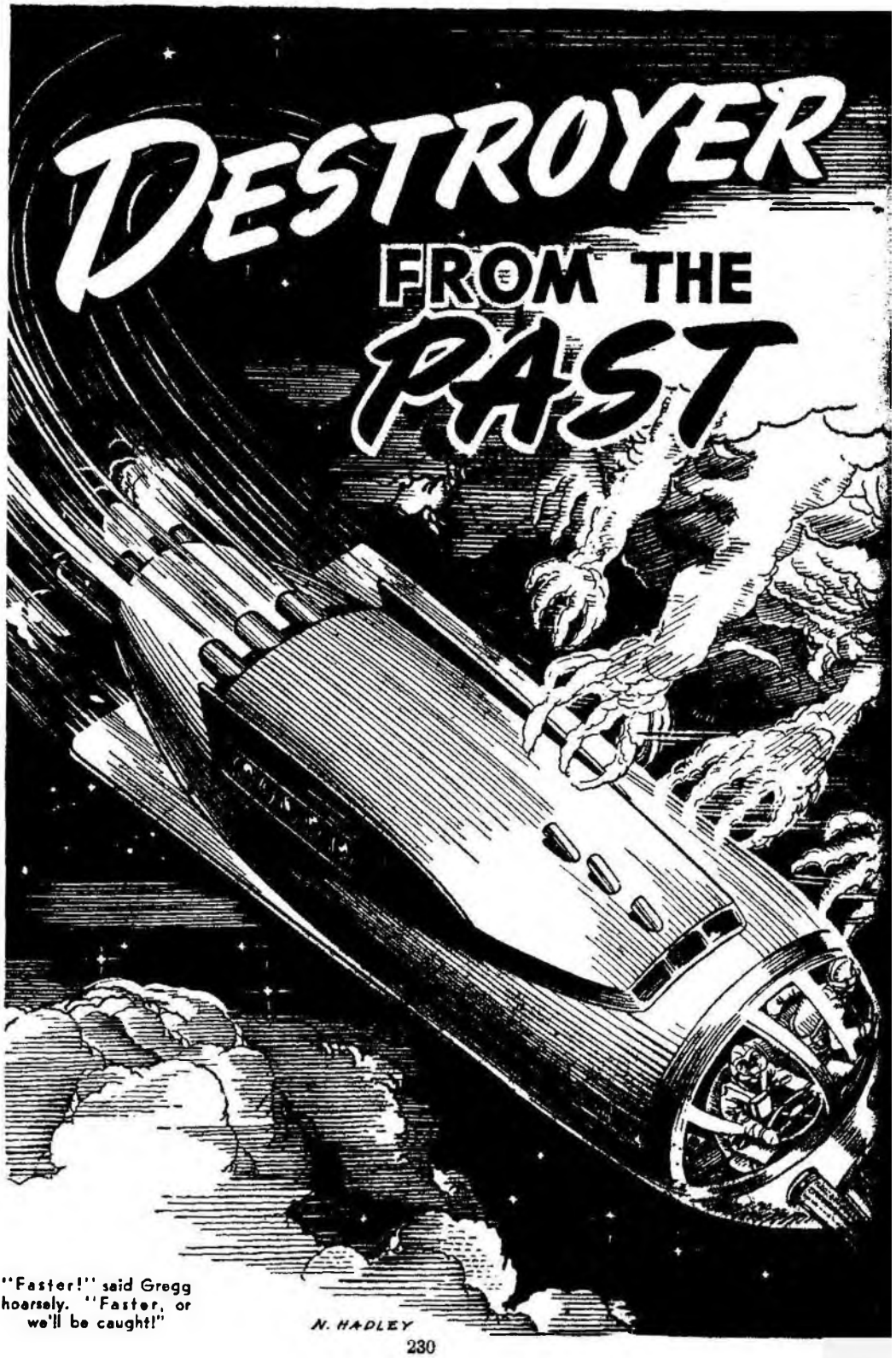
Lack of appetite is usually due to lack of Vitamin B. Muscular paralysis is caused by absolutely no Vitamin B in the diet at all. Cooking of vegetables destroys this vitamin. Animal products, milk, citrus, nuts, and green vegetables contain Vitamin B.

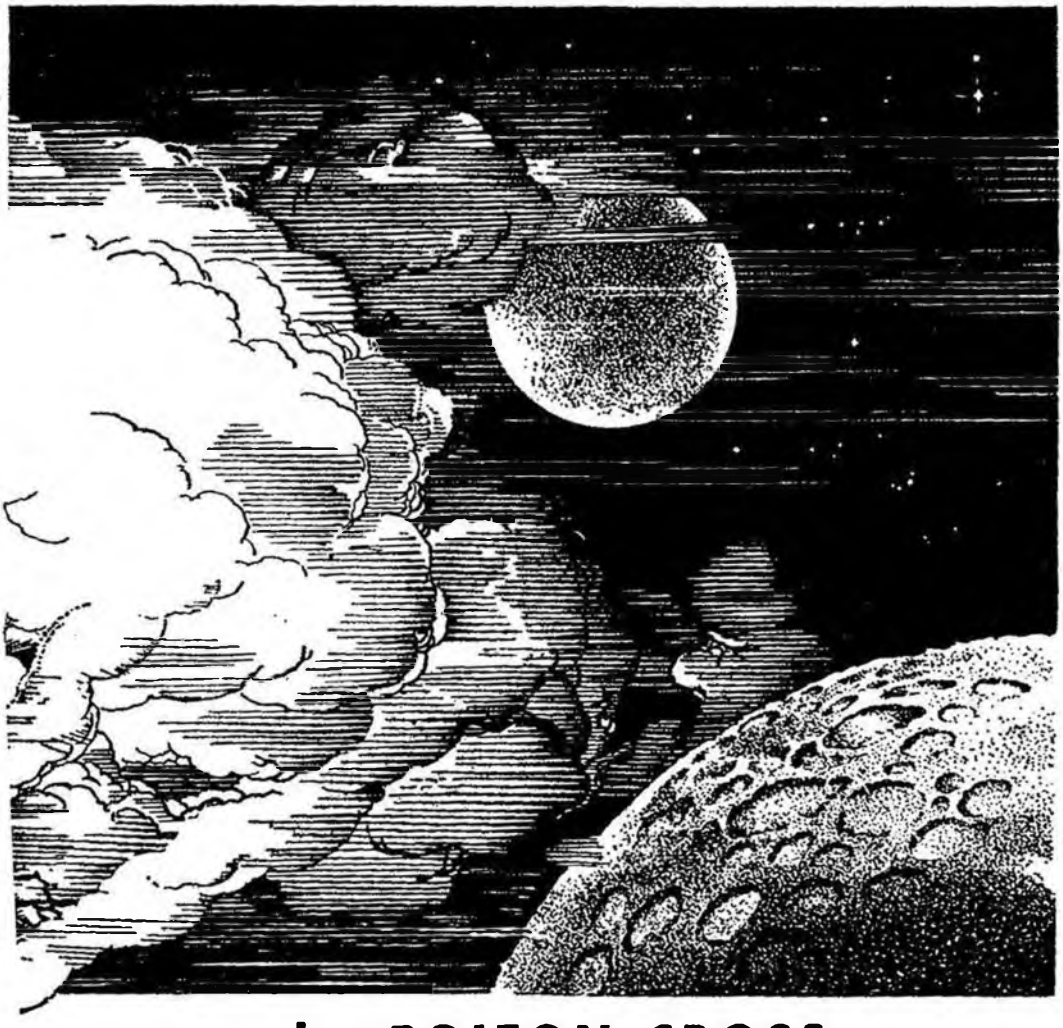
Both adults and children need a daily supply of Vitamin C to prevent bleeding gums, loose teeth, sore joints, loss of appetite together with loss of weight. A fatigued condition resulting in scurvy is the ultimate outcome of lack of Vitamin C. Cooked foods cannot be depended upon for Vitamin C, hence the need for raw fruits and vegetables.

It is common knowledge that calcium and phosphorus are required in the building of teeth and bones, but unless Vitamin D is also present in the diet, these tissues will not develop normally. Ergosterol, a chemical substance, is changed into Vitamin D by ultraviolet light. Human skin contains a small amount of ergosterol. Sunshine is also a good source of Vitamin D. Cod Liver Oil is another. Egg yolk, milk, butter, salmon, oysters, are all rich in this vitamin.

Reproduction is dependent upon a sufficient supply of Vitamin E in the diet. Vegetable oils, wheat, green lettuce and other green vegetables contain great amounts of Vitamin E.

Premature old age can be avoided by plenty of Vitamin G. Digestive disturbances, sore mouth, inflammation of the skin are also caused by lack of this vitamin. Animal products, mustard, turnip tops, watercress, spinach, bananas and yeast are rich in Vitamin G.


DESTROYER
FROM THE
PAST
"Faster!" said Gregg hoarsely. "Faster, or we'll be caught!"
N. HADLEY



by POLTON CROSS

Something was desperately wrong out in the void, and Gregg had to track it down

MURRAY GREGG, veteran chief of the Earth-Mars Space Route, stood at the window overlooking the sprawling towers ringing the departure grounds. He was worried: every line of his strong cast face showed it. There was even a despondent droop to his usually erect shoulders.

He was alone in this great operations office, surrounded by the numberless instruments that kept him in touch with space ports the world over. And being alone meant that he was dictator of all space travel and its necessary safety. . . . That was why he was worried. Something was desperately wrong.

He turned almost in relief as the door opened and two men were shown in. Then his face fell as he gazed at them. They were so shabby, so apparently inefficient. The one huge, fat, round-

faced and genial. . . . The other much shorter, keen eyed, with a comical seriousness about his face. Their clothes, such as they were, were ill-fitting. Rather than looking like men prepared to face death, they resembled comedians. To Murray Gregg the famous Laurel and Hardy of the Twentieth Century were mere memories, otherwise he might have been tempted to remark the similarity.

"You—you are the firm of Long and —er—Shortt?" he asked gravely.

The big one smiled reassuringly. "Don't let that worry you, my dear sir. The names are assumed, of course, befitting our physical characteristics and also, might I say, covering up the names of two—hm!—unwanted members of the human race. Ex-hoboes, sir! But not afraid of danger, or of death. Where special agents fail, Long and Shortt succeed."

"I see." Gregg's voice was dry. He felt he had made a damn fool of himself. But he went on colorlessly, "If you can make anything of the case I'm handing to you you'll indeed show special agents something, since they can't overcome the trouble."

"Speak, sir—we are all ears," Long invited, beaming, and his little partner nodded though he looked half asleep.

Gregg motioned to the reports on his desk.

"Four space liners recently have returned to Earth on their robot controls with all the passengers and crews dead! That means something like four thousand people wiped out by something in the void between here and Mars on the usual space route. I have had to cancel all space travel by that route until the mystery is solved. Special agents of the company have investigated—and never returned. Or if they have they have come back dead! Possibly you have heard of this, however?"

"Nothing," said Long calmly, "escapes us. And realizing the matter was beyond special agents you called us in?"

"I noted in the professions index that you were spacemen able to tackle any danger, great or small. So I—" Gregg hesitated, looked at the two again unhappily. "So I sent for you. Maybe I made a mistake . . . ?"

"Our firm," said Long with dignity, "will undertake anything from disinfecting a ship full of cultures to transporting a planet. We always deliver the goods—At a price!" he cooed. "For this, with such at stake, our terms are—"

"One million dollars," said the little one, eyelids drooping.

"My partner is, for once, right," Long agreed.

Gregg shrugged. "You will receive that sum when—and if—you completely destroy this menace, otherwise only a small expense fee for your initial tests. I think," he added grimly, "that is all. Make of it what you can."

He waited, an eyebrow raised, as both men doffed their worn civilian hats and went out together side by side. He shook his head sadly.

"I have a suspicion that route is sealed forever," he muttered. "At least until first class scientists solve the problem. *These* two mountebanks—" He gave up with a grunt of despair.

BUT NEITHER Long nor Shortt were mountebanks. As Long had intimated they were ex-hoboes and the owners of a battered space machine filled with all imaginable scientific gadgets, some their own idea, others politely "frisked" in years of wandering the various worlds of the System before they had teamed up to make money in the way they loved best—space roaming. Their down-at-heel appearance was part of their stock-in-trade—it

made people talk about them—but there were brains aplenty under those oddly diverse exteriors.

"Have you any ideas, Mr. Long?" Shortt asked off-handedly, as they trudged together to the public space park where their bus was grounded.

"None, alas," Long sighed, his fat wabbling with exertion. "Unless it be the old trouble of a full-spot of cosmic rays. As we know, a nest of cosmic rays, blocked by some transverse radiation, can produce instant death to the tenants of any ship running into it."

"That," Shortt averred, "doesn't match up with the newscast reports. The people were found sitting or standing exactly as death had reached them. And they had no cosmic ray burns. Just as though they had gone to sleep and had all the life jerked out of them. . . . Definitely, Mr. Long, we are going to earn our million dollars."

"At least we shall collect it," Long answered ambiguously.

Fifteen minutes later they reached their space machine—a twenty year old model with "Jollopy" inscribed shamelessly—and with no pretensions to art—on the prow. Inside it was a sight to make a trained pilot wince; but not so either of the partners. Long waved his hand airily to the airlock, left his colleague to shut it—then he wormed his ponderous mass in and out of the jam of instruments to the switchboard, sat down, put in the power.

The vessel climbed swiftly heavenwards in a flare of rocket exhausts, violent exhausts indeed. Long sniffed once or twice then said sagely, "Rice pudding. That smell means the off tube is hot, Mr. Shortt. No matter: at a later date we will 'borrow' one some place."

"Agreed," Shortt nodded; then he turned to the charts on the curved wall, studied them. Finally he commented, "This unknown destroyer might be anywhere in the lane. I think the reacter might tell us something."

HE SET a delicate oscillating instrument in commission, studied it with his sleepy eyes, scratched his head once or twice, then studied it again. Designed to pick up energy emanations, the instrument would immediately reveal the presence of anything in space which was not normally there from charting. . . . And it did.

Shortt whistled. "Hey—take a look at this!"

Long put in the robot control and lumbered over, breathed hard as he stooped to survey the pointer-needle. It was hovering around an unheard-of energy vibration, far above that usually relegated to planets, or even asteroids.

"Amazing!" Long declared, then as he studied it carefully he went on, "Do you realize, Mr. Shortt, that this wavelength does not belong to inorganic matter at all? It has the wavelength one gets from *organic* matter—protoplasm, amoeba, and so forth. But what can there be of a protoplasmic nature in *space?* For that means . . . life!"

"If we drive on," Shortt said with rare wisdom, "we might find out."

Somewhat huffily the big fellow returned to the controls and hurtled the ship onwards steadily. Quickly his eyes searched the void, but he could not see any trace of the thing recording itself so infallibly on the detector. . . . Space looked normal enough.

Away to the left was Venus, the planet which had been deemed unsuitable for space travelers. To the right was red Mars, partly colonized, cities rearing up by engineering miracles under domes of air filled glass. The Moon— That didn't count anyway. But this *unknown* was totally absent. Maybe it was space-black and absorbed all light-waves. . . . Hell, lots of things!

Still Long held onto the controls with podgy hands, sweeping along the deserted spaceway usually crammed with traffic, commercial and passenger, plying between Mars and Earth. And it was likely to stay deserted unless he and Shortt found out what was so haywire.

After some two hours of breakneck progress he frowned and rubbed his forehead, pushed up his hat. There was a pain in his brow, an unexpected one, as though his nerves had started to play hell with him. Queer! He had imagined his nerve was cast iron.

Then Shortt suddenly gave a yelp of anguish. He turned a face that was almost comical in its sudden drawn look.

"Something—is wrong with me, Mr. Long!" he gulped. "I could swear my heart skipped a beat—or something—" He doubled up abruptly in a paroxysm, then when he straightened up again his cheeks were ash-white.

"Something is attacking us!" he panted, and crawling to a chair he flopped into it and hugged himself.

BY THIS time the massive Long was little better, but being bigger he held on longer. He mopped his round, sweating face and stared out bewilderedly onto the void. Still nothing—But no! There *was* something, gray, impalpable—away to the left, perhaps five hundred miles from the regular space lane but so low in albedo it was hardly noticeable. Indeed it had probably escaped attention from space pilots as a mass of cosmic dust or something. But it was there all right, giving off a queer pulsating glow.

Long twisted excitedly. "There! Take a look!"

Anguished, Shortt nodded weakly. "I am in no position to argue, Mr. Long. I'm dying! Let's get outa this—"

Long hesitated, then as he felt terrible pains burning into his ample chest he swung the vessel around in a blaze of sparks and drove away as hard as the ancient tubes would take him. And the greater the distance the less his pain, and Shortt's. At last they were normal again, with the ship coasting gently.

"What in cosmos was it?" Shortt panted, color flowing back in his thin face. "It felt like a pair of forceps trying to pluck out my heart and nerves."

"Accurately put, Mr. Shortt," Long beamed. "And remember that we only skirted it. Small wonder those on board the regular ships were killed. . . . Definitely we have a job to do."

"I'm wondering if it's worth a million bucks."

"You forget our reputation, Mr. Shortt. We know that the asteroid or whatever it is is lethal. Very well, we will approach it again in protective suits. . . ."

Shortt nodded and moved over to the store cupboard, dragged out two suits that looked rather like old fashioned armor. The difference lay in the metal of which they were composed, coated on the inside with a furry asbestoslike substance which negatived everything known in the way of radiation. Probably some harassed engineer was wondering right now where these two suits had gone. . . .

The two clambered into them, fastened up each others' square helmets; then looking like a big and little robot they prepared for the return trip. Shortt kept on the lookout, and Long once more took the controls.

Again they moved toward that gray smudge, watched it loom ever larger. But this time they felt none of the sufferings of the earlier visit. They could study the unknown at leisure, unpained, as they flew round it.

Its size was about that of a reason-

ably large asteroid. But from every position it appeared to be covered in the main by a grayish, moldlike substance.

"Looks like a rock gone bad," Shortt commented through his headphone.

"Foul life," Long agreed, then turning to the instrument board he dropped a scoop-trap attached to a wire from the safety sink in the ship's floor. Withdrawing a scoop full of the stuff he tipped it by mechanical means into a glasslighted globe and sealed it quickly.

HE AND Shortt watched the curling, feathery reaction of the stuff against the light in the globe. Certainly it was alive for it writhed incessantly.

"Bacteria?" Shortt suggested.

"It has a similar formation," Long agreed. "But what sort of bacteria is it which can destroy over a distance—and in space? Guess we'd better try again," he decided, and once more the scoop dropped, this time bringing up samples of the basic rock itself under the sea of molds.

Carefully he stirred the gritty substance with a glass rod.

"Dirt," Shortt sniffed. "Nothing more. Bits of ice, that's all. All asteroids look alike anyway."

"They look alike, but they are *not* alike," Long corrected in a grave voice. "Asteroids, Mr. Shortt, are messengers, telling us exactly where they've come from. From their makeup one can tell what part of the system they hail from: if not that, then the planet from which they have broken away . . ."

He got busy with the analyzing equipment, a device which sorted out the atomic weights and components of the stuff he'd obtained. Hardly any personal work at all was called for, for automatic and infallible results were given. The pointer finally swung to the substance in closest parallel to it in composition.

"Venus!" Shortt ejaculated, his jaw lolling behind the face glass. "This meteor came from Venus! *That* can't be right!"

"Instruments do not lie, Mr. Shortt." Long looked back at the asteroid, puzzling for a while. "I recall no reports of anything being torn from Venus recently. . . . Ah, but why recently!" he cried, after an interval. "Venus probably once had a moon!"

"Probably . . . So what?"

"Nobody knows what happened to it," Long elaborated. "If it followed normal laws it just broke up: why, we do not know. The chances are that this chunk of moldy stuff is part of the one time Venusian moon, which has drifted into our system—or at least to this point of the system—by cosmic currents. How the life got onto it we do not know."

"Where does it get us? Shortt asked. "We can't do much about a moon which vanished so long ago nobody has ever recorded it."

Long did not answer: he was busy with the instruments again, checking the drift of the asteroid carefully, working out details on a "borrowed" adding machine. When he turned his big round face was worried behind the glass.

"It is drifting," he said slowly. "And it is slowly moving into the Earth's field. Within a very short time it will drop to Earth itself, and when it does, with those molds on it, God knows what will happen!"

"What do we do?" Shortt asked. "Incinerate it?"

"We might—but if it is created by special action, incinerators will only destroy it temporarily, then it'll re-form. However, we can but try—"

LONG switched one of the heat beams into action and trained it on the as-

teroid. Smoky trails blasted through the fluffy, disgusting stuff and left deep scars upon it. But they formed again with miraculous speed.

"No use, Mr. Shortt." Long switched off impatiently, his eyes narrowing as the problem absorbed him. "It attacks over a distance and it is indestructible. Remarkable! And it is moving toward Earth. . . ."

He turned to the radio, contacted the Earth-Mars Space headquarters. The voice of Murray Gregg came through. Briefly Long summed up his progress so far.

"And it is moving toward Earth?" Gregg repeated, his voice obviously horrified. "But surely something can be done? Can you not cleave it in pieces with sufficient gunpower? I will send out a fleet of cruisers if you—"

"Of little avail," Long sighed despondently. "If we broke it into small pieces the molds would still be upon it. Earth would get a rain of moldy meteors in various places instead of one huge lump—and the disease, whatever it is, might wipe out humanity. No; the better way is for you to train repulsive rays upon it the moment you sight it from Earth. Hold it at bay while we determine procedure."

"How long will that take?" Gregg asked uneasily.

"It depends—but it seems Venus might provide the answer. I shall contact you again later."

Long switched off and Shortt looked at him curiously. "Venus? What do you hope to find there?"

"Does it not strike you as possible that the Venusians might have gotten rid of their moon on purpose because it was deadly to them? If it was anything like ours is, it was airless and dead: maybe it developed molds which were dangerous to Venusian life. So they blasted the moon out of the way—and bits of it swirled back to prove dangerous—like this asteroid. . . . If the Venusians did that they may know by this time what it is and how to deal with it. So far Venus has not been properly examined. Now seems as good a time as any to get started. Only a theory—but worth following."

Shortt nodded, none too happily. Long lumbered back to the controls, gradually pulled the ship away from the asteroid. Only then did they remove their stuffy suits. The small sample of mold by itself was powerless to do damage. None the less Long took the precaution of putting it in an open-topped culture jar. Later, Earthly chemists might be highly interested in it. . . .

CHAPTER II

Mystery on Venus

WORKING in shifts the two hurtled the vessel across the sixty million mile void to the glowing planet which lay dead ahead of them. Each in turn they watched it thoughtfully, wondering—as had many explorers before them*—just what sort of a history it really had.

The planet grew larger: the general mass of dense cloud was more distinct, blinding silver in the sunshine. Together now, both men watched the packed layers sweep up to meet them—Then they were in them, blanketed in dense mist, the total unknown on every side. Their speed was swift, so swift indeed they had left the daylit side of the planet before they realized it, were nosing blindly through murk, feeling

* Grant, Munroe, Talbot—they had all had a look at it and pronounced it an ephemeral world—flowering gigantic verdure during the 720-hour day; and a mass of ice during the equally long night. A world that ran its seasons into a day's time. But of life, unless the explorers had landed in inopportune spots, there had apparently never been a sign.—Ed.

their way.

Eyes on the instruments, podgy jowls tight, Long began to feel his way down. He realized instant destruction faced the pair of them if he cannoned into a mountain side or a glacier. Fortunately, the instruments revealed no such obstacles. . . .

Lower—lower— Then with a bump that stopped the machine with a sudden crushing shock they landed. All was still—deathly still.

"Hm—not so bright," Shortt murmured, peering into the abysmal dark. "Like a subway with the lights out."

But Long was studying the instruments. "Air pressure a trifle denser than Earth's, but the mixture is the same. Nor is it so very cold down here on the surface—about twelve below zero. The frozen parts must be up at the atmosphere limit. Naturally the dense cloud will keep in the day warmth and make for slow dissipation—"

"I see something!" Shortt ejaculated suddenly, startled. "It looks like—a pair of headlamps!"

Long hurried over and stared outside. Not a thing was visible. The moonless, clouded night of Venus was absolute— He was about to give a derisive snort when he saw there *was* something out there in the dark—two bright little spots! And they were moving! In time there were two more spots —then three more— Finally a dozen pairs of spots were in a semi-circle.

"Cats?" Shortt volunteered.

"Or lights." Long frowned. "Don't think they can be lights, Mr. Shortt, because they do not waver. We can soon find out. . . ."

He depressed the exterior searchlight button and swung the controlling wheel. A blazing beam seared the misty dark outside and for a second or two the bright spots were framed in demoniac outlines. Scrawny little bodies, all head and pipestem neck, went scurrying into dead branches and undergrowth—to reappear again, watching from a distance.

"Venusians," Long muttered. "Eyes like those of an animal, reflecting the lights of our ship's ports. So, Mr. Shortt, Venus has got life after all! Amazing the places some people choose to evolve. . . ." He switched off and surveyed the dark. "We had better get a meal and then wait for the dawn. I do not relish tackling those things in the dark. . . . In the meantime I will fix a compass guide on the ship so we can trace it however far we may roam. . . ."

THEY ate, they smoked, they waited, then at long last pale gray began to filter through the density above. It increased very slowly. . . .

Interested again, the two moved to the window and surveyed once more. The queer beings of the night had gone now and the weary gray was throwing into relief a tangled wilderness of dry, sticklike vegetation, tall, bare trees; brown, iron-hard ground. . . . But beyond all this was something else—smashed and eroded stone columns, crumbled minarets, courtyards eaten to pieces by vines which hung dead at the moment. . . .

Here undoubtedly lay the shattered remains of a once fine city. Now dead, ruined, desolate.

"Something must be wrong with our Earthly science," Long said finally. "We always understood Venus to be young and prehistoric: instead it looks as though civilization has been and gone. . . . Grab some tackle: we're going to look. Though I doubt if we'll find anything relating to that asteroid."

By the time they were both ready it was full daylight—a blinding gray shade caused by the diffusion of piled-up cloudbanks. Outside, they found

the hard ground had now deteriorated into a sea of sloppy mud in which green life frothed and burst. Ankle deep in it in their gumboots they moved along, packs on shoulders, flame-guns at their sides.

Every now and again they stopped, convinced of that uncanny feeling of being watched. Yet they saw nothing. Even so they felt sure a myriad eyes were watching their every move—a feeling lent added possibility by the shelter afforded now from vines and trees all sprouting into speedy life.

Then here and there on the stifling air came a chatter of laughter—the silliest laughter, like imbecile children.

"Uh-uh," Shortt muttered uneasily, raising a sweating face.

"Definitely sinister," Long agreed, fingering his collar—but they went on just the same, but with increasing furtiveness. They were on a planet completely unclassified, and that might mean death at any moment. If not—perhaps a million dollars!

In half an hour they reached the ruins of the city. Only their imaginations could tell them how immeasurably vast it must once have been. It stretched through the fast-growing vegetation for many square miles, parts of it still traced out. It could be pictured as thriving, industrious, devoid of all this vegetation now twining through its bones.

Buildings were without roofs; here and there walls stood in isolation, the tops crumbled. In other places machinery of no conceivable purpose lay rusted, abandoned, most of it out of shape from incessant exposure. Once, no doubt, science had held full sway here, and probably a high order of science at that.

THEN presently, as the exploration was continued, the two caught glimpses of that weird life of the night. Sometimes they saw a Venusian hiding behind an eroded column; or at times a group of them looking over a hill of smashed machinery up which verdure traced its leisurely way.

"Like a bladder on a string," Shortt said, as they glimpsed a Venusian clearly for a moment.

"But their purpose?" Long muttered, his round face troubled. Instinctively he clutched his gun—and it was well he did so for as though with a prearranged signal a whole army of the creatures suddenly burst forth from a dozen hiding places, came speeding across the clearing.

They were queer all right—even hideous. Their bodies were only Earth-like in having trunk, head, arms, and legs. There all similarity ended. The bodies were like footballs with distended bellies. Legs and arms were scrawny, as were necks. The heads were topheavily big and bald, supplied with two enormous eyes which obviously were intended to compensate for the pitchy Venusian night. Extraordinarily enough, each one of them wore an incredible ornament in addition to a rough loin cloth. Sometimes the trinket was a glass radio valve tied round the neck with vine; in other cases it was copper wire, green with age, made like a bracelet. Still others had metallic parts linked together in a waist girdle, and the parts were clearly from a dismantled machine!

So much the two Earthmen had time to notice before they were overwhelmed. Long fired his gun and it blasted one of the beings to ashes—then he was flung over on his back for all his size, wriggled in nausea as he was pawed and gripped by hands as wet and cold as tripe.

There was tremendous strength in the skinny limbs too—almost blind ani-

mal ferocity. . . . For a few minutes both men gave back as good as they got, lamming their fists into cold, slippery flesh, injuring perhaps a half dozen of the little horrors—but finally they won the day from sheer numbers, brought lengths of vine from the jungle and trussed the two securely, laid them flat on their backs.

A war dance began—anyway it looked like that if the peals of idiotic laughter and mad shouts were any guide.

"Mr. Shortt," Long said anxiously, twisting his big face to look at his partner, "I have the feeling we are at a disadvantage. Maybe we were foolish to hope for a million dollars!"

Shortt's only response was a groan of dismay. Then Long looked back at the creatures with a vaguely scientific interest.

"Observe a few details," he said finally. "They're not animals. They have humanlike hands and feet—human appearance. They are not even highly evolved apes. I begin to think they are de-evolved from a more highly organized race."

"What gives you that idea?" Shortt grunted.

"The city. Some memory tie keeps them close to it. They are like jealous guardians. Maybe they thought we intended mischief."

SHORTT didn't reply for the dancing and laughter had ceased. With a determined rush the creatures pushed forward, seized the two in their pipe stem arms—it took ten of them to raise Long—and began to carry them along. A journey into the jungle to places unknown began. . . .

At the end of an hour of this both men were beyond comment. The creatures seemed to be pursuing an interminable journey: but finally it did come to an end as they began to break free from the matured masses of sweltering foliage and entered a clear, rocky space. Here there was an extraordinary object upon which both men had time to gaze at leisure as they were tossed down.

The object was a squat, powerful affair of metal, somewhat weather worn, and looking rather like, an inverted bottle. The neck section was rigidly fixed into a platform, this in turn being raised from the ground level by four short pillars. . . . Beside it, like an immense cylinder, was a machine that defied analysis, particularly as its summit was fitted with an affair like a radio antenna.

Perhaps even more extraordinary was the fact that at this point—perhaps the only one on Venus—the sun was shining! To left and right of the clearing were titanic mountain ranges, but between them the clouds writhed and twisted incessantly, constantly thinning to permit one clear shaft of blazing sun to stream through. Like a pointing finger the ray settled exactly upon the queer machine on its platform. And round the contrivance the Venusians were dancing, their weird ornaments bobbing, their hands linked in each other's.

"At least it is clear what is happening in the clouds up there," Long commented at length. "There must be an eternal wind from the night side over the mountains, bringing a vast temperature change which mingles with the hot side. Result is the clouds up there rupture and sunshine gets through—"

"But why the dance?" Shortt asked anxiously. "And what *is* that object anyway?"

"There, Mr. Shortt, you have me—Hallo, here they come!"

Once again they were both lifted, carried into that area of blazing sunlight. Their senses reeled for a moment at the

impact of that orb, sixty million miles nearer than on Earth. This sunlit area was like a furnace, and the glimpse they had of the sun was that of a liquid blue-white ball that gave them pink spots before their eyes for several minutes afterwards.

Drenched in sweat, agonized by the blaze, they were bounced and bumped along as the Venusians carried them round the platform base in dizzying circles, themselves apparently heedless of the blazing tide pouring down upon them.

Dazed and sick, Long watched the platform going round in apparent circles; then he noticed that underneath the platform was a deep pit, the underside of the platform raised from it by the four short pillars. He was trying to fathom its purpose when to his alarm he was suddenly hurled forward violently, sailed right into the pit and fell headlong.

He dropped some twenty feet into an evil-smelling, revolting dark. Then Shortt fell on top of him, jerking all the breath out of him. . . . They both lay gasping and struggling for a moment, listening to the peals of idiotic laughter from above. . . .

Then slowly, gradually, the laughter began to die away. A dead silence ensued.

CHAPTER III

The Past Revealed

"IF YOU could get your teeth into these vines, Mr. Shortt, I would be indebted."

Shortt stirred at the voice beneath him, at the heaving of his colleague's ponderous body. He shifted, obeyed the request, and some minutes later had got Long's wrists free. From then on it was easy. Finally they stood up, staring at the circular hole through which they'd dropped, and the base of the queer machine.

Shortt gave a sudden sniff. "Hm, it would seem the sanitation is pretty bad around here. Smells rather like a slaughter house."

It did. In fact the stench was appalling. Both of them began to move round to trace the cause of it, wondering if they had been tossed into a rubbish dump. Then Shortt gave a sudden cry.

"Say, there's something here like the end of a dog's nose! Must be a Venusian— Up you come!"

Long heard him wheeze with effort and moved toward him. He found Shortt supporting a Venusian nearly too weak to stand. His huge eyes were visible, catching the light from above.

"I suppose," Shortt reflected, "I ought to wring his neck? But seeing as we're in the soup together, I won't— Hallo, more of them!" he ejaculated, as getting accustomed to the gloom they could see three or four Venusians sprawled on the floor around them, apparently motionless—perhaps dead.

"Possibly they *are* dead," Long reflected. "That would account for the odor."

Shortt nodded, shook the Venusian he held. "Say, onion-puss, is there any way out of here beyond climbing?"

The Venusian responded with a chatter that meant nothing. Shortt gave a despondent sigh. But Long became active and went to the nearest wall, returning presently with the vine ropes they had cast off.

"Simple," he murmured complacently knotting them together—then tossing up the free end he let it fall around one of the pillars and so back to him.

"Being slightly heavy," he said; I'll go first."

As daintily as an elephant he went

up, while Shortt watched him anxiously from below. Then as Long motioned him to follow he tossed the Venusian over his shoulder and began to climb, emerged over the pit edge to find Long looking round him with his raygun ready.

There was no sign of life. Apparently the Venusians had gone.

"Just wonder why they went to all that trouble?" Shortt asked, tossing the Venusian down—then he gave a start of horrified surprise. Now the Venusian was in daylight it was apparent his absurd body was covered with ugly sores.

"Uh-uh," Shortt said, inspecting himself. "Don't like the look of this—"

"Apparently burns," Long pronounced, frowning. "Similar to those from X-rays. Not catching anyway, I fancy. . . . Tell me, sir, do you understand what I am saying?' he asked the Venusian.

THE creature simply gazed with his catlike eyes. But there was an expression close to gratitude on his queer face. And at length he did try to explain himself, but in an impossible language.

"If only we could get him to talk sense we might be able to understand the set-up of this place," Shortt sighed. "More than that, we might find something out about the asteroid. After all, that's our prime purpose."

"Proceed," Long suggested gravely. "There can be nothing lost. . . ."

So Shortt started pointing out the various things around them, identifying them in the Venusian language as the creature gave it, then supplying the Earth equivalent. Shortt realized it was going to be a long tedious job—and he wasn't made any more patient by the thought of a mold-smothered asteroid creeping ever nearer Earth.

However, he slogged on because it was the only line of action. Several Earth days elapsed, but there was no sign of returning Venusians. Now and again Long took a turn with the "education," and gradually between them they began to get results. Besides, they rather liked the Venusian in spite of his skin trouble. He was quite obviously intelligent—and still grateful. And at last, to the infinite relief of the two, he got to the stage where he could sling words together to make sentences.

"Would—like to thank you—for food and water," was his opening statement. "And for rescuing me from down there. Would have died like fellows otherwise. Was thrown there because of this—" and he pointed to the burned looking patches on his body.

"What are they?" Long questioned sharply.

The Venusian pointed to the sun, said simply. "Certain rays."

"I imagine," Shortt said thoughtfully, "that certain radiations of the sun, in excess, have gotten him into this mess. Just the same as overzealous sunbathers get ulceration."

"Name of me is—Vilji," the Venusian volunteered.

Long said paternally, "Mr. Vilji, we seek information. What race do you belong to? What are you all doing here?"

That took Vilji some time to explain and demanded pantomime, but from his mixed up metaphors and split infinitives it finally became fairly clear that he and his race were descendants of the original scientists who had built the now eroded city.

"We remember them little," Vilji sighed. "Once there was greatness, but we know it only from records. Space travel was tried: the man who tried crashed on our moon. His body fell prey to a metallic life on that moon. A

new sort of life so came into being—a moldlike life. It needed living people like us so it could live. It formed into a fog, came down to our planet here, and killed many thousands, leaving weak survivors. Our scientists built a gun to destroy that moon. . . ." And the pipestem arm indicated the queer "inverted bottle" on its platform.

"I was right," Long breathed. "Degenerate survivors. They have only memories, and a hereditary instinct keeps them still near to the city where there was once such pomp and power. . . . Just what did they use in that gun to destroy a moon?" he asked wonderingly.

Vilji reflected, then said brightly, "Split power."

Long frowned, then he beamed. "Split atoms—atomic force! Of course!"

HE PAUSED as the Venusian apparently made up his mind on some objective, motioned them to follow him. They hesitated, wondering if it was a trick. Then Shortt gave a grunt.

"Might as well go with him. I think he is genuinely grateful for being dug out of that drain. We could do with new scenery."

They accompanied him through the riot of jungle until he came to a tiny clearing. Without hesitation he went on his knees and burrowed in the ground, finally dragged to view a roughly made box of tree bark. With all the reverence of finding a treasure he handed it over, a look of sublime trustfulness on his face.

Long took it solemnly, to find Shortt grinning.

"Sad," Shortt said, "to think of a mighty race reduced to burying things like dogs! What's in it? Cigarette cards?"

Long jerked up the lid and stared in surprise at the odd assortment. It was rather like the junk a child might collect —many trinkets, odd bits of wood, coils of wire— And finally a sheaf of stiff parchment paper on a drum, to which was affixed a handle.

"Say," Shortt whistled, stirring his finger in the odds and ends; "there are diamonds here! The value of 'em. . . . Come to think of it," he went on slowly, "the Venusians all wear something queer. Remember those scientific gadgets they had for ornaments?"

"Obviously they have plundered the city's remains," Long responded, then he fished out the diamonds, counted three to himself and Shortt, pocketed them with a complacent sigh. "A trifling security," he explained to the Venusian, who didn't seem to mind in the least. In fact he nodded urgently to the parchment drum.

Long examined it thoughtfully, turning the handle. The sheets instantly whirred and he gave a violent start.

"For you," Vilji offered. "Special treasure—of mine."

"I'll take the diamonds—" Shortt started to say, but Long cut him short.

"Special treasure's right! Look here—! This darn thing, if Vilji only knew it, is movie history. It's one of those things where a selection of photographs, each advanced in action, gives a moving picture impression— Lord, if only we had all of it, Mr. Shortt! Even as it is it's enough. . . . See!"

Shortt watched fascinatedly. As the handle turned the sheets flickered into a blurry movie of a city by moonlight—obviously this same city that now lay in ruins—for a good distance from it was a half completed device, unmistakable in shape. That atomic gun!

IN THE moonlit streets of the city lay thousands of dead, or slowly

moving Venusians, most of them struggling and milling away from the tentacles of a deadly fog reaching down from that moon.

Unhappily there was not much of the record, but it was enough to plunge both men into thought for a long time after they'd run it through several times. Finally Long summed up.

"We know the molds started by a metallic element absorbing the life of a dead Venusian. It needed more organic life to keep it going—so it bridged the gap to Venus. When that happened the gun was only half finished. Obviously there was time to complete it. It blasted that moon into bits, hurling the parts to all quarters of the System. The mold-like stuff no doubt went into a form of suspended animation, came to life again on one of the floating pieces when it realized life—inside spaceships—was near it. It absorbed that life over a distance and grew in consequence. If it hits Earth it will consume all life.

"But, Mr. Shortt, we also know from this record that the gun was built in sections—plate by plate. And it used the one thing we haven't solved as yet—atomic force."

"I don't see the connection," Shortt puzzled.

"If it blew a large sized moon into pieces it could reduce an *asteroid* to dust," Long pointed out. "It might even be capable of destroying that mold life completely."

"But how in heaven's name do you propose to get a gun that size into space?"

Long smiled. "It is in sections! If we could dismantle it—!" He turned to the Venusian. 'Tell me, Mr. Vilji, do you know anything of the art of gun dismantling?"

THAT was a teaser—but put in more simple language the Venusian began to ponder. Finally he led the way back to the gun-site and the two watched him as he climbed onto the platform. Exerting but little effort he pushed on one of the gun's curved plates— Amazingly enough it came away along grooves and dropped with a clang, exposing the gun's interior.

"Of course—a portable gun!" Long cried. "This site is much further away from the city than the one in the movie record. The thing can be moved—How very, very interesting! Come!"

They climbed up to the Venusian's side and peered through the opening into the firing chamber of the thing. It was complicated beyond belief, but all housed in weather-proof casing. This, and its superb workmanship, had effectually defied the ages.

"Atomic all right," Shortt said finally. "See, here are the firing electrodes—and here's the matrix in between. Then the power is concentrated here. But look, what would they fire? Shells?"

"Through a portable gun?" Long cried aghast. "My dear fellow! No; they wouldn't need to fire anything—only the ray or beam of force generated by atomic disruption. Probably they used copper blocks in the matrix and the resultant energy was trained upward. Shells indeed! Come to think of it we have copper aboard our ship which might come in useful."

They turned aside and looked further, discovered how easy a thing it really was to take to pieces. The bore itself was not in the least reenforced, proving beyond doubt it was only made to direct a force beam and not a shell. . . . That settled it. They went to work taking away plate after plate, piling them up into a small hill on the platform. Then when they'd gotten right down to the matrix itself Long gave a groan of dismay.

"We have no power to fire it!"

"Not so!" Vilji insisted, who had been watching the proceedings with interest. Indeed, he seemed to have grasped the scientific implications completely for he pointed to the odd-looking cylinder with the "radio antenna" on top of it. He made a motion to show it was dangerous, then pointed to the sunshine streaming onto it.

Finally he pressed a switch low down near the base. The result was amazing. The cylinder hummed violently and the electrodes at each side of the gun matrix began to glow. Invisible disruptive radiations collided with one another since there was nothing in between to be disintegrated.

A RECOIL of hot air and choking dust all but pitched the three off the platform. Instantly the Venusian struggled over to the cylinder and switched off. Then he motioned to its various wires. Some led to the gun-matrix, and others sank into the ground.

"I think I understand," Long said slowly. "They erected the cylinder just here because of the eternal sunshine. It must absorb solar power and store it up as potential—a feat we have tried unsuccessfully for ages. And the earth wires take care of the surplus charge. . . . And from the look of it the cylinder can be moved too. Mr. Short, we have the power—and the gun. I see that million dollars coming much nearer!"

"How about getting this junk out of here?" Shortt asked.

"You must go and fetch the ship. And hurry! I'll do my best to get this firing cylinder detached."

Shortt nodded, vaulted to the ground, studied his compass for the way back to the ship, then hurried off with leveled raygun. Long watched him out of sight, then turned back to the job. . . .

CHAPTER IV

Hero from Venus

LONG had just gotten the cylinder free when a sudden hullabaloo arrested his attention. The Venusians were returning, their shouts and yells filling the air. And this time they were armed with weapons—deadly looking things like rayguns, only smaller. Long gave a start of alarm as the rays from one of them chipped metal clean out of the platform.

Immediately he drew his own gun, shot an anxious look at Vilji.

"They furious," he explained. "This gun—sacred shrine to them— Don't know real meaning of it. Not scientist like me."

"Act of desecration, eh?" Long's round face went grim. "Okay; but I'm carrying on just the same—" and he lashed round his gun suddenly. Two Venusians dropped in clouds of ash.

Long ducked, dragged Vilji down with him. The frightful force of the ill-aimed Venusian weapons were tearing chunks out of the platform, and less frequently the apparatus. Long's anxious eyes wandered to the cylinder of potential force. If there was a direct hit on that he didn't dare imagine what might happen.

"I suppose they've frisked these guns from the city?" he asked.

Vilji nodded worriedly. "That is why they have been quiet. They went to get them. Atomic force. Like big gun here."

"Which means they have an almost infinite supply of power," Long growled. "Nice going!"

He dodged again as more ray charges flashed around him. Pulling the Venusian down beside him he took careful aim, peering round the mass of the dismantled gun. Another wildly charging

Venusian went down with half his body blown away.

Long looked troubled. There was something nauseating about all this. He'd sooner have a good clean fight with flesh and blood than a lot of *papier mâché* beings like this.

Whang! He flattened as a chunk of metal cleaved out, V-shaped, immediately over his head. Another charge flashed violently on the precious gun matrix—but nothing happened. Long breathed again. No damage done apparently, except for the smoky mark on the casing. . . .

After awhile, to his deepening horror, the Venusians began to close in more obstinately, reinforced by greater numbers from behind. All of them it was clear were hell bent on destroying the machinery and the defilers with it.

Time and again Long fired at them vigorously, but in any case he had not enough gun-charges to account for all of them— So his gun finally ran out and he tossed it away, lay waiting anxiously with his eyes searching the mob.

"This is going to be tough, feller," he confided to the Venusian crouched beside him. "Once they realize we've run out of sugar they'll make a mass attack. . . ."

His eyes searched the sky desperately, hoping for some sign of the spaceship. So far nothing so pleasant was visible. . . .

FORTUNATELY, the pile of metal from the gun was an ample protection, and the wariness of the Venusians took up further time. Then, gradually realizing that all opposition had collapsed they fired their guns with withering force, beams flashing in all directions, chipping metal from a dozen different points.

The din of their cries made the clearing echo—then it was gradually obliterated by another noise, the glorious roar of rocket tubes! In a sudden rush *Jollopy* appeared over the glade, circled it twice, then let loose its incinerator rays. Screaming, yelling, the Venusians tore pell mell for safety with burning tracks whipping on their heels.

Long stared upward, waving his arms frantically. Shortt's amplified voice bawled down at him.

"Put yourself on that heap of gun metal—and better bring onion puss with you. I'll use the attractors and lift the lot!"

Long nodded, clutched the wet coldness of the Venusian to him and scrambled up on the pile of dissembled gun. Inside three minutes the powerful grapple magnets of the ship descended, clutched the metal in its magnetized maw and lifted the pair upward to the ship's belly. The rest was easy. . . . In five minutes they were in the control room and the floor airlock closed securely. . . .

"NICE going!" Long said approvingly, pulling himself into shape. "And we made it. . . . Next thing to do is to assemble the gun on *Jollopy's* exterior—on the roof. Gravity from the ship and magnetic anchors will hold it in position. Guess I'll start getting busy."

He donned his space suit and scrambled like an elephant through the emergency lock in the roof. Gaining the top of the ship he attached his life line and unbuckled the belt of instruments about his waist. It was a queer sensation standing thus on the hurtling vessel in the deeps of space, with sheer nothing on every side of him, and Venus rolling away into the gulf below.

Accustoming himself gradually to a balance he went to work, drawing up the plates as, released from the anchor

and held only by the ship's own gravity, they floated around the vessel. . . . The lack of gravity helped him in the assembling for one thing: for another it was a drawback because of the tendency for the plates to fly away from him. However, he kept on doggedly, fitting section into section so that the thing was horizontal, parallel with the ship's upper surface.

Nor did he manage it all in one sweep. Four times he rested: four times he worked—but at the end of the fourth effort it was completed, matrix in position, and potential solar power cylinder fully wired and reposing in the control room below. As for "food" for the matrix he stuffed it with copper filings. Satisfied, he came back below.

"All we have to do now," he said, pulling off his space suit, "is point the ship the way we want the gun to fire: we're all set for aim. . . ." He broke off and looked through the port. "Hmm looks like we'll reach that moldy asteroid in an hour or so. Right?"

"Seventy minutes," Shortt answered. "And from the look of things it has drifted a lot nearer to Earth— Better see what they've done to help things," he added anxiously. "Take the controls while I radio."

"That," Long said coldly, "is my task. Continue your own!"

HE SWITCHED on and made Earth-contact. After awhile Gregg's voice came through—irritable, acid.

"Oh, so it's you again! Look here, where the devil have you and your colleague been all this time? How far have you—"

"The matter is well under control," Long stated calmly; and went into the details.

"And—and you really believe you'll be able to destroy this asteroid?"

"We hope so. We try to give service."

Gregg's voice changed to despondency. "Well, it's the last chance, I guess. While you've been away we've had repulsion rays trained on the asteroid, but they are by no means powerful enough to prevent it falling inward to Earth. It's slowed down, but it has not stopped. . . . Nor can we get a scrap more power."

"You may leave everything to us," Long said serenely, and with that he switched off and added dubiously, "I hope!"

"At any rate—" Shortt started to say; then he stopped and gave a yell. "Hey there! Lay off!"

His order was directed to Vilji who was fingering the culture jar in which swarmed the deadly life Long has taken from the asteroid on the trip out.

Long lumbered over. "Don't you realize this stuff is the very disease which struck down your race so long ago?" he demanded.

The Venusian put the culture jar down slowly, pulled away his two fingers which had been immersed in the fluid. There was an odd look in his huge eyes.

"I thought—it might be," he said slowly.

Shortt turned suddenly. "Time to get busy! We're all set for our protective suits. Asteroid's very near."

They scrambled into them quickly, using the spare one for Vilji; then Shortt sent the ship sweeping ever nearer the deadly asteroid. Long waited with his hand on the potential cylinder switch as the maneuvers went on. At last the nose of the ship was directly pointed at the asteroid. . . .

Long closed the power switch, sending the terrific force streaming into the matrix of the gun on the roof.

There was a brief stabbing ray, then a violent recoil that jerked the vessel with terrific force, sent them all sprawl-

ing. At the same instant an explosion glared space from somewhere outside, transmitting its concussion through the ship.

Hastily Long got up and switched off, looked at Shortt in baffled wonder. He scowled for a moment inside his helmet, then bundling on his space suit over his protective coverings he floundered up once more through the emergency lock. When he came back his big round face was unusually grim.

"Mr. Shortt, we lose one million dollars," he announced forlornly. "The thing's failed us!"

"BUT what's wrong?" Shortt asked in dismay.

"For one thing the recoil has torn it away from the anchor hold and it is floating comparatively free. For another, there's a crack in the matrix casing which lets power escape and gives us only twenty five percent down the gun barrel. I expected it—it's the work of those blasted Venusians when they attacked us! One of their rays weakened the casing and under sudden strain it fissured."

Shortt couldn't find words to say: he was too stunned.

"We're licked," Long shrugged. "Of course, if we got this atomic gun back to Earth it could be quickly repaired, and with a firm foundation it would be okay. Since it once blew a Venusian moon in pieces it could surely wreck this asteroid— But that is not the point.

The pieces, molds and all, would still fall to Earth and spread death among the human race—"

He stopped rather impatiently as Vilji tugged him. He had his communicator in action.

"Can I—look at gun? Outside?"

Long stared at his little face behind the visor. "I guess so. But what in heck can you do?"

"Idea," Vilji said simply. "Give me space notebook please."

Long puzzled for a moment, then he nodded and handed over the incased stylographic instrument with which space-engineers made notes in the void, through special traps in the instrument. Vilji took it, nodded, then clambered into a space suit. Finally he went up through the emergency lock, leaving the two men watching him in puzzled silence through the roof port.

Presently something gleamed in his hand.

"It's his knife," Shortt said in wonder. "What the hell does he think he can do with that, I wonder? Hallo! Now what?"

Vilji was kneeling down, writing slowly through the traps of the stylograph. It took him a long time, and finally he lifted up the emergency trap momentarily and dropped the stylo through into the control room. Both men glanced at it, but were too interested in watching him to bother about it, immediately . . . For he was doing a most surprising thing.

With a sudden sweep of his knife he slashed right through the life line holding him. Instantly the superior power of the deadly asteroid lifted him upwards—or rather downwards—hurtled him head over heels through the void, faster and faster, towards that gray and merciless surface.

"He's broken loose!" Shortt screamed. "He's—"

"Wait!" Long snapped. "He hasn't finished— Look!"

AS HE keeled into the growing remoteness they saw his knife flash once more. Instantly the remains of his space suit and protective coverings burst open. His body, dead certainly, broke free and hurtled faster and faster, tattered ends of garment fastened to it.

The body vanished in distance, but in their imaginations the two men thought they saw the faint disturbance he made as he fell a lifeless wreck into that mass of mold.

"The fool! The little idiot!" Shortt groaned. "He did that deliberately! Committed suicide? But why?"

Long frowned at the stylograph instrument on the floor, whipped it up and jerked out the engraven metal plate. He read in growing amazement, then handed it over.

"You saved my life. I save yours. See culture jar. I prefer it this way. Have no planet worth while. Do not desire Earth. So will die of service."

Both men looked at each other in surprise then hurried over to the jar of molds the Venusian had been examining. Long whipped it up, tapped it—but to the amazement of both of them the feathery stuff remained motionless at the jar's base. It did more; it slowly disintegrated into powdery sediment.

Hurriedly Long fished out some of the stuff onto the slide, stared at it through the binocular microscope.

"It's *dead!*" he whispered incredulously. "But—but—"

"Wait a minute!" Shortt cried, thinking. "Didn't Vilji have his fingers in the fluid when we spoke to him? His *sore* fingers?"

"I guess so—" Long started. "Good God, man, you mean the disease he'd got, caused by solar activity, was fatal to this mold?" Then he answered his question himself. "Why not indeed? A malignant disease to cure another form of malignant disease. Isn't that the fundamental basis of all serums and antitoxins?"

"And that heroic little devil, realizing his disease could kill the mold, realized also what his whole body could do," Shortt said slowly. "So he sacrificed himself in order that the stuff might die—that it might form a cancer capable of smashing it!"

"Yeah . . . That's the answer!" Long stared before him. "Can you imagine the courage of that little guy . . .?"

The same thought in both their minds they hurried to the port and started down. The judgment of Vilji had plainly been correct, for even as they watched they could see a brownish area beginning to spread from the bottom right hand limb of the asteroid. Quite obviously the blight was progressive, would gradually spread over the entire mold-surface and destroy that foul life forever.

"And we," Long said slowly, "can go back to Earth, get the atomic gun repaired, then blast this asteroid to hell when we know all the mold is gone. All Earth will get is a brief rain of small meteors which means nothing. . . ."

"And a million dollars," Shortt nodded. "Long and Shortt always deliver the goods, I guess . . . But I guess we wouldn't have but for that little hero."

Long sighed. "Makes one feel sort of guilty taking those diamonds like we did . . . However, one must live." He gave a last look at the asteroid, straightened up.

"Home, Mr. Shortt. Our largest assignment is complete!"

THE END

Uncle Sammy and the Snakes

By ARNOLD WARD

"LOOKS kinda queer," said the blue-eyed postal inspector. "Think we oughta open it up?"

"It's an innocent enough looking affair," said the gray-haired boss, raising his glasses to his forehead and staring at a package postmarked from Spain. "But the regulations say we's got to open it; so open it we must."

The clerk picked up the travel-worn, tan-colored box and shook is questioningly. He read the label for the fourth time: "To the Curator of Reptiles, Field Museum, Chicago, Ill." Then he shook his head in resignation and started to open the box. "It sounds like somethin' alive, all right," he said as he nervously fingered the wrapping.

Oddly enough the opening of an unusual package creates suspense for even postal inspectors, and ten or twelve other package priers had gathered around in cautious awe to watch what might be the unveiling of almost anything, alive or dead, in the reptile or snake family. Working slowly, carefully, the blue-eyed clerk pulled back the last covering. Nothing happened. A sigh of relief went through the group. The gray-haired boss cleaned his glasses for the fifth time and anxiously looked into the box. Suddenly he jerked back with a start. A whopping ocellated lizard poked its head through the wrapper. It jumped out of the box onto the inspection bench, stuck its tongue out a few times like lizards sometimes will, and scurried off for a tour of inspection.

An hour later Mr. Ocellated Lizard was once more interned "for the duration." His tour of inspection had been far from peaceful what with inspectors chasing him around with brooms, waste baskets, and what-have-you. But he just blinked a few times and stuck his tongue out some more and figured that only humans could act so foolish; and, after all, he was a lizard and would have to make allowances.

Eventually Mr. Ocellated Lizard did reach the curator at the Field Museum. But escapades such as his made a deep impression on Dr. Howard K. Gloyd, director of the Chicago Academy of Sciences. Dr. Gloyd is widely known among herpetologists for streamlining snake transportation with what is now called a "Snake Pullman." This bit of reptile advancement consists of a box with neatly screened openings at each end and "safety doors." These doors are two hinged lids, the outer one wooden, the inner one screen or wire. The curious inspector of things like poisonous snakes can take a peek without opening the box completely and giving the snake a chance to take a bite or two. Furthermore, when the express agent sees the words "Snake Pullman" he feels everything is under control and he is not apt to refuse the parcel as has been the case often in the past.

Up until recently members of the snake family have been riding the mails in comparative happiness. Now, after having numerous snakes take sample bites out of various and sundry postal inspectors, Uncle Sammy has decided he will have nothing more to do with any member of the snake tribe. This means you can't send your pet rattlesnake by mail. You've got to send it by express—and then they might refuse you unless you've got a "Snake Pullman" handy.

Museums, zoos, and reptile fanciers, strangely enough, find snakes and lizards about the easiest of all animals to ship. Uncle Sammy has no objection to the shipping of reptiles (such as lizards and turtles) through the mails. In shipping these cold blooded animals either by express or mail very little care is needed once they have been incarcerated in their cages. These creatures can survive for days, even weeks, without food or even water, so that they can travel without too much hardship. Furthermore, the lizard family can live on astonishingly little air, and although metal cans must always be perforated, paper wrappings and wooden boxes seem to admit sufficient air without any extra holes for that purpose.

Soft-skinned frogs and salamanders have come to Chicago's Field Museum all the way from Europe. All that was necessary to their shipment in safety was a metal can punctured with a few holes and filled with damp sphagnum moss. Karl P. Schmidt, curator of amphibians and reptiles at the museum, warns that the moss should be only damp—not wet.

Express regulations require that snakes be shipped in a box with a screen wire covering. It's okay to ship small specimens in lard or syrup pails with the cover wired on; but be mighty sure the cover is securely fastened. They may look frail, but they are terrifically powerful; so it's best to put them in a cloth bag before placing them in a container.

A few years ago the Field Museum was advised of the shipment of a snake from Texas which had the power to change color, and inasmuch as this capacity is unknown in snakes, members of the museum staff eagerly awaited the serpent's arrival. The snake, however, didn't know he was so rare. He saw a chance to push his wire covering aside and took it on the lam. You can guess the rest.

Suddenly an expression of terror crossed the professor's face

24 Terrible Hours

by JOHN YORK CABOT

Professor Campbell loved his wife, but he was aware that she didn't love him. This led him to a strange act—he gave her the freedom she wanted, via a time machine!

ON THE morning of July 1st, Professor Calvin Campbell rose at five o'clock. He had slept with the alarm beneath his pillow, and its ringing had been loud enough to wake him but soft enough not to wake his wife, who still slept soundly in the twin bed on the other side of the night table.

Professor Campbell dressed quietly, quickly. A few moments later he stood over his wife, looking down at her gravely. This was a sort of farewell. He'd never see Kathleen alive again, except for one last moment when he'd be beside her *yesterday*.

Kathleen was much younger than Professor Campbell. All of twenty years younger. And in her sleep she never looked more youthfully lovely.

Campbell sighed. He deeply regretted what was to happen. But the situation as it was had finally become unendurable. He couldn't stand it any longer. Loving Kathleen the way he did, it was impossible to go on like this.

Kathleen sighed in her sleep and turned over on her side. Her blonde hair glistened against the white pillow like golden webs of silk.

Kathleen had been out with young Vickers until three in the morning. Campbell had been awake when his wife came in. He hadn't let her know that, however. Young Vickers had taken Kathleen to that meeting in Marshall Township, just on the other side of the mountains. They'd wanted Campbell to come, of course, or said they did, but the older Professor had excused himself, pleading work to be done.

Campbell couldn't find it in him to hate Vickers. Vickers was a pleasant enough chap. He was handsome, youthful, around Kathleen's age. And in his daily contact with Vickers at the College Laboratory, Campbell was aware that the young man had a brilliant future in store for him; knew this, also knowing that Vickers was in love with Kathleen.

Vickers had come to teach at the college over a year ago. He'd started as an instructor. Campbell had been responsible for his rise to a professorship; had made sort of a protegé of him until he finally realized what was going on.

Campbell even found it hard to blame Kathleen for liking the handsome and personable young Vickers. He himself

was neither young nor handsome. He was just a rather old professor in a somewhat obscure college, holding down a young and beautiful wife.

Kathleen had never complained. She wasn't the sort to complain. But Campbell had realized that it wasn't working out, that it could never really work out. And when Vickers joined the staff of the College, Campbell had calmly faced the inevitable.

THREE months ago Campbell had made up his mind. That had been the week when the older professor learned that young Vickers was slated to take the head professorship from him at the start of the following term.

Campbell had been bitter. But he kept his knowledge to himself. He didn't even let Vickers in on the fact that he knew. But Vickers had been told. The fact that it made the younger man sincerely and sickly unhappy, didn't alter the circumstances for Campbell. This was the final blow.

And Vickers had gone to Kathleen, had told Kathleen that he'd been elected to replace her husband. Kathleen, also, hadn't found the courage to bring it up before Campbell. She felt sorry for him, terribly sorry, Campbell knew. But he didn't want pity from her. He'd never told Kathleen that he knew.

There had been planning, then; careful and thoughtful planning. The other thing had worked in admirably. He'd thought that the other thing would some day reap for him the rich reward of everlasting scientific fame and fortune. He'd never told a soul about the other thing, even Kathleen. He'd wanted to keep it from her until he was certain. He'd planned to tell her when the experiments were positively completed. It would have been what he'd always wanted to give her—riches and success. He'd been certain that it would have compensated to her for the fact that he was an older and more drab man.

It all changed, however, even to the other thing, when Campbell discovered that Kathleen and Vickers had found one another. It made the other thing too late. It made it worthless. For what was fame and fortune when he didn't have Kathleen?

And so he'd planned to use the other thing as an instrument of a different kind of compensation. For Campbell determined that if he couldn't have Kathleen, no one else could have her.

Vickers couldn't have her.

NOW Campbell bent over his wife and kissed her gently on the cheek. It was better, this kind of a goodbye. He could think for a moment, this way, that she was still fully his wife, that she still loved him completely.

Then Campbell turned and left the bedroom.

There was no one around the campus but the watchman when Campbell turned his automobile up the driveway that led to the college laboratories. Campbell had been with the college almost as long as the watchman had, and he stopped his car beside the old man and leaned out.

"Up early this morning, aren'tcha, Professor Campbell?" the watchman smiled.

Campbell forced a smile.

"Up very early, Mike. But then there's a lot of work I have to catch up on."

Mike nodded and said something else.

Campbell waved his hand and threw the car into gear. Two minutes later he parked behind the science building and was climbing out of the car.

"This will all change," Campbell told himself. "I must remember that."

Then he had his keys out of his pock-

et and was fumbling at the rear entrance to the science building. The door swung inward and Campbell flicked on a light switch that illuminated a locker-lined corridor.

Campbell walked along the corridor, and at the end he flicked another light switch. Then he marched up the three flights of stairs that led to his own laboratory.

He let himself into his personal laboratory and turned on the lights. He methodically began to change into a clean white smock. Moments later and he was rummaging around through a maze of equipment in a closet.

When he brought what he needed out of the closet, Campbell went over to his work bench in the corner. There was a long, almost oval object under a white sheet atop the table. Campbell removed the sheet and looked down at the machine of steel and glass that lay there. This was the other thing. This was the object over which he had labored these many years. This was his secret.

This was a Psychotrans Time Machine.

This would project the mind of a man into the past or into the future. This would open to man the undreamed of possibility to travel through Time. Through this machine the mind of a man in the present could be placed in the body of a man in the past or the future. It was the culmination of Campbell's scientific genius. It was the dream of achievement which every scientist from Pythagoras to this modern day had groped for.

And it was Campbell, the drab, obscure, aging professor of a small western college who had finally conquered Time.

BUT Campbell wasn't thinking of this as he set about to work. He wasn't thinking of anything but the task he had at hand. He was going to project his mind into the past. He was going to project his mind into Yesterday. This was July 1st, Campbell was going back a scant space in Time to June 30th.

And Campbell was going to send his mind into the body of young Vickers.

Campbell sat down at the bench before his work table. He busied himself over a series of charts and graphs for an instant, arrived at the calculations he wanted, then rose again.

Now Campbell tinkered with the delicate dials on the face of the steel and glass machine that would send his brain back into Time.

According to Campbell's calculations Kathleen and young Vickers must have left the meeting at Marshall Township sometime around eleven o'clock last night. That was a scant seven hours.

Campbell was going to send his brain back seven hours into the past. There, at that time, his brain would take possession of Vicker's body.

Vickers and Kathleen would be leaving Marshall Township in the young chap's car at that time. Ahead of them would be the sheer twisting, dangerous roads that lay along the mountain between Marshall Township and the college.

An automobile, roaring through the night, might very well hurtle off the side of one of those twisting roads. Hurtle off the side—

There were jagged rock beds at the bottom of those gruesome drops. An automobile, twisting, falling through the darkness down to these rocks—

Campbell sorted his equipment carefully. There was a round, glass and metal headpiece. Wires led from it. Campbell plugged the ends of this wire into his Time machine.

He made some more adjustments, consulted his charts again, and nodded

in satisfaction. Everything was in order. Everything was ready. Campbell paused a moment.

"I must remember," he told himself, "that everything will be different. Everything will change."

Yesterday would change, of course, for Campbell. Last night would change for Kathleen and young Vickers. When you tamper with what has passed it is wise to remember that certain elements in the present also change. Campbell was prepared for this.

He was prepared to receive the shocking announcement that his wife and young Vickers had been killed when the car plunged off the cliff side. It would be a few hours anyway before it was discovered. It was good to remember not to mention having left your wife home; asleep, when she died the night before.

Campbell donned the headpiece.

NOW he reached forward and made the final adjustments on the dials of the time machine.

On the right of the machine was a switch which Campbell hadn't touched. Now he threw the switch forward. His body suddenly began to tingle with electrical vibrations.

The dials on the time machine flickered for an instant, then climbed slightly and stopped. On Campbell's face was an expression of desperate concentration. He felt himself growing weak. His knees would no longer support him. He sat down on the bench. The dizziness was growing, the room wheeling. . .

Campbell was suddenly aware that he was looking out through the windshield of an automobile roaring through the night along a narrow, twisting mountain road. His hands were gripped to the wheel of the car.

"Not so fast, Vick," a voice said beside him. "These roads are tricky."

It was Kathleen's voice. Kathleen was beside him, and he was in control of Vickers' mind, in Vickers' automobile, for an instant, in Vickers' body!

He turned to look at Kathleen. The last he'd see of her before she died. She looked gloriously beautiful in the faint glowing reflection of the dashboard.

"Not so fast, Vick," Kathleen repeated worriedly. "I'd like to get home alive."

Campbell looked ahead. There was a sharp turn up there, a very dangerous turn. It was a long drop to the rocks below if you didn't make that turn. He mashed his foot down hard on the accelerator pedal. The turn rushed up at him.

Kathleen's scream pierced into his ears.

Campbell saw the cliff's edge looming up to him, blackly, terrifyingly. He was seized by an overwhelming frenzy of fear. He felt his heart pounding madly.

"Vick!" Kathleen screamed again. "Vick, for God's sake!" She was reaching over toward the wheel, trying to get his fingers from it.

Campbell hung on, frozen in horror, the cliff edge was very near. . .

IT WAS half an hour later before young Vickers was able to light a cigarette, his hands trembled that badly. His face was still ashen. Kathleen was driving. They were just entering the little college town.

"I still can't figure out what possessed me, Kathleen," young Vickers said shakily. "It was just as if I was asleep. My mind was in a fog, a complete blank. If you hadn't grabbed that wheel—" He didn't finish the sentence. He put his hand over his eyes and shuddered.

"I know, Vick," Kathleen said. "It

was the most horrible thing. I looked at you and it was just as if you were in a trance. I'll still never know how I managed to grab that wheel in time. You were frozen to it."

"God!" Vickers shuddered. "Ugh!"

They drove on in silence. When the girl stopped the car before the residence of Professor Campbell, she turned and said,

"Won't you come in, Vick? Clive will fix you up a drink. I think you need it badly."

Young Vickers shook his head.

"No thanks, Kathleen."

Kathleen got out of the car. Vickers said good night shakily and drove off. Campbell's wife let herself into the house. She called out to her husband. No one answered. She went upstairs wearily. He was probably still working at the laboratory. . .

They notified the young wife of the elderly Campbell the following morning. It was the morning of July 1st. They broke the news as gently as they could.

He had been tinkering with some unknown experiment. An electrical shock of tremendous force—similar almost to a sudden terrible fright in intensity—had stopped a heart that was none too strong. He was found dead, sprawled across a shattered machine on his work table.

Later, after the coroner had placed the time of her husband's death, Kathleen was aware that he must have died just about the time the car in which she and Vickers were riding almost plummeted off the edge of the mountain cliff. Everyone agreed that it was the "strangest thing."

THE END

ATOMS FOR COAL

WE know energy cannot be destroyed, yet it can become unattainable. We can exhaust our enormous coal-beds.

Coal is the source of nearly all the energy used in modern everyday life. Heat energy is produced by burning coal—a chemical process on which our entire population is dependent.

Coal energy is drawn from the sun. It took billions of years for the sun's rays to transform the vegetation of the Paleozoic era into the dormant energy of the tremendous prehistoric carboniferous fields.

As far as our present knowledge is concerned, the depletion of our coal-fields would mean the end of the entire world civilization.

There is no other source of energy that can come close in comparison with that of coal. We know of the power in our waterfalls, and attempts have been made to take advantage of the power in the tides.

However, there is a future hope. The energy contained in the atom is practically boundless. When science eventually frees and controls the atom, the world will laugh at our steadily decreasing coal supply.

ANGELS WITH PARACHUTES

WITH our country at war you should not be surprised if a plane flies overhead and drops its deadly load in your backyard. But, something that really would make you sit up and take notice is a beautiful blonde nurse floating down from the sky to administer to your needs.

Strange as it may seem, this situation is being anticipated and prepared for by the Bronx Civilian Defense Office in New York. They are organizing a parachute corps for women nurses and have already issued application blanks for a course given by the American women's hospitals reserve corps.

These trained nurses will be used to bring aid to bombed civilians in areas that are inaccessible to motorized units of the American women's hospitals reserve corps.

The age range for these nurses will be 18 to 25 and fat women will definitely not be accepted. Local airports will be used for parachute practice. These "angels" are to be used entirely for civilian defense purposes and will have no connection with the army.

Remember when that blonde bundle from heaven comes floating into your lap, don't say we didn't give you fair warning.

LUNA—Goddess of Love

by WILLY LEY

How do the planets really look? Here is a scientific and authoritative picture of the Lunar landscape

NO. 2

I CANNOT help but feel that ancient astronomers had an easy life. They knew and had named the most conspicuous among the fixed stars, they knew their zodiac, they knew those planets that are visible without the aid of optical instruments and they knew—approximately and from experience—how these planets, and sun and moon, moved among the stars. From this knowledge they predicted when solar or lunar eclipses were due to occur and everybody admired them when there really was an eclipse "soon after the noon hour." Nobody thought of checking their predictions to a tenth of a second or less, not even the astronomers themselves. And the leisure time they had they spent in philosophical conversation about the usefulness of the universe.

And they did not worry at all about the surfaces of the planets. Greek philosophers thought occasionally that the moon might be a disc of bright silver. Eye evidence taught, of course, that that disc was not completely untarnished and that fact caused the first scientific controversy about the moon. One school of thought held that the spots visible on the disc of the moon were simply dirt, caused by "unclean vapors" in the air—we have to remember that the true distance was unknown and that "airless interplanetary space" is a later invention—while another school would not permit any dirt on celestial objects. They said, instead, that those dirty spots were as unreal as the face of a pretty girl mirrored in a silver disc on Earth, in short, that the spots on the moon were only the mirror images of the seas and continents of Earth.

That was the first controversy on lunar matters but it was by no means the last. There is no other object in the heavens that has taught as many "lessons in uncertainty" to humanity than the moon, especially during the last century or so. Astronomy in general was subjected to many and drastic revolutions during that time, revolutions that "p u r g e d" many "well-established theories" without always advancing better ones. Very often, entirely too often for comfort, yawning gaps were left, to be filled slowly and late by other theories that again might fall prey to some simple mathematical formula somebody developed and that showed discrepancies between theory and actuality that were bound to kill either the facts or the theory. And since science is based on facts the theories had to give way.

A Map of the Chief Plains and the Craters of the Moon. The plains were originally supposed to be seas; hence the name "Mare." Actually, the moon is now airless and waterless, shaded areas being deserts

You only have to look at the history of the many theories invented to explain the origin of the solar system and you'll know what I mean. At present we are again looking at such a yawning gap in just this respect, there is no theory, exactly none, that is satisfactory all around. What applies to the solar system applies to most of the individual planets too. One should think that at least the Moon which is closest to us—being just a measly 240,000 miles away—should be an exception, but unfortunately it isn't.

IT IS true that the surface of the Moon, as far as photographed and hand drawn maps are concerned, is very well known to us. In fact it is better known than the surface of the Earth over which we crawl along instead of having the advantage of seeing it from a close cosmic distance.

A hundred-foot object could not escape detection by terrestrial astronomers, especially if they are looking for it and know approximately where to look for it.

Large cities like New York and Chi-

cago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow and Shanghai would be clearly visible and, if necessary, even street maps of them could be drawn.

Railway trains, large and small ships, zeppelins, the larger airplanes and individual dinosaurs could be seen.

But all this amazing knowledge—as I said before: knowledge superior to that we have of our own planet—still tells very little about the nature of the things we see; it only tells about their appearance. We cannot touch those things we see . . . but it is evident that a few samples of the equipment of a battleship, not more than one man could carry, might tell much more about it than the most excellent photograph of the whole ship.

It is nice to know that there are rocks of a certain color in a certain spot . . . but there are very many different kinds of rocks that may have the same color.* Even the knowledge that the density of the moon in general is somewhat less than that of Earth does not help very much.

Now what are the things that can be seen in a big telescope or that show on a good photograph of the surface of the moon. Most conspicuous are, of course, the wide level plains of the "mare." Then there are chains of mountains, bearing names like Lunar Alps, Lunar Apennines etc. and an odd 30,000 ringwalls or craters. Then there are the bright "rays" emanating from certain craters like Tycho and Messier and the deep chasms of which the one near the crater Hyginus is probably the best known.

Of all these formations only the mountain chains are entirely clear, they are the same as terrestrial mountain chains. It might well be that those mountains are the oldest of all the lunar formations we see but some of the craters—mighty Clavius for example—compete with them in age, being just as much eroded as the other mountains.

The wide plains of the "mare" are often believed to be the bottoms of ancient seas; we can let it go at that for the present.

But the other formations are definitely puzzling. There is hardly any explanation at all for the "rays," there is only one for the chasms and there are, unfortunately, several for the craters. If America were still undiscovered the chasms would be without explanation too, but our geographical knowledge being what it is they are usually compared to Grand Canyon or to canyons in general. They are said to betray the former existence of rivers just as the mare betray that of ancient seas.

But they might just as well be gigantic cracks caused by seismic forces, as long as nobody climbed into one of them and examined them closely that question has to remain a moot point.

THE craters, by their very number, are, of course, the main feature. And since no lunar theory that does not explain the craters of the moon has much of a right to be heard, most theories started out with those craters. The oldest of them are the ones that are most fantastic to our way of thinking because they credited them directly to the Selenites, the inhabitants of the moon.

Before the craters of the moon were even known people had talked about

* Although it is usually said that Lunar landscapes would be "studies in black and white" this conception does not hold true in the light of critical examination. Not only that the rocks themselves may show colors the shadows would not be just an inky black. There is no air to diffuse light, but an illuminated surface would *reflect* light into a shadow just the same.—Ed.

Selenites, the Greek Lukian had written adventure stories in which they figured and one of the greatest astronomers, Johannes Kepler, had also talked freely about Selenites in his posthumous *Somnium*. That he thought them to be lazy and slow and mainly snake-like in appearance had no definite (real or imaginary) reason, it was plain fancy. But Kepler knew, of course, that a "day" on the moon was roughly two weeks in duration and he imagined that it might be pretty hot around noontime and very cold near midnight. Thus he concluded that to the Selenites each full day would constitute two periods of activity, separated by two hibernation periods during the warmest and coldest hours.

When the newly invented telescope was then directed at the moon and astronomers saw the ringwalls for the first time they felt convinced that these circular walls were artificial—nothing natural on Earth looked like them—visible signs of the activity of the Selenites that might, after all, be less lazy and more human than Kepler had imagined.

They took the walls to be immense fortifications, built to protect cities located in caves in the central mountains of the craters. Or, those central mountains might be the buildings themselves, to be compared with ant and termite hills on Earth. Some craters showed no central mountain, they were lost positions, razed by the enemy.

Then it was established that the moon has no atmosphere, save for possible small quantities of tenuous gases in the deepest craters and chasms. That did not spell doom to the Selenites as one might think. Two theories were invented to come to their rescue. One was that which infests science fiction yarns ever since H. G. Wells wrote his "First Men in the Moon"; the theory that the moon is like a gigantic sponge.

Being less dense than Earth in general, but being Earth's child (according to then prevailing astronomical theories) and therefore consisting of the same material, it had to have immense caves. Thus originated all the stories and theories about life *in* the moon since there was obviously no place for it on its surface.

The other theory proved to be even more imaginative. The center of gravity of the moon, it was said, and the mathematical center of the lunar sphere, were not the same. And the reason for this was very simple, because the moon was not a sphere! It was egg-shaped, always pointing its sharper end toward Earth.

BUT if that was the case then all the ideas about life on the moon had to be revised radically. If that part we see was only what might be called the peak of a tremendous mountain, no conclusions drawn from this part were applicable to the rest of the moon. Naturally there was no air on top of that "mountain," naturally it was cold up there, naturally one could not expect life.

But that was true only for the part we saw, the other half, definitely hidden from prying terrestrial eyes, might be rich in soil and water with a nice atmosphere. In fact it *had* to be a t r o p i c a l landscape with luxuriant growths, getting just as much sunlight as Earth, but keeping living things to the ground with only one-sixth of terrestrial gravity.

It is really too bad that that nice theory also had to be purged again. But the fact spoke against it and in such a case a theory is lost. In the first place it was found that the moon did not deviate from the ideal form of a true sphere to any much greater ex-

tent than the other planets. Then it was even mathematically proven that it couldn't even if it wanted to. And then astronomers began to organize special searches to determine the formations on the "other side."

The moon always turns the side known to us toward earth, but it "wobbles" a bit—the technical term is libration—so that in time about four-sevenths of its surface becomes visible. And it was found that the formations from "our" side just continue. There is even one crater known in the really inaccessible parts. Its position could be calculated from various "rays" appearing on the rim of the visible side.

That was the end of a beautiful theory which, incidentally, also won literary laurels in a famous noved by the Polish author Jerczy von Zulavsky.

But what, you have a perfect right to ask, are those "craters" and what do astronomers know and think at present?

Since the first requirement for the conception as well as the discussion of a theory is the knowledge of many and reliable data it is necessary to get acquainted with the facts first.

There are about 30,000 lunar craters, ranging from "tiny" things of a hundred feet diameter to gigantic ringwalls measuring more than 200 miles from rim to rim. An observer, if placed in the center of such a crater would not be able to see the ringwall not even if the crater were placed on Earth where the horizon is much farther away than on the moon.

There exist a few elliptical craters, but the vast majority of them are circular in outline. Barring one single exception the floor of every crater is below the level of the surrounding territory while the central mountain—if it exists, about half of all craters do not possess one—is always considerably lower than the ringwall and as a rule constitutes the difference between the levels of the crater's floor and of the surrounding territory.

The craters, therefore, have the shape of very large and very shallow bowls and it is a curious fact that they all could be just filled in by using the material supplied by ringwall and central mountain.

So much for the facts. Now for the theories.

NUMBER one, still upheld by some astronomers, accepts the name of these formations as a fact. According to that theory the thirty thousand craters are just as many extinct volcanoes. But that theory falls short in a few unimportant details. It fails to show any lava flows, and it fails to say why no terrestrial volcanic crater possesses those typical shallow-bowl-contours. It also fails to explain the existence (or absence, depending on how you look at it) of the central mountain and for good measure it fails to account for the difference in size between the largest terrestrial volcanic crater and the average lunar ringwall measuring an even hundred miles. The difference in gravity helps, but not enough.

Approximately the only thing about the moon we can be certain about is that those things are *not* extinct volcanoes. But what are they?

For a while there existed what may be called the "bubble theory." It claimed that gigantic bubbles formed when the moon was still molten rock and that the craters are the "scars" of those bubbles that broke down later. This raises the question why not one tiny bubble was left to show how it happened. Furthermore, it can be calculated just how large a bubble could grow under given conditions. And in stretching all the factors in favor of

bubbles the calculation answers: "maximum diameter for lunar conditions is sixty feet."

The theory that the lunar craters were caused by meteorites is not as new as most people think. That it gained recognition as slowly as it did had two main causes. One was that similar formations on Earth, where examination could prove or disprove meteoric origin, were not known. The other was that neither astronomers, nor geologists nor physicists had any definite ideas about the mechanism of the formation of a meteor crater, assuming that there were such things.

A few decades before the beginning of the Twentieth Century the mile-wide Meteor Crater in Arizona was discovered and after some hesitation agreement on its meteoric origin was reached. And then geologists suddenly found quite a large number of meteor craters of all sizes in other parts of the world. Which proved that meteor craters exist on Earth, too, but unless they happen to be formed in a fairly arid section they don't last very long.

On the moon only those that formed early when there was still water and air could erode; all the others were preserved perfectly.* And if you say that only one meteor strikes (or struck) every ten years and if you count 60,000 craters—for both hemispheres—you'll suddenly realize that 600,000 years are not such a long time, after all. Even six million years, one large meteorite per century, would not seem too much.

And as to size, remember that gravity on the moon is only one-sixth of that on Earth. Fragments of rock dislocated by the impact of the meteorite and thrown aside do not only fly farther due to the lesser gravity, there is also no air resistance to brake their flight. Around Meteor Crater in Arizona boulders can be found ten miles from the center. Even without any calculation you can say that it would be 100 miles on the moon.

METEOR CRATER in Arizona has that shallow bowl shape of the lunar craters. But experimental craters failed to give satisfactory results for quite some time, until Dr. Alfred Wegener discovered the flaw in the experiments. The materials used in the experiments had all been too strong as compared to the speed of impact, only in using dust (for the "surface" as well as for the "meteor") you can duplicate actual conditions on a small scale.* At any event it was shown by these experiments that experimental meteor craters cannot only be made, but also why they have to look as they do, and furthermore, why the lunar craters look as they do.

When the meteor strikes, it breaks up. Its tremendous kinetic energy is converted partly in heat, but mainly into forces acting radial from the point of impact. These forces push the rock in all directions until they are spent, thus forming a circular ringwall . . . the scooped up material that just about would fill the depression. The mass of the meteorite itself is comparatively small and can be neglected. If the rock is of only average density no central

* Applying terrestrial conceptions the moon is, of course, a dead world—but it certainly is not without intriguing and dramatic places. And the most dramatic of them is that Great Valley of the Lunar Alps that can hardly have any other origin than that of being the "scar" left by a small asteroid—one of those now famous "Objects Reinmuth"—plowing with incredible velocity through the ancient mountains. What happened to that asteroid we do not know, but we can see what happened to the Moon.—Ed.

* Readers especially interested in these experiments can find more about them (with photographs) in an article by the author in the April, 1937, issue of *Natural History Magazine*, published by the American Museum of Natural History, New York.—Ed.

mountain results. But if there are thick layers of very hard and dense rock under the surface they receive part of the shock so that the top layer in the center is only crumbled and destroyed but not carried away. The result is a central mountain extending from the floor to about the height of the surrounding territory, its own original level.

The meteoric theory thus explains those strange details in the dimensions of the lunar craters, something no other theory can even attempt to do. It is also the only theory accounting for the Great Valley of the Lunar Alps, caused by a very large meteor or small asteroid grazing the surface before it came to rest somewhere else.

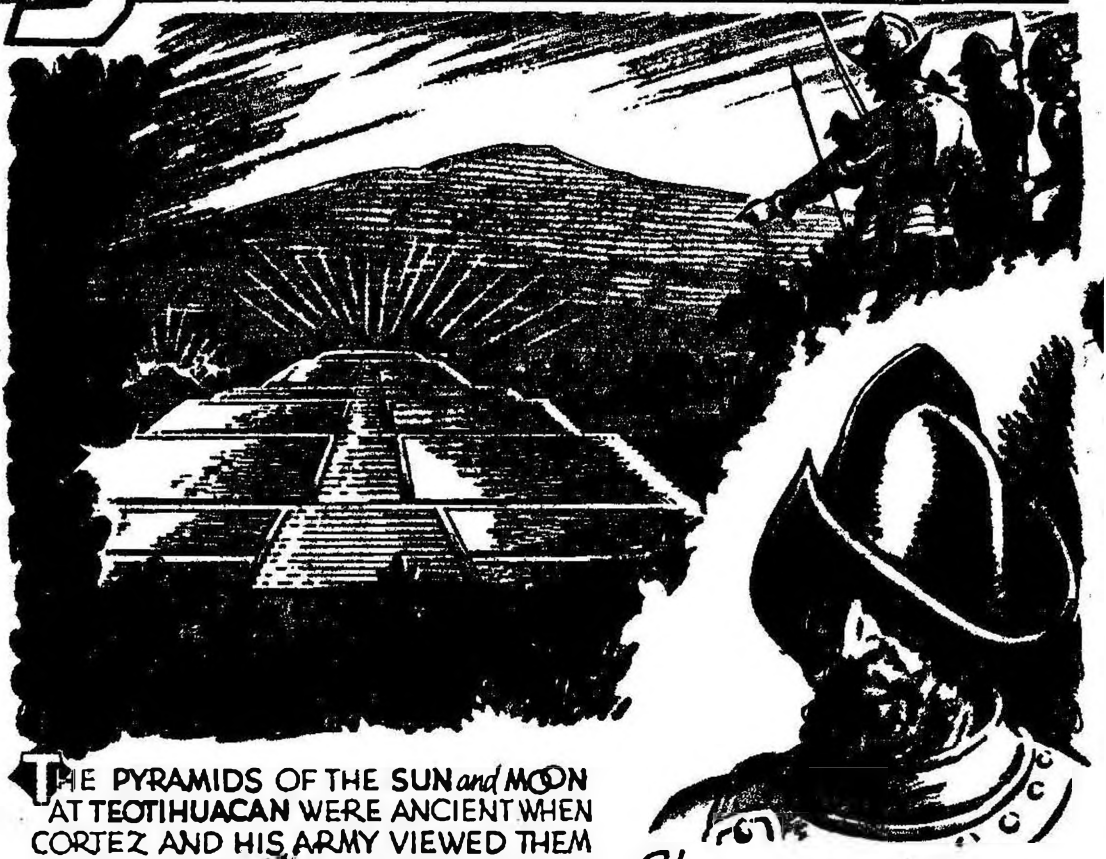
The deep chasms may have been caused by moonquakes which in turn may also have been caused by meteors. And the "streaks" or "rays" may be similar chasms filled with dust or sand or chipped rock, whatever term you wish to apply to the small splinters into which rock breaks up when subjected eternally to a change of searing heat and tremendous cold.

It would not surprise me much if explorers on the moon would search for those "rays" in vain because their different color might be just a result of slightly different reflection of light.*

I admit that all these thoughts and theories are much more complicated than the simple old thought that the spots on the Moon are just a reflection of the continents and oceans of Earth. But the realization that the same natural laws that operate on Earth, if shuffled differently, can produce such an alien, though related, world as the moon is certainly more fascinating.

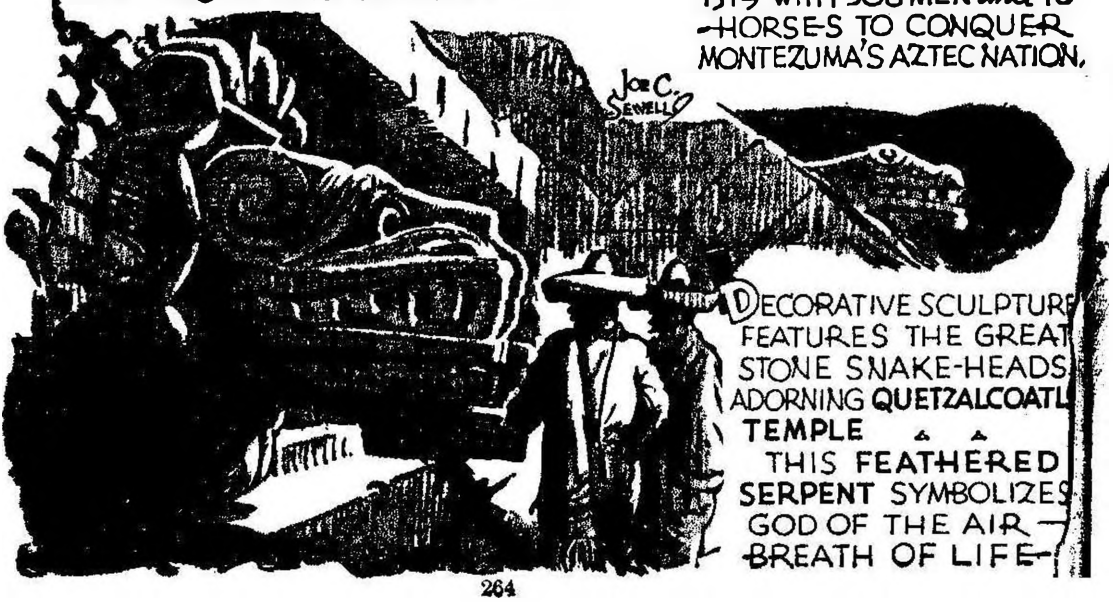
* Aviators often see certain patches of vegetation in a strikingly different color (caused by different minerals in the soil) which is not noticeable to those on the ground.—Ed.

Scientific



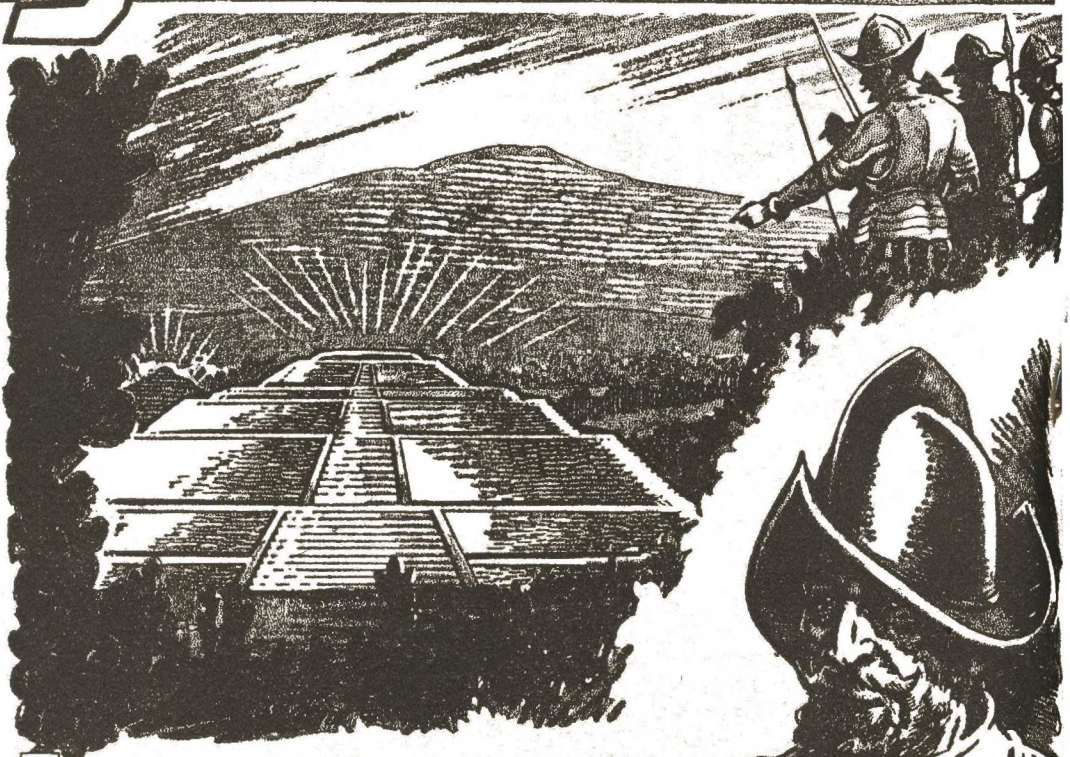
THE PYRAMIDS OF THE SUN *and* MOON AT TEOTIHUACAN WERE ANCIENT WHEN CORTEZ AND HIS ARMY VIEWED THEM IN THE EARLY 16th CENTURY—THEY ARE CONSTRUCTED OF ADOBE FACED WITH STONE AND STUCCO . .

HERNANDO CORTEZ LANDED AT VERA CRUZ, MEXICO IN 1519 WITH 508 MEN *and* 16 HORSES TO CONQUER MONTEZUMA'S AZTEC NATION.



DECORATIVE SCULPTURE FEATURES THE GREAT STONE SNAKE-HEADS ADORNING QUETZALCOATL TEMPLE . . THIS FEATHERED SERPENT SYMBOLIZES GOD OF THE AIR—BREATH OF LIFE—

Scientific



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DECORATIVE SCULPTURE FEATURES THE GREAT STONE SNAKE-HEADS ADORNING **QUETZALCOATL'S TEMPLE** ▲ ▲ THIS **FEATHERED SERPENT** SYMBOLIZES GOD OF THE AIR—BREATH OF LIFE.

Mysteries

LOST RACES OF AMERICA

By Robert Moore Williams

Perhaps the area around Mexico City contains a seat of culture and civilization more ancient than any other known the world over, if we could know the truth

WHEN Hernando Cortez, and his band of Spanish freebooters and Indian allies, conquered the Aztecs under Montezuma in 1521, he found in the great valley of Mexico a series of ruins which indicated that conquerors far greater than any who had ever set sails from Spain had been there before him. No doubt Cortez went to visit these ruins. If he did visit them, he found one pyramid with a base larger than the pyramid of Cheops, the largest of the Egyptian pyramids, though not so high, he found a second pyramid almost as large as the first, and he found, on both sides of a broad street known as the "Avenue of the Dead," a series of temples and other buildings extensive enough to indicate that possibly, at some time in the unknown past, this valley was the center of a civilization that may have numbered thirty million people.

Teotihuacan is the name given to the vast ruined city that Cortez found here. It is assumed that this city originally had a religious and ceremonial character. The largest structure is the Pyramid of the Sun, which is about two hundred feet high with a base that encloses an area of 547,200 square feet. It is about as tall as a fifteen story building and is bigger than many city blocks.

The Avenue of the Dead runs directly in front of this pyramid. Rising from a broad platform fronting on this street a series of steps lead by successive stages directly to the top, which is flat. According to descriptions that have come down from the past, the top of this pyramid supported a large stone figure which bore a plaque of gold on its chest. This figure was ordered destroyed by Father Juan de Sumarraga, first archbishop of Mexico. Today archeological excavations of the surrounding area have revealed many stone statues which probably originally adorned the pyramid but which have fallen from the place they once occupied.

When the author of this article visited this pyramid recently, workmen were just engaged in uncovering one of these statues. Most of it was still buried but enough of it had been exposed to reveal that it looked like the head of a huge lion. However, the local museum has several similar statues, which are labeled as sculptures of tigers. To the author, they looked more like huge lion heads than like tigers. But whether lions or tigers, the question immediately arises as to the model employed by the ancient sculptor, for neither of these animals exist in America today.

In order to determine the interior construction of this pyramid, two exploratory tunnels were run through it at different levels. No hidden chambers, no secret passages, were discovered. The Egyptian pyramids were possibly built to serve as tombs for kings, but the Teotihuacan structures apparently served another purpose.

THE second largest ruin in this area is the Pyramid of the Moon, which greatly resembles the Pyramid of the Sun except that it is smaller. The third most impressive piece of architecture, the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, is a series of small, flat-topped pyramids built on a thick wall which encloses a great quadrangle over four hundred yards long. In the center of this quadrangle is the altar of Quetzalcoatl, which is decorated with huge snakes carved from stone. This is the lair of the Feathered Serpent, that mysterious deity of these ancient peoples of which so little is known.

From the Temple of Quetzalcoatl the Avenue of the Dead leads past the Pyramid of the Sun to the Pyramid of the Moon. Along this avenue, which extends a distance of almost two miles, are located other temples, including one dedicated to Tlaloc, the rain god, and another which is called the Temple of Agriculture. The whole archeological area of Teotihuacan compares favorably, in the impressiveness of its monuments, with the primitive civilizations of Egypt and Hindustan.

Who built this vast city which now lies in ruins in the great valley of Mexico? One thing is certain: the Aztecs did not build it. They had their own city, which they called Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs were newcomers here, having arrived in this place, according to their records, in 1325, after coming from somewhere in the north, supposedly California. Living in this valley before the Aztecs was a race known as the Chicimecs. No definite information is available on how long the Chicimecs had been here. Possibly this had been home to

them for three or four hundred years. However the Chicimecs did not build Teotihuacan. It was here before they came. Another race, known as the Toltecs, is considered to have provided the architects and the builders for the great city of Teotihuacan that once sprawled across this valley.

Who were the Toltecs? Nobody knows. Like the Aztecs, they seem to have come from the north. When they came and how long they remained in this valley is not known, but the vast pyramids and temples they erected indicate a stable culture extending over a period of centuries.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS date the Toltec civilization anywhere from 300 to 800 A.D., but it may have started a thousand years earlier and it may have ended. . . . Here is another catch. Nobody knows when it ended. Nobody knows when the Toltecs left Mexico. Nobody knows why they left or where they went. Coming out of mystery, they departed into even greater mystery. They are truly a lost race. They came out of nowhere, remained in this valley long enough to erect tremendous structures, then vanished.

Nor can science today do much more than guess about the people who built these monuments. The builders, the time when they were built, and the purpose of their construction, remain today as much a mystery as they were four hundred and twenty years ago, when the first white man came.

The Toltecs built Teotihuacan. Then they left their city. The exact meaning of Teotihuacan is: *place where people are converted into gods.* It is of course fantastic to assume that this mysterious race actually possessed more knowledge than we can guess at. Science knows no way by which people can be converted into gods. But here are the facts. For centuries the Toltecs sweat blood erecting pyramids and temples. They carried stone long distances, worked it with inadequate tools, lifted it high into the air by sheer muscular exertions. They must have worked like fools at the task. For such tremendous labors they must have had a reason, a good reason, an overwhelming reason. What the reason may have been, we can only guess, but after vast labors preparing what they called a *place where people are converted into gods,* the Toltecs vanished, disappeared, went from sight, utterly and completely. They are heard of no more. As they walked into the pages of history, they walked out of them a mystery.

"What fools these mortals be!"

When they erected Teotihuacan, and called it a place where people are converted into gods, maybe the Toltecs knew what they were doing!

THE foregoing suggestion is put forward as pure fantasy. The Toltecs were a primitive people, unacquainted with so simple a device as the wheel. But a race primitive in some respects can be tremendously advanced in others. Even if they knew nothing of the wheel, the monuments they left behind them indicate they had a sure knowledge of something far more intricate—astronomy. They also had a complex and accurate calendar. There is no doubt but that the Toltecs had knowledge of a sort. But whether they knew what they were doing when they spent centuries erecting a place where people could be converted into gods is a riddle lost in the mists of time.

Nor were the Toltecs the first people to occupy this valley. Just as excavations in Asia Minor have revealed the existence of not one but seven cities on the site of Troy, all built on top of each other, so excavations at Teotihuacan reveal that these massive pyramids and temples are built on top of still older structures, which date so far back into history that little can be said of them except that they once existed.

Not much is known of these of the ancient cities that preceded Teotihuacan, of the vanished peoples that, coming from somewhere, lived here for a time, then went away into the vast somewhere from which they came. Bits of pottery are found, small clay sculptures, a few tombs and a few monuments. It is certain, however, that since long before the dawn of history this valley has known a series of migrations. Tribes have wandered into this shut-away world, grown great, and vanished.

The valley in which these ruins are situated is really a shut-away world, and comes close to fulfilling the fantastic stories of lost lands hidden away in jungle fastnesses. On all sides high mountains deny entry and to the north there are terrible deserts. The valley itself is at an elevation of 7,400 feet surrounded by still higher mountains.

The valley, set like a cup among high peaks, is roughly circular and is over fifty miles in diameter. This whole vast cup was once the crater of a volcano. The climate is neither hot nor cold, there is plenty of rainfall, and the soil is rich. Wandering tribes, such as the Aztecs and the Toltecs, coming in from the deserts of the north and first catching sight of this valley from the high mountains surrounding it, must have thought that at last they had reached the promised land. Below them lay a huge bowl, green with vegetation, blue with small lakes, misted with showers, it must have been a beautiful sight to these desert wanderers.

A tribe, once settled here, would soon grow strong. Unquestionably many tribes have settled here in the past twenty-five thousand years.

This figure may seem excessive, but some evidence exists to substantiate it. Just outside of Mexico City is a basaltic lava stream which four to ten thousand years ago flowed in from a volcano in the surrounding ranges. No one knows exactly how long ago this lava flow did occur, but certainly it is very ancient. Yet old as this lava flow is, men were here before it, men who built pyramids, men who buried their dead, men who made pottery. Skeletons in graves, pottery, implements, have been found under the lava.

The oldest monuments of primitive man may not be in Asia Minor, may not be lost somewhere in the wilds of Tibet, but may be located here in America, in and around what is now Mexico City.

THE END

Meet the Authors

A. R. McKenzie.

IF you don't mind I'll skip the funny stuff. That's been done to death. Besides, a straight personal sketch is tough enough. Try it sometime.

For the record: age, 34; ht., 5' 5"; wt., 145; hair, gray; complexion, ruddy; born: Wooddale, Illinois; boyhooded: Itasca, Illinois; high schooled: Elgin, Illinois.

Sold my first story (Amazing Stories—you wouldn't remember LUVIUM) while attending Carroll College at Waukesha, Wisconsin. It was a gooey story. I meant it to be. In those days, most S-F characters made love to equations, embraced slide rules and fought to the death to protect the honor of a theory. A woman, if any, was just in the way. I resented that. So—LUVIUM.

In college, I majored in biology. Today, I couldn't name three different types of trees offhand. I spent most of my time playing intramural sports and hearts, and hating French and the Gammas. Won my varsity letter in tennis. Studied dramatics under the late Mae N. Rankin who coached Broadway's famous Alfred Lunt. Played comedy leads with Dennis Morgan (Hollyhood star and one grand guy). Decided against acting as a career when I read about the easy life writers lead.

The railroad is in my blood. I was born fifty feet from the eastbound main. Both my dad and mother were operator-agents. From third grade through high school, I commuted to my studies. With Itasca—a drowsy suburban village west of Chicago—as my base, I rode the old C. M. & St. P. milk train east to Bensenville. Remember those trains? And the little milk shanties along the right-of-way, and those wheeled platforms which were rolled out against the side of the milk cars, and the way brakemen used to hand-spin the milk cans from platform to car? Kid-style, I helped spin—and spill—cans until I was promoted to the engine—and heaven! Engineer Jim used to let me jockey the cars into position; fireman Ben used to let me shovel coal.

Two school years of that—eight miles daily—then to sixth grade in Elgin. And thirty-two miles daily all the way through high school. New rules kept me out of the engine so I started reading to pass the time. When the Elgin Library ran out of Tom Swift and the Rover Boys got married, I picked up something called THE POISON BELT by H. G. Wells.

That was my finish—and start. I soon found Burroughs. Four chapters and I had my tree house built and knew how to say "surrender?" in ape language. I made one mistake. I tried to give THE BEASTS OF TARZAN as a book review for English class.

Purely personal: I've played semi-pro ball and amateur tennis. Like movies, fishing, model railroading, table tennis and time-travel stories. Dislike cities, salads and timeclocks (except when snowed under by rejections). Pet aversions: vitamins, dentists and radio advertising.

I've traveled forty-two states and Canada, mostly by thumb work and shoe leather. Between writing splurges, I've worked as librarian, clerk, electrician, janitor, section laborer, reporter, etc. Married to a southern lassie, live in a rattle-trap house trailer and bang the typewriter far into the night.

I consider E. R. Burroughs the king of them all though, truthfully, I've never read a S-F yarn I didn't like in some way. I'm disappointed because S-F editors and publishers still think of their product in terms of pulp, backboned by violent covers and "bang-bang-I-hate-you" stories, when the success of such movies as ALL THAT MONEY CAN BUY and HERE COMES MR. JORDAN and yarns such as Knight's THE FLYING YORKSHIREMAN have clearly indicated that there exists a much greater and practically virgin field for this type of magazine fiction.

I hope you like Juggernaut Jones.

A. R. McKenzie.

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

ULTRA-FINE

Sirs:

Your March issue was ultra-fine, especially "Disciples of Destiny." The only story in the issue which was not up to snuff was "Men of the Bronze Age" in which I detected traces of cynicism, which I do not like from Burroughs.

My ratings on your stories were: 1. "Disciples of Destiny"; "Sarker's Joke Box." 2. "Suicide Rocket" and "Planet of Ghosts." 3. "Wacky World" (a revelation) and "Planet of Love." 4. "Men of the Bronze Age."

When are we going to have some more novels by Coblentz and how about Paul on the front cover? Also Steber, Cabot, and O'Brien for stories.

JOE L. HENSLEY,
411 S. Foss St.,
Bloomington, Ind.

Novel by Coblentz in this issue! Artist Paul will soon begin work on a new series of back covers for our companion magazine, Fantastic Adventures. All the authors you mention will appear very soon.—Ed.

PROMISE

Sirs:

You fiend! In the January issue you promised us a 'Mac Girl' for either March or April. The March cover was by Fuqua, and then you tell us that the April cover will be by Fuqua also. I'm all hepped up for a "Mac Girl" and you give us Fuqua! From a fellow that could kick you.

BILL WATSON,
1299 California Street,
San Francisco, Calif.

We hope the Mac Girl on this cover will avert that imminent kick! We wanted to get a super story to go with the cover, so we gave the job to Duncan Farnsworth. We think you'll thank us for delaying another month!—Ed.

"PRETTY NEAR FLOORED"

Sirs:

Recently I happened to be looking through a magazine stand and my eye was attracted to your magazine, AMAZING STORIES, the March issue. After reading this magazine, I glanced through the back and saw the advertisement that told about the *Fantastic Adventures Quarterly*. I thought that if it was as good as the first one I read, it would be perfect. Imagine my surprise when I saw the size of the magazine, and then I was pretty near floored when I started to look at the contents page. I read every story in the book.

I can't wait till your next issue of AMAZING STORIES for the second part of "Disciples of Destiny."

Thank you for new reading happiness.

WILLIAM MAYER,
26 Ferncliff Road,
Scarsdale, N. Y.

Back issues may be obtained for 20c per copy (25c per copy for the current and last six issues), if you will address our circulation department.

HERE'S A "BOND" FIRE!

Sirs:

It burned me up to read in a recent issue of either AMAZING STORIES or *F.A.*, I disremember which, some fan's criticism to the effect that Fuqua was careless (the word used was either "sloppy" or "slovenly" as I recall) artist. I've looked and looked for that letter to get an exact quotation, but can't seem to find it.

Anyhow, if you know the letter I mean, I wish you'd tell the critic for me that Bob Fuqua is *far* from being careless in his work. You might add that when I sent you the manuscript for (title deleted) I deliberately requested that the art assignment be given to Fuqua, whose painstaking research on Mayan archaeology lent much strength and flavor to the earlier "Sons of the Deluge," and whom I felt positive would devote the same meticulous care to study the archaeology of (deleted) before he laid a brush to canvas.

I do not know why our friend has objected to Bob's work, but I do know that as a writer I am always pleased to learn that he has been given one of *my* jobs to illustrate. Four of Bob's originals are now hanging on my workshop walls, and I hope that after the publication of (deleted) there will be another—or others!

NELSON S. BOND,
Willow Road,
Grove Park,
Roanoke, Va.

You said it, Nelson! Mr. Fuqua, the last time we visited him, had the most amazing collection of old tomes we've ever seen—books worth a great deal of money in themselves—which he was using to substantiate his newest illustrations. Books we

didn't believe existed. His library is tremendous, and when we want authenticity, we go to Fuqua. —Ed.

A CONFIRMED READER

Sirs:

I am a confirmed reader of your magazine AMAZING STORIES, and have been for years. I wouldn't miss a single copy of it for love nor money; it is unquestionably the "tops" in its field. Also I have every copy of your *Popular Aviation* (now *Flying & Popular Aviation*) and *Popular Photography*, since they started publication; so you see I am not actually a stranger to your publications.

I heartily agree with you that Harry Schuster stuck his neck out when he condemned the Mac Girl covers. I don't claim to like the covers because they are art; I like them because of the girl herself, and I don't feel the least bit hypocritical in saying that I think a great number of your readers will agree with me. According to Mr. Schuster's way of thinking, it would be indescribably embarrassing for him to be caught coming out of one of the great metropolitan museums where some of the "old masters" (such as Titian) are on display.

"Disciples of Destiny" is all that it promised to be; I only hope that Wilcox can keep up the pace as well as Frank Patton did in *Fantastic Adventures* with his "Doorway to Hell."

RICHARD H. LEWIS,
Box 465,
Jeffersonville, Ind.

What happened to Schuster in our letters this month shouldn't happen to Schuster! And if we weren't sure of the popularity of the Mac Girl before (which we were!) we certainly are now. Man, oh man, how she is loved!—Ed.

A VERDICT

Sirs:

Having read the March issue of AMAZING STORIES I am hereby ready to deliver a verdict: Positively super!!

I remember asking in one of my other letters, that if Wilcox could write the "Lost Race Comes Back" in forty days, what could he do if you gave him more time? I certainly have the answer now in the first part of "Disciples of Destiny." Egad!! How that man can dish it out!

As for the rest of that issue, it is the best in many a month.

1—*Planet of Ghosts* by David V. Reed.

2—*Men of the Bronze Age* by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

3—*Suicide Rocket* by Manly Wade Wellman. This space yarn by one of my favorite authors is one of the best shorts on the subject in a long time.

4—As for number four, I couldn't make up my mind between: *Sarker's Joke Box* by Raymond Z. Gallun or *Wacky World* by Edmond Hamilton.

5—*The Planet of Love* by Jep Powell.

I didn't include "Disciples of Destiny" in the rating because I just like to think of it as being separate from the rest of the mag.

I usually don't say much about the illustrations, but I must say that the two illustrations by Rod Ruth were swell, and that the cover was swell too. I'll be waiting for the other half of "Disciples of Destiny" with bated breath.

I noticed two or three stories from AMAZING in a book called "The Other Worlds." That's a swell plug for AMAZING STORIES and its writers.

HARLAN CAMPBELL,
618 Roberts,
Reno, Nevada.

Yes, it took Don Wilcox quite some time to write the novel, "Disciples of Destiny," but it was well worth the time. It was 60,000 words of very swell fiction, said the readers.

Your rating of "Planet of Ghosts" is not quite where the other readers placed it. But it goes to prove that in a story of this type, there is always a widely varied opinion. But we do think that a complicated story does not go over as well. That's why Don Wilcox holds your interest so well.

But there you have it—variety! We try to give you something different with each story. And for this time—so long.—Ed.

AMERICA ON GUARD!

Above is a reproduction of the Treasury Department's Defense Savings Poster, showing an exact duplication of the original "Minute Man" statue by famed sculptor Daniel Chester French. Defense Bonds and Stamps, on sale at your bank or post office, are a vital part of America's defense preparations.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

George C. Mayer, 1430 Rufu Avenue, Louisville, K., has AMAZING from 1928 to 1933 as well as other items for sale against any fan's want list . . . John K. Flitcraft, Bradley, Ill., would like female pen pals from the middle west 20 to 30. He would also like to buy a copy of "Ship of Ishtar" by A. Merritt . . . Frank H. Rathbone, Georgia Tech., Box 3007, Atlanta, Georgia, is 17 years old and a freshman at Georgia Tech. He would like to correspond with girls around his own age . . . Anita Schulz, 539 Baker St., Lansing, Michigan, would like to correspond with any and all from the ages of 15 to 30. She is interested in music, dancing, science, travel, sports, reading, and will answer all letters promptly . . . Barbara Scherer, 1637 Herbert St., Lansing, Michigan, also desires correspondents of the ages 15-18. She is interested in music, sports, and travel . . . S. A. Warnar, 144 So. Broadway, Yonkers, N. Y., wishes to sell AMAZING STORIES. He has every issue from June, 1938 to December, 1941 . . . Don Eastman, 326 Lawton Terrace, Co. Bluffs, Ia., would like to hear from V. R. Heiner, so he can buy some books from him. He would

also like to buy S.F. books or magazines. Please send list . . . Chester Hooey, care Mrs. Meyer, 162-5th Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y., will trade a Banjo-uke and science books for a professional snare drum with instruction book and sticks . . . Benjamin Bobrow, 265 Williams Ave. Brooklyn, N. Y., has SF magazines and books, small printers' set, stamp doubles and hundreds of other articles he wishes to trade for stamps from North, South America and any other part of the world . . . Joe Kahn, 718 St. Marks Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., would like to communicate with female science fiction fans living in Brooklyn. He is 15½ years old . . . Charlie Lee Morris, 443 W. Market St., Anderson, S. C., has Carl H. Claudy's "Mystery Men of Mars" in good condition that he will exchange for his "Land of No Shadow" or his "A Thousand Years a Minute" or any other SF book in good condition . . . Tom Ludowitz, 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash., has all the Books by E. R. Burroughs in new or used copies. Moderate prices. List free. Also, anybody interested in an amateur science fiction or fantasy magazine, or writing for one contact him at once . . . Ashe Rostowsky, 10 Marmion Road, Cape Town, South Africa, would like to correspond with anyone aged 14 to 16 years. He is interested in sports and science . . . Hugh Hinchliffe, 1265 S. W. 19th Terr., Miami, Fla., would like to correspond with good-looking girls age 13-16. He is 15, good-looking and interested in science. Send picture . . . Barbara T. Witek, Box 324, Ancon, Canal Zone, has a number of AMAZING STORIES she would like to swap for pre-cancelled or U. S. or foreign stamps . . . Ronald Townshend, Mile End Road, Diep River, Cape Town, South Africa, would like to correspond with pen pals from all over the world. Interested in anything, anyone, any age, and either sex . . . Joe Vallin, Jr., 5809-33 Street, Washington, D. C., would like to get all of E. R. Burroughs' books, and also quarterlies and annuals of AMAZING STORIES . . . Bill Blackbeard, 216 Orchid Ave., Corona del Mar, Calif., has the following science-fiction books for sale: The Planet of Peril by Otis Albert Kline. (First Edition) $2.50 . . . The Underground City by Jules Verne—$.60 . . . The Monster Men by E. R. Burroughs—$.95 . . . Tarzan at the Earth's Core by Burroughs—$.95 . . . The Warlord of Mars by Burroughs—$1.25 . . . Readers in Philadelphia can get all the current issues of science-fiction and fantasy magazines, as well as some back issues at Winner's, 1709 N. 13 Street, Philadelphia, Pa. . . . Fantasy Fiction Field offers the "Nycon" booklet to all fandom. Twenty-five pages of fotos from the First World STF Convention with complete and authentic writings. Also as a prelude the booklet contains fotos and facts on the conferences preceding the "Nycon" itself. A limited edition—Price right now is 50c. Copies are ready—Julius Unger, 1702 Dahill Road, Brooklyn, N. Y. . . . Charles Lee Riddle, Box 212, Fort Smith, Ark., would like to gain a few "just pen-pals" between the ages of 16 and 20.

AIRSHIP OF VENUS

by HENRY GADE

What kind of aircraft would we find on Venus? Its science, its materials, are limited. It must be a primitive craft

ON THE back cover of this magazine, artist James B. Settles has depicted the kind of airplane that would be scientifically possible on a primitive world such as science says Venus must be. He has pictured it in the form of a giant bird, fashioned of skins and light wood braces.

Venus, being close to the sun, is a tropical world, but it has the advantage of a tremendously thick cloud blanket which surrounds its entire hemisphere at all times, which screens the surface from the tremendous heat that would otherwise destroy all living things.

But this condition means that its peoples are still in the early planetary stage, and are comparable to the creatures who might have lived on Earth during the carboniferous period.

Yet, Venus is not so much a younger planet, and the mental stage of advancement on Venus is probably at a much further stage than it had been on Earth during the day of the giant fern, and the dinosaur.

So, we can assume that the man from Venus, half-human, half-fish (because his planet has very much water), knows enough to invent a ship that can travel through the air, beneath his cloud blanket.

However, he would be faced with a problem. Metals, naturally, would be beyond his comprehension, and he would have to build his airship of the light forms of wood (perhaps greatly similar to bamboo) and the skins of birds and lizards.

Lighter-than-air wood on Venus might not be so strange a thing, considering the very dense atmosphere. It is conceivable that certain plants could contain, as part of their makeup, hollow stems filled with a gas that would buoy them up in the heavy atmospheric blanket, and prevent them from sinking into the morass.

Building his plane of this material, covering it with skins, the Venusian would find himself possessing a craft that could be floated at a medium height over the surface of his world. Its ceiling would be quite low, perhaps only a few hundred feet. But it would be easily handled, in spite of its bulk, because of the very fluidity of the air.

He would soon find that he could cause its wings to flap as do the wings of the bird, or of the flying lizard. He would discover how to rig them up so that the crew could manipulate them much as the slave galleys of the Mediterranean were propelled by oars.

Turning would be a simple matter of a rudder. And the pilot would be stationed at the fore-part of the ship, controling its direction by means of cables which he would operate by hand.

In case of accident, a fall would rarely be fatal, since the descent would be so slow in the thick atmosphere. Also, it is quite possible that the Venusian would think nothing of a dive into the sea from as high as a hundred feet.

The surface of Venus is probably ninety percent water, and all flights would be over the sea. And to land there would be exactly as safe as a church, in a literal manner. The Venusian is at home in the water, whether it be a thousand miles from shore, or a dozen yards.

It would be necessary for the Venusian airship to be so balanced in regards to its buoyance that when not in actual flight, with its wings flapping, it would settle very slowly to sea-level pressure. Thus, it would not be a balloon, or dirigible in direct principle, being incapable of floating aloft and escaping.

When stopping, and making a descent, the crew would simply cease their efforts at the wing-flapping devices, and the ship would settle slowly downward until it reached sea-level.

However, air travel on Venus would not be the main method of transportation, since a journey in the craft would be a very slow process. Its top speed would probably be only five miles per hour. Its value would be in traversing the gumbo-swamp areas of Venus where the amphibian Venusian could not swim, or use his surface craft.

Scientists believe that Venus does not rotate on its axis more than once in its circuit of the sun. Therefore, there is no change to day and night, and the only area where temperature changes would result in atmospheric movement would be the twilight areas. Here the Venusian would not venture with his aircraft, because it would collapse under the force of the ponderous moving masses of air.

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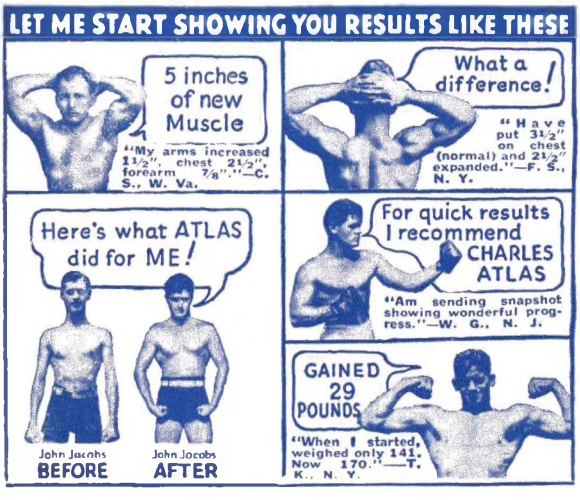
LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE



CHARLES ATLAS

Awarded the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" in international contest—**in competition with ALL men who would consent to appear against him.**

This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

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"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical **natural** method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—**my way.** I give you **no gadgets or contraptions to fool with.** When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension," you can laugh at **artificial** muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No **theory**—every exercise is **practical.** And, man, **so easy!** Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of **"Dynamic Tension"** almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

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Name.....
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Check here ☐ for booklet A if under 16.

AIRSHIP OF VENUS

The airplane of Venus is a combination of lighter-than-air craft, and airplane, and is flown like a bird, by flapping its wings. Power is obtained manually. See page 273.