FANTASTIC STORIES OF THE FUTURE

SCIENCE FICTION

TEN
NEW STORIES

MARCH—15c

UNDER THE WHITE STAR
by EDMOND HAMILTON

"Science Fiction"

by HUGO GERNSBACK

WHEN I coined the term "science-fiction" way back in 1926, in the first science-fiction magazine (Amazing Stories) which was published by me at that time, I perhaps did not fully realize what I had let loose on an unsuspecting and unprepared world.

While science-fiction has had its ups and downs, lately it has taken a remarkable upswing and the end is not in sight. It would seem that the younger generation, in particular, is beginning to take science-fiction more seriously than ever before, which is as it should be; because, after all, science-fiction is a great stimulus to the imagination, and particularly to the younger people who refuse to believe that space navigation and death rays are an impossibility, as maintained by many scientists today.

Then too, science-fiction has received a tremendous stimulus via the comic strips where, for a number of years, science-fiction has held forth triumphantly. On top of all this, the radio has done a great deal to popularize science-fiction and, adding up all the factors, it would seem that this type of literature is in for the universal popularization which, as I have always maintained in my former writings, it should command.

The possibilities of science-fiction are quite endless. When I conceived the first science-fiction monthly, there was no science-fiction on the air, nor in cartoons and movies; all of these have come later and have proven a tremendous boost to this type of fiction. What new forces there will be added during the next ten years to come, to further popularize it, is difficult to predict. There is no question, however, that science-fiction has come to stay and that it will keep going at a tremendous rate from now on.

The mere fact that, today, there are more magazines of this type than ever before is a very healthy sign and augurs well for the future of this type of literature.

While I have been somewhat distressed to note that some of the magazines have departed from the science-fiction type of story, and gone in almost wholly for the "fairy-tale" type of fiction instead, I believe this will remedy itself in due time.

So many new things are happening in science every day that there is really no excuse for going into the "Alice-in-Wonderland" type of fiction.

For this reason I am particularly well pleased that the publishers of this new magazine have chosen the name of "Science Fiction," which I originally coined, and I believe they are to be congratulated upon their wisdom in the selection of this title. I predict that the magazine will have a long life and, with good old artist Paul back on the job to give you the brilliant drawings and covers you want, there is no reason why SCIENCE FICTION Magazine should not have a brilliant future.

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SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 1, No. 1

10 NEW STORIES

March, 1939

FEATURES

OUR COVER—An original painting by Frank R. Paul, depicts a scene suggested by Edmond Hamilton's story of the dim future—"Under the White Star."

SCIENCE FICTION, published every other month by Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc., 1 Appleton Place, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 60 Hudson Street, New York N. Y. Application entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Yearly subscriptions, 75c; single copy, 15c. For advertising rates, write Double Action Group, 60 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes and submitted at the author's risk.

CASH PRIZE CONTEST!

IT IS worth money to us to know what you, as a reader, consider to be good science-fiction—therefore this Cash Prize Contest.

The Editors of SCIENCE FICTION want to make certain that they are always giving you the very best stories in this field of fantastic literature. In order to please you by presenting a magazine filled with A-1 material each and every issue, it is necessary for us to find out just what you like.

Some fantasy fans believe that science-fiction should stress science—facts, theories, and general discussions—while others think that its primary function is to stimulate the imagination, and not to educate its followers; that the science in the stories should be at a minimum and never allowed to dominate the themes.

Here is your chance to voice your opinions on science-fiction, and at the same time, win a cash award for your effort. See how *easy* it is!

We want you to submit an essay to us—anywhere from fifty to a thousand words in length—on the subject, "The essentials of good science-fiction." That's all there is to it!

There will be nine prizes for the best entries:

FIRST PRIZE: Twenty-five ($25.00) dollars in cash.
SECOND PRIZE: Fifteen ($15.00) dollars in cash.
THIRD AND FOURTH PRIZES: Each five ($5.00) dollars in cash.
FIFTH TO NINTH PRIZES: Each a one-year subscription to SCIENCE FICTION.

All entries must be legibly written, either by hand or typewriter, on one side only of 8½x11 in. paper. The Editors of SCIENCE FICTION will be the sole judges in this contest, and entries must be in the editorial offices by Friday, January 27, 1939. The judges cannot enter into correspondence with the contestants, nor will any contributions be returned. Address your entry to Editor, SCIENCE FICTION, 60 Hudson Street, New York City. Results of this contest will be announced in our next issue. Everyone is eligible to enter except employees of Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc., and their families.

Go to work now and write that essay! You can win as easily as anyone else. You don't have to use a lot of fancy language—nor must you have any special abilities. All you need is an interest in science-fiction.

Besides winning a prize in this contest, you can help form the editorial policy of SCIENCE FICTION, because the Editors will choose stories for future issues according to what you, the readers, suggest in your essays as good science-fiction!

Send in your entry today!

Under The White Star

by EDMOND HAMILTON

Darl is thrown out upon an airless world where a dying sun seals his doom—and he alone could save an enslaved people from the wicked tyranny of Gorm Oga!

Two gray-clad guards hurried forward, bearing a heavy suit of pliable metal. Darl Ailing was forced into it.

IN THE dusky twilight, the frozen black plain stretched far away toward a low, jagged range of white hills. Beyond the fanged ridge lay a dim, bluish sea, extending out of sight. But those white hills were of solid ice, and that vague sea was a sea of liquid air. It was cold on earth now—cold!

Even now, at midday, the temperature was two hundred degrees below the Centigrade zero. And only a thin white light like strong starlight came from the tiny, shrunken, brilliant disk of the little sun. For the sun, long ago, had met the fate of almost every normal star in the universe. It had become a white dwarf.

Millions of years ago, long before the thing had happened, astronomers had warned man of the peril. They had pointed out that, in structure, the sun was perilously near the danger edge of the Russell Diagram—and that once it crossed that edge,

its outpush of radiation would no longer balance the gravitational attraction of its own mass. It would contract into a white dwarf; a compact, tiny sun, giving only a hundredth of its former heat and light to Earth.

The prediction had come true. Once the danger stage was reached, the sun shrank into itself in comparatively short time. Earth's soil froze hard, and its oceans congealed into ice-packs that buckled up in great hills, and its atmosphere condensed into liquid air that ran into the hollows of the planet to form weird, shimmering blue seas. Now the sun would remain as a white dwarf almost unthinkably long, spending its radiation with miserly slowness for eons.

On this frozen, terrible earthscape, there could be seen one strange thing—a thing like a huge, shining bubble that rested on the frozen plain, that glowed with self-contained warmth and light. The streets and roofless buildings of a large city could be glimpsed inside that transparent dome, for this was one of the many-domed cities in which Man, the adaptable, still maintained existence upon his changed world.

For ages before the sun changed, Man had enjoyed the use of atomic power derived from the accelerated disintegration of radio-active elements. And when the sun shrank to the white dwarf state, atomic power gave the race the means of life. It warmed and lit the doomed cities that were built in preparation for the change. It was used to transmute frozen rock into air and carbohydrates for food, by subtle tampering with electronic structure. For ages, now, Man had lived comfortably in the bubble-cities. But he was still Man, and in his domed cities there still existed the ancient elements of ambition and intrigue and conflict, of love and hate.

JUST inside the air-lock gate of City Five, a tense drama was being enacted. A crowd of half-horrified, half-awed men and women stood in the metal street, under the flaring synthetic sunlight of the atomic arcs suspended high above. The crowd was held back by a double file of gray-uniformed guards armed with stubby pistols. In front of the guards stood two men—judge and convicted prisoner.

Gorm Oga, chairman of City Five, was the judge. There was solid satisfaction on his dark, square face, a gleam of satisfied hate and malice in his black eyes, as he surveyed the prisoner.

"Anything to say before you are locked out, Darl Ailing?" he inquired mockingly.

Darl Ailing's lean young face flushed bitterly. His shoulders tensed, his fists balled, as his blazing brown eyes met the chairman's mocking gaze. He longed to rush forward on Gorm Oga, but knew well that the guards would kill him before he took more than a step.

"I have this to say," Darl spoke bitterly. "This tyranny of yours will not last much longer, Gorm Oga. Sooner or later the World Council in City One will hear of your oppressions here, and will visit retribution upon you."

"Listen to the traitor prate of the Council!" Gorm Oga exclaimed satirically. "You, who have been proven guilty of treason to the city, mouthing lies about oppression."

"You know they are not lies!" flashed Darl Ailing. "And you know that the charge of treason trumped up against me was a false one, that

you are having me executed because I dared protest your tyranny—and because I would not yield the girl Urla to you."

A stir ran through the crowding people, a mutter of voices in half-angry agreement. Gorm Oga's black eyes narrowed.

"Enough of this traitor's ranting!" he snapped to the guards. "Put the suit on him and lock him out, the penalty for the black crime of treason."

Two gray-clad guards hurried forward, bearing a heavy suit of pliable metal. Darl Ailing was forced into it. It was one of the super-insulated suits in which, alone, men dared the extreme cold of outside.

Darl made no resistance. He was looking around the awe-struck crowd for Urla. But her sweet face was not visible. Evidently she had not felt able to witness his doom. Yet he wished achingly that he could have seen her just once more before he died.

The suit was now on him, the glassite helmet screwed into place, the oxygen generator working.

"Put one gram of fuel into his heater," Gorm Oga ordered loudly, and added with a mocking smile, "that is what the law allows to those who are locked out."

One gram! Darl Ailing smiled bitterly inside his helmet as the tiny quantity of gray radio-active mineral was thrust into the metal tank of the compact heating apparatus on the breast of his suit.

One gram would keep a man's suit heated less than an hour, outside. Then he would die slowly of torturing, terrible cold. That was why the law allowed convicted criminals that tiny amount of fuel—so that their end was made more bitter by that dreadful hour of waiting.

"Into the gate-lock with him," Gorm Oga ordered brusquely. As Darl Ailing was forced forward to the lock, the dictator added tauntingly to him, "If you want to report me to the World Council, all you have to do is to walk to City One. It's only a hundred or so miles away!"

An obsequiously appreciative laugh went up from a few of the tyrant's followers. But most of the people in the crowd watched with sad eyes. They knew Darl Ailing had tried to be their champion against the ruthless dictator who had seized control of their city. They would have rescued him, had it not been for Gorm Oga's watchful guards, standing waiting with their heat-pistols for any sign of rebellion.

Darl knew that if he made an appeal to the watching people, they would try to save him, even despite the guards. But it would only end in many of them being slaughtered. He could not waste their lives thus, so he stepped heavily into the transparent-walled gate-lock.

The door slammed shut behind him. That heavy slam seemed to cut him off forever from warmth, life, and love. The outer door opened. The air inside the lock puffed out—and Darl Ailing stood in a near-vacuum at a temperature of two hundred degrees below zero.

He did not feel that awful cold—not yet. The heater on his breast was functioning, keeping the interior of his suit warm, eating up the little pinch of fuel given him, minute by minute.

Darl stepped slowly out of the lock, a dozen steps away from the wall of the domed city. In the dusky twilight, the black, frozen plain stretched before him beneath low, white stairs, a realm of eternal cold and death, infinitely inimical to all

who possessed warm-blooded life.

His hand went slowly to his helmet. There was no need to wait for the slow, torturing freezing to death that would be his in less than an hour. He had only to unscrew his helmet, and icy death would drop him in his tracks. Every criminal locked out did so, rather than wait that dreadful hour for the slow tortures to the inevitable end.

As Darl started to unscrew his helmet, he turned to gaze yearningly back through the transparent gate-lock at the watching people inside the bright-lit city. If he could see Urla now, before he died—

He did not see her. But he did see Gorm Oga, watching with intense satisfaction and triumph on his dark face. The exultant hate and satisfaction in the tyrant's black eyes stung Darl.

"Damn him, at least I won't give him the satisfaction of seeing me die!" he swore.

And Darl dropped his hand from his helmet and strode doggedly away from the city. He would get out of sight of the gloating tyrant before he died, at least.

He climbed a slow rise toward a black rock ridge a half mile from the city. Then he made his way down the other side, and was hidden from sight of the glittering bubble of the city behind.

As Darl paused here, his body suddenly stiffened. There was somebody else here, a figure clad in a metal cold-suit like his own. A waiting man, who now came toward him, gripping a heat-pistol.

DARL'S bitterness of soul increased. Gorm Oga had not taken even the slightest chance of his escaping, then! The tyrant had ordered one of his men to wait here and to make sure of Darl's end.

The armed man came with quick steps toward him, but did not raise the pistol. Then as he saw the other's face through the transparent glassite helmet, Darl uttered a cry to himself.

"Urla!"

It was the girl. Her lovely face was strained with worry, her luminous dark eyes anxious. She came on until his metal-clad arms went around her shapeless figure, and held her close.

"Darl!" Her muffled voice reached him, conducted by the contact of their suits. "I thought you'd never come—I've been waiting here for hours."

"Urla, I don't understand!" he said bewilderedly. "What are you doing out here?"

"I slipped out when I heard this morning that you had been condemned by Gorm Oga," Urla explained quickly, her dark eyes shining fondly at him. "I knew that you would be locked out, and I made up my mind I would either help save you or die with you. I waited here out of sight all morning—I knew you wouldn't take the easy way of suicide.

"I've brought a heat-pistol, Darl," she continued with an eager rush of words. "And I stole as much fuel as I could find, and brought it with me."

"How much?" Darl asked tensely. Life or death hung upon her answer.

"About six grams," she answered anxiously.

He felt his momentary hope die coldly in him—yet he kept his form straight, tried not to show the emotion in his face.

"It isn't enough, Urla," he said gently. "It would take more than that to keep even one of us alive long enough to reach City One.

That's a twenty-hour march, at least."

He patted her metal shoulder with yearning tenderness. "You've got to go back into the city, Urla. There's no use of you dying because I must die."

"I won't do it!" she declared rebelliously. "And you don't sound like the Darl Ailing I know, giving up so tamely. What if it isn't enough fuel—we can start toward City One and maybe find enough ore along the way to keep our heaters going."

"You know how little chance there is of our being that lucky," he said sadly. "It takes years of survey, sometimes, to locate radio-active ores. We're not likely to just stumble on some."

"The rooters and the raddys always manage to find ore," Urla persisted stubbornly. "And they're not even intelligent like us."

"All right; you keep enough fuel to get back into the city, and give me the rest," Darl temporized. "I'll start toward City One, and if I'm lucky, I may find fuel on the way, and I'll know that you are safe back in the city."

"Safe?" she echoed scornfully. "You know how safe I'll be with Gorm Oga! And the fact that I committed the crime of stealing fuel and leaving the city without permission will put me into his power. Are you going to send me back—to that?"

"No!" Darl exclaimed tormentedly. "But I can't let you stay with me, die with me—"

"I'm not afraid of dying with you, Darl," Urla said earnestly, dark eyes reflecting her great love. "It's dying without you that I'm afraid of."

His arms held her very tight against his metal form for a moment. Then his jaw set.

"All right, Urla—you go with me. I'll get you to City One safely—I'll find fuel on the way somehow. I swear I will!"

She handed him the heat-pistol. "You take this, Darl. I thought we might need it if we met any raddys or rooters."

He nodded, stuck the stubby weapon into his belt. It took but a moment more to pour into his heater half the gray radio-active mineral she had brought, Urla insisting that he take an exact half. Then his metal-gloved fingers closed strongly upon her hand.

"Come on, Urla; we're starting. If fortune is with us, we may make it to City One. I hope so—I'd give my life to see Gorm Oga and his cowardly crew condemned and smashed by the Council."

THEY started over the dim plain. In the eternal twilight, the great white stars looked down curiously at the two tiny figures bravely wending their way over the frozen immensity of the heatless planet. Youth, love, courage, surviving and challenging the inimical universe with the ageless high-heartedness of their race.

Darl and Urla moved eastward toward the low, jagged range of white ice-hills. Beyond it lay the great sea of liquid air, and almost a hundred miles along the shore of that weird sea was City One.

In his heart, Darl Ailing knew that their attempt was madness, that they had scant chance of finding any fuel-ores on the way. Men from the dome cities had surveyed almost the whole planet, searching out those precious ores and mining them carefully.

They trudged on toward the ice-hills. Walking in the heavy suits was a slow business. No sound broke the

vast, dusky immensity of the black plain, for there was no air to carry sound. The pale, tiny disk of the white dwarf sun declined slowly toward the west.

Darl tried not to let Urla see him glancing down at the indicator atop the fuel-tank of his heater. He was fatally aware of the remorseless creeping of its hand across the dial to the zero that meant death. He felt the shadow of the icy inevitable deepening over them.

"Darl, do you think there is any truth in the stories they tell about long ago?" Urla asked, as she trudged valiantly along, holding his hand. "I mean, those stories that ages ago the sun was so hot that people could walk around everywhere without cold-suits on at all, and didn't even need to live in dome cities?"

"I don't know—that's what the old legends say," Darl answered broodingly. "Most people now think they are just fairy stories. It seems impossible that the sun could ever have been that hot."

"If it was really like that long ago," Urla persisted, "maybe some man and girl walked right where we're walking now, loving each other the same way we do."

She looked back up at the declining little ghost-sun, and instinctive heritage from dead generations made her wistful.

"It must have been nice, if it was ever like that."

"Urla—there's a rooter!"

Darl had snatched her to a halt, grabbing the stubby pistol from his belt as they froze rigid, staring to their right.

A hundred yards away a thing was moving slowly, ponderously, in the dusk. A nightmare, grotesque animal.

It looked not unlike the rhinoceros of ages before, with squat, huge body on four thick legs, and massive shapeless head surmounted by a tremendously thick, sharp tusk. The thing's body was gray, with the flexible, yet mineraline look of asbestos.

Nature, the unconquerable, had not ceased to spawn new life after the coming of the great cold. She had merely adapted her creations, by force of the stern laws of evolution, to the changed conditions. She had produced, by myriad experimental mutations, creatures that needed no air, and that could maintain their life by feeding on the radio-active ores present in the crust of the earth. The rooter was one of these new life-forms that had come into being upon the frozen earth.

The creature was engaged in the activity which had given it its name —with eyeless, massive head lowered, it was digging into the frozen plain with that great tusk, searching for the precious radio-active ores that were its food and life, and that it spent its life hunting.

"Darl, there are others there beyond it—see!" Urla whispered tensely, her fingers tightening convulsively on his hand.

Darl Ailing perceived that beyond this nearest rooter, away off in the somber dusk, were a whole herd of the creatures, digging or moving fitfully over the frozen plain.

"It's scented us!" he rasped suddenly. "Those beasts can sense fuel for miles away!"

The nearest rooter had ceased digging and raised its head. It turned it this way and that, blindly, as though sniffing.

It was not sniffing, for in an airless world these creatures had no sense of smell. But whatever strange

sense it possessed that was sensitive to radio-active matter had been awakened. It started suddenly to lumber clumsily toward the man and girl.

"Come on, Urla!" cried Darl. He jerked her forward, running toward the ice-hills whose white scarps were now a half-mile ahead.

They ran desperately, for they could feel the plain under them vibrating to the heavy tread of the lumbering monster. It had scented the fuel in their heaters and would rip them open to get it.

Urla was already panting, for running in the suits was an exhaustive effort. The ice-hills still seemed far away, and the lumbering tread of the rooter was close behind them.

Darl suddenly stopped, swung desperately around. The rooter was coming toward him like an express train, fifty feet away. As he raised his heat-pistol, he glimpsed that the whole distant herd of the creatures had sensed them also and was now coming on the run.

A thin beam of white fire lanced from Darl's pistol and hit the rooter's massive head. The intense charge of heat seemed to splash and spread over the mineraline flesh rather than penetrate it.

Darl desperately kept the trigger compressed, recklessly pouring forth all the charges of the pistol in an attempt to penetrate the thing's flesh. He could glimpse the thin beam. now tearing into the gray flesh—yet the rooter was still charging on.

He heard Urla scream, still gripping his hand. The heat-pistol went dead, its charges exhausted. He turned to push the girl out of the path of the monster, but the rooter had suddenly halted.

It stood motionless, ten feet from them, a blackened hole showing in its head above the gaping mouth. Then it clumsily fell.

"We got it—but the others are coming!" Darl cried. "Quick, Urla—if we get into the hills, we can lose them."

The whole herd of the monsters, a score in number, was lumbering clumsily across the dusky plain toward them. Darl flung away the useless pistol and ran forward again with the panting girl, heading toward a cleft-like pass in the icy ridges. He glanced tensely backward.

The herd of galloping rooters was overtaking them. Then he saw them stop at the body of their slain fellow, gather around it and tear it apart with their tusks. They were seeking the little amount of radio-active ore in it that had not yet been assimilated by it.

THEIR stupidity enabled Darl and Urla to gain the pass in the ice-range. They staggered into the pass, out of sight of the monsters back on the plain. Urla stumbled and almost fell from exhaustion.

"We daren't stop yet, Urla," panted Darl. "Those brutes will likely trail us—we've got to get a safe distance from them."

"All right," she gasped, valiantly straightening her tired body. "I can go on."

His heart ached for her, yet he pushed ahead with all the speed he was capable of, through the passes.

Gleaming white cliffs of ice towered awesomely above them, raising fantastically sculptured spires and minarets into the dusky twilight. These white cliffs, that had once been part of the water envelope of a warm earth, frowned down upon the two toiling little figures.

Darl picked a way through the icy

canyons and chasms, heading always east. He was laboring for breath himself, his lungs aching, when they emerged finally on the other side of the icy range.

Before them, beyond a frozen black rock shore, lay the vast, bluish expanse of the sea of liquid air, shimmering spectrally in the shrouding dusk, a waveless, weird ocean stretching out of sight beneath the white stars.

The black shore on which Darl and Urla stood curved northeastward along the shore of the sea. It was the way they must follow to reach City One, still almost a hundred miles away.

Darl looked back into the chasm from which they had just emerged, but there was no sign of the rooters back there.

"I think we've shaken them off," he said hopefully, "though those brutes will go half around the world for fuel."

He looked ahead, along the curving shore of the silent, shimmering sea, with a little eagerness.

"We'll get started, Urla," he said. "It's only—"

Darl's voice trailed off into silence. An icy shock ran through his frame. He had just glanced down mechanically at the indicator on his fuel-tank.

The hand was but a fractional division away from the zero. In their encounter with the rooters and their flight, he had forgotten that each minute was remorselessly consuming their fuel.

Urla felt his arm stiffen in her grasp, and saw his face set. She glanced down at her own indicator. A quiver ran through her.

"It—it's nearly the end, isn't it, Darl?" she said. Her voice came to him, steady and without hysteria.

"Yes," he said, the word seeming to choke him as he uttered it. He grasped her shoulders fiercely. "Urla, I knew this would be the finish, and now it's come, I realize what a fool I was to bring you along to your death. I shouldn't have done it!"

"I'm not complaining, Darl," she said softly, her dark eyes watching him steadily. Then she asked, "How long have we?"

"Less than an hour," he said dully, "and City One still over eighty miles away."

"Let's continue toward it, anyway," Urla said. "And, Darl, I'm glad I came out of the city and came with you. I'm glad!"

"Urla, I'll save you yet—I will!" he cried tormentedly. "We'll find fuel somewhere, somehow. Come on!"

He started desperately with her along the frozen shore, his eyes frantically searching the black rock for sign of the glistening gray radioactive ores. But as they went on, the flame of rebellion sank in his tortured mind before the cold inevitability of the end.

For there was no sign of the ores they sought. Such ores, in fact, were never found near the liquid air oceans. Both knew, as they tramped on, that they were merely occupying themselves until death.

Darl stopped suddenly. In a high black ridge of frozen rock to their left, yawned a natural tunnel a dozen feet in diameter. Its entrance was strewn with a curious litter of rock debris.

"Raddys have been here a lot!" he exclaimed, looking at the debris. "There must be one of their caves down there."

Urla shuddered. "Let's get away from here, then. If they come out and see us—"

"Urla, you don't understand what

I'm thinking of," Darl declared excitedly. "If there are raddys down there, there is fuel there, too—you know that the creatures are supposed to be so intelligent that they bring back the ores they gather to their caves, share them and store them for the future. If we go down and get some of their ore—"

"Darl, no!" cried Urla in horror. "Go down into the very midst of those horrible creatures? I'd rather die up here."

"Perhaps we can keep them from sensing us, steal some of their ore," Darl said tensely. "It's a chance, Urla!—our one chance to live, to get to City One, to expose Gorm Oga's tyranny over our people."

Urla still shrank against him in sick horror, but after a moment she nodded her helmet bravely.

"All right, Darl; I'll go, if you're determined."

He could see her chin quivering, her eyes dark and wide with fear, yet she made a pitiful attempt to smile at him. Darl held her hand tightly as they started into that gloomy tunnel.

The hair bristled on his neck as they advanced in the great rock passage. Of all the weird forms of life that evolution had produced on the cold planet, the raddys were the most horrible to men, because they were the most intelligent, the most manlike.

THE big tunnel slanted downward slightly. It was almost completely dark, only a few faint rays filtering from outside. But Darl and Urla could see dimly—generations of humans living in a world of eternal dusk had greatly enlarged the visual powers of the human eyes.

Then the tunnel opened into a great, somber rock cavern. There was no one in it, but raddy signs were numerous—debris of rocks that had been shattered to extract the life-giving ores, and tracks of big, toeless feet in the rock-dust.

Darl descried passages opening from this cavern. He took the largest. In a few minutes, he and Urla froze rigid at the entrance to another large and almost lightless cave.

At least two score of raddys were squatting at the center of this cave. Grotesquely, horribly human-looking, with bowed legs and dangling arms that had chisel-fingered hands, and flat, eyeless heads with gaping mouths.

Things of the night, they were, things of cold and darkness, their glistening black bodies no synthesis of carbon compounds but of other elements that could renew themselves by crystalline accretion, and whose fire of life was not a process of oxidization but of atomic disintegration. They sat like squatting apes, two wrangling and striking at each other, the others greedily stuffing little nuggets of gray ore into their mouths.

Darl, watching tensely with Urla's hand quivering in his grasp, saw one of the raddys rise and shuffle across the dim cave to a niche in the wall that contained a little heap of gray mineral. The creature returned to its fellows, cramming the stuff into his mouth. That gray heap was the food-store of the raddys, hoarded here for future use.

Darl started forward, sliding along the cavern wall with the trembling girl. That little pile of mineral meant life for Urla and himself, life and the chance to free their native city of tyranny.

If the raddys sensed him! He watched them as he and Urla crept toward the niche. The eyeless crea-

tures appeared not to suspect their presence. He reached the niche, and with shaking, gloved hands, Darl scooped up the precious gray nuggets. He jammed fistfuls into the tank of Urla's heater, then into his own. Jubilation sang in his heart.

"Come on, Urla—we're getting out," he whispered.

As softly as they had entered, they crept back along the cavern wall to the passage by which they had come.

But this time, the raddys raised their blind heads suddenly, then clambered erect. The creatures, with their strange sensitivity to radio-active matter, had sensed that some of their hoard was moving.

They started toward Darl and Urla in a rapid, shuffling run. Further secrecy was impossible. Darl yelled.

"Quick, Urla!" He tugged her with him, into the passage. The whole eyeless horde was behind them as they ran along it.

As they emerged into the first cavern, Urla suddenly gasped and fell. A rock, flung blindly by one of their pursuers, had struck her back. Darl wildly stooped and lifted her to drag her along.

Useless! The raddys were on them before he even got started with her. He struck fiercely at the obscene, groping horde. The raddys recoiled for a moment from his terrific metal fists.

Then with renewed ferocity they came back on the two humans in a smothering wave. Whatever intelligence they possessed was enough to make them aware that their precious hoard had been looted and that they had the looters here. A dozen hands pulled Darl Ailing off his feet.

As he went down under the smothering weight of crystalline bodies, sick despair was icy in his soul—to be done to death down here in this dim place by eyeless brutes, just when he had procured the means of life for Urla and himself! He fought with maddened savagery.

But the fight was hopeless. He glimpsed Urla, pinned down by black bodies. A raddy at her head was pounding at her glassite helmet with a chunk of rock. The stout glassite had resisted so far, but it soon would crack and—

Darl made a supreme, raving effort to shake off his attackers. It failed. And he felt strength and courage running out of him. There flashed over him a wild wish that he and Urla had died a clean death from cold outside, rather than this horrible end.

Abruptly, as he struggled with the last of his strength, Darl glimpsed something entering the cavern from the big tunnel that connected with the outside world. Something huge and gray, a massive, blind head with a terrible tusk—

A rooter! And behind it were others, crowding forward in the tunnel. The beasts stopped, as though sensing the multitude of prey before them. Then, with a thudding thunder of great hoofs that shook the rock floor, they charged into the cavern.

Darl glimpsed a half dozen raddys impaled on the tusks of the great beasts, before the raddys became aware of the attack. Then the manlike horrors sprang up from their two human victims, scattered about the cavern in a wild effort to escape the ferocious brutes.

The rooters charged this way and that in short rushes. As they trampled or impaled the frantically fleeing raddys, they tore open their bodies with their tusks, seeking the nourishing grains of radio-active mineral. The cavern had become a

wild chaos of nightmarish battle.

Darl leaped to Urla's side and snatched her out of the path of a charging rooter. The huge beast thundered by.

"Now's our chance to get out!" he yelled, pulling her to her feet.

IT SEEMED impossible that they could get across the dim cavern of mad struggle to the mouth of the tunnel. But Darl and Urla had the advantage of sight over the raging, eyeless combatants.

They dodged, ran, twisted between the battling rooters and raddys. It seemed a miracle that they reached the big passage, and ran up out of it into the open, onto the shore of the shimmering sea.

Darl stopped, holding the half-conscious girl. Anxiously he examined her helmet. The tough glassite had not been cracked.

"Urla, we're as good as safe now, thanks to that herd of rooters!" he cried. "They trailed us through the ice-hills, as I was afraid they would, and trailed us right into the caves of the raddys!"

Holding her, he started jubiliantly along the shore of the liquid air ocean, northeastward. The tiny white sun was sinking.

"We'll make it to City One all right now—we've more than enough fuel!" He exulted.

It was after many hours of toilsome but uneventful trudging that Darl and Urla stumbled through the gate-lock into the bright, domed metropolis of City One. And in less than a minute, Darl had his helmet off and was telling an astounded official his news.

"The World Council will hear of this at once!" the official declared. "We'll dispatch a substantial force to City Five immediately to depose Gorm Oga and bring him here for trial."

He became aware that Darl Ailing was no longer listening to him. The young man was hastily unscrewing Urla's helmet. After all, you couldn't very well kiss your girl through glassite.

THE END

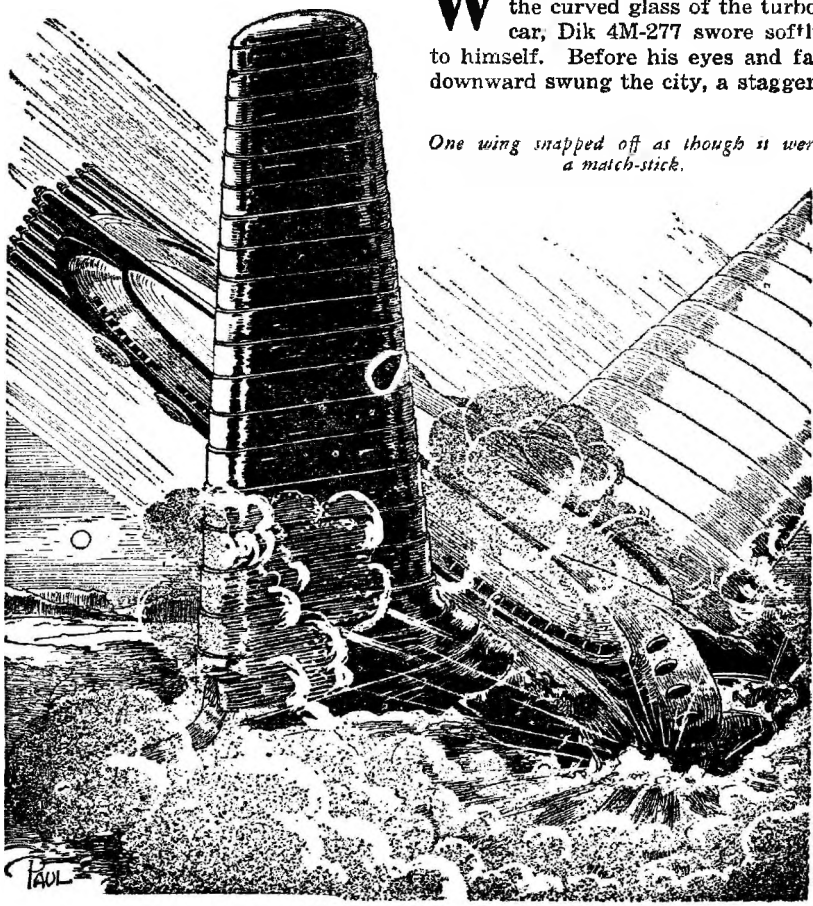
Martian Martyrs

by JOHN COLERIDGE

The most terrible plot ever to work against the future of mankind throws Tom and Dik into a desperate adventure! They see through the monstrous hoax — but it is too late!

CHAPTER I

WITH his face pressed close to the curved glass of the turbo-car, Dik 4M-277 swore softly to himself. Before his eyes and far downward swung the city, a stagger-



One wing snapped off as though it were a match-stick.

ing maze of buildings and spans. It was 3004 A.D.

"Grumbling again?" queried Tom 3M-189, his companion who sat beside him in the small compartment.

Dik made no answer, so Tom continued: "I suppose it's the same old subject—you don't like the way the world is run; you're a misfit; you should have been born ten centuries ago; etc. I should think, Dik, that your mind would be sick of reviewing that same thing so long." Tom laughed softly.

The other glared at him. "You might look at this as some huge joke, but your mind isn't as analytical and deep-seeing as mine."

Tom again had occasion to laugh. He had teased Dik about his discontented state of mind as long as they had known each other, which had been most of their lives. Together they had studied side by side and grown to manhood.

Dik's periodical "grumbling" and the ensuing arguments often afforded them relaxation and even fun in the stern and disciplined age of 3004 A.D. Ten centuries before, the rule of earth fell into the hands of scientists, because their inventions and discoveries had gradually made them all-powerful; more especially that they hoarded their secrets from political parties. All mankind obeyed the scientific ruling power in the new regime. Bigotry and political machinations vanished. They had fashioned a new world and a new life. It consisted of work, study, and the thirst for more knowledge. Few, very few, were dissatisfied with it, for it was pleasant and easy to live. But Dik and Tom, the latter to lesser degree, were "throw-backs" with atavistic tendencies that would have fitted them better in the year 1940 A.D., when all men were "free" to do as they pleased and get away with it.

After some moments of silence, as the turbo-car hummed along its span a thousand feet above ground through and between the canyons of buildings, Tom turned his head.

"Look here, Dik. For every moment you have thought of that, as many individuals in the 20th century had wished they could live in our well-ordered times. Why, do you know, in those old times it was possible for a man to be unemployed and actually starve to death? You're just wasting energy, grumbling against our life. What does it bring you?"

"A grand headache," answered Dik. "But seriously, Tom, it wasn't exactly of that I was thinking. It's this meeting we're on our way to now. Take my word for it, there is a Dark Moon in it somewhere. For instance . . ."

"Did you say," interrupted Tom, "a moment ago that you had an analytical mind? I'd call it a suspicious one."

"Listen to me," went on Dik earnestly. "Did you ever stop to think that we have been schooled for three years in spacenautics and yet none of us have ever seen a spaceship?"

"We have the stratosphere and troposphere rocket ships, and that was our main study and training."

"Well and good. But why the spacenautics? Would you take one of those ships out into space?"

"Well, hardly," Tom answered, puzzled at the other's meaning.

"I'll tell the stars you wouldn't! There you are—we learn all there is to know of the plants from air density and gravity, from space-charts to meteor repulsion screens, and by the blessed moon, neither you nor I nor anyone else in the world knows of an existing ship that can traverse space.

Then how can you say that there isn't more to it than we can guess?"

"I can, though," returned Tom for the sake of the argument. "Suppose the Sci-tri* has secretly invented such a ship and trained us for the purpose?"

Dik nodded. "But what has happened to all those others who have been trained in our school for the past—let me see—three score years? Has anybody ever heard of them again?"

"That's a foolish question, Dik. You know how we are shifted around by the Sci-tri. It's their system of doing things. It might happen to you and me, that we would be separated and not see each other for years. I distinctly know of such a case. A friend of a fellow I met years ago went through spacenautics and today he is captain of a troposphere ship between London and New York."

"All right," assented Dik. "But that one case does not account for the thousands who have vanished. What ever happened to my father? He was also chosen for this years ago. Where is he now? You know that I would be laughed at as a sentimental fool if I were to ask the Section Recorder. Besides, all the answer I would get would be that my father had commendably done his duty.

"That's what I'm so against in our life today," went on Dik moodily. "We are to show no family feeling of any kind. Our lives are forfeit to the State with no questions asked. It's unnatural—cruel!"

Tom would have gone into his usual tirade. That last curt statement had often made him tell the other of the benefits of the age in which they lived. He would recall history of earlier times when frightful wars made a shambles of cities, when people were slaughtered like rats. He would tell of political graft, of money tyrants who lived in luxury when thousands died of starvation; of the hodge-podge of finance that swept nations into bankruptcy. Those things were cruel! None of this ever happened under the sage rule of the Sci-tri—but this time Tom desisted. Dik's words had brought a vague unrest in his own heart.

THE turbo-car sped along. It was an express with few stops. Blinding fast though it was, there was no chance of accident, for indefatigable robot controls could make no mistake. The spans of the turbo-cars, which were the standard intercity transport vehicles, honeycombed the entire conglomerate of a hundred square miles of city structures.

The two youths sat silent for some time. Both watched the scenery as it swept beyond the windows as though they saw it for the first time. But they were not taking particular notice of the things they had seen from birth onward; they were thinking.

A bell rang. Mechanically they fastened the wide belts that dangled at the sides of the seats. A minute later their bodies strained at the belts as the brakes were applied.

An amplifier in the ceiling droned out: "Station Red-10. Change for 23, 54, and 60. Main transfer on Station Blue-5 in two minutes."

When the bell rang again, they unloosed the belts. Some rode with them always fastened, but the majority did not like their bodies so tightly harnessed. Tom even pushed away the shoulder straps. He was large and they chafed his flesh. He look over to Dik.

*Note—"Sci-tri" was the official abbreviation for "Tribunal of Science," the ruling power of Earth.

"It won't be long now; next station is ours. What do you think we'll get—positions, ships berths, a fancy diploma, or connections that will separate us?"

"I wish I knew," muttered Dik. "But I can't help think it will be none of those — perhaps something we can't foresee."

"What a pessimist!" cried Tom. "One would think we're going to be dissected, by the way you say that. Cheer up! We might get a nice appointment. We didn't learn all that but for some good use. Think of it, captain of some stratosphere ship, soaring the grand skies—bankits*—recreation—women. What more can we ask?" He slapped his hands together in keen anticipation.

Dik looked at the cheerful Tom with the ghost of a grin on his cherubic face. "Your inclinations are very common."

"Well, why not?" countered Tom quickly. "I can never be a scientist or intellectual. So I must be common. Call me what you like, but I just thought of that girl I met—you remember, at the Club Orion? If I ever get to be a captain, with a captain's bankits, she'll hear from me, you can bet on it. Hair, Dik, like spun gold; eyes a dream; and wild! She's as wild as—let me think—as a mustang, and . . ."

"Now what's a mustang?" Dik broke in.

"Oh, we had it in ancient history of the Capitalistic Age. There's another name for them . . . a horse! That was the animal the ancients used for transportation. They had to be broken into harness. Well, this girl is wild and untamed like that . . ."

*Note—"bankits" were the medium of exchange, being paper notes whose value never fluctuated.

But Dik was laughing heartily, bringing a sheepish grin to Tom's face.

The signal bell clanged again and they strapped themselves in. The turbo-car hissed in rapid braking.

"Tom, I'm a commoner too," said Dik. "But sometimes I feel—different!"

Then the robot voice droned softly: "Station Red-14. Take elevator 22 for Sci-tri. Change for . . ." etc.

They got up from their seats. An automatic control opened the door of the vehicle, and they stepped out upon the platform of the station. Through the great throng of the terminal, they made their way toward the numerous elevators. Here at the hub of world control, the red-uniformed guards of the Sci-tri were everywhere in great number.

They hadn't taken a dozen steps when one approached them and asked politely, "Credentials, gentlemen."

After a close scrutiny of the papers, the guard turned on his heel with a "Follow me, please."

They stepped into an elevator. Down it whisked with breathless speed. The bright lights went out and Dik and Tom stood stiffly in the soft blue glow of an overhead lamp. They knew that it was for the purpose of searching them for weapons; the Sci-tri took no chances. The scientist rulers knew the weaknesses of human nature and occasionally had trouble on their hands. It was always stamped out completely, with cold efficiency.

IN A few seconds, the bright lights again flashed on and shortly after the elevator came to a stop. The guard led the way. It was quite thrilling to the two youths, for it was the first time in their lives that they were in the Sci-tri center. The

term Sci-tri had come to be synonymous with "power," and called for awe and respect.

With not a little trepidation, they followed the guard. He led them to a great door of metal which had neither latch nor hinge, yet it opened at their approach. Ahead stretched a long corridor whose vaulted ceiling lost itself in dim height that reared above hanging lights. On each side were numbered doors set in the glistening walls. At one door, the guard held up a metal object and flicked its tap control; the door opened silently.

"In there," motioned the guard. "I leave you. Good-day, gentlemen."

A trifle fearfully, Dik and Tom walked in, looking at each other and asing with their eyes, "What now?"

An amplifier above them spoke: "Please enter the door upon your left." They lost little time in doing so, for action was far better than standing in that oppressive silence. They had no sooner entered this door when, with a shout, they both ran forward—for there were the others of their class—six young men.

Eagerly they all exchanged greetings. They had not been together for a month and each wanted to know what the other had done during their furlough. In the midst of this noisy and exciting reunion, a deep voice called for silence. They knew better than to disobey.

"Gentlemen," said the voice. "It is the pleasure of the Sci-tri at this appointed hour to see you personally. Please enter the forum from the door numbered 3A."

It was the great moment—to see the famed and mysterious Sci-tri! The eight youths fell into line behind one another and entered the forum. A series of steps leading downward at a slight angle ran between many rows of seats with desks before them. For a moment, they thought that they were entering another classroom—but upon looking ahead and upward, they saw a rotunda of burnished metal set with a massive judge's bench that extended the entire width of the forum. Behind the bench sat the members of the Sci-tri.

The body of youths stopped as one and saluted as they gazed on with conflicting emotions. No one had prepared them for the shock of seeing the fifteen Sci-tri scientists. Fifteen men—yet how different from men!

So conspicuous was the largeness of their heads, that the first impression was that they were heads alone. But closer scrutiny revealed the human frames that supported them. Not a vestige of hair was upon the heads. Like pale, damp marbles, they shone in the lights of the forum. Their cranial capacity was easily twice a normal man's. What marvel of scientific achievement was here manifested?

CHAPTER II

"GENTLEMEN, be seated," spoke a stentorian voice from above.

Still shaken with awe, the youths sat down as if in a dream. They had always thought the Sci-tri to consist of men such as they. Never in all their lives had anyone said otherwise.

Dik noticed immediately that the Sci-tri members had no nameplates*, and his eyes narrowed at this.

"Gentlemen," the voice resumed, "the Record informs us that you are

*Note—every person on earth had a pliant chain of light metal around his neck which bore a small round plate inscribed with the wearer's name and number. It could not be removed (violence was the only way) without severe penalty.

students from Branch 6 of the Air School and that you are technicians of spacenautics, three full years completed and degrees conferred. Splendid work, and the Sci-tri takes this opportunity to commend you. We are proud of you!"

With that, the rulers of earth arose. An audible gasp came from the group in the forum as they likewise arose and saluted. Those massive heads were not out of proportion to the bodies, for they were attached to stalwart frames of muscle eight feet tall! Why, here was ten thousand years of evolution!

The stentorian voice spoke again as all seated themselves.

"There is much to be said. Make yourselves comfortable. And now hear the words and commands of the Sci-tri. None of you could be common workers, nor yet scientists, because of your natures. You have within your bosoms that ancient spark of "adventure." It is an atavistic complex, demanding action. There is no outlet for such complexes in our world today—except one. You have been chosen, gentlemen, to venture out into space!"

Dik looked at Tom and his eyes said, "I told you so."

The voice went on: "It is the wish of the Sci-tri to enlighten you further. Fifty-nine years ago, the first ship was sent out. How successful it was in landing on another planet, we do not know. And since then many others have left. None have been heard from . . ."

Dik leaped to his feet, his face flushed, fists white at the knuckles. He was about to speak with burning words when the stentorian voice sternly commanded him to sit down.

"Dik 4M-277, it will please the Sci-tri for you to control your emotions. We know exactly what is in your mind. Have the patience to hear us out. Your words would have been to the effect that it seems a wanton destruction of human life to send out more ships when so many have failed.

"Here is our answer: it is necessary. Permit us to elucidate. You men know from your studies that forty miles above earth is an invisible and thin layer of ozone, the isotope of oxygen. It is the phenomenal purpose of this layer which completely surrounds our world to shield us from a great deal of the sun's ultra-violet rays. Were it not for the ozone, animal life as we know it could not exist—and were we humans struck with the full force of the rays that the layer absorbs, we would be burnt to a cinder.

"It was a century ago that the scientists found, to their amazement, that the ozone layer was strangely dissipating itself! All our science cannot stop it. Careful measurements revealed that the human race has but a short century more of life left on this planet. The only alternative to death is migration to other planets!"

The voice stopped to let this astounding statement saturate the brains of the youths in the forum.

"We as yet know little of the other planets, and have no idea if they will support life. For fifty-nine years now, the Sci-tri, keeping knowledge of the doom from the masses, has tried its best to send exploration ships to our sister worlds. Our purpose is humanitarian. Now would you, Dik 4M-277, or the rest of you, say that this was wanton destruction? Can you now realize that you will be martyrs to a great cause? Upon your success, as well as that of other ships, depends that welfare of billions of lives. Successful space navigation must be accomplished.

"Up to the present time, we attribute our failure to the inadequacy of rocket motive power to traverse space. It is a stupendous task to bridge space, gentlemen—a well-nigh impossible task. We have already sent out 235 ships—none have we knowledge of once they left earth. But we have lately entertained high hopes that we will soon succeed. It is a new method of propulsion that gives us such hope, and your ship will be the first to use it.

"We will give you now a brief description of it. Later you will be trained thoroughly how to run it. Our present rocket engines are not powerful enough to send ships across the void, apparently. They are highly successful in our airships, but that is out of comparison. The new ship is not unlike a stratosphere ship. It will leave earth's atmosphere by rocket explosion, but once out in space, it will continue its journey by the radiation pressure of the sun's rays!

"For this purpose, it is specially equipped with telescoped arms which extend from equal points of the ship's stern. Motors will operate the arms and push them to their full length. Then sheets of metal foil will be drawn along them by cable guides. The ship will then have metallic "wings" whose total area will be almost a square mile! The beating of the sun's rays on this will push the ship forward through frictionless space, stabilized by a gyroscope. The power is unlimited, thus allowing the precious rocket fuel to be used for landing purposes.

"The Sci-tri is confident that this ship will traverse space successfully. Your destination will be Mars. Other ships, with the same motive power, will also be sent to other planets in the near future. When you have landed, it shall be your duty to radio back to us the conditions. There will be much hardship, but the glory will ring forever!

"Gentlemen, do you wish to resign from this expedition?"

DIK sat flushed of face. In that age, there were small opportunities to indulge in daring deeds and bravery. This was the grand chance, and he would be the last to shrink from it. He bounded to his feet and shouted that he was as eager to go as any man could be. An answering shout from the others made the decision unanimous.

"The Sci-tri is proud of you," said the voice. "Farewell and good luck!"

Thereupon a curtain fell from the ceiling, shutting off the Sci-tri rotunda from the forum. Down the aisle strode a man in the uniform of a guard. He was a man well on in years, yet his lithe body cast age from him. An overhead amplifier buzzed to life.

"Gentlemen, Commander Jarl 6P-88 of the Intelligence is before you. He will take charge of you from now on. The Sci-tri transfers to him full authority. Your families will be informed of your departure from State life in the usual way. From this moment on, your connection with the world at large has ceased."

The youths saluted Commander Jarl and, at his order, strode from the room in stiff formation. They were taken to the private turbo-car system of the Sci-tri, and from there were transferred to an airport.

With a thunder of rockets, the stratosphere ship hurtled into the night sky. Where they were going, none of them knew.

Tom looked across at Dik.

"Well, Star-eater, what do you think of it?"

The other fumbled with his fingers.

"Funny thing, Tom, but now that I've had a few moments to think it over, I feel queer about it. It doesn't seem such a grand martyrdom after all. I think there's a Dark Moon in it somewhere."

Tom threw up his hands and cried, "Another Dark Moon!"

"I wasn't wrong about the first one, was I?" pursued Dik.

"Just a lucky guess. You've been Dark Mooning so many things that it's against the law of averages not to guess correctly a few times."

"The whole thing is, Tom, that your mind isn't as anal . . ."

"Please," burst in the other. "Let's not go into that again."

Dik nodded his head with a smug expression of contentment on his face, as though he had won the argument. They remained silent for the rest of the voyage.

A sudden jar told them that the stratosphere ship was preparing for a landing. The drumming of the rockets became louder, concentrated at the nose of the ship. At last the rocket noises ceased. Then came the hum and throb of electric motors pushing out the landing wings. Even this sound died, and in utter silence, the great ship cleaved the air for its landing. Then a new sound came to their ears. It was the base landing siren, clearing the field for the mammoth of the upper air. Like some dying gargantuan monster, it shrieked its warning.

They stepped from the ship into the cold, frosty air of early morning. The others of their class joined them from other compartments. All about them stretched the mazes that bespoke a mighty metropolis.

Commander Jarl hustled them along to an eating room and supplied their wants. Then a short turbo-car ride brought them to a long, low building that was patroled with numerous guards with Sci-tri uniforms. Inside the building, they were assigned rooms in pairs and told they could sleep till noon. All were tired and went to bed promptly.

At noon a bell clanged them awake. They were ushered into a great mess hall where hundreds of other youthful Air School students like themselves, were partaking of food. After the meal, Commander Jarl spoke to them and outlined their course of training, which would take many weeks.

They had seen the new space-ship. It was a dream of mechanical and scientific perfection. Weeks passed in thorough training in its mysteries. They grew to love it, for it was to be their last connection with life.

The crew was to consist of nearly two hundred, each having strict duties. A youth by the name of Lon 3M-883 was appointed captain, having rated highest in the final examinations. Everyone liked him. He was of slight build, but known to have amazing physical prowess.

LON had been in the same class as Dik and Tom and had long sensed their close companionship. He had the foresight not to separate them in their duties aboard the ship. He detailed them to work side by side in the engine room. A friendship sprang up between the three youths while yet on earth, and before the final departure, they were inseparable pals.

The weeks went by, and finally Commander Jarl announced the day appointed for departure. Feverish hours of preparation constituted the remaining time. Supplies had to be stored—oxygen tanks, food, fuel, and other equipment in such huge quanti-

ties that it seemed the ship could hardly hold it.

One thing had puzzled Dik for many weeks. He confided his suspicions to Lon and Tom and held their interest with his speculations. The world in general had always rumored that the Sci-tri had a secret laboratory so immense and wonderful that it defied description. But no one knew where it was. Some had guessed it to be in the Amazon jungles, and others in equally outlandish places.

But it took Dik's inquisitiveness to reveal that they were right in it!—and a number of shrewd guesses made it fairly certain that they were in the heart of Siberia!

"You see, fellows," finished Dik, "The reason we were brought here so mysteriously in the dead of night, is because they want no one to suspect that in Siberia lies the secret laboratory of the Sci-tri. Mark my word, there's a flock of Dark Moons in this, and I'm going to find out all I can before we leave earth."

He was as good as his word. The night before their grand take-off, Lon and Tom waited for Dik in his room, anxiously wondering what had happened to him. He had vanished into thin air after the evening meal. Neither of them wanted to raise a general alarm, for it might go bad for Dik. The breaking of disciplinary rules meant severe punishment—and the treason of spying on Sci-tri affairs would merit instant death!

It was nine o'clock when Lon again looked at the time. Anxiety was written all over his face. "Do you think he has . . . deserted—escaped somehow?"

"No," answered Tom quickly. "Not Dik. I know him too well to think he would skip and leave us without a word."

"This is a big thing, Tom," said Lon, referring to the trip in space, about which they had previously been talking. "Look at my hands—they're shaking! Tomorrow we leave—out into space! Out into that emptiness . . . something gone wrong . . . the ghastly cold . . . hideous death . . ."

Tom put a comforting hand to the youthful captain's shoulder. "Don't talk like that, Lon! We must control our emotions—and our imaginations! It's dangerous—yes, it's a big thing . . . a fearful thing!"

The door softly opened. Dik slunk in quietly, closed the door carefully, and then faced them with a mirthless grimace.

As the other two stared at him in relief that he was safe, and in perturbation at his strange expression, Dik slid into a chair. He rubbed his hands, for the night air had been cold. Then he leaned forward and whispered tensely: "I saw it!"

"Saw what?" asked Tom.

"The laboratory!"

"What!" cried the other two in unison, leaning forward.

"It's astounding," began Dik. "Of course, I had only a long-distance view of it, but I saw enough. You've seen Universal—well, that doesn't come within a stone's throw of this place for machinery and activity. But aside from that, I saw something that nearly made me lose my perch. I mentioned before that I thought it strange that a base should have a metal wall around it. Why should it? It set me thinking. It made me think that this was the Sci-tri secret laboratory. Since then, I've studied the buildings. The Mechanics Building, which extends the entire width of the spacenautics headquarters, is extremely high—so high that I figured there must be some-

thing behind it that the Sci-tri wanted none of us to see. Just this evening, I decided to test my theory, so I sneaked to the Mechanics Building and climbed it by means of its corner carvings. . . ."

"Holy comets!" exclaimed Tom. "At the constant risk of your life, either from falling or being shot down by a Sci-tri guard!"

"I suppose I did take a risk," shrugged Dik indifferently. "But it was worth it. It took me an hour and a half to get to the roof. I crossed the flat top, lay down on my stomach in the cold and darkness, and peered down on that mysterious other side that no one sees.

"There, down in a little valley not far away, I saw a city in a glass bubble, it seemed. I can't well describe it.

"But here is the important thing, that which made me forget the cold and risk: I saw not just a few, but thousands of supermen like the members of the Sci-tri!"

"Thousands? That's odd!" commented Tom.

"Odd!" cried Dik vehemently. "Why, I'd lay a month's bankits to it there is a Dark Moon in it somewhere."

Tom waved an eloquent hand. "There he goes Dark Mooning again. Why, I suppose they are reserve members of the Sci-tri, probably that's all."

"Listen, you fools!" continued Dik. "Can't you see that there is some sinister significance in that? My mind has already anal . . ."

Lon burst out laughing. "Now it's the analytical mind again. Sorry, Dik; I can't listen tonight. As your soon-to-be captain, I order you to bed. Tomorrow is our big day."

He saluted them and left the room.

CHAPTER III

THE last-minute preparations were made just as the sun sank behind the low hills in the far distance. The great space-ship was in its specially constructed cradle a mile from the city. With a last farewell to the Sci-tri guards and to Commander Jarl, the massive lock was swung into place.

In the pilot room, Lon and his ten assistants sat at their boards. Their lips were grim. A glistening sweat covered the captain's forehead. When the signal clanged, he and his men bent tensely over the controls.

Outside, it seemed the distant hills reverberated the thunderous roar as the giant rocket tubes belched blue flame. The ship jerked from its cradle, threw its nose upward at a slight angle, and thundered away from the ground. Its course took it over the city where thousands watched it climb into the sky like a comet. Those thousands were exiles, isolated from the rest of the world—they would never have the chance to tell others of the space-ships that periodically left earth and were never heard from again.

In the ship, many hearts quaked—not for fear of death, but for awe at the stupendousness of their project. Out into space—to a new world!

Tom and Dik and one other had charge of a separate engine compartment. It was their task to watch the engines jealously and to keep the fuel feed running smoothly. Calls came in constantly from the control room. The orders had to be carried out with deadly precision. After many agonizing minutes, Lon's voice came over the speaking tube from the control room.

"Boys, we've made it—we're out of the atmosphere!"

All over the ship there were shouts of joy, and many capered in relief. It was well understood by all that take-off and landing were the most dangerous events of a space voyage. At that moment of gladness over the successful departure from earth, none gave a thought to that worst of all dangers—the landing. That, being far in the future, was forgotten for the time being.

Then many hours passed in the task of giving the bird of space her cyclopean wings of metal foil. Here and there difficulties arose, but none so great that they could not be surmounted. The rocket power had been shut off entirely and the ship sped away from earth at a constant velocity of a dozen miles a second. The telescoped arms were slowly extended by electric motors, till they radiated from the ship like the strands of a giant cobweb. Then all hands were called to help unroll the thin foil and feed it to the cable guides which slowly pulled it out onto the long spokes.

The three mathematical adepts ran through long calculations in the meantime, so that when the report came that the wings were fixed into place, the spokes could immediately be turned so as to get the most push from the sun's rays. Captain Lon breathlessly watched the velocity needle to see it gradually climb the scale as the metal foil wings took the full force of light-pressure.

* * * *

Weeks passed. The monotony of the voyage brought a certain callousness to the crew. They began to accept the strangeness as natural, and thought little of death. They spoke of things earthly and of earthly pleasures and at times conjectured what the new world would be like.

Eighty-three days out, the first catastrophe came. The repulsion screens which side-tracked meteors had up till that time worked satisfactorily, protecting the ship from collision, although the metal wings had become pockmarked with thousands of holes, some a dozen feet in diameter.

"It was during the "night" period that it happened. The sleeping quarters were against the hull, completely sealed from the inner engine and supply rooms—thus the engines and supplies were amply protected. Better, the designers had thought, that a few lives be lost and the engines saved, than the engines lost and all destroyed.

A meteor crashed into the sleeping chambers, just grazing the hull enough to buckle the plates and let the air out. The shock was felt throughout the ship. The watch sounded a general alarm. Lon was the first one there and looked through the fused quartz peep with horror. Seven men had been sleeping in the room that lost its oxygen. Seven corpses, frozen and bloated, now floated somewhere out in space, sucked out by the escaping air. Everyone on the ship came to look at the chamber of death and left with a chill in their hearts. The Grim Reaper had paid his first visit.

Lon made an investigation, questioning the repulsion screen detail. They, three having been on duty during the collision, proved that it had not been negligence on their part. It was obvious then that the meteor had been a terribly large one and that they were extremely fortunate to have merely been grazed by it. A head-on crash would have splintered the entire ship.

On the eighty-ninth day, preparations were made for the deceleration of the ship. The great wings

were drawn in on their winches. The telescoped arms were pulled in by the motors. Then the nose rockets were made to boom forth mightily, day after day. Lon made his calculators check and recheck constantly on their rate of deceleration. Their lives depended on their accuracy.

On the ninety-third day, the speed had been retarded to the proper degree and the air-wings were swung out. Soon they touched the fringes of atmosphere and the great ship quivered like a live thing. Lon and his pilots worked with frenzy, calling for more and more power from the engine room. The titanic blasts of the nose rockets ate up the fuel eagerly, and the engine detail began to worry if they would have enough.

Lon found a few seconds to look down at the red terrain looming far below, rushing at them. His heart pounded. If only to live a few minutes on the sands of another world! It would be worth death. To have crossed space . . . to have felt the terrifying emptiness . . . to have the grand thrill of landing on Mars and looking up at Earth as a star—it would be worth anything!

The huge ship fluttered downward uncertainly, for the pilots were encountering new air conditions. It plunged, then swung horizontally, still possessed of a terrific speed. Again and again the nose rockets blasted forth. Then it could be delayed no longer—they must touch ground. It was level and bare, like a desert, but even its thick cushion of sand could not soften the crashing descent of the space-ship. It struck with such force that it burrowed part way underground and swung sideward so quickly that one wing snapped off as though it were a match-stick. The red dust of Mars swirled in clouds around it.

DIK shook his head. He felt his arms and legs. Something warm was running down his face. He wiped it away with his hand and saw that it was red. He managed to get to his feet, although for a while he could not take a step. His head spun.

He finally cleared his eyes from blood and mist and saw, through a large rip in the wall, others trying to rise, and still others lying quietly in pools of blood. Hastily, he looked for Tom—then he saw him lying against a column of tubes. He rushed over to him, lifted his head and chafed his hands violently.

After some moments of feverish work, Tom opened his eyes. He grinned weakly.

"All right, Dik. I can make it," he said in a weak whisper.

In a few minutes, both felt nearly normal and none the worse for their experience. They fell to the rescue work and revived several others—but there were many who would never rise again.

Having done their share in the engine compartments, they hastily decided to make their way to the control room.

"No use, Dik," said Tom, after trying vainly to force the main door between the stern and the central corridor. "This thing is wedged tight. It seems that the hull is pressing down on it. We're trapped back here, I guess."

"Not while I have this," shouted Dik, who had been rummaging behind a motor. He held up a metal-torch. "We can't burn through the walls any place, but the door is of softer stuff."

The two of them held the torch and lit its fuse. A sparkling, humming white flame shot to the metal door and quickly melted it away.

Then they had to wait till the heat dissipated before they could crawl through the hole that had been burned. When Dik went through, he was followed by Tom and several others of the engine detail who wanted to see the front of the ship, to search for particular friends.

It was a shambles. They made their way forward. In one compartment they found several dead and others moaning with pain. Only one was here on his feet. But Tom and Dik did not linger; they wanted to get to the pilot compartments. They breathed hard as they wound their way through increasing debris and turned their eyes from horrible sights.

Only once was there speech, when Tom said hoarsely: "I hope Lon's all right. He certainly did his best."

It had been the fore part of the ship that had struck most violently. The metal plates of the hull were here bent and twisted like crumpled paper. Blood ran down the grooved floor from mangled bodies. It was ghastly.

Finally they burst into the captain's cabin. It seemed that none had survived the terrific impact. Amongst the chaos of the control boards lay a pile of bodies—a heap of gore. It was impossible to distinguish one from the other. Dik staggered at the horrible sight and closed burning eyes.

Then they noticed that the hull had been completely split open to one side, a rent ten feet long and half as wide. Tom put a trembling hand to his throat.

"We're breathing Martian air!" he muttered chokingly.

Then more of the engine detail and some of the fuel and supply detail burst into the room to stop and choke out incoherent words. Tom recovered his nerves and began to issue orders. At the sound of his voice, willing hands began to untangle the bodies to see if any were yet alive, although it seemed impossible that such could be. Dik and Tom fell to with the rest, ever searching and yet loath to see the slight body of Captain Lon in that heap of flesh.

Suddenly there was a distinct sound from outside the hull, as if someone or something were trying to climb through the gash. All eyes turned to the spot in bewildered apprehension. Then Dik and Tom leaped forward.

Framed in the yawning rent appeared Lon's head, and then his body. He was climbing in from the outside!

He leaped lightly to the floor.

"Terrible, isn't it!" were his first words.

"Yes—but Lord! We were looking for you in that," stammered Tom, pointing to the dead.

"Strangest thing ever happened to me," explained Lon, who seemed to be the calmest of them all. "When the crash came, I just closed my eyes and waited for the end. I felt myself floating in the air. I thought what a pleasant thing death was! Then, next moment, I felt a jar and opened my eyes to find myself in a cloud of red dust, outside the ship! I couldn't realize at first that I was alive . . ."

He stopped, out of breath.

"Just catapulted right out through that breech," added Dik. "What perfect timing that was! If you had hit a wall instead of soft sand, you wouldn't have lived to tell it."

"How are the others?" asked Lon anxiously.

"Terrible!" answered Tom. "From what we've seen, there'll be just a handful alive."

Then followed the trying task of

bringing a semblance of order amidst the chaos. They made a place for the wounded and detailed men to care for them. Food and water was distributed, and a check-up made on damage. None had time to think of the fact that they were on another world.

The Martian night came upon them, cold and dark, and still they labored to bring normal conditions. The lesser gravity allowed them to work long before inexorable fatigue prostrated them one by one.

The final check-up had revealed only forty-four alive. Of these, eighteen were practically unharmed; three of the injured had no chance of recovery.

Such was the landing on Mars.

CHAPTER IV

MANY weeks passed after that eventful day of the ship's crash. Many strange things came to pass in that time. The atmosphere proved to be permanently fit for their lungs. The lesser gravity played many tricks on them before they learned the new art of walking. The radio, apparently unharmed, was set up and signals sent to Earth, to which, much to their bewilderment, there was no answer. For days, they tried to contact Earth till Lon shook his head and attributed its failure to some injury beyond repair.

When they had established a fairly efficient organization, Lon sent out exploring parties to learn more about the new world. He himself, with Tom and Dik, set out early one morning. They chose a low range of hills to the north as their destination. They reached it in late afternoon. Here they found many things to interest them—verdure unlike any on earth, short scrub with pulsating leaves and undulating stems, mounds of green lace-leaves that palpitated as though able to leap and run, and other things.

They saw animal life, but only in fleeting glimpses—small things that scurried to cover in holes. They wandered on in the miniature forest.

A shout from Tom in the lead brought the others close to him. They all peered down into a little gully in which lay the twisted remains of some sort of large vehicle.

When they neared the battered wreck, ejaculations of surprise escaped their lips—it was an earth space-ship!

They circled the ruins in great wonder. Lon called to them when he found an opening convenient for them to crawl through. Excitedly they entered the ship. Everything was covered with red dust. Bleached bones scattered about told a silent story of a fatal landing, with probably no survivors.

They spoke in hushed whispers in the death-like stillness of the ship, conjecturing how long it had lain forgotten here on Mars. How long ago had the Sci-tri sent it to its doom? How many more ships might be scattered over the wastes of Mars, they could only surmise. No doubt, many too floated through space, huge coffins that had lost their direction, inhabited by frozen corpses.

They were preparing to leave, depressed by the scene, when something caught Tom's eye. At his feet in a heap of shattered bones was a small metal cylinder. He picked it up and wiped it free of dust. Upon it was etched in bold letters: "Open and read. It is for all eyes to see these words."

The one end unscrewed to reveal a roll of aluminum foil, on which had

been scratched the following message:

To whoever reads this:

My name is Buk 6M-432. In the year 2991 I left Earth in this space-ship with two hundred and forty companions. This trip being against my wishes, I preserve what I have to say for others. I am writing this en route, ninety days out from Earth.

A group of scientists upon Earth calling themselves the Sci-tri have ruled Earth (through different generations) for ten centuries. They achieved greatness when they wrested the ruling power from the ruthless, ignorant and depraved and put it in the hands of Intelligence.

But the common failing of Mankind took seed. The lust for power sprang to life, and a most diabolical and heinous plan was conceived whereby their lust could be gratified. Their plan was a scientific "Utopia" in which the mass of humanity would have no part. Wholesale murder was no wise, as the mobs of Earth had yet the greater balance of power.

About a century ago, the plan sprang into being when one of the Sci-tri succeeded in creating a superman, an advanced evolutionary creature, in the laboratory. Blinded to the good example of nine centuries of peaceful rule, the Sci-tri suddenly became corrupt and took over the new plan in secret.

It was then the new system began. Millions were shifted around until family ties were lost. All potentially dangerous characters, of which we who have been doomed to fly from Earth are the members, were singled out first. The Sci-tri decided to stamp out our breed entirely, leaving only the most spiritless of humanity to deal with.

They concocted the story of the diminishing ozone belt and made us feel like martyrs, trying to save a doomed world. Would to God the truth were known by all!

Cold fact is my sponsor. It so happened that when I was a young man during my days in the Air School, I was assigned to fly a stratosphere ship alone on a trial flight, from Berlin to Tokyo. Something went wrong. I crashed in the wilderness of Siberia. But I lived through it and found the almost mythical laboratory and stronghold of the once benevolent Sci-tri. Here too, by methods which concern me only, I learned of the plan of the Sci-tri—to make a world of supermen!

Why did I not shout it to the world?—because I was captured and put aboard this space-ship, then ready to leave. I told my story to the men on this ship, but their hearts were filled with martyrdom, and their minds with the subtle praises of the wily Sci-tri and they thought me mad.

In three centuries, by their plans, the world will be in the control of the supermen, and humanity will either be killed off or subjugated to slavery. The only hope for the continuance of our race is discovery of their secret plans and destruction of their stronghold in Siberia—a glass-covered city in which the supermen are created and await the day they can sally forth and conquer the world.

I do not know if these words will ever be read. But if some ship manages to land safely on Mars, perhaps a living hand will pick this message from among my bones and know the doom that nearly drove me mad.

The radio which is supposed to relay important information to earth is a worthless contraption, another part of their diabolical hoax. I write to an empty future, for regardless of who reads this, nothing can be done about it. Ship after ship will land here on Mars and on the other planets, ostensibly seeking a new home for humanity—actually flying to crashing death, for the Sci-tri well know that no space-ship can successfully land on other worlds by rocket power.

We are nearing Mars; its red face is looming larger as the hours pass. We will land—we will crash—in a week. Lately the men have suffered a change of heart, for the fuel is running far short, and they have forgotten the pride that sent them into space. They believe me now—but fools! It is too late! Had we turned back early enough . . .

But no use thinking of that. I have finished my tale, and will soon seal this message in the cylinder so that it will withstand the landing. Can I hope that by the reading of this, the menace of the supermen is gone?—that some unforeseen Providence will yet strike a blow against the corrupt Sci-tri? (signed) Buk 6M-432.

TOM and Lon were pictures of white-faced despair when Tom finally finished reading the long message. But it was Dik who seemed to take it most to heart. He sank to the floor mumbling, only to spring erect suddenly with wild cries.

"Thank God for this message!" he cried. "It relieves me of my last doubt."

The others could see that there was more to it than what his words implied and stared at him expectantly.

"Fellows," said Dik, "I've been carrying an immense load on my shoulders, and I dared not even confide in you two, my closest friends. You remember that our space-ship passed over the city as we left the ground, and therefore over that

glass-covered superman center? And you, Tom, remember that I was absent from the engine room for the first ten seconds?

"Can you guess where I was? I was at the auxiliary lock, which I had opened, with a hundred-pound can of fuel. I dropped it almost blindly as we soared over the city and had the satisfaction of seeing it plunge directly for that glass bubble."

He went on as both Tom and Lon were speechless: "I watched the effect—bits of glass actually pelted into the lock! That superman city is destroyed!"

Tom opened his mouth, but Dik went on: "I know what you're going to ask: How did I have the nerve to do such a thing when I didn't know what is in Buk's message? The answer is that I saw a Dark Moon in it from the first, and my analytical mind told me I was right!"

And for the first time, Tom had nothing to say against his companion's claims of a sharp mind.

THE END

SCIENCE FICTION

"THERE AIN'T NO SECH ANIMAL!"

Of course, we know that those were the words of the incredulous farmer, as he gazed upon a giraffe for the first time.

We laugh at his attitude, and yet it is this very same outlook that has hindered the development of science for centuries, and will probably continue to do so in the future. The farmer lacked imagination, and so do many powerful figures in the world today who look askance upon the scientific marvels that have not as yet become realities, thereby hindering the advance of Man.

According to popular belief, at one time the telephone was considered a toy, the automobile was impractical and would never replace the horse, and radio was a plaything for amateurs, with no commercial value.

Today, according to this *same* popular belief, space-flying ships for interplanetary travel are ridiculous impossibilities, atomic power can never be achieved, and immortality is but a dreamer's Utopia.

If the telephone, the automobile, and the radio were held with such scepticism even *after* they were invented, imagine how impossible they must have appeared a century ago!

Let us try to draw an analogy between the "impossibilities" of yesterday and the "impossibilities" of today. The heavier-than-air flying machine was *proven* impossible, just as any of today's scientific dreams may be *proven* impossible.

Despite all the ridicule and disbelief of an unimaginative populace, science has come forth constantly with new marvels, new discoveries to improve the human race.

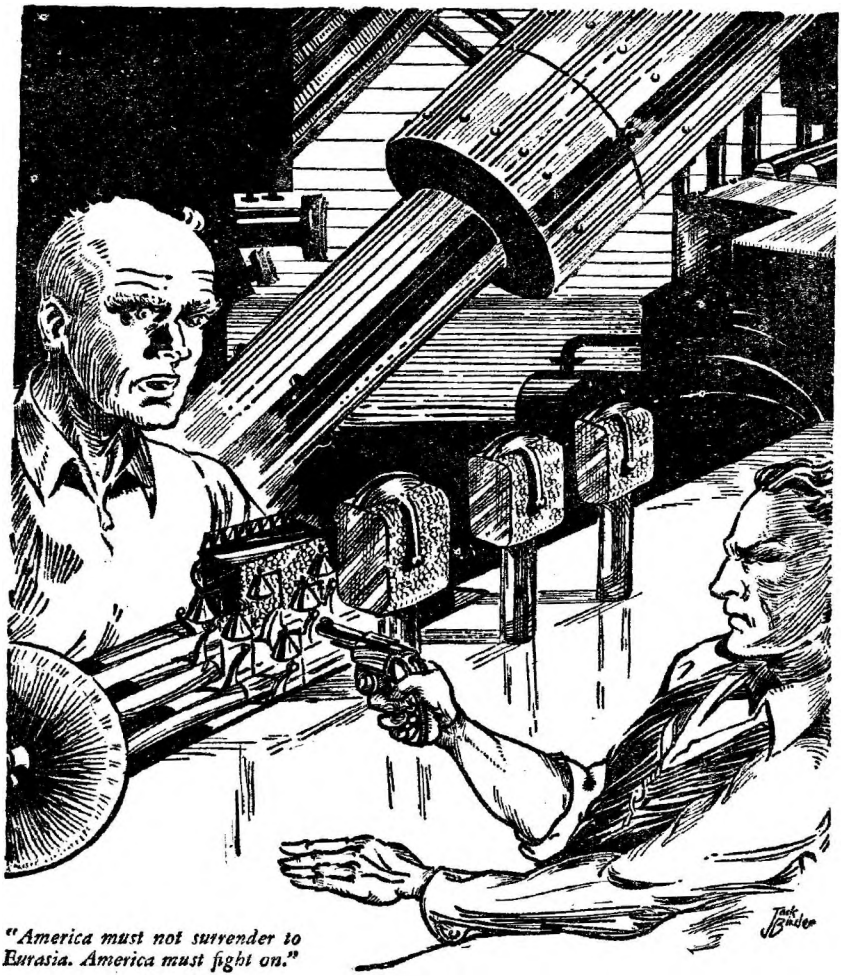
Let us learn from these lessons of the past. Let us turn an inquisitive eye upon the theories that are fantastic today, instead of one that scorns.

Remember that the fantasy of today is the reality of tomorrow.

THE CONQUEROR'S VOICE

by ROBERT CASTLE

What hellish device were the Eurasians using to make loyal Americans surrender? Shane finds the future welfare of his country entirely in his hands! But how can any man hope to defeat a weapon that cannot be seen?



"America must not surrender to Eurasia. America must fight on."

SHANE MARLIN felt the tension inside him relaxing like an uncoiling spring as he stepped out of the train into the warm Washington sunlight. He had got back—he had got back from the enemy's country alive! Even now, the secret service man could hardly believe it.

He felt like kissing the earth, the good American earth that he had hardly hoped to see again. Shane's rugged, pugnacious young face was alight, his blue eyes gleaming with excitement, as he hurried to the nearby taxi stand.

"State Department building—and step on it!" he snapped.

As the taxi rolled through the streets of Washington, swarming with war-time activity, Shane grinned as he pictured the surprise of his chief, Ellerman Hale, when he walked in. Hale must think him dead, he knew.

For Shane had been unable to report even once to his chief, since Hale had sent him on his dangerous spying mission to the capital of the Eurasian Empire. And Hale had fully expected the young secret agent to meet death. He had said so.

"This war between America and Eurasia," Hale had said in his slow, thoughtful way, "has already cost the lives of scores of our best agents. They're diabolically keen, those Eurasians, on spotting spies. I'm afraid they'll get you too, Shane.

"But I've got to send you. We know that Eurasia has some secret new weapon up its sleeve. We've got to find out more about it. You've got to find out. For though we have Eurasia pretty nearly beaten now, if they spring a totally unexpected weapon on us, they can turn the tables. Shane, if it's humanly possible, try to learn something in Eurasia."

That had been three months ago—three long, dangerous months which Shane Marlin had spent in the Eurasian capital, posing as a neutral traveller. He had been on the brink of sudden death every moment of those months, as he had pried and peered to discover the new weapon that Eurasia was preparing.

He had not discovered the nature of the weapon—that had been impossible. But he had learned who was going to use the weapon, and that it was going to be used immediately. Even now, they might be starting to use it! That knowledge had made Shane hurry back to America, to warn his countrymen.

The sudden stopping of the taxi jerked the young secret agent out of his anxious thoughts.

"Can't go any farther than this, mister," the driver told him.

SHANE saw the reason. A mob of thousands of people was streaming solidly down the next street, which was Pennsylvania Avenue, toward the Capitol. A huge, excited crowd.

They were shouting, and they carried banners. Shane Marlin read the banners incredulously.

"Stop the war with friendly Eurasia!" read one of them. And another, "Eurasia is our friend—we demand peace with her at any price!"

Still another banner was blazoned, "Eurasia's demands for South American territory are just and should be granted! We are fighting an unjust war!"

"What the devil!" cried Shane Marlin stupefied. "Am I dreaming this? Americans are too patriotic to stab their government in the back in wartime like this!"

"Is that so?" demanded the taxi driver belligerently. "Most of the people in the country right now know that we ought to stop this crazy war with a country that only wants to be our friend."

"Eurasia wants to be our friend?" cried Shane unbelievingly. "Where in hell's blue blazes did you get that idea? Everyone knows that Eurasia started this war, that they attacked us without warning when we refused to let them seize South America. They're the most brutal aggressors in history!"

"I don't care," the driver answered sullenly, "I think Eurasia means well, and so does nearly everyone else. We're not going to fight with a friendly country any longer."

"You damned traitor!" blazed Shane Marlin.

And furiously he hauled the driver out of his seat into the street. The cabby angrily struck at him.

But Shane parried the blow, hit out in a smashing left. His knuckles stung from impact against bone, and the taxi driver was knocked sprawling back on the pavement.

"That's what I'd like to do to every traitorous swine in that parade!" Shane Marlin rasped, his blue eyes fiery.

He strode on, by foot. The parade of thousands of noisy pacifists was still coming solidly up Pennsylvania Avenue, waving hundreds of banners which demanded that Congress immediately halt the war against Eurasia and grant that country's righteous demands.

Shane still couldn't believe his eyes. When he had left three months ago, all America had been blazing with patriotic fervor. The unprecedented brutality and insolence of the Eurasian demands and sudden attack had aroused in America a passionate resolve to smash this barbaric enemy for all time.

Americans had hung to that resolve in the face of the first terrible air-raids of the enemy. And now that the tide had turned strongly in favor of America, now that Eurasia was all but beaten, most of the people in America had suddenly become pro-Eurasian! Shane couldn't believe it —not of his countrymen. But there they were, before his eyes, yelling that the war was unjust, that Eurasia was their friend.

Shane had to fight his way through solid thousands seething outside the Capitol. They were being held back by khaki-clad soldiers with drawn bayonets, and were shouting interminable threats to the Congressmen inside the building, warning of what would happen if they did not stop the war.

The State Department building, by comparison, was deserted and silent. Shane Marlin, disheveled and out of breath, hurried along its cool, quiet halls, and into the small office where sat Ellerman Hale, chief of the American spy system.

"Shane!" cried Hale, getting to his feet, his keen, aristocratic face lighting in pleasure. He pumped the young man's hand. "By Heaven, I'm glad to see you alive! I never thought I would."

"Neither did I," Shane Marlin rasped. His blue eyes flashed. "Chief, I didn't succeed completely in Eurasia. I didn't find out the nature of their secret new weapon. But I did find out something.

"I discovered that a Doctor Karl Ligor, a Eurasian physiologist, is

the inventor of the new weapon. I called on Ligor, ostensibly as a fellow-scientist from a neutral country, and tried to discover what he had invented. But I couldn't do it—Ligor is a smooth, subtle devil, and his laboratory was guarded to the hilt by Eurasian agents."

Shane's mouth tightened to a hard line as he continued his rapid report.

"Three weeks ago, Doctor Ligor dropped out of sight completely! I found that he'd gone by a secret route to America. He's here now, in hiding somewhere, preparing to use whatever weapon he has devised against America. He may be already using it! We've got to locate him!"

SHANE stopped, breathlessly. To his amazement, Ellerman Hale only nodded abstractedly, without excitement.

"You did well, Shane," said the chief absently. "But there's no urgency now about discovering Ligor and his weapon. For it's probable that within a few days Congress will give way to popular pressure and declare peace with the enemy, and grant Eurasia's demands for title to South America."

Shane swore violently. "These damn traitors who are yelling for peace! I saw them in the streets—don't they realize that we have Eurasia beaten, and that if we give in to them now, we're throwing away our victory, throwing away the future of our country? What hellish kind of propaganda have the Eurasians used to dupe our people so?"

"They've not been duped, Shane," said Ellerman Hale angrily. "They've simply realized the truth—that this war with Eurasia should never have occurred, that it is our fault it happened, and that Eurasia wants only peace and friendship."

Shane Marlin's jaw dropped. He stared at his chief, unable to believe his own ears.

"Good God, sir, do you mean that you have fallen for this crazy pacifist talk, too?" he cried, stupefied.

"It's not crazy talk!" Ellerman Hale said sternly. "I'm utterly convinced that Eurasia wants to be friendly and that we are in the wrong."

"You can't mean that!" Shane exclaimed. "Why, you know as well as I that Eurasia was the one that started this war, attacking us after we refused her demand for South America."

"Their demand was a just one," Hale affirmed earnestly. "Eurasia would be a good friend to us in South America."

"You've either been fooled by the same propaganda as those people outside," Shane Marlin cried furiously, "or else you've been bribed by the enemy."

Ellerman Hale leaped to his feet, his thin, autocratic figure towering ominously.

"Get out of here!" he thundered. "You are dismissed from the service—you're one of the few war-mad idiots who want to keep America engaged in a senseless struggle with a friendly country. You can turn in your credentials."

Shane snatched the credential cards from his pocket and flung them furiously onto the floor.

"There they are!" he blazed. "If you've gone pro-Eurasian like everyone else, I don't want to serve under you any longer!"

He rushed out of the office, a flaming rage inside him, rage against his changed chief and all the other pro-Eurasians who were knifing America in the back.

Shane felt as though his world had

tumbled to bits. Ellerman Hale, bearer of one of the most famous names in the patriotic annals of America, a man who had spent most of his life working for his country, a traitor now!

Shane Marlin reached his old rooms, sat there trying wildly to figure it out. What kind of devilish propaganda was it that had changed the sentiments of so many millions of Americans so unaccountably? He could not imagine.

He switched on his small radio and twirled the dial until he got a newscaster. The excited voice was unreeling incredible happenings.

". . . tremendous wave of pro-Eurasian sentiment that has been rising the last few days continues to increase. A company of soldiers was mobbed today in New York by anti-war crowds. A regiment was called out to disperse the mob.

"San Francisco, California. Governors of western states in conference here demand the Federal Government stop the war against a friendly country, and accede to Eurasia's demands. They state people of their states are now nine to one against continuing the war.

"Washington, D. C. The President has just issued an appeal against the rising tide of pro-Eurasian sentiment. The Chief Executive expressed himself as bewildered by the tremendous change of feeling, and begged his countrymen not to throw away the future of their nation by surrendering to the enemy's demands now, when victory is within sight."

"Lord above," whispered Shane Marlin, his face white and tense. "It looks like the whole country's gone crazy."

Abruptly there was a loud squeal in Shane's little radio, a crash as of static, and the newscaster's voice was blotted out by the powerful hum of a new station.

THE radio purred with this deep, powerful wave. Then there sounded from it a high, ringing note.

It was followed other clear, cool, high-pitched notes, sweet as though from bells of ice, slowly succeeding each other, varying but slightly in pitch.

"Hell, a musical program of some kind," swore Shane Marlin. He was reaching to switch it off, but his hand paused. He frowned. "That's darn queer music. Queer, and beautiful—"

There was something fascinating to Shane's ears and brain in those clear, sweet, ringing sounds.

They seemed to weave a magic pattern of slow melody in his mind, focusing all his attention upon them. They brought Shane, more than any music he had ever heard, a sense of soothing calm, of relaxation.

"Damned queer music," he muttered absently, listening.

Then a voice began to speak with the slow, ringing notes, a soft, rich voice of almost tender accent.

"The bells of sleep are chiming," that soft voice whispered soothingly from the radio. "The little crystal bells of sleep—of sleep—"

"Some sort of lullaby stunt," Shane told himself absently. "And a good one, too. It would put anyone to sleep."

"Sleep—sleep—" that infinitely rich and tender voice was whispering as the slow bells chimed on. "Sink into the soft slumber that awaits you. Sleep—"

Shane Marlin had slumped down in his chair, feeling suddenly very tired and drowsy. Lord, how sleepy he felt, indeed! He could feel himself sliding into somnolence.

But part of Shane's brain told him he must not sleep. Part of his brain somehow recognized that soothing voice and connected it with danger. But he was so tired. . . .

"You are falling to sleep," the voice was whispering as the silver notes chimed softly. "You are falling into complete sleep."

Doctor Ligor's voice! The small area of Shane's brain still unconquered by sleep recognized those soft, rich accents at last. He felt vague, sleep-dulled alarm.

Ligor, the Eurasian scientist who had invented the mysterious new weapon to be used against America! Ligor meant danger of some kind. He shouldn't be here falling to sleep listening to Ligor's voice. He mustn't fall asleep!

But the silver, persuasive notes kept lulling his brain into a strange stupor. And now the soft rich voice that accompanied them hardened in accent.

"You are sleeping," it pronounced commandingly. "And you must now listen to the truth. You, the people of America, must make peace with Eurasia. It is very wrong of you to be fighting Eurasia, for Eurasia is your friend.

"Eurasia will always be the friend of America. It is wrong of you to fight with friendly Eurasia. It is unjust of you to refuse Eurasia's righteous demands for South America."

Shane Marlin, listening in a strange drowsiness in which his deadened brain was fighting to awake, heard that and mentally agreed with it.

Of course that was true, he thought dully. Eurasia was a good friend of America—it had been silly ever to think anything else. Why in the world had America been so wrong as to deny Eurasia's just demands for South America?

"You must make your government see that Eurasia is your friend," the soft, insidious voice was repeating. "You must make your government declare peace, and surrender to Eurasia's demands. For Eurasia is your friend—"

Shane Marlin, even while most of his mind fully agreed with those statements, knew in a small corner of his brain that they were not true. The part of him that recognized danger in Doctor Ligor's voice kept him from surrendering completely to the spell of those chiming notes and that soft, persuasive voice.

". . . and you will come to the radio again, and bring all your family and friends to listen to it," the soothing voice was commanding. "But now when you awake, you will forget all about having heard my voice.

"You will remember only that Eurasia is a friend, that the war must end and Eurasia's demands be granted. That is all you will remember. And now wake—wake—wake!"

Ligor's voice ceased abruptly, and the chiming, trancing notes stopped at the same time. The hum of the superpowerful station faded. And the voice of the newscaster who had been crowded off the ether came abruptly on again.

Shane Marlin sat, his mind dulled, chaotic, seething with contradictory emotions. Then he broke the spell of sound that had held his brain, and sprang to his feet, trembling violently.

"My God!" he breathed. "That is Doctor Ligor's invention, the new weapon that Eurasia is using against America. Hypnotism by radio!"

"It's not merely propaganda that has made most of the country pro-

Eurasian overnight. It's hypnotic command!"

SHANE'S brain rioted as he saw the diabolical ingenuity of the new weapon Eurasia was using.

He knew that it had long since been proved that hypnotism could be effected by auditory as well as visual stimuli. A slow, monotonous pattern of notes of sound had been proved capable of sending listeners into the hypnotic sleep.

And Doctor Ligor had perfected the method with damnable skill! He had evolved a pattern of hypnotic sounds that would put any listener into the hypnotic state. And by means of a hidden, super-powerful radio station that could crowd all other stations off the ether Ligor was repeatedly hypnotizing all the millions in America who listened to the radio, and was implanting pro-Eurasian sentiments in their minds. They forgot ever hearing Ligor's voice, at his command—they remembered only the ideas which he had imbedded in their consciousness.

Shane Marlin knew the reason why he, alone of all who had listened to that hypnotic broadcast, had not succumbed. He had recognized Ligor's voice, had known it meant danger! That fact had raised an inhibition in his mind against the hypnotic process.

"God above," Shane exclaimed wildly, "this has got to be stopped—quickly!"

He sprang to the door. He would take news of his startling discovery to the chief, at once.

But Shane abruptly stopped, remembering how Ellerman Hale had vehemently voiced pro-Eurasian sentiments.

"Hale's been hypnotized through his radio, too!" Shane groaned. "He wouldn't believe me—nobody of all the millions who are under that hypnotic command would believe me!"

The secret agent's rugged face was baffled, almost hopeless, for a moment. Then his chin hardened.

"It's up to me alone, then," Shane decided grimly. "It's up to me to find Ligor's secret station and stop this hellish hypnotic broadcast before it's too late."

Ironically, the newscaster's voice suddenly shrilled louder from his little radio.

"Flash! Washington, D. C. Congress will meet tomorrow afternoon for a vote on the question of ending the war. An unofficial poll indicates that the legislative body will vote to accede to all of Eurasia's demands, and halt the conflict."

Shane Marlin blanched from the deadly shock of that appalling news.

"Tomorrow afternoon! The war ended, Eurasia triumphant! Then I've got to find Ligor's station tonight!"

The next few hours were a time of frenzied activity for Shane Marlin. His first move was to hasten to the airport where his small private plane was hangared.

All of Washington was wild with enthusiasm at the news that the war was to be ended the next day. To Shane, the rejoicing of those hypnotized millions over their own doom was something to drive a man to madness.

He worked furiously the remaining hours of daylight, fitting a directional radio loop antenna to the receiver in his plane. Darkness had fallen by the time he was ready to test it, circling high above the lights of the city.

Shane turned on his radio to a network musical program. The music droned along for nearly an hour,

when there came the interruption he had been hoping for.

The regular program was suddenly drowned out. There came again the hum of Ligor's powerful secret broadcaster, and then the slow, chiming, soothing bell-notes that induced the hypnotic state.

"The bells of sleep," murmured Doctor Ligor's voice once more. "The bells of sleep, calling you—"

Shane Marlin was working furiously with the loop antenna, turning it for the greatest intensity of signals. When he got greatest intensity, he snapped the receiver off at once. He was taking no chance of succumbing to the hypnotic spell of those lulling notes.

He noted the direction of the compass-indicator at the base of the loop, the direction of Ligor's hidden station. Swiftly he drew a straight line on the map he had ready. The line ran straight southwest from Washington.

"One bearing!" Shane muttered to himself. "If I can only get another—"

He opened the throttle and the speedy little plane quit loafing and tore through the night with a rising roar of suddenly accelerated motor. Straight westward Shane flew, at high altitude and at utmost speed.

Less than an hour later, he was circling over the lights of Charleston, West Virginia. Hastily he turned on his receiver. This time he did not have to wait—the hypnotic silvery notes and Doctor Ligor's soft voice welled out at once.

". . . is your friend. Eurasia will always be the friend of America. You must make your government accede to Eurasia's demands—"

Shane Marlin feverishly twisted his directional antenna once more for greatest intensity. When he had it, he switched off at once.

WITH trembling fingers he drew another line on his map, running south-southwest from Charleston. It and the first line intersected at a point in some almost uninhabited mountains of northwestern Tennessee.

"Got it!" Shane Marlin cried exultantly. "Ligor's station is somewhere near that point. If I can find it now—"

He drove the plane southward through the night like a streaking comet. The last hope of a spellbound, self-doomed America was riding the winds with him, and he knew it.

It was another hour before Shane slowed down. Beneath in the moonless darkness lay the black, rumpled and tumbled ranges of the Tennessee mountains. No lights of cities or even villages showed in this wild region.

Careful check of his instruments showed him he had reached the exact point marked by the intersection on his map. But still Shane saw no light, no sign of Ligor's secret station. He started to circle at low altitude in a widening spiral, but the minutes fled by without any discovery.

"Hell, it's got to be here somewhere!" Shane rasped desperately. "He couldn't completely hide a station as powerful as that—"

He glided recklessly lower, almost skimming the dark ridges. Some minutes later, Shane cried out.

Tall, spidery masts and guy-wires loomed in the darkness just ahead, towering from a black hilltop. Hastily, Shane banked away from them and let his ship settle over the next ridge.

He had to land, and land quickly, and he knew what chances were against him doing it safely in this darkness. Gritting his teeth, he went

down in a long slant, peering tensely over the side.

Shane glimpsed a dark bottom, clad with vague patches of brush and young trees. He let the plane drop toward it, his face wearing a mirthless, reckless grin. The black ground rushed up—he cut the motor and ducked his head.

The crash knocked him breathless, as the ship pancaked into a thicket of brush. He was half-stunned by the impact. But he rallied his dazed faculties, dug out his big service pistol, and climbed unsteadily out of the wreck.

The thin masts of the secret radio plant loomed against the starry sky from a hilltop a mile away. Shane started toward them. He was praying fervently that the plane had not been heard when it passed near the station.

A half-hour of struggling up and down briar-clad slopes in the darkness left Shane Marlin with clothes torn and flesh scratched, and nearly breathless. But now he was climbing the hill from whose summit the great masts towered.

Beneath the spidery towers was a flat, new-looking concrete building with shuttered windows. Shane glimpsed wires, heavy cables that led from this structure down the hillside. So that was where they got their power! A hydro-electric plant, operating from one of the mountain streams!

He reached the steel door of the building and crouched listening. Voices of two men reached him from inside.

"If Borkum isn't back soon, we'll have to go look for him," one was saying in the official Eurasian tongue.

"He's too suspicious," complained the other voice. "He'll find no one about. That plane he says he heard was probably just some fool mail pilot off his course."

"Besides," chuckled the first, "it wouldn't do them much good to discover us now. Morning will see us out of here—thank Heaven, Ligor's work is finally done."

Shane's face stiffened. So they were preparing to leave? Doctor Ligor's hellish work of hypnotizing a nation was nearly finished—the result a foregone conclusion, now that everyone knew the American Congress would surrender next day to Eurasia's demands.

Shane tried the door softly, clutching his gun in his other hand. But the door was locked. And he could see no other door into the big, flat building, nor any windows. He was racking his brain for a means of entrance when he heard heavy steps approaching from the darkness behind him.

Borkum! The man whose suspicions had been aroused by the passing plane and who had gone out to look around.

Shane Marlin shrank instantly around the corner of the building. He saw the tall, heavy form of Borkum approach the door, knock and call his name. The door opened, spilling white electric light out onto the Eurasian's dark, Mongoloid face.

Shane darted forward like a leaping panther. His left arm grabbed Borkum around the body from behind and his right hand jabbed his pistol past the man, at the two other Eurasians in the big, electric-lit interior of the building.

"Up with your hands!" Shane rasped.

"An American!" yelled one of the men.

They went for their guns. Shane had hoped they would not shoot

while he held Borkum as a shield before him.

But he had forgotten the fanatic quality of Eurasian patriotism. They were quite willing to shoot their own co rade to get the American behind him.

Shane's gun roared first. One of the two spies tumbled. Bullets from the gun of the other thudded into the dazed Borkum's body.

HE DROPPED the sagging, lifeless form and crouched in the doorway, his gun spouting flame, the concrete room thundering to the echoes of the roaring explosions.

Shane saw the man he fired at fall reeling from the smacking impact of lead. But as he did so, a bullet from the side of the room smashed into Shane's left shoulder with stunning, white-hot shock. A man had appeared in a doorway at the side of the room, a thin, pale man shooting at him.

Doctor Ligor! Shane recognized the Eurasian scientist, but did not dare shoot at him. He dared not take a chance of killing the scientist—Ligor's life was now the last chance of saving America from defeat!

He dived in desperately at Ligor as the scientist shot again. The bullet missed Shane—the other man was unnerved by his suicidal rush. Then the American had Ligor down, and with every ounce of strength he could command, he smashed the scientist's chin with his right fist.

Ligor went limp. Shane staggered up, looking around the great room with wild eyes. Borkum and the other two Eurasians lay dead amid the great transformers and tubes and electrical equipment which was in the room. Shane stumbled to the door, shut and bolted it, and then tied a handkerchief around his bleeding, pain-fired shoulder.

Then he went into the next room from which Doctor Ligor had appeared. It was a small control room with microphones and other instruments mounted on a table.

He dragged the unconscious Ligor into the chair before the microphones and tied him into it with a coil of wire. Then he found water and threw it in the scientist's face.

As Ligor started to revive, Shane inspected the curious mechanism mounted in front of the microphones. It was a complex arrangement of small bells of silvery metal, with striking rods that were automatically actuated in a certain order by cams mounted on a small drum that was turned by a motor.

"What—who—" Ligor gasped, recovering, looking bewilderedly at the American.

"So this is the hypnosis instrument, is it?" Shane Marlin rasped.

"You—an American agent!" Ligor cried, staring at Shane. Then into the Eurasian scientist's pale, long face came a look of desperate triumph. "You found my station—but too late. My work is done."

"And it's going to be undone, now," Shane snapped. He felt sick from the pain of his wounded shoulder but he forced himself to remain erect.

Ligor smiled, a mocking triumph in his drooping black eyes and crafty face.

"Nothing can undo my work now. I've so conditioned the minds of the American people by hypnotic command in the last few days, that your Congress will vote tomorrow to end the war and surrender to Eurasia's demands. No matter if you spread the news of what I've done all over

the country, you won't be believed—nothing can change the convictions I've implanted in the minds of your people."

"I know that," Shane said grimly. "But there is one way in which your devil's work can be undone. You can undo it yourself—by broadcasting your damned hypnotic spell to America and telling them the truth this time—telling them they must realize that Eurasia is their enemy, and that America must go on with the war."

"So that's your idea?" Ligor cried. "I won't do it! The victory is in Eurasia's grasp now, and I won't destroy that."

"Oh, yes, you will," Shane said, with deadly meaning.

"Go ahead and kill me," Ligor challenged defiantly. "I'll die happy, knowing that Eurasia will win."

"No, I won't kill you," Shane said softly. "You'd be no good to me dead. All I'll do is to apply a few methods of persuasion which I've heard about from time to time.

"Matches stuck under your fingernails and lighted will probably coax you into doing as I say," Shane continued calmly. "Or if it doesn't, we'll try twisting a string around your forehead until your eyes begin to pop."

"You wouldn't torture me!" Ligor gasped. "You couldn't—"

"I could and I will!" Shane flared, hot hate in his blue eyes. "Eurasia has tortured more than one American prisoner, for information. I'd cut your worthless carcass into a thousand bits, to save America."

LIGOR blanched, and wet his dry lips with his tongue. His eyes dilated as Shane took matches from his pocket and began sharpening their ends.

"No!" shrieked the Eurasian scientist as Shane ominously approached. "I can't stand torture—after all, I'm no soldier. I'll do as you ask!"

Shane Marlin slowly laid down the matches. Inwardly, he was breathless with relief. He hadn't known whether, if it had come to the test, he could actually have brought himself to torture the Eurasian.

Quickly he went to the switch panels. Tremendous power was still flowing from the turbines installed in a nearby mountain stream. Shane switched it on, and there was a rising hum and crackle of giant tubes as the super-powerful wave of the secret station crowded onto the ether.

Then Shane wrote rapidly on a sheet of paper, and put it down in front of the bound scientist.

"That's the piece you'll speak," he said harshly. "You know what will happen if you say it wrong."

"I know—I'll do it," almost sobbed the terrorized man. "Switch on the microphones and hypnosis inducer."

Shane cut in the microphones, and then touched the switch of the queer little mechanism of bells. The drum rotated, the cams and strikers clicked, the chiming, slow notes began to sound, barely audible but electrically amplified to the microphones.

The hypnotic sounds were going out to every radio in America. And presently, Doctor Ligor was speaking softly, soothingly, into the microphones.

"Sleep—sleep—the bells of sleep call you—" His command was repeated over and over. Then:

"Americans must wake to their peril! Eurasia is America's deadly enemy. America must not surrender to Eurasia. America must fight on."

When Ligor finished, and looked

up shakily, Shane told him grimly:

"Keep right at it. For two or three days you've been sending your defeatist propaganda out. It's got to be all counteracted in the minds of the people by noon tomorrow. You're broadcasting that message until then!"

Some fourteen hours later, when the clock on the wall showed noon, Shane Marlin switched off the broadcast equipment. And Doctor Ligor, a weary, haggard wreck from those hours of continuous broadcasting, slumped down in his chair.

Shane went with dragging steps to a receiver and switched it on. He listened, trying to keep his dazed, exhausted mind awake.

". . . temper of the country seems to have suddenly changed overnight!" a newscaster's excited voice was saying. "Every hour has seen a greater swing away from the pro-Eurasian sentiment that for the last day or two has been rising in the country.

"Giant demonstrations against surrendering to Eurasia are forming everywhere. It is certain now that Congress, when it convenes this afternoon, will reject any idea of surrender. All America seems suddenly to have found its patriotism again, to have awakened from a dream—"

Shane Marlin grinned wearily to himself as he turned the receiver off. America had awakened from a dream, indeed!

It would only learn how dangerous and devil-inspired a dream that had been, when Shane took his prisoner back to Washington. But before he did that—

He looked to Ligor's bonds. And then he stretched on a couch with a sigh of contentment. In three minutes his snores shook the room.

VALLEY OF PRETENDERS

by DENNIS CLIVE

Those four wandering Earth people soon regret leaving the vicinity of the space-ship—for they find themselves the captives of the strangest race of creatures ever to inhabit a world of the Solar System!

They linked hands and danced around like a circle of elves and fairies.

CHAPTER I

"HELL, that's darned funny!" Mart Latham sat up in his comfortably sprung seat and stared in surprise through the huge window. "Look, we're turning towards Rhea. . . . Rhea, of all places!" he whistled blankly.

He was not the only one who had noticed the fact. A general chatter of surprised conversation rose from the passengers in the immense, comfortable lounge. Faces angled towards windows in complete amazement.

"Nothing to worry about, folks. Just keep your seats, please."

A trim, white-coated steward of the giant Earth-Europa space liner suddenly appeared at the main door. He was smiling apologetically.

"We've developed a jet fault," he explained. "It's too risky to attempt the complete run to Earth without having it fixed—so we're making a temporary landing on Rhea. We'll be there about four hours—"

He was cut short by a chorus of protest. Some had appointments, some had wives, some hoped to have wives, others were darn glad they hadn't—and so forth. The steward met the onslaught with his best "customer is always right" smile.

"I am so sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but the Interplanetary Corporation reserves the right to land in an emergency. . . . Thank you." He departed as silently as he had come.

Mart Latham looked disgustedly out the window again.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he grunted. "Ditched for four hours on the fifth satellite from Saturn with nothing to look at but jungle, and rocks—and things," he finished vaguely.

The girl by his side looked up from a half-doze and revealed a freshly youthful face framed in corn-colored hair.

"Never mind, darling," she consoled him. "It'll give you time to realize how beautiful I am."

"I don't feel like being gallant," Mart growled. "Besides, a guy doesn't tell his wife how beautiful she is after being married to her for five years. . . . Or does he?" he mused.

EDA LATHAM elevated her tip-tilted nose disdainfully. "Noted chemist on holiday from Europa trade satellite makes analysis of matrimony," she sniffed. "O.K., be high hat if you want to!"

"Rhea," Mart murmured, hardly listening to her, his gray eyes fixed on the 1500-mile diameter moon of Saturn as the vast space liner curved around towards it. "Y'know, I've often wondered what Rhea has on it. Titan's pretty well known, of course, but the other smaller moons, Rhea among them, hasn't had much to say for itself. Inhabitants of sorts, I understand; even an atmosphere. But devilish hot."

"Naturally, being near Saturn," Eda said, regarding him with level blue eyes. "Let me think now. . . . Rhea is 337,000 miles from the primary. Right?"

"Right!" Mart agreed laconically. "Revolves in relation to the Sun at the speed of 4 days, 12 hours, and 25 minutes. Gravitation somewhat less

than that of Earth's moon. Atmosphere breathable, but only to a height of 1500 feet. Satisfied?—or shall I get you a guide book?"

The girl didn't answer. She was watching the little moon rising up to meet the ship. Exhaust sparks, prevented from igniting the vegetation below by reason of subsidiary foam nozzles, spouted from the underjets. Saturn, vast and magnificent with his planetoidial rings, dominated all space. A partly molten, partly solid, but at all times rather grim, world.

Further in the distance beyond the rings moved the trading moon of Titan, and at varied intervals the but little explored other moons of Hyperion, Japetus and Phoebe. . . .

Eda started to speak as the ship began to settle down carefully over a waste of sprawling green jungle; then she stopped and turned a little as a voice cut above hers. It was slow voice, sonorously British, steeped in the toneless impartiality of the law courts.

" . . . but, m'lud, I would bring to your learned notice the case of Simmons-v-Simmons in 2415, exactly five years ago. There, the plaintiff alleged—"

"I am not interested, Sir Basil! Not interested in the least."

Sir Basil Emmot, world and space renowned interplanetary Counsel of British law, mopped a bald head and blinked protruding, bovine eyes. Next to him, Judge Asa Walbrook—thin and wizened as a disinterred corpse, and about as attractive—looked at him sourly. Nobody spoke. Nobody dared to. Judge Walbrook had captured and condemned more criminals in his career than any other man alive; even now he was heading earthwards to preside over the trial of Nick Andrews, long evasive spacial filibuster.

"Cheery looking old dear, isn't isn't he?" Eda murmured, turning back to Mart. "That face of his would make any lemon jealous—"

She stopped again as the ship suddenly jolted slightly and became still. The throbbing of the tremendous rocket engines ceased; the vessel lay in the half-shade of towering trees that stretched upwards to surprising heights against the slight gravity. The multiple lights of Saturn and the moons filled the outside jungle with a curiously ghostly white tinge, not unlike indirect floodlighting.

The steward appeared again. "If you wish to take exercise, ladies and gentlemen, you are at liberty to do so. But you are warned not to move more than two hundred yards from the ship. We are by no means sure of what this moon contains. If you go any further you do so at your own risk. Kindly leave your names with the purser as you go out, so a complete check of passengers may be made before we start again. We have four hours' wait."

He disappeared actively, and Mart got to his feet. Languidly he zipped up his shoes. They were special shoes, worn by every space traveler —steel-soled to hold firmly to the attractive gravity-compensator plates in the floor. Nor were they any too comfortable. . . .

"Guess we might as well have a look at Rhea," he murmured. "How about you, Eda?"

"Naturally!" She fixed her own shoes and patted her hair. Behind her, Judge Walbrook rose up with a face of vinegar, Emmot beside him.

"I have always felt, Sir Basil, that your learned talents are better exercised in unconfined surroundings," Walbrook observed, chopping his words with vicious economy. "We

can continue this discussion on Simpson-v-Simpson outside."

"Simmons - v - Simmons, I assure you," the Counsel corrected hotly, tugging out his pipe and filling it.

"Don't be impudent! And kindly refrain from lighting that archaic incinerator in here, too! Come!"

Mart stared after them, grinning. "That Simmons - v - Simmons case must be a honey," he said seriously. "Be glad you married a chemist and not a judge. . . ."

HE TOOK the girl's arm and headed from the lounge into the main hall. Men and women were queued up before the purser's desk. . . . Then in a few minutes Mart found himself outside the airlock on Rhea's soft, vegetation - smothered surface. Immediately a sense of amazing lightness bouyed him up. Years on Europa, however, with its slight attraction, had made him—and Eda too—practiced in the art of counterbalancing themselves.

"Pretty dry here," Eda remarked, stirring the tindery stuff at her feet. "The other satellites are wet by comparison."

"Less humidity here," Mart observed.

For a moment or two they both stood accustoming themselves, breathing the somewhat dry but tolerable atmosphere, conscious too of sweltering, burning warmth.

The people broke up into parties, wandered around the giant liner, peered into the corners of the clearing. The sound of the ship's mechanics began to echo vigorously—but above them came a fading, occasional didactic reference to "Simmons-v-Simmons" as Walbrook and Emmot wandered off to the far side of the clearing, oblivious to all warnings to stay near the ship.

"Well, what now?" Eda asked, dabbing her face languidly. "Do we stick around, or look around?"

Mart answered her by strolling towards the wall of jungle. Through the trees, the remarkably near horizon was visible, giving the odd effect of the jungle suddenly sloping away almost in sheerness.

"Mart, what exactly is that?" asked the girl suddenly, when they reached the jungle's first trees, and she pointed to a quivering rim of pale fire just visible over the near horizon. In some strange way it resembled a pale edition of the Earthly Northern Lights.

Mart shrugged "No idea—and we can't risk going too far to find out. Pity! You know, I'd like to come here some day and—" He broke off, sniffing hard. "Smell something?" he asked sharply.

Eda elevated her nose, then looked surprised. "I believe I do! Burning wood. . . . Maybe old Lemon Pan and the Counsel have built themselves a fire, seeing it's only one hundred and thirty in the shade—"

"Look!" Mart interrupted her, pointing, and she gave a startled gasp at a vision of sooty smoke rising into the air perhaps a quarter of a mile distant.

"It's a fire all right," Mart went on tensely. "And if this stuff gets ablaze— Holy Smoke! We've got to warn them back at the ship. . . ."

But there was no need for that. The officers of the vessel, conducting the mechanics' operations, had already seen the smoke and were issuing quick orders to the crew to fetch the powerful fire extinguishers.

"Inside everybody!" roared the chief steward, through his wrist-microphone. "We can't afford to take chances."

"He's right there," Mart mut-

tered, catching the girl's arm. "We'd better—"

"Help!"

It wasn't a very audible call; in fact it would probably have missed being heard altogether had not Mart and Eda been at that particular part of the clearing. They turned sharply, startled, and even as they did so it came again.

"It's coming from somewhere near that smoke column!" Eda cried.

Mart glanced back towards the ship. Nobody else seemed to have heard the cry: they were all too busy dashing for the ship in case the fire developed into a genuine conflagration.

"We've got to help," he stated briefly. "You go back to the ship and—"

"Rats!" Eda cut in tersely. "I married you until death do us part. This may be the break I'm waiting for. . . ."

Without waiting, she turned and headed into the jungle with Mart immediately behind her. With the lesser gravity to aid them they progressed in immense leaps, floating across considerable distances, coughing as the smoke grew denser and surged into their lungs.

"Hey! Where are you?" Mart yelled, pausing a moment.

"Here! Here! Quick—!"

"It's Lemon Pan all right," Eda gasped, then she jumped back as the foliage of a nearby tree began to sizzle and wither in a blighting shaft of flame shooting up its length. All the groundwork of a forest fire was laid.

THE smoke was a fog now, but the two blundered forward again, to come suddenly on Judge Walbrook and Emmot standing in the middle of a little clearing, tugging—oddly enough—at their own legs, while around them the flames of burning vegetation were spurting dangerously close.

"Keep away!" Emmot cried, as Mart prepared to leap forward. "You'll be as bad as we are if you come here. We're—stuck!" he wailed dismally.

"But—but you can't be!" Mart yelled. "You're not in a bog; you re on solid ground. What sort of a game is this? Come on!"

Ignoring the warning he jumped forward, Eda beside him, but the moment they landed they felt themselves gripped by something of vise-like power. They couldn't move one foot beyond the other.

"You see?" Walbrook bleated, more crinkled than ever now he was alarmed. "This is the fault of my learned friend. I told him not to scatter his pipe ashes in the vegetation—" He broke off with a yelp as a crackling runner of fire spat towards him.

Mart coughed violently and tugged at his feet. It was useless; he was rooted. Then he started suddenly as Eda came to his side in her stockinged feet. Her shoes lay behind her, zipped wide open.

"Take your shoes off, smart guys!" she suggested tartly. "This stuff's magnetized, or something—holds the steel soles of our shoes. You two do the same." She gazed witheringly at the best brains in British law, then helped to rip open the zippers.

"But this is perfectly preposterous!" Sir Basil cried, stumbling free of the danger area. "I cannot reconcile the fact that—"

"Never mind reconciling facts," the girl said practically "We've got to head back to the ship before we're

cut off— If we can!" she finished in dismay. "Look, Mart!"

She jabbed an arm at the pouring flood of choking smoke, the crackling advance of flames. The way back was ruthlessly cut off by a solid, raging wall.

But Mart wasn't looking. He was on his knees staring at the slaeky substance whereon the four pairs of shoes were still immovably riveted.

"Say, this stuff is magnetite!" he exclaimed in astonishment, glancing up. "Natural lodestone—like the Swedish deposits on Earth. Magnetic oxide of iron."

"So what?" demanded Eda impatiently. "Take a look at the fire!"

He sprang up from his futile efforts to dislodge the shoes, stumbled backwards and cursed as a sharp bramble stabbed his besocked feet. In dismay he stared at the beating, torrid wall of flame moving inwards.

"Come on—we've got to travel," he panted. "That way. . . ."

Stumbling helplessly he led the way to the opposite side of the clearing with Eda and the legal men picking their way behind him.

CHAPTER II

ONLY when the holocaust was some two hundred yards behind them did they stop.

"Now what?" Eda demanded, wiping her smutty, greasy face. "How do we get back to the ship? We're heading away from it all the time. Besides, this jungle is no place to hike around without shoes."

"What do you suggest?—that we walk through the fire like a collection of Hindu fakirs?" Mart asked tartly. "We've got to keep moving until it dies down, or the ship's crew extinguishes it. Come on—it's catching up again."

He began to resume the advance, but Walbrook caught his arm.

"Listen to me, young man!" he panted. "Back on the Earth I have to preside over the case of Andrews-v-Interplanetary, and it is quite unthinkable that my learned colleague and I—"

"Forget your briefs and follow me," Mart snapped out. "That fire's gaining. . . ."

Onrushing flame made further argument impossible. Floundering wildly in the slight gravity, stabbed by barbs and vicious thorned roots, the quartet blundered on, they knew not where, all sense of direction hopelessly at sea, the smoke of the forest fire formed into a dense, impenetrable fog behind them.

They became aware of other things too — the bellowing of enigmatic beasts, the shriek of unknown birds, all stampeded by the conflagration. Here and there through the rifts were glimpses of incredible objects plunging and plowing through the undergrowth.

"Looks like we loosed some kind of zoo around here," Eda said breathlessly, rubbing her gashed feet painfully. "And if you, my learned friend," she went on bitterly, glaring at Sir Basil, "had taken care where you parked your pipe ash, this wouldn't have happened. Of all the darned crazy things to do! Here!"

The Counsel's veiny brown eyes protruded nauseatingly.

"But, my dear young lady—"

"Don't 'dear young lady' me! You ought to start a Nicotine Abolition Act with that profound brain of yours— Gosh, Mart, what's that?" Eda finished with a scream, and the

others looked up in time to see a vast pair of saucer eyes staring at them malevolently from a hundred-foot high body.

"Some sort of dinosaur," Mart panted. "Can't try conclusions with that brute. This way—!"

He swung off to the right, clutching the girl's arm. Together they vaulted the nearest five-foot high row of bushes, but they did not strike solid ground beyond. Instead they found themselves in the midst of warm, fast-moving water, struggling desperately amidst a jammed, screaming mass of animals, none of which resembled anything Earthly.

Two splashes from the rear announced that Judge and Counsel had also landed. Walbrook rose up screaming words not entirely legal and finally choked out that he couldn't swim.

"But I can, m'lud," Emmot gaspingly assured him. "Leave everything to me."

He clutched the older man tightly and struck out towards Mart and Eda. His bald head looked like an emerald bladder with scum draped round it.

"Most belittling," he groaned, as he came level. "The dignity of the law, upheld by—"

"Watch yourself!" Mart interrupted him, gaze darting around him at the fighting creatures. "A flick from one of those supertails and it'll be curtains. Take it easy; the flow'll carry us along."

"Curtains?" wheezed Walbrook, smothered in mud, scum, and fury. "Curtains? Confound you, sir, how are window adornments applicable to our present position?"

Emmot ejected a mouthful of filthy water. "Americanism, m'lud," he gurgled to explain, "implying, as I understand it, a rather sudden cessation of life—symbolical, to wit, with the descent of a curtain upon a stage act, m'lud, whereby—"

"Oh, shut up!" yelled Mart. "This is no law court— Look out there!"

HE DUCKED suddenly, forced Eda down, too. A mighty object, mad with fright and twice the size of a crocodile, breathed its last as its abdomen was transfixed by a vicious spire of dead tree stump projecting from the water. With bursting lungs the quartet emerged from the froth and foam of the death struggle.

"This is all most irregular—" Walbrook began to bleat, but Mart yelled above him:

"Say, that carcass wouldn't make a bad raft! The lesser gravity will help it to float, too. Give me a hand with it. I don't think these other creatures will attack us; they're too concerned for their own safety."

He struck out vigorously and clutched the object's scaly body with both hands. It rolled over in a tumult of water. With some effort, which somehow reminded him of riding a bladder-horse in a swimming pool, Mart scrambled onto the broad back. Wedging himself as well as possible he held down his hand, dragged the girl up with ease against the l e s s e r gravity. Floundering crazily, Walbrook and Emmot followed suit.

"And now?" the Judge panted, very wet and monkeylike, as they began to drift downstream amidst the bubble and smother of stampeded animals.

Mart shrugged his shoulders. "I'm no fortune teller, judge. All we can do is go where this takes us. We're

safe enough from fire here, anyway. The space liner crew will douse it with their high-power apparatus, anyway. . . . At the moment our lives are still our own."

"But for how long?" groaned Sir Basil, wiping his taut, scummy head. "Oh, woe is me! An unknown world, an unknown river—drifting further and further away from the ship. . . . And did you notice the water was quite warm?" he finished with sudden brightness.

"Naturally, on a world so near to Saturn," panted Walbrook. "Where are your finer powers of perception, Sir Basil?"

"Rhea's nearness to Saturn doesn't altogether explain such warm water," Mart murmured. "I'm inclined to suspect volcanic forces."

"That's r i g h t ; be cheerful!" snapped Eda, tossing back her damp hair. "Next thing you'll be telling us is that we're drifting into a boiling whirlpool or something. If so, I'm heading for the bank. I never did like lobster."

Mart didn't answer her, and for a moment the party was silent. Then a bend in the river brought into view that strange aurora display the girl had pointed out a little while before—a quivering band of white, but augmented now by streaks of amber and lilac arcing across the purply-blue sky.

"Wish I could figure out what that is," Mart mused. "Seems to be centered over Rhea's North Magnetic pole. High electrical energy of some kind — maybe connected somehow with that natural lodestone area we found. . . ."

He stared up at titanic Saturn flooding his warmth and light down on this fantastic little satellite, then suddenly he looked ahead again as there came to his ears the unmistakable sound of a dim, booming roar.

For the first time he noticed that the animals in the river were battling aside, struggling towards the silent, weird masses of the jungle on either bank. There was no danger of fire here; the danger area was far behind.

"Mart, what is that noise?" Eda demanded suddenly, seizing his arm. "It's funny, but—but I remember that—Niagara sounded like that from a distance. . . . Remember? Our honeymoon?"

"It's a waterfall!" cried Walbrook hoarsely, clutching his skimpy gray hair. "It's a waterfall, I tell you!" He danced perilously on the carcass. "Do something! Don't you realize that my life is valuable? My—"

"Oh, shut up!" Mart growled. "You're no more valuable than we are. . . ." He broke off, studying the accelerated speed of the water. "If it is a waterfall we're going right over it," he breathed. "We couldn't swim to the bank against this current in any case. The animals knew what was ahead; they got free in time. River's clear of 'em. . . . Looks like we're going places."

Sir Basil gave a groan of despair. "And me with the case of Andrews-v-Interplanetary on hand! My brief—everything—for nothing!" His popeyes stared down the river, much as a cow regards a cloudbank.

THE others stared with him, nor was it very long before another bend of the river brought into sight the filmy mist that hangs eternally over plunging w a t e r s. Backed by the rainbow hues of the distant aurora, the effect was both beautiful and extraordinary.

The carcass quickened speed. Mart turned to the legal men, clutching Eda to him.

"It's a waterfall, all right—tidy size too, if the din and mist is any guide. The only thing that can save us is the lesser gravitation. As we go over, jump outward—outward for your lives. . . . You'll miss the main water impact that way."

He tensed himself as he spoke, keeping his balance with difficulty as the carcass bobbed up and down with ever increasing speed.

"This is most disturbing," moaned Walbrook; then he turned a ripely jaundiced eye on Emmot. "Sir Basil, I shall look to you for assistance."

"Willingly, m'lud — but I would bring to your learned notice that I am not proficient in the art of acrobatics."

"Mart, suppose—" whispered Eda hopelessly; but he only tightened his hold.

"Take it easy, Eda. We've taken the hurdles so far and we'll take this one—somehow. . . . Uh-uh! We're off now—"

The carcass suddenly jolted forward, so violently that the four were nearly pitched off. As they rocked and swayed they felt it hurtle towards the creaming cataract ahead. Beyond, they had a transient glimpse of the river's continuation through a deeply-wooded valley, to the left of which was a blunted, sullenly smoking volcano.

"Jump for your life!" Mart screamed suddenly, and simultaneously hurled himself outwards into space with all his power.

The effort of his jump dislodged Eda from him; in the lesser gravity she went soaring absurdly away from him, turning slow somersaults. To the rear Emmot and Walbrook rose up, looking curiously like effigies on Independence Day.

Twirling through the air Mart got a brief glimpse of the waterfall. It was at least 200 feet high. . . . He began to drop towards the river below with ever increasing speed—automatically straightening his body for a dive. Eda was falling too, yards away. . . . He struck water—but struck something else as well that burst the universe into soundless white fire. . . .

CHAPTER III

MART struggled back to consciousness, to the awareness of a throbbing head and murmuring voices. He opened his eyes to the full-bodied glare of Saturn streaming down upon him with its feverish warmth. The ground underneath him was stony and warm; several feet away the river raced past.

"Mart—! Oh, Mart, thank Heaven!" It was Eda suddenly beside him, her clothes nearly dry now in the blighting heat, her hands holding his head thankfully.

"O.K., don't strangle me," he mumbled, emerging from the clinch. "I'm all right now. . . . But say, what happened?"

"You caught yourself a glancing blow on a submerged rock. No damage done, thank goodness. We managed to pull you out."

"Oh. . . ." Mart turned and caught sight of Emmot and Walbrook sitting a little distance off, looking behind them in blank astonishment. Mart turned again and winced as his head swam.

"Say, what—what the—?" he began blankly, and Eda cut in quickly:

"They've been waiting for you to recover," she explained anxiously. "They talk—talk English!"

"Th-the devil they do!" he stammered back, and stared in amazement at a group of twenty men and

women, all of them but scantily attired, practically Earthly in general development save that the lesser gravity had given them shorter stature and more highly efficient biceps. All the men were white bearded.

Their faces were strikingly childlike and docile, differing but little from good tempered Earth boys and girls of some ten years of age. The only oddity lay in the slit, catlike pupils of their innocent misty blue eyes—pupils which visibly dilated and contracted under the changing lights of Saturn and the various moons.

Beyond them there stood a rather makeshift city of dried mud; yet remarkably enough it looked as though it was meant to resemble modern New York—a miniature version of it in mud flung here amidst the wilds of Rhea. There were recognizable edifices, even streets, but there was a complete lack of unity and careful planning.

Behind it was again the evidence of that enigmatic, multi-colored aurora, while to the right, lifting to a height of some 800 feet, and smoking sullenly, stood a squat but nonethe-less deadly volcano. . . .

Mart scrambled to his feet at last with his eyes on the men's beards.

"So this is where Santa Claus hails from," he muttered. "Methinks this is where we have plenty palaver, eh, squaw?" He grinned at Eda, then with upraised hand went slowly forward.

"Here's looking at you!" he cried, halting before the foremost man.

"Mud in your eye," responded the four-foot leader gravely, and bowed profoundly so that his beard eclipsed his narrow waistline. Then, straightening up and looking Mart full in the eye, he asked politely, "Did you brush your teeth this morning?"

"Huh?" Mart blinked in astonishment, was hardly aware that Eda, Walbrook, and Emmot had come silently up behind him.

"I speak to you by courtesy of the people of Malinjah," the man went on. "We, the Malinjahs, offer you a free sample of our excellent hospitality. Come at once, or write at once, as you will. . . ."

Mart shook himself, thumped his forehead. "No doubt about it," he muttered. "That slug on the head has made me daffy. Why, this guy talks like a radio television announcer handing out blah. . . . There ain't no such animal! Who'd you say you are?" he asked abruptly, looking up again.

"The Malinjahs. I am Ansid Rawl, leader of my people's network, complete with hookups."

"We'll skip the hookups. How'd you come to be here? How did you learn English?"

For answer Rawl turned and pointed towards the aurora. "Knowledge is cheap when it is free," he said poetically. "Write now for my prospectus. Send no money."

Eda started to snicker at the astounded expression on Mart's face. Even Walbrook's withered mouth creased painfully at the corners. Emmot's eyes had nearly parted company with his face.

"Don't you get it, Mart?" the girl gasped at last, holding her sides. "Some—somehow these people have a means of hooking onto Earthly television broadcasts; the radio part, at any rate. Very probably American broadcasts, since they're the most widely distributed and work on the strongest power. That's where they've picked up the language and they use advertisement slogans and bits and pieces out of plays, sketches

and political blurbs to talk with. Gosh, who'd have thought it!"

"I don't believe it," Mart stated stubbornly. "There's no signs of radio aerials in that city of theirs . . ." He stopped, trying to collect his thoughts, and the quaint people looked gravely at him with their big, slumbrous blue eyes and catlike pupils.

"We're from Earth—third planet out from the Sun," he hesitated. "We're—er— We're trapped. Want food. We're friends."

"You believe in democracy?" Rawl asked surprisingly.

"Eh? Yeah, sure we do. . . . But what's that to do with it?"

"If you did not we would declare a state of war. Democracy for the democrats. Non-party; unilateral. That's us."

"War? With whom?"

"Anybody," Rawl said complacently. "So long as we are right."

MART began to gesticulate, finally blurted out, "Be damned to the politics? What about a bite to eat?"

"Eat with pleasure—fear of pain afterwards positively banished! This way. . . ."

Turning suddenly, Rawl led the way up the shingle towards the Saturn-lit city. Rubbing his bruised head Mart began to follow, Eda at his side.

"Tell me, young man, what do you imagine is the matter with these people?" asked Walbrook, coming level. "In a way, I am—ah—reminded of the case of Munro-v-Munro, wherein the plaintiff complained that her husband developed a mania for writing for advertised samples. . . . Very similar, eh, Sir Basil?"

"Very similar, m'lud. Clearly these people are strongly influenced by the advertisements of the time. . . . You're a chemist, Mr. Latham. Can you account for it?"

"You've got me there—up to now," Mart confessed. "They strike me as being really quite childlike, with little initiative of their own. Take this city we're coming to. It's not built by their own ingenuity; it's taken from descriptions they've heard over innumerable radio broadcasts. Note the lack of unity, showing minds that are only half-developed in the matter of self-government and control. Rawl said that the aurora caused him to know English—" Mart broke off and stared at the strange display. "North magnetic Polar Lights all right," he breathed. "I just wonder how—"

"Gosh, what a smell!" Eda interrupted him, pinching her tilted nose. "Who's opened the sewers around here?"

"Like—like rotten eggs," Sir Basil observed, and seemed ashamed of his brief lapse from dignity.

"There's the source of it," Mart remarked, nodding towards the volcano. "H2S gas—better known as sulphretted hydrogen— Say, that gives me an idea!"

"Wad?" Eda asked nasally, still clutching her nose. "How der dooce do dese folks live arou'd here wid dat udhody odor blowi'g arou'd?"

"That's just it. Maybe they don't smell it."

"Boy, dey'd wad sub code in de dose dot to smell dat!"

"No, I mean maybe some other sense is developed instead. It might be. For instance, animals have sense of smell developed above sense of eyesight. With humans, sight comes first, hearing second, and smell last. Some even have no sense of smell."

"So whad?"

"I dunno; 'cept that perhaps these folks have a sense we don't know about which compensates them for lack of smell."

"I'd give all I've godt to loose my sedse of smell right dow—"

Eda broke off and released her nose as Rawl pointed to the nearest building of the mud city. With a beaming smile and a good deal of ceremony, surrounded by his silent people, he led the way into it. To the deepening amazement of the Earthlings, it was furnished in a style that was crudely terrestrial. There were chairs and tables in the center of a vast room that filled the entire length of the building. There were no other floors: the ceiling went up to an amazing height.

"More evidences of lack of brains." Mart commented. "They don't seem to realize that Earthly buildings have several floors and not only one ground floor. . . . Guess they're just playing at being civilized, like kids play at shop. They've just—well, just Pretenders."

Inside this room, lighted by naturally ignited volcanic gas spouting from crudely designed jets on the stone walls, the odor of sulphretted hydrogen had diminished considerably. The light of Saturn cast silver oblongs on the floor. . . .

Rawl motioned to the chairs. "If you want food, we have it—and then some," he said affably.

TURNING aside he clapped his hands sharply, spoke for the first time in an unknown language. It was the signal for his childish, passive followers to spring into action. They vanished into unknown recesses of the slipshod building and returned bearing armfuls of fruit, presumably jungle products.

"Are we expected to eat these—these overgrown bananas?" demanded Walbrook, as they were laid on the table.

"Most irregular, m'lud, but without alternative," Emmot murmured, then he looked at Mart questioningly.

"O.K.," Mart announced, sampling one. "They're safe enough. Overgrown plantains, or something. Not poisonous to our constitution, anyhow."

Rawl watched in blase contentment as the four began to appease their hunger, sharpened by their experiences. One of the women slipped outside and returned shortly afterwards with four garlands of livid-hued flowers. With a little cry of girlish delight, she placed one around Sir Basil's perfectly bald head.

"Really, young woman, I protest!" he shouted, looking up. "And at my age—!"

"Irrelevant and immaterial," grinned Mart, looking at him critically. "But you'd better not take it off. These folks have evidently got you down as a sort of god, or something— Hey, what the—" He broke off in dismay as soft white arms passed against his ears and he found himself similarly adorned.

Eda looked remarkably pretty with hers — but Judge Walbrook looked about as attractive as a pig with a lemon between its teeth.

"Most irregular!" he fumed, crinkling with passion. "I refuse to wear it!"

"You'd better," Mart counselled quickly, glancing up. "Our friend Aniseed Ball has his eye on you. . . . Keep your shirt on."

"I assure you," Walbrook said, with measured acidity, "that I have no intention of taking my shirt off."

"Oh, skip it," Mart groaned. "Why don't you learn English?"

Rawl came forward from the ranks

of his smiling, highly delighted people.

"I bring you a message," he stated, waving his small arm. "We wait for the appointed ones; they who will show us peace. You are the appointed ones."

"Oh, but we're not," Mart protested, jumping up. "You're talking about things religions, Rawl; things you've heard over the radio. Some religious denominations wait for the appointed ones, yes—but that's not us. We've got to leave here. We have a ship waiting for us."

Rawl shook his head steadily and smiled. "We have waited long. We shall honor and cherish so long as you all shall live."

"So long as—" Mart gulped, stared, then sat down with a thud. He spread his hands helplessly. "That's the marriage service you're mangling!" he yelled. "And it's time this sort of foolery came to an end. We can't stop here."

"You are here . . . on a journey which knows no returning," Rawl observed calmly.

"That's—that's Shakespeare," Eda said quickly. "An' maybe he means it, Mart. There is no way back over that waterfall. . . ."

"Hell!" Mart said helplessly, and all sat looking at each other, too concerned to notice how absurd they all looked with their garlands—all save Eda. Emmot was looking at her with a pop-eyed expression that might have either been fascinated appreciation or incipient cardiac.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER a time Rawl and his people began to hum, in not unmusical voices, watching the four intently as they did so. At first it did not occur to Mart what they were chanting, then he suddenly leapt up.

"Listen to 'em!" he shouted. "That song is 'I'll Buy Me a Robot'—the latest American craze song! They can only have contacted that by direct radio. . . ." He swung around to Rawl. "Look here, where is your radio receiver?" he demanded.

Rawl shrugged, tapped his head. "Why travel far when it comes to your door?" he asked, then pointed again towards the far end of the room. It was obvious he meant the aurora, hidden from sight now, of course.

Mart stared perplexedly, then suddenly Eda cried, "Listen, Mart, is it possible that these folks are natural radio receivers? They haven't the brains to build apparatus; they're only like kids."

"Say, I believe you've got something there, Eda. Their lack of a sense of smell, for instance, might be compensated for by another unknown sense. Here's to trying, anyhow. . . . Rawl, can you hear radio waves?"

"All-wave receiver given free," he said in gratification, thudding his white-haired head again.

"It is inside his brain!" Eda cried. "What there is of his brain, that is."

"But how—?" Mart kicked his chair back and began to pace the room, thinking. "Short-wave radio waves do penetrate this far, of course, especially the ones linked with television. They travel as far from Earth as Pluto. But— Good Lord!" he broke off with a gasp. "I began to get it now—the connection between the aurora and this radio reception. This planet is naturally highly magnetic; we know that by discovering that lodestone area back in the forest. There may be thousands of 'em knocking around differ-

ent parts of Rhea, particularly at the poles."

"Well?" Eda questioned, and the people themselves moved closer to hear Mart's halting, thoughtful exposition.

"Is there any reason," he deliberated, "why the free electrons of short radio waves cannot be caught by Rhea's lines of magnetic force spiraling around its magnetic poles? It's a highly-magnetized satellite for one thing: it doesn't spin too fast, of course, but quite fast enough to form itself into a planetary dynamo and collect radio waves and redistribute them— Gosh, yes! That would account for the weird electrical display at the pole. Probably the same thing happens at the other pole, too. Not only trapped radio wave electrons, but electric radiations of various sorts have full play. This planet has such a high magnetization it captures them pretty freely, both from outer space and Saturn's own emanations."

"That may be right," Eda admitted, thinking, "but how do you account for these folks being able to hear them?"

"Just a minute," Mart said, and turning to the table he picked up the skin of one of the plantain fruits. Gently he folded it and rubbed it together.

"Rawl, what does that sound like to you?" he asked quickly.

"Visit Niagara Falls for your honeymoon," Rawl smiled back—and Mart gave a yelp, slammed the peel emphatically back on the table.

"There you are! To us that sounded like a faint, slippy sort of noise. To him it sounds like the din of Niagara. You get it? The hearing perception of these people is way ahead of ours. Human ear limit is 10-12 watt power, and that's mighty low. Animals a bit higher. These people are above our audible frequency."

"Maybe," Eda mused, "but how does that connect up with them hearing radio waves — electronic waves? Those aren't audible anyway; they're electrical."

"I know that, sweetheart! Point is, their brains are adapted differently than ours. If they can hear inaudible sounds and magnify them as much as they do, it logically indicates that they can also receive electrical waves and interpret them."

"But how?"

"How the devil should I know?" Mart snorted exasperatedly. "Give me some cooperation, can't you? When a stream of electrons changes its course in, say, the Sun, it produces the sensation of light in our brains, via our eyes. Well, what happens inside our brains to transform electron agitation into light? We don't know; nobody does. It's a thought mutation; a cellular response as impossible to describe as explaining a color to a blind man."

EDA looked about her at the child-like faces and shrugged her slim shoulders.

"Can you beat it?" she asked at last. "Kids with radio-receiver minds in a mud city on a cock-eyed moon! And I thought I knew all the answers about space and its contents!"

"Personally," said Walbrook sadly, fingering his garland, "I am not in the least interested in space or vulgar radio. . . . I really must insist we find our way back to the ship. I have a case to judge."

"You've said something there," Mart assented grimly. "We've got to take a chance. . . ." He swung around on the smiling Rawl.

"Listen, Rawl, there must be an-

other way through the jungle without climbing two hundred feet of sheer cliff," he insisted. "A pass, or something. What about it?"

Rawl shrugged; his people giggled among themselves, as amused as children at the Earthlings' anxiety. It was perfectly plain that their strange minds saw no seriousness in the situation.

"Happy the man, whatever his lot, is he who's content with whatever he's got," Rawl observed with a certain fatalism, and folded his arms to verify his belief.

Mart groaned and clutched his hair. "Listen to him!" he muttered bitterly. "That statement's plain enough—there is no way, or if there is these walking radio receivers don't know about it. . . . Come to think of it, they're probably right," he went on gloomily, thinking. "There are no animals down in this valley. The cliff and waterfall stops them. They'd be down here and wipe these folks out like a shot otherwise."

"We might try walking round Rhea," Eda ruminated.

"Sorry, bright eyes, I don't feel up to walking a couple of thousand miles without shoes on. . . ." Mart glanced at his watch. "The ship's due to leave in about ten minutes," he groaned. "Once that happens we're here for keeps probably—"

"There's that smell again," Eda whistled, clamping down on her nose. "Seems like the wind's off the gasworks this morning."

"Do you think if we shouted—?" Emmot began, eyes glistening with unexpected discovery — but Mart waved a hand at him.

"What do you think we are?—yodelers?"

He stalked impatiently to the door of the place and stared moodily out over the little clearing towards the river, across at the sullenly smoking volcano. The odor was disgustingly strong. . . . Eda came quietly to his side.

"I'm sorry Mart," she murmured, and without turning, he grunted absently:

"Sorry? What about?"

"Well, I seemed kind of silly making cracks when this situation's so desperate. I—" She stopped suddenly and twisted her head sharply. Mart glanced at her and she raised a quick finger for silence.

"Listen!" she breathed. "Our funeral guns!"

He caught her meaning immediately. On the odorous wind came the distinct roaring boom of rocket blasts—the rockets of the distant liner as it lifted from Rhea into the void. Right on time, too.

"Well," Mart growled, "they aren't losing any sleep over us, that's evident." He stared forlornly at the purply sky. "Just the same, you'd think since we left our names with the purser that they'd—"

"Mart, the sound's coming nearer!" Eda shouted suddenly, in quick delight.

"Listen! It isn't fading away into space— There!" she screamed, jabbing out her arm. "There, near the waterfall! The ship! They're looking for us!"

She was right. Not a thousand feet above the waterfall and jungle swept the titanic bulk of the space liner, underjets and foam nozzles working vigorously. Here and there dull red ashy deposit missed the foam nozzles and sizzled in the river. . . .

Then the ship began to circle as slowly as its huge, ponderous bulk would permit. There were dimly visible figures standing in the airlock, gazing down.

MART came to himself abruptly and raced wildly into the center of the clearing in huge, stumbling leaps. Eda joined him in frantic arm-waving. Emmot and Walbrook came out of the building too and began an insane war dance in the lesser gravity, a dance entirely inappropriate to their station.

After a while, Rawl and his people came as well and copied the Earthlings' example because it amused them. Linking hands they danced around like a circle of elves and fairies, chanting that damnable craze song, "I'll Buy Me a Robot. . . ."

"Hey!" screamed Mart frantically, as the ship moved towards the smoking volcano. "Hey! Come back here! Can't you see us? Hey!" He cupped his hands and bawled his lungs hoarse.

A stream of red, glowing deposits crawled up the volcano side as the liner swept over it. Something was wrong somewhere; that foam nozzle wasn't dead true—then suddenly it seemed that the entire crazy moon went out in a flash of blindingly brilliant light and sound.

Mart and Eda found themselves flung backwards by the force of a terrific explosion, flung clean on top of the wildly struggling Emmot and Walbrook. Every one of the Rheans fell to the ground, holding their ears in anguish, their higher hearing power wrenched and hammered by the frightful concussion.

"Look!" Eda screamed, scrambling up. "An—an eruption!"

"It can't be—" Mart began, clutching hold of her; then he broke off in astounded horror at the vision of the giant liner reeling violently as it recovered from the shock of that explosion.

It was heading swiftly away now from a sudden newly born rift in the volcano side through which was spouting a hellish fury of cinders, pumice, poisonous fumes and bubbling lava.

"I get it!" Mart cried. "That sulphuric gas must have been ignited somewhere by that underjet deposit. The nozzle's wrong; must be the one they've repaired. The sparks blew out a blind cone or blister when the gas ignited, started an uprush of matter. . . ."

He stopped, gasping, staring through the swirling, darkening smoke clouds at the lurching spare liner. It could not land in the clearing in any case; it was far too huge.

"Ahoy!" he bawled, and an amplified voice thundered out over the din of escaping volcanic steam.

"You have been seen. Prepare for rope ladder escape."

"Make it snappy!" Mart howled, jumping back as a lump of hot lava spattered onto his hand and stung viciously.

"This—this is all most disturbing," panted Walbrook, coming up through the smoke. "What do we do with the rope ladder? Hang onto it?"

"Or else fry," Mart answered him briefly. He swung round, struck with a sudden thought, stared in pitying amazement at the Rheans. Every one of them was lying on the already smouldering vegetation, gasping desperately, twisting and turning.

"Rawl, what's the matter?" he panted, lifted the head of the queer, bearded little ruler.

The strange creature tried to smile, choked over his words.

"Pa-parting is such sweet s-sorrow. . . ." he whispered. "Undertaking estimates g-given. Write for—for my prospectus. . . ." That was all he said, quivered and smiled over it, then relaxed.

"Dead," Mart said very quietly.

"Poor, strange people," Eda whispered, her eyes moist. "The noise?"

"Must have been," Mart muttered. "It nearly deafened us. To these creatures it must have been brain-destroying. Perhaps it's as well. What with the volcano and that faulty underjet on the ship the whole darned moon will be ablaze in an hour. . . ." He stared around pityingly, through the smoke, on the sprawled, child-like figures. Then he looked up at a yell from Emmot.

"The rope ladder! Come on!"

He tore towards it in frantic leaps as it hung like a runged snake from the twilit gloom. Then he was pulled up short as Mart seized him savagely by the shoulder.

"Lay off, can't you? Eda first! Up you get. . . ."

He swung the girl upwards. She gripped the rungs and began to climb. Emmot followed, and after him came the panting and thoroughly frightened judge.

MART came last, felt the ladder swinging him away from that fated clearing towards the clearer air. He could not take his eyes from that group of silent beings near their doomed, toy city.

"Pretenders, playing at life," he muttered, "only to meet death through the damnable blunderings of Earthlings. God, it's like mowing down children with ray guns—"

"Hey!" came Eda's voice from above him, and he looked up to see she'd reached the airlock.

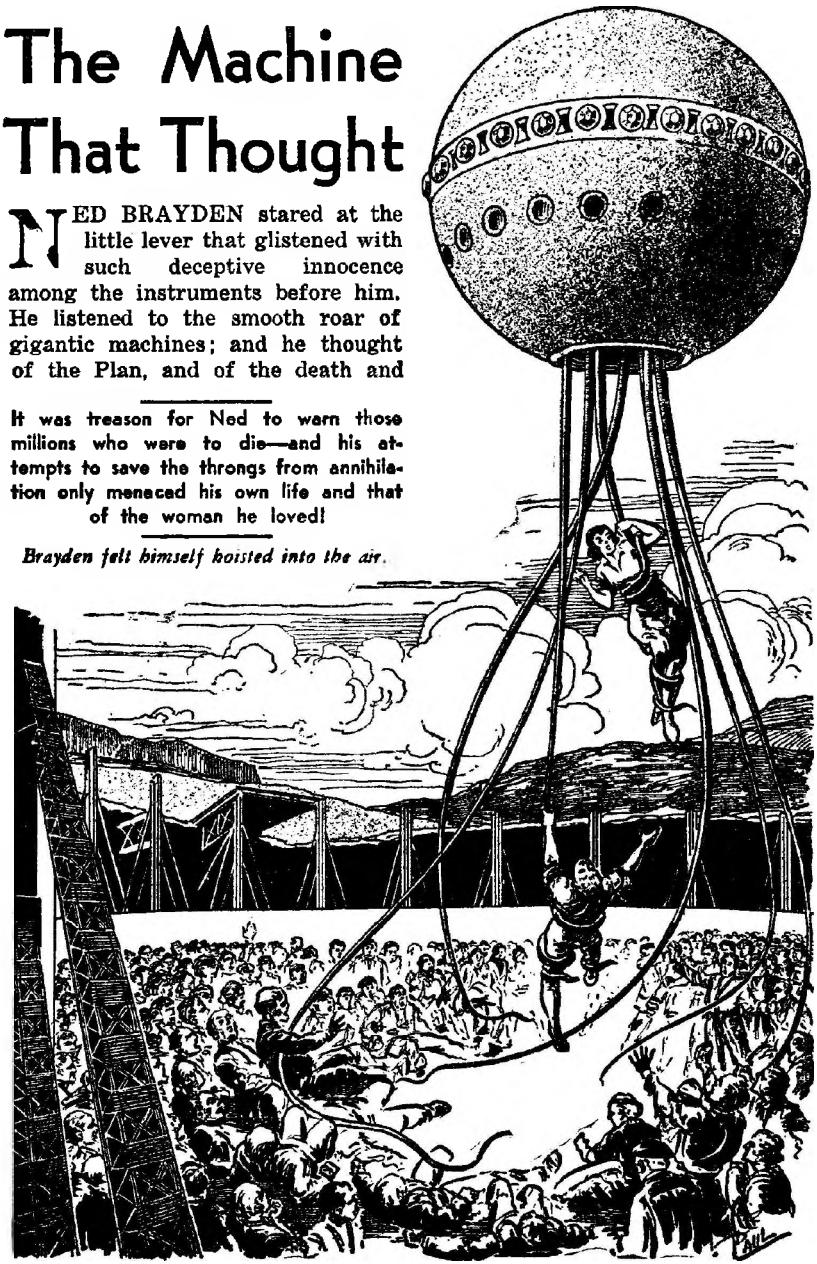
"Better come up," she called. "You might find it cold out there when we head off into space. . . ."

The smoke of the eruption hid the dead Pretenders from sight as Mart began to climb. . . .

The Machine That Thought

NED BRAYDEN stared at the little lever that glistened with such deceptive innocence among the instruments before him. He listened to the smooth roar of gigantic machines; and he thought of the Plan, and of the death and

It was treason for Ned to warn those millions who were to die—and his attempts to save the throngs from annihilation only menaced his own life and that of the woman he loved!



Brayden felt himself hoisted into the air.

destruction that it was his duty to bring about. Just a gesture—just a slight movement of that tiny lever, and, within sixty short minutes, all the hell of man's magic would break loose. Two billion human beings would perish, as if stricken by the blasts of an Armageddon.

Ned Brayden shut his eyes wearily, but even then he could see that gleaming metal grip that could open the floodgates of catastrophe; for he had been staring at it for a long time, and the impression of it was burned deep into his retinas. It was as though he had been looking too long at a brilliant, incandescent light.

He could feel his strong young body trembling now; he was weakening. Or was it weakness? There were pictures in his brain—vivid pictures of accusing eyes and of human faces contorted with fear and pleading. He had never seen this thing so clearly before—the horror of it, the brutality. He wondered what it was that had so sharpened his vision. Perhaps it was the whir of machines, so real now to his ears, and the shouts of slaving men, ringing through this buried realm of the Cyclops. He had never known this place so intimately before.

A rank, oil-tainted draft blew into the little control chamber—but mixed with its scalding smell was the faint aroma of exotic perfume. Ned heard a light footfall behind him. Slowly he turned around.

"A coward, eh, Ned Brayden? I suspected as much. I followed you here to make sure."

THE speaker was slender and pert, and as coldly beautiful as a diamond—or so she seemed. Her hair was blonde. Bits of her life had left their marks on her perfect face, and in the posture of her slight, delicate form. That truculent air spoke of a recklessness that had hurled a gaudy space flier at deathly speed around the moon. That bronzed skin had come from days of lolling and frolicking in bright sunshine. That half-petulant smile of self-esteem, spoke of a childish will accustomed to wield the toys of the gods. And yet there was a certain grandeur about her—borrowed, perhaps, from the towering palaces of quartz and chromium, where, in the pure, clear air of the Upper World, dwelt the ruling class, or Highs, of which both she and the man she had addressed were members.

Brayden's dark skin flushed with anger. "The Lows may be rats according to our way of thinking, Laurell," he stated levelly. "They may be dangerous, but they're human. I can't kill them. I thought once that I could; but I can't."

"They're the scum of the Earth!" Laurell Winters retorted with a sneer. "We don't need them any more. The robots, developed by the thought machines at the Place of Knowledge, are sufficiently perfected to do all of the work. We're going to be rid of the constant danger of revolt once and for all! Now, do as you've been ordered, and then let's get out of here while the timers function."

But something had happened to Ned Brayden—something that had been a revelation to him. Being in this acrid nether-region had given him a fresh point of view. Now that he was here in this underworld of artificially excavated tunnels and factories, he saw himself and his kind just as they were—aimless, lazy parasites of a lowlier, though far more useful folk, whom, hundreds of years ago, his and Laurell's ancestors had dominated, and had since

held in slavery by cruel heartlessness and brutality. The result was that he was suddenly nauseated by his own sleek, muscular person, and by the very name of aristocrat.

"No, Laurell," he said quietly. "I can't obey, and wouldn't if I could. I love you enough to be frank."

She looked at him for a moment, her amber eyes wide, as though she doubted the testimony of her ears. Ned had talked of love often before; and his avowal now in that direction had not surprised her. But the revolt against the traditions of his people—that was different. Laurell's face whitened with fury.

"You love me!" she spat. "I don't want your love, you fool! Stand aside, and let me do what must be done!"

But Ned's firm jaw only hardened. Lights, winking unheeded signals on the instrument panels, flickered in his face, giving to it the aspect of a devil's.

"No," he repeated.

Laurell Winters wasted no time with a verbal reply. She was a person of many aspects, with reckless impulsiveness dominating a willful, self-centered soul. She was beautiful and wild that way; perhaps, too, she had the seeds of gentleness and consideration hidden within her; but they had been strangled before they had had a chance to sprout.

She jerked a small neutron gun from her belt. Its paralyzing beam thrilled into Ned's lower limbs before he could do anything to avoid the danger. His nerves gripped by cold, numbing fire, he crumpled to the floor.

LAURELL WINTERS bounded lithely to the lever of grim fate. With a click almost smothered by the busy throb of huge engines in nearby chambers, it snapped over. There were other clicks as electrical impulses transferred the message of wholesale murder to countless instruments of death, methodically located throughout the vast subterranean habitat of the myriad slaves. Within an hour, when the timers of those instruments had completed their arresting cycle, holocaust would be unleashed. And no change now, in that particular phase of baneful destiny, was possible. Those mechanisms of destruction, once given the energizing surge of power, could not be stopped or wrecked in time. Anticipating that such efforts might be made on the part of the doomed, the Highs had seen to that. Only flight now might be the means of saving life; and if there were no warning, there could be no flight either.

But Ned Brayden's mind had seemed to work more swiftly, even, than those soulless fabrications of man's science. Perhaps there was madness in that functioning; certainly there was in it no primary thought of personal safety. Even as his knees had crumpled under the stabbing beam of the neutron gun, he had thrown himself toward Laurell Winters. He had fallen heavily, his clutching fingers just an inch from the natty boots which covered her slender legs. During the moment required for her to reach the lever and move it, he had dragged himself forward on his unparalyzed elbows. Now his fingers darted out again and grasped her ankle. With vengeful force, he jerked, using all the strength he could muster. Laurell Winters went down painfully, and with a ludicrous lack of dignity.

Nor was this the end. The fury that possessed Ned Brayden was far from spent. Still sprawling, he yanked the girl toward him. No time

was given her to protest, or even to realize clearly that retribution was at hand. Ned struck with anger-driven fierceness. His knotted fist landed, not once, but three times, against tender, pampered flesh. The thud of the blows was faintly audible even above the sounds of machinery. A curly blonde head snapped backward, like a whip being cracked. Beautiful amber eyes took on a glassy look; blood spurted from a delicate turned-up nose; and rosebud lips that could curve with such haughty insolence, were bruised like the petals of a flower beaten by a mallet.

Laurell Winters was out—and out cold.

His thin face dark with anger, Ned thrust her aside. Feeling was coming back into his numbed legs now. Possessed by some driving force far above normal, he tried to raise himself erect, only to sprawl flat again. But he managed to drag himself to the control-room phone, from which radiated the vast communicator network of the underworld. Reaching upward, he snapped a switch. Now he knew that he could give information verbally to all the members of the immense slave class.

What he said seemed utterly insane, for it made him an outcast, a hunted man, to both of the two great strata of society. His mind was working with lightning swiftness.

"People of the underworld," he began. "Attention! One who believes that you have the right to live, speaks. The Highs have decided that you are all to die at the end of an hour. Many of you, knowing the degree of perfection achieved in the robots, have anticipated such a move; and so you will not find it difficult to believe what I say. The devices which are to bring about the end, were put into position with the greatest secrecy. The timers have already been set in motion. In an hour there will be countless explosions. Each will release an enormous volume of corrosite gas. Metal and flesh alike will be swiftly eaten and dissolved by its corrosive action. You will die horribly, unless you can find means of exit to the surface soon enough. The Highs no longer need either you or the machines you tend, for old methods have become obsolete. The thought machines could have devised robots to replace you hundreds of years ago, had it been deemed necessary.

"I have only some small advice to give; the rest is up to you. First, do not forget the discipline the Highs have taught you. It will increase your chances of survival to keep cool and orderly. Second, just before the corrosite is released, it is the intention of your masters that all surface exits shall be closed. To avoid being trapped, you must destroy the devices that work the doors. Third, there is a great air and space fleet stationed near the St. Louis exit. Perhaps you can find a way to capture or wreck it. If you fail to do either of these things, you are still doomed; but if you can actually capture the fleet, the world is yours. Last of all: Doubtless you have carefully worked out emergency plans. Doubtless, too, you have secret leaders. Appeal to those leaders to guide you to the fulfilment of those plans. There is no more for me to say. Good luck!"

NED BRAYDEN snapped the switch of the phone wearily. He could have observed by television the results of the bombshell he had cast among the Lows, had he so desired; but he did not wish to add the

grimness of reality to the vivid things that he could imagine—the consternation on human faces, the fear written there, the brute power set in motion by that fear—women screaming like mad fiends, men with great knotted muscles hurrying from the blazing beauty of Cyclopean forges and factories, bent on rescuing their loved ones and wreaking vengeance upon their oppressors.

Even now, Ned Brayden could hear a sudden change in the sounds that came to his ears. Engines were grinding to harshly abrupt stops, men were shouting with a new note of dread excitement in their voices.

Would those men seek him out, to learn the motives that had led him to unmask the vast lethal scheme? No, that was unlikely, even though it would be quite simple to locate the phone from which his voice had emanated. The Lows had other, far more important matters to occupy their energies now.

Ned wondered in an odd, fogged way what would happen to him during the hour of destruction. Death seemed inevitable; and yet, with a curious confidence, he still felt that there must be some other way out. Perhaps it was only the past ease of every detail of his hitherto idyllic life, that made him feel so; or perhaps there was in him a primitive self-reliance, which made him believe in his own ability to master any situation.

He looked about the chamber. It was not large, but packed in it were many gleaming instruments whose burnished delicacy reflected the soft glow of illuminators. Each of those instruments spoke of deific triumphs achieved by the thought machines, for fragile, petty humanity.

Could he lock himself in this room, and chance survival of the holocaust? No, he decided quickly; it was impossible for anyone to remain here alive for long. The massive valve of the door could be closed, and the ventilators sealed; but even then the terrific chemical action of the corrosite would soon burn through the steel of door and walls alike, evolving heat enough in the process to roast a man as if he had been dipped in molten metal.

Ned had not forgotten Laurell Winters. He looked down at her now, lying sprawled on the floor, with a twinge of pity. She was still unconscious. But it was not her battered lips and her tangled hair, her bloody face or the pathetic, crumpled position in which she lay, that aroused that pity; for he had not relented his act of violence. Rather, it was the thought of this petulant, unruly, irresponsible child, playing god with borrowed lightnings in whose creation she had taken no more part than she had taken part in the creation of the sun. Her immense, hollow conceit had aroused his anger and contempt. She had made a fool of herself. Perhaps he had, too; perhaps in his snap judgments, his zeal for justice had overstepped the bounds of reason. He wasn't sure. But one thing he knew: he loved Laurell Winters. The reason why was a bit hazy. Maybe it was those weaknesses of hers that he loved. He was sure that it was not primarily her rich, vivacious beauty that had attracted him.

He had no complete plan of action, for such was impossible—but he made his decisions as quickly and as logically as he could.

In a locker against one wall, he found several coverall suits. From among them he selected two of the dirtiest. He smeared his own hands and face with the black grease that

stained them, and did likewise to Laurell. Then he donned one of the suits over his own trim attire, and similarly disguised his senseless companion.

One thing more. It was an afterthought. It could be of no use at all unless he could find a way to escape from this underworld in time. But if he got to the surface, it might be helpful in eluding the many dangers that would exist for him there. There was a little signaling device attached to his belt. Skilfully, he worked a button projecting through its case, striking out dots and dashes in a secret code.

NO HUMAN being would understand the message. But MZ-1 would; and MZ-1 was soulless and without fear. It did not need courage to carry out the commands of its owner. Its marvelous complexities of glass, rubber, and metal embodied at once emotionless logic and calm, cosmic power. While its armored integument remained intact, it would always obey with unruffled efficiency.

Ned Brayden finished the message quickly. Then, his face hardening, he picked up the girl and strode from the room. Though outcast, he was prepared to battle the unknown.

The engines in the huge adjoining chamber were silent and gleaming under the glow of illuminators. There was no one about. Ned passed through several other rooms and emerged into a tunnel, which was one of the many that encircled the Earth in an immense network, probing even beneath the beds of the deepest oceans to contact the cities of the Lows, located there to wrest exotic riches from the sea.

Ned leaped lithely onto a slowly traveling belt-walk on which cargo was piled. He skipped across it with his burden, and bounded onto the next belt-walk which moved faster; thence he skipped to the third walk, which moved fastest of all.

Since both he and Laurell were effectively disguised, no one hindered them. But he could not suppress a small, tweaking thrill of dread at the thought of what might happen to them should they be identified as Highs. The fact that he had given the warning, even if proven, would be of little use. When human beings go mad with fear and anger, they easily forget the gentler virtues of gratitude and justice.

The people crowding around Ned Brayden on the belt-walk seemed dazed as if they had been struck a heavy physical blow. They smelled death; the story of its sudden revelation was stamped into their grimy faces. They knew that the Grim Reaper was creeping toward them; still they could not quite realize the fact.

From along the tunnel ahead there came screams and shouts and babblings, mingling with the roar of traffic.

In a matter of five minutes, Ned Brayden was in the midst of it. The belt-walk carried him and Laurell to an immense artificial cavern, whose white-enameled dome covered what might have been called a civic plaza. There was a small park here, with grass and a few stunted trees growing under the light of great sunlamps. There were various amusement devices. Even the Lows, here in this buried world, where they were held prisoners because such had seemed the most effective means of holding them in check, had enjoyed their little scraps of natural beauty and freedom and recreation.

However, none of them thought

of such things now. Ned tried to shut his eyes to the white faces around him, and he tried not to hear the whimperings of children who had never seen the sun, for these impressions made him hate himself and all his kind. Racing belt-walks were carrying thousands of people into the cavern from every direction. The din was terrific, but there was a measure of order, too. These folk had always lived in the shadows; they had learned more completely than any High could, the cheapness of existence.

Elevator cars, meant to function like projectiles in the helical coils of an old-fashioned magnetic gun, were being loaded with passengers, surface-bound. A man, clad in a gray uniform, was shouting orders and commands which the throng around him obeyed without question. Other men were distributing small, glistening weapons, made in some secret workshop. A big electro-magnetic wave-projector that could melt metal and burn human flesh to ashes was being trundled into an elevator car. Squat and ugly, it bore a curious resemblance to a giant black-and-silver toad.

THE air was hot and reeking. Mingled in it were many odors, including the stench of sweat. Ned was surrounded by a dense-packed crowd that surged gradually forward toward the lifts. Frequently he glanced at the chronometer strapped to his wrist. Swift minutes were slipping away. Ten. Fifteen. Twenty. Inexorably the moment of doom was approaching. Men, waiting to board lifeboats on some sinking ship of ancient times, must have felt the same uncertain tension that he was feeling now.

Brayden looked down at the girl in his arms, and found that her amber eyes, swollen-lidded and terrified, were looking up into his. Laurell Winters was again cognizant of her surroundings.

Her habitual recklessness made him a little afraid. "I'm sorry, Laurell, for what I did to you," he whispered. "But don't talk now. Scold me some other time, if there is another time, but not here. If these people knew that we were Highs, we'd be torn to pieces."

"Put me down," the girl replied wearily. "I'm all right."

For the moment she wasn't quite like her usual haughty self. The peril she was aware of had subdued her to some slight extent.

He lowered her to her feet and they waited together in sullen silence. Presently flame pistols were issued to them, as to their companions. A few seconds later, they were aboard a lift, whizzing its rapid flight upward.

As they neared the surface, they heard the muffled, thudding din of what seemed to be heavy explosions. Just what the noise signified, they did not know. Nor did any of the Lows aboard the elevator seem to know either. They only whispered infrequent words and waited tensely, as if ready to spring.

A little girl of about fourteen, seeing Laurell's chalk-white face, battered, and smeared with blood, offered her a drink of water from a dented flask. Laurell accepted with dazed and wondering puzzlement, as though she had doubted that such a kindness on the part of a Low was possible.

"Thanks," she said dully, almost grudgingly, and the girl smiled an acknowledgment.

Laurell's benefactress was strangely pretty, with her dark wavy hair,

broad features, and full, red mouth. She might have been the offspring of a beautiful nymph, and a shaggy, abhorrent satyr. But in her eyes, even now, mixed with a look of fear, was a wild yearning for all that had been beyond her reach.

Events moved swiftly then; the kind angel from the underworld was gone, lost in the crowd that packed the lift. The elevator, rising from the bowels of the Earth, reached a colossal surface station. It was oval in form—a sort of crater—open to the sky. Derrick-like constructions, topping numerous shafts, dotted it.

It was night, but there was radiance more harsh than starshine to illumine the surrounding scene. The silver and crystal towers of thirty-fourth century St. Louis loomed around the pit, but they were not as they should be now. From electro-magnetic wave projectors mounted in the station amphitheater, slender, misty beams slanted upward; and wherever they touched that glorious architecture, it reddened, grew incandescent, and crumbled, great chunks of it falling thousands of feet, making thunderous sounds of explosive violence. Except for a few hundred robots, already for the most part out of action, there had been none to resist the surprise onslaught of the Lows.

Ned's warning, luck, and good preparation had combined with a certain amount of negligence on the part of the Highs, to give the people of the depths their chance to win a place in the sun. Suspicious of their proud masters, they had been making ready secretly for a long time. Their shrewd leaders had known that opportunity might come at any time; and so they had prepared to act at a moment's notice.

They were winning. The night was full of screams and yells of triumph. The flames of destruction glistened on the sweat-streaked faces around Ned and Laurell. The huge, tiered platforms of the air and space fleet landing stages were already in the possession of the Lows. The latter had surprised the lolling robot-guard completely. The fleet was theirs; and that fleet was the military battering-ram of a world. Possession of it bestowed the power to crush all opposition.

NED BRAYDEN was not happy because of this outcome. He could not be. Had he been too impulsive in his actions? He was full of doubts and many conflicting emotions. All his friends and relatives belonged to the aristocracy of the Earth. Most of them—his father and his uncles, for instance—would never yield to any democratic argument. He could never do anything more for those hard, cruel old men. They would destroy him on sight, if they learned of the part he had taken in the revolt. All in all, the situation looked very bad. His own future was hazy and uncertain. There was but one thing to console him: in this debacle that was happening, there was retribution, if there was not justice.

Laurell's attitude was far more definite. She cast one look at the grim reality of crumbling glory; then all her self-control evaporated. She laughed hysterically.

"You fool!" she screamed. "You damned, crazy fanatic, Ned Brayden! This is all your fault! My parents will be killed because of you! I want every dirty Low to know that we're Highs! I want to fling the knowledge into their faces so that they can finish me too. And you—you—"

Ned stifled her words with his palm then; but it was too late. They were hemmed in by masses of humanity. Questioning eyes were turned toward them. At first those eyes were puzzled and unbelieving. Then comprehension dawned in them. There was only one way to deal with Highs. The look in surrounding eyes changed again, this time to a glitter that was like that of cold steel. Hard, work-developed muscles strained. What followed was like a landslide in its swiftness and force.

Ned Brayden tried to use his flame pistol; but it was jammed against his side by crowding bodies. Failing in this, he fought with every ounce of strength and fury that his lithe young body possessed. But his efforts were pitifully inadequate. Dazed and bleeding, he went down, the form of the girl he had tried to protect from the results of her own folly, falling limply across his chest.

Something stayed the progress of further vengeance. It was a rattling rumble from down the shafts which led into the depths of the Earth. Mingled with it were hoarse, strangled screams from human throats. They faded out at once, and flames puffed from the shaft mouths —green flames like those of copper oxidized at a high temperature. And there was heat, too, acrid and scorching. It was evolved by the chemical action of corrosite gas, consuming metal as easily as it consumed the tender substance of human flesh. The moment of the unleashing of the forces of death had arrived. Millions of Lows were still down there in the depths, perishing; though in the hour of warning the larger percentage of them must have escaped by the surface exits scattered over the crust of the Earth.

A moment of tension passed, during which the survivors were on the verge of mad flight, which would have resulted in hundreds of them being fatally trampled. But discipline won in the end, and the traps at the tops of the shafts, blocked in response to Brayden's warning, were closed at last. For a short interval, the holocaust that raged below was sealed up. Meanwhile the juggernaut of revolt could roll on.

But it halted for another short interval. Out of the night there came a smooth, even drone. A spherical shape appeared over the crumbling towers of St. Louis. It glinted in the flickering lights, as it flew through the air without visible means of propulsion. It had ports like any other space craft, but around its equator were glittering crystalline bosses, which gave the suggestion of eyes, watchful and intent. And there were arms, too, metallic and prehensile, dangling in a cluster from the pole of its lower hemisphere. This was no simple craft of the void.

Ned Brayden, almost stunned though he was, still noticed its approach. "MZ-1!" he muttered thickly. It had answered his call.

THE monster robot of the skies hurtled in his direction. Its tentacular arms lashed like vengeful whips that sent Lows sprawling by the dozens. But when those tendrils groped for Ned and his companion, their touch was as gentle, almost, as the caress of a mother. Brayden felt himself hoisted into the air. A door opened in the side of the huge sphere, and the tendril that clutched him thrust him through the opening. Laurell followed, borne by another coiling arm. They were in a bewilderingly complex control room.

However, there were things there which did not belong in the pilot chamber of any ordinary vessel. Among them was a large, square case, from which many wires radiated. It contained the cool, synthetic intellect of MZ-1. Minds that could compare with it in keenness and power, existed only in the Place of Knowledge. MZ-1 was not like the worker and soldier robots whose simple reasoning faculties are adapted only to routine duties. MZ-1 was the first of its kind; it was a superthing, for in it were united the strength and mobility of the fastest space ship, and the mental powers of a thought machine.

The latter were marvelous fabrications now. Five hundred years ago a genius named Benz had invented the first. Its mental abilities had been about equal to those of a man, though its memory and its mathematical capacities were more accurate. Benz had made a score of the machines, and he had put them to the task of designing others. Improvements had been rapid. The first machines had swiftly become obsolete. Those they had invented had taken their place; and these latter, in turn, invented sentient mechanisms which were a little ahead of themselves. So it had gone, step by step, year after year, until the synthetic intellects at the Place of Knowledge had far outstripped the minds of men, and had reached a level of thought that was truly deific.

It might have been said that Benz was the last human being really to think. After his time, all thought and all invention was mechanical. The Highs had retained only the will that ruled a world. The thought machines could have ruled much better than they; but being selfless, they had never contested the rights of their masters. To obey was their only purpose.

Ned Brayden lay on the cold metal floor within MZ-1, panting. From somewhere a musical voice warbled a question:

"Where do you wish me to take you, Chief?"

The youth, knowing that there was no place on Earth where he could find permanent safety, hadn't much of an idea of what sort of answer to give; and so he ordered at random: "The Rendezvous, MZ-1."

The Rendezvous was situated in a little mountain valley far to the west. It was the place where most of Ned's and Laurell's friends spent their idle, aimless lives. It was a beautiful spot, where every pleasure and charm of which science and art could conceive, existed.

"I have it, Chief. To the Rendezvous," MZ-1 replied.

The great sphere swung deftly in the air and shot westward over the now falling towers of St. Louis. It was like some omnipotent god, or genie, rather; for gods do not obey the fragile, erratic wills of mortals.

And so the Rendezvous was reached. Its rich gardens were dusky under the stars; its spires and pavilions were white, like calm ghosts. All seemed still peaceful here.

MZ-1 descended, then checked itself. Now it floated motionless a few feet off the ground. Ned Brayden opened the door and clambered forth, assisting Laurell, still half dazed as a result of the mauling she had received at the hands of the Lows. The world was still and fresh with the odor of dew and flowers.

No one could be seen, and there were no lights. But Ned's mind, traveling in its usual groove in this

peaceful place, did not think of caution. He and Laurell had advanced into a grove of trees, when, from out of the shadows, a voice rasped with shrill, fear-laden fury:

"Stop, Ned Brayden!" The voice was familiar. Once it had been that of a friend; but in its tone now, there was a promise of death.

Ned halted. In his recent scuffle with the Lows, his flame pistol had been taken from him, and he had not thought to rearm himself from MZ-1's arsenal. Laurell was also without a weapon, but perhaps that was fortunate.

THE young man peered in the direction from which the command had come. Hurrying out of the gloomy portico of a building concealed among the trees was a group of young people. Several of them carried flame pistols, the muzzles of which, threateningly directed, glinted in the starlight.

Some one switched on a small illuminator beam, and by its reflection, Ned was able to see their faces.

The one in the lead—he who had given the order to stop—was Arne Melrose. He was a slender, studious-appearing cherub, with large eyes and fluffy golden hair. Ordinarily his lips were twisted into a one-sided grin of boredom, but now the smirk that curved them seemed more than a little mad with mingled anger and fright. As Ned looked at him, he somehow remembered, in spite of the danger of his own position, that Arne's hobby—his sole occupation, in fact—was the cataloging of Venusian plant life, all of which had been cataloged long since by other, wiser men than himself; yet Arne had always been inordinately proud of this occupation.

Anticipating a verbal outburst from Melrose, Ned said nothing.

Arne began to talk in a low, strained tone, evidently making a fierce effort to control himself.

"When we first saw your craft approaching, we thought that it was one of the ships the Lows have stolen," he said. "We thought it was coming here to destroy us. But then we saw that it was MZ-1, and we did not know what to believe. We recognized you by the lights of the cabin as you descended from the exit. It was clear to us, then, what we must do.

"An agent of our people escaped from the underworld a few minutes before the corrosite was released. He was unable to give warning of the revolt in time; but he heard your speech to the Lows, Ned Brayden, and he recognized your voice. We're going to kill you for what you have done to us. Do you understand? We're going to kill you!"

Melrose's voice ended in a rasping scream. The muscles of his face were jerking violently. There was no need to look at the flame pistol that trembled in his hand to know that he meant what he said. At the moment he was almost a maniac.

Ned struggled to keep cool, for everything depended on his poise. His purpose in coming here to the Rendezvous had been hazy; now he sought to clarify in his mind his subconscious motive.

"Just a minute, Arne," he said at last. "I admit that I acted on impulse when I warned the Lows. But I still believe that what has happened is closer to real justice than if the plan to wipe them out had been successful. What will happen to us as a result is not very clear to me; but we're all young. Our ideas of right and wrong, and of other values, aren't as fixed as those of our par-

ents. In consequence, there should be some hope that we will be able to adjust ourselves to a new order of things. So I came here with some dim notion of taking you all to a place of safety where we could get a fresh start."

"He talks like that!" Laurell Winters burst out suddenly. "He talks like that, when all our misfortunes are his fault! All the Earth belongs to the Lows now, or will within a few hours. We'll be murdered if we remain here! But where else can we go? We aren't like the beasts that live in the woods. We're civilized people!"

There was much that was but thinly veiled by her words: haughty pride, conceit, and selfish weakness, all betraying the emasculation of a once energetic clan. Ned saw it not only in Laurell and Arne, but in himself and the others as well. They were all of them beautiful, shallow children of a golden age wrought in blood and sweat that was not their own. In only one respect did he differ from his companions, and this difference he scarcely saw himself. He possessed, in spite of everything, the atavistic capacity for original and courageous thought and action.

THERE was a long, tense pause, during which no one moved or spoke. There was no sign that his arguments had produced a promising effect upon his audience. The baneful muzzles of flame pistols were still directed toward him. To move would have meant instant demise.

Then, from far over the frosty mountain peaks, there came a sullen droning. At last some of the ships captured by the Lows were approaching. Aristocratic jaws dropped in awe and fright; sleek muscles trembled as security-weakened souls recognized the advance of an appalling danger from out of the darkness.

Ned smiled grimly. "MZ-1 is at your disposal," he remarked, "unless you prefer to stay here and meet a glorious end."

For a fleeting second or two, pride wrestled with the world-old law of self-preservation; then it went down to an ignoble defeat.

"I will—go," Arne Melrose stammered sullenly, lowering his weapon.

And fifty other young Highs gave assent to Brayden's suggestion. Even Laurell Winters did not protest.

With no thought of their personal belongings, they clambered into the ship-like interior of MZ-1, metal genie of the thirty-fourth century.

"But where do you intend to take us, Ned Brayden?" one of the girls asked.

Ned gave a rueful shrug. "I don't know," he responded. "We will let MZ-1 decide."

His words aroused no surprise in his companions. For half a millenium all of the heavy thinking of a world had been done by mechanical intellects, vastly more keen and far-seeing than those of men.

However, some vagrant whim, or intuitive wisdom perhaps it was, prompted Brayden to make a strange and original experiment.

His command to his mighty slave was brief, but its significance was scarcely trivial: "Do what you think is best for our welfare, and for the welfare of all, MZ-1," he ordered. "I make you our absolute master. If we weaken, be hard."

Never before, on Earth at least, had a thought machine been granted such freedom.

Many of Ned's companions gave him looks of doubt and resentment; but he had already proved himself a leader, and there was no protest.

And from the vocal mechanism of the great flying robot came words that were quietly logical, but already somehow stern. "It shall be so, Chief."

The metal genie was now far above the ground. Without hesitation, it shot straight toward the approaching formation of hostile craft, whose lights gleamed among the stars.

"Not in that direction, MZ-1!" Arne Melrose shouted. "Turn back! The Lows will kill us!"

"I have been commanded," MZ-1 responded with musical calm. "No retraction of that command is possible now, for my owner has told me to be hard. The coward's existence is an unhappy one, and if it is ended the loss is small. But you are not cowards; in your veins flows the blood of great ancestors. There is courage in that blood. It is best for your welfare that you use it, even though you perish. Fight for your lives!"

"That is—that is work for—for the soldier robots!" Arne stammered.

"The robots are securely locked in their storage compartments," MZ-1 replied. "I shall not release them. The task is yours."

Ned Brayden had already leaped to the controls of an electro-magnetic wave projector whose stubby snout was thrust through an airtight shield in the outer wall of the chamber. There were other projectors set at regular intervals around the sides of the room; and now the Highs swiftly manned them, for there was no other way that their refuge might be defended.

Laurell Winters was among the first to follow Ned's example. Her small hands gripped gleaming controls. Valiantly she strove to maintain her poise. Attempting to be casual, she sighed histrionically.

"It is really unpleasant to have to humor a madman," she remarked.

However, Ned paid no attention to this jibe, directed toward himself. In him, at last, was rising a real admiration for Laurell Winters.

ARNE MELROSE was trembling violently. He seemed on the verge of tears. But after a moment, he seemed to get a better hold on himself, either by a tremendous effort of will, or by that peculiar psychic miracle which allows a person's emotions and feelings to go only so far, and then imposes on them a check, which allows necessary actions of valor to take place.

Droning thunderously, MZ-1 hurtled on toward the advancing ships of the Lows. Somewhere in the darkness beneath were snowy mountains and beautiful gorges that marvelous science had transformed into a playground for the Highs.

From wave projectors aboard the enemy craft, faint beams were lancing out, groping for the great spherical robot, whose identity was known to everyone on the face of a planet. That it was the property of Ned Brayden, young aristocrat, was common knowledge.

He and his companions were replying, now, to the fire. A red spot appeared on one of the advancing ships, brightening to dazzling brilliance. Molten steel dripped as the beam bored through the craft as a hot iron might bore through wax. Ned felt a surge of exultation as the vessel began its long, crazy plunge. Even Melrose's eyes were shining—not with pleasure alone, but with surprise. Something primitive and unexpected had risen to the fore in him, something fierce and reckless that his precise, petty past had never

offered. For a few fleeting instants, he seemed taller and harder than was his wont.

Then MZ-1 gave a lurch. There was a crackling in its massive hull—the sound of metal expanding under terrific heat. For a moment survival and destruction hung in the balance as the robot of the skies tore through the midst of the opposing fleet. Then MZ-1 had passed on, out of range of the lethal beam, and had whistled away, higher into the stratosphere. The Lows could not turn their ships around quickly enough to give effective pursuit.

"We've won!" somebody shouted. "We've got through!" Those words were an expression of a strange, novel thrill felt by all who were being borne on through the night by the great sphere.

Once again its musical voice spoke: "Yes, we have won, Chosen. Now there is a bit of destruction that we must accomplish. And then—" The sentence was left unfinished.

But the super-robot flew on unerringly. In a matter of minutes, hundreds of miles were covered. The shore of a broad river was reached, and here MZ-1 checked its awful speed. Beneath, under a pale moon, loomed a vast, silvery dome. The passengers recognized it at once. It was the Place of Knowledge, where the marvelous synthetic intellects resided.

"It is best for all who remain on Earth that this monumental triumph cease to exist," said MZ-1, "for it robs man of his purpose. He need not think, he need not have courage. He needs only to accept, and to become slothful. The Lows who have been slaves for so long would fall easy prey to such luxury. I have been ordered to benefit all, and the Lows, even though they are mad now with the lust for revenge, still are deserving. Destroy, Chosen!"

With little hesitation Ned and his companions obeyed, for they had all tasted a new and thrilling cup of life. They had felt the truth in MZ-1's words. There was no one here to hinder them in their task, and it was quickly completed. Electro-magnetic waves flashed downward. In dazzling heat, the dome and its inconceivably intricate contents wilted, leaving only a pool of incandescent liquid that hissed into the river.

MZ-1 swooped higher. The stars sharpened, and the blackness between them deepened. Interplanetary space had been reached.

"Where are we going now, MZ-1?" Ned Brayden asked.

"You need not know yet," was the reply. "Take events as they come. It is best."

Thus the long flight began, arduous, and fraught with uncertainty and the threat of death. Not many miles out, a faint hissing sound was noticed and the air within the huge robot's hull was palpably thinner and colder. MZ-1 had not gone unscathed through the formation of conquering battlecraft.

"The atmosphere is leaking away!" Arne Melrose shouted.

"Fix the leak, Chosen," MZ-1 ordered. "The robots could do the work, but you have your hands. Use them!"

CLUMSILY, inefficiently, but with a will, the young aristocrats bent to their task, for it was do or die. Soft hands, unaccustomed to the wielding of tools, were bruised and blistered; but at last the job was done. And again the owners of those hands felt an odd, almost

self-conscious satisfaction. Some of them, in reckless play, had faced danger before; but this was different. This was fact; this was necessity; this was accomplishment. Slowly but inexorably the plan evolved by MZ-1's far-seeing mind was working out.

So it went. Tender youth, used to sleeping on down, slept instead on floors of hard, cold steel. There was no food except nourishing, though tasteless, concentrates. Remasculation had begun.

At first there was much grumbling, whimpering, and cursing; but human beings are the most adaptable of all creatures. Presently, because such people are monotonous, and doubly so in the cramped confines of a space craft, the worst grumblers began to be looked upon with scorn. The result was that they did their best to mend their ways. Laughter became more common, but in it there was a touch of the grimness of maturity.

Weeks passed, and MZ-1 hurtled on, across the orbit of Mars, on which planet, as on Mercury and Venus, there were mines tended by a few Lows. Presently the asteroid belt was also astern.

At last, they arrived at the destination MZ-1 had picked. It was Io, a moon of Jupiter. Io was a primitive little world, almost never visited by man. But it was warm there, so close to the tremendous molten planet. The air was thin, but there was abundant plant and animal life in the deep valleys. Much of it was useful as food.

"Your new home, Chosen," said MZ-1. "Go forth. All of you have learned certain useful things, even in play. Some of you know a little of the science of medicine; others of you have some knowledge of the growth of vegetation. And so on. The climate is mild. You will thrive here, I think. A period of prosperity will come. You have tools and you have hands and minds with which to work. Go!"

All of the adventurers sensed a parting of the ways, a complete breaking off of ties with old, familiar things. Small wonder then that, though the new life held a promise of fresh and intriguing experience, still there were doubts and fears. Many pairs of eyes roved nervously, looking now through the windows where a sandy plain and forest-clad mountains were visible, and now back at the large square case that housed the strange mechanical genius of MZ-1.

"And if we choose to remain with you?" a girl named Emily Carter asked.

"In that event I would release the robots," MZ-1 replied. "I would order them to drive you out by force."

The adventurers saw that there was no choice. Conversing very little, they prepared for departure, gathering tools, weapons, and other paraphernalia.

Brayden was the last to leave. "And what of you, MZ-1?" he enquired.

"You shall see—what is best," was the response.

With a frown of puzzlement, Ned clambered from the exit. He saw that Laurell Winters was near him, but she moved away, turning her back. With the other members of the party she had been gay and talkative during most of the trip; but toward him she had maintained an attitude of sullen tolerance—and there was clearly no change in her now. Ned shrugged wearily; he had his pride, too; if she felt that way, he would make no advances. But he

could not help feeling, in this beautiful, alien environment, the cold touch of bitter loneliness.

The familiar drone of MZ-1's propulsive mechanism sounded behind him. He turned about, and all his companions did likewise. The spherical robot shot steeply upward into the purple firmament where hung vast, belted Jupiter and the others of its numerous retinue of satellites. Five thousand feet MZ-1 ascended, and there it halted, rigidly stationary, like a sentinel. For more than an hour the watchers on the ground continued to stare up at it, but it did not change position. At last, because nothing further happened, and because their vigil seemed without point, they turned to the tasks which must be done.

THE equivalent of an Earth-week went by. The tiny sun moved in its regular course across the heavens, regulating night and day. The former brought an ethereal enchantment to the green-clad valleys and crags of Io, for the moons and their monstrous primary were wondrously bright; the latter was a kind of soothing, golden dusk, for the sun was far away. But it was never cold; invisible heat rays streaming steadily from Jupiter, toward which Io presented but one face, maintained an even, comfortable warmth.

Much was accomplished by the colonists during that week. Rude, temporary huts were made. Gardens of strange Ioian flora were planted. Explorations were carried out. Yet, in spite of the work, there was much laughter and fun. No one regretted leaving the cramped confines of the huge robot guardian that still floated, motionless and grand, against the sky.

Oddly, Arne Melrose seemed the most pleased with the new order of things. He knew his botany, and his attempts to domesticate and raise food-plants gave him a definite objective.

"Maybe Utopia's coming at last," he said to Brayden one day. "If we work and fight hard enough."

Work and fight! Strange words on the lips of a youth like Melrose. But in a sense, the Melrose that once had been, was no more. He had found a purpose. He had learned the satisfaction of useful toil.

Laurell Winters was happy too; she hummed little ditties as she helped Arne with his tasks, or gathered wild fruit, or labored over a smoking campfire in her first efforts to master the culinary art. But so far, Ned Brayden was left severely out of her life.

Ned was full of plans. The colonists must have permanent homes; culture must be preserved; there must be comfort and a sane measure of luxury. Ned worked hard, but there was an ache within him that made him lonely and grim.

Developments came with unexpected suddenness. During an hour of leisure, he wandered up a gorge densely packed with trees that resembled oversized moss. Curious, gaudily colored lizards scampered and chirped around him. He caught one, and was examining it, when a stone, skilfully hurled, thudded against his skull. Light went out of his mind.

He awoke half choked. Someone had dragged him to a little mountain stream, that, pulled only by a feeble gravity, flowed with oily slowness down the center of the gorge. Icy water was being splashed into his face. Laurell was smiling down upon him.

"Don't tell me you threw that rock!" he growled angrily.

"I did," she responded impishly. "It makes us even, doesn't it? You, of course, remember that time you walloped me."

"Well?"

"Well, I thought maybe that if we were even we could start over with a clean—slate." There was a little catch in her voice as she finisned.

He sat up, a bit startled, and looked at her closely. At first glance she seemed just about as she had always been, except that her costume was frayed and had lost a few of its modish lines. She had the same curly blond hair, the same golden skin, with its lovely soft texture.

And there was so much of the old dare-devil glint in her amber eyes that one couldn't see the mistiness in them right away, or the cool courage.

Her mouth was curved with the mischievousness of a pixy, as of old, but in its corners were contrite and gentle shadows, too tiny to be noticed at once—but after a moment Ned Brayden did notice. There was no doubt about it: the diamond was still a diamond, but it had lost much of its false glitter.

Men have a way of responding to impulse when their vision is broadened like that, and Ned wasted no time. For a minute they clung to each other, tightly, fiercely, without saying anything. Thoughts and emotions moved too swiftly for verbal expression; but for such there was scarcely any need.

"I'm glad for everything that's happened," Laurell said at last, "even for that drubbing you gave me. But I was proud, and I had to punish you. Do you know what it was that did most to change me? It was that little girl giving me that drink of water when the lift was bringing us up from the underworld."

NED wasn't given a chance to reply just then. From overhead came a sudden droning. Together, he and Laurell looked up. The sun was setting. Reflecting its red rays was the spherical form of MZ-1 that had remained in motionless vigil for so long. It was not motionless any longer, however. Grandly and at terrific speed, it was plummeting downward toward the jagged crests of the mountains. In a moment it struck with a ground-shaking impact. Flame flashed, fragments of metal scattered. MZ-1 was no more.

"Why—why did it do that?" Laurell stammered.

Ned was white-faced, but calm. "It watched until it was sure we colonists could take care of ourselves, I guess," he replied. "Then, for the same reason that it ordered the thought machines at the Place of Knowledge destroyed, it destroyed itself. It is best we forget such mechanical minds can exist."

"No human could be so completely devoted as that," Laurell murmured.

"No," said Ned. "But MZ-1 wasn't human; it was just a machine. It was incapable of joy or sorrow or ambition; to itself, existence had no meaning. Its one purpose was to serve, and that purpose has come to an end."

There were sounds of excited voices from the direction of the camp. Ned Brayden took Laurell's hand, and together they walked through the gathering dusk toward the source of the sounds.

A faint wind blew through the moss-trees, making a low musical whisper that somehow reminded the youth of the voice of a departed friend. He seemed to hear that voice saying with paradoxical truth: "It is best."

THE END

Warning:—Don't try to fly to the moon until you've read about what you're up against!

HAZARDS OF SPACE FLIGHT

by DERWIN LESSER

ACCELERATION

BEFORE Man can travel successfully to other planets, there are several problems that must be taken into consideration. One of these is the matter of acceleration. Of course, there is no limit to the speed at which a human body can travel without harm—but sudden changes in speed or direction can easily prove fatal.

A vehicle containing human occupants bound for other worlds must leave the Earth starting at a slow rate of speed and build itself up gradually to a speed of any desired degree.

Were it possible to construct a gun that could expel a projectile with sufficient force for it to escape the gravitational pull of the Earth, it would be of little use to place people within the projectile, because the explosion, the sudden start, would crush all the occupants into unrecognizable pulp.

Deceleration would present a similar problem in the necessity of retarding speed gradually, so that an easy landing could be made—otherwise the speed of the ship and the force of gravity would cause such a vehicle to burn to a cinder in the friction of the atmosphere, like a meteor, or crash into a hopeless wreckage upon the surface.

This brings us to the problem of—

FUEL

IN ORDER to escape the gravitation of the Earth at an increasing rate of speed that the human body can stand, a tremendous amount of energy is necessary. Present experiments show the rocket principle to be a logical means of escape, but there is no known fuel that can be carried in sufficient quantities for the purpose. If the fuel were to give out before the ship had escaped from the Earth's pull, the consequences are readily discernible. Therefore, it is evident that some very concentrated and compact fuel is needed, and is yet to be developed. Should the power of the atom ever be released and controled, our problem of fuel is solved, for atomic power would provide energy thousands of times the efficiency of any fuel now being used.

Let us suppose that our ship is powered by atomic energy—once in the void, it would travel at a constant speed with the power turned off, because there would be no atmosphere to slow it down in free space. Additional power would be needed only for increasing the speed and landing. However, once we are free of the Earth, still another hazard looms—

METEOROIDS

"EMPTY" space, it is supposed, is filled with flying bits of matter, known as meteoroids. Most of them are so small that they are invisible from the Earth, but they are composed of metals and have tremendous speeds. If one of them crossed the path of the spaceship, even though it were the size of a pea, its speed would allow it to pass through walls of the hardest steel. The air of the ship could easily escape through these holes, unless there were adequate methods of shutting them up or repairing the damage. Of course, the larger meteoroids could utterly destroy the ship. These, however, might be sighted in time and the crash avoided, although a sudden change in the course might flatten the space-travelers against a wall of the ship. In the event of successfully escaping all meteoroids, our pioneers would also have the problem of—

RADIATION

IT IS known that the atmosphere of the Earth prevents most of the cosmic rays from reaching the surface, but those that do can penetrate many feet of lead—the most powerful rays known to Mankind. It is not known just what effects these cosmic rays have upon us or what would happen if we were not under their influence—but it is supposed that they are vital to life, in the state of diffusion in which they reach us. What would happen to persons exposed to these cosmic rays without the protection of the atmosphere, can only be imagined. Possibly, being infinitely stronger than radium rays, they would destroy human tissue. As cosmic rays permeate all space, there would be no escaping them. This problem would call for the development of some substance of construction that would keep out most of the cosmic rays. Let us assume that everything goes smoothly—the voyagers have atomic power for gradual acceleration and deceleration, they escape meteoroids and cosmic radiation, and have successfully launched a trip through space. But the planets are great distances apart, and it may take years to complete a single trip. Here human nature takes a hold, and we face—

MADNESS

IF THIS trip to an alien world is to occupy a long period of time, the space-travelers, after the initial wonder of the adventure had subsided, might find things quite boring. There would be no day or night, in space, and the passage of time could be reckoned only by timepieces. There would be practically no change in scenery, for the stars do not alter their places. Once the Earth had been left far behind, all space would be but a black blanket stippled with blinding points of light. It is not hard to imagine months of this monotony turning boredom into madness—unless there are enough diversions aboard the ship to keep the travelers occupied.

CONCLUSION

THESE are but a few of the difficulties that must be taken into consideration before we can hope for a successful space flight. But we must trust in Man's courage and ingenuity to overcome all obstacles and someday bring the Universe within our reach.

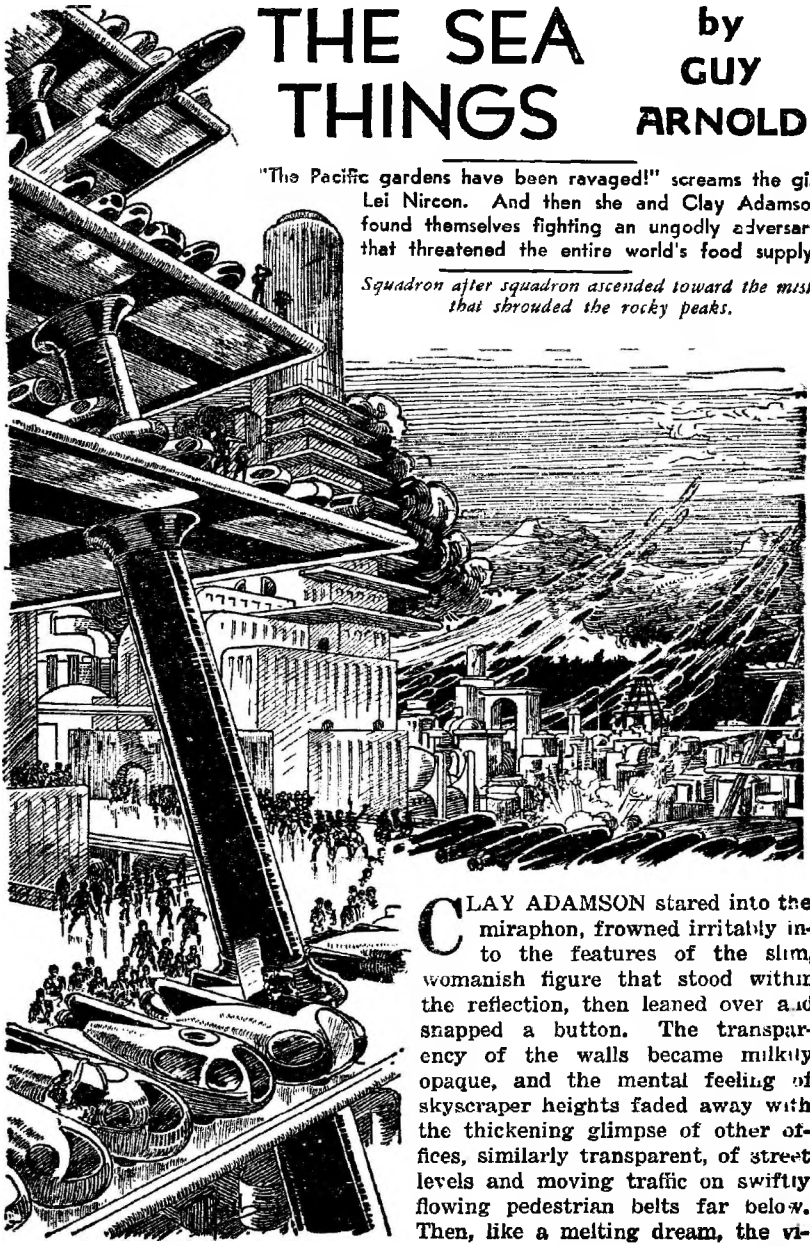
We must keep saying: "It can be done!"

THE SEA THINGS

by GUY ARNOLD

"The Pacific gardens have been ravaged!" screams the girl Lei Nircon. And then she and Clay Adamson found themselves fighting an ungodly adversary that threatened the entire world's food supply!

Squadron after squadron ascended toward the mists that shrouded the rocky peaks.



CLAY ADAMSON stared into the miraphon, frowned irritably into the features of the slim, womanish figure that stood within the reflection, then leaned over and snapped a button. The transparency of the walls became milkily opaque, and the mental feeling of skyscraper heights faded away with the thickening glimpse of other offices, similarly transparent, of street levels and moving traffic on swiftly flowing pedestrian belts far below. Then, like a melting dream, the vi-

sion was gone, and bare white walls replaced the angular expanses. The sun too, which had glimmered through the many stories of rooms and offices, had vanished, and the sudden cessation of the life-giving rays caused Adamson's scantily clad body to feel unaccountably naked. He felt cold and clammily unhealthy, although he knew that such an abrupt change from penetrating, invisible rays of solar emanations could have made but the slightest difference in that single instant. The four walls crowded upon him, and he had a sense as of being in a cavernous vault.

"All right," he growled into the miraphon, which still retained its vision. "This is the assistant director of Neptuna Foods and Sustenance Commission."

The figure, although obviously feminine in contour, was dressed very plainly in the blue garb of the Agriculture Division, with no artifice that tended to increase or accentuate the natural lure of womanhood, yet he saw that she was very comely in her normal physical attributes.

"This is Lei Nircon, director of gardening," came her voice, and its simple intonation and sincerity gave it a clear quality as of a bell. She appeared very perturbed, and spoke in a straight-forward, business-like tone. "The Pacific garden beds have been ravaged to such an extent that it will become necessary to curtail food allotments at the Neptuna populace centers."

"Good Lord!" groaned Clay Adamson with frank astonishment. "Why, it was only a week ago that our surplus was so great I ordered certain Polynesian garden tracts abandoned."

"I know it," answered Lei Nircon, director of gardening, who was speaking from the Pacific Agriculture Control Center on the mountainous peak in the Hawaiian mountain range. "And your order may well become tragic. We destroyed the South Sea Peninsula gardens and all of the lower sector products. Now we're facing a shortage, due to a scavenger horde newly arisen, which has attacked our crops."

CLAY ADAMSON arose to his feet, bewildered. He was tall, and more lithely proportioned than others in his official department. He shot a swift, frightened glance at the opalescent walls, as though eyes might penetrate the opaqueness, might seek a knowledge of his department that would become dangerous in the hands of spies from the Continent of Atlantan which lay beyond the Mississippi Straits. He tensed, and the muscles of his body lay rigid and trembling, though he hid the agitation of his eyes by closing them with a semblance of indolence. It was more than a premonition that caused him to reach up with a deft movement and flick off the image from the miraphon.

A roseate flicker had suddenly crept into the diffuse inner illumination, a warning, insidious coloring. Every instinct aroused, Clay sprang to the door, flung it aside on its tiny guiding flanges, and stood peering down into the abyss stretching below the transparent flooring.

In the distance, he saw a blur of motion. A figure detached itself from a precipitous ascent of the lower way, to become lost in whirling pedestrial flow that shot along the traffic belts.

Clay started to run down the hallway, but halted as he stood before a transverse corridor. The pursuit was hopeless. No use wasting time in rushing to the lower level. The

eavesdropper, if such the unknown was, might well be miles away by that time. He would warn the Internal Police System, and hope for the best. With the present international complications, foreign agents were common. Perhaps there was nothing to worry about after all. He determined to dynatreme to the Pacific Agriculture Control Center immediately.

The tiny one-man flyer slipped out past the opening ravine below which lay the dry bed of the former harbor of San Pedro. A cataclysmic upheaval had long ago thrown the submarine surfaces up above the sea level. In the lowlands, a series of lakes lay mirror-like in what had been oceanic deeps of former centuries, rimmed around by salty encrustations that marked the lowering levels. Farther out, the high rim of the mountainous Hawaiian range, thrust from its lower position to the peak of a glowering mountain, stood upright against the horizon.

The dynatreme soared like a great shadow beneath the sun, and presently the glint of waters became faintly visible, a mere shimmer to either side of the Polynesian range. Below, the swelling plains of the former ocean bed had been transformed into symmetrical garden plots, but even at his height, he could see that the ordinarily gigantic aquatic plants, developed from subsea flora of the past, were ravished and chewed away to mere stumps. Clay's alarm grew, as plot after plot of the agricultural regions vanished behind, all a pray to some devastating blight of whose origin he was totally ignorant.

He would have contacted Lei Nircon by the ship's miraphon, were it not for the memory of the vanishing figure on the moving ways, and the terrible fear assailed him that the news of the depredation might leak through some mysterious channel to the contemporary nation of Atlantan, which was fortunately separated from Neptuna by the treacherous, tide-lashed Mississippi Straits. The internal convulsion which had reared the Pacific ocean depths had established one convenience before the earth's terrain had stopped its shifting. A great rift had appeared beyond the Rocky Mountain ranges, letting in that other wild, windswept ocean, creating a natural barrier which had long ago been conceded as Neptuna's greatest protection against any sudden invasion from the east.

THE director of gardening was at the upper landing level, anxiously waiting for his arrival, and as he stepped from the dynatreme, she hurried from the midst of a group of blue-clad agricultural workers, who seemed to be in the midst of an alarmed conclave.

"I'm glad you've come," cried Lei Nircon. She was alarmed, but not hysterical. Her shapely body elicited only the faintest of mental responses in Clay Adamson's mind. In this century, the association of male and female was neither mentally nor physically seductive, since normal sexual relationship had long ago become moderated and sensible through the natural processes of an evolution that tended toward progress, regardless of the more animal instincts that urged one community to observe another with jealousy and avarice. So it was that neither Lei Nircon nor the man who came forward to greet her in the effusive, two-handed greeting that was customary of the age, thought of the other in terms of sex. The older emotion

of love had become refined to an extent that it was quite removed from taints of depravity, at least among inhabitants of Neptuna, although it was hinted that the more bestial Atlantanos had not yet developed to such a degree. When love came to Neptunans, it came suddenly and overwhelmingly, a common attraction that was recognized immediately and without hesitance by both participants.

"I came as rapidly as possible," said Clay, not voicing his alarm nor revealing the reason for his abrupt attempt at secrecy in his investigation. "Is the damage really so great?"

Lei nodded her head somberly. Her hair was brownish and had a natural wave. He could see that by the tufts appearing below the emblazoned hood that denoted her division rank. Unconsciously, he shot a glance of admiration at her, for she handled herself cleanly, deftly, and wasted no time through expression of unnecessary hysteria. At the same time, he was quite aware of an inner tension, seething below the surface of her carefully guarded actions.

"It is greater than I feared," she answered. "We noticed the ravaging hardly a score of hours ago, and in the meantime I have made certain that the astounding reports of scavenger invasion were not exaggerated. I went over the fields myself. Our crops, especially those of the giant sea cabbage, and the breadfruit shrubs, have been almost demolished. With the suddenness of an overnight appearance, a new menace now confronts us, a new form of menace, and—" For the first time she seemed uncertain, as though at loss to find proper expression.

"What sort of a menace?" demanded Clay, frowning inquisitively.

"It seems to be—a new form of ravager—a new form, even of life," she said slowly, staring from long-lashed eyes into his own. "Evolution, among other things than human creatures, seems to have flung a new obstacle into our path. When the ocean beds were thrown high into the air, many submarine plants were subsequently tended and proved to be highly beneficent when cultivated. However, in the stagnant pools and inland lakes, a form of animal life has been incubating, and I am at last convinced that it is now bent on invading the garden plots of Neptuna, on demolishing every scrap of vegetation in a ravenous invasion, a voracious unpremeditated impulse toward rapid and immediate regeneration. If this sudden influx of fluid animal life is allowed to procreate at its present rate, the survival of our human civilization may be menaced to a material degree."

Clay Adamson stood silently, absorbing her agitation, and he did not doubt her sincerity for a moment, although it seemed possible that she had been so startled by the sudden blight as to magnify the enormity of the calamity through primary fears. Yet now, others of the bluish-togged directorate board of the Agrarian Division stood near, and occasionally put in an enlightening word. Men and women were represented, though all were dressed similarly, and each appeared to be totally unaware of their mingling in a common and equal status.

"You're certain it isn't our old friend, the sea slug?" queried Clay. He referred to a gigantic slug-like monster that arose occasionally from the depths beyond the outlying Polynesian atolls, to feed herbivorously upon the more tender vegetation.

Lei shook her head decidedly, and there were vehement nods of confirmation among the others. He observed now that each of the group was well armed. The gleam of detronite pistols came from waist holsters, and many of them carried flame guns or apparatus for spraying poisonous fumes.

"Good enough," approved Clay. "If you've some extra bits of that capable paraphernalia available, we can go at once, and while we're investigating, we'll see if there's a way to exterminate the new invaders."

HER attempts at describing the ravagers from the inland seas seemed a trifle incomplete and evasive as the fleet of two-passenger dynatremes floated in a compact group along the western decline of the Hawaiian range. Clay knew very abruptly that the woman was more disturbed than she cared to admit, that she was waiting for his own final impressions as to the blight of fluid-animo life that had crept over ancient ocean beds.

Very little beyond mere stumps, spiking wretchedly up into the sky, were evidence of former cultured areas, and as the soft green seas of the ocean dropped upward, great clumped masses shaped something like boulders, but of a resilient fleshy appearance became manifest, grouped about the lower slopes like a swarm of monstrous leeches. Many of them were halted about stunted stumps of sea cabbage, while others squirmed nauseously across the cleared spaces, leaving broad, gleaming trails of thick slimy excrescence.

The fleet of aircraft landed in a rocky clearing that had been quite devoid of vegetation and consequently had been avoided by the voracious creatures. Holding their various weapons in ready hands, the blue-clad men, among whom the argent uniform of the Sustenance Commissioner stood out in solitudinous contrast, left the dynatremes by means of curving side doors, and advanced warily. Now that they were close to the sluggish herbivorians, the fearful faces revealed that each man was horribly impressed by the gigantic size, the alien, repulsive appearance. A miasmic odor was wafted on a spurting shore breeze, coming thickly into their nostrils.

Clay could hardly help shuddering. The things were like liquid blons, of indeterminate character, and their mode of propulsion was attained by a washing, swirling motion. In the interior of the translucent fluid clumps, various corpuscular motes and vacuoles were apparent, though no regular form or prevailing stance was indulged. As yet, no movement of the larger blobs, which were from eight to sixteen feet in rough cross diameter, revealed that they were aware of the humans who walked toward them.

"You're right!" Clay exclaimed once, but the woman did not look at him. Moving like an automaton, with flame gun half poised, she appeared not to have heard. How brave and cool she seemed! The cool outline of her smooth brow and cheek served somehow to race his own shaken spirits. "It is some new form of existence—of a primal, liquid existence"

From the wave-tossed shore line he could see turbulent waters parting occasionally to throw spumes of squirming matter to the upper sands, whorling blobs that rolled and whirled with rippling sounds toward the higher levels. A crawling sensation ran up Clay's spine. Those things were like souls, washed up from a watery grave. He started to

laugh crazily, but caught himself in time. He didn't want to reveal his innate horror, not when this woman was bearing herself with such composure.

Without warning, she stumbled, fell to one knee, and would have gone prostrate, had not Clay's outstretched hand reached out to grasp her. Her face, turned toward him in that instant, was transformed. She was afraid, after all. She revealed it in every quivering delineation of her features, revealed the impulse to throw herself blindly under his masculine protection, and for a moment, atavistic impulses overcame him as he felt her trembling form. For that instant her wretched, voiceless imploration for his assistance gave her a strangely appealing beauty. Then the mask of fear had slid from her face, and she was pulling from him, looking back nervously to see what had tripped her.

An oddly shaped disc of metal lay half-buried by the sand of high tide. Clay picked it up. There was not much thickness to it. Copper. He hurled it aside and it clattered tinnily. At the noise, which rasped on their straining nerves, the feeding blobs had quivered, and now stood with their fluid surfaces titillating expectantly.

"Keep close together," ordered Clay, instinctively taking command. "I think it'd be best to prepare the poison sprays first." The others nodded, and each donned a face mask that covered the nostrils and mouth, that had a glassy visor aperture for the eyes to peer through. Five blue-clad figures edged forward, with projectors held before them, and tiny coils of rubber hose uncoiled behind them like snakes. From a bulbous, metallic container, an inner tumbler was released, and an acidulous pressure became manifest on a small gauge. Suddenly, one of the quintet screamed. His nerves had given way. He flung the projector from him and fell over in the sand, half-paralyzed by fear. The sight that had caused his nerves to solidify in his body had come from a monstrous blob of liquid that had begun to edge forward with a nauseous gurgling sound.

"Okay, let them have it," ordered Clay, who had walked close behind the five with detronite pistol held ready. At his word, the four men opened the triggers. Thin jets hissed across the intervening distances. For a long moment, the fluid blobs quivered. An angry sucking sound blubbered forth from rippling side surfaces. Yet that was all. The noxious fumes hung in enveloping clouds, and the liquid blobs were moving forward, after that single moment of hesitance, with their swirling movements unimpeded. Clay Adamson's cheek muscles writhed. He knew a moment of panic.

Jerking up the detronite gun, he sent bullet after bullet plowing through the liquid monstrosities that rippled toward him. He could hear the glurp! glurp! as metal missiles ripped through watery obstacles, but the openings closed immediately, and he saw spumes of sand rising on the beach farther on, where the bullets had ripped after penetrating the liquid blotches harmlessly.

A LONG sheet of flame leaped out from his side. He spun about, startled. He had not known that Lei had followed, close at his side. He had naturally presumed that she would stay behind with the main group. Her blue eyes were glistening like blazing stars. The flame gun in her hand ripped out, over the heads of the four who held fume

nozzles in helpless, fear-frozen hands, and as the sheet of fire flashed into the foremost fluid blob, a swift transformation took place.

Through the microscope, back in the laboratories, Clay had watched tiny cells divide by fusion. He saw that occur with the speed of thought now in the great blobs. Instead of the one large liquid blotch rippling forward, there were two. As the flame gun seared horizontally, other blobs separated, and the attackers appeared more formidable by virtue of greater number.

The lips of the man hardened. His hand jerked swiftly to his belt, and now his own flame gun spat a crackling emanation. Others were following his lead. There followed several moments of hysteria, during which the liquid blobs divided and redivided, but as the flames subsided almost simultaneously from lowered weapons, a feeling of inexorable danger came over them, for numerous lesser liquid blotches were swirling forward. Occasionally, liquid blobs would intersect, and would merge upon contact as easily as the fusion had been accomplished the moment before.

The man on the sands had gained control of his limbs. Screaming insanely, he raced past the others in mad flight. His fume mask had been thrust aside; Clay saw his face, a distorted, craven visage with greenish eyes and a frothing mouth, as he sped by, and soul-searing chortling sounds came back from his wake. The group that had remained behind was rushing pell-mell for the security of the dynatreme vessels. Clay shouted a hoarse cry of warning.

A swirl of motion was pushing past in the slashing outline of a great expanding scimitar, was shutting them away from the twin-cowled airships. The woman was close now, cringing toward him. The four blue-clad assistants ran forward, their faces set, with staring, unseeing eyes.

Then suddenly, at Lei's very feet, a soft watery patch of sand stirred, and a tentacle moved. Not the tentacle of a liquid watery blob, but a brownish, writhing coil, splotched with the tiger stripes of the electric sand-eel that was a constant, lurking danger on the stagnant beds of Neptuna's ocean floor.

The man knew one instant of utter, quailing horror, in which his nerve fibers seemed to blaze molten hot. He wanted desperately to throw himself against the girl, to cause her to swerve, yet he could not alter that straight-forward plunge. The striped, scaly coil snapped by, whistling past his ear. He caught a glimmer of other remnants of copper disks, lying on the sand, and managed to leap over and beyond. Nor had the vicious furl of the eel's body struck the woman, else the electric paralysis would have hurled her like a bloated sack to the sandy shore.

Clay Adamson was long to remember that scene, etched so burningly in his memory—the writhing sea serpent, with its convulsive coils gyrating past the tattered scraps of glimmering metal—metal that glimmered like molten gold in the sun's rays.

Yet, etched so unforgettably as those moments were, the panicky ascent to the dynatreme vessel was destined to become a mental gap that could never be bridged by retrospection. They must have clambered and clawed their way up over a massive rock ridge, since the advancing liquid blobs had cut away their retreat along the tortuous pathway down which they had come, yet the Sus-

tenance Director could never afterward recall it. There was a hazy recollection of one last dynatreme reposing on the rocky clearing, of Lei's agile form leaping into the aperture, of his own headlong lurch.

The gurgle and swoosh of countless attackers came from below as the dynatreme rose softly and gained momentum. Breathless, exhausted, Clay stared downward. His heart was beating madly, thumping against his breast. His head was throbbing. The woman lay across the other seat as though in a deep swoon, and the bluish uniform was tattered and disheveled over the occasional glimpses of curved white flesh.

HE BENT aside from the controls, momentarily fearful, but the regular rise and fall of her breast assured him that she was still very much alive.

Later, when she had revived completely, they were almost speechless. Each was occupied with his own premonitions. Each shuddered in his contemplation of this new encroachment upon man's tottering advance through the ages toward some unseen, undreamed goal. In that first frantic engagement, the most formidable weapons known to man had been hurled into use without avail. A blank hopelessness had come over them like a lethargy. Clay Adamson had quite forgotten his distant encounter with the eavesdropper in the skyscraper office, but he remembered it with compelling vigor as soon as they reached the Pacific Agricultural Control Center.

An order, transmitted by pictorial miraphon, awaited him, ordering his immediate return to Neptuna. An addendum stated briefly that a fleet of Atlantan warcraft was spanning the Mississippi straits, was heading for Neptuna. A state of war had been declared and every available unit of man-power was ordered into the ranks of the defenders.

"So soon!" muttered Clay Adamson, his body going limp against a nearby stanchion. The fools! Did they know what that meant?—a state of war, with the food supplies on the verge of demolishment. Then he knew abruptly why hostilities had begun. Word had seeped through from the spy. Atlantan was aware, even now, of the food shortage, and the semi-bestial inhabitants of the eastern continent were eager for despoilment. A surge of despair came over him, engulfing him. War with men on the eastern front—while here in the Hawaiian ranges, an enemy, perhaps far worse, would be left without obstacle in its merciless advance upon humanity.

"You'll have to stay here," he said to Lei Nircon, and she stood very staunchly before him. Had the curve of her tiny mouth quivered tremulously? Had she swayed uncertainly for the briefest of instants? He decided not, after the first suspicious glance, for her features were like cold marble.

"Of course," she answered, as though his words were unnecessary. "This is my post. I have orders, of course, to send the majority of my assistants, leaving but a tattered remnant, but we'll hold out someway."

Then his dynatreme was plunging madly across the sky, eager to traverse that long distance, back to the city where the transparine emanations allowed crystalline spires to stretch high up into the life-giving rays of the solar sun.

The regular war unit of Neptuna was in a state of hurried preparation. In the flying field beyond the

city, a swarm of the tinier pursuit craft lay ready to take off, and the purple garbs of the aviators were visible as tiny splotches from the air.

On the higher landing platforms of the city, guarding squadrons lay at ease. Here the citizens were concentrated, ready in case the initial impact of the aerial armada would fail to turn the enemy craft as it soared over the craggy peaks of the Rockies. Though untrained in battle, these variously shaped civilian airships, of different speeds and agilities, would fight like wounded tigresses, protecting their kittens, for below them would lie their homes, their kinsmen, their hope for the future. It was upon a high, rectilinear landing field, jutting precipitously over the edge of the city, that Clay Adamson was stationed.

How like eternity those hours seemed, when the only men who talked were like bloodless ghosts, when the only topic of conversation was of war, and fear of death, and desperation.

At last the aerial armada of Neptuna had assembled, and squadron after squadron arose from the tarmac on the ground, ascending toward the mists that were shrouding the rocky peaks. The sun was sinking now in the west, and the clouds took on a bloody hue. Even as a last scarlet ray shot from the west, a blotch of tiny dots could be observed, swarming down a mountainous pass.

Night was falling swiftly, and the Atlantans had arrived.

CLAY ADAMSON stood for long in the darkness, with the high wind whispering past his body. The city was dark. An order had been given to extinguish every light. Out in the distant night, airplanes looked like fireflies. The diminutive dynatremes, with their beamlights gleaming, were plowing upward in a headlong counter-thrust against the streaming onslaught of the Atlantan warriors. Searchrays stabbed against the blackness. The whine of flameguns, the shriek of exploding detonators, were faintly audible, but gaining in volume. Occasionally he saw dynatremes bursting into flame, arching down toward the unseen earth like shooting stars.

On the wooded slopes, a forest was bursting into flames, ignited by a falling meteoric vehicle. Its eerie illumination etched smoky ridges against the dark sky and made the battling aircraft seem like moths, fluttering over the flame.

Abruptly, a bomb burst, not far ahead in the darkness. Clay heard the shouts of angry, surprised men. Some of the enemy craft had trickled through, were aiming exploratively for the unseen city. On the ground ahead, a searchlight explored upward with a tentative finger. A moment later, an elusive shape twisted past the beam. A heavy gun bellowed out of the dark near the ground. The invader broke into flames, mushrooming down through the dark.

Men were yelling at each other in alarmed tones. If that kept up, the citizens would have to take to the air. Clay stood in the dark, muscles straining, fist clenched. Cold sweat bathed his body. His fear, the fear that twitched benumbingly at his heart, was not of the aircraft battling in a dog-fight through the night, but from remembrance of those liquid blobs rolling up out of the stagnant depths of inland lagoons and seas—liquid life rearing out of the oblivion of a branching evolution that had heretofore clung close to the bottom of the ocean. Would those

fluid things advance? Could they now be rippling in a relentless march, engulfing the Agriculture Control Center in a living gravity-defying tide?

He recalled Lei Nircon, her slender body, the staunchness of her smoothly chiseled features. She would never leave her post, there at the Control Center. He knew that she would never retreat, that she would devote every effort toward stemming the tide of fluid ravishers.

He could see her again, could see the electric tiger-eel struggling convulsively in the clearing. The copperish disks kept returning to his thoughts—and that half-circle of ravenous, liquid blobs, whirling in a ghastly maelstrom of countless amorphous forms.

Again a nearby concussion interrupted his line of thought. The bomb had hit squarely this time, had ripped a great section through the transparent lower city level. He could see tiny, distant figures, hurled in the scintillating blast, could even hear diminutive screams that were shut off by the mounting holocaust of the explosion. Then darkness, a stunning silence, closed in, out of which was born the soft whine of the attacking ship, which was circling in the dark to secure another target.

He leaped forward, racing toward the unseen dynatreme. Jerking himself through the aperture, he snapped back the control cowling, switched on a light, saw the mechanisms. A chuckling sound rasped from the portable miraphon, a warning signal. He turned on the audible diverter, cupped the amplifier with his hands to deaden the sound.

"All Atlantans, attention!" barked a hoarse, guttural command. "Cease hostilities! Cease hostilities! Orders from Fleet Commander Simon, transmitted through headquarter mandates from Atlantan."

Clay got the vision then, saw a group of landed dynatremes, with figures of men, illuminated by the licking flames of the forest fire, farther on—a bestial, heavily jowled face. That was Commander Simon, of the Atlantans. Other figures stood about, clad in Neptunan uniforms. He was captive, then?

But no, for the color of Atlantan was equally perceptible in the clearing. Atlantans were armed, as were the Neptunans. Commander Simon was signing a paper, and the Air General of the Neptunans was taking the parchment next. Armistice!

OVERHEAD, the humming of the attacking craft became louder. Again a bomb crashed downward, ripped a splintering segment of humanity from Neptuna, but this time, the searchbeam came up, held waveringly along the exterior of a long spindle-shaped craft, and projectiles snarled through the night air. Several direct hits came at once. The ravager, caught in the passion of blood-killing, was hurled to a fiery grave. The force of the explosion was so sudden, so powerful, that the flame of its own kindling was puffed out quickly. Shattered, broken into metallic wreckage, it fell downward, crashed into the dark terrain.

Later, other miraphon information came. Atlantan had attacked when it was discovered that a food shortage faced Neptuna. Now, back in eastern Atlantan, a similar scourge had risen from watery depths. Grisly Fate, laughing in its teeth, had watched the liquid blobs crawling up along the coast of the eastern continent.

War could not be waged without food. Atlantan discovered itself in

the same predicament as that which had overtaken its adversary. All of its available man-power was recalled now, to fight the greater menace arising from the spawning seas.

That night was unreal, a phantom existence sliding past some inner nightmare. Dawn was breaking when Clay Adamson's dynatreme soared down again over the Hawaiian range, settled toward the bulking upthrust of the Agricultural Control Center. An unbelievable vista challenged his sanity.

Around the outer walls, clustered like barnacles, were the myriad shapes of the liquid blobs. He glimpsed white fragments, glimmering through fluid shapes on the higher sections. A horde of smaller fluid blotches was in evidence. Obviously, a desperate battle had been waged before the human defenders had been overpowered, for the bleached gleam came from flesh-stripped skeletons. Even as he watched, a great liquid form was rolling across an upper ledge, toward the higher spire. He saw a flash of blue, caught a hasty glimpse of a tiny, running figure. At the same instant, the last fugitive caught sight of the dynatreme, began to run in a zigzag course along the upper ledge in an effort to evade the pursuer.

Clay's fingers became rigid over the controls. The dynatreme banked, plummeted dizzily. He could feel the vibration of its inner structure from the friction of that power dive. Though the distance was even yet so great that her figure looked ant-like, he recognized Lei Nircon.

Now he realized that he loved her. The realization came without warning. He knew that life would be without meaning with her gone. He envisioned the soft curve of her mouth, her pulsant throat, the white quivering flesh that had been revealed by her tattered garment after their wild flight across the sands.

Again he thought of the copper disks, lying under the writhing coils of the eel. He had been thinking of that, all during that long flight back toward the Hawaiian ranges. Copper! A sheeny, almost pure copper. It wasn't copper in a crude form. That was what had captured his attention.

Lei was screaming now. She was spent, exhausted, and had retreated into a corner from which there would be no dodging. The dynatreme screamed with rapid deceleration, plumped to a landing. Clay staggered, jerked a prepared mechanism from the interior of the rocking craft, leaped downward.

The woman had a flame-gun. She was thrusting it out, jerking the release. At best, she could divide the blob into smaller parts, though others that were appearing over the ledge would trap her. Yet nothing came from the spent projector.

Everything was bet on that one thin hope that had come into his brain. If it didn't work, he was done for, but they could perish together. He shouted warningly, and she tottered toward him. Convulsive sobs racked her body.

A gurgling, hideous sound came into being. Liquid blobs lapped forward hungrily with tentative tongues, seeking to enfold the small human figures. Clay leaned forward, thrust out two electrodes.

An instant it bulked, ominous and threatening, a pulsating sentience. Then it collapsed. There was a leaping tongue of yellowish flame that died away. A nauseous mass lay at his feet, while the electrode held in the insulated glove of his right hand was covered with copper.

HE BEGAN retreating toward the aircraft, supporting the woman with one arm. Another liquid blob rolled forward. Again he extended the electrodes. A burst of flame heralded the disintegration. Fluid forms were washing up in a living tide, but the dynatreme was rising sluggishly. Jammed together in the one-man interior, he felt the intensified whine of laboring rotors. Under his guidance, the dynatreme ascended, a soft shadow floating above the horror of liquid shapes below.

An eastern sky was flooded with sunlight. Her soft lips were quivering against his own. She lay in sweet surrender in his arms. He knew, without asking or reasoning, that she returned his affection. Such was the love of Neptunans.

"I think we've nothing to fear, Lei," he informed her softly. "You can get a release from your duties, apply for an assignment as a householder and—"

"But the Control Center!" she protested. "And those—"

He laughed joyously. Sheer relief prompted the exhilaration that came over him, relief and the knowledge of her love. The dynatreme was soaring among a stratum of fleecy clouds. In the distance, he could see the crystalline spires of Neptuna, rising above the vaporous sea, and looking as though it were hewn from solid crystal in the rays of sunlight.

"That can be tended to later," he said. "The things that rose from the sea were liquid. And there's one effective way of decomposing water, that of electrolysis. Through a catalytic influence, water can be decomposed by an electric current into its hydrogen and oxygen components. That's a simple laboratory trick. If the fluid is copper sulphate, a copper film will be planted on one electrode, even if the fluid contains but a partial solution of the metallic liquid.

"I realized eventually that the copper disks that lay on the beach had resulted when the electric eel discharged its paralyzing current into those liquid blobs. Enough copper was contained in their internal constitution to create a copperish disk. As the fluid part of the liquid monsters decomposed, hydrogen, an inflammable gas, was exploded by an electric spark, and the free oxygen aided in the swift ignition.

"Electrolytic influences decomposed the liquid blobs. What was left was a mere residual slime. We can conquer them now, Lei. That shouldn't be difficult. Electrical barriers can be stretched across their advance, and we can arm our soldiery with portable electrical outfits, such as I carried."

He stopped speaking. The woman had closed her eyes. He wondered if she had fainted, but observed that her respiration was even.

"Later," he went on, his voice becoming lower. "Later the task of replanting and cultivating the garden ranges can be started. It will be a struggle, but we should be able to accomplish it. The horror of it is over. We'll have to forget that part. Like a bad dream, that's past . . ."

Lei was not asleep. She was watching him now, her blue eyes swimming mistily. Tears crept down long lashes. Her hand tightened on his arm.

"The bad dream," she said, "is past. Now a pleasant one has begun. Let's make it last."

The crystaliine spires of Neptuna glittered iridescently before them, a mirage against the gossamer web of higher encircling clouds.

THE END

OUTLAW OF SATURN

by JOHN COTTON

"Vine! Bite it! I said bite it, you blockhead!"

It was Lena's job to bring Bruce Lanning to justice—but the accursed world of the Minitors had planned a worse fate for him than the avenging arm of the law!

THE heavy log floor, fast rotting under the eternal damp of Saturn, creaked as Bruce Lanning strode back and forth across it. Being a good one hundred and seventy pounds, and gaining one pound in five on the ringed planet, he gave the underpinnings of the hut plenty of work to do.

"It won't do!" he shouted at last, swinging around and jabbing an accusing finger. "You've got to get those plantations cleaned up before the mud-tides start, else you'll find yourselves without sugar! Get it? If you weren't such a damned shiftless race you'd have cleaned the seeds up long ago!"

The creature he faced stood only two feet high—an almost perfect miniature of an Earthian, save that his eyes were wide and innocent, his hair pink, and his skin deep amber. The Minitors of Saturn were literally vest-pocket humans—"Minitor" being a malaproprism of the word "Miniature" — childlike, amazingly passive, exasperatingly lazy, and underneath it all, mysteriously vindictive. In their eyes this tough Earthian was a dynamo, a destroyer of their calm, somnolent peace.

Lifican, the Minitor, waved a thin arm timidly. His voice was like a badly played flute.

"Mister Lanning, p l e a s e sir, plenty work is difficult. Opius seeds damn hard to collect. Beg for lots of time, please."

"You'll beg for nothing!" Lanning roared. "You've been lazing your time like all the rest of your pals. You're the boss of them, so it's up to you. Now scram out of here before I bump the baby daylights out of you!"

HE STRODE forward menacingly, and the little creature twisted and flew outside with a yelp, perfectly accustomed by his small size to the rather heavy going of the giant, s t e a m y planet. Lanning watched him go, rubbed a powerful hand through sweat-damp black hair.

"Rip Van Winkles!" he grunted irritably. "They'll never get the stuff away in time at this rate; then I'll be in a spot trying to explain to Davis. . . . I just wonder what the hell's the use of it all, anyway?"

He knew the use of it well enough. The common necessity of making a living had driven him into this business of racketeering, this illicit trading in opius seeds. Once the seeds reached Earth, various methods were utilized for their disposal. The wealthy were willing to pay any price for a few hours of glorious dreams, surcease from the boredom of 22nd Century perfection.

Dreams produced by opius, unlike its old-time deadly cousin, opium, left no ill-effects on the constitution. More, it produced a kind of sublime anesthesia, detached the mind from the body.

Just the same, the business was still illegal, despite sundry efforts on the part of John Davis, chief of the enterprise, to make it a lawful occupation. Not that Bruce Lanning minded; the salary was worth it. The only drawback was climate. . . .

The ghastly climate of Saturn—

that was the thing that got into him, particularly here on the North Equatorial Belt where the opius plants flourished. It wasn't so bad over at Green City, the civilized Saturnian quarter—but here. . . ! He was becoming wearied — wearied of the myriads of childish Minitor workers on the plantation, the seasonal mud-flows from Saturn's fifty-mile distant volcanic area, the senseless driveling of the mimical birds, the alternating lights of the arcing rings of Saturn, the wild glimpses of the ten moons ever and again through heavens that were almost eternally wreathed in green clouds.

In the higher levels, the air was unfit to breathe, but down here a preponderance of breathable oxygen remained. Unlike the penal world of Jupiter, where the vast pressures had crushed out all the oxygen, Saturn still possesses some, in percentage high enough to support life of an Earthly standard.

And the heat—all internal. An almost unvaried temperature of 115 degrees Fahrenheit. . . .

Lanning grunted with discomfiture and mopped his streaming neck and face. Then, arising from his musing, he went outside to the short ladder propped against the doorway. His hut was on stilts to raise it above the periodic mud-flows.

Steadily he descended the ladder and sank the accustomed two inches into the spongy loam of the clearing. He nodded in satisfaction as he beheld the Minitors at work again, dwarfed by the weird fern-like plants whose seeds they collected. They worked with a certain sullen persistence, reminding him of children who have received a tough scolding.

"Van Winkles!" he repeated again, and couldn't help smiling a little. "Just the same I'd rather be back on Earth. No Minitors, no jungle, no cock-eyed trees that are both organic and inorganic, no mud. . . ."

His blue eyes traveled over the packed mass of the flesh-eating and normal trees rearing to the green heavens. He listened in silence to the eternal chatterings of Saturn's jungle life—then his attention was suddenly caught by his own pet mimical bird, George, as his clumsy but skillful bulk came like a bullet from the upper air.

Far larger than an earthly ostrich, resembling a pa akeet about the beak and face, his main qualities were a sublime gift of voice mimicry, sub-human intellect, and magnificent plumage. He landed in the muddy ground with a thud, folded his wings and scanned Lanning as he raised a lazy hand in acknowledgment.

"Hallo there, George. I wondered where you'd gotten to."

"Seed thief!" George retorted, in a voice that was quite unmistakably that of a girl. "Seed thief! Wash your neck!"

Lanning straightened up in surprise. "Say, wait a minute! Where'd you pick that girl's voice from?"

"Hellish hot! Seed thief! Racketeer!"

"Racketeer, eh?" Lanning frowned. "Sounds like you've been places where you shouldn't. Don't tell me you flew as far as Green City. . . . Here—come here."

George wasn't moving any. He stood on one leg and considered Lanning with beady eyes. The Earthman sighed.

"Maybe it was the Minitors," he remarked. "They're not half so darned innocent as they look, the lazy—"

"They'd be all right if you didn't have to act like a modern Simon Legree."

LANNING twisted around with sagging jaw, then gulped as he saw a slim, girlish figure in the customary shorts and silk blouse of the North Equatorial Belt advancing towards him. Apparently she had come from the side of the clearing facing the plantation. She lifted her broad welted boots with the air of a mud-trekking expert.

Lanning said nothing as she came level. Cool gray eyes looked into his; a stray, corn-colored curl peeked under a soiled white hat. His eyes moved to the neat, fast ray gun in her shorts belt.

"You're Bruce Lanning, aren't you?" she asked suddenly.

"Yeah, sure— Who the devil are you, anyway? Don't you know that nobody in his right senses is allowed beyond the two-mile zone limit of Green City? That's twenty miles north of here."

"I know that; I came from there." Her voice was level and cold. "I'm going back there almost immediately, and you're coming with me."

Lanning raised his eyebrows, noted the small but efficient pack on her back. "I don't catch on," he said. "Maybe we'd better go inside my place and talk things over."

"Wash your neck," agreed George, waddling after them as the girl turned to the ladder. . . .

"I suppose," Lanning said, as they entered the little living room, "that it was you who called me a seed thief and racketeer within George's hearing?"

"Well, aren't you?" She took the restorative he held out to her and sipped it slowly. "I did call you that, anyway. I was annoyed; I lost my way, and called you names because you were responsible for it. I didn't see this bird, though. Maybe he was above me somewhere."

Lanning looked at her steadily. "Maybe I'm very dense, but I don't understand why you came—why you trekked across mud and jungle to get here. You've no right here, anyhow."

"No?" Her sensitive upper lip was contemptuous. "I guess you're afraid of how much I'll find out, eh? Well, that's what I'm here for. . . . I'm Lena Tavistock."

"Well, I'm Bruce Lanning, but I'm still puzzled."

"Number 16 of the Outer Planets Service," she embellished icily. "You're trading in illicit drugs and I'm here to stop it and run you in. You're under arrest, Lanning!"

Before he could recover from his surprise, she had jumped to her feet and snatched out her gun, covered him squarely.

"We've got to get moving," she stated flatly, her eyes bright and hard. "You're coming back to Green City with me to answer a few questions. You know you've no right to use the Minitors as workers. By interplanetary law they're the natural inhabitants of this world, and not under the dictates of outlaw Earth men like yourself."

Lanning smiled and shrugged. "It isn't my doing. I take orders from my chief. He put the Minitors to work and I just look after them. They're lazy, but they'll work their heads off for a bag of sugar."

"Your chief, eh?" the girl repeated. "Where does he hang out?"

"Green City." Lanning laughed shortly. "Guess you might as well have saved yourself the trouble of chasing after me."

"You're wrong there, Lanning; I'll run both you and your chief in. Come on, let's move. You don't need to pack; I've plenty of tabloid provisions."

"Hot again!" whistled George, hopping about wildly.

"You're telling me," Lanning growled, turning to the door. Then, as he reached it with the girl inexorably behind him, he suddenly stopped.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "Hear it?"

She tensed, frowned at the sound of distant rumblings and thunderings, gradually coming nearer.

"It's nothing," she snapped; "only a volcanic area blowing up. They're common enough, aren't they?"

"Sounds more like mud to me," Lanning muttered. He didn't argue any further, descended in silence to the ground. As the girl dropped beside him, a group of Minitor men and women came speeding up, chattering at the top of their voices. They clutched Lanning and the girl with tiny hands, nearly deflecting the steady pointing of her gun.

"Can't you call these things off?" she demanded impatiently. "I don't like being pawed—"

"Then you should have stepped away!" Lanning retorted. He swung around to the nearest one. "What's wrong?" he demanded.

"Mister Lanning, sir—seeds we no longer get. Mud flow coming this way. Plenty danger. . . ."

Lanning looked up sharply. The Minitors were fleeing pell-mell from the plantation, more active than they'd ever been before in their lazy lives. . . . The jungle trees were shifting in the advance drafts of the mud-wind, the superheated blasts of air engendered by the relentless periodic flow of mud from one portion of the Saturnian equator to the other.

As Lanning well knew, the stuff often wiped out everything in its path—hence the stilts on his hut. Saturn, with its ten-moon gravitations, together with a swift 10-hour rotation and consequent equatorial bulge, suffered from mud tides of paralyzing height and power. . . .

LENA looked anxiously around her as the wind blew hot and odorous into her face. Then she turned suddenly as Lanning clutched her arm.

"Put that toy away and be yourself!" he ordered briefly. "We've got to step on it. Come on!"

She tried to pull free, but he was too strong for her. Shaking clear of the whimpering Minitors, they raced swiftly across the clearing and plunged into the jungle. A little way inside it, Lanning stopped and surveyed a towering, notched tree, stabbing up against the misty, perpetual ring and moonlight.

"Up you get!" he commanded, turning, and the girl stared appalled.

"Up there! But why? I—"

"It's my safety tree," he interrupted. "I use it when there's an extra heavy mud flow, like the one coming up. It's notched, and there's a platform at the top. Either that, or drown."

"But I—" She broke off in bewildered surprise as his powerful hands suddenly clamped under her armpits and shot her to the first notch. His grim face was below.

"Step on it!" he barked.

She stared up at the lofty height, then began to climb, notch by notch. He came up slowly behind her; little by little the whole clearing and contiguous plantation became visible to them. By the time they reached the little platform at the top, they could see the mud sea rolling inwards from the north, plowing down weaker trees and undergrowth, frothing in great steamy globules of dirty ocher.

Lena looked apprehensive— You're —you're sure we're safe?" she asked anxiously. All her former coldness and didactic manner had gone now. She was a woman, very frightened, but she'd rather have cut out her tongue than admit she was glad of Lanning's brawny, tense body beside her.

"No, I'm not sure we're safe," he answered briefly, watching the stuff with keen eyes. "This tree of mine has stood tides before; it should do so again. If it doesn't— Well, I guess you won't need to run me to Green City—or yourself either, for that matter."

She didn't answer him. He looked at her strangely.

"You know something," he went on, "you're too nice a girl to go around arresting people. I'll hand it to you you've got plenty of nerve, though—coming through the jungle from Green City, I mean."

She shrugged, her eyes on the mud. "It didn't take nerve. I knew where you were and I hired some guides to help me. After all, I'm used to Saturn. I was born here. My father lives in Green City."

"And he approves of this Secret Service stuff?"

"He doesn't know. It's four years since I saw him—"

The girl broke off as George suddenly came whirring through the air and alighted heavily. The little platform swayed.

"Hellish hot!" George commented affably, folding his wings.

"It's going to get plenty hotter," Lanning answered moodily. "This is about the biggest flood tide I ever saw—and then some."

He stared over the fast approaching morass. It was only a matter of yards from his hut. He and Lena watched it tensely, caught their breaths as the whole hut and plantation vanished utterly in the smother. The surging, rolling mass bubbled swiftly beneath them, but since the tree afforded little resistance, they experienced little beyond a fierce swaying that quickly subsided. . . . But all about them the lower trees of the jungle swayed and collapsed.

"Funny, isn't it?" Lanning mused. "Saturn's surface, around here anyway, is nothing but successive layers of mud from each succeeding drift. The tops of the trees and plants get snapped off, yet the roots remain, to push through the hardening mud when the flow stops. Damned queer place."

"Where do the Minitors go?" the girl asked suddenly.

He pointed to a rocky cliff bounding the southern end of the clearing. "They live just beyond there in a sort of valley. There's a sort of cleft they go through. The mud never reaches high enough to get down there."

Lena nodded slowly. Since there was not a Minitor in sight, they had evidently all escaped in time. For a while she watched the flood in silence, then spoke again.

"How do we get away from here, anyhow? What's next?"

"We stop here," he answered pleasantly. "Do you mind?"

She stared at him. "I should think I do mind! I'm no pole squatter; I'm a detective. How long do we stop, anyway?"

"Oh, it depends. I usually reckon to stop here for three days and nights—that is, by earthly standards. There is never any dark on Saturn, of course. By that time the mud is usually hardened enough to be normal and new trees and things are starting to spring up. . . . It's not half bad up here. It's warm; and

there's always light, be it the rings, Titan, Dione, or Hyperion."

She looked helplessly around her. The major force of the mud-flood had already spent itself. The vast, swirling brown river below was moving more turgidly, thickly, building up slowly to a solidity that would mean only a two-inch depth of upper plasma. . . .

"Wash your neck!" screamed George suddenly, flapping his ponderous wings. "Hellish hot! Wash your—"

"Hey, sit still!" Lanning yelled, clutching the platform edge savagely. "Stop it, you—"

HE BROKE off in sheer horror as the bird flapped his vast fan tail violently. Even on the ground, the wind action from it was enormous: in the short area of the platform it was catastrophic. The whirling feathers caught Lena unexpectedly clean in the face, sent her falling involuntarily backwards.

With a hoarse scream, she vanished over the platform edge and went hurtling down to the turgid expanse below.

"Lena—!" Lanning screamed, and flung himself flat. He was just in time to see the girl strike the mud with a dull splash, begin to strike out savagely towards the distant cliff surrounding the domain of the Minitors. . . . Without hesitating a second, he dived after her, struck the mud feet first, and swam towards her.

Swimming in the stuff made him feel like a fly in warm treacle. It weighted down every portion of his body. He could see Lena's head bobbing some distance away as she struck valiantly for the cliff base; but she was becoming weaker. He could tell that by the dragging movements of her mud-caked arms.

Cursing George, Saturn, and women who nosed around where they aren't wanted, he struck out with renewed savagery, using every ounce of his strength. By degrees, he began to gain, but he realized that he had only the gradually ceasing mud-current to thank for it. The stuff was already beginning to congeal somewhat.

He reached the girl fifteen minutes later, as she was beginning to drag her laboring limbs up the stones to the cliff base. Catching up with her, he caught her around the waist, dragged her a little distance, then set her down carefully.

"I'm—I'm sorry about that," he apologized. "It was George's fault, of course. Thank God you fell feet first into the mud, otherwise—"

"I'd have been drowned," she finished quietly, sitting up and clawing the slimy mud disgustedly from her hair and skin. "Would that have mattered so much? After all, I'm here to run you in. You can get ten years on the penal world for illicit trading, you know."

"You can only get me to Green City now of my own free will," he said grimly. "Your gun will be useless after this mud."

With a start of alarm she pulled it from her belt and fired it into the air. Nothing happened. With a rueful glance at the ruined charge-drum she tossed it away.

"O.K., Mr. Lanning, you win!" She got to her feet and faced him steadily. Their eyes met—his curiously uncertain; hers cool and unafraid.

Then his eyes went beyond her to a cleft high up on the cliff face. For a brief instant he caught sight of a Minitor who had evidently been watching the proceedings.

"They seem quite interested in us, don't they?" the girl remarked cas-

ually. "How's chances of staying with them until the mud solidifies and we can get away from this glorified little desert island?"

"Chances not so good," he replied, set-faced. "I don't trust 'em—never have done. They're like precocious children, and damned nasty ones at that. In fact—"

He broke off as there suddenly came the familiar piping voices of the little creatures. In another moment or two, the pass disgorged a veritable horde of them. They came swarming down onto the shingle, chattering and laughing amongst themselves.

"They're armed!" Lanning said, with a start of surprise. "I wonder what the game is now?"

HE AND Lena stood waiting as the Minitors came up. The men were carrying spears in their hands, tipped with deadly ilifac poison, sap of the most lethal plant Saturn produced.

"What is this?" Lanning demanded, as a ring of the little men closed around them, as the women, looking like dolls out of a Christmas store, kept at a watchful distance.

"Well, what is it?" he roared, as they were silent. "Come on, Lifican, let's have it."

The boss of the seed pickers smiled innocently. His round, cherubic little face was as babylike as ever.

"Mister Lanning, sir, we want you. You and lady. To come down into our valley. You will? Better, you know!"

"Are you threatening me?" Lanning demanded, clenching a huge fist. "If you are—"

The ogling eyes widened in surprise. "No threaten. Just order. Ask you obey, please, sir."

He glanced in bewilderment at the girl.

"Guess we'd better," she said shortly; "though it's the first time I've had an invitation in the form of a poisoned spear."

Lanning nodded. "O.K., Lifican, let's go—but make it short. We've got to get away from here as soon as possible. . . ."

Lifican beamed like a boy with a model motorboat. Proudly he led his file of people up the shingle to the cliff pass, waving his poisoned spear like a band leader as he went.

The pass was only short, leading down into a wide valley filled to a great extent with the humble hut dwellings of the lazy little people, huts that were surrounded by neatly planted palisades of ordinary trees, with a carnivora plant here and there for the consumption of carrion, waste, and unwanted foes.

When the center of the valley was gained, Lifican called a halt. His people gathered around him. Lanning and the girl stood like Mr. and Mrs. Gulliver amidst them.

Lifican bowed politely and showed his little teeth.

"Sir, we have honor to be revenged," he stated cordially. "You make work in plantation, threaten my baby daylights with prompt bumpings if I not work. So sorry to regret it. You rule with iron rod and trouble plenty."

Lanning's eyes narrowed. "You blasted, traitorous little devil!" he breathed. "So you think you need revenge for the way I've made you and your lazy tribe work, do you? And take that damned friendly grin off your face!"

"I doubt if he can," the girl put in. "As I understand it, these people are differently constituted than us. They have only one visible emotion—

that of childlike innocence. The rest of the emotions sort of boil inside them—something to do with their adrenal glands. They're under-developed, so they can't express anger. . . . We know already that their pituitary glands are almost non-existent. That's why they're so tiny. . . . So I've heard, anyway."

Lanning stared at her. "Yet knowing all this about them, you had the nerve to call me Simon Legree? As for you, Lifican, to hell with you! Come on, Lena—let's go."

He turned vigorously, but the little man made a prompt movement. In response, both Lanning and the girl found themselves suddenly smothered in the little people. Tiny though they were, there was an unbelievable power in their delicate-looking bodies and doll-like hands, begotten mainly of Saturn's rather heavy gravitation against which they were always laboring.

In the space of a few minutes, the astounded Lanning found himself being carried by fifty of the men, and the girl by another thirty. When a corner of the clearing was gained, they were hauled to their feet, their hands jerked over their heads, and fastened by a length of tough creeper to the branch of a tree.

Lifican, at the forefront of his fellows, smiled again.

"So sorry," he said affably. "Tree a Titan Bender. You know rest, Mr. Lanning, sir. No work hard no more."

He bowed, turned about, and marched off with his men and womenfolk towards the mile-distant abodes at the remote end of this palisade.

LENA twisted her face between her updrawn arms. "What did he mean by Titan Bender?" she asked.

Lanning came to the end of an underbreath reel of oaths at her words. With a final glare after Lifican, he turned towards her as well as he could.

"It's a tree peculiar to Titan. I've seen it work and it's mighty weird. A carnivorous tree, of course."

The girl studied its drooping branches, in particular the one to which her wrists were fastened.

"Looks harmless enough," she said. "In fact, I'd say it's asleep."

"That's just it," he muttered. "It is asleep. Listen; you have seen an earthly sunflower turn its face to follow the sun, haven't you?"

"Who hasn't? What's the connection?"

"This tree's pretty similar. While the moon Titan is below the horizon, this tree is limp and resistless—but once Titan rises, it comes to life!—something to do with its origin. It came, in the first place, by seed spores blown across space from Titan's Whispering Forest. On this world it starts to move and consume whatever living prey is near it the moment Titan comes over the horizon. Certain radiations from Titan stimulate its inner organs, just the same as the moon affects certain plants on Earth."

The color fled from Lena's face. "Then you mean it will attack us? Consume us?"

Lanning's jaw squared. "That seems to be the idea. It's just like those damned little devils to think of this. Torture and death rolled into one—and it took those china dolls to think of it! God, if I could only get my hands on them!"

The girl tugged furiously on the vine tethering her wrists, lifted her feet from the ground and threw her whole, weighted body into the effort. But it was of no use. The stuff only

cut deeper into her chafed wrists.

Lanning tried with similar futility. They stopped at last, panting, surveying the twelve-inch length of vine that separated them from the branch itself.

"No go!" Lanning said breathlessly. "Let me think now—" He stared at the murky sky. "It's Iapetus and ring-light at the moment. That means Titan will be up in fifteen minutes or so."

"Fifteen minutes!" Lena gave a groan, waggled her cramped arms helplessly, stared with Lanning into the varilighted scum that was Saturn's eternal sky. Then suddenly both of them twisted sharply at a faint cry.

"Hellish hot. . . . Seed thief!"

"George!" Lanning yelled. "I'd forgotten him. . . ."

He stopped and stared away towards the village. Typical of their race, now that their task of revenge was apparently accomplished, the Minitors were thinking no more about it. With their usual laziness, they had retired to their huts, probably to eat and fall into a long state of torpor.

Lanning searched the sky with a feverish intensity, until at last he caught a glimpse of an unwieldly flying ostrich.

"George!" he screamed desperately. "George! Come here!"

The bird turned at the sound of the voice, swept down in a flurry of wings and came waddling forward.

"Wash your neck," he screeched; then his voice suddenly changed to a heavy bass. "No sign of plantation. Where's Lanning? Damn, damn. Where's Lanning? Darn the mud. . . ."

"That—that voice he's imitating!" Lena cried. "Where's he get it?"

Lanning was looking puzzled. "It's the voice of my boss, as a matter of fact. Don't know how George happened on it, though—"

"You mean the chief of the opius organization?"

"Sure. Why? We've got other things to worry about right now. Here, George. Nice birdie. . . . Come here."

The girl watched tensely as George fluttered up and down, as Lanning issued tense instructions.

"Up!" he panted. "Up! Come on! Papa's baby! Up. . . ."

"Oke," George said briefly, and went up. His beady eyes shone in the pale, vague light as he listened to Lanning's desperate injunctions.

"Down a bit— This way! Vine! Bite it! I said bite it, you blockhead. . . . Come on . . ."

AGAIN and again he had to try, but little by little the bird's subhuman intellect began to function. It swooped triumphantly, snapped its scissor jaws together, and went through Lanning's vine like a razor. Instantly he dropped his leaden, aching arms. Then ripping his penknife out he cut the girl free.

"Nice going, George," he breathed gratefully. "Remind me to give you some sugar."

"Hellish hot," George observed, strutting with tail outspread.

"Let's get out of here," Lanning went on, catching the girl's arm.

They moved steadily through the shadows of the palisade, and even as they did so, the Titan Bender behind them suddenly came into life. Its branches writhed weirdly against the scummy sky, continuing their eternal, horrifying search for edible things.

Lena shuddered a little. There was something incredibly grotesque and horrible about this blind plant that was a born killer.

"Guess we only just made it," Lanning muttered. Then as the girl remained silent, he looked at her sharply. "What's on your mind, Lena?"

She looked up sharply, then smiled faintly.

"Nothing. At least, almost nothing. I'm thinking of the voice George imitated. Your boss's voice."

"Well? So what?"

"If he's around I'll have to run him in with you. I don't know how I'm going to do it without a gun, but—"

"Suppose you skip it for the time being?" Lanning suggested. "We've enough to do to get away from here without being spotted by the Minitors. . . . Now come on."

WITH extreme caution, they moved slowly away from the shadows of the palisade towards the clearing itself, skirting around the back of the huts towards the foothills of the valley cliff. George came strutting behind them.

"No sign of plantation," he squawked. "Where's Lanning?"

"Shut up!" Lanning hissed; then he glanced at the girl. "Must be something urgent that brought the boss here. Obviously he's not far away, else George wouldn't have heard him."

"What's your chief's name?" the girl asked quietly.

"Calvin Davis. He operates this racket from Green City."

"I see."

Lanning glanced at her wonderingly as they crept along, but she said no more. With the utmost caution, they made their way along the valley side, keeping a good mile of distance between themselves and the huts of the Minitors.

Unseen and unheard, they finally reached the pass. In a few minutes they were through it.

"Whew!" Lanning whistled. "Thank Heaven for that! We're safe enough now."

"And of course you're not going to Green City with me?" she asked quietly.

"After all, Lena, why should I? I'm not pining for ten years on the penal world. Besides, you can't force me to go now. You've no dangerous toy to help you. Serves the Service right. They shouldn't have sent you out alone."

"They didn't. I had two men with me, but they were killed on the way here. Got caught by a constrictor tree. . . ."

"I'm sorry," Lanning said, awkwardly.

She regarded him with steady eyes.

"I've only one course—to go back and report failure. And that means being thrown out of the service. Maybe it doesn't matter much, but I'd rather have retired honorably than be chucked out on my ear—"

She broke off and turned at the sound of a booming voice.

"That you Lanning? Why, so it is! Well, thank goodness I've found you. I thought you'd gone down in the mud flood."

A heavily-built man of middle age, followed by a dozen raft-experts—Earthian pastmasters in the art of driving rafts through Saturnian mud-floods—came slowly up, brushing drying mud from his white ducks.

"Mr. Davis," Lanning acknowledged cordially, extending his hand. "I'm glad to see you, sir. It isn't much of a surprise, though. George gave me advance warning."

Davis nodded as he glanced at the bird. "Yes, I found him flying around the site of the plantation and I told

him to find you. Had a bit of trouble getting here. The flow was bigger than usual this time."

"But why did you take such a risk?" Lanning demanded.

"It was worth my risk, my boy. You see, the Interplanetary Police have agreed to let opius seeds pass as legal merchandise from now on. Earth chemists have just discovered that they are the finest things out for producing a new form of anesthesia for severe operations—anesthesia which gives delightful dreams and leaves no hangover. Because of that, because we are the only two who own an opius plantation, and therefore have first rights, the charges against us have been canceled. Instead, I've an order to produce as much of the stuff as possible."

"Why—why, that's terrific!" Lanning cried in delight. "No more scraping, no— Lena, you hear that?"

The girl turned from the shadows of the cliff wall and Davis glimpsed her for the first time in the pale Titan light. He raised his hat.

"Hallo, there, Miss—I hadn't noticed you."

"Mr. Davis, Miss Tavistock," Lanning murmured. "She came to run us in, but I guess that's all washed up now by the new order. So you're safe after all, Lena. You can return with dignity to your job, without having to admit failure—"

He broke off in astonishment as Davis suddenly shouted, "Good God, Mary, it's you! What in Heaven's name—?"

"Father," she said simply, moving into his wideflung arms. "Oh, dad, I'm so glad that your trading is—is legal. Otherwise, I would—"

"You mean you're a member of the Service?" he demanded. "That that's what you've been up to ever since you left Green City four years ago?"

She nodded her fair head slowly. "Yes, Dad. I got sick of Green City; it was too slow. I told you I was going on a trip around the system, and sent messages to that effect from different places. Instead I became Lena Tavistock, of the Service. They assigned me to this job. . . ."

She paused and turned to Lanning. "You see, when George used the voice of your boss, I knew it was father. That was a shock to me. My duty was to turn him in, along with you—or else report it. To protect father, I'd have to admit failure. . . ." She smiled brightly. "But now it's different. I can return to the Service headquarters with a clean conscience."

"And a fresh assignment?" Lanning questioned gloomily.

"No, resign without the stigma of failure," she said slowly. "I'm getting tired of wandering, anyway. And besides, you're going to need help around here when the fresh opius sprouts. You'll want a woman around to look after the cooking department when you import good American labor to work for you, won't you?—labor to take the place of the lazy, treacherous Minitors?"

"Trouble with 'em, eh?" Davis said, catching on. "It doesn't surprise me. I think you're right, Mary—"

He stopped. She wasn't listening.

"There's only one way to do that," she said naively, as Lanning swept her impulsively into his arms.

"Wash your neck," agreed George, alighting with a thud from an aerial jaunt. "Hellish hot. . . . Hellish hot. . . ."

THE END

DEATH BY FIRE

by AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG

"THIS last note says that I am to die tonight, gentlemen, to die in fire; I'm frightened." Prof. John Kendall threw away his third cigarette in as many minutes, and looked beseechingly at Trelawney and me. It did not need his confession to tell us that

Flames leaped into being all over the office.

he was a badly frightened man.

"May I see the note again, Professor?" Trelawney asked.

Kendall fished it nervously from an inside pocket and handed it to him. Trelawney smoothed it out on the desk in front of him, and read aloud:

"'John Kendall:
"'Tonight is the night. You have lived a godless life, but the day of judgment is upon you. You shall die in fire.'"

It was unsigned.

Dean Joseph Eckerman, of Penfield College, in whose office we were gathered, spoke.

"It looks to me like the work of a religious fanatic," he said. "What do you think, Mr. Templeton?"

"I'm not so sure," I replied thoughtfully. "There's one thing about it that, to my mind at least, doesn't seem to bear out that theory."

"And what is that?" Eckerman was the type of scientist who resents having his opinions criticized, no matter how trivial the point under discussion.

"I think Lynn means the lack of any occult symbol as a letterhead," Trelawney put in before I could speak. "But there's a reason for that. People who write threatening letters rarely give their home addresses."

This had not been what I meant, but I did not contradict him. Prof. Kendall was speaking.

"I rather felt myself that it might be a religious fanatic," he was saying. "In fact, there is at present a Hindu mystic in town whom I denounced in the papers as a charlatan. He came around to my classroom the next day and made quite a scene. Dr. Eckerman had to order him off the premises."

"And it was after that the letters began coming?" Trelawney asked.

"Less than a week after," Kendall affirmed. "At first, I paid no attention to them, thinking they were a practical joke on the part of some of the students; but when they continued to appear so mysteriously—between the pages of my books and among my private effects—they began to get on my nerves. It seemed to me that the hand that was able to place them in such inaccessible places would also be able to carry out its threat."

"I wonder," Trelawney said, "that you haven't gone to the police instead of sending for me. I am only a criminologist; I can offer you no adequate protection."

Both Prof. Kendall and Dean Eckerman looked horrified.

"But, my dear sir, think of the publicity!" the dean exclaimed. "Above all things, a college campus cannot afford a scandal."

"I should think that a policeman would be less scandalous than a murder," Trelawney commented. Then, seeing the look of rising fear in Kendall's eyes, he added kindly, "But we'll not have that if we can help it. And now, Prof. Kendall, if you'll give me the name of this Hindu, I'll go around and have a look at him."

KENDALL furnished the necessary information.

"I'll be back and tell you what I get out of him," Trelawney promised. Then to me, "You stay here, Lynn, and keep your eyes and ears open."

Kendall looked after him in relief as he strode purposefully down the walk between the chemical laboratory and the administration building. "I feel better already, knowing that someone has taken charge of this—er—affair," he said. "Do you think that Mr. Trelawney will be able to

catch the criminal, Mr. Templeton?"

"I know he will," I answered. "But I agree with him, Prof. Kendall, that you should call in the police as a matter of self-protection."

"It is very unlikely that anything will happen," Eckerman put in matter-of-factly. "After all, Kendall, this Hindu would hardly dare to touch you, particularly since we know who he is."

Later I met Trelawney upon his return from visiting the Hindu.

"Our foreign friend seems innocuous enough," he reported. "He's got a good healthy hate for Kendall all right, but he isn't the sort that usually indulges in murder. Still, you never can tell. . . . Have you learned anything new, Lynn?"

"Hardly anything of importance," I answered, but I spoke of Kendall's research work for what it was worth.

"Poor Kendall!" he said with a sympathetic grin. "His work has become a mania with him, and there's not a chance in a million of him succeeding in his wild theories."

"Then it wasn't professional jealousy that made the dean so vehement upon the subject?" I queried.

"Absolutely not," he declared. "Eckerman is himself a truly brilliant scientist. The very mention of those crazy theories of Kendall's must set his teeth on edge."

"But if Kendall's such a fool," I asked, "why don't they sack him?"

"Because," Trelawney answered, "they can't afford to. Kendall is a dollar-a-year man, working for the love of it. All his money—and I understand there's plenty—is willed to the college. If they dropped him from the faculty, they'd be dropping a fat legacy as well."

We strolled across to the chemistry building, looking for Kendall. Classes were over for the day, but we judged that in all probability he would have remained behind to work on his pet experiment, if only to keep his mind away from the danger that threatened.

Hearing the sound of movement coming from one of the laboratories, we pushed open the door. However, it was not Prof. Kendall, but a younger man who turned at our entrance.

"Sorry," Trelawney apologized. "We were looking for Prof. Kendall."

"Prof. Kendall has gone down to the supply room, but he'll be back in a few minutes," the other said. "Won't you sit down and wait? I am Clay Hastings, his laboratory assistant."

We found chairs where we were least likely to be in the way.

"Are you and Prof. Kendall working on the same experiment, Mr. Hastings?" Trelawney inquired conversationally as we waited.

"Hardly," the young scientist said, and smiled meaningfully. Then he added, "I am experimenting with hydrogen, trying to find a new way to produce an isotope, you know." He gestured toward a large container marked "H."

Later, Kendall came in and led us to his tiny cubbyhole of an office in the administration building. There he silently and a little dramatically presented us with a slip of paper similar to the one we had seen that morning.

"'Remember, tonight is the night'," we read. "'You shall die in fire'."

"Where did you find this?" Trelawney demanded.

"In my private letter-box in the dean's outer office," Kendall replied. He flipped open a box on his desk and selected a cigarette, but did not light it immediately.

Trelawney frowned. "How many people have access to that box?" was his next question.

"Only faculty members."

"No one else?"

"The dean's secretary. She distributes the mail in the morning and at noon."

"Did you ask her whether anyone left a note for you today?"

"I did. Her answer was no." Prof. Kendall was now visibly trembling.

"I tell you, Mr. Trelawney, the thing is uncanny! I have been talking the matter over with Dr. Eckerman," he said, "and he has suggested what I hope will be a successful plan. But here is Dr. Eckerman now," as the door opened and the dean came in. "He will explain it to you himself."

"It is really a very simple arrangement," Eckerman began in his characteristically efficient manner. "Kendall will lock himself in this office, after you and Mr. Templeton have searched it to make sure that it contains no infernal machine or any similar device. Then you will go into the chemical building across the walk, where you can both see him through the window and keep in touch with him by means of the special short-wave radio apparatus in use here at the college. With the door triple-locked, and you guarding the only other point for attack—the window—it will be impossible for anyone to come near him."

"What about poison gas released through the ventilator shaft?" I asked, more by way of pricking his satisfaction with himself and his scheme than for any other purpose.

But he was prepared even for that one. "Quite simple, Mr. Templeton," he replied. "He will close the ventilator shaft. When the door and the window are closed, the room will be practically air-tight to anything."

"And what," Trelawney inquired gently, "does the professor plan to use for breath?"

But Kendall had an answer ready. "I will take with me a drum of oxygen," he said. "At the end of the first hour, I will open the cock, permitting the oxygen to escape and revitalize the air."

It all sounded practical enough; yet I saw that Trelawney was not satisfied. Eckerman saw it, too, for he asked:

"You don't like my plan, Mr. Trelawney? Why?"

"Because," Trelawney answered frankly, "it is always these supposedly hole-proof schemes that go to pieces when the test comes."

"You will find that this one will not," the dean snapped irritably.

Something of Kendall's old fear returned. "But you and Mr. Templeton will stand by in the chemical laboratory; won't you?" he asked apprehensively.

"If you're determined to go through with this, we'll be there," Trelawney promised. "What time do you want this—er—session to begin?"

"Around eight o'clock, I think," Kendall replied thoughtfully.

"Very well," Trelawney said. "Lynn and I will be here at half past seven."

PROMPTLY at seven-thirty we were back at Kendall's office, where we found him and Dean Eckerman already awaiting us. Trelawney turned both of them into the hall while he and I went over the office. We removed desk drawers, looked behind pictures, and even tested the floor for loose boards; but we found no death-trap of any kind. Trelawney even removed the

iron grill from the front of the ventilator, only to find the space behind it empty. When we were finished, there was not a square inch of that room that had not been gone over.

Kendall went out into the hall and returned with the big container I had seen him bring up to his laboratory in the afternoon.

"Are you sure what's in there?" I asked. Trelawney's uneasiness was beginning to communicate itself to me.

Without a word, Eckerman bent over the huge metal drum, twisted open the cock, and inhaled deeply at the hissing stream of escaping gas.

"It's all right," he reported a second later, straightening and reclosing the cock.

"Man, that was a chance you were taking!" Trelawney exclaimed. "Suppose someone had managed to substitute chlorine or carbon monoxide!"

"It had to be tested," the dean said emotionlessly.

We waited in the hall until we heard Kendall lock himself in the office. Then, after making certain that the door could not be opened from the outside, we left the administration building and took up our post in the chemical building. A cement walk with some ten feet of lawn on either side was all that separated the two buildings, so that we could see Kendall plainly through the window.

Eckerman, at his own request, had come with us. Now he turned on the special short-wave radio apparatus that had been installed shortly before to enable him or other college dignitaries to address all parts of the college simultaneously from any building.

"Can you hear me all right, Kendall?" he called into the microphone.

"Excellently," Kendall's voice was clear and distinct over the loud speaker. Looking out of our window and into his across the way, we could see him talking into the microphone that had been brought from the dean's office to his for the occasion.

"Do you want us to turn the lights on over here?" Eckerman inquired.

"No," came the answer. "You will have a better chance of catching the criminal if he thinks that nobody is around."

"As you wish," Eckerman agreed. "Call us if you want us."

He came away from the radio apparatus, joining Trelawney and me at the window.

For what seemed an eternity, we stood there watching the man across the way. At the end of the first hour we saw him turn the cock of the oxygen drum. The air could not yet have begun to grow bad, but the action gave him something to do. Then he took down a book from the shelf and affected to read.

It was about three-quarters of an hour later that we heard the click of the light switch in the hall. Trelawney was across the room in two strides.

"Who's there?" he demanded, flinging the door open.

Clay Hastings, Kendall's laboratory assistant, stood blinking at us in mild surprise. "I didn't know anyone was here," he began a little foolishly. "I was on my way to the laboratory to work on my hydrogen experiment."

Dean Eckerman moved forward. "I don't think you had better go to the laboratory tonight, Hastings," he said grimly. "I would suggest that you join us instead."

Time dragged by. At half-hour intervals, Trelawney would exchange a few sentences with Kendall over

the radio—just to let his ears check what his eyes told him, he explained.

At the eleven o'clock check-up, there became noticeable in the professor's voice a peculiar, high-pitched quality that had not been there before. Instantly, Trelawney was on the alert.

"Is everything all right, Professor?" he asked quickly.

"Everything is quite all right," Kendall answered.

"What ails his voice?" I inquired. "It sounds queer."

"Nervous tension, probably," Eckerman replied. He and Hastings were watching Kendall through the window. The younger man's expression was peculiar.

At eleven-thirty, the high, thin quality of the professor's voice was even more pronounced—although in response to Trelawney's question, he denied any feeling of increasing nervousness.

Eckerman, who for the past twenty minutes had been pacing restlessly about the room, now moved toward the door.

"I'm going to switch off that hall light," he announced. "It must be visible from outside."

We heard him walk halfway down the hall, then stop. In a minute he was back. There was a slip of paper in his hand.

"My God!" he cried hoarsely. "Here's another one!" He read aloud from the paper in his hand:

"'You will be dead within a few minutes'."

From my place by the window, I saw Kendall spring up from his chair; I realized even before his voice reached us through the loud speaker that Eckerman's words had carried to him over the microphone.

"I can't stand it any longer!" he half choked. All the old terror was back in his voice. "Come over and get me, or I'll go crazy!"

"Steady, man," Trelawney counselled. "We'll be with you in a second."

"Wait!" Eckerman exclaimed. "That may be just what the criminal wants you to do. Perhaps he is trying to force Kendall out into the open so that—"

"You leave this to me," Trelawney snapped. "I've followed other people's instructions long enough in this case. Now I'm going to act—"

And then it happened. Kendall's trembling fingers had just selected a cigarette from his case—his first during the evening—and were fumbling with his lighter, when there was a roar like the sound of an explosion. His window was blown from its frame, and flames leaped into being all over the office!

Kendall was dead when we reached him.

IT WAS after the flames had been extinguished by a hastily summoned fire brigade that the four of us sat in the dean's office, faced by a grim-jawed police sergeant. He had listened in silence to our account of the events leading up to Kendall's murder, but at its conclusion he spoke caustically.

"And after you've bungled the matter yourselves and let the man get killed on you, you call in the police. It's a lot of good we can do now."

"We're not particularly proud of the way things have turned out," I said defensively. "But even if you had been here, sergeant, I don't see how you could have done any more than we did. You couldn't, you know, have forbidden Kendall to lock himself in his office."

"No," the sergeant admitted, "but

I could have locked up that Hindu on suspicion, so he couldn't have got at the professor."

Up to this time, Trelawney had taken part in proceedings, but had sat quietly to one side, apparently deep in thought. Now, however, he spoke.

"The Hindu had nothing to do with Prof. Kendall's death," he said quietly. "The professor was killed in a cleverly arranged death-trap."

The sergeant swung around in his direction. "You don't say, now!" he exclaimed in fine sarcasm. "If you know so much about this, why don't you clear up the whole mystery and tell us who killed him and how."

"Perhaps I shall." He turned in his chair so that he was facing the rest of us. "Lynn, what made you doubt this morning that the notes were the work of a religious fanatic?"

"The lack of capitals on religious words," I answered promptly. "A religious zealot would have capitalized 'godless' and probably 'day of judgment'."

"Exactly," Trelawney nodded. "Now do you understand, sergeant, why I eliminated the Hindu from the start?"

"But if he didn't do it," the sergeant wanted to know, "then who—"

But Trelawney was not yet ready for that. "I would like to show you how the crime was committed before I make any accusation," he said. He addressed Eckerman and Hastings. "You both heard Prof. Kendall's voice the last two times I spoke with him over the radio. Will you describe it?"

"It sounded strained and high-pitched," Eckerman replied. "I concluded that he was—"

"Please," Trelawney interrupted him, "no personal opinions. Now, Mr. Hastings, your description."

" 'Strained and high-pitched' about describes it," Hastings said thoughtfully. "I might add that it was also slightly weaker than usual."

Trelawney dropped the subject, and with apparent irrelevance asked Eckerman another question:

"Was Professor Kendall an habitual smoker?"

"Only when he was excessively nervous," the dean replied. "At other times he smoked hardly at all." Hastings nodded agreement.

"Was he smoking this evening?"

"I don't think so."

"Wait," I interrupted, remembering something. "He did not smoke all evening, but he was just in the act of lighting a cigarette when the explosion occurred."

"Hah!" exclaimed the sergeant, forgetting his former antagonism. "It looks as if lighting the cigarette was what set off the explosion."

"Exactly," Trelawney agreed. "It ignited the highly explosive gas that had been released from the drum beside the desk."

"Explosive gas!" Eckerman broke in with a snort. "My dear Mr. Trelawney! That drum contained oxygen, which supports combustion but is not itself combustible."

"Your statement concerning oxygen is quite true," Trelawney affirmed. "But the drum did not contain oxygen." He swung upon Hastings. "What gas can be breathed without discomfort when mixed with air, but has the effect of weakening and raising the voice?"

The young laboratory assistant had gone deathly pale. "Hydrogen," he fairly whispered.

"What gas, when mixed with two and a half parts air and ignited, explodes violently?"

"Hydrogen."

"And with what gas are you experimenting in the laboratory shared by you and Prof. Kendall?"

"Hydrogen." This time the word was almost inaudible.

"So this is the lad that done it!" The sergeant eyed Hastings aggressively. "Shall I be taking him along, Mr. Trelawney?"

"No, sergeant," Trelawney answered, "for he did not do it. The man who did, emptied the oxygen drum that Professor Kendall brought up from the supply room and refilled it with hydrogen from Mr. Hastings' laboratory. Being familiar with Prof. Kendall's smoking habits, this man knew that sooner or later the professor would light a cigarette, and in so doing, ignite the escaping hydrogen. When Kendall had not attempted to smoke by half-past eleven, the murderer grew impatient and brought in another threat-letter which he deliberately read into the microphone. It had the desired effect."

"I object to that!" Dean Eckerman, livid-faced, was upon his feet. "It was I who brought in that note."

"And it was you," Trelawney said, "who murdered Professor Kendall!"

"That is a pure fabrication," Eckerman declared coldly. There was no real fear in his attitude; he was merely the scientist denying a ridiculous hypothesis.

"Then why," Trelawney demanded, "did you not inform us that the drum contained hydrogen when you sniffed its contents before we left Kendall?"

"You forget," Eckerman answered with a disdainful smile, "that hydrogen is an odorless gas."

"But oxygen is not," Trelawney shot back. "If you had been innocent, the very absence of its faint odor would have made you suspicious. You wanted to test that gas before I could, Eckerman—and you overdid it."

The accused man laughed derisively. "Admitting for the sake of argument that your preposterous charge is correct," he sneered, "what motive did I have? You can't convict unless you can produce a motive."

"Money," Trelawney replied at once. "You couldn't bear to see Kendall squandering his whole fortune—which you knew was bequeathed to the college—on those impossible experiments of his. You wanted that money for your own work, Eckerman; so you killed him; killed him in this fiendish way in hope that the blame might fall upon the Hindu mystic whose enmity Kendall had aroused."

"You'll need proof," Eckerman shouted, but his confidence was going, "more proof than this hypothetical fairy tale you've told us."

"And I can produce it," Trelawney answered. "One of Mr. Hastings' hydrogen tanks will be found empty, and on it will also be found your fingerprints."

But this proof was hardly necessary. Eckerman's bolt for the door was a tacit confession of guilt.

"I may not have been able to save poor Kendall," Trelawney said later, after a grand jury had brought in an indictment for murder against Joseph Eckerman, "but at least I've avenged him by helping to apprehend his murderer."

"What's more," the sergeant remarked, "that guy will be getting almost the same thing he dished out."

"How is that?" we both inquired curiously.

"Because in this state," he answered significantly, "we burn 'em."

THE END

LEECHES FROM SPACE

by EPHRIAM WINIKI

The world scoffed at Mathison's wild theories—an approaching cosmic cloud did not frighten the peoples of Earth—until it started raining leeches!

He cleared the jagged glass edges and dropped her to the track below.

IT WAS surprising how the relatively insignificant little column in the New York Daily Minute grew in meaning as the months slipped by. At first, an astronomical observation was relegated, as ever, to the least important section of the paper, preference being given over it to a society divorce. Nevertheless, those who were inclined to deeper thinking pondered the column not a little.

"Professor Mathison, the famous astronomer, has discovered that Earth is moving in her orbit into the midst of a peculiar cloud way out in space. He doesn't know what it implies, nor does anybody else, but it seems that Old Man Earth is due to go through the midst of it. Better get ready for the Day of Judgment, folks! And don't forget to pay up your tailor!"

Such was the bantering tone of the announcement. Scientists of America suffered exasperation in silence; Professor Mathison himself maintained a cold and dignified silence. And Old Man Earth just kept on steadily going through space.

That was in January, 1942. Half the world never even saw the announcement, and the other half forgot all about it—until the memorable day of June 11th in the same year that the liner Caribbean, bound from New York to Southampton, was suddenly pelted from a clear sky with something resembling massive congor-eels. That, at least, was the message that reached other ships by radio in the vicinity, until the Caribbean's radio mysteriously failed. The next discovery was of the liner floating in mid-ocean with a freight of paralyzed crew and passengers, which no power on Earth could bring back to life. They were neither dead nor alive—just frozen rigid, and yet their hearts still continued to beat softly. In this conditions they bafflingly remained.

Then suddenly the editor of the Daily Minute remembered the announcement of January and promptly got into touch with Mathison at his home near Pittsburgh. The Professor, rightly, was cold and reserved over the telephone.

"I could tell you quite easily what happened to the Caribbean Mr. Saunders," came his voice, full of hurt pride. "But I can't forget the way you handled my January observations. We're on the very edge of that spatial cloud right now and sheer chance caused the first edges of it to descend on the ill-fated Caribbean, including a vast portion of the Atlantic as well. Congor-eels, the radio said. Well, that's about right, except that they were leeches, and not eels! Leeches from space!"

THE editor bit his cigar impatiently. "Listen, Professor. I asked for some explanation, not a fairy story. I'm no scientist, but I do know that a collection of eels can't exist in the vacuum of space. It just can't be done!"

"Think not?" A sardonic chuckle came over the wire. "Well, since you admit you are no scientist, I realize you won't understand the fact that life can exist in multifarious forms, of which our own particular form of life is one of the most unstable and

weak. I hope you find out more about the Caribbean!"

"But listen, Prof! It wasn't just the crew. The engines were stalled—all electrical equipment was completely out of order. Generators, armatures—the whole darned lot looked as though it had been sucked as dry as an orange on Coney Island."

"I knew that long ago," Mathison retorted, and abruptly shut off.

Editor Saunders glared at the phone malignantly, then slammed it back onto its rest. Hardly had he done so before the voice of the switchboard girl advised him that London was on the wire. Fiercely he yanked up another phone.

"Well?" he barked savagely, and immediately recognized the voice of Clements, his London correspondent. Clearly Clements's voice came over the three thousand odd miles of submarine cable.

"Listen, chief—something serious! Berlin, Copenhagen, Warsaw, and London are being deluged with incredible eel-like objects, identical with those of the Caribbean disaster! Business is paralyzed; all electrical machinery has come to a standstill; people are being reduced to a living-dead state. The sky is black with 'em, clear to the Arctic Circle. The world is getting covered by degrees. Now heading westwards towards the States, and—" Clements stopped.

"Heh! Clements!" Saunders bellowed. "Heh! Carry on!"

The line remained silent, unbelievably so, as though the wires had been cut or the power switched off. Somewhat dazedly, Saunders replaced the telephone and permitted a shiver to pass down his forged steel spine. There was something horribly malignant about the silence. In his mind's eye he began to picture a heaven black with eel-like shapes hurtling steadily and inevitably towards America. He bit his cigar through with the intensity of his reflection—then yelled for the copy boy.

"Stop the press!" he bawled huskily into the press-room phone. "Front page write-up. Hi—Snips! Get set for a new edition—a special. Space-eels! Play up the thrill angle— And you, boy! Find me McAvoy! Never mind, I'll find him myself. McAvoy! Where in hell is that guy?"

Fuming, he jumped to his feet and wrenched open the office door. At the same moment, McAvoy entered and surveyed his chief innocently.

"Want me, boss?"

"Of course I do—been yelling my head off. Now listen! There's a disaster of some sort overpowering Europe and England, and is now heading towards us. It's exactly identical with the Caribbean affair. Only one man knows all about it and that's Professor Mathison. You remember you wrote about him last January. He hangs out at Pittsburgh I believe."

"Three miles short of it at Kentonville—a small place with fields of daisies all around it," McAvoy responded.

"Never mind the daisies. Contact Mathison and get the truth out of him. He's still burned up over that article you wrote about him last January, so watch your step. But get some news! I'm relying on you."

"Oke!" McAvoy turned away. "It's about seven hours' trip to Kentonville; I'll phone you the instant I get something."

"Right. I'll keep a wire open for you."

SEATED comfortably within the electric train—one of the new system of continental electric hook-

up completed in 1940, McAvoy pondered on what he had heard.

Upon every hand the main topic of conversation was the strange menace that seemed to have obliterated Europe. He listened, grim-faced, to the voice of the announcer as the radio was switched on. It was enough for him to know that the enigmatic eel-like objects were dangerously near the shores of America.

Practically three-quarters of the seven-hour journey he spent wandering pensively up and down the train corridor; then, as he realized that there was but thirty minutes to go, he returned to his seat to collect his bag. To his passing surprise, a fair-haired girl was seated in the opposite corner, listening with more than normal intentness to another hasty, almost desperate radio report of the approaching menace.

"Grim business, isn't it?" he remarked casually to the girl, and she looked at him coolly.

"More grim that most people realize, I think," she replied quietly—and at that he sat down. After all, there was still thirty minutes.

"They say a crazy old guy by the name of Professor Mathison knows all about this," he commented. "He discovered this death cloud way back in January and I gave him a fool write-up. I could kick myself for it now, mainly because I think the old buzzard found something really interesting after all. Maybe you saw my column in the Daily Minute?"

"Yes, I saw it," the girl assented coldly, and looked out of the window.

"Well, what did you think of it?"

"Frankly, I thought it was an insult to a very clever man."

"Guess you're right there. That's why it makes it difficult for me. You give me an outsider's opinion and it makes me see how plenty tough it's

going to be interviewing old man Mathison. These space-bugs are dangerous, it seems, and he's the only guy who knows anything about it."

The girl turned to look at him again. "You're McAvoy, of course?"

"Of course. Besides—"

"I'm Claire Mathison," the girl explained coolly, but her tone was clipped.

McAvoy started. "Claire Mathison! I—er— Well, what do you know about that? Glad to know you, Miss Mathison."

"I'm afraid I can't reciprocate that. . . . However, I am the old buzzard's daughter in the flesh. Odd, isn't it?"

"Oh, I dunno. I suppose scientists have daughters sometimes."

"Don't be ridiculous! I mean our meeting like this. I've been to New York to hand over some secret papers of my father's to a scientific convention there. I don't even know what was in them. Believe me, there is a lot more in this eel business than anybody realizes. I'm going to tell you about it—not because I've any regard for you after that fool article of yours, but because I feel you'll make amends by letting the truth get to the public. People must be warned. I was going to telephone in any case when I got back to Kentonville."

"Why didn't you call on the newspapers while in New York?"

"Because I wanted to try and get father's permission first. If that failed, I'd do it on my own—and I chose the Minute for the dual reason that it has the biggest circulation and was the one to decry my father last January."

"I'm still sorry about that. But about these eels; what are they?"

"They're creatures of space. They exist without air, are immune to

heat and cold, and can exist equally well in atmosphere as without it, as is proved by their arrival on Earth. The world has run into a veritable cosmic cloud of them. In essence, they are electrical, and according to my father's experiments, they absorb electricity to nourish themselves. Out in space they do it presumably by the constant absorption of solar radiations and cosmic rays. Here the effect is blanketed by the atmosphere, so they absorb whatever other electricity they can. That is in humans, machinery, live rails, and anything else. That is what stopped the engines of the Caribbean; that is why the passengers and crew were paralyzed. Every scrap of electrical energy was absorbed from them. By very slow degrees they may recover. . . . Leeches of space, Mr. McAvoy—leeches that suck electricity and not blood!"

The girl shuddered in spite of herself and gripped the handle of her travelling case more tightly. Then she looked up with a sudden start as a cloudy gloom began to fall on the compartment.

Puzzled she looked through the window. So did McAvoy, and they both caught their breaths in sheer astonishment. The air, the landscape, was suddenly black with hurtling objects. They thudded violently against the window or clung for a moment with black, nauseating sucker-caps, then were shaken off. Thicker and thicker, until the train began to noticeably slow down.

"By heaven, they're here!" McAvoy panted. "They're here!"

The girl's face whitened, but she said nothing. Confusion settled on the compartment as the train came to standstill. On the windows, the hideous objects, threshing mightily, gained a hold, thicker and thicker,

blotting out the daylight. The electric lights came on momentarily, flickered, and expired.

"Quick!" McAvoy panted. "We've got to get out of this!"

"How?" Claire asked helplessly, all her purported dislike for McAvoy suddenly vanishing. She jerked her head towards the dimly visible doorway, jammed with panic-stricken passengers trying to escape.

"Only one way!" McAvoy answered crisply, and seizing his own heavy bag, and the girl's, he threw them both at the window glass. Instantly it collapsed, leeches going with it.

"Through here!" He swept her up in his arms, clear of the jagged glass edges and dropped her to the track below. She tripped and fell sprawling on the sleepers, not two inches from the live rail. In an instant the leeches closed about her struggling form.

Without a second's hesitation, McAvoy was after her, kicking and hammering the viscid monstrosities with all his power. They fell away somewhat under the fury of his attack, only to return.

SHIVERING with horror, too bewildered to know what to do. Claire lay on the track. McAvoy gasped sharply as he felt the terrific drainage on her strength whenever one of the leeches obtained a firm hold. He tore off his coat, thick with the things, and hurled it away. Then he swept the girl to her feet.

"This way!" he said breathlessly. "I've got a crazy idea, but it might work. We're only a matter of six or seven miles from Kentonville. If we can get the train that far—"

He said no more. They had reached the massive electric engine, and, as he had expected, the cab was

deserted. Driver and mate had fled for their lives.

As far as the two could see along the train, the terrible creatures were rigidly fixed, absorbing all the electrical energy they could find. The live rail in the center of the track was bristling with them. It looked for all the world like a vast banana stem. And still they came! A plague of locusts was forced on McAvoy's mind—blotting out the light. Shouts and screams came from the terror-stricken.

"Up!" McAvoy said suddenly, swinging around; clutching the girl beneath her armpits, he shot her up into the driving cabin. Immediately he was beside her.

"What now?" she asked in bewilderment.

"We're going through the brutes! Here—grab this bar and brain every leech you come across."

"Right!" Nauseated, she drove off the remaining creatures, picked up the bar, then began a flailing attack. The steel of the footplate began to become horribly slippery with greenish fluid.

For a moment, Mac studied the controls, kicked two dozen of the filthy things from the floor before him, then, satisfied that the engine was driven in the same manner as his own electric automobile, he flung over the switches. Immediately the train started forward, slowly and with difficulty, to the accompaniment of a dull crunching as the leeches were crushed on the rails.

His eyes became alarmed as he continued driving. There seemed no end to the things. They were everywhere—a solid, impenetrable fog. As fast as they were slain, others arrived, sucking perpetually at the live rail ahead, until at last, just as Mac had dreaded, the power failed.

"No use!" He tossed a glance at the momentary vision of moorland bordering the track, then jumped off the engine into the midst of the slithering filth. He caught the girl as she dropped beside him. "We made about two miles," he said briefly. "We'll have to walk the rest. Come on—up the bank."

"Our only chance is to keep moving," Claire said quickly. "Those on the liner were paralyzed finally because they couldn't escape. We can keep running or walking and shake the things off as we go."

So saying she arrived at the top of the bank, Mac by her side. They cast a glance back at the smothered train, dimly visible in the choked daylight, then began a stumbling run over uneven meadow land. The girl herself, familiar with the district, set a tremendous pace, heading towards a main road which she insisted could not be far ahead and which led directly into Kentonville, passing her father's isolated home on the way.

Then, as they advanced, the growling rumble of thunder smote their ears.

"More fun!" Mac panted, and slapped another collection of leeches from his hands and face. "Thunder to add to our joys."

They went on again; for another fifteen minutes, they waded through the midst of the horrors, and at the end of that time, the storm was upon them — nor was it any ordinary thunderstorm, but something awe-inspiring in its intensity. Mac reflected that he had never seen such blinding lightning or heard such appalling thunder. It veritably stung the ear-drums and made the ground shake. Lightning streaked with bewildering brilliance through the midst of the black, closely packed invaders overhead, then stabbed vi-

ciously to the rain-soaked ground.

"Looks like we're in the center of it!" Mac yelled, above the roar of thunder and drumming of rain.

"Mac, I can't go much further!" Claire gasped, limping. "I'm exhausted. And besides I think I've ricked my ankle or something. I—Oh!" She broke off and hid her face momentarily as a terrific streak of forked lightning cracked down not six inches away from her. The ground spewed blazing brilliance for a split second. Claire fell over with the shock, and Mac, slightly behind her, felt his entire body thrill violently as he received a percentage of it.

Forgetting all about the leeches, he lifted the girl up and found to his relief that she was unhurt—only frightened. Then gradually, as he endeavored to soothe her, his eyes took in something else. All about the area of the lightning flash, the leeches lay absolutely dead! For a moment he couldn't believe his eyes.

"Look!" he almost whispered. "The lightning killed 'em! That means—"

"It means they must be composed of a like charge of the lightning," Claire answered slowly. "Like repels like — neutralize and destroy each other. Mac, we've found a solution! We've got to get to father—"

"But your ankle!"

"Oh, I'll manage. Come on!"

AGAIN they set off, accompanied by the rattling, flashing din of the thunderstorm, but gradually it passed away. To their infinite amazement, as they progressed, they found that all the leeches were dead. They no longer fell through the air. The ground was thick with their loathsome bodies, but of life they had no sign.

Gaining the high road they came across car after car, deserted, prac-

tically buried under the leeches, but as before the things were quite dead.

Confidence began to return to the two. Half an hour later, they gained the Professor's residence. Evidently he had been anxiously watching, for he came rushing out to meet them—a stern, grim-faced man whose general expression bore complete testimony to strength of character and considerable intelligence.

He fondled his daughter affectionately, gave her brandy very solicitously, and handed one less interestedly to McAvoy, then satisfied that the girl was practically normal again, he led the way into his massive laboratory.

"I have to thank you, sir, for bringing my daughter home," he said grimly. "Even though I know from her that you are McAvoy, the man who tried to turn a serious warning into an idiotic burlesque. You reporters are all alike. However, we can waive that for the moment. My only thankfulness is that my dear girl—and you too, McAvoy, I suppose—were not killed in the storm."

"Suppose, father, you tell us what it is all about?" Claire asked quietly. "We passed through the storm, yes, and hurried to tell you that lightning killed these leeches. It seems, though, that you know more about it than we do."

Professor Mathison smiled ironically. "I ought to, considering that it was I who brought the storm into being! No, don't interrupt me, Claire. . . . When I found that it was useless to make mankind take notice of my warnings, and knowing in advance from telescopic and spectroscopic analysis the nature of these terrible leeches—that they were creatures of space and composed almost entirely of positive electricity, it became obvious that the only way

to destroy them would be to create a world-wide thunderstorm—or even several, if one was not sufficient—and so produce such a quantity of similar positive electricity that the invaders would be robbed of their own supply of energy by the infinitely greater power of the lightning.

"It was not difficult. I obtained the cooperation of scientists the world over, and we erected in different parts of the world, under my directions, electrical instruments which had the effect of slowing down the molecular activity of the upper air strata. I hardly need to tell you that the slowing down produced a corresponding coldness of atmosphere. We tested beforehand until we found the exact coldness necessary to strike a supreme balance in different countries between the heat of the Earth and the coldness above to produce the correct electrical tension necessary for a terrific thunderstorm. The results were, of course, better in the Tropics than in the Arctic, but the fact remains that, by having all our apparati working simultaneously, we produced a thunderstorm of world-wide intensity, through which you passed on your way here.

"You, Claire, took to New York the orders for the release of the instruments, but I fully expected you'd be back before I had to release my own. Other countries had been so overcome, I dared hesitate no longer—nor dared I go myself to New York, because my place was here by my radio instruments keeping in touch with my comrades elsewhere. I stayed—and when the leeches attacked America, I had to release the storm and trust to Providence that you would come safely through it—and you did. The leeches have gone

—and will never return, because Earth has passed that foul cosmic spot and is free again. But had not all those storms been released—had not other scientists realized the urgency of things—there would not be soul alive on this earth today! And you, young man, came very near to bringing that about."

"I can only repeat that I'm sorry," Mac replied quietly. "I was sent here to interview you, and I've managed it. Am I allowed to print all you've said?"

"Why not?" The Professor's face relaxed into a smile. "You're still young, McAvoy, and therefore there is still time to learn sense. I accept your apology. You vindicated yourself by saving my daughter. It is she who should say what is to be done about you."

Claire Mathison said nothing then—but six months later she did say one word, and McAvoy, far from decrying the leeches from space, blessed them as the best thing that ever happened in his adventurous life. . . .

THE END

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You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for $11 which formerly could have cost them over $200. A building supply corporation pays one man $70, whereas the bill could have been for $1,600! An automobile dealer pays one representative $15, whereas the expense could have been over $1,000. A department store has expense of $88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over $2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically *every* line of business and *every* section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in *every* grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a $7.50 order, $5.83 can be your share. On $1,500 worth of business, your share can be $1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth $6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth $67.00 —in other words two thirds of every order you get as yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders —and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. Then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fall to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over $1,600 per month for three months—close to $5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made $10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over $300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from $5 to $60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. *If you are looking for a business that is not overcrowded*—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in *every* office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—*that is a necessity* but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that became you control the sales in exclusive territory in your own business—*that pays more on some individual sales than many men make on a week and sometimes in a month's time*—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, *get in touch with us at once* for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, *use the coupon below*—but send it right away—or write if you wish. But do it now. Address

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Are *you* getting paunchy around the waistline—worried about constipation, heartburn, short-wind, nervousness, continued tiredness? Or are you too thin, underweight, anaemic—always getting hacking coughs and colds, frequent headaches? Then here are some interesting facts it will pay you to read:

Constipation Is Only ONE of the World's Plagues

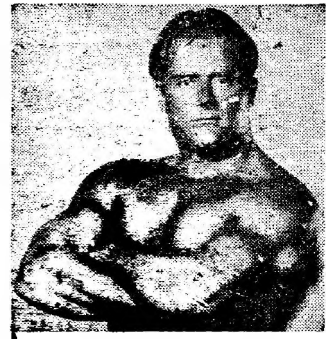
One of the most common ailments today is Constipation—so common that many people do not realise the serious results of it. Just think what would happen if the sewers of any city were clogged and did not drain out daily. Disease and death would break out everywhere! That is exactly what begins to happen in your system when you are chronically constipated. Yet to end Constipation is not very difficult providing you have no organic ailment.

But Constipation—common as it is—is only ONE of the world's plagues! Another is just the result of pure carelessness—many of us simply let our general physical condition "go to seed." We "take our bodies for granted"! First, we may begin to notice that we are getting a "little heavy around the waist." We do nothing about it. Suddenly we are amazed to find that we have a real "pot-belly." To our dismay, we find we are FAT! And no wonder! . . . because all of our processes are slowing up, due to lack of attention and healthful stimulation. Just carelessness. We get nervous, jumpy. Flabby, sluggish. Shortwinded. Pepless. We begin to look old, feel old. Yet are NOT old in years! Even our hair gets lifeless, caked with dandruff. It starts to fall out and—another shock!—DOES NOT COME BACK IN!

"You Have Made a NEW MAN of Me"

I have helped over 40,000 men (of all ages and in all parts of the world) WIN OUT over conditions like these. Thousands write to say, "You have made a New Man of me!"

My records show, for example, that I have helped relieve of Constipation nine out of ten of my clients. My method of body building tones up your entire system—actually overhauling your body. I give exercise and life to those numerous little-used muscles in your body that begin to shrivel up and atrophy. I do not believe in any weights, springs or other old-fashioned, dangerous methods. My system of Dynamic-Tension is natural and effective, and may easily be applied right in the privacy of your own home! And results can be guaranteed.



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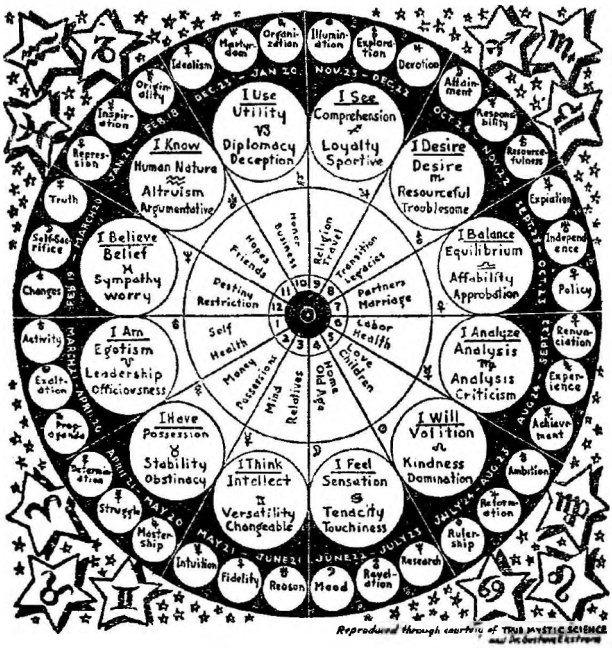

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QUIT wearing teeth that clack; that constantly slip off your gums; that are not much good to chew with; that broadcast their glaring falseness to the world every time you open your mouth. Life is too short, health too precious, looks are too important! For appearance, for health, for lifetime comfort, prefer FIT-RITE FALSE TEETH!

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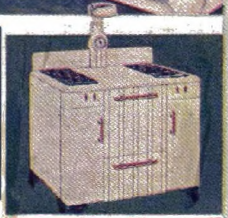

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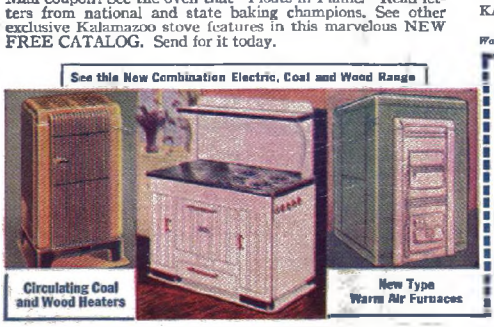

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