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by
RAY CUMMINGS



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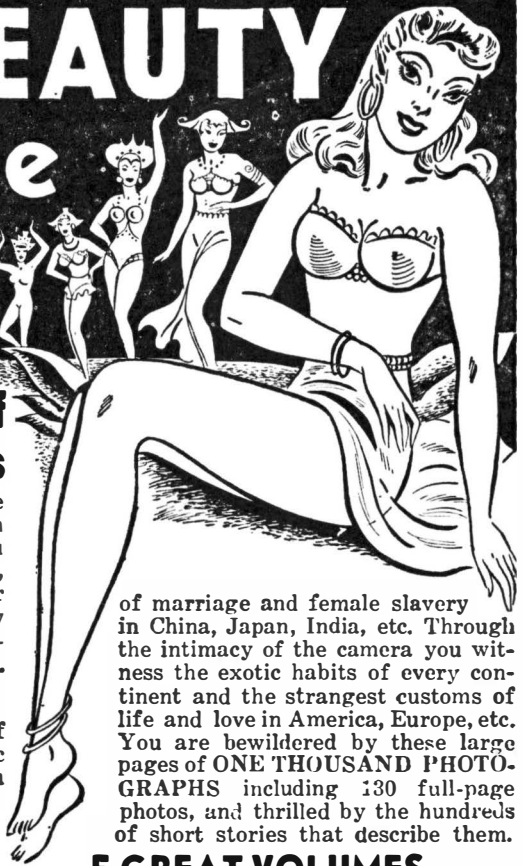
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Volume Two — Number Three

February, 1942

A CLASSIC SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

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A cry for help from beyond the veil of night, and they started off on an amazing journey into the macrocosmic. Behind them, Earth and the entire solar system was no more than an atom; before them a strange land. A novel to remember.

ASTONISHING SHORT STORIES

THE ALIEN VIBRATION Hannes Bok 74

Throughout the strange dimension he searched for the half-familiar being known simply as The Man. An outstanding science-fiction artist makes his debut with a truly unusual tale.

MY OBJECT ALL SUBLIME Lyle Monroe 82

There was something like a terror going on down in the traffic center, what with an army of reckless drivers zipping about unrestricted. But that was nothing compared to the stink that was made about it — literally!

THE PIT OF DOOM David H. Keller 88

One by one the men went into the Bad Lands, but none came out. And no one would believe the photographs that had been taken, until one day —

SACRIFICE John Hollis Mason 96

The things didn't move very fast, but they didn't tire, either. A determined man, barely keeping ahead of them, could divert the Yuicondi from a village for a long time . . .

SPECIAL FEATURES

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STATION X Everyone 100

COVER BY HANNES BOK

(from "The Alien Vibration")

FUTURE COMBINED WITH SCIENCE FICTION, published every other month by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 60 Hudson St., New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Yearly subscription 75c. Printed in the U. S. A.

How to Make YOUR Body Bring You FAME

... Instead of SHAME!

**ARE YOU
Skinny?
Weak?
Flabby?**

**Will You Let Me
Prove I Can Make You
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how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

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"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension," you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own body—watch it increase and multiply into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

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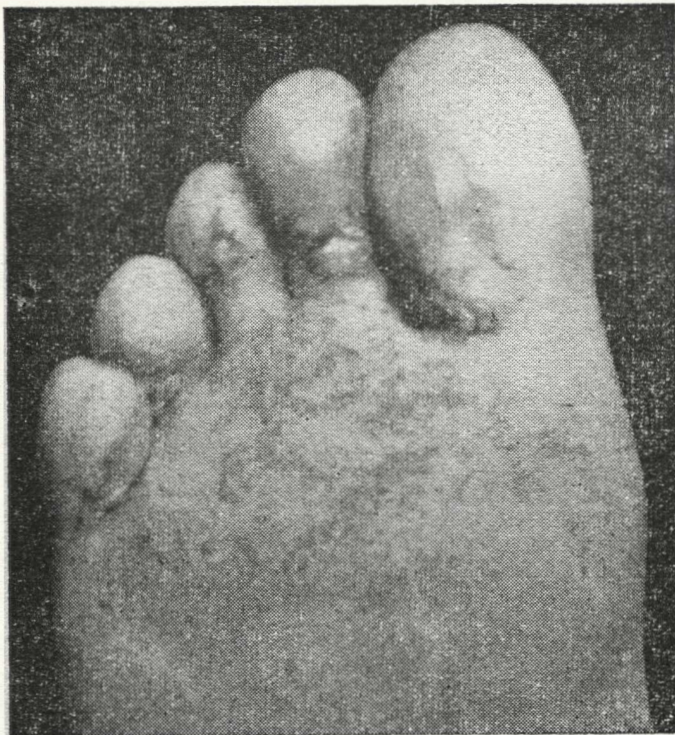
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FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT



WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. every night until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer?

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

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NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE.....

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But—if he has the right metal in him—he'll do what thousands of others have done in the last thirty-three years—men who found themselves going round and round in a back eddy—he'll begin at once to qualify himself for a better position (and for still bigger and better positions) by getting special training in his spare time *at home*.

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and almost inevitably, you'll get more and more money because you'll be worth more and more.

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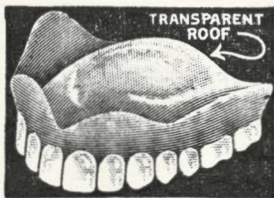
- Business Management
- Higher Accountancy
- Modern Salesmanship
- Modern Foremanship
- Industrial Management
- Traffic Management
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- C. P. A. Coaching for Advanced Accountants
- Stenography
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- Effective Speaking

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FALSE TEETH

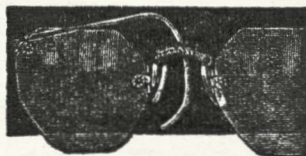


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ADDRESS.....

(Print Clearly)



*One by one, each mounted upon a
great bird, they rose from the castle
grounds.*

BEYOND THE STARS

by RAY CUMMINGS

(Author of "Into the Fourth Dimension," "The Man On the Meteor," etc.)

Man, the little god of this earth, tied down to the small star which infinite Nature gave him for an abode, storms forth into immeasurable stellar space with his thoughts; ponders and questions the why and wherefore, the whence and the whither, the beginning and the end of all that is, and tries to comprehend.
—Burgal.

CHAPTER I

"Calling for Help!"

THERE is a saying in the Service that when Liner 40 N runs late the whole world waits. It may be true enough; I suppose it is. But to me, as Commander 3 of Liner 40 N on that night in May, 1998,

**An Immortal Science Fiction Novel
Reprinted by Popular Demand**

Into the unthinkable gigantic they went to answer a call for help that came from somewhere beyond the edge of space. Less than a grain of dust in this world was their entire universe, yet they found a people they could understand—and an enemy they could fight.

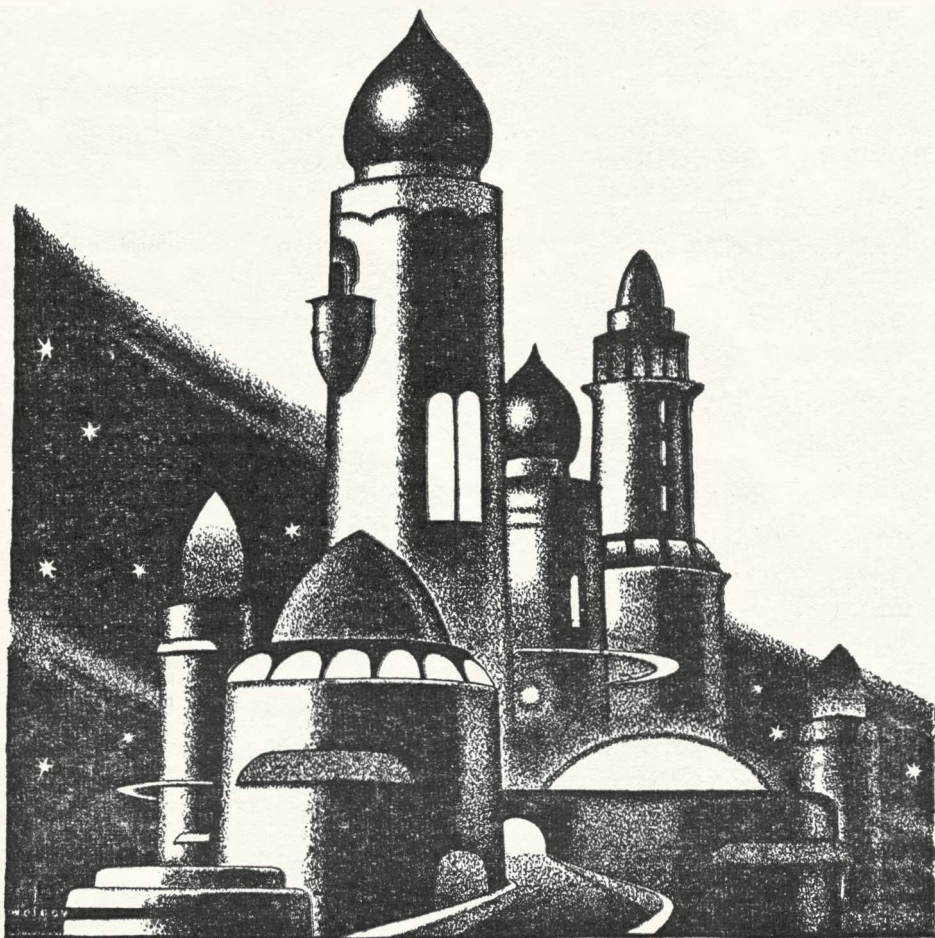
it was a particularly annoying truth.

For I was running late; at the Azores I was a good twenty-eight minutes behind where I should have been; and it hardly made things any easier for me to contemplate an impatient world awaiting me.

All the way from Madrid our port motor 8 had been giving trouble. Then at 15 W. I had no sooner left the coast than a surge of wind from the northwest had swung down upon us, and I lost a good eight minutes trying unsuccessfully to climb over it. A mood of ill-nature possessed me. I was just twenty-four years old, the youngest of the three commanders who alternated

on successive flights of the 40 N; this was only my seventh circle since promotion from the small equatorial liner of the East, and running the famous 40 N late under the eyes of a disapproving world disgruntled me.

At Meridian 45 W. the Connecting Director at New York called me up. The Northern Express, flying north on Meridian 74 W., was already at New York waiting for me. The director wasn't very pleasant about it. If I held up the express in its flight over the Pole and down 106 E., every connection in the Eastern Hemisphere would be disarranged.



The mercurial screen on my desk glowed with its image of the director's reproving face.

"You can't expect MacIlenny to make up your lost time," he told me. "Not on a night like this. The Bureau reports head winds for him all up to Baffin Land."

"I'm having a few head winds myself," I retorted.

But I grinned; and he caught my grin, and smiled back at me.

"Do the best you can," he said, and disconnected.

I made no ocean stops; but the director at 55 was a fussy fellow. I was due to pass him at ten thousand feet, to clear the north-south lanes for the non-stop Polar freighters; and with this wind and the fog which was now upon me I knew I would receive a sharp rebuke from 55 if I passed him too high.

A HUM sounded at one of the dozen mercurial screens beside me. Director 55 already annoyed! But it was not he! The small rectangle of screen glowed with its formless silver blurs, took form and color. A girl's face, ash-blond hair wound around her forehead; her white throat, with the square neck of a pale-blue jacket showing. And her earnest azure eyes searching mine, lighting with recognition as on her own screen she caught my image. Alice!

My annoyance at the threatened director's call-down died; I seized my headphone, heard her voice.

"Len?"

"Yes, Alice."

"I've been trying to get you all the way from Greenwich. They wouldn't let me through, not until I told them it was important—I had to get you." She spoke fast against the moment when the Vocal-Traffic Timer would cut her off. "Len, grandfather wants you to come up and see us. At once—when you're through with this circle. Will you?"

She saw the question on my lips.

"Don't ask me now—no time, Len. But it's important, and grandfather—Do you know where I can find Jim? We want him also—you and Jim."

"He's in the Anglo-Detective Division, London Air Service, New York Branch."

"Yes, I know; but he's in the air tonight. How can I get him?" Her smile was whimsical. "When I asked for a tracer, the timer over there told me to get the hell off the

air. I guess he thought I wanted to find Jim just to tell him I loved him."

Her image blurred.

The Mid-Atlantic Timer's voice broke in. "Fifteen seconds—last call."

"I'll get Jim," I said hastily. "Bring him with me? Soon as we can get there?"

"Yes. We're waiting for you. And Len, you won't need to sleep first. You can sleep after you get here. And tell Jim—"

A click silenced her. The screen went dark.

What could she want of me? It was pleasant to have seen and heard her, this granddaughter of old Dr. Weatherby. In the stress of getting my appointment—my continuous examinations and tests between voyages—I had not seen Alice since leaving the Equatorial Run. Nor Jimmy Dunkirk either.

I went after him now. The tracers could not rebuff me, as they had Alice. They found him at last—at 120° E., 85° N. He was coming up over the Pole, and down Baffin Bay making for New York. His jolly face, with its ever present grin and the shock of fiery red hair above it, glowed on my screen.

"Well, Len—say, it's great to see you!"

"Alice just called me—Alice Weatherby. Doc wants us both—you and me, Jim—something important; wants to see us. You off at New York?"

"You bet," he grinned. "Had a chase down through Tibet—every cursed murderer thinks the grand idea is for him to swoop it for Lhasa and parts unknown. It's a cinch—you know right where to look. When I get this fellow in his airy cage I'm off duty for a while. Alice wants us?"

"Yes. I don't know what for. She did not have a chance to—"

"Fifteen seconds—last call."

"The infernal bedamned it is!" came Jim's belligerent voice.

"Last call, Liner 40 N—limit ninety seconds by general orders." The timer was imperturbably impersonal.

But not Jimmy Dunkirk. "You cut me off," he roared. "I'll have the General Inspector tell you who you are in thirty minutes. This is Chief Dunkirk, Patrol Liner A 22, Anglo-Detective Division. I've got a murderer here—understand? A murderer! Important, official business."

With the timer cowed, Jimmy would have talked all night. But I was on duty.

"Good," I said. "I'll call you at your office after you get in."

"Old Weatherby wants us—"

"Yes. Off, Jim."

IT WAS well toward dawn when I hooked up with Jim; and together we flew up the river, where on the Tappan Zee, at the northern borders of the city, Dr. Weatherby had his home.

Alice was under the landing stage when we descended in the hand lift.

"Len—Jim—I'm glad to see you." She gave each of us one of her cool white hands. "Grandfather is waiting to— Jim, let go of my hand; you're squeezing my fingers. That hurts!"

He flung it away. He had always done that with Alice, to devil her.

"Next time," she said severely, "you bow to me—that's all."

He laughed gleefully. "Right. Sure, that's safer—when you look so pretty."

She was indeed pretty. A tall, slender girl—an inch taller than Jim. Big, serious blue eyes she had, and that braided mass of ash-blond hair. She was dressed now in a pale-blue jacket, like a tunic to her thighs, and long silver stockings from beneath the China-silk trousers that flared above her knees.

She smiled at Jim. "I'd never take *you* seriously. Dolores says—"

Jim sobered. "Dolores—"

"Dolores is waiting to see you both—she is very excited."

Dolores, the little sister of Alice. I never saw her without a pang. In this great age of science she is a pathetic example of what science cannot do.

Our wonderful, marvelous age of science! We pride ourselves on it. But this girl had been born blind, and all the learned surgeons of our learned world could not bring the light to her.

Jim called. "'Lo, there, Dolores."

"Jimmy! Is that you? I'm so glad to see you!"

See him! There was, to me, a grim pathos in her conventional words.

"Len is here, too, Dolores," Alice said gently.

"Len? Oh, how do you do, Len?" Her fumbling hand struck Jim's head; her fingers touched his bristling hair in recognition. "Hello, Jimmy, I'm so glad to see you. They told me you were coming."

He swept her up, whirled her through

the air like a child, and set her gasping upon her feet.

"Well, well—how's my little friend Dolores, huh? Want to do that again? Come on!" He whirled her again, and panted. "Getting too big—all grown up. Say, Len, she's prettier every day, isn't she, Len?"

DR. WEATHERBY was seventy-five years old at this time when he sent for Jim and me. He met us on the lower terrace of his home—a squat, powerfully thick-set figure, with long apelike arms and thick back slightly humped.

His head was overlarge, made to seem larger by its great mass of iron-gray hair. His face, large of feature, was unlined, save by the marks of character stamped upon it. A kindly face it was, smiling with friendship, but always stern in repose.

"Well, my boys, you came promptly," he greeted us. "That's fine. Come in." His huge hands gripped us with a strength that made Jim pretend to wince and grin mockingly at Alice. "Come in. We'll sit in the garden upstairs."

He led us up the inclines through his rambling house and to its roof, where in the starlight we sat on leafy couches in a garden blooming with flowers, shrubs, and coned ferns.

It was about an hour before dawn, cloudless, moonless—a brilliant firmament of gems strewn upon their purple velvet. Venus was rising now to be the morning star and herald of the dawn; red Mars lying opposite and low, glowing like the ashless end of a cigarro.

Below us over the parapet of roof was the crowded countryside, wan and still in the starlight, with the thread of river beyond—a river of silver with the blue-white lights of its boats skimming the surface. A few planes were overhead, the small local airline from Albany skimming past with a whirl of its fans.

Dr. Weatherby chatted with us; rebuked me smilingly for running the 40 N late; and listened gravely, with occasional interested questions, to Jim's vivid account of his world chase after the murderer, while Dolores snuggled up against him, thrilled, and timidly held his hand.

"Well, well—you boys do have an interesting life. Youth coming forward. Youth can do anything—the world waits on youth—"

"It did tonight," said Alice, with a shy glance at me.

I wondered what Dr. Weatherby wanted of us. He had not hinted at it; he had spoken of a morning meal, and then we must have some sleep.

Abruptly he said: "I should not have sent for you unless it were important. It is—the fact that I need you—" He stopped as abruptly as he had begun. I don't know why a sudden tenseness should have fallen upon us all; but I felt it. And in the silence little Dolores left Jim and crept to her grandfather, leaning against him.

I began lamely: "We came, of course—"

DR. WEATHERBY was staring off at the stars moodily, with a look so far away I could have fancied he was gazing, not at the stars, but beyond them. And then he tore himself back, and smiled, lighting a cigarro, flipping the torch at me and asking me to step on it.

"I have so much to tell you," he said, "I hardly know how or where to begin. You know, of course, something of my life—my work.

"Leonard—and you, Jim—I believe you are familiar in a general way with what the physicists now think of the atom? Radiant matter—these new electro-rays that seem to solve everything and yet only add another mystery?

"You know the savants now would tell us that space is curved—so Einstein told us years ago? Well, I will tell you this. Tomorrow, after you have slept, I believe I can make clear to you the real construction of our material universe."

His hand checked us. "I have been working since 1970 along these lines. Alice recently has been helping me. And then Dolores—

"This child here—in the dark—it has been given her to see things denied to our science. Nearly a hundred years ago a scientist proclaimed that *thoughts* are themselves a mere vibration, like light and heat and sound, and all these mysterious rays and flying electrons—electricity itself. They are all the same, though we name them differently."

He had been talking swiftly, but he quieted. "Tell them, Dolores."

"A big open space," she said slowly. "Mountains, and a broad valley. A cliff-side. People there on a ledge—a young man and a young woman—very white and

pale, with blood on the man's face. They were standing on a height, with a dark cavern behind them. And something threatening them.

"Other people—or monsters down in the valley—something, vague but horrible as a nightmare with a nameless horror. And the man was calling, 'Help.' Not the word—I could not hear that, but I know the meaning. Calling to me—I can hear him so often—calling to *me!*"

She said it so queerly. At once it seemed uncanny, weird, almost gruesome. A thrill very akin to fear ran over me. This was not science. But Dr. Weatherby's calm precise voice was scientific enough.

"That was several years ago. We have found since that she is receiving thought-vibrations, not from here on earth, not from the planets, or the stars, but from beyond the stars. The greater realms out there—suspected for so long—which now I know and can prove to exist!"

His voice had risen, in an excitement, an exaltation. He went on more swiftly: "But all that is nothing. I wanted you to come here to help me. Dolores has had thoughts from out there beyond the stars—and her own answering thoughts have been answered. Communication!

"Oh, I have guarded against delusion! I have sent messages of scientific import, and been answered with scientific thoughts all beyond this child's comprehension. Communication with the great unknown—the infinity of distance unfathomable.

"That was a year ago. Now, I have done more. I have learned how to get there. I can transport myself, my girls, and you! I am ready to make the journey now. That is why I want you, and need you. We're going! We want you to come with us, out beyond the stars!"

CHAPTER II

The Dead White Thing

"**I**N THE plan of the universe," said Dr. Weatherby, "we find a conception gigantic, infinite, and yet it all has simplicity. I want most earnestly to have you understand me, Leonard and Jim."

He gazed at us with a gentle smile. We had had our morning meal, and had slept heavily and long, and now it was evening twilight. We sat in the big living room

in the lower floor of the Weatherby home. Dolores, as before, cuddled against her grandfather's side; Alice was busied about the house, but presently she joined us. Dr. Weatherby's manner was as earnest as his words. He added, looking at me:

"I want to be very clear, Leonard. This thing that we are to do—this journey, in which if you will not join me I shall make alone—"

"By the infernal, you won't make it alone while I'm alive," Jim cried. "The detective service loses its best tracker, beginning right away!"

Dr. Weatherby held out his hand. "My boy!" He could say no more. And on Dolores's face was a radiance. Then Dr. Weatherby turned to me.

"And you, Leonard—will you go?"

The direct question was startling.

Would I go out there into eternity? Beyond the stars, into eternal time, and over space unfathomable, to encounter what now no finite human mind could grasp? Like Jim, I was practically alone in the world.

But to give up my commission, as youngest commander of the great 40 N, to disappear! To return, perhaps never. Wanderers beyond the stars! Was this not, perhaps, too bold a thing for human endeavor?

I heard my voice saying quietly: "Why, of course I'm going with you, Dr. Weatherby."

I was aware that Alice had come in to sit beside me, her cool white hand impulsively pressing mine. And Dolores was saying:

"Wasn't that Alice just came? Alice, they're going! Isn't that wonderful? We are all going, just as soon as we can get ready!"

"A STRANGE simplicity," Dr. Weatherby was saying. "First, let me make clear. When I say universe—the construction of our universe—I mean everything which exists, or has, or will exist, the smallest entity of our infinitesimal atomic world—to the greatest conception of what may lie beyond the stars. Does that sound complicated? Let me say again it is simple."

He leaned toward us, with his thick, strong hands gripped in his lap. "I want you to realize first that we are dealing with infinities. The human mind is so finite, so limited! You must cast off most of

your instinctive methods of reasoning. You understand me?"

"We'll try," I said.

He nodded, and went on:

"Conceive a void of nothingness. No space, no time, no material bodies. Just nothing. That was the beginning. Do not try to wonder *when* it was! A billion years ago! A billion billion! Not at all. You must not think of when, because *when* implies time. There was no *time*. There could be no *time* without material bodies to create movement and events. For time in itself is nothing but the measurement of a distance between events.

"We have, then a nothingness. A vortex. A whirlpool."

"A vortex of nothingness?" I exclaimed.

"Exactly. Why, back in the 1920's, Leonard, scientists recognized that the basic entities of matter were only whirlpools. They hoped then to find some fundamental substance, like ether. But there is none.

"A whirlpool, by its very motion, simulates substance. And, in the last analysis, that is all which exists—an apparent solidity. Divide anything, probe into anything, you find only a *motion* of something else smaller which is apparently real. But then take that smaller thing—divide it—you find more empty spaces, more nothingness. And other yet smaller things in violent motion.

"Why, Leonard, don't you realize that's what puzzled scientists? From 1900 on, they puzzled over it. They found a solid bar of iron to be composed of molecules. They said: 'Oh, yes, we understand. This solidity of iron is only apparent. It really consists of molecules of iron with empty spaces in between them, and the molecules are in motion.'

"But then—this, Leonard, was 'way back in the 1800's—they suddenly found that the reality of the molecule was only apparent. It was just like the iron! Empty spaces, with atoms in motion. Ah, at last they had got to the bottom of it! Atoms!

"But suddenly they found that an atom was no more a solidity than the molecule—or the iron bar. Still other spaces, with other vibrating particles. And fatuously they said: 'We have found electrons, revolving around a central nucleus.' But that meant nothing, and at last they began to realize it.

"LET YOUR mind leap beyond all that, Leonard. It is too fatuous to think that each division of matter is the

last, simply because you cannot make another. Let us go back to that original vortex of nothingness. It created an apparent solidity—exactly as the vibrating molecules of iron create iron. That's clear, isn't it?"

"But," said Jim, "how small is this smallest vortex?"

Dr. Weatherby laughed. "It has no size. It is infinitely small. An abstract quality, beyond human conception. If you try to name its size, then no longer is it infinitely small. It is *not* the smallest vortex; there is no such thing. It is the infinitely small vortex, which is very different.

"Conceive, then, this vortex, which creates an apparently solid particle of matter. I call this solid particle an intime. This intime, in turn, with myriads of its fellows clustering about it, vibrating with empty nothingness between, creates another, larger entity—another apparently solid substance. And so on up to what we now call an electron."

"Well, I said, "between the intime and the electron, how many separate densities might there be?"

"An infinite number," he replied smilingly. "A number which cannot be conceived. Each has distinct characteristics—just as iron differs from lead or gold."

He paused a moment, but none of us said anything. "With this conception," he went on, "we can build the definition that a material substance is a density of other substances. It maintains its separate existence by virtue of having around its exterior an emptiness greater than the emptiness of its interior. Think of that a moment.

"The earth itself is such a density. The space around it is greater than any of the spaces within its molecules, its atoms, its electrons, down to its infinitely small intimes—to the ultimate nothingness of which it is composed. That is our earth. It is in movement. And another density near it we call Venus, and another Mars, vibrating with a space between them. All our starry universe—you see, Leonard?"

My mind leaped with the thrill of it. The great vault of the heavens with its myriad whirling stars shrank before my far-flung imagination into a tiny space teeming with its agitated particles!

Dr. Weatherby added gently: "A fragment of iron is microscopically no different in structure from our starry universe. The distances between our heavenly bodies compared to the size of them are quite the same

as the distances between electrons—or intimes—compared to their size. You get my point?"

"I do," Jim exclaimed. "What we call the sky would seem a solid mass of matter—like a fragment of iron—to some greater viewpoint?"

"Exactly. Our microscopes show nothing which is actually more solid than the sky itself. From here—our earth—to the Milky Way is to us a tremendous distance. But suppose that we were so gigantic—so vast in comparative size—that we needed a powerful microscope even to perceive that space? What would we see? A multiplicity of vibrating particles! And without the microscope the whole space would seem solid. We could call it—well, say a grain of gold."

FOR A moment we were silent. There was to all this an awesome aspect; yet its simplicity was overwhelming. Dolores said timidly:

"It seems strange that so simple a thing should have been unknown so long."

"Not at all," said Dr. Weatherby. "The knowledge came step by step. It is only the final conception which seems so startling. To me it is the logical, inevitable conclusion. How could the facts be otherwise?"

"Always, heretofore, we have conceived ourselves and our earth to be some masterful dividing line between what is smaller and what is larger than ourselves. That is fatuous.

"We call the one our microscopic world, the other our astronomical world. And we sit between them, puzzling over their difference. There is no difference! They are both one, and we are in them—a mere step of the ladder."

"It makes me feel very small," said Alice.

"Or large," I said. "According to the viewpoint." I added to Dr. Weatherby: "I realize now why no size, no motion, no time, nor density can be absolute. Everything must be relative to something else."

"Exactly," he nodded.

Jim was puzzling. "This voyage we're going to make—beyond the stars. How are we going to make this trip? What in? By what method? By the nine airy demons, Dr. Weatherby, there's an awful lot you haven't told us yet!"

"Not so much," said Dr. Weatherby smilingly.

"Because," I interposed, "you don't need to know very much, Jim."

"We're going in a projectile," said Dolores. "At least they say it looks like a projectile."

"Like Mallen's moon rocket of 1989," Jim exclaimed.

Dr. Weatherby shook his head. "The various antigravity methods so far devised would help us very little, except Elton's electronic neutralization of gravity. I use that principle merely in starting the flight. A trip to the moon—such as Mallen's rocket made—had nothing in common with this journey of ours."

"They say Mallen's going himself next year—to Mars," Alice remarked.

"Let's see our projectile," Jim demanded.

"In a moment," Dr. Weatherby said. "There is, first, just one conception I want to make sure you have grasped. Forget our earth now. Forget yourself. Conceive the material universe to be a vast void in which various densities are whirling.

"From the infinitely small to the infinitely large, they are of every size and character. Yet all are inherently the same, merely apparently solid. I will ask you, Leonard: the space between our earth and Mars—of what would you say it is composed?"

I hesitated. "Nothingness," I ventured finally.

"No!" he exclaimed warmly. "There is where you fail to grasp my fundamental conception. The void of space is itself a mass of particles—a mass of densities—of every possible size and character.

"The earth is one; a wandering asteroid is another; and meteors, meteorites, down to the smallest particles of star dust. And still smaller are the particles of light, far flung everywhere through space. Other entities are again still smaller—call them intimes—down in size to infinity.

"Space then—you must realize it is not empty. The emptiness, the nothingness, is only the infinitely small. Ah, I see now that you begin to understand!"

I said slowly: "I'm imagining space as—as a jelly. Unsolid, because we ourselves are more solid, and it seems unsolid to us. But—if we were less dense, and larger—gigantic—" I stopped.

"That," said Dr. Weatherby, "is precisely the point of view I've wanted you to get. You can understand now why to beings of

some greater outside realm all our interstellar space would shrink into apparent solidity—and they would call it an atom.

"CONCEIVE yourself now a scientist of that vast universe outside. You are living on a density—a great conglomeration of particles clinging together—and you call it your earth.

"One tiny particle of your earth is beneath your microscope. You call that particle a grain of gold. You examine it. You find it is not solid. You see 'empty spaces.' They are not really empty, but the particles of matter swimming in them are too small for you to see. But you do see what you call molecules of gold.

"You increase the power of your microscope. You examine just one molecule of this gold. Now you see more supposedly empty spaces, with smaller whirling entities which you choose to call atoms.

"You examine one atom. The same result—and you call the still smaller particles electrons. Down and down—who can say how far? Until, at last, you are looking into one intime—you have now named them all intimes. You see yet smaller particles whirling in space. That is the space between our stars!

"And these whirling points of light—perhaps you can distinguish no more than a million of them. They are the million largest, brightest of our stars! You cannot see our own sun; it is too small. Or our earth—too small! And too dark!

"But if you did see our earth, and were a fatuous scientist, you might say: 'Ah, at last I have seen *the smallest thing!*' Which is amusing, because our earth has a good many rocks composing it. And each rock goes down to pebbles, grains of sand, molecules, atoms, electrons—to infinity.

"Do you get the conception now? This whole universe we see and feel from here on earth, from a greater viewpoint would all shrink into a tiny, apparently solid particle."

He paused.

"I can visualize it," I said. "It is stupendous—"

But Jim persisted: "This trip we are to make—"

Alice interrupted: "Grandfather has been making tests. We have several models; he saved one of them to show you. We can see it now?" She looked at her grandfather inquiringly.

Dr. Weatherby rose to his feet abruptly. "We'll try it now. I'll show you the model, and we'll send it—away."

"Come," said Dr. Weatherby. "When you see it start, you will understand."

We left the house. Night had closed down, a soft, cloudless night; never had I seen the stars so brilliant. Dr. Weatherby led us up a path, beneath spreading trees, past gardens of flowers, his lake with its pool and a cascading brook for its outlet down the hillside to the Hudson; past the shadowy landing stage where high overhead my plane lay moored; up the slope of a hill to a long, narrow outbuilding.

Jim and I had noticed this building when we landed at dawn. It was new to us, erected during the year or so since we had last been here.

"My workshop," Dr. Weatherby said as we approached it.

I GAZED at it curiously. It was a single-story building, without windows, flat-roofed and no more than twenty feet high; in width, possibly thirty feet, but it was at least five times that long.

It lay crosswise on the hill. At a glance I could not guess of what materials it might be constructed. Wood, stone, metal—it seemed none of these. Its aspect was whitish, not silvery, or milky; rather was it a dead, flesh white, with a faintly lurid cast of green to it.

In the starlight it lay silent and unlighted. But there seemed to it a glow, as though it were bathed in moonlight. And then I saw that the glow was inherent in it, almost a phosphorescence. Abruptly I felt that there was something uncanny, unnatural about this structure.

I made no comment. But I saw surprise on Jim's face, and at the lower end of the building where there appeared to be a door, he stopped irresolute.

"Is—is the projectile in here?"

"Yes," said Alice. "Inside. But we're going to the test room first, aren't we, grandfather?"

We went through a door and along a narrow passage. It was dimly illumined by small blue vacuum tubes overhead. I found myself with Dolores.

"It's very wonderful," she whispered to me. "You will see, very soon."

"You—have seen all this, Dolores?"

"Oh, yes. They tell me everything about

it. I—almost see it. Where is Jim? I want Jim to see it."

"You're not afraid, Dolores? Afraid of this voyage they talk of?"

"Afraid? Oh, no!" Her luminous eyes were fixed on my face.

The passageway widened. "Here is Jim," I said. "Jim, stay with Dolores. She wants to show you this—this thing we've come to see."

We entered a room some thirty feet square. Dr. Weatherby switched on the lights. There were furniture, rugs, small tables of apparatus — instruments — and banks of vacuum tubes on tripods standing about, with wires in insulated cables connecting them. The cables littered the floor, like huge snakes.

Dr. Weatherby drew aside a portiere which cut off a corner of the room. Lying on a large table, flooded with a vacuum light from above, was a model of this building we were in. It was about two feet wide, by ten long—the same dead white, uncanny-looking structure. A thought sprang to my mind. Was this building we were in itself the projectile? I think I murmured the question, for Dr. Weatherby smiled.

"No. Here is a small replica of the vehicle."

He unbolted the roof of the model. Resting inside was a tiny, dead white object some six inches long, cigarro-shaped, but with a pointed end, and blunt stern. It rather suggested the ancient subsea vessels.

It had fin-shaped projections, like very small wings for its slow transit through air. A tiny tower was forward, on top; and there were bull's-eye windows lining the sides and in every face of the octagon tower.

Dr. Weatherby pointed out all these details to us, speaking in his low, earnest voice: "I'm wondering, Leonard—and you, Jim—if you're familiar with Elton's principle of the neutralization of gravity?"

"No," I said; and Jim shook his head. "Not in detail."

In 1988 Elton perfected it. I knew of it only as an electronic stream of radiant matter which when directed against a solid substance, destroyed—or partially destroyed—the attraction of that other substance for the earth.

"I'll explain it when we get in the vehicle itself," Dr. Weatherby said. He was connecting wires to the little model building

on the table; and he closed its roof, and opened a wide doorway at its end. "I am going to charge this small building with the Elton current. The electronic stream will carry that tiny projectile with it.

"This will be the same as the start of our own voyage, Leonard—except that with this model, I have intensified the rapidity of the successive changes. What happens here in minutes, will take us hours—sit down over there, all of you."

WE RANGED ourselves in the gloom across the room. The model of the building, with its end doorway open like an airplane hangar, was pointing past us. Jim and I sat together, with Alice near me, and Dolores by Jim. He put his arm around her.

A moment, and then Dr. Weatherby touched a switch. The room was plunged into darkness. From the table came a low electrical hum.

I strained my eyes. A glow was over there. It brightened. The little building on the table was glowing with a faint, blue-white light. A minute passed; or it might have been ten minutes, I do not know.

The hum of the Elton current intensified; a whirl, then a faint, very tiny screaming throb. The building was now outlined completely—a luminous white, shot through with a cast of green, and red and yellow sparks snapping about it. From where I sat I could see partially into its opened doorway, the interior was not dark; it was glowing inside, and now I became aware of a very faint red stream, like light, pouring from the doorway, crossing the room, spreading like a fan.

It was the Elton ray, escaping its bonds, its tiny particles plunging outward with the speed of light, or more. The red glow struck the blank, dead white wall of our room, stained the wall with its red sheen. Sparks were snapping in the air around me. To my nostrils came a faint, sulphurous smell. My skin was prickling.

"Look," whispered Alice.

The opposite wall where the red ray was striking, now seemed glowing of itself, a blank, opaque wall, stained red by the billions of imponderable particles bombarding it.

But it was no longer an opaque wall. Of itself it was now glowing, becoming translucent, transparent! The stars! Through

the wall I could see the placid night outside, the dark hillside, the stars!

I felt Alice's hand gripping my arm. From the glowing model on the table, the tiny vehicle was issuing. The dead white thing! It came very slowly, floating out the doorway, as though drawn by the red diverging stream of light.

Slowly it passed me, ascending a trifle, no longer dead white; for it was transfigured. Alive now! Shimmering, its outlines wavy, unreal. It moved a trifle faster, came to the wall of the room, passed through it.

"Watch!" breathed Alice.

The vehicle—that tiny oblong shape smaller than my hand—was outside over the treetops, plunging onward in the red stream of light. Yet at that distance I could still see it plainly, its image as large as when it was a few feet from my face.

And suddenly I realized I was staring after a thing gigantic. It showed now far over the hilltop. I could have sworn it was some great air liner. A patch of stars was blotted out behind it.

Another moment; the silver thing off there was far away. Was it as far as the moon? It was larger now than the moon would have seemed, hanging out there!

I watched. I could still see it as plainly as when it started. But then suddenly came a change. Its image became fainter, thinner, and rapidly expanding. There was a faint image of it out there in the heavens, an image larger than the hillside.

There was an instant when I fancied that the image had expanded over all the sky, a wraith—a dissipating ghost of the projectile.

It was gone. The stars gleamed alone in the deep purple of the night. A click sounded. The hum of the Elton ray died into silence. The luminous wall of the room sprang into opaque reality.

I sat up, blinking, shivering, to find Dr. Weatherby standing before me.

"That, Leonard, is the start. Shall we go see the vehicle itself?"

CHAPTER III

Launched Into Space!

WE WERE to leave at dawn, and during that night a thousand details needed our attention. Jim's resignation from the service, which he gave to the superior through the verbal

traffic department without so much as a word of explanation; my own resignation, leaving the post of Commander 3 of the 40 N temporarily to Argyle.

Temporarily! With what optimism I voiced it! But there was a queer pang within me, an exaltation—which I think was as well a form of madness—was upon us all; this thing we were about to do transcended all our petty human affairs.

I was standing at the door of the workshop, gazing at a tree. Its leaves were waving in a gentle night breeze, which as I stood there fanned my hot, flushed cheeks with a grateful coolness. I found Alice beside me.

"I'm looking at that tree," I said. "Really, you know I'll be sorry to leave it. These trees, these hills—the river—I wouldn't like to leave our earth—and never come back, Alice. Would you?"

"No," she said. Her hand pressed mine; her solemn blue eyes regarded me. She was about to add something else, but she checked herself. A flush rose to her cheeks; it mantled the whole column of her throat with red.

"Alice!"

"No," she repeated. "We'll come back, Len."

Dr. Weatherby called us. And Jim shouted: "This infernal checking! Len, come here and do your share—we're going at dawn, don't you know it?"

I SHALL not forget the first sight I had of the vehicle. It lay in the great main room of the workshop. A hundred feet long, round like a huge cigarro, a dead white thing, lying there in the glow of the blue tubes.

Even in its silent immobility, there seemed about it a latent power, as though it were not dead, but asleep—a sleeping giant, resting quiescent, conscious of its own strength.

And there was about it, too, an aspect almost infernal, in its sleek, bulging body, dead-white like bloodless flesh. Its windows, staring, bulging, thick-lensed eyes. I felt instinctively a repulsion—a desire to avoid it. I touched it finally; its smooth side was hard and abnormally cold. A shudder ran over me.

But after a time these feelings passed. I was absorbed in examining this thing which was to house us, to bear us upward and away.

Within the vehicle was a narrow corri-

dor down one side; corridor windows opened to the left; to the right were rooms. Each had a window opening to the side, a window in the floor beneath, and in the roof above.

There was a room for Jim and me, another for Alice and Dolores, and one for Dr. Weatherby. An instrument and chart room forward, with a tower room for keeping a lookout, and a galley, with a new Maxton electronic stove, fully equipped. And other rooms—a food room, and one crowded with a variety of apparatus: air purifiers, Maxton heaters and refrigerators, piping the heat and cold throughout the vehicle. There was a score of devices with which I was familiar, and another score which were totally strange.

Dr. Weatherby already had the vehicle fully equipped and provisioned. With a tabulated list of its contents, he and Jim were laboriously checking the items to verify that nothing had been overlooked.

"I don't want to know how it works," Jim had said. "Not till after we get started. Let's get going—that's the main idea."

Then Alice took the list; she and Jim went from room to room. Dolores stood a moment alone in the corridor, as Dr. Weatherby and I started for the instrument room.

"Jim! Oh, Jim, where are you?"

"They're farther back, Dolores," I said. "In the galley, I think. Don't you want to come forward with us?"

"I guess not. I'll go with Jim." She joined him and Alice. I heard her say: "Oh, I'm glad to find you, Jim. I was a little frightened—just for a moment. I thought something was wrong here on board."

I turned and followed Dr. Weatherby to the instrument room.

WE STOOD before an instrument board of dials and indicators, with wires running upward to a score of gleaming cylindrical tanks and batteries overhead. A table was beside us, with a switchboard less complicated in appearance than I have seen in the navigating cages of many small air liners.

There were chairs, a narrow leather couch across the room, and another table littered with charts and star-maps. And above it was a shelf, with one of the Grantline comptometers, the mathematical sensation

of 1990. It was almost a human mathematical brain.

Under its keys the most intricate problem of calculus was automatically resolved, as surely as an ancient adding machine did simple arithmetic.

Dr. Weatherby began to show me the workings of the vehicle. "I need only give you the fundamentals, Leonard. Mechanically my apparatus here is fairly complicated. But those mere mechanics are not important or interesting. I could not teach you now, in so short a time, how to rectify anything which went mechanically wrong. I shall do the navigating.

"Indeed, as you will see presently, there is very little navigating involved. Mostly at the start—we must only be sure we collide with nothing—and disturb nothing. When once we are beyond these planets—these crowding stars—there will be little to do."

I shook my head. "The thing is incomprehensible, Dr. Weatherby. That flight of your little model was almost gruesome."

"Sit down, Leonard. I don't want it to be gruesome. Strange—God knows there is nothing stranger than this into which, frankly, I stumbled during my researches. I'll try to make the fundamentals clear. It will lose its uncanny aspect then. You will find it all as coldly, scientifically precise as your navigation of the Fortieth North parallel."

He lighted my cigarro. "This journey we are about to make," he resumed, "involves but two factors. The first is the Eltonian principle of the neutralization of gravity. Sir Isaac Newton gave us fairly accurate formulae for the computation of the force of gravity. Einstein revised them a trifle, and attempted to give an entirely different conception of celestial mechanics.

"But no one—except by a rather vague theory of Einstein's—has ever told us what gravity really is. What is this force—what causes this force—which makes every material body in the universe attract every other body directly in proportion to the mass, and inversely as the square of the distance between them?

"Leonard, I think I can make it clear to you. There is passing between every material body, one with another, a constant stream of minute particles. A vortex of rotating particles loses some on one side; they fly off at a tangent, so to speak, and perhaps gains some upon the other side.

"Seventy-five years ago—about the time I was born, Leonard, they were talking of 'electrons,' 'radiant energy,' 'positive and negative disembodied electricity.' All different names for the same thing. The same phenomenon.

"All substance is of a very transitory reality. Everything is in a constant state of change. A substance builds up, or it breaks down. Or both simultaneously; or sometimes one and then the other."

"Electricity—" I began.

"Electricity," he interrupted, "as they used to know it, is in reality nothing but a concentrated stream of particles—electrons, intimes, call them what you will—moving from one substance to join another. Lightning is the same thing. Such a stream of particles, Leonard, is a tangible manifestation of gravitational force. They had it right before them, unrecognized. They called it 'magnetic force,' which meant nothing.

“HOW DO these streams create an attractive force? Conceive the earth and the moon. Between them flow a myriad stream of infinitesimal particles. Each particle in itself is a vortex—a whirlpool. The tendency of each vortex is to combine with the one nearest to it.

"They do combine, collide, whirl together and split apart. The whole—as a continuous, violently agitated stream—produces a continuous tendency toward combination over all the distance from the earth to the moon. The result—can't you see it?—must be a *force*, an inherent tendency pulling the earth and the moon together.

"Enough of such abstract theory! A while ago, I charged that little model of this building with an Elton ray. The model—and this building itself—are built of an ore of electrite, the one hundred and fortieth element, as they called it when it was isolated a few years ago.

"You saw the model of the building glow? Electrons and intimes were whirling around it. The force communicated to the tiny projectile lying inside. In popular language, 'its gravity was destroyed.' Technically it was made to hold within itself its own inherent gravitation—and the gravitation of everything else was cut off. It was, in the modern sense, magnetized—in an abnormal condition of matter."

"There was a red ray from the little

building," I said. "The projectile seemed to follow it."

"Exactly," he exclaimed. "That was the Elton Beta ray. It is flung straight out, whereas the Alpha ray is circular. The Beta is a stream of particles moving at over four hundred thousand miles a second. More than twice the speed of light!"

He chuckled. "When they discovered that, Leonard, the Einstein theories held good no longer. The ray bombarded and passed through the electrite wall of the room, and the projectile went with it—drawn by it, sucked along by the inherent force of the flying whirlpools. The projectile with its infinitely greater mass than the mass of the flying particles of the ray, picked up speed slowly. But its density was lessening.

"As it gained velocity, it lost density. Everything does that, Leonard. I intensified the rapidity of the changes, as I told you. We shall take it slower. Hours, for what you saw in minutes."

He tossed away his cigarro and stood up over the instrument table. "When we start, Leonard, here is exactly what will happen. Our gravity will be cut off. Not wholly. I have only gone to extremes in describing the theory.

"With a lessened attraction from the earth, the moon will draw us. And passing it, some other planet will pull us onward. And later, the stars themselves." He indicated his switches. "I can make the bow or the stern—or one side or the other—attractive or repulsive to whatever body may be nearest. And thus, in a measure, navigate. But that, Leonard, will be necessary only for a few hours, until we are well out beyond the stars."

He said it quite quietly, but I gasped. "Beyond the— In a few hours—"

"Yes," he said. "In our case, differing from my experiment with the model, we carry the Elton Beta ray, the 'red ray,' with us. The gravity principle we only use at the start, to avoid a possible collision. With the red ray preceding us, we will follow it. Ultimately—four hundred thousand miles a second.

"But the source of the ray, *being with us*, will give the ray constant acceleration, which we in turn will attain. Thus an endless chain of acceleration, you see? And by this I hope to reach the high speeds necessary. We are going very far, Leonard—"

"That model," I said, "grew larger. It

spread—or did I fancy it?—over all the sky."

He smiled again. "I have not much left to tell you, Leonard; but what there is—it is the simplest of all, yet the most astounding—"

Jim's voice interrupted us. "We're finished, Dr. Weatherby. Everything is aboard. It's nearly dawn. How about starting?"

THE DAWN had not yet come when we started. Dr. Weatherby's workmen were none of them in evidence. He had sent them away a few days before. They did not know his purpose with this vehicle; it was thought among them that he was making some attempt to reach the moon. It was not a startling adventure; it caused very little comment, for since Elton's discovery many such projects were under way. One, indeed, had already been successful.

A huge rocket—they called it that—had struck the moon with a quite visible flare; but it carried no passengers. Dr. Weatherby's activities occasioned a few daily remarks from the National Broadcasters of News, but little else.

There was, however, one of Dr. Weatherby's assistants whom he trusted with all his secrets, a young fellow called Mascar—a wordless, grave individual, quiet, deferential of manner, but with a quick alertness that bespoke unusual efficiency.

He had been on guard in the workshop since the workmen left. When Jim and I arrived, Dr. Weatherby had sent Mascar home for his much needed sleep; but he was back again—now before dawn—ready to stand at the Elton switch and send us away.

Dr. Weatherby shook hands with him, as we all gathered by the huge bull's-eye lens which was swung back to give ingress to the vehicle.

"You know what you are to do, Mascar. When we are well outside, throw off the Elton switch. Lock up the workshop and the house, and go home. Report to the International Bureau of News that if they care to, they can announce that Dr. Weatherby's vehicle has left the earth. You understand? Tell them they can assume, if they wish, that it will land safely on the moon."

"I will do that," said Mascar quietly. He shook hands with us all. And his fingers lightly touched Dolores's head. "Good-by, Miss Dolores."

"Good-by, Mascar. Good-by. You've

been very good to grandfather. I thank you, Mascar. You wait at home—we will be back soon."

"Yes," he said. He turned away, and I could see he was striving to hide his emotion.

He swung on his heel and crossed the room; and stood quiet, with a firm hand upon the Elton switch. Jim called impatiently: "Come on, everybody, let's get away."

For one brief instant my gaze through the forward opened end of the building caught a brief vista of the peaceful Hudson countryside. Hills, and trees in the starlight, my own earth—my home.

The huge convex door of the vehicle swung ponderously closed upon us.

"Come to the instrument room," said Dr. Weatherby.

We sat on the couch, huddled in a group. The bull's-eye windows, thick to withstand any pressure, were nevertheless ground in such a way that vision through them was crystal clear. The one beside me showed the interior of the workshop, with Mascar standing at the Elton switch.

He had already thrown it. I could not hear the hum. But I saw the current's effect upon Mascar. He was standing rigid, tense, and gripping the switch as though clinging. And then, with his other hand, he seized a discharging wire planted near at hand; so that the current left him comparatively unaffected.

Still I could feel nothing. My mind was whirling. What was it I expected to feel? I did not know. Dr. Weatherby had assured us we would undergo no terrifying experience; he seemed to have no fear for the girls. But how could he be sure?

The walls of the workshop now were luminous; Mascar's motionless figure was a black blob of shadow in the glowing, snapping interior of the room. Sparks were crackling out there. But here in the vehicle there was nothing save a heavy silence; and the air was cold, dank—tomblike.

THEN I felt the current; a tingling; a tiny, infinitely rapid tingling of the vehicle. It was not a vibration; the electric floor beneath my feet was solidly motionless. A tingling seeming to pervade its every atom.

Abruptly I realized my body was tingling! A whirl—a tiny throbbing; it brought a sense of nausea, and a giddiness. Invol-

untarily I stood up, trembling, reeling; but Dr. Weatherby sharply drew me back.

Alice and Dolores were clinging to each other. Jim muttered something incoherent; I met his smile, but it was a very weak, surprised, apprehensive smile.

I tried to relax. The nausea was passing. My head steadied. But the tingling grew more intense within me. It was a humming now; not audible; a humming I could feel, as though every minute cell of my body were throbbing.

It was not unpleasant after a moment. A peculiar sense of lightness was upon me, a sense of freedom; it grew to an exaltation. I was being set free! Unfettered at last, the chains that had bound me to earth were dropping away. But the mood upon me was more than an exaltation, an intoxication; a madness. I was conscious that Alice was laughing wildly.

I heard Dr. Weatherby's sharp command: "Don't do that! Look there; see the red ray?"

I clung to my reeling wits. Jim muttered: "Look at it!"

The interior of the workshop was a whirling fog crenched in blood. I could see the red streaming out the opened doorway.

"We're moving!" Alice cried. "Dolores—we've started!"

The enveloping room of the workshop seemed sliding backward. Not a tremor of the vehicle. Mascar's figure moved slowly backward and downward beyond my sight. The workshop walls were sliding past. The rectangle of its open end seemed expanding, coming toward us.

And then we were outside, in the starlit night. A dark hillside was dropping away; a silver ribbon of river was slipping beneath us, dropping downward, like a plummet falling.

The red ray had vanished. Dr. Weatherby's voice, calm now, with a touch of triumph to it that all had gone so well, said: "Mascar extinguished the red ray. We used it only for starting; we must start slowly, Leonard."

The river had vanished. A huge Polar liner—I recognized its group of colored lights as Ellison's, flying in the forty thousand-foot lane—showed overhead. It, too, seemed falling like a plummet. It flashed straight down past our window and disappeared.

Dr. Weatherby went to the instrument table. Time passed. It seemed only a mo-

ment or two. Dolores murmured: "Are we still moving, Jim? You must tell me. Tell me everything you see."

The room was stiflingly hot. We were all gasping.

"I've turned on the refrigeration," said Dr. Weatherby, "to counteract the heat of the friction of our passage through the atmosphere; but it will be cold enough presently. Come over here; don't you want to look down?"

We gathered over the instrument room's floor window. Stars were down there, white, red, and yellow stars in a field of dead black, a narrow, crescent edge of stars, and all the rest was a gigantic dull red surface. Visibly convex! Patches of dark, formless areas of clouds. An ocean—the vaguely etched lines of continents—the coastline of the Americas!

We were launched into space!

CHAPTER IV

Expansion!

THEN the vehicle cooled rapidly; soon we had the heaters going. The coldness of space enveloping us penetrated the vehicle's walls, but with the heaters we managed to be comfortable.

Dr. Weatherby sat at his instrument table. His chronometer there showed 5 a. m. We had started at 4 a. m. On one of the distance dials the miles were registering in units of a thousand. The dial-pointer was nearing XX 6. Six thousand miles.

Dr. Weatherby glanced up as I appeared. Alice and Dolores, and Jim with them, had gone astern to prepare a broth. We were all of us still feeling rather shaky; though the sense of lightness had worn off.

Dr. Weatherby had a chart on the table. It showed our solar system. The sun was at its center, and the planetary orbits in concentric circles around it. The planets—and our own moon—and a few of the larger comets and asteroids were all shown, their positions given progressively for each hour beginning at our starting time.

"I am heading—this way, Leonard. Holding the general plane in which the planets lie." His finger traced a line from the earth, past the moon, past Mars. Jupiter and Saturn lay over to one side, and Neptune to the other. Uranus was far on the opposite side, beyond the sun.

Dr. Weatherby added: "The moon is

drawing us now. But I shall shortly turn a neutral side toward it, and Mars will draw us. We are more than a freely falling body, Leonard. We are being pulled downward."

I sat beside him. "What is our velocity now?"

He gestured toward a dial, an ingenious affair. He had already explained its workings, the lessening rate of the earth's gravitational pull shown by a hair-spring balance as a figure on the dial.

"Three thousand miles an hour, Leonard." But as I watched, the figure moved to 4; and then to 5, 6 and 7.

The moon, nearly full, lay below us—ahead of us, white, glittering and cold, with the black firmament and the stars clustering about it. We were falling bow down. Overhead, above our blunt stern, the giant crescent earth hung across the firmament. It was still dull red; its configurations of land and water were plainly visible. A silver sunlight edged it.

"Ah! The sun, Leonard!" Abruptly we emerged from the earth's conical shadow into the sunlight. But the heavens remained black; the stars blazed with a cold, white gleam as before. And behind us was the white sun with its corona of flame leaping from it.

IHAVE said we were falling—our projectile falling bow down, like a plummet. Gazing through the windows it seemed so. But the effect was psychological. I could as readily picture us on a level, proceeding onward.

It was as though we were poised within a giant hollow globe of black glass, star incusted. There could be no standards of up, or down; it was all purely as the mind chanced to conceive it. But within the vehicle itself—its soundless, vibrationless, level floor beneath our feet—a complete sense of normality remained.

"Dr. Weatherby," I said, "that model—you remember—it grew gigantic. But we—we are still the size at which we started?"

For an hour past, a thousand questions had been seething in my mind. This navigation of space was clear enough. All my life scientists had been discussing it. We were moving now at a velocity of some twelve thousand miles an hour. But what was that? Less than the crawling of an ant using the Equator of the earth as a race track! Twelve thousand miles an hour

—or twelve billion—would get us nowhere among the distant stars in a lifetime!

Dr. Weatherby answered my spoken question: "We are only very little larger, Leonard, than when we started. An infinitesimal fraction, for our velocity is nothing as yet. I'll use the Elton Beta ray once we get farther out."

He turned to his switches. Through the window I saw the firmament swing slightly. He was navigating, heading for some distant realm beyond all the stars that we could see, all the stars that could exist out there. This tiny vehicle, threading its way. How did he—how could he—possibly know his way?

I asked him bluntly, and he looked up from his chart with a smile. "Leonard, in five minutes I could tell you every remaining fundamental of the laws which are governing us. I will tell you—but I want Jim to hear it also. And I'm absorbed now in getting out past the asteroid. A little later, I'll make it clear."

He twinkled. "You'll realize, Leonard, that your question is unnecessary. We'll have no difficulty in finding our way—go in and hurry up that broth. I'm hungry."

WE DROPPED past the moon at a distance of perhaps a hundred thousand miles. We were then some two hundred and forty thousand miles from earth. It was nearly noon, with the earth time-standard of Dr. Weatherby's home. We had been traveling eight hours; constantly accelerating, our velocity at noon had reached a thousand miles a minute.

The moon, as we passed it, floated upward with a quite visible movement. It was a magnificent sight, though the smallest of telescopes on earth brought it visually nearer than it now was.

We ate our first meal; slept; settled down to the routine of life on the vehicle. Another twelve hours passed. Our velocity had reached then a thousand miles a second. But that was only the one hundred and eighty-sixth part of the velocity of light!

We were now—with an average rate of five hundred miles a second—some twenty-one million and six hundred thousand miles from earth. Halfway to Mars! But in four hours more the red planet floated upward past us. Dr. Weatherby kept well away—a million miles, his instrument showed as he measured the planet's visual diameter.

We had now reached a velocity of some twenty thousand miles a second.

"I shall hold it at that," Dr. Weatherby said. "It's too crowded in here—too dangerous."

We traversed the asteroid region at about that rate. It was a tedious, tense voyage—so dangerous that for nearly five hours one of us was always at the tower window, to avoid a possible collision. The belt in here between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter was thick-strewn with asteroids. But none came near enough to endanger us.

We crossed Jupiter's orbit. Again Dr. Weatherby accelerated, to one hundred thousand miles a second now, but it was over an hour before we crossed Saturn's orbit, four hundred million miles farther on. We went no faster for a time.

At this velocity it was tedious. Uranus's orbit at seventeen hundred million miles from our sun; Neptune at twenty-seven hundred million. And then that last outpost of the solar system, Xavion, discovered in 1963, at thirty-eight hundred million miles. The planet was at the opposite point of its orbit. We could not see it. Our own sun had long since dwindled into invisibility.

At last we were away! Launched into the realms of outer stellar space, plunging onward at a hundred thousand miles a second. But ahead of us the giant stars showed no change! As imperturbably distant in their aspect as when we started!

We, Jim and I, had had many hours of futile discussion; some in our room, but more in the little tower where we sat on watch, gazing ahead at the motionless stars, our eyes at the small search-telescopes with which we swept the space into which the projectile was dropping.

We had seen many asteroids, but none near enough to be dangerous; and we passed the hours wondering what it was Dr. Weatherby had to tell us. How did he know where he was going? What was his direction? In all this chaos of immeasurable unfathomable distance, of what avail to attempt any set direction? By what points could he navigate? It was unthinkable.

And more unthinkable—we had attained a maximum velocity of only one hundred thousand miles a second—only a little more than half the velocity of light. The *nearest* star, we knew to be over four light-years away. Light, traveling one hundred and

eighty-six thousand, four hundred miles a second, took 4.35 years to reach that star. We would take some eight years!

And this was the *nearest star!* Others were a thousand—tens of thousands—a hundred thousand—times farther! Eighty thousand years—even eight hundred thousand years—we would have to travel to reach the distant nebulae! And even then, what realms of dark and empty space might lie beyond! It was unthinkable.

"He'll explain when he gets ready," said Jim.

AND he did. He called us into the instrument room, short'y after we crossed the orbit of Xavion. He spoke with a slow, precise phrasing—the careful phrasing of a scientist intent upon conveying his exact meaning.

"I think I told you once, Leonard, that as a matter of actuality I stumbled upon this thing—these laws which are to govern our flight from now onward. They are definite laws, inherent in all matter.

"We are about to undergo an experience stranger, I think, than any man has ever undergone before. But not because of any intricate devices with which I have equipped this vehicle. Not at all. Merely the progressive workings of natural laws.

"I have experimented with them for some years. I think I understand them, though I am not sure. But their character—the actual, tangible result of what shortly will happen to us—that, I understand perfectly."

"What are the laws?" Jim demanded.

He gestured. "In a moment, Jim. I will say first that all this is merely a question of velocity. Matter, as it exists everywhere—all material substances—are as you well know, in varying states of velocity.

"And as the velocity changes, so does every other attribute of the substance. A group of electrons inherent in a lightning bolt—the intimates of a flying beam of light—are very different in temporary character from those of a bar of iron. But only different by virtue of their temporary velocity.

"Do I make myself plain? Any substance—for a very brief period—tends to maintain its integrity—its independent existence. But countless forces and conditions are assailing it. Wood burns; or rots. Iron rusts. The human body—a conglomeration of cells loosely clinging into a semblance

of an independent entity—grows old, dies, disintegrates.

"Nothing is in a permanent state, a permanent condition of substance. The change may be slowly progressive—or it may be sudden and violent.

"I'll be more specific. The Elton ray, acting upon the sensitive intimates of electrone, brings a sudden—and to that extent, unnatural—change.

"An added velocity was imparted to this vehicle and we left the earth. The Elton current is operating the vehicle now. We have reached—or very nearly reached—the limit of velocity we can attain by using the force of celestial gravity—one hundred thousand miles a second.

"As I told you, however, we can now use the Elton Beta ray. Our vehicle, carrying the source of the ray forward, will presently attain a velocity—" He stopped, smiled gently, and added: "To our finite minds, it will be infinite. There will presently be no standards by which we can conceive it."

I would have interrupted him with a question, but he raised his hand. "In a moment, Leonard—then I want you and Jim to ask me any questions you like. All this that I have said, is prefatory. The question is one solely of velocity. The rest is automatic. The natural laws governing the attributes of matter in relation to its velocity are these:

"First: A substance whose velocity is increased loses density proportionally. For instance, our vehicle. I consider it as a whole, you understand. As its velocity increases, it becomes less dense in substance. Comparatively less dense—everything is comparative, of course. We ourselves have undergone the same change."

"A loss of density!" I exclaimed. "Then of course, expanding—becoming more diffuse—"

"Exactly, Leonard. And that is the second law. Our *size* is growing directly in proportion to our growing velocity."

I grasped it now. An infinite velocity had suddenly been imparted to that model of the vehicle. It had expanded, like a puff of vapor, over all the sky! Dr. Weatherby went on in his same careful voice:

"These two changes—a loss of density—a gain of size—have been going on ever since we left the earth. They amount to little as yet. But presently I am going to increase our velocity immeasurably. Exter-

nal objects—the stars out there—you will see the change when you look at them!

"Do you understand me? The principle is obvious. A cold, dark star is small and dense. And moves slowly. A giant star is hot; of little density; and it has an enormous velocity." He paused. Abruptly Jim said:

"I think we understand you, Dr. Weatherby. With this—infinite velocity, we will pass beyond the stars. And growing in size—to be gigantic—"

"So that, proportionately, the stars will shrink to atoms," said Alice.

JIM nodded. "Yes. I understand that. It sort of makes you gasp—"

"But," I exclaimed, "Dr. Weatherby, you have held communication with other living minds—other beings—somewhere out here. Dolores's thought-waves."

"Yes," he said. "Thought-waves are infinitely faster than light. No one has ever—"

"I mean," I went on, "we are hoping to reach those other beings. But how—this is what Jim and I can't understand—how do you know where you are going? Might we not be heading directly away? Or perhaps Dolores is receiving the thought-waves progressively stronger—and thus guiding us—"

"No," Dolores spoke up. "It is difficult to receive the thoughts. There has been no time since we left—" She stopped, and added: "That makes me realize—didn't Alice leave us a moment ago?"

"Yes," said Jim. "It's time for lunch."

Dolores left her grandfather's side. "I must go help her."

Alice had slipped quietly away. Dolores now joined her in the galley.

Dr. Weatherby went on: "I remember remarking to you, Leonard, that there would be no need for navigation. We will grow, with an infinite velocity, to an infinitely gigantic size. Conversely, all this—"

He waved his hand at the window—the firmament of white blazing suns—"All this immeasurable space we see out there will shrink to a size infinitely small. It will, later on, be smaller than our vehicle itself, smaller than my body—my hand—"

His voice rose to a sudden vehemence: "Don't you get the conception now? All this, our celestial space, will shrink to a pinhead—an atom. We will emerge from it into some tremendously greater empti-

ness—some greater space. As much greater as the space of a bedroom interior would be to the head of a pin lying on a bureau! What matter whether we emerge upon one side of the pinhead or the other? The distance will be infinitesimal!"

What matter indeed? I clung to the conception. So simple, yet so vast! And suddenly there sprang before me a vision of our little earth back there—already invisible—circling its tiny orbit, a mere nothing in the cosmos of infinite nature! An electron! Less than that—the merest infinite particle of an electron.

This whole universe of stars, merely a cluster of tiny particles, clinging together to form an atom of something else! And trillions of such atoms making up the head of a pin, lying upon someone's bureau!

Dr. Weatherby's voice quieted: "Suppose ultimately, we were to cross our atom and emerge in exactly the wrong direction; we would find no vastly great emptiness, but merely other atoms like our own, going downward, so to speak, into the pin's head, instead of emerging from it.

"But that cannot happen. Nature, in all its natural phenomena, always chooses the path of least resistance. We could not increase our velocity without adequate space to traverse, nor increase our size without adequate emptiness to fill.

"You see! We may be going wrongly now. It makes no difference—the ultimate distance will be infinitesimal. But I know that by all natural laws we are seeking greater spaces. We will find—beyond these stars—an infinitely greater emptiness.

"Our size ultimately will fill it. But we will have turned to seek an emptiness still vaster, until at last, freed from these clusters of substance which themselves are clinging together to form that pinhead, we will emerge—"

CHAPTER V

Emerging From Infinite Smallness

ALICE and I were sitting in the small round tower that projected some six feet above the top of the vehicle, near its forward end. Through the windows here—eight of them, and one above us—the huge, inverted black bowl of the heavens lay fully exposed.

Myriad swarms of stars were thick-strewn everywhere. Freed from the distortion of

the earth's atmosphere, they blazed like balls of molten fire, white, blue-white, yellow, and red; red giants and dwarfs, the old and the young, occasionally a comet, with its millions of miles of crescent, fan-shaped tail.

Clusters of stars appeared, blended by distance; binaries, revolving one upon the other; multiple stars; single, white-hot suns, blazing victorious with their maturity; and far off the spiral nebulae—patches of star-dust, suns being born anew, or complete, separate universes. It was a glorious, awesome sight!

The red Elton Beta ray now preceded us. From here in the tower we could see it, flashing ahead like a dim searchlight beam. We had picked up velocity rapidly, had reached now some three hundred and sixty thousand miles a second, nearly twice the speed of light. Yet in all this scene—these whirling stars at which we were plunging—there was no visible movement. To an ant, crawling along a hillside ledge, the distant mountains seem coming no nearer.

The dials showed our velocity to have reached very nearly one light-year per hour. No longer was it possible to use the unit of miles; our instruments showed now only light-years. Light travels 186,400 miles a second, and in our earthly year there are 31,536,000 seconds. A light-year then—the distance light can speed in a year—represents 5,883,000,000 miles. This sum now was our smallest unit of measurement.

We were now 4.25 light-years from earth. Alpha Centauri, nearest of all the stars to earth at 4.35 light-years, loomed ahead of us. I stood at one of the forward windows regarding it. Two stars it is, in reality, for it is a binary.

Its components were beginning visually to separate now; two white blazing suns, millions of miles apart, slowly revolving upon a common center with a revolution which took thousands of years.

Yet, as I stood there I fancied I could see them turning! We were heading directly for them; they were leaping up out of the void. There was a slow but visible movement throughout the firmament now. The stars in advance of us were opening up, spreading apart, drifting past our side windows, closing together again behind us. Dr. Weatherby was at my elbow.

"I shall keep away from Centauri," he

remarked. "And presently—we must go faster, Leonard."

HE WENT back to his instrument table. The red Beta ray preceding us seemed to intensify a trifle; the firmament shifted slightly as our direction was altered. As I stood there, in ten minutes or so, the twin blazing suns of Alpha Centauri came up and swept past us.

I hastened to a side window to watch them. Blazing giants they were, floating off there a million miles away, each of them so large that our own huge sun would have been a match flame beside them.

But suddenly I wondered, blinked and stared with my breathing stopped by the shock of it. Were these indeed blazing giants a million miles off there? Or were they white points of fire a mile away? Abruptly my whole viewpoint changed. I saw these stars, all the blazing white points in the firmament, not as giant suns unfathomably distant, but only as small glowing eyes quite close.

These were gleaming eyes in a black night—gleaming eyes close around me! Eyes no larger than my own! Our vehicle—myself—gigantic! I realized it now. All this unfathomable distance around me had shrunk; I saw our giant vehicle floating very slowly, very sedately onward between the staring, crowding eyes.

Dr. Weatherby smiled when I told him. "It is all in the viewpoint, Leonard. In my computations I shall cling to the viewpoint of earth. Miles, then light-years. Earthly standards of time, distance, and velocity. But shortly we shall have to abandon them entirely. Sit down, Leonard. I want to talk to you. Where is Dolores?"

"In the galley, I think." I sat at the instrument table beside him.

"I don't want Dolores to hear me. I've been wondering whether I should try and have her communicate again with the outside. It has been a month since we did that."

This, almost more than any other aspect of our adventure, interested me. "Tell me about those thought-communications, Dr. Weatherby."

"There is nothing else to tell. There seem to be two—shall we call them people? A young man and a girl. They are in dire distress. The man is intelligent—more so than we are, I should judge. He was surprised to have us answer him."

"Does he know where we are?"

"No, I think not. But when I told him, he seemed to understand. Dolores gets, not words, but ideas, which naturally she can only translate into our English words. But, Leonard, I do not conceive these beings will be physically of an aspect very different from ourselves. We are—so close to them—"

"Close!"

He smiled. "Quite close, Leonard. One of them might be holding us—our whole universe—on the palm of his hands. An inch from his thumb, a foot from his ear. I was thinking of that, when trying to fathom the possible velocity of thought-waves. It's all in the viewpoint. His thoughts would not have to travel far to reach us. His brain gives orders to his muscles in a fraction of a second over a far greater distance."

THE dials showed us to be ten thousand light-years from earth, our velocity fifty light-years an hour, when Dr. Weatherby called to us all to assemble in the instrument room. Days, or what would have been days on earth, had passed since we started.

I had lost all count, though upon Dr. Weatherby's charts the relative time-values were recorded. We ate irregularly, slept when we could.

Dr. Weatherby was tired almost to the point of exhaustion, for though Jim, Alice and I alternated on watch in the tower—Dr. Weatherby remained almost constantly at his instrument table.

Ten thousand light-years from earth! But ahead of us the star-points stretched unending.

Dr. Weatherby faced us. "We are not going fast enough. I have not dared, but now I must. I want you all to understand. I have had the red Beta ray at very nearly its weakest intensity. I am going to turn it on full, to the intensity which I used for the model.

"There will be a shock, but only momentarily. You, Leonard, you go to the tower. If anything too large or too dense for safety seems coming at us, you can warn me."

He smiled. "But we will encounter nothing of the sort, I'm sure. I'll sit here at the controls. The rest of you—I suggest you stay with me for a time."

I went to the tower. Ahead of us was the faint stream of the red ray. The star-points were floating past us; opening to

our advance, streaming past, overhead, to the sides, and beneath, and closing after us. Even with my greater viewpoint, the points of fire were passing swiftly now. Some were very near; they seemed like white sparks. I fancied I could have reached out and struck them aside with my hand.

Dr. Weatherby's voice reached me as I sat in the tower. "Ready!" I seemed to hear, or to feel, a hum, a trembling. I saw the Beta ray flashing ahead of us with a deeper, more intense red, but for a moment it reeled before my gaze. The nausea I had had at starting from earth recurred. I closed my eyes, but only momentarily, for the sickness passed as before.

Dr. Weatherby's voice called up to me: "All right, Leonard?"

"Yes," I responded.

The scene outside my windows was a chaos, flashing points of fire. How could we avoid them? Showers of white sparks rushing at us. I tried to shout a warning, but instead I laughed with a touch of madness. Avoid them! Millions of them were already colliding with us! Sparks showering impotently against our sleek electrite sides.

And then I realized that these sparks, these stars, were passing through us! A steady, flashing stream of them. I could see their luminous white points gleaming within the vehicle as the stream flowed through.

Stars no longer. Why these were mere imponderable electrons! Some were dark, shining only by reflected light-worlds like our earth. But I knew they were not imponderable bodies passing through the density of our vehicle. The reverse.

It was we who were the less dense. Our vehicle comparatively was a puff of vapor, through which these tiny bodies were passing.

A stream of electricity, a myriad electrons flowing through a copper wire, are not less dense than the wire. The electrons are the densities; imponderable—of a mass imperceptible—because they are infinitely small. But of a tremendous density; and it is the wire which is ponderous.

So now with us. I sat bewildered, for how long I cannot say. I heard at intervals Dr. Weatherby's voice: "Light years a hundred thousand." "One million." "Ten." "One hundred million."

We were a hundred million light-years from earth! The flashing points of fire

continued to stream past. But there was a change, a thinning in advance of us; a clustering white radiance behind.

I sat motionless, tense. It might have been minutes, or an hour. I found Dr. Weatherby beside me, and I turned to him. I was stiff, cramped, and cold. I tried to smile. "We're all right—still, Dr. Weatherby."

"Look," he said. "We're beyond them."

A darkness loomed ahead. To the sides the brilliant starpoints seemed rushing together; clustering to form other, fewer white points. And the whole sweeping backward into the seething radiance which lay behind us. Soon it was all back there—a shrinking white mist of fire; billions of seething particles of star dust shrinking together.

"Watch it, Leonard. It is our universe. Watch it go!"

We turned to the rear window. Everywhere now was empty blackness, except directly behind us. A silver mist hung back there in the void. It was dwindling. Then I saw it as a tiny, flattened, lens-shaped silver disk. But only for an instant, for it was shrinking very fast.

A lens-shaped disk! A point of white fire! A single faint star—a single entity! No, not a star—nothing but an electron!

For a breath I realized how near it was! A single tiny white spark, trembling outside our window. I could have pinched it with my thumb and finger.

It trembled, vanished into blackness!

A DAY passed, a day to us because we ate our meals, and slept. But to the worlds, universes outside our windows, congealing behind us into single points, winking and vanishing into an oblivion of space and time, this day of ours was an eternity!

Our dials had long since become useless, a billion light-years from our starting point. A billion billion, and even that dwindling with our changing standards and viewpoint into a space we could have held in our cupped hands. Of what use to try and measure it! Or even conceive it!

The black, empty firmament had only remained empty for a moment. Ahead and off to the sides other luminous points showed. For hours Dr. Weatherby and I sat together watching them.

There was a moment when a single star gleamed far ahead. But soon it was a spiral of whirling star dust. It spread to the sides as we leaped at it. And every

myriad particle of it suddenly showed as a tiny swirling spiral mist of yet other particles.

They spread gigantic, each of them a nebula—a universe. One of them whirled directly through us, a white stream of tumbling radiant dust. Behind us it shrank again to a single point. And the billion other points shrank into one. And the one faded and was gone.

A night of this. Was our own universe an electron? I realized it could hardly have been that. Call it an intime. If we had encountered it now, it would have been too small for our sight. The tiniest swirling particle flashing through us now was composed of billions of universes as large as our own.

The night passed. We sat calmly eating our morning meal. The human mind adjusts itself so readily! Physical hunger is more tangible than the cosmos of the stars. Dr. Weatherby gestured toward the windows where the points of luminous mists momentarily were very remote.

"I should say that we—this vehicle is larger than an intime now. Possibly larger than electrons.

"Soon we will find ourselves among the atoms—and the molecules. There will then be a change. Very radical.

"A little more coffee, Alice, please. Presently I am going to try and erect our electro-telescope; then I must get a little sleep." He seemed, indeed, upon the verge of exhaustion.

THERE was a slow change all that day. These glowing things we were passing—universes, stars—or electrons or intimes, call them what you will—they seemed now more uniform; those at a distance, more like opaque globules, gray. And they seemed almost solid and cold. Yet it was the illusion of distance only, for we passed through several of them—streams of white fire mist as always before.

At noon a black void of emptiness surrounded us. It was the longest, the most gigantic we had encountered, an hour of it.

Then again a point showed. It spread to the sides of us. But it was different. I could not say how. It was vague—gray. It streamed past, very distant on both sides, and beneath us. At one moment I fancied it appeared as a distant, gigantic enveloping curtain, gray and vague. But then I

thought it was a film of tiny globules, solid entities, unradiant.

I called Dr. Weatherby. But before he arrived, the grayness had all slipped behind us. He saw it as a gray, formless blob. It congealed to a point. And then it vanished.

"That was an atom, Leonard." His voice had an excitement to it. "That was our first sight of anything of the new realm large enough to have an identity. Substance, Leonard! The substance of which our universe, our earth, is so infinitesimal a part. Everything we see now will be identical with it. The atoms! We are emerging!"

THEY aroused me from sleep some hours later, called me excitedly. I found them all in the instrument room crowded around Dolores who was sitting on the couch, her hands pressed against her forehead. Jim cried:

"She's getting thought-waves, Len! Some one is communicating with her!"

Dr. Weatherby was murmuring: "What is it, Dolores? Do you get it clearer now?"

"Yes. Some one is thinking: '*We can see you! We see you coming!*'"

"Yes, Dolores. What else?"

"That's all. '*We're watching you! We can see you coming!*'"

Jim murmured in a low voice: "The man on the cliff! The young man and the girl in distress!"

Dolores shook her head. "No. This is someone else. Closer. Stronger. The thoughts are very strong."

"Can't you see anything, Dolores?" Dr. Weatherby touched her. Shook her gently. "Try, child. Tell them to think about themselves."

"I see—" She stopped; then stammered. "I see—a light. A very big—light. There are people—"

"Men?"

"Yes. Men. Three or four men. Sitting near a light. It shines so white. It hurts—" But she put her hand, not to her eyes but to her temple. "I'm thinking to them, '*Why can't I see you? I want to see you!*' Wait. Now, I understand! He, someone thinks at me, '*Try your telescope! Haven't you a telescope? Soon you will see us. We have seen you for a very long time!*'"

Alice blurted out: "How long, Dolores? Ask them that."

"No," commanded Dr. Weatherby. "That's absurd! Dolores—"

But her hands had dropped from her forehead. "It's gone. I'm tired. My head is tired—"

Jim drew me to the window. "Look there! I was on watch. When this began appearing I called everybody. But then suddenly Dolores began getting the thoughts."

THE scene outside was wholly changed. Beneath us, to the sides and ahead, a grayness stretched, a continuous, solid grayness. Elusive, formless, colorless; and I could not guess how distant it might be save that it stretched beyond the limits of my vision. But ahead and above us, the scene was not gray. A vague, luminous quality tinged the blackness up there. Luminous, as though a vague light were reflected.

There was no visible movement anywhere. But presently, as one staring at a great motionless cloud will see that its shape is changing, I began to see changes. The flat gray solidity was not flat, but hugely convex. And it was slowly turning. Huge convolutions of it were slowly as a cloud bank, taking new forms. And all of it was slowly moving backward.

Then we came to the end of it. Black emptiness ahead. Behind us was a gray-massed, globular cloud. Then another, its twin fellow, came rolling up beneath us in front—spread to the sides—shrank again behind us.

"Molecules," said Dr. Weatherby. "See how they're dwindling!"

I saw presently, swarms of them, always smaller. And ahead of us they seemed congealed into a gray solidity—a substance, it was passing beneath us, and to the sides.

Again quite unexpectedly, my viewpoint changed. I saw our vehicle plunging upward—its pointed bow held upward at an angle. A solidity was around us; to the sides, gray, smooth curtains; overhead a glow of white in a dead black void.

A black void? My heart leaped. That was not blackness up there above our bow! It was blue! Color! The first sight of color! A blue vista of distance, with light up there! Light and air!

Beside us the smooth gray walls were smooth no longer. Huge jagged rocks and boulders, a precipice! We seemed in some immense canyon, slowly floating upward.

But it was a dwindling canyon. And then abruptly we emerged from it.

I saw its walls close together beneath us. An area of gray was down there; gray, with a white light on it. The light made sharp inky shadows on a tumbling naked waste of rock.

The gray area was shrinking to a blob—a blob of gray shining in a brilliant light.

The scene now was again wholly different. Overhead, like a huge flat disk of sun, was the light. Directly beneath us, stretching to the horizon on both sides, lay an undulating white level surface. The single blob of gray was down there on it. And off in the distance, where the surface seemed abruptly to end, gigantic blurs loomed into the blue sky.

Dr. Weatherby was calling me to the tower. I found him trembling with eagerness. "Leonard, I have the electro-telescope working. Look through it."

I gazed first through the front and overhead tower windows. The white disk filled a perceptible area of the sky. But it was not like a sun; it seemed rather a smooth, flat disk with light behind it, a white disk with a dark, narrow rim. Clear, cloudless sky was everywhere else. And very far away, behind and above the white disk, I saw a gigantic, formless, colorless shape towering into the blue of distance.

"Look through the telescope, Leonard!"

I gazed upward through the electro-telescope. Its condensing lens narrowed the whole gigantic scene into a small circular field of vision. I gasped. Wonderment, awe swept over me. The blue sky was the open space of a tremendously large room; I saw plainly its ceiling, floor and distant walls.

The giant shape was a man. He was bending forward over a table—the table was under me; the man's hunched shoulders and peering face were above me.

For an instant my mind failed to grasp it all. I swung the telescope field downward, sidewise, and up again. And then at last I understood. This was a room, with men grouped at this nearer end of it around the table—men of human form, intent faces framed with long, white hair.

The undulating surface over which our vehicle was floating, was a slide of what seemed glass, a clear glass slide with a speck of gray rock lying in its center. And the white disk over us in the sky was the lower, small lens of the microscope through which these men were examining us!

CHAPTER VI

The New Realm

TWENTY days! So full of strange impressions I scarcely know how to recount them. Yet, after such a trip, they were days of almost normality.

Our vehicle beneath that microscope had grown rapidly in size. And with our expanding visual viewpoint—and the nearness of solid, motionless objects—its velocity seemed infinitely small. It barely floated past the microscope, settling to the floor of that huge room; and with a normal proportionate size, the Beta ray shut off, it came to rest.

They crowded around us—old men, loose-robed, and with flowing white hair; seamed, smooth, hairless faces; stern, but kindly; and eyes very bright and intelligent.

They crowded around us, at first timid, then friendly; talking together excitedly in a strange, liquid tongue.

Dr. Weatherby tried to greet them and to shake hands. They understood neither his words, nor the gesture. But in a moment they comprehended. And shook hands—all of them with each of us—very solemnly.

The room had oval openings for windows; light was outside, but it seemed rather dim. Presently one of the men tried to herd us along the wall of the room.

"No!" said Dr. Weatherby. "Don't go! We must stay in the vehicle!"

But when we turned toward it the men resisted us with a sudden stubborn force.

"Don't!" I shouted. "Jim, stop that! We'd better go with them!" The old white-haired men seemed to have gone into a sudden panic of violence. They were pushing, shoving us. They obviously had little strength; but the commotion would draw others from outside.

We yielded, and they herded us down the long room. A panel slid aside. We crossed a long, narrow viaduct—a metallic bridge with high parapet sides. We seemed to be a hundred feet in the air.

I caught a vista of low-roofed buildings; verdure—giant flowers on the roofs; streets down there; and off in the distance a line of hills.

The air was soft and pleasant. Overhead was a blue sky, with gray-white masses of clouds. There seemed to be no sun. The light was stronger than twilight, but flat, shadowless.

At the opposite end of the viaduct the ground seemed rising to a hill. A small mound-shaped building was there—a house with a convex roof which had a leveled platform on one end, a platform banked with vivid flowers.

It seemed a two-storied building, built of smooth, dull-gray blocks. Balconies girdled it. There were windows, and a large lower doorway, with a broad flight of circular stairs leading up the hill to it.

Our viaduct led us into the second floor of the house. We entered upon a large room, an oval, two-storied room so that we found ourselves upon a sort of second-story platform, midway from floor to ceiling.

Low couches were here—a row of them with sliding panels of what might have been paper dividing them. The platform—this second story—was some thirty feet broadly oval. It had a low encircling railing; a spiral staircase led downward to the main floor of the apartment.

I saw furniture down there of strange, unnatural design; a metallic floor splashed with vivid mosaic pattern; a large gray frame, ornately carved, with a great number of long strings stretched across it, strings of different length. It seemed not unlike an enormous harp lying horizontal.

Narrow windows, draped with dark gauze, were up near the ceiling. They admitted a dim light. This whole interior was dim, cool and silent. A peace, a restfulness pervaded it. And our captors—if captors they were—seemed more like proud hosts. They were all smiling.

But when they left a moment later, I fancied that they barred the door after them.

“WELL,” said Jim. “I can’t say but that this is very nice. Let’s look things over and then go to bed. I’m tired out, I can tell you that—say, Dolores, it just occurred to me—these fellows can’t understand a word we say. But you were thinking thoughts to them awhile ago—and you understood each other. Why don’t you try that now?”

It had occurred to me also. Why had these people understood Dolores’s thoughts, when her words were incomprehensible? Were thoughts then the universal language? Tiny vibrations which each human brain amplified, transformed, into its own version of what we call words? It seemed so.

Dolores was clinging closely to Alice’s hand. In these unfamiliar surroundings she was at a loss to move alone.

“I did,” she answered Jim. “I tried—but there was so much noise—they could not hear me.”

“Try now,” said Dr. Weatherby.

“I will. I am.” She stood motionless, hands to her forehead. There was a long silence. “I think—yes, someone thought to me, ‘*The Man of Language will come to you.*’”

“Is that all, Dolores?”

“Yes—that’s all. It’s gone.”

“The Man of Language!” Jim exclaimed. “An interpreter! Dolores, what about that young man and girl who were in distress? They were out here, weren’t they?”

“I don’t know. I never get their thoughts now.”

“Try.”

“I have tried. They may—get mine. I can’t say. But they never answer.”

THEY brought us food, meals at intervals, strange food which now I shall not attempt to describe. But we found it palatable; soon we grew to like it.

Then a man came, whom afterward we learned to call the Man of Language. He wore a single garment, a queerly flaring robe, beneath which his naked legs showed.

His face was smooth, hairless. But the hair on his head was luxuriant. His head, upon a stringy neck, was large, with a queer distended look, and with veins bulging upon his forehead.

Yet withal, he was not grotesque. A dignity sat upon him. His dark eyes were extraordinarily brilliant and restless. His smile of thin, pale lips was kindly, friendly. He shook hands with each of us. But he did not speak at first. He sat among us, with those restless eyes regarding, observing our every detail.

We soon found he knew no word of our language. He had come to learn it, to have us teach it to him. We were made aware, later, that all these people, compared to ourselves, had memories extraordinarily retentive. But this man—he called himself Ren—was even for them, exceptional. His vocation was to learn, and to remember.

He began with simple objects: eyes, nose, and mouth; hands—a table, a bed. As though he were a child, we pointed out

our eyes, and named them; one eye, two eyes, a finger, two, three, four fingers.

It seemed like a game. When we told him once, it was never forgotten. But it was a game which to us, even under such conditions, soon became irksome. We were impatient. There was so much we wanted to know. And though we never tried to leave this building in which we were housed, it was obvious that we were virtually prisoners.

Ren came after every time of sleep. He stayed hours; his patience, his persistence were inexhaustible. We took turns with him—each of us for an hour or two at a time. Occasionally Dolores would try to make something clear by thinking it. It helped. But he did not like it. It was necessary for him virtually to go into a trance before he could receive Dolores' thoughts.

Gradually Ren was talking to us, broken sentences at first, then with a flow surprisingly voluble. He used queerly precise phrases—occasionally a sentence inverted; and with a strange accent of pronunciation indescribable.

We had tried to question him when first he could talk. But he avoided telling us anything we wanted to know, save that once, at Dr. Weatherby's insistence, he assured us that our vehicle was safe. And that the small fragment of rock beneath the microscope—that tiny gray speck which held our universe, our earth—was under guard so that no harm could come to it.

This was a city, the capital, the head city, of a nation. Its people had lived here on this globe since the dawn of their history, ascended from the beasts which even now roamed the air, the caves, forests, and the sea.

REN smiled at us. "You, too," he said. "I can realize that you are of an origin the same."

He did indeed think we were of a human type very primitive. The men of science who had seen us coming out of infinite smallness beneath their microscope, had remarked upon it.

The small protuberance in the corner of our eyes, the remains of the beasts' third eyelid, the shape of our heads, our almost pointed ears—I noticed that his own were very nearly circular—our harsh voices; our thick, stocky, muscular bodies were indications that they remarked on.

We discussed it. But Jim interrupted. "How did your men of science know that we were coming out of that piece of gray rock?"

It had been partly by chance. The fragment of rock had been a portion of the interior wall of a room wherein scientific experiments were being made. Ren used our words, "Experiments in physics and chemistry."

One of the scientists had found himself receiving strange thought-waves. Ren described them. They were Dolores's thoughts. The scientists traced them with measuring instruments to the wall of the room, but could be no more exact than that.

Then, later, from a tiny protuberance of the wall, a glow was observed. It proved to be a sudden radio-activity; this protuberance of gray stone had become radiant. Electrons were streaming off from it. The scientists chipped it off the huge block of stone of which it was so small a part, and put it under a microscope. It was violently radio-active. And from it they observed a stream of red.

"Our Beta ray," Dr. Weatherby exclaimed. "Our voyage, the disturbance we set up made the substance give off its electrons."

"Yes," nodded Ren. "They think so. They examined it beneath the lens, and after a little while they saw you."

Alice said: "My sister was getting thoughts from here—" She told him about the mysterious young man and girl, threatened by some unknown danger, a strange cliff, the young couple at bay upon a ledge, the valley beneath them filled with a nameless horror.

REN'S face clouded. "Yes. We have had thoughts from them. But now the thoughts have stopped. Those two are the children of our ruler. You would call him our king? They are the young prince and his sister, our princess.

"A year ago they both disappeared. A year—that is ten times daylight and darkness. We did not know why they went, or where. Run away, or perhaps stolen from us, for our king is very old and of health quite bad. Soon the prince will be king.

"But they disappeared. There is a very—a horrible, savage people in the forests beyond the great caves. You spoke it truly, my lady Alice. They are a nameless horror

—we do not often speak of things like that. We fear our prince and princess may be there.

"And here at home there is a growing trouble as well. Our women—the young girls particularly—are very restless and agrieved. They do not like their lot in life. Some already are in rebellion.

"On the great island is a colony of virgins, where no man may go. We thought—we hope—that perhaps the virgins had stolen our prince and princess, to hold them as hostages that we may be forced to yield to the virgins' cause."

"The prince and the princess stolen," Jim exclaimed, "and you've done nothing about it?"

Ren smiled gently. "We have done a great deal, but to no purpose has it been as yet. We got the prince's thoughts. He was asking us for help. But he would not say what threatened, and he could not say where he was, for he did not know. And then the thoughts suddenly stopped.

"Oh, yes, we have searched. The island of the virgins was invaded. But the virgins—indeed no woman of our nation—will admit knowing anything of the prince. We have organized an army. All the nearer forests have been searched. And now—we are getting ready to invade the caves. But it is not easy to get men for our army. That nameless horror—"

His voice held an intonation almost gruesome. He changed the subject abruptly.

"Our king, very shortly now he will want to see you. He feels, perhaps you can aid us. You men—of strength—and these two young women—they might perhaps be of assistance in dealing with our virgins. But you will have to be examined, your minds gauged, so that we may know if your oath of allegiance is honorable."

"By the infernal, mine will be!" Jim exclaimed. "I'll go with your army to the caves—nameless horror, or not."

JIM, with Ren, later joined me. And then Dr. Weatherby approached.

"Where are the girls?" he asked.

They were in another part of the building. I noticed Dr. Weatherby gazing downstairs with a furtive air, as though he had come here to join us, knowing the girls were not here, and not wanting them around.

Jim was saying: "You think, Ren, that

tomorrow—I mean after our next sleep—that the king will want to see us?"

"Yes," answered Ren. "Perhaps tomorrow."

"When we've taken the oath," Jim added, "they'll let us out of here, won't they? If we're going to join your army—"

Dr. Weatherby sat down among us. He said to Ren: "You spoke of your king being in ill-health. Do you have much sickness, much disease, here?"

"No," replied the old man. "Our climate is healthy. Our people have always been so. There is very little—"

"I mean—perhaps you have doctors, men of medicine, who are quite skillful?"

"Yes. There are such. In the past they have been very learned. The records of our history—"

"And surgeons, perhaps—very skillful surgeons?" Dr. Weatherby was leaning forward; his hands, locked in his lap, were trembling.

Ren said abruptly: "What do you mean?"

"I mean—my granddaughter, Dolores—she is blind, Ren. You know that."

The man nodded gravely. "That is so. It is very sorrowful. I have seen others here; it is a terrible affliction."

"But your surgeons, Ren. I have dared hope that she could be cured."

There was a moment of breathless silence. A pity for Dr. Weatherby swept me. Ren would shake his head; he would say: "No, she cannot."

He spoke. "Why, it could of course be done."

Ren added quietly: "A transplantation of the optic nerve is fairly simple. But it gives sight to one person only by taking sight from another. Of course, if you had a volunteer—"

He seemed to ponder a moment. Then—

"It is strange—but even though we are so different, our eyes are identical in structure—"

"You mean—a transfer of eyes between a member of your race and ours would be possible?" I broke in.

Ren nodded. "Yes. Possible. And—there is a man who will volunteer.

"Loro—a criminal who must die. He is repentant now. At his trial he pleaded that he might be permitted to live long enough to expiate his crimes.

"Loro will volunteer—I know it."

CHAPTER VII

The Sacrifice

“ARE you sure she will see when they take the bandage off?”

“I think she will, Alice. They say she will.”

“But we don't know. I wish she'd awaken. We can take the bandage off then. Can we?”

“Yes. Dr. Weatherby will do it.”

Alice tiptoed across the room and back. “She's still asleep. I wish she'd awaken. Will it have to be as dim as this in here?”

“Yes, I think so—dimmer, probably. They're afraid of the first light for her.”

The operation had evidently created a widespread interest throughout the city. Surgeons had come, examined Loro, and Dolores. Loro's eyes were perfect. The operation, they said, would be successful.

We had not yet been out for our audience with the king. Nothing more had been said concerning it; the operation was all-absorbing. The city quite obviously was in an excitement over it, an excitement only surpassed by our own publicly unexplained presence.

They had taken little Dolores up to our roof-top, where from below a curious throng gazed up at her. And then taken Loro. I heard the wild cheering.

I had wondered why they would not take one eye only, that each might see; but they had told me that it was impossible. One optic nerve taken away would leave the other to atrophy and die; nor would the lone one transplanted live more than a brief time.

Then they brought Dolores back. Her eyes were bandaged.

Hours passed. The healing fluid they said was very swift. When Dolores awoke we could remove the bandage. Alice and I sat together.

Dr. Weatherby entered with Jim. Behind them, lingering near the doorway, was the surgeon. He said softly: “You can awaken her. A little less light. Then you can take the bandage off.”

We awakened her gently. She sat up weakly, in bewilderment. “Oh, the bandage, yes—I remember now. They told me it was over; I was all right. And then I went to sleep.”

We gathered around her. A flat gray twilight was in the room. Dolores sat in

the bed. Her long, dark tresses fell forward over her white shoulders.

My breath came fast. To see the light, form, color, the world, for the first time!

Very slowly, gently, Dr. Weatherby unwound the bandage. It dropped from his trembling hands to the bed.

“Now, Dolores, open your eyes—just a little.”

The dark lashes on her cheeks fluttered up, and closed instantly against the light. She could see!

Her eyes opened again, timidly, fearfully. But they stayed open, glorious dark eyes, luminous, eyes that were seeing! Eyes with light in them.

They opened very wide. Surprised—wondering!

“I see! I see!” There were no words to express her emotion. Just surprise, and awe surging into her voice, stamped on her face. “I see! Jim, is that you, Jim? Why, that's Jim I see!” Her hand went to her eyes as though to clear a blurring vision. “That—must be Jim. Come here, Jim. I want to see you closer.”

He fell on his knees beside the bed, and her hands went to his shoulders, his face, his hair.

“Jim, it *is* you! It looks like you!”

“WHEN do you suppose this king will see us, Len? How is Loro?”

“Oh—you weren't here when Ren told us. It's pretty tough, Jim, but I suppose it is just as well. Loro never regained consciousness. But I think he realized our gratitude just the same.”

“Poor Loro,” said Jim. “Takes a brave man to do what he did—I wish the king would see us. What did Ren say?”

I understood that our audience would be at any time. Ren was to let us know. Dolores had again fallen asleep. From where Jim and I sat I could see her bed, with Dr. Weatherby sitting there beside it.

Jim said: “When we once see the king and get out of here, things will look different—what's the old doc doing sitting there so long? He acted queer to me, Len; did you see his face when he knew that Dolores was cured?”

I never answered the question. We heard a sound from in there—a choking cry; and saw Dr. Weatherby with a hand clutching his throat.

“Len, what the infernal—”

We rushed in. Dr. Weatherby sat looking at us. He had torn the collar of his robe with convulsive fingers. He stared at us. His hands were groping for the sides of his chair. "Len! I can't—I can't get up!"

Before we could reach him, his great head sagged to the high hunched shoulders. He twitched a little, then slumped inert.

I swung on Jim. "Go pound on the door! Tell them to let you out! Get Ren! Tell Ren to bring a doctor—surgeon—someone to help us!"

"He's—dead?"

"No! Unconscious; he may be dying. Get help."

THEY believed that Dr. Weatherby was dying. He lay now in a room off our main apartment, still unconscious, lying with closed eyes, motionless save for the tiny stirring of his breath.

It was, by earthly standards of day and night, now late afternoon, a soft, pale daylight. After another time of sleep the long night would be upon us.

They could not say how long Dr. Weatherby would live. There seemed nothing to do for him. The shock of his joy over Dolores, the let-down of the tension under which he had been laboring, had brought a collapse.

In hushed tones, with the awe of death upon us, we sat talking. We were on the upper half-story of the apartment off which the small bedrooms opened. I heard the sound of the door downstairs; and heard Ren's voice: "How is he?"

I leaned over the balcony. "There is no change. Come up, Ren."

He mounted the incline stairs. With him was a young girl. He introduced her gravely:

"The daughter of my uncle, who now is dead. She is named Sonya—she is very proud that she has learned from me your language. Hold out your hand, child. They shake it for the greeting, you see?"

I took the girl's extended hand. She was the first woman we had seen of this new realm, and I regarded her curiously. She seemed of an age just before full maturity, a small girl—small as Dolores, slim, almost fragile of body, garbed in a single short garment, from neck to knees.

It was a sort of smock, of soft dull-red pleats, gathered with a girdle at the waist,

high at the neck, with long, tight-fitting sleeves to the wrist. Over it was a long cloak of a heavier material, which she discarded upon entering.

Her legs were bare. On her feet were leather sandals. Her hair was long, and black as jet. Parted in the middle, it partially covered her ears, was caught by a thong at the back of her neck; and its long tresses, hanging nearly to her waist, were bound by a ribbonlike cord.

Her face was oval, with expressive dark eyes, and long black lashes; sensuous lips, I thought, but a mouth and chin that bespoke a firm character; and a beautiful young girl; intelligent, perhaps beyond most of her race. And that she was modish was plain to be seen.

Her cloak had a jaunty cut to it, a lining of delicate fabric and contrasting color. Her smock was very tight at the throat, shoulders and sleeves; and tight across the bust to mould her youthful breast.

It fell not quite to her knees, and flared with a stiffly circular bottom. Her face carried the stamp of youth and health.

She discarded her cloak, and stopped to remove the skin sandals from her feet. Upon her left leg, just above the knee, was clasped a broad, white metal band.

"I am glad to know the strangers." Her glance went to the room where Dr. Weatherby was lying. "But I intrude at a very sad time for you—"

She and Ren sat quietly down among us. Ren said abruptly:

"Our king, too, is ill. A very old man—" He shook his head dubiously.

"Oh," said Jim. "Well, then we—"

Sonya seemed to take the thought from him. "I have already told my cousin," she said quickly, "that you must swear your allegiance to the king at once. We need you—you men look very strong, very masterful—"

She said it frankly, merely as a statement of fact, but there was an unconscious admiration in her glance. "We need you—and we—perhaps need your girls." She said the last with a singular, enigmatic emphasis.

"Right," said Jim heartily. "You fix it up for us—get the audience. I want to be out of here; we've been tied here like timekeepers in a tower."

"Our king will die. That is sure now. Our girls must act; it is now, or never!"

CHAPTER VIII

Rebelling Virgins

IT WAS from Sonya that we first learned any tangible details of this new realm. She and I, with Dolores and Alice, were seated by Dr. Weatherby's bedside. Two days had passed. His condition was unchanged; we were sure now that he would never regain consciousness.

The old king, too, was more gravely ill than before. He had sent for us, so that at his bedside we might take the oath of service. Jim had gone with Ren; the rest of us remained beside the dying man. The end would come soon, at any time now doubtless.

Sonya was talking softly. I turned from the bedside to regard her earnest face.

"This city," she was saying, "we call Kalima. There was an ancient tribe dwelt here—the chief, they thought he was a god. The god Kali—" She was addressing Alice, but now she turned to me. "Our land lies in a great depression of this globe's surface. Once, perhaps, it was the bottom of some great sea. It rises into mountains everywhere. It is not large; we are less than a quarter of a million people. The caves are at the foothills—"

"You will hear more of them later." She had waved aside a question from Dolores. "On the Great Island not far from here, is what we call the Village of the Virgins—where now about three hundred of our girls are living in rebellion."

"Rebellion against the government?" I asked.

"Yes. Against the man-made laws." She smiled her quiet, grave smile. "You have come, you strangers, at a time to find our nation in what we girls think is a condition very grave. You, my friends, will understand very well what we girls are protesting against. And now, with our prince and princess vanished—and our king about to die, the time has come to—" She checked herself suddenly.

Alice was regarding her with a blue-eyed gaze of quite obvious admiration. Dolores moved over on the low couch; her hand plucked at the hem of Sonya's smock as it lay just above her knees, and touched the smooth white metal band that encircled her leg.

"Sonya, what is that? Just for ornament? It's very pretty."

"**N**O," SHE said. "Not altogether for ornament. Every woman wears one—" She brushed her fingers across it; her smile was quizzical. "It is, in fact—well, it had become almost a symbol of what we girls are striving for. The virgins' band. You see, it is quite unmarked; no man's name is engraved there—I'll explain in a moment.

"Our king, with twenty of his counsellors—my Cousin Ren is one of them—rule the nation. They make no new laws; the old laws are good enough for them. The guards—you would call them police—are all the army we have.

"They are all men—young, sturdy fellows who have no thought but to do what they are told. Which is right, of course. It is the laws which are wrong, inhuman. They are very old laws; they have come now to be customs, traditions, handed down from father to son."

Her tone was suddenly bitter. She gestured with a slim expressive hand. "I must talk more calmly. These things against which we now have come to open rebellion, were doubtless necessary at the beginning. The laws were made by men who knew no better.

"The difficulty is in the sex of our children. Out of three births, two on the average are females, only one is male. We have, therefore, twice as many women as men. Or at least, there would be twice as many, if— She checked herself again.

"Thus we have—I think Ren said that on your earth it was termed polygamy. A man may marry more than one woman."

Dolores said impulsively: "Oh, I would not like that! It used to be a custom in many parts of our earth, but now only among savage races."

"We girls—of this generation—do not like it either," said Sonya.

Her voice turned very grave. "What we are rebelling against is far worse. Often our girl children—if they seemed not destined to be beautiful—are killed. The father does not wish the expense of too many girls.

"Girls or women are never allowed to work. They must only strive to be beautiful. And when they have at last reached the proper age, to get rid of them by marriage, the father must pay a large tax to the state."

"**A**T THE age of twenty a girl must choose one of the men who has recorded his name as desiring her. Any

man is legally eligible to do that. He may have no wife as yet; or he may have one wife, or several. If he has the necessary money for the tax—and deposits it with the government, his name is recorded.

"You see—" She was cynical now. "The government needs the money! And it likes our girls to be beautiful. Fifty men may record their names as desiring a girl who is very beautiful.

"She can choose but one man. But the government only refunds half the money the others have deposited. It makes a lot of money on a very beautiful girl."

"A sort of lottery!" I exclaimed. "With women as the prizes."

"I do not understand," said Sonya. "But that is the way it is with us. Beautiful girls are profitable to the government. No girl-child who showed promise of beauty has ever been found murdered.

"But woman's beauty fades, and there are many female mouths to feed—and female bodies to clothe and house. It makes more work for the men; and the men do not like to work. And so—"

The cynicism left her voice; a hush fell upon her tragic words. "And so—when a woman can no longer bear children, when her beauty is going, then she is considered a burden.

"She has never been trained to work; she is useless, an expense.

"Each year our old women are chosen—a certain number of them, depending on the birth-rate—are chosen to die. They are given a blanket, a little food, and are taken to a place we call Death Island. Left there alone. They live awhile; and then the food is gone and they die.

"I've seen them draw the death number! I've seen, on the island—their wasted bodies, lying huddled!" Her voice choked. "But they go away—start for the island, so patient—so resigned.

"It is that for which we are in rebellion more than anything else! We of this generation now, cannot stand it. We—will not stand it—"

TO MY mind had come memories of the savages of our own earth, not so many centuries ago. They, too, had thought it expedient to leave aged members of their tribes to die. The visions Sonya was invoking to my imagination were horrible. I found my voice:

"Your men here, Sonya—surely they are not all against you girls? Your cause?"

"No," she said. "But how many are with us at heart, we do not know. And men are very strange. You cannot talk to them—they pretend you are not intelligent enough to be worthy of talking. My Cousin Ren—"

Ren! It seemed so incongruous. She went on:

"He is like all the rest. It is not, from his viewpoint, inhuman. It is the way things always have been. His mother died that way. He says, 'Her life was ended.' He says that men—brave men—meet death that way. Their life is over; the creator calls them, and they go bravely."

"But," said Dolores, "the man who hands out the death numbers is not the creator—"

"Ah," said Sonya, "but if you told that to a man he would say you do not understand."

HER hand went to her leg. "You asked me about this band. It is placed upon us when we are just maturing. On it is engraved the name of the man we marry.

"If he divorces us, that is written here—and the name of the man who next takes us. Our marriage record—written plain that all may see!" Her fingers touched the band's smooth surface. "There is nothing on mine, as yet. And there never will be—unless we win our cause!"

Alice said: "Are you one of the rebels?"

"I am—at heart—and am working with them. Technically, legally I am not. It is nearly a year yet—as you on your earth measure time—before I am of the age when I can be forced to marry."

"What have the girls done?" I asked. "Refused to marry?"

"Yes. About eighteen hundred of them. Most are just at the legal age. They left the cities, went to the Great Island, and there they have built themselves a village. They grow food there; they work; they are self-supporting. To many old women, and a few girl-children, they have given sanctuary."

"And the government does nothing about it?" I exclaimed.

"They did—at first. Men were sent to the Virgins' Island to get some of the old women, but the girls forcibly resisted them. And some of the girls were killed. Nothing much has been done since. The government, I think, does not know what to do."

SHE was scornful. "Our girls are very beautiful. It would not be profitable to kill them."

Alice said: "You reach the marriage age in a year, Sonya? Have any men recorded their names for you?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "There were eight, I think, when I last went to the records."

"But you wouldn't marry any of them? Or perhaps I should not ask—"

"Why not? There is no secret in such things. One man whose name is recorded for me I love very dearly. Our prince—"

A sound from Dolores interrupted her. Dolores was sitting with hands to her forehead, and eyes closed. She murmured: "I—caught someone's thoughts! Now they come again."

We waited through a breathless silence. Then Dolores murmured: "The prince—you called him Atho? It is he!"

Sonya gripped her. "What is he thinking? Tell me! Tell me quickly!"

Then she, too, received the thoughts. She sat tense. "Oh! The princess is dead! Killed!"

"Killed!" echoed Dolores. Then her face went vague; she was getting nothing more. But evidently Sonya was still in communication. She cried involuntarily aloud: "Atho! Dearest, dearest Atho! Where are you? Tell Sonya! Oh, he does not know! Or he cannot tell me! He says—" It was a stark whisper of horror. "He says soon he will be killed also."

She sprang to her feet, then abruptly sat down again. "Atho! Atho! Where are you?"

The communication broke. Her face went vague, puzzled, empty. And then despairing.

Beyond the window, in the street below the balcony, a sudden murmur of voices floated up to us. We went to the balcony. It was night now—a night of pale stars in a cloudless sky. Shouting people were coming up the street. They appeared in a moment at the bottom of the hill—a crowd of men—a hundred or more. They came forward, swept around the corner, and vanished. Above the babble was a single sentence. A man called it; others took it up.

Sonya murmured: "They say, 'Our king is dying! Our king is dying.' And the princess dead! And your grandfather. . . . Death everywhere!"

The man in the street shouted again. And Sonya sprang from the couch.

"He says 'Our king is dead.'" She laughed hysterically. "Death everywhere! I must go to the Island of the Virgins. Will you come? I can take you. The virgins are ready! We must act at once!"

CHAPTER IX

The Nameless Horror

IT WAS the first time we had ever left this house in which virtually we had been imprisoned ever since our arrival. Ren had not returned with Jim. If the king were really dead, there would be a great confusion at the castle; they might be detained indefinitely.

Sonya would not wait. "A few hours only," she urged. "Then we will be back. I will leave a message for my cousin and your friends." The first shock of Dr. Weatherby's death was over; there was no advantage in the girls remaining here.

We started finally. On the lower floor of the house we found long dark cloaks and donned them, with a queerly flat, mound-shaped hat for me and light scarfs to cover the girls' heads. The lower door was open; Ren had left it so, knowing that Sonya would stay with us.

Technically we were prisoners; but Sonya paid scant ceremony now to that. The king was dead; our oath of allegiance to the nation could be taken for granted.

"My allegiance goes to you," Dolores said naively. "You girls." And Alice nodded.

"Yes," agreed Sonya. "But do not say so, openly. And you, my friend Leonard—you are a man—be careful what you say if you have any sympathy for our cause."

Sympathy! How mild a word, as again visions of what she had told us sprang before me!

In this residential section of the city there was at this hour no traffic in the street. The shouting crowd had disappeared. Sonya led us to the main street level. The pedestrian bridges were above us.

An unnatural silence seemed to hang about the dark, somnolent city—as though it only seemed sleeping and were wide awake. A tenseness was in the air. The houses were dark, but in almost every window I fancied that figures were watching, faces peering out.

We avoided the lights; mounted the

hill for a block or two, then turned into a very narrow street of shadows.

The houses here—the backs of houses, I assumed—were blank, two-storied walls.

We passed each of them hurriedly; my heart was thumping. Sonya had said that these were merely back entrances to inner courtyards of the houses, but it seemed, to my sharpened fancy, that in every one some horrible lurking thing was waiting to spring upon us.

Sonya was leading. She was taking us through a back way to her home, to get the vehicle which would transport us to the island. We were nearing the end of the alley; it opened ahead of us into a street with a dim glow of light illumining it. To our right, just ahead, was a courtyard entrance—a yawning cave-mouth of blackness.

We had almost reached it, when Sonya abruptly halted, checked our advance as though she had struck some invisible barrier; stopped, and shrank backward, pressing against us. And her hand in terror was over her mouth to stifle a scream.

I SAW it then—what she was seeing. A thing, something monstrous, lurking in the blackness of that cavelike house entrance, a thing huge, of vague, grotesque outline, an upright thing, with a great, balloon-like head, bobbing from side to side, two eyes glowing in the darkness; and below them, where a neck might have been—two other smaller eyes, green, blazing points of fire.

In all my veins the blood seemed freezing; prickling needle-points of ice exuding through my pores; my scalp prickling at the hair-roots. I was stricken with fright and horror; but an instinct, so that I scarcely realized what I was doing, made me pull Sonya soundlessly backward; sweep all three of the girls behind me and downward. And as they sank to the pavement, I crouched tense in front of them.

The thing seemingly had not heard us, or seen us. It advanced out of the darkness of the doorway; and in the dimness of the outside light I saw it more clearly, a thing like a great upright animal—ten feet tall, perhaps—monstrously cast in human mold, with thick, bent legs; a long, thick trunk, with wide, powerful shoulders and a deep, bulging chest; and arms that dangled nearly to its knees.

Its head, no wider than its powerful neck,

was small, round, and flat on top. There seemed a face; its tiny blazing eyes were plain in the darkness.

A two-headed thing! The small head was bent forward; behind it, as though astride of the shoulders, was another head, balloon-like; huge—wider than the shoulders—a head seemingly inflated, distended; a large, flat face. The thing took a step; its large head wobbled as it moved.

My hand behind me kept the girls motionless. The thing came to the end of the narrow street, emerged into the glow of light there. It did not pause—the light obviously was not to its liking—it bounded sidewise, noiseless on padded feet, and was gone into the shadows.

But in that instant under the light, I had seen it more clearly. A giant, gorilla-like figure. A man! Black hair seemed upon its body; but the body was partially clothed; and I fancied I had seen a belt strapped about its waist, with dangling weapons.

The bobbling head astride upon its shoulders was very different from the rest of the thing. A bloated membrane? I got that impression. It seemed a smooth, dead-white skin; I thought I had seen distended veins on it.

And as the powerful body leaped, I fancied I saw thin little arms, four of them, hanging inert from the bloated head.

It was gone. I breathed again. Behind me the huddled girls were shuddering. At my ear, Sonya was whispering:

"The Nameless Horror!"

CHAPTER X

The Flight to the Virgins' Island

WE DID NOT continue down that street. Sonya took us back; we turned another corner, and another; and soon were near her home. She had not swerved from her purpose to take us to the Virgins' Island. This thing we had seen, was one of many of its kind which dwelt in the fastnesses of the mountains beyond the caves.

They never came out into the light; none, Sonya thought, had ever been seen more clearly than we had seen this one. No man of this realm, to Sonya's knowledge, had ever ventured into the caves to seek them out.

I could not understand such a condition. On earth, nothing had ever been so fear-

some but that man had sought to destroy it. But these people were of a different cast of mind.

"Sonya," I demanded, "how long have these things been in the caves?"

"They were first seen only just before our prince—" She faltered over the word.—"just before our prince and princess vanished."

We reached Sonya's home—a low, oval stone building, dark in its enshrouding garden of flower-trees. She led us aside, toward a small outbuilding. I suddenly paused.

I was in sympathy with Sonya and her cause, but was not the plight of the prince a more important issue? Had I not better go and join Jim now, and follow the course we had planned?

We reached the dark, single-storied outbuilding. Sonya touched a switch; a soft glow showed inside. It was a square building of stone and metal; windows barred by a metal screening; a doorway with a hinged screen.

"Sonya," I said, "just what is this you propose doing?"

She regarded me. Alice and Dolores stood beside her; abruptly I found myself ranged against the three of them.

"Why," she said, "we are going to the Island of the Virgins. The girls are ready—we have been waiting—" She hesitated, then finished: "waiting for this chance which has come tonight."

"What chance? The king being ill, or dead?"

Her eyes flashed. "Yes. The girls are ready—they will come back with us."

She stood with shoulders squared, a defiant little figure before me. I said, more gently: "What are you girls planning to do, Sonya?"

I think she had already told Dolores and Alice. They moved closer as though to defend her. Alice flashed me a defiant look.

I repeated: "What are you planning to do?"

HER EYES held level. "It is not my secret. You are a man—I have no right to tell you." She added very slowly, but wholly without emotion: "I think—perhaps you had—better go back."

It struck me with a vague sense of shame. I felt like a deserter. Alice said calmly: "Are you going back, Len?" With what

loyalty these girls already were banded against me! Little Dolores clutched me. "Don't do that, Leonard! Sonya, you misunderstand him—"

I tried to explain myself. "It's only because I thought the other course would be better for the prince," I finished. "How long will this take us, Sonya?"

Sudden tears were in her eyes. "I believe you! But you must know that I—least of all—would delay to help him I love! Mine is the better way—and we won't be long—a few hours at most."

I yielded. "All right, Sonya. You know best."

We entered the building, a large room, divided by the metal screening into huge cages. A great commotion; the flapping of wings, greeted our entrance. Travel in this realm indeed was primitive. We were to go by air, on a gliding platform drawn by giant birds trained to harness.

Sonya pulled down a swinging tube of light from the ceiling and held it toward one of the cages. Eight giant birds were there, soft, gray-white, feathered bodies; heads small, round, and bald with black top-knots like plumes.

They stood upon short legs, yet were as tall as myself. They seemed very gentle; they regarded us timorously, but curiously. They knew Sonya; as she entered the cage, they nuzzled with their beaks against her smock.

"Ah, Nana! They want sweets," she laughed. One, more bold, pecked at her pocket. She leaned, and with her shoulder heaved its great body away. Then she produced small pieces of sweetmeat, made them each take a piece decorously.

"They are well trained, you see?" She rested an arm against the great curving side of one of them; I could well imagine that on its soft back she could have ridden into the air. One had lazily opened its wings; a feathered spread of fifteen feet at least, graceful wings, gray-white, with tips that were solid black.

The platform was under an inclosure of the flat roof. Sonya rolled it out—a platform some ten feet long, by six wide. Soft furs covered its surface. It was mounted upon small wheels, with a frame set in small cylinders of compressed gas as cushions against the shock of landing.

Midway of the platform, underneath, was a cross rod. Sonya extended its sections sidewise, each jutting out some six feet be-

yond the platform edge. To each of the ends of this rod, a bird was harnessed. The other six were in two strings in front—three in a string, one in advance of the other.

There were reins for the leading birds, to pull their heads gently from one side to the other; a rein to pull downward on their feet; another rein, which when drawn upon, raised a cushion to press upward against the bird's throat.

It took Sonya only a few minutes to harness them. I had been inspecting the platform. It was built of a light metal framework, upon which a thin, strong membrane was stretched. The whole seemed light as a kite.

Beneath it, set in the space between its landing gear, was a system of small, flexible wings, and movable cones through which the air rushed. And there was a horizontal and vertical rudder, with flexible tips. Flying skill was needed. There were several controls, near the front of the platform, where now the reins were held in a notched cross-bar.

"We are ready," said Sonya. She stretched upon her side on the fur covering of the platform, with the reins and the controls before her.

We took our places beside and behind her, lying at full length, arms crooked into leather straps to hold us. Sonya called to the birds. Eight of them as one, leaped upward. The great wings flapped. We moved, rolled across the roof; at its edge we lifted with a jerk.

THE LOW housetop, the dark trees, other roofs, the dim city lights all slid downward into a blur of shadow. On a long slant, we headed upward into the starlit night.

I lay on my side, clinging to that swaying, leaping platform. The wind surged past, tearing away every sound save the flapping of those giant wings. A graceful bird on each side of me; two strings of them slanting upward in front; winging swiftly up into the night, drawing me after them. The dark world was lost and gone; the star-incrusted dome of the heavens encompassed everything.

This was not an air voyage; it was flying. The platform fluttered, slid over the air like some swiftly drawn kite. The heavens swung with a dizzy lurching. I gazed over the edge at the dark moving landscape far down.

The faint lights of the city showed a thinly built, suburban area; then the shore of a starlit sea ahead. Primitive flying, with the first startling strangeness of it gone, its romance swept over me, a magic carpet upon which I lay, magically flying over realms of mystery, a flight unreal; romantically miraculous.

I was brought back from roaming fancy. Dolores, lying beside me, was pulling at my shoulder. I caught her words before the wind snatched at them.

"Look, Leonard! There is the island!"

There was no fear of this flight upon Dolores's face; only an eager wonderment, her mind struggling with these sights—romantic, awing to me, how much more so to her so newly emerged from a life-long darkness! "See the island, Leonard!"

We were, I suppose, no more than a thousand feet high. The shore of the sea was nearly beneath us, a dark curving shore of gray sand with gentle white waves rolling upon it. Beyond the shore, some ten miles out, a dark island showed. It seemed irregularly circular.

As we swept closer, its beach became visible, gray-white sand with white rollers. A tangle of vegetation was behind the beach, a forest jungle with the land sloping up over gentle foothills to a cone-shaped hill which occupied the island's center.

Along one shore of the island, yellow and blue spots of light were showing among the trees at the edge of the beach. It was all dim in the starlight. Far ahead, where the sea unbroken reached the horizon of stars, a yellow glow had come to the sky. Sonya gestured. "The moon is rising."

It came with a startling abruptness. A great yellow world swung up, twice, three times, the visual size of our moon; a glowing yellow disk, marked with the dark configurations of its mountains. It rose horn-shaped, mounted straight up, slowly, but with a movement quite visible. The stars paled around it; a flood of yellow light lay upon the sea in a broad path of rippling gold.

The island was bathed in the golden flood. We were much closer to it now—swooping a few hundred feet above its beach which along here was broad and hard. The jungle was beside us, a fairyland of tropical verdure.

Warmed by the waters of the sea, and perhaps by hidden fires of the cone-shaped hill, the vegetation grew to giant size. A

somnolent forest edged with gold; mysteriously dark, romantic, amorous, scented with spices and the heavy perfume of flowers.

We landed upon the beach where the warm waves were liquid gold beside low, primitive, palm-thatched dwellings set like ground nests in the verdure.

With the rush of our flight gone, I felt a new warmth in the air. Upon my cheeks was the faint caressing breath of a warm breeze from the sea; it stirred the palm-fronds to amorous whispering.

White figures were drawn back from the beach to watch us land. They crowded forward into the moonlight, young girls, slim and white, with long, flowing black hair.

As I stood up and stepped from the platform to the sand, some of them scattered and fled with startled feminine cries into the enshrouded foliage. Others came shyly forward; crowded around us—golden nymphs in the moonlight, with a brief veil-like garment from shoulder to thigh.

THEY were surprised at me—a man—here upon their island. They crowded around Sonya; talking seemingly all at once; casting mistrustful glances at me, and glances of curiosity and friendliness at Alice and Dolores.

What Sonya said to them I could only guess. It caused an excitement; like fauns, many of them leaped away, running down the beach, scattering over the village. In the distance I could hear their cries, and other cries, shouts, a great activity beginning.

And presently there was heard the cheep of giant birds; the flapping of their wings as they were released from their cages and brought out to be harnessed. Far ahead down the beach, in the moonlight presently a crowd of the girls began rolling out a huge platform.

The few girls who remained with Sonya continued talking. They were tense now; but wholly composed, beautiful, intelligent-looking girls, most of them a year or so older than Sonya, and very much the same type. Upon the left leg of each, just above the knee, was a broad metal band.

The girls now were ignoring me. But Sonya called Dolores and Alice over, and it was obvious they were welcomed.

I saw presently, some of the older women. With a few little girls among them, they came to the edge of the forest and

stood timidly regarding us—infancy and age, common fugitives.

Alice was gesturing toward the sky. I turned. Off there in the starlight, in the direction we had come, was a lone bird flying. In a moment I could see its wings.

Sonya called something; and added to Alice, "A girl arriving from Kalima."

The bird swooped in a great descending arc, a gray-white bird like those which had drawn our platform. Mounted upon its back was the figure of a girl, her arms clinging about its neck. It soared with poised wings; descended to the beach near us. The girl leaped to the sand; she called: "Sonya! Sonya!"

They talked in their own language; then Sonya whirled to me. Her face had gone white.

"Alta—this girl—lives very near Ren's house in Kalima. I do not mean our home—I mean that other house of his where you were living. Alta went there to see me."

She was talking swiftly; Alice and Dolores drew me to one side; a common feeling of disaster was upon us all.

"Alta found the door open and went in. She read my message to Ren, that we had come here to the island. She was leaving. In the street outside she heard voices; from the window she saw Ren—with your Jim. They were nearly to the house.

"Then—a great black thing leaped upon them, a giant, with a great, wobbling head. What we saw, Leonard! The Nameless Horror! It leaped upon them—and there were two or three others of its kind! They seized my cousin and Jim. Lifted them up, carried them off! She—Alta—took one of my birds, and came here to tell us!"

CHAPTER XI

A Man, to Play a Man's Part

I STOOD a moment, transfixed with horror. Alice's features had become as white as Sonya's. Dolores uttered a faint little cry, "Jim!"

"Sonya—" I began. But she had turned to give orders to the girls. They sped away. I finished, "Sonya, get me back, at once!"

"Yes," she agreed. "But you can do nothing—a stranger—you cannot talk our language—"

"I can, with you to interpret for me—"

She whirled upon Alta with other ques-

tions; then back to me. "More than ever, now, I must go through with our plans. Alta says the king is not dead. But dying—he will die at any moment. We must get back—"

Down the beach the large platform was ready. A hundred girls or more were loading upon it. With a great flapping of the wings of its birds, it moved down the beach; rose into the air. It had four strings of ten birds each, with others harnessed in tandem all along its sides. Magnificently, it sailed upward, turned in a broad arc, and passed us high overhead.

From everywhere now the girls were rising. Another great platform, and still another. A score of smaller ones; and from the forest, a hundred or more individual birds, each with a lone rider.

They flapped up from among the palms; circled overhead, with their numbers augmenting until they headed away. The first platforms were now mere blobs in the starlight. A thousand girls, I estimated, were up there in flight.

We hurried to our platform. Again we were in the air. Below us still another platform was rising; around us, three or four mounted birds circled like a convoy. We took our place in the line and sped back to the city.

"IS THE king dead, Sonya?"
"No. I do not think so."

I waited a moment. "Sonya, you girls are not armed?"

She said impulsively: "No. But in the underground rooms of the castle, the science weapons are stored. Once we get control of them—" She checked herself; but she had told me what I wanted to know. An arsenal under the castle! The weapons of a half-forgotten science of this decadent race, stored there!

I shuddered at the visions which surged to my imagination. Here in the city—a government now menaced by crusading young girls! This was our condition, pitiable indeed, to oppose a savage, outside enemy!

Yet what was I to do? I pondered it until a vague possibility came to me. It gripped me. It seemed feasible. I believed I could accomplish it. With swiftness of action—power, dominance—I could carry it through. A grim exultation was upon me. A man, to play a man's part—

We landed with a swoop upon the moon-

lit garden sward. The girls crowded around us, with a fringe of curious, apathetic men beyond them. Sonya turned to speak to Alice and Dolores. Near by was a dark path between beds of giant flowers. I slipped from the platform. With my cloak held before my face, I avoided the girls and plunged into the shadows of the flowered path.

The path was dark, cut off from the moonlight by a great bed of flowers rising high above my head. A group of men came toward me; I stepped between the flower-stalks, stood enshrouded in my cloak, my figure merged with the shadows, until the men had passed.

I caught a near glimpse of them. Young men, stalwart fellows, no doubt, according to the standards of their race. But not one of them was taller than my shoulder; and beside me, they were frail, delicate of build.

In a weaponless fight, I could doubtless have engaged two or three of them, and come off the victor.

The path turned into a dim street that encircled the rear of the castle where a hundred-foot wall rose sheer. It was very dark along here. I hurried forward with my cloak drawn around me.

I had at first thought vaguely that I might be able to get into the castle, into the arsenal through some postern gate along here. The arsenal was within this curving wall of stone. I passed such a gate now—a small, narrow opening, half the height of my upright body. But it was blocked solidly with a metal door which I could see no way of opening.

I passed on, heading back through the city to the house in which we had been held since our arrival. Behind that house, with a viaduct connecting them, was the laboratory room in which we had arrived. Our space-vehicle was there. I could not operate the vehicle, but it held a weapon I wanted.

I REMEMBERED that Jim had brought it. In the excitement of our arrival, the strangeness of everything, we had forgotten it, the Frazier beam, brought out by an Aberdeen physicist in 1994.

I had left the castle behind me, and turned, somewhat dubiously, into another street. I was sure if I could get to Sonya's house, where so recently we had been, I could retrace my way from there. I had planned this while on the flying platform

as we circled over the castle. I had been able then to identify Sonya's home, and to gauge the lay of the streets in between. I turned another corner. The street was brighter.

Another corner. I saw and recognized Sonya's house. From there, my way was sure. Within twenty minutes after leaving the castle grounds, I was groping in the darkness back of the house where Dr. Weatherby's body lay.

It was near here that the nameless horrors had caught Jim and Ren. But I saw no signs of them now. The viaduct connecting the two buildings was a dark, thin line against the stars. The building I was hoping to enter was wholly dark. A two-story structure, the viaduct extended from its upper floor.

I prowled around. The lower window openings were all barred. The door oval was barred. A stairway led up from the ground to the viaduct. From the viaduct's platform I saw a cornice, too high for a normal man to reach; but I leaped for it, pulled myself up upon the dome-shaped roof of a turret.

A leap from here, and I was upon the main flat roof. There should be a door under a mound cover; most of the buildings had them. I located it; wrenched at its bar. It yielded. I went down a curving metal ladder, into the house.

In a moment I had located the laboratory room. Our vehicle in its full normal size, lay here, dead white, an end of it tinged yellow by a shaft of moonlight.

I stepped within it, went to Jim's cupboard, lighting a tiny battery light overhead. The Frazier weapon I sought was here. Its *copite* cone, with smooth glistening bone handle; *copite* headband; the tiny pulse-motor; the wires; it was all complete.

A TRIUMPH swept me. I was unarmed no longer. Playing a lone hand, here in this strange world; a man, comparatively of giant strength and physical power. But I was more than that now. I had a mental weapon, and the mental strength to use it.

I did not stop to adjust the apparatus; I wound it up in its wire, and hastily retreated. I reached the street; with the weapon under my cloak, I hurried back to the castle over the same route; I did not want to chance losing my way.

But as I advanced, I had more than mem-

ory of the streets to guide me. From the direction of the castle, a blur of cries was audible, a hum, a murmur, which as I progressed resolved itself into shouts. The shouting of a mob; heavy, angry voices of men; shrill cries of girls—a single, long, agonized scream of a girl.

I was on a lower street that fronted the water; a side entrance to the castle grounds was before me; through the trees I could see the frowning turreted walls of the castle. I stopped to adjust my weapon.

It took no more than a moment. Around my forehead, with hat discarded, I bound the headband, a narrow strip of finely woven *copite* wire, with two small electrodes pressing my temples.

On the right side two finely drawn silk-insulated wires dangled from the headband to my neck; I tucked them under my shirt, over my shoulder, down my right arm to the wrist. A band at my wrist, on which the wires were attached, held the tiny pulse-motor in place. My heart set it in motion, to generate the necessary current.

The Frazier projector was a *copite* cone, this one some ten inches long; its shape was a cone section, one end—the muzzle—with an open diameter of six inches, the other end, one-fifth inch, across which the diaphragm was fitted.

The bone handle screwed into place at the diaphragm. It was hollow; within it were amplifying tubes, and a transformer, miracles of smallness. The whole projector weighed some twenty Troy ounces. I plugged the two connecting wires from my wristband to its butt, gripped the handle, with my index finger along its side, resting on the trigger button.

I was ready! My heart was racing. The tiny motor at my wrist was racing. I could feel the hum of the current, the prickling of it under the forehead band, its tiny stabbing throb at the electrodes pressing my temples. There was power within me.

I had flung off my cloak; I stood in the white silk shirt, dark, short, tight trousers, and high, heavy, black stockings of my earth costume—stood with outflung arms for an instant and exulted in the wave of triumph which swept me. Against these people, the power of my weapon would be invincible.

Furtive no longer, I advanced with bold, open strides to the gate of the castle grounds. A few men were there, evidently about to enter. They stared at me. Before

the strangeness of my aspect, the boldness of my flashing glance, they quailed, cried with fear and scattered before me.

I did not heed them. Beyond the gate, back from the water there was a rise of ground. I mounted it, and from the thicket of flowers that ornamented its top, gazed out at the moonlit scene.

Between my hillock and the foot of the broad staircase leading up the terrace to the castle entrance, a throng of men were standing.

Spectators, standing idle; occasionally a group of them would surge in one direction or other, milling about some individual who seemed abruptly determined upon a course of action; a mob without a leader; excited, aimless, striving for points of vantage to see what was taking place in front.

THE GIRLS were massed at the foot of the castle steps. Evidently, just before I arrived, the girls had tried to mount them. The guards were gathered in a group on top. Halfway down, a girl's body was lying. It writhed, rolled down the steps. From the crowd of men a murmur rose.

The scene was clear in the yellow moon-glow. The throng of girls at the staircase bottom, were gathering their leaders, preparing again to mount; the tense guards on top seemed confused, not knowing how to deal with this unarmed attack.

On the castle balcony, at the head of the steep metal stairway, a few other guards were standing. And on the roof-top, I could make out the doddering figures of old men, gazing down in confused terror.

There was, momentarily, a pause over the scene, a silence, expectant. And abruptly the hush was broken by a shrill electrical whine. It rose in pitch to a scream, a siren from the castle battlements. It screamed for a moment; then abruptly was stilled.

I wondered what it meant. The crowd was stricken breathless. But only an instant, then it broke into a roar of shouting. The king had died! I did not know it at the time, but I suspected it. On the roof-top, the old men were waving their arms; one of them seemed trying to talk to the throng, but his voice was lost in the din.

As though the siren had been a signal, the girls began swarming up the staircase, unarmed girls—unarmed save for the shining armor of their virginity, and the desperation of their purpose. I stood watching;

it was necessary for me to know with what weapons the guards were equipped.

Some fifty young men, they stood in a group at the head of the staircase. The girls came up in a throng. I saw then that each of the guards seemed armed only with a long, curved knife, like a scimitar, incased in a black metal sheath.

Some drew these knives, waved the naked blades. But the girls were beyond intimidation. They came surging—a hundred of them in the front rank, with other hundreds pressing from below. The guards met them halfway down, a confusion of white figures with the black forms of the guards struggling in their midst.

A man with twenty girls around him. He did not want to use his naked sword. It was torn from him; the girls tearing at him savagely. He went down; the white forms swept over him. A girl who had secured his sword waved it with shrill cries.

Another guard, more desperate, was using his sheathed weapon as a club. He had cleared a space around him. A girl leaped; the club struck her head; she fell limp. But he, too, was soon overwhelmed.

The girls presently were near the staircase top; the guards remaining there were standing now, all with naked swords. I could not doubt but that they would be driven to use them. The girls momentarily had paused, a dozen steps below them.

Many now were armed with the swords they had taken. The blades were waving; a score of girls with the swords pushed their way to the upper rank, gathered for concerted, frenzied action. Then with a rush, started up the intervening empty steps.

I had been standing on that hillock, enshrouded by the flowers. I had wanted to be sure beyond a doubt, how the guards were armed; and had hoped vaguely I might locate Sonya. And a fear had struck me for Alice and Dolores. Where were they in all this turmoil?

I thought I saw Sonya now—her white-limbed figure, with the dark, high-necked smock; she was creeping alone up the steep bank of the terrace beside the staircase; trying, no doubt, to attain the top unnoticed, and thus to surprise the guards from behind.

MY TIME had come. I stepped from the shadows of the flowers into a broad patch of moonlight. From the hillock here, I knew my figure would be visible from all parts of the scene. I stood,

drawn to full height, with arms outstretched. And called with all my voice:

"Sonya! Sonya!"

The fighting did not stop, but the nearer men of the crowd turned and saw me. A murmur went up.

"Sonya! Sonya! Sonya!"

I kept repeating it. The murmur spread; rose to a shouting—shouts of wonderment, awe, and then fear. I strove to hold my voice to dominate the noise.

"Sonya! Sonya! Sonya!"

The faces were turning my way. The shouting near me died into a frightened silence. The men were milling about, with a surge away from me. Over on the stairs I saw that the girls had paused in their attack.

"Sonya! Sonya! Sonya!"

She had turned, was staring at me. I waved my arms.

"Sonya! I am Leonard—come here!"

I plunged forward down the hillock path. The crowd scattered before me.

"Sonya, come here!" She had turned; she was coming! I advanced steadily; not running, walking swiftly, with arms outstretched, menacing the crowd with my unknown weapon. The throng was stricken motionless with the strangeness of my aspect. From the staircase, the girls were staring; the guards were staring, a sea of faces, everywhere staring.

Calmly I advanced, and before me now a lane opened in the crowd. For all my outward calmness, my heart was pounding. The pulse-motor at my wrist was throbbing. I had not used my weapon yet. But it would be effective.

"Sonya! Come here! Hurry! Sonya!"

My words, strange of language, awed the crowd further. The men parted before Sonya's running figure. She came up, panting, white-faced.

"Len—"

"Sonya, you are going to obey me! You understand? You—everyone—obey me—"

She stared. I was speaking swiftly, grimly, imperatively. "You stay at my side; I'll want you to translate when I give my orders. Was that siren to announce the king's death?"

"Yes, he—Leonard, what are you doing? That thing in your hand—"

I SILENCED her. And then, fearing perhaps that she might not follow me, I grabbed her hand, jerked her forward as

I ran with rapid strides toward the crowd of girls at the foot of the stairway.

I think that Sonya believed at that moment that I had lost my reason. Her face stared up at me with terror in her eyes—a frightened child beside my bulk, whom I was dragging forward so swiftly that she could hardly keep her feet.

A few men near us shouted at me; but when I turned ferociously on them, they ran. Someone threw a missile at me, then another—stones which they were picking up from the flower beds. One struck my back; and one struck Sonya.

The crowd was beginning to take courage; a wave of it surged at me; struggling men, shoving each other. Shouting menacingly at me; but the men in the front rank, shoved forward by the press behind them, were pushing back, away from me.

Another stone hit me. I stopped short. I did not want to use the Frazier beam yet—time enough for that.

"Sonya, tell them to stop!" I dropped her hand, stood away from her. "Tell them that I won't hurt you! Tell them to stop—or I'll kill them! All of them!"

The missiles stopped at the first sound of her voice. From the stairway top a guard was shouting up to one of the old men on the roof; at Sonya's voice they both were silent to listen.

I added swiftly: "Sonya, you follow me! I don't want to drag you! Will you come?"

"Yes. I—I'll come."

I took her at her word and ran on. I had overawed an unarmed crowd of spectators. But the girls were still ahead of me, a thousand or more of them, jammed near the foot of the great stairway; and a hundred or two more upon it.

I reached the first of them, with Sonya running fleet as a faun behind me. The girls, unarmed, scattered to give us room. We dashed through to the foot of the stairway, began mounting it.

The girls on it made way for me. But, halfway up, I saw above me, three girls with swords. They stood their ground, and whirled to oppose me.

Others with swords were near them and turned at me also; and above them, I was aware that the guards were coming down from the top to attack them from behind.

I stopped, and thrust Sonya in front of me. "You tell your girls to get out of the way!"

She screamed it.

"Again, Sonya! Tell them to get off the stairway! Fools! Can't they understand I'm for them! Get them off here, I tell you! I'll handle those guards up there!"

It stung Sonya into action. She shouted my commands; rushed up a few steps, waving the girls aside. Behind me, they were retreating; clearing the staircase. Above, they stood undecided, with awkwardly brandished swords—undecided whether to oppose me or to turn to defend themselves from the guards coming down from above.

Then one girl came, passing me hurriedly along the edge of the broad steps; then another. Then they all came with a rush.

And presently the stairs above me were empty—up to near the top where the guards had retreated and now stood with drawn swords gazing down at me. Empty steps, save for a girl's white body lying head down in a crimson pool.

I started slowly up. "Keep behind me, Sonya—careful! You'll be safe enough!"

IN SILENCE I mounted toward that line of swords. The guards stood a moment in doubt. Then from the castle roof one of the old men screamed a command. The guards answered it; with a leap they came surging down the top steps to rush me.

I raised the Frazier muzzle; pressed its trigger. Its pale-green beam sprang out through the moonlight; I waved it lightly, and it spread, painting the oncoming guards with its thin, lurid color.

The first of them fell; his sword clattered; his body came hurtling down; I swept Sonya aside to avoid it. Another fell, but held to a step, lying huddled. Two others sank to their hands and knees, stiffened, awkwardly propped against the steps.

A dozen more were standing frozen of movement, with swords held stiffly outstretched. And a few retreated woodenly to the top level, where they stood swaying drunkenly, stupidly regarding me, hypnotized by the power of my will which the Frazier beam had intensified and thrown at them.

I snapped off the beam. Its effect, with my flashing glance to aid it, would last five minutes or more. Hypnotized in the modern sense, very much as the ancients claimed they could do it with the eyes alone, and mysterious passes of the hands—these men here now, to some extent, would do my bid-

ding; certainly, they were powerless to move, save as I might direct them.

I swung on Sonya. "They're not hurt! Not injured! Tell the crowd—tell everyone it's an evidence of my power."

Down in the garden the throng was pouring out the gates in a panic, hundreds milling at the gates, trying to escape. They quieted somewhat at the sound of Sonya's shrill voice.

We mounted past the stricken guards. They moved slightly; they were recovering. At the top, I stood, and with vehement thoughts commanded them to move aside. They swayed, moved a few steps, like sleepwalkers.

"Hurry, Sonya! They're recovering! Tell your girls to stay where they are, down there! If they move, I'll strike them as I struck the guards. Tell them that!"

A lone hand! But I was winning. We came to the front of the balcony stairway. The guards up there had vanished in fright. I mounted the steep stairs, with Sonya close under me. Down on the terrace top, the guards had recovered; but they were too frightened to do anything but stare up at me.

I reached the balcony, moved to where there was no door behind me—where I could not be attacked unawares. And I drew Sonya to the balcony rail. Beneath us in the yellow moonlight the great throng of men, the girls, and the vanquished guards stood silently gazing up at me.

"Now, Sonya, I'll talk to them! Tell them I am Leonard Gray, the Earthman. Remind them that their king is dead; their prince is captured by a horrible unknown enemy that menaces us all! Tell your girls they shall have justice. Tell the men that we are going to rescue our prince! All of us united, not fighting one another.

"Tell them they have seen a little of my power. I want to use it for them—for you all—not against you! All of us united to rescue our prince. And until that is done—Leonard the Earthman is their ruler!"

CHAPTER XII

The Prisoner in the Cave

JIM HAD been received by the dying king. For what seemed hours he sat with Ren in a castle room waiting to be admitted to the royal bedside. To Jim it was irksome. He was afraid the

king would die, afraid something would go wrong, and we would all be held as prisoners again.

But he finally saw the king; Jim took the oath of allegiance, swore he would do what he could to rescue the prince.

They started back through the city streets. At this time I was with the girls on the Island of the Virgins. The moon had just risen.

They were in the main lower street before our house. The moon was still low at the horizon; its light was cut off by the houses. The street lamp shone full on the railed flower bed, but close to the buildings, under the pedestrian levels, the shadows were black. Jim suddenly became aware of peering green eyes; a black shape that leaped at him. Other shapes, with great wobbling heads.

A giant shape of human form had knocked Ren down; another struck Jim, bore him with its weight to the pavement. His senses faded from a blow on the head, and blackness, smothered by clanging gongs in his ears as he lost consciousness.

For a moment—after an interval of what length he never knew—knowledge that he was still alive came to him. He seemed to remember that a giant manlike shape with a bullet head had leaped upon him. It had another head, huge, wabbling like a balloon. But the large head had fallen off it; the large head lay on the ground, with tiny arms supporting it.

The phantasmagoria of a dream, but Jim's head was clearing now, just a little. Something was holding him, and he could feel movement—a rhythmic jogging. He opened his eyes. A city street was passing. A great hairy arm was about his middle; he was being carried by something that walked; being held horizontal, his head, arms and legs dangling.

A giant, brown hairy shoulder was over him; and above that, the great bulge of a head—a smooth, dead-white inflated membrane—a head that bounced and wobbled as the thing strode forward.

A brief consciousness; a vague, dreamlike impression, scarcely strong enough to make a memory, and Jim's senses again faded into a black void of silence.

WHEN Jim came fully to himself he was lying in a glow of yellow moonlight. Beneath him was a smooth, curving metal surface. His head ached hor-

ribly; a lump was upon it; and there was matted blood in his hair.

He was sore, bruised all over, but with returning strength he realized that he was not seriously injured.

He lay a moment, trying to remember what had happened; and the memory came, distorted and vague. Over him spread the canopy of stars, with a great yellow moon rising. The curving metal surface beneath him was gently swaying. Was he on a boat? He was still no more than half conscious. He murmured:

"Ren! Ren!"

"Yes, Jim? Jim, is that you?"

Ren's voice! A whisper!

Jim struggled up one elbow. Ren was sitting hunched beside him. Ren—alive, seemingly uninjured.

They were on a boat, lying in its bottom, a small, narrow metal boat, six feet wide perhaps, and five or six times as long. Its gunwale curved up two or three feet over Jim's head. They were lying in the narrowing of its bow.

Farther astern, in the yellow moonlight, were figures, brown, hairy bodies—men; or were they giant gorillas? They had small bulletlike heads; faces flat-nosed, with receding forehead and receding chin; and two small eyes that blazed green.

Jim very slowly sank back, but in a posture where he could see the length of the boat. The figures there were not animals; they were men of brute force and brute intelligence. Four of them, with powerful, hairy bodies; wide shouldered, deep chested, with short, thick legs, and very long arms.

They were clothed in what seemed trunks of animal skin, and a skin fastened over the bulging chest to one shoulder. And each had a broad, tightly drawn belt at his waist.

To Jim came the memory of his capture. It was no fantasy, his memory of a hairy body, with a balloonlike, wabbling head. The four huge heads were here now, in a group near the center of the boat. Each was some four feet in diameter. A dead-white membrane, with bulging, distended veins on a forehead, over a grotesque flat face.

Heads, belonging to these four bodies? Jim realized it was not that. These were separate living entities, which had been riding astride the shoulders of the other four.

Intelligent, reasoning beings—it seemed

monstrous to call them men—beings which were nearly all brain, just as the others were nearly all body, heads so distended that they sagged of their own weight.

And as he regarded them Jim became aware that to each of the great heads a shrunken semblance of body was attached. Two tiny arms, which came out directly from the sides of the head, and were now turned down, with hands pressing the boat to give balance.

From the wide, convex face, beneath what might have been a bloated chin, a shriveled body dangled; a trunk and legs some two feet long. They lay shriveled beneath the heads. Useless appendage! But all of these shrunken, dangling bodies were clothed with colored fabric, and upon the breast of one was an ornate metal ornament.

JIM whispered: "Ren?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. Something struck me. Then somebody, something was carrying me. Men! I heard their voices. I tried to scream—a hand went over my mouth. I knew we were captured. I thought—"

"Hush! Not so loud! They're here—with us now."

"I know. They were talking awhile ago. They— Hear them now, Jim?"

Low, guttural voices sounded back there—the brute men. The brains—the balloon heads—were talking also; low, suave voices in a strange tongue.

"Jim! Jim, one of these men here in the boat with us—" Ren's whisper held a quiver of fear. "He's—Jim, I can receive thoughts now—like Dolores did, from a distance. It seemed, just a little while ago, that I was getting Len's thoughts. He was triumphant—exulting over something. But it was gone. Then I—"

"You get the thoughts of someone here in the boat?"

"Yes. I guess so. Someone—the thought came to me that he called himself Talon. I just now got it again. Talon. He's been studying thoughts from me. Putting them into my language. He's doing it now. It's very easy for him—studying my thoughts—our words—my words to you now—he can understand them."

"Hear us now!"

"Yes. Or hear the thought of our words.

We can't escape! Can't do anything secretly! He's laughing at us. He—"

Jim saw one of the heads raise itself up on its hands. Its shriveled body hung limp—the body with the ornate cross on its breast. The arms bent, then straightened with a snap; the head bounded a foot or two in the air, landed again on its hands, and again leaped.

It was hitching itself the length of the boat, its shriveled body trailing after it. One of the giant, hairy brutes of men moved aside to let it pass.

Jim whispered: "It's coming!"

A revulsion of horror swept him—a repugnance to have this great bloated head come near him. He strove to master the horror. This was a man. Strange of form, but a living, mortal being. A man—an enemy. Nothing supernatural, not gruesome, merely strange—an enemy with whom he had to cope.

Jim sat up abruptly. His shoulder touched Ren's. From down the boat the bloated head came hitchingly forward. A few feet from Jim and Ren it stopped, rested with a slight swaying upon the tiny body hunched under it.

JIM stared into a huge, convex face: round green eyes; holes, a circular rim of them, for nostrils; a wide mouth, thin-lipped. The mouth seemed almost a human feature; it was smiling. A soft, suave voice said:

"I—Talon." And corrected itself: "I mean—I am Talon."

It seemed to Jim in that instant that with those few spoken words the thing had itself removed most of the horror with which its outward aspect invested it.

A sense of relief swept over Jim. His tenseness relaxed; he said slowly: "What do you want of us—you—Talon?"

"Yes—Talon." His arm had a hand, with a sheaf of broad, flat fingers. He pointed to the ornament hanging on the chest of his shrunken body. "Talon—leader of my people." He spoke haltingly, groping with the unfamiliar words, and carefully, as though to avoid error. "Called Talon. You—lie quiet and soon my words are more. I study—lie quiet—until I speak again." He gestured. "Lie quiet, or—"

Another more vehement gesture. It embraced Jim and Ren. Jim understood the threat. The voice repeated, very calmly: "You had better lie down—now!"

The eyes seemed leaping pools of green fire.

They sank back. With his elbow slightly raising him, Jim watched the head of Talon hitching itself to the stern of the boat.

THE moon had risen high above the horizon. From where Jim lay he could see its yellow, horn-shaped disk. That, and a narrow segment of the star-strewn sky, was all that showed above the gunwales of the boat. The stars rolled with a lazy swing; the boat was throbbing, propelled, evidently, by some invisible engine, over a calm, rolling sea. In the silence Jim could hear the water slipping past the boat's smooth sides.

He wondered how far from shore they were? If he and Ren, with a leap, could plunge overboard—a mad, foolhardy attempt, of course, but still he must see where they were—try and plan something.

"Ren?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Move over a little. I'm going to get behind you and sit up—see where we are—how far from shore."

Jim cautiously raised his head. He half expected a command from the rear of the boat. But none came.

They were on a broad expanse of calm water. The moon made a yellow shimmering path into which they were heading. Jim sank back. It would have been folly to have attempted an escape. For a long time he and Ren lay quiet. An hour, perhaps, or more. The boat sped rapidly on.

Its invisible engine made a hiss, and a line of bubbles rose from its sides. Jim had noticed them when he sat up; the boat seemed traveling on a continuous, rising mass of bubbles. There was a queer acrid smell in the air from the gas of them.

Jim learned later from Talon the details of this boat. It was built of metal which, with its load, would barely float. Beneath its hull was a chamber through which the water circulated. A grid of wires was there; a current heated the wires, decomposed the water into its two component gases, hydrogen and oxygen.

The bubbles were buoyant. The rising flow of them lifted the boat, so that in truth it skimmed forward upon the gas bubbles beneath it. The generation of gases was controlled, so that the boat floated high or low in the water at will. The engine was similar. The forcible ejection

of gases from a tube extending under water from its stern propelled it forward. The tube was movable, like a rudder, to give direction.

AN HOUR passed. Then the hairy brutes who had been sitting quiet got to their feet, fumbled at the gunwales. An oval metal cover rolled from beneath the gunwales up like a canopy to inclose the boat overhead.

Jim had taken a last swift look outside, before the arched metal cover closed them in. The boat was now making for a sheer wall of cliff that lay directly ahead.

But in one place, for which they were steering, the cliff dropped sheer, unbroken into the water. Above the cliff, behind it, a jagged mountain range stood yellow in the moonlight, tumultuous, naked crags.

The cover closed overhead. A tiny green light winked on. Within the boat, lurid in the green glow, the four brute-men moved about with swift activity; the soft voice of Talon was directing them; his great head was raised on his hands as he followed their movements.

They bolted the metal cover, adjusted other mechanisms which now came into use at the stern. A lessening of the flow of gas from beneath the hull; the water filled the chamber there. The rear power tube now pointed downward, to dip the bow. Other tubes, one on each side below the water line, pointed upward, with powerfully ejected streams of gas.

The bow of the boat dipped; it sank beneath the surface. Jim had no idea then of the mechanisms, but he knew the boat was under water. One of the great heads was busily adjusting a mechanism to purify the air they were breathing. Another was seated at what seemed a mirror; gazing ahead through the water, steering the boat with his fingers on a row of buttons which governed the controls.

Another hour. Jim and Ren whispered occasionally. The boat was speeding uninterruptedly beneath the surface. At last Jim called:

"Talon?"

"Yes. What is it?" the head of Talon answered him.

"Come here. You can talk better now, can't you?"

Talon evidently was amused at the imperative tone. "Yes. I can talk better now."



Jim was mounted upon the giant lops—a four-footed animal more like a giant cat than anything I can name.

He came hitching forward; his great face was broken by a grotesque grin. "What is it?"

"Who are you?" Jim demanded. "What do you want of us? Where are you taking us?"

Talon was willing to talk. He sat, his fingers toying with the metal ornament, his head resting against the side of the boat for support. He and his fellows were of a race which he called the Intellect. They came from a distant world in the sky, a dark planet, satellite of one of the remote suns up there.

FIVE thousand or more of them, adventurous Intelligences like himself, had built a great ship and come to this foreign world. They had landed in mountains; a wild, desolate country. Their ship had been destroyed—irreparably broken in landing. They could not get back.

There were, he explained, in this distant world two distinct races of beings, those like himself, for countless ages bred to develop the intellect so that their bodies

shriveled and dwindled from disuse, all their physical powers nearly gone; and another, quite opposite race, bred for physical strength and power, the brute-men, of slight mental capacity, powerful of body.

He gestured. "You see four of them? They do our bidding unquestioned. They supply the body for us; we are the mind."

"You ride on their shoulders," said Jim.

Talon's eyes gleamed. "We more than ride upon them." He showed Jim where from beneath his head a ropelike sinew depended. "This we fasten upon a nerve-center of their backs. Their little brain is dulled, unconscious then of existence. Our brain takes command.

"The body is ours, for the time! We can feel its physical power; our brain animates it. We are one being. One entity when that connection is made."

Ren spoke up softly: "Why did you go to that city where you captured us? Those people there haven't harmed you. But you captured their prince and princess—"

The huge face grinned with a look of

cunning. "We cannot get back to our world. We do not like these bleak mountains—these dark caves where we have been living. We must have a better land, and other people; we want to establish our own race. And there is little food, here in the mountains. We began wandering, searching. We brought this one boat with us from our own world." He described the workings of the boat, and went on: "One day I came upon that man and woman you call prince and princess. He says he is called Atho. They escaped from me, climbed to a cliff. But we caught them again finally."

He paused. Then he added slowly: "The princess is dead now. I did not want her to die—but the prince—killed her."

It brought a shudder to Jim. He said, cautiously: "What are you going to do now? What do you want of us?"

I WAS thinking that if you were important, like Prince Atho—to this other world, I might offer to release all of you—not kill you—if they would let us live among them in the city. But I have decided now not to bother with that. I think, if you annoy us too much, we shall kill you before we start."

"Start where?" Ren demanded. His voice was steady.

"Start upon our attack. We brought little with us from our world, a few devices and scientific supplies; but for all this time since we arrived we have been manufacturing. It is difficult with so few materials at hand. But we are nearly ready. When I return now, we will start our last preparations."

His voice rose to a sudden grim power: "We have prepared well for this conquest. It is a beautiful land down there; the women, so many of them like the princess, are very beautiful. The men—they are not like you two—they are already afraid of us. Some have seen us wandering near the cave entrances. They always run in terror."

His chuckle had a horrible gloating. "They will be easy to kill. A swift attack upon the city—we are almost ready for it now!"

The boat at last came to the surface; the cover rolled back; the stars gleamed overhead as before, but the yellow moon had crossed the sky and was falling to the horizon behind them. Jim saw that they had come to the surface of a very small lake.

He could see all around its shore, a circular lake of black, cold-looking water. It lay unrippled, smooth as polished black stone, unbroken except as the boat's gas bubbles rose, and by the V-shaped waves the boat left behind it.

Around the shore was a ring of mountains. Bleak, naked cliffs of rock came down sheer to the water; behind them the mountains rose in tumbled, serrated ranks, naked crags and spires, snow-capped with yellow snow where the moonlight struck them.

Here in the remote mountain fastness, Talon had established his stronghold. This was an isolated lake, which a subterranean river boat had been plowing.

At Jim's elbow, Talon said: "These mountains seem to extend back endlessly. But I have another base already established on the Warm Sea, and from there I will make my attack. I have planned well."

Ahead of them, in one small place the mountains were broken. A narrow, canyon-like valley was open to the water, with a fringe of black-sand beach. Cave-mouths showed along the sloping valley-sides. Lights moved. The mouths of the caves were outlined by a green-white glare from within.

The boat landed on the black beach. Brute figures crowded around it in the fading moonlight—sinister, giant figures. Huge gruesome heads came bouncing forward over the sand. Voices sounded. Questions; the voice of Talon shouted commands.

HALF a hundred of the brute-men lifted the boat bodily from the water, deposited it on the beach. Jim and Ren were carried up the valley, and into the green glow of a cave-mouth. Ren seemed entranced.

Prince Atho faced Jim and Ren in the dimly lighted cave. Talon had left them. At the cave-mouth, barely beyond sight and hearing around an angle of its narrow entrance passage, two of the brute-men stood on guard. Atho's cave, which had been his home during most of his captivity—Jim saw it as a small room of glittering black rock; dimly lighted with a pale green radiance from a ceiling tube from which green-glowing wires depended.

There was a bed of skins; crude stone furniture, a mere slab of rock for a table, upon which food now lay. Draped skins

walled off a corner where the bed was placed.

Atho could not talk with Jim; but he very soon established that he was friendly. He was a man about Jim's height, this prince; but delicate, almost frail of build. A handsome, square-jawed face, had the delicacy of royalty stamped clean upon it. A high, white forehead was topped with curly hair like pale gold.

He smiled and shook his head at Jim's voluble words. He shook hands with smiling puzzlement at Jim's insistence. He seemed to understand Ren's condition.

They sat, earnestly trying with gestures and words to make each other understand. Hours passed. Atho prepared some skins for beds, and gestured that they should sleep. Ren lay down, but Jim refused.

Another interval. A brute-man came with food. One of the heads, like Talon, came hitching itself in, looked around, spoke to Atho, and withdrew.

Jim ate some of the food. He had thought Ren was asleep, but at his question, Ren sat up at once.

"Jim, what are we going to do?"

Jim was wondering that himself; and wondering also what fate Talon had in store for them. Abruptly Ren added:

"Awhile ago, Jim, I was sure I was getting someone's thoughts. Not Talon's—he's hiding them from me now. Someone—like Len, or Dolores. Or perhaps it was Sonya."

Jim's heart leaped. Something was impending! He sat between them tensely; his hand touched Atho's arm; his eyes flashed at Atho with eager questioning.

Ren murmured: "I've got it now, Jim! It's Sonya! She says: '*I am Sonya. We know you are with Atho—I am getting his thoughts, too!*'"

A silence; Atho sat cross-legged on the stone floor, as Jim and Ren were sitting, with the stone slab of table before them; the green glow of light nearby threw shadows behind them. Atho was sitting with closed eyes, his hands to his temples. He looked up momentarily; his gaze rested on Jim and Ren with a new understanding, a new friendship.

Ren murmured: "She's telling Atho about us. She says: '*Hold connection! I'm telling him—he's telling me—*'"

Atho's lips were moving with his thoughts to Sonya. The girl, over all this distance, was translating from the universal

language of thoughts for these two strangers at Jim's elbow.

REN added: "Atho says to us, Talon had promised not to kill him; Talon now thinks he will be useful after our city of Kalima is conquered. But one of Talon's men—that head who was in here awhile ago—he said they had decided we all three were to die. I'm asking Atho what he thinks we can do to escape."

Atho raised his head at the question; his eyes searched Ren's face. His lips moved.

"Jim! Jim, she says: '*We are coming to try and rescue you! If you—or Atho can direct us—we're coming—in the air now!*'"

Atho was on his feet. He seemed to be warning Sonya back. "No!" cried Ren. "Atho says no, they must not come! But they're coming! Sonya and—she doesn't say who is coming."

"What's that?"

Atho and Jim stiffened, drew back. From the entrance passage, a figure had emerged, a giant hairy brute-man. He stood with swaying dangling arms, green eyes blazing in the pale green cave light; a leer on his small flat face, a black tongue like an animal's, licking his black lips with murderous anticipation!

CHAPTER XIII

Crowded Hours

"SONYA," I exclaimed vehemently, "stay beside me! Don't leave me!"

How I cursed my inability to speak this language during those crowded hours following the king's death! At every turn, with every move I was handicapped, the force of my words lost since I had only a girl for mouthpiece.

Yet Sonya did well. The crowd in the garden had dispersed; Sonya had led the girls into cheering me; I had made a speech, promising them justice in their cause. And sent them away, not to the Virgins' Island, but peacefully back to the homes they had left. They were glad to go; there was no government now to force them into a distasteful marriage.

The guards had come before me, at first with an indecision, a sullenness; but the old men counsellors had swiftly abdicated. "Tell them, Sonya, I want all their advice; whatever they think should be done, I will

listen." I strode up and down the huge audience chamber of the castle, while the old men watched me with whispered, frightened words among themselves.

There was so much to do! I had made a speech to the men in the garden before they dispersed. Our prince must be rescued. They had a man of power and action leading them now.

My words, and perhaps my aspect as I stood up there in the moonlight, aroused them to enthusiasm. They were men. Courageous! Patriotic. They had never yet had a real leader. But they had one now.

It stirred me, as I had stirred them, when I heard their cheering.

I summoned the chief of the guards before me, a slim, straight young fellow with flashing eyes. When I demanded his allegiance—his and all his fellows—he swung on his heel to the old men who were ranged along the side of the room. They nodded timorously; and he turned back and bowed before me.

"Tell him, Sonya, that I want ten of his men always patrolling the castle grounds. And others—he can use his judgment as to the number—patrolling the city. If there is any sign of disturbance, notify me at once. I want the people all to go to their homes and stay there."

There was so much that I did not know! "Sonya, are there any cities besides Kalima?"

"No," she said, "only very small villages. And there is the village on the Virgins' Island."

I nodded. "I want messengers sent out, to tell everyone of the change of government, a warning to beware of the Nameless Horror. It is abroad—it may appear anywhere. Have the people in the rural districts gather food and bar their houses, stay indoors—Sonya, who has been in charge of organizing the army?"

She named him; but it transpired that there had been nothing at all done, as yet, except a manufacturing of the weapons of war.

"Send him to me," I ordered. "And the leader of the scientists—he has been in charge of the manufacturing? I want to see him also."

CROWDED hours! And I could not leave those girls on the Virgins' Island; a few had remained there, with the old women and the children. I ordered

them all brought in; ordered such of them as could to return to their former homes; and the others were to be quartered in the castle.

Hours of swift, decisive commands followed. And there was no one in that busy castle, save possibly Sonya, who realized how I was groping. The government I had seized—I was the king now—a simple, primitive organization, but to me, so wholly ignorant of its workings, it seemed complex indeed.

But I was learning. One by one, I had the leaders of its various departments brought before me, and from each, though they did not realize it, I learned a little more.

They were all very human. None were very hostile to the virgins; many now openly hoped the girls would be given their way.

All were afraid of the Nameless Horror, but all loved their prince very dearly. It seemed that I would have no trouble with internal conditions.

Sonya soon realized it. Her voice carried a more commanding ring. Poor little Sonya! After hours of translating, issuing my commands, running my errands, she was on the verge of exhaustion. But, as in us all, the spirit of battle was upon her. An enemy was at our doors; and soon everyone realized that every command I issued was to make us stronger to resist that enemy.

It had been well over an hour after my abrupt seizure of the castle, before I even thought of Alice and Dolores. They were unharmed. Sonya had kept them away from the castle steps; for half an hour they had been in the room with me, watching and listening with wide eyes and solemn faces, half an hour before I saw them. They did not question, but ran to Sonya and me to be of such help as they could.

Once Alice came to me. "You must rest, Leonard. You can't keep this up, you and Sonya." I had never before seen the light of a love for me in her eyes, but I saw it then!

I had sent the girls into a castle room to sleep. At last I was alone with food, and a hot stimulating drink, like coffee, before me. I was seated at a table, in the king's huge chair. I was the king! Alone here in my audience room. Through its windows, the falling moon threw a yellow glow. The time of sleep was nearly over. The city was awakening; I could hear its

voice awakening to the round of daily activity.

My city now! But the thought brought no exultation. This new day would be dark like the other. If the Nameless Horror were abroad in the city— Had I not better organize an armed street patrol? And keep the people indoors? I needed more messengers.

The young men from the outlying districts must be ordered in to enroll with my recruiting staff. Suppose the people outside of Kalima rebelled against me? Would I have to go out and overawe them with the Frazier beam?

Maxite, the scientist was coming back to talk with me presently. I thanked God, that he at least had learned from Ren my language. So much to do—and I was so tired!

My head fell to my hands on the table top. Alone there at last in the great, silent room, I fell asleep.

“WHY—”

“You’ve been asleep, highness. I did not want to awaken you.”

Maxite sat across the table from me. I aroused myself, rubbing my eyes, embarrassed at my undignified position. Maxite had evidently been sitting there a long time, waiting for me to have my sleep out. The moonlight was gone. The windows were black rectangles, the stars hidden by dark-gray cloud masses. But the city was awake, its new day now fully advanced.

Maxite smiled. He was a small, gray-haired man of middle age, black-robed, with gray rufing at his throat and wrists, and with a yellow ball ornament dangling from a chain about his neck. He said:

“Others, too, are waiting to have your orders, highness. But we knew you needed rest.”

At the farther door of the large apartment a group of men and a few girls were standing. One by one, I saw them. My chief of the guards reported that the city seemed normal; the Nameless Horror had not appeared. A messenger from the rural districts along the Warm Sea said the people were frightened.

They were obeying my orders to stay indoors; but the young men were demanding that I let them come at once to Kalima, to get from me weapons with which to defend their families.

Three girls presented themselves with a petition that the girls be allowed to join

my army. Five hundred names were on it. A fat, affluent looking individual—a wealthy land owner, he told me—came to present his claim to immediate marriage with a girl who now was returned from the Virgins’ Island. I sent him brusquely away.

There was some confusion over the return of the refugees from the island. Some of the infants could not be returned to their homes; the mothers were afraid to have them. Some of the virgins lived in the rural sections; they wanted their parents brought into the city for greater safety. And some of the old women had not been welcomed home, and had been brought to the castle.

I did my best to straighten it out. Enlistment in my army had already begun. I interviewed three trainers of the military animals, for use on land, in the water, and in the air. The animals were ready. The mechanical equipment was very nearly complete.

I sent word to the rural districts for all young men to come in and present themselves to my recruiting officers. And any family who wished, could come also. I issued a proclamation to the city, that all homes be prepared here in Kalima to care for at least one family of refugees, at the government expense if necessary.

EXPENSE! My national treasurer was already in despair. I knew almost nothing of my nation’s finance; but I did not admit it. I would learn, devise some methods of raising money. Already a dozen ways were springing to my mind. That fat, middle-aged land owner, for instance, he and others like him would not be so rich when I got my government properly operating.

Maxite and I were again alone. “Come,” I said. “I’m ready.” We had planned that he was to show me through the arsenal. I wanted first to see the small hand weapons. Maxite had told me that we had a room with a thousand or more electronic needle pipes, a simple hand device which generations ago had been used for hunting wild birds.

The army would be equipped with it, Maxite planned. I thought, too, that if it were sufficiently simple, I would send it into the rural districts, so that each home might be armed for defense.

“I want also,” said Maxite, “to show you our aerial image-finders.”

These, which he had already described, I needed at once. Our enemy—I still could only call it the Nameless Horror—probably had a base near Kalima. Prince Atho perhaps was in captivity there; Jim and Ren, if they were alive, were perhaps there also. This aerial device might enable me to locate the enemy base.

Maxite and I were descending into the lower floors of the castle. We passed rooms where the refugees were huddled. Girls had been organized to care for them. On another, still lower floor, I saw my guard pacing back and forth through dim stone corridors. We were now below the terrace level, but higher than the level of the back street.

We descended other floors, came to a narrow dark corridor. This, Maxite told me, was at the street level of the back castle wall. I remembered walking along that curving street, at the base of the wall, remembered a small door there.

"It's here," said Maxite. We stood in a dim blue radiance at the intersection of two corridors. Ahead lay a floor-opening, where down a flight of curving stone steps was the entrance to the first of the subterranean arsenal rooms. To the right, a branching passageway led to the small street gateway.

"A guard is there," said Maxite, "armed with a fire-flash for close-range work. He could kill any one who came near him—oh, Grett!"

He called the guard, but there was no answer. His soft voice echoed between the narrow passage walls. We hastened to the gate-door. The guard was not there! But in the darkness we heard a sound. Maxite's hand-wire in its blue tube flung a faint beam around us. On the stone flagging a figure lay twisting. We had heard the scrape of its movement. It was the guard, lying there bound and gagged!

CHAPTER XIV

Fugitives in the Starlight

I HAD sent Sonya, Alice, and Dolores into one of the castle bedrooms. They were all tired and overwrought with the excitement through which they had passed. A dream awakened Sonya, after how long an interval she did not know—several hours undoubtedly. She dreamed she had been talking with Prince Atho; he

was in a cave; Jim and Ren were with him.

For a long time Sonya lay pondering. Then she woke up the other two girls.

"Listen, I want to go and try and rescue Atho."

She told them her plan. They could take a small flying platform, with a few birds. Once away from the city—the distraction of the thought-waves of all its people—she would be able to communicate with Atho. Or with Ren—communicate with them, find them—rescue them!

A mad, impossible adventure, perhaps, but to the girls it looked feasible.

"Oh, Alice—oh, Dolores, shall we try it? Leonard will be many days getting his army ready. That is too dangerous, to wait so long."

Dolores turned to her with shining, tearful eyes. "If I could only get to Jim—help him to safety—"

Sonya had other plans. She could get weapons, a small weapon, the electronic needle pipe. She knew where they were kept, and how to use them.

"I heard Ren discussing it one day with Maxite the scientist. And there are image-finders stored in that same room; I think I know how to use them."

The girls decided to try it. They slipped unobserved from the room. Sonya found them long, hooded black cloaks. In the darkness, mingled with the confusion of arriving refugees, they got out of the castle without being recognized.

"Where are we going?" Dolores whispered. They were all three tense with excitement. Sonya had turned toward the rear of the castle, into the dimly lighted street along the base of the wall.

"A gate-door here," she whispered. "It is guarded by Grett—quiet! Stand close beside me, but do not speak! But be ready to do what I say! Soon we will have the weapons."

IN THE castle bedroom, before leaving, Sonya had torn a garment into long, narrow strips, a stanch, tough fabric. She handed the strips now to Alice. At the little door in the wall, they paused.

"Keep behind me," Sonya whispered. "Over there in the shadow. But be ready."

The street along here was dark; it was a street little used; at the moment it was empty. Sonya knocked boldly on the door.

"Grett! Oh, Grett!"

In her own language from within came the muffled answer, "Who is there?"

"It's Sonya."

"Yes?"

"Open the door."

"No. I must not."

"It's only Sonya—don't you know my voice?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I've news from Ren. He is—oh, Grett, you must let me show you—"

There was the sound of dropping metal bars; the doors opened cautiously a trifle.

Sonya put her hand casually on the door. "It's only Sonya, Grett. See here what I have—"

She tugged at the door. The guard was revealed, standing with the leveled metal pipe in his hand. Sonya touched the weapon. "Turn that away, Grett! It—frightens me!"

There was a low cry, a scuffle. Sonya had snatched the pipe. She leaped backward, swung it level.

"Don't move, Grett! Don't make a sound! If you do, I'll—I'll kill you!"

"Sonya—"

"I'm desperate! Can't you see it? Get back in there!" She called softly, "Alice! Dolores! Here! Come inside, quickly."

She had backed the surprised, frightened young man into the corridor, with leveled weapon and crisp menacing words. In the glow of the passageway's single dim light, she held the weapon while Alice and Dolores bound the man's legs and arms with the strips of fabric. And Sonya gagged him; and they rolled him along the floor to the wall and left him.

ALICE was grim and pale, frightened at what they had done. Dolores was trembling. "We haven't hurt him, have we?"

Sonya bent down, loosened the gag a trifle. "No, he's all right. Lie quiet, Grett. And when they find you—tell them you're not to blame—Sonya tricked you. We may be back by then, anyway—and I'll take the blame."

The girls hurried down the corridor; down the stone steps into the arsenal room. Sonya had been here once before with her uncle. The place was dark, but Sonya found a hand-wire and Alice carried it above her head. Its light glowed dimly blue, in a big room of fearsome shadows; overhead they could hear the faint tramp of a guard;

every moment they expected to be discovered.

Sonya seized one of the electronic needle pipes, and the range apparatus with which to operate it. And a large metal cylinder in which was packed a group of image finders and their aerial controls. With their loot under their cloaks, the girls hastily retreated. At the gate-door they switched off the corridor light. Sonya murmured, "Good-by, Grett!"

They closed the gate-door after them. From the outside it appeared barred. With the cloaks shrouding them they hurried to Sonya's home.

In a moment they had six birds harnessed to a small platform, and were in the air.

WITHIN the cave, Atho, Jim and Ren faced the giant murderous intruder. The brute-man stood licking his lips, an imbecilic leer on his face. There was a brief silence.

Atho spoke—soft, soothing words to the hairy giant; and then ripped out a sharp command. It went unheeded. The brute-man's dangling hand came up to his belt. But never reached it.

Jim screamed an exclamation to Ren, and leaped. His body struck the bruteman full—a solid impact which would have flung Jim back, but the giant's huge arm went around him, lifted him like a child. As he went up he flung his arms around the thick, hairy neck and clung.

His feet were high in the air as the bruteman straightened with a savage, surprised cry. He tried to shake Jim off; but Jim clung with one arm, with the other hand he gouged at the giant's face.

Atho had leaped. The giant kept his feet; swaying, kicking; he stopped, and with an upflung arm, dashed Jim's body away. But Jim was back at him again; he and Atho now, clinging, kicking, gouging.

And then Ren. The harassed giant, fighting with scarce the intelligence of a man, staggered across the cave with Atho and Jim clawing at him. Their bodies struck Ren, and, scrambling in the dark, he caught a great hairy leg and wound himself around it.

In the pale-green glow of the cave, the giant brute-man surged about. He tripped, went down, with the three men pounding on top of him.

Jim shouted, "We've got him!"

But the giant was up, shaking them off,

first one, then another, tearing them loose, flinging them back. But always they returned to claw at him. They fought silently, grimly; but the giant roared.

Harassed, frightened, Atho had torn his belt away and flung it aside. The giant stood panting, looking around to see where it had gone. Atho was gripping his thick middle firmly with both hands; Ren was wound about his legs.

Jim had been flung away again. He was picking himself up; but he stopped. He had seen a jagged, metallic projection of the cave-wall. It seemed loose. Jim tugged at it. The swaying bodies surged past him. He tugged, worked it loose. It came free; in his hand he held a heavy, jagged chunk of black metal.

"Ren! Work him over this way! Over here—here—"

JIM LEAPED to the slab of table for greater height. The giant's back was to it. Jim could not talk to Atho; and Atho could not see. But he could hear Jim's reiterated call.

The brute-man tried to turn toward the insistent voice; but Atho now understood and distracted his attention. And Ren at his legs, was pushing him backward. A step; then another.

They came within reach of the table. Jim leaped into the air. He struck the giant's back; and his hand went up; the heavy chunk of metal caught the brute-man full on the back of the skull.

He toppled, fell, writhing, jerking a moment; then lay still.

They disentangled themselves from him, and stood up. They were all three bruised and winded. There was a jagged cut on Jim's forehead; he dashed the blood from his eyes.

"Let's get out of here! Now's the time! Now, or never!"

Atho's pale face smiled at him questioningly. Jim gestured. "Out—get out of here!"

"The belt," said Jim. "What'd you do with the belt?"

The giant's weapons. Atho could not understand the words; but Jim saw the belt. He leaped over the huge, motionless body. Outside the cave an uproar sounded.

Atho sounded a warning; he was gesturing vehemently at Jim to come. Jim seized a small metal object at random from the giant's belt, an egg-shaped thing of white

metal, a muzzle-projection; a handle, and a trigger.

Lights were moving near by in the darkness with a confusion of voices. The second of the giant guards at Atho's cave had run away in fear; he was shouting, gathering other giants around him. The huge heads were bouncing forward over the rocks; calling commands. The brute-bodies were running to them, each to his master. The heads were mounting.

Jim turned to the right, up the valley. They were momentarily in darkness, open metallic ground up a rocky slope, stars overhead, lights and confusion behind them.

They ran. Jim had handed the giant's weapon to Atho, thinking he would know better how to use it. They ran swiftly. A tiny light to one side picked them out; then it vanished. Jim pulled them sidewise to change their course. Ren stumbled over the rocks as they ran, but they kept him on his feet.

Jim panted, "A cliff—over there—we can climb it—or hide."

Atho glanced back. The lights were rushing on up the valley. The fugitives were running between jagged, tumbled boulders; Jim thought they had eluded the pursuit. But suddenly ahead of them, a head rose on its hands from behind a crag.

Jim jumped for it. He struck it. His fist struck the great face between its green blazing eyes. The face smashed, cracked like the shell of an egg. Noisome! His fist sank into a soft pulpy mass. He jerked it free. The head rolled backward; the arms waving.

"Come on," Jim shouted. He wiped his fist and arm on his jacket; noisome, horrible!

"WERE on the ledge, Ren—can't climb out of the valley; it's too steep."

"Are they following us?"

"No. I can see lights going up the valley. Atho seems to want to lie here—not try to climb higher. If only I could talk to him!"

"I can't get Sonya's thoughts. I'm trying, Jim—then you could talk to Atho."

They lay on a dark ledge; a fifty-foot drop was before them, a sheer perpendicular wall; they had climbed beside it, where the ground was broken. Over the ledge, some ten feet above it, was another broader space with what seemed a cave-mouth be-

hind it. The crags were dim in the starlight; black gulleys, ravines were everywhere. Below them spread the valley floor. Lights which marked the pursuit had gone past.

For a time the three fugitives lay quiet. Jim's mind went back to the cave from which they had escaped. Two of the brute-men had been on guard.

These brute-men were hardly more than animals, like tigers with a lust for human blood. One had murderously entered the cave; the other, listening, had become frightened and decamped, giving the alarm.

Jim whispered impatiently, "Ren, can't you get any thoughts from Sonya?"

"No. I'm trying. I feel—I feel that Atho is getting them."

It seemed so. Atho was lying with his head down on his hands. Once he uttered a suppressed exclamation; and then he was murmuring as though to himself.

"You're right, he's getting them," Jim muttered. "Try again, Ren!"

Abruptly Ren exclaimed, "They're coming! Sonya, with Dolores and Alice."

"Do they know where we are?"

"They're trying to find us. Sonya says they haven't seen any lights yet to mark our valley. Atho has been trying to direct them—"

"Well, for a while we're safe here. They—"

Jim never finished. From down the valley, by the cave lights of Talon's encampment, a ball of fire mounted slowly upward, a tiny, blazing white ball. It rose in a slow arc, and suddenly burst with a blinding white glare.

The valley, the crags, the ledge upon which the fugitives lay, were all momentarily brilliantly illumined. Jim saw that beneath them in the valley a hundred of the mounted heads were gazing upward. And he knew, too, that they had been seen upon the ledge.

A shout arose; a rush of the figures to climb. But a voice—Talon's voice—seemed commanding them to stop. Farther down the valley, brute-men were dragging forward a heavy piece of apparatus, a huge gun-muzzle on wheels, the muzzle pointed vertically upward.

Jim leaped to his feet. "We've got to get higher! Try to get to that cave overhead."

But Atho pulled him back. Atho still held the weapon Jim had taken from the

giant. He gestured with it. Jim sank back.

THERE was something going on down there in the valley. Jim wondered if the weapon Atho had were of any use at this distance. Atho seemed absorbed in thought communication. Suddenly from over the cliff-tops across the valley, a small pink ball of light came sailing, floating out over the valley in a huge segment of circle, a thousand feet in the air.

A glowing pink ball; a concentrated radiance seeming to whirl upon its axis, with tiny crescent streamers of light as it whirled. It sailed in a curve above the valley, growing dimmer, as though burning itself out, until in a moment it vanished.

Jim stared; but Atho knew what it was; he leaped to his feet.

CHAPTER XV

The Rescue

THE SMALL flying platform, with the girls prone upon its fur covering, sailed up from Sonya's home and over the city. The stars were obscured by gathering black clouds—a threatening storm, but it did not break. Sonya headed the six birds for the Virgins' Island.

They passed a thousand feet above it; a barge drawn by swimming sea animals was down there, bringing the women and children back to Kalima. Sonya had only the general direction of where she wanted to go, the length of the Warm Sea toward the distant mountains and caves; the Nameless Horror had been seen always in that direction.

The girls lay silent. Sonya was in constant, though sometimes vague communication with Atho. She knew the captives were in a cave; then she got the thoughts clearer—and got Ren's thoughts also. But suddenly all the thoughts were broken.

The threatening storm passed; the moon was below the horizon, but the stars came out clear and bright. The girls were calmer now, grim with their purpose. Sonya began connecting their scientific apparatus, explaining it as well as she could.

The electronic needle pipe was a foot-long metallic pipe with a diameter the size of a small human finger. It had a large, round metallic base, to be operated by two hands.

It projected a very small stream of electrons, which carried with them a tiny, sharp pointed fragment of metal, like a needle. The needle flew with nearly the speed of light; expanding, but when it struck it solidified.

There was a range finder for aiming; and a device for curving the electronic stream, so that the beam could be bent to almost any degree of curvature. In her heart, though she did not confess it even to herself, Sonya was dubious of her ability to use the weapon.

She knew she could not aim it with any degree of skill. And she did not know its range. This needle pipe was a very small size projector, with a range, she thought, effective only a few hundred feet.

The girls were now beyond the Warm Sea, flying over a broken, mountainous country, black and desolate looking in the starlight. Atho's thoughts were with Sonya again. They had never been as clear as this before: A fight, an escape, a dark ledge, with a valley below it. There were lights in the valley.

But where, in all this dark, mountainous waste, was that valley? Sonya believed she was flying toward it. She had several times in the past hour altered the direction of the flight. Atho's thoughts, a dim feeling of his approaching nearness, seemed to guide her.

It was very vague, an intuition more than a thought. Atho himself did not know where he was, but the bond of love between these two was very strong. Each could feel the other's approaching presence. He had tried to warn her away, but when she persisted, he did his best to guide her.

Sonya murmured. "He says now: 'Lights in the valley—you will see the lights.'"

But every desolate valley sweeping beneath them was pale and wan in the starlight. Then Sonya prepared an image finder. She connected the batteries, the projector, and the grid of glowing wires.

ALICE and Dolores held the grid between them. Sonya fired the small projectile. It sailed off, a whirling pink ball. It was in reality a small, flat disk with a lenslike eye and a whirling, pink, glowing armature on top.

Over a radius of several miles Sonya's *raytron* apparatus could direct its flight; and back over the invisible connecting rays came an image of all that the lens eye saw.

The pink ball of light sailed ahead and soon was lost to view. The grid of wires which Alice and Dolores held glowed pink; then suddenly glared white. A glare of white showed ahead in the sky. It was the light flare Talon had sent up to locate the fugitives.

The flare went dark. The grid was pink again. Upon it, etched in black, was a moving scene—mountains, crags, valleys moving in slow panorama, valleys all pale and empty in the starlight. Then one showed dim moving lights!

Alice cried: "Sonya—lights! We see them now!"

Sonya's apparatus marked the position of the pink ball. She turned the birds slightly, to fly after it.

The platform was almost over the valley. Sonya sent out another pink disk. The girls bent over the grid, staring at the tiny moving image; a dim, starlit valley, at the bottom of it, a group of busy figures; a giant projector with muzzle pointing vertically upward.

The girls watched the grid breathlessly. Its image, moving with constantly changing viewpoint, was clearly etched, but dim and very small: A cliff ledge with three figures upon it; from the ledge suddenly a small red ring of fire leaped out. It sped downward, struck a rock, and vanished with a puff.

It was Atho firing the weapon Jim had taken from the giant; and in a moment the still distant girls heard a report, like a tiny clap of thunder, the sound of the red ring striking the rock. Down in the valley the giant muzzle of the vertical projector began issuing a stream of green light.

It mounted a hundred feet, sprayed out like a fountain column of water. From the ground, huge black figures tossed a balloon head into the column of light. The head rose, surged upward, until at the top it hung in the light spray, balancing itself like a ball held at the top of a jet of water.

It was all very swift, a moment or two while the girls stared at the glowing grid. The head was nearly level with the ledge. In the green light Atho's figure showed plainly; he was standing at the ledge, firing his red rings of flame.

But they were futile now. They floated slowly, and from below, some hidden marksman was catching each of them with an upflung pencil point of black light, a narrow beam, so dead black that it showed

clearly in the night. It caught the red fire rings; its rays exploded them harmlessly in the air.

The grid went dark; the second lens disk had burned out. But the platform itself now swept over the valley. The reality of the image scene was spread beneath the girls. Sonya saw that the ledge was broad enough to land upon; she guided the birds toward it.

And she raised the electronic needle projector. Fired it with a futile aim and then cast it away. There was no time for her to attempt using it further. Her birds were swooping for the ledge and they needed her guidance. A moment, and they would be there.

BUT TOO late! The head in the fountain of green light held something in its hands. A hum rose over the valley. Atho, standing on the ledge, suddenly flung up his arms. His weapon fell from him. He toppled, seemed trying to draw himself backward. But could not.

And then, forward from the ledge his struggling figure floated into the air. On the ledge, Ren and Jim were frantically clinging to avoid being drawn after him. The hum rose to a shrill whine.

In what seemed a whirlpool of air, or the levitation of an invisible magnetic stream, Atho was drawn to the head on the supporting green light beam. The green light slowly diminished.

The head, with arms holding Atho's unconscious body, was lowered to the ground. A voice down there shouted hurried commands. The lights all went out abruptly. In the starlight, Atho's body was surrounded by dark surging figures, and dragged away.

The platform swooped to the ledge, landed with a thump.

"Jim! Jim! Are you all right?" It was Dolores's anxious voice. But Sonya was cold, shuddering. All her hopes were vanished. She knew they could not go down into the dark valley, with all those armed figures entrenched in the caves. Atho was lost to her.

Jim and Ren rushed to the platform. There was a moment of confused greeting. Jim never quite knew how it happened, but from the other ledge ten feet above them, a head like Talon suddenly leaped down. It flashed to Jim that the head must all this time have been laboriously climbing in the

darkness. Or perhaps had followed some underground passage to the cave up there.

Dolores was standing a trifle apart from the others. The head seized her. On the upper ledge a giant brute-man was leaning down; the head tried to lift Dolores to where the dangling arms of the brute-man could reach her—arms which would have pulled her and the head both up to the other ledge.

It happened so quickly, it was so utterly unexpected, that Jim and the other two girls were for an instant stricken with surprise. Dolores screamed. It was the first that they knew of her peril. She called: "Jim! Jim!"

But Ren was closer. He leaped before Jim, leaped in the dark for the sound of the girl's terrified voice. He struck the head with his shoulder. His groping arms tore Dolores away.

There was a spurt of flame from some weapon the head was carrying. It caught Ren in the chest, drilled him. He fell backward, lay motionless. But he had saved Dolores from her captor. Jim and Alice had reached her.

The brute-man leaned swiftly down. The head held up one of its small arms. The brute-man drew his master to the upper ledge, with a jerk as though he were raising a large, light ball. In the valley they were trying to raise another beam of the green light.

Jim was carrying Dolores; he threw her to the platform and dragged Ren's inert body aboard, with Alice grimly helping him. Sonya screamed at the birds.

From above, the head was sending down tiny spurts of flame. They struck the fur coverings with the acrid smell of burning hair. Jim flung the girls behind him; every moment he expected that the flame jets would strike him.

It was only an instant; then the platform lifted, sailed away. The ledge dropped beneath it. The dark, seemingly deserted valley, dropped and merged into the tumbled mountain waste.

The platform struggled on, sailing low. It was over the Virgins' Island now. The moon was rising again with its flood of yellow radiance. Ahead, toward Kalima, they saw a blob in the sky.

It was the large flying platform I had hastily equipped and armed—coming out over the city to seek them.

But Ren was dead.

CHAPTER XVI

Departure for Battle

WE WERE ready at last for our attack upon Talon's forces. The night had passed, and another long day; and night had come again. Jim's return, with what he had to tell us about Talon, was of immeasurable help to me. I knew now what I was facing.

It was tremendously helpful also in arousing public enthusiasm for the war. The Nameless Horror was nameless no longer. The people recognized that a savage enemy was at their threshold; men who would have to be fought and conquered.

I did not want a large fighting force, but I wanted it well armed and trained, armed for defense also against what I could guess Talon's weapons might be. Jim had seen something of them.

I sent out scouting platforms, with the aerial image finders. But they brought me little information, for presently Talon realized what the pink balls of radiance in the sky meant. He began destroying them with his black flash beam.

This was to be a war of weapons, rather than fighting men. With Maxite, I labored to prepare a defense against Talon's black flash, and the fire rings which Atho had used. Evidently Talon was armed chiefly with weapons of electronic basis. I hoped so, for we could insulate against them fairly efficiently.

The day had just turned to night when news came that Talon's forces had left the mountains and now were encamped at the end of the Warm Sea. It was what I had hoped he would do. I had no intention of allowing him to attack Kalima, but I did not want to go up into the mountains after him. He was evidently ready now, but so was I.

It was a busy time, those last hours. Kalima was jammed with refugees. All along the shores of the Warm Sea the rural districts were deserted. I mobilized my men and girls on the castle grounds, and on the estuary there. The girls had had their way; they were an important unit of my forces. I could not refuse them, for they speedily demonstrated that in the air they were far superior to the men.

With Sonya and Maxite, I stood on the Castle terrace watching the last details of our departure. The night was clear, save

for a low bank of clouds hanging over the sea, with the horn-shaped yellow moon rising above it.

The castle grounds were crowded with my eight hundred fighting men, two hundred girls, the land animals, birds, and platforms. On the water were the boats, with sea animals to draw them. I had some four hundred men in this division—a total force of about fourteen hundred.

A busy scene of moving lights, voices, commands; the fluttering of the excited birds; and behind us, upon every housetop, in every window and point of vantage in the city, a throng of spectators watching.

The last preparations held a myriad details. "Maxite," I said, "the platform with the Frazier beam—have them hold it until last—then I'll come down."

MAXITE'S orders went out over the aerial he carried on his shoulder. I could hear the echo of his voice down there in the garden. I swung the grid on my chest to catch the rays from an image finder erected on the water front. Alice and Dolores were down there. I had not wanted them in this fighting, but they insisted; and I had put them in the division of boats.

"All ready, Alice?"

She glanced up at the image finder, it stood on a post by the shore front. On my grid was the image of her figure standing there, with her insulated suit like a black cone around her, and her helmet in her hand.

"All ready, Leonard." Her smile was grim, excited, tense; but I could see no fear in it.

"Be careful, Alice. Keep Dolores with you—and obey my orders."

"Yes." She turned away.

Sonya, standing beside me, laid her hand on my arm. "We're going to win, Leonard. And Atho—" She gestured. "I seem always to be getting his thoughts, Leonard. Again—just now—"

We knew that Atho was still alive; that Talon was going to keep Atho with him. Sonya very often had fragmentary communication. She had seemed getting it a few hours ago; and now, suddenly, we realized what evidently Atho had been trying to tell her. A messenger rushed up. He had come from one of our scout platforms.

Talon's forces had started for Kalima! The brute-men with the heads mounted upon them were dragging heavy apparatus

along the shore road! And there were rafts on the sea drawn by swimming brute-men. The rafts were already halfway to the Virgins' Island!

There was no time to be lost. Maxite's aerial sent his voice to the seventy men and twenty girls who were equipped to receive it. Each of them urged his squad to greater haste.

The individual girl flyers rose first. One by one, each mounted upon a giant bird, they rose from the castle grounds, and began circling in the air. These girls were not protected against Talon's electric rays.

It was my plan to keep them very high in the air, beyond what we estimated was the effective range of Talon's black flash. They were armed only with small explosive bombs, but were expert at dropping them upon a mark.

A hundred and fifty of these mounted girls; they gathered now in a hovering group; then in wedge shape, flew in a wide, slow circle. Well-trained birds capable of flying swiftly to great heights. And the most agile of the young girls; Sonya had selected them carefully.

This unit was the swiftest, most mobile of my forces. Sonya was to lead it. She was presently ready, bringing up her great gray bird, with its rug saddle upon which she would recline on its back between its great spreading wings.

She was dressed, as were all the girls in the air squadron, in a single dark flowing garment from shoulder to knee, with her hair bound tightly in braids around her head. The small metallic bombs were in a belt at her waist; bombs fitted with a chemical more explosive than anything I had ever known on earth.

She offered her hand in my own fashion. "Good-by," I said. "And remember, Sonya—keep well up, and listen for my signals. Do not attack until I order it."

SHE LEAPED upon her mount. It rose over me with dangling legs; the rush of air from its wings was on my face. In a moment I saw her up there, taking her place just below the girl at the point of the wedge.

From the garden, the first of the flying platforms rose. There were three of this size, each with twenty men and some ten girls. Forty birds were harnessed to each platform; birds in tandem along its sides; and two long strings in front. Four girls

were to drive them; the other girls with bombs; and the men had the smaller range electronic needle-pipes.

These platforms were fairly swift. They were insulated underneath, with the shaggy black fabric of woven wire through which the insulating current circulated. And they had side shields which could be raised; and dangling insulating curtains beneath some of the birds.

I stood watching the three platforms as they rose majestically, joined the mounted girls, and circled with them over the city.

The land forces were starting. Jim was leading this division, eight hundred men, most of them mounted individually upon the giant *lops*—a four-footed animal, more like a giant cat than anything I can name; handsome beasts, larger than an earth-horse, with great claws, a mass of shaggy red hair, and a tail like a plume of fur.

Each with a rider, they padded through the city streets. Some were harnessed to our larger projectors, and our wind device, which I planned to have Jim establish down the shore opposite the Virgins' Island. With it, Jim could lash the narrow channel waters to a fury.

THE little land force passed into the city and vanished. From the distant rooftops I could see the waving crowd to mark its progress. I turned away. The boats on the river had started, a fleet of ten long, narrow, metallic boats, with insulated sides and shields, boats drawn by sea animals—sleek, seal-like mammals, agile, swift, and intelligent.

There were some forty men and a few girls on each of the boats. A large, long-range needle projector was mounted in the bow, behind the black screen.

It could throw an electrified, imponderable blade of metal over a curved path, with almost the speed of light for an effective distance of over a mile. And these boats had light-flares, wind projectors, and horizontal bomb projectors.

They sped down the estuary, with the mammals leaping like dolphins in the water ahead of them; then they stopped, circled, came back, and waited in a line in midstream. From the city a great shout of enthusiasm went up at sight of them. On one of them were Alice and Dolores.

Our three other flying platforms were long strings of birds, our longest-range rising, heavier, smaller platforms, each with

weapons—a giant projector on each of them, with a few men to handle it.

Maxite said, "We're ready for you, Leonard." He had dropped, for the first time, my royal title; we stood, two friends, parting with a handclasp. His face was very solemn; I think he too was thinking of the home-coming. "I'll follow you with the finders, Leonard. Keep voice connection if you can. Perhaps—I will see what you overlook—and I can advise you."

I nodded. A simple handclasp. He turned away, to watch our fate from his room beneath the castle.

My platform with the giant Frazier thought-beam we had constructed, was ready. I was to operate it alone. I had learned to fly its six birds. I clasped my black, cone-shaped robe around me. My black helmet dangled like a hood behind my shoulders.

I ran down the castle stairway. From the city a roar of enthusiasm went up. I turned and waved a hand.

Departure for battle! The people expected a martial gesture, and I gave it to them. But within me was a shudder.

I leaped on the black platform; it was no more than six feet wide and twice as long—crowded with the projector, the batteries and intensifiers, and my other scientific apparatus.

I gripped the reins, shouted to the six birds, whom I had trained to know my voice and respond to my commands.

My platform rose over the castle grounds. Around me, the girls and the other platforms were circling. Down in the estuary the ten black boats were starting in a double line. Out beyond the city, on the road toward the sea, a thin black line showed in the yellow moon glow, Jim's land division. The city beneath me was a frantic, waving mass of humanity.

I shouted through my aerial. The girls and the platforms broke their circle and started forward. With my platform leading them, we swept in a great arc over the city, and away into the moonlit sky.

CHAPTER XVII

The Battle

THE WARM SEA was a body of water some one hundred miles long by ten miles wide at most places. It lay in a bowl-like depression of rolling coun-

try. Bays and caves indented its shores in some places; in others, cliffs came sheer to the water.

Kalima lay at what I might term its southern end. The sea broadened here into a sheet of water nearly twenty miles wide, which I had learned to call Kalima Bay. To the north it narrowed. The Virgins' Island divided it, with a narrow channel on each side, beyond which it opened again.

To the left, along the west side of the sea, the road from Kalima wound northward. The west channel at the Virgins' Island was very narrow—two thousand feet at the most, but it was deep, with a sandy strip of beach on the mainland, a bluff of fifty feet, with the road on top. It was along the west side that Talon's land forces were coming. And on the same road from Kalima Jim's force was marching to oppose them.

Our water division of ten boats headed into the center of Kalima Bay, and there I halted them. They lay drawn in a black ring on the placid water. To one side of me, the squadron of girls flew now in a circle at about the thousand foot level. The platforms hovered near them.

Along the shore I could see the slow-moving line of Jim's army, crawling like a black snake over the winding, moonlit road. I had hoped that the head of it would be approaching the bluff near the west channel of the Virgins' Island. But it was not that far.

I spoke into my aerial. "Make it faster, Jim!" The image of him showed his smiling face. Good old Jim, always smiling. "Right," he said.

From this height there was no sign of Talon. Behind me, from Kalima, Maxite had sent out an aerial image-finder. Its pink whirling ball came sailing past me overhead.

I SAT enshrouded in my black insulated suit. I switched the current into it; I could hear the current hum; smell its faint acrid odor. The apparatus of the Frazier projector was already assembled. The pulse-motor was on my wrist; the head-band I now adjusted on my forehead. I made all the connections; but I did not turn on the current.

Before me were my smaller instruments. A bank of image-grids was lashed there; voice receivers were at my ears, my speaker aerial was on my shoulder. I caught the

rays from the image lens mounted in Maxite's castle room; I tuned into it, saw his pale, intent face; heard his grave voice.

"No sign of Talon, Leonard?"

"No. I'm holding the girls and the boats here. I'll go higher myself—your lens just passed me."

"Yes. But it shows nothing yet."

"I'll send one beyond it."

"Good luck, Leonard."

I nodded and disconnected. Sonya was calling me.

"Can't we go forward?"

"No."

From the boats down there I caught Alice's voice, but her image did not register; it was dark in the boat, behind the black shields which enshrouded it.

"Len, have you seen Talon's rafts yet? Mett says he wants to know what our boats are to do?"

"Nothing. Stay as you are."

"Be—very careful of yourself, Leonard."

"Yes," I said. I cut off, urged my birds upward. At nearly ten thousand feet I hung poised. Far up the Warm Sea, on the west road Talon's approaching force was visible. And on the water, I saw the black blobs of his rafts, four of them, evidently huge affairs, crowded with men and apparatus. One of them was in the yellow moonlit path. I could see the swimming figures in the water, harnessed, drawing the raft slowly forward.

The pink ball I had sent out passed Maxite's. It sped toward Talon's rafts. On my grid I caught a glimpse of the wooden raft, with dead black beams standing up from it, vertically in the air. Hundreds of figures crowded there. A black beam caught my whirling lens; burned it. The grid went dark.

TALON'S land force was almost to the north of the Virgins' Island channel. The rafts were over near that shore. It was what I wanted to know. Talon would use the west channel.

I dropped my platform downward, and adjusted my helmet, though I kept its visor open. Talon's land force would reach the channel before mine could get there. I had hoped that Jim would be able to set up our wind projector on the bluff there to command the narrow water. But Talon would be there first unless I could halt him.

I turned to my aerial and gave the order for a general attack.

I rose again, high in the air, and urged my birds forward. Beneath me, the scene of battle spread out like a map of three dimensions. Far down, our boats showed as tiny blobs speeding through the west channel.

They were fast, but not so fast as the squadron of flying girls. Sonya came leading them upward. They passed me, a giant flying wedge heading over Talon's rafts. There were four rafts; three close to the shore, perhaps for protection of the land force. But one of the rafts was farther out, separated from the others. It was still several miles beyond the north tip of Virgins' Island.

Sonya's squadron was the first to make contact with the enemy. The girls headed for this isolated raft. They were ten thousand feet or more above it. My heart was heavy with apprehension. I could see the black rays from the raft standing up into the air. Would they reach that high?

It seemed not. The girls went safely over them, wheeled, and came back. They had dropped a bomb. I saw a glowing spot of light as it fell. It struck the water, wide of the raft. A surge of water mounted upward, with a spot of red light where the bomb had burst; then another; a score of them. I began to hear their sharp reports.

The raft was lashed by the waves, but still unhit. But the brute-men pulling it were disorganized, many of them killed, no doubt. The raft stopped its forward progress. Its black beams wavered, then seemed to connect into one narrow black ray.

It shot up through the girls; cut a wide swath through them. Some wavered, came fluttering down; falling, recovering, limping slowly back toward Kalima, struggling to keep above the water. Others fell like plummets into the sea. Half our girls, undoubtedly, were killed or wounded by that single black blast.

Our boats swept through the channel. Three stopped in midstream; seven surged on. Lights flared, our lurid, but penetrating red flare of light went up in an arc from one of our halted boats, and burst over Talon's land force. It seemed that thousands of figures were there on the land. They had spread out from the road; over by the bluff, just beyond the north end of the channel, they were erecting a huge piece of apparatus.

THE LIGHT flares died. But the gunners on our three boats which had stopped in the channel had the range. I could see the streams of their electronic needles, straight paths to the shore. Dim violet beams, with white radiance where the great metallic needles were striking Talon's army.

There must have been a chaos on shore. Then from a projector there in the darkness, a great hissing rose. A yellow glow, almost like the moonlight, became visible. It wavered, fanshaped from its source; a light that lingered, persisted in the darkness, spread until all along that section of the shore it hung like hovering, yellow smoke, a barrage against which our electronic needles launched harmlessly. I could see them materialized into white solidity as they struck it, then flaring red, and yellow as they fused and burned.

The gunners on our boats tried curving their beams. Some were effective, curving in a great violet arc, up over the barrage, or sidewise around its edges. I judged that some were finding their mark, though the barrage was constantly shifted to check them.

The scene everywhere was now a chaos of flashing colored lights. The girls who had escaped the black blast had wavered, gone higher. Their bombs were falling wide; the sea everywhere here was lashed into foam where the bombs were bursting. A chaos of light, sound, and smell, mingled electrical hums; the pungent, acrid electronic odors; the hiss of the flares; the sharp crack of the exploding bombs.

The girls for a moment withdrew, off to one side, very high up. They could not hit their marks; the black beams from the rafts, now spread purely for defense, rose cone-shaped, a cone extending widely over them to protect their swimmers. The bombs, those few which were accurately aimed, exploded in midair as they struck the cone.

A chaos of swift, simultaneous action was everywhere taking place. Our great projectors on the flying platforms opened fire, downward at the rafts. But now from shore a solid black beam suddenly came sweeping out. It caught one of our platforms. The birds fell. The platform—its insulation inadequate—shriveled in the colorless blast, and went down, a tangled mass of birds and struggling human figures.

The beam swung. It caught another platform—and another. All six—the only six we had—were surprised by it—caught there,

low over the channel, before they could escape. One by one they went crashing down into the water. The last one tried to dive; it was struck just as it neared the water level.

This black beam from Talon's shore projector was raking the channel from end to end. It seemed to have a range of several miles—a longer range than any of our weapons. It destroyed our six platforms, and then swung upward at the girls. But they were just beyond it. They wavered as they felt its effect, and then went higher and farther away.

TALON'S white light flares were now continuous from shore. The scene was a dazzling glare of white, with alternating periods of blackness. The black beam, guided by the white flares, sought other victims. It swung on our boats, three of which were bombarding the shore, the other seven heading for Talon's rafts.

The three closest ones caught the black blast full. It burned through their insulating shields, as it had burned the platforms. One boat sank like a stone. Another up-ended; the third tried to retreat.

But its animals evidently were caught at the water surface and destroyed. It lay there, its needle-beam wavering. Then it, also, was hit full by the black beam. It shriveled, disappeared. The water down there was gruesome with black struggling figures.

The beam swung after our other seven boats. They were headed to attack the rafts. They felt the beam, but they were farther away, and their side insulation withstood it. I roared orders at them; and by some miracle my voice got through. Alice answered me.

"Head back!" I commanded. "Around the island. Into the east channel."

It was all very swift. I had been fairly high and about a mile away when the black beam began its deadly work. It flashed by me several times; but my lone platform, with its six birds, was a small, inconspicuous object. The beam missed me; its handlers evidently were after bigger game.

In my ear Maxite's voice sounded: "Keep the girls away, Leonard! Retreat! Our land forces are too close!"

I gave the orders. Maxite's pink blobs of fire were constantly arriving from Kalima. He had seen our disaster. That black beam mounted on the shore seemed impregnable,

unless perhaps from the rear I could assault its gunners with the Frazier thought-beam. I told Maxite my plan, and he approved.

I swept back toward the Virgins' Island. I would go back and come up over the west mainland, flying low. I could make such speed that in a few minutes I would be behind Talon's barrage. Talon's rafts were all well out from shore now, gathered in a group.

I swung within a mile of them. Their black, cone-shaped barrage was over them. They had made no attack—except the one upward blast at the girls—and no attack now was being made on them.

During those brief moments when we had bombed them, their swimming brute-men must have suffered severe loss. Many dove, and climbed to the rafts. But some were still swimming.

The rafts were heading slowly for the north tip of the island, keeping well away from where our boats were lurking in the other channel.

MY BIRDS were flying with tremendous speed. Occasionally I passed wounded birds, and wounded girl riders clinging desperately to them, trying to get back to Kalima.

I sailed over the island, toward Kalima, and then turned and passed inland above the road. Jim's forces were drawn up in an arc, extending from the sea, back inland some half a mile.

The heavy insulating shields were erected at intervals. The projectors were ready; and our wind projector was erected at the shore. It seemed a safe condition. Five miles or more of open country was between this line and Talon's black beam. I could not see the beam from here.

But Talon's yellow shore-barrage glowed clearly. Save for that radiance, the scene up there was now dark. A lull had come to the battle. The first engagement in which we had been so decisively worsted, was over. A momentary lull it was, while Talon seemed waiting to see what we would try next.

The scene was dark and silent. The night was darker now as well. Black clouds obscured the moon and all the stars to the north. And in the silence I heard a low muttering thunder.

I passed over our line, ordering Jim to remain inactive.

"Why?" he protested. "Don't I get in this at all, Len?"

But I kept him there. It was no time for us to plunge recklessly at Talon. He had surprised our first attack and worsted us in the conflict. I was not willing to try that again.

Flying low, I headed over the rolling hills for Talon's present land base. I put on my helmet; drew up the insulating shields that lined the sides of the platform. At my wrist the pulse-motor was throbbing.

I switched on the Frazier current, gripped the controls of the huge projector. If I could concentrate my thoughts enough—with intensity enough. I was letting them rove, now, gathering strength. If I could halt that devastating black beam, and then order another attack, all our remaining forces attacking at once—

In my ears suddenly was Maxite's voice: "I'm ordering Jim to use the wind projector. Talon's rafts are making for the island. We may be able to blow them away, toward the East Channel, where our boats can get at them."

BEHIND me I heard the hiss and roar as the great wind projector got into action, a stream of expanding, heat-yielding electrons flung in a path over the channel surface. A roar; the hot air rising, the cold wind sweeping in; the channel was soon lashed with angry waves.

It had grown very dark. Black clouds edged with lightning were coming down from the north. The thunder claps were louder. I swept low over Talon's lines. Groups of heads clustered on the ground, some mounted on the brute-men.

A crowd moved about a huge black muzzle pointed diagonally upward toward Kalima.

I passed close over it, a hundred feet up; but I hoped that for a moment I would not be seen in the blackness.

To my right was the yellow barrage radiance along the shore. Large, bowl-like wire cages set at intervals of a hundred feet. They glowed yellow, huge pots of the spreading barrage light. Mounted heads were attending them.

I dashed at one. I shouted, stood up on my swaying platform and screamed with menacing words. The heads looked up, surprised. The Frazier projector spat its intensified ray.

Woodenly, the heads and the brute-men

stood stricken; the pot of light went out. I passed within fifty feet of it; my fire-flash, effective at this short range, spat its tongue of blue flame. The brute-men and the heads, the pot of barrage light itself, shriveled under the blast.

I swept along the barrage line, the Frazier beam preceding me. From the other side, and from below me, yellow rings of fire darted up. They struck my upraised side shield, and the bottom of the platform. I could hear the crack of the reports as they struck.

The encampment was in confusion, thousands of dark, surging figures. Small black beams swung at me, mingled with the fire-rings. A light-flare burst over my head. Shouts; a rush of dim figures to avoid me; one of my birds was struck. I cut it loose. It fell.

BUT I was not halted; a minute or two of swift flight, the barrage went dark as I sprayed it with the Frazier beam and the blue fire. I came to the giant projector of the black ray; it shriveled, fused. Its gunners vanished under my blast.

The air was acrid with metallic gases—and the smell of burning human flesh. But Talon's shore-line was dark, devastated. Another of my birds wavered; I urged them all upward. Fire-rings rocked my platform with their detonations. But I was rising. They fell away. The shouts of confusion lessened, melted beneath me.

I was over the water again, safe beyond the lines. The barrage was gone. The giant black beam was destroyed. I tried to tune in for Maxite, could not get him; but I got Jim.

"Forward! Attack now! Swiftly, Jim—with all you've got!"

Then I got Maxite. "Order the attack!"

I could not get his image. My controls were disabled, or the atmosphere was overcharged. But I heard his triumphant voice. "We'll get them, Leonard, get them now!"

The storm from the north broke with fury; no rain, but a blast of wind; sizzling lightning bolts, and the roar of thunder.

Jim had evidently abandoned his wind-blast. His forces were dashing forward. A spray of the violet needle beams curved up before him.

Talon's line was answering. Fire-rings were floating up. Black rays were waving. The two lines, coming together as Jim's

army rushed forward, the rolling hills off there were a confusion of darting lights and crossing rays, a myriad mid-air explosions.

Then it seemed that Talon's line was drawing back, a retreat northward. A yellow barrage went up to cover it. But Jim rushed it; the barrage vanished. With some great projector, Talon's heads made a stand.

A great ball of fire rose into the heavens, a tremendous arc over Jim's army, until it fell at the horizon. Fell on Kalima? I thought so. There was a glare against the sky over there. At five-minute intervals these fire-balls went up, bombarding the distant city.

SONYA was fifteen thousand feet over the channel when our second attack began. The storm was driving the girls back; the birds could barely hold against the wind. The sea far below was a turmoil of lashing waves.

Our boats in the East Channel started forward to try and reach Talon's rafts. But the rafts had blown ashore, were wrecked on the north rocky beach of the island.

Angry waves dashed over them. The heads and the brute-bodies were washed ashore with each white surge of the water.

Our boats saw it. They dropped back into the lee of the island, in the East Channel. The water was a little calmer there.

Close along shore they hovered, and began raking the island with their needle-beams, a steady outpour of violet streams, and blasts from the blue fire-guns.

The island's verdure shriveled, all along the east shore. Then Maxite ordered Jim to set a projector on the west bluff. It soon was sending a blue stream across the channel. The west side of the island was raked from end to end.

Sonya's girls were scattered by the wind. But she saw some of them poised over the north end of the island where Talon's men were trying to land from the rafts. The girls dropped a bomb; then another. The bombs were finding their marks.

Sonya urged her bird in that direction. But abruptly the thought of Atho came clear and vivid to her mind. She had long since given Atho up for dead, killed by our own weapons. But he was not dead. His thoughts came to her with sudden clearness.

I SAW the bombardment of Kalima finally halted. Jim, victorious, was sweeping everything before him. His projector still raked the island. The island's vegetation was burning now from end to end. On the north beach the huddled figures were nearly gone, bodies were everywhere. The water was dotted with them.

Along the main shore now, in advance of Jim, Talon's army was in utter rout. Frantic brute-men with mounted heads rushed to the beach, plunged in. The heads were torn away; floating like balloons on the white-lashing waves. Back along the shore, Jim's men were lined. Needle beams darted out at the floating heads.

Everywhere we were winning. Far back in the country I could see Jim's triumphant lights, spreading everywhere.

From the turmoil of water beneath me, a boat rose up, a long, narrow black boat. Its cover slid back. It was heading northward, away from Kalima, speeding swiftly, with a line of bubbles in its wake.

I remembered it; the boat Jim had described. Talon's boat! Talon, who had been lurking beneath the surface of the sea, waiting in safety for victory, so that he might rush for Kalima. Now, with defeat, he was escaping. Atho, perhaps, was with him.

I turned my aerial, trying to pick up Maxite. But could not get him. Then I tried one of our nearest boats raking the island, ordered it to follow Talon. Behind me, far down, I saw it turn and start.

I drove my birds downward in a swoop for Talon's boat. Beneath me, close to the water I seemed to see the shadow of a flying bird; but in a moment I had forgotten it.

A breathless swoop and I was close upon the boat. From the dim glow of its engines, I saw it held only four figures, three mounted heads. Two were controlling the boat. The other was Talon. I could see him moving about giving commands. And Atho lay in the boat's bottom; Atho, his body lashed and bound into an inert bundle.

My Frazier beam struck the boat's interior. The two mounted heads controlling it stiffened and fell. But Talon was untouched. I was close over the stern of the boat, holding my projector downward. Talon's face glared up at it, untouched. His brute-body stiffened and slumped; but Talon disconnected from it.

HIS head dropped to the deck upon his hands. His eyes glared up at me. A flash of black spat from his hand-projector. At this close range my platform crumpled. It fell; struck the boat's stern, and toppled half into the water. I had leaped. I fell into the boat.

But another figure had landed there before me; a giant, fluttering bird. Sonya jumped from it, seized Atho's bound body. Talon's small flash darted at her, but missed.

My wrecked platform, half on the boat's stern, weighed it down. The boat began to fill with water.

I saw vaguely as I leaped at Talon, that Sonya was dragging Atho's inert form to the gunwale. They went overboard together. My hurtling body struck the head of Talon. It cracked, smashed under my weight. I climbed from its noisome, sticky mass.

The boat was filling; sinking, stern first. I dove over its side, into the wave-whipped sea.

The sinking boat sucked me under. But I came up. Around me was a white, tumultuous darkness. Overhead the storm clouds had broken into a rift; the yellow moonlight came through. Something was floating near me, some wreckage from the boat, a gas-filled pontoon. I seized it.

Behind me, our boat from the island was approaching. Then I saw, upraised near me by a surging white wave-crest, a human figure struggling. Sonya, struggling to keep Atho above the water. I reached them.

"Sonya! Here, hold to this! I've got him!"

A sea animal went by us with a rush. Our pursuing boat drew up; its black side was a wall above us. The insulating side-shield rolled back. Anxious men's faces stared down at us over the gunwale. Arms came down and hauled us up.

I heard Alice's voice; and Dolores's:

"Len! And Sonya—and the prince! Thank God you're all safe!"

And from far over the land came the scream of Jim's siren, the signal of victory there.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Great Riddle

THE home-coming! The return of our war-racked forces to the city, with half its suburbs burned, and a thousand of its people killed by Talon's

bombardment! I shall not describe the cheers, the laughter—the sobbing. Victory in war is so little better than defeat! All the pæans of triumph cannot heal the maimed, or bring back the dead.

I was king no longer, for our prince now was ruler, with Sonya for his queen. I was glad to be released. There is a very false, a pseudo-glory, in ruling a nation.

But Atho would not have me wholly resign. My promised reforms, my earthly ideas of government, were needed here. And so they called me premier; and thrived upon a crude but humane version of what we on earth would call a civilized government; a veneration of the aged; a new idea of infant welfare; a monogamy of marriage, with the surplus women doing their rational work in art and industry.

Of Talon's thousand, fully half escaped back into the mountains. They are there now. They will always be a menace. But there is not a race of humans in all the universe unmenaced by something. The very essence of human existence is struggle. We do not think of Talon's brutes now as the Nameless Horror, and we are always prepared.

It was shortly after my marriage to Alice, that one evening I came upon Jim and Dolores in each other's arms.

"Well!" I said. "What's this?"

He kissed her again. "I loved her right from the beginning," he declared. Which was not exactly true, but I knew that he thought so.

I had never seen little Dolores so radiant.

"And I always loved him, Len. You know that."

I did indeed. And she had never wavered in that love, from the days when he had seized the little blind child and whirled her in the air.

Our return to earth? We never made it. With Dr. Weatherby's death, the grave held the vital knowledge we needed for such a journey. Nor did we desire it. Our lives were cast here.

Often now, from earth, thought-waves reach me, tiny earth, rolling on with a speeding time so much faster than ours in this outer realm! Centuries have passed on earth. Of what use for me to return—a primitive, savage being of their past ages?

Civilizations have risen, held their peak, and declined. Great cities have come and gone. Ice has been again where once I saw the jungles of the tropics. And the ice has melted again through countless ages.

The new humans of earth often communicate with me. Their thoughts are amazed at what I have to tell them. It is all amazing to me, the great riddle of the universe. And I think sometimes of that ancient earth-astronomer, groping with the riddle, writing in his ancient book:

Man, the little god of this earth, tied down to the small star which infinite Nature gave him for an abode, storms forth into immeasurable stellar space with his thoughts.

From that little earth I stormed forth in body, beyond the stars!

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FUTURIAN TIMES

LOS ANGELES "FUTURIAN HOUSE"

Christened FUTURIAN HOUSE by Charles D. Hornig, former editor of FUTURE, the new permanent club room of the Angeleno imagi-natives was met in for the first time on the occasion of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society's 201st meeting. Voices of those present (28) were recorded. Among the celebrities were international rocket authority Willy Ley from New York; Denvention's Guest of Honor, Lieutenant Heinlein & Wife; Henry and Catherine Kuttner (CLMoore); Henry Hasse; and a number of prominent fans, including Geo Hahn, late of the Futurian contingent of New York, Murojo, Paul Freehafer, Walt Daugerty, Bruce Yerke, Bill Crawford, FJ Ackerman, Ray Bradbury, Pogo, and so on. A letter from London, reporting on the first Open Air Science Fiction Convention was read, as well as a communication from Australia and an article by HG Wells. Speeches were given by Ley and Kuttner.

New addresses, where all LASFS meetings will be held henceforward is 1035 WILSHIRE BLVD, #4. Fans congregate starting 7 o'clock every Thursday eve, with visitors always welcome. Housed here is the club's mimeo equipment, which publishes "Voice of the Imagi-Nation", "The Damn Thing", "Pacifconews", et alia; and the society's fantascience library, containing approximately 1025 pieces of professional and fan stf plus weird mags. Visitors are cordially invited to attend a meeting in the near FUTURE!

FUTURIAN SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

Way out west, it's the LASFS, as given above, but THE organization on the East Coast is the Futurian Society of New York, the official headquarters of which are the Futurian Embassy, 142 West 104th Street, New York City. This society has just recently celebrated its 2d birthday and has completed a year's functioning under the most unique constitution ever to be the guide of a fan group. The FSNY constitution actually fills three quarters of a page, typed single space, and covers everything!

To quote briefly: "The Futurian Society of New York is an amorphous collection of individuals bound together by ties of varying magnitude of social, literary, artistic, or science fiction and fantasy implications."...in regard to meetings: "The Futurian Society shall be considered to be in permanent session, broken only by periods of recesses at such time when there is no sizeable number of Futurians in the same place at the same time... A formal meeting of the Society can be called whenever at least seven Futurians are present, who shall include at least four members of the Executive Committee. Such a meeting will consider any valid business of the Society as a whole and may make decisions which may not be counteracted save by another meeting. The formal governing body of the Society, which

alone may speak in the name of the Society, shall be the Executive Committee."

The present Exec. Committee members are John B. Michel (Director), Robert W. Lowndes (Secretary), Chester Cohen (Official Editor), Donald A. Wollheim (Treasurer), and Cyril Kornbluth (member-at-large). Official publication is FUTURIA, an occasional magazine, which is mailed out gratis to exchanges.

STF NEWS WEEKLY

If you're a collector, or if you're interested in keeping abreast of what is going on in the world of science-fiction and fantasy, both professional and fan, then the sheet for you is FANTASY FICTION FIELD ILLUSTRATED NEWS WEEKLY.

This publication sells for five cents the copy, is either mimeographed, or neatly hectoed on a first-class ditto machine, and contains 2 to four pages per issue. Most important of all are the photographs. There's always one, and sometimes as many as four. It may be a foto-preview of a forthcoming issue of some science fiction or fantasy magazine, a foto of some fan, fans, author, or authors, fotos of original illustrations, rare stf and fantasy collector's items, fun-fotos of fan activities, or what not.

This sheet is published by Julius Unger, 1702 Dhill Road, Brooklyn, New York. You can get three copies for ten cents, six for twenty-five, or a full year's worth for two dollars.

MAKERS OF FANTASY FANDOM

1. Donald A. Wollheim

This issue of FUTURE is dedicated to the man who first won the distinction of being selected as world science fiction fan number one: Donald Allen Wollheim.

His fan career started in 1934 when he joined the International Cosmos Science Club and started writing stf spotlite columns for the club's official organ, the "International Observer."

From that time, he has pursued his favorite activity with ever-increasing vigor and enthusiasm, piling up a truly remarkable record of constructive achievement in the fan field, among which the founding of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, organizing the Futurian Society of New York, and inaugurating the machinery for the first World Science Fiction Convention, held in New York, 1939, are but a few examples.

His influence upon the field has been world-wide. In England and in Australia fans have profited by the experiences of Wollheim and his colleagues, and the aid that American futurians have given them to the end of building lasting organizations has not been inconsiderable.

Wollheim still publishes an amateur fan journal, the PHANTAGRAPH, which has the distinction of being the oldest fan magazine still appearing. He has recently re-entered the field of science-fiction writing, and has had a number of stories published, many of

which have been quite popular with stf readers.

SERVICE DEPARTMENT

This department will try to answer any questions of general interest to fankind any reader sends in.

Q: What was the ISA?

A: ISA are the initials of the International Scientific Association, founded in 1933 by John B. Michel, Edward Gervais, and Walter Kubillus. The original name of the club was "International Cosmos Science Club," the name being changed to "International Scientific Association" in 1935. The club dissolved in 1937. For further information, we refer you to the "Friends of the ISA", in care of this publication.

Q: Where did the artwork of Frank R. Paul first appear?

A: In the ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER circa 1915.

Q: Did Jules Verne ever write a sequel to "The Mysterious Island"?

A: Two sequels were written, to our knowledge, one of which is (or was) available in the Everyman's Library editions. They are not very well known, and cannot be found in science fiction bibliographies.

Q: Did Verne ever write a novel called "The Chase of the Meteor"?

A: We've seen a book by Verne with that title, but apparently it hasn't been translated. It does not seem to have any connection with the popular "Hector Severadar."

Q: Has W. Olaf Stapledon written for any of the English science fiction magazines?

A: No. Mr. Stapledon's classic works of imaginative fiction were written before he, personally, was aware of the existence of such things as science fiction magazines.

FAN MAGAZINES

PEGASUS, published at 281 14th Avenue, Columbus, Ohio. No price is given on this first issue, but we assume you can get one for ten cents. Neatly, in fact, beautifully hectographed, contains interesting departments and articles by Widner, Chauvenet, Bronson, and Jenkins.

WAVELLENGTH, published at 520 Maple Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland, by Henry Andrew Ackermann. 10 cents the copy. Current issue somewhat marred by typos, but material of interest. Chauvenet dissertates upon fan poetry (it really should have been more extensive, for our money); Widner tells how he became a fan, and your editor tells about his initiation into the editing field.

SPACEWAYS, published at 303 Bryan Place, Hagerstown, Maryland, by Harry Warner, Jr. Single copies ten cents; 3 for 25 cents. This fanzine is still leading in fan polls, and manages to keep a high standard. Current issue features articles by Parnadi (on collecting and a collector's experience), Widner (telling of his journey to Chicago in 1940), and Belling (calling for a fan library service). Regular column by the S. F. Cynic, "Beacon Light," covers a number of subjects as usual.



HANNES
BOK

She lifted him to her bosom.

THE ALIEN VIBRATION

He followed the will-o'-the-wisp to a strange world, a world distant, yet near, for he had never been far away. But why did the alien ones remember him?

by HANNES BOK

FRANK ROGERS first heard the tortured wailing when he was sitting alone by his hearthstone, cosily dreaming before a dying fire. Instinctively he glanced sidewise, then chuckled—for of course no one else was present. Sparks snapped in the fire. Had he been dreaming? He relaxed; the wind's whispering around the eaves soothed him. It was night in scarlet autumn.

All that day the man had been out in the woods near his home, his eyes feasting on the gaudy frost-tinted foliage, his ears filling with the music of the sighing wind as it stripped the trees. His nostrils had dilated to catch the sweet scent of the deep-drifted dry leaves through which he had waded as though through rustling dry water pattering him with flakes of fragrant foam.

He had stood on the hilltop, stretching his hands up to the soft turquoise blue of the heavens, had flung the gates of his senses wide open to receive the beauty of this day. Then, in the dim afterglow, he had returned home, tranquil. His house was a shadow in the dusk; entering it, he lit a fire, dined, and went to the hearth. Hearing the outcry at his side, he turned, found himself alone, and decided that it had been a trick of his imagination.

THE whimpering began again—not petulant; despairing, rather, as if the being from which it came was no longer able to restrain itself. It was the kind of cry that no one could possibly ignore. Rogers extended his hand, touched nothing, stood up and looked around, still seeing no one. He went over to a wall and snapped on a light, banished the flickering shadows set in motion by the fire. The only living thing in that room was himself.

Yet the sound had ceased as he had arisen, as if their maker had been silenced by surprise or apprehension. But now, as Rogers shook his head, puzzled, the lament was resumed.

The man again explored the place from which the moaning seemed to emanate; though he found nothing, the sound slurred at the movement into a pleased gurgling, as when an infant's tears give way to chortling at its parents' attention. Then a pause, and a rapid flow of tones. Words? If so, in a tongue unknown to Rogers—though, as he listened they became oddly familiar, as if he had memorized them long ago, then forgotten them. Plainly they questioned; he stepped backward uncertainly. The query was repeated, this time haltingly, as if to allow the man ample chance to comprehend every syllable; he shrugged, baffled. If he were not dreaming, this thing must be a ghost . . .

Ghost? Or some alien presence; he rejected the supernatural. This would be the first he had ever encountered. Most of his life had been spent in crowded cities, where the atmosphere was too confused by conflicting currents of thought for delicate otherworld perceptions; here the air was clearer, and in opening his senses to the day's loveliness, might he not also have opened them to—something else?

The inquiry was repeated—a third time, impatiently, now. The man could not bring himself to answer it: words boiled in his mind, but speaking them amounted to talking to himself. There was a burst of exclamation from the unseen intruder, then a coy pleading, wheedling. At last Rogers spoke.

"Go away! I don't know who or what

**A Favorite Science Fiction Artist Paints
an Unforgettable Word Picture**

you are—and you make me nervous. Try bothering someone else, please.”

An upward inflection of surprise answered him, shading into eager earnestness.

“You may as well go away,” the man furthered. “I can’t understand what you’re saying . . . I was perfectly happy until you came along!”

The reassuring murmur which replied began beside the man and ended at the door; it was as if the speaker had walked, talking, from Rogers’ side across the room to the entrance. The last notes were insistent.

“No use; I don’t fathom you,” the man said.

Again the response across from beside him, leisurely approaching the door. He followed it. Immediately, triumphantly, it passed through the door and called from outside. For a clock’s tick, Rogers hesitated, then stepped out into the night, heeding the invisible voice. It sped ahead at once, pleased and promising; he went after it.

So they went on, the sound summoning, the man pursuing it until he was deep in the whispering woods, stumbling through the night. Over the tissue-paper rustle of trampled leaves the voice nuanced from a continual stream of words to an occasional evocative hoot—now at one side of the man, now on the other, guiding him. Rogers knew the woods well, and so did the garrulous presence, for carefully it steered him away from gullies and tangled underbrush. Not even a low-hanging branch barred the way.

They reached the summit of the hill, and the presence fell silent. Over the man curved the blue-black sky, powdered with stars. The cold breeze, plucking at Rogers’ garments, ruffling his hair, was like a playful hand, teasing. . . .

Looking skyward at the points of light, the man felt that he had merely to stretch his arms wide to launch himself off the hill’s crest into infinity. . . .

Peace; the calm of eternity. Hypnotic. Rogers forgot where he was, even that he existed. There was only a mesmeric sensation of restful serenity. . . .

HE HEARD the muted babbling of many childish voices, and the one which had summoned him was murmuring, “It is all right, now: he can hear us and understand what we are saying; his eyes will see us.”

He felt a light hand on his arm; with difficulty he tore his gaze from the fascination of the stars and turned to see what had touched him. At first he was aware only of a diffused mellow glow filled with drifting splotches of golden effulgence; then he perceived that the moving lights were blurred mirthful faces like those of half-remembered children.

The gentle glimmer issued in all directions from a landscape of light. Prismatic trees and hills, restless forms of luminescence. The nearest objects were most clear; those farther away merged into the gleaming haze. The variations of hue and intensity blended into a splendid ambrous harmony.

Rogers could discern, scattered about, fragile pavilions rising out of rainbow glamors. Every glance disclosed something until then unseen. Abruptly he was startled: as he regarded admiringly a clump of diversely colored flowers, it dimmed and vanished! Like a fadeout on a cinema screen.

One of the hills dissolved into nothingness; in its place foamed an amethyst sea on which magic islands appeared and disintegrated. The sea rolled away beyond ken: Frank was looking into a canyon of malachite. . . .

“Mirage,” he murmured, and heard laughter; the drifting faces concentrated around him. Misty wide eyes, blue and amber, dwelt amusedly on him. Slender hands lifted in graceful gestures of disdain out of trailing half-visible lilac draperies.

“He thinks it’s not real!” the faces murmured. “Let’s prove to him that he’s wrong!”

Fingers gentle as thistledown prodded him; little wispy forms raced ahead of him as somnambulistically he allowed himself to be goaded forward . . . He stumbled over a shrub which suddenly sprouted in front of him and which disappeared as he awoke from his trance to glance disapproval at it.

A voice cautioned, “Remember, our mother is waiting! We mustn’t detain him too long!” Rogers scanned the speaker, a little ruby wraith spangled with brassy glints. It danced tantalizingly close to him, eluding his clumsy attempts to grasp it.

“You are—?” he asked, and it replied, “Shi-Voysieh, child of Yarra, The Woman.”

“Yarra?” the man queried.

“You will see her very soon.”

"And these?" Rogers indicated the other child-faces.

"They too are Yarra's children," Shi-Voysieh answered. "Our brothers . . . and sisters."

AT EVERY new phantasmogorical manifestation, Rogers observed that the shining-visaged children pointed three fingers in its direction.

"And why do you do that?" he asked of Shi-Voysieh.

"In worship of their maker," the ruby-clothed presence replied.

"And that is—?"

"B'Kuth, The Man." Again Shi-Voysieh reverently performed the ceremonial salute.

Frank had no opportunity for further inquiry, for just then the ground was swept from under his feet and he found himself tumbling on the surface of a tempestuous lake which tossed him about violently. The waves looked like water, but they felt like rubber and were perfectly dry. After a hasty ritual of homage, the children scampered nimbly from the crest of one gigantic comber to another, shrieking delightedly if a sudden billow tumbled them. They clustered about the man giggling at his confusion.

Then, in a breath, the waves whisked away, leaving an endless azure sky in which the children darted about joyously, uttering glad cries, like birds. There was nothing but the blue of sheer atmosphere. Rogers did not realize then that all of these disconcerting phenomena were being intelligently produced for the purpose of bewildering him. The children preferred frisking about to explaining the cause of Rogers' plight; perhaps they deemed explication unnecessary.

Only the man's struggles to breathe in an uprush of air, and the dwindling forms of the children, told him that he was falling. He shouted with panic—and discovered that he was quite safe in a hammock swinging among the treetops, while above him the children were enthusiastically cavorting on puffs of cloud: "These're ice-floes, and I'll be a bloodhound and chase you, if you want to be Eliza!"

As Rogers relaxed, panting, the hammock dissolved; he was seated on pavement at the foot of an immense white stair-

way; at its summit the children were impatiently hailing him. Beyond them loomed a marvellous edifice of translucent milky stone; its spires faded into the mists of sky, and nebulous forms were discernible moving within it. Rogers had undergone enough of the whirlwind changes, and refused to ascend the stair until the children assured him that there would not very likely be any further trouble.

He climbed high and higher. Whiffs of vapor puffed up from the white steps, enveloping him like languorously-cast veils; they thickened, obliterating everything. Rogers felt the children's hands patting him. Then long pale fingers drew the mist aside as though parting a pair of curtains, and he looked up into the somber eyes of Yarra, The Woman.

SHE WAS seated on a throne of white stone and was indistinct, as though seen through waxed glass. All of twenty feet tall, she was robed in clinging cloudy white which trailed into the mist and merged with it. Her oval face was margined with sleek yellow tresses that flowed over her shoulders. For eyes she had dark stars; her slender nose was negligible; her mouth a rosy pucker. Her flesh had the sheen of pearl and the veins pulsing at her temples, throat and wrists were like pale blue roots . . .

Reaching down, she lifted the man into her lap as though he were a kitten. Involuntarily he nestled against her warm bosom, breathing the delicious femininity which scented her clothing; then he drew away in embarrassment and sat tensely erect. The Woman's eyes softened; she smiled understandingly.

"So you're the one whom Shi-Voysieh has been following," she murmured; at the mention of his name, the ruby-swathed presence flitted up to the pair and sat on The Woman's forearm, clinging to her. Rogers shared his gaze with them both, comparing them: there was a disturbing sameness about them which he dismissed as a family resemblance, not suspecting the truth.

Shi-Voysieh petulantly informed him, "For a very long time I have watched you, but you never saw me, never heard me. I told this-our-mother about you, and asked if I could not bring you to her, since you

seemed so appreciative of beauty. For awhile she would not consent; she said that you would be confused, away from your own scheme of things . . . and she said that if you were aware of this world of ours, you could enter it unaided. Then in the red woods I caught you with all your senses receptive—but I could not make myself known above the day's wonder. So I followed you to your home and waited—but it seemed too late; you could not feel nor hear me. In my despair I cried out, and then you heard! But poorly. So I have led you here and asked our-mother-Yarra's help—and it is by her strength of will that you are kept with us."

Rogers looked for confirmation from The Woman; she nodded. He thought, "Shi-Voysieh mentioned a Man . . . if this is The Woman, what must The Man be like?" As if he had spoken the thought, Shi-Voysieh shrank away; The Woman's face hardened as if at a bitter thought, then became gentle again. All around Rogers was a flutter and scurrying of agitated children.

"Was it such a dreadful thing to think?" he queried.

The Woman's gaze was reproachful. "When you are aware of Him—do honor to Him." She herself made the ceremonial salute which the children used.

"It's a strange custom; I didn't understand," Rogers explained, and she saw the children exchange worried glances at this.

"I know, and I forgive," The Woman answered, assuaging him with a caress of her long fingers. "You ask of The Man: His name is B'Kuth." She eyed him as if he had known and she was reminding him. "He is a mystery—to know B'Kuth and for what He stands would be to comprehend the riddle of Life itself." Speaking The Man's name, she made the reverent sign. "No mere mind like yours could understand such an intensity of knowledge as to realize B'Kuth. To understand The Man is to have become—The Man!"

"And—you?" Rogers asked.

"I?" She threw back her head; at her sudden horrible laughter, the children screamed, wildly scattering into the mist, leaving Yarra and Rogers alone. "I am only one whom He has exalted—!"

For a moment she looked away, her face a cold mask; then she quickly set Rogers down and arose, turning from him to go. He put up his hands to stay her.

"Don't go! Please!" he cried. She did

not look at him, and he was afraid that she had not heard, that she had forgotten him. But after a pause, she said, "I cannot take you with me, for I go now to—Him; I am His mate, you know." And again her terrible laughter flared.

SHE mastered her emotion, bent more calmly over him. "Do as you wish until I return. Create whatever you desire. That's the law here, you know—to create, to imitate B'Kuth. You don't know what I mean? Why, look: suppose you desire food! Then, imagine its qualities. Describe its appearance in the air with your hands—visualize it until you almost think it is before you—"

Rogers shook his head helplessly. Biting her underlip—and he sensed her impatience—she knelt before him.

"Now watch," she said. "I wish for a fruit. It must be round, transparent, purple and pithy. Not sweet, nor bitter, but with a haunting undertaste of drowsiness—" and as she spoke, her cupped hands apparently fondled an invisible globe in mid-air. Suddenly the fruit which she had described materialized between her palms. She dropped it beside her—it fell with a thud—and she motioned imperiously to Rogers. "Now, do something like that," she said.

He closed his eyes. "I'd like to make a cloth," he said, gesturing. "A very large piece. Weightless. Like strands of woven green fire, with little vine-embroideries. . ."

Something swept his cheek; he lifted his eyelids and beheld The Woman holding up a vast sheet of fabric. The little damasked designs of vines were vague, wavering; he complained of this to Yarra.

"It was because your thought of them wasn't explicit enough," she explained. "Get more practice." She arose. "Now I must go."

"But this cloth—it's a shawl, for you!" he cried, thrusting folds of the stuff at her.

"Thank you, my dear." She smiled sagely. "Let us see how long it is." She began to drag on the cloth, hand over hand. There seemed to be no end to the piece: Rogers was practically lost in the accumulated folds. Then Yarra held up the last of it, which wisped away into nothingness. He had forgotten to imagine any edge to the cloth!

"It was a very large piece," she commented, wryly smiling. "I'm afraid it's too large—even if weightless—for me to use, ever.

But thank you, child . . . I can see that you're wondering what to do with all that material: walk away and forget it. As soon as you've lost interest in it, it'll vanish—that's the way with things here. Now really, I must leave you." She touched his head affectionately and stepped into the mist.

Rogers stood gazing at the spot where she had been. Then the purple globe caught his eye. He wondered how it tasted, and reached for it—but it vanished in his hands: The Woman had "lost interest" in it. "The way with things here." When he looked for the green cloth it too had disappeared.

IF THE law here is to create—then who makes all these changing illusions which harass me so?" he pondered. "It's malevolent and damnable!" He thrust his hands upward and shouted, "I want to behold whoever is in back of all this!"

Instantly manifestations overwhelmed him; there was a rocketing of sound, a crash of Cosmos shattering. Mad seas lurched in and out of shrieking blackness; whirling stars collided in blasts of brilliance; lightnings raced in chase after each other; whole landscapes moved under Rogers in zigzag marches, lifting and dropping him, painfully knocking him about.

It rained ice, rocks, fire, and strange yellow luminaries. Rogers was bounced on an endless sheet of stinking human flesh . . . he was drenched in slime . . . howling winds picked him up, spinning him through a place where strata of colored air boiled like a cauldron of rainbows. Falls of metal scraps thundered clangorously, and tangled plants of flexible grass grew to monstrous size and exploded. Rogers was stifling in an atmosphere of struggling wet worms . . .

All this in the space of ten seconds, so many things—some so inexplicable—that he could hardly identify a thousandth of them.

HE WAS lying on a mirror which faded into illimitable distance. Overhead was a purple sky and rapidly whirling garlands of yellow moons and stars. One of the stars slipped away from the others, drifted downward, augmenting with approach. It halted at Rogers' side, and he recognized Shi-Voysieh.

Rogers asked, "Why must you make that sanctimonious signal at every new apparition which confronts you?"

"Because it is the handiwork of B'Kuth," the child said, making the respectful ges-

ture. "We are fortunate to behold the work of The Man; therefore we make the Motion of Admiration to tell Him so."

"You mean, all these alterations of the scenery are His doing?" Rogers asked.

Shi-Voysieh nodded. "He is ever transforming the old into the new."

"Listen," Rogers said, "I don't like being here at the mercy of a maniac. I want to get back to my own world, where things are comparatively coherent and tranquil. But how can I do it? Tell me how to get out of this nightmare—or take me back; you brought me here!"

The child eyed him dubiously.

"You will have to re-create your world," he said finally. Then—"But—ah! Don't you see?" His eyebrows were lifted imploringly.

"What do you mean?" Rogers asked.

The child pointed down to the mirrored floor. Rogers gazed, saw his reflected self. Only—it was not himself, not as he was accustomed to seeing himself. It was like Shi-Voysieh, a red-clothed, shining-faced immature image!

"Shi-Voysieh!" he cried, clutching the child, who shrank out of his grasp. "But what does it mean?" He peered at the reflection.

"You really want to know? I'd like to tell—" The child leaned forward eagerly; Rogers motioned for him to proceed. "Yarra won't like my telling you—but"—as he performed the sacred signal—"I believe that B'Kuth prefers you to know . . .

YOU WERE one of us, long ago. But you were more ambitious than we. B'Kuth, The Man, took delight in you, because of the complex things which you shaped. You were proud of His indulgence, and mocked the puny efforts of us others; you went apart from us and created a cosmos all your own out of the thought-material which The Man has given us—again the reverent rite—"the ether-energy which is manipulated by the impulses of our wills. You entered this cosmos of yours, forgetting us—and when we searched for you, though we found you, we could not make you remember us, or notice us in any particular. But Yarra said that one day you must remember, that you could not rival The Man"—performing the ritual—"with your inventions. But it seems that you could, or almost so, because you made it a law of your cosmos that your works

would progress without need of stimulus; you called it evolution—creation, of course. And I . . . I despaired of your return, my brother!

"So I asked The Woman to let me bring you here, if I could, to remind you in case you had absolutely forgotten us. She didn't wish it, but at last she agreed, on the premise that we treat you as a stranger; for if we were to tell you, she said, it was probable that you might take offense in your perversity, or refuse to believe—and since you had found your place more appealing than ours, you might be frightened back into it, never to return to us again. Refuge—in your private universe—shunning the realities of B'Kuth—insanity! Afraid to face the fact of your existence here!"

"Shi-Voysieh!" Rogers cried, horrified, but the child had more to say.

"Our-mother-Yarra further said that though you were brought back to this region and we could persuade you to destroy your cosmos by forgetting it, still we could not prevent you from rebuilding it . . ."

"Shi-Voysieh, there's a flaw in what you say," Rogers objected. "How can a man make something without having a model to go by?"

"You mean, what does a creator use as a foundation—as an inspiration? Why, he works like any artist: he obtains material from what is around him and enlarges upon it. And B'Kuth gave us the original material on which we have elaborated!" In his fervor he forgot to make the sacred sign.

"But then it's a useless game. No purpose at all," Rogers mused, "because to *create* you must make a thing which has never existed before in any wise, and you can't do that: you can only embroider what you've experienced. It's impossible for anyone to conceive something which he has not experienced except in terms of what he has experienced. And that's not creating at all! Merely rearranging facts into a new pattern!"

"But—then what of B'Kuth?" Shj-Voysieh trembled as he gestured reverently.

"He too is limited by His own law; He cannot make what is not potentially within Him. And therefore this so-called 'creating' of His is only a silly game to while away eternities—the fantasies of a lost and frightened child in the dark, babbling gibberish as it pretends that it is not alone.

"B'Kuth is only a fool like you and me, building dreams from remembered experi-

ences, rearranging old patterns into new. Who's to say where the original Pattern of Patterns came from—some super-universe of which B'Kuth was once an inhabitant—?"

"Stop!" Shi-Voysieh screamed, fluttering several paces away. "Oh, I shouldn't have told you! But I had to know if you remembered us—and instead I find you insane, insane! To say such things! Quick—remake your worlds and depart to them, leaving us as we were before at peace! You frighten me . . .!" He drifted a few feet above the mirror as though ready to take flight.

"Wait! Don't go! I'll try!" Rogers cried, and shut his eyes, striving to recall the home from which Shi-Voysieh had drawn him—but there was only a blur.

"It's Yarra's will, still holding you here," Shi-Voysieh murmured slowly. His voice was weighted with guilt. "She will punish me when she learns that I have told. . . I am afraid! . . . I could make myself a world and hide in it, but that would be insanity, fear of facts, and anyway, I'd want to return to my native place . . ." He sighed resignedly, then spoke with reproach: "As for you—you'd better wait here until Yarra returns, and tell her how things stand. Now goodbye—I'll never want to see you again!"

With a curt nod, the child wriggled his shoulders, flirting his scarlet draperies, and flashed upward to the dancing stars. They gathered around him, flickering excitedly as though exchanging gossip of light, then scattered, leaving an absolutely blank sky. The purple deepened to murky brown . . . Rogers sat peering at his child's face in the mirror, like Narcissus.

FAR OFF, he beheld a phosphorescence gliding his way. As it neared him, he discerned that it was Yarra. Her radiance was wan, and the misty glory was ebbing; her hair was tangled wildly, and her white robe was soiled and rent.

"Ah, I've found you. I searched and searched, and my thought drew me here at last," she sighed; bending, she lifted him to her bosom. She swayed, evidently ill, and Rogers hung on to her in terror lest he fall. Her free hand brushed back a golden tress which had fallen athwart her face, and she bent her head over the man. "I release you, little one. Go back to that world of yours," she whispered. "But—take me with you. I don't care whether it is madness; I can endure B'Kuth's tortures no longer."

"But B'Kuth! Will He allow it?" The Woman had neglected to make the reverent salute, and Rogers forgot it also.

"B'Kuth!" she sneered. "We aren't puppets, are we? Hasn't he given us the powers of thought and action?"

"He can follow us!"

"Perhaps. But it may be that once we are in your world, He will forget us . . ." She was asking for suicide, Rogers knew; he was willing to risk anything to return to his own place.

She shook him impatiently as one might shake an offending kitten. "Quickly! Quickly!"

Unheeding, Rogers thought aloud, "Surely I can't have created—my world!" He was horribly perplexed, and Yarra realized that his mind must be at rest before he could begin to shape the haven which she hoped to reach; she allowed him to finish. "I—who have looked through a microscope with awe! I couldn't enjoy the forest's beauty if I knew I had fashioned it—unless, of course, I were insane, as Shi-Voysieh claimed."

Yarra dropped him despairingly and fell sobbing into a huddle. Shaken by the tumble, Rogers lurched to his feet; gently he patted The Woman's smooth shoulders. Then he concentrated on the forest near his home; he closed his eyes, imagined its murmuring. But it was a dim, blurred sound. It must become louder, if it were to seem real—there, that was better—but louder still, until it was all around him. The trees, shedding their papery foliage; the drifting crumpled leaves; night, with stars overhead . . . Yes, it was very real . . .

Yarra's hand fettered his wrist; he opened his eyes. They were out of B'Kuth's domain and back in the autumn woods.

There was peace on The Woman's tired face as she struggled erect and they plodded through the brush toward Rogers' dwelling.

"We're safe now," she exulted. Something of her glory had returned to her.

Rogers pondered, "There may be other laws than just B'Kuth's. What we call Substance here has been conceived as being composed of variations of a primal force. But it doesn't indicate that there is only one such force: there may be millions—

each with its own set of laws—dwelling harmoniously side by side like the colors in the spectrum; perhaps congruently. But if these forces are each distinct from the others, how could I, the creature of one, leave my controlling vibration and enter another—since if the forces were interpermeable, they'd have blended long ago. Well, perhaps one can enter an alien vibration but not become part of it, merely observe it imperfectly because of senses governed by a set of differing laws . . . my head's whirling . . . a flaw of one force in the enveloping ether of another . . ."

Yarra was not attending his words; she stood still, peering up at the stars in the sky, her hands crossed on her breast.

"Like my children—Shi-Voysieh," she whispered.

WAS IT her nostalgia which dragged her back? Or the work of B'Kuth? Rogers heard a little rush of wind. Like a candleflame in a draught, Yarra's nimbus flickered, and she dissolved into the night. There were only rustling trees beside Rogers, and the wind wailing among them.

He found the path which led to his house, and stumbled inside, with many backward looks. There was no trace of The Woman. He slammed the front door and leaned against it, staring wide-eyed at nothing, his head bursting with ideas.

Had Yarra deserted him out of loneliness for her children? Or had B'Kuth snatched her back? Perhaps The Woman was only B'Kuth's thought, and He had been playing a jest on Rogers. That would make Shi-Voysieh and the others phantoms likewise. What could it all mean?

Suddenly Rogers knew—

For he was—he could be no other than—The Man! And Yarra, the children, everything of which he was at all conscious . . . only dreams in the theatre of his brain—a theatre where he was an actor as well as spectator.

Outside the wind howled ominously. He recognized it for what it really was.

"Only my imagination," he said scornfully.

The howling obediently stopped.



"MY OBJECT ALL SUBLIME"

Those traffic violators were a stink to say the least; that was certain. But suddenly came the day when that expression was no longer figurative—they stank literally!

THE City Editor tells me to go to Seventh and Spring.

"There's a story there," he says. "Go down and check it."

"What kind?"

"They say it smells."

"Why shouldn't it?" I told him. "Columbia Bank on one corner, Fidelity-First National on the other, and the City Hall and the Daily Tide building just down the street."

"Wise guy," he answers. "I mean a real smell—like yourself."

Dobbs is all right—with him it's stomach ulcers and matrimony. "What's the sketch?" I asked, ignoring the crack.

"Seems like it ain't safe to drive a car through that intersection," he answered seriously. "You come out smelling like a telephone booth. Find out why."

IEASED down there and looked the situation over. Nothing I could put my finger on, but a general air of nervousness and uncertainty. Now and then I'd catch a whiff of something, some ancient rotteness. It put me in mind of the morgue, again it was more like a Chinese river boat. When something happened that gave me a lead—

A truck came charging through as the lights were changing. He had time to stop, but didn't—and just missed a feeble old gal in the crosswalk. There was a sharp "fuss": the truck driver got a look of agonized surprise, and wipes at his eyes. As he passed me I smelled it.

No mistake this time—it stunk like a convention of pole kitties, with prizes for range and distance.

The truck wobbled along for a few yards, then double-parked on the car tracks. I came alongside. "What happened, Buddy?" I asked the driver, but he is too far gone

with choking and gasping. I left, not wanting the perfume to soak into my clothes.

I went back to the corner, having an idea and wanting to check it. In the next thirty minutes seventeen drivers did things I didn't like, bulling their way through left turns, jumping signals, ignoring pedestrians, and the like. And every one of them gets dosed with *eau de Cologne*. Usually with the sound of a hiss just before it happened.

I was beginning to plot a curve, as it were, when I leaned up against a postal storage box on the corner. "Oh, excuse me!" comes this polite voice in my ear.

"No harm done, chum," I answered, and looked around. Nobody near me, nobody at all.

The stuff a leg-man drinks has to be cheap, but I was sure I hadn't gotten any quite that green. I considered it, then moved my hand toward the box. I encountered something solid in the air about a foot over the box, and grabbed. There was a smothered gasp, then silence.

I waited, then said very soft, "Well, Cagliostro, it seems to be your move." No answer. I clamped down on the chunk of breeze and twisted it. "Well?"

"Oh, dear!" comes this same mild little voice. "You seem to have captured me. What shall I do?"

I thought. "We can't stand here playing statues. People would talk. There's a beer joint just around the corner. If I let you go, will you meet me there?"

"Oh, yes indeed," I'm answered, "anything to get out of this predicament."

"No tricks now," I warned. "Fail to show up and I'll have them search for you with a paint spray gun. That'll put a stop to your fun games."

"Oh, no!" empty air assures me, and I let go.

(By the author of "Lost Legion," "Let There Be Light," etc.)

by **LYLE MONROE**



"Oh, excuse me," comes this polite voice in my ear.

I HAD killed a bottle of suds in the joint in question when this mousy little bird shows up. He glanced nervously around, came up to my booth and gulped at me.

"Are you," I asked incredulously, "Cagliostro?"

He gulped again and nodded.

"Well, I'll be a—skip it. Draw up a chair. Beer?"

He fidgeted. "Uh, might I have a little Bourbon whiskey?"

"You know best, Pop." I fingered the waiter. "Joe, bring this gentleman some eight-year-old Kentucky." When Joe got back Caspar Milquetoast took a tumbler, poured four fingers in it, and drank it, swallowing steadily. Then he sighed.

"I feel better," he announced. "My heart, you know."

"Yes, I know," I agreed. "I hated to upset you, but it's in the interest of science."

His face lit up. "You are a student of science, too? In what field, pray tell?"

"Mob psychology," I told him. "I'm a reporter for the *Graphic*."

He seemed upset at once, so I calmed him. "Take it easy. We'll make it off the record for the moment and talk about a story later." He relaxed a little and I continued, "Right now I'm curious on my own account. I figure you had something to do with that gymkhana around the corner on Spring—not to mention finding you holed up in a slice of air. Come clean, professor."

"But I am not a professor," he protests in that same diffident voice, after tucking away another four fingers of corn, "I am a private research student in spectroscopy. My name is Cuthbert Higgins."

"Okay, Cuthbert. Mine's Carter. Call me Cleve. Let's get to it. What is it? Mirrors?"

"Not precisely. It may be hard to explain to a layman. Are you versed in advanced mathematics? The use of tensors, for example?"

"I was doing all right," I said, "up to improper fractions. Do they come after that?"

"I am, uh, afraid so."

"Okay," I told him, "I'll hang on where I can."

"Very well," he agreed, "you are familiar with the gross phenomena associated with seeing. Light strikes an object, is reflected or refracted by it to the eye, where it is interpreted as sight. The only ordinary substance which reflects or refracts so little as to be invisible is air."

"Sure."

"For a number of reasons it is difficult to change the optical characteristics of the human body to the point where it would match air and be invisible. But there remain two possibilities: To bend the light rays around the body is one way. The other is psychological invisibility."

"Huh?" I demanded. "Come again. Do you mean hypnosis?"

"Not at all," he told me. "Invisibility by suggestion is a common phenomenon . . . a stock in trade of stage magicians. They suggest that an object in plain sight is not in plain sight, and surely enough, it is not."

I nodded. "I catch. Thurston used to do that in his levitation stunt. The frame that supports the gal is in plain sight, but the audience never sees it. I never saw it until it was pointed out to me, then I couldn't see why in the hell I hadn't seen it."

HIGGINS nodded happily. "Exactly. The eye ignores what is actually there and the brain fills in the background. Lots of people have that quality. Good detectives. Pickpockets. I have it myself—that is what got me interested in the problem of invisibility."

"Slow up!" I said. "Don't sit there and tell me that I didn't see you a while ago

simply because you are inconspicuous. Dammit, I looked *through* you."

"Not quite," he corrected, "you looked *around* me."

"How?"

"By application of the laws of optics."

"Listen," I said, slightly irked, "I'm not quite as ignorant as I made out. I never heard of any optical laws that would fit."

"It *does*," he conceded, "involve certain advances of my own. The principle is similar to total reflection. I throw a prolate ellipsoid field about my body. Light strikes the screen at any point, runs on the surface of the field for a hundred and eighty degrees, and departs at the antipodal point with its direction and intensity unchanged. In effect, it makes a detour around me."

"It sounds simple," I commented, "but I don't think I could build one."

"It is hard to make it clearer without recourse to higher mathematics," he apologized, "but perhaps I can give a somewhat analogous example with prisms and mirrors. When a ray of light strikes a surface, it may be reflected through twice the angle of incidence, or refracted through the angle of refraction, thusly—" and he started to sketch on the menu. When an optical system is arranged in *this* fashion—" He sketched a sort of daisy chain of mirrors and prisms. "—a beam of light striking the system at any point 'A' and at any angle 'theta,' will be reflected and refracted around the system to point 'A prime,' and exit at angle theta. So you see—"

"Skip it," I cut in. "I can see that it gallops half way around and heads out in the same direction; the rest is over my head. All right, that clears up half the mystery, but how about that reign of terror in the traffic?"

"Oh, *that*." He gives me a silly grin, and hauls out a gat as long as my foot.

I DON'T like the look in his eye. "Put that thing down!" I yelled.

He does so reluctantly. "I don't see why you should make such a fuss," he protests. "It's not dangerous—not very. It's just a squirt gun."

"Huh?" I looked at it more closely. "Pardon my I.Q., Cuthbert. I begin to see the sketch. What's it got in it?"

His face lit up. "Synthetic essence *mephitis*—skunk juice!"

"Mmm . . . Cuthbert, is that nice?"

He grinned guiltily. "Perhaps not—but it's awfully good fun."

"Hmmm!"

"It was a by-product of an attempt to find a synthetic base for perfume," he explained. "No real use, but I had made up quite a supply for experimental purposes—"

"And squirting it on traffic is your idea of a joke."

"Oh, no! For years I have been incensed—as who hasn't?—at the reckless drivers that infest our city. It would never have occurred to me that I might do anything about it myself, had I not heard a less inhibited victim refer to one of these loutish persons as 'stinking'—along with less repeatable things. It brought a whimsical thought to mind—would it not be a capital jest to make dangerous drivers smell physically the way they already smelled spiritually. At first the project seemed impractical; then I recalled the invisibility apparatus which had been gathering dust in my laboratory for ten years."

"What!" I demanded. "You mean to say you've had this gadget for years and have not used it?"

He gave me a big-eyed stare. "Why, certainly. Obviously there was no use for it. In the hands of an irresponsible person it could be the source of much wrong doing."

"But—Hell, you could turn it over to the government."

He shook his head.

"All right, then," I persisted. "You could use it yourself. Think of the things you could do. You could start out by cleaning up that mess down at the City Hall. Sit in on the crooked deals and expose them."

He shook his head again. "I am forced to regard your viewpoint as naive. Good government grows out of the people; it can not be handed to them."

"Oh, well," I shrugged. "You're probably right. Still, think of the fun you could have—" I was thinking about back stage at the Follies.

But he shook his head again. "Uses for amusement only would almost certainly involve some violation of the right of privacy."

I gave up. "Go on with your story, Cuthbert."

"Having determined to try the jest, I made my preparations. They were simple. A water gun suggested itself as an applicator and a hot water bottle serve as a

source of supply. Earlier today I sought an outlying intersection and experimented. The results exceeded my fondest hopes—there are at least a dozen drivers who regret having jumped the light.

"Then I came down here where the hunting is better. I was just warming up when you apprehended me."

I stood up. "Cuthbert Higgins," I said, "you are a public benefactor. Long may you squirt!"

He was pleased as a kid. "Would you like to try it?"

"Would I! Half a sec while I phone in my story."

His face fell. "Oh dear!" he moaned. "I had forgotten you were connected with the press."

"'Chained' is the word, Cuthbert. But don't give it a thought. I'll cover you like a grave."

Dobbs was difficult as usual, but I convinced him, gave my story to a re-write man, along with the license numbers of the cars I had seen sprayed, and rang off.

CUTHBERT'S car was a couple of streets away. I wanted to drive, but he managed to convince me that he was sober, in spite of the \$6.40 worth of liquor in him, by balancing a pencil by its point. Besides, I really wanted to try the invisibility gadget.

It fit like a knapsack between the shoulders, with a switch on the straps in front. I threw the switch.

It was as dark as the inside of a dog. "Get me out of here, Cuthbert!" I demanded.

He flipped the switch, and came the dawn. "Naturally you were in darkness," he said. "Try these."

"These" were a trick pair of spectacles. "Rectifiers," he explained. "The shield bypasses visible light but not ultra-violet. With these you can see by ultra-violet."

"I get it," I announced, feeling smug. "Black light." I've read about it."

"Not exactly," he said, "but that will do. Try them."

I did. They worked. No color, black-and-white like a movie peep show, but I could see with the shield up.

FROM then on it was "Tallyho!" and "Yoicks! Yoicks!" More fun than a Legion Convention. We penalized everything from cutting in and out to jay-walking. But a guy had to be doing some-

thing actually stupid and dangerous before we court-martialed him.

All but one. We got a horn-tooter behind us at a signal change. One of those lugs who wants the driver ahead to jump the lights so he can hurry on about his all-important business. You've met 'em.

Well, when this item pulled in behind us and started his serenade, I glanced at Cuthbert. "It's a moot point," he said, "but I think there is justification."

I slipped out of the car and sprayed him just as he was leaning out to cuss Cuthbert. So I sprayed the upholstery too, just to teach him not to use naughty words.

But the high point of the day was a motorcycle cop. He had a meek little citizen backed up to the curb and was bawling the bejessus out of him for a little technicality not actually dangerous—failing to signal a right-hand turn on a clear street.

I gave the overgrown ape a liberal dose, not neglecting his pretty uniform and his shiny motorcycle.

THE *Graphic* played it big: "STENCH STALKS STREETS; POLICE PUZZLED" and "WAR WAGED ON DANGEROUS DRIVERS." The other papers copied in the later editions—all except the *Tide*. The *Tide* waited to the final, then let forth a blast that would curl your teeth, demanding immediate apprehension of "the lawless terror prowling the city streets." Poor old Cuthbert was made out to be something between Jack the Ripper and Dracula, with a dash of Nero.

When I looked over the list of victims in the *Graphic*, I understood. On it was Felix Harris, owner-publisher of the *Tide*.

Felix Harris arrived in this town riding the rods. He got a job on the *Tide*, married the boss's daughter, and has looked down on the common peepul ever since. He owns a pew in the right church, chairmans all the stuffed-shirt committees, and takes his cut on every racket in town. And he and his fat-headed son are notoriously bad drivers.

But Heaven help the cop silly enough to give one of them a ticket!

I COULD smell trouble, but saw no way for Cuthbert to be nabbed, if we were cautious. Dobbs kept me on the story; Cuthbert and I spent four colossal days, taking turns driving and squirting the stinkum.

Then I get a call from the jailhouse; Cuthbert is on ice.

They had gotten onto him through me—seems I had been tailed for three days. They had nothing against him but suspicion, but a dick had snooped around his house and had smelled him cooking up a fresh batch of the skunk juice. They nabbed him.

I ducked out to see a lawyer pal of mine. He thought it was a cinch for habeas corpus, but he was mistaken. There wasn't a judge in town who would issue a writ—we knew the squeeze was on. And Cuthbert was booked for everything from malicious mischief to criminal syndicalism. Maximum bail on each offense, total *seventy thousand dollars!*

The paper would go bail for a story, I knew—but not that much.

CUTHBERT was unperturbed, though I did my best to explain what a jam he was in. "I know I have a loyal friend in you," he said, talking soft so the turnkey would not hear. "Can you go to my home and get the invisibility apparatus?"

"What?" I almost shouted. Then I lowered my voice in a hurry. "Didn't they grab it?"

"I think not, else they would have questioned me about it."

It was there when I looked for it, right where we always hid it. I locked it into the trunk of my car and started back down town, thinking that I would have Cuthbert out of clink with its help in less time than it takes to buy a hat. When it suddenly occurs to me that I have no way to use it.

Here was the hitch: If I carried it down to the jail, they would never let me hand it to him. If I wore it in, invisible myself, how would I get to his cell with it? Supposing I managed to take advantage of doors as they were opened to get into the cell blocks, and managed to find his cell—another unlikely point—how would I get out after slipping him the gear? I'd be left in the cell myself. I was already connected with the case; I had a dirty suspicion that they would throw away the key and pipe me fresh air and sunlight on alternate Wednesdays.

I pulled up to the curb.

A half hour later I had a headache and a plan, but it called for an accomplice. The

plan, I mean. The headache I could manage alone.

There is a little actress, name o' Dorothy Bardou, with whom I've had many a swell time. There isn't a mean streak in her—however, she would blow up the County Courthouse if it appealed to her imagination. I phoned her, found she was in, told her to stay that way, and drove over.

I brought her up to date and then broke my plan. "You see, Dotty," I told her, trying to make it both reasonable and intriguing, "all you do is wear the shield and follow me. I do all the explaining. When we get to his cell, you slip him the shield, and out he walks, a free man."

"Leaving Dorothy in the Bastille," she adds, coldly. "Had you thought of that, Cleve—or didn't it seem to matter?"

"Yes, darling," I said, "but that is the whole point in you doing it, instead of me. You aren't connected with the case, they've got no excuse to hold you, they don't dare sweat you, and the whole thing is a mystery. Think of the publicity."

She did not answer right away; I could see the idea had taken hold. I relaxed.

Presently she said, "I'd better dress my smartest for this. The nearer I come to looking Junior League, the better I can put over the part."

WE GOT her fur coat out of hock, which I charged to expense account, and I showed her how to use the gear. It all worked per plan, except that Dorothy sneezed in the elevator going up to the cell blocks and I had to cover with some fast pantomime.

Cuthbert was stuffy about it, but I convinced him that no other caper would work, and he gave in. I left them to work it out.

I had to get the details from Cuthbert later. "She is an intelligent and charming young lady," he opined, "as well as courageous."

"You're cookin' with gas, Cuthbert."

"Assuredly. We had a most interesting conversation during the two hours we allowed for you to establish an alibi. At the end of that time, she took off the pack, permitted me to assume it, and gave vent to the most startling outcry it has ever been my privilege to hear. The turnkey came most immediately. When he found my cubicle occupied by a beautiful young lady, his face was a study in conflicting emotions.

He felt unequal to the situation and hurriedly fetched the jailer.

"Miss Bardou gave that worthy no time to think. She demanded to be released at once, and met his request for an explanation by demanding one of him. When the jailer, sweating copiously, opened the door for her, I slipped out in the confusion.

"She was not content to let well enough alone, but demanded to be taken to the Chief of Police at once. Having no choice in the matter of doors, I, perforce, followed along. There were gentlemen of the press there—"

"My work," I stuck in.

"Excellent. She distressed the Chief very much by propounding the theory that she had been drugged and kidnapped by his own men."

"Good girl! Did the boys get pictures?"

"In quantity."

WE HID Cuthbert, for the time being, with an aunt of mine, since he obviously could not stay at his place nor mine. The *Tide* was still howling for his blood. I wrote an opus for the *Graphic* which suggested, in a nice way of course, that he had been done away with in jail, and that the Dotty incident had been framed up to cover it.

I told Cuthbert to keep indoors, and in particular not to play with his squirt gun, as it would queer my "foul play" story. This irked him. He wanted especially to draw a bead on the judge of the traffic court, as I had inadvertently let him in on how the old fraud fixed tickets for the "right" people. Cuthbert's indignation you wouldn't believe. How a man could reach his age and still be that naive I don't see.

He sputtered about "equality before the law" and such matters. I had to calm him down and exact promises.

HE DIDN'T keep the promises very well. I have to piece this part of the yarn together as I did not see all of it. It seems he was taking a walk, in the shield of course, which wasn't so bad, but carrying his squirt gun, which was strictly against contract.

He has just crossed the intersection of two boulevards, when a big sedan, doing about sixty, goes through against the signals. It just misses two cars going with

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THE PIT OF DOOM

The ever-popular author of "The Revolt of the Pedestrians," "The Human Termites," and many others, returns to science-fiction with this strange tale of the creatures which dwelt in the Bad Lands of Dakota.

THIS narrative has to be told because there may be more of the flying men left. If, by any chance, there are, and should they greatly multiply, they would be a serious threat to the safety of our race. Of course, I never saw any females or young; it might be that those I saw were only a few survivors of what was once a mighty breed. Perhaps they had lived on for centuries, only the large males surviving. But I have my doubts and because I am not sure, I am writing this tale of what happened in the Bad Lands of South Dakota.

There is a large part of these lands that have never been charted on any map. Centuries ago volcanoes vomited ashes and lava over what may have been a lovely landscape, leaving it a hell on earth. It is a land without water, vegetation, or hope. No one with any common sense would go into a country like that, and none but the insane would stay there. Early in the last century of our history it was the reputed home of bandits, but if they went there voluntarily they were brave as well as bad, and if they came out alive they were merely fortunate.

I knew a little about the country by hearsay. When my brother came and told me he was going exploring its waste, wild, windswept miles, I replied pointblank that he was a fool.

"What can you possibly hope to find of any value?" I asked. "You know what Father always said about it? The story of the rabbit who was given a thousand square miles of the Bad Lands and could not live on it because there was nothing for him to eat? If you want adventure and exploration, or yearn to be a detective, go find Oscar and his herd of sheep. Take a horse, a mule pack, and a gun and find Oscar."

"That is exactly what I intend to do," he replied. "Oscar is the family question

mark. A man noted for his honesty, but what else do we know about him? For twenty years he took his sheep into the plains and for twenty years he came back. Then the next year only one dog came back and died a few hours later. Oscar is not the only one who never came back from this country. Here are my notes on the men who have disappeared; over sixty in the last five years. Read them and ask yourself why."

I glanced over the notes casually. "Most of them never came back because they never wanted to. That man Smith was a murderer with a price on his head; Baccus robbed a bank; this Murphy person had a wife that any sane man would leave, while Johnson escaped from a home for the criminally insane.

"I do not see that there is anything queer about it. Perhaps some died, but others are probably living out on the Coast under other names. Why should you worry?"

"I want to find Oscar!"

"Go and find him then. But before you go, give me an idea of your plans so I can have something to go on when I start after you. Going to take a pack train and a desert rat?"

He laughed. "This is 1937, not 1849. Why should I go on a horse when I have a plane? Besides, there is something more. I have been in there, or rather, over there; I found a valley with grass in it, and that means water. And I found Oscar's sheep."

"Alive?" Then why did the dog leave them? A sheep dog has never done that."

"He left them because they were dead," whispered my brother. "All I saw was a pile of bones on the grass."

"See anything of Oscar's skull?"

He shook his head. "I told you I didn't stop. But here is a map. A man could go in there with an automobile, with solid

by **DAVID H. KELLER**



He tried to use his revolver, but it was just like using a pea shooter against a herd of elephants.

rubber tires and a trailer filled with spares. The lava would cut the average tire to ribbons in a few minutes. But it is a beautiful country; it could be called God's country, that little pocket of grass amid a maddening, hellish desert. And there is something else you ought to know."

"Tell the rest to your grandchildren!" I spoke sharply because by this time I was disgusted with his nonsense. "They will believe your tales of fairy-lands and goblins. I am off to Rio for my first vacation in years; see you later, and say hello for me to Oscar when you find him. Leave the map and directions, and be sure to make a will before you go. That will make it

easier for me if you do not come back. Good thing you're not married."

I left him and dashed across the country to the airport. I always liked John, but now that he was of age I saw no reason to worry about him.

IT WAS a year before I came back home. My first idea had been to spend six weeks in Rio, then cut south to Buenos Aires, but a charming lady who has no place in this story made me linger.

I walked into my office, hung up my hat and coat and barked at the stenographer. "Did John come back?"

She had worked for our family thirty

years. That made her old enough to know better. She simply stopped typing, smoothed her grey hair, looked at me steadily with her keen, grey eyes, brushed an imaginary piece of dust off her immaculate gray business dress and said: "No."

Opening my suitcase, I picked out a small package, untied it and walked over to her desk. "Here is a piece of real jade for you. A necklace from the land of mystery via South America, but rione the less authentic. The next time you visit a night club in New York you can wear it."

Helen Carlson handed it back to me. "I never visit night clubs in New York and I never wear jewelry. And if you knew anything about the symbolism of jewelry and the least little thing about women you would never have thought of buying that for me. Mail it to one of the ladies you met in the Argentine."

I sighed, deciding not to deny having been in the Argentine. It was foolish of me, I remembered. At the last minute, dashing into a shop especially recommended by reliable sources, I had simply said: "I want a jade necklace for a lady." The place was Japanese. Never looked at the jade, merely paid the price. I sighed again, picked it up and threw it into a drawer. "Where is John? And why didn't he come back?"

Helen was order personified; she kept wonderful files. Of course she had a folder for John. She took it out of the filing case, opened it, took out a map and spread it on my desk. She took a pin with a black glass head to it, stuck it in the center of the map and said: "John is there."

"The Helusay! But why the black pin? Why not a pink or red or even a white one?"

She turned and looked at our large property map which nearly covered one of the walls of the office.

"If you will remember, Mr. Swanson, we have always used the black pin at certain times. For example, here is the private cemetery where your parents are buried. I have it marked with two black pins." She took a pointer and showed them to me.

I laughed. "You think John needs one?"

"Here is a letter he left for you. Perhaps it will tell you something you ought to know."

"Have you read it?"

"No. It is marked 'personal.' I never open personal mail."

She returned to her desk and the click, click, clickity-tick of her machine told me she had gone back to work. So there was nothing to do except to read the letter. Then I placed it on her desk; she read it.

I looked out of the window but watched her out of the corner of my eye. She read it, walked over to the wall map, put a black pin in the family cemetery that made three and started to cry. For the first time I realized that she was woman instead of a piece of proficient, professional machinery. I knew how to handle a laughing female, but had little experience with crying ladies, so just let her go on crying. Instead of trying to comfort her, I sent a telegram.

TWO days later Jerry Halstead walked into the office, and, by way of introducing himself, handed me the telegram. Without comment I handed him the map and John's letter. He took a half hour to digest the documents, then asked: "When do I start and what do I get?"

"As soon as you want to and whatever you want. You ought to get there and back in less than a day."

"I'll start tomorrow and the price will be \$500."

"O.K. By the way, this is Miss Helen Carlson, my secretary. Miss Carlson, meet Mr. Halstead, and get his data. We always card index our employees. And we take out \$10,000 accident insurance for thirty days. To your family or estate?"

"Make it out to some home for aged stenographers. I have no family and no estate. My true love is my monoplane and I do all my loving in the air." He turned to Helen. "Are you Helen of Troy? Is this the face that launched a thousand ships? Surely not. This face would have launched ten thousand men-of-war."

"Miss Carlson, to you, Mr. Halstead. And my face never launched even one little rowboat, and I do not like jade necklaces with questionable pendants. Now will you answer the questions: full name, address, nearest relative, banking reference. Are you married or single? Any dependents?"

He turned to me, laughing. "It's 90 outside but below zero here. I am an aviator and not a schoolboy answering teacher's inquisitive questions. I will leave tomorrow at seven. Till then I will tune up my one true love," and he stalked out of the office.

"You never will marry if you are not nice to nice men, Miss Carlson," I commented.

In answer she took a black pin and stuck it on the map in the region of the Bad Lands.

"That is for Mr. Halstead," she commented.

THE next morning at 6.45 I met Jerry Halstead.

"I will look for you this evening," I said. "A thousand extra if you find Oscar, and five thousand more if you locate my brother."

"Give it to Helen of Troy. I will be back this afternoon. About two this afternoon. You be here."

"Are you sure?"

"I always have come back. Like the plane? I always paint it white." He jumped into the cockpit and was off.

I was there waiting for him that afternoon. To my surprise he came back. The white plane was covered with red blotches. Halstead did not even try to get out. His face and hands were torn and one eye was missing.

"Everything in the letter was true," he gasped, "but if you go, for God's sake take a tank and machine guns." He slumped forward and I did not need a doctor to tell me he was dead.

I told Helen about it. She simply took the black-headed pin out of the Bad Lands and put it in the family cemetery. Neither of us said a word for over five minutes, then she walked over to my desk. Wonderful woman and wonderful emotional control!

"Give me the jade necklace and a drink of whiskey," she whispered. "I need something to help for an hour or so. He was such a nice boy. What are you going to do?"

I handed her the necklace and she put it on, but slipped the pendant beneath her collar. She drank the whiskey without water.

"Sit down," I urged, "before you go to the floor. That is better. I am going to buy a caterpillar tank and some machine guns, and hire a man to run it for me. A two-man tank."

"Get a larger one," she replied, "because I am going with you."

"You are not! Why should you?"

"I don't know. How can a woman tell why she does things? Perhaps I want to go because I liked Oscar."

THE next month was busy. Not the easiest thing in the world to find a caterpillar tank and machine guns and a man who would understand how to use them, not for a private expedition like this. But I found what I wanted, then spent more time learning how to run the tank and work the guns. Then there were long hours working over the question of gasoline and placing an emergency supply of it and provisions a hundred miles out in the desert. When we were all ready to start, Helen insisted that she be taught everything.

Mike Murphy had been in the Tank Division of the British Army during the first World War. He hated the English, but loved machinery. He was also a woman hater, but he liked Helen.

"Put pants on her," he declared, "and she would be a man. Wonderful girl. If I had not been shot to pieces and gassed besides I would marry her."

"I will wear pants," she replied, "but I like you too much to marry you and spend the rest of my life in a tank. I only loved one man enough to marry him."

I was under the tank when she said that, trying to learn what made the wheels go around.

"What was the gentleman's name?" I yelled.

"Oscar!" she yelled back, above the roar of the engine.

We were ready to start the next morning. The three of us sat in the office. Helen suddenly walked over to the map and put three pins in the center of the Bad Lands; they were tipped with gold, glass heads.

"Not black this time?" I asked.

"No. I am optimistic instead of factual this morning. Besides, I am taking my family with me." She pointed to a cage.

"Hell's Bells!" cried Murphy. "Two love birds in a tank with machine guns. I thought you said family. A nice girl like you should have a husband and children. Why not?"

"Ask Oscar," was her cryptic reply.

All hands were out to see us off, including a newspaper reporter, trying in vain to get the real facts.

"Nothing doing," I told him. "We are going hunting for jack-rabbits, and that is all there is for you to put in the papers."

"Yeah? Tell that to the draftees. Fine article that would make. Western millionaire goes hunting rabbits with an armored tank and machine guns. Have a heart and

break the news for me, or I will follow you in my open car. No law against it, you know."

"No, no law. But if you have any brains, you won't."

But he did. A strange parade we made. Three of us in the tank with the two love birds and Murphy at the wheel, and the reporter gayly at our heels. We made our supply station without anything worth writing about, then we put a lot of extra gas in, a few thousand more bullets for the machine guns, and as much food as we could find room for.

"Any news?" asked the reporter.

"Yes," answered Murphy. "It was hot as hell in that tank. We stay here until sunrise tomorrow, and you had better beat it for town tonight or there will be a dead reporter around these parts tomorrow. I didn't see Jerry Halstead when he came back, but from what I was told, he made a very unsatisfactory piece of work for the undertaker."

The reporter started to write, then took a pigeon out of a cage, tied a message to her leg and released her. "This is going to be real news by the time we get through," he said laughing.

"It certainly is," growled Murphy.

The next morning we started out again. It was rough going and, after fifty miles we saw the reporter was having trouble with his tires. He came to a halt and tried to put on a spare. We stopped the tank then, but it was too late. He tried to use his revolver, but it was just like using a peashooter against a herd of elephants; we did not get out of the tank because there was nothing we could do.

The last we saw of him, he was being carried through the air by a winged animal, the like of which none of us had seen before.

"And that is that," sighed Murphy.

"Let's go back and see if the pigeons are alive," suggested Helen. We did, but the pigeons were gone, the cage broken and bloody.

THAT afternoon we came to the green valley. So far the map had been absolutely accurate. The grass was three feet high. We went carefully because it seemed that there must be water and we did not want the machine to bog down in a swamp.

And there, in the middle of the grass, I saw the top of the hole.

"Stop the tank," I said, "and let me out. I am going over there. You keep me covered with machine guns. If those things come I will stay close to the ground while you open fire."

They didn't like it, but I insisted, made them close the door of the tank after me. Slowly I walked over to the pit. It looked like a large circular well with stone sides and it was covered with a meshwork of metallic bars. There was a hinge on one side and a lock on the other. And all around the edges of the pit were skulls.

The silence was terrible. I could hear my watch tick, hear my heart beat.

"Hello, down there!" I yelled, kneeling at the edge of the pit. "Hello, anybody there?"

I waited, then I heard movements, sounds of soft things rubbing against stone. It grew louder and finally I saw things that had once been men climb up the stone sides of the pit and peer through the metal grate, holding on with clawlike hands. Heads covered with matted hair, faces hidden behind year-old beards. Their eyes were hopeless, almost insane, peering in desperation through sunken sockets.

"Hello!" I whispered, trying to control my nausea. "Who are you and why are you down there? Is Oscar there? Or a man called John Swanson?"

Their laughter was silly and cackling. But one man tried to brush the hair from his eyes as he answered: "Who are you?"

"I am John Swanson's brother."

"And I am Professor James, late of the University of California. Pleased to meet you. All very interesting if you take interest in this sort of thing."

"Tell me about it!"

"Not much to tell. There are twelve in this pit. Always twelve, no more and no less. It seems that the things can count that many. When we throw a skull out, they send another doomed man down through the one way tunnel, and he comes to live with us in this pit. There's water and mushrooms and meat. I have been here about a year, but then I have brains, found a hiding place, and I guess I am old and tough and not very satisfactory as a source of food. That is why I am alive. Most of the men do not last more than a month. Some of these boys have been here longer but they have turned primitive."

"Go on," I urged. "Who brought you here? What does it mean?"

"Very interesting!" He sighed. "It would be fine if I could report it or take some specimens back. Animals with wings and human heads. I think they can talk and count to twelve. They fly over the pit every night, and very seldom in the daytime. They do not eat us; I think they eat grass and animals. When they caught me I found a pile of bones, sheep bones and some dog bones and I know they ate my horse. Saw them doing it. . . . But as far as I know they are not fond of human flesh. They save that for us.

"I do not know where they live or how. I cannot identify their species, never even heard of anything like them. They are big; one of them could easily carry a man."

"What about John or Oscar?"

"I don't know. I am the only one here who has the least idea who he is. The other eleven are just so many animals. At least, there were eleven this morning besides me, but they finished one of them and I guess they will throw his head out tonight. And then the routine is to put another man in his place."

"That will be the reporter," I said.

Shadows began to drift over the grass. I looked up, saw some bird-like things in the air, and started to run for the tank. I reached safety just in time. Three of the damnable things swooped down and landed on the grass near us. At least twenty feet long, tails, hind legs like reptiles, front legs like humans. The backs of arms and legs were a flying web; the arms had long fingers, and their two-foot necks were topped with a head that looked almost human. All were covered with a greenish smooth hide. One crawled over to the tank, rose up on hind legs and looked in through the window.

Murphy wanted to turn the gun on it, but I told him to wait. And, when I could get my breath, I told them what I had learned.

"ELEVEN men down there now and I guess the reporter is on his way. Ten of them are insane animals but there is a Professor who looks like a very sick man, but who has retained his sanity. Those things outside catch a man and force him to go through a one way tunnel. Everytime they eat a man down there and throw out his skull, the animals find a new man for them, to make an even dozen. So there are always eleven men down there eating mush-

rooms, drinking water, and tearing a twelfth man to bits and eating him.

"There's no telling how long it has been going on, probably for centuries. They must have built the tunnel and made the metal grate and even the lock to keep the men in. They never eat human flesh themselves. Perhaps it is some kind of way they worship a god or amuse themselves according to their ancient form of humor. But these things have intelligence of a high degree. No telling how many there are, or whether they have any females or young. Any ideas, Murphy?"

"Sure. You say ten of them are insane and the wise guy is sick, and then there is the reporter. Suppose we wait until early tomorrow morning, drive as near as we can and put some explosive under that lock and blow the lid off. The men will come out of the pit and the animals will come to see what has happened. Then we turn the guns on them."

"And kill the poor men?" asked Helen.

"They are better off dead," I interrupted. "Even if they lived and all the flying men were killed, we could not get them back to civilization. And I think they might as well die here as live on in a hospital. The Professor and the reporter will probably have sense enough to stay below ground until everything is over. Suppose we arrange some kind of a bomb with a fuse."

But in the end we had to give the idea up. Murphy took a chance later on in the day after our visitors left. When he came back, he simply said: "I can shoot that lock to pieces with three or four bullets from the elephant rifle you brought along. It is big enough to make a good target and old enough to go to pieces easily, and I guess the men can lift the grate once the lock is broken."

We slept uneasily all night. The animals must have been prowling around because we could hear them scratching with fingernails and teeth, trying to work their way into the tank. Towards morning I heard Helen sobbing, so I put my arms around her and cuddled her head on my shoulder; she went to sleep like a little girl calmed after a nightmare.

Morning came with shimmering sunshine. We drove very carefully till we were barely thirty feet from the pit. Then I took over the machine gun in front, Helen the one on the side towards the pit, and Murphy

placed three bullets very carefully into the lock.

Then we waited, but not for long. Two things happened at almost the same time.

The grate was hurled upward and backward on its hinges and the doomed men crawled out onto the grass. And from the skies, like forks of lightning, came the killers. We waited till they were on the ground, then started firing into the mass with machine guns while Murphy carefully used the elephant gun. In a few minutes we were able to stop the slaughter and open the door of the tank.

Revolver in hand I walked carefully to the edge of the pit and called for the Professor. He called back saying that he was too weak to climb up, so it ended in me going down after him with a rope. Murphy and Helen pulled us up, one at a time.

"Where is the reporter?" I asked the old man.

"Dead and eaten. He didn't have the common sense to take care of himself; started to turn on his flashlight and make notes. I called to him but it was too late. He wanted a story for his newspaper and I guess he got one. Carry me near one of those animals and take my dictation. I want to give you a scientific description before I pass out."

EVEN now, months later, I think that the most remarkable thing in the whole weird story are those last moments of the scientist's life. Murphy supported him while he sat on the ground near the largest of the flying-things and dictated to Helen words of many syllables, technical and ultra-scientific, talking to the end and then calmly falling back and dying in Murphy's arms.

Murphy started towards the tank; I walked around looking for an upper jaw with two gold teeth in it. Suddenly I heard Helen scream. One of the animals in its death agony had seized her and was trying to tear her throat. Four bullets in its

head solved the problem and I carried the unconscious woman into the tank.

"Beat it, Murphy," I cried. "There's no telling how many more of these things there are."

He turned the tank around slowly and headed toward home. The gas lasted till we were within three miles of the office and within a few feet of a filling station. I got a neighbor to put Helen to bed, then Murphy and I drank, took bromides, and slept for 24 hours. When I paid Murphy I knew I would not have to ask him to keep quiet about the whole affair.

Helen came back to the office the next day. We attended to the accumulated mail, then I said: "While everything is fresh in our minds, I want to dictate the story of that pit of doom."

As I dictated I looked at her. She had on the necklace and the pendant was outside her shirtwaist. I started with Oscar and went on to tell about John, his map and letter, and finally reached the Professor's description. He had said: "As far as I know all the animals were male. Somewhere in the caves of the Bad Lands, there may be females and their little ones, but everything points to the fact that the twelve who were killed were the last of their race."

"That is wrong," protested Helen.

"How do you know?"

"Feminine intuition. That one who had me when you killed it was not trying to tear my throat. Never even scratched me. She was trying to get the jade necklace, had hold of the pendant. A male would not have acted that way; I am sure that this one was female. As I was fainting, I kept saying to myself: 'She must not get it; it belongs to me. The only piece of jewelry any man ever gave me.' I wanted to keep it, and I did."

"But . . . but . . ." I stammered, "you always said you were in love with Oscar."

"I know. But I thought you would understand—some day."

And I did about five seconds later.

We put the finished story in the safe.



(Continued From Page 87)

the lights, and one of them climbs the curb and crashes into a store window.

This is too much for Cuthbert. He steps off the curb, takes careful aim, and gets the driver of the sedan right in the eye. Then he jumps back, for they almost run him down. He is tripped by the curbstone, and falls over a fireplug, which dislodges the invisibility gear and it falls into the gutter, but he is much too busy to notice.

When he got to his feet he saw that the sedan had climbed the curb and skidded into a terrace a little further down. Filled with remorse, he went down to see if he could help. As he does, four men pile out of the car. One of them is wiping his eyes, two of them are carrying guns, and one is lugging a small child.

"I felt instinctively," Cuthbert tells me later, "that they were malefactors of some sort. So I shouted for them to put up their hands, meanwhile brandishing my water pistol."

I arrived on the scene right after this, in a police squad car. I had been at the station when the call came in and went along to cover it. For it's a kidnapping and

a big one—old Felix Harris's grandson and probably the only person in the world he really cares about.

We find a curious scene. One of the kidnapers is down, shot in the leg by Cuthbert with one of their own gats, two of them are wiping their eyes and moaning, and one is very quiet. The kid is sitting on the grass, crying.

When Cuthbert sees us, he crumples up at the knees.

Cuthbert is not only a hero; the charges against him are quietly dropped. The secret of the shield is still safe, as the police car ran over it there in the gutter, and crushed it beyond recognition. The boys are puzzled as to how he can have spread so much skunk juice with the entire town looking for him, and question him not a little before they let him go, but he has an answer ready. "I'm naturally inconspicuous," he told them. "Nobody ever notices me. You just didn't see me."

Which was true, as far as it went.

I groaned so much over the destruction of the shield that Cuthbert promised to build me a new one for my birthday. I'm looking forward to it. I've got some plans of my own.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

Of Future Combined With Science Fiction published bi-monthly at Holyoke, Mass., for October 1st, 1941. State of New York

County of New York } ss.
Before me a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold Hammond, who having been duly sworn according to law, depose and says that he is the publisher of the Future Combined With Science Fiction and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Harold Hammond, 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.; Editor, Cliff Campbell, 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.; Business Manager, Louis H. Silberkleit, 60 Hudson St., N. Y., N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

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HAROLD HAMMOND
(Signature of Publisher)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1941. Maurice Coyne (My Commission expires March 30, 1942.) Notary Public, Bronx Co. No. 104, Reg. No. 10-C-42; Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. No. 162, Reg. No. 2-C-148; Cert. filed in Kings [SEAL] Co. No. 146, Reg. No. 2118.

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SACRIFICE

by JOHN HOLLIS MASON

DRAK tensed, his small, wiry body body congealing in something akin to terror. From between the two huge tree boles, his eagle eyes made out several dark dots upon the plain; dots that resolved themselves into the great, ungainly bulks of the Yuicondi, Man-hunters. He had never seen them at such close range before, and the sight gave rise to strange feelings.

The human peered anxiously behind him, his piercing gaze sweeping the broad valley that extended for many miles to the far slopes of distant mountains where the jungle thinned out and gave way to a new country. At this great distance, he couldn't make out details, but it almost seemed that he could sense a movement of tiny figures on those far slopes, and some of the fear he felt on seeing the Yuicondi left him.

It had begun yesterday morning when the aerial machine of the Yuicondi swept overhead to catch the village of Man unsuspecting. The Man-hunters' aircraft were often seen at a distance, and occasionally one of them passed over the jungle within visible range of the village, but Drak's people had always been able to conceal themselves in the surrounding foliage and escape detection before.

Drak thought of the old books now being borne away to a country beyond the great mountains in the west. Again he remembered the wisdom of Old Crathan who had taught him how to decipher the mystic symbols in the books called "writing"; and the wonderful tales of old he learned from the writing.

The books told a strange story indeed. Long ago, as the tales went, the entire world was teeming with men, billions of men, though such figures meant little to Drak who had never seen more than the thirty-odd humans of his tribe. Man had been free and unhunted then, with civilization and organized in large groups under "governments." Trying to imagine what a world with civilization and "governments" would be like was a bit too much for Drak. He compromised with the conclusion that those who wrote the books were describing a truly magnificent world, but one beyond his comprehension.

Into this wondrous existence had come the Yuicondi. Invaders from beyond the sky, they arrived in great vessels and attacked the world before Man realized what was happening. Deadly as the weapons of Man were, those of the Yuicondi were even more deadly. The "governments" were paralyzed, the unity of Man sundered. When men finally realized what was happening, it was too late. Already the invaders were hunting them like wild animals.

Before the disorganized remnants of the "governments" were completely put out of action, however, their combined efforts inflicted enormous losses upon the Yuicondi. Though the invaders' weapons were superior to Man's, the latter was still powerful enough to destroy great numbers of the Yuicondi and many of their ships. Finally, though, Man was beaten; his last defenses shattered; and the Yuicondi were masters of the world. The authors of the ancient books believed the Yuicondi's ships were

all destroyed in the tremendous battles that took place, for none of the machines were ever seen to rise from the earth again.

THE Yuicondi were so dissimilar to Man that they could eat his flesh without repugnance, just as Man eats the flesh of the lower animals. Some said that the Yuicondi came to Earth because the food supply on their own world was exhausted. There were so many men, despite the hundreds of millions who died in the Conquest, that the invaders should have a constant supply for long ages. This would have been so, undoubtedly, if the Man-hunters hadn't been so prodigal in the years following the Conquest, but eventually they must have realized they had squandered their food supply so needlessly and to such an extent, that much care would have to be exercised if Man was not to become extinct. Thus many of the small communities were allowed life to assure a future supply of food for the Man-hunters. At first men knew this, and on it based the hope that they might one day rise again, when their numbers were increased sufficiently, to overthrow the conquerors.

In the eons that followed, most of those who were left degenerated to savages and forgot the glories of their ancestors. But there still remained wise men, those who pottered about in the ancient ruins for books and relics of Man as of old. And these beings kindled the fires of hope in their fellows that someday humans would again be free and unhunted. Perhaps this was part of the reason why Man still clung to life.

These wise men even went on to say that the invaders had retrogressed, and forgotten much of their civilization. Though no one ever found out how they lived, it was known that they were very different from Man. Perhaps the strange environment slowed and dulled their faculties.

Once or twice down through the ages, large groups of men managed to gather, and tried to make war on the Yuicondi. They were always defeated, but the awful weapons of the invaders the old books spoke of were noticeably lacking in these battles. The Man-hunters always won by physical combat with Man, and the latter was no match physically for the Yuicondi. But why didn't they use their weapons to kill Man in the much safer way? It seemed

as though the invaders no longer possessed the weapons their ancestors used in the Conquest. And fewer and fewer of their once numerous aerial machines were seen as the years went by, and only when they searched for Man were these used.

Drak knew that Man was very near extinction now. His old billions had shrunk to bare hundreds. For, Drak had met the men from the south and east and west. Yes, even the five powerful men who had seen the Great Lake far to the east, which extended to north and south so far that its limits had never been found. Those same travelers had even seen the ruins of Man's greatest city. Drak read much of this titanic place the ancients called N'yuk. The five found books in the wrack which they brought with them. Drak gave them much food to continue their journey in return for these books.

That was years ago, and no more men had passed in the interval. Drak thought his tribe must be the only one left.

Then the aerial machine passed over the cleverly camouflaged village, catching its inhabitants in the open before they could conceal themselves. It circled low over the clearing several times, as if making sure of the position before it flew away.

THERE was but one thing to do. The tribe must migrate at once. Through the depths of the jungle toward the great mountains that rose high in the west. And further till they found a place to build their homes and dream their dreams in comparative safety.

Drak knew the Man-hunters would reach the village the next day and almost surely follow. They were slow, clumsy things, but if they were hungry they would carry on the pursuit, their aerial machines reconnoitering ahead to keep track of the fugitives.

So Drak stayed behind to try and gain time for his fellows. If they could once make the distant mountains, he felt sure they would be safe. The clumsy Yuicondi were not adapted for scaling terrestrial mountains.

The huge, ungainly bulks of the Man-hunters were very near now and visible in all their loathsome horror. Had Drak known it, they were a heterogeneous combination of crab and spider, with something of the crocodile thrown in. To him they appeared as sheer horror, the embodiment of all his

nightmares. It was little wonder that Man had fallen to these monsters!

But he must divert their attention if he could. The creatures' locomotion was very slow, Drak noted with satisfaction. Perhaps he could complete his plan after all.

Suddenly, the man sprang into the open. The lumbering Man-hunters were barely a hundred yards away. The foremost saw the human and paused momentarily in stupefaction at such strange conduct on the part of its intended prey.

Then Drak was away with a bound. His powerful, little body arced as he raced off down the plain, skirting the right flank of the advancing Yuicondi before they knew what was happening and fleeing in the direction they had come.

The thunder of clattering members that followed told Drak the success of his ruse, the sight of his running form being enough to blind the hungry Man-hunters to all else but pursuit.

After the first spurt, Drak slowed his pace to a rate less arduous, and one that would keep him just ahead of the Yuicondi.

The race continued for half an hour. Drak began to feel the first strain of his undertaking and drew upon the vast reservoirs of his strength.

He was far ahead of the Yuicondi now, none of whom had been able to match his flying feet, but they still came on with their inevitable, lumbering determination.

Drak thought of the tribe, now far beyond the village; of Old Crathan carrying his precious volumes; of his mate who would revert to some other man of the tribe according to custom. His mind lingered long on each, cherishing them with the love of things lost.

HIS breath was coming in gasps now, his lungs were red-hot. How long he had been running he had no idea, but it seemed like eons. His legs were leaden weights as he pounded on and seemed to require more strength to lift at each step.

He was nearing the end of the plain now, and in front of him rose a series of sharp, precipitous hills and gullies. Behind, he still heard the stridulous pursuit of the Man-hunters.

As he sprinted for the nearest declivity, everything seemed peculiarly unreal. It was almost as if he were trying to run in water. The very atmosphere became a tangible menace that conspired with his pursuers to halt his progress. When he plunged down the declivity, the Yuicondi were very close.

Alternately staggering and stumbling with the drunken disregard of the fatigued, he covered the gully floor to the next rise. Somehow, Drak gained purchase on the steep slope. After an eternity of climbing, he reached the top. But the Yuicondi had found a less arduous way up the acclivity, and were dangerously close as he took to his heels across the open space.

The man no longer cared whether he was caught. Pain was one blinding agony within him and anything to alleviate his torture was welcome. Again his thoughts dwelt on the others, now far across the jungle, perhaps even beginning to traverse the mighty expanse of mountains; his mate, she of the golden hair and lovely eyes; Old Crathan, the erudite, one of Man's last scholars, hugging his precious books close as his aged limbs grew heavy with the unrelenting speed of the fleeing tribe.

Drak thought of the old tales again, and all at once he realized that Man's future rested on the shoulders of his tribe, that in them were the seeds of that old dream of resurgence. Sometime in the future he envisioned Man rebelling against the decadent Yuicondi. . . .

At that moment a long, barbed tentacle whipped forward and caught Drak on the back of the head. There was a smile on the dead face as the Man-hunter gathered Drak's still body to it, reflecting the satisfaction his last thoughts had brought to him.

Drak had died, but Man lived on.





The Ayes and Noes of Fandom

SCOOP! It's more than just a rumor that *Future* is the first stf magazine to present a story by Hannes Bok, it's a straight fact. See contents page. And, in case you hadn't noticed it there's more. After we told the author of "The Alien Vibration," he jumped for joy. "Yippee!" he shouted, "not only is my story accepted, but I get a cover by Bok!"

THE lead novel should, we think, speak for itself. "Beyond the Stars" is one of Ray Cummings' early macrocosmic stories, and has all the charm that is attached to these old classics. Need we add that Dolgov did the double-spread? And that, in response to a great many requests, we've put in another illustration for the feature story?

IT SEEMS hardly necessary to introduce Dr. Keller, yet we have to remember that some of you are reading *Future*, and perhaps science fiction itself, for the first time, while others, perhaps, have read longer, but are not acquainted with one of stf's finest authors. Dr. Keller first made his appearance in the original *Amazing Stories* back in 1928 (the exact issue was February 1928) with a novelette entitled "The Revolt of the Pedestrians." It was a truly different story, introducing the readers of that day to a new and highly distinctive style which has not changed since in Keller's work; it is as popular today as it was then. Since that time, dozens of stories, and several classic novels have come from Stroudsburg, Penna., where the doctor lives: science fiction, weird fiction, fantasy—he writes them all. And just this year Simon and Schuster published Keller's book: "The Devil and the Doctor". If you have not read it, there's a treat in store for you.

A GOOD many letters have stated that the Ajax Calkins stories should be longer. Yes, I'll admit that last one was rather brief, very brief in fact. But I thought that it

would be much better to have them in compact form, in the Caesarian style of writing, which, as those of you who may have read Caesar's Gallic Wars may know is simple and directly to the point, taking time out only for matter-of-fact blowing of one's own trumpet. However, since you've asked for it, we're going to see what Pearson can do with a longer Calkins tale, and have suggested that he make the coming one "Mye Day," the same length as "Pogo Planet," in our October issue. (RT—If you missed the October issue, copies can still be obtained by sending 15 cents in stamps or coin to *Future, Combined With Science Fiction*, 60 Hudson Street, New York City, and asking for same. This issue has a dandy cover by Bok from the Pearson story, contains Ray Cummings' classic "Man on the Meteor" and has other top-notch stf tales by various popular writers.)

LYLE MONROE is a newish stf writer, whom we've had the good fortune to meet. Or perhaps we should say: the Lyle Monroes. Seeing Lyle without his lady is virtually unthinkable, and the Monroes maintain that they are perfect schizophreniacs, the one being entirely capable of thinking, acting, and speaking for the other without any disharmony then or thereafter resulting. To get down to the point, Monroe's appeared a number of times in our contemporaries, and we felt 'twas time we had one of his tales. So, here's hoping you like "My Object All Sublime." And Damon Knight has done an adequate drawing for the tale, we think.

Let us know, by the way, won't you, what you think of Station X's new makeup.

NOW is the time to talk about *Science Fiction Quarterly*. We refer to issue number five, dated Winter 1941-42. As we type this, we can turn around in our seat and gaze fondly at the cover Bok drew for it, symbolizing Ray Cummings' unforgettable

You are invited to send your letters of comment upon FUTURE FICTION, and science fiction in general, for publication in this department, to FUTURE FICTION, 60 Hudson Street, New York City.

"Into the Fourth Dimension." And, in our mind's eye, we can see the compelling double-page spread Dolgov drew for the story. This time, we've two novelettes: "Sir Mallory's Magnitude" by the perennial favorite, S. D. Gottesman; Forte drew a full-page illustration for it; and there's Hugh Raymond's stimulating "The Year of Uniting," this one illustrated by Dolgov. The short stories consist of "Power Plant," by Lee Gregor, illustrated by Roy Hunt; "Caridi Shall Not Die" by Walter Kubillus, illustrated by Bok; a sequel to Clarence Granoski's "Femintown, Mars," entitled "Ephony's Spectacles," this one illustrated by Knight, and "Baby Dreams" by Allen Warland, a newcomer. This issue also contains a new department, *Prime Base*, where the editor, and anyone else who wants to come in, chews the well-known rag. All in all, we think this issue of the Quarterly is something not to be missed; if your news-dealer is out of them, you can always obtain a copy by sending 25 cents in stamps or coin to the address mentioned above, in regard to back issues of *Future*.

SOME of you have asked about back issues of *Science Fiction* magazine, the earlier issues of *Future Fiction* and *Science Fiction Quarterly*. According to the latest reports from the stockroom, we still have all issues on hand, but the supply of some of them is getting low. The prices are the same as those of current issues: 15 cents for copies of *Science Fiction* magazine and *Future Fiction*; 25 cents for copies of the *Quarterly*. For your convenience, we'll list the dates on these books now. *Science Fiction* magazine: In 1939 there were: March, June, August, October, and December. In 1940: March, June, and October. In 1941: January, March, June, and September. *Future Fiction*: 1939: November. 1940: March, July, November. 1941: April, August. *Science Fiction Quarterly*: order by numbers: there are four back issues; issue number five is available as you read this. *Future Combined With Science Fiction*: 1941: October, December.

IN REGARD to our current contest (the double-spread illustration original for each issue of *Future* is given to the writer of what other readers consider to be the best letter in each issue of Station X. Only those votes which accompany a letter of comment upon the current issue are counted) I'm afraid we'll have to adopt the same system we use in regard to reporting to you on how the stories in former numbers were received. That is, we cannot close the contest with the closing of copy on the succeeding issue, inasmuch as there is not enough time between the date a new *Future* appears on the stands and the date that another goes to the printer to permit a really representative vote. I know that many of you write in as soon as you can, but it isn't always possible to get a letter of comment in on time. Thus, I'll let you know next time who won the Dolgov double-spread for "Around the Universe", although the winner will actually receive it as soon as possible after this issue you are now reading is on the stands.

HERE'S how the October *Future* rated with you. The cover won universal acclaim, as did the interior artwork. The stories came out like this: 1. "Pogo Planet" by Martin Pearson (8.5); 2. "The Thought-Feeders" by R. R. Winterbotham (6.9); 3. "Out of Nowhere" by E. A. Grosser (6.3);

4. "The Man on the Meteor," by Ray Cummings (4.7); 5. "Across the Ages" by Don Passante (3.5), and 6. "Forbidden Flight" by Chester B. Conant (-1.3). The figure in parenthesis indicates just what actual rating each story received. Any number above zero means that the story was better than just fair. A rating of 5 or over means that you definitely liked it, while a rating of 10 means that you thought it was excellent. A rating of 1 would mean that everyone voted the story for first place in the issue, and that would make it virtually a new classic. A rating of zero means that you were indifferent to the story, while down to -5 means you disliked it; -10 means that we should hang our heads in shame, wear sackcloth, and sift ashes on our hair for having inflicted it on you. This time, you'll see that Conant's story came out a little behind the 8-ball, but it wasn't heartily disliked. The general consensus was that the tale was well enough written, but that it wasn't really a complete story—only a fragment. We'll be careful about this sort of thing in future *Futures*.

NOW comes a paragraph I'd appreciate your all reading carefully. Those of you who have written in have, for the vast majority—more than 75%—shown your approval of what I'm trying to do with *Future*. That's a great deal of encouragement and I appreciate your having taken the trouble to tell me so, even as I appreciate your having tipped me off when I pulled a boner. But I'm going to need considerable more help from all of you if *Future* can hope to fulfill the program we're planning for it, because my plans are based to a large extent upon your wishes, as expressed in your letters. Therefore, I'm going to put it squarely up to you. *Can every one of you who feel that Future is the kind of magazine you want, or is becoming that kind, find a new reader for Future during the 60 days that this issue will be on sale?* We've just begun to scratch the surface of this magazine's possibilities, you and I; I think we both realize that. But there's just so much that I can do, even with all your splendid criticisms and suggestions—above that point, I need your help.

There are a good many things *Future* needs if we are going to be what we can be. We need more pages, more illustrations, and monthly publication. But none of these things can be realized without a constantly growing reader audience, a clearly visible growth. Then I can take my plans to the publisher knowing that he'll listen because a magazine expanding in circulation is a sound investment, worth spending more money on in order further to stimulate its circulation.

Your letters have made me feel that I am doing my part; won't you do yours now?

IT'S the end of October as I type this out. Weather cold but clear. By the time this is in your hands, it will be December. The date on this issue is February. Which just goes to show how confusing the life of an editor can be. Now is the time to wish you all the best returns of the Christmas season. I wish it were possible to send individual cards to all of you, but this will have to do. . . . And a happy New Year!

So, on to the letters, and we start this time with

FRANK ROBINSON

Your October and December issues were some of the best I've seen in my short

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Future Combined with Science Fiction

period of Fantasy Collecting (I hesitate to say the best because I've neglected reading the stories, but if looks count . . . !)

Outside of Paul and a few Finlays and Rogers, the Bok covers are the most beautiful there are. Must I ask for more, more, MORE? The former editor of FUTURE frequently apologized for the cover by saying that lurid paintings were necessary to attract customers. Well, the first few FUTURE covers were lurid enough but I can't remember buying any because the cover attracted me. . . .

Outside of the painting itself, the cover is to be complimented for the arrangement of the title and the small amount of printing upon it.

FUTURIAN TIMES and STATION X are likewise good, mainly because of the editor's humanizing it.

Regarding "Someone in the Dark": I've seen the book and to tell the truth, it is the most unattractive book of its kind (this referring to the dust jacket and not to the contents.)

About "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde": It would have been better if Spencer Tracy had worn more makeup. After the "Freudian" part showing evil triumphing over the good in his brain, one expected a terrifying change in his face and figure. Unfortunately there was so little change that I, and the rest of the patrons of the show couldn't help laughing.

6636 South Sacramento, Chicago, Ill.

Definitely, looks count. We might have the most wonderful stf book ever, but if we had artless, dull covers, or equally artless lurid ones, and uninspiring interior artwork, few people would know what kind of stories we ran. On the other hand, attractive covers and fine interior art are not much good if the stories do not live up to the book's appearance. It works both ways. So, while we're happy to hear you rave over our art, we'd like to know if you think the rest of the book is worth your while.

We'll have to refrain from comment upon "Jekyll & Hyde," as we haven't seen the latest version. We still recall, however, the very effective makeup job on Fredric March in an earlier edition of the film.

Now, here is

ANTHONY C. TARR

Your request for "Information, Please" in the December issue of FUTURE has at last spurred me to write my first letter to a stf mag, having read them more or less continuously since 1928. So—you will see that I have plenty of definite ideas on the subject stored up by this time.

In the first place, please, oh please! do not start your short stories back among the advertisements. If we must paw through the pages of drivel, why not have just one short story running through the back pages and let us enjoy the others without having our attention diverted by lurid blurbs for false teeth, hair-dye, and asthma cures every time we turn a page.

Another thing, there are too many short stories in FUTURE, and they are much too short. I would prefer to see a novel, a novelet, and about three short stories of

Station X

seven or eight pages each. Very few writers have the ability to capture and hold attention to a plot in two or three pages, and so far I haven't seen their names on your contents page.

Station X is a swell feature, and I'm glad to see one magazine that isn't afraid to print a few lengthy letters of real interest, rather than cut down a couple of dozen nondescript missives to the bare phrases in which their own particular magazine is praised to the skies.

Now to comment on the current issue, based on rating my favorite story as 10 points, and the others pro rata:

10. **DAY OF THE TITANS.** Not the best story I've ever read, but interesting enough to hold my interest. And, being on the time travel theme, would rate first with me almost automatically.

7. **AROUND THE UNIVERSE.** A somewhat silly story stuffed with too many high-falutin' figures of astounding size but little interest. It belies your claim that it might have been penned recently, both by its style and its omission of the planet Pluto which, I think, had not been discovered at that time. Its redeeming feature was the point in which the space ship reached the "inner shell" of the atom in which our system of universes is claimed to be located. The story was too long and drawn-out to rate first. I've seen the world saved from a Martian invasion in much less space.

6. **DESTINY WORLD.** Of the shorts, this was best.

5. **SALVAGE JOB.** No comment.

4. **QUARRY.** Somehow, this story had an indefinable something that left me thinking about it, and any story that can do that isn't a complete bust.

0. (Yes, I said zero!) **NO STAR SHALL FALL, SOMETHING FROM BEYOND, and SPACE EPISODE.** The first two are fantasy stories, and I never have and never shall like that type of story. Hope you will keep fantasy strictly out of **FUTURE.** (Ssh! Who said anything about **QUARRY?**) **SPACE EPISODE** was quite disappointing. . . . I had expected to see some sort of explanation for the surprising conduct of the two men, and that they would regain their senses at the last moment, but when it ended just as the author had obviously led me to believe it would, I felt quite a "let-down" feeling.

So, you see, there were three stories that I wouldn't care if I'd never read, and those pages might just as easily have been used to add to the experiences of Ajax Calkins, for instance, which bears out the point in my third paragraph.

Your cover illustration was very, very good. I like Bok's covers much better than I do his interior illustrations, although even those are improving now. Would also like to speak a good word for Forte's illustration for **DAY OF THE TITANS.** More by him, please. Most high school kids can do as well as Knight, but maybe he will improve.

Almost forgot to put in my vote for the

(Continued On Page 104)

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Future Combined with Science Fiction

(Continued From Page 103)

best letter in Station X. Let's give it to Damon Knight. His illustrations may be corny, but I like his style of writing.

Finally, I would like to plead for original stories, rather than reprints. Surely there is enough new material coming from authors' mills so that you do not have to dig into antiquity for something readable. (And which seldom is.)

55221 15th Avenue, N. E., Seattle, Wash.

P.S.—Much as I like time travel stories, I have a theory which definitely proves that time traveling will never be invented. If, in some future age, some genius should discover the secret, he would doubtless have traveled back to our time and would be here with us now to tell us about it. As we have no record of such a visit, ergo! it can never be!

We're really sorry about the number of short tales starting way in the back, last time, and promise it won't happen again. In regard to the shorter stories, a great many of the readers seem to be fond of them, but the majority bears you out in your request for a smaller number of them per issue.

Look, if you positively could not endure fantasy, then you wouldn't have been able to stomach *Quarry* which was the sheerest of fantasy. Obviously, you really object to a particular kind of fantastic story, of which *Something From Beyond* and *No Star Shall Fall* are representative. We'd appreciate hearing as to whether or not you care for *The Alien Vibration* in this issue.

In regard to *Space Episode*, the girls all thought it was grand, and most of the males seemed hurt. Well, I'll have to admit that it was definitely a woman's story and not exactly jibing with the masculine ego. And, further, that I wouldn't care for a great many of such stories myself—but this once, I found it refreshingly different. Let you know next issue just how it finally came out.

We can think of a number of evading-points in regard to your objection to time travel, but, for the moment, we'll let the rest of you readers fight it out, inasmuch as we've already hogged a lot of space. Thus, on to

FOUR COMRADES

Our Dear Editor, Mr. Lowndes: May four jolly but lonely British chaps cut in?

We four are part of a gunnery platoon down here in (censored); right in the middle of this jolly war, what? But don't let your American newspapers alarm you too much, because things have been pretty quiet here since (censored) and wiped up.

However, all that has nothing to do with this letter. We four jolly (but lonely) chaps read your magazine regularly. It is air-mailed to us monthly by a friend Twitteridge has in the States. We understand that another magazine, *TIME*, is also air-mailed around the world. This makes jolly company for "our" mag, what? Birds of a feather fly together, you know. (The following sentence was censored in our office. Ed.)

When we were home (two of us are from London, one from Leeds and one from Aberdeen) we read *TALES OF WONDER* and *FANTASY* as often as they bunged their jolly carcasses on the news vendor's

Station X

stand. But it is much different down here in (censored). *FUTURE* is the only one we see.

So you see, we value it very much; we really can't thank this friend of Twitteridge's enough for his jolly favors. We may as well comment specifically on this October book; and of course we will all be eager to see our letter in your jolly old *Station X* next month.

We can't quite agree on this Cummings story, *MAN ON THE METEOR*. Twitteridge claims it is a classic of sheer beauty; Oglethorp on the opposite end contends that it is a piece of work not fit to besmirch the pages of a penny dreadful. In between, are Hasenwinkle who believes it has beauty, while Bludsole takes a stand yet between the first and third respectively. He says it is simply sheer. Period. (I might mention that Bludsole is a deep chap, and his thought processes are sometimes not easy to follow. This may be a compliment.)

In looking over your pictures inside the book we find much to amuse and entertain us. One thing, however, keeps popping up constantly to annoy us, and search as we may the contents page, we cannot find a logical reason for the same. It is this: Why does your artist who draws the pictures sign different names to each picture? For instance, this Bok chap signs his own name to the cover picture, and to two others within. Yet, on other pictures, he signs Dolgov. Now why? (He uses still another, a "John Forte," which perplexes us even more.) Please answer this puzzle for us.

Now one thing more, and we will close. It being about time for the (censored), we will soon be getting back to work.

On page 94, illustrating a story called *OUT OF NOWHERE*, is the picture to which your artist signed the name "Forte." Examine the girl closely please. Her legs. Particularly the back of her right leg, immediately behind the knee.

There is a wart!

Sir, we are disappointed in you! We expected you clever Americans to be the champions of pure, beautiful womanhood! And you have the gall, the corruptness, the unmoralness to picture that beautiful girl carrying about a wart on the back side of her knee!

We're not getting your magazine (by airmail) gratis from Twitteridge's friend in the States, we would cut our subscriptions at once. Do not let this happen again, we pray you!

(Signed) H. P. Twitteridge, Terrence Oglethorp, Morton Hasenwinkle, Jonathan P. Bludsole, Battery VK, 21st Royal Coast Artillery (censored), Egypt.

Dear me, can it be possible that this foul blemish upon our fair heroine crept in? Begad, it did! and we blush for not having corrected it in the proofs! As for Bok, well, you see he's a sort of multiple-schizophreniac. Very rare case. You'd be amazed at the number

(Continued On Page 106)

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Future Combined with Science Fiction
 (Continued From Page 105)

of names under which he draws. Paul, Morey, Wesson, Knight, and so on. (In case any of these gentlemen are reading, we do but jest!)

Seriously, friends, we have a somewhat different setup here in the States. We have not just one, but several artists on our staff. Besides Hannes Bok, there are B. I. Dolgov, John Forte, Damon Knight, Frank R. Paul, Roy Hunt, David A. Kyle, and others. Does that clear matters up for you?

Best of luck to you, lads, and thumbs up. Now, here is

CLIFFORD ANDRESEN

I like your magazines but I wish to make a few remarks regarding your artists in FUTURE and the Quarterly. For gosh sakes! please get rid of BOK! I think he is one of the worst artists you have. I would rather not have any pictures for the stories than have Bok mess them up by something that looks as if a five-year-old child drew it. Paul comes first in my choice, then I prefer Dold, Schneeman, Kramer, Rogers, and about two dozen more I could name. I also list FINLAY and PAUL as the two best artists there are. All of your stories are OK; just keep them coming as they are, and I won't kick. But please! No more BOK.

You published a letter of mine in the July 1940 issue of FUTURE FICTION and I received a letter on September 20, 1941, from a fellow who is on a British battleship, stationed somewhere in the Mediterranean. The letter was sent from Sydney, Australia, postmarked May 28, 1941. The seaman saw my letter and wrote me, as he wishes to correspond with fellows in the USA. His name is F. Greer, A. B. S. 1527 and the address is 18 Mess., H. M. A. S. Perth., c/o G. P. O., Sydney, Australia. Would you please publish this so other readers can write to him? Thank you. I am writing this paragraph just to let you know that your magazines are read all over the globe.

204 North Locust Street, Anamosa, Iowa

We take it that you just don't like Bok. Hmm, that seems to cover the situation. Except to remark that so far as we can tell, you're in a very small minority. However, we await other readers' comments on the subject. And now, we present

VICTOR MAYPER, JR.

Dear Doc: Well, first the comments on the December issue of FUTURE. In general, it wasn't as good as the last issue, which was really tons.

First, of course, comes the latest Ajax Calkins scream. More! More! And yet more! Nice going, Pearson. Give it an 8.7 on a scale of 10.

As a rather poor second comes DAY OF THE TITANS, with 7.4. Why the h— do time-traveling stories have to be published? Still, it was better than most of the others. At least, it was fair.

Third comes the story by Ray Cummings, that master of the stinkeroo. Please note that the 7.3 which this gets is better than I have ever given a Cummings story—and this one was written in 1923! Since you are so set on printing Cummings reprints, take them from far enough back to be sure

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Chapter 2—Love Problems of Wives

Why marriages fail—wife often frustrated, disappointed—husband should improve in sexual relations—set routine grows boring—case of the under-sexed wife — how to keep love alive.

Chapter 3—Scientific Sex Program in Marriage

Marriage based on mutual love and co-operation—instructions for performing and following marriage sex program—chart of safe periods—normal frequency of relations.

Chapter 4—Functions of Organs

The purpose of sex—how conception takes place — secondary stimuli zones — attaining highest pitch in compatibility.

Chapter 5—The Art of Married Love

The importance of preparation—first act the courtship or love-making—second part of the Coitus—many positions possible—final act or climax—half hour all too short for courtship—develop mutual sexual rhythm—reaching a climax together—women often unsatisfied — problems of physical mismatching—overcoming difficulties.

Chapter 6—Secrets of Sex Appeal

What does a man notice—how to dress for charm and appeal—choosing clothing, attending to complexion, figure and personality.

Chapter 7—Dangers of Petting

Is it wise to pet to be popular?—Embracing bodies and kissing lips dangerous?—yearning desires difficult to control.

Chapter 8—How to produce ideal conditions for marital relations in your home.

Chapter 9—Birth Control

A moral issue long debated—arguments in favor and against limitation of children—mechanical contraceptives against law—various methods used — no method ideal.

Chapter 10—Mistaken Ideas on sex.

Chapter 11—Advice to married people.

Chapter 12—Pregnancy

Changes following fertilization—first indications of pregnancy—care of prospective mother—abortions and miscarriages—dangers of pregnancy—preparations for birth—pregnancy 28) days approximately.

Chapter 13—Techniques favorable for mutual satisfaction.

Chapter 14—Can Sex of Unborn Child Be Chosen

Science Investigating various theories—no certain methods.

Chapter 15—Motherhood

Actual process of childbirth—follow doctor's instructions — caesarian operations — puerperal fever — summary for prospective mothers.

Chapter 16 — Methods of Easy Childbirth

Select doctor you have complete confidence in—follow his instructions—anaesthetics which diminish labor pains without injuring infant.

Chapter 17—Intimate Questions of Husbands

Overcoming some common sexual problems—how to attain "control"—importance of prolonged courtship—effect of frequency of control—overcoming frigidity in wives —can impotency be overcome—organic deficiencies—various faults and their remedies.

Chapter 18—Intimate Questions of Wives

Importance of free discussion with husband—avoid haste—be patient—strive for perfection—sex a mutual matter—abstinence and excesses—intimate women problems.

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How to develop your charm and sex appeal.

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Future Combined with Science Fiction

(Continued From Page 106)

that they are not in his present stereotyped—and lousy—plot and style.

Fourth, and almost tied with the Cummings classic (?) is SALVAGE JOB. The only reason this rated so low was that I've seen that particular way of getting drunk under water in another, non-stf, book. Mr. Croutch, have you been reading anything by the name of "Spanish Ingots" lately?

Fifth is SOMETHING FROM BEYOND. 6.7. Very poorly handled.

Sixth—NO STAR SHALL FALL—6.5. Barely passing. Old idea, poor plot, bad handling.

Seventh—QUARRY—6.4. If this had had an ending, it would have been good. The writing was excellent. As it was, it was failing.

Last—SPACE EPISODE—6.0. Of all the hacky, sour, limping stories, this tops them all. Bah! Triple bah!

Cover. 7.0. Fair. But please, please, please. . . . Bok is a fantasy artist, not science fiction.

The inside illustrations were only fair. That's about all I can think of to say about that particular issue.

The Manlius School, Manlius, N. Y.

As to why Day of the Titans was published, just look at the first letter in this issue of Station X. We were pretty sure that most readers would enjoy it.

In regard to Quarry, we do not exactly get your point about it's not having an ending. True, a great deal is left to the reader's imagination, but enough is given so that the reader can draw his own conclusions: (a) it was just hallucination and nothing happened, (b) begad, they got him! The final section is deliberately ambiguous for that reason.

Now, here is someone who does not exactly agree with Mr. Mayper. Let's hear from VIRGINIA COMBS

Here I am again. FUTURE just off the stands and just this moment read. So I'm all hepped up, like a space-hand on a Mercurian jag. Lezzee . . . the vote for the best letter . . . hmm, well, J. S. Klimaris takes my vote, not for the cuteness of his wording, or his wise-cracks, but because his reference to his own favorites set me browsing for some half-forgotten classics. Put it down to sentiment, but that's the way she lays.

Now for the ratings. This is going to be fun; I really like this issue. Maybe it was that matchless cover, but it really got under my skin.

1. SPACE EPISODE. Good, fine, and super. The last story in the magazine rated first with me. Call it loyalty to my sex or what you will, but I still like it best. It was well. More!

2. SOMETHING FROM BEYOND. (I am not reading the magazine backwards . . . can I help it if you stick your best stories in the back?) Perhaps it is the reference to the Kracken . . . so reminiscent of "Dwellers in the Mirage," by Merritt, although the stories are nothing alike, but this one made me think of things that science has not yet explained. More, too.

3. NO STAR SHALL FALL. I kept wanting to put this first. Perhaps it was

Station X

that ge-e-orgeous cover. . . . BOK is so grand. Yummmmmmmmm. More and more.

4. DESTINY WORLD. I liked this much better than POGO PLANET. Really and definitely better. Keep up the good work, Pearson, I'll like your hero yet.

5. Station X. D—— if this isn't better than some of your stories. I seem to remember saying something like that last time, but it still holds.

6. SALVAGE JOB. Funny, I liked the hero. Heroes should never be heroic.

7. DAY OF THE TITANS. Goody-goody.

8. AROUND THE UNIVERSE. So you think this should have come sooner. Sorry, I never felt vitriolic about any of Cummings' other stories, but this seems so d—— silly to me. I lost interest several times, and frankly that's fatal.

9. Futurian Times . . . handy as all get-out.

That's a terrible thing to do to your magazine . . . rate all the stories in just about reverse position, but you have 'em that way.

About the art. As long as you continue to have Bok, ahhh Bok, and Forte I'll continue to buy FUTURE. The cover is quite the most superb thing I have ever seen on a science-fiction magazine. Why, oh why, can't you run off color cuts of such masterpieces before marring them with the necessary but oh so mundane lettering? You'd sell this fan every time and I'll bet there are plenty of others. After all, we all love BOK.

The illustration for the Cummings novel is unique and charming. I love it. That for DAY OF THE TITANS is full of rich and varied detail. Good. The pic for SOMETHING FROM BEYOND made me shiver, so brutally strong and black . . . fitted the story. To go into detail about the others would just waste your time and mine, they were all good. It must be the frustrated artist in me, but art work always scores heavily with me.

All foolin' and wisecracks aside, this issue of FUTURE topped all others in my estimate. Glad to see you're improving. Keep it up and I'll keep reading you until the stars fall.

That's all for this time and I'll bet you're glad you only come out bi-monthly. Box 907, Crandon, Wis.

We're only human, Virginia, and that means we're sort of lazy. So in a way, we feel happy about bi-monthly publication. But we're also ambitious. That sort of balances our laziness. We want to make Future so that you and thousands of other readers will think each issue the best yet. To do that, we have to work, even though it's much more comfortable to ride on laurels. And really to fulfill our ambitions, we'd have to come out monthly, so you see we are hoist by our own petard, because that would mean more than twice as much work.

As for color cuts of the covers, without printing, it's a lovely idea, but expensive. True, there's the old saying: If it pays, we do it. But so far as we know, it wouldn't pay. Perhaps a few thousand readers can

(Continued On Page 110)

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Future Combined with Science Fiction
(Continued From Page 109)

change our minds on the subject, however. Now, here is

BILL STOY

Now that *FUTURE* is definitely a bimonthly, instead of the occasional publication it once was, it can really start improving! Not that an excellent job hasn't already been done, what with far better art work and stories, but the firm groundwork laid by the past three issues permits more rapid improvements. If this does come about, *FUTURE* might, in time, reach the top ranks—for despite the superabundance of titles, there's always room for a good one at the top. And *FUTURE*'s phenomenal advancement thus far must indicate something!

Oh well, now that I've patted the editor on the back and gotten him in a receptive mood, I can start criticizing the December issue. First the stories:

AROUND THE UNIVERSE naturally takes first place as an old stf classic. Tsk, tsk, it's saddening to think to what depths of hackdom Cummings has degenerated of late. In second place comes Ajax the Admirable in *DESTINY WORLD*; Pearson has created something immortal in that character and many return performances seem to be in order for the modest little fellow. And to round out the picture, third and fourth places respectively go to *DAY OF THE TITANS* (in this yarn, Fowler seems almost a second Ajax) and *SALVAGE JOB*.

The art work... it's beeyootiful! Bok is doing a lion's share of the work and more than holding his own. Forte, too, is doing fairly well, but Knight is no asset... I'd much rather see Dolgov.

The best letter in Station X (incidentally, wouldn't "Future's Forum" be a more appropriate title?) is easily the one by Klimaris. This dept. is slowly but surely developing into one of the better letter sections of the stf field, due to the informal style.

O yeah, here are my answers to those questions on page 88 (in order): Good idea (combining magazines); yes (like present title); good stories (what kind of stories wanted); yes (like covers and artwork).

About that review of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: If the opinions of those of my friends who saw the picture are any criterion, the readers' reaction should come in about three or four to one against the film. Though this was a controversial movie, I admit, I'm in the minority, and I'm going now into a rigorous two-months training period living only on a diet of finely ground copies of "Sterenson's immortal classic" mixed with bits of undeveloped films, in order to prepare for any blasts in the next issue. I'm awaitin' boys!

140-92 Burden Crescent, Jamaica, N. Y. There's not much to say in reply, Bill, except that Knight's work, so far, seems to be coming out ahead of the game. Not that we expect Damon to replace Dolgov, see his illustrations for *Beyond the Stars* in this issue. Speaking of our demon artist, here he is

(Continued On Page 112)

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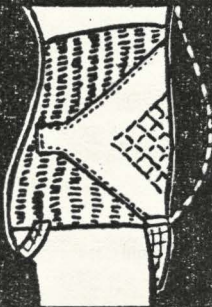
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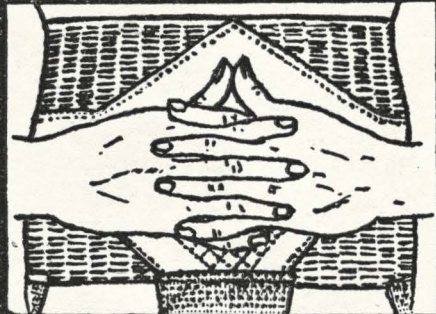
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(Continued From Page 110)

DAMON KNIGHT

What ho, Doc: Last issue I said the plot of Winterbotham's *THE THOUGHT FEEDERS* annoyed me because of its hare-brained metaphysical reasoning; you wanted to know what, exactly, I meant. Okay, I'll clarify . . . but first let me say that I objected to the element mentioned only because an overdose was present. The story was in the Winterbotham tradition, amusing and interesting because of the wacky way in which the plot is built up. But in this case, the wackiness was just too wacky, and there was too much of it. I couldn't stomach it.

Now that that's clear, I'll go on to explain precisely wherein the reasoning on which *THE THOUGHT FEEDERS* was based was harebrained metaphysical reasoning. Oh yes, you asked me to define that phrase, didn't you? My dictionary defines "metaphysical" as ". . . pertaining to, or based on, abstract qualities; reasoning from theories or abstractions; above or beyond the material world . . ." The "hare-brained" was meant to limit the term to perhaps the best-known type of metaphysical logic, the kind which, reasoning from wildly imaginative premises, ignoring facts wherever found, and failing adequately to define its terms, reaches astounding conclusions such as that Achilles could never catch up with a tortoise if the tortoise had a head start, and that every cat has nine tails. (No cat has eight tails. Every cat has one tail more than no cat. Therefore every cat has nine tails.)

Winterbotham's harebrained plot first becomes evident on page 75 (October *FUTURE*) where he justifies his race of thought-feeders by the following process: The first life fed on animate elements in the sea and rocks. Then came animals who ate the plants. Then came other animals who ate the first animals, up to man, who

eats the flesh of lower animals. Therefore, the next stage is a race which feeds on men's thoughts. This is a typically metaphysical train of logic which justifies the hypothesis to be proved by inserting it in a sequence of events totally foreign to it.

Next, Winterbotham neatly gets around the question: "Since the cloud-beings eat thoughts, why can't they produce their own?" by the bland answer: "Because that would be cannibalism." This again is typically metaphysical for the reason given above, and by virtue of assuming that the moral taboo against cannibalism is an Eternal Verity—one of the ephemeral things for which metaphysicians searched.

Finally, Winterbotham, in developing the concept of thought as food, treats it not in the strictly physical sense, as a minute charge of electricity passing from one brain-cell to another—which might make some sense, because electricity is a form of energy (although a simple dry cell would provide that more easily, and in greater quantity)—but in the old, metaphysical sense, as a mysterious substance of unknown composition, with an independent existence in its own right.

That seems to cover it. Thanks for listening.

142 West 103d Street, New York City

And thank you, Damon, for clarifying. We're keeping strictly out of this little battle, but it's wide open for a rebuttal from Mr. Winterbotham, or for further comment on either side of the question from any reader who wants to horn in.

Which closes this edition of Station X. We'll be seeing you soon again, with a lineup of favorites . . . can't say at the moment just who they'll be, but R. R. Winterbotham's recently kicked in with a dandy little yarn called *Old Man Mars*; E. A. Grosser has a top-notch, titled: *Time Exposure*; we've another Ajax Calkins story coming in, and Bob Tucker, Dick Wilson, and Cecil Corwin are all awaiting printer's ink. Until then, happy reading! Sincerely, RWL.

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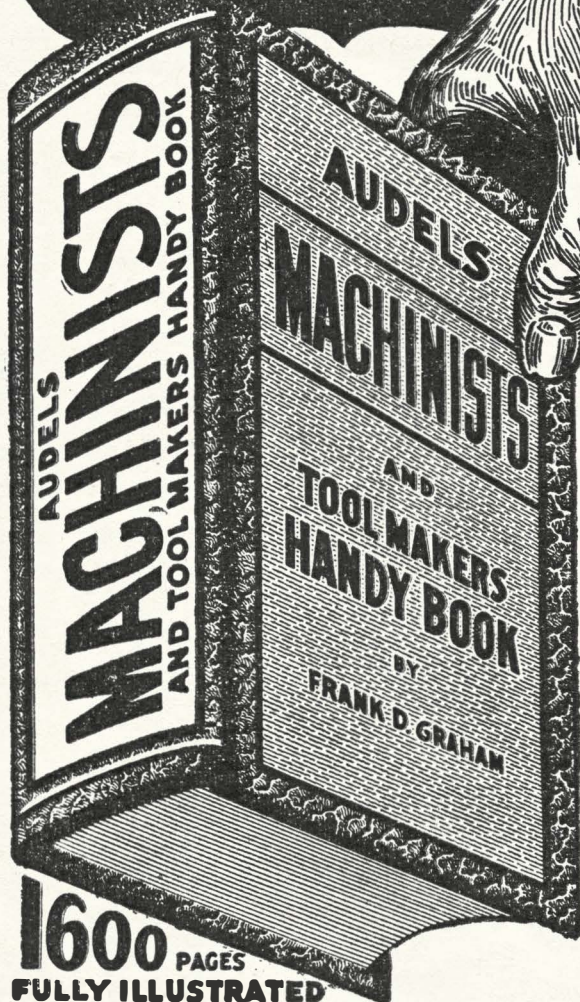
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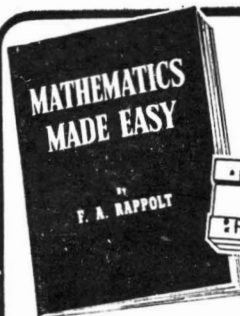
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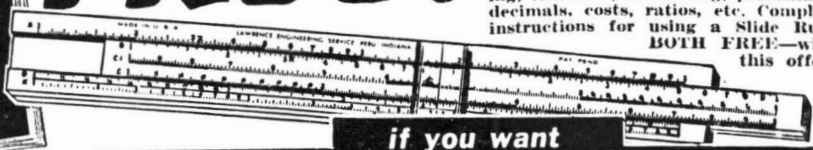
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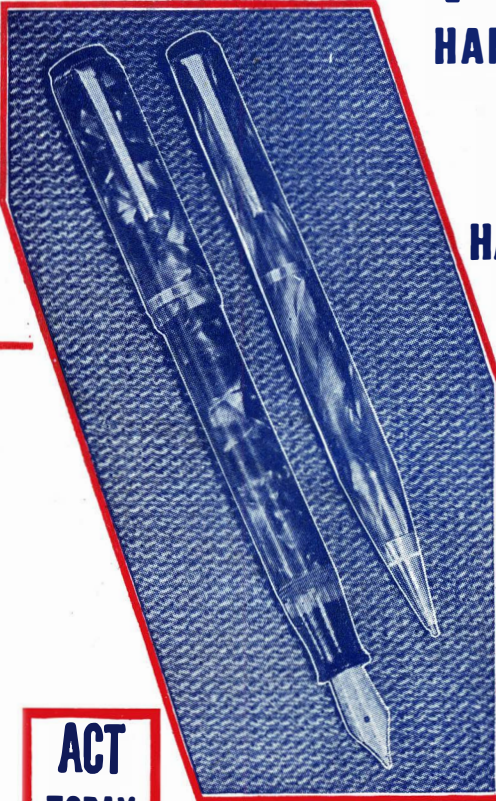
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