

20 STORIES - All Complete

# fantastic

ADVENTURES REISSUE

## QUARTERLY

**MOONS  
of  
DEATH**

By  
**DAVID V.  
REED**



**LAND of the  
SHADOW  
DRAGONS**

By  
**EANDO BINDER**

**GODDESS of FIRE**

By  
**EDGAR RICE  
BURROUGHS**

WINTER  
25c



**BRILLIANT  
FANTASY** *by*

**DON WILCOX ★ DUNCAN FARNSWORTH  
JEP POWELL ★ ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM  
JAMES NORMAN ★ POLTON CROSS**

**ROCKET RAID from MARS**

SEE  
BACK COVER

# fantastic ADVENTURES

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## QUARTERLY

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Reissue

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Stories that have appeared in Fantastic Adventures Monthly

- LAND OF THE SHADOW DRAGONS (Novel)**.....by Eando Binder  
When the Invisible Robinhood faces invisible dragons, something is bound to happen!
- THREE EYES IN THE DARK (Novelet)**.....by Don Wilcox  
There she was, before Nort's eyes—the girl who wore three mystic jewels that meant rescue to man.
- THE MASTERFUL MIND OF MORTIMER MEEK (Novel)**...by William P. McGivern  
It's easy to command when you know your will power is irresistible. Maybe just a bit too easy!
- MOONS OF DEATH (Novelet)**.....by David V. Reed  
It takes a steady hand, clear eyes, and iron nerve to be a moon-diver. But what if you lose all three?
- THE MAN WHO MURDERED HIMSELF (Short)**.....by Duncan Farnsworth  
It was a marvelous party. Everyone changed identity. Then one of them died. Was he guest or host?
- THE MACHINE FROM THE PAST (Short)**.....by James Norman  
He came out of the bay to warn of a disaster. Was he insane, or had time really been bridged?
- MR. DUFFY'S OTHER LIFE (Short)**.....by Arthur T. Harris  
Mr. Duffy figured he'd do diferent if he had his life to live over again. Then the chance came.
- ONSLAUGHT OF THE DRUID GIRLS (Novelet)**.....by Ray Cummings  
Lee Blaine went to find Earth's second moon, and found also a lovely girl in dire, mysterious danger.
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The Little People were forbidden to traffic with the Big Ones, but then, a favor ought to be returned.
- THE MAN WHO BOUGHT MARS (Novelet)**.....by Polton Cross  
Hal Bailey bought Mars although it seemed worthless. But then he slept for a century and a half.
- AMAZONS OF A WEIRD CREATION (Novelet)**.....by Jep Powell  
Spud Harris and Dr. Pipp were in a spot—two lone men in a woman's world; and what hags they were!
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Problem children are difficult, eh? Well, did you ever own a robot with a screw loose in his head?
- BILL OF RIGHTS, 5000 A.D. (Short)**.....by John York Cabot  
There was Truth on that ancient scroll! And it inspired Shar to defy his masters, fight for freedom.
- GODDESS OF FIRE**.....by Edgar Rice Burroughs  
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If you were broadcast by radio and became two men, would it be a crime to kill your other self?
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Abner bought a pair of glasses, and found they enabled him to read minds—and life became hell!
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- THREE TERRIBLE PEOPLE**.....by John York Cabot  
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- ROBOTS CAN'T LIE**.....by Robert Leslie Bellem  
The robot couldn't lie, because what it saw was recorded. This one saw the murderer.
- DOORWAY OF VANISHING MEN**.....by William P. McGivern  
People walked into the revolving door of the big store, but didn't come out the other side!

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#### ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

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## ADVENTURES

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NO. 3

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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Cover painting by Robert Fuqua depicting a scene from "Land of the Shadow Dragons"  
Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, Julian S. Krupa, Jay Jackson, Magarian, Rod Ruth

William B. Ziff, Publisher;  
B. G. Davis, Editor

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VOLUME 3,  
NUMBER 3





**IF** you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

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# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

**A**S you read this sentence, you already know the good news—about **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** going monthly with the June issue. We made up our minds in a hurry, just as we were going to press with this May issue. And the reason we made this quick decision? Well, the editors want to thank the readers of **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** for the many encouraging letters, and the many requests that we publish the magazine every month. We are pleased that our latest issues have met with your complete approval, and with some very fine stories on tap, we are going to go “double” immediately, so as not to let them go “stale,” if that word could ever apply to the treats on tap *every month* from now on!

**J**UST as a teaser, how about these, for that first monthly issue?

“The Druid Girl” by Ray Cummings, featured by McCauley’s “Mac Girl” in another sensational cover scene. It’s easily the best work of both men, and Cummings’ story is proof that he has hit the “comeback” trail with a vengeance.

Another returning favorite is Eando Binder with another “Little People” story.

Then there’s Jep Powell, our newest writer, with “Amazons of a Weird Creation,” which is a rather unusual story, we confess.

But let’s not reveal any more. We won’t have any suspense left, if we do. All we *will* say is that it’s a top-notch lineup!

**P**ERHAPS one of the most exciting bits of forecast information we can give you is the news that Nat Schachner, the old master, is coming up in August with “The Enchantress,” as fine a fantasy as we’ve ever read!

And in July we have James Norman’s great character “Oscar of Mars” in his third thrilling adventure. Oscar bids fair to become a legend

in fantasy fiction. Don’t miss this one, by any means! We’re warning you now!

**A**LL of which points to some of the things in this issue. This seems to be “comeback” time! For instance, here’s the Invisible Robinhood, who made such a hit back in July 1939, our initial issue. Binder has penned another adventure of this modern champion of justice.

And David V. Reed returns after a long absence with a swashbuckling story that’ll burn your ears off for sheer action and suspense. It’s fine stuff!

He’ll be back again! He’s scheduled for “Kid Poison” very soon in our companion magazine, **AMAZING STORIES**. If you like good interplanetary stuff, watch for that one!

Next, there’s Don Wilcox with the second of his new kind of story, the true fantasy. Let us know what you think of “Three Eyes In The Dark” will you?

And our humorist, William P. McGivern hits us again with the most hilarious adventure of them all—and with a complete novel! Laugh? We think you will!

**B**Y the way, if you haven’t gotten that big 15th Anniversary

issue of **AMAZING STORIES**, don’t fail to dash out right now and nail a copy. It’s the biggest ever, and crammed with your favorite writers and artists. 244 pages of entertainment plus!

**W**E have a fantastic crime-wave on our hands!

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**Steubenville, Ohio**—An entire mile of track was stolen from a Pennsylvania Railroad spur!

**Chicago, Illinois**—An apartment building under construction was looted of 158 bathtubs!

**Little Falls, New York**—A granite monument weighing 1,600 lbs. was stolen from Jas. Hallinan!

(Concluded on page 123)

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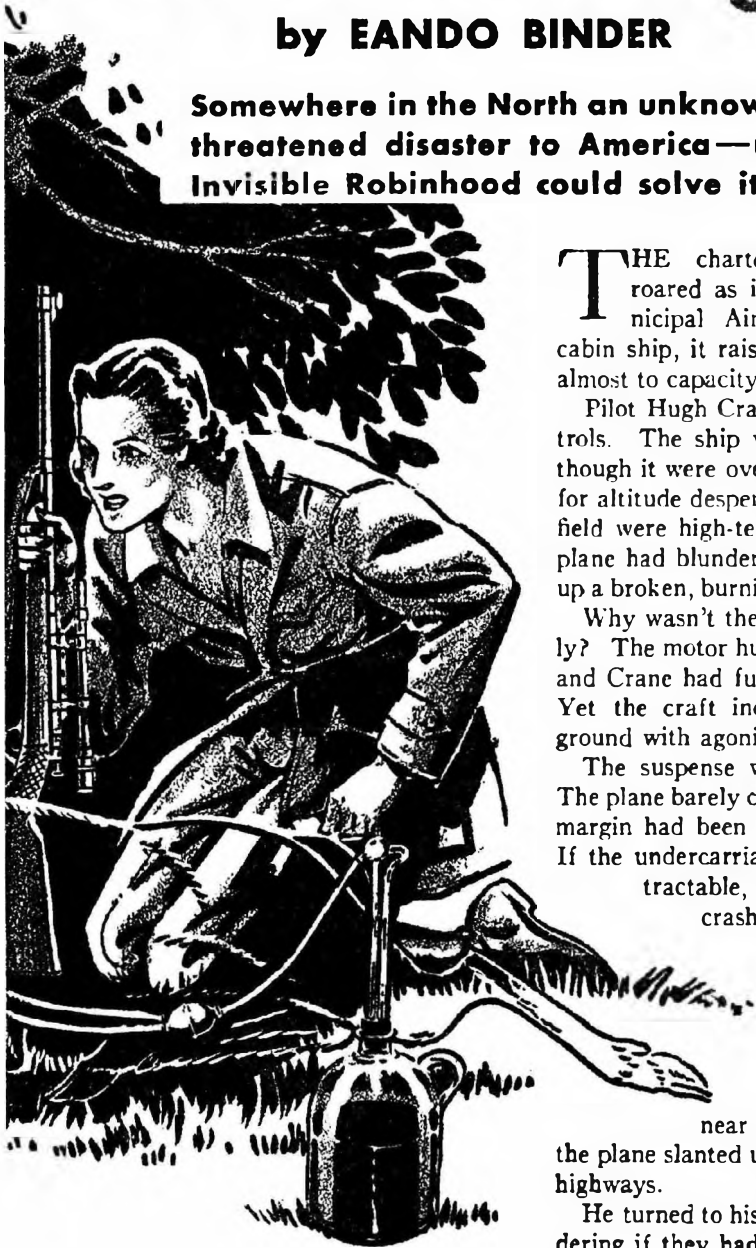
The jar filled slowly with the blood of the invisible deer.



# Shadow Dragons

by EANDO BINDER

Somewhere in the North an unknown menace threatened disaster to America—unless the Invisible Robinhood could solve its mystery



THE chartered plane's motor roared as it left Chicago's Municipal Airport. A low-winged cabin ship, it raised sluggishly, loaded almost to capacity with crated supplies.

Pilot Hugh Crane tensed at the controls. The ship was acting almost as though it were overloaded! He gunned for altitude desperately. Far down the field were high-tension wires. Once a plane had blundered into them, ending up a broken, burning mass of junk.

Why wasn't the plane rising normally? The motor hummed smooth as silk and Crane had full control of ailerons. Yet the craft inched itself from the ground with agonizing reluctance.

The suspense was over in seconds. The plane barely cleared the wires. The margin had been uncomfortably close. If the undercarriage had not been retractable, the ship would have crashed.

Crane unclamped his lower lip from his teeth. In his years of piloting, he had never come that near to disaster. But now the plane slanted up into the safe aerial highways.

He turned to his two passengers wondering if they had noticed.

"Rather a poor take-off, wasn't it?" Paul Harlan said sharply. "We were careful not to overload the ship, according to airport instructions and inspection."

Crane knew he wasn't going to like Harlan. Tall and dark, he seemed about Crane's age, under thirty. His bearing was stiff and cold, his lips straight and thin. A man who would play his own game, given the chance.

Ignoring the words, Hugh Crane addressed the girl in the side seat.

"Where to, Miss Damon?"

She did not reply at once.

Dawn's glowing red arc brightened in the east, revealing the girl more clearly. Crane's brief glance formed a staccato impression. Figure tall, slender. Features regular except for a slight upturned nose. Type, titian blond. Clothing mannish for roughing it — boots, leather breeches, suede jacket, tam o'shanter. Total effect, not bad!

"You will fly due northwest," the girl directed. Her tone was preoccupied.

"To what, or where?"

"Our destination is near Great Bear Lake, Canada."

"Which side of it?" Crane pursued.

A frosty stare accompanied the girl's response.

"As I told the airport officials, that's my business. I paid for the privilege of having an uninquisitive pilot!"

"Ouch!" Crane said mentally.

What kind of trip was this? Why all the secrecy? He took a longer look at the girl. No, she wasn't just a wealthy madcap, out for a lark. There was quiet purpose in her hazel-brown eyes. Almost grimness.

"I can't go by those general directions," Crane ventured. "Not all the way. A plane isn't something you can amble around in aimlessly. After all, Miss Damon—"

Jondra Damon interrupted with a toss of her head.

"You're being difficult. When we reach Great Bear Lake, I'll give you more specific instructions. If that doesn't satisfy you, turn back! I'll get another pilot."

For a moment they glared at each other. Then Crane shrugged and turned eyes front. The girl was within her rights. He had been instructed to fly where she wished, within the range of risk to life and ship. Beyond that, the officials had said—or known—nothing of the eccentric arrangement.

WHAT was it all about? Crane began to feel he was flying in some sort of mystery. To Crane it wasn't exactly an unpleasant thought.

The girl's hand touched his shoulder. She was suddenly smiling.

"I didn't mean to be so abrupt. But I really can't explain much more at present. My father is up there—Dr. Sewell Damon. He's conducting experiments. Mr. Paul Harlan, who answered my ad last week for an experienced chemist, is to assist him. The exact destination is being kept secret as long as possible at my father's request."

She added, after a moment's hesitation, "I think he fears—well, spies."

"Spies!" Crane echoed the word with a start. "What sort of experimenting is he doing?"

The girl shook her head, but not angrily. Her eyes suddenly gleamed with worry. She spoke in a low murmur.

"I think he may be in danger!"

She arose, as though to pace the narrow cabin floor.

"Sit down!" Crane snapped. Hastily he added, "Sorry, but it's the best thing to do while flying."

But before the girl could obey, the



ship lurched through an air pocket. The girl seemed about to stumble and fall backward. But miraculously she didn't, as if a hand had caught her arm just in time.

"Thanks!" she smiled at Harlan, gaining her seat.

Harlan stared at her blankly. He had had no chance to help her, half sliding out of his seat himself.

"What —" he began, but then shrugged. It was hard to talk above the drone of the propellor.

Crane's quick glance behind him had taken in the episode. Again things seemed verging on the mysterious. First the plane, apparently overloaded. Then the queer mission they were on. Now the girl, acting as though an unseen passenger had assisted her.

But there was no such passenger. She had imagined that someone had helped her keep her balance.

**T**HE plane drummed northwest. The countryside below became steadily more bleak and rugged with each degree of northern latitude.

Ten hours later, Hugh Crane turned to Jondra Damon, dozing in her seat. He hated to disturb her, but now was the time for directions. She looked like she hadn't had proper sleep for a week, in preparation for this strange venture.

"We're within a hundred miles of Great Bear Lake. Might tell me now exactly where you want to go."

Jondra Damon rubbed her eyes. "Fifty miles east of Great Bear, directly on the Arctic Circle.

Minutes later, a snow squall came up, chilling the heated cabin.

Crane pondered. "If the snow gets thicker," he said, "I'll have to land on the first level stretch. But maybe we can make it to your destination. What are we looking for? Any landmark you can name?"

"It's a valley," the girl responded shortly, lighting a cigarette.

Crane looked helplessly at Harlan.

Harlan shrugged. "I know as little about it as you do," he grunted.

At the same time he eyed the girl as though he, too, resented being kept so much in the dark.

Jondra Damon blew out a cloud of smoke imperturbably.

"I thought it was women who were always curious. Now look, you're both paid to do as you're told, and paid well. You, Mr. Harlan, were hired at ten dollars a day to help my father when we arrive. You, Mr. Crane, were engaged to land the plane where I state, help unload the supplies, and then leave. It's simple enough, isn't it?"

"But the valley!" Crane said patiently. "I presume there's a big sign somewhere saying *valley* in big red letters?"

The girl flushed. "Oh! Well, it's a sunken valley. Father informed me that it should stand out from the air by itself."

Crane shook his head, but went back to his controls.

Reaching Great Bear Lake, he cruised over its eastern shore, and swung gradually away in a wide circle. The snow thickened, making a landing imperative within an hour. Crane swept his eyes from horizon to horizon for the valley. A sunken valley. What in the world would it look like?

A hand gripped his shoulder suddenly, turning him slightly. Then Crane saw it himself—a dark gash in the general whiteness of snow-tufted land.

"Yes, that must be it!" Crane said, wondering why Harlan was so mysterious, grasping his shoulder and not saying a word. He looked around, but Harlan was now beside the girl, peering down.

What was the man's game? Crane thought fleetingly. Had he known how the valley would look, despite his pretended ignorance of the whole thing? Was he keeping things from the girl, as well as the other way around? What was in that valley—gold, radium?

He'd soon find out. Crane zoomed for the spot. Circling and lowering, he made out the barren floor of the valley, with only an evergreen here and there. A landing could easily be made in the valley itself. It was sunken, all right, at least three hundred feet below general level, with sheer cliffs at every side.

"How queer it looks!" Jondra Damon was murmuring at his side, peering through the windshield. "Watch out for the snow . . ."

IT struck Crane too. Swirls of snowflakes dropped into the valley and seemed to hang. Momentarily, they seemed to form the ghost-shapes of tall trees. Crane felt a qualm of uneasiness, but quickly killed it. One could see anything in clouds or snowstorms, with a dash of imagination.

"No time to waste," he warned. "We're going down. Hold on!"

Heading into the wind, Crane slanted down for the broad, smooth area at one end of the valley. There should be no trouble.

Suddenly a tiny figure emerged from some hidden shelter below, near a cliff-face. It ran madly into the open, swinging its arms wildly.

"It must be father!" Jondra cried. She peered closely. "He seems to be warning us away. I don't understand. There's something wrong!"

Harlan gasped. "The man's mad! He's firing his gun at us!"

Above the roar of the propellor sounded the sharp bark of a rifle. The man below was firing not at them, but in warning not to land! To stay away!

"I'm going to land anyway!" Crane yelled. "I've got to! Blinding snow-storm up above, and getting worse. This is a safer chance."

A hundred feet above ground, Crane gasped through tight-pressed lips.

Something had brushed against the undercarriage! He felt it jar through the ship, though he saw nothing! A keen instinct of danger knifed through him. He tried instantly to zoom upward again, but again something struck the ship.

This time it had been at the right wingtip, almost wrenching the wheel out of his hands. The plane dipped groundward sickeningly, like a wounded bird. With desperate strength, Crane straightened the craft just as the wheels touched ground.

Bouncing badly, the plane rumbled over the rough terrain. It rolled almost to a stop, but abruptly struck something with a stunning impact, shivering through its entire length. Crane found himself thrown in a tangled heap with his two passengers on the tilted cabin floor.

The motor coughed to silence, luckily, eliminating the danger of fire if any gas had spurted out of the wing tanks.

## CHAPTER II

### The Invisible Spectre

HUGH CRANE picked himself up dazedly, then pulled the girl to her feet. She lay limp in his arms for a moment, half stunned. Finally her eyelids flew open. The warm color of her eyes was washed over with terror that faded, and wonder that grew.

"What happened?" she asked weakly. "Why did the plane act as if it had struck something?"

"Struck something!" Paul Harlan

stood beside them, dark face glowering, a bruise over his right eye. "Bad piloting, that's all," he growled. "First he nearly wrecks the ship in taking off at Chicago. Now he nearly puts us down in pieces!"

His voice rose harshly. "Spies! Your father is worried about spies, you say. I just wonder if this Hugh Crane is a licensed pilot at all. Or if he's using his right name!"

Jondra Damon's eyes widened. She stepped back from Crane.

"Father warned me to be very careful, and now—"

"Good God!" Crane exploded. He'd had to bite his lips to keep from swinging at Harlan. Now the stark suspicion in the girl's eyes added fuel to a mounting rage. He didn't have to take this from anybody!

He lunged at Harlan, driving his fist forward.

*The blow never landed.* Crane was not quite sure why it didn't. Some force seemed to grasp his wrist and hold his arm back. He tried again, more enraged than ever.

"Stop!"

Crane whirled. The new voice had come from the swung-open door of the plane's cabin, with a bark of authority. A man leaned there, rifle upraised. Tall and thin, gray-haired, unshaven, boots and pants muddy, he looked the part of some desperate character. But there was intelligence in his high brow and level gray eyes.

"Dad!"

With the one word, Jondra flew to embrace him. He patted her head, then disengaged her gently, facing the two men again.

"I heard your little quarrel," he said casually. "Your nerves are upset by the close escape you had. Calm down, please."

Crane relaxed, anger draining from

him as suddenly as it had come.

"You're Dr. Sewell Damon, of course," he said, and introduced himself and Harlan. He went on, grinning ruefully, "I was supposed to just land, and unload, and go. But I guess now I'll have to stay till I can make repairs."

The scientist's lips pursed behind a week's growth of beard.

Crane snapped, "If you think that's a spy's trick, so that I can stay and horn in on whatever you're doing here—" He shrugged indifferently.

Dr. Damon's eyes narrowed. His hand tightened on the rifle.

"If there's any spying, it wouldn't be healthy. The secret of this valley—"

"I don't want a dime of it," Crane growled. "Just tell me one thing—what spoiled my landing? Bad air-currents rising from the valley?"

**D**R. DAMON stared. "You haven't guessed?" he said slowly.

"Guessed what?" Crane looked blankly at Harlan, who was equally mystified.

The scientist turned. "Follow me."

The four stepped from the cabin. Dr. Damon dodged under the right wing and stood erect beside the motor cowl. There was a large round dent in the front wing-edge. Crane gaped at it.

"Exactly as though I'd struck a tree there, just before the plane stopped rolling."

"You did," Dr. Damon said.

"What? Where's the tree?"

Crane looked around for the fallen tree, but there was no sign of one within hundreds of yards.

"Look, Dr. Damon," he grunted, "I'm not in the mood for humor—"

A startled cry from Harlan interrupted. He had passed back of Crane, stretching his cramped muscles. Now



he was toppling to the ground, for no visible reason—as if his legs had been knocked from under him!

Rising to his elbow, looking foolish, he slowly stretched out his hand near the ground. Crane watched in utter fascination as Harlan's hand seemed to meet something, and explore its outline. Harlan looked up with his foolish expression altered to one of ghastly shock.

With a smothered curse, Crane kneeled and stretched out his hand to the same spot. In mid-air he felt something—the bark of a tree! Solid and real to his sense of touch, but unseen by his eyes.

Harlan's whisper seemed to shatter the quiet air.

"It's—*invisible!*"

For a moment nothing more was said. The three newcomers to the valley looked at one another in dumb amazement, as human beings must when confronted by a wonder out of the realms of fantasy. Invisibility! A dream of science—and of superstition before that—come true!

Hugh Crane followed the length of the fallen trunk before he was satisfied. With his hands he felt the bole, the lower branches, and the upper foliage of some pinelike tree with needles and cones, knocked over by the plane.

He came back facing the scientist.

"So that's the secret of this valley, Dr. Damon! Not gold or minerals, but invisibility!"

The elderly man nodded slowly.

"It's a miracle that you landed without smashing up completely." He swept an arm around. "The valley looks bare to the eye, doesn't it? As a matter of fact, it teems with life! Trees, bushes, grass and animals. All invisible!"

THE others looked around. The level stretch of the valley floor was naked, to their eyes. Yet they realized

now that between them and the cliffs must be a thousand unseen things. Jondra shivered. Crane could hardly keep from doing the same, overwhelmed by the eerie mystery.

Dr. Damon resumed. "By blind, lucky chance, you brought the ship down in a cleared patch of bush growths. Almost any other spot you would have cracked up against rows of trees."

"Fools luck," agreed Crane. "But why weren't we warned?"

"I tried to warn you away," the scientist reminded. "I fired my gun, hoping you'd go back and land up above somewhere."

"But why wasn't your daughter warned, before we even arrived?" Crane eyed the man accusingly. "You risked your daughter's life by keeping that so secretive!"

"No, I was told," the girl spoke up. "That is, father mentioned invisibility in a message to me. But he didn't tell me the whole story—that the valley is crammed with invisible trees and life."

"I couldn't," Dr. Damon said gently. "You might have thought I was mad." Then his voice sharpened. "But Jondra, I did warn you not to let the plane be landed in the valley, in my second message—"

"Second message?" The girl stared at him. "I didn't get a second one!"

Dr. Damon whirled.

"Pierre!" he cried. "Didn't you deliver my second message?"

Crane started as another figure silently stepped forth from the shadow of the plane. He had come up so quietly that the others hadn't known he was there. Black eyes, sleek black hair, emotionless features and buckskin garments tabbed him instantly as a French-Canadian guide and a roamer of the north country.

"Pierre, my guide," Dr. Damon in-

formed them parenthetically. Then again he demanded: "The second message, Pierre. By heaven, if you failed to send it—"

"I send it," Pierre protested in a hoarse, taciturn voice. "I mail it from Good Hope, t'ree week ago."

"Then it was lost in the mails," Dr. Damon sighed. "Well, things have been uncertain right along, since the war. Thank heaven you're here safe and sound, Jondra. And you, Crane and Harlan. Sorry about your ship, Crane. I'll pay for the damages."

"You can stay as long as you need to repair it. Plenty of food supplies came with Jondra. I have a comfortable cave-home in the nearby cliff. Well, You're all probably tired and hungry. We can unload the plane tomorrow. Follow me."

The night was coming on. The three who had spent a dozen hours in the air were ready for food and rest. And shelter. A chill wind swept down into the valley, protected though it was.

As Crane stepped away from the plane, a thought ground forward in mind.

"Who turned off the motor, just after the landing?" he asked aloud. "Harlan, Miss Damon and I were on the floor, helpless. You, Dr. Damon, and Pierre were approaching. It couldn't be any of us." He grasped the scientist's arm. "There wouldn't happen to be—*invisible men?*"

Dr. Damon started. "Not that I know of," he vouched. "It's a preposterous thought. Your motor died by itself."

CRANE shook his head. "I'd like to believe that. But the ignition key was turned off."

"Then the jar of landing turned it," Dr. Damon retorted. "Don't let your imagination run away with you."

Imagination? Imagination that the plane at take-off had been heavily loaded? That Jondra Damon had kept on her feet in the bouncing air pocket? That a strange force had withheld his blow at Harlan? That a shock-cushioned ignition key had been turned by a human hand?

All imagination? Or did it add up to some mystery, strangely linked with this phenomenal valley of invisibility?

Crane didn't know. But he was determined to find out, one way or another.

### CHAPTER III

#### Sabotage

PIERRE and Dr. Damon led the way. Harlan, Jondra and Crane followed in single file, carefully stepping in the exact path they broke. Blundering into an unseen tree would not be pleasant.

Dr. Damon kept one hand directly before him like a sleepwalker, for emergency, but seemed able to avoid invisible trees by some instinct. He stepped along sure-footedly, as did Pierre.

"From experience," he confided, "I can make out the trees. They aren't absolutely invisible. Nothing can be, except air and colorless gases. The trees throw a faint shadow that my eyes—and Pierre's—have learned to watch for. With the sun setting, the shadows are longer and more definite. Do you see them at all?"

Crane gradually made out the faintest of shadows slanting over what seemed barren ground. Like eyes adjusting themselves to gloom, he could squint and bring them up slightly. He sucked in his breath. There were hundreds of those long, faint shadow-streaks. A whole forest towered around them!

A forest of trees as solid as the ground, but as vagrant to the eye as

smoke. Light went through them with less hindrance than through glass. It was amazing, almost incredible.

The ground was not barren, however, upon closer inspection. A carpeting of dead needles lay decaying over the ground, as in any pine forest. Here and there they stepped over logs and fallen trees, completely visible. Dead branches and sticks were in the visible spectrum.

"This valley's invisibility is confined solely to its living life-forms," Dr. Damon explained. "When a tree or animal dies, it passes into the visible." He stopped, pointing. "Look—a rabbit!"

Crane barely made out a faint trail of mist streaking across their path. Invisible animals roamed these invisible forest glens.

"There are also fox, deer, and I think bear," Dr. Damon elaborated. "It—"

He was interrupted by a blood-chilling roar that sounded faintly from far across the valley. Both Pierre and the scientist jerked their heads, exchanged a glance, and gripped their rifles more firmly.

"Lynx," stated Dr. Damon briefly.

"Are you sure it wasn't anything bigger?" Crane asked. "I just thought I saw a shadow thrown momentarily across the far cliff wall, near where the sound came from. It was the outline of—"

Crane stopped. He had been about to say something preposterous.

"Lynx," repeated Dr. Damon tersely.

Crane saw the scientist's surreptitious glance at his daughter. He kept still. But the shadow aside, the roar itself had never issued from the throat of a mere lynx. Of that Crane was dead certain.

**A** NATURAL rock overhang formed the roof of Dr. Damon's valley

dwelling. It extended back fifty feet in the base of the east cliff wall, which was three hundred feet high. Logs set upright to enclose the sides of the rock pocket were of Pierre's handiwork.

The space within was warm, dry, with a hard-packed floor. Pierre, with his kind's resourcefulness, had also fashioned several items of crude furniture—chairs, tables and low bunks cushioned with pine needles. One new bunk had been added, obviously for Harlan.

"You hadn't meant for me to stay, then," Jondra said. "There's danger here, Dad! You wouldn't say it in the message, but there is danger. I can feel it!"

Already unnerved by the hazardous landing, the girl's face was strained. It was not a light shock suddenly to see—or not see—a valley of shadow-things in an otherwise normal world.

"Danger of stubbing your toe!" Dr. Damon forced a laugh and chucked his daughter under the chin. "Food and sleep are what you need, all of you."

Pierre had already begun boiling a stew of jerked beef and onions over a stone stove just outside the pine-slab door. They are looking out over the now-dark valley. It was not so eerie with darkness substituting for invisibility. The unseen forest creaked and rustled under a whipping wind from regions above.

Crane woke twice in the night, on his unaccustomed bed of pine needles. Pierre sat dozing before the smouldering fire he kept up against the night chill of the northern latitude.

But the second time Crane woke up, Pierre was standing erect, staring out over the valley of shadow-life. His expression in the firelight was strange—fierce and determined.

Pierre would bear watching too, Crane told himself. Had he delivered



that second message, or not? If not, why not?

UNLOADING THE plane took the better part of the next day. Pierre, Harlan and Hugh Crane shuttled between the plane and cave with arms full, Pierre leading. Besides food supplies for an extended stay, there were crates of apparatus and chemicals.

Dr. Damon unpacked the latter eagerly, and set the items up on a long table previously made for the purpose, at the back of the cave. His laboratory workbench. Crane felt growing wonder at the array of test-tubes, flasks, hypodermic needles, morphine, alcohol and more complicated reagents.

"Now I'll get somewhere," the biologist asserted, rubbing his hands together. "Pierre wasn't able to pack more than a few pounds of equipment here to me from the small town of Good Hope, northwest of here. I'll have the answer soon."

"Answer to what?" ventured Crane, nettled at the man's secretiveness.

Dr. Damon's gray eyes veiled themselves.

"How long will it take you to repair your ship?" he countered in a tone that meant, "How soon will you get out of my way?"

"I don't know, probably a week or two," Crane lied.

Brief examination had shown him that the ship could leave now. The motor was intact, also the fuel tanks. The left wing was rather badly ripped, and the undercarriage out of line, but with most of its former load gone, the plane would take off easily in the same cleared stretch they had miraculously landed in.

THE plane was ready to go, but Crane wasn't. Not till he was sure Jondra Damon was in no danger.

He couldn't leave a girl—any girl, of course—in the midst of unknown risks.

"You have a radio in the plane?" Dr. Damon said. "If you contact your airport, to tell them of the delay, I'll trust you not to reveal this valley's exact location. Name your price and you'll go back with my bank draft—"

"No sale," Crane snapped, angered at the cheap approach. He turned on his heel, aware that the scientist was staring after him with narrowed eyes.

He trudged to the plane, following the trail now marked with stones, winding through trees that he could feel with his hands in passing, but whose bulks were as transparent as air.

The wonder of it was somewhat subdued this second day. His thoughts revolved more around the undertow of human cross-currents gradually shaping themselves.

He passed Pierre on the trail, lugging a box on his broad shoulders. Reaching the plane, Crane stepped into the cabin. Harlan was there, and he turned with a startled air.

"The doctor's supplies are all in the fuselage compartment, not here," Crane said coldly.

Harlan's shrug was studied.

"I suppose now I'm some sort of spy?" he retorted sarcastically. He stepped out to hoist a box to his shoulders, leaving.

Crane glanced around the ship. What had Harlan been doing? Then he saw . . .

When he left a minute later with the last box, his eyes were hard. He strode rapidly. He set the box down inside the doorway of the cave, and straightened with grim accusation on his face.

"Who smashed the plane's radio?" he demanded, eying them one after another. His glance came back to Harlan. "You were there last, Harlan."

"You'd have heard it if I did it,"

Harlan returned easily. "I was just ahead of you—don't you remember?" His eyes flicked to Pierre significantly.

Pierre's beady eyes met Crane's, then shifted.

"Pierre wouldn't do it," Dr. Damon declared quickly. "I know him too well."

Crane ground his teeth.

"Someone did it! It was done between the time I talked to you last, and went to the plane." He smiled grimly. "If Harlan and Pierre are eliminated, that leaves—"

"How dare you!" Jondra Damon blazed, stepping before him. Neither Dad nor I would do such a thing. You could have done it yourself, since accusations are in order!"

Crane threw up his hands.

"I'm getting tired of all this!" he exploded. "That radio was our only emergency contact with the outside world, since the plane is damaged. Someone in this group smashed it, for reasons of his own. What's more—"

He stopped suddenly and ripped free a lath of the crate he had last brought. Reaching within excelsior packing, he drew out something by a handle and held it up.

"Grenades!" he hissed. "Potato-masher type. You say there is no danger here, Dr. Damon, yet you had your daughter bring rifles and hand grenades. Are the mosquitoes that big here?"

Jondra had shuddered at sight of the grenades. She clutched her father's arm.

"**W**HY did you have me bring them? You must tell me!"

A swift, disturbed look came over the scientist's face. Then he drew a smile over his features.

"You're both being foolish," he laughed. "The grenades are handy for

any number of things, like blasting down trees."

He turned away, in dismissal of the subject.

"All right," Crane said calmly. "I'm going to repair the radio if I can. Then I'm going to signal the authorities and ask for an investigation. Something isn't right here!"

He stamped back to the ship. In the cabin he sat down and waited, without touching the radio. The set was beyond repair. He knew that from the start. His threat, he hoped, would smoke out something. Far worse than groping through an invisible forest was this groping through undefined human purposes.

Who would come sneaking around now, to see if he was repairing the radio? Who was it that wished them isolated from the outside world — and why?

He tensed at a sound—the soft pad of feet under the wing outside. He slowly inched up till his eyes peered over the windshield ledge. Not a soul was there! Puzzled, Crane sank back.

The sound repeated itself a while later, just outside the cabin door. Crane crouched, waiting. When the sound was near, he rushed out, arms extended, ready to knock away a gun if the intruder carried that.

He gasped in chorus with a startled shriek. Jondra Damon was tight in his closing arms. Releasing her, he stepped back.

"You, Miss Damon? But—" Crane was more confused than at any time before.

Color flushed into the girl's paled cheeks. And then suspicion leaped into her eyes. Crane was almost grimly amused. He realized his actions must be as queer in her eyes, as hers in his.

"Sorry," he murmured. "Let's call it quits between us. Frankly, I thought

the one who had smashed the radio would show up, not you."

"Thanks for the implication." She answered his grin with a smile. "I came to ask you something—"

"Yes?"

Her hand touched his arm, before she went on.

"I trust you, somehow. I want you to guard my father, every minute of the day!" The words came in a rush now. "I feel his life is in danger. I feel there's something in this valley—something horrible — that threatens him. Maybe all of us! Will you guard him for me, Mr. Crane?"

Suddenly she was in his arms again, but not by accident. He crushed her to him.

"Yes," he whispered fiercely. "And I'll guard you too—Jondra!"

She struggled free, her eyes wide, startled. She turned.

"Let's go back to camp," she said quietly.

## CHAPTER IV

### Ally Unseen

**J**ONDRA DAMON hurried down the trail, Crane following. The redolence of pine forest was around them, and the rustle of branches in the wind. Almost, Crane could vision the trees themselves, and the girl tripping lithely through them. She glanced around once or twice, her hazel eyes glad to have him as an avowed friend in this queer adventure.

A hundred yards from the plane he caught her hand, striding beside her despite the danger of colliding with a lurking shadow-tree. He wanted to say something.

"Jondra—"

Crane was interrupted by an ear-splitting roar. They froze in their

tracks. Then there sounded the crackling of undergrowth, and the lumbering of some form through the forest toward them!

Jondra cowered in his arms.

"Something's coming at us!" she cried. "Something big—and invisible!"

Crane had already come to that conclusion. He shoved the girl ahead of him, back toward the plane. It was nearer than the camp. They sped as fast as they dared down the marked trail. Invisible bushes dragged at their ankles. Behind them sounded the heavy tread of some nameless beast, snorting and growling ferociously.

"If we could only see it!" Crane groaned.

But on second thought, perhaps it was better not to. No bear or tiger, or any creature Crane could think of had made the noises they heard. Its roar had come from a huge, rumbly chest. Its ponderous feet thumped against the ground with more than elephantine force.

In the name of the universe, what frightful monster was pursuing them, uncatalogued in any zoo or book on Earth?

Crane prodded the girl ahead faster, feeling blind and helpless. What chance to escape the invisible horror? Its growlings drew nearer, and imagination or not, Crane felt a hot fetid breath on his neck. Once it seemed to squeeze between two close-set trees. There was a crack, as one tree gave way.

Just as they reached the wing-edge of the plane, Jondra stopped short with a shrill scream. Crane saw it at the same moment—the ghostly shadow of the creature, cast ahead of them against the nearest cliff-wall.

Crane's own mind and muscles turned numb. A mighty body reared in silhouette, at least twenty feet high.

Great triangular spines ran the length of it. Two thick legs pumped thunderously, upholding the body like a kangaroo. The short forelegs displayed claws that could rend apart an elephant at one stroke. At the end of a serpentine neck slavered huge ridged jaws of more than crocodile magnitude.

Unwisely, Crane shouted the one word to describe it.

"It's a *dragon!*"

Jondra went limp with a little moan of utter terror, slumping against the wing-edge. Crane half swept her in his arms for a desperate run to the cabin, but released her. There wasn't time. By the size of the shadow ahead, the behemoth behind must be within striking distance.

Sobbing in haste, Crane ripped open his jacket and drew out the masher-grenade he carried. He thanked his stars for suspecting he might need it, after discovering he'd brought them here. He gripped its handle, facing the oncoming beast.

**I**F he could only see to throw!

Pulling the pin, he flung it blindly, judging as best he could by sound and instinct where the creature was.

There was a dull roar as Crane flung himself over the girl's form, head down. A second later he heard the majestic crackling of a shattered tree, toppling and crashing its length through the other pines. Branches whipped across his pilot's uniform, bruising him through the fabric. The tree had very nearly smashed down on them.

The grenade had done that—blown down a tree. But had it stopped the beast? The monster's roar had echoed the explosion.

And now the beast's bellow sounded again—nearer and utterly enraged. Crane had missed! In another second ferocious jaws would crunch through

him and Jondra, snuffing out their lives. Crane winced, waiting for the death stroke.

He wasn't sure what happened then. The whole sequence was a blur of sound. He seemed to hear a second grenade explosion, just after his own, clipping off the beast's angry roar. And then from its throat issued a scream so piercing that Crane quivered as if stabbed.

Head ringing, he could hear little more. He sensed that the beast had gone. Picking himself up dazedly, he looked around. But he could see nothing!

That was the ghastly part of it. He couldn't see the fallen tree, or the retreating monster, or any sign of the explosion save a swirl of settling dust. It was like a nightmare. Figures suddenly catapulted through the dust clouds, shouting. Dr. Damon was in the lead, with a grenade, Harlan and Pierre behind with rifles. Pierre shaded his eyes and stared down the valley, evidently at the fleeing beast.

Dr. Damon picked up his daughter, rubbing his cheek against hers, muttering.

"So, that's what the grenades were for!" Crane hissed. "Why didn't you warn us that dragons run around loose here? You pretty nearly fed Jondra to them, you old fool!"

"Let me explain," Dr. Damon said tiredly. He eased the girl back, and continued.

"Six months ago I trekked with Pierre past Great Bear Lake, for first-hand glimpses of Arctic life-forms. I'm a government biologist, retired. We stumbled into this valley. It's almost undetectable from ground level. I doubt if any white man has ever been here before. We almost fell into it before we knew it was here."

He went on, as though finally aware



he must tell the whole story.

"We circled the cliffs and found one spot where you could climb down, at some risk. Finding the astounding phenomenon of invisible life-forms here, I decided to stay for a study, sending Pierre back now and then for pack supplies. Finally I sent the message to Jondra, for more material, in order to make a more permanent stay.

"My idea was simply to have the supplies delivered, and then Jondra would return with you. I didn't want to tell of the dragons, for then she would either insist on staying with me, or worry herself to death back home.

"I still hoped, after the bad landing, that that you would repair the ship and leave with her before the dragons became evident. I was only trying to keep it all from Jondra, for her own peace of mind.

"Not knowing you, Crane, I couldn't tell you either and be certain you wouldn't tell her."

**H**E gulped for breath and went on. "So now you know the final secret of this valley. If there's been any mystery about all this, it's cleared up now."

"Is it?" challenged Crane. "I'm not so sure." He shrugged. "Anyway, I begin to understand a few things. Thanks, Dr. Damon, for tossing your grenade in time."

The scientist stared. "I didn't throw one. I wasn't near enough to, before it was over."

"Then who did?" Crane asked slowly. "I could swear my grenade missed the beast. A second one went off immediately after, chasing the beast away. Didn't you hear two explosions?"

Dr. Damon shook his head, Harlan and Pierre following suit.

"We heard one explosion, then a tree crashing and the beast screaming.

There was so much confusion of noise that you merely imagined you heard another grenade."

"Take the credit due you," Harlan said dryly. "Your grenade did the trick. You're a hero."

Crane ignored the sarcasm, but started a little, meeting Jondra's eyes. She had come to quietly. There was no sarcasm in her eyes, only a deep silent thanks that made him turn away, flushing.

The girl sat up. "I heard every word you said, dad," she stated, "about the dragons. If you're staying, so am I."

Dr. Damon looked at Crane helplessly. That was that!

BACK AT camp, the excitement over, Crane addressed the scientist while they ate their evening meal.

"Why not explain the rest, Dr. Damon?" he suggested. "What experimentation are you carrying on? And why have you wanted the valley's location kept secret from public channels? I think Harlan and I are entitled to know."

The scientist stiffened, as though to refuse. But when Jondra touched his arm, he relaxed. He smiled self-consciously.

"I suppose I have the foibles of any scientist who has stumbled on a great thing. This is one of those phenomena that crop up only once a century. If the world heard about it, a hundred biologists would be swarming up here overnight.

"Can you blame me for wanting to keep it to myself—for a short while anyway? Studying it, recording data, and then announcing it in one grand moment?"

Crane smiled. All his suspicions of Dr. Damon's motives vanished in a flash. He was simply a scientist-miser with a bag of gold, figuratively. He had

heard before that, contrary to general belief, scientists were often childishly jealous of their individual discoveries, and loved the limelight as well as any other human soul.

That took care of the scientist. But what of Harlan? And Pierre? Why had they acted strangely at times?

Crane temporarily shelved the matter.

"What accounts for the invisibility?" he queried.

The bustle of arriving and unpacking, and the battle with the shadow-dragon, had kept them busy. But now the thought loomed—why should this isolated valley bear only invisible life-forms? It was unheard of in the annals of science.

**D**R. DAMON'S tone became academic.

"I've learned a little, and surmised a lot, in the six months I've been here. It traces down to a certain type of grass, which has the property of invisibility. The herbivorous creatures eat the grass—rabbits, deer, etc. The carnivores—bear, fox, weasel, lynx—eat *them*. Excrement and decaying bodies go back to the soil—and back to the vegetation, including trees, bushes, moss. It's a closed cycle, mutually kept up, as it would be in any isolated valley."

"But what causes the invisibility itself?" It was Harlan who asked, leaning forward.

Dr. Damon's tone became vague, dreamy.

"Perhaps it goes back a long way, in evolution. Evolution tries anything and everything. What does vegetation—to personify it—fear most? Being eaten. And being *seen*! If it were invisible, it might escape the crunching jaws of planteaters.

"Thus ages ago evolution may have tried this offshoot species, protected by

invisibility. It failed, because of the animal sense of smell. It vanished in evolution, as so many abortive life-forms have. Only here in this valley it survived, and stayed to the present day."

He waved a hand. "Sheer speculation, I admit. But however it happened, the invisible vegetation is here, and the resulting invisible animal life."

"But what is the exact *agent* of invisibility?" Harlan insisted.

Crane didn't like the tenseness in the chemist's voice, nor the eager way he waited for an answer.

"That's what I want to find out," Dr. Damon returned. "And where you come in. Between us, we may be able to find out. I suspect it's a hormone, a gland-product. Transparent life-forms are not unknown, of course—jellyfish, many worms, tropical fish, etc.

"A jellyfish is practically invisible in water. Thus it is hidden from its enemies. Its protoplasm is no different from ours, but contains gland-products that render it highly transparent.

"The same thing, to a much more marvelous degree, has occurred with this valley's life-forms. Their protoplasm is just as material as ours, but almost completely transparent to light."

Crane nodded. "Clear enough," he punned.

"But the dragons!" he asked in the next breath. "Why should there be invisible beasts never heard of before?"

"Not dragons—dinosaurs," smiled the biologist. "A species of them closely related to the extinct *Tyrannosaurus rex* fiercest of them all. The dinosaurs died out, millions of years ago, in competition with rising mammalian life. But this invisible species had just enough edge to survive, though it has narrowed down to this lone valley."

Dr. Damon's voice lowered almost in awe.

"What we've stumbled on, in this protected valley, is the last vestige of one of nature's great experiments—invisibility.\* It's like finding live saber-toothed tigers, or mastodons, or submen."

THEY all felt it—an air of having been projected into a strange and ancient vault of Earth's long past. Empires of life had risen and fallen, like empires of man. Perhaps the Unseen Life had once lorded it over Earth, only to give way before keener-nosed, sharper-eyed species.

It was a chapter of evolution that had been totally unsuspected. The *dead* forms of the Unseen had all fossilized into opaque stone, leaving no slightest clue to their one-time invisibility in life.

Harlan broke the silence.

"You think, then, that you and I may be able to isolate this invisibility hormone?"

"Not here," Dr. Damon demurred. "It would take years of work, in a well-equipped laboratory. The best we can do is collect samples of blood from these

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\* Author Binder here propounds one of the most interesting propositions ever advanced in science fiction. What if, in the great long ago, certain species of mammals and plant-life acquired the power of almost complete invisibility, as a protective coloration against the encroachments of more aggressive animals and more sturdy life-forms?

Even today there are certain species of animal and fish life which, when in danger, can so alter their color as to blend with their natural surroundings, thus confusing their enemies and warding off destruction.

The theory of invisibility has long intrigued science fiction and fantasy writers, and many fine stories on this fascinating theme have been published. All sorts of suppositions have been put forth as to invisibility in man—peculiar bodily makeup, the ability to acquire this strange phenomenon through an outside agency such as secret chemical formulas or intricate atom re-integrated machinery.

But perhaps Nature is wiser than all the wiles of chemistry and electricity, even as Author Binder suggests.—Ed.

creatures and bring them back to civilization for that laborious research. The blood will contain the hormone. That's our job, Harlan."

The scientist rose. "Let's get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow we're going out hunting—for invisible game!"

"You kill?"

Crane started. It was a surprise to hear the taciturn Pierre speak up of his own volition. The French-Canadian's expression was again strange—almost protesting.

"Yes, why not, Pierre?" Dr. Damon said, surprised.

"Hard job," Pierre grunted, turning away.

But Crane felt he hadn't said what he meant. What went on in the guide's secretive mind? And secondly, why was Harlan so keen on the invisibility angle itself?

When he went to bed, Crane asked himself another startling question. He had counted the grenades. There were four cases, containing six each, according to the bill of lading.

*Two were missing!*

*Who had flung the second grenade?*

## CHAPTER V

### The Man in the Mists

THE hunt the next day proved a strange one.

"I know something of the layout," Dr. Damon asserted. "Pierre and I explored the valley quite a bit. I even made a map."

He displayed it before they started. The valley was roughly five miles long and a mile wide. It was densely wooded in the center, but more thinly at the ends where sunlight was often excluded. The invisible vegetation needed life-giving rays the same as any normal *g r o w t h s*, absorbing nourishment

through a colorless form of chlorophyll in their transparent leaves.

"Deer browse and sleep in the central section," the biologist resumed. "We're after them."

"Where do the dragons hang out?" Crane wanted to know more practically.

"Anywhere," Dr. Damon said briefly.

"I'm going along," Jondra declared firmly. "I won't stay at camp and bite my nails."

The scientist shrugged, without an argument.

"Well, we have the grenades," he said.

"I'm going along too," Crane stated.

"But the plane—"

"Will keep," Crane finished shortly. "Besides, I'm a good shot."

The scientist seemed pleased. "We can use another man with a rifle. Let's go."

Pierre leading, they trekked single file toward the center of the valley, brushing past unseen vegetation.

Crane looked around. Sheer, steep cliffs on all sides. They had kept the outside world out, and the things within from escaping. But the average temperature, it occurred to Crane suddenly, was hardly Arctic. In two days, none of them had been forced to wear more than mackinaw jackets.

"There are steam springs in the central area," Dr. Damon explained. "This valley was formed, ages ago, by the sinking of land into a volcanic bed. The underlying heat works up through the soil, keeping the valley warm."

"No seeds flying up out of the valley can take root in the cold, snow-covered regions above. Thus the invisible vegetation has been confined."

They saw the steam springs soon after, puffs of vapor rising from porous ground and curling vagrantly into the air. Often the ghostly shapes of trees and flowers would be outlined for a mo-

ment, revealing the verdant character of the invisible forest before them.

Singularly, here and there an ordinary pine stood plainly in view, green and solid.

"Some seeds drift down into the valley from above and take root. Seeds of the common visible variety."

Crane suddenly chuckled.

"Hunting invisible deer! Most hunters have a devil of a job bagging one they can see!"

"You think we're fools to try?" countered Dr. Damon imperturbably. "Wait and see—"

He broke off and held up a warning hand. The line stopped. The scientist pointed ahead.

Two hundred yards beyond, a steam spring's vapor wound lazily around and around a clump of bushes. Off and on, like the shutter of a blinking light, it outlined the form of a deer lying hidden. Sensing human presence and the consequent danger, the creature was on its haunches, ready to leap away.

**B**UT it was still there—a perfect target. The steam silhouette betrayed it, robbing it of the advantage of invisibility.

Pierre was slowly bringing up his rifle, with the caution of an experienced hunter. The others held their breaths. The gun streadied, then barked, sending echoes crashing back and forth between the cliffs.

Crane saw that Pierre had missed. The deer had leaped away at the crack of the gun, with all the lithe grace of its kind. It vanished utterly, passing beyond the steam curtain like a fading dream.

"What's the matter with you, Pierre?" Dr. Damon snapped irritably. "First time I knew you to miss a perfect shot like that."

The French-Canadian stood dazed,



looking at his rifle in stark disbelief.

"Something push barrel," he mumbled. "Spoil shot."

"If that's the best excuse you can think of—" The scientist glared at the man, then waved the party on. "Well, we'll try our original scheme. We won't find and more deer lying that conveniently in view."

He explained his plan. "You've said frankly you're a poor shot, Harlan. So you be our beater. Make a circle near the cliff edge quietly, and then cut straight toward us. Any deer you scare up will run our way."

"Now, there are three main springs ahead. Pierre, the one at the left. Crane, the middle one. I'll take the right one. Between the three of us, we eventually should bag a steam-silhouetted deer."

The scheme was carried out. Harlan, carefully picking his way through the invisible forest, made a wide circle, then stamped noisily toward the three men with ready rifles. Two deer were seen leaping through the steam curtains—but away instead of toward them. Disconcerted, Crane's shot went wild. Pierre and Dr. Damon hadn't even tried to fire.

"Deer gone here now," the scientist muttered. "We'll try again in an hour."

The results were the same. The deer were again leaping away from them, at an angle they were unprepared for. No one fired.

"What's wrong?" Dr. Damon rasped, his temper short. "You must make too much noise circling, Harlan."

"I don't!" the chemist snapped back. "If you ask me, something else scares them first, before I get near—and from the other direction."

"A dragon?" Jondra gasped in alarm.

"Of course not," her father snorted. "We'd easily hear him."

An hour later, Harlan tried again. Three deer came leaping. At the instant

Crane saw a silhouette over his steam spring, he tensed to swing his rifle from right to left. The deer's motion the other way—from left to right—completely disconcerted him. There was no use to shoot blindly, a second later, at the portion of thin air into which the deer had dissolved.

"Damn!" he grunted. "We'll never get them that way. They just don't come from the right direction. What's doing it?"

**H**ARLAN came back with a sober, almost frightened face.

"I think I saw—" he gulped.

"A dragon?" Jondra asked again.

"—the shape of a *man!*" Harlan finished.

His four listeners gasped. The thought of an invisible man, more than even the frightful dragons, sent chills down their spines.

"I saw it way ahead, running through the steam curtain, swinging its arms and chasing the deer away before I could get near. He must have made enough noise to scare the deer, though they couldn't see him."

"Nonsense!" Dr. Damon had recovered and almost yelled the word. "You're all letting your nerves go. Pierre and I have been here six months without running across this mythical invisible man. It was a bear walking upright, naturally."

"Now scare up the deer again, Harlan. And don't picture your grandmother in the mists next!"

Crane this time deliberately watched for the deer to be scared up from some point opposite Harlan. When a steam silhouette did appear, he had the exact bead. The crash of his gun hurled from the nearest cliff.

In his eagerness, arriving first at the spot, he yelped as an invisible hoof cracked him smartly on the shin. He

stared down. On the grass before him lay a creature kicking in its dying reflexes. He could actually see only one thing—the mushroomed bullet hanging apparently in mid-air, lodged in an invisible heart.

Then he saw more. A pool of liquid was slowly outlined at his feet and began to tinge with a faint ruddy hue.

“Quick, Jondra!” Dr. Damon panted, running up. “The incisor and pump.”

Jondra opened the case she had carried all morning, handing over the instruments. With the skill and speed of experience, the biologist inserted a large hypodermic in an invisible jugular vein. Crane and Harlan sat on invisible animal legs that were still striking out. Dr. Damon attached rubber tubing and pumped transparent blood into a series of flasks.

“Haemolin—sodium citrate!” he barked at Harlan.

Harlan dumped the prepared solutions in the flasks, reagents that prevented coagulation and deterioration. It was all done in a minute.

The blood-drained body beneath Crane shuddered, gave a final heave, and was still.

“Watch!” Dr. Damon commanded.

Slowly the corpse took form. Inner organs misted into being, rapidly solidifying to visibility. Then overlying tissue precipitated out of thin air. Muscles sprang into being. A vast network of veins and arteries snaked into vision. Finally hide, hair and hooves appeared.

In the space of fifteen minutes, an ordinary deer lay before them, no different from its cousins in the outer world. With the passing of life and the breakdown of the delicate invisibility hormone, flesh hidden from human eyes had dropped into the visible spectrum.

It was uncanny, eerie, like a magician’s trick perfected to an impossible degree.

“But its blood is still invisible!” Dr. Damon crowed, holding one flask up.

To all appearances the flask was empty, clean. Even the refractive index of the solutions added had been largely erased.

“The secret of invisibility—in a flask!” Harlan murmured.

CRANE glanced at him sharply. The man’s eyes were enigmatic.

Jondra shuddered and turned away from the scene.

“Let’s go back to camp—”

“What? Without taking along delicious cuts of venison?” her father scoffed.

Pierre already had his knife out and was expertly skinning the carcass. Soon after he was carving off choice steaks. The strong, salty smell of fresh meat rose into the air.

Crane fidgeted. “Isn’t this rather risky, in case one of the dragons—”

As if at a signal, a blasting roar thundered against the confining cliffs. A dragon had crept close, attracted by the smell, its noises camouflaged by the steady hiss of the surrounding steam spring. A treetop cracked, no more than a hundred feet away. In seconds the monster would be upon them, clawing and rending.

The five froze into the paralysis of fear.

Crane broke from it with a groan and fumbled for the grenade slung on his belt. Dr. Damon and Harlan were too stupefied to even remember them, or bring up their rifles.

Crane pulled at the pin with fingers of rubber. Before he could draw it, a hand clutched his wrist in a grip of steel.

“Pierre, you fool!” Crane snarled. “Let me go—”

“No kill beast!” Pierre muttered.

They struggled. The sound of mon-

sters feet pounding heavily against their ears. Only seconds were left . . .

The grenade's roar drowned out the triumphant bellow of the behemoth about to overtake them. A frightful scream shattered the air, as of a creature mortally wounded. Violent threshing sounded, as a mighty body writhed in death agony. A tree crackled and toppled, brushing at the five humans now stumbling away.

They stopped and faced one another, a hundred feet from the danger spot, pale, trembling, shaken to the roots of their souls at the narrow escape.

Dr. Damon suddenly let out a jubilant shout.

"It's dying right on the spot! More blood! Come on, all of you, back to camp for more bottles—"

Not till an hour later, after they had returned, did the reptilian monster give its final gusty sigh of death. One last swish of an invisible tail flung dirt, needles and splintered branches in all directions. Then all was quiet.

The scientist brought up with a jerk as Crane held him from running close.

"Let go!" Dr. Damon screeched. "I have to pump that blood out before it's too late."

"You'll wait five minutes, till we're sure he hasn't one last kick in him," Crane said firmly, holding the biologist tight. "That tail, if I know anything about dinosaurs, could bash in the side of a locomotive."

Jondra touched his hand and flashed him a smile of thanks.

But the monster lay still, and in fifteen minutes they had drained gallons of viscid fluid into the jars they had lugged from camp. Harlan dumped in wholesale quantities of his preserving chemicals.

**T**HEN they watched, gasping, as the corpse passed, by degrees, into the

optical realm. Thirty feet long, from snout to tail-tip, spined, armor-plated, huge as a house, it lay in a mass of trampled vegetation and half-splintered trees which more slowly assumed a visible status in death.

It was the first dinosaur seen by human or near-human eyes for an unthinkable age.

"Look what it took to kill it!" Harlan said, awed.

The exploding grenade had torn out its entire chest. Bullets alone would have been a laughable farce against the gargantuan creature.

"Thank heaven for the grenades!" Dr. Damon breathed. "I'm wondering now how Pierre and I dared to sneak around for six months with our pea-shooters, under their very noses!"

He turned with a glowing face, waving at the bottles filled with invisible blood.

"We owe you our lives, as well as this, Crane. You tossed that grenade just in time!"

Crane said nothing. Obviously the others, paralyzed in blind terror, hadn't seen that desperate moment when he struggled with Pierre. He looked at Pierre, but the impassive face avoided his. Pierre had no explanation for his astounding act.

But what bothered Crane the most was something else.

*He hadn't thrown the grenade!* Nor had Pierre or the others! An unseen hand had done it.

*Had there been a man's shape in the steam mists?*

## CHAPTER VI

### The Invisible Robinhood

**T**HE following day dawned clear and bright. But there was a cloud in Crane's mind. He watched Dr. Damon

and Harlan busily transferring the blood to sealed cans, at the workbench.

Jondra watched moodily. This was not the right environment for her. Her feminine nerves would give way in a few more days.

Pierre sat in the sun, staring out over the valley, as though observing the shadow-life.

Crane's churning mind strove to put the jigsaw puzzle together. Why had Pierre wanted the dragon to live? And what lay veiled in Harlan's cold eyes?

And was there a fifth man—invisible—in the valley?

Crane strode to his plane, in sudden alarm. This was their only way of getting out of the valley—as a group. If someone had other plans.

Too late! He knew it the moment he entered the cabin. The panel-board lay smashed by a wrench from the tool chest. The drive-wheel had been battered to bits, and the steering post bent and twisted out of shape. The plane was useless, beyond repair!

They were trapped, in the valley of invisibility!

Crane stood cursing. It had been done the night before. Harlan or Pierre? Or—a chill went down his spine—the unknown presence?

Returning on the trail to camp, Crane held his rifle grimly. Harlan, Pierre or the invisible man? It surged through his mind like the beat of a drum.

Pierre still sat impassively before the cave entrance. His beady eyes did not turn. Crane watched him for a long, cautious moment. Was he shamming, fully aware that Crane must know of the ruined instrument board? Was he waiting for Crane to make the first hostile move. . . .

"I'd advise you to drop your gun!"

Crane whirled. It was Harlan in the doorway, half smiling. An automatic

in his hand pointed straight for Crane's heart.

Caught off guard, Crane had little choice. He dropped his rifle. Pierre, starting from his daze, was tensing preparatory to lunging for his rifle, a yard away.

"Easy, Pierre!" Harlan warned, and the French-Canadian relaxed. "Now step to the right, both of you, away from your guns."

As they complied, Dr. Damon and Jondra came running out.

"What is this, Harlan?" the scientist demanded testily. "What—"

He gasped, seeing the gun.

Harlan herded them all together, unarmed and helpless before his automatic. He looked from one to the other with undisguised triumph.

"So it was you, Harlan!" Crane said. "You smashed the instrument panel so we couldn't leave the valley. What's your game?"

"I can say it in one word—invisibility!" Harlan retorted.

"You mean you want the secret of invisibility for yourself?" Dr. Damon guessed belatedly. "Why? For what earthly purpose? Harlan, this is outrageous—"

"Shut up!" Harlan grinned strangely. "For what purpose? Can't you guess? You mumbled about it all morning. That a person could take a dose of that animal blood with its invisibility hormone—and become invisible himself!"

CRANE cursed, but at himself. Why hadn't he seen that before? The secret of invisibility was of incalculable significance. From the first, Harlan must have plotted to hog it.

Harlan resumed. "Last night, Crane, after smashing the panel-board, I used your batteries. They furnished power for a little private radio in my belt. I

sent a prearranged signal, to friends of mine. They should arrive, by plane, in an hour or so. You called my hand, but a little too late.

"We'll take all those cans of blood. And then we'll leave the valley—alone!"

The plain, brutal threat sent icy rage through Hugh Crane. His muscles knotted, and a growl rasped from his throat.

"Watch yourself, Crane!" Harlan yarned. "I prefer to let my less squeamish friends do the job. But if I have to, I'll fill you full of lead! This is too big a thing to stop at anything. No one will ever find the four bodies rotting away in an undiscovered valley on the Arctic Circle."

Crane leaped away. It was a desperate gamble, but Pierre might have a chance to get at Harlan afterward. Better the try than tamely to wait for certain death later.

Crane's big body lunged forward like a football tackler, toes digging in the dirt. Head low, he aimed for Harlan's legs.

Jondra screamed. Crane knew he could never make it. The ugly snout of the automatic leveled straight for him. Harlan's finger began to squeeze. Crane mentally winced, waiting for the slugs that would churn through his brain.

A shot rang out . . .

Harlan had missed! Another shot . . . four more shots . . . and still no bullet touched Crane!

It was an impossible miracle. And then Crane gasped. He stopped short, staring at the amazing phenomenon occurring before him.

Harlan stood in a strangely unnatural position. His right arm was stiff before him, the wrist bent, the automatic pointed upward where he had pumped the useless shots. It was ex-

actly as though a man had grasped Harlan's wrist from the side, jerked his arm up, and twisted the wrist!

Yet there was no man there.

Harlan gave a shriek suddenly, as his wrist almost turned in a complete circle. His arm looped awkwardly back and he staggered in an off-balance position. A moment later the automatic dropped to the dust from Harlan's nerveless fingers.

The automatic bounced once, then miraculously rose into the air by itself, pointing at Harlan. The chemist reeled back, groaning with the pain of his bruised wrist, and at the unnerving sight of his own gun, unsupported, threatening him.

"It's an invisible man!" Jondra whispered.

Crane tensed himself again. Friend or enemy? Had they been rescued from Harlan only to face a new menace?

"Who are you?" he demanded.

**A** LOW, quiet voice issued weirdly from a spot just above the gun, held by an invisible hand.

"I'm known as the Invisible Robinhood."

Crane's mouth fell open.

"The Invisible Robinhood? You mean that publicity myth that stirred up the country last year?" \*

"Publicity myth?" The unseen man chuckled. "Yes, I suppose most of you hard-headed people never did quite believe I actually existed as an invisible man. For a year I spied and tracked down criminal rings, and still no one believes I exist. No one except the criminals whose careers I ended, and

\*In the first story built around this character, (July, 1939) *The Invisible Robinhood* was built up through the press as the champion of right, and it was the phrase of the day: "Who knows, even at this very minute he may be at your elbow! Think twice before you act!"—Ed.



my one confidant and contact man. Well—”

Crane could almost see the invisible shrug. Then he gasped, as his thoughts pierced back and back, through haze of mystery.

“You were with us all the time!” he exclaimed. “The take-off at Chicago—the plane was overloaded because of your added weight. During the flight, you once kept Jondra from falling. It was your hand on my shoulder that first indicated the valley to me, from the air.

“You kept me from striking Harlan, when he criticized my landing. You turned off the ignition key, to prevent danger of fire!”

Crane gulped for breath. It was all so clear now! He could see dawning looks of understanding on the others’ faces.

“Yes,” came from the Invisible Robinhood, “and I also threw the second grenade, when the dragon attacked you and Jondra. I was the one sneaking around the plane, when Jondra appeared, after the radio was smashed.

“Yesterday, I threw the grenade when you and Pierre struggled together, killing the second dragon.”

“You saved our lives?” Dr. Damon murmured. “Then you’re our friend—”

“Is he?” Crane’s face was suddenly grim. “It must have been you that spoiled Pierre’s first shot, and later chased away the deer, Mr. Invisible Robinhood. *And you also smashed the plane’s radio!* You, as much as Harlan, have wanted to keep us locked in this valley without outside communication. Why?”

The unseen man seemed to ponder for a moment, silently. Then his disembodied voice, ignoring the accusations, addressed the dazed, crestfallen Harlan.

“I’ve tracked you from the start,

Paul Harlan. I knew you would reveal yourself—*Agent R-616!*”

Harlan started. “You mean you know—”

The Invisible Robinhood made an affirmative sound.

“Everything.” He addressed the others. “This man is a quisling\*—a member of the fifth column operating in North America!”

“Fifth column!” Dr. Damon gasped. “What do they want up here in this god-forsaken—”

“Your invisibility, of course,” the answer came back sharply. “They got on the track of it when Pierre, delivering your first message, took time out for a few drinks. He slipped, mentioning the valley of invisibility. No one paid any attention except a fifth column spy. They’re all over, with their ears and eyes open for everything.

“Their headquarters was informed, in Chicago, and a certain masked Commander “Z” met a certain agent R-616 in a cheap hotel room, to give him his instructions. When Jondra put an ad in the paper for a chemist, Agent R-616 answered. Paul Harlan is an expert chemist, in real life. But he is also a fifth columnist—working for them, not you!”

“Good Lord!” Dr. Damon shook his head dazedly. “I never dreamed—”

“How do you know all that, Invisible Robinhood?” Crane asked.

THEY could sense his peculiar smile.

“I am silent as the wind, swift as the tiger. I am unseen, undetectable. I see all, know all, hear all. At any moment I may be at your elbow, any where!”

He chuckled. “At least, that was my publicity, during my campaign against crime, for the benefit of those who

\* “Quisling”—the 1940 term for a traitor, a fifth columnist.—Ed.

needed to fear me. As a matter of fact, I stumbled on this accidentally.

"Since the European war, I've been investigating fifth column activities, the greatest menace on this continent today. For a year I was on the trail. It wasn't an easy job.

"The fifth column has spawned and spread almost unhindered, like a malignant cancer. They are very clever, no quisling knowing more than one other quisling by name. The vast anonymous network has but one common basis—the undermining of the North American peoples. They vision the day when in one stunning upheaval, America the unconquerable will be fast in their grip.

"They have gained recruits—renegades to their country—from every walk of life, and by any and all means. Particularly appeal to ambition and dissatisfaction.

"Paul Harlan is a typical example. He is ambitious. The fifth column converts have more ambition per square head than any other group in the country. And the fifth column G.H.Q. lavishes promises faster than any blitzkrieg ever took objectives.

"That's what I'm up against—for I've vowed to smash the fifth column. The only way will be to reach the top men. I had laboriously tracked my way as high as Commander Z. But when he gave R-616 his instructions to get the secret of invisibility, I had to follow that branch trail.

"I was at Paul Harlan's elbow when he met Commander Z. I was at Paul Harlan's elbow when he stepped into the plane at the airport."

Crane had to laugh at Harlan's crushed air.

"You didn't have a chance at all, Harlan, in your doublecrossing—"

He broke off, lifting his head. They all heard it—a faint drone from the

sky. A tiny plane sparkling high in the air, in the south. It rapidly enlarged into a two-motored cabin ship. It swooped, circling the valley.

"Harlan's fifth columnist friends!" Crane whirled to the scientist. "What's the way out of the valley by foot, that you and Pierre found? The sooner we leave, the better. We can pack enough food along to reach some town—"

Harlan was grinning. "The one trail out of the valley," he put in, "is at the other end. I saw it on Dr. Damon's map. There is also a clearing there, wide enough for a plane landing. I told my men to come down there!"

"We're cut off!" the scientist groaned. "There's no other way out!"

They watched helplessly as the plane zoomed down, landing five miles away in the clearing at that end of the valley.

"They'll be here soon, probably with sub-machine guns," Crane muttered. "Their job is to mow us down."

He automatically patted Jondra's shoulder as she crept into his arms. They all knew without saying that the fifth column revolutionists were more brutal in their methods than any in history. There was no escape, and no quarter from which to expect help.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Fifth Column

THE Invisible Robinhood's voice rang out.

"It isn't over yet. We have guns. Stand them off. Lock Harlan up in the cave."

His authoritative voice broke up the indecision of the others. They accepted his leadership instantly. Somehow, invisible though he was, there was an air of confidence and resourcefulness about him.

Crane and Pierre shoved Harlan into the cave, after removing all guns, ammunition and grenades. The solid pine door was swung shut and barred from outside. Harlan would have no chance to aid his fellow quislings.

Then Crane, Dr. Damon and Pierre distributed themselves at separate points just behind the outjutting logs of the crude walls. They would not be easy targets in the shadow of the rock overhang. Jondra stood beside Crane, a rifle gripped in her hands with grim determination. Crane squeezed her shoulder.

"Be brave, Jondra," he whispered. "The Invisible Robinhood will have a trick or two up his sleeve, if the stories about him are at all true."

But for the present, he had simply done as they had—taken a strategic position. A rifle hung eerily at shoulder height, waiting for the adversary.

The enemy appeared within two hours, picking their way gingerly through the invisible forest. Harlan had evidently given them enough details of the valley and its strange unseen life to allow them planned action. They came directly toward the cave.

Crane's heart sank. Six of them, hard-looking men, trained by the fifth column for just this sort of bloody work. Each carried a rifle, a knapsack of grenades, and three of them carried the parts of a portable automatic gun. They wore metal helmets and dull-gray uniforms. They were as efficiently prepared for their mission as any spearhead unit of a mechanized army in the European war.

The fifth column did nothing by halves, in their subversive program to undermine the thus far adamant American hemisphere.

The party stopped five hundred yards away, out of range of any but superb marksmanship. One man

raised a speaking tube to his mouth and yelled across.

"You have Paul Harlan prisoner?"

Sensing the Invisible Robinhood did not wish to reveal his presence, Crane cupped his lips and shouted back the affirmative.

"Give yourselves up!" came back. "You have no chance against us. If you surrender quietly, we promise you safe passage back. We do not want your lives, only the secret of invisibility!"

"A lie, of course," the Invisible Robinhood's whisper came. "The fifth column doesn't know what the word 'honor' is. If we surrender, we'll be shot down like dogs!"

Crane's voice was an enraged taunt.

"Come and get us!"

The leader waved a hand instantly, as though knowing that would be the answer. The men scattered in a semi-circle and began creeping within gun range. Rifles barked. Shots tore around them viciously.

CRANE shot six times, taking careful beads, and then cursed lividly. Not one of those clearly exposed men had dropped or even faltered.

"The invisible forest protects them," Jondra said. "They're running from invisible tree to invisible tree."

Crane ground his teeth at the irony. Imponderable light went through the trees, but not bullets. The raiders had a perfect protective medium. They crept closer steadily, firing slowly, waiting to get within effective range.

Their tactics were mercilessly efficient. At three hundred yards, three men scurried together, and began hastily assembling their machine gun. The other three poured a withering rifle barrage toward the cave, to disconcert the defenders' aim.

The gun was set up in seconds. Two

men dashed away and the third threw himself full length behind the gun. In a moment its raking fire began systematically to cover every inch of the defended area.

Flinging Jondra flat on the ground behind the log wall, Crane himself shrank back. Solid sheets of lead were prying into every nook and corner. Splinters of wood flew viciously.

"What can we do?" came Dr. Damon's wail from the other side. "We can't fire a shot back!"

Crane knew there was one thing to try. Waiting till the swinging muzzle had arced away from him, he desperately ran out, hurling a grenade. It fell far short, digging a useless pit. The horrible chatter of the automatic weapon went on unabated, filling the valley with a rattling thunder.

As though his grenade had been the signal, the other five invaders ran forward boldly, grenades in their hands. In a few seconds, within range, they would bomb down the log walls.

"We've got to do something, Invisible Robinhood!" Crane shouted. "For God's sake, think of something! We'll be murdered where we stand—"

Crane suddenly realized he was talking to himself. The spot where the invisible man had stood seemed no different except for one thing—there was no rifle hanging mysteriously without support.

"Damn him!" Crane raged. "He's deserted us! I knew I shouldn't have trusted him—"

His voice was drowned out by a furious roar. The grenades! Then already the enemy were within range!

Crane waited for the log walls to crash around their ears, leaving them defenseless.

Instead, the roar was followed by the familiar crackling of a splintered tree. Then a ground-shaking thump, as its

invisible bulk smashed down and measured its length on the ground.

Another roar. Again a tree gave its death wail and sought its grave.

*Roar!—Crash!*

*Roar!—Crash!*

Crane looked out. The five advancing attackers had halted in their tracks, grenades unthrown. They looked about frightened, as the invisible forest seemed to have gone mad, threatening to crush them with hundred-foot falling juggernauts.

**H**UGH CRANE let out a whoop of joy. The enemy couldn't know that an invisible man was among them, tossing grenades at trees and bringing them down. It was as though a giant were uprooting them as clubs and beating the ground to blindly obliterate the invaders.

So it must have seemed to the thoroughly astounded fifth columnists. They fled back, like scared rabbits. They had been ready for anything, but not trees falling like leaves.

The man at the machine gun courageously stuck to his post, until invisible branches of a crashing tree knocked his weapon twenty feet through the air, and himself into a thicket of invisible brambles.

They retreated, but not in panic. Well trained, even in the face of a staggering surprise, they unhitched the machine gun and left at a dog-trot. One man ran smack into an invisible tree, knocking himself out. Two others put their arms under his shoulders and dragged him along. One man covered the rear at a slower pace, glancing back as often as he could, rifle ready.

Crane restrained himself from ordering a counter-attack. They were still a formidable force, in their well-organized retreat. Let them go. Crane contented himself with taking a careful

bead, estimating the invisible trees by their winding path, and seeing one man jerk and clutch his arm. They would take back one wound, as well as their bruises from the falling trees.

"Well, how was that?"

Crane started. The Invisible Robinhood's voice had spoken beside his ear.

"Great!" Crane commended. "You saved the day! But why not follow them now? You could pick them off one by one—"

"No. If I tried that, they would radio to the plane. They are always in radio contact. The men at the plane—perhaps three or four men left on guard—would then know of an invisible man. They'd plan against me.

"I've seen enough of fifth column methods to know it's a mistake to underestimate them. They're not brainless, blundering gangsters. They're intelligent, clever, efficient to the highest degree."

His voice became low, thoughtful.

"We have a tough fight ahead of us—to escape them. They'll come back next with light field guns, perhaps, hurling shells from a mile or two back."

"Good Lord!" shuddered Dr. Damon. "Just like the war in Europe—machines against men. We haven't a ghost of a chance of holding out!"

A pair of invisible fingers snapped.

"We have one good chance. Their whole mission is to bring back the secret of invisibility. Suppose we spill all the blood samples, and then let them know that Harlan will be killed by us.

"They might be willing to bargain for his life, since they would lose time starting at scratch again. One of the fifth column's main creeds is speed, speed. Let's talk to Harlan."

"Spill the samples—no!" Dr. Damon almost shouted it. "I won't allow it. I—"

Crane could feel the invisible man's

cold stare at the scientist.

"Have you thought of invisible fifth columnists, Dr. Damon? They would have a noose around America before we could say mechanized unit! *They must not get that secret!*"

DR. DAMON gasped. "Invisible fifth columnists!" He made no further objections.

Pierre swung open the barred door.

"Come out, Harlan," Crane commanded. "We want to talk to you."

There was no answer. Crane repeated his words, then stepped in impatiently.

"If I have to drag you out, like a stubborn child—"

His voice ground to a startled halt.

The interior of the cave-space was empty! The others crowded in, gaping. Harlan was simply not there, only his clothing piled in a heap.

"How could he have escaped?" Crane said dazedly. "Through solid log walls and a barred door?"

Jondra screamed. "That shadow at the door—"

They whirled. Something shadowy and vague was plunging through the doorway. It was in the shape of a man.

"Harlan!"

Crane leaped, but something shouldered him aside at the door. The Invisible Robinhood had leaped first, and was chasing the escaping man.

Running outside, the rest saw only a translucent silhouette racing away into the forest, pursued by something they could not see at all.

Five minutes later the Invisible Robinhood's voice sounded before them, panting.

"Got away. Wasn't quite invisible, but in the sunlight it was like keeping your eye on a fitting shadow. I lost him."

"He injected some of the blood solu-

tion into his veins!" Dr. Damon cried. "I should have known he'd try it. The invisibility hormone is so powerful it works within an hour. He'll be completely invisible soon, and stay that way till the dose wears off—probably twenty-four hours."

"An invisible man against us!" Jondra whispered.

Crane looked at the Invisible Robinhood—or the spot he occupied.

"That complicates matters. Harlan, invisible, can come sneaking back and—"

He didn't finish the sentence. It would sound too horrible to say it. But suddenly he did say it, in altered form.

"Why not sneak to their camp and murder *them* in their sleep?" he demanded. "Every minute that goes by endangers us. And all America! You're invisible. They can't touch you. Take a gun and shoot them down like they would have shot us down.

"I know it won't be an easy thing to do. Any decent man's soul revolts at being a cowardly assassin. But you've got to, Robinhood. It's the only way!"

The others looked at each other, shuddering. It was a stark, merciless suggestion. The height, perhaps, of sheer deliberate murder. But the stakes were equally in proportion.

There was silence from the Invisible Robinhood for a long moment. Then a deep, grim sigh.

"Give me a rifle and twelve bullets," he said.

A moment later he was gone, as unseen and silent as the wind.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Under Fire

CRANE said little to Jondra as they waited, his arm across her shoulder. Dr. Damon seemed to find the

ground interesting. Pierre stared out over the invisible forest, his black eyes enigmatic as always.

They strained their ears to hear shots. The shots that would announce human beings murdered without a chance, by an invisible assassin. It was a grim, soul-searing game that was being played out in a sunken valley, far north of the teeming cities of America.

Crane started. A twig had crackled, somewhere out at the fringe of the invisible forest. He jumped up. Their invisible friend was returning.

"Robinhood? You—"

A shot rang out. The bullet whistled past Crane's ear and thunked into the logs behind.

Jondra screamed. "Look there—a gun pointing at us!"

Two hundred feet ahead, a gun hung in the air.

"Harlan!" groaned Dr. Damon. "He's invisible now and he'll kill us!"

Another shot split the air, as they all leaped for the cave door. Harlan, a poor shot, had missed again. But if he pumped shots at their massed group, entering the doorway, he couldn't fail to get one or two. Then he would stalk them inside, shoot them down one by one . . .

Even as he ducked and whirled, Crane saw what happened. Something wrenched the gun from Harlan's hands. It swung around as a club. It whacked against an invisible tree, the stock shattering. For a moment it hung, then began moving toward them, at the pace of a man walking.

The battle of the invisible men had been short.

"Did you get him, Robinhood?" Crane queried eagerly.

"No." The bodiless voice was weary, defeated. "I tried to club him, but he slipped away. He's completely invis-



ible now. And that's why I failed in everything . . ."

"Failed? You didn't get the other men?"

Again a weary, "No."

"Everything seemed perfect," the voice went on. "The men were all outside the plane—ten of them altogether. Creeping close, I shot one." He seemed to shudder a little.

"But when I aimed for the second, a shot rang back. Harlan had been expecting me. Guessing my position by the hang of the visible rifle, he could get me eventually, poor shot though he is. I couldn't get him. He was behind the plane.

"There was only one thing to do. I had to drop my giveaway—the rifle—and leave. Still, I hung around a few minutes, debating some other plan. For instance, using a grenade, and blasting plane and all apart.

"Suddenly, it came to me like a blow. Harlan now knew I was there. Therefore he would run to this camp and murder you, not having me to fear. He could do his job much quicker than I could do mine, and still have time to return and rescue whatever men remained. That's how the fifth columnists figure those things—in plain, cold, emotionless figures.

"I guess I came back just in time, running all the way. Harlan's first shot told me where he was. I ran to him—and you know the rest."

Crane pondered. "Invisible man against invisible man! No matter what you do, he can duplicate it. And Harlan has the advantage. He has more men and more arms. Good Lord, what can *we* do?"

It was not stalemate. It was certain victory for the enemy.

**D**USK came, as the sun slowly sank. Darkness settled over the valley of

invisibility and terror. And menace.

"Suppose they attack at night?" Jondra breathed.

"I doubt it," the Invisible Robinhood said. "Darkness gives us more advantage than they, on the defensive. All blitzkrieg tactics take full advantage of the best, not the worst of conditions. However, we'll take precautions. I'll stand guard outside. Crane, you sleep at the door. The rest back in the cave."

The night hours wore away. Crane awoke from the doze he had achieved, disturbed by some sound in the forest's night quiet. The stealthy pad of feet! Closer they came, silently shrieking of threat.

Where was the Invisible Robinhood? Why wasn't he on the job? Had he left them exposed to throat-slitting by the invisible Harlan?

Quivering at the frightful thought, Crane raised his rifle. He felt blind and helpless, as so often before. How could he fight an unseen presence who could come from any side, strike at any unannounced moment?

Was a sharp knife even at that moment sweeping toward his unprotected back?

The next sound Crane heard was the most welcome in the world. It was a sniff. An animal sniff, followed by the low growl of an invisible bear, snooping around the camp for tidbits of food, most likely.

Crane fumbled for a piece of the deer meat and tossed it out.

"Here you are, old top," he whispered. "I'm glad it's you rather than a certain invisible snake. Hope all your children are visible. Now scam."

A pleased grunt sounded, and the slice of meat floated off into the starlit night.

Crane didn't doze any more. Dawn was breaking. A new day was here—the day that would tell the story, one

way or another.

A hand gripped his shoulder.

"I'm back, Crane."

"Robinhood! Where were you? Damn you, man, do you realize you left us at the mercy of Harlan, if he had come?"

"I knew he wouldn't," the unseen man said calmly. "He was too busy guarding his own camp. Besides, it's chilly at night. Don't forget, he has to run around naked. His clothes are still visible.

"I went to their camp. I had grenades along. I thought of blowing the plane up, with them all inside. But only four were in. The rest were elsewhere, in some cliff cave I'd have to search for all night. If I did eliminate the four, Harlan would again have raced here and bombed this camp to smithereens. Any way I looked at it, they would come out ahead."

His voice changed to bafflement.

"I've been thinking all night, hoping to figure out some other plan. We must try something soon, now that day is here—"

"For Pete's sake!" Crane exclaimed, thumping his head with his knuckles. "What am I waiting for? If Harlan could become invisible, why can't I? Two invisible men against one and we can get him!"

**H**E was already ducking into the cave, striding for the work bench at the rear and its bottles and cans of invisible blood. He picked up a flask, apparently empty, but heavy with its unseen contents.

Pulling out the stopper, Crane filled a hypodermic lying nearby. Eagerly he brought the needle close to his left arm's largest vein, for injection.

A hand knocked the hypodermic away, shattering it on the ground.

Dr. Damon had watched, rubbing his

eyes, and then bounded from his bunk.

"You fool!" he barked. "That stuff is poison. I would have suggested it yesterday, except for that. Any animal blood is poison in a human being's veins, except certain types of anthropoid blood. Harlan will be dead before this day is over!"

"Did he *know* that?" Crane gasped.

The scientist nodded.

"The fifth columnists are fanatics," the Invisible Robinhood remarked. "Harlan sacrificed his life for the cause."

The words seemed to echo in the cave.

Crane picked up another hypodermic, grimly.

"Two invisible men against one, and we have a chance—"

Dr. Damon looked at him, but said nothing. The Invisible Robinhood made no move to interfere. They would have to stand aside now, and watch deliberate suicide.

With a tightening of his lips, Crane prepared to plunge the needle home. Again it was knocked out of his hands.

"I can't let you!" Jondra sobbed. "Isn't there anything else we can do?"

She was facing the spot at which the Invisible Robinhood stood, bitterly.

"In smashing the fifth column, Mr. Robinhood, you're smashing us just as ruthlessly. You started all this—by not exposing Harlan at the beginning. You played the game your way, and we suffer as pawns. There's probably no room for emotion—love, for instance—in your career of giant-killing. You're just a cold, feelingless human robot—"

The tirade ended in a choke, as the girl buried her head against Crane's chest.

Love! That was a queer thing to bring up in this valley of hate and death and menace.

An aura of sudden sadness radiated

from the unseen man. Crane could feel it. Hard he might be at times, striving for his goals at any cost, but beneath it he was human. And somewhere, something had seared his soul—but still left him human.

There was the merest murmur.

"Love? I loved a girl once. She is like you, fair, sweet . . ."

The voice trailed away. Then it spoke softly again.

"Wait here. I'll investigate the enemy's activity. If anything else can be done—"

He was gone.

**H**IS voice was still soft when he returned, an hour later. Soft but grim.

"They've set up three field guns, about two miles back. Judging by their positions, and the stacks of ammunition beside them, they're ready to bombard this entire end of the valley. Raze it flat!"

*Broooooommm!*

The dull thump sounded, followed a few seconds later by a ground-shaking roar. A quarter-mile to the left of them, where the shell landed, a shower of dirt sprayed into the air. With it, unseen, had gone a shredding of the valley's shadow-life.

A second shell landed fifty feet nearer. A third still nearer, bringing down on them a fine stinging hail. The artillerists were finding the range rapidly.

"They'll systematically sweep every inch of our end of the valley," the Invisible Robinhood said, still softly. "Everything will go—forest, cave, animals, dragons—"

"Dragons!"

It was Pierre's voice, in a deadly rage.

"They kill dragon! Fear dragon! But I will kill *them*! I, Pierrè, will

lead my dragons—"

He lapsed into rapid French, shaking his fist in the direction of the thumping guns. The others watched in astonishment.

"Pierre!" Crane snapped. "Keep your head, now of all times. We need every man—"

He stopped, gasping. Pierre was stripping off his clothes. The garments dropped. The body exposed was translucent. Direct rays of the sun stabbed through and through, outlining the bones. And rapidly, even the skeleton was fading into the unseen background of air, as the hormone of invisibility bleached the guide beyond the color-spectrum faster than any dye had ever worked.

"Pierre!" Dr. Damon cried. "You took a dose of the blood. You'll die!"

Pierre does not die. Pierre will lead his dragons—"

With a wild shout, the wraithlike form stalked toward the forest.

"Mad! Utterly mad!" Dr. Damon whispered. "I suspected it all along, in the previous six months. The thought of the invisible dragons preyed on his mind."

Crane jumped to catch Pierre, but an invisible hand stayed him.

"Let him go. Time's short. We have to dodge these shells. We can't run forward openly, for they'll be waiting for us. But we can move along the cliff-edges, in comparative safety, ahead of the barrage."

"Suppose we survive the bombardment, by a miracle?" Crane said hopelessly. "What then?"

"Pierre is leading the dragons!" the Invisible Robinhood breathed.

Crane started. Had the Invisible Robinhood gone mad too? But there was little time to speculate. An invisible hand, covered with fine wire mesh, grasped his, pulling him away.

Jondra had Crane's other hand, and her father brought up the rear.

They were to play a new game—dodging shells.

## CHAPTER IX

### Blood Barrage

CRANE was never quite clear how they escaped the holocaust of bombardment. With the precision of army artillery, the field guns methodically lobbed their shells back and forth across the narrow end of the valley. Starting at the cliff-face, the barrage worked inward.

The tenth shot struck the cave home, scattering logs in all directions. The four were driven forestward, to keep ahead of the destruction. Eventually, they would stumble into the arms of the enemy.

"What plan have you?" Crane yelled above the terrific rumble of sound banging between the cliffs. "Why didn't you take the last chance—letting me become invisible? What chance is there now?"

But no answer came from the man whose unseen hand pulled them forward.

Crane noticed suddenly that they were working their way toward their own wrecked plane. Had the Invisible Robinhood forgotten that it was useless for flight? Crane tried to jerk away. Why let this madman lead them to certain destruction?

"You fool, stay with me!" came back the fierce retort. "Now's our chance!"

He was tugging them toward the plane. The barrage had swung toward the other cliff-face, temporarily. They were safe for a few minutes from flying steel splinters and crashing trees.

"Quick!" commanded the Invisible Robinhood. "Run your gas out on the

ground. But not the reserve tank. Start your engine and let it run on the reserve—at high speed."

Crane complied, shaking his head in angry bewilderment.

The fuel poured out, soaking the plane and all the surrounding ground with its grass and bushes. The motor coughed, but started willingly enough, fed by the reserve tank. Crane set the throttle at half-speed, just at the point where the whole ship trembled and sought to move. A little more and it would trundle forward, to ram into trees with its controls wrecked.

"Now run!" the invisible man yelled. "Run as fast as you can—"

And he insanely led the way directly through the barrage line!

The raking shells began to pound nearer and nearer, like a returning pendulum. Trees crashed behind them, clutching at them with whipping branches. Flying splinters thudded viciously against invisible tree boles.

Crane felt a nudge in the flesh of his left arm, and the warm stickiness of blood, but raced on. He was half carrying Jondra. An invisible arm was pulling Dr. Damon along faster than his age could propel his muscles.

The universe seemed falling about their ears. But they made it.

The thumping barrage swung away on its ordered course. It neared, now, the spot where the plane lay.

PANTING, they stopped and watched as a livid sheet of flame sprang from the spilled gasoline. Trails of fire promptly cracked into the air, following the branches of invisible trees. Billows of smoke swirled into the sky.

In seconds, the first tentative flames had become a roaring forest fire, fanned by the propellor blasts of air. The next shell sent the plane into oblivion.

And it scattered firebrands.

"It worked!" The Invisible Robinhood's shout was a cry of triumph.

The fire became a blazing inferno. Rapidly treetops touched off from one to the next. A line of flame strung itself across the valley from cliff to cliff. Then, like an enraged bull, it charged forward toward the center of the valley.

Demon fire had joined the battle in the valley of invisibility!

It was a strange sight. The flames seemed to spring out from nowhere, burning on invisible fuel. Branches and trees became visible, under the scorching death, but again vanished in the consuming blaze.

Crane hardly realized he had been screeching like a maniac for some time.

"I get it!" he yelled above the din. "Jondra! Dr. Damon! We're safe here, where the barrage blew the forest to bits. No fuel for the fire. But the flames will sweep through all the rest of the valley. Harlan and his gang can't blitzkrieg a fire away. They're sunk!"

His voice changed just as suddenly. "But wait—suppose they simply turn the field guns and blast clear their end, before the fire comes. Then they're saved too." He groaned. "We're still no better off!"

"Pierre is leading the dragons!" the Invisible Robinhood said enigmatically. In more practical tones, he added, "The valley is narrow. The fire will drive all animals before it, toward the enemy's camp. Including the dragons. Have you ever seen what a herd of elephants do on a stampede?"

Jondra shuddered. "The men will be trampled to death!"

THEIR JUBILANCE over victory was subdued by the thought of what must be happening on the other side of that pitiless, searing, charging wall of flame.

The field guns stopped thumping abruptly. Crane could picture the gunners staring at the oncoming wave of fire in horror. Then screaming and running. No "strategic retreat" this time. Just a blind, panic-stricken flight.

No safety in their plane, with its gasoline but fuel to feed the enveloping flames. No time to take off. They could only stumble hopelessly on, to the very end of the valley. They would turn around then, with their backs to the cliff, eyes horror-struck at their doom. They would tear at each other in the attempt to struggle up the one scalable path out of the valley.

**B**UT before this would come the waves of fleeing animals. The animals would dash themselves against the cliffs, making them slippery with blood. The monstrous dragons would thunder up, snorting, bellowing, trampling. Their mighty feet, as they raced up and down seeking escape, would crush all the lesser animals. Including man.

It would be a sight no one would want to see.

The four were silent, waiting. In a short hour, the whole valley had gone up in smoke. Walls of smoke had mercifully screened from their eyes any glimpse of the happenings there. The steady crackle had camouflaged all sounds.

The flames died, then. The valley lay a smouldering ruin.

"Every living thing is wiped out!" Crane grunted. "This is the valley of death!"

"Not quite—listen!"

They heard the racking of a ponderous body through the dying embers ahead. Through the pall came limping a smoke-silhouetted dragon. Crane gripped a grenade but then relaxed. The beast, staggering and groaning,

had no interest in them. It sought a cool spot. Easing its bulk down in the unburned section, it licked its wounds.

"Some of the animals escaped," the Invisible Robinhood mused. "Perhaps the fleetest deer, and a few of the armor-plated dragons. Undoubtedly some of the vegetation here and there, in niches. The cycle could start again . . ."

His voice trailed away thoughtfully.

## CHAPTER X

"The Secret Must Remain a Secret!"

THEY returned to what had been the cave home. Most of it was a gaping ruin, but the back portion was comparatively unscathed. Food supplies remained, and a dozen sealed cans of blood.

Dr. Damon picked them up eagerly.

"I thought they would all be destroyed. I'll take these back. I'll still announce to the science world the great discovery of invisibility!"

His voice changed to a bark.

"Here—stop that!"

Unseen hands were stamping a rifle butt down on the cans, splitting them open. The invisible fluid vanished into the dirt. Dr. Damon attempted to wrench the rifle away. A hand that could not be seen roughly pushed him away.

Crane clutched at an arm whose position he guessed.

"Listen, Robinhood! Just—"

A fist thudded against his chest, breaking his hold. He almost reeled back against the wall.

For a moment, loud breathing sounded from the invisible man, as though he were a jungle animal over a kill.

"Back!" he grated. "Stay back, or I'll—"

Suddenly his voice changed, to its usual softness.

"I'm sorry. But I must do this. The secret of invisibility must remain in this valley!"

Crane's thoughts clicked. The last bits of the puzzle slipped into place.

"I see!" he murmured. "That's why you didn't reveal yourself to us right away. You played a lone game. You smashed the radio, so the outside world could not be told of this.

"You chased the deer because you didn't want Dr. Damon to get blood samples. You wanted neither the fifth column to get the secret, nor Dr. Damon. Nor anybody—except yourself! But what right have you, Robinhood, to deny Dr. Damon, a scientist, his discovery?"

The Invisible Robinhood's voice came back in deadly earnest.

"No one must have the secret of invisibility—ever! I discovered it by accident, by a physical principle rather than through a hormone. I've not misused it. Many others would do good with it, as I have.

But once it got into the wrong hands—chaos! The world would be a madhouse. Invisible deeds of crime! Invisible spies! Invisible armies! Think of those things.

"I know you're an altruist, Dr. Damon. You probably think of good uses for invisibility—as in crushing crime. But you can't quite know, as I do, what power it gives a person. You can't quite know that you're tampering with dynamite that can blast the world!

"I hope you see my viewpoint. That if it's within my power to prevent anyone else from having my secret, I must do so!"

Jondra spoke up firmly. "It's cold, ruthless reasoning. But it's plain logic!"

The two men glared, still angered,



but they made no move as the rifle butt resumed cracking open the cans, spilling the last of the blood samples into the ground.

"There!" It was a deep sigh from the unseen man. The sigh of one who has accomplished a vital mission.

An echoing sigh came from Dr. Damon. His shoulders sagged. He turned away without a word, brokenly.

**C**RANE could think of no way of consoling a man who had just seen the discovery of a century trickling into oblivion. Nor could he think of any way of denying that the Invisible Robinhood had done right.

He turned to Jondra. He had something to say to her, anyway.

**DAWN STRETCHED** its rosy fingers across a seared, blackened valley. The four people—one invisible—picked their way to the other end. The fifth columnists' plane, in its clearing, had freakishly remained unburned, its fuel untouched. The saboteurs had not thought that miracle would happen, or they would have huddled in the ship.

Instead, they had fled. All that remained of them now was scattered somewhere in the black strewing of scorched bones littering the cliff-face. Crane shuddered, at thought of what terror had reigned here the day before.

"Look!"

Jondra's hand pointed halfway up the cliff-face, along the steep path that led out of the valley. Pierre's body hung there, against an outjutting stone—visible once again in death. Skin half black, the flames had just reached Pierre. One arm was stiffly outstretched, as if he had been beckoning. The expression on his face was strangely at peace.

The Invisible Robinhood spoke solemnly.

"Have you guessed about Pierre? When he drank too much whiskey that time, delivering Dr. Damon's letter, he babbled into the ears of a fifth column spy, as I mentioned. The spy took all the conversation down, in a report to Commander Z. I saw the verbatim wording.

"In one place, Pierre had said, in drunken French:

"I just dare the blitzkriegers of Europe to attack our shores! I will lead the invisible dragons out of the valley. They will frighten the enemy. They will stamp the enemy flat. Yes I, Pierre, will save my country from the enemy, for I will lead the invisible dragons against them!"

The invisible man's voice rose a note.

"I salute you, Pierre! In your own way, you were ready to defend your country and continent against invasion, even if you were mad in the thought. And you *did* lead the dragons . . ."

**CRANE WAS** not surprised when the Invisible Robinhood, a while later, made no move to enter the plane.

"I'm staying. Perhaps two or three of the dragons are alive yet. I must hunt them down. And any others of the Unseen Life. Then I must destroy every last vintage of the Unseen Vegetation, with burning gasoline.

"Leave with me, besides food, a rifle, ammunition, the grenades, and a tin of gasoline. Invisibility is a menace. When I leave, this valley will be barren of life. After that"—he paused—"there are many things to do."

Jondra felt for his arm. "You said before that you loved a girl, and that she's still alive. You're wrong in denying yourself—and her—that love, no matter what tasks you set yourself!"

**A** LOW, almost harsh chuckle sounded. "Look!"

A switch snapped. With startling abruptness, Crane and Jondra saw a tall, lithe young man before them. He was completely sheathed in what looked like fine chain-mail. The gauntleted hands reached up to unfasten the helmetlike hood. Hugh Crane and Jondra Damon gasped in unison.

The face revealed was hideous beyond belief. Great burn-scars obliterated what had once been strong, handsome features. There was little of nose or hair. The lips and jaws were a network of white lines where surgical thread had sewed mangled flesh together. The mouth still looked like an unhealed wound. Only purple folds of lumpy scar tissue remained.

Jondra and Crane stared at this dreadful, once-handsome caricature of a man with horror-stricken eyes.

"I discovered my method of invisibility in a laboratory," said the Invisible Robinhood. "There was an explosion—"

"Oh, you poor fellow!" Jondra cried and burst into tears.

Again there was a click, and the Invisible Robinhood vanished from their sight.

THEY TOOK off a little later in Crane's airplane, which had been quickly but efficiently repaired. Three people were in that plane, leaving for-

ever behind them a land which time had truly forgotten—Hugh Crane, Jondra Damon and her scientist father, bitter lines about his mouth in the knowledge that the greatest discovery of all time had come to naught.

Crane looked down. He could see nothing of an invisible man stalking invisible beasts. Somehow, it had all been a horrible dream. Not the least tragic had been that poignant moment when the Invisible Robinhood had figuratively unmasked himself, a splendid young man whose caricature of a face would curse him through all his days.

Curse him, and deny him the fruits of a happy life. But raw courage and high achievement would be his, and Crane knew in his heart that when ugly menace stalked the highways of crime, the Invisible Robinhood would somehow be on hand, ever on the alert against men who would use the marvels of science for their own vicious purposes . . .

Hugh Crane turned to Jondra. Thank heaven, she at least had come out of this all unscathed. And she was entirely visible. In fact, come to think of it, she was a most attractive-looking young lady.

Jondra, with a woman's intuition, read the message in Crane's gray eyes.

Her answering smile was the most visible thing Crane had ever seen.

## « « EARLY EXPLORERS » »

WHO discovered America? For centuries historians have answered this question without difficulty. It has been generally conceded that Lief Ericson, the adventurous Norseman, was the first to set foot on the North American continent, and, that Columbus, the Genoese sailor, followed him several centuries later. But in the light of recent developments in South America it begins to look as if neither of these is the true discoverer of this continent.

For, on the outskirts of Rio de Janerio, curious stone tablets have been unearthed by native archeologists. Most curious fact in regard to these stone

tablets is that the symbols carved on them are in the *language of the ancient Phoenicians!* History had no record of this race ever venturing toward that section of the world. In fact it had been taken for granted that the Phoenicians were a somewhat cautious race, content to trade safely and unexcitingly in the Mediterranean. But this idea falls to pieces when we consider their inscriptions, thousands of miles from their homes, in South America. If the Phoenicians were the first discoverers of America, history needs a good deal of rewriting.

# 3 EYES In The Dark

BY DON WILCOX

**Nort bore his Martian slavery patiently and dreamed of the day when "Three Eyes" would rescue mankind . . .**

**L**AGGAMON and Etang, the two Rabs, lay on their blankets beside the campfire. Nort, their slave, had prepared hot water for their baths, but they would not bathe. The mountain air was too chilly. Besides, they were already getting sleepy.

Nort, the Venortian slave, came trudging past them with his arms full of firewood.

Laggamon, nudging his companion, gave a swift swing of his muscular right arm that held a long woven black whip. The end of the blacksnake lashed the slave's ankles. Nort stumbled and fell, face down, into the heap of firewood.

"Pick it up, you wretch!" Laggamon shouted. "What's the matter? Can't you walk straight?"

"He must be drunk," Etang snorted. "Got intoxicated on that soup he gave us for supper."

The two Rabs made ready for bed. The Venortian slave shook the sand from their blankets and made up their beds in the open rear end of the truck. Then he went back to his firewood.

"Three fires every night," Etang

muttered. "Damned if Venortians aren't the most superstitious people that we ever chased off a planetet."

"And how they hang on to their silly customs is a fright. Even invent new ones. Did you hear the latest that's making the rounds?"

"Three eyes in the dark?"

"That's it. One slave'll say to another, 'Have you seen three eyes in the dark?' And maybe the second slave will say 'yes', or maybe he'll give a blank stare—depending on how superstitious he is."

"There's something back of it," Etang grunted. "There's something about the number three. Look how he lays out those fires—in a triangle. It's always been the same, every season we take him out on these surveying trips. I'll swear if we were in a treeless desert, or above the timber line, he'd rustle enough wood to make three fires. He claims one's for cooking, one's for warmth, and one's for our Rab gods," and Etang expressed his contempt by spitting. "There's still too much Venortian about Nort for him to build a fire to *our* gods. If his people ever should



Reverently Nort knelt before the wonderful vision of "Three Eyes."

come back, he and a lot of other slaves might turn into something beside faithful, plodding servants."

"Pfff!" said Laggamon.

"Don't you believe it?"

"They'll never come back. Only a few thousand got away in third-rate space ships—and that was long ago—before our time. Even this fellow Nort was no more than a boy, so I've heard him say. And look how the seasons have tamed him. Now he's nothing but a harmless old man. Give him a few lashes with the blacksnake every day and he's as good a slave as any Rab could want."

With that Laggamon turned over and went to sleep. Etang watched the three flickering fires for several minutes, studied the slow, patient, mysterious figure of Nort the slave sitting by one of the fires patching his ragged garments.

"Bring me a drink of water, Nort," said Etang. When the slave came with the cup of water, the Rab eyed the weatherbeaten old face closely. "Have you seen three eyes in the dark?"

Not a flicker of change crossed the plodding old slave's countenance. "I do not understand."

"All right. Get yourself to bed, Harmless. We'll have a hard day tomorrow. I don't want you lagging with that supply cart."

"Master Etang," Nort spoke in his even, unemotional voice, "may I have a little salve from the medicine box?"

"What for?"

"For the lashes on my back."

"You and your lashes! You'll get over them. You always do. Get to bed, before I give you some more."

**T**HE succeeding days took the little party of three higher into the sand-blown mountains. Nort, who had borne his burdens of slavery for countless sea-

sons, grew heavy at heart. The little steel supply cart that he hauled around at the beck and call of the two survivors was light compared with the invisible load he carried.

It hurt Nort to see what had happened to this fine land. He had visited it when he was a boy. Then it had been irrigated from the mountain streams. That was how the Venortians had made it useful. Now it was a waste of mountainous desert. That was what the Rabs had done to it. They had not farmed it, they had come in with their gigantic machines and literally *mined* it.

Evening morning Nort saw the dull pink, arid sky. No promise of rain, only the promise of floating dust, wasted soil.

Every sleepless night Nort huddled by his fire, watching, the fine sand sift into the flame. Sand got in his eyebrows and clung to the deep lines that striped his face. Sand scoured his old memories bright.

How well he remembered the slaughter. It had come when he was only a youth. The Rabs had pounced down from the skies without warning. Their fighting ships with the sleek metallic lines had skimmed the surface of the planet, dragging sickles of death after them.

Nort remembered it as if it were yesterday. One can't witness the cold-blooded killing of one's parents and forget it in the same century of seasons.

The few, the fortunate few, had crowded into the available Venortian space ships and taken off swiftly. The remaining Venortians, enslaved, would never cease to whisper of that dramatic escape of the ships. Those fortunate few had escaped with the promise that some day they would come back, to rescue the others.

"The mythical rescue!" That was what the cruel and mighty Rabs called

it. That was their joke, their favorite taunt to the Venortians they had enslaved.

The Venortians had been crushed into slavery swiftly. For many seasons the killing of slaves had been rampant. But after a time every living Venortian suppressed his rebel spirit and *pretended* patient obedience. Pretense was the price of living—waiting—hoping.

In rapid succession came the Rabs' crimes against the planet itself. All those natural resources, given by the gods for man's use, were ravaged and squandered. Lands that had been hundreds of thousands of seasons in the making was laid waste in a few seasons of helter-skelter management.

And now, each day, the realization filled Nort with such bitterness and hatred as he had never known before. This mountain trek gave him a more poignant perspective on man's crimes against the gods, and saturated him with acid hatred against the arrogant men who took relish in such crimes.

Then, one sleepless night while the weird winds whistled and the sands blew into the flames of his three fires, Nort saw the three eyes in the dark.

**T**HE two Rabs were sound asleep. So far as Nort knew, there was no other living person within miles, other than Laggamon, Etang, and himself. The nearest Rab outpost was at least a quarter of a day's journey down the valley, at the lower end of the long winding irrigation pipe line that the Venortians themselves had built many generations ago.

And the nearest city was a day's journey beyond that.

Nor were these mountain wastes frequented by wild beasts. Animal life had migrated down the valley with the coming of the sands, and most of it had been exterminated.

But even if there had been beasts, Nort would not have thought of them now. Those three eyes that shone out of the blackness of night were no freak of biological nature. They were not really *eyes*. They were three glittering jewels, flashing back the light of Nort's campfires.

Nort saw them, coming out of the blackness, a little to one side of a withered brown pine tree that sang mournfully in the wind. He saw them coming closer, a triangle of flashing jeweled eyes; he brushed the sand from his eyelashes; he rose slowly. The advance of the three eyes stopped.

With a quick reassuring glance at his two masters, sound asleep in the truck, he ran to his tool cart, grasped a hand-ball blaster. This in case of unexpected danger. But Nort didn't really anticipate danger. Unless someone was using the ancient Venortian symbol of hope in mockery—

Nort advanced toward the old dead pine tree cautiously. It was more than three dots of light, hanging in the air in triangular formation. It was a black-hooded, black-cloaked figure. A slight motion of a black-gloved hand invited Nort to come.

Pressing one hand against the pocket that contained the hand-ball explosive, Nort came forward, every cell of his body tingling.

Within eight paces he stopped. By now the three "eyes" had become three ornaments, one at each shoulder, the third upon the belt buckle that clasped at the figure's waist.

As for the figure itself, it stood less tall than Nort, its hood was a full-blown creation, its flowing cape draped a pair of shoulders that were narrow, while the black covering of the graceful body and limbs were close-fitting. Nort knew at once that this was a girl.

"I am Nort, a Venortian slave," he



introduced himself with a courtesy reminiscent of pre-conquered days, though his poise was marked by a certain breathlessness that he couldn't prevent.

Slowly the girl removed the black hood from her face and head, revealing a countenance that was at once intent and indescribably beautiful. Even by the dim light of the waning campfires, her eyes struck Nort as having a penetrating quality unlike any eyes that had ever looked upon him before.

THE girl's gloved hand made a slight gesture toward her hair, which began to blow in loose waves the moment her hood was removed. Then she spoke, in a voice that seemed to still the winds—and her language was Venortian, the language forbidden by the Rabs!

"I am known as Three Eyes in the Dark. Have you ever seen me before?"

"No."

"I have seen so many in the past season that I no longer remember them all. But I hope to see everyone before the time—"

She hesitated, as if in danger of speaking too hastily. She looked toward the camp fires, the bright steel tool cart, the big Rab-made truck.

"You have come from one of the cities down in the valley, I presume," she spoke inquiringly.

"Yes, a day's ride beyond the old power plant down this trail." The eagerness in Nort's voice betrayed his thrill at speaking his native language again. Never except in the most guarded moments had he dared to say such words even to himself. "I am the slave of Etang and Laggamon, who are scouting these mountains for patches of land that can be farmed by Rab methods."

"I have often seen your three fires when flying over this region. Probably you have never heard me go over. My plane is almost perfectly silent." Again she gestured with her gloved hand, toward the deep blackness where her plane was evidently parked. Then in that low, intent tone of inquiry, "I do not mistake the meaning of your three fires?"

"They are the ancient Venortian symbol of hope," Nort's words came forth with a reverence that his masters would have been surprised to hear.

"Then I have not misjudged you," said the girl. "You realize that I am Three-eyes because I wear that symbol. I have come with a message of hope for all enslaved Venortians."

"You have come—from where?"

"From a distant planet, where my parents and all escaped Venortians found refuge."

"They are alive? Then there is hope!"

"They are coming back soon. That is my message. Make ready. When they come it will be war, but it will be victory if the enslaved Venortians are ready to help."

"Will it be soon?" Tears of eagerness and happiness surged near the surface of Nort's eyes.

"Perhaps a matter of days. I cannot say. When we were sent forth, the preparations were moving ahead rapidly. That was more than a season ago. Four of us, each with planes, came in a small space ship to spread the secret news. Our landing met with disaster. I am the only one of the four who lived to carry on the work. But every true Venortian has helped to pass the word along. And the stupid Rabs who get wind of it call it superstition. But I must hurry on."

Three-Eyes extended her gloved hand to Nort, who pressed it between

his two rough palms.

"I'll do anything I can."

"There'll be something for everyone, to do, even if the fighting ships land on the opposite side of the planet." The girl's deep, penetrating dark eyes lingered on the blood marks in Nort's shirt. She reached into an inner pocket of her black cape brought forth a small jar of cream. Her smooth fingers were gentle, caressing, as she spread the cream on his wounds.

"This will ease your wounds."

And as she spoke, Nort could no longer feel any pain. He uttered the Venortian words that expressed deepest appreciation.

To which Three-Eyes replied with a long-forgotten word for farewell. Then she was gone. And though Nort listened almost until dawn, he never heard her plane when it soared away.

## CHAPTER II

### A War Fleet in the Sky

"GET up, your damned lazy wretch!" Laggamon punctuated his words with a crack of the blacksnake. Nort wisely slept out of range. Neither of his masters ever bothered to climb out of bed in order to make the day's first crack of the whip effective. They were content to shout and curse at him until such time as the spirit moved them to get up. And they never got up until Nort had breakfast ready and waiting.

Nort rose stiffly. He was already dressed, except for his boots. He stirred one of the fires, started breakfast, hurried to the spring for water.

"Get a move on, Harmless!" Etang shouted in a harsh sleepy voice.

Harmless! That was what they called him—the harmless old man. Nort felt a twinge in his shoulders, a tingle at his finger-tips.

While the pails filled with water, Nort seized time to finish strapping his boots with the odds and ends of ragged straps that still clung. Involuntarily his eyes roved skyward. Pink dust of dawn. Impenetrable haze. A vague hint of purple, high overhead;—that was doubtless a sharp-edged cloud, screened by the opaque fog of floating soil.

Nort's furtive eyes shot back toward the camp. He must not be seen sky-gazing. Or day-dreaming. Or trembling from the strange new boundless emotions—

Three-Eyes! Three-Eyes! Three-Eyes! What a mystical creature! No wonder every Venortian slave was whispering, 'Have you seen her'?

Stop thinking about her! Stop, or they'll hear your heart pounding! They'll see it in your face. They'll probe you and torture for your secret. They'll kill you, before the time is ripe for you to kill them—

Harmless old man! All right, let them think it. But for the lashings you would be in the prime of life. And harmless? Well, let them think it, but when that day comes that Three-Eyes foretold—

The hand-ball blasters! Slip a few of them out, hide them. Miscount the ones you use to clear the trails for them. Then when the day comes you'll be ready. Blast them into elements! Let their pulverized cells enrich the soil they've set adrift!

Stop thinking about it! They'll hear your heart!

Nort's gaze again swept the purple streak in the sky overhead, lowered to take in the vast fingers of mountain that pointed out into the plains where the floor of farmland stretched, brown and barren, toward a horizon lost in haze. The richest of plains were turning to desert under the ruthless monster-

machines of the Rabs.

In their day the Venortians, too, had used machines; but their machines had been made to work *with* the soil, not against it.

Nort's eyes lingered upon the pinkish-white stone structure halfway down the mountainous valley. There was a sturdy reminder of the old days. It had been a Venortian power station.

Now it was one of the Rabs' many defense outposts. The barrel of a huge atomic gun extended upward on an angle from the top of the building, like a black smokestack caught in the act of falling.

Except for the sight of that gun, Nort liked to look at the old power station and think of the glorious past.

Water no longer ran down the long winding concrete pipeline; once it had roared with the rush of an unlimited supply of waterpower. But the Rabs had scorned water-power as obsolete, and irrigation as primitive. With their coming, the forests had been depleted, lake dams had fallen into neglect, and water flumes such as this one had gone silent.

A film of dust gathered on each pail of water as Nort jogged back to camp.

He paused for a final moment of nostalgic sentiment as he crossed over the square-topped concrete pipeline. All the way down the old power station it trailed, like a perfectly graded railroad bed. It was solid beneath Nort's boots. For all its long disuse, it showed no signs of decay. The concrete encasement was too thick to give forth much of a hollow plunk when Nort kicked a stone across it.

On up the mountainside it wound, like a serpentine path of steel ablaze with morning light, blotched here and there by small landslides that had covered it over. Nort wondered if water would ever run through it again.

**B**ACK at camp, Nort made swift work of the breakfast preparations, ate his own meal as he worked—for he never sat down with his masters if he could avoid it. He loaded the cart with the tools he had sharpened and polished the evening before. He carefully packed in a few hand-ball blasters to be used if Laggamon wanted to explode away some obstructions.

"Harmless!" Laggamon called between bites.

"Yes, Master Laggamon?"

"Get me the air map of this region."

"It's in your hip pocket, Master Laggamon."

Laggamon grunted. Etang gave a snort and made a light jab at the Venortian slave for knowing the contents of his masters' pockets, at which Nort smiled discreetly.

Laggamon spread the map before him, passed a finger across one side of it to trace their course. Most of the valley surrounding the outpost he had already crossed out with a blue pencil. Here and there he had encircled a patch with red.

"Not much land worth farming between these strings of mountains," Laggamon muttered, crossing out the previous day's survey with a blue pencil.

"Old Harmless thinks there's lots of good land through here," Etang said with a wink. "Don't you, Old Man?"

"It used to be good," said Nort. He took a lash of the blacksnake without looking up. The tart answer had escaped his lips before he could stop it. His spirits were too high. If his heart didn't stop thumping so loud, he would never get through the day.

Nort continued to apply grease to the axles of his little steel tool cart. He was bending down. To the two Rabs the back of his shaggy head was much in evidence.

Laggamon droned on.

"We can't be bothered by Nort's kind of land. Any areas that can't be stirred and seeded with our flying plows and planters aren't worth bothering about. When all the good grounds are gone we'll simply have to find another planet. Our standard of living—"

"Laggamon, look at that!" Etang interrupted.

"What?"

"The Harmless Old Man's hair!"

"Well, by the gods!"

Shaggy as Nort's hair was, the Rabbs could nevertheless discern the high white streak running upward from the back of the neck across the base of the skull. It was crudely cut, but it was unmistakable—the symbol of Venortian allegiance.

"When did you do *that*?" Laggamon demanded.

"Speak up, wretch!" Etang roared.

"Last night," Nort answered. "Late last night."

**T**HE white-line design in the Venortian hair cut had once been nothing more than an accepted style. The Rabbs had made it a matter for persecution. Everything Venortian must be stamped out completely.

"Come here, Harmless!" Laggamon ordered. "Bring the scissors with you!"

Etang rubbed his hands together. "Nothing like a little sport to start the day right."

Nort obediently bent before his two masters. The scissors began to chop over the surface of his head. He watched the bunches of gray-brown hair fall to the sand, and wondered if Three-Eyes would recognize him if she ever saw him again.

"If we had time we'd shave his damned head," Laggamon suggested.

"And paint it with Rab colors. It wouldn't take much time. We can

always make up lost time by keeping him on the double-quick all day. Besides, there's nothing we need around here so much as a little discipline. I'll get a razor."

"And some paint, Etang."

Then both of the Rabbs suddenly forgot what they were about, for the gentle rumble of a motor car sounded from somewhere down the valley road.

"Shine up my boots, Harmless!" Laggamon abruptly ordered.

"Mine too," shouted Etang, returning from the truck. "Who do you think it is, Laggamon?"

"Probably Kentl again. He gets lonesome down at that outpost by himself."

Nort when to work on four boots at once, the two men standing before him, their eyes turned toward the valley.

"Strange," Etang mused, "that they keep a paralytic on that job."

"Why not? There's nothing to do," Laggamon retorted. "Nothing, unless you take stock in the predictions old Harmless used to make. By the way, Harmless, what about those those old rusty predictions? Are a few lashes on the back too great a price to pay for the right to express a few eloquent bars of Venortian patriotism?"

"Perhaps," said Nort without looking up.

Laggamon prodded him with a boot.

"It's been many a season since you've hinted that your fly-away Nort might come back some day and blast us off this planet—" Laggamon broke off, fascinated by the pronounced tremble in his servant's hands. "Look, Etang, look at that damned wretch shake!"

Etang gave an amused bark.

"We scared the wits out of him on that shave and paint job."

As the sounds of the car rounded the last hairpin curve the boot job came

to a quick finish. The two Rabs turned, with spick-and-span manners, to greet their company.

It was Kentl in his official car. He plowed into the camp site with a harsh stop, he was shouting.

"They're over us! They're coming down. I know they are! It's them! Come on! You've got to help me!"

**K**ENTL'S body, partially paralyzed, seemed to fairly explode as he shouted. His withered arm jerked about wildly, his official Rab guard's uniform fluttered in disarray, his uncontrolled face contorted in torment.

"Talk like a sane man!" Laggamon demanded, pacing up to the car. "What's wrong?"

Kentl went over his words with even more fury, angered that the two surveyors didn't share his excitement at once. He swung his better arm erratically at the skies.

"Invaders, invaders, I tell you! They're going to land! They've got an armada up there!"

"How do you know?"

"Scouting plane, damn it! It circled down last night—then went back! They're up there. You can see them through the telescope. A whole damned fleet, hovering right over me!

"Why the devil didn't you report to —"

"Hell, I've tried all night long! Couldn't get through!" Kentl wailed with an awful shake of his head. "Damned instruments all knocked out. Nothing in shape down there but the big gun. But that's all we need. Only my damned arms—you've got to help me with the levers! Get in!"

It all happened so quickly that Nort couldn't collect his thoughts. He stood by, dazed and helpless. The wild joy that leaped through him at the prospect of a return of his people went frozen

with terror. Those big atomic motors! They could paint the sky with death. Only a thrust of a lever or two would be necessary.

The three Rabs started away, Laggamon at the wheel. On the instant Nort whirled to the truck. He would follow. He would crash them—plunge them over an embankment! No matter if he was killed! But let no Rabs' hands touch the atomic gun. Then that blessed sky armada would be safe to come down, seize a foothold.

But like the racer who jumps the gun and forfeits the race, Nort started for the truck a moment too soon. From the Rabs' car, curving away in a cloud of dust, came a shrill shriek of brakes. At high speed the car came backing up to the camp.

For a split second Nort flinched. He was caught! But not if he got to the truck before they did. Etang leaped out of the car. Then it was a race of hard pounding footsteps, straight toward the driver's cab of the truck. A race between Venortian and Rab—slave and master.

"Stop, you damned traitorous whelp! I'll—"

Etang's bellow, from three paces back of Nort, carried the ring of rage—the rage of a master being openly defied for the first time by a slave he had faithfully beaten for many seasons. But Etang had not neglected to bring his whip.

The blacksnake cracked out, wrapped around Nort's ankle, jerked him to a hard fall against the side of the truck. Then Etang laid on the blows. But only for a moment. There was no time.

"I'll tend to you later!"

**E**TANG mounted the driver's cab. The truck roared. Nort, lying in a beaten heap, rolled to escape the wheels. He lay there motionless,

breathing hard, mumbling with each breath. . . Venortian curses. The car and the truck disappeared from view. Nort sprang up.

There was still a chance. For a few minutes the Rabs would be riding the switchback trail, down the mountain-side from the camp. There was still a chance—

Nort ran to the little steel tool wagon, grabbed a spade and a crowbar. He filled his pockets with a double handful of the potent little hand-ball blasters. He sped toward the turn of the trail as hard as he could go. The roar of the two vehicles thundered up to his ears. The cloud of dust widened.

Car and truck were shooting along on the third level below him. He dropped his tools, hurled a hand-ball toward the path of the car. And a second and a third. One by one they descended over the mountain slope—and fell short.

Each missile threw up a fan of black earth and rocks and a cloud of dust. One large rock started rolling downward—Nort's heart leaped hopefully at the sight—but the boulder only thumped to a stop when it reached the road. The cars were already on the level beyond.

The blasts from the explosions echoed back from the mountainsides and were lost in the roar of motors.

Frantically Nort plied his tools, trying in vain to start a landslide that might still overtake them. Rocks bounced downward with the vigor of gigantic molecules, but one after another they dissipated their energies harmlessly. The Rabs were away!

Nort stalked back to the camp level, a sick man. His eyes roved over the ashes of the three fires—his symbol of Venortian hope. Scarcely an ember glowed. Nor did he stir the white ashes. Now he watched the heavens.

The haze was thinning. The wisp of purple cloud he had seen earlier was still there, its jagged edges more sharply defined. It was the armada, hovering high overhead like a floating skyline almost lost in the distance. How many hundreds of ships—or thousands—within that mass of purple, he couldn't hope to guess. But that made no difference now, he reasoned.

Before mid-day the Rabs would release death from the big gun. One by one the ships would drop like hailstones, to break on the mountainsides.

Or would they descend at once, before the Rabs reached the power-station? If they only would! But no, they wouldn't take such a chance of being sighted from distant cities. They would wait for night—but night would never come for them.

Nort watched them as one might watch a friend waiting for the guillotine—a friend that one might have saved. But now it was too late.

Nort's hands clung to the side of the little tool cart, he buried his ragged head in his arms.

"Lost! Lost! And I might have—" his voice choked away. The dust sifted over his tortured body.

"There is still time to help," came a voice from a little distance. Nort looked up. At first he wasn't sure whether it was a voice or simply the freakish echoes of wind blowing through the rocks and trees. But it came again. "There is still time to help, Nort. . . But you must act quickly!"

"Three-Eyes!" Nort cried, springing up. "Where are you?"

His gaze combed the camp site, the trees and underbrush beyond. He looked up to the ravine beyond the concrete pipeline.

"Where are you, Three-Eyes?"

"Over here. My plane is grounded. I've tried all night to fix it. But it's

impossible. That's why I'm still here. Hurry, Nort! Bring your tool cart—"

The voice was lost in a gust of wind. Nort whirled about, mystified. He couldn't see the grounded plane anywhere. He wasn't even sure which way the voice came from.

"The tool cart, Nort!" It was that same low intent tone of voice, but even stronger with urgency. "I haven't any way to warn them, Nort. They'll come down today, I'm sure. Or tonight. But whether they come down dead or alive depends upon you! Come!"

"I'm coming!" Nort cried, catching the tongue of his tool wagon

"Throw out the tools, Nort. You'll only need the flashlanterns and the explosives. . . . *This way, Nort!*"

### CHAPTER III

#### Last Hope

HE dragged the little steel wagon as fast as he could go—across the sandy tracks he had made toward the spring. He stopped short before the square surfaced trail of concrete—the old Venortian water tunnel.

Nowhere did he catch sight of Three-Eyes. But he didn't stop to question her commands. Now he understood.

He seized a hand-ball blaster, hurled it, then dropped under the steel wagon and waited for the fragments to fall.

The thudding ceased, and before Nort's eyes was a section of the concrete tunnel torn wide open. In an instant he was in, and the wagon with him. The tunnel was fully six feet in diameter—dry and musty.

Nort jumped on the wagon, stomach down, eyes ahead, and shoved off with a powerful push of his ragged boot against the floor. Into the long black cylindrical cavern he rolled.

At first the grade seemed too slight

to be effective. Then the wagon began to gain speed. The daylight back of him began to fade. But abruptly Nort stopped. There was a triangle of eyes in the darkness before him.

Three dots of brightness standing solid, unmoving, in the center of his cavernous path! Three clusters of jewels catching the dimly reflected light of day! Could this be Three-Eyes again? *Inside* the tunnel?

Nort turned on the flashlantern. The three scintillating eyes became adornments on the black costume of a hooded figure. A jeweled belt-clasp and two shoulder ornaments.

"Three-Eyes!" Nort cried, leaping to his feet. "I thought you—"

"You thought I was outside—and so I was. I entered through a break in the tunnel." The girl hurried toward him, slipping the hood off, revealing the same beautiful face that Nort had looked upon the night before. "I shall ride with you, Nort. It may take both of us—"

They mounted the little steel wagon, clutched tightly as it gained speed. Daylight was lost behind. They coasted into what seemed an endless passage of unexplored blackness. There was a momentary flick of sunlight—the break in the walls where Three-Eyes had entered, no doubt.

Faster—faster! Click. . . click. . . click! Like giant tiles laid end to end the sections of concrete flew past them, now a straight-away, now a shift curve. The flashlantern fought the dark like a candle against the night.

"We'll be there almost as soon as the Rab's," Three-Eyes sang out against the roar of the wheels. Her voice made round alto echoes through the long passage. Nort could feel her tense breathing close against the back of his neck. "Have you many explosives?"

"Ten or twelve," Nort called back.



His teeth were clenched, his muscles taut. Every bend was more dangerous than the last, for they were still gaining speed. He guided the cart with wonderful skill. He was losing all sense of direction, of time, of distance.

On and on came the mysterious stream of blackness, unfolding at an ever swifter pace. Sometimes a spot of outdoor light would flash across the path. Sometimes clumps of soil and rocks would loom up, to deal them a rough joggle as they coasted over. The joints of the giant tiles had allowed bits of landslides to wedge through. But only once did they have to blast their way through an obstruction. And again they were off.

A fresh flashlantern helped. Then, after, a time, a third flashlantern was pressed into service. This time the shift was made without a stop, but it almost resulted in a costly accident. The speeding wagon was momentarily thrown into a perilous balance. Nort's hand, cramped and knotted on the wagon tongue, jerked abruptly. The wagon swerved.

**I**N that swerve Nort scraped against the flying wall, ripped his shirt, burned his shoulder. But the wagon righted itself and sailed on. Nort could hear the beautiful girl breathing in quick, fearful gasps.

"Were you hurt, Three-Eyes?"

"No, I'm—I'm all right."

The clutch of her hands around his waist seemed to be slipping. Now came a long straight-away. For minutes they seemed to be falling downward through a bottomless shaft. And every minute Nort felt that the warm fingers clutching at his sides were growing weaker.

"Hold me tight!" Nort called.

"Don't mind me!" came the gasping reply. "Keep going. . . ." And after a little time she repeated the half-

whispered command. "Keep going. . . Whatever happens to me, keep going. . . . Time is short. . . ."

The tunnel shuddered. A roar echoed up through it—a low ominous thunder.

"Could that be the atomic gun?"

Three-Eyes cried out against the rumbling echoes.

"The atomic guns are noiseless,"

Nort muttered fiercely.

"Then that must have been a falling ship!" And a moment later when the thundering echo repeated, she added knowingly, "Another ship. They're crashing against the mountainside. We're almost too la—*Keep going!*"

The final command came from Three-Eyes as she fell. The wagon dashed over a clump of obstructing rocks, cutting its speed. Nort burned his boot against the tunnel wall to try to stop, but he was unable to prevent the girl's fall.

He glanced back, almost stopped.

"Keep going!" she called out. "I'm not hurt. I'll come! Keep going Kee-e-e-ep goin-n-ng!"

He could only see the three dots of light that adorned her black costume. The swiftness with which they receded warned him that he was accelerating down a sharper grade.

"Kee-ep goin-n-ng!" The musical call went round and round in the tunnel fading fainter, fainter. Nort could still feel that last lingering touch of her warm fingertips as they slipped past the tear in his shirt.

The end of the tunnel was just ahead. The shaft turned sharply downward. He scooted to a stop. Another thundering crash best his ears.

Another ship! That meant that the big atomic gun was finding its mark, scraping the edges, at least, of the hovering fleet. Soon they might be falling like a shower of stones from a volcano.

NORT remembered this downward turn of the water flume, having seen it from the outside. It was the turn that had once led straight down to the Venortian turbines.

Down the steel ladder he went, trying to carry the wagon with him. The thing was terribly heavy. But he might need it. He had a half-formed plan . . . but he wasn't sure what he would find . . . or what he could do. Down—down—his arm was breaking, his torn shoulder bleeding a stream. But he had a plan—

The hand-ball blasters spilled out, plummeted down the open shaft toward the daylight. Everything went—explosives and flashlanterns—but Nort clung to the wagon, fought his way on down the ladder.

The light of the explosions glared up at him, but he was never sure that he heard their blast. Another terrific rumble pounded against the mountain-side somewhere near, and sent its heavy thunder leaping up through the concrete.

This time Nort caught a glimpse of the ship, rolling and spilling over the rocks. Uniformed Venortians tumbled out of the wrecked hull, as dead as stones.

Nort's ladder had suddenly come to an end in mid-air. The old water flume had been cut away to make room for the vast base of the atomic gun. Down across the open court he could see the glass enclosed control room where the three Rabs stood. Laggamon was at the controls, Etang and Kentl were at a window watching the rain of dead, Venortians. Kentl was leaping about in an uncontrolled frenzy of jubilation, Etang was pacing, slapping the folded whip against his thigh, as if he were the master of the world.

No one saw Nort. No one thought

to look across to the catwalk that led around the vast base, passing beneath the dangling end of the flume ladder. The center of their interest was in the other direction.

In a final burst of energy, Nort leaped to the catwalk, dragging the wagon with him. He rounded the narrow curving walk, spiraled upward into a level that was dense with shadows. Shadows streaked with gleaming copper cables, brightened intermittently by rattling sparks.

Instantly Nort gambled his chances on the two lead wires, which stretched, bright and bare, into the opaque shadows. He had only his steel wagon and his life to give. He gave. He hurled the wagon with all his might. . .

## CHAPTER IV

### A Dreamer's Victory

THAT day the armada of Venortians landed in the mountain valley beside the old power station. The days that followed brought the opening attacks upon the cities of Rabs. There were victories, there were defeats, then more victories. At last, when a season had passed, the planet was again in the hands of its rightful owners, and every Venortian who had been a slave was now a victor.

One of the many military parties assigned to the conferring of honors upon citizens motored up the newly-surfaced mountain road to a tourists' stop known as Nort's Outpost.

Nort, bareheaded, his hair neatly trimmed in the customary Venortian style, came down the steps to confront the party.

"I have a group of tourists waiting to enter the tunnel. Have you come to join us?"

The tourists gathered on the porch

back of him, but the military-honors party disregarded them. A marshal stepped forward, extending a jeweled medal."

". . . to you, Nort, for highly meritorious service," said the marshal smiling. "Since you disregarded our summons to come for this award, we were forced to bring it to you."

"It does not belong to me," Nort protested. "It belongs to Three-Eyes—"

"To you," declared the marshal, still holding forth the medal. "All Venortia knows how you were found hanging to the steel wagon that you somehow hurled across the wires. Though no one knows by what miracle you survived that daring deed. You were found half dead from electrocution—but, as all Venortia knows, you stopped the atomic gun—"

"The reward belongs to Three-Eyes, I tell you. She came to me, even as death was ready to claim me—"

"Three-eyes is a beautiful myth," said the marshal. "Without that myth, the enslaved Venortians would not have been ready to help."

The marshal pinned the glittering medal upon Nort.

"I shall give it to Three-Eyes."

The marshal smiled. "Do with it as you will."

Nort turned to the waiting tourists, led them away by the crooked mountain path to the break in the pipeline.

The military party loitered about, fascinated by the mystic feelings that the one-time slave had somehow engendered in them.

"He's one who will never be convinced," said the marshal's lieutenant. "I've heard he even claims his wounds were soothed by a magic salve applied with Three-Eyes' own hands."

"A curious superstition," said the marshal. "But we've proved con-

clusively that it is nothing more. First, we know that no party of Venortian scouts ever landed, previous to the night of our attack. Next, we've never found any trace of Three-Eyes, living or dead. Thirdly, we've traced the myth to its origin—a child's prank on a dark night. But someone was taken in, and from then on, every downtrodden person tried to see those three eyes in the dark—our symbol of hope."

"Then the symbol became a beautiful girl, whispering words of encouragement—"

"All a myth—but their faith in what they *thought* they saw spread like wild-fire!"

"Odd," said the lieutenant a bit skeptically, "that it should have happened during the very season that we were preparing."

"Perhaps when telepathy is better understood," said the marshal, "it will not be so odd."

The two officers fell silent. The people were returning from the tunnel, murmuring in low voices. There was a strange rapture in their faces. They spoke in reverent whispers—of *Three-Eyes, whom they had seen in the darkness*. They spoke of the singing echoes they had heard—ceaseless echoes that seemed to say, "*Keeeee goinnnng! Keeeee goinnnng!*"

The people departed. Tomorrow others would come, some believing, some skeptical.

Nort smiled to himself as he plodded up the steps. He was not a slave, he was not a harmless old man—no, no Rab would ever rise from the dead to call him that again. He was Nort the Venortian, as proud as any man who lived.

He paused to look out over the vast valley—a valley that was beginning to bloom again. Proud he was of that valley, and proud of the view which he

commanded from this cabin—the cabin the Venortian government had helped him build.

And he was happy. Let them think that Three-Eyes was a figment of his imagination. He knew better. He could still feel her fingers on his mutilated back; on the ragged whip-wounds that had healed so marvelously well.

He knew she was real, and he knew that someday she would come to him again. She still lived—for if she had died, he would have found her body in the tunnel.

Until she came, he would wait—and be happy with those other people, those tourists, who could also see . . . three eyes in the dark!

## « IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD! »

If you are adventure bent and have a flair for the scientific, you can carve out a career for yourself by taking a course recently offered at the University of Michigan. Scientific adventuring and exploration is the background of this course, with actual field work in such far-off regions as the Yukon being included in the study requirements. Also included in actual work in the various uncharted wilds to which the students are sent, is land mapping, study of animal and plant life, and geological and natural resources estimation.

### THAT BIG EYE

The much discussed giant telescope under completion at the California Institute of Technology is 640,000 times the strength of your own eyesight. In other words, if you stood on a street in New York looking at a sign on a shop window on the other side, you would—through the use of the giant telescope—be able to move that sign clear across the continent, to San Francisco, and still be able to read its every letter! Another interesting expectation concerning the giant 'scope which holds scientists breathless with anxiety, is the fact that—once completed—the Great Eye is expected to reveal over *one million new universes* whose existence has hitherto been unproven!

### DON'T BET ON THIS

Undoubtedly you've heard the expression, "I'll eat my shirt," and just as undoubtedly, you've probably thought of it as an absurdly fantastic bit of phraseology. Nevertheless, it can be done—literally. A Harvard chemistry professor, having made a bet that he would eat his shirt if something didn't occur as he predicted, fulfilled his bet through his knowledge of science. After dissolving his shirt in acid, then neutralizing the acid with a base, he filtered the precipitated matter, carefully spread it on a piece of bread—and ate it!

### SCIENCE AND THE CROOKED GAMBLER

The next time you feel the urge to "play a friendly hand" or "roll a few for the baby's shoes," pause long enough to remind yourself what science has done to make the art of crooked gambling

even more nefarious. There is a large middle-western manufacturing company which puts out all sorts of crooked gambling devices. This company manufactures no less than 62 various decks of marked cards which absolutely defy detection, and 73 types of "loaded" transparent dice which have been so cleverly made that they can be weighed, measured, cut, burned, or tested with calipers—and still defy any efforts to prove their dishonesty!

### THE FUTURE LOOKS SILENT

Recently a time capsule was sealed into the corner of a New York building. But, unlike other time capsules, this one contained merely recordings—of street noises! It was explained that honking horns, police whistles, cries of newsboys, screeching of brakes, rumblings of traffic, and other common city noises, would very probably be nonexistent in future metropolitan areas. The playing of these recordings, it was stated, would enable future generations to hear what they were missing!

### STOMACH ACHE

The hydrochloric acid in the human stomach is some twenty-five thousand times that of a fatal dose of carbolic acid. Remember this the next time you burn your hand in a laboratory. No wonder they call it "intestinal fortitude"!

### DINOSAURS AS DOG FOOD

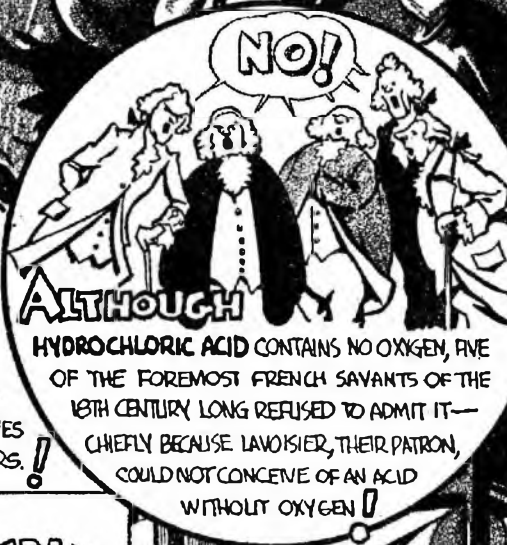
In Siberia, peasant farmers on the frozen wastes occasionally discover perfectly preserved and frozen mammoths, over ten thousand years old! These ancient animals, which made their last stand in Siberia thousands of years ago while retreating southward before the ice, were trapped in the soft, ice-water marshes and frozen solidly into the tough soil. Some of them, on discovery, are still with hide, flesh, hair, and even undigested remains of food in their stomachs. To the peasant who unearths them, however, this is of little importance, for he merely rips off enough red meat from the ancient mammoths to feed his dogs!—*John York Cabot*.

# Romance of the Elements - - - Chlorine



**I**N 1774, SCHEEL, CONTACTING HYDROCHLORIC ACID WITH CRUDE MANGANESE DIOXIDE, FINELY GROUND, OBTAINED A GAS WHOSE ODOR WAS "MOST OPPRESSIVE TO THE LUNGS." HE CALLED IT DEPHLOGISTICATED MARINE ACID BUT IT WAS CHLORINE HE HAD DISCOVERED. . .

**E**XACTLY 140 YEARS LATER GERMAN TROOPS AT NEUVE CHAPELLE USED SHRAPNEL CONTAINING DIANISIDINE CHLOR-SULPHONATE ON APRIL 22, 1915 AT LANGEMARCK, THEY DISCHARGED CHLORINE GAS FROM TANKS. THIS STARTED THE CHEMICAL WARFARE THAT BEFORE HOSTILITIES CEASED, WAS TO CLAIM THE LIVES OF 800,000 GERMAN AND ALLIED SOLDIERS. !



**A**LTHOUGH

HYDROCHLORIC ACID CONTAINS NO OXYGEN, FIVE OF THE FOREMOST FRENCH SAVANTS OF THE 18TH CENTURY LONG REFUSED TO ADMIT IT—CHIEFLY BECAUSE LAVOISIER, THEIR PATRON, COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF AN ACID WITHOUT OXYGEN !



**C**HLOROFORM

WAS PRODUCED SIMULTANEOUSLY, IN 1831 BY GUTHRIE IN AMERICA, SOUBEIRAN IN FRANCE, LIEBIG IN GERMANY! FIRST USED, ANAESTHETICALLY, ON ANIMALS IN 1847; ON HUMAN BEINGS IN 1848



**P**ULP AND PAPER BLEACHING IS STILL CHLORINE'S "BIG TIME JOB," A FAST-GROWING USE IS PRODUCING SYNTHETIC FIBERS IN TEXTILE MILLS. CHLORINE SANITIZES WATER, HELPS IN SEWAGE DISPOSAL. U.S. REQUIREMENTS, LESS THAN 67,000 TONS IN 1921, EXCEEDED 420,000 TONS IN 1935 !

**C**HLORINE is number 17 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Cl and its atomic weight is 35.457. It is a greenish-yellow gas possessing a disagreeable smell. It is about 2.5 times heavier than air. It may be condensed to a liquid, and boils at 33.6°. It enters into compounds with almost every other element.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Chromium.



by **WILLIAM P. McGIVERN**

**M**ORTIMER MEEK raked a cold eye over the desks and typewriters of the Snappy Service Loan Company. Squaring his narrow shoulders he pointed an accusing finger at a lattice wire wastebasket.

"So," he hissed, "it's you, Bloody Bill, who started this mutiny. With your guns and your gold you've corrupted my sailors, incited them to rebel."

Here Mortimer Meek paused dra-

matically, glared about the empty office, and then flung his head back at a defiant tilt.

"Well it won't work," he cried, his voice swelling to a squeaky shout, "because you are helpless against the power of my will. You are powerless to resist my commands. And I command you to put down your guns. Put down your guns and clear off the bridge of my staunch ship, the whole sorry lot of you."

# The MASTERFUL MIND of MORTIMER MEEK

All he had to do was command, and he was obeyed! But would his power work when his very life depended on it?



To his amazement, Myfisto obeyed his command to take a jump for himself!



As the last command echoed through the office, Mortimer jerked himself up to his full height of five feet four inches and raised one arm challengingly above his head, triumph and vindication radiating from every inch of his puny frame.

"Mortimer Meek," a bewildered feminine voice snapped behind him, "whatever in the world are you doing?"

To say that the sudden voice startled Mortimer would be putting it mildly. He reacted as if he had been prodded with a red hot poker. A surprised squawk ripped from his throat and he sprang from the floor, his spindly arms flailing desperately.

Returning to earth, as it were, Mortimer's knees buckled suddenly, dumping him with a sickening thud on the hard floor. Flat on his face, his arms and legs spreadeagled like a butterfly on canvas, he presented a ludicrous spectacle.

Painfully conscious of this, Mortimer scrambled to his feet, to face a girl—the girl in Mortimer's life, as a matter of fact—whose delicate, lovely features registered every expression from exasperated annoyance to scornful amusement.

"Betty," he gasped, "I didn't know you were here. I mean," he struggled on desperately, "you don't usually get down to work this early. I got here ahead of time so I could practice."

"Practice for what?" Betty asked in a tone of voice that would have bored through chrome steel.

"I didn't tell you about it," Mortimer said excitedly, "because I wanted to surprise you." There was a jittery tremor in his voice and his heart was behaving foolishly as it always did in Betty's presence.

"You see," he explained, "I'm taking a correspondence school course in will power. Every lesson I have to over-

come a difficult situation. This morning I had to put down a mutiny on board my ship. All by myself and with just my will power. The book says it isn't fair to use weapons no matter how tight a spot you're in."

"Oh does it?" Betty planted her hands on her shapely hips. "Does it really?"

"Yes it does," Mortimer rushed on blissfully unaware of the storm signals. "That's one of the most important things.

"But," he added slyly, "sometimes I cheat. As a matter of fact, just last week I had to pull a knife on a big bully down in Mexico."

**B**ETTY was ordinarily a patient, sweetly understanding creature but one would never guess it from her present reaction.

"Mortimer Meek," she blazed, "what *has* happened to you? This is the most terrible thing I've ever heard of."

"But it was self defense," Mortimer pleaded, "he was about to strangle me."

"Oh I don't mean that," Betty said helplessly. "I mean this nonsense about will power lessons. Talking to yourself, dreaming all of these wild, impossible situations. That's what I mean. You're going crazy."

"Crazy?" Mortimer said in a grieved voice. "You just don't understand, that's all. I'm trying to develop my will power so that people will respect me. Why it's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me."

"If that's what you think," Betty said grimly, "then I'm through with you. Until you get these wild ideas out of your head you can just forget about those . . ." her voice was suddenly uneven ". . . those plans we had."

"But I can't give it up," Mortimer cried frantically. "I paid for the course in advance."

"Then I hope you'll be very happy with it," Betty said brokenly. She brushed a large tear angrily from her cheek, then turned and marched away.

Mortimer started after her, frantic pleas trembling on his lips, but his pursuit was abruptly checked by the opening of the office door and the entrance of the tall, cadaverous figure of Jeremiah Judson, president of the Snappy Service Loan Company.

Jeremiah Judson's motto was: "All work and no play is the way to spend the day," and with the possible exception of an income tax blank, nothing infuriated him more than the sight of an idle employee.

He stopped at sight of Mortimer's hesitating figure and then coughed meaningly.

Jeremiah Judson did not waste coughs or anything else for that matter. This particular cough hinted strongly that time was passing and that there was work to be done, and furthermore there were hundreds of capable men who would be glad to take over Mortimer's job if he were tired of it.

Mortimer hesitated, torn between love and fear, but finally the latter triumphed and with a last mournful look at Betty's retreating figure, he turned and ducked across the office to his desk.

**S**AFE at his desk, where he interviewed prospective borrowers, there were routine matters to handle, and the office began to hum with the activity of a new day, people of all sorts to question and interview.

But through all these diversions a part of Mortimer's mind dwelt moodily on the events of the morning.

It was terrible to think that Betty was through with him. Terrible to think of facing life without her beside him. Suddenly he decided on a great

sacrifice. He'd give up his will power lessons—that's what he'd do. He'd tell her so at noon.

"I'll go to her on bended knee," he murmured fervently, "and beg her forgiveness."

"Now ain't dat poetic," an unpleasantly nasal voice growled next to his desk.

Mortimer looked up, startled. He saw a large, tough looking young man, attired unbecomingly in a loudly checked, extremely cut tweed suit. His features were heavy and coarse and from his tightly clenched teeth a stubby cigar jutted belligerently.

"Don't let me distoib ya," the loudly dressed young man said with heavy sarcasm, "I c'n wait till ya finish dat poem. Time's nuttin' to Slug McNutty."

"I beg your pardon," Mortimer said stutteringly. "I must have been thinking of someone—of something else. Won't you have a seat?"

"Don't mind if I do, chum," the large young man slid into a chair next to Mortimer's desk and shoved his white fedora back to the crown of his head.

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" Mortimer asked.

Slug McNutty looked quickly about the office and then leaned closer to Mortimer.

"All I want from you, chum, is a little information. And I'm tellin' ya, de easier de talk flows de easier it's goin' ta be on you."

"Why . . . why," gasped Mortimer, breathlessly, "what do you mean?"

"Just dis," the nasal growl sank to an ominous whisper. "Dis outfit of yours is makin' a special shipment of dough dis week in an armored truck. All I want to know from you is where dat truck is goin' to be at t'ree o'clock tomorrow aftanoon."

It took a little time for the full im-

pact of Slug McNutty's words to make themselves felt on Mortimer's brain but when they did his knees began to tremble under the desk. He gazed desperately, beseeching about the office. Why . . . why, he thought wildly, this man is a gangster.

Mortimer knew the armored truck would be at the corners of Plaza boulevard and Fifth Place at three the next afternoon. The shipping clerk had mentioned that to him but if he told that to the gangster . . . why he would be an accessory to the crime.

"I can't tell you," he croaked dazedly, "it wouldn't be honest . . . you must be joking."

"If you t'ink it's a joke," McNutty growled, "you got a good sense of humor. Dat truck is goin' to be knocked over tomorrow aftanoon and if you ain't willing to play ball wit us we're goin' to have to knock you off instead."

"Oh my goodness," Mortimer gasped, as a rising tide of panic engulfed him. He thought of crying out, screaming for help, but one frantic look at the gangster's ominously hardened jaw convinced him that his first scream would also be his last.

"Please," he begged, "don't pick on me. I don't want to be a criminal."

"We ain't pickin' on ya," McNutty returned impatiently, "we just want a little cooperation, that's all. Now look. I'm goin' to give ya de rest of de mornin' to get me de dope I want and I'll be back here after lunch. If you ain't got it you ain't goin' to be nuttin' but a memory at dis time tomorrow. And don't get any smart ideas about spillin' dis to anybody cause from now on one of de boys is goin' ta be on your tail. Get me?"

Mortimer stared with glassy, terrified eyes at the huge, ominous figure of the gangster and his head bobbed weakly on his neck.

"I get you," he whispered hoarsely. "I get you."

**H**IS heart continued to leap at his ribs like an imprisoned bullfrog for minutes after the heavy figure of Slug McNutty had disappeared from the office. And then as reason began to return, the hideousness of his plight struck him with the force of a loaded night stick.

If he acceded to the gangster's demands he would be guilty of grand larceny—just as surely as if he held up the truck himself. But if he didn't—he shuddered at the thought—there was no dodging the fact that Slug McNutty meant business.

He groaned and sank his head in his hands. Why did this have to happen to him? What would Betty say? The last thought snapped him upright in his chair.

Betty was through with him!

But no . . . when she learned of his trouble she couldn't stay angry with him. The thought cheered him slightly. He would see her at noon, take her to lunch and pour out his troubles into her sympathetic ear. She could help him, suggest something that might untangle him from this mess.

He felt a glow of confidence spreading its comfortable warmth about him as he thought of this. Feverishly impatient he watched the hands of the clock move with agonizing slowness from hour to hour, until at last they crossed at twelve and the bell announcing the lunch hour pealed through the office.

Before it stopped echoing Mortimer was out of his chair and halfway across the office. Betty was standing next to her desk adjusting a jaunty little hat on top of her dark curls when he reached her side.

"Darling, I've been a fool," he pant-

ed, "I've got something terribly important to talk to you about."

"I'm sorry," Betty said coolly. "I'm afraid it will have to wait." She pulled out a tiny mirror and studied her carmined lips critically. "I have a date for lunch and I'm late now."

"About ready Betty?" a smooth masculine voice asked from behind them.

Betty looked up and flashed a brilliant smile over Mortimer's shoulder.

"I'm all ready, Jon," she said brightly.

Mortimer turned, his eyes following the direction of Betty's smile. They encountered a slender, foppishly dressed young man whose blandly handsome features were creased in a smug, superior smile.

The foppishly dressed young man was Jon Debaere, a junior executive of the Snappy Service Company. Mortimer had never trusted him and now he realized that his suspicions had been well grounded.

"Just a minute," he said indignantly. "You're not taking my girl to lunch or anywhere else for that matter."

Jon smiled. A languid, superior smile. "You seem to be in your usual state of confusion," he purred, "but supposing we leave it up to the young lady. After all, it's her choice. What do you say, Betty?"

Betty hesitated and Mortimer seized the occasion to demonstrate his ignorance of feminine psychology.

"You're not going with him," he bleated shrilly. "Do you hear me?—You can't."

Betty reacted as any member of her sex would have. Her lips pressed tightly together and she marched past Mortimer and put her hand on Jon's arm.

"Shall we leave?" she asked, looking up at him. "I find the air getting a little close in here."

"But . . . but," gurgled Mortimer,

"you can't do this. I need you. I'm in trouble. I've got to . . ."

"Sorry, old man," Jon broke in lightly "Just another case of the better man winning."

Before Mortimer's beaten and distracted brain could think of a rejoinder the two had moved off, and laughing gaily, passed through the door, out of the office.

Mortimer watched the door swing shut behind them, and a lump the size of a billiard ball crawled up his throat. His shoulders slumped wearily and his chest felt as if an elephant had suddenly sat on it. Gloom and despair blanketed his brain and with all this came the sharp, stinging sense of irretrievable loss.

"She'll be sorry," he muttered bitterly, "when she sees me lying on the floor, riddled with machine-gun bullets, wallowing in my own blood."

With this chilling thought settling over his spirit like a damp pall, he turned and plodded listlessly out of the office.

**F**IVE minutes later, leaving the building, he joined the throng of lunch-bound office workers. Immersed in his own troubles, Mortimer staggered on blindly for blocks until his way was obstructed by a hurrying stream of humanity, bound—he discovered on looking up—for a noisy carnival that had planted its mushroom-like tents and loud red posters on a vacant lot in the city district.

Ferris wheels were revolving, perspiring barkers were clamoring for the attention of the crowd and on a makeshift stage set back from the street, four scantily clad girls were wiggling their provocative torsos to the very vocal appreciation of the multitude.

Mortimer paused, fascinated. Carnivals and circuses had always possessed

a strange enchantment for him. The bewitching glamor of the devil-may-care performers dazzled him and acted as a heady draught of wine to his sober soul.

He had no intention of dallying. In fact he reminded himself as he took the first timid steps into the sawdust sprinkled enclosure, that he would only look around.

Peering delightedly at the strange sights, he was borne along by the crowd and finally jostled in front of a small platform on which a heavy set barker was waving his arms for attention.

"Quijee-et pleeeze," the barker's raucous voice rolled over the crowd like a wool blanket. An expectant hush settled over the milling throng.

"The exhibit which you are about to witness," he shouted impressively, "has thrilled and amazed every country of this great world. It is the most stupendous, incredible soul-chilling demonstration that human eyes have ever been privileged to behold. Myfisto, the incomparable, the one and only mental marvel, is waiting inside this tent to baffle you, to bewilder you, to mystify you with the wisdom and clairvoyance that have been handed down to him from the ancients who lived and died when Time was in her teens." The barker paused and wiped his face with a red and white handkerchief before launching into his peroration.

"And now," he bellowed, "the show is starting. Get your tickets while there is still time. This is an opportunity that comes but once in any man's existence. Don't let the price—the tenth part of a dollah—prevent you from witnessing the most amazing man the world has ever produced—Myfisto—the mental marvel."

As he finished speaking a five-piece band broke into a wild march that sent

Mortimer's normally conservative blood dancing crazily through his veins.

He had no intention of going inside and therefore it was a slight surprise to find himself seated in the front row of the small tent peering expectantly at a dimly lighted stage hung with oriental trappings.

His troubles had disappeared into the limbo of lost things and with naive delight Mortimer waited to be mystified, amazed and bewildered.

He did not have long to wait. The heavy draperies parted slowly and a tall, impressive figure strode dramatically onto the stage. His skin was dark, almost black, and he was dressed in a strange, white garment that buckled at his shoulders and fell in rippling folds to the floor. His head was swathed in a red turban and where the bands crossed on his forehead a huge bright emerald blazed.

The strange figure stared silently at the awed crowd with dark, fathomless eyes, then he turned and walked silently to the side of the stage.

THE draperies parted again and the barker, dressed now in an oriental costume, stepped onto the stage. He held up one hand and walked to the front of the stage.

"Myfisto," he announced solemnly, "is ready to commence his exhibition. His first demonstration will be one of simple hypnosis. And for this it will be necessary to ask the assistance of a member of the audience." His eyes flicked calculatingly over the crowd. "Aha," he cried, "I see the very gentleman we need. Will the handsome young man in the first row kindly step up on the stage? There's nothing to be alarmed about. No danger at all."

Mortimer peered about excitedly, looking for the handsome young man who was to take part in the experiment.

He saw no one that fitted the description. His attention was jerked back by a sharp dig in the ribs.

"Go ahead buddy," the fat man in the seat next to him whispered. "Show him you ain't afraid. Show 'm you got the guts."

"Me?" gasped Mortimer. "What . . ." He broke off and jerked his eyes back to the stage. The barker *was* pointing at him.

"No, no," he cried. "I can't. That is I . . ."

"It won't take a minute," the barker shouted over Mortimer's thin protests. "Let the young man through down there. Help him along."

The fat man put a heavy hand on Mortimer's shoulder and gave him a helpful shove that dumped him into the aisle.

"Go on," he whispered encouragingly. "He said there wasn't nothin' to be afraid of."

Helpful hands jerked Mortimer to his feet, pushed him along until he stood at the bottom of the steps that led to the stage.

The barker hopped down the steps, grabbed Mortimer's hand in a vise-like grip and dragged him up the steps onto the stage.

Mortimer stared helplessly about him. The barker had left his side, the audience had quieted to an expectant hush and Mortimer looked up to see Myfisto, the mental marvel, moving slowly toward him.

"Be not alarmed," Myfisto said in a deep, mellifluous voice. "You are becoming drowsy, a peaceful sleep is stealing over you."

This was not exactly the truth. Mortimer had never felt more thoroughly and completely awake.

For a space of several seconds Myfisto's black, all-knowing eyes bored into Mortimer's very soul; and then he

looked up and signaled the barker.

"Our subject is ready," he said. "Let us prepare."

The barker bowed low, hurried off the stage—to return wheeling before him something that looked like a tea table. On top of the table reposed a square metal box, with wires leading from it to disappear under the table.

Myfisto stepped to the table, lifted the lid of the box and drew forth a curious shining object that looked like a stream-lined football helmet. On the side of the device there were several rheostats and gadgets and on the cone-shaped top of the peculiar object, tiny, shining wires were coiled in thick little clusters.

Mortimer edged closer and peered over Myfisto's shoulder. He saw that the interior of the dome was completely lined with glistening threadlike filaments. From these, insulated wires led to the box on the table.

Myfisto turned slightly.

"You will put this on," he said in a tone of voice that brooked no argument.

"But," gasped Mortimer, "I don't . . ."

"Fits excellently," Myfisto cut in as he raised the shining headpiece and pressed it down firmly on Mortimer's head.

Mortimer trembled. The thing felt funny on his head. The filament wires were pressing into his scalp as if they wanted to crawl right into his brain.

The barker turned and walked to the front of the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he bawled, "this object you see on the head of the subject is a device that coordinates electrical impulses with human thought waves. By this, the thought waves of Myfisto, the mental marvel, can be carried by electrical vibrations to the receptive brain of the subject. Thus the

will of the subject becomes completely subservient to the will of the master."

An expectant hush settled over the audience as the barker retreated and Myfisto raised one arm dramatically over his head.

"Quiie-et," he hissed. "I must have absolute silence."

He picked up a rheostat from the table, peered at it closely and then bent down and threw a switch on the side of the box.

Instantly a faint humming reverberated across the stage.

**M**MORTIMER looked about helplessly. There was a strange tingling sensation in his ears, a sensation that became more pronounced as the humming noise grew in volume. The wires pressing against his head seemed to be vibrating gently as the humming settled to a steady purr.

He felt a peculiar giddy sensation stealing over him as the wires seemed to burn into his very brain, as the strange tingle spread from his ears to the base of his skull.

Sweat stood out on his brow as the headpiece grew warm. He looked despairingly at Myfisto just in time to see him snap another switch on the other side of the box.

At the same instant he felt a sharp, painful prick at the base of his skull. As if a red hot needle had been jabbed into his flesh.

"Ouch," he cried, "that hurt." He grabbed the headpiece with both hands and jerked it off his head, and held it out accusingly. "What's the idea?" he demanded angrily.

Mortimer's comically indignant pose snapped the audience out of their temporary trance. Waves of laughter, loud, ribald laughter, broke from their lips to crash deafeningly about Mortimer's blushing ears.

Mortimer stared helplessly about him, his face a dull crimson, his eyes smarting with angry tears. They had got him up on the stage to make a fool out of him, to provide the audience with a laugh. That was all there was to it. To make an object of ridicule and derision out of him.

With this realization came a swift, bitter anger. He turned to the barker and waved a puny fist under his nose.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" he fumed. "Making a laughing stock out of honest, law-abiding citizens. Well there's nothing funny about it," he shouted rather pointlessly, "nothing funny about it at all." He wheeled and marched indignantly to the steps but before he could descend the barker caught his arm.

"You got the wrong idea," he said anxiously. "Something funny as hell happened just now."

But Mortimer cut him off.

"Oh, you think it's funny," he cried. "Well then, just . . . just . . ." he plumbed his brain for the most scathing, derisive retort he could think of . . . "just go take a running jump for yourself. You, too," he shouted at Myfisto, "both of you, go ahead. See if I care."

With tears of humiliation blinding him, he pounded down the steps and fought his way through the crowd, his soul burning with bitter disgrace as the gleeful cries of the crowd suddenly swelled to riotous, screaming laughter.

Laughing at him, he thought with sickening mortification. Well, let 'em laugh. Struggling and sweating, he forced his way blindly through the milling audience and without a backward glance, broke free and plunged through the flap of the tent. . . .

Mortimer had not looked back . . . but if he had, he would have seen that the sudden clamorous roar of the crowd



was not directed at him, but at something else far more amazing, far more arresting.

Myfisto and the barker had stood stock still as Mortimer stamped off the stage, a bewildered, dazed expression spreading over their features.

And then like men in a hypnotic trance they had raced to the edge of the stage and leaped into the air. A long, flying leap that landed them with a crash on the laps of the patrons of the third row of the tent.

They had taken a running jump for themselves!

**T**HE tent was in an uproar as they attempted to extricate themselves from the tangle of legs and chairs. But over the din Myfisto's voice could be heard shouting:

"Catch him. Don't let him get away."

He scrambled to his feet, jerking the barker with him.

"Hurry," he hissed in the other's ear. "Follow me. We must stop him."

In another ten seconds, panting and disheveled, they burst through the flap of the tent. Myfisto gazed wildly about the milling throngs and a groan burst from his lips.

"We are too late," he gasped. "He is loose."

"What's it all about?" the barker asked bewilderedly. "What do you want that little guy for? And say," he cried suddenly, "what made us act like a pair of screwballs just now? Leaping off the stage into the audience?"

Myfisto was still gazing distractedly at the faces that drifted by him and as he turned to the barker there was a frightened, terrified look in his eye.

"We couldn't help ourselves," he groaned. "We couldn't resist his will." His voice broke into an excited babble.

"It's the headpiece," he groaned.

"It's worked. Gave that little man a terrible power. An irresistible will. Nobody can disobey him. We must stop him before he innocently unleashes the horrible power that is his."

"Are you goin' batty?" the barker said scornfully. "We've been usin' that thing for months in our act. It's nothin' but a phony; a gag to impress the audience. You know that as well as I do. You're goin' batty, I tell you."

"No, I'm not," Myfisto cried. "That headpiece was an invention of mine designed to increase by electrical stimulation the forces of will that are dormant in every human psyche. But it never worked; I thought it was a failure. So I used it in the act for effect. But now, somehow, it worked on this little man. We've got to stop him."

"Cripes," gasped the barker, incredulously. "If what you say is true, if nobody can resist that little guy's will, he's liable to turn this town upside down."

"That's why he must be stopped," Myfisto groaned. "When I was completing this machine I also developed an antidote for its effect. It may not work—but it's our only chance. We must find him, strip that power from him, before he has a chance to use its hideously destructive force. . . ."

**T**EN minutes later, looking like anything but a latent destructive force, Mortimer slouched into the bustling lobby of the Snappy Service building, his steps lagging as if they were reluctant to carry him to the elevator.

In comparison with Mortimer's beaten appearance a whipped cur would have looked like a jaunty, confident creature. The humiliation at the carnival, the prospects of facing the gangsters, the loss of his girl, all these rested on the shoulders of his spirit with a leaden, crushing weight. Gone

was any notion of resisting or fighting back.

"What happens, will happen," he muttered with gloomy unoriginality.

He stepped into the elevator and squeezed back into the corner as the lunch hour crowd jammed in after him.

"Twelve, please," he squeaked over the mumble of voices.

More people were crowding into the elevator and Mortimer was crushed back against the wire netting of the car as they forced their way in. He wondered with uncertain timidity whether he had been heard.

"Twelve," he cried again. "Twelve, please."

The elevator operator, a haggard, perspiring young man, turned around and snapped.

"Okay, bud, I heard you." He turned back to the controls but suddenly the exasperated expression was wiped from his face to be replaced by one of respectful obedience. "Yes, sir," he stammered, "right away."

The door slammed shut with a bang, the throttle lever shot into place and the elevator started upward with giddy, unaccustomed speed.

"Three," a voice said.

"Five," said another.

Seven, eight and ten had been called by the time the elevator shot past the third floor.

"Hey, what's the idea?" a man cried. "I called three."

The elevator operator did not reply, merely shoved the throttle over another notch. The elevator responded with another burst of speed.

"Young man," a woman screamed shrilly, "let me off. You passed my floor!"

Other voices joined in the clamor and by the time seven, eight and ten had been swiftly passed, the noise in the car had swelled to a noisy babble.

"My time's valuable," the burly man in front of Mortimer shouted. "I'll take this up with the management."

Before he had got the last words out of his mouth the elevator stopped with sickening abruptness and the doors clanged open.

"Twelve, sir," the operator said respectfully.

"Now," the man in front of Mortimer bellowed, "let's see who it is that's so much more important than the rest of us."

"Pardon me." Mortimer quaked fearfully. "Could I step by, please?"

The man whirled and glared at Mortimer.

"So," he snapped, "it's you, is it? Who do you think you are, the King of Siam?"

"No, not at all," Mortimer stuttered, edging past his burly bulk. The angry, impatient muttering grew in volume as Mortimer struggled and twisted in an effort to force his way out of the jammed car. It was with a relieved sigh that he finally squirmed his way into the corridor. He turned, an apology trembling on his lips, but the operator, in response to the indignant demands of his passengers, had slammed the door and started back down.

"Well," gasped Mortimer, "what do you think of that?"

He walked toward the Snappy Service office shaking his head wonderingly. What had made the operator disregard the other passengers and whisk him up to the twelfth floor? He wrinkled his forehead trying to figure the thing out. Why should the elevator operator . . .

It was then he remembered the extra loud tone of voice he had used in calling his floor. He stopped suddenly, a strange excitement rushing over him. The loud voice! The commanding voice! That was what the will power book had insisted upon in every lesson.

Was it possible . . . ? Could it be that the will power lessons were beginning to work?

**H**E was still puzzling over the strange occurrence when he seated himself at his desk for the afternoon; and it was still buzzing around his head like an annoying fly when the first client of the afternoon sauntered up to Mortimer's desk and dropped himself into the chair alongside it.

Mortimer looked up to see a fat, flashily dressed little man regarding him with sly blue eyes set in a pink, bland face.

"What can I do for you?" Mortimer inquired, tearing himself away from the riddle of the elevator. "Something in the nature of a loan?"

"As a matter of fact," the fat little man said, "I could use a hundred or so. One of those things, y'know," he shrugged nonchalantly. "Caught a little short between the pater's monthly check. I could've borrowed a stack from young Vandergilt but I just learned he's out of town."

"Well, that's too bad," Mortimer said solicitously. It was his first experience with a real, honest-to-goodness playboy and as he handed the application blank to him he said eagerly, "just fill this out and I'm sure we'll take care of you." And as the flashily dressed "playboy" started away, he added perfunctorily, "Answer all questions accurately and truthfully to the best of your ability."

The pink-faced little man nodded and moved to the writing desk, seated himself and spread the form out in front of him.

Mortimer watched him as he started to write and then he turned back to his desk, his thoughts and worries returning with him.

It was a quarter of one and Slug McNutty had promised to be back "after

lunch." he was due any minute. Looking over at Betty's desk he realized that she wasn't back from lunch yet. He thought of dimly lighted cocktail bars and Jon's glibly persuasive tongue and his soul writhed with jealousy and anger.

He writhed unhappily for a bit and then he turned his thoughts to the more menacing of his problems. The gangsters and their demand that he "case the joint" for them. Gnawing nervously at his pencil he tried desperately to think of some way out of his predicament.

It was about that time that the little man returned and with trembling fingers laid the application on Mortimer's desk.

Mortimer looked up and to his surprise the man was quailing visibly, a furtive, guilty look on his face as he peered about the office.

Looking back to the application blank, Mortimer spread it open on his desk and examined it.

"What . . . what the . . ." he gasped, but he was unable to finish the sentence for his mouth had dropped open in sheer astonishment.

For the flashily dressed "playboy" had written in answer to the question on the blank:

OCCUPATION—Confidence man.

PURPOSE OF LOAN—To skip town.

REFERENCES—None, except the ones I forged.

For a second Mortimer's brain reeled giddily and then he peered incredulously at the "playboy" who stood twisting his hat miserably in his hands.

"Why . . . what do you mean?" sputtered Mortimer.

"It's a racket," the self-indicted con man said hoarsely. He paused and swallowed nervously and a gleam of terror showed in his eye. "I've worked

it all over the country, but—" he broke off, peering about apprehensively, "you told me to put down the truth and I . . . I just couldn't help myself. I just *had* to do what you said. I don't know whether I'm going balmy or not, but one thing's certain. I *am* going."

Before Mortimer could open his mouth the fat little man had wheeled, and with surprising speed, raced across the office and bolted through the door and out of sight.

Mortimer stared after the flying coat-tails, his mouth hanging open in ludicrous bewilderment and a dazed, unbelieving expression on his countenance.

He looked down at the application blank and as he did a sentence that the confidence man had spoken jumped before his eyes.

*I just had to do what you said.*

Mortimer trembled with excitement. Twice in a row his commands had been obeyed. It *must* be the will power lessons that were responsible for these amazing occurrences. He remembered a phrase from the book:

*All men in whom greatness is dormant will one day be recognized for their true worth. A truly dominant spirit might manifest itself, even after years of timidity and uncertainty.*

It came as a shock for Mortimer to realize that he was the dominant type and that people were beginning to appreciate him for his true worth. He stood up at his desk, his eyes focused on some far distant horizon and unconsciously his shoulders squared, his chin thrust out.

"Today," he whispered dramatically, "I am a man."

**H**E looked about him, seeing the office as it was for the first time. He saw the mole-like clerks at the desks, the cringing, frightened people waiting for their requests to be considered and

he took another deep breath. About the third in his entire life.

Walking toward him he saw Bennie, the office boy, a lanky, callow youth, one of the minor banes of Mortimer's existence. Mortimer's head tilted defiantly, a stern, cold look froze on his face.

"Bennie," he snapped, and his voice would have delighted the author of the volume on will power, "come here."

Bennie turned, the impudent expression on his face gradually changing to one of dazed, helpless deference.

"Yes," he gulped, "right away."

He hurried to Mortimer's desk.

"What is it, sir?" he asked obediently.

"In the future," Mortimer said icily, "you will address me as Mr. Meek. And as for the present, get me a glass of water and be quick about it."

"Yes, sir," Bennie gasped. "Immediately, Mr. Meek."

He wheeled and with one last bewildered, frightened look over his shoulder, scurried away.

Mortimer sat down, a strange, intoxicating glow spreading over him. He was the dominant type. The book was right. "Assert yourself," it said, "and respect and obedience are yours for the asking."

Well, he had asserted himself—and it worked!

Bennie was back with the water and Mortimer seized the glass in one firm hand and stood up again.

"To the new Mortimer Meek," he cried, and then he tilted the glass and drained the water in one long gulp.

You cannot go about a modern business office drinking toasts to yourself without attracting a certain amount of undesirable attention, and, in this respect, the Snappy Service office was no exception.

"What is the meaning of this?" a

chilled voice inquired behind him.

Mortimer spun around to face the formidable figure of Jeremiah Judson, president of Snappy Service. Under the stare of Jeremiah's gimlet-like eyes, his confidence melted away, like putty before a drill.

"Heh, heh," he laughed weakly, in an attempt to convince Mr. Judson that the whole situation was very droll. "Heh, heh, just a little joke. Think nothing of it."

Jeremiah's frown faded and a blank look stole over his lean face.

"Think nothing of it," he muttered. "Very well," he said dully. Turning, he strode away, his face as empty and expressionless as an idiot.

Mortimer sagged into his chair, his breath whistling through his teeth like steam from a leaky radiator. This was too much. He wiped the perspiration from his brow with a shaky hand. He, Mortimer Meek, had cowed the boss, Jeremiah Judson.

Why . . . why, anything was possible now. If his will power had been developed to the extent that he could bluff a hard, flinty-eyed old warrior like Jeremiah Judson . . . then he could do anything with it. Nothing was impossible!

Judson was halfway across the office by the time Mortimer reached this conclusion. Intoxicated by the sudden surge of power that swept over him, he sprang to his feet, squared his shoulders.

"Mr. . . . *Judson*," he shouted, come back here."

Jeremiah Judson stopped in his tracks and then turned, the expression of a sleep walker stealing over his face.

"Yes . . . y . . . yes, sir," he stammered, hurrying to Mortimer's desk.

Mortimer felt a moment of panic. Maybe he had gone too far. But it was too late to stop now. He had to carry the thing off.

"Judson," he said loudly, "I'm not at all satisfied with my present salary. If you aren't in a position to pay me what I'm worth I shall be forced to tender my resignation. Effective immediately."

"How . . . how much do you want?" Judson gasped weakly.

MORTIMER staggered back, his brain reeling. He tried twice to speak, but he succeeded only in producing an incoherent squawk. This was incredible—but it was happening. Judson was waiting patiently, meekly, for his answer.

Mortimer started to ask for two dollars, but suddenly a wild, rash confidence took hold of his tongue.

"Four dollars," he stated. "Four dollars a week."

"Yes, sir," Mr. Judson even bowed slightly. "That will be arranged. Is that all?"

"No, it isn't," Mortimer snapped. Gone was his hesitation, his timidity, his lack of confidence. Mortimer Meek had arrived.

He swept a majestic eye over the awed and open-mouthed employees who were regarding the scene. He turned back to Jeremiah Judson.

"I want you to give every one of your employees a two-dollar-a-week raise. And," he waggled a stern finger under Jeremiah's nose, "this slave driving nonsense is a thing of the past. Get me?"

Mr. Judson mopped his perspiring forehead.

"Yes, sir," he managed to squeak. "Two dollars a week for everybody."

"And another thing," Mortimer said reflectively, "I don't particularly like the position of my desk. There's not enough light for one thing, and on top of that, it's dusty as the dickens. It's bad for my hay fever. Let's see," he looked critically about the office, "I

think you'd better have it moved over there next to the window."

"But that's where Mr. Debaere's desk is," Judson's voice was incredulously horrified.

Mortimer smiled maliciously. Mr. Debaere was out to lunch with Betty, his girl. Probably sitting across from her right this minute in some dimly lighted cocktail bar.

"That's a pity, isn't it?" he said casually. "Nothing to do but put Mr. Debaere's desk where mine is. He hasn't got hay fever. He won't mind it."

"Yes, sir," Judson said helplessly. "I'll have the maintenance department take care of it right away."

"That's a good fellow," Mortimer said. "Snap into it."

"Yes, sir," Judson bowed again and scurried away.

A few minutes later he was back with two husky laborers trailing in his wake. Mortimer took charge of things.

"Move that desk away from the window," he ordered, "and we'll shove mine right in its place."

The two laborers nodded, moved to follow Mortimer's instructions.

Mortimer watched them clear the papers off the desk with a happy, gratified smile. At last one of his long-sought dreams was about to be realized. The laborers carried the desk to the middle of the office and then one of them turned a flushed, perspiring face to Mortimer.

"Where to now, bud?" he gasped.

"Set my desk down," a voice cried.

The words, angry and loud, had not issued from Mortimer. He looked up to meet the indignant gaze of Jon Debaere, who stood inside the office door, his face mottled with fury. With him was Betty.

"What's the meaning of this?" he shouted, advancing on the laborers. "Who gave orders to move my desk?"

Mortimer coughed.

"I did," he said.

"You?" Jon cried unbelievably. "Who do you think you are?"

Mortimer threw back his head defiantly and raised an arm dramatically over his head.

"Hah," he cried. "I am Mortimer Meek."

"So what?" Jon snapped. "I'm telling you, Meek, you're liable to get yourself into a mess you hadn't figured on."

"Ain't it de truth?" a horribly familiar voice rasped in Mortimer's ear.

**A** CLAMMY, cold sweat broke out on Mortimer's brow and his thin hair tried to stand up and walk away. He didn't need to look around to know that the voice belonged to Slug McNutty the gangster any more than a man has to look around to know that he has been slugged in the head with a baseball bat.

It was Slug McNutty, accompanied by a dark, dapper little man, carrying a violin case under his arm.

"Didja tink over dat little deal," McNutty snapped, "or are you still goin' to play dumb?"

Mortimer felt Betty's hand tugging at his sleeve.

"Who are they?" she whispered. "They . . . they look dangerous."

"Don't worry," Mortimer heard Jon's voice in the background. "They're just a couple of his cheap friends. I'll take care of you, darling, never fear."

"How about it, chum?" McNutty's voice was ominously impatient. "Are ya ready to spill?"

"I have to settle one thing at a time," Mortimer cried. "Don't rush me."

He glared wildly about from one couple to the other. Here were all his troubles, concentrated and localized, dumped suddenly onto his neck. This,

he knew, was his Thermopylae. If he failed now everything was lost. He clenched his fists and jerked himself up to his full height. He recalled fleetingly the comforting words of the book:

*In times of great stress, when the outlook is darkest, strike with the cunning of the fox; the strength of the lion; the savageness of the tiger, and the battle is won.*

It was a large order for Mortimer, who had spent but one afternoon in the city zoo in his life, but it was now or never, and Mortimer's soul was rising to the occasion. He cleared his throat and opened his mouth.

"Looks like a hooked bass, doesn't he?" Jon cut in maliciously.

The impatience, the humiliation, the anger that had bubbled in the crucible of Mortimer's soul, frothed over at this last slur.

"Oh!" he exploded. "Go . . . go to blazes!"

He wheeled to the grim figures of the gangsters, his head snapping back in a defiant tilt, his features cold and stern.

"Now," he snapped belligerently, "what the hell are you thugs hanging around here for?"

"Don't get tough," McNutty whispered menacingly. "You know what I want. Where's dat truck goin' to be at t'ree o'clock tomorrow aftanoon?"

"It's going to be at Plaza and Fifth," Mortimer snapped, "but that information is never going to do you any good."

McNutty's companion glanced nervously about the office.

"I don't like it," he whined. "Dis guy sounds like he stooled. Let's get outa here."

"You little rat," McNutty snapped at Mortimer. "Did ya tip the coppers off?"

Mortimer threw back his head and laughed loudly. He had seen this gesture used innumerable times in the

movies and he had longed secretly for an opportunity to use it himself. He threw back his head and laughed again.

"You flatter yourself," he sneered. "I don't need the police to attend to the likes of you. You cheap cads have met your match in Mortimer Meek." Drawing himself up he launched into the finale of the bridge scene, chapter twelve, page 443. "Because you are powerless to resist my commands. Do you hear? Helpless!"

It was at this point that Jeremiah Judson chose to inject himself into the scene.

"What do you men want?" he cried, waving his arms at the gangsters.

"What's the idea of standing around my office like a pair of . . . of gangsters?"

Mortimer experienced a pang of jealousy. What did Judson mean stealing the spotlight from him that way? His voice had a distinctly frozen edge as he said:

"I'll take care of things, Jerry, just—"

"But I demand to know," Judson interrupted, "what—"

"Oh, shut up," Mortimer cut him off exasperatedly. "Go climb a flagpole, you old fossil, and I'll take care of these crooks. These cheap hoodlums have met their match in—"

Two things cut off Mortimer's harangue.

One was Betty's shrill scream and the second was the beefy fist of Slug McNutty crashing into the side of his head.

**M**MORTIMER hit the floor and bounced twice before he settled for good on the back of his neck, his fingers and legs twitching spasmodically.

"Mortimer," Betty screamed. "Mortimer."

Dimly Mortimer heard the clamor in



the office, the shrill cries of the women, the rasping voice of Slug McNutty.

"Don't anybody make a move," he heard him yell. "Spike, get out the chopper. We'll shoot our way outa here."

And then he felt soft, cool hands on his face and heard Betty's anguished voice in his ear.

"Mortimer, darling," she moaned, "you're hurt, bleeding."

Mortimer felt a surge of returning confidence.

"Hah," he said thickly. "What's a little blood to Mortimer the mighty?"

He struggled to his knees but Betty pulled him back. "Don't," she begged. "You'll be killed."

"So what?" Mortimer snarled for the first time in his life. "So what?" His courage returned with a rush as the defiant phrase rolled off his tongue. He pulled free from Betty's grip and struggled to his feet, his lackluster eyes trying hard to flash commandingly.

The situation was one that would ordinarily call for a riot squad, tear gas and a dozen or so husky cops.

Slug McNutty was backing toward the door, a heavy automatic clenched in his right fist. His companion had un-snapped the violin case and dragged out a stubby, vicious looking tommy gun, which he pointed menacingly at the huddled group of frightened employees.

"Stop," Mortimer cried, advancing toward them. "Stop, you . . . you thugs."

The tommy gun swung around, its black barrel aiming at Mortimer's mid-section and Slug McNutty's finger tightened on the trigger of the automatic.

"You're beggin' for dis," McNutty rapped.

"Drop those guns," Mortimer cried desperately. "Drop them, I say."

An instant later, to the astonishment

of Mortimer and the terrified employees, the gangsters released their grip on the guns and let them drop with a clattering crash to the floor.

An awed, incredulous murmur rose from the trembling office workers as the gangsters stared helplessly down at their guns and then looked dumbly and dazedly to Mortimer.

It was a sweet, soul-satisfying moment for Mortimer. He filled his lungs and swept a triumphant gaze over the breathlessly silent office.

"That's better," he said, trying to keep his voice from cracking with relief. "Much better." He turned to the white and shaking figure of Jeremiah Judson. "Nothing to worry about now, Jerry," he said loftily. "I have things under control."

"Oh, Mortimer," breathed Betty. "You're . . . you're wonderful!"

"Sure I am," Mortimer agreed. "The dominant type."

He turned back to the gangsters, his features hardening, his head snapping back defiantly.

"Come here," he cried, in a tone of voice that sounded like the bark of an anemic pekinese. "Come here, and make it snappy."

The gangsters obeyed numbly, their eyes staring glassily.

"Now get this," Mortimer said when they cowered before him. "I'm not going to be hard on you fellows. You don't deserve any mercy, but I think you've learned the futility of crossing swords with Mortimer Meek."

"Jeez," said Slug McNutty humbly, "ya mean ya ain't goin' to turn us over to de cops?"

"No," said Mortimer, "I'm not. You've learned your lesson." He paused, delighted with his new role of kindly benevolence. "If you ever need any advice or inspiration feel free to call on me. Now go on about your busi-

ness, like real men.”

“Jeez,” said Slug McNutty. “We sure will.”

TWENTY seconds after the door had closed upon the sheepish exit of the gangsters, a mild sort of pandemonium broke loose. The employees surged about Mortimer, pumping his hand, slapping his back, almost tearful in their relief and happiness. But Mortimer heard only one voice, saw only one face.

“Oh, darling,” Betty was crying, “I’ve been such a fool.”

The words trickled over Mortimer like cool water on a parched plain. He looked about for Jon, his erstwhile rival, but he was nowhere to be seen.

But he did see something that made him start like a prodded horse.

The metal door that led to the incinerator chute was swinging gently, and caught on an edge of metal was a piece of light gray cloth; light gray cloth of the same shade as the suit that Jon had been wearing.

“I don’t know where Jon went,” Betty rushed on, “and I don’t care. He certainly got out of here in a hurry when he saw those guns.”

Mortimer heard the sound of Betty’s voice but the words were not registering. He was looking at the piece of cloth with horrified eyes while his brain recalled the last thing he had said to Jon.

Go to blazes, that’s what he had told him. The incinerator chute led to the furnace. Could it be . . . had Jon, impelled by his powerful will, taken the command literally? The evidence pointed that way.

He remembered with a feeling of relief that it was summer—there was no fire in the furnace. At least he hoped there wasn’t.

“He certainly proved himself a

coward,” Betty said indignantly, “when things got too hot for him.”

“I hope they haven’t by now,” Mortimer answered.

“Oh, you were splendid,” Betty rushed on. “The way you bluffed those gangsters was the most thrilling thing I’ve ever seen.”

Mortimer held up a deprecating hand and smiled modestly.

“A little firmness now and then,” he said, “is useful.”

“But the most wonderful thing of all,” Betty gushed, “was the charitable way you gave them another chance and then calmly told them to go on about their business. That was big of you, Mortimer.”

“I didn’t want to be too hard . . .” Mortimer’s voice choked off as his heart began to tumble around like an egg in boiling water. A phrase of Betty’s had suddenly leaped across his brain, glaring like a bright neon sign.

*Told them to go about their business!*

The words sprang before his eyes in letters a foot high. That’s what he’d told the gangsters to do, to go on about their business. And the business of the gangsters had been to rob the special truck. He had told them, commanded them with his new, powerful will to hijack the armored truck!

“What’s the matter?” Betty asked solicitously. “You look ill, Mortimer.”

“This is terrible,” Mortimer babbled excitedly. “The gangsters . . . they’re going to rob the truck. I told them to. They can’t help themselves.”

“Now, now,” Betty said soothingly, “you’re just overwrought. You’re suffering a reaction from the nervous excitement.”

“But you don’t understand,” Mortimer cried wildly. “The truck . . . I told them to rob it! That’s their *business*. I told them to *do* it.”

"You told them nothing of the sort," Betty scoffed. "Those men were thoroughly cowed when you got through with them. They won't cause anyone trouble."

"That's what you think," Mortimer yelled. He felt his courage rising again to meet this emergency. He remembered that he had boastfully named the intersection where the truck would be. He'd have to hurry to stop them. Breaking free from Betty's restraining hand he strode across the office and wheeled dramatically to face the bewildered circle of employees.

"Never fear," he cried, raising one arm triumphantly above his head, "Mortimer Meek will take care of things." With a final dramatic wave of his hand he turned and raced down the corridor to the elevator. . .

**D**ASHING out of the lobby of the building he wheeled and streaked down the street like Equipoise after a sack of oats. He was secretly glad that another chance to demonstrate his will power had presented itself.

"Good practice for me," he panted as he scurried along. Oblivious to his surroundings he pelted down the street turning over in his mind the most dramatic way to rout the gangsters.

He had just decided to order them to march away from the scene single file, when he remembered something. Something that acted as a brake on his driving legs and slowed him down to a walk.

He had just remembered that the robbery was scheduled for the following day.

Feeling slightly foolish he came to a stop, his sides heaving from the unaccustomed exertion. He stood scratching his head for a minute before he decided upon a course of action. Why, it was simple. He'd go to police head-

quarters, at the City Hall, and explain the situation to them. They'd take care of it for him. No sense in him going to all that trouble of stopping the robbery when they were being paid to do it.

Silently congratulating himself on his keenness he started walking again, hurrying in the direction of the City Hall.

It was not until he turned the block leading to the entrance of the City Hall that Mortimer became aware of the hurrying streams of humanity that were excitedly rushing in the same direction.

Strangely enough, they were all peering up at the sky, shading their eyes with the backs of their hands.

Mortimer looked up and saw nothing, not even a cloud in the sky.

Dropping his gaze, he hurried along through the thickening crowd. Using his elbows and knees, he plowed ahead until finally his way was blocked by a solid, unyielding mass of humanity that stretched from sidewalk to sidewalk, completely closing off the street.

"What's it all about?" Mortimer muttered bewilderedly.

"Ten cents a look," a harsh voice twanged behind him. "Ten cents for a look at the madman. Can't climb any higher. Won't come down. Take a look while there's still time. He may jump any minute."

Mortimer looked around and saw a dark, monkey-like little man standing next to a telescope mounted on a tripod.

A crudely lettered tin sign reading SEE MARS FOR A NICKEL dangled from the telescope.

"Ten cents a look," the little man was intoning. "Take a look before he jumps. While there's still time. Don't miss the chance of a lifetime."

Entranced, Mortimer moved closer, fumbling for a dime.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"Man on the flagpole of City Hall," the pitch man answered laconically. "Probably some nut."

Excited, Mortimer paid the man a dime and squatted behind the telescope, placing his eye to the barrel. He swung the 'scope up the brown facade of the Hall, past the top ramparts, and then tilted it until it focused on the flagpole.

Sure enough, right at the top of the pole he could see the enlarged figure of a man, clutching desperately to the slender swaying flagstaff.

"Gosh!" said Mortimer.

He tilted the 'scope and then the man's face was visible—and the breath left Mortimer's lungs with an incredulous *whoooooosh*.

For the bewildered, dazed, pathetic face that focused in the telescope was that of Jeremiah Judson!

**F**OR a dizzy second Mortimer's head reeled and then with sickening force he recalled the exasperated command he had hurled at Judson when the gangsters were in the office. Go climb a flagpole, that's what he'd told him. And that's just what Jeremiah had done.

"This is terrible," Mortimer cried. "I've got to tell him to come down before he falls and is killed. I've got to get through."

"No soap, Buddy," the man next to him said. "The cops have got the crowd roped off. They've got a net spread for him. Not a chance in a million to get through."

But Mortimer had not waited to hear the last. Kicking and scratching, he plunged through the mob, his breath searing his lungs like a blast from a furnace.

"I've got to get through," he yelled. "I know him. I've got to get through."

The crowd parted unwillingly with angry mutterings and Mortimer plunged on like a miniature broncho

until he collided with a broad, blue-clad back.

"Aisy now," a heavy voice growled, a foot or so above his head. "We got one nut to watch wit'out bein' bothered by the likes of you. Get back there now."

"But I tell you I know him," Mortimer pleaded hysterically. Furiously, but futilely, he struggled against the hands that held him.

"Get back there," the policeman roared. "I'm not foolin' wit' you."

He placed both hands on Mortimer's chest and pushed, suddenly and heavily.

Mortimer staggered backwards, tripped on a loose stone and sprawled to the street, landing in a pool of murky, dirty water.

Tears of humiliation blinded him as he struggled to his feet, water dripping from his clothes. "Who do you think you're shovin' around?" he cried angrily.

"Sure and maybe it's Napoleon Bonaparty," the policeman sneered sarcastically. "Or maybe just the King of England."

"It's Mortimer Meek," Mortimer cried, "and I'm telling you to clear out of my way."

The policeman's huge fists doubled menacingly, but then he began to tremble.

"Go right ahead, sir," he quaked, backing fearfully away.

Mortimer ducked past him, raced across the street and up the steps of the City Hall.

"Let me by," he shouted at the officer who was guarding the doors. Instantly the doors were jerked open by the dazedly obedient guard and Mortimer dashed into the interior of the building.

A fat, red-faced little man was standing in the middle of a group, moaning and wringing his hands.

"A week before election it's gotta happen," he groaned. "It couldn't be a week after, oh no. This is terrible publicity. The papers will say he jumped in protest against my taxes. This is terrible."

Mortimer recognized the Mayor from the pictures in the paper. He made a beeline for him and grabbed him by the arm.

"Listen," he cried urgently. "I can get that man down if you'll take me up to the roof of the building."

The Mayor looked at him sourly.

"What makes you think you can," he asked, "when all the cops in town have failed?"

"Take it or leave it," Mortimer snapped. "I'm telling you I can get him down."

The Mayor hesitated for an instant, then he snapped his fingers.

"I'll give you a chance," he snapped. "You can't be any worse than these police have been."

**A**N express elevator whisked them to the roof. There Mortimer saw fifty or sixty policemen, sergeants, captains, lieutenants crowded about the base of the flag pole shouting and gesticulating at the figure fifty feet above their heads.

"It's no use," one of them cried as the Mayor hustled out of the elevator. "The nut won't come down. If we climb after him, he's liable to jump."

Mortimer stepped out of the elevator after the Mayor. "I'll get him down," he said confidently. "Just watch."

"What are you goin' to do?" a captain asked suspiciously. "Put salt on his tail?"

"No," Mortimer said calmly. "I'm just going to tell him to come down."

"What?" yelled the Mayor. "I thought you had some plan, something in the way of strategy. If this is a gag, you'll find out it isn't funny!"

Mortimer favored him with a cold look and then strode to the base of the slender, swaying flagpole. He looked up its shining length to the pitiful, huddled figure that had clamped itself to the top of the pole. He turned to the crowd of officers and officials.

"Please," he yelled. "Be quiet. I must have silence."

The murmuring talk died away until the only sound on the top of the roof was the wind whistling past the flagpole.

Again Mortimer looked up the pole at Jeremiah Judson and then he cupped his hands over his mouth.

"Jeremiah," he shouted. "Can you hear me?"

A second later a quivering affirmative floated down to the tense crowd on the roof.

Mortimer paused, stared dramatically around the silent, breathless circle of spectators and then looked back up the pole.

"Okay, then," he yelled. "Come on down."

**I**N the Mayor's office a congratulatory, back-slapping crowd surged around Mortimer. Flash bulbs popped in his face and reporters with greedy notebooks shot questions at him.

"How'd you get him to come down," one of them asked, "when all the efforts of the police had failed?"

"I just asked him to," Mortimer replied nonchalantly and then he added maliciously: "That's the one thing the police forgot to do."

"What a story! What a story!" the newshawk chortled happily. "Fire hoses, safety nets, police cordon fail but polite request turns trick. It's headlines for you, buddy."

Mortimer felt a light tap on his shoulder and he turned to face an alert looking, well dressed young man who grabbed Mortimer's hand and pumped

it enthusiastically.

"Name's Blake, Terry Blake," the young man said. "Represent the Me, John Public, radio show. You've heard it. Odd slants on the day's news. Now I wonder if you'd do us a favor and make an appearance on tomorrow's show and tell the radio audience about your experience here today?"

"Oh it wasn't that important," Mortimer began but the other chopped him off.

"Yes it was. That's the kind of stuff that John Public eats up. Now will you do it? There'll be a nice check in it for you."

"Well," Mortimer prolonged the delightful conversation, "what time is the show?"

"Two o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Can I expect you?"

"Well," Mortimer tried to sound as if he were weighing factors, "I think I can make it. As you say the public enjoys that type of thing. Makes it sort of a duty, doesn't it?"

"Right you are," the affable young man agreed. "Two o'clock, don't forget. I'll be looking for you."

It was quite a time after he disappeared before Mortimer was able to break away from the enthusiastic crowd and get to the corridor.

And it was then and only then that he remembered the business that had brought him to the City Hall in the first place.

The robbery. The robbery of the delivery truck that was scheduled to take place the following day.

"Gosh," he muttered to himself. "Be too bad if I forgot that."

Peering about, he saw a door lettered CHIEF OF POLICE and turned his steps in that direction.

"They can take care of it," he thought. "I'll be too busy. I'm going on the air tomorrow."

"—AND NOW, ladies and gentlemen, it is the privilege of the Quiscuit Biscuit Company to present to you at this time a man whose name has been blazoned across the headlines for the last twenty-four hours."

Mortimer clutched his speech nervously as the announcer approached the climax of the introduction. He smiled wanly at Betty who stood next to him gripping his arm tightly.

"Are you nervous, dear?" she asked worriedly.

"N . . . not at all," Mortimer lied. "It's just that . . . it's just that it's a little close in here, that's all."

"And now," the announcer signalled Mortimer with his hand, "you will hear Mortimer Meek tell you in his own words the thrilling story that has captured the imagination of the country overnight. Quiscuit Biscuit takes pleasure in presenting, Me, John Public's Man of the Minute—Mortimer Meek!"

Mortimer walked to the "mike" on knees that shook and wobbled painfully. He swallowed nervously and then he felt a draft on his neck.

He risked a quick peek over his shoulder and saw that Betty had raised one of the windows. A refreshing breeze was wafting through the studio.

He smiled fleetingly at her and then turned back to the "mike" clearing his throat.

"Go on," the announcer whispered. "You're on the air."

Mortimer rallied his courage and set his feet firmly as if he were preparing to take a swing with a golf club.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he read, "my name is Mortimer Meek. I was walking downtown yesterday afternoon when suddenly—"

An eddying gust of wind whistled through the studio and Mortimer paused to push the hair out of his eyes.

"When suddenly," he struggled on

again, "I noticed a crowd—" He stopped again as another burst of wind rattled the papers in his hand. He tried desperately to get a firmer grip on the paper and then it happened.

His sweaty fingers slipped on the smooth paper and the next instant his speech was flying across the room, twisting and twirling like a leaf in a gale.

Mortimer started after it but the announcer jerked him back.

"You're on the air," he hissed. "Keep talking."

Mortimer stared in terror at the "mike."

"Hello," he gulped inanely. "I didn't do anything much . . . that is . . . I mean, I didn't think it was much but I suppose you people want to hear about it anyway. The radio executive was telling me how foolish you people are about things like that." Mortimer paused and looked desperately about the studio. The announcer and two control men were still chasing after his speech.

"What I mean," he floundered on, "is that it wasn't much of a job for me. As a matter of fact the biggest job I had was to convince the police to let me through so I could get the man down. You know the police in this town are not as bright as they might be." Mortimer remembered the policeman who had shoved him into the puddle and warmed to his subject.

"We'd get along a lot better if all the dumb, incompetent policemen listening to this program would go and take a two week vacation for themselves. What this city needs—"

**A** STRONG hand grabbed Mortimer's shoulder, jerked him away from the "mike." Then the announcer was saying breathlessly:

"Due to circumstances beyond our

control we will be unable to give you the rest of this broadcast. A transcribed organ solo will follow."

The announcer switched off the "mike" and wheeled to Mortimer.

"You can't say things like that," he cried wildly. "It's slander. The Federal Commission may jerk our license for this."

"But it's true," Mortimer insisted weakly. "The police *are* incompetent."

"Oooh," the announcer groaned. "That doesn't make any difference. This is terrible."

Mortimer felt Betty tugging at his sleeve.

"We'd better be going dear," she said. "That's the thanks you get for trying to help your old city. They just don't appreciate it."

Mortimer felt slightly better. "I guess you're right," he said in a voice dripping with self pity. "I'm just a martyr, that's all. Just a martyr."

Outside in the hallway leading to the elevators Mortimer almost bumped into a large, red faced policeman who was hurrying by.

"Sorry, fella," the cop yelled over his shoulder, "I'm just starting on my vacation and I'm in a little hurry."

Slightly puzzled, Mortimer followed him to the elevator and crowded in behind him.

At the first stop three more policemen pushed into the car.

"I'm heading for the lakes," he heard one of them say. "I'm really going to enjoy myself this vacation."

The others laughed heartily and slapped him on the back.

"So are we," one of them chuckled. "I can't wait till I get the old fish pole in my hands."

Mortimer cowered in the back of the elevator, a strange, wild premonition chilling his spine. Maybe it was a coincidence—maybe . . .

The elevator stopped and Mortimer dashed out of the cage and raced through the lobby to the street.

And then—his premonition became a horrible reality as he stared at the chaos and confusion that greeted his eyes.

Policemen were walking arm in arm, laughing merrily at the snarled traffic, at the bewildered, panic-stricken pedestrians.

A mounted policeman galloped through the street, waving his cap over his head.

"Hiyo, Silver," he bellowed. "Aaaaay. Aaaaay for a vacation. Gang Aaaaaay!"

Dimly, through the fog of terror that swept over him, Mortimer realized that Betty was screaming in his ear.

"Mortimer," her voice was edged with panic. "What's happened? All these policemen are deserting their posts. They've gone crazy. What does it mean?"

"They're going on vacations," Mortimer whispered hoarsely. "They're going on vacations because I told them to."

"Oh nonsense," Betty exclaimed. "If you're thinking about what you said on the radio—why that's absurd. And besides," she concluded triumphantly, "you distinctly said that only the incompetent policemen should take a vacation."

"But don't you see," Mortimer cried hysterically, "that's just it. They're all incompetent. They're all leaving."

He stared wildly about at the milling crowds, at the jammed traffic. Then his eyes flicked past a clock and subconsciously registered the time.

Two thirty! Suddenly, with the force of a pile driver, a terrible realization crashed into his consciousness.

Two thirty! In a half hour the gangsters would be hijacking the armored delivery truck. There was nothing and

no one to stop them. The police, in response to Mortimer's thoughtless command, were deserting their posts in droves.

It took Mortimer several long seconds to recover from the shock, but when he did his head snapped back defiantly. Gangsters ready to strike; police nowhere in sight.

It was Mortimer Meek to the rescue.

"Betty," he grabbed her by the arm, "Wait here for me. I've got a little job to take care of."

"Darling," there was a note of alarm in her voice, "where are you going?"

But Mortimer was already streaking away to keep his date with Destiny . . .

MORTIMER heard the brisk, chilling rattle of machine gun fire before he reached the intersection of Plaza and Fifth. The thought that he might be too late acted as a spur in his flank, driving him on at a breathless, increased speed.

He heard a shout, a scream and then as he rounded the corner the scene was suddenly spread before him.

Gangsters were swarming about the wrecked delivery truck, menacing the bystanders and armored truck drivers with machine guns. A moving van had been backed up to the delivery truck and Mortimer saw then that the rear doors of the armored truck had been forced open. A familiar, bulky, loudly dressed figure was clambering into the armored truck, a heavy automatic in his fist. Slug McNutty.

And a second after Slug McNutty's figure had disappeared into the interior of the truck, a heavily stuffed money bag came flying out, to vanish through the open doors and into the bowels of the waiting van.

In this crisis Mortimer was calm. He squared his shoulders, tilted his head defiantly and then charged into the



middle of the street.

"Stop," he cried. "Stop. It is I, Mortimer Meek, who commands it."

His sudden, surprising arrival checked the gangsters. Their muzzles dropped uncertainly as Mortimer looked about sternly.

"Now," said Mortimer. He stepped between the two trucks and just at that instant a heavy currency sack hurtled through the air. It struck him at the base of the neck with a stunning paralyzing blow that ignited a sparkling constellation of stars in his head, and then knocked him flat on his face.

Mortimer didn't hear the excited exclamation that ripped from the lips of the gangster, nor did he see the figure of Slug McNutty clamber down from the back of the truck.

"Cripes," gasped McNutty, "it's de little shrimp from de Loan Company. Here," he yelled to one of the gangsters, "gimme a lift wit dis guy. We can't leave him here, he'd tip the cops for sure."

Strong hands lifted Mortimer's limp figure and tossed it into the van on top of the currency sacks.

"Let's get rollin'," McNutty snapped, "before som'thin' else happens."

The words had hardly passed his lips before something else did happen.

Something in the form of a clawing, scratching, dark-haired bundle of feminine fury that launched itself at Slug McNutty like an angry tigress.

"Mortimer," the dark-haired girl screamed. "What have you done with him?"

McNutty wheeled, yowling as long red fingernails raked the back of his neck. Twisting he grabbed the squirming, kicking girl and hoisted her onto his shoulder.

"Open de doors of de van," he yelled, "it's de little guy's dame, we gotta take her wit' us too."

The doors swung open, McNutty dumped his struggling burden into the van, the doors swung shut, a padlock snapped.

"Come on," shouted McNutty. "The bulls will be along any minute. We'll take care of dese two when we get to de hideout."

MORTIMER climbed wearily through thick clouds of fog and opened his eyes to see Betty looking down at him a tender, worried expression on her face.

"Betty," he gasped weakly. "Where are we? How did you . . .?"

He started to rise, but sagged back groaning as a thousand hammers started to pound in his skull.

"Oh Mortimer," Betty groaned. "We're in terrible trouble. The gangsters brought us here to this little farmhouse about twenty miles from the city. I heard them say it's a hideout."

"But how did they get you?" Mortimer asked dazedly.

"I followed you," Betty said. "I suppose it was foolish, but I had some strange feeling that you were going into danger and I wanted to be with you. The gangsters grabbed me, threw me in the truck and that's where I found you. You've been unconscious for three hours. You must have had a terrible fight with them."

"Three of them," Mortimer said, "jumped me from behind."

He climbed to his feet, disregarding the pain in his head.

"But they won't get away with this," he cried. "I am Mortimer Meek. I'll show them they're playing with dynamite."

"Oh Mortimer," Betty said ecstatically. "When you scowl like that it sends chills up my spine. You're wonderful."

Mortimer squared his shoulders. He



"Stop!" cried Mortimer Meek. "It is I who commands."

hadn't had a chance to display his will power at the robbery but he'd make up for it now.

Striding to the door, he pounded on it with both fists.

"Come in here," he shouted, "and make it snappy."

There was a moment's silence and then a slightly bewildered nasal voice answered.

"Okay buddy, we'll make it snappy for you."

Mortimer turned to Betty, his chest swelling proudly.

"Did you hear that," he asked happily. "I've got 'em on the run."

A bolt and chain rattled and then the door swung inward and a wedge of light slanted into the room. A second later the large bulk of Slug McNutty moved into the room.

Mortimer paused and sneered at the burly gangster. He searched his brain for the most humiliating command that he could think of. They wouldn't dare bother him again. He opened his mouth—but he was too late.

Slug McNutty's beefy hand flashed out and clamped over Mortimer's mouth.

"Yer talkin' too much," he grated. "There's somethin' funny about de way you order people around. We're goin' to fix ya so ya ain't so gabby."

Mortimer squirmed helplessly. The gangster's heavy hand clamped over his mouth and nose almost strangling him.

"Glug," he mumbled desperately.

McNutty twisted his arms behind his back and then propelled him through the door, slamming it behind him on Betty's whimpering protests.

**M**MORTIMER gazed frantically about the room, at the five or six hard bitten thugs who leered at him.

"Get them leather thongs," McNutty snapped. "I'm goin' to fix dis punk so's

he'll stay quiet."

One of the gangsters walked to a closet and returned carrying four or five hide strips which he tossed to Slug McNutty.

The hand over Mortimer's mouth was suddenly removed. But before he could shout the commands that would save him, a leather thong was shoved between his teeth and jerked tight. The strap cut into his lips and cheeks as McNutty wound it through his mouth to the back of his neck, again and again.

Mortimer struggled desperately and frantically. If he couldn't talk he was helpless. He managed somehow to squirm around in the gangsters grasp and then with all of his strength he pounded his fists into McNutty's face.

"You little rat," McNutty snarled. He tied a last knot in the leather gag and then his fist lashed out and exploded with a solid, stunning smack on Mortimer's jaw.

Mortimer flew backward, crashed into a table and slid to the floor. His hands tore helplessly and futilely at the gag in his mouth, as he squirmed around on the floor.

He had to get the gag out of his mouth. If he couldn't, gone was any chance of saving Betty or himself.

He didn't see the kick that McNutty directed against his threshing figure. His first knowledge of it came when it crashed into his posterior anatomy. Under its impetus he slid along the floor and rolled under the table. His hands encountered something cold and hard and with the dazed idea of using whatever it was as a club, he clutched it to his chest.

"Kick the table over," he heard a voice shout. "I ain't through with the little punk yet."

A heavy foot struck the table and the next instant Mortimer's huddled figure was exposed to the gangsters.

"I'll get him," a heavy voice yelled, but the words were almost drowned out in the shrill scream of terror that blasted through the room.

"Look out," a voice screamed. "He's got the tommy gun!"

Mortimer clambered to his feet and there was a wild scurrying of bodies as the gangsters hurled themselves from his path.

Mortimer took advantage of the momentary opportunity to tug desperately at the leather straps that were almost strangling him. But it was no use. Slug McNutty had done his work well. The gag held. It was only then that he became conscious of the instrument of destruction he held tightly clutched in his hand.

Mortimer knew just as much about intricate machine guns as the average Zulu tribesman.

He peered uncertainly at the weapon and then he tucked it under his arm and raced out the door. He knew that he wouldn't have time to stand there and figure out how the gun worked. His only salvation was to get a few minutes of uninterrupted time in order to get the gag out of his mouth. Then he'd show 'em.

He clattered down the steps into the yard and a large red barn loomed before his eyes. With terror and hope guiding his steps he fled toward it in a crouching, bobbing run.

A shot *whisssshed* past his ear and he heard shouted cries behind him.

"Don't let him get away," a voice cried. "Keep him in sight."

The barn was large and dim and as Mortimer peered wildly about for some niche or cranny, he spied a ladder leading up to a loft.

And by the time the gangsters crept cautiously into the barn Mortimer had scrambled up the ladder and disappeared from sight.

IN the loft, like an hysterically scared ostrich, Mortimer burrowed deep into the hay until only the tip of his nose was visible. With one hand he worked furiously at the leather gag and with the other he clutched the gun to his chest as if it were a hungry baby.

"He's in here somewhere," he heard Slug McNutty's voice bellow. "Look in de stalls and den we'll try de hay-loft."

Trembling with a strange mixture of terror and anger, Mortimer twisted to dig himself deeper into the hay, and as he did, his hand tightened involuntarily on the gun.

A metallic clatter ripped the silence and a stream of bullets shot by his nose and whistled into the hay.

There was a triumphant shout below him that sounded like the bay of a bloodhound to Mortimer. He hurled the gun from him and scrambled out of the hay, glaring wildly around for some place to flee.

There was none! The gangsters were below. The gag was still firmly in place. He was out of the frying pan into the fire.

Fire! What had made him think . . . ?

He sniffed curiously and then with horror as the burning odor of pungent hay stung his nostrils. He wheeled to see tongues of flames leaping from the hay. Smoke was billowing up in great choking clouds as the fire licked its way greedily through the tinder-dry hay.

It must have been the sparks from the gun, he thought distractedly.

"Fire," he heard Slug McNutty shout. "Clear out. We can pick off the little guy as he tries to get down."

Mortimer backed away from the fire, his mind tossing about like a straw in a tornado. The gag was still cutting into his mouth, cutting off air. Almost choking as the bitter smoke burned into his lungs, he staggered across the

floor, his eyes and hopes riveted on a small window through which smoke was spiralling. Sparks and embers were burning the back of his neck by the time he reached the wall and stuck his head out of the window.

Disregarding the fact that it was a fifty-foot drop to the ground, Mortimer clambered up the wall and hoisted himself onto the sill of the window. He looked down into a small fenced enclosure built against the barn evidently to save additional fencing. Tethered in the enclosure Mortimer noticed a large black cow pawing the earth and goring the air with huge, thick horns.

It was the first "cow" Mortimer had ever seen with horns, but then Mortimer had never seen many cows.

He was on the point of leaping when he noticed the lightning rod. It ran down the side of the barn about two feet from the window. Gathering his courage, he climbed to his feet and reached out and gripped the rod. He hadn't decided to slide down, but suddenly the decision was made for him. The window ledge gave way with a splintering crash and Mortimer swung crazily from the rod, one puny, rapidly weakening hand between himself and a fall to the ground.

He managed to get a grip with his other hand and then began a careful descent. He wondered where the gangsters were. If they were waiting for him on the opposite side of the barn he might be able—

"There he is. Hurry up."

The shout cut off his optimistic thoughts. Straining about he twisted his head for a look over his shoulder. Slug McNutty was unfastening the gate with one hand and waving excitedly with the other. Mortimer's hopes plummeted to his shoes as he saw the four remaining gangsters join McNutty at the gate.

Mortimer clung to the lighting rod, his soul in a tumult. His arms were strained and quivering with fatigue and the gag was swiftly strangling him. The fire was raging a few feet above his head and it would only be a matter of seconds before it was licking at his hands. He peered helplessly, despairingly over his shoulder. The gangsters were crossing the enclosure, guns drawn, greedy anticipation in their eyes.

"Glug, glug," groaned Mortimer. In the stress of the moment he clapped his hands to his head—and then as he started to fall, scratched furiously at the side of the barn. But it was too late. Mortimer was on the way down.

**H**E landed at the feet of Slug McNutty with a jarring bounce that deflated his lungs with a whoosh.

He felt himself jerked to his feet and when he opened his eyes he was looking into the black muzzle of Slug McNutty's automatic.

"Say yer prayers," McNutty grated. "You've caused us de last bit of trouble your goin' to." His finger tightened on the trigger—but just at that instant a strange noise sounded in their ears.

It was more than a noise. It was an enraged moose-like bellow that sounded like a cross between a hungry lion and a donkey with sinus trouble.

Mortimer's eyes strayed over McNutty's shoulder, focused on the source of the sound.

"Glug, glug," he attempted a warning.

McNutty wheeled, his eyes following the direction of Mortimer's gaze.

"It's a bull," he gasped. "A wild bull. He's ready to charge."

Mortimer's "cow" was pawing the earth furiously. Enraged by the humans, terrified by the sparks that fell on his back, he strained his massive bulk against the thin rope, his small

red eyes gleaming viciously.

His mouth yawned open and his angry, terrifying bellow thundered through the air. His heavy shoulders lunged frantically against the thin rope. Another lunge and the rope snapped—sending him to his knees.

The gangsters fled, wild, hoarse screams of terror ripping from their throats, but Mortimer's nerve centers were paralyzed, refused to work. He stood rooted to the spot, powerless to move a muscle.

"Glug, glug," Mortimer croaked desperately. "Glug."

The bull glared at Mortimer and then at the fleeing gangsters. Whether he felt there wouldn't be much sport in goring Mortimer or whether he just liked to play the field will never be known, but at any rate, he wheeled and charged after the gangsters, his sharp, driving hooves kicking a spray of dust back into Mortimer's face.

The chains of paralysis were struck from Mortimer, and with a sobbing cry of thankfulness, he turned and raced around the corner of the barn and struck off across the yard, sprinting toward the highway.

This was his chance, his one, heaven-sent chance. He heard the gangsters shouting and yelling on the opposite side of the barn and he redoubled his efforts.

He had covered a good hundred yards before they spotted him again.

They had evidently managed to escape the bull, for as he glanced over his shoulder he saw two of them racing after him, brandishing their guns.

They were too late, he thought exultantly. With a hundred yard start they could never catch him before he reached the highway. There he could spot a car and—

Mortimer didn't see the well!

He didn't see it until he crashed into

it—and then it was too late.

His hoarse desperate scream was choked back by the the leather gag that cut into his mouth. His hands clawed at the air as if they expected to find an invisible ladder there. And then his frantically twisting body plummeted into the depths of the well.

It struck the green, scummy water with a splash that sent geysers of water shooting back to the top of the well.

For a minute or so Mortimer was mercifully unconscious and then as reason began to filter back to his brain, he opened his eyes to find himself sitting in about eighteen inches of water.

"Well, well," Slug McNutty's unpleasant voice drifted down to him. "You saved us a lot of trouble, chum. We was wonderin' what to do wit' your body and what could be nicer than a nice private well?"

Mortimer peered fearfully up to the top of the well. Slug McNutty was gazing down at him and as he watched, the heads of the remaining gangsters appeared over the rim of the well.

"Let's let him have it," McNutty said with a wolfish grin. "At dis range we can't miss, can we boys?"

Five muzzles pointed down at Mortimer.

"Glug," he gasped. His mouth and eyes were full of water. "Glug," he gasped again and this time he felt something slip. The water soaked leather straps were stretching, giving, as Mortimer worked his jaws.

"Okay," McNutty's trigger finger clenched. "Let 'im. . . ."

"STOP! Stop!" Mortimer's voice, muffled and indistinct, reached the gangsters ears paralyzing them. "Stop. Put those guns down." Mortimer ripped the loosened thongs from his mouth and clambered to his feet. "Throw those guns away," he yelled, "and get a rope

and get me out of here."

He stared commandingly, scornfully at them and then threw his head back defiantly.

"Make it snappy you hoodlums, before I lose my temper."

Mortimer Meek was back in the saddle.

Dripping, but masterful, he was hauled out of the well and deposited on the ground. Slug McNutty and his henchmen cowered before him, their faces stamped with a mask of bewilderment and obedience.

"You stupid, moronic thugs," Mortimer said icily, "have made your biggest and last mistake in matching wits with Mortimer Meek. Now . . ."

His eyes roved speulatively over the farm house, the still smouldering barn, lighted on the well and stopped there. An expression of malicious amusement passed over his features.

"Now," he repeated, "you are going to pay for it. Climb down into this well. All of you."

"But jeez," Slug McNutty protested weakly, "it's dirty and cold and—"

"Get down in that well," Mortimer's shout cut him off. "And snap it up."

Without another word Slug McNutty stepped to the rim of the well, threw a leg over the stone embankment and plunged into its depths.

Mortimer looked meaningly at the other gangsters.

"You too," he snapped.

One by one they repeated McNutty's plunge until, vindicated and triumphant, Mortimer was left alone—master of all he surveyed.

He reveled in the heady, thrilling sensation of complete power until a cry disrupted his pleasant thoughts, jerked him around.

He saw Betty running toward him.

"Oh Mortimer," she sobbed as she threw herself into his arms. "You're

not dead. You're not dead."

"Why not at all, not at all," Mortimer said blandly. "Whatever gave you the idea that I might be in trouble."

"But I thought . . ." she started, and then her voice broke suddenly and she looked around in sudden alarm. "Mortimer," she gasped, "where are the gangsters?"

"All taken care of," Mortimer said loftily. "Right down to the last detail."

"But how?" Betty asked incredulously.

Mortimer blew on his knuckles.

"It wasn't very pretty," he said, glorying in her admiring glance. "Quite a bit of gore and all that."

"Oh, my hero," Betty breathed. "I knew you could do it, but I was worried a little bit anyway. When the gangsters left the house after you, I got out of the room and found a phone. I found a phone and called the city. The police are still acting funny so they're sending the G-men down. They should be here soon."

Before she had got the words out of her mouth, the faint, banshee wail of police sirens drifted to them on the breeze.

"There they are now," Betty said.

"Hardly necessary," Mortimer said loftily. "Just tell them that Mortimer Meek has arrived and has the situation well in hand."

**M**ORTIMER MEEK was not the sort to be late for his own wedding. As a matter of fact, he arrived at the church some thirty minutes ahead of schedule. Arrived briskly, in the manner of an impatient Napoleon at a coronation.

He pushed his way through the throngs which had already gathered outside the canopied entrance, throngs attracted by the headlined announcements of the Meek nuptials in the morn-



ing papers, and made his way to the rectory.

Humming "Pomp and Circumstance" lightly, almost gaily, Mortimer pressed the bell at the Rectory door, and was rewarded by the sight of the minister peering out quizzically from behind its half-opened panel a moment later.

"What—" began the minister, a short, rotund, bald little fellow, looking like a vicar in an English novel.

Mortimer pushed in past him, and swept on into the parlor. The round little minister followed him bewilderedly. "Wha—" began the rotund little parson again.

"I," announced Mortimer, fixing him with a gaze that seemed to challenge any denial, "am Meek."

The minister's brows knit at this announcement, and he seemed to be slightly at a loss for something to say.

"Oh," he ventured after a moment, "are you?"

"Yes," said Mortimer.

"That's nice," murmured the clergyman. "The Good Book says that the meek shall inherit the earth. However, if there's something I can do for you . . . ?" he left his sentence dangling lamely.

"I," said Mortimer frigidly, "am decidedly *not* meek. I am Meek!"

"Oh," said the parson, edging toward the door fearfully, "is that right?" He gulped apprehensively, for Mortimer was fixing him with "The Dominant Stare" of page 38.

"I am getting married in half-an-hour," said Mortimer, "and I thought it wise to check up on the ceremonies beforehand."

The minister paled.

"I'm afraid you can't get married in half-an-hour, young man. We've another marriage scheduled. A Mr—" his eyes opened, and his expression became one of acute apology.

"Ohhhhhh," he murmured, light breaking forth, "*you* are Mr. Meek!"

"Yes," Mortimer replied testily. "I've been trying to tell you as much." He glanced briskly at his watch. "There's only twenty-five minutes left until the ceremony starts. I want to make sure that you don't botch up my wedding."

The minister looked hurt. Hurt and indignant. Clearly, he wasn't used to having bridegrooms accuse him of incompetence.

"Really . . ." he began.

"Never mind," Mortimer cut in, "making any apologies. Have you much experience at this sort of thing?" His tone was that of an employer hiring a scullery wench.

"I have married," the minister replied acidly, "over four hundred couples."

Mortimer reflected on this. Reflected, then said:

"Did all of them take?"

"Take?"

"Yes," Mortimer snapped impatiently. "Did all of the weddings turn out well?"

THE minister looked like a chef who has been accused of leaving hairs in the bottom of his soup bowls.

"*All* my weddings turn out right!"

"Hmrrrrrr," said Mortimer. "I suppose I'll have to take your word for it." Then: "How about the arrangements for the ceremony? What about the music?"

"Our organist," the parson said indignantly, "is the best. He has selected the usual appropriate music. The Wedding March for the entrance, and Oh Promise Me, for the exit."

Mortimer frowned.

"The entrance music is fair enough. But I don't like the exit stuff."

"It is customary," the minister re-

plied testily. "Really Mr. Meek, if you'll leave this in our hands, I'm sure—"

"Never mind," Mortimer broke in. "I'll take care of the music. I'll see the organist personally." He stared thoughtfully at the little parson. "See to it," he concluded, "that your end of the thing goes off without a hitch!" He started toward the door.

The rotund little minister felt red waves of indignation rushing up to his head, but much to his amazement, the best he could say as Mortimer stepped out the door was

"Yes, sir, I'll see to it, Mr. Meek."

Mortimer had no sooner stepped out of the rectory door than he was surrounded three deep in clamoring humanity. News reporters, press photographers, curious spectators and auto-graph seekers milled around him. He glowed importantly as he pressed his way through all these.

Truly, this was to be a wedding befitting the importance of Mortimer Meek, he reflected. Then he remembered that he wished to see the organist.

"Please," he demanded of the crowd, "let me through!"

The crowd parted, and Mortimer marched on. Up on the steps of the church, he could see the Mayor and other local dignitaries waiting top-hatted and impressive, for the start of the ceremony.

"Please, Mr. Meek," a chorus of voices begged him, "won't you give us a few shots?"

Mortimer saw that the chorused request came from a battery of press photographers. He smiled tolerantly, halting.

"How's this, boys?" Mortimer asked jovially striking a pose.

"Fine, Mr. Meek. Chin just a bit higher, please."

Mortimer lifted his chin a bit higher,

gazing directly into the line of cameras pointing at him. Good boys, the photographers. Knew a good subject when they saw it. He recognized some of them from his experience at the City Hall, others from his triumph after aiding the F.B.I. Then, behind the shining brass plate of a reflector flash, Mortimer saw a face he recognized from quite a different source.

He was about to open his mouth, about to single out that face with an accusing finger, when the first flash bulbs popped. More popped, and Mortimer blinked dazedly. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, an explosive detonation shattering his eardrums, hurling him to the ground with its concussion!

Head swimming, blood trickling slightly from his nose, Mortimer realized dazedly that he was on the ground. Hazily, he saw a face bending over him, the same face he had recognized a moment before among the photographers. The face of Myfisto, the magician!

He saw, too, that Myfisto's assistant was beside him, that the pair of them were bending over him.

"Good," Myfisto was muttering rapidly to his assistant. "The concussion's done the trick. Give me the plate!"

Dazedly, while trying futilely to rise, Mortimer realized that Myfisto's assistant had handed a copper battery set to the magician. Myfisto was pressing the battery set against Mortimer's aching skull, and the thing was filling his brain with a strange vibration.

The sensation were those of sudden weariness, a momentary weariness, during which something seemed to drain from him, like water from a punctured bag. Then he felt the assistant's hands leave his shoulders, heard Myfisto mutter:

"It is good. See the expression in

his eyes. My electra-therwillific set has removed his dangerous power!"

PEOPLE were helping Mortimer to his feet, spluttering angry protests. Myfisto and his assistant had vanished into the crowd. Indignantly, Mortimer pushed all hands away from him. He was about to scream out: "Stop those men!" but there were no men to stop.

"Are you all right?" someone was asking anxiously, and Mortimer saw the Mayor.

"Certainly," Mortimer snapped. "Certainly. This shall not interfere with the ceremony. Let us proceed. Where is my bride?" He was climbing the steps to the church as he spoke.

"She's already arrived," someone answered. "We'll have to get around to the vestry for your entrance."

Then, hurriedly, Mortimer was led around the side of the church, up to the front side entrance. Nervously adjusting his cravat, the Mayor, acting Best Man, whispered hoarsely to Mortimer.

"Now!"

Mortimer and the Mayor stepped into the vast, crowded church, walking pontifically toward the center front where he was to join his bride. The

organist was slipping gracefully into a selection when Mortimer remembered. He'd forgotten to tell the fellow what to play.

Mortimer halted, turning toward the choir loft.

"Stop!" he shouted.

The organ ceased abruptly, and a shocked murmur ran through the church as all necks craned to see the dramatic interruption.

"I don't want that number," Mortimer announced.

The Mayor was plucking frenzily at his sleeve.

"Don't make a scene," he pleaded. "I have over a thousand votes in this church!"

Mortimer ignored him, fixing the tiny figure at the organ in the choir loft with a commanding stare. In a loud clear voice he indicated the number he desired played. There was a feeble protest from the loft, a shocked protest. Mortimer repeated the number. Then the organ commenced again, dutifully.

And to the strains of "Hail The Conquering Hero," Mortimer Meek strode to the center of the church where his bride was to join him.

## « « THE GOOD SHIP "FRIDAY" » »

SINCE time immemorial man has clung tenaciously to peculiar superstitions of one sort or another. In the middle of the eighteenth century the seamen of His Majesty's Navy were religiously convinced that it was dangerous and unlucky to put out to sea on a Friday. This belief became so widespread and fixed in the minds of the "tars" that the Admiralty was forced to take unusual measures in an attempt to dislodge it. The superstition was causing them untold inconvenience and, what was more important, it was costing them money which couldn't be tolerated.

So they worked out a very clever scheme. They made a public announcement that the keel of the next ship to be built would be laid on a Friday. This caused a ripple of dismay among the seamen, but the storm broke in full when it was learned that this same ship was to be launched on Friday

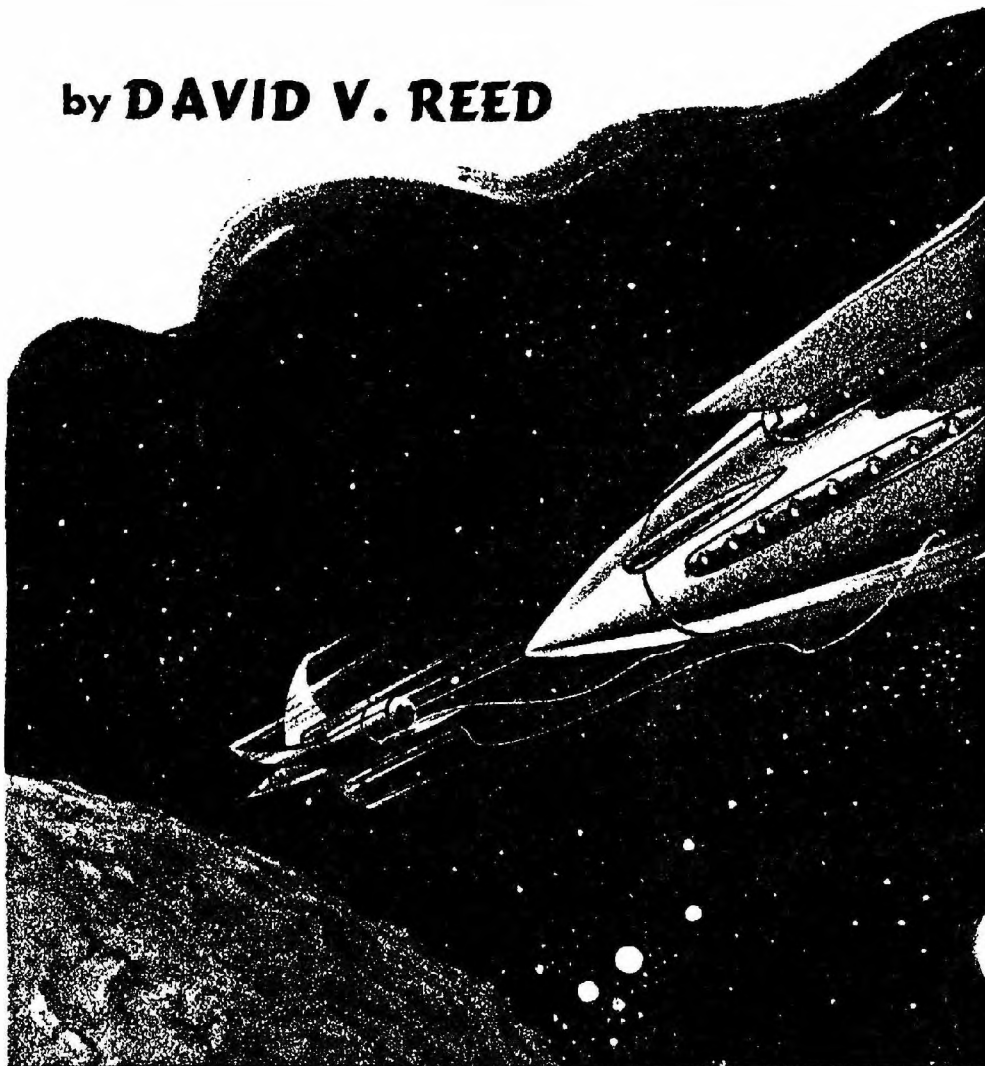
and christened on Friday. Gray-bearded sailors wagged their heads in profound disapproval and made dire predictions.

The Admiralty completed the shattering of the superstition by naming the ship the H M S Friday and embarking her on her maiden voyage early one Friday morning. They congratulated themselves with the successful completion of their campaign. Surely now the seamen's fears would be dissipated and this annoying and costly superstition would be speedily forgotten.

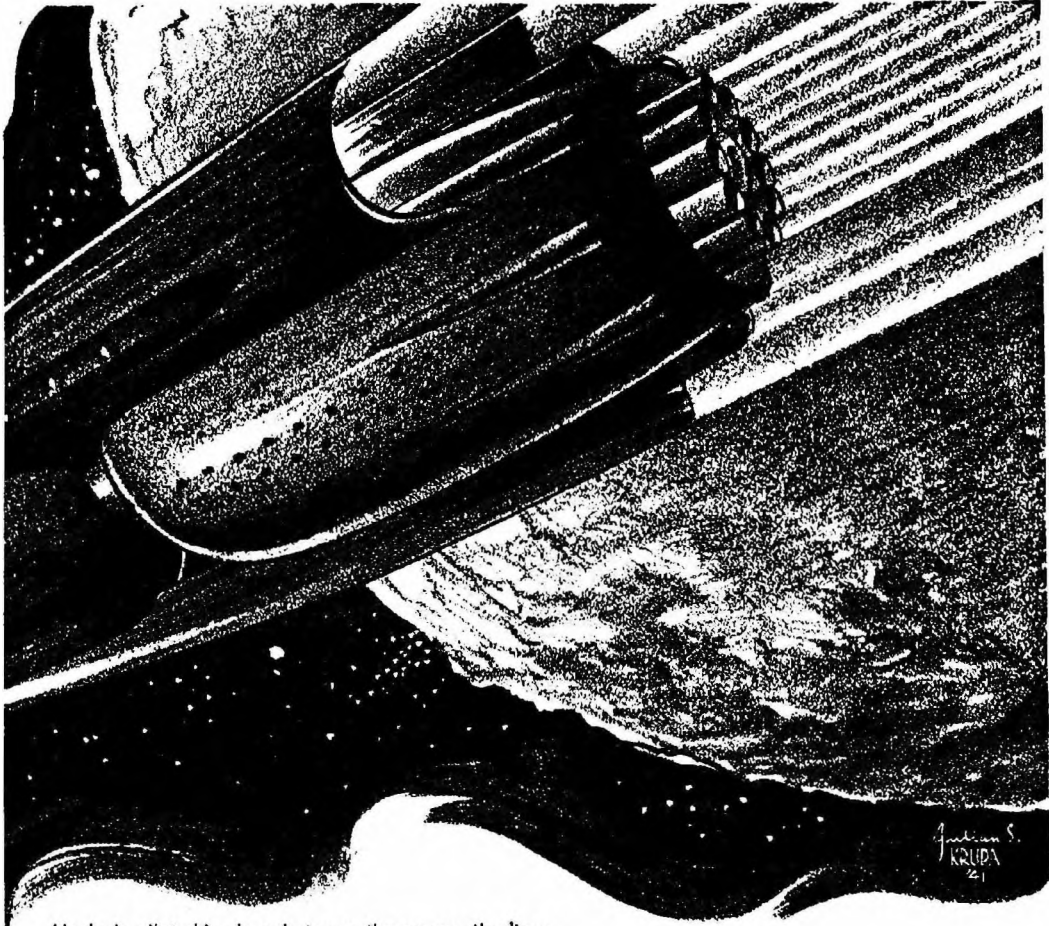
To give the astute gentlemen of the Admiralty staff credit, it must be admitted that their plan would probably have been enormously successful had it not been for one slight hitch. And that slight hitch was that the H M S Friday never returned from its maiden voyage and has never been heard of or seen, from that day to this.

# **MOONS of DEATH**

by **DAVID V. REED**



**Hanley was the best "moon-diver" in the business, but someone was out to "get" him. He didn't know who until he found himself diving blind, compass wrecked, and a liner's fate depending on guesswork.**



Hanley's pilot ship dove between the moons, the liner close behind.

OLD Rugger Hanley said evenly, "I'm not drunk, Kieller, and you know it. Now give me those lenses and let me go to work."

Samuel Kieller, general manager of the Ceres Company, smiled. "I think you've had a little too much of that Martian *behla*, Rugger. I was watching you as you came across the field. You could hardly walk erect."

"It's nothing," said Hanley quietly. He rubbed a hand across his lined, weatherbeaten face, brushed back his greying hair. "It's just that after Tom Worth crashed on the moons. . . ." His voice died away. "You don't think I'd take any chances up there, do you, Kieller?"

"I'm not worried about you, Rugger. A moon-diver is one life, but when he's piloting in a space liner, hundreds of lives are in his hands. Remember that. Here are your glasses." Kieller opened the huge wall safe and took out a large pair of dark glasses. Stamped into the glass itself was the Interplanetary Patrol seal, Hanley's full name and his resignation number. Those special Haydite lenses were the key to Corellan commerce; they had to be carefully guarded.

Rugger Hanley took the proffered glasses, turned, and walked slowly out of the magnificent office. Even so, there was a slight hesitancy in his steps, as if he wanted to be sure he didn't stagger.

Samuel Kieller walked to the great windows and watched the old pilot climb into the single-seater moon-diver. At the last minute, one of the ground crew had to help him in. The door adjoining Kieller's office burst open and a heavy, baldish man waddled in hurriedly. "Kieller," he said, "I've been watching old Hanley walk to his ship. He's drunk. Do you think it's safe?"

"Safe?" A crafty gleam lit up Kieller's eyes. "Hanley's diving in the *North Star*, isn't he? And she's heavily insured, isn't she? What if she isn't on our schedule? What if she happens to crash because old Rugger had a shot of *behla* too much?"

"But they can get you for letting him go up in that condition!" the fat man barked. "They're liable to see right through the whole—"

"They won't," said Kieller calmly. "Because Hanley won't crash. Not today. Drunk or sober he's the best moon-diver on Corella, and he'll bring the *North Star* in safely. But tomorrow the *Silverbeam* comes in."

"The *Silverbeam*? Isn't Hanley's son aboard that ship?"

"You have an excellent memory, Frazer. Yes, young Ronald Hanley is our new Navigation Officer on the *Silverbeam*. Rugger will want to bring that ship in." Kieller paused, lighting a fresh cigar. "I'll have a little surprise for old Rugger tomorrow with your help," he said, showing his teeth as he smiled. The fat man sighed and smiled with him, and in silence both watched the tiny pilot craft take off.

There was a sudden roar, a flash in the rocket pit, and the ship swept into the moon-studded heavens of Corella. On the inner side of the moons, they looked like pale green and white bodies, moving harmoniously across the sky in beautiful order. But they were more than that—they were almost the sky

itself because there were so many of them. The 212 moons of Corella were a curtain that separated it from the universe, a curtain with tiny holes that showed now and then. Hanley's ship had unerringly darted through one of those holes the instant it appeared.\*

Now he had gone up to meet the *North Star* two hundred thousand miles

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\* The planet Corella, first discovered in 3415, A.D. is surrounded by a complete curtain of moons—212 of them! These moons, of various sizes, together form what amounts to a hollow sphere, and inside that sphere lies Corella with its valuable minerals and plants, and the great city of Metro. The Corellan moons all move at different velocities, circling the planet, and as they move, from time to time there appear spaces between them which appear like holes in the curtain of moons. The only approach to Corella is through those holes in the curtain. A mistake in the speed or location of one of the moons is disaster and death on the outer, sun-baked surfaces of the Corellan moons.

In the early days of the planet's history, more than a score of ships were lost, trying to pierce the mystery of Corella. Then Malcolm Steinway devised a special instrument, the great Steinway Integrator. This instrument charted all the moons and their various speeds, and mathematically calculated the holes in the curtain. The holes must be passed at exactly the right instant, for they last but an instant.

Landing on Corella is possible only when a "moon-diver" or pilot boat comes out to guide a liner or freighter in, using its Integrator. The moon-diver goes in front; it is a fantastically fast vessel, but it cannot stay out for more than an hour. It meets the liners 200,000 miles out, gets in front, sets the speed for the liner to follow, then dives for the curtain. The liner dives behind it, and it always appears as if the ships are darting to certain death, but at the last instant the hole appears and there is beautiful Corella, shining underneath.

One other factor complicates life for moon-diver pilots. The two brilliant suns that light Corella with reflected light, spend most of their intense heat and light on the outer surface of the moons. So brilliant is this light that exposure to it by the naked eye brings on a peculiar blindness, known as "Corellan eyes." To guard against it, passenger and freight ships diving through always provide dark pads for travelers' eyes. Pilots, who must use their eyes to watch the Integrator, wear a special lens known as Haydite, which is made and checked by the Interplanetary Patrol, to guard against inferior brands being made by commercial companies if they should enter into competition.—Ed.

out, to lead it in a dive back through the moons—lead it as only a pilot craft with the Steinway Integrator could lead the way. . .

Forty minutes later, the eerie whine of two ships coming in together could be heard all over the spaceport of the Ceres Spaceways Company. Kieller, chewing the butt of his cigar, and Frazer, standing beside him, looked into the heavens. The great moons moved in their various orbits and speeds, some slowly, some scudding along—and suddenly there was a gap among them and two ships came diving through, easily, gracefully, swinging in in wide arcs.

When Rugger Hanley climbed out of his craft, he didn't go chat with the officers of the *North Star* the way other moon-diving pilots did. He lurched across the field, talking to no one, disappearing from sight.

"Odd fellow, that Hanley," sighed Frazer. "Sort of a hermit."

"Been that way for years," Kieller said. "Maybe he's been in the game too long. He used to be pretty lively and a good mixer until he took to drinking *behla*." He crushed the cigar butt. "Works out fine for us," he said softly. "Tomorrow, when the *Silverbeam* crashes, we'll be through for a long while. Just as well the last crash will be above suspicion."

"JUST leave the capper \* here with me, Nikko," said Big Mike O'Shea, the bartender. "No use trying to wake Rugger. He's full of *behla*."

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\* A slang expression for "capsule letter". The small aluminum capsule contained a roll of copper wire on which a message had been recorded. This economical and personal method of communicating antedated letter-writing where no auditor communication was possible. The cappers were bound in papers colored to denote their various points of origin; white for Venus, red for Mars, blue and yellow for Earth, etc.—Ed.

The little Martian shook his head. In both hands he held tightly clasped a capsule wrapped in the yellow and blue paper that signified it came from Earth. He stood over the sleeping form of Rugger Hanley and tried to wake his master. It was long past the Corellan curfew, and the drinking house was empty. The police had cleared the place an hour before, and they let Hanley stay there only because Big Mike had said he would put up Hanley for the night.

"You hear me, Nikko?" O'Shea said as he swept the littered floor. "Leave the capper here. Rugger likes to read his son's cappers when he's sober, and it can wait until then." He approached the little Martian who refused to move. One of his large hands burrowed into the Martian's little ones and he took away the capsule from the silent Nikko. The bartender turned it around and looked at the writing on it. Suddenly his face went white. His hands relaxed and the capsule fell from his grasp.

"It can't be!" Big Mike gasped. "It can't—*Tom Worth's been dead three weeks!*"

Nikko nodded his head solemnly, and his green eyes flashed, as if he understood the shocking words. He stooped and picked up the capsule. O'Shea muttered as he shook himself. "Come on, you damned heathen Martian, we'll both of us wake up old Rugger."

A few minutes later, Rugger Hanley was sick from the stuff that Mike poured down his throat. He held his head in his hands and groaned. "I'm all right, Mike. Don't give me any more of that damned swamp syrup." He lifted his head and looked up, his eyes glazed. "Is that Nikko?" he asked. "What's little Nikko doing here?"

"Rugger," said O'Shea quickly, "you've got to listen to me! Nikko brought you a message, a capper from Earth."

Hanley nodded. "I know. Been expecting it. My son's coming in tomorrow on the *Silverbeam*. It's all over now, Mike. He's going to find out about me at last . . . and it's too late to help me. . . ."

"Rugger! It isn't from your son—it's from Tom Worth!"

If old Rugger Hanley heard, he gave no indication of it. "It's over now, Mike," he went on quietly, immersed in his own thoughts. "I've won. Tomorrow my son comes in as a Navigation Officer on a great liner . . . but he'll find out about me. . . . It's his first flight, and I'm washed up . . . too late to help me" His voice trailed off, then he went on, as if he had just heard O'Shea. "Tom Worth, did you say? He wanted to see Ronald. He loved the kid."

The bartender grabbed the jug of *neemsplant* extract that Hanley had called swamp syrup, and forced more of it down Hanley's mouth. Then he ran to the back of the bar and brought out the capsule-reader. He paused briefly when he took up the capsule, for he was breaking one of the strictest I.P. laws, but he broke open the seal. He took out the copper wire and inserted it into the reader, and touched the switch.

The mechanical diaphragm began its sensitive speaking. "*Hello, Rugger. I'm sending this to you in a roundabout way—*"

Rugger Hanley started violently. His eyes stared up into space. He half rose from his chair. "Lord!" he cried hoarsely. "Tom—Tom's voice!"

O'SHEA held his hands to the switch. He shivered involuntarily as he

nodded assent and tried to meet Hanley's gaze. "Nikko brought it here. It's a capper from Tom Worth. Listen!"

*" . . . roundabout way, but I'll explain that after I'm through with the important part of this message. Today is Thursday, the twelfth, and I'm going up in a few minutes to dive the Cythera through the moons. . . ."* As both men listened, the voice seemed that of doom itself, for on the twelfth, three weeks before, Tom Worth's pilot craft and the *Cythera* had crashed in a dive. *" . . . but I've just discovered something funny going on around here.*

*"I can't tell you everything now, except a conversation I overheard today. You remember the way you commented on the luck the Ceres Company had this year, having two big ships crash and collecting insurance worth ten times the ships' value, just when it looked like they were going broke? I heard Kieller talking today, and I think he arranged those crashes!"* There was a pause as the voice stopped, and the voice came more quickly, as if it were arguing. *"I know this'll sound crazy to you, Rugger, but I think the Claybourne and the Skybird were both his work. If my hunch is right, the Cythera is next and after that, the Silverbeam—"*

"No!" Rugger Hanley leaped out of his chair, shouting. "No, Tom—you're wrong! Not the—"

Big Mike held the switch until Hanley quieted down. He was still partially under the influence of the *behla*, and he was trembling. When Hanley nodded, Mike let the reader continue.

*"Half an hour ago, when Kieller gave me my Haydite lenses, I thought there was something wrong with them. I sent those over to you today, on the twelfth, because I'm not going to use them. I wrote you to give them to your*



boy Ronald as a present from me, but that was a blind, in case Kieller had the package opened. Then I asked him for my auxiliary pair of lenses, and I'll use those today.

"In case I don't come back, for one reason or another, have those glasses examined. I'm sure there's something wrong with them. I'm sending this capsule in a peculiar way, first to Earth, and then I'll have it trans-shipped back here to you, because Kieller asked a lot of questions when I wanted my other lenses, and he may try to trace my mail and stop it.

"I'll feel awful funny if I'm with you the day you get this capsule and nothing's happened. I'm laughing already. So long, Rugger."

THE voice stopped, but the copper wire kept spinning until the rest of it had played out. In complete silence, the two men and the Martian sat there. The sweat was pouring down old Rugger's face.

"No," said Hanley, "it can't be. I've slaved too long and I've worked too hard." The quietness of his voice frightened Big Mike. "They can't do this to me," Rugger went on talking. "You know, Mike, now that my son's coming, he'll know the truth about me, and he'll be angry. He'll say I threw myself away, because I think it's too late for me now. . . ."

But suddenly Rugger Hanley sat up straight in his chair, and his lips pressed into a tight line. "Mikel" he said, loudly. "Mike—do you realize what they've done? Do you know what those butchers have done for their money?" O'Shea shook his head. He couldn't speak.

And now, the momentary hysteria had passed from Hanley. "My boy's on that *Silverbeam*," he said, speaking slowly, "and he's got Tom Worth's

lenses with him."

"What?"

"Yes. I didn't wait for him to come. I sent them to him that same day. I wanted him to be wearing them when he came here on his first flight."

"But they may be your only evidence against Kieller, and if—"

"Yes, Mike," Rugger Hanley nodded grimly. "If the *Silverbeam* crashes tomorrow, I'll lose the chance to avenge Tom Worth, and I'll lose my son . . . and my reason for living the way I've been living these three years."

"What are you going to do?" O'Shea breathed. "Weren't you planning on diving the *Silverbeam* in yourself?"

"It isn't a question of diving it in," Hanley clipped. "The ships that crashed were up against something. Maybe the lenses, maybe something else. The *Silverbeam* has to be stopped from coming in tomorrow, before anything happens to her!"

"But how?"

"I'll work that out as I go. Nikko, you come with me. Mike, keep that capper here for me."

Before O'Shea could stop him, Hanley had walked, half stumbling, through the door, leaning on Nikko.

THERE were always lights at the spaceport. Day and night, no matter whether ships were expected in, the green-golden beacons lit up the great fields, the rocket pits like wounds in the smooth land. In the Communications Building, the operators were sitting, talking to the ships that were out somewhere in the void. Here the freighters, small and lonely, the gay liners, the military ships, let their voices be heard as they passed by, exchanging news, gossip, banter. The void knew no day or night: . . .

A small terra-car drew up noiselessly beside the huge Communications Build-

ing, and a spare, unstopped figure came out. "Nikko," said the man, "wait here for me." Then Rugger Hanley went into the building. He entered an elevator and went up to the topmost story. When he came out, he was in the midst of the Section-At-Hand division, where contact was kept with the ships bound for Corella from all over the universe.

"Hi, Rugger," a short man called out to him. "What're you doing up this time of night? We haven't seen you around here in a long while."

Hanley forced a blank smile. "Hello, Charley. I'm being kept pretty busy these days." He paused. "Listen, Charley, will you do me a favor?"

Charley grinned. "Run out of *behla*? Here's a couple of bucks—"

Rugger g e s t u r e d impatiently. "Thanks," he said. "It isn't that. Listen, my boy's coming in tomorrow on the *Silverbeam*. Do you think you could manage to let me get a message to him?"

"Hell, Rugger," said Charley, "I don't have to tell you that the *Silverbeam's* in the At-Hand section, and with the interplanetary clock at 22:04, most of the crew's asleep there."

"I know. Only this is something special. Could you manage to fake a navigation call, so they'll call him to the auditor and I'll hear his voice?"

"You sure are nuts about that kid," Charley muttered. "Listen, Rugger, you know you're asking me to break all the rules? What the hell kind of a message am I going to fake? What's the hurry anyway? He'll be in within twelve hours. Can't you wait?"

"Tell him to watch out for asteroid fragments—anything, I don't give a damn. After that, there's a message I've got to give him. It may be important."

"Asteroid fragments, hmmm!" Charley snorted. "If the chief ever

heard me give out . . . Okay, I'll do it, but I must be nuts. Only remember you can't say anything personal. He'll recognize your voice, but you'll have to give him the message in third person."

"Thanks, Charley," Hanley said quietly. He could hardly conceal the fever that burned in him. The strain to keep his voice and manner casual was almost more than he could endure. He took Charley's arm and followed into one of the cubicles whose walls consisted of great concave charts of the void around Corella. Here and there tiny pin-points of colored lights marked the locations of ships as the lights moved imperceptibly along the charts.

"See that white one?" said Charley, pointing. "That's it."

"Sure looks pretty."

"Look out, Rugger!" Charley grabbed Hanley by one arm. "Hell, you almost fell right on top of the speaker!" Charley frowned as he looked at Hanley. "I can smell that *behla* over here," he said, shaking his head. "Now take it easy while I get her."

CHARLEY'S hands raced over the glistening black instrument board, touching levers and pressing buttons. A red bulb glowed brightly and Charley took the speaker. "Corella Ceres Company calling *Silverbeam*," he said once. Then he repeated it.

*Silverbeam* in Corella Section-At-Hand," came the answer.

"Navigation warning. Is the Navigation Officer there?"

"That you, Charley?"

"Right. Hello, Fred."

"Listen, Charley, you know the whole damn crew's asleep. What the hell are you doing interrupting my reading?"

"You read too much anyway. Fred, can you get me the Navigation Officer?"

"You serious about that?"

"You're damned well told I am. You

know the by-laws by now, son. Navigation warnings in person to the Officer."

"Nuts," said the voice. Then it added, "*Silverbeam* in Corella Section-At-Hand requests your line to keep open. The Navigation Officer is being called." A tiny, stifled voice added, "Nuts."

"Okay, Ruggier," Charley whispered. "You take it from here." As he stood up to let Hanley take his chair, Charley said, "What's the matter, Ruggier? What're you shaking like that for? Anything wrong?"

Hanley shook his head. "I'm fine," he whispered. "Just fine."

"Navigation Officer Hanley aboard the *Silverbeam* reporting," the audiphone said suddenly.

"Navigation warning," Ruggier Hanley said evenly. "Unconfirmed reports of asteroid fragments. Suggest double watch all the way." He couldn't keep his hands still.

"Hey, is that—" the voice started, then stopped. "Thank you very much for the timely warning. Is that all?"

"Personal message to Navigation Officer Hanley," said Ruggier. He felt Charley's hand on his arm and he shook it off. "He is requested by Ruggier Hanley not to wear Haydite lenses sent him recently and to use the standard equipment of the ship. Have you got that?"

Ruggier Hanley could hear Charley's sigh of relief as he gave the message impersonally. He looked up at Charley and whispered, "Get me a drink of water, Charley. I feel faint. Don't worry—I'll sign off."

The short man hesitated, then hurried through the door.

"Ronald!" Ruggier Hanley said sharply. "Listen to me! You've got to get the *Silverbeam* to turn back! Don't let it land on Corella! I can't

explain. Do you hear me? They're trying to sabotage the—"

"*Ruggier — get away from that speaker!*" Charley had come running back into the room and he dived at Hanley. Hanley stood up and swung his free left hand, catching the short man on the chest. As Charley fell, he raised an arm and swung it across the black board. The red bulb went out suddenly. One word had come through the audiphone: "*What?*"

Charley stood up dazed. "You're crazy!" he barked. "Ruggier, you've gone out of your head! Do you realize what you've done may cost me my job?" He brushed a hand across his chest.

"It may cost me more than that!" said Hanley savagely. "Charley, I can't reason with you now. I've got to get the *Silverbeam* to change her course! It's a matter of life and death for hundreds of people!"

"Get out!" Charley cried. "Get out of here, you drunken fool! I'll have the police here in five seconds." His face was a mask of rage and bewilderment, and he raised a hand over the alarm signal. "Get out of here while I try to undo the damage you've done."

Slowly, Ruggier Hanley backed out of the cubicle and made his way down the corridor. When he came out of the building, he entered the terra-car. "Take me to 400 Metro Boulevard," he told the driver. There was no longer unsteadiness in his voice.

"YOU did *what*, Hanley?"

"I tried to warn them over the audiphone, Commissioner," said Hanley. "Not more than an hour ago."

Commissioner Paige of the Interplanetary Police scowled. He was in his pajamas and he was shivering with cold as he sat with Hanley in the foyer of his home. Outside the first grey

signs of the Corellan dawn were appearing. "There'll be trouble about this, Hanley," the Commissioner said, sighing. "Of course, I'll wait until I've heard of it in my official capacity. And I'll take into account the fact that you're still upset over the death of your closest friend . . ." he grunted, "even if you did hardly ever see him since you took to drinking."

"You mean you don't believe me?"

"Frankly, no, Hanley." Paige took on a kindlier attitude. "Be reasonable, man. How can I have the course of a liner changed on the—uh—unverifiable scraps you've given me? Where is the capsule? Your friend O'Shea seems to have left his bar and you don't know where he lives. The mysterious Haydite lenses are aboard the *Silverbeam*. All right. Let's wait a few hours. The ship will come in, and then we'll have a look at them. Maybe there has been foul play. The Department hasn't overlooked that."

"But the ship won't come in! Tom Worth was right!"

"There isn't any sense in your exciting yourself this way, Hanley. You can see I can't do anything." Commissioner Paige drew his robe on. "Isn't it faintly possible, Hanley," he said, half humorously, "that all this is just a bad *behla* dream?"

Rugger Hanley rose and clenched his fists. "I don't drink *behla*," he said slowly. "I haven't had a pint of the stuff in the last three years you spoke of. I had some earlier tonight, when I realized that tomorrow my son would be here. It broke me up. But I don't drink."

"Ah," said Commission Paige, rising with Hanley. "So you don't drink *behla*, is it? Perhaps you can explain your constant—"

"I can't. Not unless I'm willing to give up my last chance to save that ship.

And that's one thing I won't give up." He bade the Commissioner good-night and went back to the terra-car.

After that, Rugger Hanley lay in bed awake all through the night, unable to sleep. And all the while he was thinking, planning, working the thing out in his mind. There were only a few chances for Kieller to take to gain his ends. Hanley had to know them all in advance. There must have been something he'd overlooked.

For the rest of that night, Nikko, the little Martian, sat by his bed, dozing off and awaking just in time to light Hanley's next cigarette. It was very quiet where they lived, far from Metro, far from the spaceport and the men with whom Hanley had spent so many years of his life. . . .

THE *Silverbeam* was due in at 32:30, interplanetary time, and an hour after noon Corellan time, but Rugger Hanley got to the spaceport an hour ahead of time. Word of the past night's events had gotten around, and as he made his way slowly to the pilot craft hangars, he could feel the way people were looking at him. He felt very tired and he knew his face showed it. He had to be very careful now that everyone was watching him. There was no sign of his drinking now, and he hoped that most people would assume he was tired . . . because if they caught the answer . . .

The mechanics, with whom Hanley had seldom exchanged a word in years, clustered around him. One of them had a message. "Mr. Kieller said to be sure to see him before you go up for the *Silverbeam*."

Rugger nodded. He had planned to see Kieller himself. In Rugger Hanley's plans, Kieller was destined to play a leading role within the hour. But he was a bit startled to hear that he had

been posted to take in the *Silverbeam*. Of course, Kieller had known that Hanley would want to bring that ship in; Kieller had conferred a great favor on Hanley by signing young Ronald on one of the Ceres Company ships. But that meant that they weren't going to discipline Rugger for last night's events. . . . Or did it mean that at all?

He had the mechanics go over the tiny pilot craft thoroughly. He was careful not to ask them more than the usual questions, not until they were all finished. Then he said, "Please check and see whether the sparkers are all set," then, hesitating, and as if he had thought it over, he added, "On second thought, get me a whole new line of sparkers."

Of course there was hesitancy; he'd expected it. One of the mechanics said, "But the ship doesn't need them, sir."

"She lost speed too fast yesterday," said Hanley. "I think—"

"But, sir," the mechanic interrupted, "you didn't use this ship yesterday at all."

"Didn't I?" Hanley said, cursing his blunder. "That's all right," he caught himself, "get a new set anyway. I'm not taking any chances today. If I could use a brand new ship, I would."

"Yes sir," said the mechanic. "It's a big day for you, isn't it?" He was a friendly youngster, that mechanic.

"Mind your business!" Rugger snapped. He was immediately sorry. He had been wondering which of these young mechanics was the one who would soon be sneaking away to report to Kieller, to tell him of the careful check-up he'd ordered, the new sparkers. One of them, certainly, and then Kieller would know. Hanley had to stop him.

**W**HEN the new line of sparkers had been installed, Rugger Hanley

said, "Lock up the ship, please, and give me the key." The mechanic hesitated at the strange order, but he took one look at Hanley's set jaw and complied. As he gave Hanley the key, Rugger whispered, "Sorry I barked at you, son. I'm just upset."

As he made his way to the administration Building, just as he left, Hanley heard one of the mechanics say in a low tone, "The old boy's gone completely nuts. Morale shattered. Worth's crash must have . . ."

He wanted to walk away faster, but he kept his pace slow, his head down. There were more people at the Administration Building, standing in little knots. The news had spread fast. Hanley wondered whether it wasn't a good thing. Maybe all the publicity would stop Kieller because it would be too co-incidental.

No, it wouldn't do that at all. If anything happened now, they would be sure that Hanley had been crazy, and his unbalance had resulted in a tragedy. It was the best thing he could have done for Kieller. They could only say that Kieller might have exercised better judgment.

"Hello, Hanley. Aren't you going to talk to me?"

Rugger started. "Sorry," he mumbled. "I must have overlooked you. I'm all wrapped up in thought, Commissioner Paige."

"Come here a moment, Hanley," said the Commissioner, taking Hanley by the arm. "That's just what I want to talk to you about." He went inside the cool corridor with Hanley and stopped where they were alone. "I've been upset by the things you told me last night, Hanley. Frankly, I'm worried whether it's exactly wise for you to go up in your mental state." The Commissioner hesitated. "I've been wondering whether Kieller isn't showing more sentimental-

ity than sound judgment in allowing you to go up today."

"Please," said Hanley, his voice barely a whisper, "stay out of this. I'm all right. I've been flying these ships for fifteen years. You know I wouldn't go up if I thought there was any reason for me not to."

"If anything happens—"

"Nothing's going to happen," said Hanley flatly. "Nothing!"

Paige smiled. "All right, Hanley," he said. "That's all I wanted to hear. If you aren't afraid . . . I trust your judgment implicitly. I was only worried you might show up, ah—"

"I know," said Hanley. "Drunk. I've never gone up drunk in my life." He turned away, walking down the hall. He didn't like the way Commissioner Paige had been looking at him; he couldn't take the chance.

Now that he was about to open the door to Kieller's office, the first doubt seized him. What time was it? There couldn't be much time left, and he had to act quickly and smoothly. He entered the reception room. "Mr. Kieller's waiting," said the secretary. "There isn't much time."

Rugger Hanley walked through the door the secretary opened. Kieller stood up from his desk. "Ah, Hanley," he said, cordially, "I've been waiting to—"

**H**ANLEY closed the door with his back and stood against it. As Kieller spoke, he withdrew his hands from his pilot's jacket. In his right hand there was a short, blue barreled electric gun. "Don't say another word, Kieller," Hanley said softly, advancing. "I haven't much time. Open the wall safe."

Kieller's eyes held fear. "Hanley, have you gone out of your—"

"Open the safe."

It was the very quietness with which Hanley said it that got Kieller. He couldn't take his eyes off the gun. They had outlawed those guns ten years before. The old rocketeers had carried them. They could make a hole through steel, quietly, in a second. Kieller opened the safe.

"Give me Tom Worth's Haydite lenses," said Hanley evenly.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Kieller.

"I'll give you five seconds—"

The inter-office phone buzzed and a girl's voice called, "The *Silverbeam* is about to start her dive. Mr. Hanley must hurry."

"You haven't any time, Hanley," said Kieller. Hanley took a step forward. Suddenly, Kieller's voice changed, and a new light shone in his eyes. "All right, Hanley," he said. "You've got me—but you can't do a thing until you come down again. You've no time. Here." He handed over two pairs of lenses from the safe.

"So that's it," said Hanley. "That's how you got Tom. You switched both pairs on him."

"Yes," Kieller smiled wryly. "He suspected the first pair, but not the second. You know, the light from those moons is simply terrible."

Rugger Hanley went pale. The nails of his left hand tore his palm. "Who else did you use this on?" he said.

"No one," Kieller replied calmly. "I don't use the same idea more than twice, and in this case I used it once."

"What about the *Claybourne* and the *Skybird*?"

"Ah, yes. I had another little device there. I—"

"Mr. Hanley," the phone called, "the *Silverbeam* is starting her dive now. Your ship's ready. You're late."

"Hurry," said Kieller, smiling, "or the *Silverbeam* may join—"

Hanley feverishly pointed to a piece of paper. If only he'd watched the time. Someone was knocking on the door. "Coming," called Hanley. "Write that down, damn you," said Hanley to Kieller. "Write fast. Put down what you said about Tom Worth." He waited, glanced at the paper. "Now write this," he said. "I also brought about the crash of the *Claybourne* and the *Skybird* by substituting worn lines of sparkers in their engines, causing the rockets to lose speed and slow the dives—"

Kieller hesitated, then smiled as he continued writing. "Very bright of you, Hanley," he observed. "It's a pleasure to lose to a man like you. You've got me dead to rights."

". . . and cause the pilot craft—"  
Hanley was dictating.

"Mr. Hanley! Mr. Hanley! The *Silverbeam* is diving! She's calling for the pilot craft!" They were kicking at the door now, hammering and calling outside.

"That's enough!" said Hanley. He grabbed the paper and ran to the door, and as he opened it, he heard Kieller call after him, "Remember a confession's worthless without evidence—"

**H**ANLEY rushed through the office, bumping into people, ran into the corridor, putting the gun away as he ran, trying to avoid the throngs that were everywhere and not succeeding. Several porters saw him coming and formed a flying wedge for him, and he ran behind them to the ship. It was in the pit, tilted, ready for blasting. He fumbled for the key, gave it to a mechanic, then jumped inside. The door slammed behind him as he settled into his cramped quarters. He was still holding Tom Worth's lenses and the crumpled sheet of paper that Kieller had written.

He kicked over the bars under his feet, started the engine, let his hands touch the controls. . . . The sudden shock, the lift and tear of the rockets, the noise of the blasting. Ten seconds later, Hanley slowed his speed and peered through the glassite ports. He had been so late in starting that he'd missed all the usual holes in the curtain of moons. The Steinway Integrator, taking up most of the forward control board, was flashing brightly, its calculators marking the tiny figures and letters as they changed from instant to instant.

The *Silverbeam* was probably half-way through her dive by now. He could imagine the panic that must have been inside the hearts of the men on her bridge as she dived, unable to stop, without the sight of a pilot ship to take her in. The Integrator was ticking away, flashing, and the noise of the rockets were thunder in Hanley's ears. The fatigue of the sleepless night came up suddenly to threaten his skill, and Kieller's last words rang in his ears.

"Evidence." He had it. He had it with him. Some of it Mike O'Shea had, and the rest, the counterfeit lenses, Ronald Hanley had. He could get them together, but only if he lived, and only if he brought the *Silverbeam* in safely.

When he roared through the curtain, the twin suns of Corella were close together, and the moons were at their brightest. In his hurry, Hanley had forgotten to take his own lenses! But he had Tom Worth's. The lenses were made for individuals, according to their sight, but it didn't matter much to Hanley now.

He let out the rockets to their maximum speed and sat relaxed, trying to get the feel of the ship. She was going well; the sparkers had done it. How right he had been about the sparkers!

Not that it had been so difficult to figure out. There weren't many places in a ship that could be quickly and effectively sabotaged, that wouldn't immediately be apparent in a check-up. But one had to suspect before one could exercise caution. And Hanley had more than suspected—he had known!

Where was the *Silverbeam*? It was time he had gotten her call. And there it came. "Hello, Hanley? Thank God you're up. We're halfway down. Can you see us?"

"No. Correct direction. Those suns are too close."

"Tack three points and a half port at present speed and hold it until we hail you."

**R**UGGER HANLEY set the controls and took a deep breath. He didn't usually have to fish for ships; he was up there in plenty of time, waiting for them, with time to spare. . . .

"Hello, Hanley." It was Kieller's voice, coming through the audiphone, quietly. "We're on my private line now, Hanley, and I thought I'd like to have a last chat with you. Now don't tune me out—this is important. You know, that was a clever thing you did at the port today, having those sparkers changed. The only thing is, I hadn't had them touched at all. You see? I don't use the same idea more than twice."

There was a dangerous deliberateness in Kieller's voice that made Rugger Hanley's scalp tingle. "I didn't count on the sparkers at all," he was saying. "Instead—"

"Hello, Hanley!" the contact phone bawled, drowning out Kieller's voice, "Can you see us now?"

Hanley pressed his face close to the glassite. "Yes," he said, as he threw open the switch to answer. "Changing direction and getting ready to dive be-

fore you."

He touched the controls slightly and the contact phone shouted, "Hanley—veer off!" He saw the dark shape flash by him suddenly and he kicked the bars until the sky was empty again.

"Did you hear that, Hanley?" came the taunting voice of Kieller over the audiphone.

"Hanley—what the hell is the matter with you? Who's in that ship with you? Stop that talking there and pay attention! You almost rammed us!"

"Can you hear that other voice?" Hanley called. A sudden flash of hope had gone through him.

"Only a mumble. What's going on? Stop it!"

"Kieller's talking to me from the port," Hanley said. "You know I can't stop that. He's throwing me off, upsetting me. Get him to stop."

There was no way to stop an audiphone voice from a spaceport. It hadn't been provided for, according to the I.P. laws, to make certain that a pilot always listened to the port instructions.

"Do you understand, Hanley?" said Kieller's voice, speaking very softly. Rugger Hanley gritted his teeth and turned the ship over in its dive, adjusting his glasses. The *Silverbeam* was a black spot against the light, and as he dove at it, the spot grew larger. Hanley's mind was in chaos. He could hardly think straight. What was Kieller saying? What had he said, in that quiet, contented voice, while the contact phone had shouted instructions from the *Silverbeam*?

"So you see, Hanley, your caution with the sparkers didn't help you," Kieller's voice returned. "What can you do without an Integrator?"

"All right, Hanley, you're well in front now," called the *Silverbeam*. "We're following, matching speed. Well done. Hold on."



There were no more than five minutes left now.

"Look at your Integrator," Kieller said, softly, his voice just at Hanley's ears. "It looks all right, doesn't it? It was all right when you went up, wasn't it? Well, it isn't anymore. I saved my special idea just for you, Hanley. *I arranged with the kind aid of Mr. Frazer, to have your Integrator unbalanced.*"

**S**UDDENLY it hit Rugger Hanley.

He had heard the words before, but he hadn't really understood them, hadn't listened, hadn't . . . So that was what Kieller had saved for the last! Not the lenses, not the sparkers—the Integrator—the one thing Rugger Hanley had never thought of, because he never had figured on Frazer being part of the conspiracy.

"Hanley, what are you laughing at?" the *Silverbeam* called.

Rugger threw out the contact sending phone, so his voice could no longer be heard. He was laughing almost hysterically now, and the tears were rolling down his cheeks. He was crying like a child, and then the noise stopped, and only the tears and the shaking of his shoulders showed that he hadn't stopped. He was diving now full into the moons and the *Silverbeam* was right behind him.

The moons were like great, hot balls of gold. Their light came up through his lenses and filled his brain. Rugger Hanley was quiet at last, his body motionless, his hands poised, leaping to the board and touching it, and the tiny craft danced with him. Faster, faster, the rockets blasting away, the moons rushing up, the light unbearable. A touch and the ship swerved, then swerved back again.

"All right, Hanley! Hold!" The *Silverbeam* called.

Then Corella was under him, and the moons above. The great planet was lovely to see. Rugger Hanley sat calmly now, guiding the ship in, spotting the spaceport and its huge markings. He was at home up here. He wondered whether he would hear Kieller's voice again, but the audiphone was quiet.

"Beautifully done, pilot Hanley!" the *Silverbeam* called.

## CHAPTER V

**I**T wasn't an unusual landing, because no one knew what had happened. The pilot craft landed smoothly, and the *Silverbeam* lay down in her cradle, giving a mild thrill to the children whose parents had taken them to the spaceport that day.

Not till Hanley stepped out of the ship did he realize that there was something unusual after all. There was a lot of noise coming from the Administration Building, and he thought there were people running out to him. Then, at his elbow, Commissioner Paige said, "He killed himself, just as the *Silverbeam* came into sight." The Commissioner paused, then said, "We had hooked up a phone on Kieller's, and we heard every word he said to you up there. The others gave you up for lost."

"But not you, sir?"

"No," said Paige, "not I. Because I knew the answer. It came to me after you blasted off. I prayed I was right. Hold tight now, here they come."

The spaceport police was fighting with the mob that surrounded the pilot craft, but they let one through, Ronald Hanley. "Dad!" he said, quietly, taking his father's hand, "I just heard."

Commissioner Paige bent over and whispered, "Take off your lenses,

Hanley. You're still wearing them."

Rugger smiled and took off the lenses. The three men began walking through the space the police cleared, in the midst of the cheering, clamoring mob. The Commissioner and Hanley's son walked on either side of Rugger. . .

WHEN the Doctor was through, he turned to the assemblage in the large room and said, "I think it can be done. It's a badly neglected case, but it's not too late."

A great sigh went through the room. Rugger Hanley smiled and lit a cigarette. "Now that that's over, where was I?" he asked.

"You were explaining the *behla*," someone said.

"I know that voice," said Hanley. "That's Charley." He gripped the extended hand. "Well," he continued, "I had to have something to cover up the way I was stumbling everywhere. You see, when I lost my lenses on that trip through the moons three years ago, I didn't realize how it would develop. Ten, when I found out I was getting blind by degrees, I knew it could be cured, but it would mean that I'd stop working. And if I stopped working, Ronald would have stopped going to school. So I kept right on."

"But how could you?"

"I didn't know if I could," Hanley replied. "I'd been diving through the moons for twelve years by then. I used to think that I knew those moons backwards. I knew everything about them, when they parted and made gaps, where it was, their orbits, speed, their pock-marks—every damned thing.

"The only really dangerous trip I made was the first time I went up. I went up alone that time. No ship was expected in. I said I was going up for a joy-ride, but I didn't know, exactly." He took a drag on his cigarette. "It

turned out I was right. I couldn't read the little figures on the Integrator anymore, but I didn't need them. Those moons were my friends. As my eyes got worse, I couldn't read anything much, and I used to glance at things and pretend I was reading.

"I'd bump into people all the time. I'd fall over stones. But the one thing I couldn't miss were those moons. I couldn't see much, but I couldn't miss those moons. Even with my glasses on, they used to burn holes right through me when I came at them. And I knew them by then. So I kept on working. I knew I wasn't really taking chances, yet, and I was waiting for Ronald to finish.

"Then, yesterday, I was afraid I'd gone too long, and I'd be blind, and knowing the kind of kid Ronald was, I felt he'd never forgive me. I still didn't want him to find out, but I didn't know how to stop it. I thought maybe I'd go on buying *behla* everywhere, so people would always think I was drunk when I came stumbling along."

"You gave it away last night," said Commissioner Paige. "I couldn't believe you at first, but today, when I knew you hadn't had a drop in hours, and I saw you running into people on your way to the ship, I remembered how you hadn't seen me when you first came here. I had the answer then, but it was too late to stop you."

"And a good thing too," said Ronald Hanley.

"Mr. Hanley," said the Captain of the *Silverbeam*, "would you mind telling me what you were laughing about while we were diving? I still can't understand it."

A chuckle escaped Rugger Hanley. "You see, Captain," he said, "I realized then that Kieller had done the one thing that was calculated to be the end of any pilot—if he could get away with

it, and he did, but here I was, the one man to whom the Integrator was useless, and Kieller had banked on that. He could have done any one of a dozen other things. Oh, I thought about them all while he was talking to me up there.

"He could have hurt the rockets, the chambers, the contact phone, the control board. It wouldn't have been as simple as the device of the sparkers or the lenses, but since he was taking pains enough to throw the Integrator off—a really hard job—"

"And," interrupted Paige, "accomplished with the loving co-operation of Mr. Frazer, the only man here who could get to those things."

"Yes," Hanley agreed, soberly, "I hadn't figured on Frazer, or I'd have realized what I was up against, and how

wide their field was. But when Kieller showed me how they'd wasted their opportunity, throwing off the Integrator, the irony of it almost killed me."

"Ah, yes," said the Captain of the *Silverbeam*, dryly, "it almost killed us all."

There was a noise in the back of the room. Voices were being raised. Then Hanley heard Big Mike O'Shea yelling, "But I tell you it ain't *behla*. It's Irish whiskey, good clean Irish whiskey, straight from me old mother in Ireland, and Nikko and me are going to drink with Rugger Hanley if we have to kill everyone in this room."

No one in the room was killed, after all, and they were still singing an hour later. . . .

## « STRANGE, BUT TRUE »

AS a general thing when we add something to something we get something. This sounds so ridiculously simply as to be axiomatic. But recent experiments have proven that this is not necessarily always the case. For in the case of sounds it has been proven that when two sounds of a certain pitch are produced the net result is silence. Also in recent lighting tests it has been demonstrated that two beams of light can be produced in such a manner that they neutralize each other and the net result is darkness. These are indeed paradoxical demonstrations, but as yet no one has succeeded in adding two and two in a manner that totals zero.

\* \* \*

You've probably heard and read a lot about the fourth dimension. H. G. Wells, the old master of Fantasy and Science Fiction dwelt on that theme in many of his most popular stories. Many theories in connection with the whereabouts of this mysterious dimension have been advanced but Science has not as yet accepted any of them. However, those who deny the existence of a fourth dimension might have a little difficulty explaining a phenomenon which occurred more than sixty years ago on the Kansas Pacific R. R. In 1860, a freight train of thirty cars started on a run and disappeared completely. No trace of it, or its crew, has ever been discovered to this day. No one has ever advanced a logical theory as to this

mysterious disappearance, so who knows? Would it be too fantastic to suggest that the fourth dimension might be the answer to this baffling problem?

\* \* \*

Those who have had the misfortune to encounter at close hand that deceptively innocent-appearing animal, the skunk, have every reason in the world to nurture a feeling of violent ill will toward the little pest.

In all fairness, however, it must be pointed out that the much-maligned and odorous property of the lowly skunk has been instrumental in saving the lives of countless miners. For scientists have chemically reproduced this offensive odor in the compound *butyl mercaptan* and it is extensively used in large western mines where fire alarm bells could not possibly be heard over the noise of the machinery. A few drops of butyl mercaptan dropped in the air-circulating system warns the miners almost instantly of fire or cave-in or similar dangers. So the next time you catch a whiff of attar of skunk on the breeze, just remember it's an ill wind that blows no good.

\* \* \*

And speaking of odors it might be well to point out that practically every pleasant odor known to mankind can be synthetically created from coal tar, the black, acrid-smelling liquid obtained from the distillation of bituminous coal.—P. F. Costello.

# THE MAN WHO MURDERED HIMSELF

by DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

“SOMETIMES,” Interplanetary Inspector Carson told the silent room, “I wish I had myself a nice quiet sane job driving a space truck. This streamlined deduction is enough to drive a guy whacky.”

Gloomily, he inspected the paper weight in his hand. The thing was a curio, an antique—a small, fat little elephant encased in glasscade and bearing the legend “GOP CONVENTION, 1940”. Carson turned it over in his hand, regarding it wistfully.

“Wish I was back five centuries,” he mused. “The boys had it easy then, if they’d only known it. Perry Mason, Nero Wolfe, Nick Carter, yeah, even Sherlock Holmes—what a snap they had!”

He sighed heavily, and pushed a button on his desk. In an instant the light below his telaboard glowed crimson, and the cherubic face of Brisk Haynes, his assistant, appeared.

“Yeah, Chief,” Haynes said cheerfully. “Ready to go?”

Carson sighed again. “Might as well. Haven’t figured out a single angle but we might as well.” He rubbed the bald spot on the back of his head.

“Meet me on the roof runway.” He flicked the button, and the face of his assistant disappeared. . . .

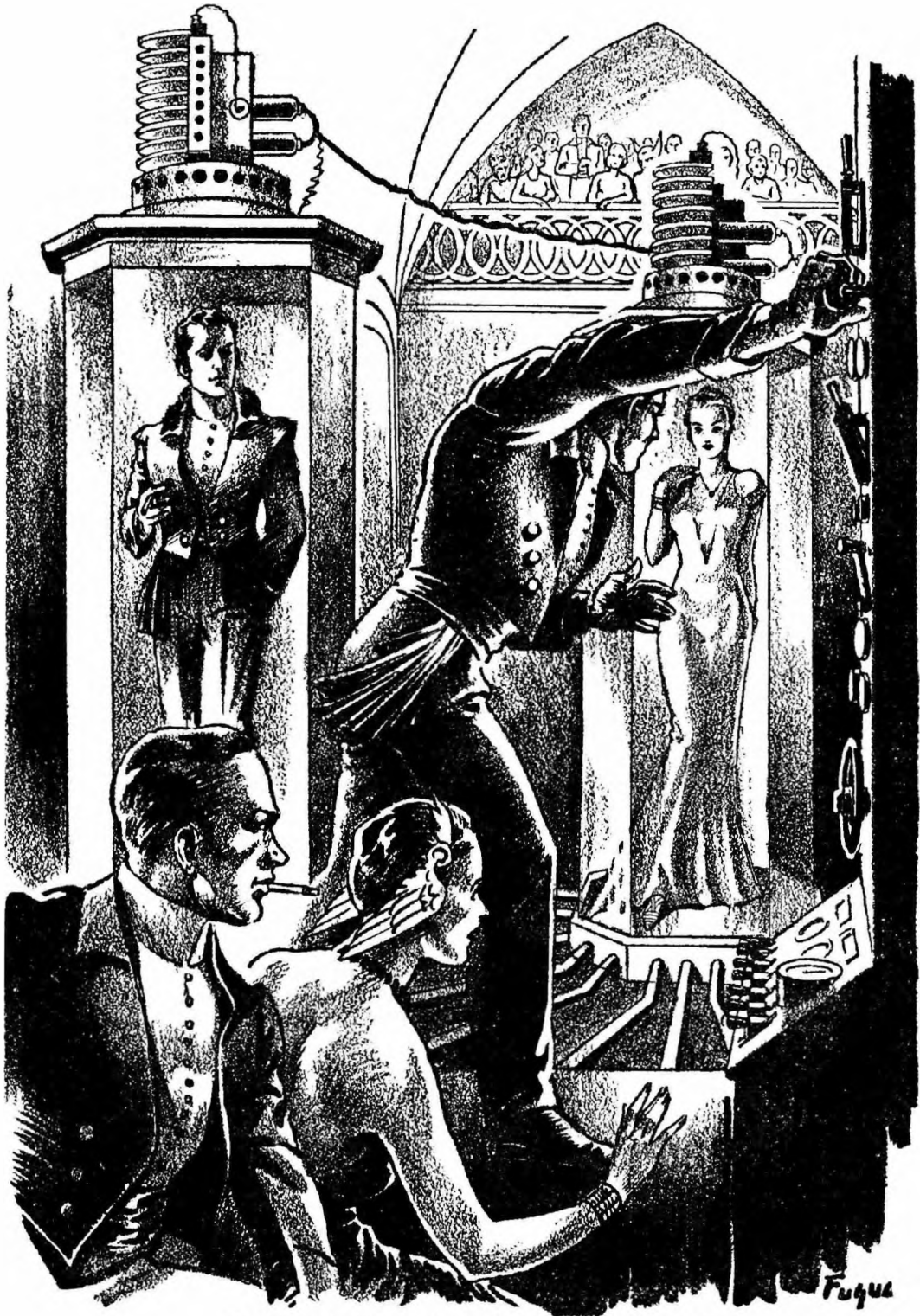
“The way I see it . . .” Brisk Haynes began, when he and Carson were comfortably seated on the space train headed for Los Angeles.

“There’s only one way to see it,” Carson cut in dourly. “We haven’t got a thing on this bird. We can go to the house, yeah. We can make a check, yeah. We can ask questions, yeah. But we don’t find out anything. And all on account of this damned streamlined world. A bunch of idle rich are having a party in this fellow Dole’s home. They’re drinking pretty heavy, sopping up an imported brand of planet punch, and someone gets the bright idea that they should play games.”

Haynes remained expectantly wordless, although he knew the case as well as his Chief.

“This guy Dole,” Carson continued, “is Corporate President of Spaceways Science Institute. He remembers that his company has developed a new wrinkle which they’ve been going to put on the market. It’s built around that recent body-switching thing-a-ma-jig.”

**A man was dead. You couldn't say he had murdered himself. That's just suicide. But what if the man wasn't really "himself"?**



The highlight of the party was the identity-switching machine

"Yeah," Haynes agreed. "It's been scientifically accepted for nearly a year."

"Scientifically accepted," Carson mimicked. "Damn, how I hate that phrase. It's so typical of this day an age. They develop a whosis that'll enable two people to switch bodies and no one even bats an eye over it. Just take it for granted—like that." He snapped his fingers.

"What's eating you, Chief?" Haynes asked bewilderedly.

Carson glowered at his assistant. He fished into his pocket and brought forth the tiny elephant curio.

"This thing," he said, "has made me sick. It's made me realize whatta snap the dicks had back then. Science, high-gear living. Bah, I'm getting sick of it."

Haynes remained silent, but grinned inwardly. His Chief was probably the keenest scientific Inspector in the Interplanetary Police. These periodic outbursts in which he longed for the return of "the good old days" were just a steam outlet for him.

"So," Carson went on, stuffing the curio back in his pocket. "This guy Dole—like I say—remembers that his company has made some pretty snappy strides in this body switching stuff. A perfect party game for the idle rich, see? Give them a thrill. Let them fool around with something that's been only used scientifically up until now."

Haynes nodded. "Uhhuh."

"He calls his laboratories in New York," Carson continued. "In an hour they've got all the necessary equipment out in Los Angeles, so that Dole and his ritzy chums can switch their pie-eyed bodies around for an evening's entertainment." He grimaced. "Great stuff, letting stinkos like them fool around with that sort of thing."

"Must have been some brawl,"

Haynes mused. "I'd kind of like to try it myself. Think of me in another body."

"Skip it," Carson said caustically. "It's bad enough as it is. Then he added: "And, incidentally, there won't be any more of that sort of thing. Not after what happened. I got in touch with Earth Commissioner this morning and got him to put a ban on the body-switch business for any purposes other than science experimentation."

"Kill joy," Haynes growled.

"I was summing up the case," Carson said acidly. "So, to get on with it, they get this body-switch business going at the party. It's great stuff. Mrs. Rujerfitt has a swell time running around in the body of Mr. Muchdough. Hilarious and all that. Up to a certain point. And that point is when they come to switch back bodies."

"They all got their own bodies back," Haynes put in.

"Yeah, all but Dole and another guy—a fella named Sturgess. They're walking up on the roof garden part of the time. Both of them are tanked. Dole is in Sturgess' body, and Sturgess is in Dole's. That's when Sturgess, in Dole's body, decides to walk the ledge on the roof. Dole, in the body of Sturgess, bets him he can't."

"Well?" Haynes knew the answer, but he also knew he was supposed to ask.

"He can't," Carson remarked tersely. "While he's weaving along the edge, he falls off."

Haynes frowned. "Dammit, now I'm mixed up. *Who* falls off?"

"Sturgess falls off," Carson said. "Sturgess in Dole's body. And that's the end of Sturgess, and of Dole's body. That's how come Sturgess and Dole don't get a chance to switch back. That's how come Dole is stuck with his chum's body right now. That's how

come we gotta run our legs off making an investigation—because Dole, in Sturgess' body, pulls wires with the Commissioner to have the thing certified and cleared."

Haynes sighed. "Now I'm twice as muddled."

"Then wait till we're there," Carson answered. . . .

CARSON and Haynes entered the luxurious study of Martin Dole several hours later. They had been admitted by a squat, Venusian house-boy who disappeared, leaving them alone in the room.

"Some joint," Haynes remarked. "Wish I was one of the idle rich. If I was, I'd retire, take me an inter-planetary cruise ship and find some nice—"

"I've been here once before," Carson broke in. He was looking at the book-cases, at the trophies and knick-knacks along the tops of them. "Used to know Dole's old man before he died a few years back." He frowned. "Never thought his worthless son would get himself into this kind of a mess. But that's this str—"

"Streamlined world," Haynes finished for him, grinning.

Carson glowered, removing his coat and placing it along the back of a chair.

"Didn't see young Dole's wife around. She must be going a bit daffy over it all."

"Wouldn't blame her," Haynes began. "I know if I—"

He was interrupted by the sound of the door behind them being opened. They both wheeled, to see a tall, blond moustached fellow standing there. He was dressed in an ill-fitting smoking robe.

"How do you do," he said. "You're Carson, I believe?" He spoke to Carson in a jerky fashion, and his face

was strained.

"This is Haynes, my assistant," Carson replied. "And I take it that you're Martin Dole."

The tall blond nodded. "Yes, but looking a bit differently since the tragedy."

"You mean that the body you happen to be wearing at the moment happened to have once belonged to a fellow named Sturgess, eh?"

Dole nodded, and sat down gesturing Carson and Haynes to chairs across from him.

"Yeah," Carson's voice contained no sympathy. "I know all about it. Some party, eh?"

The lines on Dole's face—or, rather, on Sturgess'—grew tighter, and he gulped nervously. He looked like a man on the point of a complete breakdown.

"We were drinking heavily," he said. His voice was husky. "I never would have hit on such an idea if we hadn't been. I realize now how foolish, how horrible—"

"But it's too late now," Carson broke in calmly. "Perhaps you can tell us what happened on the roof."

Dole seemed to take a grip on himself.

"You'll excuse my state of nerves, gentlemen," he began. "This having a different body, plus the fact that your very best friend was killed through your own foolishness, can play hell with you." His hands trembled slightly. Then:

"It was after our switching of bodies. As I said, I'd been—we all had been—drinking heavily. Sturgess and I decided to take a breath of air up on the roof. He was in my body and I was in his."

Carson nodded. "Obviously. You still are."

"Well," Dole went on, "we were

alone up there, kidding one another rather drunkenly about the deficiencies of our respective bodies. I told him that being in his body made me realize how fine my own body was, and all that sort of thing. He said that my body couldn't stand liquor as well as his. He said he'd prove it by walking the ledge. We were drunk. I let him. He fell!" Dole's last words seemed to have been husked from him, and he put his head in his hands, shaking.

"He fell," Carson echoed, "in your body. You were left, trapped in the body of Sturgess, so to speak."

Dole nodded. "I have to have this thing cleared up. My wife and all my friends know, of course. And I don't see how we can keep from unfavorable publicity. But I must go on—even though I've a different body now. I had the Commissioner send you down here to give the accident as clean a bill of health as possible. You can talk to any other people who were at the party, if you'd like. But, somehow, things have to be regulated. I have to go on—" his words trailed off lamely.

**C**ARSON rose.

"It won't be necessary to talk to any of them. Got in touch with six or seven by telaboard this morning. Their stories seem the same. Sturgess' death was undoubtedly an accident. You're right about the publicity, there'll be plenty of it. I'm sorry, for I knew your father. But you have it coming to you."

Dole nodded.

"I know I have." His voice was a half sob.

Carson had advanced to the bookcases, was reaching for his coat, which he'd thrown over a chair, when he paused. He picked a tiny knife off the shelf, turning it over in his hands.

"An odd piece," he remarked. "You

must have been a collector, like your father."

Dole nodded.

"I got that in Titan," he acknowledged. "Picked up most of that stuff during my interplanetary travels."

Carson nodded, eyes searching the shelf until he reached out and brought down a tiny earthen mug. He held it out.

"This, too, I suppose?"

"Yes," Dole acknowledged. "Picked up that piece while I was on a trip through Juno." He seemed suddenly impatient, and a little puzzled.

Carson picked up his coat, started to turn, then reached for the shelf once more.

"Say," he murmured, "this thing is really odd," he held out a piece to Dole. "Where did you get this?"

Haynes, who had been waiting at the door, started to say something, then clamped his jaws.

Dole had risen. He looked at the object Carson held in his hands.

"Oh that," he shrugged. "It has a little value. Got it on a trip through Venus. It was given to me by an old—"

But Dole got no farther. Carson had drawn an atomic pistol from inside his coat.

"Hold that so-and-so!" he snapped to Haynes. "We'll need him for the murder of Martin Dole!"

Haynes acted quickly, and after a brief scuffle, had the prisoner in handcuffs. . . .

**C**ARSON and Haynes were on the space train, heading home from Los Angeles. Now and then Carson's assistant looked at him with a sort of speculative awe.

"That was a neat trick, Chief," Haynes said at last. "But how in the hell did you dope it out?"



Carson finished lighting a rank Venusian cigar.

"Simple," he grunted. "When I got in touch with the rich rascals who'd been at Dole's party, I found out that there was a certain vagueness about the events during and after the body-switching. They were all so drunk that everything was hazy, and anything would have gone by them without their knowing it. Then, too, the accident on the roof seemed too pat."

Haynes nodded.

"So a little checking on the telaboard revealed that this Sturgess guy was nuts about Dole's wife, and vice-versa. Sturgess didn't have much dough, so he couldn't take Dole's wife and keep her in any style. She's expensive. The body-switch gave them their chance."

"Yeah, but—" Haynes began.

"As I was saying," Carson glared. "The body switch gave them their chance. Sturgess and Dole's wife had stayed pretty sober.

"Sturgess was clever. Clever enough to know that such a wild scheme might work. So he and Dole didn't switch bodies. While Dole was drunk, Sturgess—pretending that he'd switched with Dole—took Dole up on the roof and pushed him off.

"But they hadn't changed?"

"Of course not. Only the people at the party thought that they had. They

thought that Dole was in the body of Sturgess. But he wasn't. It was Sturgess just as he'd always been. However, he pretended to be Dole, now."

"But how—" Haynes began.

"Willya listen?" Carson barked. "Sturgess was smart, he knew almost everything about Dole. Everything down to tiny personal habits. He must have suspected we were trying to trap him when I forced him to identify the knick-knacks on the mantel. Only Dole would be able to do so, and remember them rightly."

"But didn't Sturgess identify them?" Haynes asked. "Those first ones, I mean?"

Carson shrugged.

"How in the hell do I know? He was probably making it up as he went along. But when I showed him this," Carson dug into his pocket and pulled forth a tiny object, "and he pretended to remember where he'd gotten it, I knew it was Sturgess and not Dole."

Haynes looked at the little curio in Carson's palm. An antique, a little elephant encased in glass. It bore the legend, "GOP CONVENTION, 1940."

Carson sighed.

"They had it soft in those days—Nero Wolfe, Perry Mason, yeah, and even Sherlock Holmes!"

The End.

## « « FANTASTIC ODDITIES » »

### POPPING OFF

Although few people are aware of it, almost any material substance has the potentiality of explosion. Some of the most unexpected explosions of odd substances have occurred in freshly mined diamonds, elephant ivory that has been suddenly chilled, and dried milk dust!

### COUNTING ATOMS

The principle by which atoms are counted is not different from that used by a farmer who wishes to count the sheep in a large flock? The sheep herder counts the sheep in a carefully measured square and then multiplies that figure by the area the herd covers. In measuring atoms the scientist first measures a small hole in a screen.

Then the so-called "alpha particles" which are really helium atoms, are bombarded against this screen from a measured surface of radium. By this method it has been ascertained that a cubic centimeter of helium gas contains (take a deep breath now) 2,560,000,000,000,000,000 atoms. Figures like these are meaningless to use for our minds balk at the attempt to visualize their almost infinite scope. Their unbelievable enormity can better be appreciated by means of this illustration. If the atoms of helium gas in a pellet the size of a pea pod, were to be released at the rate of a thousand a second, about two thousand million years would have elapsed before the last atom escaped!

**D**EIMOS was the strangest little man Officer Gilbert had ever seen. He fished him out of the lake, drenched, teeth chattering and face as cold and gray as the dawn. Scrambling up the pier ladder he staggered to his feet, then looked around in bewilderment at the maze of docks, the shipping gear and the mist-shrouded city skyline beyond.

Gilbert blinked his eyes incredulously. He could have sworn that he had seen the little man swim in—as if from beyond the lake horizon. *But there was no boat out there!* Not even a drifting log!

“What the hell were you doing out there?” he demanded. “Don’t you know there’s an ordinance against swimming around the docks?”

The little man clenched his fists to control the involuntary chattering of his teeth. His jaw undershot his face like a spade and it grew rigid as he tried to speak.

“The volcano!” he gasped. “We’ve

got to warn them! The city will be destroyed!”

Officer Gilbert’s huge frame shook with the latent beginnings of anger.

“Volcano!” he exploded brusquely. “None o’ that now. What’s your name?”

“Deimos,” answered the little man with an accent that was distinctly foreign. “But where am I?” he added hastily.

“Cleveland,” said Gilbert.

“C - C - Clev - land? There was a puzzled light in the little man’s eyes as they swept toward the city’s skyline. Suddenly he grabbed the officer’s arm and began tugging vehemently. “There is no time to lose. We must warn them. East of the city—the volcano.”

“Volcano?” Gilbert grunted. “Say, what the hell is this?”

“It’s going to erupt—the volcano,” Deimos pleaded excitedly. “I saw it erupt and bury the entire city! I managed to escape only in time. But I’ve come back to save the girl and to

**“YOUR city is doomed! Warn the people! The volcano is about to erupt and kill you all!” cried the strange little man who came in . . . .**





Deimos was the strangest little man officer Gilbert had even seen.

warn the people. I tell you we must hurry! It's to the east."

He tugged at the officer's arm in desperation. Gilbert yanked himself free and backed away a step. He scowled suspiciously at the agitated little man.

"There's no volcano around here," he said.

"I tell you there is!" screamed the little man.

Officer Gilbert's eyes narrowed, becoming aware of the little man's clothing. It was of a curious cut: short sleeveless jacket and loose knee-length trousers of a silken material. The shoes seemed to be made of metal.

Suddenly it occurred to the officer to humor the little man.

"Okay, we'll talk about the volcano later," he spoke in a voice normally reserved for children. "Now, tell me, what's your name?"

"Deimos."

"Deimos what?"

"Never mind," the little man answered hastily. "We must warn them of the volcano. Quick!"

"Say, where the devil are you from?" demanded Gilbert.

The little man's lips twisted nervously while his eyes leaped excitedly from the city to the policeman and back.

"I'm Deimos—from the year 2020," he said. "I came back here in a time-piston. It was wrecked and sank into the bay there. I managed to escape and swim into shore. Now will you come?"

Deimos started at Gilbert a moment. The officer watched him in a hawkish manner that brooded ill. The little man edged away nervously. In a flash, he ducked under the big officer's arms and ran up the dock toward the city.

"You can't stop me," he shouted. "I must warn them of the volcano before it's too late again. I'm sane, I tell you!"

His metal shoes clicked over the planking, ringing in the cold morning air. Officer Gilbert's heavier boots thundered behind him. Deimos glanced back over his shoulder for a bare instant. He saw the officer tugging at his pistol as he ran.

Racing across the pier-end, Deimos cut behind a warehouse. He could hear the officer coming, gaining on him. He hurried up a series of stairs, leaped a low stone fence and ran across Lakeside Drive.

Zzzing! a bullet hummed a deathly melody above his head. He swerved to the left and ran with renewed energy. Then, abruptly, he banged into something that was yielding, yet solid. Staggering back, gasping for breath, dizzy from the shock, his befuddled gaze framed the figure of another policeman.

THE pot-bellied turnkey at the Euclid Avenue police station wobbled toward cell number 3. Fitting a key in the cell lock, he swung the door open and turned toward the thin man who followed him.

"He's harmless," said the turnkey. "He gabs a lot. He'll give you a good story, but you'd better be through before the guards come to take him off to the nut house."

"Thanks." The thin man slipped a five to the turnkey. The cell door closed behind him as he entered. A half-smile flickered across his lips as he stared at Deimos.

"I'm Thomas of the Daily Record," he said. "You seem to be in quite a fix. Anything I can do?"

"Get me out of here!" Deimos suddenly shouted. "They think I'm mad—I'm not! The volcano! Can't they understand it's going to erupt. It's going to blow the entire countryside apart. It'll bury the cities! I must get out!"

He began shaking the bars in the cell

door with all his strength.

"Take it easy," said the reporter. "What the hell is this all about?"

Deimos threw a scornful glance toward the other and began pacing the floor. He beat one fist into the palm of the other and glared at the reporter.

"You don't believe I've come out of the future either, do you?" he asked. "You think the volcano to the east is harmless, don't you?"

The reporter grinned and flicked a cigarette into his mouth.

"Say, I'll believe anything—if there's a story in it," he said. "Tell me, how'd you get here?"

Deimos halted his pacing for an instant while he shot a penetrating glance at the reporter.

"That's right," he said. "I forget that you people have not reached the scientific level achieved by our men of the twenty-first century. You're ignorant concerning atoms, electricity, time-travel."

"Just as you say," nodded Thomas.

"Well, many generations in the future—the year 2000 A.D. in fact—men discovered a means of traveling into the past, into almost any year of past history. We invented an atomic piston. Change of time is merely a re-arrangement of molecular and atomic structures. Our time-piston takes an atomic structure such as myself from one period of time and thrusts it into the structure of another period . . . but this is perhaps too complicated for your undeveloped science to understand."

"Yeah, get on the volcano. We haven't much time," said the reporter, glancing through the cell door to see if anyone approached.

"Using a time-piston, although they're not perfected yet in 2020, I set my time meter," Deimos continued.

"Time meter?"

"Yes," Deimos nodded abruptly.

"It's a small, octagon shaped meter with dates engraved on it. It's attached to the outer surface of the piston, a capsule-form machine. With it we set the period of journey into the past. I arrived here, or a smaller city to the east of this. It was near the volcano."

The reporter arched his brow quizzically.

"Which volcano?" he asked.

"You ought to know," Deimos snapped. "At the moment of my arrival it was smoking and throwing flaming bits of rock into the sky as it is doing at this very moment. The people of the city, however, seemed undisturbed. They did not realize . . . in fact, you don't yet realize what horror is going to sweep down upon you."

The little man's face suddenly turned pallid. Grasping the cell bars, he rattled them desperately.

"I've got to get out," he screamed. "Someone has to believe me! I must save her!"

THOMAS, the reporter, leaped to the little man's side. "Calm down," he snapped. "Who's this woman you're talking about?"

"Will you help her? Will you warn her?" Deimos asked hopefully.

"Yeah," said Thomas, sinking back on the bunk. "Where is she?"

The little man wrung his hands nervously.

"I neutralized my time-piston near a well at the outskirts of the city just as the volcano spread a shower of soft ashes over the country side. I saw a girl drawing water at the well—a beautiful girl. She wore a silver-bordered tunic and a small band of gold leaves in her dark hair.

"She was at first frightened when I stepped out of my time-machine. Then, upon seeing I was human and a

stranger, she smiled. There was more than friendly interest in that warm smile. . . . If I could have only saved her then, before it was too late! If I had only known then. . . ."

"Better hurry," the reporter interrupted.

"The girl smiled, but suddenly her eyes harbored stark terror! The earth began to shake at its very foundations. The volcano, some distance beyond the city, erupted with a shocking series of concussions. The mountain crown blasted away. Fire swept across the somber sky in hues of angry purple and yellow. People in the city staggered about in horror and agony. Molten rocks thundered into the city like a cannonade blasted out by the artillery of the primal gods.

"I was struck down by the first concussion. I heard the girl at the well scream. Gaining my feet, I stumbled toward her as she ran into a nearby house. Reaching the gateway, my heart sank. Ugly cracks split the walls and roof of the house, throwing down showers of dust and rubble. Then, before my horrified eyes, the building crumbled inward, crushing those within under tons of mortar, brick and volcanic refuse.

"Almost blind, I somehow managed to reach my time-piston. I had only the slimmest margin of time in which to escape; still, the thought of the girl held me there. My mind worked in a desperate, split-second fashion. I had to save her—and there was only one way."

Deimos glanced at the news reporter dramatically. The reporter raised his brows critically, waiting.

"I took a desperate chance," the little man continued as he paced the floor. "I reset my time meter. Reset it for the same year, but so that I might voyage only a day into the past. I planned to rescue the girl and warn the people

in time. It was a dangerous attempt. Our time meters sometimes fail. I took the risk, chancing the margin of error. If my meter failed I could have been plunged again into the midst of the eruption.

"So here I am. I succeeded. I must get away from here! The people must be warned! Another few hours and it will be too late."

DEIMOS halted his story abruptly. He stared at the reporter earnestly. There was something in the news man's expression that unnerved him.

"*You think I'm mad, too! You don't believe I've come back from the future?*" he screamed hysterically.

"Got any proof?" the reporter shrugged.

"Proof!" shouted Deimos. "My time-piston was smashed. It's in the bay. Go fish for it! By that time we'll all be dead!"

"You mean the lake?"

"You must believe me! I must reach her side before the volcano erupts." the little man began pleading. "*You've got to believe me!*"

"I believe anything—if there's a story in it," the reporter answered drily. "I'll be damned if I don't think there's a wow of a story in this. . . ." He stepped to the cell door, glanced up the passageway, then turned toward Deimos. "Listen," he said tensely. "I want a story—a good human interest story. You've got it. The Don Quixote stuff . . . saving a pretty gal . . . horrible menace . . . fighting windmills and so on."

The little man looked puzzled.

"You'll help me?" he cried hopefully.

"Yeah," replied the reporter. "I'm going to park in the outer office. When the asylum guards come, I'll try stalling them as long as I can. You get out of here. I'll tag along once you get out-

side. Where is this volcano of yours?"

"East." Deimos glanced toward the cell window. Beyond it the sky was heavy with soot and smoke belching from a dozen factory stacks. "It's starting—the volcano!" he cried.

"Okay," the reporter cut in. "The walls of this klink are made of soft stone. Here's my nail file and pocket knife. You can dig out one of the window-bars. When you're free, don't go hopping off to a tavern. I want adventure, human interest. And if they catch you—we just ain't never met! Get that?"

The news reporter whistled for the turnkey and a moment later Deimos began working with frantic haste. The stone in which the window bars were impaled was weatherworn and soft. Ten minutes of scrapping and digging loosened one of the bars from its anchorage.

The drop from the window to the wall, then to the deserted alley behind the police station was but a moment's work.

Something jerked his arm violently. It was Thomas, the reporter.

"Step on it. They've gone into your cell," he yelled. "Now, what—little man?"

"We must warn the populace," Deimos cried. His anxious eyes swept toward both ends of the alley. Then he ran with startling speed. "The church . . . the bell tower . . . a peal of warning."

"My God—what a story!" gasped the reporter as he followed the little man through the church entrance and up the spiral stairway into the belfry.

**A** MOMENT later the deep clangor of tower bells pealed through the city. The bell sound increased in violence, clashing upon the ears of the pedestrians in the streets below. Five

minutes . . . seven . . . ten . . . It swelled to a maddening thunder. People clutched their hands to their ears. Others swore at the bells. There had never been a peal rung like that in all the city's history. It became maddening.

In the bell tower, Thomas the news reporter clung to the belfry beams for support and gaped at the most amazing sight he had ever seen. "The little guy's mad—madder than a march hare," he muttered fearfully.

Deimos hung from a bell rope, swung back and forth like a fantastic human pendulum, bringing the bells into motion. He swung from one rope to another in the midst of the most unearthly din. Then he raced to the tower windows, shouting frantic warnings to the people in the streets below. His high-pitched, hysterical voice was engulfed by the iron roar of the bells and became a nothingness cast into the sky.

"The volcano!" he shouted. "Run . . . there's no time . . . save yourselves!"

The bell thunder washed away his voice until his mouth shaped a mere mockery of words.

Suddenly he released the bell ropes and stumbled down the belfry stairs in mad flight. Thomas, the reporter, shook the dizziness from his head and followed. Glancing from a window he saw the police closing in on the church.

Deimos burst from the doorway just as a cordon of blue coats approached.

"You can't stop me!" he screamed, his voice carrying upward to a thin hysterical pitch. He cut across the church yard, eluding the police for a moment.

A police billy whizzed past his head and bounced on the pavement to his right.

"The volcano—" he gasped.

He gained a dozen yards and lost them again as a squad car roared in pursuit. The siren, wailing at his back,

added energy to his desperate sprint eastward. But suddenly, a dozen policemen swept down upon him.

A club crashed with a glancing blow across his neck and shoulders. He staggered. For an instant he was down on his knees. Then, as if forced on by some fanatic inner urge, he crawled on hands and knees.

Finally the police stopped him. It took four men, for Deimos bit and scratched and wriggled, trying to shake them loose. He shouted hoarsely, his voice growing weaker, cracking.

"The volcano—I've got to save her! . . . I must . . . warn . . ."

He struggled as they laced him in a straight jacket. He was raving when they carried him into the asylum ambulance.

"He's the worst case we've had," said one of the guards. "You'd think he had something on his mind."

Reporter Thomas shrugged.

"You'd think he really knew about volcanoes the way he went to bat for one," he observed drily. "But Lord—what a story! I'd give my right eye if a nut like the little guy would escape every day."

**O**FFICER GILBERT rested one large policeman's foot on a capstan and viewed with interest the bustling activity aboard the harbor service barge that slowly chugged away from the docks.

"Where you going, Mike?" he shouted to one of the seamen.

"Work," answered the seaman. He lazily wound in a hauser-line trailing in the water. "Gotta grapple for the buoy that sunk an quarter mile out channel. Want to come."

Officer Gilbert did not respond. He made a funny little noise in his throat as he watched the barge pull out. He was still wondering about the little guy

with the gray face, undershot jaw and funny clothing and this made him think of it.

"Damn odd," he muttered, turning back to his beat. "Where the hell did he swim in from?"

Meanwhile, aboard the service barge, Mike watched the harbor cop's huge figure dwindle upon the dock.

"Poor Gilbert," he grunted, "this cop business ain't much fun." He spat into the lake water and turned his attention to the winches.

A short crane swung over the slate water, grappling hooks dangling from the cable end. Mike jerked the chock from the windlass and let the hooks plunge into the water.

"Drag?" shouted the donkey-man.

"Ten foot . . . fifteen . . . twenty . . . twenty-two . . ." Mike called the numbers mechanically.

Suddenly the crane cable stiffened.

"Contact!" yelled Mike.

The donkey-man set his engine throbbing. The cable grew taut. The engine tugged and slipped, growling like an old dog. Then, abruptly, the grapple slipped. The engine race madly, winding in cable.

In the claws of the grapple as it came to the surface, was a strange object. It had been torn from some larger mechanism. Mike pulled it on deck and examined it; an octogan shaped meter with lines etched upon the metal surface. Dates.

"What are those numbers?" asked the donkey-man.

Mike turned the meter over in his hand. Its pointer had been exactly set upon a certain number—79 A.D. Mike shrugged, handed the meter to the donkey-man who looked at it, then tossed it overboard.

"That ain't part of the buoy," said the donkey-man disgustedly. "Maybe the buoy drifted."



"Yeah," said Mike. "—79 A.D. Gee, that's kind of familiar. I went to school once. Yeah, that date was important . . . ah . . . Yeah, that was when the volcano, Vesuvius, exploded and

covered a whole city at one whack."

"So what?" growled the donkey-man, looking upon Mike's smattering of education with suspicion. "So what?"

"Nothing," answered Mike.

## The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR  
(Concluded from page 6)

*Kansas City, Missouri*—Mr. Joseph T. Cousins spent a cold, gray dawn on the morning following the theft of the furnace from the basement of his home!

*Miami, Florida*—A ten-ton steam roller was stolen from the Homestead Machinery Company!

*Paris, France*—An entire house was stolen during the absence of its owner, who returned the next morning to find nothing but the foundation of his domicile remaining!

*Concord, Massachusetts*—The steeple of the First Parish Church in Concord was looted of \$500.00 worth of gold leaf which had served as its proud and gleaming adornment!

What is this, a gang of interplanetary, or extra-dimensional, thieves? Sometimes we wonder why we publish this magazine!

**B**LIND as a bat, you say? Well, you ought to have a bat's ears then! Here's a bit of truth abouts bats that's fantastic enough to bear our editorial scrutiny.

Experiments recently conducted at the Harvard Physics Laboratory show for the first time how bats avoid objects in the dark. In flight, it was proved that they emit a continuous series of shrill cries, on a sound-wave band of between thirty and seventy thousand vibrations per second. Sound echoes reflect back from obstacles ahead, warning the bat to veer aside. The human ear, with a top pitch of twenty thousand vibrations per second, cannot detect these cries.

\$20,000,000.00 found in a shark! Oh, you don't believe it? Well listen to this:

Fishermen and canners along the California coast are now developing a shark liver industry. Pinback, grayfish, bonita, thrasher or whiptail, and leopard sharks have livers rich with vitamin A, but by golly, the soupfin shark tops 'em all! The liver<sup>o</sup>oil, undiluted, or added to other compounds is a potent health restorer.

Rather unironically, these sharks are *not* man-eaters. So maybe *they* have a kick coming!

The industry has more to it than oil, though. Sharkskin is made into shoes and traveling bags; teeth become novel jewelry; fins appeal to the Chinese as soup stock; and shark flesh, finely ground up, "hamburger a la stockyard," is an exceptionally fine livestock feed!

**A**NISEIKONIA. No, it's not a Martian world meaning "keep off the grass." It's a good part of the reason for the bad eyesight of twenty-five million Americans who wear glasses, and thirty-five million more who should. This new eye-trouble with the fantastic name was first discovered in 1934 by Dartmouth research scientists and is now being treated by means of newly developed aniseikonic lenses. The Greeks gave us the word (they seem to have a word for everything even before it's discovered!), aniseikonia meaning "unequal images." It means that each eye sees the object in a different size and shape. (Remember how things look after the third Zombie?)

Symptoms of this defect are headaches, stomach and nerve disorders. A highly complex instrument, like an author's nightmare in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, is used to detect the defect.

So, readers, maybe just seeing this instrument is compensation for having "aniseikonia"!

**J**UST to keep the "merchants of death" happy, the 1917 scarcity of glycerin can now be avoided. They used to get it out of the by-product of the soap-making industry. Now it can be made from petroleum. Now we can go "bang-bang" with no thought of a shortage of the wherewithal of detonation!

**H**ERE'S another item to make the Nazis jealous. We, our scientists, that is, have developed a substitute (ersatz) China wood oil. It's called "tung oil" usually. The substitute is extracted from a bean grown by American farmers.

What is there about tung oil that makes it important? Well, traffic lacquer for highway stripping is made from it. And, as you know, the roads must roll.

The new bean product, however, is superior and almost fifty percent cheaper. Eventually its growth will add \$20,000,000.00 to the income of our farms.

Which reminds us that paltry sum is getting just a bit monotonous. Shark oil, tung oil—science sure is greasy, isn't it?

**H**ERE'S more about U-235. It seems we'll get more than atomic power out of the darn stuff! American scientists have found a way to disintegrate U-235, so that in the process of releasing its power, six different elements are yielded as a by-product. They are: iodine, xenon, cesium, lanthanum, cerium, and molybdenum. Handy discovery, eh?

And with that, we'll be going. This is where we came in. See you *next month*. *Rap*

# MR. DUFFY'S OTHER LIFE

by ARTHUR T. HARRIS

**How many of us said: "If I had my life to live over, and knew what I know now, I'd do much differently!"? Mr. Duffy said that too, but . . .**

WITH a scowl on his face *this* big, Sam Duffy stalked grumpily into the dining room.

"Oh dear," murmured the long-suffering Mrs. Duffy, half aloud, "Sam's had another bad day at the office."

"What's that?" growled Duffy, his head jerking up. "Always that infernal mumbling. It's enough to drive a saint to drink."

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Duffy said meekly. "Yes, indeed."

It was always that way with the Duffys. It had been that way now for the past fifteen years. Because, Duffy thought, his whole life had been a mistake.

He'd wanted to be a doctor; he'd wound up as an accountant. He wanted to marry young into a wealthy family; instead he'd waited till he was thirty-two, and his spouse had been a sweet little home-body, not a glamour girl.

Yes, his whole life had been wasted, and now he was forty-seven and merely another cog in the white-collar machine. And not a very important cog at that.

"I wish you'd fix something that I like, for a change," Duffy complained,

glaring up from a deliciously browned slice of pot roast.

"But you *ordered* a roast this morning!" Mrs. Duffy squeaked desperately.

"Well, it's overdone! Maybe it's under-done! Anyway, it's lousy!" Duffy barked, and went into the living room to punish his five-cent cigar.

Mrs. Duffy sighed unhappily and began clearing away the dishes. Something had come over Duffy, of late. Nowadays he even growled in his sleep.

The doorbell, ringing timidly, broke into her morbid thoughts. A young man was on the porch; a young man lugging a funny looking contraption, a heavy, boxlike affair which looked like a cross between a radio and a small-scale X-ray machine.

Mrs. Duffy eyed him nervously.

"We really don't need anything today," she apologized: "Maybe you can come back next week—"

The young man smiled at her reassuringly and walked inside.

"What the hell do you want?" came a bellicose roar, as Duffy came charging into the hallway. "Beulah, what



Mr. Duffy stared into the whirling mirror in amazement.

is the meaning of this?"

"I really don't know," cried his flustered wife. "I tried to tell him—"

"It isn't her fault, you know," the young man said abruptly, calmly, in fact quite charmingly. "I have to make a demonstration tonight. I'm sure everything will turn out all right."

He was a blond young man, and he cast a spell as intangible as the quiet challenge of his steady blue eyes. Duffy, glaring at him, swallowed a couple of times.

"Well, be quick about it," he growled. "But I'm telling you right off the bat, you're wasting your time. I'm broke."

The young man turned to the open-mouthed Mrs. Duffy and said:

"I'll only be with your husband a few moments," he explained.

"Oh!" breathed the browbeaten spouse. Taking the hint, she scurried back to her dishes.

**I**N the living room, the young man cleared ashtrays and bric-a-brac from an end table. In their place he plumped down the odd-looking contraption and plugged it into a wall socket.

"Now," he said, turning to the truculent Duffy, "Mr. Duffy, step closer, please. I want you to examine this time-machine."

"A time-machine?" gasped Duffy. "You mean—it *can* be done?"

The young man smiled knowingly.

"You will see," he said softly.

Duffy gasped. It was all true, then. Each night for years, after Mrs. Duffy had trooped forlornly off to bed, he'd delved deep into the pages of science fiction magazines.

He'd found solace in imagining himself as a future Dictator of the Spaceways, zipping across the void in streamlined rocket ships as a conquer-

ing hero. And now, God forbid, pseudo-science had turned right around and was paying him off in its own coin!

He goggled at the apparatus. It had an amazingly intricate hodge-podge of condensers, tubes and connecting wires. A circular disk like a loudspeaker, with a little central knob below it, was affixed into the front panel.

But it was like no loudspeaker Duffy had ever seen. The cone was plated with tiny circular mirrors, and in the very center was a little bulb, which looked like the conventional electric-eye.

Duffy stared and stared. Why, with this machine he could live his life over, correct his mistakes. Knowing what he knew now, he could . . .

His eyes grew wide with incredulity. And as they gazed into the cone, fascinated, the young man, with a little flick of his hand, turned the knob.

The bulb began to glow, waveringly at first; then it shone forth with all the brilliant, coruscating colors of a magic spectrum. The circular mirrors reflected back the color-waves in a kaleidoscope of ever-increasing tempo.

A kaleidoscope that began, gradually, to march back through the years, projecting a series of pictures, now dim and now clear, in which Duffy saw himself again as a man of forty, a bridegroom of thirty-two—and a young man of eighteen, good-looking, ambitious, eager.

\* \* \*

"**S**AM," said his father worriedly, "I don't think you should do it. Your mother and I, we've got the money for you, yes. Been saving it for you since you were a little shaver. But now—well, things just haven't worked out that way."

Sam Duffy's eyes glowed challengingly.

"Dad, I've set a goal for myself, and

nothing is going to stop me. I'm going to medical school, I'm going to be a doctor, and I'm going to marry a rich girl, so she can set me up in practice."

"On Park Avenue?" snorted his father, resenting the boy's calculating attitude.

"Why not?" said young Sam Duffy. "I've got what it takes!"

His father's eyes were bitter.

"That's just it, Sam. You're bright, yes. But not thorough. You do things too much in a hurry. You're impatient; you hate to grind away at a job. Being a doctor, son, is the toughest job in the world. You've got to be so darn careful what you do."

Sam's eyes were ice cold, determined.

"But it's still my money, isn't it?" he purred.

THE DEAN OF the College of Medicine looked up as Sam Duffy, twenty-six years old, strode confidently past the door.

"Duffy," said the dean kindly, "I thought it might be well to have a little talk with you. You know, there's a lot more to being a doctor than knowing anatomy and various diseases and the right medicines to prescribe."

"Have I failed in any of my final tests?" Duffy sneered politely.

The dean's mouth hardened.

"You know you haven't. The point is, you do just enough work to get by. You're brilliant, Duffy—that's the trouble. I ought not to recommend you for graduation, but I can't help myself. You've done all the required work. But that's just it. That's all you've done."

He eyed the arrogant young man earnestly, worriedly.

"Duffy, it's the *extra* work, the *extra* care that makes a good doctor. Just getting by is not sufficient. You've got to be thoroughly competent in the

bargain. Because, Duffy, the medical world will allow you just one mistake. Just one. After that—"

Duffy's lips curled sarcastically.

"I don't intend to make mistakes," he said. "I don't intend to be just another medical mediocrity. I'm going to the top! I've got everything planned out, and that's the way it's going to work. Of course, if I should be prevented from graduating"—he sneered.

The dean went back to his papers. He rifled through the official records of Sam Duffy, medical student.

"You will graduate," he said coldly, with a gesture of dismissal. "God forbid I'm going to recommend you."

AT LEAST A hundred young medical students thronged the balcony of the operating theater at Central Medical Center.

There was to be a great brain operation today. An operation on Cornelius van Schuyler, the city's leading banker. And van Schuyler's son-in-law, thirty-five year old Dr. Samuel Duffy, had elected to perform the difficult surgery.

"Perform" was the right word. Every act of brilliant Dr. Duffy was a curtain-raiser all its own. He had the finest society practice in town. He moved in a fast-living, hard-drinking social set—yet was always at his Park Avenue office punctually at ten to minister to the complaint of overweight dowagers.

"Sam," said his chief assistant, an able surgeon ten years Duffy's senior, "don't you think this brain job is—well, a trifle risky?"

He eyed Duffy shrewdly, apprehensive. Sam Duffy had been out the night before, and he showed it this morning rather worse than usual. His eyes were red-rimmed, a little cloudy. His fine tapered hands hung a little uncertainly at his sides.

"Risky?" laughed Dr. Samuel Duffy, who had not had a tough operation in three years. "Hell, I did harder jobs than this when I was an interne. Besides, I promised the old guy I'd get him well quicker than that mushroomed brain specialist he first consulted."

"That's just it," muttered the assistant under his breath. "It's too much of a family matter."

"You think I've lost my touch, eh?" sneered Duffy, with a sideward twist of his mouth, as the two of them marched into the operating theater.

**"DUFFY!"** barked the senior resident at Central Medical Center.

An old man of forty-seven looked up from his pail and mop. His face was lined and bitter, his blue eyes a little vague, a little frightened, as though life had given him an uncommonly raw deal. Hair straggled in grayish-white strings down his frayed attendant's collar.

"Yes, sir," said Sam Duffy nervously. "Is—is something wrong."

"Hell, no," said the senior resident gruffly. Then, a little more kindly, "Duffy, the woman in Room 308, Ward Ten, passed out a couple of minutes ago. Clean the place up will you, like a good fellow? It's been reserved for another patient."

"Yes, sir," said Duffy meekly, and scuttled off to his task.

The resident shook his head as he turned to the young interne who had been admitted for duty that day.

"A damn shame," the man who was Duffy's boss explained. "That fellow Duffy was once the highest-priced doctor in town."

The young interne's mouth opened.

"Huh? *Him* a doctor!"

"That's right. Samuel Duffy, M.D. And don't think his license has been

revoked, either. He can still practice. Only—well, the poor guy is absolutely scared of his own shadow. He wouldn't even take a cinder out of your eye."

The interne stared down the corridor after the hurrying Duffy.

"That's the damndest story I ever heard."

"Yep." The resident pursued his lips. "Duffy's only forty-seven, but he looks and acts like he was sixty. You see, when he got out of medical school, he worked his way into the social set—got mixed up with a blonde named Gloria van Schuyler.

"The girl's old man set him up in practice. Duffy did well for himself, too, made a young fortune. But you know that society crowd—hard drinkers, anything for a party and a laugh. Well, Duffy let his tough cases go to his assistant, concentrated on dowagers who fell for his 'bedside manner'."

"So he lost his touch," surmised the young interne.

"That's it," nodded the senior resident. "The payoff came when old van Schuyler came down with a brain tumor. Duffy insisted on operating himself. Well, his hand slipped. The old boy died on the operating table. The story is, Duffy had been out on a bat the night before."

The interne thought that over for a bit. Then his brows formed a V.

"But heck—how come he's working here now, just another hospital drudge?"

The senior resident's eyes were moody.

"He went downhill like a sky-rocket, after that mistake. Practice folded up like an accordion. That wife of his ran off with a gigolo. All his fair-weather friends gave him the gate. So—well, he's been a cleaner here for the last eight years, I think."

The young interne put his hand on

the other's sleeve.

"Say, Doctor—you certainly know the whole story."

"I ought to," the senior resident said softly. "My Dad told it to me years ago, when I was going to medical school. Dad, you see, was the dean of the medical school. In fact, Samuel Duffy was once one of his most brilliant students."

\* \* \*

"SAM," exclaimed Mrs. Duffy as she came into the living room, her supper dishes stacked away, "aren't you feeling well?"

Sam Duffy started as though coming out of a trance. A trance?

He glanced frightenedly, furtively about the room. There was no time-machine in sight. Everything was exactly as it had been for more nights, and more years, than he could remember. Yet somehow he knew that he had been through a terrible experience—

Yes, he remembered now. He'd sent the young man away. Shouldn't have done that. Should have smashed the machine. It could drive men mad . . .

"Why, where is that young man?" Mrs. Duffy looked nervously at her husband. "I didn't hear him leave." She glanced about the room, but failed to see the odd-looking contraption the young man had brought with him.

"Gone," gasped Duffy.

"Oh," said his much-abused spouse, not too brightly, "he didn't sell it to you, after all."

Duffy shook his head, as though to clear it of thoughts his wife would never understand. Then, to Mrs. Duffy's sudden fright, he took her by the arm and looked into her face with eyes that were utterly strange, utterly unfathomable.

"Beulah," he began in a strained voice, "how old am I?"

"Why—forty-seven."

"And—and my hair isn't really white yet, is it?"

Poor Mrs. Duffy shivered. "Goodness gracious, no! You've thick black hair, even if it is a little thin in spots."

"And—and I haven't any white uniforms, have I? You know—like a street cleaner wears?"

Mrs. Duffy suddenly understood everything.

"Samuel Duffy, I just knew I should not have bought that whisky for my cold yesterday! Where did you find it—in the medicine chest.

Duffy took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"It hasn't been such a bad life, has it, dear?" he pleaded, his voice hoarse and urgent.

"Why Sam Duffy!" exclaimed his long-suffering spouse. "I do declare, you must be bewitched! Going sentimental on me, and after all these years!"

"Sentimental?" asked Duffy. Then he nodded. "Not a bad ideal!"

He grabbed her and kissed her.

"Honey," he said fervently, "I'm awful glad you aren't a glamour girl!"

## COMING NEXT MONTH

### EANDO BINDER'S LATEST "LITTLE PEOPLE" STORY

Remember "The Little People," which made such a great hit in our March, 1940 issue? Here's another story of the fascinating little people Binder so aptly portrayed. And the new hero is a little fellow with red hair. Yes, he's Irish, and a fighter who isn't afraid to face the BIG people!

**BIG JUNE ISSUE**

**ON SALE APRIL 20**

# IF THE SUN TURNED GREEN

By Lyle D. Gunn

**O**N DECEMBER 4th of that year, people saw the first sign of the change. The sun was tinged with green!

A few paused to wonder; most hurried on about their day's affairs.

But on the following day the sight was more arresting. Over the great solar orb, as if it were a snake's eye, a thin green membrane had blinked shut!

Through it, very faintly, shone the normal yellow light. As the week wore on, that too vanished. The sun was a solid green disk—like a space-port looking out on some distant corner of space where Nature had run wild!

In the nightmarish glow that had taken the place of accustomed daylight, the alarm of the public grew. There was no word from the great observatories. That silence spread panic. Religious fanatics proclaimed that the Day of Judgment had come!

Meanwhile, another phenomenon went almost unregarded. People expect the unexpected where the weather is concerned. *But the world was steadily growing warmer.*

Christmas parties were held outdoors on verdant lawns. Trees put out new leaves and flowers blossomed in a second Spring. And on New Year's Day, an iceberg was sighted from the boardwalk at Atlantic City!

No longer could the public be kept in ignorance. The polar ice caps were melting!

As the oceans began to rise, hurried orders were given to evacuate all coastal cities. But the task of moving the millions inland produced a crisis in transportation facilities. Food shortages developed—and to the tens of thousands who died of starvation were added those trapped when the first huge tidal waves raced down Manhattan's canyons!

On the high plateaus above the new Inland Sea, refuge was found at last under the green sun. And there science's last un-

certain word was heard. The color of the sun was the effect of increased output of heat—and it was possibly on the way to the "blue heat" point of such stars as Rigel with its temperature of 16000° Absolute!

No one had ever known what maintained the sun's great mass of six billion trillion tons in its fine thermodynamic balance between the opposing forces of gravity and radiation pressure. And now no one could say where a new balance would be found.

But the word of the scientists was not needed to show that the sun was getting still hotter! The plateaus were turning into steaming jungles!

Somehow, civilized man managed to survive that first plunge back to primitive conditions, to hold his own against the beasts that lurked in every cove of giant ferns, the snakes that silently dropped down from overhanging branches. But the temperature kept rocketing, until the surface of the earth became a veritable furnace! No man could breathe that searing air and live!

Then *into* the earth man went, and for a while was safe in burrows beneath the mountains. There he brought forth his children in darkness, tried to preserve his last vestiges of humanity.

*But still the sun grew hotter.*

Visibly now it was expanding, becoming a monstrous shapeless blue-green blob. The face of the earth was one barren, blackened ruin.

*And then the earth itself began to go.*

The very elements that made it up began to fuse! Great fissures opened in the ground and molten metals poured in on man in his last refuge! All life was wiped out. . . .

There is little more to tell. From the space-ships in which a fortunate few had been able to flee far out beyond the orbit of Jupiter, the end was seen as the earth reverted to a glowing, incandescent ball—circling a green sun.



# »»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

---

DAVID V. REED

Author of

MOONS OF DEATH

**I**N responding to your editor's flattering request for some of the details of my sheltered and moribund life, I have been careful first to consult my files of collected autobiographical sketches, written by the leading authors in science-fiction. The experience has made me rather cautious in writing my own.

You have read many of these sketches, and so we probably share the knowledge that our favorite authors are remarkable people. They live in picturesque villas on top of deserted mountains, they collect de-coded Sanskrit, ride unbroken Arabian horses, breed hooded cobras. Their lives, at worst, are fascinating sagas of adventure and romance. Some flew for General Hop in obsolete airplanes, some poisoned the customs guard in Nova Zembla, some lay fever-ridden in the Congo while the native drums beat a hollow tattoo, some caught the hoof-and-mouth disease in Patagonia. Or so, approximately, they say.

I am not necessarily implying that their stories are untrue; on the other hand, I have met some of these remarkable people, and sometimes I think their best fiction lies in their autobiographical accounts. I have in mind at the moment, and it gives me scant pleasure, the beefy image of a certain writer who has, with the aid of a weak Scotch, grown a family tree in five minutes, complete with heraldry and ancestors who include William I through General Lee.

My own life, by comparison, emerges as a fitful series of anti-climaxes. I have only the comfort of knowing that I have stayed resolutely within the bounds of truth. It may not be much, but I haven't the courage to buy a rusty cutlass in a hockshop and pass it off as being an heirloom passed down by great-uncle Dewey, just as the Spaniards came.

I am living at present in a quiet dell within a stone's throw of Rockland Park, a fact of which I am constantly reminded by an incessant shower of stones. My daily tasks, in the winter, consist chiefly of raising turnips which I take to the market each day in a basket woven by my grandmother, who was a Mexican and had little talent for anything else. My other waking hours are devoted to puttering around a collapsible submarine, a ridiculous contraption which will never work, and in which the U. S. Navy has shown a

reasonable indifference.

The rest of the time, a lousy sixteen hours a day, I spend sleeping in a bunny-suit lined with wolf-hair. It isn't very comfortable, but I don't care.

In warmer weather, however, I am really active. I wait impatiently for Spring to simmer and Summer to spring. Then I rise each morning with the thermometer and run straightaway to the woods. Here I listen to the babbling brook until I am disgusted. Then off for a walk through our lovely woods, which extend for almost half an acre in any direction. There must be many interesting stories about our woods, but I have never heard any.

Afternoons I go fishing. It usually takes me about two hours to have all my bait stolen, but I persevere until finally the hook and the rod is gone. Legend has it that our lake is the summer home of several score man-eating sharks, and indeed, once after waking from a brief nap, I discovered that my picnic lunch and one shoe had disappeared too. I have never stopped congratulating myself on the fact that I wasn't wearing the shoe at the time, else I might now be walking with a pronounced limp.

Five o'clock is tea time, and back to my little cottage I scurry, putting up curried prawns and cottage cheese and brewing my precious oriental tea. When it's ready I wait for somebody to come along and drink it, because I hate the stuff, being strictly a coffee fiend. At six, I pour the tea down the well, and with a full day behind me, I now proceed to think seriously of working. I think about it until eight, and then I go to the movies.

And so to bed, secure in the knowledge that at least if my life isn't an interesting one, it isn't healthy either.—David V. Reed.

*(Mr. Reed asked us to publish this little sketch exactly as he wrote it, which we did. However, he neglected to mention a few things in a serious vein, which we'll do. Mr. Reed, who made an instant hit with his "Where Is Roger Davis?" in July '39 AMAZING STORIES, and won the merit prize for that month, has sold almost every yarn he has written, being a polished writer with practically his first professional paragraph.*

*At present he is engaged in radio writing, play-writing, and is planning an invasion of the slick paper fields. He is married, lives in Brooklyn, and will probably die there. He is "New Yorker" clear through. Watch for him in the slicks, and on Broadway. He'll be there!—Ed.)*



## Don't Miss These GREAT STORIES!

★ **DICTAGRAPHS OF DEATH**—by P. F. Costello (Novel). Mr. Wu was just a little Oriental, but there was something fearsome about him... yes, and that something became a mighty force when the Dictographs of Death began recording their grim store of stolen knowledge... stolen knowledge that left men with empty brains!

★ **SECRET OF THE LOST PLANET**—by David Wright O'Brien (Short Novel). Three years of lonely toil were behind him, and now he was to return to Earth. But as he stepped from the relief ship, armed guards closed in... and the treachery of a trusted friend meant a life sentence on a penal moon. What tremendous plot threatened civilization? What was the mystery of the lost planet?

★ **A LOST RACE COMES BACK**—by Don Wilcox (Complete Novel). Three worlds lay side-by-side: the past, the present, the future. And through all three a man and a woman fought their way toward the final happiness that many centuries denied them. Don't fail to read this thrilling story of inter-dimensional worlds!

★ **PLANTS THAT THINK**—by Joseph J. Millard (A Scientific Mystery). A most amazing true story of thinking plants. Is there really such a thing? Is the plant world a world of intelligent beings, with which we may someday exchange thoughts? What activates the strangely deliberate actions of the Venus Fly Trap?

★ **THE MAN WHO FORGOT**—by John York Cabot (Short). When the raiders boarded Johnny Deming's space ship, he saw a sight that was burned into his memory—as his comrades were burned down horribly at his side; but then he forgot. And it meant disgrace and shame, and the life of a fugitive, until he remembered again. . . .

★ **THE FATE OF ASTEROID 13**—by William P. McGivern (Short). Philip Trent, Federation Agent, found something distinctly fishy on Asteroid 13—which had become a potential death trap for every living being on it. Yet they were forced to remain to face destruction, as slaves of a great corporation, until Trent traded places with them. . . .

★ **LONE WOLF OF SPACE**—by Joseph J. Millard and A. R. Sleser (Short Novel). Almost legendary was the reputation of Shulride Larry Buford, the Lone Wolf Musketeer of the void! On the moon, Earth's first line of defense against militant Mars, he fought a lone fighter's battle to thrust back the armed forces of a war-mad planet. He laughed at Death, and Death laughed back. . . . all because of a woman whose love had turned to treachery!

★ **WAR BETWEEN THE WORLDS**—by Frank R. Paul and Henry Gade (Back cover feature and article). What will the space war of the future be? Read this prophetic article of a future possibility—a raid on New York by space ships from Mars. Painted in full color by science fiction's top artist on the back cover!

**AND OTHER THRILLING TALES** and articles by Miles Shelton, Alexander Blade, Joseph J. Millard, and Wallace Quitman!

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# Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself 3 points for each correct answer.

## TRUE AND FALSE

1. Aluminum, a metal, is found free in nature. True..... False.....
2. A physical change is any change which does not alter the chemical composition of a substance. True..... False.....
3. The middle portion of a gas flame is hotter than the tip or outer end of the flame. True..... False.....
4. The law of buoyancy was discovered by Ohms about 240 B. C. True..... False.....
5. Shadow bands are narrow, rapidly moving shadows seen on the earth's surface before and after a total solar eclipse. True.... False....
6. Corona is part of the moon seen only at the time of a total eclipse. True..... False.....
7. A nimbus cloud overhead would mean the chances for rain would be rather slim. True..... False.....
8. Fungi are lower plants without chlorophyll. True..... False.....
9. The first law of magnetic force is that like magnetic poles repel and unlike magnetic poles attract each other. True..... False.....
10. An electric current flows through a copper wire. True..... False.....
11. If it were not for the Hertzian wave radio reception as we know it today would not be possible. True..... False.....
12. An air pocket is a vacuum occurring infrequently in the earth's atmosphere. True..... False.....

## CHANGE OF STATE

*There is no sharp boundary between the physical and natural sciences. Biology depends on physics, physics upon astronomy, astronomy on mathematics, and so on. In the following section you are asked to define a scientific term, and then using these and our additional letters to change them into another scientific term as later defined.*

1. Change water in the form of vapor to the

(Answers on page 145)

science that treats of the laws and conditions of magnetic force.

- ; - - g n - - i - m.
2. Change the mixture of snow or hail and rain to an astronomical optical instrument.  
-----; - - e - c o p - .
  3. Change the word pertaining to bodies at rest or forces in equilibrium to the inherent property in bodies by which they recover their former figure or state after the external pressure, tension, or distortion has been removed.  
-----; e l - - - i - - - y.
  4. Change an element of the tin family to the ratio between light reflected from a surface and the total light falling upon the surface.  
-----; - - b - - o.
  5. Change a device for transforming electrical energy into mechanical energy to an instrument for measuring the intensity of light.  
-----; p h - - - e t e - .
  6. Change a perennial woody plant to a shooting star.  
-----; m - - - o - .
  7. Change a color of the solar spectrum to the capacity of a body for doing work.  
-----; - - - - - y.
  8. Change the periodic rise and fall of the ocean to the distance on the Earth's surface northward or southward from the equator.  
-----; l a - - - t u - - .
  9. Change an alloy of carbon to a secondary planet revolving around a primary one.  
-----; a t - l - i - - .
  10. Change the organ of sight to a hot spring from which water or mud is ejected in a fountain-like column.  
-----; g - - - s - r.

## A BATCH TO MATCH

- |                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. A cyclone at sea.    | 1. Parsley family. |
| 2. Horticulturist.      | 2. Camel.          |
| 3. Hemlock.             | 3. Skull.          |
| 4. Union Jack.          | 4. Typhoon.        |
| 5. New Amsterdam.       | 5. Carnivore.      |
| 6. Meat-eater.          | 6. Luther Burbank  |
| 7. Best conductor.      | 7. Flag.           |
| 8. Sol.                 | 8. Radius.         |
| 9. Compressed carbon.   | 9. Imbecile.       |
| 10. Graphite.           | 10. Chlorophyl.    |
| 11. Half-diameter.      | 11. Silver.        |
| 12. Dromedary.          | 12. New-York.      |
| 13. Retarded mentality. | 13. Coronium.      |
| 14. Green Grass.        | 14. Diamond.       |
| 15. Cranium.            | 15. Pencil.        |

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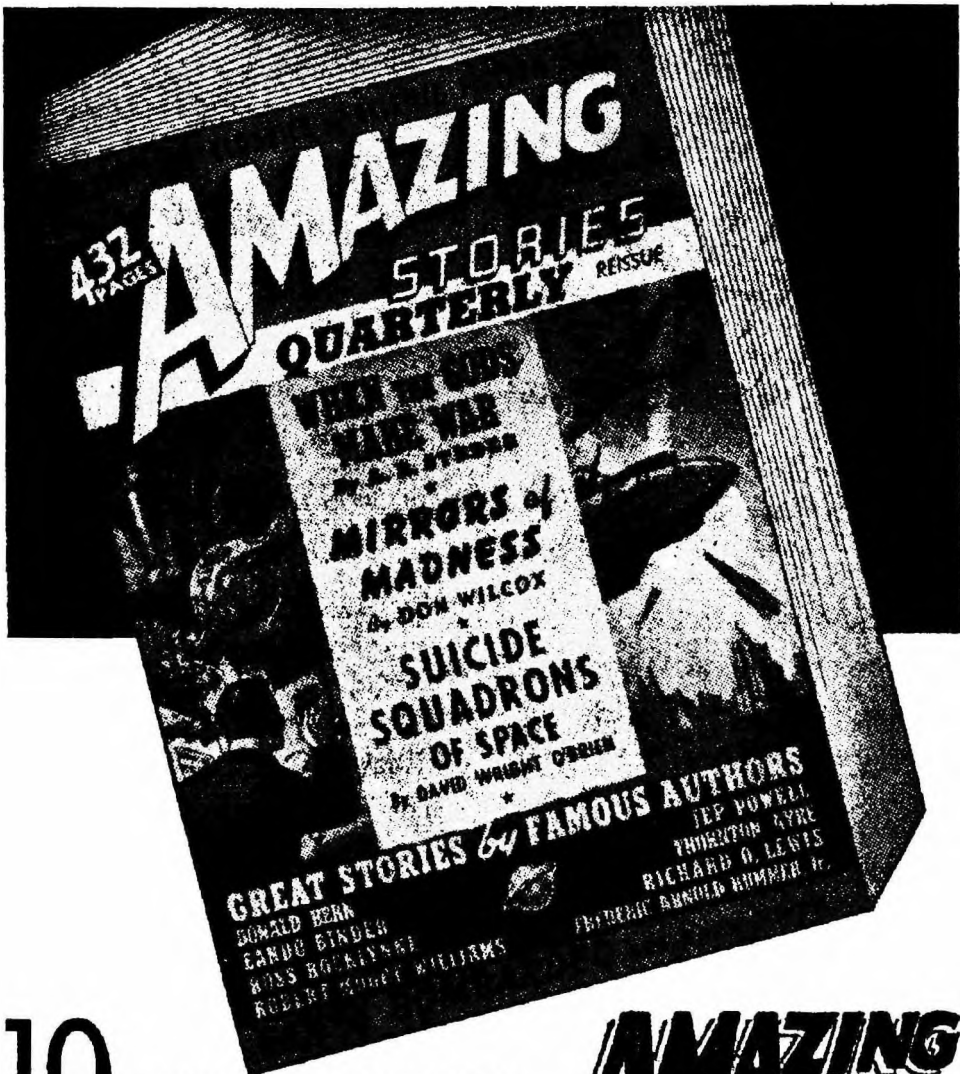
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# READER'S PAGE

## A LADY LIKES US!

Sirs:

I've started reading your magazine lately, and its companion AMAZING STORIES, and I wanted to tell you the stories are simply swell. There's only one thing wrong, I think every issue of FANTASTIC, and at least every other issue of AMAZING, should carry one of Nelson S. Bond's stories. Give us more of Horsensense Hank and Lancelot Biggs, please!

When will the next issue of the large quarterly AMAZING go on sale, and does FANTASTIC have any quarterly issues?

You asked if the readers wanted the Amazon's children to have any adventures. I think it would be a swell idea to have those kids grow up quickly.

I think Oscar of Mars is great also, although I liked the first story about him much better. Don't let Oscar get disappointed the next time he falls in love.

Mrs. Ernest Edmonds,  
Hepler, Kan.

*We're mighty glad you think our stories are good. We try to make them entertaining. Nelson S. Bond will certainly not stop writing about Lancelot Biggs and Horsensense Hank!*

*The next quarterly goes on sale May 14. Now that Fantastic has gone monthly, it seems probable that there will be quarterly reissues. We'll keep you posted.*

*Poor Oscar, he's a Martian. But maybe some of these days, he'll meet a Martian girl, and fall in love with her!—Ed.*

## SWELL COVER—GOOD YARN

Sirs:

It has been some time since I have written to FANTASTIC or AMAZING STORIES, but I haven't missed any issues of either magazines.

One of the best covers on your pulps, I think was on the January Issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, which was made by H. W. McCauley, and for that interesting story, "The Floating Robot," by D. W. O'Brien. It was a swell cover, for a good yarn.

Glenn W. Roberts,  
4427 N. Parkside Ave.,  
Chicago, Illinois.

*We have received so much commendation on that January cover that we are convinced this department will be the hardest we have ever put together—because almost every letter dwells on it!*

*How can we get variety that way?—Ed.*

## IN RE!

Sirs:

In re FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for January, 1941: Cover—Ah! Another compelling cover by McCauley! And a robot with a girldle! Fancy that. The girl is nice, very nice. A better cover than your ninety-nine others!

*The Floating Robot*—The best story in the issue! Probably O'Brien's best to date!

*The Dynamouse*—Had its moments!

*The Vanishing Witness*—A tasty morsel! I mean the heroine. As for the story itself, let me see the original, please, Mr. Rocklynnne?

*The Golden Amazon Returns*—Hmmm! Yes—yes, I see that she did.

*Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher*—Richard O. Lewis—second place snatcher!

*The Horse That Talked*—Ah, ah, ah, Mr. Hamilton! Mustn't strain yourself!

*Illustrations*—Jay Jackson draws the way Thornton Ayre writes! His humans are as shudderingly atrocious as Ayre's use of American slang! Except I like Jackson. He has something all your other artists lack: eye-appeal!

Thanks for bringing Oscar back! And Coblentz! And I'm like Jane Ryan (whoever she is and wherever she lives!): I'd like to see some PURE fantasy, too.

Kenneth L. Harrison,  
1812 S. E. 48th Ave.,  
Portland, Oregon.

*Hey, we just said something about the January cover. Well, we expected to have trouble. But absolutely, readers, if the following letters have been deleted, and you're displeased, that's the reason.*

*About the O'Brien story "The Floating Robot." When we checked up, we were amazed. The story came in first by a wide margin. So it seems we had a grand combination that time!*

*Pure fantasy? How about Wilcox's last two? (one in this issue)—Ed.*

## OOOPS!

Sirs:

Have just finished the March issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and I think it was grand.

First, I want to commet on the cover painting. It was miserable. Why can't you have McCauley and only McCauley do your covers?

I would rate the stories as follows:

1. Death Walks in Washington
2. Secret of the Stone Doll
3. Slaves of the Fish Men
4. Adopted Son of the Stars
5. Beyond the Time Door
6. The Thought Robot
7. Twenty-Fifth Century Sherlock

How's about some hints of future issues?

Harry Urbanus,  
15001 Lannette,  
Detroit, Mich.

*Thanks for the opinion on the March issue, but we walked right into something with the cover, eh? How come? Let's have a more definite explanation of why you didn't like it. How can we know, if you just put thumbs down?*

*Future issues? Well, take the next one for instance. Eando Binder brings back the Little People in "Wanderer of Little Land." Cummings pens "The Druid Girl," and this story is illustrated by McCauley, whom you so enthusiastically demand every month. Jep Powell does "Amazons of a Weird Creation." Polton Cross returns after a long absence with "The Man Who Bought Mars." McGovern has written an unusual robot story that will tickle your fancy, "Sidney, The Screw-loose Robot." But that's enough of the future.—Ed.*

MANY PLEASANT HOURS

Sirs:

Your March issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

was by far one of the best I have ever read. I used to buy your magazine only now and then, but from now on you can depend on me to read it all the time. My favorite stories were as follows: (1) "Beyond the Time Door." David Wright O'Brien turned out a masterpiece in this story. When he is at his best there is not another writer to compare with him for exciting stories. "Adopted Son of the Stars" ranks as my choice for second place. Mr. McGovern's screamingly funny story brought me much pleasure, since I am an invalid and do not get a chance to laugh very often. My third choice is Don Wilcox's "The Secret of the Stone Doll." It was really marvelous, and the last paragraph was one of the most breathtaking "punch" endings I have ever read. Mr. Burroughs rates fourth. His stories are always good, and I used to read them many years ago. "Twenty-Fifth Century Sherlock" was very fine, and I would rate it fifth. I didn't care much for the story about Oscar or the Thought Robot, but maybe other readers will like them. Thank you so very much for giving me so many pleasant hours. I feel sure you will give me many more. God Bless You and good luck for the years to come.

Martin Kenning,  
Chicago, Ill.

*We hope that your pleasure will be increased now that we are publishing FANTASTIC ADVENTURES every month. Our pleasure is as great as yours,*



## VISION in a CRYSTAL!

**T**HERE she was, lithe, lovely—entrancingly beautiful—dancing in the forest in this incredible world in a jewel! And to Lee Blaine, when he saw her in the cheap traveling tent show, she became all that meant anything to him. But infinity lay between their worlds, an infinity that he must cross. Then one day he found the way, and entered a weird world of adventure and danger, and fought for the love of Aurita, the Druid Girl.

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JUNE ISSUE

**FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**

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and we know O'Brien, McGivern, and Wilcox will appreciate your lavish praise of their work. They have some even better stories coming up.—Ed.

DITCH KRUPA!

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for one year now, and I am only twelve, but I think that you should ditch the one—the only—J. Krupa! He can draw machinery well, but when it comes to human figures—?? Robert Fuqua is okay and so is Jackson, I guess, although I don't like his pen technique. McCauley is wonderful. Even for my young innocent mind, that Mac girl was Yum-Yum.

Here is how I liked the stories:

- "The Floating Robot"
- "The Horse That Talked"
- "The Dynamouse"
- "Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher"
- "The Vanishing Witnesses"
- "The Golden Amazon"

Thornton Ayre is getting so he can't write a decent story. The Amazon surprised me. It was lousy!

Anthony Ahearn,  
3170 Valhallo Pl.,  
Bronx, N. Y.

*Krupa will certainly read your letter, and maybe he'll do something to change your mind about his figures. Your editors think that for interior illustration, he is science fiction's finest artist. We have yet to see an artist who can approach his constant excellence. Yes, we praise our own men—but we are only repeating what hundreds of letters say every month. Are you sure you want him "ditched"?*

*Wait'll you see the Mac girl on the June cover!—Ed.*

A-B-C

Sirs:

My two cents concerning the January FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

Cover rates B with me.

Stories, "The Floating Robot" rates C.

"The Dynamouse"—B.

"The Vanishing Witnesses"—C.

"The Golden Amazon Returns"—B plus.

"Dr. Kelton, Body Snatcher"—B.

"The Horse That Talked" is the best in this issue and its rating is A.

Have you any back copies of the AMAZING STORIES Quarterly in your office? I have gone to about ten newsstands looking for it, but my searches were unsuccessful.

A. L. Schwartz,  
229 Washington St.,  
Dorchester, Mass.

*We have no copies of the Fall Quarterly on hand. The Spring issue can be had by addressing the*

# STAY

a wage-slave

## IF you wish

# BUT-

**DON'T** you wish you were like some of your friends who are forging ahead while you stay put? Like it or not, people size you up by what you earn. Is their sizing flattering to you? —Why not *plan* to get ahead, to make more money, to get a raise? If you don't know how, perhaps we can aid you as we have so many others. Chances are good that we can help you *boost yourself up* in ways you never thought of. —Thousands will gladly tell you how our planned training helped them—directed their work along *charted* paths to business success, bigger earnings, 10%, 20%, 50%, some even 100% and 200% greater income . . . At any rate, let us send you the inspiring book "Ten Years' Promotion in One." It's FREE! It will surely help you *plan* your next raise whether you ask us to *help* you plan or not. Write us today for the book—the coupon is for your convenience.

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28x4-10-20	1.85	36x4-00-20	2.10
28x4-00-20	1.85	36x4-00-20	2.10
28x4-00-19	1.85	36x4-00-19	2.10
28x4-00-18	1.85	36x4-00-18	2.10
28x4-00-17	1.85	36x4-00-17	2.10
28x4-00-16	1.85	36x4-00-16	2.10
28x4-00-15	1.85	36x4-00-15	2.10
28x4-00-14	1.85	36x4-00-14	2.10
28x4-00-13	1.85	36x4-00-13	2.10
28x4-00-12	1.85	36x4-00-12	2.10
28x4-00-11	1.85	36x4-00-11	2.10
28x4-00-10	1.85	36x4-00-10	2.10
28x4-00-9	1.85	36x4-00-9	2.10
28x4-00-8	1.85	36x4-00-8	2.10
28x4-00-7	1.85	36x4-00-7	2.10
28x4-00-6	1.85	36x4-00-6	2.10
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subscription department. The cost is 25c post-paid.—Ed

FA IS MONTHLY!

Sirs:

I want to compliment you on your front cover on the January issue. It was swell. The simple figures, the simple but clear and distinct lines, the pleasing contrast of the figures in reds, yellows, and whites, and the background in blues. McCauley's doing fine. Keep him on as long as he does work like that.

The best story by far was "The Horse That Talked." The next was "The Floating Robot." The third was "The Golden Amazon Returns."

As a suggestion, why not have a science discussion department?

You're doing fine on your mag. Here's hoping that FA comes out monthly.

Robert R. Franck,  
1530 Leimert Blvd.,  
Oakland, Calif.

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES attempts to steer away from too much science, and to live up to its title, which is derived from "fantasy."—Ed.

"FLOATING ROBOT" BEST

Sirs:

I have just completed your January issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I have been reading the magazine for several issues, all being very interesting and exciting. Your last issue being no exception. I think the story of "The Floating Robot" being by far the best in months.

What I really wrote to you about was the several paragraphs in "The Floating Robot" about "Radio Hams." This really burned me up! The first thing I saw (or read) was the operator going on the air drunk. I myself have never heard of one being on the air while drunk. Secondly, you have him swearing while on the air. This being unlawful (swearing). They just don't do it.

Well, I guess I've got off what I had on my chest. Sure hope to see more stories like those in your last issue, but for heaven's sake have a heart on us poor guys. We have our fun over the air, but we don't to that.

Frank Cook,  
6717 18th Ave.,  
North West, Seattle, Wash.

PS—I am waiting now for my ticket and hope to be on the air soon.

*It seems to be the consensus of opinion that "The Floating Robot" was an okay story. As for the misinformation about "hams," we take it all back. You are correct, of course, and we'll see that O'Brien learns the truth, and writes it one hundred times on the blackboard.—Ed.*

FUNTASTIC ADVENTURES

Sirs:

On the stands, your Jan. issue sure was an eye-catcher. But inside, the contents were a bit

disappointing. Wait a minute! Every yarn was good, with the majority very good. What I mean is that Fantastic should be called "FUNTASTIC ADVENTURES." Gone are the days of science—science blended in with a good yarn, and the days when a wizened prof could be the hero and not have to be six foot six with a shock of "unruly red hair" and built like an Atlas, with the features of an Apollo. I can easily remember when the fans wept and wailed, begging for satires, humor stories, and anything with a few laughs.

Okay. You gave it to them in an early issue—then came another—other mags picked up the thread until now I wince when I know there's a funny story in any mag.

But don't withhold any real good humor yarn, especially some by Kaletsky or Bond, though Sir Lancelot is a bit overworked.

For gosh sakes keep the spooks and boogie-woogies out. I like science in my yarns (I'll take adventure too), but please keep the walking corpses away!

I was looking over some old issues of FA and by the looks of the most recent issue, you'll never match or beat such yarns as "The Robot Peril," "The Little People," "The Man from Hell," and "Into Another Dimension."

Try to get yarns from Binder, Wellman, and a few serious ones from Hamilton. If you can get all of those "Big Three" in one issue, you can trust that you have one of the best issues of the year!

Alfred Edward Maxwell,  
545 E. Madison St.,  
Opelousas, La.

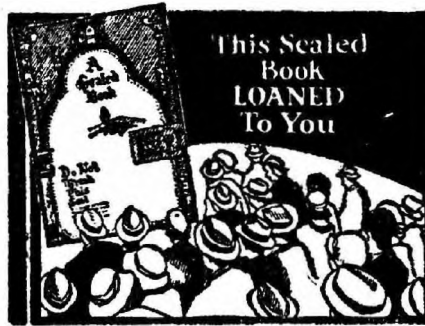
*So we won't match "The Little People," eh? Well, cast your eyes over the June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. It's got a swell sequel by Binder.—Ed.*

HE IS—AND HE AIN'T!

Sirs:

I am eight years old, and I have been reading your magazine for the past ten years. I am also in the fourteenth grade. I realize that I should keep this a secret, but then everyone that writes you his age and grade gets his letter printed so why shouldn't I.

When are we going to get trimmed edges? . . . We don't want trimmed edges. It's the stories that count. . . . Yes we do too. Let's have more interplanetary stories. . . . Why do you have to print so many interplanetary stories? They're nothing but stepped-upped cops-and-robbers stories. We don't want any humorous stories. They have no place in science-fiction. . . . Why don't you print more humorous stories? Thanks for your timely yarns concerning the horrors of war. . . . Cut out the stories of future wars. We have enough of that in our local newspapers. We want to relax when we read a fiction magazine, and not be reminded of the war all the time. The Adam Link stories are the best you have ever published. . . . Why don't you get rid of that



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animated junk heap, Adam Link, and get Eando Binder to write some good stories. Give us more stories by Edmond Hamilton and Ray Cummings. . . . Get rid of Edmond "World Saver" Hamilton and Ray "Sixteen-Year-Old-Heroines" Cummings, and give Goodenough and Nuttall a chance. Hurrah for the two-way reader's department. . . . We don't want a two-way reader's department. It should be kept only for the reader's letters. . . . Who said that!

Why doncha get Paul or Wesso to do a cover? . . . Don't ever let anyone but Fuqua do a cover. He's the best artist you have. That Krupa is certainly a good artist. . . . Get rid of Krupa. His pictures look like fugitives from a comic strip. Thanks for the pictures on the back covers. . . . Cut out the picture on the back cover. I always used to carry it with the back cover outward, but now I have to carry the darn thing under my coat when I take it home.

The December issue of FA was the best one I ever saw. I hope future issues will keep up the good work.

Long live the Discussions department! May our intelligent comments ever continue to confuse a bewildered editor.

Val Vodicka,  
2431 First Ave., West,  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

*We appreciate your very lucid letter. Only one comment baffles us. We didn't have a December issue. Or did we? Oh, skip it; we're confused.—Ed.*

WE WOULD HAVE SAID . . .

Sirs:

You do not belong on the fire, on the contrary, you belong on a throne and pointed to with pride. This may sound different from my last few letters, but, believe me, anybody who can answer a letter as wisely as that *deserves* praise. I wonder what you would have said had you not known who wrote that second letter. . . .

Please bring back McCauley for the covers; he is the nearest rival of Rogers that I know of for covers.

"Slaves of the Fish Men" was an extreme disappointment after his stories in AMAZING, I can only give it third place. First place (again) is taken by Oscar. Second goes to McGivern's short, fourth to "Secret of the Stone Doll" which was terrible next to the author's other stories. The robot and time-traveling stories tie for fifth; Fuqua's illustrations were aromatic—in a skunkish sort of way—who ever heard of a robot looking for a rust spot on his nose with *all* four eyes? Last is taken by the defective story, a typical lowbrow detective story trying to go highbrow via s-f.

What *were* those two beautiful creatures doing on the editorial page? They belonged on page 150.

You may (though I doubt it) wish to know whatever prompted me to write two letters. The

main reason for my brainstorm was to see how much you'd favor Anon's letter.

That's all for this time except I still wonder what you would have said if you hadn't discovered . . .

Wallace E. Buchholz and  
Anon E. Mouse,  
330 Spaulding Ave.,  
Ripon, Wisconsin.

*We would have said . . . just what we did. We don't give any special "favor" to any particular letter. We print the interesting ones. We don't play up the praise, and play down the criticism. In fact, we have to sometimes search for a critical letter to provide contrast and add interest.*


*All of which brings us to the end of another Reader's department. Why don't you get in on the fun and give us your own opinions, you who haven't written? We like to see the postman come!—Ed.*

**CORRESPONDENCE CORNER**

George Schwartz, 1793 Prospect Pl., Brooklyn, N.Y., has magazines to trade with other fans. . . . Jim Jett and Paul Gallagher, C.R. Division, U.S.S. Maryland, Long Beach, Calif., are interested in science of the present and future and sports; would like to hear from those interested in corresponding with two sailors, either individually or collectively. . . . John Armand Preve Jr., East Side Dr., Concord, N.H., would like to obtain copy of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY containing E. R. Burroughs' "Pellucidar" story; state price wanted. . . . George Parras, 1544 W. Adams St., Chicago, 17 yrs., desires pen pals of either sex who are interested in science fiction or companion subjects, people, reading, astronomy, etc. . . . Marshall Arnold, Martinsburg, W.Va. (Emmert Apts.), has for sale May and September, 1927 and September and April 1928 issues of AMAZING STORIES. . . . Don Hirsch, 2910 Court Ave., Erie, Pa., 16 yrs., is desirous of playing chess by mail. . . . Katherine Baum and Kendall Morrison, 1243 Juniata St., North Side Pittsburgh, Pa., have for sale rare science and fantasy fiction books which will be sold to the highest bidder; enclose stamp. . . . D. B. Thompson, 2302 U St., Lincoln, Nebr., wants to get in touch with fans and potential fans in and around the vicinity of Lincoln; ask for "Don" at 5-7372. . . . Fred Claassen, 978 Moodycrest Ave., Bronx, N.Y.C., has for sale many used SF magazines dating back to 1926. . . . Charlotte Herzog, 966 St. Marks Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., wants pen pals, either sex, 14 to 16 yrs., who are interested in current or other topics, from anywhere except the eastern states. . . . Arlo K. Richards, 710 S. St. Andrews, Los Angeles, Calif., is a pre-engineer in electronics interested in athletics, physiological and physical science, freelance newspaper writing, and radio; would like to hear from SF fans, male or female. . . . Ed Connor, 929 Butler St., Peoria, Ill., would like to corres-

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pond with young ladies between 16 and 19, especially those living in Latin America or foreign lands, who are interested in sports, science and exchanging picture post cards, or stamps. . . . Bob Meredith, 624 Lavelle Court, and Ray J. Sienkiewicz, 312 E. Elm St., Scranton, Pa., would like correspondents residing in Scranton who read **AMAZING STORIES** and **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** to communicate with them if they are desirous of joining Scranton's only organization for fantasy fiction followers. . . . Sheldon Elam, P.O. Box 68, Haysi, Va., wants to hear from anyone concerning buying back issues of magazines, or organizing a writers' fiction club. . . .

Earl H. Williams, 1512A State St., East St. Louis, Ill., 30 yrs. of age, would like to receive letters from both sexes, and will reply to all. . . . Leslie McCarthy, 587 21st Ave., Rock Island, Ill., would like to receive the March and June 1940 issues of **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**. . . . Solomon Kaplan, 3204 Holland Ave., N.Y.C., 19 yrs., would like correspondents of either sex, anywhere, who are interested in stamps, music and art. . . . Kenneth Nahan, Box 305, Westfield, N.J., is interested in hearing from anyone in Canada, South America, Alaska and abroad; he would like to discuss current affairs, philately, writing and science. . . . Chester Hoey, 301 6th Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., has for sale **SCIENTIFIC ENCYCLOPEDIA**. . . . Fred Heinichen, 152 W. 62nd St., N.Y.C., would like to hear from young men between 12 and 17 who are interested in joining an organization; this applies to those living in Manhattan and all letters will be answered. . . . Maxine Harrison, 4923 Stimson, Houston, Tex., 17 yrs., would like to hear from anyone near her age outside of Texas. . . . C. G. White, 27 Kineo St., Bangor, Me., 17 yrs., would like to correspond with girls and will answer each letter. . . . Claude Held, 494 Carlton St., Buffalo, N.Y., will quote prices on SF magazines he has for sale; also wants to purchase

some. . . Virginia Scattergood, Route No. 1, Breverton, N.Y., is desirous of pen pals. . . Jimmy Wood, 2712 Anderson Dr., Raleigh, N.C., 13 yrs., would like to hear from readers and exchange opinions. . . Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Rd., Muscatine, Ia., wishes to dispose of magazines and wants pen pals interested in SF and general correspondence. . . Dick Waite, Route 1, Banker, N.Y., will trade magazines and reply to all correspondence. . . Joe Gilbert, 314 34th St., Union City, N.J., has traveled, likes swimming, football, hiking and music; would like correspondents interested in these activities, and will make early replies. . . John Robertson, 1352 N. State St., Jackson, Miss., is desirous of pen pals from Australia and South America; 17 yrs. . . Jack Clark, 962 North St., Jackson, Miss., would like to sell or trade magazines. . . E. Evans, 191 Capital Ave., S.W., Battle Creek, Mich., would like to hear from those fans in the southern Michigan area interested in a new club named The Galactic Roamers. . . Toby Kavanaugh, 227 S. Ashland Ave., Lexington, Ky., has magazines in excellent condition for sale. . . Harry Docherty, 113-22 216th St., Bellaire, L.I., N.Y., wants to hear from stamp and post card collectors in foreign countries, and post card collectors in the United States, who would care to exchange these items. . . Fred Claassen, 978 Woodycrest Ave., Bronx, N.Y., has for sale about 50 SF magazines, good condition; write for price list. . . Robert A. Nelson, 2044 N. 34th St., Milwaukee, Wis., wants pen pals from all over the world. . . Harry Peterson, Jr., 2221 Carmen Ave., Chicago, Ill., wishes pen pals of both sexes, 16 or 17 yrs. . . Harry Jenkins, Jr., 2409 Santee Ave., Columbia, S. C., wishes correspondents interested in writing and will reply immediately. . . Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Rd., Muscatine, Ia., wishes to obtain No. 1 AMAZING QUARTERLY. . . Mrs. Frank B. Lapi, 311—6th St., Union City, N. J., wishes correspondents anywhere. . .

**QUIZ ANSWERS**  
(Quiz on page 134)

**TRUE AND FALSE**

1. False. 2. True. 3. True. 4. False. Archimedes discovered it. 5. True. 6. False. Part of the sun. 7. False. 8. True. 9. True. 10. False. Around the wire. 11. True. 12. False. It is a down or up current.

**CHANGE OF STATE**

1. Steam; magnetism. 2. sleet; telescope. 3. static; elasticity. 4. lead; albedo. 5. motor; photometer. 6. tree; meteor. 7. green; energy. 8. tide; latitude. 9. steel; satellite. 10. eye; geyser.

**A BATCH TO MATCH**

1-4; 2-6; 3-1; 4-7; 5-12; 6-5; 7-11; 8-13; 9-14; 10-15; 11-8; 12-2; 13-9; 14-10; 15-3.

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### X Where's YOUR Rupture?

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A strange man in Los Angeles, known as "The Voice of Two Worlds," tells of astonishing experiences in far-off and mysterious Tibet, often called the land of miracles by the few travelers permitted to visit it. Here he lived among the lamas, mystic priests of the temple. "In your previous lifetime," a very old lama told him, "you lived here, a lama in this temple. You and I were boys together. I lived on, but you died in youth, and were reborn in England. I have been expecting your return."

The young Englishman was amazed as he looked around the temple where he was believed to have lived and died. It seemed uncannily familiar, he appeared to know every nook and corner of it, yet—at least in this lifetime—he had never been there before. And mysterious was the set of circumstances that had brought him. Could it be a case of reincarnation, that strange belief of the East that souls return to earth again and again, living many lifetimes?

Because of their belief that he had formerly been a lama in the temple, the lamas welcomed the young man with open arms and taught him rare mysteries and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which have enabled many to perform amazing feats. He says that the system often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, can be used to achieve brilliant business and professional success as well as great happiness. The young man himself later became a noted explorer and geographer, a successful publisher of maps



and atlases of the Far East, used throughout the world.

"There is in all men a sleeping giant of mindpower," he says. "When awakened, it can make man capable of surprising feats, from the prolonging of youth to success in many other worthy endeavors." The system is said by many to promote improvement in health; others tell of increased bodily strength, courage and poise.

"The time has come for this long-hidden system to be disclosed to the Western world," declares the author, and offers to send his amazing 9000 word treatise—which reveals many startling results—to sincere readers of this publication, free of cost or obligation. For your free copy, address the Institute of Mental-physics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 201N, Los Angeles, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

# **fantastic**

## **ADVENTURES**

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 3  
NO. 4

### *Contents for June, 1941*

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FANTASTIC  
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JUNE, 1941

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VOLUME 3,  
NUMBER 4

# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

**I**F you haven't already stared your eyes out at the lovely "Mac Girl" who reappears on our cover again this month, you must like this column immensely! Your editor thinks this is the finest cover he has ever secured for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and he's hoping you think the same.

It is a fitting cover for the fine story by Ray Cummings that provides our lead for this issue. A combination of excellence that'll be sure to tickle your literary and artistic palate.

It isn't the last of the "Mac Girls" either. There'll be many more of them, and all we can say is that the reader who tagged her with that name, and forecast that Petty and Varga had better watch out, wasn't sending up any hot air balloons!

**S**HE'S coming back in August with a cover prepared for Nat Schachner's long awaited "Enchantress" story. Which is a crack story by an ace author who can really boast the title "name author."

**T**HIS issue is another example of a fine "fantasy" issue. It has only one story that isn't true fantasy, that one is Polton Cross' fine fantastic Martian story, "The Man Who Bought Mars."

But you read it for yourself, and let the bars down in your comments. We think we have something here this month, no kidding.

**W**HEN an editor gets an issue like this together, it means he's done a lot of hard work, but there's another factor that seems to intrude in spite of all the credit he tries to take. That factor is chance. It's just sheer luck when a group of authors bats out top notch stories at the same time and we happen to get 'em in the same issue. We hope we stay lucky.

**S**PEAKING of luck, or chance, or fate, or what have you, here's a bit o' stuff that might give point to our point.

A little rainstorm was enough to alter the whole course of European history. This is how it was:

Louis XVI was fleeing from Paris away from the revolutionists to Austria to engage the aid of the Hapsburgs. He sat patiently in the hired coach watching the rain come through the leaky roof and soak into his clothes until he was chilled to the bone. He called to the driver to go faster and to reach the next inn where the party might

await the rain's stopping. And thus it was that he was recognized when he stuck his head out of the carriage window to argue with the postillion as they passed through Vernes.

If he hadn't been recognized, he might have reached Vienna and procured Austrian assistance. Certainly he would not have been carted back to Paris and beheaded. If King Louis had not been beheaded, the way would not have been cleared for the ambitious little Corsican general who turned Europe topsy-turvy for twenty years.

All because it chanced to rain!



"Can I use the Time Machine tonight, Pop? I want to take my girl to the Boston Tea Party."

**J**EP POWELL has a new story in this issue. It's his second suc-

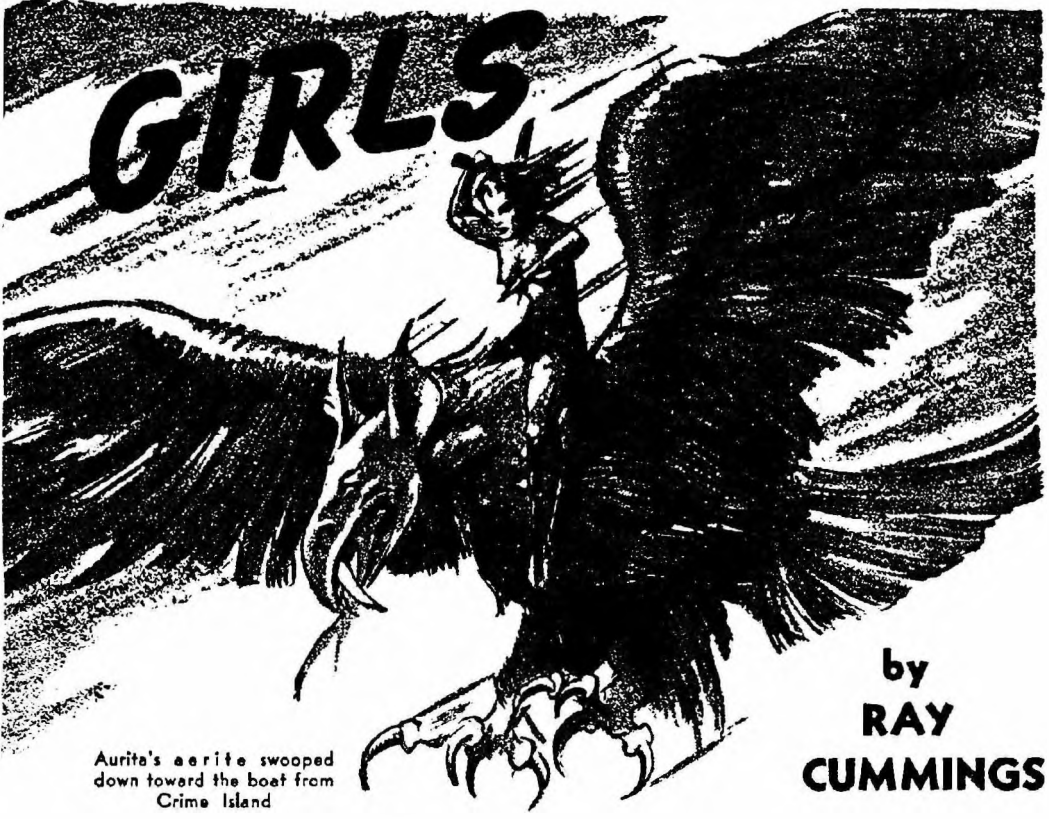
cess with us, and we have two more in the house. One is a space story that'll appear in our companion magazine, AMAZING STORIES. It's about the most unusual character we've seen in many months, and maybe Mr. Powell will find other things for him to do. Mr. Powell has won a deserved measure of acclaim from readers of fantastic fiction.

**S**PEAKING of "different" stories, don't miss William P. McGivern's story in this issue. (Concluded on page 95)

# Onslaught of the **DRUID**



**W**hen Lee Blaine reached Earth's second moon, he found a tangle of mystery. Who were the Nonites? What danger menaced Aurita and her Druid girls?



by  
**RAY  
CUMMINGS**

**T**HE scream of the meteor, flaming its way down through the atmosphere, still echoed over the quiet Wisconsin countryside.

"Robert . . . Robert," came an anxious, startled voice penetrating the lonely observatory from the staircase that led down to the little cottage itself, "What has happened? What was that awful noise?"

"A meteor, only a giant meteor," Dr. Robert Blaine's old voice called down. "It landed close, Mary, but everything's all right, I'm sure . . ."

He turned and peered through the gloom of the observatory, toward the iron stairway that led to a tiny walk circling the room. Up there were a few small, shuttered windows. From them he might be able to see something . . .

Slowly, because his old joints creaked

with movement, he walked around the telescope that took up most of the center of the floor. Halfway up the stairway to the tiny walk he heard footsteps behind him. Light footsteps, sure and dainty still, even though the woman who had come into the laboratory was white-haired and wrinkled with the years that make a grandmother so sweet.

"I'm coming up to see too, Robert," she said. "Besides, you know you shouldn't be climbing around here. You're liable to fall . . ."

"Now, Mary," he protested. "Just because you're my wife—these fifty years past—you don't have to treat me like those babies who've grown up and gotten out of your tender clutches. The years have meant less to you, because I've been kind . . ."

"Yes, Robert, and haven't I always

been a good wife and given as much as I received? So now, it is my shoulder you must lean on, when you climb."

He waited on the stairway until she was at his side. Then he reached out and kissed her fondly.

"It's been a good life, hasn't it, Mary? A little lonely, but . . ." he paused as he saw the wistful look that flashed for a moment into her eyes.

"It would have been nice if Lee were here to help us both," she said. "He would take us to the meteor . . ." She stopped suddenly—

"Oh, Robert, do you think . . . ?"

"You mean—a message—from him? The meteor . . . ?" Dr. Blaine frowned. "He promised he'd communicate—if he could—some way, especially if he could justify my theory . . ."

"Robert," she said swiftly, tremulously, "I have such a strange feeling. Almost as if our grandson were near . . ."

Together they climbed the stairway and opened a shuttered window to the stars. Outside, it was night, and the sky was a blue vault of jeweled treasure.

"It landed on this side, to the east," said Robert Blaine, peering with his old eyes into the night.

"Robert! Over there! A red glow—and smoke. The grass is smouldering in the roadside near the barn . . ." Mary's voice was youthful with excitement, and her still-beautiful face was tense.

Blaine peered in the direction she pointed, past the lacy cuff of her long-sleeved dress.

"Yes," he nodded slowly. "It landed there."

"A message—from Lee!" she exclaimed.

He laid a hand on her arm.

"Now, Mary, don't build up your hopes. Don't jump to conclusions. That's not the good astronomer I've

taught you to be."

"I'm not an astronomer tonight," she said with a catch in her voice. "I'm a lonely old lady, with a woman's intuition, and a wish to hear from . . . from Ethel's boy. When you lose your own children, a grandson seems to become even more dear."

Robert Blaine put an arm around her shoulder.

"I know, Mary," he whispered. "I loved Lee, too, and that night he went away, out into space, saying he would prove I was right about the second moon and restore my good name in astronomy, I wished I'd never discovered Zonara. Always was an impetuous lad, was Lee. Never gave a thought to the fact that he was gambling his life for something so trivial as his grandfather's integrity as an astronomer . . ."

"It wasn't trivial to him . . . and besides, Lee knew what he was doing. He believed in space travel. I know he's alive, that he didn't die out there in the void." Mary's voice took on a sure tone. "That meteor out there; we've got to dig it up . . ."

**B**UT it was late afternoon of the next day before they got the meteorite out of the ground where it had buried itself eight feet beneath the surface. Henry, the hired man, had to dig a trench about it, then drag it out with the station wagon.

And then, when they got it into the basement, a welder had to come out from town to cut into its hard metal with a torch.

It had been, roughly, about three feet long and eight inches in diameter. Scarred and pitted, it was, from its fiery flight through the atmosphere. But even from the start, it had been obvious that it was no ordinary meteor.

"It's from Lee," Mary Blaine said

positively many times.

And when it finally fell in two halves, her woman's intuition was found to be correct. For the shell contained a variety of objects. There was a manuscript, on strange buff-colored material that wasn't paper; a sheaf of maps, charts, and computations; a folded note; and strangest of all, two great diamond-like jewels that sparkled and shone brilliantly as the light fell on them.

"Diamonds!" gasped Mary. "Bigger than any on Earth . . ."

"No," said Dr. Blaine slowly. "Not diamonds. Just some kind of crystal. But they are beautiful, aren't they?"

He picked one up and walked to the light to examine it. He peered into his carved facets, and an exclamation burst from him.

"Mary, look . . . !" he began.

"Robert," she interrupted him. "This note. From Lee. He's safe, and happy—but," her voice fell, "he says he has no means to come home . . ." her voice trailed away. "Oh, Lee, my darling . . ." she murmured.

Blaine took the note from her and read:

"Dear Mary and Bob (Lee had always called them that):" it began. "I am on Zonara, and I have proved all your theories. Charted proof is included in this shell, and the story of my adventures here. I am safe, but I cannot return to Earth. My machine is wrecked. I am happy, though, and would not leave if I could. If you will look into the crystals, you will find out why. Love to you both. Lee."

Dr. Blaine lifted the crystal he still held in his hand and stared once more into it.

"Look, Mary," he said gently. "Isn't she beautiful?"

Wonder in her eyes, Mary Blaine peered into the crystal, and a cry came

from her old lips, as she saw, deep in its flashing depths, the shimmering image of a girl.

A tiny figure at first; but soon the image seemed to grow until Mary Blaine almost imagined she were looking through a window at the elfinly beautiful face of a lovely girl who stared out at her.

Long hair seemed to float in the wind, and deep blue eyes, filled with earnestness, and yet with a laughing joyousness, looked into hers.

"She's perfect!" breathed Mary. "Oh, Lee, if she's yours, then you *are* happy there on Zonara!"

"Look here," said Robert Blaine, handing her the other crystal. "It's . . . Lee!"

Looking out of the crystal she saw the handsome features of Lee Blaine, although an older, more manly Lee Blaine than the youth who had gone so bravely and so foolishly into space three years before. He seemed tall and strong and fully developed. His cheeks were tanned, and he was healthy and smiling and happy. It was almost as if he were speaking, so real was the image confined in the depths of the mysterious crystal.

"So much better than our pictures," breathed Mary. "He cannot ever be far from us while we have these . . ."

"Come, Mary," said Blaine. "Let's go upstairs and sit before the fire. You can read the manuscript. Your eyes are better than mine. I've spent too many long hours at the telescope . . ."

He put an arm around her shoulder and they went upstairs. There they sat before the fireplace and read the manuscript of Lee Blaine, who went to Earth's second moon to prove that it really existed; to vindicate his grandfather, Dr. Robert Blaine, who listened now to his wife's clear, quiet voice reading the story on the curious buff sheets



that had crossed the void from 440,000 miles away in space.

And this is the story of Lee Blaine and of Aurita, the Druid Girl of Zonara:

## CHAPTER I

### A World Beyond the Moon

I AM addressing this, mathematically as close as I can, to my grandfather and grandmother, Dr. and Mrs. Robert Blaine, of Delavan, Wisconsin. However, if it should not reach them, but someone else, I will introduce myself.

I am an orphan. My name, Lee Blaine. I was twelve when my father and mother were killed in a laboratory explosion during a research experiment on atomic power. After their death, my grandfather devoted himself to me and my scientific training.

At twenty I was a technical assistant to a famous Chicago inventor. He and I were working secretly on artificial gravity control. He was a believer in doing, not talking, so he insisted on secrecy. And he had been successful. We had, in the laboratory, a little twenty-foot, one-man space-rocket, if you want to call it that. A finned, tubular steelite cylinder some six feet in diameter. As yet untested, but we were sure it would operate correctly.

Some of the technical details were mine, but I feel that it is not fitting for me to give them here. The anti-gravity force in the alumite-iridium alloys was the work of the inventor. Yet, with a humorous smile on this thin lips—he was already sixty years old—he named the machine for me. He called it the Blaine-rocket.

So much for me, Lee Blaine, and the original Blaine-rocket. You who read this may perhaps know far more details than that, anyway . . .

I must get on to the factors that ultimately led to my first—and last—voyage into space in that Blaine-rocket.

It all began when I got a letter from grandfather Blaine. It said simply, among the other homey things that a letter from the "folks" always brings, that grandfather's theory of a second moon had been rejected by the Astronomical Society.

But the papers said more. Far more! They picked up the story, and overnight, because of the strange sense of humor of a conscienceless newspaper writer, it became the laugh of the nation. "*Astronomer Moonstruck!*" ran the headlines. "*Sees Double!*"

For days the nation laughed at the poor old man in Wisconsin who claimed to have discovered a new moon, a second satellite of Earth, out beyond the orbit of Luna, some 440,000 miles away. No other astronomers would support the theory. None had observed it. Not even Grandfather had *seen* it. But he could prove its existence to his own satisfaction. He had called it Zonara.\*

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\* The existence of a second satellite has long been a question of debate by astronomers. Certain perturbations in the orbit of Luna, and in the astronomical time calculations based on this body have led to the suspicion that somewhere in space a small body exists, or did exist, which also circled the Earth as a satellite. However, today, it is not thought that there is such a moon, in any size worthy of mention as a satellite. Yet, astronomers feel sure that at one time in Earth's past, a second, and quite large moon did exist, and was destroyed by some catastrophe, possibly by a wandering asteroid, like Eros, which approached very near the Earth recently, to within some 3,000,000 miles.

In the Carolinas there are a series of meteoric craters, discovered by aerial photography, which indicate that the fragments of a large stellar body smashed down there in the dim past. Was it the second moon of Earth, falling in fragments, that gouged out these craters? Possibly, say astronomers. They may be able to prove it someday, when computations now being made are completed. As to the present existence of a second moon, they only shrug. It could be so, they admit.—Ed.



I myself believed there was a second moon. My own father had suspected its existence, when he had been helping Grandfather in his observations. A tiny asteroid, with perhaps a strange form of atmosphere incapable of reflecting sunlight, so that its small, dark object had not been visible in Earth telescopes. They had located it approximately, and remembering, I could recall some of their computations. I could point to the spot in the sky where it *should* be.

I believed in it so much that thinking of it, and of Grandfather's justification, one day when a test was to be made of the new Blaine-rocket, the inspiration came to me.

**O**RDINARILY, my employer, the inventor, would have gone on the maiden voyage himself. But he was sixty; too old to withstand the rigors of such an experience. So he hired a "suicide-volunteer"—a professional hazard-man as they are called, to test our mechanism . . .

My idea was simple. I defrauded that hazard-man of his job. The night before he was to make his flight, when all was in readiness, I sneaked to the take-off field, stepped into the Blaine-rocket, and blasted off!

A fool stunt? The thoughtless act of a youngster? Perhaps, but was it any more thoughtless than the "stunt" of a newspaper writer who made an old man the laughing stock of millions?

I think I need not detail that pioneer spaceflight now. Certainly it is not important to my narrative of explanation . . . I was unconscious surely for the first half of the trip, with only my youth and strength saving me. Perhaps the hazard-man would not have fared so well.

The shock of the explosive take-off rendered me unconscious; I was well

beyond the attraction of the Earth, perhaps being pulled by Zonara itself, when I recovered.

Then at last I could see my destination. I was still within the giant cone of the Earth's shadow, with the huge half-moon far to one side and now behind me, when slowly the drab, round disk of Zonara became visible. And then it was a monstrous, cloud-banked surface, filling all the Heavens under me as with retarded velocity I dropped down upon it.

I could see a forest along the edge of a lake; the lake itself winding about with mountain peaks off to one side. You may guess the pounding of my heart, my tense excitement as now, in the dim effulgence of the Zonara night, I came down under the cloud banks with the small, convex surface of the little world close beneath me. Dark little mountains, ragged with starlit metal spires; rivers and little lakes; and a vast, blue-black and brown forest, lying in patches . . . dark, mysterious. And queerly ominous . . .

I had the sudden feeling of menace, down there in the darkness of the forest surface. It was as though the aura of a strange fear down in its depths reached up at me . . .

**I** CRASHED through the forest-top and smashed the little Blaine-rocket to the ground. Inexpert; and certainly with primitive mechanisms at my command. At all events, again I was knocked unconscious. For how long I do not know. Then at last I was dimly aware that I was smothering; that I must get out of the cylinder . . .

Zonara!

My first awareness of it was that I was staggering out into darkness. The air was strangely heavy, choking so that my head reeled and sang with new violence. I felt myself sinking to a soft,

mouldy ground. The lush smell of vegetation was in the night air. Weird gnarled shapes of trees were thick around me; clustering air-vines were like tangled ropes everywhere—vines with pods and great elephant-eared leaves.

A jungle primeval. I did not quite sink back into unconsciousness this time. I recall that over my head, far up, faint straggling starlight was visible. And then suddenly I tensed, struggling up on one elbow as I stared.

A little brown shape, white-limbed, was running up there through the trees along giant boughs. A girl! I gasped in utter amazement. A lovely girl, human, here on a tiny world that Earth and humankind didn't even suspect existed! It was incredible.

She was swinging down on the vines as she descended.

The crash of my landing of course had been obvious. I saw her, fifty feet over me, and to one side, grip a dangling rope-like vine. And as she swung free, her weight came with it in a great swaying arc. Her hair and her little draped brown garment fluttered. Then she lightly struck the ground, with her skilled motion so that she kept on at a run until she was beside me.

Her long hair, gold among the tangled vines and leaves, fell loosely from her head, with a night breeze rippling it like a cloak about her brown-clothed body—a single, simple little brown garment from shoulders to thighs, with her pink-white rounded limbs glistening in the starlight.

There was fear upon her as she gripped me. Fear perhaps of me—but it seemed not so much that as fear of something else. In the darkness here she was only a blob, murmuring vehement, unintelligible words, with her hands pulling frantically at my jacket.

## CHAPTER II

### A Fight—and Flight—in the Dark

I COULDN'T understand her words.

But I could understand the frightened glances she cast over her shoulder, and the plea in her lovely almond eyes, eyes that were not Oriental, yet strangely exotic. She was afraid of something that pursued her—was begging me to save her from it. Begging me, who was also a stranger, but obviously less to be feared even though unknown, than whatever or whoever menaced her from the forest's gloomy depths.

Now I could hear a crashing, the sound of a body forcing its way through the tangled vines. Mirrored in her oval, girlish face; obvious in the quickening pulse in her slim, white throat; rising with the panting heave of her young breast, was added terror at the sound.

She uttered a low cry. Unmistakable. A cry for help.

I sucked in my breath. Whatever followed her, I would face it. It would be worth facing, for the chance to look further on her beauty, so weird, so fascinating . . .

And I had to face it now; for into the tiny clearing burst . . . a man! Not a fanciful monster, but simply a man. A great, brutal hulk of a man, his evil face cast in an enraged mask of desire and passion.

He stopped suddenly, as he saw me, but then, before I had a chance to do more than thrust the girl behind me, he threw himself forward again.

With bone-crushing force he smashed against me, and as I went down, youth that I was, I knew that I would be no match for his brute strength in the kind of battle he sought to wage. So I scrambled frantically, almost in panic, to roll

away from his grasping arms, and to regain my feet.

Perhaps, to the girl, in that instant it appeared that I was afraid.

Afraid! Yes, I was. I had never fought like this before. I was used to boxing, in the gymnasium, sparring lightly. Here was an opponent who wasn't intent on getting exercise. He was intent on one thing only—killing me.

But when he came up again, rushing me, I did what I had always done in the gymnasium ring; I fainted, side-stepped, then swung from the balls of my feet . . . with all the vigor of my one-hundred-seventy pounds in a punch for the first time in my life! And I connected. Squarely on the point of his bearded chin my knuckles landed—and pain shot to my shoulder.

But suddenly I gloried in the pain, for the bruising hulk of a man went down in a heap. I knew that back on Earth any man hit like that should have been down for the count of ten. But to my amazement, not so with this fellow. He clambered drunkenly to his knees, shaking his head back and forth. And as he reeled there, he bellowed in enraged violence.

ON my arm I felt the pressure of soft fingers, heard the girl's urging, frightened voice. She was tugging at me. We were to flee . . . while we had the chance.

Rubbing my stinging knuckles, I turned, and rather precipitately, ran at her heels, following her beckoning figure. There was something about that brutal fellow that chilled my blood.

Killer! That was the word. He would kill me, or I would have to kill him! That I did not want to do. Cowardice? No. I was yet a stripling, unused to such a savage world as this. And my intuition, along with the per-

suasive urging of the frightened girl, told me that much of existence here lay in flight, without any dishonor. So we fled, we two, into the night.

And behind us came the crashing of pursuit.

I swept the girl up in my arms. Queerly weightless, slim little body; on Earth I would have judged such a weight to be twenty pounds perhaps. I would have tried to climb into one of the trees, but her hand shoved and gestured. Shining water was near us, some twenty feet away. I ran for it, and she made me put her down, running with me. We plunged in. Behind us the man stopped at the water's edge. His panting, baffled cry sounded—a hideous call. For a moment he stood on the shore, then he turned, lunged away. The underbrush crackled. Then abruptly ceased; he was waiting there, in ambush.

In the water beside me, the girl's pale face gleamed wetly. She looked up at me. Her soft, cool hand was on my arm, and she spoke in a musical series of syllables. I understood what she meant, from her motions. We would have to swim on, if we were to escape.

Together we swam. It was much like swimming in Earth-water. With her guiding me, we followed the jungle edge to where in a tangle of branches and vines, a vine-ladder hung from high overhead. I climbed it; amazingly easy to climb, with my weight half that of Earth and my strength the same—climbed with this amazing, lovely girl into a strange tree-top world . . .

I WAS gazing upon a tangle of vegetation—a great spread of tangled vines, strange huge leaves, pods and flowers, matted here into an undulating surface.

A forest top! I could see it plainly now in the starlight. A lush, tangled

jungle of gnarled, grotesque-shaped trees with their crooked branches and air-vines so intermingled that the top of it here was a spreading, continuous surface. The dim ground, black with shadows, was in spots faintly distinguishable a hundred feet or more below us.

And literally, this place was a village. Village in the tree-tops! Here this girl's people lived, and she had come back now, escaping from a strange man, savage, not of her people, yet human as she. What was the meaning of it? Why had the man pursued her, beyond simply the driving urge of his vicious nature? There had been hate, more than just frustration over her escape, in the bull-voice of the bearded man as he had plunged back into the forest there at the water's edge.

More to this than lay on the surface!

She spoke to me, her voice clear as silver now that the terror had all gone from it. I understood nothing, but I listened entranced, and as her people gathered around her, staring at me in wonder, at my strange clothes, she chattered to them excitedly, evidently recounting her escape from the beast-man, and my part in the encounter.

She told them, too, I could see from her gestures, of my Blaine-rocket, smashing down into her world from the skies.

But tiring of it all, I interrupted her. I pointed to myself and said:

"Lee Blaine. I am Lee Blaine. Who are you?"

She broke into a dimpled smile, and her eyes met mine with a new and kindling interest that was more than just curiosity.

"Lee Bla--a-aine!" she enunciated with a curious hesitation over the unfamiliar syllables. Then more swiftly, and with a pert, proud motion with one slim arm that included stabbing herself

in the breast with a pointed forefinger, she said: "Aurita!"

I said it over, once, twice. Aurita. How amazingly descriptive! What it meant in her language, I could not know, but how close it came to Earthly "aura"! So apt; like the flame of her loveliness that surrounded her like a halo.

"Aurita." She said it again, herself, evidently greatly pleased with the way I had repeated it. And suddenly she laughed, aloud, clear. The tones echoed through the darkness of this strange tree-world. And in spite of myself, I found that I was laughing too, with some sheer exuberance that exuded from her very personality. Vibrant; pulsing with life she was. And yet, beyond our laughter, I thought I heard the thwarted shout of a burly beast of a man, lying in wait. Somewhere, over all this picture, was something evil . . . suspended, ready to destroy all such laughter as now rang from the loveliest lips on two worlds.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Forest People

**I** MUST summarize many Earth-months. Eighteen or twenty, perhaps, though I lost count. The little world of Zonara? I can give here only a brief sketch so that you who read this may at least try to understand. My necessity, and perhaps that the language is of fundamental simplicity, made it possible for me to learn it in that time. Certainly Aurita was a willing, persistent and skillful teacher. So I skip those twenty Earth-months of time, translating the quotations of my narrative as well as I can into the English equivalent . . .

Little Zonara, second satellite of Earth. Some two hundred thousand

miles outside the orbit of the Moon, it revolves around the Earth once in approximately fifty Earth-days. Presenting, like the Moon, always the same face to the Earth, it has nearly equal days and nights, each of some twenty-five Earth-hours. Most of its small, convex surface is a barren, rocky waste, with patches of forest. This forest, in which Aurita's people lived, was no more than sixty or seventy miles in extent.

The Forest People: There were, I understood, some ten thousand of them, scattered over the forest-top in little groups which could be called villages. Nearly half of them were concentrated here in the city of Dreen.

Strange little group of humans, living here in the tree-tops.

A primitive people, these tree-dwellers of little Zonara. Yet I found them possessed, not so much of a primitiveness of mind, but only primitive life, of necessity, and perhaps desire. Nature on the whole was to them beneficent. Their needs and their wants were few. Water came in the form of rain; food grew in the tree-tops; in some places they engaged in agriculture on the ground. All primitive; yet I found their intellects fundamentally the equal, perhaps the superior of my own.

And they were experimenting now with science; reviving the work of past generations which had progressed astonishingly in scattered, isolated directions. But it had been neglected, passing into tradition, since, as Aurita's father—Ruler here in the city of Dreen—once told me with his slow, quizzical smile, science seemed only to be leading them into complications which would make their way of life less happy. And I wonder if that is not an ironic commentary of our own great civilization on Earth!

YET, there is another aspect. Perhaps no humans are destined to exist without problems—most of their own creation. It was a strange social order here, drifting now into its own created menace. I had thought I saw a lurking, submerged terror in Aurita's eyes. It was there. I saw it plainly, and I heard it in her voice, these months when she was teaching me her language. I recall those days when I was beginning to understand her words . . .

"It is coming, Lee—bloodshed here—a time when man will stand against man and try to kill. And Ptyah, my father, will not see that. And old Caroh, his Counsellor, he just laughs. He says that the Nonites will not dare to rebel, and why should they not do the dangerous ground work? Of what use in our world is a Nonite, save to work for us? But that is wrong, Lee."

"Nonites?" I asked her. "What are they?"

She shook her head, a frown on her pretty face.

"It is strange to me," she confessed. "They are—just different. How, I do not know. Except that they are not male, or female, like other people. It is not that they are queer; they are just another kind—a kind we do not exactly understand. I think that they are equal to us. But others do not think so."

"But where do they come from?" I wondered.

"From the Forest People," she said. "Occasionally, in almost all of our families, there is a child born that is neither male or female—not like us. When such a one is born, it is set apart from the rest of the family, trained among its unfortunate fellows into the lot of a ground-worker. A human being—and yet considered here not quite human. A sexless Thing, fashioned pathetically in its own mould—a Thing of muscle, brain, but supposed not to have emo-

tion; no thought, no wish of its own but to do what it is told."

"What happens to them?" I asked curiously. "Why do you feel so perturbed over it? After all, it is something you cannot control. It would be wrong to assume them the same as yourselves, and make them try to fit into an environment that does not fit them."

"Some of them become slaves," Aurita explained. "But most of them are banished. They live in villages of their own. They are outcasts—shunned by every one of the Forest People. They are not permitted to return to their own families, except as slaves, and then only a few of them."

Aurita paused, her eyes sad, and filled with that mysterious fear that I had so often noted. I was about to question her about it when she went on.

"But that is wrong, Lee. A Nonite—how can we say what it thinks, what it feels? It is human, Lee—as human as we are." Aurita's little face was earnest and her eyes glowed. "You have seen the Nonites. You know we do not treat them right."

I had indeed seen them. Several worked here in the big dwelling of woven vines and thatch, bound into the tree-tops, which was the Ruler's home, perched at an edge of Dreen near where the forest ended at the lakeshore. The Nonites were about up to my shoulder in height. Taller, stronger than the men here, with well-formed heads and glistening hair, a face cast in handsome mould except for a more pallid, white skin and a curiously blank expression. It was as though nature had given them a mask to hide their emotions. But their eyes—

**I** RECALL that one of them came into the rustic little apartment where Aurita and I were talking, bringing us

food and drink which she had ordered. This one was called Groff. It stood respectfully serving us. And then suddenly it said, to Aurita:

"You and the other Virgins—you have plans to help us Nonites?"

"Oh yes, we have indeed, Groff—"

"Because," the Nonite said, "two more of the ground-workers disappeared just before this last time of sleep. And I hear things among my people—"

I tensed. "What do you hear, Groff?"

It went suddenly sullen. But the gleaming, almost phosphorescent eyes of the Nonite sent a shudder through me.

"Nothing," Groff said. "That is just my idea to warn you."

It turned and stalked away—stalwart, pale-white thing of rippling muscles, clad in a brief nondescript white garment wound around its middle. The ghostly replica of a human being. I have seen groups of them toiling on the ground in the starlight. They look like phantoms.

That was the night when Aurita took me to the edge of the forest a little distance beyond the city outskirts, to show me the sparite crystals. The sparites were found in the distant barren lands; they had been known to the men of science of former generations. Natural image-receivers, they were termed here.\*

Dug from the ground, in the dark, they were carefully wrapped so that

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\* Obviously these crystals, like photographic film, are sensitive to light, and when exposed to it, undergo a chemical change which fixes the light rays in their depths, so that the scene they mirror upon first exposure is retained permanently in their interiors, and is visible, from all angles through their many facets. The uncanny crystals therefore, present, at one and the same time, a three dimensional photograph of the scene impressed in them from all sides, and can be so viewed by simply looking through the different facets.—Ed.

light did not touch them. Then, later, when opened to the light, they received the light rays of the scene around them, and mirrored it perpetually in their depths, like a crystal photograph.

With the enthusiasm of a child she dug into the earth, finally uncovering one of the crystals. Carefully, while I stood in bewilderment behind her in the dark, she wrapped it in a cloth and put it in a bag she carried slung over her slim shoulder. Then she dug another, and when we came from the forest, into the treetops, she explained to me.

"They will capture our images, with light. All we need do is look into them and step into the moonlight."

She handed one to me, and then took the other herself.

"Smile into it," she said naively, "so that you will look nice!"

Then we walked out of the dark into a moonlit patch in a clearing. And as I stared into the crystal, I saw mirrored in its depths my own features, smiling back at me. And they grew clearer, resolved from shadowy dimness to sparkling, moonlit clarity. I gasped.

There, within that crystal, my image, clear as the crystal itself, and eerie in its naturalness! And though I was no longer smiling, but amazed, the image did not change. As it had first received my image it remained—permanent, wonderfully real and perfect in every detail.

I snatched her crystal from her and looked into it. There she was, every lovely feature of her, smiling back at me.

"It is yours," she murmured. "So that you will always be able to see me when you wish . . ."

"It—it is beautiful, Aurita," I murmured.

I touched her, with some of my emotion undoubtedly stamped upon my

face, but she drew away with a sudden, half-frightened virginal timidity. She had always been like that. And yet there were times when she would gaze at me slantwise, with her dark eyes impish as though to provoke my love-making . . .

"Let us go down to the castle-cliff and look over the lake," she said hastily now. "We can see the island where my brother, and his colleagues work."

## CHAPTER IV

### Aurita's Fear Explained

I HAD met her brother, Raalt—a slim, handsome young fellow nearly as tall as myself. Several hundred of the young virgins here in Dreen had long ago sworn that they would do all they could to help the Nonites; and Raalt had felt the same. He was one of ten young men who were working now in a science-laboratory which had been established on a small island—a honeycombed rock like a little gibraltar in the lake some twenty miles distant.

It was called Castle-Cliff. They were working there on a vibration-beam. Traditions of it had come down from former generations; old apparatus had been found. A vibration which dissolved any living tissue with which for a moment or two it came in contact. A weapon to use against the criminals—such as the beast man with whom I had fought that first day I landed on Zonara. Then the Virgins and children could venture on the ground in safety; agriculture would be more extensive. All the Forest People would be benefited. The tree-tops gradually could be abandoned; the ground at last would be habitable.

Fatuous humans! As though a weapon like that would be used only for such a purpose! Our whole his-

tory of earth has demonstrated the contrary.

"You see," Aurita told me with her girlish enthusiasm. "That we have promised the Forest People. Never will there be danger to them again. My brother and I—we persuaded my father and his Counsellors that the weapons must be made. Our flying knives\*—they are really useless against the criminals."

I wondered again about these beast men, but I had no opportunity to question her now.

Raalt and the young men with him were just finishing the projectors. A dozen or more of them, with an effective range of some five hundred feet

Aurita and I, that starlit night, went down a little path leading to a tunnel-mouth entrance to the inner grottos some miles down the lake.

And then suddenly, on the path Aurita gripped me.

"Look Lee—how strange—one of Raalt's companions—"

The figure had abruptly appeared coming along the path. He seemed lurching, staggering, as though perhaps he had been drinking too much *palka*—intoxicating beverage, made from the pulp of tree-pods. We held our breaths as we watched him with his unsteady, lurching steps. Then he staggered off the path, into a patch of shadow where he seemed to fall. We waited, but he did not rise.

Queer. Surely Raalt and his young men were working too hard out there to bother with *palka*. I met Aurita's white-faced stare.

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\* Flying knives—a naked handle-less curved blade shaped like a boomerang, about a foot long. It is double-edged, pointed at both ends. The blade is hurled by a little sling, rotating, and is used mainly to kill tree-reptiles and to cut down birds of prey in the forest which served as human food. The Virgins are all adept with them—Ed.

"He—looked drunk," she said. "On the mainland, on a spree . . ."

I nodded.

"Well—" I said. "Too bad—"

We were abruptly too perturbed to voice our thoughts. To us both it had seemed, for days now, as though some unseen menace were descending upon our little world. Forces here, brewing with an aura of evil that you couldn't miss. The sullen, resentful Nonites; Raalt's dissolving beam—lethal weapon seemingly so out of place in this quiet, primitive little realm—so fatuous of us to think that it would only be used against the criminals!

Aurita seemed to read my tumultuous sweep of thoughts.

"The men of crime," she burst out abruptly. "Oh Lee, I am so afraid of them—out there on their island-ring. Afraid of them—all my life."

I DREW her down beside me on the rocks beside the path.

"What is it, Aurita," I asked. "What is it that you fear so much?"

She looked at me, her eyes troubled. Then she spoke. Strange story she told me there in the moonlight. Incredible. But true; I could see it in the trembling of her lips as she spoke.

"It is our civilization. Something wrong with it. To most of us, it is the Nonites who are the cause of all the trouble. Yet, to a few of us, the real answer is obvious. But what can we do about it—unless, soon, the new weapons are ready . . ."

"Ah!" I interrupted. "I knew it!"

"Knew what?" She looked at me puzzled.

"Never mind," I said. "Let me hear more."

"I've called them criminals. Although among the Forest People there is no crime. No theft, no murder—that is," she amended hastily "until





It seemed as though she lived and breathed in the crystal

lately. Among us there is only one important class of criminal. The kidnaper."

"The kidnaper?" I frowned.

"Yes. It is a crime against both the children and the Virgins. It is punishable by life-exile. The real crime is kidnaping of children, but it has come to include the Virgins too, because they too could be of the same use to the kidnapers . . ."

"I don't understand . . ." I began.

"You will. Remember the man you fought the day you came to Zonara? He was a kidnaper, sentenced to life-exile because he tried to make advances to a girl. Little evidence of intent to kidnap is necessary. Only the girl's statement, with perhaps a few corroborating statements.

"Some three hundred kidnapers are in exile now. They are on a little island near the one where my brother, Raalt is working. It is where the castle cliff turns a sweeping right angle, and the lake broadens into a great forty-mile, almost circular expanse. It is in the center of this expanse, a lone island of a few hundred acres.

"There is a little soil there; a few stunted, gnarled trees, with vines, pods and flowers. Crime Island, we call it. The three hundred kidnapers have been banished there; they live in crude stone and thatched dwellings; grow a little food. And at intervals food and minor necessities are taken to them. No offender is supposed to build a watercraft and leave the island. That is a crime punishable by death. And yet, they do leave—more now than ever . . ."

I interrupted her now.

"But why kidnapers?" I asked. "What can they possibly gain from kidnaping. Is it ransom? I didn't even know you had money here?"

"Money? What is that? No, we do

not have it here, whatever it is. The reason for the kidnaping is because of the Nonites. You see, it is a law among the Forest People that any Nonite couple who shall marry and bear a normal human child, shall thereby regain their status as human beings, and be freed either from slavery or exile. Thus, the crime of kidnaping, which is the worst crime that can be committed on Zonara, has become prevalent. Babies are stolen, delivered to the Nonites who wish to escape their exile, or be freed of their servitude, and they pass it off as their own child."

"I see," I said slowly, the light breaking over me now. "But what of the Virgins?"

"They are kidnaped too," she shuddered, "and they are never seen again. It is believed by most of us that they are forced to marry a criminal of the Crime Island, and their children, being normal human children, sold to the Nonites in return for something, some favor, that we haven't discovered yet. Raalt thinks they are dealing in weapons—flying knives, boats . . . but we do not know for sure."

She was silent for a moment, then she started up.

"We must go back to Dreen," she said swiftly.

"You going to tell your father what we saw?" I suggested.

"No. You and I—we must go to the island and see Raalt."

A desire to shield her brother and his companions, because that might have been a drunken man we saw!

THE tree-top tangle swayed with a little rising night-wind as we followed one of the thatched bridge-like paths. A storm coming? Then the city of Dreen showed in the starlight before us.

Fantastic little group of human hab-

itations. Mound-shaped little dwellings of brown and purple thatch, roped into the tree-tops like birds' nests. At different levels; in little groups, or strung in rows. Platforms were in front of some, where the people lounged in the starlight. Ladders and roped vines connected them; thatched paths at intervals lay like streets; and at lower levels other strung paths were almost like little tunnels through the lush tangle of foliage.

Flimsy city. It had that appearance now as it swayed, undulating gently in the rising night-wind. Torchlight showed through the side openings of the larger dwelling, roped into the branches of one of the highest trees, which was Aurita's home. We found Aurita's father there, with Caroh, his chief Counsellor. And Torm, Caroh's son.

Torm was speaking as we entered. He was a tall young fellow, nearly my own height; wide-shouldered, powerful. His face, with high-bridged nose, wide thin slit of mouth and the queer slant eyes, was considered handsome masculinity here. His well-muscled figure was clad in short, brown leather jacket and a round, purple lower garment, knee length. The insignia of his rank as sub-Counsellor was a varicolored band of fabric which he wore around his forehead, binding his brown tangled hair which fell long about his ears and was cut at the base of his neck.

"If the Virgins had not promised so much," Torm was saying, "then would the Nonites perhaps not have gotten these ideas."

"The Nonites will do as they are told," old Ptyah, Aurita's father, retorted. "I shall call them and talk to them. Two of them dead, mysteriously murdered? And what is that? The others should be thankful it was not they."

Old Ptyah looked at Caroh for approbation.

Long ago I had, I think, correctly judged these two men. Aurita's father, ill now, weak of will, with the traditions of the social order here the only things in his mind. But this Caroh was different. A scheming fellow of perhaps fifty. Whatever his purpose, certainly on Earth I would not have trusted him with a minimum copper coin, even though it was counterfeit. Nor his son, Torm.

Or was that because I was jealous? Torm certainly was a handsome, swaggering fellow here. And of all the young virgins, I could not miss that it was Aurita to whom he was most attentive.

WE sat for a time listening to the talk. The Nonites seemed upon the verge of rebelling—a thing unprecedented, unthinkable.

"If any Nonite dares rebel," Caroh was saying grimly, "I will toss that Nonite off the castle-cliff while the rest of them watch. That will fix them."

"That you will never do," Aurita said abruptly.

"The Virgins," Caroh retorted, "talk too much. If they had not started this trouble, encouraging the Nonites—"

I drew Aurita away. Outside the wind was still rising. If we were going to see her brother, certainly we should be starting. Torm followed us to the door-oval. He took me aside.

"You never speak to put your word into our affairs," he said. "Perhaps you are right." He glanced at Aurita and lowered his voice. "The Virgins mean well—I agree with them, of course. But—you might as well know it, Lee—I am more worried over this thing than I will say."

"So am I," I agreed.

"Your flying platform," he said.

"You have it nearly ready? Surely a wonderful thing—especially for us men who cannot ride the aerites."\*

"Yes, almost ready," I evaded. It was completely ready, though Aurita and I had not yet tested it—a little platform which I had constructed from the gravity plates of the wrecked Blaine-rocket in which I had come from Earth.

"That is good," Torm said. "I shall be glad to try it with you."

We got away from him presently; descended a vine-ladder to where Aurita's small boat was at the lakeshore—a narrow, canoe-shaped hull some thirty feet long. Its bow was decked over for a little shelter. It had a triangle of thatch for a crude sail. It was a buoyant, fragile little vessel, light as though built of cork. With a fair following wind it could make astonishing speed; or with adverse wind, be paddled like a canoe.

We sat in the stern, with the wind now behind us. Soon the flickering lights of Dreen were fading; the dark blob of the forest-edge merged in the gloom.

For a time we did not talk. Beside me Aurita sat steering, staring grimly ahead. The wind fluttered her long golden hair forward over her shoulders. It brushed me, and my fingers entwined in one of its soft tresses that lay on the seat between us.

"This could almost be on Earth," I said softly. My words mingled with

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\* Aerites—giant birds, brown and white with great green wings, spreading a full fifteen feet. Almost like a hawk, with strange huge-beaked head and sharp, pointed ears. However, they are really gentle creatures of the forest-top. At Dreen, Aurita's city, many of them are domesticated. They have at least the intelligence of an Earth dog—the same obedience and willing loyalty. The young Virgins of Dreen, weighing what on Earth would be no more than twenty pounds, often ride the aerites. But the men, more than twice as heavy, could not be carried by the willing birds.—Ed.

the sighing of the wind and the slap of the water against our bow. "Aurita dear—"

Almost like Earth? As though to belie my words, to one side of us, above the close-curving horizon of this convex little world, a flash of red lightning split the sky. And then came the booming, eerie crack of muffled reverberating thunder. A red-storm coming . . .\*

"Lee—look there—"

SHE gestured ahead of us. The warty horizon was no more than two Earth-miles away. A boat coming toward us had suddenly appeared. A boat, smaller than our own, being paddled into the wind. We were up to it in a moment. It was Aurita's brother, alone in the stern. I dropped our sail and we brought the boats together. Raalt was pallid, shaking.

"One of our men found stabbed," he gasped. "A flying knife that cut into his side."

That staggering man we had seen on the path! Quite evidently he had been bleeding from the wound, had been trying to get back to his boat, to his companions, and had fallen in the shadows beside the path, where later Raalt had found him.

"He was just dying," Raalt was gasping. "He was just able to murmur—an exile—escaped from the island of crime—who killed him!"

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\* Red-storm—On Zonara electrical storms are different than on Earth. The quality of the atmosphere makes the lightning flare brilliant crimson, possibly because of a high neon content, and the chemicals that make for red in the electrical discharge. These storms are quite violent, and whip up terrifying winds that rise and die with devastating suddenness. The spectacle of a red-storm in full sway is a magnificent, though terrible one. The heavens are a continual flare of rolling, blood-red, moiling with scudding clouds. And the thunder, too, is a particularly ear-piercing, crackling kind.—Ed.

The kidnapers had dared to leave their island of crime! They were roaming loose, killing! . . . It was as though the red lightnings at the horizon were a symbol of the crimson torrent that now would engulf our little world! The men of crime; the unfortunate Nonites; the altruistic, crusading virgins . . . Diverse human motives, brewing here for so long in this little cauldron—simmering with an aura of impending horror . . .

And now it had broken loose!

## CHAPTER V

### Grotto of Death

WE stared numbed at Raalt, with the red lightnings flashing again at the horizon and our little boats bobbing on the waves in the rising wind. I had with me a single small weapon which I had brought from Earth—a little heat-gun, capable of drilling a hole through a man at a distance up to some thirty feet. Futile weapon indeed, with what seemed upon us now.

"And that murderer, he escaped from you?" Aurita was saying.

Murderer! The very sound of the word made both of them shudder. There had been no murderers here on little Zonara.

"Yes," Raalt agreed. "We searched our rock. He must have come and gone in a boat. But there are so many caves—the rest of us were searching still when I left to get help from Dreen. We have no boat there just now big enough for us all, and the weapons."

"The projectors are ready?" I demanded.

"Yes, for the criminals. They will work—they will kill the murderers—"

Another stab of the red lightning flashed up from the horizon—a great forked crimson streak. It struck the

sullen, scudding purple clouds, painted them with crimson. And for that second, put a blood-red stain upon us all.

Aurita was gripping me.

"Oh, Lee—what shall we do? Our boat here—so big, hardly could we shove it against this wind to get back to Dreen."

"I will go to Dreen," Raalt put in. "My smaller boat—I can handle it if I start now. And tell them in Dreen that our projectors are ready. Never again will there be danger on the ground for the Forest People."

Danger? My memory went back to the sullen Nonite, Groff. The Nonites were smouldering with rebellion now. Their resentment had startlingly increased within the last few days. Was there some connection between that and this exile who had dared leave his island of crime and commit murder? Raalt and Aurita were gazing at me—both of them so young—looking to me to say what should be done. It was the first time in this world that anyone ever had done that. My world now . . .

"I'll go on to the castle-cliff," I said abruptly. "The projectors must be mounted, made ready. Raalt, you take Aurita—go to Dreen—tell your father there is danger—real danger. Have the young men of Dreen organize to watch the Nonites." I leaned toward him so that perhaps Aurita would not hear. "Have those young men armed with the flying knives. If any Nonite causes trouble—that Nonite must be killed, you understand? It may precipitate things, but I don't think so. I think the other Nonites would be frightened."

Aurita had heard me. She gave a little cry of protest, and then checked herself. How quickly one may get used to the necessity of bloodshed!

"Yes, I will do that," Raalt agreed.

"And your volplane—the little anti-gravity flying platform—"

"It's ready. I'll test it when I get back—"

"Oh—look there—" Aurita said. "An aerite coming. A girl is riding it—"

WE followed Aurita's gesture. Off in the lurid storm-sky—in the direction away from Dreen—a little dot was visible. It came struggling nearer, flying toward Dreen against the wind. An aerite winging toward us. Then we could see the brown blob of the girl astride its back, with her arms around its neck and her hair and her draperies fluttering.

"It is Jeena," Aurita suddenly murmured.

I knew Jeena quite well. Little sixteen-year-old virgin, like Aurita, save that her hair was not golden, but tinged with an auburn light. It was understood that she was to be Raalt's mate, when they were older. She saw our two boats clinging together, bobbing here on the waves, and her hand pressing her aerite's head guided the bird down to us. It swooped; and then with back-fluttering wings landed skillfully on top of our decked-over bow. Its cheeping voice was eager with recognition of Aurita and Raalt. And I thought then that the huge bird flung a glance at the little bow-cabin of our craft, with the feathers of its neck ruffling. Queer. But I forgot it with the shock of Jeena's first words.

"I was flying near the island of crime," she gasped at us. "They must have been building boats there secretly for a long time—"

"Boats—" Raalt echoed numbly.

"And they are getting ready to leave in them," Jeena finished. "Oh, Raalt, I was coming to the castle-cliff to tell you—"

Strange little counsel of war, here

on the lake, our frail craft in the midst of the gathering crimson storm. Raalt, in his small boat was to go to Dreen, with Jeena winging ahead of him to spread the news. I would go on to the castle-cliff and with the young men there get the fifty projectors of the dissolving ray ready. Boats from Dreen would be sent to us.

The thought of those vibration-projectors with their five hundred-foot range heartened me. What had we to fear from a few hundred roaming criminals armed with knives perhaps, and with crude implements of agriculture? Or what to fear from rebellious Nonites?

But haste undoubtedly was necessary. Aurita now had refused to go back with her brother to Dreen. She insisted on going with me, and I yielded. Strange little Aurita. So gentle, but now she said suddenly:

"You, Jeena—it may be that my father will not realize that this is an emergency. He has very strange counsel. Jeena—you call the virgins together. As many as you can get. Have them take their aerites—and you fly with them to our meeting place. You understand?"

"Oh, yes—yes," Jeena agreed. Her eyes too were flashing. She drew herself erect, with her red-gold hair blowing in the wind and her young bosom panting under the bodice of her little brown-red druid-garment. "If there is to be—danger," she added, "the virgins will do their part."

"You tell them I will come there and join them," Aurita said. "Go now—and you, my brother, do your best—"

The red glare of lightning painted us as we separated—Raalt forcing his little boat forward and Jeena rising with her aerite and winging away. Then Aurita and I raised our small sail; our craft, caught by the wind, skimmed

forward over the white-capped waves.

IT was some fifteen miles further to the castle-cliff. We made it in half an hour. The red-storm still seemed mostly below the horizon. The wind was puffy; the overhead, swift-flying clouds were low. With the lightning darting at intervals, the clouds were a great blood-red blanket, undulating close over us.

Then out of the red-murk ahead, the little castle-cliff loomed. It was a two hundred-foot rock-spire. Pitted and honeycombed with crevices and cave-openings. Fantastic little rock rising naked out of the water—ridged and terraced with multiple little needle-peaks dotting it. Around its base, where in places there was a little level apron of rocky ground, the lake was pounding. Red waves; crimson spray . . .

We landed in the lee of the rock where there was a small cove.

"The entrance to the laboratory is on the other side," Aurita said. "A little tunnel-passage there. My brother and the others fixed up two small grottos. You will see they have it well-equipped. Laboratory work that could not be done in our swaying tree-tops—"

We had tied up our boat and gone ashore. As we rounded the base of the rock, the wind and spray hit us, whipping away Aurita's words. And then I felt her clutch me.

"Oh, Lee—our boat—"

I turned. Our narrow little boat, with its sail raised, was heading out of the cove! A man's figure was in its stern, guiding it. As he reached the rougher water outside the cove we saw him stand up, heaving overboard one of the small outriding cylinder-pontoons, with its razor-keel to prevent side-slipping when sailing cross-wind. A big figure with a band around his fore-

head, holding his waving bushy hair.

It was Torm, Son of Caroh, the Chief Counsellor. He had been hiding in our bow-cabin, of course. No wonder the aerite-bird, scenting his presence, had seemed startled. He saw us on the shore and stood up, waving with a jibbing gesture. My little heat-gun was in my hand, but he was far too distant to be within range.

The wind brought his ironic voice:

"The Earthman is a fool. Have nothing to do with him—you, my dear one—remember what I told you? The time would come when you—and all virgins—will do what the men command. That time has come—"

His mocking laugh ended his words. I gripped Aurita.

"What does he mean by that?"

"Oh, Lee, I never told you—Caroh has three sons. Torm, and two older brothers. And those other two—they have been banished. Kidnapers several years ago—"

How clearly I could understand it now! The wily Caroh, with his counsel of oppression for the Nonites—stirring them into rebellion! Two of his older sons on the island of crime? Of course he would plot to release them. And Torm—

"What does he mean," I insisted, "saying he told you all virgins must yield to the men?"

Her gaze would not meet mine.

"He—he did say that. Oh, I never told you, Lee—just before you came—he—he tried to force marriage upon me. But I did not love him. He said he was sorry—pleaded with me. So I forgave—"

"I see. That's enough, Aurita—I understand—" She was trembling as my arm held her against me.

OUT on the tumbled, blood-red water Torm with our boat slanted



over the waves toward the distant crime-island. To join his brothers. To lead them, of course, against the city of Dreen, where their father was waiting with the Nonites stirred into rebellion.

But what had we to fear, with the fifty projectors of the vibration ray which could dissolve human flesh? Those projectors must be assembled and taken to Dreen at once—mounted there before the Nonites could act, and before Torm and his men could attack . . .

We came to the small tunnel-mouth entrance. It was here that Aurita and I had seen that wounded young fellow staggering along the path. I stopped. His blood still showed on the rocks here. The curved knife-blade that had stabbed him was still lying here where Raalt had drawn it out of his side.

“Lee—look here—back at Dreen—”

Aurita called to me as I was examining the knife. She was standing at the cliff-top. I joined Aurita, and we peered. The tree-top horizon back toward Dreen was red and murky with the storm. No one, nothing, in sight there across the water. And then I saw a tiny blob of figure. A Nonite. And then another and another. Stalking forward, furtive in the foliage—pallid-white figures, like shifting ghosts stained crimson when the lightning glares painted them. Ghosts drenched in blood, stalking the city . . .

I drew the shuddering Aurita away.

“We must get inside—tell Raalt’s companions all this—and get the projectors assembled—”

It was so silent in the dim passageway with the lash and roar of the storm, muffled and then gone. Silent, as death . . .

“Aurita—you stay behind me—”

With my small weapon in hand, slowly I advanced. My heart was

pounding. In the heavy silence here I could seem to hear it knocking against my ribs. And suddenly I gasped; and Aurita, half behind me, gave a low, startled cry.

The passageway had opened into a small grotto, which Raalt and his fellows had draped with grass rugs and mats on the floor. The characteristic low, rattan-like furniture of chairs and a table was here. And a dim form, lighted by the flickering brazier of tree-gum which still burned in its bracket on the wall.

A young man lying here. We bent over him. His throat was a crimson welter, almost severing his neck so that his head dangled askew. A young fellow not much older than Raalt. His dead eyes, still seeming to hold horror and the agony of death, stared mutely at us. But he wasn’t the one whom Raalt had told us had been murdered! And then we saw another—and another . . .

**F**ORGETFUL of ourselves, we rushed into the adjoining laboratory. Its stone workbenches were overturned; chairs were strewn; apparatus and tools of the work which had been carried on here, lay in a litter on the floor. Mute evidence of the struggle for life which Raalt’s young companions had put up before they were overcome. And here in the wreckage the rest of them lay. One was decapitated. Another lay hacked, horrible with gore. Ghastly evidence of the ferocity of the attackers . . .

I pushed Aurita back . . .

And then we saw one burly fellow of the attackers dead here. From the crime island; his forehead was emblazoned with the crimson star, badge of his dishonor which had been branded there when he was convicted and exiled.



Grotto of death. Mingled with the aromatic smell of the resin torches there was the horrible stench of gore.

Every one of the young men scientists dead.

And the weapons were gone!

## CHAPTER VI

### *Army of the Virgins*

**M**AROONED. We ran out of the grottos, back to the storm-lashed rock shore. Alone here on the island, with what bloody events about to break forth back in Dreen I could only shudderingly imagine. Baffled, helpless rage swept me. What was going on back there? I thrust away the weird pictures my strained imagination conjured.

"Oh, Lee, how will any boat get to us from Dreen, in this storm? What will we do now? Those crimson-star men from the crime-island—"

The wind whipped at her words and flung them away into the murk. The storm now had broken into full intensity. For how long, I have no idea, we huddled among the rocks, gazing with awe at this wrath of nature. Weird, fantastic scene indeed.

The wind, slanting at us from the direction of Dreen, now was a steady roar. Rain was falling—great sheets of driving droplets that slanted almost horizontal. Overhead, purple and orange-green cloud-vapors had lowered, racing so close that the spires of the little castle-cliff split them as like a turgid purple river the vapors flowed past. The lake was a seething mass of waves now—white-caps with the spume blown from them to mingle with the rain.

Momentarily there had been no lightning flares. The scene was a deep turgid purple. All but the water of the

lake. The waves there had stirred an opalescence in the water. The flying spume shimmered iridescent—a million-million pearl-drops pelting us. And then the lightning came again—a seemingly horizontal flash from one horizon to the other. A sustained bolt, this time. Through what seemed an eternity it hung like a giant, blood-stained scimitar arching over our heads.

Awesome glare of glorious splendor. The clouds seemed dripping blood—every rain droplet glistening crimson, mingling with the opalescence of the spume. The sky was crimson—the lake suddenly a sea of gore. Ghastly premonitory symbol.

Beside me the crouching little figure of Aurita, her wet brown drapes plastered to the lithe young lines of her body—her golden tresses tossing in the wind—suddenly I saw her as though soaked in blood, so that I held her closer, shuddering.

And then, with the eerie crackling thunderclap rolling away, engulfed by the storm-roar, the red sword over us melted and was gone. The deep purple gloom settled here again, like a tragic mask to hide the blood that had been spilled.

"I think that was the worst of it," Aurita said. "The red-storms usually do not last long."

Another interval, and then I could feel that the wind was lessening. Then the rain ceased, with an orange glow on the rifted clouds and the red lightnings again at the horizon, growling and muttering.

**T**HEY ought to be able to send that boat to us from Dreen, starting about now," I suggested.

"Yes," she agreed.

It seemed obvious to me that the storm, a disadvantage to us, had also been a disadvantage to Torm and his

men. But there were some three hundred of them, there on the crime-island. They had the projectors of the dissolving vibration-ray, of course. Doubtless they had landed on the castle-cliff, just about the time Raalt left, so that he was the only survivor there. They had boats now at the crime-island, as Jeena had told us. And with the rays, they would come to attack Dreen. I could picture those rays, hurled into the little forest city.

"The storm will have delayed them," I was saying to Aurita. "And now, if we can get away from here—"

To do what? But Aurita saw it perhaps more clearly than I did.

"They must not reach Dreen," she said grimly. "And it is the Virgins who will stop them—kill them."

Grim, set little face. The red-purple of the stormlight made her slant eyes deep turgid pools. Miserable commentary upon mankind, that now these events, all man-created, could make gentle little Aurita thirst for blood, with her lips pressed together and her fists clenched as she envisaged how she would try to kill. Instinct of self-preservation. It can make a killer of anyone, of anything that lives . . .

Then the storm broke away. The rifted clouds thinned, gloriously painted orange and green until that too faded and patches of silver stars were showing—starlight that gleamed to glorify the sullen spent waves of the lake; and gleamed on the little pools of water here in the rock-hollows beside us.

Calm and quiet beauty after the storm. That was nature's way. But our storm of human conflict wasn't over. It was just beginning. If only this could be an omen of its end for Aurita and me . . .

"No boat coming yet?" I murmured.

"No. I don't see any."

I wondered if Torm had been able to

reach the crime-island, or if the storm had engulfed him. Fervently I hoped that it had.

"Lee—could that be an aerite?" Aurita said presently.

In the sky, off toward Dreen where now the clouds were only a thin stream of opal vapor, a little dot had appeared. At first we thought it might be one of the bird-like aerites, winging toward us. But then as it enlarged, it showed as a flat, squarish blob, wingless. At an altitude of only a hundred feet above the lake, it came sliding through the air toward us . . .

My volplane! It was an oblong platform some fifteen by twenty feet, built of wood into which I had erected some of the mechanisms and segments of the anti-gravity plates from the wrecked Blaine-rocket in which I had arrived. Artificial gravity-repulsion, enough to raise it or hold it poised, and with electronic little rocket streams to give it lateral motion. The faint violet streams were visible now, like a tiny spreading comet-tail behind it.

THEN as it slowed and lowered, we saw a man's figure lying prone on it, clinging to the hand-holds I had devised. And piles of racked silver-gleaming objects were stacked beside him, lashed with thongs to the platform's planks.

It was Raalt. He had, upon occasion, helped me build the volplane. He knew how to operate it. I held my breath now as he waved to us, checking his advance almost over us, with a dozen of the little violet gas-streams giving the platform a circular rotation. And then with gravity attraction, he was descending to the rocks near us.

"Easy!" I shouted. "Don't smash it, Raalt!"

"Why should I?" he called back. His grinning boyish face, flushed with his

excitement, projected for a moment over the platform edge. And then he landed, with not too much of a thump and no damage done.

"Knew I could do it," he laughed. "This thing is just grand, Lee—"

But his laugh faded when we told him that there was no one here but ourselves—and the dead, his murdered fellow-workers. And that the ray-projectors were gone.

"Why—why—" he gasped. "They're going to send a boat here from Dreen, but that's no use now. Why—then those crimson-star men can attack us with our own weapons! Rays to dissolve human flesh—used upon the city of Dreen—"

"Yes," I agreed. "They've got boats there at the crime-island—probably starting now—"

It numbed him, and then he gasped,

"That damned Torm. You, my sister, I always told you he was dangerous for a girl to be with. Damned dirty villain—"

"Right," I agreed. "But that doesn't help us now. You arranged for the young men to organize in Dreen—"

"Yes, surely I did. Father always has two hundred—what you on Earth, as you tell me, call a police force. He will have a thousand others added to them within an hour or two. Jeena is getting the girls to fly to your meeting place," he added to Aurita. "Some have got their knives—but I thought I would bring some more, and take you to join them."

His face had gone white as what we really were facing now dawned on him. He gripped me.

"Lee, I thought—the girls meeting with their aerites—that was a good idea, because mostly it would get them out of danger in Dreen. But now—but now, these crime men coming with our projectors—why my God, if they

reach Dreen—"

"But they will not!" Aurita cried. "My girls will stop them—who else?"

If only I had had some warning of this! If only men could fly on the aerites! But that was impossible. If I had had more time, perhaps to duplicate my gravity-plates and little rocket streams, so that I could have constructed a dozen of these platforms, with young men upon them, to attack the boats of the oncoming enemy! Futile thoughts!

**A**URITA and I lay with Raalt on the volplane. I took the controls, raised it off the apron of rocks there by the little castle-cliff. And at an altitude of a hundred feet or so we slid smoothly through the air, heading for the Virgins' meeting place. It was partly toward Dreen, but back from the lake where the forest frayed out and there was only naked desolation of the barrenlands where animals of a dozen weird kinds roamed, feeding upon each other, and upon slithering, frightened reptiles.

Weird, tumbled landscape of glowering desolation. Grey-black, porous rocks, burned and pitted as though by a Titan's blowtorch. Occasionally as we passed, slithering things were visible down there in the silvery darkness.

Steadily the wild landscape rose into terraced jagged hills. The Virgins' gathering place was at the top of a black crystalline peak—giant triangular shaft that rose some three hundred feet above the surrounding wastes. A table-rock top surmounted it—grey-black marble-like surface, with a ring of great boulders around its depressed center.

We landed smoothly. A dozen or more of the girls were already here, with their huge aerite-birds docilely among them. And now as we unpacked

the crescent knife-blades and the slings to hurl them, other girls on the great birds were arriving from Dreen. They came singly and in little groups, for a moment circling overhead, with the *cheep* of the aerites mingling with the girls' cries of greeting as they swooped down and landed.

Little Jeena was here, her face flushed with excitement, her bosom heaving under her brown-red bodice, her red-gold hair in a sheen glinting with starlight as it enveloped her.

"Four hundred of our girls," she told Aurita and me excitedly. "They are coming."

Weird, starlit eyrie, this gathering place of the Virgins, up here in the silvery night. The aerites were bringing them now in clusters, circling, with girlish, excited voices calling down; and then the back-flapping beating wings of the giant birds as they alighted. Soon the rocks echoed with the girls' chatter and like dogs the fluffy brown and green aerites caught the excitement, standing with flapping wings and excited bird-calls.

**I** STOOD with Aurita, silently watching. Some of the girls had brought slings and knives; Raalt and Jeena were distributing them to the others. My heart welled with queerly mixed emotions. Frail, beautiful little creatures, these Virgins of the Forest People. Excited now. Enthusiastic. Girding themselves for battle. Laughing as though it were a game. But there was death ahead, for them . . .

And nothing that I could do to stop them. Nor could I even dare want to stop them. The thought of the city of Dreen assailed by the men from the crime-island with their rays—the helpless old men and women, the mothers, the children there—that was a greater horror.

And it must have been that Aurita was sharing my thoughts, my emotions. For suddenly with a leap that carried her twenty feet from me, she mounted a butte-like rock, facing the chattering, assembled girls, with her arms flung up for silence.

Amazing, this transformation of the gentle little druid-girl I had thought I knew! Like a Valkyrie she stood, up there in the starlight. Transfigured. Every beautiful line of her was tense, dominant, commanding. And then she spoke:

"Virgins of Dreen—we have been always for gentleness, for love. Always have we wanted to help the Nonites, for we know they too, are human. Never would any one of us raise a hand in violence against another human. Unthinkable! But it isn't unthinkable any longer. From the island of crime the crimson-star men of crime have dared to escape. They have stolen the ray-weapons.

"And the men of crime now will turn those weapons against our city. They will rule our Forest People. Oh, you know what that means for you and for me. You know their purpose. And to achieve it they will kill. Your mother to be killed. Your father, and mine—and your little sisters and brothers . . .

"And so we must stop them. A virgin now, for the first time, must kill. That is a terrible thing. But if we do not, what surely will happen is worse."

Battle cry of the Valkyries. She sounded it suddenly—a little throaty call that must have sprung within her, inspired by the blood of some remote ancestress who fought and killed for her mate. And four hundred girlish voices echoed it.

Battle cry of the Virgins. It welled up into the starlight—voices of purity who would fight to keep it unsullied. Who would fight and kill with primi-

tive ferocity to save those they loved. And who would die, still fighting and unafraid.

**T**HEY were all assembled here now. Then with slings in hand, with a dozen of the curved blades hung at their waists, they mounted the aerites. And rose in little groups, circling overhead.

Raalt and I, grim and tense, watched them until they were all aloft. Then we mounted the volplane. At least a hundred extra slings and knife-blades were piled beside us. Slowly, with gathering speed, the little anti-gravity platform rose. The girls, led by Aurita, who now wore a garment of flaming red—their leader, and behind her Jeena, were circling, milling, forming into the small flying groups as they had planned.

Frail, fluttering little army, with only its bravery for its chief weapon . . .

I met Raalt's grim gaze; and suddenly he burst out:

"Oh, if only we had never revived that damnable ray—"

How often that has been said in the recent history of our own Earth! Science for the benefit of mankind! With what ghastly mockery the lust of man has turned it into exactly the opposite! So often indeed, that one may truly wonder whether Earth would not be better without that science of which our age so proudly boasts!

I swung our volplane ahead of the four hundred girls. Behind us they were flying now in forty little groups of ten, strung out in a double line, with Aurita leading them.

What a picture she made, astride the aerite, arm upraised in the signal to advance!

Within a few minutes we had crossed the barrenlands and were out over the starlit lake. I swung higher. Five

hundred feet; then seven or eight hundred—surely beyond range of the enemy projectors. At the lake I turned, not toward Dreen, but toward the castle-cliff, where far to the left an arm of the lake opened into the big forty-mile lagoon which held the island of crime.

The volplane was flying faster now. With the groups of girls strung out in a single line behind us, we advanced to battle.

## CHAPTER VII

### Blood of Zonara

**R**AALT and I crouched on the volplane, planning the conduct of our attack. We had already been able to scan all of the lake down to Dreen. There was no sign of the enemy vessels; it was obvious that they had not yet come into this arm of the lake.

We swept on, until presently the little castle-cliff came into view. Starlight glimmered on it like a silver halo. To the left here the lake bent in a sweeping wide curve, opening into a big irregularly circular basin, in the center of which, some twenty miles further, the crime-island lay, a little dark dot against the silvery surface.

"Those girls should stay back," Raalt said presently. He gestured to where two of the groups of ten girls had urged their aerites forward so that now, one group on each side, they were passing us.

Weird sight, those two little squads, seeming trying to race with us the huge brown birds with their great spread of flapping green wings were stretching their necks and big gray-blue bills forward. The girls, astride them, were slim brown blobs, with pink-white legs pressing close into the birds' brown feathered body. The wind rushed past,

fluttered the girls' brownish drapes and flowing hair.

I stood half erect, gripping one of the volplane's hand-holds to steady myself in the rush of wind. Close behind us Aurita was flying. Her red garment set her apart like a red-storm lightning flash.

"Bring those girls back," I shouted.

Her waved hand answered me; she urged her aerite to greater speed, herded off the two groups, sent them behind us . . .

And then we sighted the enemy boats. They were just leaving the crime island. The storm undoubtedly had delayed them; and probably also the assembling and erecting of the projectors. We saw them now—a boat coming out from the island, and then another.

I rose higher, swung off to one side with the girls obediently following. For ten minutes or so we waited. Then another boat came; and then a fourth.

My signal to Aurita and to Jeena held the girls back; and at eight hundred or a thousand foot altitude, I sent the volplane skimming forward so that we passed almost directly over the little line of boats. Four of them, and no more seemed coming.

They were crude wooden affairs, each some thirty feet long, wide and cumbersome. Open boats, not decked over. We could make out the black dots of the men crowding them; some seventy-five in each, doubtless. A line of them at the gunwales, manning long sweeps, like oars, sent the heavy craft slowly forward.

**I** TURNED us back to rejoin the girls. The boats were some five hundred feet apart. As we passed back over the leader, a little pencil ray of orange light stabbed at us. The first shot.

It fell far short. It was a thin nar-

row beam, certainly no bigger than a man's arm. It darted up, held for perhaps ten seconds and then faded.

"The beam cannot spread?" I murmured to Raalt.

"No. Just a thin stab, like that one. After five hundred feet, I think it would do very little damage."

That at least was in our favor. It would not be easy to hit one of the fluttering birds, several hundred feet away, with that narrow beam. Nor to hold it on the shifting target so that its lethal effect would be felt.

I summoned Aurita now. My plan of battle was fairly clear in my mind. We would have to attack, of course. Without that, the enemy boats would go on down the lake until they could assemble and bring their rays upon Dreen. There was a bottleneck in the lake a few miles beyond the turn—a narrow passage only two or three hundred feet wide, with the lake widening at both ends of its half mile length. The jungle pressed close to the edges of the narrow strait. When the boats got in there, particularly if we could get them bunched, that was our best time for attack.

I explained it to Aurita. With the boats clustered, we would have a far bigger target for the descending, whirling knife-blades.

She nodded eagerly.

"Yes, I understand. I will tell Jeena—and we will tell all of them."

"You are to keep out of range until the boats reach there," I directed. "And then—well, I'll give the signal. You'll see the volplane going down."

"Yes. Very well, Lee. I shall tell them."

"Look!" Raalt interjected. "One of the knives—"

A girl, from up here at our high altitude, had sent one of the blades descending. Shining, whirling little thing,

its swift rotation making it look like a round blob. It skimmed down, like a boomerang in a big crescent arc, heading to one side and turning. The starlight glinted on it as it skimmed, fell.

It missed the leading boat by a hundred feet or more and fell with a little splash into the lake. In the heavy night-silence, the men's shouts of derision floated up to us.

"Tell the girls not to do that," I ordered sharply. "Just a waste of blades and we have not too many."

**A**URITA left us, her aerite winging away to join Jeena.

For another interval we hovered, high up. It would be nearly an hour perhaps before the boats reached that bottleneck strait. I presently called to Jeena as she passed, ordering the girls to wait here, to follow the boats. Then Raalt and I skimmed the volplane for Dreen. As though with a premonition . . .

Certainly there was nothing now that we could do for Dreen, save to attack this oncoming enemy . . .

We passed high over the little tree-top city, skimming in a great circle. Starlight was down there, and now the crescent Earth was rising, mellowing the forest-top with its yellow glow. Prone on the volplane, Raalt and I stared down.

Ghastly sight! On one of the swaying, bridge-like little streets, Nonites were running—pallid ghostly shapes, stained yellow by the Earthlight. Nonites with harvest tools, like swords glinting in the Earthshine.

I saw one of them reach a little thatched, moundshaped house, with the lounging platform before it. A woman huddled there—a woman in terror holding a little girl against her. The frenzied Nonite's sword flashed, with a cutting sweep as one would harvest grain

in a field. Then it was a sword dripping with crimson as the woman fell.

The little girl, screaming, tried to run. With a pounce the Nonite seized her; whirled her; flung the child's body down through the foliage—little blob falling to the dark ground far underneath . . .

Ghastly horror. In this little section of Dreen, the Nonites everywhere were running—hunting the terrified people in the houses; hurling them from bridges, from vine-ladders to which they were clinging.

In the silence the agonized screams floated up. Screams mingled now with other faint weird sounds, even more ghastly. The lusting voices of men filled with the frenzy of murder. Like vultures they were gathered down there on the dark ground. There was a place where for an instant we could see them—milling formless blobs of horror, eager for more victims for their swords.

We swept on. I saw another section where the young men of Dreen were fighting, groups of them lunging at the lustful, now-murderous Nonites. Pressing the Nonites back, cutting through them, fighting their way forward . . .

"Oh Lee, our home—look down there—my father—"

**I** HAD dropped the volplane lower.

Close ahead of us, no more than a hundred feet down, the big dwelling of old Ptyah lay surrounded by its spreading tree-branches. Nonites were in the platform-garden in front—a group of Nonites standing waving their weapons, shouting at old Ptyah who had appeared in the doorway. Their Ruler, so that momentarily they were afraid to advance and could only stand their ground, brandishing their weapons while they hurled invectives.

It was just an instant glimpse as Raalt and I floated almost overhead. Then in that second, behind Ptyah in

the doorway, Caroh appeared. Wily old Counsellor—the Nonites quite evidently now thought him their friend. A knife glinted in his hand as he jumped. Raalt and I both shouted at once; frantically we were fitting a blade into our slings.

But too late. Caroh's knife sank into Ptyah's back. He fell. My blade whirled down at almost the same instant. For that second I held my breath. By luck doubtless, my aim was true. The whirling blade struck Caroh's neck; he fell, with his head dangling askew.

All in a few ghastly seconds. Our platform swept past. Looking back we could see where the Nonites in Ptyah's garden now were being attacked by arriving men.

Poor Raalt for a moment, with that vision of his murdered father still before him, crouched numbed. There was nothing that I could say. Only with my hand on his shoulder could I let him know how I felt.

I headed us back up the lake. There was so little that we would have done, back there in Dreen. Our task lay ahead. I could only pray that the young men of the Forest People would beat off the Nonites. It seemed that perhaps they would. And now, if this other enemy could be turned back . . .

The girls, as I had commanded, were still circling at a thousand feet. And the first of the four boats, still in a line, was just entering the bottleneck strait. I called Aurita, warning Raalt not to tell her what we had seen in Dreen. Surely at least for now, I could spare her that.

"You take half the girls," I directed. "Twenty squads. Fly low in front of that first boat. They will think you are about to attack, and they may stop and wait for it. But keep well away—more than five hundred feet. Have Jeena,

with the other girls, press toward the rear boat—try and drive it forward, you see?"

So that we might get them bunched in the bottleneck. Raalt and I held the volplane in the center as the girls divided, swept down in great fluttering arcs. It evidently startled the enemy. A few futile stabs of their rays darted at the descending girls. I could see the men at the sweeps in the first boat stop their efforts.

And then I swooped the volplane. The first attack.

WE dropped downward, heading at the last boat. It increased its speed. Its ray stabbed at us as we came within range; missed, and then we were over it. A ray-beam came up, struck our bottom and for ten seconds clung. No great damage. There was the smell of chlorite gases; and the queer fetid odor of rotting wood.

In that swift swoop down and up again, Raalt and I hurled several of the whirling knives. Most of them missed, but one or two went into the rear boat. We saw one of the men fall, as the whirling blade cut into him. A confusion down there . . .

Then we were up again out of range. The tactics had partially worked. The first boat had stopped; the last one, under the volplane's attack and with the squads of girls behind it, seeming about to swoop on it, had frantically hastened its advance. Almost in a little group, all within the space of a few hundred feet, the four boats were bunched in the bottleneck.

And then I gave the signal for the general attack. It started with a great flutter of the huge aerites' wings; grim shouts of the girls urging them forward and downward.

Awe-inspiring sight, that swoop into battle. But soon it was a thing of



horror. Little squads of ten, they dipped down and up again, hurling their whirling knives at the bottom of the arc. Then the orange beams of the pencil rays were stabbing into them.

I shall never forget the sinking of my heart as I saw the first girl struck. She had avoided several of the stabs in her swoop, and had discharged her knife, at close range. But as she was rising, the narrow orange beam struck her, and for almost all its eternity of ten seconds, miraculously it clung. Ten seconds while the aerite fluttered. I had a vision of her there on its back, clinging . . .

Suddenly a ghastly leprous vision—part of the bird and the girl's white-limbed body abruptly were melting. Ghastly, fused, leprous thing, bird and girl, rotted blob that in those seconds was falling, turning end over end until it struck the water with a little splash, mercifully to hide it.

And there were others. A ray that cut through a whole squad of ten, some falling, others with the bird flopping sidewise, struggling drunkenly with one wing. One or two others sagging down, flopping into the water. A girl down there, freed of her wounded bird, was swimming . . .

**T**HE wind whistled past our ears as Raalt and I swooped the volplane. Lying prone on it, with our heads projecting a little, with our weapons ready for the bottom of our swooping arc, it was impossible to see much of what was going on. We hurled our knives into one of the crowded boats; I circled us low and we came back, hurled again; and again. The rays stabbed at us from underneath. The fumes of the chlorite gases and the rotting smell of the dissolving wood of our under-planks at times was choking. Would the rays dissolve through? Undoubtedly so, if

enough of them struck in the same place.

But the hurled, whirling knife-blades were finding their marks. We had a glimpse of one of the boats, crowded with men, with a dozen or so of the little projectors mounted among them. There was confusion down there. Men hacked by the knives, falling among their comrades. Several of the projectors had been smashed as the men fell.

At the gunwales, the men with the long sweeps had given it up now. Some of the sweeps were floating overboard. The boat was drifting; the current in the bottleneck was carrying it toward the jungle-like bank.

Already that boat was in distress. We took another swoop at it and then rose. The end of the first attack.

Most of the girls were struggling up out of range now. My heart went cold. The girls were still trying to keep into squads. But they were broken; fifty girls at least were gone, out of our four hundred—leprous ghastly figures down in the water; others struggling in the air. One or two, with the girl perhaps realizing herself dying and her aerite unharmed, were winging back toward Dreen.

My anguished gaze sought Aurita—she was up here, safe; and so was Jeena. Both of them shouted at us as they fluttered past. They ignored any possible command from us. Again with the girls following them, they swooped.

The horror went on. A minute, five minutes, or even half an hour, I have no way of saying. Every passing moment seemed to bring an eternity of things terrible, indescribable.

One corner of our volplane had melted, rotted away now. Much more of that and the gravity-plates would be disorganized. Two of our rocket-

streams were dead. As we rose from our swoops I could see more of the girls, wounded, struggling away. A dozen or more had wavered off and dropped into the nearby forest. Nonites were lurking there now, waiting for what might come to them . . .

But we were making progress. Two of the boats had gone ashore. It seemed that in one, most of the men were strewn in a weltering mass. No shots were coming from it. On another boat, fire had broken out—one of the projectors, wrecked, had short-circuited, killing all the men near it. The others were struggling in chaos. The third boat was fighting, with the girls still swooping at it. The fourth was making away toward Dreen.

"We'll go after it, Raalt—"

"Yes," he agreed. "Oh Lee, look—over us—"

SEVERAL times girls had come to us to get more of the knife-blades. We had no more than twenty or thirty left here. And suddenly now a wounded aerite was fluttering—an aerite and girl. Then the bird, with one of its wings gone, wavered sidewise and the girl dropped off, fell six or eight feet and landed beside us.

Jeena . . .

Raalt gave an agonized cry and threw himself down to hold her. Poor little Jeena. An arm, and one of her legs seared . . . She lay pallid in Raalt's arms, just barely conscious but still she was trying to smile as she gazed up at him.

"We—we're winning, Raalt?"

"Yes—yes, of course, Jeena dear—"

I hurled the volplane at that escaping boat. Its open interior was a welter; more than half of its men lying strewn. The others were manning the sweeps, frantically urging it forward. It seemed to have only one projector

still in action. A big man was standing there in the stern with it, training it on us.

Torm! The starlight, Earthlight and the flames from the burning boat illumined him. His blood-smearred face was grinning. I poised us, ready for the final swoop.

Then over us there was a flutter. Aurita dropped beside us, and her wounded mount wavered away. Aurita, thank God, still unharmed.

"I need some knives," she gasped. "I can call another aerite."

"We haven't any knives to spare." I gripped her. How could I be blamed that now I could not let her start off again into that turmoil of death, by trick of fate so much more dangerous for her, than for me, here protected by the volplane planks.

"You stay here," I said. "We've got them beaten, by God we have."

Her strained white face went into a twisted grin.

"Yes, we have."

One of the wrecked boats was jammed against the shore. I glanced back. The girls had ceased their attack now; what was left of them had struggled up and were poised overhead.

"Jeena needs you," I murmured to Aurita. She had not seen Jeena. With a little cry she threw herself down; and Raalt came to lie beside me.

And then we swooped at Torm.

Skimming low over the water, I slid the volplane directly at him. There was a second when his orange beam sizzled close over our heads. Then Raalt's hurled blade went into his side and mine seemed to strike his throat where his lusting, murderous blood spurted in a crimson torrent.

The volplane swept close over him. Then we turned to look back. He had fallen. Then with a last desperate frenzy he staggered erect. His smashed

projector was darting flames of electronic fire at him. For an instant he poised on the gunwale, gazing at us with an arm waving as though still trying to hurl defiance. Then his body pitched overboard. There was a splash. A monstrous rotting thing in the water for an instant. And then there was nothing . . .

**A**FTERMATH of battle. Return of the victorious army. As my mind goes back to it now, really I have little heart to describe it—that pitiful little army slowly winging its way back to Dreen. In war, even the victor is vanquished. How true that is! Broken little army, to struggle back now and celebrate its victory. We were able to rescue a few of the girls, but even so, a scant hundred and fifty were left to realize that they had won.

Nor need I describe with any detail what since has happened to me here in Dreen. The rebellion of the Nonites was checked by the young men of the Forest People, that terrible night. The Nonites realize now how they were tricked.

Jeena recovered from her injuries. Fortunately the ray had held her only a second, and her skin only seared by its dissolving qualities. In a few months—for she was a long time recovering from the shock—she was wholly well, and more beautiful than ever. Perhaps more beautiful even than Aurita, but I will never admit it fully. She and Raalt are very happy; married now.

Aurita and I, too, are mated. With Raalt we rule Dreen. A new era is dawning for us all, we hope. Our ray-weapons have been destroyed; the Nonites now are our equals, happy as we. Food is more abundant; soon we hope that we can build cities on the ground. A new era. I wonder if that

really is progress toward human happiness . . . ?

I have written this narrative; I shall try now to wait my chance, and launch a little cylinder I have built, hoping that some time this may reach Earth, so that my dear grandparents may understand the mystery of me. I hope they forgive me. It is all for the best. Surely this will show that my very strange destiny brought me here, and I am happy . . .

LEE BLAINE.

**D**R. ROBERT BLAINE, astronomer, looked up from the tiny flames of the embering log in the fireplace.

“He is happy, Mary,” he whispered. “We would not have him return, would we?”

His wife picked up the crystal that mirrored Lee Blaine’s smiling face and looked into it fondly.

“No,” she said softly. “He has a perfect world there—and he will make of it what mankind has failed to make here on Earth . . .”

Reflectively Dr. Blaine picked up the other crystal. As he looked into its depths and into the flashing, laughing eyes of Aurita, the Druid girl of Zonara, his fingers reached out and took the sheaf of maps and mathematical calculations that proved the existence and location of Earth’s second moon. For a moment he fingered them, then he tossed them atop the glowing log.

“Robert,” Mary Blaine said. “What are you doing . . . ?”

Dr. Blaine handed her the crystal in his hand.

“Look,” he said softly. “Do you think an old man like me can place such a fleeting thing as personal vindication for a discovery before her happiness and Lee’s? It is better that the newspapers laugh at me. Better that

mankind does not believe Zonara exists; so that Lee and Aurita can keep their paradise. Then *we* will have the last laugh, eh, darling?"

She placed a hand on his white head and ran her fingers fondly through his hair.

"Yes, Robert," she said softly. "We will."

And they both watched while the flames licked away the last trace of proof that 440,000 miles away in space was a world where man's hate had been obliterated.

## « THE MOST PERFECT RACE »

BY GUY FAULDES

**I**N spite of the steady progress of science and sociology in the world today, we still find it quite impossible to conceive of a race living in a utopian world. It is impossible to imagine, for example, a world in which dishonesty would be nonexistent merely because no person could be dishonest. It is equally impossible to imagine a race so sublimated to the good of all, that the individual passions of envy, jealousy, anger, and greed were unheard of.

However, such a world exists. And it exists here and now, living alongside our own world. We find it in the utopian scheme of living upon which the insect world thrives. So perfect has been the civilization that tiny insects have set up beside our own imperfect mode of existence, that scientists have been forced to conclude that we human beings will arrive at an equal civilization status with insects only after millions of more years are spent in our development!

Probably the most carefully studied and most civilized race in the insect world is that of the ant. By comparing ant life to our own existence, and on our own standards, we are more

easily able to get a picture of its existence.

On this premise—comparing the ants to us—we can visualize a society of workers diligently laboring night and day, building bridges, constructing tunnels, engaged in agriculture, horticulture, and caring for all sorts of domestic animals. These workers are protected in their hard and ceaseless toil by an army of soldiers. Now, in our own society, we would expect the workers to be both men and women, and the soldiers to be male. Not so, however, in the ant world. Both the workers and the soldiers are female!

But before any males reading this snap their fingers in unholy glee at the thought of a civilization in which such tiresome duties as work and fighting are taken care of by the female of the species, let us add that the male ant lives under circumstances which are far from delightful.

Like a Broadway impresario, the male ant's task is to produce. However, unlike Broadway impresarios, he doesn't produce plays. His task is to attend to the propagation of the race. Aside from this task in duty to the ant society, the male is treated indifferently

by the female dominated world in which he lives. During his short life span his other jobs are menial and minor. His lack of stature in the society of his kind is due, in great measure, to the fact that there are far more female of the species than there are of the male.

To get back to the important cogs in ant civilization—the women—we see that the workers in the insect scheme of existence have other tasks than those of construction and cultivation. They are also called on to take care of all the young. When you consider that the ant children are so delicate that the slightest changes in temperature may kill them, and that they have to be constantly carried from one place to another, this task in itself seems staggering. However, there are other duties to the workers in the ant kingdom. One of the most primary is the tending of live stock. And believe it or not, the ants employ plenty of domesticated animals in their service—584 in all!

Now all of this makes the day a pretty full one for Lady Ant, even if she is boss of her civilization. Consequently, in this superutopian mode of living, it becomes necessary to regiment sleep to its proper place. Of course, this, too, has been attended to.

The workers take their sleep in shifts, never napping for even a second longer than necessary. And as for the matter of food and drink, individual desires in this respect once more take the pattern of the civilization and give ground to a scheme that makes the most good for the greatest number. It is interesting to note that, in rationing of food supplies, there is no selfishness or grubbing in the ant world. Each ant has its share of food and, even when there isn't a great deal of it, will want no more than its allotted portion.

Only those ants whose particular task is to serve as Mothers are allowed all

they want in the way of food, drink, and sleep. These ants have a pre-eminent position in the civilization, and receive the attention and care of favored queens. It is seen to that they are most plentifully supplied in every necessity of life, even to the finest housing places.

There is no murder in the ant world, for there is no need of it. Each ant, like a character from Shangri La, suppresses her individual wants to the benefit of the others. None ever get out of hand, and there is no such thing as revolt in this civilization.

Now, before you begin to ask us, "Is *every* ant kingdom so conducted?" or, "Are *all* ant civilizations so perfect?", let us stop to remind you that this streamlined manner of perfection in living is found only in the higher types of ants. Like our present day civilization, the ant world possesses its yet unconverted barbarians. However, like our own world, we can consider the best in any civilization as representing the attainments of that species. There are bushmen and savages in the ant world. There are untutored, wild and woolly tribes crouching in their jungles just the same as there are in our own. But just as we intend to one day bring the poor benighted heathen into our mode of life and manner of thinking, so do the advanced ant civilizations strive for the betterment of their species as a whole. They're a progressive bunch.

However, before we extol them to the point of utter sociological and moral perfection, we have to admit that they've taken one of man's greatest weaknesses and most long-lived stupidities into their manner of life. They carry on wars outside their own borders; wars just as costly, just as vicious, and probably just as pointless as our own!

# WANDERER OF

By EANDO BINDER



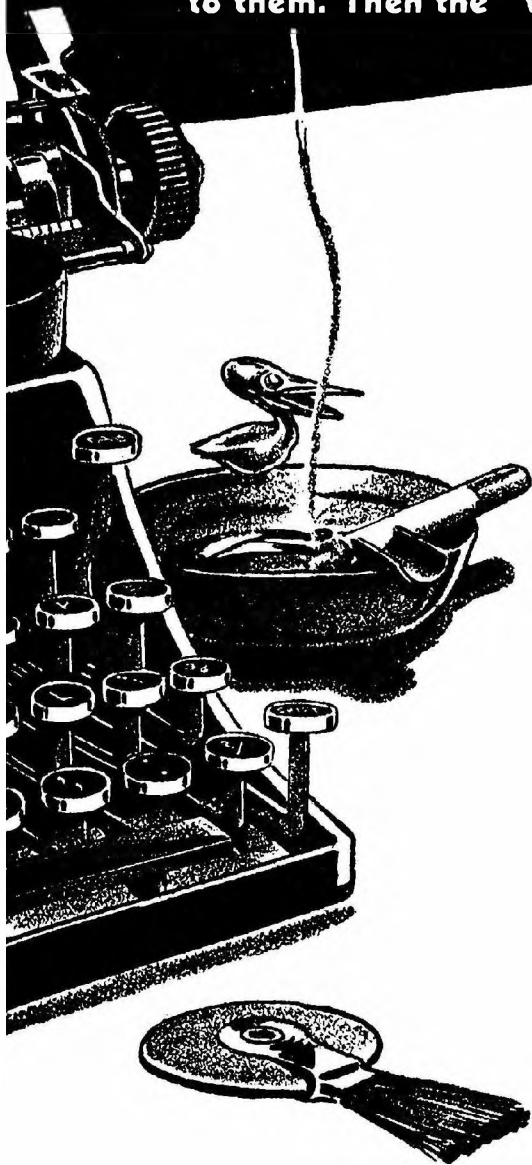
I cannot reveal myself to You. It is against  
Our

Robt.  
Fuqua—

Idic jumped on the  
sys while Boro sat  
on the shift key

# LITTLE LAND

The Little People had to reward these two Big People, but to do so meant great danger to them. Then the "wanderer" volunteered—



**T**HOUGH tired and weak from a day of it, Jim Harvey continued to sit on his camp-stool and dab at the paint-board on the easel with his brushes. It was near dusk.

Somehow, the day had been perfect and the new setting he had found seemed exceptionally inspirational. A shaded grotto ahead, with a crystal-clear brook murmuring through it, whispering of things mysterious. If only he could get it down as his soul saw it! Around him stretched the untouched wildwood of the upper Catskills. The low peaks in all directions were crowned by the flame of sunset. It was sylvan, idyllic.

A scene of fairyland, Jim Harvey mused. He could almost feel little eyes on him. Not just those of a rabbit nibbling in a briar-patch, or a slinking weasel. Perhaps the canny little eyes of an elf, or brownie. If he looked quick enough, he might see their little forms lurking behind tree-stumps and toadstools. And if he came here at night some time, in full moonlight, he could paint in the Dance of the Fairies, there in that glade. . .

He clucked his tongue. His second childhood already, before he was thirty? He laughed silently at himself as he stroked in the brook with silver-grey water color.

The stroke broke off at a sudden noise. The crackling of underbrush shattered the twilight serenity. Harvey turned and saw a bear coming toward him from the side.

Startled, he jumped up. Was the bear attacking him? Bears never attacked grown people, except in rare cases of goaded anger or starvation. The he relaxed. It was a half-grown bear, probably a second-year cub, its first independent season away from its mother. It chased something small and twinkling, unaware of the man. A rabbit or wounded bird or chipmunk. . . .

Harvey strained to see, in the dusk.

He gasped suddenly. Were his eyes playing him tricks? It was a little man! A tiny, human-proportioned figure about six inches high. It was scuttling across the clearing for the sanctuary of the nearest briar-patch. But the bear was right behind, gaining, intent on gobbling up the tempting morsel.

Jim Harvey acted instinctively. A dead branch lay at his feet. He grabbed it up, ran forward to intercept, and cracked the bear over the skull sharply. Taken unawares, the bear's gait broke. Its prey skipped on, into the briar-patch, melting into shadow. It was safe.

Snarling, the bear turned on Harvey. Its teeth bared ferociously. A full-grown bear might have attacked. But after a growling appraisal of its new and sudden assailant, the cub loped off.

"Sorry, old man," Harvey laughed. "Hope you find another dinner. But I couldn't let you—Good Lord!"

The laugh broke off. It suddenly occurred to him why he had interfered. Because he *believed* he had really seen a little man! A pixie, a woodland sprite—one of the mythical Little People. Trick of the shadows, of course. Or the effect of the fairy-like setting, and his

own previous wool-gathering.

And yet . . .

TEN minutes later he turned from his search of the bushes into which the little form had scuttled, finding nothing. He packed his paints and brushes, slung his easel and sketches under his arm, and left. He looked back once, shaking his head.

Three miles beyond he came to his home. It was little more than a cabin, with a two-acre patch of cleared ground back of it, isolated in these hills. The nearest farm was twenty miles east. The nearest town, Tannersville, fifty miles south.

Harvey reached the door at the same time that a battered, chugging Ford crept up along the weed-grown road which was the only direct connection with civilization. The car stopped and a young, slender girl leaped from it into his arms—when he had dropped his paraphernalia.

"Mary, darling," Harvey greeted his wife. "Any luck today?"

"Poor dear, you look tired," she said in tender evasion. "And yet you look a little excited, too. Well . . . about the paintings—"

"I am excited!" Harvey suddenly burst in. He grasped her by the shoulders, looking deep into her azure eyes. "Mary, do you believe in—elves?"

"Jim!" She peered closely at him.

"I mean it! I saw one today. Or rather, one of the Little People."

"Jim, you aren't well yet, and you've been working so hard—"

Harvey brushed a thin hand through his red hair. "Now look, Mary. I know I'm Irish, romantic by nature, and all that. But I tell you I saw one. I'm going to find them—there must be more—and paint them—"

He stopped, turning. Again a car's motor sounded, but this time the smooth



purr of an expensive, new one. The man who stepped out was short and heavy-set, his face thick-featured in the fading twilight.

"Henry Bainbridge!" breathed Mary, pressing close to her husband.

"Hello," Bainbridge greeted tersely. "Just happened to be looking over some of my other property hereabouts. Thought I'd drop in on you." Then, as though having satisfied the amenities, he raised his voice. "I didn't receive your last monthly payment, Harvey. You're four months in arrears now. How long do you expect me to wait?"

"We'll make a payment next month," Harvey said just as tersely. "You know you overcharged us for the land, in the first place. I've had some bad luck recently, placing my paintings—"

"I'm a business man, not a father-confessor," Bainbridge retorted gruffly. "I want those payments made up. This is good land. Other people would like it, if you don't. Understand?"

**H**E turned on his heel, and his car backed around, its taillight vanishing along the winding road that led to the highway.

"You're not crying?" Harvey said softly, as he took the unsold paint-sketches from the car to the cabin.

"No," Mary denied, avoiding his eyes. "But I didn't place a single painting today, in Albany. Jim, what are we going to do? You know what he meant. You've got to stay here. Your health—"

She whirled, her eyes widening suddenly. "Jim, what were you saying before? About—elves!" Worry shone from her eyes, more than for just his physical health.

"Elves!" Harvey bitterly snapped the word out. "There's nothing like a little reality to knock out romantic nonsense. Bainbridge wants his money.

The garden needs weeding. Those are the real things."

His tall form drooped a little. "All along I've been like that—foolish, impractical, romantic. Our elopement. The attic in New York. I was going to be famous overnight. I ruined my health. My first sensible move was to get this place, a year ago. Nature began healing me, and inspiring my art. But I've got to keep myself in line. The garden needs weeding. I'll do that tomorrow first thing. And if my pictures don't sell better, they need a hired hand at the Wilkins farm."

He took a deep breath, getting that off his chest. He looked out of the window, at the full moon slowly rising, bathing the countryside in silvery splendor. Tiny figures, dancing in a glade under such a moon, the legends went.

He shook his head firmly.

"What I saw," he murmured, "was a squirrel or chipmunk. . . ."

## CHAPTER II

### Festival in the Forest

**Y**OUNG Aldic peered from behind a clump of grass as tall as he was, down into the glade. The rising moon spotted the rich sward with liquid silver, through the rustling branches of giant trees.

It was the Full Moon Festival, gayest of the Little People's nightly cavortings. The young people were dancing and laughing, to the tune of golden cymbals and tiny reed-flutes and three-stringed snail-shell lyres. The sweet night air was filled with tinklings and pipings, and the great moon smiled down and nodded.

Aldic's blood surged. He had not enjoyed such a festival now for several moons. More, his eyes had singled out the lithe, swaying form of a lovely girl

whose hair blazed like spun-platinum.

Aldic's heart quickened, for she was sculptured beauty. But he paused, as he was about to reveal himself.

"Ey-oo!" a voice called down there, and a stalwart young man raised his arm for attention. "Ey-oo! Listen to Boro! Listen to me, all of you. I chased away a bear, before, single-handed!"

The dancing stopped. Figures crowded around Boro, the girls eagerly, the other men reluctantly.

"A bear?" queried the girl with silver locks. "How wonderful! Tell us of it, Boro."

"It was a mighty bear," Boro complied, sweeping his arms around in a huge arc. "The greatest you've ever seen. Ten times taller than I. I battled with it. Every time it charged, I rapped its toes with my club and danced beyond its nose. Finally I leaped on a stump and smote it a terrific blow on the nose. Howling, it ran off like a frightened rabbit from Boro the Mighty!"

"From Boro the Braggart!" amended a male voice. "It could not endure his endless boasts."

"There was no bear at all," charged another voice flatly.

"No?" Boro challenged. "Then what tore this?"

Standing in a moonbeam, Boro turned his back. Half his spider-silk shirt was gone, ripped from the rest as if by a great claw. And a thin but noticeable scratch ran the length of his body.

"Does one receive scratches in the back when fighting from the front?" demanded a male voice derisively.

"Who said that?" As he spoke, Boro leaped among the clustered men. He dragged one back in the moonbeam, cuffed him with the flat of his hand, and then shoved him sprawlingly to the ground.

"Now," he shouted, "who else says Boro is a liar?"

He leered around, his powerful body hunched for a spring. The men were suddenly silent, and backed away. The girls gazed at Boro with sighs.

"I do!"

**B**ORO whirled like a shot, searching out the clarion voice. It came from beyond the group.

Aldic leaped from his concealment, and strode down the slope. The moon's limelight revealed him as a tall, slender figure, clad in silken-green shirt, kid-leather shorts, and alligator-skin moccasins. His arms and legs were bare and sun-bronzed. His weapons hung from a belt of copper-wire, from which the light reflected a burnished glow. But not as bright a glow as the flaming red hair of his head.

He stepped with easy grace before Boro.

"I call you liar, Boro the Braggart. I saw the episode. The bear was a small one, not full-grown. It was pursuing you. You had no thought of fighting it, in your great fright. You did not chase it away. Someone else did."

Boro squirmed in humiliation, at being thus exposed by one who had obviously seen the true event. But he was more surprised, for the moment, than shamed.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

All their eyes were on Aldic wonderingly, for none had ever seen him before. He was a total stranger to their tribe of a thousand, all of whom knew each other.

"I am Aldic, a wanderer," the newcomer returned. A child of nature, he went on without false modesty. "I have traveled from far, and have crossed many lands and had many adventures. I have even been in some of the great cities of the Big People."

"He is from another tribe!"

"He wears clothes made from the Big People's things!"

"He has been in their cities!"

It was a mixed chorus of awe and respect from the group. Not in the memory of those living had a stranger visited them from another of their tribes scattered widely over Earth's vast surface.

Boro growled a little. This newcomer had punctured Boro's tale, and robbed him of the limelight, both. It was too much. Boro unslung his bow, fitted a bone arrow to its caterpillar-silk string, and let fly. The arrow whistled through the air, thunked against a tree-trunk, and hung quivering by its point in the dead-center of a target used for practice.

Aldic answered the challenge, unslinging his bow of sprung steel which had once been a delicate watch-spring. The arrow, also of metal, was a daring needle with the eye broken in half for a notch. The twang of a violin-string sounded as the metal shaft darted for the tree and split Boro's arrow into splinters of bone, taking its place at the bull's-eye.

Boro shot his second arrow for a target twice as far away, taking more care, testing the wind. The sliver of bone arched high. Carelessly, Aldic loosed his second shaft almost at the same time. In mid-air, the steel arrow struck the one of bone, shivering it in two—and went on to impale the target hardly an inch from the center.

The exhibition brought a chorused gasp from the watchers. No Robinhood, of their legends or those of the Big People, had ever attained such skill.

**B**ORO, face glowering, was not satisfied. Balancing his spear in hand, he crouched and then flung it almost straight up. It reached the branch of a

tree, high overhead, with just enough force to cling by its fire-hardened point. Twenty-five feet in the scale of the Big Ones. Three hundred feet, in proportion, to the Little Folk. A mighty cast.

The point of Aldic's spear consisted of a common-pin embedded in the wooden shaft. His body snapped like a bow-string as he cast. Higher and higher the weapon sailed. Its sharpened point split the haft of Boro's spear and went thrice its length further before falling back. Aldic caught it in his hand, and glanced quietly at Boro.

Sweating, Boro jerked his stone-headed axe from his belt, and hurled it against a tree-stump with such force that its blade sank half-way into the hard wood. Aldic's arm, like whipcord, buried his bright-metal axe-head completely out of sight.

All this had taken only seconds. The crowd had watched in silent wonder. The red-headed stranger was besting Boro, who had no peer among the tribe, in the manly things. Now two of the men ran to the pile of prizes—things stolen from the Big People—and returned carrying a flat length of wood with markings on it.

The ruler was placed upright on the ground. Tallest of the tribe, Boro stood against it and was measured off at the fourth little marking above the sixth big marking. His eyes gleamed triumphantly, and then clouded as the stranger's mane of red hair reached a notch higher—six and 5/16 inches.

Cheers now rent the air, from the spectators. It was good to see Boro, bully and braggart, humbled. The smiling, red-haired stranger was a man of men.

"Aldic is taller than Boro!"

"And more skillful!"

"And stronger, perhaps!"

"Look out, Aldic—"

The last was a half-shriek from

the girl with silver-blonde hair.

Without warning, Boro had launched himself at Aldic. At the girl's cry, Aldic pivoted and met the attack. Boro locked his arms around Aldic's waist. The powerful muscles of his shoulders and arms bulged out thickly. Aldic's arms promptly went around Boro's shoulders.

Locked together, unmoving, the two stalwarts exerted their full strength. The crowd's breath went out, as though they were the ones being squeezed. Some shook their heads sadly. Though taller, Aldic was not as heavily-built as Boro, who was a miniature Hercules.

Yet now they saw how the receptively smooth arms of Aldic had suddenly tightened into knots of iron. His back and shoulders bulged beneath his green-silk shirt in one mass of muscle. Relentlessly as a vice he squeezed till Boro gulped, went purple, and sagged to the ground.

Aldic, barely breathing himself, stood over his adversary, panting on the ground.

"Now, Boro the braggart and liar, tell the truth! Tell them who saved you from the bear—"

### CHAPTER III

#### Reward for a "Big One"

**A** SHARP cry interrupted, from the edge of the group.

"Eyool A fox! A fox! Run!"

A glance over their shoulders and they all saw the red-furred killer leaping from the thicket-edges of the moonlit glade. Of all their enemies—save man—the fox was the most to be feared. Yet the Little Folk, inured to danger, were not panic-stricken. They melted away into the protecting thickets with a speed that promised to rob the prowler of a meal.

All except one. Spent by the recent ordeal, Boro staggered to his feet, not fully in command of himself. He stumbled across the glade, last. The fox's quick eyes saw this straggler, and veered toward him with slavering jaws ready for the kill.

Aldic had run with the rest, though behind them. Glancing back, he saw the imminent tragedy. Stopping and turning with the swiftness of a snake, he raced back, tugging at the spear slung back of his shoulder.

In the center of the glade, Boro had turned bravely, to at least die facing the deadly killer. None of the Little Folk were cowards. He fumbled with his bow, in the hopeless attempt to speed an arrow at one of the fox's gleaming eyes.

Aldic flung his spear on the run, yet knowing the fox's thick fur would protect it from vital harm. The spear pricked flesh and stuck, but the great beast hardly noticed. Aldic's thoughts flew faster than his twinkling feet, as he neared. An arrow might strike a vital spot. But he would have to stop and aim. There were only seconds left, before those terrible jaws would crunch with Boro between them.

Aldic used the seconds to reach Boro and leap in front of him. And now the ferocious teeth snapped for Aldic.

Aldic did a strange thing. He jumped straight into those gaping jaws! A moan went up from the watchers at the glade edges. Aldic had sacrificed himself to save Boro! Yet Boro stood stupidly, too amazed to run.

A still more amazing thing happened. Aldic had not jumped blindly. His quick little feet had planted themselves solidly just back of the lower jaw's teeth. Bending double, he placed his two hands against the bone-ridge of the upper jaw, under the snout. One mighty heave Aldic gave, with all his

muscles cracking, breath tearing from his throat.

And then—a muffled crack as the tortured jaws of the fox gave way.

Aldic was thrown head over heels as the fox jerked convulsively. Then with a bark of agony, the red-furred killer loped away, his lower jaw hanging limp and broken.

Aldic picked himself up and threw back his mane of red hair in laughter. "Eyoooo!" he roared. "Reynard will chew only air for a time!"

AND now the others scrambled forward and filled the glade with clarion cheers. They held hands and formed a ring around Aldic and the still stunned Boro, dancing. A chant rose into the night air.

*"The Big Ones are clumsy and witless,  
We are so clever and sly,  
They never will, never will catch us,  
Not to the day we die!"*

"What is all this commotion among you young people?"

The new voice was the querulous one of venerable Zutho, the Elder, who had just entered the glade from their village. He hobbled up, his long beard like silken moss. Behind him came all the villagers, the children and mothers and the old, to join the Festival which would now swing into full tide.

The merry-makers stopped and parted to let Zutho through. At the same time they babbled out the story of the fox, confusedly.

"Broke the fox's jaw?" Zutho cried, almost incredulously. "Indeed that is a mighty feat, Boro!"

Zutho and the villagers crowding up gazed at Boro admiringly. The young people hushed one another, forcing

Boro to make his own admission.

"No, Father, not I. Though if Aldic hadn't stepped in front of me, I would have. It was Aldic."

"Aldic? Who is Aldic?" For the first time Zutho caught sight of the stranger, with his berry-red locks.

Aldic stepped before him, inclining his head deferentially.

"I am of the Little Folk of Ireland, Father."

"Ireland?" Old Zutho's eyes sprung wide. "You are from across the Great Sea!"

The audience gasped. To most of them, in their restricted little world, the Great Sea extended limitlessly to wash the shores finally of half-mythical lands that seemed utterly beyond reach. Only the Elders and the wise knew the other lands were real. It was as though Aldic had come from Mars.

Aldic nodded.

"I am a wanderer. I slipped aboard one of the Big People's sailing vessels, hiding in its hold. At times, I was spied, but taken for a rat-creature. At times, I fought with the rats, down below."

He displayed a scar on his left arm, marking the bite of sharp teeth, then resumed.

"The great boat docked and at night I crept to shore. Many Big People and lights were about, but I escaped detection easily, for the Big Ones are clumsy and witless. And blind to the unbelievable. I traversed the city—New York City, it is called."

"New York City!" breathed Zutho, reminiscently. "I was there once, in my youth. It is choked and crammed with Big Ones. Aldic, I hope you took care—"

"Yes, Father. I am well aware of the First Law of our people—never to be seen by or have traffic with the Big People. I gained the countryside. I

knew of your tribe here in the hills to the north, and sought you. But I wasn't sure I would find you. It has been a century and more since either of our tribes has had a visitor from the other."

"**Y**ES." Old Zutho shook his head sadly. "We Little Folk dare not carry on much communication, because of the dangers of crossing the Big People's territory. Our sole hope of continued existence and liberty has been to keep out of their knowledge. At times, in the far past, we had traffic with the Big Ones, to our sorrow. But for a thousand years the First Law has been engraven into our policy. Only by chance have the Big Ones seen or heard of us, as their legends state. It must continue so—forever."

He took a deep breath.

"But this is not the time to talk of sad things, on Full Moon Festival night. Tell me, Aldic of Ireland, how are your people? Do you live as we do—dance, sing and be happy despite the shadow that hangs over us?"

Aldic nodded. "We are celebrated in the Irish legends particularly for our Dance of the Fairies, glimpsed at rare times by a Big One, but never believed by the rest."

Zutho chuckled. "Superstition among the Big Ones has been our best cloak. They see us more seldom than any woodland creature, even the clever shrew. Therefore, we do not exist. Are all your people red-haired like you? And"—he looked up and down—"why, you are almost as tall and strong as our Boro!"

"Taller and stronger, Father!" It was the silver-haired girl who had spoken, Teena. She told briefly the episode preceding the fox. The newly-arrived villagers grinned at Boro's hanging head.

"And now tell us, Boro," insisted Teena relentlessly, "who saved you from the bear?"

Boro looked around and saw no escape. "It was a red-haired one—"

"Aldic! Aldic!" shouted the young people.

"No." Boro shook his head, along with Aldic. "One of the Big People. He who lives in the cabin nearest us." He told the rest of the story quickly, eager to have his humiliation over with.

A startled hush came over the glade.

"One of the Big Ones saved you?" Zutho murmured. He raised his eyes. "As rarely as the blue moon has that happened in our history!"

"And the Big One must be rewarded!" rang out a voice. Instantly, a whole-hearted acclaim arose through the glade.

Zutho hesitated, then nodded.

"That is as much a part of our tradition as the First Law. The First Law states no traffic with the Big Ones. The Second Law states no killing among ourselves. And the Third Law says any act of kindness toward us, unwitting or otherwise, by a Big One, must be rewarded—so long as it does not violate the First Law."

**L**USTY cheers rang out. The Big Ones, masters of Earth, were feared and dreaded with a great fear and dread. But an act of kindness from them was, by contrast, an occasion for wild joy in reciprocation. A cruel god's smiles are a blinding light.

"Now, how shall it be done?" Zutho queried.

Aldic raised his hand for attention. "After the Big One chased the bear and went to his home, I followed. Perhaps"—he grinned—"because he has red-hair, like mine. I overheard their speech, which I understand well. They have a garden that needs weeding."

"Good," Zutho acceded. "But we must not risk too much. Ten of the young men will go, tonight, the quickest and strongest. Who shall lead them?"

"Aldic! Aldic!" drowned out a few sporadic calls for "Boro!"

Boro turned away angrily, but Teena taunted: "You must go, too, Boro. After all, it was your life that was saved!"

In a short time, Aldic stood at the head of ten young men. They danced up and down spiritedly, eager for the adventure ahead.

Zutho had a last word. "Take care, you young ones. This is not a lark. Work quietly and do not be seen. Do you hear?"

He tried to look stern, but the wrinkles around his old eyes smiled. "Ah, if I were only young myself," he mumbled. "Go. Aldic, I trust you to bring them back safely."

The party pranced off, through the moonlit glade, knowing all eyes were on them. But beyond, at Aldic's signal, they crept single-file into the forest dark. Nocturnal killers roamed the woods. The party went on cautiously, their tiny eyes peering around warily. Their little hands gripped their weapons, ready for instant action.

Nothing of note happened. When the moon was high at zenith, the cabin loomed before them like a gigantic castle. Quietly, efficiently, their Lilliputian forms went up and down the rows of the garden, tugging out weeds with both hands, as though uprooting young trees. It was hard work. Their little backs ached and their little hands blistered, but outdoor life had inured them to such hardships.

On through the night they worked, and when the moon sank, they crept away as silently and unobtrusively as they had come.

## CHAPTER IV

### Aldic Returns a Favor

SUNRISE spread its red glory over the Catskills, and reflected in added brilliance from Jim Harvey's thatch of hair, as he brushed it and then sat down at the breakfast table.

"In the city we never saw the sunrise," he mused. "Out here I wouldn't miss it for the world . . ." His voice trailed away as he buried his nose in the newspaper Mary had brought back from Albany the evening before, like any city-dweller.

"The eggs are getting cold, dear," Mary reminded. "I want to get an early start today. I'm going to place some of your pictures if it takes all day."

"You look pretty even with your chin out," Harvey teased. His eyes went back to the paper—and widened. "Mary, listen to this! What a coincidence!"

He read the small item tucked away opposite the comic page.

*"New York. Do the legendary Little People exist, as Dr. Asa Bolton claims, or is it a hoax? Dr. Bolton returned from the Catskills recently with an unproved story of seeing the Dance of the Fairies, and even capturing tiny six-inch high people. They escaped, he says, and the body of one he still had was spirited away—by the Little Folk, he claims. Dr. Bolton stated that he had already enlisted the aid of naturalists of the Anthropological Institute in his quest on the Catskills. It is sometimes to be wondered whether so-called scientists are not more gullible than laymen."*

"Exactly," Mary said quickly. "Now,

Jim, you aren't trying to convince yourself you saw one of them yesterday?"

The glow in Harvey's face faded. "Guess you're right. Ready, dear? I'll pack you into the car and then get right at weeding the garden. You see I remembered!"

Mary smiled and glanced out of the window at the garden. The saucer in her hand dropped and shattered on the floor.

"Mary, what's the matter?"

"You shouldn't frighten me so, Jim! You foolish boy, getting up in the middle of the night and weeding the garden."

Harvey took one look and bounded out of the door. He stared down at the cleanly plucked rows of greens, thunderstruck. Not a single weed had escaped.

"You *didn't* do it, Jim?" Mary gasped, seeing his face. "Then who did? Who in the wide world—" She stopped, utterly bewildered.

"Elves!" Harvey murmured dazedly. "Like in the fairy tales, returning a good deed. I saved one yesterday. Mary, this proves it—"

"It doesn't!" Mary cried, in relief. "Thank Heaven I just remembered. I gave the Wilkins boy some candy yesterday, passing their farm. He's a serious boy, and must have come all the way here last night just to show his thanks."

Harvey had to grin. "You'd rather believe that?" He became serious, pointing down to soft dirt which showed the light impress of what might be tiny feet, a half-inch long—or animal tracks. "What about those—"

He was interrupted.

"Hello, there!"

**H**ARVEY turned. Out on the road stood three men, dressed in shorts and light mackinaws against the morn-

ing chill. They carried a camera, food-pack and butterfly net among them.

"I'm Dr. Pertie of the Anthropological Institute of New York," the elder of the three introduced himself. "Wilson and Zeller, my assistants. We have a camp about ten miles north. We've been up here a month. We're looking for evidences of the Little People."

The younger men grinned rather sheepishly, but Dr. Petrie went on firmly. "That is, in the scientific sense. Small manlike beings about six inches high. Have you seen any signs of them? Or do you have the slightest suspicion, no matter how faint, that such little creatures may exist around here?"

Taking a long look at the butterfly net they carried, obviously for the purpose of snapping up little beings like prize insects, Harvey checked the eager words on his lips.

"No, of course not," he said. He smiled derisively. "You mean actual little men six inches high?"

The men shrugged, as though about ready to give up their quest, and left, striking off through the woods. Harvey could not resist whistling a soft tune after them, whose words ran:

*"Last night I saw upon the stair,  
A Little man who wasn't there—"*

"I'm glad you said that, Jim," Mary remarked as they packed pictures in the car. "I'm going to Albany now, and you have all day to paint. I'll bring the Wilkins boy some more candy, on my way back. Jim, please say it?"

"All right," he acceded. "There aren't any elves. And we have a mortgage payment to meet. And the art dealers in Albany say I've lost my touch. Those are the real things."

A few minutes later, painting paraphernalia under his arm, he was head-



ing for the woods. His red head vanished among the trees.

Another red head, a far tinier one, emerged from the rose bushes at the side of the house.

Aldic pondered what he had heard. He had not left with the others, after the weeding, leaving Boro to lead them back. He had stayed partly to see that nothing went amiss. Mostly, to see the reaction of the Big Ones when they noticed their garden weeded. It had thrilled his little soul to see the glad surprise in their eyes. Especially that of the man. Aldic felt a peculiar affinity toward him. Though one was a giant and one a midge, there was the bond between them of common geographical origin. And red hair.

Aldic pondered. Yesterday this Big One had unwittingly saved a life. Today, perhaps not so unwittingly, he had declined to set human bloodhounds on the trail of the Little Folk. Had withheld a clue to their existence.

The Big One should be rewarded again, according to the Third Law. But how? Aldic smiled suddenly and scampered around to where a vine grew against the cabin wall, acrobatically swinging himself up hand over hand. A partly ajar window let him in. He jumped to the floor. Against one wall leaned three of yesterday's paintings, drying.

Aldic nodded happily as he saw paint-pots nearby, and several brushes in a box. Needing water, he roamed about till he found a thimble in a sewing-basket, and filled this from a bucket by the sink.

With two-handed strokes of a brush, Aldic labored for the following hours. He added a touch of silver to a brook meandering through a glen. A delicate stroke of brown to suggest a rabbit nibbling among herbs. He stood on tiptoe to put a dash of vivid green where it

belonged, high in a tree. And now a tinge of purple where the shadow of a mountain fell. Here and there the brush touched.

Little exquisite touches they were, that Aldic's rustic soul transferred to canvas with a supremely artistic instinct.

Squinting his eyes, Aldic was satisfied. The scenes, twice as high as he was, looked real enough to step into. And an aura of mystery hung in them, too. Aldic was almost tempted to paint himself in, peeping from behind a toadstool. But no, there was the First Law. As it was, the paintings would appeal to those among the Big Ones who liked to dream of things unseen.

"Eyoo, my big red-headed friend," Aldic exulted aloud. "That is the way it should be done."

He put the brushes back carefully, and left. With him he carried the thimble, perched over his red thatch, as self-given remuneration. Surely the Big Ones could get another.

OUT in the forest, finding a rabbit warren, Aldic nudged a sleepy buck aside and curled up next to its soft fur. Mannikin and rabbit slept through the heat of the day.

In the late afternoon, approaching the village of Little Folk, Aldic heard the blast of a snail-horn, used only as an emergency alarm. He broke into a run and saw the glint of brown fur ahead. A bear! By its size, the same one who had yesterday chased Boro, and today evidently nosed out their village's site. But there was no Big One near this time to chase it away.

Aldic heard the splitting of wood as the great monster ripped open one of their tree-stump homes. He heard the screams of a child—screams that clipped short. Then he was close enough to see the bear's claws scab-

bling within the hollow for another delectable tidbit. Half the awakened community had emerged from its camouflaged variety of homes, rubbing sleepy eyes that filled with horror.

The men were paralyzed, not knowing what to do. The bear was seldom a menace unless he blundered into their village, sniffing out their homes. It hadn't happened for a generation. How could this towering behemoth, ten times bigger and heavier than the frightful fox, be killed or even driven away? Within the hollow stump, three children and their parents were trapped. The bear would claw them out, one by one.

Aldic took the situation in at a glance. Without pausing in his stride, he ran up the bear's back like a nimble mouse, using its hair for hand-holds. It ignored him completely, intent on ripping the tree-stump wider. Aldic reached one shoulder, spear in hand. Balancing on his feet against the bear's movement, he clutched the spear in his two hands, high over his head.

He thrust then, with all the impetus of his powerful little shoulders, straight into one ear of the bear. The sharp metal point buried itself in tender flesh. The bear screamed and hunched, throwing Aldic through the air like a chip of wood. The animal rolled over and over, clawing at its ear. The haft sticking out broke off and the bear ambled away awkwardly, uttering painful grunts.

Fearful faces peered from the tree-stump, seeing they were saved. Old Zutho hobbled up to where Aldic sat on the ground, shaking his head from his fall. He came to his feet, unhurt.

"First the fox," Zutho commended. "Now the bear. You are a mighty warrior, Aldic. I and my people thank you for the lives you saved."

"The bear will come back," Aldic

said thoughtfully. "My spear-thrust was a mere prick to it, after all. Its pain gone, the bear will come back tomorrow, now knowing where to find us."

Zutho sighed heavily.

"It should be killed, but that is impossible for us to do. As with the Big People, we can only scurry from its mighty feet. We will have to migrate from this village-site to a new one. We will have to start now—"

"Wait." Aldic held up a hand. "Perhaps I can kill the bear."

"What? You are mad, Aldic. You must know that no weapon of ours can kill a bear."

"No weapon of ours," agreed Aldic. "Still, I wish to try. Will you give me till tomorrow?"

Zutho looked long at Aldic, on the point of calling him a young, conceited fool whose so-far successful exploits had gone to his head.

Teena's silvery-sweet voice sounded, as she stepped forward. "Let him try, Father. Somehow, I trust Aldic. I think he can do anything he says!"

A murmur of agreement ran through the others. Teena suddenly flung her arms around Aldic, kissing him. "It was my sister and her children you saved," she said, blushing as she stepped back.

Over Aldic's face stole a red as vivid as that of his mane of hair.

Zutho grinned, then spoke gravely. "You may try to kill the bear, Aldic of Ireland. We all trust you."

"I will need a helper, the strongest young man." Aldic's eye fell on Boro. "You, Boro."

"No!" Boro roared, obviously nettled by Teena's act. "Whatever mad thing you hope to try, I'll have no part of it."

"Are you afraid, Boro?" Teena suggested.

Boro hesitated. Then—"I will go!" he snapped.

## CHAPTER V

### An Expedition

AN hour later, panting, the two young men peered from bushes toward the cabin.

"The Big Ones are not back yet," Aldic said. "Follow me, Boro, into the cabin."

Dropping to the floor from the window, after climbing the vines, Boro straightened and spoke his first words.

"Now what, Aldic the Fool? The bear is certainly not here. Have you thought better of your rash resolve? As Zutho said, no weapon of ours can kill a bear."

"But that can!" Aldic pointed over the fireplace, where a long metal instrument hung on two pegs.

"The weapon of the Big Ones!" Boro gasped.

"It is called a rifle," Aldic supplied. "Come, we will try to get it down."

Leaping from a table to the mantel over the fireplace, they found the gun high out of reach.

"We can throw vine-lassoos up and drag it from the pegs," Boro ventured.

"It is big and heavy. It would crush us, or fall to the floor and be damaged. The Big Ones will be back soon, anyway." Aldic's eyes roved thoughtfully about the living room, then lighted. "Come, Boro. Help me write a note to the Big Ones on what they call a typewriter."

It was an amazing undertaking to Boro, though obviously Aldic was not unfamiliar with the instrument. Standing at the top, Boro held the paper as Aldic, at the side, grasped the roller-knob in his arms and strained every muscle to turn it. The paper moved

around, though a little crookedly.

It was a succession of surprises to Boro as he blindly obeyed Aldic's commands. "Sit on the shift-key—there, Boro." Then Aldic jumped from the top down on another key and the machine threw up a lever and snapped loudly, startling Boro.

"Now the space-bar, Boro—that long black bar." . . . "Now stamp on that key with two dots, from where you are." . . . "The black bar again." . . . "Wrong letter that time. Stamp on the backspace there, Boro." . . . "How do you spell 'against' in the Big People's language?"

Aldic tugged open a dictionary on the table beside the typewriter. On hands and knees he searched for the word when he had the right page open. At some time or other, Boro was aware, Aldic had spent much time spying on the Big Ones, learning their language. Then Aldic was back at the machine.

Finally it was done and Aldic unrolled the paper, placing it flat on the table. Boro was about to speak, but instead a gleam came into his eyes. This was a violation of the First Law, writing a note for the Big Ones to read. When Boro told of it back at the village, Aldic would be in disgrace!

AT sunset, Jim Harvey trudged to his cabin, tired as usual, and still aware that he had somehow lost his "touch." Worry over the payments had done it, no doubt.

Fifteen minutes later the Ford arrived and Mary stepped into the cabin, discouragement in her face. "I placed only one today," she began, then stopped, noticing how fixedly her husband was staring at the paintings set to dry against the wall. "Jim! They're wonderful! You've touched those up beautifully."

"Did I?" Harvey whispered, running

a nervous hand through his red hair. "Mary, what if I told you I didn't—"

She laughed. "And that you didn't weed the garden last night? Darling boy, you'll always be the same. The night before our elopement you insisted I had wings, like an angel, till I almost became angry. I spoke to the Wilkins boy, by the way. He wasn't here, I'm sure of that. Now confess—*oh!*"

While talking, she had picked up the paper beside the typewriter, glancing over it. She faced her husband sternly. "Jim, this is carrying it too far. I'm not asking to be amused—"

Harvey snatched the sheet from her hand, reading the somewhat badly typed message.

"I cannot Reveal myself to You. It is against Our FirSt Law. We needyour gun. If You wish;to help uz, bring it outside, by a TreE, and leave it there tonight. Aldic of Ireland. P.S. We both have Red hair."

Harvey looked up, his blue eyes far away. "Aldic was king of the fairies, a thousand years ago, according to Irish mythology. This little scamp must be his descendant—"

"Jim, you mean—"

"It's genuine? Of course, I wouldn't play such an elaborate practical joke on you, Mary. The Little People exist, don't you understand? And I'm going to bring out the gun tonight!"

A call came from the outside the house. It was one of the three naturalists—Wilson—alone. He spoke excitedly. "Can you give me a lift to the highway? Dr. Petrie will meet me there with our car. We separated today, in our search. And look what I found!"

He displayed a torn bit of cloth of some kind, oddly shaped as though to

fit a tiny form, with a claw-mark in its center.

"A small bear passed me this afternoon," Wilson explained. "Ambling fast as though running from something. He blundered through thorn bushes and left behind this clue to the Little People. He must have caught one, and clawed away its clothing before eating it. This rag clung to his claws till it came away in the thorns. It means the Little Folk, all right. I'd swear this stuff is woven from spider-webs!"

**H**ARVEY burst out laughing, to the surprise of Wilson and Mary both.

"Sorry to explode your hopes, Wilson. But I recognize this cloth. Remember, Mary, we cleaned out the trunk the other day, and you decided to throw away that mantel doll at last? Isn't this part of its miniature dress, Mary?"

Mary nodded mechanically.

"We threw it in our usual dump-heap, back of the cabin," Harvey continued. "We've seen that bear-cub rooting around among the cans and bottles, at times. Bears are omnivorous, you know, and he probably clawed the doll apart in hopes of finding it edible. Too bad the explanation is so prosaic, Wilson. But it will save you future embarrassment with your companions. Come on, I'll give you a lift to the highway."

When Harvey had returned from delivering the very crestfallen young naturalist, he explained to Mary.

"White lie, of course, about the doll. If the Little People *wanted* to be known, they'd reveal themselves. Therefore I sidetracked Wilson. There are things, Mary, that even science must leave alone. Call it my poetic soul, or romantic nature, or whatever you want—but I had to do it!"

It was dark now. Harvey took down the gun, slipped five shells into the magazine, and strode out into the night. He placed the gun upright against a tree. Then on second thought, smiling he laid it flat on the ground.

Had little ears heard him? Were little eyes watching his every move? Or was some cunning maniac roaming the hills, as Mary might suggest next, taking it into his twisted mind to commit a murder without leaving a clue to himself?

From the cabin window, later, Harvey saw the moon rise and flood the space under the tree with its soft but revealing light.

The rifle was gone!

**S**TEPPING along in perfect rhythm, Aldic and Boro carried the rifle. Aldic was at the front under the stock, Boro behind with the round barrel across his shoulder. The gun was heavy, but they were strong and kept up the tireless pace.

Once a weasel, thinking its victim occupied, darted at Aldic, sharp teeth ready to crunch into soft flesh. Without dropping his burden, Aldic's left hand, holding his axe, bit deep into the weasel's tender snout, sending it off whimpering with pain.

"Eyoo!" chuckled Aldic, and added unnecessarily. "It seems to me the weasels of my land put up a better fight."

"This is mad," Boro grunted for the tenth time. "What will we do with this clumsy machine when we get back?"

"You will see," promised Aldic, a little tickled that he alone knew what he had in mind.

The villagers all saw, gradually, when they began carrying out Aldic's commands, after he had arrived. The gun, a cannon to them, was propped

against a stump with forked sticks. Aldic drilled six men in certain duties, to raise or lower the barrel at instant notice. Another six were stationed on each side of the stock, to swing it sideways if needed. One man would be at the trigger.

"The bear will come at dawn, likely," Aldic predicted, "nosing about the homes again. He must be decoyed across the glade. Someone must be that bait, running before him and climbing one certain tree. I would volunteer, except that I must superintend the shooting of the gun."

"Let it be Boro," rang out Teena's voice. "He had experience once before in eluding the bear. If it catches him, he can turn and easily battle it-- as he once claimed to do!"

With a hue and cry, Boro was elected for the dangerous assignment. Boro shrugged, bidding his time. After Aldic's harebrained venture had failed, Boro would reveal the note-writing, crushing Aldic with double disgrace. Then Teena would despise Aldic, and once more be sweet to Boro.

## CHAPTER VI

### Death of a Monster

**A**S the rose of dawn lighted the woodland scene, the tense community in their hidden homes heard the crackling of twigs. Tiny spying eyes watched the bear nosing at stumps, coming nearer and nearer, seeking the Little People for prey.

Aldic nudged Boro. Taking a breath, Boro leaped out and ran across the bear's path, toward the dancing glade. The bear, evidently reluctant to make a chase if he could find trapped victims in stumps, did not follow till Boro had deliberately danced in front of him.

"Eyoo!" Boro shouted, making the

dramatic most of what was a dangerous business anyway. "You fat, clumsy, ugly monster! Catch Boro if you can, who is fleet as the wind, strong as—"

He had no time for further self-eulogies. The bear snarled and made for the audacious little upstart. Boro raced across the glade and managed to reach the designated tree in time to scramble to its lower branches. Bear-like, the pursuer stood on his hind legs, stretching his claws for the mannikin almost within reach. In another moment, if anger so moved him, he would climb . . .

Aldic was shouting orders at the gun. Now was the time, while the bear stood upright, a perfect target. Aldic straddled the stock of the rifle, peeping through the sights. The men with forked sticks were ready to move the barrel whichever direction he commanded.

"A little up, you men at the front! A little more—stop! Now a little left—easy!—stop! Hold it, all of you! *Fire!*"

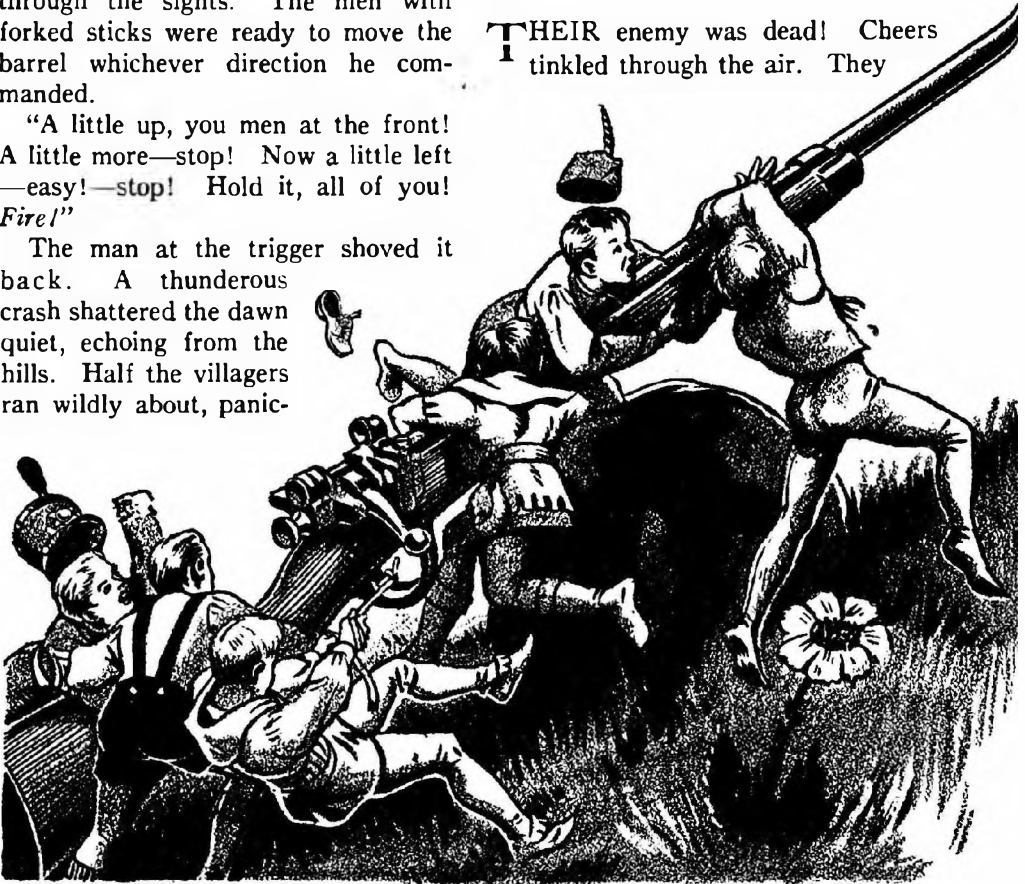
The man at the trigger shoved it back. A thunderous crash shattered the dawn quiet, echoing from the hills. Half the villagers ran wildly about, panic-

stricken, sure that a mountain had fallen. They had never heard the weapon of the Big Ones before, except as far-away barks.

Aldic picked himself up from where the recoil of the gun had tossed him like a rag doll. Blood trickled from a bruise in his forehead. The dozen men who had handled the gun lay around in dazed bewilderment. One lay still, completely knocked out. Another groaned with a broken arm. A third lay pinned under the gun itself.

Women ran to help them. The rest of the villagers ran with Aldic to the glade. Boro still sat on his branch, rigidly, staring down at the body of the bear. The shot had torn half its head away and killed it instantly.

**T**HEIR enemy was dead! Cheers tinkled through the air. They



Aldic pulled the trigger,  
and the tremendous con-  
cussion hurled him from  
his feet



wouldn't have to seek a new home after all.

"This is a mighty deed, Aldic," said old Zutho. "One that will be handed down from father to son for generations!"

"But, Father," spoke up Boro, clambering. "Aldic violated the First Law, to bring this about." He told of the note.

Zutho looked at Aldic a little shocked.

"Is it true, my son? Have you deliberately revealed our existence to a Big One?"

"It was either that or migrating, which at this time would be dangerous," Aldic said calmly. "I did not want to alarm you, but three Big Ones from New York are prowling about, half suspecting our existence."

"But then you have made it worse!" gasped Zutho. "The note will prove it to them—"

Aldic shook his head. "The red-haired Big One is to be trusted. Did he not turn one of the three searchers from the trail? Admit it, Boro, for you heard."

Boro grunted an admission. Aldic put his arm around his shoulder. "But let us give due credit to Boro, for performing his hazardous task well!"

Cheers rose for the two stalwarts standing together, slayers of the mighty bear. Teena stepped up and kissed them both, in sight of all, so that all the villagers wondered which she would eventually choose.

"To work!" Zutho commanded.

With a will, the Little Folk fell to cutting up the great carcass, swarming about it like ants. They would have meat, preserved in herbs, for weeks to come. And the warm fur would be useful against winter's bite. A ring of armed men stood at guard against scavengers attracted by the smell of blood. Even the fox would hesitate before he dared charge that phalanx.

"Come, Boro, we will return the gun," Aldic said.

When they left, behind them trooped a dozen men carrying choice cuts of the fresh meat, as a gift to the Big One.

**T**HAT evening, Jim Harvey saw that Mary was glowingly happy, as she returned from Albany and pointed proudly to the empty back seat of the car.

"The three pictures sold to the first dealer, Jim! He wants as many more as you can turn out. He says you have a touch in them now that's sheer genius. How did they turn out today?"

Harvey waved at three paintings drying against the wall.

"Yes, I've got the touch now." His voice was that of a man to whom some inner secret had been revealed. "Thanks to little Aldic and his lesson."

Mary started. "You still believe—"

Harvey motioned toward the gun once more hanging from its pegs over the fireplace. "I found it on the doorsteps when I got back. Also this—"

"Bear-steak!" Mary gasped. "But Jim, I still can't believe in them. I just can't! After all, we haven't *seen* them—"

She stopped as the smooth purr of Henry Bainbridge's car sounded outside, and then the harsh blast of his horn. Another man was with him.

Mary clutched her husband's hand, at the determined frown on Bainbridge's heavy face. "I'm foreclosing," he said without preamble. "I'll take the court loss in costs, in order to resell to a cash client."

The cold, brutal announcement was like a physical blow to Harvey and his wife. All their hopes and dreams shattered.

"You can't!" Harvey protested. "My pictures are beginning to sell now. You've got to give us a chance."

"Sure I'll give you a chance," Bainbridge smiled thinly. "If you pay me \$500 by next week, the place is yours. That's a business proposition. And now, I'm within the law in taking whatever pictures you have on hand, as your only tangible negotiable property, against your payments in arrears. This is Deputy Lang, of Tannersville."

Harvey stood by helplessly as his paintings were loaded into Bainbridge's car.

"If you get the \$500, mail it to me in New York City. Remember—a week!" With this parting shot, Bainbridge drove off.

"In other words," Harvey said bitterly, "Bainbridge has a higher offer for this property, enough to absorb the loss in foreclosure and make a profit. Strictly business. He's within his rights. Naturally our problem doesn't concern him. Mary, crying won't help."

Mary swallowed bravely. "Five hundred dollars!" she murmured, in a tone that doubted the existence of that much anywhere. "Jim, it's awful to have to



leave this place, just when we had a start."

Harvey nodded haggardly. "And just when I was getting the thrill of my life, over the Little People—"

"If they only *did* exist, Jim! And were able to help us! Oh, I'm getting as foolish as you are. That's only in fairy tales—" And now the dam of Mary's tears did break.

Harvey's red head bowed over hers against his chest, pityingly, for her heartbreak. As for the Little People—Harvey wasn't sure himself. He was only certain of one thing—that the world had tumbled apart.

ANOTHER red head moved, outside the open window, peeping forth from ivy-vines along the cabin wall. Aldic scrambled to the ground, Boro after him. The other men had left long before. Aldic and Boro had stayed out of curiosity. It pleased them to hear the Big Ones talk of the little beings who moved so mysteriously and kept out of the knowledge of man.

"They will have to leave," Aldic murmured a little sadly, as the two headed back for the village. "I would like to help them."

"It is best they leave," Boro grunted. "They know too much of us. But tell me, Aldic, why are the Big Ones cruel to each other like that?"

"They have not learned to be civilized," Aldic returned simply. "They worship a god, called money, to the exclusion of all the more fundamental things of life. It is money my red-headed friend needs—" His voice trailed away in thought.

At the village, Aldic approached Zutho, telling the story.

"I am going to New York City, for money," he concluded.

"Tamper not too much with the doings of the Big Ones," Zutho demurred.

"Especially their good money. I forbid it, Aldic."

Aldic spoke gently. "You forget, Father, that I am not of this tribe. This I do on my own accord, not as a tenet of the Third Law."

"Still I forbid it," Zutho proclaimed. "You are from Ireland, but this region is in my jurisdiction. I cannot risk the safety of these my people for a foolhardy venture. If you were caught, our existence would be known to the Big Ones. You must not go, Aldic."

Aldic seemed about to speak, drawing himself up, but instead nodded obediently. Yet that night, while a merry dance went on in the glade, Aldic stole into the thickets and crept away. A hand suddenly caught his arm. Aldic whirled to face Boro, who had evidently kept an eye on him.

"Call the others," Aldic dared. "Before they come, I will toss you into the brambles." His hard young body tensed for battle.

Boro strangely shook his head. "I will go with you, Aldic."

Aldic gaped in surprise. "Why Boro?"

Boro scuffed at the ground with his foot. "You saved my life once. Perhaps I can save yours, in the dangers ahead."

Aldic grinned. "Good. I was wishing for you to come along." Then, his face sobering gravely, he opened a small pouch in his belt and took therefrom one of two small pellets. "Keep this with you, Boro. It is deadly poison, from the nightshade. So concentrated is it that it will cause the flesh to wither away in hours. If caught by the Big Ones, with no escape—"

He paused, and Boro nodded grimly, putting the pellet gingerly in his own pouch.

Another form suddenly slipped up before them.

"Teena!" they said as one.

"I heard," the girl whispered. "My heart goes with you—both. When you come back—"

The two stalwarts looked at each other, wondering which the girl had already chosen. She had simply not told, lest one, or both, fail to return. With a last murmur of farewell, the two adventurers slipped away.

Teena wiped away her tears before reappearing in the glade. When it suddenly came to general notice that Aldic and Boro were gone, she calmly told Zutho of their departure.

"After them, men—stop them!" But Old Zutho waved his command aside in the next moment. "No use to hope to catch them, the two fleetest." His eyes blazed. "Rash fools! When they return—if they do—they shall merit the full penalties of the broken First Law!"

## CHAPTER VII

### On to New York!

AT a steady trot, the two adventurers forged their way through the night forests, up hill and through glen.

"We have only a week to reach New York, find money, and return," Aldic informed. "We must not lose a moment."

"New York!" Boro murmured, shivering in excitement. None of the present generation had ever dared invade that stronghold of the Big Ones.

Their eyes, as well adapted to night-vision as day, watched carefully on all sides for the night hunters. Once a ferret crossed their path, and lay there with its skull split open by their hand-axes. A fox treed them till Aldic's needle-arrow in its snout sent it yelping away. A browsing deer, startled, nearly trampled them with its hard

hooves, in its panic to get away from what might be a bear. They swam a small river with steady strokes, and on the other shore impaled a hissing snake with their spears, chopping its head off.

"Eyoooo!" exulted Boro. "We are a mighty pair. Who dares stand against us?"

"The skunk," Aldic said dryly, pointing ahead. The swaggering creature blocked their path. Without a word, Boro slunk to the side, through brambles that scratched, following Aldic.

At dawn they reached the concrete highway which Boro had seen before and which he knew led to New York, along the great Hudson river. Boro shrank a little from the great roaring machines that thundered by, like ocean-liners on wheels. Tired from the night-long pace, they curled up in a convenient hollow log and slept through the day. They could only travel by night.

At dusk, they hunted a field-mouse and ate of its tender flesh. With renewed strength, they ran along the highway course, in the bordering fields.

"It would take us a week to reach the city, running," Aldic said. "We must catch a ride on one of those machines."

Boro sucked in his breath, at the daring thought. "But how can we? They roar by faster than the wind."

"There is a crossroad ahead," Aldic pointed. "Machines stop there. I know of these things. Keep close to me."

At the cross highway, brakes squealed constantly. Aldic's sharp little eyes watched, from a bush just beside the road. "There! That one has a New York City license. Come, Boro. Do as I do."

The two little forms scuttled out of hiding like swift animals. Any Big One seeing would idly take them for rats or chipmunks, in the dark. Aldic leaped

on the running board and jabbed his spear down into the rubber-matting that covered it. Boro did the same. The car started up again, bearing two hitch-hikers unsuspected by the driver.

AS gears ground, and the engine roared into high speed, Boro gaspingly watched the countryside blur by. A fierce wind tore at them, threatening to whip them loose from their spear anchorages. At times, bumps in the roadway tossed them up and down till their teeth jarred.

They clung for dear life. Once Aldic's ready arm pulled Boro back as he almost lost his grip. Boro's face was white. The wheels of a car behind would have flattened him to pulp, if the fall first hadn't broken his every bone.

"Eyoo!" Boro said weakly then, at Aldic's somewhat scornful smile. "This is great sport!"

But Aldic himself felt the strain. At the next crossroad, the car stopping, he whispered: "There is only the driver inside. The back is empty. Follow me!"

As the car halted, Aldic jerked his spear from the rubber mat and took a running leap to the top of the smooth back fender. From there he jumped lightly to the edge of the open window, and down into the back of the car. Boro followed, in as many seconds. They crouched in the dark space of the rear floor.

Hearts beating wildly, they remained tense till the car started up again. The driver hadn't heard or noticed. They were safe. The ride was much smoother here. Enjoyable, in fact. Aldic and Boro looked triumphantly at each other, their little souls pleased at their daring, stealing a ride right under the nose of a Big One.

The machine thundered on. The driver seemed in a vast hurry. He

wheeled past car after car, on the road, sometimes by a slim margin as oncoming cars brushed by.

"This driver is reckless," Aldic said worriedly. "Sometimes these cars smash against one another in terrible accidents."

The next moment, to Boro's astonishment, Aldic leaped to the back cushion, thence to the door handle and finally to the backrest of the front seat. Crouching just behind the Big One's ear, he began whispering, in their language.

"You are driving too fast! You are driving too fast!"

Over and over. His thin low whisper reached the Big One's ear only as a faint faraway murmur. The man squirmed uneasily, but kept up his prodigious pace. Again he began to roar past a car, on a hill.

"You are driving too fast! You are taking chances!" Aldic droned on.

With an exclamation, the driver eased his throttle and remained behind the car ahead. He gasped sharply as headlights suddenly loomed over the rise and a huge truck whistled by. He would not have made it, trying to pass.

"Thank Heaven!" the man grunted aloud to himself. Thereafter he drove at a much saner pace, unknowing that his conscience had been in the guise of a tiny man.

LATE in the night, as suburban sections whirled by, Boro became nervous.

"Where exactly are we going, Aldic?"

"Into the heart of the city—if this car takes us there," Aldic returned in a guarded whisper. He went on gravely. "From now on, Boro, we must be utterly alert. The Big Ones surround us on every hand."

Boro did not say it, but he had already given themselves up for lost, curs-

ing silently his rash participation in this mad venture. He fingered the pouch which held the pellet of death.

Aldic saw the gesture and squeezed Boro's arm. "Take heart! I have been in cities before. With reasonable luck, and constant caution, we can surmount any danger. You are not afraid?"

"No!" Boro snapped, stung.

They crossed two bridges, and now the fantastic ramparts of Manhattan reared about them. Boro hardly believed his eyes. Higher than any mountain he had seen towered the sheer dwellings of the Big Ones. Everything was on such a gargantuan scale that he felt like a tiny insect.

Aldic stirred, finally, peering toward the east, where a faint pearl glow limbed the buildings. "It is close to dawn. We must leave this car and find a hiding place in the city, through the day."

When the car next stopped for a red light, Aldic led the way, leaping to the window onto the fender, and then to the pavement. Hearing a slight sound, the driver turned half-way, then shrugged and started up, with a green light.

Scuttling to the overhang of a curb, Aldic and Boro flattened in its shadow, watching the car roll away down the street.

"Thanks," Aldic breathed after it, half derisively. "He would not believe, if some one told him, that all night he had two of the Little Folk as passengers."

Then they peered around. The night streets were almost deserted. Only an occasional car, and a still rarer pedestrian moved within sight.

"There are no trees, no grass!" marveled Boro. "The Big Ones lead a strange life."

Aldic's eye turned to a street sign which read, on two cross-bars: "Fifth Avenue—34th Street."

Boro was now craning his neck, his eyes popping, trying to see how far up the incredible structure nearest them pierced. It was the Empire State Building, two miles high in the eyes of six-inch beings.

"This must be the pillar that holds up the sky!" Boro said excitedly. "As Zutho once conjectured."

"And what held up the sky before this was built?" Aldic snorted. "Old Zutho may not know everything. Some of our superstitions about the Big Ones, Boro, are as childish as theirs about us."

A pedestrian passed close to the curb, so close that the squeak of leather shoes rang like gongs in their ears. And now the first shaft of dawn speared redly over the scene.

"We must hide quickly!" Aldic stated. "The city will soon wake to life. Come, Boro."

After long study, Aldic had picked their hiding. With no one in sight for the moment, they ran before a metal box, eight times as high as they were. On the outside was painted: "Waste Paper. Help Keep Our City clean." It rested next to a metal pole surmounted by a shining lamp. There were foot and hand holds, because of its roughened design, and they clambered up, leaped across to the top of the tin-box, and darted down in after pushing aside a swinging door.

They landed in a pile of papers. The air inside was stale. But it was dark, and completely cut off the outside world. Through the walls, they could hear the rising tempo of city life, as the new day began. The crescendo of traffic arose, and the babble of voices. And Boro began to feel again like a little insect caught in a beehive of angry, buzzing wasps.

"Relax and go to sleep," Aldic bade laughingly. "What use to die a hundred deaths ahead of time?"

## CHAPTER VIII

## Two Elves in a City!

**J**IM HARVEY ran his hands through his red hair, at the breakfast table, in his cabin in the Catskills. His face was haggard from a sleepless night.

"Five hundred dollars!" he muttered again. "Some dealer in Albany might loan it to me, if I contracted to make it up in pictures. Might!"

Mary said nothing. What was there to say when air-castles lay in ruins?

Harvey fingered the paper signed "Aldic." His voice was low, desperate. "If I found and caught one or two of the LittlePeople—and sold them—"

Mary spoke now, sharply. "I wouldn't let you do that, even if they *did* exist. Why, it would be—horrible! But they don't exist. And we have to do something for ourselves. No little creatures in our imaginations are going to do it for us."

**N**IGHT fell in New York City, and the pangs of hunger came to Aldic and Boro, awakening from slumber among the papers of the tin box at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street.

Boro stoically said nothing, but Aldic said it.

"Food? Well—"

They huddled down as for the hundredth time the swing-cover above creaked, letting in light, and more papers that struck them with not too gentle force. Something else hurtled in—a half-eaten apple that bounced off Boro's head, half stunning him.

"And there it is!" Aldic laughed.

They ate to repletion of the fruit. It filled the stomach, if nothing else. "And now," Boro growled, "let us get out of this stuffy prison. I would rather face the Big Ones than breathe much more of this close air."

The confinement lay heavily on them, for they were used to the openness of nature. But not until hours later, in the dead of night, did Aldic give the signal, when the city-noises had again faded.

Getting out was not as easy as getting in. They piled papers one on another, but were still out of reach. Boro was alarmed till Aldic unwound a thin cord wrapped around his waist—a five-foot lariat of strong, woven caterpillar-silk.

"This rope will be of more use in the city than our weapons," Aldic commented, tossing again and again for the slight projection of a bolt-end up high. The loop finally caught and Aldic went up hand-over-hand nimbly, catching hold of the swing-opening. After Boro came up, Aldic retrieved the rope and peeped out. When no pedestrian was in sight, they scrambled down the lamp-post and scuttled to the shadow of a curb.

Boro expanded his chest thankfully, but made a wry face.

"This city air smells bad, too. How can the Big Ones stand it all their lives? Well, Aldic, now what? Is there any of this money we have come for within reach?"

Aldic was thoughtful. "It is all around us. But I must see a telephone book. Come, Boro."

Boro followed, mystified, and they ran beside the curb—toward Sixth Avenue down 33rd Street, a New Yorker might have told them. Toward the end of the block, Aldic stopped and surveyed a small open-all-night lunch room. It was empty, in this late hour, and the proprietor was deep in a newspaper. The door was open. There was a telephone booth in the corner, beside it a stand of telephone books.

In the twinkle of an eye, they were within. Boro waited in trepidation below while Aldic clambered up silently.

Fortunately the Manhattan book was open. Aldic turned pages with a minimum of flutter, scanned quickly on the right one, and went down again. The proprietor had looked up just once, at the door, as though hoping to conjure a customer through it. He had not looked in the corner by the phone booth.

**O**UT at the curb again, Boro wiped the sweat from his brow. "I would rather battle the fox, than strain my nerves waiting for something to happen. Do you know where to go now, Aldic?"

"Yes, except that I do not know this city well. The next thing we must do is ask directions."

"Ask!" cried Boro. "Ask a Big One? Are you mad?"

"A certain kind of Big One," Aldic said mysteriously. "That one in a blue uniform. He is called a policeman. And he is Irish!"

Boro following with a resigned air of fatalism, Aldic led the way along the curb and then over the sidewalk to where the lone policeman leaned against the building, staring off into space, whistling. He was large, middle-aged, florid-faced, with Irish blue eyes that held the kindly twinkle peculiar to their kind.

Aldic took a deep breath, and then boldly tugged at the man's trouser-leg. The florid face turned down. The blue eyes widened as they made out the twin mannikins. The mouth fell open.

"Saints preserve us!" rumbled the Big One's voice. "It was only a little drink!"

"Hallo, there!" Aldic called up. "Pick me up, ye son of Erin!"

Aldic gripped Boro's arm. "If the worst happens to me, run and leave the city. But I'm sure of my man."

Eyes bulging, the policeman stooped, as if the little being's command must be obeyed. With surprising tenderness

for so great a creature, he picked Aldic up. He placed him on the palm of one hand level with his eyes—and stared as though he would continue doing that forever.

"Saints!" he mumbled again, pushing back his cap with his free hand and displaying sandy-red hair. "It has red hair, begorry. What can the little scalpeen be?" Suddenly the blue eyes flashed. "Be you one of the—the Little People?" Almost automatically he added: "Sor!"

"That I am!" Aldic yelled back, his piping voice shrill to the Big One's ears. "If ye are a true son of Ireland, ye'll help me. If not—if ye so much as raise a finger against me—I will lay upon ye the curse of the fairies!"

The policeman started. Behind his eyes that had seen the harsh realities of his world of crime prevention tugged a superstition born in his blood centuries upon centuries before. The Fairies were a pleasant myth, sure. But what was this in his hand?

"The curse!" Aldic emphasized.

"Oh no, sor! Please!" Superstition won. "What—"

He broke off as a pedestrian bore down on them. In one swift gesture, the policeman slipped Aldic into his coat pocket, and whistled tunelessly till the person passed. Boro had safely huddled behind a leg.

Aldic straightened out his rumpled shirt as the big but gentle hand once again held him as on a platform.

"What would yez have me do, sor?" the policeman asked, now irrevocably a fellow-conspirator with his little charge.

"I want directions," Aldic demanded, "to get to a certain address—" He gave it.

"Your wings—" suggested the policeman respectfully, half turning the mannikin to look.

"It pleases me to use your transpor-

tation, crude as it is," Aldic lied magnificently to cancel the superstition. "Which subway, for instance. Answer me!"

"Yes, little sor! Well, you'll be after taking the Eighth Avenue subway. Then—" The policeman gave explicit directions.

Aldic nodded. "The Fairy Queen will reward you for this deed. But if you tell a soul you have seen us—the curse! Now put me down and turn away. It is not well for you to see, as we vanish from mortal sight."

**P**LACED on the sidewalk, Aldic grabbed Boro's hand and scampered for the curb. They ran along it. When they looked back, the policeman had just turned around, but too late to see them. He stood for a moment, as though asking himself a silent question regarding the episode's reality, then moved off, scratching his head.

"What fools these Big Ones be!" Aldic said, as his distant relative Puck before him had first said, centuries before.

The memorized directions ringing in his ears, Aldic led the bewildered Boro several blocks along, hugging shadows when there were eyes to see. Then into a subway kiosk, down stairs, and under a turnstile to the train platform. Human eyes might have seen them, as the two mannikins crossed clear stretches, if they had thought to look down rather than at their own eye-level. Aldic used every advantage of shadow and niche with masterful forethought.

A sign said: "Uptown express." The train was long in coming. Boro paled as the mighty ten-car juggernaut rumbled up, to stop with creaks and hisings. Preoccupied Big Ones stepped off and on. The doors hissed shut. Aldic pulled Boro forward and they leaped to a small open platform between

cars, as the train started.

If the ride in the car had seemed exciting, this to Boro was heartstopping, for he saw concrete walls rushing by no more than a foot away. The noises alone were terrifying, to one used to the solitude of deep forests. The train ground to a halt at station after station, and kept thundering on and on.

"We aren't crossing half of Earth," Aldic smilingly informed Boro. "This is all one city. Seven million of the Big Ones live here, in an area smaller than your tribe's hunting ground."

"The Big Ones are mad," Boro decided, giving up trying to conceive how many finger-countings equaled seven million.

At the station labeled "181st St.," they left the train and scuttled up to open air. Aldic took his bearings from the hanging lights of a bridge spanning the Hudson. George Washington Bridge, the policeman had called it.

One street down and several over they went. Aldic saw a street sign saying "St. Nicholas Ave.," named after one of their race, of centuries before, who had made toys for the children of the Big Ones. The next street was Audubon. Aldic followed its curb. Finally they peeped from behind a tree that seemed out of place in this steel and stone world. An apartment building held the number "87."

"That's it," Aldic said. "We're going in."

"Going in?" Boro protested. "We'll be trapped!"

"We take our chances," admitted Aldic. "But we have two things on our side—smallness and wits."

"Is that the only place we can get this—this money we have come for?"

"No." Aldic smiled, as though enjoying a future joke. "But the most appropriate."

"What fools *we* be!" Boro suddenly

said. "Risking our necks, and the safety of our people—for what? Why are we doing it, Aldic?"

"Because a friend among the Big Ones outweighs risks."

Aldic sighed heavily. "But mostly, I think, out of defiance to the Big Ones. Our people's spirit lives on the sagas of ventures against our unnamed masters who do not even know we exist. . . ."

Boro nodded slowly. He remembered the ceaseless warnings of his childhood, to fear the Big Ones. And then, like a light in darkness, the tales of exploits under their very feet. The Big Ones, too, yearned and strove for liberty, even a shadow of it.

Together they strode forward, to complete a saga that would warm their people's hearts for generations to come. The apartment-hotel loomed as one of the most impenetrable strongholds of the Big Ones. To get in—and out—would be adventure supreme.

## CHAPTER IX

### An Adventure in Cat-Taming

THE only entrance to the big apartment building was a revolving door. Aldic peered cautiously through the glass partitions into the lobby beyond. At this late hour, only the night telephone operator was there, dozing with his back to the doorway.

"Push!" Aldic commanded, and together, straining their utmost, they managed to shove the strange door just far enough to slip in and run under a lobby chair.

"I know something of these dwellings," Aldic said. "The Big Ones here live on various shelves. I have to find out which level we want."

They fell silent and waited as a late arrival entered, exchanged a perfunctory greeting with the sleepy opera-

tor, and went up in an elevator. Then Aldic crept around the desk and looked over the man's bobbing head at a chart beside a series of pigeon-hole mail boxes. In returning, the spear slung behind his back clicked against the desk.

The operator started, stared around in half interest, then went back to his dreams with the muttered word: "Mice!"

"We have to reach the 11th floor," Aldic informed Boro. "Come."

He had already seen that the door marked "Stairs" was propped half-open, to create something of a breeze since the night was warm. The stairwell was utterly deserted, and used only in emergency, such as fire. The Big Ones used the elevators, averse to unnecessary physical effort.

Using their spears as poles, they vaulted from step to step, each as high as they were. It became hard work after a time, and the stairs seemed endless.

"I would rather climb a mountain," panted Boro, "where at least the slope is gradual."

At the fifth landing, Aldic peered from the propped-open door out into the hallway. His eyes gleamed at a daring thought. He pulled Boro with him to the automatic elevator, open at this level where the last passenger had stepped out. That is, open except for a precautionary latticed metal gate through whose framework they wriggled, into the cage.

Unslinging his useful lariat again, Aldic cast for a knob at the chest level of the Big Ones, pulled himself up, and pounded in the button labeled "11" with his fist. An automatic door hissed shut and the cage arose like an obedient slave.

"Magic!" Boro muttered fearfully, and then grinned delightedly as noth-



ing dire happened. Harmless magic, anyway.

AT the 11th floor, the automatic door opened and they squirmed through the lattice-gate into a carpeted hall. Rows of doors lined both sides. Behind them slept dozens of the Big Ones, unknowing of the two tiny intruders.

"They are packed like rabbits in a warren," grunted Boro. "Who are they hiding from?"

Aldic stopped before a door marked "C" with a name card under it that meant nothing to Boro, for he could not read the Big One's language, though he understood it well.

"Now we have to get in. There is but one way. Keep close to me, Boro."

After a cautious glance up and down the hall, Aldic boldly stood before the door and rapped on it with his spearbutt. The sound would register within as a knock, a custom of the Big Ones to inform each other of their presence, rather than an uluating shout of "Eyooo!"

It was not till the third series of knocks that their quick ears heard sound within. Two ponderous slippered feet approaching the door. Aldic tensed. The clank of a lock sounded and the door opened a few inches. Puff-eyed with sleep, the face of a middle-aged, portly man peered out.

Astonishment at seeing no one came over his features. He had no suspicion that two little forms, down where he hadn't dreamed of looking, had already slipped into the room, past his legs.

Closing and locking the door, muttering to himself, the man crossed the room, clicked off a shaded lamp, and retired to an inner room. Aldic and Boro heard the creak of his bed, and then the sound of his heavy breathing.

Aldic's beating heart eased.

"Well," he whispered to Boro, "now we are here. We have three days—at the most—to accomplish our mission."

"And just what is that?" Boro demanded. "You have been very secretive, Aldic. How will we get this money?"

"We'll see," Aldic said non-committally. "It is close to morning. We can do nothing now. We will observe what is before us."

Dawn was already spangling through curtained windows. The two little men were under a wide concealing structure that Aldic vaguely knew was a studio-couch. They waited to see how they could spin their plot against the Big Ones.

TWO hours later, the household woke to life. A maid-servant emerged from one bedroom and began bustling in the kitchen. Shortly after the man arose and sat to breakfast, with his wife.

Aldic and Boro saw little, for the time being. But the voices and noises came to them clearly.

The two Big People eating seemed at odds.

"That darling fur-piece is only \$700, dear," sounded the wife's voice, in false sweetness. "Now's the time to get it, in spring. Prices go up in the fall, you know."

"I can't afford it," the man's voice came wearily. "Stop nagging me. You don't need it in the first place."

"But I *want* it, dear, and you *can* afford it—"

It went on, with variations, till the man left for his office, slamming the door. The woman vented herself on the maid, ordering her about sharply. Later, another voice sounded, that of a boy-child, as he was awakened, dressed, and given breakfast.

The morning hours passed, while

Aldic and Boro listened to the doings of typical Big Ones, little of which they understood. The maid had finished the dishes and was making beds and bustling about the apartment, dusting. The wife made telephone calls and lolled about.

The boy-child wandered around, and eventually began playing with a cat in the living-room, near the studio couch. Aldic and Boro shrank back against the wall. They did not fear the child, but the cat—

And suddenly its canny eyes pierced under the couch. Its fine senses told it there was something amiss, and it crept under. A great, menacing head loomed before the two little men, as large to them as an elephantine tiger. Two yellow eyes sought them out of the gloom under the couch, and a low growl rumbled from its throat.

"We must kill it," Boro grunted, "before it kills us."

Aldic hesitated. "They will hear the noises. This cat spoils everything!"

"Tabby!" sounded the little boy's voice, in childish accents. "Come back. I want to play with you, Tabby."

But Tabby, all his animal instincts alert, was after prey. Tail swishing, he crept close to the two little creatures, claws ready. Boro's spear was balanced for a cast at one gleaming yellow eye.

Aldic knocked it away.

"Tabby!" his voice piped out. "Tabby—nice Tabby! Nice pussy!"

**A**T the point of charging, the cat eased slightly. Puzzled, its ears cocked forward. As Aldic repeated his soothing words, it seemed undecided, but suddenly relaxed. Its feline instincts dissolved before the plain fact of hearing a spoken voice. Any creature that spoke, no matter how strangely

small, was its master.

"Nice Tabby!" Aldic soothed away its last doubts, stroking its fur and tickling its ears. He jumped back startled at a new rumbling sound. The cat was purring like a great beating drum.

"You have tamed it!" Boro marveled. "You are a brave man to try it, Aldic."

Aldic thought it unnecessary to tell Boro he had been frightened stiff, at the crucial moment, not knowing whether a sharp claw would rend him or not. They both tensed, then.

"Mummy!" sounded the child's voice as it suddenly ran to next room. "Mummy, who is Tabby talking to, under the couch? I heard them just as plain!"

Aldic and Boro looked at each other. Exposed, trapped!

The woman's voice answered.

"Tabby is talking to the little brownies, that's all. Now Elsie is going to take you to the park to play. Mother is going to a bridge party."

When they had left, Boro shook his head in bewilderment. "Brownies? Did she mean us? But why didn't she capture us then, since she somehow knows we're here?"

Aldic laughed uproariously. "Boro, at times you are utterly—well, never mind. We're safe. Come, the place is empty. We can scout around."

The following hours were an adventure in themselves. With the soul of a true explorer, Aldic went through all the rooms. Suddenly he seemed to go a little wild. He bounced up and down on cushioned chairs. He leaped to a dresser-top and tried to run a giant comb through his red mane, and admired his image in a mirror. When the phone rang, he lifted the instrument from its cradle in his strong arms and laughed to hear the impatient "hello!

hello!" from it before he thrust it back.

And everywhere they went, the cat went, purring, gamboling. Boro entered into the spirit of the thing and they chased one another around the huge furniture, yelling. They were children in the castle of the giants. It was a lark. It was fun, too, to sit in chairs and pretend they were Big Ones.

"I'm hungry," Boro said finally.

In the kitchen, dragging a chair over, Aldic managed to open the refrigerator, shivered in its icy draft, and speared a slice of sausage and a small piece of cake. They were careful to leave no crumbs.

Aldic suddenly darted out of an open French door, onto a veranda. They peered out, between a grill railing, at the widespread city, stretching up and down the Hudson in unbelievable cubistic masses. When they peered straight down, for what seemed a sheer mile to them, Boro drew back dizzily.

"Enough is enough," he grunted. "Let us get our business done and go."

**S**OBERED, they thought of their mission. Aldic led the way to the bedroom, with the instincts of a master burglar. In a drawer of a dressing-table, he found a jewel-box and opened it. Treasure gleamed forth. Rings of gold, chains of silver, and a string of iridescent pearls.

"Those pearls are perhaps worth a thousand dollars, in the Big People's conception," Aldic mused. "They will do—"

But now a key sounded in the front door. Aldic acted with the rapidity natural to their size, closing the box and drawer so no sign would point to their presence. Then they barely had time to race back under their studio-couch hiding-place. They would have to get the pearls at night.

The maid and little boy had re-

turned. Soon after, the wife was back, and dinner was prepared. Hardly had the man arrived and the meal begun, than it started again.

"Tomorrow's my last chance to get the fur-piece, dear. It's genuine high-grade fox."

Aldic and Boro looked at each other. Though they hated the fox as a mortal enemy, in their woodland haunts, it seemed outrageous for the Big Ones to kill them only for their fur, not in self-protection.

"I can't afford it," the man parried, as he obviously had for days.

Henry! Don't lie to me." The feminine voice was strident now. "You're foreclosing the property that Harvey has up north and it's sheer profit because they've more than paid for it with interest. You told me yourself you have a cash buyer, at twice its value—and twice what the fur would cost."

"Why did I ever tell you?" the man pleaded with the universe at large. At the end of the meal, he gave up. "I knew it wasn't any use. Here's the money,—*darling!* I'm going to have a little poker game with the boys to-night. Okay?"

"Why, of course, honey!"

But if the woman was thrilled, another in the place was much more thrilled—Boro. Under the couch, he turned astounded eyes on Aldic.

"Now I see! I thought I recognized the man's voice—Henry Bainbridge, the Big One whom we saw up north, telling Harvey he would have to give up his home!"

Aldic laughed a little. "You finally caught on, Boro!"

Boro cursed himself for his thick-wittedness. They listened to the household sounds, ready now to play the final act in this strange drama.

After an evening phoning all her

friends and telling them of the darling fur-price she was going to buy the next day, Mrs. Bainbridge went to bed. The maid and junior had retired.

## CHAPTER X

### Plaything for a Child

WHEN all was quiet, Aldic and Boro crept forth. Getting the drawer open in the bedroom was tricky work, for it squeaked. But the heavy snores of the woman in bed—they could see now she was fat—were louder. Aldic tugged open the jewel-box. Seven crisp pieces of green paper lay three now, over the jewels, with the figure "100" on each.

"I'll take these," Aldic decided.

"But they are only paper," objected Boro. "Take the treasure."

Aldic looked rather witheringly at Boro. "This paper is that which is called money."

Boro flushed at his ignorance.

"The pearls would be hard to sell," Aldic said decisively. "And our friend might not even take them. This paper money is better."

Folding and stuffing the bills inside his shirt, Aldic led the way to the front. "We will get out when the man returns, late tonight. Our mission is accomplished. There is no further danger. Ah, we have made fools of these Big Ones!"

But danger struck, as they passed the open door of the boy's bedroom. The cat confronted them suddenly, desiring to play, remembering the afternoon's cavortings. It mewed loudly, cuffing at them and rolling on the floor in moonlight. One of its playful pats knocked Aldic stunned to the floor.

And the next moment, with a patter of bare feet, the boy was there. His pudgy hand picked up Aldic as though

he were a doll.

"Run!" Aldic said weakly to Boro, but Boro did not run. He had his spear half out, but the child's other quick hand picked him up. The boy seemed about to shout delightedly, at finding the two little animated dolls. He would awaken the household. There was no escape, for he held them tightly, with their arms pinned at their sides. Too tightly, in his childish eagerness. Their senses almost swam, with their breath squeezed out.

Boro looked across at Aldic and saw the grim look in his eyes. They were caught. They would have to pay the penalty. Aldic was already striving mightily to reach a hand to his pouch, for the pellet of quick death. . . .

It was ironic, to be caught by a cat and child, after outwitting so many grown Big Ones!

It was the time for decisive action. But instead of struggling to reach his pouch, like the panic-stricken Aldic, Boro worked one arm free and up-raised it. The boy saw, holding them in a moonbeam, and checked the eager shout on his trembling lips.

"Listen to me, little boy!" Boro half-shouted. His piping voice, he knew, was less likely to be heard than the boy's deeper, fuller tones. The boy listened, delighted to hear the dolls speak.

"We are brownies," Boro gasped out. "Don't make a sound. You must let us go."

"But I want to play with you," whispered the boy, respecting the request for quiet. "I won't hurt you." At the same time, suiting action to word, the imprisoning fingers eased somewhat.

Boro gulped in air thankfully. "We will come back tomorrow and play with you. Now set us down. Take Tabby in the room with you, close the door quietly, and go to sleep. Or else we

won't come back at all!"

Obediently, the child set them down, dragged the cat into his bedroom, and closed the door. It opened again a crack, but already the brownies had vanished.

SAFE under the studio-couch, Boro wiped sweat from his brow. "That was a narrow escape!"

Aldic grabbed his shoulder. "That was magnificent, Boro! Only your quick-thinking saved us. I had lost my head completely. You saved our lives, our mission, and perhaps future trouble for our people."

Aldic went on, making a confession. "I took you along on this mission to make you feel small, insignificant. To show you up, to yourself. I am sorry now if I ever intimated that you were dull of—"

"Ouch! Ohhhh!" Boro pretended to have a sharp pain in his ribs, from the child's eager grip, for Aldic was embarrassed. "Let us not talk, Aldic. We need rest."

Late in the night, a key grated, and Bainbridge tiptoed in with exaggerated caution. A breath of alcoholic vapors came in with him. Ready and waiting, Aldic and Boro scuttled past his legs, out into the hall, but not entirely unobserved this time. They heard the man's mutter as he closed the door: "Rotten stuff! Spots in my eyes."

Skilled now in their timing and traversing through the Big People's domain, they easily left the building. Outside, Aldic turned for the George Washington Bridge.

"I studied the view when we looked out today from that high balcony," he told Boro. "The bridge leads quickest to the north. We will run across the bridge. On the other side we will find cars going north. We will be back home tomorrow night, in time to give

this money to our red-headed friend. We have done well, Boro!"

At the middle of the bridge, Aldic threw back his mane of red hair and laughed.

"Eyooo!" he cried at the city behind them. "Sleep well, Big Ones!"

SOON after dawn, two days later, Jim Harvey hardly ate at the breakfast table.

"Our last day of grace, Mary," he murmured heavily. "There's still a chance of getting a loan—"

"No there isn't." Mary's eyes weren't red. She had cried herself out in the past week. "We may as well face the facts. We can sell some of our furniture and get a month's rent ahead. We'll find a cheap place, in Albany. Start over."

But Jim wasn't listening. He was staring through the door into the living room. Slowly, like a robot, he arose and stalked in, Mary following in alarm. He reached over the fireplace, where seven pieces of green paper were pinned to the wall with thorns, under the rifle.

"Seven hundred-dollar bills!" Mary gasped. "Where—who—"

She read the answer that Harvey had come to, in his eyes.

"Hallo!"

They went out to see who had called. It was the scientist named Wilson, haggard-faced from lack of sleep, shivering, but wildly excited.

"I saw them!" he babbled. "The Little People! Last night, in the moonlight, dancing. Just a few miles off from here. Have you got a drink? I'm chilled to the bone!"

He was almost incoherent. Harvey took him in and poured him a stiff drink from a quart-bottle of whiskey, handy against colds with doctors so far away. Wilson explained more rationally.

"I got the idea of looking around at

*night*, you see, when they have their dances. That is, assuming they were the basis for our fairy legends. Petrie and Zeller balked at the night business, about ready to give it up as a wild goose-chase, but agreed to stay three more days."

He took another drink, warming his hands before the fire Harvey had built. The nights were cold in the hills.

"I went around near where I saw that bear. The third night—last night that is—I found them! Heard them first—little tinkling sounds. The woods are quiet at night. As silently as I could, I followed the sounds. I didn't go any closer than a hundred yards. But I saw them clearly. Little half-foot beings, dancing and singing."

For a moment his eyes shone, as though he had witnessed a sight beautiful beyond telling. Then his voice became flat, practical.

"Fairies, pixies, sprites, kobolds, elves, brownies—they've been called in legend, and accredited with supernatural powers. Actually, of course, they're simply a race of flesh-and-blood beings of miniature size, as Dr. Bolton claimed. *Homo minutiae!* Undoubtedly they spring from the same ancestral stock as man, apes, and all sub-men, during evolution. This is the discovery of the century, in science!"

Harvey had listened without interruption. "Another drink?" he offered. "You're still shivering. You don't want to catch pneumonia."

Wilson gulped it down eagerly. "I lay there for three hours, watching. Forgot how cold and damp it was. It was a wonderful sight, in a way, the Dance of the Fairies—"

Harvey's eyes were glowing. "I'd like to see it myself!"

"You will," Wilson promised, warmed by the liquor. "We'll capture as many as we can. Everybody will

see them. Great scientific discovery, you know."

"Certainly is," Harvey agreed. He turned to his wife, who was regarding him queerly. "See, Mary? I told you they existed. Great scientific discovery. I'll drink to that, Wilson. Bottoms up!" Harvey's red head went back as he tossed down the drink.

. . . Outside the window, another red head went back, in shock. Aldic and Boro, listening, stared bleakly at each other. Not only were their people in danger, but their friend had betrayed them . . .

Mary had been staring at her husband, her eyes questioning. Suddenly she spun about and retired to the bedroom, slamming the door.

"Don't mind her," Harvey grinned. "Tell me more about those little scamps. Here—another drink. This doesn't happen every day!"

**A**N hour later, Wilson rose unsteadily to his feet. "Gotta go now. Tell th' others." His speech was thick.

"I'll drive you," volunteered Harvey. He was staggering too. But once in the car, he gripped the steering-wheel firmly.

He returned an hour later.

Mary met him in a cold fury. "Jim, how could you? Drinking to that, when only a moment before the Little People had—oh, you beast!"

Harvey took her in his arms, laughing. "I flipped most of my drinks into the fire." His face became grave. "There aren't any Little People, Mary."

She stared at him, ready to scream.

"Listen," he told her. "Wilson was dead drunk when we arrived at their camp. He babbled over and over about the Little People. I told Petrie and Zeller to leave with him immediately—before he lost his mind. Told them Wilson barged in on us last night, shiv-

ering from hours of useless search. We had drinks. Wilson soon got to seeing elves, I said, dancing out in our yard. Petrie looked disgustedly at the babbling Wilson. When I left, they were packing to leave. You see, Mary? There are no Little People. Wilson will never be believed!"

"You darling!" Mary nearly squeezed his breath out. "But Wilson can't be fooled. He'll come back eventually—"

"He won't find them. I've gained enough time. Wilson told me exactly where to find the Little People. I'm going to warn them to move—tonight."

"It's the least we can do," Mary agreed, holding out the money. "For this. But Jim, is it right? Where did this money come from?"

"There's no way in the world we could ever find out, unless the Little Folk tell," Harvey said slowly. "They'll never know what this means to us—and we, for our part, can be certain that no injustice has been practiced on anyone through this, no matter how queer it may seem to us."

There was a happy grin under another thatch of red hair, just outside the window, as Aldic and Boro slid down the vines and scampered off toward the village. But wearied of their travels, they first curled to sleep in a squirrel-hollow, and approached the village at dusk.

## CHAPTER XI

### Migration

"ZUTHO will be angry with us," Aldic warned. "And as for Teena—" He smiled faintly and glanced at the suddenly embarrassed Boro. "But look! There she comes—"

They had reached the dancing glade, and Teena was already flying from

among the young people. "Eyoo! Aldic and Boro! You are back safely!"

She stopped before them, and her expression changed from gladness to sudden shyness. She was lovely, with her spun-silver hair and long-lashed eyes turned to the ground.

"Yes, we are back," Boro cried boastfully. "We have had a great adventure. We took money from right under the Big Ones' noses. We—" He abruptly broke off, and went on in changed, sincere tones. "Not we—Aldic. It is all to his credit, for conceiving and leading a venture that will live long in our people's memory."

"Where is Boro the Braggart?" laughed Aldic. "Take him, Teena. I know you choose him. You have loved him all the time, save that he was such a braggart. Now I have brought back a new Boro."

Aldic reached under his shirt and plucked forth a gleaming golden wedding ring, taken from the Big One who had taken her vows so lightly she didn't wear it. Aldic slipped it on Teena's arm, where it shone in beautiful contrast to her silvery hair.

With a little cry of happiness, Teena ran to Boro's arms.

Aldic turned away with a smile, and saw old Zutho hobbling up as fast as he could. He waved his gnarled cane before the two young stalwarts.

"You have broken the First Law! Perhaps you have been seen, and we will have to migrate—"

Aldic nodded. "You must move to a new home immediately, deeper in the wildwood."

"I knew it!" raged Zutho, pounding his cane on the ground. "You must be punished. I sentence you, Aldic and Boro—"

"Wait, Father, before you say it." Aldic went on, telling the full story, and all realized that except for the efforts

of the Big One with red hair, they might this day be caught.

"Well," old Zutho muttered, "you must still be punished, in some way. I forbid you to eat in our company for a moon. I forbid you—"

Aldic smiled peculiarly. "You forbid your—king?"

"King?" Zutho gasped. He stared for a long moment, at the tall, impressive young man, in dawning understanding. "Then your name is generic. You are the direct descendant of Aldic, ancient king of all the Little Folk!"

Zutho bowed his white head, and all the tribe likewise, in the tiny moonlit glade.

"Raise your heads, my people," Aldic commanded softly. "I am king, but only an uncrowned king. I have wandered from tribe to tribe, over Earth, seeing that all my people are well. So

did my father, and his father before him. The Big Ones have become too numerous, and too scientific, to allow better contact. And so it must be—perhaps forever."

There was silence in the glade, between this monarch and his scattered driven people.

"I will leave you now," Aldic said, at their mute query. "There is a tribe in the Ozarks, whom I must visit."

Then his voice rose in a merry shout. "Look! The red-headed Big One comes, and his mate. Let us have one more dance, in this glade, for them to see!"

Just before the cold dawn, the moon peered down into an empty glade through which the wind sighed as though in memory of the Little Ones who would no longer dance here, but had gone on . . .



## Carson of Venus Fights Again!

ONCE more Carson Napier roams the planet Venus, fighting to save himself and the lovely Duare from the Fishmen of Mypos. But victory seems never to be won on Venus, especially when the fighting leads toward a mysterious woman . . . a woman so beautiful that she makes other women appear as beasts! Who was she? What would Carson and Duare discover when they finally faced her? What was the strange lure of

### THE FIRE GODDESS

?

A brand new novel by  
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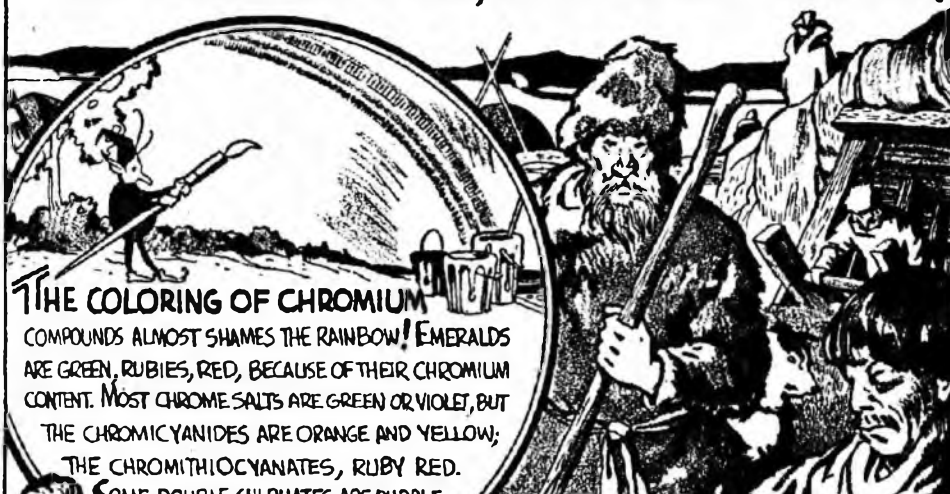
# fantastic ADVENTURES

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS MAY 20th!



# Romance of the Elements --- Chromium

**A** FAR CRY FROM A PRIMITIVE MINE IN 18TH CENTURY SIBERIA— ARE THE PARTS OF A MODERN AIRPLANE—YET THE ELEMENT, **CHROMIUM** SO ESSENTIAL TO MODERN METALLURGY, WAS FIRST ISOLATED IN 1798 BY VAUQUELIN, FROM SIBERIAN RED LEAD ORE. LITTLE DID HE REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WHITISH, METALLIC NEEDLES HE FOUND IN HIS CRUCIBLE!



## THE COLORING OF CHROMIUM

COMPOUNDS ALMOST SHAMES THE RAINBOW! EMERALDS ARE GREEN, RUBIES, RED, BECAUSE OF THEIR CHROMIUM CONTENT. MOST CHROME SALTS ARE GREEN OR VIOLET, BUT THE CHROMICYANIDES ARE ORANGE AND YELLOW;

THE CHROMITHIOCYANATES, RUBY RED.

SOME DOUBLE SULPHATES ARE PURPLE,

THE PURE METAL, HOWEVER, IS STEELY WHITE!



## AS EARLY

AS 1880, THE SESQUIOXIDE OF CHROMIUM (CHROME GREEN) WAS USED IN GLASS STAINING, PORCELAIN PAINTING, BANK NOTE PRINTING.

FOLKS THEN WERE USING POTASSIUM BICHROMATE IN GALVANIC BATTERIES, IN THE PRINTING OF PHOTOGRAPHS—EVEN IN ADULTERATING **SNUFF!**

## ALTHOUGH BUNSEN, IN 1850, SUCCEEDED

IN DEPOSITING METALLIC CHROMIUM ON ANOTHER METAL, HIS ACHIEVEMENT WAS PASSED OVER BY SCIENCE FOR DECADES. UNTIL THE 1920'S, LITTLE PURE CHROMIUM WAS USED; THEN SCIENTISTS SERIOUSLY LOOKED INTO CHROMIUM PLATING. IN LITTLE MORE THAN A DECADE CHROMIUM PLATING HAS BECOME A COMMON PLACE PRACTICE.



## METALLURGISTS

CALLED THIS THE **MASTER OF METALS**. CHROMIUM IMPARTS HARDNESS TO STEEL; GIVES FINER GRAIN STRUCTURE, INCREASES TENSILE STRENGTH, RETAINS DUCTILITY, RESISTS CORROSION AND OXIDATION. THEY USE CHROMIUM-NICKEL STEEL IN AIRPLANE BUILDING IN THE MAKING OF SHELLS, ARMOR PLATE AND AUTO PARTS.

**CHROMIUM** is number 24 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Cr and its atomic weight is 52.01. It is a metal resembling iron, but brighter and whiter when polished. It has a density of 6.9 and a melting point of 1615°. It is extremely hard, dense and tough, and is used in cutting tools, in stainless steel, pigments, etc.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Cobalt

# THE MAN WHO

by POLTON CROSS



**"Centuries have passed, and you now own Mars," they told Hal Bailey when he awoke, "but it's worthless." Then why did they want to buy it?**

# BOUGHT MARS



"They aren't dead!" exclaimed Hal.  
"They've been sleeping—for years!"

**T**WO-HUNDRED DOLLAR stake in a planet that's as dry as a textbook! Are you crazy, buddy?" Hal Bailey shook his head at the question.

"Nope, I'm not crazy; no telling when Mars might pay dividends. Just make out the claim and give me a receipt. I'm just back from a trip out there, and even red sand will sell at a price."

"Not in 1970, pal. Still, it's your funeral."

Hal took the receipt handed to him, smiled gravely as he left the Space Corporation Building. People glanced at him curiously as he walked along. He knew he looked odd, attired in rough, dirty space slacks, a lump of gray mineral rock under one arm. His face was masked in its good humored cleanness by a bristling stubble. He looked, and felt, all washed up from his personal trip in an old space can as far as Mars and back.

Anyway, it had been worth it. Something queer about the rock he had found. Emanations. Probably valuable to the authorities. And his two-hundred dollar stake on the other planet secured things.

He nodded as he thought his deal over—then all of a sudden every thought was dashed and blinded out of

his brain by a terrific blow on the head— He pitched into a darkness blacker than space.

HAL STIRRED uneasily, conscious of awakening life. It was a queer sensation, quite unlike a normal awakening from stupor. It was more like gradual recovery from cramp in which his limbs merged from leaden uselessness into warmth and feeling. Threaded through his mind was the fading memory of wandering afar off; a conviction that he had accomplished much while yet being unaware of doing it—

He opened his eyes abruptly and gazed mystifiedly about him.

Hospital? Possibly. Morgue? No, sir! Cemetery—? But no; there were men's faces watching him—earnest and respectful faces. There were six. Hal's eyes went round a room of immense proportions scattered with endless, non-paned ceiling-floor windows. Light—light and more light. It poured in on him from everywhere.

What he saw through the windows made him awaken thoroughly, and with it came a certain fear. New York, as he had known it anyway, had gone! In its place reposed a metropolis of breath-taking size rearing into the blue summer sky. Skyscrapers, bridges, street cars, radio towers, aircraft— As far as the eye could see.

"Holy cats!" he gasped suddenly, rising up. "What happened—?"

He stopped, looking down at himself self-consciously. He was dressed in a light smock which covered him from head to toe. He realized now that he had been lying on a bed of vacuum cushions, electrically heated from below. His body felt saggy from disuse. He was shaved, however, his hair was brushed, and his nails manicured.

"This," said one of the men gravely,

looking at Hal with piercing gray eyes, "is indeed a momentous day! Helgis"—he glanced at one of the other men—"inform the Publicity Bureau."

Hal watched the man go, then moistened his lips.

"Say, what goes on?" he asked uneasily. "How'd I get here? Who was the guy that socked me out in the street?"

"Socked you? Oh—you mean your assailant of long ago? I am afraid we have no idea. . . ."

"No idea?" Hal looked more worried than ever. "And what do you mean by 'long ago?' How long have I been unconscious anyway?"

The man with gray eyes looked at his companions momentarily, then as they nodded he answered gravely:

"One hundred and fifty years. We had no idea when you would wake up—if at all. It became clear long ago that a curious pathological condition was—"

"Damn the pathology!" Hal exploded, scrambling off the bed. "You said a hundred and fifty years! You don't mean it! You *can't* mean it! Why dammit, it only feels like an hour ago—"

He stopped, breathing hard. He stood passive as an unemotional servant threw a robe about him.

"This," said the man with gray eyes, "is the year 2120, and you, Excellent Friend, have been the medical wonder of the past years. As record has it you were attacked in 1970 and taken to the hospital with a fractured skull. From there, your condition being one of slight body movement without actual recovery of consciousness, you were taken to the Medical Wing of the State Museum. Through the years, as your wealth was used by State trustees, you became the especial care of principal medicoes in this residence. We have eagerly awaited your return to con-

sciousness, have spent our lives studying you. The day has come . . . My name, Excellent Friend, is Nilicot."

Hal stared for a while, then rubbed his head. "You—you said something about wealth?"

"Yes, Excellent Friend. At a rough estimate you are worth some hundred million croni—dollars as you used to call them. Your other possessions include half of this city, the planet Mars—Is something the matter?" Nilicot broke off anxiously, as Hal staggered.

"No—no." Hal sat down on the bed again with a thud. "I'm just kinda dizzy. . . . I'd like something to eat and drink."

"Of course! Forgive my lack of attention . . ."

Nilicot turned to the wall and pressed a variety of buttons. Trays guided on radio beams shot through the wall's unseen hatches and came to rest in mid air at the level of Hal's lap. There they remained. With bulging eyes he stared down at the perfect food awaiting him—then with a hopeless shrug he picked up knife and fork and started.

**S**UDDENLY one of the men in the group, a bulldog-faced man in a tight blue one-piece suit went into detail. His voice and brain were like those of a robot for accuracy.

"In 1970 you staked a claim with the Space Corporation for a strip of territory on Mars encompassing Cynia Oasis. You became unconscious before you could make good your claim, thereby establishing a precedent in law because you were neither dead nor alive and your claim still held good. By the law of progressive land interest holdings your claim doubled in three years. Experts viewed Mars and decided it was of no particular value to us . . . In a hundred years your claim entitled

you to three quarters of the planet. Now . . ." The man took a deep breath. "Now, Excellent Friend, you own Mars!"

Hal looked up and smiled weakly.

"Think of that! Is there anything else?"

"Decidedly. Your space machine was found and disposed of by the State. The auctioned money was placed in the bank for you in the form of investments. The investments realized enormous sums after the Scientific War of 2050 and it ended as you are today, with ownership of half this city and a bank account of some hundred million croni. You are a wealthy man, Excellent Friend—wealthy even for this age of finance incarnate."

"Yeah . . . seems I am." Hal got slowly to his feet, went to the window. "And when I got laid out I was a no account space-hogger. I've got the wealth—but I've lost everything, gentlemen! I've lost the girl I was going to marry, my friends, my ideals, everything. I have been pitchforked into an incredible world way ahead of me . . ."

He fell silent, staring out on the gigantic enigma of the city.

"You will accustom yourself," said the bulldog financier gravely. "If I can help you at any time my name is Dagnam. I'm Treasurer for the City."

"Thanks. I'll remember that . . ." Hal looked at the others. "I just recall something. When I was laid out I was carrying a chunk of mineral rock. Anybody know what became of it?"

"Mineral rock?" repeated Nilicot. "From where?"

"From— That doesn't matter," Hal said briefly. "I want to know if there's any record of it having been used? Any record of the theft?"

"Not that we know of," Nilicot said.

Hal compressed his lips. Then he asked:

"Just why *did* I go into a trance for one hundred and fifty years? Anybody know?"

"You have confounded medical science. The blow dulled your brain and yet did not kill you. It was as though you moved into some other Time-continuum—"

"And that's the best explanation you advanced scientists have to offer?" Hal demanded.

The men shrugged and glanced at each other. Financier Dagnam said softly:

"Decidedly!"

Hal shrugged.

"Okay, I'll have to accept it—until I know better, anyway. Seems to me I've a lot to catch up on . . ."

**I**T TOOK Hal some time to even begin to adjust himself to the altered, advanced conditions. The city seemed to work like clock-work. Everything he wanted in this immense residence was there for him. Servants without end passed silently up and down the long marble corridors of the place. Robot controls were everywhere; teleplates brought the world to his side.

At first it was amusing, thrilling, staggering—by turns. But Hal Bailey was no mug and the vital issues of his interrupted life insisted on being dealt with. On the seventh day he summoned an astronomical expert.

"Of just how much value is Mars?" Hal asked the man.

"Of no value at all, Excellent Friend. The pity is that you staked your claim on a planet since proven so useless to science. You own it of course; by law nobody can touch it—but State examinations on your behalf have shown it has no useful mineral or other yields. Its only value lies in it being useful as a refueling station for long distance space flights."

"Would you suggest," Hal asked slowly, "that I sell Mars?"

The astronomer shrugged.

"Why not? A planet of red dust is no use to you. The Government would make you an offer. If that does not come up to expectations try the city control—Dagnam is the Treasurer."

"Okay . . . Thanks."

Hal sat in thought for a while, face grim—then he pressed a teleplate button. The Secretary of State appeared on the mirror.

Hal said, "Mr. Secretary, Mars is in the market for sale. What is the Government offer?"

"For the past twenty-five years it has remained at one thousand croni—"

"What! A thousand smackers for a whole planet? And of huge value as a fuel station—"

"That is the figure," said the Secretary implacably. "I am only the mouthpiece of the State, Excellent Friend. I am not in a position to enforce you to—"

"You bet you're not!" Hal switched off, pressed another button. Bulldog-faced Dagnam merged in view.

"Ah, Excellent Friend, good morning! I—"

"Listen, Dagnam, if I decide to sell Mars to the city what's the price?"

"Basic figure of forty fifty thousand croni, open to adjustment."

"Hm-m. . . ." Hal's eyes gleamed. "Well, thanks. I'll do some hard thinkin. . . ."

He switched off, thought out loud.

"If Dagnam will pay that and the Government won't it looks as though Dagnam is responsible for whatever jiggery-pokery is going on behind the scenes. So Mars is not valuable, eh? That's what they think! Seems to me I can't do better than go and look that real estate over a little more thoroughly. I might find something."

## CHAPTER II

## 22nd Century Racketeer

**I**N ten minutes Hal was in his private solar car driving at a smooth 500 m.p.h. down the elevated city track to the space grounds.\* As he drove he meditated, still none too certain of the setup in which he had landed. To own a planet was one thing: to be sure how much others knew about it was another.

He glanced up suddenly at his rear mirror as he heard a roar behind him. In the mirror was a powerful black solar car striving to overtake him. To move out of his single car track was impossible.

Then his alarm abated and he grinned. Of course! These cars were not like 1970. They moved in a fixed groove and the black car was on the faster track anyway. He waited for it to overtake him.

It drew level. Momentarily he caught a glimpse of men's faces, then a tiny pellet sailed through the air and struck his car engine amidship. Instantly the world seemed to burst into a fiery confusion of flying metal and flame. Wheel brakes screamed wildly and frantically, working automatically as the engine failed.

Hal felt himself flying through the air, hair and eyebrows singed with the flame from the engine. He struck out desperately, clamped his fingers more by luck than judgment to the guard rail bordering the track. He hung on, feet dangling, cast a look below him. His brain reeled. A thousand feet down yawned the chasms of the city's power-parks— His fingers slipped—

Then suddenly strong hands were

gripping him, hauling him up to safety.

"You—you came just in time, I guess," he panted, rubbing his racked arms and gazing at the grim faces of the traffic police. "I was attacked by somebody—"

"We saw it, Excellent Friend," the officer replied. "From our guardhouse down the track. It was an attempt to stop your car with an atomic bomb—probably a kidnaping racket. Have no fear, we'll get them."

"You'd better!" Hal's jaws tightened. "Somebody seems to have marked objections to my knocking around— Okay, I'm all right now. Give me a lift to the space grounds, will you?"

They did, saw him safely into the private one-man express machine he chartered. Thoroughly convinced now that he had stepped into a hornets' nest of intrigue somewhere, Hal set the controls and drove swiftly over the heights of the city, flashed outward into the void. Turning, he set his course for Mars, eyed it grimly.

"Useless planet, huh? And the moment I set out for it I nearly get bumped off! Guess that residence of mine must be wormeaten with secret devices and somebody knew what I'd planned. You've things to learn, big boy. This 2120 racket is no nursery!"

He half expected as his journey continued that there would be some other attack—but nothing happened. Here and there the space patrol signaled a greeting; far behind was a leisurely old space-tramp pursuing the usual lanes . . . otherwise nothing.

**P**ART of the time Hal slept, using the robot control. Then as Mars began to fill heaven with its streaking *canali* he was aware of considerable surprise at sighting a lone spaceship perched in the void perhaps two hundred miles from the red planet. As he drew nearer

\* Solar car—A car assumed to utilize the power of the sun, this power operating from a central plant and distributed to all Vehicles. The idea exists today in the minds of scientists.—Ed.



he opened up his space radio.

"Hallo, there! What goes on? Who are you?"

To his surprise a girl's voice answered—a cool, charming voice.

"Who wants to know?"

Hal frowned, then his jaw set. He drove alongside the solitary craft and saw a face framed in the outlook port. So far as he could make out it was a good looking face, oval, framed in black hair.

"You're inside the five hundred mile zone limit," he announced curtly. "That makes you a space trespasser on my property—"

"*Your* property! Who are you anyway?"

"I'm Hal Bailey, owner of Mars. If that doesn't convey anything try 'Excellent Friend.'"

"You're—you're him are you?" He heard her gasp. "Excuse *me!* I can explain this . . . Come on over."

She opened her ship's outer lock. Hal lowered his space-tunnel into position, crossed into the girl's control room.\* The place was littered with spectrometers, charts, maps, sextants, and Martian desert drawings. The girl was a slim, cool-looking piece attired in the prevailing space slacks of the time.

"What's the idea?" Hal inquired, eyeing her steadily.

Instead of answering she said,

"Yes, you're the Excellent Friend, all right. I've seen you enough times in the Museum. The Medical Wonder! The owner of Mars himself— Well, I'm trespassing all right, only it was quiet and empty of space police so I—" She shrugged. "So I just went on with my work."

"Spying for those damned folks back on Earth who are trying to kill me?"

\* Space Tunnel—A space "gang plank" entirely inclosed, extending from airlock to airlock of adjoining ships—folding up concertinawise when not in use.—Ed.

Hal asked bitterly. "Like the rest of these chiseling heels of 2120 you're—"

"I resent that!" she cried, her dark eyes blazing. "I'm no spy! I'm a student of cosmic hieroglyphics. Vilma Crandal is the name. You've heard of me, or my dad?"

"Frankly, no." Hal frowned. "Sorry I offended you. Space hieroglyphics? What's that to do with you being near my property?"

She nodded to the table, indicated the numberless drawings of Mars.

"Mars changes its canals a lot. You know that?"

"Sure. Alter all the time. So what?"

"My dad believed, and I believe, that the Martians used the canal system not for water but to convey a message to Earth. Their language being different to ours they used the only method understandable to scientists anywhere—geometry."

Hal stared at her, then he grinned. "Sounds screwy to me—"

"It isn't screwy!" she objected heatedly. "Evan Lowell, way back in your dim past hinted at it. Every week more or less, for centuries, the Martian *canals* undergo change in length and design, appear and disappear. The Martians knew exactly what changes would occur in the surface of their planet for generations after their decease and arranged it that the canals fell into predetermined shapes—geometrical shapes. Those shapes, traced back into the past, and followed to the present day, spell a message—an amazing message. My father and I made it our life's work to solve the meaning of it."

**H**AL stared down on the other planet. "But hang it, those marks don't even make sense!"

"Neither does shorthand until you understand it. Geometry is a language all its own—the science of magnitudes.



If you take the propositions postulated by the canal designs you arrive at logical conclusions. For instance, two parallel lines of same length and distance apart mean, obviously, the term 'Equal.' That's how it works . . ."

The girl stopped a moment, added seriously,

"Upward of ninety years Dad and I studied Mars. From the propositions we've learned how much Mars really contains, what a mastery of science the extinct Martians really had— Even today Mars contains vast scientific power deep in its bowels. They couldn't send messages to Earth by radio because at that time—when the Martians died out—Earth was not fully aware of radio power. Possibly nobody on the Earth has made cosmic hieroglyphics their specialty as Dad and I have. That is why I'm here, checking notes."

Hal rubbed his jaw.

"Perhaps there *are* others in on it," he said slowly. "It may account for certain factions trying to get Mars from me at all possible cost—"

He stopped and twirled around as the radio speaker came to life.

"Hey, there, Excellent Friend, we want a word with you! You'd better agree since we have your ship covered."

Hal looked grimly through the window onto the dirty space tramp he had seen following him for long enough.

"State your business!" he snapped into the mike.

"Withdraw that airlock tunnel then we will."

"Better," the girl said seriously. "I've no protective weapons on this ship. If these guys get tough, whoever they are, they'll make it hot for us."

She broke the magnetic contact holding the tunnel to Hal's ship and it folded back in place. The tramp drifted

alongside, fanned out its own tunnel, then three men came into the control room. The foremost was Financier Dagnam. Behind him were two men with paralyzing guns in their hands at the ready.

"Surprised?" the financier asked dryly, then before Hal could reply he went on, "You shouldn't be. Way out in space here I am not compelled to cloak my actions as I was on Earth, surrounded as you were by laws, scientists, and state officials. You're a free man here and can take your chance . . ." He stopped, his piggy eyes glinting. "Not long ago I made you an offer for Mars. You will be well advised to accept it!"

"So it was you who tried to kill me on the traffic way!" Hal exploded. "I might have—"

"My orders were to have you kidnaped," Dagnam said curtly. "The scheme went wrong and the police intervened. It has meant my being forced to follow you out here to get you to sell Mars to me. You have no use for it—"

"Who says I haven't? Get the hell out of here, Dagnam, before I damn well—"

"Let us not waste time," the financier interrupted coldly. He planked a printed sheet down on the table, fingered a pen grimly. "On Earth," he said slowly, "I might have been forced to actually pay you the money stated—but not here. You will sign, because I have the guns."

"Supposing I let you shoot me instead?" Hal demanded grimly.

"That won't happen, my friend. You have placed yourself in a rather unfortunate position. Either you sign or this woman here dies, and her death will be on your conscience."

Hal hesitated and looked at the guns. He glanced at the girl and saw she was giving little shakes of her head.

"It's a wonder a snake like you doesn't sink to forgery," Hal said bitterly, eyeing Dagnam's remorseless face.

"I'm not above it," he shrugged. "Only back on Earth you have signed too many documents since you awoke for me to escape with a forgery— Sign, damn you!" he blazed. "You're wasting time!"

**H**AL tightened his lips, then bent down to the table, apparently to append his signature— Instead he suddenly whirled up the heavy brass sextant with which the girl had been working and hurled it with terrific, unerring force at the nearest gunman.

He fell to the floor, dead-stunned as the instrument struck him a glancing blow on top of the head and then whizzed on its way into the switchboard. There was a violent purple flash—

Even as the missile traveled on its way Hal jumped, brought the startled other man down with a tackle, hurled his massive fist into his upturned face time and again until he sank back with bleeding mouth, his gun flying out of his hand.

Instantly the girl picked it up, tossed it over to Hal. He caught it deftly.

"Out!" he said between his teeth. "Go on, Dagnam—get out! And take your infernal paper with you—!" He hurled it in the magnate's flabby, vindictive face. Dagnam clutched it, crammed it in his pocket and headed for the airlock. A kick helped him on his way.

Without ceremony Hal bundled the two dazed and battered gunmen after him, fired one charge from the gun that sent them scuttling through the rest of the airlock tunnel back to their own ship.

"Okay, we get outa here," Hal said

briefly to the girl, slamming the lock shut. "That ship of mine doesn't signify anyway. . ."

The girl closed a switch and the ship jolted—then she gave a cry of alarm.

"The switch! It's broken— Where the sextant hit it!"

Hal leaped to her side, stared at the smashed wiring.

"What—what happens?" he gulped.

"It fires the forward tubes. If those don't fire as well as the back jets we'll never pull free of Mars' gravity field—we're falling now!" the girl cried hoarsely, as the ship moved a little way and then began to twirl oddly, moving slowly down toward the vast other landscape below. With seconds whipping by, it gathered momentum.

Hal felt himself sweat with sudden fear. He set to work to try and replace the wiring, gave it up as hopeless. It would take hours. The girl cut off the power, but the damage was done now. Faster and faster the ship fell out of the anchor-field over the deadline and the other wilderness rose to meet them.

The girl tensed, biting her lip—then almost at the limit of their headlong dive she gave the rearward tubes everything they had. In that maneuver she succeeded for the ship twirled and lifted her nose sideways, struck the sand in a long gouging sweep, tore along in it for a space, then halted.

"Nice going!" Hal breathed, straightening up.

The girl gave a relieved nod. "Thought that last bit might do it. What we have to do now is fix this wiring and then—"

"It can wait," Hal said, looking through the port. "Dagnam and his boys are heading voidwards; evidently think we went to destruction. Now we've landed on this darned planet of mine I want to be sure exactly why Dagnam is so anxious about it.

Is it that he knows of Martian secrets buried in it, or is it the secret I once found—? How much do you know of Mars' surface, Miss Crandal?"

"From personal contact, nothing. Private property, remember."

Hal grinned crookedly.

"Pity other people haven't your sense of honesty. Let's see—" He studied the gages. "Air thin but breathable, just. Temperature seventy. Hm-m, good enough. And we're three miles from the spot I want—Cynia Oasis. Okay, lock that stuff of yours away in case unwelcome factions find it—"

"I'll take the principal charts with me," she said briefly. "If Dagnam returns I'll leave nothing from which he can benefit."

She stuffed a collapsible roll of prints and charts into the belt pocket on her waist, then nodded to the airlock. Hal gripped the solitary paralyzer-gun more firmly and followed her.

### CHAPTER III

#### Slow Motion Life

AS they ploughed along together through the sand, accustoming themselves to the lesser gravity, Hal said,

"Look here, Miss Crandal—or is it Vilma now we know each other better?—you know plenty about Earth where-as I was just flung into it. What's the setup? I mean, who's supposed to rule the cities and the countries?"

"In every country save Merica—that's where you and I hail from—money alone is in control," she answered. "Capitalism won the fight after the Scientific War, except in our country. There we have the Presidential form of Government, with finance striving hard to overthrow it.

Dagnam is one of those who is trying to oust a political Government and set up a monetary one, like other countries have. If he could only get the wealth he needs—even if only in solid gold—he could rule the country. But gold can only be bought in hard cash from other countries and planets. Therefore the one with most gold is nominally the big shot of the lot."

Hal reflected. "Rather like our Twentieth Century setup used to be, only now it's on clearer lines. Seems to me Dagnam is a guy to be wary of. Obviously he—"

Pausing, he pointed ahead.

"There, that sand and rock ridge. In it there's the entrance to an underground cave. I found it before I went to sleep— Come on."

The girl followed him through a narrow opening in the hard rock, right into the ridge itself, lowered herself down a stony slope into Hal's waiting arms. The dim sunlight filtering in revealed an immense internal cave hanging with numberless stalactites.

"This is it all right," Hal said grimly, as he and the girl fingered the rock inquisitively. "I took some of these stalactite rocks back to Earth. I must have been followed and they were stolen from me. Since nothing's been heard of them since I presume they were no good. . . ."

"What did you think they were, anyway?" the girl asked.

"My instruments said heavy water crystals.\* The rock gives off emanations, I know that. I carried my samples in steel tongs at arms' length until I felt sure they wouldn't hurt me. On Earth I carried them under my arm."

\* Heavy Water—Produced by electrolysis, especially solar power passing through tenuous atmosphere. Heavy water possesses more electrons than normal water, is an isotope. Its powers, according to science, are mainly medicinal and produce different results according to dosage.—Ed.

A startled look began to form on the girl's face.

"But heavy water crystals might be valuable—for all kinds of things! They arrest metabolism for one thing—that is age. In concentrate form they can be powerful drugs. Heavy water crystals is right!" she went on. "Martian water would be electrolyzed by the weak atmospheric blanket, would sink down here from the oasis in heavy water form. . . Maybe Dagnam knows a thing or two, at that!"

"Mebbe . . ." Hal was wandering thoughtfully around the cave. He came up suddenly against the opposite wall and gave a shout.

"Hey, Vil! For Pete's sake come and take a look here!"

Hurrying to his side the girl started in surprise at discovering an inlet square of immensely thick glass. But beyond the glass was yet another cavern, furnished incredibly enough after the style of a hospital ward! There were earthly tables, chairs, instruments, beds, and a dully glowing ceiling lamp, apparently of radium origin, allowing just sufficient light for visibility.

This was not all. In the place were six men, Earthmen, clad in light one-piece tunics. They lay or sat in all manner of positions, motionless apparently. Some were bald, and all were over middle age.

"What—what *is* this?" Hal gasped. "Business man's waxworks?"

"Good Lord, I know some of these men, by sight!" Vilma cried. "There's Millpont, the famous financier, for one— And Valcane, the big broker!" Her voice broke with excitement. "And that fat man there is DeManyon, about the biggest chain store merchant in Merica— Wait, something comes back to me! While you were asleep Hal all these men here announced their inten-

tion of retiring. Then they dropped out of sight—to *here*, obviously!"

"Are they dead?" Hal stared in bewilderment.

THEY were silent for a while, watching intently. It seemed too incredible, but with the moments the men were seen to alter position very slightly, an alternation as infinitesimal as the movement of the distant stars.

"No, they're not dead," the girl whispered. "They're *slowed down!*"

"Men in slow motion!" Hal breathed.

"*Now* I begin to see the light! This is Dagnam's doing! I told you that heavy water rock gives off emanations. Way back in the past it was stolen from me, probably by some predecessor of Dagnam's. They found out that it was the emanations of the rock that made me sleep for a hundred and fifty years. *That's* what the explanation is. Those guys closest to me back on Earth, like Nilicot my adviser, knew all about it—But Dagnam kept them quiet. Probably they figured I'd never wake up—"

"Then these men—?" the girl asked breathlessly.

"It's obvious! Dagnam, or somebody before him, traced the stuff back to this cave. They used it, probably as concentrate. Of their own accord these men here have been dosed with concentrate. They may not wake up for centuries. Suppose they left behind them certain investments to accrue with time—? When they wake up they'll be as incredibly wealthy—wealthier—than I found myself! You say they only retired. Okay—their holdings remain firm until they reappear or death can be proved. A racket!" Hal whistled. "A sanatorium for businessmen! Financial power in pickle! Wow!"

"You recovered, proved obstinate, so

Dagnam's got to get this planet from you at all cost," the girl mused. "Yes, I believe you are right. And he relied on the general honesty of other people to keep this place secret—and it's worked! We—"

She stopped, suddenly staggered a little.

"Something wrong?" Hal caught her anxiously.

"Just—just darned sleepy, that's all." She looked vaguely surprised. "I guess it must be this thin air—"

She shook herself, yawned widely, then stopped half way and swung to the cave opening at a sudden sound. Three figures dropped into view—Dagnam and his two gunmen. Instantly Hal's hand flew to the gun he'd thrust in his belt but Dagnam's voice rang out.

"Better not, Bailey! I'm in no mood for games this time!"

Dagnam came forward with a grim face, halted.

"Good job we watched what happened through the telescope after your ship cracked up," he commented briefly. "Right now you know just a bit too much about my affairs . . ." His cold eyes slanted to the girl as he thrust out the sheet of paper Hal had hurled at him on the spaceship. "This time I'll take no chances. Sign! That is all I need. You can talk yourself black proving otherwise back on Earth. I'll have you taped by then—Come on, Bailey, sign! Or this girl dies. I'm no joker!"

"I'll be—" Hal checked himself, suddenly conscious of a vast wave of weariness billowing over him. He fought against it with all his strength as for a moment Dagnam and his gunmen seemed to recede into a distant mist.

"*Get busy!*" the financier roared, holding out a pen.

Furious, he lunged out with his fist, sent Hal spinning to the sandy floor.

Hal fought his way up again, trying to figure out what had gone wrong with him. Life seemed to be ebbing from him in a tide. He hardly felt the brutal blows Dagnam rained time and again into his face. Only his dinning command—"Sign!" penetrated his brain.

Numbly, he took the pen. With the cave spinning round him he scrawled his signature, twisted his head to stare at the girl where she was held against the wall at the gunpoint.

"Okay," Dagnam said briefly. "Pay the account, boys. Use the ordinary revolvers—no taking chances with paralysis or rays."

Hal jerked his head up in alarm as the gunmen backed away. Half-way back up the cave they paused, leveled their guns and fired—once, twice. . .

Hal stared in blank horror as he saw the girl crumple in a limp heap to the floor. Then to the accompaniment of another gun explosion he felt a dull, numb pain in his chest.

His exhaustion was complete. Darkness flowed over him.

THROUGHOUT a period of duration he could only guess at, Hal was aware of slight movements, of patched-up events as brief and odd as those of a nightmare. In a half-formed way they reminded him of his one hundred fifty-year sleep. Then all of a sudden he recovered consciousness.

Once more that feeling of receding cramp, of life pouring back into his limbs. Hunger gripped him.

He sat up abruptly, blinking in the wavering glow of volcanic light. He was in some kind of inner cave that went as far as he could see. In every direction sprouted bushes of livid green, their branches laden with heavy, vivid-colored fruits like peaches. It was cool down here; the air sucked into the planet's core, was fresh. The plants, dry

soil specimens, flourished obviously by absorbing what water vapor remained in the air.

"What the heck . . .?" Hal rubbed his face, noted in amazement the vast beard he had grown. His hair too was down to his shoulders.

He stared around him again, then started as he saw the sprawled figure of the girl stirring slightly. At the same moment, seeing her threadbare clothes, he became aware that he himself was in tatters. For some reason his tough space togs were worn out. He made hasty readjustments to what remained then scrambled dizzily to his feet.

"Vilma!" he cried, shaking her bare shoulder. "Vil, wake up!"

She moved again at that, opened her eyes. For a long time she looked bemusedly around, then as her faculties returned she scooped her torn clothes more tightly about her and stared at Hal's bearded face.

"What—what happened?" she breathed.

"Search me," he replied worriedly. "Last thing I remember was being shot at. Dunno how we got here . . . Up you get!"

He raised her to her feet, then he felt his chest thoughtfully.

"Right here," he said slowly, "is something hard. It must be the bullet Dagnam's gunman fired at me— You should have a couple in you somewhere."

"I have," she said, fingering herself. "They ought to have killed us—but they didn't! I seem to remember I was half asleep—Hal, what's happened to us? Where are we on Mars?" She caught at him anxiously.

"Something has happened that I hardly dare think about," he said in an awed voice. "We made a mistake in handling those heavy water stalacites as we did. The emanations must have

gotten into our bloodstream and slowed down our faculties—just as it happened to me before when I was fool enough to carry the rock without protection. The bullets didn't kill us because death relies on the speed at which a shock can be assimilated. With us the shock was infinitely protracted, so we didn't die . . .

"We moved," he breathed, astounded. "We followed Nature's law and looked subconsciously for stimulant. We needed precious little, but still *some*. As if in a stupor we must have moved from our cave to here . . . Here there is fruit. If we follow our trail back we'll no doubt come to our cave—"

"From our clothes and your Raspustin beard, it's some time," Vilma said. "Let's take a look."

Hal turned to the nearest fruit bush, snapped off a partly dried branch and thrust it in the volcanic flame spouting out of the rocks. Thus armed with a torch they searched around until they found a small single opening. It led through a long tunnel with a sandy floor.

"Notice?" Hal exclaimed, triumphantly. "Gouged tracks in the sand where we've dragged ourselves along with infinite slowness. Blind animal instinct replacing normal reasoning, as it naturally must if the faculties are slowed up."

The girl nodded but said nothing. Hal realized that, like him, she was oppressed by the awesome thought of the time that must have slipped by in the interval.

For an hour they went on, twisting and turning through the single narrow passage.

It brought them out finally into the very cave where they had met the bullets of Dagnam's gunmen, seemingly so short a time before.

## CHAPTER IV

## Martian Strategy

SILENT, they looked at the wall of the cave where they had last seen illumined glass. Now it was powdered with sandy dust and behind it all was dark and quiet.

"They've gone," Hal said, shrugging, then as he looked about him, "And they've taken tons of stalactite material with them! Look at the amount of stuff they've broken off—!"

Vilma nodded slowly, then they went together to the cave exit and stared out onto the Martian night sky. Cold wind blew about them, set them shuddering.

Earth was there over the desert, a tiny green ball. Then as she studied the winking constellations the girl turned suddenly and seized Hal's arm.

"Do you realize how long we've been crawling and eating?" she asked breathlessly.

"Some time, I guess. I can't judge it exactly—"

"I can, from the stars— It's about two hundred years!"

"What!"

"It's right," she insisted seriously. "In all that time we've passed a slow motion existence. We've been veritable lotus eaters. In two hundred years all we've done is move to lower quarters of Mars and eat fruit—"

"But what's happened on Earth during this time?" Hal cried. "Do you realize—"

"I realize that more of the stalactites have been taken, obviously for use by the revived industrialists who by this time must surely be veritable masters of the world. They probably wondered where we went to— That doesn't signify. We're still here, alive . . ."

"Yeah, and little good it does us!"

Hal stared over the mournfully empty desert. "Either your space ship was taken away long ago or else it's covered in sand. We're alone, Vil— Lost!"

"Not quite," she said quietly. "Don't forget the Martian civilization, or what's left of it, still lies deep inside Mars. I know enough to find my way to it. Original notes are gone of course, but my memory still serves me. Come on, we've got to find a way down to this planet's very core. It's our last chance. There may be stuff there to help us escape."

TOGETHER they made their way back to the underground cavern, refreshed themselves with the curious tasting fruit—then they lighted more torches and started a careful exploration. It was not long before the girl found an immense volcanic fissure extending into the depths.

"Okay, let's go." Hal said grimly. "We can't go up so let's go down."

They descended cautiously, slipping down precipitous lengths at times, barking their bare feet on loose pieces of rock, but gradually descending ever lower into the sponge of a world. Down here, as the fissures linked right through the planet, there was a tremendous draft, cold and cutting.

It was also a region of more and more volcanic light from the nearly extinct fires in the core. They flashed and rumbled incessantly but without any promise of becoming dangerous. In the cave in which the two finally dropped—indeed it was far more than a cave, it was the vast root core of Mars itself—there was an awesome quality. Its silence was broken only by the muffled thunder of internal explosion, its darkness by the stabbing lights that threw distorted shadows. And at its far end, gleaming where the light struck it, were two vast doors of black metal.

"This is it!" the girl cried exultantly. "The last habitat of the Martians! In the transcribed message it said thought waves alone can open those doors—the thought wave of the first proposition in Euclid—"

"What a hope!" Hal groaned.

"I think I can do it," the girl retorted. "Maybe you forget I've spent my life—or *did* spend my life—on the problem. Now quit talking and let me concentrate . . ."

For a long time she stood staring at the doors, concentrating with brows down. Time and again she failed—then just as Hal was giving it up as hopeless there came out of the rumbling stillness a series of clicking noises. With the creak of untold age the doors began to move, parted up the center, sent forth a belch of curiously exotic air like that from an Eastern tomb.

Within, the atmosphere was breathable but oddly tainted. It clung to the nostrils of Hal and the girl as they stepped cautiously into the hallowed reaches. The reflected light from the volcanic cavern shone on incredibly intricate mechanisms operating the doors.

Silently they went on to a wilderness of machines cloaked in thick, dust-caked grease.

"Yes, this is it," the girl whispered. "The Monte Cristo of Mars—the last inventions of Martian science waiting for those who could read the signs of the *canali*. And we've got them!"

"Yeah . . ." Hal felt he had to subdue his voice. "Where do we start?" he went on. "I don't begin to understand the setup. Anyway, there'll be no power—"

"Not of the sort we know of, perhaps—but scientists as clever as the Martians probably used solar power—like we used to use on earth for solar cars two hundred years ago. Let's look around."

AN hour later, with the girl's knowledge of advanced machines and Martian signs, they tabulated their findings. All power was clearly governed by an immense self-contained power unit connected with the roof—and thence presumably to some point on the exterior where the sun's power could reach it.

"Telescopic devices, space radio, transmutational machines, synthesis apparatus, the whole shoot—" Hal said.

"All linking to the central switch-board and robot controlled from there," the girl nodded. "Let's see what we get."

Rather nervously she went to work on the switches. It took some time to find the right combination, but fool-proof devices prevented any disastrous mistakes, and suddenly there came a throbbing of power from the immense storage resources.

"It works!" Hal cried excitedly. "Nice going!"

Between them they went to work on the radio television apparatus, fished around for an interval before they transformed the blur on the screen into a view of the heavens, and presently to a picture of Earth perfectly mirrored by the X-ray devices—

It was a changed Earth—a different Earth from anything they had ever known. Where New York had stood there now sprawled a city which covered the entire American continent. New York *was* America, apparently. Across the oceans on other lands reposed similar giant cities, covering every country. They were traced out with roadways and countless lines of communication; the seas were thick with craft, the air jostling with bullet-fast air machines.

"Things have kinda grown," Hal said somberly. "Doesn't get us away from here either. Seems the Martians hadn't



mastered space travel in spite of being good scientists—or if they did they took darned good care to leave no clues for us.”

The girl fiddled with the radio apparatus, at last got it tuned to an ultra short Earth wavelength. Most of the announcements failed to make much sense, except that there was constant reference to the “grace of the Merica World State.” Everything, it appeared, was done by its consent.

“In other words, Merica has got a grip on the whole world and is the dominating State.” Hal said thoughtfully. “That kind of adds up. Those industrialists returned, claimed their accumulated money, and thereby became the wealthiest men on Earth, buying everybody else out. Dagnam, we presume, is either dead or in pickle for the future.”

Vilma nodded slowly, thinking, then she looked at the radio quickly as another announcement came forth.

“By the grace of the Merica World State it is announced that the appeal for commercial help by the controllers of Europa State cannot be granted. In these days of financial control, Merica holds the largest gold reserve in the world and is thereby dictator of policy by common consent. The Merica World State, under the control of Exchequer Chancellor Millpont, therefore considers—”

**T**HE communication faded out, blurred with space static. Hal switched off, looked at the girl inquiringly.

“Millpont, huh? One of the pickled industrialists who was on Mars here. And the rest will be around him . . .” Hal clenched his fist. “It’s the very devil! A money juggernaut backed by gold, able to enforce its will on the world until somebody with greater

wealth and gold turns up! And what can we do? Nothing! Even if we could get back to Earth we’d be no better off. A bulk of a planet like this—”

“And your own wealth accumulated with two hundred years,” the girl pointed out. “Don’t forget that! You must by now be enormously wealthy and as long as you are alive the law remains. Not even Millpont can alter that.”

“Yeah,” Hal sighed. “But still way behind buying him out.”

The girl was silent, wandering around the machinery. Then she halted and said slowly. “*I wonder . . . !*”

“Huh? Wonder what?”

“These transmutational machines here,” she said slowly—then suddenly making up her mind she closed the transmutator power switches. Giant tubes flared into life for a moment and they both stared in awe at the display, watched the battering onslaught of energies clashing in fiery grandeur in the transparent mutational chamber.

“Anything into anything!” the girl said, studying the hieroglyphics on the chart attached to the machine. “Here there are one hundred elements of which we know only ninety-two—but they’re in the same Periodic Weight. That’s natural, anyway. And the corresponding switch numbers are shown—Hal!” Her voice sharpened eagerly. “This chart can help us change anything into anything else—lead into gold, for instance. Look, I’ll show you!”

She picked up a lead cube from the adjoining container and put it in the transmutational chamber, closed the appropriate switch. A battering hail of complex forces descended on the cube. It began to glow, changed color as it formed fresh atomic units. Automatically the power at last cut itself out and there remained a block that shone dull yellow.

“*Gold!*” Hal yelled. “It is gold!

Vil, we've got to contact Earth by radio and tell 'em Millpont isn't the richest power, that this so called hulk of a planet is—"

"And have Millpont see to it that you never use your secret? Oh no!" The girl shook her head. "We fight fire with fire here, Hal. We can't get away from here—so Millpont and sundry others will come to us!"

"Are you crazy?" Hal shouted. "It's asking for it. Once it is known we can manufacture gold *et al* in this place we—"

The girl interrupted him, went across to the radio, began to fiddle for Earth transmission waves again.

"Leave it to me," she said, smiling faintly. "You may be a good space man but you're a rotten business man—" She made more adjustments, intoned her voice into the microphone. "Mars calling Earth! Urgent message! Mars calling Earth!"

**A**FTER a long interval Earth replied. The announcer sounded mystified.

"Earth replying. What apparatus are you using to speak from Mars?"

The girl ignored the question.

"Here is a message for the Merica World State, and Chancellor Millpont in particular. Mars is in extreme danger of being annexed by unfriendly powers and it is essential that Chancellor Millpont and the head of every other State in the world come to Mars immediately to determine preventative measures. I am a member of the Space Secret Service, marooned on Mars, and I have discovered this amazing plot. I await reply."

There was a long interval, then,

"Chancellor Millpont concedes to your request, extends his cordial thanks for your promptness. How will he contact you?"

"Cynia Oasis. I will be waiting. . ."

The girl switched off, smiled grimly. Hal looked at her in some puzzlement.

"And when he comes?"

"You'll see," she said briefly. "In the meantime we're going to make some clothes with the synthetic machine, hunt up what arms we can to protect ourselves—though I have an idea it won't be necessary—and you're going to tell me the whole story of your life from the time you awoke in 2120 up to meeting me. . . Let's get started."

**M**ANY Martian days and nights passed before Hal and Vilna, watching from their cave entrance, sighted the approaching Earth fleet. It landed close to the oasis and a party of eight men finally emerged, began to walk toward Hal and Vilna as they signaled their presence.

The bald-headed Millpont stared at the ill-dressed two amazedly.

"Are *you* S.S.S. agents?" he cried. "Or is this some damned joke? If there's been a trick—"

"No trick," Hal said calmly. "Follow us, gentlemen, if you please."

Wonderingly, not a little irritably indeed when it came to the long descent into Mars' bowels, the men followed Hal and the girl. Once in the vast Martian power-hall they gazed around in mystified awe.

Suddenly Millpont harrumphed loudly and cocked a grim eye on the girl.

"Presumably you sent the message," he said. "It was a woman's voice, I am told. Well, where's the danger?"

The girl ignored the inquiry. Composedly, she asked a question.

"Just what countries do you gentlemen represent?"

They looked at each other, then Millpont gestured impatiently.

"There are no countries! You should know that! There are only cities, owned and controlled by the grace of

Merica—" He stopped, his jaws setting. "Just what are you two doing on this planet? It is private property and—"

"In other words," the girl said, eyeing the other quiet-faced men, "you are under the heel of this man and his city of Merica?"

There was a slow nodding of heads. One said gravely.

"Financial power backed by gold is the ruler of the Earth, therefore Merica is the legal master."

Vilma smiled crookedly, looked at Millpont.

"What gave you the idea, Millpont, that you own this planet? It was bought—or rather stolen by force—from one Hal Bailey nearly two hundred years or so ago."

"It is on record that it was bought," Millpont retorted. "The Hal Bailey person died or something. Look here, what *is* this?" he roared suddenly. "Why did you ask us here anyway?"

"Shut up, and listen!" Hal was speaking now. "Hal Bailey was one of the richest men in Earth at the time of his supposed death, was he not? Where did his property go? Nobody could use it until his death was proven. That's the law. Right, gentlemen?"

The others nodded again firmly.

"Bailey's death was proved to the hilt!" Millpont snorted. "His property was confiscated by the State then, according to law—"

"Then it's going to be tough on you," Hal said grimly. "I'm Hal Bailey myself, and I can prove it in any way you want once I get back to Earth! I was robbed, cheated, shot at! I lay for two hundred years with this girl here in slow motion— Yeah, that pricks, doesn't it? Slow motion! Just the way you and your pet industrialists passed the time away while the interest mounted up—"

Millpont hesitated, his eyes glittering.

"You'll never prove anything—and you're not Bailey! You—"

"A MOMENT," one of the men interposed. "It has never been quite understood how Millpont and his colleagues succeeded in gaining such a legal hold over vast sums of money. Do you suggest that they used some scientific method to get a start on us—"

"I'm not suggesting, man—I'm *telling!*" Hal roared. "I own Mars, always have. It was stolen by Dagnam from me. In spite of my signature, in spite of everything, I demand restitution for this! I'll make you pay for this, Millpont! I'll drag the story of heavy water crystals through every damned State on Earth! I'll blast your whole rotten setup! You're going to give me back Mars and my estate in money— But especially Mars! Understand?"

"One moment," Millpont said, calming. "There will be endless difficulties in trying to sort out your legal title to the estate you had two hundred years ago—nor do I believe for a moment you would be able to gainsay the signature you gave making Mars over to us, or at least to Dagnam. Suppose we were to compromise? Suppose I take your word for it regarding Mars and you leave the matter of your accrued inheritance alone?"

"What! Not on your life—"

"It would be—safer," Millpont said gravely.

"Yeah, you mean you'd bump me off before I could make a claim at all, huh?"

"Hardly that—but calamities befall all of us sometimes. You are a business man, and so am I. Strategically Mars is worth as much as your estate if you will communicate with the Venusian

Government. They are anxious to buy."

"Boloney!" Hal said frankly. "You mean it's an old hulk and you are glad to get rid of it! You've gotten all the minerals you want, sucked it drier than a lemon—"

"You still have these machines," Millpont shrugged. "I am willing for you to have everything on this planet in return for your silence concerning your legal claim."

Hal hesitated, glanced at the girl. She closed one eye solemnly.

"Okay," Hal said briefly. "I'll do it."

"Good!" Millpont motioned his waxen faced secretary and he went to work on a portable printer. Within a minute Millpont held forth a printed transfer of sale, signed it with a flourish. Hal did likewise and the other men appended their signatures.

Millpont smiled gravely.

"You are not a very good business man, my friend," he sighed. "However, now it is done it is your—"

"I haven't finished yet!" Hal retorted, as the group turned to go. "I've something to add. Now I own Mars—to which you are all witnesses—I intend to buy Merica as well!"

"You—what?" Millpont asked deliberately.

"How much do you want?" Hal demanded. "Name a price! Any price—as high as you like!"

"You're crazy," Millpont said sourly. "Besides, there is no price! All the gold reserve in the Solar System could not—"

"In a world given over to financial domination everything has a price!" Hal shouted. "Take a look at this if you doubt my capital!"

**H**E nodded to the girl and she slammed the switch on the transmutational machine. Millpont, indeed all the men, watched with popping eyes

as blocks of lead, copper, tin, iron, and so forth fell forth to the rack as pure gold.

"What the—" Millpont gasped. Then he burst into a roar. "By God, this is trickery! Damned, infernal—"

"I'm the business man, Millpont, not you!" Hal grinned. "Now you see! Mars is an old hulk, is it? The richest planet in the System, that's what it is! Wealth without end— And I own it! Gentlemen, you are my witnesses! I can outbuy Millpont here, outbuy anybody!"

"We'll see if you will!" Millpont shouted, then before anybody could stop him he plunged forward and drove his fist through the glass into the transmutation chamber, grabbed at the lead block forming slowly into gold.

Almost instantly he staggered back, dragging his apparently numbed arm clear. In some odd way the gold block was cloying to his fingers, spreading a yellowish tinge into his hand—assimilating with his flesh! For a second or two he stood in mute anguish while the others looked on, thunderstruck. Then he crashed over to the floor, rigid, his whole gross body twisting and shuddering tremendously as the transmutational powers surged through him.

"He's—he's turning into gold!" one of the men whispered.

"It's the energy that does it," the girl said quietly. "He tried to seize it at the point of change and the energy of change passed into him as well. This transmutator changes anything into anything. Millpont loved gold, I guess—and he sure got it!"

The others were silent, staring at the gilded image cloaked in a suit upon the floor.

"I think, gentlemen, the issue is decided for us anyway," Hal said quietly. "We had better return to Earth and make our arrangements. Mars hence-

forth is the master planet. I do not have to tell you that no domination will be sought—”

He caught the girl's arm as she came up. She smiled at him.

“Sure was a lucky day for me when I bought Mars,” he murmured. “Only

day to improve on it was the one when I met you.”

“There's still one more to beat them both, if you like,” she said naively, then they turned together and followed the Earth delegates out of the hall.

The End.

## The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR  
(Concluded from page 5)

**R**ECENTLY we dug up a fantastic document (out of our files, not out of the ground!). It was a Roman menu. It's worth passing on!

While not necessarily supernatural, the quantity and variety of food the stout Roman businessmen put away at their little get-togethers borders on the fantastic.

**A**CCORDING to Cimon Africanus' "History (of Roman gastronomy)", in 67 B. C. Lucinius Procmius, a leading army contractor, served the following menu to three colleagues while discussing a merger:

Olives, dormice, wild honey, fried suckling, poppy seeds, baked lamb chops, damsons, pomegranate grains, stewed brains of bird, peafowls' eggs, peppers, ram's head pie, roast beef, kidneys, lambs fry, African dates, cheese cakes, sea fish, hare, lobster, goose, mullets, honeycomb, bread with crushed fig, cucumber, Syrian dates, Theban (Greek) dates, frozen drops of Spanish honey, endive, jellied apples, pears, pudding sausage, strawberries, peaches, nuts, cream cheese, grape jelly, snails, chutterlings, stewed livers, pickled turnips, kidney beans, salted olives, thrushes in pastry with chopped nuts, quinces, oyster and scallops.

Naturally, you will say, all this required an aid to digestion. So here's what they drank.

**T**HREE jugs of wine of Araby, one jug of Chinese cordial, two jugs of Syrian thick wine, one jug of Greek wine, two jugs of Roman wine, five large jugs of Frankish beer, one large jug of Egyptian beer, two jugs of light Spanish wine, and one jug of barley water!

No wonder the Roman Empire fell! We'd say it passed out!

**W**HAT makes Friday such an evil day in the superstitions of many people? Now take these instances (for instance) and see what you think. Each one is a fortunate fact, rather than unfortunate, and if there's anything to the dread of Friday, it's all wet on this scale!

On Friday, August 3rd, 1492, Columbus sailed from Spain; on Friday, October 12th he first sighted the New World; he started homeward on Friday, January 4th, 1493, and reached Palos, his starting point, on Friday, March 14th.

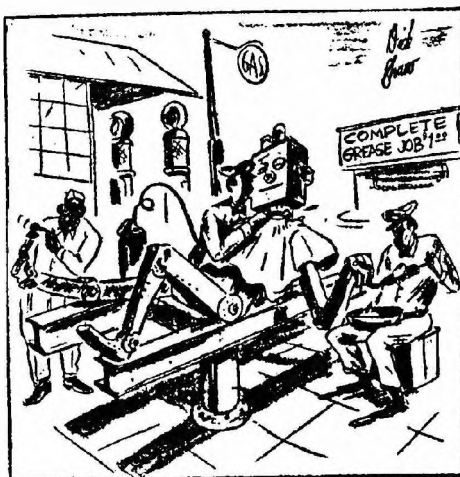
Columbus first reached the coast of South America on a Friday, June 12th, 1494; Giovanni Coboto, otherwise John Cabot who discovered Canada, received his commission from King Henry VIII on a Friday, March 5th, 1496; St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest town in the United States, was settled on a Friday, September 7th, 1565; the father of our country, George Washington, was born on a Friday, February 22nd, 1732.

On a Friday, October 17th, 1777, General Gates defeated the British commander, Burgoyne at the famous battle of Saratoga; on Friday, September 19th, 1781, General Washington defeated Lord Cornwallis; on Friday, July 7th, 1776, John

Adams demanded before Congress the recognition of the secession of the American colonies.

Friday looks pretty good to us! So why the fuss? Incidentally, we're writing this on Friday!

**B**EFORE we forget, Edgar Rice Burroughs has another John Carter yarn in the June **AMAZING STORIES**. It's called "The Black Pirates of Barsoom" and it's on the stands now. If you like Burroughs, take a hint and get this one now. It's really a fine bit of work, and takes you right back to the Valley Dor, the First Born, and all the familiar scenes of "The Gods of Mars"—*Rep.*



"Gimme a simoniza job too, boys. I gotta date with a leadhead tonight."



MADARUS

# AMAZONS of a Weird Creation

by  
**JEP  
POWELL**

**There was something decidedly wrong about this future world; there were no men in it, only hateful old women**

**A** WATER glass crashed into the spotless wall of a private room in Atlanta's City Hospital.

"I got him!" whooped Spud Harris. "Pick him up, Nursie, and bring him to me."

"Got who?" demanded a pretty but exasperated nurse.

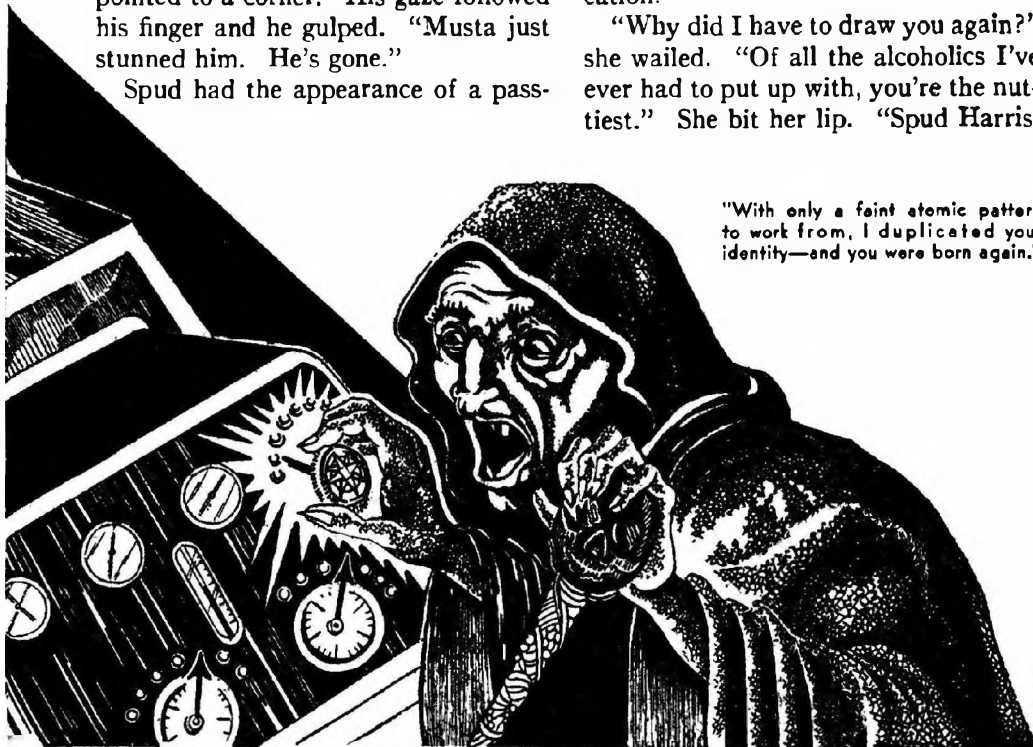
"That damn turtle that was crawlin' up the wall. There he . . ." Spud pointed to a corner. His gaze followed his finger and he gulped. "Musta just stunned him. He's gone."

Spud had the appearance of a pass-

ably handsome former football star who had tried to cram too much living into forty years. His reddish-brown hair was tousled; his grey eyes bloodshot. He needed a shave. Spud had been plying himself with liquid courage, preparatory to starting a perilous Time flight into the Thirtieth Century. He had plied assiduously.

The nurse made a gesture of deprecation.

"Why did I have to draw you again?" she wailed. "Of all the alcoholics I've ever had to put up with, you're the nuttiest." She bit her lip. "Spud Harris,



"With only a faint atomic pattern to work from, I duplicated your identity—and you were born again."

why don't you snap out of it? You used to be a swell sports writer, but now look at you. You'll wind up in the wacky house if . . ."

"Look, Toots," Spud interrupted. "Call up the Times and ask for the sports desk. Tell Luke Gordon I'll be in Monday, sure. What day is this?"

"Tuesday," she said acidly. "Also your wife's been calling here. What do you want me to tell her?"

A prodigious shudder shook his already jittery, lank frame. Molly opposed his drinking; sometimes vociferously, sometimes violently.

Three reporters pushed past a protesting floor superintendent and barged into the room.

"They're waiting for you down at the lab, you lug," one of them bellowed at Spud. "Climb outa that rear-entrance kimono and into some duds. We got a cab waiting. Where's his clothes, Nurse?"

**H**ALF an hour later a handful of skeptical scientists and several derisive reporters and photogs were gathered in Dr. Amos Pipp's laboratory to watch a senile inventor and a rum-soaked sports writer hurled a thousand years into the future; maybe into Eternity.

Dr. Pipp surveyed the group, tugged at his wispy white goatee, and spoke pontifically.

"Gentlemen, before Mr. Harris and I embark on our epoch-making journey, I'll explain for the benefit of some of you that Time does not fly, as we are wont to say. It doesn't even creep; doesn't move at all. Time is static and we move through it. Everything moves through it. Everything that ever was or ever will be, now is somewhere out there in Time. . . ."

"Hold it, Professor," cut in Duffy of the News. "I don't savvy. You mean

I'm already dead? That my first kid is already born? That . . .?"

"Please!" Dr. Pipp barked petulantly. "I'll simplify it this way. Let us compare our normal passage through Time to traveling along an unfamiliar highway across the continent. Every city and town, every river, every mountain already is along the route. They just don't become real to us until we reach them—but they're there all the time. Now Mr. Harris and I will leave you at this point on the road of Time, speed on by faster vehicle, make observations, then return to meet you a short distance ahead. Simple, isn't it?"

No one agreed.

"Look, Doc, why go tearing through ten centuries?" another reporter asked. "Why not just take a little test hop or something, say a year or two ahead?"

"The power required to project us into the future will not permit us to stop so soon. While the principle is different, this may give you an idea. The power required to force a rifle bullet through a barrel smaller than itself sends the bullet far beyond the muzzle . . ."

"I get it," a photog declared. "You and Spud gonna be fired like a couple of human cannon balls in a circus."

Dr. Pipp's scrawny five-foot-four went rigid. His caprine whiskers trembled.

"Throw that clown out!" he choked.

"He isn't clowning, Amos," a fellow scientist soothed. "He doesn't know what—er, what vehicle you're using. Maybe some of the others don't. Perhaps you'd better explain it."

Dr. Pipp calmed down.

"We will be hurled into Time—not into space," he explained. "Our flight cannot be measured in miles but in years. Indeed, we may never leave this spot. We will be projected into the future on an electric beam."



A reporter suppressed a laugh as he pictured Spud Harris trying to keep his balance astride a light ray.

"But first we will be atomized," Dr. Pipp continued.

"You'll wh-a-a-a-t?" Duffy bleated.

"We will be reduced to atoms."

**SILENCE** fell over the little group. The newspapermen did not know whether to hoot or gasp. They cast sympathetic glances at Spud. He eased a bottle from his pocket and took a quick nip of fortitude.

"How in thunder do you ever expect to come out whole again?" somebody asked.

"The assembler in the atomic receiver will take care of that," Dr. Pipp assured him. "Every atom has a definite affinity for one other atom. In the assembler, under electrical influence, each atom will seek and find its affiant. When each has claimed its own, Mr. Harris and I will be ourselves again."

Through a boozy haze, Spud could see pieces of a scrambled jig-saw puzzle dancing about and claiming partners, finally settling down in the proper pattern.

"What good is it gonna do you, floating around in the future like a couple of dust clouds?" a reporter wanted to know.

"Thirtieth Century scientists will receive us and reassemble us in a device like my own. Probably a much improved one," Dr. Pipp declared. "Later they will reject us to our own Time."

"All I can say is, I hope you jell right when those atoms start choosing partners," the reporter cracked.

A smock-clad man entered a door and squinted myopically through lenses as thick as a tea-room sandwich.

"Ready, George?" the inventor inquired. "Gentlemen, this is Mr. Nobles, my assistant. He will handle the

controls. Let us go to the projector room."

The projector room was infinitely more horrible than an electrocution chamber. In the center of the room on low tables were the atomizers, looking like twin coffins of opaque glass and having weird smokestacks. The "smokestacks" were transparent tubes ending in large bulbs near an opening in the roof. Each of the bulbs was encircled by a spiral of wire, giving it something of a bird-cage appearance. On the opposite side of the room was a control panel equipped with a mystifying array of dials, tubes, indicators and switches.

No time was wasted in this gruesome chamber. There was handshaking and attempts at cheerful banalities. Then Dr. Pipp and Spud were out of their clothes and into their coffins.

Nobles turned a dial with each hand, held them until a low humming noise began, then moved them again a fraction of an inch at a time. The humming grew to a higher pitch with each twist of the dials. No one spoke. No one breathed. A wisp of dust appeared in the nearest smokestack. Nobles jerked a switch and the hum became the shrill whine of an idle band-saw. Dust shot up through the tube and swirled around the bird-cage. The bulb took on a dull glow, growing brighter as the agitation within it increased. Momentarily the bulb shone with the brilliance of neon, then a puff of dust shot up through the opening in the roof, hung for a split second like a steam cloud, and vanished.

"There goes Doc!" a photog gasped, aiming his camera too late.

"Spud's tougher for the atomizer to digest," Duffy grunted. "He'll have to be distilled first, I suppose. I bet he'll test ninety-proof."

A few moments later Spud followed

Dr. Pipp into the Unknown.

Nobles immediately made the changes which converted the atomic projector into a receiver, and at once took up his post to await the return of the adventurers—whether it be a matter of hours, days, or months.

## CHAPTER II

### Glimpse of Hell

**A** MOMENT after Spud stretched out in his coffin-like atomizer, a numbness crept over him. He became dizzy and lost consciousness, but seemed to awaken almost immediately in a wind tunnel filled with tiny feathers.

Suddenly he was hurled or drawn into what he supposed was the future. There was alternating light and darkness of split-second duration, which he took to be his passage through days and nights. It reminded him of speeding past a white picket fence, or rather of being suspended while the fence flew past him. He did not see the light and darkness, as he possessed no physical senses, yet he was conscious of them. He was aware also of intermittent warm and cool breezes, which he reasoned were Summer and Winter.

Spud wondered suddenly where Dr. Pipp was. He had supposed they would travel together. Had Doc soared on ahead, or had Spud jumped the barrier? Possibly something had gone wrong in the atomizer and Doc hadn't come out at all. Maybe Doc was dead. Or maybe *he* was dead, and now was just a ghost drifting through Eternity. He hoped he was dreaming and tried to pinch himself. There was nothing to pinch.

The flight became monotonous—and fearful. Spud felt that millions of years lay behind. Then he felt a presence.

"That you, Doc?" he wondered.

"Hello, Harris," Doc greeted mentally. "What delayed you?"

"If you think I've been loafing along the way, you've got another think coming, you old goat," Spud thought, adding a telepathic scowl. "I've been sailing along at better than a year a minute, maybe twice that fast; I don't know. And I've been wondering if I'm dead. You reckon we're dead, Doc?"

Dr. Pipp thought not. He was confident everything was going according to his plan.

Spud's fear was not dissipated easily. He was sure they had overshot their mark. He thought of Doc often riding absent-minded past street car stops. But it was not funny now.

"Dang it, Doc," he thought. "You didn't figure on any way to put on brakes, did you? I'm scared we'll be sailing on like this till doomsday."

Doc answered with a mental grunt.

Spud kept his thoughts to himself for a while. No doubt about it, he decided, they were millions of years from the Twentieth Century. They were dead, but Doc just wouldn't admit it.

So far, Spud had not felt hungry. He wondered what ghosts ate, if they did eat.

Then there was a violent tugging at him. He and Doc were separated. As dust is sucked into a vacuum cleaner, Spud was drawn into a dark, swirling hole, a maelstrom in Eternity. He felt warm and thought he detected smoke.

"Oh, my God! No, no!" he tried to cry out. He had never thought much about an everlasting Hell. Vaguely he always had believed a man was punished on Earth for his sins. And he believed he had suffered his share of Earthly Hell.

He wanted to resist this power that was pulling him into the swirling, hot blackness, but he had no hands with

which to claw out, no heels to dig in. He plunged deeper—then oblivion.

SPUD awakened with the sensation a traveler feels when he awakens on a Pullman sleeper to find the train has stopped somewhere in utter darkness. He was in a cramped position and moved his legs. This startled him. He actually had moved his legs!

He decided to pinch himself. It was a soft, weak pinch, but definitely a pinch on his left arm. Then he tried to move his arms, but they were held tightly folded across his body by a snug wrapping.

"Oh-oh," he thought, remembering what the City Hospital nurse had said. "A strait-jacket. They've finally had to put Spud Harris in a nutty shirt."

His next impulse was to cry out, but he could not open his mouth.

"Did they have to gag me, too?" he wondered. "I must be a pretty violent case."

Claustrophobia seized him. He squirmed and kicked with nightmarish fury. Suddenly he was free, only to find himself held aloft by the heels and being spanked soundly.

He raised his voice to protest against this indignity but uttered only a pathetic little wail. However, the spanking stopped. He opened his eyes and saw blurry shadows but could distinguish nothing. The light hurt his eyes, so he closed them. Someone wrapped him in a blanket and moved him somewhere. Then he was receiving a rub-down.

"My God!" he thought. "Then I am dead—or was. And now I'm reborn—reincarnated. I'm a baby!"

He had never believed in reincarnation, but now it was real. He had heard that spirits of humans sometimes were reborn as beasts and birds. He might have been reborn as an ape. He shud-

dered. Perhaps Doc was being reincarnated. Visualizing Doc's long face, sad eyes and scanty beard, Spud could not imagine his being reincarnated as anything but a goat. He would suspect every billy-goat he ever saw of being Dr. Pipp.

With a gurgle of thankfulness for his human estate, he lapsed into a long sleep. When he awoke he was hungry and decided a thick steak and French-fried potatoes would go nicely. He tried to shout his wants. Again there was only a wail. It carried more authority this time and brought results. Something soft prodded his face. He ate.

Several days passed in a monotonous routine of sleeping, awakening, eating and sleeping again. No one had cuddled him since his rebirth and Spud began to wonder about his new mother. Surely a mother would fondle her baby. Maybe she . . .

"Poor Mother," he mused sadly. "And poor me. I'm about to enter a new and strange life as an orphan."

HE wondered who he now was, where he was, and how long it had been since he died. Some day he would like to go back and see his grave, and dig up newspaper accounts of his death. Had he and Doc Pipp been eulogized as martyrs to science? He wondered what his widow would think of that.

"Molly couldn't think anything nice about me," he decided bitterly.

Blurry vision had not disturbed Spud greatly. Indeed, blurriness and double-vision had become quite usual with him in his late sodden years. But his sight now began to grow sharper. Phantoms became human beings with faces. Everyone he saw was female. They were stern, efficient-looking women. Their figures were mannish, angular and flat-chested. None of them gave

him even a fond pat. Undoubtedly he was in an orphanage, he decided.

Up to this time he had neither seen nor heard another baby. Then one day an uncouth howl fractured the peace of his morning nap. Someone had trundled another crib into the room and in it was a bawling baby. Spud wondered if it was Doc.

"Pipe down!" Spud thought. "Let me take a gander at that mug of yours. Are you Doc?" But thought communication now was useless. Maybe it wasn't Doc. Spud decided to try vocally.

"Hiya, Doc," he attempted, but all that came forth was a gurgle. It attracted attention, though, and the other baby stopped crying. A smile flickered across his tear-drenched visage. Spud burst into a torrent of meaningless babble. The other baby silenced him with a familiar petulant grunt.

"It's Doc, all right," Spud decided.

### CHAPTER III

#### Atoms Scattered

**S**PUD and Doc developed an amazing speed that would put the proverbial weed to shame. In a few weeks they were learning to walk on wobbly legs. They were talking volubly, although their sibilants escaped fuzzily past incipient teeth.

They strove desperately to question the nurses and doctors about their new status but the mannish women brusquely parried their overtures. They performed their duties to their young charges with an air of efficient impersonality and had no time for talk. At times they were even resentful.

"If this ain't reincarnation, what is it?" Spud demanded. "You're dead and don't know it. We're both dead, and we're reborn as somebody else."

He moaned disconsolately. "We don't even know who we are—or where."

"I know *who* we are. Our entities haven't changed," Doc snapped. "The question that interests me is *when*. Is this the Thirtieth Century?"

"Nuts!" Spud snorted. "You still think we're Time traveling?"

"Undoubtedly," Doc said firmly.

"Then why do we turn up as a couple of brats? And how come we grow so fast. Who are all these unshapely dames? Why ain't there any men around? What kind of a place is this?"

Doc shook his head sadly.

"We've asked them all that, and learned nothing. We'll have to wait till they're ready to talk."

**F**OUR bespectacled old scare-crows from a historical society came to visit the hapless youngsters, bringing with them overstuffed brief cases and the musty smell of a library.

The leader of the group peered for a moment at the pair as she might have contemplated a couple of entomological specimens.

"H-m-m-m-m," she commented.

"Whatsa matter?" Spud chirped. "Do we look like freaks?"

She ignored the question.

"Please, Madam, what century is this?" Doc begged.

"The Fourth Century."

"Wh-a-a-a-t?" Doc brayed.

"This is the Fourth Century of our New Creation," she said. "The year, three-eighty-nine. Anno Domini reckoning stopped with the year 2450."

"What is this 'New Creation'?" Spud demanded.

"It is the real—the ultimate—civilization," she declared proudly. "A civilization without the human male."

Spud gulped hard to swallow his amazement.

"Are you batty?" he finally sput-

tered. "How in hell do you. . ."

"Wait, Harris," Doc interposed.

"How can you perpetuate the race without males?"

"Parthenogenetically," she said without a bobble. She gave him a quizzical look. "What century are you from?"

"The Twentieth."

She eyed him unbelievably and wagged her head.

"There was no atomic projector in the Twentieth Century."

"But there is!" Doc piped. "I'm its inventor, Dr. Amos Pipp."

"The Pipp projector?" she asked herself thoughtfully. She raised her eyes to the ceiling and moved her lips silently, looking like a hen drinking. "Oh, that one—it made only one transmission. It was unsuccessful."

"Unsuccessful?" Spud cried. "We're here ain't we?"

"Yes—unfortunately," she replied with a trace of sympathy.

The significance of her answer struck the Time travelers speechless. Surely their projection had been successful, although their arrival as infants had not been according to Dr. Pipp's plans. Then the fault of his machine must lie in the receiver. What would happen if they tried to return to the Twentieth Century?

Spud tried not to think of it.

"Why did we arrive here as babies?" Doc wanted to know. "My atomic receiver was designed to reassemble its subjects just as they were before projection."

"Our receivers do that when a full complement of atoms is available," another of the savants said. "But your machine did not project a concentrated beam. It spread, scattering you everywhere. Our receivers were able to pick up only a few stray atoms. These were incubated and nourished in the genetics

laboratory. And so—well, here you are." She smiled as if that explained everything.

"What you reckon happened to the rest of us?" Spud asked.

She shrugged. "Who knows? Part of you may have been intercepted earlier. Undoubtedly, some of you went on ahead."

It took a long moment for the full import of her statement to sink in. Spud was the first to find tongue.

"Holy mackerel!" he whispered in awe. "You mean we may be living somewhere else at the same time? That I may be living in a century or two behind and in a century or two farther on? Three of me at once?"

"It is possible."

"I don't see how. . . ." Spud began, then stopped. It made him dizzy to think of it. What if he and Doc succeeded in going back to the Twentieth Century, only to find their twins had beat them back to claim their fame and fortune as Time travelers? And which ones would really be the rightful claimants? Worse still, they might be preceded by more than one each of themselves. Their return might complete two sets of triplets, or quadruplets. Still others might come straggling back in later years.

"Jehosophat!" Spud gasped. "I might become a whole family of brothers—enough for a baseball team."

## CHAPTER IV

### Extermination of Males

THE two Time travelers had reversed the interview completely, giving their visitors little opportunity to question them. They learned that they were in a Government hospital which was chiefly a nursery for raising babies of the parthenogenetic New Creation.

Such hospitals were located in various areas for the artificial conception and, later, the birth of the nation's young. Population was controlled in this way. New people were produced only as they were needed.

After birth, the babies were kept in the nursery through infancy. Then they were transferred to nursery-schools and still later to advanced schools. Graduation from school gave them full rights as citizens of New Creation.

"I haven't seen any other kids," Spud declared.

"The Government ordered you segregated," she explained.

"Oh. Like lepers, huh?" Spud grimaced. "Look, lady, do New Creation babies grow as fast as we do? What makes us grow so fast?"

"All babies develop rapidly in this age," she said. "Why let them waste all those years in natural growth? Time is too valuable. We do not sit idly by and wait for lazy Nature to develop them. We speed up their biochemical processes, make their development in months equal the growth of your ancient babies in years." \*

But Doc was more interested now in this fatherless creation. He asked the spokeswoman to explain it.

"We came to question you, not to be questioned," she said. "But I will tell you briefly. Parthenogenesis always has existed in certain forms of plant life and in lower marine life. The first mammalian creature conceived without a father was a rabbit, produced in an experiment in the Twentieth Century, the year 1939. I remember the history because of its importance to us.

"Your ancient scientist impregnated a natural doe rabbit with a simple saline

solution. In due time she bore a baby doe. Later-day scientists experimented successfully with the highest form of mammals—humans. The discovery was put to no purpose until nearly four-hundred years ago when the world was almost depopulated by continuous and ruthless warfare. There were not enough men left to perpetuate the race. Then we had to take matters into our own hands."

"And there hasn't been a man on Earth for four-hundred years?" Doc gasped.

"Almost. Three-hundred and eighty-nine years ago we had to take over and correct the miserable botch you men had made of civilization. The few remaining males were sterilized. So a man-less civilization was born. We date our calendars from that year."

"Just one more question, please," Doc begged. "Where are we now? How far from Atlanta, Georgia, U. S. A.?"

"This is City 4-A, Southeast Zone," she said. "Atlanta once stood here."

THE historians questioned Doc and Spud at great length about the Twentieth Century. They were interested especially in women of that time: Madame Curie, Susan B. Anthony, Senator Hattie Caraway, Ruth Bryan Owen and other important figures.

Spud was of little help, although he could offer some interesting bits about Eleanor Holm, Dorothy Bundy, Sally Rand, Ann Sheridan and a few others about whom his questioners had never heard.

"You have received other visitors from past centuries?" Doc asked as a parting shot.

"Yes, from as far back as the Twenty-second."

"Then why didn't they warn their peoples about those devastating wars?"

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\*Early in the Twentieth Century, thyroxin, an iodine-containing compound of the thyroid gland, was used successfully to accelerate growth.—Ed.

Doc cried. "Why couldn't . . ."

"Men were fools!" she snorted. "Millions of war-mad men bringing extinction upon themselves. Who could stop them?"

"I'll stop them!" Doc shouted with a solemnness unbelievable upon a childish face. "I'll make them listen. I'll . . ."

The spokesman shook her head. That same faint trace of sympathy shone in her face.

"You will not return to your Time. Our histories record no return prior to 2180 A. D."

Her words fell with stunning effect. What dangers lurked out there in Time? Would it be better to remain in this weird century—a couple of freaks in a man-less age? Both Spud and Doc knew they could not stay. They must attempt a return to their own Time, regardless of what fate awaited them.

## CHAPTER V

### Kiss That Spells Death

THE preternatural growth of the two unhappy Time explorers continued unchecked and each increase in stature brought new woes to them. Hospital attaches, once merely indifferent, now were becoming resentful.

Spud and Doc were transferred to another wing of the huge Government building and quartered in a glassed-in room where visitors were allowed to come and gape at them.

"You'd think they never saw a brat before," Spud complained. "Now I know how the Dionnes feel."

The change in quarters brought a change in doctors and nurses. The doctor in charge was an overbearing old battle-ax with an undershot jaw and a perpetual scowl. Her subordi-

nates called her Mag. One of her legs was shorter than the other and she walked with a dippy gait that suggested a cyclist riding a wheel with an off-center hub. She carried a dangerous-looking walking stick.

Old Mag was openly hostile to her new charges and seemed to take fiendish delight in prodding and thumping them mercilessly.

"Swine!" she would hiss. "Filthy swine. I'd enjoy butchering you alive!" Her murderous scowls were corroborative.

"I've never socked a dame yet," Spud muttered when she was out of ear-shot, "but one of these days I'm gonna bop that old hussy in the kisser." He knotted a hard little fist.

"I don't like it," Doc sighed. "The old shrew hates us for invading her man-less civilization. She's got murder in her heart and she'll stop at nothing. The sooner we can get away from here the better."

Mag's abuses were off-set somewhat by the kindness of one of the new nurses. This girl was small, pretty, shapely and softly feminine—an oddity among her sisters. She had large hazel eyes with long, curling lashes and wavy chestnut hair that cascaded down over her shoulders. All of her sisters wore their hair cropped short. Her name, Rosamond, also was unlike those of her sisters, who chose short, unfrilly names such as Ann, Nan, Em or Sue. Legally, they had no names, but were numbered serially. They adopted names merely to economize on words.

Rosamond took an especial fancy for Spud. She would sit close to him for hours, as if to protect him from the bellicose Mag. She told him much about Fourth Century civilization and would listen breathlessly to stories about his Time. Often she would try to fondle him as a little girl does an

unwieldy teddy bear, cooing and laughing happily. Spud resented this type of coddling but suffered it because she enjoyed it.

"Just wait till I get a little bigger," he mused. "I'll show her a trick or two about petting."

**D**URING the following weeks, life became almost unbearable in the glassed-in "cage." Old Mag had forbidden Rosamond to visit the growing Time explorers except on necessary errands. Other nurses who came into the room were curt and unsympathetic. Visitors who came to peer curiously at them through the sound-proof walls irritated them.

Spud rubbed at pubescent down on his cheeks and wished for a razor. But a razor was as obsolete in this man-less civilization as was a flint and tinderbox in his own Time. Nothing masculine now survived. Even the language had been purged of masculine terms. There was no attire in New Creation befitting a male. Spud and Doc had to wear the floppy culottes and loose pull-over blouses that most of the "sisters" wore.

"Dang it, Doc, we got to get out of here," Spud moaned. "If we don't hurry back home, a couple of our twins may beat us there and cop all the gravy from the news syndicates and all."

"And the fame," Doc added.

"I'll beat the ears offa any upstart twin of mine who tries to crash my racket," Spud growled.

Doc was silent.

"You know, it's funny," Spud said thoughtfully. "Suppose another one of me should beat me back. Which of us would be the real Spud Harris? He might be just as much me as I am."

"Maybe fingerprints would decide," Doc suggested.

"I never was mugged and printed," Spud said ruefully. "They never got

me for anything worse than 'D and D'."

"I had hoped I could stay here a while for some scientific research," Doc said. "But this place and these women are getting on my nerves. It's worse than a prison."

"Mag acts like we were a couple of 'fifth columnists' or something," Spud mumbled gloomily. "The old bat."

"We *are* potential saboteurs," Doc admitted. "Saboteurs of their New Creation."

"You mean . . .?"

"What else could I mean, you fool?" Doc snapped.

"Who'd go for these frosty dames?" Spud hooted. "As far as I'm concerned, they can all go jump in a lake. All except . . ."

"Except Rosamond," Doc finished for him.

"She is kinda nifty, ain't she?" Spud said slyly. "But, hell, I ain't started anything with her."

"Not wittingly, perhaps," Doc said. "But her speculative glances at you couldn't go unnoticed. As icy-veined as she is, old Mag can interpret those glances. And she doesn't like the interpretation."

**T**HE sliding door to their room opened silently and Rosamond tripped in, singing a cheery greeting. She brandished her hypodermic needle, preparatory to giving her charges their daily injection of growth accelerator. Doc was dosed quickly and efficiently, but Rosamond dawdled fondly over her administration to Spud.

"Look, Toots," Spud whispered. "Maybe you'd better stop dosing me with that growing juice. I'm big as you are now. Pretty soon I might up and fling a flock of woo at you."

"You what?" She did not understand his slang but read a tender message in his eyes. She snuggled close.



"This!" he muttered, gathering her in a fierce embrace and planting a long Twentieth Century kiss on her full, red virgin lips. Rosamond struggled briefly, then her arms stole around his neck and she clung breathlessly in a lingering and instinctive return of her first kiss.

When he released her, Rosamond gasped and reddened in pretty confusion. She turned toward the door to confront the sour-visaged Mag who had witnessed the entire scene.

Spud attempted banality.

"Don't shoot, I'll marry your daughter," he managed with a weak grin.

Mag unleashed a storm of incoherent invective that fouled the air, banging her heavy stick against the floor for emphasis. Rosamond crept timidly back to Spud and stood in front of him as if to protect him from her fuming superior. Spud put his arm around her and patted her shoulder.

Mag bounced into the room, tore the girl from Spud's embrace and flung her toward the door.

"Get out!" Mag bellowed. "And never come to this ward again. I'll have you transferred."

She whirled upon Spud in a choking rage.

"For that," she finally seethed, "you die!"

She stormed out of the room. The door closed silently.

## CHAPTER VI

### Nature's Grim Prank

"THIS war of nerves is getting my nanny," Spud complained a month later. "That gas getting mixed up in the ventilator tube to our room a couple weeks ago don't look like any accident to me. I been jittery ever since."

"Accident or not," Doc said, "if I hadn't been lying awake trying to think of a way to escape, we'd both be dead."

"Your insomnia sure came in handy," Spud declared. "And I'm getting it now. I'm afraid to go to sleep. Why don't the old bat start something, instead of pulling something sneaky like that? I'd shove her teeth down her throat."

"Sh-h-h-h-h-h!"

Both whirled toward the door which was closing behind Rosamond. She stood smiling mischievously, a finger on her lips.

"Rosie!" Spud whispered. "What you doing here? Old Pain-in-the-Face told you to stay outa here."

"I'm a mouse," she giggled softly.

"What the hell you talking about?"

"The cat's away, and I'm playing," she explained. "Mag is away from the hospital today, so I sneaked down to see you. Let's take a walk."

"You mean walk right outa this dump? Somebody'd stop us."

"No one ever disobeys Mag, so everyone would think I had permission to take you out," Rosamond said. "No one will stop us."

"I'm gonna risk it, Doc," Spud decided. "Let's go, Baby."

Rosamond clutched Spud's arm with an air of possessive pride as she marched him past her sisters. She looked up into his eyes happily.

Spud halted at the door of the hospital. The building was situated on a high hill, affording an excellent view of a large part of the city. Spud was surprised, because it was much smaller than the ancient Atlanta he had known.

"It's just a little burg," he grunted.

Rosamond explained that there had been no large cities since the beginning of New Creation. Speedy transportation facilities removed necessity for living in cramped areas. People lived

along the wide, smooth highways that criss-crossed the country like avenues in a city.

Spud wanted to go to the shopping district and inspect some of the stores; maybe attend a theater. Rosamond thought it might be unsafe. Mag was downtown on business. She might see them. Rosamond suggested a nearby park.

**T**HE day was hot and, after a short stroll, Spud sprawled on the cool grass to watch several large girls playing a listless game of croquet.

"This the most thrilling sport you got?" he asked. "Tapping a wooden ball around with a mallet? No baseball, no football, no prizefights?"

Rosamond shook her head at the unfamiliar terms.

"This is a hell of an age," he grunted. "Back in my Time you could go to an arena and see a couple of bruisers belt the daylights out of each other; or eleven men tear into eleven other men in a bone-breaking melee. Even wrestling's more exciting than this?"

"You do not like our games?" Rosamond asked, a little hurt.

Spud snorted.

"You call croquet and jackstones and tiddlywinks sports? Look, Babe, eleven real men line up against eleven brawny opponents. Big fellas. The ball is snapped. They pile into each other in a tangle of arms and legs and helmets. Human spaghetti."

He grew tense, illustrated his word picture with gestures.

"Out pops a swivel-hipped giant with the ball clutched against his side. An opponent dives at him. He sidesteps and races toward the sideline while his interference forms. He cuts back toward midfield, then heads for the goal. Opponents hurl themselves at him, only to be mowed down by his interference.

He streaks hell-bent-for-election to the goal while fifty thousand wild spectators yell their lungs out."

He paused for breath.

"That's a real game!"

Rosamond was rapt, eyes shining, fingernails digging into her palms.

"I reckon your shows are about as exciting as your games," Spud continued. "Nothing to 'em. How could there be? You can't have plays without plots and you can't have plots without love. You don't know the meaning of love; it ain't even in your language. Back in my Time we have real plays. Men fight and kill each other over women, and women kill each other over men. And . . ."

"And have babies?" she cut in.

"Ulp," Spud choked. "What?"

"Women have babies of their own?" she asked wistfully. "I want one, Spud. Some day I will have one, but they will take her away from me, as they take my sisters' babies. They will keep her in the hospital and raise her. I will never see her. My sisters do not care, but I want a baby of my own. My baby to keep, and dress, and bathe, and hold close—like this. I want her to be a male baby, like you, Spud."

Spud felt a surge of sympathy for this pretty, anachronistic angel. She did not belong to this man-less age. She was alive and vibrant, filled with an atavistic desire unknown to her sisters of New Creation to which she belonged, to have her man and her babies? Why must this utterly lovable and love-hungry creature be a freak because of her normality? Why couldn't . . .

**R**OSAMOND broke into his musing.

"You're not a baby now, Spud. You're almost grown. Soon you will be a big man."

"Yeah. And soon I'll be hellin'-it back to where I belong."

"You want to go back soon?" There was distress in her tone.

"You're darn tootin'. It ain't getting too healthy for me here; or Doc, either. I've learned enough about your New Creation to make a fortune on magazine and syndicate articles. And I'm gonna ghost a scientific book for Doc.

"Yep, I'll be rich. I won't drink anything but champagne. I'll get so full of it I can squirt it through my teeth at Luke Gordon on the Times sports desk. Hell, I'll buy the paper and fire him. And I'll even. . ."

"You will take me with you, my Spud?" Rosamond begged.

"Huh? Er, yeah, maybe." A glowering picture of Molly flashed into his mind. He winced. "But you see . . ."

"And fight for me as other ancients fought for their women?" She edged closer to him and laid her head on his shoulder, oblivious of others in the park. Her soft, warm body snuggled close to his.

"Judas Priest!" Spud yelled, leaping to his feet. "The old . . ."

Mag was bearing down upon them in a limpy lope across the grass, brandishing her cane and muttering murderous imprecations. Spud checked an impulse to flee as Rosamond sprang protectively in front of him. He shouldered her aside and faced the fuming Mag.

"Come on, you old bat!" he challenged.

Mag's cane swished through the air and caught him a glancing blow on the head. Spud went down but not out. He felt blood trickle down his scalp. Mag reversed her cane and brought it down again as Spud staggered to his knees. The blow almost paralyzed his upraised arm and flattened him again. Rosamond leaped to his defense but a backward swipe of Mag's free hand sent her sprawling. With a supreme

effort, Spud hunched his shoulders and hurled himself at his attacker in what Twentieth Century wrestlers knew as a flying tackle. His head thumped into Mag's midriff. She went down and out with a wheezy grunt.

"I've sure played hell," Spud panted as he and Rosamond hurried back to the hospital. "She'll really be out for blood now."

## CHAPTER VII

### Death Watch

LIKE a faithful dog waiting beside the grave of a departed master, George Nobles sat hunched before the weird atomic projector-receiver in Dr. Amos Pipp's laboratory, nursing a waning hope for the return of his employer and Spud Harris from the Unknown into which he had sent them.

Nobles had aged ten years, although it had been slightly more than a year since the Time explorers had departed on their dangerous journey. He had aged because it was his hand that shot home the switch to send millions of volts through their bodies, atomizing them; his hand that turned the dials to tune the powerful electric beam on which their atomized bodies rode into—what?

Not for an hour—hardly a minute—had he deserted the atomic receiver. His daughter brought meals to him there and he made coffee on a hot plate. He slept there on a cot, beside which was rigged an alarm attached to the ever-tuned receiver.

Nobles arose stiffly from his chair and answered a knock at the laboratory door.

"Guess what I brought tonight, Daddy," his daughter greeted him. Then without waiting for his answer, "I got chicken salad and sliced toma-

toes and a vacuum bottle of iced tea. It's so hot I thought you'd like something like that."

"You're my angel, Patty," he declared, taking the bottle and rumpling her yellow curls. His voice was tired and his smile strained. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

Patty opened the lunchbox and made a fuss of setting things on the little table. She chatted cheerfully while he ate, waiting patiently until he had finished before reopening their usual argument.

"Daddy," she finally began. "Don't you realize it's useless to wait for them any longer? It's been more than a year now. They aren't coming back; never could have come back. People are beginning to say you're—well, crazy."

Nobles heaved a long-suffering sigh. "I don't care what they say, I just can't abandon my post—not yet. I don't believe they're dead, as people claim. There wasn't a trace of them left in the atomizers, was there? Not a trace.

"No, Patty girl, they're somewhere out there in Time. I don't know what's delayed them so long but, if I deserted my post now, I'd always feel like—like a murderer."

"But, Daddy," Patty pleaded. "You aren't drawing any salary and we're going deeper into your savings every week. Soon we won't have any money left—then what?"

Nobles shook his head sorrowfully. "When they come back, Honey, we'll all be rich." He said it without conviction.

Silently Patty put the dirty dishes back into the box and poured the last of the tea.

"Listen, Daddy," she said at last. "I'm trying to find a job."

"But you're going back to school in September."

"I *do* want to finish, but we can't use up *all* of your savings. I won't go back until there's some money coming in." She fought to keep back tears, then smiled weakly. "But it's all right. I'd like to work. I'll get a better education that way."

She gave him a quick kiss and hurried away.

Nobles aged another year or two. He returned to his monotonous waiting, thinking unhappily of his daughter's desire to finish school and of his dwindling bank account. He reached into a drawer and took out a letter he had read a dozen times since receiving it that morning. It was a terse note from the power company to Pipp's Laboratory, and read:

". . . and, unless your account is settled immediately, we shall be forced to discontinue service."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Doomed!

SPUD and Doc anxiously faced a grim-visaged Government judge to receive sentence as aliens dangerous to the New Creation. Spud had brought on the indictment by awakening amorous emotion within the lovely Rosamond, but he and Doc were tried jointly and found guilty as charged.

Until recently, Mag had stood alone in her bitter hostility toward the Twentieth Century males; other sisters of New Creation had showed only mild resentment. But Spud's belly-caving counter attack against Mag in the park evoked widespread sympathy for her and brought wholesale wrath upon himself and Doc.

"Maybe she'll deport us," Spud whispered hopefully.

The judge glowered at them. Mag leered triumphantly.

"It shall please this court to mete out the kind of punishment the Twentieth Century intruders know," the judge intoned in a crackling voice. "I sentence you both to be deported—after two years of hard labor."

Her words crashed against the prisoners' ears like the knell of doom. Already more than a year had passed since they had been hurled from their own Time. Would Nobles stand by for them another two years? Hardly. If they were sent backward on an electric beam two years hence, there would be no one to receive them. They would drift on and on forever, neither dead nor alive—just atomized human jetsam on the boundless sea of Time.

The judge was speaking again: "We have no barbarous prisons or labor camps in our civilization but Sister Mag has graciously agreed to supervise your punishment. You will be in her custody for the duration of your penal servitude."

Mag fairly beamed malevolence.

The prisoners were returned at once to the Government hospital to begin paying their debt to New Creation.

"**D**AMN!" Spud gasped, using a forefinger as a squeegee on his forehead. "It's hotter'n the Black Hole of Calcutta in here."

"The old vixen cut off the ventilators," Doc groaned. "Hold that dustpan still, will you?"

Their initial task was giving them an insight into the ingenious mind of a spiteful old shrew. What at first appeared to be a simple chore had become back-breaking toil. With Doc wielding an antiquated broom and Spud handling a dustpan and an oiled rag, they were sweeping and polishing a narrow walled-in stairway that seemed to have been accumulating rubbish for ages. But they were required to work from

the bottom upward. Almost every movement Doc made from above brought down a small cascade of trash and dust to nullify their efforts.

Escape was impossible, as the thoughtful Mag had disconnected the photo-electric cells operating the doors from within the hermetic staircase. As extra precaution, she had stationed guards outside the transparent plastic doors both above and below her victims.

The guards lounged in comfortable chairs, sipping tall and tantalizing drinks, unmindful of the prisoners.

Spud staggered down the steps and pounded on the door.

"Open up, Sis'," he begged. "We're roasting alive in here."

She kept her eyes glued on the book she was reading.

"Well, turn on the air," he pleaded.

She took a deep swig at her frosty glass.

Bathed in sweat and gasping at the dust-laden, scorching air, Spud and Doc worked feverishly to finish their Hellish task. Completion of the job was their only salvation. With deftness that sometimes characterizes madmen, they made slow but steady progress. At last they were only a few steps from the top landing. The guard outside rose lazily from her chair and the door opened. A gust of clean, cool air rushed in.

"When you are through," the guard said tonelessly. "Mag has a new task." She stepped back and the door closed silently.

"God, that air feels good," Spud exclaimed. Then his countenance fell. "Hey, whoa. What the . . ."

The gust of welcome air eddied down the steps, undoing all the work Spud and Doc had done.

Spud gulped in dismay.

"We gotta do all that over again?"

"She's a devil," Doc croaked. "That fresh air to tantalize us and undo our work was part of her fiendish scheme."

Like the futile Sisyphus rolling his elusive stone in Hades, Doc and Spud disconsolately began their task anew. Soon their breath of fresh air was forgotten. The place grew hotter and their spirits lower. Sweat streamed down their faces, stinging their eyes. Dust caked in their nostrils and parched their throats. Doc leaned on his broom and fought for breath.

"Dammit, I can't go on," Spud panted. "My back's broke and my tongue's hanging out a yard."

He gazed hopelessly at the guard at the lower landing. She lifted her glass for a deep draught.

Spud sputtered incoherently, gripped his dustpan and stumbled down the steps. He banged his dustpan on the door.

"Let us out!" he bawled. "We're suffocating."

The guard made a slight shrug without looking at him. He continued whaling away with his dustpan.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A Long Chance

**R**OSAMOND stepped from a room several doors down the hall. Her eyes were red-rimmed. She had learned of the sentence upon her Twentieth Century friends and had sneaked into the room for an old-fashioned, womanly cry.

Spud's clanging dustpan attracted her attention. She turned, saw misery on his begrimed countenance and rushed toward him with a sympathetic little sob. The guard intercepted her before she came within range of the door's electric eye.

Rosamond, not fully comprehending

the situation but seeing that Spud needed help, flung herself at the guard with the fury of a tigress. The startled woman staggered backward, screaming as Rosamond's nails raked across her face. She fastened both hands in Rosamond's long hair. Slowly the girl's head was bent backward until Spud, watching helplessly, was sure her neck must snap.

In her writhing Rosamond inadvertently rammed her foot into her opponent's shin. The guard jumped backward. Rosamond turned the accident into a mode of attack. Again she dug her little shoe into the guard's shins—and again. The guard clung desperately to Rosamond's hair but retreated steadily until she broke the door's photo-electric beam.

The door slid open and Spud staggered out, Doc close at his heels. They stood for a moment sucking cool, pure air into their lungs, gulping like a couple of goldfish. Spud pounced on the guard and dug his fingers into her shoulders until she released Rosamond's hair. He flung the woman into her chair and clenched a menacing fist under her nose.

"Where's the rejector room?" Spud croaked. "Lead us there, Rosie. Quick!"

Until that moment his thoughts had been merely of escaping from the sizzling torture chamber. Now they might as well go all the way if they could make it.

They sprinted down the hall before the cowed guard could recover. Rosamond, in the lead, pointed to an intersecting corridor.

Three sisters, attracted by the screams, burst through a door at the far end of the hall and came on the run.

"Around the corner and run for it," Spud ordered. "I'll bring up the rear

and stand 'em off."

They swung around the corner, only to confront four other husky sisters braced to meet them at the far end of the hall.

"Oh-oh," Spud grunted, dashing into the lead. "Follow right on my heels. Run with your heads low, and run hard!"

He crouched and picked up speed for a line plunge. "Give 'em Hell, Georgia!" he whooped.

The women toppled like tenpins as Spud plowed into them. The trio dashed for the door, which opened just in time.

"Now where?" Spud demanded.

Rosamond pointed to a stairway. The sight of it made Spud falter. A gong clanged somewhere behind them and throughout the hospital other gongs joined in a chorus.

**D**OWN the steps they plunged and into a short hallway that led to the rejector room. But again their escape was cut off. A group of grim sisters awaited them. They were unarmed but Spud had seen what they could do with their fingernails.

"Wow! There must be twenty of 'em," Spud muttered as the trio pulled up. He looked anxiously over his shoulder, considering retreat. A swarm of pursuing sisters clattered down the stairs behind them.

"Doc, I still haven't socked a broad," Spud gritted. "But I think my knuckles are gonna get a taste of it now. You'd better try a little of it, too. Grab my belt, Baby. You grab hers, Doc. Now follow me. Crouch low just as we get there. Let's go!"

With eight pursuers on their heels, the trio raced toward the waiting sisters. The sisters advanced to meet them. Spud and his allies ducked low and plunged.

There was a chorus of screams and moans as sisters crashed into sisters. The now incessant clanging of gongs added to the din. Butting and elbowing, Spud made progress through the melee. His left eye came in contact with a knee. He felt it closing. Short, painful grunts behind him told him that Doc also was using his elbows.

Spud emerged from the tangle and his good eye sought the door. A sister rushed for him and missed but grabbed a handful of Rosamond's hair. Spud put her to sleep with a neat clip to the button. He hustled Doc and Rosamond ahead of him toward the rejector room door.

The door slid open and Rosamond held it. Three sisters broke from the crowd and charged at Spud. He wound up and let fly a haymaker at the leader. It caught her on the chin and spun her head around. She crumpled and the other two stumbled over her. Spud wheeled and rushed through the door. It closed and Rosamond pressed a catch that locked it.

"Warm up that atom squirter, Sis'," Spud growled at the operator. "We got two tickets to Georgia—and 1940!"

The technician shook her head defiantly, looking hopefully toward the door at which a horde of sisters were pounding.

Doc was peering at the control panel of the rejector. He was puzzled by the absence of dials and switches which had cluttered up the panel of his original projector. Suddenly his face lighted.

"It must be automatic," he shouted, making a nervous, closer examination. "It is! All you have to do is set it for the Time to be traversed, then throw the switch."

"So we won't need this dame?" Spud yipped joyfully.

"No, Rosamond can do it. I can show her how."

"All right, Toots," Spud shot at the technician. "Just so's you won't gum up our take-off, I'll make you Number 3." He knotted his fist. "No-o-o, I won't have to." He snatched off his belt and bound her wrists. Doc followed suit and tied her ankles.

**D**OC set the control for rejection to 1940 and hurriedly showed Rosamond how to throw the switch when they were ready.

Spud gripped Rosamond by the shoulders.

"Sugarlumps, I don't know how to thank you," he declared with a gulpy catch in his throat. "You sure saved our hides."

She swayed toward him and his arms enveloped her. He printed a briny, dusty kiss on her eager lips.

A metallic clank jerked their attention to the door. Old Mag was wielding a heavy hammer. The door chipped but did not shatter.

"Gotta make it snappy," Spud blurted, wriggling free. She released him reluctantly.

"I will follow you, my Spud," she declared tearfully. "You will wait to receive me?"

Spud fought away an imperious vision of Molly.

"You bet I will, Baby!" he promised sincerely. Then to himself he vowed: "I don't know how in heck I'll manage it—but I will!"

Mag continued her hammering with unabated vigor. A crack appeared near the top of the door.

Impatiently Doc shoved Rosamond toward the control panel.

"Au revoir, Sweet. Turn your back," Spud cried, peeling off his blouse and kicking off his shoes. "This may not be as artistic as Gypsy Rose did it, but here goes." He stepped out of his culottes, his only other garment, faced the

door for a split second with thumb to nose in impudent salute to old Mag, then ducked into his atomizer. Doc was following suit.

"See you somewhere out there," Spud grunted grimly to Doc and lowered the lid of his atomizer. In their frantic escape from the roasting stairway, he had given no thought to the return-trip peril of which the old historian had hinted. But there was no turning back now. Numbness crept over him.

## CHAPTER IX

### All for Naught

**D**R. PIPP'S laboratory was a madhouse. Weird squeaks and crackles in the atomic receiver had yanked George Nobles from the depths of despair and sent him flying to the telephone to notify City Hospital he was attuned to a beam from another century; undoubtedly a beam heralding the return of the long-absent Time explorers. A squad of doctors and two ambulances were on hand; so were the ubiquitous reporters and photogs. Cops swarmed the place.

Sam Morgan, enterprising press agent for Sally Smiley, recently elected "Miss Peachtree" in a city-wide beauty contest, was on hand with his honey-blond protegee.

Nobles crouched in front of his control board, fidgeting with the dials. The hisses and crackles became a low, steady hum. A tiny vapor cloud appeared above the opening in the roof, growing as it hovered. The spectators stared breathlessly.

The cloud wavered uncertainly. It seemed to grow a wispy arm, like the tentacle of an octopus. The arm groped exploringly into the bird-cage bulb of one of the receivers. Nobles nursed a rheostat, coaxing more power into the receiver.



Apparently satisfied with its findings, the cloud streamlined itself and swooped into the bulb. Nobles closed a switch, yanked open another, emitted a tremulous sigh of fleeting relief, then glanced anxiously toward the hole in the roof. No other cloud had yet appeared.

The humming in the receiver had ceased. Awed silence filled the room. Nobles reached for a dial, changed his mind and waited nervously.

There was a faint thumping inside the assembler. Nobles hopped to it and raised the lid. Spud sat up and blinked foggily. Someone snatched a sheet from a stretcher and threw it around him. Nobles saw another vapor cloud and leaped back to the controls.

Spud climbed stiffly out of his coffin and stood beside it like a pallid Ghandi. He seemed a bit haggard from his trip but appeared a much younger and healthier Spud Harris. A doctor advanced with a stethoscope. Spud pushed him aside scornfully.

Sally Smiley tittered. Morgan shoved her through the crowd.

"Greet him, Sal," he ordered. "Go into a clinch. This'll make P-Eye everywhere. You photogs get a load of this."

Sally confronted Spud for the clinch. He approved and cooperated.

The second vapor cloud had formed and reached for the bulb.

There was a commotion at the door as a flushed and panting Molly Harris tried to crash through two policemen. A belated newsreel cameraman shouldered his way inside and Molly followed.

She saw Spud as he was coming up for air the second time.

"Surgeon!" Molly yowled. She snatched the cameraman's tripod and heaved it at her philandering spouse. The heavy end of the tripod caught him squarely on the noggin and bounced against the "smokestack" of his assembler. The stack broke off at the base

and crashed into the other assembler. Glass shattered.

A thin cloud hung together for a moment near the ceiling. It dispersed into wispy fragments that wafted about the room, then disappeared.

"My God!" a photog gulped. "It sprayed Doc all over the place."

SPUD awoke in a tidy room in City Hospital. He pressed a hand to his throbbing head.

"Ow!" he groaned. "Musta took on a few too many."

His eyes fluttered open and he saw several important-looking doctors hovering solicitously over him. "Go 'way," he ordered weakly. "Lemme 'lone."

He caught sight of the familiar face of a pretty nurse.

"Hiya, Toots," he grinned feebly. "I'm back again."

"Oh, Mister Harris," she gushed, showing a new respect. "You're famous! The place is fairly teeming with publishers and reporters and photographers and scientists, all waiting to interview you."

"About what?" he demanded. What the hell was she talking about?

"That blow. His memory's gone," a doctor whispered.

"About your trip," the nurse explained.

"What trip?"

"To the Thirtieth Century. Dr. Pipp died on the return voyage and you're the only one left to tell about it."

Spud stared at her in blank astonishment. Then a twinkle lit his eyes. He winked and gave her an intimate pinch.

"Cute little kiddie," he sighed. "Look Babe, I gotta snap outa this. Go sneak me a little snort of something, will you? Then call up the Times and ask for the sports desk. Tell Luke Gordon I'll be in Monday, sure . . . Er, what day is this?"



There was an unequalled expression of contentment on Sidney's face

# SIDNEY, the Screwloose Robot

by

WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN

**Sidney, the robot, was perfect in every detail, except for one thing—he had a screw loose! Which made a difference . . .**

**S**TRETCHED out on the workbench he—I almost said “it”—looked just like one of those illustrations you see in science fiction magazines. You know the kind . . . robots with jointed arms and legs, cylindrical steel bodies and bucket-like heads, generally caught by the artists in the act of crushing their creators.

But Sidney—why we called him that I don’t know—was not a picture. He was the real McCoy. A living, thinking robot. Our tests had just proved that beyond any doubt.

I gazed down at him paternally. I don’t suppose he was actually any more handsome than a polished-up garbage can, but to me he was the most beautiful sight in the world. Family pride, I guess.

I heard my partner, Dave Wright, draw a deep trembly breath behind me. I looked at him and smiled at the somehow, ludicrous expression that was stamped on his fat pear-shaped face.

“Well,” I said, “it’s all over but the shouting. Sidney hits an all six so I guess that makes fathers out of us—or something.”

“Yeah,” Dave continued to gaze solemnly at Sidney. “Do you think we ought to pass out cigars—or something?”

I laughed and slapped him on the back. In spite of our clowning this was probably the biggest moment of our respective lives. For four years Dave and I had slaved to prove that the creation of rational robot life was more than just a wild dream.

And now we had before us the tangible evidence that our years of toil and sacrifice had not been wasted. Important also was the fact that our success had arrived just in time to save our financial as well as our scientific standing. Bills had been piling up for months and our only hope had been to get Sidney ready in time to exhibit at the science convention. If the judges considered Sidney a useful, productive addition to society—and we knew they would—we would be eligible for a fellowship that would enable us to continue our experimental research free from the spectre of impatient creditors and nagging collectors.

"Come on," I said jubilantly, "let's have a drink. Every father is entitled to that much after pacing the floor all night. We'll connect Sidney up again when we come back. We've got to get an early start on his education, y'know."

"About his education," Dave said later, as I poured him two fingers—up and down—of Scotch, "just how much will we have to teach him?"

I scratched my head.

"That's kind of hard to say. We know of course that he has an adult brain. We'll have to explain a lot of things to him, but I'm not anticipating any trouble on that score. Our big job is to make him appreciate his responsibility and obligation to mankind. We've got to teach him to work.

"And we've got to prove to the judges at the convention that he can and will work or we won't have a chance at that fellowship."

"It sounds like a big order," Dave said dubiously.

I drained my glass.

"It is," I said. "So let's get back and hook him up. The sooner he gets to work the better."

**I**N the lab, Dave made the necessary adjustments under Sidney's metal scalp and then slid it back into place. In a few seconds we heard the faint humming noise that emanated from the brain coils and then Sidney opened his eyes and sat up.

We had introduced ourselves in the first experiment, so there was a gleam of recognition in his eye as he regarded us.

"Well here we are again," I said rather inanely. "How do you feel?"

"Oh fine," Sidney answered vaguely. "How do you feel?"

Dave nudged me.

"Hear that? Smart as a whip."

Sidney apparently heard this, for his metal mouth slit parted in a wide smile. He stared with new friendliness at Dave.

"Now Sidney," I said hurriedly. "We have several important things to tell you. First of all you are a robot. You must always remember that. You must be industrious, you must be efficient, you must be useful. These are the three laws that are to govern your behavior. In short you must make up your mind to work."

"What was that last word?" Sidney asked, and I thought I detected a note of apprehension in his voice. "It's got a kind of a nasty ring to it. What is it?"

"Work," I repeated. "Work."

"It doesn't sound very pleasant," Sidney said, and then I was sure there was apprehension in his voice. "Tell me about it."

"Well," I said, "the best illustration I can give you—"

I stopped. Sidney was stretching himself out on the table.

He looked up in embarrassment as my voice trailed off. "I'm sorry," he said apologetically. "I just feel a little better when I lay flat. You don't mind do you?"

"Maybe he's just like a growing boy," Dave said rather weakly. "You know," his voice faltered as he looked at me, "tired all the time."

"Sure," I said. I looked back at Sidney. He had thrown one metal arm across his eyes. "Light bothering you?" I asked and I'm afraid there was a distinctly cold edge to my voice.

"It's all right," Sidney's voice sounded muffled. "I can stand it. Tell me some more about this work business."

Dave smiled at me triumphantly.

"See," he whispered. "You've got him interested."

"Well," I started again, "by work we mean, well, for instance, just what we're doing now."

Sidney removed his arm from his eyes.

"Oh," he said relievedly, "is that all? You had me worried for a while."

"Don't get me wrong," I said grimly. "You're not working now. *We* are. When you start to work it will be much different. You'll carry bundles, mow the lawn, scrub the floors, things like that to start with. Then when you get a little experience we'll get you a job in a factory. Then you'll learn how to operate machinery, handle tools, make yourself generally useful."

Sidney raised himself on one elbow and stared at me.

"For Heaven's sake," he gasped. "Why?"

"Why?" I sputtered. "Because that's what you've been created for. Don't you want to become a productive member of society. Don't you want to work?"

"Do you?" Sidney asked incredulously.

Well, I tell you it almost floored me. I looked helplessly at Dave and he wiped the smile from his face.

"Go on," he said innocently "tell him how much you love to work."

Sidney was shaking his head bewilderedly as he lay down again.

**I** BEGAN to get a little uneasy. Somehow I'd got off on the wrong foot but I intended to erase any false impressions I'd created. I explained the whole set up to Sidney again, but this time I was really eloquent.

I pictured to him the inspiring prospect of a world of robots lifting the burden of drudgery from the shoulders of mankind, leaving man free to devote his leisure to the arts and sciences. I was pretty terrific and I noticed that

Sidney's restlessness seemed to be disappearing. He seemed to be lost in thought.

Encouraged, I soared on.

"It is the golden age again," I proclaimed, "and it is to be your glorious privilege to be the first of man's metallic brethren to lift from his aching shoulders the burden that—"

Ssssssh," it was Dave's voice hissing warningly behind me.

"Eh?" I broke off and looked at him blankly. "What's up?"

"Sidney's asleep," he whispered. "Tone down or you'll wake him up."

"What!" I shouted. I wheeled back to Sidney. It was true. Not sleep as we know it, but a passive state resulting from total inactivity of brain cells that duplicates the symptoms of human sleep.

"Let's leave him alone," Dave said softly. "He's all tuckered out. We can try again tomorrow."

"I hope we do better than we did today," I said wearily. "We've got to get him working right or we won't have a chance at that fellowship." I turned to leave then and I noticed a tiny object glittering at my feet. I picked it up and saw that it was a small screw.

"Where'd this come from?" I asked Dave.

Dave peered at it for an instant and then a horrified look spread over his face.

"I just remembered," he cried wildly. "I lost it when I was assembling Sidney's brain this morning. I intended to look for it later but everything fitted all right," he spread his hands helplessly, "so I forgot it. Can't we take him apart and see—"

"Not a chance," I cut in. "We might never get him ready in time for the convention. We'll have to take a chance on teaching him as is." I looked down at the screw in my hand and then at

Sidney's peacefully recumbent figure. "A sweet set up," I muttered bitterly. "All our hopes pinned on him—and he's got a screw loose."

**T**HE next morning I didn't waste any time. I routed Sidney out of the lab and led him down to the basement. I introduced him to a pile of logs and an axe and told him what I wanted. I left him gazing moodily at the wood and I returned a half hour later to see how he was progressing.

Sidney was asleep in the coal bin!

I jerked him to his feet and put him to carrying out ashes. He dropped the first basket in the middle of the living room, stumbled over it and fell into a chair that collapsed under his weight. I found him there, ten minutes later, still sprawled on the floor gazing sorrowfully at the chaos he had created.

No one could possibly have guessed from my expressionless face that something inside of me was slowly withering away. It was my cherished dream of productive, useful robot life turning up its toes.

"That'll be all, Sidney," I said heavily, "for today."

He brightened up.

"Fine," he said. "I think I'll catch forty winks down in the basement where it's cool." He clanked out of the room just as Dave walked in.

I slumped into a chair and told Dave what had happened.

"And," I concluded, "what the hell can we do?"

"You expect too much," Dave said. "We'll just have to give him a little more time. I feel sure he'll improve."

"He'd better," I said, "or we might just as well start looking for a nice cozy debtor's prison in which to spend the winter."

"Don't worry," Dave said confidently, "he'll do better."

Dave, it turned out, was a poor prophet. As the days raced by Sidney got steadily worse. Threats, bribery, cajolery all failed. Sidney was a hopeless case. He lay around in the shade with an asinine expression on his metal features, evidently quite pleased with things. Finally I threw up the sponge.

"I'm through," I stormed at Dave. "We may as well face the facts. Sidney is nothing but a worthless, lazy bum. If I was sure of my moral grounds I'd put him out of his misery with an acetylene torch."

Dave was shocked.

"You couldn't do that," he protested. "Why I may be crazy, but I can't help liking the big lug. I feel like, well," he paused and shuffled his feet awkwardly, "almost like he was a son of mine."

That was the night that Sidney disappeared.

**W**E missed him just before supper and after a hasty search through the house and garage we sat down to eat. It wasn't a pleasant meal. After a few mouthfuls I pushed my plate away and stood up.

"Where the devil could he be?" I muttered more to myself than Dave. "It isn't like him to walk away. He might ride, but he hates walking like poison."

At eight o'clock I was just crossing to the telephone to call the police when Dave held up his hand.

"What's that noise?" he asked nervously.

I heard it then, and as I recognized it a cold sweat started trickling down my ribs. Through the window came the sound of a voice, a tinny, bleary voice singing:

For he's a jolly good felloooooo-  
oow—  
which nobooooody can deeeee—ny.

Dave beat me to the window and as he jerked aside the curtain my astounded eyes encountered a sight that will be stamped on my memory forever. Sidney was standing in front of the house, weaving crazily about, and as we watched in mingled astonishment and horror, he started up the stone walk that led to the door. And then we could see something was radically wrong with him.

He lurched forward, staggering with every step to keep his balance and then he stopped and stared at the house as if he were seeing it for the first time.

"Helloooooo," he bawled at the top of his unmusical voice. "Helloooooo, house." He bowed low and almost fell on his face.

"Ye Gods," I groaned. "What's the matter with him?" I wheeled from the window and opened the door just in time to meet Sidney face to face as he staggered the last few steps up the stone walk.

He blinked owlshly at me and then giggled.

"Hello." He peered solemnly about and then turned to me and placed one finger over his lips. "Ssssssh," he whispered, "gotta keep quiet." He hiccupped violently and almost toppled over. "Howsh about a lil' drink?" he beamed happily. "Noshin' like a lil' drink to fiz ya up."

"Sidney," I said desperately, "what's happened to you?"

He giggled coyly.

"Just ha' a lil' drink."

He swayed precariously and then as he raised his arm I saw what he was holding in his hand.

A gallon of penetrating oil!

And as I stared at it in bewilderment he raised it to his lips and took a long swig.

I jerked the can away from him and grabbed him by the arm to prevent him

from falling. Dave, who had been watching in open-mouthed astonishment, grabbed his other arm and between the two of us we dragged Sidney into the house.

"To the lab," I snapped. "I don't know what he's been doing but I've got an awful suspicion."

We stretched him out on the lab table and I wiped the grease from his mouth and chest.

"What's the matter with him?" Dave cried. "He acts like—like he's drunk."

"He is," I said dully. "He's as drunk as a lord!"

"**B**UT how," Dave gasped. "How . . . I mean he's a robot. He can't—"

"Sure he's a robot," I cut in bitterly. I picked up the can of oil that Sidney had carried away from the lab and handed it to Dave. "See that. It's penetrating oil. He found it here, started drinking it instead of his usual heavy grease. With the result that all of his gears and wheels began to revolve at about three times their normal speed."

"Well I'll be darned," Dave gasped incredulously. "He's oiled up."

"That's just it," I said. "He gets the same kick from thin oil that you or I would from alcohol." I waved my hands helplessly. "On top of being a lazy, good-for-nothing loafer, he's taken to drink."

"Now don't be too hard on him," Dave said. "There's nothing wrong with a young guy goin' on a tear every now and then. He's just sowing a few wild oats."

"I suppose he'll get a bumper crop of rivets," I said sarcastically.

"Aw, don't—" Dave's voice choked in his throat. "Look," he managed to yell.

Sidney was threshing and twisting

around on the bench. Streams of crazed, incoherent words were pouring out of his mouth and a froth of oil bubbled over his metal lips.

"Hold him down," I yelled. "He's going crazy."

We grabbed him by the arms and held him as firmly as we could but his head continued to roll wildly on his neck.

"Thousands and thousands," he groaned. Thousands and thousands coming after me. On the wall, on the ceiling, on the floor. Thousands of 'em. Points, points, sharp points coming after me."

"What are you talking about?" Dave shouted at him.

"Pink can openers," Sidney screamed. "Pink can openers, thousands of pink can openers coming after me. Points, points, pink points coming for me."

I let go of his arms and staggered back, wiping my forehead with a shaking hand.

"By the great Jehovah," I gasped, "Sidney's got the D.T.'s."

"You mean delirium tremens," Dave demanded, "from too much liquor?"

I nodded bitterly and stared at Sidney's moaning, twitching figure. There lay our years of work and sacrifice. We had dreamed of creating a useful addition to mankind in the form of robot life. Instead we had produced a drunken bum who would never do anything worthwhile in his life except boost the stock of Standard Oil.

**A** WEEK later Dave and I sat in the living room and stared gloomily at one another. The representative of the Finance Company had just left. So had his truck. So had our equipment.

The convention was to open the following day and Sidney—

"Where's Sidney?" I asked dully.

"In the lab," Dave answered dispiritedly.

"Is he sober?"

"He was when I left him."

"That's fine," I said bitterly. "If he stays sober another hour he'll break his own record. Then we can get him a temperance badge and a membership in the W. C. T. U."

The last week had been hell. After his first binge Sidney had been repentant, but it hadn't lasted. We couldn't keep him away from the oil. He'd find it no matter where we hid it and we were afraid to lock it up for fear he might be tempted to wander into the village and steal some.

Gone was any hope of entering him in the convention. We'd be the laughing stock of the scientific world if we took Sidney down there.

Our equipment was gone. More creditors were nipping at our heels with foreclosures and attachments. It looked like Waterloo. And all on account of Sidney.

"I'm going to get a hack saw," I said grimly, "and commit mayhem on that drunken bum."

"You couldn't do that," Dave said accusingly. "He's a good egg. You gotta admit he's kind of funny at times."

"Funny?" I almost screamed. "So are the Marx brothers. I don't want a funny man. If I did I'd turn on the Jack Benny program. All I want is a sensible, sober, unobtrusive robot. But what do I get, what do I get—?"

"You got me!"

The metallic voice was followed by a few unmusical clanks and then Sidney clumped into the room.

"You!" I said bitterly. "Baaah!"

Sidney hiccupped gently and sank into a chair. I was just opening my mouth to tell him to wipe the oil from his lips when the doorbell rang.



"Who's that?" Dave asked.

"I hope it's the junk man," I snapped, with a spiteful glance at Sidney. "Maybe we'll get something from our invention."

I WALKED to the door, opened it and a slim red-haired girl threw herself into my arms and flung her arms around my neck.

"Surprise," she cried. "Glad to see me?"

"Sis!" I yelled. "Of course I am." I held her at arm's length and took inventory. Slender rounded figure, eager youthful features and flaming red hair.

"You haven't changed a bit," I said, "except you're better looking. How come the visit? Did they throw you out of college?"

"Just a little vacation," she answered. "So I thought I'd blow in and see how the great quest was coming."

That kind of quieted me. She meant the robot of course.

"Come on in," I said drily, "and see for yourself."

She walked into the room and her cry of delight could be heard an even city block.

"Oh you did it," she cried happily. "I think he's just *wonderful!*"

I followed her into the room. She was regarding Sidney as if he were a six-foot pile of gold bullion.

"You know Dave," I said, "but you haven't lived till you've met Sidney." I motioned to Sidney. "Stand up, you lug. This is my sister, Nancy, a very nice little girl, so be on your best behavior."

"Oh I think he's too cute for words," Nancy cried. She walked over to Sidney and held out her hand. "I'm very pleased to meet you," she said primly. "I know we'll be great friends."

I watched Sidney curiously. He was

shuffling his feet awkwardly like a country bumpkin at his first dance. And then it occurred to me that Sidney had never seen a girl at such close range. Especially a girl like Nancy.

"Go ahead," I said. "Shake hands with her. She won't bite."

Sidney wiped his hand on the upholstery of the chair and then held it out as if he were sticking it into a buzz saw.

They shook hands and Nancy smiled up at him.

"I wonder if you'd do me a favor?" she said sweetly. "I left my grips outside on the porch. Would you take them upstairs, please?"

"Why — why sure," Sidney said hoarsely. "Why gosh yes, right away, thank you ma'am. I mean, you're welcome please." With a great deal more confusion he wheeled and ducked out of the room.

"Oh, he's darling," Nancy cried, as Sidney plowed up the steps with her grips. "I wish I had one just like him."

"No, you don't," I said.

In response to her surprised look, Dave and I explained the circumstances to her.

"Then," Nancy said thoughtfully, when we paused, "you've lost the equipment, and the lab goes next unless a miracle occurs."

"Right," I said. "We'll be back where we were ten years ago. Except, of course, we'll have Sidney. He'll be a big help I know."

NANCY bit her lip and we were silent until Sidney came charging back into the room with all the grace of an animated box car.

"Anything else, Miss Nancy?" he gulped.

Nancy looked thoughtfully at him and then suddenly she smiled and

crossed to the sofa and seated herself gracefully.

"Come here Sidney," she patted the pillow next to her invitingly. "I want to talk to you." She crossed her pretty legs and smiled charmingly at him.

"Well, gosh," Sidney bleated. "I don't know, I mean gosh."

I caught Nancy's wink and knew she was up to something.

"Go ahead, old man," I said. "Sit down and have a nice chat with Nancy. Dave and I'll get supper ready." I shoved him toward the sofa and grabbed Dave by the arm and pulled him out of the room.

"What's the idea?" Dave demanded, when we reached the kitchen.

"I don't know," I answered, "but Nancy's got something up her sleeve. Maybe she's going to appeal to his better nature."

Dave shook his head doubtfully.

"She can sing 'lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine,' but I doubt if it'll help. Sidney's beyond hope. He's incurable."

Which went to prove how little he knew about Sidney.

You wouldn't believe the change that came over him that night. When Nancy got through with him and brought him out to the kitchen he even looked different. As if he were shining with some new inner light.

He set the table. He passed the plates during supper. He dried the dishes. After supper he mowed the lawn, cleaned the basement, and cut about a cord of wood. To top off the entire amazing performance he went to bed sober for the first time in days.

Sidney had hit the sawdust trail and no fooling!

Dave and I were jubilant for the first time in months and we gave all credit to Nancy.

"You must have given him a power-

ful pep talk," I said, "because he's certainly a new man."

"You boys just didn't know how to handle him," she said smiling. "I told him if he was a real good boy today and tomorrow at the convention, I'd let him take me for a walk the next day. And he thought that was just fine."

"Well," I said, "I hope he stays on the wagon until after the convention. After that he can take up quarters in an oil refinery for all I care."

The next day started fine and I kept my fingers crossed. When I got up Sidney was down in the basement polishing himself on the buffing wheel. He helped Nancy pick up the breakfast dishes and then we all got in the car and started for the convention.

This was the day. This was the all-important day that Sidney would meet his all important test. I looked at him, riding in the back seat with Dave.

He was sniffing a violet.

I kept my fingers crossed.

**F**LASHLIGHT bulbs popped, reporters snapped questions and the throngs that gathered about the entrance to Convention Hall stared in wonder as Sidney made his entrance.

If I hadn't grabbed his arm and hustled him through the doors he would probably have spent the day there, bowing and scraping to the multitude like a politician.

Inside, I hurried Dave, Nancy, and Sidney down the hall to a room which had been assigned to us for the duration of the convention.

"The judges," I said to Sidney, "will want to examine you in a little while. Don't be alarmed at anything they do. They'll inspect you and probably ask you questions the rest of the day."

"Will they come down here?" Nancy asked.

"Nope," I said. "Sidney will have

to display himself in the exhibition gallery. A page will let us know when they're ready for him."

I had some people to see then so I left them and spent the rest of the time praying silently that Sidney would behave.

A half hour later I was sitting in the exhibit arena, clenching and unclenching my hands when Dave and Nancy found me.

"He's all set," Dave said. "He'll make his appearance any minute now."

"Fine," I said and hoped it would be. The stands were crowded with people and up in the special boxes I could see several of the judges leaning forward eagerly. Everyone was anxious to see the man of metal, as the papers had dubbed him. To see whether he was just a clever mechanical toy or whether he was what we claimed: a rational, thinking robot.

I swallowed nervously as the murmuring of the audience settled to an expectant hush. There was an electric tension in the air, as the judges, the assembled scientists, and the crowd waited expectantly for our brain child to appear.

I was so nervous and excited that I didn't feel the tap on my shoulder immediately. Not until it was repeated sharply, insistently, did I turn around.

An angry, dark little man in overalls was standing behind me.

"I'ma da janitor," the little man said heatedly. "I'ma—"

"Some other time," I cut in hurriedly. "I'm busy now. Please, see me later."

"I'ma wanta see you righta now," the janitor said emphatically. "Data beeg tin guy you make, he'sa steal my oil can. I'ma wanta know whosa gon pay me for my oil can?"

I heard a thunderous roar of applause. Sidney was being announced.

"Listen, Bud," I implored, "can't you see me tomorrow about this oil. I—" I stopped suddenly, a cold fist closing over my stomach.

I grabbed the janitor by the throat.

"What did you say about oil?" I yelled.

"I'ma walk down the hall," the little man said angrily, "minda my own business, when dees beeg tin guy jumpa out and grab my oil can. 'Gotta hava bracer, gotta have a bracer' he yell and den he run like hell. Now whosa gon pay for my oil can?"

A cold sweat broke out on my forehead and trickled down my face. Sidney was off the wagon!

MY first wild thought was to somehow get to him, stop his appearance, but the next instant I knew I was too late.

To the wild roars of acclaim of the entire auditorium, Sidney walked onto the stage.

Staggered would be a better word.

My first despairing look convinced me that he was hopelessly oiled up. There was a strange belligerent roll to his walk and his mouth was parted slightly as if he were hoping to catch flies with it. From one corner of his stainless steel mouth a thin stream of oil had dribbled and spattered onto his aluminum chest.

"Oh," I groaned to Dave. "He ought to be at the Keeley Institute instead of up there."

Dave and Nancy looked helplessly at me and then back at Sidney, who by this time was weaving his way to the front of the stage. The audience craned their necks curiously as he stopped and peered foolishly about at the judges and scientists.

Then he hiccupped and staggered back a few paces.

I groaned as I listened to the in-

credulous murmur that arose from the spectators. The jig, I knew, was up.

I had a horrible vision of our fellowship and scientific standing vanishing forever into the mists of scorn and derision.

And then, if such a thing was possible, my horror increased.

Sidney was going to make a speech.

I closed my eyes and prayed as his metallic voice boomed clear through the hall.

"Ish jush a lota nonsense," he shouted. "Jush a lota damn nonsense. Jush to make a spectacle outa me, thash all it is." He wobbled around a few steps and seemed to calm down a trifle.

"Of coursh," he paused to hiccough, "of coursh if you jush want to look me over thash all right. But nobody's poking around in my stomach and that's final. Thash not scientific curiosity, thash jush damn noseynass."

The shocked gasp of the audience acted as a tonic to Sidney's ham-like instincts. His metal lips parted in a pleased smile and he bestowed a grateful glance upon the crowded arena.

"I'll buy a drink," he announced suddenly. "Thash what I'll do, buy a drink for the house. He staggered back from the edge of the stage. "Barteeendeerrr," he bawled at the top of his voice, "set 'em up for everybody."

THE audience was laughing now and I felt tears of humiliation stinging my eyes. Dave and I would be branded as charlatans and quacks from now on, no matter what we might accomplish.

As a man might watch his own execution, so I watched Sidney.

The laughter of the audience had evidently convinced him that he had a mission in life as an entertainer. With a coy smile he raised one clumsy foot

in the air and began the first movement of something that looked like a hideous cross between the black bottom and an Old World gavotte.

With an absurd smile spreading his lips he pranced and leaped about the stage, his three hundred pounds threatening to shatter the floor boards with every step. Finally the inevitable happened. He fell. Not just an ordinary fall, but a high arching dive that dumped his metallic carcass to the floor with a splintering, jangling crash.

The audience were standing in their seats as Sidney rolled over and straightened to a sitting position. He peered dazedly, but happily, at their amazed faces and then his mouth opened wide and his voice, thickened with liquor, soared over their heads.

For I'm a jolly good fellooooooo

oow—

Which nobody can deenyyy.

He ended the song with a noisy hiccough and then collapsed on his back, out cold. Sidney had passed out cold and as I listened to the shouts and laughter of my scientific brethren I realized that with him had passed my own dreams.

"I'll get him," I said wearily to Dave, "and meet you later." I added "Don't be so gloomy. After all Sidney's happy so why shouldn't we be?"

It took me a few minutes to edge my way through the milling crowd and by the time I clambered onto the stage I saw that several of the judges were standing over Sidney's recumbent figure.

It was a humiliating moment for me, but I was beyond caring very much. I elbowed them aside and grabbed one of Sidney's arms.

"Get up," I snapped, shaking him roughly. "On your feet, the show's over."

I felt a hand grip my arm then and I turned to meet the stern, piercing eyes of old Professor Norton, head of the New York research foundation. His first words were as shocking as a lead pipe on the skull.

"Congratulations, my boy," he boomed. "You've done it; captured the human element. Your robot has a sense of humor and humor is the element that separates man from beast. Funniest imitation of a drunk I've seen in years." He winked broadly at me. "If my vote will help, that fellowship's as good as yours this minute."

My mouth opened and closed foolishly. I struggled to make some sort of reply. But it was no use. The words just weren't there.

"Tell me," a white haired judge addressed me, "does this remarkable robot of yours think up his own imitations or do you help him. I swear his imitation seemed almost too realistic."

It was at that moment that Sidney chose to hiccough noisily. I whipped out a handkerchief and snorted into it.

"A little cold," I said feebly. "Must've picked it up at the hall."

**A** DOZEN terrible thoughts were chasing around in my head like frightened rabbits. The judges thought Sidney had been acting. If they found out differently, they certainly wouldn't grant me a fellowship to continue robot research. Imagine anyone in their right mind wanting more steel sots like Sidney roaming around loose!

Sidney was stirring restlessly and the judges watched him anxiously.

"Is everything all right?" Professor Norton asked suspiciously.

"Fine," I lied. "Just fine."

I had to get Sidney out of the way until he sobered up.

My heart hammered against my ribs with painful bangs. A wild idea had

just occurred to me.

"I think," said Professor Norton, "we should question your robot now."

"No, no," I stammered breathlessly. "He's all tuckered out. Almost in a state of collapse. Might bring on a nervous breakdown. He needs a week to recuperate, at least."

"From what?" Norton asked bluntly.

"Just last night," I replied desperately. "Sidney had to take out his own appendix. Have any of you gentlemen ever gone through that experience? I can assure you if you haven't that it's quite trying."

Professor Norton coughed embarrassedly.

"Of course old man," he said brusquely. "I didn't know."

"Then a week from now," I said quickly, "at my laboratory. You can examine Sidney thoroughly at that time."

Professor Norton frowned.

"That is satisfactory," he said slowly, "but your robot acts just as if he's passed out completely. Why doesn't he show some life?"

"He'll show some life," I promised. If my wild idea worked he'd show plenty of life. I stooped over and shook Sidney.

"Quick," I hissed in his ear, "run for your life, they're coming after you. The pink can openers are coming. Thousands of them. *Hurry!*"

Sidney's eyes opened. He peered foggily at me for an instant and then with a wild cry he clambered to his feet. He glared hysterically about him.

"My God," he yelled, "they're everywhere." With another tinny scream, he charged off the stage and disappeared down the corridor with a tremendous clatter.

"Well!" gasped Professor Norton.

"He's like that," I said weakly. "Abrupt."

I tried to get away but they plied me with questions about Sidney and it was several minutes before I could tear myself away. Then I looked for Sidney. In the halls, in our room, and with increasing worry, through the exhibit room, through the entire building. But it was no use.

Sidney had vanished.

**I**F you follow the papers at all you probably remember the rest of the story. Sidney had disappeared and the tabloids made quite a fuss about it. Dave and I hunted high and low for him and in our spare time, built another robot.

With Sidney as a lesson in what to avoid, we constructed a robot that was useful, efficient, productive and, in my opinion, about the most boring and uninteresting creature that ever existed.

But the judges liked him and, with many speeches and huzzahs, Dave and I were awarded the muchly coveted fellowship.

In spite of the acclaim of our scientific brethren everything seemed kind of flat. Nancy went back to college and a week or so later Dave looked across the room at our new robot—we called him number one—and said disgustedly:

“He’s perfect, but who the hell wants to be surrounded by dull perfection. I wouldn’t swap Sidney for a thousand like that. He was screwy and silly and unpredictable—and human. I miss the big lug.”

So did I. A week dragged by and then one day I was driving across town and a tire blew out. Cursing under my breath I climbed out of the car and looked around for a service station.

Luck was against me. There was nothing but a junk yard in the block and that was on the other side of the street. I started to walk when sud-

denly I saw something that knocked the air out of my lungs with a whoosh and started my heart pounding with dizzy excitement.

I should have said I saw *someone* because it was Sidney.

He was lounged comfortably in the driver seat of an old model T that was parked in front of the junk yard. A battered top hat was set at a rakish angle on his metal dome and one leg was draped loosely over the side of the car. He was so crusted with rust that he probably couldn’t move if he wanted.

“Sidney,” I yelled excitedly. “Sidney!” I dodged through the traffic and raced to the side of the car. “Sidney,” I yelled again, “it’s me.”

Sidney’s eyelids were closed and I couldn’t tell whether he heard me or not.

“What d’ya want, bud?” a thick, suspicious voice sounded behind me.

**I** LOOKED around. A heavy set man in overalls was standing in front of a shack built on the edge of the junkyard. He wiped his hands on a piece of cheesecloth and walked toward me. I noticed he was watching me rather curiously.

“I just paused to look at this—this,” I paused and waved a hand at the car, “at this advertising stunt. Very clever.”

The proprietor’s lips parted in a pleased grin.

“Do you think so?” he asked contentedly. “Some kids brought dat tin dummy in here a few days ago. Dey found it in an alley. I buys it for a half a buck and stick it out here. Kinda gives a tony air to the joint. Gets a lotta attention.”

I looked at Sidney closely for the first time. There was an almost beatific look of contentment on his

rusty face. Sprawled on the cushions, uselessly idle, he was in his glory.

"It's gettin' kinda rusty," the junk dealer said, "so I'm going to oil it up this aftanoon."

I smiled.

"Do that," I said, "and remember—use nice thin oil."

I knew then that I was not going to disturb Sidney. He had found the never-never land his simple soul had yearned for. Nothing to do but rest, someone to keep him pleasantly oiled up and enough attention from passers-by to gratify his exhibitionist nature.

It was Valhalla for him and it would take someone far more heartless than yours truly to destroy his paradise.

"So long," I murmured and as I turned I noticed something that brought a quick smile to my lips.

Walking away I thought of it.

It might have been an optical illusion—but I preferred to think it wasn't.

For Sidney had winked at me. As I had turned to leave one of his metal eyelids had fluttered slyly. A gesture, I knew, that bade me a happy, comradely farewell.

## « FANTASTIC FACTS »

**I**N the last war, men from remote rural districts, where they'd never had measles or acquired natural immunity, came down in batches from the disease and then caught pneumonia. Many deaths resulted. This time, the Army has the situation well in hand.

**A**TENTION, drivers! Your worries are practically over. Over in England, trucks and busses are now using fenders fabricated from molded rubber. During blackouts, collisions are naturally frequent. The new fenders change everything. They straighten out their own dents!

**W**AR being the least gentle art, another murderous new offensive weapon has just cropped up—the parachute land mine. Floating down from the skies, it explodes instantly on contact, instead of digging itself a crater and wasting its force. This gadget is said to be fatal to troop concentrations, machine-gun nests and artillery emplacements.

**N**YLON continues to demonstrate its wide range of utility. Latest use is for tennis racket strings, made possible by the development of a "giant" strand, about one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter. Wearing better than silk or gut, it is little affected by weather change and does not fray, being solid through its length. No waxing or shellac treatment is needed.

**A**S destructively prolific as ever is the locust. According to recent observation, the female lays from fifty to seventy-five separate deposits of eggs in a thirty-six inch square. These will produce between five thousand and seventy-five

hundred locusts. There's only one way to destroy the eggs—ploughing the ground under. Once exposed to the air, the eggs can't hatch.

**O**NE of science's most unpleasant mysteries now seems to have been solved—the reason why fish tastes "fishy." Research reveals that diatoms and dinoflagellates, with grass, are the two most important plants on earth.

Diatoms correspond to grass in the sea and comprise the great source of food and energy for marine creatures. But they are so tiny as to be invisible. Yet in volume and importance they overshadow every other sea plant.

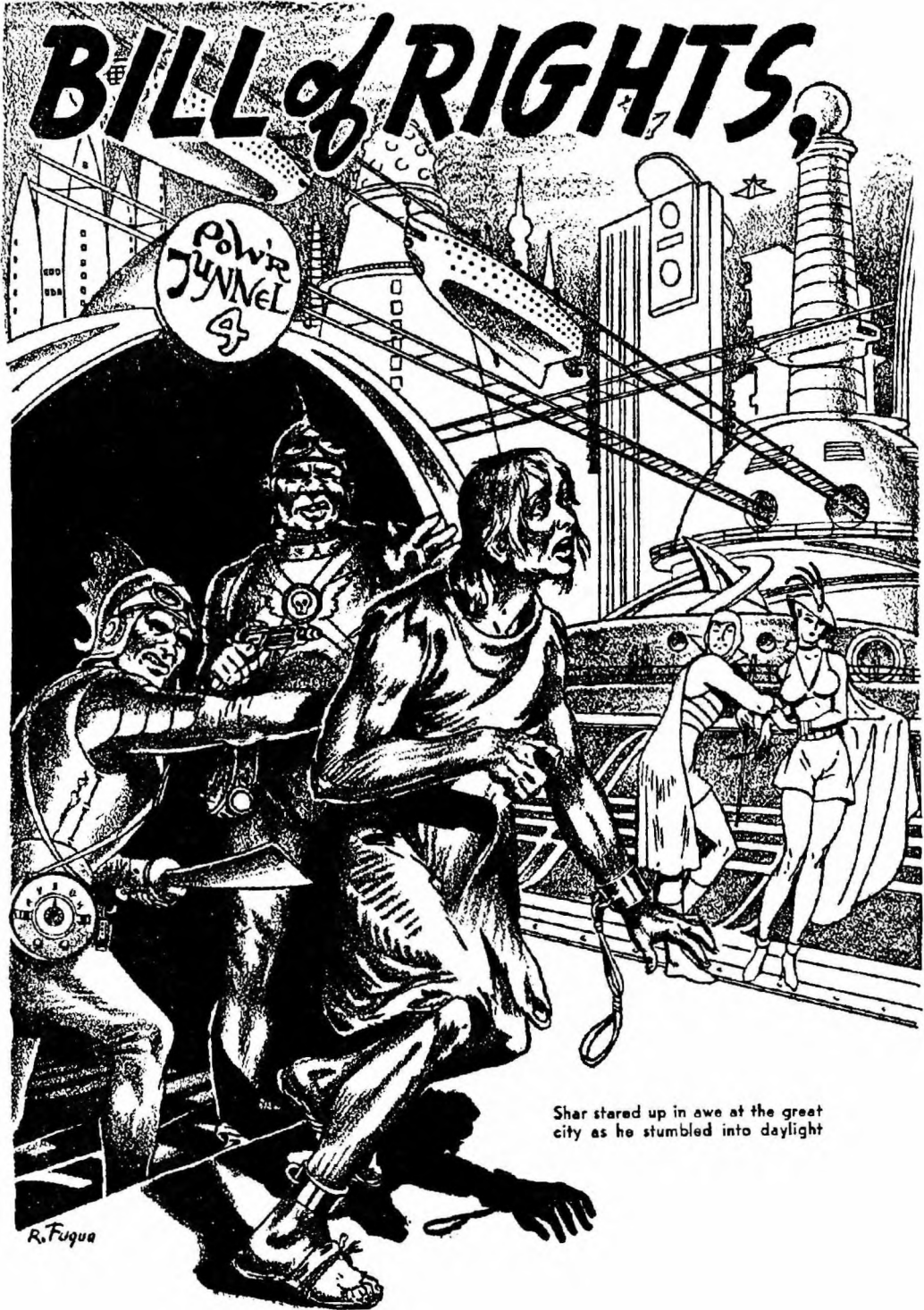
Microscopic in size, diatoms and dinoflagellates, which are technically referred to as phytoplankton, flourish particularly in cold water, since warm water contains less dissolved carbon dioxide.

Diatoms vary widely in specie. The main single element is green chlorophyll. Some diatoms and dinoflagellates (microscopic, with whiplike branches) are brown, yellow and even red—hence the Red Sea, where they flourish.

Fish become "fishy" and smell that way because big fish eat little fish, the cycle beginning with copepods. The copepod is the original ocean vegetarian.

Tiny, flealike crustaceans, in a direct line with the lobster and the crab, copepods eat diatoms. Then small fish, such as herring, gobble up these crustaceans. And codfish, marine birds, seals and whales, in their turn, eat the poor herring!

To carry the analogy even further: If you have a laying hen, give her repeated doses of cod liver oil, or grind up a heavy proportion of fish in her mash. In a few weeks, her eggs will smell to high heaven. "Fishy"!





# 5,000 A.D. *by John York Cabot*

**Shar was a spiritless slave—until he found the mysterious box and read the message—and knew what it said was true**

**S**HAR had never seen the sky. Like the thousands and thousands of his fellow toilers who were born and lived and died in the vast, underground labyrinthine cities of Earth, Shar didn't know of the sky. Shar knew little of anything except the Supreme State—and his Task.

There was a world above him, Shar knew that. Now and then—perhaps twice a year—visitors from that world came down to inspect the mines and factories in which Shar and his fellows labored.

Shar toiled in the mines, and sometimes in the middle of his digging he had looked up furtively as these visitors passed. Then after they had gone he would make up fanciful stories about them in his mind—even though he knew it was dangerous to wonder and that only work was right.

Shar's flights of imagination concerning that upper world were never wistful, and only were ignited by a tiny spark of curiosity in the back of his mind. However, he kept this spark of curiosity strictly to himself, for he had been taught that anything not concerning his Task and its relation to the Supreme State was bad.

The punishment of those who would sabotage the State was swift, and just, and somewhat terrible. Shar shud-

dered when he remembered some of the whispered rumors of that punishment, and how it had been administered to those who had been ungrateful to the Supreme State.

So Shar kept to his Task, and remained grateful to the Supreme State. For did not the State give him his work? And did not the State supply him with clothes, and food pills, and a compartment in the general compound for him to use for sleep?

The State gave much, Shar knew this, and asked in return only complete concentration on his Task. The State had let Shar marry, and bring his wife to his compartment for a month each year. And the State provided for the children of that union, seeing that they were raised and educated to their Task. Shar had never seen his children, for, of course, the State had assumed immediate responsibility for them. But he was grateful in the knowledge that they would always have compartments, and clothing, and food pills, and Tasks.

So Shar labored diligently at his digging and remained useful and grateful, as the words in the State pamphlets told him to, and tried to keep his curiosity in check. Until The Day.

**O**N the morning of The Day, Shar had been digging alone at the end

of a faintly illuminated tunnel. Digging stolidly and concentrating on his Task—until his shovel encountered an oddly hard substance. When he bent over, probing his calloused fingers into the damp clay beneath his feet, he felt something smooth and cold and hard.

Shar frowned, and squinted in the faint light, as he bent down to pick this strange object up in his hands.

It was small, the object, and as he chipped away the clay that covered it, he began to recognize it as a box. For an instant he wondered if he should summon one of the Watchers and turn it over to him. But in the next instant he decided against this, for that spark of curiosity burned in the back of his mind.

“See what it means, Shar,” a tiny voice inside him was insisting. “See what it means, first.”

Unaccountably, Shar’s heart began to thump quickly and sweat broke out on his brow. Furtively, he looked down the long tunnel. There were no Watchers in sight. Then—even though he knew it to be wrong—Shar turned back to the box.

His first efforts to open it were fruitless. But by finally putting the box on the ground and prying it open with his shovel tip, Shar managed to snap the catch that held the lid. His hammering heart told him that he was taking a great chance, as he bent to pick up the open box, but his curiosity was now a flame over which he no longer had control.

Shar’s hands shook as he lifted the box and breathlessly peered into it. And then he was filled with a sudden anger and sharp disappointment as his eyes took in the contents. He was about to hurl the box back to the ground thinking of covering it over again with clay so that his crime would not be discovered. That was when his

eyes suddenly narrowed, peering closer at the contents, puzzledly.

He didn’t hurl the box to the ground. He sat down, unconscious of the risk he ran if a Watcher found him that way, and leaned against the wall. He held the contents of the box in his gnarled paws, regarding them intently, utterly absorbed.

AND so it was that Shar was apprehended by the Watchers some four hours later. But he was not caught in the tunnel assigned to him. He was not caught sitting alongside his shovel with the contents of the box in his hands. He was caught several miles away from there, shouting wildly to other tunnel toilers in other shafts.

He was tracked down only after his words had been carried to many others of his fellows—who in turn breathed them through the underground labyrinths, echoing them endlessly onward.

And thus it was that Shar—shackled and beaten—was taken by Guards into the World Above, and for the first time saw the sky. Saw the sky, and other things which he had never dreamed existed—huge buildings, tubes shooting through the air, and many people whose faces did not bear the pallor of the underworld. Until at last he was led into a gigantic hall, and pushed stumbling before a great dais on which ten men sat.

“The traitorous prisoner!” Shar’s guards announced, their words ringing loudly in the vast hall.

Then one of the men on the dais was speaking, and Shar noted that he was like the others in this Above World—like the visitors who had sometimes inspected the mines.

“This is the undercreature accused of treason to the Supreme State?” The man on the dais asked. “This is the

man who carried words of lies to his fellows?" And Shar heard the guards answer affirmatively.

Then, to Shar, the man on the dais said:

"You have sabotaged the State, and are here to be sentenced for your crime!"

But Shar, even to his own surprise, did not cringe, did not tremble. He held his head high, and his words were strong as he answered. "I have a right—" he began.

But Shar never completed those words.

His last impression was one of terrible pain, and he slumped to the floor seconds after his guards crushed his skull with their merciless blows. And then, while they stood breathing heavily over the lifeless body of the creature from the underworld, the man on the dais addressed the guards.

"You acted wisely, justly, and swiftly in silencing those treasonable words," the man on the great dais said. Then, as in afterthought: "This is the

first breath of treason in three thousand years. Have you the evidence that you were to present?"

And then the guard closest to the dais stepped forward. In his hands he held papers, yellowed and dry. The man on the dais took them wordlessly, glancing at the ancient lettering upon them.

"*We hold these rights,*" the script on the yellowed sheets read, "*to be self-evident: that all men are created equal—*" the man on the dais paused, his face whitening. Then he read on: "*That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are, Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.*"

Purpling with rage, the man on the great dais rose, tearing the yellowed sheets again and again, while the guards trembled at his wrath . . .

But deep in the bowels of the underworld, creatures like Shar were echoing those words along the dim, labyrinthine cities. And the murmur was swelling . . . swelling.

« IT CAN'T BE DONE »

SCIENCE, working in the matter of aerotechnics, has developed certain absolute axioms in regard to flight of any sort. It has established that certain weights, shapes, and angles in relation to the total wing spread of any object determine whether or not that object can fly. These rules are absolute, scientific. However, the poor bumblebee, whose weight and body size in relation to his wing spread makes it utterly impossible for him to fly, doesn't realize that science confines his adventures to the ground. He doesn't realize it, poor bug, and goes ahead and flies anyway!—*Guy Fawcett*.

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# »»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

WHEN we asked Mr. Cummings for a sketch for this department, he wrote us a letter, sent a book jacket with editorial comments on the fly-leaf, and a poem written by his daughter, Betty Starr. We present here a biographical sketch culled from these sources.

Mr. Cummings is reticent in talking about himself. He would much rather discuss his fourteen year old daughter, Betty. At the age of four she had already traveled some twenty thousands miles, been shipwrecked, and been through three hurricanes. All of which would indicate that Mr. Cummings does not live a very quiet life himself.

Adds Mr. Cummings to the above: "Betty's mother and I are very proud of her. Last year, at 13, she wrote her first fiction story, and it sold to *Liberty Magazine*."

It seems that literary ability runs in the Cummings family.

That little story in *Liberty* brought astonishing response. A personal letter from Kirsten Flagstad, the opera singer; and one from the White House—a personal note from Mrs. Roosevelt. And the story had been on the stands only a day or two when it was put over the radio; and subsequently the child herself was interviewed over the radio. She is now, at 14, starting her senior year at boarding school—the youngest senior in the school's history.

Mr. Cummings goes on to say:

"Incidentally, Elizabeth Starr—not as such—but as Ray Cummings' daughter, I should think must be somewhat known to pseudo-science fans. I recall that some published mention of her when she was four—little girl with long gold curls, etc., brought an amusing incident to me at sea. Coming home from Bermuda, I was on deck with the child; was accosted by a young man who said he had been reading my stories, had never seen a picture of me, but was I Ray Cummings?—that certainly looked like Ray Cummings' little daughter.

"And I recall, in *AMAZING STORIES* not so long ago, you reported the N. Y. Convention of Science

Fiction fans, with mention that I had dropped in there one afternoon. Though you did not mention it there was a tall, reserved, very quiet young woman, with me. She was Elizabeth Starr, 13, trying very hard to look older.

"I think she succeeded, for she was surrounded by young men, demanding her autograph, and taking her photo. Flashlight bulbs popped all around her. If opportunity arises, she would like very much to have you convey to those young men her sincere appreciation.

"Her mother—Gabrielle Wilson—also writes fiction when domestic duties will permit. But recently she has engaged herself in anti-fifth-column work. Often, as we all know, public speakers—under the guise of something or other—stand on street corners and prove themselves nothing but masquerading fifth columnists. One of Mrs. Cummings' most recent activities is to make the crowd realize it and cease listening. She seems to have a very special genius for accomplishing that result."

We might quote "Bob" Davis, famed editor, who said of him: "He is a Verne returned and a Wells going forward." Other critics have called him "The American H.

G. Wells." It is certainly true that he has a style of presentation, and the type of imagination that made Wells and Verne famous. However, to this is added a true American originality.

Cummings has a flair for things scientific as evidenced by the fact that while in Princeton University he accomplished the remarkable feat of absorbing three years' of physics in that many months.

His five years' association with Thomas A. Edison as the latter's personal assistant also added to Cummings' knowledge of the scientific. His bizarre early life, living on orange plantations in Porto Rico, striking oil in Wyoming, gold seeking in British Columbia, timber cruising in the North, before he was twenty, also left its imprint.

(Concluded on page 145)



RAY CUMMINGS

# Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you, and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine.

Count indicated points for each correct answer. If your score is between 80 and 100 you're better than Mr. Average Man. If you score between 50 and 80 you are Mr. Average Man. If your total is below 50, don't worry; the law of averages will catch up with you yet!

## MANIPULATIONS IN MATH

(worth 20 points)

Arrange the numbers seen in the squares so that the columns down and across, as well as both diagonal columns, will total to the same number. When—or if—this is accomplished, state the number of solutions possible in this problem.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

## STAR GAZING

(worth 20 points, five points each)

(a) Astronomy is a very ancient science, and many have been the brilliant men who have made the study what it is today. We're sure you know some of these men, but try to rearrange their names so that they follow in proper chronological relation to one another.

Darwin, Gould, Herschel, Maskelyne, Hevelius, Brahe.

(b) We can attribute the discovery of the motion of the solar apogee to one race in particular. That race is,

Phoenicians, Gaels, Scots, Arabians, Grecians.

(c) Ptolemy was strictly the big shot in the field of astronomy until one of the following men came along to explode the theories he had advanced.

Thales, Copernicus, Ibn-Yunis, Pasteur.

(d) Without telescopic equipment of the finest sort, an astronomer would be out of luck. One of the following names is legendary in the history of telescopic science.

Louis IV, Julius Caesar, Einstein, Alvan Clark, Pouillet.

## ARMCHAIR ARCHAEOLOGISTS

(worth 20 points, 4 points each)

The doping-out of cuneiforms, hieroglyphics, etc., is usually the work of the fellows who unearth ancient monuments. However, using some very common other alphabets scrambled, let's see how many of them you can recognize and put in their proper places.

Phoenician Russian Gaelic Greek Arabic



## WHO AM I?

(worth 30 points, 15 points each)

(a) It's up to you to figure out who I am. I was born in Germany in 1811, studied at Göttingen University, not to mention Paris and Vienna. Later I was Experimental Chemistry Professor at Heidelberg University. If you've ever studied high school chemistry you've probably used my name more than that of any other scientist, for I invented something very necessary to laboratory experimentation.

(b) Although I'm considered pretty much of a modern among today's men of science, I died not so very long ago. I was born in Mass. around 1849. In a farm boyhood, I learned to love nature and resolved then to devote my life to the study and improvement of it and its resources. In 1875 I went to Santa Rosa, California, to establish an experimental farm: Soon I was crossing darned near everything in plant life, and eventually was world famous as a wizzard of horticulture.

## YOUR KEN OF CHEM

(worth 10 points, 5 each)

(a) One among the following races was superior to all others in its knowledge of Chemistry. Which?

English, Phoenicians, Romans, Germans, Egyptians, Persians.

(b) Here are some very common chemical terms with definitions, scrambled of course. Fix 'em up.

Oxygen—Mn  
 Ferrous sulphate—FeSO,  
 Lead—Si  
 Manganese—O  
 Silicon—Pb

(Answers on page 146)

# READER'S PAGE

## WANTS THE AMAZON'S CHILDREN

Sirs:

I am writing for myself and a friend to say that we would both like to hear about the further adventures of the two children of the Golden Amazon. We enjoy the magazine very much.

Yours truly,

Marion L. Foster,  
17 Pleasant St.,  
Hyde Park, Mass.,

## OSCAR EVERY ISSUE?

Sirs:

The January cover is positively SUPER. Such colors. The feature yarn is excellent. What a yarn. I want to see Oscar every issue . . . he's tops. The Dynamouse was swell, reminded me of "The Hungry Guinea Pig," as it threatens a city. So long 'til next time.

Harry Schmarje,  
318 Stewart Rd.,  
Muscatine, Iowa.

## McGIVERN TOPS

Sirs:

I have just finished my first copy of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES but this is my second letter to you. Maybe you'll like it better than the first although I have a few brickbats to throw. First of all I wasn't crazy about the cover. I liked the story all right though.

Story I enjoyed most was *Adopted Son Of The Stars* by William P. McGivern. I liked it because it was funny and entertaining. The writing was above the average in my opinion.

Next I would put Wilcox's *Secret Of The Stone Doll* because of the powerful "punch" ending. After that Burroughs and O'Brien just about split even although Burroughs' story was longer.

Then comes Oscar—very good. Finally I would put *Twenty-fifth Century Sherlock* which was very good too. I liked *The Thought Robot* too, but it seemed there was something wrong with it.

I like the humor in your books and I hope you don't change this policy. The Editor's column is one of your best features. Keep it up. I guess in the long run I just like the whole darned book.

So I'll be looking for it from now on.

Edward Dusolenski,  
Chicago, Illinois.

*If you like humor, you'll find more of McGivern's work coming up constantly. He's got several humor stories in the house now. And "Sidney, The*

*Screwloose Robot," in this issue, is certainly one of his best.—Ed.*

## WANTS MCCAULEY

Sirs:

The January cover was indeed a masterpiece, done by a master artist. The blended colors are the kind that please the eyes. More of McCauley for the front covers.

Leading stories for same issue were "The Golden Amazon Returns" and "The Dynamouse." "Our Lord The Sun" was a very interesting article. I desire others of the same type.

Can you not use the back cover of F. A. for colored pictures like AMAZING? If this idea is ever considered or acted upon you might choose subjects that are popular with the fans.

I anticipate great enjoyment when authors Norman and Burroughs return.

Albert Betts,  
18 Wascana Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario.

*How do you like the Mac Girl on this cover? You see, we answer your requests even before you make 'em. And also, our articles by Millard, which you praise, will continue. There'll be more in future issues.*

*We have ad contracts for the back cover of F. A. but we will continue back covers on AMAZING STORIES.—Ed.*

## ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS

Sirs:

Thanks for printing my last letter to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. It was a great surprise to me.

I want to give my opinion of your features in AMAZING STORIES Magazine. Questions and Answers is a great help in answering the many disputes that I have encountered. Science Quiz is also a great feature for testing one's mental knowledge of our Earth and universe. My favorite feature, Discussions, gives the reader a chance to get whatever he may think about the mag off his chest.

Oh, yes, I want to know if it is possible to obtain some book or scrapbook of "The Romance of Elements" which is featured in your magazine FANTASTIC ADVENTURES?

Yours until Adam Link rusts.

Everett Robertson,  
1140 S. 10th St.,  
Slaton, Tex.

*Questions and Answers has been discontinued in*

AMAZING STORIES, due to lack of interest. "Romance of the Elements" is a long way from complete, as yet, and the possibility of issuing them in book form has not been considered seriously. However, you could clip them each month for your own scrapbook. If you lack any back issues, they can be obtained from our circulation department.—Ed.

### "... AND YOW!"

Sirs:

Just read your magazine FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and yow! What a kick! It is without doubt the best magazine I have ever read of this type. Every adventure a "great slam." How do you pack so much grand reading in one issue?

Keep the magazine small; the size is much easier to handle than the large size ones.

Why not have a quarterly? It ought to be a sure fire hit.

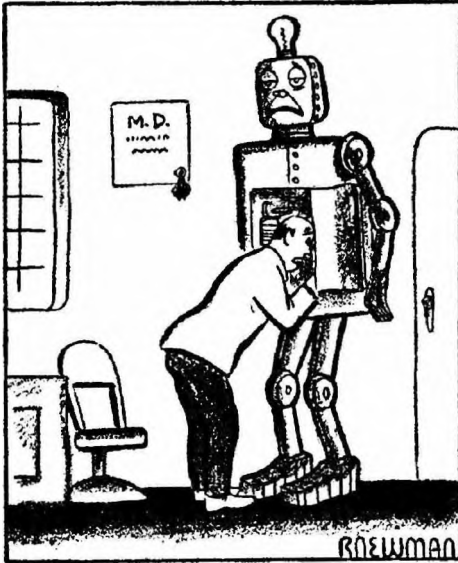
Marianne Ferguson,  
20 S. Buffum St.,  
Worcester, Mass.

We'll do some thinking about your suggestion. Many thanks for your compliments. We appreciate them deeply.—Ed.

### MORE STRAIGHT GOODS

Sirs:

Quite right; that letter was straight goods. Now before I wade into the April issue perhaps I'd better elucidate a little more on "Battering Rams of Space." First, let me apologize for calling it junk. I don't know why I said that, but the fact remains that I did. The first story in the series was bad, and perhaps it carried over very strongly. At any rate, I re-read "Battering Rams"



"What you need is a good dose of castor oil"

and found that it wasn't such a bad story, after all. There were some poor parts, some fair parts, some good parts, and some very excellent parts. However, there is, in my opinion, some indefinable something wrong with the greater portion of the story. It still gets last place. Sometime in the very near future I intend to write a story for you which will put all your authors to shame. Then Wilcox will have an opportunity to pick my work apart at his leisure; maybe.

And so we trip gaily into the present issue, which wasn't quite so good this time. Cover: so-so. Not up to the standard St. John has set for himself and a little disappointing. Feature novel: good. Hansen reminds me of Burroughs, with a little dash of H. Rider Haggard. Best story in the issue was, of course, Rocklynn's "Big Man." Might not have been as good as you would have us believe, but still a swell story. McGivern's tale: not so hot. Bernal's story: swell fun. "Priestess of the Sleeping Death:" different plot from Neil R. Jones' recent stories, but I'm getting sick and tired of the Durma Rangué. We'll forget Wilcox's story for the present while I make some suggestions.

To begin with, I have some ideas about your QUARTERLY. My suggestion is this: why not put out a real QUARTERLY? Say, something in the old 11¼ x 8½ size with 100 pages, selling for 50c. I can just see the first issue! That rumor about Dr. Smith has just materialized, and printed in bold letters, across a brilliant cover by Paul, you have the following: "Ultra Skylark," the greatest story yet written by Dr. E. E. Smith—with five stories by other prominent authors." You could print a long novel, or two, or three, and some shorts each issue. I'm sure you'd find enough purchases, so how about it?

And now to "Invisible Raiders." It was pretty good. Surprised? It was a great improvement over "Battering Rams;" the only thing that bothered me was the constant use of that word "zang." It sounds terrible! Take this for instance:

Zang! Congratulations on your fifteenth anniversary! Zang! I hope that AMAZING lasts for years to come. Zang! I am feverishly awaiting your May issue. Zang! 240 pages for twenty-five cents.

ZANG!

Silly, isn't it?

Leonard Marlow,  
5809 Beechwood Ave.,  
Indianapolis, Ind.

It seems to us that another quarterly would be just a bit too much. We'd be confused ourselves, with three magazines on the stands with the same title. Zang!—Ed.

### 1941 CONVENTION!

Sirs:

As most of you know, the World's Science Fiction Convention is going to be held in Denver, Colorado, July 4th, 5th, and 6th, sponsored by the Colorado Fantasy Society. The Convention Committee fervently hopes that all readers and fans of



science fiction will make this convention if possible. Following is the last minute pertinent information pertaining to this gala event of science and fantasy fiction:

It will be held at Denver's fashionable hotel, the Shirley-Savoy, in the Colorado and Centennial Rooms. The rates of this hotel are extremely reasonable, more reasonable in fact than any of the other larger hotels in town including the YW and YMCA, and we'd appreciate it if all of you that will, room here, for if a hundred delegates put up here we will be able to get the hall free, and consequently have more funds for elaborate preparations and entertainment.

All fans who write ahead will be met at the bus station or depot and driven to the hotel. If your arrival is unheralded you may get in touch with us by calling CHerry 1067 (Roy Hunt). The opening session will begin promptly at 9 A. M., Friday the 4th. The program has not as yet been worked out in too fine a detail before this goes to press, but we are more or less certain of the following:

Friday morning from 9 to 12 will be an informal gathering where old acquaintances are renewed, new ones made, and autographs exchanged. Here you will meet many of the editors, authors, and fans that you have seen in the various science and fantasy magazines, and above all, Denvention's honor guest, Robert A. Heinlein. Editors

Palmer, Tremaine, Weisinger, Pohl, Wollheim, and Lowndes are expected. Mr. Tremaine, incidentally, is offering a \$25 cash award to the fan who overcomes the greatest obstacles in making the Denvention. Authors E. E. Smith, Robert Heinlein, Willard E. Hawkins, D. B. Thompson, A. E. Van Vogt, Ross Rocklynne, A. G. Birch, Ralph Milne Farley, R. R. Winterbotham, S. D. Gottesman, Charles Tanner, and many others are expected. Such famous fans as Ackerman, Tucker, Madle, Widner, Morojo, Freehafer, Reinsberg, Sbroyer, Dikty, Gilbert, Korshak, Bronson, Wright, Fortier, Tullis, Yerke, Knight and countless others from all parts of the continent will be present.

In the afternoon there will be speeches pertaining to various phases of fantasy by leading science fictionists. That evening there will be the traditional costume party where everyone that can, dresses as some science fictional character. Punch, beer, and wine will be free, and after the party the equally traditional auction will be held, Korshak presiding, where the delegates may buy the original cover paintings and interior illustrations of your favorite fantasy artists, and numerous other collectors' items to grace your den and collection.

Saturday (5th) will be a meeting of the Colorado Fantasy Society limited to members only. Incidentally, all of you fans and readers, whether you plan to attend or not, and who wish to further

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the cause of science and fantasy fiction should send us your fifty cents membership fee, for which you will receive a beautiful modernistic membership card, a number of booster stickers for your letters, and the official CFS publication, The CFS Review.

The afternoon will be an open business meeting of fandom discussing various problems paramount to fans, such as where the next convention will be held. The rest of the program is not yet decided upon, although within the realm of possibility is a comical science fiction play written and produced by the pro science fiction author, Willard E. Hawkins, and a feature length scientific movie, if possible either H. Rider Haggard's SHE or Jules Verne's THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND. Sunday evening the Denvention will officially terminate with a banquet in honor of Robert A. Heinlein.

Anyone requiring further information should contact Lew Martin at 1258 Race Street, Denver. Memberships may also be sent to this address in either cash or money orders. No checks or stamps, please.

Let's all pull together and make this, the Denvention, the most successful convention ever, and one to be remembered far into the future.

The Denvention Committee,  
Olon F. Wiggins,  
Lew Martin,  
Roy Hunt,  
Denver, Colo.

MR. X

Sirs:

I have not been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES or AMAZING STORIES for a very long time, but I have been reading them long enough to form my opinion about the different types of stories. From the picture on the cover of the January issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES I thought that this was going to be a colossal story, but after I had read it I changed my mind. It was not bad, but it could have been a lot better. (By the way, I forgot to mention the name of the story, "The Floating Robot.") The cover of this FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was very good; one of the best I have seen.

The best stories in this issue are "The Golden Amazon Returns" and "The Horse that Talked." "Dr. Kelton, Body Snatcher" was quite good, but ended too abruptly. As to "The Vanishing Witness": a little too impossible. If the Dynamouse had eaten the cheese with that high explosive, how is it that it didn't go off while chewing it? And as far as I know, explosives are poisons and would have killed the mouse. Again why would the prof. leave this deadly explosive lay around carelessly where it could easily get knocked off by himself or by Mr. Hoskins, the reporter?

Mr. X,  
Cargill Ave.,  
Half-Way-Tree P. O.,  
St. Andrew, Jamaica.

*Explosives are poisons, Mr. X, but U-235 is not an explosive. It is an isotope of Uranium. Its*

atomic power can be released under the right conditions. As for being careless, a lot of people are!—Ed.

**O'BRIEN'S REPUTATION SAVED!**

Sirs:

Although I am not a regular reader of your magazine, I happened to be glancing through the pages of your May issue when I chanced upon some correspondence on the "Reader's Page" which caused much amusement on my part. It seems that a deluded gentleman from Seattle, Washington by the name of Frank Cook has accused the noble author of "The Floating Robot" of certain inaccuracies concerning radio hams in his story. Mr. Cook seems to be under the impression that a "ham" operating his station under the influence is an exceedingly rare if not a non-existent occurrence. I beg to differ with Mr. Cook in this assumption, and wish to state further that if he ever happens to be in this part of the country he may drop in and pay me a visit, during which I will give him a demonstration of this procedure. As for the profanity situation, I can only suggest that Mr. Cook do more listening on the twenty meter phone and c.w. bands and perhaps he will change his opinion.

I hope that this communication has helped in the clearing of the author's name, and has also helped to straighten out a few ideas in certain peoples' minds.

Dick Dunham,  
WILCA,  
Bass River, Mass.

*Thanks, Dick, for admitting that "hams" are human too! And maybe we'll do a little listening for you ourselves. Only one caution: if you hear any funny noises, turn off your set. There might be another floating robot around! They're wuss'n pink elephants!—Ed.*

**OW!!!**

Sirs:

In regard to March, 1941 issue, I might say that a more morbid collection of tripe has never been my displeasure to read before. In matters pertaining to illustration and material, the less said the better.

I must, however, since this is another one of those fool letters that readers write every now and then and nobody pays any attention to, say something about the contents of this month's issue.

To begin—for heaven's sake, why do you have to dig up artists that make cartoon sketches and call them drawings? The illustrations for *Slaves of the Fish Men*—which was incidentally one of the cheapest examples of the blood and brawn type of adventure story sneaking into the pages of a sf mag I've ever seen—were so disgusting I covered one side of the page with one hand while reading the tripe on the other side.

Some people call Mr. Burroughs an excellent sf writer. I think Mr. Burroughs writes good



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fiction, insofar as adventure is concerned. But his sf is, to say the least, lousy!

In fact, the whole issue was filled with detective and gripping horror tales. Recommended for the ash can, (1) *Death Walks in Washington* (it ought to keep right on walking), (2) *Secret of the Stone Doll* (which could go in the now defunct *South Sea Stories*). There were two good stories that might be passable—*Beyond the Time Door*, and *Adopted Son of the Stars*. As a whole, this issue was a flop!

Arnold Kolner,  
8810 West Gray,  
Houston, Texas.

P. S. Dump *Twenty-Fifth Century Sherlock* in the ash can too.

*It is with some trepidation that we lift our head out of the bomb shelter and meekly say: "but you read the page over which you weren't holding your hand." We figure you for a pal, because of that. Keep on reading us. Maybe we'll surprise you.—Ed.*

### "EXACT" COPY?

Sirs:

Well, imagine that, you didn't cut out much (too much) of my last letter; I am amazed! ! ! Could it be that the old man is going soft on us?

If that shadow on the cover resembled anything remotely related to a Tyrannosaurus rex, I'll eat it (the Tyrannosaurus rex, of course). It looked more like a goat—and it got mine.

So F.A. is going monthly, huh? That's fine, but when is it going weekly? And trimmed edges? And slick paper?

For once the feature story took first place which it hasn't done for a h— of a while. "Three Eyes in the Dark" was a fine story in its class, but it was outclassed . . . Wilcox would do better if he stuck to science. "The Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek" cannot be rated because it was almost an exact copy of a story appearing in another mag several months ago. "Moons of Death" was a fair story, but get Bond back . . . and Wellman. The ending of "The Man Who Murdered Himself" was too obvious, you made it even more so by telling us all about it on the contents page. "The Machine from the Past" and "Mr. Duffy's Other Life" were pretty good; you are publishing too many of this type though, one every two months will be enough from now on. . .

What! No cartoons? 'Smatter, use up your supply in Amazing's Anniversary Issue?

Why wasn't "If the Sun Turned Green" listed in the contents?

Get more than one in "Introducing the Author" by having them cut down on the gas and give us the bare facts.

You print the interesting letters. Wait a minute! ! ! You're all wrong—you print mine. . .

Wallace E. Buchholz,  
330 Spaulding Ave.,  
Ripon, Wis.

*We read the story you mention, and all it had*

in common with McGivern's fine yarn was "will power." As for being unable to rate it, we disagree. We read it a half-dozen times in the process of putting the magazine together, and we liked it better each time. In short, it was an excellent yarn, and you are the only reader so far to disagree, if you do! The cartoon in the last issue was yanked to supply space to announce our going monthly. It was a last minute decision, and the only place we could put it. As for the author department, our readers like to know all they can about the author. More than one a month, and we'd soon be stymied for material.—Ed.

ANOTHER "THINKER OUT LOUD"

Sirs:

In answer to your editorial in the March issue. YOU are a very definite personality. A charming one. I think the phrase "a swell guy" serves very neatly. Nothing "stiff" or "stilted" nor do you talk down to your readers as if you thought them all children. You could edit a country weekly and build a good circulation. You are at your best when you just think out loud . . . a la Odd McIntyre. (I am STILL wondering about those 116 dog pictures!!!)

As to love. Many very young readers protest loudly against the love element in stories. They are really arguing with themselves. After all, Rap, don't YOU remember being "off women for life" every so often!!!! You shouldn't take those chaps seriously. As you pointed out, human beings ACT on MOTIVES. So? WHY then would chaps write protests against love interest in stories? It irks them? H-m-m-m . . . all right. Then WHY does a love angle irk 'em? Answer is obvious. We do not even need Oscar to help us figure THAT out!

WHAT IS LOVE ANYHOW?

Some would define it as "The Biological Urge." I do NOT agree. I can love horses, dogs, cats and my old-maid aunt. There just ain't no biological urge involved.

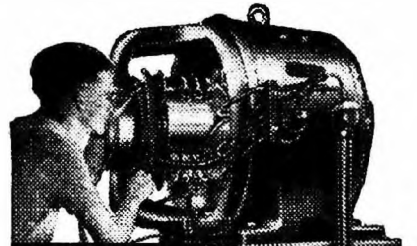
Personally I think love is a sort of sympathy, a sort of "tune" . . . like we tune a receiving set to a certain radio station. Now and then we run across some one whose thoughts and emotions strike an answering chord in our own hearts and minds, and we call that response "affection."

There is an old saying, Rap . . . "A man who falls in love with a pretty face may find a face more fair. BUT a man who loves an ugly woman is in love forever!"

And THAT brings me to Don Wilcox's story: "The Secret of the Stone Doll" That story is a literary CRIME. Wilcox builds up to a terrific climax that isn't there . . . it just goes "pfft."

Let's imagine a little twist. The chap is horrified, grief stricken, crushed. This old, old woman . . . his lovely Looma?????!!!! He still LOVES HER, old woman or not.

HE WANTS TO BE OLD ALSO! If this crazy thing can be for her, why not for him? He pours out his heart . . . and they turn back together to the cave. . . he and this feeble old white-haired



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woman. . . He . . . bent on throwing away his youth, his strength, all that the vigorous years of life can mean.

SO? The call for a BRAVE man . . . as a mate for the chosen woman of the tribe . . . fits now in our story! (In the Wilcox ending . . . it is meaningless. Just as the taboo is meaningless.)

BOTH have proven their ability to rise above things that would break most folks. BOTH have chosen dedication of self to the good of the tribe.

All the Traysomians are now their children. To love, rule, guide . . . and end up with 'em kneeling very solemn, reverent and happy . . . facing the setting sun or sumpin'.

Then the story makes sense. Fantastic sense, but a kind of sense. As Wilcox ended the story it is as unpalatable as a warmed over fried egg. Forgive me, Rap, but THAT comes right back to land in YOUR lap. YOU should not have accepted that anticlimax of an ending Wilcox gave you.

The other stories? "Slaves of the Fish Men" was a typical E.R.B. blood 'n' thunder yarn. Quite acceptable. The others were POT BOILERS. I also like Oscar, but just the same he turned up in a pot boiler this time. You say yourself: "James Norman rushed him into new adventures." Quite so. RUSHED is the word!

Don't let all the criticism get you down. I wouldn't buy the mag if I didn't like it and enjoy the stuff you dig up. Nor would I be so critical if you didn't publish some swell yarns. So I get critical when others fail to hit the same plane.

George A. Foster,  
P. O. Box 188,  
Stoughton, Mass.

P. S. Was amused to note in editor's notation anent Carson of Venus that you said Venus was "barely a sleeper jump in the vast reaches of infinite space." H-m-m-m . . . ya sound like our mutual friend, Pahjois Tuuli. YOU don't happen to hail from Uranus also do you? ! ! !

*What an argument you'd have on your hands among an authors' group! Any story can be written a hundred ways. Your way is just another way. Editorially, we say it's good, but just a bit on the sentimental side. As for being from Uranus, maybe we are!—Ed.*

## A SUGGESTION

Sirs:

Would it entail too much expense to publish all of Burroughs's early novels one at a time, in magazine form?

Many readers of Fantasy, who up until now have not been able to get them, would like to have the entire works of E. R. Burroughs, the Prince of Fictioneers, in their collection. I am sure an idea of this sort would meet with the approval of many.

In complimenting the recent issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, let me say that it is still the same old mag. Better than ever if that is possible.

The Burroughs novel was, of course, first.

Keep St. John.

Secret of the Stone Doll came in second.

Third: Beyond The Time Door.

Fourth: Adopted Son of the Stars.

Fifth: The Thought Robot.

Sixth: Death Walks in Washington.

Seventh: I DON'T LIKE SPACE SHIPS, so not having read this story, I can't pass an opinion.

Jay Jackson is swell and gives St. John a close race for the title of THE BEST INTERIOR ILLUSTRATOR of the time.

Vaughan Ralf Heiner,  
225 Second St.,  
California, Pa.

Republishing all of the Burroughs works would be a colossal task. And we believe the readers would rather have new works by Burroughs than reprints. After all, his books can be purchased in any bookstore—Ed.

**INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR**

(Concluded from page 135)

Leaving Mr. Edison's employ, Cummings began writing scientific fiction for many magazines. His stories gripped the popular imagination and they "clicked." Mr. Cummings' success as a writer has been meteoric. In a few years he became one of the world's most popular authors of science fiction.

Perhaps one of his most popular books was "Tarrano, The Conqueror," published as a \$2.00 edition.

Ray Cummings was the inventor of the type of story known as the "atom world" stories, in which imaginative journeys into the infinitely small, or the infinitely large were accomplished. It is perhaps this type of story which has given him most of his reputation.

When Mr. Cummings asked us what we wanted for AMAZING STORIES, we told him to hark back to the stories he used to spin in the days when he did his best work. Which was a good bit of advice, because not only did Mr. Cummings give us stories like his old masterpieces, but he actually outdid himself and created new ones.

If you don't like "Onslaught of the Druid Girls" in this issue, you are going to be mighty lonely!

We present here the bit of poetry penned by Ray Cummings' daughter in honor of this unusual biography, which might have been titled: "Ray Cummings, the Story Of His Daughter!"

But then, he's proud of her—and we are proud of them both!

**MOONLIGHT**

We sat together there, as twilight fell,  
And watched the truant sun slip fast away  
From out the rippling river's dancing spray;  
The chimes of some great temple tolled a knell  
Of mournfulness for this, the death of day.  
And then bright beams of silver, to array  
The laughing waves, appeared to cast a spell  
Upon the earth. He spoke . . . but of the way  
The Nebular Hypothesis could tell  
Me all I wished to know of whirling gas,  
And that concerning heat in molten mass.  
I listened, yet to me, the moon throughout the while  
Was but a ray of joy to light a lover's smile.  
—Elizabeth Starr.

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30x6.00-19	2.45		
30x6.00-18	2.45		
30x6.00-17	2.40		
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## QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 136)

### MANIPULATIONS IN MATH

Ans: there is only one solution to this, others being only reversals of the first.

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

### STAR GAZING

(a) Brahe, Hevelius, Maskelyne, Herschel, Gould, Darwin. (b) Arabians. (c) Copernicus. (d) Alvan Clark.

### ARMCHAIR ARCHAEOLOGISTS

(a) Phoenician. (b) Arabic. (c) Gaelic. (d) Russian. (e) Greek.

### WHO AM I?

(a) Robert W. Bunsen, creator of the "Bunsen Burner." (b) Luther Burbank.

### YOUR KEN OF CHEM

(a) Egyptians. (b) O, FeSO<sub>4</sub>, Pb, Mn, Si.

## CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Marianne Ferguson, 20 So. Buffon St., Worcester, Mass., would like to correspond with anyone in their twenties interested in science, movies, stamps, etc. . . . Langley Searles, 19 E. 235th St., N.Y.C., has SF and fantasy books for sale. . . Stanley Crandon, 656 W. 162nd St., N.Y.C., wishes to sell books by Burroughs and Claudy, at moderate prices; write for list. . . Herbert Van D'Elden, U.S.N., Box 7, "U.S.S. Texas," % Postmaster, N.Y.C., has been living out of the U.S. for several years and wishes to correspond with intelligent girls interested in classical music and sciences. . . M. Schwartz, 1793 Prospect Pl., Brooklyn, N.Y., would like pen pals from everywhere; will reply promptly. . . Michael Arthur Torro, 25 Wall St., Cranford, N.J., wants correspondents of any country interested in sports, science, stamps, photography and radio. . . C. E. Gallagher, General Delivery, Keddie, Calif., is anxious to buy John Taine's "The Gold Tooth," "Green Fire," "The Purple Sapphire," and back numbers of AMAZING STORIES; will pay well. . . Edmund Vincent Cowdry, Jr., 121 1901 Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., would like to correspond with young ladies (17-20) who are interested in SF and traveling; college girls preferred. . . Thomas "Tommy" E. Townsend, 1524 W. 28th St., Little Rock, Ark., would like to contact those in the metropolitan area of Greater Little Rock with intentions of forming a fan club; call 4-3856. . . Jack L. Thompson, 16 yrs., 118½ N. Main St., Apt. 4, Mishawaka, Ind., wants pen pals anywhere. . . Albion E. Dossie, 4 Glentake Ave., Toronto 9 Canada, would like to receive copies of AMAZING STORIES after February '41; war conditions prevent his obtaining them any other way. . . R. K. Paris, 318 Springlake Ave., Madisonville, Ky., wants April and October '39 issues of AMAZING STORIES. . . Reed Frederick, 298 W. Franklin St., Ephrata, Pa., would like correspondents around 17 yrs. . . Prof. Chester Hoey, 301 6th Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., wants correspondents. . . Richard Gookins, 2605 State St., Salem, Ore., wishes feminine pen pals (17-22); will reply to all communications. . . Dell Andrews, 29 yrs., 41 Retta Ave., New Miami, Hamilton, Ohio, would like to discuss by mail subjects on airplanes as well as science. . . Marvin Gold- enberg, 1382 Goodfellow, St. Louis, Mo., wishes pen pals of 14 yrs.; will reply to all letters. . . Edward Gonia, 2475 S. Austin St., Milwaukee, Wis., 16¾ yrs., wants male correspondents not interested in stamp collecting, astronomy, chemistry or physics. . . M. Kritzberg, 4748 N. Crawford, Chicago, Ill., has hundreds of AMAZING STORIES and other SF magazines; postcard will bring free list. . .

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# **Fantastic**

## **ADVENTURES**

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 3  
NO. 5

### *Contents for July, 1941*

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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John & H. W. McCauley featuring "Goddess of Fire" and the Mec Girl

Illustrations by J. Allen St. John; Robert Fuqua; Margaritan; Julian S. Krupa; Jay Jackson; Rod Ruth. Cartoons by Wofford; R. Newman

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FANTASTIC  
ADVENTURES  
July, 1941

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VOLUME 3,  
Number 5

# The Memory of an Atom



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--and THE PURPOSE OF  
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# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ONE of our readers suggested that our artists collaborate on a cover. Well, that's exactly what was done on this month's cover, illustrating "Goddess of Fire," Edgar Rice Burroughs' latest "Carson of Venus" yarn.

The cover itself was painted by J. Allen St. John, and then the now famous Mac Girl was added to it by the popular H. W. McCauley. The result, in the opinion of your editors, is as lovely a cover as the fantasy field has ever seen. We know you'll like it. As for ourselves, we will frame this one and hang it in our office for the admiration of future visitors. If you ever drop in, you'll see it there, which is by way of an invitation. If vacation brings you into Chicago, drop in on us!

THERE'S a bit of a story behind this issue of *Fantastic Adventures*. It has to do with Edgar Rice Burroughs and Ralph Milne Farley. They both appear with stories. And that's where the story inside a story comes in!

Long ago, working without knowledge of each other, these two writers wrote a story about an "inner world" inside the Earth. Both of those manuscripts reached the desk of the editor of a weird magazine on the same day.

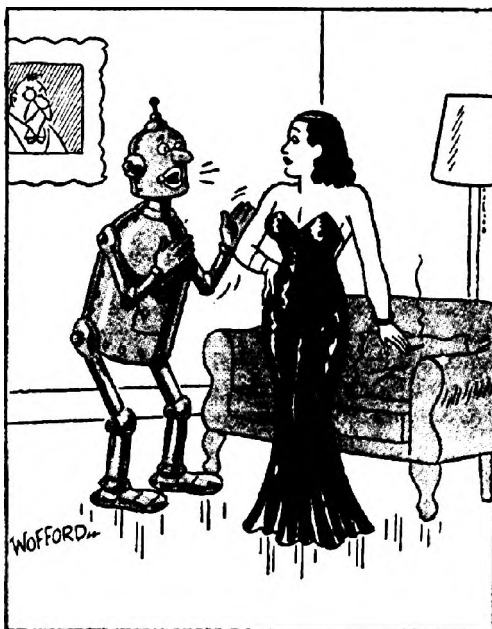
That editor couldn't buy either of the stories, but he recommended another market to both. The final result was publication of both stories by that other market, but *six years apart!* And it was Burroughs who beat Farley to the punch, by a quirk of fate.

So you see what strange consequences can come of a mere coincidence. Burroughs, because he had first publication, wrote a series of inner world stories. If Farley had been first, the series would have been his.

Which reminds us that a new series of Pellucidar stories will appear in *Amazing Stories*, our com-

panion magazine beginning with the December issue—which is a long way to forecast, but then, Burroughs is worth waiting for!

WE introduce to our pages this month a new writer to fantasy fiction. He is Robert Leslie Bellem, who is not unknown in the writing world, having penned some of the finest south-sea, adventure, and detective fiction that has appeared in recent years. We know that his addition to our little family will bring some very fine stories to you in the near future. Just keep your eye peeled for his name. It means "here's a good story!" Incidentally, his autobiography is on page 136 of this issue.



"How can you be so indifferent, Branda?  
It's more than metal and oil can stand."

REMEMBER Nat Schachner? You ought to, because he was one of the names that popularized fantasy fiction from its early days. He's quite a big-shot writer these days, but he's come back to fantasy with a swell novel, complete in one issue, in the August issue of *Fantastic Adventures*. It's "The Return of Circe" and it's 30,000 words of the finest story you ever read, we guarantee it. Also, it is featured by a new Mac Girl cover by you know who! Which is reason enough to be on the dot when the issue hits the stands on June 21! Don't say we didn't tell you about it! It's a "must" story if there ever was one.

BUT maybe the big news of the August issue is a new contest, the finest we've ever run. It is based around a story called "Problem On Mars" by Duncan Farnsworth . . . and wow, is it a problem! It'll make you pounce on your pencil and scratchpad and dope out a way to nail \$50.00 in easy money! By all means, get in on this one—it's the berries! No complicated letter to write, no story to finish. Just answer one simple question!

(Concluded on page 124)

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These warriors fought with spears—more deadly than I had imagined.

# GODDESS OF FIRE

*by Edgar Rice Burroughs*

**How could this Venus girl, so beautiful other women seemed as beasts, remember Brooklyn? She could never have seen or known it—and yet. . .**

**S**AFE!" breathed Duare. "Safe at last!" She nestled closer to me in the seat of the little plane as we hurtled along through the Venusian sky lanes beneath the eternal cloud blankets.

Safe! That word has its nuances. Safety is relative. In relation to her immediate past, Duare was quite safe; but we were still thousands of miles from Korva, with only a very hazy idea of the direction of our goal.

We had enough concentrated fuel to fly the ship for, probably, some fifty years; but we would have to make occasional landings for food and water, and it seemed as though every time we landed something terrible happened to us.

But that is Venus. If you had a forced landing in Kansas or Maine or Oregon, the only thing you'd have to worry about would be the landing; but when you set a ship down in Venus, you never know what you're going to run up against.

It might be kloonobargan, the hairy, man-eating savages; or a tharban, that most frightful of lion-like carnivores; or a basto, a huge, omnivorous beast that bears some slight resemblance to the American bison; or, perhaps worst of all, ordinary human beings like your-

self, but with a low evaluation of life—that is, your life.

But I was not so much troubled by consideration of these possibilities as I was of the fate of Kandar and Artol. They were splendid fellows, and I hated to think of their having to remain slaves in Mypos.

Duare had evidently been watching my face, for she said:

"What is troubling you, Carson? You look worried."

"I was thinking of Kandar and Artol," I replied. "We had hoped to escape together."

"Who is Artol?" she asked. "I do not recall a slave by that name."

"I met him after I was taken to Tyros' palace," I explained. "He was a warrior in the body guard of Jantor, jong of Japal—Kandar's father, you know."

"We should help them to escape, if we can," said Duare.

"I can't risk your safety again," I said.

"They are your friends," she said. "We cannot abandon them without making an effort to save them." That was like Duare.

"Well," I said, "we might fly over the city and see what can be done about it. I have a plan. Perhaps it will work,



and perhaps it won't. That will depend more upon Kandar and Artol than on us. Take the controls a minute."

As she flew the ship, circling back toward Mypos,\* I found writing materials in one of the storage compartments; and wrote a note to Kandar. I showed it to Duare, and after she had read it, she nodded her approval.

"We can do our part easily enough," she said; "I hope they can do theirs."

I tied the note to a spare bolt, and took the controls. We were now about a thousand feet above Mypos, and I started a wide spiral down toward the city, aiming at Tyros' palace.

As we got closer, I could see people staring up at us from the streets and from the palace grounds; and I could see others scurrying for safety. Of course none of them had ever seen an aeroplane before, for our anotar is the only one in Venus—as far as I know;

at least none of them had seen one except the Mypos warriors who had captured us. Of course they had told every one about it, but nobody believed them.

I HEADED for the slave compound in the palace grounds, flying very low and looking for Kandar or Artol. At last I recognized them both; they were standing together, looking up at us. Although I had told Kandar all about the anotar, he looked now as though he couldn't even believe his eyes.

As I circled again, some of Tyros' warriors ran into the compound and commenced to hurl spears at us—the three pronged tridents with which they are armed. As far as we were concerned they were quite harmless; but they fell back among themselves; and after one impaled a warrior, they desisted.

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\* Permanently etched on the golden plates of memory is my first meeting with Carson Napier. He had come to my office at Tarzana to enlist my co-operation in recording his projected voyage to Mars in the giant rocket ship he had built on Guadalupe Island off the west coast of Lower California.

He told me briefly something of his background. I believe that I can almost recall his exact words. They will explain how it has been possible for him to narrate his remarkable adventures to me.

"To get the whole picture clearly before you," he commenced, "I shall have to tell you something about myself. My father was a British army officer, my mother an American girl from Virginia. I was born in India while my father was stationed there, and brought up under the tutorage of an old Hindu who was much attached to my father and mother. This Chand Kabi was something of a mystic, and he taught me many things that are not in the curriculums of schools for boys under ten.

"Among these things was telepathy, which he had cultivated to such a degree that he could converse with one in psychological harmony with him quite as easily at great distances as when face to face. Not only that, but he could project mental images to great distances, so that the recipient of his thought waves could see what Chand Kabi was seeing, or whatever else Chand Kabi wished him to see. These things he taught me."

Having discovered by an ingenious test that

my mind was attuned to his, Carson Napier asked me to receive and record the story of his flight to Mars and his adventures on the Red Planet.

His failure to reach Mars and his landing on Venus instead, through an amazing miscalculation, are matters of history now, as are his many adventures on the Shepherd Star.

You have read of his winning of Duare, the sacrosanct daughter of a king; of his adoption by Taman, Jong of Korva; of his rescue of Duare from the clutches of her father; and of how, as they were attempting to return to Korva in the aeroplane Carson had built, the Sun had burst through the two cloud envelopes which surround Venus and the ensuing storm had carried them thousands of miles into a strange country.

Here in Mypos, they had become prisoners and slaves of Tyros, the jong, ruler of a race of web-footed humans, the gilled heads of whom resembled the heads of fishes. (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, March, 1941; "Slaves of the Fish Men.")

While in Mypos, Carson had formed friendships with two other slaves, citizens of Japal, a nearby country: Kandar, son of the jong of Japal, and Artol, a common warrior from the same country.

Barely escaping with their lives from the palace of Tyros, Carson and Duare found their plane safe in the shelter of a wood where they had had to abandon it when they were captured; and it was with feelings of immeasurable relief that they took off and soared above the strange landscape that is typical of Venus.—E.R.B.



I didn't want the warriors in the compound; because I didn't wish them to see me drop the note to Kandar. But how to get rid of them? Finally I hit upon a plan. The only trouble was that it might chase Kandar out of the compound, too; but I could only try it.

I zoomed to a thousand feet, and then banked and dove for the compound. You should have seen slaves and warriors scurry for safety! But Kandar and Artol never moved from their tracks. If the compound had only been a little longer and there had been no pool in it, I could have landed and taken off again with Kandar and Artol before the terrified warriors could have been aware of what I was doing.

Duare gave a little gasp as I flattened out and just missed the cornice of one of the palace buildings by a hair; then I banked again and came back. This time I dropped the note at Kandar's feet; then I rose and circled back low over the compound. I saw Kandar pick up the note and read it. Immediately he raised his left hand above his head. That was the signal I had written him to give if he would make the attempt to escape that I had suggested. Before I flew away, I saw him destroy the note.

I rose high and went inland. I wanted the Myposans to think that we had gone away for good. After we were out of sight of the city, I turned north and gradually circled back toward the lake on which Mypos is situated. Still well out of sight of the city I found a secluded cove, and made a landing a short distance off shore. Here we waited until after dark.

It was very peaceful on the waters of that little cove. We were not even threatened by any of the fearsome creatures which swarm the lakes and seas of Venus. In fact, none came near us. Our only discomfort was hunger. We could see fruits and nuts and berries

growing on shore, but we could also see kloonobargan watching us from behind trees and bushes. Fortunately, we were on a fresh-water lake; so we did not suffer from thirst; and we were so happy to be together again and so contented to be temporarily safe that we did not notice the lack of food particularly.

After dark\*, we took off again, heading for Mypos. The motor of our anotar is noiseless; so I didn't anticipate being discovered. I took to the water about a mile above the city and taxied slowly toward it, avoiding the galleys anchored in the roadstead off the city.

WE came at last to a point about a hundred yards off the palace, and here we waited. The night dragged on. We could see the ghostly shapes of ships out beyond us, with here and there a light on them. We could hear the sounds of men's voices on ship and on shore, and on shore there were many lights.

"I am afraid they have failed," I said.

"I am afraid so," replied Duare, "but we must not leave before daylight. They might come yet."

Presently I heard shouts on shore, and very dimly I saw a boat put off. Then a torch was lighted in it, and I could see that the boat was full of warriors. The boat was not coming directly toward us, but was quartering. I could hear men shouting from the shore: "Not that way! Straight out!"

"They must have escaped," said Duare. "Those men are searching for them."

"And they're coming our way now,"

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\*Venus has no moon, and no stars are visible through her solid cloud blankets. Only a mysterious, eerie light relieves the gloom of the nights; so that they are not utterly black. One can see faintly for a short distance.—Ed.

I said, for the boat had changed its course, following the directions from shore.

I searched the surface of the water for some sign of Kandar and Artol, but I could not see them. The boat was coming straight for us, but not rapidly. Evidently they were moving cautiously so as not to overlook the fugitives in the darkness.

Presently I heard a low whistle—the prearranged signal. It seemed to come from off our port bow. The ship was lying with its nose toward the shore, and the boat-load of warriors was approaching from slightly to starboard.

I answered the signal and started the motor. We moved slowly in the direction from which that low whistle had come. Still I saw no sign of Kandar or Artol.

Some one in the approaching boat shouted, "There they are!" and at the same time I saw two heads break the water a few yards from us. Now I know why I had not seen them: they had been swimming beneath the surface to avoid discovery, coming up to signal and then going under again when they heard the answer. Now they were swimming strongly toward us; but the boat was approaching rapidly, twenty paddles sending it skimming across the water. It looked as though it would reach us about the same time that Kandar and Artol did.

I shouted to them: "As I pass you, grab the side of the ship and hang on! I'm going to tow you out until we're away from that boat far enough to stop and get you on board."

"Come on!" cried Kandar; "we're ready."

I opened the throttle a little and bore down on them. The Myposans were very close. They must have been surprised to see the anotar on the water, but they kept on coming. A man in the

bow raised his trident and called on us to stop.

"Take the controls, Duare," I said. She knew what to do. Duare always does. For a girl who had led the cloistered life she had in the palace of her father before I came along, she is a marvel of efficiency and initiative.

I turned and faced the boat just as the fellow in the bow cast his trident. It was a close shave for us: the weapon whizzed between Duare's head and mine. Two other warriors had risen and were poising their tridents; then I let them have it. The hum of my r-ray pistol sounded no warning to them, but almost simultaneously three Myposan warriors crumpled and fell—two of them over the side of the boat into the lake.

Kandar and Artol had seized the side of the ship, and Duare had given her more throttle. Two more tridents were hurled, but this time they fell short. We were pulling away rapidly, when Duare saw another boatload of warriors ahead of us. The boat had evidently been lowered from one of the ships in the roadstead.

Thinking quickly, Duare throttled down.

"Climb aboard!" she cried to the two men, and they lost no time in obeying her; then she opened the throttle wide and bore straight down on the second boat. I heard the frightened cries of its crew and saw the frantic efforts they were making to get out of our way; as Duare pulled up the anotar's nose and we rose gracefully into the air above them.

"Nice work!" I said.

"Beautiful!" said Kandar.

**A**RTOL was speechless for a moment. It was his first flight. This was the first plane he had ever seen.

"Why don't we fall?" he said.

Kandar was thrilled. He had heard me talk about the anotar, but I imagine that he had taken all that I said with a grain of salt. Now he could scarcely believe the testimony of his own senses.

I was planning to return Kandar and Artol to Japal, where Kandar's father, Jantor, was jong. It lies at the upper end of the Lake of Japal, about five hundred miles from Mypos; and as we didn't wish to arrive there before dawn, I determined to make a landing and ride the night out on the surface.

There was no wind, and the surface of the lake was like glass; so we made an easy landing and prepared to lie there until morning. We settled ourselves comfortably in the two cockpits, content to wait out the night.

I asked Kandar if they had much difficulty in making their escape.

"It was not easy," he said. "As you know, the outlet from the slaves' pool to the lake is too small to permit the passage of even a small man; so we had to find some way to reach one of the palace pools.

"After you killed Tyros, things were in a chaotic condition. Skabra, his wife, proclaimed herself sole ruler; but she is so generally hated that several factions sprang up, insisting that their particular candidate be made jong. There were so many of them that they have, at least temporarily, defeated their own purpose; and Skabra rules; but the discipline of the palace guards has been undermined. Naturally, they want to favor him who may be next jong; and, as they are hoping that it won't be Skabra, they are not very loyal to her. They spend most of their time holding secret meetings and scheming; so the interior palace guard is extremely lax.

"Artol and I decided to take advantage of this; and we also decided upon a bold move. We knew that the

royal pool connected with the lake; that much we were positive of; so we agreed that the royal pool was the one we would use.

"The slaves' compound is usually heavily guarded, but tonight was the exception. Only one warrior stood at the gate that leads into the palace grounds. We had no weapons, not even the wooden swords with which we are furnished when we guard the royal pool. We had nothing but our bare hands."

"And a tremendous desire to escape," added Artol.

"Yes," admitted Kandar, "that was our most powerful weapon—the will to escape. Well, we worked our way around to the guard, a great bearded fellow, who had always been extremely cruel to all of us slaves."

"That made it easier," said Artol.

"Whatever the cause, it was not difficult for Artol," said Kandar, grinning. "When we approached close to him, the guard asked what we were doing in that part of the compound, and ordered us back to our shelters; and he supplemented the order with a poke of his trident. That was what we had expected and hoped for. I seized the trident, and Artol leaped on the fellow and got him by the throat.

"You have no idea how powerful Artol is, or how quick. The guard didn't have time to cry out before his wind was shut off; and then he was down on his back with Artol on top of him, choking the life out of him; and I had the trident. I knew what to do with it, too.

"We took his sword as well as his trident; and, leaving his body where it lay, walked out into the palace grounds. This portion of them is not well lighted, and we came to the wall surrounding the royal pool without being discovered. Here was another guard. He proved a much simpler obstacle to overcome; because now we had a sword and a trident.

"Leaving his corpse resting peacefully on the ground, we entered the enclosure wherein lies the royal pool. This was well lighted, and there were several people loitering on the other side of garden. As we approached the pool, one of them came toward us. It was Plin."

"The fellow-slave who turned traitor and stole my pistol," I explained to Duare.

"Oh, by the way, how did you get it back?" asked Kandar.

"Plin threw it into the royal pool," I replied; "and when I dove in after Tyros and Duare, I found it lying at the bottom—but go on, what happened then?"

"Well," continued Kandar, "Plin screamed for the guard. We didn't wait any longer then; we both dived into the pool, hoping we could find the corridor leading to the lake and not drown before we could swim through it."

"And we barely made it," said Artol. "I think I did drown a couple of times before my head finally broke the surface. As it was I was practically unconscious, and if Kandar hadn't helped me up for a couple of minutes, I'd have a been a goner."

"So that's how the search started for you so quickly," I said; "it was Plin."

Kandar nodded. "Yes," he said, "and my only regret at leaving Mypos is that I shall now not be able to kill Plin."

"I can take you back," I said.

Kandar grinned. "No thanks," he said; "I am not that mad at anybody. Then, too, having such a friend as you outweighs Plin and all my other enemies. I shall not try to thank you for what you and Duare have done for us—not in words. There are none adequate to express my gratitude."

"I am only a common warrior," said Artol, "and know but few words; but, after my jong, you have all my loyalty."

## CHAPTER II

### The Timals

AS dawn approached, we took off and headed up the lake toward Japal. Kandar thought that we had better set the ship down outside the city, when he and Artol could go to one of the gates and make themselves known.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that if they saw this thing flying low over the city, they might fire on it."

"With what?" I asked. "I thought you told me that you had no fire arms."

"We haven't," he replied, "but we have engines that throw rocks or lighted torches for hundreds of feet into the air. They are upon the walls of the city and the decks of the ships anchored off shore. If one hit your propeller, you would be brought down."

"We shall land outside the city," I said, and this we did.

Japal is a very much better looking city than Mypos, and larger. There is a level plain stretching inland from it, and on this plain we landed about a hundred yards from one of the city gates. We could see the consternation our appearance caused the guard at the gate. Several warriors who had been standing outside, rushed in and slammed the gates closed. Others jammed the barbican, pointing and gesticulating.

Kandar and Artol dropped to the ground and walked toward the gate. Presently we could see them talking to the men in the barbican; then they turned and started back toward us. Immediately afterward the gates

opened and several warriors rushed out; then Kandar and Artol commenced to run, the warriors pursuing them.

I realized that something was radically wrong. The crown prince of a country doesn't run away from his country's soldiers unless there *is* something radically wrong. I saw that the warriors were going to overtake Kandar and Artol before they could board the anotar, or at least bring them down with the spears they carried.

Of course I didn't know what the trouble was, but I saw that Kandar and Artol seemed to be in plenty. I had commenced to feel responsible for them. I think we always feel responsible for our friends. I know I do. So I decided to do something about it. My best weapon, under the circumstances, was the anotar. I gave her the gun and started toward the running men, and then I lifted her off the ground a little—just enough to clear Kandar's and Artol's heads—and dove straight for the warriors. I hadn't retracted my landing gear, and it and the pontoons simply mowed 'em down; then I rose, banked, and landed close to Kandar and Artol. They clambered into the after cockpit, and we were off.

"What happened?" I asked Kandar.

"There has been a revolution, led by a fellow named Gangor," he replied. "My father escaped. That is all I know. One of the warriors at the gate told me that much. He would have told me more if one of Gangor's officers hadn't come out and tried to arrest us."

"Wasn't it Gangor who arranged for your capture by the Myposans, Artol?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Now I owe him double vengeance. I wish that I might have gotten into the city, even though I may never avenge what he did to me."

"You may some day," said Kandar.

"No," said Artol sadly; "he has but one life, and I must avenge my jong first."

"Where to now?" I asked Kandar. "We'll take you any place you'd like to go before we set out in search of Korva."

"I can think of only one place that my father may have escaped to," said Kandar. "Far back in the mountains lives a tribe of savage aborigines called Timals. My father once befriended Yat, their chief, and they are extremely loyal to him and to all other Japalinas; though they refuse to own allegiance to any sovereign other than their own savage chieftain. I should like very much to go to the Timal country and see if my father is there."

THE flight was uneventful. We passed over some wonderful game country and several mountain ranges, until we finally came to the Timal country, a high plateau surrounded by jagged peaks—a most inaccessible country and one easily defended against invasion.

Kandar pointed out a village in a canyon which opened out onto the plateau, and I dropped down and circled above it. The people stood in the single street looking up at us. They showed neither panic nor fear. There was something peculiar in their appearance, yet they seemed to be human beings. At first I couldn't make out what it was; but as we dropped lower, I saw that they had short tails and horns. They were armed with spears and knives, and some of the males were menacing us with the former when Kandar caught sight of his father and called to him.

"My brother, Doran, is here, too," Kandar told me. "He is standing beside my father."

"Ask your father if it's safe to land," I said.

He did so and received a negative answer.

"Yat says you may come into the village, but not the strangers," Jantor shouted up to us.

"But I can't come in unless we are permitted to land the anotar," said Kandar. "Tell Yat that these people are friendly. One is Artol, a former member of your Guard; the others are Carson of Venus and his mate, Duare of Vepaja. They rescued me from Gangor. Persuade Yat to let them land."

We saw Jantor turn then and speak to a large savage, but the latter kept shaking his head; then Jantor called to us again as we circled low above the village.

"Yat says that strangers are not allowed in Timal—only I and the members of my family—and he doesn't like the looks of that ship that sails in the air. He says that it is not natural and that the people who ride in it cannot be natural—they might bring misfortune to his people. I can understand how he feels, for this is the first time that I ever saw human beings flying. Are you sure this Carson of Venus and his mate are human?"

"They are just as human as you or I," said Kandar. "Tell Yat that he really ought to let the ship land so that he can examine it. No one in Amtor ever saw such a thing before."

Well, eventually Yat gave permission for us to land; and I came down close to the village and taxied up to the end of the single street. I know that those ignorant savages must have been frightened as the anotar rolled toward them, but not one of them turned a hair or moved away a step. I stopped a few yards from Jantor and Yat, and immediately we were surrounded by

bucks with couched spears. For a moment it looked serious. The Timals are a ferocious looking people. Their faces are hideously tattooed in many colors, and their horns only add to the ferocity of their appearance.

Yat strode boldly to the side of the ship and looked up at Duare and me. Jantor and Doran accompanied him. Kandar introduced us and the old Timal chief examined us most carefully. Finally he turned to Jantor.

"He is a man, even as you," he said, indicating me. "Do you wish us to be friends with him and his woman?"

"It would please me," said Jantor; "because they are the friends of my son."

Yat looked up at me.

"Do you wish to be friends of the Timals and come among us in peace?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Then you may descend from that strange creature," he said. "You may remain here as long as you wish, the friends of Yat and his people. I have spoken, and my people have heard."

**WE** climbed down, glad to stretch our legs again. The Timals gathered around, but at a respectful distance, and inspected us and the ship. They had much better manners than civilized people of the great cities of Earth, who, under like circumstances, would probably have torn our ship to pieces for souvenirs and stripped our clothes from us.

"They have received you in friendship," said Jantor, "and now you will find them kind and hospitable. They are a proud people who hold their honor most sacred. As long as you merit their friendship, they will be loyal to you; should you not merit it, they will destroy you."

"We shall try to merit it," I said.

Old Yat was tremendously interested in the anotar. He walked all around it, occasionally poking it with a finger.

"It is not alive," he remarked to Jantor, "yet it flies like a bird."

"Would you like to get in it and see how I control it?" I asked.

For reply he crawled into the forward cockpit. I got in beside him and explained the controls to him. He asked several questions, and they were all intelligent questions. I could see that, despite horns and tail, Yat was a high type of reasoning human being.

"Would you like to go up in it?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Then tell your people to move away and not to come out on this level ground until I have taken off."

He did as I asked, and I came about and taxied down the valley onto the little plain. The wind was blowing right down the canyon; so my take-off was up hill, and we were going pretty fast practically up to the village before I left the ground. We skimmed over the heads of the watching Timals, and then I banked and climbed. I glanced at Yat. He showed no sign of nervousness; but just sat there as unconcerned as a frozen goldfish, looking all around at the scenery and peeking over the side of the cockpit at the panorama of landscape below.

"How do you like it?" I asked.

"Fine," he said.

"Tell me when you want to go back to your village."

"Go there," he said, and pointed.

I flew through a pass in the mountains as he had directed. Ahead and far below stretched a broad valley.

"Go there," he said, and pointed again. "Now, lower," he directed a moment later; and presently I saw a village beneath us. "Go low above that village."

I flew low above a thatched village. Women and children screamed and ran into their huts. A few warriors stood their ground and hurled spears at us. Yat leaned far over the side as I circled back at his request. This time I heard a warrior cry:

"It is Yat, the Timal!"

Yat looked as happy as a gopher with a carrot.

"Go home now," he directed. "Those were the enemies of my people," he said, after a while. "Now they will know what a great man is Yat, the Timal."

**A**LL the Timals of Yat's village were waiting when we returned.

"I was sure glad to see you coming back," said Kandar. "These fellows were getting nervous. Some of them thought that you had stolen Yat."

Warriors gathered around their chief.

"I have seen a new world," said Yat. "Like a bird I flew over the village of the Valley People. They saw me and knew me. Now they will know what great people the Timals are."

"You flew over the village of the Valley People!" exclaimed a warrior. "Why, that is two long marches away."

"I flew very fast," said Yat.

"I should like to fly in this bird ship," said a sub-chief, and then a dozen others voiced the same wish.

"No," said Yat; "that is for chiefs only."

He had now done something that no one else in his world had ever done. It set him apart from other men. It made him even a greater chieftain than he had been before.

We learned to like these Timals very much. They were very courteous to Duare, the women especially going out of their way to be kind to her. One would never have expected it in such primitive savages.

We rested there for a few days; and then I flew Jantor, Kandar, and Doran back to Japal to reconnoiter. As the anotar does not carry more than four comfortably, I left Duare and Artol behind. I knew that she would be safe with the Timals; and, anyway, I expected to be back before dark.

We circled low over Japal, causing quite a commotion in the streets. Jantor hoped that in some way he might get in touch with some of his friends, and learn what was going on in the city. There was always the chance of a counter-revolution that would place him back on the throne; but either his friends were all dead or imprisoned or afraid to try to communicate with him, for he never saw one whom he could trust.

As we prepared to leave and return to Timal, I circled far out over the lake, gaining considerable altitude; and from this vantage point Jantor discovered a fleet of ships far down the lake.

"If it's not asking too much," he said to me, "I'd like to fly down there and see who that is."

I headed for the fleet, and presently we were circling above it—fifty ships of war packed with fighting men. Most of them were biremes, and there were several penteconters, open galleys with decks fore and aft and propelled by fifty oars as well as sails. Some of the biremes had a hundred oars on each side and carried several hundred warriors as well. All had their sails set, and were taking advantage of a gentle breeze.

"The Myposan war fleet," said Jantor, "and it's headed for Japal."

"Gangor is going to have his hands full," remarked Kandar.

"We must warn him," said Jantor.

"But he is your enemy," expostulated Doran.

"Japal is my country," replied Jantor. "No matter who is jong there it is my duty to warn him."

ON the way back to Japal, Jantor wrote a message. We dropped down low over the palace grounds, Jantor making the sign of peace by raising his right hand. Almost immediately people commenced to come from the palace, and presently Jantor recognized Gangor and called to him.

"I have an important message for you," he said, and dropped the weighted note over the side. A warrior caught it before it reached the ground and took it to Gangor.

The fellow read it carefully and then motioned us to come lower, which I did, circling above them.

"I appreciate your warning, Jantor," said Gangor when we were within easy ear shot. "I wish you would land. We shall need your help and advice in defending the city. I promise that you will not be harmed."

I looked at Jantor; so did Kandar and Doran. We waited for his curt refusal of the invitation.

"It is my duty," he said to us. "My country is in danger."

"Don't do it," counselled Kandar. "Gangor is not to be trusted."

"He would not dare harm me after making that promise," said Jantor; "too many warriors heard him, and they are not all dishonorable men."

"All those with him are traitors like himself," said Doran.

"My duty lies there," insisted Jantor. "Will you take me down, please?"

"If you insist, I'll land you outside the city," I said; "it is your right to risk your life at the hands of a scoundrel like Gangor; but I will not risk my ship and the safety of my mate."

I circled low above them again, and Kandar exacted a new promise from



Gangor that his father would not be harmed and that he would be permitted to leave the city whenever he chose. Gangor agreed volubly—far too volubly, I thought.

"Bring that thing that you fly in right down here in the palace grounds," he said; "I'll have them cleared."

"Never mind," I said, "I shall land outside the inland gate."

"Very well," said Gangor, "and I myself will come out to meet you, Jantor, and escort you into the city."

"And don't bring too many warriors with you," I cautioned him, "and don't come within trident range of my ship. I shall take off immediately the jong has disembarked."

"Bring Kandar and Doran with you, Jantor," invited Gangor. "They will both be welcome; and I promise again that you shall all be perfectly safe the moment that you step foot within the walls of Japal."

"I shall feel better now that Doran and I are going along with you," said Kandar, as we rose and headed for the plain beyond the city.

"You are not going to accompany me," said Jantor. "You do not trust Gangor. Possibly you are right. If I die, the future of our country lies with you and Doran—the future of our dynasty. You must both live to bring men-children into the world. If all three of us placed ourselves in Gangor's power simultaneously, the temptation might prove too much for him to resist. I think that I alone shall be safe enough. Neither of you may accompany me."

"Come now, sir," exclaimed Kandar, "you must let us go with you."

"Yes," said Doran, "you must. We are your sons; what will the people of Japal think of us if we let our father go alone into the hands of his greatest enemy?"

"You shall not accompany me," said Jantor, with finality. "It is a command," and that ended the matter.

I SET the ship down three or four hundred yards from the inland gate, and presently Gangor came out of the city and approached us with a dozen warriors. They halted at plenty of distance from the ship; and Jantor, who had already dropped to the ground, advanced toward them.

"I wish we had never come here," said Kandar. "I can't help but feel that our father has made a grave mistake in trusting Gangor."

"He seems quite sure that Gangor will live up to his promise," I said. "You heard him ask me to wait and witness the battle and then come for him when it was over."

"Yes," said Doran, "but I don't share his faith. Gangor has always been notorious for his perfidy, but no one paid much attention to it because he was only captain of a merchant ship at the height of his fortunes. Who could have dreamed that he was to make himself jong of Japal!"

## CHAPTER VII

### Skabra Again

I COULDN'T help but have a great deal respect for Jantor. He was doing a very courageous, albeit a very temerarious, thing. I watched him as he walked toward his enemies. His step was firm, his head high. He was every inch a jong.

I had taken off immediately he left us, and was circling about rather low. Jantor had approached to within a few steps of Gangor, when the latter suddenly raised his short, heavy spear and plunged it through the jong's heart.

Kandar and Doran cried out in hor-

ror. I opened the throttle and dove straight for the wretch; and as he saw me coming, he and his warriors turned and fled for the city. Low behind them, I turned my pistol on them. Several fell, but Gangor reached the city gate in safety.

Without a word I rose and flew over the city and out across the lake. For some time neither Kandar nor Doran spoke. Their faces were drawn and tense. My heart ached for them. Finally Kandar asked me where I was going.

"I am going to tell the Myposan fleet that Japal has been warned and is ready to annihilate them."

"Why?" he asked.

"It was your father's wish to save the city. Some day you will be jong there. Do you want it conquered by the fish-men?"

"You are right," he said.

It was late in the afternoon that I dropped down low over the leading Myposan galley, the largest of the biremes. They had evidently seen us from a distance, as the deck was crowded with warriors, all staring at us.

"Be careful," cautioned Kandar. "They are preparing a rock thrower. If they hit us, we're through."

I gave the peace sign then, and called down to them that I had a message for their commander. A big fellow whom I recalled having seen in Tyros' palace answered the peace sign and motioned for me to come closer.

"Tell them to take the rock out of that catapult," I shouted.

He nodded and gave the necessary order; and after they had unloaded the thing, I dropped down quite low. The anotar is quite maneuverable and can fly at very low speeds; so I had no difficulty in carrying on at least a broken conversation with the ship.

"Who commands the fleet?" I asked.

"Skabra, the vadjong," he replied.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yes; the slave who killed Tyros," he replied.

"I should like to talk with Skabra, if she is not too mad at me," I said.

THE fellow grinned. Their faces are hideous enough in repose, but when they grin, they are something to frighten grown-ups with. Their fish mouths spread across their faces, forcing their gills open. Their countless, sharp fish-like teeth are exposed behind their huge beards.

"Skabra is not angry," he said.

"Which is her ship?" I asked.

"This," he said.

"Well, tell her that Carson of Venus wishes to speak to her. Tell her I have very important news for her."

Just as I finished the sentence the old girl came on deck. God! but she's the beauty. She looks like a bloated cod fish.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Do you want to murder me, too?"

"No," I shouted. "You were kind to my mate. I would not harm you. I have important news for you, but I can't talk this way. Get in a small boat and row off a little way. I'll come down and land on the water and talk with you."

"You must take me for a fool," she said. "I'd be at your mercy."

I had to keep circling the ship and shouting a few words at a time. It was no way in which to carry on a conversation.

"Very well," I said. "The word I have for you is very important, and I have given my word that I shall not harm you in any way. However, do as you see fit. I'll stand by a few minutes."

I COULD see them talking excitedly on the deck for a few minutes, and

then I saw a boat being lowered with Skabra in it; so I came down a short distance from the ship and waited. Presently they came alongside. The old girl greeted me pleasantly. She didn't seem to harbor any ill will because I had killed her mate, nor was I surprised at that. You see I'd not only rid her of a most obnoxious husband; but I'd put her on the throne, where she'd rule until the horrid little amphibian monstrosity that was her son grew to maturity.

"The first thing I'd like to know," she said, "is how you escaped from Mypos."

I shook my head. "I might be a prisoner there again some time; so I'll keep that secret to myself."

"Perhaps you're wise," she said; "but if you do come again, you'll be treated well, as long as I'm vadjong. Now what is the important news you have for me?"

"Japal knows that your fleet is coming, and the city is fully prepared. I advise you to turn back."

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

"For two reasons: You were kind to my mate, and the sons of Jantor are my friends. I do not wish to see Mypos and Japal at war."

She nodded.

"I understand," she said, "but nevertheless I shall keep on and attack Japal. We need more slaves. Many of our galleys are undermanned. The creatures die like flies at the oars."

We talked a little longer; and then, finding that I could not persuade her to give up her plan, I taxied away and took off. As we approached Japal, we saw that the fleet was fully manned; but remaining close to the city. Kandar wanted to wait and learn the outcome of the battle. It was now late in the afternoon; so there was little likelihood that the engagement would take place before morning, as the biremes would

move up slowly so as not to exhaust the men at the oars; they would need all their strength and energy for maneuvering during battle.

"They'll probably come up to within about a kob\*," Kandar said, "and lie to until dawn; thus the slaves will be well rested."

I didn't like the idea very well, as I was anxious to return to Duare and get started on our search for Korva; but it meant so much to Kandar that I agreed to wait. He knew where there was a cove a short distance along the coast, and we flew there and anchored.

At dawn Kandar awakened me.

"The Myposan fleet is moving in," he said. "I can hear the creaking of their oars."

**I LISTENED.** Very faintly I could hear the complaining of the wooden oars against the wooden rowlocks. Even a greased oar is not entirely silent. We took off and headed for Japal, and almost immediately we saw the Myposan fleet coming in in three lines of fifteen or sixteen ships each. The fleet of Japal, still lay close below the city wall.

When the first line of the Myposan fleet was within a hundred yards of the enemy fleet the engagement started. A ball of fire rose from the deck of one of the Japal ships, described a graceful arc, and landed on the deck of a Myposan bireme. The burning brand had been shot from a catapult. Immediately the engagement became general. Fire balls and rocks were hurled from both sides. Many fell into the water, but many found their marks. Three ships were on fire, and I could see men hauling buckets of water from the lake to fight the flames.

Still the Myposan fleet moved in.

\*A kob is two and a half of our Earthly miles.  
—Ed.

"They are going to grapple and board," said Doran.

Soon I saw why the Japal fleet hugged the shore, for now the batteries on the wall of the city opened up. These were heavier than the catapults of the ships; they threw larger fire balls and heavier rocks. The penteconters had moved up now between the big ships of the Myposans. They were much faster and more maneuverable. Their principal purpose, as far as I could see, was to harass the enemy by coming alongside and hurling short spears through the ports where the rowers sat chained to their benches. Disable enough oarsmen, and you have disabled the ship.

A rock from a shore catapult dropped directly into the center of one of the penteconters, killing two or three men instantly and crashing through the bottom of the ship, which immediately commenced to fill and sink. The survivors, leaping overboard, were speared from the deck of the Japal ship they had been attacking. I could hear the dying men screaming and cursing.

"That was a good shot," said Kandar.

By now, four of the attacking ships were burning, their crews taking to small boats, of which there were not half enough, while the slaves burned in their chains, screaming horribly.

Other Myposan ships came alongside those of Japal, and there was hand-to-hand fighting on decks slippery with blood. It was a grewsome sight, but fascinating. I dropped lower to get a better view, as the smoke from burning ships was cutting down the visibility.

I dropped too low. A rock from a catapult struck my propeller, smashing it. Now, I was, indeed, in a bad fix.

**M**Y first thought, when I saw that my ship had been hit, was of

Duare. Here I was, over a battle between two peoples who were my enemies. What chance had I of ever returning to Timal? What was to become of Duare? I cursed myself for my crass stupidity as I glided to a landing. I just had altitude enough to permit me to land about a mile along the shore from Japal. I hoped that in the heat and excitement of battle no one on the walls of the city had seen the accident or noticed where I had gone.

I had come down close beside a forest, and I immediately got Kandar and Doran to help me push the anotar into concealment among the trees. As I looked back toward the city, I saw that smoke from burning ships hid much of it from my view; and I hoped that it had also hidden my landing from the city.

Kandar and Doran were most sympathetic. They said that the fault was all theirs. That if I had not been trying to help them, the accident would never have happened.

I told them that there was no use crying over spilled milk, and that what we had to do now was find some tools and some wood to make a new propeller. I removed what was left of the old one—one blade and the stub of the other.

As I was explaining to Kandar the tools I should need and the kind of wood, he became very much interested; and asked me many questions about the construction of a propeller, how to determine the correct pitch, and so forth. You would have thought that he was going to make one himself.

Getting the right wood was a simple matter. The same kind of trees from the wood of which I had made this propeller grew in the forest where we were, but getting tools was an entirely different matter.

"There are plenty in Japal," said Kandar. "We must find some way

to get them. Doran and I have hundreds of friends in the city, if we could only reach them."

They racked their brains for some plan, but the whole thing looked utterly hopeless. Finally Doran hit upon something which at least contained the kernel of success—but a very small kernel.

"I know a man who makes knives," he said. "I know him very well, for he has done a lot of work for me. I also know that he is honest and loyal. He lives close to the wall, not far from the inland gate. If we would reach his house, we could get knives."

"But how can we reach his house?" demanded Kandar.

"By climbing the wall," said Doran.

"At its lowest point the wall is one ted\* high," Kandar said. "I can't jump that high."

"No one has to jump," explained Doran. "You stand on Carson's shoulders; I climb up and stand on yours—I am already over the wall."

"Suppose you got caught," I said. "Gangor would have you killed—no, I won't let you take that risk."

"There's practically no risk," said Doran. "We will do it after dark. Everyone will be tired after the battle; and anyway, the watch is never very good."

"How will you get back?" asked Kandar.

"My friend's house stands against the wall. The roof is only a vault below the top of the wall. I shall go down through the door in his roof, get tools, come up, and—there you are!"

"It sounds simple," said Kandar.

"I think the risk is too great," I said.

"We shall do it," said Kandar.

point which he was sure was just outside the knife-maker's house. It was not far from the inland gate—too close, I thought, if the sentries kept any kind of watch at all.

Everything went splendidly. Kandar climbed on to my shoulders, and Doran scrambled up on to his. There we were, just like that, when a gruff voice behind us said:

"Come down. You are prisoners. We are the guard."

I was holding onto Kandar's legs to support him, and before I could draw my pistol I was seized from behind. Kandar and Doran lost their balance and fell on top of me and half a dozen warriors. Most of us went down, but the fellow who had seized me never lost his hold.

When we had disentangled ourselves and gotten to our feet, I found that I had been disarmed. One of the warriors was displaying my pistol proudly.

"I saw him use this this morning," he said. "If I hadn't recognized him when I did and gotten it away from him he'd have killed us all."

"Be careful of it," I cautioned him; "it is apt to kill you."

"I shall be careful of it," he said, "and I shall keep it always. I shall be proud to show it to my children."

"Your children will never see it," said another. "Gangor will take it away from you."

We had been walking toward the inland gate while they were talking, and now we were admitted. Again I was a prisoner, but I thanked Heaven that Duare was not one also.

They shoved us into a room off the guardroom in the barbican, and left us there until morning. None of the warriors seemed to have recognized either Kandar or Doran, and I was hopeful that no one would.

Doran, who was quick witted, had

**T**HAT night we approached the city after dark, Doran leading us to a

\*A ted is 13.2 Earth feet.—Ed.

told a cock-and-bull story about our having been out hunting; and, not getting back before the gates closed, we were trying to get into the city and go to our homes.

One member of the guard asked:

"Why were you hunting when there was a battle?"

"A battle!" exclaimed Doran. "What battle? We have been gone for two days."

"The Myposans came in many ships," explained the fellow; "and there was a great battle, but we drove them off. We took many prisoners, but they got none."

"Fine," said Kandar. "I am sorry that we were not here."

About the middle of the morning an officer came and said that Gangor wanted to see the man who flew around in the air—the one who had killed so many of his warriors.

"That is I?" I said, stepping forward.

"Who are these others?"

"I don't know," I said. "They were returning from a hunting trip when I met them last night, and they asked me to help them get over the wall and into the city."

It seemed strange to me that an officer should not know either Kandar or Doran; but the former explained to me later that Gangor had evidently commissioned a lot of low born fellows, mostly sailors from ships he had sailed on; so it was not strange that they were not recognized.

"Well," said the officer, "I might as well take you all along; Gangor would probably like to see your friends, too."

The moment that we were ushered into Gangor's presence he recognized Kandar and Doran.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "the traitors. I saw you fighting against my ships yesterday."

"You saw nothing of the kind," I said.

"Shut up!" snapped Gangor. "You were all fools to try to come into Japal. Why were you coming in? A-ha! I know. You were coming to assassinate me. For that you shall die. I condemn you all to death. Take them away. Later I shall decide how they shall die."

## CHAPTER IV

### Into the Dungeons

WE were taken to a dungeon below the palace of the jong, into which Gangor had moved. It was a most insanitary and unpleasant place. They chained us to the wall; our jailer, who did it, being unnecessarily rough with us. He wore the keys to the dungeon and our padlocks on a chain about his neck.

He took the chain off to use the key when he fettered us; and he struck us each several times with it, just to satisfy his lust for cruelty. There could have been no other reason; as we offered no resistance, nor did we even speak to him. If I ever had murder in my heart, it was then; and for a long time I planned how I might kill him. It was then that an idea came to me.

After the fellow had left us, I noticed how dejected Doran appeared; and I told him to cheer up, that we had to die some time. I didn't feel very cheerful myself. I kept thinking of Duare. She would never know what had happened to me; but she would guess that I was dead, for she would know that only death would keep me from returning to her.

"How can I be cheerful?" said Doran, "when it was my silly plan that brought us here to die."

"It is no more your fault than ours,"

said Kandar. "We had to take a chance. It was merely a misfortune, not a fault, which caused it to fail."

"I shall never forgive myself," insisted Doran.

We remained in that dungeon for a couple of weeks. A slave brought us food once a day; we saw no one else; and then, at last, our jailer returned. He was quite alone. I backed close to the wall as he came in.

"I just came to tell you," he said, "that you are to die the first thing in the morning. Your heads are to be cut off."

"It is that homely head of yours that should be cut off," I said. "What are you, anyway, a Myposan?"

I saw Kandar and Doran looking at me in astonishment.

"Shut up!" growled the jailer, "or I'll give you another taste of the chain."

"Get out of here!" I yelled at him. "You stink. Go take a bath before you come down here again among your betters."

The fellow was so mad that he couldn't speak; but he came for me, as I knew he would—he came with his chain swinging. It was what I had planned—it was happening just as I had hoped it would; and when he came within reach of me, I seized his throat in both my hands. He tried to scream for help; but I had his wind choked off, and he couldn't. But he was beating me all the time with his chain. I pushed him over closer to Kandar.

"Grab his chain," I said, "before he beats me to death."

Kandar got hold of it and held on, while I choked the brute. I thought of the blows that he had struck us so wantonly, and I gave his neck an extra twist. I have killed many men in self-defense or in line of duty; some I have been glad to kill, but usually it has made me sad to think that I must take

a human life. Not so now, I enjoyed every second of it until his corpse hung limp in my grasp.

I SNATCHED the chain from about its neck and let it slip to the floor; then I unlocked my padlock and freed myself. Quickly I did the same for Kandar and Doran.

"At first," said Doran, "I couldn't understand why you wanted to enrage that fellow and get another beating for nothing, but the moment he stepped toward you I guessed what you had in mind. It was a very clever trick."

"Yes," I said, "but what now?"

"Maybe this is where we come in?" said Kandar. "We were both born and raised in this palace. We know more about it than the jong, our father, did."

"More than anyone in Japal," added Doran. "You know how little boys are. We explored every corner of the place."

"And you know a way out?" I asked.

"Yes," said Kandar, "but there's a hitch."

"What is it?" I asked.

"There is a secret passage leading from the palace out into the city. It ends in a building near the wall. In the cellar of that building another passage starts that leads outside the city."

"But where's the hitch?" I repeated.

"The hitch is," he said, "that the secret passage starts in the jong's own sleeping apartments, and the chances are that Gangor occupies them now."

"We'll have to wait until he is away," said Doran.

"Can we get to them without being apprehended?" I asked.

"We can try," said Kandar. "I think it can be done after dark."

"It is after dark now," I said.

"So we start," said Doran.

"And may our luck hold," added Kandar.

Kandar led the way along a dark cor-

ridor and up a flight of stairs at the top of which he cautiously opened a door and looked into the room beyond.

"All right," he whispered, "come on."

He led us into the palace kitchen, and through that and several pantries into a huge state diningroom. The jongs of Japal lived well. We followed Kandar to the end of the room farthest from the main entrance, and here he showed us a little door hidden behind hangings.

"Where the jong used to escape when he became bored," he explained.

Beyond the door was a narrow corridor.

"Go quietly," cautioned Kandar. "This corridor leads to the jong's sleeping apartments. We'll have a look in them and see if Gangor is there."

We crept along noiselessly through the dark little corridor until Kandar halted at a door. We pressed close behind him as he opened it a crack. The room beyond was in darkness.

"Gangor is probably drinking with some of his cronies," whispered Kandar, "and hasn't retired yet. We are in luck. Come on, follow me; but still go quietly."

We crept across that dark room, Doran touching Kandar to keep in contact and follow him, and I touching Doran. It seemed a perfectly enormous room to me, and traversing it that way in total darkness, I somehow lost my balance just enough to cause me to throw one foot out to regain my equilibrium. Well, I threw it in the wrong place at the wrong time. It hit a table or something and knocked it over. The thing fell with a crash that would have awakened the dead; and instantly there was a cry, and a light went on.

There was Gangor right in front of us sitting up on his sleeping couch, screaming for the guard. On a table at the side of the couch lay my pistol. Gangor had taken it away from the warrior

of the guard all right. It would have been better for him had he not.

As I leaped forward and snatched it from the table, a dozen warriors burst into the apartment.

"This way!" Kandar shouted to me, and the three of us backed away toward the secret entrance to the corridor leading from the palace. At least I thought that that was where he was leading us, but he wasn't. As he told me later, he had not wished to reveal the secret to Gangor and his warriors.

I menaced the advancing guardsmen with my pistol.

"Stand back!" I ordered. "Don't come closer, or I'll kill you!"

"Kill them! screamed Gangor. "Kill them all!"

**A** WARRIOR rushed me. I pressed the trigger—but nothing happened. For the first time since I had had it, my r-ray pistol failed me—failed me when it was a question of life or death and even more; a question as to whether I was ever to return to Duare again.

But, unarmed as I was, there were other weapons at hand. Maybe they had not been designed as instruments of death, but they were to serve their purpose. I seized a bench and hurled it into the face of the advancing warrior. He went down; and immediately Kandar and Doran grasped the possibilities of the furnishings of the apartment, and seized upon the nearest things at hand.

Behind them a cluster of spears had been arranged upon the wall as a decoration. I saw them and dragged them down. Now we were armed! But the odds were against us—twelve against three; or rather eleven now, for the man I had hit with the bench lay where he had fallen, and Gangor only sat on his couch screaming for more guardsmen. I saw Kandar working his way to-



ward him; and so Doran and I moved with him, keeping our backs against the wall.

Fencing with spears is quite an interesting experience; while thus engaged, one does not doze, I can assure you. It happened that the spear which had fallen to me was light and rather long, a fact which gave me an advantage that I was not long in realizing and seizing upon. I found that while I could not parry well with one hand, I could jab quite effectively; so, picking up a light table to use as a shield, I succeeded so well that I jabbed an antagonist in the heart after parrying his thrust with my table.

Doran and Kandar had each killed a man, and now the remainder of them seemed less keen to push the assault. Kandar had worked around until he was close beside Gangor's couch; and as he jerked his spear from the heart of a dead guardsman, he wheeled and drove it through Gangor's body.

Gangor did not die immediately. He lay sprawled across his couch vomiting blood; and between paroxysms, screaming in agony. Jantor, jong of Japal, had been avenged.

Now more warriors were pushing into the chamber; and it looked pretty bad for us three, when there burst upon our ears the sound of gongs and trumpets. As if by magic, the fighting stopped, as we all listened.

**B**ENEATH the sound of the gongs and trumpets, we could hear men shouting.

"It is the call to arms!" cried a warrior. "The city has been attacked."

"The Myposans have returned," said another. "Who will lead us? We have no jong."

"You have a jong," I cried. "Follow Kandar! He is your jong."

They hesitated for a moment; then

a warrior said:

"Kandar is jong. I will follow him. Who will come with me?"

Kandar, taking advantage of their indecision, started for the door; and Doran and I followed him.

"Come!" commanded Kandar. "To the streets. To the defense of Japal!" Like sheep they followed him.

When we arrived in the palace grounds and the warriors there saw Kandar and Doran leading some of their fellows, they cheered; then Kandar took command, leading a strong party out into the city streets where fighting was in progress.

It was then that I saw that it was not Myposans who had attacked Japal, but strange, repulsive looking warriors of a sickly greenish hue and entirely hairless—no hair on their heads, no whiskers, no eyebrows, no eyelashes—and right on the tops of their heads was a little knob of flesh. They fought with swords and long-handled hooks, holding the latter in their left hands. With these hooks they would catch an antagonist and draw him close; then cut or thrust at him with the sword. Oftentimes, the hook was enough if the point caught at the base of the brain. They were nasty weapons.

If my pistol had been serviceable they wouldn't have worried me much, but with only a spear I felt very much at a disadvantage. I had had no time to examine the pistol since I had recovered it, but now I stopped before getting into the thick of the fight and went over it carefully. Evidently some one had been tampering with it, probably in an effort to discover how it worked; and I was much relieved to see that they had merely changed an adjustment.

In a few seconds I had remedied the trouble; and when I looked up I saw that I was just in time, or almost just

in time. I wasn't quite sure which, for a big green devil was reaching for me with his hook.

I was in a most disadvantageous position, as I had rested my spear in the hollow of my left elbow with the butt on the ground while I worked on my pistol; and the hook had already passed over my shoulder to take me in the back of the neck. It was just the matter of a split second before I should be gaffed.

I did what was probably the best thing, but I did it quite mechanically—there was no time for conscious reasoning. I sprang toward my antagonist. Had I sprung away, the hook would have impaled me; but by springing toward him I confused him. At the same time I struck his sword aside with my left arm and sent a stream of r-rays through his heart. It was a close call.

Kandar and Doran were in the thick of the fight a little ahead of me. Kandar was closer, and he was hotly engaged with one of the invaders. He, too, had nothing but a spear; and I hurried to his aid. He had so far successfully knocked the gaff to one side every time his antagonist reached for him with it; and then he would have to parry a sword thrust; so he never got a chance to bring his spear into play as an offensive weapon. He was always on the defensive, and no duel or war was ever won that way.

I reached him just as a second enemy attacked him. The r-rays hissed from the muzzle of my gun, and both Kandar's antagonists went down; then I started right through the ranks of the enemy, spraying r-rays to the right and left and ahead, cutting a path wide enough to drive a combine through. I was having a glorious time. I felt as though I were winning a war all by myself.

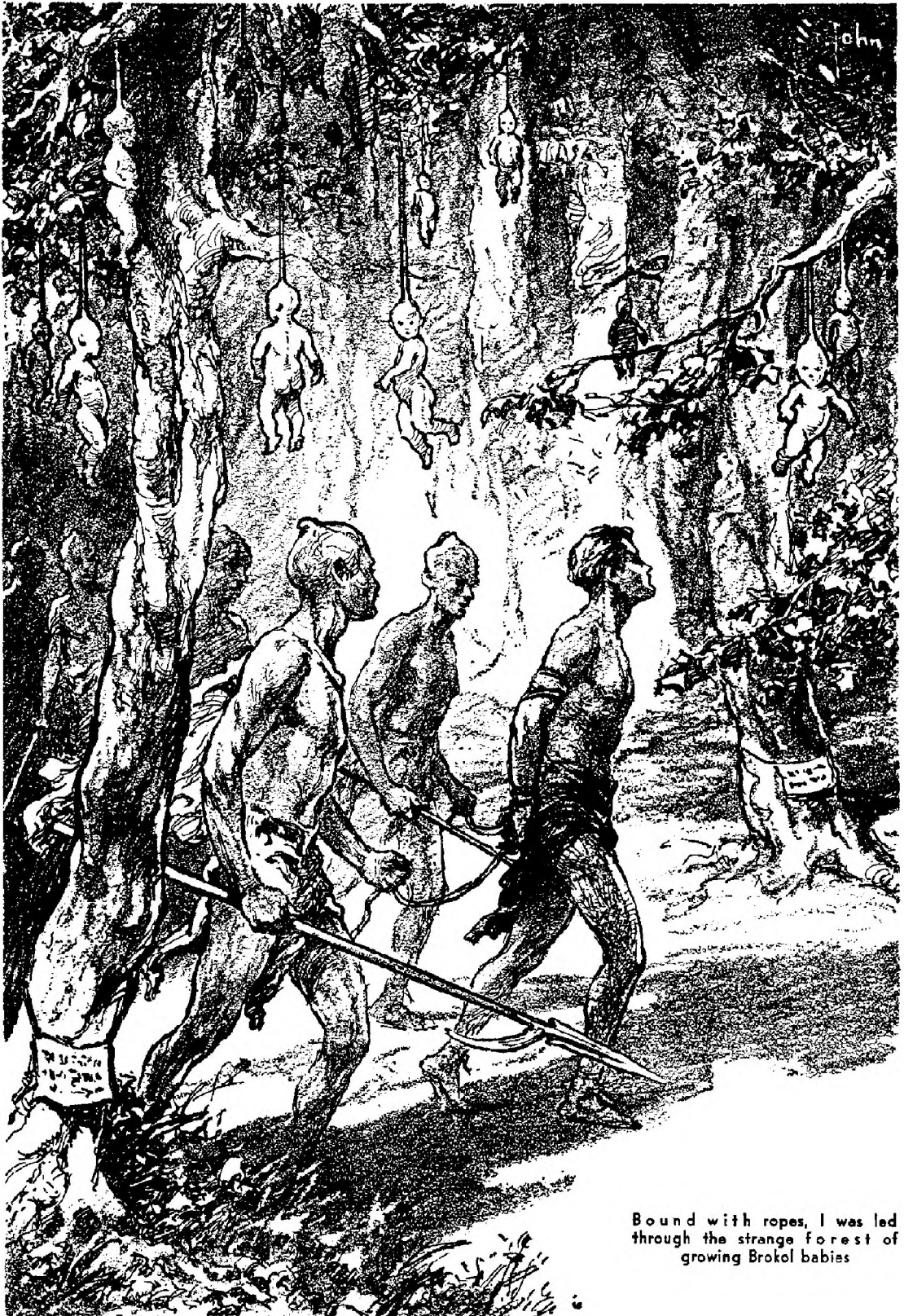
SUDDENLY I realized that the invaders were fleeing before me and on both sides. I looked back. I could see nothing but these hideous warriors. They had closed in behind me, and I was being carried along with them. Presently I was tripped; and as I fell, I was seized on either side, my pistol was snatched from my hand, and I was hustled along with the defeated army.

Down the main street of Japal they dragged me and out through the inland gate, nor did their retreat end there; for Japal's fighting men followed them far out onto the plain, constantly harassing their rear. It was almost dark when they abandoned the pursuit and turned back toward the city. It was then that I became convinced that Kandar did not know I had been made prisoner. Had he, I am sure that he would never have given up the pursuit until I had been rescued.

A warrior on each side had been dragging me along up to this time; but now that the pursuit had ceased a halt was called; and while the creatures rested, a rope was tied about my neck; and when the march was resumed, I was led along like a cow to the slaughter.

I saw my pistol tucked into the loincloth of a warrior; and I kept my eyes on the fellow, hoping that I might find an opportunity to retrieve it. I knew that only as a forlorn hope could I use it if I had it; for my captors were so numerous that, though I might have killed many of them, I knew that eventually they would have overwhelmed me.

I was terribly depressed. Ill fortune seemed to dog my footsteps. Right on the threshold of freedom that would have permitted me to rejoin Duare immediately, my rash impetuosity had plunged me into a predicament which



Bound with ropes, I was led through the strange forest of growing Brokol babies

was probably as fraught with danger as any I had ever encountered. Why should I have tried to fight a battle practically singlehanded? I don't know. Probably I am overconfident in my own prowess, but I have reason to be. I have come through some mighty trying experiences and escaped hundreds of dangers.

Where were these strange, silent creatures taking me? What fate lay in store for me? I had not heard them speak a word since I had seen them. I wondered if they were alalus, lacking vocal organs.

One of them approached me as we resumed the march. He wore three gold armlets, and the haft of his gaff was circled by three golden rings.

"What is your name?" he demanded in the universal language of Amtor.

So they were not alalus.

"Carson of Venus," I replied.

"From what country come you?"

"The United States of America."

"I never heard of it," he said. "How far is it from Brokol?"

"I never heard of Brokol," I replied. "Where is that?"

He looked disgusted.

"Every one has heard of Brokol," he said. "It is the greatest empire in Amtor. It lies forty kob from here on the other side of those mountains." That would be a hundred miles. I not only had to get myself captured, but now I had to walk a hundred miles!

"Then my country is ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol," I said, doing some lightning mental calculating.

"There is nothing that far away from anything," he said, petulantly. "You are lying to me, and that will make it worse for you."

"I am not lying," I said. "That is the nearest my country ever gets to Brokol; sometimes it is farther away

than that."

"You are the greatest liar I have ever heard of," he said. "How many people live in your country?"

"If I tell you, you won't believe me."

"Tell me anyway. It is probably a little country. Do you know how many people live in Brokol?"

"I'm afraid I could never guess."

"You are very right that you could never guess—there are fifty thousand people living in Brokol!" I guess he expected me to faint.

"Indeed?" I said.

"Yes, fifty thousand; and I am not lying to you. Now how many live in your little country? Tell me the truth."

"Somewhere around a hundred and thirty-four million."

"I told you to tell me the truth. There are not that many people in all Amtor."

"My country is not on Amtor."

**I** THOUGHT he was going to explode, he became so angry.

"Are you trying to make a fool of me?" he demanded, turning a dark green.

"Not at all," I assured him. "There is no reason why I should lie to you. My country is in another world. If Amtor were not surrounded by clouds, you could see it at night shining like a tiny ball of fire."

"I said you were the greatest liar I had ever heard of," he said. "I now say that you are the greatest liar any one ever heard of; you are the greatest liar in the world."

I do not like to be called a liar, but what was I to do about it? Anyway, there was something of awe and respect in the way he said it that made it sound more like a compliment than an insult.

"I don't see why you should doubt me," I said. "The chances are that you

have never heard of Vepaja, or Hava-too, or Korva, yet they are countries which really exist."

"Where are they?" he demanded.

"Right on Amtor," I said.

"If you can lead us to countries we have never heard of, you will probably not be sacrificed to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja; but you had better not lie to her or to Duma."

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja, literally translated into English, means most high more than women. None of the various peoples of Amtor with whom I had come in contact had any religion, but this name and his mention of sacrifice in connection with it suggested that she might be a goddess.

"Is Loto-El-Ho-Ganja your vad-jong?" I asked. Vadjong means queen.

"No," he said, "she is not a woman; she is more than a woman. She was not born of woman, nor did she ever hang from any plant."

"Does she look like a woman?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "but her beauty is so transcended that mortal women appear as beasts by comparison."

"And Duma?" I asked. "Who is Duma?"

"Our jong—the richest and most powerful jong in Amtor. You will probably see him when we reach Brokol, and maybe Loto-El-Ho-Ganja, too. I think they will wish to see such a great liar, one whose hair and eyes, even, are lies."

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded.

"I mean that there can be no such thing as a man with yellow hair and gray eyes; therefore they must be a lie."

"Your powers of reasoning are amazing," I said.

He nodded in agreement, and said,

"I have talked enough," and walked away.

If these Brokols have anything to recommend them, it is their lack of garrulity. They talk when they have something to say; otherwise they remain silent, in which they differ greatly from most of my own species. I am always amazed, if not always amused, by the burst of feminine gabble which follows the lowering of a theater curtain for an intermission. There can't be that much important conversation in a lifetime.

## CHAPTER V

### The Most Beautiful Woman

I MUST say that after my conversation with this chap, whose name I later learned was Ka-at (kā-át), I was really curious to reach Brokol and see a woman so beautiful that she made other women appear as beasts. If it hadn't been for my concern over Duare, I'd have looked forward to it as another rare adventure. One must die eventually, even though he has been inoculated with the longevity serum as have I; so if he has no one dependent upon him, he might as well crowd all of adventure and experience into his life that he can, even though he at times risk that life.

During the long marches to Brokol no one spoke to me again. They communicated with me and among themselves largely by signs. I sometimes wondered that their vocal cords did not atrophy. I had much time to think; and of course most of my thoughts revolved about Duare, but I also thought of the strange suggestions Ka-at had placed in my mind. I wondered what he meant when he said that Loto-El-Ho-Ganja had never hung from any plant. Why should anyone wish to

hang from a plant? I am quite sure that the horse thieves they used to lynch in the days of our old West would not have chosen to hang from a tree or from anything else.

The Brokol carried nothing but their spears, swords, and a little bag of food; for we lived off the country as we went; so they covered quite a little ground every day. During the morning of the fifth day we climbed through a mountain pass, and from the summit I saw a city lying on a well watered tableland below.

The party halted at the summit; and, looking down upon the city, bowed three times from the waist. We were standing pretty close together, and the opportunity I had been awaiting came because of that. I was behind and touching the warrior who carried my pistol. As he bowed, I brushed against him; and when he straightened up, he did not have my pistol—it was hidden in my loin cloth.

I didn't know when the opportunity to use it might come. I knew that I couldn't shoot my way out of a city full of enemies, but as a last resort I could sell my life dearly. Anyway, I was glad to have my weapon back again; somehow it gives me a feeling of security and superiority that I don't have without it; and that is strange; because before I came to Venus I never carried a weapon of any description.

The bowing at the summit of the pass, I learned later, was something of a religious ritual, Brokol being considered by them a holy city. In it was located the principal temple of Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. Here came the people of the lesser villages to worship and make offerings.

We continued the march immediately, and were soon at one of the gates of Brokol. I shall not bore you with the details of our entry into the city, but

I may say that it was not a triumphal entry for Ka-at. He had been defeated, and he brought back no spoils and only a single prisoner. Ka-at was a vookokor,\* or commander of a thousand men.

The three gold armlets that he wore and the three golden rings which encircled the haft of his gaff were the insignia of his office.

I WAS taken to an open square or plaza in a poor part of the city and locked in a cage. There were a number of these cages, but only one other had an occupant. He was a human being like myself, and his cage was next to mine. We were not exactly on exhibit; but the plaza was not enclosed, and many Brokols came and gaped at us. Some of them poked us with sticks, and others threw stones at us. For the most part, however, they just looked and commented—a word or a short phrase. They were not given to loquacity.

One looked at me and said to his companion,

“What is it?”

The other just shook his head.

“Yellow hair,” said the first.

“Gray eyes,” said the second.

They were running on terribly, for Brokols.

“You talk too much,” the man in the next cage yelled at them.

One of them threw a rock at him, and then they both walked away.

“They hate to have anyone say they talk too much,” confided my neighbor.

I nodded. I was suddenly sick at heart, as though I felt a premonition of tragedy. Somehow I connected it with Duare, and I didn't feel much like

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\* Vookokor means, literally, a thousand daggers; and is a military title corresponding with our colonel.—Ed.

talking.

The fellow in the next cage shook his head sadly.

"You don't look like a Brokol," he said, "but you talk like one. It is too bad. When I saw you coming I thought that I was going to have some one to talk with. I have been afraid that I was going to forget how to talk."

"I am sorry," I said. "I shall be glad to talk with you."

He brightened up.

"My name is Jonda," he said.

"Mine is Carson."

"I am from Tonglap. Where are you from?"

"From Korva," I said. There was no use going through the futile explanation of where the United States of America was. No one on Venus could have understood it.

"I never heard of Korva," he said. "Tonglap is far away in that direction." He pointed toward the north. "I am a vookor\* in the army of Tonglap."

The days dragged heavily, and I became much depressed. Here I was in a cage in a strange land, a prisoner of queer, half human creatures; my ship lay disabled at Japal; and Duare was far away in Timal. How long, I wondered, would those savage people remain friendly to her. I began to lose hope, for it seemed impossible that she and I ever would be reunited, that we should ever reach Korva.

Jonda had told me that at any moment one of us might be chosen as a human sacrifice to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja.

"From remarks I have overheard," he said, "I think she either drinks the blood of the victim or bathes in it."

"I understand that she is very beautiful," I said. "Have you ever seen her?"

"No, and I don't want to. I understand that it isn't good for one's health to have Loto-El-Ho-Ganja take an interest in one. Let us hope that she never hears of us."

After a couple of weeks Jonda and I were taken from our cages and put to work cleaning up an oval field which had tiers of benches built around it. The benches were raised, the lower tier being some ten feet above the ground; so that the whole thing resembled a Spanish bull ring more than it did anything else. There were two main gates and a number of small doors in the wooden paling surrounding it.

I remarked to Jonda that it seemed strange to me that we didn't see more slaves in the city. As far as I knew, there were only the two of us.

"I've never seen any others," he replied. "Duma, the jong, sent out that expedition under Ka-at to gather slaves; but he didn't do very well. He may have had his head lopped off for it by this time."

"Shut up!" snapped one of the warriors that were guarding us. "You talk too much. Work, don't talk."

While we were working, half a dozen warriors entered the arena and approached our guard.

"The jong has sent for these two," said their leader.

One of our guard nodded, and asked, "And us?"

The leader of the warriors just nodded. No words wasted there.

THEY conducted us to the palace grounds and through what appeared to be a well kept orchard of small fruit trees. I could see what appeared to be some kind of fruit hanging from the branches, but only one or two to a tree. There were many guards about.

When we had come closer to the or-

\*Vookor really means one dagger, but is the title of an officer who commands one hundred men, a captain. Tonglap means big land.—Ed.

chard, I was amazed to see that what I had thought was fruit were diminutive Brokols dangling in the air by stems attached to the tops of their heads. This suddenly explained many things, among them the knob on the tops of the heads of all the Brokols I had seen and Ka-at's statement that Loto-El-Ho-Ganja had never hung from a plant.

The little Brokols were perfectly formed. Most of them hung quietly, swaying in the breeze, with their eyes shut; but a few were very active, wiggling their arms and legs and making complaining sounds. It all reminded me of the first stirrings of a new born babe, yet there was something almost obscene about it. They were of all sizes, from those but an inch long to some that were fully fifteen inches in length.

Jonda pointed to one of these, and remarked,

"Pretty nearly ripe and about to fall off."

"Shut up!" snapped one of our guard. That was practically the extent of the conversations we ever had with our captors.

We were taken into the presence of the jong, where we were told to bow four times. It is remarkable that from the depth of the African forest to the Court of Versailles, on Earth or Venus, there is a similarity in the trappings and the ritual surrounding kings.

The throne room of Duma was as elaborate as the culture and means of the Brokols could make it. There were battle scenes painted on the walls, there were dyed fabrics hanging at the windows and doorways, swords and spears and the heads of animals adorned the walls.

Duma sat upon a carved bench on a dais strewn with furs. He was a large man, as hairless and hideous as his subjects; and he was loaded with bracelets,

armlets, and anklets of gold. A Brokol woman, the first I had seen, sat on a lower bench beside him. She, too, was weighted down with golden ornaments. She was Dua, the vadjong. This I learned later, as also that the jongs of Brokol were always named Duma; and the vadjongs, Dua.

"Which is the slave from Japal?" asked Duma, and then, "I see, it must be the one with yellow hair and gray eyes. Ka-at did not lie. Did you tell Ka-at that you came from a country ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol, fellow?"

"Yes," I said.

"And did you tell him that there were a hundred and thirty-four million people in your country?"

"Correct."

"Ka-at did not lie," he repeated.

"Nor did I," I said.

"Shut up!" said Duma; "you talk too much. Could you lead an expedition to that country for the purpose of obtaining loot and slaves?"

"Of course not," I replied; "we could never reach it. Even I may never return to it."

"You are, even as Ka-at said, the greatest liar in the world," said Duma; then he turned his eyes upon Jonda. "And you," he said; "where are you from?"

"From Tonglap."

"How many people are there?"

"I never counted them," replied Jonda, "but I may say that there are fully ten times as many as there are in Brokol."

"Another liar," said Duma. "Brokol is the largest country in the world. Can you lead my warriors to Tonglap, so that they may take prisoners and loot?"

"I can, but I won't," said Jonda. "I am no traitor."

"Shut up!" said Duma. "You talk



too much." He spoke to an officer. "Take this one who is from Tonglap and put him back in his cage. Loto-El-Ho-Ganja wished to see the other one. She has never seen a man with yellow hair and gray eyes. She did not believe Ka-at any more than I did. She said, also, that she would be amused to hear the greatest liar in Amtor."

THEY led Jonda away, and then several men with plumes fastened to their heads surrounded me. They carried golden gaffs and very heavy short-swords with ornate hilts. Their leader looked at Duma, who nodded; and I was led from the throne room.

"When you enter the presence of Loto-El-Ho-Ganja, bow seven times," the leader instructed me, "and do not speak unless you are spoken to; then only answer questions. Ask none and make no gratuitous observations of your own."

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja has a throne room of her own in a temple that stands not far from the palace. As we approached it, I saw hundreds of people bringing offerings. Of course I could not see everything that they brought; but there were foods and ornaments and textiles. It evidently paid well to head the church of Brokol, as it does to head most churches and cults. Even in our own Christian countries it has not always proved unprofitable to emulate the simple ways of Christ and spread his humble teachings.

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja sat on a gorgeous golden throne that made Duma's bench look like a milkmaid's stool. She was surrounded by a number of men garbed like those who escorted me. They were her priests.

Loto-El-Ho-Ganja was not a bad looking girl. She was no Brokol, but a human being like me. She had brunette hair and eyes and a cream colored skin

with just a tinge of olive, through which glowed a faint pink upon her cheeks. I'd say that if she were not beautiful, she was definitely arresting and interesting; and she looked alert and intelligent.

After I had bowed seven times she sat looking at me in silence for a long time.

"What is your name?" she asked after a while. She had a lovely contralto voice. Listening to it, I could not imagine her drinking human blood or taking a bath in it.

"I am Carson kum Amtor, Tanjong kum Korva," I replied; which, in English, would be Carson of Venus, Prince of Korva.

"And where is Korva?"

"It is a country far to the south."

"How far?"

"I do not know exactly—several thousand kobs, however."

"Did you not tell Ka-at that your country lay ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol?" she demanded. "Were you lying then or now?"

"I was not lying at all. The world from which I originally came is not Korva, and that other world is ten million four hundred thousand kobs from Brokol."

"By what name is it known?" she asked.

"The United States of America."

She wrinkled her brows in thought at that; and a strange, puzzled expression came into her eyes. She seemed to be straining to bring some forgotten memory from the deepest recesses of her mind, but presently she shook her head wearily.

"The United States of America," she repeated. "Would you tell me something about your country? I cannot see what you could expect to gain by lying to me."

"I shall be glad to tell you anything you wish to know," I replied, "and I can assure you that I shall not lie to you."

She arose from her throne and stepped down from the dais.

"Come with me," she said, and then she turned to one of her priests. "I would examine this man alone. You may all leave."

"But, Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," objected the man, "it would be dangerous to leave you alone with this man. He is an enemy."

She drew herself up to her full height.

"I am Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," she said. "I know all things. I have looked into this man's eyes; I have looked into his soul, and I know that he will not attempt to harm me."

The fellow still hesitated.

"Such a thing has never been done," he said.

"You heard my command, Ro-ton," she said sharply. "Do you, my high priest, dare question my authority?"

**H**E moved away at that, and the others followed him. Loto-El-Ho-Ganja led me across the room toward a small door. The throne room of this goddess, if that was what she was, was even more elaborate than that of Duma, the jong; but its wall decorations were gruesome—rows of human skulls with crossed bones beneath them; doubtless the skulls and bones of human sacrifices.

The small room to which she led me was furnished with a desk, several benches, and a couch. The benches and the couch were covered with furs and cushions. Loto-El-Ho-Ganja seated herself on a bench behind the desk. "Sit down," she said, and I seated myself on a bench opposite her.

She asked me about the same questions that Duma had, and I gave her

the same answers that I had given him; then she asked me to explain how there could be another world so far from Venus, and I gave her a very sketchy explanation of the solar system.

"Sun, planets, moons," she said musingly, "moons and stars."

I had not mentioned stars. I wondered how she could have known the word.

"Before they brought me before you," I said, "I was told to speak only when I was spoken to, and to ask you no questions."

"You would like to ask me some questions?"

"Yes."

"You may," she said. "Ro-ton and the lesser priests would be shocked," she added, with a shrug and a smile.

"How did you know about stars?" I asked.

She looked surprised.

"Stars! What do I know about stars? I am Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. That answers your question. I know many things. Sometimes I do not know how I know them. I do not know how I knew about stars. In the back of my mind are a million memories, but most of them are only vague and fragmentary. I try very hard to piece them together or to build them into recognizable wholes," she sighed, "but I never can."

"Of course you are not a Brokol," I said. "Tell me how you came to be here, a living goddess among alien people."

"I do not know," she said. "That is one of the things I can never recall. Once I found myself sitting on the temple throne. I did not even know the language of these people. They had to teach me it. While I was learning it, I learned that I was a goddess; and that I came from the fires that surround

Amtor. My full title is Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj." (literally Most High More Than Woman Of The Fire; or, for short, Fire Goddess), "but that is too long and is only used on state occasions and in rituals. Ro-ton and a few of the others I permit to call me just Loto in private." She pronounced it ló'tō, and as it means Most High, it was still something of a title.

"You," she added graciously, "may call me Loto while we are alone."

I felt that I was getting on pretty well, to be permitted to call a goddess by her first name. I hoped that she was going to like me so well that she wouldn't care to drink my blood, or even bathe in it.

"I shall call you Carson," she said. "Like so many other things that I cannot understand, I seemed to be drawn to you from the moment I first saw you by some mysterious bonds of propinquity. I think it was when you said 'United States of America.' That name seemed to strike a responsive chord within me. Why, I do not know. United States of America!" She whispered the words softly and slowly, almost caressingly; and there was that strange far-away look in her eyes.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Mystery of Loto

**L**OTO and I were getting on famously when there came a scratching at the door.

"Enter!" said The Fire Goddess.

The door was opened, and Ro-ton stood scowling on the threshold.

"I thought I told you we were to be left alone," said the goddess with some asperity.

"I come from Duma," said Ro-ton. "He wishes to offer a sacrifice to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," and he looked straight

at me with a very nasty expression on his green face.

"If he insists, I shall accept his sacrifice," said Loto; "but I shall reserve the right to select the victim," and she looked so meaningly at Ro-ton that he turned a dark green, which faded almost immediately to a sickly greenish white. "It will probably be one of those who disobey me."

Ro-ton faded from the scene, closing the door after him; while Loto tapped her sandalled toe upon the floor.

"He aggravates me so," she said. "Whenever I demonstrate any liking for a person, he runs immediately to Duma and gets him to select that person as an offering. One of these days I am going to lose patience and select Ro-ton myself. That would be a great honor for Ro-ton, but I don't think he'd enjoy it."

"Is it true," I asked, "that you drink the blood of the sacrificial offerings?"

Her eyes flashed angrily.

"You are presumptuous!" she exclaimed. "You have taken advantage of my kindness to you to ask me to divulge one of the most sacred secrets of the temple."

I stood up.

"I am sorry," I said. "Now I suppose I must go."

"Sit down!" she snapped. "I am the one to decide when you are to go. Have you no manners?"

"I have never before had the honor of being entertained by a goddess," I said; "so I do not know just how to act."

"You are not being entertained by a goddess," she said. "You are entertaining one. Goddesses do not entertain any one, especially slaves."

"I hope that I *am* entertaining you, Most High," I said.

"You are. Now tell me more about the United States of America. Has it

many cities?"

"Thousands."

"Any as large as Brokol?"

"Most of them are larger. One has nearly seven million people."

"What is that city called?" she asked.

"New York."

"New York," she repeated. "New York. It seems just as though I had heard that name before."

Again we were interrupted by scratching on the door. It was a priest to announce that Duma, the jong, was coming to the temple to pay his respects to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. Loto flushed angrily, but she said:

"We will receive him. Summon the priests to the holy chamber." When the priest was gone, she turned again to me. "I cannot leave you here alone," she said; "so you will have to come with me."

**WE** went out into the throne room. It was what she called the holy chamber. Loto told me to stand over at one side; then she took her place on the throne. Priests were arriving. Roton came. They made a barbarous spectacle in that skull decorated room, with their green skins and their plumes of office.

Soon I heard the sound of drums, first at a distance; then drawing nearer; and presently Duma entered, preceded by drummers and followed by fully a hundred officers. They stopped before the dais and bowed seven times; then Duma mounted the dais and sat on a low bench next to Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. Everyone else in the room remained standing. You could have heard a pin drop, it was so quiet.

They went through a sort of stupid ritual for a while, Duma standing up every few seconds and bowing seven times. When that was over they com-

menced their conversation. I could hear every word.

"Ro-ton tells me that you have refused my sacrifice," said Duma. "That is something that has never before happened."

"I did not refuse it," replied Loto. "I simply said that I would select the victim."

"That is the same as refusing it," said Duma. "I wish to select my own offering."

"You may," said Loto, "but I have the right to refuse any offering that is not acceptable. You seem to forget that I am Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj."

"And you seem to forget that I am the jong of Brokol," snapped Duma.

"To a goddess, a jong is only another mortal," said Loto, icily. "Now, if you have no further matters to discuss, I permit you to withdraw."

I could see that Duma was furious. He turned dark green, and he fairly glared at Loto.

"A jong has warriors," he said, angrily. "He can enforce his wishes."

"You threaten me?" demanded Loto.

"I demand that I be permitted to select my own offering." Duma was fairly shouting now.

"I told you that you might name your selection," said Loto.

"Very well," said Duma. "It is the slave, Carson, with whom you have been closeted alone for hours, defying the traditions of the temple."

"I decline your offering," said Loto.

Duma leaped to his feet.

"Take that slave back to his cage," he shouted. "I'll attend to this woman later. Now I declare that she is no goddess, but that I, Duma, am a god. Let those who accept me as their god bow seven times."

That was the last I heard, as several warriors had seized me and hustled me out of the holy chamber.

They took me back to my cage and locked me in. Jonda was still in the adjoining cage; and when I told him what had happened, he said that I didn't have long to live now.

"That's what comes of getting mixed up with goddesses and jongs," he added.

"They were going to kill me anyway," I reminded him. "At least this way nobody's going to drink my blood."

"Maybe Duma will," he suggested. "You say he's god now. If that is so, he can select you for his first sacrifice."

"I wonder if the people will stand for his ousting Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," I said.

"If a jong has plenty of warriors, his people will stand for anything," said Jonda.

"Loto-El-Ho-Ganja seemed all-powerful to me," I said. "The high priest and the jong did her homage and stepped around for her until Duma lost his temper."

"Look!" exclaimed Jonda, pointing. "Who is that they're bringing? I've never seen a human woman here before."

I looked and was shocked.

"It is Loto-El-Ho-Ganja," I said.

"So Duma *is* a god now!" said Jonda.

Two warriors were escorting Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. They were not rough with her. Perhaps they felt that she might be a goddess regardless of what Duma had proclaimed, and one doesn't willingly offend a goddess.

They were coming toward our cages; and presently they stopped in front of mine, unlocked the door, and pushed Loto in with me.

**I** HAVE had many strange experiences in my adventurous life, but being locked up in a cage over night with a goddess was a new one. Loto

appeared dazed. I imagine the shock of her fall from Olympus was terrific.

"What happened?" I asked.

"This is the end," she said. "Thank God, this is the end. I feel it."

She spoke in Amtorian, all but one word: God. That she spoke in English! There is no word for God in Amtorian. Most High More than Woman of the Fire is the nearest approach to the name of a diety that I have ever heard here. Where did she learn that one English word? I asked her; but she only looked more dazed than ever, and said that she did not know.

"Why is it the end, Loto?" I asked.

"He has condemned me to death," she said, and then she laughed. "I, who cannot die, and condemned to death. But he has condemned you, too—you and this other prisoner—and you *can* die. I wish that I might save you."

"You tried to, Loto," I reminded her. "Why did you do that? It has cost you your life."

"I liked you," she said. "I was drawn to you by some power I do not understand."

We three, Loto, Jonda, and I, condemned to death, talked together long into the night. They told me strange, almost unbelievable things about these green Brokol people. They told me that their blood was not red; but white, like the sap of some plants, and that they ate no meat, though they drank the blood of warm blooded animals.

I asked about the tiny Brokols I had seen hanging from trees, and they told me that the Brokol females laid small, nut-like eggs which were planted in the ground. These grew into trees; and in a matter of years, bore the fruit I had seen hanging. When the little Brokols were ripe, they dropped from the trees wild, untamed creatures that had to be captured and disciplined.

Each family usually had its own orchard of Brokol trees, the one I had seen, belonging to the royal family. Guypals, the great birds with which I had become familiar at Mypos, accounted for many little ripening Brokols, which accounted for the armed warriors guarding the royal orchard. Here was a race of people who not only had family trees, but family orchards.

When a woman planted an egg, she stuck a little marker in the ground beside it to identify it, just as our home gardeners place markers every spring in their gardens so that they will know which are beets and which tomatoes when they come up.

Because of guypals and insect pests the infant mortality of the Brokols is appallingly high, not one in a thousand reaching maturity. However, as the Brokols are polygamous and both the ground and the females extremely fertile, there is little danger that race suicide will exterminate them. I might mention that no dogs are allowed in the orchards.

**D**URING a lapse in the conversation, Loto suddenly exclaimed,

"I did not drink human blood. While I was Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj, I could not tell you; but now that I have been deposed I am free to speak."

"Somehow, I could not believe that you did," I told her, "but I am glad to hear it from your own lips."

"No," she said, "it was Ro-ton, Duma, and a few of the more favored priests who got the blood to drink. It was only their craving for blood which ever induced them to sacrifice a human slave, as these were considered very valuable as workers. Most of the offerings were Brokols who had incurred the displeasure of Duma or Ro-ton, but they did not drink the blood of these. I did not even kill the victim; Ro-ton

did that. I merely presided and repeated a chant; but the priests let the people think that I drank the blood, in order to impress them. It seems that the common people must be afraid of their goddess in order to be held under control."

"You and Carson speak of strange creatures of which I have never heard," said Jonda, the godless one.

"Let us talk of something else then," said Loto.

"I should like to hear more about the United States of America, of New York—New York—New York—" She whispered the name slowly, drawing it out; and her eyes were dreamy and introspective. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Betty! Betty! Betty! I'm getting it!" She was terribly excited. "Call—call—Betty call. I almost have it! Oh, God, I almost have it! Brooklyn! Now I have it! Brooklyn!" Then she swooned.

I tried to revive her, but she didn't respond; so I had to let her lie there. I knew that she would regain consciousness eventually.

What she had said mystified me. What could she know about Brooklyn? I had mentioned New York, but never Brooklyn; yet I could not be mistaken—she had said Brooklyn plainly. And what did she mean by *call*, and who was Betty? When she came to, I intended to get an explanation, if I could. Could it be that there was another American on Venus, whom she had seen and talked with? If I had reached the Shepherd Star, another might have done so. Perhaps he had been a prisoner here, may be an offering with whom she had talked before he died. I must find out! But what good it would do me, other than to satisfy my curiosity, I did not know; for was I not to die on the morrow?

Thinking thus, I fell asleep.

It was morning when I awoke. I was alone. Loto was not in the cage, and the door was still securely locked!

I AWOKE Jonda, but he could give me no information. He was as much mystified as I. Something tells me that I shall never see Loto again and that I shall carry this unsolved mystery to the grave with me.

Shortly before noon Brokols commenced filing past our cages. They were going toward the "bull ring" that Jonda and I had once cleaned. Many of them stopped and looked at us, commenting, usually in a most uncomplimentary manner, upon our looks and antecedents.

Presently they came for us—a couple of dozen warriors. I wanted to use my pistol, but I decided to wait until we got in the arena and I could wreak greater havoc.

The warriors were much concerned and not a little upset by the absence of Loto. They saw that the lock of the door had not been tampered with. When they asked me how she had escaped, I could only say that I did not know. They took us to the arena, which was crowded with Brokols. It was very quiet, nothing like a Spanish bull ring or an American base ball game when they have a large audience. There was little conversation, no cheering, no shouting. When Duma entered with his family and entourage, the place was as quiet as a tomb.

Jonda and I were standing in the center of the arena with our guards, one of whom left us and went and spoke with Duma. Presently he returned and said that Duma wished me to come to him. Half the guards accompanied me.

"What became of the woman?" demanded Duma, overlooking the fact that I had not bowed to him either four times or once.

"That is a stupid question to ask me," I told him.

Duma turned the color of a green lime.

"You must know," I continued, "that if I did know, I wouldn't tell you. I don't know, but if I told you that, you would not believe me. No, I don't know; but I can guess."

"What do you guess?" he asked.

"I guess that you can't hold a goddess behind bars," I said, "and I also guess that she has gone to arrange punishment for you and Ro-ton for the way you have treated her. You were very stupid to treat the Most High More Than Woman of the Fire the way you did."

"It was Ro-ton's fault," said Duma.

Ro-ton was there and he looked very uncomfortable, and when Duma said again,

"It was all Ro-ton's fault," he couldn't contain himself.

"You wanted to be the Most High More Than Man of the Fire," he blurted. "That was your idea, not mine. If she comes back, she'll know whose fault it was."

"Goddesses always do," I said. "You can never fool 'em."

"Take him away!" snapped Duma. "I do not like him."

"I think I hear her coming now," I said, looking up in the air.

Immediately Duma, Ro-ton, and all those around them looked up. It was a very tense moment, but no Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj appeared. However, I had upset their nervous equilibrium; which was all that I hoped to do; though it wouldn't have surprised me much if a girl who could have disappeared so completely and mysteriously as Loto had the night before had suddenly materialized carrying a flaming sword. However, she didn't; and I was haled back to the arena center.

**J**ONDA bowed to me seven times. Jonda has a sense of humor, but the Brokols haven't. There was a hissing noise, as though thousands of people had gasped simultaneously; and I guess that is exactly what happened; then the silence was deathly.

Duma shouted something that I could not understand, drums were beaten, and the warriors left us alone in the center of the arena.

"We are about to die," said Jonda. "Let's give a good account of ourselves."

Two warriors came out and handed us each a spear, or gaff, and a sword.

"See that you put on a good show," said one of them.

"You are going to see one of the best shows ever put on in this arena," I told him.

When the warriors had retired to places of safety, one of the small doors in the arena wall was opened and six nobargans\* came out. The nobargans are hairy, manlike cannibals. They have no clothing nor ornaments; but they fight with slings, with which they hurl stones; and with the crudest kind of bows and arrows.

The nobargans came toward us, growling like wild beasts, from which they are not far removed. If they were proficient with their slings and bows, our gaffs and swords would offer no defense. We'd never be able to get close enough to use them.

I threw down my gaff and drew my pistol, carrying the sword in my left

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\*The derivation of the word nobargan is interesting. Broadly, it means a savage; literally, it means hairy men. In the singular it is nobargan. *Gan* is man; *bar* is hair. *No* is a contraction of *not*, meaning with; and is used as a prefix with the same value that the suffix *y* has in English. So *nobar* means hairy, and *nobargan*, hairy man. The prefix *kloo* forms the plural (hairy men) savages. Throughout this narrative the English form of plural is used as a rule, as the Amtorian is quite awkward; in this case, *kloonobargan*.—Ed.

hand to use to fend off the missiles of the savages. Jonda wanted to barge ahead and get to close quarters, but I told him to wait—that I had a surprise for him, the nobargans, and the Brokols; so he dropped back at my side.

The savages were circling to surround us as I raised my pistol and dropped the first one; then all I had to do was pan, as the photographers say. One by one the creatures went down. Some missiles flew by our heads; and three of the beast-men had time to charge us, but I dropped them all before they reached us.

Utter silence followed, and endured for a moment; then I heard Duma raving like a madman. He had been cheated out of the sport he had expected. There had been no contest, and we had not been killed. He ordered warriors to come and take my pistol from me.

They came, but with no marked enthusiasm. I told them to stay back or I would kill them as I had killed the nobargans. Duma screamed at them to obey him. Of course there was nothing else for them to do; so they came on, and I dropped them just as I had the savages.

The Brokol audience sat in absolute silence. They are the quietest people! But Duma was not quiet. He fairly jumped up and down in his rage. He would have torn his hair, had he had any. Finally he ordered every armed man in the audience to enter the arena and get me, offering a splendid reward.

"Good work!" said Jonda. "Keep it up. After you have killed all the inhabitants of Brokol, we can go home."

"I can't kill 'em all," I said. "There are too many of them coming now. We'll be taken, but at a good price."

**T**HOUSANDS of armed men were jumping over the barrier and com-



ing toward us. I can't say they were hurrying much. Everyone seemed to be quite willing to let some one else win the reward; but they were coming, nevertheless.

As they were closing in on us, I heard a familiar sound above me. But it could not be true! I looked up; and there, far overhead, circled an aeroplane. It could not be true, but it was. As far as I could see it, I could recognize that ship. It was the anotar—my anotar! Who had repaired it? Who was flying it? Who else could it be but Duare, the only other person in all this world who could fly an aeroplane.

"Look!" I cried, pointing up. "She comes! Loto-El-Ho-Ganja Kum O Raj comes for vengeance!"

Everybody looked up. Then they turned and looked at Duma and Roton. I looked at them, too. They were beating it out of that arena as fast as they could go. I'll bet they're running yet.

The anotar was circling low now, and I was waving wildly to attract the attention of Duare, or whoever was in it. Presently Duare leaned out and waved.

I called to the Brokols to fall back out of the way or be killed by the bird ship coming with a new Loto-El-Ho-Ganja. I thought they might notice too soon that Duare was not the original Loto. They made room in a hurry, scrambling out of the arena and leaving the stadium as fast as they could go.

Duare landed in the arena—a beautiful landing—and a moment later I

had her in my arms. I would have done the same thing had we been on the corner of 42nd and Broadway.

Doran was in the ship with her, and a moment later Jonda was in and I was at the controls with Duare at my side. We were both so full of questions that we almost burst, but eventually I learned that one of Kandar's first acts after he became jong of Japal was to send a strong body of warriors to Timal to bring Duare and Artol back to his court. He also, following my instructions, had had a new propeller made for the anotar. Knowing that I had been captured by the Brokols, they knew where to look for me; though they had little hope of reaching me in time.

We were flying at a couple of thousand feet altitude when I looked back at Jonda. He was gazing around and down, wide-eyed with excitement.

"What do you think of it?" I asked him.

"I don't believe it," he said. "I think Ka-at was right—you are the greatest liar in the world."

#### Editor's Note:

Not that it has any bearing on this story, but just as an example of a remarkable coincidence, we want to reproduce here a news item that appeared in the daily press recently.

Brooklyn, Sep. 24. Special Correspondence. The body of Betty Callwell, who disappeared twenty-five years ago, was found in the alley back of her former home here early this morning. The preservation of the body was remarkable, as Miss Callwell must have been dead for twenty-five years. Friends who viewed the body insist that it did not look a day older than when she disappeared. The police fear foul play and are investigating.

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### FIRST ON THE SPOT

**W**E in America are not only the best informed people in the world, but very often we hear European speeches even before they are heard by the audiences to whom they are addressed. Here's how this curious phenomena is explained. If Goering, for example, is speaking to an audience in a vast hall

in Berlin, we who are tuned in on his words by short-wave radio hear them before they reach his listeners in the rearward sections of the hall. This is because his voice travels at a speed of about one thousand feet a second, while short waves travel at a speed of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second.

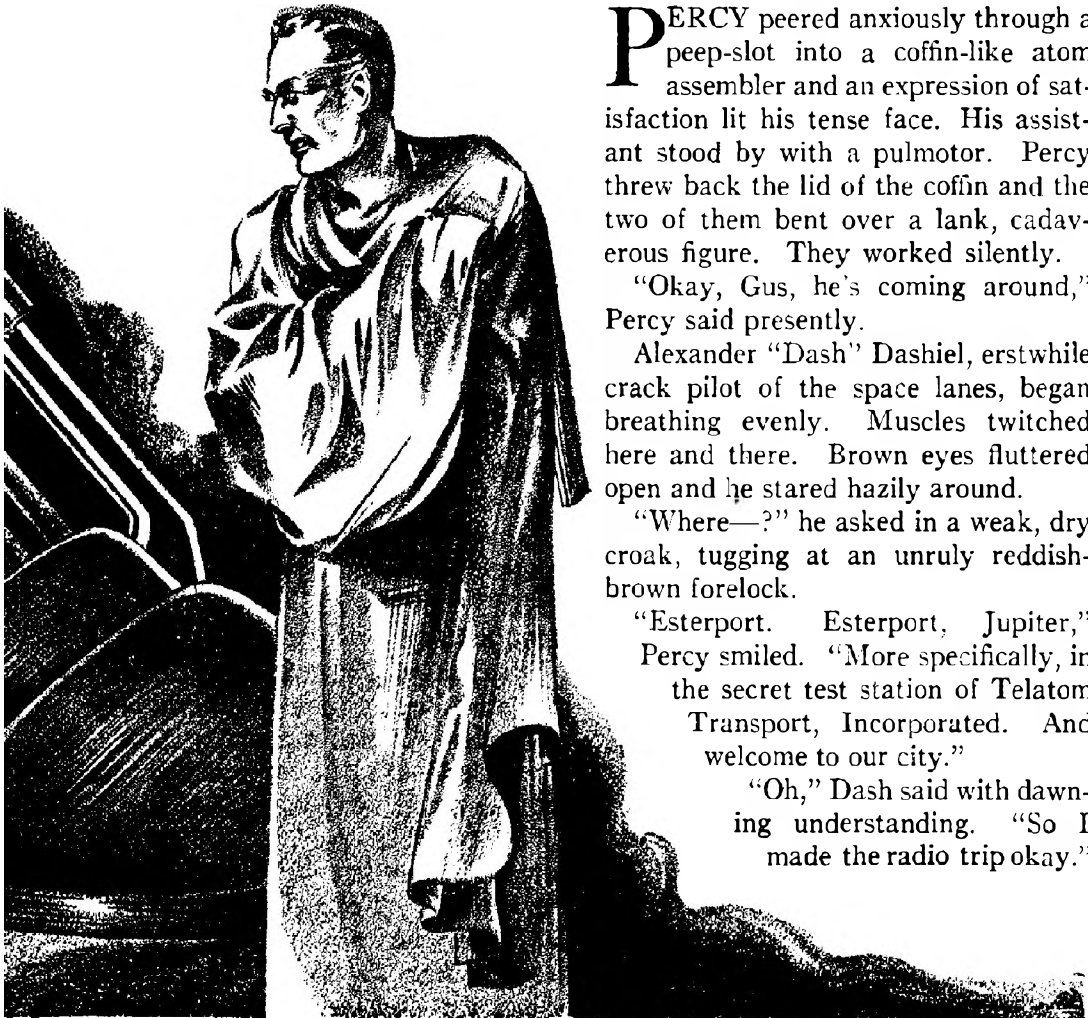


"Migod!" gasped Gus. "It's a little man—it's you in miniature!"

# MURDERED— YET ALIVE

*by Jep Powell*

**Dashiel traversed space via etherwave, and arrived twenty pounds underweight. Then a tiny Dashiel followed—and trouble began!**



PERCY peered anxiously through a peep-slot into a coffin-like atom assembler and an expression of satisfaction lit his tense face. His assistant stood by with a pulmotor. Percy threw back the lid of the coffin and the two of them bent over a lank, cadaverous figure. They worked silently.

"Okay, Gus, he's coming around," Percy said presently.

Alexander "Dash" Dashiel, erstwhile crack pilot of the space lanes, began breathing evenly. Muscles twitched here and there. Brown eyes fluttered open and he stared hazily around.

"Where—?" he asked in a weak, dry croak, tugging at an unruly reddish-brown forelock.

"Esterport. Esterport, Jupiter," Percy smiled. "More specifically, in the secret test station of Telatom Transport, Incorporated. And welcome to our city."

"Oh," Dash said with dawning understanding. "So I made the radio trip okay."

It had been a long chance, and a desperate one, for Dash. Once a famous pilot of the spaceways, he had been demoted and finally grounded forever because of his weakness for the insidious Saturnian loco-berries. He had gravitated to a point where no space ship would sign him on, not even the most disreputable old tramps. Washed up—though he was just beginning his middle thirties.

A few days ago he was a hopeless bum. Then came the weird offer from Telatom. It promised rehabilitation—or death. He had snatched at the offer; agreed to make the secret test flight by atomic projection. No publicity attended his departure from Earth. As a part of the plan, he firmly dated himself by becoming conspicuously drunk in several familiar Chicago hangouts. Then he was whisked secretly to Toledo, where he silently bade the world goodbye and stepped into the awesome atomizer. Now he was sitting on top of the world.

He was the first to travel from Earth to Jupiter—anywhere, for that matter—by electric beam. He was to receive a tidy little fortune from Telatom for his perilous venture. An even bigger fortune would come from personal appearance tours, advertising testimonials and in other ways.

“Well, what are you staring at?” he demanded. He was as naked as a peeled, hard-boiled egg. “Where are my clothes?”

“Right through that door.” Percy pointed. “You’ll find suit, shoes, shirts, everything. We got them as soon as your sizes were flashed to us.”

Gus cocked an attentive ear and hopped to the receiver controls.

“Say, there’s something else comin’,” he declared.

“Impossible!” Percy said. “They wouldn’t dare shoot anything else this

soon.” He stopped and listened to a hissing, crackling sound. “Well, damn their crazy souls! Probably testing again with a rabbit or something. A couple of minutes sooner, and they would have gummed up everything. If Frank Hoyt was here he’d get them told. Where the hell is Hoyt?”

**D**ASH stormed into the room in a suit that swallowed him.

“What kind of prank is this?” he demanded.

“It’s the size you ordered,” Percy declared.

Dash glowered up at Percy.

“How tall are you?”

“Five-eleven.”

Dash swallowed hard and paled.

“Then—then I’ve shrunk. Shrunk at least two inches. I was an even six feet.”

“Hey, Perce!” Gus shouted, eyes glued to the peep-slot in the assembler. “This ain’t no rabbit. It’s a human bein’. A brat.”

A few minutes later a tiny man sat up in the assembler and blinked in bewilderment into three equally bewildered faces.

“Holy Moses!” Gus gasped. “He’s a spittin’ image of the other’n.”

“Wh—who are you?” Dash gulped.

“Dash Dashiell,” the little fellow piped with some misgiving as he stared at the larger Dash Dashiell. He fingered a stray forelock.

Frank Hoyt strutted in with the air of a man trying to look like a busy executive. He was a paunchy, beady-eyed, middle-aged man who smiled only with his mouth—the left side of it.

“Dashiell!” he greeted. “Congratulations! I knew it couldn’t fail. Telatom is made! We’re all made. Wait’ll old Billy Smith hears about it. I’d like to see his face. The old walrus. Thought he had a strangle-hold on atomic travel,

did he? We'll relegate his shiny fleet of space ships to the limbo of the ox-cart. We'll put the old coot out of business. We'll—er, what's the matter?"

Wordlessly, Dash pointed to the naked little Dash.

"He says he's me," Dash muttered weakly.

"I am!" little Dash chirped.

Slowly Hoyt's astonishment changed to consternation.

"Dammit to hell!" he blared. "I've done everything but pray to have you projected safely through space—and what do I get? Two of you! Two are as bad as none. Space travelers aren't going to patronize our projector if there's danger of arriving as twins. What am I going to do, cancel all the personal appearances and the publicity I've got lined up?"

He slumped into a chair.

"How did it happen?"

"God knows," Percy sighed. "Maybe something went wrong back in Toledo; or possibly some elemental disturbance interrupted the beam. But how he arrived in two installments, identical except in size, is too much for me."

"I've got to talk with Russell in Toledo," Hoyt decided. "Connect me from my private office." He strode out of the room.

Hoyt was gone several minutes. When he returned he found the two Dashes arguing over the matter of identity. Little Dash was wearing a large towel, Indian blanket fashion.

"Quit wrangling," Hoyt ordered. "I think I've got a solution. Now, listen, Dash—"

Both Dashes answered as one.

**H**OYT bit his lip, then a slow smile curled it. He addressed the smaller one.

"To avoid confusion, we'll call you Dot. How's that? Dash and Dot. Dot-Dash. Get it?" He seemed to enjoy his cleverness.

"All right, Dash," he continued. "You'll go on with the personal appearances as I had planned. We'll get you a new outfit. Shoes with built-up heels to make your height about right. I'll get the mayor to greet you here. You'll ride with him behind a police escort to City Hall. You'll make a speech there and receive the key to the city. Tomorrow night you'll be honor guest at the Explorer's Club. I'll get busy with the arrangements. We'll keep Dot out of sight and—"

"The hell you will!" Dot screeched. "What about my contract?"

Hoyt was thoughtful for a moment. Then,

"Write your signatures on separate pieces of paper. Get two pens, Gus."

Their signatures were identical.

"All right, I give up," Hoyt sighed with a gesture of resignation. He brooded a minute and a shrewd smile played at the corner of his mouth. "I'll figure a way out by tomorrow. Meanwhile, you fellows can sleep in a room here at the station. But right now you need some food, I guess. And something for Dot to wear till the stores open tomorrow. I'll have my chauffeur take you to a restaurant and he'll dig up some clothes for Dot. Call Lefty, will you, Gus?" He peeled two large bills from a fat roll, handed one to each Dashiel.

"What about the twenty-five grand?" they chorused.

"Which of you gets it?" Hoyt snapped. "I told you I would take care of all that tomorrow."

Lefty pushed his cap backward in what may have been a salute, and stood slouchily in the door. He was a large man with arms that dangled like an

ape's. He had the scarred face of a sparring partner in a heavyweight champion's camp. The face split into a smile of toothy gold.

"Lefty, these gentlemen are Mr. Dashiell," Hoyt said. "Figure that one out for yourself. You are at their service."

As they turned to look at Lefty, Hoyt drew a forefinger across his throat and pointed at Dot. Lefty nodded.

"**B**BETTER keep off the main stems," Dash told Lefty as they climbed into the sleek uranium sedan. "We can't afford to spoil the publicity setup. Some of the space flyers may recognize me if we go around any of the regular hangouts."

"Me, too," Dot added.

"Don't worry," Lefty grunted.

The streets grew narrower and darker. Dot glanced into the rear-view mirror and caught an ominous leer from Lefty.

"Where you taking us?" Dot quavered suspiciously.

"You wanted to stay off the main stems, didn't you?" Lefty retorted. "It won't be long now," he added significantly.

Squalid, unlighted houses now were spaced farther and farther apart. Dim street lights shone only at intersections. The streets were deserted. Dot shivered and wrapped his towel closer around him, although the temperature in the domed city was quite comfortable.

The car slid by what seemed acres of gloomy junk-yard. Lefty stopped in the shadows of a deserted building. He stepped out of the car and there was a clank as he lifted a manhole cover. He snatched open the car door and peered in.

"C'mere, you!" he growled, reaching a long arm into the car and seizing Dot by the foot. He yanked Dot from the

seat and clapped a hand over his mouth to smother a shriek of terror.

Dash sallied out of the car and lit on Lefty's shoulders like a lioness defending her cub. His 160-odd pounds equalled nearly a quarter of a ton in the heavy Jovian gravity and Lefty went down under the weight. He dropped Dot. Dash hammered his fists into Lefty's scarified visage. Lefty's big arms closed in a bear-like hug and he rolled over, pinning Dash helplessly to the pavement. Dot was scurrying around looking for a stone to use on the chauffeur's egg-shaped head.

"Hold your hosses, fella," Lefty panted almost apologetically. "I'm just doin' you a favor. I could drop the little gink down there and slide the cover over 'im and nobody'd ever miss 'im. Then he couldn't crab your act."

Dash squirmed under Lefty's weight and shook his head.

"I've sunk pretty low," he admitted, "but murder's out."

"He ain't nothin' to you, is he?" Lefty demanded.

"No!" Dash snorted. Then, "Hell, I don't know."

"You're nuts," Lefty grumbled. "I got my orders and I'm gonna keep 'em. I'll take care of the little shrimp and you won't even have to see it, or know anything about it."

"Listen, you cold-blooded ape," Dash grated. "If you harm him, I'll have you and Hoyt and the whole crew behind bars."

Lefty eased his embrace slowly.

"Okay, mister," he said finally, "if you feel that way about it. If you want to let a shrimp spoil your act, that's your business. You fellas get back in the car and we'll get some grub and some clothes for the runt."

**F**FRANK HOYT paced his office in restless rage. Dot Dashiell, a syn-

chromy in brown attire obtained from the children's department of an Esterport store, sat sullenly in a big leather chair, feet dangling half way to the floor.

"A whole day gone and we haven't moved an inch," Hoyt groaned. "All because you had to turn up."

"What's a day?" Dot reported. "It's only ten hours up here."

Hoyt almost strangled.

"What's a day?" he sputtered. "It's—it's precious. Every hour counts. Dash was seen in Chicago on Saturday night—"

"Sure I was," Dot interrupted.

"All right," Hoyt continued impatiently. "—seen in Chicago Saturday night. Drunk and disgusting around several familiar haunts. That was the last time Earth saw him—"

"Me!"

"Well, you, damn it! Now Dash Dashiell, whoever he is, is here days sooner than any space ship could bring him, yet we can't cash in on it because you want to tag along like a shadow." Hoyt released a deep, quivering sigh. "Now listen, runt, as soon as I hear from Toledo, I'll have a reasonable proposition to offer you. You'll take it, or—" He crooked his thumbs into hooks and gestured toward Dot's throat.

Dash swaggered into the room in a new brown outfit. He stopped, twisting a recalcitrant brown lock and glaring at Dot.

"You would get brown," he snorted.

"I always liked brown," Dot declared.

"And I suppose you like dark blue with a chalk stripe."

"Yeah," Dot admitted. "I got one like that. Did you?"

A choking noise came from Dash's throat.

An evil glint lighted Hoyt's eyes.

Identical tastes would breed hatred between them, he mused. Give them enough rope, that's all. Soon either could enjoy seeing the other murdered—tortured in the bargain. Give them more rope. But hurry!

"Now, fellows," Hoyt said unctuously. "You both have good taste. Remind me of, er, twins."

"Wha-a-a-t?" they blared.

Hoyt chuckled.

"You're so alike. It's distressing to see you quarrel. But I was just saying to Dot, er, I expect to hear from Toledo right away and I think we can get everything ironed out. While I'm waiting, why don't you go out and enjoy yourselves? Get in a better humor. Go to some obscu—, er, quiet little night spot where you won't be recognized. Lefty will know where to—"

Dot shivered.

"Lefty was a little, er, hasty last night," Hoyt continued in his oily tone. "But now that you fellows are sticking together, he wouldn't dare try anything. And he has my orders not to. Congenial chap, Lefty."

**I**NTERASTRAL CLUB was a high-sounding name for the tawdry backstreet honkytonk where Lefty dined the problem guests of Telatom Transport. But the brochetteed swamp-moles were done to a king's taste and the excellent teka wine warmed their insides to a pleasant glow. Lefty heaved a prodigious sigh and patted his stomach. His other hand guided a toothpick between his 18-karat molars. Then he reached into a pocket and pulled out a handful of shriveled locoberries. He swirled them in his palm and eyed his guests cunningly.

Involuntarily Dash and Dot reached toward the dried berries, then halted their hands. Dash wet his lips with

his tongue.

Lefty selected a berry, put it in his mouth and chewed tantalizingly. He dropped the other berries on the table.

Dash's hand inched forward.

"No!" Dot cried. "Don't touch 'em! You know what they did to you—to us—before. Don't—"

"Shut up!" Dash growled. He scooped up several of the berries, popped them into his mouth and chewed avidly.

The Callistonian twist band played with a frenzy that would make a Harlem jam session seem like a chamber musicale by comparison. One of the hostesses, a willowy, honey-blond Earthgirl, paused questioningly at the table.

"M-m-m-m!" Dash and Dot said in unison.

She gave a provocative little twitch.

Dash bolted out of the booth and swept her away. Dot sulked in silence as he watched them gliding gracefully across the floor in long, sweeping strides. He'd have to use stilts to look down into her violet-blue eyes as Dash was doing.

Lefty gulped down a goblet of teka and looked the place over for another Earthgirl. They were scarce, not one was available. A plump little Jovian half-breed caught his eye and skipped up to the table. With the pert brunette wig that covered the nut-like shell of her head, false eyebrows and lashes, and expert make-up, she resembled an Earthgirl closely.

"Not ba-a-a-d," Lefty announced after a brief scrutiny. He stumbled out of the booth and towered over her. They shuffled off.

A blue-skinned Venusian cutie sidled into the booth with an undulating movement.

"Leth danth, Honee," she lisped through her forked tongue.

"Ugh!" Dot said, avoiding her round, fishy eyes. "Go away."

The evening was young but the fun was in full sway. Nights are short on Jupiter and frolics begin in high gear. There is no time for warming up. Gaiety threatened to lift the roof of the Interastral Club but it only added to Dot's misery as he sat alone in the booth. Dash and his blonde whirled past and Dash flung back a tormenting sneer.

Dot shrank deeper into his gloom. He eyed the loco-berries longingly. His fingers drummed nervously near the berries. He withdrew his hand with a supreme effort.

Dash and the blonde Earthgirl came to the booth for a drink of teka.

"O-o-o-o-o," the girl said, flashing a dazzling smile at Dot. Then to Dash, "Your little boy?"

"Hell no!" Dot shrieked.

"Oh, brothers," she assumed.

Dot grunted an unintelligible answer.

"I think you're awful cute," she cooed. "Come sit on Mimi's lap and let's make a loving cup of this goblet."

Dot bristled, changed his mind, accepted.

Dash glowered. Dot grinned at him evilly and made a noise like the ripping of canvas.

Mimi did a giggle that ran up the scale.

"Little mans got great big kiss for Mimi?" she asked teasingly.

Dot buried his lips in the highly-rouged pucker proffered.

**D**ASH leaped to his feet, upsetting the table with a clatter of dishes and silverware. Four shell-headed Jovians sprang from nowhere and propelled the furious Dash speedily to the door. Brawls were frequent in the Interastral and capable bouncers knew how to nip them in the bud.



Lefty deserted his wriggly Jovian dumpling, caught Dot up under an arm, tossed a banknote to the cashier on the way out and joined Dash outside the door.

"Whatcha tryin' to do, attract attention?" Lefty growled. "Can't you take it if your gal plays up to the little gink?"

Dash shot Dot a poisonous glance through dilated pupils. Dot backed away uneasily.

"Where to now?" Lefty asked with mock politeness as he opened the car door. "Like to just catch a little air?"

The Dashiels doubled sat in strained silence as Lefty piloted them around the city. Occasionally he pointed out something of interest.

The car slowed down suddenly.

"Say, there's a street carnival," Lefty announced. "I ain't been to one in a coon's age."

"To hell with it," muttered the Dashes.

Ignoring them, Lefty swerved to the curb. He jumped out and opened the door. Childish excitement shone on his face.

"I like to throw baseballs at them shell-headed Jovian dodgers," he grinned. "Hope they got a dodger concession. I used to be a pretty good fireballer back in the Three-Eye League."

Unenthusiastically they followed him to the carnival lot.

Dot stopped short in front of a freak show. The barker was pointing to a pretty blonde midget on a platform. He called her Princess Teeny. She was smiling into the multitude of gaping faces but a wistful expression lurked in her large hazel eyes.

"Ain't she darlin'?" a red-headed Earthwoman cried.

Dot agreed silently.

"She is a cute little trick," Dash mut-

tered. "I could go for her if she was bigger."

"Come on," Lefty urged. "Let's find them dodgers."

Dot stood firmly and gave him an appealing look.

"Ho-ho!" Lefty hooted. "He's fallin' for the dwarf. Ouch!"

Dot had given him a vicious kick on the shin.

"Okay, pee-wee, you can go in an' see her," Lefty chuckled. "We'll all go in."

Inside the tent, instead of following the spieler who led the crowd on the round of freaks, Dot marched straight to Princess Teeny's little section. Lefty kept an eye on him.

TEENY was seating herself at a miniature desk to autograph post-card photos. She looked up and saw a small but tense face peering through a flap in the four-foot-high cheap plush curtain that surrounded her.

"May—may I see you?" the tense face stammered.

Her surprised look melted into a charming smile. She came to the curtain flap to greet him.

"Hello," she said, offering her hand. Her voice was a tiny golden bell.

"Ulp," was all Dot could say, but he said it eloquently. He tried again, but he was as tongue-tied as a flustered schoolboy. Suddenly he realized he was still holding her hand. He let go of it as he would a hot potato.

Teeny smiled reassuringly.

"Are you joining the show?" she asked. There was a hopeful tone in her voice.

"No, I—I just saw you out there." He jerked his thumb toward the entrance. "I—I thought you looked unhappy."

Her eyes dropped, then came up with that same wistful expression.

"I'm not very happy. It's—well, long hops, strange places, strange faces. People staring. Always people staring. And having to live and eat and travel with—with freaks. I used to be with a midget troupe. It was nice then. But I'm the only midget with this outfit."

Sympathy crept into Dot's eyes.

"But some day I'm going to get away from all this," she said with a far-away look. "I'm saving my money. Maybe I'll be able to buy a little home somewhere—somewhere away from people. I'd like to live in the country. Raise chickens." She smiled again. "Would you like my picture?"

She went to her little desk, nibbled pensively at the butt of her pen, smiled, then wrote: "Till we meet again—Teeny."

Dot dug into his pocket as she handed the card to him.

She shook her head.

"No. It's a present from me because I think I like you. And I autographed it 'specially for you."

The spieler was leading his mob their way. Dot glanced hastily at the autograph.

"Gee! Thanks," he breathed.

"And what is your name?" Teeny asked.

Dot's answer was drowned by the raucous voice of the spieler. He was swept aside by the mob without a chance to say goodbye.

**L**EFTY was in high glee as he drove back toward the hideout. He had bagged two of the shell-headed dodgers, sending one of them to the hospital with a cracked cranium. But his passengers were uncongenial. Dash was still grumbling about the night club episode. Dot was thinking about a pair of hazel eyes and a chicken farm.

Lefty also lapsed into silence. He

slumped in his seat and eased up on the accelerator. Suddenly he came to attention and snapped his fingers. A crooked smile split his unhandsome face and he drove furiously for the hideout.

"Say, Big Fella, I got a swell idea," Lefty said as he stopped in front of Telatom's secret station in a dilapidated warehouse. He twisted around in his seat. "I got a way to get rid of the little guy without harmin' hide or hair of him. You can 'arrive' tonight and the boss can get busy with all the publicity stunts. Everything'll be—"

"Hey, wait a minute!" Dot screeched. "You can't—"

"Shut up!" Dash barked. "What's the plan, Lefty?"

"We'll just turn 'im over to that freak show we was at."

"The hell you will!" Dot yowled.

Lefty lunged over the seat and his hairy hand closed over Dot's windpipe. Then he stuffed a dirty handkerchief into Dot's mouth. He snatched off his tie and completed an effective gag.

"That'll hold 'im for a spell," Lefty grunted, yanking Dot to the front seat and holding him in one arm. "Now you don't have to take no part in it, Big Un. I take 'im down to the carnival and turn 'im over to the freak collector. I ought to get a little piece of change out of 'im; and maybe the boss'll slip me a bonus. But I'll make the side show man agree not to show the runt till the outfit's away from Es-terport, maybe off the whole planet."

Dash fumbled with a cowlick as he considered.

"He won't get hurt or nothin'," Lefty continued almost pleadingly. "He'll make a good living with the show. And, if he turns up a few months later and claims he's you, everybody will say he's a screwball. Sound okay?"

"Yeah," Dash said. "Sounds okay."

"Be still, pee-wee," Lefty muttered. "You'll get a chance to see plenty of that half-pint twist. You got nothin' to squawk about. And you, Big Un, you better call the boss and tell 'im everything's all set. You can get 'im at the Terra Arms. He'll probably hop right over here. I'll be back as soon as I put the runt in the show business."

Dash started toward the gloomy warehouse. He turned and came back.

"Good luck, punk. You brought it on yourself," he said to the squirming Dot. Then to Lefty, "Got a few of those berries left?"

**F**RANK HOYT'S fingers tapped an angry tattoo on his desk.

"You're crazy," he snapped. "You'll get what your contract calls for, and not another damned dollar."

"You'll pay me double," Dash insisted, "Or—"

"Or what?"

Dash's dilated pupils gleamed cunningly through narrow slits. He tugged nervously at a moist, reddish-brown ringlet. A corner of his mouth twitched.

"How would you like it if I spilled the story about arriving here double? How far back would that set the opening of Telatom's transportation service. I could locate the runt, and we would prove—"

"The old double-cross, eh?" Hoyt rasped.

"Who the hell are you to talk about double-crossing?" Dash spat at him. "You stole your atom projection secret from Old Man Smith when you were working for him, didn't you? And now you're using it to put him out of business. Maybe he'd be interested in my story, if you don't come across."

"You dirty, blackmailing louse!" Hoyt hissed. "We picked you up out of the gutter and gave you a chance to get on your feet again. Now you try

extortion. We should have known better than to pick a berry-munching hophead when reckless bums are a dime a dozen."

"Then hire yourself a bum," Dash goaded. "Hire a dozen. Even if all of them make the trip okay, people will still be skeptical about your service after what happened to me."

"No they won't, Dashiell," Hoyt said slowly. Rage faded from his face, replaced by calmness of grim decision. "They won't know anything about you." His hand came from under his desk. It held a snub-nosed automatic. His finger tightened on the trigger.

**A** SHORT, thin man with handlebar mustaches knocked at an office door of Telatom's dismal warehouse. He was flanked by two hulking, bull-necked men. Another person, hardly more than a yard tall, stood behind them.

The door opened and Lefty squinted into the darkness.

"I'm looking for Frank Hoyt," the mustached man announced.

"He ain't here," Lefty said after a moment's pause. He poked a revolver through the door. "Get the hell away."

A blackjack cracked Lefty on the knuckles and his pistol dropped. Another blackjack crashed down on his head in time to cut short his yelp of surprise. Lefty slumped silently to the floor. The mustached man kicked the fallen pistol out into the darkness. The four figures moved into the building and crept stealthily down a long, dimly-lit hall. They stopped at an open door.

Inside the room Frank Hoyt, Percy and Gus were crouched over the coffin-like atom assembler. There was a low humming in the coffin. The three were so engrossed in the business at hand they had not heard the scuffle at the warehouse front, the steps in the hall.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the mustached man said softly.

The three startled men swung around.

"B-Billy Smith!" Percy gasped.

Billy Smith, transportation tycoon whose space ships served every port in the Solar system, twirled his white mustaches with caressing fingers. A smile played on his lips but his grey-blue eyes were diamond hard.

Hoyt dived for his automatic that lay on a nearby chair.

"Better shoot fast and straight," Smith said coolly, folding his arms. "If you get me, Mumbo and Jumbo here will tear you to pieces—tiny pieces." He glanced at his gargantuan bodyguards.\* "If you miss me, I'll take that gat and pistol-whip you to a pulp."

The cocky little old man strode calmly toward Hoyt.

Hoyt's hand wavered and he let the pistol drop to his side. "What do you want, Mr. Smith?" he asked sullenly.

Smith took the automatic and flung it scornfully into a corner.

"Is this the way to greet a competitor, Frank? Where's your hospitality?" Smith taunted in mock rebuke. "Receiving another test passenger?"

The humming in the coffin stopped and Hoyt breathed a fluttering sigh of relief. Smith's gaze fell upon Dash's bloody clothes beside the atom assembler. His eyes bore into Hoyt's.

"H-m-m-m-m," he murmured. "So

that's the way it is. First a little larceny, and now it's murder. That assembler can also serve as an atomizer. And you've just been using it to get rid of the corpus delicti; puff it out into space. Smart, eh?"

He worked his lips as if he had a bad taste in his mouth, then spat on the floor. He raised his voice to a thunderous bellow.

"But not smart enough, Rat! The whole gang of you are rats—dirty, sneaking, yellow rats!"

He eyed each of them with silent scorn, then grew calm again.

"Thought you could outsmart me, eh Frank? As my trusted employee, you knew I bought the secret of atomic projection and failed to patent it. You recognized it as the greatest advancement in the history of transportation, so you decided to steal it; make millions for yourself; put me out of business.

"You thought my failure to patent the secret was an oversight, didn't you, Frank? Well, it wasn't. I might have used it and made enough money to snap my fingers at junking my own fleet of ships. But the method is too revolutionary. The universe is not yet ready for it. I bought the secret to protect the transportation industry, to protect my employees, such as you, Frank, and even the employees of my competitors. That's something you couldn't understand, you self-centered skunk."

Hoyt's eyes darted toward the door, where Lefty stood gripping his recovered revolver.

"Let him have it!" Hoyt screamed.

**M**UMBO and Jumbo moved like twin bolts of lightning as Lefty's pistol roared. Lefty went down under Mumbo's titanic bulk. He fired again but the bullet went wild as a huge fist smashed into his face. Mumbo continued to belabor the already uncon-

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\* The inhabitants of Jupiter, in order to withstand the tremendous gravity of that world, have evolved by environmental influence to tremendous creatures with great density of body structure, and having bones as strong and unbreakable as steel. Earthmen on Jupiter must use anti-gravity shields in their dwellings, and wear gravity-repeller belts when out-of-doors. This is accomplished by a reversal of the force of gravity, associated with magnetism, to the extent of some 40%, which would make a 200 lb. man (Earth Standard) weigh only approximately 250 lbs. If he did not, he would weigh nearly five times as much, and the weight of his body would break his bones.—Ed.

scious chauffeur, battering his face into an unrecognizable mess.

Jumbo stood with his back to his master, stoically plucking at a slug that had flattened itself against one of his steely ribs.

"I've got some iodine in the car. We'll fix that up in a jiffy," Smith said to the silent Jumbo, slapping his shoulder in a grateful gesture that the giant understood.

"As I was saying, Frank," the old man continued evenly, as if nothing had happened, "you weren't so smart. Oh, you were smart enough not to steal the original secret. You copied it. But I suspected you; had you tailed ever since the day you left my employ.

"I knew 'Boss' Russell was backing you; knew you were building stations in Toledo and here in Esterport. I knew you were about ready for a test projection, so I rushed here. En route here, I was advised by my American office that Dashiell was to be your human guinea pig. He beat me here by a day—at least, they did," he corrected, glancing at Dot. "My spotters located them tonight at that cheap night club. I learned about your cowardly man-hole episode after we rescued the little fellow from that side show."

He paused for breath after his long speech. Hoyt started to speak, glanced at the gory Lefty, and shuddered. Neither Percy nor Gus had said a word. Dot was staring with frank admiration at the vigorous old shipping tycoon.

"Yes, Hoyt, you're sunk!" Smith declared.

"You—you haven't got anything on us," Hoyt whimpered.

"Oh, no? I couldn't do anything about the theft of my secret, because it wasn't patented. I had to wait for you to make a slip. And, without the corpus delicti, a murder charge probably would fizzle. Any way, it wasn't

a thorough murder because Dash Dashiell still lives." He pointed at Dot. "That's where I've got you. He'll be the prosecution's star witness on a kidnaping charge. The freak show man also will testify gladly because he lost the money he paid to your chauffeur. And a kidnaping rap is as serious here as it is back in the U. S. A."

He waited for that to sink in.

"Now you're going to send a message to Russell, telling him Telatom is washed up. Then you're going to sign a little confession, Frank—I won't ever use it unless I have to."

While Hoyt wrote with halting strokes, Billy Smith dictated the long confession involving Hoyt, Percy, Gus, the inert Lefty, "Boss" Russell, and each member of Telatom's Toledo crew.

A snuffle attracted attention toward the atomizer where Dot squatted over the little heap of Dash's bloody clothes. There were tears in his eyes.

"What's the matter, sonny?" Billy Smith inquired.

"I—he was my own flesh and b-blood," Dot gulped sadly.

"That reminds me, Hoyt," Smith said. "You and Russell can forget about Dashiell's contract. He is in my employ now. I'll pay what you agreed to pay—twenty-five thousand, wasn't it?—and put him on my payroll."

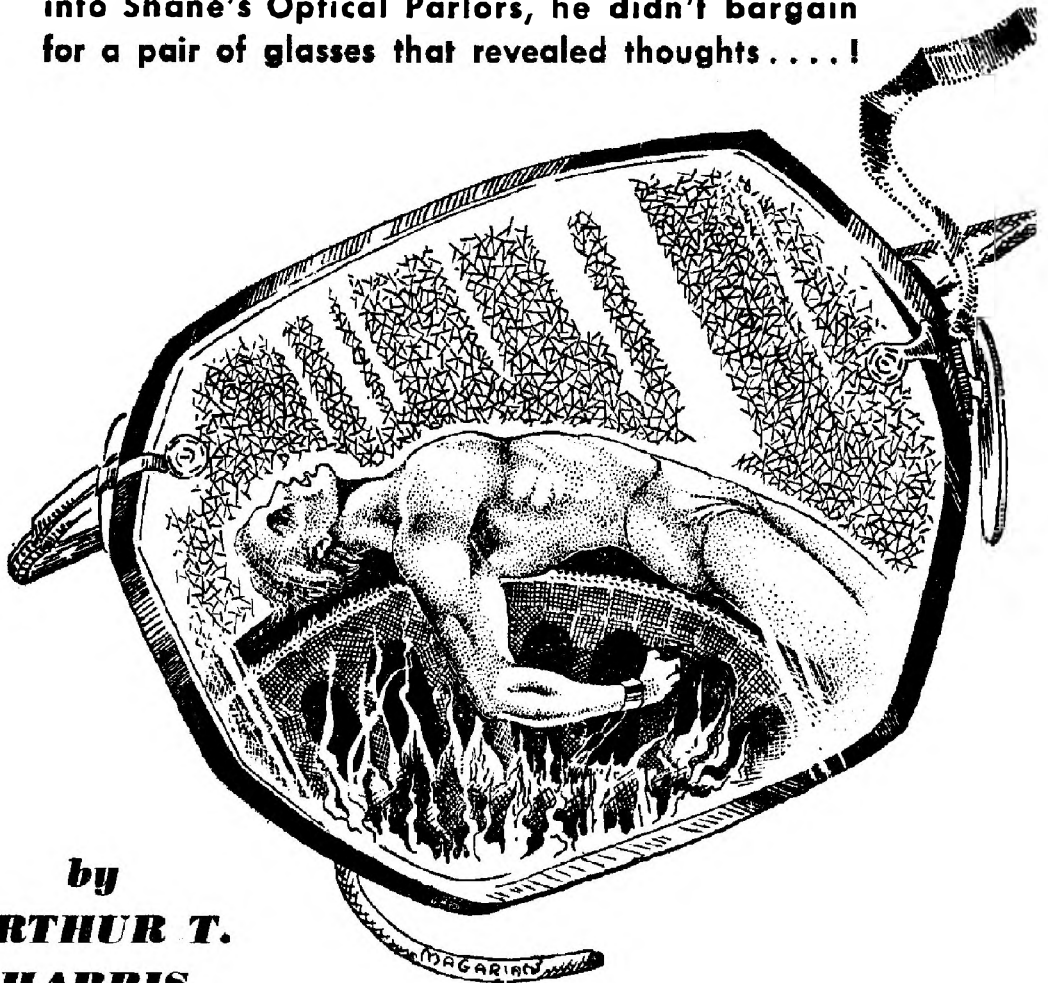
"Damn, Mr. Smith," Dot exclaimed. "You're sure a square shooter. You mean you'll give me a chance in your—?"

"Easy, Dash," the old man said. "You wouldn't exactly fit into a pilot's seat now, would you? You could buy some kind of business with the cash. Figure you could stay off the loco-berries and run a business?"

"Yes!" said a resolute Dash Dashiell, tugging thoughtfully at a stray forelock. "And the business is going to be a poultry farm."

# **ABNER SCHLAP'S STRANGE INSIGHT**

When Abner Schlap, mogul of Terminal City, went into Shane's Optical Parlors, he didn't bargain for a pair of glasses that revealed thoughts . . . !



by  
**ARTHUR T.  
HARRIS**

**W**ITH dreadful finality, Abner Schlap, the Terror of Terminal City, barged commandingly through the portals of Doc Shane's Optical Parlors.

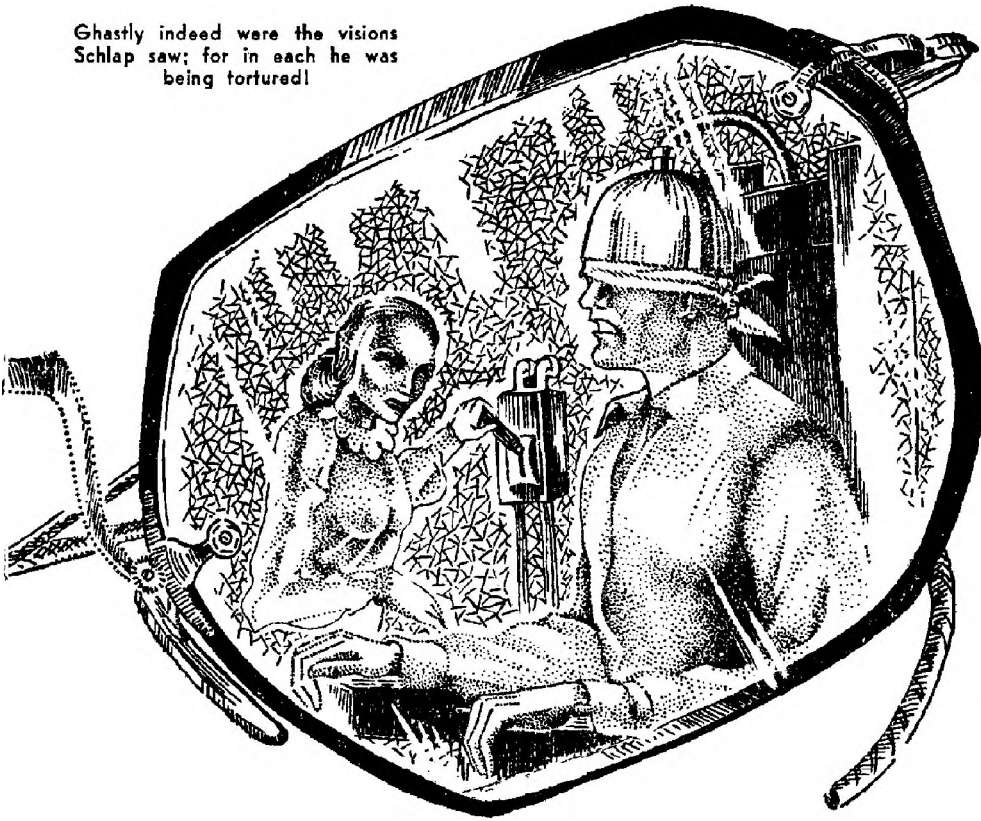
"I," announced Schlap with the voice of doom, "have come for my glasses."

Horace Heysead, Doc Shane's newly hired assistant, notched up his courage three and a half pegs and stammered,

"Oh, indeed? How nice of you to call on us, Major Schlap."

"Colonel Schlap!" thundered the proprietor of Terminal City, who had

Ghastly indeed were the visions  
Schlap saw; for in each he was  
being tortured!



once been a corporal in a boys' military school. "And I did not come to pay you a visit! I detest doctors and politicians—quacks, all of them! I might even detest you," he added ominously, "if you don't get me my glasses in a hurry."

"Oh, no, sir!" quavered Horace. "That would be awful! I'll see about your prescription at once. Dr. Shane is home, ill," he flung back over his shoulder as he scurried from the room.

"Ill, huh?" growled Abner Schlap. "I trust it's nothing trivial."

The frightened Horace was back in a few minutes with an attractively designed pair of spectacles. The lenses, as a timid beam of sunlight struck them, seemed for a moment to reflect an oddly phosphorescent glint, as though a rainbow had become imprisoned in a fortune-teller's crystal globe.

Schlap glared at the eyepiece suspiciously.

"This doesn't look like the frame I ordered," he snapped.

"Oh, but there must be some mistake!" Horace quivered. "These were laid out in Dr. Shane's special drawer for—er—important customers."

Schlap appeared slightly mollified.

"All right," he grunted. "I'll try 'em on."

For a man of such large and well-nigh formidable proportions, Schlap handled the glasses almost gingerly. He put them over his gimlet eyes. The spectacles hung awry; and with a simper of apology, Horace Heysead went to work.

"How is that, sir?" he asked after he had made one or two little adjustments.

"Uncomfortable!" Schlap snorted.

"Here, sir," Horace suggested, "watch my finger."

He moved the shaking member back and forth from the center of Schlap's nose. Schlap focused and unfocused his eyes blurrily, trying to follow the finger. Finally he impaled it with a dangerous glare. Yes—a man's finger, all right.

His eyes lifted abruptly to stare at the anxious Horace. And then Schlap started. He was looking directly into the eyes of Doc Shane's young assistant—and what he saw there was, to put it mildly, shocking.

Straight through the black pupils he looked—right through Horace's twitching eyeballs! But instead of seeing a collection of blood vessels, lymphatic veins and other unmentionable things, Abner Schlap beheld a miniature motion picture!

A motion picture, no less, of Horace Heysead's inner mental processes!

"Oh, God!" moaned Schlap piteously.

He closed his eyes weakly. But he couldn't get the dreadful vision out of them. He quaked like an aspen leaf, recalling the two characters in that hectic scene.

One of them had been Abner Schlap. He was stretched out on a rack, like a defenseless victim of the Inquisition. Only it was a 1941 rack. All aluminum, with sharp little spikes. On a bicycle-seat contraption had sat Horace Heysead. A wheel-and-sprocket gadget was attached to the rack.

Every time Schlap groaned, Horace made another gleeful turn of the pedal. Every time Schlap stopped groaning, Horace pushed a little switch, which sent sharp electric jolts through the sharper little spikes, on which Schlap was impaled.

Yes, indeed, it had all been perfectly frightful . . .

"Don't do it!" Schlap screamed. "I'll give you a half interest in my trolley company!"

Horace Heysead turned the color of salt.

"Can—can I get you a doctor?" he stammered hoarsely. "You seem a trifle upset."

"Upset!" screamed Abner Schlap horribly. "My God, man, I'm in a state of collapse!"

Tottering to his feet like a wounded moose, Schlap cast one more horrified look at the incredulous Horace Heysead and lurched fearfully to the street.

TEN minutes later, Abner Schlap sank like a stone into his office chair. He wiped his forehead with a big silk handkerchief. Then he pushed the first in a row of panel buttons.

Ten seconds later, a mouselike female fluttered like a dying hummingbird into the Great Man's sanctum.

"Miss Droope!" Schlap said anxiously. "Look into my eyes."

"Yes, sir," squeaked his long-suffering secretary. "Of course, sir."

Miss Droope, for all her beanpole figure, came of good stock. An ancient ancestor had come over on the *Mayflower*, or at any rate on a boat. The heritage of heroes flowered however nervously in the veins of Miss Belinda Droope.

But to Abner Schlap, that bloodstream was an icy torrent of murderous revenge.

"No!" he screamed. "You don't have to work Saturdays! I'll give you a raise! I'll—even—help—you—to—get—married! Only for God's sake, *don't torture me any more!*"

Miss Droope behaved quite normally. She let out an anguished howl and fled like a moth-eaten gazelle from her abject employer. She fled right out the door of Schlap's Golden Brewery



and down the main street to her room in Terminal City's oldest hotel. There Miss Droope buried her head in her bed covers and proceeded to shudder in tearful spasms.

Schlap also shuddered. For it was true, then. He didn't have the d.t.'s. Heaven forbid, although he was not in bad health, a *second* dreadful vision had come before him! Just the other day, his doctor had pronounced him sound. No; he, Abner Schlap, must be *bewitched* . . .

The movie had flashed on again. That dreadful mental movie, which undoubtedly came straight from the most secret recess of the human brain. The subconscious mind, perhaps.

But whatever it was, the scene had been virtually repeated—another torture episode. This time, instead of being spitted on an aluminum rack, Abner Schlap had been wound around the inside of an automobile clutch.

On all sides of the clutch was a magnificent roadster, and in the driver's seat, coyly depressing the clutch pedal, was Miss Belinda Droope.

The car was bowling gaily down a torn-up mountain road. Every time there was a particularly bad hole, Miss Droope let out the clutch and slowed the car. This meant that Abner Schlap was being alternately whirled on a flywheel and ground by friction into fat little bits.

It was, indeed, ghastly. It was even more disastrous when the Terror of Terminal City, coming to his senses, realized that Miss Droope had an incorrigible reputation as a gossip, and that before many hours he, Abner Schlap, would be known about town as a werewolf, a human cannibal and a man-made blitzkrieg.

**A**T the same time, further consternation was afoot.

Promptly at 10 a.m., a bare half hour after Colonel Schlap had begun the first of his morning trials, Professor Engelbert Snipe weaved lankily through the aforementioned portals of Doc Shane's Optical Parlors.

"Good morning!" he announced cheerily.

Horace Heysead, who had been scanning his favorite muscle-building magazine, while shivering every other moment at the *Affaire Schlap*, thrust the literary tonic behind the counter guiltily.

"Er—hello. I mean, good morning," he stammered. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"My good man," said Professor Snipe, "you can give me a new aspect on life. In fact, a most interesting aspect," he added with a sudden twinge of conscience. "Dr. Shane, I presume, has my prescription ready. The name is Snipe."

Horace's blue eyes widened.

"Oh, Professor Snipe! Yes, indeed. It was a special order, I believe. I'll be right out."

This, it must be admitted, was a white lie; for Horace did not return for a full fifteen minutes. And when he did, it was evident that he had been through the tortures of the damned.

"Professor Snipe," he quavered weakly, "I have made a dreadful mistake. I—I think I have mislaid your lenses. They just aren't anywhere around. But I'm sure we'll have them for you in the morning."

Snipe looked instantly startled.

"But you mustn't lose them!" he screeched. "They're very valuable. I've spent two solid years on the prescription for those glasses. If anything should happen to them— Oh dear, if someone else should get them by mistake! But of course that's impossible."

"Yes, sir," Horace nodded, ghastly

pale and in a complete fog. "Impossible . . ."

A frightened look came over Professor Snipe's face.

"My research—I mean, I shouldn't like to have it known just yet about my experiments—that is, if it is all right with you, young man—"

"Oh quite, quite!" Horace gushed with gales of relief. "Not a soul shall hear of this. Not even Dr. Shane," he added in a still small voice.

"Very well," breathed Professor Snipe. "I mean, it could be much worse—really, it could." And like the last rose of summer, he wilted wanly out the door.

Down the street he jolted, to the Miller House, the aforesaid ancient hostelry of Terminal City. Lurching corpse-like up the rickety stairs, the professor let himself into his room—next door to that of Miss Belinda Droope's—which resembled nothing so much as the laboratory of a frustrated genius.

Prisms, charts, mathematical calculators, old boxes, scads of notepaper and several impossible-looking appliances littered this alchemist's den. The professor did not even glance at his precious apparatus.

Instead, looking over his shoulder at least twice, he stole across the threadbare carpet to his dresser, brought forth a nearly full bottle of Bourbon, raised the opening to his bluish lips and began a long and nervous gurgle . . .

Meanwhile, several blocks away, Horace Heysead, having scampered aimlessly about the optical store's workroom, had at last come to the terrifying conclusion that he had given Professor Snipe's glasses to none other than Abner Schlap!

**B**EING a stalwart but unimaginative soul, Schlap never for a moment

questioned the mysterious properties of his new spectacles.

He had never worn glasses in his life. Yet the mere correction of one's vision surely did not conjure up a host of horrid hallucinations.

Just to be on the safe side, however, Schlap, squirming uncomfortably in his swivel chair, removed the glasses and leered at them with a jaundiced eye.

Hell, no. Glasses they were, and glasses they could not be anything else but. Besides, although the frame fit a bit snugly over his beetle-browed face, the lenses definitely improved his vision.

Snorting belligerently, Abner Schlap slapped the new cheaters back across his ears. Tommyrot, that's what it was; tommyrot! He'd been working too hard lately. Now that he recalled it, the doctor *had* said something about "nervous strain."

That was it. Lot of responsibility, running a whole town. Too much on his mind, Schlap decided. No wonder he'd been seeing things. All great men of affairs have to let down their hair occasionally. Even Napoleon had his lighter moments . . .

Feeling reassured and almost smug again, Schlap heaved himself to his feet, intending to drive out to his club for a round of golf and a few locker-room highballs.

Never was a holiday more cruelly interrupted. As Abner Schlap reached his office door, there was suddenly a great ringing of gongs, a flashing of red lights, and the hiss of sprinkler systems spurting away on a rampage.

"Fire!" someone yelled.

"Sabotage!" came a confirming shout.

"The Nazis have landed!" a frightened female yelled.

Into the midst of all this chaos stormed Abner Schlap. He sniffed the

air suspiciously.

"Who started that damned rumor about fire—" he began.

Further bombast was unnecessary. With an earth-quaking roar, a boiler blew up, scattering three floors and a large section of the roof.

"Who," roared Abner Schlap, "is responsible for this time-bomb?"

No coward, he began herding scared employees toward the exit. When he finally reached the street himself, flames had enveloped Schlap's Golden Brewery with a vengeance.

Casting his eye angrily down the street, Schlap was just in time to see the Terminal City Fire Department, late as usual, come clanging to the rescue.

SEVERAL blocks away, Professor Snipe was rapidly becoming befuddled.

He had taken his swig of whiskey, returned the bottle to the dresser, dutifully washed out his mouth with cold water—and then, on second, third and fourth thoughts, had gone back for more little snifters.

"I am a ruined man," groaned the professor. "I shall drown my disgrace in forbidden spirits. If someone has made off with my precious lenses, the greatest discovery since Adam created Eve will be broadcast wholesale to a cruel and undeserving world!"

Unhappily the professor slumped in his old Morris chair. For two long years, he had labored in solitary grandeur in these proud but poverty-breathing surroundings. He had permitted nothing to distract him—not even the skinny but hopeful Belinda Droope, who had cast him many coy and admiring glances when they'd met in the hallway from time to time.

If the truth be known, the ultra-shy Professor Snipe, walrus mustaches and

all, had long harbored reciprocal sentiments in regard to Miss Droope. To put it bluntly, he hoped one day to offer her his hand—once his magnificent brainchild had come to life in a shower of golden coins.

For the thing was indubitably magnificent. It was, to be specific, the greatest advance in optics since Galileo had invented the telescope.

With these wondrous lenses, easily fitted into ordinary spectacle frames, anyone could look into the eyes of another—and read his every thought.

Not having the necessary grinding apparatus, Snipe had had to entrust his priceless prescription to Doc Shane's Optical Parlors.

The professor had first got the basic idea from his knowledge of brainwaves. The eye, he knew, is connected to the brain through the optic nerve, which transmits images recorded on the retina through the pupil.

Therefore, since it follows that brain and eye cooperate mutually, it must also be true, Professor Snipe reasoned, that thought-impulses—in particular, ideas generated by the subconscious mind—are themselves reflected back\*

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\* Think of two mirrors. Place a lighted candle between them. Light rays will be reflected back and forth, from one mirror to the other. Similarly, then, there is no reason to suppose that the retina of the human eye is not a motion picture "screen." On this screen, thoughts are projected from the brain; if they could be read accurately, even a man with a "poker face" could not hide his inner emotions.

We speak of a man who "sees red." Actually, he isn't seeing anything visually, but his brain is seething with anger or indignation. That emotion is instantaneously conveyed back along the optic nerve and "screened" on the retina.

If we watch the fellow closely, we can detect the angry glint in his eye. We cannot tell just what action he is planning, because we do not have the proper apparatus to interpret his thoughts. We only know he is in a rage.

Therefore, in designing his precious lenses, Professor Engelbert Snipe knew that the secret formula which they contained would enable anyone to read another's mind.—ED.

on the retina, the thought being conveyed through the regular eye-brain channel: the optic nerve.

But now, Snipe told himself between hiccups, all was lost, all. In his alcoholic miasma, strange visions began to cloud his weary brain.

From afar he heard the peal of an organ. Nearer it grew, nearer. Wonder of wonders! He, Engelbert Snipe, was suddenly in church. Not only in church, but draped on his skinny arm was the emaciated but happily smirking Belinda Droope.

Like two animated skeletons, the bridal pair proceeded awkwardly down the center aisle. They came at last to the altar. There was a man standing there, severely clothed in what might or might not have been ministerial vestments.

Oh God, Professor Snipe groaned, as Belinda shook in sympathetic panic, this was no minister. This was Colonel Abner Schlap, the man who single-handed practically ran the miniature metropolis of Terminal City.

Schlap stood there formidably; and then he began to read from an ominous little black book.

"I, Privy Councilor to His Majesty, King Satan of Hell," Schlap began, "do hereby forbid this marriage—"

**W**ITH a shrill scream, Professor Snipe woke up. A loud explosion reverberated thunderously in his ears. Snipe shuddered, as spilled whiskey fumed up from the overturned bottle of Bourbon.

He looked around, to find his arm entangled with a dust mop.

"Oh dear Lord," he moaned, staring at the mop. "And I thought you were Miss Belinda Droope! That's what I get for drinking. I'm just a will-o'-the-wisp, a ne'er-do-well, a soldier of fortune in the Army of Sin—"

Sounds of the ever-late Fire Department came clangorously from the street. Getting groggily to his feet, Snipe weaved to the window and stared out.

"My stars!" he muttered. "It's the Schlap brewery, and— Oh precious saints!" the professor yelped. "Miss Belinda Droope works there!"

With a spasmodic gulp, Engelbert Snipe fairly flew out of the hotel, his funereal black suit flapping disrespectfully on his bones.

Had he glanced back, he might have seen the gaunt and excited figure of Miss Belinda Droope; who, having bolted for home but a few minutes before, was still shaking in righteous terror, after her sad episode with her employer, when the Schlap boiler blew up.

Yards behind the agitated professor came Miss Droope, afraid that her very job was going up in flames. And behind Miss Droope came half the town, eager to see the fun.

**T**O Abner Schlap, it was anything but a carnival.

"My brewery!" he stormed. "I've got insurance, but it's the principle of the thing! Enemy agents are behind this! I shall wire the Senate to declare war—"

He espied the approaching form of Chief Creepers, head of the Fire Department. Schlap descended on the unfortunate fellow like all the seven furies.

"Creepers!" he snarled. "You're late again! My lovely brewery will burn to ashes and—"

Involuntarily Schlap glared at the unhappy official. Glared straight into his eyes. Glared, and then shrank back, mumbling in abject terror and beginning to drool at the mouth.

It was horrible. It was ghastly. Worse, it was the truth! Outwardly,

the bodily proportions of Chief Creepers were trembling with fear. But inwardly—inwardly, in the secret recess of his much-abused soul, the doughty fire-fighter was seething like a four-alarm volcano.

Looking into his ordinarily mild blue eyes, Abner Schlap beheld a scene of utter horror. There was, he saw all too clearly, a handball court. At one end of the court, a heavy fat man wearing bathing trunks stood with his back to the wall.

In the center of the wall was a little door, just big enough to squeeze through. From every part of the door-frame protruded—razor-edged knives.

Facing the frantic victim stood a middle-aged, athletic man wearing asbestos gloves. Every ten seconds, he would reach down into a brazier full of blazing live coals and palm one in his hand.

Swish! With unerring accuracy, the live coal would head for the quivering body of the unprotected fat man. Always it would land, to sizzle on the bare flesh like steak on an open griddle.

And if the victim tried frantically to escape—there was only that narrow spiked doorway to go through.

The athlete, of course, was Chief Creepers, of the Fire Department. And the victim, scorched as a barbecued ham, was none other than Colonel Abner Schlap, the titan of Terminal City . . .

Sweating from every pore, Schlap backed away from the astounded Creepers, as hundreds of townfolk gaped on the sidewalk.

"Mercy!" bleated Schlap. "I'll give you everything I own—I mean, ten percent! I—I take back all the nasty things I've called you! I'll see the city gives you a gold medal of honor! I'll—"

"He's gone nuts!" several onlookers

muttered simultaneously.

"Schlap is slap-happy!" observed a local pugilist.

"The Great Brain has collapsed!" cynically opined the editor of the Terminal City *Banner*, who had just arrived.

FOR Chief Creepers, it was even worse. For twenty years, Abner Schlap had presented himself at each and every fire. As the town's largest property owner, Schlap had always insisted on taking personal charge of the city's fire apparatus.

Therefore, Chief Creepers was now in a terrible pickle. It had been so long since he'd fought a fire on his own, he hardly knew what orders to give. Meanwhile, some twenty-five firemen stood around dazedly, waiting for the strident Schlap commands which never came.

As if in united accord, firemen and onlookers turned beseechingly toward Abner Schlap. The Terror of Terminal City returned their pleading stares with frightened eyes. His mouth continued to drool.

"Leave me alone, you nasty people!" he cried. "You're torturers, that's what you are—gangsters! Now go away and let me die in agony—I mean, in peace!"

This dreadful stalemate might have kept on until the Schlap brewery, and several other fine buildings adjoining, had burned to the ground, causing irreplaceable damage and the jobs of many hundreds, had Belinda Droope not arrived on the scene, to be followed like a lunging panther by Professor Engelbert Snipe.

"Mr. Schlap!" screamed Belinda Droope, courage mounting from her birdlike soul. "Your competitors are trying to ruin you! Snap into it, Mr. Schlap, and put out this fire! Snap

into it, Mr. Schlap!" she pleaded.

A split instant later, Professor Snipe skidded to a frantic halt. He misjudged the situation at a glance. He saw the cringing Abner Schlap, the excited, anxious, imploring Miss Droope, egging her boss on to direct action.

Snipe, of course, misinterpreted the whole scene.

"Abner Schlap!" he bellowed through his squeaky vocal cords. "Abner Schlap, you do NOT own this town! You will NOT let it burn to the ground! You will NOT drive Miss Belinda Droope to the brink of madness—and furthermore, sir, you will NOT prevent our marriage! I mean—"

"Let me alone!" shrieked Schlap, backing away hysterically from the angrily advancing professor. "Stop *persecuting* me!"

So saying, he made a frantic swipe with his arm. It brushed Snipe aside like a wind-swept willow. Snorting defiance, Snipe charged back into the fray like a spitting wildcat. He kicked, he screeched, and he made a wild scratching jab with his hand.

The scrawny fingers collided with Schlap's glasses. They knocked the spectacles off the Schlap face. Ten feet, the unoffending eyepiece flew, to land in a million little bits on the sidewalk.

This was too much for Abner Schlap.

"You big brute!" he roared. "Kick a helpless man when he's down."

He made straight for Professor Snipe. Snipe stood his ground courageously, knotting his small fists like two doorknobs in a doll's house. When the two men were only inches apart, Schlap glared bitterly, involuntarily into the other's eyes.

Then he started. His mouth flew open, and his own eyes read incredulously into the depths of his persecutor's soul.

There was no malice in the eyes of Engelbert Snipe. Anger, yes, but no hatred, no spirit of horrid revenge. Snipe was just like any other man who thinks he has been wronged.

*More important, in his bright, defiant gray eyes was no vision of unutterable torture upon the prostrate body of Abner Schlap!*

"HALLELUJAH!" Schlap yelped joyously. "I'm a free man! I haven't got the heeby-jeebies any more! Nobody's persecuting me—"

He realized then what he was saying; realized, too, that everybody for yards around thought him quite mad.

"Creepers!" roared Abner Schlap, once more the captain of his soul.

"Yes, sir," bleated the happy fire chief, recognizing his master's return to sanity.

"Creepers," commanded the rejuvenated Terror of Terminal City, "take this man"—he pointed to the still angry Snipe—"out of my sight. I will deal with him later. Apparently he has a grievance. I, Abner Schlap, deny justice to no man. Now, then, put out this fire!"

"Absolutely, sir!" nodded the overjoyed fire-fighter. "The usual way, sir?"

"The usual way," Schlap gestured imperiously. "Schlap methods have never failed."

Moments later, Abner Schlap was reminded of this axiom when he felt an anxious hand of his arm.

"Yes?" he rumbled deeply, turning. "Oh—Miss Droope. No, don't look so worried, Miss Droope. Everything is quite under control."

"But that gentleman over there—" Miss Belinda Droope blushed furiously as Schlap's eye followed her distraught gaze to the gaunt figure of Professor Engelbert Snipe, now engaged in strug-

gling futilely with a burly fireman.

"Oh." Schlap stared at him long and hard, seeming to recall that the two had once met. In fact, he seemed to recall quite a bit.

"Well, what about that human scarecrow, Miss Droope?"

"Oh, but he's not!" she protested anxiously. "I mean, that's the man who spoke up to you and brought you to your senses, and—"

"Enough!" commanded Abner Schlap in his most dignified manner. "As I understand it, Miss Droope, you are concerned about that—er—gentleman. You wish to have him released?"

"Oh, Mr. Schlap!" cooed the breathless Belinda Droope.

Promptly the order was given. A moment later, a thin and still flustered

man, in flapping black clothes, and an even thinner but radiantly blushing beanpole of a woman, could be seen making their way together down the street.

"Oh, Professor Snipe!" Belinda Droope gushed. "I'm *so* glad I happened along to rescue you from—er—from all that trouble! You know, Colonel Schlap really isn't such a bad person. It's just—well, sometimes I think he has the wrong aspect on life. You know—as if he were looking at things through the wrong pair of glasses."

"My dear," responded the professor, still wondering fearfully what would have happened had anyone, so he thought, found his precious lenses, "my dear, let's not even think of such things."



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# CITY OF LOST SOULS

by **Ralph Milne Farley and Al P. Nelson**

**W**ARREN!" cried Hammersmith, as he thrust his shaggy head between my tent-flaps. "The desert chieftain, Mu-Lai and his blarsted Mauros have wiped out our garrison at Wacco. Two hundred Legionnaires and a hundred Martians!"

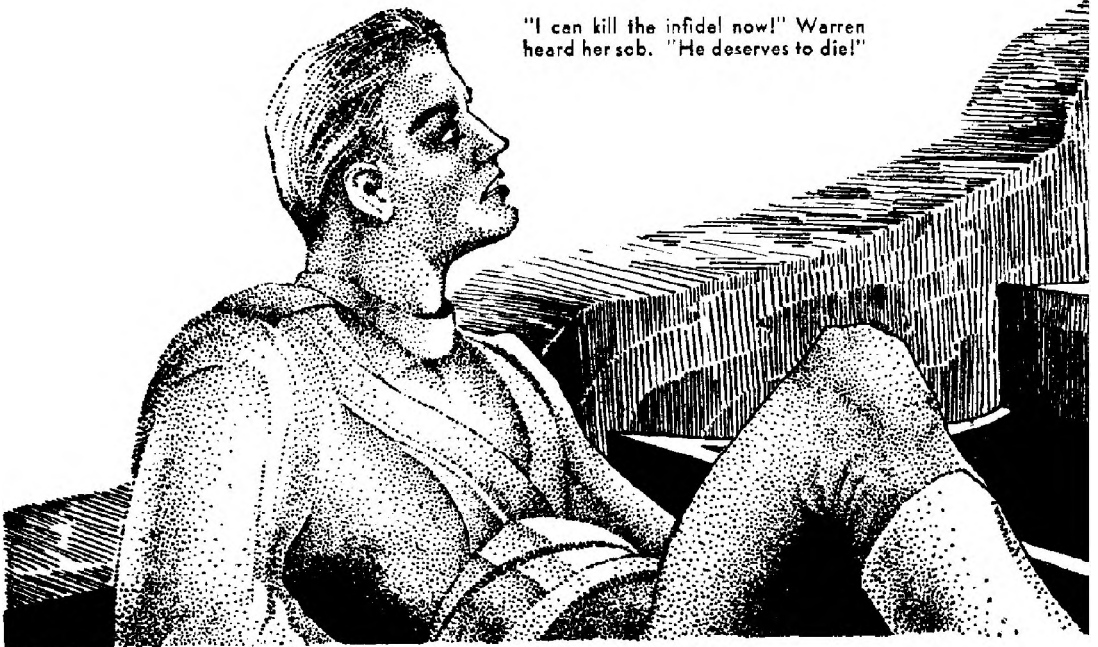
Hammersmith, a rangy red-haired Australian, with cold blue eyes, was the only Earthman to hold a commission in the Martian Foreign Legion; for all the other officers, and even some of the non-coms, were copper-skinned Martian aristocrats.

He eased his rangy frame into my tent and sat down at the foot of my canvas cot. Little Cedric, the Englishman, followed him in.

**Three thousand Martian Legionnaires faced more than they could handle when they attacked the holy city of Daloss to rescue captured comrades**

"It happened last night!" Cedric breathlessly added. "One of the survivors has just reached camp—he's over at headquarters right now reporting to Colonel Ak-Ak. He says the Mauros fell on the little city at midnight and slaughtered nearly every man, woman, and child. Babies—little babies — torn from their mothers'

"I can kill the infidel now!" Warren heard her sob. "He deserves to die!"







breasts and slit open with swords. Oh, my God!" His boyish face was blank with horror.

Hammersmith's leathery jaw was set and grim. His blue eyes flashed in the light of my tent-lantern.

"That's not the worst of it. The dead are dead, but think of what's going to happen to our buddies who were taken prisoner. Ten of them! Dragged off to Daloss to be tortured and then burned alive on the golden altar as a sacrifice to the Dark Star, Erlik. One of them in particular!" His voice broke.\*

Daloss. In spite of my horror at the fate of my comrades, I could not restrain a thrill at the magical spell of that name. Daloss, hidden deep in the fertile valleys between the ranges of the

mighty Fobian Mountains, was the age-old mystic city of the Mauros, a stronghold which bristled with guns and superstitions.

Here the worship of the Dark Star was most devout. Here plans were daily reviewed for the mighty holy war, which some day would find all followers of Erlik rising to wipe infidels from the face of the planet.

Scourge of Mars for generations, Daloss was known as the most holy city of the worshippers of Erlik. If a non-believer should venture to reach its borders, the curses of the dark religion, yea, the curses of Erlik himself would most certainly fall upon him. Disease and misfortune, like a raging storm, would seize the infidel crraat,\* or would fill his soul with an evil dark spirit to torture him the rest of his days upon the planet, should he escape death from the Mauros themselves.

This city it was that the Martians dreaded to approach too rapidly, despite the despotic orders from the Capital city to seize the Mauro gold mines at any cost.

No believer in any other religion had ever come back from the holy city. Infidel captives were anointed with rare Martian perfumes, then burned alive on the great altar of gold in the Maadar, largest and most sacred of all of Erlik's temples. Then their ashes were scattered upon the fields, where the heavy hooves of lumbering oxlike Martian beasts of burden ground them into the soil, so that no trace of the unbelieving crraats might remain to taint the city of the Dark Star.

Truly a City of Lost Souls—Christian souls, Martian souls, doomed by incantation of Erlik's high priests to roam in misery over the red planet, pursued by evil dark spirits.

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\* The Foreign Legion of Mars (called Legion of the Damned by peoples of the other planets) is perhaps the most famous military group in history, not even excepting the French Foreign Legion of Africa, which was dissolved with the ending of the Second World War in Europe.

It boasts a history of one hundred years of bloody conflict, of victories and of defeats that can be equalled by no other fighting group on Mars or Earth, the only two worlds in the solar system where armies are maintained.

Like the Earth Foreign Legion, its members are mostly derived from the ranks of fugitives from justice, and from the adventurers of five planets. They are all a hard-bitten, careless, fearless lot, used to facing death.

And in the Martian Legion they do face death constantly. Nowhere in the system is there a planet where warfare rages more continually. This is perhaps because the peoples of Mars are comparatively few, and being segregated and isolated tribes, they develop a fierce animosity toward each other, which flares up into bloody battle at any chance meeting.

Fortunately these meetings are rare, since travel on Mars is a serious undertaking. Yet, periodically, migrations occur, when the site of a camp becomes too arduous, and then it becomes a matter of capture or defend a new site or what you already hold.

The Legion holds the unenviable position of being mediators (by the right of force) between migrating tribes, with the usual result that both tribes attack the Legion.

But of all Mars, Daloss, the holy city, alone has never bowed to the Legion.—Ed.

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\* "Crraat," a particularly repulsive desert rodent-like reptile.—Ed.

And yet there was a romantic side to this city of mystery. The tales which reached us from Daloss were not all horror. There were things to draw us there, as well as to repel us. For not only was there the fabulous wealth of its gold mines—but there were its women!

Little Cedric, the English boy, was telling us this. But somehow it went against my prejudices.

"Filthy wenches!" I snorted.

"Not all," said Cedric quietly.

Something in his tone caused me to look at him searchingly.

"Well?" I asked.

"There was one," the boy said dreamily. "Blue eyes, golden curls, skin pink and white like a sea shell. Her father was a very wealthy Mauro, and sent her to finishing school on Earth, in England. She was from Daloss. I'd like to see her again."

"A Mauro—as beautiful as that?" I exclaimed.

"A Mauro, not a gunmetal-blue Martian," said Cedric, with disdain, "nor a copper-red member of the Martian aristocracy. A Mauro, most of whom are white like ourselves. One of the reasons I came to Mars and joined up with the Legion, was the hope of seeing that little beauty again."

Then he went on to tell us of what he had heard of the midnight ritual of the City of Lost Souls.

**I**T was said that, on moonlit Martian nights, these beautiful Mauro women, shedding their flowing white shawls and silken tunics, roamed the streets of Daloss, to perform weird, naked, worshipful dances in honor of Erlik the Unspeakable, while hidden stringed instruments throbbed with wild barbaric music. Every male inhabitant cast his eyes upon the floor of his hut while these dances held sway,

for worthy only is Erlik himself to gaze upon so much naked loveliness.

A growl from Hammersmith snapped our minds back from these dreams, to the horrid fate awaiting our ten captured comrades.

"Who were they?" I asked. "Any whom we know?"

"Well, there's Gustav Schmidt," little Cedric began.

I shook my head. The name was not familiar.

"And Victor Lafontaine?"

"Not Vic?" I cried. I knew him well, a lovable roly-poly Frenchman.

"And Hammersmith's own brother!"

So that was the reason for the catch in Hammersmith's voice a few moments ago.

"The others," the young Englishman ended harshly, "were not of our outfit."

"Well," I demanded, "what are we going to do about it?"

"The Legion is wild with rage!" Hammersmith declared. "You and Cedric are the two senior Sergeants—other than the Martians. I want you two to come with me to headquarters to talk to Colonel Ak-Ak."

"You're on!" I cried, jumping up and jamming my desert hat onto my head.

Together the three of us made our way to the whitewashed stone house, which served as headquarters and dwelling for the red Martian aristocrat, who was our commandant.

Colonel Ak-Ak, a gross swarthy Martian with long drooping moustaches, received us with an air of graciousness, and listened quietly to the suggestions of Captain Hammersmith.

"Sir," our Captain concluded—in Esperanto, of course, the official interplanetary tongue, "the men are eager to avenge this damned massacre, and to rescue their comrades from blood-

thirsty Mu-Lai and his savage Mauros. Is not this what you have been waiting and hoping for? An incentive to drive us to capture the gold-mines which the Capital City is anxious for us to seize?"

The Colonel seemed pleased at the suggestion, promised to take it up with the Staff early in the morning, thanked us profusely, and poured out some excellent wine—quite different from the rancid syrup, swimming with desert insects, which formed a part of our daily ration.

Then we returned to our encampment and spread the word of the rescue plans. The whole camp buzzed with excitement. Weird tales of the City of Lost Souls, and its beautiful women, were told far into that desert moonlit night.

Now at last we Legionnaires could look forward to a real war! No more mere slow skirmishing across the sun-baked red sands. No more cautious advances. Quick action, desperate action, decisive action would be necessary, if we would save our ten comrades.

**N**EXT morning we awoke—those of us who had slept at all—eager to set out for Daloss. But no call to the colors came. All through that sweltering day, we fretted and chafed beneath the boiling sun, watched the red haze of the mighty Fobian range, and waited.

We questioned the junior Martian officers and non-coms concerning plans for the advance. But they merely shrugged their shoulders.

"What are a mere ten men? And especially mere Earthmen, mercenaries?" they said, snapping their fingers. "Nothing, in a war like this. And the massacre? 'Tis but the fortunes of war, nothing more: a mere desert wind, which blows some good, some ill."

The Legion seethed. For with every minute that slipped by, rescue was becoming more and more difficult. So finally Captain Hammersmith and Little Cedric and I went back again to the Martian Colonel, Ak-Ak.

We intended to make demands—perhaps even to threaten a mutiny. But we never got that far. For, as we entered the Colonel's office, after cooling our heels in the outer room for an hour, we were set upon by a squad of men from one of the native Martian regiments.

"Seize—bind them!" shouted the swarthy red-skinned Colonel.

It would take more than eight Martian regulars to seize the three of us. Cedric and I dropped back several paces, and raised our fists to defend ourselves. But Hammersmith, our leader, seemed to slump with servility, as he meekly held out his wrists for the shackles.

Doubtless anxious to get him out of the way, before tackling Cedric and me, one of the native soldiers leaped forward, with the open handcuffs in both hands, ready to clap them on Hammersmith's wrists.

This was what Hammersmith had been waiting for. Lunging suddenly, he reached beneath the extended manacles, seized the soldier around the waist with both hands, lifted him aloft, and hurled him full in the faces of the others.

Then, our fists flying, all three of us waded in.

Through one corner of my eye, I saw Colonel Ak-Ak whip out his atomic pistol. I crouched low, and mixed up closer with the Martian soldiers, so that Ak-Ak wouldn't dare try to blast me. I heard several toots of the Colonel's whistle, and then more men came running.

It was a glorious fight while it lasted,

but at length we were downed, and our wrists and ankles firmly tied. Big, gross Colonel Ak-Ak twirled his long black drooping moustaches, his fat copper-hued face purple with suppressed rage.

"It may interest you crraats to know," he hissed, "that there will be *no* advance on Daloss. On the morrow, we retire to winter quarters at Ricca, there to await reinforcements for the spring campaign. *That* for your impertinence! Your comrades can rot in hell!"

He snapped his fingers; and strode, still bristling, from the office.

"Damn!" muttered Hammersmith to me, as the three of us were led away in the wake of Colonel Ak-Ak. "Now we've put our foot in it! Losing our tempers, when we needed to keep them at all costs. Poor brother, I have failed you!"

"Shut your face," snapped one of the guards, slapping him across the mouth.

We were led to the stinking guard-house and locked in separate cells, so that we got no chance of further conversation.

ALL the rest of that hot stifling afternoon, I worried about the fate of our ten captured comrades. But occasionally—I must admit—my thoughts wandered to the *attractions* of the City of Lost Souls, as well as to its *menace*. To the unlimited gold of its mines, and to its beautiful blonde Mauro maidens.

At last came evening, with its weird green shadows, cast across the desert's hot sands, its soft cooling winds, its vast desert beauty. Black batlike desert reptiles sped through the green darkness with eerie flapping of leather wings. Over the red desert lay a satisfying peace; but not on us three incarcerated ones, nor—so we later

learned—upon the rest of the Legion of Death. Time was fleeting, and there was an outrage to be avenged, and comrades to be rescued.

In the corridors of our jail, we heard the sound of scuffling—a muffled groan—a dull thud. Then cautious footsteps approached our cells.

"Captain Hammersmith! Sergeant Warren! Sergeant Cedric! Speak up, where are you?"

"Here!" we whispered in reply.

A furtive group of enlisted men from our own outfit unlocked our cell-doors, and then untied our wrists and ankles. Next they dragged in the Martian guards, bound and gagged, and left them in our places.

"What's up?" Hammersmith whispered, as we slunk through the green darkness, back toward our own outfit.

"The men have organized everything," one of our rescuers explained, "but we want someone to lead us. If you will take command, Sir, we're all set to fall upon the officers, truss them up, seize the sliths,\* and then off to Daloss. What do you say, Sir?"

"It's a go!" the Captain exclaimed, his blue eyes glinting eagerly. "Who made the plans?"

"Zenoff, Duke Keating, Bloch, and Kuswa."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Send for them."

A few minutes of discussion with the plotters convinced him that the plans had been well laid. So he gave the word for action.

A single long low barking howl, like that of a crraat: this was our signal. Instantly every Martian officer and non-commissioned officer in our regiment was set-upon, gagged, and bound. Then we crept silently like dark shad-

\*"Slith," a grey horse-like reptile, ridden by the Martian cavalry. Its splay feet enable it to travel with ease over the red desert sands, and it can go for long periods without water.—Ed.

ows toward the picket lines. Most of the guards were our own buddies; the few Martians we quickly overpowered.

We had saddled and mounted as the red disk of one of the two Martian moons climbed above the mountains, quickly shrinking and paling as it rose.

Leather creaked, sabers clanked in their scabbards; rifles were clasped in taut hands. Breath came in quick gasps; eyes flashed; faces were grim with determination.

Down the moonlit red slope we raced, past spiky argan trees, past a honey-combed slag bluff, and out onto the open desert. Past the encampment of the native portion of the Legion we rode. Bedlam broke loose among the tents that dotted the floor of the broad valley. Atomic rifles sizzled, and hoarse commands rose on the night air.

Then the whole three thousand of us were gone—vanished into the night before the sleepy fire of the waking Martians could become destructive. Only a few men were lost to us in that encounter.

**T**HUNDERING over the desert toward the distant Fobian Mountains, we headed for Daloss, the city of mystery. Behind us lay Martians and martial rule. Ahead lay rescue for our comrades, and adventure and perhaps death for us! What a step it was! We had outlawed ourselves. We were fugitives, subject to the wrath of a whole planet.

"Isn't it great?" screamed Little Cedric, wonder and awe shining in his young eyes, as we pounded along on our grey desert mounts.

"Great?" mocked the deep voice of Ivan Zenoff. "Wait until you see the wild Mauros before you say that. They fight like hell, and torture like the demons of their own black saint, Erlik. Say, buddy, you haven't seen or heard

anything yet!"

"Wait until *you* see the Mauro girls!" Cedric shot back at him.

Several miles onward, above the pungent stench of slith-sweat, drifted the thin English voice of the man whom we called the Duke.

"By Jove, they say the Mauro women are devils, too! They sneak out on the field of battle at night and sink knives into the wounded enemy, the bally things! No man comes back from this part of the world, what!"

Southward over the red dunes we swept, and up them again almost to the hurtling desert moon, yelling, singing, fair-warning the enemy. Fighting fever ran high. Singing rose louder. Our men shouted defiance at the moon, and shook their fists at the desert sky. Who cared if the Mauros heard? Who cared if anyone heard? Ahead of us lay a mission of rescue and adventure.

Hours later, small squat bushes and sparse blue-knobbed grey lichenous trees loomed before us, as the country became more hilly. We passed a black ersite shrine, solemn in its lonely glory. The hooves of our sliths clicked sharply on the bones of animals and of humans, left to scorch in the desert sun. Other battles had been fought here, grim to the very end. Life had pulsed at this spot long ago; caravans had come from the canal cities in long lines of swaying sliths, carrying plunder and Mauros, frowning Mauros with wide hats and colored capes.

"Something's going to happen!" yelled Little Cedric, his eyes glowing. "I can feel it!"

"We ought to meet them soon," I answered. "We've been riding for hours, advertising our whereabouts to all the planet. Where *are* the enemy?"

On thundered the three thousand, past lonely, rocky slag-bluffs, past saltbeds weirdly white beneath the desert

moon. Looming steadily nearer ahead of us, rose the mighty Fobian range. The second moon rose in the West, and hurtled across the sky, in reverse direction to its more sluggish brother.

Then suddenly from a grove of thick lichens on a rocky slope, spurts of livid flame streaked the night, as atomic rifles sizzled. Sliths shrieked and stumbled in our ranks, men fell, gasps and cries rent the air. The Legion of Death slowed down as though a huge wave had rolled against it. Again many shots sizzled forth, pouring death into our ranks. We were ambushed!

**W**AVING his saber, Captain Hammersmith shouted to us to follow him. Straight into that grove of fragrant blue-knobbed lichens he dashed. And we three thousand followed close behind. Sabers slashed down into the bushes; atomic pistols spurted sharply; atomic rifles sizzled sudden death. Cries rang out. More rifle shots sounded. Men and sliths tumbled into the bushes.

White-clothed **M a u r o s** appeared from everywhere, like ghosts in the moonlight. They poured from every bush, firing at close range.

A sharp cry of pain beside me, a youthful cry! It was Little Cedric. There was an agonized expression on his boyish face as he slid heavily from the saddle of his plunging slith, to be trampled and crushed by the splay feet of the sliths behind.

Poor Little Cedric! Never would he meet again his beautiful golden-haired Mauro maiden, whom he had come so far and lived through so much hell to see.

But we had no time to worry about Little Cedric or any other of our lost comrades, for we had a fight on our hands. And fight we did! Many a swarthy Mauro rose from behind a

blue-knobbed lichen, and toppled, never to rise again. Many were crushed under the thundering sliths of the Legion. But there were countless others to take the places of those who fell. From the hill beyond they poured in never ending numbers, white capes flowing in the breeze.

Cries from the mouth of a gorge ahead rose above the din of battle. Shots rang out, and a moving wave of men and sliths streamed forth, looming wild and fierce against the night's eerie horizon.

"Daloss must be close at hand!" shouted Hammersmith, his face streaked with blood, and his red hair disheveled. "These are the devils who massacre women and children, and who would burn our comrades at the altar of Erlik. Charge, men! Charge!"

The enemy cavalry met us with a fierceness that stunned us, that stopped us momentarily. Some were old bearded **M a u r o s** with flowing white capes wrapped around them, fighting with a recklessness like that of youth, their short broad-bladed lances darting back and forth with flying speed. Some, equipped with atomic rifles, fired like mad as they came forward. Some were young **M a u r o s**, haughty and disdainful, their white teeth flashing in snarls of rage, their practiced arms wielding spears with quick thrusts of death. And among them were many men with skins as white as our own—strange phenomenon of a strange planet!

Cries of the wounded rose on all sides. It was close in-fighting now, every man for himself. You could hear the sharp gasp of breath as blades sank into soft flesh. Then the agonized moan as the sabers or lances were pulled out, the heart blood leaping thickly on the slayer's arm. A wracking cough—some Mauro or Earthman choking on his own life's blood.

It was fight and slash, and slash and fight. At close quarters, rifles—even atomic pistols—were ineffective. The whole air seemed filled with stabbing spears and sweeping sabers, streaked red in the moonlight.

Suddenly a hoarse, victorious shout went up, rose loudly on the soft desert wind. The fighting mass began to shift toward the mountains. The Legion of Death was moving on!

**M**AD glorious joy surged in our hearts, and swelled in our throats. The enemy, battling desperately, retreated slowly at first, and then broke into a rout, the Legion following close behind.

At the entrance to the pass—a gash in the mighty Fobian range—we were met by a volley of shots. Here again were wild Martian natives hidden behind every rock and shrub. Determined hundreds, armed with atomic rifles, standing in the narrow defile, blocking our way.

Twice we swept against that line of white-caped Mauros, to be thrown fiercely back. But on the third charge we broke through into the rocky canyon. Clatter of hooves against the stony bottom, as we charged on; clank of scabbards echoing up the dark walls. Then we poured out into a broad valley, diminished in number, but still compact enough for battle array.

Ahead in the moonlight rose the majestic spires and minarets of a city, beautiful in its lonely glory. Jagged mountain ranges flanked it, while beyond it stretched a high plateau, red and barren and forlorn.

“Daloss!” shouted Hammersmith, digging his spurs deep into his slith. “God grant that we are in time to save our comrades!”

To a man, the two thousand who were left in the Legion of Death gave

rein to their sliths and raced toward the high red mud wall that circled the city. But the gleaming metal gate of fret-work design in the arched doorway, was closed. From the walls, hidden riflemen opened a sizzling death-dealing fire, shouting to Erlik to save their holy of holies.

Then Hammersmith, our leader, commanded our trumpeter to sound retreat. At the first notes of that well-known but little-used bugle-call, a snarl of incredulous rage arose from the parched throats of the Legion of Death.

Shouts of protest filled the air.

“What th’ hell! Come all this way for nothing? Are yez yeller, Hammy? Have youse fergot yer own brother?”

But our Captain rose in his stirrups, held up one hand commanding silence, and cried,

“It’s only to rest a moment, and take stock of losses, and form again for the final assault. Come on! To that lichen-grove over there!”

To a little lichen-grove, on a hill overlooking the city, he led us. There we found a spring and a small brook,\* where we drank, and watered our winded steeds—but scantily, only scantily—and washed off our dust and clotted gore.

Scarcely two thousand of us remained, out of our original three thousand. Hammersmith left seven hundred in the grove as a reserve and a rear guard, to cover our return—if we ever should return. In command of them he placed a bull-necked bullet-headed Hungarian named Kuswa.

**W**ITH thirteen hundred refreshed and determined men, as the sky began to turn pink above the mountain tops to the eastward, he moved once

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\* Apparently the land of the Mauros is watered by seepage from some of the quite distant canals, as no canal runs anywhere near it.—Ed.



more toward the city gates. On the way we found two water-soaked argan logs in the winding creek. With them we battered at the gate. Back and forth those battering-rams beat upon the metal doors, shaking them with every blow.

The reorganized Mauro cavalry attacked our rear; but so fiercely did our rear-guard ward them off, that the work at the gates was not interrupted. For some reason, the firing from atop the wall and from within the gates was not heavy.

At last the grilled gates crashed open. We pushed, we surged through, with wild cries. Down the wide central street of the city we rode at terrific pace, toward the great rounded dome of the Temple of Erlik, which loomed ahead.

Low red-walled buildings flanked the street on both sides. Mosaics, blue and white and turquoise green, were visible in the pale light of early dawn. In the doorways, veiled women gave us hasty frightened glances, then scampered inside. A nearby grove of some unknown flowering tree poured its fragrance on the breeze. From a house on a narrow side street, a baby wailed, and its cry was quickly muffled.

Could a man ever forget that ride? Soft winds blowing on tired cheeks, worn bodies, steaming sliths. And behind the latticed windows which lined the streets, frightened faces staring out at us: children's faces; women's faces. Shutters quickly slammed shut.

On toward the looming black-domed temple we rode. High stone walls, with windowed stone towers atop them, stretched far to the east and west. Beyond this wall waved the velvety tops of many blood-green ktath-trees indicating vast, cool gardens. And deep in the center stood the immense black-plastered temple itself, with its seven rainbow-hued spires, and its vast black

dome reaching into the Martian sky.

The sight stirred our blood. Within those walls, within that temple, were our comrades, perhaps even now being roasted to death on the sacrificial altar of gold! With a growl of rage we spurred our sliths on again, firing spurts of atomic flame back at the charging Mauros behind us, firing sidewise at the snipers who lay flat on the roofs of nearby houses.

A sudden sharp twinge in my right shoulder twisted me in my saddle; then, a moment later, burning pain. I felt myself slipping from my saddle, and grabbed madly for the pommel, missing it. The ground struck my head a stunning blow. Thundering, thudding splay hooves sped by me, over me. Then a silent darkness swept down upon me, and I knew no more.

LATER, through moments filled with wild dreams, came the sound of women's voices in the universal tongue of Mars. My years in the Legion had given me enough knowledge of the language so that I could understand what they were saying. A strident voice was scolding, commanding,

"You are a little fool, Esta! Do as I tell you!"

A low sweet voice replied in pleading tones,

"But mother mine, I cannot kill them. Even to think of it makes my heart chill!"

"What! You will not slay these foreign crraats, these beasts from another world, who have killed our own men, these infidels who desecrate the holy city of the Black Star?"

"N-no! No! The thought of it makes my hand shrink to my body."

"Fie, child. Is the betrothed of the handsome Ab-Nadik a coward?"

"I care not what Ab-Nadik thinks! I—oh, mother, *what* are you doing?"

"See, it is like this, my child. Open his shirt, pull back his head by the hair, and let the point of the knife tickle, before you sink it deep into the Earthman crraat's throat. Ah! In Erlik's name! Hear his cursed blood gurgle!"

"Mother, mother! It is terrible!"

"Nonsense, child. Every Mauro woman must do her duty. Away with your soft-hearted foolishness— See over there! An Earthman stirs into consciousness. Slit his throat, my child, and praise Erlik."

It was all a horrible nightmare to my slowly awakening consciousness. Cautiously I opened my eyes, and stared about me.

I was lying on the paving-stones of a broad street lined with red clay houses. Far down this street in one direction was the grillwork of the city gate, now closed and guarded by swarthy men in wide hats and flowing white capes. Down the street in the other direction rose the rainbow spires and the black dome of the Temple of Erlik, with a surging thousand or so of Legionnaires massed in front of it. Around me on the pavement lay many dead and dying men, some clad in flowing white, and some in the red uniform of the Foreign Legion of Mars. And a few disemboweled sliths.

But what caught and held my eyes was the girl whose voice I had heard. Curls of burnished gold. Skin, shell-pink. Eyes of sapphire blue. And a slim but voluptuous figure, half concealed, half revealed by her flowing white shawl and diaphanous garments beneath. My heart beat wildly at such sheer beauty.

And standing with her, a hawk-faced crone—a white woman too, but gnarled and old and fiendish.

They moved away from me toward the side of the street, the mother leading; and almost I raised myself and

called to them to return, so smitten was I at the sight of the blonde young Mauro girl.

Louder voices, closer, shriller. More native women slinking through the streets, like gaudy vultures, tearing at men's throats and hearts. Then the wail of the hawk-faced crone near the wall of a building.

"Great Erlik! It is my son, your brother Ben-Stu, who lies here! He is badly wounded!"

The younger woman ran toward the wall, but the mother pushed her away. She put her scrawny old arms around the body of the young wounded Mauro, and weeping, hugged him to her breast.

"I will take him home," she cried with fierce mother love. "But you, Esta, be about your work. The cursed Earthmen have almost killed your brother!"

"Yes!" the young girl exclaimed, her beautiful face now bitterly contorted. "Give me the knife, mother. I can kill them *now!*"

SHE strode directly toward me, a long kris in her hand, and her glinting yellow curls stirring in the wind. As she neared me, she stumbled and fell, but even as she fell she made a lunge at me, the knife sinking between the stones of the street within inches of my side.

In another moment she had righted herself. Her slender hand ripped open my shirt. I tried to roll over, but was too weak. I groaned. Her hand took hold of my hair and jerked my head back cruelly. Her pink cheeks were flushed, and there was a wild light of fanaticism in her heaven-blue eyes.

My fingers reached up and fastened about her wrist, to stay that knife which was ready to plunge into my breast. I rose on my elbow, my grip still on her arm.

"I want to live a little longer," I said slowly. "And that knife is very sharp—Esta."

Her tense and panting body was close to mine. Fiercely she struggled to get the knife free, to plunge it into my heart. Then our glances met and held. I gazed deep into the blue pools of her eyes, and smiled—smiled happily, confidently, though I was close to death. Her gaze fell. Thick long lashes masked her eyes. Her face went white—then flushed again.

I took the knife from her nerveless fingers, and flung it to clatter against the wall of a nearby house.

"You are too beautiful to be a killer!" I said as I released her. Unthinking, I had spoken in English.

And she replied in the same tongue, but with a strange lilting cadence, which gave to the language a beauty that it had never had for me before.

"No," she said levelly, although her lips trembled slightly, "I cannot kill you. Yet why did you and your comrades come, bringing death to our peaceful city, if you expect not death in return?"

"Beautiful one," I replied, "I know now that I came here for *you*! Tell me that you believe it!"

My words were as unexpected to me as they were to her. Her blue eyes widened for one startled moment. Then she smiled shyly, frightenedly, wonderingly. I slipped one arm around her slim waist, but she pushed me slowly away and stared at me, as if searching, seeking for something. A subtle joy vibrated through my war-tired body. This lovely girl and I—there was a bond between us, growing stronger every moment. We two were alone together, in spite of the dead all around us, and the stalking vulture-women. Words were unnecessary, words were not swift enough to convey the flood of

thoughts and feelings that swept through us.

For a long time we sat in silence. Finally she spoke.

"You must be an American, for the English are not like this."

"What do you know of Englishmen or of Americans, or of any of the races of my Earth?" I asked. "And how does it come that you speak my language?"

"Ah," she laughed. "I went to school in England on your Earth for two Earth years. I am the daughter of the rich Mu-Lai."

**I** STIFFENED. Mu-Lai! Slaughterer of defenseless women and children. Scourge of the trackless deserts of Mars. The fiend who was about to offer up my ten comrades on the altar of gold! It was to rescue these comrades that I had waded through blood to this holy city. I had come here to fight against fiends—not for a love tryst with an angel.

Sternly I thrust the girl from me and staggered to my feet.

"Esta," I harshly declared. "I came here for rescue and revenge. When that is over I shall return to you."

"Oh, do not go," she cried in alarm. "You will be killed. You cannot hope to prevail against the forces of my father, and against the curses of Erlik, our god."

"I can try."

"I will not let you go to your death. Erlik has sent you here not to rescue your comrades but to rescue me. Against my will my father betrothed me to one Ab-Nadik, whom I do not love. You can—but no, no! What am I saying? I must keep my promise. Still I want you to live. I can hide you. Perhaps you can escape from Daloss under cover of night, when the two moons have set."

I shook my head, though the temptation to be with her was strong. I had work to do—man's work.

"I go to rescue my comrades," I cried. "But wait here for me, Esta. I'll come back."

"If you must go, you must," she sighed wearily. "I shall wait. I shall watch, and hope."

Drawing my saber, I strode toward the towering black dome of the Temple of Erlik, scattering the gaudy-caped white-clad vulture women, who hovered about the dead and dying in the street.

"You carrion!" I shouted at them in Martian. "Leave them be! Begone, or may Erlik curse you!"

They scurried for cover, like the ghouls that they were. In a side street I spied a wild-eyed slith, stirrups swinging as it sniffed irresolute. Quietly I approached the animal. It permitted me to touch its velvet hide, to pat the smooth flow of its neck.

Painfully I raised myself into the saddle, though my wounded side burned. The quivering animal quieted as I took the reins and swung it about. Together, we clattered down the street toward the temple, where sounds of fighting rose loud upon the morning air. Rising in my stirrups and turning, I stared behind me for a moment. Standing where I had left her was Esta, her hands clasped to her heart. My blood pulsed wildly. She was mine—mine! No Ab-Nadik, nor any other blue or red Martian—or even a white Martian, for that matter—would ever take her away from me.

Then I faced toward the battle ahead, and gave my slith the spurs.

The whine of atomic impulses sped past my ears, and sang on into the morning, as I rode. The wide metal gates of the temple grounds were open. The Legion had already forced their way in. Two old Mauros in dirty capes,

lashed out at my slith's legs with their short broad-bladed lances, as we thundered on past them into the temple gardens.

At the entrance to the temple itself I saw large numbers of the Legion, fighting with Mauros. Many of our men were now on foot, their sliths slain.

**I**N front of the main doorway of the temple stood a giant one-eyed blue Martian, with a mighty broad-sword in each hand. On each side of him stood others of the enemy, clad in flowing capes, javelins darting as they tried to halt the rush of our Legion. Still others, hidden behind the ktath-trees, were pouring devastating spurts of atomic fire upon our men.

But the Legion did not stop. The unconquerable urge to rescue our comrades drove us on.

Never have I seen such a splendid physical specimen as that one-eyed blue giant, standing there guarding the temple gates. Naked to the waist, he stood, with a four-foot blade circling in each hamlike hand. His knotted shoulders were at least a yard across, and above them rose a neck corded like that of a bull. The muscles of his chest and arms rippled and rolled beneath his sleek blue hide, as he swung and lunged.

As I edged through the jostling throng, I saw our Legion surge against him three times like waves against a rock, and three times fall back in thwarted spray.

Then Hammersmith alone on slith-back charged the doorway of the temple. The huge Martian giant braced his feet, and gripped his two swords to resist this onslaught. But, just before our captain came within range of a cutting slash, he jerked his reins taut, and his charger reared up, to strike at the blue giant with its front splay feet.

The Martian gave backward not an inch. Dropping one of his swords, he seized the nearest foreleg of the slith with one mighty hand, and held the beast aloft with effortless ease, as he lunged at its heart with his remaining weapon.

With a gurgling cough, the slith collapsed. For an instant the blue giant held it up, then cast it from him with a gesture of disdain, and stooped to retrieve his second sword.

As the slith fell, Hammersmith slid from its back, and rushed the giant. Swinging his saber with both hands, he brought it down on the Martian's head with a blow that would have cleft the skull of an ox.

It never even fazed the blue man. Jerking suddenly erect, as though merely annoyed by a scratch, he swung one of his own blades at Hammersmith. But the Australian was in too close to be cut, and the weapon merely felled him with a glancing blow on the side of the head.

He dropped to the temple steps, and his adversary placed one huge bare foot on his shoulders, lowered one broadsword to get the aim, and then swung it aloft.

I charged. On my saber I caught the descending blow, and turned it aside. The very fury of my foolhardy onslaught forced the giant back up the steps. He stumbeld on the step behind him; and, by that time, I had recovered from my parry and swung at him with a low crossbody swipe.

Through the knotted muscles of his belly slashed my blade. But the blue man, though mortally wounded, was a powerful menace still. With a bestial roar of rage, he raised both his weapons aloft, and brought them convergingly down at my shoulders. The blood from his slit belly gushed out over my riding-boots. I slipped and fell. The

swords clashed together above me. Then the body of the Martian giant lurched on top of me, crushing me down to the foot of the temple steps.

SOMEONE pulled the carcass off, and I staggered to my feet and stared around. Captain Hammersmith stood beside me, his desert headgear gone, his red hair disheveled, rubbing a bump on the side of his head. The remaining Mauros had been brushed aside, now that the huge one-eyed blue Martian was no more; and the Legion of Death was surging past us up the steps.

Then Mauro reinforcements mounted on slith-back thundered into the gardens behind us, yelling wildly, their javelins flashing in the morning sunlight which now bathed the planet with pink-tinted glory.

But even this attack from the rear could not stay us. In fact, it drove us on. On we charged, fighting madly, till we streamed through the main entrance into the temple itself.

Into the high-ceilinged inner room of the Temple of Erlik we swept. All its defenders had fallen. We halted, panting for breath, and stared about us at the beautiful iridescence of the holy place. Intricate geometric weavings of pale blue, rose, and green greeted us on every side. At the south end of the vast structure, high in the glossy black vault, the sun—streaming in through many small windows in the dome—played upon a riot of colors. A million golden filaments sparkled, filling the air with a luminous haze that blended now to pale rose, now to delicate mother of pearl.

High above us, from the depths of a barred gallery, a loud unruffled voice chanted with Martian fatalism:

"Erlik! Erlik, the Dark Star! Erlik, the Unseen God!"

Then there burst upon us more

spouts of atomic energy from unseen places. Mauro riflemen, hidden throughout the temple, determined to glorify Erlik by killing the Earthman crraats who had dared to set foot therein.

We scattered to seek shelter behind the great round pillars in the labyrinth of intricate doorways and passages which angled from the spacious open center of the temple. Loud sizzling detonations echoed through the sacred place. Acrid smoke rose in grey clouds to mingle with the haze of color in the black dome of the god Erlik.

At the main doorway a small detachment of the Legion of Death were holding back the Mauro slith-mounted cavalry who had attacked our rear.

The radiance of the rising sun, constantly lighting more and more of the great dome, fell full upon a huge shining altar, filling the whole temple with bright rays of glinting gold. The altar gleamed as though it were the sun itself. It was the great golden altar of Erlik, famed throughout all of Mars.

But it was not the sight of this fabulous fortune in gold that sent us charging forward over the vast tile floor, disdainful of the atomic blasts that dropped our men like wilted insects.

No, it was the sight of the ten bodies which lay naked upon that golden altar: bodies with white skin, the bodies of our comrades captured two days ago by the Mauros.

**A**MONG them, I recognized the fat roly-poly face of my friend Victor Lafontaine. And the slim keen features of the brother of our Captain.

Golden straps clasped their ankles, their waists, their arms, their shoulders. And all were gagged with cloth of gold. Beyond the altar we could see leaping red tongues of flame licking at the thick dry faggots of lichen-wood piled there.

The bound men lying on top of the altar tried in vain to squirm, to roll away from that blistering heat. Their bodies were wet with perspiration; their eyes mirrored intense pain; and their fingers clenched and re clenched in agony.

Furiously Hammersmith raced in front of us, his red hair awry, his blue-grey eyes flashing.

"Look what the heathen devils have done to our comrades!" he shouted. "We must save them, even if it costs our own lives. I come, my brother! I come!"

As we rushed forward, two gold-encrusted doors, leading to a small chapel to the left opened. Fierce, bearded Mauros debouched, atomic rifles in their swarthy hands. The leader, a tall hawk-nosed white-skinned man with thin lips, held up his left hand.

"Halt, you Earthmen!" he shouted. "Or all of you will be shot down where you stand. I, Mu-Lai, command you in the name of Erlik! Touch not the sacred altar of the Dark Star, lest your bodies and souls be bled with a thousand tortures!"

Only for an instant did that command stay us; then once more we surged forward in an angry wave.

"Ab-Nadik," cried Mu-Lai to a dark slim handsome young Martian with black flashing eyes standing by his side, "not an Earthman crraat must live."

Red stabs of flame jettied from our guns in reply. Mu-Lai and Ab-Nadik, the betrothed of my Esta, dodged nimbly behind the golden altar, and blasted back at us from that shelter.

Around us scores of our comrades fell, but still we charged on. So fierce was our onslaught that the Mauros were forced to retreat into their chapel, even their great chief himself, and his handsome young lieutenant, Ab-Nadik. But, in spite of this retreat, snipers con-

tinued to pour atomic death upon us from all sides.

Still we came forward, scant scores of us, who had been hundreds before. With splintering swords we pried off the golden bands that bound our comrades on the altar. Weeping, sobbing, they gasped their gratitude. Captain Hammersmith clasped his brother in his arms for one brief moment. Then more blasts of force winged about us. Fast we retreated to the shelter of the columned passages, and from there we returned the fire of the Mauros.

But the enemy had reorganized, and now poured into the temple at all sides from many concealed entrances. The place swarmed with them. Swords and javelins flashed, atomic pistols barked, atomic rifles sizzled. We Earthmen had profaned the golden altar of Erlik. We must not be permitted to escape!

**B**ACKING from pillar to pillar, the handful of us who were left, made our way slowly and painfully toward the main exit of the temple. But that way of escape we now found blocked by solid ranks of the enemy.

A black passage loomed to one side, and we slid into it, only about a hundred of us now, out of the fourteen hundred who had stormed the place, and the ten men whom we had rescued. Behind us, in the mazes of the temple, our wounded were putting up a fight as long as there was any life left in them. And we knew that they would never permit themselves or each other to fall alive into the hands of the Erlik-worshippers.

Along the sides of the corridor we found some movable stone benches, and with these we threw up a barricade at the entrance. Then our red-headed Captain called to me and Keating:

"Warren and Duke, come here. I want the two of you to take a dozen

men and go down this passage to its other end. Duke, you guard the exit, and send back one man to report to me. Warren, if you can get out, take four or five fellows with you, fight your way to the lichen grove, and send in the reserves. We've given these Martian heathens so much hell, that with seven hundred reinforcements, we can cut our way to safety. Get going."

The Duke and I warmly shook our leader's hand, selected our squad of men, and felt our way down the dark corridor.

It turned and twisted, then gradually got lighter. Finally as we rounded a turn, we sighted a crouched figure in a white cape, sneaking toward us. Up came Keating's atomic rifle; but, as he pressed its button, I knocked the weapon aside. Just in time, too, for the skulking figure was that of Esta.

"Oh, my beloved!" she cried in English, flinging herself into my arms.

"What ho! Eh, what?" the Duke exclaimed, edging forward. "I say, Warren, I didn't know that you had friends in this blarsted heathen city. Introduce us, will you?" But his words, light as they sounded, had no humor in them. They were as cutting as cold steel.

"This is Miss Esta," I stammered, "the daughter of Mu-Lai."

"So!" came with a hiss from my squad. The Mauro chieftain had spared no women in his raid on Wacco. The Martian women had slit the throats of our wounded in today's battle. Then what hope for mercy could a woman of the household of Mu-Lai have, from even a British gentleman?

Up came a menacing row of atomic rifles. But I thrust Esta behind me, and drew my saber, and faced them. Knowing that it would do no good to appeal to their chivalry toward a woman of a race which had shown no

chivalry to us, I appealed to their common sense.

"Don't be fools!" I cried. "Esta was educated in England. She has no stomach for this heathen slaughter. She has come to help us. Tell them so, Esta."

"Yes, oh, my beloved. What is it that you wish? Only command me, and Esta will obey."

A snort of contempt came from my men, but I cried triumphantly,

"There! What did I tell you!" Then to the girl I said, "Can you lead me safely out of this city?"

"Yes, beloved," was her reply.

"It looks fishy to me," the Duke gritted, his aristocratic eyes flashing cold. "Well, Warren, run along with your girl friend; but Heaven help you, if you double-cross us. And I'm sending four men to trail you."

"Some day you'll apologize to the lady for this. She's saving your worthless hide," I shouted, contemptuously. Then I turned and followed Esta.

The last that I heard behind me, as I rounded the next corner, was one of the squad anxiously asking,

"'Adn't I better pot the blarsted blighter?"

And Keating's disdainful reply,

"Don't bother. If she takes him home with her, he'll end up on the golden altar of Erlik. So what's the bally difference?"

**O**UT through a door in the side of the temple, hidden by lichen-trees, she led me. This door opened upon a quiet peaceful sunlit court. Tied to a ring in the wall was a stately white slith, saddled and bridled.

"My brothers," she said simply. And, at the memory which those words kindled in her, her blue eyes flashed fire for a moment. God, but she was beautiful in her anger!

Then her face cleared, and she smiled

up at me. I clasped her in my arms, and covered her face with kisses. For several minutes, she pressed close against me; then drew bashfully away. Suddenly she whipped off her white cape, and stood revealed to me in her blouse and pantaloons. Never had I seen such beauty! Her perfect features were lit with the light of service.

"Take this cape," she softly murmured. "With it wrapped around you, and riding my brother's slith, you can make a dash for safety."

"Safety?" I cried, though my heart was in my eyes, which were devouring Esta, rather than in my words. "Safety? Never! I shall bring back reinforcements, and we shall win!"

Alarmed, she clutched my arm, and her touch thrilled me.

"No, no!" she cried. "They will kill you all. Already your men are almost overpowered. Soon they will capture all of you, kill some, and throw the others into the dungeons. Then on each holy day many of you will be sacrificed to Erlik on the golden altar. Go, before it is too late, beloved."

"Never!" I cried. "I shall return to die here with the rest, if that be our fate. But I am grateful to you. I—I love you." My gaze burned into hers.

She hid her head. I thought I heard a sob. Then she straightened, and looked me squarely in the eye.

"My beloved is brave, as becomes the chosen of the daughter of Mu-Lai," said she. "Go, then, and bring back help to your comrades if you can. And may Erlik go with you. Esta will be waiting for you."

Once more I held her girlish form close to me. Then, as the hidden door in the side of the temple opened to disgorge the four Legionnaires whom the Duke had sent to follow me, I released my darling, untied the white slith, wrapped the cape about me, vaulted



into the saddle, and clattered off out of the little courtyard.

As I turned the corner at the end of the alley, I twisted about in the saddle, and glanced back. The golden-haired Martian maiden stood waving one dainty hand at me. On each side of her stood two Legionnaires with jaws dropped open in stupefied surprise.

A strange exaltation thrilled through me. I felt that I could ride down any number of heathens. I filled my lungs with glorious thin morning Martian air, and drove my spurs into the sides of my splendid white mount.

SOON I had found the main thoroughfare of the city, and was winging down it, away from the temple, and toward the big fretwork gates of the main entrance. They stood slightly ajar, for we had smashed their locks and bars with our argan logs earlier that morning. To one side squatted two white-clad Mauros, their long atomic rifles leaning against the parapet.

"Ho, Ben-Stu," one of them shouted, recognizing the white slith as belonging to Esta's brother.

"It is not he!" cried the other, leaping up and reaching for his rifle.

I snatched out my atomic pistol, and sent a blast of pure force through his head. Then reining my mount, I shot down the other. Two dead Mauros. Two less enemies to meet our depleted forces.

Dismounting, I propped the two bodies up against the wall, so that they would look like the sleepy watchmen they had been but a moment before. Then vaulting once more into the saddle, I sped out of the city to the lichen grove on the hill.

Here I found the bullet-headed Hungarian, Kuswa, and his seven hundred men, fretting with inaction, and chaf-

ing over the delay. Briefly I sketched the situation. Then, with Kuswa and me at their head, the reinforcements filed quietly out of the grove and down to the city gates. No one showed up to oppose us. The two dead Mauros sat still as though dozing on guard, as we entered the city.

No time for concealment now! With a cheer, we charged down the central street toward the black-domed Temple of Erlik at the other end. The Martian cavalry heard us, and formed and met us just short of the temple. At their head rode Mu-Lai himself, slim, hawk-nosed, white-skinned, with thin sneering lips. I spurred to meet him.

But, as the two forces crashed together, I was swept slightly to one side, so that it was Kuswa, not I, who took on this chieftain of the enemy.

I sent atomic blasts from my pistol at Mauro after Mauro, until its force-chamber was exhausted; then drew my saber and laced out at the fiendish wide-hatted faces all around me. Two javelins lanced at my neck, and I could guard against only one.

My slith foundered, pulling me down with him. I ducked, and the blades flashed harmlessly above me. Then I was up and out of the saddle, fighting on foot, slashing the bellies of sliths, cutting at legs of Mauros, dodging the thrust of javelins.

It was not long before most of the combatants on both sides were off their sliths, struggling on the rubbled pavement. And gradually the tide of battle worked its way up to the wall of the temple, and through the garden gates, and to the temple steps beyond.

Down the steps to join us came our red-haired Captain and his mere handful of survivors.

SUDDENLY I found myself facing Mu-Lai in the press. We crossed

blades, his javelin and my sword, and the Mauros and Legionnaires gave way to let us fight.

At first we fenced cautiously, until finally the Martian chieftain forced me back a pace, and drew back his javelin to spear me through. Putting both hands to my saber, I swung it around my head with such force that it swept his spear from his grasp. Caught off his balance, he crashed to his knees before me. He was at my mercy. I drew back my blade to pierce the heart of this slayer of women and children, this torturer of Christian men.

But the memory of a blue-eyed gold-framed face stayed me. I lowered my point.

"Rise, father of Esta," I mumbled in Martian. "I cannot kill you."

Mu-Lai glanced up at me, with surprise and perhaps gratitude in his cruel eyes. Then something struck my head from behind, and I pitched forward into black unconsciousness.

**M**Y return to my senses was equally black, the blackness of night. Not a star flickered above. I lay on damp stones; and around me was a musty, foetid smell.

I sat up. I stood. I groped about. Stone walls on three sides of me, hemming me in. And on the fourth side iron bars. A prison cell!

I stumbled over something soft and yielding. A human body. It groaned. Kneeling, I felt of it. It wore a military uniform, the uniform of an officer of the Legion.

"Hammersmith!" I cried. "My Captain!"

"That—you—Warren?" he thickly replied.

"Yes. What happened?"

He sat up, and clasped my hand in the black darkness.

"They got us. All of us," he said.

"I was the last to go down. Well, I guess we shall grace the golden altar of Erlik together, you and I. But it was a glorious fight while it lasted. There *were* three thousand of us. Now there are just you and I."

"We can kill ourselves—or each other," I suggested, feeling for my weapons. But they had been taken from me.

A flickering light appeared in the distance. I could now see a dimly lit corridor, stone walled, stretching away from the barred door of our cell, and two white-swathed figures coming toward us, one of whom was carrying a torch.

It was my Esta! And her father, Mu-Lai, the Mauro chief!

My darling looked sweet and worried and wholly desirable. And, strange to relate, the bloodthirsty old Martian did not seem at all fierce or wicked at the moment. Perhaps it was due to some strange effect of the flickering torchlight. But, as I stood there, clutching the bars of my cell, he looked to be a courteous kindly gentleman of my own Earth.

And why not! We of the Legion of Death were regular fellows when off duty—no better, no worse, than the average run of mankind. Yet to our Martian enemies, in the heat of battle, we doubtless seemed like fiends from the hell of their dark god. And so, by the same token, the Mauros were probably quite charming in the bosom of their own homes.

These thoughts flashed through my mind, as I stood there staring out through the bars at Esta and her hawk-faced father.

Mu-Lai advanced and held out his hand.

"My dear Sir," he said in perfect English. "You are a brave fighter, and a worthy foeman. Erlik loves such as

you. And so, I am informed, does my daughter." He smiled at his little joke. "Furthermore, you spared my life in the battle. So I am prepared to offer you your freedom—if you will embrace the faith of the Dark Star, and will join the desert tribe of Mu-Lai."

I glanced from his aquiline face to the pleading eyes of the girl. Why not? It seemed my only chance for life; and perhaps, if I accepted, Esta might—Perhaps the unloved Ab-Nadik had perished in the battle.

And then I thought of Bill Hammer-smith, lying behind me, wounded, in the cell.

"The Chief is very kind," I replied, "and the Chief's offer is most magnanimous. Set my Captain free likewise, and I will gladly accept."

"The *other* Earthman crraat must die on the golden altar of Erlik," he snapped.

"Even if he embraces the Dark Star faith like me?" I asked.

"I wouldn't trust the infidel."

"Sir," I said, "neither the Captain nor I can ever return to the Martian Foreign Legion. We would be shot for treason. So it will be safe for you to trust us."

Esta cut in with, "Oh, my be— Oh, Sir." She was speaking English, like her father and me. "You cannot save *him*, but you *can* save yourself. What is the use to throw away two lives, when one can be saved? And I *want* you saved."

"I'm sorry, dear!" I replied with sad dignity. Then, turning to her implacable father, "Captain Hammersmith and I stand together, Sir!"

**F**OOTSTEPS sounded in the darkness, and the rattling of a scabbard. A tall dark handsome young Mauro came forward out of the gloom. It was Ab-Nadik!

Esta's face whitened. Fear leaped into her beautiful eyes.

"Ah, father of my betrothed," said Ab-Nadik in Martian, casting a respectful glance at Mu-Lai. "I see that you are preparing to pass sentence on the last two of the Earthman crraats. But what are *you* doing in this foul place, sweet Esta?"

Mu-Lai's eyes flashed a warning at his daughter.

"She came with me, to see the infidels who have killed so many of our men. She is a fearless girl, Ab-Nadik—a worthy bride for you."

Ab-Nadik showed two rows of white teeth in a self-satisfied grin.

"Yes, my chief, she is pure and steadfast. Now that the enemy have been repulsed, Sir, perhaps we can plan for an early wedding."

"There will be no wedding!" Esta spoke clearly, calmly, though her face was pale. She reached through the bars and took my rough hand in her smooth soft one. "*This* is the man I love!"

My heart pounded at her words. Yet it all seemed so hopeless now.

Mu-Lai's face clouded with anger. Ab-Nadik stared at Esta, unbelieving; then rage and hate welled into his dark molten eyes. A sneer overspread his handsome face. He whirled savagely toward Mu-Lai.

"She, the daughter of a chief, marry an unbeliever?" he gasped. "She must be mad!"

Mu-Lai jerked his daughter away from me with one sinewy hand.

"Ab-Nadik," he gritted, "I did not tell you of this, for I thought the girl had but a passing fancy for this man from another world. Then, too, he had saved my life. But he slew our men, so many of them that my heart is now hardened against him. Esta shall be yours."

"No! No!" cried my beloved. "I shall kill myself first."

Ab-Nadik grinned with malice, his burning eyes filling with hate as he glowered at me.

"Then," said he to Mu-Lai, his voice like the hiss of a desert serpent, "the crraat shall die?"

Mu-Lai nodded.

"Yes, he shall die. *Both* of the Earthman crraats shall die!"

"On the golden altar of Erlik."

Once again Mu-Lai nodded, his eyes black slits of fanatic hate.

Esta, in a frenzy, flung herself upon Ab-Nadik and pounded his chest with small clenched hands.

"Oh, I hate you," she cried brokenly. "I love him, I tell you. I love only him."

Ab-Nadik laughed harshly and drew her within his arms.

"But you shall learn to love *me*, light of my heart," he exulted, "after *he* is dead!"

The young Martian tried to kiss Esta, but she twisted her face aside.

"Come, Ab-Nadik, let us go!" Mu-Lai said sternly. "Esta, I command you!"

**T**HEN they dragged Esta away, kicking and squirming. With tense fingers I stood gripping those bars. Oh, that I were free to fight for her, to carry her with me, far from this heathen city of a strange planet.

Ab-Nadik turned, and cast a triumphant leering glance back at me. Helpless, raging, I shook my fist at him. How I longed to get my fingers around his throat. My Esta! Would I ever see her again?

Hammersmith patted my shoulder.

"The fortunes of war, my boy," he said comfortingly. "You passed up your chance. The old chief would have saved you, had you accepted his offer.

You should have seized your freedom and let me die on the altar."

"Never!" I declared. "It was freedom for *both* of us or for *neither*."

"Bosh!" he retorted. "You're just being quixotic. I'd have butted in while you were buzzing the old buzzard, but I hoped you might get away with it. Looked like you might, till that Ab-Nadik guy showed up."

"Skip it!" I snapped.

For a while we sat in the darkness, each busy with his own thoughts. Death was close at hand. It is one matter to face death in the heat of battle; it is another to face it in the quiet calm darkness of a stinking prison cell.

I knew that Hammersmith felt the same as I. He reached over and clasped my hand warmly in the dense darkness. No fear in that clasp—only an attempt to probe what lay ahead, that which has baffled men since time began. Weak and wounded, he awaited death—unafraid.

Suddenly, I released his hand. "Look!" I whispered.

His gaze followed mine down the corridor. Someone, carrying a torch, was coming toward the dungeon.

It was Esta, alone!

In one hand she carried the torch and in the other a large brass hoop strung with heavy iron keys.

A hurried word of greeting. Then the barred door of our cell was unlocked and swung open. Esta handed the torch to the pale Hammersmith; then I clasped her slim, warm body in my arms. It was a long, long embrace, filled with pent-up emotion. I could feel the rapid beating of her heart against my breast. Was there ever such a courageous girl as she?

"How did you get away, Esta, dear?"

"I slipped out while father and Ab-Nadik held council!"

Again I embraced her.

Finally she gently pushed away from me, and said,

"Hurry, beloved. There is a secret passage out of this dungeon. There are sliths, saddled and awaiting, beneath the city wall."

"How many sliths?" I asked, scarce daring to hope.

"Three," she replied, with bashful downcast eyes.

A fierce wild joy surged through me. I straightened my shoulders and drew a deep breath.

"Lead on!" I cried.

**D**OWN the dark corridor we followed the girl, until she paused at a heavy barred door at one side, and unlocked it.

"The treasure chamber of Daloss," she whispered.

And indeed it was! The light of the torch, held high by Captain Hammersmith, disclosed unnumbered bars of solid gold piled high about the walls. Brass-bound chests, containing who knows what wealth, filled the center of the room.

"Precious jewels," said Esta, noting the direction of my gaze.

One chest stood open, overflowing with the thin gold minted slabs which pass for coinage on Mars.

"Take!" the girl commanded. "We shall need them."

But I shook my head.

"I am robbing thy father of a more precious jewel than any of these," I said. "And that is enough to have on my conscience. I am no common thief."

She sighed. Then gazed at me with blue eyes full of approval.

Suddenly she stiffened, alert with listening.

"Someone comes," she said fearfully. "If he finds the cell empty, he

will try this door, knowing it to be the only possible means for your escape. Unfortunately it does not lock on the inside." She unsnapped the huge key-ring from the key in the lock, and handed the key-ring to me, as she continued breathlessly,

"Quick! That other door over there, across the treasure chamber, leads to the secret passage. I will lock the door through which we entered, and hold back whoever comes, until you have time to reach the sliths."

Brushing a kiss on my forehead, she snatched the torch from Hammersmith's hand, and darted from the chamber, shutting and locking the door behind her. We two Legionnaires were in darkness—alone.

It had all happened with such stupefying swiftness, that I had had no chance to remonstrate. And now she was gone—my Esta!

I crowded my ear to the door, in an effort to learn what was going on in the corridor outside. Esta was speaking.

"Oh, my father, do not ask me."

"So, it is you! Ab-Nadik was right. You did loose the Earthmen crraats from their cell," came Mu-Lai's voice. "You, my trusted daughter, descendant of the Dark Star himself! Where are the prisoners?"

"I—I will not say, Father. I—I love him so."

"Perhaps in the treasure room," suggested the savage voice of Ab-Nadik. "If she would cheat *me* of my love, she would not be above cheating *you* of your jewels."

"Ah—could it be?" Mu-Lai snarled. "We shall see. I have a key."

I heard a scuffle, evidently Esta trying to keep her father away from the door. Then came his voice.

"Aside, girl. You have vexed me enough today. If you are a traitor—"

Hammersmith spoke in my ear.

"Warren—come. They'll be inside in a minute."

I dreaded to leave Esta to the savage mercy of her angry father, yet there was no other course. Free—perhaps I could come back to rescue her. Imprisoned—I would die, unable to help her.

I STUMBLED across the room. Once I bumped against a chest—an open one, filled with the slablike coins. My hand clasped one, and I slid it into the pocket of my blouse—as a souvenir of Daloss. I have it still, an unbelievably ancient Martian coin, solid proof to me of my adventure, when sometimes even I doubt that it could have happened.

"Here." Hammersmith reached for my hand in the darkness. "I have the door open. There's a tunnel ahead."

Hurriedly we stepped into the tunnel, as a key grated in the lock of the main door of the treasure chamber behind us. Hammersmith closed our exit and locked it.

"They will be delayed getting *that* open," he said grimly. "Now, let's move for those sliths."

Rapidly we proceeded along the dark tunnel. Esta had said it led to freedom, and we knew that she would not betray us. Sliths were awaiting us, she had said. But how could I bear to leave Daloss without her?

Finally we saw faint light far ahead. We pushed forward, and came to a small barred iron grating hidden in a gully of shrubs. The grating was locked.

"One of these keys ought to do the trick," Hammersmith said grimly, lifting the huge key-ring. "I hope those fellows got detained in the treasure room."

With fumbling nervous fingers he tried one key after the other. At last a

key slipped into place, and the lock mechanism turned. The grating gave way at our touch, and we stood in the silvery starlight of a Martian mountain night.

Three sliths, saddled and bridled, and slung with food and water, were tethered behind some bushes to our right.

"The girl did not lie," breathed Hammersmith. "Here are our mounts!"

But I shook my head. A mad desire for Esta surged within my veins.

"I must go back to get her," I said bitterly. "I cannot leave her behind."

"You are right!" spoke a guttural Martian voice nearby. "You cannot leave her behind, for you yourself shall never depart from here."

A tall figure in flowing cape rushed from the bushes, brandishing a javelin.

"Infidel, you die! I suspected you would try to escape this way."

It was Ab-Nadik. The man had evidently circled back alone, while Mu-Lai was following us through the treasure room passage.

DESPERATELY, I glanced about for some weapon of defense. I saw a long lichen branch lying in the bushes near me. It was about five feet long and several inches thick.

Hammersmith, though weak from his many wounds, also saw the stick and lunged for it just as I did. Faster, however, was I; and up I came with it clenched tightly in my right hand.

Ab-Nadik loomed above me. I saw the quick flash of moonlight on his downward-thrust blade; saw beyond it the triumphant leer of the white teeth in his copper-hued face.

With one despairing effort, I swung the stick forward and upward at the shaft of his spear with all the strength in my body.

*Crash!* Wood hit metal shaft, and sent it hurtling away out of Ab-Nadik's hands, to fall with a rattling clangor on a nearby rock. My soft lichen stick bucked under the impact. I cast it away.

"Now, you heathen murderer," I snarled, "it's my turn to crow!"

Like two madmen we met. A sinewy fist sent stars whirling before my eyes, but I did not fall. Instead my own fist bored into his ribs.

I heard the Martian grunt. His arms flayed blows at me, but I would not yield. Again my fist shot out. This time a louder grunt.

My dazed bloodshot eyes caught a glimpse of a sagging face before me. Quickly I shot still another blow at that vision, felt knuckles sting from the impact.

I looked again, and the vision was gone.

"Come on. You knocked him cold. Let's light out before any more come."

It was Hammersmith. Vaguely I could make out his swaying form on a slith.

Stumbling through a red haze, I groped my way to one of the sliths, and somehow managed to clamber astride it.

"But what about Esta?" I groaned. "We can't desert *her*."

"Okay, Warren. I'm with you. I'll go back and fight the whole crowd for you. I'll—"

Hammersmith slumped forward on his slith's neck. Game to the end in spite of his wounds, he had at last fainted dead away.

I could not leave him, for I owed him a loyalty higher than love. Riding close to his mount, I lifted him across my saddle, grabbed his reins, and set out for the mountain pass which led to the red sands of the great desert of Mars.

The third slith whined softly, sending a pang through my heart, for *that* beast was to have carried my Esta.

In the pass, I revived Hammersmith with water from a small skin in one of the saddle-bags. Then we dashed past the Mauro sentries at the outer defile, and were on the open desert, now lit by the full glare of both moons.

THE rest of our journey across the red sands is an uncertain nightmare to me. I have a vague recollection of hiding the keys in some rocks. I remember reaching our old encampment, only to find it abandoned. Then of pushing on to the canal city of Ricca, winter quarters of the Martian forces. Our water gave out. Hammersmith died—at least, I think so. At any rate, I remember burying his body. And I slid off my slith and dropped unconscious on the desert sands, within sight of the first Martian sentry at Ricca.

Of course, I was tried for treason and desertion. They could not make the first charge stick; for, after all, the Capital City *had* ordered the attack on Daloss. Furthermore, a conviction for treason must be reported to the higher-ups, and pig-eyed old Colonel Ak-Ak was afraid of the effect of such a report. But they did convict me of desertion.

My sentence was three long Martian years in the penal labor battalion. I have five more days to serve, and then I shall be free!

Three thousand of us, I say. There were three thousand of us, who rode like mad, with sabers held high and hell in our eyes, into Daloss, the City of Lost Souls—but only one returned.

And he, as soon as he is free, will not return to the Earth, but rather will struggle back across the red desert sands of Mars to the City of Lost Souls, where—he hopes and trusts—his Esta will be waiting for him.

# 3 TERR

by John York Cabot



YOU'VE heard of Terrence Titwillow. He's the fellow who wrote all those spine-chilling mystery yarns, such as the *Case Of The Bloody Bishop*, *Death Is So Definite*, and *Murder By The Millions*, just to mention a few.

Terrence and I used to be fellow hacks. We wrote for the same magazines and frequented the same dens of debauchery. But when he wrote his first best-selling novel, *The Severed Left Ear Of A Lady*, he moved out of my class completely, socially and professionally. Except for almost yearly occasions when he'd invite me up to his penthouse to pour a few down the drain and talk over old times, I would have lost track of him completely. Terrence had gone big-time and I was still small fry.

It was a distinct surprise, therefore, when my telephone rang one December evening and I picked up the receiver to hear the voice of Terrence Titwillow on the other end of the wire.

"Hello, h-hello, Danny. This is Terry Titwillow."

**They were holy terrors, these three characters out of Titwillow's typewriter. Fine stuff in a novel—but sheer devils when they came alive**



# IBLE People



"I'm Pierre, the personable Parisian," he said. "One of your characters, remember?"

"Well," I said, feeling like a fool, "well, well. How are you, Terry? What do you know?"

"Plenty," he said, and in that instant I caught something strained, odd, in his voice. Something I couldn't place, a sort of ragged fear. "Plenty," he said again, "but I haven't time for that now. I'm in a hell of a mess, Danny. An awful mess." The fear seemed sharper. "I have to see you, Danny. You've been my best friend in the old days. You're still the only one I can trust. I have to see you."

"When?" I asked, slightly soured at this old-pal hokum.

"Right now," he answered, and I think his voice split an octave on the last syllable. "It's terribly important!"

I hesitated for an instant. It was cold outside, and a good half hour ride to his apartment, a Michigan Avenue penthouse. If I was such a pal, such a damned fine friend in need, why had he waited so long to remember it? Then sentiment took control. Maybe he *was* in trouble. And, after all, we used to be broke together.

"Okay," I replied. "I'll be right over."

In ten minutes I was out in the cold, kicking the starter of my refrigerated jalopy and cursing myself for a chump. This was a hell of a night to be leaving a warm house.

After about ten minutes of driving, I turned on the radio figuring that maybe some hot dance music would warm me a bit. But there wasn't any dance music right then. Just an excited news announcer babbling about some sort of a crime wave that had been holding Chicago in its grip for the past forty-eight hours. I'd lived in Chicago for most of my life, so I was most unimpressed. But one bulletin snapped my head up.

"Flash," said the announcer. "A report has just come into the station, but is as yet unverified. It is believed that the fabulous Coanor Diamond has been stolen!"

The Coanor Diamond!

For a minute I couldn't believe it. Everyone who had been reading the papers in the past two weeks was aware of the fact that the incredibly priceless gem had been brought into Chicago less than a month after its discovery in South America. Some wealthy Chicago merchant had bought the thing. Paid a tremendous price for it.

And now it was believed stolen.

"What a story," I thought. "What a *helluva* good story!" I was so excited that I nearly hit a lamppost. And then, just as I was eagerly awaiting further information from the announcer, a dance band came back onto the air. Disgusted, I snapped it off.

I WAS still ruminating on the possibilities of the diamond theft when I drew up in front of Terrence Titwillow's apartment. Along with my magazine hacking, amateur crime speculation had always interested me intensely. It must have taken some awfully clever work to lift the Coanor. Rumor had it that the thing was guarded night and day by a cordan of ten policemen.

But I pushed the news item to the back of my mind as I pressed the button on the elevator which would lift me to the penthouse hovel of Terrence Titwillow. I wondered what he could have called me for.

He was at the door of his apartment when I arrived, which was quite a surprise. Usually he'd let the butler admit me on my other visits—to impress me. But there was no butler this time, just Terrence Titwillow, standing there

in the door wearing Chinese pajamas, and with a wild gleam in his eye.

"Danny," he croaked, and I saw that he had a full three days' beard stubble on his jowels. Bleary bloodshot eyes, too. I gaped, for I'd never seen him in such bad shape.

"Jeeeeeeudas," I managed to say at last. "What in the devil have you been doing to yourself? Growing ragged from those literary teas?"

He grabbed my hand as though I might run away. "It's terrible, Danny. Simply terrible!"

While I threw my hat and coat on the hall table, Terrence stood there wringing his hands dismally and looking like a fat and troubled edition of Humpty-dumpty. Terrence had always been given to excess flesh, and the fact that he was as bald as an egg and less than five feet three in his bare feet added nothing to his glamour.

His pajamas, hideous black and pink things embellished with rampant dragons, clung to his paunchy frame in a dejected sort of way. He was holding an unlighted cigarette drooped from the corner of his twitching mouth, giving the impression that his hands might be too damp to strike a match.

"Tell me all," I said with enough melodrama to cover the situation.

Terrence nodded and shuffled across the room to where he had several glasses already waiting on a tray. He gave me one, and gulped down the other in a lightning gesture. From the tremble in his hands I could tell that he was bearing down heavily on the stuff.

"Well," I repeated, "what's it all about?"

"It's a long story, Danny. A long and terrible story. Maybe you aren't going to believe me. I haven't dared hint at it to anyone else, and if *you* don't believe me, I'll go utterly raving mad!" There was a passionate plead-

ing in his voice, and suddenly I felt a surge of pity for the man. Here was genius on the verge of going *phfffffft!*

"Go ahead, Terrence," I said as consolingly as I could. "Go ahead and get it off your chest."

HE ran a trembling hand over his third chin and reached for the scotch decanter and soda siphon.

"You remember my first best seller, Danny, *The Severed Left Ear Of A Lady?*"

"Of course," I nodded.

"Remember what the critics said about it?"

I frowned. What the hell, had he brought me up here to remind him of all his nice press clippings?

"Yeah," I answered curtly. "They said that it was a corker. I think they said that your ability to create living and breathing characters would carry you a long way. You were always good at characterization."

"Unusually vivid characterization, Danny," said Terry nodding excitedly. "That's what they said. Characters that lived and breathed!" He gulped his drink and filled himself another.

"That's right," I went on. "All the rest of your stuff got the same raves. Critics claimed that you were the only crime author in the racket who could get away with weak plots and still write best sellers. Of course, they said that your characterization was the key-note of your work. But," I frowned again, and my voice must have been sharp, impatient, "I don't see what in the dickens that—"

He broke in hurriedly.

"Don't get me wrong, Danny. I'm not breaking my arm. I didn't get you up here to listen to self-adulation. I'm just telling you this because it's terribly important. Terribly important in view of," his voice quavered, "*in view*

*of what has happened."*

"I don't get it." I was becoming thoroughly disgusted by now. Being called out of a warm house on a cold night to listen to a drunk babble on about his deft characterization didn't appeal to me. "Get to the point. If there's something I can do to help you, okay. But if you just want to talk shop—"

"But Danny," Terry was pleading now. "That *is* the point! That's the all-important point. My characterization, my vivid, utterly real characterization. The thing that the critics have raved about in every book I've written. And now it's boomeranged!"

I rose to my feet. I could see it all clearly now. Titwillow, bless his drunken hide, had been on a bat. Been on a bat and was now in need of someone to hash over his past successes. I'd been picked as the goat.

"Look," I said coldly. "You'll be all right in the morning. Take a cold shower; get your self a bro—"

"But Danny!" He leaped to his feet, folded his hands in an imploring gesture. "Danny, I'm not tight. I wish I were. Oh, I wish I were stinking drunk! But I'm not. Please. I'll get to it in a moment. But all this I've been telling you is vitally important."

"Okay," I said. "I'll give you just two minutes to get to the point. What is it?"

"The characters I created in my novels!"

"I don't get it yet. Get to the point!"

"You remember my characters, Danny. There were three of them on which I built all my stuff."

"Yeah, I know. But what has this all got to do wi—"

"Those three characters, Danny. Honest-to-God, may the heavens strike

me dead if I lie, *have come to life!*" His voice was an almost hysterical scream, and his gimlet eyes fixed wildly on me.

I turned and walked out into the hall to get my coat.

## CHAPTER II

### Pierre, the Personable Parisian

"DANNY, Danny," Terry's voice was hoarse, pleading. "Don't walk out on me. For the love of heaven, for the chums we once were, for the sake of those good old days, Danny, wait!" He had followed me into the hall.

"Nuts," I growled. "All you need, my fat and successful friend, is a bromo." I slid one arm into my coat.

"Danny!"

"Goodnight!"

"But, Danny, they've come alive. My three biggest characters. I'm not crazy, man. *They've come alive!*"

I was busy looking for my hat, coldly ignoring the rum-pot babblings of my old pal, when I absently reached into my inner pocket for my wallet.

"Danny, believe me, they're here in this very apartment!"

I wheeled on him.

"Where in the hell is my wallet?"

This threw him off the track.

"Wallet?" he muttered. "Don't know where your wallet is. *I haven't got it.*" Then, suddenly, a foolish expression slid slowly onto his face. "Seeeeeeee," he screamed. "There! I told you they'd come alive. Pierre must have taken it!"

I was boiling mad by now. If he thought in his drunken mind that he could make me stay by hiding my wallet like a child! This was the last straw.

"Look," I said slowly, very frigidly, "*give me my wallet!*"

"Pierre has it!" Terry was triumphant, a very sick sort of triumph, however. Like a man who has proved he hasn't any legs.

"And who in the hell is Pierre? A new butler? Tell him to bring it here, pronto!" Maybe I was shouting a little.

"Pierre, you know Pierre. He's one of my characters, Danny!" My drunken chum backed a few paces away as I balled my fists. "Pierre, the personable Parisian, Danny. You remember Pierre. He was one of my most vivid characters, Danny." Terry was backing away, his voice hoarse and squeaky. "I created Pierre in my second novel, *Case of the Bloody Bishop*.<sup>\*</sup> **AND NOW HE'S COME ALIVE, TOO!**"

In a single bound, I had Titwillow by his pajama collar, all my rage exploding in a single gesture.

"Look," I bellowed. "I'll give you just two seconds to give me back my wallet and let me get out of here!"

I had raised my fist above poor Terry's frightened face, when a voice came from behind me.

"You are looking for your wallet, *mon vieux?*"

I wheeled, releasing my grasp on Terry. And as I gazed pop-eyed at the speaker, I wished I'd hung onto Terry's collar, for my knees never needed support as badly as they did at that moment.

There, smiling suavely with white teeth beneath a dark waxed little moustache, was a dapper, exquisitely tailored little Frenchman, holding out my wallet!

"I told you so," I heard Terry gasp weakly. "It's Pierre!"

I'M not quite certain what my emotions were at that moment. I think I almost fainted. For I had read all of the Terrence Titwillow novels, and if Pierre, the personable Parisian, had ever stepped from their pages, he would have looked *exactly* like the smiling little Frenchy who confronted us now!

"Quite yes," murmured the Frenchy, nodding at Terry. "I am Pierre, the personable Parisian!"

I took my wallet and wheeled again on Titwillow.

"Look," I demanded, but without my former fury. "Who the hell is this guy? He looks like a Hollywood ham made up for the role of Pierre in a movie!"

Titwillow just shook his head sadly.

"I thought he *was* a ham actor, once, Danny. I thought all three of them were hams when I first saw them. Thought some of my friends had hired them to play a practical joke on me. But that was over a week ago. Since then I've learned better. It *is* Pierre, Danny. Believe me!"

The Frenchman tweaked the waxed ends of his moustache and bowed gracefully from the hips.

"A pleasure, *Monsieur, hola!*"

"Pleasure, hell," I snapped. "I'll take care of you later, buddy!" For suddenly it was all clear to me, down to the last detail. Undoubtedly some of Titwillow's waggish friends had cooked this all up on him. I knew, from reports, that Terry had been working awfully hard on his latest book. The strain had told on him, and some of his pseudo-chums must have hired this ham actor to slip into poor Terry's apartment and pretend he was Pierre come to life. Terry must have been in a hell of a state of nerves to accept such a childish trick as fact, but some-

<sup>\*</sup> *Case Of The Bloody Bishop*, by Terrence Titwillow. Published 1937, Channing-Moad Co. Story featured the adventures of Pierre, the personable Parisian, a sly, suave, Frenchman, jewel thief and crook extraordinary. Pierre appeared frequently in later novels by Terrence Titwillow. —Ed.

times too much work can do funny things to an author.

I felt sorry for him. Sorry, and sore as hell at the louses who'd fixed up this impersonation on him. Didn't the fools realize it could have sent him off the deep end?

"Take it easy, Terry," I said softly. "Everything is going to be all right. You've just been working too hard, that's all. Someone's played a rotten practical joke on you. But don't worry. I'll handle this from now on."

He smiled feebly. "I know what you're thinking, Danny, and I appreciate it. But you're all wet. Believe me, you're all wet. That guy is Pierre. I've already proved it. And there are two others in the apartment, too."

"Others?" I frowned. "Do you mean to say that you have more than one of these phony Pierres around?"

"No, just one Pierre. And he's not a phony, Danny. I'll prove it in a moment. What I mean to say is that my other two well-known characters, Snodbury Snipe, the super-sleuth of society, and Lady Ashington, the eccentric dowager fence, are also alive," his voice was subdued almost without emotion, now, "and here in the apartment."

"Monsieur Snipe and ze Lady Ashington are indeed here," the Frenchy cut in.

I glared at him.

"*Parbleu, Monsieur,*" the Frenchy drew himself up haughtily, "I am afraid you doubt your eyes!"

"Shut up!" I ordered. "I'll attend to you later!"

Then I took Terrence Titwillow by the arm and steered him back into the living room.

"Take me to those other two frauds, Terry," I said, "and I'll send the bunch of them out of here in a frenzy."

And at that instant, the two other "frauds" made their entrance. As in

the case of Pierre, I didn't have to look twice to recognize them as very excellent reproductions of Quaggle's famous Snodbury Snipe, and the equally celebrated fiction creation, Lady Ashington.\*

THEY stepped out of Titwillow's study, and seemed surprised to see me. Surprised, but not particularly concerned. Snodbury Snipe, dressed in white tie and tails, looking keen, young, and bored, was astonishingly like Titwillow's characterization of him in his novels. Lady Ashington, weaving a bit (he had made her quite a drinker), loomed huge in a frilly gown and peered haughtily through a lorgnette.

"So," I snorted. "These are the other two frauds. Your chums went to great lengths to play their practical joke!"

At my words, Lady Ashington glanced inquiringly at Titwillow. She raised her lorgnette, and turned her owlsh gaze on me. To him she said:

"And to whom do we owe the pleasure of meeting this rude stranger?"

Snodbury Snipe merely smiled in a careless, nonchalant way, and then turned his gaze to his immaculate cuffs.

"Look," I said menacingly. "You two are going to get the hell out of this apartment, pronto, or I'll call the cops. Haven't you, and whoever hired you, deviled Terry enough?"

"I'm sure," said Snodbury Snipe, smoothing out the lapels on his tailcoat, "that I haven't the foggiest notion of what you're trying to say, old fellow. Please be more explicit. If it's police you seek, mightn't I do?"

"Damn you all," I shouted. "Don't think that you can goof me the way

\* Snodbury Snipe, young society sherlock, appeared first in *Murder By The Millions*, published in 1936 by Channing-Moad Co. Lady Ashington, the hard-drinking dowager "fence" was a character in the same novel.—ED.

you've done with him. I meant what I said. Get out of here, quick, or you'll all be in the stir!"

"Fantastic character," murmured Lady Ashington under a heavily alcoholic breath. "What's his name, Terrence?"

"You see," Terry spread his hands in mute, beaten resignation. "They *are* real, Danny. I've been trying to tell you that I *know* they aren't hoaxes. I can prove it to you."

Pierre had followed us into the living room, and now put in his two cents.

"*Precisement*," he added. "We are all quite real, Monsieur. And Titwillow can prove it, *tres bien*."

It suddenly seemed as if the room were unbearably hot. Trip hammers had started a ceaseless tattoo in my head. This was getting to be far too much for me. Hoax or not, real or fake, I couldn't stand much more of it.

"Get them out of the room, Terry," I almost screamed, "I want to talk this thing over!"

Titwillow nodded. But he said nothing to them, merely walked over to his typewriter in the corner of the room. He sat down and inserted a sheet of white paper in the machine, typed out a sentence. I had followed him to the machine, and was looking over his shoulder as he typed. The sentence was, "Together they left the room."

I wheeled. Pierre, Snodbury Snipe and Lady Ashington *had* left the room!

TERRY smiled wanly at me.

"You see," he ran a trembling hand over his fourth chin, "this is how I *know* they are my characters!"

For a moment I almost believed him.

"But Terry, you fool, they heard me tell you to ask them to leave the room!"

Terry shook his head with infinite weariness. He typed out a second sentence. And as the letters sprang up I

read, "They returned to the room for an instant, then left again."

And before I could turn, I heard footsteps coming from Terry's study. When I faced the sounds, I saw Pierre, Snodbury, and Her Ladyship had re-entered the room. Re-entered the room, when they couldn't possibly have known what he had typed—*unless they were his characters!*

A moment passed while I considered the possibility that I had gone stark raving mad, and in that moment the three of them left the room once more!

"Good God, Terry," my voice must have been as hoarse and ragged as his own. "My God, you mean—"

"Yes," he said with simple, utter weariness, "it's just as I told you, Danny. *Those are my characters, right out of the books!*"

I turned and made my way shakily across the room. Titwillow said:

"You'll find the scotch in the cupboard, Danny."

"Thanks," I muttered. "I'm gonna need it!"

"As soon as you get straightened out a bit, I'll tell you exactly why I called you here." By now I was able to marvel at my friend's comparative serenity. It was a wonder that he hadn't cracked completely. Even now, he seemed to have calmed a great deal, just from the knowledge that someone else shared his utterly impossible, horribly incredible problem.

"Yes," said Terrence Titwillow, after I'd gulped down four fingers from my glass. "You can help me more than you'll imagine."

I nodded numbly, scarcely hearing him, pouring out four more fingers into my glass.

"For you see," he said, and some of the shakiness, the ragged terror, crept back into his voice, "I have the Coanor Diamond!"

The glass, the scotch, the decanter, crashed to the floor, just as though they had been knocked from my trembling hands by a baseball bat.

"You *what?*" I screeched.

"Pierre stole it two days ago," Terry said.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Terrible Three

I SAT down abruptly. My knees were knocking together like castanets and the ornately furnished room was spinning dizzily before my eyes.

"Don't say any more," I said weakly, "until you open another bottle of scotch. If I must go crazy I want to do it with a drink in my hand."

Without another word, Terrence waddled to a well-stocked liquor cabinet and returned with two stiff jolts of scotch.

I tossed mine down neat, then hunched forward on the edge of my chair.

"Was I dreaming?" I asked in a whisper, "or did you really say Pierre stole the Coanor diamond?"

Terrence shook his head miserably.

"It's the absolute truth, Danny." He shuddered visibly and then plunged on: "Let me start at the beginning, Danny. I've thought about this thing until I was sure I was going bats, but I'm beginning to get an idea about what's behind all this."

"Shoot!" I said. "If the gentlemen in white jackets don't break up our little party, I'll listen till the cows come home."

"First," Terrence said excitedly, "look at my typewriter!" His plump index finger shot out in the direction of his desk, on which rested a bulky, gleaming, old-fashioned typewriter. "Do you notice anything unusual about

it?" he asked breathlessly.

I was past the point of being surprised at anything my erstwhile chum could say or do.

"No," I said with judicial calm, "I don't notice anything unusual about it."

Terrence mopped his damp brow and stared at the black gleaming typewriter in something very like terror.

"But there *is* something unusual about it," he cried, "horribly unusual."

He was trembling again, his plump little body quivering like a blob of jelly.

"Steady," I said, more for my own benefit than his, "calm down and tell me what you mean."

Terrence Titwillow made a visible effort to get himself under control.

"All right," he said hoarsely, "I said I'd start from the beginning, didn't I? Well, I'll try to." He stood up then, lighted a cigarette and began pacing nervously back and forth in front of me.

"About a week or so ago," he said, "a salesman came here and tried to sell me a typewriter. He wasn't an ordinary salesman by a long shot." Terrence stopped speaking and shuddered at the recollection. Then he went on: "He was a tall, somber looking creature, dressed in black clothes and one of those funny string ties the artists wear. When I opened the door he peered at me through thick tortoise shell glasses and murmured:

"'You want a typewriter, yes?'"

"I said, 'I want a typewriter—NO!'," and slammed the door in his face. But in about an hour he was back. Asked me the same question. It kind of got my goat and I told him to clear out and stay out. He gave me a kind of long sly smile and murmured something under his breath and walked away. I thought he must be some kind of a nut so I forgot about the whole thing. Then," Terrence paused and mopped his brow feverishly, "a day or



so later the bell rang and it was him again. Dressed in black, smiling sadly, peering at me through tortoise shell spectacles. He asked me the same question:

“‘You want a typewriter, yes?’”

“I chased him away,” Terrence babbled, his voice suddenly going ragged, “but the next day he was waiting for me in my car. I called the police, but he was gone by the time they got there. The next day he was waiting at my club. I had the management throw him out, but that night he was back here again. Still dressed in black, still smiling sadly, still asking his infernal question:

“‘You want a typewriter, yes?’”

“I GUESS I went a little crazy,” Terrence muttered, “but I had stood all I could. I jumped on him. I hit him in the face. I rolled him down the steps. I called him every name I could think of. I threatened him with murder and mayhem if I ever set eyes on him again. I finally stopped, but only from lack of breath.”

Terrence suddenly gulped the untouched drink which he held in his hand.

“He was still smiling sadly,” Titwiltlow continued frantically, “as he stood up and brushed off his long black coat. He straightened the tortoise shell glasses on his bony nose and peered up at me.

“‘So,’ he said gloomily, ‘you do not want a typewriter, yes?’”

“Then,” Terrence said hollowly, “he left. Never a backward glance or anything. He just left and I haven’t seen him since.”

To say I was irritated with Terrence’s long and pointless story would be putting it mildly.

“So what?” I snapped. “What’s all that got to do with the Coanor diamond and the rest of your troubles?”

“It’s got everything to do with it,” Terrence cried wildly, “for the day after that a package came for me and when I opened it I found that blasted typewriter in it. There was a note signed *Admirer* with it and that was all. I had forgotten about the typewriter salesman so I went ahead and wrote a few chapters with this infernal machine.” Terrence slumped into a chair and buried his head in his plump hands. “You know what happened then,” Terrence cried out in a strangled groan, “Pierre and Lady Ashington and Snipe come to life.”

“Now look here,” I said, with a nice blend of hysteria and exasperation, “you don’t expect me to believe such rot as that.”

“But it’s the only solution,” Terrence said frantically. “This damnable machine he sent to me is bewitched. The people it writes about come to life. He knew what would happen. He knew the terrible, hopeless mess it would get me into. It’s his way of paying me back. Don’t you see?” Terrence was almost sobbing outright now, “this is his revenge on me for the way I treated him.”

I got up and poured myself a drink. A stiff one. I would have liked to get stinking drunk, but I knew there was no chance of that.

“Look,” I said, in an attempt at reason, “it isn’t so important *how* those characters got here. The important thing is that they *are* here and that you’re in a sweet mess. The first job is to get that straightened out if there’s any way under heaven we can. Tell me when you discovered these characters of yours and then tell me how and when Pierre copped the Coanor diamond.”

Terrence lifted his head from his hands, stared at me with his red-rimmed despairing eyes.

"Monday afternoon," he said dully, "I wrote a chapter on this typewriter. It was for my latest book in which I intended to combine my three most famous characters, Lady Ashington, Pierre and Snodbury Snipe. The chapter I wrote brought all of them into the story. That was all I did that day. I went out to the club, got pretty drunk I'm afraid, and then late that night I returned home."

"And that's when you met Pierre?" I asked.

TERRY nodded.

"He appeared last Monday night. I found him waiting for me in the study when I came home from the club."

"And of course you thought you were drinking too much?"

"Naturally. I snapped off the lights, making a concerted effort of will factors to ignore him, and went to bed. When I got up in the morning he was still there." Titwillow shook his head, as though trying to lose the memory of that horrifying moment. "I saw him and thought instantly that I was in the throes of a staggering hangover. So I ran to the kitchen for another drink."

"And that's where you saw Lady Ashington?"

"Yes, she was there, gloriously drunk and peering owlishly down at me through her lorgnette."

"Gad, what a shock!"

"You've no idea," continued Terry, shuddering. "I rushed to the window, set to hurl myself out—when Snodbury Snipe stepped out from behind one of the drapes in the living room and stopped me!"

"Ughhhyh!"

"Ghastly, it was more than I could stand. Then, just as you suspected at first, I thought that perhaps some of my friends had hired ham actors to

scare the hell out of me. I told all three of them, Pierre, Lady Ashington, and Snipe, to leave my house. They just laughed; and Pierre stole my watch." Titwillow shuddered again.

"And then?" I inquired.

"Then I got my idea for proof. I figured"—Terry went on—"that if they were *really* my characters, I should be able to control them, affect them, just with this typewriter."

I nodded.

"Just as you proved their existence to me."

Terry grimaced.

"I sat down at the typewriter and wrote a sentence ordering them to lie down on the floor and roll over."

"And," I said, "of course they did?"

Terry nodded.

"But I was still unconvinced. So I put in additional character touches. I gave Pierre a streak of gray at his temples. Made Snipe a little heavier around the midriff, and put an extra set of wrinkles around Lady Ashington's brow. When I looked, all the changes were there, just as written!"

It was my turn to shudder.

Terry shook his head sadly.

"There was only one thing to do. I got roaring drunk, immediately and without further ado!" His voice was growing shaky again. "Which," he concluded, "was the worst thing in the world I ever could have done."

I sensed that the explanation of the theft of the Coanor Diamond was approaching, and waited for him to continue.

"I woke about four o'clock the following morning," he said hoarsely, "and found myself tied to my chair!"

"Tied?"

Terry nodded.

"Tied to my chair, and I noticed, too, that the strange typewriter had been locked on me. All three of my char-

acters were gone!" He sighed deeply. "They had sensed that I was able to hold control of them so long as I was at the typewriter. They had sensed that, and tied me up deliberately, locking the typewriter as an extra precaution." His voice trembled. "They never could have done it, if I hadn't been so stinking swaffed!"

**I** WAS beginning to see the thing take shape.

"Hours later they returned and untied me," Titwillow resumed. "But it was too late for me to repair the damage done, and they knew it. For they had been running loose throughout the city for fully forty-eight hours. Forty-eight hours, Danny," his voice rose hysterically, "while those lunatics, creatures of this infernal typewriter, ran riot!"

"And during that time," I managed to say, "Pierre stole the Coanor Diamond?"

Terry nodded.

"He stole the Coanor and everything else around Chicago that appealed to him. *He has over a half-million dollars in jewels lying in a suitcase in my study, Danny!*"

"Good God!" I blurted.

There were tears in Titwillow's eyes as he continued.

"You haven't been listening to the radio, Danny, or reading the papers?"

"No," I confessed, "I haven't read a paper in the last forty-eight hours, and the only radio broadcast I heard was the announcement of the Coanor theft, while I was on my way here."

Terry rose, and walked over to his desk. Opening it, he pulled forth a stack of newspapers. He returned and threw these into my lap.

"This should give you a running account of what my creations managed to accomplish while they were loose."

I looked at the first paper, a headline from the *Chicago Trib* standing forth, "CITY IN GRIP OF ASTONISHING CRIME WAVE!" My hand flipped the *Trib* over, found a copy of the *Daily News*, "LAKE FOREST HOMES PILLAGED; GEMS STOLEN!" The *Daily Times* declared, "McCORMICK JEWEL COLLECTION HEISTED!"

"All this is the work of Pierre?" I asked. How any one person could have lifted so much in such a short time was beyond my ken.

"Don't forget," Terry said hoarsely, "that I made Pierre the *perfect* crook. His instincts for crime are flawless!"

"How about Lady Ashington," I wondered. "Where does she come into this picture?"

"Lady Ashington, as you'll recall, was a female fence in all my novels," Terry replied, holding forth another paper. "She was the gal who disposed of all crime loot for Pierre!"

I scanned the paper he handed me, a copy of the *Herald-American*. "Police On Trail Of Gem Thief," ran the first streamer. "Link Trail To That Of Female Fence," the second streamer declared.

"A drunken dowager-duchess type of woman, riding a milk horse and singing bawdy ballads through the loop, early in the morning hours, yesterday, tried to force her way into five of Chicago's largest jewelry stores.

Passersby who noticed her, told police that she insisted she carried untold loot which she wanted to sell to the proprietors. No one made any effort to stop her, and the stores all being closed, the strange woman rode away singing drunkenly before the police arrived."

"THIS," I gasped, "is awful! Supposing the police find out that Lady Ashington's trail leads here?"

Titwillow looked gray at the corners of his mouth.

"They haven't as yet, and I'm hoping they won't." He held forth another

paper. "If they do," he moaned, it will be because of this sort of thing. Read it."

The paper was the *Trib* again, a later issue. The drop read, "MYSTERIOUS STRANGER CALLS POLICE TO GIVE TIPS ON CRIME WAVE." The story went as follows:

"Police today are narrowing down a number of telephone tips received in connection with the forty-eight hour crime wave ravaging the city. A cultured-voiced young man has made ten such calls to the Central Detective Bureau, offering his assistance in the solution of the crime wave. So far, police have been unable to trace the calls to their source. Last-minute leads indicate that they may have further information on this within twenty-four hours."

"Snodbury Snipe?" I said, knowing damned well that it was.

Terry nodded.

"Yes. He says that he can offer his valuable sleuthing abilities to the local constabulary and solve the thing in more than record time. He says he's merely waiting until the moment when they are completely stymied. Then he will step into the mystery, very dramatically, in the best tradition of my novels, and unsnarl the thing for them!"

"But," I said, not realizing how assinine I must have sounded, "this is awful!"

"Do you realize," he squealed, and all of the old hysteria was returning to his voice, "do you realize what this will mean to me, what it will do to my reputation, my career?"

"But *why* did they do it?"

"They said that they were disgusted with me," he moaned. "My own characters, disgusted with me!"

"Disgusted?"

"Yes, they said that my plots were growing more and more silly with every succeeding novel. Said they were tired of doing such childish things as I made them do!

"They said they wanted some real,

honest-to-goodness, red-blooded action. They said I was a character writer, and nothing better. They wanted to humiliate me, Danny. They deliberately went to work to create such a horrible mess that a genius couldn't unsnarl it!"

"I can agree with that," I muttered.

"And then," Terry rose to his feet, and as he rose his voice did likewise, "they defied me to unsnarl the muddle they'd made!"

TERRY was sobbing now, and his small, fat shoulders shook tremulously.

"So that's how you're going to be able to help me, Danny!" he groaned at last. "That's why I called you. You may be a hack, but you have an unholy adroitness at plotting. Your plots have always been superb, Danny!"

"But I don't see," I protested, ignoring the unflattering remarks about my hack tendencies, "how I can help you. What under the sun can I do?"

Terrence Titwillow lifted his head from his tear-stained paws.

"Don't you see?" he bleated. "The only way I can control these . . . these characters, is on this infernal type-writer. But I'm exhausted, Danny, I'm losing what little control I did have over them. And in addition to that, I'll need super-colossal plotting to get them out of their horrible mess!"

"You want *me* to plot them out of this?" It was suddenly dawning on me.

He nodded, his round, tear-stained face fixed anxiously on me. Anxiously, with a pleading-dog expression.

Every instinct, from that of self-preservation on, warned me to get out of this mess while the getting was good. They were his characters, not mine. It was his misfortune. I could leave now, and it would never affect my life again.

But maybe it was due to Titwillow's unconsciously dirty crack about me being a hack, or it might have been his flattery and respect for my plotting. I don't know. At any rate, I suddenly made my decision. I took the challenge

"Okay," I said. "Let's get down to work on this thing. It's going to be an age-old battle of the literary world—plotting versus sharp characterization!"

#### CHAPTER IV

##### Lady Ashington Complicates Matters

TERRENCE TITWILLOW grabbed my hand, while crocodile tears rolled down his fat cheeks.

"Danny," he muttered huskily, "Danny, I'll never forget this."

I was smiling, in a superior sort of way, I'm afraid, for in the back of my brain I could already see the solution beginning to shape. Terry must have caught the cat-ate-the-canary look on my phizz, for he blurted:

"Danny, good Lord, Danny. What is it? Have you got—"

"A solution?" I broke in. "Absolutely, old bean. I've a solution that's so remarkably simple, it's a pity you didn't think of it sooner."

I fished into my pocket for a cigarette. This was a moment I relished.

I lighted the cigarette, timing the words as dramatically as I could.

"Kill them," I said simply. "Just kill them, that's all you have to do, Terry."

"Danny!"

I looked full at him, expecting to find rapt admiration accompanying his ejaculation. Looked at Terrence Titwillow and got the shock of my life. Horror was written on his face.

"Danny," he repeated, aghast. "I

can't *kill* them. Why, the very thought is horrible. They're *alive*, Danny. Don't you understand? I'm the reason why they're alive. Even on a typewriter, killing them now would be like murdering actual people."

There was such unspoken indictment in his tones that I suddenly felt like a combination of Bluebeard and Jack the Ripper. And I knew then that my hack solution would never do. He would never condone the willful murder of his characters. However, I tried one last angle.

"What have they done for you? What have they done for you, except make trouble?"

Tears were starting afresh in the eyes of Terrence Titwillow. He shook his head sadly from side to side.

"Danny," he murmured. "I could never bring myself to such an action, never. I know that they've brought me nothing but trouble. I'm aware that they deliberately made this mess to jam me up. But I could *never* kill them."

"Let me, then," I offered. "I'll bump them off on the typewriter without so much as blinking an eye. They wouldn't be the first characters I've killed off when my plots got too jammed up."

He shook his head again.

"No, Danny. I could never permit it. No."

"Then what the hell do you expect to do? The cops are going to track those three morons back to your apartment sooner or later. The loot will be found here, and you're going to be in a helluva mess!"

And at that moment Snodbury Snipe chose to saunter back into the room. His gray eyes swept carelessly over the scene, but he didn't say a word. Just walked over to the telephone.

I was about to say something to him,

but he started dialing a number. Something held me motionless while I watched him. Then he was speaking into the phone.

"Hello," said Snodbury Snipe, "hello, old boy. Is this the police department?"

I MUST have leaped across the room in a split second, grabbing the telephone from Snodbury's hand and slamming it back on the hook.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Snipe gave me a frosty look.

"I have decided," he said, "to lend my invaluable assistance to the stupid police of this metropolis."

I was across the room to Titwillow's typewriter in an instant. My fingers flew across the keys. A moment later and I looked down at what I had written.

"Snodbury Snipe abandoned any idea of telephoning the police."

"There," I gasped, "that ought to hold you."

Snipe looked undecidedly at the telephone a moment, then shrugged his well-tailored shoulders and walked out of the room once more.

"Terry," I fairly shouted, rushing over to the couch and grabbing him by the shoulder. "I can control your characters, too."

He just looked up at me dully.

"Of course," he said. "There's not much trick to it. They're creations of my brain, but they respond to this damnable typewriter."

As he was speaking, I heard a sharply indrawn breath behind me and wheeled to face Pierre, the personable Parisian. He had entered the room and come up behind me so softly that I hadn't been aware of it.

"*Monsieur*," Pierre bowed gallantly from the waist, "when are the police coming?"

"The police?" I was shocked to think that this knave could speak so calmly of the cops after what he'd done.

"*Oui*, the *gendarmes*. When are they coming to surround the apartment?"

"Surround the apartment?"

"*Precisement*, when are they coming?"

*Monsieur* Titwillow always has the *gendarmes* surrounding me in apartments."

"Oh," I said, not knowing what else to say. "Oh, he does, does he?"

"*Oui*, and, of course, *Monsieur*, I always escape *zem*."

"Well, that's nice," I answered.

"That's very nice. But I don't think there'll be any police for a while yet, Pierre."

He looked hurt and slightly disappointed.

"But *Monsieur*, I 'ave stolen *so* much!"

"Nevertheless," I said firmly, "there won't be any police for a while yet. Get Snipe to surround you, if you really feel the need for such a thing."

"Snipe," there was open disgust in Pierre's voice, "pah! Eet is to laugh. He can do nozing. *I*, Pierre, the personable Parisian, am a super-crook!"

With that he turned and panthered out of the room, tail feathers rustling like a peacock's. I watched him leave, while at the back of my brain another thought was plucking. It was becoming plain that upon the slim shoulders of Pierre, the personable Parisian, rested the cause, effect and solution of this problem. But I wasn't able to get it straight. Not then.

TERRY was still slumped mournfully on the couch, so I turned on the radio, for want of something better to do. Listening to the radio had often been a great help in twisting out plot snarls. I lighted another cigarette and tried to think.

It was obvious that we couldn't just

sit around waiting for something to happen. If we did so, the cops would pour in on us so fast that we'd be out of luck entirely. Action was necessary, immediate action. But what kind? And how?

Here was a mess proper. A fortune in jewels lying around the house, a super thief getting restless because of inactivity. A damned fool society sleuth beginning to get the urge to turn us all in to the forces of law and order, and a drunken female fence who had some bright ideas of turning over a neat bit of profit on the stolen stuff just as soon as she could contact a dishonest jeweler.

For figments of an author's imagination, these characters were certainly causing enough trouble. They could be controlled on the typewriter, but it was too late for that now. During the time when they'd done all their mischief, Titwillow had been drunk, and they'd run riot. Now what good would controlling them do?

So far, it had done nothing but postpone the inevitable. I found myself wishing again that Titwillow would let me kill them all and be done with it. Many an editor had been less squeamish about the bumping off of characters. They never seemed to mind, why should he?

But he did, and this line of reasoning was getting me nowhere in a great hurry.

It occurred to me, then, that the biggest problem at the moment was the loot. It was in the apartment, and would serve as impossibly damning evidence, should anyone trace the three characters.

"Terry," I gave him a shake, and he looked up at me from his brooding. "Show me where the jewels are."

He shook his head.

"It's no use, Danny, no use. You'd

better leave. I've resigned myself to my fate. I've been thinking it all over, fellow. There's nothing to do but call the police and have it done with."

Titwillow, it was suddenly apparent, had funk'd out at last. Given the thing up. Broken under the strain. I couldn't let this happen. I was determined by now that we'd see it through. How, I didn't know. But somehow.

"Look," I said, "snap out of it, man. There's some way of getting out of this. You got me up here. I agreed to see it through. I'm in it now, up to my neck. The least you can do is stand by!"

He sighed, a deep long, tremulous sigh. Then he rose.

"Okay, Danny," he said without too much enthusiasm, "I won't quit. Come with me and I'll show you the loot."

"IT'S in the study," he said a moment later, as we stood before the closed door of his den. From inside, voices speaking hotly drifted out to us. One was thickly accented, Pierre's, and the other was that of Snodbury Snipe.

"All they do is wrangle about their relative supremacy," Terry explained. "Been at it for hours."

He opened the door and we entered. Pierre and Snipe, who faced each other in two easy chairs, subsided into silent glaring, paying not the slightest attention to Terry or me.

"It should be over here, in Pierre's briefcase," Terry observed, walking to a table and picking up a leather portfolio.

"What is it *Monsieur* seeks?" asked Pierre, looking up suddenly.

"The loot you lifted," I snapped at him. "Where is it?"

Pierre looked at Snodbury Snipe, and the suave playboy sleuth grinned. Something unspoken passed between them. I could hear Terry, at the table,

exclaim in surprise.

"It's not here," he gasped hoarsely.

"Where is it, Pierre?" I demanded.

"Have you hidden it under a rug?"

Pierre shrugged, while Titwillow's soft moaning again filled the air. I turned to Snodbury Snipe.

"Okay, super-sleuth, what's happened to the swag?"

Snipe studied his well-manicured nails, an irritating characteristic Titwillow had given him four novels ago, then spoke languidly.

"Really, old boy, I believe Lady Ashington has them."

"Lady Ashington!" Terry was beside me, glaring down at Snipe. "Where is the old she-fool?"

"She 'as fled zee coop, *phfffft!*" Pierre declared.

"Gone?" I bleated, "you mean she's gone?"

"*Precisement,*" observed Pierre with relish. "Now maybe the *gendarmes* will surround me, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Oh God," Terrence groaned huskily. "Oh God, that drunken old fool is probably out on the street at this very moment trying to peddle the jewels and the Coanor diamond!"

## CHAPTER V

### Where Is Lady Ashington?

"THIS is the end," Titwillow was moaning over and over again. "The cops are going to pick her up trying to get rid of those jewels." He shuddered. "Then they'll trace it to here, and what will become of me? Leave, Danny. Leave while you have a chance."

"Nuts," I snapped. "I started to unravel this thing and I'm at least going to have a try at it. Buck up. We've got to stop Lady Ashington before the police do. So get your coat on and

bring that typewriter along. We might need it. Thank goodness all the jewelry stores are closed. We may have a fighting chance."

Titwillow hesitated, bewildered by my sudden surge of action.

"Get a move on," I barked. "Grab your coat and the typewriter."

"But my pajamas," he gasped, "I'll have to cha—"

"Change them hell," I rasped. "Throw an overcoat on and no one will know the difference. We haven't too much time."

Pierre and Snodbury were watching me with visible bewilderment.

I turned on them.

"You two got coats?"

They nodded in unison.

"Good. Get 'em on. We're going places."

Pierre flushed.

"But, Monsieur, I cannot leave. I must wait for zee *gendarmes*. They will surround ze apartment shortly—"

"Get your coat," I ordered, and the tone of my voice was more forceful than a typewriter order would have been. Titwillow had left the room in search of his coat, and I could hear him in the living room packing the typewriter.

In a moment later, Pierre stood beside me in an Inverness cape and a slouch hat. Snodbury Snipe had donned his topper and a Chesterfield plus white gloves and muffler. They looked like the last scene in a crime movie.

I steered them out into the living room, where Titwillow, overcoat over his pajamas, typewriter in his hand, was waiting bewilderedly, yet hopefully, for us.

"Okay, children," I ordered. "Now let's get out of here!" I grabbed my own coat and hat as we marched through the hall and out of the door. We stepped into the self-running elevator and pressed the button.



On the way down in the elevator no one said a word. We must have been one of the oddest assortments imaginable. A harassed, plump little bald man, wearing an overcoat over his pajamas and clutching a typewriter and sheafs of paper; a leering, sleek and suave, wax-moustached Frenchman, dressed in a cape and slouch hat; an incredibly well-groomed young man about town, wearing top hat, white tie; and yours truly.

We were some collection.

"Okay, kiddies," I said, as the elevator stopped at the lobby. "Let's get organized. We haven't any time to lose." I turned to Terry. "Get your car, it's bigger, faster than mine—and incidentally a helluva lot more comfortable."

"But Danny, what's this—"

"Never mind," I broke in. "Get your car. You'll find out later."

**H**E hesitated, looking down at his plump pajama-clad shanks peeping from beneath his overcoat. Then he gritted his teeth and moved across the lobby of the apartment building. I watched him step out of the door that led to the garage, then turned to Snodbury Snipe and Pierre.

"Did the old bat say anything about where she intended to go?" I asked.

"You mean Lady Ashington, of course," Snipe observed.

"That's right. She must have had something in mind when she packed out with the loot. Did she say anything?" I insisted.

"*Non*," Pierre put his two cents in, "ze Lady Ashington she ees too damn drunk to say anything."

I heard a horn toot out in the driveway, so I steered my two charges out through the lobby door, where Terrence Titwillow was waiting in his long black limousine. I shoved in beside him.

"Get around on the other side," I ordered. "I'll drive. You're gonna be plenty busy with that typewriter."

He got out and came around to the other side, while I slipped behind the wheel. Our two figmentary chums were still standing nonchalantly beside the car, had made no effort to get in.

"You two," I ordered, "pile in, pronto."

They made no move.

"I say, old bean," Snipe said, "don't think we'll go with you. Things to do. Thanks just the same."

I looked at Titwillow.

"Order them in," I demanded.

He slid the cover off his typewriter and twisted a sheet of paper into the roller. With the machine on his lap, he then clacked off a brief sentence. I smiled in satisfaction as Snodbury Snipe and Pierre climbed into the rear of the car without another word.

Then I threw the car into gear, and in another moment we were barrelling wildly down Michigan Boulevard, headed for the Loop. The clock on the dash board set the time as shortly after midnight. That was just as well, for there wouldn't be any jewelry stores open. I was gambling on Lady Ashington's desire to peddle the stuff to the more well established gem houses, as she had done previously. Which would mean that we'd probably catch up with her somewhere in the Loop.

At Randolph and Michigan, we veered sharply to the right and roared under the "L" structure going west toward the center of the Loop. We'd take a look at State Street, first, I reasoned.

"Danny," Terry had gripped my arm, "slow down, Danny! Can't you hear the sirens?"

I let up a bit on the accelerator. He was right. I must have been deaf, for sirens were wailing wildly behind us,

and a spot threw its flash on the rear of our limousine, its glare blinding me in the rear vision mirror.

"Damn," I moaned, "if we're pinched for speeding, we *will* be out of luck!" "Voilà!" exclaimed Pierre, who had been holding his tongue up until now. "Voilà! Eet is ze *gendarmes* come to surround me! I am so 'appy I could shed tears."

I ignored his wishful thinking, and slowed perceptibly, drawing close to the curb. The siren screamed louder, the spot flashed ahead of us, and to my utter amazement two squad cars raced *past* us, cutting sharply to the left at the corner of State Street!

"WHEEEEW," I gasped. "Close call. Evidently they didn't want us." Then the moan of sirens dashing across the other side of the Loop came wailing to our ears.

"Lord, Danny," Terry exclaimed, "something must be popping. Hear those sirens? There must be over a dozen cars racing through the Loop!"

"Yeah," I said, "yeah. But we've got to find Lady Ashington. We haven't any time for problems that aren't re—" I stopped short, as a horrible premonition burst loose beneath my thinking cap.

"Omgawd!" I cried, "those sirens might be, could be, more than likely *are*, for Lady Ashington!"

"Voilà!" exulted Pierre, "ze *gendarmes* are hot on ze scent!"

"Could have solved the crime long ago," Snodbury Snipe groused, "if they'd asked *me* in on the case!"

I looked sharply at Terry, who's face had gone deathly white. But he didn't say a word. Smashing my foot down on the accelerator again, I swung the car out from the curb and shot the block from Wabash to State Street in less than a hair-split-second.

"We're going to follow those cars!" I gritted. "And I hope to Jeudas that we won't find what I think we're going to find."

Three seconds later we were wheeling down State, and in less than a minute I'd jammed on the brakes. The squad cars, close to eight of them so far, were massed in front of a State Street jewelry store!

Sirens still moaned, indicating the approach of other squads. People had already filled the streets, stopping traffic, and above the tumult could be heard a throaty basso, somehow feminine, bellowing an entirely indecent *ballade d'amour*. Lady Ashington!

"Ohhhhhhhh," Titwillow's gasp was soft, like that of a man who sees the last straw bobbing away on a wave.

"Come on," I blurted, opening the door of the car, "let's find out what is happening!"

I was out in the street, waiting for him to come puffing around to where I stood. Snipe had stepped out beside me, and Pierre, too, had piled out.

We were right at the fringes of the crowd, and it was immediately apparent that we'd have to do a lot of elbowing to force our way through to the circle of activity in front of the jewelry store.

"Zis is *magnifique!*" breathed Pierre, showing his white teeth in a flashing smirk beneath his waxed moustache. "Voilà! I meet ze police," he fished into his pocket, "with zis!"

I looked at what Pierre had drawn forth, and gasped. He held a shining, keen-edged knife in his hand!

Terry was with us now, and he paled. "Jeeeeudas, Danny," he breathed, "make him put that away. I taught him how to use it too well!"

There was no time for quibbling. No time for typewritten commands. Pierre wanted to meet the cops in combat, had waited eagerly for it. That was enough

for us. We most certainly did not want Pierre to meet them. Not right now, anyway. I swung, efficiently, if I do say so.

Pierre went out like the Lindbergh Beacon, toppling face forward to the pavement. The knife slid along the pavement to a gutter. Terry and I bent simultaneously and picked him up like a sack of wheat. In another few moments—with the aid of my necktie and several belts—he was temporarily out of the picture, trussed up neatly in the back of the car.

**T**HEN we were shoving through the crowd, elbowing, thrusting, until we were near the center of excitement.

A Black Maria rolled clanging up to the scene, while cops, swinging nightsticks expertly, paved a path for it through the crowd. Terry and I were forced to retreat about ten yards to get out of the range of those nightsticks.

And all this time the bellowing voice of Lady Ashington could be heard singing lustily above the uproar. Finally, the crowd parted enough to give us a view of the proceedings.

I had to clutch Terry by the arm to keep him from falling over in a dead faint at what he saw. There were two horses on the scene, the first being the disarranged and bellowing Lady Ashington, and the second being an actual animal of that species, looking as though it might have been stolen from a milk truck!

Lady Ashington, still in control of the situation, was astride the milk horse!

In her hand, swinging unerringly about at the heads of the sweating policemen who were trying to drag her down, was the case carrying the stolen jewelry, including the Coanor Diamond! A second glance revealed that the dowager had evidently tried to ride the terrified animal through the plate

glass window of the jewelry store. For the window was utterly shattered, and the milk horse was rearing majestically about in fragments of splintered glass.

"Danny," Terry moaned. "Do you see her?"

"See her? How can I help it!"

"What are we going to do, Danny?" he bleated.

The cops were finally, through the strength of sheer numbers, winning in the battle against horse and dowager. Lady Ashington was slipping from the back of her mount. I could see that it would be just a matter of moments before they had her in the paddy wagon.

"There's only one thing to do," I answered, grabbing him by the arm and turning him back toward the car. "That's get out of here!"

We turned, then, and pushed as rapidly as we could away from the scene. A voice, shrilling excitedly in our ears, told us that it hadn't been too soon.

"They've got her," screamed the voice excitedly, "and now they're tossing her into the wagon!"

"And they'll find the jewels the minute they open the case," moaned Terry.

Finally, it must have been fully three minutes later, we were back at the side of the car. A quick inspection told us that Pierre was still out as cold as yesterday's gravy in the back of the limousine.

"Climb in," I ordered. "Everything has been shot to hell. We've got to put some distance between ourselves and the gentlemen of the law. Give us time to figure out another angle—that is, if there are any angles left to this mess!"

I was in the car and Terry was beside me when he grabbed my arm frantically. "Danny! Where's Snodbury Snipe?"

In the excitement we had forgotten

our society sleuth!

"Lord, I thought he was beside us all that time!"

I jumped out of the car and dove into the crowd again, Terry right on my heels. One thing was certain. Things were bad, terrible, but they would be plenty worse if Snipe got loose among the coppers!

Three minutes later one fact was obvious. No Snodbury Snipe! My stomach was turning cartwheels and my neck was turned into Niagara in miniature, what with the perspiration rolling down my collar. It was hard to believe that five minutes before had seemed like the climax to our misery.

I grabbed one of the bystanders. I recognized him as having been up at the front of the trouble when Snipe was with us.

"Where did the fellow who was with us a moment ago disappear to?" I demanded. The look in his eyes told me he didn't get it.

"Huh?"

"A chap with a top hat, dressed formally, y' know. Remember seeing him?" I was shaking the hapless sap, now.

"Yeah, mister. He was with youse two."

"Where did he go?" I repeated.

"Why," the bystander looked at me as though I was loony, "he went over there," he pointed toward the line of squad cars. Then his eyes lighted. "See," he bleated. "There he is, now. Just getting into one of them squad cars with the cops!"

I turned, while my heart tried to kick its way through the soles of my shoes. Turned, and saw the tailcoat of Snodbury Snipe vanishing into a squad car!

"Terry," I screeched. "Look!"

But I might as well have saved my lungs. For Terrence Titwillow had seen, and keeled over in a faint!

## CHAPTER VI

### The Stranger Again

THE respiration work necessary to revive Terrence Titwillow took a little better than five minutes, during which time the Black Maria bounced majestically away carrying Lady Ashington and followed by a squad car detail in which Snodbury Snipe was riding.

The remaining coppers dispersed the crowd as rapidly as they could, and just before several bluecoats were about to descend on Terry and me, I brought him around and helped him into the car.

"Tell me," Terry begged, as I was starting the car, "tell me that this is all a ghastly nightmare, Danny!"

"Do you have to be told?" I snapped, for by now I was growing more than a trifle irritated. "Why," I demanded as an afterthought, "couldn't you have been a writer for the kiddy magazines? Or a scribe for a religious journal? The next time you create characters, my fat chum, please create decent, normal, god-fearing ones."

"I'm sorry Danny. I guess I've dragged you into a pretty devilish mess. You can step out if you want to."

"Step out?" Now I *was* burned. "Step out?" I repeated. "After all I've had to go through in the last few hours? Don't be funny. I'm going to see this thing through if it lands us all in Alcatraz!"

"Thanks, Danny," Terry mumbled humbly. "I won't forget all you've done."

I didn't answer, just threw the car into gear and shot ahead along State, going south. Moans from the back of the car indicated that Pierre was coming out of the fog.

"Where are we going, Danny?" he asked.

I had been doing some fast and furious weighing of problems during the past five or ten minutes, and now I had another angle.

"Look," I told him. "The situation is about like this. The police have Lady Ashington and the swag. Our pal Snodbury Snipe has followed them to the lockup to put in his two cents' worth. Between Snipe's amateur efforts to make a name for himself as a Sherlock, and the damning evidence of the Coanor Diamond and those other expensive trifles, we haven't a chance in the world. Right?"

"Right."

"Okay. We're in a hot spot no matter what happens. There's just one chance in a hundred of getting through this thing."

"What's that?" Terry hissed hopefully.

"If we follow them to the station," I speculated aloud, "we might have a chance of shutting up Ashington or Snipe, or both, before they spill the soy beans."

"But how'll we get near them? Surely the police are going to be grilling Lady Ashington the moment they find the loot in that bag."

"Once upon a time," I answered, "I used to work for a living. As a police reporter. Remember?"

Terry nodded.

"I spent most of my time around the Central Bureau, at 11th and State. That's where they're rushing Lady Ashington. I know a number of the coppers there. The Desk Sergeant owes me a favor. I hushed a nasty little mess for him at one time. We can get into the grilling easily enough," I answered.

"*Mon Dieu!*" The exclamation came to us from the back seat, indicating that Pierre had finally come around.

"What are we going to do about him?" Terry asked in a shaky voice.

"Take me to ze peeg police!" demanded our charge venomously. "I 'ave a zing or two to settle with zem!"

"Shut up!" I snapped at Pierre over my shoulder. Then to Terry. "We can stop at a pawn shop a few blocks down. I've a chum who will sell me a pair of bracelets. We can snap them on the frenzied Frenchy just to make sure he doesn't follow us into the midst of the coppers."

THREE minutes later I was climbing into the car once more, a nice set of handcuffs stuffed in my side pocket. Three minutes more and we pulled up in front of the Central Bureau, at 11th and State.

I was just starting to clamber out of the car when a smooth, suavely familiar voice purred in my ear:

"Pleeze, do not move, *mon vieux*."

This was the last straw. I turned slowly and looked into Pierre's beaming black eyes and smiling face. In his hand he held nonchalantly, a small pearl handled revolver.

"You got loose," I said stupidly.

"But certainly," Pierre beamed good-naturedly. "Am I not Pierre? Am I not ze supreme, ze invincible, ze masterful crook of crooks?"

"You am," I said disgustedly.

Terrence Titwillow was staring at his brain child in undisguised dismay.

"I forgot," he stammered, "about the revolver. I put in a special holster in his sleeve in my last book."

"Dandy time to remember that," I said sourly.

"Pleeze," Pierre held up a slim hand in admonition, "we must not quarrel. Geeve me ze handcuffs pleeze."

"What for?" I asked stubbornly.

Pierre wagged a finger playfully.

"You shall see." He motioned with the revolver. "Pleeze, ze handcuffs."

There wasn't anything I could do. I

passed them over to him. Then, to Titwillow's and my intense humiliation, he wound our arms through the spokes of the steering wheel and cuffed them together at the wrists. We were definitely going to sit that one out together.

Pierre stepped from the car and bowed gracefully to us.

"Since ze stupid gendarmes weel not surround Pierre, *voilà!* Pierre he surround zem."

He turned then with another suave bow and slung his Inverness cape about his shoulders. Pulling his black slouch hat low over his eyes he slunk up the steps of the precinct station and disappeared behind its massive iron doors.

"That does it," I said despairingly, "with your three looney characters running at the mouth to John Law, your goose is cooked. They'll be at your apartment for you inside of a half hour. They'll probably hold me as an accessory after the fact."

"I shouldn't have got you into this," Terrence groaned. "It was my problem. I had no right to mix anybody else up with it. This damnable typewriter and that screwy salesman are my worry. I should have kept it that way."

As he spoke something popped in my brain. It wasn't an idea or a definite plan of action. It was one of those wild unbelievable, screwy hunches that afflict the best of us.

Titwillow's terrible typewriter was between Terrence and me on the seat. I twisted it around until the keyboard faced Terrence. He was looking at me in slight bewilderment.

"Write," I commanded him, "write every blessed thing you can remember about that crazy typewriter salesman. Don't miss a thing. His tortoise shell glasses, his sad smile, how his voice sounded, everything. And hurry!"

"But Danny," Terrence protested

weakly, "I don't see—"

"Write!" I almost shouted the word. "Forget about what you can or can't see."

**S**ULKILY, muttering under his breath, Terrence complied with my wild request. To tell the truth, as, I listened to the keys clattering under the nimble fingers of his free hand, I had serious doubts myself as to just what I was trying to do or prove.

Terrence typed for five or six minutes while I sat there stewing helplessly. Inside the Central Bureau, Pierre and Snipe and Lady Ashington were sealing our doom. But if my half-formed, incredibly wild idea worked we might have a chance, a bare thousand-to-one chance.

Terrence had stopped typing.

"I can't think of another thing," he said. "I've got it all here. I've got him on paper to the best of my memory."

I realize then, with a hopeless sinking feeling, that my vague plan had been unimaginably preposterous.

"What was the idea behind that brain storm, Danny," Terrence asked rather suspiciously.

"What difference does it make," I answered gloomily. "It was just one of those crazy impossible ideas that—"

I broke off abruptly, every muscle suddenly tensing.

For behind us in the back seat, *a discreet cough had sounded!*

For an instant I was too stunned to act and then I wheeled about in the seat as fast as my fettered condition would allow. Terrence Titwillow turned almost simultaneously with yours truly.

My eyes binged out about a full inch at the sight they beheld and for a terrible instant my heart stopped altogether.

For sitting calmly in the back seat of Terrence Titwillow's limousine, was

a tall gaunt stranger, dressed completely in black and wearing tortoise shell glasses over the bridge of his nose.

Terrence's strangled cry split the shocked silence.

"*You!*" he cried hysterically. "H—how did you get here?"

"My hunch was right," I crowed jubilantly. "You brought him here, Terrence. Or rather the typewriter did. That was my idea. That typewriter, by some fantastic process, which I don't even pretend to understand, materializes anyone it writes about. So here we have the guy that got you into the mess in the first place. If anybody can get us out, it's he."

"That sounds logical," Terrence said breathlessly, hardly daring to begin to hope. "He's the boy who's going to straighten this mess out."

"I refuse," the black-clad creature said in a hollow voice. "Get out of this mess yourself. I refuse to assist you in the least."

"Now be reasonable," Terrence said tearfully. "I'm in a terrible jam. You've got to help me. You're the only one that can."

The tall man shook his head with finality.

"I refuse."

"Is that so?" I snapped. "Well maybe I can change your mind."

I was getting desperate, and another wild idea had just popped into my head. I should be able to control this black-clad stranger on the typewriter, just as I had been able to control Snodbury Snipe and the others. It was reasonable and if I could—

I swung the typewriter in front of me, wriggled one free hand to the keyboard.

"Is that your last word?" I asked him.

"Absolutely," he answered with emphasis.

I TYPED one sentence as rapidly as I could. Before I finished there was a wild yell from the back seat. I peered quickly in the direction of the terror-torn scream and my hopes began to rise. For the inscrutable typewriter salesman was crouched in a corner of the seat—as naked as the day he was born.

"Look Terry," I yelled, "I can control His Nibs with the greatest of ease. The sentence I wrote just described him without any clothes and presto! *Voilà!* as Pierre would say. It is done."

"W-what good will that do?" Terrence asked bewilderedly.

"Give me back my clothes," our tortoise-shelled chum cried unhappily. "I—I feel cold."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," I told him sternly. "We're in front of the police station right now and I'm going to send you in there. I'm going to send you into the policewomen's washroom—just as you are. After you've spent a few minutes with the ladies of the law you'll be glad enough to come back here and be a little more co-operative."

I started to type again but before I had clacked out three letters a frantic hand gripped my shoulder, spun me around.

"No, no," our naked nemesis gasped in terror, "you—you wouldn't do that."

I started to type again.

"*Wait!*" he shrieked. "Stop. I'll help you. S-stop typing, please."

I stopped, but I kept my fingers on the keys.

"I'll give you five seconds. At the end of that time—in you go."

"All right, all right," he gasped. "Do as I say. Type down the names of those people who were animated by the machine."

"You mean Pierre, Lady Ashington and Snipe?" I asked.

I didn't wait for his pendulous head

to bob on his long neck. I went ahead and typed out the names.

"What now?" I asked.

Skin-and-bones didn't answer. He leaned over the back of the front seat and with his forefinger he poked one key of the typewriter so fast that it sounded like a miniature machine gun banging against the paper.

I peered down at the paper in the machine and saw that our chum had merely typed diagonals through the three names, as follows:

~~Lady/Lady/Lady~~  
~~Shobbery/Ships~~  
~~Pierre/No/Not/Not/Pat/Blah~~

For a minute I couldn't speak. I was completely stunned with the magnificent simplicity of his solution.

"You mean, you mean," I gasped, like a double-talking radio comedian, "that that's all there is to it?"

"All?" he echoed in an injured tone, "isn't that enough?"

"What's it all about, Danny?" Terrence Titwillow said dazedly. "I feel like I came in in the middle of the picture."

I held up my hand.

"Listen!" From the top of the Central police building a banshee siren had started to moan through the darkness and silence.

"What's that for?" Terrence asked uneasily.

"Escaped prisoner," I told him happily.

AT that instant the heavy doors of the Bureau building burst open and a dozen or so blue-uniformed officers streamed out. One of them, conspicuous by a dash of gold on his sleeve, hurried to the side of our car.

"See anybody come out here?" he demanded. "See anything of two screwy looking guys and a screwier looking dame?"

"I shook my head.

"Nope officer, didn't see a soul. Why? Somebody get away?"

"You might as well know," he said bitterly, "the reporters have got the story by now. That woman we found with the Coanor Diamond got away. Disappeared without a trace. So did that young fellow in the dress suit who was helping the D.A. question her. On top of that a nutty Frenchman disappeared from a padded cell in the basement. He was wearing a straightjacket at the time, so it must've been an inside job. I'm telling you though, we won't quit looking till we find 'em."

"Good hunting," I said.

When he had gone, Terrence began to sob with relief. His fat shoulders shook spasmodically.

"We're out of the woods, Danny," he cried, almost hysterically. "We're safe. They've gone, gone, gone."

"Can I have my clothes now?" It was the somewhat plaintive voice of our thin-shanked deliverer.

I turned and looked at him.

"I don't seem to remember your name," I said.

"Oh," he answered, "it's Dr. Erasmus. I am a scientist. I constructed that typewriter based on my fourth dimensional experiments and I needed a writer who created fictional characters to give it a test. That is why I chose Mr. Titwillow."

"How about his fictional characters?" I asked him. "Pierre and the rest, I mean. Are they blanked out for good?"

"Until Mr. Titwillow writes more of their adventures on my machine, they are as those not born," Dr. Erasmus said coldly. "Now—my clothes, if you please."

Terrence had been picking at the typewriter, while I was talking to the Doctor and when he stopped I looked



at him. There was a funny, complacent expression on his face, like a cat let loose in a bird store.

I turned again and stared. The backseat was empty. Dr. Erasmus was very much gone. A horrible suspicion came to me and I grabbed the sheet of paper from the typewriter and stared at the last sentence. Or last words I should say, which read simply:

~~Dr. Erasmus~~

Then, before I could stop him, Terrence Titwillow hurled the typewriter from the window, into the path of a rumbling ten-ton truck which reduced it to a tangled mass of splintered wreck-

age.

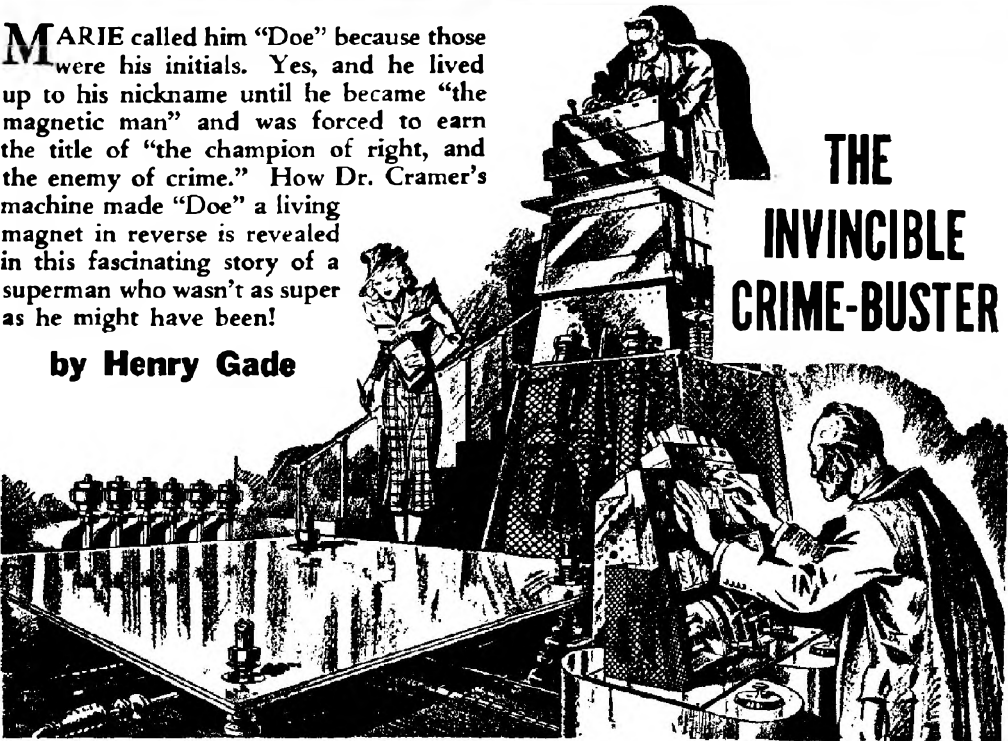
"And that," he said, in a tired, but triumphant, voice, "is that!"

That was just about all there was to it. Terrence and I managed to get uncuffed and we haven't seen each other since that unforgettable night. His publishers announced that his next book would be delayed somewhat because Mr. Titwillow was doing all his work in long hand now.

As a sort of last line I might tack on a public apology to that typewriter salesman I threw down the steps the other day. I'm still a little jittery I guess.

**M**ARIE called him "Doe" because those were his initials. Yes, and he lived up to his nickname until he became "the magnetic man" and was forced to earn the title of "the champion of right, and the enemy of crime." How Dr. Cramer's machine made "Doe" a living magnet in reverse is revealed in this fascinating story of a superman who wasn't as super as he might have been!

by Henry Gade



## THE INVINCIBLE CRIME-BUSTER

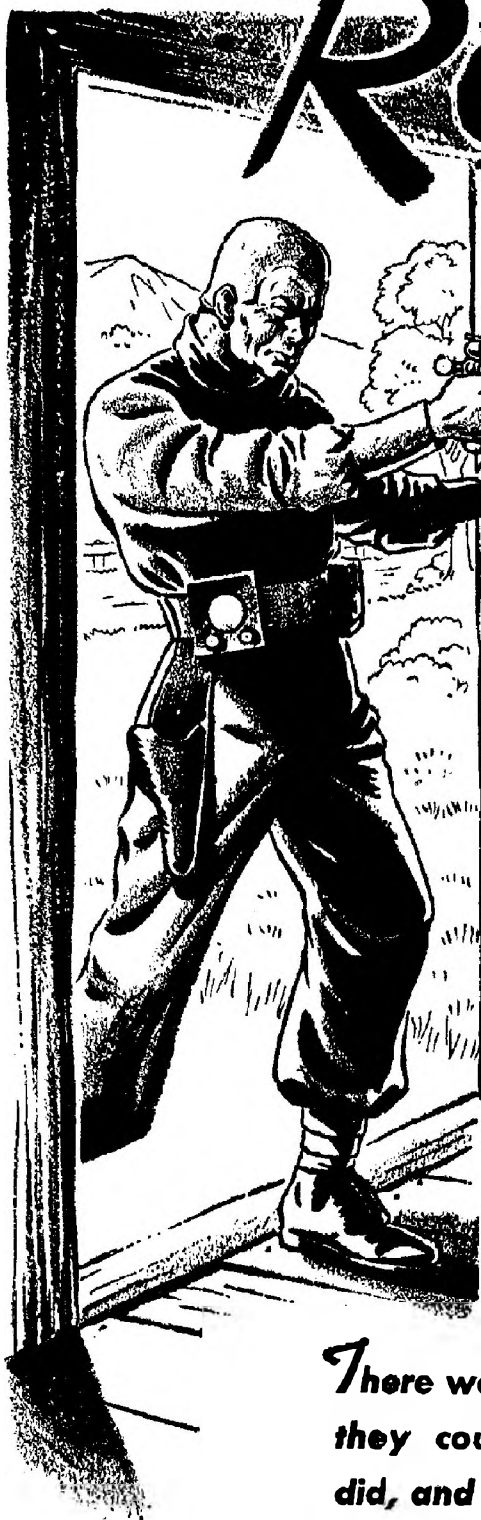
And there are 5 other GREAT STORIES you'll want to read this month by these famous authors: William P. McGivern ★ David Wright O'Brien ★ Robert Moore Williams ★ James Norman ★ Leigh Brackett

**BIG JULY ISSUE**

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# Robots



by **ROBERT  
LESLIE BELLEM**

“**G**OOD God—!” the words burst bomblike from Tim Kermit’s taut throat. “Sylvia!”

Sylvia Gaynor didn’t answer. She would never answer again. She lay on the cloth-of-gold couch, her eyes closed, her hair a stilled storm of ebony, an enigmatic smile on her lips. To Tim Kermit that smile was vaguely mocking, almost like a taunt; for Sylvia had been murdered—

*And the police were accusing him of the crime!*

The injustice of it filled him with savage anger. An hour ago they had arrested him at the televideo studio without even granting him time to leave a note for Dutton, his boss. That was bad enough, since it might adversely affect the promotion he’d been

*There was one thing about robot slaves; they couldn’t tell a lie—yet this one did, and put Tim Kermit in a murder cell*

# Can't Lie



A ray gun flared from the open door, directly at the robot.

promised; but this present ordeal was worse.

Hotly he turned on the homicide sergeant to whose wrist he was manacled. "You've no right to bring me here to her home and make me look at her . . . like this!" And he tried to keep his gaze off the ugly Q-ray wound that marred the white perfection of Sylvia's breast.

But the detective stolidly jockeyed him around so that he was again forced to stare at the corpse.

"Why shouldn't you look at her, pal? You were in love with her, weren't you?"

"Once, maybe," Kermit admitted. "Not any more."

"How do you mean that?"

Kermit said: "I was like a lot of others at National Telecasting when she was a star there. Her beauty had most of us in a dream."

"Well?"

"Later we woke up," Kermit made a grim mouth around this.

"What caused the so-called awakening, pal?"

Kermit said: "She married a man with money," and flashed a glance of contempt across the room at Geoffrey Gaynor.

Gaynor, beef-jowled and swollen with the arrogance of the wealthy, gave Kermit a frosty smile.

"You think it was my money that won Sylvia?"

"I'm sure of it."

The fat man's smile winked off.

"Maybe you're right. She *was* a gold digger; I found that out. All the same, she jilted you and married me. That's why you murdered her."

Rage festered up into Kermit's gullet. He shouted: "I tell you I didn't—"

"Keep your voice down, pal," the homicide sergeant let the advice drip out of a corner of his mouth. "Yells

won't buy you anything. Why don't you come clean?"

"I haven't got anything to come clean about! Why should I kill Sylvia? What would be my motive?"

"Jealousy," Geoffrey Gaynor again thrust in his verbal oar. "Because she tossed you over."

Kermit pivoted and felt suddenly as an abattoir animal must feel while awaiting the slaughterer's Q-bolt.\*

"Damn you, are you deliberately trying to put me in the lethal ray chamber?"

"Precisely," the older man's answer cut like a winter wind. And his malevolent expression started a shudder inching down Tim Kermit's spine.

THAT shudder was spawned of fear, Kermit secretly admitted. He was no coward, but he was scared. You couldn't combat a thing like this with ordinary courage; couldn't fight the charges with your bare fists. Not when they'd been made by a man of Geoffrey Gaynor's importance. Gaynor was president of General Robots, Inc. What chance had a minor telecast executive against that kind of enemy?

He must keep calm, the accused man told himself. As soon as possible he must contact Dutton, his boss at the televideo station, and arrange for a lawyer. He looked around the room, first at Sylvia's corpse and then at the fragments of a smashed Gaynor household robot in a far corner, its mechanism wrecked by a tubular steel chair

\* Q-bolt—the emanation of a radium gun. An isotope of radium, radium-Q, discovered by Le-Temps in 1987, disintegrates, under propitious circumstances, nearly 10,000 times faster than ordinary radium. Thus, it is possible to use it in the form of a ray which causes radium burns at such an enormous rate that the result is an explosion of the flesh cells. A person hit with a Q-bolt is not very nice to look at since the flesh struck by the bolt is severely disrupted and burned.—Ed.

that somebody had used as a sledgehammer. Then he spoke quietly to the homicide sergeant.

"Even a millionaire's unsupported word isn't enough to convict a man of murder. You'll need more than that."

"We've got more than that, pal."

"Meaning what?"

"It's a surprise. Even the newscasters don't know about it yet. A servant robot."

"That thing?" Kermit indicated the ruined electro-automaton in the corner.

"Nah, pal. That's just the one you busted when you realized it had seen you killing Mrs. Gaynor. You knew its testimony would convict you, so you wrecked it to keep it from talking."

Kermit forgot to stay calm.

"For God's sake quit calling me a murderer! If you think you've got proof of my guilt, drag it out and let's have it!"

"Sure, pal. Keep your tunic on. First let me ask you something. Do you agree it's mechanically impossible for a robot to tell a lie?"

The question puzzled Kermit. That was almost kindergarten stuff. Everybody knew that an electro-automaton was incapable of anything but the truth, undeviating and inflexible.\* It

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\* Camera-like, the Gaynor robot viso lenses record all events and actions which might transpire within their focus; but instead of registering the scenes upon impermanent cellulplastic cinema film, all impressions are electrically conducted through a series of selenium converter-cells to the central magnetic braincoils.

There the impulses are sorted and chronologically filed on the robot's memory discs, from which at any future time a playback can be obtained. By virtue of a complicated process called magneto-synthesis, this playback is audible rather than visual; that is, the automaton's electrovox describes the selected scene verbally down to its minutest detail.

Obviously, because of the tamper-proof nature of the mechanism, it is impossible for the slightest inaccuracy to slip into a playback. In brief, a robot simply can not lie. It records whatever it "sees" and repeats whatever it records.—Ed.

was the way they were constructed.

Kermit warily met the homicide detective's gaze.

"Of course a robot tells the truth. So what?"

"You'll see, pal," the headquarters man growled. He tugged Kermit to a closet; opened it. "Take a look at what's going to put you in the ray chamber." And he gestured to an ordinary Gaynor robot servant, a current model.

A whirring hum emanated from the automaton's motivity center, indicating that it was in functional condition. Its polished viso lenses surveyed Kermit for a dispassionate instant; then, ominously, it leveled an accusing metal finger at him and said: "*You are the man.*"

KERMIT felt his scalp tightening and sweat forming in his palms.

"What in hell's name—?" he gasped.

Again the automaton's electrovox dinned at him like some fantastic nightmare.

"*You smashed the other robot, then blasted my lady's body with a Q-gun. You are the man.*" And as this doom-droning mechanical monologue continued, a picture leaped into Kermit's imagination; a picture as fully staged as any production he had ever helped Dutton, his boss, to direct at the tele-video theater . . .

. . . He saw himself on trial for his life, saw this metallic monster in the witness box, its perjured testimony accepted as truth because it was axiomatic that an automaton could not tell a lie . . .

"But this one's lying!" Kermit belated as he brushed away the ugly vision and whirled on Geoffrey Gaynor. "And somehow I think you're responsible, damn you! You manufacture these robots and you probably know

some secret way to alter their brain-coils. It's a scheme to frame me for a murder I didn't commit!"

The millionaire's mouth thinned.

"You'll never evade punishment with that ridiculous theory, my friend. Nobody on earth can alter a robot's memory discs."

Frustrated, rage-lashed, Tim Kermit turned back to the homicide sergeant.

"Take me out of here before I go off my chump! And for God's sake do me a favor!"

"Name it, pal. I'll let you know."

"Get in touch with my boss at the studio," Kermit pleaded. "His name is Dutton. Tell him to hire a lawyer—"

"By this time they were outside the mansion of murder. And the sergeant's favors proved unrequired, after all. Someone came sprinting across the street from a parked electroglider; a tall well-dressed man whose mobile features revealed deep concern.

"Tim! Tim Kermit!" He called.

"Mr. Dutton!" Kermit answered as he felt a surge of relief and gratitude leaping through him like a warm tidal wave. Here at last was someone he could depend on, this man who was his superior at the telecasting station. Now he need no longer feel so friendless in the face of Geoffrey Gaynor's enmity.

He was aware of Dutton studying him.

"They told me you had been arrested, Tim. I came right away. Is it true that—"

"No!" the younger man answered through clenched teeth. "I didn't kill Sylvia Gaynor, if that's what you're asking me."

"But what about the robot's testimony?" Dutton said. "You had better shoot straight, Tim. For Loreen's sake."

That was Loreen Lane he was talking about; his private secretary—and Tim Kermit's fiance, if Tim ever summoned up enough nerve to pop the question. Just thinking about her made Kermit almost forget the depth of his present jeopardy.

He said: "Loreen doesn't think I'm guilty, does she?"

"She's waiting to find out. So am I, Tim."

"I've already told you," Kermit said.

"In spite of that robot's story, I didn't murder Sylvia Gaynor. But I think I know who did."

"Who?"

Kermit started to answer, but the homicide detective tugged at his handcuff; interrupted him.

"No use accusing Geoffrey Gaynor again, pal. You can't make it stick. Come along, we got to be goin'." And he bundled his prisoner into a squadglider; opened the propulsion tubes.

**I**T was evening when Loreen Lane came to see Kermit down at headquarters. A turnkey escorted her to the cell, grumbling.

"Visitor for you, buddy." And then Loreen herself was wailing.

"Tim! Oh-h-h, Tim, darling!"

Kermit seized her hands through the vanadasteel bars. Her nearness, her fresh young blondeness, filled his veins with the wine of elation.

"Then you got my message, sweet?"

"Y-yes, Tim. I hurried here as soon as I heard from you."

He smiled wryly.

"Thank you, beloved. It shows you believe in me."

"I do believe in you, Tim! But—but I don't understand why you had that note smuggled to me asking me to bring a powercar outside the jail—"

Sharp anxiety knifed into his lowered voice.

"Wait a minute, Loreen. You did bring one, didn't you?"

"Y-yes."

"Good!" he breathed more easily. "And now, with a spot of luck, we'll be on our way." Whereupon he leaned on the barred door of the cell—and his weight swung it open!

Loreen drew back in amazement.

"Tim—"

"Sh-h-h! They left it unlocked when they put me in here. So I got that message out to you and bided my time." He slid an arm about her slender waist, guided her along the deserted corridor. "The exit is this way. If nobody sees us we'll be in the clear around that next bend."

"But—but you can't do this, Tim! If you escape it'll seem like a confession of guilt!"

Subconsciously he clenched his capable fists.

"On the contrary, it'll prove my innocence . . . I hope!" Then there was a rear door directly ahead of them, unlocked, unguarded. Kermit and the girl scurried toward it, fled noiselessly into the outer night. Darkness spread a cloak of shadows around them.

At the next intersection rested Loreen's powercar, cumbersome and earthbound by comparison with more modern modes of transportation such as the swift antigrav rocket craft and the moulded plastic electrogliders. But the powercar was part of Tim Kermit's plan—because it contained luggage room abundant enough for his special purpose.

He slid into the operator's compartment with the golden-haired Loreen beside him; touched the controls that sent this outmoded but speedy vehicle scooting for the suburbs. Loreen nestled close to him, shivering.

"Tim, I'm frightened! First jail-breaking, and now excessive speed—"

"You can add burglary to the list before I'm finished," he chuckled without mirth.

"*Burglary?*"

He nodded while gluing his gaze to the roadway ahead. Presently he swung about, aiming for a palatial estate on his left. It loomed dark and sinister against the night's brooding background, a silent house whose recent guest had been death.

"Geoffrey Gaynor's mansion!" Loreen whispered.

Kermit braked his powercar to a halt.

"Stay here, my sweet," he said crisply. Then he strode off through the blackness.

HE was gone a long time. Ages, it seemed to the waiting girl. Even when he returned, it was only for an instant.

"Couple more trips should do it," he reassured her. Then he deposited an armload of metallic fragments in the rear luggage space and vanished again.

At long last he finished his burglarious mission; settled himself once more at the powercar's steering knob. Heading back toward town, he gave no thought to the possibility that Geoffrey Gaynor might be following. It never entered his mind.

"Are you game to see me through the rest of my experiment, hon?" he asked the girl at his side.

Her chin came up; she straightened her dainty shoulders. "I shan't leave you, Tim. Ever."

"Thanks, beloved." He was silent a grateful moment. Then: "What we need now is a place to work; a place where I can try to fit the pieces together."

"You m-mean you don't dare go home? The police might have look-outs there, hunting for you?"

Kermit's fingers drummed a thoughtful tattoo on the steering knob. "I have it!" he suddenly exploded. "We'll call Dutton. Dial him now on the autorad, sweetling. Hurry!"

Swiftly the girl reached for a miniature wheel on the instrument panel, a wheel perforated and marked with countless numbers and letters. This was the powercar's autorad dial with which communication could be established with any citizen from one border to the other.\*

Presently, from a concealed electro-vox, there came a mellowly modulated response.

"Dutton speaking."

"Th-this is Loreen Lane, Mr. Dutton. I—"

"Hello, Loreen. You sound worried. Anything wrong?"

"Y-yes . . . and no. It's about Tim. He . . . he wants . . ."

Tim Kermit reached over, took the tiny microphone from her grasp.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir. I'm out of jail and I need a place where I can conduct a certain experiment."

"They released you, Tim?"

"No, sir. I escaped."

"Good Lord!"

Kermit said rapidly: "Don't misunderstand, sir. It was my only chance to prove my innocence. To pin the killing of Sylvia Gaynor where it belongs. And I think I can do it—if I can have an hour or two of absolute seclusion."

---

\* Each adult possesses his own individual wavelength assigned to him for life, thanks to the scientific way in which radio channels have long ago been split up into vernier segments—thousands of them being crowded into each frequency formerly allotted to a single broadcasting unit.

Whether at home or in your private conveyance, you always have some form of autorad receiver-transmitter near you. And to contact anyone else you merely look him up in the teledirectory, turn your autorad dial to the proper combination. At once your contact is established.—Ed.

"You want a place to work? Certainly, Tim. How about my garage? You're welcome to it. And if I can help—"

Tim Kermit smiled happily.

"Thanks a million, Mr. Dutton. I'll be right over there." And he snapped off the autorad connection; poured more speed into the whirring powercar.

**DUTTON** was waiting; had the garage doors open when Kermit nosed his cumbersome vehicle over the threshold. At the front of the small outbuilding a workbench had been cleared and tools laid out in readiness.

"I didn't know what you might want, so I dug up everything I had," the older man grinned.

Kermit's gaze swept the assortment.

"Just the electrical stuff will be all I'll need, sir. You see, I'm going to try to patch up a smashed robot."

"You *what*?"

The younger man nodded grimly.

"I have a theory that whoever killed Sylvia Gaynor was caught in the act by a household automaton. To keep from having his identity disclosed by this robot, the murderer smashed it."

"Sure, Tim. But that second robot claims it was you—"

Kermit balled his fists.

"I know. The second robot accused me. But that accusation was false."

"Robots can't lie, Tim!"

"They can be fooled," Kermit answered tersely.

"Fooled—?"

"Yes. It's my guess that the killer did his stuff and could have got away without leaving a trace; but he wanted to frame *me* for the crime."

Loreen Lane came forward.

"How could anyone frame you with the second robot's testimony, Tim darling? It sounds so utterly, hopelessly impossible!"



"It could have been done very easily, my sweet," Kermit said. "After murdering Sylvia, *the killer could have disguised himself to resemble me.* Then he summoned the second robot and allowed it to watch the first one being destroyed."

"You mean—"

"I mean the murderer maliciously gave that second robot a phony visio-impresion. Permitted its selenium 'eyes' to record a counterfeit scene so that later the playback would mistakenly recognize and accuse me. Something like the old motion picture technic of a century ago when one actor would 'double' for another."

Loreen's hand flew to her mouth.

"But who'd do a thing like that? And how are you going to nail him?"

"Through the wrecked robot," Kermit said grimly. "I have an idea it was smashed because it witnessed the actual killing. And if I can restore its brain-coil and memory discs to working order, it may name the murderer!" He turned to the workbench. "Excuse me now. I haven't much time."

Loreen and Dutton fell back as Tim Kermit commenced his task. They watched him bringing shattered bits of robot mechanism from the luggage compartment of the spacious powercar; saw him fitting the pieces together as if they were parts of a terrifically complicated jigsaw puzzle. Slowly and laboriously the electrobrain took patchwork shape under his deft fingers; time after time he applied weak current, got no results, shook his head and started all over again. . . .

And then it happened.

**A**S if from nowhere a scratchy whir sounded. The whir grew shriller and became mushy syllables, metallic, misshapen.

"—my lady is being shot—Q-gun—

she falls on the couch—dead—the man is coming at me—"

Loreen Lane's whisper was almost a quavering moan.

"Tim! It's going to name the murderer! Listen! It's going to name Geoffrey Gaynor!"

Kermit warned her to silence with his outflung hand. The patched electrovox was still blating out its hideous message.

"—is coming at me—with a chair—to strike me—I see his face—he is—"

"No you don't, by God!" a voice roared. Something arced across the garage, smashed into the robot mechanism and again reduced it to shattered wreckage. "I destroyed that damned thing once and I won't let it send me to the lethal chamber now!"

Tim Kermit spun on his heel. His palm clipped Loreen Lane on the shoulder, sent her staggering to the floor in a flurry of pert whipcord skirt and tapered, kicking legs.

"Duck!" he yelled at her. Then: "*Drop that Q-gun, Mr. Dutton! This is one trap you won't get out of!*"

His studio boss was crouched low, a deadly ray-weapon in his fist, its muzzle trained on Kermit's belly.

"Trap, eh?" he panted in a madman's keening, narrow-chilling whine. "Maybe so. But you'll be the meat for bait. Dead meat!"

"Oh, no!" Kermit said quietly. "You'll do no more killing. You see, I've got a headquarters homicide sergeant hidden in the luggage space of that powercar and he's got you covered. His was the voice you thought you heard from the patched robot; the voice that trickled you into making a move that was a full confession of guilt!"

Dutton stared stupidly toward the powercar and saw the homicide detective emerging, guns drawn.

"My God . . . !"

"Yeah, pal," the headquarters man nodded. "You'd better start praying because you're aimed for the cemetery. We've got you dead to rights."

"Y—you can't prove—"

"We've got our proof, Dutton," Tim Kermit said. "You gave yourself away today, in front of the Gaynor residence. You quizzed me about the second robot's accusing testimony; yet at that early hour *no word about that second robot had been released to the newscasters*. So how could you know any of the inside details *unless you had planted the counterfeit scene on the automaton's memory discs yourself?*"

Dutton seemed to shrink within his clothes.

"I—I didn't—I didn't intend—"

"Of course you didn't intend to give yourself away. It was a slip. A bad one. The sergeant and I could figure out the rest of the story between us. Like a lot of other fellows at National Telecasting, you'd been infatuated with Sylvia; you'd been furiously jealous when she married Geoffrey Gaynor. That was your primary motive for murdering her.

"But you thought you could kill two

birds with the same stone. Lately your studio work has slipped—and *I was slated for promotion to your job*. You knew this, so you planned to get revenge on Sylvia by killing her, then put me out of the road by framing me for the murder. You knew Geoffrey Gaynor would prosecute me to the limit if he thought me guilty.

"It was clever, Dutton. Nobody but an old-time televideo theater actor like yourself could have used a disguise make-up so perfect that it would fool a robot into thinking you were myself. But tonight, when you thought a broken electrovox was about to mention your name, fear made you tip your hand—and now you're washed up."

The detective sergeant snicked handcuffs on Dutton's limp wrists. Then he turned to Tim Kermit.

"Thanks for your help, pal. From jailbreak to capture, everything went like clockwork, eh? And now I suppose there'll be a wedding pretty soon." He cast a sly glance at Loreen Lane.

Kermit lifted Loreen to her feet; slipped a protecting arm around her.

"We'll send you an invitation, sergeant," he promised.

## The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 6)

**L**AATEST popular myth to go out the window is the well-propagandized thesis of "Nordic superiority." Just to correct the record, Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, the famous physical anthropologist of the Smithsonian Institute, called in 150 top-flight American scientists, members of the National Academy of Science.

Dr. Hrdlicka found, not long skulls and flaxen hair, but wide heads and brunettes. He also exploded the myth of high brows. Contrary to popular belief, the average man of science does not sport a bulging forehead and he is not a screw-loose professor, with oversize head precariously balanced on a stoop-shouldered, reedy body. In fact, the scientists Dr. Hrdlicka studied were full grown and perfectly healthy.

Another widespread fallacy is that a scientific genius must have a huge brain in an oversize skull. A positive sign of inferior intellect is supposed to be a back-sloping forehead.

Dr. Hrdlicka found that seven percent of his scientific aces had just this type of head. The cause of a sloping forehead is generally due to enlarged sinuses over the eyebrows, which makes the skull wider at the base instead of narrower at the top. And even when this slope has resulted from other causes, brainpower doesn't necessarily have to join the rear rank.

**I**F you've enjoyed the stories in this magazine you might be interested to know that right now you can go to your newsstand and get a copy of the July *Amazing Stories* which features two of the finest stories we've seen in months. "Survivors From 9000 B. C." by Robert Moore Williams is a grand novel, and "The Invincible Crime-Buster" by Henry Gade is about a new kind of superman, who isn't as super as you might think—in some respects! Recommended by *Rap*

# Romance of the Elements - - - Cobalt



**MYTHOLOGICAL** SUBTERRANEAN GNOMES OF MEDIAEVAL GERMANY— CALLED **KOBALDS** — WERE BELIEVED BY THE SIMPLE MINERS TO TAKE UNHOLY DELIGHT IN DESTROYING THEIR WORK...

**L**IT IS NATURAL THAT EARLY SAXON MINERS SHOULD APPLY THE NAME OF "KOBALD" TO THE "WORTHLESS" ORE THEY SOMETIMES FOUND IN PLACE OF THE SILVER THEY WERE DIGGING FOR.



**ALTHOUGH IGNORANT** OF THE ORE THEY USED ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND TROJAN CRAFTSMEN USED COBALT COMPOUNDS TO TURN OUT BEAUTIFUL BLUE GLASSWARE. IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1735 THAT BRANDT, A SWED, ISOLATED METALLIC COBALT, EXPLAINED ITS PROPERTIES. CERAMISTS STILL USE COBALT COMPOUNDS TO MAKE BLUE GLASS AND PORCELAIN AND AS A PIGMENT IN OTHER PIGMENTS.

**SUPER-MODERN** PRODUCTION CUTTING TOOLS USE COBALT IN ALLOY; 6% COBALT CONTENT IN 18% TUNGSTEN, 4% CHROMIUM HIGH SPEED STEEL INCREASES TOOL LIFE, MAKES POSSIBLE TODAY'S SPEED PRODUCTION TURNING, BORING AND MILLING IN MACHINE SHOPS. PERMANENT MAGNETS OF STEEL, COBALT ALLOYS AND TUNGSTEN SUPPORT MORE THAN TWICE THEIR OWN WEIGHT. BEFORE 1890, METALLIC COBALT PRODUCTION WAS LIMITED TO MODEST LABORATORY NEEDS



**NICKEL**, AMAZINGLY LIKE COBALT IN MANY PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL PROPERTIES, STILL IS FAVORED FOR MANY INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES OVER THE MORE COSTLY HARDER-TO-GET METALLIC COBALT

**C**OBALT is number 27 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Co and its atomic weight is 58.94. It is a metal similar to iron. It usually occurs in combination with arsenic and sulphur. It is used in high speed steel, for tools, and in electroplating, and to some degree in coloring glass. It makes a very strong permanent magnet, and magnetos for ignition purposes in aircraft.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Columbium

# Doorway of

**It was just an ordinary revolving door in a department store—except for one thing; people went into it, but didn't come out!**

*by William P. McGivern*

**M**Y City Editor hung up the phone and pointed a determined finger at me.

"You're it," he said. "That's the fifteenth call I've had this morning about Barton's Department Store. It would seem something very screwy is going on over there. Check on it and let me know the minute you pick up something that we might blow up into a column. Snap into it."

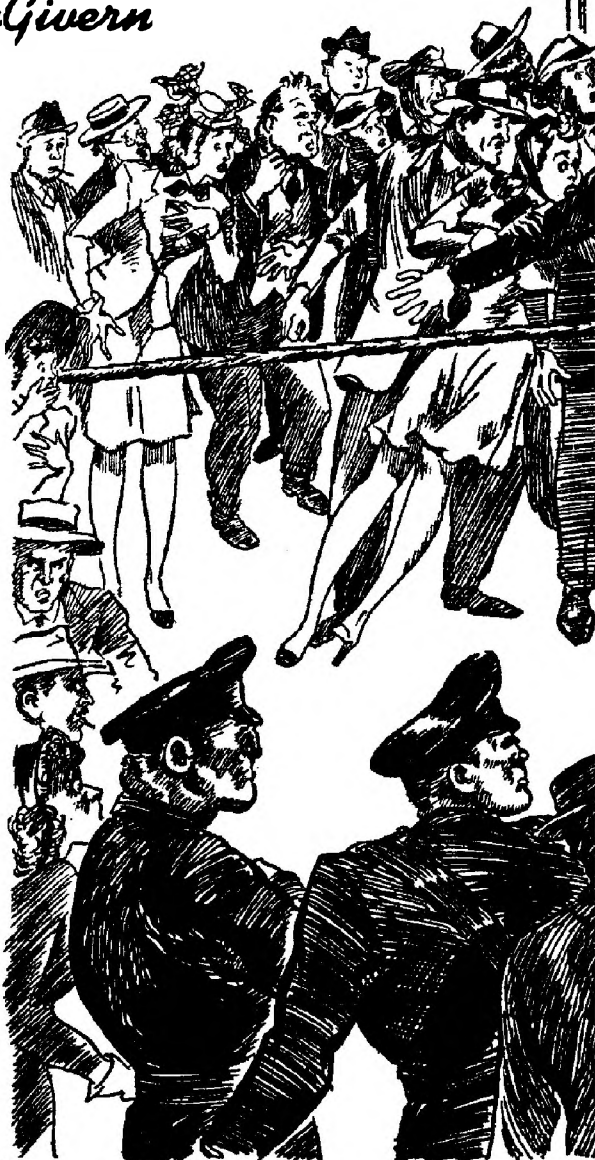
"Why?" I asked.

"One excellent reason," my editor said with suspicious calm, "is that you are employed by this paper and hope to draw your check next week. Another fine reason is that there might be a story there. I know this latter reason does not appeal to your idealistic nature, but for the sake of the first—scram!"

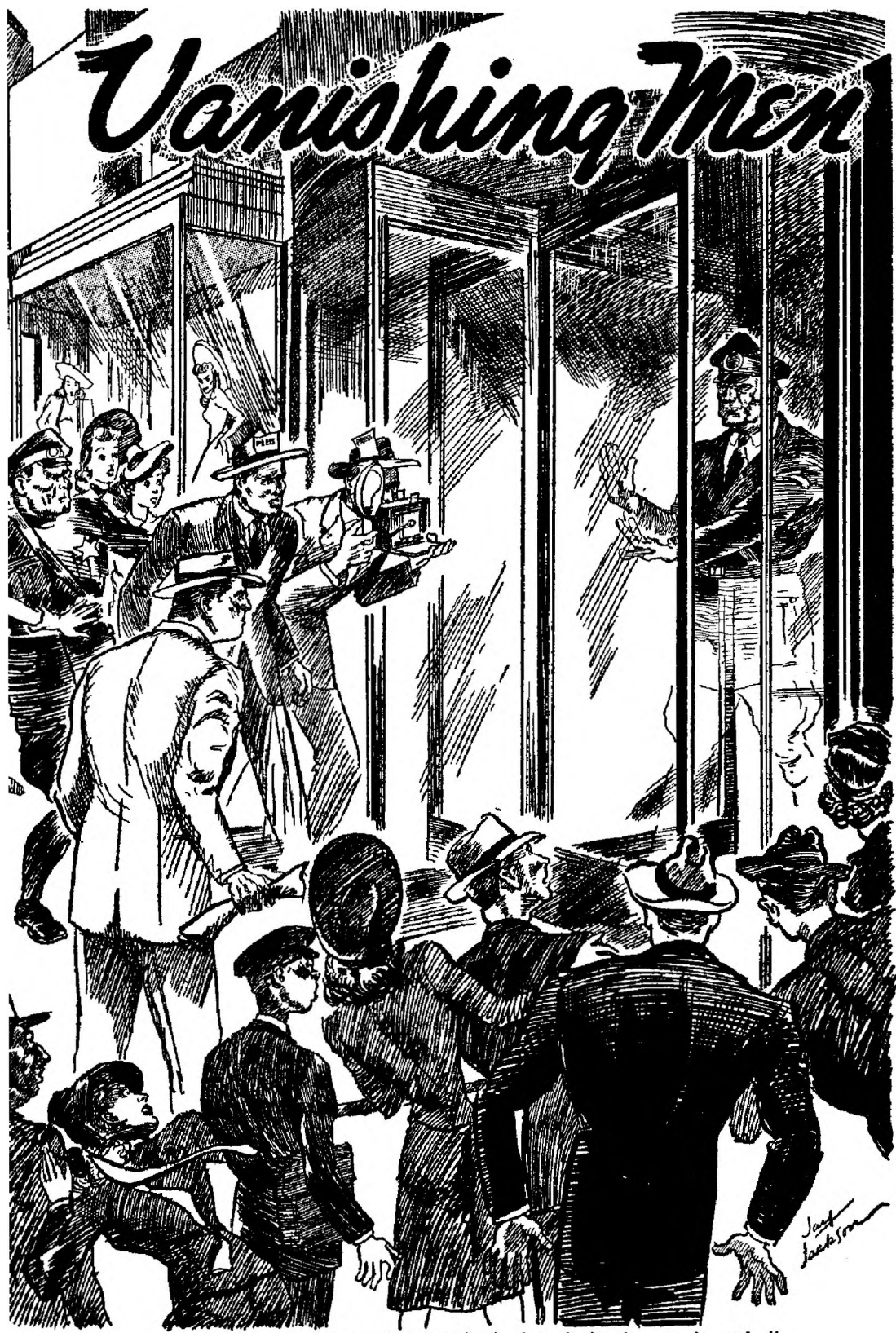
It is my opinion that editors see too many movies and consequently get to acting like Hollywood thinks an editor ought to act. Which is a sad state of affairs for reporters.

I climbed to my feet, like the wage slave I am.

"What seems to be popping over there?" I asked, starting to leave.



# Vanishing Men



The Chief of Police walked confidently through the door—and vanished!

"People," my editor said distinctly, "are disappearing over there."

"Are you kidding?" I asked suspiciously.

The slave driver shook his head. I could tell he was serious.

"That's the report. It might be just a corny gag but I've got a funny hunch it's more serious than that."

I got moving then . . .

**T**WENTY-TWO minutes later I walked into the office of Brixby Barton, President of the Barton Store. He was a plump, pink, harassed-looking little man with a nervous blink to his eyes. Surrounding him were a half-dozen assorted public-relations men, department heads, complaint managers, etc. Everybody looked plenty serious.

"It's the press, gentlemen," I announced. "Ready to listen, look and tell all."

Barton flushed a deeper shade of pink and tried to smile.

"Now Lansing," he said weakly, "we don't want any wild stories to get started. If you'll just be patient we'll try and give you the facts in the case. Above all we mustn't have any undesirable publicity. Is that perfectly clear?"

I began to feel my story pulse accelerating.

"I won't bother you gentlemen," I smiled, as I backed toward the door. "I'll just peek around on my own and see what's up."

"No you don't," Barton cried unsteadily. He rose from his desk and hurried to my side, panting heavily. "I don't trust you," he said, with something like desperation in his voice. "You'll get your story from us and nothing more. I'm not going to let you start any riot in this city. I carry plenty of advertising with your paper and you'll print what I tell you."

I looked at Barton closely. His eyes were widened with fear and his mouth was twitching uncontrollably.

"You're in a jam," I stated. "Something is decidedly screwy around here and I'll get the story if I have to dynamite this building. If you want to play ball, I'm willing. Give me the straight dope about what's eating you and everybody else in the store and I'll treat you as gently as I can. If you'd rather play the role of Tough Executive, okay. You'll still read the story in tomorrow morning's *News*."

Barton took a deep breath.

"You're quite mistaken," he said with an effort, "if you imagine that something—out of place is going on in my store."

"What about the people disappearing?" I snapped. "Would you call that out of place?"

Barton clapped a hand over his mouth and peered fearfully about the office.

"When did you find out?" he hissed to me.

"Come on," I said irritably, "let's dispense with the question bee. I know, that's enough, isn't it? Do you start cooperating now, or do I get this story in my own prying, snoopy, annoying fashion?"

Barton mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief and turned despairing eyes to the stooges grouped around his desk.

"I—I'll go with Mr. Lansing and show—tell him the story," he said nervously. "We must cooperate with the press, of course. D—don't give out any information on the phone while I'm away, to anyone." He turned then and opened the door. "After you, Mr. Lansing," he said tonelessly.

**H**E followed me out of the office and led me to the elevators. On the

way down he asked me a funny question.

"Lansing," he said earnestly, "do you believe in—in ghosts or spirits?" He blurted the last two words out as if anxious to get them off his tongue because they were hot.

I looked hard at him.

"Under certain circumstances I might," I answered. "I remember one night believing firmly in the existence of three elephants that had followed me home."

He looked rather unhappy at my answer and nothing more was said until we reached the main floor and were walking toward the main revolving doors. I broke the silence.

"What's the matter with everyone?" I asked, peering about at the clerks and customers. "They all looked scared to death."

"They probably are," Barton said unhappily. He had stopped walking and I saw that we were directly in front of the main entrance to Barton's store. The four-paneled glass revolving doors were not in motion. There was something vaguely disturbing about those doors. It might be, I decided, the odd manner that the sunlight bounced through them. The refraction was at a greater angle than the eye expected and the effect was somehow created that the panels might be out of true, or a bit warped.

Through the door I could see cars whizzing by on State street and knots of pedestrians huddled about in a peculiar manner in front of the entrance to the store.

"LOOK!" Barton suddenly cried in my ear.

I followed his pointing finger and saw that a man was approaching the revolving doors. Barton was staring at him, as if mesmerized.

The man stepped into the door and

shoved the panel, and the door began to revolve.

I saw the man clearly as he stepped into the door. I had been sober for a week. My eyes are good. May Heaven be my judge if I am not stating things accurately.

*That man vanished completely in that revolving door.*

The door turned slowly and came to a stop, concrete evidence of the energy of the man's shove. But the man had completely disappeared. I could still see the cars whizzing by on State street through the glass panels of the door. The man had stepped into the revolving door from State street, but he had never entered the interior of the store. In some mysterious way he had been blotted up like a dew drop on a June day.

I turned shakily to Barton.

"D—did you see what I think I just saw?" I asked dazedly.

Barton nodded miserably.

"It's been happening all morning," he said dully. "Men, women and children have been vanishing in that revolving door since we opened the store this morning. At first we thought it was some publicity gag some magician might be working. But before we had the doors open ten minutes our complaint department was stormed by wives, fathers, mothers, all yelling their heads off because some relative or friend disappeared in the door. We've sent workmen in to inspect the floor and the mechanism of the door and they've vanished too. It's terrible, absolutely terrible."

"Did you call the police?" I asked.

"Heavens no!" Barton exclaimed. "I couldn't stand that kind of publicity. It would absolutely ruin me."

I heard a shrill wailing siren in the distance and I smiled at Barton.

"Consider yourself ruined," I said.



"The strong arm of the law will soon be rapping at your door." I shuddered as I said that last word.

**I**NSTINCTIVELY I glanced toward the revolving door.

"Let's find another exit," I said, "and meet the law when it arrives."

Barton nodded wordlessly and motioned me to follow him. As I turned I noticed a high-domed salesman standing before a ribbon counter which was almost directly in front of the revolving doors. He wore dark, drab clothing and perched on his bony nose were huge horn-rimmed glasses. Why I noticed him I couldn't say. Maybe it was because he was wearing a satisfied smile on his face. The only smile I had seen in the entire store that morning. Naturally it would stand out.

I hurried after Barton. He left the store by a side exit and by the time we walked around to the main entrance on State street, three black police cars were pulling to the curb. I almost swallowed my cud when I saw the Commissioner himself climb out of the first car and stride toward the revolving door.

"Hold it, Commish," I yelled. "Don't go in there."

"Why not?" he bellowed back at me.

I caught up with him and grabbed his arm.

"Funny business is going on inside," I said.

"That's why I'm here," the Commissioner snapped, "we've received about two hundred calls so far from hysterical wives and mothers and fathers. All with the same story. A loved one has disappeared without a trace in the Barton store. What do you know about things here, Lansing?"

"I don't," I said, "except that this revolving door here is a very peculiar piece of business. People go in one side of it, but don't come out the other."

"You—"

"I have not been drinking," I said, beating him to it, "but unless some one explains this thing to me in words of one syllable, every night will be New Year's eve with me from this date onward."

The Commissioner gave me a look of intense disgust.

"I might have known it would be some crackpot crank nonsense," he fumed.

"This deal," I said with great distinctness, "is no nonsense."

"Nonsense," bellowed the Commissioner. "I'll bet you a new hat I'll walk through that door as I've done a dozen times before."

"Don't do it," I pleaded. "You don't know what you're up against."

Without deigning to answer me, he wheeled and strode toward the door. His stout, bluecoated figure was visible for an instant as he shoved the panel, then he was gone. The doors revolved idly, but the Commissioner had disappeared, vanished like a puff of smoke in a breeze.

**A**N angry, unbelieving exclamation rose from the officers and policemen who had arrived with the commissioner. A few surged forward but I got in front of them and did my best to herd them off.

"Take my word for it," I said desperately to a sergeant, "you can't lick that door. Nobody's returned from it yet and nobody's gotten through yet. Be smart and throw a rope around this section. It's the only thing you can do."

The sergeant hesitated for an instant, then he barked the necessary orders. In a few minutes a rope cordon had been formed, completely blocking off the main entrance of the Barton store.

"This is a terrible thing to happen,"



Barton wailed, "especially on the first day of my big sale."

"Isn't it though?" I murmured.

I hurried back into the store and made my way to the main entrance again. This was where the nub of the mystery was located, I was sure. The doors continued to disturb me. Something was wrong with the light that streamed through them.

I saw the smiling salesman again, too. He was standing in front of his counter, which, it seemed, was doing little business, and gazing at the revolving doors. His smile was more than satisfied. It was fond and proud and paternal all at once. He even shook his head, as if he were admiring something rare and precious, which ordinary mortals could not perceive.

I shook my head and forgot him. I had enough to do to get some sort of a story out of this mess without wasting my time worrying about peculiar salesmen with idiotic smiles adorning their pans.

My eyes flicked about the floor, from counter to counter and noticed the universal worry and fear that was stamped on the faces of the clerks. Fear can grip a crowd and spread from person to person faster than any other emotion. While I was thinking this, a peculiar thought occurred to me. There was funny pattern to this whole thing but I couldn't make any sense out of it. The cogs didn't mesh together. I always ask myself questions; and my eyes were just swinging past the smiling, professor-like salesman when I asked myself the question, "Why?"

Why indeed?

I sauntered across the aisle until I stood beside him. He was certainly harmless enough looking, with thin, stooped shoulders and spindly arms. My little question was still bothering me though.

"Why so happy?" I asked him abruptly.

My voice startled him. He turned suddenly, looking pathetic now instead of happy.

"I—I'm sorry, officer," he stuttered breathlessly, "I—I shouldn't be day dreaming like that, but I just couldn't help it. I—I'm kinda excited."

"Why?" I asked coldly. All I needed was a whip to play Simon Legree. But as long as he thought I was an officer I decided to take advantage of it.

"Oh," he said vaguely, "just because."

"What do you think of the way things have been going around here this morning?" I asked him. I had already given him up as a dead duck.

His eyes brightened.

"Fine," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because," he said happily, "with the main exit closed there's no traffic past my counter. I'm not so busy now. I can take things easy like all the other fellows do." His enormous eyes burned brightly into mine. "It isn't fair for one fellow to be stuck always in the busiest spots with never a chance to take a slow breath. That's why I changed it."

"You changed it?" I asked cautiously.

HE looked down miserably at his shoes.

"I might as well confess," he said unhappily. "I was going to hold out longer than this but I might as well give myself up now as later."

"Give yourself up?" I asked. "What for?"

"I'm responsible," he said earnestly, "for the confusion and mystery surrounding the revolving door at this exit. I didn't hurt anyone, but that

does not mitigate or extenuate my guilt. You may take me into custody."

This is typical Lansing luck. Four million people in Chicago, but I have to pick a crackpot to get suspicious of.

"Forget it, kid," I said. "The excitement's got you down."

"Please, officer," he said, "you've got to believe me. You've simply got to."

I started to turn away but something stopped me. I guess it was the sincerity in the kid's voice.

"Spill," I said, "but make it good. And just to keep the record straight I'm no coper."

"In the first place," the kid said eagerly, "that revolving door really isn't a door at all."

"Oh, oh," I said, backing away, "school's over. Pick up your marbles and go home."

He only smiled.

"It's not a door but a geometrical figure which physicists call a tesseract. A tesseract," he added, "is the visual concept of what we call the fourth dimension."\*

"Lovely," I said, "but where does that bring us?"

"That revolving door," he confided in a whisper, "is really a time machine. The principle is my own idea. A tesseract shows us the fourth dimension which is actually time itself. By constructing a tesseract which will turn as this one does, it is possible to bend

\* A tesseract is constructed by assuming a point (on paper for a visual concept if you wish) and moving it a short distance so as to form a line. Then the whole line is moved in a plane at right angles to form a square. The square surface thus achieved (which is where you'll have to leave your paper) is in turn moved at right angles through the third dimension. Now, theoretically, the next movement of your resulting figure, which is a cube, is at right angles to all lines of the cube (the fourth dimension) so as to form the figure in question, a tesseract. This figure, purely imaginary, is used to demonstrate that unknown place called the "fourth dimension."—Ed.

the dimensions and time so that a passage may be effected from the third dimension into time. Do you understand?"

I didn't. I didn't have the foggiest notion of what the kid was driving at. So does this sound too silly?—I believed he was handing me the straight dope.

"You did all this," I asked uneasily, "to keep the main flow of traffic away from your counter?"

"Well, why else?" he asked surprised. His burning eyes peered into mine intently. "You don't know what it means to have the time to think and ponder."

I felt very old and helpless. I wanted a drink too.

"Look, Voltaire," I said, "supposing, just supposing everything you say is true. Where are the people who went in that door?"

"They're *there*," he answered readily.

"They're—*where*?" I asked.

"In the door."

"Oh," I said, and studied the floor. Things were getting a bit too deep for me. I wished heartily that I had kept my mouth shut.

"You see," the horn-rimmed wonder said, "those people are in the fourth dimension. Every one of them is instantaneously repeating the action of stepping to the door, slipping into the fourth dimension, stepping to the door, slipping into the fourth dimension, etc. No time passes because they are returned through the fourth dimension to the exact second in time when they stepped to the door in the first place."

"Like chain smoking," I muttered for no reason in the world.

"When they step out of the revolving door," he continued avidly, "they will be under the impression that they merely stepped through the door. Not

one of them will realize that anything unusual has happened to him."

**I**T was just about this time that Barton pulled up beside us, wringing his hands unhappily.

"It's terrible, absolute—"

"Forget it," I said. "Your worries are over. Almost anyway."

"What do you mean?" he said sharply.

I pointed to Hornrims.

"This young man can extricate you from the nasty situation in which you find yourself."

"Oh, thank the Good Lord," Barton breathed fervently.

"I don't see why I should," Hornrims said sulkily.

"What?" Barton demanded hysterically.

Hornrims studied his nails with magnificent nonchalance.

"It will create a great deal of inconvenience for me," he said casually. "All sorts of traffic rushing by again." Hornrims shook his head unenthusiastically. "Not much point to it, really."

Brixby Barton had not attained his present position without the aid of sharp, shrewd bargaining. My respect for the man went up a notch as he tugged thoughtfully at his lower lip.

"Tell you what," he said reluctantly, "since there will be all this business and traffic back when you open the main entrance, I'll do the handsome

thing for you." Mr. Barton beamed broadly, the picture of a man distributing largesse to faithful retainers. "I'll put you on a commission basis so you can take advantage of it."

Hornrims grabbed Mr. Barton's hand and pumped it enthusiastically. He streaked away then and came back in seconds with a ladder under his arms. Like a human squirrel he went up over the rungs and climbed off on top of the revolving doors. I don't know what he did to them, but then I haven't the foggiest idea of what he did to them in the first place. I only know what happened after he got through puttering.

Human beings of every sort and description came pouring through the door, looking like the human version of the exodus from Noah's ark.

Last to emerge was the stout, over-coated figure of the Commissioner. His face was wreathed in a broad, happy smile.

"You can just buy me a hat," he said triumphantly. "I told you I'd walk right through and that's just what I did. I wasn't delayed a second."

"I'll buy the hat," I said, "but doesn't it occur to you that I made pretty good time to get inside the store before you did? You left me standing on the sidewalk y'know?"

The expression on the Commissioner's face was some compensation for the five bucks I spent on his new hat a week later.

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#### FANTASTIC FORECAST?

**E**VERY one of us know some person who can relate his own—or another's—personal experience in which a dream turned into reality. Insofar as psychology has been able to determine, dreams have no factual basis in life other than serving as an odd outlet for subconscious emotions stored up during a day. However, not the least among those who had dreams that came true was Abraham Lincoln.

It is a fact that several days before his tragic assassination, Lincoln told a friend and his wife of a dream which he had had on the

previous evening. In the dream, he related, he wandered from room to room in the White House, seeing no one, but hearing the sound of sobbing. Finally arriving at the East Room, he saw a crowd of mourners near a bier on which was a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Uniformed soldiers stood guard beside the bier. Lincoln then related that he asked one of the mourners who had died. "The President", the person in the dream answered. "He was killed by an assassin." Less than a week later, the fantasy had become fact!

# « « FANTASTIC ODDITIES » »

## THE GHOSTLY PASTOR

ONE of the most interesting mosaics in the British Museum is a sample of a Roman design called "Orpheus and the Beasts", and one of the most interesting factors about this mosaic is the fact that it was unearthed in England itself. Behind the unearthing of this ancient section of slab, however, there lies an even more fascinating tale.

It seems that an English country rector happened to accidentally run across fragments of the ancient mosaic while watching the grave-diggers at work in the local churchyard. Being absolutely certain that the pieces of mosaic were authentic and of much scientific value the good rector realized that a thorough digging up of the church graveyard would result in reaching sections of old Roman pavements of which British science had hitherto been unaware. But his task was not as simple as that. Wholesale digging around the churchyard would bring down the wrath of his parish flock, most of whom had ancestors lying in that graveyard, and who would naturally resent such a sacrilegious disturbing of venerated tombs.

Giving careful thought to the matter, the pastor decided that science was more important than parish feelings, and decided to take a daring course to complete his plans. He hired workmen from far-off towns, giving them double wages and swearing them to secrecy. These diggers hid in his rectory by day, and emerged only at night, to dig up the graveyard. To insure his daring scheme against possible betrayal by curious townfolk who might go near the cemetery at night, the pastor clothed himself in sheets and took a position at the gate of the cemetery while the diggers toiled. When any parishioners ventured near the churchyard, the good pastor flapped his sheets, howled hideously, and gave an A-Number-One impersonation of a ghost. Needless to say, his plan worked perfectly!

## CIGARETTES IN TECHNICOLOR

IT may not be very long before the smoke that gets in your eyes from your chum's cigarettes will be—colored! Listed in the U. S. Patent Office is a process for treating cigarettes so that they will give off smoke of various striking hues. Female nicotine-ettes will be able to select their favorite brands with an eye to the dress they're wearing or the color of their nails, while gentlemen inhalers will be able to pick up a pack of coffin nails to match the color of the ties or suits they wear!

## THE UNAZIED STATES OF AMERICA

IN the heart of Germany, less than four hours from Berlin, there is a little group of villages lying in the Warthe valley, called Midget America. In these strange villages live the descendants of a band of Germans who—when setting out to colonize in America long ago—were forbidden to leave Germany by their then emperor, Frederick The Great. In order to compensate for the harshness of the restriction, and to please his sometimes peculiar sense of humor, Frederick gave these people a sector of land along the Oder. Then, giving all the villages in the sector American names, Frederick said: "There's your America for you."

In this peculiar sector there are signposts bearing names such as New York Road, Maryland Street, Pennsylvania Boulevard, and even a fire fighting division called the "Volunteer Fire Brigade Of Florida"!

## ARE YOU SUPERSTITIOUS AT ALL?

IN Arkansas, John Ingram's barn was struck by lightning. The entire structure and two mules were destroyed. Believing in the axiom that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, Farmer Ingram put up another barn on the same spot. In a little over a month after that, lightning struck the new barn, destroying it and the newly bought mules just as thoroughly as it had the other.

And when General Emilio Mola, one of the leaders in Franco's Spanish forces, was taken from the wreckage of the plane crash that killed him, it was discovered that he was clad in his stocking feet. An officer who knew him well related that General Mola always removed his shoes when entering an airplane, because a Gypsy once told him that he would die with his boots on!

A woman in Madison, Georgia, Mrs. Willmore Trotter Jones, has had a hobby of finding and saving four-leaf clovers for many years. The four-leaf clovers she's picked total in the thousands. In spite of this fact, Mrs. Jones has been in five automobile wrecks, lost three husbands, and been the victim of almost daily minor disasters.

And not so very long ago Mrs. Nelille Colman, a housewife, refused to eat with guests because there would then be thirteen people at the table. She waited until they were finished, then sat down for her own dinner alone. Before she had finished eating, Mrs. Colman was stricken with a fatal heart attack!

17 COMPLETE SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

432 PAGES

# AMAZING STORIES

SUMMER 1952

REISSUE

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# »»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

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ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

SOME guys are born to be hanged; others are predestined to a writing career. I'm one of the latter. Ever since I can remember, I've been putting words on paper because I can't help it. But the *kind* of words—action, gunplay, thrills—well, I guess that phase of it was shaped by environment and circumstances.

I recall vividly one occasion when I was a grammar school kid in Philadelphia, my home town, where my dad was a railroad dick. I took him his sandwiches that evening and finally located him out in the freight yards. He spotted me coming; yelled for me to duck the hell out of the way. I wondered why.

I soon found out. From around the end of a freight car a gun blammed: "*Pow!*" and my dad staggered; grabbed at his side. Then he regained his balance! sprinted forward. He vanished on the other side of that freight car. Presently he reappeared with a freight-thief in tow. Dad had a bullet-crease across his ribs. Likewise he had the gun that had done the damage. He also had the trigger artist—and the trigger artist had a busted jaw. Dad always was handy with his fists.

To me from then on, cops were heroes; guys who fought through to victory with their brains backed up by knuckles were supermen; they still are. Sometimes I wish I'd followed in the old man's footsteps instead of becoming a newspaper-

man; but the closest I ever came to wearing a badge was down in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

That was in '20 or '21 when Tulsa had its famous race-riot. I was a special deputy for the first twenty-four hours of that nasty affair—until the National Guard took charge. I heard my share of gunfire then; saw my share of sudden death. As a member of the *Tulsa Tribune* staff, some of the pix I snapped of that trouble were used by dailies all over the country.

Fifteen years of newspapering took me to almost as many places as those pictures had gone. Philadelphia, Atlantic City, Miami during the boom, New York, Memphis at flood-time, Albuquerque before it lost its glamour—I hopped from sheet to sheet like a bedbug with the hotfoot. Always gathering and storing experiences; constantly seeking the side of life that wasn't prosaic.

I helped cover Woodrow Wilson's death for Universal Service during one of my tricks in Washington; I can still feel the bitter cold of that last night, with Cary Grayson, the ex-President's personal physician, coming out of the somber Wilson residence on S street every hour to issue his grim reports.

A few doors away there was an excavation for the cellar of what was to be Herbert Hoover's home. All the national wire services had bed their lines into that shack; it was headquarters for the correspondents and telegraphers of the death-watch. Somebody hammered a couple of gallon oil-cans flat and made a fire on the resulting crude hearth. That was where we warmed ourselves—and almost burned the shack to a cinder.

The Long Beach, California, earthquake was another of my high spots. Until the day I traded it, my car bore the dents of falling bricks from a collapsing building; if I hadn't juiced the tripe out of all six cylinders I'd have been a gone goose. Br-r-rr-r!

But it wasn't all as exciting as that. There were years of drama-criticing, literary reviewing and the conducting of a daily column. And other years of selling advertising; of being classified advertising manager for papers large and small. There was a blissful period on the *Fresno Bee* in the hot somnolence of California's San Joaquin Valley; an interval of radio announcing for KPSN; a fling at Hollywood as a movie extra for Universal; and finally the quiet passivity of my last newspaper job on the *Pasadena Star-News*.

(Continued on page 145)

# Quiz Page

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific and pseudo-scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 50% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average. Give yourself indicated points for each correct answer.

that we're giving five points for each correct answer. If you know this one you can boost your score thirty points by breezing through it. It's a famous law of Newton's and if you can fill in the missing words you'll deserve the thirty points.

Every material body draws or attracts every other material body in a force which varies \_\_\_\_\_ as the product of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the two \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ between them.

## INVENTORS MATCH

Here's a list of inventors and it's your job to try and link them up with the inventions which made them famous. Three points for each correct answer. Give yourself thirty if you hit the nail on the head each time.

- |              |                        |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 1 Marconi    | ( ) Printing           |
| 2 Fulton     | ( ) Wireless           |
| 3 Colt       | ( ) Sun motor          |
| 4 Whitney    | ( ) Sewing machine     |
| 5 Ericsson   | ( ) Incandescent light |
| 6 Stephens   | ( ) Torpedo boat       |
| 7 Howe       | ( ) Platform scales    |
| 8 Edison     | ( ) Cotton gin         |
| 9 Fairbanks  | ( ) Railroad engine    |
| 10 Gutenberg | ( ) Revolver           |

## AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

This next might be called a literary workout. Under each of the following well-known bits of poetry you will find the names of three authors. If you pick the correct author it's worth five points to you. Total for this literary gold course is twenty.

"To be or not to be, that is the question."

- (1) Shakespeare (2) Chaucer (3) Dickens

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea."

- (1) Whittier (2) Gray (3) Longfellow

"Tell me not in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream."

- (1) Thackeray (2) Cowper (3) Longfellow

"Once upon a midnight dreary  
While I pondered weak and weary."

- (1) Browning (2) Poe (3) Bryant

## IT'S A LAW!

Here's a really tough one now and because of

## TRUE OR FALSE

Give yourself two points for each correct answer on this one.

1. A gallon of boiling water is heavier than a gallon of frozen water.
2. A steel bar is longer at the South pole than at the Equator.
3. A pound of gold is lighter than a pound of feathers.
4. A keg of wine frozen to within two inches of the center contains a two inch pocket of water only.
5. A frozen piece of iron repels a wet surface.
6. Cleveland Abbe was a renowned meteorologist.
7. H. G. Wells was one of the first great fantasy writers.
8. In Grecian mythology, Apollo was called the "Lord of the Silver Bow."
9. Newton dropped apples from a tree and this stirred him to the study of gravitational law.
10. The brilliance of stars is constant.
11. Electric currents are led around paths called trajectories.
12. Sirius is the brightest star in the heavens.
13. Sulphuric acid is an organic acid.
14. The Earth is slowly and gradually losing weight.
15. Spider's webs are an indispensable material for war purposes.

## SCIENTISTS MATCH

Match the names of the following scientists with the branch of science with which they are associated. Perfection here is ten. Two points for each correct answer.

- |                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| (1) Copernicus    | ( ) Medicine     |
| (2) Pythagoras    | ( ) Astronomy    |
| (3) Roemer        | ( ) Anthropology |
| (4) J. B. Lamarck | ( ) Zoology      |
| (5) Darwin        | ( ) Mathematics  |

(Answers on page 145)

# READER'S PAGE

## THANK YOU

Sirs:

Congratulations on going monthly! The best news I've heard in a long time.

The lineup of new stories sounds great: Binder, Schachner, Norman, and even Cummings. I hope "The Druid Girl" is not another version of "The Girl in the Golden Atom."

Best stories in this issue were Wilcox, Binder and McGivern.

L. L. Schwartz,  
229 Washington St.,  
Dorchester, Mass.

## A NEW READER

Sirs:

I do not read magazines very often, because I like books better. The other day at a friend's house, I picked up a copy of your January magazine. I glanced at it, and read a few pages. I became very interested in it, and took it home. I have read every story in it, and I have become a fan of yours.

I thought D. W. O'Brien's *The Floating Robot* was a very thrilling story, one of the best stories I have ever read in a magazine. I enjoyed *The Golden Amazon Returns*, *The Dynamouse*, *The Horse That Talked*, and *The Vanishing Witnesses*. The only story which I did not enjoy was *Dr. Kelton—Body Snatcher*. Perhaps that was because it was so short, just ten pages.

I like humor in your stories, too, and *The Dynamouse* was an exceptionally good story.

I have found out your magazine comes out once every two months. Why? Surely this is too long. Why not once each month, or even twice?

Edward H. Holt,  
1409 W. 6th,  
Little Rock, Ark.

*Wrong!* FANTASTIC ADVENTURES comes out each month! We began monthly publication with the May issue. And we're glad to welcome you as a new and steady reader. Write us again. We like to know what you think of us.—Ed.

## FUQUA COVER LIKED

Sirs:

I just finished the May issue of F.A. The cover by Fuqua is excellent, wonderful, great—the best in a year. I rate the stories as follows: "Land of the Shadow Dragons"—Good, not exceptional; "Three Eyes in the Dark"—very good, let's have

more like it; "The Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek"—you couldn't print what I think of that story. How come you let it take up so much room, and why did McGivern use the name of a radio character? "Moons of Death"—pretty good; "The Man Who Murdered Himself", "The Machine From the Past", and "Mr. Duffy's Other Life" are no good; they're too short.

The best picture *inside* the magazine is the one on page 138, in the ad for the June F.A. The picture for "Three Eyes" is very good, but it doesn't belong in a S.F. mag.

How do you pronounce "Robot"?

Robert Greenberg,  
1860 Morris Ave.,  
The Bronx,  
New York, N. Y.

*Robot is pronounced rô-bôt with the accent on the first syllable. The French pronunciation is rô-bôw.—Ed.*

## ABOUT FACE!

Sirs:

Like most of your other readers, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that you have returned to a monthly basis. Though it is probably asking too much, I wonder whether or not you are going to give us the old size again—but I presume you are *not*. The large size made your book more like a slick, but from your nice little comments on letters I presume you are aiming at the usual pulp level of recent issues.

I do not like the idea of a Cummings feature novel. From the ad on page 138 I'd bet an asteroid it's one of his frequent reshapes of "The Girl In The Golden Atom." Now, none of these reshapes that I've read has even remotely approached "The Girl," etc., or its sequel. But enough of that; let's get to the present issue.

The cover is not so *hot*. You've got Fuqua busy on A.S.; why can't he lay off F.A. and make room for McCauley and St. John? Paul would be appreciated, and, if Stockton Mulford can do something with the power of May, '40, why, let him do it!

"Land Of The Shadow Dragons." A fine story, but I think the Valley life should have been left as such for another sequel. I don't think Binder should have made so much "mystery" out of the loaded plane, because everybody knew in advance it would be the Invisible Robinhood.

"Three Eyes In The Dark." Somehow it went against the grain. First Wilcox tale to do so.



Its picture was rotten too.

"Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek." Great! Best story of the issue. Why don't you run more novel-length humor yarns?

"Moons of Death." Second to McGivern. Good idea, and excellent ending.

"The Man Who Murdered Himself." Carry on, Carson. If the two shorts about him go over, how about a novelette?

"Machine From The Past." Takes third!

"Mr. Duffy's Other Life." Too bad it was so short—would have made a wonderful novelette.

Special Requests: Bring back Paul. Toss out Fuqua—he belongs only in A.S. More McCauley, St. John, and Mulford (if possible). Give us the old size, and a back cover. And lastly, if you HAVE to have things like "Three Eyes," get Hannes Bok to illustrate 'em. Don't ever give us Magarian again!

Sincerely,

Paul Carter,  
156 S. University St.,  
Blackfoot, Idaho

*Well, this letter reverses everything the preceding one said. We won't try to figure it out, but someone once told us—if you start an argument, you're on the popular side of the road!*

*Unfortunately, Hannes Bok's illustrations are not suited to our requirements, since he specializes in a distinctly outre and weird type of illustration, too far from the credibility we try to achieve in our illustrations. And too, Magarian has made an instant hit, and his originals frankly aren't safe from visitors to our office unless under lock and key. In fact, Don Wilcox now treasures the very illustration you speak of as his most prized memento.*

*No, we intend to keep FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in its present convenient format. We might give you an argument about that "pulp level" stuff. Our books are recognized for their quality among both our readers and by our authors. Ask any one of 'em, if you doubt us. Good writing is found more frequently in the so-called pulps than it is in the slicks.—Ed.*

## DON WILCOX SCORES

Sirs:

It seems that a sequel is never as good as the original story. So it is with the second Invisible Robinhood adventure. The story was good, however, but not up to the level of the first one.

And while on the subject, can't Robert Fuqua read? I refer to his cover. Now don't tell me that overdrawn tin can is an airplane. At that, an airplane that could take to the air again? Not that junk heap. And why is the pilot all dressed up like a Nazi soldier? I give up—completely.

The best story in the issue is Don Wilcox's "Three Eyes in the Dark." I have yet to read a poor story by him. In the illustration, Magarian shows promise.

McGivern's story of Mortimer Meek hasn't a new plot, but in the way it was told made fast

and enjoyable reading. Jackson's drawings were clever and appropriate for this type of story.

"Moons of Death" was pure science fiction and had no place in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. But even then it was a good story. So, you're excused this time.

Which about winds up the May issue. Except for the "fillers." All were fair, but Farnsworth's yarn leads the others by a fair margin.

David Glazer,  
12 Fowler St.,  
Dorchester, Mass.

*There's a story behind that Fuqua cover. Originally painted, it looked like an ordinary aviation cover. So we changed the plane to a more futuristic model, made it look as though it had crashed (as the story has it) and gave the pilot a uniform, which also is futuristic and not Nazi. We've looked at some Nazi uniforms and we don't quite see how you can compare them.*

*Yes, Don Wilcox keeps pretty high in quality. We're glad you think so, too!—Ed.*

## "SURE IS OK"

Sirs:

I have just finished reading your May, 1941 issue and I must say it sure is ok.

Sometime ago I wrote your companion magazine *Amazing Stories*, and now I just couldn't help writing you.

I sure enjoyed the return of Robinhood, and "Moons of Death" by Mr. Reed tied it closely.

When I read in The Editor's Notebook that *Fantastic* was to be published monthly, I sure was glad because good things should come often.



"A good polish and he'll never know my ancestors came from a scrap metal heap!"

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20x4.50-20	1.85	.85
20x4.50-21	1.95	.85
22x4.75-19	1.95	.85
22x4.75-20	2.10	.95
22x4.50-19	2.25	1.05
20x4.00-20	2.45	1.05
22x4.25-18	2.45	1.15
22x4.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x4.25-20	2.45	1.15
31x4.25-21	2.60	1.15
31x4.50-17	2.75	1.15
32x4.50-18	2.75	1.15
22x4.50-19	2.75	1.15
6.00-14	3.15	1.40
6.00-17	2.85	1.15
30x4.00-18	2.85	1.15
31x4.00-19	2.85	1.15
32x4.00-20	2.95	1.25
33x4.00-21	3.10	1.25
32x4.50-20	3.20	1.85

**TRUCK BALLOONS**

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	3.50	1.85
6.50-20	3.75	1.95
7.00-20	4.00	2.30
7.00-22	4.15	2.75
8.25-20	5.75	4.50



**HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES**

Size	Tires	Tubes
8.25-10	8.50	4.50
8.25-11	8.50	4.75
8.25-12	8.50	4.75
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8.25-93	8.50	4.75
8.25-94	8.50	4.75
8.25-95	8.50	4.75
8.25-96	8.50	4.75
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Here's roses to Fuqua for his excellent cover, and daisies to Krupa, Jackson, Magarian and Ruth for interior, not inferior, illustrations.

Give us another story by Don Wilcox; he sure is an excellent writer.

I don't care how I try, I just can't throw brick-bats at you because you don't give a very big target.

Well, goodbye for now. I'll be writing again soon and in the meantime, good luck and continued success

Ellsworth W. Snitcher,  
2709 Bellevue Ave.,  
Wilmington, Dela.

## TWO PLUS TWO EQUALS ZERO!

Sirs:  
In your May, 1941 edition of *Fantastic Adventures*, you made a statement in the article, "Strange, But True", that to quote your exact words, "as yet no one has succeeded in adding two and two in a manner that totals zero."

If you look in your algebra book you will see that when using "signed numbers" you can add plus two (+2) and minus two (-2) and arrive at the answer of zero (0).

$$\begin{array}{r}
 + 2 \\
 - 2 \\
 \hline
 0
 \end{array}$$

adding signed numbers

Patrick Zabel,  
1372 S. Orange Dr.,  
Los Angeles, Cal.

Well, okay, Pat, but gee whiz, algebra isn't properly mathematics, just a means of mental calisthenics, to be literal. And a heck of a lot of it is axiomatic, which isn't scientific at all, because a scientist does not accept an axiom, or anything that must be accepted without proof.—Ed.

## "14" TO THE GIRLS!

Sirs:  
O.K., so I'm only 13 (14 to the girls) and I may be just a kid, but I still think F.A. is d——n good magazine, worthy of the highest praise.

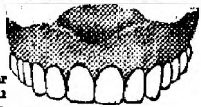
In rating the stories it is easy to see the story of the month is Burrough's *Carson Of Venus* story which is truly a masterpiece as all of his stories are. Not too far behind in second place is *The Secret Of The Stone Doll* which has that certain mystic touch and a very surprising ending. More power to Don Wilcox for it.

Here is something which may surprise you. I think that Oscar smells! Yes, I said smells. The author's—Norman's—Zombies are the driest thing from here to Caledonia. May I suggest that he remember the title of this magazine, *FANTASTIC Adventures*, and forget about those lousy detective stories.

I would also like to comment upon *25th Century Sherlock*, the best short in the book. As a short it is excellent, it is marvelous, it is abso-

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CITY..... STATE.....

lutely a super-duper. I am glad it was not made any longer. Let's have some more stories of the same type by the same author.

Marty Kenyon,  
230 Huntley Rd.,  
Woodmere, Long Island

*Norman won't give us any more Zombies, Marty. But as for Oscar, he's even got Adam Link beat for popularity!—Ed.*

**GINGER'S BACK!**

Sirs:

Just finished reading Don Wilcox's "Three Eyes In The Dark" and found it a GRAND story . . . do give us a sequel to it.

All in all, the May issue of *Fantastic Adventures* was one of the best yet.

I mailed you a card complaining of the terrible service your Buffalo agent gives the "Small Town" readers. It's almost impossible to get any of the STF magazines no matter how many times we put in orders for them . . . so can't you do something about it? No wonder there are so few STF readers . . . we get the FIRST issue, then we can seldom get any later copies unless we go in to Buffalo . . . twelve mile drive . . . which is a very pleasant ride in the summer, but so darn rotten with three or four feet of snow on the ground! How about giving us some service? Mr. Anthony, mayor and druggist of O.P. is willing to do all he can—which is to ORDER the magazines and wait for delivery—which he DOESN'T get!

Thanks for giving us a monthly issue of F.A. We certainly appreciate it! And the BIG issue of *Amazing* was TOPS! I haven't a single complaint to make against the magazines. They are both still my FAVORITES.

Mr. Ahearn—Krupa happens to be a VERY good artist, but if you have an idea you can do better, why don't you send in your ATTEMPTS? You might find your figures extremely POOR in comparison! But then NO ONE can PLEASE EVERYBODY, so why try? Only—I do HATE "chronic" fault finders.

Why not make a list of the GOOD points in a STF mag and one of the BAD points (if you can find any) then compare the lists? You'll soon see that the good outmarks the bad—at the small price of twenty cents!

By the way—I think McCauley is good, too. As for FAVORITES—well, PAUL for me, but then again we can't ALL like the same people. Besides I don't think I'd care to have every woman MAD about MY husband!

Again—best wishes to the best reading of the month,

Ginger Zwick,  
Just-A-Mere-Farm,  
Box 284,  
Orchard Park, N. Y.

*We'll see that your comment about the conditions there are relayed to our circulation department, and we're sure they will investigate. We*

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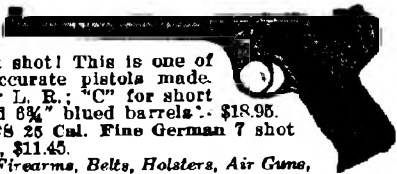


H. H. Bromley, of Shelburne, Vt., writes: "I suffered for years with acid-stomach trouble. My doctors told me I had acid stomach ulcers and would have to diet the rest of my life. Before taking your treatment I had lost a lot of weight and could eat nothing but soft foods and milk. After taking Von's Tablets, I felt perfectly well, ate almost anything and gained back the weight I had lost." If you suffer from indigestion, gastritis, heartburn, bloating or any other stomach trouble due to gastric hyperacidity, you, too, should try Von's for prompt relief. Send for FREE Samples of this remarkable treatment and details of trial offer with money back guarantee. Instructive Booklet is included. Write:

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Be an expert shot! This is one of the finest, accurate pistols made. Mod. "B" for L. R.; "C" for short 22's—4 1/2" and 6 3/4" blued barrels. \$18.95. **AUTOMATIC 25 Cal. Fine German 7 shot (vest pocket), \$11.45.** Bargain list: Firearms, Belts, Holsters, Air Guns, Scoops, Police Goods, Badges, etc. Stamp, please. **LEE SALES CO., (Dept. FN), 35 West 32nd St., N. Y. C.**



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Name.....Age.....  
Address.....  
City.....

certainly don't want you walking miles through the snow and slush to get our magazine—although we're flattered to think you would—Ed.

### GOING MONTHLY MADE A HIT!

Sirs:

I have been reading *Fantastic Adventures* and *Amazing Stories* for quite some time, and I think they are both grand. First, let's comment on the art department: January's front cover by McCauley was super-terrific, let's have more like it. As most of your other readers, I, too, would like to see Paul do a front cover.

As for the inside drawings, keep KRUPA doing the swell work. The more of him the better we readers like it. Fuqua is a genius at certain kinds of drawings but on others he falls down. Jay Jackson still does the worst stuff in the whole mag. His figures don't look lifelike; however, he pops up with a good one once in a while: *The Secret of the Stone Doll* in the March issue.

Your features are all excellent, the page by ye editor being my favorite.

As for the actual stories, they are swell. Don Wilcox has hit a winning streak with two swell stories, namely, *The Secret of the Stone Doll* and *Three Eyes in the Dark*. I enjoy McGivern's humor stories very much, but keep him on them and not the serious stuff. Binder's *Invisible Robinhood* story was tops in the May issue along with Wilcox's novelet. I enjoy a good long story once in a while. How about it, ye ed?

I suppose we're all looking forward to "Oscar" and the new Burroughs' novel, but in between let's have some more of those swell short stories by Cabot and Norman. Keep up the swell work.

Alden Verity,  
Beverly Hills, Calif.

P.S.: *Fantastic's* coming out monthly is the most wonderful thing that ever happened.

How about "*The Return of Circe*" in our next issue? That's the longest complete story we've printed to date. How's that for complying with requests?—Ed.

### YES, SERVICE IT IS! AT YOUR COMMAND!

Sirs:

The biggest news I have heard in s.f. since the start of F.A. was the announcement that your mag. is going monthly.

Last month I wrote to A.S. and my only objections were that there were not enough cartoons and F.A. was not monthly. Now A.S. has more cartoons and F.A. is going monthly. Boy, I call that service!

Before I forget (as if I could), your cover was the best on any FANTASTIC yet. It was superb.

My rating of the stories is:

- 1—"Land of the Shadow Dragons."
- 2—"The Masterful Mind of Mortimer Meek."
- 3—"Three Eyes in the Dark."
- 4—"Moon of Death."

5—"The Machine from the Past."

6—"Mr. Duffy's Other Life."

7—"The Man Who Murdered Himself."

Please keep your stories pure fantasy.

P.S.: I am not in favor of trimmed edges.

Toby Kavanaugh,  
227 So. Ashland Ave.,  
Lexington, Ky.

*Look! A reader who doesn't want trimmed edges!—Ed.*

## MORE ABOUT PHOENICIANS

Sirs:

At the bottom of page 43 of the May *Fantastic Adventures*. The little write-up about early explorers seems to prove that the ancient Phoenicians were on this side of the world a long time ago.

Here is something else that might clear things up a little. I have a book here called "ATLANTIS: THE ANTEDILUVIAN WORLD." It says that the Phoenicians got the alphabet from the Mayas. Here is a line or two from the bottom of page 222 of this book:

"We have seen in the table of alphabets that in every language, from our own day to the time of the Phoenicians 'o' has been represented by a circle or a circle within a circle. Now, where did the Phoenicians get it? Clearly, from the Mayas."

We got most of our alphabet from the Phoenicians and it looks like they got the general idea from the Mayas.

Harold Leaman,  
216 Meridan St.,  
Pittsburgh, Pa.

## THE MAC GIRL

Sirs:

Have just finished reading the June issue of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. Undoubtedly you have here the finest imaginative fiction magazine on the market. I have never read your magazine before, but when I saw the June cover, with that perfectly magnificent fantastic painting of the Druid girl on the huge bird, I simply had to buy it. And to my amazement I found that here was a magazine with stories as fine, both in entertainment value and in quality of writing, as any magazine I've read, and I read quite a few slicks each month.

How do you get such polished writers? Certainly they could write for better-paying markets!

I notice you call the girl on the cover the "Mac Girl." Have there been other paintings featuring her—are there to be more?

Many thanks to you and to Chance, for introducing me to a diet of grand relaxation. Keep it up!

L. Warren Hazlip,  
12 North Parkway,  
Portage, Wisconsin.

*Yes, our January cover featured a "Mac Girl" and our cover in this issue does likewise.—Ed.*

# BACKACHE?

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**EUREKA!**

Sirs:

Eureka! At last Fantastic Adventures has come through with a tale that equals Eando Binder's unforgettable "Little People." In fact, the ultimate has been reached in the way of fantasies. The story which causes this outburst is "Secret of the Stone Doll" by Don Wilcox. Remember "When the Moon Died" way back in August, 1939? Right then and there, I was positive that Don Wilcox was one of fantasy's finest writers. "Secret of the Stone Doll" proves it. Wilcox took the difficult situation of human emotion and handled it masterfully. Any one who has written with any degree of success knows that it is only human that the weaker sex must be brought into the story. But also one knows that any slight overplay of this part of the story could turn a masterpiece into just so many pieces of paper. Don Wilcox had the right amount handled in the right way. I am afraid that Mr. Wilcox will "graduate" into higher fields,—but that is—"Vling-gaff!" Truly FANTASTIC ADVENTURES has published its best story to date. It will be one of the best yarns of 1941 and will long be remembered in years to come.

A novel that would ordinarily capture all first place honors in any issue except this one is "Slaves of the Fish Men." This is Burroughs at his inimitable best. I'll be looking forward with eager anticipation to the next Carson of Venus.

He came for a second visit. Who, Uncle John? Heck no, somebody we enjoy dropped in. Why Oscar, the guy with the sensitive nose, of course. The lovable little character returned to mop up

a mess of zombies. Tell Norman to give us Oscar in something else besides his detective capacity. A change would help Oscar's sensitive smell. (Very subtle hint there.) Anyways, the latchkey is out for Oscar anytime. "Beyond the Time Door" draws the fourth place, closely followed by "Adopted Son of the Stars." Neither O'Brien or McGovern were up to their hilarious best. "Twenty-Fifth Century Sherlock" brings back memories of Thornton Ayre, who is a past master at these scientific mysteries. Farnsworth shows promise, however so don't discard him as a bad egg.

Don't use J. Allen St. John so much, for several people have told me that he has a style which they easily tire of. Don't overuse this fine artist. The cover for this FA isn't as good as the other St. Johns that have been done for AMAZING and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. The interiors by St. John were good this time, but Krupa's two had him beat. In fact Krupa's drawing for "25th Century Sherlock" is one of the best I've had the pleasure to gaze upon for a long time. Use Krupa more than you do, willya?

Harry Jenkins,  
2409 Santee Ave.,  
Columbia, S. Carolina.

*Oscar comes back in our August issue. We think you'll like his new adventure—out west! Glad to see Wilcox coming through so well with his fantasy effort.—Ed.*

**CONCERNING ZOMBIES**

Sirs:

Except for the fact that every so often you find in FANTASTIC a story that I term mushy love tripe, I do enjoy reading your magazine. I do understand that love interest keeps a story alive, but it certainly should not drown the rest of the plot.

In the March issue I liked Burroughs' novel by far the best. In second place "Beyond the Time Door" by O'Brien. Third I believe "Death Walks in Washington."

Concerning Norman's zombies in the above mentioned story, may I add a few facts with which I am acquainted.

There is in the tropics, particularly in Central America and the islands thereabouts, growing a species of cactus of which the juice, or perhaps you would call it the elixir, has the most interesting property. When some of this juice is administered to a person, he loses his will power. So complete is the loss of ego, self control, that the victim could very well indeed die if he were not commanded to eat.

These are the zombies as I have heard of them. Also might I mention that even the slightest amount of salt will counteract the above condition completely.

I am not one to scoff at black magic or the supernatural because too little is known about them. But the zombies I speak of are not a

supernatural manifestation.

Robert Byrde,  
929 Pine Street,  
San Francisco, Cal.

*Thanks for your comments on zombies. We're always glad to pass information on to our readers from those who have had experience, or knowledge, that we have not.—Ed.*

## QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 137)

### INVENTORS MATCH

10—1—5—7—8—2—9—4—6—3

### AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

(1) Shakespeare (2) Gray (3) Longfellow  
(4) Poe

### IT'S A LAW!

(1) directly (2) masses (3) bodies (4) inversely  
(5) square (6) distance

### TRUE OR FALSE

(1) False (2) False (3) True (4) False  
(5) False (6) True (7) True (8) True (9) False  
(10) False (11) False (12) True (13) False (14)  
False (15) True.

### SCIENTISTS MATCH

4—1—5—4—2

## CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Walter Tevis, 13 yrs., 700 Franklin Ave., Lexington, Ky., would like to buy old SF magazines; send list . . . Mrs. Dolores Lapi, 515 82nd St., North Bergen, N. J., wishes to correspond with anyone, anywhere, and will answer all letters immediately . . . Pvt. Samuel Bernstein, 18 yrs., 67th Materiel Squadron, Elgin Field, Valparaiso, Fla., would like pen pals from all over the world between 17 and 19, interested in aviation, baseball and science fiction . . . Louise Holbrook, 71 St. Stephens Ave., Keasbey, N. J., would like to correspond with skating fans and those interested in bowling, photography, stamp collecting and trading stickers from different skating rinks . . . Abraham Oshinsky is interested in contacting amateur astronomers who would like to join the International Astronomical Society . . . Robert Hageman, Jr., 18 yrs., Sanborn, Minn., would like to communicate with those interested in exchanging U. S. and foreign issues (stamp collecting); also will sell back issues of AMAZING STORIES cheap . . . S. M. Ritter, 1160 Simpson St., N. Y. C., has a list of about 30 magazines to trade for 1941 issues . . . Louis Kopeny, 2240 N. Kilpatrick Ave., Chicago, Ill., would like to hear from anyone of either sex about 15 yrs.; preferably from outside Illinois . . . Nat Silberstein, 1826 Trafalgar Pl., Bronx, N. Y., is desirous of buying, swapping and corresponding with

"nature" and "pet" fans over 14 yrs. . . C. Hidley, 2541 Aqueduct Ave., N. Y. C., wants to buy perfect, inexpensive pre-1936 magazines; send price lists . . . R. John Gruebner, 2306-N. 40th St., Milwaukee, Wisc., would like to hear from anyone around 14-16 yrs. interested in joining a science fiction club in Milwaukee . . . Jerry Gordon, 288 W. 92nd St., N. Y. C., will sell to highest bidder H. G. Wells "The World Set Free"; good condition . . . William E. Shaw, Jr., Route No. 1, Box 266, Rocky Mount, N. C., desires correspondents from all over the world, either sex, any age . . . Everett Robertson, 1140 S. 10th St., Slaton, Tex., would like to obtain the complete "Romance of the Elements" appearing in AMAZING . . . Pvt. Weldon W. Robinson, 8th School Squadron A. C., Building 2-325, Chanute Field, Rantoul, Ill., 22 yrs., would like to correspond with boys and girls whose hobbies are outdoor sports, writing letters and stamp collecting . . . Bill E. Galloway, 1114 Bandera Rd., San Antonio, Tex., 20 yrs., wants to communicate with girls about 18 yrs. in foreign countries; he was born in Mexico and can write Spanish . . .

## INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR

(Concluded from page 136)

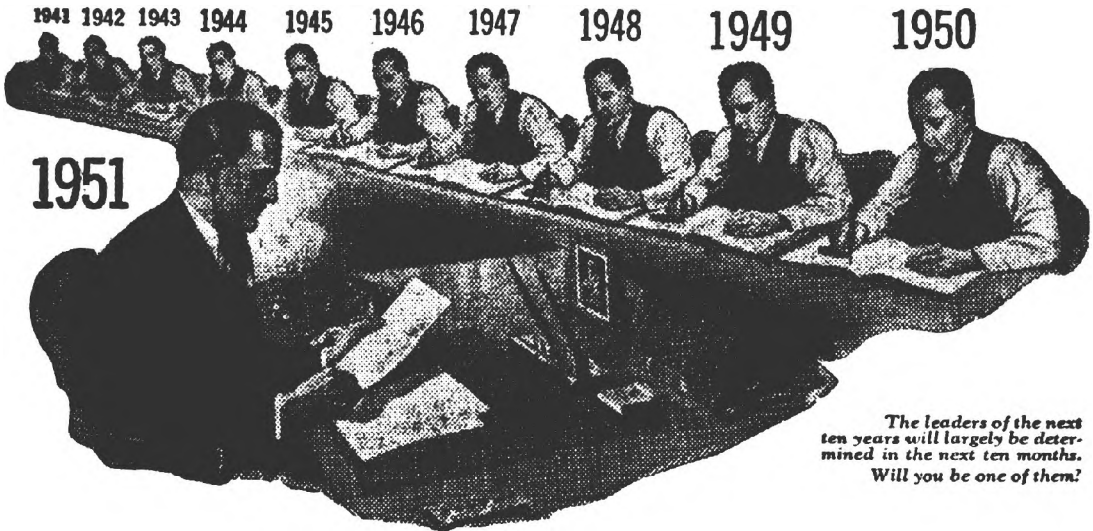
Then, at long last, the thing I'd wanted always: a career as a free lance fiction writer.

Seven years I've been at it, now. I've written and sold more than a thousand magazine stories and one novel. I have an office on the eighth floor of a downtown Pasadena office building where I put in eight hours every day. When I'm tired of city life I move down to my desert home in Twenty-nine Palms; spend my spare time exploring the back country and killing rattlesnakes. Once in awhile I go back east—by train, auto or plane. Flying's best—maybe because I once took a short course and learned to handle an OX-5 Travelaire after a fashion. I never quite mastered the art of the three-point landing, though.

About my sole claim to fiction fame is my Hollywood detective character, Dan Turner, who has appeared in every issue of one certain magazine for nearly seven years without a single break. This, and the fact that I seem able to write practically all types of stories with equal facility: adventure, detective, sport, horror, love, confession and even an occasional western. I think I like the adventure stuff best—which is why I'm so thoroughly delighted to appear in the pages of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. This is my first yarn in the magazine, but I hope it won't be my last. The lovely blonde wife of my bosom insists that I try again; who am I to argue?—*Robert Leslie Bellem.*

(Editor's Note: Mr. Bellem appeared in a great many pulp magazines along with your editor when he was pounding out free-lance fiction, and though we never knew him, we know of him as one boy we used to eye jealously—but not any more! Now we are tickled to see his name in *our* pages!)





# Will You Be Clerk or Manager Ten Years from Now?

**"SURELY, this could never happen to me,"** you say—  
 "that I should be sitting at the same desk—be doing  
 the same work—for ten straight years!"  
 But wait a minute—

Exactly that same thing has happened to thousands upon thousands of men. It has probably happened to men right in the company you now are working for. And—*unless you fit yourself for a better job—there is a very good chance that it may happen to you!*

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Here is Mr. Dixon's own story—"Just after I returned from the war, one of your representatives found me plugging away at a bookkeeper's job in Marietta, Ohio. He performed a real service and explained to me the need of further training, and induced me to take the LaSalle training in Higher Accountancy. After a few months of study, I secured a position with the Trust Department of a National Bank. This was the stepping stone I needed to various responsible positions including handling of receiverships and other important duties. That quickly boosted my income several hundred percent."

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If you think Mr. Dixon's success story unusual, please read what J. H. Krouse of Memphis, Tennessee, says. "When I decided to take your training in Higher Accountancy, I was a clerk. Today I am Chief Consultant Accountant for the U. S. Engineer's Office in Memphis, Tenn. Whatever success or recognition I have had, I owe to your training. I have had no other specialized training along this line. Your method of teaching is not only instructive but highly engaging. I have observed other courses, but firmly believe LaSalle has the best to be had anywhere."

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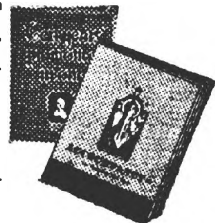
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- Commercial Law
- Effective Speaking



Name..... Age.....

Present Position..... Address.....



# RAIDERS from MARS

***How would we combat a future invasion from the red world? What weapons can we use to beat them back; destroy them?***

ON our back cover you will see the artist's conception of raiding ships in countless numbers circling in from space preparatory to swooping down on an unsuspecting planet. If such a thing did occur, say in 1975, how might the people of Earth then combat it? Let us picture 1975.

We have suspected, because space travel is now a reality, that another planet might try to invade us. So we have set up a base on the moon. From there we can watch for incoming spaceships with our powerful telescopes.

Now we see them, a million miles away. We radio to Earth to be ready. This is to provide opportunity for them to descend into bomb shelters. They have no defense on Earth itself. No guns can fire that far from Earth.

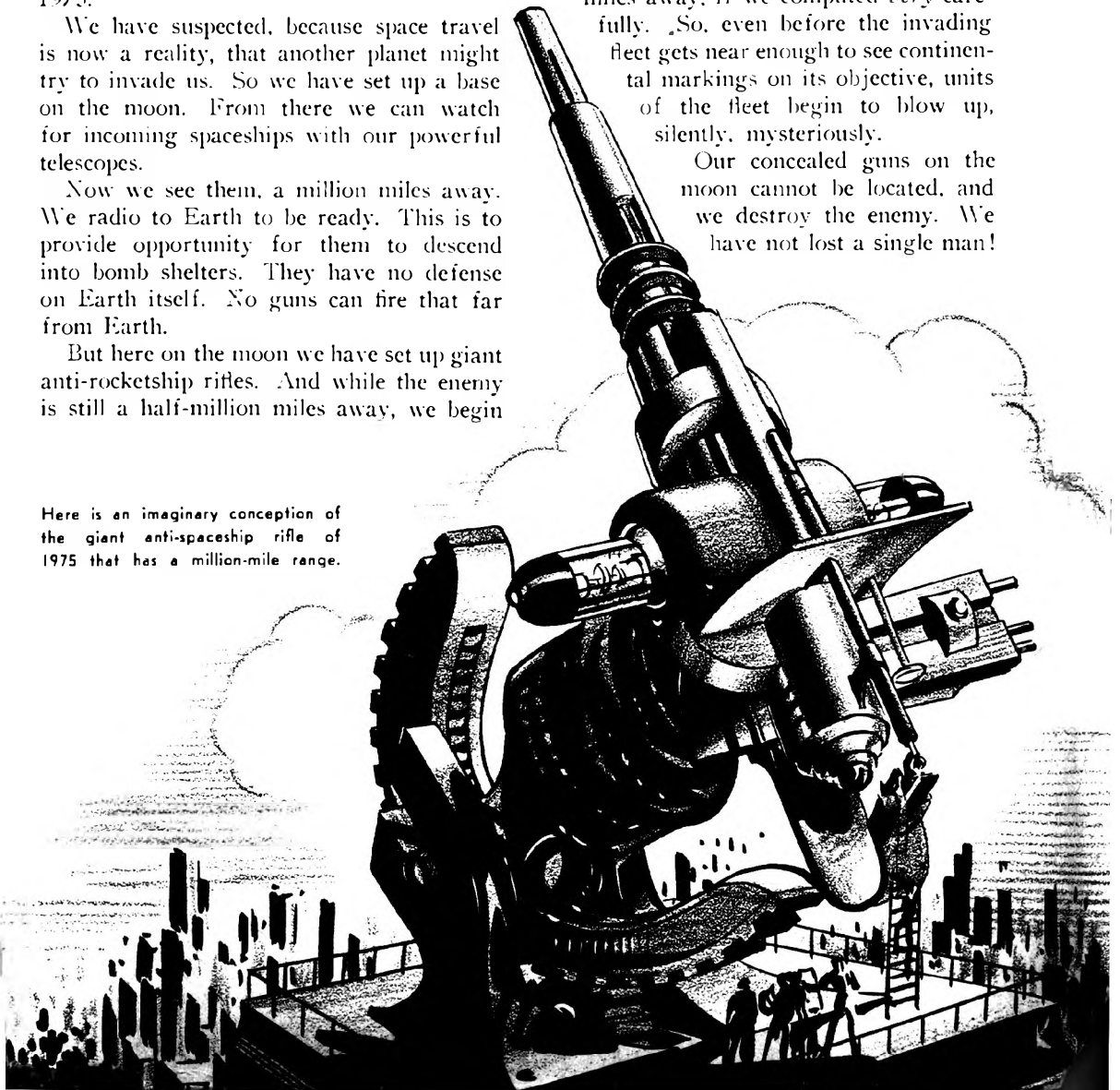
But here on the moon we have set up giant anti-rocketship rifles. And while the enemy is still a half-million miles away, we begin

firing huge projectiles at a certain point on the course of the invading ships, which has been computed for us by our astronomer rangefinders.

Due to the moon's slight gravity, and lack of atmosphere, we can aim with incredible accuracy. We might hit a ship ten million miles away, if we computed *very* carefully. So, even before the invading fleet gets near enough to see continental markings on its objective, units of the fleet begin to blow up, silently, mysteriously.

Our concealed guns on the moon cannot be located, and we destroy the enemy. We have not lost a single man!

Here is an imaginary conception of the giant anti-spaceship rifle of 1975 that has a million-mile range.







## INVADERS from MARS

Five hundred years from now, when space travel is commonplace, we may face warfare on a greater scale than any Earthly war could reach. We see here a fleet of rocket ships, raiding the Earth. A fleet such as this could swoop down with devastating suddenness, unseen until they strike. Only observers, outposts, on the Moon could warn us in time. (See inside back cover)